

Hospitality



LODGIAN

Lodgian Standardizes on Ruckus Smart Wi-Fi to Give Guests Better, Faster Wi-Fi Everywhere

When complaints about Wi-Fi connectivity began increasing, Lodgian, the largest owner/operators of full-service hotels in the United States, listened and listened intently.

When it came to integrating new technology into its hotels to improve the guest experience, Lodgian was recognized as a pioneer and among the first to install Wi-Fi over three years ago as a free service available in over 8000 guest rooms throughout its 48 hotels.

But since then, everything changed. More guests were accessing its Wi-Fi networks using a myriad of devices. And once on the network, guests wanted to do more than just surf the Internet. They wanted to stream video, make phone calls, and much more. And they wanted Wi-Fi to be everywhere they were. As Wi-Fi usage grew, so did complaints about weak signal coverage, erratic performance, and dropped connections.

“Like a lot of hotels, Wi-Fi began merely as a convenience,” said Dan Webber, Vice President of Information Technology at Lodgian. “But as I visited our properties, it quickly became apparent to me that Wi-Fi could be used for so much more and that the user experience could be radically improved. Superior Wi-Fi coverage and performance has become a huge differentiator for any hotel and is now one of the top three criteria for selecting where to stay.”

Lodgian had outfitted all of its hotels with first-generation Wi-Fi gear from 3Com. While the Wi-Fi system was good for providing casual connectivity for Internet access, Wi-Fi coverage was spotty, signal stability was erratic, connectivity was hit or miss and performance was slow. What’s more the Wi-Fi network couldn’t be managed centrally. If problems cropped up, technicians had to physically repair access points sprinkled through its properties. Managing so many access points individually was a problem.

Lodgian was also looking to expand coverage throughout its hotels in areas where Ethernet cabling didn’t reach, such as meeting spaces, conference rooms, restaurants, cafeterias, poolside and the far corners

of each property. Finally, Lodgian wanted to begin using Wi-Fi for new services such as gaming, digital signage and voice over IP. The Wi-Fi system installed just wasn’t designed for this purpose.

“We quickly made the decision that we could turn this problem into a big win by re-evaluating the role Wi-Fi was playing in our properties and finding new technology that was purpose-built for our business. So we went looking,” said Webber.



Lodgian selected One Media Wireless to integrate Ruckus Smart Wi-Fi as the new Wi-Fi standard for its hotels.



COMPANY OVERVIEW

Headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, Lodgian is one of the largest independent owners and operators of full-service hotels in the United States. Lodgian owns and operates 48 hotels with over 8000 rooms, within its portfolio including nationally recognized brands such as Intercontinental, Marriott Courtyard, Wyndham, Doubletree, Radisson, Crown Plaza and Holiday Inn.

REQUIREMENTS

- Upgrade existing Wi-Fi infrastructure for 34 hotels in 90 days
- Deploy fewer APs that deliver better coverage and signal reliability
- Extend Wi-Fi coverage to new areas where no Ethernet exists
- Reduce network administration and trouble calls, improve user experience
- Fast, easy installation and configuration
- Easy maintenance and customization

SOLUTION

- Ruckus ZoneDirector family of Smart WLAN controllers
- Ruckus ZoneFlex 2942 802.11g APs
- Ruckus ZoneFlex Lite Mesh Gateways

BENEFITS

- Reduced Wi-Fi network administration by 90 percent
- Reduced user support calls by 85 percent
- Eliminated Wi-Fi coverage gaps/holes
- Gained superior control over entire Wi-Fi domain
- Provided ability to offer next generation multimedia services
- Realized better Wi-Fi signal reach and reliability
- Simplified deployment and ease of use (single hotel installed in under 5 hours)
- Extended Wi-Fi network in new areas where no Ethernet cabling existed

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- One of the largest independent owners and operators of full-service hotels in the U.S.
- 48 hotels
- 8000+ guest rooms
- Nationally recognized franchises such as Marriott, Radisson, Crowne Plaza, Intercontinental, Hilton and Holiday Inn.

LODGIAN STANDARDIZES ON ONE MEDIA WIRELESS AND RUCKUS

What Lodgian found was a number of wireless alternatives that ranged from costly and complex high-end systems to low-end consumer gear. “When it comes to Wi-Fi, there’s no lack of choice, just a lack of value. We wanted a Wi-Fi system designed with hotels in mind - easy to use and with a precise set of capabilities that solved basic problems we had experienced such as range and reliability,” said Webber.



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"When it comes to Wi-Fi, there's no lack of choice, just lack of value."

With our first property, the Buckhead Courtyard Marriott in Atlanta, we converted the entire 300-room hotel to Smart Wi-Fi in under five hours - realizing full coverage and better signal quality.

To quote a guest: 'the difference is night and day' - it's simply just a better experience for our guests."

Dan Webber
VP of Information Technology
Lodgian

Lodgian conducted an exhaustive competitive bid process that included top wireless vendors such as Cisco, Aruba, Trapeze, 3Com and others.

Lodgian ultimately selected and standardized on the Ruckus ZoneFlex system along with OneMedia Wireless as the integrator to put it all together.

According to Lodgian, the Ruckus ZoneFlex system was ideal because it combined the precise mix of capabilities needed and the most affordable price while delivering unique functionality, such as wireless meshing and beamsteering technology, that alternatives couldn't match.

According to Lodgian, five key criteria drove their decision to standardize on Ruckus Smart Wi-Fi technology:

- 1) extended range/coverage
- 2) better signal reliability
- 3) ease of use and deployment
- 4) centralized management of the wireless LAN
- 5) providing Wi-Fi services in areas without Ethernet cabling

To extend range, provide strong coverage to the very corners of each property and deliver more reliable signal quality, Lodgian chose Ruckus ZoneFlex 2942 802.11 b/g access points (APs). Each Ruckus ZoneFlex 2942 integrates a smart antenna array that allows Wi-Fi signals to be directed and focused toward the communicating user instead of being broadcast in all directions. This eliminated wasting RF energy and causing unwanted interference where Wi-Fi was not being used.

To address ease of use, simplified deployment and centralized management, Lodgian decided on the Ruckus ZoneDirector. The Ruckus ZoneDirector is a centralized controller that automatically configures ZoneFlex APs and provides a central point of configuration, security and network management for the entire Wi-Fi environment. Remote management lets Lodgian see into and securely access the Wi-Fi environment of any hotel over the Internet.

With the ZoneDirector, Lodgian now has complete visibility into and control over the Wi-Fi domain. Lodgian is able to see how many users are associated with any given AP, control the number of users associated to a specific AP, identify unauthorized APs attached to its wired network and control how much bandwidth each user can consume within a specific SSID.

And to extend Wi-Fi to areas where Ethernet cabling did not exist, Lodgian standardized on the Ruckus Lite Mesh

Gateway. The Ruckus Lite Mesh Gateway functions as a single-hop, long range wireless bridge requiring only power to operate. Placed anywhere, the Lite Mesh Gateway functions as a client associated with an Ethernet-connected AP. It receives the Wi-Fi signal from the associated AP and repeat the signal in surrounding areas.

Lodgian's roll-out plan for Smart Wi-Fi was aggressive. Within a 90 day period, Lodgian wanted to retrofit 34 hotels with Smart Wi-Fi using over 1000 APs. Lodgian deployed a single hotel as the model and quickly began duplicating that success across its other hotels.

"With our first property, the Buckhead Courtyard Marriott in Atlanta, we converted the 300-room hotel to smart Wi-Fi in under five hours," said Webber.

"We were able to come in and put the Ruckus ZoneFlex system into place, get it up and operational with full management in a fraction of the time it would have taken us with any other enterprise Wi-Fi system. And we went from having dead spaces and gaps in coverage to 100 percent coverage with better reliability, fewer AP and fewer complaints," said Webber.

Since the retrofit, Lodgian has reduced the number of user support calls by over 85 percent and increased customer satisfaction significantly based on response and comment cards from the guests.

In the future, Lodgian looks to use the Smart Wi-Fi network to support digital signage, multimedia gaming, voice over IP and other innovative guest services.

"To quote a guest, 'the difference is night and day,' - it's simply a better experience for our guests and has become one of the main reasons for selecting a Lodgian hotel," Webber concluded.

