

Case Study: The Rica Hotels Deployment of Wireless Technology and PoE in its Chain of Norwegian Hotels



BACKGROUND

As use of the Internet and mobile working has become more ubiquitous, hotels have found that their guests demand a high level of connectivity during their stay to enable them to carry on working during their time away from the office. Where formerly, the provision of Internet access and wireless local area networking (WLAN) gave a hotel a considerable competitive advantage, now, most business guests expect to find Internet access points in their room, in the same way as they used to expect a phone.

Wishing to upgrade their guest's communications facilities, Rica Hotels, a Norwegian hotel chain with over 90 hotels located throughout Scandinavia, approached NetPower Wireless Solutions AS, a network and Internet IT specialist, to recommend a solution for its network of hotels.

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We were delighted with the IPZone solution implemented by NetPower, because it minimised the amount of cabling that had to be used in order to install the network, resulting in lower cost, less downtime, easier maintenance and greater installation flexibility.

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Hans Vigstad
IT Manager for Rica Hotels ASA

THE CHALLENGE

The hotel wanted to install a state-of-the-art wireless network that would provide guests with the ability to access e-mail or download a file from anywhere in the hotel, even whilst travelling in the lift down to reception. In addition the hotel also considered deploying information terminals and guest PCs throughout the hotels where guests can access local information to make their stay more rewarding, such as details of concerts, plays and other special events happening in the area with the facility to book tickets online and download payment details. For the purposes of health and safety it was important to avoid the possibility of trailing cables posing a danger for guest's safety as well as maintaining the stylish look of the décor.

A major prerequisite for the installation was to cause minimal disruption to the running of the hotel, which precluded the option of running additional wiring to power the wireless hubs that were located throughout the hotel, often on the ceiling where power points were not currently present. This would entail the cost and disruption of employing electricians to run new cabling and involve additional decorative costs, not to mention the disruption it would cause to hotel guests.



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PowerDsine 6000 Family
Power over Ethernet Midspan

THE POWER OVER ETHERNET (POE)SOLUTION

NetPower recommended their IPZone high speed internet solution which included Proxim WLAN hubs powered by Power over Ethernet (PoE) midspan units. PoE technology allows electrical power to be carried together with data over standard Ethernet cables rather than by separate power cords and eliminates the need for the installation of AC power outlets near the wireless hubs. The use of PowerDsine units meant that the Proxim WLAN access points could be sited wherever they were most useful, rather than being constrained by the practicalities of running power and installing power outlets at each location.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

NetPower recommended a solution that met all the specification criteria laid down by the hotel management prior to its commencement. The addition of PoE meant that the installation of IPZone could be implemented by the value added reseller without requiring the services of a qualified electrician, which removed the disruption, added time and cost of installing additional wiring or power points. By choosing to install PowerDsine midspan units, the customer was also able to extend the features on the network, while also protecting Rica Hotels' investment in its existing switch infrastructure. Again, this resulted in significant cost savings for the hotel chain as well as adding value to the network services Rica was able to offer its guests.

From the guest's perspective the combination of wireless hubs and PoE technology meant that is now possible to surf the Internet, in downtown Oslo whilst enjoying a cold beer, seated either on the terrace overlooking the bustling city or in the warmer surrounding of the comfy Etoile bar on the top floor of the Grand Hotel. According to Sjur Usken, CTO at NetPower, this freedom is particularly important

to some of the hotel guests following the recently introduced regulations in Norway surrounding smoking in public areas.

"It's now possible to moor your boat alongside the Rica Havna Hotel situated in a location aptly named "Verdens Ende" (the end of the world) on the southern tip of Norway and still hook up to the web. Other hotels in the Rica chain, where the wireless network has had a similar dramatic impact on guest's communications' options, include the Rica Hell Hotel, situated in the town of Hell in Trondheim, the Rica Alta Hotel and Rica Arctic Hotel Kirkenes in the northern part of Norway on the border to Russia / Murmansk.

The next stage of the project entails rolling out secure Guest PC to allow guests to store documents and presentations on USB memory sticks and download the information to their hotel PC, so that files can be edited using Office and emailed to others. A key element of this is to ensure that once finished and logged out, all files are cleaned from the PC leaving it ready for use by the next guest.

According to Hans Vigstad, the IT Manager for Rica Hotels ASA, the benefits of the wireless network combined with PowerDsine's PoE midspan solution were self evident." We were delighted with the IPZone solution implemented by NetPower, because it minimised the amount of cabling that had to be used in order to install the network, resulting in lower cost, less downtime, easier maintenance and greater installation flexibility".



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