RUSSELL INN HOTEL AND CONFERENCE CENTER

Rural hotel serves guests with the best Wi-Fi for miles around

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OVERVIEW

The Russell Inn Hotel and Conference Center in rural Manitoba is popular year round for leisure travelers, community events and business meetings. The hotel prides itself on making guests comfortable with lots of amenities and great service. But meeting expectations for free guest Wi-Fi wasn't possible until a new Internet service provider came into the rural area. At that point, the hotel could finally replace its old network infrastructure with a Ruckus wireless and wired infrastructure.

CHALLENGES

- Management was frustrated by constant complaints about unreliable guest Wi-Fi
- The existing Wi-Fi was a hodgepodge of vendors and unmanaged switches were a nightmare to troubleshoot
- The hotel wanted someone to take charge of deploying and managing a new network of APs and switches

SOLUTION

- 101 indoor 802.11ac access points
- 4 ICX switches
- ZoneDirector

BENEFITS

- The high-performance wired and wireless network easily supports high-density business conferences and high-bandwidth video streaming
- Guests can roam anywhere on the property without losing a Wi-Fi signal
- The new network can be configured and monitored remotely by a Ruckus partner, leaving hotel management free to focus on guests

VACATIONERS FROM THE BIG CITY LOVE RURAL HOSPITALITY, EXCEPT FOR POOR WI-FI

When city dwellers want a country retreat, they don't always want to leave their conveniences behind. No one understands that better than the management of the Russell Inn Hotel and Conference Center in rural Manitoba, Canada. In fact, the hotel describes itself as offering "urban amenities wrapped in rural hospitality." The hotel features 122 rooms across three properties. It has its own water slide, indoor pool, conference center, gas station, several restaurants and even a beer store. And the management co-owns the adjacent ski resort.

The Russell Inn Hotel has a diverse clientele, including long-term residents, families, businesses, golfers, campers, kayakers and skiers, schools and more.

But the facilities lacked something that all of these guests expect—great Wi-Fi for Internet access.

The existing Wi-Fi network was a hodgepodge of mostly consumer-grade products from as many as six different vendors. "Guests loved everything about the hotel, but they were vocal about their frustration with the Wi-Fi," says Daymon Guillas, owner and general manager. "My staff spent so much time trying to respond to complaints, it was horrific."

Unfortunately, there was a big obstacle standing in the way of change. "Poor Internet service is a problem throughout rural Canada. As much as we wanted to upgrade our Wi-Fi and switches, it wasn't worth the investment because we didn't have a decent Internet service provider," says Guillas.

Then a very welcome resident came to town—a new service provider. The provider offered cable Internet service, but it was the new fiber backbone in the region that allowed high-speed guest connections.

But there was still one problem.

"Now we had to find a local expert in Wi-Fi and switches. And that's also like mining for gold in rural areas," says Guillas. "We needed someone who could recommend the best vendor, and also design, deploy and manage the network for us."

"Loyalty is everything to us, and we don't want to lose customers because they're dissatisfied with our Wi-Fi. For years, we had no control over improving that experience. But when we finally had the opportunity to change, we made a great choice with Ruckus. Guests love it and my staff can ignore it and focus on the guests. That's the experience I was looking for it."

DAMON GUILLAS
Owner and General Manager
Russell Inn Hotel and Conference Center

Fortunately, Guillas feels like he struck gold when he found Steve McKim of 45 Networks, a Ruckus partner. "Steve understands the hospitality industry. He knows networking inside and out. And he was able to manage the network for us once it was deployed. The network infrastructure upgrade jumped to the top of our list."

McKim knew that Ruckus was the perfect fit for the hotel. "Based on my experience, other vendors can't match Ruckus for performance."

Case in point: McKim recently attended a technology conference in another part of Manitoba. "The hotel's Wi-Fi was incredibly bad. All of the attendees—all technology people—were wandering around holding up their phones to try to get a signal. If you did get a signal, the service was painfully slow," says McKim. "It's clear why Ruckus is the leader in hospitality. No other vendor comes close to Ruckus reliability, coverage and performance."

McKim also points out that network management is extremely important for companies like his. "I can manage both the ICX switches and APs from anywhere. I can monitor and analyze traffic across the whole network. I can configure almost anything remotely, down to really granular changes. That's a big selling point when you're talking about managing sophisticated networks in rural areas."

THE NEW WIRED AND WIRELESS NETWORK IS THE BEST AMENITY THAT GUESTS CAN'T SEE

McKim installed a Ruckus ICX switch in the main closet for the network core/aggregation and three ICX access switches in each of the hotel's wings. 94 Ruckus APs are deployed in each guest room, and seven more are deployed in the two conference centers, the bar, dining room and the indoor pool. All of the APs are powered from the switches with PoE. "We didn't have to run three or four different cables to connect the APs in different locations. That saved the hotel a lot of money and allowed us to deploy quickly," says McKim.

In fact, the network was ready in time for ski season. And the response from guests has been enthusiastic.

Prior to the installation of the new network, guests could barely get connected, the Wi-Fi signal strength was terrible, and 45 Networks was constantly chasing network loops created by the consumer grade switches. They certainly couldn't roam from one part of the hotel to the other—even from one wing to the other. Now there are no barriers, except invisible ones for segmenting and securing traffic. McKim set up separate VLANs and SSIDs for the guest network, the conference rooms, and back office operations.

"The top traffic generating application in hospitality networks is video streaming. Ruckus handles high-bandwidth applications easily. Guests can FaceTime or Skype in their rooms and continue as they roam around the property," says McKim. "We've had almost 300 devices connected during corporate events and the Wi-Fi just purred along. I can set rate limits on traffic if I need to keep any single client from hogging the Internet connection, because I have such granular control with the Ruckus network. But it simply hasn't been necessary. I expect the Internet connection will be the bottleneck on this network long before the Wi-Fi is."

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STEVE MCKIM
Wireless Network Engineer & Owner
45 Networks

The Russell Inn Hotel keeps expanding facilities to attract new clients, like a new spa. When the spa was being built, a large number of construction trailers and campers moved on site. "In the past, all of the construction workers would have been using their cell phones to access the Internet. I put an outdoor Ruckus AP on a utility pole and then set up a VLAN and SSID for the construction crew. It took about an hour to give them secure Internet access, including the time to mount the AP," says McKim.

Guillas and McKim have discussed installing an IP phone system and IPTV down the line. "The hotel has the network infrastructure that can handle anything," says McKim. "I would say the Russell Inn network is now miles ahead of any facility in rural Manitoba."

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