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The Crowne Plaza Marlow stamps out internet complaints in partnership with Quadriga



Highlights

Dramatic reduction in complaints from guests regarding internet services.

The hotel can now offer the internet to guests for free, while still protecting its revenue.

Provides sufficient bandwidth to all its guests, through tiered bandwidth services.

A modern 4 star hotel in a countryside setting, the Crowne Plaza Marlow is located in the heart of the Thames Valley. The hotel offers modern accommodation and facilities for business travellers, who make up 90 per cent of the hotel's total guests at any one time.

Large volume of customer complaints

The hotel had historically used two vendors to provide internet services to guests. Quadriga provided wired access to the rooms, while a second supplier was responsible for the conference and public areas. The consequence of this approach meant that business guests were often paying for internet access twice – once in their rooms and a second time in public areas/meeting rooms – which resulted in a large volume of customer complaints. Furthermore, from a commercial point of view, this approach did not work. The hotel was making little to no profit on their service because it was paying two providers for a service which essentially one could manage efficiently.

In addition to this, the Crowne Plaza Marlow was also battling with the free internet challenge. Guest's expectations have changed over the years and they now view broadband as a fourth utility that should be free. However, this trend presented some obvious challenges with regard to bandwidth availability, quality of internet services and its impact on the revenue per available room that the hotel could make.

The hotel was struggling to provide reliable internet access for all its guests due to limited available bandwidth, especially at peak times, in the morning and evening, when many of its guests were accessing the internet. On average a hotel receives 4Mbs of bandwidth. However in the case of the Crowne Plaza Marlow, because the hotel was so far away from the telephone exchange it was only getting between 1.5 to 2Mbs. This meant that any available bandwidth was being more thinly spread between guests wanting to use the service.



Jon Child, General Manager
at The Crowne Plaza Marlow

“The difficult thing is striking the balance between providing a free solution which satisfies guest demands but which is also commercially viable.”

“The free internet issue has always been contentious within the hospitality sector,” explains Jon Child, general manager at The Crowne Plaza Marlow. “The difficult thing is striking the balance between providing a free solution which satisfies guest demands but which is also commercially viable. We were at the other end of the scale, charging customers twice for a slow and unreliable internet connection.”

Guest internet options

30 minutes	Free (limited to 256Kb)
2 hours	£5.99 (limited to 1Mb)
24 hours	£14.99 (limited to 1Mb)

Fast, ready and available

In May 2009, the Crowne Plaza Marlow made the decision to work with one supplier, Quadriga, for its internet provision. This ensured that it didn't matter where the guest was in the hotel; they were connecting to the internet via one system which meant only paying for the service once.

The first problem which the companies addressed was the poor bandwidth availability. Quadriga laid four additional DSL lines into the hotel, which increased the bandwidth feed from 2 to 8Mbps, a 400 per cent increase – double what the average hotel receives.

Quadriga also upgraded the Crowne Plaza's existing internet solution, to allow it to offer its guests a tiered bandwidth service, giving them a choice of bandwidth level, quality and price options depending on their needs. All guests wishing to access the internet in the hotel are now offered four different price and bandwidth packages to choose from. These range from a free 30-minute internet access option (limited to 256Kb) to 24 hour online usage with the maximum bandwidth of 1Mb for £14.99. It is up to the guests to define the speed and quality of their connection depending on what they want to do - whether just looking at emails or downloading files - by opting for a suitably priced package.

“Quadriga's tiered bandwidth service has enabled us to market a variety of flexible and fair internet options, where guests only need to pay for the level of service they require. Our business guests are happy to pay for the bandwidth they need for their applications and we can also offer a free service for those guests who just need to view emails or browse the web. In addition, for those guests wishing to also make the most of our superb range of on-demand entertainment, we offer a special 'all service' price of £24.99 which includes unlimited access to the internet. Now we can satisfy the internet requirements of everyone,” said Child.

“Quadriga’s technology is contributing towards [the] drive for repeat business as well as supporting our hotel’s modern and sophisticated brand.”



Increased guest satisfaction

On average over 70 per cent of guests opt for the free internet service. However, despite the hotel’s initial concerns, providing this has actually had a minimal impact on the Crowne Plaza Marlow’s revenues. This demonstrates that a bandwidth management and appropriately supporting pricing policy can enable hoteliers to offer free WiFi with limited effect on their bottom line. It has, in fact, dramatically improved the service to all guests.

“Everyone staying at the hotel completes a guest satisfaction survey. Before the upgrade the top complaint from customers was the internet – having to pay twice, slow and unreliable connection, etc. Since the Quadriga upgrade, the number of complaints has fallen dramatically and internet issues rarely come up. In fact, some guests are even commending the internet service we offer, which is having a knock-on effect on customer loyalty and repeat business,” comments Child.

Onwards and upwards

The Crowne Plaza Marlow will continue to work closely with Quadriga in the future to ensure they are meeting guest demands for more sophisticated technology and services in their hotel rooms.

Child concludes: “The current recession has hit the hotel industry hard, so we need to continue to look at ways of ensuring our guests return to our hotel by offering similar, if not better, services than our competitors in the area. Quadriga’s technology is contributing towards this drive for repeat business as well as supporting our hotel’s modern and sophisticated brand.”