

How to improve guest experience and hotel staff productivity with unified communications

With the proliferation of WiFi and mobile technology, communications expectations have changed. The majority of us expect immediate access through always-on communications channels — and hotel guests and staff are no different.

Unlike traditional business employees who typically work seated at desks in the company office or at home, your hotel staff is constantly on foot throughout the property: meeting guest needs, taking care of back office operations or both — often traversing long distances at larger properties. To enable a connected workforce, many hotels still rely on legacy technology, using two-way radios, such as walkie-talkies. Unfortunately, these devices are not secure, offer little privacy and often disrupt those within earshot. They are also unreliable, as battery life, line-of-sight and range issues can interrupt communications.

Today's communications demand a more sophisticated solution. Savvy organizations have risen to the occasion, employing smartphones, messaging, mobile apps and video to keep their businesses moving forward at a competitive pace. Hotels need to take a similar approach — utilizing fast, reliable, secure and easy-to-use collaboration solutions — to continue meeting ever-increasing guest expectations.

Improved communications and collaboration among hotel staff will increase efficiency in addressing guest and operational issues. A more productive, empowered hotel staff will be able to provide the highest-quality guest interactions, ultimately improving the guest experience.

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Modern communications for a more productive workforce

Unified communications (UC) is a cloud-based voice and collaboration solution with features that are accessible from anywhere, comprising presence, instant messaging, video calling and desktop sharing. It also integrates with mobile devices, such as smart phones and tablets, and may come with call center functionality capabilities such as logs and recordings.

According to research firm IDC, improving productivity and increasing cost efficiency are the top two UC priorities for businesses.¹ UC allows seamless and instantaneous connection among staff and provides a single platform that scales easily.

For hotels, a UC solution makes it easier to communicate in real time with staff, since the technology leverages the mobile devices they are accustomed to using. For example, using text messaging to communicate between staff and management can replace the legacy use of walkie-talkies, increasing employee productivity and improving the guest experience. Capabilities like selective call forwarding enable management to receive the incoming calls they identify as most important, even while away from their desk. Integrated voice, IM and email work in tandem to make staff more responsive to guest needs, quickly satisfying them as they arise. For multiple properties, the simplified and standardized communications platform across properties reduces the need for management oversight and allows the business to scale, as new properties can be added quickly to the same solution.

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Keeping on-site equipment functioning and up-to-date can be taxing, both in terms of capital and the availability of skilled technicians, as repairs and upgrades are often unplanned and costly. Equipment and system functionality may also prove to be difficult to manage across multiple properties. Changes to a legacy system may require outside resources and take staff attention away from critical guest and hotel operations. With UC, new capabilities are easy to add and are updated and maintained automatically, freeing staff from the burden of phone system maintenance to ensure hotel communications are reliable.

Moving beyond premises-based equipment

Many hotels have traditionally used premises-based phone systems, with a private branch exchange (PBX) phone system that allows users to communicate. These phone systems require on-premises equipment and regular maintenance by either hotel IT staff or a third party vendor. However, in the modern hospitality environment, the needs of hotel properties have evolved beyond what a traditional PBX is able to support, as these systems may lack features critical to hotel operations. Mobile hotel staff using a premises-based voice solution may appear as “unavailable” when not at their desk phone. With a UC solution, mobile hotel staff can use “find me, follow me” capabilities to integrate their desk phones, mobile phones, and even a virtual “soft phone” on a laptop or tablet to stay accessible regardless of location.

The following are two use cases that demonstrate how a UC solution can improve outcomes throughout the hotel property.

Use case: Improving accessibility and productivity

A general manager needs to prioritize accessibility to callers at varied hours

To meet guest expectations, hotel general managers (GMs) must respond to issues as quickly as possible. UC features allow them to better manage their accessibility on or off property at different times of day and to communicate through the most convenient channel. The service also relieves VIP callers of the need to manage different numbers for the GM and presents a more uniform image of the property. With presence, a staff member can see the GM’s status and text or email instead of calling, giving the GM the option to respond via his or her medium of choice. The GM can also start a call at his or her desk and seamlessly transfer the call to a mobile device using his or her medium of choice.

GMs and other management team members gain greater control over inbound call direction, plus have better visibility and accessibility to staff with UC. Management and staff can preschedule when calls will automatically forward to a mobile number and control what happens when the call originates from a specific number with selective call forwarding. For example, an important call to the main office after 6 p.m. from facilities maintenance or a VIP can be transferred seamlessly to the GM’s mobile number, while other calls can be sent to voicemail. The GM can also specify that returned calls appear as originating from the main number, and not from his or her mobile device. With the presence feature, staff members can view the GM’s status (mobile, office or on/off line) and vice versa. All of these features can be managed and changed easily through an online user-friendly portal.

Outcome: The GM gains confidence and control over accessibility, and critical calls are immediately connected.

Use case: Improving guest experience

Confirming completion of amenity delivery and room maintenance tasks

A hotel is expecting a VIP with a large room block and meeting space, bringing in considerable revenue. The GM wants a specific amenity waiting for the VIP upon arrival. With a UC solution, staff can use their UC functions to text in-room dining with a request for an image of the presentation, like cheese or wine, to confirm delivery to the GM's specifications. While placing the amenity, a staff member notices that a bath fixture needs to be repaired before the VIP guest arrives. Facilities maintenance is notified with an IM and confirms with a time-stamped message when the repair is complete. A UC solution enables hotel staff connected via their mobile devices to:

1. Chat with in-room dining staff to confirm delivery of items
2. Compare a digital record of the chat session to the requested amenity
3. Capture an image of the presentation to confirm it meets expectations

Outcome: The right amenities are waiting for the VIP upon arrival, and the GM has records and images of the delivery, as well as confirmation of the repair — offering an exceptional guest experience for the VIP.

Choosing the right provider

If a UC solution sounds right for you and your hotel properties, choosing the right provider will be next on your “to do” list. Yet with more than 100 UC providers in the U.S. today, finding the right one can be challenging. Consider asking these questions when vetting a potential UC provider:

Do it yourself (DIY) vs. a managed provider

- Will the solution be a DIY configuration and installation or include a dedicated project manager, from initial consultation to service delivery and ongoing support?
- What happens after installation on day one, and what user training is provided?

Network access to the virtual PBX and UC capabilities

- Is access via public “over the top” Internet or via a private network with dedicated bandwidth?
- Will service be delivered over a private network with separate, dedicated bandwidth for voice and data so I don't need to worry about quality or dropped calls?

Performance assurance, reliability and guarantees

- What types of service-level agreements (SLAs) are applied? What is covered and how is it measured?
- What are the differences in coverage and how are problems resolved?

Client service and support

- Does the support model include local, end-user support that's easily accessible via *611 or only remote support?
- How do service and support hours match my hours of operation, and what type of support should I expect?

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Hotels, especially ones with limited resources, should understand how much responsibility they have for getting the system up and running. Just because the features are managed doesn't necessarily mean that the ongoing maintenance of the solution will be. Probe for how the potential vendor will help make the transition: Will the components simply arrive on a skid one day, or will there be people available to help set up and ensure staff are trained? What training is included post-implementation? At the end of the day, hotels must be equipped to effectively and seamlessly manage both operations and the guest experience and the UC vendor should be, too.

In an industry based on increasing guest and staff expectations, don't let your properties fall behind. Explore how to improve hotel staff productivity and guest experience with a fully managed, turnkey Unified Communications solution from Spectrum Enterprise.

[Learn more](#)

¹ICD's 2017 U.S. Enterprise Communications Survey

About Spectrum Enterprise

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