



InterContinental Mark Hopkins San Francisco

Hands-free wireless voice solution helps hotel staff better perform guest services

CHALLENGE

Allowing staff members to communicate better while maintaining a tranquil atmosphere

One of the premier luxury hotels in San Francisco—if not the world—the InterContinental Mark Hopkins prides itself on providing guests with not only the finest accommodation but the finest service. In 2002, the hotel renovated its 380 guest rooms and facilities and later completed a communications upgrade, issuing mobile pagers and walkie-talkies to help staff better communicate with each other and improve guest services. However, the hotel's Director of IT, Robert Cantrell, noticed a problem: despite having mobile devices, staff still were not properly communicating with each other—and guest services were not consistently at the level the hotel anticipated they would be.

“For example, the front desk agents often were not able to reach someone in banquet services because the people in banquet services were using walkie-talkies and the agents were using a telephone,” explained Cantrell. “And the housekeeping supervisor couldn't reach room attendants because they weren't receiving or responding to pages.”

The hotel decided not to give front desk agents walkie-talkies because they were noisy and disruptive. Nor could it rely solely on pagers which were inefficient. Moreover, neither pagers nor walkie-talkies could be operated hands free which was important to the hotel's mobile staff members who needed to carry or move items and perform their daily tasks.

What the InterContinental Mark Hopkins really needed, determined Cantrell, was a mobile, hands-free communication system that all staff members could use, providing both staff members and guests the help they needed quickly and quietly.

SOLUTION

A wireless, hands-free voice system that allows employees to quickly, efficiently, and quietly communicate

While searching for a new communication solution, Cantrell came across Vocera. Not only did he like that Vocera worked with just a touch of a button and could be worn around the neck or clipped to a jacket or shirt pocket, Cantrell also liked the versatility of the Vocera communications badge. Unlike some other mobile communication technologies, Vocera allows one-on-one communication between staff members as well as instant one-to-many (push-to-talk multicast) capability, and could also interface with the Mark Hopkins PBX system. Telephone users could call into Vocera and reach a Vocera badge wearer and vice versa, meaning no more missed calls.

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Robert Cantrell
 Director of IT
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In 2005, the Mark Hopkins participated in an on-site trial of the Vocera communications system involving approximately 25 staff members in guest-related services. Vocera performed up to expectations in areas of the hotel with strong wireless coverage. In areas where there was inadequate or no wireless coverage, the system didn't work and staff became frustrated. "But the consensus was that the Vocera system would work well and could replace our existing wireless communication devices if we had complete [wireless] coverage," said Cantrell.

To address the need for ubiquitous coverage, the hotel installed additional access points throughout the building. It also hired wireless solution provider Ruckus Wireless to diagnose its VoIP/packet-loss issues. That meant replacing its existing wireless network designed with only the transmission of data in mind (Internet access to guests), not voice, with a "smart" wireless system and WLAN controller. The new Ruckus system allowed the hotel to manage the RF environment and automatically address any VoIP-related interference and packet-loss issues.

With its wireless coverage problems solved, the Mark Hopkins was finally ready to officially deploy Vocera.

RESULTS

Improved employee communication = improved staff performance = happier guests

Today, the Mark Hopkins has 148 active Vocera users and is happy it made the switch to Vocera. "We definitely see the Vocera system as a big improvement over the wireless communication we were using previously," said Cantrell.

"Vocera has definitely improved staff performance. For instance, the front desk agents are now in tight communication with the bellmen and doormen," he said. Now when a guest pulls up, the valet can instantly communicate that the guest has arrived to the front desk, so the guest is greeted by name. Similarly, when a guest checks in, a front desk agent can use Vocera to contact housekeeping to confirm that the guest's room is ready. "And when a guest has a request, it gets immediately communicated," he added. Best of all, the technology is invisible to guests. They only know they are getting great service.

It's not only guest services that Vocera has positively impacted. Staff relations have also improved, observed Cantrell. Indeed, since deploying the Vocera communications system, Cantrell has noticed that hotel employees have been communicating more and better with each other, creating a more pleasant atmosphere throughout the landmark establishment. As hospitality experts have found in a number of studies, when employees are happy, they provide better customer service—and better customer service leads to happier customers and increased sales.

Recently, Cantrell rolled out Vocera to the hotel's engineering department and will soon introduce the technology to the banquet department. "I would actually like to do more, but budgets are always a consideration," he said. For now, the Mark Hopkins is busy making sure that all staff members are properly trained and comfortable using the Vocera communications system, providing guests with the five-star experience they've come to expect from this world-class hotel.



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