

Giving New Meaning to Five-Star Excellence

Customer Case Study



Cisco end-to-end architecture enables leading hotel group to maximize investment, efficiency, and service quality

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: InterContinental Hotels Group

Industry: Hospitality

Location: Egypt

Number of employees: 1400

Challenge

- Transform operational efficiency, hotel experience, and guest satisfaction across three hotels in Cairo

Solution

- Cisco Borderless Network foundation
- Unified Computing System for virtualization
- Cisco Collaboration solutions for digital signage, IPTV, unified communications, high-speed wireless Internet access, and hospitality applications

Results

- Scalability of architecture, return on investment, and platform for ongoing evolution
- Significant increase in guest satisfaction through range and quality of services
- Staff productivity enhanced by ubiquitous connections and roaming technology, which allows guest services data to be communicated in real time

Challenge

The InterContinental Hotels Group is a global hotel company. Its aim is to create Great Hotels Guests Love, with the goal of growing by making its hotel brands the first choice for guests and hotel owners. The company has three of its nine brands available in Citystars, Egypt's groundbreaking 21st century urban development, which brings retail outlets, entertainment venues, a residential tower, and leisure and medical facilities together within a state-of-the-art 750,000m² block.

InterContinental Cairo Citystars comprises three hotels: InterContinental, Holiday Inn, and Staybridge Suites Cairo Citystars. Collectively, they offer 1500 rooms and suites, equipped with IP telephony, IPTV, and secure, high-speed wireless Internet access. These features help ensure guests can make the best of their business and leisure time during their stay.

Thanks to a single common network platform, which helps staff deliver high-quality service and gives guests an unrivalled experience, the hotels command an award-winning reputation when it comes to guest satisfaction ratings. For example, a range of wireless and multimedia applications allows staff in every department to be responsive in real time to on-the-spot requirements, helping them to be more proactive.

This success is based on a centralized IT model that uses an end-to-end Cisco architecture, enabling network infrastructure and services to be efficiently shared across the three hotels. "It's an approach that encapsulates our vision and ultimate goal of creating the best possible experience for visitors, guests, and staff," says Simon Stamper, area general manager for InterContinental Cairo Citystars*.

Solution

By making a conscious decision early on to place technology at the heart of its business, InterContinental Hotels Group invested once in a Cisco end-to-end architecture and has since reaped the rewards of that investment many times over. At the heart of the infrastructure is a virtualized data center based on Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS®) C-Series rack-mounted servers from which integrated data, voice, and TV services are delivered to all three hotels across a Cisco® Borderless Network using Cisco Catalyst® 6500 switches.

*Incorporating InterContinental Residence Suites Cairo Citystars, Holiday Inn Cairo Citystars, and Staybridge Suites Cairo Citystars



“One of the most important benefits of Cisco’s end-to-end approach is the quality of service and experience we are able to offer our guests. They will never miss a call in their room, and they can stay in touch. This, together with the range of applications and services they can access from their IP phones and televisions, has given our hotels a global reputation for excellence.”

Simon Stamper
Area General Manager
InterContinental Cairo Citystars

Building on this network platform, the group has made full use of Cisco Collaboration solutions to create an environment that connects anyone, anywhere, on any device, at any time. Cisco Unified Communications Manager is another key benefit. The enterprise-class IP telephony call-processing system can be upgraded without changing hardware, once again helping to protect and maximize IT investment.

In total, some 2400 Cisco Unified IP Phones are distributed throughout the hotels. Most rooms are equipped with the 7960 model, with the executive suites benefiting from the enhanced features and XML applications offered by the 7975 model. Approximately 100 members of staff are equipped with Cisco Unified Wireless IP phones.

From the guests’ perspective, one of the most important innovations has been the introduction of a single Cisco IPTV solution, which avoided the need to purchase three separate video head-end systems. “Previously, television services were delivered to the rooms using analogue signals,” says Sharif Nader, director of technology. “The number of channels was limited, and transmission quality was erratic, making it hard for the hotels to provide a satisfactory service for multilingual guests.”

Another notable innovation has been the deployment of the Cisco Digital Media Suite, a network-based platform for digital signage. Before, changing event and welcome notices, using traditional plastic letters, was a time-consuming manual process. Today, more than thirty 52-inch Cisco screens have been installed discretely (framed in wood to suit the modern design of the hotel interiors) in meeting rooms and public areas. As well as displaying specific announcements and meeting information, the screens are used to promote facilities and restaurants within the complex, and other destinations in the chain, encouraging non-residents to book a stay. The content is all created and managed centrally.

Cisco UCS delivers all the benefits of virtualization, including a smaller data center footprint, faster time-to-provisioning, and application consolidation. Resilience has also been strengthened. In the unlikely event of a failure, the UCS allows services to be rapidly reinitiated on another server in the main Citystars data center.

Results

Adopting a holistic Cisco architecture has helped the hotels increase guest satisfaction with Internet and television services from 70 to 90 percent, securing their place as best-in-class across the Middle East and Africa.

“Supervising the IT infrastructure is much easier with the Cisco architecture and the associated benefits of virtualization,” says Nader. “Instead of having several servers in each hotel, we have just five in one data center. Everyone is connected at all times. And, thanks to the ubiquitous fixed and wireless network, we can adapt rooms, facilities, and spare space in the hotels for different purposes at very short notice.”

High-speed wireless forms a key part of the hotel experience. With more than 600 Cisco Aironet® Wireless Access Points, minimal variance occurs in the strength of the signal between rooms. Roaming technology means that anybody with a Cisco wireless phone can travel along corridors and between floors without disconnecting their call or suffering reconnection delays. Wireless phones also help staff to be more productive and instantly alert reception that tasks such as cleaning have been completed, allowing the efficient allocation of rooms to new guests.

Rather than being tied to the room, voicemail services follow guests around, making it easy for them to keep in contact with relatives, friends, and colleagues. They can also send voice emails, simply by pressing a button on the room phone and entering the recipient’s address. The message is then delivered as an attachment.

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InterContinental Cairo Citystars

“The Cisco Unified Communications Manager is fully integrated with the hotels’ billing system, making it easy to account for external voice calls,” says Nader. “Also, using Cisco DMS, our marketing team can push internal video promotions, such as restaurant happy hour offers, special events, and sightseeing suggestions.” Digital signage has also delivered an average time saving of seven hours per week by removing the need for staff to walk around the hotels manually changing notice boards.

The Cisco IPTV solution offers more than 230 premium channels, including high-definition services, prioritized to suit the profile (nationality, age, and gender) of the registered occupant. In addition, hotel staff can selectively push channels to individual rooms. When 200 Chilean guests checked in for a conference, for example, it took just 30 minutes to provision their televisions with specific programming. The IPTV system is also fully integrated with the Cisco Unified Communications Manager, so that the television is automatically muted when a call comes in. Message alerts are displayed on the TV set as well as the Cisco Unified IP Phones, and can be accessed by either platform.

Room service can also be accessed via the TV, which allows guests to see images of the restaurant and menu, and place their orders. The televisions are Internet-enabled, with wireless keyboards so that the screen can be used as a browser, for example to check emails.

“One of the most important benefits of Cisco’s end-to-end approach is the quality of service and experience we are able to offer our guests,” concludes Stamper. “They will never miss a call in their room, and they can stay in touch. This, together with the range of applications and services they can access from their IP phones and televisions, has given our hotels a global reputation for excellence.”

For More Information

Learn more about Cisco Collaboration, go to www.cisco.com/go/collaboration

To learn more about improving the delivery of video and content, go to www.cisco.com/go/video

Product List

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Catalyst 6500 Series Switches

Unified Communications

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager
- Cisco Unified IP Phones (7960 and 7975 models)
- Cisco Unified Wireless IP Phones (7921 model)

Video

- Cisco IPTV
- Cisco Digital Media Suite

Data Center

- Cisco Unified Computing System



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