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WHY MITEL? CUSTOMER HIGHLIGHT SERIES

Starwood Hotels and Resorts

Mitel's flexible interoperability with other technologies, leading IP solutions, and positioning for communications convergence and "the cloud," keep Starwood Hotels at the leading edge of communications in the hospitality sector



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Starwood Hotels and Resorts Enjoys Flexible Technology Interoperability and stays Leading Edge

When Starwood Hotels and Resorts went looking for a better way to handle their communications, they knew exactly what they wanted.

As one of the world's largest hotel and leisure companies, with over 1000 properties and almost 150,000 employees in about 100 countries, they needed technology they could integrate across all their existing solutions, in all types and sizes of properties, while continuing to be a communications leader in the hospitality sector.

With technology taking up large amounts of real estate, and a mix of different solutions from a variety of vendors at multiple locations, Starwood faced a challenge. Add to that their desire to transition from analog to IP and open a future migration path to emerging hosted solutions for voice and data, and choosing the right vendor and the right solution became critical.

"To meet our requirements, we went through an extensive RFP process with all of the players in the communications technology market," says Mark McBeth, VP of Information Technology for Starwood's North American division. "In the end, it was an easy decision to go with Mitel."

Interoperability means freedom to mix and match technologies

A key reason for choosing Mitel was its ability to operate with the wide array of technologies that Starwood already owned, rather than forcing standardization.

"We had a lot of legacy systems in our 530 or so hotels in North America," says McBeth, "and a lot of diversity with regard to manufacturers and age of equipment. We needed a solution that would work with all this, whether it was from Cisco®, HP, or different telephone vendors. With Mitel, we can just plug in a system and have it work with the equipment in the field and the devices in the guest rooms."

Leading VoIP technology

With communications convergence in mind, Starwood was also looking for a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) solution from a leading company well-positioned for the future.

"If you look at the history of Mitel and their evolution over time," says McBeth, "how they've worked to come into the IP world and where they stand now, we think they are well positioned to continue to lead in this area."

Specifically, Starwood chose the Mitel® Communications Director (MCD) and Mitel 5550 IP Console for all of its North American hotels. This combination ensures that staff can be reached no matter where they are on a property, and that guests get quick, efficient answers to questions and requests.

In many locations, Starwood also uses embedded voice mail, which supports alternative greetings to provide callers with important information, allows guests to set their own wake-up calls, and provides a range of other features that ease the burden on reception staff without compromising customer service. Caller ID, for example, makes it easier to accommodate in-room dining, and enables operators and desk personnel to deliver more personalized service.

Just having the technology, however, is not enough. In the hotel and resort business, it's essential that it work the way it's supposed to—all the time. "In a hospitality environment like ours," says McBeth, "the expectation is that technology works flawlessly every time, and with Mitel that's exactly what we get."

Hospitality-savvy channel partners

Starwood was also impressed with Mitel's thirty-plus years of hospitality-specific communications solutions and with its Hospitality Specialist Program for channel partners. By following rigorous requirements, and demonstrating technical expertise and a commitment to deploying Mitel hospitality communications solutions, Mitel Channel Partners become experts in delivering communications solutions for the hospitality industry.

As McBeth explains, "we had some good channel partners that we were using and wanted to continue to use, and we found that they were part of Mitel's Hospitality Specialist Program. That was a real key to us, because our partners out there that deploy and support this equipment are very important. Our IT managers in the field are not voice specialists, so we depend on channel partners and Mitel to manage our converged IP network while our IT managers focus on the needs of our guests."

Starwood's Director of IT for North America, Ted Hopcroft, also emphasizes this need for hospitality-specific knowledge. "One of the core benefits of adopting Mitel is that we can actually plug it into our networks and have confidence that Mitel already knows what the hospitality marketplace needs. It's not as easy as everyone thinks. There are special requirements within a hotel, and Mitel knows them and delivers on them."

Green, small footprint technology

In any kind of retail business, space is golden, and the ability to use it profitably is essential. As Hopcroft puts it "Besides our people, the most valuable asset we have is real estate. If space is taken up by equipment, we can't turn it into sellable space."

Being able to operate with a wide range of technologies from different vendors helps address this need. "With Mitel we can minimize our technology footprint," says Hopcroft, "because Mitel's interoperability enables us to choose products and infrastructure that are best in class, not only from the standpoint of infrastructure and footprint, but also vendors, products, partners, and so on."

Mark McBeth chimes in to point out that this kind of small-footprint solution not only requires less space, but less power and cooling, which brings the green factor into play. "Starwood is very, very keen on sustainability," he says. "We promote it and we live it. And Mitel helps us do that."

COMPANY

Starwood Hotels and Resorts, one of the world's largest hotel and leisure companies, operates under a wide range of brand names, including St. Regis®, The Luxury Collection®, W®, Westin®, Le Méridien®, Sheraton®, Four Points®, AloftSM, and ElementSM.

EVALUATION

Find a communications solution they can deploy and standardize across their many hotel brands, all sizes and types of properties, and all existing infrastructures, to deliver leading IP communications to staff and best-in-class services to guests now and in the future.

CHOICE

Mitel® Communications Director (MCD) with embedded voice mail, and Mitel 5550 IP Console, with integration into HP networks and support from Mitel Hospitality Specialist Partners.

WHY MITEL?

- **Flexible interoperability.** Mitel frees Starwood to make the best use of existing technology by accommodating a wide array of products from different vendors in a single coherent solution.
- **Leading IP technology.** Industry-leading IP technology and capabilities means Starwood is future-proofed against advances in technology.
- **Hospitality specialists.** A leader in communications for the hospitality sector, Mitel has channel partners certified in the Mitel Hospitality Specialist Program.
- **Small footprint.** Interoperability means Starwood can choose best in class solutions that minimize space and free real estate for income-generating rooms.
- **Superior service.** Mitel's responsiveness, backed by a vast knowledge base, means immediate answers and quick solutions.
- **Convergence and the cloud.** Mitel technology poised to support the converged, hosted, cloud-based solutions of today and tomorrow.

"With Mitel, we can just plug in a system and have it work with the equipment in the field and the devices in the guest rooms."

– Mark McBeth, VP of IT,
Starwood Hotels and Resorts, North American Division



Superior Mitel service

Of course, no matter how perfect the technology is, issues are bound to occur. And that can be the real test of the relationship between technology provider and user.

“Our guests have high expectations, and it’s essential that we meet those expectations,” explains Mark McBeth. “We’ve found Mitel to be very nimble. When we do have an issue, they react quickly and solve it without asking a lot of questions and without a lot of delays.”

Adds Ted Hopcroft, “We know that if something out of the norm does occur, Mitel has a vast knowledge base they can draw on to address it quickly.”

Cloud communications—positioning for the future

With the future in mind, Starwood is looking closely at hosted applications and the rapidly emerging world of cloud computing.

“One of the things we’re looking at is our ‘above property’ computing capability—you can call it the cloud if you want,” says McBeth, “and Mitel fits well into that model because they understand hospitality whereas some of the other players don’t.”

Flexible interoperability, leading-edge technology, expertise in the hospitality sector, and a commitment to the future make for a solid relationship between Starwood and Mitel. “We are excited about Mitel for the future,” concludes Ted Hopcroft. “We look at Mitel as a valued partner moving forward.”

About Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide

One of the world’s largest hotel and leisure companies, Starwood Hotels and Resorts operates both directly and through subsidiaries. With nine hotel brands, including St. Regis®, The Luxury Collection®, W®, Westin®, Le Méridien®, Sheraton®, and Four Points®, the company is well represented in most major markets around the world, and employs approximately 145,000 people. For more information, visit <http://www.starwoodhotels.com/>

About Mitel

Mitel delivers flexibility and simplicity in smart unified communications solutions and applications for organizations of all sizes. Combined with a full range of managed services that include voice and data network design and traffic provisioning, custom application development, and attractive financing options, Mitel is reinventing how successful organizations gain competitive advantage by easily collaborating and communicating over distance and time with customers, colleagues and partners. Mitel’s (www.mitel.com) US headquarters are in Phoenix, Arizona. Global headquarters are in Ottawa, Canada, with offices, partners, and resellers worldwide.

<http://www.starwoodhotels.com/>



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