



An Emphasis on Service: WLAN at Le Manoir

Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons, Raymond Blanc's hotel/restaurant, and home to the Raymond Blanc Cookery School in the Oxfordshire countryside, is among the UK's most prestigious hospitality establishments. Under Chef Blanc's lead, it has held two Michelin stars for 22 years, won innumerable awards and become a destination of choice for celebrities, business executives or anyone seeking a top-flight experience. No wonder then that when Le Manoir's IT department decided to implement wireless LAN (WLAN) to enhance guest accommodations even further, they looked for a top-of-the-line solution.



System specifications were stringent. The WLAN had to provide ubiquitous network access everywhere on the grounds, and had to adapt to the physical constraints imposed by the hotel's 15th century landmark status buildings. In addition, the solution had to be essentially zero-maintenance and simple enough to be administered remotely by a service provider rather than hotel staff. Only an Extricom WLAN could meet every requirement.

When Conventional Wisdom is Wrong

How do you implement WLAN service in a hotel? If you follow conventional wisdom, you do extensive pre-deployment planning, followed by interior cabling work, perhaps even shutting down a wing of the hotel to complete construction and make sure the environment is stable from an RF standpoint. When everything is just right, you carefully roll out the system and then provide intensive training to educate the staff on how to maintain it.

To a hotel executive, this can be a formula for disaster. In the luxury hospitality sector, the objective is to enhance and improve the guest experience technologically sophisticated travelers, without causing any disruption. The chosen WLAN, therefore, must be implemented quickly and quietly, and needs to provide comprehensive coverage throughout the facility without extensive configuration and tweaking. And most of all, it can't detract from the primary mission: making sure guests have everything they need, including wireless that works right every time.

Fulfilling a Tall Order

Gurval Durand, Deputy General Manager at Le Manoir, needed a WLAN that could practically do the impossible: maintain the integrity of a National Trust property with minimal cabling,

provide coverage everywhere on the hotel premises, ensure there was no disruption in hotel activities, and most of all, run by itself. His resources were stretched thin, so any solution he picked had to exist on low-to-no maintenance. To make matters even more challenging, the WLAN had to be deployed to provide coverage from access points (APs) positioned on the outside perimeter of the buildings, with the signal aimed into the hotel's interior. Durand knew this would be a tall order. He contacted a trusted integrator with wireless expertise, G4 Networks, who put forward the Extricom WLAN as a possible solution. As Durand recalled, "I thought it could not be done, but G4 Networks assured me that if any system could do it, it would be an Extricom WLAN."

Forget Everything You Learned

What made G4 Networks so sure Extricom was the right choice for this project was the technology's operational flexibility and simplicity. The Extricom solution is based on Channel Blanket™ technology, in which multi-radio APs, all transmitting on the same channels, form blankets of aggregated Wi-Fi coverage, essentially creating multiple, simultaneous and overlapping wireless networks from one set of APs.

The wireless operation of all the APs is fully



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Gurval Durand
Deputy General Manager
Le Manoir

Project Scope

Implement WLAN to provide guest network access everywhere on the grounds of Michelin-rated luxury hotel and restaurant. Deployment could not involve alterations to listed property, and solution had to be zero-maintenance, with no hotel staff administration.

Solution

- Two EXSW-1200 Switches and 20 APs.
- System deployed with APs outside building facing in.

Results

- Solution quickly deployed without interruption to guest services or hotel operations.
- Future-proofed infrastructure capable of supporting full mobile wireless access, as well as planned VoWLAN phone system and secure backend data access.
- Simplicity of solution allows it to be offered as managed service, remotely monitored and administered by VAR.

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controlled by a central intelligence located in the Extricom WLAN Switch. In such a system, client devices associate with the switch rather than an individual AP, and it's the switch which dynamically decides, on a packet-by-packet basis, which APs are best positioned to serve the client at any given moment.

This innovative approach appealed to Dave Allen, the project's wireless consultant and an industry veteran who knows, and has deployed, most WLAN solutions out there. "With Extricom, basically you've got to forget everything you learned about wireless," attests Allen. "Blanket technology means no channelization problems – easier design, more stable environment, no AP-to-AP conflict... and AP installation is dead easy. Put it on the wall and connect it. Simple as that."

Moving to the Next Level

With such an endorsement, Le Manoir gave the project the green light but with one key condition: if it didn't work they wouldn't pay for it. Confident in Extricom's abilities, G4 Networks went ahead with an initial deployment to prove the system's promises to Le Manoir's satisfaction.

The deployment went well, in spite of the challenging physical conditions, and was completed without any disruption to Le Manoir's luxury hospitality experience. Within a short period, Le Manoir was able to extend their already comprehensive suite of guest services to include mobile wireless access anywhere on the hotel grounds.

For Durand, project success meant moving the business to the next level. "Many guests make WLAN a key criteria for choosing a hotel. If you don't have Wi-Fi not just available on the premises, but available everywhere on the premises, you're at a disadvantage."

Future-Proofing the Buying Decision

Investing in a "future-proof" technology is always highly desirable, and this is one of the Extricom WLAN's greatest strengths. Extricom's flexible architecture can support any 802.11-compliant device or application including complex video or RFID solutions, whether part of the original design, or easily and non-disruptively introduced later.

While Le Manoir's initial objective was to provide guest data access, Durand underlined the critical difference that a future-proofed system makes in a buying decision, stating, "The way technology moves, our system will need to support all our applications eventually, including secure access to backend servers and VoWLAN for staff and guests. The strength of the Extricom WLAN is this: it's a single infrastructure and a single product, but any number of different solutions can be implemented on it."

Guaranteed Service

For the integrator, the Le Manoir implementation sparked a different sort of realization regarding Extricom's potential. Le Manoir had made it a specific requirement that G4 Networks manage the system remotely once implemented, rather than train hotel staff to do it. This request has led G4 Networks to begin selling WLAN as part of a managed service instead of a standalone product.

As Dave Allen put it, "It's easy to learn because there's only really two elements to go down, the switch and the AP, and it's very, very easy to maintain: basically you only have to go in twice a year for a healthcare check. Extricom allows us to offer a guarantee we can take to market, and we see real prospects for this kind of service... I think Extricom will go to number one because of its stability and ease of deployment."

Quality Will Tell

Technology and market considerations aside, in the end the Extricom WLAN has helped Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons accomplish what any hospitality business really looks for: provide the best service possible. Durand summed up the outcome of the project, "We wanted a solution that was top-of-the-range, but ultimately you gauge the quality and success of the system by whether or not you get complaints from users who can't access it. So far, that hasn't happened."