



## How to Make a Good Hotel Great: Wi-Fi Ensures Ryder Cup Coverage

### Abberley Court Hotel and Apartments

The number of ways companies can use a wireless local area network (WLAN) to make their operations more efficient is limited only by the imagination. How about mobilizing the press at a golf tournament? That was precisely the driving force behind the installation of Wi-Fi at the Abberley Court Hotel and Apartments in Tallaght, a suburb of Dublin, Ireland.

Abberley Court's close proximity to the K Club, site of the 2006 Ryder Cup golf tournament, made it a preferred choice for sporting journalists as a base from which to file their stories. Abberley Court needed to have a Wi-Fi solution that would meet the data-intensive needs of the correspondents, and they found it in the Extricom WLAN, the only solution that could ensure comprehensive coverage and capacity for all users, everywhere on the premises, while enabling the hotel to meet very tight deployment timeframes.

### Wi-Fi as a Hospitality "Must Have"

The criteria for what makes a good hotel used to be fairly straightforward: comfortable rooms, attentive staff, and a convenient location. But today's business travelers have added a new high-priority requirement to the list: Wi-Fi service. A hotel that offers guests property-wide, secure access to their email, VPN, and business applications becomes an extension of their office, allowing them to wring more productivity out of a working day on the road. It's little wonder that WLAN has gone from a nice perk to a "must-have" when choosing a hotel.

Wi-Fi is also becoming an essential operational technology to the hotels themselves. The range of applications is seemingly endless: Voice over WLAN networks, automatic guest check-in, point of sale order-taking, and mobile room audit are just a few examples of high-tech trends in the hospitality industry that a WLAN can enable. At a minimum, the integrated WLAN means real financial returns as hotels can quickly expand facilities without installing an extensive cable plant, and administration can move from paper to paperless without expensive retrofitting of existing offices.

### How Do You Upgrade a Good Hotel Easily?

When Brian Flynn, the owner of Abberley Court, decided to improve his existing 40-room hotel with the addition of a 107-room extended-stay apartment building, installing a Wi-Fi network was high on his priority list. He realized that

offering wireless would be both an incentive for first-time guests and a great way to ensure repeat business. As he put it, "How do you upgrade a good hotel easily? Deploying cost-effective, unique technology could give us an advantage over five-star establishments."

While the advantages of implementing WLAN seemed obvious, overcoming the technology issues involved was not as easy. By his own admission, Flynn was no expert in RF technology. He knew, nonetheless, that deploying a conventional WLAN to ensure coverage and capacity for 400-500 users spread out over a 40,000 square foot, three-story hotel and a 250,000 square-foot, five-story apartment building would involve a lengthy planning and implementation process.

### Ryder Cup Changes the Schedule

Time was in short supply, however. The Ryder Cup, one of Golf's most prestigious and intensively covered events, would be taking place at the nearby K Club, and lodging for sports journalists was in heavy demand. Abberley Court was ideally situated as an ad hoc press center, but only if it could offer wireless connectivity to all rooms. Flynn had to come up with a Wi-Fi solution, and he had one week to do it.

To start, he contacted Invisible Link, a local wireless specialist with deployment expertise. Tony Finn, the President of Invisible Link, was well aware that most wireless networks simply

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Colin McClinton  
Chief Deployment Engineer  
Abberley Court Hotel and  
Apartments

### Project Scope

Under very tight timeframes, deploy WLAN system to two buildings totaling 290,000 square feet. The objective was to support press coverage of the 2006 Ryder Cup golf tournament by journalists staying at hotel.

### Solution

- EXSW-800 and EXSW-2400 WLAN switches, and a full complement of UltraThin™ Dual-Radio EXRP-20 APs.
- System configured to support users on 802.11a/b/g standards.

### Results

- Deployed Wi-Fi to over 290,000 square feet of property in three working days.
- System placed into production concurrent with ongoing deployment.
- Flawless performance prior to and during the Ryder Cup peak period.

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cannot be implemented as quickly as needed by the hotel due to the requirement for cell-planning, which can take weeks.

He had to have an alternative, and he found it in the Extricom WLAN. As Finn observed, “We needed to do it all in one shot. The Extricom solution promised to be quick to deploy, which was a big plus.”

### A Network Skeptic Is Won Over

Finn may have been convinced, but the chief engineer for the Abberley Court implementation, Colin McClinton, wasn’t so sure. McClinton, a CCNP with expertise in WLAN deployment and administration, thought the Extricom channel blanket approach, and promised ease of deployment and management, were simply not feasible. As he flatly stated, “It seemed unbelievable. Surely we’d need to carry out an extensive RF site survey first, and if we deployed an access point (AP) on channel 6 on one floor, we’d definitely have to use channel 11 for the AP on the floor below...”

McClinton installed an Extricom 8-port switch in a test environment and his skepticism quickly vanished. The setup and configuration of the switch and APs were accomplished in a matter of minutes, unlike traditional “fat” AP systems that require complex configuration of every AP. Furthermore, McClinton confirmed that the channel blanket really provided the promised contiguous coverage and seamless connectivity without handoffs as users moved within the coverage area.

The testing team simulated the demands of a bandwidth-intensive application by running continuous network pings to remote servers, and found that the Extricom WLAN supported a predictable level of service for users and pervasive coverage no matter how the APs were deployed, key requirements for the hospitality industry. With McClinton’s seal of approval, hotel management were confident they could implement a working WLAN within the required timeframes.

### Solving Real-World Problems

Lab tests are one thing, real-world deployment is another. Disturbing or displacing hotel guests during installation was out of the question, so the implementation team needed to roll out quickly and unobtrusively. In addition, the WLAN would be situated in an environment ripe with RF interference from competing signals of neighboring businesses. Even the buildings’ architecture was an issue: while the hotel had a traditional design of rooms and corridors, the

apartment block was a U-shaped structure with an outdoor hallway opening onto a courtyard, which would have made cell-based AP placement problematic.

Once deployment began, however, the only real challenge for the IT team turned out to be ensuring that the connection to Abberley Court’s ISP was in place. The apartment block’s layout issues were met by deploying Extricom APs wherever needed for the desired level of coverage, without the interference or channelization constraints seen in traditional WLAN systems.

Finally, the team had to make sure the system would support all types of users. This is a big challenge in the hospitality industry, since hotels cannot control what kind of wireless device the guest may carry, and the 802.11a and 802.11b/g standards create different connectivity requirements. To address this, the team leveraged the Extricom solution’s multi-layer WLAN characteristics. That is, the same switch and dual-radio AP infrastructure can be used to power overlapping and concurrent WLAN channel blankets, so that 802.11a users can operate on one blanket, while 802.11b/g users can operate on the other. This ensured that any guest could access the system without having to reconfigure their laptop, an important feature when hotel staff have limited IT support capabilities.

### Live at the Ryder Cup

In the end, the Extricom WLAN was installed and configured at Abberley Court in three working days, well within the stipulated timeframe. As McClinton, by now a complete convert to the system, stated, “We were expecting a lot more work, but the hardest part was figuring out how to mount the AP brackets... Had we been using a traditional WLAN, we would have had to deal with co-channel interference, channel planning, unpredictable client bandwidth, and, ultimately, a lot less flexibility.”

No sooner was the Extricom WLAN installed than it was pressed into service by arriving Ryder Cup journalists, who associated to APs literally within seconds of their being connected. The WLAN functioned flawlessly throughout the buildup to the Ryder Cup and during the event itself, giving the assembled journalists ubiquitous connectivity everywhere on the premises. Flynn summed up his experience with the Extricom WLAN by highlighting what it didn’t do, namely cause problems. “No one has mentioned the wireless system since it went into production... which just shows how well it’s working.”