

Hotel Buckminster

“Our Meraki network will become a true profit center with better ROI than any other profit center in the hotel.”

Jon Colter, General Manager, Hotel Buckminster

Challenge

Older concrete-and-steel construction made for a challenging wireless environment

Bids from bundled-services vendors like LodgeNet ran up to \$78,000, with negligible opportunity to recoup costs

Hotel management had to provide WiFi as a value-added amenity to stay competitive

Results

Reliable WiFi available throughout the hotel

Tiered access and billing enables the hotel to charge for access and allows the network to pay for itself and generate profit for the hotel

Simplicity of installation and management keep overhead costs low



The 125-room Boston Hotel Buckminster was built in 1897 in the Kenmore Square neighborhood. Designed by Stanford White, it was among the first hotels ever built in Boston. Today it offers 94 guest rooms and suites, but is also home to about 31 permanent residents.

In the 1990s, hotel management installed wired internet connections in the guest rooms. But Boston's notorious weather corroded the wiring over the years, making service slow and intermittent. Seeking an interim solution, general manager Jon Colter looked into wireless solutions. But the hotel's concrete-and-steel construction was too thick for first-generation wireless radios to penetrate.

Colter solicited bids for a hotel-wide wireless internet solution, but was less than impressed. The lowest was \$12,000, and the highest was \$30,000. Hotel management decided to "sit on the bids" for three months, Colter said. "We couldn't justify spending \$30,000 on technology that, for all we knew, might change in six months and we'd be stuck with something obsolete."

Colter turned to LodgeNet, a major provider of hospitality media services. LodgeNet generally provides television, cable, and movie packages to the hospitality industry, but now also offers connectivity packages including WiFi. LodgeNet offered to deploy and maintain a WiFi network at the Buckminster ... for \$78,000. "They threw in a

negligible 5-to-10 percent revenue-sharing plan," said Colter. That would not ever come close to defraying the huge up-front costs.

Fortunately, one of the permanent residents of the Buckminster had heard of Meraki. Colter investigated, and ordered a few Meraki units for a test-drive. "We're not tech guys," Colter said, "But it was pretty clear from the start this was a user-friendly wireless system."

The Buckminster invested less than \$10,000 for a Meraki system, and it took them a single day to install it throughout the property. It has been up and running ever since.

Colter has instituted a tiered access plan that allows him to collect revenue from his hotel guests. All guests receive the first hour of usage for free, and then are charged \$5 for each additional hour. Or, if they choose, they can purchase an entire day's access at \$10 or \$20 (for higher speeds). The backhaul bandwidth, in the form of dedicated DSL and a shared cable line, costs the hotel about \$1,100 a month. For 2009, Colter expects the network to bring in about \$16,000 in its first year, meaning it will more than cover the bandwidth bill, and will pay for itself in less than 2 years. "That's significant in a department that is usually a loss-leader in a hotel," Colter said.

Before Meraki, Colter could not track down or control "bandwidth abusers" in the hotel. Now he can use the Dashboard to manage bandwidth consumption, and track network performance. It's "the best part of my day," he said.

