



New Broadband Venture Pays Off for Cheshire Hotel Group

If you're a frequent business traveller, the consistent standards offered by the large hotel chains reduce some of the uncertainty about work trips. But Venture Hotels Group - owner of four premises in the Northwest - has a new means of increasing its competitiveness. "Broadband," says Marketing Director Paul Abson, "is saving us money, increasing our efficiency, and providing a marketing edge to help us win new business."

Three hotels - the Comfort Inn and Dene Hotel at Chester, and the Paddington House Hotel at Warrington - have introduced not just broadband, but also wireless networks and a new telephone system which allows them to make free calls over the Internet.

A completely new market

Paul Abson believes that "the investment has made us one of the leading - if not the most advanced - small hotel group in the country for information technology. I also think that we're some way ahead of many of the larger hotel chains. The result is a completely new market - road warriors and the companies they work for, or with."

Hotel guests can have free high speed Internet access in two ways - through the hotel's own wireless network, or through cable connections in around a quarter of bedrooms and all of the conference and meeting rooms. "This means," says Paul, "that they can check their e-mail or surf the web from anywhere in the hotel."



Paul Abson (left) and guest use wireless Internet access at Paddington House Hotel

"Broadband is saving us money, increasing our efficiency, and providing a marketing edge to help us win new business"

Key Facts

- **Broadband is making a small Northwest hotel group more competitive against larger chains**
- **Internal telephone calls now routed over the Internet at no cost**
- **All hotel areas have free broadband access.**



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And, if they're in the meeting rooms, they can easily set up videoconferences.”

Free calls over the Internet

Paul Abson notes that “we have been able to make this access even more useful to one customer by tweaking our set up so that it's compatible with his own network. I'm sure that this was a major factor in our retaining their business in a recent retendering. We're confident that the ability to provide secure access to internal networks will give us an edge with other corporate clients.”

Broadband also allows telephone calls to be made via the Internet rather than conventional telephone lines, at no, or little, cost. Venture has made use of this for all internal calls between the three hotels, so that these are now free. Staff simply dial a four digit code before the ordinary number on special handsets. The company estimates that this saved almost 5% of their telephone bills during the first months of operation. The figure will rise when the system is extended to their fourth, Manchester, hotel and when more customers get the cheap or free software which enables calls over the Internet.

More efficient managers

Paul Abson is impressed with the impact on the work of managers like himself. “Our new handsets are portable and recognised by the system wherever they are,” he comments, “so we can just carry them from one location to another. The wireless network also means we can easily check e-mail at any of the three hotels. And in future we plan to make internal use of the videoconferencing capability.”

Getting the most from the new investment has required new skills in, and considerable training of, staff. Everyone has needed to understand how Internet telephony works, and customer facing staff have needed a basic familiarity with wireless technologies in order to help customers gain access. Internal IT capabilities have also been increased.

All in all, Paul Abson believes that “our experience shows that broadband can help level the playing field between larger and smaller companies, and help maintain a local presence in a market dominated by big chains. We're now ahead of the game - and will be stressing that in our marketing. I'm sure that the results will be much more hotel and conferencing business - and therefore higher profits - than we would otherwise have achieved.”

Further Information

The Northwest Regional Development Agency wants the region's people and businesses to benefit from the new opportunities created by the digital revolution. It has worked with partners to establish Digital Development Agencies in Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside and Lancashire to achieve this at local level. The agencies help identify ICT priorities for their areas, work with local organisations to identify projects to address them, and secure the resources to make these projects happen.