

The background of the top half of the page is a photograph of a modern hotel lobby. It features a large, ornate chandelier, a reception desk with a computer monitor, and a mannequin in a pink dress. The lighting is warm and the atmosphere is sophisticated.

CASE STUDY

SOUTH AFRICA



HOSPITALITY

NETWORK EXCELLENCE ENABLES HOTEL TO STREAMLINE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY AND DRIVE SERVICE INNOVATION



Create a network template to support a growing hotel business, with simple management and the ability to quickly add new users, devices and functionality.



A good business isn't dependent on a good slogan, but it can help. South Africa's Hotel Sky has a great one: "A four-star experience at a two-star price," says Founder and CEO, Paul Kelley.

RETHINKING THE HOTEL OPERATING MODEL

For Hotel Sky this means finding locations in the best neighbourhoods in South Africa. It means hotels with as many as 400-rooms, room sizes of less than 18sqm and rates of just \$55 a night.

"I know that 95% of my guests just want to use their room for a great night's sleep and a good shower," says Kelley. "We then provide beautiful communal spaces, a great on-site restaurant and access to the best of Cape Town and Johannesburg on their doorstep."

Sounds simple. But in the cut-throat world of hospitality, working off the slimmest of margins, this requires high occupancy rates and razor-sharp operational efficiency.

CREATING A WOW MOMENT FOR EACH GUEST

Hotel Sky was founded in 2019. It has two properties: a 453-bed site in the Sandton neighbourhood of Johannesburg and a 535-bed property near the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront in Cape Town. New properties in Melrose and KwaZulu Natal are being lined up. The plan is to have eight properties within five years.

Location is everything but Paul Kelley wants each property to be visually stunning. Each site should be Instagram-ready, he says.



REQUIREMENTS

- Enable the scale to support 300% growth in property numbers
- Simplify adoption of new digital services and devices
- Establish a network-as-a-service model, with clear SLAs

SOLUTION

- Aruba Unified Access Points
- Aruba Core and Access Switching
- Aruba Central
- Network-as-a-service delivered by Aruba Business Partner, Bright Horse IT

OUTCOMES

- Reduces network management effort through central management and as-a-service model
- Allows the launch of robot concierges, creating a new service experience
- Supports free high-performance Wi-Fi throughout each property, elevating the guest experience
- Enables smart building functionality, including access control and app-based maintenance and support services
- Securely integrates services such as self-check-in kiosks, digital key, CCTV, IPTV and video conferencing
- Provides a solid platform for operating the hotel's app and consumable digital services

"We want to provide a 'wow' moment," he says. "Guests will forgive the room size if you provide sufficient networking or social space, a great restaurant and fitness facilities. The majority of our stays are two to three days."

For Hotel Sky, the challenge is finding the right balance between a unique experience and the efficiency of standard processes. From a network perspective, the goal is to ensure secure high-performance connectivity throughout each property, the ability to support the



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CEO & Founder, Hotel Sky

latest smart hospitality applications and a consistent architecture capable of being replicated at new sites.

DELIVERING THE NETWORK AS A MANAGED SERVICE

The network management and service delivery are enabled through Aruba Central, a cloud-native and data-enabled platform. This allows the networks in all Hotel Sky sites to be deployed, secured, monitored and managed from a single dashboard, hence simplifying IT operations and allowing Kelley and team to move at speed with reduced network management costs. The engagement is delivered as a service by Bright Horse IT, a local Aruba Business Partner and provider of specialist solutions to the hospitality sector.

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The unified network architecture, from core to edge, is based on Aruba AOS switches and wireless access

points. Bright Horse IT installs and remotely configures and deploys standard configurations to all the network elements using the Zero-Touch capabilities through Aruba Central. To date, 370 APs and 120 switches are managed by Bright Horse IT for Hotel Sky on Aruba Central.

Bright Horse IT currently manages the networks of four hotels on the same multi-tenant platform and is looking forward to adding other sites, including new Hotel Sky locations.

ENSURING A WIRELESS EXPERIENCE THROUGHOUT

At its most simple, the Aruba network allows Hotel Sky to provide high-performance connectivity and digital services to guests throughout each hotel. Wi-Fi is free at the poolside, in the room and in every corner of each site.

“We don’t want to nickel-and-dime guests with added expenses,” says Kelley. “Here, Wi-Fi is free, every time. We know guests will bring their own devices and want to connect to Netflix and WhatsApp. That means we don’t need fixed phones in each room and can provide a secure Wi-Fi phone through our app, or simply let people use our Wi-Fi to use their own favourite IP communication platforms. Guests expect good Wi-Fi like they expect a good shower and a great night’s sleep.”

ENABLING SELF-SERVICE FOR GUESTS

Self-service is central to the hotel experience. It doesn’t matter if you’re operating at the top or the budget ends of the market, certain guests are happy to check-in online or download a room key to their phone.

“We talk about creating a ‘home from home experience’ for guests, but how often do you have to ask someone at home for a key to your front door,” Kelley points out. “Many of our guests want to manage this themselves.”

The Hotel Sky app, developed on the iRiS platform with customisation from Bright Horse IT, allows guests to check-in, download the room key, order food and explore local attractions. The Aruba network means guests can check on the location of room service deliv-





ery and the room key is synced to the Assa Abloy digital lock.

DRIVING OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY WITH A DIGITAL AUDIT TRAIL

One less noticeable but very important impact is on housekeeping. There is clearly a cost benefit to having guests check themselves in or order room service via the app rather than calling down to reception. The more significant benefit is Hotel Sky's ability to monitor all aspects of room cleaning and facility maintenance.

"Our housekeeping teams can check each room, using an iPad camera to record details, in a sequential process," Kelley explains. "We log every scratch and every dent."

This ensures standards are upheld and that the appropriate maintenance teams are requested. It drives operational efficiency and leaves a clear audit trail.

SUPPORTING SERVICE INNOVATION

The most eye-catching examples of Hotel Sky's commitment to technology in the service of the guest experience are three concierges at the Sandton property, named Lexi, Micah and Ariel. The difference with the Hotel Sky concierges is that they are robots.

Lexi, Micah and Ariel can take your luggage to your room. They can bring your Uber Eats order to the room or offer advice on local places to eat or tomorrow's weather. They can adjust the AC in your room and remind guests to switch off their lights. They're also multilingual.

Even with the pressure to control costs, and the temptation to enable guests to self-serve everything, Kelley



is adamant hospitality remains a people business. But Covid-19 has placed unique strains on the operating model: Hotel Sky's three robots, wiped clean and virus-free, have helped navigate temporary restrictions.

"Is it a gimmick? Of course, and it's a gimmick that has generated a huge amount of positive press coverage for us," says Kelley. "But the robots have also served to highlight a growing trend in the hospitality sector: some guests are not that interested in engaging with a human. They want to get to where they want to be with the minimum amount of interaction."

For guests comfortable with using the app, a robot concierge is just the next step. Your food is packed in the kitchen and is untouched by anyone else except by yourself once delivered to your room.

"It also means we have more human resources to serve those customers that want more personnel engagement," says Kelley. "In a 400-room hotel there are many different types of guest. We can deliver an appropriate service for each demographic."