Digitisation and personalisation continue to be paramount to unlocking operational efficiencies and elevating the guest experience. Steigenberger Hotels & Resorts is driving its digital transformation on an Aruba architecture. By adopting a global standard, it can accelerate new hotel openings, centrally manage network usage and provide a consistent platform for digital innovation.
It is tough to discuss the hospitality sector and not acknowledge the impact of Covid-19. The global pandemic has caused business travel, holidays and flights to grind down to a trickle. Hotel occupancy rates are a fraction of what they need to be.

Deutsche Hospitality has, arguably, more reasons for optimism than most. The group is diversified. It operates five hotel brands, covering the luxury, business, budget and city centre style sectors of the market. It was also acquired in 2019 by Nasdaq-listed Huazhu Group, investors with long-term ambitions.

“It is no secret that we intend to grow,” says Florian Daniel, Vice President Group Information Technology, Deutsche Hospitality. “We plan to have 500 properties in the next couple of years. We’re also investing in the digitisation of the business.”

CREATING A SEAMLESS DIGITAL EXPERIENCE FOR GUESTS

Setting aside unexpected and unavoidable business disruptions such as the 2020 pandemic, digitisation and generating value-driven experiences for guests is the long-term plan, says Daniel. The ideal is to create seamless interactions and services for guests, from the initial online search, to chatbots to help with booking and checking in, to ordering room service.

“If a guest so chooses, they can have an entirely digital interaction. They’re checked in automatically, their room key is on their phone, they can order any service via an app,” he says. “Or we can do it in person. The challenge is to be ready for both approaches.”

Deutsche Hospitality is accelerating this digitisation by building the networks at Steigenberger Hotels & Resorts, its luxury brand, on an Aruba architecture.

“We operate all around the world. It is important we have a partner that can manage, install and maintain a network in those geographies,” Daniel explains. “We also need an architecture that is easy to manage, consistent and reliable.”
Aruba provides clever products for the hospitality market. Easy to integrate, easy to manage, with a simple architecture and clear future strategy.

FLORIAN DANIEL
Vice President Group Information Technology, Deutsche Hospitality

No matter which segment of the market, guest Wi-Fi dropping out is unacceptable.

A STANDARDISED APPROACH TO ACCELERATE DEPLOYMENTS
The Aruba architecture is built on 300 Series access points, deployed as pairs, and a mix of 2930F and 5400R series Campus Switches which constitute the network from the data centre core to the hotel access layers. Each hotel houses its own Mobility Controllers and the collective group of controllers are managed centrally via a Mobility Conductor at Deutsche Hospitality’s Frankfurt data centre. Over 10,000 devices are managed, also centrally, via AirWave Network Management and the security, NAC and user and device role-based policies are orchestrated via ClearPass NAC and Policy Manager for the business network.

In each room, dedicated LAN and Wi-Fi wall-mount AP-303H access points provide unified access for wired appliances and services such as IP-TV, IP-Telephony or in-room music, while ensuring high performance Wi-Fi for guests, managed and delivered by a third-party provider.

The network secures and provides high-performance connectivity for services such as CCTV, registration desk, POS, digital business corner, fire and voice alarms or digital billboards. Each application and domain is securely segmented and access controlled in order to ensure that only the right and known profile of users, devices or things can be connected or can access each area.

“Aruba provides clever products for the hospitality market,” Daniel says. “Easy to integrate, easy to manage, with a simple architecture and clear future strategy.”

There are different access points for guest rooms (Aruba AP-303H) and higher-density conference rooms (Aruba AP-315), but otherwise the design is straightforward and easily replicated. The exception is the Steigenberger Hotel in Davos, host to the annual World Economic Forum, where failure is not an option and all equipment is doubled up.

The Aruba architecture and business solution also enables the optimisation of business processes for Steigenberger Hotels & Resorts. “It is a standardised approach. The advantage is that we can deploy quickly, we can deploy with certainty knowing the Aruba products will perform and we can quickly calculate the cost of a network for any size of hotel.”

When opportunities arise, it means Steigenberger can move at pace.

DIGITISATION TO DRIVE PERSONALISATION AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY
The Aruba architecture also allows Steigenberger to segment different user groups, devices or network usages. This is most relevant in differentiating guests - and loyalty members - from conference attendees.

Personalisation will continue to be the key challenge for the hospitality sector, Daniel believes, particularly at the luxury end of the market. Digital provides opportunities, but data compliance - GDPR in Europe - sets restraints.

“We have to respect GDPR. Personalisation has to be with the consent of the guest,” he says. “It will be possible to
identify a guest by their MAC address and grant them digital services directly, but this cannot be invasive. We will explore this, of course, but there has to be a balance."

The more immediate promise of digital is on operational efficiency. It can help streamline housekeeping, procurement and smart building management. Steigenberger is looking at digital layering to improve staff skills and productivity.

“The more information about a guest or our services we can put into the hands of our staff, the better the service. We need to be transparent about this, and serve to empower staff,” he says. “We’re also in a competitive jobs market. Digital can help train and retain good staff.”

TOWARDS GREATER STANDARDISATION AND CENTRAL MANAGEMENT
Steigenberger Hotels & Resorts is not the entire Deutsche Hospitality business, Daniel states. The group’s other four brands will all have their own priorities. However, as a group, there is sense in taking a standardised approach to the network and in centralising management.

It is natural that Deutsche Hospitality will explore Aruba’s cloud-based management tools, he says: “We see the advantage of cloud-based deployment and management. We just need to be clear on security, redundancy and value.

“From a network perspective, our goal is to be more automated and orchestrated. We are hotel operators and our attention must be on our guests.”