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Washington State Resort Embraces Wireless

BY PAULA BERNIER

When it comes to hotels, Salish Lodge & Spa is simply top drawer.

Thirty miles from Seattle and near Snoqualmie Falls, the second most visited tourist destination in Washington, the resort's rooms feature wood-burning fireplaces, oversized whirlpool tubs and featherbeds.

That's not to mention the spa, fine restaurants and voluminous meeting spaces.

As a result of the luxurious environment and services, Salish Lodge & Spa has received numerous awards, which



The Salish Lodge & Spa, a luxury property 30 miles outside of Seattle, this July turned up free Wi-Fi for visitors throughout its resort.

include the AAA 4 Diamond Award for 2003, the Mobil 3 Star Award for 2003, a position on the Conde Nast Traveler Magazine Gold List 2002, and a spot in Travel and Leisure magazine's 500 Best Hotels in the World.

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It's no wonder Salish Lodge & Spa wanted only the best for its customers when it came to broadband access. Earlier this year, the resort implemented Wi-Fi connectivity throughout its property and offers it as a complimentary amenity to its guests.

"We have a lot of corporate customers, especially in the high-tech sector" who were asking for high-speed Internet access at the resort, says Peter Cooper, director of e-business for Salish Lodge & Spa, which hosts a large number of events for Redmond, Wash. - based Microsoft Corp. "But, the lodge was built some years ago before high-speed Internet access was even an issue."

Stringing wire throughout the property would have been too expensive, says Cooper, so the lodge opted for Wi-Fi. The company invested about \$30,000 outfitting the property for Wi-Fi; Cooper estimates a hardwired solution would've cost twice as much, with most of the costs in human resources to do the install.

To keep costs and the pull on resort staff to a minimum after the installation, Salish Lodge & Spa tapped wireless ISP Wi-Fi Guys to provide a managed Wi-Fi solution, Cooper says. The WISP handles about 80 percent of the infrastructure maintenance on the network, and offers technical support to guests through an 800 number.

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In keeping with the top flight quality of the resort, this isn't just your run-of-the-mill Wi-Fi setup, says Tom Sullivan, chief manager of Wi-Fi Guys. Instead of simply implementing a standard Wi-Fi network setup, Wi-Guys did a custom network architecture design that includes not one, but two, T1s.

Each of the two dedicated connections goes to different Internet backbone providers — one to ACC Business, a division of AT&T, and the other to carrier Qwest Communications International Inc. The dual T1s offer redundancy, in case either backbone provider should have an outage, and better throughput, given Wi-Fi Guys uses a bandwidth aggregator to bond the two T1s to take advantage of the full bandwidth available on the connections, explains Sullivan. The resort already had one T1 in place for its meeting space, so Wi-Fi Guys integrated that existing wireline solution with its wireless service, he adds.

FatPipe Networks contributed a router clustering device called WARP to the Salish deployment. The product offers redundancy and reliability, and does load balancing between connections, says Sanchaita Datta, Fat Pipe CTO.

The network also consists of a gateway access controller from Nomadix Inc. The FatPipe Networks and Nomadix engineers worked over the phone to preconfigure the resort's network architecture.

Datta says it can be tricky when multiple VPNs originating from remote users at a location like a hotel try to access different corporate headquarters. That's because the network doesn't know anything about the traffic because it's encrypted. The vendors set up a solution so lodge visitors don't have to make changes their PCs or IP addresses, she says. "We had a conference call with Nomadix to make sure both [products] could pass traffic without causing any configuration issues or pain to the end users," she says.

The Salish Lodge & Spa's Wi-Fi network architecture is also unique in that it offers coverage throughout the property — both inside and out, allowing for seamless roaming of Wi-Fi-enabled device users. "So there's no need to reboot the router if you move from your room to a restaurant," for example, Sullivan says. That broad coverage is enabled by the network's 15 access points, supplied by 3Com Corp.

Wi-Fi Guys also uses Micro Energetics Corp.'s LAN*Minder tool to allow it to reboot network elements to maximize performance on the network, says Sullivan.

It's that kind of attention to detail that enabled Wi-Fi Guys to win the Salish Lodge & Spa deal over others, Sullivan says. "We beat out the No. 1 player in town on this," he says, adding the Salish Lodge & Spa is both Wi-Fi Guys' largest and most prestigious deployment to date.

Adds Jay Lewis, vice president of Wi-Fi Guys, "If you're thinking Ritz-Carlton, think low-end compared to the Salish Lodge & Spa."

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