



SOTI MobiControl delivers a five-star performance for peninsula hotels in-room control systems

Peninsula Hotels is a prestigious hotel group managed under the Hong Kong & Shanghai Hotels, Limited portfolio. Its five- and six-star properties are located in major cities throughout Asia, Europe and North America. In 2012, the R&D group at Hongkong & Shanghai Hotels began exploring the implementation of Samsung Galaxy tablet devices in guest rooms, starting with its Hong Kong property, with plans to expand to its global operations once the infrastructure was in place. The key to successful deployment was a simple but effective enterprise mobile management (EMM) platform that would allow seamless, centralized control over deployment, software upgrades and device tracking and lockdown.

The Lockdown Challenge

In 2012, the Hongkong & Shanghai Hotels Research and Technology group was tasked with developing in-room tablet-based control systems to manage lighting, heating and cooling systems, drapes and guest information on hotel services and around the city. The intent was to create a solution that could ultimately be deployed in all Peninsula hotels worldwide. According to Christopher Chan, Senior Manager R&D, Research & Technology for Hongkong & Shanghai Hotels, deploying Samsung tablets in guest rooms raised a number of management challenges from the outset. Not only do the devices require ongoing monitoring from a central console, it was essential to have full screen lockdown to prevent users from browsing the Web and enable deployment via the network.

“Without centralized management control, we realized that deploying tablets worldwide would be extremely cumbersome for our IT group,” Chan explains. “Capabilities such as device lockdown, geofencing and remote monitoring and diagnostics were very important needs for us.” While working with Samsung on product development, it became clear that the organization would need to find a fully developed EMM solution. “We didn’t have the time to wait for a solution to be developed. We needed something right away,” Chan says. One thing that stood out from the outset of the project was that the Samsung Galaxy tablets did not have a home button. “That meant guests could easily access other programs,” he says. “So first and foremost, we wanted a program that would enable full screen capture so people would be unable to browse.”

The MobiControl Factor

Chan learned about MobiControl from SOTI. “We initially went to Samsung to see if we could work together to develop a management solution for the tablet deployment. Their Mobile Division introduced us to SOTI, who happened to be one of the first in the industry to help Samsung in this area.”

With over 120,000 enterprise deployments and millions of devices managed globally, SOTI MobiControl enables organizations to centrally manage, support, secure and track mobile devices, regardless of the type, platform and location.

Vertical: Hospitality

Deployment: Corporate-liable

OS: Android

Mobile Devices: Samsung Galaxy Tablets

The Challenge:

Managing, monitoring and securing wandering mobile devices in a hotel room setting.

Benefits:

Improved Efficiency and Productivity:

- Centralized deployment with the ability to remotely deploy apps silently
- Remote Access to check in on tablets, from battery usage to technical issues

Improved Customer Service:

- Full screen capability on the tablet provided a great user experience, there was no other EMM that was able to provide this
- Ease of Check-out

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Christopher Chan,
Senior Manager R&D,
Research & Technology
for Hongkong & Shanghai Hotels



Key features include:

- Centralized administrative control via a convenient web console
- Single, simple and intuitive user interface for managing multiple devices on multiple platforms
- Ability to block access to unwanted features and apps on devices
- Efficient software distribution
- Tracking and reporting of all mobile assets.

Chan says that MobiControl stood apart from anything else they had looked at. "One of the key things we really liked about the product is that we could deploy apps 'silently'. This was essential since uploading an app to an Android device usually requires user intervention. Imagine if you had 2,000 devices and needed every person to click okay to deploy an app. That would seriously affect efficiency and productivity."

Centralized deployment was especially crucial since application development for the guestrooms is an ongoing process, Chan explains. "With MobiControl we can manage anything from battery monitoring to MAC address checks to accessing information on who handled the deployment on every single tablet. Another feature that helped us a lot was the NTP [network time protocol] clock synchronization, which allowed us to synch up all the tablets in a room at the same time."

MobiControl also addressed the hotel's need for its app to go full screen with a lockdown function so that guests could not exit the application without a password. This full screen effect was a particularly compelling point of differentiation for Chan. "Others simply couldn't do that, or were comparatively weaker in terms of security, monitoring and deployment. It was an easy decision."

A Platform for Growth

Currently SOTI MobiControl is used to manage over 400 devices in its Hong Kong property. "This year's plans are to deploy close to 900 more systems in our Paris and Beverly Hills properties," Chan says. "Chicago is next. In total we expect to have 1,700 devices deployed by 2015."

He says while they were very specific about their needs, he was pleasantly surprised by the additional capabilities MobiControl had to offer. "We found we could disable cameras, lock certain programs and wipe out icons on screen. One of the

great things is that we can do all those things remotely, including presentations and remote support, rather than working with devices one by one."

The team has also been leveraging remote access to check in on tablet performance, Chan says. "We can tell if it's healthy, if something is wrong and the condition of the battery. At any given time we can even determine which technician is working on a tablet and when. We're able to keep logs on everything."

The benefits extend to housekeeping, engineering and IT staff at the hotel itself, since they can be notified by central administration to check up on a tablet from time to time. "Sometimes we get information from MobiControl so we can send email alerts to different departments if something needs checking, such as a tablet that may be offline."

MobiControl's scalability is another major factor as the organization works on its expansion plans. "Activation is a big issue as we expand globally," Chan explains. "It takes only one email to get things up and running and since we already had deployment experience, it is all relatively easy. All that's needed is an APK [Android application packet file] to get the console up and running and that's it. It's pretty much a no brainer."

The Results

While it's still relatively early to generate return on investment numbers, Chan says one of the biggest benefits has been the public response to in-room tablets. "It's big publicity for us, because very few hotels are using them at the moment. Some are using tablets for video streaming or as ebooks. In terms of having a tablet to control lights, we're the only ones in Hong Kong. In-room control features are proving to be very popular with guests. They can even take the tablet with them to another location such as a theatre room to control systems there."

Chan is also looking forward to using the geofencing functionality. "There are things we have come up with that we need to do to improve security, such as RFIDs and sensors on devices. Once a tablet leaves a room, we may have a system that automatically sends an alert to security or engineering, or trigger a siren. We're still looking at the possibilities."

The organization is now looking to create its own OEM tablets to streamline processes, reduce costs, and create a consistent brand experience as it deploys units across multiple properties, Chan says. "There's no doubt that SOTI will be there with us as well."

SOTI is the world's most trusted leader in enterprise mobility management. Over 12,000 customers worldwide use SOTI's award-winning MobiControl to enhance enterprise mobility and enable Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiatives.

More Information

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