MICROS OPERA PMS INTEGRATION

FEATURE GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

For the hotel industry, Property Management Systems (PMS) have long been in place to reduce the IT overhead for hotel staff and personnel. Hotel PMS are typically comprehensive software suites that manage a variety of operational tasks, such as guest reservations, guest details, and room billing. Already the central hub for a large majority of hotel services, the PMS can naturally be further extended to integrate wireless network infrastructure. From automatic account creation using guest details to consolidated Wi-Fi and room bills, hotel staff can easily offer managed Wi-Fi to their guests without the additional burden of having to continually operate two separate systems.

This feature guide describes the integration of 4ipnet WHG-series Wireless LAN Controller with Micros Opera PMS, and outlines all the features supported directly on the interface between the two systems without any additional Middleware. No additional software or equipment is required to support the features described in this document.

WHY MANAGED WI-FI?

To fully understand why hotels should even be concerned with integrating their PMS systems with modern day Wi-Fi solutions, there is one fundamental question that needs to be addressed. Why should a hotel invest in a complete, managed Wi-Fi solution, and not just install the wireless routers that can be picked up from the electronics shop down the street? To answer this question, a hotel must look at both the tangibles and intangibles associated with deploying a managed wireless network, which all boils down to one factor: guest satisfaction.

When a guest is not satisfied with the Wi-Fi provided by a hotel, whether it is because there is no Wi-Fi at all or because the Wi-Fi performance is poor and unreliable, a multitude of detrimental effects can occur:

1. Guests don't return to the hotel in future travels/vacations
2. Guests leave negative reviews on travel websites, causing the hotel to lose bookings from potential new guests
3. Guests refuse to pay any charges associated with the Wi-Fi service

How do hotels avoid this? **Invest in a managed Wi-Fi solution.**

Contrary to the wishes of hotel IT staff, not all Internet users are respectful of their fellow guests. Therefore, a managed wireless LAN solution is necessary to help hotels maintain Wi-Fi service quality. Through advanced features such as bandwidth control, traffic classification, and firewall policies, hotels can prevent an individual or small group of users from consuming the entire network bandwidth when using bandwidth-hungry applications such as HD video streaming or Bit Torrent. Furthermore, the centralized management interface provided by wireless controllers enables the hotels to respond to Wi-Fi issues reported by guests much more promptly than if simple consumer-grade Wi-Fi routers were deployed. Lower maintenance efforts, quicker response time, and most important of all, fine-grained control over the wireless usage of each hotel guest all contribute to maintaining a high-quality Wi-Fi experience.

A happy guest is a happy hotel.

MICROS OPERA PMS INTEGRATION

If a hotel has to operate an additional, independent system just to provide Wi-Fi to its guests, the tasks involved increase exponentially, becoming time-consuming and burdensome while offsetting the some of the previously described benefits. However, for hotels using Micros Opera PMS, there is now a simple and easy solution. 4ipnet's WHG-series controllers come with a built-in interface to Micros Opera PMS, making the process of providing managed Wi-Fi a walk in the park. Why operate two systems, when you only need to operate one?

The remainder of this document is a list of features that are made possible by the 4ipnet WHG to Opera PMS interface.

HANDS-FREE, EASY TO REMEMBER ACCOUNTS

When a hotel is operating a managed Wi-Fi network, every user needs to be assigned a unique account for authentication and monitoring purposes. However, if you were a hotel guest and both the username and password for Wi-Fi access given to you by the front desk were a string of random characters, such as "0xre23nkq", wouldn't you find it very annoying and difficult to remember?

With the 4ipnet WHG-series controllers, hotel staff do not even need to lift a finger. Accounts don't need to be manually created, and usernames and passwords don't need to be manually configured. After checking-in to the hotel, guests can directly login to the hotel's secure Wi-Fi network using their own room number, last name, or reservation number. For example, many hotels today elect to provide accounts using the guest's room number as the username and the guest's last name as the password. If you were the guest in this case, all you would have to do is remember your own room number – surely, that can't be too difficult.

Currently the allowed parameters for the Wi-Fi account's username and password are:

1. Room Number
2. Guest Reservation Number
3. Guest Name (typically configured by hotels as the guest's last name) [password only]

CONSOLIDATED ROOM BILL

Although there is a growing trend in recent years for free Wi-Fi, many hotels today still use Wi-Fi as part of their business strategy for additional sources of revenue. In some of these hotels, basic Internet access is free, but larger bandwidth is going to cost you a few extra dollars. In others you aren't even given a choice, and must pay for any form of Internet access. In both cases, it would be inconvenient if the hotel had to manage two separate bills for a guest - one for basic room charges and the other just for Wi-Fi.

On the 4ipnet WHG-series controllers, Wi-Fi access charges can be directly posted to the room of the guest, which serves multiple benefits:

1. The guest does not have to use traditional forms of payment (e.g. cash, credit card) to purchase Wi-Fi access
2. The hotel does not need a dedicated personnel/cashier to service guests who wish to purchase Wi-Fi access
3. The guest has one single bill for all activities/facilities used in the hotel, including Wi-Fi

Furthermore, for any tourist or business traveler it is typical to check the room bill for discrepancies during check-out and ensure that all the charges are legitimate. The WHG controller supports the sending of a text description along with charges posted to the Opera PMS. Thus, on the final room bill received by the guest there is a description of the Wi-Fi charge, in addition to the actual charge quantity.

GUEST ROOM CHANGES

Suppose Mr. Smith checks-in to a hotel in room 1010, and for whatever reason on the second day he requests a room change to upgrade from a garden view to ocean view room, switching to room 1030. Following the previously mentioned example of using room number as username and last name as password, Mr. Smith would have been using username 1010 and password Smith during the first night of his stay. However, it makes no sense for him to continue using 1010 as his username for the remaining four nights of his stay in room 1030. Normally in this case, the hotel would have to manually enter the wireless LAN controller's management interface to modify the account credentials.

With 4ipnet's solution, this process is completely automated. The 4ipnet WHG-series controllers automatically detect when any of the guest's details are modified on the PMS, and if the modified details are used as the Wi-Fi account's username or password, the account credentials are adjusted correspondingly.

Room number is not the only field that this feature supports. As previously mentioned, the current allowed fields for username and password are room number, guest name, and guest reservation number – modifications to any of these three will be reflected on the Wi-Fi account, as long as the modified parameter is being used as the account username or password.

GUEST ROOM SHARING

In many business hotels, it is common to have multiple guests checking-in to the same hotel room. For example, airline flight crew often share rooms, but require separate room bills (and hence separate check-ins) for corporate accounting purposes.

This is where the 4ipnet solution is unique and truly shines. As a guest-based system, the 4ipnet WHG-series controllers are able to distinguish between the different guests staying in the same room. Each guest can have his/her own individual Wi-Fi account, which is necessary in hotels that provide multiple-tiered services (e.g. free vs. paid Wi-Fi). For instance, the first guest may only need free Wi-Fi for checking emails, while the second guest may need unlimited bandwidth Wi-Fi for HD video streaming. There is, however, one caveat – hotels must not configure the Wi-Fi account username to use the room number parameter, as both guests are staying in the same room. Usernames should be unique, and in the guest share scenario, the room number is not a unique parameter.

As long as a unique parameter is used for the account username, the WHG controller can post charges to the Opera PMS individually for each guest, such that when the guests check-out at the front desk, there is no space for dispute as to who made the charges in the shared room. This automation eliminates a lot of tedious tasks otherwise required by the hotel front desk.

AUTOMATIC ACCOUNT DELETION

When guests check-out of hotels, it would be troublesome if the hotel staff had to manually delete each of the Wi-Fi accounts used by the guests. Furthermore, following from previous examples, if the account username is room number, the account must be deleted before the check-in of the next guest to avoid overlapping accounts in the system.

Fortunately, the WHG controller supports automatic deletion of accounts on check-out. In other words, when the hotel staff helps the guest check-out of a hotel, there is no additional action required with regards to the Wi-Fi account. This falls in line with the primary purpose of a direct interface between the WHG controller and the Opera PMS - to make the integration of managed Wi-Fi to existing hotel technology as automated as possible and minimize operational overhead, even when there are actually two separate systems.

AUTOMATIC DATA SYNCHRONIZATION

Typically hotels have already been operational for some time before the installation of a wireless network infrastructure. Therefore, it is impossible to require hotels to pause operation of the PMS in order to allow for synchronization of guest and room information with a newly deployed wireless LAN controller. Furthermore, for large hotels with hundreds or even thousands of guest rooms, manual synchronization is an unthinkable task.

Fear not, as this daunting task can be accomplished on the 4ipnet WHG controller with the click of a button. The automatic synchronization feature between the WHG controller and the Opera PMS guarantees that the two systems have the exact same copy of all guest and room information, which is necessary for hotels to start providing Wi-Fi accounts. With 4ipnet, getting the wireless network up and running is extremely simple and requires no downtime at all of existing hotel operations.

SUMMARY

Based on the features described above, it should be clear how the direct integration of 4ipnet WHG-series controllers with Micros Opera PMS simplifies the work required for hotels to provide a managed Wi-Fi network. **Most important of all, this is accomplished without any middleware or additional tools.**

Given that Wi-Fi performance and reliability is crucial to the continued success of a hotel in today's smartphone and tablet environment, hotels must be able to manage its wireless users and traffic. From the hotel guest to the employees and staff, 4ipnet brings a solution considers all facets, making Wi-Fi simple to deploy, easy to use, and effortless to maintain.