5 Star Printing for the Perfect Hotel Stay

A hotel can only offer perfect service when their IT systems work seamlessly. That's why FocusNet developed their Private Hotel Cloud and rely on ThinPrint as the central printing solution.

The taxi to the airport is waiting outside, which is why hotel check-outs need to be quick. If the receptionist needs forever to print the requested receipt, this can be annoying, unnecessary and leaves a bad final impression on what may have been a pleasant stay. And even when arriving, you don't want to have to wait long at the reception desk due to technical difficulties. This scenario is unfortunately not uncommon, because in many hotels the IT infrastructure is outdated, and printing is often part of the problem. The hotel industry in particular has certain specific requirements – the front office is hectic, with check-in and check-out forms, invoices and other documents having to be printed without delay. The relevant requirements for printer-specific settings, including different paper trays for different forms, additional small printers for Wi-Fi codes or suitable drivers for each PC for example, are often not met on site.
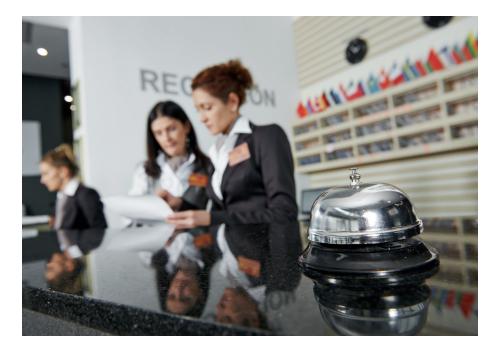
Managed Services for the Hospitality Industry

Against the backdrop of these challenges, FocusNet developed its scalable Private Hotel Cloud solution in 2016. The Berlin-based IT provider offers full-service IT for the areas of system administration, server and storage, office communication, infrastructure, planning, consulting and sales. Among other customers, the hospitality industry is one of the company's focal points. FocusNet's references include numerous international hotel companies with between five and 120 locations. *"Via the Private Hotel Cloud, we provide them with a centrally managed IT environment as a managed service,"* explains Lukasz Madeksza, Technical Director at FocusNet. *"They can run their entire day-to-day business centrally in the cloud".*

Plannable Revenue Instead of Disaster Response

The advantage for the hotel companies is that they no longer have to worry about keeping software up to date at each individual site, and possibly require an IT specialist to take care of it. In addition, costs are reduced because payment follows the pay-per-use model – an amount is paid per user based on the extent to which individual applications are used. A cloud solution is also a more rewarding business model for the service provider, creating a more predictable, low-maintenance and recurring source of income than a constantly recurring, spontaneous battles against incidents.

When FocusNet tested the solution for the first hotel chain in pilot operation in 2016, printing was the biggest challenge. The reason for this is the system integration typically found in the hotel industry – numerous hotel-specific sub-IT systems, ranging from opening and closing doors, air conditioning, pay TV, etc., are all coordinated via a central property management system (PMS) to which the applications are connected via interfaces. The standard PMS in the hotel sector is the Oracle Opera system, which is also used by all FocusNet customers. It consists of two parts – a server component usually hosted directly at Oracle and the client at the central IT point of the hotel company. In the past, FocusNet had to provide helpdesk support for the clients. This was particularly time-consuming when printing, as the print jobs in Opera are based on two identifications – the exact PC name and the printer name. Whenever a user renamed them, or installed a new printer, nothing worked

anymore and FocusNet had to follow up the change in Opera with remote maintenance.

Exotic Printers in Exotic Destinations – Managed from Berlin

Almost all print jobs in the hotel are generated via Opera. *"Unfortunately, the system is quite complicated to manage,"* says Lukasz Madeksza. There are various print tags – "Print invoice", "Print report", "Print Wi-Fi codes", etc. On each individual PC, you have to define these tags individually for the printers connected to it. On site, this is still possible, although tedious. With a centralized cloud solution, however, which is designed for multiple locations with multiple printers and multiple PCs, you would have to have every conceivable printer driver available on the server – which would require an immense effort.

FocusNet managing director Ryszard Szklany describes the elegant Thin-Print Engine solution to the challenge – *"Only the ThinPrint Client needs to be installed on the central server, which we give a certain name to, for example 'Standard Printer'. This is defined as the default for all print tags and locations and can therefore be set up in just a few clicks."* So instead of having to provide the appropriate drivers for some exotic printers on each individual PC in each hotel, there is only one virtual printer driver available on the Private Hotel Cloud's central print server – the ThinPrint Output Gateway.

For the hotels, this means that they don't have to employ their own IT staff on site to ensure that every printer is properly controlled. Above all, the central solution facilitates the work of the frontline employees – if the service staff at the front office in Opera wants to print out an invoice or a check-in form, the PMS sends the print job to the ThinPrint Engine. This is where automatic printer mapping takes place. It ensures that the correct printer and printer tray is selected for the client on site. The convenient ThinPrint features such as optimized compression, SpeedCache, streaming and encryption guarantee that print job performance is never lacking, despite the cloud solution being hosted in Germany and the hotels sites located across the globe.

"We were amazed at how smoothly and reliably centralized printing with ThinPrint works," says Ryszard Szklany. For him as a provider, ThinPrint's billing model also means high flexibility – *"We don't have to buy 300 licenses at the beginning and then permanently purchase additional licenses when additional workstations are added at the hotel. With pay-per-use, we can calculate the costs for the software solution far better. When customers use the software more, which generates more revenue for us, we pay the corresponding licenses to ThinPrint, and vice versa."* This all takes place internally, without hotel guests and service staff on site noticing anything. For them, all they see is that hotel IT services function perfectly and both guests and employees can look forward to the next visit!

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