



► High-Stakes Networking

Emtec's expertise and methodology pay off during Tropicana expansion project.

During a recent \$280 million expansion project that made it the largest hotel in New Jersey, the Tropicana Casino and Resort in Atlantic City needed a technology partner with the skill and experience to implement a sophisticated and highly secure data network. Emtec, Inc., proved to be a good bet.

"We were basically doubling the size of our network, and we needed a partner to do the design and installation because of resource constraints," said Don Kneisel, Tropicana's Assistant Vice President of Information Technology. "It was a challenging project because it wasn't your typical network setup. "Emtec was very responsive to our needs, from the design phase all the way through implementation. They not only had the expertise, but they were flexible enough to give us some wiggle room here and there, which you need in a project of this size. We've been extremely satisfied."

From a guest's perspective, the networking project is undoubtedly the least-visible aspect of the expansion known as "The Quarter at Tropicana." With its palm-tree encircled plaza, brightly colored facade and the balustrades and balconies of its colonial-style architecture, The Quarter spectacularly evokes the 1940s cosmopolitan yet exotic street life of Havana, Cuba. The addition features some 200,000 square feet of dining, entertainment, retail and spa locations, as well as the Havana Tower — an 18-floor wing that adds 502 rooms and 45,000 square feet of meeting space to the Tropicana's capacity.

The network, however, ultimately serves the same purpose as these more visually stimulating delights: It contributes to a world-class level of guest service that is essential in the ultra-competitive resort-casino industry.

Broadband Access:

In addition to integrating with the pre-existing network to handle the Tropicana's administrative needs, the network also supplies high-speed Internet access to each of the Tower's guest rooms and suites.

"In-room broadband access has become an important amenity in the hospitality industry," said Kneisel. "Because the quality of the network will be reflected in our guests' experience, we had to have a solution that was stable, reliable and highly secure."

Emtec was chosen to help design the network infrastructure, acquire all the necessary hardware and install and implement the finalized solution- only after a thorough selection process. Emtec's attention to detail during the bidding process impressed Tropicana's IT staff.

"We have a very detailed methodology that helps set the customer's expectations," said Dave Pfiester, Emtec Network Architect, "beginning with the assessment phase all the way through the design, implementation, and support phases. We were able to put Tropicana at ease that the project would be completed to their satisfaction within their required time frame."

"I was looking to begin a relationship with a networking company, so I was looking past this project to the future as well," he said. "They put a lot of time into the initial analysis, so that made us very comfortable during the evaluation period."

"I also checked references. My network staff spoke with some of their clients, and I spoke with some of my industry peers who have experience with Emtec. We got a lot of positive feedback. That was very important to us."

By the time Emtec was selected, the shell of construction was in place and Kneisel's staff had already developed a basic network design. Emtec's team then stepped in to fine tune the design and make recommendations about what type of networking gear should be used and how it should be configured in order to ensure maximum redundancy, efficiency and security. Emtec and Tropicana agreed upon a design based on Cisco switches because their inherent flexibility and intelligence have been demonstrated to deliver consistent, predictable and reliable service.

Emphasis on Broadband Security:

Access to all guest rooms in the new tower was an important element of the new network, and that placed a premium on network security considerations. Not only do guests need to be confident that their personal communications are kept private, but the Tropicana staff had to be sure that their corporate network was secure also.

"Ensuring that we could secure every connection from every room required a pretty high level of network design," said Pfiester. "From a technical perspective, it wasn't a simple job. It was a considerable challenge."

There were other challenges as well. The new system had to be integrated with an existing network, which was not based on Cisco gear. In addition, the integrated network had to be compatible with the Tropicana's existing billing system. That meant Emtec's team had to work with several other vendors to achieve a successful integration.

"That was another area where we needed Emtec to work with us, and they did," said Kneisel. "They made sure everyone played nice to pull this all together. There were very few bumps in the road, and when we plugged it in, everything worked fine."

"In fact, I've been pleasantly surprised by how few changes have been necessary because you would expect more with a project of this size. But that's what you get with proper planning and good design. One of the things we did right with this project was put a lot of time into the initial analysis and design so that the final solution required few changes."

Another key, according to Kneisel, was having a technology partner that was willing to be flexible.

"From the end of design to deployment, we had some downtime due to construction delays, and that sometimes meant Emtec had to warehouse equipment longer than they had anticipated," he said. "They never complained and they didn't charge us storage fees. They didn't nickel and dime us."

"With a project like this, you can't define down to the last detail what is going to happen. We needed a partner that understood that, and Emtec did. They always were willing to work with us."

About Emtec: Established in 1964, Emtec, Inc. is a systems integrator that provides IT services and products to the federal, state, local, education and commercial markets. Our market leading value-based management methods, coupled with best-in-class IT technology, consulting and development services, address a wide range of specific client needs, as well as support broader IT transformation initiatives. Emtec's service capabilities span the United States, Canada and countries around the globe.