

Seaport Hotel Implements SessionSuite SOA Edition to Enhance Guest Services and Increase Value of Telecoms Infrastructure

Situated on the historic waterfront, just minutes from Boston’s finest shops, museums and attractions, guests of the Seaport Hotel and Seaport World Trade Center Boston will now enjoy a new, innovative service: the Seaportal. Seaportal is a complimentary state-of-the-art, in-room amenity designed to enhance the guest experience by providing valuable information about the Seaport Hotel events and facilities, along with direct voice calling services through a revolutionary touch-screen Web portal. Seaportal was implemented quickly, cost-effectively and without any upgrades to the existing voice and data network infrastructure using *SessionSuite™ SOA Edition* software from BlueNote Networks. *SessionSuite SOA Edition* integrates IP Telephony with Web services, enabling any organization to embed voice easily into any business application, including portals.

Business Goal: Improving the Guest Experience

The Seaport Hotel and Seaport World Trade Center Boston (www.seaportboston.com) distinguishes itself as a deluxe hotel, meeting, exhibition and special function facility located at the heart of the city’s seaside attractions. Careful attention to detail by the management and staff earned the hotel placement on the prestigious Condé Nast Traveler Gold List and a Four Diamond rating from the AAA. But the management at the Seaport Hotel wanted more; they wanted to advance the guest experience into the 21st century by offering unified communications through an innovative and intuitive Web portal.

The new Web Portal, dubbed Seaportal, would need to deliver personalized services to guests in their rooms immediately after check-in. The portal would provide the usual one-stop-shopping for information about the hotel, and its events and services, but it would also need to provide guests with email access, and local and long-distance calling services.

The Seaport IT staff was tasked with bringing the concept to life within 90 days, and with limited resources. Given the need to coordinate multiple systems and services, the staff determined that a Web-based, service oriented architecture (SOA) would need to form the foundation for delivering this high-value guest experience. The desire to add voice over IP (VoIP) services was constrained by the existing TDM-based PBX/telephone system, which would be too expensive to upgrade or replace.

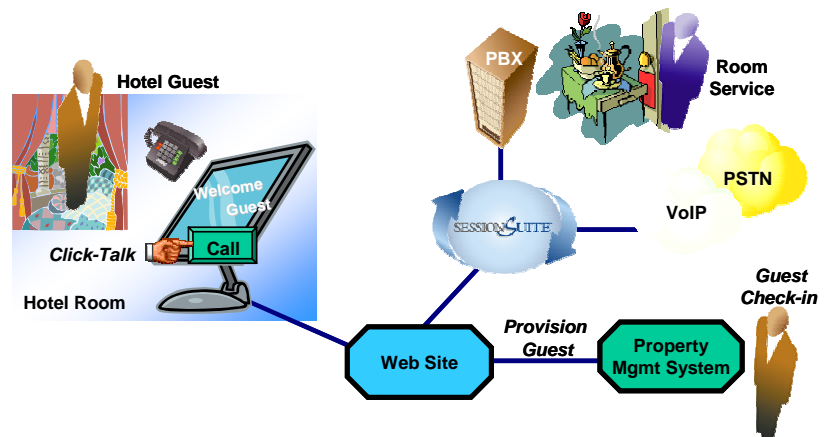
To deliver the highest value solution while containing the scope of the project, existing public Web technology, currently used to advertise the hotel property and book reservations, would be extended to deliver the personalized Seaportal service directly to guests. A new Web service interface to the existing Property Management System would leverage guest information to personalize both content and services. The in-room system itself would be a “thin-client” device with a touch-screen display, and a wireless keyboard and mouse to minimize deployment costs and simplify operation.

The Solution: SessionSuite SOA Edition

After an extensive evaluation of available solutions, John Burke, vice president of technology at Seaport, explains a key reason the hotel chose BlueNote’s *SessionSuite SOA Edition*: “VoIP capabilities were a mandatory requirement for phase I of the Seaportal and BlueNote’s SOA approach enabled us to design, build, implement and integrate this technology into our application without the need to overhaul our existing PBX and guest-room phones. With BlueNote’s *SessionSuite SOA Edition*, we quickly integrated cost-effective IP telephony service into the Seaportal using simple and easy-to-understand Web Service APIs. The low-cost, high-value addition to our infrastructure was accomplished using existing developers, without the need for specialized telephony expertise.”

SessionSuite SOA Edition not only met the demands for fulfilling the guest services, but also offered significant cost-savings for the project with its support for:

- ✓ *Native Web Service APIs* – no specialized telecomm skills required
- ✓ *Minimal Web portal development* – lower investment expense and rapid deployment
- ✓ *Compatible with existing phones* – no VoIP phones or PBX/network changes needed
- ✓ *Integral VoIP service gateway* – minimizes or eliminates long-distance calling expenses



The *SessionSuite SOA Edition* Web Service APIs gave the IT staff the ability to initiate phone calls using simple “Create Session” XML/SOAP messages. Creating the interface logic to *SessionSuite* took only a few days, after which the staff returned to enhancing the portal experience and building the service directories with links to *SessionSuite*. Implementing the call initiation logic did not require any specialized telephony skills or training.

The entire PBX infrastructure and hotel phones remained in place because *SessionSuite* is able to initiate calls between existing rooms and service phones, as well as the PSTN and the Internet. No changes were required in the PBX dial plan or route table. Long-distance calls from hotel guests are routed to a VoIP service provider by *SessionSuite*, affording a savings of up to 80% over previous long-distance costs. As a result, the hotel now promotes complimentary VoIP service as a competitive differentiator without incurring any additional costs for VoIP phones or upgrades necessary to support them.

All phone calls, both inside and outside the hotel, can be initiated from the Seaportal screen using a softphone-like dialer or speed dial icons for hotel or partner services. When the guest dials, the room phone rings and upon answering, guests are connected to the called party. And when surfing the Internet from the in-room display, a guest can initiate a call simply by selecting a number from a Web page. The phone still works as usual, of course, for those who prefer to dial normally.

Using *SessionSuite SOA Edition* not only successfully met the expectations of the hotel IT staff, but also resulted in significantly lower project costs and a rapid deployment schedule of less than 60 days. And when ready, the IT staff can migrate all of the hotel voice services to a software-only solution using standard off-the-shelf servers, allowing the hotel to avoid paying costly PBX maintenance and support fees.

Seaportal features include information on the hotel and local attractions, video and audio entertainment, travel updates and access to Web-based e-mail. By voice-enabling Seaportal using *SessionSuite*, Seaport Hotel also provides direct calling capabilities to various featured guest services, such as room service, as well as complimentary local and domestic long-distance calls over the Internet—all from a user-friendly touch screen display. The Seaportal appeals to the hotel’s wide variety of guests and enables business travelers to leave their laptops at home—an important benefit in these days of fluctuating air travel restrictions. Users can even read email attachments, copy files to a flash drive plugged into a USB port, and print documents, such as boarding passes, at the hotel’s business center.

Seaportal Guest Benefits with *SessionSuite SOA Edition*

- ☛ *Enjoy “one-stop-shopping” for voice, email and IM communications*
- ☛ *Intuitive initiation of all phone calls—both inside and outside the hotel—from a single, unified screen*
- ☛ *Direct “click” connection to featured hotel guest services, such as the concierge, through speed dial icons*
- ☛ *Ability to surf the Web and place a call from any Web page simply by highlighting a phone number*
- ☛ *Complimentary local and domestic long-distance phone calls utilizing Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology*
- ☛ *Enhanced capabilities coming soon, such as direct connection to featured partner services, including local restaurants and attractions*

The Results: A Profitable Platform for the Future

Burke is quite pleased with the initial success of Seaportal: “The launch has gone very smoothly. The feedback has been tremendous, and we feel it’s a real competitive advantage for us.” Regarding the VoIP service, Burke adds, “We have found that guests enjoy the opportunity to experiment with the VoIP technology, and as they become more familiar with the capabilities, they are using the Seaportal to complete more phone calls.”

Burke estimates that the cost to implement Seaportal would have been four times higher if it were not for *SessionSuite*’s unique ability to integrate seamlessly with the existing voice and data network infrastructure.

With the versatile *SessionSuite SOA Edition* software in place, the possibilities are now virtually endless for Seaport. By delivering voice communications as a re-usable Web service, the IT staff can now plan future projects to transform its existing environment to a next-generation, applications-based infrastructure focused on improving guest experience, managing costs and promoting new revenue opportunities by delighting guests in ways that entice them to purchase additional services, rebook future visits, and recommend the Seaport Hotel to friends and colleagues.