

Hospitality Group Greets Guests with Greater Care in the New Normal

As the global pandemic continues, AHC Hospitality follows distancing guidelines, consolidates operations and reimagines customer services in today's new business environment.

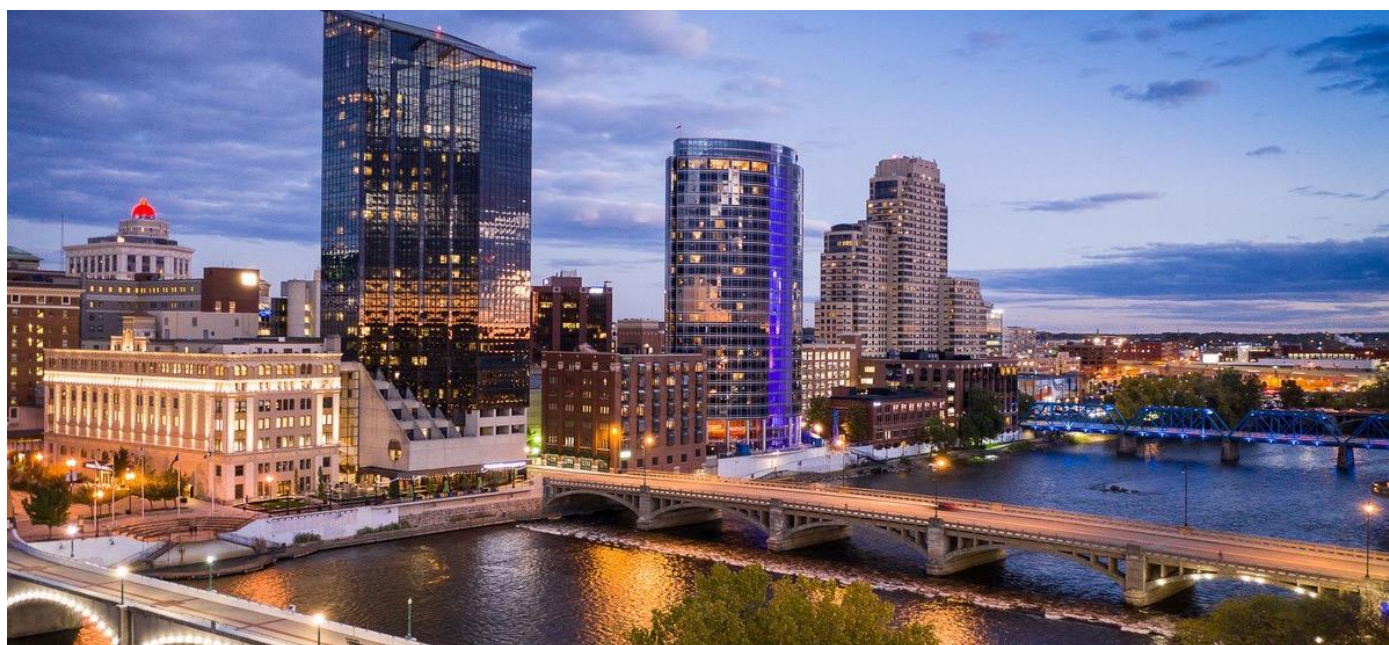
Customer summary

Customer name | AHC Hospitality

Industry | Hospitality | Hotel Management

Location | Grand Rapids, Michigan

Number of employees | 1,500



Companies like AHC Hospitality are rethinking their value propositions with renewed urgency as they adapt to the pandemic. Josh Serba, Chief Information Officer, AHC Hospitality, discussed his company’s contingency and recovery plans after the stay-at-home restrictions are lifted in a recent interview. Here is what he had to say.

The current environment has positioned AHC to offer our management team the ability to perform their jobs while complying with the current “stay-at-home” orders with products like the Cisco HyperFlex. The Amway Grand Plaza will continue to maintain service, including foodservice via the Kitchen Counter by Wolfgang Puck, and room service. What’s next? When we are fully open for business again, and stay-at-home orders are lifted, the built-in intent-based IT network fabric will bring people closer together.”

Q. What changes do you see when the industry recovers?

A. We are already implementing technical advances, which include touch-less services, remote monitoring, personalized support, and digital keys that allow guests to check in, enter and lock their doors from a smartphone without stopping at the front desk.

Q. What have you learned during this crisis about the advantages of Cisco business continuity to bring people-to-people communication closer?

A. The pandemic provides a proving ground for the resilience of customers, partners, municipalities, governments and employees to operate effectively in virtual environments down the street or across the globe. Prior to the pandemic, the advanced network capability of our Cisco UCS server, switches and router networks kept our staff and management team securely connected. We had remote visibility into the network to scale as needed, which allowed AHC to quickly pivot and address a reduction and consolidation of our workforce and operations. Fortunately, we had installed the hyperconverged product last year because our partner, Phil Rienstra, vice president of sales at The KR Group, recommended the HyperFlex platform. It met our budget and remote management requirements plus was easy to configure. This enabled our employees working from home to safely connect to their network and teammates.





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Q. What is your strategy for communicating with customers and employees and eventually bringing them back to work?

A. We've been using several technologies that aid our hotel clients during the pandemic but I'm especially curious to learn how our staff will continue to use them when business gets back to normal. Most of our communications to the public are driven by the franchises, such as Hilton and Marriott. I do believe the franchises will offer more "touch-less" services, such as digital keys, mobile check-in and check-out, and mobile device-based room control.

The biggest change is the way we support our users. We have some great systems, like the new Meraki MS-250 Switches that allow us to troubleshoot and fix systems remotely. But we've always been conditioned to visit a user's desk in an attempt to offer personalized support with a perceived level of care. Meraki's wireless, switches and firewall are all in the cloud-managed environment, so that's nice and convenient.

I'm going to advise my team to support our users remotely more regularly in an effort to reduce the amount of physical interactions with keyboards, mice and other equipment. We will continue to have all the systems in place that allow our users to work remotely.

Q. What properties do you support and what plans for using technology for a sustainable future?

A. Hotels under the AHC Hospitality Management umbrella include the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, JW Marriott Grand Rapids, Courtyard by Marriott Downtown Grand Rapids, Peter Island Resort & Spa, Ruth's Chris Steakhouse in Ann Arbor, AC Hotel by Marriott Grand Rapids, Hyatt Place Grand Rapids, Hotel St. Regis in Detroit, The Waterfront Inn in The Villages, FL, and The Brownwood Inn and Spa, The Villages, FL. Each is focused on surpassing the expectations of each guest's technology needs. There is no shortage of challenges when it comes to integrating property management systems into client-facing technologies. Staying ahead of the technology curve can be difficult in the hospitality industry. A significant investment into the latest IoT innovations is helping to overcome those challenges by providing guests with more reasons to stay at the hotel.



Q. What lessons did you learn about The KR Group – your Cisco Partner?

A. Simply put, The KR Group has been an indispensable partner. I met Phil Rienstra when I first started working at AHC Hospitality. At the time, I was more of a network engineer. A colleague advised me to connect with Phil – and I soon realized the value that partnering with The KR Group brings to us. Honestly, I don't even shop around at this point because I'm quite satisfied with their services. They've helped us with our network, which was my previous focus. However, today, I'm concerned about much more – phone systems, servers and our virtual environment. We've migrated many of those to Cisco Systems and, as a result, we find ourselves in a very stable environment. I always tell Phil that we don't need him to engineer a solution or to push boxes. We need him to take the order, evaluate the situation and tell us if this is the right direction or if there's a better fit. We also rely on The KR Group for information on products that are on the horizon. This is huge for us since our engineers don't always have time to stay on top of emerging trends. On the systems and infrastructure side, KG Group's technical support has helped us plan big projects, like Microsoft Office 365 migrations as well as upgrades and major overhauls to our systems and networks. More than ever, we're relying on The KR Group to help us prepare for an unpredictable future.



“Powered by cloud - managed networks, remote is the new strategy and normal for customer and employee communication.”

--Josh Serba, Chief Information Officer AHC Hospitality

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