

Title: Ireland's first IPTV hotel sees benefit of VDA's PowerTV
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Sheraton Fota Island Hotel and Spa on the Fota Island resort in Cork Harbour is Ireland's ultimate luxury destination. The landscape around the hotel is nothing short of stunning: playing host to Ireland's only wildlife resort means the tiny island looks like a National Geographic photo-feature. Opened in 2006, the challenge for the resort owners, Fleming Construction, was to make sure everything in the hotel, run by Sheraton, was up to the five-star standards set by the landscape – including the hotel's in-room technology.

Sheraton Fota was determined to offer its guests more from their in-room entertainment than standard television programming, with a television picture quality that was as good as the view from their windows. Damien Sheridan, IT and Communications director for Fleming Construction, used his years as a network specialist to discover the best possible guest experience, and opted for TV channels distributed over Internet Protocol (IPTV). "Most providers still use standard coax cables to provide their TV channels, but I didn't feel the quality was good enough for what we wanted to create at Fota; by contrast, IPTV has perfect picture quality. It also gives us the opportunity to turn the television into an interactive resource of services and information for guests," he explains.

"As we had already decided to roll out IP telephony and broadband internet throughout the hotel, IPTV made perfect sense. Instead of having countless outlets for all of our different services, we could run everything through our IP servers, which would make maintenance a lot easier and keep costs down."

Sheridan chose to install PowerTV, VDA's IPTV platform, at Sheraton Fota after experiencing it for himself at The Beacon Hotel in Dublin. "I was impressed by the flexibility of the product and the well-designed, intuitive user interface which can be customised with the hotel's unique branding and images," he says. "PowerTV enables all guests to access the TV channels and films they have come to expect from a five-star hotel, plus great added extras like music on demand, gaming and internet access."

Sheraton Fota was the first hotel in Ireland to install IPTV. The implementation took place in three stages to enable more televisions to be added as the resort expanded. The first stage was the installation of two to three television sets in all of the hotel's 131 bedrooms and 63 of its lodges. This was followed by stage two, in which an additional 55 lodges were fitted with IPTV. The final stage will encompass the remaining 163 lodges, plus the 49 new lodges that are scheduled to be built later in 2008.

Gary Francies, Director at VDA, agrees with Sheridan that IPTV is the future in terms of guest entertainment. "IPTV can offer so much more than standard coaxial systems. Not only is the picture quality superior and the networking facilities simpler to integrate with other services, but IPTV also provides hoteliers with another opportunity to communicate with their guests.

"With an IPTV system like PowerTV, the integration of fee-paying services such as films on demand, internet and pay-TV, coupled with the insertion of advertising pages, offers hotels an additional revenue stream," he adds. "In the future, Sheraton Fota will be able to offer guests the ability to book hotel facilities, like spa treatments and golf lessons, direct through their VDA in-room television sets."

"The roll out has been beyond our expectations and I know the hotel has had some great feedback from guests," Sheridan concludes. "VDA has been, and continues to be, fantastic through the whole process. We chose them because they had the best product for the job, but their customer service is as good at their technology. Warren Edwards, who heads up operations in Ireland, has been faultless in his support, making sure everything has come in on budget and on schedule with the minimum of stress. We can't fault them."