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Uniworld Boutique River Cruises



Uniworld Boutique River Cruises ensures impeccable quality in everything they offer to their guests including their complimentary onboard Wi-Fi. With RebelRoam's help, Uniworld is now providing their guests good quality, free and unlimited onboard Wi-Fi while at the same time reducing mobile broadband costs by up to 80%, keeping the company's Wi-Fi budget under control.

We sat down with Uniworld's Head of IT, Marc Strub, to talk about onboard Wi-Fi challenges, solutions and their experience working with RebelRoam.

Uniworld's challenges in providing onboard Wi-Fi

When asked about onboard Wi-Fi challenges, Marc states, "Our main problem was quality of bandwidth as the guests were not happy about the former solution. Internet onboard was slow for the guests and way too expensive for the company."

Finding a solution

As an IT engineer with extensive experience, Marc knew where the problem lies but couldn't find a proper provider.

He recalls, "I was looking for a partner that is more in a premium league - not a standard provider. And to be honest, I wasn't convinced by RebelRoam in the first place either, mainly because their initial presentation was not very strong. However, when they started to talk about IT, it became convincing."

Mark continues, "I was impressed by the fact that RebelRoam CEO Henri Ploom managed to fill my questions with valid answers. I realized I have an equal partner on the other side of the table and this made me confident enough to dig deeper."

Marc added that Uniworld's standards are really high and that they invest more money on concepts that can help them provide premium level service. "Our Benefit-cost ratio for providing unlimited Wi-Fi onboard is very high" says Marc.

Before working with RebelRoam

"Well, our customers can enjoy unlimited free Wi-Fi onboard, but demand for excellent solution. We received not that excellent feedback. We tried to solve it through doubling the amount of data and doubled Wi-Fi speed in the ships. The results were marginal to none. Network still got congested, client complaints were the same, quality the same and our data provider said we are over the budget though several months to go to a new year," Marc recalls the challenges he was tasked to solve.

He adds, "And sure, we could have increased our budget for example 4 times bigger and might have got better quality, but we also had to understand what was happening in the networks, so that we could improve and that kind of overview we were not able to get thanks to certain protocols."

Understanding the Wi-Fi problem

“What we understood was that we have to choose a new type of service provider, because changes only in current data plans won’t solve our onboard Wi-Fi problem. We were in need of a much more mature and smarter product,” Marc says.

“Our challenge was not how much MB cost, because Internet is consumable like food. The more you have, the more you consume it. That’s why we don’t use carrier aggregation VPN-s in our solutions, as they generate a lot of overhead. RebelRoam approaches aggregation differently, by the means of intelligent data routing. That way MB is 20% more expensive, but others use VPN-s and lose 38% before anything is sent out to customer. So the solution without VPN gave obvious advantage.” Marc explains. “No other provider besides RebelRoam used that solution. Our monthly cost was higher than the budget, but for RebelRoam solution the MB price becomes not that important, because even if RebelRoam price is higher you will use it less and have better quality. End of the month, your budget is under control and congested Wi-Fi network topic off from your table.”

Choosing a solution

Marc explains the process of selecting a new provider, “We had four quite comparable offers in a race. Speed offer was the same, everyone should use the same cell towers, same antenna, same chips per SIM. Only RebelRoam talked about VPN and optimization of networks that would improve quality of service.”

He adds, “For me the solution without VPN was the answer that made RebelRoam stand out from the others, but for the rest of the company decision makers, the question about data volume sizes was most important. RebelRoam’s basket was a bit smaller than other providers volume sizes. This made the selection easier.”

Marc explained that when the actual implementation for RebelRoam solution started they realized that it was a perfect match. He said that the changes in Uniworld’s onboard Wi-Fi solutions is a symbiosis of two companies. They

could have ended up with the same outcome eventually, but most certainly it would have taken a lot more time. “We already had a very good hardware on our ships, but we couldn’t have done it with the same amount of time” Marc states happily.

Impact on guests’ Wi-Fi experience

Uniworld’s main customers are in the 60 yrs old and above age group and Marc observed that they use a lot of Internet, “First thing after getting onboard they want to connect to the Internet. Couples travelling from USA in this age range are very tech savvy and very communicating,” says Marc. “For example, one lady in her 80’s was FaceTiming with family back home throughout her trip. Customers want to talk with families and friends. Also, they are very Facebook savvy people.”

“However, for our other brand U by Uniworld, the main customers are millennials and for them Instagram is the king. WhatsApp is also heavily used and what they expect is to have proper video calling and SnapChat. Millennials manage to use more data than our other ships,” Marc adds.

“Although the age range is so different, what connects them is that they both expect excellent Internet quality. We do ask feedback after every trip and last year’s main complaints were about Internet. This year we can’t see them anymore,” Marc explains the biggest change so far. “Also, what makes me happy is that inside the company, employee satisfaction is higher as well. Back-office can be instantly connected to the ships and IT spends less time resolving issues on that side”.

We also asked Marc if guests were particular about having access to YouTube since this service is blocked right now, “For us having Youtube is important, but it’s essential to have Facebook and FaceTime enabled, rather than Youtube videos. According to our quality principles we can offer Youtube, but the quality has to be HD. Until then it’s not a real deal. Guests’ expectation is to have a good Internet, but we here in Uniworld want to offer exceptional Internet.” Marc explains. “I would go a further path to get the quality we are looking for” he adds to make his commitment level clear.

Marc shares, “Service is very important for us. We never say no to our customers and what I like is that RebelRoam is the same. Every request sent to RebelRoam is answered fast and they are super flexible to meet our needs. Marc states another benefit of working with RebelRoam, “You see, we had a special cruise with two ships that lasted for a week and RebelRoam charged us 10 times less than what we would have paid with other providers”.

Key facts about Uniworld:

- // Fleet size: 21 ships**
- // Founded: 1976**
- // Area served: Worldwide**
- // Operates more than 500 river cruises annually**
- // Itineraries in more than 20 countries**
- // Part of The Travel Corporation group**

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