

CASE STUDY

Aspen Snowmass Gets Guests on the Slope Faster With WAVE ID® Readers

Aspen Snowmass is a world-class destination resort owned and operated by the Aspen Skiing Company, which hosts more than 1.5 million skiers and snowboarders each season at its four resorts in Pitkin County, Colorado. When not enjoying the 5,547 acres of skiable terrain and the largest lift-served descent in the U.S., visitors eat at resort restaurants, shop for souvenirs, rent ski equipment and more. The company asked how it could easily and affordably extend the functionality of its RFID-enabled ski passes to serve all of its customers' needs. rf IDEAS® readers provided the answer.



THE CHALLENGE

Expand functionality of RFID-enabled guest ski passes to restaurant, retail and rental locations throughout the resort

In 2008, Aspen Snowmass installed large RFID-enabled gates at each mountain access point. Wearing an RFID ski pass encoded with an ID number, guests could ski through the gates while RFID readers collected the ID number and sent it to a database tied to the guest's profile. The profile was immediately displayed on a weatherproof computer monitored by a staff member stationed at the lift, providing the guest's photo, name, age and product purchased.

The new, streamlined process reduced the time guests waited in line to reach the top of the mountain and start their day on the slopes. The system worked so well, the IT department decided to extend usage of the RFID ski passes to allow guests to use them to make retail purchases throughout the resort.

"We wanted to give our guests the convenience of locking their wallets and credit cards in their guest room and using the ski pass for more than just mountain access," says Rob Blanchard, director of IT support services, Aspen Skiing Company. "It was an ideal solution, and we knew it was possible for us to simply tie their RFID-enabled pass to their credit card."

The idea seemed perfect except for one giant obstacle. The existing readers were around \$450 each, which put the project over budget. In addition, the readers were serial devices that would not work with the MICROS® POS terminals located in the restaurants.



THE SOLUTION

Cost-effective rf IDEAS readers mounted on MICROS POS registers

Although RFID was the right approach, the level of technical sophistication provided by the ski-pass RFID readers was overkill for the resort's restaurants, and Blanchard and his team began researching less-expensive options. They found the perfect solution with WAVE ID card readers from rf IDEAS.

"The rf IDEAS readers were compatible with the specs of the existing RFID media that Aspen Snowmass already had in place, but the price would be significantly less than the readers already used in the resort," says Blanchard.

Wearing their lift pass, guests could purchase meals at any of the resort's restaurants and, on the way out, would simply either tap the pass on the WAVE ID reader mounted on the MICROS POS system near the cash register or keep it in their jacket and stand next to the reader.

Aspen Snowmass initially purchased about 30 WAVE ID readers to test the concept. Today, they have an installed base of over 100 WAVE ID® Solo 13.56 MHz readers (RDR-7581AKU) and 80 WAVE ID® Plus dual-frequency readers (RDR80581AKU).



THE RESULTS

Excellence in guest service and satisfaction



Since 1967, Aspen Snowmass has offered its guests a world-class resort destination with beautiful surroundings, perfect mountains, excellent restaurants, and world-class accommodations. But the ideal vacation destination is more than that. Aspen Snowmass is dedicated to continuous improvement in all aspects of the experience, so that from the time guests enter the property, every detail is covered no matter how small. And with the installation of the WAVE ID readers, Aspen Snowmass continues to deliver.

Keeps the line moving

"It's a huge time saver," says Blanchard. "Guests can now auto-fill their information by waving their Resort Charge lift ticket next to the reader rather than having to enter it manually. This greatly reduces the time it takes to fill out a rental contract. For example, depending on the person filling out the form, it could take a family of four up to 12 minutes. When using rf IDEAS readers, it cuts the time to just a couple of minutes, allowing our guests to spend less time in the rental shop and more time on the slopes."

Lets new employees hit the ground running

In the ski industry, employees are often seasonal. However, the rf IDEAS solution was so easy and intuitive, employees picked it up quickly and with no training. "There really is nothing hard about it," says Blanchard.

Increases sales potential

When it's made easy, guests will shop more. "We believe there's a commensurate increase in retail and food and beverage sales since we've implemented this program just because it's so quick and easy," says Blanchard.

Reduces cost

The rf IDEAS readers provided a very cost-effective solution. "It's definitely saved us money," says Blanchard. "Our previous readers cost about \$450.00 each. The rf IDEAS model we chose costs about \$150. They are easier to install and don't need constant firmware updates. You plug them in, they work, and they saved us around \$54,000 for the entire project. Plus, they're super easy to use and there's no training or maintenance to do."

Ensures security and PCI compliance

rf IDEAS readers quickly and simply read and relay the information on the guest's ski pass and send it to an encrypted database on the resort's backend, protecting the guest's credit card information. "For the guests using Resort Charge, it virtually eliminates the opportunity for credit card data being stolen at the retail, restaurant or rental locations," says Blanchard.

THE RESULTS

"rf IDEAS has been a good asset to our company. The readers have been a great addition and we were definitely happy to find them. In fact, we've had a number of ski resorts get in touch with us and ask about them and we're happy to oblige."

— Rob Blanchard, *Director of IT Support Services, Aspen Skiing Company*

Deploys quickly and easily

The WAVE ID readers are virtually plug and play. "It's USB, you plug it in, it has power, and it works," says Blanchard. "If you need to program it, rf IDEAS provides software to load the configuration file so all you have to do is take it out of the box, plug it in, load the file, save it, unplug it and continue until all of them are done. It's seriously idiot-proof."

Excellent support

When Aspen Snowmass first received the WAVE ID readers, the readers were unable to read the number on the ski pass that would identify the guest. Blanchard sent the rf IDEAS development team some of the resort's existing readers, along with tickets and ski passes and identified the 20 digit number they were looking for. rf IDEAS quickly put together a configuration file that would enable Blanchard's team to easily program the reader. "Now that we have purchased additional units, rf IDEAS programs them for us ahead of time so they are ready to go out of the box. It's been a very easy process all the way around."

THE KEY TO SUCCESS: partnering with the best

Solid technology, unsurpassed quality, and partnering with the best integrators in the industry allow rf IDEAS to provide solutions that add quantifiable value to its customers.

iTech Automation, an expert in automating data entry and tracking assets using barcode and RFID technology, is one of those partners. Since 2010, iTech Automation has worked closely with Aspen Snowmass to help them expand their use of RFID technology. "rf IDEAS has a comprehensive and reliable line of RFID readers and offers solid technical support," says Paul Lemieux, iTech Automation. "They are a great partner to involve when building RFID solutions."

**For more application information,
visit www.rfIDEAS.com**

**Toll Free: 866-439-4884
Voice: 847-870-1723
Fax: 847-483-1129
Email: sales@rfIDEAS.com
rfIDEAS.com**



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