

Accor partners with Verizon to meet the standards of PCI compliance

Learn how the hospitality group teamed up with Verizon to manage the complex challenges of the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS).

Challenge

Accor Group: 5,400 hotels, 10,000 bars and restaurants, 200 million meals served every year, 185,000 meeting rooms or workspaces, in 110 countries.

To deliver on its promise of “providing exceptional experiences”, the world’s leading hotel group relies on its 290,000 employees and an organisation based on a skilful blend of centralisation and autonomy. “Our organisation requires different approaches in order to apply a consistent security and compliance strategy, regardless of the status or nature of the establishment”, explains Marie-Christine Vittet, VP Compliance for Accor.

With more than 40 brands divided into two categories, Luxury & Lifestyle and Premium and Midscale & Economy, the Group caters for tourists, business travellers and teleworkers. “For each customer profile, in each country, Accor adapts to very specific payment habits”.

These diverse experiences and consumer habits must nevertheless meet the same security and compliance requirements. Since 2008, Accor has taken a number of initiatives to ensure the security of payments and its information system. In 2012, Accor decided to go even further and adopt the PCI DSS standard.



“ The orchestration of our compliance programme is based as much on the intellectual agility of our teams as on technical rigour. To achieve this, we rely on a number of standards and processes that are the best guarantee of service excellence in very different environments.”

Marie-Christine Vittet,
VP Compliance – Accor

Solution

Responsible for coordinating the PCI DSS project for the entire Group, Marie-Christine Vittet chose to entrust the IT consulting assignment to Verizon. “The expertise and support of a partner like Verizon, with whom we had already worked, seemed to us to be a solid basis for deciphering the Standard and defining what our PCI DSS roadmap would be based on a document called “Prioritised Approach”, Marie-Christine Vittet and her teams laid the foundations for compliance with the PCI DSS V2 standard.

A working group was then set up to manage the project over a three-year period. “We defined an ambitious roadmap and set ourselves indicators to keep pace with a demanding project that would not have been possible without the support of the IT teams”.

The driving force behind the approach: transparency and the desire to give meaning to the project. At that time, payment methods in the hotel industry were beginning to change, with credit cards predominating over the cheques and foreign currency. “Welcome and payment in all of our venues are key moments in the customer experience.

Secure payment and reliable payments are clearly part of the Accor group’s welcome experience,” notes Marie-Christine Vittet. Through PCI DSS, we have abandoned old practices such as scanning both sides of a credit card”.

Results

In 2015, after 3 years of hard work, the first PCI DSS certification exercise was launched. “The efforts made by Verizon’s teams and experts paid off, as we obtained our first certification. System changes, upheavals in usage and behaviour, technical and financial investments - the transformation was deep and contributed to the creation of the compliance department within the Accor group.

“This organisational change was important because it demonstrated the strength of the change and the interest it held for all our employees and partners,” emphasises Marie Christine Vittet.

“ The Verizon teams played a key role at every stage of the project. Acting as a coach, and a partner, we chose each other because Verizon was one of the few players to have a PCI DSS compliance programme. We both came out of the partnership stronger.”

Marie-Christine Vittet,
VP Compliance – Accor

Benefits

Partners who listen and adapt

Given the scale of the Accor Group and its high standards, “we need partners who can listen and adapt”. This is really key given the Accor international reach. “Verizon’s international service coverage gives them a better grasp of our issues and challenges, and we have to recognize the work of the QSAs (Qualified Security Assessors), who can speak several languages and are highly adaptable”.

These are just some of the specific features that have enabled Accor to meet the challenge of PCI DSS compliance. “It’s a constant effort to challenge ourselves, which is being reinforced with the imminent introduction of the PCI DSS v4”

Ongoing support

To guarantee its compliance with the PCI DSS standard, Accor carries out regular audits. Preparing for the audit keeps the teams busy for 6 months. “We like to carry out a pre-audit, which is training for the final audit.

It allows us to check what we have learnt and identify any areas for improvement”. Following the pre-audit, a remediation plan can be implemented before the final audit, which can take up to 3 months. It represents more than 50 interviews carried out, mobilising a large number of teams, with weekly meetings.

“It’s an unfazed but continuous tension that enables us to obtain our certificate of compliance, which opens to a ROC (Report of Compliance)”. This report is then passed on to Verizon’s Quality Assurance department, who’s delivering the final certificate of compliance.

Planning for the future

The PCI DSS standard is evolving and Accor plans to be compliant with PCI DSS V4 by 2024. Within the PCI committee set up by the hotel group, a sharepoint has been created to coordinate a number of tasks and demonstrate the improvements being made on a regular basis. “The PCI DSS v4 standard includes an ‘action planning’ dimension, which we have already taken advantage of to meet our promise of excellence”.

Learn more:
[PCI Compliance](#)

