



# Restructuring Expectations

*CDW•G helps governments build IT infrastructures they can depend on.*

**T**HE GROWING THREAT OF TERRORISM and the ever-present possibility of natural disasters make coordinated and intelligent IT infrastructure crucial to governments' ability to respond effectively to disaster.

Disaster planning is not new. Until recently, however, most plans have been fragmented and focused only on individual regions. Numerous examples from recent years have illustrated — sometimes painfully — the need for disaster response solutions that give emergency personnel a wider perspective. At the core of many of these disaster response plans is the emergency operations center, or EOC.

Today's EOC is not a refuge where responders retreat to sort out a situation. Instead, the EOC has become a hub where people and technology meet to take decisive action. More and more governments — small and large — are taking advantage of cutting-edge technology that enables people to act on data instead of react to it.

"The 21st-century threat environment is for real," said Houston Thomas, public safety business development manager for CDW•G. "To meet this challenge, the EOC had to move from being just a place where people meet and coordinate their activities to a place where technology and people intersect. Technology and information from a variety of sources are fused into one place so a common operating picture can be constructed and distributed to the folks involved in the return to normalcy."

CDW•G partners with local governments to help them build next-generation EOC solutions. Many of these partnerships are in areas especially prone to disasters. A number of Florida counties, for example, are building EOC facilities that give authorities the power to better serve citizens in times of need. From IBM blade servers to EMC storage and Cisco VoIP, having robust and reliable technology is invaluable in a disaster situation.

Some of these EOCs exceed current expectations by serving as regional data centers and combining with 911 dispatch centers

to create facilities that are prepared to handle both day-to-day emergency response as well as the rare catastrophe.

In one Florida county, the EOC includes not only a 911 dispatch center, but also provides data backup for all other county services, said Thomas. "The county took a forward-thinking approach, making the investment in a hardened facility that's an emergency response hub as well as a repository for critical data."

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The EOC is a prime example of the possibilities that exist when public safety agencies have a technology provider that is there before, during and after deployment. For all their bells and whistles, IT solutions are useless without the people who run them. This is why CDW•G works hard to be much more than a technology provider, Thomas said. CDW•G's mission is to become a trusted technology partner, consultant and adviser for government at all levels and stages.

"There's more than just what is inside the four walls of the building," Thomas said. "We want to help governments shape their vision. We want them to think beyond the four walls and think of deployable tools, external cameras and wireless communication networks as all part of the project. We provide consulting services, testing and evaluation of vital technologies, an ecosystem of partners and internal technical resources to help develop the vision and design and supply the solution needed for the modern-day continuously operating government."





CASE STUDY: GADSDEN COUNTY, FLA.

## IT Overhaul Delivers Better Service and Safety

It's not too often a county is in a position to rebuild its IT infrastructure. But in Gadsden County, Fla., an outdated, piecemeal IT infrastructure had begun to slow operations and was becoming increasingly difficult to support. Given the fact that so many county services — including those that save lives — rely on the IT infrastructure, the county needed a partner that could provide rock-solid infrastructure technology while giving due consideration to the county's budget.

Almost all aspects of county IT needed upgrading, according to county IT Operations Manager Kembrew Jackson, from e-mail to disaster recovery and emergency operations. While the existing systems functioned, they did not give the county the sort of holistic perspective it needed, and the county wanted to address a litany of problems.

"Partial information, in some cases, is as bad or worse than no information at all," explained Jackson. "This was the problem with the previous networks, which were all decentralized. Information was scattered, and at times, incomplete. Files could only be shared by individuals sharing the same offices, via e-mail or using everybody's least favorite, sneaker net. Both hardware and software were not

up to current standards enterprisewide, multiple outside consultants provided minimal support due to the lack of technical knowledge, there were multiple workgroups, there wasn't a centralized server room consolidating all locations and the disaster recovery plan was not sufficient with regard to information technology. Users often referred to outside entities for help-desk support as well as to learn new and existing technology."

Obviously a complete infrastructure overhaul is a mammoth undertaking. But by moving to new and better technology, the county will recoup its investment through increased efficiency and performance.

The county was well aware of the benefits that would come from such an upgrade, but the challenge was finding a technology provider that would give it the most bang for its buck.

"The prior IT person had a relationship with CDW•G, and it was a good relationship, so when we came in, we nurtured that relationship," Jackson said. "We had good pricing, good service, and they stayed on top of everything and were really sensitive to our needs. If we had a problem, we could call

them and in a matter of minutes, they're on it. There was never a time where I would wonder, 'Are these guys really working on this?' I knew they were putting forth their best efforts to get everything done."

Myron Williams, IT Services Manager, and Davin Suggs, IT Director along with Jackson and an outside consultant initially drew up an IT plan describing what they wanted to accomplish. Suggs, the county IT director, began researching similar projects to see what he could learn. Due to Gadsden County's smaller size, however, finding like implementations proved elusive. So the county began gathering quotes and having conversations with CDW•G specialists. It became clear CDW•G was the right partner for its IT infrastructure overhaul. Jackson said he could tell CDW•G exactly what the county wanted to accomplish, and CDW•G would explain precisely what equipment was needed to get it done and how much it would cost.

"When you do an undertaking of this size, you have to be able to trust the people you're working with," Jackson said. "A lot depends on us, so we depend on CDW•G a lot, and they haven't let us down. They've taken this project as if they were doing it for themselves."

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**Kembrew Jackson**, IT Operations Manager, Gadsden County, Fla.

And of course, the county is doing all of this in hopes of meeting its ultimate goal: providing better service to the people of Gadsden County. Revamping an entire IT infrastructure is a long and challenging process, one that has just begun in Gadsden County. Partnering with CDW•G, Jackson said, positions the county to improve service delivery and lay a solid foundation to build on for future needs.

"The purpose of this entire expenditure is to better serve the citizens," said Jackson. With the new infrastruc-



Photo courtesy of [www.visitgadsden.com](http://www.visitgadsden.com)

ture, county staff will be able to easily collect, store and redistribute data that once took days to collect and days to disseminate. Building officials will soon have the ability to create and manage trouble tickets in the field, enabling them to resolve the tickets more quickly. Citizens will enjoy more technology services in their communities and in Gadsden County as a whole. Fiber-optic connections between libraries will provide the capability to deliver enriched learning experiences through video, voice and data services, he said.

"The benefits are really quite numerous and will only increase," Jackson said.

And Gadsden County residents will receive the most reliable and prompt service from their county government when it counts the most — in emergencies. EMS and other emergency services will have access to the latest data so emergency personnel can reach citizens whose lives are on the line as swiftly as possible, said Jackson.

"In the event of a disaster, citizens will not experience diminished or delayed support from the county because of failing technology," he said, "because we will implement a disaster recovery plan that reduces, if not eliminates entirely, the delay in services caused by major and minor disasters. We will eliminate the technology phobias by improving the lives of those this technology will support."



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