



Texas Two-Step Gateway Tablet PCs help Texas Comptroller's Enforcement Division streamline processes and collect more revenue.

*Albert Perez,
supervisor, systems
administration section,
Texas Comptroller
Enforcement
Division*

The eyes of Texas are upon state taxpayers in a new and innovative way thanks in part to a Gateway solution that helps generate millions of dollars in revenue while providing secure, up-to-the-minute data for tax collectors and citizens.

The Texas Comptroller's Office collects state taxes and monitors spending. That all-encompassing mission includes handling payroll for every state agency, paying each bill submitted to the state, tracking 586 state funds and accounts, running the State Energy Conservation Office, operating a dozen toll-free consumer help lines that average 475 calls every hour, and collecting billions of dollars in annual sales, motor vehicle, motor fuel and franchise taxes.

The Enforcement Division of the Comptroller's Office is in charge of collecting delinquent tax revenue. As part of these essential collection efforts, the Enforcement Division employs 122 enforcement agents who spend their time traversing the state to visit taxpayers and "interact with them regarding their tax liabilities," according to Albert Perez, supervisor of the systems administration section for the Comptroller's Enforcement Division.

PRE-WIRELESS SOLUTION

For years, enforcement agents have spent long hours in the division's 33 field offices, downloading taxpayer information and plotting each day's travel routes on old-fashioned paper maps.

"Our agents had to drive into the office and, depending on the number of taxpayers they were going to visit, spend two or three hours printing records and making sure they were accurate," said Perez. "Plotting out how to get to all the businesses might take another hour or more."

Frustrated by the small amount of time agents actually spent in the field, Enforcement Division officials came up with an ambitious wireless initiative to free desk-bound agents and bring more revenue to the state.

Senate Bill 1458 gave the department \$1.5 million to work with — but the money came with a condition. "The requirement of the project was that we generate an additional \$9 million in revenue for the \$1.5 million that was being invested," explained Perez.

The stipulation called for quick work from the division. The project required securing a wide area wireless network contract, building applications, purchasing equipment and training personnel.

Amazingly the wireless computing solution that began on Oct. 1, 2002 deployed the division's first-generation solution only six months later — on April 15, 2003.

Ultimately the solution included a contract for wireless service that covers three-quarters of the state; a partnership with a national IT solutions provider to develop and implement the wireless initiative; and the purchase of 50 Gateway Tablet PCs for use by agents in the field.

CUSTOMER PROFILE

AGENCY:

The Texas Office of the Comptroller, Enforcement Division is in charge of collecting delinquent taxes.

MISSION:

The Comptroller has a constitutional responsibility to estimate available state revenue and to supervise and manage the state's fiscal concerns. The Comptroller also collects taxes and fees owed to the state.

OBJECTIVE:

Implement wireless technology to make field enforcement agents more efficient and productive.

SOLUTION:

Outfit field agents with Gateway Tablet PCs that provide wireless access to taxpayer information and allow them to fill out forms, collect signatures, map routes and track mileage electronically.

BUSINESS IMPACT:

Using wireless services and then adding Gateway Tablet PCs, the Comptroller's Enforcement Division reduced field agents' office hours and increased collection of tax revenue by more than \$13 million.

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“We looked at PDAs, but they were too small,” said Perez. “We looked at laptops, but we needed to deal with business owners face-to-face. They want to be able to see what’s going on. They don’t want to feel like agents are hiding behind a screen.”

Through a competitive bid process, the Enforcement Division chose Gateway Tablets in October 2003.

HITTING THE ROAD

Gateway’s advanced Tablet PCs provided the perfect combination of functionality and easy portability required by the Enforcement Division. Equipped with wireless connectivity and portable printers, the tablets allow in-the-field access to taxpayer files, necessary forms and even online tax law and rulings that were previously available only in field offices.

Forms also are stored on tablet hard drives, so they’re available even when agents are out of wireless range.

User authentication, constant data encryption and a special electronic signature-capturing capability — which locks away information once the taxpayer signs an electronic receipt for taxes paid — provide the multiple layers of security needed to ensure accurate payment records and taxpayer privacy.

Because agents can now easily access information while on the road, they are able to make more unscheduled visits — known as “cold stops” — to taxpayers who are located in close proximity to planned taxpayer visits.

RAPID RETURN

Since they were acquired in October 2003, the Gateway Tablets have aided in the overall success of the Comptroller’s wireless initiative begun six months earlier. Now, with portable Gateway Tablet PCs in hand, enforcement agents spend more time in the field and collect more revenue.

“As the result of an increase of 13.5 percent in field hours through March 2004, we’ve collected additional revenue of \$13,100,975,” said Perez. Those results helped the state recoup its technology investment in record time, Perez said.

“In April 2003, we collected an additional \$1,342,847, and in May we collected an additional \$1,196,263,” Perez explained. “So within two months, we had already collected the \$1.5 million we had invested.”

That quick return on investment and astounding increase in productivity among field agents led the Enforcement Division to begin adding components to the wireless solution.

NEXT STEPS

Soon, division officials will roll out a GPS mapping system that will allow field officers to automatically plot daily taxpayer visits on maps stored in their Gateway Tablet PCs.

“What used to take an hour or more now will take a matter of minutes,” said Perez.

New mapping capabilities also will automate mileage reimbursement for agents who used to spend tedious hours recording odometer readings and completing travel vouchers in order to receive reimbursement for mileage.

“The GPS will track the agents as they go through their day,” Perez said. “At the end of the day, they can synchronize with their tablet and upload the data to our back-end system, and a travel voucher will be systematically printed for them.”

Adding GPS capabilities will push the division even closer to its goal of “streamlining and automating whatever we used to do manually,” according to Perez.

Those efforts generate more revenue and make the lives of field agents easier — even seeing them through some extraordinary circumstances.

In February 2003, the division’s Denton field office was unexpectedly closed because of extensive water damage. Though the new wireless solution was not completely developed, agents already were equipped with tablets, so they temporarily relocated to the local courthouse.

“This allowed them to continue to provide taxpayer service while the office was repaired,” said Perez.

Similarly, when the division’s San Antonio office experienced a power outage in April 2003, agents with tablets continued to collect payments and provide taxpayers with needed information.

“With wireless cards, agents are able to connect to our Web site and pull up statutes and rulings on the various taxes we administer,” explained Perez.

One field agent from San Antonio also shared this story. “I was assisting in a full seizure, and we had a mistake on the ‘Property Seized’ report. But thanks to my tablet, I was able to print out a corrected copy right on the spot.”

Now, with the help of their newer Gateway Tablet PCs, such success stories are the norm for a department that used to be burdened by massive amounts of paperwork; long, unproductive office hours; and troublesome mapping and record-keeping requirements.

“The tablet computers have been great, and Gateway has been very nice to work with,” said Perez. “We’ve had excellent service with them. We’ve been very satisfied.”