



Don Shafford, IT manager,
Ohio Public Defender's Office

GUARDING THE RECORD

The Ohio Public Defender's Office continues its 'no shutdown' record with Gateway PCs and servers.

Unfailing IT can be a matter of life and death at the Office of the Ohio Public Defender (OPD). Being ready to file an appeal up to the last moment in a death penalty case is mandatory. Since most courts have added e-filing capabilities to their systems, it is more necessary than ever to have all the network's capabilities available all the time.

The Ohio Public Defender's Office hasn't had an unexpected IT shutdown in more than 10 years. The office's IT staff protects that record with a passion, which they apply to choosing PCs and servers, said Don Shafford, IT manager for the Ohio Public Defender's Office.

"Solid, dependable equipment, seamlessly integrated, reliable software, and a caring, diligent, professional staff enable our users to be prepared to give their clients the best legal defense this office can offer, 24 hours a day," said Shafford.

Shafford said his IT staff members, Judy Love-Choate, Nancy Rector-Kauser and Priya Kuttathara, are second to none in striving to give users what they need, when they need it and in being proactive to keep the network running at its top performance levels. "The OPD IT staff is always working hard to give our users the tools they need to do their job effectively and efficiently," he noted.

An experimental purchase of Gateway desktops and three Gateway servers in early 2005 hooked Shafford with easy-to-repair designs, rapid part replacement processes and surprisingly low cost.

The office has expanded Gateway usage in its main building in Columbus, Ohio, and four other branch offices with plans for more purchases in the near future.

"When we started looking at Gateway, I called other IT people who had Gateway servers and found that the company's brochures were correct. Their downtime is minimal and whenever they do have a problem, they respond very quickly," Shafford said.

He selected a four-hour replacement warranty on the servers and overnight, on-site part replacement services for the desktops. Shafford said he doubted he would need the on-site PC service.

"The PCs themselves are just way too easy to work on. You don't have to use a hand tool to do anything. Swapping out a motherboard takes about two minutes," Shafford said.

Shafford has had few opportunities to test that process, however, because only one of his Gateway desktops has needed a part replacement in the past year and a half.

He said some computers from the office's last vendor malfunctioned within the first three months, and computers from another vendor had to be shipped back for major repairs.

Goodbye Homemade PCs

Until recently, the office's IT staff built more than half the PCs in its inventory. Naturally PCs built by the IT staff had no warranties, and all repair

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Customer Profile

Agency: Office of the Ohio Public Defender

Mission: To protect the constitutional rights of Ohio's citizens who are accused of crime by ensuring quality representation is provided despite their financial status. The agency vision is to position itself as a center of knowledge and expertise in criminal defense representation, and as a resource to which both individuals and their respective legal counsel can turn for advice, information and assistance.

Technology Objective: Find high-performance PCs and servers at the best possible price to continue Office of the Ohio Public Defender's stellar record of IT service.

Gateway Solution: Gateway was chosen to provide desktops, laptops and servers.

ROI: Gateway's high-performance PCs and servers empowered the Public Defender's Office to maintain its 10-year record of operations without an IT shutdown, drastically cut costs, reduce repairs and cease building its own PCs.

responsibility fell on them. Replacing homemade PCs with Gateway desktops slashed overall repair time because the Gateway models have three-year warranties.

Shafford also discovered it was less expensive to acquire Gateway desktops than to purchase motherboards, hard drives, cases and other components individually — and that didn't even account for the labor to build them.

"That was kind of a no-brainer in terms of what to do," Shafford said.

Going with Gateway has helped the Public Defender's Office keep costs in line while simplifying repair and maintenance.

Understanding Service

Before switching to Gateway, Shafford struggled with phone support technicians.

"If I'm talking to a technical support person, especially when it has to do with one of our servers, I need to talk to a person who understands me and whom I can understand," Shafford said. He never has trouble communicating with Gateway technical support, he said, adding that Gateway support technicians' detailed knowledge of Gateway products helps them resolve issues quickly.

"They know their product. You tell them what's going on, and they say, 'This is the problem, and this is what we're going to do.' It's usually in short order, which makes my life a lot easier," Shafford said.

Gateway's rapid part replacement services empowered Shafford to keep the office's rare hardware failures practically invisible to employees.

When a hard drive in a server failed, he utilized Gateway's four-hour part replacement service and the server's hot-swap capabilities to have a new one installed before the next work day.

"I swapped the hard drive out," Shafford said. "And of course, the users didn't know that there was even a problem."

Surprised by a Server

Shafford experimented with three Gateway servers in 2005. He said he was surprised to find

the Gateway servers worked just as well as servers of the same size and speed purchased from other vendors that were three times more expensive.

He said the Gateway servers give him fast access 24 hours a day, without him spending much time monitoring them.

"Servers need maintenance and monitoring. I feel they should do it themselves," Shafford said. "I shouldn't have to baby-sit a server."

Given the high performance and considerably lower prices of Gateway servers, Shafford said he has already placed more orders for them as part of a steady shift to Gateway in his server farm.

Bank of Notebooks

Shafford purchased 10 Gateway notebooks for attorneys in the Public Defender's Office to log out for temporary use. The notebooks have wireless and dial-up connectivity to all servers, so attorneys can access necessary information from anywhere.

"I'm sure they've gone through some serious knocks and bangs, but not one of the notebooks has had an issue," Shafford said.

Maintaining Excellence

Shafford said his devoted staff and reliable equipment is a combination that protects the stellar record of IT service in the Ohio Public Defender's Office. As computer applications increasingly perform tasks previously done by other staff in the legal profession, the dependability and functionality of an attorney's PC is more vital than ever.

Occasionally Shafford receives a letter from a former staff attorney who has moved on in his or her career. The attorneys always seem to profess a level of IT excellence at the Public Defender's Office they could not appreciate until they went a day or two without a functioning PC at their new firms.

Passion for continuing that service — and determination to find reliable equipment that enables it — fuels ongoing IT success at the Office of the Ohio Public Defender.



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