

Service in a Snap

With Gateway delivering computers and support, LaPorte County, Ind., focuses on serving constituents, not wrangling over repairs.



Ron Tulacz, director of data processing for LaPorte County, Ind.

Ron Tulacz, director of data processing for LaPorte County, Ind., describes his jurisdiction as “just a simple county government.” But there was a time when keeping county workers productively employed on their computers wasn’t simple at all.

Located in northern Indiana, LaPorte County is home to nearly 110,000 residents spread across 598 square miles. Like governments everywhere, it relies on information systems to help it deliver essential services to citizens. About 350 county employees working in multiple buildings use applications that run on servers, desktop computers and notebooks. When these don’t work, they can’t do their jobs.

Unfortunately the county couldn’t always rely on support from its technology vendors. One time, for example, the county had a problem with a server. The vendor refused to make things right. “We fought for nearly a year on that thing, about whether the problem was with the software or with the machine,” Tulacz said.

Members of vendors’ technical support staffs often didn’t credit Tulacz and his team with the ability to diagnose problems. Instead, they questioned their assessments and asked them to walk through procedures they had already performed. When vendors agreed to replace parts under warranty, those parts took two or three days to arrive. While they waited, LaPorte’s IT staff had to scramble for backup solutions to keep employees productive.

SERVICE PARTNERSHIP BUILT ON TRUST

About six years ago, LaPorte County started buying computers from Gateway. Today, Gateway is the county’s exclusive supplier for servers, desktop PCs and notebooks for a wide variety of government applications. Along with high-performance hardware, the partnership brings the county a level of service and support that no other company has been able to deliver.

Tulacz is especially pleased with Gateway’s technical support program, which makes hardware repairs

CUSTOMER PROFILE

AGENCY:

LaPorte County, Indiana

MISSION:

To deliver a full range of government services to a community of 110,000 residents.

OBJECTIVE:

To keep servers, desktop PCs and notebooks operating with as little downtime as possible, so county employees can concentrate on serving the public.

GATEWAY SOLUTION:

Personal, one-on-one relationships between Gateway’s agents and the county’s staff, plus a streamlined process for delivering service parts, ensures that all technical problems are resolved quickly.

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easy and fast. “They have allowed us to do the diagnostic work and tell them we need a hard drive, CD drive or whatever,” transmitting the information via e-mail, he explained.

Gateway also dedicated a technical support agent to its customers in Indiana, giving them a single point of contact for all problems and questions. The agent forged a personal relationship with each customer, so he understands the extent to which professionals such as Tulacz can analyze their own hardware problems, and he knows when he needs to step in with further help.

At Gateway, technical support agents “don't belittle you by asking you to repeat things you've already done,” Tulacz said. “If we tell them we did it, they accept that and go on, and we take care of it.”

Now, the process of repairing malfunctioning hardware is quick and trouble-free. “If we have a problem,” Tulacz said, “we put it to them and they address it. The next thing you know, it's taken care of without having to scream and holler and get upset.”

When Tulacz and his staff need a replacement part, “we fill in the blanks on the form, and if we do it by noon one day, usually the UPS man carries it in the next morning. We don't have to prove the validity of our diagnostic work. Gateway just sends the parts out. They include an RMA (return merchandise authorization) number, so we just box up the old part and send it back to them.”

Aside from always knowing where to turn for help, LaPorte County gains another advantage from buying all its hardware from Gateway. Components from machines manufactured at about the same time are interchangeable, so as computers reach the end of their life cycles, Tulacz can mine them for spare parts. “I can switch back and forth and piece them out,” he said.

CLOSE CONNECTION, QUICK RESOLUTION

Gateway's marketing team gives LaPorte County the same kind of personal attention as its technical support agent. The inside and outside marketing representatives quickly handle

any questions that arise about products and orders. “Whenever we call our marketing reps, they work diligently to resolve our problems,” Tulacz said. Whether the IT staff needs information about the features of new computer models, needs to make sure an order arrives extra-fast or wants to discuss Gateway's future product plans, answers are just one phone call away.

Marketing reps also serve as a resource when the county assembles solutions to meet emerging needs. For example, one county judge expressed interest in developing an electronic courtroom, where he can conduct arraignments via video conference and court officials can use electronic systems to document and index evidence. LaPorte's Gateway account representative analyzed the judge's requirements and created a turnkey solution combining products from Gateway and other partners.

Gateway's technical experts help LaPorte plan for future requirements, too. “Once in a while they'll get a server product engineer involved on a special server need, if we don't feel comfortable with the way we're going,” Tulacz said. When Tulacz and his staff put together specifications for a new server, the engineer helps them choose the product that precisely meets their business needs. When they go to the county commissioners for support, they use this information to demonstrate that they are procuring the right solution at the right price.

A FASTER TURNAROUND

Gateway's superior service helps LaPorte County's IT team ensure that county workers continue serving constituents without a hitch. Working in partnership with Gateway, “we can do a faster turnaround for our users,” Tulacz said. “If we lose a machine, we don't have to figure out some other backup because it's going to be down for an extended period of time.”

Instead of waiting two or three days for replacement parts, Gateway delivers the goods in a day or less.

“We're happy with the ability of their technical staff to turn those things around for us, with no questions,” Tulacz said. “It just happens.”