

# A Question of Value

Outstanding before- and after-sale support makes Gateway the obvious choice.



**H**ome to about 1.4 million residents, Tarrant County is the third-largest county in Texas and one of the fastest growing urban counties in the United States. Its Information Technology Department is responsible for acquiring, installing, maintaining, programming and operating the county's data processing and data communications systems, including approximately 5,000 desktop computers.

For the past two-and-a-half years, Tarrant County has turned to Gateway for its desktop systems, along with tablet and notebook computers for its mobile applications. Each year, the county replaces 25 percent of its desktop computers with new ones. Currently, half of its desktop machines are Gateway computers.

Gateway is an excellent technology partner, said Steve Smith, CIO of Tarrant County in Fort Worth. "We find them very engaged and interested in our business," he said. Gateway makes it easy for Smith and his team to gain access to the representatives best equipped to address the county's concerns, whether they are high-level technical support staff or top corporate executives.

"I'm able to speak directly with their chief financial officer and their senior vice president of sales, and even the president," Smith said. "They seem very

interested in what we are doing and tell us we are very much a target customer for them."

## SWIFT SERVICE

Along with high-performing, reliable hardware, Gateway provides Tarrant County with services that save the IT Department time and money, and help keep end-users productive.

When it comes time to replace a desktop machine, Gateway copies the applications, data and configuration settings from the user's old hard drive onto the new one. "They pre-image our machines for us, so our machines come set up and ready to go out of the box," Smith said. The county receives the machines at a central distribution point, then transfers them to the locations that need them. "Then we tag them for our asset management and plug them in. It's very fast," he said. Employees who receive new machines can start working on them without delay.

If the county has problems with a Gateway computer under warranty, IT Department technicians are certified to diagnose and solve the problems themselves. They order replacement parts through a Gateway Web site, without having to contact low-level support staff. For more complex situations, they

## CUSTOMER PROFILE

### AGENCY:

Tarrant County, Texas,  
Information Technology Department

### MISSION:

The Information Technology Department installs, maintains, programs and operates data processing and data communications systems and equipment for the county government. The IT Department coordinates the planning of information

systems for Tarrant County departments and provides data processing services for such applications as payroll, elections, motor vehicle registration and court data.

### OBJECTIVE:

To keep IT systems in service, maintain them as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible, and stay abreast of new technologies and service offerings that will benefit the county.

### GATEWAY SOLUTION:

Gateway cuts out the middleman, supporting the IT Department's technicians in assessing and resolving hardware problems on their own. The company quickly delivers replacement parts and provides direct access to high-level service technicians and corporate executives who are eager to learn about the county's evolving needs.

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order parts by phone. When the parts arrive, technicians make repairs themselves, and Gateway pays the department for their work.

For Tarrant County, this is a better solution than sending a service contractor to work on the Gateway machines. “We prefer to do it this way, since our employees are responsible for maintaining custodial ownership of our data,” Smith said. “We can’t let it out of county hands, because it’s potentially sensitive information.” The self-maintenance agreement also helps offset the department’s maintenance costs. “It generates a return on investment that we hadn’t really counted on,” he said.

If IT staff members need help with a problem, Gateway offers live technical support through an online facility, available on the company’s Web site 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Gateway also provides support by phone through its service account management program. Gateway matched Tarrant County with a senior technician who is familiar with the county’s IT setup and understands its special needs. Calls from county IT staff go directly to this representative. Instead of explaining the county’s situation to a new person each time, technicians can focus immediately on the problem at hand.

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Tarrant County’s previous technology vendors often took a day or two to resolve hardware problems. Now, employees can get back to work on their machines much faster, “sometimes almost within 15 or 20 minutes if it’s a simple problem,” Smith said.

Services like these add tremendous value to Gateway’s products, Smith said. “And the cost is still lower than what we were getting in bids from other vendors.”

#### HIGH-LEVEL ATTENTION

Once a year, members of Tarrant County’s IT staff travel to Gateway’s headquarters in Irvine, Calif., to discuss their future needs and learn about new technologies Gateway and its partners, such as Microsoft and Intel, have in development. “We meet with the top company executives, and they’re interested in direct feedback from us as a

target customer,” Smith said. “I think that’s an interesting concept, for a major desktop provider to invest that time.”

For instance, Smith is interested in using biometric readers to allow employees to access the county data network instead of passwords. “Part of our long-term cost is people constantly forgetting their passwords,” he said.

The IT Department has discussed allowing county employees to buy computers at a discount through a Gateway Web site. Also, “we talk about some of the things we think could be improved — size, space, shape, usability,” Smith said.

In addition, the department is exploring possible hardware leasing arrangements with Gateway. The company brought in experts to help Smith make the case for that initiative to county officials. “That’s not my forte, yet I have to deal with a budgeting director, a county administrator and a purchasing administrator,” Smith said. “They’re interested, but they need to be convinced.” And Gateway provides a great deal of help in that education process. “It’s a good partnership,” he said.

#### COST OF OWNERSHIP MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

The attention Gateway devotes to Tarrant County and the large range of services it provides make Gateway computers an intelligent choice for Tarrant County. Gateway’s value-added services help IT Department staff solve hardware problems efficiently and economically. County employees spend less time waiting for repairs and more time attending to their work.

“I think they’re really looking for ways to differentiate their product,” Smith said, adding that support costs are a key factor for the county. “They listen to that,” he said. “They’re not just moving a commodity box. They provide a product support role.”

As a support organization, Gateway “is one of the best I have worked with so far,” Smith said.