

SPANNING VAST EXPANSES

Dell and the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services tame the logistics of a statewide upgrade and migration



SOLUTION
• **MANAGEMENT**

CUSTOMER PROFILE

COUNTRY: United States

INDUSTRY: Government

FOUNDED: 1959

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 3,400

WEB ADDRESS: www.hss.state.ak.us

CHALLENGE

The State of Alaska's Department of Health and Social Services' remote offices created unusual challenges for the IT team as they faced projects such as a major computer deployment and platform migration initiative.

SOLUTION

The department's IT group implemented 1,600 Dell™ OptiPlex™ desktops, and Dell Services worked closely with the department to help manage the complex logistics.

BENEFITS

- Conducted implementation without stressing staff or budget resources
- Made significant advances in the department's technology infrastructure, all while continuing to support end users



Untamed, larger-than-life forces have helped shape the State of Alaska. Its immense size, abundant natural resources, and a history rich in culture have given it a place of legend and lore in America. The 49th state admitted into the Union, in 1959, Alaska has the largest land area in the United States—but with only about 700,000 people, one of the smallest populations.

“DELL HELPED US ADDRESS OUR SMALLEST PROBLEMS TO OUR LARGEST CHALLENGES. WE RECEIVED A GREAT DEAL OF PERSONALIZED ATTENTION AND EVERYONE AT DELL UNDERSTOOD WHAT WE WERE TRYING TO DO.”

Kathleen White, information technology customer services manager, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services

While Alaska’s state government is relatively young in comparison to other states in the country, it is well established and provides a wide breadth of services to residents and tourists. The Department of Health and Social Services encompasses many organizations, including the Alaska Pioneer Homes, the Division of Behavioral Health, the Division of Juvenile Justice, the Office of Children’s Services, the Division of Health Care Services, the Division of Public Assistance, and the Division of Public Health, among many other important functions that help maintain a high quality of life.

UPGRADE AND MIGRATION PROJECT POSES SPRAWLING CHALLENGE

In addition to the number of organizations that make up the Department of Health and Social Services, the sheer size of the state and the long distances between each site are tremendous challenges for the IT team. The group supports approximately 300 sites spread out across 33 cities, towns, and remote villages. In many cases, the only way to reach the remote locales is by boat or small plane; in certain places, the employees must bring their own sleeping bags because there are no hotels. So when it came time to upgrade 1,600 of the state’s computer systems, the IT team had to contend with unusual logistics.

“It is very difficult for us to get equipment in and out of some of the offices that we support,” Kathleen White, information technology customer services manager, says. “It is expensive for technicians to travel to those sites, so it is a problem if we don’t have everything we need when we arrive.”

Another project challenge was asset recovery. Each site needed to remove existing equipment yet had no way to dispose of the systems properly and cost-effectively. In addition, the IT team needed to wipe the hard drives within stringent state guidelines and federal data regulations. “We must verify that the old hard drives are completely sanitized of any data. It is a very labor- and time-intensive process that involves a great deal of paperwork,” White says.

Trash disposal for a project of this magnitude was no small consideration. “In replacing 1,600 systems with monitors, we ended up with 3,200 boxes and large quantities of Styrofoam packaging material that we had to get rid of,” Ted Israelson, information technology services manager, says. However, in many locations, there are no disposal capabilities or easy ways to remove the trash.

HOW IT WORKS

HARDWARE

- Dell™ OptiPlex™ GX620 desktops
- Dell OptiPlex GX745 desktops
- Dell 17-inch monitors

SOFTWARE

- Microsoft® Windows® XP OS

SERVICES

- Dell Services
- Dell Custom Factory Integration

“IT HAS BEEN A JOY TO WORK WITH THE GREAT PEOPLE AT DELL. OUR EXTENSIVE PLANNING AND THE SUPPORT OF OUR PLAN FROM DELL ENABLED US TO CONDUCT THE INSTALLATIONS, MIGRATION, AND UPGRADES WITHOUT DISRUPTING EMPLOYEES. THEY COULD STAY FOCUSED ON PROVIDING CRUCIAL SERVICES TO RESIDENTS.”

Ted Israelson, information technology services manager, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services



DELL SERVICES HELPS SOLVE COMPLEX LOGISTICS

The Department of Health and Social Services wanted to implement a standardized computing solution across the state. A streamlined platform would help reduce the complexities of maintaining systems in remote and isolated locations. The team was also looking for a partner that could help simplify new system deployment, along with migration to a standard Microsoft® Windows® XP OS. They found the right partner in Dell.

The state decided to deploy 1,600 Dell OptiPlex GX620 and OptiPlex GX745 desktops with 17-inch flat screen monitors. Dell was able to provide reliable high-performance computers, and Dell Services helped simplify implementation of the new systems in Alaska’s rugged, spread-out environment. The Dell Custom Factory Integration services staff pre-imaged the machines with each division’s required software. Dell also shipped the computers to specified locations according to a carefully coordinated schedule. Computers arrived when a technician was scheduled to be at each

site to perform the installations. “We don’t have a staging area where we could have received the full order. We also did not have the resources to ship the computers from a central storage area to each site,” White says. “This drop-ship arrangement saved us shipping expenses and hundreds of labor hours.”

Using the Dell Asset Recovery program, the department saved even more work hours. Dell sanitized the hard drives and certified the removal of the data. Dell also handled the logistics of

packaging and shipping the old computers and monitors, including non-Dell equipment, for proper disposal. "This was very important to us as we replaced non-Dell desktops with Dell computers," White adds. What's more, Dell removed the new equipment's packaging material so the division did not have to struggle with the challenges of trash disposal, particularly from remote sites.

PROACTIVE FOCUS

"Dell helped us address our smallest problems to our largest challenges," White says. "We received a great deal of personalized attention and everyone at Dell understood what we were trying to do." The assistance from Dell helped the small IT team stay focused on advancing the state's technology infrastructure and supporting its divisions instead of devoting limited resources exclusively to implementing the new systems.

With Dell pre-imaging the computers before they arrived and shipping the computers to each location as needed, the IT team could focus on supporting end-users. "We only had to commit half of our resources to perform the deployments out in the community," White explains. "The rest of the staff was able to deal with home-based tasks. Dell allowed us to keep our heads above water."

The IT group used the implementation as a stepping-off point to accomplish other goals. Technicians made the most of the deployment project by visiting sites they don't have a chance to visit often. Beyond installing the new machines, they improved the overall functionality of the state's technology infrastructure by strengthening

security capabilities and upgrading software. "Connectivity and network bandwidth varies throughout the state, so enhancing desktop performance can make a significant difference in speed and customer productivity," Israelson says.

The IT team made Windows XP standard on all systems to help simplify maintenance and increase performance. "Maintenance can be a major ordeal in our environment," White says. "Employees in small villages and remote sites must package their machines, send them to Anchorage, Juneau, or Fairbanks for repair, and then we must ship the computers back to the site. The process is expensive and can take weeks, so reducing maintenance requirements is important."

The new desktop implementation project was a success. Not only was the IT team able to easily accomplish a tremendous initiative, but the end users they support have also been pleased with the results. "It has been a joy to work with the great people at Dell," Israelson says. "Our extensive planning and the support of our plan from Dell enabled us to conduct the installations, migration, and upgrades without disrupting employees. They could stay focused on providing crucial services to residents."

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