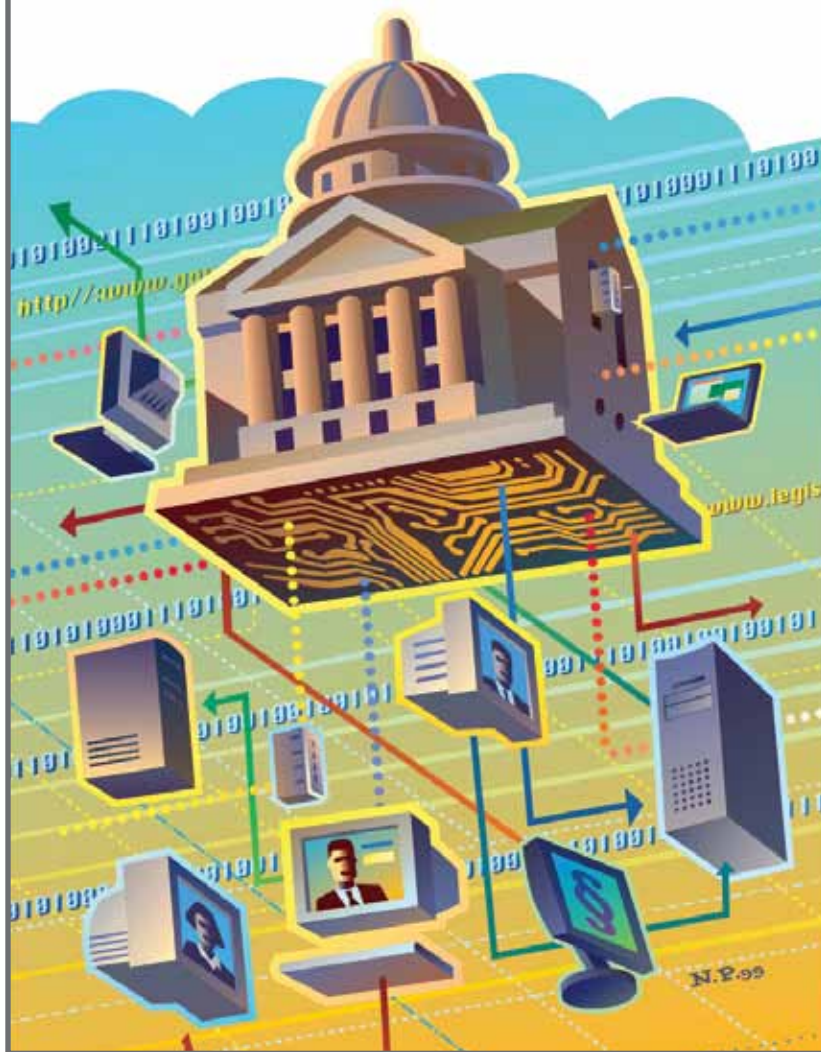


DOES YOUR TOWN GET IT?

Local Government
IT—**Done Right**—
Makes a Big Difference

By Alan Drummer



Seven-mile-long Big Bear Lake sparkles in the sunshine more than a mile above Los Angeles and 100 miles to the northeast. A town of 6,000 on its shore attracts many water skiers, hikers, and fishermen in the summer and snow skiers and boarders in the winter.

Winter Park is a charming city of 28,000 in central Florida, designed over a century ago as a vacation retreat for the wealthy. It includes small, winding brick streets surrounded by a canopy of oak trees draped with Spanish moss.

Cobb County stretches across lush, historic farmland just 20 miles from Atlanta. Its 700,000 residents enjoy one of the largest park systems in the southeastern United States.

These three places share more than good scenery: their quality of life is enhanced by the way that local governments use technology.

City of Big Bear Lake

Founded: 1980
Location: Big Bear Lake, California
Website: www.citybigbearlake.com
Residents: 6,000
Employees: 140
IT Staff: 1

Click for livability

In Big Bear Lake, citizens can learn about any issue before the city council by automatically searching indexed video replays of meetings online. They can apply for and track the status of their building permits online. These and other services are provided by a city IT staff of one.

In Winter Park, the city is accountable for answering questions through help desk tickets that citizens can generate and track online. The seven-person IT staff is planning desktop virtualization, potentially delivering six-figure IT savings.

In Cobb County, citizens will soon be able to dial 311 to have helpful representatives speed them through county business. Or they'll be able to choose to fill out an online form or drop an email. Key IT initiatives like these are made possible by an easy but effective financing technique.

In each of these places, small IT teams are achieving what IT departments everywhere strive to achieve: deliver more value and services while driving down costs. What approaches are these local government IT teams using that might help any IT team?

First: centralize, standardize, stabilize

The infrastructure was once in rougher shape at each of these locations.

When Ken Watts arrived as manager of information systems in Big Bear Lake three and a half

years ago, there were major issues to solve. One was a lack of data protection: most of the servers spread across various departments weren't backed up, and when one of them failed, the city had to pay a data forensics service \$25,000 to recover the hard disk. In addition, the network was, on average, only 50 percent available and services such as email and Voice-Over-IP (VoIP) were being restarted several times a day. And the email system had been compromised by a Trojan that transformed it into a spam relay, and was blacklisted as a result.

Watts worked with Advanced Internet Security, Inc., a Symantec Gold Partner, to centralize the city's servers and deploy Symantec Backup Exec to back them up completely for the first time. He replaced the white-box servers and desktops the previous IT management had been building by hand and standardized on Dell servers and desktops under warranty, raising network availability from 50 percent to virtually 100

percent. He put an antispam solution in place and got the email server off the blacklist.

Across the country in Florida's Winter Park, IT manager Parsram Rajaram inherited a server room that was designed to hold 20 servers, yet

Ken Watts, Manager of
Information Systems,
City of Big Bear Lake



“Web 2.0 challenges every local government to facilitate more access for the public via technology. There will be much innovation and many new tools ahead.”

– Ken Watts, Manager of Information Systems,
City of Big Bear Lake, California

Parsram Rajaram,
IT Manager,
City of Winter Park



City of Winter Park

Founded: 1887

Location: Winter Park, Florida

Website: www.cityofwinterpark.org

Residents: 28,000

Employees: 550

IT Staff: 7

Symantec NetBackup for VMware, for \$100,000 less than competitors, aided by the cost efficiency of an HP LeftHand SAN.

In Cobb County, Georgia, police officers in the field still had a 20-year-old application on their laptops, and it couldn't keep up with their needs. As a result, they had to do more paperwork than necessary. The

county's IT team, led by MIS Director Paul Ruth, took the opportunity to not only replace that particular application but to "push technology out to the edge—where it can better serve officers and other county staff in the field."

Productivity at your fingertips

The mobile computers in Cobb County police cars now have access to SunGard OSSI public safety software, national and Georgia crime information centers, and 911 information. The county's field inspectors and other code enforcement staff also have access to new software on mobile devices for their respective duties. "Whether it's a code citation or a traffic ticket, they can print the ticket in their car, hand it out, and away they go," Ruth explains.

That puts field staff in a proactive rather than reactive mode, Ruth adds. "If an officer is answering a complaint about a house where the lawn hasn't been cut

in three months, and on the way passes four other houses with the same problem, the officer previously was able to only issue the citation for the first house because he or she had no information on the other four," Ruth says. "Now, the officer can stop on the way, key in the other addresses, see who the owners of the houses are, and take care of citations."

Officers and other staff can also spend more time in the field. Before, they had to go back to their offices as much as three hours before the end of their shifts to get paperwork done. Now they can stay in the field until as late as an hour before the end of the shift, with the county benefiting from hundreds of extra enforcement hours per week.

Beyond the above, Ruth's Cobb County team saw another way to increase government efficiency: switch to VoIP, which will reduce the county voice and data bill by 35 percent or a projected \$900,000 a year.

Selling IT transformation: how to get clout and use it

In a tough economy, how do these IT departments get funding for new technology initiatives and deploy them successfully?

Cobb County covered its \$2 million VoIP project by rolling the capital expenditure into a five-year lease-to-own. "We're able to pay the lease off the savings, and we don't have to go back to the well," Ruth says. "And once the lease is done, we'll realize the savings."

Another strategy that makes new initiatives successful at Cobb County is to have a dedicated

had 55 servers operating in it. The cooling system strained to hold the temperature at 86 degrees! Meanwhile, each of the city's 12 departments ordered their own white-box PCs independently. They would arrive unannounced for the IT team to stage.

Rajaram centralized PC purchases and standardized on two models of HP desktops to simplify maintenance. He chose Symantec Ghost Solution Suite to centrally deploy images to multiple machines simultaneously in 20 minutes, instead of having a technician spend five to six hours deploying each PC.

He and his team cooled the server room by using VMware to virtualize 33 of the 55 physical servers on just four HP ProLiant DL380 servers, reducing five racks of gear to two. The temperature dropped from 86 degrees to 82, and the city will see a reduction of as much as \$30,000 a year in power and cooling costs. Symantec Partner CDW provided the virtualization solution, including

implementation team. It consists of 10 people who work separately from the client support and technical operations teams. "Some people are built to keep things going, and some are built to do something new," Ruth explains. "We try and identify the do-some-

continue to show our departments we're here not just to fix issues but to come up with new ideas," Ruth explains.

A strategy like this is critical in breaking down bureaucratic silos that can exist in government, write McKinsey consultants

“We plan on implementing desktop virtualization, which will extend the life of the city’s 150 desktops another three years, saving \$700 a desktop for a total of \$105,000.”

– Parsram Rajaram, IT Manager, City of Winter Park, Florida

thing-new folks and keep them on the implementation team, and put people who like to keep things going in client support.”

An implementation team seems like a natural target for budget cuts, so how does it survive in tough times? Budgets are always tight at Cobb County, Ruth notes, and through good management, funding for the team has been preserved. "The Cobb County Manager, David Hankerson, has been serving for 16 years. He has a good understanding of what the Board of Commissioners want, and he routinely reviews and squeezes every budget line item every year. Last year, the county finished a few hundred thousand dollars in the black while many of our counterparts were millions of dollars in the hole," he observes.

The Cobb County IT team also works carefully with each department so that it is perceived as a partner rather than just a service provider. Five technical service managers check in often with each of 54 departments to understand their challenges and brainstorm how technology can help. "We

Maia Hansen and John Stoner in "A Leaner Public Sector." "This can be done...by having employees spend a day shadowing their counterparts in other organizations. Assembling leaders from different units into problem-solving teams can go a long way in this regard."¹

Transforming cost into revenue

In Big Bear Lake, there's another strategy for getting approval for new IT initiatives: show they enhance service to citizens or capture revenue that would otherwise slip through the cracks, says Watts. A new online permit system does both. The city had a land management system that didn't calculate fees correctly, Watts learned, and it was capturing only a portion of the fees that the city was due for permits.

An application upgrade would cost \$600,000, but by shopping alternatives, Watts found BUILDER-Radius BluePrince for 75 percent less or \$130,000. The new application came with extras such as the capability for each local contractor to have a private Web page for

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- > Symantec Backup Exec for Windows Servers
- > Veritas NetBackup
- > Symantec NetBackup PureDisk
- > Symantec Hosted Backup

Infrastructure Operations

- > Altiris Total Management Suite
- > Symantec Ghost Solution Suite
- > Symantec Workflow

Security

- > Symantec Brightmail Gateway
- > Symantec Endpoint Protection
- > Symantec Network Access Control
- > Symantec Protection Suite Small Business Edition
- > Symantec Hosted Services (MessageLabs)
- > Symantec Web Security

tracking the progress of plan reviews and requesting inspections. "So far, everybody loves it," Watts says, "and complete payback is projected to take about two years."

In Winter Park, Rajaram can sell new IT initiatives more easily for a different reason: his previous experience with the city. He started as the technician who fixed PCs in every city department, sewing seeds of goodwill, and then worked his way up the ranks. "The reputation I built as a systems administrator and systems analyst helps the city management have confidence that I'm making the right recommendation as manager," he says.

Raising service levels and adding value

Because all three IT teams have stabilized and enhanced basic systems,

Paul Ruth, MIS Director,
Cobb County, Georgia



Cobb County

Founded: 1832
Location: Cobb County, Georgia
Website: www.cobbcountyga.gov
Residents: 700,000
Employees: 4,400
IT Staff: 100

accountability from *SunshineReview.org*. “Our county manager has a great feel for the way this county needs to be run,” Ruth explains.

What’s IT all about? Service to others

Delivering positive results like these requires good IT talent. How can local governments find and retain it when the private sector pays more?

One attraction can be location, says Cobb County’s Ruth. “It’s an hour’s commute by car from here to Atlanta, and the people we tend to find are tired of commuting,” he says.

There’s another key reason, Ruth adds. “When you work in government systems, you see the impact of what you’re doing in the community,” he says. “A lot of people who work in the private sector don’t ever see that. They work hard and do a great job, but they don’t ever see where it comes into play. But when someone on our team implements a new library system and they hear their neighbor talking about how cool it was to check a library book out on their own, there’s a strong sense of satisfaction in having made that difference.” ■

¹ Maria Hansen and John Stoner, “A Leaner Public Sector,” *McKinsey Quarterly*, August 2009, pg. 6.

² Jason Baumgarten and Michael Chut, “E-Government 2.0,” *McKinsey Quarterly*, July 2009, pg. 6.

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they have more time to focus on new initiatives that add value.

In Big Bear Lake, Watts sees a major opportunity. “Web 2.0 challenges every local government to facilitate more access for the public via technology,” he says. “There will be much innovation and many new tools ahead that help citizens mine government data and find what they’re looking for.”

Watts already empowers citizens by providing searchable video clips of city council meetings. He plans on integrating the city’s document management system so that links to relevant documents are available next to the clips. And he’d like citizens to be able to leave posted comments in that area and begin online conversations with various city leaders.

More governments need to make this kind of change, observe McKinsey consultants Jason Baumgarten and Michael Chut, in their report entitled “E-Government 2.0.” They argue that government Websites need to shift from “publishing” to “sharing” and embrace user participation.²

In Winter Park, Rajaram and his seven-person IT team have deployed GovQA, an application from WebQA, Inc. that enables citizens to ask questions, make requests, and track their progress. It also displays the most frequently asked questions along

with answers. “To get this program working, we had to get buy-in from every department to handle the questions citizens ask online,” Rajaram says. “It was a really good effort from the entire city.”

Rajaram and his IT team are also taking advantage of the extra capacity that they brought to the Winter Park server room through virtualization. “We plan on implementing desktop virtualization, which will extend the life of the city’s 150 desktops another three years, saving \$700 a desktop for a total of \$105,000,” Rajaram notes.

Get what you need fast

In Cobb County, Ruth’s team is re-designing the county’s Website to streamline interaction for users. “We don’t want users to have to understand county government structure,” Ruth explains. “If you’re curious about your property, you should just be able to type in ‘428 Campbell Hill Street’ and see everything about it. You shouldn’t have to know that the tax assessor has the appraised value, the tax commissioner knows if taxes have been paid, or that the superior court clerk has the deed records.”

Cobb County is already the only county in the state of Georgia that gets an “A+” for transparency and