

Georgia's Big Win

Georgia goes to the private sector for major improvement with network transformation.

Georgia needed to make a change. With an aging IT infrastructure, slow network speeds, inadequate security and no failover mechanism, the state knew it had to make a big leap forward in a short period of time. Georgia turned to AT&T and IBM for industry-leading expertise on infrastructure and network services.

The AT&T agreement, for managed network services, covers five years and is worth \$346 million. While the state is only in year two of the network transformation, it's already seeing significant benefits.

The Georgia Technology Authority (GTA) is overseeing the agreement for the state. "AT&T had managed this in a different form before," said Chris McClendon, technical architect with GTA. "They had a contract where they were delivering voice and data services, but in a very fragmented way. Each agency bought their own solution, based on their needs and what they could afford. Under this contract, we've brought it under one umbrella. AT&T is managing the entire network services landscape from one end to the other, so there's a common set of services that all the agencies have."

With the network on one platform and managed by AT&T, the agencies have better security, less maintenance and administration, and a modernized network that meets the needs of today's government.

Former Georgia CIO Patrick Moore believes putting technology in the hands of an expert frees up state agencies to focus on what they do best: providing service to the public. "The entire concept of what we're doing with AT&T is based on a transformational model that we see as necessary to get us out of doing things we shouldn't be doing," Moore said. "In other words, technology is not a core competency of state government."

By moving management of routers, switches and other facets of network operations to AT&T, state government can be more



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productive, Moore said. "This is designed to give the agencies a greater capability to focus on their business, and to focus on their productivity and their ability to deliver services," he noted.

Improvements All Around

Georgia's technology transformation is one of the largest public-sector IT transformations in the world. The project affects 70,000 state employees and 1,400 state and local government offices. The state has 116 departments, agencies, offices, commissions and councils. They serve more than 9 million residents — an 18 percent increase since 2000.

AT&T began providing managed network services in May 2009, and the state is well on its way to better network performance, security and redundancy. GTA is working with AT&T to consolidate the data centers of 13 agencies into one data center with a Tier IV rating from the Uptime Institute. These 13 agencies include Public Health, Revenue, Corrections and Natural Resources.

The consolidation into one enterprise network will give the state many advantages,

including cost savings, simplified maintenance and stronger security. AT&T doubled the network capacity for the state, and with 24/7 proactive monitoring, AT&T can find and fix network issues — often before customers are aware.

Security was a big factor, as the state had endured a major security breach in the past. AT&T helped bring the state down from 900 firewalls in numerous agencies to fewer than a dozen for all agencies. With a simpler security environment enveloping all agencies, updates can be handled quickly and easily, and there are fewer entry points into the system. The state also has a level of redundancy it never had before. The state's entire network can fail over to AT&T facilities in another state.

McClendon said there are numerous other benefits too. "We also have better architecture for routing the data from one agency to the next, and also to the outside world," he said. "And there's an ongoing process to provide best-in-class services. This contract also allows us to take advantage of the technologies that were already within the infra-

structure, but had not been approached from an enterprise standpoint before.”

By taking the enterprise approach, the state is now in a position to improve network management and security for all agencies — something that would have been practically impossible under the old model, with each agency needing to be addressed individually.

Faster, Easier

Georgia’s network transformation is also about faster, easier service. Technology solutions provide the ability to deliver more effective and efficient customer service in a reliable way. “We have spent a lot of our time and resources just trying to keep up. ... We needed a model in which we are using technology to deliver services to constituents who are looking at the world through a glass touchscreen. Agencies should be able to focus on their core competencies and their customers. Technology should enable state government to serve citizens in a manner that citizens are coming to expect,” said Moore.

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The Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) is one of the first agencies to benefit from the network transformation. For OPB, live video streaming of legislative sessions is critical. The agency’s budget analysts need to watch the legislative sessions while simultaneously analyzing the fiscal impact of pending legislation and working with the



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budgets of the state executive, judicial and legislative branches. But the state’s video streaming had degraded to the point where it was almost useless. Thus the budget analysts had to attend the sessions in person, losing much of their ability to multitask.

“We were part of the state MPLS [multiprotocol label switching] network, which relied on older equipment, with variable standards. It was somewhat of a hodgepodge,” said Terry Wolf, CIO of the OPB. “We were experiencing widely variable network performance. We

would sometimes benchmark at sub-DSL speeds.” That all changed once AT&T began transforming the network.

“AT&T came in and began the transformation, and we’ve seen dramatic improvement,” Wolf noted. “We’re now benchmarking in the 14-16 megabit range. We’ve had as many as 40 users able to view legislative video stream-

ing simultaneously. The improvement has been absolutely overwhelming. It’s a real success story.”

Various reports and file transfers — which had taken exceedingly long times with the legacy network — also are happening much faster now.

Like many states, Georgia has seen declining revenues for the last three years. Significant budget cuts have forced the state to deliver more services with fewer resources. “This is not the time for technology to be part of the problem,” Wolf said. “It’s time for technology to be part of the solution. AT&T’s performance in improving our bandwidth and stability and reliability and the sheer volume of our network capacity is allowing OPB to do more with less.”

The Best Technology, Always

With the aging equipment and infrastructure on its way out, Georgia can rest easy knowing its network will be more dependable and secure than it’s ever been before. “A fundamental driver behind why we are going down this road of a managed network service solution is to drive risk out of the state’s technology environment,” said Moore.

By going with AT&T, an industry leader, the state can always stay current with technology — technology it wouldn’t be able to have on its own, as the AT&T contract includes a regular refresh of equipment. “We can leverage technology that was previously unavailable to us,” Wolf said.

It’s a proposition that many states might find appealing, Moore noted. “I think the concept makes sense, no matter who you’re talking to,” he said. “Obviously each state’s going to have its own set of circumstances, but the general notion of who is best suited to keep pace with changing trends and technology — that is clear. The private sector clearly has a leg up on government, in terms of being able to stay current.”

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