

Small Town Provides Big-City Services with HP



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—Brad Kowerchuk, President,
Bralin Technology Solutions

HP Customer Case Study: IT Infrastructure

Industry:
Government
(Municipal)

A little town on the prairie saves thousands of dollars and serves its constituents more efficiently thanks to HP hardware, software, and service partners

Objective:

Improve the city government's delivery of public services and reduce operating costs with a reliable, flexible, and cost-effective IT infrastructure

Approach:

Provide HP servers, storage, and networking hardware, plus outsourced IT services from HP partner Bralin Technology Services

Business benefits:

- Better availability for online government services
- Streamlined communication and collaboration among city departments
- Fast support response in crisis situation
- Cost avoidance on salary of one full-time IT employee

Technology improvements:

- Improved network traffic management
- Greater storage flexibility
- Easier repairs and fewer service outages due to HP monitoring tools

About the City of North Battleford

Located in western Saskatchewan, Canada, the City of North Battleford is home to around 14,000 residents. The city is located where fertile farmlands meet the beauty of the province's 100,000 lakes, vast forests and the spectacular panorama of the North Saskatchewan River Valley.

Small town, big solutions

North Battleford is a placid town of about 14,000 people on the Saskatchewan prairie that boasts abundant grain harvests, hiking, fishing and winter sports along the scenic North Saskatchewan River, a wide range of business and community services—and a state-of-the-art IT infrastructure that would be the envy of companies or cities many times its size.

From the City's Main office to the fire station to the municipal aquatic centre, a majority of the city's departments and buildings are connected and running on a secure Virtual Private Network (VPN). A storage area network (SAN) allows swift electronic access to decades' worth of city records. The city's Web site offers council meeting agendas, budgets, recreation schedules, and a one-stop portal to apply for business permits and licenses. The city's technology platform is protected against security breaches or power fluctuations from storms and heat waves.

The city contracts with local HP partner and Advanced Product Reseller Bralin Technology Solutions for design and support services. The solution Bralin put in place runs with surprisingly low administrative overhead, thanks to a robust infrastructure of HP servers, storage, networking hardware and administrative tools, as well as reliable HP desktop and laptop computers.

Making sense of IT options

With only about 35 to 40 users in its various city agencies, North Battleford's IT needs are similar to those of a small business, with the complexities of a municipal government woven in.

“You might think they'd have only a very basic network,” says Brad Kowerchuk, president of Bralin Technology Solutions. “But the city's needs are a lot more complex than a typical mid-sized business with the same number of users. To meet these needs they are now using, and benefiting from, a lot of cutting-edge solutions that were previously only available to enterprise clients.”

Solution at a glance

Hardware

- HP ProLiant ML350 and ML370 servers
- HP StorageWorks MSA 1000 Small Business SAN G2 Kit
- HP desktop and laptop computers (various models)
- HP 10642 G2 universal crated rack
- HP R3000 uninterruptible power supply
- HP ProCurve 2600, 2800, and 1800 Series switches

Software

- HP Systems Insight Manager
- Microsoft Exchange Server 2003
- Microsoft SQL Server 2005

Operating System

- Microsoft Windows Server 2003

HP Partner

- Bralin Technology Solutions, an HP Advanced Product Reseller

Evolving sophistication

An important milestone in 2003 was installing a terminal server infrastructure based on HP ProLiant servers running Microsoft Windows Server 2003 along with a series of VPNs that allowed city employees in different locations to share information and files centrally, rather than swapping faxes and e-mails. "That sped things up right there," says Gail Adams, the city's office manager, who also oversees all its IT projects. "By having direct access to the databases, our remote locations can now do inquiries on general ledger accounts and balance them, instead of having someone in the main office do this."

Meanwhile, Bralin upgraded the city's network with HP ProCurve 2600, 2800, and 1800 Series switches to support the higher network traffic. "Even something as inconspicuous as switches can make a big difference, in terms of reliable messaging, when you're delivering mission-critical services, like dispatching fire trucks or snowplows," Kowerchuk says.

The city also expanded its storage by adding an HP StorageWorks Modular Smart Array (MSA) 1000 Small Business SAN G2 Kit. At the same time, Bralin reconfigured the city's data centre using one HP 10642 G2 universal crated rack and one HP R3000 uninterruptible power supply. This frees up extra space in the server room for future growth—not to mention adding extra protection against power outages caused by heat waves or blizzards.

"And we now have a lot more flexibility to upgrade or migrate data, since the HP storage equipment doesn't box us in," Kowerchuk says. "This gives us better space management and the ability to add more programs and data without slowing down the system."

Only a phone call away

Even the best hardware platform needs support and maintenance, and the city now contracts with Bralin for these services. "I'm the go-to person because I manage the city's offices, but I'm not the right person to field 45 tech support calls a day," Adams says. "Bralin delivers excellent service. They're always just a phone call away."

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—Gail Adams, Office Manager,
City of North Battleford

Bralin relies on HP Systems Insight Manager as an in-depth reporting tool. "Systems Insight Manager delivers detailed information that helps us get to the bottom of a problem right away," Kowerchuk says. "We rely on HP server management tools to reconfigure machines as we fix them. They're definitely helpful."

Riding to the rescue

In fact, they helped Bralin save the day in June 2006, when an aging server housing a key database of property tax information failed just before the end of the month. That's a bad time for the database server to go down, Kowerchuk notes, because that it is our due date for property taxes and also the kickoff to the Canada Day holiday weekend.

"The server crashed on a Tuesday before the long weekend, and we had it back up by the following Tuesday," he says. "So it was only down for about three business days. We worked through the weekend, but what really helped us make the fix so quickly was HP's distribution system. They made the parts available to us right away, and didn't make excuses about it being a holiday. That really speaks well of them."

"That speedy response really took a load off my staff, because until the tax database was revived, they had to process the payments manually," Adams says. That meant going back to cash registers and hand-written receipts for over \$1 million CDN worth of payments, a stark reminder of how computers have streamlined even the most routine of city processes, she adds.

Ongoing savings

Like any small business, the City of North Battleford wants to keep current with technology without adding new, costly employees. Using the combination of Bralin's services and HP hardware, the city is able to save money by not having to hire a full-time IT manager, according to Adams.

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"We've always tried to make use of technology where it makes sense to solve business problems and do a better job at a lower cost for our residents," she reflects. "But over the past several years, there's been just a flood of new IT developments. So it becomes more and more challenging to sort through them, choose the right solutions, and install and maintain them. Because we're a small town, we can't afford to hire a full-time dedicated IT employee. That's why we've chosen to standardize on a solid foundation of HP hardware with support from Bralin. They've both been very good to us."

To learn more about Hewlett-Packard Canada, visit www.hp.ca

To learn more about the city of North Battleford, visit www.city.north-battleford.sk.ca