

Eaton County

Eaton County places complete trust in Logicalis to design, deploy and manage entirely-new IT infrastructure to support the organization well into the future

Identifying creative financing to make a new technology refresh possible

When collaborating with an IT solution provider for 20+ years, the relationship evolves into a high-level, two-way street of trust and respect. So when Eaton County in Michigan finally received the required budget for a much-needed technology refresh, Dr. Robert J. Sobie knew exactly where to turn: Logicalis.

“Our IT infrastructure was aging and users began to experience application performance issues,” says Sobie, the Eaton County Director of Technology Services. “We needed new technology to ensure we could continue providing services to county citizens, and based on the long track record my staff and I have had with Logicalis for so many years, there was absolutely no doubt they would take on the project for us and perform at the highest level.”

A major contributor to Sobie receiving the budget green light was the ability of Logicalis to arrange for favorable financing terms. As a strategic partner that works very closely with Cisco on behalf of many customers, Logicalis identified a multi-year, interest-free Cisco financing program that Eaton County could tap into. The financing applied not only to Cisco technology, but also to other technologies the county required to completely refresh its hardware and software infrastructure.

“We’ve stayed with Logicalis for so long because they are very tuned into our needs, both from a technological perspective and a financial perspective,” Sobie says. “They are very like-minded and want to see the county succeed in our mission to effectively provide services to our citizens.”

A never-ending drive to reduce costs

In addition to the ability to arrange for project financing, another major factor in Sobie’s decision to partner with Logicalis was its approach to solving the challenge of an aging IT infrastructure. Instead of just simply recommending new hardware and software, Logicalis first proposed an infrastructure assessment and needs analysis. This enabled Eaton County to know exactly what it already had to work with and just what it needed to do in order to bring infrastructure performance to the required level.

“After the assessment, Logicalis even showed us how we could get by for a while longer by reconfiguring the existing environment, which would have minimized our costs,” Sobie says. “They also demonstrated how our existing infrastructure could be used in a failover site for disaster recovery. These are great examples of how Logicalis provides options and sincerely wants to do what is best for us.”

Sobie decided to proceed with the option of refreshing the entire hardware and software infrastructure—especially where the county had authorized the expenditure and could leverage the Cisco finance terms. He also wanted to deploy a modern IT infrastructure so the county would not have to worry about another refresh for several years.

“Even then, Logicalis continued to look for ways to cut our costs,” Sobie says. “For example, rather than selling us new VMware licensing for our virtual servers, they worked with our incumbent software provider to upgrade our existing licenses, which lowered our overall costs.”

Advanced technologies complemented by the latest IT best-practices

The solution Logicalis designed and deployed for Eaton County includes a combination of Cisco, EMC, VMware and Microsoft technologies that impact every component of the IT infrastructure:

- Server compute and virtualization resources
- Network routers and switches
- Storage
- Disaster recovery and data/system backup
- Unified communications
- Wireless
- Security
- Microsoft Active Directory and Exchange
- Desktop lifecycle refresh

In addition to refreshing the hardware and software, Logicalis also optimized system configurations that allow Eaton County to better utilize IT resources and generate faster application performance throughout the environment. Logicalis also updated the network design to follow current best-practices, which makes system management much simpler.

“We were fortunate to act when we did,” Sobie says. “With many of our hardware components reaching end-of-support status, we would have experienced extended periods of downtime in the event of a failure.”

The system engineering design team at Logicalis also recommended improving some of the fiber cabling on the Eaton County six-building main campus to improve redundancy and to allow for 10GB connectivity throughout the campus. Other enhancements included configuring a tiered-model storage array to automatically select the best place to store data based on data demand and frequency-of-use.

“Because Logicalis deployed the latest VMware virtualization software, the solution also streamlines our backups considerably,” Sobie says. “It used to take 40 hours just to run incremental backups, but we can now run a complete system and data backup in just 12 hours—a huge benefit should we ever encounter a disaster.”

Enhanced end-user collaboration through unified communications

The upgrades to the compute components of the datacenter have improved overall server utilization dramatically. The newest versions of VMware allow virtual servers to take full advantage of the latest tools to run as efficiently as possible with high levels of automation. Logicalis also upgraded Eaton County’s Cisco Unified Communications platform

“One of the communication features we particularly appreciate is that voice mails now also appear in our email accounts so end-users can easily check voice mail on their smart phones when they are away from the office,” Sobie says. “We are also leveraging new features such as Cisco Jabber (instant messaging) and Cisco Presence to help improve employee productivity. It’s now much easier for us to communicate.”

Deploying new technologies without interrupting daily operations

The ways in which Eaton County benefits from the Logicalis hardware and software refresh covers just about every operational area. The upgrade to the wireless network increases speed and availability, with stronger indoor and outdoor coverage at the main campus as well as three satellite offices and 15 police, fire and emergency-response sites.

Police cars, for example, can just pull up to the side of a county building to upload videos covering activities that occurred during each shift. Citizens can also now enjoy free Wi-Fi whenever they visit county offices. At the same time, Logicalis upgraded Eaton County’s security with Internet filtering, endpoint protection and enhanced management tools that make it easy to control access to county data.

The core of all end-user computing at Eaton County is now driven by the latest version of Microsoft Active Directory and Microsoft Exchange email. Logicalis upgraded Eaton County to the latest versions of both of these mission-critical applications by using unique tools that make migrations from one version to another as simple as possible.

“Logicalis also did a great job managing the logistics of rolling out the new infrastructure so that our day-to-day operations would not be impacted,” Sobie says. “They built the new technologies alongside our existing infrastructure, and once everything was in place, we migrated groups of users at staggered times. By taking this approach, there was no impact on our ability to continue providing services to county citizens.”

Protection for a major investment in IT

Upon completion of the infrastructure refresh, Sobie decided to safeguard the county’s IT investment and extend the partnership even further by relying on Logicalis to provide 24x7 Managed Services. Logicalis now monitors the performance of all major compute, networking and storage components while also managing any software updates and maintenance the devices require. “Utilizing Managed Services is a first for the county, but we wanted another pair of eyes to monitor the network and to take preventative steps to mitigate problems,” Sobie says.

“At first, my IT staff expressed concerns about their future role in overseeing the network,” Sobie adds. “But it was never about changing staffing levels or the important services these highly-skilled and experienced professionals deliver every day. Rather, Managed Services is an important extension of our service delivery role to further ensure the stability and security of our new network. After I emphasized how busy we are with day-to-day support activities of the 2,100 devices on our network and our 350 end users spread over nearly 20 locations, the IT staff concluded it was the right decision. We don’t always have time to monitor server logs, firewall logs and unusual activity—that’s what we get from Logicalis. When issues occur, they take early action and then partner with us to fix the issue.”

Logicalis Managed Services features penalty-based SLAs for the performance of each device to give Eaton County the best possible protection. Logicalis selected various service levels based on the types of components and keeps the environment performing to expected levels by utilizing top certified engineers as well as leading monitoring and management tools.

The Managed Services component has also played a role in enhancing Eaton County’s security.

“Managed Services provides added protection to proactively thwart attacks,” Sobie says. “We can also fine tune our anti-virus solution, which performs better on the new network.”

“Partnering with Logicalis makes good business sense, even for organizations like ours that have a skilled internal IT team. We don’t have the budget and bandwidth to help our IT staff to keep up with the latest innovations and best practices. That’s why we turn to Logicalis.”

Dr. Robert J. Sobie, Director of Technology Services, Eaton County