CASE STUDY

County Government Selects Colocation For Expanding IT Infrastructure

Travis County, Texas Finds Secure, Cost-Effective Data Center Solution at CyrusOne

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Abstract

Travis County is the fifth largest county in the state of Texas, with 1.1 million residents. The county government operates from Austin. Until 2011, Travis County's IT infrastructure was housed in a basement data center that had multiple points of failure, offered no room for expansion, and was prone to disasters, including flooding. Travis County moved its critical infrastructure to CyrusOne's Austin I data center. CyrusOne's facility provided a cost-effective colocation solution with 100% uptime service level, space to grow, multi-layered security, built to standards allowing a customer to meet HIPPAA compliance requirements, and carrier-neutral connectivity for Travis County's IT footprint.

The Company

With approximately 1.1 million residents, Travis County is the fifth largest county in the state of Texas. The Travis County government operates from Austin, the county's largest city, and employs around 5,500 people, including 45 elected officials. Over 20 cities and municipalities fall under Travis County's government jurisdiction, and utilize its public services.

"We provide a broad range of services, including emergency management, social services, parks and recreation, election processing, and district and civil court case processing," explains Walter LaGrone, IT Operations Director for Travis County. "About 10 local municipalities use the Travis County Sheriff's Department, because they don't have their own law enforcement divisions. At Travis County IT Services, we support the needs and goals of our elected officials and public service departments by providing innovative technology services.

"Our departments have access to about 190 applications running on our IT systems. For example, our Civil and Criminal Justice divisions, including the Sheriff's Department, prosecutor's office, county courts, and correctional facilities, use an integrated system of applications to share data about investigations and court cases. Our tax office uses tax collection and voter registration applications. Our case workers in Health and Human Services use applications to distribute social services, and Travis County residents can access applications on our county website to see if they're eligible for public assistance programs.

"All these applications are critical to our county operations. If our IT infrastructure goes down, our entire county government shuts down, because these applications will be unavailable to those who need them."

The Challenge

Until 2011, Travis County's IT infrastructure was housed in a private data center in the basement of the Gault Building in Austin. The building was built in 1974, and the original data center had been designed for a single mainframe computer, with only 1000 square feet of floor space. In 2000, Travis County expanded to an additional 1000 square feet, with part of the L-shaped data center going into an adjacent parking garage.

"We'd had several near-disasters that put our IT footprint in serious danger," says LaGrone. "A few years ago, we had a huge rainstorm, and our rooftop drainpipe leaked into the basement and flooded a part of the data center. We had to form a 'bucket brigade' to bail out the water and stop it from reaching our servers. Also, there were water pipes running across the basement ceiling over parts of our IT infrastructure. If any of those pipes had leaked or broken, the water could have damaged or destroyed our IT servers.

"It became obvious to us that the basement data center was no longer suitable for our current IT needs. At one point, we had to jack up all our servers and install new floor tiles underneath them, because the old tiles were bending under their weight. Also, our data center had trouble meeting the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) security standards that are required by the FBI for local government infrastructures."

The Solution

In 2010, Travis County did a study to determine if it should keep its county government offices at its downtown campus in Austin, or move to a new location. This study also looked at possible solutions for the problems facing the county's data center.

"We decided it was time to move our IT infrastructure to a better facility, since the building it was housed in might need to be torn down and replaced," says LaGrone. "We determined that it would be far too expensive to remodel our current data center, or to build a new one and continue to operate it ourselves. Even if we did this, a Tier II data center was the best we could do.

"So colocation was our best and most cost-effective option. CyrusOne was already housing the servers for our county auditor's ERP system, so we chose them as our data center provider. In 2011, we moved our main IT footprint into their Austin I facility.

Benefits

A Data Center Built To Withstand Disasters

Travis County splits its infrastructure between CyrusOne's two Austin-area data centers. Both data centers are strong and durable facilities, built to withstand tornadoes and other natural disasters. Each data center has a reinforced physical structure that includes steel-lined walls, concrete bollards, storm protection shutters, and bulletproof glass.

"With CyrusOne, we no longer have to worry about our data center going down due to a flood or a power outage," says LaGrone. "Their facilities have redundant dual power feeds, one from Austin Energy and one from a south Texas nuclear power plant. If one power feed goes down, the data center will still have power from the other source. And if both feeds happen to go down, each data center has four on-site, fuel-powered generators and UPS's [Uninterruptible Power Supplies] to ensure that our IT systems always have the power and cooling they need.

"I'm also impressed by how CyrusOne has planned out their data centers to prevent disasters. For example, in addition to VESDA [Very Early Smoke Detection Apparatus] systems, they have fire prevention procedures where you can't bring flammable materials like cardboard containers onto the data center floor. You have to leave them in the lobby, or in the shipping/receiving areas, where they can contain a fire if they need to."

Space to Grow

"In our previous data center," LaGrone explains, "our L-shaped IT footprint covered 2300 square feet, and we had no space left for growth. When we moved to CyrusOne's data center, a CyrusOne representative came and counted the racks and servers we had. He told us we'd only need 1500 square feet, and this would still give us room to grow.

"I thought he was crazy, but he pulled out a map and showed us how the servers would be laid out in hot aisle/cold aisle configurations, with empty space included on the end so we could expand our footprint. With CyrusOne's help, we made better use of our IT space, and have room left over for growth at less cost."

Multi-layered Security

CyrusOne's Austin facilities offer multiple layers of security, including perimeter fences, an entrance area that requires security check-in with a government-issued RFID and biometric fingerprint scanning, anti-passback doors, video surveillance, and dedicated cabinets and cages.

"We keep an on-site IT staff at the Austin I data center, and fewer than 10 people are cleared to access our IT infrastructure at all times," says LaGrone. "Any Travis County official who doesn't have clearance – and that includes me – has to sign in and leave their driver's license at the front desk, pass through several mantraps, and be escorted to our dedicated cage by an authorized Travis County IT staff employee or a member of CyrusOne's 24/7 security team."

Connectivity

"Travis County is part of the Greater Austin Area Telecommunication Network (GAATN), and we use the University of Texas Internet service," says LaGrone. "Our IT footprint at CyrusOne's Austin facility is connected to GAATN and UT's Internet network through a dual-feed fiber connection. If one feed goes down, the other will still remain active. And if GAATN or UT's Internet network ever go down, we can connect to another telecom or Internet provider, thanks to CyrusOne's carrier-neutral connectivity."

A Cost-Effective Solution

"I know many local governments feel the need to own and control their own data centers," says LaGrone. "But colocation with a reliable data center provider gives you much better value for less cost. You leave your power, cooling, and security to qualified experts, and your ability to expand is much cheaper than if you build your own facility.

"When we had our old data center, I used to have sleepless nights worrying about what was going to fail this week or this month. Now, thanks to CyrusOne, I don't have to worry about our data center failing. I can have sleepless nights worrying about other things."

To learn how CyrusOne can help you achieve your goals, visit www.CyrusOne.com or call 1-866-297-8766 today.

About CyrusOne

With over two dozen data centers across the globe, CyrusOne helps many of the world's largest global businesses – including 9 of the global Fortune 20 companies and over 135 of the Fortune 1000 – and companies of all sizes take advantage of the latest data center technology and realize top operational efficiencies through:

- **Flexible design** – Scalable, customized data center solutions that are engineered with Massively Modular data center technology to align with your business needs
- **Personalized service** – High touch customer service delivered by data center experts
- **Full transparency** –Full transparency in communication, management, and service delivery
- **High reliability** – Excellent availability using state of the art technology backed by 100% service level agreements (SLA)
- **CyrusOne National IX** – Offers low-cost metro connectivity and city-to-city transport in an ever growing number of cities across the US.

About the Author

Scott Brueggeman oversees the management of CyrusOne's global marketing, product development, inside sales, and corporate communications including branding, demand creation, and public relations. His 20 years of marketing and sales experience includes Fortune 50 firms, as well as smaller high-growth companies. Prior to CyrusOne, he spent several years with running marketing at a data center hosting and managed services company, as well as Chief Marketing Officer at an international financial services firm. Prior to that he was VP Marketing for CareerBuilder, and also held leadership positions at AT&T and PepsiCo. Brueggeman serves on several advisory boards.