

Company/Organization:
City of Hagerstown

Founded in 1762, Hagerstown, Md., has evolved into a modern city that maintains an outstanding transportation and communication network, a strong and loyal workforce and enviable tourism statistics.

Website: www.hagerstownmd.org

Business Challenge: Responsible for the safety of more than 35,000 residents, the city government of Hagerstown has a civic duty to provide police, fire, utilities and other public services to a diverse population. Quality customer service is key to ensuring residents are satisfied that services are delivered as promised and billing is reliable. Unfortunately, ensuring that civic employees have reliable access to the city's mission-critical systems has been a challenge across an aging distributed network.

Solution: To ensure the availability of Hagerstown's mission-critical applications, the city deployed a remote and automatic systems management solution from Kaseya that gives IT administrators a complete view of systems in the distributed network. Through a powerful software license management module and a streamlined patch management strategy, the city is able to ensure that workstations are always online and running optimally, ensuring that civic employees have access to mission-critical business applications and are able to provide consistent and superior customer service to residents.



Kaseya Improves Availability of Mission-Critical Applications for City Government

City governments have two responsibilities to its residents—provide reliable municipal services and collect revenue to pay for these services. In addition, municipalities have an obligation to the taxpayer to use revenue responsibly, using cost-efficient technology to support civic employees and enable them with the tools and information they need to effectively serve the local population. Hagerstown, a small city in northwest Maryland, is no different. Its mission is to offer police, fire, water, sewer, electricity, trash and other municipal services to 35,000 residents while keeping an eye on customer service and costs.

"Civic employees use a powerful municipal financial system to manage revenues and expenditures, but in order to guarantee residents are not left out in the cold, it is essential that civic employees have access to the application 24 hours a day, seven days a week," said Scott Nicewarner, IT manager, City of Hagerstown. "Ensuring application availability and systems health in a distributed environment, however, can be a monumental task."

Hagerstown's distributed environment required administrators to drive out to remote offices around the city, severely limiting the IT staff's ability to proactively manage systems to ensure they are always running optimally. Also, because on-site visits could take hours, administrators waited until multiple issues arose and scheduled visits accordingly, hoping to consolidate trips. Not only did this postpone application availability resolutions but created an environment among end users where they figured they had to live with certain performance or availability constraints.

Not having access to a key application is more than just a nuisance. There is a financial impact as well. In order to send bills to utility customers, cash checks or electronic payments and mark bills received, employees need reliable access to the city's billing system. Customer service representatives also need to access the system to field phone calls and resolve billing or service issues. Even short delays caused by planned or unplanned downtime could cost the city thousands of dollars per day due to lost interest from collected revenue.

"It was obvious we needed to revamp our IT service delivery strategy to transition from a data processing organization to a proactive IT department," Nicewarner said. "We needed to centralize our help desk, consolidate management and keep better track of the systems on the network."

Consolidated Help Desk and Remote Systems Management

In order to improve availability of its mission-critical municipal applications, the City of Hagerstown deployed a remote and automatic systems management solution from Kaseya. By allowing administrators to access distributed systems from a web browser at their desk, the IT department is able to proactively manage the environment, heading off potential availability issues before they occur.

The Kaseya solution is installed on all 13 servers in the data center and 225 workstations spread out over the city and allows administrators to remotely access and take control of any system on the network, improving the city's visibility into its computing environment. Kaseya's help desk module centralizes trouble ticketing, allowing administrators to remotely resolve application availability issues as they are ticketed without having to wait for multiple problems to arise in one location or scheduling an on-site visit.

"Kaseya allows us to set up alerts and monitor trends in our computing environment, giving us a heads up on performance issues prior to the system going down," Nicewarner said. "We're no longer running around reacting to the world falling down around us. We're on the offensive."

The centralized management console also allows administrators to automatically roll out software updates and security patches to remote workstations, ensuring network security is consistent and external threats can not worm their way through the network looking for vulnerabilities. For example, Nicewarner is able to better control how updates are deployed, setting up policies and groups to protect the environment from deploying unstable patches. Last month, administrators strategically deployed a daylight savings patch for Windows XP to a couple of desktops and made sure the patch worked and wouldn't negatively affect availability or performance. The patch didn't immediately cause performance issues and was automatically pushed out to remaining systems. Prior to deploying Kaseya, Nicewarner has to go around to each computer to install updates and just hope for the best.

The software deployment module also helps streamline and centralize software license management. By knowing exactly what software is deployed in the computing environment—the number of clients, when they were installed, when they expire, when they were last updated—the IT staff can accurately assess computing resources, provisioning additional servers to handle a growing workload or reallocating systems to other applications. Kaseya also helps prevent over-procurement and is a valuable inventory tracking tool during annual audits for future IT planning and budgeting. The annual audit used to take three weeks to complete. Now it takes less than five minutes to print a reliable and complete inventory report.

"Kaseya is an absolute life saver, allowing us to proactively manage our entire network from our data center on the first floor of city hall Nicewarner said. "If a problem occurs, we simply take control of the system through the remote access feature and troubleshoot the issue without leaving the room."

Improved Application Availability and Performance

As a result of centralizing management of the distributed network and creating a consistent strategy for software deployment and patch management, the City of Hagerstown was able to improve application availability of its mission-critical systems, giving civic employees reliable access to the tools and accounting information they need to provide quality customer service to its residents. Availability of Hagerstown's municipal financial system also ensures that utility bills are processed in a timely manner and taxes are paid on time, preventing most billing discrepancies from occurring. With revenue processed consistently on time, the city can reap additional interest payments, slightly increasing the city's coffers.

Key Benefits

- Hagerstown is able to proactively manage its IT resources, improving application availability of mission-critical applications
- Average technical support issues are resolved in less than 10 minutes, down from two hours previously
- By utilizing resources more efficiently, the IT staff can help the city achieve fiscal responsibility
- Patch management and software deployment is more controlled, streamlining IT operations and ensuring consistency of the city's network security strategy
- Better visibility into systems on the network gives administrators a snapshot of IT resources at any time, reducing the time it takes to conduct annual audits from three weeks to ten minutes

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When issues do occur, Kaseya's remote access capabilities have improved resolution times from up to two hours (or sometimes days for low priority issues) to less than 10 minutes. Not only can administrators troubleshoot the issue remotely, but they do not have to rely on phone communications to understand the problem. By taking control of the system, the communication barrier is eliminated. In addition, not only are issues resolved more quickly and more accurately, but small performance issues that end users would have learned to live with previously, can now be taken care of remotely in a matter of minutes.

"We're definitely seeing an increase in trust from end users who can now simply click on the 'Kaseya' icon in their task bar and issue a ticket in seconds," Nicewarner said. "This trust is good for everyone. Application performance improves, enabling them to do their jobs faster. And if we can take care of these little quirks early in the game before they become bigger issues, we're saving our staff time down the road. It's win-win."

The new focus on proactive management also helps improve the efficiency of the IT staff, streamlining their daily tasks and reducing the department's burden on the taxpayer. Historically, IT has always been an expenditure on the civic ledger, but now the IT staff is able to lessen its financial impact.

"Kaseya has really made our jobs much easier in the IT department," Nicewarner said. "We're able to support city employees much more efficiently without being a burden. This allows the city to refocus revenue and resources to resident-facing services, improving the lives of everyone who lives or works in Hagerstown."

About Kaseya

Kaseya is a global provider of IT automation software for IT Solution Providers and Public and Private Sector IT organizations. Kaseya's IT Automation Framework allows IT Professionals to proactively monitor, manage and maintain distributed IT infrastructure remotely, easily and efficiently with one integrated Web based platform. Kaseya's technology is licensed on over three million machines worldwide.

For a free 30 day trial visit www.kaseya.com/download

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