



Jefferson County Finds Fast, Affordable Answers to Network Uptime with NHR's Pre-Owned Gear and NetSure Maintenance Offering

Nestled between two of Wisconsin's largest metropolitan areas is Jefferson County, a mostly rural enclave of some 90,000 people that is experiencing "big city" growth with population soaring due to its desirable location between Madison and Milwaukee. To keep pace with ongoing expansion while providing approximately 840 employees with the latest technology tools and services, Jefferson County's nine-person IT department maintains two data centers with 33 file servers and two AS/400 computer systems. A 23-mile, fully redundant fiber-optic network backbone links 11 county buildings encompassing 650 desktops and about 100 notebook computers.

According to Roland Welsch, IT manager for Jefferson County, the department has standardized on leading-edge solutions from top-tier providers, including Cisco and Microsoft, as part of an overarching philosophy to deploy market-leading products. "Cisco plays a major role in ensuring a highly available, redundant network foundation with a full assortment of switches, routers, IP telephony and security solutions," he explains. "Implementing Cisco gear gives us the best opportunity to deliver the highest quality in voice, video and data networking services."

The Challenge

In 2003, Jefferson County installed state-of-the-art Cisco equipment, including Catalyst Series 6500 and 3500 switches, 2600 Series routers as well as Cisco CallManager, 7900 Series unified IP phones, Unity voicemail and Security Access Control Server wireless access points. At the time, Jefferson County also invested heavily in Cisco's SMARTnet support and maintenance offering to ensure the delivery of timely, regular software updates, fast response to technical questions and expedited equipment replacement in the event of catastrophic failures.

Jefferson County made this substantial investment upfront with the expectation of achieving a seven-year lifespan with its core routers and switches. As some of the devices got older, however, higher failure rates became common; at the same time, the IT staff found it was

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Roland Welsch
IT Manager
Jefferson County (Wis.)

increasingly difficult to obtain identical replacements for the equipment from the manufacturer. "Some pieces were only available if I bought the latest generation," Welsch adds. "I didn't want to do this for several reasons—the cost exceeded my budget and the new generation equipment brought interoperability challenges as well as required us to learn a new version of IOS."

Jefferson County's network challenges were not limited to securing equipment replacements. There also were increasing problems with the maintenance coverage provided by Cisco through its SMARTnet offering. Since the county is located more than an hour from a major airport, the IT team elevated its service level to ensure rapid delivery of replacement gear. "We paid an additional premium for four-hour equipment replacement, yet Cisco never managed to get equipment to us within that window," recalls Welsch. "If we placed a call at 3:00 p.m., we'd be lucky to receive replacement gear by noon or later the next day."

In addition to growing dissatisfaction with Cisco's inability to meet the four-hour service level agreement, the IT team became dismayed by ever-increasing SMARTnet maintenance costs. "Over the years, we watched the prices of Cisco's maintenance go from high to exorbitant," says Welsch. "When maintenance on just one product goes beyond 10 percent of your budget, you know you have a problem."

The Solution

The dwindling availability of replacement gear for the routers and switches prevalent in Jefferson County's network along with rising maintenance and less than stellar support response led the IT team to seek an alternative. In late 2006, Jefferson County first purchased from Network Hardware Resale, the world's leading provider of pre-owned networking equipment. According to Welsch, the fact that all purchases from NHR come with a full one-year replacement warranty was a big selling point. This peace of mind enabled Jefferson County to create a cache of spares, including a Cisco 3524, 3500, a 6513 chassis as well as spare routers and assorted other items.

In January 2008, NHR unveiled its NetSure hardware maintenance program to provide customers like Jefferson County with extra protection for previous-generation and end-of-life equipment at substantially savings over SMARTnet. Faced with a tight 2008 budget and mounting frustration with Cisco support, Jefferson County decided to take a closer look at the alternative maintenance service.

"We had a Cisco chassis die once and it was 12 hours before Cisco could get us a replacement—despite us paying for the four-hour response," Welsch recalls. "The sheriff's department, among other county operations, has 24x7 operations, so this downtime was unacceptable." The IT team's frustration with Cisco support reached an all-time high when they had to call Cisco repeatedly about serial numbers that didn't match because the OEM had confused purchases from one of the

other more than two dozen Jefferson counties across the U.S. “We figured if Cisco couldn’t keep track of us, maybe it was time to see if someone else could deliver better service,” says Welsch. “It didn’t take long for NHR to prove they could.”

The Benefits

Jefferson County moved all network elements that no longer require firmware or software upgrades from Cisco SMARTnet over to NHR’s NetSure coverage. This includes seven Catalyst 6513 and Catalyst 6509 switches as well as all the cards and blades within. Previously, this level of coverage under SMARTnet cost Jefferson County \$90,000 a year—including a 19 percent government discount. Under NetSure, the same service costs \$19,000 a year.

“If we had opted for SMARTnet, I would have been forced to cut a staff position to meet budget,” says Welsch. “By going with NHR’s NetSure offering, we’ve been able to realize a higher level of service while saving a valuable department resource.”

Beyond the budget savings, NetSure support has provided a measurable improvement over SMARTnet. “NHR says if we get in touch by 2:00 p.m., they’ll deliver the next day,” says Welsch. “So far, this has been true, which is faster response than we ever had with Cisco.” At the same time, NHR’s vast inventory of equipment keeps the county’s spare pool replenished.

As more of Jefferson County’s Cisco equipment no longer needs software upgrades, the prospect of buying spares for hardware swap-outs becomes even more appealing. In the long run, it makes more fiscal sense to purchase “like new” equipment from NHR than to try and buy it from Cisco, especially since availability of previous-generation equipment is extremely limited.

“We truly appreciate having a bundle of pre-owned equipment and support under one roof,” Welsch concludes. “We’re not interested in the cheapest parts as it’s more important to have high-quality network gear and responsive support. Today, with the rising prices of Cisco’s new equipment and our tightened budget, leveraging pre-owned equipment and maintenance from Network Hardware Resale is the only way we can continue to afford Cisco and ensure maximum network uptime.”

Solution Snapshot

Customer: Jefferson County, Wis. On the Web at <http://www.co.jefferson.wi.us/jc/public/jchome.php>.

Challenges:

- Attaining equipment replacements of previous-generation gear became increasingly difficult and expensive.
- Inadequate support, despite paying a premium for accelerated response and expedited equipment replacement.
- The rising costs of Cisco's SMARTnet maintenance became exorbitant.

Solution:

- Pre-owned networking equipment from Network Hardware Resale, along with the company's NetSure maintenance and support program.

Benefits:

- Yearly maintenance costs are reduced from \$90,000 to \$19,000, enabling the county to avoid personnel cuts.
- NHR meets agreed-upon parameters for expedited response and overnight equipment replacement.
- A bundle of pre-owned network equipment and maintenance maximizes a constricted budget and ensures optimal network uptime.

About Network Hardware Resale

Network Hardware Resale (NHR) is a leading provider of pre-owned Cisco, Extreme and Juniper networking equipment. The company also is an authorized reseller of resilient, massively scalable networking gear from Force10 Networks. Founded in 1986, the Santa Barbara, Calif.-based organization has been recognized by Inc. Magazine as one of America's fastest-growing private companies and honored by VARBusiness magazine as one of North America's top technology integrators. NHR provides global sales and network support services from its locations in the United States, Asia and Europe. More than 10,000 organizations worldwide purchase quality networking equipment from NHR, including Global 1000 companies, small and mid-sized enterprises, government entities, educational institutions, healthcare organizations and telecommunications service providers. For more information, visit www.networkhardware.com.



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