

Chickasaw Nation Builds For Future Revenues with Solid IT Foundation

Like most industries, the casino/hospitality industry requires that IT departments maintain 24/7 reliability because on average, a large casino loses about \$1M per hour in play volume when systems are down. As a Fortune 1000 company with a core competency in the gaming industry, the Chickasaw Nation decided in August of 2005 to embrace the best available technologies and began revising their casino management system to develop a system that could keep up with their facility expansions and growing demands.

As part of the IT overhaul, the Chickasaw Nation Division of Commerce created an entirely new IT department building, two new data centers to support the back-end of their gaming operations, and embarked on a strategic IT plan, which was directly tied to revenue growth for the businesses within the Nation. The result is a system that allows the casinos to operate with reduced risk from a technology perspective. This allows for more emphasis on providing an unbeatable customer experience that entices guests to spend more time on the floor, ultimately leading to greater revenue.

Chief Information Officer Rob Jacks led the strategic IT efforts through the construction of Riverwind Casino in Norman, Oklahoma, opening in 2006 as the state's largest casino at that time, and through the expansion of WinStar World Casino and Hotel in Thackerville, Oklahoma, now one of the top five largest casinos in the world.

Before the Nation could begin developing the WinStar expansion plan, it needed to ensure the IT infrastructure could support a single casino with 6,000 slot machines in addition to the 8,000 additional machines currently operating in its 17 other casinos. In a little more than two-and-a-half years, the organization built a storage foundation that guarantees complete high availability, zero data loss, and which allowed the IT department to participate in the Nation's overall revenue growth.

Jacks' three-step approach for the foundation started from the ground up, and included stabilizing the IT infrastructure, creating a disaster recovery solution to ensure zero data loss and guaranteeing casino guests are never impacted by a technology failure. "Because of this stable IT foundation, the businesses within the Commerce Division are free to grow



unencumbered by technical constraints," said Jacks.

The Chickasaw Nation Division of Commerce IT department designed their new center of operation to be fully redundant and to ensure that all critical systems in their Ada, Oklahoma facility have a primary server, as well as a secondary high availability server. "When choosing a high availability and disaster recovery software suite, we would not tolerate any downtime or data loss," said Jacks. "And we believe our choices have really paid off."

All server maintenance happens seamlessly with casino customers never knowing the difference. The IT staff swaps servers at their convenience with no downtime, and more importantly, no lost revenue. Also, the servers are never taken offline for backups. Instead, tape backups are taken from high availability servers that aren't running in production.

"In the past year and a half, we have focused on implementing Bally Technologies' ACSC system. We had two measurements of success: uptime and revenue. We used to lose the old system for hours at a time every weekend, costing us millions of dollars. Since the system went live, we have had zero downtime."

The Commerce IT department has also focused its efforts in other areas of the division. In addition to the Bally Technologies' ACSC system over the past four years, eight other major applications have been implemented. They include:

- Kronos – HR, payroll and time keeping
- Great Plains – Financials

- Datastream – Procurement
- Cognos – Business intelligence
- LMS – Hotel management
- Infogenesis – Point of sale
- CLC – Online learning system
- ECommerce – Websites for Winstar Hotel & Casino, Riverwind Hotel & Casino and Bedré Chocolate

In 2009, Jacks was recognized by IDG's *Computerworld* as one of the business world's Premier 100 Information Technology Leaders. Jacks was selected from nearly 1,000 nominees who were measured against *Computerworld's* IT Leadership Index, a set of characteristics that describes executives who guide the effective use of IT in their organizations. The award honors executives who show exemplary technology leadership in resolving pressing business problems.

“The overhaul of the IT structure of the Commerce Division has been an integral part of our revenue enhancement strategy,” says Commerce Division Chief Executive Officer Bill Lance. “Rob and his team have done an exemplary job of providing more secure and robust systems for our casinos, as well as our administrative operations within the Division of Commerce.”

The ability to implement all these systems and support an organization with 6,000 employees and thousands of customers rests on the shoulders of 80 IT professionals. This backbone of technology personnel supports payroll, accounting and casino management applications that in turn support the business - regardless of size and growth. This level of technology infrastructure places the Chickasaw Nation Division of Commerce on even ground with the major casino companies in the world.

Because of the vision and leadership of The Chickasaw Nation, the IT model created has the ability to deliver

solutions in a rapid and low total cost of ownership manner. This is truly an anomaly in today's information technology space. ♣

For more information about the Chickasaw Nation, visit www.chickasaw.net.

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