

Atmos Energy

Increased Efficiency and Significant Cost Savings with ClearCube



The Challenge

Desktop PCs are critical to the success of the Customer Support organization. They are used 24x7 by the support representatives to service Atmos customers. But the traditional desktop PCs posed significant challenges for Atmos. They were very expensive to support, difficult to secure (hardware and data), delivered poor uptime and took up a lot of valuable space in the Support Centers. “We wanted a full PC solution, but not the support hassles of a regular PC”, says Rex Petrey, Network Administrator.

ClearCube Delivers Results

Atmos turned to the ClearCube architecture, which removes the PC from the user's desk, shrinks it into a PC Blade (powered by the latest Intel processors), and centralizes it in a secure location. The small User Port, which connects the peripherals (monitor, keyboard, and mouse) to the PC Blade, remains in the user's workspace.

The company deployed ClearCube throughout its Amarillo, Texas and Metairie, Louisiana Support Centers.

Overview

- **The Challenge**
Finding a PC solution that would lower support cost and dramatically improve efficiency and employee productivity.
- **The Solution**
Atmos Energy deployed ClearCube PC Blades throughout its Amarillo site as well as in its remote Support Center in Metarie, Louisiana.
- **The Benefit**
Greatly decreased costs and no need for additional support staff as the company grows. Increased efficiency of deploying and supporting PCs. Improved, cooler and cleaner working environment for employees with more space and less noise.

Atmos Energy, one of the largest pure natural gas distributors in the United States, delivers natural gas to approximately 1.7 million residential, commercial, and industrial customers.

Known as one of the most efficient natural gas utilities in the industry, Atmos translates its company-wide focus on efficiency and customer service into operating and maintenance expenses that are significantly lower than those of its leading competitors.

Technology plays a very important role in Atmos Energy's success, and the company constantly seeks solutions that increase productivity while decreasing costs.

Increased Efficiency, Decreased Costs

The most important benefit of using ClearCube's PC Blades, says Petrey, is the centralized management of technology assets and the resulting lower cost of technical support. The convenient centralization of computing assets saves valuable support time when the Support Center undergoes a shift bid, a process in which employees select new shifts based on seniority and other factors. "Usually when this happens, the employee teams change and we have to move our users to new locations within the Center," says Petrey.

While in the past, the entire IT team spent days on the floor supporting these moves, today a user simply requires switching out a single cable in the computer room. "This is not only easier for the support team, but it's easier for the user too," says Petrey. "Now they can move within a matter of minutes, sit down, and start using a computer with images that look exactly like what they were using before."



"The same ease of use applies should a PC Blade fail," says Petrey. "We always have spare PC Blades up and

"Because every single PC is now in one secure location, we don't have to carry a bunch of heavy boxes around, unpack them, and set them up all over the Support Center, particularly when we're deploying new PCs. Now it's just a matter of plugging one cable into the User Port and moving down the row."

**Rex Petrey
Network Administrator
Atmos Energy**

running, so instead of finding an empty cubicle to work in, the user can stay at their own desk and it's just a matter of minutes until we get them going again."

The ClearCube Management Suite (CMS) software gives IT administrators additional, unprecedented control over computing assets, dramatically reducing the time and effort it takes to rollout or upgrade PC Blades. The software also lets IT administrators easily create images for deployment to multiple PC Blades. "This lets us do a lot with little effort on our part, which was especially nice because with our old PCs we had to maintain multiple software images," says Petrey.

With CMS, support staff can manage all of the PC Blades from a single location through a secure Web interface. Petrey and his team remotely manage and support PC Blades in the Metarie Support Center,

which no longer needs on-site support staff.

Improved Working Environment

An unexpected benefit of deploying ClearCube is the improvement in the employee work environment. "Our agents' cubicles are not very big, so they are happy that ClearCube lets them regain some space and have more room," says Petrey.

The employees also like the cooler, quieter working environment. "By moving the heart of the PC equipment away from the agents' cubicles and behind the locked doors of the computer room, there's no heat or noise to worry about on the Center floor," says Petrey. In fact, the company anticipates significant savings in cooling costs as a result of using PC Blades.

Stronger Security

"The Amarillo Support Center operates twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and security of both hardware and data assets is a concern," admits Petrey. ClearCube enables IT administrators to enable or disable the use of mass-storage devices (i.e. floppy, CD, or CDRW drives) and USB peripherals at the desktop, preventing user-introduced viruses and unlicensed software uploads and sensitive data downloads.

Ongoing Value

As Atmos Energy continues to grow, Petrey explains that ClearCube's remote management capability will eliminate the need (and cost) for additional support staff as existing Centers grow and new Centers are built. This translates into significant cost savings for Atmos Energy and enables it to focus on what it does best - serving its customers.

