



STRATEGIC
INTEGRATORS

JESUIT UNIVERSITY RELIES ON DEDICATED PARTNER TO BUILD A SOLID IT FOUNDATION

135 years ago, along Washington's Spokane River, Father Joseph Cataldo founded Gonzaga College on the old Ignatian model of educating the whole person—mind, body, and spirit. Today, this holistic mindset has found an expression in a seemingly unlikely place—Gonzaga University's IT Services (ITS) department, where Assistant Director of Systems Administration Tom Buck oversees a burgeoning array of technology that supports academic, research, and administrative applications.

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING LEADS TO GREEN LIGHT FOR SIGNIFICANT SAN INVESTMENT

Several years ago, Tom's team was looking down the road at a sizable investment in its storage area network (SAN). As it was shaping up to be a considerable expense, the team was engaging with several technology vendors and integrators, but wasn't ready to invest.

That's when Tom began to notice something different about the rep from Strategic Integrators. Unlike the other reps, Tom recalls, "he didn't have a particular agenda. He was just getting to know us and what we did, and was offering possible solutions. He would make a suggestion, and we would toss it out, and he kept coming back with another option. This went on for three or four years until we made a purchase. He wasn't pushy, wasn't trying to make a quick buck; that gave me a lot of faith in Strategic."

"We've moved several contracts to Strategic, because they've been so responsive. We just don't have that kind of relationship with the other vendors."

— Tom Buck, Assistant Director of Systems Administration, Gonzaga University

GONZAGA UNIVERSITY



gonzaga.edu



Higher Education



Spokane, Washington



7,491 students
1,262 faculty and staff

RELATIONSHIP BENEFITS

- Optimal technology selection aided by trusted, vendor-agnostic advice
- Purchase approvals facilitated by detailed documentation
- Rapid response to requests and queries
- 20 hours/week saved on backup administration

Eventually, Gonzaga decided to purchase a Dell Compellent SAN solution through Strategic. And though the University's procurement office required competitive bids from other vendors and integrators, none was able to best the Dell Compellent offering that IT Services had selected.

DOCUMENTATION PROVIDES PROOF OF TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Tom believes one of the reasons his technology purchase requests have moved relatively smoothly through procurement is that he gets not only advice, but also detailed evidence from Strategic to support his selections. Case in point: When ITS raised concerns about its virtualized environment, Strategic brought in a VMware expert, who implemented a 5-day health checkup. "The VMware expert from Strategic did a deep dive into the metrics and statistics within VMware to show us where our bottlenecks were," Tom says.

It turned out that Gonzaga's Dell servers lacked the levels of RAM and CPU capacity that it needed to support the virtual environment. Strategic suggested that Gonzaga beef up its server farm with higher performance machines, basing its recommendations on the results of the VMware health check. "Strategic not only gave us some good pointers about how to manage VMware, but they also left us detailed documentation backing our purchase decision, which we sent on to procurement." Tom and his team now manage 20 Dell servers hosting more than 400 virtual machines.

ECONOMICAL SOLUTION ELIMINATES TAPE BACKUP, SAVES ADMIN TIME

After 17 years at Gonzaga, Tom is no novice when it comes to data center operations. Still, he's come to rely on Strategic to save him time by narrowing down the field of options when selecting new technology. "Strategic will not recommend hardware to us unless it's enterprise level," he asserts. "If they say it's good, I know it's going to be good."

Then again, "enterprise level" doesn't necessarily mean high priced. When Tom wanted to do away with Gonzaga's onerous tape backup processes, Strategic suggested he consider Veeam Backup and Replication on Nexsan E18 high-density storage arrays as a cost-efficient disk backup solution. Not ideal for an enterprise SAN, the low-speed Nexsan disk was perfectly suitable for enterprise backup.

In what Tom calls "a huge game changer," the new backup solution has enabled Gonzaga to completely eliminate tapes from its environment. "Before, we had constant maintenance: grabbing tapes, putting them in the safe, hauling them off to a remote location once a week. All that's gone now. We do a Nexsan backup with Veeam through a fiber link to an offsite data center, and we're done. We save at least 20 hours a week."

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS SUPPORT AND ANTICIPATE GROWTH

Saving systems administration time is important, because Gonzaga's lean ITS department has experienced tremendous growth over the past couple of years, adding new services or expanding support for existing services. To provide more efficient IT services with the current staff, Tom will continue to work with Strategic Integrators to improve its backend infrastructure, leverage the cloud, expand and enhance its VMware environment, and find better tools to measure and analyze its hardware and services.

"We've moved several contracts to Strategic," Tom says, "because they've been so responsive. We just don't have that kind of relationship with the other vendors. And with all those contracts in one place, I just have one number to call if I have a question."

BUSINESS NEEDS SHOULD COME FIRST IN QUEST FOR ADVICE

After seven years of partnership with Strategic Integrators, Tom has this advice for making the most of the relationship: "Set up a meeting, talk about your pain points, and let Strategic find a way to help. You can call them with a specific problem, as we did with VMware. But I think Strategic's strength lies in listening to your business needs and finding solutions. They not only have a good feel for what's out there, but they also vet the solutions they suggest. Everything I've purchased from Strategic has been rock solid."

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