

Acer team delivers in Algoma

By Acer Canada

Acer's technology solution fits the bill for establishing a standard computing platform across all Algoma District School Board offices and schools

In early 1998, the Algoma District School Board (ADSB) staff faced the challenge of amalgamation. When the board was formed, the province of Ontario decided to streamline the education system. Six regional school boards were combined creating one "superboard," encompassing 16,500 students in 60 facilities spread across 72,000 square kilometres. The challenge was making it all work.

One of the first challenges facing the staff was to refresh computer equipment. They began by replacing desktop computers, as part of a broad four-year plan to improve the ratio of computers to students from 8:1 to about 4:1.

Wayne Lamming, director of information technology for the Algoma board, said the board sought a technology solution that would establish a single, standard computing platform across all board offices and schools, replacing aging computers with industry-standard platforms, all within stringent budget requirements.

In April 1998, Acer was invited by one of its resellers, Algoma Business Computers in Sault Ste. Marie, to participate in a presentation to the board. The reseller had worked previously with the board, providing solutions using products from Acer competitors, but Mike McGonigal, a partner at Algoma Business Computers and one of the key contacts with the

Algoma District School Board, was impressed with Acer products.

The Acer sales team arranged to have the servers and desktops delivered to Sault Ste. Marie, and then travelled to the Sault to help their reseller explain to the board how Acer could best serve their needs. The Acer team received a positive response, as well as an invitation to make an additional presentation to a second group of school board officials.

Following the presentation, the board put together the specifications for the Request for Proposal, which was issued in late May of 1998. The board was impressed enough by Acer's product line that it specified Acer in the RFP.

Acer worked closely with Algoma Business Computers in preparing its bid, offering support, including preferential pricing. Algoma won the contract, which called for the delivery of 350 Acer desktop PCs.

Over the next 12 months, the board ordered, and Acer's local reseller delivered, 100 more AcerPower Flex 4000 desktop PCs, and 50 Acer Altos 330 servers to address ongoing classroom and administrative needs. Again, service was paramount, with deliveries often taking place the same day the order was placed. During this period, Acer representatives

made regular visits to Algoma, to supervise and oversee delivery and installation, guaranteeing customer satisfaction.

The ADSB proved to be a very satisfied customer. The board was impressed, not only with Acer's products, but also with the after-sales service and support by both vendor and reseller. Lamming recalled, "We had never been visited by a vendor before - we had never been contacted to make sure things were going well".

In May 1999, the board issued another RFP - this time for 881 PCs - as the process of replacing classroom technology gained momentum. This time, the specifications in the tender were broadened to include the names of all of Acer's major competitors.

Acer and Algoma Business Computers again worked closely to prepare a bid. The result was another contract for Algoma Business Computers.

To date, Acer and its reseller partner have delivered more than 1,400 computers, 50 servers, and numerous mobile PCs to the Central Algoma School Board, with more deliveries slated for the coming year.

For Acer and Algoma Business Computers, the keys to success are

clear: high-quality products, good value, first-rate customer service, and fast, trouble-free delivery. The success of Acer's channel strategy shows why customers often benefit from the local presence of a reseller, and demonstrates why direct selling by vendors doesn't always work. Algoma Business Computers, led by McGonigal, partner Mark Lutes, and account lead Dave Rogozynski, has provided tremendous on-the-ground support.

Of course, from the school board's perspective, the only thing that really counts is the delivery, performance and support of the products - everything else is secondary. Acer and Algoma Business Computers delivered what the board needed: high-quality products; fast, reliable service; and door-to-door delivery of products that were ready to run right out of the box. In the end, how a product is delivered becomes less important to a customer if it doesn't deliver a solution. The Acer team delivered.

Partnership a Success

Acer's success was the result of a partnership that included four components: Acer's superior desktop and mobile PCs, and servers; a leasing company with local knowledge and contacts; a local reseller able to provide top-notch local service and support; and the Acer distributor, EMJ Data Systems.

Using AcerPower desktop PCs and Altos servers, all units were built to configuration. EMJ made sure the software required to meet the school board's specifications was preloaded before delivery. Computers were shipped directly to the various locations required, eliminating the need for the board to move the computers to their final destination from one central delivery site.

Speed was another important requirement for the board. Once the contract was awarded to Acer, the PCs were needed quickly. Again, the Acer team delivered. It took just three weeks, from order to delivery.

Perhaps more valuable was Acer's remarkable quality control. The board took delivery of more than 900 computers in 1999, and the number arriving with technical problems was precisely zero - a record that is unheard of with an order of this size, and well below even Acer's stringent one-percent problem standard.

At the end of the day, McGonigal says, the key to the success of the Acer-Algoma Business Computers team is service and support. "You can have the best product in the world, but if you're not there for the client when they need you, you're not going to keep that client". And, as he points out, keeping a client is a lot easier than finding a new one.

The team blended Algoma's local, on-the-ground service and support with Acer's quality products. The combination - quality products, competitive pricing, tremendous service and support, and old-

fashioned hard work - has paid obvious dividends. Acer and Algoma Business Computers have won two contracts with a significant client.

If customer satisfaction is the cornerstone of a successful customer relationship, the future for Acer and Algoma Business Computers with the Algoma District School Board holds tremendous promise. While the board will continue to issue RFPs to complete its four-year plan, Lamming acknowledges the board's satisfaction with Acer products and support.

The future looks bright for Acer and Algoma Business Computers.



Mike McGonigal (left) of Algoma Business Computers and Wayne Lamming, director of Information Technology for the Algoma District School Board

Success Summary

Country Canada

Acer Family Member Acer Canada

Customer(s) Algoma District School Board (ADSB)

Type of Enterprise Education

Acer Product Profile Desktop PCs and servers

Scope of Solution (# units and/or \$ value)

350 AcerPower desktop PCs

100 AcerPower Flex 4000 desktop PCs

50 Acer Altos 330 servers

(To date, Acer has supplied the ADSB with more than 1,400 computers, 50 servers, and numerous mobile PCs)