

Leasing vs. building

How outsourcing your data center can provide a secure, cost-efficient solution

Building a data center from the ground up involves more expense and time than most companies have to spare.

Much like building a new office facility for a growing business, the end result might meet your needs, but at what cost? And what if your company continues to expand or contracts?

Most companies require the help of an outside party — whether it's leasing building space or making use of a third-party vendor's data center — to most efficiently meet their business needs.

Using an outside vendor's data center requires less capital expense than it would for a company to build and host its own, and it's a cost-effective choice that is just as secure as doing it yourself — if not more so.

Smart Business spoke with Margi Shaw, Chief Operations Officer of CIMCO Communications, about how a third-party data center makes the most sense for businesses seeking data security, technical support and cost savings.

What is the purpose of a data center?

The purpose of a data center is to house your mission-critical applications and equipment in a safe and redundant environment. The importance of this solution is that it provides a separate, protected location with a single objective of keeping your organization up and running in the event of a business-impacting interruption of service — whether it be a man-made or natural disaster.

Why would a company outsource this function?

The expense of building and managing a data center can be very costly. Outsourcing allows you to avoid these major capital expenses while providing better benefits, security and the protection that your business needs to run smoothly.

In addition, managing the intricacies of a data center requires special expertise and skills that are usually not part of the core competencies of a company. Outsourcing makes the data center provider responsible for managing the facility and equipment, allowing businesses to reallocate their IT staff to more appropriate areas. A good provider will have technical experts that have the skill sets to do



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as little or as much management of your equipment as you are comfortable with — essentially becoming an extension of your IT staff.

What are the key considerations for a proper data center?

Not all data centers are created equal. Data centers require multiple layers and components to perform at the highest level. It's important to do your due diligence when selecting a data center provider.

Some primary considerations when selecting a data center are:

■ **Location.** Determine whether you will need physical access to the data center and the proximity of its location in relation to your organization's main offices.

■ **Environmental controls.** Heating, cooling and fire suppression are a critical part of the infrastructure of a data center. Without tight management of environmental controls, your equipment can become vulnerable to a variety of malfunctions.

■ **Backup generators and power.** Look for large battery and fuel backup generators that will continue to run power to your equipment without interruption.

■ **Security.** Due to the sensitive nature of your equipment, security is impera-

tive to the integrity of your business operations. Consider all types of security, from on-site staff to security controls in the physical data center, including video, mantraps and biometrics.

■ **Staff.** Will you require the assistance of data center technicians to perform either basic or complex tasks to your equipment and applications? Ensure that the data center on-site technicians have the certifications and expertise you need.

What options and flexibility can a data center provider offer?

When building a data center, there are so many unknowns that it can be hard to substantiate how you might efficiently use a data center once it's built, not to mention justify the cost.

Data center providers already have the facility and can offer a variety of flexible solutions that can be tailored to your business needs, including:

■ **Collocation.** This is basically leasing space in a cabinet at your provider's data center. They supply the power for your equipment and network access, and you manage your equipment. Companies usually collocate equipment that runs business-critical applications or data-intensive applications.

■ **Managed hosting.** This option frees your time to focus on core business objectives and allows data center staff to manage the daily maintenance of your equipment. You don't have to invest in the hardware, and you get the flexibility to scale appropriately as your business changes. You always maintain remote access to equipment but can lean on your provider to perform routine maintenance tasks.

■ **Storage.** Your daily operations can be unburdened by offloading backup files and programs to off-site storage, allowing your network to run with increased efficiency and provide protection for critical data.

■ **Remote backup.** Unfortunately, it's in times of crisis that a business learns it needs a backup solution. With this data center solution, you can eliminate the pain of daily tape backups and ensure that your data is safely protected in a secure data center. <<

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