7 key considerations in selecting a colocation provider

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SERVICES™

CONSIDERATIONS CHECKLIST

Executive Summary

Faced with the need to optimize, every aspect of their department, IT organizations are recognizing the benefits of selecting a colocation provider for their mission-critical equipment in a data center. The time, cost savings, and quality of service a company can realize as a result of using a Managed Services provider for colocation are very appealing. With significant benefits of scale, IT Operations need to look for reliable facilities that offer uptime, power environmentals, physical security, carrier diversity, and high quality networks.

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With a colocation provider, customers can reduce their costs by relying on the provider's staff 24/7. The additional services and highly redundant, scalable networks, allow customers to reduce their internal network requirements or repurpose them for other uses. This means they'll be able to focus more on their core business.

The greatest benefit of selecting a colocation provider is – making a more effective use of capital and having higher quality facilities for your mission-critical applications through power redundancy, cooling, and scalability/growth. Here are some additional questions that can help guide your selection.

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1

What are the main criteria for choosing colocation and why? How do you determine quality in colocation facility selection?

There are multiple factors to consider when assessing colocation services including the quality of the facility, redundancy, physical location, connectivity, the provider's business health and services offered. For example, does the provider staff the facility 24/7 or is it managed by remote hands? This one factor can make a major difference in both quality of services provided and physical security. Companies should not overlook examining the audit processes and certifications of their colocation providers. For example, check to be sure your provider is SAS 70 Type II certified, meaning their internal controls have been independently audited and certified.

2

What are the aspects of the colocation decision often overlooked and how can companies get a better handle on this?

Customers need to resist the temptation to compromise on provider redundancy, connectivity or quality of facility in return for better pricing terms. The colocation facility is the foundation of the home for your applications and data. You need to know your provider and its strategy in order to safeguard your corporate IT assets.

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What are the determining factors to decide what to put in a colocation facility vs. A company owned data center?

The criticality of applications is a top determining factor. Companies should look to put production applications at a third-party provider and keep testing and development internal. External facing applications, such as e-commerce sites and customer service, are well-suited for colocation because third parties typically have redundant connectivity and can more easily scale up as application needs grow.

4

What are the primary considerations in outsourcing cooling and power? Are there any internal constraints and limitations they should think about?

Power and cooling are without a doubt the hottest buttons in colocation today. It is essential for customers to speak the same language as providers when it comes to power requirements. Customers need to understand their power — where it is coming from and how they use it — to be sure they are on the same page as providers.

When it comes to assessing internal facility capabilities for a data center, this is more than a simple available office space issue. Companies need to look at do they have the infrastructure to build a data center — covering areas like power, cooling, fire suppression systems and more.

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5

How about on the security side? Which apps and data should be offloaded and which should be retained? What sort of security checks and balances should the company insist upon to ensure its data is secure?

Applications should inherently be more secure in a colocation facility than in your own data center.

At a base level is physical security. Customers should develop a comprehensive understanding of a provider's security approach. Are they staffed internally or do they use contractors? Where are the security cameras and how is data retained? How are access rights granted into the facility and to your specific environment? Security considerations also need to extend to the logical layer, such as Internet services, to be sure your applications and data are protected from external threats.

6

How about disaster recovery considerations? How can a company set up a colocation best for dr purposes, or perhaps set up the colocation and the main data center as dr sites for each other?

If a company does its homework in the selection process, it will statistically reduce the probability it will experience a physical outage by utilizing a quality colocation provider.

Companies should utilize either their own facility or another site offered by the provider as a secondary site. And the secondary site should be 'far enough' away to be outside the disaster area of the primary but also 'close enough' to be able to leverage technologies like synchronous replication if required. Also, look for a colocation provider experienced in providing both production and secondary sites so they can map to your complete needs.

One disaster recovery best practice that is sometimes overlooked is testing. Companies should commit to regular testing to be sure their disaster preparedness plans can quickly recover the applications most critical in running the business.

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What should companies look for when it comes to virtualization? Can they virtualize things between the main data center and the colocation machines or should they avoid trying to do this?

When moving to a colocation environment, we recommend starting with minimal changes to your existing architecture. Then, once you are established in your provider's infrastructure, look to optimize with technologies such as virtualization. And when you move to virtualization, be sure you understand how these changes will impact your power and density.

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Conclusion

While the needs a colocation provider fulfills may seem basic: access to high quality data center space; power; carrier diversity and high availability bandwidth with redundant networks; and more predictable costs, working with a reliable provider that offers higher levels of availability and makes continuous investments in its infrastructure will result in true cost benefits.

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Visit our website to see all colocation options.

About the author
With more than 12 years of experience in the technology industry, Rahul Bakshi has significant background in the managed hosting space. Throughout his career, Rahul has played an integral role in establishing and solidifying strategic relationships with key customers and partners and overseeing some of Sungard AS' most complex solutions. Rahul's extensive knowledge of holistic business processes stems from experience with two start-up technology firms — one of which was a Managed Services provider that grew from zero to $80 million and increased by more than 300 employees; in which he played significant roles.

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