

# Data centre management

By Phil Dawson, managing director, MDS Technologies



As the economic climate continues to strangle budgets, businesses facing rapidly escalating costs for housing their own data are wising up to other options.

Staffing, security, and energy costs are all elements of in-house data storage that businesses are finding increasingly difficult to contend with. But for companies who are, or are considering, storing their own data, web or software applications, it's not just rising costs and sinking budgets they need to be wary of - the inevitable technical and logistical problems that accompany on-site data centres need to be factored in.

From the amount of IT equipment required, to the processing and accessing of data - not to mention power requirements, bandwidth and connectivity - the infrastructure needed to house data on-site can be both pricey and problematic.

As a consequence, it's not surprising that an increasing number of facilities managers are becoming ever more eagle-eyed when it comes to assessing their data storage options - and it's these judicious companies that are investigating the benefits of shared data centres.

These organisations understand that the costs and barriers of in-house data centre provisions are acutely tuned to their business requirements and ambitions. As such, reducing costs and simplifying IT infrastructure is crucial for firms wanting to emerge from the economic downturn not only intact, but competitive.

Shared data centres can help with both. While advanced outsourced facilities are staffed by experts and built around the most sophisticated equipment available, the fact that provision

is spread across numerous customers means it can also prove far more cost effective than the average in-house equivalent.

Alarmingly, a study by consultancy BroadGroup recently found that, on average, UK corporate data centre energy bills alone are more than £5million per year. Indeed with energy bills likely to be the most expensive consideration of any data centre, managers could do far worse than think about using shared facilities - not only for their independent power transmission equipment and proximity to primary power distribution points, but crucially, for the backup generation facilities should there be an interruption in the main power supply. With shared data centres optimised for ultimate power efficiency, companies opting to out-source their data rather than house it onsite can also reduce their carbon footprint.

Powering servers isn't the only key concern for storing data in-house however - simply keeping them cool is also a taxing job. Despite improving cooling technology, data centre equipment still emits huge amounts of heat into the immediate environment. What's more, if companies don't get it right, overheating can lead to irreparable damage and/or replacement of extremely costly equipment. But it's the potentially catastrophic results of downtime that can occur as a result of overheating that can prove most damaging to companies storing their own data.

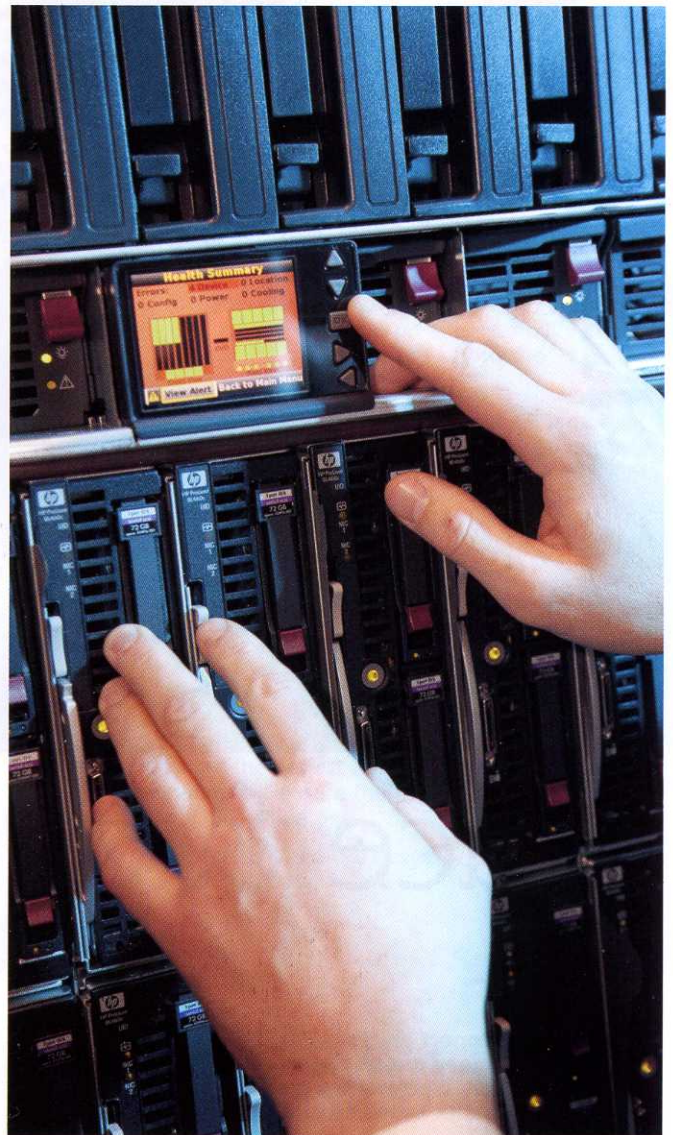
Companies also need to think about the quality of their connectivity and bandwidth when considering their application and data storage options. A shared data centre allows you to change bandwidth requirements to suit your needs while offering multiple resilient landline and mobile connections - so if one exchange encounters problems, the other will kick in. The costs involved in doing this onsite can be astronomical.

Here at MDS for example, we have multiple incoming land lines from several carriers, so if one fails there is always at least one back up and, while enjoying an excellent working relationship with Vodafone, our mobile connectivity has multiple redundancy, so in addition to increased performance from direct links to the network, back-up lines avoid reliance on one single connection.

Facilities managers are increasingly looking to shared data centres for the security and peace of mind they provide. Physical and virtual security of a company's IT infrastructure is another costly part of managing IT applications in-house, and a cause for real concern. A shared data centre offers customers unrivalled security, meaning managers have one less thing to worry about in a climate where keeping your eye on the ball has never been more important.

Security is a primary concern for many of MDS's customers, including vehicle tracking specialist Navman Wireless. The company relies on MDS to host its web servers and deliver its online tracking application - a decision it made early in the company's development to avoid leaving their customers vulnerable to security risks and downtime. With unscrupulous rival operators happy to house their customers' valuable data in the backrooms of unsecure offices, the company was conscious of the importance of doing things professionally from the start.

With the immense amount of valuable data that the modern company now produces, availability of resources such as energy, processing-power and rack-space are becoming a major concern within the data centre arena. As Navman Wireless and its vehicle tracking technology developed, the amount of data the company had to deal with grew, but MDS was confidently able to accommodate the expansion.



These reassurances have acted as a backbone for Navman Wireless, helping the organisation offer a highly reliable service to its customers and ensuring that there is always availability to accommodate the company's continued growth.

Maintaining high levels of customer services can also be a considerable challenge when recession bites and company resources are being stretched to the maximum. Any data centre worth its salt should be staffed by highly experienced and knowledgeable experts – and customers will ultimately benefit from this. It's also more cost-effective to have one out-sourced expert working for you rather than employing in-house technicians.

It's worth remembering that because of the career opportunities available, it is the stand-alone data centres that often attracts the best talent – meaning customers are always talking to the real experts.

We help companies facing these issues every day – and we see how outsourcing data centre requirements are making life easier for firms who want take a progressive approach to their business strategy.

There has never been a better time to consider outsourcing data centre requirements so managers beware – now is not the time to let data centre planning fall off the business agenda.