

Business Process and Technology Trends in FM

Data storage

Information **overload**

It's invisible and intangible, but without it you don't have a business. Data is one of an organisation's key assets, but the cost of storing it in-house is on the increase. Phil Dawson of data centre and cloud computing specialist MDS Technologies (pictured), explains why the arguments for using sharded data are quickly stacking up.



The escalating volume of data generated by business is an issue that creates headaches for IT managers and hard-pressed facilities managers. The sheer amount of infrastructure required to house valuable data, combined with staffing costs and security, and the energy costs of powering and cooling an in-house data centre can soon spiral out of control.

A study by consultancy BroadGroup found that the average energy bill to run a corporate data centre in the UK comes in at a whopping £5.3m per year. The report predicted that this would double to £11m by 2010 and that the UK would eventually become the most expensive place in Europe to run a data centre. That may be fine for the likes of Google, Yahoo and Microsoft, all developing data centres the size of double football pitches in America's Columbia River basin, where hydro power is plentiful, but for most UK-based companies it's depressing news.

Help is at hand though with an increasing trend for companies to use the services of a shared data centre which can make the issue a lot simpler. Economies of scale are a major factor in the usefulness of outsourced data centres, where racks of cutting-edge servers, designed for ultimate power efficiency, are serviced by expert staff. It all amounts to a cleaner, greener and more efficient operation

than the usual mish-mash of technologies.

A further consideration for your data centre's IT infrastructure is bandwidth and connectivity. A shared data centre will not only be able to offer you the flexibility to take up the bandwidth or capacity you need as and when you need it, but it will also guarantee more than one resilient connection, probably across two different internet service providers (ISPs), through two different exchanges. This can be a significant cost for an individual organisation to take on.

Back up generation facilities

In a shared data centre, the cost of the infrastructure can be spread across multiple customers as long as the issues of data privacy and confidentiality are well managed and maintained. The power infrastructure is a major aspect of the whole set-up, given that it is likely to be your biggest cost if you're attempting to build your own data centre, or even convert another facility. Not only will a shared data centre have independent power transmission equipment that's not dependent on lots of others, crucially it will have backup generation facilities that kick in if the main power supply goes down.

A data centre's power infrastructure is doing two things - it's powering the servers and powering the coolers. A well-designed cooling environment is an essential, and unfortunately costly, requirement of running servers, which, despite improving cooling technology, still throw out huge amounts of heat into their immediate environment.

The physical security of your data centre is also vital. Is your system really secure enough to prevent the wrong people gaining access?

Depending on the size of the business, it's becoming an increasingly tall order to attract switching and a myriad of other complex technical issues, extending well beyond the standard IT expertise you are likely to already have on your team. But



because a dedicated data centre organisation involves increasing degrees of complexity and challenge, it can offer a promising career path guaranteed to offer rewards.

A major attraction of using the services of a shared data centre is the range of exceptionally flexible options on offer. MDS Technologies has developed a partnership with a global organisation that develops diagnostic systems for cancer, such as radiation imaging scanners and related software.

The company has helped them to re-commission a data centre in their UK

headquarters, which now comprises their other data centres worldwide, as well as helping them to improve their data housing and processing function on a global scale. This free capacity to be sold to third parties, maximising the value from their facilities by reducing the costs of operating their own data centres.

Buying-in expertise in areas that are outside your knowledge sphere makes good business sense. In terms of processing and accessing data it pays to go to a shared data centre run by an expert. ■

