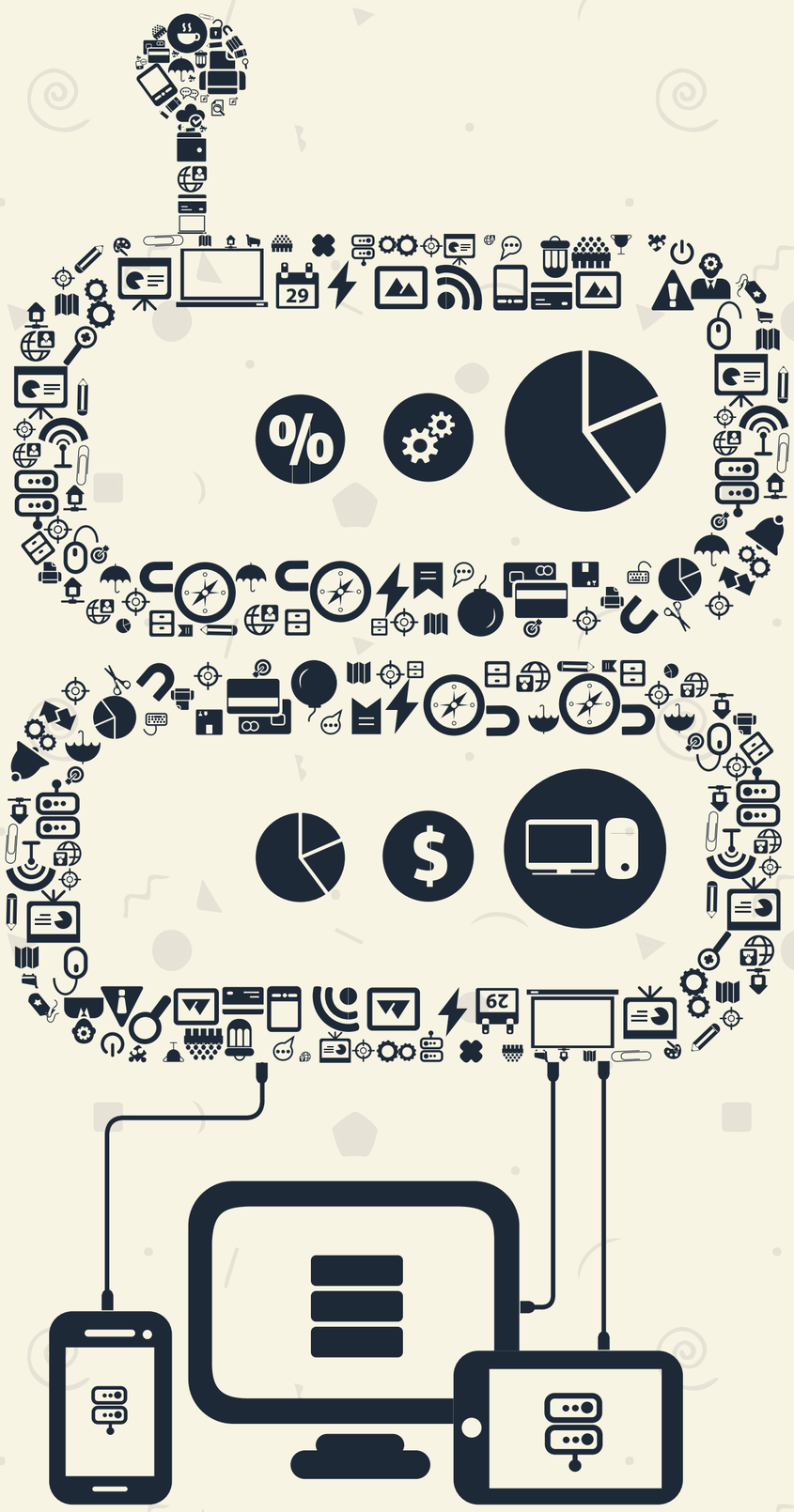
10 QUESTIONS TO ASK

BEFORE YOU BUY
DATA CENTER SERVICES

FOR YOUR BUSINESS



DATA CENTER

A colocation data center, which allows several companies to rent IT facilities on a shared basis, can be an excellent option for internet-related businesses with mid-level data requirements. The advantage is simple – with colocation, instead of dedicating your resources towards maintaining your IT system, you can leave that to the experts at the data center so that you can concentrate on other things.

The advantage of renting space offsite is that you get all of the benefits of access and none of the headaches of being responsible for any infrastructure.

Here are ten questions that will help you determine which data center will serve your business needs best.

DO I NEED A DATA CENTER? MAYBE AN ONSITE SERVER ROOM IS BETTER?

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Colocation data center companies run servers, with power, connectivity and cooling all taken care of by teams of experts who do nothing else. Data centers generally have robust climate control systems connected to redundant power systems, and multiple physical and carrier connectivity options.

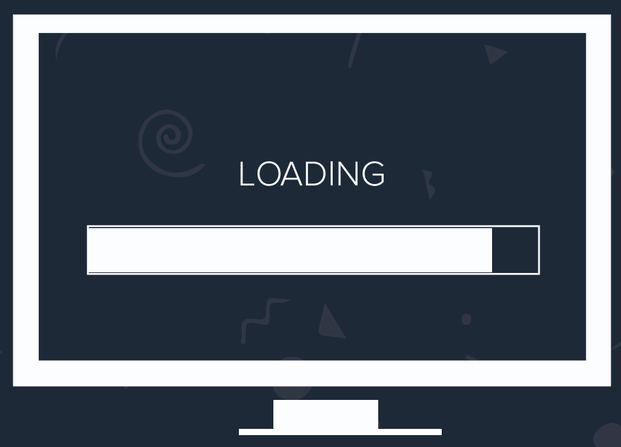
In contrast, an onsite server gives you easy access, but the responsibility and expense is all on you. Indeed, being able to share costs among multiple data center customers is one of the main advantages of relinquishing the easy access of an onsite server room.

WHAT IS COLOCATION? HOW DO I DECIDE IF IT'S RIGHT FOR US?

2. WHAT IS COLOCATION? HOW DO I DECIDE IF IT'S RIGHT FOR US?

Colocation means that your servers are located in a facility that is owned and operated by another company. You lease space, bandwidth, power and assurance of physical security and uptime.

If your office space is small, to the extent that devoting a closet or room to a server will cramp your style – or if you absolutely need your servers running constantly – then colocation may be a great choice for you.



HOW FAST CAN I UPLOAD/DOWNLOAD VIA A DATA CENTER?

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Data centers usually have multiple fiber connections, so they have the capacity to offer upload and download speeds that are basically unlimited. Your own access to this speed capacity, though, depends largely on how much you pay for bandwidth.

Many centers, particularly those with server colocation, include some measure of bandwidth with their service, often delivered via Ethernet. You'll set up and use your own VLAN, and you'll be assigned your own dedicated IP address, to ensure secure data transmission.

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4. IF WE DON’T HAVE LOCAL SERVERS, HOW WILL WE ACCESS OUR LARGER FILES HOSTED AT THE DATA CENTER?

When you store your data offsite, if you need frequent access, you’ll want to make sure that you have ample bandwidth connecting your office to the data center. To make sure that multiple users accessing the same large files does not result in slow-downs, you can set up a point-to-point circuit designated for connecting the two locations. What makes this affordable is that it does not require a port for internet bandwidth.

Alternatively, you may decide to keep your most frequently accessed files on a server at the office while the rest of your servers are hosted by the data center.

WHAT KIND OF SECURITY DOES A DATA CENTER HAVE?

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Data centers provide two categories of security: physical and network. Physical security begins with ensuring that all unauthorized personnel is denied access to the servers. It may also include locked server cabinets or cages. Some data centers have berms, boulders, or fences providing a physical barrier surrounding the data center, while others even have armed guards on constant patrol.

Network security means ensuring that unauthorized users cannot access your network remotely. Some colocation data centers cover the costs associated with managing these threats by billing their customers per-user rates since more seats mean more risk. Additionally, data center operators work to prevent DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service) attacks, which can have a negative effect on your operations and reputation.

WILL USING A DATA CENTER PUT US AT RISK OF VIOLATING GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS LIKE HIPAA?

6. WILL USING A DATA CENTER PUT US AT RISK OF VIOLATING GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS LIKE HIPAA?

Data centers often attain regulatory certification (PCI, FISMA and SSAE 16, for example), so a data center may be ideal as a means of meeting your regulatory responsibilities.

Depending on your compliance needs, and particularly when there are potentially multiple contradictory regulatory standards, the fiscal burden of compliance may well be eased by relying on the expertise of a data center.

DO WE HAVE ACCESS TO OUR OWN SERVERS IN THE DATA CENTER?

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Yes indeed. Data centers are obligated to give you access to your servers. Most interested customers provide their data centers with updated lists of authorized personnel who are required to show identification when visiting the center.

Choosing a data center in fairly close proximity to your office can be particularly helpful in facilitating your convenient access.

WHAT KIND OF UPTIME CAN I EXPECT?

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Data centers have redundant power, cooling and connectivity, so computers' functioning uptime reaches the desired "five nines" (up and running 99.999% of the time) metric.

In contrast to an office building that uses public utility power and is therefore at risk of losing power during thunderstorms and the like, and is only fed one entrance path for circuits, data centers are built specifically with intent for maximum uptime.

WHAT KIND OF BACKUP SYSTEMS DO THE DATA CENTER SERVERS USE?

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Data backup is essential as a matter of policy and insurance, and it is often an add-on service to colocation pricing. You might want to backup “manually,” using removable media like a hard drive that can connect to the data center servers via USB, Thunderbolt or Ethernet.

Some data centers offer access to a Storage Area Network that customers can access for backup purposes, and others leverage cloud backup services. The main advantage of backup services via a data center is the ample connectivity to handle the volume of data being backed up – with the exception of removable media, where the backup speed is contingent upon the device.

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Data centers use uninterruptible power supply (UPS) hardware onsite. These connect to power distribution units (PDUs), and it is from there that the power circuits serve you, the colocation customer. This system provides conditioned power in the event of a surge and also temporary auxiliary power in the event of an outage – that is, at least one generator will be operable onsite.

You may also want to look into whether or not the provider you're considering supports automated switchover to its generators, so that no human being is required to intervene to start the alternative means of power. Sufficient fuel should also be kept onsite to be able to continue powering the generator during extended blackouts.

READY TO TAKE THE LEAP?

There are many key advantages to moving servers out of the office and using a colocation data center instead. When you don’t need to maintain your own physical infrastructure, you get the best possible options for scalability, security, uptime, backups, compliance and access.

Got any more questions? Let us know what you’re wrestling with, and we’ll see if we can’t help make it all clear for you.

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