

13 Strategic Considerations Before You Select a Colocation Provider

Choosing a colocation provider is a strategic business decision that evolves from thoughtful consideration. This partnership likely requires a multi-year commitment from both you and your provider. It is important to know what to look for and the right questions to ask.

1 Scalability

It is critical for colocation customers to measure the data center provider's ability to support their evolving computing and network requirements as their businesses grow. The ability to scale efficiently and on-demand by deploying higher density configurations within your existing footprint not only impacts your solutions' Return on Investment (ROI), but also your company's bottom line. To make the best colocation decision, you must find a provider who is implementing new facility design elements and integrating proven technologies that increase power and cooling capacities to support much higher density rack configurations. A scalable data center environment that provides for flexible deployment of higher density solutions in an on-demand model will give you the opportunity to scale within same facility and extend your longevity, ultimately improving Return on Investment (ROI) for your collocated solutions.

2 Reliable and Resilient

A reliable colocation partner will have N+1 design providing redundancy in power and cooling infrastructure which means maximum system uptime. You should also look for a provider that offers well defined service level agreements and supports 100% uptime. After all, your business depends on the uptime your colocation partner provides.

3 Security

Physical security is an important component in deciding where to house your mission critical data. A colocation provider should offer comprehensive security, beyond the guard, ensuring your information is protected at all times. Biometric security, card readers, keypad or electronic locks as well as digital camera placement should be a part of any data center facility you choose.

4 Technical Support

Make sure that your provider has the data center and the support centers staffed 24/7. Technicians should be reachable by e-mail and phone in the event of any problem. Avoid automated e-mail attendants, and make sure your tickets are immediately sent to a human being who is physically looking at your equipment to determine the nature of your problem. Talk to the Tier-II engineers, and raise some hypothetical questions about what you might experience to see how they respond. Finally, contact references that can attest to how the provider responded in a failed situation.

5 Monitoring

Proactive monitoring of availability, server resources, port checks, as well as hardware states are necessary services to look for in choosing a colocation provider. Your provider should conduct real-time analysis and in-depth network performance metrics of your IT infrastructure to quickly detect any network performance problems and outages to help mitigate risk to your business.

6 Expanding Markets

It is important to find a colocation provider who can expand with your business. If you expect to do business in other areas of the country or internationally, finding a provider that has multiple facilities in major cities may be important to you. Like many businesses, speed to market will also be essential, so be sure to choose a provider that can build out your space quickly.

7 Location

Where is your provider located? How far you need to travel to maintain equipment is certainly key, but you should also consider location in terms of susceptibility to natural disasters. A provider located in a flood plain or an area prone to hurricanes creates unnecessary risk for your business. Avoid providers in areas where threats of down time are increased.

8 Provider Diversity/Connectivity

Network performance issues can have a tangible financial impact to your bottom line. Since high speed is so important to your online customer, a delay of even a few milliseconds can have a direct impact on customer loyalty and revenue. Partnering with multiple high-speed Internet access providers allows a colocation provider to add diversity. In the event one Internet provider fails, another can pick up the slack. Ask potential colocation partners how many carriers feed into their facility and how they optimize and route traffic to ensure network speed and ongoing connectivity.

9 Environmental Controls

A data center must be cooled to allow for the added heat produced by server and storage equipment. Check out the cooling and heat extraction systems in place at the facility you are considering to make sure they are up-to-date and reliable. Temperature alerts should be in place to maintain optimal conditions so your hardware can perform at its best. Trusted data center facilities will also have fire detection and suppression systems to minimize the risk of damage to your equipment, often known as VESDA (Very Early Smoke Detection Apparatus).

10 Energy Efficiency

On a typical workday, a data center might consume 100 times more power than the standard office building. As the world's appetite for apps increases, so does the demand for processing power and the energy to fuel it. Your colocation provider should be looking for ways to address this growing need with sensitivity to the environment. Wherever possible, the facility you choose should have an eye toward green practices that maximize energy efficiency and reduce dependence on fossil fuels and natural resources.

11 References

Make sure that you understand the company's financial condition, how it is audited, the number of years it has been in business and its overall performance track record. Ask the

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provider for references, and then call them all. You may also request a copy of a SAS 70 audit report from the data center provider, which represents a third-party validation of internal process and controls. This auditing standard is a must for any reputable provider.

12 Value-Added Services

The number of data center facilities is on the rise, giving you many choices for colocation services. When searching for the right partner, be sure to look for a provider that is well equipped to handle your future needs beyond colocation, including managed hosting and cloud computing. Be sure to ask potential partners about their ability to offer advanced services and benefits along with the leased space, such as Remote Arm, managed installation, circuit testing and even infrastructure management.

13 Costs

There are many ways to save money when going with one provider over another, but the lowest bottom line isn't necessarily the best for your business. It's important to understand the tradeoffs that you are making when saving money. Lack of support, insufficient product lines or unreliable data center facilities can end up very costly for your business. Some providers, for example, will give you a very low price. However, non-covered items can quickly add up to an amount equal to or above what another vendor may have offered as a part of the solution package.

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