

Byline article from Paul Kavarana, technical director at Richardson Eyres

For further information please contact:

Deborah Leah/Fiona Whyatt

Insight Marketing

T. 01625 500800

e. dleah@insightmkt.com / fwhyatt@insightmkt.com

Facilities

Are you making the most of your facilities? Where can you build your data centre, should you be looking outside of your local area? Can latency issues be overcome? What is happening to the real estate market in the UK? Can you find the power in the location that you wish to build your data centre?

Location, location, location

Location is the key when deciding on any type of property, Paul Kavarana, technical director at data centre consolidation specialists, Richardson Eyres asks if it is still feasible to house your data centre close to your business and customers....

One of the most important considerations when planning a data centre is its location. After all, the location of your data centre could prove to be the difference between the business's ability to continue trading or not in the worst of scenarios, such as flooding and fire. It is hard to forget the flooding of last year which had a catastrophic impact on homes and businesses in affected areas; the consequences of which are still being felt today. As a result of the flooding, the PITT report was commissioned which endorses BS 25999, to help safeguard against such disasters in the future.

Plan for the worse, not hope for the best

Business continuity best practice is to 'plan for the worse scenario, not hope for the best', and the same applies to planning the data centre. A number of data centre hotspots are cropping up around the country, offering lower cost real estate with the added bonus of reduced building costs. However, price cannot be the only factor, and as every business is different, there cannot be a one fits all solution.

For example, if you have a high percentage of staff based at head office and you suffered a major disruption, such as a fire which brought the business to a complete halt, it would be sensible to have provision at a disaster recovery facility for a limited number of people to work and ensure it was feasible for the rest to work at home. This type of model would allow the business to operate with either full or limited services, but is obviously dependent on the type of organisation as it would be impossible for a manufacturing plant to work on this model.

For an organisation that has a number of offices at multiple sites and remote staff, then it could be an option to house the primary data centre at the business's head office or one of the larger sites and co-locate facilities to house a disaster recovery environment. With this type of infrastructure, if there is an incident at head office the rest of the business could continue to operate with full or limited services.

Another option is to have two data centres, both as active environments, sharing the services load. High density facilities, located in city centres could be reserved for those latency sensitive applications, while the low-density data centre could house the less latency sensitive applications. In the event of a data centre failure or 'denial of access' only the services housed at the effected data centre will need to be 'failed over.' This means that the recovery point objective should be lower than an active/passive environment (sharing the load).

A green approach

Much like buying a house, when commissioning a new data centre, it is important to perform a search to find out what facilities are available. For example, does this site have enough power capacity for your needs now and in the future, and how accessible is it from where your organisation is based? It is also crucial to consider your organisation's plans for growth as you will need to make provision for this at the commissioning stage.

Anyone commissioning a new data centre today will also need to think about building it around energy efficiency and allowing it to run on less power. As power costs soar, the operating costs of a high density data centre will remain high, but much is being done to improve efficiency. All too often data centres are filled with ageing infrastructure that can be easily consolidated to reduce the number of physical servers required, and so lowering power and space requirements. Also, much can now be done to reduce heat in the data centre. Cooling systems designed by the likes of HP enable businesses to efficiently remove heat at the rack level and further efficiencies can be gained by adopting virtualisation technologies from VMware

There is much more to the data centre facility than just a building. The data centre is the life blood of the business and is key to its ability to trade. As such, the site on which it is located should be very carefully considered.

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