



Differentiating Data Centres

Comms Business Magazine talks to key data centre operators to find out how they differentiate their offerings and provides a check list for resellers looking for partners.

If hosted and cloud based applications are to thrive then they need a secure platform and location from which to operate and with such a diverse range of applications being developed by service providers and resellers seeking to differentiate their offerings, the Data Centre is emerging as the key and core component in the mix. However, the market is getting ever more competitive and for table stakes 'state of the art everything' is now required as standard.

We wanted to find out what key data centre firms are doing to attract business and what they have to offer channel partners that is DIFFERENT.

Hosted data centres are rapidly gaining popularity because of the time and cost savings a company can make as result of using shared data centre infrastructure. Modern enterprises are increasingly finding that developing their own, internal data centres is prohibitively expensive. By using a hosted data centre, enterprises can avoid a significant portion of this initial CapEx, and instead pay only for on-going expenses, such as power costs. Even in terms of OpEx, hosted data centres can help their enterprise customers run their facilities more efficiently and less expensively.

Bryn Jones, Account Manager at CommScope, a provider of network infrastructures to data centres is seemingly well placed to comment on this issue.

"Third-party hosting companies are able to make additions to their facilities more economically and more rapidly than an individual enterprise would be able to. Having custom-built facilities and set procedures in place, means that hosted data centres can execute such upgrades extremely rapidly – minimising or entirely negating any downtime for enterprises. As dedicated data centre facilities, hosting companies are able to focus exclusively on ensuring reliability from the moment of initial construction. Such companies invest heavily in properly designed, robust, high-performance infrastructure across their entire facility.

The demand for hosted data centres is already outstripping the supply of services available in the marketplace. It's essential that hosting companies continue to seek out the highest quality infrastructure available. Forming partnerships

with trusted, high-quality IT infrastructure suppliers will be key to ensuring that new hosting centres are future-proofed, robustly designed and can easily support future technology upgrades with minimal downtime."

Trusted Partners

For resellers providing cloud based services and applications to their own customers a data centre partner can be hard to choose. According to Stefan Haase, Divisional Product Director - Data Cloud Services at InTechnology, you need to ensure you have selected a dependable partner so that the service that you are passing on isn't ineffective or, at worse, defective.

"Security is an essential component when choosing your data centre partner. What do we mean by this? Security isn't just hands and eyes and entry locks. Security is the reassurance that you get from knowing that data is safe, always available and in the hands of a reliable, reputable company. Many data centre providers are little more than property agents and the measure of a service provider can come down to one simple question... 'Does the service provider use the DC space themselves?' Having trust in your product portfolio means that partners can too.

Hybrid Hosting is a key market differentiator at it gives companies the best of both worlds, by integrating secure Cloud infrastructure and top of the range network solutions with physical co-located infrastructure. Utilising state of the art DCs alongside an Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) offering, Hybrid Hosting is the perfect solution for partners and their users who want to transition to the cloud, or who require both the scalability and convenience of the Cloud as well as the security of traditional hosting. IaaS also provides a standby DR environment in the event of a disaster without having to invest in your own expensive infrastructure. For example, if your critical systems go down due to a fire, by implementing IaaS you can be back up and running from a remote location

quickly, meaning no loss of trading.

Alongside Cloud solutions and physical infrastructure, businesses are often searching for Software as a Service options with their cloud. Companies who can offer document management software and e-procurement solutions as part of their network and data package look much more attractive than those who just sell the space on the network.

InTechnology has recently added to its data centre estate with a facility in Reading opening just this year. This is a contemporary blueprint for energy efficiency utilising the latest technology, with cold aisle containment, advanced building management systems, new carrier grade Cisco routers and switches, Riello/Perkins generators, system monitoring of over 200 key metrics, everything expected of the Tier 3 standard plus more."

Steve Davis, Sales director at Next Generation Data (NGD), says that when a channel partners decide what data centres they want to use it is a similar decision as to what brand of hardware will be chosen.

"Investment by the channel in training, understanding access and other aspects of a DC world should not be wasted by choosing a poor DC supplier when it comes to the facilities or sales and engineering support on offer. NGD offers partners a comprehensive sales and engineering support programme to complement its world-class data centre facilities.

While it may appear 'convenient' to have your colo data centre on the doorstep in a converted

Sound Byte:

Jon Bunyard, Director, Value Business, Ingram Micro (UK) Ltd

I really see the subscription data centre model moving rapidly to a mature industry state with a lot of consolidation. In choosing a long term partner to work with, buyers need to spend as much time investigating the business acumen and resources of the provider as understanding the technology they use. Ultimately a white box server will deliver you as much computer power as a well-known brand, but if it means the provider can thrive financially then you know they will be more likely to hang around. I'd also ask them what they know about legislative compliance and how will they help you understand this thorny issue.



Bryn Jones of CommScope

office building in a city/metro location, there may be serious compromises down the line in terms of room for future expansion when it comes to actual floor space as well as the power to rack availability. Some city locations are already struggling to provide 1 or 2 kW per rack. NGD Europe in South Wales is one of the few tier 3+ data centres outside of London/SE England. Its low cost base compared to London facilities and a vast 750,000 sq ft campus, enables huge economies of scale which can be passed on to the reseller. NGD is around half the price of London on space which enables good margin opportunities for resellers.”

Don't Forget the NOC!

Pierre Lams, Sales & Marketing Director at NewNet says that before building its Newark data centre NewNet did a fair bit of market research.

“The company looked at the needs of its own customer base and what was available in terms of infrastructure technology that fitted the bill. The latter ranged from getting all the electromechanical bits right and ensuring that the cloud story was absolutely up there. When talking cloud we are talking the connectivity, storage processing and virtualisation infrastructure.

There was one piece of the story that NewNet found compelling. This was how to make sure that if something went wrong the company and its customers were armed with everything they needed to get the problem fixed as soon as humanly possible. Or even before the problem occurred.

To be able to do this required a monitoring capability that was unrivalled in the industry. The company decided that it needed a Network Operations Centre at the heart of its business that would have full 24 x 7 visibility and control over its estate.

As a supplier of not only the data centre infrastructure but also of the network and the online platform (ok cloud) NewNet already had a capability that exceeded that of suppliers of pure colocation by a country mile.

The company set about to integrate this

monitoring capability with the resources of its new data centre. In fact NewNet went a lot further. The NOC now uses a set of leading edge tools that sets the benchmark for data centre services.

Its customers get access to the same screens that are viewable by front line DC staff. What's more ticketing and trouble management tools such as ServiceNow can be integrated with the customer's own instances of these tools.

There are huge benefits from having a NOC integrated with both DC and network. Traditionally a NOC and any monitoring function, if there is one, sits remotely to both the network and DC. Access is often via VPN through a firewall to the MPLS core. If this access point fails visibility of the network (and data centre) is lost.

At NewNet the monitoring takes place inside the MPLS core which is fed by dual 10Gbps diverse connections. Access to the monitoring can take place from anywhere within the MPLS network.”

Is it all down to chemistry?

With two carrier-neutral datacentres based in Manchester, Chris Byrd, Technical Director of M247 Limited, has a great perspective on what range of end-to-end solutions the reseller should be looking for. He also understands that the chemistry has to be right on both sides if the relationship is going to survive the zigs and the zags throughout the coming years in this fast moving industry.

“Co-location is the bread and butter of many data centres and, although it should be easy to compare prices for standard offerings such as rack configurations, cages, shared rooms or private suites, the challenge to the reseller is how best to compare other features and services to arrive at a near perfect arrangement that should stand the test of time. Naturally, you will need to know that your equipment is secure, not just physically secure but you will also need to know that the company is itself a well-organised and well-funded outfit with an eye on the future. Imagine the problems you would face after you've spent valuable time and money only to watch the data centre go bump a few

years down the line. You will also certainly need to know that the datacentre accommodation has excellent power provision with efficient climate controls and has fantastic connectivity and extensive interconnects. You will also need your IP addresses to be assigned very quickly and at times when you need it most, you will want to be certain that it's easy to access great technical support that's available 24 hours a day all year round.

All of these should be pretty routine stuff for any good data centre and all of them should be able to supply specification and sales information that will make comparing features and services quite a straightforward task. Its occasionally important to some resellers to have a part managed co-location solution so it's increasingly important for datacentres to build flexibility into their packages, making it easy to add or subtract features without major contractual upheavals.

Often the seemingly small things make all the difference. What are their customer amenities like and how much of an effort do they put into making sure you're a happy reseller? Do they communicate well with you and is there a good

Data Centre Selection Check List?

With most data centres seeming to offer similar solutions and services and even their prices are close, there are many other considerations that will help you differentiate the good from the not so good. Chris Byrd, Technical Director of M247 provided an exhaustive check list for readers from which we have selected some key questions to ask.

1. How secure is the business behind the data centre? Is it well capitalised? Do the figures stack up in a Risk Disk search?
2. Does the data centre have the appropriate ISO standards in place? ISO 27001 for security assurance and ISO 9001 for quality.
3. Is there a 24 hour UK support customer structure in place and how easy is it to get to the right support answers? Before signing up, it's worth talking to other customers of the data centre to ensure they are happy with the level of support.
4. How secure is the data centre, what Tier level are they claiming and can they substantiate their claims?
5. Is it possible to call the data centre and arrange a tour from one of their directors? It's a good sign if they are proud enough to show off their facilities once you've been checked through security.
6. What range of partner solutions is on offer and how easy is it mix and match? Some data centres have off-the-shelf solutions that are so rigidly contrived that they may not suit you exactly.
7. Are the deals flexible and scalable with easy in and easy out set-ups? It's not unusual these days to expect short term contracts if that's what suits you best.
8. Is their pricing competitive? If everything else looks watertight but their prices are a bit steep, try talking to them about it and find out if anything can be done. Often top quality costs money so it's unrealistic to expect absolutely everything at knock down rates.
9. Are the terms of their SLA's truly achievable? Ask the data centre to explain how they can justify the SLA claims and find out exactly what's covered.
10. What range of connectivity solutions can the data centre offer and how resilient is their network?



positive feel about the place when you make a visit? It may well boil down to a gut feeling if all other comparisons look more or less equal.”

Working Harder

Jack Bedell-Pearce, Managing Director of 4D Data Centres, says that as the reseller market for colocation and connectivity services has matured over the past two or three years, data centres and ISPs have had to work ever harder to maintain significant market share.

“Colocation for most resellers and end clients is often chosen on the basis of service level (or Tier rating), reputation (uptime record) and geography. Because the London data centre market has become particularly crowded, resellers are becoming much more discerning about which providers they’re going to risk their reputation endorsing. Being able to demonstrate quality of service and uptime have therefore become a priority for data centre operators which means investing more in quality technical, operations and account management staff to ensure the smooth running of facilities.

Similarly the connectivity services have become increasingly crowded. However, because it is such a commoditised market, the key differentiators of quality of service and reputation are even more important. Unable to compete on price with the major carriers any more (e.g. £9 for an FTTC from BT), many ISPs are starting to concentrate on value-added connectivity services. This may include 24 x 7 network engineer support or superior connectivity through resilient networks and multiple carriers.”

Co-location Applications

Griffin Managing Director Andrew Dickinson sees two major applications of colocation services for the channel. Firstly as part of an end customer’s MPLS VPN solution and secondly as a way of hosting a reseller’s own hosted applications with close integration of the network infrastructure required to deliver services to clients.

“As businesses look to consolidate their ICT resources in a centralised location, increasingly using virtualisation to reduce costs and improve flexibility, they need to be able to deliver those applications back out to users dispersed around their company networks. Rather than just providing the MPLS network, the channel can include within the overall solution an on-net data centre with links back into the MPLS network, and if required also out to the Internet. This is a simple value add that helps support the customer to deliver the benefits of virtualisation, and at the same time enabling the reseller to add additional recurring revenue.

Many Partners will also be looking to provide their own cloud services, for example software application services, back-up and storage, or

hosted telephony. Delivering these services from a data centre that sits on a provider’s network enables more effective scaling of the business. Both in terms of connecting to end customers, using whatever connectivity type is most suitable, and increasing network interconnect bandwidth quickly and cost effectively when the business grows.”

According to Dickinson major trends seen over the last year have been in the demand for more power per rack and higher levels of data centre resilience.

“One driver for this is the increase in the use of virtualisation and technologies delivered on blade servers. This has led not only to higher demand in power, but also an increasing need for highly resilient environments due to an increasing dependency on that infrastructure. The use of geographically diverse data centres to further deliver service resilience is also growing.

Griffin has a range of data centres with different levels of classification from tier 1+ to tier 3+ that sit on our high capacity core integration network, enabling simple integration with our MPLS and Internet connectivity services that encompass all the major UK carriers and their network access options. We have recently installed our own cloud computing infrastructure service in two of those tier 3+ data centres, delivering a high availability platform that enable Partners and end customers to run their own applications without the need to invest in their own equipment.”

Dickinson concludes, “As more companies look to use or build cloud-based services, a critical area is how these services will be delivered to end users with the network performance required. Therefore any implementation of cloud services should take into account the wide area network and data centres that closely integrate with a provider’s network capabilities where performance quality can be controlled is a major benefit.”

Reseller Comment:

For over 20 years Blue Chip has successfully delivered end-user productivity through IT Solutions and Services and has now extended its services portfolio to include Data Centre and Cloud Computing Services.



Stefan Haase, Divisional Product Director - Data Cloud Services at InTechnology

Anthony Green, sales and marketing director at Blue Chip explains the significance of investing in building Cloud offerings to add alongside its existing services portfolio: “Infrastructure as a Service’ (IaaS) provides our customers with the latest generation of virtualised infrastructure, hosted in a secure, resilient facility whilst negating the long term costs associated with running, maintaining and replacing on premise hardware and IT Infrastructure and the need for virtualisation and storage skills in-house. We make the investment and our customers get the benefits instantly without the usual up-front Capex expense.

“The argument for the Cloud has already been proven through reducing overall costs whilst increasing performance and productivity, which is why so many customers have already started migrating. The decision on which partner to work with must not be taken lightly, think about financial stability, technical capability and check they have a proven track record of delivering Cloud Services.”

By partnering with leading UK data centre specialist, C4L, to provide Co-location services for both its own platform and its customer’s equipment, Blue Chip provides customers with a guaranteed, secure, robust service with connection to multiple datacentres giving improved Disaster Recovery, all connected by a private Terabit network. The securely housed facility has uninterruptable power supplies (UPS) with backup diesel generators, Finger Print access and 24/7 CCTV.

Ed Says...

The data centre market will become increasingly important for resellers developing and selling their own cloud based applications. The good news is that data centre operators are keen to work hard to get your business.