



The Role of the Data Centre in the Channel

Paul Bryce, Business Development Director at Node4, talks to Comms Business Magazine about what he believes the channel should be looking for in a data centre provider.

Managed hosting, hosted servers, virtual servers, on-line back-up, hosted applications (like exchange), hosted IPT and not forgetting cloud, are just some of the popular industry buzz words currently making the headlines.

Each of these buzz words have one thing in common: At the heart of each will be a data centre.

The past few years have seen a shift in the way customers engage, with rising recognition of the value in 'hosted' services. Rather than contacting their trusted technology supplier with a defined technical requirement, more and more customers are instead saying they want a particular service or application at a monthly price with an SLA.

Due to high entry market costs, delivering these types of services presents a challenge to the channel. Not only is there an investment to be made in the hardware, there is also an even bigger investment required to build a data centre that provides the right levels of resiliency and uptime from which to deliver these services.

Obviously the data centre has to have the right specification – power, cooling, SLAs offering 100% guarantees (including an understanding of how those SLAs are actually being delivered to ensure they are not just words). Location of the data centre is also important if you or your customers will need to access it.

But if you are serious about delivering hosted services then there are a few other elements to consider. It is about more than just the data centre. Connectivity is still a core element of delivering any hosted service. There is an alarming amount of providers that seem to be missing this as a critical component- saying you can use 'any' connectivity. You need to ensure that your application, especially if it is voice-related, can operate with the internet connection the customer uses.

So ideally the data centre you choose needs to be well connected, with interconnects into multiple carriers so that you have a choice and you can get the right connectivity at the right price to your customers. Although internet access is crucial and you need to ensure there is a resilient backbone for this, it is not just about access to the internet. If you want to deliver hosted voice services, SIP access would also be worth considering.

In the world of technology things can go wrong. Hosting equipment in a data centre means that you are not going to be where your equipment is. Therefore, who you work with needs to have an on-site support team and be someone you can work with. There needs to be a common vision in how to deliver good customer services because your data centre partner is going

to be your hands and eyes – checking servers are running and providing cabling, configuration, installation services.

Then there are the wrap-around services – choosing the right data centre provider should give you additional opportunities to increase revenues and margins, upsell services to existing customers and attract new ones.

Once you have chosen your data centre provider, you have to consider the types of services you can begin to offer.

An obvious service to consider is colocation – for its space and power for hosting customer-owned equipment in a secure, resilient facility. There is still a lot of growth in this area.

For example, if you are a PBX reseller, you might have a customer with multiple sites. Why not host the PBX centrally in the data centre? Centralise PSTN breakout with SIP trunking and add connectivity to the customer sites. This will ensure that the PBX is in a secure, resilient environment that maximises the availability. Previously you would have installed the PBX at one of the customer's main sites and if the PBX went down, the whole organisation would have gone down with it. Now you can deliver a complete end-to-end solution that is no longer reliant on a single customer site.

Several PBX manufacturers are introducing systems capable of multi-tenanting so you can have multiple customers on one platform. With the

right data centre provider who offers SIP and connectivity, this is a really easy way into being able to offer hosted voice services.

Cloud infrastructure is another service which data centres can offer. Node4 has a cloud infrastructure that can be used separately or in addition to a colocation service. We see a lot of growth in a more bespoke approach where customers will have both a colocation and a cloud requirement so it is helpful to work with a data centre provider which offers both. It will also allow you to start offering services such as data backup which is a really simple value-added service.

As you evaluate what hosted services are right for your business and which provider is the right one to partner with, I would naturally encourage you to look at Node4. We have data centres up and down the M1 corridor in Leeds, Derby and Northampton and you probably won't be surprised that Node4 can satisfy all the things you should be looking for in the right provider. The data centre undoubtedly presents new opportunities. But you need to choose your partner wisely.



Paul Bryce, Business Development Director, Node4