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Is two always better than one? Is four guaranteed to be an improvement over two? Quite possibly, if the topic being discussed is data centers.

As data centers internally consolidate and become increasingly efficient, a growing number of enterprises are considering the idea of operating multiple facilities. There's a strong case to be made for data center decentralization: the concept of dispersing and/or duplicating IT and networking resources on a regional, national or even global basis. Multiple data centers can benefit enterprises in several different ways, including enhanced productivity, scalability and redundancy, not to mention cost savings.

Not convinced that having multiple data centers is a good idea? Then consider these points.

Cost savings. Businesses located in areas with sky-high real estate and energy costs, such as California and New York, can off-load operations to a satellite data center in a far less expensive place, such as Arizona, to save significant amounts of money. Virtualization can make multiple data centers appear, and function, as a single entity, making management a snap. Meanwhile, an automated secondary facility can also help IT managers trim payroll costs.

Enhanced scalability. Spreading servers and related equipment across multiple sites makes it easier to raise and lower computing capacity. Enterprises can open, close and scale remote facilities in lockstep with current business requirements. This approach is far more cost-effective than expanding an existing on-site facility, which can't be easily shrunk if future business or technology needs (such as virtualization) dictate.

A place to experiment. Satellite sites provide a perfect test bed for experimenting with potentially useful types of new equipment, software and services. A remote data center gives IT staff members the ability to evaluate promising new technologies under actual business conditions without the risk of unintentionally damaging vital operations at the main data center.

Uninterrupted productivity. Data center operations often falter during server replacement operations or whenever the facility's physical infrastructure is being enhanced or remodeled. During periods of upheaval at the main data center, a secondary facility can step in to provide much needed computing support that will keep operations humming along.

Business continuity insurance. In a perfect world, enterprises could confidently place all of their IT eggs into a single data center basket and never have to worry about the consequences. But in the real world, where fires, storms, earthquakes and other catastrophes are all too commonplace, a secondary data center allows operations to continue even if the main facility is disabled for an extended period. Fortunately, you don't have to spend gobs of money to build a fully-staffed duplicate facility. Many organizations have discovered that even a small colocated equipment cabinet is sufficient to keep critical operations running along at an acceptable, if not optimal, level during an emergency.

Mission-critical data support. It doesn't take a full-blown disaster to obliterate mission-critical data. Routine server and storage system failures, as well as human error, are responsible for more lost data than all disasters combined. Automatically duplicating critical documents, such as contracts and emails, at a remote facility provides absolute data redundancy without exposing the information to an external party.

Remote data archives. Some organizations, such as law firms, financial institutions and government agencies, prefer—or are required—to archive their data in a particular geographical location, which may many miles away from the main data center. While storage outsourcing is a possible solution, for convenience, security and privacy reasons many organizations prefer to manage and store critical information on equipment they own and operate.

Stronger security. If an enterprise's on-site data center suffers a security meltdown, the facility can be quarantined and decontaminated while one or more remote facilities continue handling vital operations.

Tags: Business Continuity, data centers, Scalability

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