

Transitioning To a Virtual Data Center - IO



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The data center is dead! Long live the data center!

A major benefit of virtual machines and cloud computing is that businesses no longer have to fret about where their servers are located. Your organization can be based in Arizona, New York, the U.K. or even Antarctica and have the same level of server access and availability as a company that has a traditional data center sitting in its basement.

Yet even virtualized servers accessed via the cloud still have to exist somewhere in the physical world—and that “somewhere” is almost always a data center. Sound confusing? It’s not. While virtualization and cloud computing may be killing the data center as we’ve all come to know and love it over the past couple of decades, it’s also giving birth to a new type of data center, a virtual facility that efficiently serves multiple customers located just about anywhere.

Virtual data centers take nearly all of the work of out designing, equipping and managing a data center. All that’s left for you to do is contact the provider and order a specific amount on processing, memory and network bandwidth resources.

Considering the convenience and cost savings a virtual data center creates, it’s no surprise that providers are now popping up all over the place. Finding the right provider for your business, however, requires both careful research and some introspection.

Since a virtual data center can exist almost anywhere, location usually isn’t an important decision factor when choosing a provider. And price can’t be the sole determining factor, since it’s very easy for a provider to drive down costs simply by supplying inferior service. Actually, the only way of ensuring that a virtual data center will perform better than an on site facility, at an equal or lower cost, is by verifying all of the critical details beforehand.

Here’s what you need to understand and look for:

Scalability. Using a virtual data center is all about scalability—being able to dial resources up and down in synchronization with business needs. A good provider will let you buy service in small chunks at reasonable price points. While larger customers that order more resources typically receive quantity discounts, the provider shouldn't hit you with special fees when you need to occasionally raise or lower a service setting.

Availability. You undoubtedly want your virtual data center to be available on a 24×7 basis. A good sign that a provider is committed to consistent availability is the use of industry-leading, “name brand” products, including servers, storage systems, network equipment and virtualization software. Also check to see if the provider is using state-of-the-art and redundant power, cooling and backup technologies. Finally, don't settle for anything less than a 100 percent service level agreement (SLA).

Flexibility. Is the provider willing to work with you to meet your specific needs, or does the company simply offer a menu of “take-it-or-leave-it” package deals? An unwillingness to accommodate your requirements and preferences is a sign that the provider is putting profit before service.

Network. A virtual data center's value hinges on the quality of its network service. Expect the provider to offer carrier-neutral access to a wide selection of networks. Remember, however, that network support is more than a simple numbers game. Make sure that the provider has made arrangements with an array of tier-one carriers, the ones you are most likely to use.

Support. Who will you go to when you have a problem with your virtual data center? What types of support are available? What's free and what costs extra? You'll want to know the answers to these questions before you sign the deal.

Security. How will your data be protected in both the virtual and physical worlds? Make sure that the provider takes security as seriously as you do. Ask the company to describe the exact measures it uses to protect your data.

Commitment. Consider the provider's overall commitment to service and stability. Any hot new technology—and virtual data centers are certainly hot—attracts its share of quick buck operators. Before aligning with any particular provider, examine the company's track record, physical infrastructure and client list. Major deficiencies in any other these areas should raise a giant red flag and motivate you to look elsewhere.

Tags: Scalability, virtual data center, virtualization

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