13 Hard-Hitting Questions to Ask When Shopping for a Data Center

The reason you're shopping for a data center is to eliminate the threat of downtime and ensure your company has access to its corporate data and applications 24/7/365. There's too much at stake for your company to lose access to its data, even for a minute. That's why the data center you choose to partner with matters a great deal.

We've compiled from our 30 years of experience, thirteen hard-hitting questions to ask each data center you're considering so you can be equipped with all the information you need to make the right decision for your company. The questions we're providing you in this guide are the questions most data centers hope you don't ask, and we explain the reasons why you should.

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1. Has your data center customers' power, cooling, and/or connectivity been impacted due to any hurricane, tropical storm, or natural disaster event over the past 25 years?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Houston resides in the path of hurricanes and tropical storms. Therefore, it's important to ensure your data center of choice has a successful Survivability Report Card during all past storms.
- If you do business and/or have employees outside of the Houston area you can't take the chance of having a local natural disaster impact corporate performance worldwide.
- You don't want to risk any impact on revenue, operations, customer experience, and company reputation.

Bonus Tip: Ask to review their Disaster Pre-Planning Strategy and Event Preparedness Protocol.

2. What is your Service Level Agreement (SLA) for power, cooling and connectivity?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Anything less than a 100% uptime SLA for power, cooling and connectivity is accepting that your organization will be down for at least 5-525 minutes per year* without access to corporate data and applications.
- The SLA showcases how confident the data center is about the services they offer.
- 1 minute of downtime is equal to $9,000-$50,000 in revenue, depending on the industry. $50k per minute x 525 minutes per year = $26 million in lost revenue impact to your organization annually.

*based on 99.9%, 99.99%, or 99.999% uptime SLAs, which are commonly offered by data centers.

Bonus Tip: Average data center outages costs each customer anywhere from $100k to $1M per year, not to mention the negative impact to your corporate reputation.

3. Do you have a Network Operations Center (NOC) that is staffed 24/7/365?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Having a 24/7/365 staffed NOC ensures the quickest response time because they reside in the facility with your infrastructure. They become an extension of your team and customer service will never be impacted by weekends, holidays, natural disasters, etc.
- Companies with business or mission critical operations must be able to quickly reach data center staff around the clock to ensure their company is running at all times because business never stops.
- You should have one phone number and/or one email address to connect to the support team . It should be as easy as calling your "IT department" for help, maybe even easier.
- If the data center has a Remote Call Center instead of Onsite Support, you're faced with playing phone tag, handing off of support tickets, etc., which results in lost time and lost revenue.

4. What is your human response time to customer service requests? Do you have Tiered Levels of Customer Service based on customer size and/or level of triage?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- When lives are on the line, every second matters.
- Every second of waiting for a response to your support request results in a loss of time, productivity, and revenue.
- The data center industry standard for response time is hours or even days after a customer request is submitted.
- If there's a tiered level of customer service, you could very well be faced with added costs depending on the size of your company, or when you need help.

Bonus Tip: Be sure you clearly understand how their process works:
  - Customer request
  - Ticket #
  - Waiting in the queue
  - Ticket assigned to technician
  - Information gathering and troubleshooting
  - Completion of customer request

5. How much do you charge for 24/7/365 Hands & Eyes Services? Is there a Tiered Level of Service and Charges based on level of complexity, time of day, or the need to expedite?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- 'Nickel and diming' for EVERY little action and request will add up to significant extra charges.
- You will constantly be "weighing" whether to send your own tech onsite to perform the work or pay the data center the charges.
- If you have to send your own tech, you'll be faced with lost productivity of your staff due to travel and repair time.
- Being charged for Hands & Eyes Services will result in inconsistent billing, forcing you to get monthly AP and/or budget approval. It can be embarrassing, time consuming, and painful to get approval for small, everyday requests.

Bonus Tip: Ask if the cost for onsite Hands & Eyes Services changes during emergency events.

6. Does your location reside outside of the 500-year flood zone & can withstand the Category 4 wind rating?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Houston easily floods due to its aging infrastructure built just above sea level.
- To ensure survivability during weather events, it's important to partner with a data center provider that has a successful track record of properly mitigating flood/hurricane risk.
- Knowing your data center of choice is outside the 500-year flood plain and can withstand the Category 4 wind rating will result in less stress and worry, allowing you to sleep soundly at night.

7. Do you have any single points of failure in your power and cooling infrastructure?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- A data center is only as strong as its weakest point.
- Your data center provider is the lifeblood of your organization. If it goes down, your business will come to a screeching halt.
- A data center must have redundancies in every aspect of their power, cooling, and connectivity design and solution offerings to ensure your environment will be up and running 24/7/365.

Bonus Tip: Full redundancies for all elements of power, cooling, and connectivity should be non-negotiable.

8. Do you have First to Fuel status?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- A data center must have the ability to run their generators indefinitely during any impacting event.
- Even if your data center has redundant power infrastructure it needs unlimited access to fuel.
- A data center ought to have fuel relationships with multiple FEMA rated providers, which are geographically diverse to ensure successful pre-staging onsite and continual delivery throughout the natural disaster and during the post event recovery phase.

Bonus Tip: Ask the data center about its fuel relationships and past report card for survivability of impacting events.

9. Do you offer a direct connect Hybrid Cloud solution?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- As technology is constantly evolving, it is important to choose a data center partner that is forward thinking and bridges current and future technology solutions.
- With a hybrid cloud solution already built in, there will be no delay in service deployment, and you'll have a seamless and quick onramp to any cloud provider.

Bonus Tip: A direct cloud connection results in reduced ingress and egress fees.

10. Do you offer a premium aggregate internet solution with diverse carriers & diverse points of entry?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Many data centers have multiple ISP's, but they all ride the same "last mile." The data center needs to ensure that their ISP's have geographically diverse points of entry into the data center to ensure connectivity isn't lost due to a fiber cut, or a single event.
- Premium connectivity must be comprised of multi redundant carriers designed to automatically reroute based on availability to ensure 100% uptime.
- Premium connectivity must use Session Based Layer Routing Protocol, which results in the optimal path of connectivity based on the final destination and lowest latency.

11. Do you offer Workspace, Office, & Business Continuity Accommodations?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- A data center that operates as a true partner with your company will be a one stop shop for your technology infrastructure, and for your people. Make things simple by selecting a provider that can meet all your needs.
- When a data center offers workspace, office, and business continuity accommodations, essential employees can continue working "business as usual" throughout a natural disaster or impacting event, ensuring company operations are unaffected.

Bonus Tip: Select a data center that is a Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity expert and offers a full plan for disaster resiliency, even down to helping your "critical/emergency" team secure hotel space during an impacting event.

12. What is your average turnaround time for implementing new Services?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Your data center should be able to quickly grow and accommodate your requests.
- The industry average turnaround times for new services can range anywhere from 14-120 days.
- Your data center's prolonged lead, prep, and buildout timeframes will hold your company back from implementing new services.
- Don't let your data center hold you back.

Bonus Tip: Your data center should be flexible, agile, nimble, and responsive.

13. How long have you been under your current ownership?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- You deserve a dedicated ownership and leadership group that is committed to long-lasting customer relationships and success.
- Because your data center is the lifeblood of your company, it should go the extra mile for you, maintaining a customer-centric approach and not be focused shareholder value.
- Most data centers change ownership frequently. With each change in leadership, you may be faced with changes to your SLA/Agreement. What happens if guarantees made to you by current ownership are not guaranteed under future ownership?

Bonus Tip: Constant leadership changes result in a loss of talented and experienced operations team members and a fractured culture, which negatively impacts customer satisfaction.

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> ## We'll leave you with a few practical tips on how to use this guide, and how to shop for your next data center partner

- **Identify what's most important for your company**: After reading through this guide, you have a good understanding of what data centers can (or should) offer. Create a list of what's most important for your company, what the deal breakers are, and what the perfect data center solution looks like for your organization.

- **Evaluate multiple data centers**: Don't be afraid to ask them the hard-hitting questions in this guide. Like we said in the beginning, there's too much at stake for your company to experience downtime. You deserve all the information necessary to make the right decision for your company.

- **Ask for references**: Don't be afraid to ask the provided references the hard-hitting questions when you connect with them. Ask what they like, don't like, and wish they had known about their current data center provider. Find out what the "real" customer relationship will look like, to ensure you select the best data center partner.

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