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General Information

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Moving The Data Center

Prepare Your Hardware, Your Data & Yourself

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When it's time to move a business to a new location, the data center must go along for the ride. No employee feels the stress as much as the data center administrators who must make sure that hardware, software, and data make it to their new location in one piece.

As if that weren't enough, today's 24/7 business environment is not very forgiving of business interruption. Customers have lots of choices, and if your data and systems are not open for business, somebody else's will be.

So, as if they didn't already have enough to worry about, admins must also pull off a complex move with minimal, if any, business interruption. If you're facing a data center move, don't despair. Even though the task is complex, it is not impossible.

■ Plan Ahead

Fred [Latala](#), director of data center relocation services for Forsythe Technology, a technology infrastructure solutions provider, says, "Lead time for planning is directly correlated to the size and complexity of the environment and the general state of [its] processes, procedures, and documentation." If your equipment and procedures are poorly documented and you have a fairly complex data center operation, begin formulating your plans well in advance of your move. In fact, this could be a golden opportunity for closing gaps in documentation and getting organized.

Even organizations that have fairly simple data center operations and/or very thorough documentation should begin planning well in advance of a move. Clay Whitney, president and CEO of DataMove, a corporate and data center migration specialist, recommends that companies begin planning three to six months in advance.

Dr. Vincent C. Jones, founder and CTO of Networking Unlimited, a networking design company, says companies should allow plenty of lead time, especially when setting up high-bandwidth WAN connections from telco providers. For example, Verizon requires a 90-day lead time for setting up WAN services.

Finally, Jones emphasizes, "There is no substitute for paranoid planning." Jones recommends that you assume the worst—and then assume you're being too optimistic.

■ What To Think About

If applications must be available during the move, then redundancy and alternate site considerations are important. "The better the applications are implemented in terms of redundancy and alternate siting," says Jones, "the more likely the move can be executed with minimal disruption." But, Jones cautions, the time to test redundancy and failover operations is well before the actual move. You don't want to find out about a flaw in your systems or processes *during* the move.

Obviously, utilities are a critical consideration. Forsythe's Latala recommends that businesses assess, design, and implement the appropriate physical operating environment for their data center assets. Power and networking, Latala points out, are the two issues that surface the most during a data center relocation. To quickly resolve any problems that might arise, it's important to have infrastructure suppliers on hand or readily available, says Latala.

HVAC is also a critical consideration: Without proper airflow and climate control, critical equipment can overheat, causing business interruptions due to failure of critical applications.

■ Transporting Your Equipment

Because equipment manufacturers' maintenance and warranty contracts require the use of manufacturer-authorized resources for performing the technical and transportation elements of a relocation, says Forsythe's Latala, companies must "exercise great caution when selecting a transportation carrier." In short, this is not a job for your run-of-the-mill moving company. Only consider carriers that have divisions or groups that specialize in the relocation of high-value electronics, Latala points out.

DataMove's Whitney says companies should consider the cost of hiring a migration company vs. the cost of "doing it themselves." Factors to consider include the cost of postponing normal activities during the move, the cost of lost revenue due to downtime, and any cost overruns that occur when execution falls behind schedule. The decision ultimately comes down to one key question, says Whitney: What is the cost of downtime?

■ Plan For The Worst

A healthy streak of paranoia is not a bad quality to have when planning your data center's move. A good contingency plan ensures that any unexpected problems are addressed quickly, efficiently, and with minimal business interruption.

Latala emphasizes that contingency plans vary based on the criticality to the business of the systems involved. For that reason, he adds, it is important to understand the interrelationships between the systems, both from an infrastructure and a business-flow perspective. The end result, Latala says, is a business impact assessment for each "move group."

If you're thinking insurance is part of this game, you're on the right track. One key factor to consider, says Latala, is that a manufacturer-authorized source for relocation services will usually bundle insurance coverage into the project price. Also, Latala adds, consider whether the insurance covers the replacement or market value of your equipment. This is very important in the fast-paced world of IT equipment, where today's hot hardware is tomorrow's bargain-bin surplus equipment. Finally, Latala says, consider the time it takes the insurance company to process and pay a claim, which can be as much as 120 days.

Another insurance consideration, says DataMove's Whitney, is whether your business insurance coverage includes business interruption coverage. Proper planning will likely result in little to no business interruption, but knowing you have the coverage will bring you peace of mind. But before you purchase full-value insurance from a carrier, Whitney cautions, verify whether your business insurance covers your equipment while it's in transit. This can save you some money, Whitney says, because carriers charge extra for this coverage. Also, Whitney adds, customers should only hire data center migration companies that have insurance.

Don't get complacent just because your relocation appears to be far off on the horizon. Start planning your move as soon as you learn about it. Although you can't prepare for every unwanted

surprise that could spring up during your move, allowing plenty of time to prepare will improve your odds. ■

by Sixto Ortiz Jr.

Relocation Timeline

PLAN (3-6 months before the move)

- **Assign responsibility.** Create a team and assign responsibilities for all aspects of the move. Make sure all areas of expertise are covered; you may have to look outside of IT for some areas.
- **Look over existing documentation; close any gaps.** Here is where you find out how good or bad your assets documentation is. The key is to thoroughly document what you have.
- **Design a layout for your new data center.** Get familiar with the dimensions of the new location and determine where everything will be located.
- **Develop a schedule.** A complex data center move is all about timing. Divide and conquer by breaking the task into manageable subtasks.
- **Set up services.** Contact service providers for all the utilities you'll need, such as WAN services. Do this well in advance of your move, but even then be prepared for possible delays.
- **Make business interruption plans.** Plan the timing for shutting down and bringing back essential applications and services. Leave plenty of time for testing.
- **Consult the experts?** Many consulting firms specialize in data center moves, so don't hesitate to call in the cavalry if pulling this off on your own will be too tall a task.

DO (During the move)

The move will quickly reveal whether your months of planning bear fruit. Here are some tips:

- Only personnel involved in the move should be present at this time.
- Have contact numbers for all your vendors handy.
- If you are moving into a newly constructed building, try to have representatives from the construction firm present.
- A data center move means a lot of work getting done in a short amount of time. Make sure you have resources on "standby" in case you require more help.
- Have plenty of help desk staff available to help users get their PCs and network configurations set up. If your entire business is moving, you will have lots of users asking for help.

CHECK (During the move)

Test your critical applications and hardware once everything is in place. Is your hardware operating properly? Are your critical applications running without a hitch, or are there configuration problems to be resolved? Is your networking equipment operating properly?

ACT (During and after the move)

Act to correct any problems revealed by your testing. Document any problems thoroughly and file the report in a safe place. After all, you never know when you might be moving

again!

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