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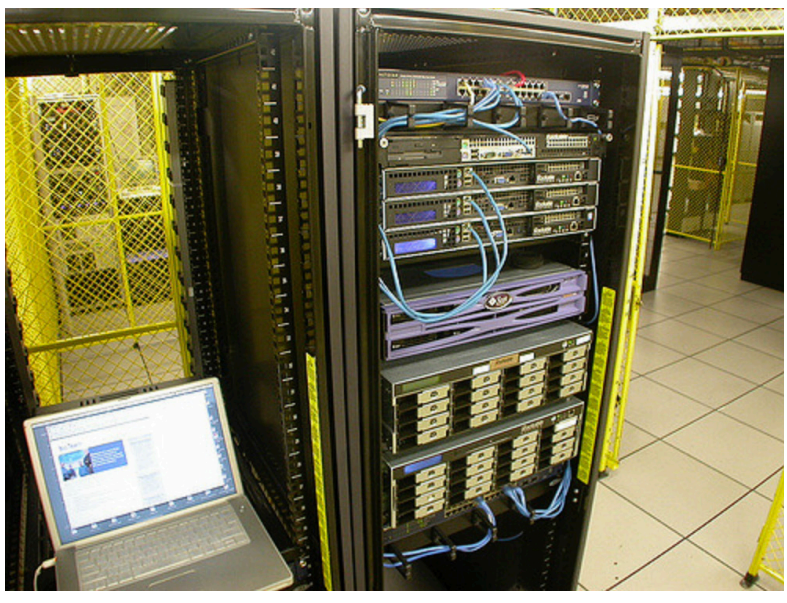
DATA CENTER COLOCATION ◇ DATA CENTER MANAGEMENT

COLOCATION VS. CLOUD: IT'S NOT EITHER-OR FOR MISSION-CRITICAL DATA

written by ***Mark Gerard*** | May 14, 2018



To say that Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has lost a few "friends" would be a glaring understatement. His reputation and his company's have taken a huge hit in the wake of revelations that the social-media giant's lax data-security policies allowed Cambridge Analytica to access the data of about 50 million people without their knowledge or consent. Apple CEO Tim Cook says things must change. "I think that this certain situation is so dire, and has become so large that probably some well-crafted regulation is necessary." According to Cook, "The ability of anyone to know what you've been browsing about for years, who your contacts are, things you like and dislike, and every intimate detail of your life—from my own point of view, it shouldn't exist."

The firestorm surrounding Facebook should serve as a wake-up call to companies that are storing all their valuable data in one place. Doing so only invites catastrophe. Redundancy and resilience are vital for prudent data storage, both to manage the risks of natural and manmade disasters and to ensure business continuity. This stark reality raises a number of questions for companies and government agencies: Where do you put all your "mission-critical" data? How much redundancy do you need? Should you depend on the cloud or colocation to keep your data safe? Although debate frequently surrounds those questions, it's not an either-or dilemma.

Many consider the cloud and colocation to be competitors, but it's not the case. Cloud-based companies need data centers to outsource their massive data-storage needs. Data centers are uniquely qualified and certified to support large data and application demands to meet customer security requirements. Using a colocation center that's designed to handle future cloud applications, companies and government agencies can scale seamlessly thanks to around-the-clock support of an expert technical team that can tackle the cooling, power and maintenance requirements of high-density equipment. A cloud-neutral data center provides many benefits: reliability, redundancy, flexibility and low cost of ownership.

Estimates indicate organizations only run 10–20% of their workloads in the cloud. According to a RightScale survey, 77% of respondents said cloud security is a challenge. A cloud-neutral data center should maximize customer choices, offering best-in-class capabilities for those seeking colocation, while seamlessly accommodating cloud services such as Amazon's AWS or Microsoft's Azure. This approach provides a great Plan B for savvy data managers who want to keep a copy of their files in a data center, since Murphy's Law dictates that cloud services will fail occasionally.

Many companies employ cloud-based applications in hopes of reaping financial benefits. But those savings don't always materialize. Dropbox is a case and point. For nearly a decade, it stored files for 500 million computer users atop the Amazon cloud. Two and a half years ago, it changed course and began moving most users' data off AWS. This move has proven to be the right one. Dropbox has saved nearly $75 million in infrastructure costs, and it has drastically increased cash flow and gross margins by building out its own on-premise storage. Although the company now stores more than 90% of customer data on its vast computer network, it hasn't completely dropped AWS. It will continue to work with Amazon outside the U.S.

If a company values flexibility as well as cutting-edge compliance and security, a cloud-neutral facility offers the best of both the colocation and cloud worlds. Whether you're a government agency facing shrinking budgets or a company laser-focused on profitability, you need ways to make data management as cost effective as possible. If your organization is challenged to provide adequate resources to maintain an on-site data center, or you're in an older off-site data center that inefficiently uses space and power, a leading-edge cloud-neutral colocation facility should help you cut costs.

Colocation and cloud-based solutions can work hand in hand to give you the best set of data-management options. But you must choose a colocation facility that's cloud neutral for this approach to work.

What does cloud neutral mean? It's having a data center with the following:

- The flexibility to bring in any cloud provider that meets a customer's needs
- Convenient proximity to critical vendors
- Access to public-cloud providers plus dedicated infrastructure services for both
- Computing and storage
- FedRamp-enabled capability
- The physical space and capacity to accommodate scaling

A data-management strategy is about more than costs, of course. Security is a necessity—and in these days of heightened cyber- and physical security threats, it's an area you can't afford to overlook. A large part of security involves physical location and appropriate barriers to unauthorized access. For example, a remote, high-resilience location means customers needn't worry about threats associated with large cities and variable climate.

Facebook is learning a painful lesson about what happens when you take a reactive and laissez-faire approach to problems such as the misuse of personal data. Zuckerberg, who has been largely silent about the situation, now says he accepts the possibility of increased privacy regulations. It may be too little, too late. The social-media giant is under siege from users, regulators and legislators around the world. Facebook's troubles should be a lesson for the data center industry. Security is all important.

Although the colocation-versus-cloud debate will remain, the relationship between the two is one of mutual benefit when it comes to protecting critically important data.

About the Author

Mark Gerard is president of DP Facilities, Inc., a data center colocation provider and services firm that has built and owned data centers for Fortune 500 companies in the U.S. and abroad.