



The Beginner's Guide to Colocation

When you're running a business, it's highly likely that understanding the ins and outs of server storage and knowing exactly what plugs in where isn't your main priority. As far as you're aware, redundancy isn't something you want to be talking about openly in the office. Sure, you know that your IT infrastructure is mission critical in keeping you operational, and naturally you want it to be performing at its optimal levels, but that doesn't mean you go to bed dreaming about the latest server equipment.

Of course, some people do. For these people, it's great to be in charge of the high tech systems that are powering their companies, and the thought of taking their hardware and data outside of their own premises where they can't tuck it in at night is strictly unthinkable.

But how do you know where you fall on this scale? Colocation is for companies of all sizes... and for those who are highly tech savvy, and for those who can barely work their smart phones. Luckily, Itility is on-hand to guide you through the maze of data centre wizardry and show you just how a colocation facility can work for you, whether you're more Steve Jobs, or Steve the IT guy.

Let's take a look at some of the most common questions that might occur to you while considering colocation.

Q1. What **is** colocation?

We're glad you asked. A data centre is an IT facility which allows you to rent space for your servers or computer hardware, where everything will be monitored, maintained and protected on your behalf. Because a data centre looks after the equipment of a range of businesses under the same roof, this process is called colocation.

Your servers are likely to be mounted in metal racks, or cabinets, with space usually offered in single shelves, quarter racks, half racks, full racks and full data suites. You'll also see measurements such as 42U, which reflects the vertical unit of space. U is a Rack Unit, with each U being 4.45cm.

All racks will be housed within climate controlled suites, with fire suppression measures and security surveillance in place. The statistics and data collected from these areas will be closely monitored and measured by technicians working from a Network Operations Centre within the building, and there is likely to be a security or front desk team controlling or escorting visitor access.

You can also use colocation as a disaster recovery option. More on that later.



Can't I do all that myself?

Yes, you can. Data centres are an alternative to an in-house server or comms room, which is where you store and service your IT infrastructure within your own business premises or corporate headquarters. Looking after your own equipment can be hugely costly, as you'll need physical space, dedicated staff, and of course, all of the hardware, cooling and power systems that go along with maintaining the technical hub of your company. You'll also be responsible for a wide range of practical variables and potential problems, and will find yourself being called into the office at 3am when the server goes down and your business is taken offline unexpectedly.

Data centres remove this burden. They offer high performance connectivity, industry leading climate control, fire-suppression, unrivalled resilient power and whatever-happens, backup protection. A colocation facility will be guarded by high tech security measures, and will be staffed by teams of professional engineers who will perform constant checks on the environment, monitor the site and undertake remote hands assistance if there are any problems, or you want any adjustments made.

Whilst an in-house solution is right for some organisations, a data centre often allows you to benefit from a better service for less money. For example, a data centre will have interconnects with leading network providers and telecommunication carriers, and will also be able to put large scale measures in place for Green Data and operating to more environmentally friendly levels.

Because data centres service a lot of businesses at once, you can take advantage of the latest technology in multi-million pound facilities, even if you're a small business with only half a rack to fill.



How does disaster recovery work?

Disaster recovery is the process of planning for unforeseen events, understanding how they may impact your business, and being prepared enough to minimise disruption in order to get back up and running again as soon as possible. You'll need to consider natural disasters, such as being flooded out of your office, and made-made threats, like terrorist attacks. You may also experience problems as the result of human error, or equipment failure. With disaster recovery, you're essentially putting together contingency plans should the worst happen, and a strong disaster recovery policy is often a regulatory requirement for many industries.

Data centres fit in to your disaster recovery strategy in a variety of ways. Firstly, the act of using colocation for your IT hardware immediately reduces any physical threats that may occur within your own location. Data centres are on a constant state of alert for intruders and emergencies, and can resolve issues promptly without any interruption in service, with multiple back-up systems for any eventuality. The sites themselves are often built to withstand major incidents.

You can also use data centres for housing duplicates of your systems. You may choose to use an in-house server room as your main solution, and store a second set within a data centre, or you may opt to have a primary data centre and a secondary data centre in a different location. These methods double your security; if your office becomes unavailable, your data is still protected by a data centre, and if a London data centre falls prey to an emergency, your alternative site outside of the capital is likely to be unaffected.



Will colocation make my business safer?

In an increasingly digital world, one of the biggest concerns for modern businesses is that of cyber security. How do you know when a DDoS attack could wipe out your online presence? Is it possible for somebody to hack into your most sensitive files?

Data centres are prepared for these outcomes. They are set up for any eventuality, and present a highly secure option for data protection, being ISO certified, and PCI compliant. You'll see impressive uptime records, and you'll never have to worry about your online presence suddenly crashing, as well as being guarded against external threats and cyber-attacks.



Aren't data centres just for big companies?

Actually, no. Large companies certainly represent a large share of data centre custom globally, but small and medium size enterprises are just as welcome at the vast majority of facilities. In fact, even if you're a lone entrepreneur with a single server without an office space to call your own, you can often just rent a single shelf, and you'll be ready to take over an entire suite in no time.

You don't need an extensive team behind you, as the benefits of colocation extend to clients with all ranges of IT needs. And should your business grow, the process of upscaling to fit your expansion is easy, as you can simply add more rack space and power as and when you need it.



Is colocation cost-effective?

Outsourcing is anything but an unnecessary expense for your business; in fact, due to their economics of scale, data centres can provide you with the kind of savings that you just won't be able to achieve individually.

As your IT infrastructure becomes more and more critical to your success, a data centre will provide you with the security and peace of mind that you need and will generate substantial cost-reductions in comparison to storing your servers in-house.

Summary

Now that you're more informed about the processes involved in collocation, and the very real benefits that a data centre could have for your business, here's a quick check list of things to think about before embarking on your data centre journey:

- ✓ How often will you require access, and how does the data centre facilitate that?
- ✓ How much bandwidth do you need?
- ✓ Does an in house solution allow small to medium sized business to benefit from the economies of scale historically reserved for large enterprise customers?
- ✓ Does your server ensure your critical resources are in a safe, secure and reliable environment?
- ✓ Which will be the best option for you to minimise disruption to your business and reduce operating costs?
- ✓ Does your server storage offer instant flexibility and expansion capability?

As a final thought - an external or outsourced Data Centre instantly gives your business peace of mind without the capital expenditure or staffing requirements of an in-house solution.



Colocation with Itility

Itility offers high performance colocation within our Manchester data centre, supported by a 24/7 team of engineers ready to offer remote hands assistance and technical support at any time of the day or night. We also offer dedicated virtual and managed servers, virtual desktops, cloud services and software. To find out more about colocation, why not [visit our website](#) or [contact the team](#) today and see how Itility can provide a range of flexible IT solutions for you.

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