



WHITE PAPER: Not all Data Centres are Created Equal

Seven Things to Look for in a Colocation Provider

Bryan Doerr
Chief Technology Officer, Savvis

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Seven Things to Look for in a Colocation Provider:

1. Power and capacity planning
2. Physical Security
3. Network connectivity and proximity
4. On-site 24/7 support, remote hands services and technical support
5. Flexibility: Flexible commercial terms and prices to suit your requirements
6. Geographic footprint
7. Best-in-class technology and expertise

The use of colocation and services is increasing dramatically, according to the research firm IDC, 10 percent of companies currently use outsourced data centres compared with less than 1 percent a couple of years ago. Colocation is increasingly becoming the solution of choice for organisations seeking an efficient, secure and cost-effective way to manage their IT infrastructure. It encompasses the housing and running of your IT infrastructure off-site, instead of building and managing an in-house data centre. The benefits are tangible. But what are the differences between colocation providers and what should you look for when selecting one?

Data centre vs. colocation service: Know what you're buying

It often helps to understand the terminology as you are embarking on a search for a colocation partner.

In the data centre world, providers define a data centre as a physical building with a power infrastructure, cooling resources and security measures.

Colocation is a service. That service is based on the standards, policies, procedures, people and the data centre infrastructure. The quality of each of these components drives the overall end-user experience. The type of provider also drives the end-user experience because you get what you pay for.

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- IDC

The components with colocation are as follows:

1. Space – Measured on a per square-foot or metre basis. Client space is typically delivered in either racks or cages.
2. Power – The most critical component of a data centre or colocation offering. It goes beyond input power or critical load. Without a reliable power source, there is no colocation offering. It is a robust combination of utility, generators, UPS and distribution at the circuit level to client equipment.
3. Cooling – There has been a lot of development in cooling technologies to help drive efficiencies and deliver greater data centre densities. Increased cooling capabilities result in higher densities. Greater efficiencies result in potential savings delivered to the end-users.

Together, these elements make colocation a very sellable service.

“Savvis takes a different view of the colocation experience, providing it as a service,” explains Drew Leonard, vice president, colocation product management at Savvis. “Core competencies like security, facility management and carrier access should be a given. These are required items that can make or break the colocation experience. Clients benefit from these offerings and can focus their efforts and resources on managing and growing their business, not managing a data centre.

“The client’s core business is at the pinnacle of their priority list,” continues Leonard, “All aspects of the colocation experience must adequately support that. A colocation provider should deliver the stable foundation upon which the client can execute on their IT strategy or e-commerce platform.”

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*Drew Leonard, Vice President,
Colocation Product Management at Savvis*

Know the three types of colocation providers

There are three primary types of colocation providers, each offering a slightly different take on service offerings:

1. Wholesale colocation providers

These providers want only to build data centres to their or your design, and then lease you the whole site, floor or large powered suite. They deliver a building with the cooling and power distribution to the floor, but it is the client's responsibility to then distribute and manage delivery to the racks and manage the entire space. It is sold at commodity prices because you as the client do everything. The client, in this case, bears a significant amount of the time and cost to operating the data centre.

2. Carrier-owned providers

Many of these providers view colocation as a loss-leader to sell their core services, typically network access. These providers do offer a greater array of services that directly benefit by the client. However, limited carrier diversity can hamper both choice and network growth.

3. Retailers/managed service providers

These providers, Savvis included, have refined the commodity. These providers will distribute and manage the power and cooling to the racks, provide the racks and cages, supply cabling, remote hands and support services. The differentiator becomes the varying levels of competency, ability and delivery of the end-user experience.

Because this is a refined product, it obviously commands higher prices than the wholesale proposition. It is important for providers to differentiate themselves and show added value over and above the other providers.

"With a commodity, price is almost everything," explains Savvis' Drew Leonard.

"With colocation, greater importance is being placed on value-adds such as capacity, connectivity, location and the human factor, all well before pricing."

Tim Anker of Colocation Exchange takes it a step further: "Pricing ranks fifth on (a client's) list of key decision factors. If you are not in the colocation or data centre management business, you should not want to concern yourself with building or managing the top four items on the list. You should expect this from your provider. In the end, your level of expectation and need for levels of service should dictate your decision on which type of provider you choose. Not the price."

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Know the seven things to look for in a colocation provider

Savvis' Drew Leonard advises clients to look for seven key aspects when considering a colocation provider. These aspects are:

1. Power and capacity planning

It is imperative that your provider is able to demonstrate a scalable and reliable power supply in order to keep pace with your requirements. A supplier who focuses on your future needs will be proactively capacity planning so that they are prepared to underpin your business as it grows. Make certain that the cost of data centre design, capacity, power, security and space management are included in your monthly fee and that you are not faced with a large project and bill when the time comes to look into the future.

2. Security and technical advancement

You should expect that state-of-the-art security will be applied to all aspects of the data centre. Physical security equipment should include video surveillance, mantraps and biometric hand readers, and should extend beyond video surveillance of the halls and access ways to the rack or cage level. Look for world-class facilities in terms of power management, heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), fire suppression, Tier 1 Internet connectivity and access to intelligent IP and IP MPLS networks. If you are from the finance or public sector then you should check that the security meets the relevant public sector and financial services standards. It's also imperative to expect that any data centre you use is SAS70, ISO27001 compliant and can assist you with achieving PCI compliance.

3. Network connectivity and proximity

It is essential to expect your colocation provider to offer built-in carrier access. Many data centres are owned and managed by the carrier and, if this is the case, keep in mind that your choice and potential network growth may be limited. Other colocation providers are carrier agnostic, which means they will offer you connectivity to multiple carriers, using local loops instead of cross-connects from within the suite.

Proximity to other services required by your business is another issue to consider. A data centre that manages key players in your supply chain or within your ecosystem, for example, will minimise any latency between applications.

4. On-site 24/7 support, remote hands services and technical support

Your data centre should be manned 24/7 by operations and facilities staffing personnel. Your company staff or contractors should be able to gain secured access to your hardware at any time. Look for a colocation provider who supplies remote hands services and technical support so that, regardless of the issue, you can be sure of immediate attention and early resolution if required. In addition, if your business is global, follow-the-sun support will be a must. If your data centre provider does not offer this level of service, it is worth considering the cost of travel time and associated expenses for your own staff to run what may be routine maintenance or upgrades.

5. **Flexible commercial terms**

Some data centre providers will offer terms ranging from five to 15 years, which is ideal for a large enterprise or another colocation provider. For the average colocation user, a long-term arrangement will not deliver the appropriate level of flexibility. Look for a provider who offers one- to three-year contract terms, who will be flexible on early termination, and who will work with you to scale down infrastructure in one location and up in another if that's what your business requires.

Be mindful that some colocation providers will charge for extras such as security and 24/7 technical support. Look for a full-service provider who view these as critical components of their colocation service and will not burden you with the cost of these critical functions.

6. **Geographic footprint**

A colocation provider with a wide geographic data centre footprint can facilitate clients with requirements not just across the U.K., but also around the world. A global footprint should include consistent global service with follow-the-sun support.

Businesses with global operations should also consider a provider with the capability of helping them manage their infrastructure on an international scale. With a flexible provisioning service, clients can move efficiently from market to market by scaling infrastructure needs that are aligned with the business.

7. **Best-in-class technology and expertise**

Best-in-class technology is a must when looking for a colocation provider. But not all providers offer the expertise and service that give you access to the latest technological innovations, guarantee reliability and proven performance. It is important to note that not all of them bundle that expertise within the fee. Relying on the engineering skills, knowledge and thought leadership of your provider means that you carry less of the overhead for training and management, particularly in specialist skills that are not core to the operation of your IT organisation.

Finally, look for a supplier who shares in your goal to grow your business. After all, your business expansion means their growth, too.

Know Savvis

It's important to remember that not all data centres are created equal. And not all colocation providers are created equal.

The one key takeaway: Colocation is a service. That service is based on the standards, policies, procedures, people and data centre infrastructure. The quality of each of these components drives the overall end-user experience . . . your experience.

It is important to remember that Savvis is, after all, a managed service provider. All of our products, including colocation, feature a level of management that adds to their efficiency and value to the client. A client in our data centre will be supported at a level that ensures that their business grows. Our approach to every client is solution-based in that we give a design that may or may not include a blend of managed services — storage and backup, for example — that is aligned with the client's business needs and drivers. Savvis provides data centre operations as a service, which underpins our global managed service offering and makes us a technology leader.

We operate 50 data centres worldwide, with over two million square feet of raised floor space and 1,600 colocation clients. We have available space for you today in our facilities at Reading, Slough and London.

Need help moving in?

Savvis can provide project management and physical migration services to help with your installation. We have a proven track record of supporting clients with migration, in particular delivering complex colocation solutions within tight timelines.

Savvis is Colocation.



To find out more about Savvis visit
www.savvis.co.uk or call **+44 (0)118 322 6000.**

Global Headquarters

1 Savvis Parkway
St. Louis, MO 63017

Tel 1.800.SAVVIS.1
(1.800.728.8471)
www.savvis.com

Canada

6800 Millcreek Drive
Mississauga, ON
L5N 4J9

Tel 1.877.387.3764
www.savvis.ca

EMEA

Eskdale Road
Winnersh Triangle
Wokingham
Berkshire RG41 5TS
United Kingdom

Tel +44 (0)118 322 6000
www.savvis.co.uk

Asia Pacific

50 Raffles Place
Singapore Land Tower
#13-01
Singapore 048623

Tel +65 6768 8000
www.savvis.sg

Japan

7th Floor
Kyodo Building
(Jinbocho 3cho-me)
3-29 Kanda Jinbocho
Chiyoda-ku
Tokyo 101-0051
Japan

Tel +81.3.5214.0151
www.savvis.jp