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Q&A: Data-storage moves require pinpoint precision

Moving a data-storage center is a challenging project for any company. Information is one of the most precious commodities in business today, and moving those systems where vital information is stored is a key concern in any relocation project.

Bob Keeley, president of Diversified Project Management Inc., a Newton-based company specializing in corporate relocation and construction administration, talks about some of the challenges associated with data-center relocation projects.



Keeley

Q: What makes data-center relocation different from other types of high-tech relocation projects?

A: Complexity and importance. Information is the heart of a business. A data center is often running 24 hours a day and may support multiple locations in several time zones. The minimization or elimination of downtime for relocation is critical. If downtime is unavoidable, a plan must be implemented to ensure the least impact on data access.

Other options include utilizing a company's "hot site," an off-site location that offers redundant data operation and will remain up and running during the relocation. Some companies also have "cold-sites" in place that provide backup equipment that can be implemented to take on the workload of the

downed data center.

Q: How can a company determine if relocation is necessary or if expansion is an option?

A: Relocation is generally done in order to address or alleviate certain problems a company has with its current space. In some cases, those problems can be addressed and overcome without the necessity of a wholesale move. Before thinking about relocation, consider your alternatives. Expansion within your space or relocation of some of the less critical data-center operations to ancillary space should be considered. When considering data-center space allocation needs, remember that as

technology continues to evolve, equipment will become smaller and heat loads should reduce. However, the need for access to more data and storage will grow.

Q: What is the first step in relocating data-storage equipment?

A: The first step is to take inventory of all existing equipment and the vendors that service or own it. Identify vendor requirements for the relocation of the equipment. It is important to document who the users are and determine a plan for downtime or duplicate/redundant data storage and access or downtime. Consider what the new facilities offer to house the data center. Once you've identified what's moving and

who the players are, a schedule can be prepared. This schedule must include timing for data backups.

Q: What are some of the specific needs for data-storage centers?

A: Data-storage equipment needs constant power supply as well as generator systems to ensure backup power. The cooling capacity of the center and regulated humidity is imperative to the center's operation. Raised and anti-static flooring, gaseous fire suppression systems, adequate racking systems are some of the specifics that need to be addressed.

Location of the center should be planned as interior space away from windows and free from plumbing on the floors above and on a floor high enough to offset flooding concerns. Security access to the center will demand a system appropriate for the space.

Q: What special steps have to be taken during the physical move of data-storage equipment?

A: The process of relocation focuses on the process of disconnecting, packaging, transporting, unloading and reinstalling. Sequencing and pre-planning is accomplished with a detailed timeline schedule drilled down to the hour with clear assignment of responsibility.

One of the best ways of ensuring that all the proper precautions are taken at every step is to re-enlist the product vendor who originally supplied the equipment. In some instances, it's a necessary move in order to be in compliance with warranty requirements. In the event that the equipment isn't owned by the company that is relocating, contracts often require the company to re-enlist the same sources that originally installed the equipment.

For the actual relocation process, anti-static packing material must be employed to protect the equipment. Air ride moving vans provide for smoother transportation of the equipment.