

Supporting growth

How outsourcing IT can help you manage growth quickly and safely **Interviewed by Matt McClellan**

As manager of IT Engineering at Enova Financial, Jeff Bagnall found that his company's need for power, space and cooling had far outstripped the capabilities of the facility.

"We were an explosive growth company, with a startup environment attitude," Bagnall says. "Get it out, get it out fast, and if there are growth problems, we'll figure it out later."

When the time came to address the growth issues, Bagnall began looking at colocation centers, a type of data center where multiple customers keep their mission-critical equipment and data.

Smart Business spoke with Bagnall about why he decided IT outsourcing (ITO) was the right move and what he looked for in an ITO provider.

What challenges was your business facing?

There was not always proper planning. Our growth was massive, as far as how many servers were required. Different applications required double the amount of nodes needed to run them over a year's span because the growth was so large. We didn't have any room in our office in downtown Chicago for all the equipment.

And even if we had room, we probably wouldn't have planned it properly due to our explosive growth.

Also, we don't own the buildings our corporate offices are in; we just lease them. So it wouldn't make sense to bury \$1 million or so into a place we don't even own when, in four or five years, we might just abandon the building. About four years ago, we occupied one floor. Now we occupy six floors, and we're looking to acquire a seventh.

We're probably in the building for the long haul, but to make that kind of investment in a building you don't own doesn't make sense.

What IT requirements were necessary to improve the situation?

When a company is growing quickly, it needs more power right away. Having access to data 24 hours a day, seven days a week was also very important, so if there is a problem in the middle of the night, you have access to the colocation



Jeff Bagnall
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center.

It is also important to have a data center provider that is SAS 70 compliant. For example, some facilities have programs that give the auditors the documentation they require. With some other colocation providers, a company would have to produce its own documentation.

A sane shipping area and process is also something to consider, as is access that allows you to get in and out of the facility quickly.

What factors did you consider when choosing a provider?

There were several factors that were important for us to consider:

- I have had bad experiences with power issues at some lower-tiered data centers, so I consider different tiers in which the data centers are rated. So if the data center is housing processes or applications that make us money, we wanted a higher-tiered data center with multiple power sources, multiple grid, generators, etc. I look at what we plan to do, then find a colocation provider to fit it.

- Another factor I considered was how much of my staff lives around the

area because we have high retention rates.

- Responding in a timely manner is also important. It won't make or break my decision, but I'm more willing to leave if I get bad customer service.

- In the past, we needed to do a lot of data shuffling. We've had to move out of data centers before because they ran out of room, so now I look for colocation providers that have abundant space available.

What advantages have you seen as a result?

In the past, we were constantly losing things because of power/cooling issues. We don't have that issue anymore. Previously, air conditioners would die and overheated servers would lock up. Now, there's no more running out to buy large fans.

Another big advantage is we have room to grow. I'm not going to have to pack everything up and switch data centers again. That is a very expensive process, which can take months to do, and it's a waste of time.

If I need another cage full of racks, I can get that rather quickly from my data center instead of having to build it myself or finding another data center provider.

Without the cooling/power issues, we have increased uptime. Servers aren't popping circuits because of the air conditioning giving out in the little server closet.

Now we can focus on positive improvements in our environment without having to worry about the infrastructure. We don't have to calculate power circuits and cooling anymore. You had to figure out, once you put this in, can the air conditioner keep up with it? Now, it's not my problem anymore. I just say, 'Hey, I need two more power circuits in rack nine,' and it happens.

You don't have to deal with electricians' permits, labor groups or facility management. You just snap your fingers and it's done. <<

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