

Take a load off

What to look for in an IT off-load solution

IT resources are often pulled in several directions, with more time spent on the ongoing maintenance and monitoring of the core IT infrastructure in place than they would prefer. Projects that would position the company for more profitability or greater efficiency are not always achieved in a desired time frame.

Smart Business spoke to Carlos Oliveira, vice president of engineering and Irvine general manager at Latisys, to help define the business benefits of off-loading routine IT services to a provider of managed services, and what to look for in an IT off-load solution.

How does IT off-load differ from off-site and how does a firm know when it is ready to transition?

IT off-load solutions, which are designed to enhance the performance, reliability and security of an organization's core IT infrastructure, are delivered as fully managed services so an organization's internal resources can focus on strategic IT initiatives and critical server infrastructure.

IT off-load solutions allow organizations to better control their hardware, system and personnel costs by alleviating tactical day-to-day management operations and converting the capital dollars needed to procure these technologies into operational expenses for the services.

The IT off-load profile enables an organization to build upon the robust infrastructure provided in the off-site profile by leveraging IT staff from the data center provider for the maintenance and monitoring necessary to fully support the infrastructure.

The following are characteristics of organizations that fit within the IT off-load profile:

- Human resources constraints within the IT organization
- Internal or regulatory requirements to maintain full control of compute resources within the infrastructure
- Subject matter expertise gaps within the IT knowledge base
- Massive data growth that exceeds capital availability

What specific applications and services can an enterprise leverage with off-load?

Commonly leveraged managed services include:

- High-performance primary storage
- Enterprise data backup
- Firewall



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- Load balancing
- Site-to-site and client-to-site VPN
- Intrusion detection

Additionally, IT organizations can leverage a team of highly trained network and system engineers to validate and escalate issues within their IT infrastructure, improving the signal-to-noise ratio of monitoring activities and reducing fatigue and workload from key internal IT personnel.

How can an off-load solution free up a business's resources to focus on its core competencies?

A large amount of time is spent on the ongoing maintenance and continual improvement of IT systems. From configuration changes, firmware upgrades, change-control meetings, managing multiple vendors and training on specific technologies, there is often little time for anything else. In organizations that have limited staffing resources, these routine — but very necessary — activities divert critical thought cycles away from solving more strategic IT challenges.

Why can it be beneficial to off-load data protection, system security, monitoring and maintenance of your IT infrastructure?

The infrastructure needed to support

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these capabilities is typically very expensive. Aside from the associated capital expenses, a huge amount of due diligence is typically done to ensure the particular technologies you invest in perform as expected within the specific environment they are to be deployed in. Off-loading these types of services not only relieves internal resources of the management tasks, the associated Service Level Agreements (SLAs) mitigate risk for the business.

On top of the risk mitigation benefits, off-loading security and monitoring tasks typically increases the visibility for most organizations, as they receive 24-7 support from a staffed network operations center.

Are there different types of companies that provide managed services?

Indeed. As with all industries, there are providers that have different variations within their service portfolios, different levels of investment within their infrastructure, different demographics and different specializations that their staff focuses on. These variables ultimately mean that organizations that are considering an IT off-load strategy need to be diligent when identifying the right partner. They need to make sure that partner aligns with their own business needs and is positioned to grow with their business over the term of the relationship. We recommend that CIO's consider the following:

- Ensure the partner you choose is focused on the services they are offering you. Many firms are willing to stretch beyond their area of expertise in order to secure new business.
- Understand the associated SLAs, and make sure they support your business needs.
- Understand your infrastructure growth path, and make sure your partner can support it. Don't overlook potential future regulatory needs, or the regulatory needs of your own customers. Also keep in mind that while you may want to maintain full control over certain aspects of your infrastructure today, consider that you may not have that requirement tomorrow.
- IT is a 24-7 business, regardless of industry. Make sure your partner can support you 24-7. <<