

# 24 Questions You Need to Ask Before Selecting a Colocation Provider

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# Security

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Choosing the right colocation provider is a lot like dating. You're going to be spending a good amount of time with whomever you choose, investing resources, and trusting them with your most intimate information. Before you commit to one colocation provider, there are some things you must know to ensure the relationship is a success. What follows are 24 questions that will help to ensure your colocation provider is the perfect fit for your needs – now and into the future.

Data center security involves more than just a lock and key. There are various levels of security available and ultimately you need to determine what level you require for your sensitive equipment when you choose a facility for colocation.

*Here are some essential questions to be sure to ask a colocation provider before signing the contract:*

- 1. What are your standard safety procedures?** Make sure you know the safety procedures and understand how your equipment will be protected in the case of fire or other safety issue.

*US data center construction increased by more than 130% from 2014 to 2015 with facilities in primary markets reporting lower vacancy rates according to commercial real estate firm, CBRE*



## Security (continued)

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- 2. What certifications and audits does the facility meet?** SSAE 16, SOC 2, or SOC 3 auditing, PCI-DSS compliance, FISMA – all of these serve to assure that industry and government regulations are adhered to for facility, infrastructure and data security. In order to maintain these standards, a facility must keep the certified level of security now and into the future.
- 3. Does the facility have a 24-hour manned presence?** Not all facilities have a person on-site around the clock. Many rely on video surveillance to ensure security in off hours. A 24-hour manned presence will ensure that you will have someone on-site should you need them at 2 AM and that response to any issue is rapid.
- 4. Can I get unescorted access?** Most often if you require a locking cabinet, you will be able to access your equipment unescorted. For security regulations (and this is a good thing), shared cabinets should require escorted access so that there is no chance of unauthorized individuals accessing your equipment.



# Infrastructure and Scalability

What follows are questions that will get you valuable information about the colocation environment you're about to move into. Key issues you must address include the equipment included or available for you as well as cross-connect, bandwidth and power concerns.

5. **Who are your bandwidth providers? How many do you have?** The more bandwidth providers that are available at a facility, the more options you have for service and the more failover possibilities there are should outages become an issue.
6. **If I exceed power expectations during the term of the contract, can I increase my power?** As your company's power needs grow, you'll need to increase the resources available to your cabinets. Verify that there are no limits within the contract (such as terms restarting if resources are adjusted) or the construction of power in the datacenter facility that would restrict you from upgrading or require you to move your servers completely should you need more amperage.

*In order to get an Energy Star label, a datacenter must rank in the top 25% of its peers in the EPA's rating system. That rating system is also based on PUE.*



## Infrastructure and Scalability (continued)

7. **Are my power configurations flexible? Can I get dual circuits in one cabinet?** Flexibility is not guaranteed with every data center. You need to ensure that you can get the number of circuits and configuration you need.
8. **What happens if I require more space/power/bandwidth?** Resource demands change. Even if your data center allows you to increase your power or bandwidth requirements mid-contract without restarting the terms, will they require you to move all of your equipment? This could significantly impact uptime and cost to you.
9. **Is bandwidth metered or unmetered?** Focus on speed, not metered bandwidth, and where you can avoid overages. Also, be sure you know if you will be alerted if you are reaching your limits.
10. **What green initiatives are there in the facility?** Green isn't only good for the environment, it's good for your budget, too. Energy Star, LEED certified buildings use less power to run their systems, which can reduce costs for you. A metric created by the Green Grid (<http://www.thegreengrid.org/>) called power usage effectiveness (PUE), can also give you an idea of how efficient your datacenter facility is.



## Infrastructure and Scalability (continued)

11. **Do you offer cross-connects of fiber, co-ax and copper?** If you will be requiring a cross connect to a network or telecommunications provider, you can typically get those connections in fiber, co-axial or copper. Prices vary and usually include a monthly charge and setup fee. You should be prepared to spend anywhere from \$150 - \$300 per month, per cross connect depending on the type of connectivity you require.
12. **Are PDUs included in my colocation price?** There are many advantages of PDUs. Managed PDUs can power cycle servers remotely, so you don't have to go to the data center – saving you time and money. Often in shared hosting PDU's are included, but if they aren't included PDUs can range up to \$500, which is quite expensive if you have limited infrastructure.
13. **Do you have multiple UPSs or generators in your facility?** Redundancy is key for any data center facility. Make sure there are multiple power sources, backup generators, and redundancy for all critical systems to ensure that even the most massive power outages don't greatly impact your mission critical information.
14. **What if my server doesn't have rails or isn't rack mountable?** Many providers offer shelves for units that are not rack mountable, but be sure to ask.



## Infrastructure and Scalability (continued)

15. **Can I ship my equipment directly to the data center?** Not everything can be carried in, so it's important to know if you can ship your larger equipment direct. If this is possible, ask to see the staging area for the equipment. Make sure it is secure and ask about any possible restrictions, such as holding time for deliveries as some datacenters will return packages to sender if not picked up within a day or two from delivery.
16. **Can I use my own firewalls or VPN appliances?** If you plan on supplying your own firewall or VPN appliance, be sure to check to see if there are any restrictions on the types of appliances you can bring into the data center.
17. **If I don't have a firewall or VPN, can you provide that for me?** Some colocation providers will lease firewalls or VPN appliances, or offer these as managed services. If you need that sort of assistance, it's better to know up front what you will be able to get from your provider and what it will cost so that you can budget accordingly.

# Terms and Support

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Even if you aren't planning on using managed services, it's essential to know what support policies and options are available. Outages happen and your staff might not always be able to make it physically to the data center. Knowing ahead of time what support options, SLA's, and uptime are guaranteed by your colocation provider will ensure there are no surprises when you're in need.

Here are some essential questions to ask:

18. **What sorts of SLAs do you offer? Do you have guaranteed uptime?** People can offer 100% uptime, but what will they do for you if they don't hit it? Be sure you understand not only what percentage of uptime is offered, but what is guaranteed and backed up by an iron clad service level agreement (SLA).
19. **Do you have remote hands and eyes? Support services?** In the event that you or someone from your staff is unable to physically make it to the datacenter in an emergency, be sure you know what options you have for on-site support, how much it costs, and what hours this support is available to you.
20. **What are your setup fees?** Setup fees can be several thousand dollars or completely waived with the right contract length. When comparing vendors for colocation, setup fees can make a big impact on your budget.

## Terms and Support (continued)

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- 21. **What is included in setup?** Not all data centers will include rack, setup, power, or bandwidth provisioning in the setup of a colocation environment. Watch out for hidden fees.
- 22. **Can we do remote power cycles?** Having the ability to do remote power cycles will save time and money that you pay either your staff or remote hands staff just to push a button.
- 23. **What are your contract terms? Are long-term contracts required?** Not all contracts are created equal. It might seem like a no-brainer, but review your contract terms to ensure you know what length of commitment is required, what the payment structure looks like, and ask to see if there are any breaks for longer contracts, and what penalties exist for broken contracts, you could save yourself thousands of dollars.
- 24. **Is there a comfortable work space for my technicians?** Even if you aren't the technician on-call to handle data center setup and servicing, it's good sense to ensure that they have a comfortable place to work and rest when servicing your colocation environment. That way, those 2 AM service windows aren't quite as painful and can be much more productive.

# Have More Questions? Go Ahead, Ask Us.

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While this is not an exhaustive list, being able to answer these core questions will help to ensure that you are selecting a colocation partner who has the resources, support, and terms you need to successfully serve your business.

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