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Technology & Intellectual Property A Conversation with Bryan Smith

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Regional vice president | Expedient Communications

Premium content from Business First

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***Bryan Smith** has spent his career in the telecom industry. He joined **Expedient** in early 2002 as a carrier consultant and was promoted to the regional vice president role in 2004. Smith, 34, runs Pittsburgh-based Expedient's Columbus data center that opened earlier this year on Arlington Center Boulevard. A native of Bellville, he has a bachelor's degree in business marketing from Baldwin Wallace College.*

Why is Columbus a good market for Expedient?

We were looking for an area that was within 250 miles of one of our existing seven data centers to help facilitate the technical ramp-up of our new staff. We also were looking for a market that was underserved by the data center/managed hosting services industry and had a large number of companies that fit our normal customer profile of midsize businesses with a regional or national headquarters. Columbus was an ideal fit – it is in the middle of some of our other facilities in Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Indianapolis. It also is one of the fastest growing cities in the Midwest. We also looked at the higher-than-normal availability of fiber based connectivity options and reasonably priced electric rates.

You invested millions of dollars renovating the Upper Arlington facility. What exactly did you do?

The data center we renovated was originally CompuServe, which later became an AOL data center. We replaced every physical surface that you can see and did significant upgrades to the electrical infrastructure. It also was important to get the facility connected to our other data centers via our fiber backbone to enable customers to transfer and replicate data between facilities.

How common is it for clients to ask about disaster recovery planning and infrastructure management? What trends are you seeing in this area?

The most frequent conversations we have surround the topics of infrastructure management and how to build a highly available environment to make sure data always is accessible even in the case of a significant disaster. One of the trends we have been seeing is companies trying to stretch the life of their hardware due to the down economy, and now many companies have put their data in jeopardy. They have either used up their spare capacity that originally was designed for redundancy or they are running on hardware that no longer is being supported by their vendor. Many are looking at options on how they can avoid capital outlays and still upgrade their computing environments. Companies have put off major upgrades to their own data rooms and are now at a point where they need a new generator or additional cooling. When situations like this happen, the conversation always goes to a build versus buy analysis, and many companies decide they no longer want to be in the facilities business – they would rather outsource. Another area we spend a lot of time on is disaster recovery planning. The amount of data companies are generating is staggering and many businesses are required to keep this data for years, which compounds the issue. The other trend is that as companies become more reliant on their computing environment, they have much less tolerance for down time. Three years ago, many companies would set recovery goals that were measured in days, and now they set targets to have critical systems available in minutes.

How much demand is there in a market like this for data protection?

When most people think of disaster recovery, the first things that come to mind are the major natural disasters, but the most common disasters are much more localized such as fires or a water leak from the roof or a broken pipe. Other things that are often classified as a disaster – anything that takes the business offline for an extended period of time. Some common examples would be a power outage from an ice storm or a car accident that takes out a telephone pole.

Is there an advantage to not being in the central city?

The biggest advantages to us not being located in a multitenant building in the central city are mainly physical and convenience. Our building is single-story with bunker-type construction, so we don't have to worry about who is above or below us and if their bathroom is going to leak into our data center or if construction that another tenant is doing will impact our electricity or network connectivity.

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Bryan Smith of data services company Expedient said a sour economy is causing clients to stretch the life of their hardware, with many of them putting their data at risk.

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