

Decommissioning your data center can become an unexpected and significant cost. The challenges increase in leased space. Be prepared to address this as a unique element in your migration plan!

Most often, the decommissioning of a data center is the result of a planned move to another physical or virtual (e.g., cloud) location. Understandably, the IT team is most focused, as they should be, on ensuring a successful transition. **And herein lies the problem: no one pays appropriate attention to what is being left behind.** Here are some aspects to consider.

Timing. What is the migration completion date? How much time is there between that date and the completion of the lease? Is there time contingency included for business related delays (change in priority company or staffing) or unexpected delays (migration vendor, weather, labor issues)? Finally, is there time included in the overall plan for the decommissioning of what is not being migrated? This last timeframe can vary greatly depending upon what has to actually be decommissioned.

Understand your lease. Leases typically include language that requires the space be returned to its original condition. If the data center was built in an office building, in most cases, the intended use was office space. Leases also typically include language that improvements to the space become property of the landlord which seem to conflict with the previous stipulation. Hence, it is vital to check the language in your lease and speak with the property manager to ascertain the building owner's position.

Develop an approach. Your lowest cost solution and least risk is most often to leave the data center as is. You are going to have to sell that. As data centers are very costly to build, it can be a positive feature/asset for the property manager to attract a tenant. However, with the popularity of colocation and cloud, this becomes more challenging. Quite possibly, there may be some data center assets that could be repurposed such that they can remain in place. This could include raised floor converted for flexible office space. Underfloor air HVAC benefits occupant health and productivity. Generators could be repurposed for new or existing tenants' use.

Act. Activities your team should undertake:

1. Consider on-boarding a consultant whose sole focus will be managing this issue. Your migration vendor may have that capability. But require a unique project manager address this aspect.
2. Define the asset and its value. Document the features of the data center (we leverage a one-page form called Data Center Facility-at-a-Glance) and the level of investment made.
3. Offer to help the property manager, who may not be familiar with data centers, market it, with your staff, or your consultant, providing tours and answering inquiries.
4. Do you know IT peers that would be interested in your data center? If so, reach out.
5. If it is determined that the data center must be decommissioned, immediately develop an initial high-level plan and timeline. Compare against the lease expiration date. You may need extra time to complete the work.
6. Get early approval and official sign-off of your high-level plan from the property manager.
7. Immediately after approval, start developing the detailed plan – SOWs, contractors, sequences, etc.



About the Author

Tad Davies is a 32-year veteran of the data center industry. He advises clients nationally on Business Centric strategy issues such as consolidation, provider selection, and build vs. buy and Facility Centric strategy issues such as risk assessment, conceptual planning, and owner's representation. Tad is President of Fodere which provides data center guidance.

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