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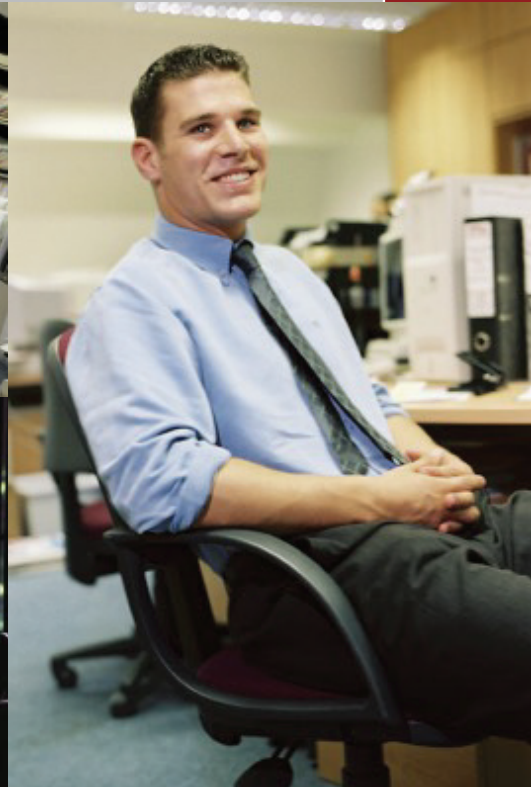
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Internet Server-Room Megasites Not Known for Tech Support

By Del Williams

IT personnel can get lost sorting through all the server rack, cooling and power products on the market, but customizing the equipment for the application with experts and engineers from the manufacturer can sort it out.

While server rooms have gotten more complex, the number of products on the market for server rooms has exploded. Websites list thousands of power strip and supply products, server racks, cooling options, cables and other products. For IT staff navigating vital power and cooling issues in server rooms, including cabinet size, ventilation, blade servers and more, the only answer may be direct connection with sales consultants and the manufacturers who can give technical advice.

This approach, known as consultative sales, links IT staff with sales consultants and manufacturer's design teams who can deliver exact technical data to establish precise needs and ensure rack mount, cooling and power products are correct for the application.

The consultation can often go to the extent of joint online conferencing between end user, sales consultant and manufacturer, and can allow plans and drawings to be reviewed, brainstorming, and the creation of exact or even custom solutions for the application.

The problem is, most Internet-based computer products vendors are not service oriented. In fact, good luck in reaching anyone whom has the ability to give any informed advice, as typically, these firms are staffed solely by order takers.

"Every end user has their own unique needs—some have security issues, others have cooling issues, some have varying power requirements," notes Mike Martin, of Martin International Enclosures, a Seabrook, N.H.-based maker of standard and custom rack mount enclosures



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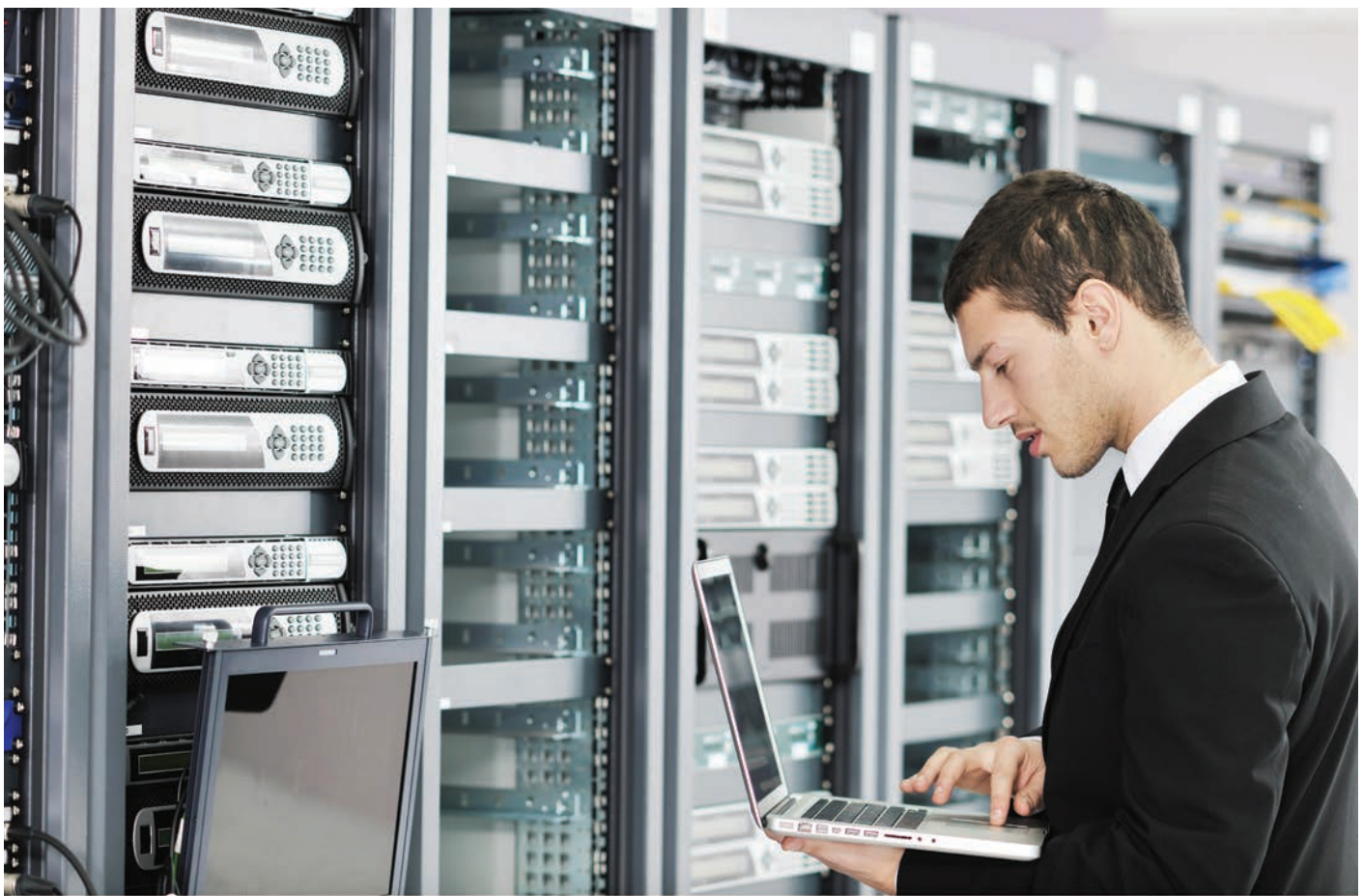
and accessories. "If you go on the Internet and try to buy something, you'll get what's in the box—it may fit your needs and it may not."

Working directly with the engineers and designers eliminates all confusion. Such direct linkage to manufacturers ensures that server rooms are correctly designed and that no unexpected outages occur due to improper ventilation, cooling, cabinet dimensions, incorrect cabling, etc. While IT staff may believe they have safeguarded their servers with air conditioning, hardware redundancy, UPS and generator backup, this is not always the case.

"Everybody cannot just buy off the Internet and expect to be satisfied. Take a server room where the ceiling



Proper airflow to cool the servers is vital to prevent them from overheating—getting this right depends not only on the heat output of the server, but also on whether the server cabinet is sized properly.



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is too low, or say you have a hotter than normal room, there are so many variables. Customers either wind up getting very frustrated by going to someone who is not willing to have a dialog about what they need, or they go to someone who is willing to do some consultative sales and ensure the right components are specked for the application," says Martin.

Questions such as, 'what if only one of the many servers a company has is overheating?' 'Will it raise the room temperature enough to set off alarms?' The answer: typically no and the results can be disastrous, suggests Kevin Hunt, VP Sales & Marketing of Information Support Concepts (ISC), a Mansfield, Tex.-based supplier of rack mount products including server rack cabinets, power, cooling and network accessories.

According to Hunt, the three critical factors to get right in choosing a server cabinet are height, usable depth, and airflow. Contrary to popular belief, there is nothing standard about any of these, and all must be measured to suit the application.

Height is measured up and down, as the server cabinet is used. But this is typically noted as "U's" in the industry, with each U being the equivalent of 1.75 inches in height. This terminology is a matter of convenience within the industry, as it eliminates referring to fractions of an inch in regard to height.

Usable depth is measured front to back, as the server cabinet is used, and is not to be confused with length, width, or the server cabinet's outside dimensions. "Many manufacturers list the outside dimensions of the cabinet, but not its usable depth," cautions Hunt. "But knowing the server cabinet's actual usable depth is crucial. Being off even a half-inch can make storage so tight that the server cables hit the door, don't have a proper bend radius, or airflow is inadequate."

The three critical factors to get right in choosing a server cabinet are height, usable depth, and airflow.

Proper airflow to cool the servers is vital to prevent them from overheating. Getting this right depends not only on the heat output of the server, but also on whether the server cabinet is sized properly. Other considerations include the

percentage of open perforation on doors for proper air flow, where fans are placed when used, if portable air conditioning is necessary, and how blank panels can direct airflow.

Because the IT marketplace is so large, complex, and changing so rapidly, particularly in regard to power and cooling products, even experienced IT professionals appreciate the specialized expertise that can be put at their disposal when vendors are practitioners of the consultative sales process, according to Hunt.

Since appropriate power and cooling is so important today, particularly with hot-running blade servers, Hunt often recommends placing sensors for temperature and humidity in each server cabinet. He advises including sensors for amps and watts if power monitoring is needed as well. If these sensors are remote IP addressable, they will be able to email or text alerts to IT staff if conditions warrant. This ability to remotely monitor devices and receive alerts can prevent serious problems in a new generation of "smart power" devices.

Custom to the Application

With all the variables that go into selecting the right server cabinet, power and cooling for the application, it is no surprise that more IT staff from both smaller and larger organizations are taking advantage of consultative sales help and customization.

For example, when a prominent California university recently sought about ten server cabinets in several configurations and off-the-shelf product was not up to the job, they turned to ISC. Hunt arranged a series of joint online conference calls that included reviews of CAD drawings with the end user, himself, and the server cabinet manufacturer, Martin International Enclosures. Among the specifications met were single and double wide server cabinets, a rugged frame with heavy rails and extra gussets in every corner, cable routing through the middle of the cabinets, brush grommet cable entry to prevent dust accumulation, a top fan exhaust with a pagoda top to protect against potential water entry from sprinklers, and front door ventilation through clear Lexan windows, according to Mike Martin.

"On this sort of application there were so many design variables that it would be impossible to order straight out of a catalog or online website," says Martin.

Take, for instance, the details of strength and cable access. Martin says the server cabinets had to be structurally

sound enough to support heavy equipment in the double wides. But cable access was needed both through the base and top, with cable routing through the middle of the server cabinets. The brush grommets allowed cable access without dust entry, but care had to be taken to preserve proper airflow and cooling.

Summary

"When projects take specialized knowledge and IT professionals are not sure of the right questions to ask, let alone the answers, working with a vendor that practices consultative sales such as ISC can expedite a

project," concludes Martin. "Including the manufacturer's engineers, when needed, will shorten the design process and ensure the application is done right."

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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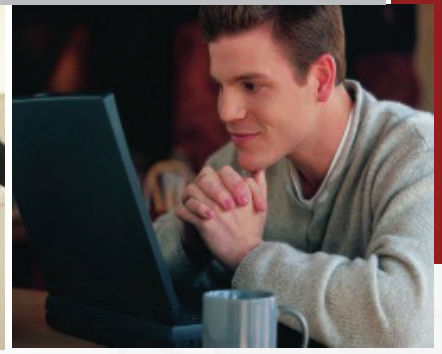
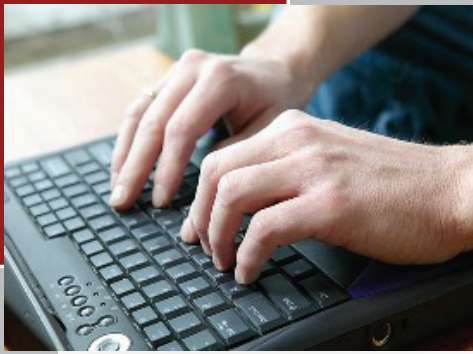
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