

Six Questions to Ask Every Vendor

DATA CENTER IS CHANGING...

The data center has become one of the most valuable and strategic assets within any organization, acting as the backbone of today's digital business. However, data centers are also becoming increasingly complex environments. With growing virtualization and the evolution of software-defined networking (SDN), the technology landscape is rapidly shifting.

When evaluating data center solutions, asking the right questions is of paramount importance to future-proof your investment.

HERE ARE 6 CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN EVALUATING DATA CENTER NETWORK SOLUTIONS:

- How flexible and open is your data center solution?
- What is your service & support model?
- How does your data center solution leverage software-defined networking (SDN)?
- Does your solution provide 100% visibility into the data center traffic, both physically and virtually?
- Does the management platform span both the virtual and physical data center environments?
- What is your networking experience outside of the data center?

This evaluation guide goes through six key questions to ask any data center solution vendor when considering your next data center purchase.

1. How Flexible and Open Is Your Data Center Solution?

The data center is a complex ecosystem that includes networking, computing, and storage capabilities. It is important to understand the hardware and software dependencies within the data center solution. Many vendor solutions deliver orchestration that works only with specific servers, storage arrays, networking hardware and virtualization platforms. This locks your data center into specific hardware and software, limiting flexibility, choices, and agility.

A truly open and standards-based solution offers full coordination across any storage, computing, and network environment. An open and standards-based data center offering will have a strong partner ecosystem with proven and documented out-of-the-box technology integrations.

2. What Is Your Service and Support Model?

The complexity of the data centers makes it difficult to service and quick time-to-resolution (TTR) capabilities are more critical here than anywhere else in the network. Not all vendor support is equal; few are award-winning. Service availability 24/7 is a critical consideration in supporting today's data center technologies.

Ask about the vendor's support staff. Is it out-sourced or in-sourced at ALL levels? Important elements to consider include:

- Statistics on support call. How fast are problems resolved?
- Support process. How quickly will you be escalated to a 2nd level engineer?
- Industry reviews. Do they have positive analyst recognition, certifications or awards for their support services? Check industry ratings to see how the experts and fellow IT professionals assess their support.
- Personal References. Reach out to customers that are not listed as references to get candid feedback on their experience, both good and bad.
- Test-drive the support system and call their support line before purchasing. Suggest a proof of concept (POC) as part of the evaluation process and call their support service as a customer for that POC.

3. How Does Your Data Center Solution Leverage Software Defined Networking (SDN)?

- Understand the role of SDN within each data center solution. Gather important information on the openness and flexibility of the solution and how well it supports a broad range of technologies and manufacturers.

- Is the SDN solution based upon an open source community or is it proprietary and driven by a single vendor?
- How much disruption is required in order to realize the benefits of SDN in your data center?
- Is there a solid partner ecosystem for developing new applications?
 - If so, how large is it?
 - Is there a two-way certification partnership where the vendor and partners work together to ensure that the applications maintain compatibility, even when the vendor's solution changes?

4. Does Your Solution Provide 100% Visibility into the Data Center Traffic, Both Physically and Virtually?

You need deep visibility into your data center to gather business intelligence, identify trends and move quickly and intelligently. To apply agility, you need comprehensive analytics.

- What kinds of network analytics are available to insure that the traffic is optimized and orchestrated appropriately?

5. Does the Management Platform Span Both the Virtual and Physical Data Center Environments?

Management tools that provide visibility only of the physical data center create complexity throughout the network. This forces the need for multiple, disparate management tools. The goal of the network is to deliver a positive user experience, therefore the broader the visibility you have from the data center to the end-user edge, the easier it is to provide that positive user experience. It is important to ask:

- What else can the management system integrate with?
- How easy is it to expand the management of the data center to other areas of the network?
- Can I use it to orchestrate network activity outside of the data center?
- Does the solution make it easy to work with other management teams as well as the equipment they manage?

Again, the better the management platform covers all areas of the network, the better IT can service the users.

6. What Is Your Desired Networking Experience Outside of the Data Center?

The fact is that networks are built to connect end-users to applications. End use success is based on smooth, overall delivery.

- Can the vendor's data center solution provide you with value beyond just the data center, spanning across wireless and campus LAN?
- Do you need a separate solution for wireless networking, edge or aggregation switching?
- Can this vendor support your needs for anything other than the data center alone?
- Can the same management tools from the vendor manage all of these discrete systems?

A data center solution that also supports and interoperates seamlessly with edge-to-core networking and Wi-Fi solutions, simplifies your business dramatically. It makes troubleshooting and diagnosis of faults simple and fast, no matter where they occur.

The data center is one of the most mission-critical components of your network. The ability to provide visibility and orchestration with virtual technologies of today and tomorrow can profoundly impact the success of any organization. Data centers are multifaceted; every organization strives to streamline and improve agility. Community-driven SDN accelerates the availability of applications for the data center. Openness and flexibility of data center technology is vital to your future success. Understand how simplified third-party technology integration can position your data center for the future.

The increasing velocity of change within the data center, driven by community-led SDN innovation, is remaking the landscape of networking. Be sure you are ready.



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