

My data center is a mess, where can I find cabinets?

Contributed by Ray
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I'm in charge of the data center at my work which not only includes the servers but all the other junk that is kept there. Our data center also serves as the storage room for all the of misc. desktop, server and networking supplies and equipment. We've got two steel shelving units and a bunch of plastic bins. But its all over flowing with equipment, no one knows where anything is and it gives me a headache just looking at it.

I've tried to go online and look at all the organizational furniture out there, but I can't find anything thats right for a data center. When I do a search on data or electronics storage all I get are hits on backup tapes and other media... which makes sense because well that is data storage. But what about a place to store those data tapes!!! When I try doing a search on organizational furniture I get a lot of closet and kitchen related stuff. What do other companies do with their stuff, how do they organize everything? There's got to be someone out there that specializes in my needs. I'm tired of tripping on mouse cords and network cables! Please help me!

Oh my. It just so happens that I have had occasion to be in lots and lots of data centers. Big, small, medium and gargantuan. If it comes as any consolation, it's not just a problem you face, it is very common. Just about every data center that is a year or more old has junk strewn about it everywhere. It makes sense if you think about it, in the enterprise world equipment goes out of style as often as I change my underwear... which I assure you is at least once a day. It is also a rule of thumb that data center or Info Tech staff are always overworked, stressed, and a little grumpy.

Decommissioned equipment doesn't yell and scream about deadlines and tends to take a back seat to insistent customers who want there stuff running NOW, an so it sits. I have found that it will sit, sit, lay around, sit, and sit some more until... A fire marshall inspection or an accident. The first time someone trips over a cord and reports the accident management seems to get righteous about the issue.

Which brings me to the real solution to your problem. Go trip on a cord and report it to your safety department... JUST KIDDING!!!!

Seriously though, this is not a one man show. Maybe your center is small enough that it could be, but I am still willing to wager you didn't create the mess all by your lonesome. This is a policy change that needs to be implemented to achieve any lasting success in creating a clutter free environment.

Here is a detailed suggested plan of attack:

Sit down with management and discuss the issue and how important it is to get resolved.

Present a 'policy' which clearly defines the lifespan or retention plan for equipment and peripherals. How long are you gonna keep that old keyboard or mouse? Is that old 15" monochrome display going to ever be used by anyone? 486's may have been enough to power the space shuttle, but MS Word demands a little more... get rid of it.

Propose how and where this stuff will be stored. Make a case for some allocated closet or storage space that is 'off the floor'. Data center floor is a valuable commodity and it's pretty easy to justify not using it for closet space. As an added bonus it mitigates the safety and aesthetic issues.

Lastly, remember that you are an expert in whatever it is you do. Be it routers, switches, LAN, WAN, desktop support, whatever it is, you have honed your skills and hopefully get paid accordingly. In my eyes, and if you present it to management properly they will see, it is a miss-allocation of resources to have large messes cleaned up by such skilled personnel. In the end it amounts to janitorial work and having skilled technical staff cleaning up garbage doesn't make much sense. Day to day up keep is slightly different matter and should be addressed in your 'policy'. Something like adding dedicated time and resources to each project to deal with the 'aftermath' of decommissioned equipment and peripherals.

If you have a large mess to clean up, suggest hiring a company that specializes in clean up and organization to come in and take care of the problem after you have decided on your new policies.

In a perfect world you will get everything you ask for and by the end of next week your mess would be all cleaned up and in a nice closet somewhere all dealt with by an outside vendor. Ahh, if we all lived in a perfect world. So as not to leave you hanging while your manager 'prioritizes' your request I will point you in the direction of a cabinet vendor I have been using for years: <http://www.apluswhs.com/>. There selection of cabinets and organizational shelving will leave you mesmerized.

All the best,

Ray & Jay