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BUSINESS

This farm breeds computer servers

\$1m data facility in Halifax offers clients space, piece of mind
By CHRIS LAMBIE Business Editor
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Bruce MacDougall, president of Internetworking Atlantic Inc., stands in the doorway of the Halifax company's new \$1-million data storage area on Wednesday. (TIM KROCHAK / Staff)

A LOCAL technology company will open a \$1-million server farm today in downtown Halifax.

Internetworking Atlantic Inc. is hoping to attract local, national and international customers to the facility at 5562 Sackville St., next door to the CBC Radio building.

"It's a high-security, high-redundancy data centre that is suitable for enterprise customers," said company president Bruce MacDougall.

Internetworking Atlantic already has clients lined up and Nova Scotia Business Inc. is slated to help market the company's services in the United States.

But the provincial government's lending agency isn't putting money into the facility.

"It's an entirely privately funded project," MacDougall said.

"Our company has been around since 2002 and this is just a natural progression for us."

He is convinced the data storage business will be profitable.

"It represents a significant investment for our company, but we believe that it will generate a healthy return for us," MacDougall said.

The company now has a staff of a dozen people.

"We expect that to grow by perhaps two or three by the end of 2010."

The data storage facility is a white room where companies house their computers in racks.

"It's supported by diesel backup power, so it's not dependant on (Nova Scotia Power Inc.) for power," MacDougall said.

"It has dedicated cooling, which means there's a redundant cooling system that takes away all the heat that's produced by the computers. It has what's called an inert gas fire-suppression mechanism, which means that if there should be a fire, the fire's extinguished by inert gas rather than sprinklers, which doesn't damage the equipment."

The facility boasts an uninterruptable power supply that's about the size of seven refrigerators.

"It actually powers the thing from batteries, if necessary, while the diesel starts" MacDougall said.

"So it's a fairly large piece of infrastructure, all to support our customers' computer devices, which are in the white room."

All of those assets should help the company deal with whatever poor weather Mother

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Nature throws at Nova Scotia.

"I think we've got a good 50 metres on sea level before it begins to effect us," MacDougall said. "I think we'll have other problems before that."

And Halifax is not a high-risk area for earthquakes, he said.

"One of the things that's important to us is it's not generally considered necessary to build to seismic standards in Nova Scotia."

The company could host about 1,200 servers in 30 racks in its Tara building location.

"Our prices range from less than \$100 for a single server per month, up to our top price, which is about \$2,800 for a high-density, high-power rack," which can carry as many as 40 servers, MacDougall said.

Internetworking doesn't have any banks lined up yet as clients, he said.

"We'd love to do business with banks," MacDougall said. "In fact, that's certainly a target area for us."

Internetworking owns a fibre optic network that stretches about 125 kilometres, he said. It runs through the peninsula as well as Woodside, Dartmouth and Burnside Park.

Customers, including hospitals, use the dedicated line, which is partly buried and partly strung from utility poles, for high-speed data communications, he said.

"We have lots of enterprise customers that buy fibre optic telecommunications services from us now," MacDougall said. "And they've been asking us for hosting facilities as well. So this (data storage project) dovetails well with that."

Several local companies offer similar services, he said, including Aliant, CGI and Hibernia Atlantic.

"We believe there's plenty of demand for it," MacDougall said.

Halifax businessman Anton Self, chief executive officer of Bastionhost Ltd.'s new data storage facility, dubbed Dataville, located at the former Diefenbunker in Debert, said he welcomes the competition.

"The Halifax and Nova Scotia marketplaces need more data centre infrastructure," Self said in an email from Montreal.

"The higher the quality and lower the price for services, the better. Consumers will benefit."

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