

Canberra targeted as data centre hub

Billion-dollar plans have been drawn up

Andrew Colley

A CONSORTIUM led by property developer CB Richard Ellis has hatched a billion-dollar plan to make Australia, and more specifically Canberra, the Asia-Pacific region's leading data centre hub.

The consortium, which includes ActewAGL and hi-tech property developer Technical Real Estate, plans to build about 130,000sq m of data centre space at two sites in the suburbs of Hume and Belconnen.

The company said it expected to complete the first data centre by September 2008 with the remaining sites to become operational over the next five to 10 years.

On completion the combined facility will comprise about 30 data centre units.

TRE director Bruce McEwen said research by power equipment suppliers showed that the world, and particularly the Asia-Pacific region, would soon face a shortage of data centres with adequate power to serve current computing technology.

Late last year technology research group Gartner said data centre operators were struggling to deal with a jump in computing demands without incurring the expense of building new facilities.

"What we see now across Asia, Europe and North America is that a lot of the data centres that were built even as recently as five or six years ago, and of course more historically 30 years ago, are buildings that are now past their useful life.

"That's for a lot of reasons, but the main one is that it is very difficult and hugely expensive to get power upgraded to these buildings to allow them to sus-

tain incoming computer technology," Mr McEwen said.

The information technology sector is currently caught in an invidious position between a market with an increasing appetite for computing power and a community confronted with unprecedented frequency by global warming doomsday scenarios.

Gartner said information technology could be responsible for between 1 and 2 per cent of world greenhouse gas emissions.

It is not clear which master the IT industry has chosen to serve.

Enterprise computing system makers across the board have been quick to launch marketing campaigns spun from the global warming threat.

Mr McEwen said, however, that there was no evidence the industry's power requirements were falling.

"Customers are buying technology that's calling for 15kW and 20kW per rack and you only have to go back five years ago, to find they were 1.5 to 2kW per rack," he said.

TRE is quick to trumpet the Canberra project's greenhouse credentials nevertheless.

Mr McEwen said the centres would produce about 40 per cent less greenhouse gas per unit of computing output than current data centres by using a mix of environmental technologies, including some that would take advantage of Canberra's cool climate.

Utility provider ActewAGL has also agreed to build facilities to power the site using gas piped from Bass Strait if power loads at the facility reach 40MW.

Using gas is expected to reduce its carbon emissions by a further 10 to 15 per cent

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