Clean energy: the key to economic and environmental resilience

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As we continue to strive for a cleaner planet, governments, industries and organisations around the world are uniting to build a sustainable future. The time is ripe to explore innovations and technologies that can work to reduce carbon emissions and help to facilitate better resource efficiency.

In our digital age, data centres are commonplace. However, in the winds of the climate crisis sweeping the globe, it is incumbent on the data centre and colocation industry to minimise its environmental impact and maximise its energy efficiency. Since 2007, when industry consortium The Green Grid first materialised, it has been clear that clean energy is the key. Unfortunately, concerns about prohibitive costs put the data centre efforts on the backburner.

But today, a selection of forward-thinking companies in the sector have led the charge in embedding cost-competitive renewable energy supplies into the data centre ecosystem. And now, as businesses face both mounting energy costs and pressure to conduct more sustainable operations, renewable energy should take centre stage, as we fight to rescue our resources and economies.

The promise of a net zero future is in our sights. Luckily, we do not have to choose between acting on the energy crisis or the climate crisis, with renewable energy, we can do both.

Helping businesses overcome one of today's greatest challenges

As its intersecting benefits for both the environment and economy are realised, the spotlight on clean energy has brightened. Businesses are seeking collaborations that underpin their sustainability, as well as financial goals and are partnering with companies who use clean energy in their own operations, or better yet, investing in their own renewable energy procurement solutions. As a prevalent partner in the modern business landscape, this naturally includes data storage operators.

One of the key business challenges in many parts of the world today is soaring energy costs. A gas shortage in Europe in 2021 first pushed energy prices up and then the Russian war in Ukraine doubled them. But the crux of the problem is that relying on any one country for the import of energy, Russia or otherwise, is risky. If countries can increase the amount of their energy coming from local renewable sources, each market will become much more resilient and energy costs will decline.

Unlike fossil fuels, the sun and the wind are not subject to fluctuating costs, and despite their intermittent nature, once the assets are built to harness them there is minimal recurring cost. As such, companies investing in clean energy infrastructures, data centres amongst them, enjoy predictable and consistently lower energy

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costs, which is usually a benefit they can pass on to their customers.

Thus, the economic benefits of a renewable energy supply are as significant as the environmental ones. It is unquestionable that embracing clean energy will strengthen all businesses, everywhere. Even just in the UK alone, predictions are that widespread adoption of renewables could lower the nation’s electricity bill by close to 9 billion pounds every year.

The steward our planet deserves

As a necessary partner for millions of businesses, data centres must resolve to be the ally that their customers, and indeed the planet, needs.

A decade ago, despite enthusiasm for using renewables, existing procurement sources meant that data centres just could not make it work. It was simply too expensive. Luckily, the efforts of determined operators who developed innovative procurement solutions have since made green energy cost-competitive and reliable. Now, there is no reason not to use it. If we make a collective, industry-wide drive to use 100% clean energy in all data centres, the momentum will shift our energy supply to a greener grid overall and help to make renewables more accessible to everybody.

Using green energy in the world’s data centres is only part of the puzzle though. The commitment to sustainability needs to be broad for every operator if we are to build the carbon-neutral industry we’re all aiming for: targeting exponential decrease in Scope 1 and 2 emissions, for which a 25% reduction over five-year periods is certainly realistic; joining the Climate Group’s EV100 initiative and pledging to achieve fleet-wide electrification this decade; working with the Environmental Defence Fund to identify efficiencies and natural gas mitigation strategies to bring down heating costs and reduce carbon emissions; and building BREEAM design-certified facilities that mean operations are sustainably minded end-to-end.

In a world beset by complex challenges, our industry has the power to make real progress in some of the biggest. Organisations of every kind must recognise the opportunities before them to create change, data centres are now able to access the resources that contribute to a sustainable future and what is more, enable our customers to do the same.

By weaving sustainable practices into all data centre operations, we can allow businesses around the world to join the ‘clean energy revolution.’ Not only will this help to create the change our planet so desperately needs, but it will also help to solve one of the largest economic threats to global businesses today.

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