IT Parameters for Building Selection

Information technology is a relatively new tool for industry whereas the building stock that will house much of that technology in the Chicagoland area is relatively mature. When a company is planning to develop a mission critical environment there are several consultants to utilize, including architects, MEP and structural engineers, technology and security consultants. There are also several factors to consider when choosing a building to house the new facility.

What is the history on the reliability of the power utility in your area?
It’s important to know what kind of record your local power utility, in this case Com Ed, has in the area in which you are considering as a site for your mission critical area. Look at detail about power outages in the area over the past few years and the ability to restore power quickly. It’s also important to know whether service is delivered overhead or underground. Most power issues can be solved with back-up generators and secondary power, but it’s important to understand the types of problems you may have to solve once you choose a site.

Do the buildings you’re considering have the power, cooling and structural capacity available that you need?
Newer buildings generally are better equipped from a power standpoint but many older sites have invested in reinforcing their infrastructure. If you find an ideal site without the power available, it’s important to find out if you can make additions to the power in the building to meet your needs and to assess the readiness of the building for making those upgrades. Likewise with the cooling capacity for the building because, as most of us know, technology-rich facilities require more and more constant cooling than typical office floors and your building must be able to provide it.

The structural capacity of the floor slabs is another consideration. A typical building floor that was designed to house a traditional office environment may not have the structural integrity to handle lots of equipment and thus, if you choose a traditional office building you may end up reinforcing the floor to handle your technology.

How does security measure up in the space, for people, equipment and information?
Some buildings already provide all the security needed for a mission critical site. Many do not. We’ve done several projects that required us to create a virtual building within a building to create the necessary security, cooling and power infrastructure to support a data, disaster recovery or operations center. Of late, many have additional concerns such as blast and electronic terrorism resistance. From this perspective, parking within a building is considered a drawback (with adjacent parking favored as can proximity to flight paths.

A team of architects, structural and MEP engineers and technology and security consultants can effectively assess any building and determine how suitable it is for housing a mission critical operation, what kinds of modifications are required to “harden” the space, and what costs would be incurred in the process. Thus when planning a facility to house sophisticated technology that must be operational 24/7/365, work with your real estate and AEC consultants to ensure that the space will deliver on your expectations.