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The Rise of Data Centers

And the Local Small Businesses Powering Them

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SECTION I

Why "Outside the Rack" Is the Real Opportunity

Data centers are the beating heart of the digital age. As the world embraces AI, cloud computing, and decentralized finance, the infrastructure needed to support this shift is booming — and it's not just Big Tech that stands to benefit.

Big Tech is investing fast. Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Meta, Apple, Oracle, NVIDIA, and X.AI are building data centers across the U.S., with major activity in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia. This is creating a ripple effect of opportunity for the small, often-overlooked businesses that support and sustain these massive facilities.

While headlines focus on NVIDIA chips or Amazon's hyperscale centers, very few are talking about the "outside the rack" layer — the picks-and-shovels companies that keep these data centers operational day in and day out. These include electrical contractors, HVAC specialists, air quality technicians, precision cleaning services, water treatment operators, and dozens of other niche service providers.

This evolution is a rare moment where local businesses — if they adapt — can carve out highly defensible, recurring revenue streams by servicing data center infrastructure.

SECTION II

Why Now

The surge in AI workloads, digital currency mining, and global cloud adoption is driving unprecedented demand for compute power. Four numbers frame the moment:



Data centers now consume nearly 4% of the world's electricity, with 1% attributed solely to Bitcoin mining. With 2.5% of that energy used for air cooling, demand for support services like energy-efficient HVAC systems, thermal management, and environmental control is only growing. The Boston Consulting Group reports that demand for data center capacity in the U.S. will double by 2030. But they also note a bottleneck: operational complexity. Building a data center is one thing — running and maintaining it is another. That's where local businesses come in.

Where Local Service Providers Win

The opportunity lies below the surface, in the mechanical, electrical, and operational layers of a data center. Local, family-owned businesses already have many of the capabilities — they just need to reframe how they market and position their services.

Power and Thermal Management

- **Local electrical contractors** specializing in backup power solutions, industrial contracting, and energy efficiency.
- **UPS & battery backup providers** offering uninterruptible power supply installation, maintenance, and battery replacement.
- **Power distribution & switchgear services** handling switchgear, circuit breakers, and industrial power components.

HVAC & Cooling Systems

- **Commercial & industrial HVAC contractors** focused on process and data center cooling.
- **Refrigeration & climate control companies** servicing precision cooling systems.
- **Ductwork & ventilation specialists** fabricating custom airflow solutions.

Fire Suppression & Environmental Safety

- **Fire suppression system installers** focused on mission-critical infrastructure.
- **HVAC & air filtration cleaning services** handling deep cleaning of CRAC units and ductwork.

Cable & Physical Infrastructure

- **Cable tray & raceway installers** managing overhead and underfloor cable routing.
- **Server rack & containment companies** designing rack layouts optimized for airflow, power, and scalability.

Precision Cleaning (Static Control & Compliance)

- **Anti-static and HEPA cleaning companies** ensuring raised floors, server rooms, and critical environments meet ISO standards.

Water Treatment & Cooling Innovation

- **Water treatment contractors** like Chemstar WATER offer system optimization and preventative maintenance for cooling systems.

- **Recycled water & closed-loop cooling operators**, such as Arcadis and Tomorrow Water, focus on sustainability.
- **Microsoft** is rolling out designs with zero water use for AI workloads, signaling a growing emphasis on conservation.

These services are critical. Most data centers use raised flooring to manage cables and airflow, creating new demand for specialized cleaning, fire prevention, and cooling solutions. And while energy gets the spotlight, water will become a major battleground. Companies like Equinix are already turning to reclaimed water and desalination. Lenovo's Neptune™ platform recycles warm water to cool data centers, reducing power consumption by up to 40 percent.

SECTION IV

Local Businesses Must Adapt

Every data center is a micro-economy.

According to *Fast Company*, each one can bring hundreds of permanent local jobs, especially in maintenance and construction. But those roles don't go to whoever is nearby. They go to businesses that are ready. To capture this opportunity, small businesses must:

- **Embrace specialization** — data center-focused marketing and compliance.
- **Invest in safety training, certifications, and uptime service models.**
- **Build B2B partnerships** with general contractors, REITs, and data center developers.

SECTION V

Why Legacy Is Paying Attention

At Legacy, we're not chasing NVIDIA. We're focused on the service companies that help data centers run every single day — the ones responsible for airflow, temperature, water usage, electrical safety, cable management, and more.

These businesses won't show up on Bloomberg, but they will define the future of local economic resilience. The demand is already here. The infrastructure wave is already building. And it's local businesses — the picks and shovels — that will keep it running.

A Once-in-a-Generation Transformation

Now is the time to step in, evolve your offering, and future-proof your role in this once-in-a-generation transformation.

The picks and shovels will keep it running.

Benjamin Krall is the Founder and Managing Partner of American Gridwork Partners (AGP), a platform company of Legacy Holdings United, LLC, executing a buy-and-build strategy across the infrastructure execution layer powering AI, electrification, and data.