



60 Seconds with... Shaunak Pandit

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Morrison Hershfield

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How did you get into the Data Center industry?

“By accident. I got involved with the design work of Data Centers for financial institutions in the early 2000’s and I really enjoyed it. I joined Morrison Hershfield in ‘06 and we started to do some larger Data Center assignments. I was then fortunate to get a chance to play a role in growing the business and now lead a practice group exclusively focused on the Data Center industry.”

What makes the Data Center sector unique?

“A couple of things stand out for me. Firstly, it is a great sector for engineering geeks, especially mechanical and electrical engineers like me. One half of the building is engineering, and the other half is IT. Looks do not matter too much and it is more about the performance of the building. This also leads to our clients (developers) being well informed and able to speak the same language as us.

Secondly, the pace of play of the industry also makes it unique. Everyone believes in speed to market and everyone talks about the old saying “time is money” – this industry lives and breathes it more than any other. This creates a very intense design flow.”

What 3 tips would you give to someone just getting started in the industry?

- “Be prepared to exercise good engineering knowledge and judgement all the time. Be an engineer first.”
- “Give it time, you may not have all the glamour to start with but there is plenty of opportunity in Data Centers to make a big difference.”
- “Don’t get frustrated with lack of room for innovation. There will be room to innovate but many clients will have a standardized design model (as much driven by operational considerations as anything else) – it is nothing personal, just find other ways to influence their engineering design for the better.”

What do you think will be the biggest challenge in the next five years for the Data Center market?

“Pace of play. The market is very hot right now, even hotter because of the increased demand from the current pandemic and the increased power of the online world. Can you design fast enough? Can supply chains keep up? Can capital investment ensure cash flow? Is the workforce skilled and knowledgeable to keep up with demand?”

How do you believe we can overcome this challenge?

“We are overcoming these challenges through hiring and training ahead of the work. We have developed a good in-house training program which we like to call the “Data Center University”. Ensuring your work force have the knowledge to be able to deliver projects to a high standard is key to keeping up with demand.

Morrison Hershfield also has a team dedicated to commissioning Data Centers, who have the skills to assist with the design work when needed (and our designers support the Cx team) This allows opportunities to cross-train and share knowledge & lessons, making us better designers and commissioning agents, keeps staff engaged by offering variety in tasks and ultimately creates a pool of in-house resources we can draw upon to meet demand.”

November Round-Up

As we look ahead to the bright lights of 2021, it is safe to say there are no signs of a slow down for the data center industry. From a personal level, most of the clients we partner with have exciting growth plans and expect to hit the ground running in Q1 with several projects about to be awarded. Industry reports are forecasting a year full of growth, both from an investment and construction perspective. 2021 won't be without its challenges but has the potential to be the biggest and best yet.



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