

Location The Internet search giant is committed to building centres where there is a lot of renewable energy - with high winds and tides, the province could be the perfect setting

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As the IT industry's greenhouse gas emissions skyrocket, corporations such as Google are looking for locations abundant in cheap renewable resources to house their infamous energy-sucking data centres.

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Kimberly White/Bloomberg News

At U.S.-based data centres, Google spends 40 per cent of annual payroll costs on health care compared to between 16 and 20 per cent in Canada. Locating here, then, would save the company millions of dollars.

One Ottawa-based IT researcher says New Brunswick could be one of these places.

"Companies like Google and Microsoft are looking to build centres where they can get renewable power," said Bill St. Arnaud, chief of research for non-profit IT group Canarie Inc. "Google is looking at New Brunswick as a possible location."

Committed to carbon neutrality, Google (NASDAQ:GOOG) has a tight list of criteria for data centre locations, which New Brunswick fits. Because of high winds and tides, the province has potential to produce a lot of cheap renewable energy.

The company's three-year-old The Dalles, Ore. site was chosen specifically for its proximity to hydropower from the Columbia River.

The sprawling data centre, which houses computer systems and information, is comprised of six buildings of varying sizes - all over 15,000 square-feet.

Google is wary of releasing details about their data centres' cost and power usage, but it's estimated they use at least 50 megawatts and cost approximately \$600-million to build.

John Boyd Jr., vice-president of site location consulting company New Jersey-based The Boyd Company, said Google is also looking for small-market locations with low labour, utility and land costs, factors that "speak well" for New Brunswick.

Google did not respond to inquiries.

"Utility rates in New Brunswick are very competitive," Boyd said, also noting that the province's proximity to the northeastern United States serves as another bonus.

The region is close enough to larger markets that the company wouldn't have to make business sacrifices to save money.

"The market between Washington D.C. and Boston is the richest market in the country."

Nationalized health care is another big draw for the Internet giant because it lowers operating costs, Boyd said. At U.S.-based data centres, Google spends 40 per cent of annual payroll costs on health care compared to between 16 and 20 per cent in Canada. Locating here, then, would save the company millions of dollars.

Business New Brunswick wouldn't confirm the information St. Arnaud heard from a provincial government official. The IT industry is so competitive, said spokeswoman Ashley Bursey, that she isn't able to disclose details.

She did say, however, that the government is always trying to recruit new IT companies.

"It's something we're interested in bringing in because we have the communications infrastructure to support it," she said. "But we can't speak about different companies."

David Campbell, an economic consultant with Moncton-based Jupia Consultants Inc., disagrees, saying at this point he doubts New Brunswick's power rates are cheap enough to attract Google.

It's too bad, he said, because for New Brunswick, a province full of call centres, data centres would be the logical next step in a telecommunications evolution.

"A large data centre uses half as much power as the entire province of P.E.I.," he said. "It all comes back to how important cheap power is to these facilities."

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