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Why Canned Hotdogs Are a Warning Sign for the Data Center Industry



The iMasons Legacy Podcast
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Why Canned Hotdogs Are a Warning Sign for the Data Center Industry

Left to right: Anthony Bolner, Executive Vice President & Partner at Stream Data Centers; Santiago Suinaga, Chief Executive Officer, Infrastructure Masons; Mary Morgan, VP Marketing & Communications, Brian Frazier, Sr. Vice President, Energy Strategy.



Beyond Canned Hotdogs

Weird. Gross. Offensive. These are some of the words that came to [Chris Bair's](#) mind when he found a can of "American Hotdogs" on a grocery store shelf during a recent visit to Amsterdam.

"If we need to get protein really fast because we're in a crisis situation, we can eat a canned hotdog," said Bair, Chief Commercial Officer and Partner at [Stream Data Centers](#). "But it's not what I want to sustain myself on."

Bair was in Amsterdam to visit family and take a break from the frenzied pace of digital infrastructure development, but there on the shelves in the "American" section of the international foods aisle was a reminder of the unwanted direction this frenetic pace of data center development could lead.

The digital infrastructure industry builds, operates and maintains the systems and equipment that underpin and enable the modern economy – everything from remote work, telehealth and online banking to content creation, media streaming and online gaming.



Chris Bair, Chief Commercial Officer and Partner at Stream Data Centers.



Beyond Canned Hotdogs

Construction of data center capacity accelerated at the onset of COVID-19 to keep up with the demand for digital services and then hit overdrive when generative artificial intelligence (AI) went mainstream.

Standardization became a necessity across the industry, Bair explained, following the pattern of consistency and replicability that made Henry Ford's Model T the first widely affordable automobile.

"If you want to do big volume, you want it to be as homogenous as possible," Bair said.

The risk of the rush to standardization and homogeneity in the digital infrastructure industry stared him in the face as he held up the can of "American Hotdogs."

His reaction was visceral.

"If you're starving and want a hotdog, the canned version can be your port in a storm," he said. "It was the same with data centers for a time. But the industry isn't starving anymore. We have the means and the time to make and consume better hotdogs."

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The ‘Good Business’ Phase

Growth across the digital infrastructure industry remains robust and demand for data center capacity is stronger than ever, noted Bair. Yet, the industry has matured. It adapted to the pace of development.

For example, Stream Data Centers, which develops wholesale colocation capacity and build-to-suit facilities for hyperscale and Fortune 100 enterprise users, innovated a [standardized-but-configurable data center design](#) that brings both flexibility and replicability to data center development.

Stream also pivoted its business model from either building speculatively or building to suit customer requirements, to building to suit customer performance specifications.

This focus on detailed, verifiable criteria minimized supply chain risks on long-lead items such as generators and locked in relationships with vendors of mechanical, electrical and plumbing equipment, which optimizes the speed and cost of capacity delivery, Bair noted.

Now, companies that took advantage of the ramped-up demand by overpromising and under delivering are at risk of no longer being in the game, he explained.

“As supply and demand come into balance, the next phase is going to weed out folks that aren’t running a good business,” he said. “This phase

is actually more difficult than simply building a data center. It’s about meeting our tenants’ complex compliance, health and safety, and environmental requirements while ensuring the people impact and the societal impact of our industry is positive.”

For example, as demand for digital services continues to increase, digital infrastructure will expand into more communities around the world. This phase of growth must balance efficiency and scale with tailored solutions that meet the specific needs and tastes of each community.



Photo courtesy of Stream Data Centers



The ‘Good Business’ Phase

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“Any organization with capital can build a reasonably functional data center but understanding what it takes to be a great member of the communities we operate in while upholding the very high standards set by the major hyperscale providers is the hard part of data center development,” noted Bair.

The hard part requires intentional community engagement, attention to how the industry is perceived and working with community leaders to build a local workforce, maintain essential services and protect both people and natural resources.

Stream Data Centers finds support for doing the hard work as a Global Partner of [Infrastructure Masons](#) (iMasons), a global nonprofit professional association that unites the builders of the digital age.

“The things that we think are the harder things to do are also the things that iMasons is a consistent proponent of,” Bair said.



For a Better Digital Future

Since iMasons was founded in 2016, more than 6,000 professionals representing more than \$1.5 trillion in digital infrastructure projects in 130 countries have participated in iMasons' programs to bring more people into the industry, drive innovation and increase efficiency.

These programs include workforce development initiatives focused on military veterans and women, and workgroups and accords focused on decarbonization and the societal impact of digital infrastructure.

Stream Data Centers, which was founded in 1999 and has its own employee resource groups for veterans and women, joined iMasons in 2017. The company has had a seat at the table since iMasons' earliest days and helped lead defining initiatives with remarkable engagement from many individuals, noted [Santiago Suinaga](#), Chief Executive Officer of iMasons.

"Stream Data Centers has over 25 years of experience," he said. "They were here before the internet bubble. They have a proven track record, and their experience helps us all focus on what really matters."



VETS@SDC



WOMEN@SDC

Graphics courtesy of Stream Data Centers

For example, [Stuart Lawrence](#), Vice President, Product Innovation and Sustainability, and [Amanda Abell](#), Senior Director, Sustainability, at Stream Data Centers are helping drive a [partnership between iMasons andGRESB](#), an organization that provides environmental, social and governance data and benchmarks for the real estate and infrastructure industries, to create the first global sustainability benchmark tailored to the needs and operations of data centers.

The iMasons working group focused on the benchmark has identified energy, water, worker health and safety as key environmental and social issues for data center and investment professionals.



For a Better Digital Future

[Michael Lahoud](#), Co-Managing Partner at Stream Data Centers and a member of the iMasons Global Advisory Council, helped found the [iMasons Climate Accord](#) to achieve carbon neutrality in digital infrastructure across materials, equipment and power, noted Suinaga, the iMasons CEO.

“We have a profound affinity for working with the Stream Data Centers team,” he said.

Suinaga recently visited a deployment in his home town of San Antonio, Texas, with [Anthony Bolner](#), Executive Vice President and Partner, and [Mary Morgan](#), Vice President of Marketing and Communications, to witness the strict health and safety processes Stream Data Centers follows at their construction sites.

Other members of the Stream Data Centers team, including [Rick Crutchley](#), Chief Operating Officer, have been instrumental in conversations about how the digital infrastructure industry can earn the trust of the communities where data centers are deployed.

Today, these conversations are driving the development of the [iMasons Social Accord](#), a commitment to build infrastructure in economic, social and ecological balance with local communities.

iMasons’ initiatives focused on decarbonization and community engagement are driving the next stage of development in the digital infrastructure industry, noted Bair. They are key to running a good business and show the world the digital infrastructure industry is better than canned meat.

“Hotdogs can be delicious,” he said. “But why settle for the canned version if you can have the gourmet option and enjoy it the way you want it?”

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— Santiago Suinaga,
CEO of iMasons





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