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Power Drain: 15% of Servers Go Unused

A surprising new study finds that one in six computer servers sucks up electricity without doing any meaningful work, and could be decommissioned

By [Sophie Curtis](#)

Wondering how to make that tech budget stretch a little further? Perhaps you might like to take a long hard look at your server

estate.

IT departments around the world are wasting money supporting millions of servers that are not doing any useful work, and could make significant savings by decommissioning the hardware instead, it has been claimed.

As many as 4.7 million servers worldwide—more than 15 per cent of the global total—are merely consuming energy without serving any productive purpose, according to a study sponsored by IT power management company [1E](#).

In its survey of server managers, nearly three-quarters said 15 per cent or more of their servers were not doing anything useful, while 83 per cent of managers admitted they do not have an adequate grasp of server utilisation. Nearly two-thirds said they rely on manual checks to find unused servers, or wait until something is broken.

One of the largest causes of energy and IT operational waste in datacentres are servers that are simply not being used said 1E CEO Sumir Karayi, who said the savings from decommissioning non-productive servers "cannot be ignored".

Gartner analyst Rakesh Kumar told silicon.com that because project managers buy more new hardware and new software for each project, consolidation is not happening—and that IT departments need to be going back and doing that housekeeping.

A separate study by researcher IDC found that because of rocketing energy prices it now costs more to power some servers than to buy them in the first place.

IDC said that while the amount of energy required to operate servers and datacentres

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declined slightly between 2007 and 2008 this was not enough to offset the spiralling energy costs, pushed up by increasing electricity prices.

The decline was mainly due to improved typical power consumption values and a decrease in the number of mid-range and high-end servers, which require more power than volume machines.

In the wake of energy prices that hit 12.5 euro cents per kWh, the cost to power datacentres in Western Europe increased 13 per cent year on year in 2008, to reach €4.9bn.

IDC said if the overall datacentre power bills are reduced to a per-server basis, this means €623 was spent to operate an average server 24 hours per day in Europe in 2008, compared to €585 in 2007 and €562 in 2006.

It said that in some cases, for example for low-end servers sold at a price point below €800 and with an average life of three years, it will cost more to power these machines than it cost to acquire them.

Nathaniel Martinez, IDC programme director for European enterprise servers said that last year, more money was spent on powering datacentres than was spent on acquiring new datacentre networking hardware, or new external disk storage.

He said in a statement: "While we expect server capex to shrink yearly by eight per cent through 2013, following consolidation and the adoption of virtualisation, datacentre expenses are projected to remain around the same levels, as energy price dynamics could offset improvements in hardware and facility operations."

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