

Smarter information management is key

Information volumes continue to grow at an unprecedented rate, particularly in the area of randomly generated unstructured user data. This is a result of the way the modern 'information worker' interacts and transacts with electronic platforms on a daily basis.

By [Chris Hathaway](#) 5 Nov 2014



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In addition, there is an ever-increasing number of platform options for users, including: email, file, collaboration platforms Microsoft's SharePoint and Yammer, as well as other social media platforms. Many of these platforms add another level of complexity as they may be hosted or cloud-based services and solutions.

The increased data volumes, variety of data sources, and increasing number of data locations, lead to increased complexity when it comes to managing this information, not to mention added costs and risks related to retaining and managing data storage. In addition, legislation around privacy and the storage of personal information means that information governance is more important than ever.

Intelligent Information Lifecycle Management (ILM) has, thus, become a critical tool for organisations, allowing them to make the most of their data. ILM is also essential in assisting organisations to gain an understanding of what data they have and what data can be safely or 'defensibly' deleted in a controlled process, while also preventing storage costs from spiralling out of control. Having the appropriate policies, processes and technologies to drive the management and defensible deletion of Redundant Obsolete or Trivial (ROT), or 'risky' information is essential for maintaining good corporate governance and compliance with legislation like POPI.

A myriad challenges

Without information governance in place, organisations open themselves up to a myriad challenges, risks and threats with regard to the data they store. In heavily regulated or litigation-prone industries, this challenge is further exacerbated by the requirement to extract, analyse and review information on demand should investigations or audits be required.

While this is not a new challenge, the need for information governance, including policies, security and e-discovery tools, is becoming increasingly necessary. Unfortunately, this has become increasingly complex as a result of growing data volumes, cloud services, and other factors such as Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), which adds further complexity and data volume. The simple reality is that as data volumes increase, so too does the corresponding requirement for an increased and more complex storage footprint. The financial impact of not only storing, but protecting this large volume of data is becoming increasingly onerous.

Data retention strategies need to adapt. In the past, the prevailing approach was to store all information indefinitely in the event that it was required sometime down the line. However, hoarding data in this fashion, indiscriminately, beyond its usefulness and even beyond its required retention periods, is a costly exercise. This cost includes not only the storage space required, but the costs of back-up, redundancy and network connectivity, as well as the potential hidden risks within the redundant data.

For example, employees may be sending customer information like credit card or account numbers to different departments via email or spreadsheets, which are subsequently stored in mail boxes or unsecured file locations. Without proper information governance, this risk is impossible to control. In the case of an HR or legal process, the increased cost of e-discovery when data needs to be found and reviewed can also be significant. In addition, as a result of legislation such as the Protection of Personal Information (PoPI) Act, there is a growing requirement to 'tighten' up data governance and the policies and practices around data within an organisation.

Information management requirements have changed and both the information strategy and the tools used to implement them need to be reassessed in light of these changing requirements. ILM needs to support a changing information landscape without loss of visibility or control of data, and the tools and approaches used to analyse, control and protect data need to be aligned with this landscape. This requires smarter information management that is less complex, less costly and more responsive to a dynamic environment, and that delivers a comprehensive, actionable understanding of information. Policies need to be adequately defined so that information is not over-retained and does not become cluttered, with the result that storage, e-discovery, risk and security costs can be optimised and prevented from spiralling out of control.

A holistic picture

In addition, organisations need a holistic picture of unstructured data, and an awareness of unstructured data volume, composition, risk, and business value. This is critical in order to sift the sensitive and valuable information from the clutter of dark data and junk that unstructured data sources are typically a repository for. Tools such as enterprise search, classification, archiving and e-discovery products are solid building blocks; however they do not provide the efficient, ongoing and holistic picture of that data situation that today's information landscape requires. Meeting modern information management needs requires continuous and ongoing access to a clear and accurate 'big picture' view.

By creating an actionable understanding of live data, organisations are better positioned for more effective information governance, and to take advantage of a number of benefits. Tangible savings can be leveraged from reduced storage costs by identifying junk or legacy data and either disposing of it or moving it to cheaper storage solutions. Automated, improved policies result in improved governance and enhanced visibility while intelligence around data assets helps to improve security. Risk is mitigated and spend is decreased with e-discovery processes, and business productivity benefits from reduced data clutter. In addition, compliance to regulations such as PoPI can be more easily implemented and demonstrated as a result of improved data governance and control.

The information landscape has changed dramatically in recent years, and ILM tools and processes need to adapt to meet these changes. Intelligent ILM, information governance and data management solutions are vital to prevent data storage costs from overwhelming an organisation, and are also critical for compliance and risk management purposes in a data-driven business world.

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