

Data Protection as a Business Enabler

Not all data is created equal

Freeform Dynamics Ltd, July 2013

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Management Summary

Business people from organisations of all sizes agree that the information they hold on their computer systems forms part of the crown jewels of the enterprise. But while the importance of business information is almost universally recognised, few organisations have enjoyed either the time or the resources required to ensure that the data they store across an expanding range of computer systems is adequately protected. At the same time, significant numbers of organisations recognise they could exploit the information they hold more effectively.

In today's business climate the importance of managing information in a dynamic environment is growing daily, although few organisations have been willing or able to tackle the challenge. Data protection capabilities in many organisations operate the way they do because 'that's the way they have always worked'. But as external regulation of data storage increases and as organisations seek to utilise new technologies, such as mobile solutions, and incorporate flexible working practices into their environments, the time has come to improve how data is managed and protected. Fortunately the technology to help to do so is maturing nicely, but 'people' related issues must also be addressed.

The realities today

Managing storage budgets today is frequently a challenge for organisations of all sizes. IT requests for additional funding to add storage capacity and make systems more reliable are a common occurrence in a world where users are storing more files and making use of video and audio in documents in every line of business. But while IT tries to keep up with the business demand for storage, line of business users often struggle to find the data they require when they need it without having to expend considerable energy. The proliferation of devices being used by staff, especially smartphones and tablets, is also making it hard for users to keep data synchronised between devices, often resulting in frustration when something is 'misplaced' or 'left behind'.

Unless your business is totally static, you will undoubtedly be experiencing at least some of these issues, and if you are not hearing the kind of requests and complaints we have mentioned, you should probably be even more concerned. Our research over many years tells us that an apparent absence of challenges to do with information management is probably not because things are perfect. It's far more likely that your staff have either given up asking, stopped caring or have implemented their own, often creative, perhaps risky, solutions.

Why should you care?

There are several, potentially profound, factors why managing data and its protection more effectively should be under active consideration today. On the minus side, inadequate data management almost invariably leads to the organisation having a poor understanding of the types of information held and hence limited knowledge of where and how data is stored. When coupled with ambiguous ownership of data, policy and processes, the end result is usually under-investment in systems, tools and skills.

These limitations can result in business managers and end users suffering delays and interruptions while executing routine tasks. The subsequent sense of frustration experienced, coupled with variable success at working around data storage and protection limitations, consumes time which could be better spent being productive and can negatively impact overall satisfaction at work. This is never more the case than when important data is 'lost'.

BENEFITS OF BETTER INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

Cost and Risk

- Lower operational overheads due to increased productivity within both IT and the business
- Capex savings within IT from better utilisation of storage
- Lower risk of compliance and reputational issues arising from security leaks, data loss, human error or misjudgement

Business Value

- Time freed up to spend on activities that create value and/or foster innovation
- IT budget and resource freed up to support value creating activity that makes a difference
- More effective use of information to drive sales and market development

Overall the results can be felt, even if they are sometimes hard to measure accurately, in terms of increased operational costs for IT, lost business revenues and opportunities or, worse still, customer retention challenges or business brand / reputation problems. Even more importantly, the organisation may find itself making crucial decisions based on less than complete or out of date information, making it more difficult to drive the type of business initiatives that really matter.

Or flipping things around, the benefits available from managing information and its protection more effectively can

enhance top and bottom line performance by liberating the potential locked up in hard to access data. Indeed, better data management capabilities can enhance productivity, foster innovation and directly facilitate better decision-making within both IT and the business.

A rapidly changing world

The general speeding up of markets, more frequent business change and the hunger for access to more information in a timely manner all drive up the level of expectation within the business. The enhanced richness of transaction data, the level of customer/supplier communication, electronic trading, increasing instrumentation and automation, combined with a general increase in the use of multi-media, are also ramping up data volumes being stored. This makes the challenges around information management and protection ever more acute.

In addition several 'social' factors are further complicating the picture. The rise of mobile and home working coupled with a proliferation of access devices, some of which may not even be owned by the enterprise, are further fragmenting where data is held and needs to be adequately protected. Then the rise of sophisticated collaboration solutions plus the emerging use of cloud services are all changing the nature and distribution of data.

Beyond these operational issues, regulatory and legislative considerations are adding to the visibility of data storage and data protection. Organisations must be able to meet a seemingly ever-expanding portfolio of regulation and legislation requirements, such as the EU data protection directives, Sarbanes Oxley and countless others around data storage.

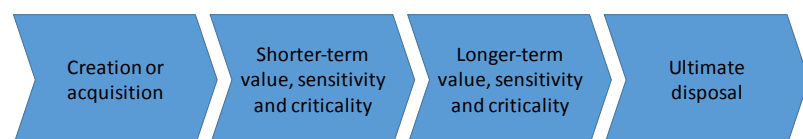
Understanding the basics

An important principle in information management is the notion that data varies considerably in terms of its value, sensitivity, and criticality to the business. There is a big difference, for example, between records relating to trading activity with customers, and the multiple drafts of the latest marketing presentation that led up to the final PowerPoint document being agreed upon.

Another key principle is that the value, sensitivity and criticality of any particular type of information is likely to

change over time, as is the likelihood of it being updated. Typically data is far more critical, in demand and subject to change when it is first created, so requirements for protection and access are higher.

THE 'LIFECYCLE VIEW OVER' TIME



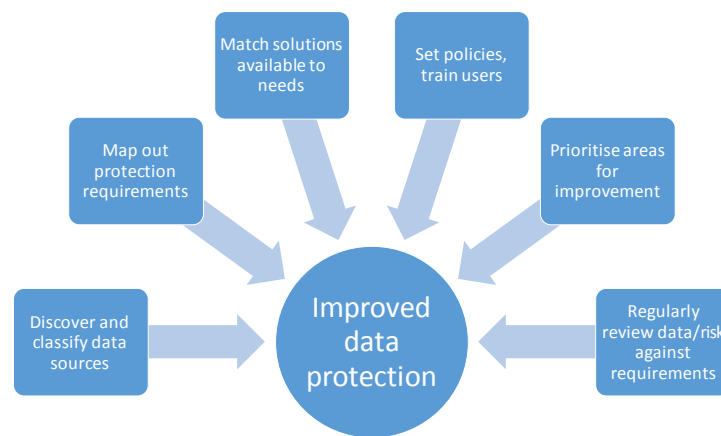
Over time, however, the vast majority of data is accessed less and less until it ultimately becomes a static resource that may not be looked at for months or years. Indeed the majority of files and data may never be accessed again following the first few weeks of being produced.

This 'information lifecycle' view of the world matters because protecting data through ongoing backup and other measures to guard against loss and ensure rapid recovery represents a direct business cost, as does making sure that data is immediately available at all times. It only makes sense to incur such expense if it's really necessary. As a simple example, holding historical data that hasn't changed or been accessed for years on expensive high performance equipment then backing it up alongside your live data is just a waste of time, money and effort. Much better to either dispose of it securely or move it to a cheaper 'archive' type solution, depending on whether or not you really need to keep it.

This brings us onto the steps required to drive improvement.

How to move forwards

There are challenges to the better protection of data in the highly fragmented world into which we are rapidly moving. Fortunately the maturity of data protection solutions has moved forwards considerably in the last few years. And such solutions now offer organisations an opportunity to not only undertake the core task of securing business information, they can now also begin to assist in the better exploitation of business information, perhaps via the use of archiving and creating a centrally managed data store where all business critical or important information is held securely.



Data discovery and classification

The primary step that must be undertaken is a data discovery process to identify the information held by the business. This should be followed by classifying the data according to business needs for its protection. Keep classification simple. This is a good opportunity to assign 'responsibility' for data so that everyone knows how to manage information over time and whom to contact for guidance on long term data protection and retention.

Map data protection requirements

Once data has been classified the organisation needs to work out how the data should be kept and protected over its lifetime, which must be defined otherwise the temptation is to keep all data indefinitely. This task must be undertaken by the business and IT together to avoid the potential for 'misclassifications' to occur, but this clearly requires political good will all-round.

Match solutions to needs

Check the market and channel partners to identify which data protection solutions can provide the protection the data requires. The range of offerings has expanded greatly in recent years with new options available for organisations of all sizes.

Set policies for data protection

Policy setting will again require the input of both the business and IT to ensure all data is protected appropriately. It is also important to ensure that end users understand why the policies take the shape they do, rather than simply communicating what not to do. In addition it is a good idea to ensure everyone is clear on the positives of data protection policies.

Prioritise areas for improvement

Once policies are in place the next step is to identify where data protection policies are not being adequately delivered. It is then possible to assess which data sets need to be the first to receive enhanced data protection and availability. It is usually more effective not to attempt to improve all areas at once but to start with targeted areas that can deliver benefits rapidly.

Monitor / Review / Revise

In common with most IT systems, data protection can never be a fixed entity as data sources change, work processes are modified and solution offerings evolve, often very rapidly. Thus it is important to keep an eye on what is happening to ensure that the implementation of data protection keeps pace with fluctuating business needs.

When selecting solutions and making the business case for their implementation it is important to ensure that best practice is exploited. The most important challenge is to not attempt to 'boil the ocean' and do everything at once. Instead tackle the data protection / business / technology challenges one by one, but use a solution that allows things to be expanded going forwards.

About Freeform Dynamics



Freeform Dynamics is a research and analysis firm. We track and report on the business impact of developments in the IT and communications sectors.

As part of this, we use an innovative research methodology to gather feedback directly from those involved in IT strategy, planning, procurement and implementation. Our output is therefore grounded in real-world practicality for use by mainstream IT professionals.

For further information or to subscribe to the Freeform Dynamics free research service, please visit www.freeformdynamics.com or contact us via info@freeformdynamics.com.

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CommVault provides companies with a better way to protect, manage, and gain business value from their data. Today, with more than 17,000 customers and counting, CommVault is liberating companies worldwide from chaos, excessive costs and complexity.

CommVault is a publicly traded data and information management software company headquartered in Oceanport, New Jersey. It made its mark with the industry's leading backup product, Simpana software. Customers choose CommVault because of its Solving Forward® philosophy and ability to deliver complete solutions with infinite scalability and unprecedented control over data and costs.

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