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Information Management and Access in the Public Sector

The potential role of active
archiving

August 2014

Introduction

About this Paper

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With the advent of digitisation, all public sector environments generate and capture a significant amount of electronic data. Once stored, it is used to make management and operational decisions, to demonstrate compliance, and to keep citizens and other stakeholders informed^[1]. If you are responsible for some or all of this activity in your organisation, you will be aware that data volumes are growing rapidly, as are the expectations of your users for fast and flexible access.

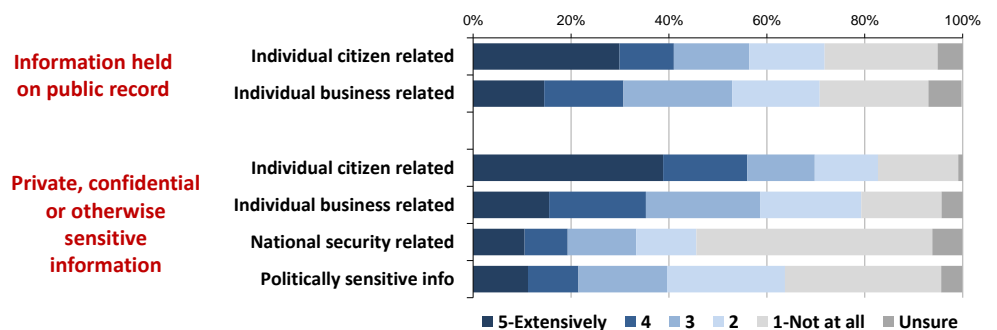
Against this background, we will explore how to manage costs and risks while meeting these changing needs through ‘active archiving’. This approach is becoming popular among those who have to address information challenges and conflicts. Along the way, we will refer to data from Freeform Dynamics research including a study based on responses from 118 public sector organisations on their evolving information management needs.

The opposing pulls of convenient access versus security and privacy

Your organisation will undoubtedly handle many different types of data, from private information relating to individual citizens and businesses, to material that could be politically sensitive in nature^[1] (Figure 1).

Figure 1

To what degree does your organisation hold the following kinds of information?



Sensitive data is often subject to a range of security criteria that must be met in order to satisfy external regulations and legislation. National and European legislation in particular impose ever greater security requirements.

‘Privacy’, especially in the wake of the Snowden revelations, has become very high profile. More than ever, the citizens you serve expect you to protect them from their information being stolen, lost or otherwise disclosed to unauthorised parties.

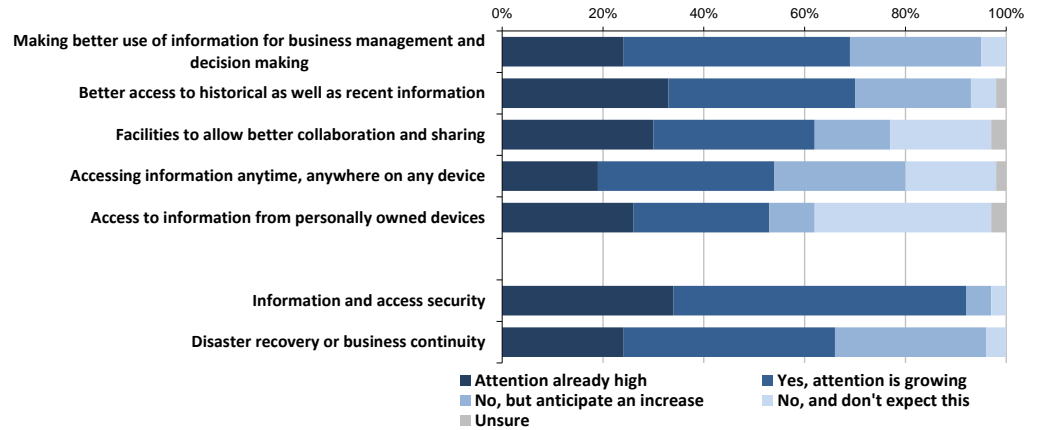
All of these requirements are difficult enough to manage in their own right, but are further exacerbated by the need to factor in users’ expectations of immediate and flexible information availability. This brings us to the question of how operational needs are evolving.

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Changing operational needs

Operational requirements in the public sector are changing just as rapidly as they are in private enterprises^[2]. Beyond basic security, most organisations see increasing requirements to make better use of information for decision-making (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Are you seeing requirements or expectations growing significantly in any of the following areas?



Users increasingly expect access to information at any time, regardless of their location and the device they are using.

Users often need access to ‘historical’ as well as current information, which may be in their own files and email accounts or in those of their peers. Research^[1] tells us, however, that users in public sector environments frequently know that data exists, but find it difficult, time-consuming or even impossible to access. Furthermore, many complain that this data is often not available quickly enough to allow it to be acted on effectively.

The rise in the use of mobile devices accentuates such problems. Users increasingly expect access to information at any time, regardless of their location and the device they are using, including personal equipment.

Working pattern changes make information management, security and sharing increasingly more complex.

Beyond information access requirements, Freeform Dynamics' research^[1] also highlights an increasing demand among public sector organisations for greater collaboration both internally between departments and externally with similar organisations and partners. Some have to extend collaboration to other types of public sector bodies or even to private businesses and enterprises.

These working pattern changes make information management, security and sharing increasingly more complex, and highlight the challenges with end-user activity. Of particular concern is the management and security of information held in email systems and on end-user devices such as PCs, laptops, tablets and smartphones.

Modern information management solutions, including active archiving which provides users with controlled and secure information access, could help address many of these challenges.

The role of 'Archiving' and Active Archiving

Until recently, archiving has been used mostly in business scenarios where compliance incentives demand long-term data access and recovery.

The acceptance of archiving solutions is likely to accelerate as data volumes increase.

The first step should be to undertake a data discovery exercise to identify the data that the company holds, where it is stored and which data sets would best benefit from being archived.

The term 'archiving' is not new, but it is an area of functionality that is often overlooked, or where up to date knowledge is scarce. Traditionally, the term refers to solutions that migrate 'inactive data' to cheaper, and generally less accessible, storage.

Until recently, archiving has been used mostly in business scenarios where compliance incentives demand long-term data access and recovery. Today, 'active archiving' has evolved to include sophisticated indexing and the ability to allow the archive repository to be accessed, within the constraints of security and data governance, from multiple devices or, where permitted, by user searches.

The archiving of non-sensitive content will probably become more pervasive as archiving products extend capabilities to provide secure access to a potentially rich source of useful but, so far, under-utilised data. Indeed, the acceptance of archiving solutions is likely to accelerate as data volumes increase by providing opportunities to ease cost pressures on primary data storage facilities and traditional backup and recovery systems.

The combination of search with a centralised active archive repository, internal or cloud-based, that would improve access to information is another important capability with the potential to save your users time and help them produce better results. A cost effective and secure active archive could significantly enhance information transparency and augment collaboration.

Where to start?

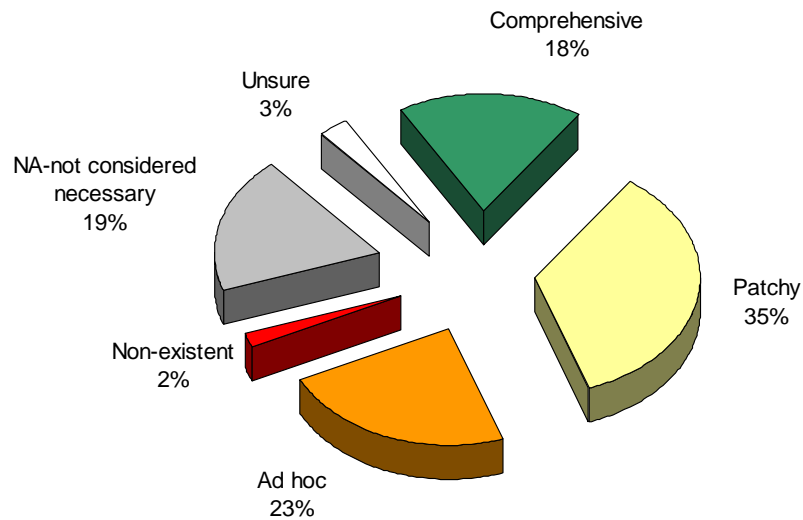
Before implementing an archiving project, the first step should be to undertake a data discovery exercise to identify the data that the company holds, where it is stored and which data sets would best benefit from being archived. This step is especially important with respect to the files held by your users on portable systems, laptops, tablets and smartphones.

Once you have the results of the data discovery, the next step is to classify the types of data held in order to be able to work out what access restrictions, legislative as well as operational, should be applied when it is archived. This step will also include determining how long it should be kept, and whether the archive repository is suitable for hosting in external systems (cloud or otherwise) or if it must be kept in 'internal' platforms.

You should also identify who is allowed to search and access different information types. This can be a resource intensive, and 'politically sensitive', process, which could explain why many organisations don't have readily available data classification policies already in place^[2] (Figure 3).

Figure 3

How would you describe your policies and procedures in relation to the classification of data to allow objective decisions on what needs to be kept and for how long?



Keep classification uncomplicated so that information security, access and management are kept as simple as possible.

The key is to keep classification uncomplicated so that information security, access and management are kept as simple as possible. This approach should help identify which users and data sets, both email- and file-based, would be included in a traditional or active archive system.

The next step is to identify potential archive and active archive solutions. Several are available that will operate on your own IT infrastructure or as 'cloud solutions' provided by organisations running the software in their data centres.

Identify potential archive and active archive solutions – either those that operate on your own IT infrastructure or as 'cloud solutions'.

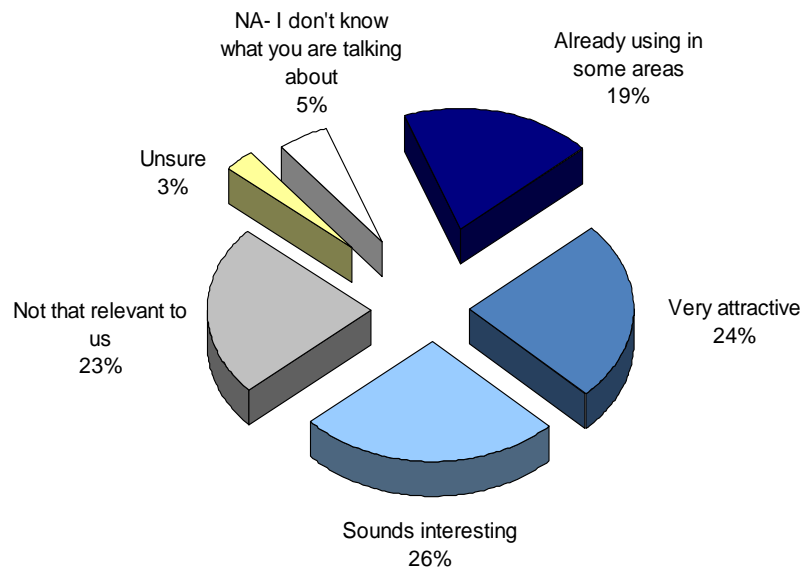
The use of 'cloud' solutions is growing in both private enterprises and the public sector. While the use of such services is not yet widespread you should not dismiss their potential without careful consideration. Various studies carried out by Freeform Dynamics illustrate that the use of external cloud solutions is accepted by many organisations for certain workloads. Indeed, the UK Government is actively promoting the very concept of Cloud Services via the G-Cloud initiative, making cloud solutions something that should always be considered.

There are also pressures in the Public Sector to increase collaboration capabilities. In the report 'Keeping Score in the Public Sector'^[1], over one in five IT professionals working in Public Sector organisations stated that the exploitation of shared infrastructure resources and the use of external services to support business demands was either a big imperative or a significant push.

This provides some context for Figure 4 which shows that half of organisations of all types find the idea of 'active archiving' to be either very attractive or something of interest, with a further fifth already using such solutions. Fewer than one in four state that such solutions are not relevant^[2].

Figure 4

How attractive would you regard online active archiving to be in your type of business environment?



The best way to move things forwards quickly is to start out with clearly delineated projects that have obvious short term benefits.

The most advanced organisations are already making changes to how their data is stored and managed.

The main challenge is to identify good solutions that deliver the capabilities you need at a price you are willing to meet. But with the management costs associated with storage rising all the time, the potential for professional archiving is likely to grow rapidly.

However, don't try to boil the ocean and do everything at once. Our research consistently shows the best way to move things forwards quickly is to start out with clearly delineated projects that have obvious short term benefits. Your methodology should also include a mechanism to report on success to key sponsors in your organisation. And you definitely need to keep refining usage as you develop your understanding of both solution capabilities and your end-users' needs.

The potential benefits of active archiving are many and various. Some may be simple to quantify, such as storage costs avoided, but others may be softer, such as more effective team collaboration. It may even be possible for you to include 'enhanced security' in your benefits list, for all forms of information access device and delivery mechanism, whether owned by the organisation or by the individual.

Archiving and active archiving are solutions that could help you address many of the challenges your organisations face today and sidestep further problems in the future. You can be sure that the most advanced organisations are already making changes to how their data is stored and managed in order to keep costs down and improve their operational effectiveness.

References and further reading

1. Keeping Score in the Public Sector
2. Storage Anywhere and Everywhere: Dealing with the Challenges of Data Fragmentation

The above papers and reports are available for download at www.freeformdynamics.com.

About Freeform Dynamics

Freeform Dynamics is an IT industry analyst firm. Through our research and insights, we aim to help busy IT and business professionals get up to speed on the latest technology developments, and make better informed investment decisions.

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About Mimecast

Mimecast is a leader in enterprise cloud services for the protection and management of corporate human generated data. The company's email security and cloud archiving services are built on Mimecast's world-leading secure cloud platform and optimized for Microsoft Exchange and Office 365.

Mimecast Email Security protects against inbound and outbound email-borne threats, deliberate or accidental data leaks and email service outages. Mimecast Cloud Archive unifies email, file and Instant Messaging data to give end-users fast access to their personal archive via PC, Mac and mobile apps. Other end-user productivity tools include Large File Send which allows users to send large attachments from within email.

For IT teams, Mimecast gives them a single administration console that provides centralized management of security and content protection as well as retention policies to support compliance and eDiscovery requirements. Founded in 2003, the company has over 10,000 customers, nearly 3 million users and works with over 800 channel partners worldwide. Mimecast has offices in Europe, North America, Africa and Australia.

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