

Information Governance

It's No Longer Merely "Nice to Have"

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In a challenging economic climate, the name of the game is lowering costs and doing more with less. In our personal lives, we postpone or forego purchases that we do not deem absolutely necessary. In our business lives, we look for ways to do things more efficiently. We cut costs from day-to-day operations and take steps to increase the productivity and value of resources.

At the same time, the new era of "going green" has us reducing waste, looking for innovative ways of reusing and recycling materials and making the most of existing resources.

But how many of us can say that we apply this same philosophy to the way we manage electronic information?

There is no question we are creating more electronic information than ever before. Analyst estimates suggest a 60% per-year volume increase in the amount of electronic information generated worldwide. The consistent complaint we hear from customers and colleagues is that there is just too much information.

How much time do you spend managing email, for example? According to a recent AIIM survey, many of us spend more than one hour every day doing just that (Source: *AIIM Industry Watch*, "Email Management: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly" May, 2009).

And when the time comes to find that specific piece of information you need—a contract, a presentation, a document or an email—how much time do you spend looking through a variety of systems, and in many instances, still not find what you're looking for?

In a time when we are all finding ways to extract maximum value from resources, the same approach needs to apply to the way we use electronic information. But where do we start?

Proactive, Policy-Driven Information Management

A good way to level-set all of your organization's needs is to take an information governance approach to information growth. *Information governance* is a proactive, policy-driven information management strategy. It integrates business objectives with information management policies to address corporate governance, regulatory compliance, e-discovery and

privacy mandates throughout the lifecycle of information, whether physical or electronic.

Information governance is born of broader governance, risk and compliance (GRC) initiatives that companies are developing in order to apply enforceable, repeatable, consistent and defensible policies.

To ensure that information is managed according to policy and is delivering business value, various constituents—including compliance officers, records managers, legal departments and IT—must come together.

Of course, getting this group to agree upon an information management strategy can be challenging. However, pressures posed by the growth of electronic information, 80% of it unstructured (per IDC estimates), coupled with expanding regulatory and e-discovery requirements, ultimately necessitate a unified information management approach.

Effective information governance provides a foundation for addressing the various challenges that we face with electronic information, including:

- ◆ **Management of information growth.** Proactively monitoring and managing what content is being stored based on business value and record keeping obligations;
- ◆ **Mitigation of risk.** Reducing risk and ensuring conformance with different regulatory, legal and business policies; and
- ◆ **Management of access to content.** Driving competitive advantage and improving business operations through both access control and better re-use of information.

Policy is at the heart of each of these challenges and key to an information governance strategy. Information governance is most effective when policies can be carried forward consistently with enabling technologies. Foundational technologies at the core of a good information governance strategy include classification, security and access control, retention policy management, search, archiving and *content management*.

The True Value of Information Governance

A question often asked is how to measure the ROI of information governance. To answer this, you must look at both the tangible and intangible benefits.

Tangible, hard-dollar savings come from the improved performance and reduced costs in production systems, which is achieved by instituting retention management and information lifecycle management (ILM).

ILM ensures that information, based on its business value, goes to the appropriate tier of storage with the appropriate services. This means that production application environments are not bloated with excessive content. The most valuable information resides on the highest performing, most expensive infrastructure, while aged content migrates seamlessly to a more cost-effective environment for long-term retention.

Operational savings arise through reduced server and storage capacity requirements, lower backup and recovery costs, as well as reductions in disaster-recovery expenses. System performance improvements and the ability to more consistently meet service level agreements are more difficult to quantify, but offer operational benefits nonetheless.

Organizations also experience information governance ROI from compliance and e-discovery perspectives, which is where some of the more intangible benefits come in to play.

Consider the damage to your company's reputation or the potentially significant fines you stand to face for non-compliance with industry regulations. Imagine the penalties you might face if a member of your organization deletes information outside of the retention policies at the same time that a legal investigation is underway? Considerable money is saved as well when you bring e-discovery in-house and create a proactive, repeatable business process instead of a one-off fire-drill each time.

At a time when there are so many competing priorities for corporate budgets, information governance may still be on your "nice to have" list. Yet, the rapid expansion of electronic information, particularly of the unstructured type, is causing more and more organizations to assume a more systematic, repeatable approach to information management.

In order to stay ahead of competition and avoid drowning in overload, it is time to make sure your information works more intelligently, your operations perform more efficiently, and your organization runs as effectively as it can. ■

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