



Unstructured Data: the elephant in the room

The time has come to take action

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Managing exponentially increasing volumes of data is fast becoming a great concern for corporations. It is not only the cost of storing this data, but—more importantly—the ability to properly secure or manage this data, understand the content and access to the data, and mitigate any associated risks.

These risks amplify the impact of data breaches, where accessing stores of data that are large, unmanaged, and containing potentially sensitive content could damage an organization. They also impact the course of business, in the case of requests for data in response to events such as litigation, access to information requests, or General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) related subject access requests. When these unplanned activities are coupled with large data shares, they can end up having a negative impact both on an organization's financial results, and reputation.

How can corporations take greater control of the situation? Well, it is not as simple as deleting hordes of data. Let's examine the three systemic issues that shed light on the challenges and considerations for remediation.

1) Unstructured Data is Largely "Invisible"

The term "unstructured data" refers to information that doesn't reside in a traditional row-column database where repetitive fields are capturing information. Unstructured data therefore includes business documents such as email messages, word-processing documents, videos, photos, audio files, presentations, and web pages. Gartner estimates that upwards of 80% of data held by an organization is unstructured and that the same percentage in number of enterprises (80%) also have "very little visibility into what's happening across their unstructured data, let alone how to manage it"¹.

Such data is the lifeblood of an organization and being unmapped poses significant risks to an organization's ability to address security and data hacks. This increases their vulnerability to security breaches and the subsequent need to remediate and manage any potential reputational and legal implications of having confidential information exposed to the public.

2) The "Storage is Cheap" Paradigm

As part of a corporation's need to be compliant and govern

their data information according to government standards and regulations, they first need to be aware of what their data footprint looks like and what gaps there may be in managing and securing that data.

However, any concern about the management of increasing data is often met with approval for purchase of more storage repositories to address this problem. In fact, this action only addresses the symptom and does not even begin to tackle the root cause.

Understanding what data is being created and amassed, who has access to the information, and what policies and procedures are in place and is adhering to, is the only way to mitigate the risk of exponential data growth. Otherwise, significant risks stemming from potential information leaks, and the increasing expenditures and costs of non-compliance will ensue and proliferate.

"[Compliance, Governance and Oversight Council] estimates that a large company with 10 petabytes of data could be spending as much as \$34.5 million on data that could be deleted."²

3) Hope is not a Strategy

All too often, strategic objectives and priorities are not aligned with compliance regulations and leading practices.

"Cleaning house" on their data, so to speak, has not been a top priority for organizations so far. There needs to be a commitment by all business units to address data hoarding and work towards a common goal of protecting both organizational and client information. Better policies and practices need to be in place to support the management of the data to mitigate risks and the potential enormous cost expenditures that could be prevented.

So, how can organizations address this business-critical issue?

- First, organizations need to gain insight into the type of data that their organization collects and creates, where that data is located, and what information business units and employees have access to. Third-party assessments will help shed light on the organization's data composition, locations, and risks.

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1 Source: www.ciklum.com/blog/big-data-and-the-challenge-of-unstructured-data/

2 www.cgoc.com

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- Next, a deeper review of the different types of unstructured data will help determine what may be relevant to keep within the organization and which documents can be defensibly deleted. There are several case studies showing that, on average, 70-80% of an organization's data volumes contain redundant, obsolete or trivial information (ROT). Storing this data costs organizations millions of dollars.
- Finally, executive teams and an organization's key information business units must be aligned at a strategic level for overall better compliance, review and monitoring of policy and procedures on an ongoing basis. If policies are not brought to life within an organization's culture with process, acceptance and utilization, they cannot be effective. Policies must be designed to enable accountability, remediation and management to truly mitigate the associated risks and costs to the organization.

"AIIM reports that on average, half of an organization's retained information has no business value."³

While there is no magic button that will address the root problem at one moment in time, every organization must prioritize good Information governance as an ongoing management concern and make it a part of a company's key initiatives going forward. To do this, executive sponsorship of the critical need to increase and sustain awareness

3 www.aiim.org

within an organization of the root cause includes a top-down commitment to take action to address the situation. The prioritization of assessments on the current state with actionable remediation plans and ongoing monitoring are the keys to beginning the journey towards the pursuit of good information governance going forward. ***The growing wave of digital information can no longer be ignored.***

Ricoh Legal Services and Ricoh eDiscovery solution architects have a long-standing history of working with corporations to help them manage the data deluge and to make more informed decisions to reduce cost, increase efficiencies, and mitigate risk. Contact us at www.ricohediscovery.com to find out more about how we work with enterprise organizations to solve the ongoing challenge of unstructured data and improve overall Information governance.

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