
Missing Metadata

The Barrier to Effective Storage Management

Tony Lock, August 2008

In a nutshell:

As the volume of data being generated continues to soar and the costs of storing it escalate dramatically it is clear that something has to be done to ensure that business information is managed effectively and within budget. Can content management solutions now provide the meta data required to enable effective storage management?

Key points:

- Until recently IT has never really focussed on storage management. Enterprises, irrespective of their size, cannot succeed without fast, reliable and secure access to corporate information
 - Information management is a major challenge. What to keep and where to store it being just two of the extremely important factors to be assessed. Storage management strategies need to change.
 - The challenge of 'the missing meta data' is now being addressed via evolving discovery and classification capabilities
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When it comes to information, most organisations' efforts have focussed on processing – i.e., moving and manipulating information in a business context. Until recently it would be fair to argue that too little attention has been given to the long term storage of said information.

However, as the volume of information and data being generated soars and the costs of storing it escalate dramatically it is clear that something has to be done. This is an issue about which, perhaps uniquely in the history of IT, all vendors and almost every organisation agree. It's time for change in just about every aspect of storage management in modern business.

Two approaches have been adopted traditionally to the long term storage of data. One was to leave it alone until the 'system', usually a business application, dies or, if there is just too much data to leave it at rest, move some of it to tape. The decision of just what data to move off of the spinning disks was usually based on how old it was or, in sophisticated cases, when it was last accessed or modified.

Now this approach is marginally better than doing nothing but, in today's high pressure, litigious business world where attention is grabbed by anything that saves money, reduces risk or can help generate new value, it is clear that such basic methods of data archiving are simply no longer

acceptable. This is where Freeform Dynamics believes that content and document management systems coupled with dexterous archiving management software have a major role to play in helping organisations develop appropriate storage management infrastructures and information management capabilities to meet modern business requirements.

Until recently, content management systems and archiving tools have required considerable effort to deploy and get up and running. Consequently they have usually only been implemented in key or highly targeted business scenarios.

However, some vendors have started to deliver software that helps to automate the first key steps - discovery and categorisation – the processes that form the foundation of ECM / EDM systems.

Previous research [1] has shown that these two areas in particular could be major sticking points for many organisations when it comes to moving forward in the information management area. Many are still struggling with policy at a corporate level (information governance). However, from a practical point of view, being physically unable to discover and classify information places an organisation at a serious disadvantage when it comes to improving storage management.

Hence, the simplification of information discovery and categorisation in terms of its business importance is an important step. In some situations they can even become semi-automated. Such essential metadata about the nature and value of information really should have been built into IT systems on day one, but that is another story.

Holding 'information about information' puts the storage manager in a position whereby they and their business peers and data generators / information owners, are in a much stronger position to understand the management policies that should be created and implemented. The goal, naturally, is to allow corporate data to be safely and cost effectively controlled whilst still allowing the business to generate maximum value from it.

As a sideline (albeit a very important one) these capabilities can also help organisations reduce the effort required to meet regulatory obligations; without the possession of accurate storage meta data information, requests for information at any level present a significant headache [1].

With the 'missing meta data', it becomes possible to define policies that describe just how and on which platforms different classes of data should be held. Improved information management capabilities drive the need for improvements in storage infrastructure and vice versa. It is a virtuous circle and an area which poses considerable headaches – and opportunities – for businesses today.

The latest software and the application of best practices now offer the chance for effective data classification to become a reality. It is this metadata that promises to help improve the administration and exploitation of data over long periods of time.

References

[1] Information Governance: The keystone of a sustainable business and IT strategy
Atherton & Collins, Freeform Dynamics Ltd, February 2008.

<http://www.freeformdynamics.com/fullarticle.asp?aid=138>

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