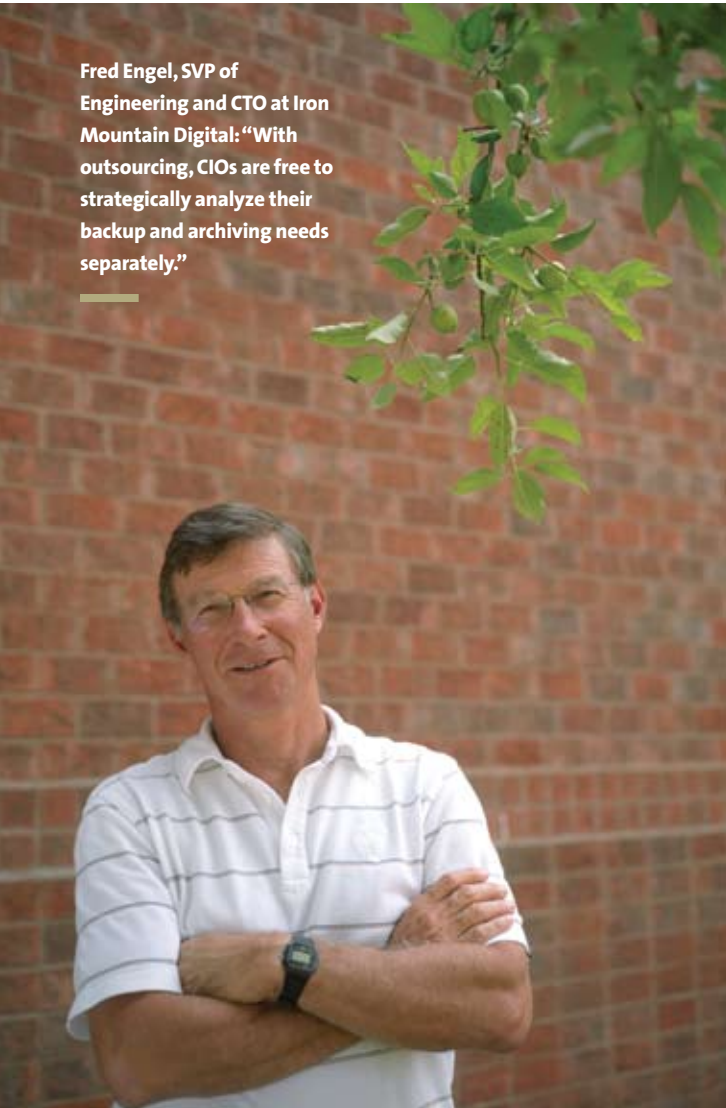


Fred Engel, SVP of Engineering and CTO at Iron Mountain Digital: “With outsourcing, CIOs are free to strategically analyze their backup and archiving needs separately.”



Best Practices or Best Effort?

IDG research reveals gaps between information management best efforts and best practices

BY KARYN MURPHY

BOTTOM LINE

Recent research reveals that IT professionals understand the fundamentals of managing and protecting data, but key best practices are often not in place.

COMPLIANCE AND SECURITY, among other things, are driving greater attention to electronic information management strategies, from data retention schedules to destruction protocols. But are CIOs overly confident in their efforts?

A recent study by IDG Research Services reveals that IT professionals understand the fundamentals of managing

and protecting data, but key best practices are often not in place.

Case in point: The majority of respondents express an appreciation for outsourcing as one of those best practices, yet only 17 percent are ready to embrace Storage-as-a-Service. The study polled 100 IT decision-makers from organizations with 1,000 or more employees. Research took place in January 2008, and included responses from 15 verticals, with healthcare, manufacturing, government, finance and banking, and insurance comprising the majority of respondents.

“This obvious discrepancy begs a very important question,” says Fred Engel, SVP of Engineering and CTO of Iron Mountain Digital. “Are CIOs doing enough to bet their badge on their current information management, storage and data protection strategy?”

Progress, but Still Room to Improve

When it comes to information management, storage and data protection strategies, CIOs are making significant headway. The IDG study identifies four decisive actions that respondents say they are taking to better manage and protect their data. But at the same time, it uncovers several critical areas where enterprises may be falling short.

1. CIOs are creating policies around retention and destruction. Ninety-four percent of respondents indicate that they have created or are in the process of creating written policies governing the retention and destruction of electronic information. Still, with such an overwhelming response, one must question how formal and comprehensive those policies are. Best practices mandate that policies be continually updated and formally communicated. Perhaps more important, those policies must extend enterprise-wide, across centralized records and desktop files alike. And they should cover all types of media, from physical and electronic records to structured and unstructured data. That seems a tall order for such a high percentage of respondents.

2. Enterprises are treating backup and archiving requirements separately. Another encouraging fact is that nearly half of the respondents say they archive separately from their backups. Yet a full 39 percent still do not discern

between the two disciplines. Best practices require CIOs to consider the business implications associated with both scenarios, rather than turn to what's most comfortable. "An IT decision maker responsible for disaster recovery mustn't automatically solve archiving-related problems with backup solutions," says Engel. "And an email database administrator shouldn't fixate on an archiving solution to resolve a business continuity need."

3. The retention and destruction of electronic records has become a selective process. The majority of respondents are selectively retaining electronic data for a specified period of time. However, about 20 percent say they keep everything indefinitely, or selectively retain data indefinitely. This may reflect a learned tendency to rely on nightly backup as a retention policy. But that certainly doesn't make for a best practice in these highly regulated times. Rather, enterprises need to implement archiving protocols based on the business and legal implications of specific types of data, and then communicate and enforce the policy enterprise-wide.

4. Enterprises are actively investing in archiving technology. In regard to infrastructure, enterprises seem to be on track, with 62 percent already investing in information archival technology. "Though in another survey conducted by IDG last year, we learned that only 38 percent of enterprises index their data," Engel observes. Indexing is certainly a best practice in eDiscovery, as the technology is used to locate, analyze and present requested records in a timely manner based on specific requirements.

Moving Storage to a Service

The greatest gap between best practices and best efforts involves outsourcing. Storage-as-a-Service is becoming a compelling option, in which information is selectively removed from an operational system and stored with a third party for electronic archival and retrieval.

"It's clear from the survey results that IT leaders understand the potential upside to outsourcing their storage requirements," says Engel. "So it's no surprise that Storage-as-a-Service is emerging as an overarching best practice in information management."

That's because it affords enterprises the capabilities necessary to bring their efforts to the next level. Storage-as-a-Service provides data protection and recovery across servers, shared files, even desktops. Scheduled and automated archival and backup are configurable based on specific policy, and data meet

more stringent recovery time objectives and recovery point objectives than in internal programs. What's more, enterprises can leverage state-of-the-art technology without the capital investment. The Storage-as-a-Service model delivers the indexing capabilities required for eDiscovery. Files are compressed to minimize the storage footprint, and replications are made only for incremental changes to existing files. And all of this is transparent to the end user with onsite appliances for rapid restore.

Indeed, the return on investment for Storage-as-a-Service speaks volumes, with survey respondents pointing to a host of risk and cost benefits. The risk benefits rate highest overall, including simplified legal discovery, long-term protection and enhanced compliance; offloading risk and third-party indemnification rank lower. Cost benefits, including improved utilization, reduced complexity, simplified storage infrastructure and less floor space, rank strong as well, but are secondary to risk rewards.

But only a mere 17 percent of respondents express readiness to jump aboard the Storage-as-a-Service bandwagon. That brings to bear some critical questions: Is outsourcing worth greater consideration? Are CIOs willing to admit there could be a better way? And how confident are they, really, in their strategies, now that the benefits of Storage-as-a-Service are understood?

"Most important with outsourcing, CIOs are free to strategically analyze their backup and archiving needs separately and implement the right information management for their unique business needs," says Engel. "And, of course, their valuable data assets are safe, available, compliant-enabled and useful." ▲

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