

Tap into a rich vein of information

Unstructured data like emails, call-centre contacts and comments on social networking sites could be of great value to companies, but the huge volume of data and uncertainty about its value have prevented many from trawling through it. With the help of experts they could rationalise their storage needs and discover a goldmine of information, Matthew Yeager of **Computacenter** explains to Jim Banks.

The volume of information generated by large corporates continues to grow at an astounding rate, bringing many challenges in terms of storage and data management. Amidst the repetitive and the redundant lie gems of information about customers, products and market perception, but it is a brave company that dives into the data to find the hidden treasure.

'Any large company is now into petabytes of data. A few years ago the maximum was one petabyte, but now companies may have two, three or four petabytes of data to manage. A lot of that, often 80%, is unstructured data, and a lot of it is duplicate or dormant data. Getting value from it is very difficult unless you look at all the data, and I don't know any tools that can do that efficiently,' says Matthew Yeager, Practice Leader of Storage & Data Protection for Computacenter (UK) Ltd.

Computacenter is a leading independent provider of IT infrastructure services, helping customers to maximise the value of their IT investment. As such it has seen the volume of its customers' data grow exponentially. To put this growth into perspective, one petabyte is equal to one quadrillion bytes. That is 1,000 terabytes or 1,000,000GB.

'It is hard to quantify the value of that data, which could hold credit card data or important customer information. It could be a treasure trove. Some companies coming from a transactional process background may want to trawl through all of their emails and so forth to get to the useful data, but if I were to do it I would institute the use of a particular equation,' Yeager remarks.

'You must look at the spend versus the value, while considering the disruption to the business. It is hard to point that

equation at data en masse, so the first step is to reduce the amount of target data by identifying duplicate information and dormant data that has not been touched for a long time. Usually the ratio of duplicate information is about 40:1, but it can be as high as 200:1. Identify the duplicate data and you reduce your actively managed data footprint. Then you can run your analysis,' he stresses.

The equation is *Return on Investment (ROI) + Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) + Disruption*.

'In the downturn it is all about cost savings, so after due diligence, if we are wrong about the savings then we write you a cheque. That's what sets us apart.'

Be practical, prioritise

Minimising the amount of unstructured data is undoubtedly the first step in making it manageable and uncovering its value.

'A lot depends on how your data is structured – how much of it, for instance, is tier-1 data? How fast does it grow? We have industry standard guidelines and we have deep vendor relationships, so we can look at how techniques like virtualisation could reduce the amount of storage



you need across different tiers of data,' explains Yeager.

'We tell you how much you could save and what's more, we underwrite those savings because we have confidence in our solutions. In the downturn it is all about cost savings, so after due diligence, if we are wrong about the savings then we write you a cheque. That's what sets us apart. There are some great data management products out there, and we show how these technologies can reduce your data footprint. We are confident enough to underwrite it, and that has to be attractive to finance directors,' he adds.

Computacenter will apply Yeager's equation and show a specific level of savings that can be made for a given spend by a company, and if it is wrong then it will pay the difference.

'Over the last 20 years storage has become something of a black art. We can show you that it is not as complex as it seems.' ■

Further information

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