G00232238

IT Cost Savings With Information Governance

Published: 17 April 2012

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By systematically eliminating redundant information, Cisco has retired multiple legacy systems, eliminated "shadow IT," reclaimed 1 petabyte of storage space in its data centers and saved $12 million in IT costs. Its approach demonstrates a number of best practices.

Key Challenges

- In many organizations, valuable intellectual capital is not being properly controlled; the legal team is finding that litigation requests are harder to manage; and organizations generally have the feeling that they are not getting full value from the systems they invested in to manage documents.[1]
- Records management is not enough: true information governance protects intellectual property (IP), helps exploit it effectively, improves IT performance and performance management, and cuts costs.
- Only business users can define the business continuity data that they need but they need advice about how long to retain it and how to organize it. The discussion is extremely valuable, but be prepared for it to take a lot longer than anyone thinks it will.

Recommendations

- Build an information governance business case around saving money by reducing storage costs; enabling data to move to the cloud; decreasing the cost and risk of e-discovery for litigation; enabling regulatory compliance; and helping the CIO to implement new systems that will improve IT efficiency and responsiveness.
- Roll records management efforts into an information governance initiative. Because it is a strategic initiative, it encompasses all data, assigns roles and responsibilities, puts an information life cycle in place and emphasizes enforcement.
- Information governance is not stand-alone — find a business outcome that depends on information governance and use that as a catalyst.

- Do not give end-user groups a blank sheet of paper: put mechanisms in place to analyze their data usage to make recommendations for them, asking for their opinions and recommendations in return.
- As a first step, work first with legal to define a set of information that can be deleted without necessarily consulting the business. Unless it is needed by legal to comply with a preservation order, and records management deems that it is not a record that still needs to be retained, information can be deleted without reference to the business users.

Analysis

Like many organizations, Cisco has been facing a growing amount of digital information. Also in common with many organizations, it has made attempts in the past few years to bring this problem under control.

In 2005, it began looking at a way to implement a records management program to deal with the vast amounts of digital data produced by its employees and systems. The state of play at that point was the same as it was — and is — for many companies. Data was accumulating at an increasing rate, was resident in many systems (online and offline) and a focused review or enterprisewide best practice was missing. IT were creating backup tapes and, like many organizations, they were allowing these to serve as a data archive. As a result, they were being kept for much longer than is recommended for backup best practice.

Although there were content and data management systems and policies in place, they were not being used and were regarded by many as simply too much trouble. "Shadow IT" workgroup-level systems were cropping up and these were being used to bypass the system of record. The result was that engineering management felt that valuable intellectual capital was not being properly controlled; the legal team found that litigation requests were harder to manage; and the organization generally had the feeling it was not getting full value from its IT investment.

Before beginning this project, Cisco spent a considerable amount of time and energy trying to build a records management system, but did not succeed. The records management and legal groups (most interested in the issue of document control) and IT (forced to spend ever-increasing amounts of money on storage) were all frustrated and could not seem to engage others in the organization to get up to speed with the records management program.

This story is similar to many that Gartner has heard over the years. Storage is perceived as inexpensive: dealing with data is IT's job, and mostly because sorting and deleting information is more trouble than simply ignoring it, end users, who create and use the data, tend to ignore records management projects. There are technical solutions to the problem, but they require a lot of upfront work and effort and ongoing commitment on the part of IT, management and individual employees. In the vast majority of companies, the result has been that despite repeated attempts to implement records management, very few records projects have succeeded, let alone been sustained.

In 2008 and 2009, that situation changed at Cisco and many other companies. Like every company during the recession, management was looking for ways to cut costs and reduce risk, while

remaining agile and competitive. The senior manager of the records management program at Cisco saw this as an opportunity to revitalize the project with a stronger business case.

To build that stronger business case, interested parties at Cisco recast the records management program in a more strategic context. There were several main points to the strategy. First, the control of information was linked to other strategic goals within the company, such as more efficient use of IT resources, better leverage of valuable engineering information and reducing the cost and risk of litigation. At high technology companies like Cisco, IP in the form of patents is a primary driver of value (see Note 1). Protecting and defending IP in patent litigation is of strategic importance. Because much of the provenance of inventions takes the form of engineering drawings, project information and other documentary evidence, any patent-intensive company can use IP protection as the basis of a case for information governance. In outlining the governance program, the project leaders at Cisco also set objectives that were linked to metrics so that they could measure their success. Goals included a reduction in the amount of shadow IT that people were using and a reduction in the amount of data that was held overall. A parallel metric was to reduce the number of legacy systems maintained by Cisco, including systems that held structured operation data as well as systems that had unstructured and semi-structured data in them. To make sure that these objectives were met, information governance champions met with business leaders. They consulted with them and ensured they understood that if they wanted the benefits of information governance (such as having less data to sort through in the event of litigation), they would need to be responsible and accountable for the information life cycle in the future.

The result has been, over the course of the intervening years, that Cisco has succeeded in implementing and maintaining an information governance program. Its experiences have yielded some best practices and recommendations that we believe will benefit any company that is taking on, yet again, an information governance effort.

Cisco was successful in making the transition from a records management project to an information governance program. The key elements were: *all* information was in scope (not just documents); multiple departments were involved (not just IT and legal, but also business); and the program is ongoing and includes information life cycle management, assignment of departmental-level responsibility and accountability, and the use of metrics to measure program success.

Best Practice: Include All Structured and Unstructured Data

The Cisco program's scope was broad and covered all data types (documents, structured data, video, social media, etc.). The approach in dealing with structured data was different than with documents or videos, but all tied back to a single policy: the records retention schedule and information disposition policy. Immediate success was based on identifying two to three of the largest databases which were all structured. They identified data that was current or had records retention requirements and migrated it to a new system. Over 90% of the data that was in the old system was not brought over and, after legal review, was destroyed. This was repeated across a number of databases and provided quick (and easy) success. The process for dealing with videos or documents involved business user interaction and was more time consuming than structured data. In the end, however, Cisco identified data that had ongoing value to the business or legal

retention requirements and established a process to manage data as such. The best practice is to identify data that has ongoing value to the business and to purge no-value data in a consistent and repeatable cycle.

Best Practice: Determine Who Needs to Be Responsible, Accountable, Consulted and Informed

When asked, business leaders typically respond with something like "We need all of it," meaning that they didn't have time to think about the problem. Instead, at Cisco, the information governance team from the records management and IT departments took responsibility with legal to make sure that they did not violate any legal or regulatory requirements in the initial purge. They spent the first year identifying duplicates, extremely old data, backup tapes that did not contain any data that was being held for litigation purposes and simply got rid of it, and shared the responsibility and accountability with legal. As it happened, the first three systems that they tackled were structured data held in database systems. This part of the project took a year, but it eliminated duplicates, backup tapes that were years old and other data that was of no interest to anyone and not required by law or regulation to be held. The legal, records management and IT teams were fully responsible and accountable for this work.

In terms of best practice, when beginning a massive data cleanup project, work with selected business leaders (legal and compliance) to get rid of that which is truly worthless. Engaging with the business more broadly at this early stage can be inefficient and/or counterproductive, but does put everyone on high alert, ready to ensure that IT keeps all its data because it "might need it some day."

Best Practice: Gauge and Prioritize the Appropriate Involvement of Business Users

Although it is necessary to involve business users in the information governance process, do not involve them too early. Don't approach them with a blank sheet of paper. IT can study the data usage patterns of business groups, which gives them something to go on, rather than presenting them with a blank sheet of paper, asking them to analyze their own information usage. No matter how much of a head start you may have in this regard, gauge how much time you think you will need to get its input and then double that amount of time. It takes twice as long to identify business continuity information and document its life cycle than you think it will. Some groups are easier to work with than others. At Cisco, the engineer's requirements were among the most complex. Starting with easier groups for quick wins is a good strategy to pursue. Tackling the information needs of complex functions can stall the project and failing to show results might be enough to derail it in the long term. Experiencing a few successes — and other occurrences — makes it easier to continue with the more complex problems, no matter how long it may take.

As a best practice, use part of the time spent with business to provide them with a basic understanding of information governance, records management and other policies that apply to the data.

Best Practice: Emphasize the Value of Data to the Business, Not Just the Risk

End users often complain about the time a report takes to generate or the time it takes for search results to come back. Even when the results do come back, it's often a mixture of old and duplicated information and the business is left to sift through all of it. Information governance programs should aim to keep only relevant information in production systems, helping reports and searches come back quicker and be more relevant. Overloaded data systems tend to break down and end life prematurely. From a compliance perspective, this is about doing the right thing for the company. By reducing data, the time and dollars that Cisco spent as a company looking for information during litigation, audits, etc., were reduced. Finally, if policies state that information should be destroyed at the end of the retention requirement, litigation and audit teams can say "Our policy says we don't have this data and I know we don't because we follow our policies." As a best practice, emphasize the "greater good" component when talking about caring for IT investments.

Best Practice: Create a Maintenance Plan and Measure Compliance

Information governance teams work in parallel with IT architects to document all system environments, managing both structured and unstructured information types, and researching policies around the data privacy, retention and security aspects of the systems. All groups are a part of the approval process for any information governance tasks. Armed with the inventory of the systems and data, along with the policies about its use, information governance people work with system database administrators to create an appropriate life cycle for the data at the end of its life cycle. The questions that need to be answered are:

- Who is using this system
- What is the data and where is it physically located
- When does this move to an archive/less expensive storage tier, include one that is offline
- What are the records and what are the nonrecords

Each existing system and any proposed systems must address these questions. The information governance team at Cisco spent 18 months going from system to system, starting with the biggest ones (in terms of data stored), working its way through a series of questions. The maintenance of the program is then handed off to IT and the business users themselves, who audit once every two years or so. The audits determine if disposition cycles are being kept up to date, whether or not new data is being captured and so on.

Best Practice Summary

In this example of information governance best practices, Cisco demonstrates many of the characteristics of a world-class information governance program:

- The information governance model reflects the corporate governance model — decision rights about information are allocated in the same way as business decision rights.
- The governance model is lightweight. The governance project and legal teams took as much of the work on themselves as possible. They gathered the data to help business units make their decisions about information, mainly by analyzing what they were using in the first place. As much as possible, ongoing work is designed to have minimal interference with ongoing business operations. By eliminating systems that were not being used, and focusing on the high value ones, overall there is less information to keep track of and worry about, for everyone.
- The information governance model covers both IT and business aspects of Cisco operations.
- Roles, responsibilities and rules are clear and concise. Responsible and accountable parties in the governance process understand what to do, as well as how and when to do it.
- Outcomes were measured and reported on. For example, improved user experience was a key benefit of Cisco's program. A metric regarding user experience consisted of a reduction in online transaction processing response times for online transaction processing. By having this SLA in place, customer satisfaction was improved.

By raising governance to a strategic level and tying it to business objectives, and following the guidelines outlined in this best practice note, your organization can realize the benefits of information governance.

Recommended Reading

Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.

"Chief Legal Officers Need Better Partnerships With IT: Gartner/ALM CLO Survey Results"

"Information Governance Best Practices for Content-Intensive Processes"

"Information Governance: 12 Things to Do in 2012"

"Managing Orphaned Data Will Require a Multidisciplinary Approach"

"Ten Reasons Security Is Overlooked in Information Governance, and How to Fix It"

Evidence

[1] The material for this research note was obtained by interviewing Cisco personnel.

Note 1 IP Management and Protection

IP management and protection is a huge issue in many industry verticals, including: high technology, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, media and publishing and fast-moving consumer goods. IP-intensive industries are among the most productive.

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