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How's Your Archive? Do You Really Care?

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How's your archive? Do you really care? Your answer to the second question will pretty much indicate the importance of long-term information retention in your organization. A [recent survey](#) conducted by the SNIA Data Management Forum (DMF) found:

- Less than 50% of business people believe they get value from their long-term information archive
- Over 80% of business and IT think the cost of long-term archiving is too high
- Business management does not value archive work

Ok, no big surprise. Archives don't seem to provide an obvious business value: they cost too much to maintain, and most business people I know don't arrive at the office in the morning dying to know how their company's archive work is going. These attitudes have relegated archiving to non-business critical status for years.

Changes in the business environment (regulatory compliance, legal risk and sustained high data growth rates), improvements in digital archive technologies and development of a new interface that allows applications to search, access and migrate fixed-content data across heterogeneous storage environments are creating a renewed interest in archive - and compelling reasons for you to care.

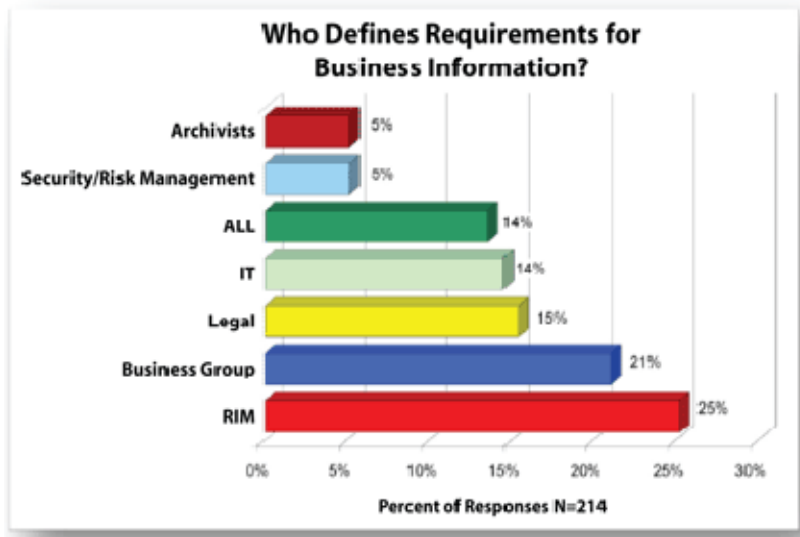
The Time-Horizon of Business

Business people typically focus on the next 30-90 days. Whether it's closing the sale, meeting production quotas or implementing cost control programs, business managers are keeping one eye on stock values and the other eye on hitting short-term goals to reach bonus targets. Ask a business manager to spend time and money to store and manage last month's, last year's, or three-year-old data - and you'll find their cell phone just keeps them too busy to sit in a planning meeting.

IT is not much better. Operations folks are planning new system rollouts, storage system upgrades and worrying if backups and disaster recovery processes are working. Most of the time they think - "hey, if all the parts are moving, and application up-time requirements are being met, we're doing our job." The database architects are just trying to keep up with growing storage needs and with planning space for the next new application coming on line.

Who's Managing the Information?

So who's responsible for managing the businesses information? The IT group moves bits and bytes around and deals with data streams, file systems and table spaces. They rarely, if ever, talk about the value of the business information in the space they manage. Who determines when business records should be purged, what should be preserved and for how long? The SNIA DMF survey found inconsistent answers to these questions.



The good news is that 14% of survey respondents said that Business, Records Information Managers (RIM), Legal, Security and IT collaborate to establish information retention policies. The bad news is that ONLY 14% of businesses are collaborating to establish the value of their information!

Another 14% of respondents said they leave the decision to IT. I have great faith in the work ethic, technical knowledge and the sincere interest of IT people to implement solutions to support their organizations (I have to, I've been doing just that for over 25 years). I also know that 95% or more of IT people have absolutely no idea about the value of the information they are managing, or if the information should be preserved or destroyed. The 14% of survey respondents counting on IT to manage their information had better take another look at their planning practices.

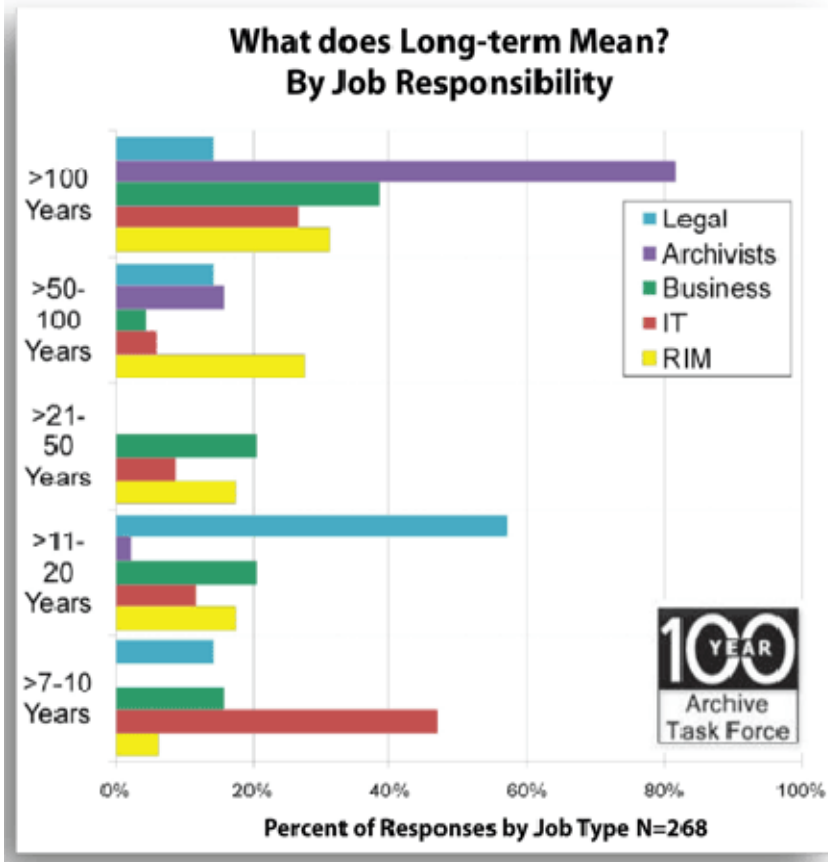
21% leave information preservation decisions to the business groups. It is interesting to contrast this with the finding that 80% of business respondents thought their archive costs were too high. Do you think if they got involved they might help drive down the cost while raising the value of the archives? You bet.

It is worrisome that only 15% of companies get legal involved, and only 25% get RIM personnel involved in information retention planning. These are the business areas that are tasked with understanding how compliance and e-discovery issues affect the business. Business, legal and RIM understand the value of the data and the requirements for information retention and preservation. Security and IT understand how to create solutions to meet retention requirements. If these groups are not collaborating, your business is wasting time and money, and it is at risk of fines and judgments for operating in non-compliant environments.

How Long is 'Long-Term' for Archives?

The SNIA DMF survey asked, "what does long-term mean?" and found some very interesting results. Based on survey responses:

- 80% of respondents have information that must be kept more than 50 years
- 95% of archivists define long term as greater than 50 years
- 75% of records managers defined long term as greater than 21 years
- 65% of business respondents defined long term as greater than 21 years
- 64% of IT personnel defined long term as only 7 to 20 years

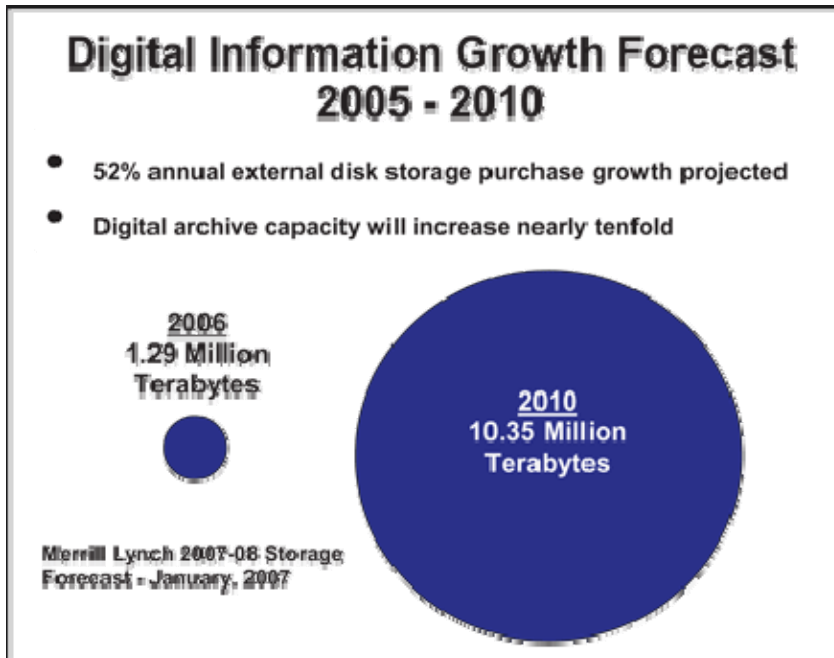


You can argue over the time period findings, but the magnitude of the disconnect should not be ignored. Business, RIM and archivists are viewing long-term information preservation from a completely different perspective than IT folks.

IT is responsible for developing and implementing technical solutions to address business requirements. They should be driving the collaboration process while it is working to document business needs and architect solutions. This survey clearly shows information retention planning is not happening as a collaborative effort.

Data Growth, Cost and Complexity

The Merrill Lynch annual data growth rate forecast of 50% continues the trend established in 2002. In the past, hardware, software and system advances have helped deal with data growth - in the next few years, already over-stretched IT operation staffs will simply be overrun by growing storage and data management needs.



The high cost of maintaining this growth rate on tier one systems - the most expensive to operate due to performance, recovery time, recovery point and disaster preparedness requirements they serve - cannot be absorbed by IT operating budgets.

Addressing the Triple Threat

It is clear that the IT industry has entered a new era. Data growth rates, compliance regulations and risk of legal action have created a triple threat to the data center and the business it supports. Existing practices are not enough to deal with the combination of issues. As one survey respondent elegantly stated "Remember that IT doesn't own the information. RIM, Legal, Business units and IT all have a part to play in the decisions applied to business records and should be sitting down at the table together." The SNIA DMF has been working on promoting collaborative business practices for a number of years and defines archive in the context of long-term digital information, as "...a collection of information objects retained in a repository designed to protect, control, maintain integrity, and guarantee access over their required retention period." (visit <http://www.snia-dmf.org> to view the full text).

Digital archive solutions can help data center operations address this triple threat by reducing operating costs and providing compliant storage environments for long-term digital data. Some people still think an archive is placing a tape in a cave - it's not.

The implementation of proper archiving practices will remove data from tier one storage faster, therefore reducing the size, cost and complexity of operating these environments. It will maintain appropriate business information in an immutable, searchable method, and it will ensure data deletion at appropriate times. So the next time you are asked if you care about your business' information archive, you now know the reasons you should!

The SNIA Data Management Forum

The SNIA Data Management Forum is a cooperative initiative of IT professionals, vendors, integrators, and service providers working together to conduct market education, develop best practices and promote standardization activities that help organizations become Information-Centric enterprises. Areas of focus include the technologies and services that support information lifecycle management, data protection, information security and long-term digital information

retention, and preservation. For more information, visit <http://www.snia-dmf.org>. Find a passion. Get involved.

References:

- SNIA-DMF 100 Year Archive Requirements Survey, January 2007
<http://www.snia-dmf.org/100year/index.shtml>
- Merrill Lynch 2007-08 Storage Forecast - January, 2007

About the Author

Jeff K. Porter, senior technologist in the Information Management Solution Group at EMC Corporation, has over twenty-five years experience in a variety of technology disciplines including engineering, product management, consulting, customer service and technology management. He is an active member of SNIA and is Chairman of the Board of Directors of the SNIA Data Management Forum.