

IS YOUR TAPE ARCHIVE A TICKING TIME BOMB?

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Despite reports of its demise, tape remains the predominant repository for historical business information. In fact, recent research from the Enterprise Strategy Group (ESG) shows that 82 percent of organizations still use tape to support all or at least a portion of onsite backup processes. However, many organizations still do not have the proper procedures and controls in place to keep track of their data.

Organizations without a tested strategy for managing stored data are taking a serious gamble with their future. Moreover, simply assuming legacy data will not be an issue and archived information will be easily accessible and usable if and when they need it is a mistake. To avoid the tape archive ticking time bomb scenario, it is imperative companies put an effective strategy in place to determine what information is stored on these tapes - and for how long they are kept, onsite or off - to avoid facing a deluge of problems ranging from inflated IT budgets to increased e-discovery risks and costs.

A reliable corporate information management strategy can both maximize accessibility and minimize risk, reducing potential headaches as businesses face regulatory compliance, security and litigation readiness requirements.

To illustrate the potential risks associated with remaining reactive with your information management strategy, here are seven threats that could impact not only the accessibility of your data, but the long-term health of your business – especially if they are not discovered until your organization is in a reactive, crisis mode. Even if you routinely backup and store information, your processes may not be strong enough to protect your data from issues including:

- **Backup Software Failure:** Although your organization's backup software is set up correctly, the actual backup data itself is never verified, effectively losing your data in a sea of information.
- **Storage Media Failures:** Regardless of the reliability of your storage media, failure is a simple fact of life. An organization can face tape drive failure, corrupt or inaccessible tapes, or simply the information written to tape in not "readable."

- **Human Error:** One of the leading causes of data loss, human error can include simple errors such as accidentally re-initializing a tape or forgetting to enable the append option before starting a backup.
- **Volume of Data and "Findability:"** The sheer volume of data and the ability to find specific content within the corporate memory can be overwhelming - particularly in the case of large or global organizations.
- **Aging Systems & Obsolescence:** Even in today's world, the need to maintain legacy data, and convert old static systems to another format or newer technology can result in a loss of data.
- **Disaster:** Fire, water damage, mud, extraordinary cold, heat or other natural catastrophes are often the reason tapes become contaminated, damaged and no longer legible using standard means.
- **Forensically Unsound Methods:** Finally, while the data may be "readable" by a human, moving it incorrectly can modify the file or system metadata relied upon for compliance, investigative and e-discovery purposes.

Developing a system to effectively protect your information and avoid the data accessibility gamble does not need to be a time consuming, technically difficult or costly exercise. Technology can easily streamline the entire process, and expert consultative assistance is available for organizations that need help making sense of the information life cycle.

Rather than rely on a false sense of security, the following four simple steps are proactive measures to manage stored data more efficiently, reduce the load on IT personnel and infrastructure, and ultimately ease your mind and prepare you for any information demand you face.

1. **Define The Project:** Defining the project scope and identifying the required technical and personnel resources is a step that cannot be skipped or completed half-heartedly. Recording the type of media and its condition is just as important as clarifying the suitable target medium. Even with apparently devastating damage, there is usually some sort of recovery possible offering the opportunity to arrange the company's long-term backups better at the same time.
2. **Analyze The Data:** An organization must identify the contents of the media in order to make informed decisions later about data retention, destruction, or suitability for compliance or litigation readiness. Depending on the business

needs, scanning, cataloging, or indexing the media can help an organization narrow their focus to the relevant media.

3. **Manage and Refine The Data:** Organizations regularly complete incremental (daily/weekly) and full (month-end/year-end) backups. Although this is an industry “best practice,” the result creates multiple copies of the same data. Based on the previous analysis and knowledge of an organization’s backup procedures, the relevant data set can be culled further, and assuming there is no active legal hold on the data, the duplicate data can be deleted. If the data must be retained, backups can be consolidated by restoring them to higher capacity tapes.
4. **Perfect Data Delivery:** When defining a project’s scope, data conversion and/or manipulation requirements may have been identified. It is important to understand the degree of complexity involved in order to keep the project on schedule and within budget. Some conversions are straightforward such as copying files from one computer system platform so they are readable by another platform, but other conversions may require more technical expertise. A more complex conversion may involve the manipulation of fields in a database.

Projects involving the management and manipulation of stored data can be triggered by a variety of regulatory, compliance or e-discovery needs. Planning for data accessibility streamlines the effort required to meet those needs and mitigates the associated risks. Organizations that define their information management strategies and employ the tips outlined above will see these results. Simply put, an information management strategy generated with a well-defined project plan, comprehensive documentation of data contents, improved usage of IT resources and timely delivery of data will greatly benefit your organization, regardless of your storage solutions.



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