



MEEJA HORS

Media whores and media wars mean storage is the new, safe sex.

BY JANE SMITH

Did you know? If only 1 megabyte of data is lost you can say goodbye to 500 sheets of A4 paper, lose 2 gigabytes of memory and you lose the equivalent of 1 million sheets of A4 paper! Whatever the degree of loss, the effect is always the same, to disrupt business, cause unnecessary work and cost business more money.

Both professionally and personally we are becoming ever more dependant upon our PCs and most of us probably don't have a good backup plan.

Whether we're talking about the smallest of businesses through to the giant corporations, the effects of lost data are the same. So an effective back-up plan is essential. Right across the spectrum, from high-end requirements through to the home user, the choice of media storage solutions now available means there's the opportunity to match the right product to the need rather than being forced down a particular route.

For example, DVD technology is proving popular for backing up due

to its universal compatibility and capacity when used in a jukebox environment. There aren't many PCs or laptops that cannot read this type of media anymore so it's really useful for distribution of information too.

But keeping your information safe is not the end of the story, it's much more complicated than that. Does anyone remember the Butter Mountains of Europe? Well we're now starting to experience Global Information Mountains!

We're now producing so much information we're all finding it hard

to cope and the scale of effective information management is becoming a major challenge, particularly in larger organisations.

Lifecycle management of information needs thinking about in a lot more depth, especially in relation to what products are best to use based on the principles of accessibility, availability and protection of information. Cost of ownership is also an important consideration as there are hardware and software solutions available across the spectrum of price depending upon complexity and scale. Owners and users of information need to be clear and base their decisions upon where the data is in its lifecycle and its importance to the organisation i.e. how quickly is access needed and how critical would it be if things went wrong.

In simple terms there are two types of business information. Fixed Content Data; comprising backup copy, transactional, historical data

and final documents such as contracts, reports and emails and Working Records; comprising short-term fixed content and active content. It is for Fixed Data Content that legislation is being written and because such data must remain unaltered it must be distinguished from other data types (including database) in the way in which it is stored and managed. For example, conventional backup provides no guarantee that the files are original and authentic as any changes or deletions simply cycle automatically through to the back-up copies. In other words taking a back-up of what's on the system is to treat all information the same.

Legislating for the digital economy has been a big issue. Associated laws and best practice guidelines for the management of electronic information have evolved over the last 10 years. At national level, existing legislation is being or has been changed to allow electronic records to have the same legal

weight as paper records. However, at this point there is no mandate on the use of specific technologies, document formats and storage mediums. The breadth of regulatory mandates associated with corporate compliance is also forcing companies to change from a departmental plan or ad hoc approach to consider an enterprise-wide, compliance strategy for the management of business information.

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In terms of the overall market the requirements for data storage are growing at the phenomenal rate of about 50% each year. It is predicted that the biggest growth will be in Fixed Data Content and both the growing volumes of information to manage and the growing burden of legislative and regulatory demands are fueling this growth. After all, an organisation's information is a valuable asset and, as a result, it is critical that data is stored efficiently and securely. While historically we have predominantly archived information stored on paper, the sheer volume of information involved means that this medium as a sole form of archiving will be defunct going forward.

Document Records Management is a new term we are likely to hear a lot about as the need for electronic media storage grows. A Document Records System will often provide for the management of both electronic and paper records and will be required by organizations to conform to legislative requirements dictated by regulatory bodies and also to address public requirements, for example to keep personnel files in accordance with the data protection acts and to ensure customers'

purchasing rights. This is likely to be the way forward in terms of managing Fixed Data Content.

As the meaning of media storage moves from simple backup routines to complete Document Records Management Systems (DRMS), inevitably more jargon will also emerge. So here's one for starters.

We started this feature with a 'did you know?' question, so we'll end with one too. Do you know what WORM technology is? It's something that's write-once, and read many times.

Once you recognize the importance of backing up your data you then need to ensure it is done on premium products no point in buying cheap products that may fail, no one would want to be guilty of losing the company data from having skimped on storage media cost. The dealer salesperson needs to influence the clients buying decision and get them to buy premium products that are reliable.

Media storage really is an interesting subject and one few organisations will be able to avoid. Right now many are still not backing up consistently and regularly at a departmental level. Simply bringing attention to the subject will increase awareness and a broader understanding of the principles of media storage and the potential risks of not following the simplest of backup routines. So, at the very least let's ensure that everyone understands the potential risks and the way in which the area of media storage is moving. Embracing technology and being abreast of up and coming legislation in this field will provide greater efficiencies and competitive advantage opportunities. And, if by chance you feel this is an area that you need more help understanding then there are experts on hand to help by way of manufacturers such as Sony, Verbatim, Imation, Maxell, TDK and many, many more. ■

