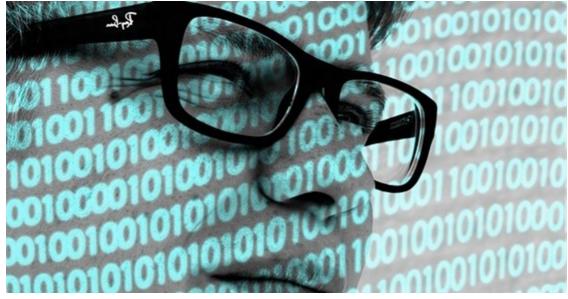# Transforming data from being a cost centre to a strategic asset

The chief information officers of today are increasingly being asked to extract greater value from the data residing within the organisation - transforming information into a valuable asset that the organisation can use as the springboard to future success. This issue was explored in depth by Michiel von der Crone, CommVault EMEA chief technology officer, at an IDC Information Management event in Johannesburg last week.

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A new set of requirements

The fundamental shift taking place, he explained, is that the data management function is being elevated from being a cost centre to that of a profit generator. Whereas previously the data requirements would have been to store data, secure it, back it up and make it broadly accessible, the new demands placed on the data management function involve all of these, plus a new set of requirements, including:

• One virtual repository that indexes data in one place - irrespective of where it resides;
• Faster, near real-time access to any information, from any device or location; and
• Advanced data science techniques to generate useful insights and trends that power business strategy and product development.

The catalyst for all of these new data management demands and opportunities is what's becoming commonly known as 'the third platform'.

Speaking at the same event, IDC's associate vice-president for sub-Saharan Africa, Mark Walker defined the third platform. As cloud computing, mobility, big data and social media start converging, the digital landscape becomes characterised by millions of apps, billions of users, and billions of connected devices.

Key innovations

In the ever-changing world of technology, some of the key innovations in this third platform include advanced robotics, three-dimensional printing, cognitive/learning systems, next-generation security, and natural interfaces. Many of these fields are already starting to have a direct impact on data management.

In fact, the third platform is stimulating the evolution of data management into an area that we are now starting to term 'data science'.

Furthermore, it's against this backdrop that the CIO and his data management team needs to corral masses of information from disparate sources - structured or unstructured, hosted or on-premises, machine-generated or human-generated - and, ultimately, model these into consumable insights.

Further complicating things are considerations on the user side. Those business stakeholders consuming the data ask for immediate access and high levels of control over the information. They require profiles, rights management, strong security, and for the information to be extended down to any mobile device.

'Unofficial' channels

Another area of concern, and something that is spiralling out of control in many enterprises is that of employees who are sharing and saving data in 'unofficial' channels like Dropbox and social media sites. The ease with which employees can do this creates numerous headaches for CIOs - from a risk/governance perspective, as well as a data leakage perspective.

To address these accelerating demands, CommVault suggests a five-fold approach to data management in the modern era:

• **Back up and restore** - lower the risk of critical data loss, and reduce costs by using fast and transparent end point backup/recovery;

• **File sharing and collaboration** - empower staff and partners in the value chain to become even more efficient, productive and collaborative with secure file sharing features;

• **Data analytics and advanced reporting** - provide key business stakeholders with powerful, scientific analysis that enables informed decision making;

• **E-discovery and compliance** - ensure that the approach to data management keeps up with the evolving world of data governance and customer data legislation like POPI; and

• **Security and data level parallelism** - secure against any potential data breaches with a comprehensive approach to security, encryption and remote wipe functionality.

At the heart of this re-imagined approach to data management is the idea that the organisation has to stop seeing its data as a challenge to overcome, or as a cost to be managed down. To succeed in the business world of tomorrow, companies need to think of data as their biggest next strategic asset available.