

Evaluating Information Governance Technology

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The ViaLumina Executive Brief series on Information Governance provides business leaders with a grounding in the fundamentals of IG and how it should affect business, legal, and IT strategy.

Making Information Governance Real

Information Governance is made real through the implementation of smart policies in the culture *and* in the technology environment of an organization. The problems that IG addresses are simply too complex and varied to be solved with siloed, point, and disconnected solutions. IG is about solving problems created by the success of information technology in the enterprise: massive amounts of valuable, complex and varied information created by thousands of endpoints. These are not problems that can be solved without technology.

IG is an emerging market comprised of several overlapping technologies. Some of these technologies have been primarily identified with mature markets (such as content management and enterprise search), and some are just coming to the market, relatively speaking. For technology buyers, this can make evaluating and purchasing IG technology challenging. As such, buyers should extrapolate high-level requirements and use them to guide the evaluation process.

Evaluating Information Governance Solutions

Key considerations when evaluating IG technologies are outlined below.

Centralized policy management. IG involves the holistic application of information policy across a number of domains including retention, search, privacy, security, and knowledge management. Today, many organizations continue to manage policies for each of these domains as part of separate programs. IG provides the greatest benefit when the creation, management, and implementation of these rules are coordinated, which means that buyers should look for IG solutions that provide for centralized management of IG policies.

Broad policy implementation support. IG policies have little effect until they are implemented. While employees own some responsibility for policy compliance, organizations should look for solutions that enable IG policies to be implemented in an automated fashion in the environments where information is created and managed, reducing the burden on employees. Buyers should look for IG solutions that can communicate with the range of platforms and repositories where content lives.

Multiple data types. IG solutions should be able to address the application of policy to a variety of structured and unstructured information types. Today the IG problem is not limited to “records” or even data that fits neatly into the rows and columns of a database. Social media information, sensor data, and other types of information in the enterprise and its use, management, and analysis must be a part of your IG program and technology.

Automation. The volume and complexity of information in today's enterprise is too great for humans to manage using manual processes. A successful IG program relies on technology that magnifies the power of human decisions about information value through automation. Categorizing information for business value, risk, privacy, knowledge, and other purposes cannot be achieved at scale without such technologies.

Governing information where it lives. Centralized policy management does not mean centralized IT. In fact, current trends point to an increasingly heterogeneous and federated IT environment as knowledge workers adopt cloud-based collaboration tools that were not necessarily designed with the enterprise in mind, and as corporate IT progressively loosens its grip on the tools that employees use. A successful IG program accounts for this reality by employing tools that can "reach into" multiple content repositories, apply policy, or otherwise migrate critical content to managed environments.

Taking Action

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Buyers of IG technology need to be honest about the maturity of their IG program. The most advanced technology does little good if an organization is not ready to implement and use it. We have observed many organizations with tens or hundreds of thousands of dollar worth of enterprise licenses sitting fallow on a shelf because they were not ready for the technology. Technology sitting on shelf does little good.

What kind of technology are you ready for? Are you focused on reducing the cost and risk of legacy data, for example, and thus would benefit most from technology that enables analysis and remediation? Or perhaps your IG program is mature; you have addressed key risk issues; and are looking to monetize your information. Both use cases are part of IG, but you need to evaluate the best technology for each. Modular IG platforms that enable buyers to integrate categorization, archiving, e-discovery, legal holds, records management, and other IG functions – as well as to add capabilities when their program evolves – should also be seriously considered.

Finally, buyers should evaluate the technology provider. Models for deploying and using IG technologies are evolving rapidly. IG builds on a number of disciplines including information security, enterprise content management, and master data management. This means that IG buyers require partners with both innovation and depth. As such, when evaluating IG technology, evaluate the provider's IG vision and their ability to execute.