



Make Email Management and Retrieval a Priority

An efficient system for archiving and retrieving email is no longer a “nice to have.” It is now absolutely essential in this day and age of Sarbanes-Oxley and other regulations. Case in point—companies involved in Federal litigation are now required to produce “electronically stored information” as part of the pretrial discovery process, according to amendments to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure which were passed in late 2006.

As a result, companies must keep better track of all electronic information and have the ability to retrieve it quickly. For many firms, the control and storage of email is like trying to subdue a Hydra, that multi-headed creature from Greek mythology—once you solve one issue, two sprout in its place. This is particularly true with regard to email maintenance. Limiting mailbox sizes does little to tame the data control problem. There are always exceptions and then, regardless, many employees tend to load up their personal folders with the mail.

Your first step, before investing in any technology or service, should be to establish a firmwide email policy. Determine what kinds of emails should be kept and for how long. Your next big decision? How the material should be saved.

One option is to save the data within the company and put everything on DVDs. When it comes time to search for something, however, what are you going to do? Can you afford to have your employees sit for hours upon hours looking through emails? Hiring third

parties to examine the data for particular documents or communications is also time-consuming and expensive. You may want to consider an externally managed service. Several companies provide archiving software that can help your company not only store email, but categorize it efficiently as well. The ability to find specific information at the touch of a button is a must.

Another alternative is to hire a company to manage and store your email for you. There are several firms that will extract the internal and external email out of your system (based on when you deem it proper to remove it internally) and categorize it for easy retrieval. The key is to make the data as “searchable” as possible via key words, dates or individuals.

Regardless of the method you choose, one thing is certain—data management policy cannot be left solely to employees—it must be determined at the corporate level, and now. In today’s business environment where compliance is critical, there is too much at stake. The longer you wait to address this issue, the worse the impact could potentially be to your auditors, your staff, your shareholders and your customers. ■

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