

RESEARCH PAPER

Email archives: no longer fit for purpose?

Most organisations are using email archiving systems designed in the 1990s: inflexible, non-compliant and expensive

May 2013

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Executive summary

Email remains the most dominant and best loved form of communication between business users today. It is the most common way for organisations to communicate internally and externally, but the storage of potentially millions of emails is starting to cause problems for organisations, not only because of the volume of data that they represent, but also as a result of increasingly stringent legislation.

Email archiving systems were first added to networks in the mid to late 1990s in order to help solve storage management problems. This was a time when there was far less messaging taking place, and nearly two decades later, those same systems have become dated and no longer fit for purpose. In 2012 it was estimated that the average corporate user sends and receives 112 emails every day*. There were 1.3 billion email users in 2008 and in four short years that number had risen to 2.2 billion. Additionally today's email archive can contain a mix of many different types of data, including voice and video.

Archiving is becoming increasingly important to the corporate mindset. An email archive contains sensitive and confidential data, enabling businesses to maintain a complete record of their corporate knowledge and intellectual property, and mitigating against the threat of data loss through disaster or accident. In addition, regulatory or legal compliance can require organisations to quickly retrieve emails that may be years old.

This paper examines the difficulties and pain points that organisations encounter as they seek to straddle the conflicting pressures of ever increasing volumes on one hand, and the need for faster, more flexible accessibility on the other. It also explores what practices and policies are currently in use when it comes to archiving emails, and the ways in which businesses can improve practices in this crucial area. There are, for example, options available which can bring email archiving up to date, with e-discovery and archiving-driven solutions available in the cloud. But to what extent are they being accepted by businesses, and what are the barriers to the acceptance of these solutions? The whitepaper also identifies the obstacles to change and how they can be overcome, as well as the many advantages to be had for business as a whole from adopting modern archiving solutions.

Current working practice

Computing questioned 150 IT professionals, of whom well over half (61%) described themselves as an IT manager or similar title – be it systems administrator, project leader, network manager. They were employed across a spread of industries, with technology, the public sector and finance industries the most strongly represented. The vast majority (72%) work in large organisations which employ over 1,000 staff with 49% of respondents working in companies that employ upwards of 5,000 staff.

Most of the companies questioned (61%) have an in-house email archive, held on-premise in a data centre. Seventeen percent store their email archive in a third-party data centre; only seven percent opt for third party hosting in the cloud; and a slim two percent opt for an in-house archive solution held in the cloud.

* <http://www.radicati.com/?p=6904>

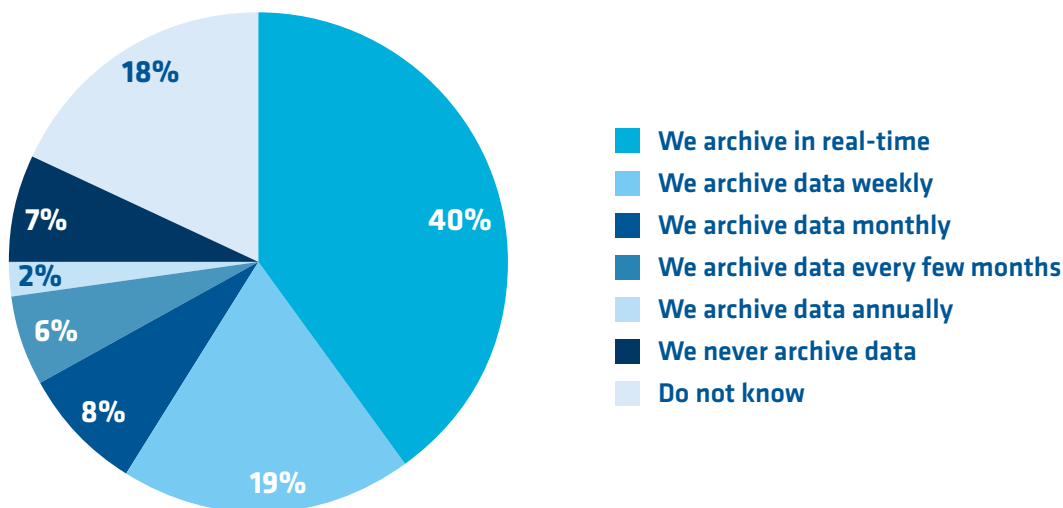
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As you might expect, in nearly three quarters of companies the IT department controls and manages the email archive. Crucially, in only 8% of organisations do some members of staff have access to the archive, showing that companies do not fully appreciate the potential benefits in leveraging, accessing and repurposing the valuable information held in their archive.

There is quite a variation in working practice when it comes to archiving: in two out of five companies data is archived in real time; and in nearly one in five companies the data is archived on a weekly basis. In a few companies (8%) data is archived monthly, and 6% of respondents thought that their company only archived data on an annual basis. Surprisingly, 7% of respondents thought that their company never archived its data, and 18% of respondents did not know how often their company archived its data (Fig. 1).

Companies do not fully appreciate the potential benefits in leveraging the valuable information held in their archive

Fig. 1 : What are your policies on the archival of data?



The advantage of real-time archiving is that it is an automated process, allowing a permanent backup of data without needing the manual intervention of IT. This means that emails are archived as users create them, and they are stored before they can be deleted. Real-time archiving has the added advantage of making the complete archives a scalable, forensic repository of 100% of email, rendering it more searchable for e-discovery or analytical purposes.

It is, however, most common for a company's archive to act as a simple data storage facility. This is the case for 68% of those surveyed. Only a relatively small percentage go beyond this – 15% of companies say they use their archive for compliance data, 13% cite replication and 13% cite data warehousing.

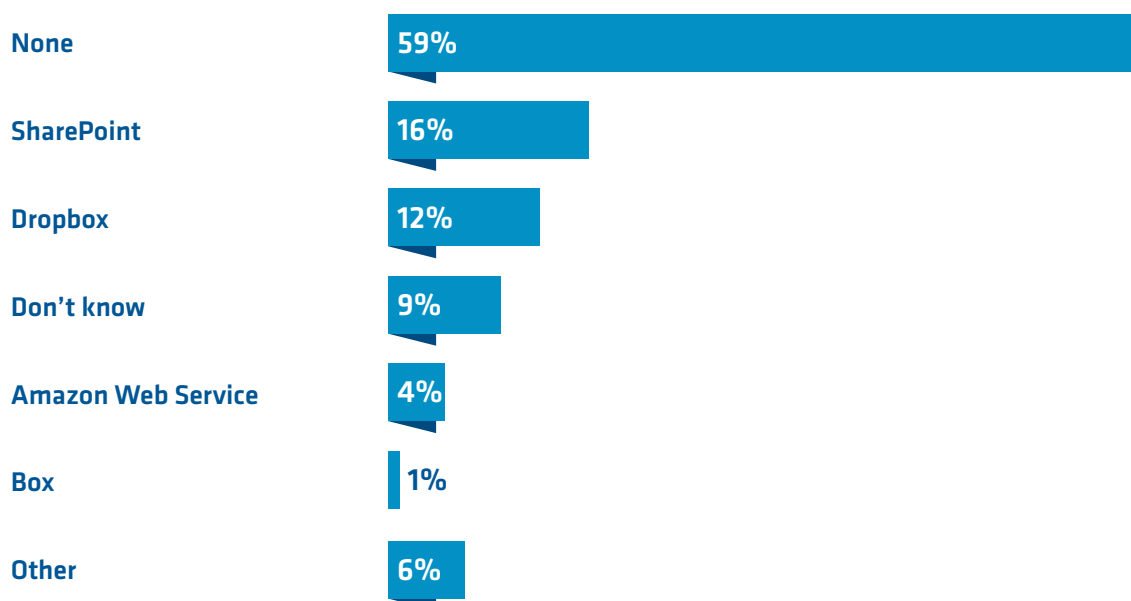
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Evidently, most organisations are not making the most of the potential value in business intelligence that archived emails can bring. This assumption is based on the premise that only 8% allow non-IT staff access to the archives. This is an indication of the set and forget nature of historic email archiving, most IT departments think about archiving in a “simple-storage” model, rather than thinking about the value of the intellectual property held within.

Although the cloud has yet to gain widespread acceptance as means of storing a company's email archive, respondents are using cloud storage to some extent. Of those that do, 16% use SharePoint, 12% use Dropbox, 4% use Amazon Web Service, and 6% use another service. (Fig. 2).

Interestingly, in answer to a separate question, 11% of respondents admitted that staff use such archiving services outside of the remit of the company. As mobile and home working become more common, the simplicity and convenience of these services is hard to resist, leading to possible consequences in terms of data protection legislation and data governance being breached.

Fig. 2 : What public cloud services do you use for storage?



* Respondents could select multiple answers.

Collaboration

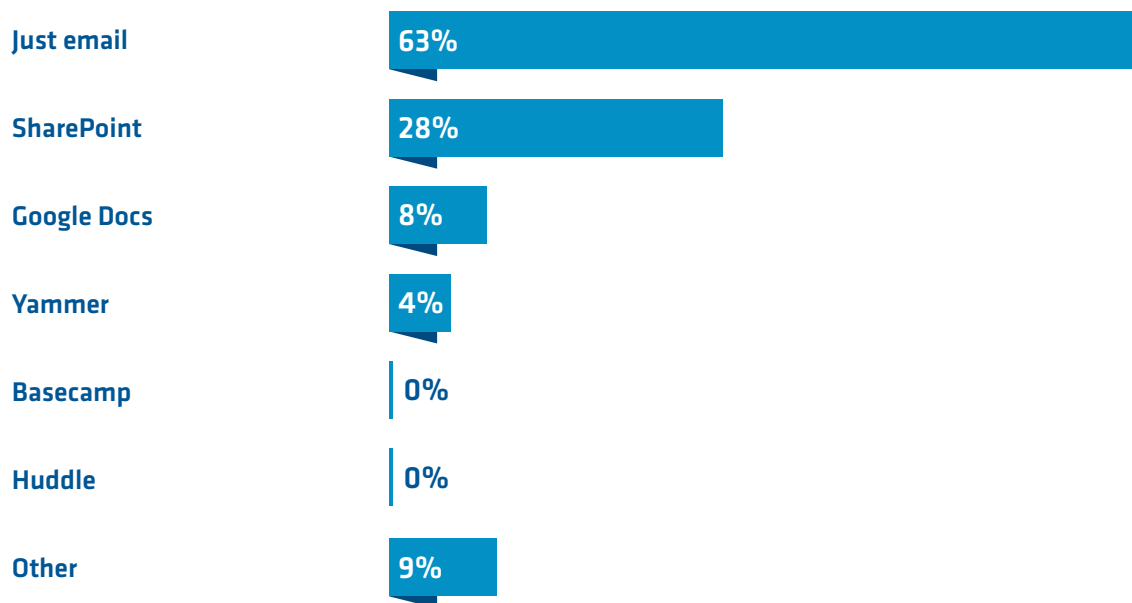
Companies are certainly recognising that their staff need to collaborate electronically with clients, partners and each other. Just over half of the companies in the survey provide their staff with collaboration tools but forbid them to use any other tools, and in 31% of companies surveyed the staff use a mix of personal and company-provided collaboration tools. Meanwhile 10% of respondents say that they only collaborate in meeting rooms!

Like the “unofficial” use of cloud storage service, this mixture of collaboration tools can easily mean that data goes astray. Ideally, the IT department or data governance team needs to be aware of where every file is located and where it has been sent. This is made difficult when some tools are off the radar. This unofficial use of mixed collaboration tools has the added disadvantage in that work and files may be duplicated, which is both inefficient and burdensome on storage and network infrastructure.

The notion that collaborative tools can be valuable in email archiving is only slowly catching on; 63% of respondents are only using email, 28% using SharePoint and 8% using Google Docs (Fig. 3).

Using a mixture of official and unofficial collaboration tools can easily mean that data is stored outside of the IT departments control

Fig. 3 : What types of collaboration tools are used in email archiving?



* Respondents could select multiple answers.

Consolidating the view that most take a simple storage view of their archives, there appears to be little flexibility in access to archived material. Only 4% of respondents say that they can access email archives with smartphones and tablets, whereas more than 75% say it is only accessed through desktops and laptops.

Bring your own device (BYOD) is a much discussed-current trend. The popularity of the phenomenon has been driven in part by the population's growing familiarity with IT and the concomitant increased technical expertise and know-how of specialists, as well as the explosion in types of IT devices. The survey shows a spectrum of attitudes to the BYOD trend, however, and only relatively few companies in the survey (14%) actively encourage employees to bring their own devices to work.

Moreover, 29% of survey respondents say that staff are actively prevented from bringing their own devices to work and 24% say that only certain senior staff are allowed to access the corporate network with their own devices.

As is the case with collaboration and storage, tech-savvy staff are likely to find ways around such restrictions. As many IT directors have told *Computing* "If you doubt that this is the case, go and check your server logs".

Other research show that BYOD is slowly being accepted in organisations, so we can expect that, so long as robust procedures and controls are in place, that BYOD will increase in acceptance in large organisations such as those represented so strongly in this study.

E-discovery and compliance

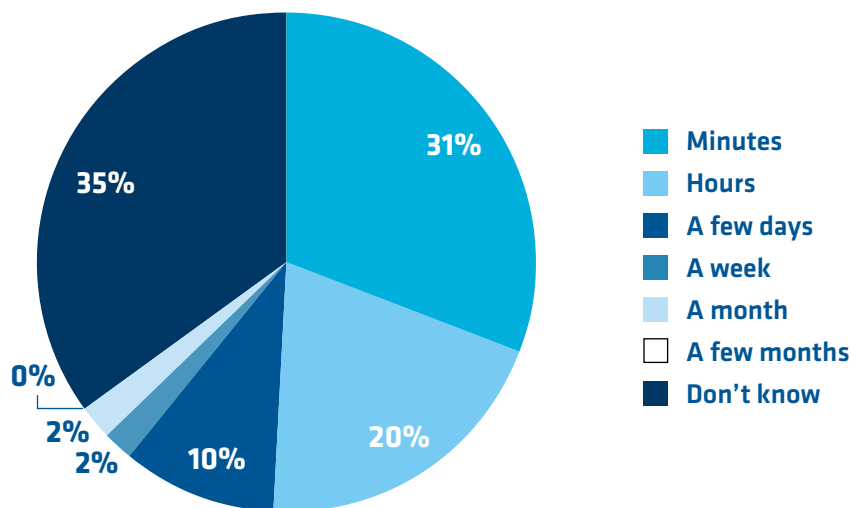
Historically, corporate governance issues have been the drivers behind maintaining an email archive. Present-day choices about archiving are informed by the need to comply with legal and financial regulations as well as the realisation that an email archive can enable a company to retain a complete record of its corporate knowledge and intellectual property.

Speedy e-discovery and disclosure can lead to an early understanding of case information and therefore potentially dramatically reduce otherwise hefty legal costs. But the static email repositories commonly in use in organisations represented in the survey do not always lend themselves to speedy search and retrieval. Aside from potential financial penalties, a company's reputation can also suffer if required information is not quickly made available.

In fact, just under a third of respondents are confident that they would be able to find a historic email or document within minutes as part of an e-discovery request, while over a third of respondents have no idea how long it would take them to respond to such a request (Fig. 4).

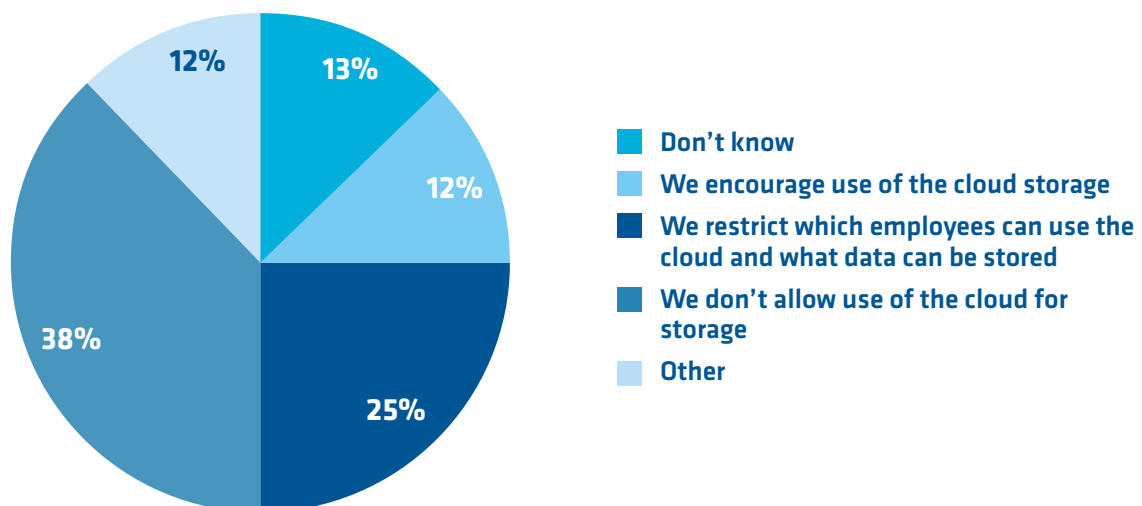
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Fig. 4 : If you received an e-discovery request for a historic email or document, how long would it take to find?



Thirty eight percent of companies do not allow the use of the cloud for storage (most of whom cite compliance and security concerns as reasons for this), **while 25% restrict options where employees can use a combination of data and cloud storage solutions**. Only 12% of companies encourage the use of cloud storage.

Fig. 5 : What is the approach of your organisation to the cloud?



It appears that many organisations are still cautiously evaluating a move to the cloud for some areas of business and business processes. 41% of respondents are planning a move to the cloud in the future, whereas only 23% say no such move is planned.

Conclusion

For a variety of reasons – compliance, analytics, competitive advantage – archiving is becoming increasingly important to all types of organisations. Instead of being considered as simple stores of outdated information, in many organisations archives are now regularly mined for potentially valuable data about the organisation, and the markets in which it operates.

Email archives are sometimes overlooked in this strategy, despite containing huge amounts of potentially useful intellectual property. In order to make best use of this resource, searchable access to email archives should be made available – at an appropriate level of security – to every individual in the organisation.

Currently this scenario exists in only 8% of organisations, meaning that the vast majority are missing out on the potential benefits of archiving.

A majority too are missing out on the quick wins offered by real-time archiving. As well as providing a safeguard against loss of valuable emails – real-time email archiving is important for disaster recovery, analytical and compliance purposes. As such it represents a simple answer to some complex questions.

Most organisations are clearly failing to make the most of the potential value in terms of business intelligence that advanced archiving can bring. For the most part, their existing archive solutions are failing to deliver the speed and flexibility that can lead to vastly improved collaboration and therefore the reduction in costs that every IT department is under pressure to find.

Using a secure, compliant, cloud-based solution can move an organisation's email archive from the static past to the collaborative, flexible and interactive present.

Critically, the “bottomless” storage capacity of cloud solutions means an end to restrictive mailbox size limitations. Employees no longer have to delete potentially important emails just to make space for incoming emails, and the necessity to backup old messages in cumbersome static archives or PST files becomes a thing of the past.

A cloud-based solution can also free both the administrator and the end user to make informed business decisions. Users can now access every email they've ever sent or received and admins can fine-tune control of email retention policies to maximise efficiency.

The on-demand nature of cloud services allows for predictable storage costs and the flexibility to engage with new ways of working, such as Bring Your Own Device (BYOD).

To a specialist, archiving in the cloud can offer secure archiving at a predictable cost with little upfront investment. It can allow a company to be much more responsive and flexible in its search and retrieval of archived information, and because the archive is put in the custody of a third party, accuracy of preserved records is guaranteed.

About the sponsor, Mimecast

Mimecast (www.mimecast.com) delivers cloud-based email management for Microsoft Exchange, including archiving, continuity and security. By unifying disparate and fragmented email environments into one holistic solution that is always available from the cloud, Mimecast minimises risk and reduces cost and complexity, while providing total end-to-end control of email.

Founded in the United Kingdom in 2003, Mimecast serves more than 7,000 customers worldwide and has offices in Europe, North America, Africa and the Channel Islands.

For more information:

Visit: www.mimecast.com

The logo for Mimecast, featuring the word "mimecast" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. A registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the top right of the letter "t".