

# Jump-Starting Your Information Governance Program

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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.

## Bringing the Challenge Down to Size

Two words send shivers down the spines of even the most experienced business and IT teams: Information Governance (IG). With all the sources of data in an enterprise and the sheer volume of it, the management challenge can feel like bailing out the Titanic with a teaspoon. However, the problem is not going away. Legacy systems are operating at capacity. New sources of data are filling up data centers as fast as we can build them. This contributes to an overwhelming urgency for enterprises to implement an IG program that limits their liability, ensures they stay on the right side of regulators, and leverages their information to provide a competitive advantage.

Fortunately, starting an IG initiative is manageable. Rather than trying to tackle the initiative all at once, from all angles, organizations can attack the IG problem with a targeted, step-by-step strategy. Knowing where to lay the foundation is the first step in succeeding with IG.

Practitioners should pick a business unit or department and gain an understanding of their information environment using smart tools that can inventory the unstructured information hiding in its nooks and crannies. From there, the business can extrapolate and decide on the best way to tackle IG by running a pilot program on that department and cleaning up worthless, legacy data. The return on investment (ROI) demonstrated through this project can then be used to drive IG throughout the rest of the organization's information repositories and departments.

## Building Allies

Like an episode of Survivor, having the right allies in IG can mean moving to the next round or having the IG project voted off the table. Stakeholder engagement and support is critical to your IG program's success. Legal and IT department support is especially critical, and a data-cleaning initiative will help bring them over to your side. Gaining legal department support is a matter of illustrating how an organization-wide IG initiative will make it easier to produce data under Legal Hold or for auditors, in addition to creating sound policies that will hold up under legal scrutiny. IT support can be gained by demonstrating – through the inventory process – how IG can enable the disposition of vast amounts of useless and outdated information that currently hits the IT budget. This enables IT to redeploy capital then for more strategic projects.

## Cleaning Up the Past for ROI

Enterprises often have data stores going back several decades, and it is not all structured data stored in production systems and legacy databases. Unstructured data lurking in file shares, email repositories, and content management systems like SharePoint not only hogs valuable storage space but can also put the organization at risk, much to the dismay of both the legal and IT departments.

Selecting the right technology can help wrangle structured and unstructured data that holds servers hostage. Enterprises can classify data and remove duplicated and outdated legacy information that serves no business purpose, further cementing support from IT and legal. Organizations can even retire outdated legacy applications, thus freeing up more storage space as well as easing the e-discovery process and streamlining legal holds while demonstrating the value of IG to the rest of the company.

Through the inventory process, enterprises discover how much information exists, where it is stored, and how much of it is duplicated, which sets the stage for a cleanup effort. Organizations also need to learn which information has value – or potential value – versus that which no value, never will have value, and in fact might only be a source of risk and cost. In addition, they need to understand which information they must keep because the law requires its ongoing retention or preservation.

However, an organization does not need to complete an inventory across all business units simultaneously. Because an IG initiative is not supposed to feel like an endless, dehydrated crawl through the Sahara Desert, choosing to initially target just a portion of the business will reveal enough hard truths about the rest of the organization's data to gain traction for an IG initiative. Most stakeholders, senior management included, are unaware of the reality of the information environment, and presenting these bare facts, even from just one department, will help gain support and financing for the next critical step of IG.

Using just one or two business units that are not mission-critical also affords the opportunity to make mistakes. For example, starting an IG initiative in HR, where information is important but will not directly affect revenue, provides leeway to gain experience and build out a sound strategy for the rest of the organization.

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When getting started with IG, practitioners do not have to start by fixing the entire enterprise. Success is found in starting with a focused effort at the departmental level and building out.