# Data Management - are you seeing the real value?

By Gary Allemann

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The business value of data is unquestionable. *The Economist* went so far, last year, as to claim that data has overtaken oil as the world's most valuable commodity. Despite controversy surrounding how to define the value of data, and whether it truly is more valuable than oil, it's still evident that data holds the potential to deliver unsurpassed value to any organisation - if managed correctly.



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With charged articles like *The Economist*'s, CIOs are increasingly under pressure to ensure their organisation's data is well protected, properly stored, easily accessed and effectively mined in order to deliver on the sought-after business value.

However, in order to achieve this goal, it's important that businesses do their homework when it comes to selecting a data management vendor.

## More value for less money – or is it?

There seems to be a lot of confusion in the market around what data management really is. Some service providers offer services such as hosting, storage and data protection and label it "data management". Although all important aspects of data management, none of deliver the true value of data.

Data management is a set of disciplines that combine collaboratively to deliver data for operational and reporting uses. More than just servers or reports are a set of offerings which incorporate the likes of business intelligence, analytics, governance and data quality, along with storage and security, to answer questions posed by the business.

Vendors jumping onto the data management bandwagon, often offer generic 'data management' solutions, ranging from 'data storage to the latest Business Intelligence (BI) tool' that they tout as the panacea to delivering value from their data.

In practice, the biggest issue is that businesses need to first define what they want to achieve with the data, so that its understood what data they need to be looking at, whether its structured or unstructured, and whether it will or won't give the insight they need.

A good place to begin to understand this, is to put a data strategy in place which aligns with business objectives. Data management can then be prioritised to those areas of business where it will achieve the best impact. A competent data management partner will ask about a business's data strategy and will provide curation that aligns with it, combining various elements to deliver maximum value.

## But how?

Different businesses have different requirements of their data, although a common goal is to drive customer service and productivity, thereby increasing profits – the primary goal of any business. How the business is driven dictates an organisation's data strategy, whether it's through the dynamics of disruption, or purely through streamlining current processes. Data management is a conglomeration of different elements, each determined by the business's data needs and culture.

Different data management disciplines are at different levels of maturity. Some disciplines, like data architecture, have mature frameworks like The Open Group Architecture Framework (TOGAF). Others, like governance, are far more dependent on the experience and expertise of the company and partner. The right partner will bring the right blend of maturity aligned with the company's culture to build a complete capability over time.

## And why?

Proper data management delivers on the data strategy which in turn ensures that the business achieves its goals. The right technology combined with the methodologies, principles and disciplines of data management is a critical enabler.

Data management tools must support both business and technical stakeholders. As you move into business-oriented disciplines such as data governance and quality, the user experience needs to be taken more seriously. Change management and training are critical for adoption and need to be planned for when embarking on a data management implementation.

Data management partners who bring with their selection of tools, a range of knowledge and experience to address these challenges will ensure that businesses discover the true value of their data – and that it may well be worth more than oil.

ABOUT GARY ALLEMANN

MD of Master Data Management He is passionate about Information Communication Technology (ICT) and more specifically data quality, data management and data governance.
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