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INSIGHTS

BREAKING THE DATA BARRIER

CLOUD-BASED, ENTERPRISE-CLASS COLLABORATION

HOW TO USE THE CLOUD FOR GREATER VISIBILITY AND INSIGHT AMID ENHANCED CONTROL

Silos, archaic IT systems and other organizational impediments—many not even recognized—impede collaboration and data sharing. Business users, workgroups and entire departments become less productive when they can't easily locate and share information vital to their daily work. Through it all, the IT department struggles to ensure that employees don't breach policies—risking corporate and customer data security and privacy—in the name of expediency.

Fortunately, there's a solution to these challenges: cloud-based, enterprise file sync and share (EFSS). Today's solutions can help would-be collaborators achieve their objectives while still respecting security rules. Working groups can share folders, files and workflows within a well-defined framework. This means business users and analysts can gain greater insight via a more natural flow of information and ideas—even as IT and data security executives achieve enhanced governance.

"I call it consumer-simple, enterprise-secure," says Blake Brannon, vice president product marketing with VMware AirWatch, a vendor of cloud-based management and security products that integrate with cloud file-sharing platforms. "The cloud is re-engineering application design to be more focused on end-users and work processes versus infrastructure and technologies."

BENEFITS OF CONSOLIDATING DATA

Data roadblocks arise for numerous reasons. A common cause is that individual workgroups use applications best suited to their own roles, storing their files in unique formats in discrete servers. In contrast, EFSS platforms, working as an integrated adjunct to existing ERP systems, store files centrally, accommodating multiple data formats to support information sharing. This can reduce productivity losses that arise when people cannot find needed files or know for certain which files are current. By

IN ASSOCIATION WITH: **Dropbox**

contrast, with a central, cloud-based information storehouse, people know immediately where to look for the latest versions of desired files.

Thanks in part to application programming interfaces (APIs), these file-sharing programs do more than just break down departmental silos—they can also smooth information flows among software as a service (SaaS)-based business systems, common in areas such as human resources and customer relationship management. Companies can use the file-sharing platforms to store videos and other unstructured information, building associations with relevant records in the business systems. These capabilities combine to integrate all the various data sources into a main system of record.

End-users can also dynamically create workflows to make their jobs easier. For example, the ad sales process at a large media company starts with the account team exchanging information with the legal department to finalize a contract. The marketing and creative teams then share initial ad content with the account team, which sends the ideas to the outside ad agency and ultimately to the client. Data is contained in a diverse range of spreadsheets, presentations, text files, layout programs and audio or video files. No matter the boundaries that exist among applications, functions, departments or companies, cloud-based file sharing allows teams to configure workflows to support each form and role.

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> **—Blake Brannon**
> Vice President Product Marketing, VMware AirWatch

HOW THE CLOUD STRENGTHENS SECURITY

The shift to consolidated, cloud-based file sharing provides benefits not only to end-users, but also to IT. End-users retain access to already familiar data and applications that are improving their productivity. But at the same time, IT can bring it all into a framework of centrally managed security and governance. In fact, cloud-based approaches tend to actually be more secure than traditional approaches.

For example, traveling executives or team members know the complications involved in accessing cor-

porate networks to download needed files. Virtual networks tend to be slow and unreliable. So all too often, workers opt for riskier options, such as emailing documents to personal accounts or loading USB drives before hitting the road. In transit, external drives are easily lost, leading to the risk of sensitive files ending up in the wrong hands.

EFSS applications with embedded security controls provide a much safer alternative. The best platforms encrypt data both at rest and in transit. In addition,

through APIs, they connect with an ecosystem of third-party security products for heightened safe-guards. This includes data-loss-prevention (DLP) tools that can flag sensitive information or block it from flowing outside of corporate networks.

Finally, in addition to making business users more productive and protecting corporate data, EFSS consolidation can reduce costs. Multiple depart-mental file servers and FTP sites are costly to maintain. By moving information storehouses to the cloud, enterprises reduce their fixed costs for on-premises IT in favor of a variable and typically lower total cost of ownership (TCO) service contract.

CONSOLIDATION BEST PRACTICES

Easy to use, workflow-enabling tools tend to grow organically in an organization. Still, a little pro-motion can go a long way toward encouraging adoption. It can be important to educate end-users on the benefits of using a platform they're already familiar with to work securely together.

A good first step is to make people aware of the newly available enterprise-sanctioned platform. Develop an internal marketing campaign to high-light its advantages as well as flag the risks, costs and inefficiencies of the legacy approach. In particular, point out how consolidated data pools and processes can supercharge workflows. As Brannon explains, "They're much more likely to switch when you demonstrate how you're making it easier to collaborate with colleagues."

To encourage opt-ins, IT managers should send a message to all active corporate email accounts notifying them that a secure, enterprise-class file-sharing system is now available. Include a signup link that automatically converts existing file-shar-ing accounts used for business purposes to the new version.

Best in class EFSS systems can, if desired, be configured to highlight relationships. So once enabled, employees can opt-in, providing greater visibility across the enterprise regarding their exist-ing working relationships. This information can be potentially invaluable from a networking point of view. Now, someone in marketing can see that the same colleagues they share information with in advertising also have shared relationships with peers on a product team. So when product issues arise, the networking is already in place. Such insights can lead to opportunities for new and even stronger connections, leading everyone to do their jobs more effectively.

A WIN-WIN WITH CLOUD

The right cloud platform breaks down barriers to let ideas and information flow freely to wherever they can make people more productive. At the same time, IT managers gain enterprise-grade security options that can actually enhance governance. EFSS-based consolidation is a win-win throughout modern organizations.

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