



The Importance of Data Governance

The Challenge

Data is one of the core assets in business. Information can be valuable, proprietary, sensitive, and private. In many cases it is stored in spreadsheets, documents, and other files on servers that are accessible to everyone on your network. Those servers are the part of the official “source” of record for the organization. Therefore, the file server needs to be the front-line of data protection, with the principle of those with a business need to access the data should have access; those without the business need should not.

Unfortunately the security architecture that is provided by the Microsoft and UNIX operating systems is insufficient to safeguard these assets. For instance:

- There is no centralized management tool to determine across the entire enterprise what data users have access to and why they have that access.
- There is an inadequate audit trail of user activity to understand what data is being accessed.

Because of these technical limitations, most companies have insufficient processes for provisioning and maintaining user security. This leads to too many people having access to far too much data.

The Business Impacts

There are a number of impacts that result from this lack of a centralized security infrastructure. To demonstrate that, here are several questions that illustrate management concerns that may not easily be answered with today’s tools.

- If a departing employee copied or deleted data on the way out the door, how would the organization detect and deal with the findings?
- When an employee leaves the firm, how successful is the organization in removing their permissions from the file system?
- Under what circumstances does management need to identify what data a particular person was accessing? This may occur for legal or business reasons.
- Are the business leaders involved in security reviews, periodically validating who has access to proprietary and sensitive data?
- If a regulatory agency or came in for a security audit, how quickly could the organization respond?



- Does the growth and expense of disk space seem to continue without any review of data usage?
- When there is an acquisition or merger with another company, what is involved in setting up and integrating the security of the two systems?

Administrative Burdens

The normal Windows Operating does not track file activity. In addition to the security considerations this has other impacts on the organization. If a user moves or deletes a file inadvertently, they may not be able to recall the missing file and the help desk needs to go on a “virtual expedition” to find and recover the file.

If several users are working with the same file at different times without the knowledge of other parties, users may find unexpected changes. There are several ways to solve this problem. Require the use of a document management system to check in and check out files. A second would be to provide an automatic log that identifies all of the people who have been working with a particular file.

Potential Solutions

A potential solution to some of these issues is to undertake entitlement reviews on a regular basis.

Entitlement Reviews are typically initiated when, for example:

1. Someone has modified critical business data, deleted a file, or taken data they should never have had access to in the first place. Who was it? How did they get access? Who else has access? How do we fix the problem?
2. The organization changes because business needs shift, management changes, or mergers occur. Suddenly people want to know: who in the organization has access to key business data? Who should have access? Who owns the data?
3. Auditors – internal or external – ask for documentation demonstrating is in compliance with corporate policies, industry practices, and/or legal regulations.

These efforts involve reviewing all users within the computer systems and the permissions that are set up on each electronic folder. These reviews are extremely expensive and difficult without an automated solution.

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