

A background image of a man in a dark shirt looking down at a tablet device. The image is faded and serves as a backdrop for the text.

From Chaos to Competitive Advantage

How to find, analyze, and manage your unstructured data to make money, save money, and mitigate risk.



The Race for Data Value Is On – Are You Poised To Win?

Today's modern organizations know how to leverage huge structured datasets to make data-driven decisions.

But there's an even bigger opportunity with greater business potential, and it sits within unstructured data – the documents, emails, and other files that teams create, capture, and share, and that serve as the lifeblood of an organization.

Organizations everywhere are becoming increasingly skilled at designing systems that generate and consume large amounts of structured data for analysis, insights, reapplication, and decision making. The same isn't true for unstructured data.

Consumers generate structured data with every interaction. Products collect usage data. Machines create production data. Software and tools log data.

You get the picture.

Primarily, then, data scientists compile structured data sources to serve the needs of the organization.

Consequently, organizations design their systems with the goal of capturing specific data points—even if how that data will be used is not yet defined.

In other words, they already know what they need to know. They decide what fields are used in an ERP or which metrics are needed to track specific customer behaviours when they're developing their data strategy. You may be surprised to learn that these structured data sources only make up 10 to 20 percent of all business data. There is a staggering 80 to 90 percent of data being left out of business decision making.¹

¹Tapping the power of unstructured data, MIT Sloan School of Management

Structured data only makes up about 10 to 20 percent of all business data that can be used by the organization, leaving a staggering 80 to 90 percent of data in the dark. Accessing and using the data hidden inside documents, files, and records provides a huge opportunity for organizations.²

This significant amount of unstructured data includes emails sent internally and externally, proposals that take the combined input of cross-functional teams to draft, and the contracts and service-level agreements that inform customer relationships and business operations.

There's a larger opportunity on the horizon that offers greater value than what's gained from leveraging only structured data. This opportunity is ushering in a paradigm shift in how modern organizations think about making data-driven decisions.

Historically, unstructured data has been very hard to manage, because it lacks a data model. In short, the diversity and spread of documents, files, media, records, and more is chaotic. Cheap storage makes it easier to ignore the growth rather than assigning significant resources to the nearly impossible task of putting all that data under management. However, emerging technology has made it possible to extract data, insights, ideas, contract clauses, and more, at scale, from files created by knowledge workers. These files — what is known as unstructured data — drive business processes and support large projects. Yet, many continue to let unstructured data grow unchecked and unmanaged in their repositories. A few early adopters are finding ways to leverage this data, and those that can will create competitive, operational, and productivity advantages for themselves.

² Tapping the power of unstructured data, MIT Sloan School of Management



Before an organization can leverage their unstructured data, they have to get a grasp on the chaos. The chaos looks something like this:

- By 2025, global data will surge to 180 zettabytes.³ Unstructured data will account for 90 percent of that.⁴ For context, one zettabyte is equivalent to about 250 billion DVDs.⁵
- There is an ever-increasing number of places to store content such as Microsoft Teams, business messaging applications, email, network drives, and content management systems like Sharepoint making it difficult to centrally index and retrieve files.
- An increase in hybrid work has pushed more collaboration online with a preference towards using easy and fast communication channels, making it hard for content management solutions to keep up.
- It is impossible for Information Technology and Information Governance teams to stay on top of the information being shared. As teams grow, employees opt for convenience and speed over following policy and procedures, which proliferates the places where information is shared and stored and adds risk to an organization.
- Knowledge workers seek speed and convenience when it comes to accessing the information they need to do their work, and this has become an important part of the employee experience and employee retention.

Grappling with these challenges can lead to a “death by a thousand cuts” scenario in which an organization takes small hits from all sides without realizing the severity of these challenges or how hard it will be to claw their way back from deep technical debt.

³ The World Is Moving Beyond Big Data, *Business Wire*

⁴ Tapping the power of unstructured data, *MIT Sloan School of Management*

⁵ What's a zettabyte?, *The Guardian*

Here's an overview of how these "thousand cuts" add up.

ISOLATED SCENARIO	CHAOS AT SCALE
<p>Employees keep redundant, obsolete, and trivial data (ROT) in personal drives, shared drives, Microsoft Sharepoint, OneDrive, and more.</p>	<p>This adds up across the enterprise, which increases the risk of confidential information unknowingly sitting in an unsecured repository, rising storage costs, poor user access control, slower server performance, and more.</p>
<p>An employee documents a customer's Personal Identifiable Information (PII) in their personal drive and shares that information with a colleague when asking for help with a specific customer.</p>	<p>Personal identifiable information (PII) sits in multiple locations, with no central visibility or access controls over it, putting the company at risk.</p>
<p>An organization has many years of proposals, S.O.W.s, emails, and other communications spread over email servers, personal drives, and systems of record.</p>	<p>When a long-time customer initiates a lawsuit, all information and communications must be found to support the defense and avoid surprises from opposing council.</p>
<p>A sales representative captures important customer details in a Word document during a discovery call, but it's saved to their personal drive.</p>	<p>Sales teams have turnover and valuable information about customers is lost, ramping up onboarding time for new employees, frustrating the customer, and making it difficult for the organization to continue the customer relationship.</p>
<p>A customer has trouble using instructions for solving a technical problem. A customer success associate sends an email providing a more detailed explanation or a workaround.</p>	<p>This valuable information remains in the email rather than shared with the product team to solve the problem or with the larger customer success team to close similar tickets faster and create happier customers.</p>
<p>Knowledge workers who are trained in accounting and finance, data analytics, marketing, sales, and more have to spend a significant amount of time per day finding the files and information they need.</p>	<p>Jumping between applications and frantically finding files needed to complete work on time leads to low employee satisfaction levels, contributing to employee turnover.</p>

Table 1: How isolated unstructured data management pains can lead to chaos at scale over time

There's a better alternative available. One in which effective unstructured content management enables multiple productivity and operational benefits to the organization, such as:

- Information management at scale across multiple different content storage locations
- Improved experience for employees by providing the accurate and up-to-date information they need, when they need it
- Reduced process bottlenecks by empowering employees with the information they need to deal with process exceptions
- Visibility over the full picture of the health of the entire business to make more informed decisions regarding investments and strategic decisions
- Search functionality for administrators that allows content repositories to be continuously monitored for new content as it is created to identify ROT, monitor retention schedules, classify important content, find sensitive data, and tag other important information according to business rules

What all of these factors allow you to do is create an organization where employees don't spend their time constantly context switching between applications and searching for information. Instead, they can focus their cognitive energies on helping customers, solving business problems, or working with other teams.

Achieving this is possible, but there are initial steps enterprises will need to take first in order to go from operating in chaos to becoming more competitive.



Unlock the Value of Your Unstructured Data in 4 Steps

Your enterprise is sitting on a mountain of valuable information. Unlock its value by following the four steps below.

Your 4 Step “Chaos to Competitive Advantage” Checklist

Step 1: Create the inventory of your entire content landscape

Step 2: Separate the valuable files from the ROT

Step 3: Enrich, tag, and classify files based on your business rules

Step 4: Continuously monitor your content landscape for new content as it's created



STEP 1

Create the inventory

Figure out how much unstructured data you have, what it is, and where it's stored.

Your data exists in different formats across multiple silos. Before you can manage it, you need to understand it by creating a content inventory. Once you can identify and access your data, you can begin to work with it and monitor it for changes.

Employees create millions of word documents, spreadsheets, PDFs, CAD files, and more. Manually managing this incredible amount of business information is no longer possible. Automation is necessary.



STEP 2

Separate the valuable files from the ROT

Use rules to identify ROT (e.g. last access date is more than 7 years) to declutter and defensibly delete files with no business value such as files that no longer need to be retained, duplicates and copies, or files stored on business repositories that have no business value.

Use predefined ROT rules or your own rules built within the context of your business to tag content with appropriate metadata so that files can be identified for defensible disposition.



STEP 3

Enrich, tag, and classify files based on your business rules

Use the inventory to identify specific types of content or content that contains specific identifying information and tag and classify those files for information management or enhanced search.

An enterprise-wide content inventory based on an index of all unstructured information sources provides many benefits, from using business rules to identify content as it's created to enabling search across all these sources with a single query.



STEP 4

Continuously monitor for new content

Identify, tag, and enrich information as it is created, so it's findable to anyone in the organization who has the appropriate access.

For instance, you can:

- Write a rule that identifies the numerical structure of a credit card number, so the file can be flagged as containing personal identifiable information (PII) and handled correctly.
- Create different tags that are automatically attached to specific types of files.
- Apply rules to identify content for disposal.



Your Unstructured Data Can Take You From Chaos to Competitive Advantage

It's easier than you think to get started. The first step of any unstructured data management project is knowing what files, documents, and records you have, and where they are located. Get a detailed inventory of your business content with a Content Landscape Assessment that uses automation to quickly crawl and inventory your multiple content sources.





Book your no-pressure, no-obligation consultation with one of our Shinydocs specialists.

[Click here to get started.](#)

About Shinydocs

Founded in 2013, Shinydocs' software automates the process of finding and identifying all files, media content, and documents buried in repositories across your organization so you can make more informed decisions to drive growth and positive customer experiences. We believe that there's a better, more intuitive, and cost-effective way for organizations to manage their information. This belief has propelled us forward in the development of our software, services, and strategy and allows us to support global corporations in their pursuit of improving their customer experience, collaboration, innovation, and ability to demonstrate compliance with industry regulations through easier and more effective management of their business content.

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