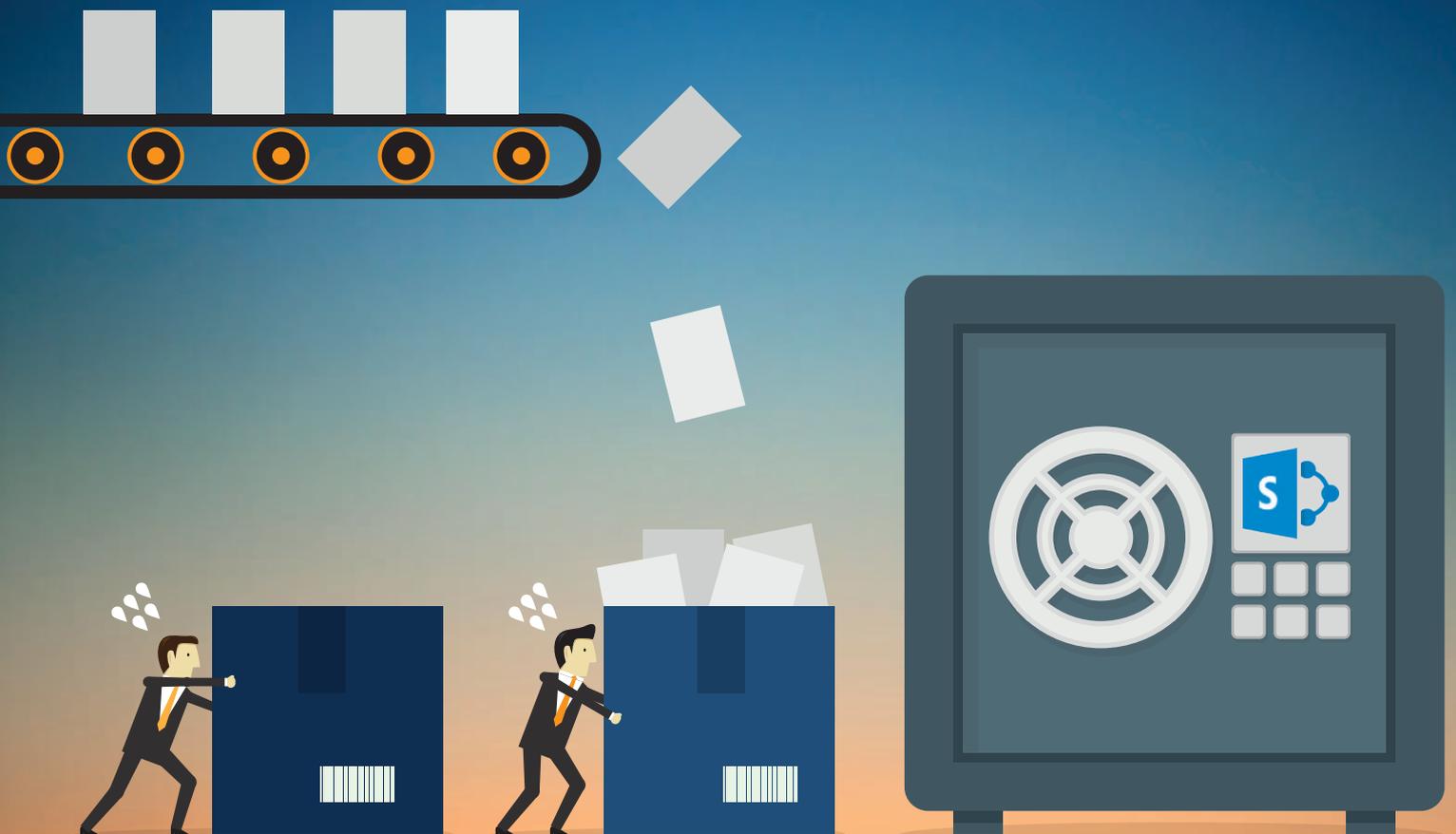# Information Governance

Improving information governance
in SharePoint

Govern your information.
Govern your business.

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As businesses today deal with increasing amounts of information and stricter rules and regulations surrounding data, it's not surprising that information governance is a priority. Information governance helps with legal compliance, operational transparency, and reducing expenditures associated with legal discovery, effecting the entirety of how an organization functions.

For information managers, whose job it is to implement an information governance strategy, it can be a burden trying to make this strategy a successful one. This problem for information managers stems from a problem for end-users—the process of classifying, storing, and retrieving important information is time-consuming and inaccurate.

Unfortunately, the resolution involves more than simply deploying a suitable document management platform. Organizations who use SharePoint, for example, have the potential to manage their information in a way that ensures good information governance (among many other benefits)—but often they still struggle. And this struggle has very real implications for how organizations operate.

This eBook will explore the key challenges facing information governance best practice and how a business can put a structure in place that ensures accountability, security and compliance over their data.

Why do businesses struggle to classify, store and manage the information they work with?

- Emails are not treated as business documents, and are therefore more difficult to classify, store, and manage in SharePoint

- The SharePoint browser is not up to the task of uploading and classifying documents en masse

- Information becomes very hard to find when not classified accurately

- Other flawed end-user practices in SharePoint

The solution

By making the process of information management in SharePoint easier, information governance can become a more manageable task and improve how the entire business operates.
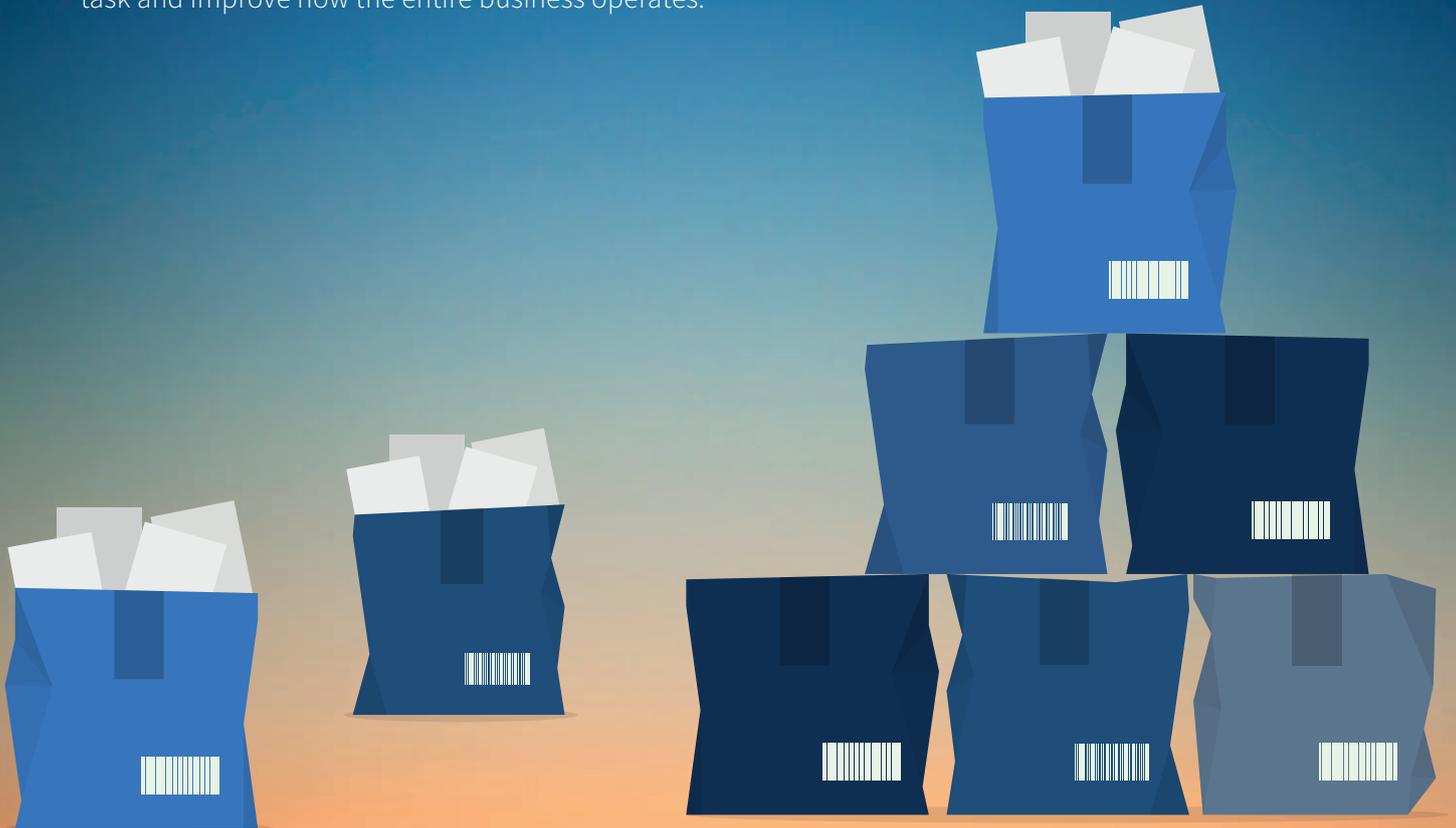
Information governance today

We are living through a time in which advances in technology are causing a greater volume of information than businesses can account for. This can put a strain on everything from compliance and security to productivity and the customer experience. But by implementing information governance best practice, organizations can utilize this increase in information instead of straining under it.

Information going Double Dutch

Take for example, the large Dutch insurance company who, back in 2014, mixed up the personal data of customers. Over 2,500 participants in a large medical research program received e-mails with information that was not meant for them. The mistake was blamed on human error. With better information governance practices, could they have avoided the blunder and the consequential losses to their budget and reputation?

The bottom line of information governance is knowing what information a business has, where it is stored, and what needs to be done with it. The trouble is that information often resides in several places across an organization: in the form of paper documents, digital records on individual desktops, in a document management system like SharePoint and in email inboxes as both attachments and in the email content itself. It's the latter where the most problems arise.

The importance of good email management

Email is still the primary method of business communication and so remains pivotal in any information governance strategy. However, it is difficult to make sure that information contained within emails is accounted for consistently. The sheer volume of email threads comprising of different subject lines, multiple senders, and conversational (i.e. not business-critical) information can make it difficult to find important data when it is needed.

The space between SharePoint and email

As one of the most popular document management systems, SharePoint is a secure place to store, organize, and share information. In theory, with the power of SharePoint as a document management solution, implementing an information governance strategy should be straightforward. But the reality is rather different.

There are two significant problems when it comes to implementing effective information governance in SharePoint:

1. Emails make up most of enterprise records in organizations but don't undergo the same document management processes as business documents

2. Information can be more difficult to effectively store and organize in SharePoint than many realize.

The high cost of neglecting information governance

Incorrect information storage or data mismanagement may lead to numerous issues that can wreak havoc on a business. A lot of this mismanagement comes from failing to treat emails as important documents of record.

Imagine the case of a mid-sized financial institution. Without standardized, well-functioning email management practices, important information about customers, business partners and other third parties is at risk. Let's look at just several of the risks a business like this would face if information is not handled correctly:

Breach of regulations

Regulations surrounding the storage of data received from partner companies are often very strict. As regulations (such as the GDPR) tighten their grip on the information businesses can and can't store (and what they can do with that information), mismanaging sensitive information residing in emails can be extremely costly. For example, fines for failing to comply with the GDPR can be as high €20 million, or 4% of annual turnover (whichever is higher).

Breach of regulations

The volume of emails and their disorganization means employees can struggle to find the information they need when their business is being audited. Not being able to find the right information at the right time (for example, during a financial audit) can lead to severe losses both financial and reputational.

Frustrated employees

When employees can't find the information they need, or if it takes them too long, they get frustrated. Frustrated employees can become disengaged and your whole business will suffer because of it.

Poor customer service

Missing and mismanaged data cause delays in internal processes, which negatively affect customer service. Whether that is a slow service or mistakes with an order—without correct or updated information, organizations can struggle. For example, when the personal data of their customers is at risk because it is not stored correctly.

Data security risks

A lackluster information governance setup can lead to mistakes that put sensitive data at risk. For example, in 2018, a software startup that provides customer management solutions to insurance firms, exposed highly sensitive information on thousands of policy holders. The data included specifics like names, addresses, dates of birth and phone numbers.

Address the symptom, fix the problem

The concept of 'information overload' is only a symptom of more fundamental information management problems. By solving the following issues that lie at the heart of information governance, businesses have a much better chance of implementing a governance strategy that will be successful.

Complex procedures

Storing files and information in SharePoint is easy. But storing it on the platform in a manner that makes it easy to find is less straightforward. For example, SharePoint uses metadata to tag files and documents, so they can be found later. But because users don't know how to (or simply don't want to) enter the correct metadata, document search suffers.

Combating the challenge: By simplifying and thus improving the process of classifying, storing, and retrieving documents and emails in SharePoint, companies can make it far easier for their employees to find information as and when they need it.

Emails not being treated like business documents

A lot of information and documents live in inboxes across an organization. When organizations fail to recognize emails as documents of record, it can lead to information silos and ultimately poor governance strategies.

Combating the challenge: Developing a routine process of extracting and storing important information from emails enables employees to access the information when they need it. Microsoft has added solutions to Outlook intended to help this process including archiving and Outlook rules. However, this doesn't solve the problem of emails being kept separate from document information stored in SharePoint.

Fix the process, fix the problem with harmon.ie

User processes are at the heart of information governance. And yet the processes for managing information – from storing to classifying, accessing, and searching – are often not standardized. When these processes are inconsistent it creates problems across the organization, such as duplicate versions of documents, incomplete data on business cases or customers, miscommunications, and delays.

By fixing the processes around document management, information governance can be improved. For example, if the process that an employee goes through to optimally store, classify, and access a piece of information is a matter of drag and drop or a process as equally simple, then they will be much more likely to do it consistently, leading to better overall information governance practices.
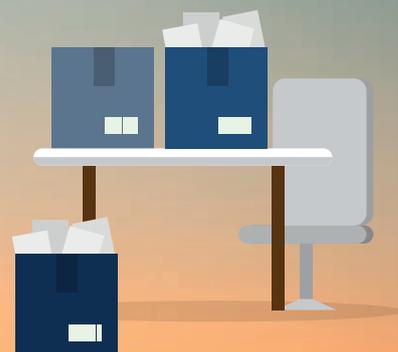
Improving user processes in SharePoint

If organizations want to improve the storing and searching of information in SharePoint they must consider making the application of metadata as easy as possible.

By doing this they will:

- Improve search capabilities,

- Ensure a 'single source of the truth' for documents

- Easily store important emails in SharePoint

All of which enables employees to correctly manage and catalogue their information and find it when they or others need it.

By using harmon.ie to improve the user experience, organizations can then begin to improve the process of information management in SharePoint and make their information governance strategy a success.

harmon.ie does this by granting users access to their SharePoint libraries from within their Outlook inbox. harmon.ie allows users to:

- Use Outlook rules to automate the information management process

- Use Version History for a single version of the truth

- Use metadata to better classify and search for documents

- Differentiate emails from other documents

Capture essential information

harmon.ie significantly reduces the complexity of storing emails in SharePoint. It enables users to simply drag and drop emails and attachments from Outlook into SharePoint without leaving the email client. It prompts the user to insert metadata that makes it easy to find the information later—a fundamental part of good information governance strategy.

Classify information accurately

harmon.ie makes it simple to organize emails in SharePoint by recognizing information in the email, such as who it is from or the subject line and tagging the information with the appropriate metadata. Trawling through countless email threads is a thing of the past. Users are also prompted to supply required metadata, ensuring that emails and documents get classified correctly.

Search and Discover to find information fast

Information governance relies on the ability to find the right documents and records as quickly as possible. Thanks to the better classifying process (above), finding important information in SharePoint is more exact than ever. harmon.ie goes further and provides powerful discovery capabilities. This includes sophisticated filters which quickly narrow lists of documents, 'favorite views' which help organize content in a way that's clear to the user, and search results that are more fine-grained than ever.

Great governance and beyond

Implementing a successful information governance strategy is difficult. While there may be lots of different reasons why, depending on organization size or industry, the main issues are consistent:

- Emails are difficult to classify, store, and manage in SharePoint

- End-user processes surrounding information management are flawed

Solve these two issues and companies can look forward to more successful information governance across the organization, without spending big on a dedicated information governance solution.

harmon.ie makes it easy for users to capture, classify, and discover important emails and documents in SharePoint, directly from Outlook. This not only helps make data more easily retrievable when it comes to compliance audits and other aspects of information governance, but more easily accessible for employees to ensure better overall business processes. It's time to implement better information governance with harmon.ie.

To find out more about how harmon.ie can help your business with information governance best practice, contact us today.

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