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SMART EMAIL RETENTION WITH OFFICE 365

Reduce Risks While Improving Business Performance

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Why does email retention matter?

Today's organizations face a growing data problem.

Businesses deal with larger volumes of data and greater complexity than ever before. Within this confusing mass of information lurks sensitive data that can leave these organizations at risk, as well as business-critical records that can easily get lost in the pile.

This data comes from many sources – one of which is email. Information within emails can be particularly difficult for businesses to manage. But it should not be neglected.

Ineffective management of emails, (storage, retention, organization, and retrievability), can result in missed opportunities, costly failures, or even legal difficulties.

Certainly you shouldn't save every email because many are not needed for business. Nor should you merely treat all your company's emails as disposable instant messages (though many can and should be disposed of). Many are important documents of record.

This distinction is extremely important when it comes to certain vital emails, which may be subject to regulations or corporate governance directives that dictate how they're handled. This matter is referred to as "compliance" and will be discussed in greater depth later in the eBook.

Firstly, let's look at the different kinds of emails your organization is likely to deal with and how retention might apply to them.
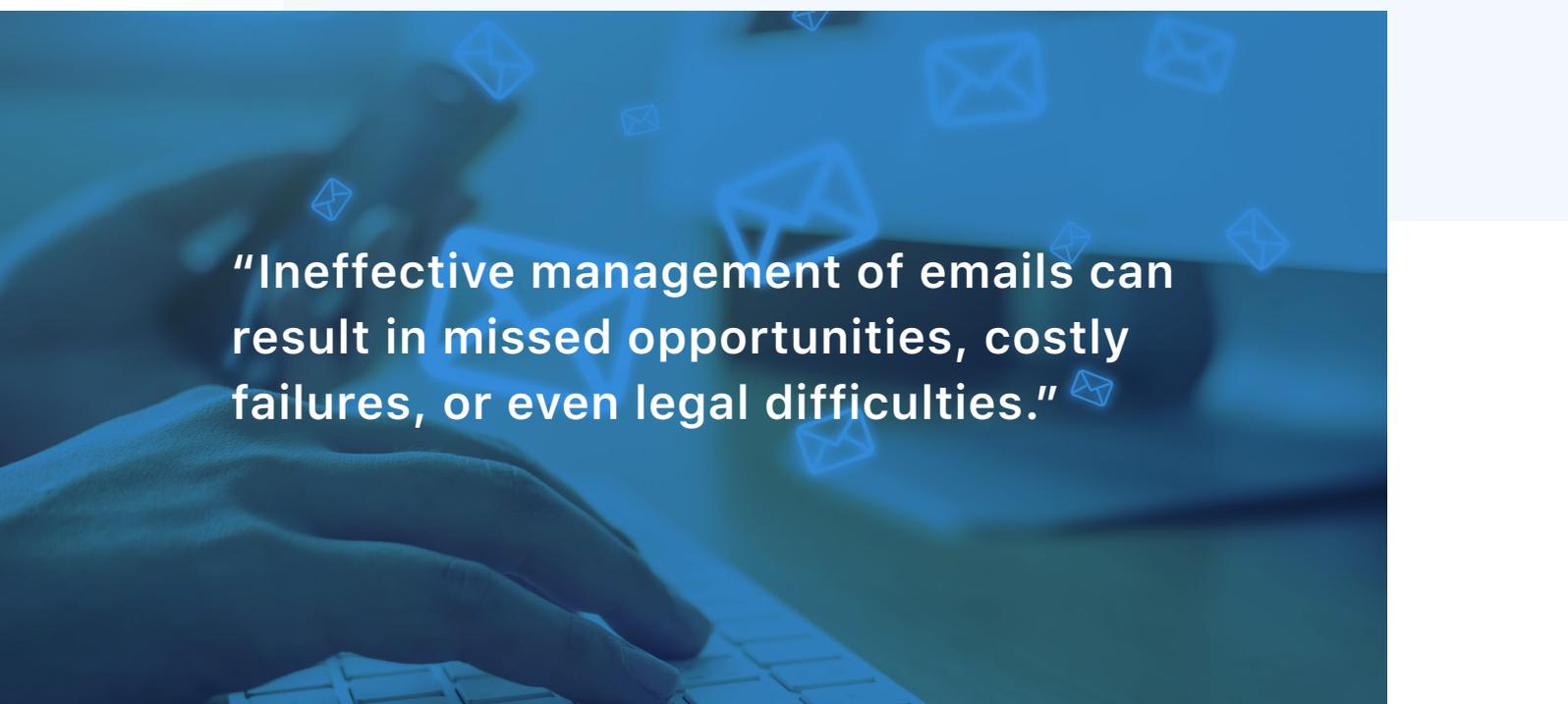
"Ineffective management of emails can result in missed opportunities, costly failures, or even legal difficulties."

Classifying your emails

Emails can be divided up into three broad categories, which will form a basis for making sense of the mess:

Redundant/old/trivial (ROT) emails

These emails offer your organization no value and deleting them involves no risk. This could include daily status updates between team members. Storing unnecessary emails in bulk makes it hard to find important information among them. But there's also an urgency to delete certain sensitive information, such as customer details you no longer need, which leaves your business open to risk.

Business Records

There is significant business value in these emails, and they should be retained for future reference and classified in as much depth as possible, so they can be easily found. These need to be easily available for ongoing reference, and might include important materials like pricing lists, or customer inquiries that multiple employees might need to access on short notice.

Retention records

It's important to retain some emails because they may be required one day for legal purposes. They include tax records, property deeds and engineering plans – items that need to be kept "just in case", but are likely never to be needed again. And this means there's no need to expend excessive effort and investment in classifying them.

Is this email compliance-sensitive?

Different regions, industries, and government departments have their own data storage regulations. For instance, there may be a minimum or maximum retention period for personal information.

"The erasure of unnecessary personal data is now required under European law."[1]

Some examples of these regulations include the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA).

Breaking these rules can have extremely serious consequences for your organization, including fines and other penalties. To give you an idea of just how important compliance is, breaching the GDPR can result in a fine of up to €20 million or 4% of annual global turnover.

Nobody is immune. In 2019, tech mammoth Google was hit with a fine of around $56.8 million for breaking European regulations relating to how

it dealt with data. In the same year, Danish taxi company Taxa4x35 was fined roughly $140,000 for retaining customer records that they didn't need and storing them improperly.[2]

Meeting compliance requirements, however, is not a "one size fits all" solution. Some compliance requirements, such as GDPR, mean disposing of customer information when not needed. Others, like many related to financial institutions, require keeping documents for potential future audits or litigation. And others, like "freedom of information" requests require rapid discovery of customer or constituent data.

"Google's GDPR fine: $56.9m"

[1]GDPR.EU. How does the GDPR affect email? Available online: https://gdpr.eu/email-encryption/
[2]Global Data Review. Danish enforcer seeks first GDPR fine. Available online: https://globaldatareview.com/article/1189237/danish-enforcer-seeks-first-gdpr-fine

Purging risky records

It's crucial that you delete certain kinds of risk-bearing data. As well as specifying that you must present any necessary customer data you have on demand. The GDPR also prohibits retaining information that you no longer strictly need. This is where most businesses' main compliance risk lies. For instance, penalties can be severe if your organization is hacked, customer data is compromised, and you're found to have kept that data unnecessarily and stored it with inadequate security.
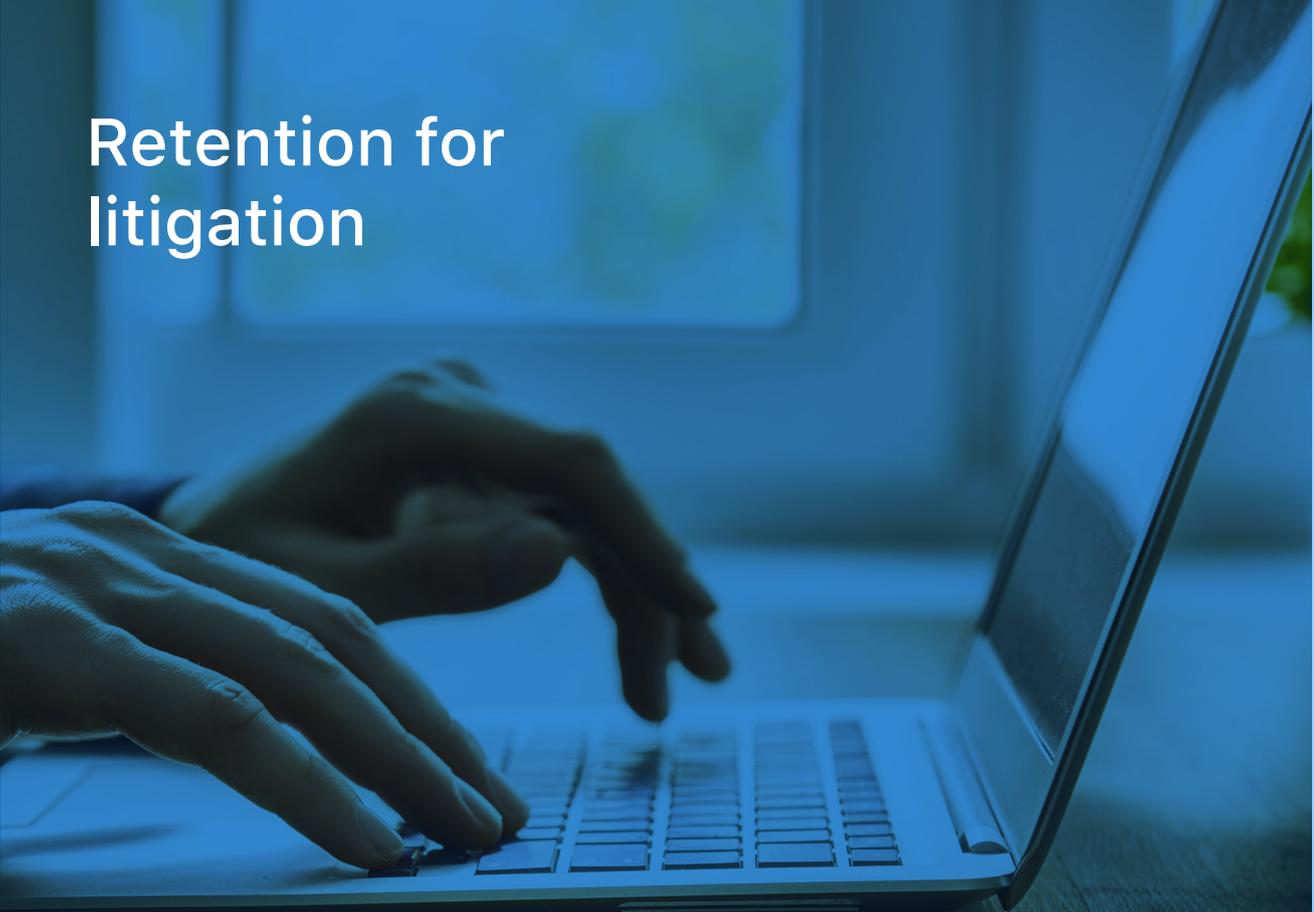
Retention for litigation

During litigation, organizations are required by law to produce relevant documents in what is termed "litigation discovery". These documents are referred to as "retention records" in this eBook; they need to be retained but not classified in depth or accessed unless by a third party during legal proceedings. This is a process known as eDiscovery, and since it's not conducted by your organization, classification, and discovery of these documents aren't your responsibility – just retention.

Producing records on demand

The regulations may require your organization to retrieve an individual's personal records in response to a "freedom of information request". In this case, these documents should be considered "business records", because you need to be able to access them quickly at any time and therefore need to be classified for ease of retrieval.

Challenges in email retention
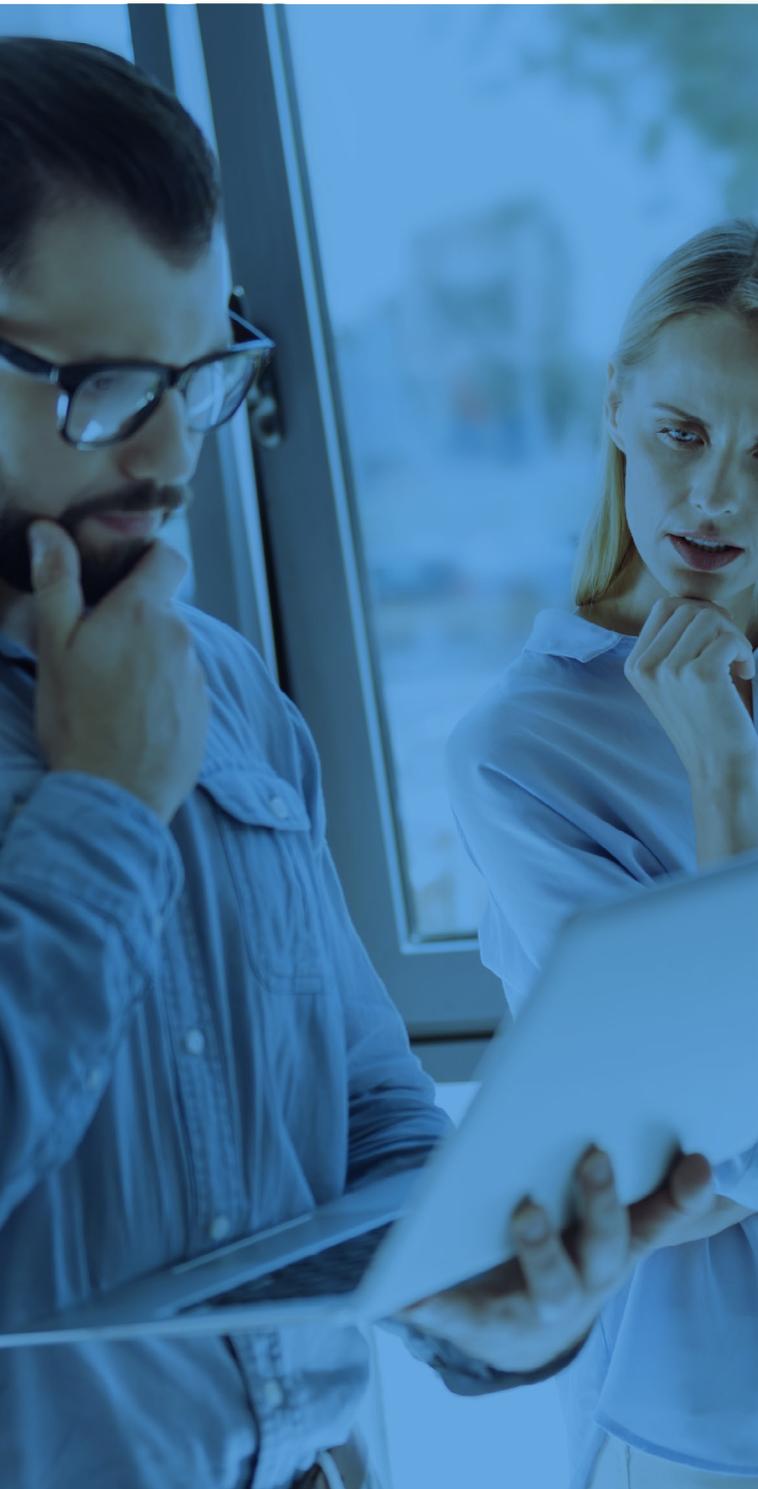
Making your policy too hard to implement.

If your email retention policy is unworkable from an IT perspective or too complex and repetitive for the people carrying it out day to day, you're setting yourself up for failure. Focus on the user, not just the policy, and make the right thing to do the easy thing to do, so people *will* do the right thing.

Losing the connection between records.

If your email business records are stored in a separate application (for instance, in personal Outlook inboxes) from your other documents, like contracts and proposals, which may be stored in SharePoint for example – how can you have easy and total visibility over all the information on the same topic? And if your data is siloed in many different places, that makes finding the items you need quickly for ongoing business more difficult.

Becoming overwhelmed by complexity.

With so many factors at play and ways in which an email could be classified, it's easy to get lost. Start with the basics: segment via broad classifications, including important compliance concerns like maximum or minimum retention periods. Think about what your priorities are.

Being unable to retrieve information.

Good, consistent organization is key. If data is classified and stored in a uniform manner (instead of remaining siloed in various applications, for instance), you will be able to much more quickly and easily retrieve it later when you need it for business purposes.

Too much or not enough?

Your organization may have a preference for minimum or maximum email retention. There are good reasons to take either position, as well as downsides.

Compliance departments may wish to retain as little email data as they are legally obliged to, in order to reduce compliance risk. However, this eagerness to delete may result in the loss of useful data– or, in the worst-case scenario, data that is required to be retained for other compliance requirements or possible litigation.

On the other side, business units may want to retain as much of their email data as possible, for fear of losing information that is valuable or even vital. The problem here is that the more emails you retain, the more you need to deal with. This means more emails to categorize, organize, store, and search through, which makes it much harder to find what you need, when you need it.

Managing email the right way is crucial for both kinds of business. Those who seek minimal retention need to be able to ensure they delete all the undesirable data, but not information they're legally required to retain. And if your aim is maximum retention, you need to be able to sort, retrieve, and analyze all the data you're keeping.

"Managing email the right way is crucial for every business."

Handling emails like documents

We've explored the importance of email retention and explained why important emails should be treated with the level of rigor and care applied to any other business document.

But how do you do this? For many people, emails exist simply within their Outlook inbox, with hardly any organization applied, except for some folders within that application.

To have true visibility and control over your emails, you need to be able to do the following:

Classify and label them

so that you can find them quickly at a later date for ongoing business, such as to service a customer request.

Filter and sort them in bulk

so that you can find all the records related to a particular area of business and consult them or take action on them as required.

See them in context

alongside all your other information stored elsewhere, so you can apply the same rules to them and make more informed decisions.

An intelligent solution

Integrated directly into Outlook, harmon.ie allows you to easily classify your emails by content, as soon as they arrive. This makes the everyday process of storing and organizing every email much quicker and simpler.

With harmon.ie, you can now quickly and easily classify emails in Outlook using its exclusive "Descriptive Labels." In this case, business record emails are stored on the Exchange mail server and for the first time, include vital identifying information like account, product, or project names.

Previously, harmon.ie enabled you to apply metadata to items saved on SharePoint. Now, harmon.ie also supports "in-place" record retention for email. This allows you to tag email content and define their business uses direction in Outlook.

harmon.ie's Descriptive Labels connect emails stored in Exchange to your other documents found on SharePoint, as well as conversations on Microsoft Teams.

This means that you can now locate records individually or in bulk much more easily at a later date when your business needs them. harmon.ie brings them all together, whether they're on SharePoint or Exchange. Now you can find all the relevant records in one step straight from Microsoft Teams too, or using Microsoft Search, Filter and Views.

Your mass of emails is no longer a mess, but rather an organized set of records. Now you have the visibility you need to gain easy access to business records whenever they're required, wherever they are. And when you can see and analyze your emails in context with all the rest of your information elsewhere, it allows you to make more informed decisions across your business.

With harmon.ie, you can now quickly and easily classify emails in Outlook using its exclusive "Descriptive Labels."

To learn more about how harmon.ie can simplify email retention and management by providing streamlined and enhanced functionality within Office 365 and SharePoint, talk to us today.

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or to
speak with a harmon.ie email management expert.