

# What's your data worth?

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In this article we will at how to calculate the value of the data on your computers and systems. This is the first step in determining where and how you protect and back it up. Before we go any further, it may be worthwhile to define what "data" is on a computer or network. Data is any piece of information that has been created by you or your colleagues or records stored in a central database. For the purposes of this article, we are referring to information stored on computers in an electronic form. This includes;

- a. Documents
- b. Pictures
- c. Emails
- d. Databases
- e. Accounting data

In this age of computerisation, we find that as more and more information is created and stored electronically, so an awareness of what this data means to your organisation in regards to its value and management become paramount. As anyone who has lost even a small amount of critical data will tell you-it is not a nice experience. Most people take the "once bitten, twice shy" angle after such an event and usually implement steps and processes to ensure it doesn't happen again.

One of the common problems when discussing data is the fact that because stored data on a computer is not physically "tangible", it is more than often overlooked in respect of its value, that is, until it is somehow lost.

So how do we determine what the value of the data on our systems is? Firstly we consider the following three questions;

1. What did it cost to create the data?
2. What is the commercial value of the data?
3. What would it cost to re-create it?

Looking in depth at each of these questions –

## What did it cost to create the data?

This aspect includes considerations such as "people hours" creating, entering and even managing it. Remember as a rule, "Valuable people, create valuable data". These are staff such as engineers, consultants, managers etc. Of course, it is the people hours multiplied by the hourly rate of the person creating the information. As an interesting note, the standard for a technical writer to produce one page of a technical document is eight hours!

## What is the commercial value of the data?

Here we consider a couple of aspects. If the data has been created for the purpose of selling a commercial product; what is its monetary value and what is it worth to your opposition? In this day of electronic documentation, once something has been written at a substantial cost, its value is in its reproduction and resale. In this case it is imperative to ensure that the "source files" are secure and protected from illegal reproduction and distribution. If the data is part of an on-time delivery project, then any sort of delay could also incur penalties such as overtime fees or even contract cancellation, resulting in complete revenue loss.

## What would it cost to re-create it?

In this question, we must consider some of the points of the above aspects like valuable people creating valuable data and commercial value. If your valuable people are tied up re-creating lost data, then other projects will effectively be put on hold until complete. So this equates to the cost of creating it and the impact in cost to other timelines and contracts.

As mentioned previously, electronic data can take up very little space on a computer hard drive or storage disk. To give you an idea of how electronically stored data can be represented, we can look at the following exercise;

The capacity of a hard Drive is measured in MB (Megabytes). A MB is a Million Bytes and the average Hard Drive in a PC has a capacity of 80 GB (Gigabytes), that is a Thousand Megabytes.

Below are some examples of how much space would be used to take up 1Megabyte;

- \* a 1000\_1000 pixel bitmap image with 8 bit (1 byte) color depth
- \* a minute of 128 kbit/s MP3 compressed music.
- \* 5.7 seconds of uncompressed CD audio
- \* 100 pages of single-spaced 12 point font text in OpenOffice.org
- \* a typical book volume in text format (500 pages\_2000 characters)
- \* 3 seconds of DVD-quality video

If you were to print out a Gigabyte worth of Word documents with no pictures, it would take 500,000 pages of printing or stacked up in reams (1,000), just over 3 Cubic Metres of paper!



This pallet is;  
1.46 Cubic Metres  
48 Boxes  
240 Reams  
120,000 Sheets

**=240 Megabytes**



Remember a previously mentioned fact; Eight hours work, for one page of a technical document – interesting, but scary maths!



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