

Press Release

Saving on the hidden cost of communication

In today's fast-paced market we tend to rely heavily on e-mail for communicating and forwarding documents to clients and colleagues. But in this new age of electronic communications, are we aware of the level and type of information we are inadvertently revealing?

When forwarding documents in electronic format, apart from the text itself the document could potentially contain 'metadata' — data specifically relevant to that document and the firm, but not necessarily imperative to the recipients. This could include: audit and version history of the document; life cycle; hidden text and comments; template and file location and, in some cases, changes that have been made or deleted from the document.

Availability of metadata within the document is a standard feature within Microsoft Office. Therefore, the recipient of the document could potentially uncover information that could compromise the firm. So how can we avoid this?

For a start, the 'track changes' function in Microsoft Office can be turned off, but that only addresses one issue. The document can be forwarded in PDF format, but again if the recipient has the necessary editor tools they can still view the metadata.

In the past two years the software market has seen the rise of several solutions aiming to address document security.

Workshare Protect, ezClean, Metadata Assistant and iScrub all promise the protection and cleansing of all MS Office application as well as e-mail attachments. Workshare Protect provides the ability to clean-save PDF mail functionality and iScrub can perform a 'mass cleanse' of documents.

All the above vendors also offer the ability to integrate with the users' existing document management and storage system to provide different levels of cleansing and to protect documents from future editing and exposure.

However, one important aspect still requiring attention is the ability to cleanse and protect e-mail metadata content as well. E-mail is now one of the most common forms of communication: do we really want all the recipients of our e-mails to know its full audit trail?

It is also important to bear in mind that this type of process should really form part of an organisation's overall document and workflow strategy; it should not be seen as a separate entity by itself.

About imus

imus is an independent London based management consultancy and technology organization, specializing in Intellectual Asset Management. The comprehensive management of knowledge within an organisation is our core business. With a clear grasp of the challenges faced by organisations today, imus is able to provide all the services required to help our customers manage and retain their intellectual capital by delivering and deploying a Knowledge Based Solution successfully.

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