The End of the Information Lifecycle —
Proper Destruction Protects the Enterprise

Analyst: Anne MacFarland

The lifecycle of information is a litany of changing risk. There is the vulnerability of proper capture and the risk of data loss through improper versioning as a business record approaches completion. Then there is the need to secure the information for proper use, and proper sharing and other forms of reuse. And now, government compliance mandates that business data be kept accessible and searchable for years.

However, the importance of these mandates to keep corporate information accessible pales in comparison to the importance of protecting that information from unauthorized access. Fail in the former and the enterprise gets fined. Fail in the latter and, in the best-case scenario, the enterprise merely gets sued. In the worst-case scenario, the reputation of the enterprise is tarnished and the future of the enterprise is destroyed. Some upstart smoothly takes over your customer base and mindshare and your enterprise is left with only the dregs of failure.

So, enterprises spend a lot of time and money protecting their information systems from intrusion. This gives them the freedom to move the data where it is needed – and move it they do. All this data migration makes good business sense, and enterprise information continues to be protected through a variety of methods including fingerprints, authentication, and limited-time authentication. However, **these same enterprises often neglect the final chapter of data protection, which comes when the information is deleted and media comes off lease, is traded in, repurposed, or discarded.** No one questions the need to shred paper with confidential business information on it, but they sometimes fail to see that improperly erased storage media carries the same liability risk as unshredded business documents.

The problem is that the *delete* command does not delete the information, but only the pointers to that information (which is one of the reasons you can have the blessing of *undo*). The body of the information remains, until the space is reused And, as in an archaeological dig, those with the proper skills can reconstruct the shards of bits and bytes into a treasure of credit card information and relational databases. **True erasure only comes with overwriting the data multiple times, with the number of times usually determined by government or other standards.** True compliance with data protection and privacy regulations only comes with a certifiable overwrite process that assures that the data is unrecoverably destroyed. Third party certification is the gold standard here. With very sensitive information, this overwriting may be appropriate before media is reused within the enterprise. But for every enterprise, the critical need is when the media leaves the enterprise to be recycled or trashed. It is an inherent part of the cost of ownership.

Crushing old disk drives and shredding tape might have the visceral satisfaction of paper shredding, but keeping the proof that it was done would be awkward. A reputable erasure service can do the job and certify that the overwrite was done the proper number of times as needed. The liability for data misuse is destroyed along with the data – and the certifying destroyer now stands at your side..

Taking proper care of information end of life issues properly is part of assuring the sustainability of your enterprise environment – not just in the long run, but depending on the hostility of your markets, perhaps in the short run as well. **Certified erasure is part of asset lifecycle management. Just do it.**

About The Clipper Group, Inc.

The Clipper Group, Inc., is an independent consulting firm specializing in acquisition decisions and strategic advice regarding complex, enterprise-class information technologies. Our team of industry professionals averages more than 25 years of real-world experience. A team of staff consultants augments our capabilities, with significant experience across a broad spectrum of applications and environments.

➢ *The Clipper Group can be reached at 781-235-0085 and found on the web at www.clipper.com.*

About the Author

Anne MacFarland is Director of Enterprise Architectures and Infrastructure Solutions for The Clipper Group. Ms. MacFarland specializes in strategic business solutions offered by enterprise systems, software, and storage vendors, in trends in enterprise systems and networks, and in explaining these trends and the underlying technologies in simple business terms. She joined The Clipper Group after a long career in library systems, business archives, consulting, research, and freelance writing. Ms. MacFarland earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Cornell University, where she was a College Scholar, and a Masters of Library Science from Southern Connecticut State University.

➢ *Reach Anne MacFarland via e-mail at Anne.MacFarland@clipper.com or at 781-235-0085 Ext. 28. (Please dial "1-28" when you hear the automated attendant.)*

Regarding Trademarks and Service Marks

The Clipper Group Navigator, **The Clipper Group Explorer**, **The Clipper Group Observer**, **The Clipper Group** *Captain's Log,* and *"clipper.com"* are trademarks of The Clipper Group, Inc., and the clipper ship drawings, *"Navigating Information Technology Horizons"*, and *"teraproductivity"* are service marks of The Clipper Group, Inc. The Clipper Group, Inc., reserves all rights regarding its trademarks and service marks. All other trademarks, etc., belong to their respective owners.

Disclosure

Officers and/or employees of The Clipper Group may own as individuals, directly or indirectly, shares in one or more companies discussed in this bulletin. Company policy prohibits any officer or employee from holding more than one percent of the outstanding shares of any company covered by The Clipper Group. The Clipper Group, Inc., has no such equity holdings.

Regarding the Information in this Issue

The Clipper Group believes the information included in this report to be accurate. Data has been received from a variety of sources, which we believe to be reliable, including manufacturers, distributors, or users of the products discussed herein. The Clipper Group, Inc., cannot be held responsible for any consequential damages resulting from the application of information or opinions contained in this report.