Is IBM is Serious about *Managing Information* instead of *Storage Infrastructure*?

Analyst: Mike Kahn

It seems obvious, but a focus on managing information rather than the underlying storage infrastructure has been elusive for many decades. Over the last thirty years, vendors under a variety of campaigns have presented this challenge as everything from *Information Resource Management (IRM)* in the 1980s to *Information Lifecycle Management (ILM)* in this decade.

Unfortunately, at the end of the day (and during each decade), the focus has seemed to return to one of *storage administration*, as in *how much storage can a single administrator manage?* This is not surprising, especially as the data volumes (and costs) have grown so fast (especially during this decade). Meanwhile demands for retention, reuse, and compliance also are pushing enterprises to the edge of not being able to cope, both administratively and financially.

This has appeared in other ways, as well. For many reasons, servers have become more commoditized than storage, possibly because virtualization of servers has been more widely adopted than virtualization of storage. Where the focus used to be on the servers enabling an enterprise's business processing, that focus has moved to the transparent enabling of applications (and data, as described above).

Now, IBM is making it official. **Managing information is its dominant focus with the devices of data storage and security being relegated to a subordinate role as important infrastructure enablers.** Unfortunately, this is an over simplification because the keepers of the data (i.e., the data center managers) still need to procure, enable, and manage storage software and hardware from a plethora of choices. **What is different is the top-down focus on an enterprise's information architecture and the absolute need for a strategy for making it happen.**

While this sounds obvious, and it is, it has been only given lip service in many organizations. The focus has been on fighting the explosive growth in data volumes and the many demands for retention, protection, and access. This is where the rubber meets the road and where the friction of reality tends to get so hot that all of the focus goes toward quenching the heat, as opposed to reducing or removing the sparks (origins) of the heat.

IBM structures its new focus around four pillars of information delivery, under the acronym of *CARS*:

- *Compliance*
- *Availability*
- *Retention* and
- *Security*

These are the applications of managing an enterprise's information. They speak to *what needs*

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to be done as opposed to *how to make it happen*, and is a much better place to develop an enterprise strategy on information management.

IBM sees information management being discussed in four dimensions:

- *Business continuity*
- *Storage virtualization*
- *Infrastructure and storage management* and
- *Data protection*

With five enterprise (customer) goals:

- *Speeding time to value through flexible, integrated compliance solutions*
- *Enabling massive scalability through break-through storage technologies*
- *Driving exceptional efficiency gains via data de-duplication and protection*
- *Simplifying information security with unified media encryption* and
- *Ensuring enterprise success in these endeavors by providing an expanded ecosystem*

We commend IBM's decision to refocus from storage products (hardware and software) to managing information (i.e., secure service delivery of information, when and where it is needed). We encourage enterprises to do the same. Otherwise, IBM's newly proclaimed strategies on "information infrastructure" will regress quickly to an all too familiar discussion of storage products, functionality, and offered services, a plentitude of which was included in today's announcements (but is not the focus of this *Captain's Log*[1]). **Let's make this refocusing stick, as the need has never been greater!**

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[1] Look for other Clipper bulletins covering this announcement.

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About the Author

Mike Kahn is Managing Director and a cofounder of The Clipper Group. Mr. Kahn is a veteran of the computer industry, having spent more nearly four decades working on information technology, spending the last 15 years at Clipper. For the vendor community, Mr. Kahn specializes on strategic marketing issues, especially for new and costly technologies and services, competitive analysis, and sales support. For the end-user community, he focuses on mission-critical information management decisions. Prior positions held by Mr. Kahn include: at International Data Corporation - Director of the Competitive Resource Center, Director of Consulting for the Software Research Group, and Director of the Systems Integration Program; President of Power Factor Corporation, a Boston-based electronics firm; at Honeywell Bull - Director of International Marketing and Support; at Honeywell Information Systems - Director of Marketing and Director of Strategy, Technology and Research; with Arthur D. Little, Inc. - a consultant specializing in database management systems and information resource management; and, for Intel Corporation, Mr. Kahn served in a variety of field and home office marketing management positions. Earlier, he founded and managed PRISM Associates of Ann Arbor, Michigan, a systems consulting firm specializing in data management products and applications. Mr. Kahn also managed a relational DBMS development group at The University of Michigan where he earned B.S.E. and M.S.E. degrees in industrial engineering.

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