

View Data as an Asset

Cloud forces agencies to rethink how they manage their data

Cloud computing opens a whole new world of possibilities for government agencies, but also presents new challenges for how they manage their data. For most agencies, it's not a question of if they will move to the cloud, but when and how fast they can make the transition.

At the Small Business Administration (SBA), its cloud first strategy—and its determination not to buy another piece of hardware for its data center—required a rapid move to the cloud. In less than three months, it went from zero, to design, to architecture, to implementation, and finally to ATO. Now the agency has more than 150 virtual machines running in its cloud and also was the first to implement CDM in the cloud, says Sanjay Gupta, Chief Technology Officer, at the Small Business Administration, speaking at an Aug. 23rd Cloud Summit.

Moving to the cloud represented a fundamental business change for the SBA. “We recognize that the on-prem model is a very capital intensive model and can't be sustained,” says Gupta. It was also a financial decision, as the agency searched for a way to get a more “uniform spending pattern by moving to the cloud.”

As organizations build their cloud strategies, it's a good time for them to review their policies and standards, particularly as they relate to data management. Agencies need to ask themselves, “Why should we keep doing things the way we have always been doing them,” says Rolland Miller, Federal CTO, Rubrik.

He says it's also an opportunity to better secure and manage data that organizations move to the cloud, and rethink data governance. It forces agencies to reevaluate a tool or

application and the policies surrounding it. People tend to be “digital packrats,” says Miller. “You have your information and you store it and you manage it and then you forget about it. You don't want to look at it.”

Agencies must continually evaluate their information, particularly as they move data to the cloud and some of the underlying foundations

are shifting and networks are re-architected. Agencies must consider data as an asset, says Gupta. “You manage it, you secure it, and you own it.” A common problem today—even with on-premises data—is lack of clear ownership.

Ownership is necessary because if someone owns data, then they will take care of it, maintain it, have a purpose and goal for it. “Those are the things you have to define,” he says. It's easier said than done, but the transition to the cloud is the perfect opportunity to accomplish that.

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CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER, SBA

The SBA is reinvigorating its data management and data governance program to respond to these challenges. There is no magic bullet to solve the data governance problem. It has to happen one program office at a time. However, once data ownership is established, “the other things start falling into place,” says Gupta.

As data from the Internet of Things continues to swell and new technology such as machine learning and artificial intelligence appear on the horizon, agencies must be ready. The tools and automations must be in place so the data that comes in is automatically managed, says Miller. “For us that means being an API-first platform that runs inside the cloud.”

Cloud enables a set of utilities and tools capable of managing this influx of data that an agency's on-premises infrastructure does not. It gives agencies granularity into applications and who is using them, which helps them determine if a particular application is worth its value, says Miller. “The cloud is absolutely your friend. Now you can automate and expand your digital universe to support requirements that before you didn't have a way to support.”

