Cloud Archiving Platforms

The Enterprise Buyer's Guide for IT

Technical Requirements to Consider
When Evaluating Platforms

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Cloud Archiving Platforms — A Market In Transition

Enabling workers across an enterprise organization to share information is a critical component of a successful business. However, in highly regulated environments such as financial services, government and healthcare, managing potential risks that lurk within those communications is critical. It requires a sustained effort to collect and preserve communications data. Until recently, that data was often hard to access or analyze, and the process was strictly obligatory.

Demands for how to proactively manage and use communications data are increasing in today’s digital and mobile world. These go beyond what is required to meet established compliance and supervision obligations.

Organizations now have a wealth of insights available that can influence various parts of their business. Those insights can enable more effective communications governance and more efficient and thorough e-discovery. They can also enable strategic cost cutting, better ways to maximize IT resources, and data analytics that illuminate competitive advantages. These potential enhancements are driving organizations of all sizes, and from many industries, to adopt sophisticated cloud archiving strategies.

However, it has taken a transformation in the archiving solutions marketplace to achieve these valuable milestones. This shift has happened in three waves:

1. First, firms implemented on-premise archiving applications centered on email, primarily for compliance purposes.
2. The second wave featured a growing move to cloud-based archiving, still mainly focused on email, but then with the addition of a small handful of other communications, primarily to address regulatory requirements.
3. Now, enterprises are quickly shifting to cloud-based solutions and are actively moving to platforms that address a wide and ever-expanding set of communications and content types (e.g., collaboration platforms, SMS/text messaging, voice, etc.). These solutions are deployed not only to satisfy compliance, but also for legal, IT, privacy, customer insight, and other needs.

As part of this transformation, compliance professionals are increasingly collaborating with their counterparts in legal, IT, security and line of business roles. Unfortunately, they are finding that many offerings available in the market do not fit their enterprise needs.

To select the right solution and set the stage for success, this guide outlines common challenges for regulated enterprises, key cloud archiving platform considerations and benefits, and next steps for effective evaluations of those tools.

Common Enterprise Challenges with Archiving Platforms

In addition to addressing compliance needs, cloud archiving platforms can:

- Improve communications governance and e-discovery
- Cut IT costs and enhance resource utilization
- Deliver key business insights captured from a complex set of content sources

Yet many legacy platforms have fallen flat in meeting these goals. Organizations report that they struggle with lack of flexibility and a broad array of obstacles with certain solutions. As buyers consider options for upgrading to a comprehensive cloud archiving platform, we recommend keeping these common challenges and their respective considerations in mind:

“Email only” or gaps in key communication and content types

Existing systems are designed for email, but today’s communications sources are far from homogeneous. Enterprises use a broad and growing variety of tools like Microsoft Teams, Slack, Zoom, and messaging apps designed for mobile devices like WhatsApp and WeChat. These channels are used not only for internal collaboration, but also for customer communications and partner exchanges.

Gaps in the platform’s ability to manage key sources can obstruct the insights and context needed for complete, successful regulatory responses and e-discovery demands. For example, archiving systems designed for email “flatten” dynamic, interactive content sources such as texts and chat messages into email format, losing key metadata and context as a result. Email is important, but lack of focus on other communications is a recipe for failure.

Well-designed cloud archiving solutions:

- Support a content-agnostic approach (preserving any form of communications data, not limited to an email format)
- Address modern dynamic content (including edits, deletes, entrances and exits from chats, document versioning, etc.) as well as static content
- Capture and retain content and metadata in its native format
- Enable easy integration with custom content sources and new networks

Flexibility is key. The system should easily adapt to support new and evolving content types and other legacy sources or enterprise-created applications. It should also provide appropriate context across the holistic set of communications. As younger generations continue to join the workforce and steadily reduce reliance on email, appropriately addressing emerging and changing communications types is essential.

Monolithic architecture

On-premise deployments pose multiple points of failure. Performance is unreliable and degrades with high data volume. Monolithic design locks firms into whatever technology choices are available at the time of deployment, which significantly limits the ability to incorporate advances in areas like indexing, storage and information security. Smaller cloud vendors may cause similar headaches.

In many non-modular designs (both in on-premise scenarios and in situations where the vendor is just using the cloud for storage, as opposed to leveraging cloud computing), databases eventually become a bottleneck as load or data volume increases. And corrupted monolithic indices can impact system performance and can be difficult to diagnose and remediate. Accordingly, the consequences of data loss during an investigation or a legal matter can be very high.

Enterprises are best served by selecting cloud archiving platform vendors that incorporate modular design and architecture. These systems should leverage a distributed architecture of services, storage and indexes in a cloud environment based on open source and horizontally scalable technologies.

Robust platforms incorporate resilient architecture with no single point of failure and can horizontally scale all components as needed. Modular designs also facilitate the ability to swap out components as new technologies emerge or become available in different cloud offerings, and reduce the risk of technology lock-in.

Performance and scalability shortfalls

Performance bottlenecks frustrate enterprises attempting to preserve and produce significant volumes of content or tackle other high-volume tasks. Searching across a large collection of data can be difficult, sometimes returning different results for the same search query. And issues in exporting high volumes of content to a downstream review application could mean missing court or regulatory driven deadlines, resulting in financial and reputational damage.

Also, with certain cloud archiving platforms, moving large volumes of content from legacy on-premise archives or discordant cloud archives to new solutions can be unpredictable, expensive and time-consuming.

Given that enterprises may have thousands of participants using a variety of communication applications and generating huge volumes (potentially terabytes) of data, performance is key when selecting appropriate vendors.

Archiving systems designed for the enterprise should allow for demand-driven, automatic scaling, so that companies pay only for the resources they need at any one time. Robust performance and scale are paramount for firms contending with time-sensitive regulatory responses and e-discovery obligations.

Reliable performance for ingesting, searching and exporting data, along with cloud-scale storage, are essential. These systems should utilize proven, web-scale technologies across the entire system for processing, storage, search and indexing (as opposed to search only). They should also provide scale across content types (e.g., email, social, collaboration, images, attachments, etc.), while preserving context.

Cloud platform limitations

Infrastructure matters. Amazon, Microsoft and other top tier public cloud infrastructure vendors are heavily investing in their cloud offerings. Smaller vendors simply can't keep pace with the significant, ongoing financial contributions that these leaders contribute for testing, security, and optimization. Top tier cloud vendors provide the ability to place resources, such as instances and data, in multiple locations and they operate state-of-the-art, highly available data centers.

Also, contending with cross-jurisdictional conflicts (e.g., privacy requirements vs. litigation or investigation demands across multiple geographies) can be very challenging, particularly when a vendor has a limited number of data centers.

A limited number of vendor data centers can create obstacles to meeting new privacy or regulatory mandates. This constraint can also inhibit deployment to new regions and make it difficult to meet data locality requirements. Many providers also don't support the ability to simultaneously or serially deploy their platforms in multiple cloud environments, limiting flexibility as business needs change.

Cloud infrastructure flexibility is an important consideration in selecting cloud archiving platforms. Given the major impact that a data loss or a data breach can have on your organization's operations, falling behind industry-leading cloud infrastructure standards can exact a heavy price.

True cloud-native applications can be deployed on Amazon's AWS, Microsoft Azure, and other leading cloud infrastructures either separately or in multiple cloud infrastructures at the same time.

Firms should strongly consider vendors with a multi-cloud approach. This provides optimal flexibility to facilitate regional expansion, address geographic specific requirements (e.g., privacy and regulatory driven data retention), and enable straightforward data transfers as business needs change.

Lack of data security and privacy

Getting ahead — and staying ahead — of privacy and security demands is a not trivial task. Especially considering the broad array of communications that firms must manage, many legacy systems simply do not meet the capabilities that modern enterprises require.

In addition to the security and privacy capabilities provided by cloud infrastructure vendors, global financial services firms and other organizations that require robust controls should closely consider the capabilities of the cloud archiving platform providers themselves. Third party certifications and attestations (e.g., SSAE-16 SOC II, ISO 27002, and audited and accredited operational, management and technology controls) are essential to substantiating vendor claims.

Prioritize vendors that deliver strong privacy capabilities, robust operational security management, and role-based access control. Their solution should encrypt data and rest and in transit, and not allow readable access to client data.

Openness and extensibility pitfalls

The ability to quickly and flexibly leverage the data within a company’s cloud archiving platform is key. Isolated application silos are just a redo of the last generation of on-premise systems that add limited enterprise value. Some providers have gaps in their ability to integrate with other systems. Others limit or block exporting data from their platforms, making it difficult to utilize data in other applications (e.g., legal review, advanced analytics, etc.) or to move it to a competing solution.

These limitations, as well as the high fees that some providers charge for exporting an enterprise’s own data, can pose major headaches and thwart the realization of business value by limiting insights from disparate communications and content sources.

With a well-designed system, enterprises can have a central point of control for data that feeds other applications, like legal document review, content surveillance, or business intelligence applications. It should enable highly reliable, high speed, high volume information delivery, including all content and context to other systems. And it should use enrichment APIs to add metadata and securely pass data back to the cloud archiving platform.

In addition to more effective e-discovery and regulatory response, extensible systems can contribute to business insight programs and enable rapid response to regulatory changes, new communication applications, and technology or analytics advances.

The Many Benefits of Cloud Archiving

Compliance, supervision and governance

Regulatory scrutiny is on the rise, which means enterprises must be prepared to address the evolution and future of electronic communications. Though email remains a critical part of the overall electronic communications landscape, collaborative and mobile platforms (e.g., Slack, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc.) are playing an increasingly important role in how companies conduct business.

Conversations throughout a global enterprise are fluid and incorporate myriad interactive sources, including texts, emails, social media, chat messages, and a variety of emerging modalities. This confluence of communications makes compliance more difficult and introduces new sources of risk. Effective cloud archiving platforms that address an extensive and flexible set of communication types can help reduce compliance burdens, curb risk and facilitate regulatory responses.

Modern communications tools enable new connective touchpoints internally and with customers and prospective customers. Without the controls delivered by an appropriate cloud archiving platform, it would be difficult to communicate with third parties on all channels — due to compliance and risk concerns. This development is a gateway for new and renewed business.

IT & legal efficiency and cost savings

In addition to potential fines, reputational damage and other losses, IT costs to support compliance and e-discovery obligations can be significant. Many organizations struggle with disparate, disconnected applications when seeking to address these needs.

Well-designed cloud archiving platforms can cut these costs. For example, systems that can address a broad spectrum of communications (e.g., text, chat, voice, etc.) reduce the need for siloed systems that support a limited set of sources (e.g., only email), lowering overall IT costs. In addition, cloud archiving platforms with rich openness and extensibility support straightforward “handoffs” to other applications like legal review, resulting in more cost cutting and improved response times.

A more effective system, with fewer disconnected applications and stronger integration, also enables IT to focus on other areas of the business to bolster productivity or uncover competitive advantage.

Sources of insight and analytic advantages

In addition to addressing compliance and risk and cutting IT costs, modern archiving systems hold strong potential for underscoring additional business value, especially given the extensive variety of content they capture and preserve.

Enterprises are finding that “big data” or “data lake” applications can be enhanced with this rich communications and collaborative data. Incorporating this extensive data set can advance customer data mining, analytics and a broad set of other programs.

These technologies and insights set the stage for increased revenue, more cost cutting, competitive advantage and stronger customer retention — positioning organizations for the future rather than reacting to the past.

Next Steps: Evaluating Cloud Archiving Platform Requirements

There are several different cloud archiving platforms on the market. Navigating all the options can be a complex process. To select a solution that best addresses evolving enterprise needs, we recommend carefully measuring the following requirements and considerations:

Enterprise Requirements	Buyer Considerations
Content Capture and Preservation	• It's not just about email. Ensure that the system has strong support for an extensive set of communications and content types (e.g. text, chat, voice, etc.) and confirm that the system can easily add new sources as they emerge. • Validate that the system can capture and preserve native content and metadata and provide appropriate context across the holistic set of disparate communications.
Design and Architecture	• Monolithic architecture is not a recipe for success. Prioritize modular design and architecture. • Seek systems based on open source and horizontally scalable technologies. • Insist on resilient architecture with no single point of failure. • Carefully weigh the ability to swap out components as new technologies emerge or become available in different cloud offerings, to reduce the risk of technology lock-in.
Performance and Scalability	• Validate high performance for ingesting, searching and exporting data along with cloud-scale storage. • Confirm that the system supports demand-driven, automatic scaling, so that only necessary resources must be paid for.
Cloud Native Capabilities	• Check if the system is a true cloud native application that can be deployed on AWS, Azure and other leading cloud infrastructures. • Give high marks to those systems that can deploy on multiple cloud infrastructures — separately or simultaneously — with a seamless, flexible approach.
Security	• In addition to the security provided by infrastructure vendors, closely consider the security capabilities of the cloud archiving platform providers themselves. • Seek vendors that deliver strong privacy capabilities, robust policy and operational security management, role-based access control, include data encryption at rest and in transit, do not have readable access to client data, and can demonstrate third-party certifications and attestations.
Openness and Extensibility	• Confirm that the system is well designed as a central point of control for unstructured content and integrates well (bi-directionally) with other applications like legal document review, content surveillance or business intelligence. • Validate that the system supports highly reliable, high-speed, high-volume information delivery including all content, context and metadata to other systems with a rich XML schema and a data model description.

Evaluating these requirements takes a concerted effort. Decision makers should press providers to prove their capabilities on each of these dimensions. The following tactics can go a long way in separating aspirational claims from demonstrated capabilities:

- Ask for a conversation with one of the vendor's top architects
- Insist on a reference check with some of the firm's largest production customers
- Request benchmark data that supports their stated offering

This analysis largely focuses on key buyer considerations and underlying technologies of cloud archiving platforms. For successful implementations, appropriate cross-functional teams (e.g., compliance, IT, legal, security, privacy, etc.) should also be involved in the decision-making process.

A robust, flexible archiving system is just part of the puzzle for a successful enterprise. True cross-departmental collaboration is key in developing appropriate policies and procedures. This ensures that the system selection process incorporates different enterprise needs, adjusts as business needs change and ensures stakeholder buy-in over time.

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