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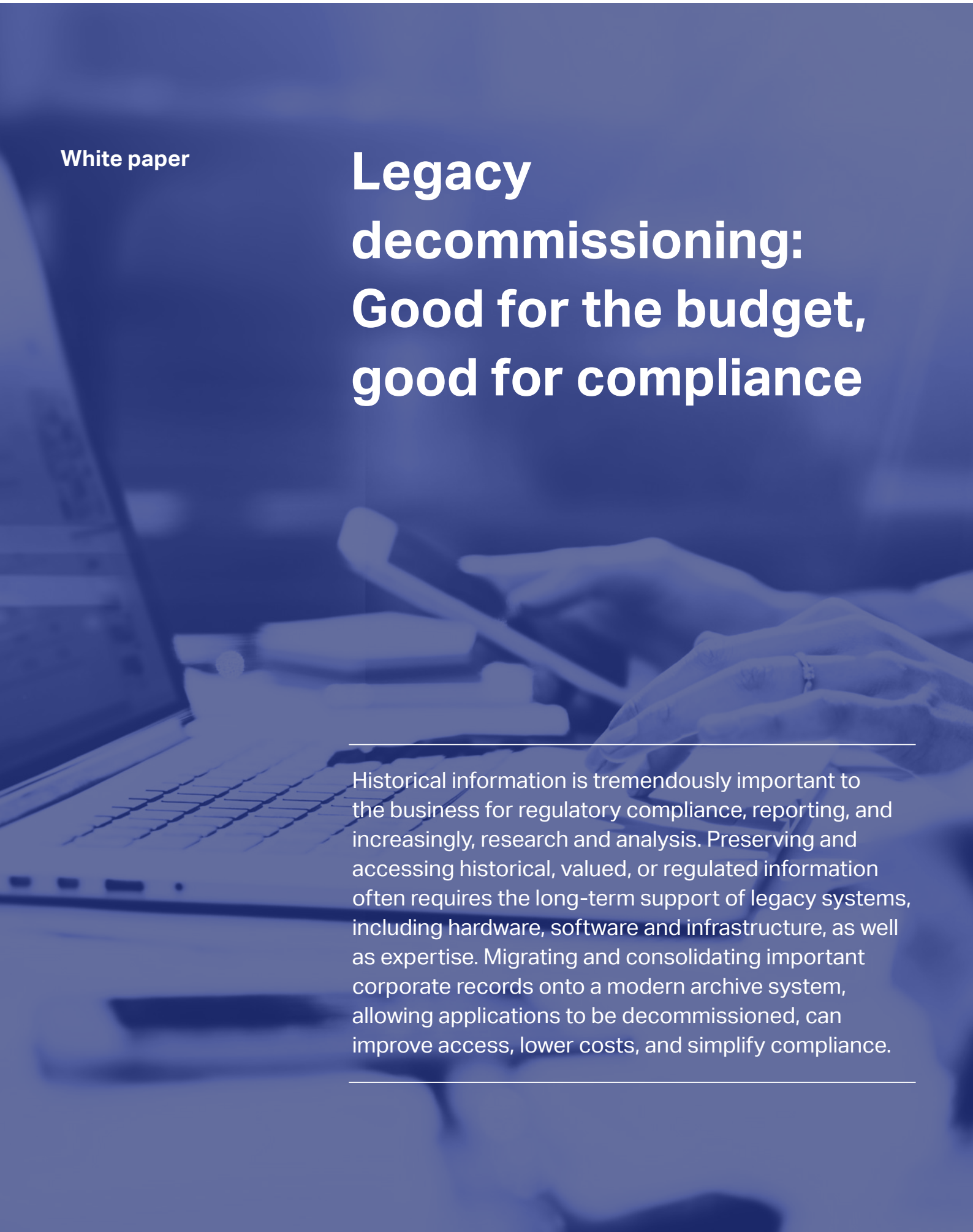
White paper

Legacy decommissioning: Good for the budget, good for compliance



Historical information is tremendously important to the business for regulatory compliance, reporting, and increasingly, research and analysis. Preserving and accessing historical, valued, or regulated information often requires the long-term support of legacy systems, including hardware, software and infrastructure, as well as expertise. Migrating and consolidating important corporate records onto a modern archive system, allowing applications to be decommissioned, can improve access, lower costs, and simplify compliance.

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Contents

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Retention intention

Legacy information is everywhere–human resource applications, eCommerce systems, customer sales and marketing databases. The amount of information stored is staggering—and generally must be retained for years. Retention policies are often mandated by governments, regulatory bodies, industry best practices, and legal counsel. It is necessary to store content and data, which may span multiple obsolete or obsolescent applications, in order to enable the reconstruction of a specific transaction or event. Employee records may span HR systems, payroll records, and emails. Financial transaction reconstruction may require not only transaction logs, but also historical pricing from stock exchanges, voicemails, and bank receipts.

To maintain that information, IT needs to expend considerable resources. Perhaps the legacy software runs on obsolete hardware. The vendor supplying the legacy software may charge significant annual fees for licensing and/or patches. Staff must be trained. Network infrastructure must be in place, as well as other physical resources, such as racks, power, backup power, cooling, and cables. Even though the information in a legacy system may be unchanging, a data backup/restore system must be in place, as well as disaster recovery plans—after all, if you are required to keep systems running for compliance or other reasons, they must be protected as much as current line of business systems. Millions of dollars are spent each year to protect and maintain old hardware, software, and infrastructure. Yet what is important to the enterprise, CIO, and corporate counsel is the information, data, and content. The goal for such systems should be decommissioning, yet an end-of-life plan may seem to be at odds with compliance and governance policies. This does not have to be the case. Archiving that information into the OpenText™ InfoArchive platform and then decommissioning legacy systems can reduce both cost and risk, while improving the usability and compliance of historical and valuable corporate information moving forward.

Now bidding: One Ultra SCSI drive

A sales management platform was replaced by a cloud-based service in 2012. A transaction management system running on an IBM® minicomputer was officially retired in 1997. A data warehouse lives on a set of Unix® servers. Compliance policies insist that these systems may not be turned off, yet keeping them alive is non-trivial. This leaves IT departments scrounging for spare parts on eBay, stockpiling network switches that support 10Base-T, and zealously guarding the dwindling supply of 16 GB Ultra320 SCSI hard drives for the server racks.

Hardware, as difficult as it may be in some cases, may be the easier part of maintaining a legacy system as a regulatory retention platform. The operating system and applications may be obsolete, yet they still must be maintained, with licensing fees paid to the original vendor or a consulting company. Patches, especially those that have security implications, must be applied, often by consultants, often for a fee (and no small amount of trepidation in case something goes wrong). Backups of the legacy system must be made and tested on a regular basis, perhaps as part of the modern enterprise data backup system, or using legacy tapes or disks. After all, although the data in the out-of-date system is not changing, the business still needs to ensure that backups are current and reliable.

Keeping one legacy system alive is a challenge. Having dozens—or hundreds—of old IT systems is a chore, because each one offers its unique sets of costs and technology issues. Complexities multiply exponentially when the old systems are interconnected. The CRM system links to documents in a repository. Old sales records tie into the old inventory management platform. If one system stays up, they all must stay up, unless the information can be extracted with contextual links to other information, and stored in InfoArchive. Archiving not only eliminates the need for IT staff to maintain the old systems, but also means that information can be accessed in one place. And once the old systems have been decommissioned, you can sell those Ultra SCSI drives on eBay instead of stockpiling more of them.

One policy to rule them all

What's in a compliance policy? Rules about the duration of information retention and how that information is preserved and protected. Expected norms for who can access that information, and how quickly a request from a corporate officer, the legal officer, or a regulator will be filled with summary reports or primary sourced data. The compliance officer may not have a magical golden ring, but she wants to have one policy, uniformly applied—not policies that contain exceptions based on the physical, software or skills-based limitations of old software systems.

The reality is that each legacy system may have its own compliance policies. In some cases, the software may have policies that nobody knows how to change, or even find. Depending on the skill set within the IT department (or its consultants), it may be next to impossible to certify that legacy systems meet current regulatory rules, not only for information retention, but also for access. Are old financial systems compliant with Sarbanes-Oxley? Do old patient records systems conform to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act? Again, it may be difficult to certify compliance. If the systems cannot be proven to be compliant, remediation may be impossible or extremely expensive, even with a magical golden ring—which itself may not be compliant with current European standards. Note, by the way, that regulatory standards can change many times each year.

Single point of access

The word eDiscovery strikes fear in the hearts of not just CIOs and legal officers, but also IT staff members, who realize that one simple-seeming information request touches half a dozen interlinked legacy platforms, and will require four different administrators. One of those admins is on her honeymoon, and one is in the hospital. Oh, and the top mainframe specialist is retiring next month. Let's see, who knows how to work that old system, again? Not to mention challenges with staff or gaining access to systems, some of which require connecting to specific protected networks or using an old terminal system.

Is it MS-DOS or IBM 3270? That is not the point. Getting the information out as complete reports or reconstructing an old stock-vesting transaction may require integrating data from disparate sources. Do any of those legacy systems needed for the eDiscovery query or the regulatory investigation export data onto floppy disks? Let's hope not. The alternative: When information is migrated onto a consolidated archive, secure and compliant access becomes easy. No more terminal emulation or remembering the intricacies of an old version of shipping manifest solution. The information can now be made available directly to legal staff or even to regulators using a modern application with a modern user interface—in full compliance with industry and government regulations. Reports can be exported as raw data or PDF files, depending on what is required. The relationships between data sources are retained and, what's more, can be explored through one interface, not dozens. We will not pretend that anyone ever enjoys eDiscovery, but with InfoArchive, your admin will not receive a phone call on her honeymoon.

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A step toward decommissioning

Old servers are not important. Legacy applications are not important, nor is the infrastructure, except when needed to maintain critical historical information. The business cares about information retention, whether for internal research purposes, compliance with policies or external regulatory requirements.

Ever-increasing costs for hardware, software, supplies, and expertise place stress on the IT budget. Ever-changing requirements make it difficult to ensure compliance, while regular reports, periodic audits, and complex queries that span multiple legacy systems are always a challenge.

Migration and consolidation of information—both data and content—onto InfoArchive can reduce costs, improve access, and help ensure compliance. Preservation meets innovation: InfoArchive is the best solution for providing a compliant and accessible archive for all your structured data and unstructured content—providing greater contextual value for your information, and helping drive legacy applications to end-of-life decommissioning.

For more information on application decommissioning, visit http://documentum.opentext.com/infoarchive/

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