

Information – Does Increased Availability Heighten the Risks?

Thursday 13th October 2011, Deloitte, Manchester

The purpose of the meeting was to explore the implications for the safe/secure management of information as data availability is ever more easier, faster and wider. Judging by the number of publicity flyers for similar events held by other professional bodies and events organisers it is obvious that this and cyber security has a rising profile. This is probably because the issue has moved out of the expert domain and into an arena where organisations, the media and general public are becoming increasingly engaged – and concerned.

This meeting aimed to present various perspectives – from national cyber security to a government department, from cloud computing to the insurance angle. This would provide, hopefully, a rounded view. Unfortunately, on the day, the Operational angle was not covered as the speaker had to regrettably withdraw at the last minute due to business priorities.

Notwithstanding this we are, as ever, very grateful to all our speakers. They provide their services for nothing and often go to considerable trouble on behalf of our audiences.

The meeting took place in the excellently appointed office of Deloitte in the centre of Manchester. The venue and facilities were first class and we are very thankful to Deloitte for this and the refreshments. The event attracted 35 participants and the feedback they gave us was very positive.

Most of the presentation slides are on the website alongside this note which provides a brief summary of the event (with the responsibility for any errors or misinterpretations being mine alone!).

First up was Ben Rendle of Detica. He is the co-author of the Cabinet Office report on “The Cost of Cyber crime” (February 2011). Ben began by setting the context of cyber crime, the parameters around their investigation which included the challenging time scales for reporting. This was compounded by the fact that this was the first attempt to put the whole thing into context and come up with estimated costs to the UK economy. A theme throughout the presentation was the health warning around the stated amounts which were, almost certainly, a (significant) under-estimate. Ben went through the findings on the impacts of cyber crime for three categories: citizen; business; and, government. The slide-deck details the associated costs and the sobering fact that cyber crime is very attractive to the criminal fraternity be they individuals or organised. Reasons for this include: the minimal financial outlay; low risk of being detected/caught; the equally low risk of the crime being reported; likelihood that those being infiltrated will be unaware and/or pay up when threatened with loss/corruption to data; if caught they

would face relatively short prison sentences; and, the “infinite” number of potential victims.

Following this, Tony Meehan of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) outlined their approach to Information Management. He prefaced his session by providing the Office for Government Commerce’s definition for information management and then went on to outline how this compares/contrast with information security. The latter, especially within the public sector is well understood and centres around the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information. Whereas, the management of information has the different and, at times, contrasting premise of efficiency, economy and effectiveness. For the DWP (like many other public facing government departments) the use of information is core to its activities and its ability to pay benefits. So for the DWP what does this all mean in practice? It’s about:

- only asking for information once but re-using it many times and, where necessary and sharing it with trusted partners to deliver better public services;
- knowing what information is held and where to find it, improving storage methods and the ability to access electronic information, bringing down the costs of digital filing and reducing the reliance on paper;
- improving information availability - ensuring that the public can access their own information and see more of the information used to define the delivery of services, the effect that programmes and activities are having and assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department
- Improving the information architecture - understanding the information needed to support delivery; with standard information sets for key business processes and products, information standards for each item of information, policies guiding the use of our information and the management of its lifecycle
- improving information governance and capability by recognising the cost and value of information, and having the capability/skills to manage it.

Tony also touched on the problems faced by digital obsolescence. This was something that was already recognised and the DWP has a Digital Continuity Policy that articulates what the Department needs to do to ensure digital information remains usable, complete, and available.

For the last session before lunch Eric Healing of Deloitte took us into (or should that be, up to?) the world of cloud computing. He provided the background, technical background and business advantages of using this technology and how he saw it as the obvious way to go in terms of efficiency and economy. It is fair to say that there are many concerns around the security, ownership and availability of data. Eric accepted their validity but asked us to put it into historical context by reminding us of the original fears in moving from the water well to piped water into our homes and other such like changes that we take for granted and think nothing of. Yes, there are many associated risks which he outlined but they can be mitigated and he believes we will come to think of cloud computing as the ‘natural’ way of things. Eric finished by taking the audience through examples of where he worked with the client to successfully implement cloud computing as the preferred solution.

The final presentation - and one that dispelled the myth of being first up after lunch is the ‘graveyard’ slot - was by Alan Tickner of Bluefin. He took us on an entertaining



journey through the world of insurance which may appear to be a contradiction in terms but I can assure you the audience thought otherwise. What soon became apparent was that insurers are still playing catch up in relation to IT related claims and that generally traditional policies do not provide cover. This has typically resulted in losses being absorbed by the organisation or individual. Alan advised that companies need to take a step back, re-assess their IT insurance requirements and look at specific IT policies. But even here, as is the way, the exemptions can still lead to liability exposure, which could be especially damaging to companies in cases like data breaches (e.g. right to privacy and breach of confidence). That is quite a health warning, so great attention should be given to the wording and implications of a policy before taking one out. Also that one should seek out the IT specialist insurers – there are a few out there!

In summing up – and as stated in the introduction – the subject profile is growing. This, of course, brings its own risks as facts become obscured by perceptions, half-truths and exaggerated realities. One thing is certain, as we move further into an era where our information sources/'natural' ways of working are progressively more reliant on the digital world we need to effectively address the risks as we may not be able to fall back on a paper based back-ups.

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