REPORTS and ANALYTICS

Understanding your Data:

The Value of Reporting & Analytics to your Business

Using reporting and analytics software, your internal teams can assemble and analyze organizational data to identify key details from data sets before outside council is brought in for eDiscovery.

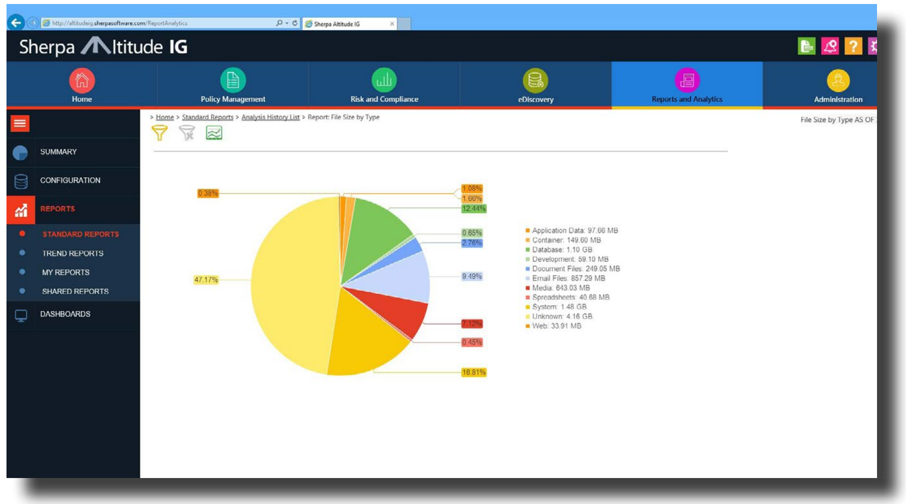
SHERPA SOFTWARE

When was the last time you looked closely at your organization's unstructured data? What insights did you gain that you used to inform business decisions? If you're not able to answer those questions, trust us, you're not alone. Despite its value, data or information reporting and analytics is often—too frequently we might add—an afterthought, even at organizations that do everything else right in a quest to make information governance a priority.

Below, we explore how data, also known as electronically stored information or ESI, reporting and analytics can save your business time and money and offer guidance on systems for inventorying and analyzing ESI within your organization.

What You Can Learn with Routine Reporting

As we all well know, data is never stagnant. Staying on top of this constant change through regular review and analysis is the only way to pinpoint risks and opportunities in your data before it's too late. From identifying redundant, outdated, and trivial data to exposing troublesome dark data to monitoring sensitive business information and more, reporting and analytics tools can prove invaluable to your organization.



Identify & Remove ROT Data Information

Let's start with one of the most common and troublesome data types—ROT (redundant, outdated, or trivial) data. This is information that is no longer, or maybe never was, relevant or useful. Chain emails, old meeting agendas and contact information, pictures from an office party two years ago, lunch menus, duplicate files, you name it—ROT exists in so many forms.

So, why should you care? According to AIIM.org, up to 80 percent of ESI can be classified as ROT. That's a lot of vital storage space and resources (monetary or otherwise) dedicated to something with virtually no value. Plus, sorting through all of that unnecessary information can become a real problem during eDiscovery—significantly increasing time and money spent on processing and review.

Fortunately, once you define clear criteria for ROT, this data should be simple to identify and, more importantly, remove, so that you're no longer wasting space, time, and money.

Illuminate Dark Data

Dark data lurks in every organization—in the cloud and on hard drives, USBs, and mobile devices. Basically, dark data is information that you control but that you're not monitoring or using for any known purpose. It was probably important once and may still be in the future, but, for now, it's mostly been forgotten. However, as its ominous names suggests, dark data holds inherent risks.

- Missed opportunity cost: Every now and then, meaningful information may be hiding in dark data. Since you've last seen the data, there is a chance that you've gained new tools or information that could bring greater relevance or value to the data.

- Data leakage: If a USB drive is misplaced or a laptop stolen that contains dark data, information could be lost without your knowledge. Sensitive information could be revealed to a competitor, the general public, or worse. Only when you understand what data you have can you find better ways to keep it secure.

- Litigation risk: If you don't identify and analyze dark data now, you may end up doing so while facing litigation. Not only will this, like ROT, increase time and money spent on eDiscovery, but, if confidential or illegal information is present, you can face significant legal or financial penalties. Additionally, this type of data has typically fallen outside defensible disposition processes—leaving you open to increased risk.

Just as with ROT, regular reporting and analytics is the best way to identify and manage dark data, reducing associated risk and potentially even shining a light on valuable information.

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Monitor Intellectual Property & Sensitive Information

By generating regular reports, you can gain insight about how users are storing and sharing intellectual property and sensitive information. Reporting tools can provide an easy way to collect intel on what files users are emailing, where and how sensitive information is being stored, and how much of your ESI contains specific words or phrases indicating sensitive data. Armed with answers to these questions, you can investigate potential problems and propose solutions before problems get out of hand.

Determine Trends and Opportunities for Policy Improvement

Seeing changes in data types and volume across weeks, months, or years can help you to spot trends or problems that will inform your future plans. Once you have a thorough picture of your data, you can respond appropriately to apparent concerns or needs. You can also use reporting and analytics to ensure that your policies are being successfully followed or automated.

Special Cases: When Data Reporting & Analytics Can Benefit You Most

As we've seen, investing in tools for routine data reporting and analysis can be beneficial for many reasons. However, there are two special cases in which data reporting and analytics is particularly crucial: early case assessment and policy creation.

Conducting Early Case Assessments

When preparing to prosecute or defend a legal case, one of the most important steps is eDiscovery—the process of locating, collecting, reviewing and producing information pertinent to the case. With the abundance of ESI today, eDiscovery has become increasingly difficult, lengthy, and expensive.

Luckily, with the right reporting and analytics tools in place for early case assessment (ECA), you can estimate the time and cost associated with legal proceedings before facing the burden of complying with the discovery process. Having a realistic picture of the risk and benefits of moving forward with a case can greatly impact your strategy.

Using reporting and analytics software, your internal teams can assemble and analyze organizational data to identify key details from data sets before outside council is brought in for eDiscovery. With the right ECA tools, you can then organize your data into reports by date, sender, attachments or other categories, so that, from the start, you present a clear picture of evidence, which can drastically reduce your litigation costs. Even if you settle, you've saved costly discovery time. If you go to trial, you've already sorted and prioritized the information you'll need—a win-win for your company!

Creating Information Governance Policies

Before updating or creating information governance policies, it is imperative to recognize what data you have and where it's located. By creating an information inventory, you can learn where information currently resides, how it is being created and stored, and who owns and accesses what information.

Only once you have a solid grasp on your organization's data landscape you can determine what policies you need and for what data. Remember, ESI and how employees interact with it changes rapidly, so if your policy is built on old or incomplete information, you are almost guaranteed to miss something. On the other hand, the more you know, the more effective and applicable the policies you create and enforce become.

Also, if you'll be presenting your policy recommendations to colleagues, many reporting and analytic tools will provide you with visual representations, including charts and graphs, that can be especially helpful for others looking to discern the facts and reasoning behind your proposals.

Getting Started with Inventorying & Monitoring Your Data

Before you can monitor your data, you'll need to inventory existing data types and locations. For a full inventory, you will need to include all structured data, unstructured data, and old legacy content. Of these types, unstructured data, which we've been focusing on, can be especially complex.

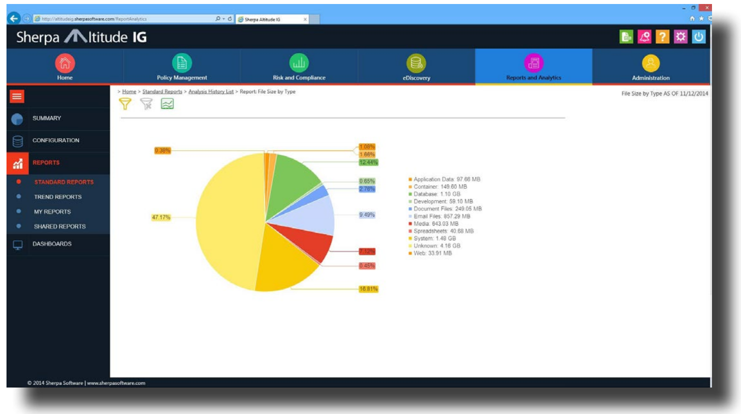
For example, files should be classified by content rather than file extension, so that you can later set and apply retention policies for specific content types. However, this means you'll need to develop a list of file classifications before beginning an information inventory, although that list may change along the way. During the inventory, remember to include physical storage, such as external hard drives, and outside partners who may also maintain company information.

In terms of departments, focus first on those most likely to be impacted by litigation, talking with department stakeholders to learn what data they manage and its primary locations. The information you gather from these stakeholders should later be compared with your inventory results to ensure that there are no major discrepancies. While these discussions with stakeholders are most critical for your initial inventory, it is beneficial to all to maintain regular, open communication about data trends and management.

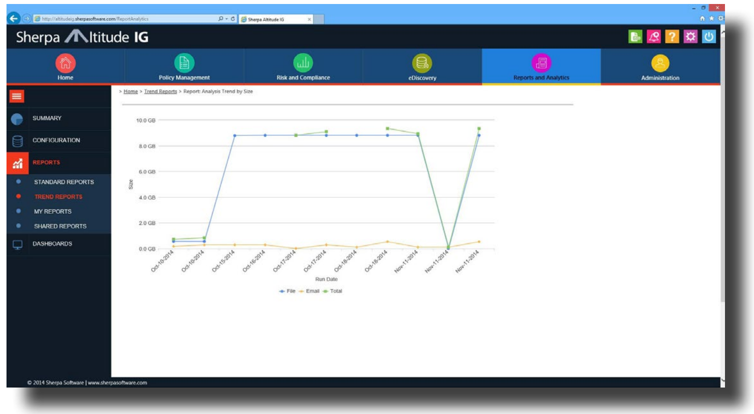
While much of the planning and preparation for your initial information inventory will be manual, software can automate a large portion of the inventory process as well as the majority of your routine reporting and analysis work. Once you have an automated system in place, we recommend preparing and reviewing reports on a set schedule in addition to the reports you'll run on demand when special circumstances or questions arise.

Using Altitude IG Reports & Analytics

Sherpa Altitude IG® Reports & Analytics can provide solutions to your information reporting and analysis needs, with tools for data profiling, data analysis and early case assessment. With Altitude IG, you can inventory and analyze unstructured data for regular data upkeep, early case assessment, and to develop information management policies.



Altitude IG also allows you to easily create visual representations and reports around core areas of concern discussed previously, such as ROT data, intellectual property management and risk, and general data trends and storage information. For information and statistics you plan to monitor closely, you can build personal or shared reports as well as customizable dashboards with intuitive graphical charts.



About Sherpa Software

Sherpa Software, a leading provider of technology-driven information governance solutions, has helped more than 3,500 companies worldwide. Sherpa's award-winning software, services and support address information management, regulatory compliance, electronic discovery, PST management, email archiving and more. Sherpa Altitude IG, Sherpa Software's signature information governance platform, connects to more data sources than traditional platforms, leaves your data in-place and offers robust analytics and metrics, while addressing core business issues.