

How modern businesses are managing data more intelligently

 By [Kate Mollett](#)

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The last ten years have seen an evolution in how organisations of all sizes implement and manage their IT infrastructures.

The arrival of cloud computing models like software as a service (SaaS) now enable users to connect to and use cloud-based apps directly over the internet with Microsoft's Office 365 being one popular solution of this type.

Then there's infrastructure as a service (IaaS) which lets organisations build agile computing infrastructures that can scale up and down on demand. All of these new models change an organisation's requirement to ensure data protection and data availability, with many focusing on creating an intelligent data management strategy.

Intelligent data management is fundamental to the success and differentiation of any connected business in a digital environment. However, many organisations are still stuck in the traditional mindset of how they approach, store, and analyse data. They must become more 'data aware' in an always-on environment and embrace the characteristics of being hyper-available and capable of delivering intelligent data management for business growth.



Data, customer experience and hyper-availability

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The cornerstone to deliver on these hyper-availability aspirations is the secure automation of the constant data flow as it enters the organisation, irrespective of source. For South African businesses this requires a significant shift in approach.

Data cannot be managed in a policy-driven way. Instead, it is about embracing a behaviour-driven mindset that can use innovations such as artificial intelligence and machine learning to enable a transition to this automated, real-time data environment. This enables a business to be more agile in how it adapts to changing market and customer conditions and can tweak organisational strategy in a more fluid fashion than previously.

Meeting customer expectations

The competitive environment has seen local companies understand the need to meet customer demand. People are expecting their service providers to have sight of their likes, dislikes, solutions requirements, and so on irrespective of the device they use or where they access information from.

Digital has become an indispensable part of our lives (whether professionally or personally). Organisations can no longer afford not to have access to the data that defines customer expectations and informs customisation. So, even though a willingness by decision-makers is needed to become more open to this hyper-available environment, local organisations must also be prepared to adapt their solutions to reflect the need for more intelligent insights.

Given how much data has become available, companies must not only be able to accurately capture and store it, but they also need to understand the relevance for business advantage. Just consider how much data is generated by customers on social media, how much data is stored in cloud environments (public, private, or hybrid), and the data created by 'as-a-service' solutions.



Data availability - The next frontier

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Capturing and storing it is fundamental but having data available at all times is where the challenge comes in for many not willing to understand its complexity. Backing up and restoring, while still priorities, are supplanted by making sense of the data sprawl a business has access to. The first step in understanding data and having any chance of managing it comprehensively, is a data audit. If a business does not know where all its data is stored or who has access to it, it will never be able to make sense of it or ensure its protection and availability. And, as more data-driven services are required by customers or employees, expectations of service level can never be truly met or set with confidence.

A truly hyper-available business keen to embrace intelligent data management must review how it evolves in a digital landscape, but it all starts with a solid backup and recovery strategy, as well as replication and failover capability.

Own your data, don't let your data own you

So, to take it back to the start, while a platform may change, the rules on the data and availability expectations do not change. Microsoft Office 365 is a good example of that. The promise of this SaaS solution is great: a relief of on-premises tier one storage, the opportunity to reduce the need for mailbox quotas, and with OneDrive for Business a way to combat "shadow IT" file sharing outside of corporate mechanisms. These are real business problems solved by Microsoft Office 365 and these changes are welcome to both users and IT administrators alike.

But what doesn't change when the application does change? The responsibility of the data. Organisations need to realise that this is their data and they must take responsibility for it. Only then can they implement the steps required to become fully always-on.

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