

Long Term Digital Preservation and IG: The Evolving When, Where, and How Strategy

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As I begin digging into the intricacies of long-term digital preservation (LTDP) of electronic healthcare data, I am realizing how little I knew. The ever-changing formats and standards for accessing personal health information (PHI) come to mind. Once obsolete, how will this information be acquired? Will we still be able to exchange the information or even continue to use the information at the very least? How are healthcare organizations supposed to tackle their most critical digital assets?

It seems as though the research community has a head start in providing digital curation and preservation of information resources. Many academic articles focus on research data integrity, security, and authenticity over time. But what about the healthcare industry? We not only need direction on how to preserve data, but also direction on how to interpret and effectively utilize historical data and information for better patient care and more informed business decisions. With evolving regulatory strategies and new advances in technology, healthcare will also require a solution that includes scalability to control the preservation of the information lifecycle.

An enormous amount of electronic data and information filters through healthcare organizations on a daily basis. The sheer volume of this data and information calls for a more structured approach. These records also need to be stored in accordance with state, federal, and organizational retention schedules—but how can we keep track of the tremendous amounts of historic records and legacy systems?

Information governance supports long-term digital preservation initiatives. Many organizations have a variety of disparate legacy systems that are not streamlined and are not meeting best practices. With the help of an information governance program, a committee can advance the strategy and road map of the LTDP projects. The committee can also help the individual business units incorporate synchronized technologies that are ideal for LTDP best practices. These technologies may include public and private cloud architectures and other advanced technologies to be implemented enterprise-wide.

It is important not to make the mistake of categorizing this enormous undertaking as just another information systems project. The most effective lens would be to implement an information governance program. Developing a systems infrastructure that utilizes software that is compatible across many types of platforms and operating systems is a step in the right direction toward an efficient enterprise-wide framework with LTDP. Additionally, the IG committee will have a risk management plan in place that ensures the efficiency of LTDP program and technologies. An information governance program is essential to managing an organization's digital assets. Implementing the LTDP program will maximize the value of each business unit's legacy systems and other information resources. The time has come where we must thoroughly manage all data and information resources to stay competitive and deliver high quality patient care as well as make more informed business and clinical decisions based on these critical assets.

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