

# PUND-IT RESEARCH

## Weekly Review

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# Mapping the Digital Universe

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EMC announced an IDC research report that attempts to measure and forecast the amounts and types of digital information created and copied globally. The report, *The Expanding Digital Universe: A Forecast of Worldwide Information Growth Through 2010* estimates the amount of information the world is creating and copying in a given year and extrapolates the development of the "digital universe" through the year 2010. Among the findings:

- In 2006, the total amount of digital information created and copied equaled 161 exabytes (161 billion gigabytes), or roughly 24 gigabytes of information for each person in the world.
- If storage growth follows current trends, the volume of information created and copied annually will increase ten-fold by 2010 to 988 exabytes.
- Over 95% of the digital universe consists of unstructured data such as email and media files. In businesses, 80% of all information is unstructured.
- By 2010, nearly individuals will create 70% of data. However, organizations including businesses will be responsible for the security, privacy, availability, and compliance of 85% of that data.

## The Pitch

*The Expanding Digital Universe* highlights the long term implications of "fast food" storage.

## Mission Accomplished?

The history of IT is rife with success stories but it is difficult to think of one more compelling than the stunning price/performance gains in information storage. Not only do traditional storage vendors continue to develop ever faster and more capacious disk and tape storage solutions for businesses and consumers, but innovations in flash and related technologies have enabled the creation of highly affordable storage-enhanced mobile devices including MP3 players, cell phones, and digital cameras.

What are the effects of this evolution on information users? There are both good and bad. On the good side, ever-cheaper and ever-expanding storage technologies encourage consumers and businesses to access to ever-increasing amounts of rich data. This provides them the means to make better decisions and lead richer lives, but like fast food goodies anything cheap and easy has a downside. Over consumption of "fast food" storage can confuse their senses, upset the organism, and reduce the efficiency of processes that information is supposed to enhance.

In the world imagined in *The Expanding Digital Universe*, the growing glut of data foreshadows increasingly difficult or even potentially unsolvable management problems, leading to a situation where crippling volumes of data could eventually outweigh the overall value of information. But is that ugly scenario inevitable? We believe not, though significant challenges will need to be addressed. The fact is that while increasing price/performance has been a constant in data storage, data management technologies have often lagged behind, though by varying degrees.

A six-fold increase in stored information will potentially create at least as many losers as winners. We see particular dangers to consumers in this regard, most of whom are already straining to deal with expanding collections of digital media files. Some will simply never get a handle on the situation and will instead be awash in tens or even hundreds of thousands of dusty emails, dimly remembered audio and video files, and digital snapshots from forgotten vacations. Their future heirs, like heirs today, will wonder just what grandma and grandpa were thinking by keeping all that junk.

The implications for businesses are deeper and potentially more severe, especially if they are saddled with responsibility for data security, privacy, availability, and compliance envisioned in *The Expanding Digital Universe*. If that scenario does happen, effective information management will not simply be a goal to pursue but imperative to organizations' survival. Consider the difficulties com-

panies already face in contending with current security and compliance issues surrounding complex unstructured data.

The problem is anything but "one size fits all." Small businesses are likely to suffer (as they do now) disproportionately from information indigestion compared to large organizations where effective data management has long been a common part of doing business. While painful for many, this situation is likely to open significant opportunities for vendors of scalable, robust storage and information management solutions. They are the trainers who will help wean data-engorged businesses from their fast food storage habits, reduce their Expanding Digital waistlines, and get them solidly on the road to information health.

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***Pund-IT emphasizes understanding technology and product evolution and interpreting the effects these changes will have on business customers and the greater IT marketplace.***