AIIM WHITE PAPER

Delivering the priorities and opinions of AIIM's 193,000 community

What's Happening with File Sync and Share?

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What's Happening with File Sync and Share?

About the White Paper

As the non-profit association dedicated to nurturing, growing and supporting the user and supplier communities of ECM (Enterprise Content Management) and Social Business Systems, AIIM is proud to provide this research at no charge. In this way the entire community can take full advantage of the education, thought-leadership and direction provided by our work. Our objective is to present the "wisdom of the crowds" based on our 190,000+-strong community.

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ShareBase by Hyland
28500 Clemens Road
Westlake, OH 44145
Tel: 216.788.5000
www.ShareBase.com

Process used and survey demographics

The survey results quoted in this report are taken from a focused survey on File Sync and Share. One hundred and forty-two responses were collected from individual members of the AIIM community using a web-based tool. Invitations to take the survey were sent via email to a selection of AIIM's 190,000+ registered individuals.

About AIIM

AIIM has been an advocate and supporter of information professionals for nearly 70 years. The association mission is to ensure that information professionals understand the current and future challenges of managing information assets in an era of social, mobile, cloud and big data. AIIM builds on a strong heritage of research and member service. Today, AIIM is a global, non-profit organization that provides independent research, education and certification programs to information professionals. AIIM represents the entire information management community: practitioners, technology suppliers, integrators and consultants. AIIM runs training programs, which can be found at http://www.aiim.org/Training.

Bob Larrivee
Vice President of Market Intelligence, AIIM

About the author

Bob Larrivee is Vice President of Market Intelligence at AIIM, and an internationally recognized subject matter expert and thought leader with over thirty years of experience in the fields of information and process management. Bob is an avid techie with a focus on process improvement, and the application of advanced technologies to enhance and automate business operations.

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AIIM
1100 Wayne Avenue, Suite 1100
Silver Spring, MD 20910
+1 301.587.8202
www.aiim.org

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28500 Clemens Road
Westlake, OH 44145
Tel: 216.788.5000
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Introduction

There's a growing demand by and for employees to share and collaborate on documents with people inside and outside of their organizations. As a result, businesses must carefully assess their file sharing needs. From customers and vendors to constituents and auditors, information must be made available to a variety of stakeholders in a timely and secure manner to reach and maintain effective operations and service levels.

It's no longer "good enough" to rely on slow, asynchronous methods of collaboration. Instead, businesses must adopt more synchronous methods of interacting with key processes and content. Today, many organizations are turning to enterprise file sync and share (EFSS) solutions to extend their information ecosystem while providing secure, cloud-based sharing. This ensures support for a more collaborative means of working for both internal and external parties while allowing organizations to retain ownership of their shared data.

Key Findings

Profile

- **38% of respondents say that 50% or more of their organization has a need to share files with someone outside of their organization.** 29% say that 25% or less of the organization has this need to share.
- **58% of respondents say they are using third-party cloud apps for sharing outside of the corporate network, with 49% saying they use FTP sites.** Not surprisingly, but somewhat concerning, is that 85% are still using email for this purpose.
- **When asked about standards for cloud-based sharing, 35% say they have some level of sanctioned file-sharing standard in place.** 52% say there have no cloud-based sharing standards at all.
- **Unsanctioned file sharing tools are in use by 65% of those polled.** 35% say they are not aware of unsanctioned tools being used in their organization.

Policies and Procedures

- **21% of respondents say they have an information governance manager or director in place.** IT is held responsible for ensuring proper use of tools, policies, and procedures for 45% of responding organizations.
- **Lack of insight on what is being shared outside the company is a concern for 60% of organizations.** Controlling who can share and data loss after termination of employment is of concern to 49% of organizations.
- **Education is a key element in preventing unauthorized sharing for 65% of respondents.** Monitoring of the user community is a practice for 46%.

Integration/Interoperability

- **Opportunity for integration is there for the 50% of organizations indicating they have no integration between their file sync and share tool and their core applications.** A tightly programmed integration is in place for 11% while 16% say they use add-on products.
- **The ability to easily revoke a user's rights, especially once they have left the organization, is a top feature sought by 77% of respondents.** The ability to gain insight and audit file-sharing activities is high on the list for 60%.
- **Security is on the minds of 71% of respondents, indicating that the use of unique encryption keys is very important.** Assurance that their information is siloed from other clients of a cloud provider is considered very important for 65% of respondents.

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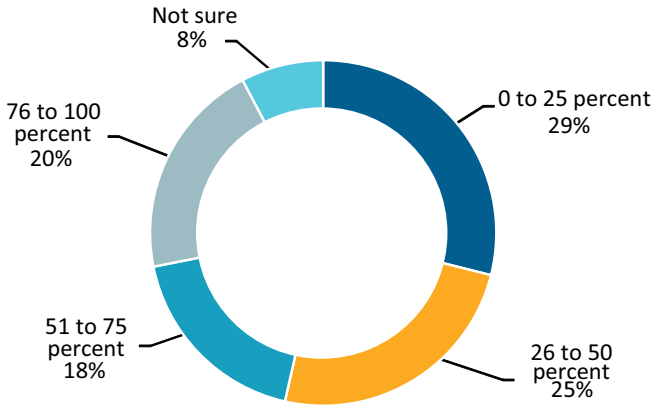
Profile/Perceptions

Sharing information with clients, partners, and suppliers is a necessary part of business. The need to share and collaborate on business information beyond the corporate walls has always existed, but the way we share has changed. AIIM Research finds that 38% of our respondents say there is a need in their organizations for more than 50% of staff to have external file sync and sharing capabilities. (Figure 1)

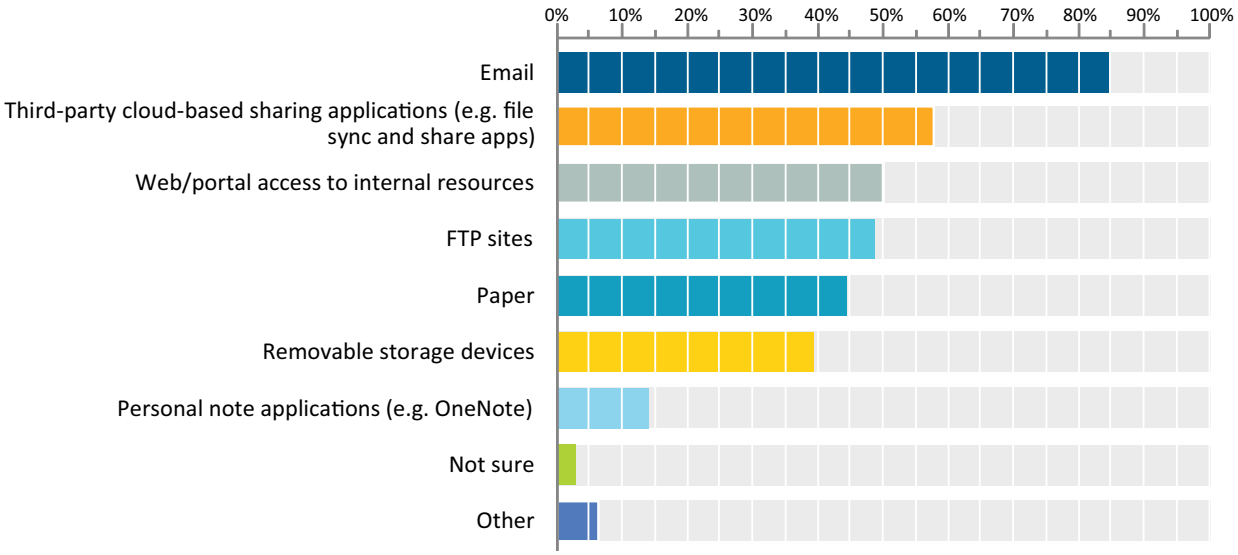
Figure 1. How many people within your organization need to share and collaborate on files with someone outside of your organization?



The difference today is the method used for information sharing. Not surprisingly, more than 40% of our respondents indicate they still use paper as a means of sharing information. The reason could be as simple as cultural reluctance, or as complex and constraining as regulatory, legal, or industry compliance.

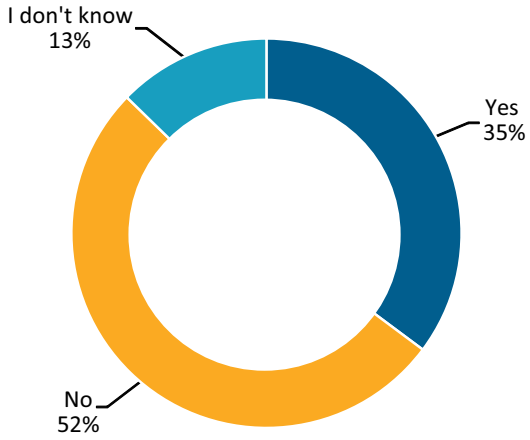
But is paper the most efficient and safest way to share anymore? Email remains a dominant force and the tool of choice for 85% of respondents, likely due to the cultural nature and prevalence of email use since its inception. But is email really the most secure way to share? For those who are more forward thinking (58%), cloud-based file sync and share applications are in use. The proper file sync and share tool allows employees to be efficient with their data sharing while keeping it secure. (Figure 2)

Figure 2. What methods are used within your organization to share and collaborate on files outside of your corporate network?



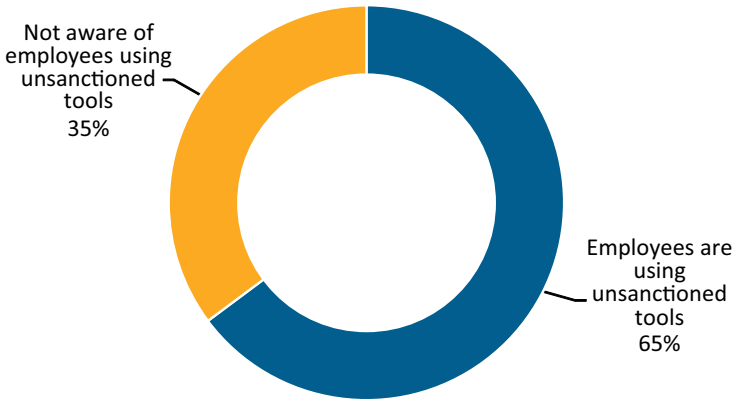
While it is good to have a process in place, the question of governance and standards must be addressed. Technology without governance – while it may provide the functionality for internal and external file sharing – may not align with or support corporate compliance requirements. Organizations need to educate their employees on the processes they have in place and the possible implications of file sharing. For many organizations (52%), there are no approved standards in place for cloud-based file sharing, and if there are, 13% have no idea they exist. For 35%, there is some level of sanctioned or approved standard. (Figure 3)

Figure 3. Do you have a sanctioned, or approved, corporate standard for cloud-based sharing (e.g. file sync and share) of files?



If businesses are to manage their risk properly while at the same time meet user demand for file sharing capabilities, indications here point to the need for governance and standards related to file sharing. When we asked about the use of unsanctioned tools within the organization, 65% of our respondents said they are aware of such tools being used to share files outside of the organization. (Figure 4) Not only does this present a risk and challenge to their organizations, it is also an opportunity for those organizations to take charge, assess the needs and use said tools, identify functional requirements, and implement approved solutions.

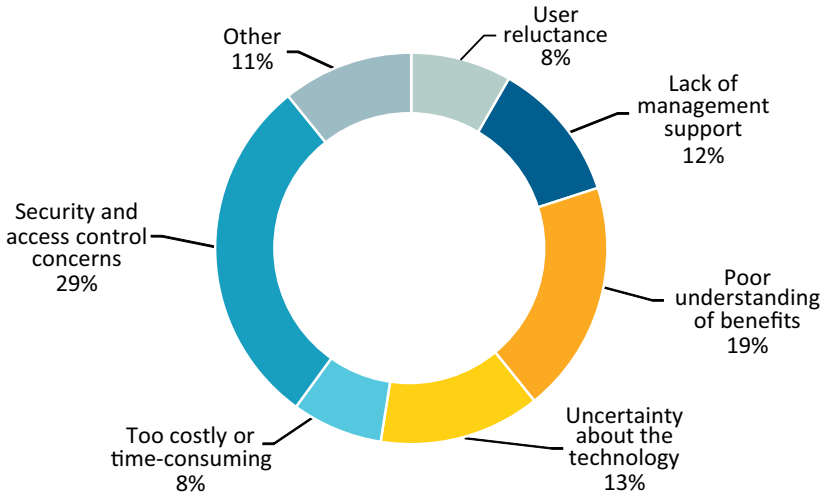
Figure 4. Are you aware of employees using unsanctioned tools to share files outside of your organization?



Policies and Procedures

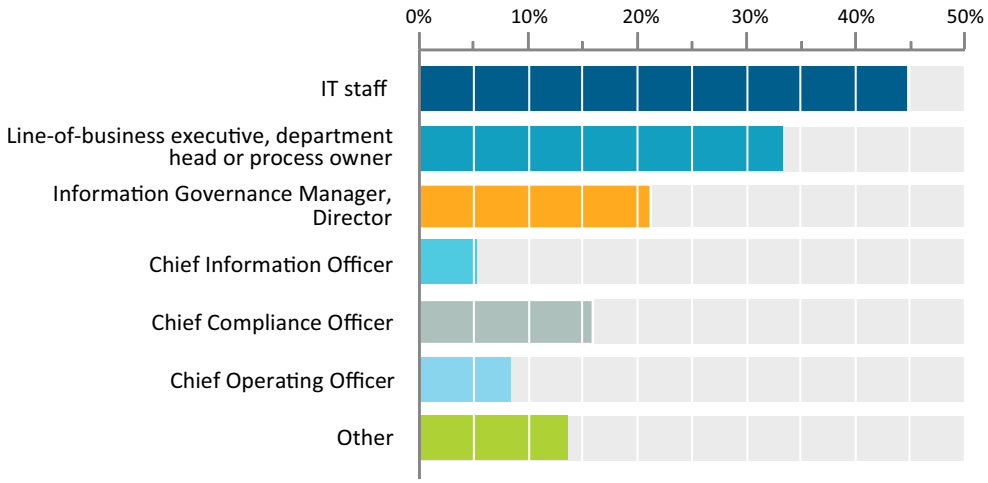
File sync and share is on the rise, yet there is still a cultural challenge and user reluctance slowing organizations from moving in this direction. While there are proven technologies available, 29% of our respondents cite concerns over security and unauthorized access to their information as a big challenge in implementing a file sync and share solution. For 19%, the challenge they face is a lack of understanding the full benefits file sync and share can bring to their organization, and for 20%, it is the cultural challenge related to change management, combining a lack of management support (12%), and user reluctance (8%), as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. In my opinion, the biggest challenge preventing or slowing my organization's adoption of file sync and share is:



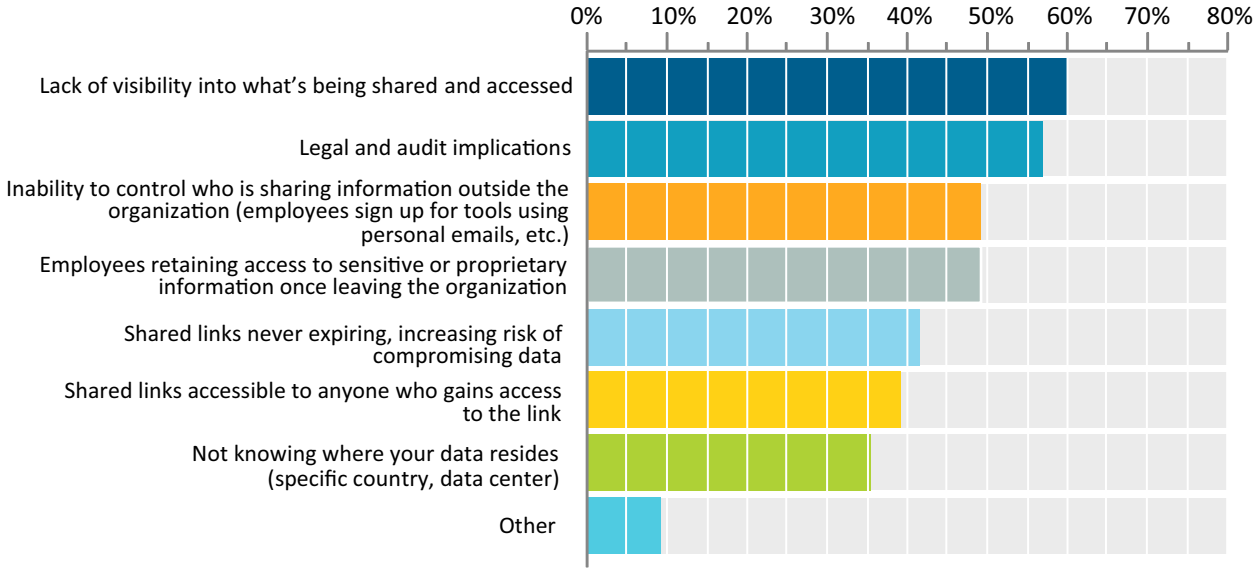
This leads us to ask about the responsible parties in the organization who ensure that content sharing policies and procedures are followed. For 21% of the organizations we polled, there is an information governance manager or director, and for 33%, it is the line-of-business manager or department head who is responsible for policy and procedural adherence. For 45% of our respondents, it is IT that is seen as the responsible party. (Figure 6) In reality, though, every corporate citizen should be responsible and accountable to follow corporate policies and procedures.

Figure 6. Who, if anyone, is responsible for ensuring the proper use of your content sharing tools, policies, and procedures?



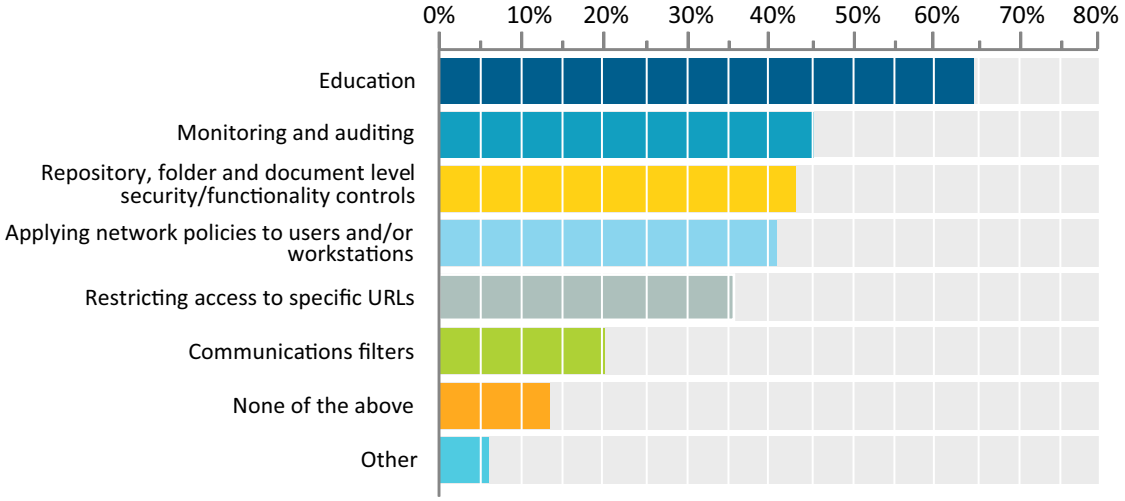
Inconsistent practices, as well as a lack of standardized monitoring, leads to uncertainty and a sense of risk. When we asked about the three biggest concerns regarding the use of cloud-based sharing tools outside the organization, the top concern cited was a lack of visibility into what exactly is shared and accessed (60%). This was followed by 57% saying they are concerned with legal and audit implications related to content sharing, and another 49% who have dual concerns: First, about their lack of control over who is sharing what, and second, loss of vital/sensitive information when employees leave the organization. (Figure 7)

Figure 7. What are your biggest concerns regarding employees using cloud-based sharing tools to share and collaborate on files outside of your organization?



Given these concerns, what steps are being taken to keep information safe? What steps are being taken to get the total user community on board with the importance of secure information sharing practices and prevention of unauthorized sharing methods? We asked this very question of our survey audience and found that 65% of organizations use education as their primary means of protection from unauthorized sharing methods. Monitoring the user populations is key for 46% while 43% rely on the use of various levels of security to control access to their information assets. (Figure 8)

Figure 8. How are you protecting your organization from unauthorized sharing methods?

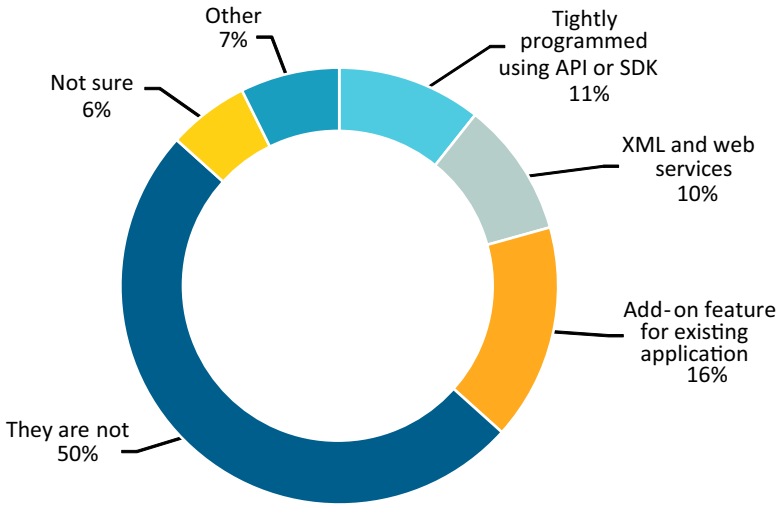


Integration and Interoperability

In order to gain the full benefits of a file sync and share solution, there must be linkage between applications and information across the enterprise. Ideally, the level of integration and interoperability to accomplish this would appear seamless to the user community; the user only wants to know they can confidently save and retrieve information without concern as to what is happening behind the scenes.

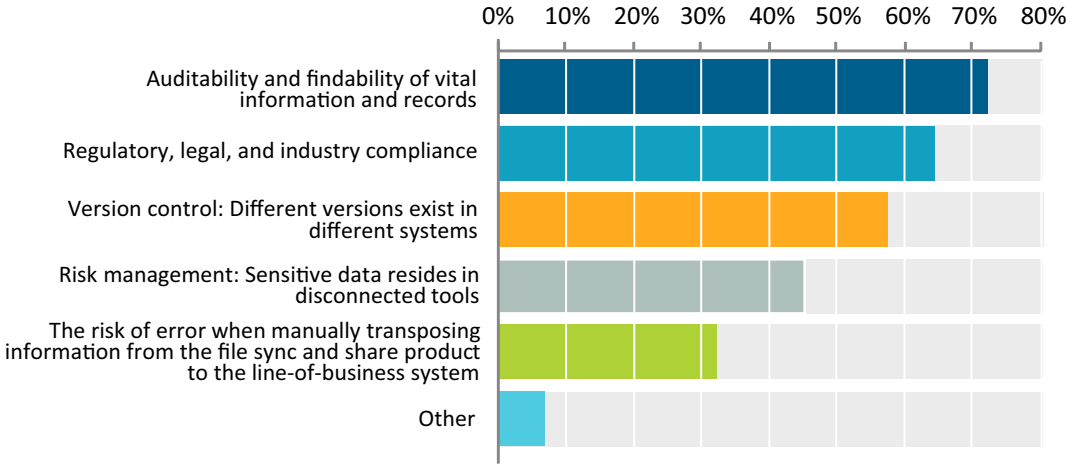
While file sync and share is on the scope for many organizations, 50% of our respondents say there is currently no integration between their file sync and share solution and core business applications. (Figure 9) In other words, they are using file sync and share without integrating it with their business processes. In this scenario, the potential is high for misaligned silos containing duplicate information sets, outdated materials, and the risk of not finding information.

Figure 9. How are your file sync and share products integrated with your existing core applications and/or content repositories?



Therefore, the question then arises: What are the reasons to integrate a file sync and share solution with line-of-business applications? When we asked our survey audience to share their top three reasons, type of integrations, findability, and auditability topped the list at 72%. What can be gleaned from these results is a call to eliminate misaligned silos and bring information assets to light to ensure they are the most up-to-date versions. 57% say it is for better version control, which aligns with the previous reasons of findability and auditability to support the 64% saying it is in support of risk management. (Figure 10)

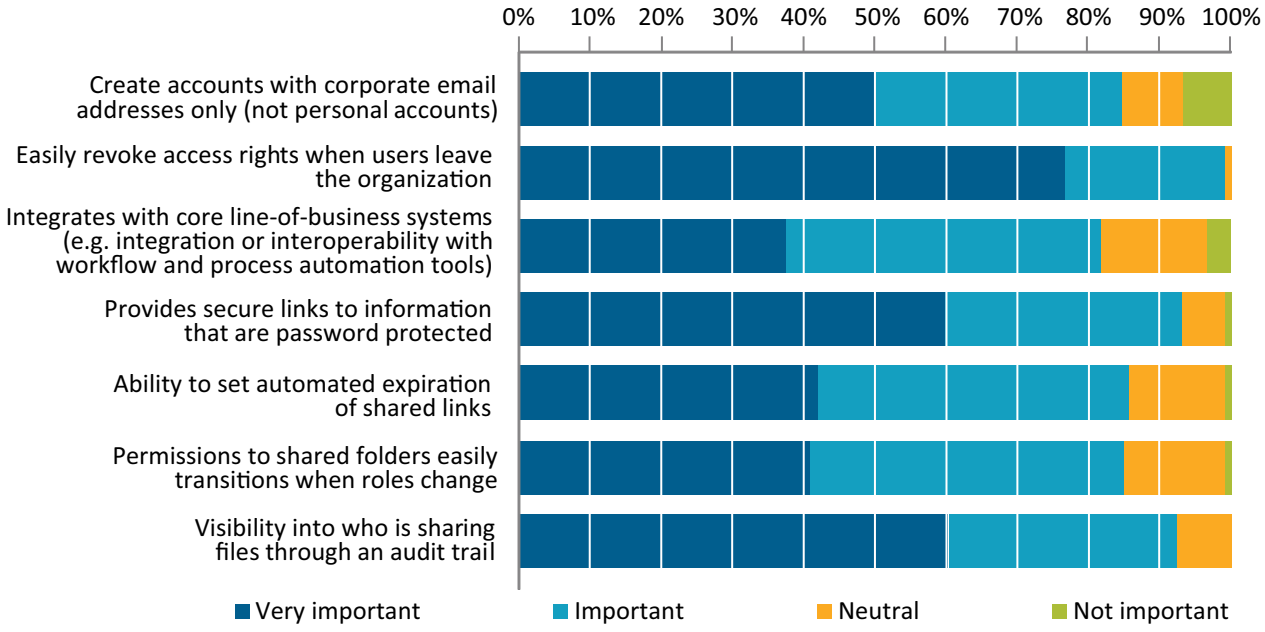
Figure 10. What are reasons why you do or would want to integrate a file sync and share application with your line-of-business applications?



Important Features

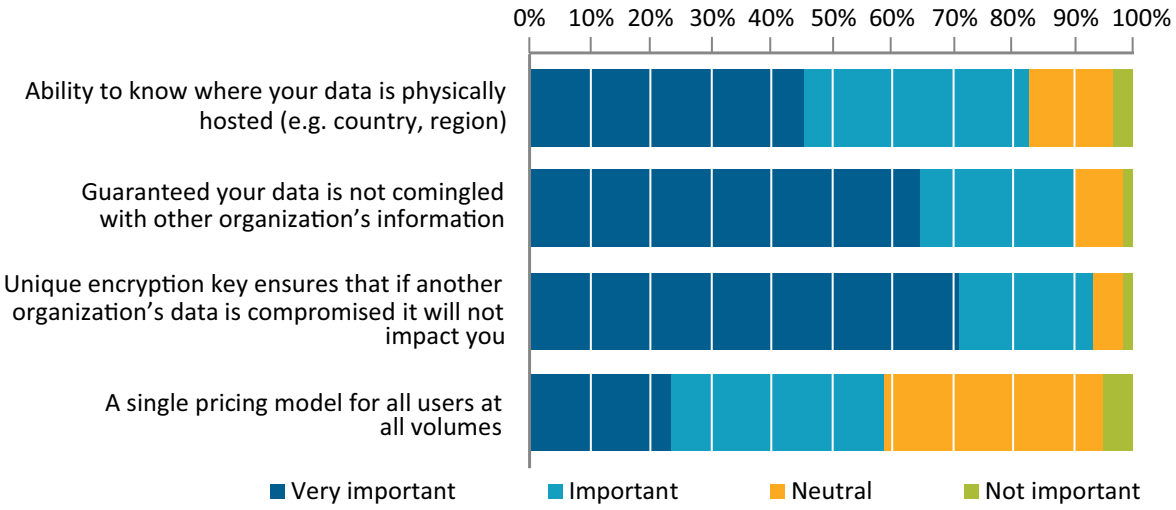
Control, visibility, and security are all concerns and drivers for organizations. The responses we received support this when we asked about the levels of importance for features and benefits related to file sync and share. Topping the list as a very important feature and benefit for 77% of our respondents is rights revocation – the ability to take away access to information when a person leaves the organization or is suspected of breaking the rules. Following up at 60% are visibility, auditability, and secure links to information that are of most importance. (Figure 11)

Figure 11. When it comes to your ideal file sync and share tool, how important are each of the following features/benefits?



Knowing what is needed and having an expectation of benefits is only part of the equation. There is also the need to look at the supplier. Organizations must ask tough questions of their suppliers in order to determine if their needs can be met. When we asked about the selection criteria for a cloud vendor, 71% of our respondents ranked unique encryption key capabilities as their most important criteria. For 65%, assurance that their data is secure and set apart from data belonging to other cloud clients of their chosen provider is key. The information must be segregated and secure with tight controls preventing information leakage and theft. (Figure 12)

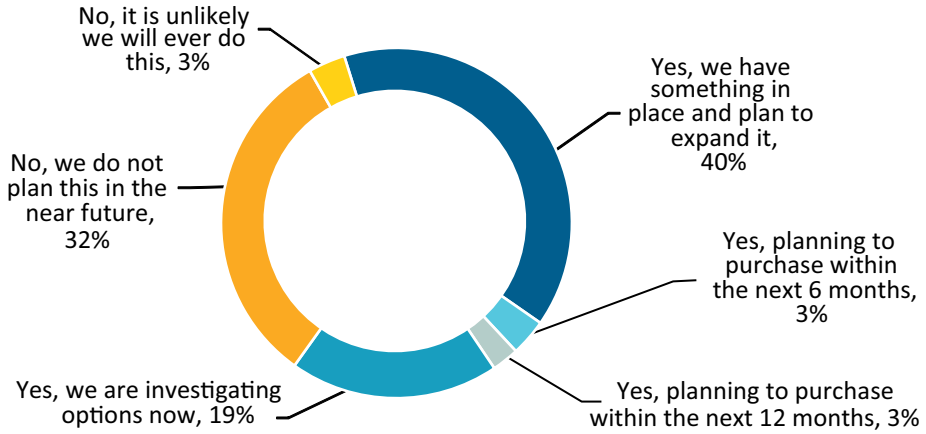
Figure 12. When it comes to choosing a cloud vendor to host your file sync and share solution, how important is each of the following?



Purchase Plans

We know organizations are aware that file sync and share can bring benefits to their organization. We also see that, at some level, they have an understanding of what they need from file sync and share applications and suppliers. So, what are they doing in relation to making a purchase? Research shows that 40% of our responding organizations plan to expand what they have in place, while 6% plan to make a purchase within the next 6 months. Additionally, 19% are in the investigative stage, assessing what their needs are and where to look. Alternatively, (Shown in Figure 13) 35% of our respondents say they have no plans for file sync and share in the near future (32%) or ever (3%).

Figure 13. Are you considering purchasing and using a file sync and share solution?



Conclusions and Recommendations

To respond to current customers, create new business opportunities and maintain an overall competitive advantage, organizations need secure, timely, and accurate access to key information. This requires a holistic approach to information and content management – developing and supporting an information ecosystem that offers an infrastructure for sharing, collaborating, and analyzing content in ways that enhance its value and maximize its use.

One way to achieve these objectives is by extending applications – such as an enterprise content management (ECM) solution – by leveraging file sync and share tools. An effective cloud-based sharing approach can help bridge content silos across the enterprise, providing consistency in content, enhancing internal and external collaboration, and improving access.

In order for this to happen successfully, there are steps that need to be taken and effort to be put in. We recommend that you consider the following:

Content Access

Identify content creation sources. Who is creating the content? Who is using the content and how is it used? How is it currently accessed and how does the user community want to access it? Chose a product that allows you to decide who can share and access the file-sharing tool. This will allow you to retain ownership over all shared content. A product with a document audit trail will also allow you to gain insight into how and when a document is shared, viewed, and edited.

Revocation of access and the ability to transfer ownership

You revoke network access when employees leave your organization. You should also be able to revoke access to your cloud-based file sharing tool. The ability to revoke access to your file-sharing product will keep your documents protected within your organization. Being able to reassign ownership of those shared folders in your sharing tool – to new owners within your organization – will increase efficiencies.

Interactions with your current systems

Implementation of a file-sharing tool that interacts with your current systems will allow you to automate document sharing, reduce bottlenecks and the manual copying of files. It will increase the efficiency of your processes and decrease inaccuracies.

Confidence in your sharing

Make sure you have insight into how and where your content is being shared. Some file sync share tools let you know exactly where all of your data is hosted. Look for products that protect your data using unique encryption keys and that do not co-mingle your data with the data of other organizations.

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About ShareBase by Hyland

ShareBase, an enterprise file sync and share product, provides a secure, IT-approved, cloud-based platform to easily share information inside and outside the organization. Specifically designed for corporate use, ShareBase provides information governance to IT administrators by enabling them to closely control user access and permissions while creating an audit trail of user activity. When used in conjunction with OnBase, Hyland's industry leading enterprise information platform, sharing content outside of OnBase becomes an automated part of your business processes, reducing bottlenecks through seamless collaboration.

For more information, please visit www.ShareBase.com

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AIIM
1100 Wayne Avenue, Suite 1100
Silver Spring, MD 20910
+1 301.587.8202
www.aiim.org

AIIM Europe
Office 1, Broomhall Business Centre,
Worcester, WR5 2NT, UK
+44 (0)1905 727600
www.aiim.eu

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