How GDPR can be a strategic driver for your business

From data and software management to building customer loyalty and new revenues, the General Data Protection Regulation is a business opportunity.
Among the areas of particular concern is the ‘right to be forgotten’, a new principle which requires firms to remove all data about a customer on request. Another area of concern is the obligation to ensure customers, where appropriate, have given explicit consent over the use of their data.

But there is also a positive side to the incoming regulation: GDPR, which replaces the EU’s 1995 Data Protection Directive, can be a strategic driver and accelerator for businesses. This is because when firms are taking steps to comply with new legislation, they may be required to perform a ‘spring clean’ of their data, which can in turn boost operational efficiency.

Streamlining information improves the way firms carry out data analytics and can even result in additional revenue streams. At the same time, getting data in order for GDPR compliance encourages firms to replace legacy systems and adopt flexible cloud services that will potentially make their business more agile.

Organisations have a choice, says Sharad Patel, GDPR expert at PA Consulting Group: “They can treat GDPR simply as another compliance issue, or they can take a more business and customer-centric approach.”

According to Patel, the latter allows firms to manage personal data in a way that helps to make more informed decisions. This creates a better experience for both customers and stakeholders.
A new approach to data

Complying with the new legislation requires a more transparent approach to data. It is therefore important that organisations become fully aware of their entire data flow, says Jamal Elmellas, chief technology officer (CTO) at Auriga Consulting.

He explains: “To comply with the regulation, you must be able to illustrate to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO – the data protection authority in the UK - although companies may face these requests from any EU supervisory authority) how data comes into the company; how you handle and store it; and how you treat it at end of life. What we are facing is a business process modelling tsunami: it’s essentially taking apart how a business handles data.”

Among the advantages offered by taking steps towards GDPR compliance, according to Elmellas, business process modelling can be used as an opportunity to build efficiencies.

Organising company data results in multiple efficiency gains, says John Meakin, former group risk and information security officer at Burberry. “There is absolutely no question that understanding customer data is very empowering: You can look for new opportunities to make use of this information to serve the customer better.”

GDPR compliance also helps businesses to improve systems and processes. “If you discover you have collected data twice, rather than once, the customer experience can be improved,” says Meakin.

In addition, GDPR helps to accelerate application retirement so firms can get rid of the software that is no longer necessary. David Kemp, EMEA specialist business consultant, Micro Focus (Micro Focus), says: “Most companies have grown through acquisition. One of our clients has 25,000 Microsoft SharePoint sites – each one has stuff in it. We don’t know if it’s useful or not. The idea of carrying out defensible deletion is important.”

Meanwhile, GDPR could also be a driver to add efficiencies by moving to compliant software-as-a-service (SaaS) cloud offerings. For example, says Elmellas: “If you have a lazy content management system, you could use GDPR as an opportunity to move to SaaS cloud.”

Reaping the benefits

There are already examples of businesses reaping the rewards of moving towards GDPR compliance. Kemp cites the example of a large UK insurer that is taking steps to comply with the GDPR’s ‘right to be forgotten’ principle.

For large insurance companies with multiple business lines, ‘forgetting’ a customer is not a simple task. If a client asks to be removed from a database, a company must include multiple files and formats – such as security footage and audio files of a customer talking to a call centre. This is in addition to the fact that most firms hold a lot of ROT (redundant, obsolete, trivial) information about their clients and staff.

But the insurance company was able to turn this potentially complex area of compliance into a positive for the business, by reducing the size of its data lake to make information easier to find. This immediately cut costs for the firm.
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Jamal Elmellas, chief technology officer (CTO) at Auriga Consulting.

“By reducing data in the data lake, the CIO was able to cut the cost of storage as well as the cost of powering storage, as well as back-up expense,” says Kemp.

Making these adjustments also leads to other efficiencies. Kemp explains: “The CIO realised he was planning other strategic tasks: For example, reducing the number of programmes he used. GDPR can be catalyst to improving other areas.”

Revenue generation is another benefit that can be offered by GDPR compliance. Take the example of a major Finnish company, which on being assessed and approved as GDPR compliant decided to put a ‘GDPR effective’ stamp on its website to gain brand loyalty and attract new customers.

There is also the example of a major national airport authority that handles vast amounts of customer data. As it moved towards GDPR compliance, the airport bought technology to protect itself so it could handle more data. But it also rented the technology out to small airlines within the airport, creating an additional revenue stream.

The 25 May 2018 - the date GDPR becomes effective is only one year away, which doesn’t give companies long to comply. It is therefore important that organisations start taking steps to assess their data now.

Firms should also assess the technologies they are using to address data management and information security challenges, says Kemp.

Micro Focus offers a technology assessment workshop, where enterprises can identify gaps in their current technologies and understand how to address them. This workshop specifically covers the technologies and not the legal aspects of GDPR compliance.

Taking this into account, complying with the new regulation does not have to be daunting. Organisations that take the opportunity to spring clean their data will find they build efficiencies within the business. This approach will potentially lead to new revenue streams, more efficient systems and better services for customers.

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