

Information transformation: AI enablement for public sector agencies



Information transformation

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Information and data are the foundations of modern organisations and the fuel that powers artificial intelligence, and represent the enduring knowledge and insights that guide them forward.

Unfortunately however, many organisations have only a limited understanding of their information assets and how they can be used. Many find themselves with information that is stored in different formats (both physical and digital) and spread across multiple locations with no centralised point of access and retrieval.

And while many have made great strides in digitising their information, that alone does not translate into understanding, unifying, and making that information accessible

The same is also true in the public sector, resulting in agencies and departments that don't know what they know. This problem can quickly escalate when the agency sets out to deploy an AI strategy and finds itself training AI using information that is either inaccurate or incomplete.

What is needed is a comprehensive approach to managing information, one that incorporates assets stored in both physical and digital formats, and backed by the skills needed to classify, organise, secure, digitise, access, and automate that information in a clearly defined and logical manner.

At Iron Mountain, we call this process **information transformation**. And like all transformations, it starts with making a plan.

The challenge of modern data environments

Departments and agencies today might be awash with information, but its usefulness is generally limited by how it is managed. Hence the starting place for information transformation is to completely understand the entirety of the current information environment.

For instance, although we live in a digital age, for some agencies their information assets can be decades old, which not only creates a challenge for information retrieval but also for its preservation, especially when the records constitute historical artefacts. This means that any approach to information management that only considers digital assets is not solving the entire problem.

The challenges of physical documentation don't end with its digitisation, either. Regulatory requirements can demand the retention of physical documents for many years, followed by their appropriate disposal when those requirements expire. Knowing how to appropriately dispose of data on physical media (including both paper and digital media such as tapes and hard drives) securely and sustainably can be a critical aspect of information management. This requirement demands access to the skills and knowledge needed to properly handle all forms of information.

Even when assets are fully digitised, there is a significant difference between possessing that asset and being able to utilise it fully. Expertise is needed in the data capture and management process to ensure information can be retrieved quickly and easily by those who need it and are authorised to access it, while ensuring it is protected from those who are not.

Applying rigour to data capture and storage pays additional dividends by allowing the creation of information workflows and automated processes. Automation in data workflows can be especially beneficial in boosting workers' productivity, by ensuring they have access to the data they need when they need it - and potentially even before they need it. This same capability is also crucial should an agency or department wish to expose information assets to the outside world via self-service portals or other customer-facing facilities. None of this can be delivered effectively without first considering the nature of information assets and how they are managed.

Developing an effective plan for information transformation requires close consideration of all these factors.

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Putting data to work at the UK Probate Service

The value of implementing an information transformation strategy has been clearly demonstrated at the United Kingdom Probate Service, which is responsible for issuing grants of representation to the next of kin of deceased people.

When tasked with the challenge of preserving and digitising the records of more than 41 million British citizens, the Probate Service chose to rethink the process of digitisation and retrieval, opting to create a service that is now providing greater functionality to the public, and also generating revenue for the UK Government.

The Probate Service engaged Iron Mountain to design and develop a purpose-built facility to store physical records of UK citizens, including famous and noteworthy individuals such as Sir Winston Churchill, Baroness Margaret Thatcher, and Princess Diana. Many of these records were centuries old, with some recorded on media as diverse as animal skins, and even eggshells.

Once the safety of these irreplaceable assets had been assured through their migration to the purpose-built facility, Iron Mountain then undertook the painstaking process of digitising them as retrievable digital information. Not only did this ensure that the physical assets were preserved for future generations, but it also fulfilled a requirement to provide public access to those records as a digital service.

The digitisation and storage process implemented by Iron Mountain also enabled the introduction of automated workflows which have enabled the Probate Service to introduce a new service whereby citizens can pay to access records through an ecommerce portal. This has created a new revenue source for the UK Government which is fully compliant with all legislative requirements for data protection.

None of this would have been possible were it not for the Probate Service taking a comprehensive approach to information transformation, starting with its physical storage and preservation through its digitisation and organisation.

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The information transformation maturity model

At Iron Mountain, we approach the challenge of information transformation through the prism of a three-stage **transformation maturity model**. This model is designed to help teams assess their current information capabilities and find potential gaps, while also helping them define a goal for ongoing transformation activity.

The first layer of this model is **business critical information management**, which involves the organisation identifying the different types of information in its possession and how it is managed, so that it can reduce risk, maintain compliance, and start digitising, finding, and organising its information. This improves decision-making by unlocking insights and identifying patterns in the data.

The second stage of maturity is **business information optimisation**, which involves finding efficiencies and savings through the creation of information workflows to improve worker productivity.

The third phase is **business information transformation**, where automation is used to identify patterns in the information and accelerate the application of insights to help make better decisions or respond to changing circumstances.

For public sector agencies, the second and third phases of the transformation maturity model provide a template by which they can map out the workflows that will ultimately put that information to work for both staff and citizens. This can happen through streamlining information retrieval and decision-making processes, and through the creation of automated citizen-facing applications and services. Importantly,

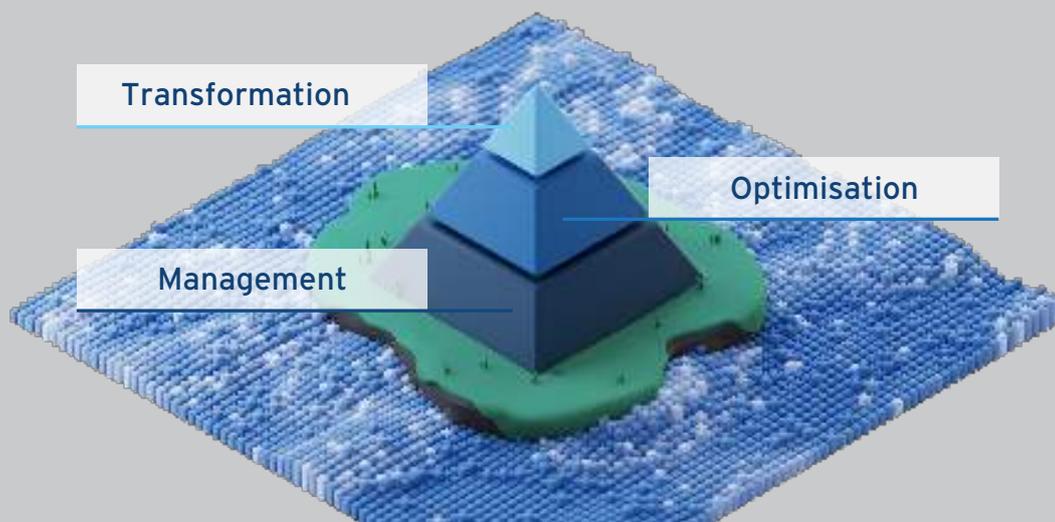
this is the state that agencies need to achieve to begin considering how they might monetise their information assets.

This maturity model also provides a guide for achieving complex information goals, such as the development of cross-departmental information projects. By ensuring that a department or agency has a complete understanding of the information in its possession, it is placed in a strong position to understand how those information assets might interoperate with those from other agencies to create new services for citizens, including how it might navigate relevant regulatory or legislative requirements.

Overcoming shared challenges across the Australian Government

This may be of specific interest to agencies that are tasked with responding to Freedom of Information requests in a timely manner. ¹Between 2015 - 2021 there were 225,000 FoI requests lodged for the entire government, while in Victoria more than 42,000 requests were received in 2020-21 alone. ²There are around 1000 agencies in Victoria who are subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and who are required to take all reasonable steps to notify an applicant of a decision no later than 30 days after the request is received. ³Not surprisingly, it has been reported that Victoria's request backlog has grown from 3,370 requests in 2016-17 to 6,649 requests in 2022-23, and that today, fewer FOI requests are being processed on time.

This is a challenging scenario for any agency and a good reminder of the positive benefits that come from having its data house in order.



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Fuelling the AI transformation

This maturity model is especially important for agencies and departments which are considering their artificial intelligence strategy. Information is the fuel that powers AI, so it is critical that this information is fit for purpose.

The information transformation maturity model provides a useful tool, with the first stage outlining the work needed to ensure the AI strategy is fit for purpose. The further any organisation proceeds on its information transformation journey, the greater the dividends it is likely to reap from its AI strategy.

The workflows that arise from business information optimisation can also be critical for ensuring that the insights generated through the AI program can be implemented quickly with minimal disruption, and business information transformation takes this one step further by automating those workflows.

Agencies and departments that choose to utilise this maturity model when developing their AI strategies lessen the risk of running into dead ends or building tactical capabilities that are incompatible with their long-term strategies.

The sooner an organisation begins its information transformation journey, the sooner it can begin building up its own base of experience in AI and set itself on the path to positive outcomes for Australian citizens.

Conversely, failure to properly comprehend information maturity can see agencies setting off on their AI journeys with incomplete or inaccurate information sets, significantly increasing the risk of negative outcomes.

Getting the most out of AI can only come about through taking a comprehensive view of information management - one that looks at all stages of the information lifecycle across all media, from creation through to storage and retrieval, and if necessary,

disposal. This includes the ability to bring additional technologies such as workflow and automation to improve information processes and maximise the value of information assets and the people working with them.

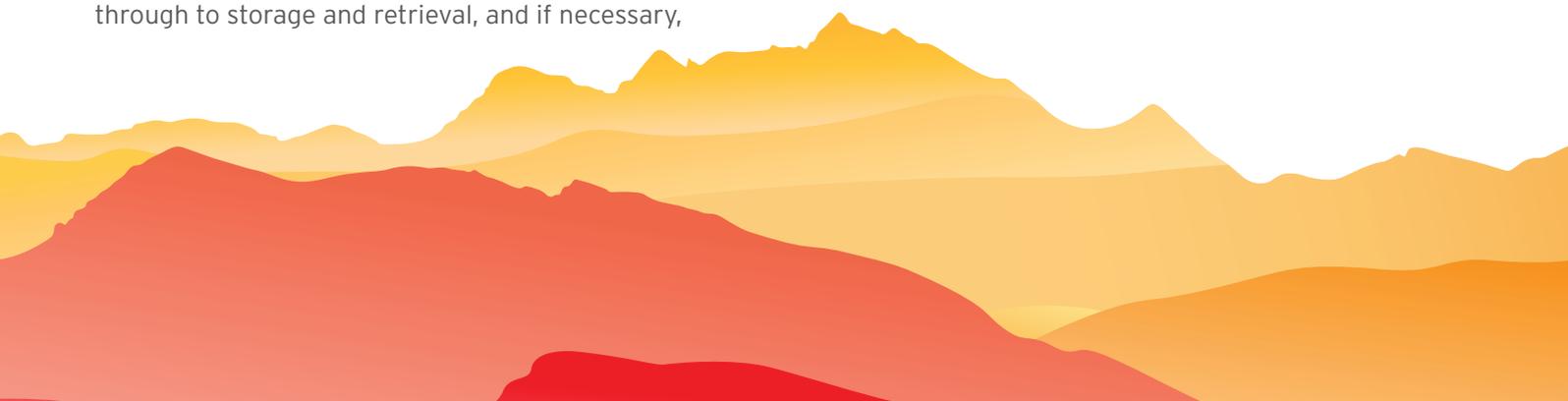
For more than 70 years Iron Mountain has been helping government agencies around the world to better manage their information assets. Locally, we've been trusted by Australian public sector agencies and organisations for more than 35 years. This heritage means Iron Mountain has the experience needed to assist with all aspects of information transformation, from the preservation, management, and destruction of physical media through to the digitisation, management, and automation of digital assets.

This capability is embodied in a set of applications and a team of trained personnel who bring the expertise needed to view information management from all perspectives, providing the 'human in the loop' capability that purely digital solutions often lack.

Harnessing the power of IRAP certified technology and humans-in-the-loop

We might live in a digital world, but it is still run by humans, for humans. By working with a team that is experienced across all aspects of information management, Iron Mountain customers gain comfort from knowing they are working with people who have the expertise to understand the processes and the outcomes they are delivering and who provide an extra layer of oversight regarding information management practices. This includes a strong capability and experience in the secure and sustainable disposal of physical assets, including the ability to unlock and return residual value in those assets where possible.

Furthermore, Iron Mountain services are supported by a comprehensive security capability, including IRAP certification across all vital services.



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Planning for success with information management

Mature information management is a non-negotiable requirement in the public sector, but that doesn't mean it has to be a cost centre.

The benefits of information transformation can be significant, from unlocking the value in information through to minimising the potential for non-compliance with regulatory requirements. And as the UK Probate Service has shown, by applying the principles of information transformation, it becomes possible to find new revenue opportunities by delivering new information capabilities.

However, failure to take on this challenge not only increases the potential cost of doing so in the future, but it also denies today's citizens from receiving the benefits that can be delivered now.

Information transformation is a complex process, and one that takes a commitment to a broader appreciation of information.

And like all great undertakings, it starts with a plan, and the help from the right people who can implement it. Do you need to cost-effectively digitise, store, or destroy information? Are you looking to structure your assets for better governance, compliance, and security? Perhaps you want to automate document-centric processes.

Speak to an **Iron Mountain expert** today to receive a free information transformation consultation.

Visit the website to learn more

Sources

¹<https://ovic.vic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/resources-for-agencies/the-state-of-freedom-of-information-in-victoria-a-special-look-at-foi-in-victoria-from-2019-to-2021/>

²<https://ovic.vic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/resources-for-agencies/professional-standards/>

³<https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/victoria-should-consider-proactive-disclosure-to-unclg-foi-system/>



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About Iron Mountain

Iron Mountain Incorporated (NYSE: IRM), founded in 1951, is the global leader for storage and information management services. Trusted by more than 220,000 organizations around the world, and with a real estate network of more than 85 million square feet across more than 1,400 facilities in over 50 countries, Iron Mountain stores and protects billions of information assets, including critical business information, highly sensitive data, and cultural and historical artifacts. Providing solutions that include secure storage, information management, digital transformation, secure destruction, as well as data centers, art storage and logistics, and cloud services, Iron Mountain helps organizations to lower cost and risk, comply with regulations, recover from disaster, and enable a more digital way of working. Visit www.ironmountain.com for more information.

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