

Buy-in guide:
Tackling unstructured
data within your
organization



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Taming unstructured data can feel like trying to herd cats – cats that seem to spawn out of nowhere, leading to a staggering volume of hair, scratches, and opinions.

So once you've done the hard yards of identifying key high risk areas (perhaps, using our Unstructured data audit template?), it's time to take action. The first action? Getting all the right people enthusiastically on board.

Setting the scene

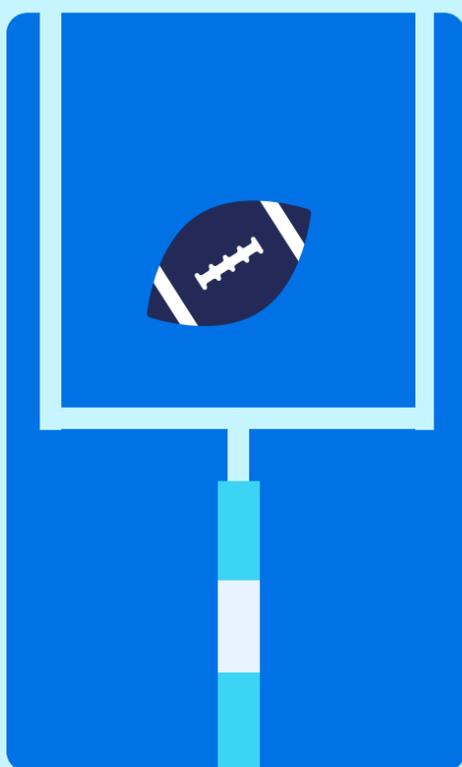
Every single piece of unstructured data has its own unique story, including who created it, why, when, and how it must be managed. Because of its unwieldy nature, unstructured data can't be managed at scale as easily as other types of data that are predictable in format and structure.

Because of this unpredictability, many people get frustrated dealing with unstructured data – and stakeholders often speak different dialects of 'data frustration.' This can lead to ineffective (or even, non-existent) management of these pieces of info, which can put your organization, its data, and its customers, at risk.

There's really no way around it: You'll have to tackle your unstructured data problem sooner or later. It's safe to say, you'll thank yourself if you choose the 'sooner' option.

To truly get a handle on your unstructured data, you'll need support from stakeholders across the business, whose time, resources, objectives, and opinions will all need to be accounted for. You can do this by creating a pilot program that a unstructured data.

Because of these differing priorities, it's a good idea to tailor your approach, depending on each stakeholder's dialect of data frustration. Use these examples as inspiration for preparing your pitch:



Step 1

Identify your stakeholders and tailor your messaging to them

Step 2

Show them the cost of doing nothing

Step 3

Enlist allies early

Step 4

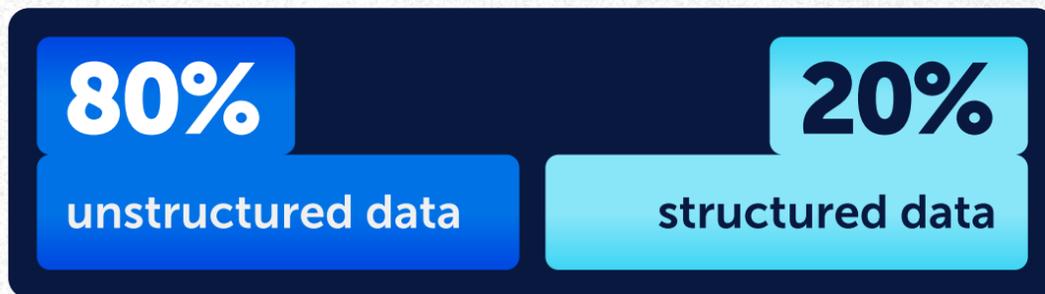
Make it easy to say yes

Step 1: Identify stakeholders and tailor messaging

Stakeholder	Pain point (their data frustration dialect)	Example messaging (what you can say to them)
IT teams	"We're drowning in unmanaged files. Every month I fight for budget, and storage alone eats up our entire ops request."	By automating metadata tagging and disposal policies on unstructured data alone, IT can cut manual file-tag time <u>by 80% and reclaim 30% of storage spend</u> , freeing budget for your next cloud migration.
Legal	"I spent three days compiling DSARs last quarter, and our audit trail still had gaps. We're at risk every time regulations change."	A unified view of our data will equip Legal with a continuous, tamper-proof log of every document action, so you meet GDPR, CCPA, and new privacy laws with a single click.
Security	"We know we shouldn't be hoarding old PDFs and media files, but we lack visibility and that's a ticking breach time bomb."	Identifying and disposing of ROT (redundant, obsolete, trivial data) shrinks your breach blast radius and can reduce breach costs by up to <u>\$1 million per incident</u> .
Executives	"Last year's breach cost us credibility and \$158 million in losses. I can't justify another reactive spend."	The global average cost of a data breach reached <u>\$4.88 million in 2024</u> , a <u>10% increase over 2023</u> , a proactive unstructured data pilot is small change compared to that hit.
Employees	"Every new compliance tool I've used interrupts my workflow and adds more clicks — people just ignore it."	In-place data management means you can focus on your job – not worrying about duplicate or outdated files.

Step 2: Show them the cost of doing nothing

It's impossible (and expensive) to ignore the financial drain of unstructured data. Around 80% of enterprise data is unstructured. It's an inverted spend ratio that quietly siphons budget every day.



Breach costs

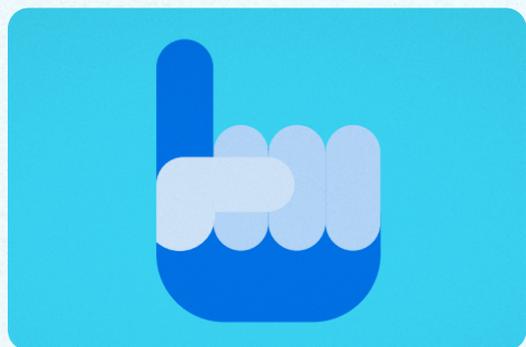
Then, layer on the breach-cost risk: IBM's 2024 Cost of a Data Breach Report puts the global average loss at \$4.88 million, a 10% jump over 2023. That figure covers everything from remediation and customer-notification expenses to regulatory fines and lost business. And of course, it's not only financial consequences – when sensitive unstructured files end up in the wrong hands, you pay both in dollars and reputation.

Dark data costs

Beyond storage and breach fees, there's also the issue of "dark data." IBM research finds that about 60% of stored data loses business value almost immediately, yet organizations still pay to store, secure, and manage it indefinitely. That hidden cost can add up to billions at scale, creating a massive unnecessary expenditure.

Opportunity costs

Finally, don't overlook opportunity costs: if your e-discovery team spends 20 hours per week on manual searches at an average fully-loaded rate of \$75 per hour, that's nearly \$78,000 per person annually. Compare that to a six-week governance pilot, and you could see real ROI in a matter of months.



Step 3: Enlist allies early

Successful governance programs don't live in a silo. From day zero, you'll want champions in each department who recognize your efforts as a shared win, and who can help you navigate their team's unique concerns.

Start by mapping current initiatives – maybe IT is rolling out a new SharePoint framework, Legal is automating DSAR workflows, or Security is rolling out AI governance policies to protect sensitive data. Position unstructured data governance as the risk-reduction glue that ties those projects together.

Next, identify the right person in each group. That person might be:

- **IT ally:** The SharePoint or Teams admin who owns platform health
- **Legal ally:** The counsel responsible for privacy or records retention
- **Security ally:** The incident-response lead or CISO's operations partner

Invite each ally to a 30-minute discovery session. Frame it as collaborative risk reduction — not a turf war. A simple agenda might be:

1. **Share** current state and pain points (5 minutes)
2. **Walk through** a high-level risk dashboard (10 minutes)
3. **Brainstorm** quick-win pilots that deliver value to both their team and yours (15 minutes)

Co-create success metrics on the spot. Ask each ally about their end goals: "What outcome would make this a home run for you?" Capture their answers, whether it's "Cut DSAR time by half," "Reclaim 25% of our dormant storage," or "Show compliance audit coverage in under an hour," these uniquely meaningful metrics become your north star for the pilot and beyond.

Step 4: Make it easy to say yes

The difference between concept and commitment often comes down to simplicity and shared understanding. Structure your pilot so that stakeholders see clear, low-risk steps ahead and fast, tangible wins coming their way.

1

Define a clear pilot scope

- Limit the project to one data store (e.g., the Sales team's SharePoint libraries) or one specific content type (e.g., PDF contracts).
- Set a 4- to 6-week timeframe with two check-ins:
 - One after initial classification
 - One after first disposal recommendations

2

Minimize stakeholder lift

1. Leverage out-of-the-box integration — that means no desktop agents or lengthy installs to intimidate your users
2. Use existing metadata or simple keyword rules to jump-start classification, rather than building a new taxonomy from scratch.

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3

Visualize success early

1. Week 2 report: Show total items scanned, % inventoried, and a heat map of high-risk content.
2. Week 4 forecast: Project potential storage savings from identified ROT, and simulate compliance-audit coverage.

4

Offer a frictionless next step

1. After pilot success, expand governance across additional sites with a single toggle or policy template.
2. Emphasize that future regulation changes (new retention schedules, privacy requirements) flow automatically into the same platform — no reconfiguration needed.

By keeping scope tight, lift light, and visibility high, you transform an abstract governance project into a series of quick wins. Stakeholders feel in control, budgets stay lean, and you build the momentum to scale from pilot to enterprise-wide program.