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Developing innovative services with real-world data

Seeding quality data into realistic production environments is the key to secure, successful digital services

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The digital services provided by government agencies are essential for giving the public timely access to information, resources and support. To develop, test and release these services, high-quality data is essential. Low-quality or fabricated data doesn't represent real-world conditions and makes it difficult to test functionalities and catch the bugs that real-world data would reveal.

Instead of working with low-quality data, agencies need to create realistic conditions for development and testing using anonymized production data. Overlooking the importance of seeding high-quality data could result in project delays, missed opportunities and inadequate outcomes. Poor testing choices could also disrupt an agency's mission continuity and ability to achieve the objectives of modernization initiatives.

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More advanced development and testing capabilities such as predictive analytics, seasonality analysis to understand patterns within a dataset, or anything involving artificial intelligence or machine learning can't happen without high-quality historical data stored in daily backups.

The ability to anonymize data for development and testing

A robust platform such as Salesforce can capture detailed and layered information that is difficult to simulate through other means. The richness and relationships of the structured data and metadata in Salesforce enable developers to create better applications more quickly while avoiding the disruption that comes from finding bugs after deployment. The end result is a better user experience and better security and compliance.

Within Salesforce, Own Accelerate helps agencies speed the development and testing process by seeding high-quality data into developer (sandbox) environments. With Accelerate, agencies can schedule or create refreshed sandboxes without wiping out their old data. They can also seed sandboxes from backup data, which is essential for AI applications. Training and testing AI models on historical, high-quality data will lead to more effective development and better performance.
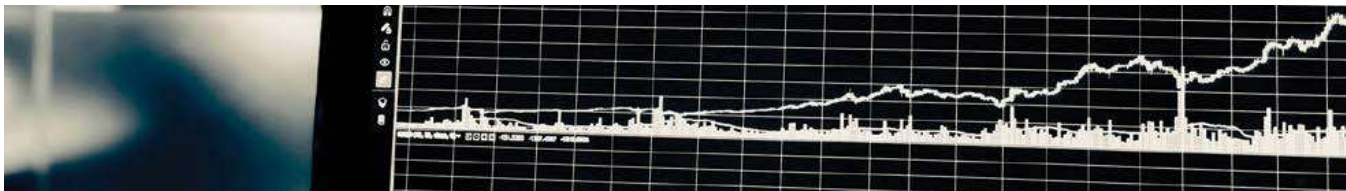
Furthermore, it's highly valuable for government agencies to be able to anonymize the data they bring into sandbox environments. This capability allows them to strike a balance between innovation and security. Accelerate gives agencies that ability and enables them to create templates to streamline the process. Customers have told us that having the ability to anonymize data for development and testing purposes has

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been a huge benefit to their agencies because they can use realistic data while protecting sensitive information.

Building security into pre-production environments

Agencies should also build security models within pre-production environments so that new services do not deploy until they comply with relevant security controls. Specifically, data classification, field-level encryption of sensitive data when necessary, and management of user permissions and access to data should happen in the pre-production environment. When agencies conduct those activities throughout development and pre-deployment, they will deliver

a more secure software-as-a-service application.

Own's Secure for Salesforce product streamlines the process of creating such security models to protect data security controls while generating real-time data security reports that satisfy internal and external security requirements, speeding up the delivery of authority-to-operate documentation.

Most agencies will go through several stages of maturity to seamlessly integrate these protective solutions and incorporate good habits into their development processes. But as they learn to make effective use of tools like Own Accelerate on the

Salesforce platform, they will find it easier to maintain high-quality data while enhancing development processes. They will gain the agility to write code and perform unit testing in the development environment so they can address any problems well before deployment.

This maturing process takes some time and requires learning new tools and techniques, but the Own team is ready to help agencies every step of the way. ■

Eoghan Casey is vice president of cybersecurity strategy and product development at Own Company.