

Where on earth are those sales figures?

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So the boss has to make a big presentation to senior executives tomorrow and—lucky you—you're putting together the PowerPoint. After days of sifting through the company database, you've finally found the information you need, except that some of the numbers conflict, and others are just plain wrong.

If employees can't find information or find it too late, companies pay a high price: bad decisions, duplicated efforts, lost productivity, missed opportunities. Yet middle managers spend a quarter of their time searching for information that's necessary to their work—only to find that the information is often "useless." That's according to a recent Accenture survey of 1,000-plus middle managers at large companies in the United States and Britain.

In fact, respondents said it was often easier to find information on competitors than it was to find accurate material about their own organization.

Only half of managers say their companies do a good job in distributing information or have adequate processes to determine which data is needed by each part of an organization. Nearly three out of five respondents said they miss information that might be valuable to their jobs almost every day because of poor information distribution. You can blame technology for it. While it's much easier to produce, distribute and retrieve information than ever before, the natural selection processes that would have otherwise kept all but the most important information from being published have been reduced, says Royce Bell, chief executive officer of Accenture Information Management Services. "The result is an explosion in often irrelevant, unclear and inaccurate data fragments, making it a challenge for companies to get the right information to their employees." To make matters worse, information is now stored in so many formats and in so many places, it's difficult to find.

The solution, ironically, may be more technology—an easy-to-use enterprise search system that generates fast, accurate results. Picture Google for your company's database. In fact, Google, IBM and other companies are working to develop just that.

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