DM technologies comprise offerings designed to desensitize data to protect it from inadvertent disclosure or privacy risks. SRM leaders can learn from the implementation experience of their peers shared on Gartner Peer Insights.

Overview

Gartner Peer Insights is a free peer review and ratings platform designed for enterprise software and services decision makers. Reviews go through a strict validation and moderation process to ensure they are authentic.

We analyzed 121 Peer Insights reviews to identify lessons learned implementing data masking (DM) tools. This report focuses on the responses to the questions: “If you could start over, what would your organization do differently?” and “What one piece of advice would you give other prospective customers?” To browse all reviews, see the full list of Data Masking Tools.

Peer Lessons Learned

This edition of “Lessons Learned” summarizes clients’ firsthand experiences with implementing DM tools. The peer advice results both from successful implementation projects and learnings based on what went wrong. This peer perspective, along with the individual detailed reviews, is complementary to expert research and provides a holistic view to the implementation process. Reviewers who submitted their lessons learned represent a cross-section of small- to midsize and large organizations. (See Figure 1.)
Lesson 1: Identify Your DM Requirements to Define Your Expectations for the Vendors

Various peer members recommend SRM leaders invest time in requirement gathering to ensure clear vendor expectations. Peers stress having an in-depth understanding of the nature of the data and the level of DM needed in the organization, to deliver efficient results, and ensure internal and client data protection.

A peer adds:

Be clear with the requirements and engage with relevant stakeholders before entering negotiations with the vendor. It would be helpful to have a detailed plan outlined for the deployment team, for seamless integration with existing infrastructure.

— Technical Professional, Healthcare Sector
Know your data, a peer states:

Please have a good understanding of your data and what all/what level to mask data. Too much DM has performance implications while doing any processing around that data. Also, create masking rules and change them frequently, especially in data-critical domains like finance and healthcare.

— Application Professional, Finance Sector

Peer recommendations include:

- Define all types of DM broadly per your present and future needs — break down requirements in case of massive data. Collate and find the correlation between different data and indexes, and format them based on entity-based relationships.

- Ensure to do your due diligence and research before moving to the vendor evaluation phase. Extend the requirement scope to include data security in a broader sense and not just anonymization.

- Finalize the overall DM strategy for your data, given the diverse nature and needs around masking.

Recommended reading:

**Market Guide for Data Masking**

**Lesson 2: Focus on the Licensing Requirements and Budget to Select the Ideal DM Tool**

The majority of peers advise SRM leaders to evaluate all the information and technical specifications from multiple vendors, including the license types, to determine if they meet your organizational needs. They also direct leaders to carefully assess the requirements alongside the costs associated with the tool. It can be easy to scale, but the price that comes with scaling could be more than purchasing the hardware itself.

In this context, a peer states:
I would spend more time evaluating different vendor offerings as over time vendor licenses can really get expensive. Moreover, if the pricing model is not feasible, it can restrict the organization to add more users to the applications using the server.

— Business Professional, Manufacturing Sector

Another peer states:

Explore multiple vendors in the market based on your organizational requirements. You should assess all the functionalities and offerings of the vendors and then take a call on the selection.

— Analyst, Unnamed Sector

Further, a peer suggests:

Make sure you understand the cost of the product when planning your deployments. Some server deployments can be pretty expensive. Ensure that the databases can be consolidated, while checking the performance does not drop with your consolidation. In addition, security is paramount when coming up with a game plan. It might be more challenging to consolidate if you have an issue with security between databases. It all depends on your infrastructure and security stance when it comes to database access.

— Data and Analytics Professional, Construction Sector
Peer recommendations include:

- Choose a DM tool that would enable IT teams across the globe (if your organization has offices at different geographical locations) to monitor any risks, and stay compliant with the various policies and regulations like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

- Ensure the tool is compatible with your legacy products and scope the server hardware accordingly for future growth. Establish a tool with scalability and future innovations in mind.

- Research on the type of variants of DM for different datasets (for example, real data and dynamic data) before concluding. Discuss and start implementing more advanced vendor tools for dynamic DM, and nontraditional data sources such as HTML, PDF and social media.

- Leverage the licensing structure properly and get a test server to learn in a safe environment.

Recommended reading:

Gartner Peer Insights 'Voice of the Customer': Data Masking

Lesson 3: Map the DM Tool to the Practical Use Cases in Your Organization; Train the Users for Maximum Output

Various peer members suggest SRM leaders to chart the chosen DM tool against their practical organizational use cases to save time. Peers further urge leaders to invest adequate time in training the professionals and educating them on the tool’s functionalities and capabilities, for seamless usage, to attain the desired results after implementation.

A peer shares:
Understand the organizational use cases properly. Gain knowledge and understand if and how the tool can accommodate most, if not all, data masking/encryption needs of your organization easily. Not having a correct understanding could make it difficult for downstream systems to read the data. Pinpoint when masking/encryption is needed. It can be tricky.

— Business Professional, Finance Sector

A peer further opines:

We would have invested more on training our internal employees and upskilling them. The lack of highly skilled employees is our driving force to involve more vendors to the business, which would have been omitted, if we had our skilled workforce.

— Enterprise Architecture and Technology Innovation Professional, Manufacturing Sector

Another peer highlights:

Use your online vendor resources as well as other online forums. You do not have to be an expert to be able to use the DM tool. However, you should definitely get some education so that you know what it’s doing and why.

— Infrastructure and Operations Professional, Education Sector

Peer recommendations include:
Recommended readings:

Hype Cycle for Data Security, 2020

Lesson 4: Create a Detailed DM Deployment Strategy; Employ Vendor Resources During Data Obfuscation

Several peer members endorse the importance of effective deployment planning and timely decisions for utilizing the DM tool and its features. It would help the organization to keep their data secure and efficient. A section of peers emphasizes taking the best advantage from the vendor support team for data obfuscation as they have the required experience to get you on the right track.

A peer stresses:

Make sure your team has the bandwidth to ensure full competence of your chosen DM tool. Understand the licensing model and plan how you will make it work in your organization. Do not underestimate the potential complexity and intricacy involved in undertaking a data obfuscation task.

— Infrastructure and Operations Professional, Finance Sector
Another peer endorses having a plan:

Ensure to plan for future upgrade paths of the DM tool for deployment. We have too many versions throughout the organization. It would be best to have a standard version instead of the many ad hoc servers.

– Infrastructure and Operations Professional, Education Sector

Peer recommendations include:

- Work with the vendor support’s timelines and capabilities, and perform a technical evaluation in your environment, before integration and deployment.

- Encourage additional internal resources to learn the process. Add additional databases to scramble/expand the scope.

- Allocate additional database administrator (DBA) resources for managing the migration of your previous RDMS solution. It would empower in accelerating the DM tool implementation.

- Provide more access to the vendor support staff to implement the tool. It would enable them to troubleshoot any customization freely.

Recommended reading:

Guide to Data Security Concepts

Methodology

Of the Peer Insights survey data considered for this market, only those responses meeting the following criteria were included in this synthesis:

- Reviews less than 12 months old.

- Responses that pertain to the project experience and are not tied to the capabilities of a vendor.
Reviews were clustered into the top-four most-referenced categories (lessons learned) and then listed in order of relevant phases in the project life cycle.

The results of this synthesis are representative of the respondent base and not necessarily the market as a whole.

“The data used in this report is drawn from reviews on Peer Insights, a crowdsourced enterprise review platform that relies on dynamic data. Key to maintaining the integrity of the site is our ongoing moderation and validation of those reviews. Reviews are examined before publishing to the site and periodically, post-publishing. Due to the dynamic nature of the data, the external Peer Insights site will always have the most updated view of the data in this report.”

Recommended by the Author

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Market Guide for Data Masking

Hype Cycle for Data Security, 2020

Gartner Peer Insights ‘Voice of the Customer’: Data Masking

Preserving Privacy While Using Personal Data for AI Training