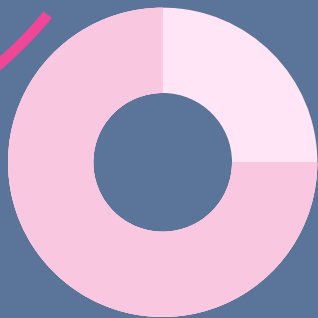
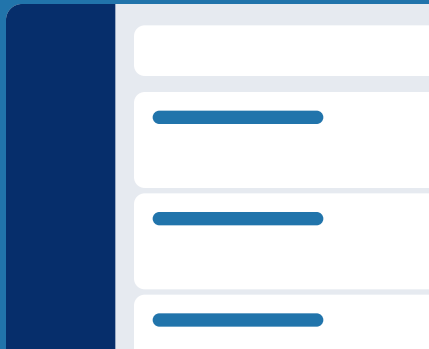
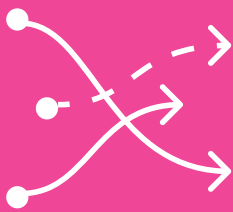


GUIDE

# The No Bullsh\*t Guide to Data Strategy



## OVERVIEW

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**2** Prioritize simplicity & practicality

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**3** Go back to basics with your goals

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**4** Find the solution you really need

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## INTRODUCTION

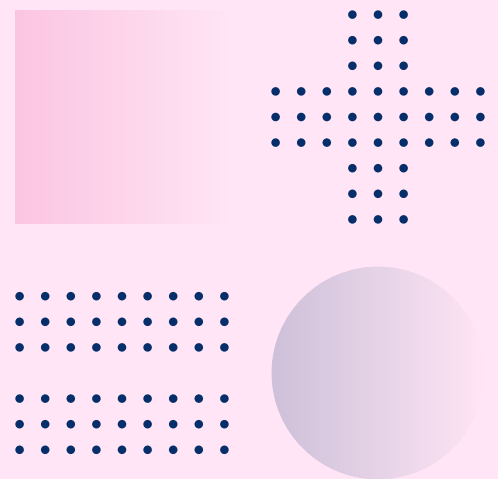
Have you looked at your washing machine lately? When you bought it, you likely spent a lot of time comparing specs, reading reviews, and wading through a million-and-one laundry buzzwords; in the end, you (hopefully) got a machine that cleans your clothes. But what are these extras, and why did you pay more for them? When was the last time you downloaded a new cycle to your machine? Were your gym shorts that much cleaner after an “athletic wear” cycle versus a “normal” wash? Things that should be simple, direct, and useful are getting overcomplicated.

On the surface, shopping for a washing machine is nothing like searching for the right data solution. But, in lots of other ways, it’s strikingly similar. There is a dizzying array of features (few of which you actually need day-to-day). They tend to look identical from the outside. Many sellers use confusing terms and jargon to make (often overblown) claims about how their product will improve your life. And there’s no clear way to choose the best option without spending a lot of money and risking disappointment.

The global enterprise data management market has exploded in recent years, meaning more suppliers are vying for your time, attention, and dollars. Valued at \$89.34 billion in 2022, the industry is expected to expand 12.1% annually from 2023 to 2030.<sup>1</sup> And that makes sense considering the vast stores of data that companies are accessing and managing today.

With so many systems, sources, and data management solutions out there — and a sea of often conflicting information — it can be a painful experience trying to move your data strategy forward. So if you’re feeling stuck in the proverbial washing machine aisle, where do you go from here?

<sup>1</sup> Grand View Research, [Global Enterprise Data Management Market Size Report, 2030](#)



## Get unstuck with your strategy

Our goal with this guide is to help you find clarity (and break free from BS) by providing straightforward steps you can take to get your data program on track to success. We’ll cover what to watch out for when building your data strategy, so you know the right questions to ask yourself and suppliers.

### By the end of this short overview, you’ll be savvy about:

- what you need to jumpstart or improve your data program
- what to watch out for when it comes to buzzwords and overbuying
- what matters most in your purchase decision

There’s a lot of information out there. Let’s make sense of it together.

# Break through jargon & get clear on your plan

# 1

Have you ever been overwhelmed by the number of different data tech solutions you're told you need? Struggled to navigate the minutiae of data fabric versus data mesh? Felt confused by an article that tells you to weave DataOps into your architecture to streamline data integration delivery?

Creating a data strategy is complex — and with a new buzzword and software solution added seemingly every week, the industry jargon only adds to the confusion. It's perfectly normal to not have all the answers, even after you've done thorough research and planning.

In fact, expecting to have a be-all, end-all solution upfront is one big reason why some companies find themselves in too deep with a vendor that doesn't meet their needs — a revelation that often comes after an evaluation cycle of 12+ months and an adoption process that's slow, complicated, and disruptive.

If you've already started searching for a solution provider and are feeling overwhelmed, the first step is to take several steps back and revisit your strategy.

*The purpose of a data strategy is to improve how you acquire, store, manage, share, and use data.*



## The building blocks of a data strategy

When it comes down to it, a data strategy is a plan for sourcing, managing, and sharing your information assets, so you can use them to make better decisions. At the core of the strategy is a set of goals that define what you want to achieve with data. And the rest is all about identifying what you need to support those priorities: technology, processes, and people.

Like any company, you likely have a unique set of capacities in certain data disciplines and challenges in others. Identifying where your strengths and weaknesses lie in these five key areas can help you pinpoint what needs to be improved in your data operations:

- Identify and understand data of any structure, origin, or location.
- Store data in a way that supports sharing and security in equal parts.
- Provision data so it can be reused, shared, and accessed by the right people.
- Integrate data from siloed systems and create a unified, consistent view.
- Govern data by establishing rules and methods of compliance.

*with auditable records of everything!*

The power of understanding these components within your organization is that they can help you hone in on concrete challenges and define goals that support your business priorities.

With these building blocks in mind, let's look at some common pitfalls of building a data strategy and how to avoid them, so you can get your data program running (or running better).

# Prioritize simplicity & practicality



While you may have a big, long-term vision about where your data program is headed — and that’s never a bad thing — the keys to success are simplicity and practicality. A good data strategy is simple, in that it identifies your immediate business priorities with data, and practical, in that it focuses on achieving those through calculated, step-by-step actions.

If this approach goes against what you’ve been told by suppliers, you’re not alone. Many solution providers will say you can revolutionize your entire data operation in one fell swoop and they’ll encourage you to change everything at once. Tempting, right? Who wouldn’t want to flip a switch and magically optimize their data program overnight?

## The case for incremental progress over sweeping change

The hard truth is, it’s a much longer road to success and trying to push every piece forward at once will only prolong and complicate the journey. If you’re like the vast majority of companies, full-scale digital

*Stay nimble, so your data strategy can evolve with your business and people*

A pink circle graphic containing the text "Stay nimble, so your data strategy can evolve with your business and people".

transformation or organization-wide AI adoption are not things you can implement with the components you have today. That's not something to feel bad about. You need fundamental pieces in place before any of those outcomes can be unlocked.

Ideally, your **data strategy is a multi-step roadmap that identifies short- and long-term milestones** you can work toward for larger-scale transformation. Not only do you see more positive progress when you take a step-by-step approach, but you're also able to react more efficiently when things don't quite work or need on-the-fly tweaks.

Compare that strategy to a wide-scale transformation: you sink nine months (if you're moving fast) into a massive deployment that involves several teams. In that scenario, you can easily get stuck forcing an ill-fitting solution to work, **if only to justify the investment you've put into it.**

*sunk cost fallacy!*



Of course, given the marketplace for data solutions, taking a measured, incremental approach can be easier said than done. Let's look at why that is and how to set your own pace.

# Go back to basics with your goals

# 3

Many organizations struggle with strategic initiatives because they're too complex, their focus is too broad, and it's not clear what success looks like. Often with a data strategy, it can feel like your goals — and the things you're being sold on — are dependent on too many variables. When a solution provider pressures you to take things too big, too fast, it's bound to create issues for your organization, and when things inevitably go wrong (wasting your time, money, and resources), you're made to feel like it was your fault.

Of course, everyone wants to generate insights and drive data culture across their organization. But what needs to happen first, before you can get there? Where's the sense in improving access to data if the numbers can't be trusted? If you haven't established foundational things like data quality, how will you ever hit those bigger strategic goals?

Since it's impossible to achieve everything right away, consider launching (or relaunching) your strategy with a small, value-driven project. What's the first problem you'd solve with data if there were no



logistical challenges involved? Consider this question at micro-scale, zooming in on an achievable project you would tackle right away.

*If you had a data-optimizing magic wand, what would you fix first?*

## Key goal-setting questions

Business priorities	Data challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What specific business problem(s) are we trying to tackle with data?</li><li>• What does the business need right now?</li><li>• What outcomes are most urgent?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What data do we have access to as an organization?</li><li>• What data is most used and therefore most valuable?</li><li>• What can and can't be shared?</li><li>• What's missing from our workflows?</li><li>• What can be improved?</li></ul>
<p><b>Example</b></p> <p>Whenever our business analysts need to generate reports, they interact with team members in three different roles to get access to data. We need to improve our process with self-service access that's secure and governed.</p>	<p><b>Example</b></p> <p>Integrating data from various sources (CRM, operational, historical, customer, and product data) will give business analysts access to the data they need without extra work from the data and IT teams.</p>

# Find the solution you really need



Especially when establishing yourself as a data-driven company, it's important to find a vendor that supports your data goals (not theirs). Among other things, the ideal solution meets the needs of your users, handles a variety of data sources, and reduces the number of moving parts in your data ecosystem.

If you're already in the market for a data management solution, you've likely noticed that most big players have catered their products to the enterprise. That's good for some things and bad for others, especially if you're a small or mid-sized organization.

## The pros and cons of enterprise solutions

Some of the benefits of large-scale enterprise solutions include extremely strong security protocols, cloud-ready infrastructure, massive scale and capacity that can grow with high demands, and virtually all the technical specifications you can imagine.

*Every additional tool brings new costs, new management needs, and new points of failure/data quality loss*



But there are quite a few downsides to enterprise data platforms that you'll want to keep in mind:

- **Expensive.** Forrester TEI reports show the actual cost of adoption for an enterprise data catalog can be higher than the sticker price by as much as six times! Will the outcomes you're anticipating justify the increased cost and time to value?
- **Not for everyday users.** Enterprise solutions are most often developed for subsets of technical specialists. These tools won't be easily understood by most people in your company, meaning they won't support your goal of getting more data to more users.
- **Limited to the cloud.** Cloud computing is incredible, but relying on it for everything gets costly, fast. An increasing number of companies are rebalancing toward hybrid data storage, but many enterprise solutions are cloud-only — a limitation that keeps your on-prem data siloed.
- **Oversized and hyper-specific.** Because they're focused on massive enterprise companies, many major providers have specialized tech that solves one problem at scale, meaning you need to buy multiple oversized solutions to achieve your goals

*A far cry from  
"one-size-fits-all"*



The takeaway: think about the minimum requirements to achieve your immediate priorities and what makes sense for your organization. The right data catalog platform solution will help you strengthen the five building blocks of your data strategy, address identified challenges, and achieve your defined goals at an appropriate scale, pace, and price point..

# Succeed where you need to, improve as you go



By now, you've likely gleaned the moral of our story: start where you are, not where a vendor tells you you can be. Flashy demos and capabilities are often built on sterile, perfect data ecosystems — but we know that's not what data looks like in the real world.

Once you're clear on your goals, you can use those to focus on getting the solution you need, not the one suppliers are selling. As you begin to implement your step-by-step roadmap approach, you'll want to evaluate your progress early and often. Ask yourself:

- **Is the team using the tools?**
- **Is access to data increasing?**
- **Is the data consistent and reliable over time?**
- **Do we have more or less visibility and control?**

The answers to these questions may necessitate a rethink of your strategy. But the value of choosing a manageable scope and right-scale solutions is that you can easily evolve or pivot your plan.



The answers to these questions may necessitate a rethink of your strategy. But the value of choosing a manageable scope and right-scale solutions is that you can easily evolve or pivot your plan.

## The power of small, incremental wins

Consider this the first leg in your journey. Once you generate business value, then you can expand to the next phase in your plan. Those step-by-step wins will eventually add up to the organization-wide transformation you envision.

Ready for a no-bullsh\*t approach to managing and using data better?

**Learn more at [www.thinkdataworks.com](http://www.thinkdataworks.com)**

*And you won't have sunk time and resources into going down the wrong path*

## ABOUT

# ThinkData Works unlocks the value of your data to grow your business

Connect to any source, catalog your assets, and deliver data to the people and applications that need it most while retaining visibility and control. Our unified cloud platform cuts overhead, fuels innovation, and drives revenue growth.

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