What are the key challenges for enterprise data on the road ahead?

Veeam's vice president of product strategy on the key challenges for enterprise data and his outlook for the road ahead.

The amount of data that organisations hold is swelling—this is true across all industries and all areas of a business. "It used to be that every organisation had their CRM and human resource information system, but now we have dozens of systems that make our organisations run," says Danny Allan, vice president of product strategy at global data management firm Veeam. From software-as-a-service applications, where information is stored in the cloud, to consumer interactions from social media, "not only is the data growing," he says, "but it is growing all over the place."

At the same time, businesses will find it increasingly difficult to grow without tapping into that data: "Data is becoming more critical and we can't just ignore it," he says.

How businesses use and manage data has become pivotal in recent years and is likely to become even more so going forward. Since May 2018 data regulators across Europe have been enforcing the continent-wide General Data Protection Regulation—giving greater privacy rights to millions of people—and US authorities are also looking at introducing stronger laws governing how data is used.

Not taking data management seriously, Mr Allan says, can be damaging for companies. Cyberattacks, such as ransomware, can result in data being lost, heavy fines and PR damage. Service outages to consumer websites or booking systems, for example, can similarly impact a brand's reputation, cost money and lower employee morale. These threats mean that companies need to continue to invest in how they store, recover and use data.

Because of data risks, robust and resilient IT infrastructures are key (London's Gatwick Airport offers one case in point). According to Mr Allan, more chief information officers are adopting cloud services

for this reason. Analysts at Gartner have predicted that public cloud services, in which a service provider makes resources available to the general public, will have grown 21.4% by the end of 2018 and reach a total market valuation of $186.4bn.

At the moment, Mr Allan says that most businesses operate on a hybrid model—with some data and services for staff provided on site and select others running in the cloud. However, this is going to change in the next few years. "We're definitely seeing that shift and I would expect that the tipping point will happen where over 50% of services are in the cloud," Mr Allan says.

Going forward, he adds, companies should be looking to leverage the data they hold by using artificial intelligence and machine learning. For instance, a data centre could constantly check for seismic data—when an earthquake is detected, it would automatically back up data to different sites.

Businesses, however, should not rush to implement new technologies, he warns. "Every cutting-edge technology and every cutting-edge idea from a risk side exposes you to an even greater attack service," Mr Allan says. "Complexity is the enemy of security and complexity is the enemy of availability."

To make the most of data and these new technologies, he says that firms should assess the value of adding new systems and make decisions based on the predicted outcomes. This will enable them to harness data to identify innovative solutions and encourage new growth.

"Let's use data to drive the business forward," he says. This is using data efficiently—and businesses that do so hold plenty of promise.