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CYBERSECURITY LEADER'S GUIDE

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# The Ultimate Data Classification Playbook

PRODUCED BY



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[www.dataclassification.com](http://www.dataclassification.com)

[www.handd.co.uk](http://www.handd.co.uk)

## INTRODUCTION

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**The dataclassification.com website is a product of HANDD Business Solutions, a global leader in delivering data classification projects.**

HANDD has become a trusted partner to more than 700 customers in 27 countries around the world, delivering independent advice on the identification, integration and roll-out of data protection platforms. By delivering training and support through deployment and beyond, HANDD ensures customers continue to get the best return on their investment throughout the entirety of its lifecycle.

The Ultimate Data Classification Playbook will walk you through;

- 7 reasons to classify your organisation's data
- How to create the perfect data classification policy
- 6 steps to implementing a data classification programme

# 69%

of large UK businesses and 59% of mid-market businesses say they have suffered a data attack or breach in the last 12 months.

Source: UK Government Cybersecurity Breaches Survey 2023.  
Survey data collected between October 2022 and January 2023.

CHAPTER ONE

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SEVEN REASONS TO  
CLASSIFY YOUR  
ORGANISATION'S DATA

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**21%** of IT professionals say regulation, legislation and compliance will be one of the biggest challenges to impact data security.

Survey commissioned by HANDD

## INTRODUCTION

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Business owners more responsible for the protection of their data. It is no longer the responsibility of IT staff alone. Data has no identity unless it is read or interpreted by humans or machines, giving data a classification gives it an identity: sensitive, publicly viewable, confidential content.

Days where data remained static are long gone. Data is saved, downloaded, reviewed, sent, amended, and destroyed.

We call this the journey of your data. To protect data effectively, you need to ensure it's secure at every stage of its journey. The first step of this is often giving it an identity.

## THE FIRST STEP

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First, you need to identify what's valuable.

Classification is the process of labelling data as it's created, so you can quickly and easily identify, protect and observe sensitive data moving forward.

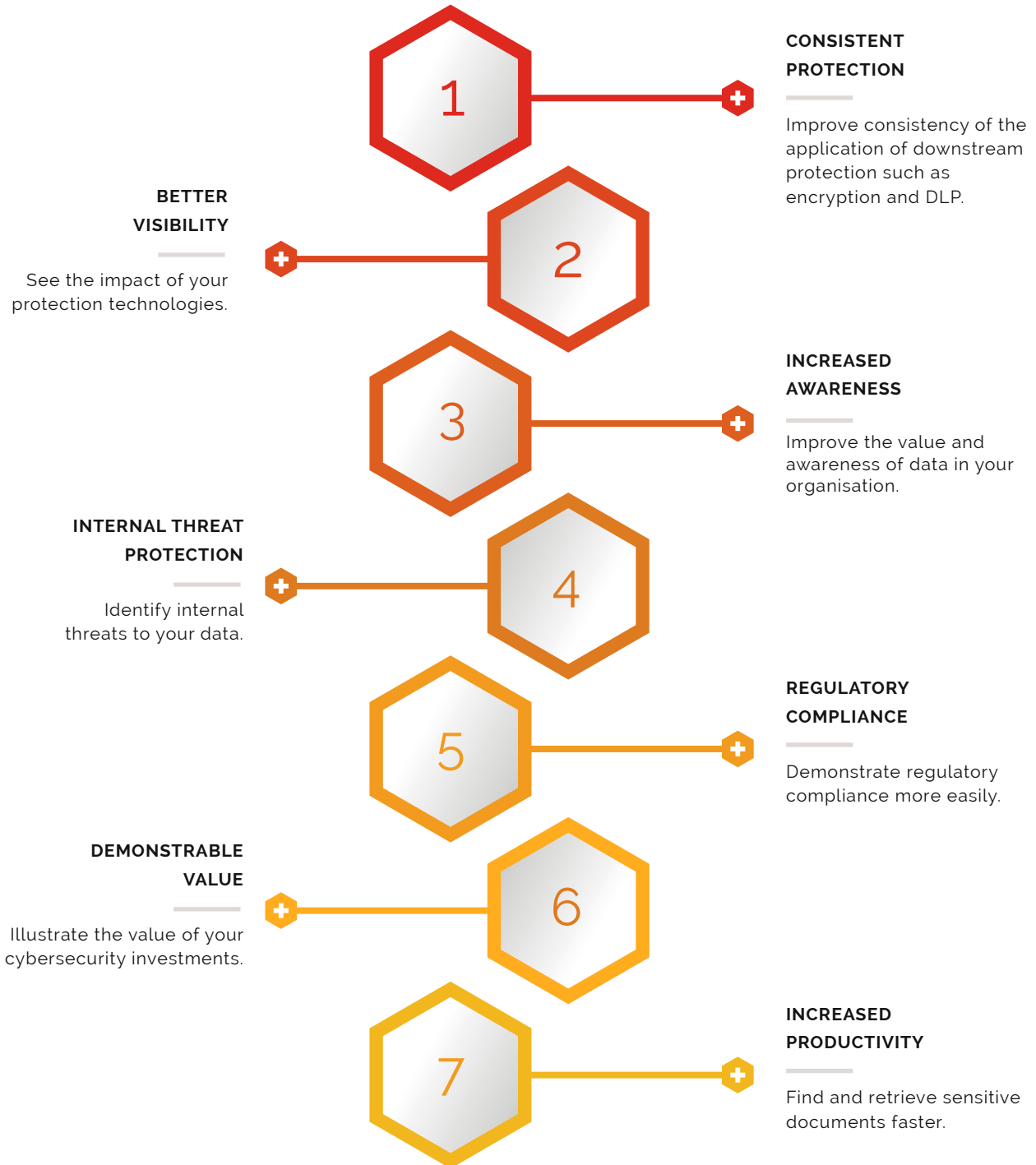
For more information on how HANDD can help you meet your data classification goals call our specialists on +44 (0)8456 434 063 or visit [www.dataclassification.com](http://www.dataclassification.com)

**35%** of IT professionals say ensuring data is stored securely, and whether it's on premise or on the cloud is their biggest challenge.

Survey commissioned by HANDD

# SEVEN REASONS TO CLASSIFY YOUR DATA

Today's companies have petabytes of data – some of which needs to be kept, some deleted, some protected at all costs. But without understanding your data, where it's stored, and how it's protected and used, you can't begin to gain control.



CHAPTER TWO

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HOW TO CREATE  
THE PERFECT  
DATA CLASSIFICATION POLICY

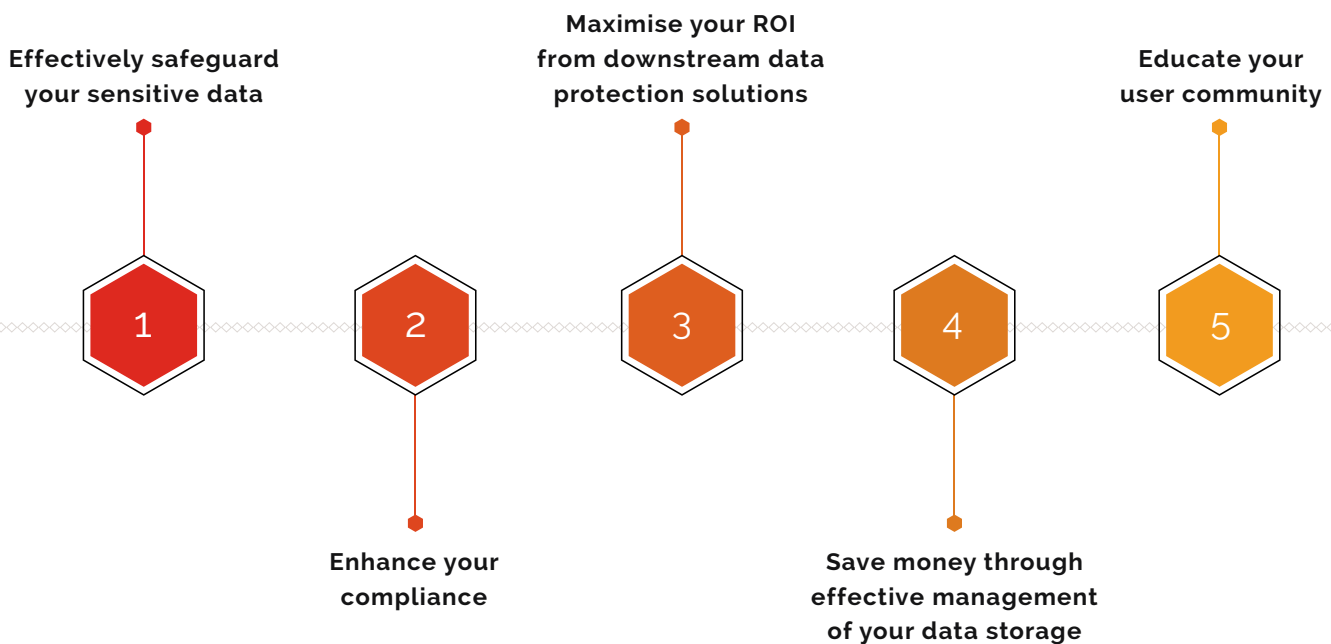
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## INTRODUCTION

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You've taken the plunge and decided to deploy a data classification solution. Now, you need to develop a data classification policy that will help you get the most from your investment - one that will support you to:



## WHAT IS A DATA CLASSIFICATION POLICY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

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A data classification policy is required to identify critical and sensitive data. Without one, the technology remains useless.

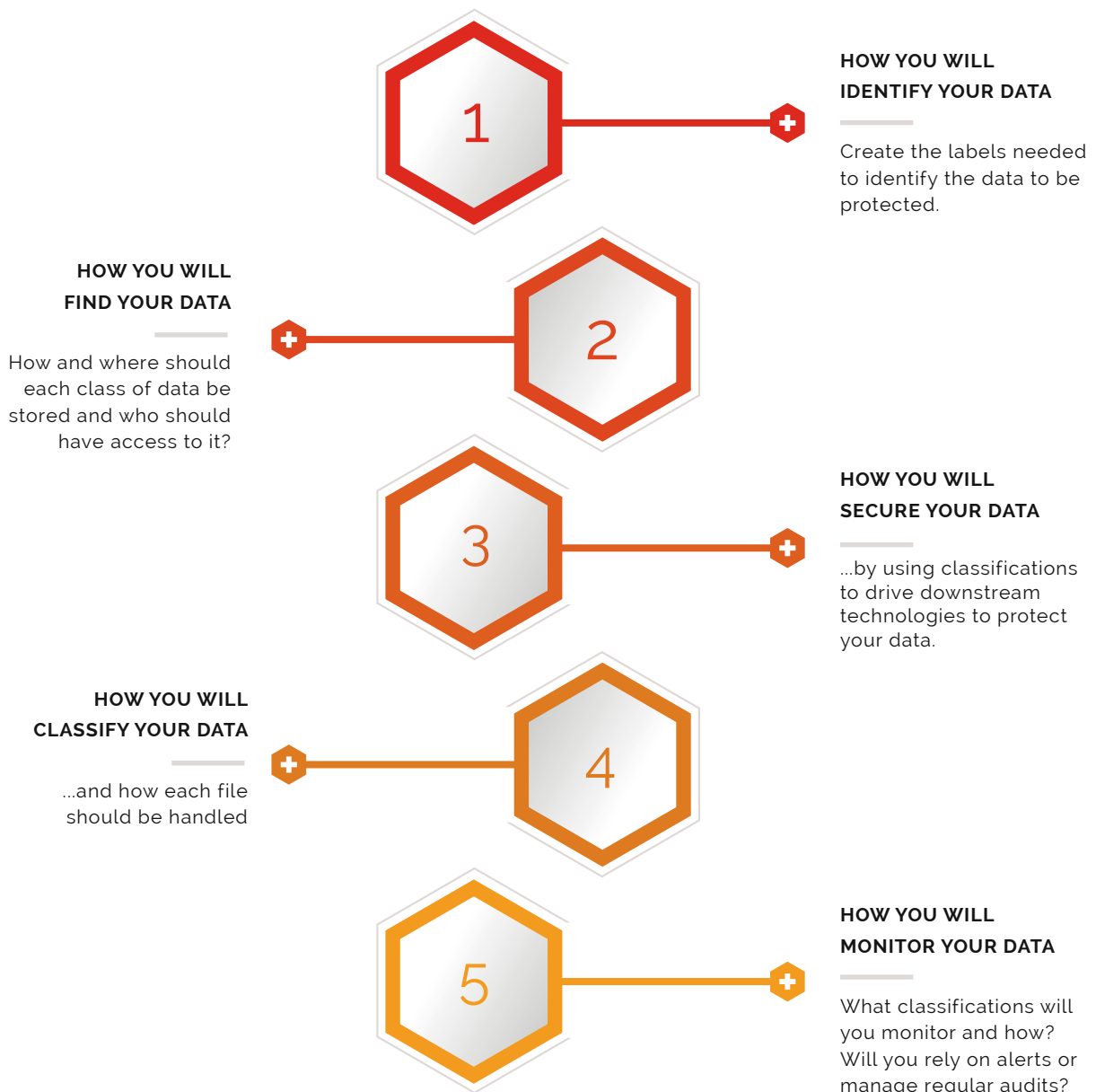
It shouldn't be limited to defining the categories used to label the data and indicating which categorisation each file belongs to. Your data classification policy should provide granular instruction on how data is to be handled throughout its lifecycle.

Your data classification policy should serve as a reference guide on how you will use visual markings, metadata and handling rules to help you meet each of the 5 steps in protecting your critical data.

Once arrived at, this policy will then be applied computationally by the data classification software and its rulesets.

# FIVE STEPS TO PROTECT YOUR CRITICAL DATA

By ensuring that your data classification policy covers each of these elements, you'll be able to maximise the effectiveness of data protection within your organisation. Your data classification policy should determine:





## CREATING A CULTURE OF DATA SECURITY

A data classification policy should provide a framework on which your organisation can nurture a culture of data security and develop healthy data hygiene habits in users.

Continually requiring users to make decisions on the value of data makes data security an obligatory part of every user's workflow.

The importance and sensitivity of data files becomes second nature through habit, shaping the way in which your employees handle, share, and manage data.

Creating and encouraging a culture of data protection means users are less likely to leave data in public places. Chances are, they'll even think twice before sending documents outside of the company or mindlessly forwarding email chains.

The benefits of a culture of data security will extend well beyond inadvertent data loss.

A general awareness of the value of data will also make users wiser to phishing attacks or malicious software.

### THE THREE ELEMENTS OF A DATA CLASSIFICATION POLICY



Visual markings of each document's classification level provide increased awareness and reduce the chances of human error

The data behind the document, meta data, is added to each file to dictate how it should be treated and governed

Handling rules determine how each document is handled, including who can access, send and receive sensitive files and docs

## 1 VISUAL MARKINGS

As well as dictating the classification labels to be applied, your data classification policy should specify how visual markings should communicate the classification itself to the end user.

In addition to embedding the classification in the header or footer of a document, you could choose to feature the classification as a watermark, unmissable by anyone who happens to be looking at the document.

Visual markings serve to deter users from leaving documents on printers, photocopiers, desks or screens and can significantly reduce the opportunity for human error by:

- Increasing the awareness of the data user to the sensitivity of the document
- Improving the awareness of data protection within the organisation by reminding users of the value of data

## 2 META DATA

When data is classified, metadata is injected into the file dictating how that file should be treated.

According to a survey carried out by Ponemon into 874 companies that had experienced a significant data loss event, internal access was to blame for 68% of data leaks. This startling figure highlights how working on a need-to-know basis is the best practical way to protect data.

Your data classification policy should define exactly what information is to be added to the metadata. It should provide granular details of:

- Where each classification of document should be stored
- Those allowed to access sensitive data

This level of governance means that your organisation can genuinely operate on a need-to-access basis, so the receptionists can't access market-sensitive prototypes and your design team can't see employees' salary details.

### The benefits of metadata

Metadata can be read by software. This means it can automate a response from your third-party data protection solutions, enhancing their reliability and improving your return on investment.

Metadata can make files easier to protect. It can even determine whether files are sufficiently sensitive to warrant being saved in your costlier (but more secure) storage solutions, or whether they can chance a public cloud-based alternative.

### What else can data classification metadata drive?

- DLP solutions
- Event monitoring software
- Data governance
- Access control
- Retention policies and more

## 3 HANDLING RULES

Handling rules make up an important component of any effective data classification policy.

These handling rules determine how documents within each classification are to be managed and handled. They answer questions such as:

- Who can send, access and receive sensitive data?
- Should a user be alerted if they are attempting to send sensitive data to an unauthorised recipient?
- Should a user be challenged or follow a confirmation process before being able to send sensitive data?
- What happens when an employee tries to send data to an unauthorised third party?
- Should the data be stopped in its tracks?
- Should management receive visibility on the attempt in a report?
- When should interventions or alerts occur?

Your complete data classification policy should combine a number of these measures to:

**1)** Deliver a comprehensive data protection road map

**2)** Determine whether classification is mandatory and provide intuitive feedback and guidance to the user community

**3)** Provide guidance on how preventative measures are implemented stopping breaches and misuse from occurring at the point the data is created

In achieving this, your data classification policy will play an important ongoing role in developing a culture of data protection and enhancing the way in which your organisation protects data.

## ABOUT HANDD

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The [dataclassification.com](https://dataclassification.com) website is a product of HANDD Business Solutions, a global leader in delivering data classification projects.

HANDD has deployed data protection solutions in 27 countries, helping to safeguard critical data for 8 of the world's largest banks and 45% of FTSE 100 companies.

[Find out how HANDD can help you protect your data.](#)

CHAPTER THREE

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SIX STEPS TO SEAMLESSLY  
IMPLEMENTING A  
DATA CLASSIFICATION PROGRAMME

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## INTRODUCTION

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**Getting your users onboard is essential if you are to unlock the compliance, time, and cost saving benefits of classification.**

Rolling out a solution too early. Failing to create a shift in data awareness. These are just a couple of the reasons investment is wasted on failed data classification initiatives.

With support from data classification specialists early on, you'll unearth potential challenges and conflicts at the outset.

Once identified, these can be resolved, so you can develop a robust and reliable platform. With the right training and cultural awareness, you'll secure advocates at every grade, transforming data management and compliance throughout your business.

**41%** of IT professionals say employees are an organisation's greatest asset...  
**but 21% believe employees can post a big threat to data security.**

Survey commissioned by HANDD

## 6 STEPS TO SUCCESS

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These six simple steps outline how your organisation can use data classification to move towards building a safer, more secure environment for your most valuable data assets.

### 1. Classification Audit

Understand the people, policies and processes you have in place and identify what you need from your data classification solution.

### 2. Technical Discovery & Policy Configuration

Understand the environment, people, processes and technology that will be affected by a data classification programme.

Seek expert advice to help you uncover all of the ways in which data classification can support the business' goals. This will ensure you unlock the full potential of your investment. Often overlooked, this essential step will enable your data classification platform to be configured correctly to give you the functionality you need.

Identifying training needs and the roll-out strategy at this stage will help the seamless management of the programme.

### 3. Technical & Business Pilot

With a full audit under your belt, testing the platform with your administrators is essential to uncover any issues at an early stage. A technical pilot will avoid risking user confidence with a hasty roll out.

Advocates at different levels throughout the business will improve the adoption of the platform and minimise the risk of user push-back. A controlled business pilot using a selection of employees across the business will help you create essential advocates early on.

### 4. Communications & Awareness

All the technology in the world is useless if documents are left on scanner. Develop a strategy to get employees at every level working to protect your data. By raising consciousness of data security within your business, you'll also enhance buy-in among users.

### 5. Training & Education

"41% of IT professionals say employees are an organisation's greatest asset... but 21% believe employees can pose a big threat to data security."

**Survey commissioned by HANDD**

Ensuring your users have all the training they need will help you demonstrate regulatory compliance and get the most out of your data protection software.

We train administrators, empowering them to deliver a successful roll out, and we train users on how and why to classify data. So, wherever you are in your data classification project, HANDD has your back.

### 6. Solution Deployment

A carefully managed and phased roll out is essential for success.

Working with someone who has previous experience of rolling out a data classification programme can really pay dividends.

**HANDD Business Solutions (HANDD) advises clients on keeping their data safe - at creation, at rest, in use and in transit. Delivering truly agnostic advice on data security, HANDD removes traditional barriers for the adoption of new or alternative data security, giving each organisation the freedom to choose data security solutions to suit their specific business needs.**

HANDD has become a trusted partner to more than 700 customers in 27 countries around the world, delivering independent advice on the identification, integration and roll out of data protection platforms. By delivering training and support through deployment and beyond, HANDD ensures customers continue to get the best return on their investment throughout the entirety of its lifecycle. HANDD works with a range of market-leading vendors and brings a wealth of experience to complex integrations for faster, smoother and easier platform deployment to protect the asset that resides at the heart of every modern business – data.



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