WHY YOU NEED AN AUTOMATED ASSET MANAGEMENT SOLUTION

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As information technology organizations grow and mature, there is a greater need to stream-line asset management to deliver business value. However, many IT teams, particularly in small to midsized businesses, continue to struggle with how to comprehensively manage their IT assets — particularly software licenses — in conjunction with their software deployment processes and ongoing patch management.

To get the most reliable inventory data, IT should leverage an automated asset inventory manage-ment solution that incorporates asset discovery, an asset database, and related financial data. Once an automated asset management solution is deployed and accurate asset inventory data is in place, IT is in a strong position to proceed with other activities. These activities include automated de-ployment and migrations, service desk integrations, policy compliance adherence, and proactive soft-ware license management.

Automated asset discovery and inventory: the key to success

Typically, organizations manage assets by entering licenses and related materials into a configuration management database (CMDB). However, it takes an automated asset management solution to ensure that those assets are authenticated and adhere to corporate compliance and security policies.

With IT change constant, many organizations do not always have a detailed accounting of what devices are accessing their network. Knowledge of your total inventory extends beyond knowing what's active on the network. It also includes being able to account for devices yet to be deployed (waiting in storage) and devices that have been retired (such as an end-of-life laptop). Asset discovery tells you what's connected to the network and, coupled with a com-plete inventory of hardware and software data, results in enhanced security and financial controls over IT assets. This delivers value not only to IT but also to the business as a whole.

Getting value from automated asset management

Automated inventory management is critical for software compliance management because it provides an accurate network picture to ensure your organization is deploying the correct number of licenses with version detail. Knowing the number of

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licenses owned versus the licenses deployed prevents organizations from over deploying or under deploying software, both of which can be costly — as a result of either a failed audit or wasted budget dollars on unused software licenses. In addition, if unauthorized software titles are discovered, an automated asset management solution should be able to remove those titles to further ensure that clients deployed are compliant with corporate policies.

Patch deployment is another area where automated inventory management adds value. It is often a redundant and manual task for the IT department, taking staff away from strategic projects, but critical enough that it can't be delayed or ignored. Keeping network devices current with the latest patches and service packs reduces the risk that your network will suffer from a preventable breach or virus.

This tighter level of client management means an organization can automate the discovery and remediation of noncompliant clients accessing their network.

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Advantages of financial asset tracking

Being able to assess exactly what your assets are worth at any given point can be critical in today's budget climate, and automated inventory asset management provides the data you need for such forecasting. This forecasting can extend to support agreements and hardware warranties so that CIOs and other senior IT management can account for those added expenses into their budgets.

A complete end-to-end asset management solution includes the detailed reporting that can prepare an IT organization for obtaining necessary budget allocations for IT expenditures, empowering them to leverage data from customized reports to support their requests.

Implementing an automated asset management solution

If your IT department isn't overtaxed with an ever-expanding deployment, then you probably don't need an automated discovery and inventory management solution. However, that is not likely the case. With proper planning, implementing an automated asset management solution does not have to require lengthy or costly services engagements. Generally, the rollout plan and size of your organization determine the level of planning and the time it will take to deliver a solution that aligns with your network topology and architecture. Leveraging relay servers will reduce the impact on your network bandwidth, and a single agent technology limits the performance impacts to your end points.

The business side might resist implementing an automated asset inventory management solution because of its initial costs. However, the efficiencies an organization can realize with such a solution can save hardware and licensing costs, making it an investment for the long term. These efficiencies and the return on investment need to be part of any business case for an automated asset inventory management solution to gain executive level support for the project.

Preparing for an automated asset management solution

Once you have management approval for an automated asset management project, some upfront analysis will help ensure that the deployment goes smoothly. One of the first questions to address is the approximate number of end points (laptops, workstations, and servers) that your organization is looking to manage. Be sure to factor in office locations, roaming end points (generally home office workers and field sales), network implementation diagrams, and the connectivity between headquarters and the various branch offices. Bandwidth is another planning area to consider.

Bandwidth planning should include determining roughly how many network users access products and product functionality, and require software distribution. Use your Active Directory server to view and define roles, and activate the appropriate rights and capabilities for employees. For example, Active Directory information can determine machine images based on an employee's department or role within the organization.

IT also needs to consider processes around and ownership of reporting, patching, deployment, updates, and retirement, to name a few. Having these processes mapped out will save significant time when it comes to setting up operational rules that will enhance IT's use of their automated asset management solution.

Integrating asset management data with the service desk enables help desk staff to resolve issues more quickly without escalations. Service desks can also benefit from remote control capabilities, automated feedback, incident tracking, and options for integrating an asset inventory management solution across other departments in the company, such as accounting and facilities management.

The threshold at which companies decide that manually tracking IT assets is no longer feasible and an automated inventory solution is needed varies. Outside of the obvious management savings, software distribution is another reason to deploy such a solution. Asset management solutions are ideal for updating applications on a single device or multiple devices simultaneously.

Automated software deployment adds exponential value as the number of end points being updated increases. When distributing packages to 50 client devices requires the same level of effort as 10,000, it is easy to understand the value proposition an automated asset management solution can deliver. IT staffs can spend more time focusing on business critical tasks and strategic projects rather than becoming bogged down in repeatable and routine maintenance.

When it makes sense to implement an automated asset management solution

When your IT deployment extends to only hundreds of end points and around 500 users, an asset management solution may rank as a nice-to-have. But once you extend beyond that threshold, automated inventory asset management becomes a must-have, as maintaining control over so many varied devices and software titles becomes much more difficult.

The adoption threshold also varies based upon what an organization may be trying to do.

» Is a corporate merger part of your recent past or planned for the near future? How many additional end points will IT be expected to manage?
» What about application deployment considerations? Are you considering an upgrade to Microsoft Windows 7 or Microsoft Office for all users, a department, or even on a one-off basis?
» What about ensuring your software is properly patched? Patching multiple systems without automation can be difficult and extremely time consuming.
» And, of course, what effort are you willing to expend if your organization is audited? How do you currently account for deployed software and versions?

Asset management solutions are ideal for updating applications on a single device or multiple devices simultaneously.

When the employee base is large and distributed, walking from PC to PC is no longer a viable alternative. Smaller IT departments are also strong candidates for an automated asset management solution, as it simplifies the management of large numbers of devices without requiring additional staff.

While many associate asset management solutions with hardware inventory, asset management is now being leveraged more for controlling and managing software assets. Today's Windows applications running on Internet-connected PCs require continuous patch management as another level of security against viruses and hacker threats. Having an asset management solution in place helps minimize negative impacts to employee productivity due to security breaches — another positive point to emphasize when making your business case to management. An upfront investment in an asset management solution is another way to ensure continuous business operations.

Take, for example, the recent Microsoft Internet Explorer vulnerability (September 2012), allowing hackers to unassumingly deploy a virus to a client device. An asset management solution could identify every device on the network running an impacted version of Internet

Explorer and allow IT to quickly and automatically take action to mitigate the potential risks. Therefore, the next time the user logs into the network, the automated asset management solution can then push updates and patches to his or her PC, regardless of the device location, ensuring network security. In addition, wake-on-LAN and power management capabilities allow IT to also push updates to devices on the network after hours, not always waiting for users to log in on Monday morning.

Automated asset management solutions benefit the bottom line

Organizations implementing an automated asset management solution can realize several IT management, compliance, security, and financial benefits through tighter controls of their IT assets, ensuring network devices are secure from threats and in compliance with license agreements.

BMC Software offers BMC Footprints Asset Core, a comprehensive, automated IT asset management solution enabling the discovery, configuration, management, and security of IT end points to help IT control costs, maintain compliance, and reduce vulnerability and financial risks. To learn more, visit **www.bmc.com/products/footprints/bmc-footprints.html**.

Automated asset management solution — key implementation best practices

» Align the automated asset inventory management solution with your network architecture.

» Determine the number of nodes (laptops, workstations, and servers) that the asset management solution needs to manage.

» Determine which workstations are static or roaming.

» Determine the number of users the asset inventory management solution needs to support.

» Complete an upfront analysis of network bandwidth requirements.

» Factor in any special head or remote office requirements and connectivity.

» Integrate the asset management solution into Microsoft Active Directory for setting up roles and access for asset management staff and corporate end users.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicolas Renard has more than 10 years in software development. He manages support and professional services for customers in France and is responsible for corporate support on asset management solutions. He has worked in a variety of areas — from development to integrating products, as well as in quality assurance and support.

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