A Strategic Approach to IT Asset Management without the Pain

Abstract
With the advent of cloud, mobile, and the “consumerization of IT,” requirements for IT Asset Management (ITAM) are changing dramatically. IT is no longer a stable or predictable environment (if it ever was), and yet the pressures on IT to support and contribute to business value have never been greater. This brief ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES® (EMA™) report addresses new core requirements for a more strategic, inclusive, and automated approach to ITAM and introduces Scalable Software as an exemplar of meaningful innovation within this changing IT universe.

What Is the “New ITAM”? 
It’s no secret that most people view the world from a unique perspective central to them. While this is human nature, it’s not always the best answer for an IT organization that needs to work together as a team to deliver key business services across an increasingly fractured mosaic of changing interdependencies.

In research that EMA just completed (Next Generation Asset Management and Financial Analytics: Optimizing IT Value in a World of Change, EMA, May 2014), one trend that was dominant was the wish to provide a more cohesive, cross-domain view into IT assets and where they reside. For instance, from an organizational view, nearly 40% of respondents are seeking to at least create a role for looking at IT investments across all domains, and that number shoots up to nearly 60% once telecommunications accounting is excluded. Having a cross-domain approach to ITAM resulted in benefits such as:

• More effective assimilation of cloud resources.
• Better insight into usage and accounting requirements across IT.
• Higher levels of data accuracy.
• More effective software license management.
• Increased valuation of IT by the business.

Nimble, Accurate, Coherent and Unifying
Aside from cross-domain insights, however, the new ITAM has to be nimble, adaptable and flexible in support of change. For instance, rather than paying consultants for expensive compliance audits, the new ITAM needs to deliver value in what might be perceived as “revolutionary” ways, as the quote below suggests:

“We wanted to invest in effective inventory tools—but our company opted for a consultant audit instead. The global consultant audit cost our company $5 million dollars and was obsolete as soon as it was completed.”

Just as the new ITAM needs to be broad and adaptable in scope, its data must be both coherent and accurate—or all its credibility, and all the savings that can result, will fall away. Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, a truly strategic approach to ITAM should begin to bring the worlds of applications (as assets) and the rest of IT assets together. Significantly, 66% of EMA’s research respondents viewed integrating application portfolio rationalization and consolidation as important or very important.

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What Are Some of the Key Challenges to Getting There?

Being able to achieve all this should at least sound good. But what, in fact, are the realities? Based on recent data from the research cited above, most IT organizations are still lodged in technologies that keep them from actually making their strategic ITAM goals work. Here are just a few of the data points.

- Spreadsheets still dominate in housing IT asset data, which typically resides in multiple sources from multiple databases, other paper (besides Excel), Visio, and an odd mix of asset management and inventory and discovery tools.
- The average IT organization spends about ten hours a week seeking to reconcile ITAM-related data accuracy issues, and 14% spend more than twenty-five hours a week.
- IT organizations are juggling an average of seven different inventory and discovery tools to cover domain differences, among other things—and some are struggling with more than 40!
- While 73% of our respondents have some form of software license management, only 64% are able to track usage and re-harvest desktop software to any degree.
- Dissatisfaction with software license management is so pronounced that a clear majority—61% of respondents—have set aside budget to improve their software license management situation.

Cloud is also raising the bar in driving more dynamic and comprehensive approaches in supporting IT asset management. When asked about cloud, respondents highlighted changing requirements in measuring costs and more pronounced requirements for automation, shifting organizational needs, and more real-time awareness—with better insights into accounting for infrastructure and usage.

A Short Introduction to Scalable Software

Scalable Software enters the ITAM fray as a true innovator focused on delivering a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) platform for optimizing IT assets across domains. Scalable provides a platform with rich functionality designed to make it easy to add new applications. The solution’s current focus includes:

- Broad, versatile, and accurate cross-domain inventory and discovery through its own collectors (or pods), as well as assimilation of data from a wide array of other sources, such as Microsoft’s System Center Configuration Manager (SCCM).
- Scalable’s versatility is enhanced by its ability to look at flow data among other sources to understand usage and impact related to both infrastructure and application investments.
- Scalable offers full lifecycle support for managing endpoints—including mobile end points—with governance for configuration as well as compliance requirements
- Scalable’s knowledgebase can enrich data from in-house and other sources to homogenize and standardize on software license Ts and Cs across the full infrastructure.
- Through its unique end-point instrumentation, Scalable can provide meaningful insights into how, where, and when applications are being used.

EMA Perspective

The benefits of SaaS investments in ITAM and other critical areas of IT management are becoming increasingly evident. In related EMA research (The Changing Role of the Service Desk in the Age of Cloud and Agile, EMA and CXP, Q1 2013), the drivers for SaaS were:

1. Minimal overall administration.
2. Extensibility/scalability to expand across infrastructure resources as needed.
3. OpEx savings.
4. Functional extensibility—easy to add new capabilities as needed.
5. CapEx savings.
6. Accelerated deployment.
7. Easy upgrades.

Scalable Software’s SaaS ITAM platform brings all these benefits to the table with an added focus on the functional extensibility so critical to next-generation ITAM.

While no single solution does it all, e.g., Scalable does not offer lifecycle change and configuration management across the full data center, the vendor’s architecture includes strong integration and reconciliation capabilities that allow it to function as an effective component of a yet larger initiative. Moreover, EMA has not seen another vendor likely to match Scalable’s combination of inventory breadth and ease of administration and deployment as a fully integrated feature in a strategic ITAM platform.

Scalable is bound to challenge industry norms still linked to siloed, inaccurate and unwieldy answers to ITAM. The company has invested in both functional breadth and quick time to value in a balanced and compelling design. As such, it is very much a vendor for IT’s short list in the move to making IT asset management an effective strategic investment—without the “pain.”

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