

## Three Tools of an IT Asset Management Program

**Sorting through the IT asset management tools available and the corresponding marketing hype to choose the right tools can be difficult. To aid in the selection process, we outline the differences and provide a partial list of vendors.**

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### **Core Topic**

Sourcing: IT Asset Procurement

### **Key Issue**

What are the best practices for the procurement of IT assets?

Software tools facilitate an enterprise's ability to automate the implementation of an IT asset management (ITAM) program while providing valuable data about all of its managed IT assets. Because of overlapping data sources from network and systems management (NSM) and fixed asset systems, there is considerable confusion regarding the capabilities and differences among the most visible types of tools — autodiscovery/inventory, repository and software usage tools. We provide a base-level understanding of how each of these tools fits into a total solution. Once appropriate processes are in place, ITAM tools can assist an enterprise in maintaining accurate contractual, physical and financial data on its IT assets. Although there is some value in implementing each tool individually, it is in the integration of these tools and processes over time where enterprises will realize the most value.

### **Autodiscovery Tools**

An autodiscovery (also referred to as inventory or tracking) tool collects physical data on an enterprise's networked IT assets (e.g., memory, processor and software version), even if users only dial in to send/receive e-mail or access a browser (e.g., mobile users) and record a history of changes made to the asset. However, the process of maintaining an accurate inventory must include at some point a physical inventory of all the IT assets that are not network-attached (e.g., in storage closets or locally attached) and, therefore, not discoverable.

To ensure the ongoing accuracy of this data, a process must be put into place to track deployment, changes and retirement of the asset. Depending on the rate of change in the environment, automated inventory tools can be scheduled to run hourly, weekly or monthly. The data collected by these tools is typically reconciled and fed into a repository for reporting, or it is often

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accessed by the IT service desk for rapid user profile identification. In environments that are migrating to new hardware or software, the software deployment team will use inventory data to schedule upgrades of hardware and OSs. Although autodiscovery tools may have basic ITAM features that are complementary to asset tracking, they do not represent a comprehensive ITAM implementation (see Note 1 and Note 2).

#### **Note 1**

##### **Use of Autodiscovery Tools**

Many enterprises that have some form of NSM tools already deployed typically attempt to leverage that investment and make use of the included inventory capabilities. Because these capabilities are primarily included to support other core functions, such as electronic software distribution, the tracking capabilities can be difficult to install, use and customize. In these instances, enterprises will need to determine if the cost and benefit of leveraging their investment exceeds that of purchasing another tool that is optimized for IT asset tracking.

#### **Note 2**

##### **Examples of Vendors With Autodiscovery/Inventory Tools**

Absolute Software  
Altiris  
Attest Systems  
ASAP Software  
AssetMetrix  
Axios Systems  
Belarc  
BindView  
Blue Ocean Software  
Centennial UK  
Cognet  
Computer Associates International  
Critical Devices  
Eracent  
Intel  
Isogon  
LSVi  
MainControl  
Microsoft  
Network Associates  
Novadigm  
Peregrine Systems  
PS'Soft  
Staff&Line/EasyVista  
Tally Systems  
Tangram Enterprise Solutions  
Tivoli Systems

## **ITAM Repository Tools**

An ITAM repository consolidates the physical (e.g., asset ID tag, serial number and model number), financial (e.g., purchase price, depreciation, book value and property tax) and contract (e.g., terms and conditions, warranties, service levels and entitlements) information associated with an enterprise's software and hardware IT assets and associated services across multiple platforms to create a centralized view of the data. Reports can be generated to support numerous management functions, including software license compliance, lease management, budgeting, planning, deployment, chargeback and contract negotiations. Most recent versions of repository tools can be differentiated by each vendor's capacity to deliver and customize event workflows (e.g., new hires), Web-based interface and chargeback capabilities. Repositories facilitate a full-service approach to IT asset life cycle planning, including implementation, management processes, retirement and disposal (see Note 3 and Note 4).

## **Software Usage Tools**

An often-overlooked component of an efficient ITAM program, but one that is often found in mature ITAM implementations, is software usage tools (SUTs). Environments with concurrent licenses historically implemented metering to assess whether licenses were underused or overused to meet contract terms. As software and hardware vendors follow Microsoft's lead and move toward subscription-based pricing, the role and value of SUTs will greatly increase.

Today, these tools are being more commonly used to track usage patterns and reporting on trends to assist with server load balancing, as well as license negotiation to prevent costly overbuying or risk-laden underbuying. SUTs can also be used to monitor and control the use of unauthorized applications (e.g., video games and screen savers). Enterprises that implement SUTs typically yield savings of 5 percent in the first year and 2 percent to 3 percent in years two and three (0.7 probability). Although these savings are low in comparison to larger projects, the value is in the managed environment (see Note 5).

**Note 3**

**IT Asset Repository Content**

Repositories typically include data on IT asset costs, configurations, demographics, event history, contractual rights and obligations, taxes, accounting and operations expenses. The data is usually merged with data from multiple sources to provide reports, as well as to ensure data integrity. Sources include manual input, procurement/purchasing systems, accounting systems, HR systems, consolidated service desk tools, contract management systems, inventory tools and software usage tools.

**Note 4**

**Examples of IT Asset Repository**

**Vendors**

Axios Systems  
FrontRange Solutions  
Intraware  
Isogon  
iVita  
MainControl  
Magic Solutions  
Peregrine Systems  
Provance Technologies  
PS'Soft  
Royal Blue  
Staff&Line  
Tangram Enterprise Solutions  
USU

**Note 5**

**Examples of Software Usage Vendors**

ABC Systems and Development  
Isogon  
Tally Systems  
Ubiquity Computers  
WRQ

**Bottom Line:** There are three distinct tools — autodiscovery, repository and usage — that make up an effective, mature ITAM program. These tools can work independently to address targeted problems or in conjunction with other back-end systems (e.g., the IT service desk or the purchasing system) to create strategic savings that will help control IT budgets and planning. Enterprises should keep in mind that ITAM tools are not a panacea. They will automate, but not replace, the processes that support an ITAM program.