Effective change & configuration management, coupled with intelligence asset management processes delivers IT cost savings, productivity gains, regulatory compliance

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Increasingly stringent regulations such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX), higher penalties associated with licensing infringements, and the need to improve user and help desk productivity are a few of the factors that make it more critical than ever before to maintain accurate and in-depth information on IT assets. The configuration management database (CMDB) provides the foundation for IT service management (ITSM) by delivering understanding of the context and content of the IT infrastructure and ensuring the infrastructure is fully authorized.

iET Inventory Center provides the detailed and accurate information needed to meet today's more demanding IT and business requirements. iET Solutions' CMDB approach and products are unique in providing the four critical functions - reconciliation, federation, mapping and visualization, and synchronization - that distinguish a true CMDB from other tools. In particular, the graphical representation of the CMDB improves both front- and back-office service delivery operations by making it easy to visualize relationships between configuration items (CIs).

Need to comply with a range of tough regulations

Regulations such as the SOX, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), the Graham-Leach-Bliley-Act, and others appear on first glance to focus on accounting and auditing. But data management in general - and financial reporting in particular - is almost completely reliant on the performance of IT assets such as networks, software, servers, and desktops. Some companies recognize this linkage explicitly by requiring their CIOs to certify the processes, accuracy, and security of the IT assets they manage.

The SOX and other regulations require documented controls and processes for the IT hardware and software used in the financial reporting system and, where IT assets are material to financial statements, for those assets themselves.

Complying with software licenses without overpurchasing

Many companies risk fines and bad publicity by unknowingly failing to comply with software licensing requirements. The rapid rate at which IT infrastructure is now changing means that assets containing licenses are frequently disposed of or redeployed to new uses when the licenses are no longer used. The result is that the IT budget is often padded with a substantial amount of dollars to purchase, license, and support hardware and software that are not addressing the organization's core goals or maybe not even be used at all. Another problem is that licenses are often purchased at the departmental or even individual level. This lack of consolidation results in higher acquisition costs, as companies are unable to take full advantage of quantity discounts or negotiate optimum contract terms.

Lack of knowledge of the IT infrastructure and applications can lead to a host of other problems and tie up IT resources in correcting them when they are finally detected. How many users have critical intellectual property on their machines that is vulnerable to theft because they have neglected to install a new security patch? How many do not have antivirus software installed or have not updated their definitions file for a considerable period of time? How much equipment has been lost, stolen, or converted to other than the intended use?

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Delivering help desk and customer productivity

The CMDB provides the foundation for proactive IT service delivery. It is also essential in change and release management for impact and deployment planning and for incident and problem management in recording the authorized state of the infrastructure to speed restoration of services. The shift from a reactive IT to a proactive posture and the integration of the front office functions of incident and problem management with the back office functions of configuration, change and release management makes it more critical than ever before that the ITSM processes be integrated with a CMDB.

Weaknesses of traditional asset management solutions

Most companies use manual methods to track the IT infrastructure and applications. But IT assets have become so numerous and complex in most companies and change so rapidly that manual methods take up a considerable amount of time, generate relatively small amounts of information, and become hopelessly outdated due to the rapid changes in the infrastructure.

For almost two decades, automated asset management solutions have been used by a minority of companies to obtain information on IT assets. This approach is promising because automation of the data collection process saves time, captures far more configuration information, and enables data collection to be performed on a regular basis. But not many companies use this approach.

Traditional asset management discovery solutions depend on agents being installed in every device in the infrastructure. Their weakness is that devices are invisible unless the agent is installed. But some devices, such as printers and routers, cannot run agents. Some companies prefer not to install agents on critical assets such as production servers because of resource consumption issues. Users often disable agents because they are concerned about resources or simply because they want to avoid prying eyes. The result is that some IT assets are invisible to traditional agent-based automated discovery tools.

Another problem with traditional asset management solutions is that they rely on multiple tools to gather and hold asset data in diverse and separate repositories that make it very hard to deliver information when and where it is needed. For example, accountants may maintain listings of fixed assets in the enterprise resource planning systems. A separate listing may be maintained in the CMDB used in the ITSM system.

The network management system may also maintain its own list of assets with a focus on its network configuration. Each repository is configured to serve the needs of the departments it serves and none has the complete information required to meet today's needs. Furthermore, the usefulness of automated tools is hampered by the difficulty in distinguishing the critical areas in the configuration data that require action from the huge volume of routine information.

Traditional asset management tools also are limited to providing information on CIs only in tabular form such as lists and charts. This approach works well when the user seeks information on a single CI but often fails to reveal patterns such as recurring problems among particular types of CIs or the dependence of the organization on a soon-to-be-orphaned software package.

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iET Inventory Center provides automated asset discovery

iET Solutions has addressed these issues with the release of its iET Inventory Center and iET CMDB Intelligence products. iET Inventory Center is a powerful agentless discovery and inventory tool that provides complete mapping of the assets in the IT infrastructure. iET Inventory Center can be configured to automatically perform scans as often as desired and can scan virtually every device on the network, providing a much higher level of accuracy than that achievable with manual or agent-based scans. Since agents are not needed, there's no need to install and maintain software on client computers, nor is there any need to leave open on clients that might compromise security. iET Inventory Center is also delivered with agents that can be used when desired, such as for devices that are only occasionally connected to the network.

iET Inventory Center dynamically queries a wide range of configuration items including hardware components, installed software, security patch level, network configuration, etc. It can discover information about desktop computers and servers running any operating system, including Windows, Mac, Linux, Unix, etc.; network devices such as switches, routers, and wireless access points; operating systems; utility and application software including patches; and printers, etc. The information captured ranges from high-level tracking information such as IP address and mac number, down to detailed information such as the rated clock speed, password expiration dates, software patches installed, etc.

iET CMDB Intelligence makes asset information actionable

Besides accepting information from iET Inventory Center, iET CMDB Intelligence can also support other discovery tools by importing their data into its staging area.

iET CMDB Intelligence brings the information captured by each scan into a staging area where predefined processes can be performed to identify actionable items such as noncompliance with software licensing agreements, security risks, and configuration problems. Alerts can be configured to move the information directly to the person responsible for acting on it.

The information can then be automatically delivered to the configuration management database, ensuring the accuracy of the data repository that underlies so many critical business processes.

iET CMDB Intelligence addresses all four of the Gartner Group's requirements for maintaining the CMDB: federation, reconciliation, synchronization, and mapping. iET CMDB Intelligence federates the multiple data sources so they can feed or link the required amount of data to the CMDB while the individual domain sources continue to maintain detailed configuration information about the CI. The key to federation is providing one logical view of the data. Every organization has multiple islands of data about its IT infrastructure - discovery, financial, networking, spreadsheets. The CMDB must incorporate some level of data from each of these sources. Without this ability there are several complications and/or issues that arise. For example, how does IT know which system to trust and for what data? Additionally, an effective CMDB solution must provide federated links in context to other sources - such as problem, incident and change management to enable a deeper level of analysis for proposed change impact, as well as root cause analysis.

iET CMDB Intelligence reconciles this information by rationalizing the same instance of a CI or component that might come into the CMDB from multiple sources. iET CMDB Intelligence keeps the CMDB in synch with external federated sources by updating the CMDB with approved changes as well as identifying changes that are not approved. The mapping and visualization capabilities of iET CMDB Intelligence provide the ability to visualize the relationships between CIs and graphically display the incidents, problems, changes and releases that are connected to a CI.

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The graphical interface to the CMDB provides more accurate problem diagnoses as well as the ability to more effectively plan changes by visualizing their impact on the entire organization. It can provide valuable information on the lifecycle of the IT infrastructure such as maintenance costs, software usage, and expenses by function and product. A graphical view delivers significant advantages including the ability to more accurately diagnose problems by visualizing relationships between seemingly unconnected incidents and the ability to more effectively plan changes by gaining a high-level understanding of the connections between different elements of the IT infrastructure.

iET CMDB Intelligence enables the consolidation of IT asset data into one repository, providing an accurate and complete view of the entire asset landscape. It interacts with the CMDB and change management systems to ensure all processes and changes in the IT asset environment are registered and auditable. The tool ships with standard reports, and nearly any flavor of custom report can easily be created and accessed by authorized users over the web. For example, missing in action (MIA) reports on critical equipment containing sensitive data can easily be produced without relying on agents that could be intentionally disabled.

iET CMDB Intelligence operates as follows in a typical usage scenario. First, iET Inventory Center or other discovery tools are used to gather information. In a second step, iET CMDB Intelligence imports data into the staging area. After that, mapping and reconciliation are carried out. iET CMDB Intelligence then automatically identifies unknown configuration items and changed items. Based on policies that have been defined by the user, the software also identifies configuration management policy violations. The user sub-sequently can review both of these areas, take action to correct any problems, and reconcile any conflicts in the discovery process. Afterward, iET CMDB Intelligence auto-matically moves the changes into the CMDB and provides a complete audit trial of the changes that have been made.

CMDB improves IT processes

iET Inventory Center and iET CMDB Intelligence enable FitSM® alignment. The configuration management discipline is based on providing a logical model of the IT infrastructure by identifying, controlling, maintaining, and verifying all configuration items. Configuration management is used to account for IT assets; provide accurate information to support service-related processes; provide a basis for incident, problem, change, and release management; verify records against the infrastructure; and correct exceptions.

iET Inventory Center and iET CMDB Intelligence can substantially reduce the amount of time required to resolve incidents and problems by putting configuration information at the service reps' fingertips. Your help desk staff will be able to instantly call up accurate and detailed information on the configuration of devices experiencing problems. The ability to visualize CIs in graphical format in relation to incidents, problems, changes, releases and SLAs will help service desk personnel more quickly detect the root cause of a problem. Just as important, devices with configuration issues can be identified and corrected before they trigger a problem.

> A graphical view of the CMDB provides more accurate problem diagnoses and the ability to more effectively plan changes by visualizing their impact on the entire organization.

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The CMDB also provides information that is valuable in change and release management for impact and deployment planning and for incident and problem management in recording the authorized state of the infrastructure to speed restoration of services. The ability to easily access organization-wide configuration management will simplify a wide range of IT administration tasks. For example, administrators responsible for installing a new software version can very quickly determine which users require upgraded hardware in order to support the new version.
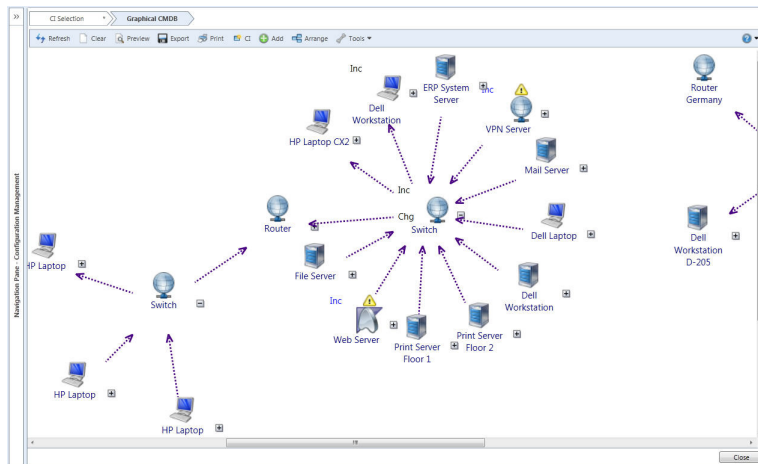
Graphical view of the CMDB

iET Inventory Center and iET CMDB Intelligence enable regulatory compliance, improve productivity, and lower costs

The actionable information provided by iET Inventory Center and
iET CMDB Intelligence delivers a wide range of business benefits that will dramatically pay back their cost. Their ability to maintain an accurate and complete CMDB - with a minimum of manual effort and no need for agents - will reduce the costs of compiling information, searching for exceptions, and generating reports. But the ability of these new software tools to greatly increase the accuracy and depth of the information in the CMDB will provide even greater business benefits. iET Inventory Center and
iET CMDB Intelligence can substantially improve your financial reporting, data privacy, and other controls while reducing the cost of compliance. By tracking and consolidating the complete IT infrastructure, they will improve your ability to control assets that may contain sensitive data or have a financial impact on the organization. Just as important, iET Inventory Center and iET CMDB Intelligence make it easy to provide a documented method for ensuring that changes or failures in the reporting systems are immediately detected and brought to the attention of those individuals who have the responsibility for correcting them.

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Maintaining a detailed and accurate CMDB can also drive down software licensing and other expenses. Maintaining information on software licenses in a central location makes it easy to ensure license compliance, identify licenses that are not being utilized, and negotiate with vendors on a centralized basis for maximum quantity discounts. iET Inventory Center and iET CMDB Intelligence also provide complete information on hardware, operating systems, processor type and speed, memory capacity, disk capacity, etc. This information helps IT managers achieve cost savings in managing asset leases, planning and budgeting for IT projects, and improving IT service levels.

> iET Inventory Center and iET CMDB Intelligence substantially reduce the time required to resolve incidents and problems by putting configuration information at the service reps' fingertips.

All in all, iET Inventory Center and iET CMDB Intelligence will provide your organization with an accurate and in-depth CMDB that will make it possible to ensure regulatory compliance, while reducing costs and improving the productivity of virtually every business process that depends on the IT infrastructure.

ABOUT iET SOLUTIONS

iET Solutions, a division of UNICOM® Global, helps large and midsize enterprises to increase the efficiency and security of their IT operations and infrastructure. Organizations around the world use software from iET Solutions for IT service management (ITSM), software asset management (SAM) and enterprise service management (ESM). The company has more than three decades of experience in service management and works with organizations across all industry sectors.

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