

Productiv^{IT}

A Sensible Approach to Asset Management



Introduction

Most IT managers would agree, an effective asset management program is the key to successfully managing the IT enterprise. Whether it is measuring total cost of ownership or creating an enterprise-wide security plan, understanding an organization's widely distributed assets is a critical first step.

While most IT Managers understand the importance of an asset management system, far fewer have actually implemented an effective program. As IT departments try to get by on abbreviated budgets, costly asset management solutions are ending up on the cutting room floor. Too often, IT Managers are presented with solutions geared for the enterprise, which beyond licensing costs, require skilled technicians to implement, customize and administer. And, as most of us know, an enterprise-like solution often translates into an enterprise-sized price tag.

The high cost of these asset management solutions is compounded by the fact that it is taking too long to realize a measurable return on the investment. It can take many months, sometimes a year or more, to fully configure and implement an asset manager. In some cases the job is never finished, leaving the organization with a very expensive investment and no chance of return.

What is the problem?

Most asset management solutions available today are complex products. They were conceived to fill an apparent void in solutions that span technical support and financial or resource management. In doing so, they have created an unwieldy feature set that is redundant with the functionality of more focused help desk, asset tracking, financial and resource management tools.

This broad feature set is rarely available out-of-the-box and requires considerable customization. In fact, these 'add-on' services account for the bulk of the expense. The result is a system with too many functions that is difficult to administer and maintain.

The TekInsight LLC Approach

While other asset management tools focus on hyper-functionality, TekInsight LLC's strategy is to focus on critical needs first. TekInsight LLC's 80/20 methodology, based on project management best practices, helps organizations

implement an asset management program in a step-by-step fashion. This approach capitalizes on the idea that up to 80% of what is on our asset management “wish list” is of immediate value and can be achieved without a great deal of cost and risk. The remaining 20% is “nice to have”, and something that can be addressed in a later phase of the program. If you follow this approach you will realize the benefits of asset management sooner and with minimal investment and risk.

We apply the same 80/20 approach to select the right tools that offer features that are at least 80% standard and require no more than 20% customization. Using tools that can be implemented rapidly with little or no customization drastically reduces the cost of the effort.

ProductivIT™ –The Foundation for Asset Management

TekInsight LLC’s proprietary technology, ProductivIT™ serves as the foundation for a strong asset management and technical support program. In fact, the company uses ProductivIT in its own seat management services business to provide superior support and customer service at a surprisingly low cost.

As the underlying technology, ProductivIT forms an integrated desktop management solution that shares a common framework and data structure. This unifying architecture makes asset management and any other activity associated with the desktop lifecycle inherently more manageable. And as a totally web-based solution, Internet or intranet, ProductivIT allows all IT stakeholders to share information, respond to requests, analyze data and create reports through a single, easy-to-use portal. The result is substantial cost savings and tangible improvements in every measure of IT performance and service.

A Sensible Approach

A step-by-step approach to building an asset management program begins with the identification of the assets. While asset identification sounds simple, without some kind of tool to automate the process, this step can absorb a tremendous amount of time and manpower. ProductivIT’s desktop agent instantly collects thousands of fields of system-specific data, including hardware and software, and makes it available through a secure, centralized web-based portal.

ProductivIT’s all-purpose data capture utility can supply diagnostic data and other asset information for the full range of desktop management activities. ProductivIT activates in a variety of circumstances to capture precise state and configuration information.

- Automatically, in case of a system fault or General Protection Fault (GPF)
- Manually by user activation to request technical support or to report a problem
- Periodically by scheduled activation, or upon installation, to track assets
- On command, called by another program or in response to an event

ProductivIT can be downloaded via the Web or from an email link. Electronic software distribution packages, like Microsoft SMS, Computer Associate's ESD and Novell's Zen Works, make it convenient to distribute the relatively small agent. ProductivIT can also be installed from a CD-ROM. ProductivIT sets up quickly and, in a matter of hours, will provide valuable data for asset tracking and support.

The following offers a more detailed description of an asset tracking and configuration management program using ProductivIT.

Asset Tracking with ProductivIT™

For new desktop assets, certain information concerning contracts, purchase orders, license information and warranty and service agreements is recorded in the image of the asset when it is configured. The software image also includes the ProductivIT support request and data capture utility (ARTS). This utility will activate upon login to capture end user registration information.

A variety of asset tagging schemes can be supported with this method to accommodate the specific needs of the department or agency. These schemes range from affixing a serial number to the physical asset and recording that number somewhere in the registry to adopting naming conventions to assign logical identifications, such as machine ID, to the asset. Tagging the asset when it is deployed begins the audit trail that will eventually document the history of that asset, - its performance, service requests and change history - throughout the lifecycle.

Establishing the Baseline

When an end user logs in for the first time, the ARTS utility will activate and prompt the user to provide or verify personal information, including department or workplace, phone number, etc. Each agency can specify exactly what type of information to request. Within the first few seconds of activation, the agent will

capture the complete inventory of software and hardware as well as the configuration of the desktop. This capture generates an Incident Data File (IDF) called the Baseline IDF, which is then sent with the user registration information to the portal or support facility.

The Baseline IDF serves several purposes. It is a confirmation of successful deployment of the desktop. A report of baselines generated for a department or agency can serve as documentation of the deployment's progress. The Baseline establishes the beginning date of the desktop lifecycle and the point of reference for all software and hardware refreshes and seat or lease renewal dates.

The end user information collected at the time of Baseline capture is used to register the deployed seat with the IT department to begin the support process. Key information regarding appropriate service levels can be captured along with other Baseline data or can be associated with the user or machine ID at the central site through a reference table.

Periodic Updates

Each time a user activates the ARTS to make a request or to report a problem, a complete data capture occurs at the desktop. This data is sent with the request as an IDF to the IDF repository. In an automated comparison of the new IDF to the Baseline, the help desk staff or field technician will be immediately alerted to changes in the makeup or configuration of the desktop. These changes are often at the root of the reported problem.

Periodic updates to the repository can also be scheduled to maintain an ongoing asset history. These can be set to occur on a specific date or can be scheduled on a weekly or monthly basis. The IDFs generated during these updates are added to the IDF repository where they can be accessed in a variety of asset reports.

Moves, Adds, Changes (MACs)

End users can make individual requests for updates, changes to hardware or moves using the ARTS utility. If they use ARTS to initiate the request, the help desk or field technician will have the most up to date inventory and configuration information for the desktop at the time they receive the request. This will shorten the time to respond and ensure, in advance, that the change or upgrade is compatible with the existing desktop configuration.

Not all organizations will allow individual users to make request a MAC without prior authorization. In some cases, only a supervisor or someone in the IT

department will be authorized to make a request. Differences in policies and service level agreement information can be maintained at the central site and associated with each desktop. Before a request for a MAC is dispatched, the help desk staff can confirm that the request is consistent with the policy for the parent organization.

Requests involving numbers of desktops are handled according to the size and nature of the request. A MAC for a smaller number of desktops can be handled in a way similar to an individual request. Larger numbers of desktops, which can approach project scope in size, should involve advanced planning and coordination. In any case, the asset inventory provided in the IDF repository can supply all of the information needed for determining specific requirements, identifying potential issues and planning the implementation.

Once work involved in the MAC has been completed, a new Baseline is generated to update the asset inventory. This new Baseline can be used as proof that the work was completed, including the exact date and time, as well as confirmation that the change resulted in the desired configuration.

Configuration Control

Standardization is the key to an effective and efficient computing environment and to maximizing end user uptime. This does not imply a one-size-fits-all strategy. There can be any number of configurations to support the business needs of an organization. However, each configuration should be defined, tested, and certified as stable enough for the production environment before it is accepted and deployed.

A standard configuration includes specification of the hardware platform, operating system and application software. Custom or agency-specific software can also be included as part of the configuration. Each configuration is loaded onto all target platforms and tested according to a documented test plan. After successful testing, the configuration is certified as production-ready and added to a library of configuration profiles.

Since in its automated mode the ProductivIT agent will activate and generate an IDF file anytime an application crashes and causes a GPF-type fault, the pre-certification testing conducted in the test lab can be augmented with real-time information from the production environment, giving ongoing evaluation and confirmation of a configuration's stability.

This kind of desktop telemetry is also very useful in beta tests and production rollouts of new or custom software applications. With an IDF generated for a fault or report of trouble, the software vendor or engineering group can quickly identify and correct problems in application logic or platform configuration.

Once a desktop is deployed or after a MAC is completed, a Baseline IDF is generated and sent to the IDF repository. This Baseline establishes the identity and the precise configuration of the desktop. The Baseline IDF serves as audit confirmation that the desktop is properly configured and functioning.

Periodically, asset inventories can be taken and compared against the configuration profiles to identify any non-conforming assets. Reports of differences between the periodic snapshot and the Baseline and the profile can be used to uncover suspicious activity or enforce configuration policy.

Financial Management and Reporting

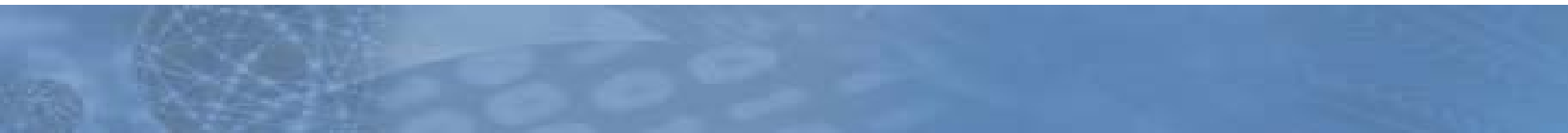
So far, this discussion has centered on asset tracking and configuration management. The last component of asset management is financial management. That is, tying in financial information for budgeting, charge back, depreciation and financial reporting purposes. The contracts function, which also can be considered part of financial asset management, includes contract or lease maintenance and service level agreements.

With its wealth of information, ProductivIT can support a wide range of financial and resource management activities. This information is readily available through ProductivIT's powerful reporting facility and can be used for a variety of purposes including workflow scheduling, planning and financial reporting.

ProductivIT's asset repository can be shared with enterprise resource planning, accounting, customer support or other departments through the portal reporting facility, an application programming interface or ordinary file transfer.

Conclusion

With TekInsight LLC's ProductivIT technology, an integrated asset management solution is both attainable and affordable. At a fraction of the cost of comparable tools, ProductivIT's web-based architecture provides IT Managers with immediate, real-time results.



*For more information on how ProductivIT can help you
regain control of your IT assets, please contact:*

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