THE LOOKING GLASS

A publication for IT professionals

Issue #9 / February 2007

ITAM Data Capture and Data Store

Part Three of a Four Part Series

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The previous articles in this series discussed the IT Asset Management (ITAM) evolution and why we need to view ITAM differently today than we have in the past. We have explored the need to base our approach on business requirements, information needed to satisfy those requirements, as well as the data architecture and processes to support the information. This article will focus on capturing and storing appropriate IT asset data and how to ensure its accuracy throughout the asset life cycle.

Data Happens

Many IT asset repositories and data in use today have evolved from various attempts to capture asset information for some specific purpose. Typically, the data is collected and controlled by the organizations that required the asset data to solve a particular problem at a point in time. Generally this is done with a narrow view of the data requirements and is usually driven more by the capabilities of the available capture technology than by the business requirement. This scenario may happen often across many different business units, including IT, creating a perpetual cycle of data gathering that is very difficult to escape. Even when there is an attempt to aggregate these disparate sources of data there is not enough consistency and commonality of key fields to correlate the data. The lack of consistency casts a cloud of doubt on all of the data sources and often spawns yet another attempt to collect more data.

The primary reason for this happenstance of data is that there is no single source of trusted asset data that can satisfy the particular business need, much less all of the business requirements. Even when there is a focused effort to collect asset data enterprise-wide, the typical approach is to collect as much data as possible, deliver it to the business units and hope that they can use it to solve their problems. This approach produces large amounts of data but rarely the information that is really needed.

Data by Design

In parts 1 and 2 of this series, we established prerequisites for the data capture phase. Business demands, information requirements and data architecture should guide the asset data capture and data store approach. The approach should also consider the following objectives:

Data Architecture

- Ensure that asset definition and granularity has been established and documented. Each unique asset should be defined in a single asset record.
- Use a common asset catalog to enforce standards and referential consistency.
- Define the data elements that will satisfy the business information requirements for those assets.
- Identify the source of the data element and process requirements to sustain its accuracy.

Data Capture

There are three data capture activities that need consideration: 1) initial population of the asset repository for existing assets, 2) capture of data for new assets as they pass through each phase of the asset lifecycle, and 3) a periodic asset discovery for audit purposes.

- Identify existing sources of asset data and tools in use. Assess the quality of the data already collected.
- Capture and store only the data elements needed for the known business issues. Capturing and storing data elements that are not likely to be used by the business wastes resources and creates a maintenance burden.
- Minimize the number of tools used for data capture. A comprehensive solution may require more than one tool, but maintaining many tools that overlap in function creates ongoing costs and confusion.
- Match the frequency of data capture to the business requirements.

Data Store

- Store data in a central repository that has enterprise acceptance as the system of record (SOR) for IT asset data.
- Ensure that the SOR is integrated into the business processes for all asset touch points in order to capture change and sustain data accuracy.
- Provide SOR availability and accessibility to business units.
- Establish ownership, control and accountability for the repository.
- Create audit processes based on business requirements.

Technology for Function and Automation

A successful ITAM program requires an implementation approach founded on business requirements and applied to a combination of process, organization and tools. We are sometimes tempted to approach the ITAM problem with technology first because tools are often perceived as the solution and, if true, would certainly be the shortest path to success. There are some excellent tools available today that will enable the ITAM program but their effectiveness is greatly diminished if we have not done due diligence to a requirements based approach.

Software Success partners

Technology is available that brings the ITAM program to life in several ways. The general functionality desired to support ITAM is as follows:

- Repository – A data base that stores hardware and software asset records. It must also store or link to an asset catalog, procurement data, configuration management data, HR data, finance data and contract information. Links to other repositories must have similar keys and granularity.
- Discovery – A tool that can detect and inventory objects on a particular network. These may or may not require agents to be placed on the objects to be inventoried and most will provide data for hardware, software and components.
- Physical Inventory – Use of a scanner to collect data from tagged IT assets based on bar codes or Radio Frequency Identification (RFID). These are often used for assets that cannot be detected on the network.
- Reporting – Report generating tools can be standalone but are most often incorporated in the repository products.

Quality Assurance

Quality information begins with complete and accurate data. How can we assure our business units that the asset data we provide is trustworthy today and will maintain that integrity in the future? One of the founding principles and success factors in building the ITAM program is also the key to its longevity – sponsorship. We must have ownership and accountability for the ITAM program at an executive level, but it must not be isolated to one individual or group. The process and importance of managing assets must be woven into the very fabric of every business unit in the enterprise with appropriate accountability. Buy-in and participation is the key to sustaining information accuracy throughout the asset lifecycle. This may be the most important phase of the evolution that transforms the ITAM project into an ITAM program. Therefore it is important that the enterprise exploits the data to solve business problems and in turn establishes the commitment to its accuracy.

Are We Finally Done?

We have implemented the ITAM process and tools and we have lots of great data so we must be done, right? Not really. We have yet to use the data to solve business problems which was the primary reason for the program. The final article in this series will explore the ways that we can transform this asset data into business value.

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IAITAM

IAITAM 2007 Annual Conference and Exposition
November 7-9, 2007

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Making IT Asset Management a Success

Software Success Partners offers a broad array of services designed to guide you through the IT Asset Management (ITAM) implementation maze. We have developed a practical approach focused on business requirements, information quality and process simplification. The approach creates a solid foundation for the application of technology to automate and optimize the ITAM function. Our methodology is consistent with ITIL best practices.

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