

5 Capabilities to Consider

Guidelines for Choosing the Right Inventory Management Tool for Your Business

According to the Enterprise Management Associates (EMA) survey, “The Changing Face of Asset Management: Merging Asset, Service, and Financial Management,” 40% of IT organizations still do not have automatic asset discovery and inventory systems in place.¹ One of the core components of a comprehensive IT asset management (ITAM) solution, inventory management tools have been gaining popularity as a reliable way to cut costs and rapidly improve efficiency. If you’re one of the organizations still thinking of investing in an inventory management solution, there are some important factors you should consider to find the best fit for your business.

Obviously, automating the discovery and tracking of your IT assets will allow you to eliminate errors and inefficiencies that always occur with manual processes. But maybe more importantly, an automated IT inventory management solution gives you a clear picture of every asset in your network, helping you to leverage investments you’ve already made. One of the major benefits of automated inventory management is that it provides you with enhanced control over your assets by increasing visibility and providing real-time updates on all the hardware and software in your portfolio. To help you gain control and reap these rewards, here are some helpful tips on how to select an effective inventory management solution that suits the unique needs of your organization.

Five Capabilities to Consider When Looking for the Right Inventory Management Solution

Inventory management solutions vary significantly; each tool delivers automation in different ways and has different levels of complexity with regard to implementation and management. If you choose a solution that isn’t flexible enough to evolve with your organization, you could end up spending more time

and money configuring the tool or buying “add-ons.” To provide some guidance, here are five things you should look for when evaluating any inventory management tool:

- A Comprehensive and Flexible Discovery Engine
- Software License Compliance and Metering
- A Scalable Architecture
- Built-In, Expansive Reporting and Dashboards
- An Integrated Platform of Solutions

A Comprehensive and Flexible Discovery Engine

To start off, the solution you’re considering should have an auto-discovery feature that can quickly give you comprehensive visibility into all the assets in your portfolio. To make this feasible, your solution must have a powerful discovery engine capable of supporting both agent and agent-less discovery of heterogeneous network devices such as Microsoft® Windows, Linux®, MacOS® and VMware® workstations, as well as mobile phones/smartphones, laptops, servers, scanners and other devices.

Software License Compliance and Metering

Along with hardware discovery, the solution you select should allow you to automatically discover and account for all the software assets currently in your system. This will enable you to easily track compliance and usage across your organization, in order to avoid costly software audits and help redistribute under-used software applications.

The concerns regarding software are really two-fold: overuse of licenses resulting in software audits or non-compliance issues or under-utilizing software you’ve already invested in and wasting money spent on unnecessary applications. To address these concerns, simply make sure the solution you



choose can automatically account for both situations.

For example, you can avoid costly software audits – currently on the rise – by ensuring your inventory management tool has automatic alerts for important software updates, as well as extensive measurement capabilities to compare purchased versus installed software licenses in your system. Aside from addressing software compliance, having sophisticated software metering in place will help you identify under-utilized software and enable you to reallocate those assets to areas that need them.

In addition, you can automatically block restricted or outdated software applications, giving you the power to automatically limit access to prohibited assets and avoid using expired licenses.

A Scalable Architecture

As Dennis Drogseth, vice president of Enterprise Management Associates (EMA), explains, “One of the most common complaints EMA consultants hear from IT organizations is, ‘I vastly underestimated how hard it would be to get my arms around the [inventory management] infrastructure.’ So, while inventory and discovery are not new ideas, they remain a far from trivial concern across IT.”²

Inventory management shouldn’t be complicated, it should help you gain control over your assets and maintain it over time. In addition, the tool you select should have a multi-tiered architecture that fits your organization – regardless of its size or complexity – and should be scalable enough to monitor thousands of nodes across multiple locations and/or network configurations. Also, the solution needs to be easy to configure, so it doesn’t require time-consuming and costly scripting or programming.

Built-In, Expansive Reporting and Dashboards

One of the best capabilities you can ask for in any inventory management tool is extensive reporting and measurement dashboards. As mentioned above, these detailed reports are vital for proving compliance and demonstrating use of existing assets across various individuals, groups and departments. In addition, these reports should be customizable, so you can adapt them to your changing requirements and make sure you’re providing upper-level management with the detailed information needed in real time.

That being said, the tool should also have a library of report templates, so support staff don’t have to create reports from scratch. All these factors ensure you’re communicating any changes, updates and information about all the assets in your network to the right people, without having to manually export these reports to the appropriate parties.

An Integrated Platform of Solutions

The final capability you should consider is how easily the inventory management tool integrates with other asset management solutions. For this, you should step back and ask yourself questions like: will the tool grow with my business?

Will it support my OS deployment needs or my patch management needs? Will my desktop management solution work in harmony with my service management and configuration management solutions? If the answer is no, keep shopping. There are vendors that offer an integrated IT service and asset management solution set at reasonable price points.

The most valuable IT inventory solutions will be flexible and practical enough to meet changing corporate requirements and policies. The tool will achieve this by working seamlessly with other asset management products as a cohesive solution, providing a holistic view and enhanced control over your entire asset lifecycle. In the short term, this ease-of-integration means a lower cost of implementation, as well as fewer hassles and costly disruptions for your IT department. And, in the long term, the solution will enable you to quickly and easily connect end-to-end processes, enhancing overall productivity and improving customer service.

Conclusion

As budgets continue to be carefully scrutinized and software vendors pursue more intensive audits, you’ll want to gain enhanced visibility into everything in your network and control all your IT assets by automating processes throughout the IT asset lifecycle. It’s imperative to choose a flexible solution that meets both your current and future business needs, and can grow as your organization evolves over time. It’s likely that you’ll face budgetary and personnel constraints that will impact your ability to handle your assets, so having automated IT asset discovery, updates and comprehensive reporting are vital features to help keep your system running efficiently, without negatively impacting your service levels.

So when you’re ready to invest in an IT inventory management solution, make sure it’s cost effective, comprehensive and practical. And, be sure the solution you choose also offers on-demand reporting and ease-of-configuration that will help save time and prove value when it really matters.

1. Dennis Drogseth, Enterprise Management Associates (EMA), “[Product Brief](#)” September 2009

2. Dennis Drogseth, Enterprise Management Associates (EMA), *The Changing Face of Asset Management: Merging Asset, Service, and Financial Management*” (June 2008)

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