



Making the Case for the Use of an IT Asset Management Solution in an SME

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Over the years, as the increasing value of IT Asset Management solutions for smaller organizations has been recognized, vendors have created leaner and more flexible solutions especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This new breed of ITAM solution is not one that is imposed on an organization; in fact, it is flexible enough to grow and change with the company dynamic.

Streamlined ITAM solutions for SMEs are intuitive and proactive: delivering automation of a wide range of tasks; offering cost-saving measures; alerting to any number of warning scenarios; and providing an extra layer of security – all things that facilitate a quick turnaround to support the smooth running of systems and enable the decision making required in fast-paced enterprise environments. This white paper aims to set out the business case in more detail for why organizations should employ such an initiative.

Executive summary

In today's technology-driven world, it is hard to believe there are organizations that still have little or no detailed awareness of the IT assets they own, their exact locations or how efficiently they are working. Indeed, many are also only vaguely aware that, instead of being a financial burden, with a little help, their assets could work smarter and actually be part of a targeted program to cut company costs – rather than be a resource that is a constant drain on budgets.

The consistent challenge for every IT manager is to do more with less – and generate more value from an ever-shrinking budget allocation in the process. But with between 70 and 80 per cent of IT budgets being spent on simply keeping existing systems running¹, this is a huge challenge. With many departments running with minimal staff who are consequently all short on time, a complete review of an organization's IT systems has been a task that has traditionally been something that would be good to do but, due to cost and/or time constraints, has always been pushed to the bottom of the priority pile.

These days, with the additional pressures on IT departments increasing in terms of compliance with contracts, audits and fines, the possibilities of IT Asset Management solutions as a way to help SMEs streamline their processes and save money have come to the fore – with many willing to invest both time and money to see an improvement in not only the visibility of their IT assets, but realize the potential of how they can actively work *for* them.

The lack of any ITAM solution in a company may be based on a historical perception of their capabilities and usability. At one time, many of these solutions were regarded as something only large corporations required, and they had a reputation of being cumbersome, expensive and difficult to use, with a steep learning curve that impacted negatively on staff time. However, over the years, as the increasing value of ITAM solutions for smaller organizations has been recognized, vendors have created leaner and more flexible solutions especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This new breed of ITAM solution is not one that is imposed on an organization; in fact, it is flexible enough to grow and change with the company dynamic. Streamlined ITAM solutions for SMEs are intuitive and proactive: delivering automation of a wide range of tasks; offering cost-saving measures; alerting to any number of warning scenarios; and providing an extra layer of security – all things that facilitate a quick turnaround to support the smooth running of systems and enable the decision making required in fast-paced enterprise environments.

Of course, without knowing the in-depth realities of what an ITAM solution can do, many managers will dismiss the prospect of spending precious funds on software that they suspect will not repay its outlay cost and will fall out of use. This is especially true if it is perceived as partly “duplicating” processes that are currently managed in a different way or by separate standalone solutions – and particularly if they believe that their current systems are working adequately and the upheaval of implementing a whole new program would simply take up too much time. But with evidence of ITAM solutions' potential provided by respected technology industry analyst, Gartner, stating, “**...clients who successfully execute ITAM as a discipline typically achieve 30% cost savings in the first year of their initiatives and at least 5% cost savings in each of the subsequent five years,**”² how can managers not afford to sit up and take notice?

¹ Source: Information Week 2014 Software Licensing Survey; ² IT Asset Management Key Initiative Overview – Gartner, June 2013



What is ITAM and how can it help SMEs?

Used as part of an organized program, IT Asset Management (ITAM) solutions help to document and manage an organization's IT assets as they progress through the asset lifecycle: from acquisition to installation and configuration, usage, updating and reassignment – through to decommissioning and disposal.

Without a single solution in place to manage these (and other) processes, things can either go awry or get left out altogether, thereby exposing the enterprise to financial loss (of assets that cannot be located); or security risks (if software upgrades or security updates have been missed, or unauthorized software has been installed).

The implementation of an IT Asset Management program not only gives enterprises a clear view of the location, inventory details and performance of assets, but also helps them to record relevant financial information and keep on top of regulations surrounding licensing and contracts management, security and so on. With accurate data gleaned from a well-functioning solution, managers can see evidence of how the use of this technology contributes to the overall activities of the enterprise and how it impacts its bottom line.

Headline benefits of an ITAM program



A solution that not only helps an IT department track and record the status of all of its physical IT assets but will also eliminate waste is a must for SMEs, where time is at a premium and staff have limited opportunity to manually check what is happening with, for example, a computer in the Sales department or where the paperwork is for a particular server lease that is thought to be due for renewal sometime soon.

Added to this, the presence of an extensive Software Asset Management (SAM) component helps enterprises manage the simultaneous headaches of dealing with the differing compliance requirements that various vendors have for their software products – as well as storing and maintaining the financial and usage records of their licenses.

The fact that IT Asset Management solutions offer organizations opportunities to operate in a leaner, more cost-effective manner is a bonus. As part of a well-planned and implemented ITAM strategy, enterprises can configure the software to work proactively for them – alerting them to operational or security concerns, contract renewals, and so on.

ITAM software not only informs IT managers of issues such as these, but can also determine areas for cost reduction; energy wastage being a prime candidate and an easy save for businesses once they are alerted to the patterns of their own usage. For instance, if organizations were aware that leaving just one PC left powered on continuously consumes more than 700kWh per year³ (more than the average fridge), then the financial impact of taking action to regulate that could add up considerably. So, through accurate tracking of typical energy use and the subsequent application of an enterprise-wide power management policy to power PCs on or off out of working hours, SMEs are able to not only reach their own energy goals as part of a “green” enterprise strategy, but simultaneously achieve cost efficiencies – in this, and other areas such as print costs and so on.

In summary, increased visibility over a company’s IT assets allows it to lower operating costs while minimizing security and financial risks to help realize greater savings in terms of time and money. Finding a solution that works proactively for an IT team in this way can only be positive for any enterprise – and this white paper aims to set out the business case in more detail for why organizations should employ such an initiative.

³Source: CRS

What will decision makers need to know in order to consider an ITAM solution?

There are several headline issues that SMEs need to consider before choosing to implement an ITAM solution for the first time. Let's take a look at some of them here:

Balancing spend against ROI

An IT department that tracks its assets with manual counts and enters the data on spreadsheets or internal databases is only as good as the people completing those tasks. Yes, a company may feel that these are issues that are all taken care of and the data is complete – so why should valuable budget be spent on a solution that merely duplicates what is already working successfully? But when a certain member of staff leaves, or the members of a team change, it doesn't take long for the frequency of processes to be modified, the accuracy of recording the information to slip or even be overlooked altogether – resulting in huge, unrecoverable gaps in the enterprise's IT asset data records.

In this respect, implementing a single, unified ITAM solution that can provide a central view of IT assets and work proactively for an organization (regardless of who is in the IT team), is an immediate win.

Alongside this, is the issue of return on investment (ROI). IT managers want to be convinced that the financial outlay to implement an ITAM solution will deliver real cost-saving benefits to the enterprise. In the main, these savings will come from the following areas:

- **Better management of unused software licenses – allowing redeployment instead of buying additional ones;**
- **Managing automatic renewal costs rather than unwanted renewals happening automatically;**
- **Tracking of lease and maintenance agreement details, such as expiry/termination dates and costs;**
- **Redeployment of under-used hardware and software (revealed by usage reports);**
- **Avoidance of software non-compliance fines (and any subsequent true ups);**
- **Minimized requirements for physical on-site support;**
- **Informed migration decisions (from the benefit of inventory and history data) to ensure a smooth process with minimal impact on staff time;**
- **Increased user productivity (with controlled access to selected applications);**
- **Fully supported and streamlined asset lifecycle management program;**
- **Reduced energy costs;**
- **Reduced print costs;**
- **Increased security (and the avoidance of associated downtime).**

We already know that the average enterprise achieves a larger ROI in the first year of its ITAM program, but if such an initiative allows SMEs to make year-on-year incremental monetary gains (Gartner suggests a figure of 5%) in areas that had hitherto been left largely to chance, this is surely a significant return.

The aims of the implementation

It is important to define at the outset what the aims of the implementation are. Is it purely to save money? Keep the enterprise license-compliant? Help it adhere to procedures for asset disposal? Help with forward planning? Or all of these things? ITAM is an all-encompassing topic, but if goals are identified and set out carefully first, it is easier to assess how an ITAM solution can help them to be achieved in a planned and measured way, rather than risk a directionless, failed implementation.

Length of time taken to install and implement

Solutions that are simple to install and configure are always high on an IT team's wish list. But with the obvious complexities of IT Asset Management, is there such a solution? Nobody wants to take time out to read instructions or manuals – and vendors have recognized this by creating lean, logical solutions that are quickly installed with minimum impact, meaning SMEs can get going with the project sooner rather than later. Plus, automated processes in the initial stages ensure data is consistently collected across all devices, giving IT teams a head start.

Staff training needs

Easy-to-use solutions that do not require significant training time for IT staff are always going to score highly with decision makers. Usability is key, and it goes without saying that an intuitive solution will make the transition to an ITAM implementation so much easier for staff – including those in other departments such as Finance and/or Purchasing, who may also be required to access documentation on the system – and keep the impact on the enterprise to a minimum.

How will the organization measure its effectiveness?

Without any ITAM solution installed, an enterprise may be able to estimate what assets it has, but will not be able to produce exact data to show what they are, how frequently they are being used, their location, who is using them, how efficiently they are running or their total cost of ownership.

IT Asset Management provides the direct link between data and enterprise expenditure that can improve overall operational efficiency, but also delivers evidence to allow practical decisions on forward planning to be made on hardware or software renewals, for example.

Aside from the obvious comparing and contrasting of areas before and after implementation (such as staff time, unnecessary hardware/software expenditure over the last year, license compliance fines and so on), an ITAM solution will highlight costs that perhaps had previously gone unnoticed or unmanaged (like unexpected/unwanted end-of-lease renewal costs, unregulated print expenditure, unregulated energy use, etc). Taking these (and other) areas into account, it is not difficult to see the potential enterprise-wide financial benefits a flexible ITAM program can deliver.

How will enterprises gain from their ITAM investment?

An ITAM solution enables IT Managers to:

- **Introduce a process for the management of assets and set out a strategy for implementation – e.g. initiating the standardization of naming conventions will ensure greater data accuracy across departments;**
- **Account for each IT asset by user, location, configuration and so on – then determine the status of each;**
- **Easily manage the lifecycle of enterprise assets – keep track of when they were added to an inventory, their updates, fixes, redeployments and their end of life (EOL) dates;**
- **Keep on top of software compliance and minimize the risk of fines and true ups – maintain all associated contract information recorded centrally and set up alerts when renewals are due;**
- **Automate and streamline software deployments (with minimal impact on user time), then restrict and manage subsequent software use to enforce compliance;**
- **Enhance system security – mitigate vulnerabilities by ensuring no devices are missed from system updates; and scan the network to be alerted to non-standard system configurations, unauthorized software installs, etc;**
- **Deliver endpoint security and protect company data with authorization options for removable and portable storage devices (and including USB/virtual devices);**
- **Energy cost reduction – monitor energy use and deploy a power management policy for optimized utility running costs and adherence to sustainable enterprise commitments.**

The fundamentals of ITAM for an SME

The primary task of an intuitive IT Asset Management solution is to create a central repository of enterprise asset data. At the top level, this menu will list all of the individual items of hardware across the company and will include servers, computers, associated peripherals and any SMNP devices (such as printers and access points).

Following this, it will compile an inventory about each item of hardware. This data-gathering exercise forms the basis of accurate reporting and provides the foundation from which to streamline and improve operational efficiency. The hardware inventory will include all of the factual information about a device, such as the:

- **Name of asset**
- **Make and model**
- **Serial number**
- **Location**
- **Allocated user**
- **Details of components (e.g. memory, CPU, available disk space, BIOS information etc)**
- **History of any changes made to these components.**

We will call this “static” data. The premise is that the solution will later draw on its wealth of static data to be able to perform “active” processes (i.e. automated, proactive or interactive tasks).

The next level encompasses Software Asset Management, where the solution will gather a software inventory of each device. This round of “static” data will record details of:

- **The installed operating system**
- **What programs are installed (e.g. MS Office 2015)**
- **What applications are installed (e.g. MS Word)**
- **The store apps that have been downloaded and installed.**

At this stage, PDF copies of software license agreements, purchase orders or documentation associated with leases and maintenance can also be included on the system for efficient record-keeping. In addition, organizations should note that some SME-specific ITAM solutions will record what files (e.g. .doc, .xls etc) have been saved locally on each device to ensure that any key documents are not being missed from set enterprise backup routines.

This data repository is now ready to be employed for “active” processes. A good ITAM solution will work proactively and provide the means to configure automated tasks (such as bulk software distribution), create detailed usage reports, implement and manage a power usage policy – and use proactive alerting features to be notified of dozens of warning scenarios ranging from low disk space remaining on a server, to security alerts, to unauthorized software being installed, and so on.

Identifying and managing assets

A high-quality ITAM solution will monitor and identify any new devices that appear on the enterprise network and trigger an alert so that system administrators can choose the necessary path of how to manage that device in the future, e.g. by automatically deploying an Agent out to those devices that require monitoring and interaction.

The same is true for SNMP devices. These will automatically be detected and the real-time data gathered about their performance will allow technicians to monitor and configure any desired active processes for them going forward.



Gaining a full picture of IT assets and how they work

As we have already seen, hardware and software inventories are the foundation of any IT Asset Management initiative. Solutions that allow SMEs to not only see individual device data but to compare the data of devices across selected departments or dynamic groups are extremely beneficial. This way, system administrators can analyse components or software across departments to ensure consistency throughout – or gain insight from the real-time data provided to be able to plan and schedule upgrades or redeployments across a specific group. Furthermore, those solutions that provide standalone inventory apps to enable technicians to access data on the move are especially valuable for enterprises operating across multiple locations.

Of course, it's not exclusively about managing assets; people are a key part of the equation too. Therefore, the ability to manage and track asset users across an enterprise is essential to its smooth operation. This information can be made up of the "static" data of user name, location, telephone number, device asset tag details and so on – and be augmented by the inclusion of "active" supporting processes such as real-time chat and messaging to aid problem solving; system administration tools; and, to bridge the gap, a range of dedicated user account management tools.

Monitoring the use of enterprise assets via real-time metrics reveals where improvements and efficiencies can be made. So, by gathering statistics on items such as application/internet use, the number of programs installed, the number of apps used, the number of pages printed, or the number of hardware changes made over a given time, each SME will be able to see the details of how its systems operate.

Vendors know that it's all about the data – and the need to access it promptly. So, choosing a solution that delivers an intuitive means of querying the central database to extract information, plus the tools to quickly interpret and organise that data into meaningful formats for management reporting, must surely be high in the list of requirements for a prospective ITAM solution for any SME.

Reducing risk factors and ensuring compliance

Without an ITAM program in place, enterprises are exposed to a range of risks. Aside from the financial and operational issues we have already mentioned, areas such as unregulated internet use by staff may see network bandwidth being compromised by unauthorized downloads; malware being introduced to the system; or productivity time may be lost when a network problem crops up out of the blue.

Instead of reacting to problems once they happen, small organizations with fewer IT staff can benefit greatly from a proactive solution that can be configured to deliver customized alerts when changes, errors or warnings occur – either system-wide or on individual devices. Alerting in this way allows technicians the time to take preventative action and avoid impacting productivity, rather than be dealing with a "surprise" technical crisis; thereby saving the organization both time and money.

Software Asset Management is a vast area and there are many solutions on the market that are dedicated solely to it. Yet an ITAM solution that includes a comprehensive software licensing/management component is worth its weight in gold. For SMEs, making sure their software portfolio is in order not only provides peace of mind should a dreaded vendor audit take place, but keeping a tight rein on licensing can also aid cost saving in areas such as:

- **helping to ensure enterprises take full advantage of the product use rights set out their contracts (and avoid wastage by paying for features that are unused);**
- **reducing overspend on licenses that are not needed (plus subsequent savings made from their redeployment);**
- **eliminating maintenance payments on "shelfware";**
- **reducing security risks from malware entering systems through unlicensed software installs, thereby avoiding costly downtime.**

If documentation recording suppliers, purchase and invoice details, department or cost center allocation, maintenance contract renewal dates and other supporting information can be stored alongside license details within the ITAM solution, then the ongoing management of licensing is made so much simpler.



Achieving results from an ITAM solution – a summary

In order to deliver cost, time and security benefits for their organization, SMEs can look to achieve the following benefits by considering a solution with some of the following characteristics:

Cost cutting	Time saving	Improving security
Single, unified solution to record everything centrally	Fast installation time	Clear summaries of visibility over asset portfolio equals greater security awareness
Comprehensive data repository to inform decision making	Intuitive user interface	Customizable proactive system/PC alerts
Real-time statistics on asset performance	Minimal staff training required	Internet metering to prevent unauthorized downloads
HW and SW costs tracked alongside license details	Real-time statistics dashboards	Endpoint security options to protect systems and data
Application monitoring to assign SW to correct users	Proactive alerting to protect against system downtime	Delivery and enforcement of Acceptable Use policies
Easy software license redeployment	Device auto-discovery	Control of CD/DVD drives (physical and virtual)
Enterprise-wide energy monitoring	Bulk software auto-distribution	Enterprise data is maintained within its own systems
Deployment of power management policies	Accessible custom enterprise reporting	
Monitoring and reduction of printing costs	Mobile apps for technicians	
Internet metering and controls to boost productivity	Quick deployment of Agents	
User management components	SNMP device auto-discovery	
SW license management to maintain compliance and avoid fines	Contracts management	
Increased asset visibility to deliver a swift ROI	Cross-platform inventory capture	
	Barcode inventory scanning	
	History data informs problem resolution	
	User management components	
	Low impact on enterprise bandwidth	
	Remote control for quick problem resolution	

It is also important for SMEs to consider the implementation of an ITAM solution in the wider context of providing 360° system administration support (for instance, with the possibilities of integration with complementary help desk or remote control solutions), to ensure that whether issues are raised proactively (by alerts) or reactively (by users themselves), the tools are in place to address them promptly and effectively.

Conclusion

In the past, enterprises may have implemented ITAM solutions as a response to a crisis, for instance: an impending audit; a management directive that costs must be cut; a realisation that the company's software is not compliant, or recognition that the IT department just does not know what assets it has or where they are, and now management is asking for a report...

However, now that we know how a single, flexible and scalable solution can be configured and used to optimize an organization's asset portfolio, we can see that the implementation of an ITAM solution is a must for SMEs. Employing a proactive, intuitive solution that can deliver the detailed data required to enable forward planning, improve procurement processes, and the opportunity to manage risks rather than simply react when a disaster happens, allows SMEs to be freed from the burdens of their IT assets – and puts them in a position to take control and use them to their advantage.

About NetSupport DNA

NetSupport DNA is an IT Asset Management solution perfectly pitched for SMEs. It delivers the full suite of features referenced in this white paper to help support the management and maintenance of IT assets across an enterprise – saving time, money and resources, while increasing productivity and enhancing security. NetSupport DNA integrates with complementary remote control and service desk solutions to offer one seamless system administration solution.



Find out more at www.netsupportdna.com

UK
NetSupport Ltd
NetSupport House
Towngate East, Market Deeping
Peterborough
PE6 8NE
United Kingdom

t: +44(0)1778 382270
f: +44(0)1778 382290

www.netsupportsoftware.com
e: sales@netsupportsoftware.com

USA
NetSupport Inc
6815 Shiloh Road East,
Suite A-7,
Alpharetta, GA.
30005
USA

t: 770-205-4456 or
(toll free): 1-888-665-0808

www.netsupport-inc.com
e: sales@netsupport-inc.com

Canada
NetSupport Canada
445 Applecreek Blvd,
Suite 119,
Markham,
Ontario,
L3R 9X7

t: 905-415-4708 or
(toll free): 1-888-901-7474

www.netsupport-canada.com
e: sales@netsupport-canada.com