What exactly is IT asset management?

IT asset management (ITAM) is another term for IT inventory management. It denotes the management and detailed documentation of a company's hardware and software inventory and their relationships and interdependencies. In addition to the inventory and management of IT assets, ITAM also provides valuable contributions to purchase and investment decisions, the definition and ongoing development of the basic IT strategy, the ongoing optimization of the use of IT assets and has a significant impact on almost all business areas. Ideally, the entire lifecycle of an asset can be mapped with a seamless IT asset management solution so that you can make tactical and strategic outlook decisions.

ITAM IN THE REAL WORLD

At Deskcenter we regularly speak to customers about what ITAM means to them and if we've only learned one thing is that the required outcomes are always a little vague and often narrow. This is no reflection on our customers, more that they realise there is so much information an effective ITAM solution can deliver which enables them to be more certain about the decisions they need to make. Take for example customer "X" – a company with three separate trading divisions, all manging their IT independently. When we first spoke to them, their requirement was to "understand" their software assets and how we could enable the centralisation of the software procurement in order to make savings and simplify processes – procurement, support, renewals etc. A two-week proof of concept followed where we ran a discovery and inventory process on 2 sites and 1000 machines – the starting point for any ITAM system. Specifically, we were asked to analyse software installation and utilisation by division, department and product type to answer the questions of "what have we got, where is it and where can we make savings?"

MEETING THE NEED

The results of the inventory provided a number of guidance points where the customer could investigate savings possibilities e.g PDF readers from 27 different vendors. Not only could consolidation bring cost savings on purchase and renewal, but the costs of supporting users with fewer types of application could be significant.

Some software had not been used – was there an opportunity to remove and stop using (no renewal) or re-harvest the license (rather than purchase additional licenses)? Some software was incorrectly licensed e.g free for private use, chargeable in commercial settings. Was the customer licensed correctly for the installation they had?

DELIVERING INCREASED VALUE –

PART OF THE SERVICE

Any ITAM process starts with comprehensive and accurate discovery and inventory. We collected 2500+ data points (on each end point) relating to hardware and infrastructure along with details of over 1200 unique applications installed which enabled more analysis to be carried out both simply and quickly. And, there was no additional work required by the customer or, more importantly, any impact on users being able to do their job. 2191 unique applications in over 270 categories were discovered.

What did we discover?

222 machines (22%) had a BIOS date older than January 2015. This gives an initial view on the age of machines from where further investigation of the information can help inform upgrade/redeploy/ replace decisions. 142 machines were using some form of removable storage – is this a GDPR / security issue? 219 machines are still running Windows 7 – a no longer supported operating system. Could this be a security threat? Will these devices be able to host and run new software (given that developers are now building for Windows 10)? 424 (42%) of machines had local admin accounts enabled. Not only could this be a security risk but also enables "shadow IT" and the installation of software at a local level.

Could there be a security risk with these unknown installations, could there be a license and compliance implication? Could this increase the workload on user support departments when incompatible software runs alongside corporately sanctioned apps? 9% of the software products identified were no longer supported by the vendor and in total, there were 9565 installations of those unsupported products. 42 – the average number of incorrectly patched versions of software per machine on the sample data or put it another way 42,000 risks. 217 machines in one division (approx. 42%) had games installed on their desktop machines whilst the other organisation had blocked all games. Is there a security risk here? A productivity issue? 200 machines appeared to have end-point security applications disabled.

Decisions, decisions!

Results Results!

From a simple request for accurate information, have we just opened up a pandoras box of problems, issues, risks costs and work? Whilst it is true that there are possibly some uncomfortable truths from what was discovered, there is a huge opportunity to streamline costs, create efficiencies and increase productivity. From the data collected, we can help the customer identify which software is really used, ensure it is licensed correctly, its usage optimised and the risk profile is defined and understood. We can also enable the customer to forward plan, proactively assessing the impact of new systems being considered – hardware capabilities, software compatibilities, support requirements etc. Most importantly, this approach to ITAM and the data that underlies it can be continuously updated and managed. Effective ITAM is an ongoing business process as infrastructure changes constantly.

New hardware and software, new business processes, upgrades to existing systems and apps, starters, movers and leavers all contribute to the fact that it is impossible to Rule IT from a static data point and a point in time (usually historical) view of the environment.

Back to the real world

Industry commentators suggest that without effective ITAM processes in place, companies are overspending by on average 25% on IT and associated services. For this customer, our initial results show a potential saving of £200,000 in software costs in year one alone. Removing unwanted and unsupported software can save them £70,000 in user support costs annually (service desk efficiencies). Automation of repetitive tasks has released 72 working hours per week within the IT support team (equivalent to 1.8 people), whilst at the same time contributing to proving the customers compliance both for software licensing rules and also legal compliance e.g GDPR.