# Gaining Visibility and Cost Efficiencies via a Strategic IT Asset Management Solution

CIOs are endlessly scrambling to manage inefficient manual and electronic processing of IT, telecom and cloud services. Organizations of all sizes, and across all industries, have identified the need to manage these assets with an efficient and reliable solution. Typically, a mid-sized enterprise struggles to achieve this goal, and is instead stuck with a mixed bag of tools that are ineffective in tracking the many resources that require attention. Many organizations have difficulty with:

- Network control

- Network integration

- A lack of connection between service providers and the physical infrastructure

- No consolidated Configuration Management Database (CMDB)

- No automation

- No integration of workflows
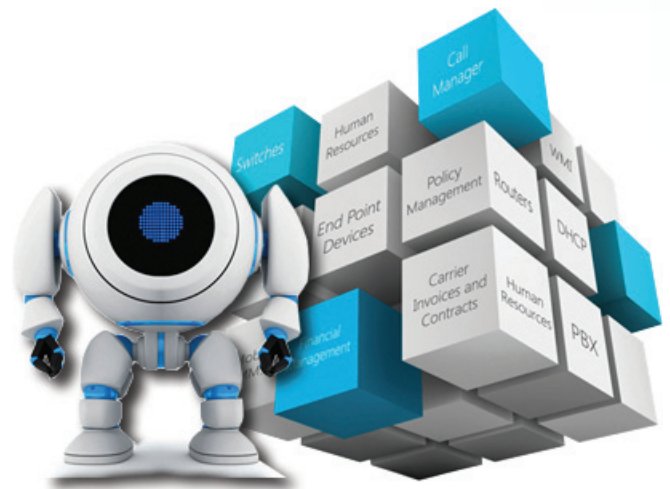
For a large-sized enterprise, the issue becomes even more significant. Managing 25,000+ telecom invoices is no easy task. If a sizable organization such as this is still processing invoices manually, then problems mount. Issues such as late payment penalties, billing errors, and inaccurate inventory are difficult to resolve.

Therefore, it is crucial that companies lacking these elements in their IT Asset Management (ITAM) implement a comprehensive solution – specifically one that unifies telecom and wireless expense management with cloud and IT asset management. There is increasing demand for CIOs and other executives to identify the most effective way to add, track and monitor the connection of all IT, telecom and cloud assets. It is imperative that these components are organized and catalogued based on their value and how they are implemented to help a company achieve its goals.

Gartner defines ITAM as a solution that collects inventory, as well as financial and contractual data to manage every IT asset throughout its lifecycle. This process depends on tools that automate processes that have long been manual endeavors. ITAM captures and integrates auto discovery/inventory, and the financial and contractual data, in a central repository for all IT assets. This allows for the effective management of vendors, software and hardware from requisition to retirement, monitoring the asset's performance for the duration of its lifecycle.

ITAM and Expense Management

Telecom Expense Management (TEM) providers face a myriad of technological challenges in an effort to achieve true ITAM functionality on their platforms. The biggest challenge is the absence of connection to the physical network. Most inventory management tools rely on information being fed to them from other systems that often contain inaccurate or outdated information, depending on the carrier. Vendors, managed by TEM providers, are shifting their business models and delivering their most robust data into their service portals. The drive to automate will only increase as we move forward. To this point many providers have addressed this issue by adding more employees to process the data, but this approach is beginning to show its limitations resulting in more customer dissatisfaction.

Another major challenge is the inability of the TEM industry to add value to a client's environment by utilizing workflow automation technology to implement business process improvements through automation. How can one take true best practices and turn them into integrated workflows? With a comprehensive Expense Management - ITAM solution, organizations are able to ensure all vendor and asset information is discovered, updated and managed. It also creates an environment which allows for accurate contract compliance and improved information quality, avoiding the high-error margin that results from manual data collection. Additionally, the high costs related to in-depth analysis are reduced, along with user service provision and delivery times. Millions of records from multiple sources are systematically transformed and processed in clear reports that eliminate the need for sample analysis. It is an absolute necessity for TEM providers to connect services, devices and people through automation. A comprehensive ITAM solution delivers just that.

The Benefits of a Comprehensive ITAM Solution

A complete ITAM solution allows for real integration between services, devices and people through the automation of business processes. Manual processing has proven to be inefficient and extremely detrimental to the bottom line. When a comprehensive ITAM solution is implemented, it leads to improved compliance, the elimination of stranded assets and over-subscribed services. An ITAM solution gives deeper visibility, oversight of IT inventory and greater control over asset lifecycle management.

Many companies still opt to perform ITAM by antiquated means, using outdated methods such as manual data entry into spreadsheets and other techniques that are susceptible to human error and oversight. In fact, a 2016 CIO Trend Report from InfoTech Research Group states that "only 53.8 percent of business leaders are satisfied with IT core services while less than 40 percent are satisfied with the ability of IT to deliver solutions that satisfy business capability needs."

ITAM Delivers

ITAM allows for the delivery of cost-effective and timely services. The achievement of an environment which enables financial management and resources involved in providing IT assets and services should become a core construct of any organization. It creates an invaluable tool that provides standardization of the process, considerations for budget and detailed ROI analysis. An ITAM database tracks all relevant asset management, including:

- User details
- Maintenance information
- Asset type
- Asset locations
- Asset history
- Costs
- Retirement and replacement

ITAM is an incredibly valuable tool that saves enterprises a significant amount of time and controls wasteful overspend. According to Sandi Conrad, World Class Operations practice lead with InfoTech Research Group, effective ITAM provides the foundation to manage vendors and contracts, support security efforts and cut costs, "sometimes by as much as 25 to 50 percent." Forrester Research Senior Analyst Stephen Mann notes that many organizations lack insight into the assets used to achieve their goals, or do not recognize the need to focus on IT cost to improve efficiency. Awareness of the key role played by ITAM is increasing due to factors such as expenses, Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) and virtualization.

The Case for Automated ITAM

As previously stated, many enterprises still make the mistake of managing IT assets through manual processes that waste resources, utilize the time of critical personnel and are likely to result in inaccurate data rife with inconsistencies. IT systems which are regularly updated with manual business processes require additional employees whereas an automated ITIL based ITAM Management system improves efficiency and allows for the redirection of resources to other areas of the corporation.

CIOs are now discovering ITAM solutions that offer network monitoring tools that are far-reaching and provide a complete and cost-effective solution. This solution also permits their staff to exhaustively index inventory within the network infrastructure and compile those records into a single CMDB. An extended CMDB allows for the lifecycle management of IT products, as well as overall expense administration of those assets. Lifecycle management from requisition to deployment to retirement and disposal should always be a focus for an enterprise. This way, no aspect of an asset is left unreported.

The Need for a CMDB

The IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL), which represents a set of best practices for IT service management, defines four primary tasks for a CMDB (http://searchdatacenter.techtarget.com/definition/configuration-management-database):

- Identification of configuration items to be included in the CMDB
- Control of data to ensure that it can only be changed by authorized individuals
- Status maintenance, which involves ensuring that current status of any configuration item (CI) is consistently recorded and updated
- Verification, through audits and reviews of the data to make sure that it is accurate

When implementing an impactful ITAM strategy, the key is to identify an effective, comprehensive process that reduces expenses, increases operational efficiencies and minimizes risk. Some companies opt to acquire more than one tool to achieve these goals, which can result in more confusion and inefficiencies. Organizations should seek a streamlined ITAM solution that has the capability to inventory a broad range of IT and telecom assets within the network infrastructure and organize the data into a single, extended CMDB.

This approach gives an enterprise the ability to associate the network's physical layer (Ethernet, DSL, ISDN) with networking devices (routers, switches, PBXs) to gain visibility and control of the inventory database and associated expenses. All relevant information related to ITAM is tied to corporate financial reporting systems providing the executive with the ability to look into a single portal for a comprehensive view of all deployed assets. An automated ITAM solution eliminates manual time-consuming processes and reduces human error. All data is stored in a single portal that provides access to financial detail and inventory in an easily accessible and organized format.

ITAM and Compliance

Vendors audit organizations for license compliance and enterprises need to be prepared for the scrutiny that comes with this. A useful and complete ITAM solution will create IT inventory reports that are comprehensive when a compliance audit occurs. ITAM creates an environment that ensures compliance – not only for software licensing agreements but also for any government regulations (such as HIPAA and the Sarbanes-Oxley Act) that apply. When it comes to government compliance, there are at least 34 federal laws, regulations and mandatory standards that pertain to securing IT systems. (http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-08-1075R) ITAM is integral to protecting an enterprise from finding itself in violation of any of these laws.

Software is a unique asset that incorporates some complex licensing rules that can lead to compliance issues. An effective ITAM solution will compile all of the necessary information to maintain regulatory compliance and guarantee that there are no unlicensed users. It will also create detailed reports on demand that make it much easier to actually demonstrate compliance throughout every department within an enterprise. Establishing comprehensive inventory is imperative to satisfying audits or other inquiries. ITAM is vital because it removes the human element of tracking all the necessary details to demonstrate compliance, and identify possible risks before a significant threat occurs.

Implementation of an ITAM Solution

During the implementation of an ITAM solution, it is important to build an extended CMDB which collects data on inventory, billing and provisioned services. This assures that the correct data is being analyzed, established policies are being applied, and IT services are aligned with business objectives. This allows an enterprise to:

- Capture data from diverse systems, (i.e., billing, cloud services, physical network inventory, end users) providing essential information to build the extended CMDB and service operation
- Configure devices: From the assignment of a simple extension/password creation on a PBX to cloud services configuration, as well as any other configuration driven from business policies the customer has outlined and required the ITAM tool to manage
- Integrate diverse platforms, applications, devices and web service portals – and not only those that support service-oriented architecture (SOA) standards but others that do not support those standards
- Execute automated and scheduled discovery processes that ensure any move, add or changes to enterprise assets are reflected in the extended CMDB

These features ensure that real IT and Telecom Expense Management is achieved. It guarantees that the information collected is correct and up to date while also ensuring contract compliance, improving information quality and avoiding the high error margin associated with manual data collection processes and reducing the high costs related to the detailed gathering and analysis of data. The most effective ITAM solution will allow an organization to transform and process millions of records coming from multiple sources in concise reports that do not require significant analysis. It will also guarantee that monitored device configuration is set according to corporate policies, and ensure near 100% accurate extended CMDB (inventories), reduce user service provision/delivery times and improve help desk response times.

Identifying the Most Effective ITAM Solution

Organizations must choose an ITAM partner that addresses all of its needs – from lifecycle management to maintaining an extended CMDB and development of integrated workflows that support corporate business objectives. Today, enterprises can choose a single ITAM platform that provides a comprehensive view into all IT and telecom assets deployed in an enterprise.

Avotus Corporation, the leading provider of Intelligent Communications Management (ICM) solutions, has launched a groundbreaking ITAM Robot solution that builds and monitors telecom and IT asset inventory. Real-time inventory is discovered, identified and matched against invoices and contracts then optimized in the Avotus Cloud Services platform. Online Analytical Processes (OLAP) are then used to create an accurate CMDB for all IT and telecom assets. This provides full visibility of network assets that is integrated to a comprehensive expense management platform.

The Avotus ITAM Robot is installed on a customer's network and is tasked to execute required transactions created and performed through workflows. Automated actions are created through these workflows, which exist on the client devices or service platforms, applications and web service portals. The Robot verifies pending transactions from Avotus Cloud Services and interprets and executes commands to achieve transaction requirements, capturing the transaction buffer and transmitting it back to the cloud.

The ITAM Robot elevates the Avotus traditional Expense Management (EM) platform to the industry leader in asset management. Once the solution has been deployed, it monitors and updates asset inventory in real time. Savings are realized through improved business processes related to invoices, contracts, order-provisioning and cost allocations for all services connected to the physical network. Key benefits include:

- Visibility into IT networks for informed management
- Reduction of IT & telecom expense, optimization of investments
- Associate physical network devices (routers, switches, PBX's) with geo locations
- Create flexible provisioning/approval workflows quickly
- Audit capacity utilization of data network against billing
- Integration of PBX's & routers (inventory & bandwidth reporting)
- Accurate real-time inventory of both vendor and enterprise assets
- Single system of record for IT and telecom assets (Configuration Management Database)
- Streamline current IT and telecom business processes through our workflow engine
- Optimize investments by eliminating dead assets and ensuring SLAs are met
- Eliminate manual processes and automate functions
- Realize near 100% of your VoIP investment with the patented intelligent routing solution
- Track and manage billing for cloud services
- Realize indirect savings, labor efficiencies and improved network asset management

Conclusion

The combination of EM and ITAM are an integral element of any successful organization. Gone are the days when the manual tracking of IT, cloud and telecom assets was sufficient. As trends such as The Cloud and the Internet of Things explode, the number devices and management of those devices will continue to proliferate. Now, more than ever, it is necessary to have an automated system in place that tracks and inventories all assets into a single CMDB. The benefits of an effective ITAM solution are numerous and quantifiable. Significant gains are made in decision-making, the distribution, and tracking of assets, supporting compliance and improving organizational productivity. Through the management of day-to-day procedures, maximum efficiency is realized, and optimal ROI is achieved. A comprehensive ITAM solution greatly simplifies operations and improves efficiency throughout an enterprise.

About Avotus

With more than 30 years of industry experience, Avotus is the award-winning provider of **Intelligent Communications Management (ICM)** solutions. ICM solutions enable users to optimize, manage and protect against misuse and abuse of their critical investments in telecom and technology. Avotus' ICM lifecycle can be deployed in a manner that allows each engagement to self-fund the next, while putting cash on the client's bottom line at each step. ICM solutions include: Enhanced Usage Reporting (EUR) for Unified Communications, Expense Management with ITAM Robot (EM), Intelli-Sourcing and Wireless Management. Avotus and its partners serve more than 1,000 clients in North America and around the world, many of which are industry-leading Fortune 5000 companies. ICM is Avotus' Intelligent approach to managing wireline and wireless assets, and a safeguard for your next-generation communications solutions.