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***"Plans are only good
intentions unless they
immediately
degenerate into
hard work."***

-Peter Drucker

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How to Make your Vista Migration a Success

Use IT Asset Management (ITAM) Principles and Tools to Guide You There

Note: This article is an adaptation of a longer piece posted in IAITAM's March edition of ITAK Magazine. The full article is available at <http://www.aid.com/enews/index.htm>.

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While Microsoft has had difficulties over the last year in penetrating the enterprise market with its Vista desktop operating system, there is an expectation that this will start to change in the next 12 months. Now that Vista's first Service Pack of hotfixes has been released and Microsoft has started to take steps to curb demand for Windows XP, companies are starting to take notice. One should not be misled, however, by any mixed signals that Microsoft might be sending.

While Steve Ballmer recently indicated that Microsoft will be sensitive to the installed base of Windows XP, the company is also firm about the "sunset" dates that OEM systems builders have to sell PCs with Windows XP. Many companies may still opt to exercise volume licensing downgrade rights to use Windows XP, but it is now a foregone conclusion that Vista is here to stay. This is supported not only by its increased acceptance in the market, but also by the fact that many of the initial shortcomings in the operating system (e.g. incompatible third-party software) have been overcome.

So what preparations should one make for a roll-out and deployment of any major piece of software like Vista? The concerns that an IT Manager has for Vista revolve around **system performance, usability, reliability, and compatibility** issues. These four parameters are summarized as follows.

1. Do the machines in the environment meet the recommended system and resource requirements ("**Performance**")?
2. What is the impact on the end-user experience and product learning curve ("**Usability**")?
3. How mature is the product (i.e. bugs) ("**Reliability**")?
4. What software (sw) application and hardware (hw) incompatibilities exist (e.g. lack of third party device drivers)



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("Compatibility")?

IT Asset Management plays an essential role and provides visibility into two of these four. System performance and hardware/software compatibility can be assessed using IT Asset Management tools and practices.

System Performance

To assess what existing hardware can support Vista and how that will factor into roll-out plans, one needs to inventory their environment and ensure that certain specifications are met. For Vista, that means meeting Microsoft's recommendation of 1GB of RAM, a 1 GHz processor, a 40+ GB hard drive, and 15+ GB free hard drive space. To run certain editions (Premium, Business, or Ultimate), one also needs a higher end video adapter.

Most inventory and auto-discovery tools are capable of supplying the basic information, and some can identify the video adapters as well. This inventory information is important, not only for ensuring a smooth roll-out (so that legacy machines that don't meet Vista requirements can be tagged for eventual disposal), but also for assessing project timelines and total costs. The inventory tools provide hardware data to determine what computers to replace and to assess which, if any, existing machines are salvageable with only minor upgrades; some tools even have built-in calculators for determining hardware upgrade costs.

Software Compatibility

Determining one's Vista readiness extends beyond hardware to software. Software application compatibility must also be considered. Microsoft claims to be making progress with software compatibility, according to Shanen Boettcher, General Manager of product management in Microsoft's Windows client group, speaking in late 2007. Boettcher asserted that 90 top enterprise applications are successfully running on Vista, and 2,100 applications are Vista certified (i.e. "compatible").

An IT Asset Management inventory tool provides the data needed to determine how standardized the software environment is. In the case of Vista, highly prevalent software applications can then be assessed on a case by case basis for their compatibility, which will reduce the risks of the user experience being unnecessarily impacted. The organization may then opt to uninstall lesser used applications, drawing from usage information being supplied by an ITAM tool, and/or standardize on versions that are known to be Vista compatible.

Some of the other areas where IT Asset Management practices can play a role include: providing the information to create a roadmap for application upgrades and helping monitor the upgrades while they are in process. In addition, an organization with an effective ITAM program will benefit from having a change management policy to govern software deployment, as well as standard processes to deploy the actual software and replace or upgrade hardware.

The readiness tools and processes in an effective ITAM program apply to more than just major software roll-outs. Businesses with a well designed and implemented ITAM program have information readily available for other software and hardware deployment decisions, whether during planning or actual software deployment stages.

In summary, a full review of the IT Asset Management environment is particularly important with Vista, which is the first major desktop operating system release for Microsoft in almost five years. Businesses that have an effective program of IT Asset Management (ITAM) practices

have several important advantages in determining Vista readiness and for the actual planning for roll-out. ITAM facilitates the gathering of hardware and software information needed for that assessment, helps with planning and forecasting the necessary upgrades, and helps avoid unbudgeted expenses, resource constraints, and unrealized savings.

If one properly plans, and uses the above IT Asset Management practices, a major software roll-out such as Windows Vista or Office 2007 has a higher probability of being on-time, on budget, and properly executed against project objectives.

For information on how Soft-Aid can assist you with IT Asset Management projects and software deployment readiness assessments, view our Solution Briefs at <http://www.aid.com/services.htm#1>.

Tool Review: eSMART

A brief overview of Dell/ASAP's eSMART tool.

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One of the main components of a successful Software Asset Management (SAM) program is having the right tools. This importance is emphasized in the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) SAM Best Practices Guide. The Guide describes what to consider when evaluating asset inventory tools: does the tool correctly identify and categorize software and hardware; how does it maintain license entitlements (license management capabilities); and does it have any document management features? The Guide also stresses the value of software usage monitoring capabilities, among other items. These features help simplify and ensure the accuracy of "verification and audit" processes such as reconciling licenses and ensuring the accuracy of asset records.

For more information on how to evaluate and select inventory tools, view our white paper on this topic at <http://www.aid.com/media/whitepapers.htm>. Since the above functions are implemented in different ways, email us at info@aid.com for an inventory tool matrix which compares the functionality and features of a cross-section of common tools.

In this article, we discuss features of eSMART.

How it Works

eSMART is a hosted solution providing software and hardware auto-discovery, license management, and software usage monitoring. The application itself resides at the Dell/ASAP Network Operations Center (NOC). Data is collected by agents deployed to devices across a customer's organization. The agents can be easily deployed through a variety of methods such as a supplied MSI package for Active Directory deployment, login scripts, or a provided push utility. Deployment can be "silent," meaning that the end-user will not see the installation on his/her device, or you can require the user to input various data such as name, location, department, etc.

Communication of the hardware and software inventory data is encrypted

and communicated to the data center application via a secure transmission over the Internet (via port 80). For devices not directly connected to the Internet, a relay server with an Internet connection may be used. Access to an organization's data is provided over the Web via a graphical interface and only to authorized individuals such as IT and purchasing personnel. Great care has been taken to minimize the impact of data transmission on the organization's network performance: the size of the data packets is kept small, and the transmissions are spread over time.

Core Reports

eSMART's strength is in the core inventory reports that can be produced on a regular schedule or on-demand. Its software and hardware inventory reports can provide information about individual devices or summarize information across the entire organization.

The software inventory reports provided by the tool include easy to use summary reports that include the version, edition, and language, for license management purposes. This is accomplished in eSMART through the use of a database of over 70,000 titles as of this writing. The ability also exists to have proprietary software titles added for reporting purposes. Separate reports are available for software suites; these reports can also identify individual suite components. The hardware inventory reports capture over 200 data points per device.

Customizable queries are available in the tool, which also has the ability to export data in a number of file formats such as Excel and .csv. These can then be easily imported and queried in applications like Microsoft Access.

Other Features

eSMART's license management capabilities include the ability to input license ownership and purchase records. Along with direct input capability, eSMART provides predefined connectors to capture purchase information from several major resellers and can also capture Dell/ASAP purchase details through integration with E-Way, Dell/ASAP's procurement system for customers. With the license ownership information and the deployed software data in the same tool, reconciliations can be semi-automated and thus more easily and consistently performed in accordance with industry-recognized best practices. The ISO SAM process standard, for example, stipulates that reconciliations between licenses and software deployments should be performed on at least a quarterly basis.

The tool provides the capability of organizing reporting into organizational units similar to, or the same as, what might be defined in Active Directory. Another useful feature is a customizable upgrade readiness report for determining a device's capability to be upgraded to a new software release such as Microsoft Office 2007 or Windows Vista. For organizations where devices may go missing from time to time, an alert can be produced the next time the device connects to the Internet. Finally, it should be noted that eSMART has an available add-on module that provides the ability to monitor software usage, allowing organizations to redeploy underutilized software and save money by eliminating unnecessary software license purchases.

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