

WHITE PAPER

Web-based Asset Management

Extending the Reach of the Help Desk With Web-based Asset Management Will Significantly Improve Your Support Operations

Overview

Today's IT support operations are confronted with the challenge of doing more with less. This mandate is especially relevant to the help desk, where request volumes continue to increase through multiple communication methods, including phone, fax, email, and the web. Overlaying this trend is the shrinking support team, which is often plagued with reduced staff, variable skill levels, and high turnover. Regardless of business conditions, organizations must ensure that employees are in the best position to be productive – a critical driver for business success.

Investing in technologies to automate help desk operations can certainly improve workflow processes, responsiveness and accuracy, and provides a way to optimize IT resources. One specific capability – integrating a web-based asset management program with help desk call tracking – offers a significant return on investment: integrated help desk and asset management systems improve the customer's support "experience" by allowing technicians to identify and understand technical problems faster without over-involving the user or wasting time working with inaccurate data. A comprehensive automated asset management program enables organizations to identify, locate, and track networked and remote PC assets and their constant changes on an ongoing basis, and can leverage the web-based, automated discovery tools to capture this information easily. **According to industry research from Gartner, Inc., 50% of help desk time is taken up by gaining an understanding of the users' hardware and software configuration.**

There is a strong link between a help desk's effectiveness and its ability to leverage asset management information. According to Giga Information Group, integrating IT asset management with the help desk streamlines agent flows, offering benefits such as reduced incident handling and resolution time. Knowledge of a user's or customer's desktop configuration, such as applications installed, recent changes (location and/or configuration), network settings, and peripherals, provides a wealth of information to pinpoint and resolve technical issues – without, as Giga puts it, "playing 20 questions to determine what configuration is in place." But traditional methods of collecting these details – ranging from using "sneaker net" and paper-based inventory tracking to Microsoft Access, Outlook databases, and limited asset tracking software tools -- are slow, inaccurate, and inefficient. Those in need of support get frustrated when issues are not resolved quickly, and solutions take longer because of inaccurate or incomplete data.

Of course, having a clear understanding of your organization's IT assets also has significant value beyond the help desk. According to Gartner, a majority of companies are at risk of wasting money because of poor asset management programs. The technology analyst firm estimates that less than 25 percent of all enterprises worldwide have a lifecycle IT asset management program.

Research shows that the absence of an asset management program increases the risk of poor system manageability, potential violations of license compliance, complex change management, and below average service levels. According to Gartner, these risks can increase the total cost of ownership by 7 to 10 percent annually, which can equate to \$560 to \$800 per user. Additional money is wasted when companies continue to make decisions based on inaccurate or missing data. Deploying new software, implementing upgrades, and purchasing new licenses can all add up to nothing more than a waste of money when they're done without a full understanding of what's already in place, where it's located, and how it's used across the network.

This problem will continue to compound itself and impact other areas of IT as PC resources at the user level continue to change, and organizations struggle to balance user needs with corporate objectives, budget constraints, employee turnover, and other factors. Having a proactive IT asset management system in place is critical to fast and accurate customer support, making smart purchasing decisions, managing installed systems, and controlling costs. Tying this information to the help desk can further extend the value of an organization's assets across the lifecycle.

The key to an asset management program – and integrating it with help desk operations – is to have the capability to access and maintain up-to-date, accurate configuration data about all of your users both internally and remotely. This means collecting all the necessary details and updates in an automated manner on a regular, ongoing basis and "on-the-fly" when necessary.

Recent statistics from Gartner Measurement showed that 40 percent of Gartner's clients' hardware assets are not tracked using tools, and only about 10 percent of their hardware assets are reconciled against a formal database. A recent report published by Giga further outlines that while the number of organizations that perform IT asset inventory has been growing steadily, the analyst group estimates that well under 50 percent of organizations have very accurate data.

Business Challenges

Why Web-based Asset Management Makes Sense for the Organization and for the Help Desk

Maximize shrinking budgets. With tighter resources and pressures to reduce support costs, organizations are in need of ways to improve workflow efficiency – saving time and money by automating processes using existing technology and personnel. At the same time, with a better understanding of corporate-wide assets and how they're used, IT resource managers can optimize spending by making better buying decisions – or deciding not to buy at all.

Accurately track company-wide desktop and network resources. Without the time and resources to manually track assets PC by PC, help desk technicians often have limited knowledge of the environment they support. This problem is compounded as companies grow to include remote users and global locations. In a company of any size, support teams traditionally rely on user-supplied data or other methods to baseline technical problems. These methods are time-consuming, quickly outdated, and often still provide inaccurate data – impeding the opportunity for technicians to quickly resolve an issue in a timely manner. To make matters worse, any information gathered in this manner is haphazardly recorded, minimizing the opportunity for other technicians to benefit from shared data.

Easily track and manage non-networked assets. FootPrints Asset Management powered by Centennial Discovery Technology provides two convenient ways to track and tag non-networked assets, such as cell phones, PDAs, printers, and scanners. Desktop assets can be automatically audited using a floppy disk utility, or can be manually added through the administrator's control center.

Track the physical location of your IT assets. Undertaking manual inventories to find the physical location of network assets, PCs, servers, laptops, routers, switches, and printers can be time consuming, expensive, and difficult with users at remote locations. Automating the discovery of network device location and configuration saves time and reduces costs.

Be prepared to address constant change. Desktop resources are always changing as organizations implement new strategies, programs, products, services, etc. – and users add and delete applications from their own PCs. As companies evolve – grow, shrink, or merge with others – IT infrastructures change, challenging the help desk to maintain an accurate inventory. Asset management automation and monitoring provides an added level of control.

Ensure software license monitoring and compliance. IT groups struggle with locking down and standardizing their desktop and network resources. The Internet perpetuates this problem as users have the capability to download all types of free or unauthorized software. This can disrupt desktop and network configurations, but also makes it more difficult to determine software license compliance. An asset management program can keep track of software licenses, upgrades, and maintenance contracts, and provide a better snapshot of what applications are either under- or over-utilized. Microsoft's recent changes in software licensing policies are challenging organizations to rethink their needs, as there is a tendency to overspend on software or shoulder the legal ramifications of license compliance.

Isolate recurring problems faster. A centralized, automated process to baseline IT resources enables help desk technicians to identify support trends and patterns, and implement proactive measures.

Centrally record and share information. Organizations who need IT personnel and help desk technicians to collaborate should have a repository to share information - wherever they are located. Manual methods and lightweight automation tools offer limited capabilities to link appropriate desktop asset data to related help desk trouble tickets. Linking this information allows technicians to review support histories, create reports, and share knowledge with others – speeding support and enabling analysis for forecasting, trends, etc.

Plan purchases and upgrades. When preparing for new product purchases and upgrades, organizations need to work with the most up-to-date asset information, including real cost data, to build plans that truly meet their needs.

Implement best practices. Auditing resources on an ongoing basis provides a means for the IT department and help desk to implement best practices for a range of activities. The IT manager can make informed purchasing decisions, identify correct implementation procedures, optimize configuration environments, and more. At the same time, the help desk technician can speed issue resolution, reduce user downtime, and solve more problems with automation.

When it comes to the help desk, web-based asset tracking can provide fast access to PC asset information to help technicians effectively address issues or requests. There is no longer any need to manually collect asset information, or rely on the user to explain the problem. Organizations using web-based help desk systems can achieve even greater benefits. Assets can be directly linked to issues and problems, with exact information automatically loaded into problem tickets – saving time, ensuring accuracy, and expediting problem understanding and resolution. As a result, help desks can expand their capacity to address technical problems, increase service levels, improve satisfaction – and ultimately, enhance customer and employee productivity.

About UniPress Software

Headquartered in Edison, New Jersey, UniPress Software, Inc. is a developer of web-based service desk automation software targeting mid-market companies, departments within large enterprise organizations, and small businesses. The company's FootPrints® product line, launched in 1996, provides a comprehensive range of capabilities to significantly improve help desk and customer support operations, and is widely used by more than 1,700 corporate organizations, government offices, and educational institutions worldwide, including Prudential Financial, BHP Petroleum, IBM, Kampgrounds of America, Schwab Capital Markets L.P., the IRS, and the University of Pennsylvania.

FootPrints is a 100% web-based system to track and manage all types of service and support requests received via email, the web, phone, fax, and wireless devices. The software is used to automate and optimize help desk and customer service operations, and to control the problem-resolution lifecycle. FootPrints includes centrally managed, multi-channel request tracking, business rule and task automation, self-service online, knowledge management, two-way email management, live e-support tools, powerful reporting, and dynamic integration with LDAP-based address books, such as Microsoft® Active Directory™.

FootPrints technology is available in multiple models – FootPrints software, which works with an organization's existing Microsoft Windows®, Linux®, or Unix® web server and multiple databases, FootPrints for Exchange, designed for Microsoft Exchange and Active Directory environments, and the FootPrints Hosting Service, where UniPress hosts and manages the web-based service desk's infrastructure.

FootPrints Asset Management, powered by Centennial Discovery® Web technology, integrates with FootPrints to automate network-inventory, auto-discovery, and tracking and speed the delivery of customer support. FootPrints Asset Management dynamically identifies, locates, and reports on PC assets throughout your organization. This comprehensive, web-based tool quickly gains real-time data about software, hardware, platforms and more on all of your PCs and other network assets through scheduled and on-demand configuration audits. Changes can be tracked and alerts can be issued. FootPrints Asset Management helps organizations monitor software licenses and track compliance, plus it gives organizations accurate, up-to-date data to plan efficiently when making new purchases and upgrades. Audit information can be linked to help desk tickets, recurring asset problems can be identified, and information can be shared.

UniPress also offers additional integrated, add-on tools for asset management functions, including FootPrints Integration with Microsoft SMS Asset Management and FootPrints Software Deployment.

For more information, contact UniPress at 800.222.0550 (US and Canada only), 732-287-2100, or via the web at www.unipress.com.

UniPress Software, Inc.
2025 Lincoln Highway
Edison, NJ 08817
800.222.0550 (US and Canada only)
732.287.2100
732.287.4929 Fax
www.unipress.com