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KEEPING IT SIMPLE:

The New Model for IT Service Management

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IT managed.Responsibly.

Today's IT infrastructure has a lot of moving parts. There have always been the servers, network, security concerns and desktops to deal with – along with standard and custom applications. Enter cloud, virtualization and mobility, and that complexity moves to a whole new level. In addition to desktops, IT personnel have to find a way to seamlessly manage employee-owned smartphones and tablets.   Cloud brings new agility, but also the requirements of smooth provisioning and integrated support. Instead of one or two partners, companies are using multiple vendors and toolsets to meet their varied IT needs. Keeping all of these proverbial plates in the air isn't easy.

To compound the problem, reliance on this technology has increased ten-fold, so end-users have become more demanding. Downtime is no longer acceptable – and in many cases, can bring "business as usual" to a standstill. Regulators have become more demanding too, with a litany of auditable compliance requirements impacting how the system processes, secures and documents specific types of transactions. One false move, and a company's board of directors, and its customers' personal data, could be in jeopardy.

All of these factors have contributed to a dramatic shift in the way businesses approach IT service management. In the past, this area was primarily reactive – fixing problems or responding to service requests. But for the last five years, IT service management has become more proactive – an approach that has caused this function to become increasingly complex in and of itself.

To keep up with demand and the rapid infrastructure changes, most companies have invested in different service management tools, each confined to managing a specific part of the enterprise. One tool for Cloud provisioning, another for desktops, yet another for mobile devices and one for help desk (and on and on and on) create a segmented, inefficient approach to IT management. Literally, every "stack" in the infrastructure is monitored individually with different tools, requiring an army of personnel with diverse skillsets, and a budget to match.

"While this pocketed service management approach may be inefficient for large enterprises, it presents a much bigger problem to mid-size and smaller companies," said Kevin Schatzle, president of Allied Digital. "These smaller organizations may not have the volume of their larger counterparts, but they could easily have just as broad of a mix of technology. With the traditional service delivery approach, a 2,500-employee organization could end up with 25 specialists supporting all these different technology components. With this kind of investment in people and tools and hardware, the spend-per-revenue could easily skyrocket out of control."

Today, no company can "downsize" its dependence on technology. Clearly, the smaller the business, the more technology enables them to compete. The question becomes: how small and mid-sized enterprises simplify their IT service management without eliminating vital components? How can they get the benefits of a diverse and rapidly changing infrastructure without creating a support nightmare?

According to the experts at Allied Digital, the answer is standardization and integration.

The Standardized, Shared Service Approach

"The best way to gain real efficiencies is to standardize IT service delivery – to orchestrate end-user needs, data center, mobile, security and Cloud under one umbrella; then to streamline change management and the incident process across all platforms," explained Paresh Shah, CEO and chief technology architect for Allied Digital. "Essentially, that's what Allied Digital has done. We've tied these disparate platforms into one, integrated structure that we use to manage every component of the IT enterprise."

That's an outstanding solution for a large enterprise with a large budget. But, what about those small and mid-size companies? Cloud to the rescue.

"We took this standardized delivery platform and packaged it within a secure, segmented, multi-tenant, shared service model delivered through the cloud," Schatzle said. "Utility-based pricing makes our solution affordable for companies of all sizes."

Ultimately, Allied Digital created a scalable, ITSM-process-compatible, adaptable software framework of management services that provision IT management requirements as a single platform that seamlessly integrates with each company's existing IT enterprise management solution. This all-encompassing "as a Service" delivery mechanism is transforming IT management, giving companies of all sizes world-class support and service options that just weren't possible before.

"We've invested in the best-of-breed tools for every segment of enterprise support – encompassing desktop, network, server, application and security components – and integrated them with an event management or ticketing system that can support hundreds of companies, delivered from a private cloud" Schatzle said. "As a result, a company with 300 employees can now get the same kind of support as a Fortune 1000 company – 24 x 7 monitoring, administration and remediation of their valuable technological resources – and have it all with affordable, utility-based pricing that scales with their needs."

Various IT service processes, including incident, problem, change and release configuration management, are embedded into the platform. The service catalog records all available enterprise IT components and cloud-enabled services, as well as a mechanism that enables users to make and track new service requests. At the same time, a comprehensive SLA-based ticket management system, expansive knowledge base and transparent service-level management ensure all service processes and requests are quickly addressed and resolved. It's the combination of standardization and the shared service model that makes an offering of this caliber accessible to companies without massive balance sheets.

According to Schatzle, it's the difference between 100 people going to a home improvement store and buying the same tools for individual toolboxes, versus one big toolbox allocated among all those users. In fact, through the Allied Digital model, they even supply the people who use the tools to keep the infrastructures up and running.

"The first stage of service management outsourcing involved offshoring support to India to reduce costs. Our solution is next generation IT service management, delivered through our centers in California as well as from those in India," Schatzle said. "Now, instead of relying on the same person who develops apps to take calls and handle system updates, an entire team of experts, using the best tools, are taking care of everything – from monitoring security breaches to disaster recovery, to troubleshooting problems to updating software."

Proactive, Remote System Monitoring

One of the big factors that make this model so feasible is the availability of remote monitoring tools, which have only come of age within the last five years.

"In the past, if the system was running slowly, the systems support person would have to search the different options to identify where the issue was," Schatzle said. "Now, we can remotely pinpoint exactly where the problem is, down to the specific server, network, database or application."

Agents at one of Allied Digital's support centers use software that enables them to view diagnostic system results that indicate where the issue resides. Then, they can remotely access that device or network to take appropriate action – be that increase memory, kill a job or, if necessary, create a dispatch request for someone to physically replace a broken piece of hardware.

Many times, the agents don't have to get involved at all. The software is continually "looking" for issues and can often repair these before they impact the end-user. If the system can't fix itself, then it automatically generates a ticket and produces an alarm that alerts the agent to take action. Everything's designed to speed resolution – ideally, before the customer realizes there's an issue.

"It's important to note that we also have the tools and expertise to identify the root cause of recurring incidents, so we can eliminate the problem for our customer," Schatzle said. "It's not just an incident-fix scenario. If there's a system break every Tuesday at 3 p.m., we find out why and fix the underlying problem. That takes the concept of support to a new level and is another example of how we add value."

Total, Transparent IT Management

Although important, support is only one prong of the total IT management continuum. Efficient asset management and procurement – including mobile, streamlined change management and security monitoring – are essential elements as well.

"We've applied cutting-edge innovation to our comprehensive asset management process," Shah said.

The Allied Digital solution's discovery tools collect asset information and are seamlessly integrated with the asset lifecycle management system. A single, federated repository records all enterprise components and service profiles, while the impact engine manages these assets and service relationships to map the impact of asset downtime to the specific service function it supports.

But, doesn't outsourcing the entirety of IT infrastructure management mean relinquishing control? According to Schatzle, quite the opposite is true.

"We want customers to see what's happening in their infrastructures, so we've created a real-time dashboard that gives CIOs an up-to-the-minute view of what's going on in their operation," he said. "It's actually more accurate, more comprehensive information than most companies would have if they managed the infrastructure internally."

That transparency extends to both security and compliance issues.

"Security is a top concern of every organization – whether it's a government agency or a mid-size manufacturer," Schatzle said. "As part of our solution, we provide a detailed report that details every security-related incident as well as identifying which incidents were real threats to the system."

The solution is also protects companies, their board of directors and their customer information.

"Our solution is HIPPA, PCI and SOX compliant, which takes care of some huge concerns," Schatzle said. "Essentially, we're doing the heavy lifting for them. We're managing their IT in an auditable, compliant environment."

The Benefit of Advanced Infrastructure Business Intelligence

This all-encompassing, integrated service delivery framework brings a significant, additional benefit: namely enterprise analytics, which can be translated into infrastructure business intelligence.

You don't have to look far to see the impact analytics has had on all types of businesses in the past few years. Nearly every company, in every industry, is applying analytical data to better understand their customers, create more effective marketing programs and gain greater insight into the most profitable and least efficient parts of their business.

Infrastructure business intelligence enables CIOs to get this same sort of big-picture view of their technological landscape.

"We can produce reports that show the CIO how the cost of IT is doing over the past four years, or get more granular; identifying the servers that have the most problems, where these are in the depreciation cycle and the appropriate timing for a refresh," Shah explained. "We can identify that an organization has 17 versions of Adobe running and help them get this down to one, updated application."

In addition to providing a clearer view of the IT environment, infrastructure business intelligence can also identify areas of waste, particularly in the area of unused software.

"Through license harvesting, we can identify idle, nonproductive software licenses – software on individual desktops that is never used," Schatzle said. "Instead of purchasing additional licenses, companies can move existing, unused software to a different set of users. Or, they can go back to the licensing company when they true up and save money."

Reducing Costs while Increasing Performance

As much as CIOs appreciate the concept of using existing resources for more strategic projects instead of system maintenance, and increasing user productivity, these days it's more about "show me the money." Budgets are slashed, expenditures are down and IT executives are forced to skinny down already lean-running operations.

So, with all of its benefits, the question remains: does this more comprehensive infrastructure management model really have a significant impact on costs?

According to Schatzle, the answer is a resounding, "yes."

"By using the Allied Digital solution, our customers typically realize a 30 percent savings in hard costs," he said. "That percentage doesn't factor in PCI, HIPPA and SOX compliance, productivity improvements, power savings and other soft costs."

The most obvious way this model saves money is due to the fact that companies no longer have to buy tools and hardware and add headcount to manage their increasingly complex IT environment. Everything moves from a capital expenditure to an operations expenditure, billed as a monthly "pay-as-you-go and for what you use" subscription, completely scalable with each individual company's needs.

"We can also allocate our charges among a company's specific business units, if that's how it handles IT expenditures," Schatzle said.

By identifying unused software license seats, this streamlined infrastructure management model enables companies to stop paying for unused resources. Just as important, it also provides data on power consumption, which companies can use to devise more effective power management plans.

"We also enable companies to save money on disaster recovery and business continuity," Schatzle said. "Because we host the infrastructure management in the cloud, we provide redundant back-up, so our customers don't have to invest in a separate disaster recovery product. That saves a significant amount of money as well."

The New World Order of IT Service Management

No doubt, today's IT infrastructure is getting more complex every day, with no signs of stopping. The best way to manage this complexity is to take a more streamlined, business value-centric approach; one that delivers provisioning service stability, an integrated view, a better end-user experience – and does it all in a scalable, cloud-based model that reduces costs, increases agility and manages the complexity in a single world view.

"We believe this integrated service delivery framework is a game-changer," Schatzle said. "We're redefining IT service management for today's world – and we're making it accessible to companies of all sizes."

The concept works by keeping things simple.

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