

Letter to our Customers and Friends from Barry Long, Director of New Business Development

Welcome to the first issue of the xAssets newsletter. We hope you find it interesting and informative. Our goal is to keep you up-to-date about what is happening at xAssets and in the ITAM industry in general. We'll have a guest author in each issue, writing about some key aspect of asset management or cloud computing. In each issue we'll also give you the opportunity to contribute to a different industry survey, the results of which will be published in the subsequent issue of the newsletter. Of course there'll be xAssets whitepapers, announcements and case studies, along with links to published articles.

As you go through the newsletter, let us know if you'd like to see a new feature, or treatment of a specific topic. It is our ongoing goal to make this publication a valuable source of information to you all. Send your comments and idea to us at feedback@xassets.com.

Best regards,

Barry

xAssets Announces "Resources" Web Page

xAssets has launched an industry resources service on its website www.xassets.com.

Ed Cartier, the company's US Marketing Director, noted that, "It is our intent to provide individuals involved in the use, selection and support of cloud computing applications, IT asset management and fixed asset management solutions with a place to go for news, information and discussions on topics that impact their professions. Moreover, we will keep this service open to the public, with no registration, login or password required. xAssets is committed to maintaining the Resource Page a public service."

Commenting on the new service, Jenny Schuchert, Educator for the International Association of IT Asset Managers, Inc. (IAITAM) stated, "Acting as a knowledge source is one way that IAITAM Provider Members demonstrate their industry leadership and xAssets is a good example. In addition to webinars and other presentations, xAssets has taken the additional step of developing a focused information center. Busy professionals need a short 'go to' list and I'm happy to see another good choice for the profession."

xAssets will update the Resources Page weekly, and will maintain links to articles and news as long as those materials remain available.

Guest Article - The Secret to Long Term Business Value is Program Management

By Jenny Schuchert, Educator, the International Association of IT Asset Managers, Inc. (IAITAM)

When executives are searching for new ideas or the means to act on ideas, they often ignore IT Asset Management (ITAM). If the IT Asset Management staff is immersed in day to day details and fighting fires, no one knows that it is possible to achieve more than operational efficiencies, especially without additional ITAM investment. In the classic dog biting his own tail scenario, building the investment business case requires proving that the additional value is there to be tapped, which busy ITAM staff don't have the time to do. The only solution to this dilemma is to take a different approach to the work. Actions taken to put out fires must also correct the mistakes that led to the situation and ripple through the other processes, policies and documentation that are the building blocks of the ITAM infrastructure. With this double goal for each action, future fires are lessened or avoided altogether and ITAM becomes repeatable and sustainable. This approach is Program Management, yielding an infrastructure that is robust and delivers data to analyze and the time to do it that leads to innovation and the support of innovation that is necessary for success.

Jenny is an Educator and industry spokesperson with the International Association of IT Asset Managers, Inc. She has over 20 years software publisher leadership experience as well as extensive global IT business consulting. Jenny is a frequent speaker and author on IT Asset Management business practices.

What is Program Management?

Program Management builds an infrastructure that provides direction, documentation and an organizational memory. It is a set of activities that support an entire department or function so that experience contributes to the rapid and successful resolution of new demands, problems and challenges. Program Management captures not only the process details, but also how to analyze, document, communicate and teach. A program has to span all of the key process areas and the entire set of actors that are part of those processes.

Every ITAM program is going to be different depending on the organization's culture, goals and history. Like a project, developing a program includes planning, organization and coordination. Despite the burden of day to day, the role of Project Manager is a comfortable one for the IT Asset Manager to add. For example, given the goal to decrease software non-compliance, the IT asset manager without a program approach will still assess or guess what needs to be done to achieve the goal and propose a project. A project plan is developed; consisting of newly developed steps that the IT Asset Manager needs to accomplish to improve current processes and automation. The end result of this project is a specific achievement such as the creation of a central repository of contractual information. The IT Asset Manager with a program approach adds a new level of sophistication to problem resolution.

The IT Asset Manager begins by using an assessment process that has been used before and has the advantage of previous successes and snafus that have honed the process. With a higher confidence level in the assessment and the implications of implementing the changes, the IT Asset Manager proposes a project. The project is planned with the guidance drawn from previous plans and the documentation available in the program files. This approach decreases planning time and improves completeness. Execution and end results are then incorporated back into the infrastructure with the benefit of improved tools for the next time.

Instead of executing a project as a task that begins and ends, the Program Management approach builds an infrastructure for all projects and coordinates between projects. Unlike a project, Program Management never ends. The Program Manager works with a portfolio of pre-defined resources and business strategies that ensure alignment with the organization's goals. For example, the Program Manager for IT asset management assesses the current state of IT asset management against organizational goals and specific ITAM requirements. The evaluation includes issues such as mergers, IT architecture changes or regulatory requirements faced by the organization as a whole. The next step is to review the entire portfolio of resources including systems, people and executive support. Projects can now be suggested, prioritized and initiated.

Once a program is in place, IT asset management becomes proactive, with a continual cycle of assessment and realignment aiding management decisions on courses of action. In addition to the steps described above, Program Management includes monitoring ongoing processes, policies and projects.

The results are reported to management in other departments and the executive sponsor, as appropriate. These reports of successes or issues maintain an open dialogue between ITAM and the community of managers and executives. The time to develop this dialogue has been derived from each fire drill and proactive development and represents a secondary use of the efforts already going on. The communication keeps ITAM and its value in front of the organization's planners and keeps the program committed to the organization's goals.

Why Should Program Management be Part of ITAM?

Program Management is NOT specific to IT asset management. It is in fact a set of practices that should be done in every department of any organization. Program Management is particularly significant for IT asset management because ITAM has:

- A high project rate for iterative improvement
- Impact on all areas of the organization, requiring extensive communication and cooperation
- Visibility especially from the cost and risk factors of ITAM
- A strong association with strategic decisions for IT and the organization
- Legal issues that continually drive change, documentation and process improvement
- A low profile and lots of busy work if we aren't organized!

When the discipline is in place, Program Management takes the pressure off of a project launch by clearing the path to success. Project justification can be based on the assessment of organizational goals, IT architecture and executive understanding already built through Program Management processes. Selecting resources for a project is easier because role definitions and assessment of people resources are in place. Project planning can take advantage of information about systems, network information and communication links between departments that already exist.

Program Management perpetuates these advantages from project to project and into the daily activities. If you agree that project failures and fruitless reactive tasks should be avoided, Program Management is a good way to eliminate or at least reduce:

- Choosing a project that does not address organizational goals
- Inadequate availability of resources or prioritization of these responsibilities
- Lack of cooperation with other departments
- Poor or missing communication
- Insufficient time to plan projects effectively
- No external validation

Where to begin with Program Management

Getting started with Program Management is the same for any organizational structure and that is taking on the role of Program Manager. The Program Manager is the individual who has the authority to gather information and the responsibility for guiding projects and ongoing performance for IT asset management. The Program Manager is usually a “manager” in the classic use of the term which is a person who manages a staff of people performing related duties. The best candidate for ITAM Program Manager is the individual who makes decisions about projects, budgets and executive reporting now because this person will already have communication avenues in place and will benefit directly from the successful adoption of Program Management.

The Program Manager begins by gathering the information, documentation and contacts that are in place already for policies, processes, responsibilities, reports in use, metrics kept and job roles. The existing information must be organized and stored, with access control and naming conventions just like you would on a large project. Sharepoint is a good tool for this type of work. The Program Manager then examines the collected items in order to build a general infrastructure that describes the lifecycle of a policy or process; how it would be developed, how to modify it, and how to phase it out. Here are some examples of actions that a Program Manager can take to start building this infrastructure:

- Combine the analysis steps that have been used to justify projects over the last few years and develop a process flow that is general
- Take a previously developed process and extract the steps it took to develop that process without reference to the specific process, identifying the structure that worked.
- Work with Human Resources to develop job roles and titles that make sense
- Formalize the network of managers and resources that provide valuable insight into the strategic direction of IT and the organization
- Review project plans, looking at milestones and reports in order to identify ways to monitor and validate the end results of that project that are part of daily activities

Building the framework for Program Management can be confusing because it requires looking at a specific task and thinking about how that task and others like it can be executed. Identifying the underlying structure is like developing a mold that we can use repeatedly to shorten future development and problem solving while facilitating a robust understanding of the metrics. Without a program perspective, the IT Asset Manager has to work harder to develop essential elements such as processes and measurements. It is more difficult to analyze well and develop an overall view that leads to identifying opportunities.

Complete Our Confidential Survey

[Click here](#) to complete our survey about cloud computing in the enterprise. The results will be published in the next xAssets newsletter.

xAssets Case Study

Telos Corporation

Telos Corporation has provided innovative IT solutions and services to the federal government for more than 30 years, focusing since 1997 on cybersecurity. Telos solutions ensure that the government's most security-conscious organizations comply with demanding federal and DoD information security mandates. Offerings include Xacta® IA Manager for enterprise IT security management, enterprise security consulting services, secure networks, secure enterprise messaging, and secure identity management solutions.

Under multiple contracts, Telos provides and maintains over ten thousand computer systems deployed to US military operations worldwide. Telos is responsible to provide depot-style maintenance of the computers, including records of all deployed devices, replace-and-repair support and spare parts inventory tracking and control. As such, the company needed an integrated method to match computers returned for service with the device's original deployment, allocate parts to specific repair work orders, re-inventory the repaired computer and record the details of the replacement device shipment back into the field.

In 2008, Telos was advised that support for the asset management software that it was using to manage the laptop provisioning and maintenance contract would be discontinued at the end of 2009. Consequently, Telos began a search for a new solution in mid-year. As part of the search for a new solution, Telos vetted the xAssets Enterprise Asset Management solution. During the presentation made by xAssets, it became clear the comprehensive solution could provide all of the required functionality available from compet-

ing software products, but at a lower cost and with less overhead. Following a comprehensive review of potential software products Telos Corporation selected the xAssets Enterprise Asset Management solution.

Telos had developed a list of functional requirements that needed to be met by the xAssets software. Using the xAssets Enterprise Framework, Telos-specific menu items, queries, profiles, integrations, data movements, triggers, business rules, reports, forms and processes were configured from within the user interface. This design phase included configuring the asset register to allow multiple profiles, and incorporating Telos-specific menus, reports, queries, forms and dashboards. In addition, the warehouse, help desk and shipping functions were integrated. In this way Telos was able to use a single, integrated system to create and issue purchase requests, track the availability of parts in the warehouse, allocate parts to a specific repair and automate the entire shipping process.

Using the xAssets Enterprise Asset Management solution, Telos now has a vertically integrated and automated system for tracking incoming service orders, allocating parts to those work orders, tracking the status of each repair and shipping the repaired computer. As repair orders are received the xAssets system registers the asset and work order. The required parts are entered, identified as available in the warehouse, and are automatically allocated to the repair. If parts are not available a purchase order is generated, and the parts are pre-allocated and held upon receipt. When the repair is completed the xAssets system generates a shipping order, directly integrating with Federal Express® or UPS®.

xAssets Whitepaper The Benefits Of Agentless Discovery

The comparison between Agent-based Network Discovery and Agentless Network Discovery very much mirrors the comparison of staging an application on an internal network versus staging on a hosted network (link to other white paper here). Executed properly, any choice in both scenarios will provide the same very useful result, however, in both cases the remote solution greatly reduces overhead in both cost and manpower.

Agent-based Discovery requires agents to be pushed out to every asset on the network, for reporting of hardware and software presence back to a centralized server. For this reason, Network Discovery is commonly thought of as requiring a long-term investment in terms of time to deliver and effort expended to install the agents throughout the environment.

This need not be the case, however, as advancements in agentless Discovery technology have made the process of pushing out agents throughout the network unnecessary.

By installing the xAssets Enterprise Asset Management solution, Telos was able to upgrade the existing depot and repair system, and lower the overall operating costs associated with the process. Furthermore, the fee structure for the xAssets solution Telos saved real budget dollars. After a year in operation, the xAssets solution has met all of Telos' needs, enabled the company to better serve its customer and is an integral part of the overall operations.

In an agentless-based Discovery environment, a local server is established for aggregation of data collected from briefly established small scale executables which are briefly established on each item on the network, and then removed by a remote process. The local server information is then able to be loaded into the discovery application database on a regularly determined basis. The recognition algorithms used by the lightweight executable can use a variety of ways to recognize hardware and software, including reading from the BIOS, WMI, Registry, and using other proprietary methods of data discovery.

As with agent-based discovery utilities, agentless-based discovery methods can also pull in data from outside sources, such as third-party discovery tools, USB sticks, barcode applications and any other flat-file or database source, considering that the data will be stored in a centralized database.

In addition to the reduced implementation time, agentless-based discovery tools offer

other benefits. Without agents being required on network assets, upgrade time otherwise required to be performed on those agents is negated. Also, any updates to the collection server and the application which presents the data can be performed with minimal disruption to the environment.

In addition, in environments which are particularly tightly locked down in terms of Change Management, the processes required to put agents in place may be time-consuming or even denied entirely. The implementation of an agentless-based system makes these concerns moot in that the Assets detected do not require a change to be made to them in order to be discovered.

In essence, discovery technology has adapted to the point where all items on the network can be discovered without a significant time commitment to implement the solution. There is no present advantage which agent-based solutions have over well designed agentless-based solutions, and indeed, agentless-based solutions provide many benefits regarding to the optimization of time-to-value in implementation which agent based solutions can't provide.

Join xAssets at the IAITAM Conference

Join xAssets at the IAITAM Annual Conference, October 20-22 in Nashville
Ed Cartier, xAssets' Director of Marketing
will be speaking on the future of the IT asset manager
in a cloud computing environment.

Stop by our booth for a chance to win an Amazon Kindle®.
Go to www.iaitam.com for more information on the conference.