

# Is the Role of IT Asset Manager Still Relevant?

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As part of the Information Technology backbone of any organization, IT asset management currently contributes to the health, wealth and safety of the entire organization. Health comes from the reduced risk of a very public non-compliant audit, wealth from asset optimization with avoided purchases, and safety from increased control and standardization in the IT environment. Successes by members of our profession have led to increased visibility and the authority to go along with the responsibility for the assets.

However, while we spend less time evangelizing the merits of IT asset best practices, the profession is still struggling to achieve long-term success for their organizations and ultimately for the profession. Are these struggles against the stream of change? Will IT asset management business practices remain relevant and the professional a contributing resource within the organization? To investigate the answers, let's take a look within the organization as well as at the external issues that influence the ITAM future.

## **ITAM not as Different**

For those managing the business practices for IT asset management, competing for budget and opportunity is the same as any other department. Each manager analyzes a business issue, researches the benefits and issues for solving that problem and then vies with other managers to have their problem/solution funded. In a fair comparison by

skilled executive management, this competition hones the rhetoric to a value statement that can be compared and prioritized.

IT Asset Managers have several advantages in the competition for budget that can be used to continue progress. First, IT asset management involves every person in the organization. The IT asset manager has the opportunity to build a network of champions or at the least, uncover other projects to piggyback with to achieve mutual goals.

A second advantage is that the IT asset management can be an enabler for other functions including those outside of the IT department. For instance, data about assets that is more accurate and robust is an advantage to financial managers, strategic planners and contingency planners. Within the classic IT department, IT asset management contributes to the success of security, configuration management, IT planning and IT service to internal customers.

Of course, there are disadvantages too. That same broad reach can lead to animosity when it is our job to say "no." Enforcement of policy is the right thing to do but can be unpopular if politics inhibit fair execution or the reasons for the policy have not been made clear. Calling us the "software police" may be one of the kinder epithets applied.

The interactions between IT asset managers and their management colleagues do not seem to lead to irrelevance. In fact, the better the IT

asset manager builds a network and communicates across the organization, the more helpful IT asset management business practices can be to the overall goals of the organization.

## **No Respect for ITAM**

Lack of perceived criticality is a disadvantage faced by many IT asset managers. Budget meetings can be very frustrating as well thought-out business cases are shuffled to the bottom of the priority list. Arguing that IT asset management is a necessary enabler may lose to remodeling the imaging department in a hospital or to an advertising campaign to launch a product. Competition is indeed tough, but since IT asset management really does deliver on savings and all of the other goals, IT asset management should not always lose. Continual assessment and improvement can happen without a large budget and can revitalize the interest in ITAM as a good place to invest.

If executive management continually assigns a lower priority to IT asset management, it will be harder to achieve success for the organization. If only a few organizations stunt the IT asset management program there is no reason to assume that ITAM is no longer relevant. However, if the difficulty spreads and the value proposition is no longer competitive, it might be enough to end the effectiveness of ITAM.

Decentralization of IT asset management responsibilities may also limit the future for IT asset management. With decentralization, visibility of IT asset management processes as a contributor to a solid bottom line shrinks. Decentralization may build strong bonds with other departments but ultimately the separation of triumphs such as savings, risk reduction, increased customer satisfaction and more may obscure the contribution. Without recognition of value, the pendulum may swing back to traditional two dimension views of assets such as asset price and finance, asset location and operations or asset contracts and legal.

Decentralization does not mean that the value of ITAM has been lost. Relevancy and value continues in a decentralized organization that has a centralized view of the assets. Maintained through standardized data and processes, the IT asset manager role may shift more towards the analytical and executive reporting role since operational changes are handled elsewhere.

### Technology Driving Out ITAM?

A couple of years ago, outsourcing became a trendy way to lower costs. In these scenarios, IT Asset Managers sometimes found themselves sitting at the same desk but with a new employer. In these cases, the IT asset management function was typically aligned tightly with the lifecycle of the assets and the service desk. Another scenario was the outsourcing deal that included purchasing IT assets for the organization. In those cases, the IT asset manager might become an employee of the outsourcer too.

The opposite reaction to outsourcing occurred just as often. The IT asset management function became part of IT Finance or an IT Procurement group so

that the vendor (outsourcer) watch-dog function was prioritized on the ITAM list of responsibilities. If the division of assets between the outsourcer and the direct company employees was poorly defined, it was easy to lose the value of outsourcing over the poor management and maintenance of assets. Outsourcers with differing goals sometimes changed how asset lifecycles were managed. If the service was unsatisfactory either contractual changes were made or some of the ITAM functions moved back to the original company.

During the time it took to switch from headline news to an everyday occurrence, professional IT Asset Managers worried that their role in an outsourced organization might vanish. Fast forwarding to today, it is obvious that the role of IT asset management survived the outsourcing trend to remain a relevant contributor.

More recently, virtualization for servers and desktops is changing IT architectures. At first, the virtualization software made it difficult to track hardware and software accurately. As virtualization software improved, tracking has become easier. Attention is now focused on software licensing and the search for less-pricey licensing models.

What about the next wave of trends, including software as a service and the cloudier cloud computing? Storage, applications and services can truly be “outsourced” beyond the organization’s walls. These technologies offer choices, with potential cost savings, but also with real risk and access issues. What about the impact of active RFID as pricing falls and accuracy grows? What about mobile solutions? How will technology change to protect the organization’s investments and security? There is little doubt that these changes would all impact how IT asset management is performed, perhaps changing the emphasis again, as outsourcing did not so long ago.

The only thing not in doubt about the future of IT asset management is the fact that change will continue. Technology continues to change and so will the demands on the IT asset manager. The impact will take time to assess, including whether the technology will even survive through the next, best wave.

As I end my tenth year specifically in IT asset management, I see continued opportunity for those skilled in managing IT assets, especially those who accept or encourage change.



IT drives your business. So naturally, it consumes your thoughts. Customers, on the other hand, shouldn't need to think about it at all. They just expect great service. Our approach to Business Service Management helps ensure they get it, by managing IT services based on their impact to your business. That way, with your service commitments fully in sync with your business demands, you'll be able to give your customers that most coveted and elusive of all service experiences: complete satisfaction. Of course, we'll know the source of that satisfaction is really your very own IT department.

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