DATA CENTER
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Automating Data Center Asset Management: It's About Time

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Yes, "it's about time" is a double entendré. Most would agree that it's about time that technology finally helped us save time managing data center assets. Although technology has ignited almost every other part of our lives and business operations, comparatively, the automation of data center assets was left adrift.

The Innovation Conundrum

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Sadly, even in today's modern automated world, managers of some of the country's largest data centers still use spreadsheets to try to keep track of data center assets. The reason why is simple: a lack of focus on software innovation for managing data center assets. Although there have been major advances in hardware technologies such as intelligent racks, virtualization and cloud computing, advanced software is a missing link. However, modern day business drivers requiring us to do more with less, combined with a plethora of new technologies—both open source and proprietary, have aligned to change this paradigm.

Additionally, although smart tagging technologies such as RFID have always held the promise of change, the associated costs were an economic barrier to use. Now, as the expense of RFID continues to fall, and new software-focused companies have taken on the challenge of automating inventory management, we are entering a time of change, where software advancements such as cloud applications, APIs and integrated tool sets enable the distilling of true knowledge. These types of advanced software tools are coming to market and can provide critical asset insights to both data center managers and others throughout the organization.

Automating Inventory Management

It's time to throw out the audit clipboards, pencils and spreadsheets. The dreaded inventory audit is poised for automation. Antiquated tools and error-prone methodologies are being superseded by software-fueled advancements such as modern mobile, tablet-based applications using wireless Bluetooth readers, and scanners. Although RFID tagging assets first is a requirement, a strong case can be made that it's absolutely worth the effort.

Case in point: Imagine completing an audit of 10,000 data center assets in just a few minutes, instead of spending days or even weeks. Today this is possible by simply walking through aisles of racks with a Bluetooth-enabled tablet. Imagine at the same time that the system instantly spots new assets and those that are missing or moved. Even better, using integrated software tools, the information is captured at the workstation in a report, with exceptions presented for later review.

A pipe dream? No, these advancements are currently operational. Additionally, most cost a fraction of the price tag normally attached to traditional ITAM / DCIM solutions. The bottom line benefit is huge efficiency gains in asset management with dramatically reduced times and associated costs.

Collaboration: At the Heart of Software Innovation

This new breed of software innovation delivers another major advance for the data center and the business as a whole. In addition to accurately and rapidly collecting information, new software applications seamlessly integrate into modern, multi-dimensional database environments.

This opens a plethora of opportunities and capabilities. Information captured on the data center floor can now be matched using smart indexing and semantics with information found on other systems, thereby eliminating business information silos. With this type of innovative software, asset information can be integrated with other data such as financial, contract, maintenance, utilization, and power and space utilization. Finally, this integrated view can be presented by the data center manager in a way that enables managers in facilities, IT and finance to take the actions needed to keep data centers running efficiently and effectively in a collaborative way. This in turn benefits the business by reducing over provisioning, improving compliance, enhancing security and optimizing asset utilization, to name but a few examples.

The holy grail of asset management within data centers in truly upon us. Driven by software innovation, we are now at the cusp of bringing transparency to once opaque data centers. Manual process and practices fraught with inaccuracy are being eliminated and replaced. Advancements in software are enabling an integrated, open, accessible database of asset information that can benefit all.

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