

Ways to Ensure an Accurate Network Inventory

I've previously blogged at length about the importance of Network Inventory Management in the OSS. I received numerous questions and positive feedback from many...thank you.

I wanted to highlight one specific comment (paraphrased) below:

Engineers do not trust the data held within inventory and continue to keep spreadsheets to fulfill their business functions (plan, order, allocate etc.). Inventory solutions that are simply a database of network inventory will never succeed unless they bridge the whole lifecycle from enquire, plan, order, allocate, deploy, maintain and bill.

This is a very important point. It's one thing to spend the time, energy and investment dollars designing, modeling and migrating legacy systems to a next generation inventory solution...it's another thing to ensure the inventory reflects the as-built network, at all times.

There are ways to help ensure this...but it's certainly not easy – nor is it cheap.

Network Discovery & Reconciliation

Depending on the technology and protocols, there are products out there that will poll the network and report what it has found. For example, a discovery may return specific information pertaining to network devices (device type, slots, cards and ports), logical connectivity, IP addresses, VLANs, etc. This information can then be reconciled (either manually or automatically) to the inventory database. Con Agnew previously blogged about Discovery & Reconciliation...it's a good read.

Redefining Operational Processes

To some network operations engineers, implementing an inventory solution i.e. (changing the way they do their day-to-day job) is NOT welcomed with opened arms. The fact is, for years engineers have used their own processes and their own inventory tools (spreadsheets, MS Visio, legacy systems, etc.) to manage inventory, capacity, spares, reservation, etc.

From an operational perspective, process redefinition is required and old habits must not be formed. Change is never easy and it's often frustrating. However, to be successful in the end operational processes must change with the introduction of the new system.

Ensuring your network and service inventory is consistently reflected in the inventory is extremely important. Implementing discovery and reconciliation and changing your internal processes are certainly a couple of ways of ensuring inventory remains accurate.

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