How do you —

Create an Inventory of Your Technology Assets

By Laura Dallas Burford

In a prior issue, I discussed the benefits of knowing your hardware and software (**Benefits of Knowing Your Hardware and Software**) . What I did not discuss is how to go about creating that inventory. This article provides some guidance for creating an inventory.

The article, **Benefits of Knowing Your Hardware and Software**, can be found in the Articles Section of LAD Enterprizes' website –www.ladenterprizes.com

Hardware and software costs are two of the biggest technology expenses for companies. Knowing what a company has not only assists when integrating technology into the business but also helps cut overall costs.

An inventory provides a listing of how many PCs the company has and the related hardware and software configurations. Before you start the inventory, it is necessary to decide what you want to know about your hardware and software. At a minimum, you should collect data on the manufacturer and model of the computer, CPU type and speed, amount of RAM, size of hard drive, free disk space, network configuration and settings, and a list of installed software.

Depending on your environment, you might use a manual process, an automated process or a combination of automated and manual inventory methods to create your baseline inventory. For example, a mobile PC user may not be plugged into the network, which makes that PC undetectable to a network scan. However, if all assets are networked and you can rely on a third party tool to automate the process and you can save time.

How much should you budget to maintain your current PC's?

PC<3 years = **$200** per machine

PC>3 years = More than **$400** per machine

(Intel Research)

The Manual Process

A manual process is just that – a person sits in front of a PC and manually performs an audit of the PC. Using a manual process to inventory may be practical for those who do not have many computers. For planning purposes, allocate at least 30 minutes to inventory a machine. And keep in mind, the more robust the machine, the longer it will take to perform the inventory.

A PC using the Microsoft Windows operating system has several software tools to help you manually collect information about your computer.

The most comprehensive single tool is System Information (SI). It collects your system configuration information and provides a menu for displaying the associated system topics. SI displays a comprehensive

view of your hardware, system components, and software environment. The information is organized into three categories: Resources, Components, and Software Environment. SI can save system data to a System Information file (which can only be viewed by opening it in System Information) or to a text file. You can open the text file with any text editor. Look for SI under System Tools or search for the file msinfo32.exe. Unfortunately, SI is intended to assist support technicians who require specific information about your computer when they are troubleshooting your configuration. As a result SI reports a large volume of technical information that is not useful from an asset management perspective.

Did you know new PCs could result in $3000 per employee productivity gain.

(Intel Research)

Another source of information about your computer are the applets found in Control Panel. Any applet that controls a hardware device is a good source of information. In particular, the System applet provides system hardware information (also accessed by right-clicking My Computer on the desktop and selecting properties) that is important to asset inventory activities. Data can be printed from this applet. Additionally, the Add/Remove Programs applet provides information about software installed on the computer.

A common weakness of these software tools is that the collected data cannot be easily imported into other programs (such as Excel or Access) for analysis or data management.

You can also obtain quite a bit of information from purchasing records, but you might find there are gaps between records and what is reported by the machine, particularly when it comes to software. Over the lifetime of a computer, software and hardware are installed, upgraded and uninstalled a number of times.

The Automated Process

Third party tools are available ranging from the very simple to the very robust. There are IT Asset Management packages that include not only the inventory process, but provide the ability to connect to Fixed Asset packages enabling easy recompilation to the financial records. Others push patches out to the PC's so that a person does not manually need to install the patches, and/or review the inventory on a regular basis to see if new PC's have been added to the network, and/or assist with the deployment of new equipment.

The challenge for the business executive is to decide what features you want and need. There is no question that a tool will save the company time and money. However, the range of tools varies; what meets the needs of a large company such as UPS or Federal Express might be overkill for a 70 PC company. Such a tool might be out of the 70 PC company's budget. The cost for third party tools can be considerable.

Conclusion

In this increasingly competitive business world, companies are looking for ways to cut costs and improve the bottom line. A comprehensive accounting of IT hardware and software provides companies with a clear understanding of what they own, which can reduce support costs, helps eliminate duplications, assist with controlling software licenses and simplifies migration issues.