

By John Stahmann

IMPLEMENTING BEST PRACTICES: THE DELL MANAGEMENT CONSOLE AND ITIL

The Dell™ Management Console Powered by Altiris™ from Symantec™ provides a comprehensive management platform based on standardized IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) processes—facilitating the adoption of industry best practices and helping streamline and simplify IT management in enterprise data centers.

Reduced budgets and growing demands on IT departments have forced organizations to find ways to cut costs, increase IT resource productivity, and optimize existing investments. Among the myriad options available, one key strategy to meet these goals is simplifying and standardizing IT management. Constantly developing and redeveloping processes internally, however, is often costly and unproductive. As a result, IT organizations have turned to the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) for guidance on the development and implementation of standardized processes.

The new Dell Management Console¹ is based on ITIL principles, and is designed to facilitate the adoption of industry best practices in data centers based on Dell systems. By taking advantage of the console's modular architecture and comprehensive management features, organizations can use the console to support ITIL processes and help streamline and simplify IT management in their own environments.

UNDERSTANDING ITIL PRINCIPLES

ITIL was conceived in response to increased dependency on IT and the need for process standardization, and has become a worldwide de facto standard for IT management implementation. It consists of a set of comprehensive, detailed, and publicly available IT

management guidelines, presented in a series of books that contain recommended best practices, workflows, templates, and terminology developed by the UK Office of Government Commerce. In addition to helping organizations standardize their processes, ITIL also provides definitions of common terminology to promote a forum of communication and help ensure consistent language across the industry.

Many vendors of service- and asset-management tools supply applications that support the implementation of ITIL processes, but lack the architecture and ability to help organizations act on the delivery and execution of ITIL tasks. Three tool domains are associated with providing and supporting IT services:

- **Process management tools:** Support the management and tracking of status, assignments, escalations, historical work conducted, and tasks associated with completing work
- **Analysis tools:** Support the presentation of relevant data, enabling a detailed understanding of metrics and reports to assist with the completion of tasks and enforce enhanced decision-making strategies
- **Execution tools:** Provide an opportunity for individuals responsible for task completion to utilize automation solutions to execute and complete assigned tasks

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¹ The Dell Management Console had not yet been released to ship at press time (February 20, 2009); features and capabilities in production version are subject to change.

The Dell Management Console provides organizations with ITIL-aligned processes, presentation of relevant data, and tools for executing IT support activities, helping organizations proactively strategize, allocate resources, and make accurate decisions. The foundation of a successful implementation of ITIL processes starts with knowing what assets are available and how they are functioning. Building asset relationships enables service departments to develop standardized and repeatable services that encompass collections of assets.

Accurate asset information is vital to supporting IT services, and enhances the ability of service departments to detect, diagnose, and resolve infrastructure errors. The Dell Management Console offers robust, automated discovery and collection of detailed asset information, which is then correlated to display resource associations and service-level views of discovered assets. Associating service activities with assets helps IT departments understand the true total cost of ownership of IT assets. The utilization of process management tools, analysis tools, and execution tools, meanwhile, helps align processes with ITIL principles and enables the successful management of IT resources throughout their life cycles.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONFIGURATION MANAGEMENT DATABASE

The configuration management database (CMDB) is at the center of the ITIL process model. It is designed specifically to enhance IT efficiency and cost savings throughout the enterprise while helping improve service levels, security, and decision support. ITIL stipulates that a CMDB must perform the following four critical functions:

- Account for all of the IT assets and configurations within an organization and its services
- Provide accurate information on configurations and their documentation to support service management processes

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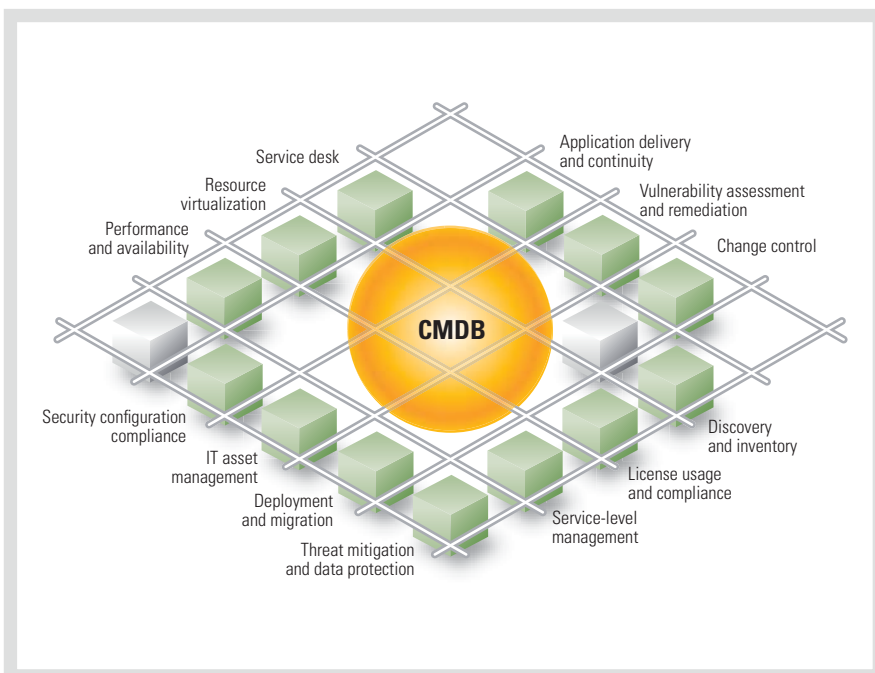


Figure 1. Dell Management Console integration with a centralized CMDB helps streamline and simplify IT management

- Provide a sound basis for incident management, problem management, change management, and release management processes
- Verify configuration records against the infrastructure and correct any exceptions

There are many ways to achieve these goals through software and processes, but the most important question is how to do so without incurring more cost and overhead than the results might be worth. The Dell Management Console integrates an extensible CMDB designed to accelerate potential benefits and help reduce both initial and ongoing costs (see Figure 1). It

is installed as part of the complimentary Dell hardware management tools at no additional cost, and can be extended automatically as other solutions are added to the system—no complex or costly services are required just to integrate other Dell modules into the CMDB.

Changes, in particular, can be a primary source of problems in IT environments. Once the CMDB is built, organizations should continually monitor for unauthorized changes and ensure that when a change is required, it is guided by a formal change process. CMDBs that are not an active part of the management process are little more than reporting databases—aggregations of data from multiple sources

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that may or may not be accurate. Inaccuracy in the CMDB often affects IT staff activities, requiring them to spend extra time troubleshooting problems and often culminating in an increased frequency of desk-side visits or even trips to remote locations, which can adversely affect service levels.

The key to the Dell management approach lies in providing powerful, easy-to-use management tools, organized around a CMDB, to those performing time-consuming, often repetitive work. These tools are designed to save IT staff both time and effort while automatically integrating the data and results of their activities into the CMDB—helping provide IT teams with a reliable source of asset information, the automation and execution tools to act on their findings, and the ability to comply with regulatory requirements to maintain an audit trail of activities.

IMPLEMENTING ITIL WITH THE DELL MANAGEMENT CONSOLE

The Dell Management Console provides a variety of modular solutions for advanced management functions—including asset management, software management, data protection, security, and others—designed


to support ITIL processes in a variety of ways and provide a convergence point that can effectively bring together multiple aspects of IT management. The modular architecture of the console provides for automated, policy-based management of discoverable configuration items within the resource model, while comprehensive Web browser-based reports and dashboards provide a unified view of the IT infrastructure across a variety of different functions that can include integrated third-party solutions.

The CMDB installed with the complementary Dell management tools can be extended automatically as administrators add management modules, helping provide actionable data that IT departments can use to standardize and automate common IT functions. The integration points organized around the CMDB can include discovery and inventory tools, automated system deployment and migration, help desks, software management, change and configuration management, security, data protection, application dependency mapping, human resource data, and more.

Dell has also opened up this management platform to a number of Dell partners

who are both building native solutions for the console and integrating their existing products into it. For example, Symantec already provides multiple plug-in solutions that integrate with the console, including Altiris Client Management Suite™, Altiris Server Management Suite™, Symantec Backup Exec™ System Recovery, Symantec Endpoint Protection, Symantec Ghost™, Symantec Network Access Control, Symantec pcAnywhere™, and Veritas™ Configuration Manager software.² Other partners plan to provide solutions for network management, printer management, power management, encryption, and more.

SIMPLIFYING IT MANAGEMENT WITH BEST PRACTICES

The Dell Management Console offers a comprehensive management platform that embraces standardized ITIL principles and can scale far beyond Dell hardware management. By using the console to support ITIL processes and industry best practices, organizations can streamline and simplify IT management tasks in their own environments—ultimately helping optimize their resources and control ongoing costs. 

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²For more information on using Symantec plug-in components with the Dell Management Console, see “Managing Operating Systems and Applications with the Dell Management Console,” by Jordan Gardner, in *Dell Power Solutions*, March 2009, DELL.COM/Downloads/Global/Power/ps1q09-20080451-Altiris.pdf.