

Service Catalog - The Next Killer Application Has Arrived

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Where does the Service Catalog sit in your organization? Most organizations follow the same general format of listing an "IT Service," its description, a few key service levels, its cost, who may use the service, and how to request it. However, this view is far too limiting to fully describe the current realities.

The truth is that the IT Service Catalog is growing up and becoming the "Enterprise" Service Catalog - a true killer application, used across the enterprise.

The Actionable Service Catalog

A Service Catalog can potentially be quite basic. Process frameworks like the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) even suggest that you can implement a Service Catalog through a document such as a spreadsheet. However, that approach misses several critical benefits that an actionable Service Catalog can provide - in other words, a Service Catalog that automates the fulfillment of service requests.

Therefore, the starting point for this discussion is the actionable Service Catalog - one that provides automated Request Fulfillment. This article will further explore how request-oriented Service Catalogs have uses well beyond the boundaries of traditional IT services, and explain why they are transforming into a core enterprise application.

Consider this analogy. Handing out maps to a distant city and suggesting people can walk there is not going to produce many new visitors to the city. These people need transportation. Similarly, IT organizations need best practice frameworks and processes (the maps to IT service management), but they also need automation (the transportation) to deliver services.

With it now painfully clear that IT service requests need supporting automation and that the Service Catalog can provide much of that automation, a reasonable question is "what other services can benefit from an actionable service catalog?"

Not Just for IT Any More

It turns out that many others types of services can benefit. Telco service providers have long offered their services for purchase and delivery through Service Catalogs. Of course, they viewed themselves as service providers well before IT organizations began to view themselves similarly.

Perhaps closer to home, individual business functions within an enterprise (think non-service provider, possibly a manufacturing company) also provide value through services. The facilities group provides workspace, parking, and building maintenance to name a few. The accounting group provides expense reimbursement and financial reports, among others.

Research completed by Enterprise Management Associates (EMA) during the Spring and Summer of 2008 confirmed that a high percentage of non-IT business functions are using the Service Catalog to automate their own domain-specific service requests. These functions include accounting / finance (35%), sales / marketing (35%), facilities (34%), human resources (32%), and others.

The Service Catalog is most often known as the IT Service Catalog. Yet it is becoming a killer application for the enterprise and could more appropriately be called the Enterprise Service Catalog. Consider some additional data points.

Nearly 20% of respondents use the Service Catalog exclusively for non-IT functions. Additionally, combined business and IT functions drive more implementations than IT alone.

The rate at which non-IT functions are using Service Catalog is interesting as well as exciting. What other IT management tool is used this broadly outside the IT organization?

C-Level Stands for Commitment

Another indicator of the spreading influence of Service Catalog across the enterprise is the rate of involvement of c-level executives in Service Catalog implementations. C-level executives are those with "chief" as the first word in their job title and for this research included CTOs, CIOs, CEOs and CFOs.

Fully 41% of Service Catalog projects referenced during the research included c-level involvement. Importantly, high rates of c-level involvement were found for companies with more than 20,000 employees - not just the smaller companies where c-levels are more often involved with individual IT expenditures and projects.

Across the Board

While request management capabilities from the Service Catalog are spreading to all corners of the enterprise, there remain some capabilities that still reside primarily under the purview of IT operations and IT finance. These include the demand, financial, and service level management capabilities.

Of course, these were historically among the latter capabilities adopted by IT-focused Service Catalog implementations. So it is not surprising they are not the first capabilities adopted across the enterprise. Still, there are absolutely reasons for non-IT functions to measure demand, calculate costs, and ensure service levels for many of the critical services they provide. These next-generation Service Catalog capabilities may well begin to appear in these critical non-IT services.

Summary

The Service Catalog can no longer be viewed simply as an IT management tool used for storing, describing, requesting, and automating the fulfillment of IT service requests. The IT Service Catalog has expanded to become the Enterprise Service Catalog - a true killer application used by all business functions across a company. Through this expanded perspective, IT organizations can deliver even greater value to the overall business by supporting non-IT services in the Enterprise Service Catalog.

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