ITAM, ITAD, IT and remote working: a blueprint for success

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Three years have passed since the start of the pandemic, and many people's working lives have not been the same since. Although many organisations re-opened their offices, many workers never returned to physical offices. Some found that working remotely worked perfectly for them and their employer, provided they had the right technology to support their needs and productivity.

Although the working world has altered unrecognisably, the responsibilities organisations have to ensure their sensitive records, confidential information and data is protected have not changed. The boom in remote work has increased the associated risks organisations face. Despite this, many organisations continue to manage their IT assets in several non-secure ways, or indeed, lose track of them all together. This can have dire consequences, including damages to an organisation's reputation.

The challenge of keeping track of physical assets

Several years on since the scramble to deploy IT equipment to employees to facilitate remote working, even the most sophisticated organisations have struggled to accurately track and recover remote devices quickly, safely and efficiently at scale. Some assets may be approaching their end-of-life period. Some need refreshes and maintenance, servicing, repair, redeployment, lease return. Then, there's employee offboarding.

A recent study by Foundry and Iron Mountain found that remote work poses multiple challenges for organisations when it comes to tracking IT devices. 45% of IT leaders reported concerns about managing and tracking IT assets throughout their life cycles, and 41% stated remote workers' devices were increasingly falling outside of their control. This is often caused by IT departments lacking accurate and up-to-date inventory information, which makes understanding the ownership and tracking the location of devices extremely challenging. This is often exacerbated by increases in the volume of returned devices due to high staff turnover and a lack of processes and protocols supporting the secure and prompt retrieval of IT equipment.

These concerns also went a step further, with more than 40% of IT leaders reporting that no formal IT Asset Disposition (ITAD) strategy exists within their organisation to manage the secure decommissioning of these assets when they come to the end of their lifecycle. Insecure disposal methods are shockingly common, with 56% of respondents admitting to frequently or occasionally disposing of assets in the trash, 79% to storing obsolete assets on-premises and 58% to storing obsolete technology off-premises.

In the digital world, do not overlook the risks hidden in hardware

Hardware asset management is often overlooked by organisations focused too heavily on prioritising their cybersecurity defenses and managing digital data breach risks. But poor management of hardware assets can also expose sensitive corporate data and lead to costly penalties. According to IBM, the cost of experiencing a data breach increased by 13% between 2020 and 2022, with the average now reaching $4.35 million globally ($9.9 million in the US). Recently, a financial services institution was fined $35m for its improper disposal of hard drives.

Shipping hardware with recoverable data insecurely exposes organisations to an increased risk of data breaches, and an ineffective data sanitisation process makes in-transit data breaches more likely. Therefore, IT asset managers must ensure they have visibility and can manage remote devices, and that data is protected during the life cycle of the asset. This includes having a trackable chain of custody when deploying hardware all the way through the end of life and disposition process that ensures data destruction on data bearing devices. Wiping can only be achieved reliably with the use of NIST 800-88 compliant and ADISA certified data wiping software. Any reputable contractor should supply auditing reports that verify complete data erasure and proof of the responsible physical destruction.

Keeping an eye on the e-waste threat

While many IT assets can of course last much longer, some equipment deployed to employees at the start of

lockdown will have a lifespan of three-to-five years and will soon need to be replaced. Not only is this expensive, but the impact on the wider environment cannot be overstated. E-waste is the world's fastest growing waste stream, with the UN e-waste coalition and PACE estimating the annual value of global e-waste at more than $62.5 billion.

As the pressure builds for organisations to set and meet ambitious sustainability targets, ITAM can help to manage an ITAD program to reduce environmental and financial impacts by ensuring assets are redeployed, recycled, or remarketed to recover a proportion of their original value. If recycling is not possible, the asset must be physically destroyed beyond recovery.

'How to' Blueprint

1. Device Deployment

The IT department achieves this through a three-pronged approach:

- First, by implementing a Centralised Depot Deployment strategy, ensuring standardised and controlled device provisioning while also initiating asset tagging and tracking for traceability.

- Second, by adopting Persona-Based Stock Management, organising depot stock based on user personas or roles, enabling tailored provisioning.

- Lastly, through integration with IT Service Management (ITSM), streamlining device deployment processes by seamlessly integrating with ITSM systems, facilitating efficient service requests, incident management, and change management related to device provisioning.

2. Device Visibility

The IT department achieves comprehensive tracking within its ITSM system, maintaining up-to-date records of device physical location, ownership, and status. Device management software is leveraged for real-time monitoring of active assets, ensuring optimal performance and enabling proactive issue resolution. Additionally, robust in-transit tracking processes are established to account for devices during transit, enhancing visibility and security.

3. Refreshes

The IT department achieves Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) optimisation by strategically planning device refresh cycles, taking into account factors like recovery value,

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performance, and favourable pricing negotiations for new hardware. Moreover, they prioritise employee-friendly refresh processes, ensuring convenience for employees by offering options to opt in or out of the refresh cycle, resulting in a smooth and accommodating transition.

4. Device Issue Reporting

The IT department enhances device management through the integration of device management software, allowing real-time issue detection and automated alerting for problem resolution. They also implement a help desk ticketing system for users to report issues and seek support, ensuring seamless integration with other ITAM components. Additionally, they integrate break-fix and device replacement processes into the ITSM system, streamlining the reporting, diagnosis, and resolution of device-related issues.

5. Repurposing

The IT department ensures efficient device returns by simplifying the process for departing employees and promoting compliance through clear communication and user-friendly return procedures. They establish a grading system to assess the condition of returned devices, enabling refurbishment and restocking to prolong lifecycles and minimise waste.

Final Thought

By reviewing and following this blueprint, your ITAM team can establish a solid foundation for managing IT assets effectively, working with the IT department to ensure all hardware assets are tracked, monitored, and optimised in alignment with organisation goals and an evolving technology landscape. This proactive approach will not only enhance the efficiency of your IT operations but also help your ITAM team make informed decisions regarding asset procurement, maintenance, and retirement, ultimately contributing to cost savings and improved overall performance.