Reporting:
Five Easy Steps to Improve IT’s Reputation and Excel at Audits

Turn management data into actionable business information that helps create operational efficiencies and demonstrate value.
Showing the contributions IT makes to the rest of the business is one of the most difficult responsibilities of the IT manager. All too often, IT is seen as simply a cost center, a necessary evil, a means to an end to getting the real work done. Those in the know, however, understand that IT is invaluable to nearly every aspect of the business—from research and development to the supply chain to sales and marketing.

According to Ziya Gunay, IT Director for Peoples Bank and Trust in Kansas, reporting is key to showing the value IT brings to the table. Rather than hope people just “get it”, Gunay suggests leveraging readily-available management data to show how IT enables business initiatives and supports revenue generation. At the same time, IT organizations can streamline the reporting process and reduce the amount of time spent collecting, storing, organizing and reporting on management data for internal analysis, service level agreements and auditing.

**Identify Your Audience and How to Get Them the Information They Require**

Gunay says that it’s important to identify the audience and the data that would be most pertinent to them and be most likely to lead to the desired action. What is the audience’s goal? Is this for measurement? Capacity planning? Procurement? Compliance? Where is this information stored? How can I get to it? Is it structured or unstructured data? How can I turn this data into action?

To answer these questions, the IT organization is going to need a central tool that automatically collects management data in real time, stores it in a consolidated repository and has a powerful yet intuitive reporting engine that can export the information in easy-to-digest reports. Here are Gunay’s five steps to improve reporting and streamline auditing for your organization:

1. **Identify Audiences with Clear Objectives**

   Audiences vary, and the data you provide to different groups should vary as well. The management team likely needs an executive summary while department heads just need the information pertaining to their group. Internal reports for the IT team need to be more technical, providing detailed IT systems management information that improves and streamlines IT services and support. It’s important that your ITSM solution is flexible enough to provide varying levels of detail for different audiences—otherwise you risk alienating the very people you’re trying to educate.

   Gunay provides dozens of reports throughout the organization from executive summaries for the board to time sheet reports for the HR department. Complete visibility into distributed systems and how they are being used give him the ability to provide all sorts of information to different stakeholders throughout the organization.

2. **Capture Pertinent Data**

   It’s important that you have a way to look into systems to get their current status—a snapshot if you will. Inventory information such as hardware components, installed applications, performance metrics and capacity is critical for compliance, security and auditing. You can’t manage what you can’t see, and knowing what is out on your network is crucial to maintaining health of the IT environment.

   Gunay uses snapshots to get a sense of the current state of individual systems in the environment. He recently migrated all XP machines to Windows 7 and was able to take a snapshot to see what needed to be done to each system to get it ready for the update, including memory upgrades, additional capacity and required drivers. He was then able to formulate an upgrade plan and price out exactly how much it would cost the organization as well as the proposed productivity gains. Instead of being seen as just a line item on the budget, management could see the justification for the project and the value IT was bringing to the organization.
3. Capture Actions and Identify Changes
Capturing actions is just as important as capturing inventory information. Unauthorized changes to systems (regardless of intent) can be disrupting to the performance of that individual machine and the health of the IT environment as a whole. If machines are not in line with IT policies, the IT team needs to be able to quickly identify that and have a plan in place to get those systems back into compliance.

Peoples Bank and Trust continually monitors all distributed systems from a central web-based management dashboard that alerts administrators of any changes to the systems. For example, Gunay is alerted when a teller console is running out of capacity on its hard drive, giving him the opportunity to address the issue before an error occurs and a user experiences performance degradation or downtime. At the same time, systems and mobile devices that join the network are immediately identified, giving Gunay the power to authorize or disconnect the machine. Being aware of what is on the network and how it is behaving allows the IT team to better ensure IT policies are being met.

4. Make it Relevant
According to Gunay, his ability to turn technical data into actionable business information is the most valuable part of his team’s reporting strategy. Not only is he able to create useful management data that helps with the daily management of the organization’s systems, he can modify that data for each intended use and audience.

The board and the management team receive a one-page monthly report about the high-level initiatives IT is addressing, his boss gets a two-pager showing more detail and HR requires detailed login information that they can compare to timesheets. And Gunay? He can run reports that show detailed system information and how they are performing, giving him insight into availability, performance and security. Armed with this intelligence, each audience is able to take action and make smarter decisions for the organization.

5. Prove Yourself
The ability to create custom reports with actionable information improves the reputation of IT across the organization. Proof that work is completed, systems are running optimally and the IT team is efficient help justify costs and show the rest of the business the value that IT brings to the table. Measurement means that service level agreements are set, being met and are reviewed by the operations staff. Internal audits can be conducted, and compliance efforts are documented. According to Gunay, regulators that audit the bank are consistently amazed at how easily he is able to pull information out of the IT environment. It’s simply a testament to the importance of IT reporting.

In Conclusion
The Kaseya IT Systems Management Automation Framework provides unparalleled visibility into distributed systems, allowing administrators to better discover, manage, automate and validate IT assets. Visit Kaseya.com to learn how Kaseya can help you get a better handle on reporting.

About Kaseya
Kaseya is the leading global provider of IT Systems Management software. Kaseya solutions empower virtually everyone — from individual consumers to large corporations and IT service providers — to proactively monitor, manage and control IT assets remotely, easily and efficiently from one integrated Web-based platform.