

Taking the Pain out of Compliance with CCM and NNT's Change Tracker

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IT MANAGEMENT RESEARCH,
INDUSTRY ANALYSIS AND CONSULTING

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Meeting the Challenges of IT Operations

IT operations support teams are busy – really, really busy. They need to meet expanding business requirements for IT with limited and sometimes diminishing computing resources, staff, and budgets. To make matters worse, IT infrastructures themselves are becoming far more complex as new software and hardware technologies are being introduced for data management, messaging, networking, enhanced security, Web commerce, workforce mobility and a wide variety of other business technology needs. Each of these new technology components can include thousands of individual configuration points each with the potential to cause disruption to the environment if not monitored and managed correctly.

Faced with this massive amount of information to regulate, traditional manual methods of IT administration are simply not effective. The breakdown occurs when systemic problems are introduced into the environment that are not easily identified or resolved. IT administrators are then forced to spend the bulk of their time “firefighting” the symptoms of the problem rather than identifying the root cause and preventing a recurrence of the incident. This “break/fix” cycle of IT administration not only ensures repeated environment failures, but also significantly reduces the amount of time support staffs have to improve IT productivity and expand the infrastructure to meet organizational growth.

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Fortunately, best practices have been developed – such as the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) – to identify where process can be improved to meet business needs. But many IT organizations are reluctant to introduce process improvements because they view the implementation process as too complex or time-consuming. It is for this reason that ITIL recommends a “phased-in” approach to process improvement. That is, to only introduce one or a few new IT practices at a time to give IT operations time to adjust to the new policies. As environment improvements are systematically deployed, environment failures are reduced, freeing up support staff to perform new environment improvements and achieve operational cost reductions.

Recognizing the value that can be attained from standardizing around best practices, many businesses, industries and government bodies have instituted regulatory compliance initiatives such as PCI DSS, HIPPA, and SOX to ensure IT security and reliability. For many IT organizations, this has created an additional level of difficulty in meeting regulatory requirements and providing proof of compliance. To handle these complex tasks, automated solutions should be employed to monitor the infrastructure for deficiencies, remediate non-compliant configurations, and report on the overall health and status of the environment

Achieving Compliance with CCM

Unapproved changes are the single most likely cause of failures in IT infrastructures. These are changes that occur outside of established tracking and approval processes. In fact, ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES® (EMA[™]) primary research has indicated that greater than 60% of all environment failures would be eliminated if unapproved changes were identified before affecting IT performance. Unapproved changes are introduced from a variety of sources including security violations, inappropriate user activity, and administrator errors. Even a seemingly benign alteration can have far-reaching, unintended consequences to IT performance and reliability. Over time, system configurations deviate further and further away from established standards. This is referred to as “configuration drift,” and the greater the drift, the greater the risk posed to the reliability of an IT support stack.

Change and Configuration Management (CCM) is the process for minimizing configuration drift by ensuring all environment settings are approved and consistent with established standards. CCM is composed of three distinct practices: configuration management which is the creation, documentation and updating of standard settings for all supported IT components; change management which is the process for identifying and approving new configuration settings and updates; and change detection, which is an ongoing process of monitoring for inappropriate changes. Achieving compliance objectives for ensuring IT infrastructure reliability requires automated solutions that address all three CCM disciplines.

Simplifying IT Management with NNT’s Change Tracker

As an example of an automated solution designed to reduce configuration drift and simplify IT administration, New Net Technologies has introduced Change Tracker Enterprise, a holistic IT management solution for monitoring and administrating IT components across the support stack – including servers, workstations, applications, and network devices. Change Tracker helps organizations develop optimal configurations and automatically tracks any change from the established baseline. Configuration changes are easily identified as being either approved or unapproved. Unapproved changes can be analyzed to identify who implemented it and why it was deployed, and out-of-compliance systems can be automatically remediated back to a desired state.

With Change Tracker in place, environment problems can be quickly identified and resolved. Performance and health status information are reported, indicating existing and potential problems. By correlating these environment conditions with change events, the root cause of incidents can be easily detected, often resolving problems even before they are detected by end users. This enables an IT support structure for proactive problem prevention, rather than reactive “firefighting,” and simplifies the process of achieving compliance by creating an environment that continually brings managed endpoints back to established and approved parameters. Achieving compliance is also simplified with pre-built templates for popular regulatory initiatives, including PCI DSS, HIPPA, SOX, NERC and CoConnection. NNT’s Change Tracker takes the pain out of compliance auditing and establishes constancy and reliability in the support stack.

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EMA Perspective

Achieving compliance and ensuring value in any IT infrastructure involves the introduction of solutions that carefully balance a breadth of functionality with cost effectiveness. If the product is too small to satisfy organizational requirements, multiple products will need to be purchased to provide comprehensive support. Utilizing multiple products for a common purpose is inherently inefficient as it creates a “swivel chair” management environment where multiple interfaces need to be utilized and the correlation of failure events between disparate applications becomes difficult, if not impossible. Conversely, solutions that are expansive in their functionality beyond the scope of established needs often either exceed budgetary restrictions or are a waste of funds that could better utilized elsewhere.

Balancing cost and functionality is particularly essential for small- and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) that typically have limited support staffs and budgets. Despite the diminished support resources SMBs must provide the same level of IT agility as their larger competitors. This is where management solutions such as NNT’s Change Tracker play a critical role – providing an inexpensive solution that achieves a broad range of ITIL and compliance automation requirements in areas including problem, incident, change, and configuration management. Large enterprises can also take advantage of NNT’s cost effectiveness as the solution scales easily to large environments. In either case, rather than purchasing individual point products for each of these disciplines, organizations should deploy a single package with a single interface for unified IT operational support.

About New Network Technologies

NNT’s change and configuration management solutions allow organizations to gain configuration control of the entire IT infrastructure. This enables IT teams to establish the best possible state and configuration for the IT infrastructure and ensure that any changes are planned and approved. NNT maintains an international presence with offices in the United States and the United Kingdom. <http://www.newnettechnologies.com/>

About Enterprise Management Associates, Inc.

Founded in 1996, Enterprise Management Associates (EMA) is a leading industry analyst firm that specializes in going “beyond the surface” to provide deep insight across the full spectrum of IT management technologies. EMA analysts leverage a unique combination of practical experience, insight into industry best practices, and in-depth knowledge of current and planned vendor solutions to help its clients achieve their goals. Learn more about EMA research, analysis, and consulting services for enterprise IT professionals and IT vendors at www.enterprisemanagement.com or follow [EMA on Twitter](#).

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Corporate Headquarters:
5777 Central Avenue, Suite 105
Boulder, CO 80301
Phone: +1 303.543.9500
Fax: +1 303.543.7687
www.enterprisemanagement.com



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