

The First Step in Creating Your Service Catalog

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A growing number of IT organizations are focused on transforming to a more service-oriented culture based on a sound IT Service Management (ITSM) program. IT leaders are igniting a flurry of activity to address the ITSM framework of services, process, people and tools, as a means to align and integrate IT operations with the ever-changing business strategies they support.

Anyone wearing an IT hat today knows that the needs of the business determine the priorities for implementing innovative technology to enable the business to gain a competitive advantage.

A critical step toward transforming IT into a service-oriented organization is to define the services IT delivers to the business. The challenge here is to define the services in business terms, rather than in terms that only technical people can understand. This step tends to shine the light on IT in a way that helps determine and reveal its value to the business.

However, many organizations have found that defining their services is often one of the most difficult tasks, akin to “boiling the ocean” or “counting the stars.” The IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) does provide some guidance on what you need to do to accomplish this mountainous task, but not details on how best to approach creating your service catalog.

In an effort to provide some guidance in creating your service catalog, let’s first take a quick look at a service industry with which each one of us has some familiarity, the restaurant business.

The Menu

When we go to a restaurant the very first thing that we are given is a menu. This menu contains everything that we, as the customer, have the option of ordering. Not only does it list all of the items offered, but it also has a description of what we should expect if we were to order any one of them. This description, which is written in a language that we understand, does not contain information about the ingredients list or how this dish is created.

If you were to ask, however, questions about ingredients and preparation could be readily answered, as all of the

detailed information about what goes into the dish is available in the recipe book the restaurant uses. Within the recipe book there should be an entry for every item on the menu detailing all of the components and steps required to provide that item to the customer. Also, note that the recipe book is written in a language that the chef understands with little concern for the language of the customer.

Another thing that we don’t see in the menu is the “supporting services” like the bus service or the wait staff service. There is no question that all of these things need to be provided, but we would not expect to see them on the menu because the restaurant does not offer it as a distinct item that we can order on its own, it is just a part of delivering the items that we order.

This example illustrates a need to create an external catalog for your customers and an internal catalog for IT. The external catalog is simply the “menu” that stipulates the services that are provided to the customers with an appropriate description, whereas the internal catalog contains all the necessary components and relationships that are needed to deliver that service to the customer.

Developing your service catalog in this manner creates a baseline for future activities such as determining service level requirements, drafting service levels, negotiating with the business and creating a measurement strategy to determine the effectiveness of the service level management program. In the same way that the kitchen has its translation of the menu, the IT professionals need to have their translation too.

They need to know the components that make up the services but should not rely on the service catalog to document every detail; instead it should be accompanied by a manageable configuration management database (CMDB). There should be an entry in the CMDB for each service with all of the technical and application components that are required to deliver each of the services. The CMDB is also a mechanism used to maintain the information related to the users of each service.

To create your baseline service catalog, nothing works better than collaborating with your customers to agree on the services that will be contained in the catalog. Quite

often, the best approach is for IT to create the first draft of the catalog by documenting the services they believe they provide. Once this step is complete, the catalog can then be validated with the customers.

This approach gives you a springboard for discussion and an opportunity to obtain buy-in from your customer base. In contrast, attempting to start collaboratively from a blank whiteboard tends to give the customer the (mistaken) impression that you do not know what services you provide.

Go Children Slow

As discussed earlier, exercise caution to ensure that your initial catalog items and descriptions are in a language your customer understands. Using technology and application terms in this first run of the service catalog might discourage the customer from providing input because they simply do not understand the terms. They often do not feel qualified to dispute what IT puts in the catalog because it is being presented by the “techie people.”

Remember, simplicity! If you take this first step of cataloguing your services, you are on a path to success. Once your catalog is agreed upon between IT and the business, the rest of your service management program can begin to take shape.

When taking this first step, don't add to the complexity by trying to identify the requirements or the related components at the same time. That step can come later. A well-defined process enables success, and focusing on your customers' point of view garners their support in your effort to align IT with the business.

Published on ITSM.Watch.com, August 13, 2007.

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