A WATCHFUL EYE

ITIL COMPLIANT ENTERPRISE SOFTWARE SUPPORT

Monitor 24-7 Inc.'s mission is to provide state-of-the-art software to support enterprise class service management processes in all areas of business. Their enterprise service management solution, IncidentMonitor™, was designed to be the most powerful, flexible and cost effective solution that isn't just focused on automating Information Technology (IT) service management processes, but on all service management processes in every department within an organization.

When IncidentMonitor was developed six years ago, its creators began with a clean slate and fresh thinking, using state of the art concepts and technology. They didn't worry about legacy applications, lowest common denominators in technology and multiple platform issues like their competitors. They simply designed a comprehensive solution using the best technology with the best interests of their user community in mind. This produced the IncidentMonitor framework which is the basis for their Enterprise Service Management solution.

An ITIL engine

Their concept was to utilize the extensive resources of Microsoft's Research and Development team in their products by taking advantage of the features available in the core operating system and the server applications that they produce. This meant they could create products for a single robust platform, therefore minimizing development, testing time and maintenance costs, while increasing their feature set and reducing the time-to-market and administration cost. In essence, they could produce solutions with enterprise features at a cost much lower than their competitors.

Over the last few years, Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) has become the service industry's standard for client management and expectation level setting. ITIL processes provide a framework to maximize the business value enabled by IT. With this in mind, IncidentMonitor has received Pink Elephant's (www.pinkelephant.com) ITIL Service Support Enhanced certification. This focuses on Incident Management, Problem Management, Change Management, Service Level Management and Configuration Management.
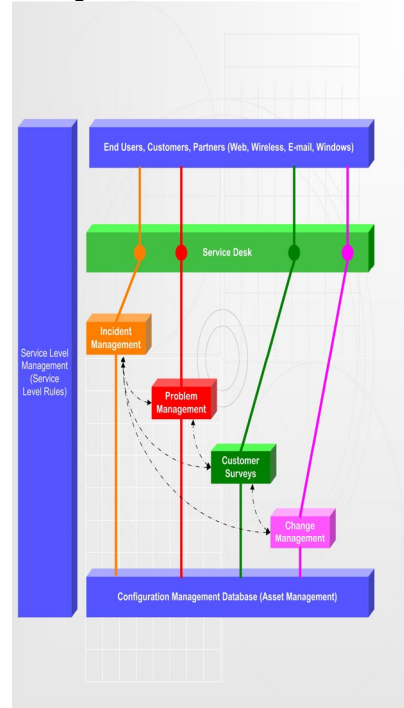

Figure 1

A flexible platform

IncidentMonitor's ability to achieve ITIL compatibility is related to its unique project concept. A project is a container that encompasses one or more business flows. In Figure 1, Incident Management, Problem Management, Customer Surveys and Change Management are unique projects within IncidentMonitor. This allows rapid deployment of an ITIL compatible process and simple customization for a specific environment. Note that the Configuration Management Database (CMDB) information is available within any of the specified projects and that the Service Rule engine constantly monitors all activities within the Service Desk to ensure that Operating Level Agreements (OLA) are adhered to. Built on the IncidentMonitor framework, this version of IncidentMonitor provides an out-of-the-box ITIL solution.

IncidentMonitor's unique project concept enables Incident Management, Problem Management and Change Management to be implemented as projects, each with their own service flows. The workflow engine extends far beyond basic routing to include stringent workflow and mandatory steps which are imperative for Change Management during an acceptance phase. These processes can be augmented for a corporate environment or, additionally, custom processes can be designed that operate outside of ITIL or integrated within the ITIL framework - it's that flexible.

IncidentMonitor's leading edge Service Level Rule engine provides the foundation for Service Level Management. IncidentMonitor's Asset Management provides the foundation of the ITIL Configuration Management which enables customers to segment assets in any view they wish - organizationally, physically, hierarchically, peer-to-peer- whatever they wish in any combination.

Web monitoring

IncidentMonitor also enables the user to present their services to their users via web forms. Each service offered typically requires different bits of information. For example, adding a user to the system would require different pieces of information from requesting a Return Materials Authorization (RMA). The web forms can be different for each type of service but are still contained in the same area for easy statistic tracking and management.

The user designs the web forms that they wish to use through a management window that lets them add sections to the form and fields in the sections. Therefore, they have all the control they need to create the forms that they require for their services.

Tailored service

IncidentMonitor's approach to enterprise service management is that contact management is at the centre of everything. All contact information is shared across all areas for consistent and up-to-date information. This information can come from Active Directory, e-Directory or from almost any LDAP server. This allows an entire organization to have consistent

contact information that can be leveraged across all processes.

Around the contacts would be all of the service offerings and processes that have been automated, including ITIL Incident, Problem and Change Management, Sales/Marketing, Administration and any other business-specific process.

All of the processes can be presented to the user community via the Service Catalogue approach. This presents a list of services the user can request from the organization based on the areas they are involved in. (See Figure 2)
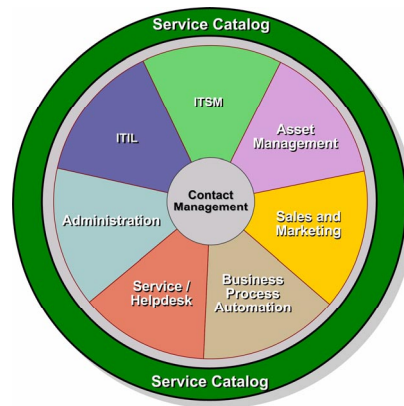

Figure 2

Financial responsibility

With companies starting to adopt the ITIL framework for service management, other factors are driving the need for advanced systems that go beyond ITIL to address other legislative changes occurring within the economy. The United States government recently enacted the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX) - the single most important piece of legislation affecting public corporations since the US securities laws of the early 1930s. Through implementing the rules of the Security Exchange Commission

(SEC), the Act charges managers of public companies with the task of certifying that they have an operational system of internal controls over financial reporting.

SOX is predominantly focused on the financial aspects of a company and the responsibility of corporate managers to certify that they have accurate internal controls for financial reporting. Internal control is not defined explicitly and is therefore left open to interpretation. To be on the safe side, one should operate under the premise that anything that can impact a company's financial position has to be controlled.

The SEC has cited the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission's (COSO) framework as meeting their criteria for a recognized framework for internal controls. Since most IT managers are not trained in the art of internal control, they need more examples and detailed guidance to help identify, document and evaluate controls than COSO provides. To address this, the IT Governance Institute created Control Objectives for Information and Related Technology (COBIT). COBIT is an IT governance framework that provides both entity level and activity level objectives. It maps to the COSO framework and, therefore, is used by many IT professionals to evaluate their systems for internal controls.

Best practice

The role that IncidentMonitor plays in SOX compliance is two-fold. IncidentMonitor can be used to create automated workflow processes with authorization points throughout the process while keeping a complete transaction

journal and audit trail for all business processes. This provides the ability to have any business process fully compliant while satisfying the auditor's requirements for full process control. Secondly, IncidentMonitor itself addresses the required points in the act for internal control by complying with the requirements for IT systems.

ITIL is the most widely accepted approach to IT Service Management in the world. ITIL provides a cohesive set of best practices, drawn from the public and private sectors internationally. ITIL certification is a rigid test of software to make sure it complies with a set of standards for service management and full traceability for all operations. The ITIL framework is part of the foundation for the COBIT model and addresses most of the requirements of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act from an IT systems perspective. COBIT was explicitly chosen as the tool of choice for external auditors in IT audits for SOX compliance.

Strong SOX compliance

How can IncidentMonitor help an organization? Take a recent client's experience - their organization was getting so large they needed to implement a consistent enterprise wide service framework that would not only address their IT needs but also SOX compliance. They were using different solutions in various business units that had no ability to interact with each other, couldn't address their current functional needs and was unsuitable for enabling SOX compliance. All of this led to conflicting information, inconsistent service and an

inability to comply with SOX legislation.

IncidentMonitor was selected to be used across all business units to implement ITIL Incident Management, Problem Management and Change Management. In addition, other business processes were created to automate their employee management. Employee management consisted of a new hire process, employee change process and a termination process. The objective with this approach was to implement a consistent enterprise service framework for all business units while achieving SOX compliance at the same time.

All of these processes were implemented in such a way that users could interact with the system using a web browser, a Windows client, a PDA device, E-mail or even actively through the XML and COM interfaces. In addition, approvals were automated to the point where all the approver had to do was respond to an E-mail message in order to authorize or reject a request.

Each of the processes could be initiated by an electronic service request form that could be filled out on-line. Alternatively, the process could be initiated through E-mail or directly through the standard browser pages.

In their specific implementation, six projects were implemented that included ITIL Incident, Problem and Change Management, New Hire, Employee Change and a Termination Process. All of these processes were designed and implemented over a three-week period. The end result was that

they now have an enterprise class, SOX compliant service framework for all internal management processes. ¤