

Bank Of America

Source:

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Toward the end of 2003, Bank of America had 246,000 desktops and laptops, 30,000 servers, 14 major data centers and 29 major and 33 minor network hubs. The problem was that it was all scattered. Who knew where every piece of equipment was, if it was working and who was using it? But executives at Bank of America wanted to know, so it fell to Alan Abbott, a senior vice president, to figure it all out.

And he had a deadline.

"Before, we had different pockets of information in different places," says Abbott. "It was all tribal knowledge. It was very fragmented... If Microsoft came out with a critical patch, we never knew when we were done patching or if we were done. If a building was to go away, what equipment was in it? What do we need to replace?"

Abbott hit his deadline, and today he says he can tell senior management exactly how many devices are scheduled to be replaced this year, and he even can forecast financial spending based on historical data.

"Inventory management is part of our frontline defense in knowing where our assets are and if they've been lost or stolen," Abbott said in a one-on-one interview with Datamation. "When we come to the table now, business sees us as an enabler, not a detractor. Before, we'd get something done but for 10 times more than they thought it would cost. Now we have hard facts and we're instantly more credible.

"It's all a different way of looking at IT than it was four or five years ago," he adds. "It's no longer an option to be at the operational excellence level. Today, it's the price of admittance."

Abbott turned to IT Service Management (ITSM) principles to get this daunting job done. Using ITIL best practices, he focused on the processes involved in inventory management. First he looked at all the processes they had, which ones needed the most attention and then prioritized them.

ITSM is a mentality where IT professionals work in conjunction with the business side. And together, they focus on the customer and providing products or services in an efficient and timely fashion to them. ITIL is a set of rules or best practices that help put ITSM into effect.

Abbott, who spoke at the Fifth Annual itSMF Conference and Expo in Chicago, says he's glad he has those rules to live by since he had five distinct user spaces to deal with in the inventory management job: branches and banking centers; back office users; trading floor managers; call centers, and international users. That means whatever processes Abbott settled on, they had to meet the needs of all five groups.

A key step, Abbott says, is breaking it all down into bite-size pieces.

"The bank had been trying to do something with asset management for about five years and they tried and failed," he says. "Then they scoped it down to just focus on inventory management. For me, it was a daunting and huge effort but it was smaller than I'd seen other people try."

With a history of inventory failures, Abbott says not everyone thought the job could be done. "There were a lot of detractors... mainly from people in the trenches," he adds. "They didn't understand ITSM or the ITIL framework, so they didn't understand how we were going to do this. We had tools. We had a framework. They didn't see that."

And since Abbott was so successful in implementing inventory management, last year Bank of America put him on the even bigger job of asset management. That means he not only has to inventory the equipment, now he has to know how much the purchase price was, how much it costs to run it and how much it would cost to replace it.

"Now, we can do financial planning based on true actual spending," Abbott says. "I can show the business how much this server is costing them." He adds that if business executives think the server is costing them a lot but not handling a critical job, they can reallocate that piece of equipment to better spend their money.

"We have people complaining that they can go to Dell and buy this PC for a third of what we're charging their department," Abbott says. "Now, we can show them the cost of the warranty uplift, the cost of making sure the applications work together, the cost of scanning for viruses and spyware. These are all services they wouldn't get buying the PC off the Internet.

"They definitely see more value [it IT] and the business really understands that," he adds. "We're at the table helping make business decisions because we can quantify costs and values."

At Bank of America, IT has become a business partner.

"IT used to be hopefully transparent," Abbott says. "If the trains ran on time, it should have been under the radar screen. The only time you got attention was when something went wrong. Today, IT has to enable growth."