

Doing More with Less: Automating IT Services in Your Midsize Business

Key questions and tips for choosing a solution that doesn't break the bank ... and sends your IT efficiency soaring



Introduction

The case for IT automation is one that has been well made. Driven by mounting compliance, security, globalization and competition issues, IT Professionals in medium-sized businesses are under unrelenting pressure to increase efficiencies and work within tighter budgets while improving services and justifying expenditures. Today's battle cry is a familiar and well-worn mantra for most: "Faster response times – do more with less." Shrinking budgets in a tough business climate are pushing many IT Professionals to look for ever more innovative ways to contribute to their organization's success and transform their IT services – or risk being outsourced.

Automation is a proven way for addressing a number of IT management challenges, notably reducing operational costs and boosting IT staff productivity. Many corporate IT Professionals have tackled the automation challenge by securing a variety of individual, disparate midmarket tools for monitoring and managing different products. These are commonly known as "point solutions".

With this approach, a tool is used to effectively manage a specific network device such as a server or printer. Some of these tools relieve the pressure on internal IT teams. However, as a rule of thumb, point solutions do not allow you to proactively and efficiently manage the desktop environment. Nor do these solutions provide a global view of the corporate network that supports multiple applications, often accessed by hundreds of end-users in a distributed environment. Alternatively, you can easily spend big dollars on large enterprise-class solutions. Yet, the majority of all big management suites fail to meet the specific IT needs of midsize businesses.

How can you objectively assess the myriad choices and tools for IT automation and ensure you get what you need without spending a bundle?

This whitepaper focuses on the desirable characteristics of a powerful, low-risk automation solution for today's time- and resource-crunched IT departments in midsize businesses and non-profit organizations as well as municipal governments. Specifically this whitepaper will:

- Highlight the top challenges of today's IT Professional and the benefits of automation

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
A Day in the Life of Today's IT Professional	4
The unacceptable cost of downtime	4
Fingertip access to C-level reports	4
Ensure security settings	5
The heat is on: to automate	5
The Power of Automation	6
The perils of "point solutions"	6
Key Requirements of an IT Automation Solution	7
It's time to go beyond "services automation"	7
Remote control	8
Remote Monitoring and Management	8
Reporting	9
Optimize Your IT Infrastructure with N-able Technologies®	11
Network and Systems Management solution	11
Take control of any device, anywhere	11
Complete remote management for IT Professionals	11
Remotely monitor all networks and devices from a single console	12
Show your IT value with comprehensive reports	12
Conclusion	13

Doing More with Less: Automating IT Services in Your Midsize Business

- Summarize the risks and pitfalls of “point solutions”
- Reveal why an IT automation solution for midsize organizations must move beyond “automating routine tasks”
- Identify the key features and functions required by IT Professionals who wants to reduce their operational costs, become more proactive and increase staff productivity
- Provide tips and insightful questions for evaluating potential IT automation solutions
- Show why a true IT automation solution must include the ability to remotely control, manage and monitor all networks and end-users from a single, intuitive console

This whitepaper will be invaluable to IT Professionals who wants to ensure their success with an automation solution that fully meets the needs of their midsize business – without breaking the bank.

A Day in the Life of Today's IT Professional

The IT landscape of midsize businesses is becoming increasingly complex. The number of business processes, databases and applications are increasing exponentially. Applications and devices are often housed on multiple platforms that are accessed by hundreds of end-users from multiple locations, sometimes across the country or around the world. End-users can be internal (employees), business partners and contractors alike. Everyone is counting on highly secure, always-available, 24x7 Internet-speed business services for all applications, desktops, servers, switches, routers and printers.

The unacceptable cost of downtime

Today's end-users have virtually "zero tolerance" for device or application problems, service interruptions or system failures. Everyone will agree that downtime is expensive regardless of the size of business. Downtime translates directly into lost productivity or worse, lost revenue. Help desk technicians are under massive pressure to resolve problems quickly or risk the scrutiny of business managers and unwelcome questions related to the management, efficiency and reliability of the IT infrastructure. The result is a furiously reactive, "break-fix" service delivery model where technicians are deployed unpredictably in a kneejerk reaction to resolve unanticipated problems. The environment is generally chaotic with precious little time for proactive strategic IT planning.

Fingertip access to C-level reports

Independent of end-users' expectations for receiving reliable and uninterrupted high-speed network access, business managers and C-level personnel expect the IT infrastructure to contribute measurably to the company's bottom line. That means the IT Professional needs fingertip access to performance data on a range of issues. This includes compliance, capacity planning and the status of all devices and systems in the network. Moreover, many senior personnel – such as the VP of Finance, VP of Human Resources and other high-level managers – are also under tremendous pressure to demonstrate the ROI of their team or business unit. Increasingly these stakeholders need and expect IT professionals to provide them with reports on key areas

The Big Four Pain Points for IT Managers

No single view of the network

- Having a 24x7 pulse on critical network devices
- Not being able to see things fail before others in the company do
- Responsible for the network – but do not have full visibility

Managing distributed architectures

- Servicing multiple office locations
- Gaining access to critical network devices

Deciding what daily activities are most important

- Fighting fires vs. being proactive
- Mundane and boring tasks: "How do I automate them?"
- The "desktop" vs. the "infrastructure"

Providing transparency to management

- How to show value to C-level management for the IT work being done
- Build and present a rationale for future IT investment
- Demonstrate direct benefits such as increased network uptime

Doing More with Less: Automating IT Services in Your Midsize Business

of the network that directly impact or measure their productivity. For example, if email is down, IT Professionals are instantly on the hot seat: Why did the system go down? What's being done to correct the problem? What is IT going to do to prevent this from happening in the future? This is why you need quick and easy access to performance reports with hard info to substantiate the status of the infrastructure, demonstrate the value of the IT department to the business and to get sign-off on future IT budget requests. And it is why easy-to-use reporting tools are rapidly becoming a necessity in order for an IT automation solution to truly meet the needs of midsize businesses.

Ensure security settings

In between ensuring an "always on" IT infrastructure, the IT Professional must also implement strategies to protect the network from crippling viruses, spyware and Trojan Horses. Security is compromised in many organizations by end-users who can do virtually anything they want on their desktop or laptop because policies are ignored or IT Professionals cannot enforce them – or get control of devices in critical situations when the need of a clear and present threat arises.

The heat is on: to automate

This is the challenging day-to-day operational reality that most IT managers experience when carrying out maintenance and security operations for their network. At best, the average internal IT technician can manage roughly 125 to 150 devices in this kind of demanding environment. Yet midsize businesses generally have 100 to 1,000 internal end-users. Not surprisingly, this operational reality has motivated many IT managers to look at automation as a way to leverage their resources, become more efficient and proactive, improve scalability, cut costs – and do more with less.

The Power of Automation

All functional areas within a business must strive to continuously increase their efficiency and productivity. For IT Professionals, one of the easiest ways to do this is to automate their operations and services. Automation carries significant, measurable and often immediate benefits. The right solution for a midsize business will enable IT Professionals to:

- Reduce or eliminate time-wasting visits to end-user sites/desks
- Slash the number of “nuisance” Help Desk calls that could have been prevented with proactive maintenance
- Reduce operational/maintenance costs while adding more services
- Speed up response times
- Manage more devices without adding technicians
- Free up time and resources to proactively plan IT programs
- Maintain consistent, higher-quality services
- Allocate work more efficiently

The perils of “point solutions”

In a rush to enjoy these benefits, and confronted by mounting budget constraints, many IT Professionals have turned to a host of “point solutions” to help automate specific applications, devices or tasks. While attractive from a pricing standpoint – some point products are in fact “free” – these tools have drawbacks and serious shortcomings.

The overriding problem is that individual point solutions cannot be integrated into a single, flexible, easy-to-use solution for providing faster response times to end-users and to deliver proactive IT services. Adding multiple products also has the inescapable drawback of adding to the complexity of planning, managing, and governing the IT infrastructure.

As well, individual point-solution tools do not give you greater predictability or complete visibility on all devices and applications deployed in the network. As a result, for the most part, you are left wondering when you will receive the next nuisance call from a frustrated end-user. That’s why most IT Professionals with point solutions still

Top benefits of IT automation reported by IT Professionals in midsize businesses include:

- Reduce network, application and end-user downtime
- Increase productivity of IT Professionals and end-users
- Deliver faster, higher-quality service to end-users
- Increase satisfaction of users
- Reduce operating costs
- Service more end-users with fewer IT staff
- Align IT services with business priorities and demonstrate measurable value
- Build stronger, stickier relationships with senior management

Doing More with Less: Automating IT Services in Your Midsize Business

find they burn a significant amount of time on Help Desk calls.

Questions to ask before choosing any IT automation solution include:

By conducting a modest amount of upfront due diligence, you can avoid the disappointment that invariably results from selecting an incomplete point solution – or worse, an over-engineered and expensive “platform” solution designed for larger, enterprise businesses. Here are some useful questions to keep in mind when reviewing automation solutions:

1. What tasks should really be automated?
2. How much effort will be required to deploy and integrate any new tools into the existing IT infrastructure?
3. How many different tools will be required to automate different processes?
4. Will these tools realize promised efficiencies across a distributed architecture?
5. How easy will it be to learn and use the tool(s)?
6. Can these tools be managed in a centralized way?
7. Will these tools quantify and report on where IT resources were invested and show the ROI?
8. How much money will these tools really save?

Key point: the right type of IT automation solution should dramatically reduce the volume of nuisance calls and significantly lessen the cost of dealing with the calls that are received by a Help Desk.

Key Requirements of an IT Automation Solution

The premise of automation is simple: the more mundane tasks you can automate, the more efficient and cost-effective you can be – and the more time you can free up to focus on proactive, strategic IT activities. With the right solution, you can automate important, yet repetitive tasks, such as applying patches running defrags, performing asset management and updating software on end-users’ systems. Many other routine tasks can be automated, saving you time and resources while allowing you to turn your attention to more critical IT planning issues such as:

- Building credibility with executive management
- Aligning IT with business priorities
- Planning and preparing cases for future IT investment and upgrades
- Communicating the rationale behind short, mid-term and longer-term IT budget requests

It’s time to go beyond “services automation”

Automating routing tasks is important – yet it is only one element in a complete automation solution for IT Professionals. Automation by itself does not ensure that you can control all areas of your network infrastructure including routers, firewalls, printers, servers and end-user workstations. In addition to fully leveraging their IT staff, and becoming more proactive through the power of automation, IT Professionals are also under increasing pressure to show how they support internal business processes and add significant value to senior management.

That’s why an effective automation solution for the IT Professional needs to involve the use of network and systems management (NSM) software to deliver IT services more efficiently to end-users. By using an NSM software solution designed specifically to automate routine IT services in midsize businesses, you can also

Doing More with Less: Automating IT Services in Your Midsize Business

monitor and manage devices, and fix issues on desktops and servers – all done remotely and easily from a central location. The specific functionality required in an NSM software solution for a midsize business is:

- Remote control
- Remote management
- Remote monitoring
- Tactical and performance reporting

Remote control

Time is money. That's why it is important for you to resolve end-users' technical issues as quickly and easily as possible. With the right software tool, you can immediately take control of virtually any remote device – workstations, servers, mobile systems and more – to troubleshoot and fix issues without disrupting end-users. Having the ability to access and control all devices on a distributed network goes hand and glove with the ability to fix issues remotely. Remote control is a key way to increase technician productivity, reduce your service delivery costs, shorten resolution times and keep end-users productive and happy.

Key questions to ask when considering an NSM solution with remote control include:

- Will this solution provide attended and unattended remote control for managed (and unmanaged) Windows and non-Windows systems, as well as network devices?
- Will this remote control solution connect in seconds and provide troubleshooting capabilities to remediate issues without disrupting the end-user?

Remote Monitoring and Management

The ability to remotely monitor is imperative for the proper management of your network devices. By employing a monitoring solution that issues alerts based on thresholds you define, you can gain impressive insight into potential problems on the network and work to proactively correct them before they lead to costly downtime for end-users. The most effective monitoring and management solutions use a combination of both agents (used primarily on mobile devices such as laptops) and probes to provide a full view of the entire business network in the most flexible and efficient way possible.

Summary of key questions to ask to ensure an IT Automation solution meets your needs

Remote Control

- Will this solution provide attended and unattended remote control for managed (and unmanaged) Windows and non-Windows devices?
- Will this remote control solution connect in seconds and provide troubleshooting capabilities to remediate issues without disrupting the end user?

Remote Monitoring and Management

- How broad is the OS and protocol support provided? (For example, will it support Linux, Novell, MAC, and Microsoft?)
- Will the solution enable you to monitor all of your networks and users from a single dashboard?
- Does this solution provide powerful Windows management capabilities?
- What specific tools are provided (for example, file transfer, remote command prompt, remote registry editor, etc.)?

Reporting

- How many views (of the network) can be created?
- Can the tool provide views on specific classes of device and services?
- Will reports provide insight to the IT infrastructure and assist with troubleshooting
- What type of performance reports can be generated?
- Will performance reports clearly demonstrate the ROI and value of the IT department to senior management?

Doing More with Less: Automating IT Services in Your Midsize Business

Key questions to assess the remote monitoring and management capabilities of an NSM solution include:

- How broad is the OS and protocol support provided? Will it support Linux, Novell, Apple and Windows?)
- Will the solution enable you to monitor all of your networks and end-users from a single management console?
- Does this solution provide powerful Windows management capabilities?
- What specific tools are provided? Does it include file transfer, remote command prompt, remote registry editor, etc.?

Reporting

The ability to access, troubleshoot, fix and manage problems remotely is undeniably powerful. Reporting is a vital element in these activities, for two reasons – it provides tactical information to ease and speed troubleshooting, and it communicates the performance of IT infrastructure (and hence the value of IT services) throughout the organization.

IT Professionals require a range of operational reports for evaluating and troubleshooting issues. Utilization, detailed status, capacity and event reports help to simplify and reduce the time required for issue resolution process. When made available “on demand”, these reports provide a quick view into the history, availability or utilization of a device or service.

For IT Professionals, the ability to demonstrate the performance of network infrastructure under their management is the final, critical component of an end-to-end NSM solution for IT automation. For example, you’ll want the ability to report on the number and duration of downtime incidents, the number of prevented incidents and other key metrics to help quantify the value of your IT organization and the value it delivers. Armed with these reports, you can justify budgets, support IT planning with empirical data and make better, more informed decisions.

In addition, the performance reporting function of an integrated NSM solution should enable you to provide customized data to senior managers – in an easy-to-generate and easy-to-read format that non-technical stakeholders can quickly comprehend. For example, can the CEO access an executive-level summary report and immediately see the recent availability and performance of the CRM? The ability to report on these and other

N-central: the Complete Toolset for IT Professionals

Reduce IT operational costs and increase IT staff productivity

- Easily automate a host of manual tasks behind the scenes:
 - Run defrags, send patch updates, distribute software, execute scripts
- Eliminate unnecessary visits to end-user sites and desks

Remote monitoring to deliver higher levels of proactive service

- Become proactive with access to real-time, 24x7 network information
- Manage a distributed architecture as if it were local
- Detect and correct network and system problems before they lead to costly downtime
- Apply monitoring automatically based on discovered asset information

Improve transparency with tactical and performance reporting

- Budgetary and capacity planning
- Legislative compliance and warranty management

Drive down operational costs and increase staff productivity

- Manage more than 500 devices per IT Professional
- Support and troubleshoot remotely anywhere, anytime
- Leverage sophisticated remote control tools to improve offsite maintenance, lower response times and improve off-hours access to systems

Doing More with Less: Automating IT Services in Your Midsize Business

questions through customized C-level views of the network is critical to demonstrating your value as an IT Professional and the services you deliver.

Key questions to ask about the reporting function of an NSM solution include:

- How many views (of the network) can be created?
- Can the tool provide views on specific classes of device and services?
- Will reports provide insight into the IT infrastructure and assist with troubleshooting?
- What type of performance reports can be generated?
- Will performance reports clearly demonstrate the ROI and value of the IT department to senior management?

Key point: Collectively, remote CONTROL, remote MONITORING, remote MANAGEMENT and REPORTING define a complete, end-to-end solution that enables IT Professionals to achieve greater efficiency and optimize their entire IT infrastructure.

Optimize Your IT Infrastructure with N-able Technologies®

N-able Technologies® conducts regular qualitative research and maintains extensive dialogue with IT Professionals in a wide range of industries. Sectors include Medical, Financial, Professional Services and not-for-profit. Typically these are midsize organizations that have one IT Professionals for every 125 to 150 end-users. Most are operating in a distributed environment. In many cases the IT Professionals are struggling to attain consistent end-user satisfaction levels, do not have visibility into their networks and have a growing requirement for reporting network performance to C-level executives. Chances are you can relate to many or all of these challenges in addition to those highlighted earlier in this whitepaper!

Network and Systems Management solution

N-able has responded to these specific challenges with N-central®: a complete, integrated remote network and systems management solution that is used by IT Professionals to efficiently and easily automate their services. N-central gives IT Professionals in midsize businesses a smart, full-featured toolset to deliver the most complete service remotely to their end-users, for the least expense – and report on those services with unprecedented detail and unmatched ease.

N-central has a proven track record for delivering the features and functionality that will most help IT Professionals to measurably boost efficiency and reduce costs while improving service levels and end-user satisfaction. Key functionality provided by N-central includes the ability to:

- Remotely manage Windows and non-Windows systems as well as network devices with lightning-fast remote control
- Distribute software, apply patches, execute scripts and transfer files – all done remotely and easily
- Auto-discover complete network infrastructure and vital systems information in minutes
- Provide real-time reports on the status of all systems and devices

Take control of any device, anywhere

N-central features remote control tools that allow you to securely connect to – and gain control over – any Windows or non-Windows device on the network in seconds. Devices can be anywhere in the world. All that's required is an Internet connection for you to troubleshoot and then instantly fix issues from an easy-to-use Web-based management console. The remote control features have a proven ability to:

- Increase staff utilization rates by giving each IT Professional the power to manage 500+ end-users
- Reduce time-consuming visits to end-user sites/desks
- Lower operational costs by providing a pre-packaged, seamlessly integrated remote control solution that doesn't rely on open external ports or VPNs

Complete remote management for IT Professionals

N-central includes a comprehensive set of remote management tools that IT Professionals require to effectively manage end-users and deliver more than 90 per cent of services remotely. Superior efficiencies enable you to slash your operational costs and improve service levels to end-users. In addition, you are liberated from nuisance calls and routine tasks to focus on strategic IT issues. With N-central features, you can:

- Remotely patch desktops and servers
- Gain one-click access for remote control and remote desktop and server management

Doing More with Less: Automating IT Services in Your Midsize Business

- Automatically distribute software and scripts to remote PCs and servers
- Conduct asset and license management for PCs and other devices

N-central also integrates with Intel® vPro™ for scheduled bulk power control and system defense for isolating an infected machine from a network while retaining remote access to the device.

Remotely monitor all networks and devices from a single console

Monitoring is critical to the delivery of effective management services that keep the IT infrastructure up and running. N-central features a single comprehensive console that enables you to easily monitor the availability and performance of any IP-enabled device, including desktops, laptops, servers, printers, copiers and other network devices such as firewalls, routers and switches. Unlike other tools, N-central offers the flexibility to use software agents, probes or both to gather all critical data and build an inventory of devices on your network. N-central also ships with pre-defined monitoring settings for more than 160 services based on industry best practices!

Show your IT value with comprehensive reports

N-central comes with more than 40 pre-built reports that automatically collect and display data in support of many tactical operational activities, including availability and performance analysis, troubleshooting, upgrade planning, license compliance, patch compliance and many others. These reports allow you to work more efficiently and effectively, doing more with less by reducing the time required to deliver a broad range of IT services.

Additionally, N-compass™, the optional performance reporting system integrated with N-central, offers a suite of 25 pre-built reports that allow you to rapidly gather and communicate vital business information from a range of areas, including network availability, reliability, utilization, regulatory compliance and asset reporting. These strategic and technical reports assist you in demonstrating the performance of IT infrastructure from a business and tactical perspective by showing events that have occurred, items that require proactive maintenance and information used to maintain compliance with SLAs and regulatory requirements.

Conclusion

Today's corporate IT Professional requires a new approach to IT management that extends beyond basic service automation. Specifically you need a complete set of integrated tools to:

- Monitor the overall network and performance of all devices (Windows and non-Windows)
- Deliver the highest levels of proactive service to end-users
- Automate routine tasks so you can spend more time on strategic IT issues
- Contribute measurably to your organization's mission, success and profitability
- Justify the needs of the IT infrastructure to senior management

The good news is that, as an IT Professional, you can achieve these goals and dramatically enhance the value you provide to their business. The way to do this is by using a solution that is designed specifically for midsize companies and integrates remote control, remote monitoring, remote management and reporting into a single integrated toolset. Collectively these features define the requirements for a complete network systems and management solution.

N-central from N-able Technologies meets these requirements. N-central is a complete network and systems management software solution. It has been purpose-built to meet the needs of time- and resource-challenged IT Professionals in midsize businesses who want to:

- Remotely monitor and manage their network and all devices using a single, easy to use console
- Use remote control to securely connect to – and gain control over – any Windows or non-Windows device on the network in seconds
- Auto-discover the complete network infrastructure in minutes
- Evolve beyond a reactive, break-fix mode of operation and become increasingly proactive
- Demonstrate the value of their IT infrastructure to C-level executives and other stakeholders

N-central is available as an on-premise software solution or as a hosted subscription-based service from N-able Certified Resellers.

To learn more about N-able Technologies and N-central, visit www.n-able.com.

Try N-central Free for 1 Year!

Get details on this limited time offer and download the #1-rated IT Network and Systems Management solution by visiting:

www.n-able.com/itautowhitepaper

About N-able Technologies®

N-able Technologies® is the global leader in network and systems management software and services for managed service providers and IT professionals. N-able's award-winning N-central® software and complementary toolsets are proven to reduce IT support costs, improve network performance and increase productivity through the proactive monitoring, management and optimization of IP-enabled devices and IT infrastructure. N-able maintains operations in North America, the U.K., the Netherlands and Australia.

www.n-able.com

Copyright

Copyright © 2009 N-able Technologies.

All rights reserved. This document contains information intended for the exclusive use of N-able Technologies' personnel, partners and potential partners. The information herein is restricted in use and is strictly confidential and subject to change without notice. No part of this document may be altered, reproduced, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, for any purpose, without the express written permission of N-able Technologies.

Copyright protection includes, but is not limited to, program code, program documentation, and material generated from the software product displayed on the screen, such as graphics, icons, screen displays, screen layouts, and buttons.

N-able Technologies, N-central, N-compass and Monitor Manage Optimize are trademarks or registered trademarks of N-able Technologies International Inc., licensed for use by N-able Technologies, Inc. All other names and trademarks are the property of their respective holders.



www.n-able.com

info@n-able.com

1-877-655-4689