

Avocent Covers IT Asset Management Lifecycle from A to Z

Abstract

Avocent Corporation's (Avocent) LANDesk has renewed its standing in the IT Asset Management Market with the launch of its latest asset management solution called the LANDesk Asset Lifecycle Manager (ALM). This release introduces an asset management solution that builds on a lifecycle approach for managing assets. It offers customers several new capabilities including an asset state engine, tightly integrated process control and automation, and workflow linkages. Avocent ALM is the first application to take advantage of Avocent's new integration engine called the Avocent Management Platform (AMP).

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This Impact Brief covers the recent general availability announcement of ALM—a real-time, comprehensive lifecycle management solution for all IT assets across the enterprise by Avocent, an industry-leading provider of IT operations management solutions. The analysis discusses the announcement in the context of the overall market and business challenges, discusses the key value propositions of the solution, and concludes with an ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES® (EMA™) perspective on the announcement with commentary on the overall Avocent strategic direction.

Completing the Cycle: LANDesk Asset Lifecycle Manager Launches

Avocent has announced general availability of its new LANDesk ALM. This launch culminates a significant effort by the company to expand its product suite to automate and manage the entire asset lifecycle across the enterprise IT infrastructure. The company's broad vision includes integrating physical, logical, contractual, and financial data in order to facilitate IT business planning, manage technical standards, acquire and deploy assets, manage MAC (move, add, change) requests, reconcile inventories and facilitate asset retirement.

LANDesk ALM is the first Avocent application built on its AMP integration platform, which allows interoperability among all Avocent products (LANDesk Service Desk, Avocent Server Manager, Avocent DSView, etc.) as well as other vendors' IT management help desks, configuration management databases, ERP/CRM solutions, etc. AMP will help Avocent to solidify its position as a "citizen CMDB" for CMDB System deployments.

In addition to its new, integrated, federated approach to IT asset management, ALM boasts a number of new features that are critical to companies interested in advancing maturity in ITAM. Most notably, the product provides a process control engine that helps companies struggling with best practices to define and automate its ITAM discipline. At the same time, the workflow engine and process tools are integrated with a powerful lifecycle state engine, which provides asset inventories as well as relationship mappings. A robust reporting engine rounds out the formidable feature list.

Of particular note, ALM introduced the state map capability which enables customers to understand the lifecycle phase for any given asset. Is the asset ready to be retired? Or is

it just coming into its serviceability? This capability is distinctive for Avocent. It shows graphically where an asset is, and more than that, it enables managers to drill into aspects of inventory information, active workflows and processes.

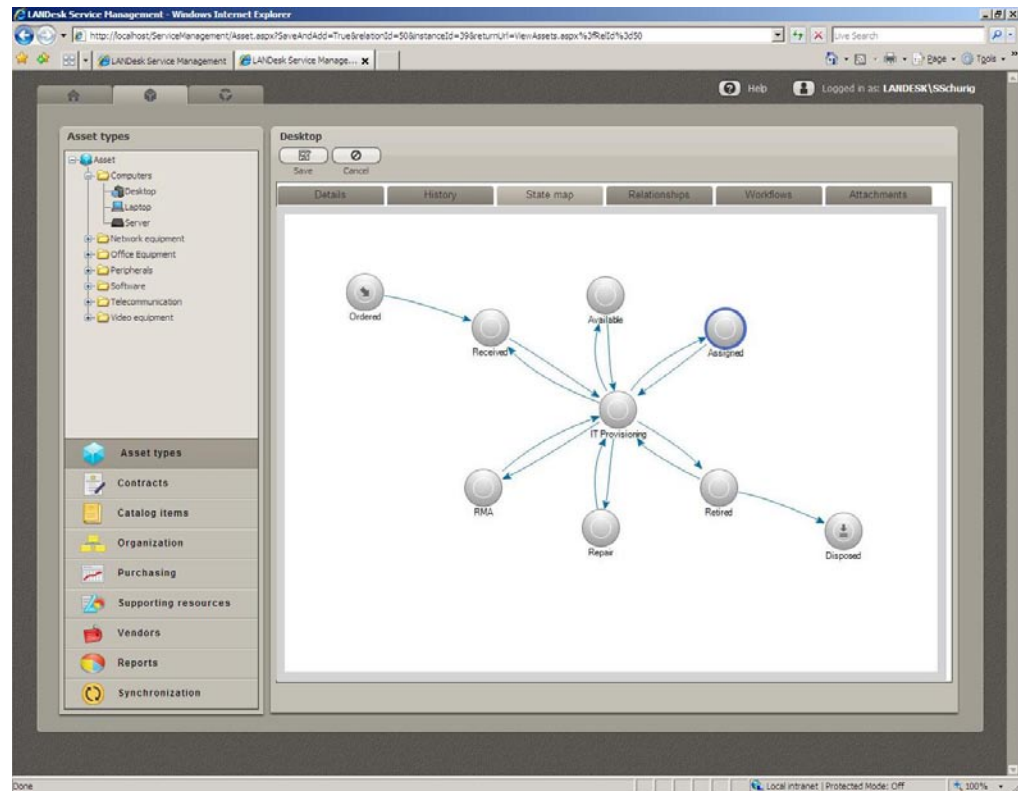


Figure One: Avocent State Engine

Avocent Asset Lifecycle Manager Highlights

The following are the key ramifications of the launch of LANDesk Asset Lifecycle Manager.

- Avocent, as a company, has re-established itself in the ITAM market with a significant expansion of its suite functionality, incorporating a full lifecycle approach. This includes both software and hardware, regardless of whether the assets are on- or off-network.
- LANDesk ALM provides real-time tracking, control and audit trails for all the assets in an enterprise IT environment. Avocent's investments in ALM are part of its move forward to manage from the desktop to the data center.
- Avocent has committed to playing a role in the larger federated IT management architecture including CMDB Systems. The ALM architecture enables integration without specific "connectors" via the data sync engine provided by AMP.
- LANDesk Process Manager provides an integrated workflow and state engines enabling a state change to initiate a workflow change, for example. Focus on the automation of ITAM processes provides scalability and repeatability of key functions.

- The Best Practices library supports overall ITIL initiatives, providing pragmatic, action-oriented ITAM recommendations.
- A powerful GUI allows users to graphically drill down and across workflow components. All of the consoles, with the exception of the designer's console, are fully Web-enabled.

Asset Lifecycle Management in 2009 and Beyond

Over the past five years, EMA has been following the evolution of asset management maturity for mid-size and large enterprises. While many companies have achieved some level of basic inventory and discovery along with the basics of desktop software licensing, most still struggle with moving into a more proactive state with accurate, dynamic hardware and software inventories, license management, IT governance, risk mitigation, and integration between asset management tools and the overall ITSM solution. Many companies are planning a move to integrate service management, asset management and IT finance; yet, most are still struggling with the integration issues involved as well as cultural challenges across IT.

With increasing infrastructure complexity and the blurring of traditional boundaries between services, applications and servers, traditional manual asset surveys and “tribal knowledge” practices no longer provide value to the organization, and may actually provide something worse than no information: dis-information—outdated data that may be mistaken as current. Even when well executed, manual asset practices do not provide adequate scalability for most growing, dynamic IT operations.

EMA predicts that the most successful IT organizations in 2009 and beyond will be those that can address four primary challenges of asset lifecycle management: gaining control of IT assets throughout the enterprise in an automated fashion; reducing costs by better portfolio management of both hardware and software; reducing risks, both from outages and compliance violations, by understanding the infrastructure and its interdependencies; and improving IT performance by maximizing utilization of assets and leveraging standardized best practices. Companies failing to address asset lifecycle management needs will find themselves at a competitive disadvantage, according to EMA research.

EMA Perspective

Almost as important as the features and functionality of the Avocent LANDesk Asset Lifecycle Manager is the return of Avocent to the asset management market after a limited presence. Initial reviews of LANDesk ALM shows the company is back on track to provide a comprehensive solution to manage everything from the desktop to the data center and demonstrates that it has vision in doing so. Key to this announcement is a commitment by Avocent to the larger, heterogeneous IT management efforts underway at many enterprises. For example, Avocent has wisely, in EMA analysts' opinion, avoided trying to compete as a “core” CMDB System vendor, instead focusing on being a good “citizen” CMDB in the overall federated, configuration management system. By avoiding trying to be everything to everybody, Avocent has been able to focus on its core competencies.

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As a note about its absence, in March 2008, Avocent moved a significant percentage of its software development efforts to ALM to bring it to market more quickly. EMA survey results and consulting engagements have shown that this investment will pay off in the long run, as integration continues to be top-of-mind for IT users and any enterprise IT shop focused on an IT service management strategy. With two more releases expected in 2009,

EMA expects Avocent to remain actively engaged in the ITAM market. The most significant business uncertainty for Avocent is its decision not to automatically upgrade existing customers.

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EMA believes the most significant new feature in LANDesk Asset Lifecycle Manager is the tight coupling of its state engine with automated workflows and process tools. This feature, which EMA believes to be unique among ITAM vendors, allows IT organizations to evolve from a focus on providing accurate IT inventories—which is important—to putting that information into the context of the larger picture of what is happening across multiple areas of the company: help desks, IT architecture, risk management, compliance, auditing, and financial

management. This evolution will significantly drive the overall ITAM value proposition, and positions Avocent well for future growth. EMA recommends that companies looking for next-generation ITAM with a focus on process put LANDesk Asset Lifecycle Manager on the short list for consideration.