

The Case for Automation

White Paper



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INTRODUCTION

In these uncertain economic times, companies are looking to control costs wherever possible. Organizations are looking long and hard at every expenditure, even those once considered mission-critical or simply ‘the cost of doing business.’

IT professionals, specifically, are feeling the pinch of financial belt-tightening every day. In a July 2008 Technisource survey, 70 percent of IT workers said the economy is growing weaker, up from 38 percent in the second quarter of 2007.

According to Network World, projections for 2009 IT budgets aren’t too rosy: In a June 2008 report, 44 percent of companies said they expect flat budgets, and only 28 percent project an increase. The remaining 28 percent are expecting decreases or aren’t yet sure.

The problem is, IT departments are under more pressure than ever, thanks to increasing government and industry regulation around data management, increasingly complex security threats, and increasing demand from management and end users for 24/7 uptime and high performance. The solutions for these issues aren’t solved by across-the-board budget cuts, but by strategic investment in technologies that can boost efficiency, save money in the mid- and long terms, and make IT an integral part of business processes and goals.

Skyrocketing fuel costs, for example, have led to cutbacks in business travel and increased teleconferencing and telecommuting. Rising energy prices have led to increased focus on consolidation, virtualization, and automation for IT equipment.

The focus on IT equipment and devices comes from the increasing realization that PC management is a major cost center, with staff devoted to maintenance of the network and servers, and technical support personnel managing updates, patches, and break/fix issues for end users. IT automation—where software manages the routine, day-to-day tasks of IT maintenance—delivers relief from the administration, monitoring, and helpdesk chores that eat up so much IT time and budget.

With automation in place, IT departments reap immediate time and staffing savings, not to mention reduced licensing fees for maintenance software. They often find that automation brings improvements in energy efficiency and security, as well, which lowers data center costs. Energy savings dovetail nicely with ‘green’ programs and standards. In fact, 73 percent of executives surveyed by CIO Insight magazine (July 2008) indicated that they’ve launched green initiatives because of the cost savings involved.

Automating routine IT tasks seems to make sense from the financial and operational perspectives, but for many companies, questions arise when it comes to implementation:

- How easy is it to switch over to an automated platform?
- How much time and effort are involved in managing the automation tools?
- Does it make sense to use different tools to automate different processes?
- Once all these factors are considered, how much is the company really saving?

To get a better sense of how mid-size businesses view IT automation, Ziff Davis Enterprise Research conducted a survey of 304 IT professionals in mid-size companies (100-999 employees). The goals of the survey included finding out how deeply automation has penetrated the market, and measuring attitudes about IT automation.

In this paper, we’ll explore the results of the survey, analyzing the IT concerns expressed and outlining why IT automation delivers tremendous benefit for mid-size companies. We’ll also explore the real-world savings and return on investment that organizations realize when implementing automation solutions.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Biggest Challenges for IT

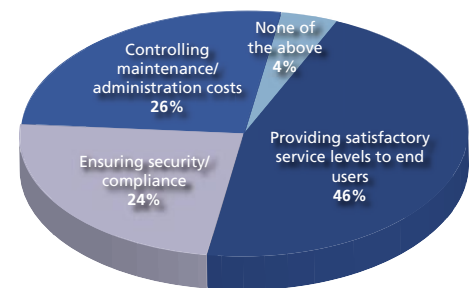


Figure 1: Biggest client systems management challenge.

When asked about their biggest challenge, in terms of client systems management, nearly half of respondents (46 percent) cited “providing satisfactory service levels to end users.”

It’s interesting that this seemingly basic expectation—that users have the tools and resources they need to do their jobs each

day—has become a challenge for IT departments. Apparently, keeping applications and systems up and running isn't as simple as it sounds, which is even more reason for companies to consider automation as an effective solution to setting and maintaining superlative service levels.

Nearly tied for second place are controlling costs—which is a top concern for all companies, as we mentioned—and ensuring security and compliance, which is an important issue for mid-size companies in particular. End-user systems represent a vulnerable injection point for cyber threats, especially when workers have free rein to surf the Web. And keeping track of what comes into the network via endpoint devices is just one side of the coin; companies must also pay careful attention to what leaves. This is where compliance concerns—especially around the privacy of sensitive data and/or client records—come into play. Violations of government and industry regulations could result in fines and negative publicity, ultimately resulting in lost business and revenue.

Mid-size companies, specifically, have to worry about these issues because of their not-small-but-not-an-enterprise status. A small operation with relatively few systems under management can keep tight control; a large enterprise often has the IT resources to maintain its systems adequately. Companies in the middle may have several hundred seats under management, perhaps even in distributed locations, and a limited IT staff and budget to keep it all running securely and optimally. IT automation, as we'll discuss, is an effective way to address all these concerns.

What's Already Automated/Automation Wish List

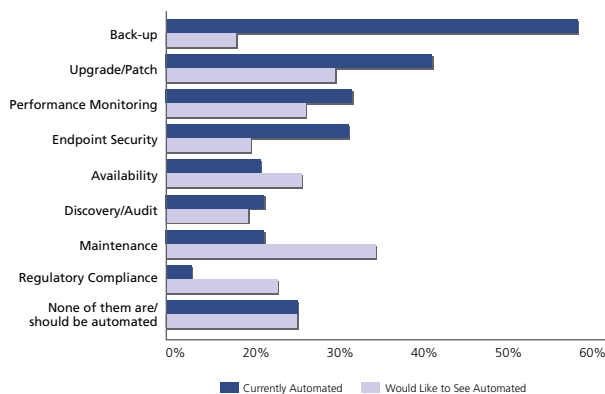


Figure 2: Which tasks does your company automate? Which would you like to see automated?

In terms of which specific IT tasks are automated, the majority of companies already automate backup activities, with upgrade/patch at nearly 40 percent, and performance monitoring and endpoint security coming in at just over a quarter each. When asked which tasks they want to automate, about a third of respondents chose maintenance—those chores that involve the most work and the most hands-on hours for technicians and individual systems. A quarter of respondents want to automate patch and upgrade activities, as well.

These tasks represent the most routine and tedious IT chores, and, in the case of maintenance, one of the most expensive, in terms of time and human resources. An automation platform that enables proactive diagnosis and repair of end systems and touch-free patch and update deployment is clearly on IT workers' wish lists.

How To Do Automation

As we pointed out, a fair number of respondents already automate certain tasks, and many others want to. We also asked whether—for each of eight IT tasks—they believe automation is superior to manual management. Across the board, respondents report that automation is the best way, particularly for backup, upgrade/patch, performance monitoring, and discovery/audit tasks.

For companies that have opted to automate various IT tasks, the next question is—what's the best way to do it? Automation software and tools can be deployed in-house, or they can be outsourced to a service provider, which is then responsible for ongoing monitoring and maintenance.

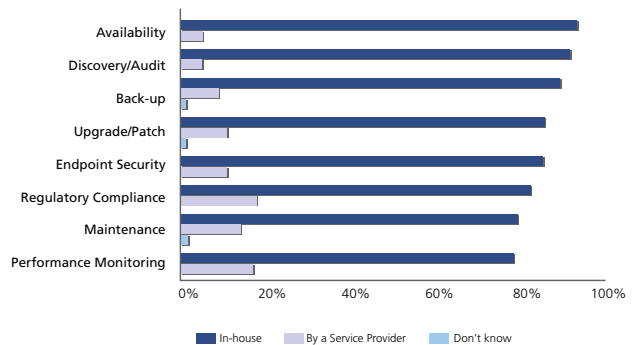


Figure 3: How has your firm deployed automation tools?

Our survey found that the vast majority of respondents that automate IT tasks manage them in-house. Only some 10-18 percent use service providers for some tasks, including monitoring, maintenance, compliance, security, and patching.

Moving the focus back to all respondents, we asked what they think about the feasibility of the options for automating specific tasks, and again, in-house beat service providers by better than two to one in nearly every category. One reason for this may be the perception that a service contract to manage 100 or more seats is roughly equivalent, in cost, to hiring a full-time IT staffer. There are other considerations—such as the number of office locations under management and the degree of dedicated expertise and guidance a company may want—that could justify a service provider approach over an in-house approach, but the survey results seem to indicate that in-house is still preferred overall.

Regulatory compliance is the only task for which service providers scored close to in-house management. This may be due to the increased understanding that outsourced automation, which follows best practices and produces auditable logs as part of its feature set, is a boon for compliance efforts. But even in this case, more

than half of respondents believe in-house automation of compliance efforts is a feasible idea.

Automated compliance makes a lot of sense—it ensures that all relevant transactions and activities are tracked and logged, and that reports can be made available whenever needed. If performed manually, this job could—and does—grow very tedious, very quickly. But it’s also a task that can be complicated when a company uses a glut of management tools. If the network monitoring software produces one set of reports, the e-mail servers produce yet another, and the database tools produce a third set, correlating the information and producing a coherent picture becomes difficult.

For this reason, bundling automation tools in one software package or solution is viewed as far superior to automating individual tasks. In fact, more than 60 percent of respondents say bundled IT automation services reduces costs, more than half say it reduces complexity and increases productivity, and more than 40 percent say it reduces downtime. This brings us to the section of the survey where we asked about what benefits companies are enjoying as a result of IT automation.

Benefits of Automation

When asked which benefits they associate with the automation of specific tasks, a majority of respondents pointed out that:

- Automated maintenance reduces downtime, increases productivity, reduces costs, and improves satisfaction, and to a slightly lesser degree, enables companies to reduce IT head count
- Automated upgrading/patching and backup bring similar results
- Automated performance monitoring increases productivity and improves user satisfaction
- Automated availability tools—aside from the obvious benefits of improving uptime and productivity—also improve user satisfaction. This correlates neatly with our earlier question about client systems management challenges. Nearly half of

the respondents reported that satisfactory service levels were difficult to deliver, and nearly 70 percent of respondents report that automating availability tasks does, in fact, raise satisfaction levels.

It’s also interesting to note that automated compliance tasks increase business/IT alignment. As we mentioned, companies are looking to consolidate and integrate operations as much as possible, and IT departments can justify expenditures and contribute to the business’s growth by aligning their services with specific corporate initiatives. Regulatory compliance is a major concern for top management, and it represents a prime area where IT professionals can step in and help ensure that the company is ready in case of an audit.

In continuing the discussion of automation benefits, we asked respondents how much they agree with four statements about their firm. Measuring those who agree strongly or somewhat, all respondents report that automated maintenance helps their firm lower IT support costs. In addition:

- Nearly all respondents report that automated endpoint security makes their company more secure than manually managed security
- Ninety-five percent (each) say automated maintenance and upgrade/patch makes their company more secure (as they virtually eliminate the need for human intervention, which can introduce lag time and errors)
- Ninety-five percent agree that automated maintenance helps them obtain higher service levels from IT equipment/support staff
- Automated availability and performance monitoring also deliver higher service levels
- Ninety-seven percent agree automated maintenance and 95 percent agree discovery/audit helps their firm better comply with regulations (as automation tools make policy creation and enforcement easier to manage)

These results show that automation is delivering impressive results, addressing the biggest challenges faced by companies (as expressed in the earlier finding) and improving day-to-day operations.

Calculating the ROI of Automation

The benefits of automation are clear, but how do they translate—in hours and dollars saved—in the real world? That’s where analyst estimates, return-on-investment (ROI) calculations, and success stories come into play.

According to a survey conducted by Enterprise Management Associates last fall, automation technologies can reduce staffing requirements by 50 percent and reduce complexity, improve response time, and reduce the need

	Reduced Downtime	Increased Productivity	Reduced Cost	Improved Used Satisfaction	Reduced IT Staff Count	Improved Business/IT Alignment
Maintenance	70%	63%	59%	54%	43%	33%
Discovery/Audit	40%	40%	56%	26%	37%	51%
Endpoint Security	64%	47%	47%	43%	34%	48%
Upgrade/Patch	70%	61%	58%	48%	41%	35%
Regulatory Compliance	21%	35%	47%	24%	35%	62%
Back-up	70%	56%	58%	42%	35%	46%
Performance Monitoring	61%	67%	48%	61%	27%	39%
Availability	67%	65%	36%	67%	25%	39%

Figure 4: Automating this task has produced the following positive outcomes.

	... Has Lower IT Support Costs	... Is More Secure	... Gets Higher Service Levels from IT Equipment/Support Staff	... Is More Compliant with Regulations
Maintenance	100%	95%	95%	97%
Discovery/Audit	83%	85%	90%	95%
Endpoint Security	76%	99%	90%	92%
Upgrade/Patch	91%	95%	91%	92%
Regulatory Compliance	82%	91%	82%	100%
Back-up	86%	89%	91%	90%
Performance Monitoring	82%	76%	94%	73%
Availability	78%	77%	94%	81%

Figure 5: As a result of automating this task, my firm ...

for ‘putting out fires.’ (“Data Center Automation: Delivering Fast, Efficient and Reliable IT Services,” October 26, 2007)

The study also found that automation reduces the average repair time for system problems by an average of more than 60 percent—which represents an immediate benefit in terms of staff time and operational cost, and a ‘softer’ benefit in terms of improved productivity and uptime.

The value becomes clearer when calculated based on time and energy savings. If a support technician charges \$75 an hour, for example, and an automation tool reduces the yearly maintenance and repair workload by a conservative 10 hours per device, a company with 100 PCs will save \$75,000 per year.

But automation saves more than just service and repair costs. Daily maintenance such as security updates, patch scans and installations, disk defragmentations, application deployments, and network monitoring all take a toll on IT resources—even if it’s just a few minutes per day or hours per week. That time adds up, and adds to the savings generated by automation.

Automated power management—where electricity flowing to idle machines is reduced—also generates cost savings while improving energy efficiency. Kilowatt hours of electricity cost from 15 to 20 cents or more, depending on location, and if the power consumption of each device can be adjusted intelligently, companies can see significant savings on their energy bills and prove they’re operating more ‘greenly.’

The same is true for reductions in tech support visits. Automation cuts down on ‘truck rolls’ and travel associated with dispatching technicians to service calls, which reduces a company’s carbon footprint and conserves resources.

Taking the energy and time savings into account, the average company recoups its investment in automation software within the first quarter or two of deployment.

SUCCESS STORIES

It’s clear that automation makes sense on paper, and its benefits have been proven countless times in the real world, as well.

In one example, Cano Petroleum Inc. incorporated IT automation tools from Kaseya into its operation to increase efficiency, reduce waste, and ensure regulatory compliance.

Jon Morgan, manager of information technology at Cano, reported that his compliance tasks involved physical visits to numerous branch offices, where he had to collect paper reports and consolidate them manually.

“It was very demanding,” Morgan said. “Nothing was integrated. Not only was it extremely labor-intensive, but the reports weren’t consistent, preventing me from getting the information I needed to ensure compliance.”

With an IT automation solution from Kaseya, Morgan can maintain, monitor, secure, and backup all servers and workstations from a central, Web-based management console. He can also produce consistent and granular reports for all of the company’s IT assets, ensuring that Cano is prepared for any compliance audits.

“Kaseya has empowered IT operations to run more smoothly,” Morgan added. “Tasks that took hours or days before now just take moments. That results in fewer interruptions to the business; allowing the company to focus on business objectives rather than a ‘tech’ taking up their workday installing patches and upgrades.”

KASEYA DELIVERS THE COMPREHENSIVE IT AUTOMATION SOLUTION

Based on our survey results, it’s clear that mid-size firms are best served by phasing automation into their operations, and doing so via a package or multi-service solution.

Automation tools from Kaseya are the best choice for breadth and depth of services, plus proven success in the field.

Regardless of the size of your business, you can experience the rewards in operational productivity and increased profitability through IT automation. By implementing a comprehensive and integrated solution with the power, flexibility, and scalability to meet your needs today and expand as your business grows, IT automation enables a proactive approach to improved operations and customer satisfaction. From software inventory to remote desktop management, Kaseya provides the tools, technology, and resources that make complete IT automation possible.

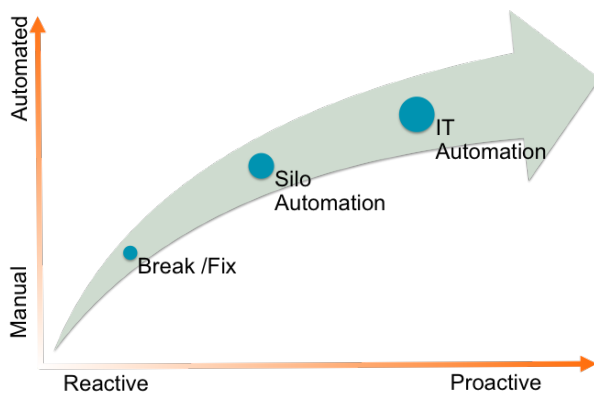
- **Easy to learn. Easy to use**

One integrated and consistent Web-based interface eases the learning curve. Schedule backups, software updates, AV updates and more using a consistent automation platform that simplifies IT service delivery.

- **Fast and flexible to deploy**

Modular deployment puts you in control. Start with remote control, systems management, backup and disaster recovery, antivirus, audit, discovery, monitoring, or patch management, all across your existing network infrastructure.

Deploying IT Automation For Strategic Advantage



As a company phases in automation, its IT processes grow increasingly proactive, trending away from a reactive, “putting out fires” model.

- **Increase productivity**

With remote IT capabilities, central management, and automation of routine tasks, Kaseya eliminates the need for additional resources, allowing you to do much more with less.

- **Save time and money while conserving energy**

Save on time, license fees, power consumption, and on-site visits. Do it all remotely so you don't need to travel to fix a problem. Reduce your carbon footprint while improving IT service.

- **Increase end user satisfaction**

Implement a proactive (instead of reactive) service delivery model, and systems run more smoothly, with less downtime, providing you with more time to focus on strategic initiatives.

- **Increased security**

IT automation helps ensure your systems are in compliance with applicable regulations and requirements. They perform better and are more secure.

Kaseya delivers a comprehensive IT automation solution that helps IT managers run entire networks smoothly from one central location. With a powerful, easy to use, Web-based platform, Kaseya simplifies delivery of IT services—saving time and money and making systems secure. Kaseya's IT Automation solution incorporates:

- Automated Systems Management
- IT Asset Management
- Performance Monitoring
- Service Desk / Help Desk
- Patch and Upgrade Management
- IT Management Reporting
- IT Security Management
- Desktop Policy Management
- Data Protection
- Regulatory Compliance

In addition, using Kaseya tools to automate routine IT tasks helps companies reduce their energy consumption—which conforms with 'green computing' initiatives, as we mentioned, and adds money to the bottom line. Kaseya User State Management (KUSM) enables IT professionals to implement out-of-band power management—limiting the electricity flowing to non-essential or idle computing resources, for example—without compromising system management capabilities.

By automating IT processes and delivering comprehensive remote support capabilities, Kaseya lets companies leverage all the benefits of automation and operate more efficiently and securely every day. ■

To learn more about Kaseya's complete IT Automation Framework, visit www.kaseya.com.