

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Service Catalog: Buy It or Build It?

By Russell Miller, Business Development Manager



In recent years it has become readily evident that the old ways of delivering IT services are just not going to cut it anymore. The days of picking up the phone to call the help desk, or sending an email to a black hole called ithelpdesk@anybiz.com no longer meet the expectations of the business consumer (what we in IT usually refers to as “users”). Whether a function of the millennial generation hitting the workforce, the consumerization of “everything,” or the increased sense of urgency that permeates most enterprises, the business consumer has an expectation that a request in the business environment will be the same as request in his personal life. There should be a digital trail, a status of fulfillment and a record of delivery. A request should be fulfilled in hours or even minutes – certainly not days or weeks.

So it’s no surprise that the concept of “consumerizing IT” is on the minds of many Sr. Manager and Director-level IT executives as they work to demonstrate the value of IT to the business. With the realization that better service delivery is not an optional initiative but a mandate from the masses – the decision for those leaders becomes not “if,” but “when” they will implement an IT service portal. A single portal – a service catalog – where the business consumer goes to request IT services, such as hardware/software, password resets, system access, VPN tokens and the like. A portal where the user sees the status of his request during fulfillment and has the ability to track its progress – a portal that mirrors his consumption habits in the consumer digital space.

So the need clearly exists, but the more challenging decision is whether to build it in-house, or buy it as an existing software solution. Let me give you three reasons why it should be the latter.

- Building it in-house requires a specialized skillset. Do you have the resources to custom develop what will likely be a SharePoint interface with some basic workflow on the back end? SharePoint is a fantastic tool, and it can be leveraged to build some pretty slick portals and forms. The challenge is finding the resources with the right skill set (CSS, HTML, JavaScript) to write code for said forms. Hiring or deploying an existing resource (or resources) is capital intensive, and the work is generally slow-going. While the end product may look very good and on the surface function similar to existing service catalog solutions, is it scalable? Can you create 100, 200, or 500 services that can be consumed by the enterprise in a way that is fast, repeatable – and most of all – supported? You can if you buy one. The right service catalog is configurable to your needs, eliminating the need for coding. This means anyone can learn how to build and manage the catalog. The net/net? This relieves you of the need for critical development resources, putting the management of the catalog into the hands of the business users.

The service catalog is moving beyond the “nice to have” to the “must have” category. The need clearly exists, but the more challenging decision is whether to build it in-house, or buy it as an existing software solution.

- Customization locks you out of future functionality improvements. As most in IT know, software customization is often done to align the application to unique processes or practices of the organization. Conceptually, that makes sense, but what happens when the application issues new releases with improved functionality? Customization rarely survives software updates, so you'll either have to entirely recreate the catalog, or get stuck using older technology. In addition, building an in-house service catalog generally involves the cobbling together multiple applications, all of which have their own update schedules. Much organization will be required to make sure the base components of your home-built service catalog stay updated. Buy an agnostic, standalone service catalog, configure instead of customize, and you are likely looking a short, reliable upgrades that don't break.
- Your business will change, requiring changes in your service catalog. Business today is moving faster than ever before. And it seems inevitable that the minute you roll out an application, it must be changed or tweaked to suit a slightly different business requirement. The service catalog should be agile to meet the needs of the business consumer as quickly as those needs change. The chance of meeting those needs with a home brewed application in the time frame likely allotted are slim to none. However, No-Code, Low Code, Drag and Drop or GUI – there's no doubt that software vendors are working around the clock to deliver applications that are easier to configure, and deploy.

The "New Speed of IT" comes with many challenges, but also many opportunities. Deploying an effective service catalog is a strategic step towards bridging the gap between IT and the business and effectively demonstrates IT's the commitment to the business consumer. A consumer who has expectations of IT service delivery that mirrors the service he receives in his everyday life. The service catalog is moving beyond the "nice to have" to the "must have" category. The only decision now is this: Do you build it? Or do you buy it?

Russell Miller is Business Development Manager at PMG with over 21 years of sales experience working with clients in multiple industries, providing solutions to a variety of business challenges. With extensive experience in project management and delivery, he approaches each unique project with a focus on the customer experience and innovation. Before joining PMG, Russell held sales positions with Nicklaus Golf, Ingersoll-Rand, and Polaris Industries.

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