Software vs. Appliance

Software vs. Appliance: Management Software Making a Comeback

Years ago, at a more innocent time in the computing timeline, the IT systems management market was dominated by large vendors such as Computer Associates, HP and IBM Tivoli. Organizations that had the budget to deploy these large, powerful applications were able to remotely monitor and manage large groups of distributed systems spread out over departments, geography and customer environments.

However, in addition to being expensive, these software solutions were bloated, complex and hard to manage. Sure, they provided valuable visibility into remote systems and enabled remote maintenance, but only the biggest organizations with large budgets and in-house expertise were able to deploy the management solutions.

This complexity led to the rise of the appliance vendors. These companies developed pre-loaded, pre-configured hardware that could deliver similar functionality in a simpler, cost-effective platform. Sure, appliances were difficult to scale, required hardware investment and took up real estate in the data center, but small- to medium- sized businesses (SMBs) loved their simplicity and price point. Then, as vendors continued to add enterprise functionality to their solutions, larger organizations started migrating to an appliance architecture simply because the solutions weren't bloated software that took several full-time technicians to manage.

It seemed like the end for management software.

Make your way back to the present, and management software is back, baby. A new generation of developers has built new light-weight management software from scratch, eschewing the complexity of past solutions. Armed with the same enterprise functionality and scalability of legacy solutions and the simplicity and price point of appliances, this new crop of management software is much better suited for today's dynamic computing environment.

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The Case for Functionality

Appliance vendors have done a good job of developing enterprise-like features and functionality in their solutions, but they still fall short in many areas. Probing technology in appliances gives administrators good visibility into the availability and performance of distributed systems, allowing them to view hardware specifications, installed applications, user activity and network traffic. However, powerful IT systems management requires more than just visibility. Organizations also need the ability to take action and make changes on remote machines to quickly remediate issues. The way appliances are architected makes it difficult to make changes, requiring complex configuration.

Management software, on the other hand, is agent based. The software sits on the managed system and gives administrators complete control over that machine, including the ability to run scripts. Software solutions even enable executions on remote machines when the connection to the central management server is lost if the execution is scheduled in advance. Sure, it's nice to see into a computer, but real management is delivered through remediation and regular maintenance.

The Case for Scalability

The ability to quickly scale on demand is critical for today's business, giving organizations the ability to meet dynamic traffic levels by quickly on-boarding additional capacity and new systems. However, new systems need to be managed to preserve performance, availability and the security of the IT environment. That said, IT systems management solutions need be scaled as seamlessly and as quickly as systems in production.

Unfortunately, appliances are extremely difficult to scale in small-scale deployments and virtually impossible in large-scale deployments. For every 50 or so managed systems, you have to purchase and deploy an additional piece of hardware. This can quickly turn a cost-efficient plug-and-play solution into a complicated architecture option that gets exponentially expensive as needs grow.

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On the other hand, today's management software was developed to make the on-boarding and scaling process seamless and cost-efficient. The solutions can be centralized on low-cost commodity servers and can be scaled efficiently according to business needs in real time. Agents just need to be deployed on managed systems, connected to the management server and the on-boarding process is complete. No additional hardware is required to scale.

The Case for Dynamic Environments

In addition to being fast paced, today's business environment requires flexibility. Mergers and acquisitions, unmanaged growth and compliance requirements have led to heterogeneous compute environments. Standardizing on a single hardware platform would be nice, but it is hardly the norm. Unlike appliances, management software doesn't care about the typography of your IT environment. Systems can be of varying types, log in from multiple locations and connect through various protocols. Once agents are installed on managed systems, none of that matters. Administrators still have the visibility into and control over these machines.

The Case for Maintenance

You don't often think about managing the management solution, but the need exists—whether you deploy an appliance, software or hosted architecture. Appliances require dozens or hundreds of pieces of hardware to be maintained. Any changes to IT policies need to be made to each appliance, a manual task that can be repetitive and time-consuming. Upgrades cause the same issue, requiring that every appliance be swapped out.

Software eliminates the requirement to make changes to multiple pieces of hardware. Changes to the central management server are automatically populated to agents deployed throughout the environment, ensuring that every managed system is up to date on all IT policies with minimal effort from the IT staff. You have better things to do than manually manage your management solution.

These solutions borrow from the best of both worlds, providing any-sized organization with a management solution best suited to their unique needs.

The Bottom Line

Organizations have a right to be wary of management software, simply because of the track record of those large big iron vendors. However, a new crop of management software solutions is helping organizations deploy simple yet powerful and flexible solutions that are simple to deploy, set up and scale. These solutions borrow from the best of both worlds, providing any-sized organization with a management solution best suited to their unique needs.

Contact Kaseya Today

Remote access and remote control of managed devices needs to be integrated within a single management framework, allowing you to conduct powerful maintenance on distributed machines without putting the firm at risk and without disrupting users. Kaseya provides this level of integration, consolidating remote systems management on a single pane of glass.

Contact Kaseya today for more information and to request a live demo of our powerful IT Systems Management solution.

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About Kaseya

Kaseya is the leading global provider of IT Systems Management software. Kaseya solutions empower virtually everyone — from individual consumers to large corporations and IT service providers — to proactively monitor, manage and control IT assets remotely, easily and efficiently from one integrated Web-based platform.

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