HOW TO EXCEL WITH THE SERVICE CATALOG

Isn't this an interesting question that many of us would like to ask: *How to excel with the service catalog*?

Let us explore this matter a little. An immediate suggestion that I provide to clients is to actually use MS Excel (or other spreadsheet application) in order to excel with the service catalog. What I mean by this is that something as simple as the humble spreadsheet can save an organization a lot of time, money and resources if used intelligently, effectively and within the limits of the application.

Note: This paper applies to a records-based service catalog not an actionable service catalog. So with this in mind, take note and read on …

At a very basic level a records-based service catalog contains information about different types of services. A records-based service catalog contains information and specific details about each service and its associated attributes. This information is contained in a form in much the same way that a CI (configuration item) record contains information about a CI and the attributes of the CI.

At the early stage of designing a records-based service catalog initial primary considerations include identifying:

— what data is needed

— what data is relevant

— what data could be stored

— what data should be stored

— formatting of data (text, numerical, alpha numerical etc.)

— the scope of services to be included

Therefore a spreadsheet can be an ideal "starting out" application. It has the ability to hold this type of basic information about services. The information can be sorted, filtered and have basic formatting applied to it. It provides the ability to trial certain data fields and various values used in lists, categories and look up fields.

The following section lists a number of advantages and disadvantages when using a spreadsheet approach for the service catalog:

Advantages

— **Reduced cost of ownership** as many organizations will already have licensed some form of spreadsheet application

— **Reduced administration overhead** as it is simple and less complex then specific applications (though admin overhead is only reduced to a certain point beyond which it may actually increase)

— **Basic and less complex** than specific applications (if kept relatively simple)

— **Familiar interface** as many people are used to using a spreadsheet or can pick up basic skills rather easily and quickly

— **Filtering of data** is possible but basic

— **Provides a cost-effective means to get started**. Sometimes a spreadsheet will be adequate to continue with, and in other cases it will not.

Disadvantages

— **I**t **remains just a spreadsheet** which does not feature rich like specific applications

— **Standalone and lack of any integration** with other systems, tools and applications

— **Limited access** even in shared mode

— **Limited functionality** as it is not as feature rich or automated like specific records-based applications

— **Administration is manual** so admin may become time consuming the bigger the service catalog becomes

— **Ability to link service records reduced**, although not impossible, it is limited and hyper-linking records can become difficult to maintain as data is updated and changes

Using a spreadsheet can help to identify and classify services and the data. Basically this approach lets you focus on the data, content and quality aspects without getting lost in the bewildering world of applications.

Once you have established a good framework for collecting, recording and reviewing the data then it is time to look and see what applications exist to help ease the administration and increase the functionality of your records-based service catalog.

At this stage what you can present to a vendor is your pre-built service catalog framework as a blueprint for what you need. After all is it not better to give a vendor or solution provider a known and working blueprint or framework of your service catalog, and one that actually fits your needs, as opposed to them (and you) starting from scratch and getting caught up in unneeded functionality and configurations and making things fit because the application can only work a certain way?

Now before we finish a final thought! This is a mantra that I use over and over again. It will help to protect an organization's investment and reduce errors and problems over time. Also it will help establish an effective foundation for a *records*'-based service catalog and help to achieve the desired outcome. It is a simple as: ***Start small and grow big.***

That's it! Trees do it, plants do it and even humans follow this code of nature so why do we not practice it more and more within the IT and business environment? The same applies in particular to the service catalog, configuration management and host of other process domains.

Information on what type of data should be recorded in the service catalog is explained in more detail in my book "The Service Catalog". A simple yet effective project approach is provided to help guide a service catalog initiative from the initial idea, through the design process and finally to implementation and support phase.

Further details are available in my book "The Service Catalog" which is published by Van Haren Publishing and is available through online bookstores.

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