



## WHAT IS A SERVICE CATALOG?

Organizations will have different levels of knowledge with regards to their understanding of what constitutes a service catalog. With respect to their level of knowledge and understanding of the subject, there are a number of situations that can be faced, such as:

- there is too much information about a subject and it is difficult to know what is what
- there is too little information about the subject
- incorrect information is available about the subject

This creates the need for guidance, information and knowledge to ensure that an organization can:

- maximize the efforts of those involved
- get it right from the start
- design and implement a useable service catalog that is part of the service portfolio
- ensure the design and implementation will provide benefit to the business and customers

- ensure cost benefits and economies of scale are achieved
- achieve adequate and expected Return on Investment (ROI) and Value of Investment (VOI)

This article looks at existing definitions of the service catalog contained within a number of different sources. These sources include frameworks, bodies of knowledge, standards and commercial products. The aim is to provide the reader with a broad view of what the service catalog is according to a number of sources.

## Definitions

The following table provides definitions of the service catalog from the respective frameworks, bodies of knowledge and so on.

<b>Framework / Body of Knowledge</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
ITIL® Service Strategy	The service catalog is the subset of the service portfolio visible to customers. It consists of services presently active in the service operation phase and those approved to be readily offered to current and prospective customers.



	<p>It serves as a service order and demand channeling mechanism.</p> <p>It acts as the acquisition portal for customers, including pricing and service-level commitments, and terms and conditions for service provisioning.</p> <p>It is in the service catalog that services are decomposed into components; it is where assets, process and systems are introduced with entry points and terms for their use and provisioning.</p>
ITIL® Service Design	<p>A database or structured document with information about all live IT services, including those available for deployment. The service catalogue is the only part of the service portfolio published to customers and is used to support the sale and delivery of IT services. The service catalogue includes information about deliverables, prices, contact points, ordering and request processes. See contract portfolio.</p>
MOF (Microsoft Operations Framework)	<p>Business-IT Alignment SMF</p> <p>A comprehensive list of services, including priorities of the business and corresponding SLAs.</p>



ISO/IEC 20000-1:2005	<p>(The code of practice): service catalog</p> <p>A service catalog should define all services. It can be referenced from the SLA and should be used to hold material considered volatile for the SLA itself.</p> <p>The service catalog should be maintained and kept up to date.</p> <p>Note: The service catalog can include generic information such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) the name of the service</li><li>b) targets, for example, time to respond or install a printer, time to re-instate a service after a major failure</li><li>c) contact points</li><li>d) service hours and exceptions</li><li>e) security arrangements</li></ul> <p>The service catalogue is a key document for setting customer expectation and should be easily accessible, and widely available to both customers and support staff.</p>
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USMBOK™	A service catalog markets an authorized service portfolio, or subset. A service catalog consists of one or more descriptions of current service offerings and optionally, future service capabilities. A service catalog is defined in terms understood by its intended customer audience and is the basis for requesting and negotiating service, and desired levels of service. A service catalog entry is the first stage of influencing and setting service level expectations.
ISM	A service catalog provides a description of (partial) services that can be provided by the service provider, in part or in combination. A specific choice of these services can be agreed in an SLA.

So there we have it: the service catalog is a repository that contains information about services or it is a comprehensive list of services. It defines all services. It is an ordering mechanism with pricing. It is where services are decomposed into components. It sets customer expectations. It is the entry point of influencing and setting service levels.



## Is that all we need to know? Could it be that simple?

A list of services on its own does not provide the full benefit to the business that can be derived from the service catalog. On its own a list of IT services does not allow:

- end-users and customers to interact and order services
- the business to understand how IT enables their operations
- chargeback for services consumed
- the ability for IT to know what it delivers in support of the business
- the business to understand its reliance on IT in order to be able to carry out key, critical and core business functions and objectives
- service impact assessments

## Bodies of Knowledge

While the mainstream Bodies of Knowledge (BOKs) that exist in the public domain define the service catalog they do not provide enough practical information and guidance that shed light on how to achieve the following:

- understand the service catalog
- plan the service catalog



- design the service catalog
- develop the service catalog
- manage the service catalog
- maintain the service catalog

It should be noted that this is not a failing of mainstream BOKs as they generally have a fairly broad scope to cover.

In recent years vendors have closed the gap in providing information on the subject. It should be observed that some (not all) may also have clouded the issue, as tools and practices adopted by some vendors may provide neither a consistent definition of services, nor an adequate platform for an effective service catalog. Caveat emptor!

### **A more relevant question**

It is not enough to just ask the question "What is a service catalog?" The answer on its own does not yield sufficient information to help organizations design, implement, manage and maintain a service catalog. Definitions serve a purpose but only go so far.

A service catalog can mean different things to different organizations depending on their requirements and what outcomes they want supported by the service catalog. So a more relevant question is "What is a service catalog and what will it achieve for our organization?"



To truly answer the question in one paper will not do justice to the role and scope of the service catalog or provide the reader with any real insight into the service catalog. Other papers in this series will look at different aspects of the service catalog.

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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