

FITARA Compliance

What it means to you, and how to find the right tools to help



INTRODUCTION

Each year, the U.S. federal government spends more than \$9 billion on software. Unfortunately, according to a report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the various federal agencies buy and manage software licenses through more than 50,000 transactions in a decentralized manner — generally without sharing information about pricing and terms to facilitate better purchasing, and without the experience needed to effectively negotiate large software agreements. Moreover, most agencies do not have a designated central oversight authority to manage the software agreements, so they often purchase unneeded capabilities, further increasing unnecessary costs.

The Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA) of 2014 is designed to help federal agencies address these issues by improving visibility into IT expenditures,

expanding oversight of IT investments, and giving agency chief information officers (CIOs) more authority to plan, approve and execute IT acquisitions. In particular, Category Management Policy 16-1 specifies a number of high-level strategies that CIOs, in coordination with chief acquisition officers (CAOs), must implement to improve their application management programs.

This white paper explores the key challenges in achieving FITARA compliance and details what to look for in tools to help. As you'll see, the benefits of addressing these challenges go far beyond FITARA compliance — you'll also reduce costs; improve IT efficiency; improve system performance, availability and security; and ensure you have the flexibility to take advantage of new technologies and implement critical strategic initiatives.

The first step to controlling costs and achieving FITARA compliance is to obtain an accurate inventory of all your software and hardware assets — and keep it up to date in real time as your IT environment changes.

THE KEY CHALLENGES IN FITARA COMPLIANCE

Maintaining an accurate and up-to-date hardware and software inventory

You can't manage what you can't see. Therefore, the first step to controlling costs and achieving FITARA compliance is to obtain an accurate inventory of all your software and hardware assets — and keep it up to date in real time as your IT environment changes.

Spreadsheets and other manual methods of tracking inventory cannot scale to today's complex and dynamic IT environments; you need an automated solution that can discover everything on your network and update the inventory as software and devices come and go. Key features to look for include:

- **Support for a wide range of software and devices** — You need a solution that can discover and inventory all hardware and software connected to your network, regardless of operating system, hardware vendor or device form factor, including laptops, desktops, servers, storage devices, Chromebooks and network-connected non-computer devices. Be sure to consider whether the solution vendor has a good track history of promptly supporting new software and device types, so you have maximum flexibility in the future and can support initiatives such as bring your own device (BYOD) and the Internet of Things (IoT). Also, be sure the solution can discover and inventory open source software, a dynamic and growing area that many agencies are exploring.
- **Software normalization** — A software inventory needs to be complete, but to be most useful, it also needs to be properly organized and normalized. Look for a solution with a comprehensive software catalog that keeps track of software solutions as they go through version updates or name changes, or pass from vendor to vendor in mergers or acquisitions. A complete, up-to-date catalog will enable more accurate and coherent reports, such as showing exactly which edition of which version of an application is installed where, without

overwhelming you with multiple different entries for the same piece of software. Be sure to ask how often the software catalog is updated, and whether you can add specialized software or your own in-house applications to the catalog.

- **Complete asset management** — In addition to your software and hardware, you need to manage a variety of other assets, from desks and lamps to peripherals, such as printers and networking devices. Some of these assets may be leased from and managed by outside vendors. Look for a solution that can discover network-connected non-computer devices and that also enables you to enter and track non-connected assets alongside discovered assets. This centralized asset management simplifies recordkeeping and enables more robust reporting.
- **Full asset lifecycle management** — Look for a solution that offers not just discovery and inventory, but complete management of the full asset lifecycle, from acquisition through retirement. In particular, ensure the software catalog provides metadata, such as general availability and end-of-life dates and manufacturer's suggested retail price (MSRP), so you can be more proactive in planning and make more informed decisions about software updates and hardware refreshes.

Optimizing software expenditures

FITARA requires increased transparency into IT investments. Knowing exactly what software licenses you have is critical to identifying opportunities for simplifying your portfolio. For example, you may discover you are paying for multiple applications that deliver similar functionality. And knowing who is actually using which software is critical to avoiding fines for violating licensing agreements or paying for more licenses than you need. More broadly, FITARA also mandates that agencies purchase through preferred vendors and take advantage of standard or preferred pricing.

To get the effective IT portfolio management FITARA requires, look for a solution that offers:

- **Software license tracking** — As noted above, a comprehensive application catalog is vital to tracking software licenses today. Be sure the solution you choose can handle the proliferation of software versions, inconsistent naming and increasingly complex license structures. The solution should also be able to discern whether an application has been installed in stand-alone mode or as part of a greater software suite, as well as distinguish between retail and OEM-purchased licenses.
- **Software usage metering** — Insight into software usage enables you to optimize your software licensing to ensure compliance without overpaying. In some cases, the savings from license harvesting alone can justify your investment in the license management solution. To avoid interfering with user productivity, be sure to look for passive metering. For example, if you've paid for 100 licenses for a given application, you don't want the solution to prevent you from using the 101st license, but merely to alert you so you can true up your license.
- **Help with planning and budgeting** — As noted earlier, a comprehensive software catalog will help you monitor your place in the refresh cycle with information about general availability and end-of-life dates and MSRP.

Simplifying migrations

Many federal agencies have been slow to move from Windows XP to more current versions, but as a result of FITARA, migration is increasingly on the agenda. The Department of Defense, for example, has announced it will standardize 4 million computers to Windows 10 by the end of 2016.

Automation is critical for a smooth and complete Windows migration. Fortunately, some of the same tools

that help with other aspects of FITARA compliance also help streamline operating system migrations. Critical features to look for in software deployment tools include:

- **Automated imaging** — Look for a hardware-agnostic solution that can build and maintain master system images across your diverse platforms to simplify your migration.
- **Fast remote deployment** — A solution with remote utilities that enable you to easily deploy to all your various sites from a central location will save you significant time and effort.
- **Offline migration** — Look for a solution that uses a pre-install task to migrate data offline without needing to first boot computers in their old operating systems.
- **Multicasting** — Some solutions can send the same bits of deployment data simultaneously to multiple devices, which greatly increases the speed of large-scale software deployment while reducing network bandwidth consumption.
- **Windows user state migration** — Your users won't consider the migration a success unless it faithfully preserves their data files and custom settings, including wallpaper, sound settings, accessibility choices, custom toolbars and more. Look for a solution that captures, stores and deploys user-specific settings and files as part of the operating system upgrade.
- **Control over what is migrated** — A migration is an opportunity to weed out unwanted or unneeded data. In particular, look for a solution that can help improve compliance with external regulation or internal policies by excluding files by type and location. For example, you might want to exclude sound and video files, or Shared Music and Shared Pictures folders.

Improving security, performance and availability

Although FITARA mandates are concerned primarily with cost savings,

Insight into software usage enables you to optimize your software licensing to ensure compliance without overpaying. In some cases, the savings from license harvesting alone can justify your investment in the license management solution.

Improving your processes to achieve FITARA compliance can deliver not only cost savings, but also improved security, performance, availability and agility.

improving your processes to achieve FITARA compliance can offer a wealth of additional benefits, such as improved security, performance and availability. For example, as you're evaluating inventory solutions to help you control hardware and software costs, be sure to consider whether the solution also provides:

- **Automated patching and driver updates** — Regular software maintenance is critical to minimizing security vulnerabilities and keeping systems available and at peak performance. IT automation is critical. Look for a solution that can not only inventory all the software on your network, but also automatically keep that software up to date with proper patches and drivers, so your users stay happy and productive.
- **Blacklisting** — It's not enough to simply know what's on your network; you also need to be able to control what can be installed there. The best solutions can prevent the installation of unwanted applications through blacklisting.

Getting the value and flexibility you need

Finally, you'll want your path to FITARA compliance to be as easy and cost-effective as possible in both the short term and the long term. Therefore, you'll want a solution that offers:

- **Low total cost of ownership** — As you evaluate solutions, be sure to look past the licensing fee to the true total cost, including the cost of training staff and how the tool affects daily IT productivity. An integrated solution with clean, intuitive interfaces will streamline workflows and eliminate the need for expensive, time-consuming training, which can make it the better value in the long run.

- **Scalability** — Be sure the solution can grow with your agency in terms of both types of assets and number of systems managed. And, as noted earlier, make sure the solution enables you to inventory and track the full range of assets you have, including not only hardware and software, but desks, printers, projectors and more.
- **Deployment flexibility** — Look for a solution that offers deployment options for today and tomorrow. Even if you currently prefer a traditional, on-premises deployment, make sure you have the flexibility to choose a virtual form factor or hosted deployment in the future.
- **Fast time to value** — Look for a solution that is easy to implement and use, so you can be on your way to FITARA compliance quickly.

CONCLUSION

FITARA is more than just a set of mandates; it is an opportunity to move to a more disciplined and agile IT software investment and management strategy. By addressing the key challenges outlined here, you can not only achieve FITARA compliance, but also improve security, performance and availability across your agency, and be better positioned to take advantage of technological advancements and implement new initiatives.

As you evaluate solutions to help, be sure to take a look at KACE Endpoint Systems Management Appliances. This integrated solution enables you to easily provision, manage, secure and service all network-connected devices and software, streamlining FITARA compliance.

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