Creating an Enterprise App Store

Addressing the Consumerization of IT without Jeopardizing Control

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Executive Summary

Think about the incredible level of convenience technology has brought to your personal life. A book review catches your interest. So you go online, order the book and download it to your iPad® or Kindle®. You hear a song on the radio that you want to share with a friend. You can download a copy from iTunes and within minutes it's ready to play on your MP3 player.

This convenience is by no means limited to media content. There are thousands of applications that you can acquire almost instantly. They provide useful services in a nearly limitless number of areas. What's more, you can access them from just about any personal device — your desktop computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone.

Employees in enterprises of all sizes and in virtually every industry are now demanding that same level of convenience in the workplace. This demand is driving a major trend, the consumerization of IT, which involves giving employees access to business applications in the same way and from the same devices they use in their personal lives. An online app store is proving to be a highly effective model for aligning IT with this consumerization trend.

An enterprise app store gives people a simple, intuitive means of finding and acquiring the applications they need to do their jobs. Employees achieve higher productivity through the ability to serve themselves. They get full visibility into and near instant delivery of available business applications, so they no longer have to spend time on the phone with the help desk.

An enterprise app store also enables IT to meet the demands of the business for more services and higher service quality while at the same time reducing costs. User self service results in a dramatic reduction of help desk calls, and that

drives down support costs. In addition, the app store gives IT higher transparency to the business and helps IT change its image from technology provider to service provider. It also helps IT increase user satisfaction.

The challenge is to implement an enterprise app store without jeopardizing security, compromising regulatory and licensing compliance or driving up cost. That requires balancing ease of requesting and immediacy of fulfillment with effective control. To achieve this balance, an app store solution must meet stringent criteria. This paper examines those criteria and illustrates how Flexera Software App Portal meets them.

Six Criteria for Success

Solutions such as Flexera Software App Portal can accelerate your transformation to user-centric computing with an enterprise app store. As you evaluate a solution for your environment, keep in mind six major criteria a solution must meet to address not only the needs of the business user but also the needs of IT. An effective solution must:

- Facilitate user self service
- Ensure security and regulatory compliance
- Ensure software license compliance
- Control costs
- Provide rapid fulfillment
- Leverage existing resources

Facilitate User Self Service

The primary purpose of an online app store is to empower business users to find and request applications on their own. If you want people to take advantage of this self service, however, you must offer ease of use and permit access from a variety of user devices.

An app store solution that creates a consumer-oriented shopping experience meets these requirements. End-user customers use an online storefront in the same way they shop for music, books or other items. They select the items they want, put them in a shopping cart and proceed through a familiar checkout process.

To avoid confusion for your end-user customers, you need to be able to configure the store catalog to display only those items that each customer is authorized to request. This ability also gives you strong control over application access because employees see only the items they are authorized to access. Additionally, employees should be able to perform all activities through a single portal, from requesting software and scheduling delivery to checking order status.

Universal access is also essential. That means the storefront should be available over the Internet so people can request items from anywhere at any time. Universality also means app delivery not only to desktop computers but also to mobile devices. Finally, if your enterprise operates in global markets, support for multiple languages and currencies is a must-have to ensure simplicity for your users around the world.

Ensure Security and Regulatory Compliance
IT organizations are (and should be) concerned that an app store may put sensitive applications and data at risk. Consequently, an effective solution ensures that only authorized people have access to applications and that they can access only the applications they are authorized to use based on their role in the enterprise.

Even when people are authorized to use a particular application, however, management approvals may be required for compliance with internal policy or external regulations. To this end, automated approval processing is a mandatory capability. And the more flexible the approval process the better. For example, the solution should support both single and multiple levels of management approval. The approval process should be dynamic, based on conditions such as cost, license need and user profile. Only designated people or alternates they choose should be able to approve requests. On the IT side, access to tools and data for managing the app store should be limited to authorized IT administrators.

Finally, an audit trail of all pertinent actions is essential because it enables IT to demonstrate strong access control and to document activities for security and regulatory purposes.

Maintain Software License Compliance
Done correctly, user self service offers huge benefits to the enterprise. Poorly implemented, self service can expose the enterprise to risk, particularly in the area of compliance with software license agreements. To avoid financial penalties, you need a solution that protects against overuse of software licenses.

The ideal solution helps you comply fully with license contract terms without overbuying. Capabilities such as software license monitoring, reclamation and leasing help significantly in this area. License monitoring tracks the quantity of licenses owned, compares it with what is installed and takes action when the count of available licenses drops below a defined threshold. License reclamation permits IT to identify assigned but unused licenses and launch email campaigns to reclaim them from the user community. License leasing temporarily allocates a license for a defined time period. Software license monitoring, reclamation and leasing help IT optimize software license utilization to keep costs in check.

Control Costs
Some IT organizations worry that an enterprise app store will drive up IT costs. The thinking is that users will behave like patrons at an all-you-can-eat buffet and request far more than they need. Consequently, the enterprise will waste money on expensive software licenses and virtual server sprawl.

To minimize indiscriminate requests, you need a solution that lets you display the cost of each item in the storefront, and even charge back for higher cost items. The ability to display costs helps shape user behavior by making people aware of the cost implications of their requests. An additional desirable feature is to present the user with a list of alternate, lower-cost applications that may satisfy the user's requirements.

A flexible approval process can also help you control costs in other ways. For example, if the solution allows you to specify varying levels of management approval based on application cost, you can ensure that managers will be in the loop and intervene if their direct reports are requesting items they don't need. You may even require the requestor to submit a business justification for certain requests. Managers can then make an informed decision to approve or deny the request. Additionally, the solution could present the approver with a list of alternate, lower-cost applications that offer similar functionality and may meet the requestor's needs.

Provide Rapid Fulfillment
Consumers download software, books and music for their personal use in minutes. They want the same kind of speed for business applications. To address that demand, your app store solution must keep applications ready for immediate deployment in all popular platform and device formats. The solution must also offer a high degree of automation in request processing, including automated approval routing. Additionally, once all approvals are received, the solution should be capable of triggering automated fulfillment through enterprise software deployment tools.

Leverage Existing Resources

Most likely you already have sophisticated tools and information bases in place to help you deploy applications to the user community. If you have Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager for example, you not only have a powerful software distribution tool but also the ability to track application usage and aggregate data about users' device configurations. A solution that integrates with Configuration Manager can deliver applications to users quickly and efficiently and leverage Configuration Manager data to help you manage software requests and software assets more effectively.

A solution that integrates with Active Directory can access Group and Organizational Unit and other user information stored in that directory. The solution can the use that information to determine which applications a person is entitled to access based on the person's role within the enterprise. The solution can then tailor the catalog accordingly for each person. This custom view of the catalog simplifies the request process and strengthens security.

A solution that permits interaction with other external systems offers additional benefits. The ability to interface with a service desk solution, for example, means that if an installation fails, a service ticket can be generated automatically to minimize delays in fulfillment. Or, the solution could trigger the execution of script that creates a mainframe login.

Creating the Store with Flexera Software App Portal

An enterprise app store must be built on a strong foundation. Flexera Software App Portal provides just such a foundation.

App Portal is a comprehensive and unified enterprise app store solution that enables you to quickly create an app store that meets the criteria described previously.

Familiar Online Storefront Model

With App Portal, users have a single portal through which they can browse, request items, check the status of requests and view their request history. As Figure 1 shows, that portal presents all applications that the user is authorized to request in a consumer-oriented catalog. The applications are System Center Configuration Manager (SCCM) software objects that have been published in App Portal for deployment through the software storefront.

The catalog displays all available applications, not just those that have been previously deployed. The entry can also indicate attributes for each item such as whether and what approvals are required, hardware prerequisites and cost.

Fast Time to Value

It's fast and easy to implement App Portal and to configure it to your unique requirements. It includes all the functionality you need in a single solution, so you don't have to install and integrate multiple solutions or deploy client software.

Administrators can quickly and easily create the catalog from a template. Customizing the look of the catalog, such as choosing colors, adding logos and selecting languages, is simple and straightforward. Administrators can also create catalog entries from a template and specify attributes such as who can request each item based on user group, role, department or geography.

Figure 1. App Portal catalog
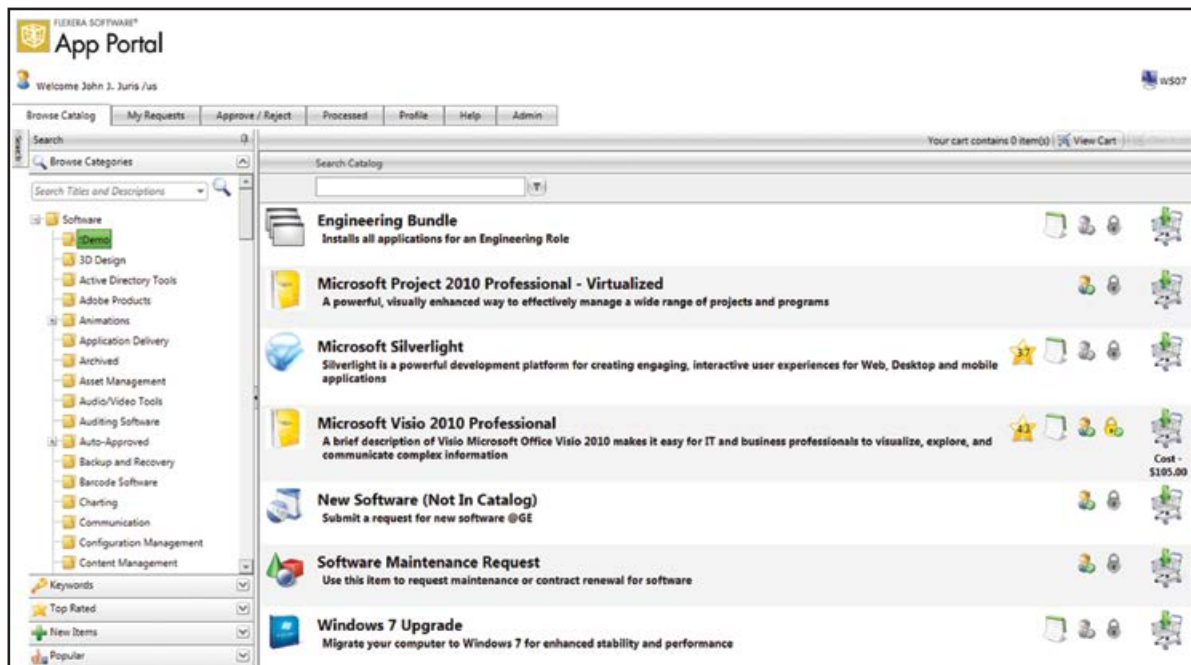
Strong Access Control

The catalog provides strong control over both user and administrator access. You can configure the catalog to show only those items that the user is authorized to request, so you can easily prevent unauthorized requests. You can base access privileges on security groups, organizational units, Active Directory properties and SCCM collection membership for both users and computers. You can also specify which catalog items require approval.

With respect to administrators, App Portal provides the ability to specify which administrators (or their designees) can access the catalog and to assign multilevel access privileges to each authorized administrator.

Robust Approval Workflow

With App Portal you can require approvals based on a number of factors, including cost, license availability, security groups, organizational units, Active Directory properties and SCCM collection membership for both users and machines. You can also establish single or multiple levels of approval. For example, you may specify that items costing under $1,000 must be approved by a manager while items costing $1,000 or more require both manager- and director-level approval.

Automated approval routing speeds time to fulfillment. The solution dynamically identifies approvers by name to ensure that only appropriate people can approve requests. For example, it can ascertain the name of the requestor's manager through Active Directory. The solution can also dynamically determine the appropriate approval process based on other Active Directory attributes such as department, organizational unit or SCCM collection membership.

App Portal automatically routes approvals according to the workflow specified by the administrator. As Figure 2 illustrates, the approver simply indicates request approval or rejection by checking the appropriate box and clicking either approve or reject. You can notify approvers via email if you so desire to keep the process moving.

The approval process can trigger additional actions when necessary to avoid delays in fulfillment. For example, if there are not enough licenses on hand, the solution can bring the purchasing department into the loop to trigger the acquisition of additional licenses.

You can require that requesters enter additional information during the check-out process — for example, business justification for the request. App Portal provides question templates for soliciting this information. The answers are forwarded to the approvers along with the request, providing managers and directors with details to support their decision making. In addition to presenting questions to requesters, you can also have questions presented to approvers. So you have input from both requesters and approvers.

Flexible Requesting

Administrators have wide flexibility in specifying for whom requestors can make requests. Typically, most users can request items only for themselves and for their own devices. App Portal can be configured so that some people can request items for other users, devices and locations. For example:

- Managers can request items for their direct reports
- Help desk agents can request items on behalf of users
- Administrators can request delivery to SCCM collections, permitting multiple deliveries to specific geographic locations and departments

For some applications, users can request either immediate delivery or delivery at a later specified time. Administrators can limit delivery times to ensure that installations do not degrade network performance or interfere with business operations.

Figure 2. Request approval/rejection

Figure 3. Inventory view
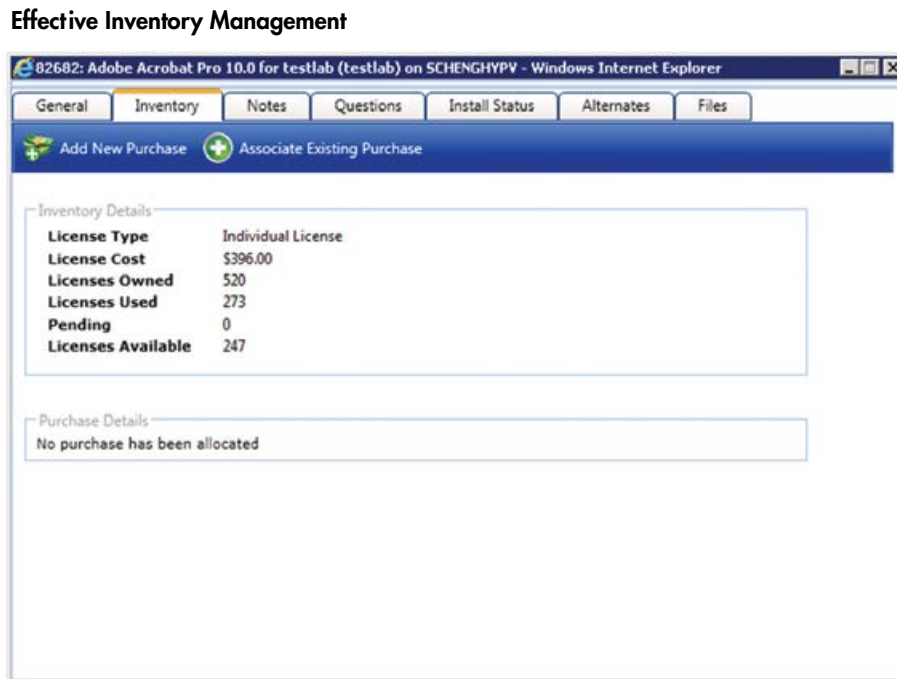
Effective Inventory Management

Figure 3 shows the App Portal software inventory display, which shows at a glance how many licenses the enterprise owns for each application and how many are currently in use. App Portal can deny a request when no license is available or, as described earlier, dynamically change the approval process to include purchasing to obtain additional licenses.

App Portal tracks Configuration Manager usage metering data such as frequency of use, duration of use and date last used. Based on this data, the solution can automatically reclaim unused or underused licenses, and uninstall associated software. Before reclaiming a license, App Portal first notifies the user via email, indicating the reason for reclamation and giving the user the choice to give up the software or provide business justification for keeping it.

The administrator can offer a lease option for certain items. For leased items, App Portal automatically reclaims licenses and uninstalls the associated software after the lease period expires.

Administrators can also capture purchase information on nearly 30 attributes including cost, quantity, invoice number and purchase order number. Administrators can enter purchase information manually using easy-to-follow forms or they can import it from other sources such as spreadsheets or databases. Purchase information provides greater insight into license inventory and cost, allowing IT to make better-informed purchasing decisions.

Integration with SCCM and other Systems
App Portal integrates tightly with Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager 2007 and 2012, and it leverages SCCM monitoring, software distribution and tracking capabilities. It supports all deployment types within Configuration Manager 2007 and 2012, and supports both user-centric and computer-centric deployment models. App Portal also leverages SCCM status messages, machine inventory, collections and software metering data. As a result, you can continue to use Configuration Manager just as you now do.

In addition to Configuration Manager, App Portal can integrate with a variety of other systems. Integration with IT service management (ITSM) systems such as BMC Remedy, ServiceNow and Microsoft Service Manager enables you to include the app store in your service management processes. That integration helps ensure that software delivery complies with internal corporate policies and external regulations.

App Portal can also integrate with third-party workflow automation solutions such as Microsoft Orchestrator. This integration broadens support to include requests for services and other items in addition to applications, such as requests for new file share or password reset, or requests for items from a purchasing system such as SAP.

Figure 4. Flexera Software application readiness solutions
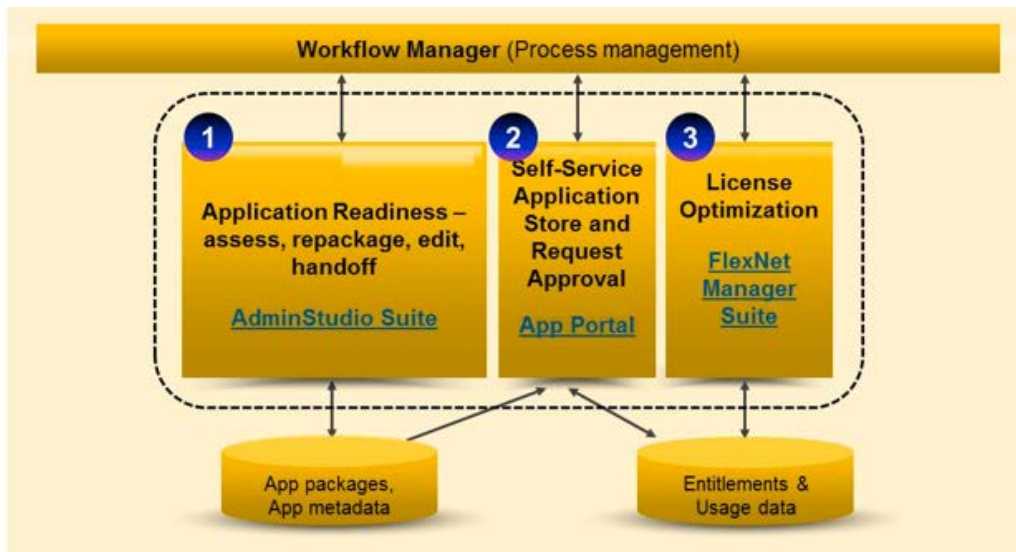
Part of a Broader Application Usage Management Offering

App Portal is a component of the Flexera Software application usage management offering. As shown in Figure 4, this offering also includes Flexera Software AdminStudio Suite, FlexNet Manager Suite and Workflow Manager. These solutions complement the capabilities of App Portal.

Flexera Software AdminStudio Suite

Flexera Software AdminStudio Suite powers an enterprise's App Readiness process, streamlining and accelerating desktop transformation, migration to Windows 7 and 8, virtualization and day-to-day app packaging operations. With AdminStudio Suite, you can automate the application management lifecycle to achieve continuous readiness of all applications regardless of deployment type.

Whereas App Portal provides the enterprise App Store, AdminStudio Suite enables you to keep the "shelves" of the store "stocked" with ready-to-deploy apps in all the deployment formats you need to satisfy the demands of your users.

FlexNet Manager Suite

FlexNet Manager Suite augments the license management capabilities of App Portal with enterprise license optimization and broader asset management capabilities. It provides extensive hardware and software asset management capabilities for managing desktop, laptop, and server hardware and software from more than 11,000 vendors. FlexNet Manager Suite license optimization solutions enable organizations to implement multiple software license management and contract optimization strategies that save time, help ensure continuous license compliance and reduce costs

Workflow Manager

Workflow Manager is a web-based process management solution that integrates with both AdminStudio and FlexNet Manager Suite. Through integration with AdminStudio, Workflow Manager enables IT to centrally control the software packaging process — from application request submissions through to deployment. It also enables centralized control of other desktop management processes such as Windows 7 and 8 migrations and virtualization projects.

Through integration with FlexNet Manager Suite, Workflow Manager enables IT to centralize and automate processes and procedures tied to asset and contract lifecycles. These processes and procedures include receiving of assets and services from vendors, retirement of assets and contract end of life, and auditing, including review of contract obligations and current compliance. Through this centralization and automation, Workflow Manager helps IT ensure software license compliance and optimize software spend.

Conclusion

An enterprise app store empowers employees with the ability to serve themselves in obtaining software from IT. That empowerment brings significant benefits to both users and IT. Now, with Flexera Software App Portal, you can balance the freedom afforded by user self service with the control needed to ensure security, compliance and cost containment. So you can open the doors to your enterprise app store and tap into its many benefits without jeopardizing control.

For more information go to
http://www.flexerasoftware.com/app-portal

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