

Deliver Business Value with Software Change Management

Comparison of In-House vs. Managed Services

**Software Change
Management is key to
managing risks,
controlling costs, and
improving productivity.**

Why evaluate software change management?

Installing software and patch updates can be frustrating and time-consuming for IT staff and end-users. Yet, it's critical to update computers regularly to keep applications and security filters current. A solid software change management strategy is needed to manage risks, costs and productivity.

Mobil computing threatens security

This need increases exponentially if your users are mobile and geographically dispersed. Computers outside the corporate firewall are especially vulnerable to attack. The availability of open, wireless connections exposes notebooks to viruses and malware. To protect your company's network, special approaches like audit trails and exception management are required.

Comparing in-house and managed services

When developing your software change management strategy, an important step is deciding who will perform the day-to-day work.

- If you already employ IT staff, should you purchase a software "tool" and continue increasing the change management responsibilities of your IT staff?
- Or, should you outsource this function to a Managed Service Provider (MSP) specializing in software change management? If so, which MSP will deliver the best service at a reasonable cost, while minimizing your risk?

This white paper examines these questions to help you define the best software change management strategy for your organization. What's more, it shows you how to leverage this strategy to deliver business value to your company.

How do you choose the best strategy?

Clearly there are significant differences between the two approaches to supporting software change management. In the “software tool” paradigm, your IT organization takes complete responsibility for managing the software change management process. In contrast, a managed services solution transfers much of the effort and accountability to the MSP.

Answering four key questions

To decide what’s best for your organization, consider how each approach will impact the business value your IT organization delivers to your company. This can be easily determined by answering four key questions:

- How does your strategy integrate with your IT organization’s core competencies?
- Does your strategy increase or reduce your company’s risk?
- How well does your strategy support your company’s mobile workforce?
- How much does it cost to fully implement your strategy?

Let’s examine each of these business value questions in more detail.

How does your strategy integrate with your IT organization’s core competencies?

As an IT organization, your core competency is what you do best – it creates value by servicing your customers and generating profit for your company. Examples range from mining a customer purchasing database, to managing your supply chain, to making an eCommerce site easy to use.

In-House “tool” approach to software distribution

When you implement the “tool” strategy for software change management, you place a heavy burden on your IT staff. They will have to learn to implement, maintain and monitor this tool..... and then use it to successfully execute your software change management strategy on an ongoing basis.

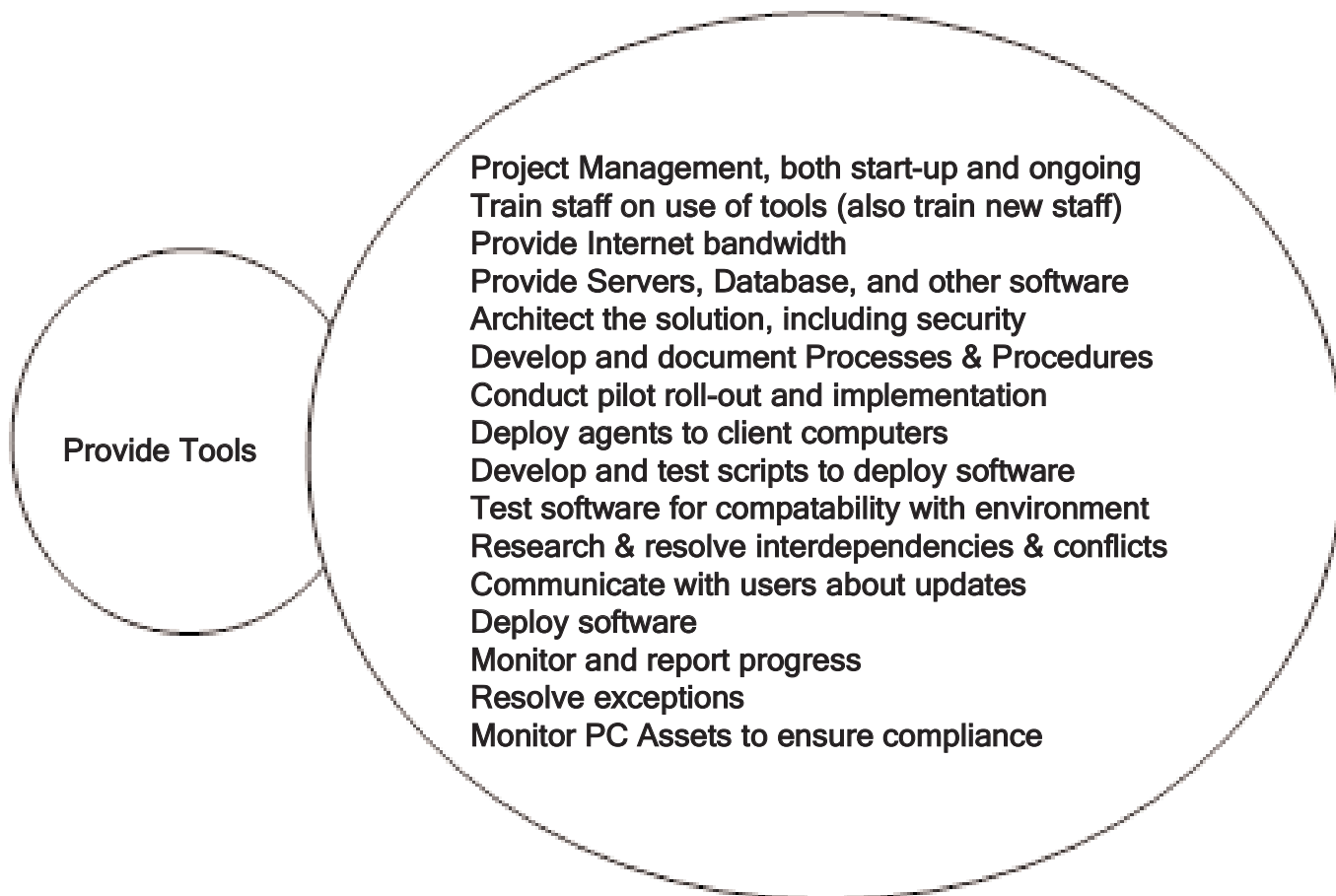
The in-house approach places a heavy burden upon your IT staff.

Your IT staff will have to learn to implement, maintain, monitor and use the software distribution tool.

Do you want your IT staff to focus on strategic efforts to build your business or day-to-day tactical issues? This graphic shows the numerous tasks and responsibilities associated with the in-house software tool strategy, and who will perform them in this scenario. Assuming these responsibilities will take your IT staff away from their core competencies on a regular basis.

Tool Vendor Responsibilities

In-House IT Tasks & Responsibilities



The MSP approach empowers your IT staff to focus on core competencies.

MSP approach to software distribution

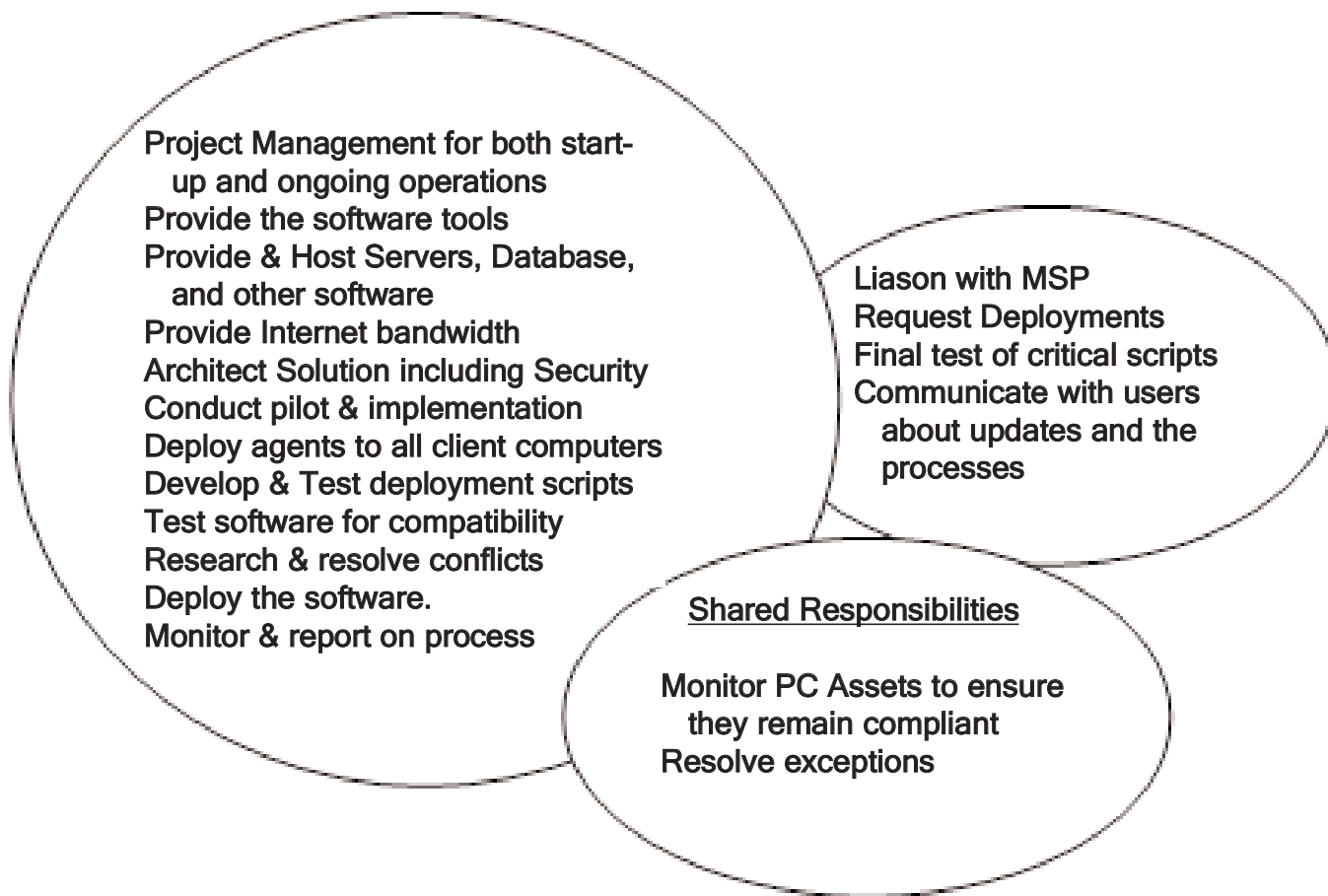
In contrast, the MSP's core competency is software change management. It's their job to seamlessly ensure that your mobile employees always have their computers available and information secure... thereby empowering them to deliver business value to your company.

Similar software tools are used in both the MSP and in-house approaches. ***The big difference is that the MSP assumes responsibility for most of the day-to-day work involved in implementing your software distribution strategy.*** This frees your IT staff to focus their time and attention on your IT organization's core competencies.

This graphic shows the responsibilities for Software Change Management when an MSP is involved, and who will perform the day-to-day work.

MSP Tasks & Responsibilities

In-House IT Tasks



Security is compromised when best practices are not followed.

How does your strategy increase or reduce your company's risk?

It's crucial to implement processes to ensure that all computing assets are at the current approved patch levels, have up-to-date anti-virus and anti-spyware, and properly configured personal firewalls. Managing these processes, and applying them consistently, is critical to successfully reducing security risks.

When your IT organization tackles software distribution alone, your staff is left to research and develop best practices and procedures for each of the numerous tasks. This can lead to sloppy procedures, which can harm computers and limit user productivity. For example, improperly tested software updates can create system instability, shut down applications, and leave computers vulnerable to attacks.

An experienced MSP will have a consistent, repeatable process for distributing software across an increasingly mobile workforce.

Focus on Best Practices

A qualified MSP has been managing the day-to-day tactical issues of providing software distribution processes for several years. During this time, they have adopted accepted industry best-practices for tool-related software distribution. These procedures span:

- Project management
- Staffing
- Training
- Script development
- Testing
- Monitoring
- Exception resolution processes

In addition, a leading MSP will have developed auditable processes to manage the entire software distribution life-cycle, as a part of ISO-9000 certified methodologies. This assures quality through continuous process improvement.

When you partner with an MSP, your IT organization and company benefit from all of the MSP's software distribution experience and expertise. The MSP minimizes your security risks and maximizes user productivity by focusing on certified best practices.

How well does your strategy support your company's mobile workforce?

Notebook computing has forever changed the way people work. Employees with laptops can do their jobs anytime, anywhere. They are empowered to respond to customers, partners, and colleagues more effectively. Sales, service, marketing and logistics improve...generating a substantial ROI for your company.

But these gains can be quickly erased. Laptops raise many security issues by extending the perimeter of the corporate network – to branch offices, homes, hotels and other remote locations. Your data becomes more vulnerable to unauthorized access, theft and corruption. Wireless mobility is a key innovation that is accelerating this trend.

What's more, mobile users have special support needs. While working away from the home office, they are not easily accessible by your IT staff. This can have a huge impact on end-user productivity when it comes to software distribution. As the percentage of mobile employees continues to grow, this factor increases proportionally.

Sample MSP mobile workforce software distribution scenario

Is your IT staff currently supporting your mobile workforce satisfactorily and cost-effectively? An experienced MSP will have developed a consistent and repeatable process for performing the business of software distribution across a mobile workforce.

For example, here is a simplified scenario for handling a typical Microsoft patch distribution:

- Microsoft releases a critical patch (on “Patch Tuesday” or another time).
- The MSP develops any necessary scripting.
- The MSP tests the deployment and results on local test machines configured to match the most common configurations, or all configurations if your equipment configuration is fairly heterogeneous.
- Using the request form on the dedicated Web Portal, the MSP deploys the patch to a number of designated test machines at your organization for further testing and validation.
- After ensuring that the patch doesn’t interfere with any of your applications, your IT group requests that the patch be deployed to designated groups (by region, all regions, etc., using the same request form).
- Your IT staff communicates to appropriate local/regional IT staff that patch XYZ has been tested and is being deployed, whether it will require a reboot, and other instructions.
- The MSP’s staff, using automated monitoring software, verifies that the deployment is working and being successfully installed on the remote systems. Your IT staff can also monitor the deployment via a Private Web Portal and automated email notifications.

In the event that there is a problem with the deployment in the field:

- Your IT staff would notify the MSP by sending an email “trouble ticket” via the Web portal
- The MSP would investigate the issue and respond ASAP. (Note: Service levels, often monitored via SLAs, are a key differentiator between MSPs.)
- As an alternative, your IT staff could back out of the software deployment if necessary using the link to the command console.
- When working with an experienced MSP, it’s very rare for a deployment to get this far and have a problem that isn’t individual machine-specific.

How much does it cost to fully implement your strategy?

No discussion of business value would be complete without a cost comparison. The hard dollar cost of implementing each software change management strategy is relatively easy to calculate. It’s based on your number of seats (client computers), and which MSP or software distribution tool you choose.

- To implement the in-house “tool” strategy, you typically need to purchase the software distribution tool, a SQL Server CAL for each user, one or more servers (up to 7 servers for SMS!), and provide Internet bandwidth.
- The MSP strategy follows an all-inclusive “per-seat” pricing model, which can be customized for your needs and budget. Generally, the MSP will bill you on a monthly basis.

To calculate your total costs, you also need to determine how much time your staff will spend implementing each strategy, and what impact that time will have on your personnel resources and budget. With the MSP approach, this impact can be minimal. However, when you choose to take on this responsibility in-house, then you need to budget for training, testing, process development, and the handling of exceptions, in addition to everyday software distribution tasks.

Most IT organizations
will save 20% or more
by working with an
experienced MSP like
CommNet International.

Save 20% or more with the MSP strategy

When all of these factors are taken into consideration, most IT organizations can save 20% or more by working with an experienced MSP like CommNet International. CommNet has delivered software change management solutions to a variety of customers for more than 12 years. Over this time, CommNet's team of experts has carefully developed and honed best practices and procedures for software distribution. You can leverage this experience to reduce your costs, minimize risks, and ensure user and IT staff productivity.

Why is CommNet the best MSP for your organization?

As a Managed Services Provider with more than two decades of experience, CommNet International is completely prepared to meet your needs. Our software change management services are designed to minimize your risk and deliver ROI to your IT organization in the following ways:

- CommNet is a trusted business partner of a leading tool provider. This provider completely empowers and supports us to meet our customers' needs.
- CommNet can conduct an agreed upon 45-60 day trial and evaluation period, so you so can see the service in action, review private Web Portal reports, and more.
- CommNet's contracts include a 90-day no-fault out.
- CommNet can provide your authorized IT staff with console access to the software distribution command server, so they have full access to the same tools CommNet uses for package distribution, status monitoring, and code libraries.

Partner with CommNet to deliver business value to your company

A solid software change management strategy is critical to managing risks, costs and productivity. But implementing a software distribution tool places a tremendous burden on IT staff, taking valuable time and focus away from your organization's core competencies. What's more, your company risks security breaches and data loss when best practices are not followed.

CommNet's backup
and recovery software
automatically backs up
business-critical
selected directories
and files using a
standard Internet
connection.

Clearly, hiring an MSP has several advantages:

- The MSP's technical team performs the day-to-day work for you.
- The MSP's staff performs the work while following well-established procedures.
- Software change management is the MSP's focus and business as a low-cost niche provider.
- Ramp-up and delivery times for both project start-up and ongoing custom work are significantly reduced when working with an MSP.
- When capital and labor costs are considered, an experienced MSP like CommNet International can save your company 20% or more.

CommNet will leverage decades of expertise and a long-term relationship with a leading tool provider to meet your software change management needs. The result? Your IT organization will deliver business value to your company by reducing costs and risks, and by enhancing IT staff and mobile user productivity.

CommNet offers pricing and services that are customizable to your company's requirements and budget. To discuss your company's software change management needs, contact CommNet today at 800-345-8988 or sales@commnetinternational.com.

About CommNet International

Founded in 1986, CommNet International is a leading solutions provider of information technology (IT) products and services. Our mission is to deliver superior, innovative solutions and, more importantly, the best service and support in the industry.

To ensure exceptional customer satisfaction, we adhere to ISO 9000 continuous process and quality improvement procedures. Recently, we received registration to TL 9000 3.0 and ISO 9001:2000. Our performance is continuously measured and

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national.com

documented through customer satisfaction surveys and both internal and external auditors.

CommNet specializes in partnering with enterprises and mid-sized businesses to support their notebook users. In response to our customers' needs, CommNet developed Virtual Seat ManagementSM (VSM), a suite of tools and services that provide total lifecycle management of portable, mobile and remote computers.

VSM enables our customers to maximize their return on investment by keeping every computer fully functioning and in the hands of mobile and wireless users. As a result, VSM is proven to significantly boost end-user productivity, reduce exposure to security risk, and increase the business value of our customers' IT organizations.

To learn more, visit our web site at www.commnetinternational.com, call 1.800.345.8988, or email sales@commnetinternational.com



About the Author

Bob Puphal is the Director of Technical Services for CommNet International. Prior to joining CommNet, Mr. Puphal was the Director of Information Systems at Philadelphia database publishers BIOSIS and the Institute for Scientific Information, and held positions at Decision Sciences Corporation, Control Data, and Burroughs. Mr. Puphal holds a Bachelors Degree in Technology Management from the University of Phoenix and a Masters of Business Administration from Drexel University.