CREATING A CULTURE OF EFFICIENCY

Cintas implements a robust CMDB

IFS assyst

Cintas improves IT infrastructure and configuration management processes by implementing a CMDB solution with the support of IFS, resulting in reduced downtime and improved change effectiveness.

Challenges

Cintas faced challenges in managing its IT infrastructure, with multiple systems, applications, and hardware devices spread across locations. This made it difficult to maintain an accurate inventory of IT assets and their configurations, while a lack of documentation increased risk.

Cintas recognized the need for a CMDB that could provide a single source of truth, consolidating information from disparate sources and ensuring data accuracy.

Solution

Cintas collaborated with IFS to develop a plan for implementing a new CMDB, divided into several phases. The first phase involved analyzing existing IT infrastructure and configuration management processes. Now in phase three, Cintas is working to refine the CMDB by defining relationships between configuration items (CIs) and understanding the history behind major issues. The end goal is to create a comprehensive and robust CMDB that provides real-time visibility.

Results

Cintas has already seen significant benefits from implementing a new CMDB solution with the support of IFS. It has provided Cintas greater visibility on their entire infrastructure, as well as increased visibility on the impacts of events and changes implemented. Having this overview of their activities enabled them to respond quicker and more effectively should any issues crop up.

Overview and background

Cintas is a leading provider of workplace safety and hygiene solutions for the manufacturing industry, including uniforms, cleaning supplies, and first-aid and safety products. With a workforce of around 45,000 employees, the corporation caters to many customers across the globe, operating in 560 locations throughout the US and Canada, as well as internationally.

In an effort to keep pace with its evolving business requirements, Cintas recognized that it needed a comprehensive enterprise service management system (ESM) solution to better serve its employees and customers. To this end, in 2013, Cintas partnered with IFS assyst (previously known as Axios) to implement an ESM solution that could integrate seamlessly with its existing IT infrastructure.

Its previous service management solution lacked the necessary tools for robust problem, change, and incident management. While there was an initial learning curve involved in using assyst, it was able to transform the enterprise, enabling management to devote more time to key business priorities.

The ESM solution also enabled Cintas to centralize its service management processes, allowing for greater transparency, efficiency, and operational visibility. As Cintas continues to expand, its partnership with IFS is also evolving. It is currently exploring new ways to extend the use of assyst beyond IT, with an emphasis on better security and end-user experiences, as well as visibility of the components revolving around IT services.

The latest addition to Cintas' ESM solution is a configuration management database (CMDB), which provides a centralized repository for storing information about the company's IT assets, including hardware, software, and network devices. This enables Cintas to maintain accurate and up-to-date records of its IT infrastructure, ensuring its support systems are operating at the optimal level. By doing so, Cintas is providing a foundation for integrating other business processes into assyst.

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Jon Murphy, IT Delivery-Infrastructure, Cintas

The new CMDB is being implemented via a phased approach. IFS is working closely with Cintas' IT staff to ensure the solution is meeting their specific needs and requirements. The CMDB has already resulted in reduced risk and improved efficiency and satisfaction across the board, with more phases still to come.

Challenge

Like many growing organizations, Cintas was facing challenges with managing its IT infrastructure, with multiple systems, applications, and hardware devices spread across different locations. This made it difficult to maintain an accurate inventory of all IT assets and their configurations.

Attempting to reconcile disparate sources of data and undocumented information was also proving difficult. For example, employees were working from various spreadsheets, some of which contained outdated information or lacked documentation entirely. From a security standpoint, the inability to quickly identify or track changes made to the IT infrastructure increased risk in the form of human error and cyber-attacks.

A lack of documentation was also impacting Cintas' understanding of its configuration item (CI) relationships. When changes are made to one CI, it can affect other CIs within the infrastructure.

Without a complete picture of these dependencies and interactions, Cintas was unable to perform effective impact analysis – and it was often difficult to identify why things were or were not working.

To address these challenges, the organization recognized it needed a CMDB that could provide a single source of truth for its IT assets and their configurations. This would allow Cintas to consolidate information from different sources and ensure data accuracy and completeness.

Solution

IFS worked closely with Cintas to develop a detailed plan for the new CMDB implementation. The implementation process itself was divided into several phases, each focused on a specific set of objectives. These include data migration, testing and validation, and user training and adoption.

The project began with phase one: a thorough analysis of Cintas' existing IT infrastructure and configuration management processes. This involved taking stock of all IT assets and configuration items across different locations, as well as assessing the current state of the CMDB. This helped the IT team to understand how things connect and enabled them to identify potential gaps. Phase one took around six months to complete, resulting in a detailed inventory that serves as the minimal viable product.

Cintas completed phase two in November 2022. This focused on building a relationship with the CMDB and understanding the value it can offer, which is instrumental in creating a more robust and efficient IT environment. As part of this phase, Cintas worked to refine the CMDB by defining relationships between CIs and understanding the history behind major issues. In turn, greater visibility will enable Cintas to quickly isolate existing problems. With phase three underway, Cintas currently has over 60,000 CIs in its CMDB.

Jon Murphy, IT Delivery-Infrastructure, Cintas, said: "When we started this latest journey with IFS, the first decision we made was to take a phased approach to implementation. With an undertaking this big, it can be easy to fail, so we worked closely with IFS' project team to establish control from the onset.

"We learned a lot of things along the way. It is really important to secure buy-in from the different stakeholders involved, keeping them in the loop throughout the whole process. Initial adoption was an initial challenge we faced and communication was key. Emphasizing the value of the CMDB throughout the business was therefore a key learning for us.

"This has been a big investment for the business, but the opportunities now available are endless. We are excited to further collaborate with IFS and roll out the final phases of the CMDB project."

Results

By the end of phase two, Cintas has already seen significant benefits. These include resolving gaps in its IT infrastructure, enabling the IT team to solve issues swiftly and facilitating a quicker return to business. To give an example, mean time to repair (MTTR) has already significantly improved with reduced downtime across the enterprise and faster engagement when those incidents occur.

Another notable improvement is to Cintas' change management process. Cintas already had a robust change management process, so moving the needle in a significant way was always going to be tough. But now that change management is integrated into their CMDB, Cintas is increasingly avoiding major incidents as data from the CMDB creates visibility of potential impacts.

An interesting result to note is an increased number and classification of major incidents. With greater understanding of its IT environment, Cintas has identified a further four major incidents since implementation. This may seem like a negative, but being able to quickly identify an issue as a major incident means you can resolve it quicker – and avoid more complex issues down the line.

All of this works to ease the workload on staff. Previously, if you wanted to learn more about a server, there would be an extensive email chain where people had to remember what devices were in production. Now, IT staff are able to locate information in a single location, reducing administrative time from hours to minutes. This enables employees to focus on more fulfilling aspects of their roles.

Jon Murphy, IT Delivery-Infrastructure, Cintas, added: "We are thrilled with the progress we've made so far, with the CMDB already yielding significant benefits for IT and allowing us to respond to the business' needs more quickly. Improving our security standpoint was a key objective for this project.

As we move towards the final phases, the team is excited about the potential for greater improvement in our IT security, processes, and infrastructure.

"Employee and customer needs drive our project team, which is a great position to be in. At the same time, the implementation of a CMDB has sparked a cultural change. Initial adoption was slow, but improved visibility has been pushed to the front and center. As we continue to work with IFS, we are confident this investment will foster continued growth and success in the future."

Looking ahead
The next phases of the project focus on the end-user experience. IFS and Cintas will come together to build in automation, reduce monitoring tools, implement employee self-service, and create governance of the CMDB in the organization's change process.

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It is important to note that Cintas is currently utilizing its existing IT tools to provide information and discovery sources for the CMDB, which is a semi-automated process. In later phases of the project, it will look to increase automation across the business, including IT operations management (ITOM) for automated discovery and data collection.

In addition, assyst is primarily confined to IT service desk users, but will be rolled out to all employees via a mobile app and self-service portal to lighten the load on resolver groups.

Tools such as a chatbot and virtual assistance will be critical in driving autonomy, reducing manual tasks where possible.

Looking ahead, Cintas plans to implement assyst across different departments, with one system and source of truth throughout the business. This will allow leadership to develop a better understanding of assets, drive better decision-making, and improve the company's overarching security posture.
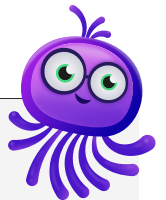
About IFS assyst

Our goal is to graduate teammates from mere operational slaves to transformative change-agents. Giving them back the time and energy needed to build the future. Automation looks after the routine work that happens every day so your people can progress the projects that really matter.

Less routine, more creativity.
Simple automation is the key to this change.
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