



Enhancing  
**the Value**  
of SMS™

*An Executive White Paper*  
**Eracent, Inc.**  
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## SUMMARY

*An organization committed to the Microsoft SMS™ deployment must examine all opportunities to take advantage of the SMS data, while not restricting the value that IT can deliver to the organization. Opportunities for greater value include working with an ITAM discovery tool to transform SMS data into software title information, and enhancing patch management processes. Through integration, SMS ROI is increased while additional value is gained from enhanced business practices.*

## WHY ADD TO SMS?

**Microsoft's SMS™** is one of the most widely used electronic software delivery systems available today. As part of the task to deploy software, SMS collects a detailed hardware and software inventory from the end-points where the SMS client is installed. The inventory data is used for effective targeting of software delivery for updates and additions to any asset that has the SMS agent on it. This inventoried data is frequently used as the starting point for software asset management. However, applying the business intelligence necessary to properly analyze the SMS data can be a costly and time-consuming process.

## MEETING SAM DEMANDS

**The inventory data** for software asset management must be accurate, detailed and available across the entire network. This level of complexity is necessary in order to allow IT asset managers to reconcile collected inventory data against ownership records, budget plans and security documents. All of the business practices that are part of software asset management begin with the inventory data. Consequently, issues with the data can significantly limit the achievement of software asset management.

While reconciling hardware is relatively simple (use of standards such as WMI has greatly reduced the complexity of this task), reconciling software inventory against software purchase records is a much more complex task. Quite often, raw software inventory results do not match well against purchasing records, requiring extensive effort to “scrub the data clean” before any software asset management analysis can occur. This manual “scrubbing” effort is time consuming and cumbersome, creating a roadblock between the SMS inventory and the use of that data for software asset management functions. The time critical tasks for license negotiations, software audits and budgeting limit software asset managers to the top set of publishers. The raw amount of data prevents them from expanding the scope of the program or gaining additional business value from the software.

**Organizations choose a unique** mix of software to conduct the business and to manage the internal workings of the enterprise. In the environments where SMS is a key contributor to network management, the product can work cooperatively with other products or provide data to another application. The choices for continuing to improve software asset management and achieve significant business goals with SMS can take a variety of paths, depending on the needs and goals of the organization.

## LIMITED COOPERATION

**The traditional choice** for expanding SAM functionality is to bring in another product designed specifically for the in-depth discovery and inventory required for the business and contractual management of software. SMS may be in the background of software asset management and used only for software packaging and delivery and hardware management.

**In this case**, a product search for a tool focused on IT asset management functionality is conducted and the requirements for SMS integration are limited to use of SMS to deliver the new product's agents. The expectation is that the new product will perform an independent assessment of the network. Integration is not really necessary in this case.

**This limited approach** may not greatly increase the ROI for SMS, but it enhances the ability of the organization to pursue IT asset management goals. ITAM tools like Eracent's EnterpriseAM™ offer thorough and accurate discovery and inventory. There is extensive attention to platforms, versions, patches and unique hardware with software, providing many business reasons to choose to bring a second product.

**A discriminator of this approach** is how well the ITAM product utilizes the native SMS mechanisms to gather the information. With a more extensive use of the SMS implementation, there is less additional expense from building a redundant infrastructure. With Eracent's EnterpriseAM, an Eracent add-on agent can perform the inventory scan and produce a raw scan file. Native SMS mechanisms are used to deliver the raw scan for processing. SMS initiates the EPA process and then collects the output through normal SMS collection to the SMS server where it can be transferred for analysis and reporting by EnterpriseAM.

## WORKING AS ONE

**Another choice is** to select an additional product that works cooperatively with SMS so that the functionality of SMS data collection is utilized and enhanced. The ideal choice would be a discovery and inventory product focused on IT asset management and yet with the capability to incorporate the SMS data collection, either as the complete source or as an adjunct to additional data collection that the product may offer. The advantages to this approach begin with extending the use and value of the current SMS deployment rather than deploying a secondary agent into the same sections of the network.

**Even greater SAM value is derived** if the ITAM discovery product appends data from numerous sources, including multiple SMS data collections as well as data discovered on other platforms. Creating a master file of discovered software is another one of those tasks that are routinely difficult to accomplish and a frequent show-stopper for real control of the asset base. Integration is the best solution for an SMS organization seeking to build a global perspective on the software installed. Eracent's dedication to technical and process integration offers this level of integration within the EnterpriseAM product. EnterpriseAM, with the Network Probe functionality, can gather data from the entire breadth of the networked environment, regardless of platform or architecture (UNIX, LINUX, Citrix, hosted, backend). Inventories are not stopped by remote devices, whether they are on slow dialup connections or wireless. Duplicate SMS IDs are detected and reported. Collaborative processes between EnterpriseAM and SMS offer increased depth, breadth and consolidation, building a stronger foundation for IT management and decision making. The combination of SMS and EnterpriseAM offers real value for the business management of software when SMS inventory data is translated into software title records, suitable for comparison to licenses and purchasing data.

**A knowledge engine** such as that available in EnterpriseAM augments SMS functionality by including SMS data as the source of data fed to the knowledgebase and analysis functionality. With over 250,000+ entries and constant updates, the knowledgebase automatically scrubs the SMS data, enhancing the value of the data to support business and contractual management business practices.

## THE OPPORTUNITY FOR LICENSE MANAGEMENT

**What if the organization is** satisfied with the extent of data and the scope of the SMS deployment? How can the organization improve the ROI on SMS through software asset management? The opportunity is in the time-consuming process for software license reconciliation where inventory data is compared and assessed against purchasing data. With only SMS and a repository tool, “ownership” information has to be manually added or accumulated over time. The hard task of scrubbing inventory data into license-meaningful units remains a mostly manual process. Time and resource issues quickly justify investigating other options.

**In this case,** a product that can transform inventory data AND purchasing data into comparable representations of licenses would be an enormous success factor for software asset management. For this option, only Eracent’s EnterpriseEM™ for Entitlements Management offers this functionality. Straightforward use of the primary sources of SMS data and purchasing data from the myriad sources within the organization are fed directly into EnterpriseEM. EnterpriseEM presents the real license picture at any point in time using the extensive knowledgebase of software titles and identifiers, along with the functionality to work with bundles, suites, upgrade paths, downgrade options and any unique contractual terms that have been negotiated. While the end result from other products may look similar, the time and effort is significantly less with EnterpriseEM.

**The capability** to use primary sources and the automation of the scrubbing, regardless of sources, speeds and simplifies the process. The repeatability and sustainability of software asset management moves an incredible leap ahead while maximizing the SMS deployment.

## FINE TUNING PATCH MANAGEMENT

**Software asset management is** not the only set of business practices that can benefit from cooperative use of an ITAM product with SMS. There are additional benefits to be gained by enhancing the functionality of SMS with a discovery and inventory product like EnterpriseAM. The specificity and breadth of the software elements that are reportable with EnterpriseAM improve patch management by creating a seamless, automated process for the SMS software deployment life cycle.

Specific improvements to the patch management process include:

- >> Targeting machines which require specific SMS bundles
- >> Feeding SMS with accurate information for automated deployment
- >> Reporting the results of actual installation success after SMS deployment

**Success with deployment** of a patch begins with defining the community of machines that are candidates, or targets for deployment of a particular patch. With EnterpriseAM, the additional information of what is NOT installed is added to the investigation, helping to better define the community.

**Narrowing down the patch itself** requires multi-faceted patch reporting mechanisms. The ITAM discovery product maintains file properties, registry entries and WMI data, making it is easier to verify that it is the right patch or hot fix. Another advantage to verification and auditing is that patches are associated with their operating system so that the patch can only be deployed to a machine with the matching operating system.

**With an SMS bundle ID associated with the packages, patches and hot fixes, EnterpriseAM detects the presence of that bundle and reports on the success or failure after the deployment. This secondary audit query can be scheduled and run automatically. Detailed information about the success or failure of SMS deployments are captured and summarized in reports. Drill down details include the reason for failure, which packages failed, the domain where the failure occurred, user information such as login, location or any of the other demographic fields associated with the machine.**

**If SMS is** an integral component of IT operations and your organization is committed to expanding the value of that deployment, consider complementing SMS with true integration. Eracent products leverage the investment in Microsoft SMS and add value by enhancing the IT asset management and configuration management business practices that depend on accurate and thorough inventories.

## About Eracent

**Eracent, Inc.** is a world-wide provider of technology for life cycle management of IT assets, uniquely balancing the inventory tracking, financial and contractual aspects for today's IT environments.

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