



Catalog and request  
management white paper  
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# The service catalog has emerged as an important tool for creating, managing, pricing and aligning IT's work.

## Introduction

### Faster. Better. Cheaper.

The modern IT organization is challenged every day to “run more like a business” while fulfilling a dizzying array of demands from various business units and IT users. These groups want unlimited options and don't care much about delivery costs or service level agreements (SLAs). As the IT environment grows more and more complex, so do user requirements, and so does the need to effectively manage and control the way IT does its job.

To overcome this supply-and-demand challenge, it is just not enough to manage the various components and events of the IT world in isolation. True business effectiveness may emerge when an organization starts to manage the services that it delivers in a holistic way. A service lifecycle management approach provides the means—both through technology and best practices—to do this. Underpinning all of this, there must be a comprehensive repository of everything that exists within the IT estate, how they are connected to each other and what their operational state is—the configuration management database (CMDB).

The CMDB is a record of what we have. To be truly effective, it is also important that we are clear about what we can have—in other words, a way to drive and enforce standardization through the IT organization and onwards to its business users.

The service catalog has emerged as an important tool for creating, managing, pricing and aligning IT's work. If IT's goal is to operate like a business, then the service catalog is the “shop window” that lets customers see what is available to them. At its core, the service catalog

and underlying catalog and request management system are a best practice-based approach to defining and enforcing a standard set of products and services—reflecting both SLAs and business objectives—along with the approvals, costs and chargebacks associated with each product or service.

The service catalog is published to the user base online, so users can select from available predefined services with a clear understanding of the cost and SLA parameters involved—giving them the power to make the best trade-off between the services that they choose and what they are willing to pay for them.

In this way, the service catalog actually leverages the power of supply-and-demand to help IT better manage the delivery of services, create a more satisfying service experience, and in the process, help IT operate in a more business-like way.

Building an effective service catalog can help transform IT into an effective service delivery organization by shifting from a reactive to a proactive delivery model. Catalog and request management helps IT document its service portfolio and develop more standardized services for its customers, along with standard process methodologies for service delivery.

# The long-term effectiveness of any catalog and request management system is directly related to the quality, predictability and consistency of each item in the service catalog.

Effective catalog and request management delivers these major benefits:

- Simplifies the process of defining and maintaining a standard set of products and services
- Enables IT to enforce the selection of standardized goods and services
- Improves security by decreasing the vulnerabilities that are exposed due to maverick buying
- Reduces costs by improving productivity, resource utilization and planning
- Creates a central repository for documenting all IT services available for end-user consumption
- Makes results easier to track and manage using key metrics such as cost and SLA compliance
- Delivers a quicker, easier and friendlier ordering process
- Reduces service desk's workload by allowing end users to raise and status-check requests via the web
- Makes IT more flexible and able to manage change

While all these benefits are both compelling and relevant to almost any corporate IT organization, it should be noted that building and implementing a catalog and request management system is a complex step-by-step process that requires a clear understanding of IT's service portfolio, as well as both the time and the commitment to see the process through.

The following sections discuss the fundamentals of effective catalog and request management, and provide the information necessary to begin the process.

## **Fundamentals of catalog and request management**

Catalog and request management is the process of aligning IT service offerings with the needs of IT's customers and clients, as well as with overall business objectives.

The catalog and request management process begins with the service catalog, which is a standard set of product/service offerings. These offerings can be bundled as needed, or tailored to meet the needs of specific business units or other user groups.

For each product, service or bundle, the service catalog stipulates:

- The appropriate SLAs
- The appropriate approval workflow
- The cost, including all related chargebacks
- The value to the business

One of the major underlying objectives of the service catalog is to build standardized, repeatable and documented processes for delivering all the products and services IT offers. The long-term effectiveness of any catalog and request management system is directly related to the quality, predictability and consistency of each item in the service catalog. The Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) framework provides an effective foundation for accomplishing this objective—and indeed for building the entire service management function.

## **Building an effective service catalog can help transform IT into an effective service delivery organization.**

Once created, the service catalog is made available online to IT's customers, and traditional market forces take over. With a service catalog in place, populated with all the available goods and services, IT can, through the catalog and request management system, control, adjust and modify services to reflect the changing IT environment, user demand and SLA requirements.

# An effective service catalog should provide instant back-end integration with a variety of other IT, ERP and accounting systems and processes.

In general, the service catalog consists of individual items and four basic components related to each item:

- **Goods:** anything that the customer can order—hardware components, software, access to services such as e-mail or the HR system, or more complex bundles consisting of a combination of these
- **Services:** the range of activities—installation, profile creation, software distribution, IMAC—needed to verify that the goods ordered are deployed successfully
- **Service levels:** the definition of the guaranteed delivery commitments that will be met
- **Approvals:** who has the authority to approve the procurement of the item

So, for example, if the item is a laptop computer, the related available “goods” might be a laptop case or additional memory or software; the “services” might be training or creating a user ID; the “service levels” might specify the number of days it takes to deliver the laptop; and the “approvals” might specify if the user has the authority to purchase the laptop (and if not, who does).

It’s easy to see how these catalog items and related components interact with a variety of other IT, ERP and accounting systems and processes. An effective service catalog should, out of the box, provide this back-end integration:

- Goods and services (links to request management)
- Change requests (links to change management)
- Service requests (links to service management)

This lowers operational, deployment and maintenance costs, reduces demand on the service desk, makes it easier to track results and improves IT productivity.

## Catalog and request management helps IT run more effectively.

Successful businesses become successful by listening to their customers and giving them what they want. For an IT organization to run like a business, IT must do the same. Effective catalog and request management helps IT do just that. It enables IT to use real-world customer input to make more informed decisions about what to offer and how to offer it, as well as helping IT balance the cost of service with the quality of service. This enables both higher customer satisfaction and SLA compliance, and in turn makes the IT organization itself operate better and become more closely aligned with overall business objectives.

Catalog and request management also helps IT make internal changes that reduce operational costs and improve service quality:

- Better monitoring and measuring of SLA compliance and customer satisfaction
- More accurate measurement of the value and performance of service delivery
- Enhanced ability to handle change and effectively deploy resources
- Simpler and more effective communication with users for all IT transactions

Together, these changes provide a pathway for moving IT from a reactive to a proactive service delivery model.

## Principles of effective catalog and request management

Regardless of the size and shape of an individual IT organization or user base, any catalog and request management system should follow a set of basic principles.

A catalog and request management system should:

- Be achievable and relevant
- Be transactional
- Use a web-based architecture
- Use web-based wizards
- Use ITIL best practices
- Give department and user groups exactly what they need
- Tie user requests to SLAs
- Integrate with the service desk

It should:

**Be achievable and relevant to the customer.** The catalog and request management system must be easily understood and used by everyone involved. It also should provide to each user only the products and services relevant to his/her job or business unit.

**Be transactional.** If a user sees something he/she wants, he/she should be able to order it on the spot. The service catalog should allow users to:

- Choose their requirements via a simple web-based “shopping basket”
- Submit their request for approval and subsequent fulfillment with a single mouse click
- Track the status of each request and any associated workflow
- See only the fields appropriate to the type of request being made

**Use web-based wizards.** Wizards make it easy for all users (both IT and departmental) to define and maintain the service catalog, approvals, security and SLA rules.

**Be based upon ITIL best practices.** The ITIL (IT Infrastructure Library) is the industry’s de facto standard for best practice-based service delivery. Since developing the service catalog involves standardizing and documenting of all IT products/services/bundles, ITIL is simply the right foundation on which the catalog should be built.

**Give individual departments and user groups exactly what they need.** A single service catalog won’t meet the needs of diverse business units or groups of users. Leveraging the power of market forces to deliver IT services means allowing these groups to create and manage their own catalogs, so IT can verify that users generally get what they want.

**Tie user requests directly to SLA parameters.** Every service request is related to one or more SLAs. The catalog and request management system must recognize this and make sure that both the requesting user and IT itself are clear on how an individual request impacts relevant SLAs, so that goods and services are delivered in line with agreed performance levels.

**Integrate closely with the service desk function.** Catalog and request management provides an organization with the means to transform a simple help desk into a consolidated service desk (CSD). Implemented correctly, it should be the focal point of communication between the providers of IT services and their consumers. If standardization and best practices are deployed effectively, the CSD enables an organization to pull together disparate parts of the business and present one unified interface.

## A step-by-step approach to creating a catalog and request management system

As previously stated, catalog and request management provides significant benefits in helping the IT organization better serve its customers, operate in a more business-like manner, and become more closely aligned with enterprise goals and objectives.

Clearly, however, these benefits cannot be realized unless all the relevant stakeholders—the IT organization, the users of IT services and senior management—buy into the entire process. Making the kinds of fundamental changes required to effectively implement a catalog and request management system will inevitably have significant short-term consequences for all the stakeholders, and so the entire organization must be prepared to see the process through.

# Seeing the process through to completion requires complete buy-in by the IT organization, its user base and senior management decision-makers.

Five steps to effective catalog and service request management:

1. Define
2. Document
3. Measure
4. Structure
5. Adjust

With such a commitment in place, here is a basic five-step approach to creating a catalog and request management system:

**1. Define-** The first step is to determine what IT offers its customers. This list should include every available item and its related components (goods, services, service levels and approvals), and should be written in plain, everyday language, avoiding “IT-speak.” Keep in mind that the people who use the service catalog are shopping for the IT products and services which are right for their needs. Therefore, the catalog should look and feel like a consumer shopping site. What the user wants, he/she should easily be able to get.

Catalog items should be segmented by the customer groups being served, so that specific content can be delivered based on user roles and needs. Department leaders should be able to create their own catalogs in order to verify that each user has access to everything he/she needs.

**2. Document-** The next step is to determine how each item is delivered. Standardized processes must be designed, tested and refined for each item in the catalog. Again, the three watchwords are quality, predictability and consistency.

Because this step involves creating standard processes for everything IT offers, ITIL best practices become extremely useful here. By using ITIL as the foundation for these new processes, IT can both save time and verify that it is taking the best possible approach.

**3. Measure-** Once the items are defined and documented, they must be quantified. Costs, values and chargebacks should be calculated for each item in the catalog. In addition, the catalog must include how each item relates to relevant SLAs—and if no SLA exists, one must be created.

This step goes to the very heart of running IT like a business. IT must know exactly what it costs to provide each product or service, and how it can recoup those costs through chargebacks or SLA parameters—something any successful business does every day.

**4. Structure-** The question here is who will provide each product/service/bundle in the catalog. Using the cost and value information from step 3, IT can determine whether each product/service/bundle is best provided in-house or through outsourcing.

**5. Adjust-** Once the service catalog is published, IT should collect user feedback and use it as the primary basis for making changes to and upgrading the service catalog.

Of course, these steps are only a high-level approach to implementing a catalog and request management system. Each step represents a number of sub-projects, some quite complex and time-consuming. But these steps do provide a good general sense of how the process works and how the IT organization can get started.

## Summary

In an era of skyrocketing user demand, increasing technical complexity and shrinking budgets, IT faces unrelenting pressure to reinvent itself as a true business. The old reactive “break-fix” model just doesn’t work anymore. What is needed now is a proactive approach that uses traditional market forces to provide IT’s customers with the products and services they are looking for.

The service catalog is the right tool for this job. Serving as an online “shop window” for the things IT offers, the service catalog creates a self-service environment where users can shop for, select, procure and track the delivery of IT products and services. The service catalog enables users to shop with confidence, knowing that they have access to all the products and services relevant to their job or their business unit. It also secures the knowledge that the catalog is the very best way to deal successfully with the IT issues they face.

Implementing a catalog and request management system offers the IT organization an excellent opportunity to upgrade and standardize its service delivery processes, particularly when using the ITIL framework as a best-practices foundation for those new processes.

Any effective catalog and request management system should be easy to use and relevant to the individual user or department, allow users to “buy” what they see, use a solid web-based architecture and web-based wizards, link user requests directly to SLA parameters, and integrate completely with the entire service desk function. At a high level, building a catalog and request management system has five basic steps:

1. Define
2. Document
3. Measure
4. Structure
5. Adjust

A catalog and request management system can help IT reduce costs, provide an enhanced user experience, track results more accurately, reduce service desk workload and improve productivity. But, creating and implementing the system is a complex task that requires complete buy-in by the IT organization, its user base and the senior management decision-makers who will provide both the budget and the backup IT needs to see the process through to completion.

## About HP Catalog Management software

The HP Catalog Management software embodies all the fundamentals, principles, features and benefits described here. It gives users the power to create requests using a simple online shopping basket and streamlines approval workflows. Individual departments or workgroups can easily create customized catalogs, and the Catalog Management module provides simple out-of-the-box integration with back-end fulfillment processes. HP Catalog Management provides IT with a consistent window to communicate with the business while tightly aligning with the ITIL processes as defined in the service lifecycle.

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To learn more, visit [www.hp.com/go/software](http://www.hp.com/go/software)

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