WHITE PAPER

Application Rationalization: Preparing for the Move to Windows 10 and Beyond

By Brien M. Posey

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Application sprawl can be a very costly problem that builds up quietly over time.

One of the major challenges that CIOs face in enterprise class organizations is that of application sprawl. Enterprise organizations typically have accumulated thousands of applications that must be actively maintained and supported every day. Even so, there is a good chance that a relatively small percentage of those applications are actively being used on a regular basis. Carrying unused or redundant applications in your portfolio is often a sign of disconnect between the business and IT.

Application sprawl can be a very costly problem that builds up quietly over time.

For instance, unused applications consume network and hardware resources that could be better used for other purposes. Likewise, patching and maintaining underused applications translates directly to wasted man-hours and wasted money. According to some estimates, application sprawl can cost an enterprise class organization millions of dollars each year (http://www.cio.com/article/2391063/enterprise-software/how-to-rationalize-your-application-portfolio.html).

The best way to combat application sprawl is to make application rationalization a required step in your Application Readiness process (**Figure 1**). Application rationalization is essentially a systematic method for determining which applications are useful and needed by the business, and which ones are redundant, add no value, and should be retired or replaced.

The key to making application rationalization work is to come up with a general rationalization strategy for 'right sizing' your application portfolio, and then implementing a continuous process to ensure that as new applications are added they are not duplicates, redundant, or can replace another version that is already deployed. A point in time project to application rationalization requires a lot of time, effort, and collaboration with the business owners, but once complete, maintaining a rationalized portfolio as a part of your daily application management will continue to add value. At the same time however, rationalization

Figure 1 *Application Readiness Process*

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techniques requiring significant effort tend to yield the most dramatic results. Even so, the best approach is to adopt a continual application rationalization strategy.

Application rationalization is all about identifying and removing applications that: are technically have multiple versions, have outlived their life span, or are no longer needed because of changes in business processes or strategy.

Often times, major IT projects, like desktop transformations, are the driving force behind application rationalization initiatives. Before an organization can migrate to a new platform they must do extensive testing to ensure that applications continue to function as expected after the new operating system has been put into place. Of course thoroughly testing all your applications for compatibility with a new operating system takes a lot of effort. This effort can be greatly reduced when you retire and consolidate applications that are out of date or no longer needed.

An operating system migration can be thought of like moving from one house to another. Moving to a new home means packing up everything that you own so that you can take it with you. However, moving isn't cheap and the more stuff that you have, the more the move will cost you. There is cost associated with the number of cardboard boxes, the size of the moving truck, and the number of professional movers required.

Think of an operating system as being like a house for applications.

Prior to moving, it is recommended that you do some major house cleaning. After all, there is no reason to move junk that you no longer need to a new house. If enough stuff can be given away, or thrown away prior to the move then you can rent a smaller and less expensive moving truck, purchase fewer boxes. Of course having less stuff to move also means spending less money on professional movers or a lot less back-breaking labor for those do-it-yourselfers out there.

So what does moving from one house to another have to do with application rationalization? Well, think of an operating system as being like a house for applications. In this analogy, Windows 7 might be the old house and Windows 10 could be the new house. Instead of moving cardboard boxes, the administrator must move applications. And like moving to a new home, moving applications to a new operating system involves a lot of expense and a lot of effort which can be reduced by cleaning out some junk (or unneeded applications) prior to the move.

If you've ever moved to a new home, then you know that moving can be an overwhelming process. There are likely to be hundreds of individual items that must be inventoried, packed and transported. Where do you even begin?

Corporations face the same types of challenges when they prepare to move applications from one platform to another. A large enterprise class environment can easily have 1000 to 2000 different applications.

Everybody has their own approach to moving, but the first step is often to go through the house on a room by room basis and identify what you have and who the owner is. Each item belongs to someone in the house and before you decide how to disposition each item, you should have the conversation with the owner about whether it should get moved, donated, sold, or be replaced. For example, if you discover that you have five toasters in your kitchen then you may not need to move all five toasters, but if one of those belongs to your college age son, you better check with him first before you toss it. Rationalization is an opportunity to have a discussion with business owners, understand their goals, and help them to develop an application portfolio that makes them become more innovative and competitive.

If you perform a blanket inventory of the PCs within an organization, you will likely find that the resulting list includes a lot more than just the applications the business actually cares about.

In a corporate environment the same basic philosophy can apply. Think of the individual departments as rooms in a home. If you are going to move then you would probably inventory your possessions on a room by room basis. If you are going to move applications to a new platform, then it probably makes sense to inventory those applications one department at a time and identify the business owners that will provide the additional business perspective on how those applications are used or not used. And just as you probably don't need five toasters in your kitchen, the marketing department probably doesn't need five different applications that all do the same thing. You will need to meet with the application owner in that department and discuss the benefits of standardizing their applications and the costs of using a wide variety of redundant applications.

Inventorying household items in preparation for a move is not without its challenges. Getting ready to move is rarely as simple as deciding which items to keep and which items to get rid of. It's not always easy to figure out who owns a particular application and what (if anything) that application is being used for.

Some might be quick to point out that most enterprises use Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager to collect inventory of files installed on each PC. On the surface, it would seem that this type of automated software inventory would make application rationalization a lot easier. Unfortunately, the devil is in the details.

If you perform a blanket inventory of the PCs within an organization, you will likely find that the resulting list includes a lot more than just the applications the business actually cares about. There may be hundreds of Windows updates listed, as well as countless device drivers, games, and patches from third-party vendors. The resulting list is likely to contain so many "noise" items that without some serious and time consuming manipulation in a spreadsheet, the list becomes impractical for use as an actionable application inventory. One solution to this problem is to use an application recognition service to quickly sort through the software inventory list provided by Configuration Manager to produce a normalized list that contains only applications and software titles. Furthermore, to be actionable the list must contain information about each software vendor and version. Only then can you begin

to have an intelligent conversation with business stakeholders about which applications need to be migrated and which can be retired or replaced.

Earlier I stated that the most effective approach to application rationalization is often a continual approach. Moving often involves a significant amount of decluttering and cleaning, but how do you maintain that clean house after the move?

Proactive and agile organizations take the maid service approach to application rationalization. Rather than rationalizing applications annually or just prior to a desktop transformation event, the organization rationalizes applications on a continual basis. As part of their Application Readiness process, the rationalization step is performed any time a new application is requested. For instance, the organization can determine whether the application is the latest version, has already been packaged for deployment, or could replace an existing version already in production.

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CONCLUSION

Application rationalization can be a difficult process if you wait until just before an operating system migration to get started. It is better to perform application rationalization on a daily basis as part of the Application Readiness process when bring new applications into your environment. Doing so will prevent application sprawl, improve alignment with the business, and significantly reduce the organization's costs including annual license renewal fees and maintenance costs for unused applications.

The ultimate goal of Application Readiness is to establish an automated, end-to-end process for managing applications over their entire lifecycles, from acquisition to retirement. That requires standardization of process steps, seamless integration within and across steps, and a high degree of automation. It also requires integration with other related business processes such as software license compliance and software deployment processes.

Flexera Software has defined an Application Readiness Maturity Model that provides a framework for continual improvement of Application Readiness maturity (See **Figure 2**). The most mature organizations,

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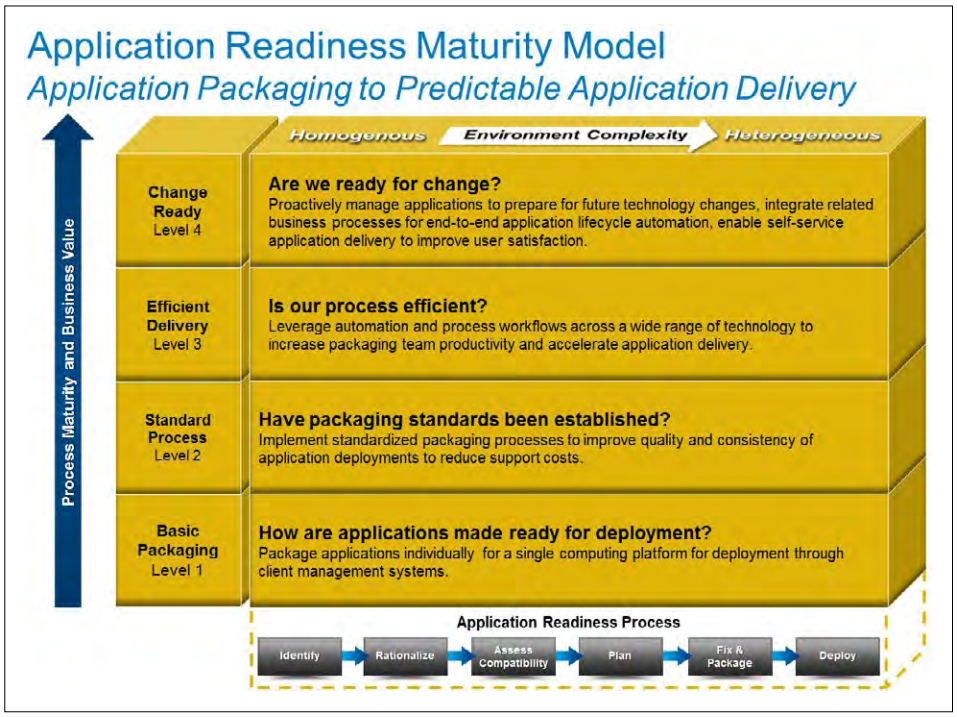

Figure 2 *Application Readiness Maturity Model*

Level 4 Change Ready, incorporate rationalization as a required step in every new application request and ensure that their applications landscape is adding value and always ready for the next change. ■

Brien Posey is an 11-time Microsoft MVP with over two decades of IT experience. As a freelance writer, Posey has written many thousands of articles and written or contributed to several dozen books on a wide variety of IT topics. Prior to going freelance, Posey was a CIO for a national chain of hospitals and healthcare facilities. He has also served as a network administrator for some of the country's largest insurance companies and for the Department of Defense at Fort Knox. When He isn't busy writing, Brien Posey enjoys exotic travel, scuba diving, and racing his Cigarette boat. You can visit his personal Web site at: www.brienposey.com.

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To learn more about the Application Readiness process visit the Flexera website http://www.flexerasoftware.com/enterprise/products/application-packaging/