

ABS counts on HP OpenView Change and Configuration Management solutions for fully managed software environment



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– Lane Masterton,
director, software management,
Australian Bureau of Statistics

About ABS

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is Australia’s official statistical agency. It assists and encourages informed decision-making, research and discussion within Federal, State and local government and the community by providing a high-quality, objective and responsive national statistical service.

ABS’s operations include eight permanent offices located in each of Australia’s capital cities. It employs over 3,000 full-time staff with another 600 contract staff operating as research interviewers. This number grows by an additional 1,000 contract staff and approximately 30,000 field collectors during Census of Population and Housing surveys, which are held every five years.



With a complex software environment, the Australian Bureau of Statistics needed a better solution for the management and maintenance of over 700 products in use across the organisation.

The need for better resource management

In 2000, ABS undertook a thorough review of its client-computing infrastructure to determine what efficiencies could be delivered and how it could deliver better software support. During that process, various issues were identified and the decision was taken to move to a fully managed software environment based on the Windows XP operating system.

According to Mr Lane Masterton, director of ABS’s software management section, the review was designed to provide a better quality, more efficient desktop software service to permanent and contract staff.

“Previously we had an environment using Windows 95 and the overhead for distribution within that environment was high,” Mr Masterton said. “We kept receiving calls to visit PCs to complete manual software installations or repairs.”

“It was also a challenge for us to schedule major software deployments because we didn’t have a particularly mature or secure process. We were using login scripts to run semi-automated installations of software, and that was too much manpower just to maintain the software environment.”



ABS faced challenges particularly when it came to maintaining its software infrastructure. With a large number of different project teams and types of statistical data recorded, the agency uses an extremely diverse range of desktop software.

ABS has a core of mandatory software including Lotus Notes and Lotus SmartSuite. However, there were also a host of applications used by various staff for a range of processes, depending on the role individuals played in the organisation's overall operations.

"Currently we have in excess of 700 products across our entire environment and we are probably adding as many as 10 new products each week," Mr Masterton said. "Managing that extent of turnover and being able to support that many products was an extremely difficult and labour-intensive exercise in the previous environment."

"We were running a range of management processes and applications to maintain the numerous software profiles that were spread across the organisation. Various workgroups needed to be authenticated to use some software programs but not others, and with applications that were not enterprise-wide there was still a substantial amount of manual loading onto individual PCs."

"Then there was the problem of staff loading their own software onto ABS desktops. This was becoming an issue, which was affecting the performance of PCs and user productivity. We knew what each PC's software profile was supposed to be but quite often it varied from what was actually being used."

Moving towards a fully managed software environment

After thoroughly assessing a range of options, ABS selected HP OpenView as the platform to underpin all of its client software management tasks. Mr Masterton said that it now uses many of the components of the HP OpenView suite of applications. These include Configuration Server, Inventory Manager, Management Portal, Proxy Server and Stagers, which are all accessed through a single interface.

Each time an ABS client turns on their system, HP OpenView runs a series of automated, policy-based diagnostic checks on mandatory and individual software inventories.

"As far as our desktop and notebook PCs are concerned, OpenView performs a daily check on the status of mandatory application suites such as Lotus Notes and Lotus SmartSuite as well as other proprietary software," Mr Masterton said. "It will ensure that the client is running the correct versions of applications and checks to determine if any repairs are needed."

"If there are any new updates, removals, repairs or changes to the mandatory applications profile, HP OpenView will automatically install them."

"Mandatory software includes about 60 of the 700-plus products used by ABS. HP OpenView also integrates with our Notes environment to publish a library of around 650 optional products through a software portal, which makes them available to users based on their login profiles."

Individual ABS users can go to the software portal and request for a particular product, which will then be distributed to the desktop by HP OpenView if the client is authorised and licensed to have access.

HP OpenView is also used to provide automated hardware inventory management by gathering data on systems and consolidating it into Web-based reports.

"The Inventory Management component allows us to get detailed information from each of our PCs," Mr Masterton said. "It allows us to report on the configuration such as the type of PC, the amount of memory or hard disk space it has, what services are running on the PC and various other matters."

ABS also uses HP OpenView to monitor PCs on the network. "We gather accurate information on the devices connected and their current status in terms of their software and hardware configuration," Mr Masterton said. "HP OpenView Inventory Manager using Radia allows us to have an accurate picture of what is on each machine, when it was installed and by whom."

HP OpenView plays a crucial role in maintaining the security and integrity of ABS's IT systems. By allowing new software patches to be automatically distributed as soon as they are available, exposure to potential hacking or software faults is significantly reduced, according to Mr Masterton.

"We can now lock down systems to the point where it is virtually impossible to install any software that is not distributed by HP OpenView," Mr Masterton said. "We use HP OpenView to deliver all of our security patches and we are now in a position where we can deploy them to well over 90 per cent of our machines within one day."

"That would have taken us two or three weeks previously. Perhaps even more important is that HP OpenView monitors that process for us so we know for sure the machines that have not received the security patch, which allows us to follow up and ensure they are updated."

Achieving efficiencies and cost savings

Mr Masterton said HP OpenView has been the foundation of the organisation's successful client computing review and transformation to a managed software environment. As a result, it is able to deliver better quality software support and service while generating operational efficiencies and cost savings, as well as improved security and stability.

"Our ability to deliver software support has significantly improved," Mr Masterton said. "HP OpenView has allowed us to automate many of the manual processes that previously interfered with user productivity. In addition, it is now much easier for us to support roaming users because their software profile is linked directly to their login authorisation."

"Meanwhile, we now have centralised management of all ABS's software needs across the country from the one location in Canberra," Mr Masterton said. "This has directly influenced our software management overheads as we have been able to reduce the number of support staff involved in maintaining PC software configurations at each of the state offices."

"From an IT operational point of view, we have realised significant savings from efficiency improvements after moving to the HP OpenView-managed software environment. We delivered a far more secure and consistent desktop environment, while at the same time reducing the number of staff actively involved in software execution, all of which has significantly reduced our operating costs."

Rolling out major new software is also now a far more manageable process for ABS thanks to HP OpenView. While it now has the capability to distribute new software across the entire organisation in a single day, HP OpenView's flexibility complements ABS's risk-avoidance strategy by allowing such deployments to be staggered.

"We use that functionality to target the deployment of software to workgroups on a priority or trial basis and this has the added benefit of allowing us to limit the impact of any issues that may arise," Mr Masterton said. "It gives us unprecedented control of the software deployment process."

According to Mr Masterton, this flexibility introduces noticeably improved stability and smooth integration with other applications.

"If we do have software implementation problems, it is very simple for us to tell a client to go back and reinstall the software," Mr Masterton said. "It is a one-click operation for them using the ABS Software Portal."



"Meanwhile, because we have comprehensive historical data of exactly what has been distributed to individual users, we can generally resolve over the phone any software issue. There is now much less intervention required from IT support staff."

"The majority of software problems we have are resolved by a single call to our helpdesk and a simple reinstallation or repair of the software concerned."

With the HP OpenView implementation now complete, ABS is looking to realise its potential to reduce licensing costs.

"We're now looking at what additional benefits HP OpenView can deliver. Cost reductions and efficiency in the area of licensing agreements are high on the priority list," Mr Masterton said. "HP OpenView gives us the ability to know exactly where each piece of software is installed and how much it is being used."

"We have aimed for better and more appropriate uses for the licences we actually have in place and, as a result, we are starting to see a reduction in licence fees flowing through. I would expect to see savings in this area going forward."

Mr Masterton said that there are ongoing benefits for ABS in dealing with a large, well-resourced organisation such as HP, which has a high-quality premium partner network.

"There are a couple of key support people at HP who we deal with on a regular basis. They are of extremely high quality and very responsive to our needs," Mr Masterton said. "We have also been very happy with the level of support and product knowledge we have received from HP's partner, EES, who we have had the majority of dealings with."

"Whenever we have had an issue, they have helped us out very quickly and effectively."

Challenges

- Difficulty in managing and maintaining complex software environment of 700 diverse products
- High overheads and manpower required to support users and handle major software rollouts
- Inefficiencies in supporting and managing numerous software profiles

Solutions

- HP OpenView Change and Configuration Management solution

Benefits

- Better quality software support and service delivered across the organisation
- Increased automation of many manual processes enhanced user productivity
- Operational efficiencies and cost savings due to centralised management of all software needs
- Improved security and stability in desktop environment
- Better control of software deployment processes

Contact information

For more information about HP OpenView software, please call your local HP reseller or HP sales office.

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