

IT complexity is increasing, yet budgets are being slashed, and clients are scrutinizing their expenditures even more closely -- while actually boosting their expectations from solution providers. How can Ecora help in this increasingly competitive and pressured work environment? Ecora's products, with a couple of mouse clicks, interrogate a client's network, collect configuration information from the servers, then just like an expert system administrator - literally write readable, accurate, and current reports.

Ecora's solutions expand a provider's business by substantially increasing

- ?? competitiveness
- ?? profitability
- ?? efficiency
- ?? client satisfaction

What kinds of issues does system configuration documentation generated by Ecora address?

Clients know the importance of all of these issues: preparing for contingency planning, safeguarding their networks, creating audit trails, addressing compliance issues, solving tough troubleshooting problems, dealing with mergers and acquisitions, implementing a successful migration or server consolidation, and coming to grips with staff reductions and turnover.

Ecora addresses every one of these client concerns. Having current knowledge of how the components of the system are interrelated, how each of these components is installed, configured, and deployed -- and tracking the changes -- are all accomplished automatically.

So how do Ecora's Configuration Solutions actually address some of the issues mentioned?

Imagine being able to walk onto a client's site and, from your laptop with a few mouse clicks, automatically produce a clean and easily readable report of the client's system -- in minutes. With a few additional clicks, you can also track the changes in the settings on any of your client's devices. Ecora's Configuration Auditor can do all this for you and, once you initiate the process, there is no need to intervene.

How do Ecora's solutions help with my client's security needs?

One of the most fundamental security requirements is to track all of the changes to server and router configurations. An extremely useful feature is Ecora's Change Management function, which compares two sets of documentation to see what has changed. This function provides a basic security monitoring tool,

troubleshooting aid, and is invaluable in understanding complex settings that affect security.

Can my client use the Ecora documentation for security vulnerability assessment?

Ecora's software generates documentation in both short and long forms, depending on how much information is desired. The short form provides just the current factual information, while the long form explains what each parameter means. The long form includes useful tips, references, and warnings and pinpoints security vulnerabilities.

Solution providers who aren't IT auditors frequently have to work with auditors. How do professional auditors react to the system documentation generated by Ecora?

The thoroughness of Ecora's documentation along with the Change Management function is appreciated immediately. In addition, network managers and auditors can now literally "read off the same page." This supports much more efficient and productive working relationships between these two groups. And since the long form of Ecora's documentation clearly explains the significance of every parameter, it saves the networking staff a great deal of time explaining this to auditors, many of whom were only recently trained. We all know that there are many good auditors who, in the middle of their careers, have had to learn this new and increasingly complex discipline.

How can I use what Ecora provides in my client engagements?

Let's look at the three stages of a typical provider's engagement:

- ?? Assessment
- ?? Implementation
- ?? Client Deliverable

So how do Ecora's Configuration Solutions help me through the assessment phase?

A consultant comes into a new customer environment and must first assess the current status, then bid on the project plan. This assessment must be accomplished on the consultant's own time and is not billable. Rarely is there adequate -- or even any -- useful configuration data available, either because multiple people have varying degrees of configuration knowledge (an NT administrator, an Exchange administrator, a DBA, etc.) or because the customer simply doesn't know his own environment. This is the rule, not the exception.

To win the job, a consultant must provide a fair and accurate quote for the project plan. And more and more clients are now requiring a fixed-price rather than a time-and-billing quote. The trend toward fixed bidding makes accuracy even more important.

Ecora's comprehensive automated documentation makes a significant contribution in the assessment phase, reducing human resource time to almost nothing. The speed and accuracy of good documentation not only produces the accessible information required to create a plausible project plan, but can even provide the potential customer with a set of completely readable documentation with the quote. This is like getting a substantial extra reward for saving your most precious commodity -- time.

How does this Ecora's system documentation guide me in the implementation phase?

After winning the job, a consultant must implement a solution. The project may be a one-person project, a team project, or a multi-site engagement. Regardless of the project size, the work requires a Reference Manual. This is consistent, up-to-the-minute documentation on all the configuration settings and changes created during implementation.

For the one-person project, the Reference Manual is the Bible, the learning tool, and the consistent building block for finishing a project accurately, on time, and on budget.

For a team project, the Reference Manual can also be used for a consistency check and report delivery, as well as for "defense." Imagine five consultants working together, each with his or her own expertise (NT, Exchange, Solaris, Oracle, etc.). One of them is whisked away by your biggest competitor. With the Reference Manual, the others can see exactly where that person left off and understand the configuration immediately because of the consistency of the manual. The time savings can be enormous in this situation.

For the multi-site engagement, in addition to the above, the Reference Manual is absolutely critical. How can you possibly manage 100 different locations consistently without a baseline configuration and detailed checking mechanism? Imagine the project leader who must check on all 100 Exchange engineers to make sure everyone is doing their job, staying on track, and keeping to the appropriate standards. The manual also provides an ideal method for internal reporting.

The configuration reports generated by Ecora creates precisely this kind of dynamic Reference Manual, which makes all of the above possible. It's also important to point out the value of creating an audit trail.

I'm not an IT auditor, so why would I need an audit trail?

First of all, when asked by a client, an accurate audit enables a consultant to properly justify the work -- and to verify that the work was done. This is one effective way prevent certain problems before they exist.

Another reason for creating an audit trail is that it enables organizations to use consultants interchangeably. This is important because resource scheduling is a big issue in the consulting business and a clear audit trail provides the flexibility to move key people around.

I assume that Ecora's documentation helps in the client deliverable phase by providing comprehensive and readable report of the scope of the consultant's work and how everything is currently set up. Right?

Not only does good system documentation trace the project from start to finish - - providing an audit trail -- but it can be delivered in a variety of consistent formats: HTML, PDF, Word, and Visio. And since the long form explains in plain English the meaning of every parameter and offers tips and warnings unique to the client's system, it helps maintain efficient and trouble-free performance. Such accessible and comprehensive information gives real meaning to the notion of "knowledge transfer." When a client receives this kind of complete documentation that is generated automatically, it reflects very favorably on the consultant's work and helps sustain a good impression long after the consultant has finished the engagement. Increasingly, clients are looking for more out of every contract engagement -- they want to be trained and educated. This tool becomes a quick and painless way for you to transfer the knowledge, thereby helping ensure your next engagement.

Can I offer any additional services to my clients with this tool?

Yes. You can use Ecora software to create systems management intranets for the IT department. Systems management intranets are hot business because they offer an immediate payback, unlike large framework-based systems management tools. You can use Ecora to generate 80 percent of the intranet and, by adding your own 20 percent, create custom-tailored solutions.

Technology Totems, for example, is building a growing business doing just this type of work.

There is also the potential to provide another very desirable service. A no-hassle, streamlined way companies disseminate the knowledge provided by Ecora Configuration Auditor is by recognizing that the HTML output actually creates an internal website, which can immediately be loaded into the company's web server. This allows everyone in the organization who needs the current information appropriate to their specialty -- whether it be IT, IT audit, disaster recovery, security, etc. -- to access this knowledge on demand.

We have worked hard to make implementing our products extremely easy and fast -- and once set up, they can be self-monitoring, proactively checking the system on a scheduled basis. Especially in large accounts wanting a turnkey solution, we have found it most helpful to the client to provide "implementation support." We send in one or more Ecora people, or outside consultants familiar with our products, to assist the client in quickly setting up the automatic routines that will make appropriate information available to the corresponding departments. We have also found that an extremely important aspect of this part of the engagement involves showing the client the many kinds of problems that the Ecora's solutions address.

With Ecora's Configuration Auditor, providing these services is not at all difficult and the payoff for the client and the provider, and the good will engendered, makes this a very valuable part of a provider's offerings.

I can see in general how the documentation that Ecora produces is a crucial safeguard in the event of a disaster -- for example, it can obviously tell us which servers to bring up first in the event of a complete or partial meltdown. This alone would save a tremendous amount of time and expense. Are there other reasons for possessing current documentation that we haven't touched on that are genuinely critical?

- ?? For managing a customer's migration or server consolidation, the system documentation generated by Ecora is a lifesaver. It can help you obtain the important details you need in the planning process and if you do have to backtrack, you have the crucial audit trail that's been automatically created along the way. Knowing the baseline starting point and the changes at every step of the way, are critical to success.
- ?? For tough troubleshooting problems, documentation can literally save the day. The Change Management feature, which determines what has changed, is clearly an invaluable tool.
- ?? For efficient mergers and acquisitions, Ecora provides an indispensable part of the solution because totally unfamiliar servers must be integrated seamlessly into the new system. How is this possible unless one knows how these are installed? The choice is to manually check screen by screen and configuration setting by configuration setting -- or click the mouse and let it all happen for you, much

- more accurately and thoroughly, and up to 100 times faster than performing these same tasks manually.
- ?? For helping bring new IT staff up to speed fast in a climate of high IT staff turnover, Ecora's long form documentation is a boon to your clients because new staff is trained on the most up-to-date data for the system they will actually be working on.
 - ?? Also, IT managers are now being asked to manage more systems with fewer people. Imagine how much easier it would be if one administrator was available for twice as many servers. Recording the details of 50, 100, or 500 servers is hard. How much more efficient it is to have a Reference Manual with that information attached to all 500 machines!
 - ?? A common thread throughout all of these critical processes is how good automated documentation saves a tremendous amount of a provider's time and adds a valuable service for the client. Not only does it give you the ability to help your clients with all of the important issues, but it also helps expand your business on many fronts and secures your next engagement.

How does Ecora's kind of documentation differ from network management tools and systems that are also currently available?

Most network management suites' core competencies lie in the areas of asset management, network performance, and system monitoring. For the kinds of problems we've discussed here, those tools only partly address them or don't address them at all. While such systems create inventory lists, record network speeds, and produce other useful (often raw) data, Ecora generated documentation provides readable, illustrated reports that show the settings, users, applications, and hardware -- and also explain how that inventory works, including the interdependencies and where problems might arise. Ecora products complement and greatly enhance many of the leading network management tools.

What's the bottom line?

Ecora's solutions are becoming more and more critical in working with today's IT environments. Due to its thorough, accurate, and accessible report output as well as the exceptional time and cost savings enjoyed by solution providers, this next-generation documentation can make you more competitive and more profitable. And without investing any additional time, it can help expand both your business and your productivity.