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CA acquires specialist service-level management vendor Oblicore

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CA recently announced its acquisition of Oblicore, a privately held provider of service-level management (SLM) enabling software, continuing its spending spree following the acquisitions of NetQoS and Cassatt at the end of 2009. CA's increased focus on SLM is timely and a welcome change to the traditional ITSM vendor bias towards incident, change and configuration management.

CA is complementing existing SLM capabilities

The acquisition is designed to help CA's customers 'optimise IT for better business results and capitalise on the emerging cloud computing opportunity' - addressing two of the major challenges facing IT organisations. This is an interesting play by CA - not filling a gap in its existing IT service management (ITSM) portfolio, but strengthening the ability for organisations to set, measure and optimise service levels across enterprise and cloud environments.

CA's existing SLM solution, CA Service Assure, can already enable organisations to define SLAs and contract violation rules, monitor SLAs in realtime and report on SLAs from a business perspective. However, as a niche player Oblicore provides greater depth of capability and the ability to better manage cloud service quality levels.

Oblicore Guarantee is a highly competent SLM solution and a good fit for CA

Oblicore Guarantee is an enterprise-level SLM solution that supports the key phases of, and activities in, the management of SLAs and service delivery in IT engagements, from contract and SLA formulation, data import and aggregation into performance metrics, to the analysis and reporting of performance against SLA targets. Ovum had previously recommended that "any organisation with an extensive array of critical services, or any service provider, would do well to evaluate Oblicore Guarantee as a potential solution to managing the complexities of providing high-quality and highly available IT services."

As a CA partner, Oblicore Guarantee integrates with CA solutions such as CA Spectrum Infrastructure Manager, CA Service Desk Manager, CA Wily Introscope, and CA eHealth. Designed for open connectivity, it also integrates with business systems and application and infrastructure monitoring tools from the major software providers.

With the level of functional parity within the ITSM software market, the Oblicore acquisition allows CA to emphasise its enhanced SLM capabilities as one of its key ITSM capability differentiators ('true' service portfolio management capabilities through CA Clarity PPM and CA's Service Portfolio Management Strategy being another).

SLM is an oft-overlooked, yet vital, component of effective ITSM

SLAs have long played an important role in outsourcing and shared services organisation (SSO) engagements, and more recently for internal IT management purposes with the continued corporate adoption of ITSM best practice via ITIL. SLAs are important to support IT functions in their need to demonstrate business value and to maximise the availability of business-critical services.

However, most organisations find SLA management challenging. While drafting the right set of SLAs requires considerable time and expertise, it is the development of an automated system for performance data collection, aggregation and reporting that can be the major barrier to effective SLM. The recent corporate penchant for service catalogues, and the associated increased business focus on IT service delivery, has strengthened the need for a 'true' rather than a 'one-off paper exercise' approach to SLM.

Given the potential for IT functions to lose both visibility and control of IT services as they are migrated to the cloud, SLM along with IT financial management will become a key ITSM capability as organisations endeavor to manage a blended mix of on-premise and cloud IT service delivery.

Is this the start of the ITSM software market consolidation that some IT analysts have predicted?

The ITSM solution market is fragmented, split between vendors and products that address enterprise or SME requirements, niche ITSM products (such as Guarantee) versus those that deliver against the core ITIL processes, and by the method of application delivery with the emergence of SaaS-only ITSM solutions. This market is saturated and the 'big four' mega vendors have strong market share, but this is being attacked not only by traditional single-play vendors but newer, smaller vendors. The effect of potential ITSM pushes by SAP, Oracle and Microsoft will also no doubt change the ITSM software landscape forever.



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