

Service management in Agrarmarkt Austria

Review after 18 months of use

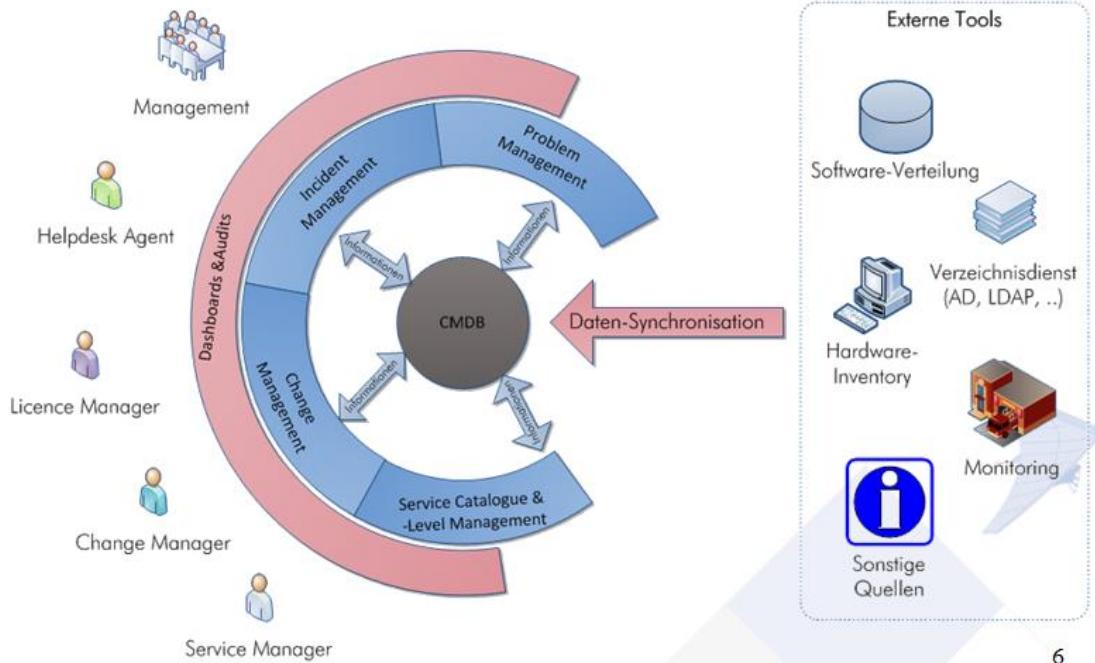
By Gerhard Dyduch, ADV financial consultant and head of IT infrastructure and information technology for AMA

Agrarmarkt Austria (referred to as AMA below) is a corporate body under public law and serves as the paying agent for agriculture in Austria. As an EU-compliant market-regulating agency, it is in charge of implementing all EU market regulations from the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management.

In November 2012, a decision was made to replace the existing Help Desk tool as it did not fulfil the new CMDB (Configuration Management Database) requirements. AMA also wanted to develop its IT service with a view to compliance with ISO 20000. It was therefore looking for a tool which could cover all of these needs, rather than just elements of them. Four tools were evaluated over the course of two months and the best two suppliers were asked to provide a quote. The contract was awarded to the "iTop" tool, which is produced by Combodo SARL. The supporting partner was the German company ITOMIG.

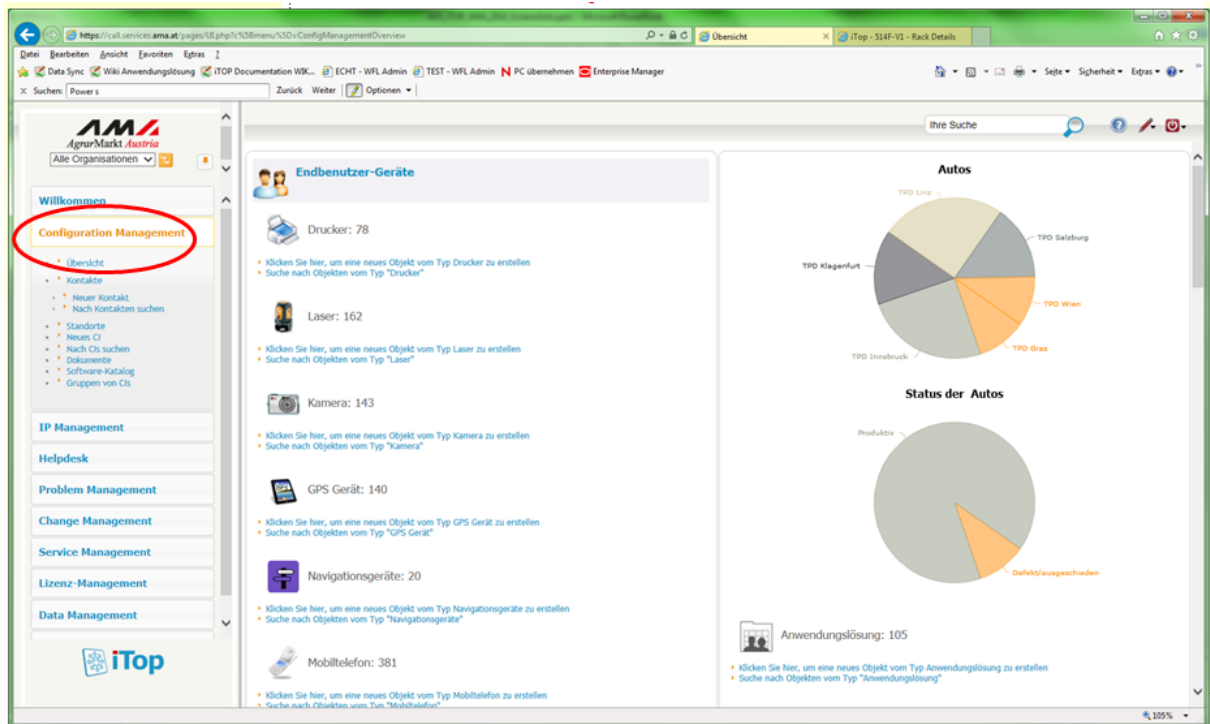
The tool impressed both the IT department and the division of AMA which was involved in the decision with its holistic approach, which centres around the CMDB. This approach – loading all assets in the tool first, then building the processes upon them – was new to AMA at the time, and opened up internal discussions on how the AMA assets will be managed in the future.

The tool was subsequently introduced for all areas including asset inventory creation for AMA as a whole and for the IT department, as well as for the scope of ISO 20000. This currently covers Help Desk, Problem Management, Change Management, Service Management, Licence Management, Configuration Management and IP Management.

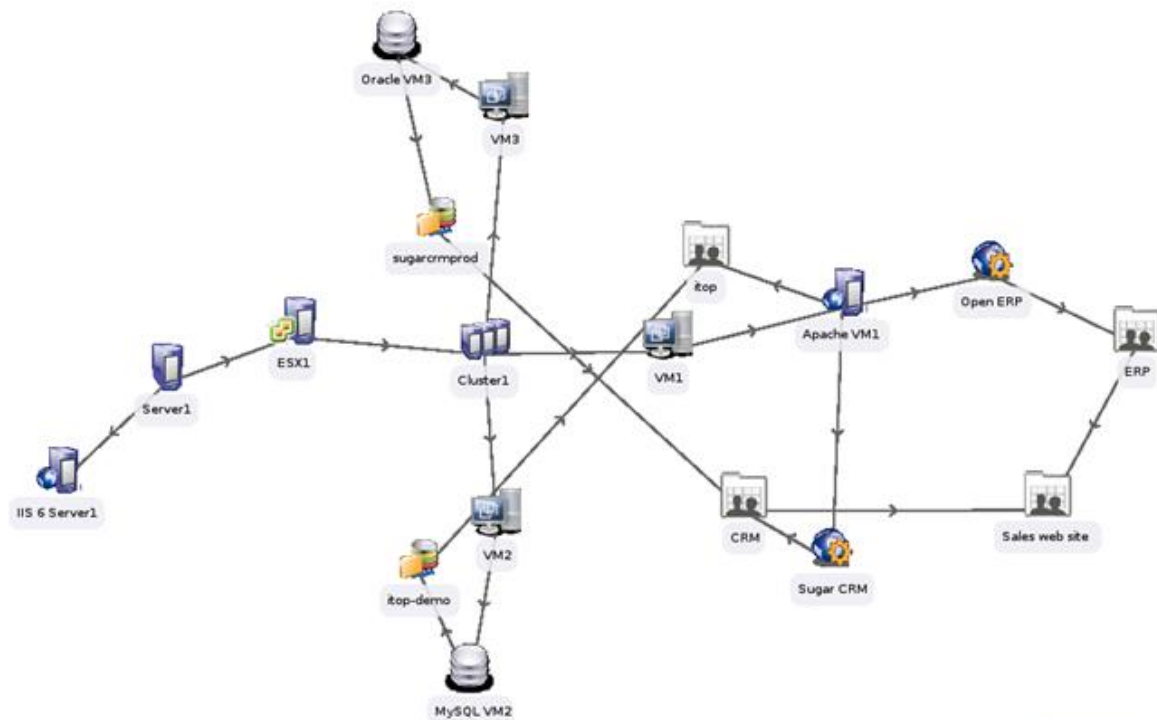


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The system was put into operation in the first eight months of 2013. The initial plan was to implement the system sooner for the IT department, but while the **CMDB** was being set up, the administration division and the department in charge of on-site inspections decided to introduce the tool to manage their assets as well. As a result, this phase – which incorporated not only the IT assets, but everything belonging to AMA that needs to be recorded in an inventory, from keys, office stamps (bearing the AMA emblem), mobile phone SIM cards, technical testing equipment, to the entire AMA IT and office inventory – took around three months longer than expected. There are currently 21,000 configuration items (CI) in the CMDB in total, whereby the IT CIs (around 11,500 items) and infrastructure CIs (around 8800 items) make up the two largest homogeneous blocks. Equipment belonging to the inspection service contributes around 600 items. It is now possible to see who has what using a single tool and, if an employee leaves the company, there is no need to search through Excel sheets and lists to find out who had which key, phone, notebook or ID so that these can be collected or blocked.



The largest block of items in the IT department is the software installed on each PC and notebook, which makes up around 7500 entries. In addition to the PCs and notebooks, however, every database, network device, server, virtual machine and user solution is contained and linked in **Configuration Management**. This means that it is now possible to see how the individual components are connected to one another, as well as which tickets have been opened, edited and closed for the individual devices. There are around 30 employees responsible for the CIs, who ensure that all of the entries are correct. This initial population took around 16 man-months and was a largely automatic process, thanks to the support provided by the tool with regard to mass imports and synchronisation tables. It was also important to link the CIs to one another to create an overall picture of the infrastructure, so that it is possible to estimate the impact when something goes wrong.



In the **Licence Management** area, the individual licence models – such as Adobe, Citrix, Microsoft, Oracle, SAP and VMWare – have been mapped as planned. This was a real challenge, as each of these is handled very differently depending on whether the licence is to be issued to the server, the user or the device, but it was overcome successfully.

On the basis of the CMDB, the **Help Desk** was put into operation at the same time. Since there was already a Help Desk system in place at AMA, the processes had already been outlined. As iTop is a licence-free tool, there are around 180 AMA employees who process the tickets, as these are also used by the divisions for their internal orders to other divisions. Only 25 of these are in the IT department itself, with a further 60 in application development. The advantage compared to the mail system is without doubt the fact that it ensures perfect traceability, and managers can see the volume of orders at a glance.

The process was somewhat different for **Problem Management**, where the old system was replaced with iTop in December 2013. Similarly, the new **Change Management** system was put into operation in April 2014. In these cases, the content of the processes defined in ISO 20000 had to be adapted with the employees in the IT department. This involved two stages: First, the processes were implemented in the standard iTop configuration with very few changes. After an observation period of three months, a review began and the necessary additions were made. This meant that the process could be adapted to suit working habits without infringing the requirements set out in the standard. For example, when a server is installed, standard work orders are created or adapted to the interface so that users can see quickly whether they are involved in a particular process step. Normal operation using the tool was therefore in effect by the middle of 2014 for these two processes.

In a project of this nature, it is important that attention is paid to the following points:

The cost of configuration work carried out by the external company. It is easy to make changes everywhere, but sometimes for upgrades it is a good idea to accept everything as it is.

Building up internal expertise. (Which is particularly important due to Open Source, as you do have to do some things yourselves.)

Limiting the scope of use. ("Everything" might sound good, but when budgets and time are limited, it is better to focus on a few aspects and finish them properly, rather than starting lots of things and not finishing anything.)

Setting up authorisation structures (clients).

Defining profiles. (Who is permitted to do what?)

It is also important that the data is kept up-to-date. (Although this is ensured by means of the synchronisation tables.)

The **authorisations** must be chosen with care. As AMA is also certified in accordance with ISO 27001, all security-related tickets are processed in a standardised manner in iTop. However, these tickets must be protected so that only the relevant persons can see them. iTop provides a good solution which makes it possible to store and process these tickets in a separate client. The employees in second level support who have access to the client will find these tickets, along with all service requests or fault tickets, in their overall processing list. This enables tickets to be processed centrally without comprising information security.

Service Management also relies on an integrated concept. The Service Management module allows users to define services, SLAs, providers and customer contracts (with the divisions) and to check them for compliance. A response time and resolution time can be assigned to each service for a fault or service request. This enables the service manager to keep track of things when agreed times are exceeded.

From AMA's perspective, the goal of covering the entire scope of ISO 20000 (certification gained in 2013) with a single tool at an operational level has therefore been achieved.

Photo credit: The first and third images were taken from an ADV presentation – "Aufbau einer CMDB zur Unterstützung des IT Service- und Systemmanagements" (Setting up a CMDB to support IT service and system management) – by David M. Gümbel, ITOMIG Managing Director.