

DISCOVERING DISCOVERY: SELECTING IT DISCOVERY TOOLS MADE EASY



Why the Confusion? (Part 1)

This is the first of two blogs covering the common challenges in selecting the right discovery tool(s), why there can be confusion, and where to start with your own evaluation or assessment. The [subsequent blog](#) will provide more prescriptive guidance around evaluating and selecting discovery tools along with a pragmatic approach for peaceful co-existence when multiple tools are involved.



Just like an opinion, everyone's got one

Some organizations collect them like individuals who collect bobbleheads or PEZ dispensers. Often, they arrive with high expectations (picture an 'easy' button) spreading across your environment and sometimes they have a love-hate relationship with your network and [security](#) teams. I'm not talking about IT personnel. I'm talking about discovery tools. As a former ITSM consultant and current product manager, I frequently meet with organizations to assess their challenges and requirements to help them find ways to mature their service management and/or asset management programs to drive success. A common question I ask during the initial stages of an assessment is *"Do you have a discovery tool (or tools)?"*. Typically, the standard response is "yes", but there is always much more to the story. Depending on the individual and their role and responsibilities, the discovery tool(s) may address that individual's specific needs, but someone in another role or department may have another discovery tool or tools which deliver a much different set of capabilities. In other words, the view of a "discovery tool" can be much different from one individual to another depending on their perspective.

Not all are created equal

So why is there confusion around discovery tools? Not all discovery tools are created equal. One discovery tool typically cannot meet the needs of everyone especially if your organization covers a wide range of environments and devices. Looking at the origin of a discovery tool can often identify its strengths and differences with other discovery tools. For example, some discovery tools originally emerged to manage traditional devices (e.g. desktops, laptops, servers) in distributed environments (e.g. Microsoft SCCM, formerly SMS), while others originated from the data center (e.g. BMC Helix Discovery, formerly ADDM) focusing on the intricacies and complexities of data center environments, discovering more in-depth components (e.g. databases, applications, clusters, etc.) and their associated relationships. Other discovery tools may focus on the security aspect, or a

specific platform or device (e.g. mobile device management (MDM)). They may discover some of the same devices and core device information, but that typically is where the commonality ends. The key differences go beyond the core discovery to more in-depth discovery details including components, software details, configurations, and relationships along with management capabilities.

Know the origin

Below is a sample of different discovery origins and solutions. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list, but to get you thinking about the range of different discovery tools along with their potential strengths and weaknesses to frame your needs and evaluation:

Origin	Description	Examples
Hardware Inventory	Traditional discovery tools which cover the core platforms and devices (e.g. desktops, laptops, servers). In many cases, their primary focus is on identifying devices and their configurations. Some offer client or end-point management. Many provide some level of software discovery, but this is where you need to be careful.	Microsoft SCCM, BMC Helix Client Management
Software Asset/License Management	These tools are designed specifically for software asset management, which typically means they have a comprehensive catalog to identify, normalize and categorize software. The more advanced SAM tools cover multiple platforms, vendors and license models. Typically, their differentiators are driven by the content and automation they provide. This goes well beyond most traditional hardware inventory tools.	Flexera FlexNet Manager, Snow Software
Data Center / Application Dependency	With a focus on the data center, these tools typically dive deeper into the data center environment, going beyond the device (e.g. clusters, databases) and provide application mapping with advanced relationship capabilities as compared to traditional hardware inventory tools.	BMC Helix Discovery (formerly ADDM), Ivanti Data Center Discovery
Security	This is an expansive segment and beyond the traditional anti-virus tools for the purposes of this blog. These focus more on identifying devices, software and configurations which pose a risk based upon a range of sources and tend to be specialized in certain areas (e.g. network, desktop, cloud etc.).	BMC SecOps, Microsoft EMET
Network	These types of tools typically focus on discovering and mapping devices, many include monitoring of your network health with availability and performance insight.	BMC TrueSight, SolarWinds
Mobility	Somewhat like traditional hardware inventory tools, mobile device management (MDM) tools focus on the mobile platform, discovering and managing the devices. Beyond management, which commonly includes controlling configurations and common actions (e.g. swiping, locking etc.), many also offer software delivery.	VMWare AirWatch, Citrix XenMobile

Where to start?

Whether you are about to begin the process of selecting a discovery tool(s) or evaluating your existing tools, you must understand the origin, the strengths, and the weaknesses of each. Like many tools in IT, each has their own strengths and weaknesses. A vendor's web page or data sheet never provides the full story as the devil is always in the details. As mentioned above, some tools may have originated in one group, but expanded into others. This is where you need to dive in and perform your due diligence to ensure the tool's origin is not the only strength of the solution.

In conclusion for this first blog, understand that there are many different discovery tools and most organizations have multiple ones. Start your evaluation by understanding their origin to frame their capabilities - exposing the strengths and limitations.

Now that we have outlined the variety of discovery tools and the needs that they address, the next blog in next week will provide prescriptive guidance to help you evaluate and select the discovery tool that is right for your organization.

For more information on the range of BMC's discovery capabilities, please refer to:

[BMC Remedyforce Agentless Discovery and Client Management](#)

[BMC Helix Discovery](#)

See [John's other blogs](#) on asset and discovery management.