

Core Messaging: Visionael 6.8/Topology Discovery

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This document introduces DataCentral as the new brand* for Visionael's offering comprising autodiscovery and data collection capabilities for both physical network inventory and logical topology data. It presents the new capabilities to specifically deliver topology discovery as DataCentral/Topology.

Since the essence of presenting any new or enhanced offer to the marketplace is to anticipate, uncover and successfully answer questions from new business prospects, existing customers, analysts/media, alliance partners and others, I'm going to present the first section, containing the core messaging, in a question and answer format.

Future note: we also plan to revise the name of our core network resource management offering from "Visionael 6" to Visionael NRM with the advent of Visionael v7.0. The intent is to eliminate issues raised by the use of Visionael 6 (or 7) as a product name...a convention we had adopted to eliminate the previous company-as-product messaging that used "Visionael" to identify both the company and the company's inventory product...which had raised issues of its own when Visionael also introduced a second product line, ServiceBase.

THE NEW OFFERING: DATACENTRAL WITH TOPOLOGY DISCOVERY

Q: *What is Visionael's new offering?*

A: DataCentral, which adds the autodiscovery, collection and reconciliation of logical network topology to the market-leading discovery/collection/reconciliation of physical network inventory already offered in Visionael's network resource management solution, Visionael 6 NRM.

Visionael will offer several flavors of DataCentral to the marketplace:


- The full DataCentral offer: physical + topology discovery/collection/reconciliation
- Physical discovery/collection/reconciliation only: DataCentral/Physical
- Topology discovery/collection/reconciliation only, as an add-on to existing physical-only Visionael 6 NRM deployments: DataCentral/Topology

Q: *Which types of companies is Visionael targeting with this offering; who can benefit?*

A:

1. Network outsourcers
2. Enterprises and government agencies
3. Service providers
4. Managed services providers (MSPs) offering services including:
 - Managed CPE
 - Internet data centers
 - VPN

*Visionael has applied for registered trademarks in the European Union and in the U.S.



Q: *What have companies been doing before the introduction of Visionael's topology discovery into the marketplace?*

A: Tracing wires by hand to determine, for example, to which port on which switch the edge device and other switches are connected.

Q: *What are some key values DataCentral brings to the table, and why?*


A:

1. Liberates you from the tedium, high cost and inescapable inaccuracies of manual audits and data entry.
2. No other network resource management (NRM) platform has the ability to load, automatically, all of the physical network equipment and logical topology data you need for network change and inventory management...or displays discovered data so easily and attractively in graphical views. Not only does DataCentral go out and discover your network, it also enables you to clearly SEE it.
3. No other NRM platform has such rich discovery and reconciliation capabilities across the multivendor network equipment spectrum and throughout Layers 1, 2 and 3 of the OSI network model.
4. No other vendor has such market-proven exception management and data reconciliation utilities (deployed in service provider, enterprise and outsourcer environments since 1999).
5. Specialized data collection API enables creation of adapters or device intelligent modules (DIMs) for importing data from Excel and other flat files, cutting the time and cost of populating existing network infrastructure into system. So DataCentral helps you discover and document both SNMP and non-SNMP networks.
6. No other vendor has as many off-the-shelf/out-of-the-box integration cartridges that can be deployed to further automate the data collection process.

Q: *What makes DataCentral ideal for network outsourcers?*

A:

1. Outsourcers design, implement, operate, maintain and evolve mission-critical networks for their large enterprise and government customers. The faster they can discover, document and manage customers' networks (read: get them under control), the sooner they can turn them into revenue streams (read: get paid). So outsourcers must quickly gather network information when taking on new customers, transitioning their networks from internal to outsourcer control. DataCentral is built to meet this need for speed while ensuring a complete, accurate picture of the customer's network, both physical attributes and topology (logical connectivity).
2. Quickly and completely collecting network information is a big win for outsourcers, who must not only manage networks for new customers but often (and rapidly) improve network management practices and information to meet SLAs. They need accurate and detailed network information, easily accessible to operations for use in diagnosing and resolving network issues. DataCentral fills the need.
3. DataCentral/Topology makes it easy to document the network's logical connectivity in Visionael 6 NRM through diagrams and reports. This makes it the ideal support system for outsourcer operations and assurance staff as they assume day-to-day responsibility for management of the new network.
4. Reduces the need or, at minimum, the amount of time required to have personnel at the customer site to map the network.

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5. DataCentral/Topology is also critical for outsourcers who bill based upon port usage, because they can use it to prove to their customers how many ports are in use—which ports are connected and what they are connected to—and charge accordingly. (“Port enabled” is not sufficient grounds for billing; you must prove connectivity.)

Q: Does DataCentral help an outsourcer get paid more (not just sooner)?

A: Yes, it helps it upfront by more accurately bidding based on knowing what is in the network. It also helps those outsourcers who charge on a per-port-in-use basis as described above.

Q: So DataCentral is really targeted solely at outsourcers and MSPs...?

A: No. Large enterprises, government agencies and service providers also benefit from the ability to automatically discover, collect and reconcile both physical characteristics and topology/logical connectivity of the network(s) they are managing. Other specific benefits include:

1. Large enterprises and government networks have an even heavier emphasis on the edge-to-backbone connections than an outsourcer does when it comes to day-to-day operations, and DataCentral gives them full visibility into those connections.
2. Service providers benefit from DataCentral’s discovery of ATM circuit identifiers and which port they are connected to. DataCentral also discovers inter-router connectivity and which ports they are connected by, which goes a long way towards reducing the work to complete a design without resorting to wire-tracing.

Q: Can we discover layer 2 circuits such as frame relay and ATM end-to-end through the network cloud?

A: No, and neither can anyone else based on device/network data. The only way to “discover” them is to enlist the help of a billing system or some other manual entry system that correlates the two circuit endpoints.


Q: What is the value of discovering just one end of a circuit?

A: It enables you to do lookups in your billing system to learn who provided the circuit by looking at the Circuit Identifier, which lets you know who to call when it is down. Also, if you discover both final endpoints (e.g., London and Boston), you will have two circuit endpoints as well as a connection group going between the two devices based on route entries. This is often sufficient decision support to migrate the circuit into a complete circuit as a manual step. (If you have multiple circuits going between two sites and some are not IP, the “router connectivity connection group” may not provide all the data you need.)

Q: Does anyone else have this capability? What are other competitive factors?

A:

1. A few companies claim to offer discovery capabilities, but integrating autodiscovery, data collection and reconciliation for both physical network equipment and logical topology into a full-featured NRM solution—and not having the combined solution dependent on a multivendor technology alliance—is unique in the industry.

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2. Some large equipment vendors offer user tracking software that accomplishes a similar function but only on their own equipment, whereas Visionael DataCentral offers autodiscovery, collection and reconciliation of physical network and topology data on multivendor equipment. Some of these companies are working with Visionael to enhance their own discovery capabilities and render them multivendor by working with Visionael to integrate their software with Visionael 6 NRM.
 3. Several companies better-known (and more widely-deployed) for their logical fault management products also offer discovery, but they are limited to logical discovery and function essentially as a notification that something has changed in the network. In deployments where Visionael 6 NRM is integrated with such products, when it receives notification of a network change it deploys DataCentral to perform “deep discovery” of the change. This ensures that the Visionael 6 NRM system continually receives full physical and topology data to provide the customer with a complete, accurate, real-time view of the network(s) it is managing.
 4. Visionael 6 NRM deployed with DataCentral offers a higher degree of accuracy on more objects because it can correctly associate the Layer 3 connection endpoint with (back to) the Layer 2 physical port. Most other vendors that can provide edge-to- switch or switch-to-switch connectivity are limited to indicating a Layer 3 Logical Interface or Address endpoint. Visionael has built into DataCentral the ability to map those Layer 3 constructs back to the correct physical termination point, and to do it across multiple vendors. So another product might give rudimentary data such as, “Richard’s PC is connected to switch XYZ on Interface 5,” whereas Visionael DataCentral will tell you that “Richard’s PC is connected to Port 3 on the 24-port switch card Part ABC in slot 5 of the Cisco Catalyst 5505.” This is significant because a Layer 3 endpoint frequently does not match directly to a similarly numbered port on the device.

Q: Does Visionael DataCentral, and specifically DataCentral/Topology, compete with CoManage?

A:

1. After CoManage tried to compete in the NRM arena and failed—took \$60 million of investor money and utterly failed—it enlisted the help of seemingly every prominent OSS industry analyst to choose a direction that might employ its technology in a fruitful way. After this process it settled on “providing discovery to the world’s Tier 1 service providers” as a business model. It then set about working closely with MetaSolv to see if it could integrate its claimed discovery capabilities with MetaSolv’s collection of products to deliver a coherent, marketable solution, and approximately a year later announced this openly to the marketplace.
2. Industry analysts point out that CoManage has already failed once in NRM—“It never had a product, just a jumble of disparate features,” said one recently in an interview with Visionael—and have stated, we believe correctly, that discovery is simply not a standalone business model. Visionael shares their skepticism and asserts that the MetaSolv-CoManage alliance is best seen as a way for MetaSolv—which acquired the OSS assets of Nortel in an attempt to shore up its sliding NRM revenues—to assess whether market hype is backed by product reality before it makes a move to acquire CoManage.
3. On the product side, CoManage focuses on discovery of desktop elements, software inventory etc. and does not effectively address desktop-to-switch connectivity at the depth Visionael already does...and with discovery, collection and reconciliation of VLAN membership data already on the way in a subsequent release of DataCentral.

4. Even if the MetaSolv-CoManage alliance does yield a workable discovery-to-NRM solution, it will be under the auspices of a multivendor alliance in which one of the vendors has already failed in the marketplace.

Q: *How does DataCentral compete with the new discovery capabilities rumored to be under development at Granite Systems?*

A: Granite has recently partnered with a company named Vibrant (which had earlier acquired little-known company Longitude) to provide discovery and reconciliation of physical + topology network data—"the as-recorded with the as-is"—but industry analysts have raised serious questions about whether Granite can execute. And even if Granite delivers on an enhanced discovery solution, it will be dependent on an alliance with this external vendor.

Q: *Why didn't Visionael include VPNs in its initial release of DataCentral?*

A: Topology discovery of VLANs is being developed for a subsequent release of DataCentral. Visionael wanted to deliver to its customers and to the wider marketplace the value inherent in discovering, collecting and reconciling topology data into Visionael 6 NRM right now. In fact, VPNs are largely transient, or where they aren't transient they usually either fall under the VLAN tag or have a permanent Routes setup. If they have a permanent Route entry, Visionael DataCentral will discover that connectivity today as a router-to-router connection.

Q: *What is the pricing for this new offering?*

A: Pricing for non-outsourcer deployments of DataCentral (available in Visionael v6.8):


- \$180,000 for new customers using physical + topology discovery
- \$105,000 for customers wanting physical discovery only
- \$75,000 for existing customers adding topology discovery to physical discovery

Outsourcer pricing is under development at this time.

WHERE WE'VE BEEN: VISIONAEL 6 NRM WITH PHYSICAL DISCOVERY

To ensure that our new offering is received with optimal meaning and impact in the market, we must remind it (telling some in the market for the first time) of where we've been so it understands the significance of the continuing evolution represented by our launch of DataCentral:

1. Visionael is an established leader in the NRM market. Visionael 6 NRM is a suite of powerful capabilities including autodiscovery, collection and reconciliation of physical network information about devices, subcomponents and locations to rapidly and accurately document dynamic network environments. Visionael 6 NRM users can readily visualize discovered assets, which are represented in physical or logical views with detailed configuration attributes.
2. Visionael 6 NRM can also bulk-load data from Excel and other flat files, cutting the time and cost of populating existing network infrastructures in the system. However, while some competitive systems are capable only of this rudimentary import, in Visionael NRM, next-generation SNMP-enabled routers and other network assets plus legacy network and switching assets alike are quickly populated into the Visionael 6 NRM Repository via the product's own autodiscovery capabilities and its ability to accept data feeds from virtually any other data source.
3. This industry-leading discovery drives Visionael's exception management process, allowing reconciliation of discovered elements against the "as-built" (current) network model in the repository.
4. DataCentral provides the market's only data-on-demand capability to discover, collect and reconcile data captured from a single device. A user in the Studio



design environment of Visionael 6 NRM can select a single device and perform in-depth data collection on it.

5. Visionael has a library containing in excess of 20,000 network objects, allowing discovered devices to be quickly represented in physical graphical views, not as “dumb” icons, and to be created from live NRM data, not stored pictures. The Visionael Library is continuously updated/extended by Visionael and its customers.