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Addressing the Dual Challenges of IT Asset Management and Sustainability

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Abstract: Today's IT leaders are caught in a double bind: They need comprehensive IT asset management (ITAM) for planning, cost control, and risk management and security, but they also face growing pressure to meet sustainability goals and minimize their environmental impact. By embracing a full asset lifecycle management approach like Zones Discovery Service (ZDS) and Zones Services, organizations can inventory and gain deep insights into their assets, while ensuring that those devices are managed to minimize their lifetime impact on the environment. By leveraging modern IT asset discovery and IT asset disposition (ITAD) services that emphasize secure recycling, refurbishment, and repurposing, Zones is both a trusted global partner in helping IT teams achieve their asset management and sustainability goals and an end-to-end services and solutions provider, which means they can and do help organizations meet these dual—but related—challenges.

The Rising Global Importance of IT Asset Management

There is little doubt about the value of ITAM. In the annual *2024 Technology Spending Intentions Survey* conducted by TechTarget's Enterprise Strategy Group, ITAM placed fifth in a global ranking of technologies that have become significantly more important to an organization's future in the last two years (see Figure 1).[1]
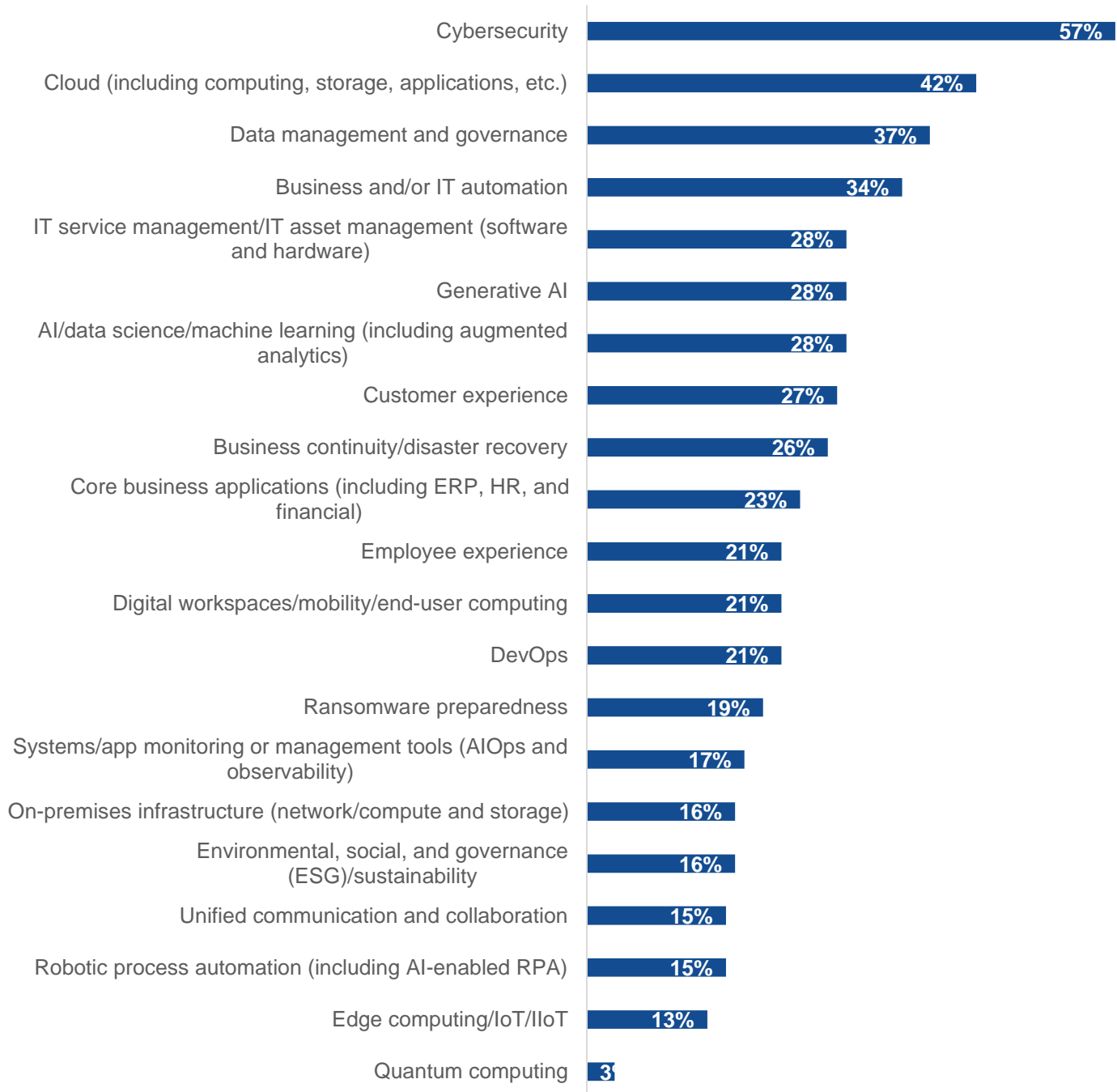
In that same study, employee experience and digital workspaces also ranked high, placing 11th and 12th, respectively, about midway through the list. The combination of the desire to deliver digital workspaces, improve security, and fulfill environmental, social, and governance (ESG) mandates (ranked 16th) increases the importance of comprehensive ITAM.

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[1] Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, *2024 Technology Spending Intentions Survey*, February 2024.

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Figure 1. Technology Initiatives That Are Rising in Importance

Which of the following broad technology initiatives have become significantly more important to your organization's future over the past two years? (Percent of respondents, N=903, multiple responses accepted)

Cybersecurity	57%
Cloud (including computing, storage, applications, etc.)	42%
Data management and governance	37%
Business and/or IT automation	34%
IT service management/IT asset management (software and hardware)	28%
Generative AI	28%
AI/data science/machine learning (including augmented analytics)	28%
Customer experience	27%
Business continuity/disaster recovery	26%
Core business applications (including ERP, HR, and financial)	23%
Employee experience	21%
Digital workspaces/mobility/end-user computing	21%
DevOps	21%
Ransomware preparedness	19%
Systems/app monitoring or management tools (AIOps and observability)	17%
On-premises infrastructure (network/compute and storage)	16%
Environmental, social, and governance (ESG)/sustainability	16%
Unified communication and collaboration	15%
Robotic process automation (including AI-enabled RPA)	15%
Edge computing/IoT/IIoT	13%
Quantum computing	3%

Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

ITAM in the Modern Context

Not long ago, PCs sat on desktops, and users worked from fixed locations, leveraging applications that were installed locally or in a corporate data center. Today, employees are increasingly leveraging cloud computing resources, with remote and hybrid employees using more devices from more locations. In addition, subscription-based and consumption-based licensing is replacing perpetually licensed software and data center hardware. What used to be a physical workspace has evolved into a digital workplace—specifically, employee digital workspaces where the entire ecosystem of digital tools and technologies used to get their jobs done is available to them, wherever they happen to be, whenever they happen to need it.

It is against this backdrop of change and increasing demands that IT teams are under pressure to deliver better employee experiences and to continue to deliver the traditional benefits of ITAM: helping organizations improve cybersecurity by identifying insecure and unpatched devices, optimize costs by identifying assets for redeployment, and meet regulatory compliance (see Table 1). Better ITAM is the key to sustainability, digital workspaces, and optimizing resource allocation.

Table 1. Key Benefits of ITAM

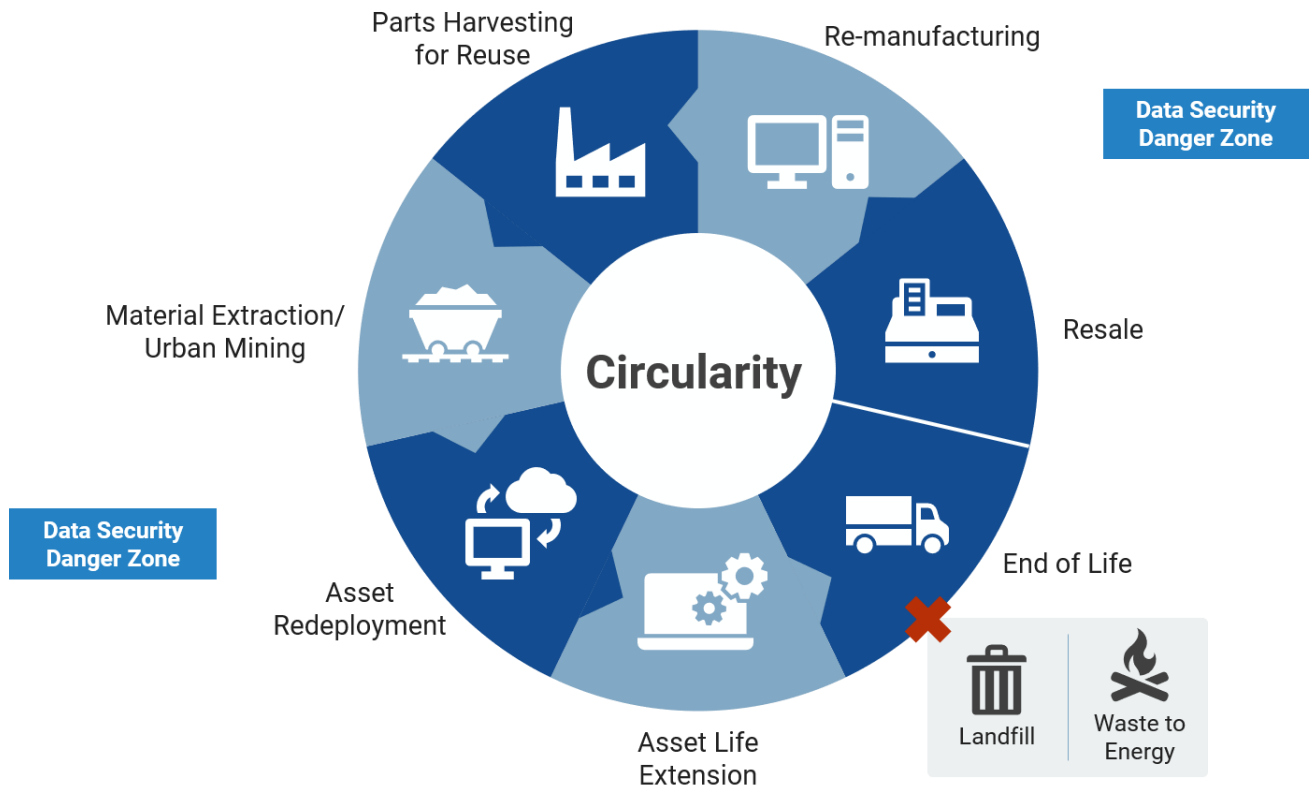| Cost Optimization	Compliance and Risk Management	Efficiency and Asset Utilization
Identify resources for redeployment.	Maintain control over IT inventory.	Track and manage assets over their lifecycle.
Avoid unnecessary upgrades.	Ensure compliance with audit requirements and licensing.	Ensure that every asset is properly used, maintained, and upgraded for better operational efficiency.

Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

The Additional Value of ITAM + ITAD

While traditional ITAM focuses on tracking and managing IT assets throughout their lifecycle, it often stops short of their final disposition. ITAD bridges this gap by providing a secure and environmentally responsible way to dispose of retired IT equipment. In this way, ITAD complements ITAM to enhance sustainability by embracing the concept of circularity (see Figure 2), giving IT leaders complete control over the entire lifecycle of IT assets.

ITAM serves as the foundation for ITAD by tracking all of the details of the asset during its useful life. ITAM helps identify assets approaching their end of life (EOL) that are good candidates for ITAD. Properly executed ITAD ensures data destruction before asset disposal. This is a critical step in the ITAD process to ensure compliance with data privacy laws and to protect against security breaches.

Modern ITAD prioritizes beneficial environmental outcomes. ITAM, when combined with ITAD, enables value recovery from those assets through resale, reuse, or recycling, while avoiding landfill and waste-to-energy schemes, which can damage the environment and might be counter to an organization's sustainability goals.

Figure 2. The Circular Asset Lifecycle Avoids the Landfill

Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

Specifically, combining ITAM with ITAD for full lifecycle asset management results in the following benefits:

1. **Reduced e-waste.** Diverting EOL equipment through proper, secure recycling, reuse, and resale channels helps minimize environmental and health hazards. According to the most recent report from the United Nations Institute and for Training and Research (UNITAR), "Less than one quarter (22.3%) of the year's e-waste mass was documented as having been properly collected and recycled in 2022."[2]

2. **Resource conservation.** Reuse and recycling reduce the need to mine new raw materials. In 2022, screens and monitors represented 10% of e-waste generated (5.9 billion kg), while e-waste consisting of small IT and telecommunications equipment (e.g., mobile phones, GPS devices, routers, PCs, printers, and telephones) totaled 5 billion kg.[3] Minimizing the need to extract raw materials from the earth can have a significant, positive impact on environmental outcomes.

3. **Cost savings.** Reducing disposal costs, profiting from the resale of materials and components, and better compliance with data security and environmental regulations through proper ITAD all help reduce the net cost of IT asset ownership.

4. **Embraced circularity.** By combining ITAM and ITAD, organizations are embracing the key tenets of circularity. The circular economy represents an opportunity to optimize resource use and drive sustainability in ITAM. Organizations can achieve a competitive edge while minimizing environmental impact by extending product lifecycles through refurbishment, reuse, redeployment, and recycling. This systemic approach aligns perfectly with the circular economy's core principles.

[2] Source: United Nations Institute for Training and Research, *The Global E-Waste Monitor 2024*.
[3] Ibid.

Challenges With ITAM and ITAD

Despite the long list of benefits and motivations for IT asset lifecycle management, some challenges can inhibit the success of these initiatives. A quick web search shows a list of challenges that organizations commonly face with regard to ITAM and disposition. These include:

1. **Lack of visibility into cloud-based assets and end-user BYOD devices.** Not all asset management tools can inventory applications and resources located in the cloud or intermittently connected to the corporate network. Organizations are increasingly leveraging the cloud, as supported by Enterprise Strategy Group research indicating that some 74% of IT on-premises applications and workloads are being considered as candidates for relocation to the cloud in the next five years.[4] The lack of visibility associated with this increased use of cloud services can lead to inefficient asset planning, security risks, and wasted resources.

2. **Software license concerns.** Implementing ITAM may expose software license violations that require remediation. While it is better than failing a license compliance audit and receiving costly non-compliance charges, there is the potential that ITAM may expand software budgets through the reconciling of discrepancies, which may require additional license purchases, renewals, and upgrades of software that may be out of date. The Business Software Alliance and Software and Information Industry Association states that about 40% of installed software in the business realm and 23% of software overall in the U.S. are illegally copied and that fines can reach $150,000 per violation instance.[5]

3. **Compliance with e-waste regulations.** E-waste disposal is heavily regulated in many countries. Regulations include the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, which covers the disposal of toxic elements in electronics; the Basel Convention Ban Amendment that prohibits the movement of certain e-waste to certain countries; and GDPR, a far-reaching digital data privacy regulation that governs which data a firm can retain about an individual under the jurisdiction of the EU. ITAD vendors and their commercial customers must comply with these regulations, plus any additional local regulations, which can be burdensome, prone to change, and require additional bureaucratic effort.

4. **Limited resources.** ITAM can be labor intensive. Most organizations don't have extra personnel to perform physical audits, which may put undue stress on existing staff.

5. **Finding reliable global partners**. Locating trustworthy partners and vendors that offer full asset lifecycle management and end-of-life asset disposal, along with data sanitization, secure logistics, and local legislation-compliant recycling services, can be daunting and time-consuming and may often involve a combination of suppliers, potentially creating further friction and management overhead for an organization.

Organizations considering a switch in their ITAM/ITAD arrangements would do well to keep these challenges in mind and to seek partners that can reliably deliver full IT asset lifecycle management at scale, globally, to ensure their needs are met.

How Zones Delivers Full IT Asset Lifecycle Management

Zones is a global solutions provider of end-to-end IT solutions provider with an unmatched supply chain. Zones IT Lifecycle Services encompass the entire asset lifecycle with services and technologies designed to reduce costs, free up capital, eliminate cost variability, and help organizations meet their sustainability goals. Services include:

Zones Discovery Services (ZDS)

ZDS combines industry-leading tools, people, and processes to help organizations quickly and effortlessly gain deep insight into everything that's on their corporate network—and what they need to know about it—to plan for upcoming projects, eliminate unnecessary costs, and minimize risk. Services include Software Landscape Assessment, a no-cost, full software inventory designed to highlight lapses in maintenance coverage, security

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[4] Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, *Multi-cloud Application Deployment and Delivery Decision Making*, July 2023.
[5] Source: Upcounsel, *Software License Violation Penalty*.

vulnerabilities, out-of-date software, nonstandard operating systems, and other high-value information about software.

Zones IT Management Tools

Zones IT Asset Disposition (ITAD) services complement Zones Discovery Services with Zones-certified asset disposal and secure data destruction to make for a complete end-to-end asset lifecycle solution. Zones ITAD empowers organizations to maximize their IT assets' lifecycle, recover value from retired and aged assets, and reduce the security and environmental risks associated with improper asset disposal.

Zones offers a collection of powerful digital tools designed to simplify IT management for customers. These include the ZonesConnect procurement platform, myZones self-service portal, ZonesCloud for cloud subscription management, and Zones Intelliplan for global supply chain planning and management.

Zones Services

Zones Services offers customized services, globally, that can help organizations manage ITAM/ITAD easily. The Zones service and solution process is proven and repeatable. It takes the guesswork out of creating cost-effective, best-in-class solutions that increase efficiency, optimize workflows, and enhance an organization's return on investment. ITAM/ITAD is an end-to-end commitment, and globally present partners means that organizations can meet all of their asset lifecycle management requirements with a single, capable partner.

Conclusion

Achieving comprehensive ITAM no longer exists in a silo. Forward-thinking organizations recognize the strategic value of aligning ITAM practices with broader ESG initiatives. IT leaders can unlock a competitive advantage by embracing a full lifecycle management approach that prioritizes asset awareness, device security, and responsible resource utilization. Partnering with service providers like Zones, which offer robust asset discovery, secure disposition, and a commitment to circularity, empowers IT teams to bridge the gap between effective asset management and environmental responsibility.