

Cisco Revs Up World's Most Popular Network Management Tools with LMS 4.0

Event

On October 5th, 2010, Cisco Systems announced a major overhaul of their LAN Management Solution (LMS) bundle with the release of CiscoWorks LMS version 4.0. The CiscoWorks LMS product is one of the most commonly used network management tools in existence, since it delivers primary configuration, deployment, monitoring, troubleshooting and administrative support for Cisco Systems network equipment. The LMS 4.0 release includes significant new functionality such as a new central user interface console, cross-product “Work Centers,” and a new initiative to deliver full lifecycle support for all new Cisco products and technologies at the same time they are released to the general market.

Context

The most important initial task of any network manager is to get his or her network devices set up and configured so that they can provide effective productivity to the organizations they serve. Network managers need the help of management tools to do this, sometimes including the use of multi-vendor platforms, but almost without exception, element management tools are the most common. In the case of Cisco Systems, this would be the hugely popular element management solution known as the CiscoWorks LAN Management Solution, or LMS.

Over the many years that ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES® (EMA™) analysts have been covering the network management sector, EMA research has shown time and again that the most popular and most trusted name in all of networking and network management is Cisco Systems. While that might not be surprising when it comes to questions of networking technology, our findings are that network professionals put Cisco at the top of the most-trusted list when it comes to just about any network management task or challenge. Further, the most common network management product called out by participants in our network-oriented research projects has repeatedly been CiscoWorks. EMA attributes this primarily to the fact that Cisco Systems is such a dominant provider of network equipment and, consequently, that the vast majority of Cisco network equipment customers have purchased and deployed CiscoWorks and have come to rely upon it heavily for their day-to-day activities.

The LMS “bundle” is a combination of several management products, utilities, and extensions, including CiscoWorks Common Services Software, CiscoWorks Campus Manager, CiscoWorks Device Fault Manager, CiscoWorks Internetwork Performance Monitor, CiscoWorks CiscoView, CiscoWorks Resource Manager Essentials, and CiscoWorks Health & Utilization Monitor. These utilities have evolved over the years to collectively address all of the management features and functions required for the various lifecycle stages of a Cisco-based network, from design to deployment to monitoring, troubleshooting, remediation, optimization, and general administration – spanning Data Center, Branch and core routers and switches across the Cisco Catalyst, ISR, ASR and Nexus product lines.

Cisco Systems continues to be the most trusted name in both networking and network management.

If there have been concerns and complaints over the years about the CiscoWorks LMS bundle, they have been around the fact that the bundle brought together multiple products, but that each of those products was separate and distinct from the others. There has also been, in many cases, a lag between the introduction of new Cisco hardware solutions and integrated support in CiscoWorks LMS. Both of these issues have been addressed head-on with the LMS 4.0 release.

CiscoWorks LMS 4.0 – Far More Than a Refresh

With the 4.0 release of CiscoWorks LMS, Cisco Systems has undertaken and delivered a major upgrade to the solution. The primary focus of the new release is streamlining and significantly improving the usability of the LMS bundle, by adding functionality, delivering new user interfaces, easing administration, improving timeliness of device support, and more. Following are highlights of the major new capabilities:

Day one Full Lifecycle Support: CiscoWorks LMS is now in the design and go-to-market path for all Cisco solutions, and integrated support within LMS is now a release requirement for those solutions. This is an important step for Cisco that goes well beyond the Network Management Technology Group, and means that Cisco's customers will have the tools they need when they need them for deploying and managing the latest Cisco Systems technologies.

New Task-Oriented Console: The new release includes a modernized, task-oriented console as a primary user interface that ties together all seven of the products comprising the LMS bundle. The console makes heavy use of de rigueur graphical tools such as mouse-overs and mega-menus around six key functional areas: Monitoring, Inventory, Configuration, Reports, Administration and Work Centers. Integral to this new capability is support for over thirty portlets that allow operators to define their own console layouts, including the ability to easily add their own content. Operators can also still access all of the functions of each of the bundled tools through a set of legacy menus if they prefer.

LMS 4.0 streamlines usability with a completely new task-oriented console interface that spans all seven subcomponents

Work Centers: Also new with this release is the concept of collecting all of the logical tasks required to deploy new Cisco technology features into a single menu interface which leads operators through all of the steps they need for implementation. For example, the EnergyWise Work Center begins with "Getting Started" tasks such as reviewing inventory to determine which devices under management are ready to turn on the EnergyWise features, followed by job scheduling to define, enable, deploy and apply policies, etc.

Cisco Expert Design Templates: Within the Configuration tools functions, Cisco has included a library of templates for defining, deploying, assigning and managing configuration jobs. Cisco experts have generated many of these, either based on Cisco's own design standards or as part of device-by-device as well as aggregate system testing.

These capabilities are added to and take advantage of existing features for centralizing layer-2 topology mapping, alarm management, performance monitoring and reporting, for small, medium or large network environments. Consequently, Cisco-heavy shops may find that the new CiscoWorks LMS4.0 is powerful and complete enough to meet most all of their network management needs.

Throughout, design emphasis has been placed on logical grouping of functions and removing the functional/navigational barriers that have existed in the past between bundled products. This has resulted in refreshes to the individual consoles and interfaces for each of the bundled tools, as well as improvements across the board for tasks such as defining and assigning roles for role-based access to management commands and capabilities. Cisco has also added, and plans to further expand, video documentation of the solution to accelerate learning curves for both existing and new operators.

EMA Perspective

Due to the tremendous popularity and presence of the CiscoWorks LMS bundle, EMA believes this 4.0 release will enable a tremendous step forward in simplifying the lives of network managers around the world. EMA has always been a strong advocate for integrating and automating management tools and tasks, especially when it comes to consistent user interfaces and cross-functional workflow support in the service of improving operational efficiency and effectiveness. CiscoWorks LMS 4.0 delivers on many of these points, including standardized interfaces, easier administration, cross-functional workflows and task-oriented interfaces.

With this major release, Cisco has made significant progress towards closing many of the gaps in their management tools that have been left to their ecosystem partners to fill. The attention to day-one support and to product usability will pay huge dividends in terms of customer satisfaction, and will allow Cisco's many customers to ensure that they are getting maximum value out of their investments in Cisco Systems networking and advanced technology products. Given the amount of value packed into this refresh, EMA expects that Cisco will continue to be the most trusted name in network management for a long time to come.

About EMA

Founded in 1996, Enterprise Management Associates (EMA) is a leading industry analyst firm that provides deep insight across the full spectrum of IT and data management technologies. EMA analysts leverage a unique combination of practical experience, insight into industry best practices, and in-depth knowledge of current and planned vendor solutions to help its clients achieve their goals. Learn more about EMA research, analysis, and consulting services for enterprise IT professionals, lines of business users, and IT vendors at www.enterprisemanagement.com or follow EMA on Twitter (http://twitter.com/ema_research).

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