

Agentless Discovery versus Agent-based Discovery

The comparison between Agent-based Network Discovery and Agentless Network Discovery very much mirrors the comparison of staging an application on an internal network versus staging on a hosted network (link to other white paper here). Executed properly, any choice in both scenarios will provide the same very useful result, however, in both cases the remote solution greatly reduces overhead in both cost and manpower.

Agent-based Discovery requires agents to be pushed out to every asset on the network, for reporting of hardware and software presence back to a centralized server. For this reason, Network Discovery is commonly thought of as requiring a long-term investment in terms of time to deliver and effort expended to install the agents throughout the environment

This need not be the case, however, as advancements in agentless Discovery technology have made the process of pushing out agents throughout the network unnecessary. In an agentless-based Discovery environment, a local server is established for aggregation of data collected from briefly established small scale executables which are briefly established on each item on the network, and then removed by a remote process. The local server information is then able to be loaded into the discovery application database on a regularly determined basis.

The recognition algorithms used by the lightweight executable can use a variety of ways to recognize hardware and software, including reading from the BIOS, WMI, Registry, and using other proprietary methods of data discovery.

As with agent-based discovery utilities, agentless-based discovery methods can also pull in data from outside sources, such as third-party discovery tools, USB sticks, barcode applications and any other flat-file or database source, considering that the data will be stored in a centralized database.

In addition to the reduced implementation time, agentless-based discovery tools offer other benefits. Without agents being required on network assets, upgrade time otherwise required to be performed on those agents is negated. Also, any updates to the collection server and the application which presents the data can be performed with minimal disruption to the environment.

In addition, in environments which are particularly tightly locked down in terms of Change Management, the processes required to put agents in place may be time-consuming or even denied entirely. The implementation of an agentless-based system makes these concerns moot in that the Assets detected do not require a change to be made to them in order to be discovered.

In essence, discovery technology has adapted to the point where all items on the network can be discovered without a significant time commitment to implement the solution. There is no present advantage which agent-based solutions have over well designed agentless-based solutions, and indeed, agentless-based solutions provide many benefits regarding to the optimization of time-to-value in implementation which agent based solutions can't provide.