

Delegated Account Management & Sponsorship Takes IAM To New Levels

Delegated account management and sponsorship responsibilities provided by an effective Identity Management (IDM) solution give technology staffs the flexibility to oversee multiple locations from a single office, while still allowing each location day to day management and control of local IT resources.

It is the goal of every organization to be successful, success brings with it many benefits including increased revenues, new employees, and the ability to expand and cover a larger market. However, those benefits come with an implicit cost associated with the support of bringing on new people and building the proper infrastructure to ensure that necessary information is received by the departments that require it. This can be difficult to manage when all of the users are at a single site, an additional level of complication presents itself when users work from multiple locations. The IT staff must be large enough to cover the support obligations of the user-base and the maintenance requirements of the software and hardware resources within the system, but must be efficient and flexible enough to not overburden the organization with cost. System automation can provide the needed gains in efficiency to allow the current technology staff to handle a much larger user base by alleviating many of the mundane and time consuming tasks that they are responsible for, freeing up their time for mission critical assignments. Information systems with users spread across multiple sites and in many cases multiple time zones poses a number of unique challenges, that must be met with a combination of knowledge, best-of-breed software, and a willingness to alter the preconceptions of system automation can accomplish.

Dallas, Texas, based BELO Corp. (NYSE:BLC) is one of the nation's largest publicly traded television companies, it has grown from a single newspaper in central Texas, to a coast to coast network of 20 television stations spanning 15 cities. As they grew and as the technology involved in telecommunications advanced, a more robust infrastructure was needed to keep up with demand they

placed on their information systems and the staff that maintains it. The senior management at BELO Corp. already possessed an excellent understanding of what an Identity Management (IDM) solution could provide in efficiency and staff workload reduction. However, the currently deployed IDM product was approaching the end of its life-cycle and replacement was quickly becoming a high priority.

"When we took a look at our identity management system, the only words that adequately described it were 'outdated' and 'complex'." , states Brenda Buckalew, the Sr Director of Technology - Enterprise Systems for Belo Corp.

BELO Corp.'s leadership wanted to replace the current legacy system with the next generation Identity Management solution. A solution that could provide the adaptability to connect current and future resources together, an intuitive interface that any user can learn, and the ability to delegate account management responsibility. The final requirement of the IDM solution was a quick implementation time that would allow BELO to begin moving forward in the near future, rather than having to go through the year long development cycle that a majority of the currently available IDM products require to deploy. Identity Automation has developed a suite of tools that fulfills all of the above requirements and can be fully implemented in as few as six weeks. The full solution combines a powerful back-end IDM engine that seamlessly connects all information resources together, with an end-user facing account management interface that is quick to learn and makes account management simple and timely.

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The Data Synchronization System (DSS) is the core of Identity Automation's new best of breed data integration solution. DSS has been designed to move, transform, and validate data between disparate systems by connecting them together with custom developed application adapters. DSS can be leveraged to provide IDM services by connecting the authoritative source for identities (in most cases the HRM system) with downstream resources such as directory services, email, telephone systems, access control systems, and almost any other network accessible resource. Data is processed through the DSS "engine" with user defined action-sets, action-sets contain instructions of where to pull data from, how to transform it, and then what system to push it to. The action-sets are then set to a schedule or bound to an event to execute the required commands. For example, once a new user is entered into the HRM system, DSS will draw the user information out and based on the employee's role, provision them into the systems required to perform their duties. BELO is utilizing DSS to automatically provision and deprovision users into two separate directory service trees based on actions that occur in the HRM system. It is also providing dual direction password synchronization between the deployed time management software and the directory services, giving employees simplified sign-on for network accessible resources. All of these actions are automated and require no administrative intervention for standard operation.

The Access Request Management System or ARMS is the end-user facing component to Identity Automation's IDM solution. It is made up of multiple modules, each designed to efficiently handle different facets of the identity life-cycle, BELO has chosen to implement the Account Management and Sponsorship modules. The ARMS modules are technology agnostic applications that can be accessed through all major web browsers. If hosted through a website, users can access need account infor-

mation, and make necessary account based decisions from any computer with an internet connection.

The Account Management Module assists users of all roles in basic account maintenance including, password and challenge response reset functionality, profile upkeep, and other general tasks. End-users can now keep their own digital identity up to date, ensuring that correct demographic and contact information is always available to those that need it. By granting self-service password reset capabilities to end-users the help desk staff can focus on mission critical tasks rather than time consuming user maintenance. If the help desk is required to assist with an account, it can be quickly tracked down and serviced through ARMS user friendly interface. Additionally, passwords can be reset without a computer by using the ARMS mobile app, which is available for smart phones.

The Sponsorship Module of ARMS gives BELO the ability to automate the identity life-cycle of external users within their organization. External user accounts can be defined as any account that exists outside of the authoritative system, in most cases the HRMS. These accounts are made up of contractors, interns, consultants, and other employees that are on site temporarily. Because they don't work directly for the organization and are not entered into the HRMS, many of the automated processes handled by DSS won't function. Provisioning and Deprovisioning them is a manually intensive process and not only costs the time of the technology staff, but also delays the start of the employee as they are entered into each system. The Sponsorship Module solves this by acting as the authoritative source for that employee, they can now have an account created in ARMS that will provision them into to the systems they require to service their role. When the account is created it is bound to a sponsor and given an expiration date, sponsors are internal employees who are responsible for the over-

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sight of the account and the attestation of the account's access. When the expiration date nears the sponsor must re-attest the account, extending its expiration date, or allow it to expire. When the account expires the user is deprovisioned from the resources they had access to automatically, the account itself remains in an inactive state so it can be used again in the future if the contractor is again needed.

The true utility of ARMS is fully realized by policy makers and system administrators who can, on a very granular basis, delegate certain functionality to other users in the system. The care of user accounts in departments can be given to the manager of that department, by giving department managers and team leaders limited control over the user accounts in their teams and departments, they can quickly solve many of the minor day to day problems encountered by their team members. This improves response time and limits user downtime by reducing the number steps required for assistance and circumventing the help desk queue. BELO used the delegation functionality of ARMS to divide each television station into its own custom group and then granted administration rights to on-site technology staff. BELO can now efficiently manage a nationwide network on a single system from a central location, while still giving individual business units the flexibility to react to local IT concerns that arise. With the IDM solution centrally linked, oversight and compliance reporting are readily available to the senior management at the home office. Policy updates to passwords, necessary profile information, and changes in role based user access can now be rolled out to all locations at once, removing the issue of having multiple policy versions existing at the same time while the changes are taking place. User access audits are available and will accurately display current account status within the system from a single point.

With Identity Automation's assistance BELO has prepared its IT infrastructure to handle future growth with the certainty that new systems can be quickly deployed and that new assets can be rapidly integrated. BELO took additional advantage of the ARMS and DSS solutions by having them deployed as a managed services, whose total cost of ownership is less than the previously deployed product's yearly licensing fee. By streamlining Identity life-cycle management, and greatly reducing the maintenance workload required for upkeep, BELO has positioned its IT staff to focus on future opportunities.