

Cisco Proactive Automation of Change Execution Solution (PACE)

Dave: Hi, everybody; my name is Dave Wetzel. I'm the manager of the solution marketing team in the network management technology group at Cisco. Thanks for tuning in to this first edition of our online Cisco network management update. This session will be one in a series of bimonthly Cisco network management podcasts where we talk about network management.

Today's session will be on the Cisco Proactive Automation of Change Execution Solution or the Cisco PACE Solution. And with me today is Cisco Solution Manager for PACE Sam Moore. Welcome, Sam!

Sam: Hi, Dave; it's great to be here. I really enjoy talking about our solution for the Proactive Automation of Change Execution.

Dave: So can you start off by giving us a brief description of the Cisco PACE Solution?

Sam: Sure. PACE is a total solution for network configuration and change management, so it automates everything in the change process; that includes workflow approvals and the actual configuration push. Most importantly, though, it provides proof of compliance with government and industry standards.

That's things like Sarbanes-Oxley, HIPPA, if you're in the healthcare business; PCI, if you're concerned about credit cards in the retail trade; or FISMA, if you're in the governmental end of things. But in the end, what PACE does is detect vulnerabilities and, therefore, provides greater network resiliency and better business continuity.

Dave: That sounds pretty comprehensive. From what I know, there's a couple of different products in the solution. There's a CiscoWorks NCM and a Cisco CAS in the solution. Can you tell us a little bit about those products?

Sam: Yes, the CiscoWorks Network Configuration Solution Manager or NCM and the Cisco Configuration Assurance Solution or CAS really complement each other. Together they provide a very robust, powerful set of features. NCM tracks configuration software and hardware changes and screens against policies, regulatory standards, or IT best practices.

CAS, on the other hand, takes that audit and compliance capability to the network level. And it starts by producing a virtual model of the network in which it can do simulations. It analyzes all the possible paths through the network and measures those against hundreds of predefined configurable rules. It uses its routing intelligence to determine the vulnerabilities and risks in the network and then pinpoints misconfigured nodes. All that information then goes back in the form of recommendations to NCM, so the process starts again.

Dave: That sounds pretty comprehensive. But what if I just wanted to selectively deploy parts of that?

Sam: Oh, yes, that's quite possible. There's a lot of flexibility. Customers can install products and services, individually, and order them separately, but collectively, all these tools together is what reduces the risks to the absolute minimum and increases network reliability to the maximum.

Dave: That sounds pretty good. Now next question I have, though, is that a lot of the customers I talk to have predominantly a Cisco network in terms of the networking equipment, but sometimes they have some third-party non Cisco networking equipment. Will this solution work with them, too?

Sam: Oh, yes, absolutely. PACE is designed as a multivendor solution, so it's highly scalable to very large global networks and handles devices from all the leading manufacturers.

Dave: So we're taking a look at compliance and making sure we're compliant in the change management. As you take a look at the NCM and CAS in the solution, have you looked at the return on investment and the payback for this kind of solution?

Sam: Oh, yes, we're looked at hundreds of customer situations. But keep in mind, every customer environment is unique. We've found that, typically, benefits will exceed costs in the very first year. The Cisco account representatives have a special ROI model that's available to them. And we invite the customers to sit down with their account representatives and plug their data into that model, so they can get a very precise idea of their payback will be.

Dave: Now we've talked about a couple of different products that are part of this solution. Can you tell me a little bit about how they get deployed or where they're deployed, and is there integration between these different parts of the solution?

Sam: Absolutely. There's four components to the PACE Solution. These all get deployed in the NAC or the network operations center. We like to start with ACS, the Access Control Server. We need to be sure that there's secure access to the network because we have this assumption—and that is you cannot manage change without knowing who's making the changes. So ACS is perfect at that. And later on we use the rule-based capabilities of ACS to handle the workflow approvals that are necessary to the process.

Now PACE is not an element management tool; it doesn't do up and down status. So, we recommend LMS, which is our CiscoWorks LAN Management Solution, to handle that aspect and do the discovery of the network. Now all the other components of the PACE Solution can leverage that discovery and that includes the Network Configuration Manager, NCM. NCM will detect those changes as they occur in the network, whether or not they've run through NCM, initially, and it checks them for compliance.

Then we have the Cisco CAS component, the Configuration Assurance Solution. That's our component that's doing the audit and analyses of the entire network, end-to-end paths through the network. And it's looking for those network misconfigurations, the differences of continually running in the background, and checking for the security threat violations. CAS then provides those recommendations for changes in the configurations back to NCM.

Dave: So if CAS is taking a look at that networkwide view of things and looking at some of those design or architectural considerations that you just mentioned, does that mean I can also use it for some planning and auditing and analyses on the planning side?

Sam: Well, Cisco CAS is first and foremost an operational tool, rather than a planning tool. CAS audits and analyzes the network to ensure network integrity, security, availability for the entire IP infrastructure. It runs in the background and automatically produces those reports and notifications. So if a customer is really looking more for a planning tool, we might point them to a companion solution, such as Cisco NAPA.

Dave: So the PACE sounds like a pretty comprehensive set of tools that do a lot for me, and that sounds great. But what about deploying these? Is it hard to deploy? What kind of expertise is required to get this up and running?

Sam: Deployment is quite fast; it's just a matter of hours. We do recommend, however, that there be an experienced technician to supervise the installation, and we have a wealth of services available from the Cisco Advanced Services group. They'd be more than happy to work with you in getting your deployment rolled out.

Dave: So this sounds like some really great information on the Cisco PACE Solution. Where can our customers go to get some more information about PACE?

Sam: I recommend that they go to our Website, which is <http://www.cisco.com/go/PACE>. There, they're going to find a wealth of information about the complete solution, an ordering guide, and details of each of the components.

Dave: Well, thank you very much, Sam. This is some great information on the PACE Solution. And we'd like to encourage our listeners to learn more about Cisco PACE by visiting the Website Sam mentioned, which is, again, <http://www.cisco.com/go/PACE>.

And that wraps it up for today. If you'd like to listen to other network management podcasts, please visit our <http://www.cisco.com/go/nmpodcasts> and thanks for listening today!



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