Hidden hardware costs that enterprises underestimate

Hardware Asset Management (HAM) is the modern enterprise's silent profit lever. The ServiceNow AI Platform is unlocking it.

When a third of an enterprise's hardware estate is unaccounted for, the IT function isn't managing assets but funding a 'shadow inventory', and the cost compounds every quarter.

Why unmanaged hardware demands executive attention

- Every manual update introduces error into the system of record that procurement, compliance, and refresh decisions depend on.
- Unverified hardware assets distort financial reporting, weaken maintenance planning, and undermine every investment decision the CFO makes.
- The ServiceNow AI Platform deploys AI agents to automate asset lifecycle tasks, enabling teams to scale without growing headcount.
- The business case for modern HAM lands in cost takeout, audit risk reduction, vendor leverage, and ESG credibility.

Somewhere in a typical enterprise right now, a laptop is sitting in a drawer. It was assigned to an employee who left two years ago. The lease on it auto-renewed last quarter. Nobody knows it exists. Multiply that laptop by a few thousand, and the result is a problem that quietly drains millions from the IT budget every year, while nobody on the executive floor can quite put their finger on why.
This is the reality of HAM today. Across enterprise clients and industries, the same pattern repeats itself: the organizations that treat hardware as an afterthought are the ones funding shadow inventories, failing audits, and missing the cost takeout targets their CFOs have set for them. The good news is that this is one of the most solvable problems in enterprise IT. The better news is that with the ServiceNow AI Platform, solving it no longer requires an army of asset managers chasing spreadsheets.

Five challenges every asset leader is wrestling with

In discovery sessions with HAM teams, five themes surface repeatedly. They are worth naming because they sharpen the conversation about where to invest first.

1. **Lack of visibility:** Asset data lives across multiple systems connected by brittle integrations that are costly to monitor and maintain. There is no single authoritative source where asset data is continuously normalized and trusted. When a CIO asks a simple question like “how many laptops do we have, by model, by location, in active use?”, the honest answer is usually “give us a week.”

2. **Cost optimization:** Significant IT dollars are spent managing infrastructure with little ROI. Technology waste and improper asset disposal expose organizations to regulatory penalties and increased costs. It has become difficult for asset managers to prove that the IT estate is genuinely aligned to budget and business need, which weakens their position in every budget cycle.

3. **Compliance:** Siloed databases and CMDBs offer no efficient or predictable way to maintain asset accuracy. There is no organization-wide governance of the full asset lifecycle from planning to retirement. When a warehouse audit or a SOX, PCI, HIPAA, or NERC review lands, teams scramble to produce evidence that should have been at their fingertips.

4. **Coordination:** Isolated and inconsistent data across departments hinders collaboration on critical asset tasks: purchasing with IT finance or procurement, servicing with the service team, onboarding and offboarding with HR. The same data inconsistencies also leave security gaps that expose assets to vulnerabilities.

5. **Sustainability:** Sustainable IT is now top-of-mind for boards, yet ESG and IT asset management teams are struggling to collect and report on the environmental impact of IT infrastructure. How much energy do the assets consume? What portion of the estate is contributing to e-waste? Without an accurate asset record, these questions are unanswerable, and the organization cannot credibly contribute to its ESG commitments. Boards are now demanding Scope 3 emission data, and IT cannot provide it without knowing where hardware is deployed.

Why the manual approach makes it worse

Most organizations did not set out to run HAM on spreadsheets and email. They got there because their tools left gaps, and humans filled those gaps with manual processes. The equation is unforgiving.

> Tool gaps filled by manual processes + human error from repetitive tasks = unknown installed inventory, purchase sprawl, and compliance exposure.

Manual updates to records every time an asset is serviced, moved, deployed, or reclaimed introduces the potential for human error at every step. The result is a system of record that is always slightly out of date, which means every downstream decision, from procurement to compliance reporting to refresh planning, is being made on stale data.

These weaknesses become impossible to hide when business events stress-test the HAM function. Vendor lease renewals. Workforce reductions and budget cuts. Warehouse and security audits. Data center consolidations. Mergers and acquisitions, where two asset estates have to be consolidated carefully. ESG reporting cycles where the C-suite expects credible numbers. Teams built on a connected, automated platform absorb these events. Teams built on spreadsheets do not.

Building a modern HAM operating model

Hardware asset management joins financial, contractual, and inventory functions to automate the lifecycle and strategic decision-making for technology infrastructure. Done well, it answers four questions every CIO, CFO, and CISO should be able to answer at any time: what hardware does the organization own? Do financial records match inventory? Is the estate being fully utilized? Are items retiring and being disposed of appropriately?

This is the problem ServiceNow Hardware Asset Management was built to solve, and it is the reason we've built our practice at Brillio around it. Three capabilities now separate leaders from laggards.

1. First, unify the enterprise on a single platform, where discovered hardware data is continuously normalized to maintain a clean CMDB and IT, finance, procurement, HR, security, and ESG all work from the same system of record.

2. Second, automate the asset lifecycle with workflow, from request to retirement, so processes scale with existing headcount.

3. Third, reduce cost and risk by uncovering the unknown portion of the IT estate, empowering vendor negotiations with complete data, and removing equipment that is end-of-support or end-of-life.

How AI changes the economics

Until recently, getting to a mature HAM function meant a multi-year program of process redesign, tool consolidation, and patient data cleanup. Now Assist for HAM, ServiceNow's AI capability for asset management, does not eliminate that work, but it dramatically compresses it and changes what asset managers spend their time on.

The most concrete example is request handling. A hardware asset manager can receive dozens of requests in a single day, some of them deceptively simple ("I need 10 laptops for new hires next week"). Each request involves identifying what is required, locating available stock, deciding whether to transfer from another location or place a new purchase order, and then executing the transfer or order.

With AI agents working on a unified platform, that entire chain can be automated or checked at appropriate steps by the asset manager:

- **Locate:** Identify the items required to fulfill an order and locate them across stockrooms.
- **Decide:** Automate the decision-making and transfer of stock to help fulfill hardware requests.
- **Execute:** Streamline hardware fulfillment by automating the transfer or ordering of devices.

The asset manager is freed to focus on higher-value work: helping with audits, reclaiming unused licenses, negotiating with vendors, and contributing to ESG reporting. This is what scaling processes with existing headcount looks like in practice.

The outcomes worth measuring

HAM transformation programs on ServiceNow anchor to four strategic objectives and the metrics that prove progress against each one.

1. **Cost takeout:** Maximize IT hardware useful life, minimize hardware asset loss, and optimize hardware inventory. Track average IT asset age at disposal, percentage of annual spend on unaccounted hardware, and percentage of assets not in circulation. A leading practice benchmark is a 65% reduction in annual spend on unaccounted hardware.

2. **Operational efficiency:** Increase hardware asset manager efficiency, measured by the number of full-time equivalents (FTEs) required to support the function. A 35% improvement in asset manager efficiency is achievable on a unified, automated platform.

3. **Risk mitigation:** Reduce outages caused by hardware issues, tracked as the percentage of unplanned outages attributable to hardware. A 25% reduction is a credible target.

4. **Experience:** Increase new hire day-one readiness and accelerate hardware request fulfillment, measured by the percentage of new hires missing critical hardware on day one and the average hardware request cycle time. A 50% reduction in new hires missing hardware on day one is a meaningful experience win that also signals operational maturity.

HAM transformation in practice

The pattern across the most successful HAM engagements is consistent, even though the industries and starting points differ widely. In one engagement with a global automotive services group operating dozens of brands across thousands of dealerships, the challenge was not the absence of asset data but its dispersion across disparate systems. Centralizing on ServiceNow and connecting asset management to procurement and contracts data moved them from effectively zero visibility to 70% visibility of their estate within months. The first downstream benefit was not a process improvement, but a vendor renewal handled with full data in hand, removing unused entitlements and creating real negotiating leverage.

In another engagement with a top-tier financial services institution, the trigger was an acquisition that doubled the asset estate overnight. Consolidating on the ServiceNow AI Platform alongside service management enabled the institution to automate a 33% share of IT service requests and cut software audit effort by 80%. The strategic win was not the automation rate. It was that the bank could redirect capacity from low-value administrative work to the innovation projects its customers noticed.

Across these patterns, the common thread is not the technology but the strategic posture. These organizations stopped treating hardware as a cost line to be managed and started treating it as a portfolio of business assets to be optimized. The platform and the AI made that posture economically viable. The decision to adopt it was a leadership choice.

Key strategic takeaways for HAM and ITAM leaders

- **Audit the asset estate now:** Unverified inventory means every procurement, refresh, and compliance decision is based on stale data.
- **Consolidate onto a single platform:** Fragmented tools and manual workarounds degrade data quality; a unified system of record is non-negotiable.
- **Automate the lifecycle, not just tracking:** Request-to-retirement workflow automation turns HAM from a reactive cost center into a scalable function.
- **Deploy AI to compress maturity timelines:** Automate request triage and stock location; redirect freed capacity toward audits and vendor negotiations.
- **Tie every HAM initiative to measurable outcomes:** Track cost takeout, efficiency, risk reduction, and experience; report progress to the CFO quarterly.

The path forward

HAM is not the most glamorous corner of enterprise IT. But the business case is unambiguous: every dollar invested in modernizing HAM tends to return multiples in cost takeout, risk reduction, and operational efficiency; with outcomes the CFO will recognize.

For organizations ready to move, three actions matter. Review the current HAM program against business goals and roadmap and identify where the gaps between strategy and execution are widest. Conduct a business value assessment that quantifies the outcomes available to the organization. And work with partners who have done this at enterprise scale to step through the combined benefits of automating and optimizing HAM on the ServiceNow AI Platform.

The organizations getting this right are not waiting for the next budget cycle, the next audit finding, or the next M&A event to force their hand. They are moving now, because the cost of inaction compounds every quarter the asset estate goes unmanaged.

About Brillio

Brillio is The Enterprise AI Accelerator helping Fortune 1000 companies move from AI ambition to scaled impact, faster. Powered by our AI accelerator platform – Agentic Data and Application Management (ADAM), Brillio is one of the fastest-growing digital technology service providers, delivering transformation across five core workstreams: business-led transformation, customer experience transformation, AI and data engineering, digital engineering, and infrastructure engineering.

With 14 delivery locations across North America, Europe, and Asia and a team of over 6,000 customer-obsessed professionals, Brillio combines deep industry expertise, modern engineering, and accelerators to deliver measurable outcomes. Headquartered in Dallas, Texas, Brillio serves clients globally with a commitment to speed, scale, and measurable impact.

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