LANsense Enterprise edition, version 9.0, from Nexans
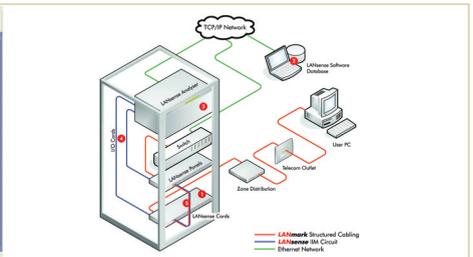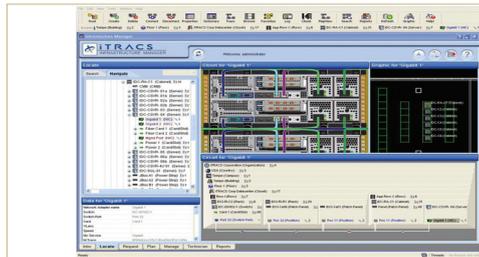
PRODUCT REVIEW PRODUCT REVIEW PRODUCT REV

Knowing that your network infrastructure was working used to be sufficient. IP convergence, increased IT dependency and risk management now conspire to make this approach utterly untenable as dependency increases on TCP/IP services including email, telephone, video and data. Network Management solutions typically address some aspect of the network; the one consistently overlooked is the infrastructure, and Intelligent Infrastructure Management (IIM) is the response.

A solution is needed that can control network devices and infrastructure, and this is what LANsense from Nexans does; a software and hardware solution with an Analyser at its heart. If required, other hardware can provide Environmental Monitoring, Access Control and Power Management. Based on the iTRACS Physical Layer Manager at Layer1, LANsense overlays essential layer 2, 3 and 4 perspectives and using bi-directional feeds, it operates with specialist applications like Building Management Systems and surveillance cameras. It functions comfortably within an ITIL environment, cooperating with most Service Desk solutions, especially in the critical area of CMDB.

The Enterprise edition reviewed here is complemented by the cut down LANsense and Data Centre editions. Everything is based on events, such as unplugging a cable, opening a door, or breaching a temperature threshold, each forming the basis for a broad flow of management capability useful to a range of operational functions, including Facilities, Service Delivery and IT. Pointing at network resources served from five cabinets, we opened Root Navigator, which presented us with a Parent/Child relationship directory. Clicking on the 1st Floor, an expanded directory showed equipment and its location.

The software comes with predefined data views (dictionaries), providing asset information; others can be created. Selecting a particular cabinet, we could observe lower, middle and upper temperatures and the power draw, as instant or trended information. System access is defined by user account, and so is secure and auditable. We drilled down and were presented with a Trace view - an end to end circuit diagram - from which we could ascertain the detailed configuration of a laptop and its floor box. A detailed floor plan simplified asset location.

LANsense has multiple routes to the same information; the Search facility quickly located a particular IP address, along with a list of connected Windows devices. Reporting allowed manipulation of data and export to CSV or Excel. We easily produced a report showing ports connected to an unterminated patch cord or not in use - critical to controlling switch and cable expenditure.

Rules and Alerts advise selected people when defined thresholds are breached. For example, an unexpected connection or disconnection may presage a security incident, and breaching a temperature threshold, a pre-emptive response.

Automated Work Orders and Workflow simplify MAC operations and LANsense can be as rigid or flexible as required. It could check that the correct patch cord has been moved as a condition of closure. Cognisant of compliance and regulatory pressures everything can be traced and audited, and if required an image could be captured when a cabinet door is opened, removing any doubt as to who was present.

Installation time is a function of objectives. Beyond the physical aspect of cables and racks, populating and configuring the software will take about one day to configure around 1,000 ports; this will vary according to the configuration choices made. User training completes in no more than three days.

If your business is IT dependant with over-stretched IT people, and if aligning facilities management and IT is beneficial, IIM and LANsense could be the enabler. Depending on the starting point, your ROI could be fast. Using LANsense, one bank found 300 PCs it didn't know it had!

There can be little dispute that the tasks an IIM system performs are vital; they feed and inform other vital network management. LANsense is a highly flexible, automated tool set, offering a diverse range of IT capabilities to revolutionise infrastructure management. In time all networks will have IIM. NC

Product: LANsense
Supplier: Nexans Cabling solutions
Web site: www.nexans.co.uk/lansystems
Telephone: 01256 486640
Email: ncs.uk@nexans.com
Price: Depends on configuration