

FastTalk – SAM: Friend or Foe?

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Software Asset Management (SAM) has often been seen as a necessary evil, used to ensure that software licences are used within contractual limits, so avoiding the possibility of fines should a company be found to have a copy of an application running somewhere without a valid licence.

The software industry itself hasn't exactly helped – early attempts to face down corporate piracy were couched in terms of fear, uncertainty and doubt, threatening all sorts of things should a company not manage its licences effectively.

However, SAM should not be seen as a cost, but as an investment. It brings to an organisation many benefits that can help in freeing up the IT department from many areas of drudge work. Here, SAM addresses the problem of simply knowing what is in use within an organisation, and how it is being used. The common use of spreadsheets to try and manage licences leads to a rapid descent into chaos: for example, what happens when a PC is junked? Without any dynamic capability of knowing what was on that PC, the spreadsheet still tends to record a live licence – something that will still be being paid for against maintenance and upgrade costs.

The use of SAM to provide knowledge of what software is being used has many benefits. Firstly, you may find that different software is being used to carry out the same tasks, and by rationalising to a single application, greater business efficiencies can be gained. Secondly, you may well find out that you have more licences installed than are actually being used, and these licences can be redeployed to provide access to the application to those who will make full use of its capabilities or the maintenance payments can be stopped for the unused licences. Licence redeployment can be done on a dynamic basis where the licence conditions allow, so enabling fewer licences to be bought and managed by the organisation. Thirdly, you gain the benefits of being able to actively manage the applications themselves, through more effective direct management.

A major cost to the IT department is in patching and updating applications. This is made worse where the IT department has only a sketchy idea of what applications are out there "in the wild". Applications can easily disintegrate in to a multitude of different revisions, and problems can then be seen in incompatibilities between different versions of the application, leading to high help-desk costs and impact on the business processes utilising the application.

SAM provides a knowledge of what versions and patch levels of software an organisation has, and backed up with suitable provisioning software can lead to the automation of software maintenance, so freeing up technical and support resource within the IT department to concentrate on what is important – supporting the business.

As newer application architectures such as service oriented architectures (SOAs), software as a service (SaaS) and composite applications such as mash-ups come into greater usage, the need to fully understand what is available within an organisation's portfolio will only be magnified. Using SAM to understand the contextual dependencies between services will further enable the IT department to be responsive to the organisation's business needs.

SAM should not be seen as a technology just for managing licences for compliance reasons. When implemented for business reasons, it can lead to savings based on knowing exactly what is being done with applications under management, in managing the complete lifecycle of the applications from implementation to retirement, and in helping to move from existing monolithic application architectures to newer service-based architectures.

That SAM also enables compliance should be seen as a welcome side effect – not the main reason for using it.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

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