

The Software Compliance Reporting Blues

The Fast and Economical Solution May Be a Hosted Software License Reconciliation Service

By now it is no secret that IT asset management solutions and systems that calculate and report an organization's degree of software license compliance (or lack thereof) are valuable assets to any IT operation. However, let's be frank here, the economic times ain't what they used to be. IT budgets have been slashed and programs have been cancelled or postponed across the board. Traditional ITAM and SAM systems have a reputation of being expensive and complex, putting new systems out of the reach of many organizations and companies. So, what are your options if you really need a solution right away?

Fortunately, SAM systems have kept up with technology, and the traditional model is no longer the only option. Hosted SAM services are now available that automate the SAM process without breaking the bank or requiring a year to produce usable reports. What's more, they are accurate, easy to use, place no strain on your network and don't require a long term contract.

Why a Hosted Service?

A hosted SAM service has many benefits, not the least of which is the speed with which it can be deployed and operational, the low one-time cost and the minimal impact it has on your operations. With a hosted operation no software is installed, the service is up and running in hours and somebody else owns the responsibility of running and maintaining the software. A full staff doesn't need to be assigned to use it, and temporary help doesn't even need to be brought in. The users get information and reports quickly, in a format that provides them with the information they need and which addresses the problem at hand. The cost is generally low enough to be handled by a departmental budget, not requiring "C" level purchase authorization, an RFP or a full breakeven analysis. Simply stated, a hosted SAM service may be the fastest, least expensive solution to satisfy an urgent need for software license compliance information.

Why Not?

There are some things these services are not. Designed primarily for a series of scans within a short timeframe, and to generate a series of reports based on those scans, the hosted service is not a substitute for an ongoing program. That is not

to say that a permanent hosted (SaaS) solution wouldn't fill the bill. Hosted services are also not a substitute for an ongoing, full time ITAM program, which is a far different animal. However, when you need answers fast and don't have a solution in place, the hosted SAM service can be a lifesaver.

Let's look at a couple of scenarios where the hosted SAM service fits right in, from a number of different perspectives.

The Auditor Comes Knocking

Much has been written about the specter of the software auditor, looming in the darkness, waiting to pounce on unsuspecting organizations or companies. But, suppose it really happened? Even if a company knows it is compliant, it still has to prove it. At a minimum, the "fire-drill" approach of gathering the required information is disruptive and can be expensive, if only in terms of lost productivity. This is where the hosted SAM service comes in handy. Operating over a web browser, and only requiring a temporary collection server on site, a service can perform the required scans of both the software purchasing and discovered software records and complete the reconciliation, all in a timely manner. Moreover, the process can be repeated if necessary. No more disruptions, frantic searches for purchasing data and manual surveys of each device. And all for less than you would probably pay for the temporary help needed to do things the old way.

You Are The Auditor (or CPA)

After the Sarbanes-Oxley bill became part of the business landscape, compliance became more than something banks worried about. More and more, companies are including compliance reports as part of their annual financial audits. For companies that do not have a SAM system, which include thousands of small and medium sized businesses, software license compliance can become a complex job for the auditors, often requiring far more professional service hours than was originally budgeted. However, the availability of a certified hosted SAM service can expedite the process. From the CPA's perspective, the firm can service far more clients in that same audit period, making its operations far more efficient and giving it the ability to service more clients with fewer accountants. For the client, even the expense of the auditor passing on the cost of the service is still likely to be



less than the cost of the billable hours that could be expended.

Resellers Count Too

Let’s suppose for a moment that you are a large account reseller (LAR) for one or more major software vendors. They rely on you to keep records of what you license to your clients. You rely on your clients not to make copies of the software you sold them, or to only buy from you per terms of your purchase agreement. Ah, trust is a beautiful thing. However, just to be sure, you might want to check up from time to time (like once a year) just to make sure your trust is well placed. You certainly can’t make your customers license a SAM program at significant expense to them. However, you can provide a hosted SAM service free to your customers at a nominal cost to you. Running it once a year will give you the peace of mind you need (or the evidence you need) and can provide your customers with valuable data about their IT infrastructure that they probably don’t have or wouldn’t discover. Hosted services are transparent, remotely operated, inexpensive, require no installation and available on demand, a perfect solution for the LAR.

Expanding Your Business

Years ago one of my MBA professors explained the essence of consulting. He said, “When you’re not working you’re selling and if you’re not doing either you’re starving.” Management consultants and SAM consultants can always use

a new tool to expand their business or provide better or new services to their clients. A hosted SAM service allows them to do both. By using a portable tool that provides an accurate and non-intrusive scan of software and hardware assets, as well as purchase records, they can provide better guidance and recommendations to their clients. Incorporating a hosted SAM service into their business model also may add a new component to their repertoire of services, attracting new clients over time. After all, a starving consultant is a sad sight indeed.

What To Look For

In the realm of hosted SAM services, accuracy, ease of use and transparency are paramount. Your existing staff should be able to operate the system and run the reports. If possible, find a solution that doesn’t require installed agents and one that can be accessed using a web browser. Above all, make sure that you control your data and that it is secure. A local collection server tied into the system can insure the security and availability of the data. If possible, look for a vendor that will allow you to run reports after the scans are complete. You never know what management will ask for just after you think you’re finished. Finally, determine if the vendor has a hosted or installed solution that can use the discovered information, just in case you get funding to install a permanent solution.

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Certified Hardware Asset Manager Professional, for all of your company’s licensing, budgeting and overall hardware organization.

