License Balance at the Touch of a Button

Keeping track of all software a company uses is important not only for license reasons. Modern software asset management systems also reduce operating costs.

The more licenses a company has, the more difficult it is to prove to software manufacturers that the company is in compliance, and the more crucial for business it is to do so. In addition to the legal aspects of maintaining an accurate license balance, there are many more good reasons why it makes sense to manage licenses systematically. The new system put in place by the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) lets the company avoid unnecessary operating costs, for example. Although SBB›s IT department had been using a license management tool for some time, the tool managed only the licenses. It did not include the provider›s inventory data, for example, which meant that the SBB was missing out on considerable optimization and savings potential. The SBB management and security department therefore drafted requirements for a new license management solution. The goal was to be able to prove at the touch of a button that the SBB has the correct license for every piece of software it uses. In addition, the SBB wanted to give its in-house license management team all the expertise and responsibility to keep it from having to rely on the provider.

REQUIREMENTS & EVALUATION

It was important for the SBB to find a partner through the tender process that would see the company through the entire project and could supplement the company›s own expertise in a way that made sense. The purchase price was only a secondary selection criterion for the SBB›s license manager, Denise Gutknecht. For her, it was much more important for the tool to have functions that would allow the company cut software procurement costs. «The price wasn›t entirely unimportant, but better quality, a more user-friendly solution and customer-oriented services can save money over the long term,» she said.

Following an extensive tender process and provider evaluation, the SBB selected the brainwaregroup and its license management solution, Spider Licence, in mid-2012. In addition to the software›s range of functions and ergonomics, the provider›s willingness to take responsibility for the project›s success was the deciding factor behind the SBB›s selection.

IMPLEMENTATION & RESULTS

The project was implemented in just a few months, and the first savings were achieved shortly thereafter. As a result, the FTEs initially budgeted for license management dropped from 1.3 to 0.6. New software asset management (SAM) processes were introduced at the same time as the tool was implemented. Instead of only creating license balances reactively, Denise Gutknecht›s team took an active role as early as the requirement process and now helps the purchasing department determine requirements and purchase licenses — an important precondition for enabling cost savings.

The project

Task
SAM and license management

Scope
- 2,000 physical and virtual servers
- 22,000 desktops and notebooks
- approx. 3 million software assignments

Investment
80 service days

Software used
Spider Licence in a hosting environment

Project duration
July to December 2012

The SBB was able to use up-to-date evaluations to bring a whole new level of quality based on trust to its cooperation with software manufacturers. Gutknecht emphasizes: «We try to find new approaches and want to be proactive about providing information to manufacturers instead of waiting until we are audited. We have nothing to hide. Thanks to the clear compliance reports, we can be sure that we have all the correct licenses.»

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE & OUTLOOK

The SBB project is once again proof that redesigning processes has to go hand in hand with introducing software. Both the goal and realistic milestones need to be clearly defined. Denise Gutknecht also stresses that the necessary far-reaching changes would hardly have been possible without management›s support, and the results of the project would have been unsatisfactory. As license manager, she knows what she›s talking about. «The topic is often given short shrift because management is not given the opportunity to comprehend the potential of SAM and license management.» Moreover, she says, drawing on other practical experience, sufficient resources need to be budgeted for implementing the project and for the period following implementation, and internal and external areas of responsibility must be clearly defined. The SBB license management team considers the fact that it is part of IT operations instead of the purchasing department to be a major advantage. The license experts are thus much closer to the action and can take a more active license management approach in close cooperation with the software users.

«The new transparency at the touch of a button amazed even the manufacturers.»

Denise Gutknecht, SBB License Manager

Continuing to build the team›s expertise is especially important since virtualization, cloud computing and new technologies mean that new products are constantly being used, license metrics are constantly changing, and special rules that are difficult to monitor are constantly being added. Denise Gutknecht›s internal license management team therefore has to learn on the job, share experiences with other license managers at trade shows, and rely on the support of external SAM specialists as needed since there are no formal training programs for becoming a license manager.

Constant advancement is essential when it comes to SAM. As Victoria Barber, Gartner›s principal research analyst, puts it, «Implementing software asset management is like trying to build an earthquake-proof house on sand.» That›s something SBB license managers are also confronted with. Their next steps will involve analyzing software usage and dealing with software that employees install themselves. The team is currently defining the guidelines, objectives and strategies to implement these steps.
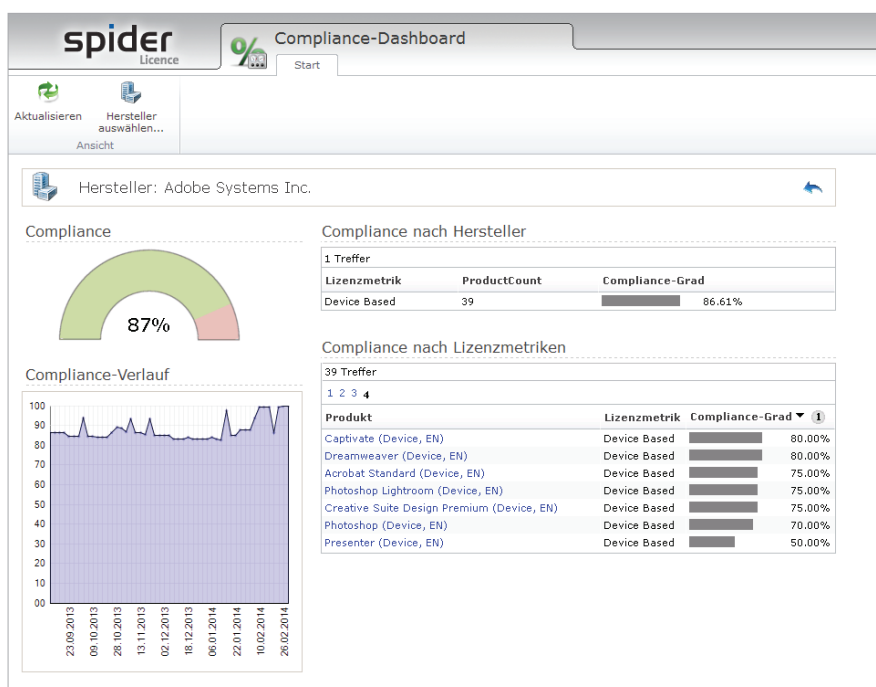
Ensuring compliance: The dashboard displays all licenses at a glance (demo, no SBB data used)