

Easy does it

Ram Dhaliwal

If you've struggled to work out the best way to buy your software, there's good news; Microsoft licensing is getting simpler.

Every year, Microsoft carries out a global satisfaction survey to find out what customers really think about its licensing programmes. On the basis of results over 2005-2006, Microsoft simplified its licensing programmes in 2006, by reducing documentation size and offering fewer programmes so that licensing is easier to understand and acquire.

To highlight the changes, the UK TechNet team held a series of popular licensing events. More dates are being scheduled over the next few months, and the event content will be available as a webcast from the UK TechNet site.

Based on feedback from those sessions, here are our top five tips to help you get the most out of your licences.

1. Actively manage your product and licence lifecycle.

For most organisations, one of the volume licensing programmes will be the most cost effective option for any new product – they reduce the price for any purchase of more than five licences. There are also lots of ways to pay for your licences and there are ways for spreading payments such as Software Assurance or Microsoft Finance.

2. Make sure it's genuine

According to the Business Software Alliance, around 27 percent of software in use in the UK is not genuine. So if you don't keep a close eye your software your organisation could be at risk in a variety of ways. Not only are the products being used illegally, but

around 30% of all counterfeit software has been found to include code changes. This might mean that viruses or malware have been included in the software, with all the security implications that implies. Check out: www.microsoft.com/resources/howtotell/uk/default.aspx for ways to tell whether your software is genuine.

3. Software Asset Management can save you money.

Software Asset Management (SAM) is a framework that can save you money. On average, customers see a 30% saving in the costs of licensing and maintenance when they make use of SAM. It helps you keep up-to-date records of the software you have on your company machines, and the licences you own for each piece of software. It's a framework rather than a single tool, and you can find out more about it at: www.microsoft.com/uk/sam/

In the first place SAM is about maintaining control – you know what your users are downloading and what software you have on your desktops. Secondly, it's about cost – you only pay for what you're using. The third benefit is security. When you know what people are loading onto their machines, you have more control.

One option well worth looking into is Self Start. This is a customer and partner driven programme aimed at organisations with more than 250 PCs whereby the customer uses a series of offline tools, resources and a Microsoft SAM partner to implement a

SAM within their organisation. When Self Start is complete, the customer or partner come back to Microsoft with their licence report, and synchronise that report with Microsoft's. They are then provided with a certificate showing that they have implemented a SAM solution as part of Self Start.

4. Use your benefits

Software Assurance comes with a wide range of benefits; for example there is new version rights and deployment support, you can make use of e-learning, technical training vouchers, and your business users can use the software on their home PCs.

So make sure you activate and consume those benefits. You've paid for it, so use it. There are lots of resources and guides on our website to help you activate and use Software Assurance benefits, find out more at: www.microsoft.com/uk/licensing

5. Renew sensibly

Organisations change and develop over time, and your software needs change too. If your company has undergone mergers or made acquisitions, you may need different products in different quantities, or want access to additional support services, training and new versions. We have tools and resources online such as the Microsoft Product License Advisor at: www.microsoft.com/licensing/mplahome.aspx so you can check that you've made the right decision. ■

RAM DHALIWAL is the
UK Licensing Programmes Manager
for Microsoft UK