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Software asset management today – Key topics, major challenges, and the right place for end-users to discuss them: the SAMS event series & lessons learned from Europe's most influential SAM & IT procurement community

DR. ĐORĐE TOMIĆ
June 22, 2017, 9:43 am   🔥 **6474**

A spectre is haunting the world of software publishers – the spectre of software asset management. Behind the scenes of new trends and allegedly revolutionary changes framed technological disruption, digitalization, industry of things, etc., a long lasting tug-of-war is taking place, almost invisible for most parts of the business: the relationship between the software publishers, mega-vendors & auditors on the one and the end-user companies' software asset and IT procurement managers on the other side.

The increasing number of software audits as well as the challenges related to new licensing models in the era of cloud services and as a service models raise numerous questions for software asset management and IT procurement professionals – Questions that urgently need to be discussed. For more than six years, the Software Asset Management Strategies (SAMS) event series has been offering the unique platform for such discussions: the only end-user driven forum and networking event format – highly interactive, involving SAM & IT Procurement experts from world's leading end-user companies and – completely free of publishers, mega-vendors and auditors – the perfect 'safe environment' for openly speaking about licensing issues, exchanging practical experiences and gathering new ideas with the ultimate aim: to reduce software costs and progress the overall business.

Moving from an operative license management to a strategic software asset management

When the first SAMS conference took place in 2011 in Berlin, hardly anyone could have imagined that six years later it will become the world's largest end-user driven SAM event gathering 400 SAM & IT Procurement professionals. In the course of these last 6 years, both the German language edition of the SAMS as well as the SAMS Europe (in English) brought together several thousands of participants, thus creating Europe's largest non-virtual SAM community. While most of the Fortune 500 global end-user companies have been on stage at the SAMS in the last years, many great SME have presented their current SAM projects as well.

In the beginning, one of the core topics was the establishing of an efficient SAM program. The question, also discussed in various discussion rounds that make the larger part of the program, aimed at finding best ways of transforming the companies' software license management into a perfectly strategic software asset management. While compliance still remains crucial, a much higher ability of SAM to reduce software spending is needed as well. Only in this way, SAM can not only make the company audit-proof, but also progress the overall business of the company.

Lots of efforts to set up such a SAM program were presented by companies from different industries at the SAMS. This finally led to establishing an own SAMS Award and a SAMS Europe Award for best-in-class SAM projects. Every year, both the candidates as well as the winners present amazing projects, different in terms of the company size, the budget, etc., but similar with regard to the demonstrated maturity of SAM.

Call a spade a spade: Software audits as a part of the publishers' business model?

Given the constant increase of software audits in the last couple of years, for many SAM the question arises whether these are meanwhile used as a veritable sales tool. But already in the early days of the SAMS, software audits represented one of the main discussion topics which led to the establishing of a special session called the Audit Debate. Over the last years hundreds of SAM have been discussing the possibilities to avoid or prevent audits, the best ways to prepare the site before the audit and how to defend the results of the audit. Departing from their practical experiences, in the Audit Debates the participants generally discuss these and further related questions, addressing also the issue of resources and technical expertise available and needed to successfully master audits. For many SAM the audit debates were most valuable preparations for their everyday working practice resulting in best tips from their peers regarding critical situations, for example helping them to find the best ways to push-back to vendors when multiple audits are running simultaneously or to prepare a software audit so that it is performed on their company's terms.

Cloud nine or dark clouds on the horizon? SAM in the era of cloud services

While all the mentioned topics remain as relevant today as they were years ago, the SAMS witnessed one significant thematic shift over the last years. Due to the technological development, cloud licensing has been evolving to one of the major topics at the SAMS as well. Regardless of the specific cloud service model – usually, most discussions refer to Software as a Service – the questions related to the biggest risks and hidden costs in cloud contracts and how to avoid them belong to the biggest concerns of most software asset and IT procurement managers. Discussing SAM with regard to

the differences between the old conventional on premise and new as a service models and the respective impact on specific issues such as the choice of SAM tools or even the expected shifts concerning software audits – is increasingly (literally) on the agenda of the SAMS. While there is no doubt that cloud services have the potential to strongly advance the business, enable innovations or expand the companies' portfolios, the costs and the licensing models of different cloud services still represent a crucial issue – lively discussed at the SAMS.

What is the relevance of SAM?

While it is true that the effects of software cost reduction will be different for different companies in different industries, the significance of an efficient Software Asset Management in a company can hardly be overestimated. If it is true that businesses which wish to become or stay successful need to embrace and foster the digital transformation, the relevance of Software Asset Management will definitely increase. A whole set of new requirements by the business regarding the new IT workplace of the future, the faster providing of applications, and the changing of IT infrastructures towards the software-defined-paradigm – all this goes hand in hand with a changing function of SAM. This is at the same time one of the questions which have been discussed at the SAMS more frequently in the last years: What is the position of SAM in the company, how to establish and implement a holistic approach, how to make SAM fully business enabling, and, last but not least, what is the relation between SAM and the management? While the debate goes on, it is clear that the good old days when the C-level had hardly any interest in SAM except for maintaining compliance are over.

Finally, it is also clear that one of the best and most efficient ways to increase SAM maturity is the direct exchange of experiences and ideas among peers – SAM and IT Procurement professionals. The SAMS event series is perfect environment to do this.

Join us at one of our SAMS events in Berlin or Boston, meet your peers, discuss your challenges and progress your SAM.