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Discovery Case Study

HOW CENTENNIAL DISCOVERY® PUT
MERTON COUNCIL IN THE DRIVING SEAT
OF A RECENT SOFTWARE LICENCE
INSPECTION FROM MICROSOFT

Overview

The prospect of a software licence inspection from Microsoft, FAST or the Business Software Alliance (BSA) has the power to turn many local government IT managers weak at the knees. Local authorities that fail a software licensing inspection can expect to be treated in a hard, unsympathetic manner by the BSA. Failure to pass an inspection can incur stringent penalties for local councils, in the form of negative publicity campaigns and severe fines of up to £50,000.



Rather than waiting in apprehension for the knock on the door by an anti-piracy organisation, local authorities should approach this matter in an honest and level headed manner. Local authority IT managers should be aware of the complete array of software licences under their authority. Although this can sound daunting – based on the good old-fashioned walk-around audit - there are a number of inventory management solutions on the market that make this once onerous task much simpler and straightforward.

The Need

In summer 1999, London Borough of Merton began rolling out a sizeable IT project to streamline Merton council's IT infrastructure following its rapid growth of previous years. Much work was done to consolidate all individual departmentalised systems - effectively enabling them to be corporately managed from a single central location. Tackling this consolidation and ensuring immunity from the Y2K bug simultaneously, left little resource to tackle what was clearly a growing problem - keeping an accurate and up to date record of all IT assets at the

Merton council, including software packages and accompanying licences.

In October last year Merton council was approached by Microsoft, with the purpose of conducting a software licensing audit of Merton's IT infrastructure, that was now upwards of 2000 licences.

Desktop PCs were used across the council for a whole range of tasks and processes. Many were of different technical specification and all carried a range of different software packages, each with its own licensing requirement. There was limited knowledge of what software was installed where, and many had the option of downloading and installing software components from the Internet of their own accord.

"By the time Microsoft contacted Merton council and announced its intentions, we had concluded that we needed a software tool that could be rapidly implemented and put to work straight away to facilitate the discovery and tracking of our IT assets. When the call came, we were actively researching the marketplace for such a package," comments Gurmel Bansal, Head of IT Services at the London Borough of Merton.



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The Solution

The initial meetings and correspondence with Microsoft were up-front, open and honest. Gurmel and his team in the IT Services Department at Merton worked in partnership with the Microsoft auditing representatives to discuss the council's software licence tracking strategy. Microsoft's team proved very useful at helping the IT Services Department to put together a strategy to complete the audit. "We were always working within a timeframe designated by Microsoft, who remained helpful and keen to help us complete our work within the deadline," comments Gurmel Bansal.

"If any organisation is working against the clock toward a licensing inspection, it is clear that whichever software tool they decide to use must be simple and effective from the moment of implementation," adds Bansal.

The London Borough of Merton considered and piloted several comprehensive tools with additional functionality. Each of these were capable of completing the task effectively, but would require a larger technical team to deploy and manage.

The IT Services division of the local authority chose Centennial Discovery®. "Centennial Discovery is simple and easy to deploy and has a level of intelligence built into it that means it requires less human resource to maintain it than the other solutions we considered. Centennial Discovery was, therefore, the clear choice for our requirements," comments Bansal.

The Benefits

Centennial Discovery has helped Merton to underpin the policies and working practices by identifying what licences were in use,

which licences were redundant and which areas of the software inventory required new licences, prior to the inspection.

"In order for us to resolve our software licensing issues quickly, we had to rely heavily on Centennial Discovery. It empowered us to swiftly identify and track all areas of our licensing requirements and rectify areas of non-compliance prior to the inspection - an achievement that would not have been possible with our existing systems," comments Bansal.

"It is clear from the events surrounding the BSA's inspection of another council in January of this year that this is a very serious issue that needs to be addressed immediately by all local government organisations." He also added that all organisations should have a clear set of policies regarding software licensing. "Given the complexity of software deployment in large organisations, it is now essential to have a software tracking tool such as Centennial Discovery to ensure compliance to licence terms and conditions. Since its implementation, Centennial Discovery has enabled us to make savings in both time and money, and has provided us with a sound foundation upon which to build a wider policy around the issue of software usage at the council."

Plans for the future

Merton council now plans to expand the usage of Centennial Discovery. It will continue to use the tool to identify and monitor the status of its software licences and to track and manage its IT hardware inventory. Merton also has plans for Discovery to play a crucial role in a forthcoming period of software migration

that will impact much of the council's IT inventory. Centennial Discovery is currently being employed to identify the physical location of relevant hardware, which will allow IT staff to pinpoint target assets quickly and efficiently, reducing the overall rollout time of the project.

Merton council also has plans to integrate Centennial Discovery with its IT service desk, enabling support staff to identify, monitor and respond to support queries remotely. Currently, each individual PC user is required to describe the specification and software status of their machine to the support staff - a process that is often complicated and time consuming. Once integrated, Centennial Discovery will automatically provide all such information by default, significantly reducing the time spent on each individual query.

Finally, the insights provided by the network monitoring capabilities of Centennial Discovery are being used to underpin a new software management policy at the council. The tool will be used to detect alterations to desktop machines and alert support staff to possible hazards and software security breaches. To this end, Centennial Discovery will significantly enhance the internal security of the IT systems at Merton council by protecting the systems against users downloading and installing software that may cause problems to the infrastructure.



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