Reduce IT Costs Through Software Application Utilization

In today's business environment, companies rely heavily on Information Technology (IT) to run their operations efficiently and effectively. This technology comes at high price tag for both products and services, and organizations are always looking for ways to reduce these costs.

In 2020, the year of a global pandemic, world economies have been forced to shut down to social distance their citizens and stop the spread of the virus. Some businesses have benefited from the pandemic while others have suffered. In addition to laying off or furloughing employees, struggling businesses have had to find creative ways to take out costs, or face bankruptcy.

How can your IT and Software Asset Management program help? Managing and optimizing your hardware and software assets is a great way to avoid unnecessary expenses. Whether or not your company has been negatively impacted by the pandemic, it's important to get a handle on your hardware and software estate, the actual need for and utilization of your IT assets, and where money is being spent. For example, taking an in-depth look at software utilization in your organization and making adjustments to licensing and maintenance is a great way to cut significant costs.

Software licensing and subscriptions represent a sizeable portion of every organization's IT budget. Often times, companies pay for licenses and subscriptions that are not being used, which is a huge waste of money. Many Software Asset Management (SAM) programs prioritize license compliance and focus on audit prevention and defense, while software utilization is tracked at a high level or pushed aside altogether. When software usage is treated as ancillary, organizations may track whether applications have been opened and accessed by the assigned user of a license on their device or devices. **While this information is extremely useful for license optimization, it doesn't tell the whole story.** If you are unable to track true levels of user interaction with an application, you may still be paying for licenses and more expensive product versions that your users really don't need. The ability to view and analyze the details of actual interaction by users provides the information necessary to make important licensing decisions that will impact your financial bottom line.

Many organizations focus on the shiny object – reconciliation - and leave a lot of money on the table. The first level of utilization is to identify if someone is using a license. The next level is to determine if someone simply opens it and then lets it sit in the background. In this situation, technically the end-user is not really using the license. Organizations need to justify the deployment of each license…is someone a power user, or just opening the application?

Let's examine software application utilization and how to go about reducing expenses on licensing.

Software Application Utilization

The Role of Usage Monitoring

Historically, organizations limited their IT Asset Management (ITAM) business practices to answering the question "What do I have?" and focused only on inventory and discovery data for hardware and software. While this information is critical to ensure an organization is in compliance with its software and hardware purchases, you need more to analyze buying strategy against today's complex goals.

Service-oriented IT departments need to tie their budgets to what is actually needed, not just preserve the environment as it was yesterday. And is the complexity necessary or can security control be tightened without loss of user functionality? This type of information provides the foundation of hardware and software utilization analysis.

Introducing Eracent's Software Application Utilization

Eracent's Software Application Utilization functionality provides detailed usage information, for both Microsoft Windows and UNIX-based software products, that IT managers need to make the best purchasing decisions. This optional functionality enables organizations to understand the effectiveness of their license and hardware purchasing strategy across platforms.

Software Application Utilization reports helps answer questions such as:

- "Do I need what I have? Can I retire any applications?"
- "Should I pay this maintenance bill? Should I buy more or am I over-licensed?"
- "Do I need to buy another laptop?"
- "Is paying for a true up the right thing to do?"
- "Are there any illegal applications being used from USB, Flash or CD-ROM drives?"

To answer these types of questions, the Software Application Utilization solution collects and analyzes real-time hardware and software usage information for specific machines or groups of machines, regardless of their physical location.

<u>Solution Benefits</u>

End users typically run many different applications simultaneously on their workstations. In many environments, Windows and UNIX applications are distributed across the enterprise, with some server-based and others operating on stand-alone computers. (Note that SaaS application utilization tracking gets its own Eracent module.) This complexity can make it difficult to understand how "windowed" applications are being utilized and the level of interaction with the end users of these applications. What if the application is running but minimized all the time?

Software Application Utilization provides the detailed usage metrics to understand and answer these critical utilization questions:

- What applications are being used
    - How long was an application open?
    - What time of day was it used?

- How applications are being used
    - Are users launching applications once and leaving them open and unattended all week long?
    - What applications are in focus, representing the true interaction needs of the users?

- Opportunities for savings
    - If an end user is not typing into an application, why is it open?
    - Is there a reader version that would meet the needs rather than the full-featured version?

- Office management/security issues
    - What if multiple users utilize a specific machine? What applications are on that machine? What if an end user "back-doors" into a system and uses services while another is already logged on?
    - Do we need to upgrade the computer or is there an issue with music or video files?

Utilization solutions that only read windowed desktop application usage information can only give partial answers to the big picture. Many licensed products have background processes and plug-ins which require a license for legitimate use. Eracent's Software Application Utilization will measure the usage information of background processes and go beyond to the application associated with the process. Accurate license usage with Eracent takes into account <u>both</u> the windowed applications <u>and</u> their associated non-windowed or UNIX-based services.

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Solution Strengths

Not all software utilization solutions are created equal. Many solutions tout impressive usage gathering capabilities. However, Eracent is the only solution on the market to provide the following advantages with minimal infrastructure, as well as the ability to scale to hundreds of thousands of endpoints.

Scalability

When instructed to do so, Eracent's Software Application Utilization functionality runs on end-user systems at all use times, executing automatically when the system is powered on. Only periodic uploads are needed to connect to the server to upload the collected software usage data.

When an end-user computer is not communicating with the server, or when off-line, the software usage data is cached locally in memory and to disk. When an end-user computer is operating, the utilization tool monitors the task list and records the start and stop time of each application, calculating the total time each application was run by the user and in use for each hour the machine was running.

By default, data is sent back to the server daily if it is available. If there is no new data, the client will not attempt to connect and no data will be sent. Null sets are not transmitted.

Configurability

The solution records the data on a user-defined reporting interval, which may be set via the ITMC web interface by an administrative user. The default setting is hourly, recording on a 00:00 to 24:00 clock. Usage tracking can be configured to include all executables (with exceptions), or a specific list of executables, enumerated by the user. These settings are also done via the web interface by an administrative user.

Reports for Software Application Utilization provide a bottom-line of the total usage by and of each application per reporting hour. Customers may aggregate data and reports to match their company's structure, with user and organization default aggregations. Reports include total files per application and changes in the total number over time. Using the flexible web-based reporting system, IT managers can examine any of the available data, analyze all aspects of their deployed software and the extent to which it is used in the enterprise.

Detailed Usage Information

End users typically have a number of different applications open on their workstations whether they are working with "windowed" or UNIX applications. With the level of accuracy and completeness available through Software Application Utilization, software management decisions can now be based on facts. It is simply not enough to know that the application is installed, or even that it is running. A proactive, mature SAM program goes to the next level of sophistication by reviewing the application mix on a workstation and determining whether an application needs to be there. Does the application need to be part of a standard image or a special request? Does use justify the expense of including the application in the standard image? To answer these questions, Software Application Utilization provides the followed detailed usage metrics to help understand and answer your critical utilization questions:

- • Open, Close and Total Running Time (all platforms)
- • Launch Count (all platforms)
- • User ID
- • I/O Bytes
- • CPU Time
- • Foreground Time
- • Keystroke Count*

(When the Eracent solution tracks keystrokes and mouse clicks, it does not track content in any way, so there is no visibility into what the user is typing.)

Concurrent License Management

Concurrent licenses are particularly difficult to manage and are frequent candidates for usage monitoring. There is no other way to determine how many licenses are necessary to meet the needs of your user community.

Some products include a hard stop at the licensed number and as a consequence, the extent of dissatisfaction of the users is unknown. For products without the built-in hard stop, compliance becomes the issue. To address these questions, Eracent provides real time, concurrent usage statistics such as:

- • Real Time Number of Concurrent Users
- • Real Time Maximum Number of Concurrent Users
- • Timestamp of Maximum Concurrent Users

How Does It Work?

The Software Application Utilization module requires a very small application to be installed on each end user device, and transparently integrates with the information stored on the ITMC™ collection server. Using Eracent's flexible web-based reporting system, IT managers can access any cross section of the available data, examining all aspects of their deployed software and the extent to which it is used in the enterprise.

To summarize the process, each end-user machine running Software Application Utilization sends usage data to the Eracent central server database. The Software Application Utilization application executes on the end-user systems when a system is in use and automatically starts when the system is powered on. Periodic connections to the server are all that is needed to upload the collected software usage data.

When not communicating with the server, or when off-line, the system caches the software usage data locally in memory and to disk. When the end-user computer is operating, the software monitors the use, calculating the total time each application was run by the user and the computer was in use. Data is reported on a user-defined schedule, reporting total usage by and of each application per reporting hour. CPU percentage use is unnoticeable, remaining essentially 0% while it is active.

Reports can be configured to match a customer's organizational structure, providing details that are aggregated at the user and business unit level. Ad-hoc query capability adds flexibility for quickly sharing data, and custom queries may be saved for future use.

How to Use the Data

Once the Software Application Utilization solution has generated the data that your organization needs, how do you use it to make important financial decisions? It's very likely that your data shows that there are numerous software licenses in your environment that are either not being used or are underutilized. This presents the opportunity for the following:

- **Automated License Harvesting.** Eracent's Software Application Utilization monitoring enables customers to set thresholds that reflect their definition of "unused" or "underutilized" for individual products. Installations that do not meet these criteria can be shared with SCCM or other software distribution tools for automated de-installation and license harvesting, enabling re-deployment to another person or machine.

- **Renegotiating maintenance.** Either before or at renewal time, work with your software suppliers to make adjustments to your maintenance so that it reflects actual software usage. Depending on the size of your environment and amount of unused software, these approaches can save up to tens of thousands or millions of dollars, presenting a great opportunity to reduce IT costs.

Conclusion

With Eracent's Software Application Utilization functionality, your organization will realize significant cost savings by getting the most efficient use out of existing hardware and software, gaining leverage with suppliers, and avoiding unnecessary purchases.

To learn more, contact Eracent at info@eracent.com or visit www.eracent.com.