



Plan International get to grips with its software management through Concorde Solutions

The Client

Plan International is one of the world's largest children's development organisations, operating in over 50 developing countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas to promote child rights and lift millions of children out of poverty.

Headquartered in Woking, Surrey, Plan has national, regional and country offices in 70 different locations around the globe, and 250 sites in the field.

The Challenge

As with any enterprise business, IT plays an integral part in the successful running of Plan's operation. Similarly, like every large organisation, its software infrastructure had become very complex. With many types of software from over 60 different vendors, Plan had difficulty maintaining visibility of its software estate.

As a result, an inordinate amount of time and effort went into keeping track of software, according to David Thomson, IT Service Support Lead. "The manual nature of tracking licenses made it difficult to enforce common standards for software management or to gain a single point-in-time view of the status of each software asset. It also required the consolidation of information from a variety of spreadsheets and systems," he says. "We were therefore keen to reduce administrative effort and create a joined-up view of our software assets that would enable more effective control."

Whilst Plan had always endeavored to be conscientious about tracking its software, Thomson says it had become clear that the organisation needed to implement a long-term Software Asset Management (SAM) strategy. "Historically, we lacked a clear understanding of our software estate in terms of compliance and numbers, so we urgently needed to put controls in place," he says.

"As well as satisfying the requirements of our software vendors and organisations like FAST, we needed to ensure that we weren't buying more licenses than we needed or that we weren't using more than we were entitled to. Being an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) with a limited budget, we recognised that we didn't have the necessary skills or resources to properly manage our software estate. Indeed, Plan previously implemented a SAM tool internally, but this proved unsuccessful for precisely that reason," he adds.

The IT services provided by Plan were published to the Internet and hosted from a co-located hub in London's Docklands. "Whilst we manage and support the organisation's hardware and software internally from Woking, our offices around the world essentially access our IT services, such as email, intranet, general ledger and other corporate services, via a hosted Web facility," says Thomson.

"From a SAM perspective, we therefore needed to manage all software running on the Windows servers in the hub and those machines running in our head office, as well as monitoring the Client Access Licenses (CALs) our users require to access the services hosted in London. The responsibility for managing operating systems and locally installed desktop software in our offices around the world rests with the local IT team in each individual country."

"Using Concorde's Solution, we are now able to view our compliance position at a glance for any vendor we choose at any given time. And because they are not a software reseller, Concorde are able to give us impartial advice and guidance as and when we require it."

David Thomson

IT Services Support Lead

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Software Clarity and Control

The Solution

After evaluating suppliers, Plan chose Concorde and its Cloud-based platform; Core Control to deliver a SAM solution whose tools and reporting mechanisms would harness the organisation's entire software asset inventory, software usage, contract terms, purchase order data, and license compliance management.

The Concorde Solution is now run on a month-by-month basis, whereby Concorde receives a monthly update of software purchases, together with a corresponding installation report containing data via Microsoft SCCM. This data is uploaded to Core Control, which then carries out the complex process of reconciling Plan's software purchases against its installations.

"This shows us if we're compliant and whether we've purchased too many or too few licenses at any given time," says Thomson. "A conference call then takes place each month between us and a Concorde license analyst to discuss our current licensing position. Whilst the installation report details lots of different software, the problem is that, in many cases, it isn't always possible to quickly identify the particular edition of a product. It will typically give some idiosyncratic name which the vendor chooses to attach to that execution file. It therefore requires the specialist knowledge of an organisation like Concorde to determine which file name links to which license."

What complicates matters further is that Plan's hub is virtualised, which has major licensing implications, says Thomson. "Whilst virtualisation allows us to run with fewer physical servers, thereby reducing our hardware and power costs, it increases complexity in the area of software licensing. An important aspect of the project has therefore been to extend the use of Core Control to our virtualised estate. Concorde has developed their solution to enable them to pull information from the physical hosts as well as from the virtual machines and thereby distinguish the relationship between the two."

The Outcome

As well as giving Plan much greater transparency of software running on the servers in its hub and head office, plus the CALs enabling its 8,000 employees worldwide to access the IT services hosted in the hub, Thomson says Concorde's Subscription Solution has enabled the organisation to free up resources. "Keeping track of software previously required the full-time involvement of one member of our IT team, plus a proportion of my time," he says. "Thanks to the service provided by Concorde, it requires substantially less IT resource, and only around 10% of my time."

By handling the day-to-day management of its software assets, Concorde allows Plan's IT team to focus on more essential tasks, and enables the organisation to monitor deployments, upgrades and the removal of software assets in future. Whilst the scope of the initial project focused on Microsoft software, Concorde has since developed its use of Core Control to include other major vendor's products.

Thomson says Concorde has enabled Plan to stabilise its software licensing position thanks to a more structured approach, and a central repository for software license records, whilst managing the software install data from multiple inventory tools. "As well as speeding up the approval process for software purchases, Core Control puts us in a better position to plan and budget for new licenses against anticipated growth in headcount. It means we're never in danger of buying too few or too many licenses."

It has also enabled the organisation to mitigate risk and protect itself against potential vendor audits. "The Concorde managed service has ensured we are now fully compliant with the major software licensing standards and provided us with much more granular information about our software estate. Using Concorde's Subscription Solution, we are now able to view our compliance position at a glance for any vendor we choose at any given time," says Thomson. "And because they are not a software reseller, Concorde are able to give us impartial advice and guidance as and when we require it," he concludes.

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