

Counting the cost

The prospect of having to visit 180 desks obviously holds little appeal for John Daly, IT manager of Lisney Auctioneers.

Weighed against that concern, however, is a need to make sure that all of the software running on computers on those desks is legitimate, licensed and paid for — an issue common to every business that uses IT. There are stiff financial penalties — up to the prospect of prison time — for any company in breach of their licence agreements.

In Lisney's case, performing all of the necessary checks could have involved a time-consuming trek across four offices — three in Dublin, one in Cork — to track down every program running on every PC. To that end the company first installed the software auditing tool Centennial Discovery, around 18 months ago, to keep track of the various applications and programs that every user has installed on his or her machine.

As Daly sees it, there are two benefits to conducting a software audit this way. "We're not buying licences we don't need and we don't need the manpower to look at 180 PCs; the software does it for us," he says.

"From a licensing perspective, we've moved to a situation where we can say 'yes, we're compliant,'" Daly adds. "In that sense, it's taken the headache away. From there, we can buy the exact amount of licences, as opposed to making an educated guess where there's always the fear that you're spending more than you need to."

An extra benefit is that the tool also shows Daly what additional programs are installed on individual PCs, such as MP3 player software, which would be in breach of company policy. "There's quite a bit of set-up needed at





www.servaplex.com

A Servaplex Ltd
17A Mellifont Avenue
Dun Laoghaire,
Co. Dublin

T +353 (0)1 2304242

E tmcalpin@servaplex.com



www.centennial-software.com

UK +44 (0) 1793 836200
USA +1 503-238-7455
Australia +61 2 9973 4151
Germany +49 (0) 6047 62881
SA +27 (0) 83 604 0 603

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the outset but it's certainly quicker than to physically visit each machine," Daly remarks. "From looking at one screen, I can map out the whole organisation."

The environment for buying and using software correctly has changed in the past couple of years, reports Ian Gavin, managing director of the Dublin-based technology provider Ionet. "People are more amenable to going out and buying the product once you tell them, 'you haven't paid for this, you're breaking the law'."

The numbers appear to bear this out. A recent study by the industry watchdog group the Business Software Alliance found that the rate of software piracy in Ireland had decreased last year. Nevertheless, the BSA estimates that 37pc of the packaged software installed on Irish PCs last year was illegal.

The penalties for non-compliance would be much more than the cost of running audit software; there are several free versions available for evaluation, with the option to buy afterwards for continued use. "The benefit for the customer is they know exactly what they own and exactly what they're licensed for," adds Gavin.

"A lot of customers don't really understand the difference between 'I own the disk' versus the ability to put the software on all PCs in the company," he points out. In his experience, it is less a case of companies knowingly flouting the rules and trying to save a few euro on software costs — more a case of not knowing, or simply being too focused on the business to keep track of who is using what.

But as with so many things in life and law, ignorance is no defence and a safer policy all round is to get compliant and stay that way.

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