



Zones deconstructs and renews complex software history

An enterprise-level company in the travel industry based in Seattle, Washington, found the need to undergo a rigorous analysis of software purchase transactions dating back seven to ten years.

The challenge

The company's software purchases were made from multiple providers, e.g., software publishers and large account resellers, and when combined equaled 11,129 transactions. The large amount of data to be analyzed and the timelines to integrate the data into other strategic initiatives created barriers, in that, other projects were dependent on this information to be successful. Software purchases, in part, provide insight into a company's software entitlement and understanding the entitlement helps in effectively managing the investment. This project had to be completed manually, as information technology asset management solutions with automated features were not available.

The project

Zones received historical purchase transaction data in multiple spreadsheets with discreet and separate formats. The transactions included non-software-related purchases, e.g., computer hardware, hardware accessories and peripherals. Before the analytics phase, Zones had to get better acquainted with the data. As such, multiple databases were created to manage the large amount of transactions using Microsoft® Access.

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Client:

Large travel company
based in Pacific Northwest

IT Project:

Rigorous analysis of software
assets, software asset management
strategy and process.

Challenge:

Reconciling multiple sources,
formats, license contracts
and duplications.

Solution:

Baseline current state of
software entitlement through
consolidating, organizing
and analyzing all
corresponding data.

Results:

Clear understanding of entitlement
and compliance under a
new software business practice.

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This note to express our appreciation to Zones for the SAM related value added services provided to us in 2011. The resources and methodologies used by Zones exceeded our expectations. The information provided has helped mature our software category and improved the way we manage our licenses. We look forward to working with you to continue to drive improvements in 2012.

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The process

Define the relevant data

Preparing and organizing the transactions to determine the relevant data is an essential step in our process before undertaking the analysis that included: data mining, culling and cataloging. Zones process methodology included preserving the original data provided by the client, and making copies of that data to be utilized during the analysis phase of the project. Of the original 11,129 purchase transactions, 7,746 were identified as software related transactions.

Normalize the relevant data

As the transactions came from multiple sources in various formats with different software publishers, product/version naming conventions, data normalization of the relevant transactions was again an essential requirement before data analytics.

Identify duplicate data

Again, as the transactions came from multiple sources in various formats, Zones compared data from the original software providers with correlating data from the software publishers. In the end, Zones had to identify duplicate records and cull the data before the analysis.

Confirm additional entitlements—maintenance coverage

This portion of the project involved identifying software transactions that included maintenance; uncovering maintenance purchased separately; and determining maintenance coverage periods, e.g., beginning and ending coverage dates.

Problem: The original transaction data provided by the client did not include maintenance coverage periods.

To determine which transactions had maintenance indicators, a review of the software product description for each transaction was studied looking for clues.



Once a determination was made, maintenance beginning and end dates were projected by using the transaction purchase/invoice date as the starting point.

Conduct license analytics

The ultimate goal of this project was to baseline the client's current state of software entitlement as it related to historical purchase transactions. After consolidating and organizing the licensing data with correlating data from software publishers, Zones took on the arduous task of analyzing the level of entitlement, line-by-line, that included:

- Software Publisher, Product Title Description, Version, License Quantity
- Product Maintenance
- Technical Support Maintenance
- Subscription Service
- End User License Agreement (EULA)
- Product Downgrade/Upgrade provisions (policy, product release)
- Perpetual License
- Term License
- Upgrade License
- License Bundles: Concurrent, Multi-User
- License Category: Server, Client, Subscription

Present final reports

It is commonly known that preparing and organizing the results of data analytics in usable report formats is essential in communication with the client. This is complicated due to the amount of information under review. And producing a report that is not scaled down can be overwhelming, and often meaningless. The challenge was to create subsets of the information for the client to digest in small portions, while maintaining a view into the complete data analyzed.

Zones created custom reports for each software publisher in scope using Microsoft® Excel workbook/worksheets. Where applicable, within each report, multiple worksheets were utilized to include a separate view for:

- Project status/metrics report showing progress on the entire review
- Complete view of the data at the software publisher level
- Custom summary pivot reports showing the data in smaller subsets
- Summary specialized data analytics
- Publisher references on licensing, product policies and version release notes

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A successful software asset management plan

Baseline study

A baseline study is an analysis of the current situation and helps provide information to help plan the starting point for a program or project. This initial step provided insight into the level of entitlement of the current software investment.

Entitlement

Software entitlement includes having an understanding of the rights to benefits specified by the kind of product purchased, and the rights provided under correlating software licenses, and/or contracts. Going through this detailed assessment provides that exact understanding.

Financial management

Financial management of software investments is similar to managing any monetary resource within an organization.

The Zones process includes strategic financial planning, forecasting, standard operating procedures, monitoring of performance management metrics and governance oversight to control processes. This project helped to enable the client with a financial view of the software investment to execute on the financial planning process.

Optimization management

Optimization management of software investments is similar to optimizing any monetary resource within an organization. The Zones process includes finding alternative methods to manage the existing software investments and the activities that impact outcomes, e.g., procurement, allocation and utilization; and to attain the highest or maximum results. This project helped to enable the customer with a view of software investments to execute on the optimization planning process, e.g., what was purchased, who made the purchase, and type of purchase.

Sustainability

Sustaining the client's software investment includes a development plan aimed to accomplish long-term goals while reducing/eliminating negative impacts to the software investments. Examples include centralized purchasing vs. purchases made outside of the channel and understanding the software entitlement inventory before making a new purchase. Zones helped to enable the customer with a financial view of software investments from a purchased inventory position. Having insight into the software entitlement inventory enables the client in financial planning of new purchases.

Due-diligence

Due-diligence practices include acting responsibly in the evaluation of risks for all transactions conducted by an organization, and is guided by its' leadership, subsequently disseminated to the operations level for execution. Key operational personnel are guided by this expectation and through day-to-day operations, performance management metrics and financial reporting, communicate upward to the organization's leadership on the results of due-diligence efforts. This project helped to enable the client with a view of the software investment at the transaction level, and insight into any potential risk associated with the purchasing levels, and individuals/cost centers making software purchases.

Compliance

Compliance practices include conducting recurring audits on internal standard operation procedures, financial transactions and physical/book inventories to confirm whether the organization is following the rules and regulations prearranged by its internal controls, and/or as defined by contractual terms and conditions. Having insight of the software entitlement inventory provides a better understanding of the level of compliance when the data is reconciled against correlating software installations, and end user access/utilization.

Zones establishes software best practice

In the end, Zones was able to not only sort and categorize a quagmire of software licenses and contracts, but build a best practice for controlling and managing software procurement, deployment, and asset control into the future.

Zones services delivery process follows IT industry best practices methodology. Zones works collaboratively with clients to apply business insights to complex business challenges and develop innovative, cost-effective solutions. Zones licensing and software asset management services deliver immediate gains and long-term benefits.

Contact Zones IT professionals for help with the procurement, deployment and management of your software investments.