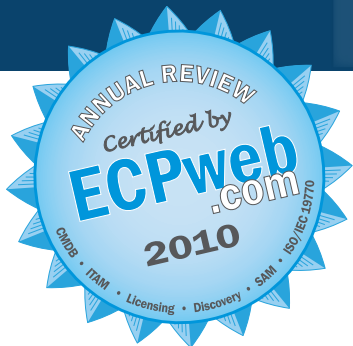


TOOLS MANAGER

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Aspera | SmartTrack 3.1

Aachen, Germany-based Aspera GmbH (aspera.com) is one of the first tool providers to recognize the importance of an entitlement-centric approach to software license management. The company is agile and responds quickly to customers' requests for enhanced functionality. Founded in 2000, Aspera has grown to more than one hundred installations worldwide split almost evenly between its software-as-a-service and on-premises offerings. Expert at software inventory reconciliation and license data management, business in these service-only areas is growing. The client base outside of Germany and in the U.S. is expanding, due in part to partner Boston-based iET Solutions (iet-solutions.com).* Well-known clients include BMW Group, Deutsche Bank, Deutsche Telekom, Siemens, BASF, Mercedes Benz and Bayer. In this review, we take a look at major enhancements included in v.3.1 released in April 2010.

Feature and function

Web-based and platform-independent, SmartTrack offers role-based access to data, dashboards and reports across the tool's five modules: SmartTrack (ST), Inventory Connect Module (ICM), Contract Management Module (CMM), FlowControl (FC) and Finance Module (FM). The company does not offer an auto-discovery tool and the ICM contains standard API connectors to many popular tools, leveraging extract, transform and load (ETL) functionality for data import. ICM also maps data from flat-file formats, including

CSV, XLS and XML. Version 3.1 adds a connector for ISO/IEC 19770-2 software identification tags. Although few software products are offered today with these tags, Aspera views it as a prerequisite in competitive situations. SmartTrack customers can quickly download, install, apply and configure version updates, which are simplified with process automation.

The software catalog function is improved in v.3.1 by an import pre-processor (IPP). The processor uses a set of tables to review raw software inventory data and compare it to known signatures. In addition, complex rules may be specified and combined to identify suites and single components. In previous versions, signatures were mapped directly to products and this enhancement permits greater accuracy and lets the user fine tune the results. The IPP is used to process data in batches (i.e., from different tools) and can be used for simple or complex product suites. The IPP creates a CSV file that can be reviewed and later imported into the inventory module.

The IPP also evaluates the effective license requirements (e.g., how many licenses are required for a designated number of machines or usage) for a given inventory set and generates a compliance snapshot. Currently there is a basic metric engine and one for IBM processor value units (PVU). The software inventory is analyzed and the correct engine is selected. This enhancement can tackle IBM PVUs, Oracle databases, Microsoft Windows Server, Microsoft SQL Server Processor, virtualization and machine- or

*iET Solutions resells SmartTrack under the name iET Entitlement Center.

Managing Editor

Steven Russman

Editor

Carolyn Schwaar

Published by ECP Media LC

400 North First Street
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48103 U.S.A.
ECPweb.com
Office and fax: 1.734.930.1925

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user-based license models. Separating the compliance function in this way improves the throughput and compliance-check function. The compliance-check function presents the user with the full picture of both the raw data and the effective license usage on a single screen.

Using the CMM, customers command powerful entitlement capabilities. Contract Management understands per-device, per-user, named-user, per-processor, concurrent-use, MIPS and a total of 274 licensing models, including publishers' variations. Out-of-box the tool can reconcile imported asset information against a corresponding catalog of hundreds of thousands of SKUs. Each SKU matches one-to-one to a specific contract from one of more than 100 publishers, mining values for upgrade, downgrade, license metric and other contractual parameters. Aspera manages its 100,000-SKU catalog and other application content internally.

Customers can roll-up versions and suites, account for secondary-use rights and downgrades, tie licenses to individual machines and users, and break down compliance reports by organizational and geographical divisions as well as by publisher and product. They can also allocate licenses among owners and intended users for more precise assignments of license ownership—a handy feature for service providers and shared-services organizations. Upgrade, downgrade and other entitlement attributes are managed via a check-box matrix associated with the license. Version 3.1 added functionality enhancing tracking of versions permitted for use under a designated entitlement. For example, end users can add or remove products and configure downgrade paths by product via a drag and drop interface. A “license move” report was added, handy for multinational organizations, which displays licenses moved within a given time period, revealing the owner's cost center and changes to the country of use.

Enhancements to the data model in v.3.1 made possible other changes. Documents (i.e., contracts, license certificates or shipping forms) can be uploaded and associated or linked with any object in the tool. A single license can have different types of entitlement (i.e., home use, second machine, server access) which, in turn, can be associated with different users, machines, locations, etc. This logic also applies to suites or bundles of titles acquired together, allowing the user to designate license variations applicable to the bundle.

The FlowControl module integrates contract management into a broader workflow that includes procurement functions and the Finance Module. If a customer requests software for which no

licenses are available, a purchase request is initiated through the SKU catalog. Workflow also ties into e-mail alerts and notifications to keep administrators apprised of license expirations and maintenance renewal periods. Introduced in 2007, the FM adds cost planning and chargeback, drawing upon the CMM and FC to undertake complex calculations in 38 currencies. A report new to v.3.1 offers a single view of contracts, licenses available, downgrade rights, true-up and costs for a selected title. Users can also associate roles with a product and create a report of authorized users showing a consolidated list by organizational level or responsibility. This report helps identify products that do not have assigned users or product owners, and users who do not have authorization. Users may select to use or not use a workflow or modify steps in an existing workflow, however, they may not create new workflows. Aspera will add new workflows as customers request them.

Enhancements to the procurement function in v.3.1 simplify the ordering process. Requests to purchase software are added to a shopping cart and when SKUs are selected, one or more suppliers may be designated by SKU for each order. Requests may be consolidated in batches and sent to procurement. In the last version an order was generated for each request. Customers can also add supplier-specific part numbers, in addition to manufacturer part number.

Each module's colorful reports are easy to customize, schedule, distribute and export. New reports in this version include a set for vendor management (e.g., "what percent of a publisher's software is being used"). Overall, reporting is improved by including all available reports on SmartTrack's report menu and tags were added to improve navigation. New reports are easily added for view by other users.

The customer base for SmartTrack ranges in size from 500 to 200,000-plus workstation seats, though Aspera gears the product more to the midmarket and enterprise crowd. The toolset is available in English and German.

ECP evaluation

Aspera is one of the first tool providers to introduce an entitlement-centric approach to license management and has worked to improve and fine tune the tool through an aggressive release schedule. The entitlement-centric approach is superior to machine-count methods because it is expandable to a wide range of license models and considers versions permitted under the license agreement. SmartTrack exceeds our expectations in software license management and enhancements to the software catalog make it a technology leader. Well suited to companies of all sizes, the tool appeals to those looking for software-as-a-service and businesses with a fixed IT asset management tool infrastructure looking for leading-edge license management functionality.

Category	Point
Company Product name	Aspera SmartTrack v.3.1
Business Value Rating	★★★★
Life cycle management	▶
Software reconciliation library	▲
Reporting, dashboards and analytics	▶
Procurement and requisition	▶
Financial management	▶
Contract management	▶
Software license agreements	▲
Vendor management	
License harvesting	▲
License metric tool	▲
Feature/Function Rating	★★★
Data collection	
Inventory management	▶
Software catalog	▲
Software usage	
User interface	▲
Data fields	
Workflow management	▶
Software-as-a-Service (SaaS)	Yes
On-premises	Yes
Event notification and interoperability	▶
Security and audit control	▶
Wizards and tools	▶
Virtualization support	▶
IT Service Management Components	
Service level agreement management	
Change management	
Problem management	
Incident management	
ISO/IEC 19770-1 Conformance	
Control environment	Full
Planning and implementation	Partial
Inventory management	Partial
Verification and compliance	Partial
Operations management processes and interfaces	Partial
Life-cycle process interfaces for SAM	Partial
Misc.	
Last reviewed	Feb. '09
Target customer	S/M/L
Languages	English, German



For ECP's *Guide to Selecting, Categorizing and Evaluating Tools*, including an explanation of ratings and definitions of terms, visit IBSMA.com.

Notes:

(L) Indicates limited contract management functionality.

Target Customer (no. desktops)

Large: > 5,000

Medium: 1,000 to 5,000

Small: < 1,000

Above expectations: ▲

Meets expectations: ▶

Below expectations: ▼