Be Wary of Audit Tools Promoted by Software Auditors
By Christopher Barnett

Most companies with more than a handful of computers in their IT environments rely on the results of network-inventory tools to gather the deployment data needed for accurate software audits. Without the tools, a business would be required to assign valuable resources to manually looking at the titles installed on each machine. Therefore, it should not be surprising when a vendor requesting an audit suggests or even requires the use of an automated tool to assist with the discovery process.

Problems arise, however, when the auditor insists on the use of a particular tool (often, a tool that is owned and made available by the auditor). I have discussed in the past the perils of deploying the IBM License Metric Tool (ILMT) in support of license-verification activities associated with IBM software products. However, IBM is not the only vendor with a dedicated audit solution.

Recently, Autodesk has requested that businesses provide deployment data from its Autodesk Inventory Advisor (AIA) tool. In some instances, the AIA output sometimes presents an inaccurate picture of a company's actual Autodesk product deployments. For instance, AIA reports may indicate that there are numerous installations of one of Autodesk's expensive CAD solutions; however, following a manual inspection may reveal that the only Autodesk products actually installed were free viewer programs that would be largely irrelevant to the outcome of an audit.

Businesses facing Autodesk audits need to remember that they are not without defenses against Autodesk's aggressive tactics with respect to audit inventory gathering. First, it is important to keep in mind that while Autodesk has the right to demand an inspection of a company's Autodesk product deployments under the terms of the standard Autodesk EULA, there is nothing in that EULA that requires a company to deploy AIA in response to Autodesk's audit demands. Second, even if a company agrees to deploy AIA and to provide AIA results to Autodesk, there is nothing to keep the company from deploying a second tool to help verify the AIA output and avoid the prospect of reporting inaccurate audit information. Finally, while Autodesk currently may enjoy a substantial share of the CAD market, companies with concerns regarding Autodesk's license terms and audit tactics should use those concerns as factors when considering their options for CAD software licensing. Autodesk does what it does because it can. To the extent that companies start transitioning to other products in response to Autodesk's current licensing positions, the company eventually may respond with more customer-friendly policies.

About the author Christopher Barnett:

Christopher represents clients in a variety of business, intellectual property and IT-related contexts, with matters involving trademark registration and enforcement, software and licensing disputes and litigation, and mergers, divestments and service transactions. Christopher's practice includes substantial attention to concerns faced by media & technology companies and to disputes involving new media, especially the fast-evolving content on the Internet.

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