How to Select the Right Software Asset Management Tools

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Initiatives: Sourcing, Procurement and Vendor Management Leaders

The process of selecting a SAM tool (or tools) is crucial, but often overwhelming. To make the right choice, sourcing, procurement and vendor management leaders must develop specific use cases, identify gaps in their organization’s data and capabilities, and perform a technical analysis.

Overview

Key Findings

■ Too often, organizations evaluate tools to support software asset management (SAM) before they have established a clear set of objectives, which leads to the selection of a tool (or tools) that doesn’t support their goals.

■ Defining SAM tool requirements and use cases can be a difficult exercise for sourcing, procurement and vendor management (SPVM) leaders, including those responsible for IT asset management (ITAM), due to competing priorities and different perspectives among stakeholders

■ Time pressure to purchase tools often causes SPVM leaders to rely heavily on vendors’ demos and promises, which results in potentially wasted investment that doesn’t adequately fulfill their needs.

Recommendations

Sourcing, procurement and vendor management (SPVM) leaders, including those responsible for ITAM, looking to invest in a SAM tool or tools should:

■ Define and document use cases for SAM tools, based on defined SAM tool strategy, processes and business objectives.

■ Evaluate capability gaps and requirements, based on a set of use cases specifically designed for their in-scope software publishers.

■ Perform an in-depth technical analysis of SAM tools’ ability to meet (or exceed) the requirements of the use cases for their critical software publishers.

Introduction
SAM is essential to help organizations meet the growing challenge of managing their software spend and the associated risks posed by underlying software assets. These challenges make managing an organization’s diverse and extensive software portfolio a daunting task.

As a result, SPVM leaders are investing in SAM tools to help automate and simplify the effort. However, due to increasingly complex infrastructures, complex licensing models, and anticipation of an expanded remit to support SaaS consumption management, selecting the “right tool” is proving challenging for them. Time pressure, driven by software audits and cash flow issues, often leads to them selecting SAM tools without having conducted adequate due diligence.

The following questions commonly asked by users of Gartner's client inquiry service reflect how confusing and misunderstood SAM tool expectations can be and the common expectation that a SAM tool will solve all SAM challenges:

- “What’s the best tool out there in the market?”
- “I want a tool that will automate everything — what should I buy?”
- “How quickly can a tool make me compliant?”

Simply deploying an enterprise SAM tool may not suffice. As an SPVM leader, you must ensure that tool selection occurs only after you have a clear understanding of what you need and why — an understanding gained by following these three steps (see also Figure 1):

1. **Develop use cases:** This enables you to focus on measurable outcomes that are relevant to your organization in terms of addressing its current and future needs.

2. **Identify gaps in data and capabilities:** This ensures you build on existing data and increase your organization’s capabilities to achieve the SAM and stakeholder objective of actively managing in-scope publishers.

3. **Perform a technical analysis:** Use your own data to conduct a proof of concept (POC) or other in-depth demonstration to test the outcomes for your use cases before making a financial investment in a SAM tool.
Steps to Minimize the Risks of SAM Tool Selection

1. Develop Use Cases
2. Identify Gaps in Data & Capabilities
3. Perform a Technical Analysis

Source: Gartner 721644_C

Analysis

Define Use Cases for SAM Tools, Based on SAM Strategy and Business Objectives

As organizations scale up, their investment in software grows exponentially, at the same time as stakeholders apply pressure to reduce cost, maintain compliance and manage risk. SPVM leaders are left in a position of not knowing what to prioritize, or how, and often try to deliver too much. This often leads to failed SAM initiatives in organizations that lack a clearly articulated SAM tool strategy and scope.

Before investing in SAM tools, you must ensure you have:

- A clear SAM tool strategy ² (see Mature Your SAM Discipline by Investing in the Right SAM Tool).
- An achievable scope, aligned with stakeholders’ objectives.
- A clear business case for investment (see Toolkit: Build the Business Case for Implementing Effective Software Asset Management).
- Support from an executive sponsor.

Given the huge number of tools available to support SAM, ³ you have a wide choice, which significantly complicates effective tool selection. Gartner’s interactions with clients indicate that SPVM leaders often do not focus on creating use cases to serve as the basis of their tool selection. But building appropriate use cases is of paramount importance, if you are to select a SAM tool with the right capabilities (see Table 1).

Developing effective use cases requires you to collaborate with stakeholders through workshops. Unfortunately, use cases are too often developed in isolation, with little or no stakeholder engagement with the SAM function or understanding of the expected benefits of SAM tools.
Key stakeholders have the following duties and requirements with regard to SAM tool selection:

- Infrastructure and operations leaders have to make changes to infrastructure and ensure alignment with the needs of IT service management (ITSM) and owners of additional inventory sources.
- Security leaders have to help enforce change and adoption, and evaluate vendor risk, agent discovery and agent capabilities.
- Procurement and sourcing leaders require data to help influence renewals or enable the integration of new contracts with existing SPVM tools.
- SAM leaders have overall accountability for the tool(s) and the associated process(es).
- Finance leaders require data to help with budgeting and measurement of savings.
- Legal leaders have to engage with SAM data for contractual changes or compliance issues.
- Enterprise architects have to evaluate the feasibility of tool architecture in terms of successful management of software within the organization.
Table 1: SAM Tool Capabilities by Use Case

Viewing partial table. Click here to view full table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool Capability</th>
<th>Use Case</th>
<th>Use-Case Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discover</td>
<td>Gain an accurate view of</td>
<td>■ Create an accurate and trusted set of license-entitlement records that identifies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>license entitlements,</td>
<td>the key data required to measure software consumption and associated contracts and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hardware, and virtual</td>
<td>online terms and conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and cloud environments.</td>
<td>■ Create an accurate and trusted inventory of hardware (end-user devices and servers),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>virtual environments (e.g., VMware) and cloud environments (e.g., Amazon Web Services [AWS]).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify</td>
<td>Map inventory and</td>
<td>■ Identify all hardware, virtual environments and cloud environments (managed and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>configurations to license</td>
<td>unmanaged) and platform configurations, along with all software installed and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>entitlements.</td>
<td>accessed via web URLs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>■ Map installed software to software entitlements, custom license metrics and users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalize</td>
<td>Ensure standard naming</td>
<td>■ Consolidate publisher entitlement into a single view, removing duplicate software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conventions and removal of</td>
<td>and hardware, and virtual and cloud records.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>duplicate records.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gartner (March 2021)

As an SPVM leader, you must categorize the use cases based on their perceived importance. An effective approach is to perform a MoSCoW analysis. This should be done in conjunction with other stakeholders to ensure consensus before investigating individual tools. A MoSCoW analysis identifies four categories of requirement:

- **“Must have”** requirements that, if not met, will cause the project to fail to deliver value.
- **“Should have”** requirements that are important but not vital.
- **“Could have”** requirements that are desirable but not necessary.
- **“Won’t have”** requirements that are requests for things that might be useful in future, but are not currently planned for introduction.
Evaluate Capability Gaps With Use Cases Designed for In-Scope Software Publishers

To be clear about your tool requirements, first assess the data associated with, and the capabilities of, your current operational tools, such as ITSM and client management tools, for each in-scope publisher and operating environment. Use the seven core activities and use cases of a SAM tool shown in Table 1.

Only after carrying out a gap analysis to reveal what data is required for your in-scope publishers, based on your use cases and tool capabilities, can you begin looking at SAM tools that could complement your existing data and tools. Table 2 is an example of such an analysis.

Table 2: Example of a SAM Tool Capability Gap Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publisher/Application</th>
<th>Operating Environment</th>
<th>Discover</th>
<th>Identify</th>
<th>Normalize</th>
<th>Reconcile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adobe Acrobat Pro</td>
<td>Microsoft Windows (OS)</td>
<td>Full coverage</td>
<td>Full coverage</td>
<td>Full coverage</td>
<td>Full coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft Windows Server</td>
<td>VMware and on-premises data center</td>
<td>Full coverage</td>
<td>Limited coverage</td>
<td>Full coverage</td>
<td>Limited coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salesforce</td>
<td>Desktop internet browser</td>
<td>Limited coverage</td>
<td>Limited coverage</td>
<td>Limited coverage</td>
<td>Limited coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oracle Database</td>
<td>Cloud — AWS (Amazon RDS)</td>
<td>No coverage</td>
<td>No coverage</td>
<td>No coverage</td>
<td>No coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Hat</td>
<td>Linux</td>
<td>Full coverage</td>
<td>Full coverage</td>
<td>Full coverage</td>
<td>Full coverage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gartner (March 2021)

By adopting this approach, you can assess whether your enterprise should invest in:

- An enterprise SAM tool (or tools).
- Publisher or vertical-specific point solutions.
Although enterprise SAM tools are very popular, due to their breadth of coverage and rich features beyond the core capabilities listed above (namely, hardware asset management and vulnerability monitoring), they may not be appropriate for your organizational needs. Organizations that have already invested in such tools may find gaps in specific capabilities, due to the complexities of SAM, which may require additional investment in specialized tools. By evaluating only enterprise SAM tools, organizations may find themselves struggling to manage critical vendors or paying for features that they do not utilize. This could leave them with a large financial investment that is not only underutilized but causes irreparable damage to their SAM program.

Perform an In-Depth Technical Analysis to Assess Tools’ Ability to Fulfill Your Use Cases

SAM tool providers often give the impression that implementation and operation of their tools is relatively simple and straightforward, and requires few resources. In reality, this is rarely the case.

An essential part of the tool selection process is a POC. Creating a POC requires time, staff and financial investment, which are not always readily available, due to conflicting priorities. However, if done right, a POC will enable you to make realistic commitments to an achievable SAM program. Furthermore, a tool vendor may require a POC agreement to be in place prior to any engagement.

Follow the seven steps below, which provide a structure for running a successful SAM tool POC and implementing pass or fail criteria (see also Figure 2 and Toolkit: Self-Service Templates for Proof-of-Concept Procurements):

1. Identify your scope: Focus on a single in-scope software publisher or application that has proven challenging.
2. Gather data: Gather software entitlements and license metrics relevant to the in-scope publisher.
3. Timebox your POC: Allow 30 to 60 days to run the POC.
4. Identify internal resources: Identify the teams and the number of people required to successfully run the POC, along with any infrastructure requirements for setting up the POC.
5. Identify entitlement: Upload entitlement for the in-scope publisher or application
6. Identify sample environment: Identify a controlled environment of end-user devices, and/or servers that those devices will report back to, for the POC. Ensure you have access/rights to deploy agents or

- A SaaS management platform (see Market Guide for SaaS Management Platforms).
- A SAM-managed service provider (see Magic Quadrant for Software Asset Management Managed Services).
to discover via the network.

7. Evaluate success criteria: Assess each use case for the in-scope software publisher or application, and give each use case a pass or fail.

Figure 2: Seven Steps to a Successful Proof of Concept for SAM Tools

Seven Steps to a Successful Proof of Concept for SAM Tools

1. Identify Scope
2. Gather Data
3. Timebox POC
4. Identify Resources
5. Entitlement
6. Sample
7. Evaluate

Source: Gartner 721644_C

A well-executed POC helps you select a SAM tool that is fully supported by stakeholders and has demonstrated the ability to fulfill your organization's most pressing use cases.

If you don't get executive approval or simply lack the budget to conduct a POC, a viable alternative is a technical demonstration of the tool, which will differ from the sales demo. Similar to a POC, a demo should be conducted for the use cases you have identified, which should be communicated to the vendor, so that it can build a customized demo environment. Insist that the demo is conducted without any representatives from the vendor's sales team, but with members of the vendor's technical staff. This allows for much more transparent exchanges about functionality and how the use cases' requirements can be met. Examples of valid technical representatives of tool vendors are:

- Engineering lead
- Lead architect
- Lead developer
- SaaS/cloud lead

POCs and other technical demos should be supported by in-depth conversations with vendors' reference clients, peer reviews and on-site visits during which you can see the tools in operation. Connecting with existing clients will also enable you to clarify any unclear aspects of POCs or other demos, and gauge vendors' willingness to commit to the delivery of features on their product roadmaps.

Evidence
Gartner's "ITAM's Future in a Digital World" survey was conducted online from 25 August through 8 September 2020 with 144 participants. Eighty-two were Research Circle members — a Gartner-managed panel — and 62 were from external organizations. The survey was developed by a team of Gartner analysts. It was reviewed, tested and administered by Gartner's Research Data and Analytics team.

Note: The results of this survey are representative of the respondent base and not necessarily the market as a whole.

See Gartner Peer Insights 'Lessons Learned': Implementing Software Asset Management Tools.

See Software Asset Management (SAM) Tools Reviews and Ratings.

Document Revision History

Select the Right SAM Tool to Reduce Risks, Optimize Costs and Improve Decision Making - 21 August 2017

Three Use Cases Can Help You Select the Right SAM Tool - 10 November 2015

Recommended by the Authors

Market Guide for SaaS Management Platforms

Mature Your SAM Discipline by Investing in the Right SAM Tool

Toolkit: Self-Service Templates for Proof-of-Concept Procurements

Toolkit: Build the Business Case for Implementing Effective Software Asset Management

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