

# Group Test – SAM Managed Service Providers

A competitive comparison of specialist SAM providers

by Martin Thompson, The ITAM Review [January 2014] [www.itassetmanagement.net](http://www.itassetmanagement.net)

## DISCLAIMER, SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The information contained in this review is based on sources and information believed to be accurate as of the time it was created. Therefore, the completeness and current accuracy of the information provided cannot be guaranteed. Readers should therefore use the contents of this review as a general guideline and not as the ultimate source of truth. Similarly, this review is not based on rigorous and exhaustive technical study. This is a paid review. That is, suppliers included in this review paid to participate in exchange for all results and analysis being published free of charge.

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
Introduction.....	4
Featured Providers.....	4
Assessment Criteria .....	5
Selecting the top providers .....	5
Expertise (33%) .....	6
Company, Infrastructure & Methodology (33%).....	6
Customer References (33%) .....	7
Market Observations .....	8
Skills Shortage .....	8
Underlying Technology .....	9
Commercial Independence & Conflicts of Interest .....	10
Service Scope .....	13
Length of Relationship .....	14
Geographical Reach.....	15
ISO Standard as Reference Model.....	16
Buyers guide to selecting a SAM MSP – General Advice .....	17
Buyers Guide to Selecting a SAM MSP – Anecdotal Feedback.....	18
The Results – Customer References Summary.....	20
The Results – SAM Managed Service Provider Best in Class .....	21
Partner Summaries .....	22
Aspera.....	22
Computacenter.....	23
eTelligent.....	25
ITAM Solutions .....	28
SHI .....	30
Softline Solutions .....	33
Anecdotal References for Providers .....	36
Contact & Questions .....	38

## Executive Summary

This group test looks at the capabilities of six SAM Managed Service providers from the UK, Germany and USA.

Service providers were rated based on the expertise, methodology and strength of customer references. General market observations during the study included the industry skills shortage, the use of underlying SAM technology, commercial independence and conflicts of interest, the scope of services, the duration of service relationships, key market drivers and using ISO as a reference model.

Softline Solutions were awarded 2014 SAM Managed Service Provider Best in Class for highest overall score and providing a good mixture of relevant expertise, savvy methodology and strong customer references. Partners did much better in this review than Tool Manufacturers.

Overall score summary as follows:

Rank	SAM Provider	Headquarters	Expertise (33%)	Company, Infrastructure and Methodology (33%)	Customer References (33%)	Aggregate Score
1	Softline Solutions	Germany	93%	80%	86%	86.3%
2	SHI	USA	100%	44%	79%	74.3%
3	ITAMS	UK	83%	66%	73%	73.9%
4	eTelligent	USA	37%	80%	91%	69.3%
5	Computacenter	UK	80%	63%	45%	62.6%
6	Aspera	Germany	37%	46%	71%	51.2%

## Introduction

This group test looks at the capabilities of six leading SAM Managed Service Providers. There is considerable interest in ITAM managed services, although the market is very much in its infancy. The key difference when buying SAM Managed services rather than SAM tools and consulting is that organizations are buying an SLA or a business outcome rather than technology.

This review assesses the expertise, methodologies and customer references of suppliers. We will also look at key market observations noted throughout this study and offer some guidance on selecting a managed service provider.

## Featured Providers

SAM Partner	Location	Website
Aspera	Germany	<a href="http://www.aspera.com/licencemanagement/services/managed-services.html?L=1">http://www.aspera.com/licencemanagement/services/managed-services.html?L=1</a>
Computacenter	UK	<a href="http://www.computacenter.com/services/solutions/C3/c3software/">http://www.computacenter.com/services/solutions/C3/c3software/</a>
eTelligent	USA	<a href="http://wp.etelligentsolutions.com/info/">http://wp.etelligentsolutions.com/info/</a>
ITAMS	UK	<a href="http://www.itamsolutions.com/">http://www.itamsolutions.com/</a>
SHI	USA	<a href="https://www.shi.com/CustomerServices/SHIMarketing.aspx?ContentId=88588">https://www.shi.com/CustomerServices/SHIMarketing.aspx?ContentId=88588</a>
Softline Solutions	Germany	<a href="http://www.softline-group.com/">http://www.softline-group.com/</a>

## Assessment Criteria

*By Martin Thompson*

I approached this review as though I were spending my own money or working in an IT department and looking to engage a service provider.

Companies were judged based on their people, their approach to SAM and the feedback from customers. Assessments were based on interviews, customer references and written answers provided by suppliers. It should be noted that this was not an exhaustive technical assessment (We didn't for example, perform licensing and IQ tests on their staff), nor did we investigate the financial credibility and long-term viability of companies. This is intended as a guide only.

Also, it should be noted that not all companies were a perfect fit for the review. I was looking for companies that provided end-to-end SAM lifecycle support. In particular Aspera don't fit that description and are focused solely at preparing SAM data. Their service could be described as SAM-data-as-a-service and because of this they didn't score particularly well on the other nuances of a SAM service in this assessment.

### *Selecting the top providers*

This review includes six market leading SAM Managed Service Providers. AssetLabs, Concorde Solutions and Flexera Software were also shortlisted but did not qualify for the top six.

Overall I was looking for companies that go beyond the usual outsource relationship to stand shoulder to shoulder with clients in the face of adversity; in particular audit activity and the every changing landscape of new complex licensing metrics and emerging IT projects. How could companies assist with on-going continual service improvement? What will the service provider do to improve procurement and software management processes?

Weightings were applied to the prepared assessment criteria as follows:

- 33% for Expertise
- 33% for Company, infrastructure and SAM methodology
- 33% for Customer references

Questions as follows:

*Expertise (33%)*

1. Please provide a high level overview of your experience delivering this service and examples of successes delivered as a result of the service
2. How long have you been providing this service?
3. Number of active customers or completed projects?
4. How many full time staff do you have dedicated to this service?
5. For the key software publishers managed as part of your service (e.g. Microsoft, Oracle, IBM, SAP etc.) - provide details of the key individuals responsible and their qualifications and experience in managing specific publishers. Please specify individual team member, publisher expertise, qualifications relevant to that publisher and whether that team member is a contract, full time or shared resource.

*Company, Infrastructure & Methodology (33%)*

1. Which department or business unit is this service aligned to within your company?
2. Are you paid to complete projects on behalf of software publishers?
3. Do you sell or profit from the sale of licensing, tools and technology or consulting?
4. Provide an overview of your process for helping customers with formal audit requests from publishers
5. Describe your process for sharing client data
6. How do you persuade prospective customers of your financial credibility?
7. Please provide a high level overview (or example) of the service level agreement provided to customers

8. What is typically in scope for your service (Environment type, geography, language, license types, environment size)? What is out of scope and how are out of scope issues managed with the client?
9. Provide a high level overview of the 'on boarding' process for new customers
10. How do you manage the maturity of clients processes and validate the data they provide to support the service?
11. What steps are usually taken to help improve the customer's situation based on the output of reports?
12. Provide a high level overview of how software is managed within your own company
13. Provide a high level overview of the technology that underpins your service
14. Provide a high level overview of the methodologies that underpins your approach to delivering your service

#### *Customer References (33%)*

Customers were asked to score their provider out of 10 for the following capabilities: Reporting & Quality of Information, Customer Service / Responsiveness, Licensing Expertise, Audit Defence Expertise and Overall Quality of Service.

References were also asked about service duration, scope, business integration, complimentary services, attitudes and reasons for outsourcing and general anonymous feedback regarding their supplier. It should be noted that suppliers were asked to supply their own customers, references were not chosen at random.

## Market Observations

### *Skills Shortage*

The interest in SAM Managed Services is being driven primarily by a severe shortage of individuals with hands-on licensing, audit and SAM implementation expertise.

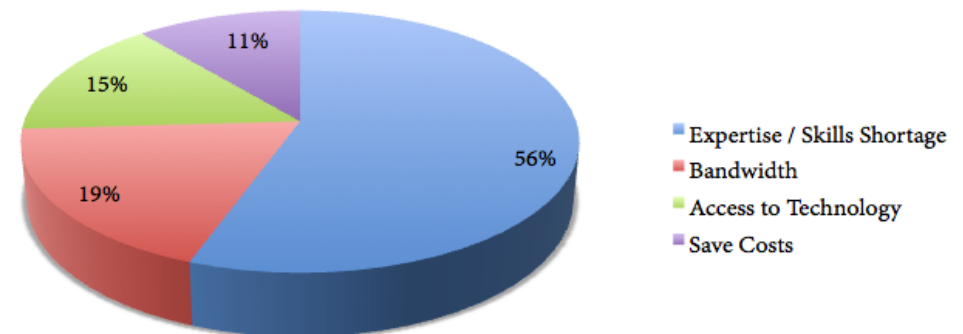
All of the service providers assessed are either actively recruiting or would be open to conversations with experienced SAM professionals. These companies are rapidly absorbing scarce talent into their teams to grow their services businesses.

This point was supported by conversations with SAM Managed Services customers:

- 56% stated limited expertise or general skills shortage as a reason for outsourcing SAM (We can't find, afford to hire or retain the right talent with the right expertise)
- 19% stated bandwidth as an issue. Audits for example are usually a short-term compelling event and organizations struggle to assign resource away from other key projects.
- 15% liked the value proposition of the SAM technology being offered but wanted help with implementation
- Only 11% cited cost saving as a reason for outsourcing SAM

Skills and expertise are the key strategic advantage of working with a SAM Managed Service provider. It can provide a great way of tapping into a pool of specialist expertise. Many providers in this review provided customers with set number of licensing queries or service desk credits per month – enabling customers to tap into deep licensing expertise at a fixed cost.

**Why Outsource SAM?**





### *Underlying Technology*

Participants in this review use SAM technology to underpin their service as follows. Some own the technology; some resell it or host it for others.

SAM Service Provider	Underlying Technology	Own The Technology	Technology Partner
<b>Aspera</b>	Aspera Smart Track	✓	
<b>Computacenter</b>	License Dashboard		✓
<b>eTelligent</b>	eTelligent Platform	✓	
<b>ITAMS</b>	Aspera Smart Track		✓
<b>SHI</b>	License Dashboard		✓
<b>Softline Solutions</b>	Flexera Flexnet Manager		✓

### *Technology Observations*

- Partners did much better in this review than Tool Manufacturers (Average score for partners: 74%, Average score for tool vendors: 56%)
- As a general rule SAM tool vendors wanted to talk about their technology, partners wanted to talk about customer outcomes and progress.
- All providers in this review were inventory source agnostic and could work with most incumbent inventory and auto-discovery sources
- Providers generally use FTP or upload to transmit data to their systems
- License Dashboard did not participate in this review but underpins two key industry suppliers in this review – Similarly most other SAM software solutions in the market also offer a ‘Service Provider Editions’ or similar to deliver their technology via a partner
- After this review was completed SHI announced they were acquiring eTelligent (<http://www.itassetmanagement.net/2014/01/23/shi-acquire-etelligent/>)

### *Commercial Independence & Conflicts of Interest*

Commercial independence and sources of potential conflict of interest are an important consideration for organizations considering SAM Services. From my experience speaking with reference customers for this review or the industry as a whole – organizations are increasingly wary of providers claiming to be an independent provider when actually working commercially for a software publisher. However participants were not scored based on these criteria, as circumstances will vary with each organization.

*Three considerations when working with SAM Managed Service Providers:*

#### **1. Completing projects on behalf of publishers:**

In my experience SAM partners perform work on behalf of publishers because:

- a) They can profit from the shortfalls / business opportunities discovered during the process. These engagements are usually only provided by software publishers when they can forecast business from the outcome.
- b) A SAM provider is inexperienced and looking to pick up paid consulting opportunities to gather experience.
- c) SAM partners are working under the misguided notion that they will pick up additional consulting with the customer after the engagement, despite blotting their copybook by working for the publisher in the first place.

Generally SAM providers can grow much more profitable and credible businesses in the longer term by avoiding publisher engagements.

## 2. Profiting from Software Licensing Sales

This is the main bone of contention for many organizations when it comes to conflicts of interest. There are many pros and cons to working with a SAM provider who also supplies software licensing but the whole argument pivots on the issue of licensing expertise:

*Working with a SAM partner who also supplies software licensing:*

For	Against
<p>Those selling and working with license programs directly with software publishers generally have the best knowledge in the industry about licensing.</p>	<p>Software resellers don't make money from licensing. They make money from the rebate supplied from software publishers. Rebates are awarded based on performance and meeting specified criteria dictated by the software publisher.</p>
<p>Those selling and working with license programs directly with software publishers generally have the best knowledge about how the vendor works internally.</p>	<p>No matter how excellent your account manager might be and independent they may act – ultimately the profitability of the whole company is riding on the rebate – which is based on publisher interests not customer interests.</p>

### 3. Selling SAM Technology

A final consideration when choosing a SAM partner is to understand if the provider is genuinely looking to provide a value added service or just another vehicle for selling their SAM tool.

#### *Commercial Independence and Conflicts of Interest Summary*

	Aspera	Computacenter	eTelligent	ITAMS	SHI	Softline
Q. Are you paid to complete projects on behalf of software publishers?	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Q. Do you sell or profit from the sale of software licensing?	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
SAM Tool Manufacturer	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No

### Service Scope

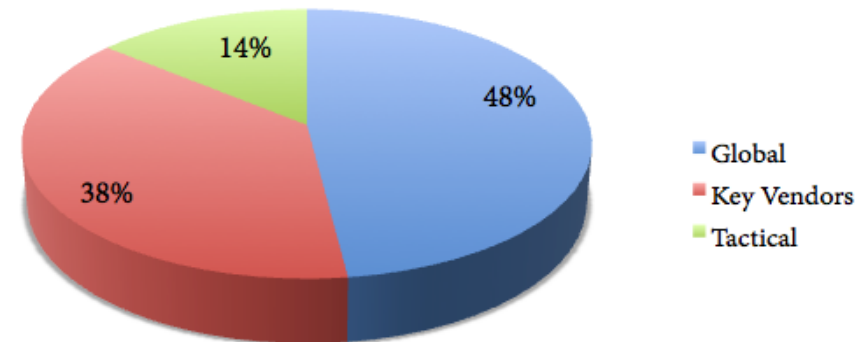
As a general rule organizations that engaged with the SAM Partners in this review tended to:

- Not limit organizational scope – i.e. the partner was not limited to a specific business unit
- Limit scope by either a) Desktop or Datacentre or b) by limited number of software publishers

Of those interviewed:

- 48% outsourced global SAM (All environment, all publishers)
- 38% outsourced a few key vendors (A select number of publishers, usually 1-8)
- 14% Only used partners on a short term tactical basis

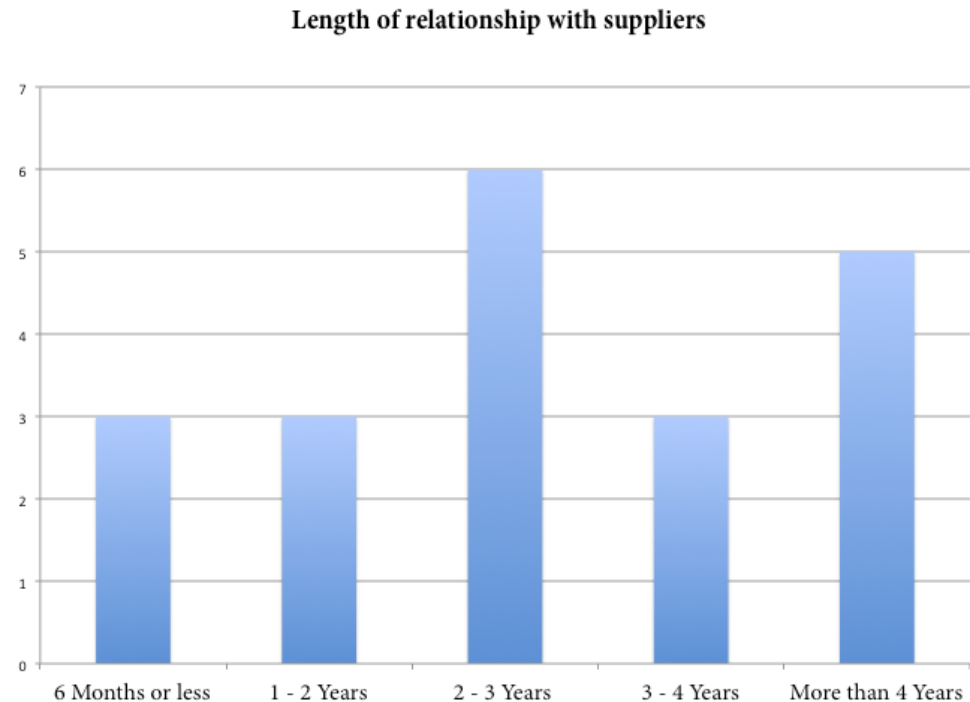
**What is in Scope?**



### *Length of Relationship*

General market observations for the duration service relationships and predictions for the future:

- The majority of customers references had been with their suppliers for several years (see graphic right)
- Most providers have developed managed services on an ad hoc basis over the course of the last decade based on customer demand
- Due to trends in the industry and customer demand they are industrializing or preparing to scale their Managed Services businesses – most have only just begun to do this or have started the process in the last 18 months
- The market is immature – no provider in this review had more than about 20 customers on a full on-going managed service
- Part of the drive towards Managed Services is also due to the Skills shortage mentioned earlier – you can utilize scarce intellect much more effectively as a remote service than putting bodies on site for traditional consulting engagements
- I foresee considerable growth in this area as Managed Service providers finish ironing out the wrinkles of their services and scale their businesses.



*Geographical Reach*

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Headquarters</b>	<b>Offices</b>
<b>Aspera</b>	Germany	Offices in Germany and USA, business partners in Benelux, France and UK
<b>Computacenter</b>	UK	Offices and Service Centres across Europe
<b>eTelligent</b>	USA	USA focussed
<b>ITAMS</b>	UK	Customers in Europe, mainly UK focussed
<b>SHI</b>	USA	25 Global Offices
<b>Softline</b>	Germany	Subsidiaries in mainland Europe

### *ISO Standard as Reference Model*

My final market observation regarding SAM Managed Service providers is the use of the SAM standard.

Whilst ISO/IEC 19770 has not been widely adopted in terms of organizations being certified, providers in this review use it commonly as an independent benchmark to assist with defining SAM strategy. Especially among SAM resellers and integrators (but not so much with SAM tool providers).

ISO/IEC 19770-1:2012(E) states:

*"This part (part 1: processes and tiered assessment of conformance) may be applied to an organization which has outsourced SAM processes, with the responsibility for demonstrating conformance always remaining with the outsourcing organization"*

So you could argue that it would be possible to certify or at least assess the strength of a SAM Managed Service provider against the SAM ISO Standard. It would be good to see this as a core credential in the market in the future. Those organizations that were graded against the standard would benefit from significant competitive differentiation.



## Buyers guide to selecting a SAM MSP – General Advice

When deciding which software publishers you need help with:

1. Consider the complexities of each software publisher
2. Consider the complexities of the data required to support that software publisher
3. Consider the risks associated with each publisher

Don't outsource problems. If you are having issues doing SAM properly your outsourcer will face the same problems. You want to outsource to tap into others expertise and because you recognize that the expertise required is not your core competence. You want to select a partner that doesn't just satisfy a SLA, but goes on a journey with you.

Ask prospective partners to prove themselves:

- Via a proof of concept (perhaps demonstrating competence with one supplier or a subset of data)
- Via customer reference calls and visits

Be very clear on obligations and what is included in the price, which party is doing what and when. A basic RACI will help with this.

Consider what is required for getting up to speed and the on boarding process – is the provider doing this? Who will do what? Are your data sources required to feed the service ready, accurate and relevant? Who will your provider need to liaise with on an on-going basis within your company? Will they do this onsite or remotely? Will they work with software publishers or liaise with them on your behalf? How will your partner interface with the major sources of change in your organization (Usually service request process, service desk, change process, new projects, starters, movers, leavers etc.)

How will you measure the success of your managed service partner? Consider quality of data, risk reduction, efficiency in spend, proactive vendor management and contracts management. Reduced spend. Happier users. Happier stakeholders, quicker approval processes, quicker deployment, SAM as enabler.

## Buyers Guide to Selecting a SAM MSP – Anecdotal Feedback

The anecdotal advice below stems from customer reference conversations in direct response to the question:

*What advice would you give to other organizations looking to select a SAM Managed Services provider?*

- “Make sure the provider has enough expertise for the particular products being used by the organization; define & describe services well to understand what activities remain within the organization”
- “Be clear about your future processes & responsibilities”
- “The most important part of the engagement is defining the scope of the work and defining the deliverables. Then to have a laser sharp clarity on the capability of the Managed provider no matter what it takes to get to that view. Thirdly, once the engagement starts, keep the pressure on.”
- “Make sure they have plenty of patience!!”
- “Relationship and trust is very important”
- “The tool must have strong reporting capability, the ability to do software reconciliation through up bound and down bound equivalents, the ability to manage the different types of license schemes of the organization (e.g., IBM PVU, Oracle Core) licenses and the ability to integrate with other ITSM solutions”
- “Work with a provider that focuses on delivering value and compliance is a derivative of achieving that value. They must understand both hardware/software asset management as well as strong understanding of licensing and business process disciplines.”
- “It's necessary that the experiences of the service provider meet the customized requirements of customer.”
- “Carefully evaluate the scope of work, and the split between internal/external deliveries, with respect to your own organisational complexity. Miscalculations will be costly, no matter whom your service provider is. Care should also be taken to retain freedom to re-source service contract, else you may face increased costs over time.”
- “Carry out a thorough RFP to select a provider. Ask potential providers to complete a proof of concept and conduct reference calls with existing customers”
- “Decide if you want a fully managed service; grow an in-house capability or a hybrid of the 2. Selecting the right SAM tool for your organisation is key and this may well influence your choice of provider. Validate the provider has experience of the specific vendors and

products used within your organisation, has a track record as a managed services provider and also take into account security considerations.”

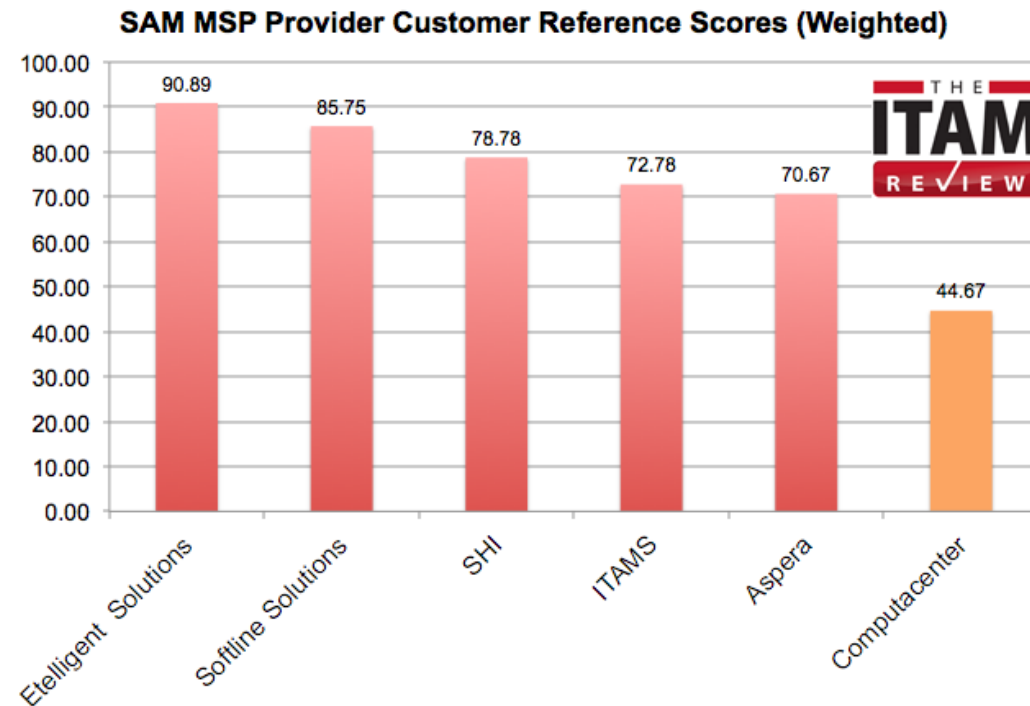
- “Be specific about your needs and really look over the proposed final results to be sure that you are getting what you expect.”
- “It is best to automate your process as best you can. The use of excel is a waste of time”
- “Select a SAM Managed Services provider based on their expertise. Make clear agreements on their services. Stay in the lead so your expectations can be met.”
- “For us, it was important to rely on a service provider that is not only interested in selling licenses or tools. From our experience, those service providers are often influenced in their consulting services. So, we have been looking for a vendor-independent service provider that is not selling software licenses and is interested in the success of the project rather than in the chance of selling tools or licenses. Also it was important to us that the provider has significant knowledge in implementing and operating a leading SAM tool and SAM processes and is able to provide additional services and added value compared to the SAM tool publisher.”

## The Results – Customer References Summary

The table shown right shows weighted customer reference scores. eTelligent scored highest.

### Customer Reference Observations:

- Very large companies have adopted these services. Of the 21 customer reference interviews conducted for this review the average seat size was 45,000 (smallest 1,000, largest 200,000, median 30,000).
- Computacenter would have scored higher in this review if they were able to provide the minimum three references required (shaded Orange).
- Customer reference scores were weighted dependent on a) the strength of the reference b) type of reference b) other private feedback provided by the reference.



## The Results – SAM Managed Service Provider Best in Class

Rank	SAM Provider	Headquarters	Expertise (33%)	Company, Infrastructure and Methodology (33%)	Customer References (33%)	Aggregate Score
1	Softline Solutions	Germany	93%	80%	86%	86.3%
2	SHI	USA	100%	44%	79%	74.3%
3	ITAMS	UK	83%	66%	73%	73.9%
4	eTelligent	USA	37%	80%	91%	69.3%
5	Computacenter	UK	80%	63%	45%	62.6%
6	Aspera	Germany	37%	46%	71%	51.2%

### Overall Best in Class – **Softline Solutions**

*“I was impressed by the pragmatic approach Softline Solutions take in assisting their clients with SAM. Their methodology, underpinned by ISO/IEC 19770-1, leads clients down a maturity path to improve their SAM practice. This begins with their ‘House of SAM’ methodology to identify weak points in the existing infrastructure and helps client build a business case and on-going SAM improvement plan. Reporting is comprehensive and action oriented.”*

## Partner Summaries

### Aspera

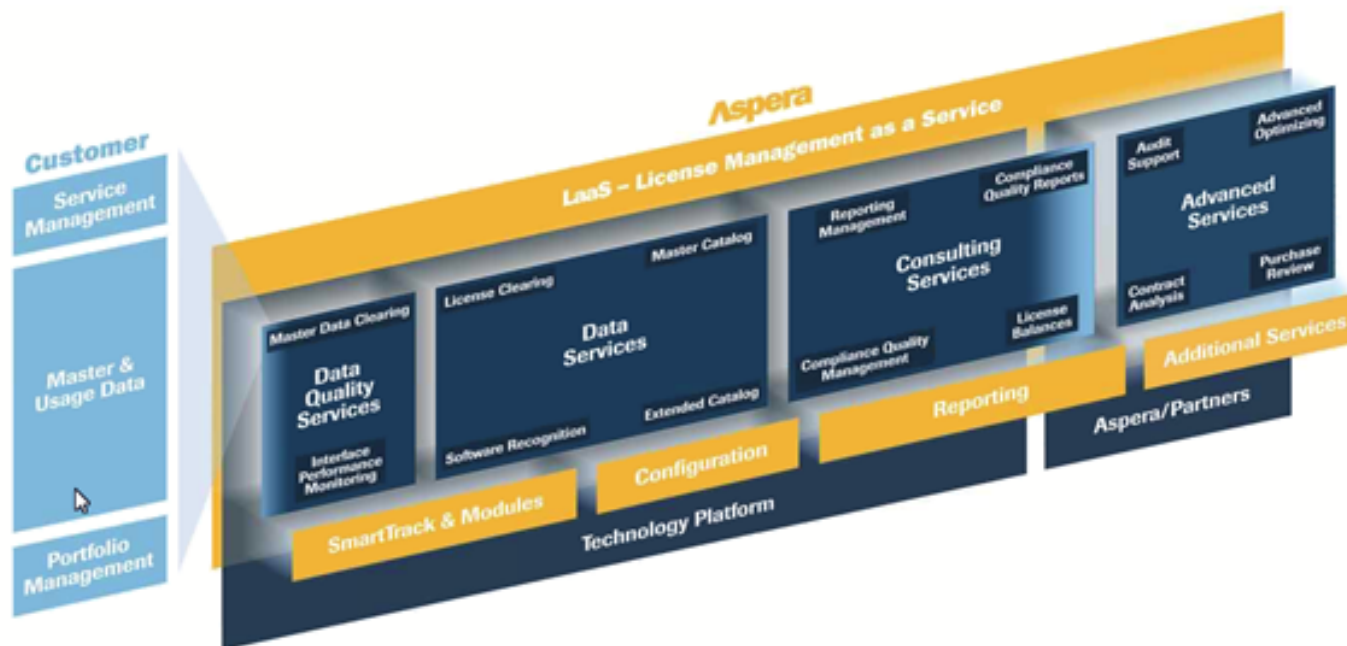
Aspera are based in Aachen, Germany with an office in Boston, USA and business partners worldwide.

Aspera offer SAM managed services to compliment their SmartTrack software. They position their SAM services as ‘License Management as a Service’ (LaaS).

For the purposes of this review we were looking for service providers who could work in partnership with customers, help them mature and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with them in the face of daily challenges. For this reason, Aspera’s SAM services are better described as ‘data cleanse’ as a service.

Aspera advise that clients start with one, two or three suppliers when embarking on SAM. They recommend starting with Microsoft, which they state can deliver some quick wins and the discovery of virtualization and infrastructure required to satisfy Microsoft reconciliations provides a good foundation for researching other datacentre software publishers.

Aspera’s primary focus is data to support enterprise SAM and not end-to-end SAM processes. Aspera have around 30 customers who have invested in ‘a remarkable amount of services’, it was unclear exactly how many of these have adopted LaaS.



## *Computacenter*

Computacenter is a £3BN IT infrastructure services business with 12,000 employees across Europe. They have developed some modular asset management services for clients struggling with too much information and not enough intelligence.

### **C3 Software**

Computacenter offer 'C3 Software' on an on-going managed basis, which is powered by License Dashboard and hosted in their Manchester data centre (which meets G Cloud requirements). The SAM Managed service offering is part of the Computacenter Shared Services Factory, which is touted as an 'operating model for industrialising IT'.

Historically Computacenter's default inventory tool for clients is Eracent, however using License Dashboard they are also able to tap into a variety of existing onsite inventory tools to provide their SAM service.

As with other providers in this review services are broken into a number of phases depending on the situation and maturity of the client:

- License Snapshot Entitlement
- Asset Discovery
- License Reconciliation: Discovery vs. Entitlement
- License Contracts and Renewals Management

In a nutshell, you might say Computacenter are offering License Dashboard hosted and implemented against an SLA. This combines software, licensing intelligence, process horsepower and hosting.

### **Typical Engagements**

A license manager is typically assigned to each customer installation to interpret results and add intelligence. The Computacenter SLA typically involved recognizing and identifying 95% of gaps within a 45-day time frame with monthly or six monthly reporting.

Computacenter customers can accrue service credits based on spend in other areas to apply against SAM services work, they can also offset savings generated as a result of SAM projects against future SAM work – therefore building momentum into their SAM activities.

### **Geared up for Growth**

Computacenter admit they are only just getting started with only 9 customers and 85,000 devices being managed with C3. However they are certainly geared up for growth with a good foundation and heritage in managed services and consulting services. The goal is to develop a centre of excellence in the UK before expanding across Europe.

Existing SAM Managed service clients include some enviable large UK corporate brand names. They just have the challenge of growing from their initial foundation and convincing the small army of consultants and account reps at Computacenter of the business value.



## *eTelligent*

eTelligent provide a SaaS based ITAM platform for management of hardware and software. Based in the US, eTelligent provide their technology as part of a managed service, standalone or white labelled via business partners.

Their solution is based on taking advantage of existing in house discovery and inventory sources and creating an ITAM repository. For the purposes of this review, the real strength of eTelligent is their approach to software request and internal charging of software.

### **Managing 'Back Channel'**

eTelligent's model is based on the following:

- An organization's software request process should be as seamless and frictionless as possible
- Software should be available at a competitive price compared to alternative sources of supply

These two concepts prevent what eTelligent term 'Back Channel'; the sourcing of software from anywhere else but IT. If users can gain access to competitively priced software and believe in the delivery mechanism, they'll have no reason to go anywhere else. As I've mentioned before, the Apple App Store is a heavily locked down and regulated environment – but wins based on elegance of execution.

### **Developing an Internal Market for Software**

eTelligent believe the key to driving internal organizational change with regards to managing software is via an internal market, money talks (If you are considering charge back or show back as part of your ITAM program I recommend checking out some of the resources provided by Brett Husselbaugh of eTelligent).

Key concepts:

*1) Trading is based on authorizations not entitlement*

Internal trading of software is based on authorizations not entitlement – this is an important concept to wrap your head around if you want to turn ITAM into a profit centre.

If I make a request for a copy of Microsoft Project to my line manager and it is approved, I can place that authorization on ITAM to fulfill. My department will be charged accordingly.

I'll get charged for that authorization; regardless of whether ITAM has stock or not. The difference between actual entitlement and authorizations allows the ITAM department to make a profit.

### *2) No false economy on reclaimed software*

The organization is actively encouraged to part with unused software, and is financially motivated to do so. However, departments are only credited for returning software if there is demand for that software. For example, if I want to return my copy of Microsoft Project I will only receive a credit for it if someone else has an authorization for it. Crediting users for removing crusty old software that nobody needs anymore would create a false economy and would bankrupt ITAM as a profit centre.

### *3) Trading on the margin*

Returning to my request to my line manager for Microsoft Project; my line manager will be charged for Microsoft Project at a rate sufficiently discounted to make him want to come to IT rather than 'Back channel' of sourcing him itself, but not so heavily discounted to take advantage of the full volume discounts of the ITAM team as a whole or any surpluses. The ITAM team can work on the margin between the two.

These two income sources for the ITAM team (trading on authorizations and the margin on price) allow ITAM to not only justify – but pay for its existence and accrue a surplus to hedge against adverse software audit charges.

## **Continual Service Improvement**

eTelligent believe in helping clients with organizational change within their service rather than leaving it to the client to figure out in isolation. For me this is an important differentiator in picking a SAM Managed Service provider partner.

They have a smart onboarding and reference architecture to support their managed service. Clients are actively encouraged to develop a prioritized 'Managed Software List' to focus their efforts and business planning includes 'Value Analysis' which aims to forecast the potential financial value to be created by the ITAM function.

#### *Weaknesses*

1. The eTelligent SaaS solution does not include any software recognition. So once you have chosen your preferred software suppliers to manage you'll need to 'Train' the system to recognize them.
2. The main focus for eTelligent's review and customer references was desktop and volume titles via a software request process. Their solution does include a 'Complex Licensing Analyzer' for management of complex datacenter licensing metrics but this has limited adoption with their customer so far.
3. Limited market penetration

eTelligent is a specialist boutique service offering a highly customized offering for clients. They have a strong foundation and methodology but have yet to see significant take up of their service. With some increased exposure and positioning I would expect to see considerable growth.

## *ITAM Solutions*

IT Asset Management Solutions (ITAMS) is an independent UK based ITAM specialist and veteran of the UK SAM Industry. The team consists of 25 full time members of staff and an extended team of associates. ITAMS is also the home of IAITAM Training and Certifications in the UK.

### **ELM 360**

ITAMS provide a suite of consultancy, project management, tools and managed services under the brand Enterprise Licence Management 360 (ELM 360).

As with other providers in this review, these services are suited to small tactical projects to long term managed services arrangements, with many variants in-between.

I found the offering from ITAMS to be pragmatic and short on rhetoric. Their services have been built up over a number of years in the industry, originating from tool selection and implementation, and developing as the market has matured to full managed services. A point reflected in their references. Services are grouped broadly into three phases of client maturity and adoption of ITAM:

- Initial exploratory advisory services or tactical projects (understanding what to do and where to go);
- Transition services or development projects (getting there),
- Business as usual services (staying there).

### **The SAM Standard & Software Advisory Group**

ITAMS make use of two key resources to assist clients in their maturity and ensure ITAM continues to add value:

- The SAM Standard – a minimum code of practice for working with software licensing which all parts of the business must adhere to;
- The Software Advisory Group – manages compliance against the standard above and provides a senior level decision making group regarding all aspects of software in the business. Ensuring stakeholders and business units have a voice.

These aspects were a key differentiator in this review, going beyond just churning data for clients to actually holding their hand and helping them continually improve. Although ITAMS admit that some clients simply want their data processed and interpreted to build a license position.

Moreover, business units throughout the business are much more likely to engage with the ITAM function if they feel their voice is being heard and items are being acted upon. This approach is long-term business development for ITAMS – since not only does it help the client mature, it also ensures the longevity and value of their service.

As with other providers in this review ITAMS have a RACI driven on-boarding process, recognizing that Managed SAM is not a one sided process or one-off process. They also offer a licensing service desk for handling licensing, negotiation and contract queries. Aspera powers the SAM tool components of the ELM 360 service, recommended in situations where clients do not have a suitable engine which can deliver the necessary intelligence and automation required to optimise their current licence management requirements.

ITAMS support around 20 customers with their full-managed service. Customers are typically enterprise size with global operations, although the majority of projects are UK or Europe centric.

## SHI

Founded in 1989, SHI is a \$5BN provider of IT products and services and includes 1,800 staff serving over 10,000 customers worldwide.

With 44 full time staff, SHI has the largest SAM team in this review consisting of Inventory Engineers, License Analysts, Project Managers, Business Development, Trainers, and Contracts Managers.

## Polaris

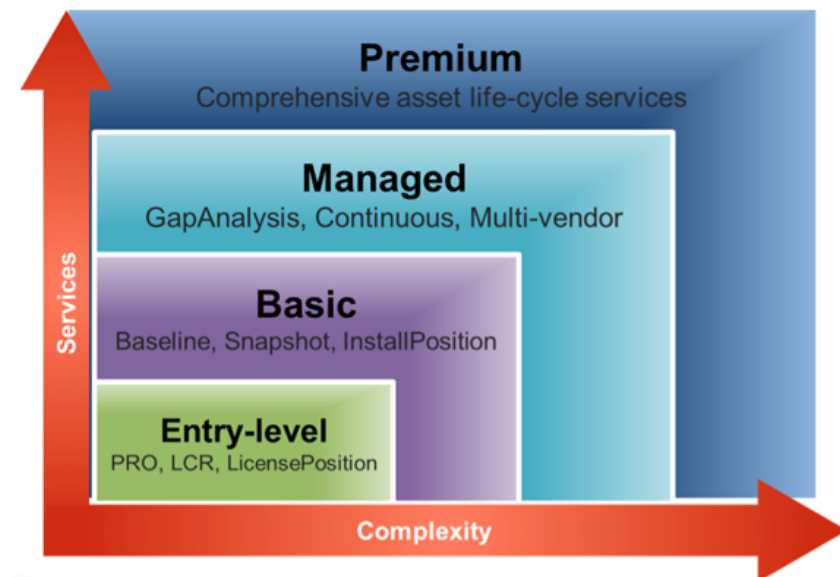
SAM Managed Services from SHI are offered under the Polaris brand, consisting of a number of specific ITAM services from the cradle to grave of software and hardware assets.

For the purposes of this review we are primarily interested in the ‘Managed’ offering in the diagram below, but SHI also offers more tactical SAM services to assist clients gain visibility of their software assets.

The Polaris services are designed to be companions to license deals such as Enterprise Agreements, allowing customers to both invest in large license purchases and also budget for managing the agreement effectively.

The on-boarding and on-going provision of managed services with SHI is governed by a statement of work and a comprehensive division of responsibilities between provider and client (via a [RACI](#)). SHI uses a combination of License Dashboard, specialised reports, and customised Executive reports to communicate engagement results.

A typical SHI SAM Managed Service arrangement might involve helping clients on a quarterly basis with up to 40 software suppliers, but usually between 1 and 10.



## **On boarding Products**

Once the specific vendors have been chosen all vendors and products in scope are on-boarded as follows.

1. Products identified
2. Licenses profiled (if not known)
3. Product metrics researched (if not known)
4. Measurement sources identified
5. Measurement methods and tools identified
6. License and Inventory plan documented

This is a good methodology for any organization to consider when looking to get up and running with SAM. Note that of the six points above – most require collaborative effort on behalf of the provider and customer. I.e. Just because you are outsourcing components of SAM you will still need resource internally to help with finding the correct data sources etc.

## **Addressing Conflict of Interest Concerns**

As a large software licensing reseller and business partner with many software publishers, prospective SHI SAM Managed Service customers are likely to be curious regarding conflicts of interest. Addressing these concerns directly, SHI stated:

1. The commercial relationship between SHI and customer is much more than just SAM. SHI ultimately wants to provide the customer with all their software and hardware – so SHI claim they have more at stake than a quick win on a licensing deal. They have to “live with the decisions we make”.
2. There is no better licensing expertise in the industry than those actively selling it.

## **Market Penetration**

SHI currently have around 20 customers on the full-managed service, the vast majority of which are already being supplied licenses from SHI. Historically the focus has been on desktop and volume license titles, although the SHI team state this is broadening to include datacentre titles.

As well as SAM, SHI ITAM services also include Asset Disposal, Refreshes, Upgrades and Redeployments. Pricing for Polaris services is based on publishers and installs included.



## *Softline Solutions*

The senior management team at Softline Solutions originate from the licensing reseller Comparex. During discussions for this review, Softline Solutions stated they found it difficult balancing the conflict of interest at their previous employer between advising clients on best practice SAM and also profiting from license sales. Now they claim they are free to advise with their client's best interests in mind. This declaration was a recurring theme of all participants in this review with truly independent SAM providers growing in popularity.

Softline Solutions have 25 SAM consultants across Germany, the Netherlands, France and Belgium with experience with over 250 SAM projects. They have an impressive list of large clients across mainland Europe. (Note: The Softline Group operates throughout mainland Europe with headquarters in Leipzig, Germany. The group is not to be confused with 'Softline International' a service provider with headquarters in Moscow, Russia).

When positioning their offering, they capture the essence of SAM. Which I'm pleased to say extends way beyond the usual SAM rhetoric of counting licenses and compliance:

*"Planned, controlled and economically sensible use of software, along with unrestricted availability, are important strategic success factors for your organisation"*

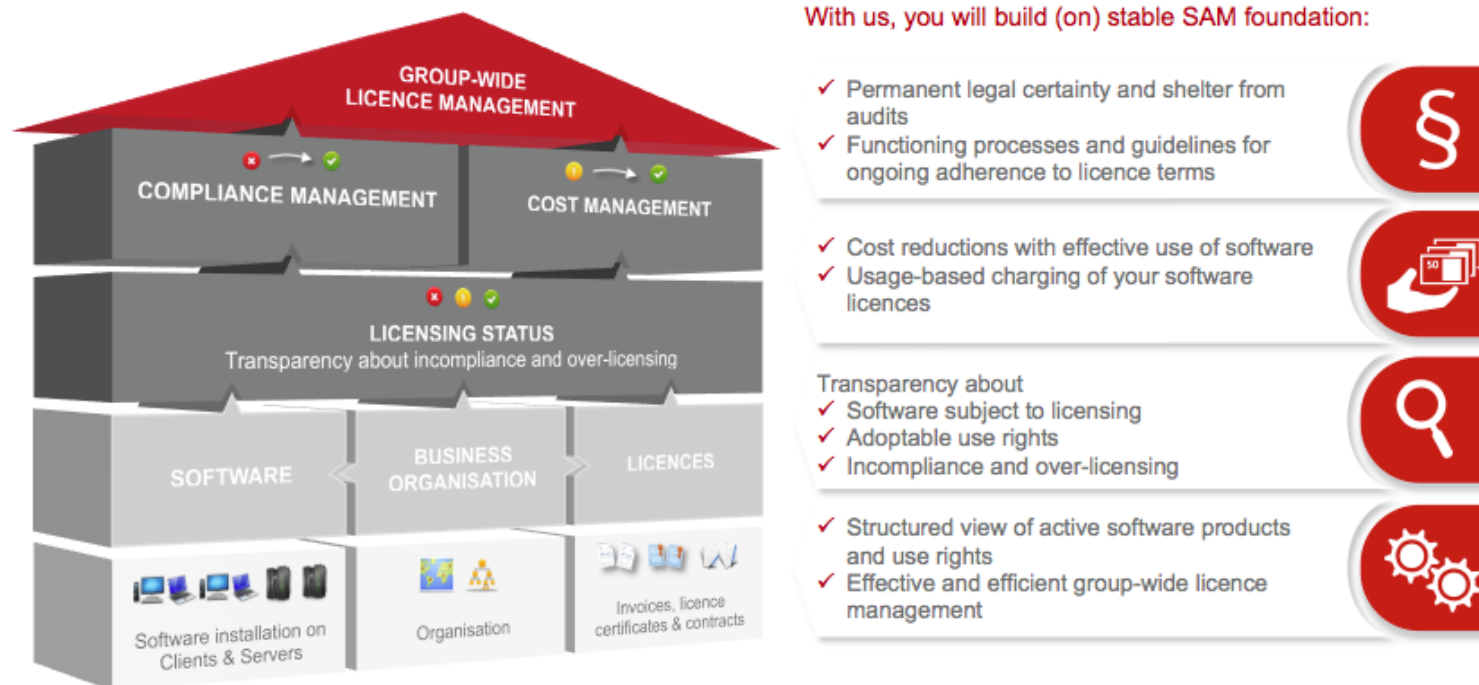
They target their SAM managed services at three key audiences:

- The CIO – looking to optimize investments,
- The CFO – looking to manage risk and provide continuous compliance and
- The IT Admin – who is concerned with deployment and availability

I was impressed by the pragmatic approach Softline Solutions take in assisting their clients with SAM. Their methodology, underpinned by ISO/IEC 19770-1, leads clients down a maturity path to improve their SAM practice. This begins with their 'House of SAM' methodology to identify weak points in the existing infrastructure and helps client build a business case and on-going SAM improvement plan. Reporting is comprehensive and action oriented.

## HOUSE OF SAM

MINIMISE YOUR RISKS. OPTIMISE YOUR COSTS. MAXIMISE YOUR RESULTS



Like other suppliers in this review Softline Solutions have a number of tiered offerings to suit different customer sizes and requirements:

- **SAMasp** – hosted SAM infrastructure. Available as private cloud (on customer site), public cloud (on a Softline datacentre) or hybrid cloud (harnessing service provider partners such as T-Systems or Fujitsu)
- **SAMdesk** – a software licensing bureau for managing licensing queries and new registering licenses

- **SAMintelligence** – remote analysis and recommendations on compliance risks and cost saving opportunities

Of these three tiers, I think their approach to ‘SAMdesk’ is particularly practical. Clients are offered monthly credits to be applied to licensing queries; with more difficult questions accruing more credits than simpler licensing questions. The result is licensing expertise on tap at a predictable price.

Their service is underpinned by technology by Flexera, yet is remarkable how different their offering compares to the managed services offered by Flexera. Softline services seem to be more pragmatic, built from experience with engagements and suited to customer requirements rather than deployment of product. If Flexera Software has the desire to rapidly expand their managed services business in Europe – the shortcut would be to simply buy Softline Solutions.

Softline Solutions are yet to see massive take up of their managed service with the majority of their current business being project led, but I believe they have built a strong model from which to scale. One to watch.

## Anecdotal References for Providers

### *Aspera*

- “Aspera provide License Clearing, Software Inventory for Datacentres, Servers, Desktops, within standard and custom metrics. Data is shared with our IT department. License shortages and unused software is flagged for removal.”

### *Computacenter*

- “The provider delivered all that was expected of them and a little more. Very professional and would be happy to use their services again.”
- “Computacenter were extremely helpful throughout the whole process. We could not have completed the project without their help”

### *eTelligent*

- “They are very responsive when I call and are always willing to listen to new ideas and help us to come up with reports that meet our business needs. They really understand SAM and help drive out the requirements of how to best setup a SAM program. Most companies try to find a system before they try to understand what they need or want in a Software Asset Management Program.”
- “What sets this solution apart from other service providers is the ease of its back end architecture and flexibility. It also has several features around infrastructure software license management that I have not seen with other SAM or ITAM solutions.”
- “There were several providers that was given the opportunity to demonstrate their solutions ability, but eTelligent's Managed Information Exchange (MIE) offered the best solution at an affordable price to manage the organization's software and hardware estate”

### *ITAM Solutions*

- “ITAMS have demonstrated a good understanding of our business, are responsive and have some very capable consultants. Whilst they have experience of the major SAM tools they are vendor independent and have supported us in SAM product selection. Their UK base was also a key consideration in their selection as security was a key consideration.”

### *SHI*

- “The team works hard to deliver timely and accurate information”

- “SHI Polaris is a intuitive and comprehensive service supported by a professional team of skilled individuals each with unique contributions, the result of their work are accessible via a state of the art web portal with power drill down capability for detail research and review. Well worth the investment”

### *Softline*

- “Softline Solutions has been responsible for implementing and operating a centralized SAM service for us at a global level. This service covers the complete license lifecycle for our infrastructure. At first this services addressed all major volume vendors and will now be successively expanded to more complex data centre vendors. The operational model has been developed and implemented by Softline in a structured (ramp up, transition, operation) and well-documented manner.”
- “Besides the technical solution, Softline solutions implemented a centralized SAM portal that both offers software related resources for all of our employees (such as a software request portal, information about licensing, software usage guidelines, information about benefits such as Home Use etc.) As well as information and support for our operational staff. This also includes a “SAMdesk” provided by Softline which acts as a single point of contact and a single channel to address licensing questions, to register purchased licenses & contracts in the global SAM system (including validation and QA) and to request reports.”
- “For us, it was important to rely on a service provider that is not only interested in selling licenses or tools. From our experience, those service providers are often influenced in their consulting services. So, we have been looking for a vendor-independent service provider that is not selling software licenses and is interested in the success of the project rather than in the chance of selling tools or licenses. Also it was important to us that the provider has significant knowledge in implementing and operating a leading SAM tool and SAM processes and is able to provide additional services and added value compared to the SAM tool publisher.”

## Contact & Questions

If you have any questions regarding this review or need help in choosing a SAM provider or SAM technology please contact me using the details below.

*Martin Thompson, January 2014*

[Martin.Thompson@itassetmanagement.net](mailto:Martin.Thompson@itassetmanagement.net)

Tel: +44 (0) 845 130 3166

[www.itassetmanagement.net](http://www.itassetmanagement.net)

## Share and Share Alike

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

In layman's terms this means you can share it freely but please tell people where you found it! ([www.itassetmanagement.net](http://www.itassetmanagement.net)).

Further details here: [http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.en\\_US](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.en_US)