

Big Changes for Microsoft System Center Licensing

By Christopher Barnett

Business software buyers increasingly are aware of the significant changes that Microsoft will be implementing to the license metrics for SQL Server when version 2012 of the popular database solution is released this April. However, of potentially equal or even greater significance for some companies is the fact that Microsoft also is planning big changes for the license rules applicable to System Center when version 2012 of the network-management line of products is released, likely in April alongside SQL Server.

In the past, System Center products like System Center Configuration Manager (SCCM) typically have been licensed with one Management Server License (for the server where SCCM is installed) and multiple Management Licenses (MLs) for the devices managed by that SCCM deployment. Both the server license and the MLs have been purchased per device (physical and virtual), with the exception of the Datacenter Server Management Suite, which has been purchased per physical processor.

With version 2012, there will be no licenses required for the System Center server installations – licensing for the products will be focused only on the kind and quantity of managed endpoints. However, for servers, those endpoints now will be licensed per physical processor. In addition, System Center products will be divided between two editions – Datacenter and Standard. Each ML will cover two physical processors running on a managed server. However, while the Datacenter edition will allow an unlimited number of virtual servers to be deployed on the managed server, the Standard edition will permit only two managed Operating System Environments (OSEs) per license. If more than two OSEs are going to be managed under the Standard edition, then additional licenses will need to be purchased.

Finally, while Microsoft has a plan in place to transition existing System Center licensees with Software Assurance to the new model, those businesses must be prepared to document their software deployments in order to obtain the full value of the conversion. If those companies produce a time/date-stamped inventory of hardware tied to System Center installations at the end of the current Software Assurance agreement term, then their existing MLs (Standard or Enterprise) may be converted to a quantity of version 2012 Standard MLs sufficient to cover the number of processors in use. However, if the licensees do not perform the self-inventory, then they will receive only one 2012 Standard ML for each, prior-version, standalone ML. Also, regardless of whether the inventory is conducted, existing Enterprise-edition licensees will need to purchase a step-up license if they want to transition to the new Datacenter edition.

As with most Microsoft licensing topics, proper System Center licensing can be a difficult target to hit. Companies with complex infrastructures should consult with knowledgeable counsel or licensing consultants if there is any doubt regarding their prospective needs.



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.

Get in touch: cbarnett@scottandscottllp.com | 800.596.6176

