



Customer: Ash Grove Cement

Website: www.ashgrove.com

Customer Size: 2,000 employees

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Manufacturing—Construction

Partner: Soft-Aid

Customer Profile

Overland Park, Kansas-based Ash Grove Cement is the sixth-largest cement manufacturer in the United States. Ash Grove has an annual production capacity of nearly 9 million tons of cement.

Software and Services

- Services
 - Software Asset Management (SAM)
 - SAM Assist

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Cement Manufacturer Gains Control of and Confidence in Its Software-Licensing Position

“Since completing the SAM Assist engagement, we have a high level of confidence in our baseline inventory of software and in how we should manage assets going forward. It’s a win for everyone.”

Bill Hicks, Director, Information Technology, Ash Grove Cement

Ash Grove Cement struggled with uncertainty about how software assets were being procured and used in its remote facilities. The company also wanted to improve the IT staff’s licensing knowledge. After participating in a Microsoft Software Asset Management (SAM) Assist engagement, Ash Grove has improved its SAM processes, increased its understanding of licensing regulations, and developed confidence in its compliance.

Business Needs

Ash Grove Cement operates in approximately 40 remote locations across the western United States, including cement-manufacturing facilities, terminal distribution facilities, packaging facilities, and sales and customer service offices. A company run by the fourth generation of its founding family, Ash Grove prides itself on delivering top-level service, reliability, and quality for more than 125 years.

When Bill Hicks joined Ash Grove as the company’s Director of Information Technology in 1998, he discovered that software procurement processes at the company lacked structure. “This company

cares a great deal about its honesty and integrity—that has been a hallmark of the company for more than a hundred years,” says Hicks. A casual attitude toward software licensing was inconsistent with the company’s values. Hicks immediately sent the message to employees that all software would be licensed appropriately.

“We made a policy statement and enforced it. But we didn’t invest in tools to measure and monitor compliance,” says Hicks. Neither did the company perform routine licensing inventories. Instead, corporate help-desk employees would review installed software only when working on employees’ computers.



At remote locations, local employees had purchasing authority, and Hicks worried that some employees might not be following the firm's software procurement policies. For example, some employees would acquire software from their local retailers and recoup the cost through their expense reports. That practice left the IT team unaware of the installation and licensing information. "We knew that we were paying for whatever we installed here in corporate headquarters. But when somebody elsewhere in the company bought something, we didn't know about it. That exposure concerned me," says Hicks.

Also, Hicks wanted to improve his team's licensing knowledge. "We suspected that there were subtleties to Microsoft licensing that we just didn't understand," he says.

Solution

Hicks was nervous when Microsoft invited Ash Grove to participate in a Software Asset Management (SAM) Assist engagement. "We didn't know what our risk might be, but the opportunity to determine an accurate baseline for our licensing was too valuable to miss," he says.

Microsoft suggested that Ash Grove work with Soft-Aid, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner for Software Asset Management. "The Microsoft and Soft-Aid team put me at ease and gave me confidence that they would take a holistic approach to understanding our needs," Hicks says.

"Virginia Braun, the Microsoft Account Representative, deserves a lot of credit," says David Mansfield, Software Asset Management Consultant for Soft-Aid. "Her professionalism and customer skills were top-notch throughout the engagement."

Soft-Aid arranged for Ash Grove to have a free trial of an inventory tool, which the Ash Grove IT team installed on the company network. The tool was deployed for two weeks to allow time to gather licensing data from computers not connected to the network every day.

Next, Soft-Aid worked with the Ash Grove team to review the results. "The tool can't know everything, so we extrapolate numbers and then send the results to the customer to double-check for accuracy," says Mansfield. The license census turned up a few surprises, including several copies of applications that had been acquired from retailers and installed without the IT team's knowledge.

Soft-Aid then compared the results with the Microsoft Licensing Statement for Ash Grove, provided through the company's Microsoft Select Volume Licensing Agreement. After Ash Grove gathered licenses for software acquired outside of the Select agreement, the results were finalized. There were only minor discrepancies, which were easily remedied. Throughout the engagement, Mansfield educated the Ash Grove team about licensing considerations and offered recommendations for maintaining ongoing compliance.

Benefits

As a result of the SAM Assist engagement, Ash Grove has increased its control of its software licenses, gained valuable knowledge about licensing, and developed confidence in its software asset management. The benefits that Ash Grove now enjoys include:

- **Improved licensing control.** Following suggestions from Soft-Aid, Ash Grove has centralized its

purchasing authority. The company also is in the process of selecting an inventory tool for ongoing asset management. "We were close to compliance, but more by accident than because we knew in every case," says Hicks. "We're in a much better place today than we were before."

- **Gained licensing knowledge.** Ash Grove now understands the licensing implications of allowing employees' mobile devices to access email through the company's Microsoft Exchange Server solution. Also, Ash Grove is preparing to deploy two cloud-based applications. "These cloud-based applications integrate with applications that we host here at the corporate office. The SAM Assist has taught us to pause and think, 'Well, am I licensed for this?' Frankly, we would not have thought about that before," says Hicks.
- **Increased confidence in compliance.** Ash Grove takes great pride in its integrity, and being out of licensing compliance would have been at odds with the company's heritage. As the IT Director, Hicks is happy that he has a firm understanding of all the software installed across the company. "Since completing the SAM Assist engagement, we have a high level of confidence in our baseline inventory of software and in how we should manage assets going forward. It's a win for everyone."

Hicks laughs when remembering his initial nervousness. "If we were approached about a SAM Assist engagement again, I would say, 'Absolutely! When do we start?'"