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Managing software licences for a large research laboratory

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The Product Support (PS) group of the IT department at CERN distributes and supports more than one hundred different software packages, ranging from tools for computer aided design, field calculations, mathematical and structural analysis to software development. Most of these tools, which are used on a variety of Unix and Windows platforms by different user populations, are commercial packages requiring a licence. The group is also charged with license negotiations with the software vendors.

Keeping track of large number and variety of licences is no easy task, so in order to provide a more automated and more efficient service, the PS group has developed a database system to both track detailed licence configurations and to monitor their use. The system is called PSLicmon (PS Licence Monitor) and is based on an earlier development from the former CE group.

PSLicmon consists of four main components: report generation, data loader, Oracle product database and a PHP-based Web-interface. The license log parser/loader is implemented in Perl and loads reports from the different license managers into the Oracle database. The database contains information about products, licenses and suppliers and is linked to CERN's human resource database. The web-interface allows for on the fly generation of statistics plots as well as data entry and updates. The system also includes an alarm system for licence expiry.

Thanks to PSLicmon, the support team is able to better match licence acquisitions with the diverse needs of its user community, and to be in control of migration and phaseout scenarios between different products and/or product versions. The tool has proved to be a useful aid when making decisions regarding product support policy and licence acquisitions, in particular ensuring the provision of the correct number of often expensive software licences to match CERN's needs.

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