

Site Licensed Software: Marketing & Distribution

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The Ohio State University

56,000 students
4,000 faculty
13,000 staff

The Instruction and Research Center supports academic computing and the campus TCP/IP network, SONNET. There are four major areas supported, including central services (e.g. mainframe and minicomputer services), networking, distributed services (e.g. operation of 35 public sites and user services), and administrative support.

Staff: 127 FTEs; 21 graduate students;
200 undergraduates

Introduction

The Instruction and Research Computer Center (IRCC) has made a major commitment to provide site licensed software to the Ohio State University community. The process that will be discussed is based on a thorough marketing approach which includes analysis of the product, price, distribution, and promotion.

Site licensed software is software that is obtained on behalf of a group of users. Such a group may be a department, college, or the entire campus. In some cases where there is evidence that a site license will benefit a large portion of the university, IRCC will pay for the license. Regional campuses are also included as part of the university when negotiating site licensing. Many agreements for site licensing allow individual users to purchase copies through a reduced purchase price at the computer store on the Ohio State campus. Through our efforts we have been able to save the university millions of dollars.

Site licensed software distribution at IRCC has grown from a single communications package in 1984 to include many platform types including microcomputer, workstation, local area networks, minicomputer, and mainframe.

Our involvement and commitment to distribution and support continue to grow at a rapid pace.

In the early years, everything was relatively simple; we treated site licensed software as another incidental task. Distribution was easy and we marketed our service through our monthly newsletter.

The first package, Mini-Link, was developed in-house. The purpose of the package was to allow minicomputers to be linked to IRCC's mainframes. In 1985 we added Freestyle, a word processing package, and ProComm, a communication package.

As demand grew around campus, the number of people contacting IRCC with requests to acquire software for classroom support, research projects, and computer assisted instruction grew dramatically. We no longer distribute an entire word processing package, but we do distribute updates to popular packages and have provided word processing in all public computing sites. In addition to these, we are also distributing software packages for courseware development, computer security, programming languages, statistical analysis, virus detection, office automation, and laboratory packages.

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As the number of software packages grew, so did the administrative responsibilities. Areas to be considered are: request, demand, cost, committee approvals, negotiation, distribution, support, updates, record keeping, contract renewal, promotion, and market research.

Request

Requests are submitted to the Leader of Site Licensing (LSL), from faculty and staff interested in having IRCC purchase a site license for a particular product. The LSL then determines purchasing options (e.g. cost per number of copies).

Demand

The LSL works with the Leader of Marketing to determine a campus wide demand for the package. There are a number of different methods that can be used to assist in determining demand, but the ones we chose are as follows:

- Newsletter articles soliciting interest
- Notable users of the platform contacted
- University Purchasing contacted regarding past single copy purchases
- Ask original requester to expand upon expected usage

While an extensive market research program would give the best results, in many cases the expense of doing such a program could be too excessive in cost. Keeping in mind that the cost of demand research should be proportional to the savings of obtaining a site license, the methods stated above would be used in varying degrees.

Cost

Cost is a factor that must be considered when a site license is being researched. The cost of a license itself is not necessarily a factor, but how it relates to demand definitely is. For example, a request for a site license from a department for a \$1,000 license for a software package that is expected to receive wide usage in a department, with additional known user departments identified will more than likely be approved easily. On the other hand, a request for a package that would cost \$30,000 and for which only a few users in a few departments have been identified, will require a more intensified approval analysis.

Committee Approvals

The LSL presents all materials to the Director of IRCC for review. The Director then presents the request and all pertinent information to the Director of Academic Computing for review. The final approval stage is presentation to the Instructional Computing Advisory Committee and/or the Research Computing Advisory Committee.

If the requested site license is not approved, IRCC is then willing to work with the department or college to assist

them in negotiating a site license. In some situations IRCC may be able to combine proposals from two or more colleges to obtain the best possible price.

Negotiation

If the request is approved, IRCC works with the vendor to acquire the best possible license agreement for Ohio State. Some major concerns are that all campuses be included and that all faculty, staff, and students be able to take advantage of our software agreements and that IRCC is not subject to the laws of any state other than Ohio.

Upon approval of a request, University Purchasing is informed that negotiations for a product is underway. Once the basics of a site license has been established, the agreement is submitted to Contracts Administration for review for legal aspects, and so on.

When the approved agreement has been returned from Contracts Administration, the order is then placed through standard IRCC purchasing channels.

Distribution

Media Types

The method of distribution depends on the computer platform and the type of software. Diskette exchange and magnetic tapes and cartridges are the most popular forms of distribution. When possible, software is also distributed over SONNET, our intra-university network. The most critical part of software distribution is adhering to the requirements of the site license.

Platforms

The Customer Service area of IRCC is the central contact point for distributing most software. The software has been divided into two categories. The first category is software for microcomputers that has a relatively simple license agreement. Software in this category can be distributed by any member of Customer Service, including students.

The second category of software includes that with more sophisticated licenses. Distribution of software in this category will be done by the Site License Coordinator.

Agreements

All recipients of site licensed software are required to sign a contract agreeing to the designated terms set forth, but we have no real way of knowing if they honor any or all of the requirements. It is our belief that they do. An important area to stress is that any software we distribute is for that particular individual or departmental use and no other copies can be made or distributed except when necessary for backup purposes. The person who signs the form is responsible for making sure the agreement is upheld. Unfortunately, this requirement has caused some of the

worst public relation problems. This generally occurs when a faculty or staff member sends another person to pick up a package and sign the agreement. An attempt is made to make sure the person signing the agreement is the person who is using the software, and if not, then they are in violation of the agreement.

Another critical aspect of software distribution is determining eligibility. Most of our agreements require that the customer provide a current university ID before receiving software. We generally do not make exceptions to this rule. A university ID helps determine the status of a requestor and prevents any persons with unauthorized classifications from receiving software.

Support

Whenever possible IRCC provides technical support services for products licensed by IRCC. A platform software coordinator handles suspected software problems and acts as a liaison with the vendor and will assist with the operation of the software. These support people are almost always full time IRCC staff members. With some very specialized software packages, IRCC will attempt to arrange for departments with expertise in the software to provide the support.

Consultation is provided for most general purpose software in the Microcomputer Consulting Area. The coordinator of this area works with the Site License Leader to keep abreast of all new site licenses, so that sufficient information is available about the package before it is distributed. Consultants differ from platform coordinators in that consultants assist in the use of software packages and coordinators are responsible for the installation and upgrades.

One of the most extensive areas of support lies in our contract with Digital Equipment Corporation. An agreement has existed between IRCC and Digital to allow all manuals and documentation relating to site licensed Digital software to be accessible over the network. This alone has proven to be a tremendous cost saving to the University.

Reference manuals are usually not included with any software. They are available for review in our Microcomputer Consulting Area, Publications Library, and through our online reference facility. Any reference or support materials negotiated during the basic license negotiation may be purchased through the University Computer Store and sometimes through the OSU Bookstores.

Another area of support that is available on some platforms is electronic bulletin boards. These are established by the designated technical support person and are an excellent means of communication and information

exchange. User groups, with which IRCC plays an important role, are popular means of support and provide an informal atmosphere to discuss ways of using all resources included in a software package.

Updates

Each agreement usually provides that IRCC will be eligible to receive any updates made to a software package during the current contract period. Vendors usually contact IRCC about any forthcoming updates and also about any bugs or problems detected in their product. They are quick to provide consultation and assistance with any problem discovered.

Updates also provide an opportunity to review our user base. Responses from notification efforts supply us with useful information. For example, we can determine if someone has left the university, discontinued use of a package, or made unauthorized copies.

Renewal

As a software package approaches its expiration date, the LSL works with the department or college that originally requested the site license to determine past demand and cost effectiveness of renewing the license.

Record Keeping

Another area of software distribution to consider is record keeping and statistics. Some vendors require that a data base be kept with pertinent information about each user. Signed site licensed agreements are maintained and each software package that we distribute is recorded and totaled at the end of each month. Statistics are kept according to faculty, staff, and graduate and undergraduate students.

This information is used to help determine the segments of campus most benefited by our services and also to help determine the use and continued demand for a software package when the contract is up for renewal. An example of how this data proved useful occurred when IRCC received an update to Authorware. A personal letter was mailed to each person who previously obtained a site licensed copy from IRCC. The letter stated that an update was available and included instructions on how to obtain the new updates. This proved to be quite successful, based on the response from our clients.

Promotion

Promotion plays an important role in the success of any site license program. All the foregoing steps can be done perfectly, but if customers are not aware of what is available, all would be for naught.

A popular means of communicating to the users of IRCC, is through the monthly newsletter. All new or upgraded software are featured in this publication. Also periodically

a general purpose article is written for new users who are not familiar with this service.

Occasionally a freeware program will be obtained and public notification can be made immediately. An example of this is when the WDEF virus hit the campus. IRCC obtained a copy of Disinfectant and wanted the campus to know immediately about the problem and also the cure. The Leader of Marketing immediately called for press releases for the local newspaper and radio stations. (This occurred during Christmas break, and the campus newspaper was not printing.) In addition, a letter was sent to all Administrators, Deans, and Chairpersons explaining the virus and the software that was available to correct the problem. These people were asked to post the notice on all public bulletin boards. It is felt that the immediate action taken by the Marketing group to inform the campus of the problem helped to stop the spread of this virus. It also raised the awareness levels of all viruses.

Each year at OSU's annual Computer Exhibition, IRCC features one software package that is distributed free, without requiring a disk exchange. For example, last year antivirus packages, Virus-Scan and Disinfectant, were featured. The year before, communication packages were featured.

Other methods of informing users of what is available, include promotion at IRCC workshops, articles in the OnCampus publication, get acquainted accounts and orientations.

Determining the most successful avenues of promotion is not the only marketing function necessary for the success of the program. Other marketing functions include sending renewal letters and providing information about conditions of existing licenses.

Market Research

An extensive research project is currently being done to determine all software on the Ohio State campus. The survey was designed to determine the number of copies of software obtained from IRCC, individual copies of software purchased by departments or faculty, and site licensed software purchased by departments or faculty. The survey consists of 27 categories listing 306 different software packages. This survey was given to all Deans, Chairpersons, and Office Administrators. This project is in the process of current distribution, therefore no results are known.

Creating a successful marketing campaign for site licenses has proven to be a challenging and exciting responsibility. New and improved methods are always being considered for market research and promotion.

Conclusion

Site licensing software at The Ohio State University is no longer an incidental task. In addition to all the previously stated areas to consider, are the behind the scenes daily chores that bring it all together. The actual across-the-counter distribution, disk copying, label making, and numerous other tasks required to get software from the contract to the counter are very important parts of software distribution. An enormous amount of work and cooperation from many people and levels of expertise is required in order to distribute and support a software package. It is IRCC's intent to offer the best service possible.

Site licensing has been a tremendous money-saving adventure for the University and has afforded faculty, staff and students the opportunity to receive and use software at basically no cost.