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Six selection criteria to help you choose the right SAM tools

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There's no shortage of choice when it comes to searching for your first (or next) set of SAM tools.

A quick web search will return results for all kinds of tools, cheap and   expensive, capable and not-so-capable. In fact, even just searching for 'SAM tools' could create problems, as you'll get results for tools offering everything from Windows-only inventory to options that include license management, to advanced platforms that include capabilities such as self-service app stores and more.

In a forest of SAM tools, it can be difficult to see the wood for the trees.

This short guide explores six questions you should ask yourself before committing to a SAM tool; six questions that will help you make the right decision and give you the best chance of meeting the goals of your SAM program.

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1. Inventory & Discovery

One of your very first considerations should be establishing what platforms, device types and software vendors are in-scope for your project – both today and in the future. The answer to that will determine the foundation of your SAM program – suitable discovery and inventory tools.

If you are only looking at Microsoft applications on the desktop, you could build a strong case for simply using Microsoft SCCM or a low-cost Windows inventory tool.

Most programs, however, have a wider scope and if you're including **Oracle**, **IBM**, **SAP**, Micro Focus or other 'enterprise software vendors' you'll need a discovery and inventory solution that does a good job of non-Windows platforms. That might mean looking for a solution with a credible agent-less inventory capability (not many data center managers will welcome you deploying agents to mission-critical servers).

You should also consider how you will use the inventory data. Do you want it solely for the purpose of managing license compliance on the desktop? Or, if you're going to go to the effort of deploying a solution, shouldn't you instead be using that inventory to support wider programs such as ITSM, **ITAM**, **digital transformation** and **supporting M&A activity**? In which case, you need a 'full' discovery solution, not a limited inventory-only tool.

Your answers to the above questions will affect the type of inventory and discovery tool that's right for you. Don't get caught out by selecting a tool that short-changes you or leaves you unable to support wider or future program goals.

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2. Cloud or On-Premises? Or both?

Standing up a SAM tool on-premises can be a headache, especially when that tool requires multiple installs, servers and databases (see question #3). If you own the servers and the data center, it might not be such a problem, but getting support for implementing a SAM tool from other teams can be a long and arduous process.

Maintaining and supporting future patches, upgrades and increasing database sizes and hardware demands only adds to the pain.

An alternative, if hosting the SAM tool on your own servers is more hassle than it's worth, you can opt for a solution that can be delivered from the cloud. Beware, however, that not all cloud-hosted SAM solutions are equal. Some are 'true SaaS' solutions that have been architected from the ground up to be delivered using a SaaS model. Others are 'faux SaaS' where an on-premise version of the SAM tool is effectively hosted in a cloud environment or third-party data center.

Why does it matter? It's all to do with performance and customer   experience. With many 'faux SaaS' solutions you'll be sharing instances with other customers, which means your performance will suffer, you won't be able to upgrade as quickly and there's a heightened security risk of your data being exposed to other organizations.

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3. Architecture

Although criteria #1 deals specifically with discovery and in-ventory, it is likely your SAM program will be broader in scope – almost certainly   managing software licenses and building Effective License Positions. Perhaps also looking at provision-ing a **self-service app store**, or including the ability to patch or distribute applications.

The broader in scope your SAM program is, the more likely it is you will expect to look at adopting a platform with all these capabilities. Except that most SAM 'platforms' actually aren't. Instead, they often comprise several distinct products with different code bases, which means multiple installs, multiple servers and multiple databases. Not to mention multiple user interfaces and brittle (and expensive) integrations.

Unless, that is, you look at a true **Unified Platform** where all the products and capabilities can be found on the same plat-form – sharing the same architecture, the same data sources and the same user interface.

How important the architecture is to you will depend on sev-eral factors over and above the scope of your SAM program. Smaller organizations might cope with SAM tools that have older legacy architectures, but organizations over 20,000 de-vices might quickly find their SAM tool running out of steam and struggling to process inventory and ELP calculations.

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4. Software Publisher Support

Ideally, you should have already decided which vendors are in-scope for your SAM program, both now and in the future. If you haven't, now is the time to do so. That's because different software publishers have very different ways of licensing their products and not all SAM tools do a good job of supporting all vendors.

As such, an important part of your selection criteria needs to be matching the vendors you want to most closely manage (and "all of them" is rarely a credible option) against the capabilities of the SAM tools on your shortlist.

If you want to optimize **Microsoft**, make sure the SAM tool you're looking at can cope with the possibility that your organization is mid-transition between on-premises and the cloud and can report on both environments in a single vendor report. Also, make sure that the tool can cope with multiple license metrics being applied to different instances of the same application (more common than you might think!).

If you are planning to manage **IBM**, make sure the tool can work with ILMT and that it supports all the complex license metrics and calculations that are required to accurately manage sub-capacity licensing. You don't want to be doing more work in spreadsheets than the SAM tool itself.
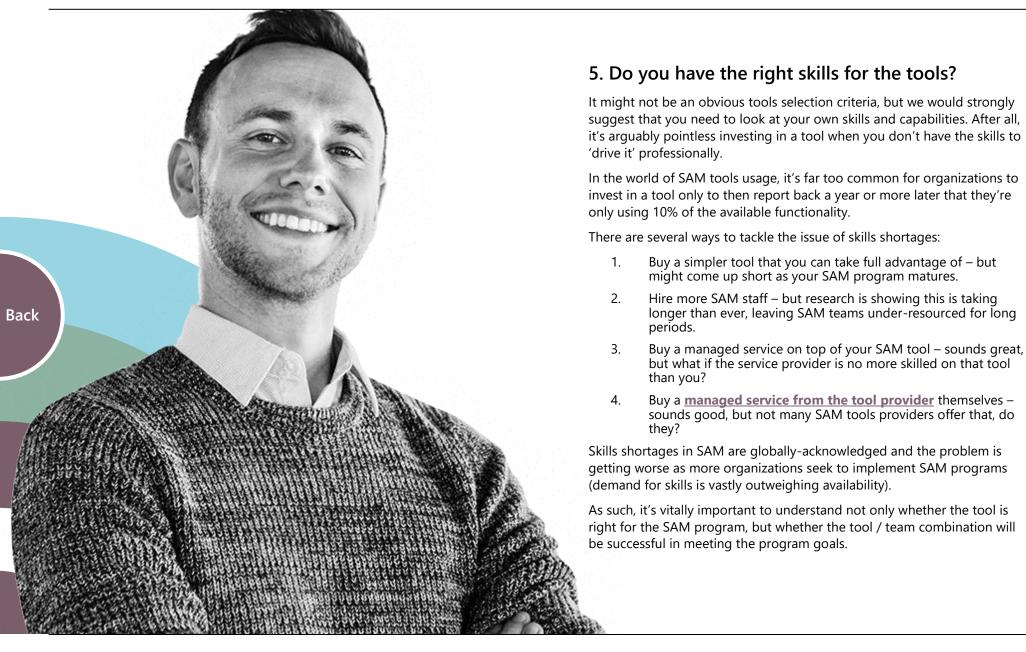
If **Oracle** is on your target list, make sure the SAM tool doesn't only discover and manage Databases. That's no use if your **Oracle** investment includes Middleware and E-Business Suite!

Once you have identified your most important strategic software publishers, get the SAM tools vendors to show you how they support them in real-world scenarios.

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5. Do you have the right skills for the tools?

It might not be an obvious tools selection criteria, but we would strongly suggest that you need to look at your own skills and capabilities. After all, it's arguably pointless investing in a tool when you don't have the skills to 'drive it' professionally.

In the world of SAM tools usage, it's far too common for organizations to invest in a tool only to then report back a year or more later that they're only using 10% of the available functionality.

There are several ways to tackle the issue of skills shortages:

1. Buy a simpler tool that you can take full advantage of – but might come up short as your SAM program matures.

2. Hire more SAM staff – but research is showing this is taking longer than ever, leaving SAM teams under-resourced for long periods.

3. Buy a managed service on top of your SAM tool – sounds great, but what if the service provider is no more skilled on that tool than you?

4. Buy a **managed service from the tool provider** themselves – sounds good, but not many SAM tools providers offer that, do they?

Skills shortages in SAM are globally-acknowledged and the problem is getting worse as more organizations seek to implement SAM programs (demand for skills is vastly outweighing availability).

As such, it's vitally important to understand not only whether the tool is right for the SAM program, but whether the tool / team combination will be successful in meeting the program goals.

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6. Is the vendor invested in your success?

This might seem a strange addition as a tools selection recommendation, but recent research from Gartner suggests that, by mid-2020, 75% of SAM tools users will not feel that their tools are meeting pre-purchase expectations of value.

In other words, three out of four SAM tools customers will be unhappy.

There can be many reasons for being unhappy (we've explored six of them here in our **on-demand webinar** and **ebook**), but one we hear time and time again is that the tools vendors are not sufficiently responsive or supportive of customer needs.

For an organization investing in **Software Asset Management**, that simply isn't good enough. You deserve to work with a vendor that will provide the support you need, as well as develop products that are fit for purpose.

One resource worth checking out is **Gartner Peer Insights**, which captures feedback from SAM tools customers on their satisfaction ratings – including with the tool, the implementation process and vendor support.

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Conclusion – make the right SAM tools choice now

There are many more selection criteria we could include (and our specialists would be happy to talk you through them – they love talking about SAM tools!), but these six criteria should help you build a good shortlist of SAM tools for your needs.

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Ultimately, you need a tool that is right for your:

- Program scope & **SAM maturity**

- Appetite for hosting on-premise or in the cloud

- Desire for single user experience or willingness to jump around apps

- Support the software publishers you want to manage

- Matches (or complements) your SAM skills

- Provides you with a positive experience

If you're just starting out on your SAM journey, or you've decided it's time to review your chosen SAM tools, **speak to a consultant today** and let us help you build the right selection criteria for your SAM program.