Maximizing Resource Efficiency: Why Usage Monitoring is Key

Carol Hill

Information resources are procured based on specific business needs, but those needs can change over time and a business case may no longer be as clear-cut as it once looked. Monitoring how resources are used can catch these factors before the next needs assessment exercise while highlighting usage patterns that are ready for cost optimization.

In this article we discuss what you can learn by monitoring resource usage, how you can monitor usage, and why Couranto Discovery makes monitoring resources simple.

What monitoring usage tells you

Are users accessing the license and how often? Within a group license, how many group members are active users? Is there excess usage indicating that users are exceeding the terms of your agreement with the publisher?

These are the type of questions answered by monitoring resource usage. The answers help you steer investment and make decisions that can help you get more out of your information budget.

Spot patterns for renegotiating and savings

Monitoring usage will quickly help you spot potential cost savings. For example, if multiple single-user licenses are associated with the same subscription product ,these could easily be wrapped into a cost-effective multi-user license.

Another example is where users are subscribing to several resources from the same vendor – but with a separate agreement in place for each product. These agreements could be wrapped up into a single, comprehensive agreement with the vendor.

Or, even where resources are from different vendors there may in fact be a single vendor that can cover you for the same needs under a consolidated agreement that is less costly, and still delivers the needed information from multiple sources.

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Evaluate return on investment

In many instances, you might find that even though the business case for a certain resource was initially clear, the usage no longer reflects an ongoing need, and that it's simply not worth paying for a license renewal.

An alternative route to meeting that occasional need may be better. For example, where a resource is used for one or two articles a month, it might be sensible to simply purchase articles through Copyright Clearance Center as needed. Likewise, where a service is in place "just in case" it could be better to sign up only if and as the need arises.

Identify glitches

Resource monitoring can also highlight anomalies and ensure that your resources remain useful. For example, if a resource was in use for years but no longer shows usage it's cause for investigating whether the license holder has left the company, changed roles, or simply no longer needs access to specific subject matter expertise.

Likewise, excessive usage can point to falling out of compliance with the terms and conditions agreed with the provider. A common cause of this is password sharing, which may put your company in violation of copyright law.

Know where to focus engagement efforts

Sometimes a resource is both high-value and much-needed but, nonetheless, usage analysis suggests that it is not used. The right answer is not necessarily to cancel or replace the resource – instead, the answer may be to advocate for it.

Try to understand why the resource is not used – are users in the license group unaware of it? Is the resource included in your Couranto Discovery library platform, shown as a prominent tile in the resource list presented to your users? Alternatively do your users need the training to be able to use the resource? It might be worth working with the vendor to educate your users. Couranto might help you host vendor webinars to ensure that your users are getting the most out of the resources you're providing.

Wait… how do we monitor usage?

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Finding the statistics can be challenging – IP-based authentication can obscure usage, for example. One option is to contact the vendor who can give you a usage report detailing which users accessed a resource – and how frequently they accessed it.

You could also draw data from the portal you use – for example, if users use a web portal like Couranto's Discovery Platform for access to resources, you could readily view access and usage reports by user, by region, by workgroup or by subsidiary.

Another option would be to run a direct survey where you ask your users which tools are used, popular, and needed. Finally, usage data may only tell you so much: it's always worth engaging in a conversation with users to find out what the real reasons are behind usage patterns.

Monitoring resource usage with Couranto Clarity

At Couranto we know how important it is to continuously monitor resource usage and our clients often ask us to help them understand what their users are doing with their information resources, and to understand where the real value lies.

That's why we built usage monitoring right into Couranto Discovery. Part of the goal of Discovery is to facilitate easy access to information for users. As a consequence, Discovery can track clicks: even if IP authentication is in use, we can still provide data on how often a resource has been accessed – and by whom.

In fact, Discovery administrators have access to a live stream view of the usage – and the most active users, as shown below.
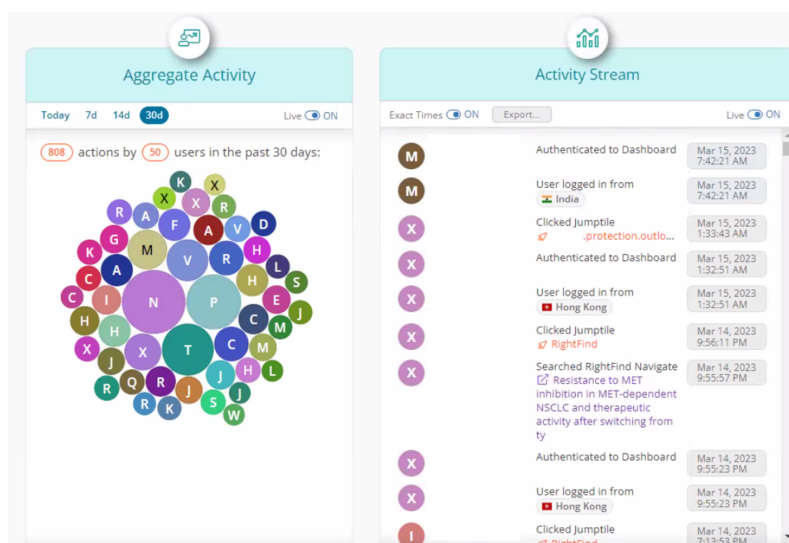
Monitoring resource usage in Couranto Discovery

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Discovery also displays a heatmap to administrators so you can monitor the ebb and flow of data requests. You can spot general usage patterns – e.g. more research being done on early in the year, on average, or certain times of day– or trends that shape around the major events for your organization.

These patters can help facilitate discussions and negotiations with vendors. You may, for example, ask vendors not to do maintenance that take resources offline during certain periods. Similarly, it could serve as ammunition to explain to vendors that high usage is not a consistent pattern – that it only happens during exceptional periods.

Because Discovery allows users to find resources using a search tool, administrators can observe search activity for commonly required needs: for example, to see when a search fails, which can help guide decisions towards needs that are not being met.

Examine your usage data – it's worth it

In Couranto's Discovery platform all data is exportable so you can slice and dice your usage data in Excel or a tool like Tableau. Whichever source you use for data, however, it's important that you do have access to usage data – and that you analyze it.

As outlined throughout this article, understanding usage can reduce costs significantly and help drive better value for your information users. Usage monitoring is also an important bridge to the next major needs assessment exercise – and will provide supportive data to work with when you get to that big review.

Carol Hill is Vice President and Director of Client Services at Couranto. With more than 20 years experience in the data analysis and data management category for major global corporations, Carol contributes significantly to her clients' effective management of this complex area.