All-inclusive Software Licensing: Best Feature Ever … with Caveats

On the surface, all-inclusive software licensing sounds great. You get all the software features that the product offers at no additional charge. You can use them — or not use them — at your discretion. It simplifies product purchases and ongoing licensing.

But what if you opt not to use all the product's features or only need a small subset of them? In those circumstances, you need to take a hard look at any product that offers all-inclusive software licensing to determine if it will deliver the value that you expect.

Why We Like All-Inclusive Software Licensing

All-inclusive software licensing has taken off in recent years with more enterprise data storage and data protection products than ever delivering their software licensing in this manner. Further, this trend shows no signs of abating for the following reasons:

- It makes lives easier for the procurement since they do not have manage and negotiate software licensing separately.
- It makes lives easier for the IT staff who want to use its features only to find out they cannot use them because they do not have a license to use them.
- It helps the vendors because their customers use their features. The more they use and like the features, the more apt they are to keep using the product long term.
- It provides insurance for the companies involved that if

they do unexpectedly need a feature, they do not have to go back to the proverbial well and ask for more money to license it.

- It helps IT be more responsive to changes in business requirements. Business need can change unexpectedly. It happens where IT is assured that a certain feature will never be of interest to the end user. Suddenly, this "never gonna need it" becomes a "gotta have it" requirement.

All-inclusive software licensing solves these dilemmas and others.

The Best Feature Ever … Has Some Caveats

The reasons as to why companies may consider all-inclusive software licensing the best feature ever are largely self-evident. But there are some caveats as to why companies should minimally examine all-inclusive software licensing before they select any product that supports it.

Best feature ever*

* Not actually ever. Also only applies some of the time.
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1. *Verify you will use the features offered by the platform.* It is great that a storage platform offers deduplication, compression, thin provisioning, snapshots, replication, metro clusters, etc., etc. at no

extra charge. But if you do not use these features now and have no plans to use them, guess what? You are still going to indirectly pay for them if you buy the product.

2. ***Verify the provider measures and knows which of its features are used.*** When you buy all-inclusive software licensing, you generally expect the vendor to support it and continue to develop it. But how does the vendor know which of its features are being used, when they are being used, and for what purposes? It makes no sense for the provider to staff its support lines with experts in replication or continue developing its replication features if no one uses it. Be sure you select a product that regularly monitors and reports back to the providers which of its features are used, how they are used and actively supports and develops them.

3. ***Match your requirements to the features available on the product.*** It still pays to do your homework. Know your requirements and then evaluate products with all-inclusive software licensing based upon them.

4. ***Verify the software works well in your environment.*** I have run across a few providers who led the way in providing all-inclusive software licensing. Yet the ones who selected the product based on this offering found out the features were not as robust as they anticipated or were so difficult to use that they had to abandon using them. In short, having a license to use software that does not work in your environment does not help anyone.

5. ***Try to quantify if other companies use the specific software features.*** Ideally, you want to know that others like you use the feature in production. This can help you avoid become an unsuspecting beta-tester for that feature.

Be Grateful but Wary

I, for one, am grateful that providers have come around with

more of them making all-inclusive software licensing available as a licensing option for their products. But the software features that vendors include with their all-inclusive software licensing vary from product to product. They also differ in their maturity, robustness, and fullness of support.

It behooves everyone to hop on the all-inclusive software licensing bandwagon. But as you do, verify to which train you hitched your wagon and that it will take you to where you want to go.