

THE ROBERT HORNE GROUP CASE STUDY



“The FAST programme gives you peace of mind by supplying a solid framework to become compliant.”

The Robert Horne Group uses the FAST framework to gain better control of its software licences

The Group achieves software compliance and responds to a Microsoft audit with confidence.

The Robert Horne Group has been working on the FAST Compliance Programme since 2000 when they were transitioning from a mainframe environment to a Windows based environment.

Recognising that licensing and compliance would be an ongoing challenge, Robert Horne Group decided to join the FAST Programme to help them put the right processes in place from the start to ensure they were properly licensed and compliant.

In early 2008 Robert Horne achieved registration to the FAST Standard for Software Compliance (FSSC-1:2007) and are now working towards Platinum which will require 3 consecutive years of registration to the standard.

Founded in London in 1925, the Robert Horne Group has grown to be the UK's leading supplier of paper, board and plastics. In 1975, the Group's head office and national distribution centre moved to Northampton and is now supported by a network of 29 branches around the UK and Northern Ireland. Since 2003, the Robert Horne Group has been owned by PaperlinX, the world's leading international fine paper merchant.

Case study highlights

- Established a more controlled environment by drafting and distributing a Policies and Procedures document outlining the acceptable uses of IT to all employees
- Integrated process with HR now ensures new hires are given the Policies and Procedures document on joining and that IT has up to date employee information to reconcile with IT equipment
- Completed full audit and reconciliation of installed software with licences
- FAST programme enabled Robert Horne Group to respond with confidence to a Microsoft audit

IT challenges

Duncan Borland has been with the Robert Horne Group for 11 years and is Group Computer Services Manager, responsible for IT infrastructure. Duncan and his team of 6 IT staff manage the organisation's Northampton, data centre, supporting 740 users across 19 locations in the UK.

In early 2000, Duncan was contacted by FAST to introduce him to the FAST programme.

“At the time we were actually going through a significant transition,” says Duncan.

“Up until that point at least 80 percent of our users were still working from a dumb terminal connected to our corporate mainframe system. In that environment licensing wasn't an issue. However, we were about to start a project to deploy a Windows based environment with a mixture of PCs and laptops across the organisation. Licensing was going to become an issue and I recognised that registration to the FAST Standard for Software Compliance (FSSC-1:2007) could help ensure we got it right.”

However it wasn't until 2002 that The Robert Horne Group got serious about the programme: “Getting started was the hardest part,” says Duncan. “However, once FAST incorporated the different stages to the programme - Bronze, Silver and Gold - we immediately felt the task would be more manageable. It's about being able to break the task down and establishing a bit of momentum.”

Gaining momentum

The first task in completing the Bronze stage was getting in a FAST Account Manager to give a presentation to the Board.

“The Board presentation was very useful,” says Duncan. “When it's a third-party explaining in very simple terms that it is a criminal offence to pirate software and generally it's the Board in an organisation who are responsible should the company's licensing situation not be fully compliant, this lends added credibility.”

It's not really a difficult concept to get across, but management buy-in underpins the success of any compliance project because it's about changing processes and procedures right across the company and it must be sanctioned from the top of the organisation.”

Duncan also attended the FAST Software Management Workshop and passed the end of course exam certifying him as a FAST Approved Software Manager.

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“Achieving the Bronze stage wasn’t difficult but it was a milestone,” says Duncan. “The FAST framework gave us the necessary processes to put place in which enabled us to establish a more controlled environment.”

While working toward the Silver award which was completed in 2003, The Robert Horne Group drafted a Policies and Procedures document that outlined the acceptable uses of IT assets. The document was signed by the Managing Director and distributed to all employees.

Duncan also attended the FAST Software Audit day and passed the exam, becoming a FAST Approved Software Auditor.

“We used the templates provided by FAST and then customised them which was very useful,” says Duncan. “We also put processes in place with HR to ensure the document was sent out to new hires along with the offer letter. If the document wasn’t signed and returned, HR wouldn’t issue a start date.”

The path to gold

Achieving the Gold award was more involved requiring a full audit of all hardware and software and then the reconciliation of installed software with software licences.

“The journey to Gold was more daunting as this is where the serious work begins,” says Duncan.

Three separate projects were run in parallel which would eventually come together in the final reconciliation process. First, a full hardware audit was conducted which was completed as part of a new equipment rollout. Secondly, the HR department was engaged so that the IT team could match up IT equipment with known employees.

“This is now an ongoing process that we’ve put in place,” says Duncan. “Reconciling the hardware that IT knows about and the users that HR knows we’ve employed so we can now identify every piece of equipment we own and every user that needs to have a piece of equipment - that way if anything is missing, we can find it.”

Finally an electronic audit tool was implemented which provided an accurate assessment of all the software that was deployed on each desktop. Only when Duncan was sure that all the information from each strand of the project was correct and could be relied on did he begin to bring it all together into one database.

“It was important that we didn’t reconcile things too quickly. We wanted to be confident that all the data we had was correct - that way when we brought all the information together to begin to look at our licensing situation, we knew we were working from information we could rely on.”

In the meantime the Robert Horne Group had been purchasing Microsoft licences on a select agreement through one vendor who produced an electronic output of all licence purchases from 1999.

“This enabled us to easily look at what licences we required from a usage point of view and compare that to how many licences we had purchased,” says Duncan. “While we weren’t far off, having the processes in place to know for sure is very powerful because at that point it means we can prove with certainty our compliance position.”

In December 2007, Duncan found himself facing an audit from Microsoft. However, because Duncan already had the audit and reconciliation procedures in place as part of the FAST programme it wasn’t a difficult process.

“The audit went smoothly though we did get a few minor things wrong - we had installed Visio Standard when we should have installed Visio Professional. It was easily fixed, but if we hadn’t been working on the FAST programme it would have been a lot harder to prove our position during this audit.”

The Robert Horne Group submitted and achieved the Gold award at the beginning of 2008.

Moving forward

The next goal for The Robert Horne Group is to achieve the Platinum award which will require three consecutive years of registration to the FAST Standard for Software Compliance (FSSC-1:2007).

Duncan is also continually refining his procedures for compliance and has recently purchased a software management dashboard tool which will provide real-time metrics. He is also signed up to attend the ISEB Certificate in Software Asset Management Essentials 3-day course.

“The FAST programme gives you peace of mind by supplying a solid framework to become compliant,” concludes Duncan.

“Once the processes and procedures are in place it’s not such a difficult task but you have to put the effort in to get there. It’s like rowing to get up to speed - you’ve got to put in the effort to start but once you have the rhythm in place you can continue to move forward. FAST and registration to the FAST Standard for Software Compliance (FSSC-1:2007) has helped make the journey easier and more manageable. We see great value in the programme.”

For more information please call **0844 815 5742**, email **contactus@fast-compliance.co.uk** or visit **www.fast-compliance.co.uk**