

MECHANISMS FOR HANDLING SOFTWARE LICENSE AGREEMENTS ON MULTI-USER SYSTEM

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention generally relates to handling license agreements for software packages in a computer system.

2. Description of the Related Art

Companies are in the business of developing software packages comprising, for example, operating system and application software products, which are then marketed to computer owners. Typically, such software packages are marketed on a fixed fee basis in which a user purchases a copy of the software package, usually under terms of a license agreement. The license agreement normally explains to the user that the software package is owned by a corresponding company and only copyrighted and licensed to the user, but not transferred.

It has been a characteristic of this industry that in order for the developers of the software to recover the often quite large investment in research and development of the software product, and also the costs of manufacture and marketing, that the purchase price of such software items has been relatively high. This high purchase price has been a barrier, in some circumstances, to the widespread licensing of some software and has limited the penetration in some markets. In addition, some users are reluctant to incur such a purchase without first operating the software, since the suitability of software is very difficult to judge without actually using it.

In order to afford users an opportunity to evaluate a particular operating system or application software product, a developer may offer the user a "trial period" during which the user is granted the right to use the operating system or application software product. Upon expiration of the trial period, the user may either license the product or stop using the product.

Growth in the computer industry has also led many personal computer systems manufacturers to "preload" software packages on the systems. The preloaded systems may be marketed as "turn-key" solutions, whereby the user is not required to install the software package(s) and may begin useful operation shortly after turning the system on. In addition, preloaded software packages may be used by a software vendor as a method of introducing the user to a particular software product(s), which the user may purchase upon the expiration of a trial period.

As is well known, a major problem with regard to the preloading of software packages in general is that the end-user is not required to explicitly accept corresponding license agreements, so that legal problems may arise in using these software packages. It is thus possible that a specific software package is preloaded which the end-user is not authorized to use.

Most of today's available software packages only display a license agreement that must be accepted before the installation process is allowed to continue. However, even the mechanisms used on workstations for rendering the license agreements are deficient for installing and managing software packages on multi-user systems. For example, the installation of software may occur off-shift by individuals not qualified to understand or accept the corresponding license agreement. Furthermore, the system language (locale) used to present the license agreement may not be the one understood by the license reviewer, i.e. the end-user.

Additionally, the license agreement's acceptance dialogs may disrupt an automated or batch installation processes.

Conventional practice also presents inconveniences when a user installs multiple software packages. In particular, installation of several software packages based on the same software product from one software provider may result in multiple, redundant acceptance dialogs and software that has been preloaded by the system manufacturer, a previous system owner or any other third-party cannot re-request acceptance.

Moreover, license agreements for software packages, which have been accepted by the end-user, cannot easily be found on the computer system in case the end-user wants to read these license agreements again. Additionally, a system administrator of a company cannot control the displaying and requesting for acceptance of license agreements to end-users when, for instance, internally redistributing software.

Consequently, the handling of license agreements for software packages in a computer system is generally cumbersome and inefficient and computer users are not able to manage license agreements of software packages installed, or to be installed, on their computer systems efficiently and effectively.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention generally relates to handling license agreements for software packages in a computer system.

One aspect of the present invention relates to a method for handling license agreements for a plurality of software packages in a computer system. The method comprises: determining whether at least one license agreement for any one of the plurality of software packages has been declined; and if at least one license agreement has been declined: building the declined license agreement from a plurality of document files; and prompting a user to accept the at least one license agreement.

Another aspect of the present invention relates to a method for handling license agreements for a plurality of software packages in a computer system, the method comprising: providing a single-action option to a user for accepting or declining a single license agreement common to at least two software packages of the plurality of software packages.

Another aspect of the present invention relates to a method for handling license agreements for multiple software packages in a computer system, each software package being identified by a unique package ID and comprising one or more components. The method comprises: providing a plurality of document files, each document file comprising one or more text elements; providing a plurality of manifest files, each manifest file indicating at least one corresponding document file of the plurality of document files and comprising a unique package ID designating a corresponding software package; extracting a specific unique package ID from a specific software package; determining a corresponding manifest file from the plurality of manifest files on the basis of the extracted unique package ID; determining the at least one corresponding document file of the plurality of document files on the basis of the determined corresponding manifest file; and combining the one or more text elements comprised in the at least one determined corresponding document file to build a license agreement for the specific software package.

Another aspect of the present invention relates to a method for handling a license agreement for a selected