

Licensing of Microsoft Desktop Application Software for use with Windows Server Remote Desktop Services

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This brief applies to all Microsoft Licensing programs.

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Summary

This licensing brief addresses the most commonly asked questions about licensing Microsoft Office device licenses in a Windows Server Remote Desktop Services environment. The general rule is "one license for each desktop accessing Microsoft Office," which is the per-device licensing policy. This brief is limited to answering questions about Office per device on-premise licenses and doesn't include per user Online Services customer scenarios.

Details

Licensing Windows Server Remote Desktop Services

The Remote Desktop Services (RDS) functionality of Windows Server can provide desktop virtual machines that have a similar look and feel of a Windows desktop experience to users desktop devices remotely accessing Windows Server across a network. RDS licenses don't give access to Windows client desktop (i.e. Windows 10). If a customer deploys Windows 10 in virtual machines, Windows 10 licenses with Software Assurance, Windows 10 Per User, or Windows VDA subscription licenses are required. Remote Desktop Services functionality enables a company to use a single point of installation from which its users accessing Windows Server can remotely run desktop applications, save files, and use network resources through a

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hosted graphical user interface as if those applications and other resources were installed locally on their desktops.

Windows Server licenses are required for each server running the Windows Server operating system. Additionally, a Windows Server CAL and an incremental Remote Desktop Services (RDS) CAL is required for each user or device using Windows Server Remote Desktop Services or hosting a graphical user interface on Windows Server using Remote Desktop Services or similar functionality.

[Licensing Windows Server Remote Desktop Services on an Azure virtual machine running Windows Server](#)

Base Access

Windows Server Base access is included in the per-minute charge for the Virtual Machines. Additive features, such as RDS, require applicable access licenses.

Remote Desktop Services access

Customers that have Windows Server RDS User CALs with active Software Assurance or RDS User Subscription Licenses may access RDS functionality or a graphical user interface hosted on Windows Server in Azure under RDS Extended Rights, as provided in the Windows Server Use Rights.

[Licensing Microsoft Desktop Applications for use with Windows Server Remote Desktop Services](#)

Microsoft licenses its traditional desktop applications such as Office Professional Plus on a per-device basis. Per-device licensing means a customer must obtain a license for each desktop on or from which the product is used or accessed. Office device licenses may never be assigned to a virtual machine. For example, when a desktop application is accessed remotely across an organization using Windows Server Remote Desktop Services, a separate desktop application license is required to be assigned to each desktop device from which the application is accessed, not the virtual machine the software is installed in.

Use of Microsoft desktop applications in a Remote Desktop Services environment requires that the suite/edition, components, language, and version of the license acquired for the desktops from which the desktop application is remotely accessed matches that of the copy of the application being accessed. For example:

- **Product:** Microsoft Office Standard 2019 and Microsoft Office Professional Plus 2019 are different products. A desktop licensed for Office Standard 2019 may not remotely access and use Office Professional Plus 2019.
- **Components:** A license for a suite (for example, a Microsoft Office suite) for the accessing desktop must have the same components as the copy of the Microsoft Office suite being remotely accessed.
- **Version:** Microsoft Office 2019 and Microsoft Office 2016 are different versions. You may not remotely access the Microsoft Office 2019 from a desktop that's licensed for Microsoft Office 2016.

Windows Server is licensed under a Per Core/Client Access License (CAL) model. The Per Core/CAL model provides both user and device licensing options. Customers with more devices than users can license users rather than devices. In contrast, traditional Microsoft desktop applications are licensed under a device-based model. This means, while user CALs permit a particular user to access the server software from any device in a Remote Desktop Services environment, a Microsoft Desktop Application License permits that user to access the application only from the desktop to which the license is assigned.

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Remote Desktop Services can be used by both Windows desktops and non-Windows desktops (for example, Linux PCs or thin client devices). Microsoft desktop applications must be licensed for each and every desktop from which they're remotely accessed regardless of whether that desktop is a Windows desktop.

Remote Access for Microsoft Office

Microsoft Office Application device licenses include Remote Use Rights, which allow the licensed device remote access to the software using Windows Server RDS. Each device accessing the software is required to be licensed for a Windows Server RDS device CAL or each user accessing the software must be assigned a Windows Server RDS user CAL.

- Customers may choose to host Office applications on a dedicated server for remote access by their end users from their own devices. This option does not require a license to be assigned to the server itself but does require an Office license for each device remotely accessing the software on the server. The customer may alternatively choose to use a third party to host the server, as long as the server is dedicated to only the specific customer. This is often referred to as "Outsourcing Software Management" and requires the third party to be an Authorized Outsourcer. The hosted environment must be on servers dedicated to the customer. An Authorized Outsourcer is restricted from being a Listed Provider and may not use a Listed Provider as a datacenter provider. A list of Listed Providers can be found at <https://aka.ms/ListedProviders>.

Note: The license terms for Outsourcing Software Management were updated October 1, 2019, which the explanations in this brief reflect. Customers with Software Assurance on Office Professional Plus who were using a Listed Provider prior to October 1, 2019 may continue to use that Listed Provider until September 30, 2020.

Dos and don'ts of using the Microsoft Office with Windows Server Remote Desktop Services: Sample scenarios

Remote Desktop Services functionality provides a rich Windows desktop experience and delivers Microsoft desktop applications such as Microsoft Office to users of hardware running earlier operating systems that are licensed for those applications. Remote Desktop Services can help you centrally manage and support deploying Microsoft Office in your organization.

Note: Every device that uses Windows Server Remote Desktop Services to remotely access Microsoft Office requires a Remote Desktop Services CAL, in addition to Windows Server CAL and a Microsoft Office license. Dedicate a Microsoft Office license for every desktop on or from which you plan to use or access Microsoft Office, even if you only use it occasionally. Examples of desktops that might access Microsoft Office using Windows Server Remote Desktop Services functionality include Windows-based workstations, Macintosh computers, and UNIX workstations. The servers hosting the applications don't require Microsoft Office licenses.

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Scenario 1: Remote use in a call center

A customer has 50 Windows-based desktops in a call center and would like to use Microsoft Office on all of these. Two servers running Windows Server Remote Desktop Services support using Microsoft Office on these desktops. The customer needs to acquire 50 Microsoft Office licenses—one for each desktop that accesses Microsoft Office on the servers.

Even if a desktop is expected to use Microsoft Office infrequently, the customer still needs to acquire and assign a Microsoft Office license to that desktop. If 20 of these desktops never use Microsoft Office, then the customer only needs to acquire 30 Microsoft Office licenses. The customer also needs RDS CALs and Windows CALs for each device or user and Windows Server licenses for each server.

Scenario 2: Call centers with multiple shifts

A customer has 100 Windows-based desktops in a call center and would like to use Microsoft Office on all of them using Remote Desktop Services. The workers who sit at these desktops work in three eight-hour shifts, so the 100 desktops support 300 workers. Whenever a shift change takes place, the current worker closes Microsoft Office and signs out of the server so that a new worker can log on and begin running Microsoft Office.

The customer needs to acquire 100 Microsoft Office licenses—one for each desktop from which Microsoft Office is used. Windows Server licenses and Windows and RDS CALs are also required. Device-based CALs may be the right option when the users outnumber the devices.

Note: The number of desktops, and not the number of workers, is important to this licensing scenario.

Scenario 3: Desktop licenses for employees

A customer has 40 Windows-based desktops and 30 employees who use Microsoft Office on all 40 desktops. The customer needs to acquire 40 Microsoft Office licenses. This is consistent with the per-device licensing policy.

Scenario 4: Laptops as secondary portable devices

A customer has 20 portable desktops (such as laptop computers) in addition to 100 desktop devices licensed under a Microsoft Product and Services Agreement (MPSA).

Under MPSA and Open Programs, Microsoft Office licenses include secondary or portable device rights for those 20 laptops. Users may not remotely access Office software running in a Windows Server Remote Desktop Services environment from those 20 secondary, portable devices. Secondary portable device rights don't cover network use.

Scenario 5: Laptops as qualified desktops

An Enterprise Agreement customer has 20 portable desktops (such as laptop computers) that already have Microsoft Office licensed and installed on them.

Under an Enterprise Agreement all devices should be counted as qualified desktops and separately licensed for Enterprise products (for example, Office), including those 20 portable devices. The users of these 20 portable desktops occasionally connect to a server running Windows Server Remote Desktop Services to access Microsoft Office remotely while they are using a dial-up or broadband connection. As long as the 20

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portable desktops are licensed for the same edition, language, and version of Microsoft Office being remotely accessed, that use is covered under the licenses assigned to those 20 portable desktops. For both the licensed desktop and the separately licensed portable desktop, Microsoft Office may be used locally or accessed remotely using Remote Desktop Services or similar functionality.

Note: Don't deploy and use Microsoft Office with Windows Server Remote Desktop Services with the expectation to just count and license the greatest number of desktops from which Microsoft Office is accessed at any one time. The Microsoft Office licenses may not be shared or used concurrently for different desktops. Even if you have fewer sessions active at any given time than the overall number of desktops from which you access the software, you must still count all of the desktops. Every desktop must have a license regardless of whether it's used at any given point in time.

Scenario 6: Call center desktop license count

A customer has 50 Windows-based desktops in a call center. All desktops use Microsoft Office on a recurring basis, but only 25 desktops ever use Microsoft Office at any given time.

The customer still needs to acquire 50 Microsoft Office licenses. Microsoft desktop applications require any desktop from or on which Microsoft Office is accessed or used be licensed regardless of the number of desktops using the software simultaneously. Microsoft desktop application licenses cannot be used concurrently (shared across multiple desktops simultaneously or assigned to more than one desktop).

Scenario 7: Remote access from a home device

Company employees remotely access a corporate network from home, using desktops that they own. While connected, the employees use Remote Desktop Services to access Microsoft Office on a corporate-owned server.

A Microsoft Office license for the version of Microsoft Office running on the server is required for the home desktop in this scenario. The company can enable this scenario by purchasing Work At Home (WAH) Licenses for the employees' home desktops. Customers with active Software Assurance can also acquire Home Use Program (HUP) licenses for their employees' home desktops. In addition, customers with active Software Assurance can also use their Roaming Use Rights to remotely access Microsoft Office software from qualified 3rd party devices. Please contact a Microsoft licensing specialist or Microsoft Commercial Licensing partner for more information about "Work at Home," "Home Use Program," and "Roaming Use Rights" options available for Microsoft Office.

Frequently asked questions

This following information addresses the most commonly asked questions about licensing Microsoft Office in a Windows Server Remote Desktop Services environment.

1. What are the use terms for desktop applications in a Remote Desktop Services environment (where the application runs on the server and not on the client desktop)?

Device-based licensing means a license must be obtained for each desktop on or from which the product is used or accessed. You may not share a license for the product with another desktop or assign it to different desktops. Therefore, in a Remote Desktop Services environment, you must acquire a license for all desktops that access the product running on a server dedicated to the customer's use, subject to the Outsourcing Software Management terms.

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2. The Commercial Licensing Product Terms says I can use desktop application software on a network device. What does this mean?

Under the network use provision, you may run the software on a server dedicated to the customer's use, subject to the Outsourcing Software Management terms, for access and use from your licensed desktops using Remote Desktop Services (or similar functionality).

3. Is there a separate desktop application licensing model for use of software with Windows Server Remote Desktop Services?

No. Use of applications with Windows Server Remote Desktop Services doesn't change Microsoft's per-device desktop application licensing model. Each desktop on or from which the software is accessed or used requires a desktop application license.

4. In addition to licensing the desktops that are accessing Microsoft Office using Remote Desktop Services, do I need to purchase a license for Microsoft Office for the server that's hosting the application for other desktops to access?

No. A license isn't required for the copy installed on the server.

5. If a desktop is licensed for a Microsoft desktop application, can I use that application both locally on the desktop and remotely using Remote Desktop Services?

Yes, if that license was acquired in Commercial Licensing. Commercial Licensing desktop application licenses give the customer the right to locally install the software and to use the same software remotely from a network server using Windows Server Remote Desktop Services (or similar technology). Local installation isn't a prerequisite for network use. In some cases, local installation may not be technically possible or desired.

6. If I already have a desktop license for a desktop application, what additional licenses do I need for a desktop to use the software from that desktop remotely in a Remote Desktop Services environment?

In addition to the license for the desktop application, you need Windows Server and Remote Desktop Services Client Access Licenses for that desktop for remote access using Remote Desktop Services.

7. I have installed Microsoft Office on a network server for access and use using Windows Server Remote Desktop Services. I have acquired Remote Desktop Services User Client Access Licenses for each of my employees. I want my employees to be able to access Microsoft Office from any company managed desktop. What licenses are needed to properly license Microsoft Office within this environment?

Since Microsoft Office is licensed through a device-based licensing model only, each desktop that's used to access Microsoft Office using Remote Desktop Services must have a separate Microsoft Office license dedicated to it. Licenses for Microsoft Office cannot be shared across desktops to support concurrent use. In addition, you may not reassign a license within 90 days of the last assignment.

8. I have installed Microsoft Office on a network server for access and use using Windows Server Remote Desktop Services. I want my employees to be able to access Microsoft Office from 3rd party devices. What licenses are needed to properly license Microsoft Office within this environment?

With active Software Assurance for Office in Commercial Licensing, you can exercise your roaming rights benefit to enable users to remotely access the Office software on a qualified third-party device, regardless of the technology used to access the software. Roaming rights don't permit the Office software be installed and run locally on the third-party device. Roaming rights also apply only to the primary user of a licensed device with Software Assurance coverage, and are subject to the limitation on the number of users in the base license terms.

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9. I have just purchased several new desktops from an OEM with preinstalled licenses for Microsoft Office Professional 2019. Can I install the software on a network server and use these desktops to remotely access it? What if the copy running on the server is licensed under my Commercial Licensing agreement—does that change the answer?

The answer is no in both cases. First, the OEM license doesn't permit access and use from a network server. Even if you're licensed under your Commercial Licensing agreement to use the software on a network server from licensed desktops, your OEM Office licenses don't permit you to access the Commercial Licensing software on the server. The OEM versions and Commercial Licensing editions of Microsoft Office aren't the same.

However, within 90 days of purchase, you can acquire Software Assurance coverage for your OEM licenses under your Commercial Licensing agreement. Doing so gives you rights to a Commercial Licensing Office Standard edition (please refer to the Commercial Licensing Product Terms for a more complete description of the rules related to purchasing Software Assurance for OEM software). You may use the software locally on those licensed desktops enrolled in Software Assurance or remotely from a network server (for example, by using Remote Desktop Services).

10. I have Office Professional Plus 2019 installed on a network server. Can I access this copy of Microsoft Office using Remote Desktop Services from a desktop that has Office Professional Plus 2016 installed and is covered by Software Assurance?

Yes. To use Office Professional Plus 2019 in this scenario, you'd need to be licensed for Office Professional Plus 2019. A desktop that's licensed for and has Office Professional Plus 2016 installed and is covered by active Software Assurance may upgrade their license to Office Professional Plus 2019.

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