



10 Tips to Protect Your Small Business from Illegal Software

Using unlicensed software poses serious financial, legal, and technical risks to small businesses. The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Business Software Alliance (BSA) have developed these 10 steps to help small businesses manage their software assets effectively:

- 1. Educate yourself about the risks to your business.** Using unlicensed software can have devastating consequences and it is critical for small businesses to be aware of the risks. If illegal software is on your company computers, your business may face lawsuits, fines of up to \$150,000 per infringement, and vulnerability to viruses. Once you are aware of the problem, you can develop an effective strategy to protect your business.
- 2. Assess your current software assets.** Software is a valuable business asset and should be managed as such. Conducting an audit of your business's software assets will give you a clear picture of whether or not your business is using legal software.
- 3. If necessary, make compliance purchases from authorized dealers.** If your audit shows that your business is using unlicensed software, immediately delete unlicensed software and purchase legal versions from authorized dealers.
- 4. Develop a software management policy for your business.** Implementing a software policy is one of the most important steps you can take to protect your business from the risks of using unlicensed software.
- 5. Assign responsibility.** By assigning software management responsibilities to one individual or team, you will centralize your compliance process and ensure all purchases and necessary documents are tracked.
- 6. Educate your co-workers and employees.** Once your software policy is in place, explain to employees the importance of using only licensed software in a way that will allow them to ask questions and raise concerns.
- 7. Enforce your software policy.** Your software policy will only be effective if properly enforced. Make sure all employees are aware of the consequences of violating the policy.
- 8. Conduct regular audits and spot checks.** Regular audits and spot checks will help ensure that your software policy is working and catch any problems early.
- 9. Ask questions.** SBA and BSA want to help small businesses avoid the risks of using unlicensed software. If you have any questions about how to manage your software effectively, please contact BSA at 202-872-5500 or www.bsa.org. For other small business questions, contact SBA at 1-800-827-5722 or www.sba.gov.
- 10. Visit www.SmartAboutSoftware.org.** This Web site, co-sponsored by SBA and BSA, is a comprehensive resource find out about software piracy, its risks, and how to protect your business. The free tools and resources available at this site can help you be smart about software.

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