

Licensing Guide – Remote Desktop Services

A background network diagram consisting of various sized grey dots connected by thin grey lines, forming a complex web of connections. The dots are scattered across the page, with a higher density in the top-left and bottom-right corners.

Remote Desktop Services CALs Licensing

The following guide will explain when a Remote Desktop Services (RDS) Licence is required and how to apply it.

An RDS CAL allows a user to access the Graphical User Interface of a server usually in a Citrix or Remote Desktop environment.

When is an RDS CAL Required?

Remote desktop services CALs are typically required when a user or device can access the graphical user interface (GUI) of a server. It is not however required to access a server GUI for administrative purposes.

If using Virtual Desktops an RDS CAL is only required if any of the following technologies are in use; Remote Desktop (RD) Gateway, RD Web Access, RD Connection Broker, RD Session Host, or RD Virtualization Host.

The version of the RDS CAL should be at or higher than the version of Windows Server currently running the Citrix or Terminal server environment (2012 RDS CALs cover Windows Server 2012 R2).

Restricting RDS

One of the most common compliance issues we see relates to RDS access. Not necessarily the CALs themselves but the other applications they grant access too.

If you have RDS User CALs then access needs to be restricted to the user, if you have RDS Device CALs then the Devices must be restricted.

This sound straight forward but many organizations will have Device CALs but use user groups to restrict access. How access is restricted isn't important as long as you can demonstrate the users or devices that have access and why others can't. If you cannot quantify the devices which can access your Citrix or terminal services, then you must license the users.

How you restrict access is essential as it is often one of the most expensive shortfalls. For example, you have purchased 1,000 RDS Device CALs but only restricted access to the users. You are audited and now need to buy 1,000 RDS User CALs, you will not get refunded the 1,000 device CALs.

Installing RDS CALs on your RDS Server

If your RDS Server is telling you that you must purchase more CALs you do not necessarily need to purchase more CALs. Equally if your RDS Server is not telling you that you must purchase more CALs it does not mean that you do not need to purchase more CALs.

You may not have a license server, or the license servers may not be linked. For this reason, the CALs which you install on the RDS Server are not a reflection of your licensing position. Always check the total number of CALs in use versus your entitlement before you decide to purchase more CALs or allow access to additional users.

External Connector Licences

Many organizations grant access to non-corporate / third party users in scenarios like supply chain integration. In this scenario the user is not an employee of your organization. In this scenario you are entitled to grant these users an RDS CAL. However, if there are a large number of these users or, due to shared logins/generic users, you cannot quantify the total number of true users then you may want to consider an external connector. An External Connector license allows an unlimited number of external users to connect to the RDS infrastructure. Note an external user cannot be a member of staff.

Please note that an RDS external connector does not negate the requirements for Windows Server external connector in addition nor does it remove the requirement to license other Microsoft products for a 3rd party user to use.

About License Dashboard

Our mission is to enable SAM, IT, Finance and Procurement teams to make informed decisions and take proactive action. Along with our partners we offer the most valuable and powerful license management services on the market.

We use a blend of home grown Software Asset Management technologies and licensing expertise to take on the time-consuming and laborious license management tasks and produce the business critical license intelligence required to move forward. From point-in-time Effective Licensing Position (ELP) programs, through to on-going license compliance and Software Asset Management initiatives, License Dashboard and its partners will help you establish, understand, optimize and manage your software assets. All of which can lead to savings of up to 30% in your overall IT expenditure.

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