

Licensing Windows Server 2012 Remote Desktop Services

This brief applies to all Microsoft Volume Licensing programs.

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Summary

This licensing brief helps to clarify Microsoft licensing policies for Windows Server Remote Desktop Services (RDS), including the new components that are in Windows Server 2012.

What's New in this Brief?

This brief replaces a previous version published in February 2012. It has been updated to reflect Windows Server 2012 licensing.

Details

Microsoft Remote Desktop Services is a centralized desktop and application platform solution that uses desktop virtualization technologies to deliver and manage corporate desktops in a more flexible way. RDS reflects the expanded role in Windows Server 2012, which is that desktop or applications can run in the data center while users can access them from anywhere.

RDS Technologies Requiring RDS CALs

Microsoft licensing policies for Windows Server Remote Desktop Services (including the components that are included in Windows Server 2008, Windows Server 2008 R2, and Windows Server 2012) require that, in addition to a Windows Server Client Access License, Microsoft Core CAL Suite, or Microsoft Enterprise CAL Suite, you must acquire a Windows Server 2012 RDS CAL for each user or device that directly or indirectly accesses the server software to interact with a remote graphical user interface (GUI) (using the Windows Server 2012 Remote Desktop Services functionality or other technology).

Remote Desktop Services functionality is defined as those features or services that are running when enabling the Remote Desktop Services role and/or role service(s) in Windows Server 2008, Windows Server 2008 R2, or Windows Server 2012. This includes but is not limited to Remote Desktop Gateway, RemoteApp network software, Remote Desktop Web Access, Remote Desktop Connection broker, Remote Desktop session host, Remote Desktop Virtualization host, and RemoteFX.

Note: No RDS CALs are required for up to two users to access instances of the server software for administration purposes.

Available RDS CALs

The following types of RDS Server Client Access Licenses are available:

RDS Device CAL: Permits one device (used by any user) to use Remote Desktop Services functionality on any of your servers.

RDS User CAL: Permits one user (using any device) to use Remote Desktop Services functionality on any of your servers.

RDS External Connector: Permits multiple external users to access a single Remote Desktop server. If you have multiple servers, you need multiple external connectors in addition to any required Windows Server External Connectors.

You may choose to combine RDS Device CALs and RDS User CALs simultaneously with the server software. You may permanently reassign your device CAL from one device to another or your user CAL from one user to another. You may temporarily reassign your device CAL to a loaner device while the first device is out of service, or reassign your user CAL to a temporary worker while the worker is absent.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is this a change from Windows Server 2008 R2 licensing?

No. The same licensing rules applied for Windows Server 2008 R2.

Do I need an RDS CAL if I am using a third-party technology like Citrix XenApp, Ericom PowerTerm WebConnect, Quest Virtual Access Suite, GraphOn Go-Global, etc. to directly or indirectly access the server software to interact with the GUI?

Yes. An RDS CAL is required for any technology used to directly or indirectly interact with the GUI. This includes (but is not limited to) using Microsoft Remote Desktop Services or other third-party software that enables multiuser scenarios on Windows Server.

Do I need an RDS CAL if I am not running a multiuser environment but use functionality in Remote Desktop Services—for example, Remote Desktop Gateway?

Yes. An RDS CAL is required to use any functionality included in the Remote Desktop Services role in Windows Server. For example, if you are using RDS Gateway and/or RDS Web Access to provide access to a Windows Client operating system on an individual PC, both an RDS CAL and Windows Server CAL are required.

Do I have to acquire RDS CALs if I am only remotely administering Windows Server operating systems by using Remote Desktop for Administration?

No. Up to two users may connect to the Windows Server operating system simultaneously to perform administrative functions without needing any RDS CALs. Additional administrative users need the appropriate RDS CALs.

If I am using VMware to enable a VDI solution, do I need an RDS CAL?

If the solution uses any RDS roles (Remote Desktop Gateway, Remote App, RD Web Access, RD connection broker, RD Session Host, or RD Virtualization Host, or RemoteFX), then a RDS CAL is required.

Where can I learn more?

You can find additional information in the [Microsoft Product Use Rights \(PUR\)](#).

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