

Rethinking Software Licensing Models: It's Time to Evolve Beyond the Dongle

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Is your software licensing model holding your business back?

For years, the industry relied on cumbersome hardware dongles and static license keys to manage access. We accepted them as a necessary inconvenience - a clunky but functional way to protect intellectual property.

The future of software licensing is not about locking down devices; it's about empowering users. It's time for a fundamental shift towards flexible, secure, and user-centric cloud solutions.

For years, the industry relied on cumbersome hardware dongles and static license keys to manage access. We accepted them as a necessary inconvenience - a clunky but functional way to protect intellectual property. But in an era of remote work, cloud collaboration, and heightened security threats, these legacy systems are more than just inconvenient; they are a direct threat to your efficiency, security, and bottom line.

The world has moved on, yet many businesses remain tethered to these relics of the past. They wrestle with the logistical nightmare of shipping physical dongles, waste valuable time managing complex license keys, and expose themselves to unnecessary security risks. This isn't just inefficient; it's a critical failure to adapt. The future of software licensing is not about locking down devices; it's about empowering users. It's time for a fundamental shift towards flexible, secure, and user-centric cloud solutions.

The Old Guard: Dongles, Keys, and On-Premise Servers

Let's be honest about the challenges that traditional licensing models present. They were designed for a different time, when software was installed from a CD (remember those) onto a single desktop computer in a fixed office location.

- **Hardware Dongles:** These physical USB locks were meant to prevent unauthorised use, but they created a host of problems. They could be lost, stolen, or broken, bringing productivity to a screeching halt. Shipping them to a global user base is slow and expensive. Worst of all, they offer a false sense of security, as they can easily be passed between users, leading to revenue leakage and a complete lack of visibility into who is actually using your software.
- **License Keys:** The digital successor to the dongle, license keys eliminated the physical hardware but introduced new frustrations. Long, complex codes are prone to typos and can be a major hurdle for users during activation. Managing, distributing, and revoking thousands of keys is an administrative burden that consumes countless hours for your support and IT teams.
- **On-Premise License Servers:** For larger organisations, on-premise servers seemed like a robust solution. However, they require physical deployment at a customer's site, creating immense logistical challenges in a global market. These servers are a single point of failure; if they go down, all connected software stops working. Maintaining them is costly and complex, not just for you, but for your customers as well.

These outdated methods all share a common flaw: they are device-centric, not user-centric. They chain your software to a specific machine, ignoring the reality of modern workflows where designers and professionals work across multiple devices, from various locations. This friction is no longer acceptable.

The New Standard: User-Centric Cloud Licensing

Modern software businesses understand that a seamless user experience is paramount. Licensing should be an invisible, frictionless process that empowers users, not an obstacle they have to overcome. This is the core principle of cloud-based, identity-based licensing.

Instead of tying a license to a physical device, this model links it directly to a user's identity—typically their email address. The benefits of this approach are transformative:

- **Seamless Access, Anywhere:** Users simply log in to their account to access the software they are entitled to use. There are no keys to enter or dongles to plug in. A designer can start a project on their office desktop, continue on a laptop at home, and review it on a tablet while travelling. This flexibility is no longer a luxury; it is a core expectation.
- **Centralised and Simplified Management:** For software vendors, the administrative nightmare of managing keys and dongles disappears. Through a centralized portal, you can grant or revoke access instantly, transfer licenses between team members effortlessly, and gain a clear view of all active licenses. This frees up your team to focus on innovation rather than tedious administration.
- **Enhanced Security:** By tying licenses to a verified user identity, you significantly enhance security. Modern identity management solutions can support advanced security features like Single Sign-On (SSO), two-factor authentication (2FA), and even emerging standards like passkeys.

A Case Study in Evolution: NedGraphics and NEDKey

NedGraphics, live and breathe innovation, not just in design software but in the entire user experience. For years, like many in the industry, they relied on traditional licensing methods. They understood the pain points customers faced—the frustration of a lost dongle, the delay in getting a new team member set up, and the rigidity of being tied to a single workstation.

They knew there had to be a better way. That's why they developed **NEDKey**.

Powered by 10Duke's advanced cloud-licensing technology, NEDKey is the answer to the limitations of the past. It is a secure, user-centric, cloud-based login system that offers customers unparalleled flexibility and control over their NedGraphics desktop applications.

NEDKey is valid across all NedGraphics programs and applications.

Here's how NEDKey addresses the core challenges of legacy systems:

- **Freedom and Flexibility:** With NEDKey, users can work wherever and whenever they need to. Whether they are in a design studio in London, a factory in a remote location with intermittent internet, or a home office, they have seamless access to their tools.
- **Effortless Management:** Through the NEDKey portal, customers can manage all their licenses in one place. Transferring a license from one designer to another is now a simple, instant process, eliminating downtime and boosting productivity.
- **Future-Ready Security:** NEDKey is more than an access gate and functions as a full security fortress that protects customer data through a robust authentication system. By partnering with 10Duke, a best-in-class software licensing vendor, we ensure that our software remains at the forefront of protection and security, with many enhancements planned and passkey authentication being only one example. Passkeys provide a faster and safer sign-in experience using biometrics while removing the associated with passwords.

Furthermore, by transitioning to cloud licensing with NEDKey, companies are adopting a more sustainable approach. Unlike dongles or on-premises servers, cloud licensing eliminates physical hardware waste and significantly cuts shipping emissions. It leverages energy-efficient, green-powered data centres to reduce environmental impact further. Additionally, it minimises energy usage by eliminating the need for always-on local servers, offering a forward-thinking solution that aligns with modern sustainability goals.

NedGraphics have successfully moved from being a provider of software to a partner in their customers' creative process, enabling them to work without interruption.

The path forward is clear. It's time to retire the dongle, abandon the static key, and embrace a licensing model built for the modern world - NEDKey.

Simplify your licensing process and empower your users. The future of your business depends on it.

NEDKey is available across a wide range of NedGraphics applications, including:

- DR** Design & Repeat/Premium
- CR** Color Reduction & Cleaning/Premium
- EC** Easy Coloring/Premium
- EM** Easy Map Creator
- ST** Storyboard & Cataloging
- EW** Easy Weave
- EK** Easy Knit
- PT** Print Server/Premium
- Manager Assistant**
- Color Atlas Manager Assistant**
- Design Finder**

In Summary:

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