

Frequently asked questions about Volume License keys



How do I activate Windows 10 computers by using Key Management Service (KMS)?

First, update your KMS host to support Windows 10 computers. See [Windows 10 Volume Activation Tips](#) for details.

What is product activation?

Product activation is a process during which a product key is input to allow the use of the software. Activation establishes a relationship between the software's product key and a particular installation of that software on a device.

Activation technologies and tools vary according to the different channels for the software—Retail, Volume License, and OEM. Most activation types require interactive steps such as entering a product key from the packaging or contacting a networked server or phone service center.

What is a setup key?

Setup keys are used for each product/version combination to "unlock" the product and will bypass activation.

There are three ways to obtain setup keys:

- Physical fulfillment. For products acquired through physical fulfillment, the setup key is printed on the media sleeve.
- Download fulfillment. For products acquired by download, the setup key is provided with the download.
- For products that are available for download from the Microsoft Volume Licensing Service Center (VLSC) website, the setup key is provided on the download screen and may be accompanied with the following text: "Some products available for download require setup keys. Please take note of this setup key as it will be needed during product installation."
- You can call the [Activation Call Center](#) to obtain the setup keys you need. When you call, you will be asked to provide Volume Licensing agreement information and proof of purchase.

How does Microsoft determine which product keys are associated with my agreement(s)?

Volume License product keys are provided for each *Licensing ID* listed in your *Microsoft Relationship Summary* in the Microsoft Volume Licensing Service Center (VLSC). You may have several Licensing IDs.

- Enterprise Agreement customers receive keys per product pool (systems, servers, applications).
- Select License customers receive keys per product pool (systems, servers, applications).
- Select Plus customers receive keys per product pool (systems, servers, applications).

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- Open License and Open Value customers receive applicable keys based on their license purchase.

Note: All customers have the [right to use keys for reimaging and downgrade](#). Enterprise Agreement, Select License, and Select Plus customers are also provided with evaluation rights and limited software copies for training and back-up.

For more information refer to the TechNet article titled [How to Choose the Right Volume License Key](#).

What is Volume Activation?

[Volume Activation](#) is a product activation technology that was first introduced with Windows Vista and Windows Server 2008. It's designed to allow Volume License customers to automate the activation process in a way that's transparent to end users.

Volume Activation applies only to systems that are covered under a Volume Licensing program and is used strictly as a tool for activation. It isn't tied to license invoicing or billing.

Volume Activation provides different models for completing volume activations.

- **Key Management Service (KMS)** – KMS allows organizations to activate systems within their own network.
- **Multiple Activation Key (MAK)** – MAK activates systems on a one-time basis, using Microsoft's hosted activation services.
- **Starting with Windows 8, Windows Server 2012, and Office 2013**
 - Active Directory-based Activation
 - During Active Directory-based Activation, any Windows 8, Windows Server 2012, and Office 2013 computers connected to the domain will activate automatically and transparently during computer setup. These clients stay activated as long as they remain members of the domain and maintain periodic contact with a domain controller.

Important: As part of your installation, it is important to plan and manage deployment of any product using Volume Activation.

Read more about [Active Directory-based Activation](#).

What is the Key Management Service (KMS)?

The Key Management Service (KMS) is an activation service that allows organizations to activate systems within their own network, eliminating the need for individual computers to connect to Microsoft for product activation. It doesn't require a dedicated system and can be easily co-hosted on a system that provides other services.

KMS requires a minimum number of either physical or virtual computers in a network environment. These minimums, called activation thresholds, are set so that they're easily met by Enterprise customers.

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- **Activation Thresholds for Windows** – Your organization must have at least five (5) computers to activate servers running Windows Server 2008, Windows Server 2008 R2, or Windows Server 2012 and at least twenty-five (25) computers to activate client systems running Windows Vista, Windows 7, or Windows 8.
- **Activation Thresholds for Office** – Your organization must have at least five (5) computers running Office 2013, Project 2013, Visio 2013, Office 2010, Project 2010, or Visio 2010 to activate installed Office products using KMS. For more information about Volume Activation of Office products, see the [Volume Activation Quick Start Guide for Office 2010](#) and [Volume Activation Overview for Office 2010](#).

For more information about activation thresholds, see the [Volume Activation Planning Guide](#).

What is a Multiple Activation Key (MAK) and how does it work?

A Multiple Activation Key (MAK) requires computers to connect one time to a Microsoft activation server. Once computers are activated, no further communication with Microsoft is required. There are two activation methods for MAK:

- MAK Independent Activation: Each computer individually connects to Microsoft via the web or telephone to complete activation.
- MAK Proxy Activation: This method uses the [Volume Activation Management Tool \(VAMT\)](#). One centralized activation request is made on behalf of multiple computers with one connection to Microsoft online or by telephone. **Note:** VAMT enables IT professionals to automate and centrally manage the volume activation process using a MAK.

Each MAK has a predetermined number of allowed activations, based on your Volume Licensing agreement. To increase your MAK activation limit, please contact your [Microsoft Activation Center](#).

Read more details about [product activation for products using Volume Activation](#).

Are there usage limits on MAKs?

Yes. MAKs allow a predetermined number of activations. This number depends on the type of agreement you have. The number of activations can be revised (at the request of the customer or of Microsoft) to accommodate your regular usage.

You can find the number of activations remaining on a MAK by going to the [VLSC](#) or by using the [Volume Activation Management Tool \(VAMT\)](#). If the existing activation limit on your MAK is inadequate for your deployment, contact the Microsoft Activation Center.

Find the telephone number for your [Microsoft Activation Center](#).

Can I use both MAK and KMS for activating systems in my organization?

Yes. As a Volume Licensing customer, you can use a KMS hosted activation service and/or MAKs to activate your computers, depending on the needs of your environment.

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Do I need a dedicated server to run KMS for Office 2010 or 2013?

No, you don't need a dedicated server; a KMS host is a lightweight service, and you can co-host an Office and Windows KMS host. However, only **Windows Server 2003**, **Windows 7** volume editions, and **Windows Server 2008 R2** are supported as Office KMS hosts.

The KMS and MAK activation processes for Office 2013 are basically the same as they were for Office 2010, except that the Office 2013 KMS host isn't supported on Windows Server 2003. The Office 2013 KMS host is supported on Windows Server 2008 R2, Windows 7 VL edition, Windows 8 VL edition, and Windows Server 2012.

Are there different keys for x86 (32-bit) and x64 (64-bit) versions of Office 2010 or Office 2013 products?

The product key for any Office product will work on both the x86 (32-bit) and x64 (64-bit) versions.

If I'm a HVMS or ISVR partner, where can I get my keys?

If you're a customer using the ISV Royalty Licensing Program or the High Volume Messaging Services Agreement (HVMS), the keys aren't available through the VLSC; you must request them by calling your [Microsoft Activation Center](#).

I'm planning to deploy Windows 7 and Office 2010 by using KMS as the activation method. Which Windows Server versions can I use to set up a KMS host computer?

If you're planning to deploy Windows 7 and/or Office 2010 using Key Management Service (KMS) as the activation method, please note:

- Windows Server 2008 isn't supported as a KMS host to activate Windows 7 and Office 2010
 - A patch is available to allow activation of Windows 7 client machines
 - A patch **isn't** available to allow activation of Office 2010 clients
- If you're using Windows Server 2008 as a KMS host, here are your options:
 - Upgrade the KMS host machine to Windows Server 2008 R2
 - Downgrade the machine to Windows Server 2003
 - Run the KMS host on a Windows 7 volume edition machine
 - Run a Windows Server 2003 virtual machine on the Windows Server 2008 machine

If you have fewer than 50 PCs, the best option is to use Multiple Activation Keys (MAK) with Volume Activation Management Tool (VAMT).

While Microsoft makes every effort to cover all of its previous platforms for compatibility, new technologies may make it necessary to decide which previous versions will continue to be supported. Therefore, Windows Server 2008 isn't covered as a platform as an Office 2010 KMS host.

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Volume License Keys (VLK), including MAK and KMS, are issued to you under a specific license agreement and enable your organization to use the software and products that you have licensed.

Which activation method should be used for virtual computers?

KMS is preferred (although either KMS or MAK may be used) because each time a computer is activated using a MAK, one activation is decremented. This applies to both physical and virtual computers.

Note:

- Windows Vista SP2, Windows Server 2008 SP2, and the release of Windows 7 and Windows Server 2008 R2: Virtual computers count toward the activation threshold for KMS. For more information about activation thresholds, see the [Volume Activation Planning Guide](#).
- Windows Vista SP1, Windows Server 2008, Windows Server 2003 v1.1, and Windows 7 support hosting KMS on a virtual computer.
- Each KMS host key can be used to set up six KMS hosts, which can be physical or virtual.

My organization's KMS host computer was activated using a Windows Server 2008 KMS key. Can we use that same computer as a host for deploying Windows Server 2008 R2?

Existing KMS hosts installed with Windows Server 2003, Windows Server 2008, or Windows Vista need an update to support activation of Windows 7/Windows Server 2008 R2 systems. This update will be available through Windows Server Update Services (WSUS), the Microsoft Download Center, and the [Volume Activation page on Microsoft Docs](#). After installing the update, you may install the Windows Server 2008 R2 KMS key on the host and activate.

I purchased new PCs preinstalled with Windows 7 Professional and plan to downgrade to an earlier version of Windows. What key can I use?

You can use one of the following:

- A KMS host activated with a Windows 7 KMS key will activate Windows Vista and Windows 7 KMS clients.
- A KMS host activated with a Windows Vista KMS key will activate Windows Vista KMS clients.
- A Windows Vista MAK.

If you want to downgrade to Windows XP, you must to use the Windows XP Professional key only.

If a "child" company (owned by a "parent" company) has an individual agreement, can the parent company use the same key (such as a Windows Server 2008 Standard/Enterprise R2 KMS key) to deploy Windows 7 and Windows Server 2008 R2 across both companies?

Although they may choose to do so, customers don't have to use keys provided under a specific Licensing ID (agreement, enrollment, affiliate, or license) for use the licenses specified under that Licensing ID. They can choose to use keys specific to agreements/licenses, or one set of keys for all. Customers have this flexibility so they can centrally manage their deployment/image.

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What happens if we do not activate our computers?

Volume Activation is designed to provide a transparent activation experience for users. If activation doesn't happen within the grace period provided (normally 30 days), the computer transitions into what's known as "notification mode." During notification mode the user will see activation reminders during login, as well as notification in the Action Center.

My organization plans to use MAK keys to activate most of our computers, but the number of MAK activations does not match the number of our purchased licenses. Why are these amounts different and how can I request more activations?

To increase your MAK activation limit, please contact your [Microsoft Activation Center](#).

Microsoft looked at several factors to determine the number of activations to associate with each MAK, including licenses purchased, the customer purchase pricing level, and the Volume Licensing program.

For Open License customers, we look at the number of licenses they have and usually give them more MAK activations than what may be needed to ensure that activations are available for scenarios such as reactivations and virtual machine licensing rights. For example, if a customer purchases between 1–25 licenses, they may get 50 activations on their MAK.

For Select, Enterprise Agreement, Campus Agreement, School Agreement, and Services Provider License Agreement (SPLA) we look at the pricing levels (A, B, C, D) and give a specific amount of activations per level, based on the general number of licenses purchased per level. We also take into account the fact that KMS is the preferred activation method.

Can I use my Volume License Keys to exercise my reimaging rights?

Yes. Reimaging rights are granted to all Microsoft Volume Licensing customers. Under these rights, customers may reimage original equipment manufacturer (OEM) or full packaged product licensed copies using media provided under their Volume Licensing agreement as long as copies made from the Volume Licensing media are identical to the originally licensed product.

As a Volume Licensing customer, the Volume License Keys you need can be found on the Product Key page. You can also request your key(s) through the [Activation Call Centers](#). Note that if you're an Open License customer, you must purchase at least one unit of the product that you want to reimage to obtain access to the product media and receive a key.

For more information, read the [Commercial Licensing brief about reimaging](#).

I want to reimage Windows 7 Professional by using the MAK instead of KMS. What happens if I don't have enough activations associated with the MAK to do so?

Once you have verified how many activations are associated with the Windows 7 MAK (you can do this by going to the product key page, or by using the [Volume Activation Management Tool \(VAMT\)](#), which is part of the [Windows Automated Installation Kit for Windows 7](#). If you need more activations, you can call the [Activation Call Center](#).

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What key(s) should I use for Small Business Server 2011?

With the release of Windows Small Business Server 2011, Multiple Activation Keys (MAK) for Volume Licensing customers will be available on the VLSC. MAK keys allow activation to take place with the Microsoft hosted activation service either online or by phone. Volume Licensing customers can find their keys on the VLSC Product Key page or by calling the [Activation Call Center](#).

- Windows Small Business Server 2011 Standard will use the Win SBS Std/Essentials 2011 MAK
- Windows Small Business Server 2011 Essentials will use the Win SBS Std/Essentials 2011 MAK
- Windows Small Business Server 2011 Premium Add-on will use the Windows Server 2008 R2 MAK B

Small Business Server 2011 installs automatically as a Key Management Server (KMS) client. KMS, another type of Volume License key, isn't offered for Small Business Server 2011. [To use a MAK, customers will need to convert their KMS client machine to a MAK activation client by installing a MAK](#). You can install a MAK during or any time after the operating system is installed.

[Get detailed information on Volume Activation and MAK Keys](#)

Please note that media for Small Business Server 2011 Standard will not be available for download on the VLSC due to the large file size. Information on how to obtain physical media will be available for customers on the VLSC.

Downgrade rights information: Windows Small Business Server 2008 is only available via physical media and product keys are adhered to that media. Windows Small Business Server 2008 CALs don't require activation. If you're downgrading to SBS 2003, you'll need corresponding SBS 2003 CAL keys to activate your SBS 2003 CALs.

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