

## Protect Your Digital World

By Jackie Tiani

I once received a letter offering software amnesty for my business. During a specified grace period, I could legalize my software and avoid punishment. I assumed this letter went out to many businesses in my area to scare them into auditing their purchasing procedures and procuring legal software. I tossed the letter. I purchase my software from reputable firms (usually directly from the software manufacturer) and I do not make it a practice to “borrow” software to load on my computers. No, I am not a member of the “Software Police”. I am a Professional Organizer and my concern has more to do with keeping my information safe and secure than the legal consequences of using copied or counterfeit software.

Software has become indispensable to business. Your own business probably depends on software every day to deal with vital information on computers and the Internet. Software makes our businesses more efficient, our workers more productive and allows us to take advantage of all the benefits of e-commerce.

Many people are not aware that like most creative works, such as books, music and films, computer software is protected by U.S. copyright laws. When you purchase software, you do not own the copyright. Rather, you are purchasing the right (license) to use the software under certain restrictions imposed by the software publisher.

According to Business Software Alliance (BSA), forty percent of the world’s software is pirated. A group of software manufacturers and publishers established the BSA in 1988 to address the crime of software piracy and to protect its members from losing money. But BSA members are not the only ones hurt by software piracy. Profits from legal software sales are also used to hire talented programmers, writers and graphic artists who work in teams to research and develop new and enhanced software for end users. The importance to you and me is that they fix bugs and improve the functionality of their software. I don’t know about you, but software glitches are a bit more than a nuisance to me. I **want** software manufacturers to spend money improving their products.

Apart from legal consequences, there are other dangers of using copied or counterfeit software. Over the past ten years, I have seen many of my clients suffer the consequences of software piracy, not in the form of legal penalties, but in the destruction of computers and data.

Many businesses face potential disaster without even knowing it because they install or use unauthorized copies of software.

- Businesses who use illegal software have a greater exposure to corrupt disks and defective software.
- There is inadequate or no documentation available with illegal software. Businesses frequently make serious installation mistakes when setting up unauthorized software because they lack the proper guidance offered in the product manuals.
- Illegal software is more likely to fail, rendering your computers and their information useless. Technical product support and warranties that are available to properly licensed users are not accessible. Your company is on its own to deal with such a failure.
- Illegal software complicates the process of distinguishing the nature of a problem through a diagnostic analysis. Many consultants who offer support refuse to support software unless the user has a legal

license.

- Illegal software is one of the prime sources of computer viruses that can destroy valuable data.
- Businesses who use illegal software are not eligible for software upgrades offered to properly licensed users.

Software piracy is not just the deliberate, systematic copying of computer programs. From individual computer users who make copies for their friends, to professionals who deal wholesale in stolen software, piracy can take many forms:

- Reproducing copies of software without authorization; copying disks for installation and distribution
- Using one licensed copy to install a program on multiple computers
- Purchasing a computer with “pre-loaded” software that was never authorized by the software's creators
- Purchasing software that did not come with obvious signs that it is genuine (such as a license and proper documentation).
- Acquiring academic or other restricted or non-retail software without a license for commercial use
- Taking advantage of upgrade offers without having a legal copy of the version to be upgraded
- Installing unauthorized copies of software on company computers
- Illegally downloading software from the Internet

You may well be using pirated software and taking a data risk in your company. You may have an employee, family member or friend who has downloaded or installed illegal software on your computer. (Your company is legally liable, even if you are unaware of the employee's actions.) Software piracy can lead to stiff fines and criminal prosecutions, but the potential damage to your company's computers and data can also be a very serious risk.

For more information, tools and resources, visit [www.bsa.org](http://www.bsa.org)