MSDN subscriptions on the cheap? [closed]

Asked 16 years, 3 months ago   Modified 8 years, 5 months ago

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81

As a long time Microsoft developer, I find MSDN to be an invaluable resource.

However, when tinkering at home I am not able to play with the best latest technologies and the different offerings coming from Microsoft as I cannot justify paying such a hefty price for what is essentially a pastime.

The Express editions are great, but fall flat when trying to use the more advanced feature I am used to from the versions I use at work. I cannot get the latest betas and play with the new offerings, not legally, anyway.

Apart from getting an [MVP](#), how would one go about getting an MSDN subscription for an acceptable price for a non-professional environment?

I am aware of the Empower program, but I thought it was geared towards getting *commercial* software to market. If this is not the case, it appears like the way for me to go. Thanks!

`msdn`

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2   MVP is generally not just something you get it is awarded to professionals who add exceptional value to the developer community and is generally a lot of work to achieve MVP status – Chris McGrath Oct 22, 2013 at 18:11

9 Answers

Sorted by: Highest score (default) ⬍

MSDN subscriptions are per user rather than per device so as long as you're the only person using them I think

33

⌄

you should be free to use them at home. I'm not aware of any differentiation being applied to the workplace, unless of course your workplace itself lays down such a rule.

From http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-gb/subscriptions/aa948867.aspx:

> MSDN Subscriptions are licensed to **individuals** who may install the provided software **without restriction**. Software provided through MSDN Subscriptions is licensed for design, development, test and demonstration of your applications.

See also http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-gb/subscriptions/aa948864.aspx.

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answered Sep 24, 2008 at 15:32

Luke Bennett
32.9k ● 3 ● 32 ● 57

So how does that work when you do things that are not for the design/development/testing/demonstration of your applications? What if you work on a personal project on that copy of Windows or Visual Studio you decided to install at home? – Jim Mitchener Nov 18, 2009 at 23:48

This is not legal. I just checked msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/subscriptions/cc150618.aspx and according to paragraph 5, you must also purchase a license for any use that is not related to the development of your work's products. So unless you intend to use this PURELY for business at home, it is not legal. – Jim Mitchener Nov 18, 2009 at 23:56

5   That's not actually what it says. The paragraph is making the point that you cannot use MSDN license for non-development purposes. It does not make a distinction between "work" and "home". If you used an MSDN Windows license for your home PC for games, videos etc, that would be illegal. If you use Visual Studio to write software on your home PC then you're covered. The question related to "playing with the best technologies" at home, so MSDN is usable in this situation. – Luke Bennett Nov 19, 2009 at 9:06

2   To clarify, if you use an MSDN Windows license for your work machine which you also send/receive email, prepare spreadsheets etc on, then you are again not covered. Like I say, the distinction isn't between work and home use, but between development and non-development use, whatever context that might be. – Luke Bennett Nov 19, 2009 at 9:13

What I gather from reading the MSDN licensing whitepaper is that you are licensed to use the software at home as long as you employed at the company. Granted, if the company chooses to continue to extend to you the MSDN license after you leave (perhaps if you're still going to be doing contract work), you would still be licensed to use the software at home. – Ben McCormack Sep 2, 2010 at 1:07

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21

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There is an Empower program that Microsoft has available. It gives you several Premium subscriptions for cheap, with the catch that you have to be an ISV working towards an actual product.

This (Not available anymore - broken link) gives you all the software you'll need for development, and even a few "real world" licenses for certain apps (like Office)

After a couple of years, you have to pay full price though. The logic being that you should have a product on the market, and can afford it.

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1   This program is working for me. I fully encourage anyone to investigate it. It has conditions so look out for those.
    – CAD bloke Oct 22, 2008 at 4:04

7   Conditions such as having to get a product out there... not really what one would want from a hobby. – Oded Jan 14, 2009 at 13:14

    Can you give some pricing examples. – JL. Sep 28, 2009 at 12:46

4   Looks like Empower is long gone, but BizSpark is a similar service, but better in just about every way. microsoft.com/bizspark – swilliams Feb 22, 2014 at 5:32 ✏

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18

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+1 Luke's comment about using work MSDN license at home. I think that's the best answer for the OP.

Also consider

- DreamSpark (for students): http://www.dreamspark.com

- BizSpark (for startups building "next gen web apps"): http://www.bizspark.com
- Empower (for ISVs wanting to partner with Microsoft): http://www.empowerforisv.com

(Note there is some overlap between BizSpark and Empower ... many ISVs will find them both useful)

And finally ... don't overlook trial versions and VHD's. Most Microsoft software is available for trial (30-360 days). Many are available via the "VHD Test Drive"

- VHD Test Drive: http://microsoft.com/vhd

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answered Dec 8, 2008 at 22:42

Patrick Foley

246 ● 2 ● 6

Empower has been replaced by Microsoft Action Pack. It costs $475 USD/year: mspartner.microsoft.com/en/us/Pages/Membership/… – adam Jun 4, 2015 at 16:37

11

Check out the Microsoft Action Pack Development and Design subscription. It is designed to replace the Empower program and gives you access to some MS products at a great price point.

https://partner.microsoft.com/global/40132997

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answered Dec 10, 2010 at 13:47

@Nate: It does work since it refers to the new page which is mspartner.microsoft.com/en/us/Pages/Membership/… – [M. Mimpen](#) Dec 24, 2013 at 11:22

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In agreement with comments already made - get an Empower subscription, it's geared up towards people like yourself. As I recall, you have 2 years to bring a product/solution to market (where market is very loosely defined) that uses some element of MS technology (again, where this is quite loosely defined). In return for quite a modest outlay, you get MSDN, a bunch of OS licenses and access to development tools and end-user application programs (XP, Vista, Office being obvious examples).

For instance, I develop in Delphi but write code to run on SQL Express 2005 and full-blown SQL Server 2005+, and this entitles me to purchase an Empower agreement. I get all the goodies, plus things like Visual Studio, SQL Server, Office and OS licenses. If you don't bring a solution to market in the time allocated, you can pay to extend your agreement or... well, I must admit I'm not sure. It's hard to see what bad thing can befall you if you try to produce something but ultimately fail - it's the American dream, right? You have to stop using the software at the end of the period, etc. :-)

If you want to develop for desktop Windows you really need some level of MSDN access, or a good broadband connection and some patience while you access the online materials. Empower is a fairly pain-free method of getting your hands on all the best tools for very little outlay indeed - you end up with a large pile of DVDs and CDs, and a few updates during the year. I'd say it was an *essential* purchase - particularly if this is viewed as a career investment, or some element of training or progression. It's not a lot of money at all (I speak as an ISV - everything I have to pay out truly comes from my pocket!).

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edited Sep 24, 2008 at 15:17

answered Sep 3, 2008 at 23:24

robsoft
5,585 ● 4 ● 36 ● 47

@robsoft You should edit the at-Orion Edwards comment. His comment is gone. The fact that the documentation and SDKs are available is still valuable info though. – Jay R. Sep 22, 2008 at 21:18

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You may want to talk to your boss about your opportunities to join MSDN for free. I work at a company using all Microsoft Software, and I get a free subscription, which comes with access to almost all of microsoft's software.

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answered Sep 3, 2008 at 23:56

Andrew
79 ● 2 ● 5

3   Your employer is probably paying for your MSDN. – Andy
Mar 30, 2015 at 1:32

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If you have an MSDN subscription at work, odds are good that your subscription license has a provision for you to be able to install things at home as well.

I know with our subscriptions here I'm allowed to install copies of operating systems and development tools at home since I obviously can't use the copies at work and at home at the same time.

Edit: I'm assuming that since you said you were a longtime MSDN developer that you are currently employed doing development on Microsoft platforms.

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answered Sep 3, 2008 at 20:14

17 of 26
27.4k ● 13 ● 68 ● 85

1 Good assumption, however, I am a contractor, so benefits that permanent employees get do not apply. – Oded Oct 25, 2008 at 21:11

Don't make that assumption without checking. Lots of times things like this aren't a benefit for W2 employees (in a US context), they're for the use of the people working on the code. Employment status isn't relevant. – James Moore Jul 8, 2011 at 16:29

Even with just one licence you can get MSDN Under a Volume Licence. This is cheaper and (depending on exactly which VL program) can allow the cost to be spread across the VL period (once fully paid the licences become permanent).

Also means you get the VL builds and keys for Office/Windows rather than just the retail.

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answered Aug 28, 2009 at 7:28

Richard
109k ● 21 ● 210 ● 272

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1 I did this, the agreement was 699 / year for three years, not a bad deal. – Andy Mar 30, 2015 at 1:33

Many MVP's have gift subscriptions that they can give away, so it pays off to be visible in the community.

2

Speak at your local user group, start (or participate) in an open source project, start a blog... just generally get your name out there.

Eventually you'll get one (or an MVP :)).

What I've found is that if you pay attention there are plenty of opportunities to snag a free copy of Office or Visual Studio at local Microsoft events.

Good luck!

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answered Sep 3, 2008 at 20:14

Ben Scheirman

40.9k ● 21 ● 103 ● 139