

Sharing programs

Rather than keep separate copies of programs on each person's computer, putting programs on a drive that everyone shares is sometimes best. For example, if ten computer users all use a particular program, you can purchase and install ten copies of the program, one for each computer. Or you can purchase a ten-user license for the program and then install just one copy of the program on a shared drive. Each of the ten users can then access the program from the shared hard drive.

In most cases, however, running a shared copy of a program over the network is unacceptably slow. A more common way of using a network to share programs is to copy the program's installation files to a shared network location. Then you can use that copy to install a separate copy of the program on each user's local hard drive.

The advantage of installing a program from a shared network drive is that you don't have to download the software separately for each computer on which you want to install the software. And the system administrator can customize the network installation so that the software is installed the same way on each user's computer. (However, these benefits are significant only for larger networks. If your network has fewer than about ten computers, you're probably better off downloading and installing the program separately on each computer.)



WARNING

Remember that purchasing a single-user copy of a program and then putting it on a shared network location so that everyone on the network can access it is illegal. If five people use the program, you need to either purchase five copies of the program or purchase a network license that specifically allows five or more users.



TIP

Many software manufacturers sell their software with a concurrent usage license, which means that you can install the software on as many computers as you want, but only a certain number of people can use the software at any given time. Usually, special licensing software that runs on one of the network's server computers keeps track of how many people are currently using the software. This type of license is frequently used with more specialized (and expensive) software, such as accounting systems or computer drafting systems.

Sharing messages

Another benefit of networking is that networks enable computer users to communicate with one another over the network by sharing messages. Those messages can come in many forms. Email and instant-messaging programs are the most common. But you can also exchange audio or video messages. For example, you can hold online meetings over the network. Network users who have inexpensive video cameras (webcams) attached to their computers can have videoconferences. You can even play a friendly game of Hearts over a network — during your lunch break, of course.