

Computer Bits by Mark Eggert of Raad One Network Solutions, Inc.

Welcome to Computer Bits, a series of articles on computers and network information. I heard a commercial the other day and thought I'd bring the topic of software licensing up again.

It's been a couple of years since we received letters from the Business Software Alliance (BSA) concerning a grace period from their audits to give us time to become legal with the software we use in our businesses and now they're back. The BSA is a watchdog group for the software industry that is tasked with stopping software piracy. In this effort they make both solicited and random software audits where they look for two things. First, they're looking for pirated software, this is software that has been illegally copied and distributed. And secondly, they're looking to see that a company has the proper amount of licenses for the software installed on their computers. It is this part that gets the most attention in the media and is something to be concerned about. The fines are up to \$100,000 per incident and prison time for company officers plus the company will need to purchase the unlicensed software. I don't think any of us could afford to pay the fine for one incident so it's important to be legal with your software.

This is a good thing to prevent and the best way to start is to do an audit to see if there are any problems. With this baseline you can do periodic audits and also have a plan for correcting any problems. Doing self-audits and having a plan or policy for software purchases can help mitigate any fines should the BSA decide to audit your business.

Actually, the BSA didn't go away a couple of years ago, they just didn't advertise that they were doing audits again. While you're not very likely to be selected for a random audit, you could have a solicited audit done. While, they're hoping that the radio ads will remind you to look at your software and become legal with the licensing, they're also reminding your employees about this. And as they say the number one cause for a solicited is a disgruntled employee or former employee. So I think it's best to be legal with your software licenses than to have a chance of being fined or worse.

If you have a computer or network question you'd like answered and you think others would like to know the answer too, please forward them to me. My email address is meggert@wi.rr.com, my phone number is 262-679-7704 and my fax number is 262-679-7664.