

Lightning Fast Licensing With FLEXIm

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With the release of the BASIS ODBC Driver® 2.0, BASIS took its first steps into the world of host-based licensing. Now BASIS' product licenses are created and released in a more sophisticated way, with each license tied to a specific PC or server. Both host-based licensing and its close cousin, floating licenses, help protect revenue for BASIS and the companies who develop with BASIS products by preventing software piracy. But this new approach has required some significant changes to the way BASIS distributes product-activation information.

License Distribution the Old-Fashioned Way: Pushing Paper

BASIS' old license distribution process was relatively straightforward. When a customer purchased a product, the BASIS Customer Service department would enter the order into the order processing system and generate a serial number and activation key for the product. That information was then printed out on a key distribution form, which was either shipped along with the software media or faxed to the end user if no media was necessary.

These old-style activation keys were easy to generate--all that BASIS had to know was the set of features for which the product was licensed. Keys could be created ahead of time and stored indefinitely, so customers could buy more licenses than they needed right away and use the keys as necessary. But in exchange for this ease of use, this system couldn't offer much in the way of security. An activation key, once generated, could be used on multiple machines at different sites. In many parts of the world, this was a major problem.

With host-based licensing, a simple extra step ensures security. Before a customer can receive the permanent license file that activates version 2.0 of the BASIS ODBC Driver, BASIS requires a unique hardware identifier from the computer on which the software will run. This sets up the software's license file for that machine alone. As a result, BASIS has to find out specific hardware identifiers from the customer, generate the permanent license, and return the license to the customer as quickly as possible in order to keep the installation process efficient.

Fortunately, BASIS' information systems and engineering departments were up to the challenge. By tying together existing web, email, and fax technology, BASIS is now capable of generating and distributing license files for its customers 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with no human intervention necessary.

New Tools Supporting New Technologies

The system that makes this possible has several components. The first component relies on the ability to create temporary authorization codes. Instead of generating a key to accompany the serial number when a customer purchases a product, BASIS now generates

a special authorization code that the customer uses when requesting a permanent license file. This authorization codes is shipped the same way that the old license used to be-- on paper or via fax--along with a special temporary license file that allows the customer to use the software for up to 60 days. Unless the software is being installed on a remote South Pacific island with no telephone or email access, a customer can easily receive a permanent license file within 60 days. In most cases, a customer can download a permanent license file in a few minutes.

This is possible thanks to a new step in the product installation process. After the BASIS software has been installed on a machine, the license installation and registration program is automatically run. This program looks at the hardware on the machine and finds the unique host identifier that BASIS needs in order to generate a permanent license file. All the customer has to do is enter the serial number and authorization code received from BASIS, enter the email address or fax number to which BASIS will send the permanent license file, and click Send to send the request to BASIS. (If the machine cannot send email, a printout can be sent by fax to BASIS.)



BASIS license installation and registration program.

For customers installing software on machines connected to the Internet, BASIS has the ability to receive the license request almost immediately via automatic email. This email launches the last piece of the process--a completely automated license file generation system. This system watches for email messages 24 hours a day. When it receives a license request, it looks into the customer information database for the serial number and authorization code that customers entered and sent to BASIS. If everything matches, the system creates a unique license file that is tied to the host information in the license-request email. That file is then returned to the customer by fax or email. Once the customer has the license file, it's a simple task to save or type the small file to a disk and tell the license installation and registration program where it is located, thereby activating the product for normal use.

This new system has also been adapted to generate demonstration keys for people who download the BASIS ODBC Driver from the BASIS website. When a customer requests a demonstration license on the web, a program behind the scenes sends an email message to the license file generator, just as the license file registration program does when a customer requests a permanent license file. The key generation system handles these requests with the same efficiency it offers all other license requests, allowing BASIS to offer demonstration license delivery via fax for the first time.

This infrastructure can and will be improved to make license fulfillment as simple and straightforward as possible. At this writing, BASIS is looking into the feasibility of requests made by touch-tone telephone, and the system currently in place will make an excellent foundation for any electronic commerce program that BASIS implements in the future.

BASIS understands the importance of making licensing compliance as simple and easy as possible, and with this new license system, BASIS is well on the way toward meeting that goal.