

Windows 10 Enterprise E3 & E5: User-Based Subscription for Windows

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By Seth Rodriguez | April 6, 2017 | Microsoft, Microsoft Licensing, Windows 10

Windows as a subscription? Windows licensed per user? *You* just blew my mind.

Microsoft continues to break paradigms that have been entrenched for decades. If you are familiar with Windows licensing, you know that Windows is typically licensed on a per-device basis and as a perpetual license (not a subscription). Well, you can kiss that paradigm goodbye. With the advent of Windows 10 Enterprise E3 and E5, Windows is now offered on a per-user basis and as a subscription.

Well ... sort of. Let me explain what's going on here.

Windows 10 Enterprise Basics

First of all, what is Windows 10 Enterprise? Simply put, Windows Enterprise is a version of Windows 10. When you buy a new PC, you have to choose which version of Windows 10 to install. Here are the various versions available today:

- Windows 10 Home
- Windows 10 Pro
- Windows 10 Education
- Windows 10 Enterprise E3
- Windows 10 Enterprise E5

The farther down the list you go, the more advanced features you receive. For example, Windows 10 Enterprise E3 and E5 include some security features that are not available in Windows Home or Pro.



	<p>\$84 per user per year</p> <p>\$7 per user per month</p>	<p>\$168 per user per year</p> <p>\$14 per user per month</p>
<p>Remote DesktopWindows Information ProtectionBitlocker Group Policy</p> <p>Mobile Device Management</p> <p>Enterprise State Roaming with Azure Active Directory</p> <p>Windows Store for Business</p> <p>Assigned Access</p> <p>Dynamic Provisioning</p> <p>Windows Update for Business</p> <p>Shared PC Configuration</p> <p>Domain Join</p> <p>Enterprise Mode Internet Explorer (EMIE)</p> <p>Remote Desktop</p> <p>Client Hyper-V</p>	<p>Remote DesktopWindows Information ProtectionBitlocker Group Policy</p> <p>Mobile Device Management</p> <p>Enterprise State Roaming with Azure Active Directory</p> <p>Windows Store for Business</p> <p>Assigned Access</p> <p>Dynamic Provisioning</p> <p>Windows Update for Business</p> <p>Shared PC Configuration</p> <p>Domain Join</p> <p>Enterprise Mode Internet Explorer (EMIE)</p> <p>Remote Desktop</p> <p>Client Hyper-V</p>	<p>Remote DesktopWindows Information ProtectionBitlocker Group Policy</p> <p>Mobile Device Management</p> <p>Enterprise State Roaming with Azure Active Directory</p> <p>Windows Store for Business</p> <p>Assigned Access</p> <p>Dynamic Provisioning</p> <p>Windows Update for Business</p> <p>Shared PC Configuration</p> <p>Domain Join</p> <p>Enterprise Mode Internet Explorer (EMIE)</p> <p>Remote Desktop</p> <p>Client Hyper-V</p>
	<p>Device Guard Credential Guard</p>	<p>Device Guard Credential Guard</p>



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		Windows Defender Advanced Threat Protection

At this point, it is important to note that **Windows 10 Home and Windows 10 Pro are only available as perpetual licenses**. In other words, if you get a license for Home or Pro, then you can use that version of Windows forever.

Meanwhile, **Windows 10 Enterprise E3 and E5 are only available as subscription licenses**. In other words, you have keep paying the subscription fee each year in order to keep using them.

Windows 10 Enterprise Baked In

So let's say you want to purchase a subscription to Windows 10 Enterprise E3 or E5. How do you get the Enterprise version installed on your device?

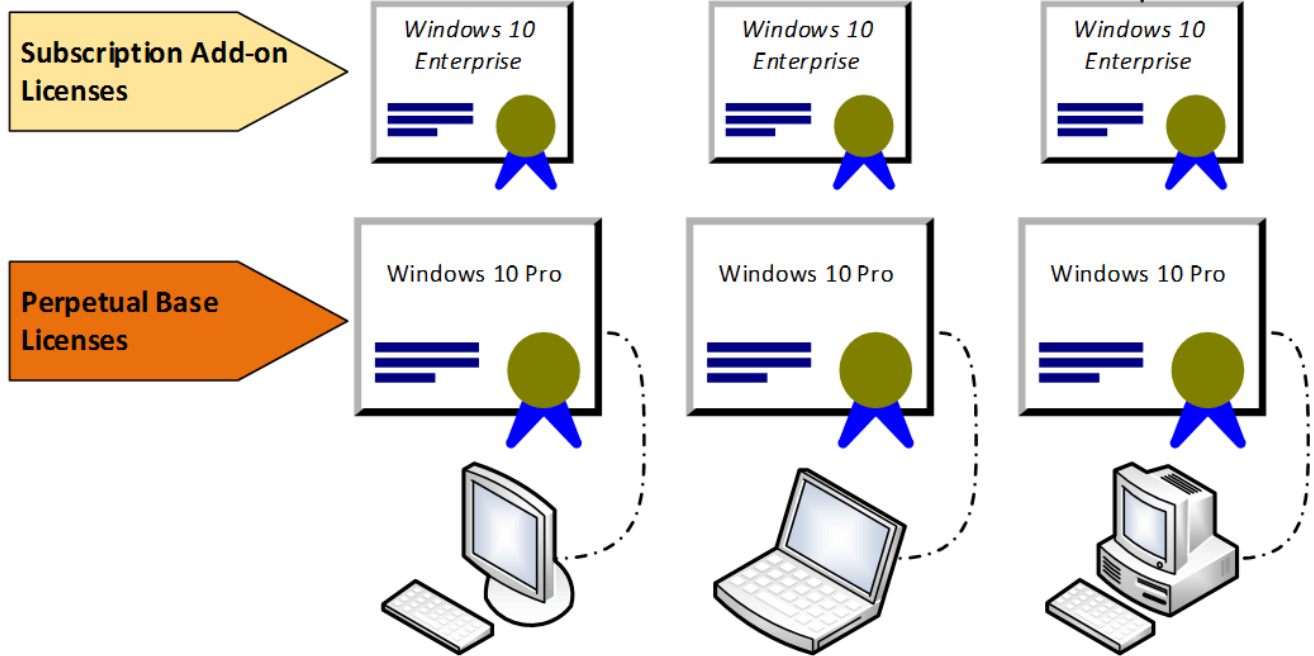
What Microsoft has done here is impressively simple. **The Windows 10 Enterprise feature set is now included in a Windows 10 Pro installation**. But by default the Enterprise features are turned off. When you apply a subscription license for Windows 10 Enterprise to your Windows 10 Pro machine, those features turn on. If you subscription expires, those features turn off again.

Windows 10 Pro



Windows 10 Enterprise User-Based Licensing

Consequently, Microsoft is able to license Windows 10 Enterprise per user. What's really going on here is that you are dealing with two levels of licensing: a base license (Windows 10 Pro) and an add-on license (Windows 10 Enterprise). The add-on license is subscription based, but the base license is perpetual. That is why I said that this solution is only "sort of" user based. The add-on subscription license is user-based, but the perpetual base license is still assigned to the device. This is illustrated in the figure below. Notice how the Windows 10 Pro licenses are tied to the machines while the Windows 10 Enterprise add-on licenses are tied to the user:



And by the way, a subscription to Windows 10 Enterprise E3 or E5 includes the right to turn on the Enterprise features on **up to five devices**. So in our illustration the user is applying a single subscription to multiple devices. Each of the base licenses need to be purchased separately, but the three subscription licenses in the illustration are included in a single subscription to Windows 10 Enterprise E3 or E5.

What if you don't have a Windows 10 Pro base license? Not a problem. Microsoft [recently announced](#) that even users with Windows 7 and Windows 8.1 machines can buy a subscription to Windows 10 Enterprise E3 or E5 and receive a free upgrade license to Windows 10. In other words, your subscription includes the perpetual base license for Windows 10 Pro *and* the subscription add-on license for Windows 10 Enterprise. According to Microsoft's announcement, if your subscription ever expires, you still get to keep the perpetual license for Windows 10 Pro.

Windows 10 Enterprise Device-Based Licensing

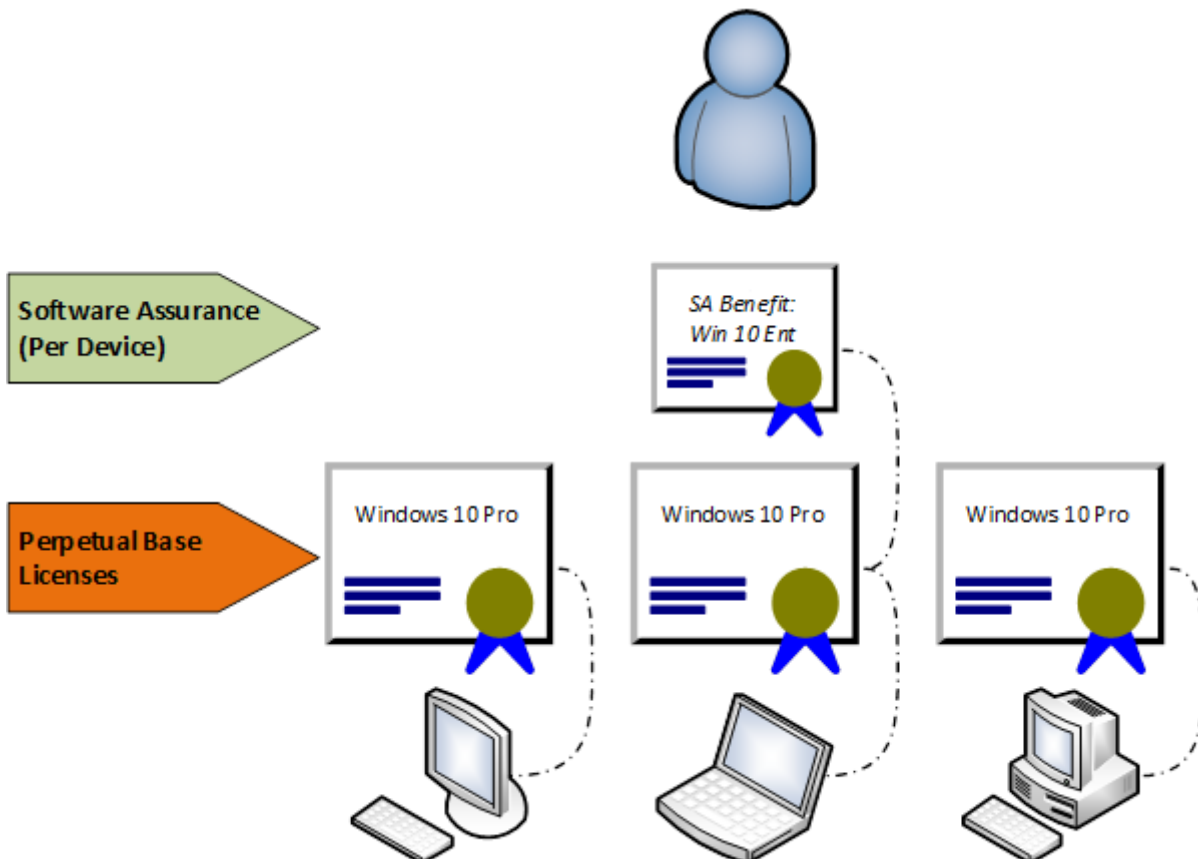
So with Windows 10 Enterprise, you get a user-based subscription license for the Enterprise version. That said, there is also a way for you to get a *device-based* subscription license for the Enterprise version. There are two ways to do this.



Enterprise. To get more details, you can download a chart from Microsoft [here](#).)

The second way is to buy a new PC from a hardware manufacturer with a qualifying base license (again, see [Microsoft's chart](#)) and then purchase Software Assurance for that license within 90 days. The base license will be an **OEM license**, but you will purchase the SA through one of the volume licensing programs. Again, as long as you keep the SA current, you have permission to enable the Enterprise features. But if the SA expires, then you get to keep the base license for Windows 10 Pro.

It is important to note that if you go this route then you can only enable Windows 10 Enterprise on that **one machine**. Unlike the per-user subscription of Windows 10 Enterprise E3 and E5 which lets you enable Enterprise on up to 5 machines, the "per device" subscription through Software Assurance only lets you enable Enterprise on a single machine. So in our illustration below, our user can only use Windows 10 Enterprise on one device, not multiple devices. Also note that the Windows 10 Enterprise subscription is tied to the device (not the user) since this is an SA benefit (not an E3 or E5 subscription):





[subscription-plan-users/](#)

If you have questions about your Microsoft licensing, we've got a team of experts available to help you. [Send us an email](#) or give us a call at 502-240-0404!

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