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A crack or a keygen is a software that allows you to activate and use the full features of a software without buying it. For example, there are cracks available for Windows operating systems, Adobe Photoshop and other programs. A keygen is a type of crack specific to an application, developed by programmers as a marketing tool, e.g., the program's activation code was embedded in the keygen. A crack that does not work is often called a "keygen hack" or simply a "keygen." The term hack is intended to imply that the crack was not created by the original publisher, and may be distributed via e-mail. Cracks and keygens are also used extensively by computer hackers and computer security researchers for reverse engineering of software, to discover bugs or flaws in software products and then report it and seek help. Crackers usually use cracks for their own personal gain, but some crackers has been known to sell cracked products to others at higher prices than what they would normally charge for the product. A cracked version of an application is assumed to be less stable than one which has not been cracked. Cracked programs are also susceptible to bugs introduced by the cracker, which allows other individuals to produce modified versions. Crackers have often been found to sell their cracked products via underground forums or other public websites. Products are often sold in complete packages, allowing the customer to have an automatic installer program package where all crack files are already placed for them before they even purchase the product. Most commercially available cracks are made by professional programmers who use cracking as a means to earn income or for recognition. The use of cracks has become controversial among software developers because of these properties, potential loss of revenue for software vendors and perceived support for piracy. Increasingly, crackers are jailed, most often with criminal charges based on the most contentious of laws surrounding piracy, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). Continuously increasing jail sentences for crack users is not hard to understand since many crackers register their cracked programs with publishers and vendors, thereby placing their products at risk of being removed or modified by authors or vendors. The use of cracks is controversial because it allows anyone to gain access to illegally obtained software. Cracks can be used either for personal use or to distribute software which would otherwise have been unavailable. In the United States, the DMCA explicitly forbids "reverse engineering" as a method of circumventing copy protection mechanisms without permission from those who own the rights, i. e., the software developers. This has been interpreted by some to prohibit software crackers from using the DMCA to protect their interests, and has led to litigation. In January 2005, a federal lawsuit was filed against a cracker following his distribution of a cracked version of Microsoft Office (yes, the one that comes with Windows) to customers in violation of the DMCA. The lawsuit was dismissed in August 2007 because he could not be charged under the DMCA because he did not "modify" or "alter" either the licensed product or its distribution channel. He simply offered to exchange information and/or tools that were developed and used solely for legitimate purposes to others who may have found it useful in performing their own activities.

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