



software protection

BITARTS SOFTLOCK 4.0

Turn your applications into trial software? This utility makes it easy

Minimum requirements Pentium 133 with 16MB RAM, Win95/98/2000 or NT 4.0
Tested on Pentium 500 with 256MB RAM, Win2000
Additional information Trial software can be downloaded from the BitArts Web site. The price quoted above is for the Express Version. The Developer Version costs £294 (£250 ex VAT)

PRICE £147 EX VAT £125 SUPPLIER BitArts Ltd PHONE 0115 959 8181 WWW www.bit-arts.com

Softlock 4.0 is a powerful utility which can be used to turn a normal fully-featured application into a piece of evaluation software. You can, for instance, arrange for trial versions of your program to only run a certain number of times, expire a certain number of days after installation or cease working by a particular date. The program works with pretty well any 32-bit executable, including EXE files, dynamic link libraries, ActiveX controls and even screen savers. This is a software-only solution, which means that your users don't have to mess around with hardware dongles, and the program is royalty free – you can protect as many different applications as you like without paying any more money.

Unlike many similar utilities, a great deal of thought has been put into the design. For example, suppose you release a program which the user can run for only 30 days. If an unscrupulous individual tries to set back the clock by a year, such tampering is detected by Softlock, rendering the evaluation license invalid. Equally, the unlock code required to 'unlock' the software must bear some relationship to a serial number which can be automatically generated by Softlock according to certain (unspecified) system parameters. To put it in simple terms, this approach prevents the common tactic of posting unlock codes on 'warez' newsgroups because the required unlock code will be tied to your specific machine. For the same reason, a purchaser can't install your product on to multiple machines – he or she will need a license for each 'seat'. That said, Softlock understands about networks and can easily be configured to enable a certain maximum number of simultaneous users.

To cater for those cases where a legitimate user wants to move a licensed program from one

machine to another, an option is provided to do this. If you're thinking that a lucky punter might find a valid unlock code by accident, then think again. The chance of finding the right code is apparently something like 2.8 trillion to one.

Internet extras

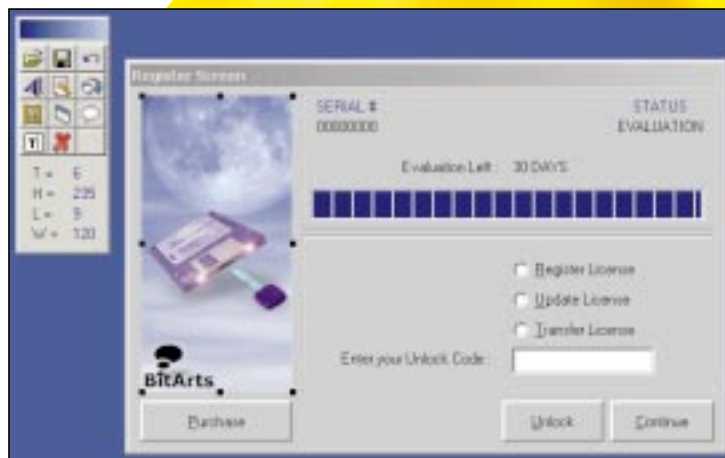
But that's only the start. One of the nicest aspects of Softlock is the integrated support for e-commerce and the Internet. The end-user can be presented with a dialog which includes a Purchase button. Clicking this button connects to the Internet and takes the default Web browser to a predetermined URL specified by you. Typically, this is where the user will enter name, address, credit card details and so forth. The e-commerce Web site will then take the user to a different URL, indicating that the transaction has been confirmed and the credit card debited. By specifying the page title of this second Web page at the time the software is protected, you can arrange that the program is automatically unlocked.

Moreover, you can actually set up three of these confirmation page titles to enable up to three different levels of unlocking over the Internet. Thus, you might have Standard, Professional and Enterprise versions of your software, the appropriate unlock level being automatically applied.

The Developer version of Softlock takes things a stage further by providing a programmable ActiveX control which can be accessed from the protected program, thus giving much finer control over the user interface that the end-user encounters. Even if you don't use the ActiveX control, there's a built-in 'screen painter' which can be used to customise the various protection dialogs built into the system.

internationalisation has been allowed for through an option for specifying that certain edit fields operate with a right-to-left ordering (for example, Hebrew) and there are facilities for showing

Softlock includes a host of well thought out customisation features. There's even a screen painter for customising the registration dialog.



Softlock 4.0 enables you to set number of runs, run-time from installation date, or an expiry date.

and inserting Unicode control characters into each field.

In our tests, Softlock added something like 240KB overhead to the size of a protected EXE file. We reckon that's a small price to pay for state-of-the-art software protection; while browsing the newsgroups, we found that 'cracks' for software protected via Softlock are conspicuous by their absence. Cracks for competing software protection schemes are ten a penny. Go figure.

Dave Jewell

PC Plus

VERDICT

BITARTS SOFTLOCK 4.0

For State-of-the-art software protection with a high level of security

Against A wizard-style user interface in the Softlock IDE would probably be more intuitive for new users

Range of features	10
Ease of use	8
Documentation	8
Performance	9
Value for money	9

9/10

This is a **software-only solution**, which means that your users don't have to mess around with hardware dongles