

How do you take your Java? Enterprise Budget Impacts from Java Licensing



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Java is a 30-year-old computing platform and high-level, object-oriented programming language that operates on billions of devices worldwide (Microsoft, 2025). Released by Sun Microsystems in 1995, Java has become the most popular programming language for application developers. Its versatility enables it to run everything from smartphones to enterprise servers, influencing nearly every aspect of corporate and consumer software development.

Widespread reliance on Java has fueled a market for its ongoing maintenance and adaptation to emerging technologies. Oracle purchased Sun Microsystems in April 2009. Oracle's Co-founder and Chief Technology Officer called Java the "single most important software asset we have ever acquired" (NY Times, April 20, 2009). Oracle has continued to capitalize on Java's widespread adoption, driving a steady stream of enhancements to market. Since 2018, Oracle has continued to modify its release cadences, releasing new Java product offerings with new licensing metrics, shifting customers to paid subscription models for nearly every use case.

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Based on the argument that Java supports an entire enterprise, not just individual users or specific applications, in January 2023 Oracle adopted a headcount-based licensing model, requiring a licensed seat for each full-time, part-time, and temporary employee as well as for contractors (Palisade, 2025). This model increases costs significantly, as larger workforces result in higher fees, straining enterprise budgets and prompting firms to explore free or lower-cost alternatives.

Oracle has positioned itself as the leading provider and maintainer of Java. There are alternatives such as Adoptium, Amazon Corretto, Azul Zulu, Red Hat Open JDK, and Liberica JDK – each of which evolved from earlier open-source versions of Java. These alternatives adhere to Java SE specifications, but they vary in performance, packaging, and update schedules. Most alternatives are community builds without guarantees of long-term support unless purchased as an added service.

Oracle's latest shift to employee-based paid subscriptions is unlikely to be its last. While Oracle's approach may suit some, other models are available as alternatives for enterprises in 2025 and beyond. Firms are left with the decision of whether to continue with Oracle Java and its associated costs or transition to another version. So, I ask again: how do you take your Java?

Sources

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