

New Risks, New Rules: The Future of Software Licensing in the Age of AI

AI is now deeply embedded in how we build, deploy, and maintain software. This new paradigm is testing traditional licensing models. The frameworks that once governed source code, ownership, and usage rights weren't designed for a world where machines can generate entire codebases, or where training data itself might contain a web of licensed, copyrighted, or proprietary material.

One of the biggest emerging risks is **license contamination**. When generative AI trained on open-source repositories produce code, developers may unwittingly integrate snippets covered by restrictive licenses (like GPL or AGPL). This raises complex questions about derivative works, attribution, and compliance, especially for organizations scaling AI-assisted development across teams. The consequences can be serious, ranging from reputational damage to legal exposure if license obligations are breached.

Ownership and authorship are entering uncharted territory. Who owns AI-generated code: the developer who prompted it, the company that deployed the model, or the creators of the training data? Courts and regulators will define these boundaries, and companies are seeking ways to monitor these changes and rapidly apply them. AI vendors have rolled out **AI-specific licensing frameworks**, such as model usage terms and "responsible AI" clauses that govern how outputs can be used, shared, or monetized.

Moving forward, we can expect **hybrid licensing models** that blend traditional software terms with data-use and ethical AI provisions. These will address not just ownership and liability, but also transparency, traceability, and accountability—especially in enterprise environments where compliance and auditability are critical.

Why it Matters. AI is not just changing software capabilities; it's changing the very **legal DNA of software itself**. Organizations should begin revisiting their IP policies, vendor contracts, and open-source compliance strategies to ensure they're ready for a future where the source of every line of code—and every AI output—matters.

Jennah Michalik
Partner

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203 N. La Salle St. Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60601