12 things to check to buy CAD software safely and avoid unpleasant surprises...

1. License type: what am I actually buying?

- Have I checked whether the license is new, pre-owned, perpetual, subscription-based, Educational or Trial?

Different license types can come with different terms and restrictions. Educational licenses, for example, are intended for learning and teaching, and commercial use is not allowed. They usually expire after six or twelve months.

To check: which features and usage rights are included in the license?

2. Price: is it too good to be true?

- Is the price consistent with the software vendor's official price list?

A price that is a small fraction of the official list price is the first warning sign. Offers of a “lifetime” or “perpetual” AutoCAD license at a very low price are not compatible with the vendor's current sales policy, which is based on subscriptions.

Behind prices like these there are often Educational or Trial licenses, shared accounts or keys that were never meant for resale.

3. License duration: can I use the CAD software without an expiry date?

- Is the license perpetual, or does it expire and require periodic renewal through a subscription?

A perpetual license lets you use a specific version of the software with no expiry date, while a subscription lets you use it for a defined period.

Important: Autodesk no longer sells new perpetual licenses of AutoCAD. Any offer of a perpetual license therefore calls for a careful check of the version, its origin and the transfer rights.

To check: what happens if I do not renew the license? Will I still be able to open my projects?

4. Professional use: can I use the CAD software for work?

- Does the license explicitly allow professional and commercial use?

Not every license authorizes use of the software for business activities or for projects delivered to clients. Non-compliant use may amount to a breach of contract and, where the law so provides, to copyright infringement.

To check: is the license suitable for professionals and companies? Are there limits on the number of users or devices?

5. License origin: can its source be verified?

- Can the seller document where the license comes from and, if it is pre-owned, that the transfer is legitimate?

In some jurisdictions, for example in the European Union, reselling pre-owned software can be lawful, provided that certain conditions are met. The rules differ from country to country.

To check: are documents available that prove the original purchase, any later transfers and, where required, that the previous owner has stopped using the software?

6. Seller reliability: who am I buying from?

- Is the seller clearly identifiable? In which country is it based?

It is advisable to check the company name, registered office, tax or company registration number, contact details, terms of sale and after-sales support.

The seller's country can affect invoicing, the legal protection you can rely on and the way any problems are handled.

If the reseller claims to be authorized, this can be verified on the software vendor's official website.

To check: does the seller have an identifiable registered office? In which country does it operate? Does it offer clear guarantees and reliable support? Does the purchase involve specific tax obligations or territorial restrictions on the license?

7. Purchase documents and invoicing: will I receive an invoice that is valid in my country?

- Does the seller issue a proper invoice and provide the documentation for the license purchased?

For a business purchase it is important to check that the invoice is valid for tax and accounting purposes in your country, and that the contract terms and usage rights of the software are available. If the invoice comes from a seller based abroad, additional tax obligations may apply.

To check: does the invoice clearly identify the software purchased? Is the documentation adequate for the tax and accounting needs of my business?

8. Delivery method: will the license really be in my name?

- What exactly do I receive after the purchase, and in whose name is the license registered?

A legitimate license is tied to an account in the buyer's name and is recorded in the software vendor's systems. Particular care is needed with offers that deliver the login details of an account created by someone else, Educational accounts registered to third parties, seats in shared subscriptions, bare activation keys or “activator” programs.

In these cases the buyer is not the license holder: access can be changed or revoked at any time, and enforcing your rights may prove difficult.

To check: is the license registered in my name or in my company's name? Can I manage it from my own account on the vendor's portal? Am I being asked to use an email address or login details that are not mine?

9. Activation and authenticity: is a working license always a legitimate one?

- Can I verify the type, duration and status of the license through the software vendor's official channels, where available?

The fact that the software installs and activates correctly does not in itself guarantee that the license is legitimate, or that it can be used for any kind of work.

A license that is not legitimate can be deactivated by the vendor even a long time after the purchase, bringing work to a halt and wasting the money spent. In the event of a license audit by the vendor, the user may also be asked to purchase proper licenses, with the costs that this involves.

To check: does the license match what I purchased? Can I verify its terms of use? What happens if the license is deactivated?

10. Updates: are they free, paid, optional or mandatory?

- Have I checked which updates are included, and whether they are optional or mandatory?

Updates may include bug fixes, security improvements and new features. Some are free, others come at an additional cost.

Skipping updates can lead to compatibility problems, security vulnerabilities or the inability to use new features.

To check: can I keep using the CAD software without updating it? How much does it cost to move to a new version? What happens to my projects if I do not install the updates?

11. Technical support: what does it cover and how much does it cost?

- Is technical support included in the price, or does it require an additional payment?

Support services can vary in duration, language, contact channels and the kind of assistance included.

To check: is support available in my language? Does it cover installation, activation and technical problems? Are there extra costs or limits on the service?

12. Compatibility and features: does the CAD software meet my needs?

- Does the software support the file formats, features and tools my work requires?

It is important to check compatibility with the files you use every day, DWG and DXF in particular, and with your operating system.

To check: does the CAD software handle my projects correctly? Does it support the 2D and 3D features I need? Is a trial version available?