

RETS Compliance Program Vendor Guide

Introduction

The Real Estate Transaction Standard is a set of conventions that allows computers to exchange information about real estate transactions. In effect, it is a common language in which interested parties can converse about listings, agents, tax records and other real estate subjects.

The RETS compliance program is a way of evaluating fluency in that common language. The compliance program awards products that have demonstrated fluency the right to display the RETS logo on its advertising and packaging. Fluency is demonstrated by the use of compliance testing software that checks RETS messages for consistency and conformance to the standard. The software and the test procedures are freely available, so developers working on a new product can continually monitor compliance prior to certification.

Use of the RETS logo is governed by a standard license agreement. The agreement states the conditions under which the logo may be used, and gives the rights and restrictions associated with its use. The agreement is available from the RETS web site and should be completed by the vendor after their product has been certified. The compliance logo is awarded for a particular version of a vendor's software. If the vendor changes their software, they may no longer be in compliance and must obtain a new certification.

It is important to note that the RETS logo does not imply an endorsement of a product, nor does it imply anything at all about a product's usability, reliability or suitability for a particular purpose. Display of the logo implies only that the product has been run in the standard RETS test environment without detection of any violations of the RETS standard.

Principles

The RETS compliance testing program is built on four key principles:

Open requirements

All of the requirements for successful completion of the compliance tests are described in publicly-available documents. These include the Client Compliance Checklist, several Server Test Protocol documents, and, of course, the testing scripts themselves.

Open tools	The tools necessary to perform a compliance test are freely available from the RETS web site. This means not only that the tools can be used by developers during product development, but that anyone with an interest in verifying the compliance of a product carrying the RETS logo can do so.
Open verification	Compliance testing for certification is most often done in a public setting, where anyone who wishes to witness the compliance test process may do so. The public test setting ensures that no vendor is dependent on a secret process or an untrusted third party to obtain a compliance certification.
Open community process	The tests and compliance specification are maintained by the RETS community at large. It is the community, rather than a single vendor or other entity that determines the meaning of "compliance". The RETS community encompasses not only vendors but end-users, MLSSs, real estate industry consultants, and state associations of Realtors as well as the National Association of Realtors. Wide community participation helps ensure a fair process that produces results helpful to all parties involved.

Definition of Compliance

A RETS product or service is considered compliant for purposes of the RETS logo if it has successfully passed the tests performed by the publicly-available testing tools. These tools are not static: as the community discovers areas in which there are compliance issues, the tools will be updated to reflect the more stringent definitions. A version of software, once certified, does not need to be recertified if the tools are modified. However, the license agreement requires licensees to ensure continued compatibility with the standard, so vendors are not relieved of responsibility to continue ensuring the compliance of their products.

Once again, "compliance" does not mean "suited for a particular purpose". It only means that, where RETS is used in a product, it is used properly. The test protocol does not test functionality except for that specified by RETS, and if a product under test does not offer a particular function, then that section of the RETS compliance test is not performed.

Continuing compliance	Compliance is an ongoing obligation: if a product is once tested and found to be in compliance, and the vendor or one of its users then discovers a compliance problem, the vendor is required to fix the product in a timely manner (set forth in the trademark license agreement). If this is not done, the vendor loses the right to use the RETS logo in association with the product until the defect is remedied.
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This does not imply that a vendor must keep up with new interpretations of the standard that were not in effect at the time of the compliance check, though it is certainly prudent to do so. Not only will the reputation of a product suffer if interoperability problems are not addressed, but the product's license agreement will probably not be renewed at the next anniversary.

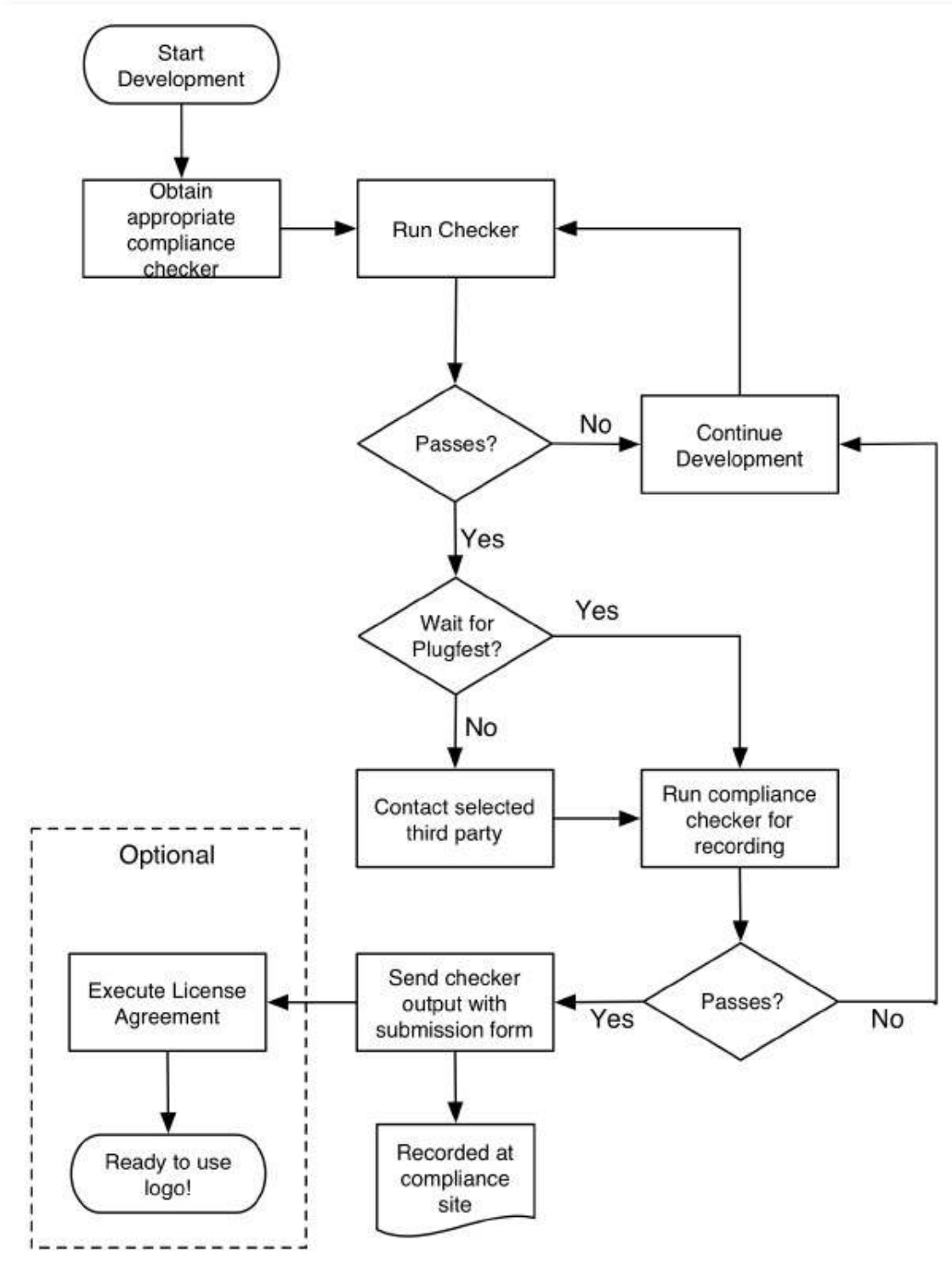
Client compliance

A client is required to comply with the RETS standard in performing whatever functionality it offers. In this case, the compliance test process does not test functionality; it merely requires that the client interact with a server according to the standard. It is up to the vendor and the tester to ensure that the client is driven through a reasonable range of functionality — enough to cause the client to emit every RETS transaction in its repertoire at least once.

Server compliance

A server is required to comply with the RETS standard in performing whatever functionality it offers. A server using the RETS logo has been shown to execute successfully all of the applicable test protocols for the functions it supports. A server must also pass negative tests for those functions it supports. Negative testing ensures that a server provides proper RETS error messages in response to specific failure conditions.

Compliance Testing Process



Venues

The compliance testing process can be conducted either at a RETS plugfest, currently scheduled three times per year, or by

a third party designated by the RETS working group.

Server Test Process

The server compliance testing process is governed by a series of test protocol documents. These are available on the RETS web site, and detail the process flow for each test. Test protocols are available for RETS 1.5 and 1.7, and planned RETS2 test protocols will be upcoming. Tests for 1.01 have been archived since the deprecation of RETS 1.01 in August 2006.

There are currently test protocol documents for eight transactions: Login, Logout, GetMetadata, GetObject, ChangePassword, Search, Update, and ServerInformation. There are Negative Testing protocols for GetMetadata, GetObject, Search, and Update. In addition, there are two protocols that use metadata to perform dynamic DMQL tests for Standard and System names.

To qualify for the RETS logo, a server is required to pass the test protocols for functions supports, including the Negative test protocol for that function. Servers that support Search must also pass the two DMQL tests protocols.

To certify a server as compliant, the test operator executes each of these test protocols in sequence, and examines the output of the compliance checking tool. If the output of the checking tool indicates that the test passes, that transaction is compliant. Once all of the required and advertised elements have been exercised by the compliance checker and have passed, the product and version are eligible to use the RETS logo under terms of the license agreement

Client Test Process

The client compliance testing tool evaluates clients for compliancy to the RETS 1.5 and 1.7 standard. A RETS2 client compliance test is forthcoming. The client compliance tool analyzes a client's request for the following seven RETS Transactions: Login, Logout, GetMetadata, GetObject, Search, ServerInformation, and Update. A client registers for the test and accesses the RETS server URL provided for the test, exercising its normal functionality. The client tool evaluates each request for compliance to the RETS standard. The operation of the client must be such that each of the transactions that the client is capable of using must be used during the course of the test.

If the output of the checking tool indicates that the test passes, that transaction is compliant. Once all of the required and advertised elements have been exercised by the compliance checker and have passed, the product and version are eligible to use the RETS logo under terms of the license agreement.

Test results

The server test produces results that may be exported to xml. These should be emailed to pobrien@ronintech.org.

The client test tool has an online application with reporting functionality built in. The vendor should use this to email a report of the results to pobrien@ronintech.org. Upon receipt of the results, the product information will then be added to the database.

The vendor may then execute the RETS Logo License Agreement and begin using the logo in accordance with its provisions.

Compliance Process Governance

The compliance process is under the control of the RETS Compliance workgroup. Membership in this workgroup is open, as is participation in its deliberations and voting. The compliance workgroup also determines what will be included in the test scripts. The full RETS Working Group can override this decision; however, because the compliance workgroup can only authorize the inclusion of tests that verify a pre-existing and unambiguous feature of the specification, this should happen only rarely.

Getting Started

The first step in obtaining formal compliance certification is to visit rets.org and link to the appropriate test tool for your product. These tools are designed to be run by anyone, so they can be used during your development process and even as part of your regression testing.

Once your product is ready for release, you may bring it to one of the thrice-yearly RETS plugfest events.

Server Test Tool:

http://retsserver.realtors.org:8080/retsservercompliance/app/client_inlp

Client Test Tool:

Registration:

<http://retsserver.realtors.org:8080/retsClientCompliance/Registration.jsp>

Instructions and Test Results:

<http://retsserver.realtors.org:8080/retsClientCompliance/Registration.jsp>

Questions

Questions about compliance certification can be directed to Paula O'Brien, pobrien@ronintech.org, who will either answer them directly or request that the Compliance workgroup address the question. Questions can also be posted on the RETS developer list; you may subscribe to this list by going to <http://www.rets.org/mailman/listinfo/rets-dev> and clicking on the Subscribe link.