

701—285.34(422,423) Automatic data processing.**285.34(1) In general.**

a. *Applicability of tax.* For the purposes of this rule, the tax on automatic data processing is applicable to the gross receipts of:

- (1) Sales and rentals of data processing equipment (hardware).
- (2) Sales and rentals of tangible personal property produced or consumed by data processing equipment or prewritten (canned) computer software used in data processing operations.
- (3) Certain enumerated services performed on or connected with data processing such as rental of tangible personal property, machine repair, services of machine operators, office and business machines repair, electrical installation, and any other taxable service enumerated in Iowa Code section 422.43.

b. *Definitions.*

- (1) Reserved.
- (2) “*Hardware*” means the physical computer assembly and peripherals including, but not limited to, such items as the central processing unit, keyboards, consoles, monitors, memory, disk and tape drives, terminals, printers, plotters, modems, tape readers, document sorters, optical readers and digitizers.

(3) “*Canned software*” is prewritten computer software which is offered for general or repeated sale or rental to customers with little or no modification at the time of the transaction beyond specifying the parameters needed to make the program run. Canned software is tangible personal property. The term also includes programs offered for general or repeated sale or rental which were initially developed as custom software. Evidence of canned software includes the selling or renting of the software more than once. Software may qualify as custom software for the original purchaser or lessor but is canned software with respect to all others. Canned software includes program modules which are prewritten and later used as needed for integral parts of a complete program.

(4) “*Custom software*” is specified, designed, and created by a vendor at the specific request of a customer to meet a particular need and is considered to be a sale of a service rather than a sale of tangible personal property. It includes those services represented by separately stated charges for the modification of existing prewritten software when the modifications are written or prepared exclusively for a customer. Modification to existing prewritten software to meet the customer’s needs is custom computer programming only to the extent of the modification and only to the extent that the actual amount charged for the modification is separately stated. Examples of services that do not result in custom software include loading parameters to initialize program settings and arranging preprogrammed modules to form a complete program.

When the charges for modification of a prewritten program are not separately stated, tax applies to the entire charge made to the customer for the modified program unless the modification is so significant that the new program qualifies as a custom program. If the prewritten program before modification was previously marketed, the new program will qualify as a custom program if the price of the prewritten program was 50 percent or less of the price of the new program. If the prewritten program was not previously marketed, the new program will qualify as a custom program if the charge made to the customer for custom programming services, as evidenced by the records of the seller, was more than 50 percent of the contract price to the customer.

The department will consider the following records in determining the extent of modification to prewritten software when there is not a separate charge for the modification: logbooks, timesheets, dated documents, source codes, specifications of work to be done, design of the system, performance requirements, diagrams of programs, flow diagrams, coding sheets, error printouts, translation printouts, correction notes, and invoices or billing notices to the client.

(5) “*Storage media*” includes hard disks, compact disks, floppy disks, diskettes, diskpacks, magnetic tape, cards, or other media used for nonvolatile storage of information readable by a computer.

(6) “*Rental*” includes any lease or license agreement between a vendor and a customer for the customer’s use of hardware or software.

(7) “*Program*” is interchangeable with the term “software” for purposes of this rule.

285.34(2) Taxable sales, rentals and services.

a. Sales of equipment. Tax applies to sales of automatic data processing equipment and related equipment.

b. Rental or leasing of equipment. Where a lease includes a contract by which a lessee secures for a consideration the use of equipment which may or may not be used on the lessee's premises, the rental or lease payments are subject to tax. See rule 701—26.18 on tangible personal property rental.

c. Canned software. The sale or rental for a consideration of any computer software which is not custom software is a transfer of tangible personal property and is taxable. Canned software may be transferred to a customer in the form of diskettes, disks, magnetic tape, or other storage media or by listing the program instructions on coding sheets.

(1) Tax applies whether title to the storage media on which the software is recorded, coded, or punched passes to the customer or the software is recorded, coded, or punched on storage media furnished by the customer. A fee for the temporary transfer of possession of canned software for the purpose of direct use to be recorded, coded, or punched by the customer or by the lessor on the customer's premises, is a sale or rental of canned software and is taxable.

(2) Tax applies to the entire amount charged to the customer for canned software. Where the consideration consists of license fees, royalty fees, right to use fees or program design fees, whether for a period of minimum use or for extended periods, all fees includable in the purchase price are subject to tax.

d. Training materials. Persons who sell or lease data processing equipment may provide a number of training services with the sale or rental of their equipment. Training services, per se, are not subject to tax. Training materials, such as books, furnished to the trainees for a specific charge are taxable.

e. Services a part of the sale or lease of equipment. Where services, such as programming, training or maintenance services, are provided to those who purchase or lease automatic data processing and related equipment, on a mandatory basis as an inseparable part of the sale or taxable lease of the equipment, charges for the furnishing of the services are includable in the measure of tax from the sale or lease of the equipment whether or not the charges are separately stated. (Where the purchaser or lessee has the option to acquire the equipment either with the services or without the services, charges for the services may not be excluded from the measure of tax if they are taxable enumerated services.)

f. Materials and supplies. The transfer of title, for a consideration, of tangible personal property, including property on which or into which information has been recorded or incorporated is a sale subject to tax.

Generally service bureaus are consumers of all tangible personal property, including cards and forms, which they use in providing services unless a separate charge is made to customers for the materials, in which case, tax applies to the charge made for the materials.

g. Additional copies. When additional copies of records, reports, tabulation, etc., are sold, tax applies to the charges made for the additional copies. "Additional copies" are all copies in excess of those produced on multipart carbon paper simultaneously with the production of the original and on the same printer, whether the copies are prepared by rerunning the same program, by using multiple simultaneous printers, by looping a program such that the program is run continuously, by using different programs to produce the same output product, or by other means. Where additional copies are prepared, the tax will be measured by the charge made by the service bureau to the customer. If no separate charge is made for the additional copies, tax applies to that portion of the gross receipts which the cost of the additional computer time (if any) and the cost of materials and labor cost to produce the additional copies bear to the total job cost. Charges for copies produced by means of photocopying, multilithing, or by other means are subject to tax. Tax applies to a contract where data on magnetic tape are converted into combinations of alphanumeric printing, curve plotting or line drawings, and put on microfilm or photorecording paper.

h. Mailing lists. Addressing (including labels) for mailing. Where the service bureau addresses, through the use of its automatic data processing equipment or otherwise, material to be mailed, with names and addresses furnished by the customer or maintained by the service bureau for the customer, tax does not apply to the charge for addressing. Similarly, where the service bureau prepares, through the use of its automatic data processing equipment or otherwise, labels to be affixed to material to be mailed, with names and address furnished by the customer or maintained by the service bureau for the

customer, tax does not apply to the charge for producing the labels, regardless of whether the service bureau itself affixes the labels to the material to be mailed. However, tax would be due on any tangible personal property, such as labels, consumed by the service bureau. (See “f” above.) Mailing lists in the form of Cheshire tapes, gummed labels, and heat transfers which are attached to envelopes and placed in the mail by a service bureau constitute tangible personal property and are subject to tax.

i. Services of a machine operator. The services of a machine operator, such as a key punch operator or the operator of any other data processing equipment, when hired to operate another person’s machinery or equipment, are subject to tax when contracted for and performed by someone other than an employee of the owner of the machinery and equipment.

j. Maintenance contracts. Maintenance contracts sold in connection with the sale or lease of canned software generally provide that the purchaser will be entitled to receive storage media on which prewritten program improvements have been recorded. The maintenance contract may also provide that the purchaser will be entitled to receive certain services, including error corrections and telephone or on-site consultation services.

(1) Nonoptional maintenance contract. If the maintenance contract is required as a condition of the sale or rental of canned software, it will be considered as part of the sale or rental of the canned software, and the gross sales price is subject to tax whether or not the charge for the maintenance contract is separately stated from the charge for software.

(2) Optional maintenance contracts prior to July 1, 1998. If the maintenance contract is optional to the purchaser of canned software, then only the portion of the contract fee representing improvements delivered on storage media is subject to sales tax if the fee for other services, including consultation services and error corrections, is separately stated. If the fee for other services, including consultation services and error corrections, is not separately stated from the fee for improvements delivered on storage media, the entire charge for the maintenance contract is subject to sales tax.

(3) Optional maintenance contracts on and after July 1, 1998. If an optional software maintenance or support contract provides for technical support services only, then no tax is imposed on the gross receipts from the performance of those services. If an optional software maintenance or support contract separately states the charges which represent improvements delivered on storage media from charges which represent other services, including consultation services and error correction, then only that portion of the contract fee representing improvements delivered on the storage media is subject to sales tax. If an optional software maintenance or support contract provides for the taxable transfer of tangible personal property and the provision of nontaxable services, and there is no separately stated charge for the taxable transfer of property or for the nontaxable service, then state sales tax of 5 percent shall be imposed on 50 percent of the gross receipts from the sale of such contracts. See 701—paragraph 18.25(3)“c” for more information.

285.34(3) Nontaxable items and activities.

a. Custom programs. These are programs prepared to the special order of a customer. Tax does not apply to the transfer of custom programs in the form of written procedures, such as program instructions listed on coding sheets. Tax applies to the sale of material transferred to the customer in the form of typed or printed sheets if separately invoiced.

b. Processing a client’s data. Generally speaking, if a person enters into a contract to process a client’s data by the use of a computer program, or through an electrical accounting machine programmed by a wired plugboard, the processing of a client’s data is nontaxable. Such contracts usually provide that the person will receive the client’s source documents, record data in machine readable form, such as in punch cards or on magnetic tape, make necessary corrections, rearrange or create new information as the result of the processing and then provide tabulated listings or record output on other media. This service will be considered nontaxable even if the total charge is broken down into specific charges for each step. The furnishing of computer programs and data by the client for processing under direction and control of the person providing the service is nontaxable even though charges may be based on computer time. The true object of these contracts is considered to be a service, even though some tangible personal property is incidentally transferred to the client. However, tax will apply to tangible personal property separately invoiced to the client.

c. Time sharing. Charges made for the use of automatic data processing equipment, on a time-sharing basis, where access to the equipment is by means of remote facilities, are not subject to tax. Time sharing which is, in fact, a rental of equipment and the lessee exercises the right of possession or control over the equipment is subject to tax. See 18.34(2)“b” and rule 701—26.18(422).

d. Designing of systems, converting of systems, consulting, training, and miscellaneous services. These services consist of the developing of ideas, concepts and designs. Common examples of these nontaxable services are:

(1) Designing and implementing computer systems (e.g., determining equipment and personnel required and how they will be utilized).

(2) Designing storage and data retrieval systems (e.g., determining what data communications and high speed input-output terminals are required).

(3) Converting manual systems to automatic data processing systems, converting present automatic data processing systems to new systems (e.g., changing a second generation system to a third generation system).

(4) Consulting services (e.g., studies of all or part of a data processing system).

(5) Feasibility studies (e.g., studies to determine what benefits would be derived if procedures were automated).

(6) Evaluation of bids (e.g., studies to determine which manufacturer’s proposal for computer equipment would be most beneficial).

(7) Providing technical help such as analysts and programmers, usually on an hourly basis.

(8) Writing (coding) and testing of programs—contract programming. These services result in the production of customized programs. This type of service is not taxable because programming requires the development or ascertainment of information, and the evaluation of data, in addition to other development skills.

Persons engaged in providing nontaxable computer services are the consumers of all tangible personal property used in such activities, and the tax must be paid on their acquisition of such property.

This paragraph, 18.34(3)“d,” shall become effective for periods beginning on or after April 1, 1992.

e. Installation charges. Where installation charges are separately contracted for or where no contract exists, are separately invoiced, or do not constitute enumerated taxable services, they are exempt from tax. See rule 701—15.14(422,423).

f. Pickup and delivery charges. The tax will not apply to pickup and delivery charges which are separately contracted for or where no contract exists, are separately invoiced.

g. Rental of computer programs. Prior to July 1, 1984, the rental of computer programs was not subject to tax since the program did not constitute equipment. *KTVO, Inc. vs. Bair*, 1977, Iowa 225 N.W.2d, 111. For the rule regarding prewritten (canned) programs subsequent to that date, see 18.3(2)“c.”

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code sections 422.42, 422.45 and 423.2 and Iowa Code Supplement section 422.43 as amended by 1998 Iowa Acts, Senate File 2288.

[see Rescission note at end of chapter]

[Editorial change: IAC Supplement 11/2/22]