

Free Alternatives to Pricy Software

There are many variations of free software licensing and many reasons why free software is made available

Commercial companies sometimes offer free software as a “come on” to encourage you to upgrade to a better product that costs money.

Shareware authors create software hoping that you will choose to pay for it. Sometimes shareware becomes “crippled” after a set period of time, or has a reduced feature set, if you don’t register it by paying for it.

Open Source projects are often collaborations among many people. These people work on the software because they like to. Sometimes commercial companies support open source projects.

Companies may offer “**Free Trial Versions**” of their software – it’s great if you want to try it out, but you’ll need to find out if the files that you have created will suddenly become unavailable to you once the trial period is over.

Commercial companies sometimes offer **free services or free software in exchange** for your viewing adjacent advertising on their website or even within the software.

Free and open-source software can give you the opportunity to try out technologies and ways of using your computer that you couldn’t ordinarily afford.

OpenOffice.org can create and edit text documents, databases, spreadsheets, presentations (like Powerpoint), can create drawings, and there is even a formula creator.

OpenOffice will open most Microsoft Office document formats, and will also save documents in most Microsoft Office formats. It also has its own OpenOffice document format if interchangeability isn’t important. It can also easily export to PDF format.

There may be some formatting differences between documents opened with OpenOffice and those created with its Microsoft Office equivalents.

OpenOffice runs on Windows XP and Vista, and on Mac OS-X with an Intel processor. (**NeoOffice**, a variation of Open Office, will run on older Mac hardware, but still needs to run under OS-X.)

<http://www.openoffice.org/> <http://www.neooffice.org/neojava/en/index.php>

Google Docs is part of the Gmail service, and you use it inside your web browser. Your files are stored on Google’s servers, which means that you can access them from wherever you have an Internet connection.

Google Docs includes text documents, presentations, spreadsheets, and forms (which you can create and then send by email to be filled out).

You can also share your Google Docs documents with other people, and work on them together. <http://mail.google.com>

GIMP is the *GNU Image Manipulation Program*, and it can do much of what Photoshop does. There’s no built-in CMYK support, it can’t use Photoshop plug-ins,

and there are other differences. GIMP runs on PCs and on Mac OS-X.

<http://www.gimp.org/>

Picasa is a more basic alternative to GIMP that also can catalogue and organize your digital photos. It searches your hard drive and catalogues the images that it finds, and gives you one place to view and organize all of your digital photos.

You can also use it to do minor touch-ups on your photos like cropping, adjusting colors, adjusting contrast and color balance, and adding artistic effects.

<http://picasa.google.com/>

GanttProject is free project management software, to create timelines for project organization. <http://ganttproject.biz>

Nvu is a website development tool that can create and edit HTML code for websites. It can automatically upload changes to your website as well.

<http://www.net2.com/nvu/>

Google Sketch-Up is an architectural drawing tool, and can be used for simple 3-D drawings or complicated plans. <http://sketchup.google.com/>

To find free software, search Google for “Open Source Software”, or search for “free alternative to “ the software you’re replacing. Other information about free software can be found at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_open_source_software_packages

<http://www.damicon.com/resources/opensoftware.html>

<http://lifehacker.biz/articles/best-open-source-software/>

<http://www.opensourcemac.org/>

<http://directory.fsf.org/>

Remember:

- Be sure that your computer has the appropriate operating system and hardware requirement for the software you are trying out
- Make sure that the software that you depend upon for your important work is stable and will allow you to share the kinds of files you need to share.
- Especially if you only occasionally need to open a Word document someone sends you, a free software package might be fine for you.
- If the software is trial-ware, find out what happens when the trial ends
- You can buy copies of free software (and this may be ok) – but you may also just be able to download it for free
- If you don’t have a fast connection, bring your USB drive to a library or a community technology center to download the free software from the web

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA. Author of this work: Bob Raiselis

Upper Valley Digital

Visit www.uppervalleydigital.com to find out about other programs and for more information on this topic