

Top Ten Free Quality Software Programs to download

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Who would have thought that you would be able to buy a decent-spec laptop for less than the office software that would make it useable? Well, if you would like to use your flexible friend and hard-earned cash for something other than contributing to Mr Gates' next Billion, then read on. (*Small print bit: The following programs are listed without any guarantee or implied accreditation of quality, compatibility, etc. So don't sue me if you don't like them, they don't work, your computer blows-up, etc.*)

OpenOffice

The first in the list has to be OpenOffice (also known as Star Office in a Google version). OpenOffice is a suite of five programs (Impress, Write, Draw, Calc and Base) compatible with 'all major office suites' and industry standard file formats – free to download, no adverts, pop-ups, or anything. At first glance, almost too good to be true. As the website says: *"OpenOffice.org is a*



multiplatform and multilingual office suite and an open-source project. Compatible with all other major office suites, the product is free to download, use, and distribute. To help build the community." Not sure what community – community of people who don't want to spend any more money with Microsoft than they have to probably! There are few little quirks (i.e.. differences), but overall it actually is faster and slicker than you might expect. Now being used as standard software in many larger organisations. Highly recommended. www.openoffice.org

Picasa



The great thing about digital cameras is that they take lots of pictures. The worst thing is that they take lots of pictures! Within no time you have 5,000 images clogging up your hard drive and you need an easy (or at least free) way of indexing and sharing with friends. Pick of the crop is almost certainly Picasa.

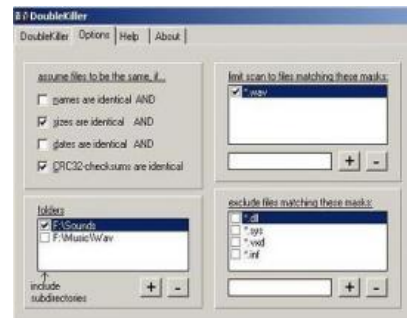
It is very easy to use, idiot-proof enough that even people like me can use it. Just point it at any and all files on your drive and it

automatically catalogues images. It allows fast searches, various browsing options, plus image enhancement and a huge 1GB online photo album. Tip: use it to create slideshows, and 'movies' – two neat features. It also steps in to help with downloading from cameras and scanners. One click will take you to a choice of sites for online printing. <http://picasa.google.com/>

DoubleKiller

This is not really a 'program'; more a utility, but incredibly useful. If your hard drive looks like a teenage fashion store on Saturday afternoon – stuff everywhere – then DoubleKiller is a life-saver. It simply scans any folder or drive and finds duplicate files. You can then easily archive and/or delete as the case may be.

<http://www.bigbangenterprises.de/en/doublekiller/>



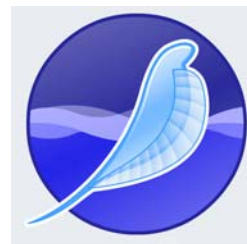
RealPlayer



Yes, everyone loves iTunes, except me! (Never forgiven it for reformatting and moving all my tracks when I clicked the wrong button once.) I have tried numerous music players, until settling on RealPlayer as the recommended option. Why? Good functionality, good sound, copes with my library of 25,000 tracks, can save streaming video from the net, device support, etc. Best of all – does not try and force a player format on you! Try it, free version is fine for most applications. Get it! www.realplayer.com

SeaMonkey

Internet Explorer is free, everyone knows that, and Mozilla is a very able program too. I have recently been converted to SeaMonkey (don't ask me why it is called that!). Underneath SeaMonkey is Mozilla, but on top are lots of useful extras. As well as a very fast and stable web-browser, there is an advanced email and newsgroup client, IRC chat client, and HTML editing made simple – basically all your Internet needs in one application. Definitely scores points in the easy and speed categories too. A really serious alternative to both IE and the Outlook stable of products. Best bit – freezes less! www.seamonkey-project.org/



AVG

An uber-geek friend of mine put me on to this after I was complaining how slow my PC was. After removing a very popular name-brand virus protection package (which cost me over £100), he installed AVG. PC speeded up, both loading and running and it seems to protect me just fine. Auto checks in the background as well as doing weekly sweep of my disks. Often finds lots of little nasties and deals with them all. Daily free updates keeps it abreast of all new problems too. A recent survey also found it to be the number one anti-virus tool in use. Whilst there are many sites where you can pay to download it, the basic program is available for free from: <http://free.grisoft.com/>



BlueVoda

As the website says: *"BlueVoda is a fully functional website builder and is 100% Completely Clean. There is NO Spyware or Adware inside of it."* This is really a very easy to use WYSIWYG type of program. If you have ever struggled with popular main web design programs, try this one. Great for using to build a prototype or test site before passing on to your web designer. However, whilst it is free, as are the many templates and add-ins, a VodaHost web hosting account is required in order for you to publish on the Internet.. Small price to pay though compared to the cost of some software programs.

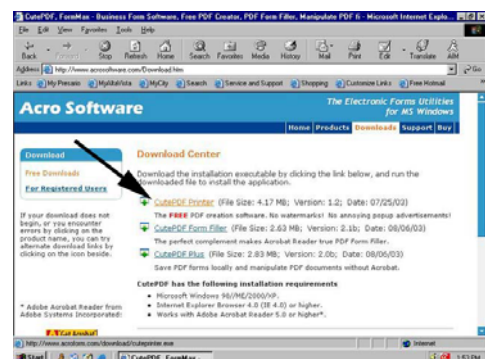


<http://www.bluevoda.com>
(rather cool website too!)

CutePDF Writer

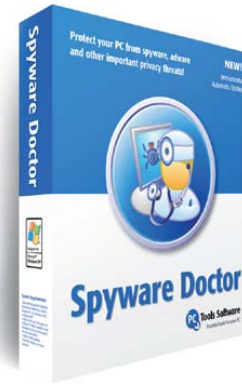
Portable Document Format (PDF) is the best way to send documents by email. They cannot be altered, retain their formatting, etc. However, Word 2003 does not allow you to save or output to PDF format (BTW – OpenOffice does!) The solution – use this simple free utility to print to a PDF format. CutePDF Writer installs itself as a "printer subsystem". This enables virtually any Windows applications (must be able to print) to create professional quality PDF documents. Tried others, this one is quick and easy and does the job. No adware, unlike other similar programs.

<http://www.cutepdf.com/>



Google software pack – Spyware Doctor

Rather bizarrely, not the easiest thing to find amongst the various offerings from the world's favourite search engine people, but well worth the hunt. As well as programs such as Picasa and StarOffice (aka OpenOffice) downloading the Google software pack will give you several excellent software programs free of charge. Best amongst these (that has not already been mentioned) is Spyware Doctor. It is as paid download from the author's site – PC Tools, but free from Google. Every day, this tireless bit of code uncovers some kind of evil thing on my hard drive, and I don't even visit any 'dodgy' sites anymore! Essential. http://pack.google.com/intl/en/pack_installer.html?hl=en&gl=uk



Google Desktop and Sidebar



Whilst this article is in danger of becoming a little lop-sided towards Google, that really is just a co-incidence, even though it might be part of Google's masterplan for world domination (if they have one that is). Google Desktop basically puts the famous search engine technology to work on your own hard drives. It allows ultra-fast and intelligent searching. No more waiting while Explorer churns around for hours and freezes your PC (You as well? Just me then!). I use this application every day and it allows me to be chronically untidy and undisciplined in managing folders and files. I love it! Works on Windows, Macs and Linux. Shame it cannot find keys though! <http://desktop.google.com/> (Spotted this Google 'fan' site whilst researching this article: <http://googlified.com/> - some people really should get out more!)

Hope you found this article useful. Please let me know any suggestions or comments. graham@virtualpaplus.co.uk If you would like more ideas on how to save time and money, visit www.virtualpaplus.co.uk

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