

Now is the time to look at an alternative to Microsoft Office (R)

Are you locked into using Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint? Are you spending extra because you need a database, and Access does not come with the basic Office package?

Well, the time has come to look at alternatives, or at least the one I'll discuss here in a few moments. Whether you are a writer on a tight budget, but need to send your submittals in Word format or an employee wanting to do work at home without either paying hundreds of dollars for Office or installing an illegal copy at home, there are inexpensive options.

(Just as an aside, do NOT ever install or use unlicensed software from Microsoft or anyone else. It is simply not worth the headaches, including huge fines and possible jail time. And if you take a copy home from the office, you may lose your job.)

How much would you pay for office productivity software with these features?

- runs on Windows (R), just like Microsoft Office
- all files can be saved in Microsoft Office formats
- a word processor
- a spreadsheet
- a presentation tool
- a database
- a drawing tool
- export to Acrobat PDF format (requires third-party add ins to do this in Microsoft Office)
- save in Flash format (.SWF) for use on the Web; this cannot be done at all in Microsoft Office

Are you interested yet? Want to know the price?

FREE.

For more information, visit the OpenOffice site: <http://www.openoffice.org>.

How can this be? Well, there is a movement among programmers around the world referred to as "open source." I won't bore you with great detail, but the idea is that programmers from all over will donate their time to working on a specific product (in this case, OpenOffice)

and leaving it in the public domain. You may have heard of the Linux operating system; it is still the most famous open source collaboration.

Just as RedHat and SuSE, among others, take Linux and add tools to make it easier to use, Sun Microsystems has StarOffice available starting at \$79.95. This includes limited technical support (OpenOffice does not have technical support.) This is still a bargain, and Sun sponsors OpenOffice. In case you are not familiar with Sun, they are a very solid Silicon Valley company, primarily known for their workstations and inventing the Java programming language.

Instead of upgrading to Office 2003, I recommend at least investigating the OpenOffice option. Whether a home user or a business with hundreds of copies of Office installed, it just makes sense.

After all, it is free!

About the author:

Gregory S. Diehl has almost 35 years experience in applying technology to solve business problems and expand opportunities. He has worked as a systems analyst, programmer, technical writer, Web developer and numerous other roles. A Master CIW Designer, he is currently starting a Web design and development firm in Las Vegas.

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