

Free Apps: Getting What You Don't Pay For

Download free or low-cost software from the Web for business tools you can really use.

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If tech costs are pinching your budget these days, here's an easy way to cut back without getting behind the curve: Download some of the free or extremely low-cost software applications available online. Whether you need easy photo editing software or some cool tools to jazz up your iPhone, there's something on the Web just for you.

- **Think beyond Microsoft.** Need a suite of office tools but don't want to pay for the latest Microsoft version? Consider OpenOffice.org (www.openoffice.org). This free suite lets you create files compatible with Word, Excel, Access, or PowerPoint along with PDF files. If you're a Mac user, another good option is iWork (www.iwork.com) from Apple, a \$79 program that includes a word processor, spreadsheet, and presentation software.
- **Take notes hands-free.** If you've ever tried to write a reminder note or a client's contact information while driving, you'll love Jott (<http://jott.com>). This app for Blackberrys, iPhones, and desktops lets you send e-mails or text messages simply by making a phone call. You can also use the voice-activated software to add an entry to your Google or Outlook calendar. You can send yourself reminder e-mails as well. The cost is \$3.95 a month and \$12.95 for the premium Blackberry-friendly version.
- **Enhance those listing photos.** Get rid of that unsightly trashcan or the toys in the driveway with GIMP (<http://gimp.org>), an acronym for GNU Image Manipulation Program. This free image editing software also offers tutorials on basics such as creating a logo and even animation.
- **Keep clients and vendors in the loop.** Share transaction documents, videos, and other property information with team members, clients, and vendors. The file-sharing wiki program PBwiki 2.0 (<http://pbwiki.com>) lets you send e-mail notifications to everyone in your group and invite others to collaborate on a project. Folders and documents can be password protected for added security. The first three users are free; you can add up to 99 business users for \$8 per month per user. Delete clients after each transaction closes to keep user numbers down.
- **Clip that image and find it later.** A picture may be worth 1,000 words, but only if you can find it later. Evernote (<http://evernote.com>) has a convenient way of organizing photos that you clip from the Web or snap with your mobile phone. It also files away digital images of business cards, receipts, or other documents you scan into your computer. Evernote's recognition software indexes the images based on keywords for easy searching, or you can browse the images graphically. It's free for uploads up to 40MB per month (roughly 270

Web clips or 400 mobile snapshots). For \$5 a month, you can upload up to 500MB and you get to skip the ads.

- **Find your voice in the global real estate market.** With 9 percent of all buyers born outside the United States, according to the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®, knowing a language besides English can differentiate you from your competitors. Livemocha (www.livemocha.com) is a free site that offers self-guided lessons, online tutorials, practice scripts, and live chats with native speakers.

The old saying goes, "you get what you pay for." But with these applications, you're getting a lot of functionality without spending a lot of cash. And that's something everyone can be grateful for today.

Fun Apps to Add

- **Don't curse the dark.** Turn your iPhone into a flashlight with vFlashlight (www.vflashlight.com).
- **Use special effects.** Use Paint.NET to create cool images for your marketing materials (www.getpaint.net).
- **Edit a podcast.** Audacity helps you record and edit an audio message you can use for a podcast (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>).
- **Manage your desktop.** Have too much information stored on your laptop? Install Google Desktop to search through all of your files and folders, including e-mail messages (<http://desktop.google.com>).

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