

Open-source software rated: Ten alternatives you need

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Open source products comprise the work of many collaborators -- sometimes thousands of them, and often separated by oceans. We've put together a collection of ten free open-source applications that will potentially save you hundreds of pounds. We've outlined their pros and cons and compared them to the nearest commercial alternative.

Paid-for version: Microsoft Office

Open-source alternative: OpenOffice

OpenOffice is a feature-packed alternative to Microsoft Office. It's developed by Sun Microsystems in collaboration with a community of dedicated contributors. The primary applications of OpenOffice consist Writer (word processor), Calc (spreadsheet), Impress (presentations), Base (databases), Draw (vector graphics editor) and Math (mathematical formulae editor, similar to Microsoft Equation Editor).

The good: For home users and families it offers everything you'll need to write letters, publish documents, formulate graphs, build slideshows and design simple Web pages. It looks and works like Microsoft Word and because it's free, it'll save you about £119 -- the cost of Microsoft Office 2007. For families, OpenOffice is an absolute must.

The bad:

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