Best Free Software 2014

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Best Free Software

There are tons of things out there that are free. Some are good, while others – not so much. We've compiled a list of our favorite free software.

Classic Shell: The new and improved software has caught up to other paid products. Start Classic is a free "start button" for those whom have had the pain of using a Windows 8 computer and hate it. By installing this free program, you will find that your computer operates much more like a "normal" Windows 7 computer. It doesn't fix everything, but it sure does make life a lot better for Windows 8 sufferers. http://www.classicshell.net/ [2]

AVG AntiVirus: This is a great free antivirus software for those who refuse to pay for antivirus software. We personally feel that it's better to pay for Norton Internet Security, but if you just won't do that, AVG is one of the best known free antivirus products. http://free.avg.com [3]

Google Chrome: Many people don't realize Internet Explorer isn't the only way to access the internet. And while IE has gotten better, I feel Chrome is still the champ in terms of the best web browser, even better than Firefox. http://www.google.com/chrome [4] -- You can also view the PcComputerGuy Chrome Tutorial.

LibreOffice: Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint etc) isn't free. For those whom don't do enough word processing to make it cost effective, there is a great alternative: Libre Office. I call this "a knock-off of Microsoft Office". I don't think it's better than Office, but it is pretty darn good, especially for being a free product. It comes with "Writer (like Word)" and "Calc (like Excel)" among other things. It will also usually allow you to open and work with Microsoft formats. So if you've not been able to open Word documents (.doc or .docx) because you don't have Word and want to pay for it, check out LibreOffice http://libreoffice.org [5]

Picasa: This is another free Google product. Picasa is an amazingly efficient photo management tool. It allows you to import pictures from any device, organize them quickly and even do basic editing and crops. It's very simple to use and is so fast that I often use it instead of my expensive Adobe suite of products to work with photos for simpler edits. We have a 3 part tutorial on Picasa as well on our website (Part 1, Part 2, Part 3). Download it at http://www.google.com/picasa [6]

Gimp: Since we're talking about photos and working with images, we'll mention Gimp. Think of gimp as a free version of Photoshop. It can do many of the amazing things Photoshop can do. Keep in mind, both Photoshop and Gimp are pretty hard-core programs that are quite powerful; meaning can be a bit difficult to use. If you check this out, it might be good to google some YouTube tutorials on using Gimp. It's pretty amazing for being a free product. http://www.gimp.org [7]

VLC Media Player: Sometimes I'll have someone who is having difficulties playing DVD's or hearing audio, or can hear audio but have no video. Often VLC solves that problem. It's a free music/movie player that contains nearly every format (codec) known to exist. It's very light weight, efficient and small to download for what it does. Its interface isn't the prettiest, but I value efficiency and ability over eye-candy. It can handle just about any format you throw at it.

http://www.videolan.org/vlc/index.html [8]

Audacity: King of the free audio software, audacity does an amazing job at processing audio. Despite it being free, I've seen Audacity being used in professional environments – which tells you if the pros are using it, it's probably pretty good and capable. We produce all of our tech talk podcasts using the Audacity audio editing software. If you need to work with audio, look no further than Audacity: http://audacity.sourceforge.net/ [9]

Skype: Most people know of and use Skype, but there are still those who don't. Skype is a pretty easy to use chat program. You can use it to make audio calls, send text messages, share files and most importantly have beautiful HD video calls with friends and family. Skype has been a God-send for so many people wanting to keep in touch with family far away. If you haven't used it yet, check Skype out at http://www.skype.com [10]

Google Voice: With Google Voice you can sign up for a free phone number through Google which you can use to send/receive text messages. You can access those text messages through your web browser by going to http://www.google.com/voice [11]. I love the ability to respond and check texts on my computer instead of the phone. However you can use your phone as well by simply downloading the google voice app from the Play-store. You can also use your Google Voice number to send/receive calls if you have loaded the app on your phone, essentially giving your phone two phone numbers. We use this for our business to have only 1 phone with 2 separate numbers that can be separated at any time… keeping personal calls personal – and work as work. Did I mention you can also try and find a "vanity" number? Vanity numbers are "fancy pants" numbers that incorporate words into the number. Actually our primary phone number started off as a Google Voice number (317-883-PCCG). We found that by using Google Voice, and after a while transferred it to a traditional office phone. http://www.google.com/voice [11]

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