

## Open source alternatives to paid-for software

There are now many 'open source' (or 'freemium') alternatives to many paid-for programmes such as Microsoft Office or the Adobe Creative suite of programmes.

If you wanted to use many of these programmes it would be very expensive to buy a licence for each one, and not practical if you are an individual or a small organisation.

But you can have very similar programmes for free, and they are mostly very, very good. They may not be as good, or as compatible, as the paid-for versions, but they are usually sufficient if you do not want to use them professionally.

### Alternatives to Microsoft Office

#### Google Docs

The first, and biggest, contender in this category is Google's free online office suite known as Google Docs [docs.google.com](https://docs.google.com). Sharable office computing in the cloud, it includes word processing, spreadsheet functionality and presentations, as well as stat-tracking forms that integrate with spreadsheets and docs. Not quite as robust in some ways, it still is the main winner. It exports to a variety of formats, including HTML, DOC, PDF, XLS, PPT and more.



#### Open Office

Open Office [www.openoffice.org](http://www.openoffice.org) is another contender, but one that isn't as easy to use as Google Docs. It takes a bit of skill to get used to the interface of this open source office suite, and feedback is mixed on it as a viable alternative. Part of what you give up when you move away from proprietary software is the ability to call tech support, and better documentation and a shorter learning curve might help more people choose Open Office.



### Alternatives to Adobe Creative Suite

#### Aviary

Aviary [aviary.com](http://aviary.com) is a freemium product suite that possibly exceeds Adobe Creative Suite for being fun to use and easy to learn. If you haven't played with the free beta yet, or jumped to one of the paid solution tiers, you might fall in love with it when you finally do.



It also adds another element that Adobe lacks – a collaborative, social aspect where you can build a network of designers. Aviary also introduces designers to the concept of

branding and Creative Commons copyright, two things designers need to learn to integrate that Adobe offers no real education on or help with.

## Seashore

Seashore [seahorse.sourceforge.net](http://seahorse.sourceforge.net) is an open source alternative specific to Adobe Photoshop. It doesn't touch on any of the vector graphics or web content offerings that the full Creative Suite handles. Even so, it's quick to learn and has enough photo editing capability for the average casual user to embrace.

## GIMP

GIMP [www.gimp.org](http://www.gimp.org) is another standby, and one that offers nearly as many options for editing that Photoshop does. Some people consider GIMP not enough of a substitute for Photoshop, but it actually does quite a bit of the same things and is handy for photo and image manipulation and editing.

## InkScape

One of the nicer Open Source answers to Adobe out there is InkScape [www.inkscape.org](http://www.inkscape.org). This open source vector graphics program goes head to head with Illustrator and does a pretty nice job competing. It gives you one of the few reliable alternative options for vector graphics that is free.

## NVU

NVU [www.nvu.com](http://www.nvu.com) is the alternative to Adobe's Go Live and Macromedia (now Adobe's) Dreamweaver. Not quite as complex as Go Live or Dreamweaver, NVU has a short learning curve for the average user who just wants to whip out a web page without having to shell out hundreds of dollars.



The folks at NVU have also made a companion program, Kompozer, that handles some of the features that NVU did not. Both are compatible with Linux, Windows and Mac OS.

## Picasa

Another alternative from is Picasa <http://picasa.com>. This image editor is designed to be a basic alternative for Photoshop, and works with the rest of the Google family of products, like Google Docs.

## Adobe Acrobat alternatives

### PDFreDirect

PDFreDirect [www.exp-systems.com](http://www.exp-systems.com) is a freemium product that lets you view, edit, create and protect PDFs. The free version offers almost all of the same functionalities as Adobe Acrobat, and the paid version is a nice complete substitute (however, for most people the

free version is more than adequate for their needs). Unfortunately, this program is Windows only – sorry Mac and Linux.

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