



Fact Sheet

Freeware & Shareware

July 2007

You may have heard the terms “Freeware” and “Shareware” before - but what do they actually mean?

Our E-Business Advisers clarify this for you:

1. What is Freeware?

Freeware programs are software that is distributed for free, often via the web.

They may well be used to establish the credibility of the programmer, for genuine altruism, or as “stripped down” versions of programs that would be charged for.

It normally comes with a document file, detailing how to use it.

There are many genuinely excellent freeware programs.

Often, freeware (even though it's not being commercially sold), is copyrighted by the programmer, and will have a license agreement attached. Some freeware requires a registration process before you can download it.

Just because freeware is free, it does not mean that it is in the public domain - there often are restrictions on how it can be used.

You need to check what the license agreement says if you want to use the freeware for anything other than your own personal use.

2. and Shareware?

Shareware is software that has been distributed on an “honour system” basis.

You get shareware free of charge: if you like it and use it, the programmer asks that you pay a small fee, usually around the \$20-50 range.

By sending the small fee, you get registered, and then you can access assistance and updates to the software.

Some shareware will allow a limited number of uses - e.g. 10 - before it won't allow further use.

Many shareware programs have a “nag screen” - a reminder that pops up every time you use it, urging you to register it.

Some shareware requires a registration process when you download it - but is otherwise free. This is known as “\$0 shareware”.

Shareware normally also comes with a document file, detailing how to use it.

You are allowed to copy shareware and pass it to colleagues: if they use the product, they will be expected to pay the fee too.

Shareware is low cost, as often it is created by a single programmer, and is offered direct to users, normally via the web. There are hence almost zero advertising or packaging costs.

Like freeware, shareware is normally copyrighted. This means that you cannot sell shareware on, but you can pass it on to others as described earlier.



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Some programs are freeware if used by individuals, but are treated as shareware if used commercially.

Some shareware or freeware programs can be earlier versions of the software that the company is actually selling - their intention is obviously to “upsell” the latest version to you, when you’ve tried out the shareware or freeware version.

3. What are the benefits?

The obvious benefit of freeware is that it’s free!

Using shareware allows you to try out software prior to purchase - there are no risks that the program may not do what you need it to. If you don’t like it - you stop using it, delete it and don’t bother registering.

As both freeware and shareware are normally downloaded from the web, you can instantly receive the program that you need - without having to go out and purchase it.

There are also some extremely useful software programs that are in very common use that are shareware or freeware - WinZip (an excellent utility program that compresses files) being probably the most common.

4. What are the negatives?

Freeware is unlikely to have technical support attached, so it may be difficult to resolve any problems that may arise - although there are often technical discussion forums that may answer the question.

Registration can sometimes add you to an intrusive emailing list.

Some freeware and shareware can be badly

written - and might not be as stable as you would wish.

There are several download sites (listed in the Useful Links section) which have a ranking system by users. You can then assess what other people thought about the software before using it.

Finally - and fortunately very rarely - some freeware has had “malware” or “spyware” code added to the program.

This could, for example, add a program to your PC that might allow unauthorised tracking of your web usage (spyware), so that advertisers can better target you. (See “Spyware & Malware Fact Sheet” in this series for more details).

Ironically, another excellent freeware program (Ad-Aware from Lavasoft) will stop the “spyware” element very effectively, and your anti-virus program should detect and remove any “malware”.

5. Useful Links

www.lavasoft.de -

Ad-Aware - very useful utility that stops spying on your web activity. (Freeware for non-business use, \$25 for business use.)

www.asp-shareware.org -

Association of Shareware Professionals - site for developers of shareware

<http://downloads.asp-shareware.com> -

Association of Shareware Professionals - site where users can download products of the association’s members.

www.winzip.com -

Web site to download the WinZip file compression utility. Shareware - you can



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download an evaluation copy for free, and register it for \$29 if you wish to continue using it.

www.tucows.com -

Very comprehensive site with downloads of freeware, shareware and demos of a range of applications for PC's as well as PDAs and mobile phones. Their rankings are based on how many cows a program gets!



www.downloads.com -

Another comprehensive download site