

04/11/09 - What software do you use every day?

Some of the best things in life are free. Let me tell you about seven of the finest free gems in the software world.

- 1) Mozilla Firefox is a superior browser. It's open source, and its add-ons deliver incredible flexibility. My favorite add-on is Adblock Plus. It blocks almost all advertisements you'd normally see on the web.

- 2) WordWeb has become one of my regular friends over the last several years. With a simple Ctrl + Alt + W (the hotkeys can be customized if desired) a box pops up instantly that allows me to look up the definition or spelling of a word. If I really want to be fancy, I can double click on a word, which highlights it, and then press the hotkeys and it instantly looks up that word. This has been a really helpful tool for me in expanding my vocabulary and improving spelling. Some people have told me that they think Google is just as good for doing this, but once you get used to WordWeb, you'll never go back.

- 3) Google Picasa is a superb free program for photo management and basic editing. It's comparable to Adobe LightRoom, which retails for \$299.

- 4) Foxit PDF Reader is an extremely lightweight and fast PDF reader. If you work with a lot of PDFs or work on an older computer, you'll notice significantly faster performance.

- 5) iTunes: It took me a while to finally come to the conclusion that I like iTunes? even though there are still things that really tweak me about it. It runs a few too many unnecessary processes in the background, and I don't like the Apple Software Updater very much, but I've found iTunes to be very stable and easy-to-use for managing music.

- 6) AVG Free Antivirus protection is a must for most computers. Instead of going out and buying Norton Antivirus every year, home users can save some money by using AVG Free. The free version offers a very decent level of all-around protection, and it's always done a good job for me. AVG also offers more comprehensive packages as well if you want to guard against rootkits and broader protection on the web.

- 7) Open Office is an excellent alternative to Microsoft Office for those who are hesitant to plunk down a couple hundred dollars to edit documents. There are a few things to keep in mind. While I've almost never had a problem opening a file with Open Office, there have been a couple of times when I've forgotten to save the file in a format that other Microsoft Office users can open? which is a frustrating experience for everyone involved. It is possible to save files in the Microsoft format, so if you're planning on sharing a document with others, simply save the file in a Microsoft format right from the start.