

LibreOffice

Microsoft Office is the gold standard for productivity software. It's used by everyone from students to major corporations. That popularity is definitely reflected in the price tag.

What if you can't afford Microsoft Office? Perhaps you just need something for a short-term project and can't justify the investment right now. Good news: There are several free alternatives to Office. Depending on your needs, some work just as well as Microsoft's productivity suite.

LibreOffice is an excellent alternative. It offers six programs, and you'll find most of them instantly familiar. For example there's Writer, which is a Word clone. Then there's Calc, which is a spreadsheet like Excel. There's also Impress, a presentation program similar to PowerPoint.

Those are the options you're most likely to need. A drawing program, a database program and an equation program round out the offerings. All of these combined make for an excellent replacement to pricier suites.

LibreOffice is also compatible with the most popular document formats. It can read .DOC from Word and .XLS from Excel, for example. That only scrapes the surface of what it offers.

Web site: <http://www.libreoffice.org/download/>