

Self Publishing on a Shoestring

by
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THINGS cost money. In the corporate world that we live in today nothing happens without cash flow to grease the wheels of industry. This wouldn't be so bad, but the cost of goods and services keeps going up due to inflation and the mysteries of supply and demand. So what exactly is a budget minded person to do? Well, if that budget minded person is an artist of sorts they could do what I've done: Find the best free stuff out there. Time and time again I hear from one person or another the old tired cliché 'You get what you pay for' and for the most part those people would be correct, however, there are some freebies out there as good or better then the best you can buy. In this article I'm going to go over what I consider the best and most useful free programs available on the internet, and hopefully, make someone's life a little easier having been able to find this information in one compact place. Let me introduce you to my arsenal of free tools.

First and foremost, if you don't have good protection on your computer then you're not going to have a computer for long. Or at least not any money in your bank account or your identity, not to mention someone could find that picture of you cross dressing and put it up for the world to see. For this reason you must have protection. Good protection is imperative for you to be able to conduct your work. Without good protection, you'll spend all your time fixing the problems caused by not having protected your computer well, instead of working on whatever it is you like to work on. Enter: Zone Alarm and AVG Antivirus. Zone Alarm is a firewall available from www.zonelabs.com and the stripped down basic firewall is free to download, use, and update. You can't get better for free, and I don't think there's a better firewall for sale out there. But a firewall needs help, and teaming Zone Alarm up with the free version of AVG Antivirus available at www.free.grisoft.com makes one hell of a lineup. In four years of use only two viruses made it onto my computers and both of them were my own fault, during that same time period a friend had to reformat his computer three times because of viruses, as well as getting infected by many others, that made it past anti-virus software that he paid a fair amount of money for. The only way I'll pay for a firewall or antivirus software is if one or both of these programs are no longer available for free.

Now that your computer is protected against nasty viruses and nastier hackers it's time to move on to other things. One of the most basic things needed to self publish is a word processing program and the only one that I know of for free is Open Office, which can be obtained from www.openoffice.org. Open Office is an open source

program that survives off of donated time and money from users around the world, much like other programs such as Linux and the soon to be mentioned GIMP. Relatively simple to use, although not as simple as MS Works, it also has more features than either Works or Word Perfect. And if you use Open Office, the perfect match for it is the GIMP. But don't worry, this GIMP isn't going to bug you for new black leather. Instead, the GIMP, available at www.gimp.org, is possibly the best image manipulation program of all time and has so many features and plug-ins available that I couldn't possibly use them all. I actually have to keep from looking at them or risk sitting around all day playing with filters and scripts just to see what they do rather than working on something I need to spend time on.

The GIMP is great, but sometimes you need something faster and simpler such as Irfanview, which you can get at www.irfanview.com. This small, simple program is a very powerful tool that let's you resize, resample, rotate, flip, and add some effects to images with but a few clicks of the mouse and an almost nonexistent load time. Similar to Irfanview, but with a few features more akin to a photo editor, such as red eye removal and a better load format to edit large numbers of images, is Fast Stone Image Viewer. You can find this program at www.faststone.org along with the Fast Stone Screen Capture. Both of these Fast Stone products are powerful tools that will come to good use time after time.

For those who like to use Word Perfect and Open Office making a PDF is but a choice on the menu, but with Microsoft Works it's not so easy. You need help in the form of a PDF printer. This is nothing more than a program that prints to a PDF that you save as a file rather than send it to a physical printer for a hard copy. CutePDF's printer, that you can get at www.cutepdf.com, is what I normally use since it was the first one I got, although there are more. PrimoPDF from www.primopdf.com and PDF 995 at www.pdf995.com are two others. If you work with PDFs on a regular basis you need a good reader, and I'm not talking about Adobe. There is a simple little program called Foxit Reader that can be obtained from www.foxitsoftware.com which can do everything the free Adobe reader does but is faster and a far, far smaller download. Once I got this program, I totally took Adobe off my computer and haven't thought twice about it.

Another side of self publishing is putting together an audio book, if you are so inclined. The same programs can also be used to put together music or spoken word MP3's. Most useful, is a free program called Audacity that can be had at www.audacity.sourceforge.net. This program can be used to record, edit, create .wav or MP3 files, and much more, the only thing needed is a decent microphone. To play audio and video files I recommend WinAmp from www.winamp.com. Not only is WinAmp an excellent player, but numerous plug-ins can be downloaded to add additional features to the core program. One of the plug-ins is a must have for anyone creating audio files, as it allows you to resample MP3's with but a few clicks and alter or change

the bit rate and frequency. Both these programs compliment each other, but neither one will edit the file tags as much as some people may need to do. For this task ID3-TagIT is a fine choice. Not only does ID3-TagIT allow you to edit all parts of a MP3 tag, but it also lets you add a graphic to the file. Get this program from www.id3-tagit.de/english/index.htm and never worry about editing MP3 tags again.

These programs are but a few of the many free programs that can be found on the internet. But beware, many free programs are more trouble than they are worth because of adware, spy ware, viruses, computer crashes due to faulty programming, and other such problems. The software mentioned in this article is mentioned because not only are they free and extremely useful to the self publishing artist, but also because they don't have many of the problems that plague other such programs. So if you were looking for quality, free software to work with, look no farther than the links in this article. Happy creating!

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The whole SPANN archive can be found at
www.ephirell.com/My_Homepage_Files/Page3.html