



Goodbye Microsoft Office[®]

eBC Guide to Free Tools to Replace MS Office[®]

Microsoft Office[®] is \$499.99 (Microsoft Office 2003 Edition, \$499.99 Canadian from Best Buy August 23rd, 2006) and if you operate a small business chances are you will need the 4 most popular components of office: Outlook[®], Word[®], Excel[®] and PowerPoint[®].

It's impossible to operate in the age of computers without the ability to create documents, organize financials, demonstrate to clients and communicate by email. There are alternatives to purchasing expensive software.

Goodbye MS Excel[®], Hello Google Spreadsheets

Imagine a free spreadsheet tool that can do just about everything that MS Excel[®] can do. It's called Google Spreadsheets (<http://spreadsheets.google.com>) and is available as a beta from Google Labs. There is no software to download and install; Google Spreadsheets works within a web browser, like Firefox or Internet Explorer. The list of features is impressive and includes cell formatting, sorting and almost 100 functions. Unfortunately, Google Spreadsheets does not support charts.

Goodbye MS Word[®], Hello Google Writely

Google Writely (<http://www.writely.com/>) is an online word processor with features comparable to MS Word[®]. A key advantage of being online is portability; work from any web enabled computer using a web browser. Google Writely enables true permission based collaboration, sharing of information and syndication with RSS. Other great features are a revision system, the ability to save documents in popular formats such as MS Word[®], PDF, RTF and HTML and a handy folder based organizing system.

Goodbye MS Outlook[®] for Email, Hello Thunderbird

MS Outlook[®] is a powerful Contact Manager but is often used only to read email. To take full advantage of Outlook a business must first install a Microsoft Exchange server; a complex and expensive undertaking. If your only need is to read email then a great free alternative is Thunderbird by Mozilla (<http://www.mozilla.com/thunderbird/>). Thunderbird is safe, fast, and easy to use, with intelligent spam filters, quick message search, and customizable views. Powerful, and customizable, it is a full-featured email application. Thunderbird supports IMAP and POP mail protocols, as well as HTML mail formatting.

Goodbye MS Outlook® for Appointments, Hello Google Calendar

If you need to track your appointments then use Google Calendar (<http://www.google.com/calendar>). Access your appointments in this secure, flexible and free calendar from any web enabled computer using a browser. No software to download and install. Share your calendar with coworkers to coordinate events and set up automatic event reminders, including mobile phone notifications, and instantly bring up anything on your calendar with the built-in search tool.

Goodbye MS Office®, Hello OpenOffice.org

OpenOffice.org (<http://www.openoffice.org/>) is an entire office suite that is free to download, use and distribute. The suite is made up of 6 components: Writer, Impress, Math, Draw, Calc and Base. It is compatible with all major office suites and works on all major computing platforms (Microsoft Windows, Mac OS X X11, GNU/Linux, Solaris). Because it is open source there are no commercial licenses or software compliance issues to worry about and no language barriers - if it's not yet available in your language, the chances are it will be soon. OpenOffice.org looks and feels familiar and is instantly usable by anyone who has used a competitive product.