

Microsoft is not free...

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Microsoft seven times more expensive than other software



With over 90% of the world's computers running MS software, it would be easy to think alternative packages simply don't exist, they do. And, according to Computing Which? (published, 30 April), with savings of almost £300 a go consumers would be mad not to shop around.

There are good reasons why PC users continue to choose Microsoft. Most PC's come ready bundled with Microsoft software so there's little incentive to hunt out alternatives. But pre-installed software isn't free - it's factored into the end cost. Add this to the limited choice of 'unbundled' PC's on the market and the perceived notion that it's easier to buy a package that comes with everything you need and it's not hard to see why Microsoft has such a large market share.

But a Computing Which? software trial found that the savings to be made mean it's well worth the effort to hunt out alternatives. StarOffice 7, (£44.99) which claims to offer 90 per cent of the functionality, at a fraction of the cost of MS Office (the standard suite starts at £326), got a big thumbs up from testers. And, in general, trialists didn't find it difficult to make the switch.

The same applied to programs used for accessing the internet. Why stick to Internet Explorer when free browsers such as Opera, Mozilla and Netscape Navigator do exactly the same job, asked trialists? And, when it comes to email software the well-established Eudora (free download) also proved a viable alternative.

Jessica Ross, Editor of Computing Which? said:

"While computers are bundled with MS software alone, there are few incentives for consumers to seek alternatives out. But, by researching their options, consumers may find cheaper solutions that meet their needs and help to support the companies that keep Microsoft on its toes.

The decision by the European Commission to stop Microsoft using Windows as a tool against rival companies is good news for consumers. Before the Commission acted, Microsoft set itself up as the gatekeeper for consumer choice, limiting the sort of software consumers could access and stifling innovation. The Commission should be applauded for taking the side of software consumers."

Whatever happens, it's unlikely that Microsoft will cease being the UK's top selling software manufacturer anytime soon, which is bad news for competition and for the consumer.

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