

# 9 free software copycats that work better than the real expensive programs

Kim Komando, 9/23/21, Special to USA TODAY

There are more features and tricks hiding in your Mac or PC than most people will ever know. You can do even more if you know the right software to download.

If you're relying on your computer's built-in spell check to catch all your grammar mistakes, for example, it's time to upgrade. [Here are five stellar options to make you sound smarter.](#) I have used one for 223 weeks straight.

With everything else we shell out cash for online, you don't always want to pay for programs. If you need to save a little cash, I've got your back. [First, check this list of simple ways to save money on streaming, cable and internet bills each month.](#)

Round out the savings with this list of full-featured programs that work just like popular software everyone else uses:

## 1. Let's start with the basics: Office software

When it comes to productivity software, Microsoft Office is the gold standard. Unfortunately, it's also expensive. Yes, there are some ways to get a discount if you genuinely need the Microsoft version. [Tap or click here for tricks to get it free or cheap.](#)

A great no-cost alternative is LibreOffice. This open-source office suite is especially great because its creators continually update it. You'll get six programs, including Writer, Impress, and Calc, which work just like Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel, respectively.

LibreOffice allows you to edit documents created in the official MS Office and save new files in Office formats, too. Someone on the receiving end of your .docx file won't know you used a program other than Word to save it.

[Tap or click here for direct download links for Mac and PC.](#)

## 2. Or try TextMaker

FreeOffice TextMaker is another solid Microsoft Office alternative. It's handy when you need to open .doc and .docx files. Unlike other free word processing programs, it offers a spell check feature in 58 languages. Like Word, you can insert tables, pictures, and drawings.

You can even create EPUB e-books. That's convenient for aspiring authors who don't want to shell out cash for another program.

[Tap or click here to download FreeOffice TextMaker.](#)

## 3. Open and edit spreadsheets, too

Another great offering from FreeOffice is PlanMaker, a free Excel alternative. Open and edit XLS and XLSX files from Excel or export your worksheets as PDFs.

It can go beyond the basics, too, with more than 430 computing functions. It comes loaded with templates compatible with Microsoft Excel 2019, too.

[Tap or click here to download FreeOffice PlanMaker.](#)

You can edit documents, spreadsheets, and presentations for free with Google Drive, too. [Tap or click for 15 tips and tricks power users rely on.](#)

## 4. Can't afford Photoshop? You're not alone

Designed for advanced users, GIMP is a professional photo editor almost identical to Adobe Photoshop. The open-source software has been around, and loved, since the '90s. You'll get access to many Photoshop tools, including advanced filters, text settings and layers.

And hey, you won't have to shell out \$10 (or more) a month for Photoshop anymore.

GIMP is available for Windows, macOS and Linux. [Tap or click here for a direct download link and more info.](#)

## 5. Or try this photo editor that runs in your browser

Sometimes you want a solid program without downloading anything. That's where Pixlr comes in. This photo editing software runs in your browser; it's compatible with Chrome, Firefox, and Safari.

Pixlr includes advanced tools like drawing and photo filters, but it's handy for easy cropping and resizing features, too. Unlike some other browser-based options, it opens nearly image format. That includes PSD (Photoshop documents), PXD, JPEG, PNG, WebP, and SVG.

If you want to work on your smartphone, you can download a lightweight version of the program on iOS and Android. The mobile apps don't need much space or memory. Plus, you can instantly share your creations with your social media apps.

[Tap or click here to find out why it's such an excellent option for beginners.](#)

## 6. On the beginner end, try Canva

Canva is not your typical photo editor. Yes, you can crop photos, add text, or resize in a snap. What makes it shine are the countless templates you can use to create your own presentations, social media graphics, greeting cards, marketing materials, posters, and anything else you need.

Canva is super easy to use, too. It's a drag and drop, intuitive editor just about anyone will be able to navigate. You can sign up for a paid account to get access to premium images and templates. For basic use, though, a free account should give you everything you need.

[Tap or click for a direct download link and more reasons to love Canva.](#)

## 7. This video player can do it all

VLC is a free, open-source media player that plays almost every audio and video file format in existence. VLC even handles webcams and streaming content and can convert media from one format to another.

Not only is VLC powerful, but it's also lightweight. It runs fast, and there are no ads. Love that. It's also simple to use. To run a video or audio file, you can drag and drop a file into the open VLC program or open it under the Media tab. The player buttons are simple and are easily accessible at the bottom of the VLC window.

VLC runs on just about any platform, is open-source, and is frequently upgraded, unlike some free software. [Tap or click here to download VLC.](#)

## 8. Free audio editing software the pros use

Not only is audio track editing complex – especially for beginners – but the programs for this task can cost you an arm and a leg. Not so with Audacity, one of my favorite free programs.

It is easy to use once you get the hang of it. Even a beginner can pick up the process after a few minutes of watching tutorials on YouTube.

If you've never used Audacity and the name sounds familiar, there were news stories back in July claiming policy changes to the terms and conditions effectively made Audacity spyware. After reading the policy and the company's response, I am not concerned.

[Tap or click here to edit music, podcasts, or other audio like a pro.](#)

## 9. Edit video for free, too

Windows Movie Maker was one of the most popular platforms people used for editing videos for a long time. Sadly, the native PC app kicked the bucket in 2017.

Many people moved on to expensive alternatives, like Adobe Premiere Pro or Vegas Pro. If you need to edit video on the cheap, try out DaVinci Resolve 17. As with any powerful editing software, there is a learning curve. This goes beyond just simple cropping.

It's available for Mac, Windows and Linux operating systems and allows you to make quick edits to your video clips or packages. DaVinci 17 uses artificial intelligence and smart detection technology to identify faces in clips and organize them automatically into smart folders.

It's powerful enough to knock out basic editing, color correction, and audio post-production, along with visual effects and motion graphics.