

Alternatives to Microsoft Office

Office 2007 is the current version Microsoft's office suite, to be replaced later this year with Office 2010. The Standard Edition includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook; other editions have more programs, among them MS Access, Visio and Publisher.

Office 2007 is significantly different from its predecessor Office 2003 and earlier versions of MS Office. The screen layout and the way it is used have radically changed; Office 2007 uses different file formats from previous versions of Office. Office 2010 is expected to be similar in appearance to Office 2007.

Microsoft and other software companies offer discounts to "qualifying registered charities" These discounts are broadly in line with those for schools and colleges and are often a substantial saving on the list price. The qualifying conditions vary from one supplier to another; to check your eligibility for discounts visit the website of a specialist supplier like Pugh Computers (pugh.co.uk.) Most members of NCVO will qualify for these discounts. With the discount MS Office Standard Edition costs £21.06 for the installation disk plus £52 per user for the licence, hence £. 541.06 for 10 users.

By registering with Charity Technology Exchange at www.ctxchange.org Office 2007 Standard Edition can be had for about £280 for 10 users. At prices like this Charity Technology Exchange looks a good deal but the application process is complex, there's an administrative fee to pay, a delay before you get the software and a limit on the number of applications an organisation can make. Eligible organisations include registered charities, industrial provident societies, housing associations and some others but there appears to be no way for other third sector organisations to apply for a discount for Microsoft's Office products.

While Charity Technology Exchange and Microsoft's educational discounts look good it's worth shopping around because there are better deals out there. To start with there are well-known free open source products like Open Office and Thunderbird email. But there are also several commercial alternatives, including Corel's Word Perfect Office X4, which is functionally equivalent to Microsoft Office standard edition. It's available to schools and charities at a cost of £49 for up to 60 users. Any charitable organisation can apply for this discount by phone whatever its legal status.

SoftMaker 2010 office suite is offered to schools, colleges and non-profit organisations at £25 for a site licence for an unlimited number of users. It doesn't have all the functionality of Microsoft Office standard edition but has enough for everyday use. It uses less disk space than Microsoft Office and runs well on lower spec devices like the new lightweight netbooks.

There are plenty of alternatives to the standard Microsoft Office, all capable of opening and saving documents in MS Office formats. They vary in appearance and function with most looking more like Microsoft's Office 2003 than Office 2007. All the programs listed below have support for British English and can be downloaded free for evaluation. Prices are as quoted on the product websites in February 2010 and exclude VAT.

Alternatives to Microsoft Office - Office suites

Corel Word Perfect Office X4

<http://www.corel.com/UK>

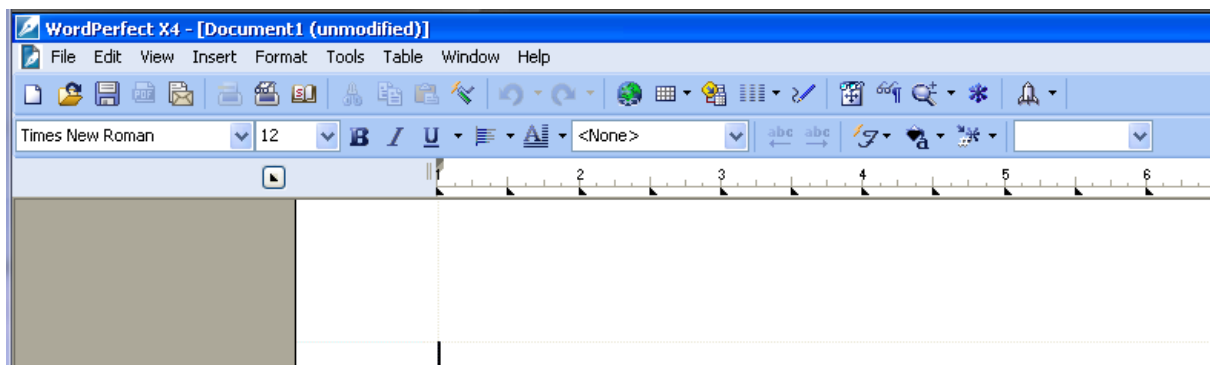
Corel Word Perfect, Corel Quatro Pro Spreadsheets, Corel Presentations.

Can read and save files in MS Office formats, both 2007 and earlier.

Similar functionality to MS Office.

Qualifying schools and registered charities can buy Corel Word Perfect Office at a discounted price of £49 for 1-60 licences. Other charitable organisations can apply for the same discount by phone – see <http://charities.pugh.co.uk/index.php?nID=99>.

Available for Windows PC only. Image below shows WordPerfect X4 running in Word mode



Open Office

<http://www.openoffice.org/>

Similar in appearance to MS Office 2003.

Open Source - free to use.

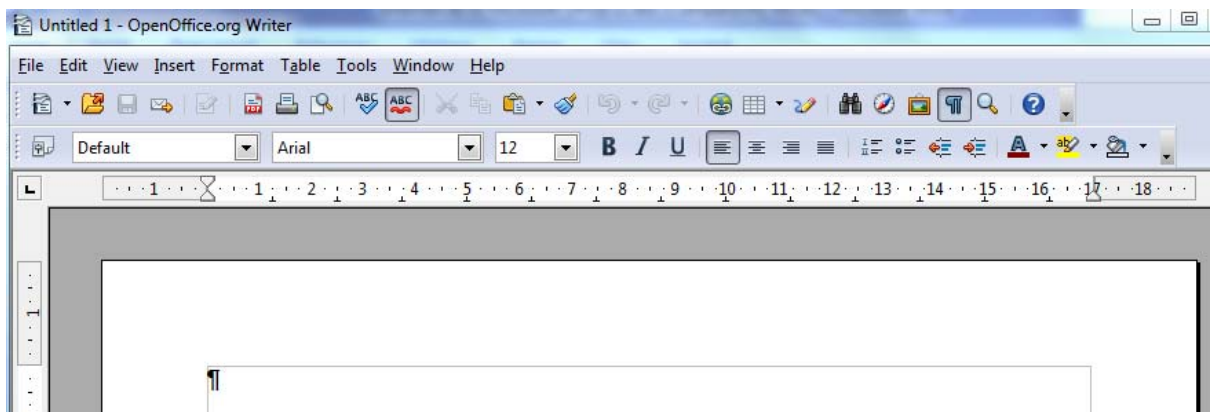
Available in versions for Windows PC, Linux PC and Apple Mac.

Estimated to have about 80% of the functionality of MS Office.

Can open files in MS Office 2007 formats and save in Office 2003 format.

The database program Base is a standard component of Open Office. It has similar functionality to MS Access but cannot open or save MS Access files.

Open Office 3.2 is noticeably faster than previous versions of Open Office.



Ability Office Business

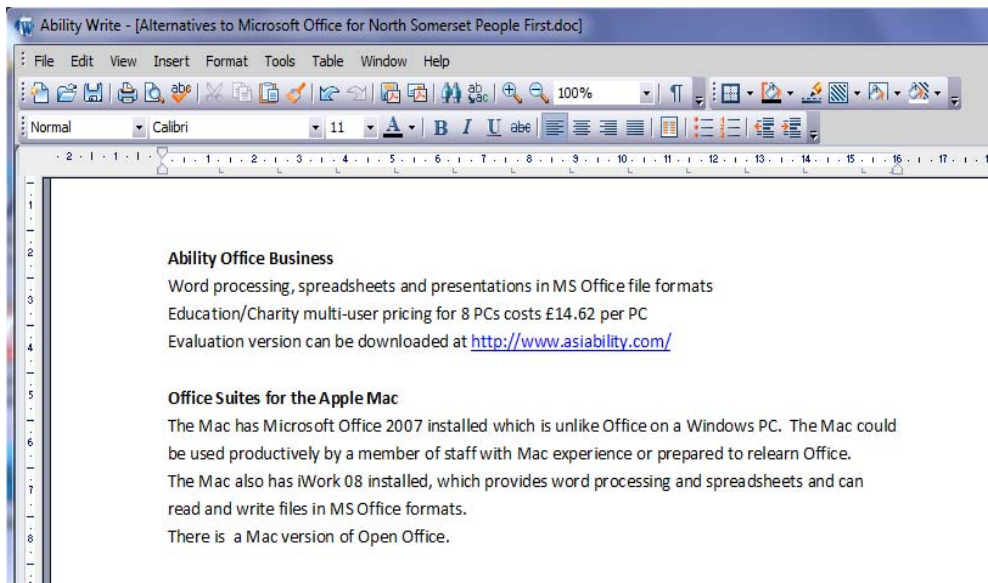
<http://www.asiability.com/>

Word processing, spreadsheets and presentations in MS Office file formats.

Includes other functionality for graphics.

Education/Charity multi-user pricing is available –example for 8 PCs costs £14.62 per PC.

Evaluation download available.



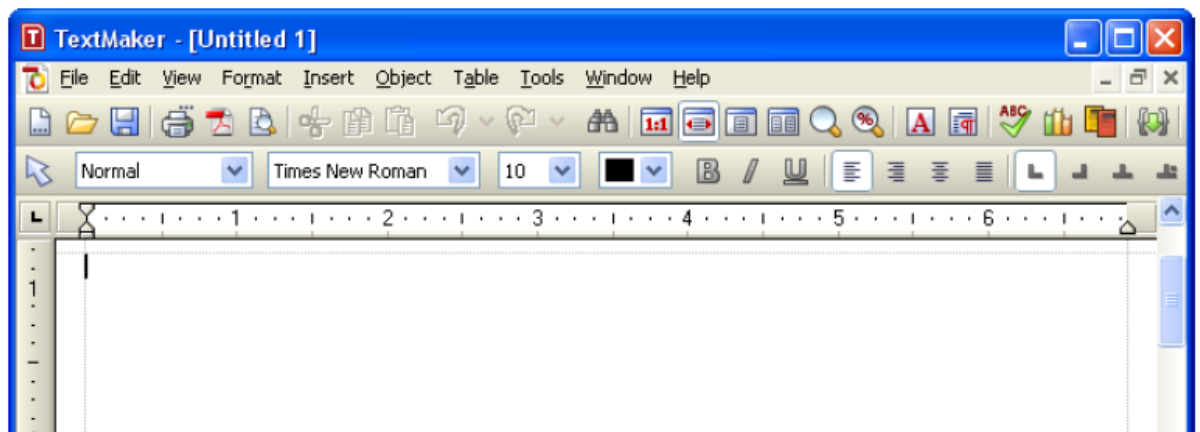
SoftMaker 2010

http://www.softmaker.com/english/ofw_en.htm

Word processing, spreadsheets and presentations.

Able to use Microsoft Office 2007 file formats

Cost about £20 per PC. Schools and colleges can get site licences for about £25. Charities and not for profit organisations can request site licences at the same price.



IBM Lotus Symphony

<http://symphony.lotus.com/software/lotus/symphony/home.nsf/home>

Based on Open Office with screens designs from Lotus Symphony.

Open Source - free to use.

Based on Open Office but designed to resemble Lotus Symphony which IBM no longer sells, so it may appeal to users familiar with Lotus Symphony rather than Microsoft Office.

Available for Windows PC, Linux PC and Mac. Has no equivalent to MS Publisher, Access or Outlook

Kingsoft Office 2009

<http://www.kingsoftresearch.com/>

Word processing, spreadsheets and presentations.

Compatible with Office 2007

Licence fee approx US\$ 70 for a single user, with discounts for multiple licences

Appears to be no discount for education or charity use

Evaluation download available

KOffice

<http://windows.kde.org/>

KOffice has been around for several years as an office suite for Linux PCs. A Windows version has been available since February which might be of interest where Linux is already in use.

Otherwise Open Office is a better product for Windows users and it's also available for Linux PCs and the Apple Mac.

SoftMaker 2006

<http://www.softmakeroffice.com/>

Available free, with word processing program Textmaker and spreadsheet software

PlanMaker, both compatible with MS Office 2003 file formats.

ThinkFree

<http://product.thinkfree.com/office>

Word processing, spreadsheets and presentations.

Compatible with Office 2007

Available in versions for Windows PC, Linux PC or Apple Mac

Evaluation download available

US\$ 49.95 per user. Appears to be no discount for education or charity use

Alternatives to parts of MS Office

These standalone programs are alternatives to parts of Microsoft Office .

Abiword

<http://www.abisource.com/>

Free open source word processing software able to use MS Office file formats but with less functionality than MS Word.

Serif PagePlus SE

<http://www.freenserifsoftware.com/software/pageplus/index.asp> -

Free desktop publishing software equivalent to MS Publisher. Does not use Publisher file formats. This is an older version of Serif Page Plus dating from about 2006.

Serif PagePlus X4

<http://www.serif.com/PagePlus/>

The current version of Serif PagePlus, available for charities and schools at about £25 per user. Serif PagePlus can produce documents in pdf format with the information that professional printers need. In this and other respects Serif Page Plus X4 is a more useful program than Publisher.

Thunderbird

<http://en-gb.www.mozillamessaging.com/en-GB/thunderbird/> -

A free open source Email client program with calendar and to-do lists available as add-ons, Thunderbird is equivalent to Outlook when Outlook is not linked to Microsoft Exchange.

Yahoo Zimbra Desktop –

<http://www.zimbra.com/products/desktop.html>

A free open source email program with built in calendar, to-do lists, synchronisation with Yahoo, Google and Hotmail accounts plus other features. Zimbra is equivalent to Outlook and can be used with other Zimbra products to replace Outlook and Exchange.

Internet services

These are an alternative to running office software on a PC and have other advantages including facilities for collaborative work, sharing documents, contacts, email and to-do lists.

Google Docs - A free internet-based service allowing subscribers to create documents spreadsheets and presentations in MS Office formats. Documents can be copied between Google Apps and the local PC or shared with other Google docs account holders.

Zoho Office An on-line office suite, free at entry level, fees charged for higher levels of functionality. Users can create documents, spreadsheets, presentations, notes, projects and more.

Editgrid - Free service for creating and using spreadsheets online. Compatible with MS Excel.

Feng Office – hosted office and collaboration suite – charges per user per month

Comparison of Office Suites

Wikipedia is a good resource for information about software. This links to a section comparing office suites:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_office_suites#Comparison_of_general_and_technical_information

This is a summary of some alternatives to MS Office 2007 on the C-Net website:

http://reviews.cnet.com/1990-3524_7-5140428-1.html

Microsoft Office – compatibility and support for earlier versions

Microsoft is still supporting older versions of Microsoft Office. Extended support for Office XP (released 2002) ends July 2011. Office 2003 is supported to April 2014 and Office 2007 till April 2017.

Office XP and more recent versions will run on a Windows 7 PC. Older versions such as Office 2000 or Office 97 won't run on Windows 7.