



PC Updater News

Find Software as an Informed Consumer



Downloading apps and software is the best way to try out a product before buying it. Free trial versions and free light versions of software let you know, for sure, that a program will work on your computer or device before you buy it.

But how do you do that safely? The Internet has no limits. There are companies trying to make money from your devices by adding cryptominers, ransomware, and browser add-ons as bundled attachments to programs you download, updates that you install, and even on brand-new computers. That's a big industry now; there are companies that specialize in delivering extra content during every download and on every new device, who will 'monetize' downloads, either for individual software publishers, or for entire download sites.

So to search for software safely, here are a few guidelines:

Download directly from the publishers' site.

There are hundreds of download search sites. They provide a valuable service, by helping you find products and read reviews. But use them for searching, and reading descriptions and reviews, and then take the time to identify and go to the publishers' site and read about the product there. That will show you what help is available for setting up the program. It will show screenshots. The help file or getting-started information will be there. And you can get an idea of whether or not the scale of the product matches what you need. For any given type of program there are small programs and large ones, or both shovels and bulldozers. There are special-purpose single-feature programs that are supremely easy to use but only do one thing. And there are programs that will do absolutely everything but may require weeks of studying to learn; that's great if you need raw power, but it's not a good choice if you need a quick technology solution. And there are people who need each of these programs. Looking at the publishers' websites will help you find a match to your own needs.

Look for the contact information.

Most of this information should be on every publisher's website:

- A complete mailing address.
- A phone number.
- An e-mail address or a web contact form.
- The name of the publisher.

Not every site will include all of these. Some small software companies are either part-time operations, or in a time zone that does not match their customer base, and in either case, telephone support is impractical. And publishing an e-mail address on a website is more useful to spammers than it is to either you or to a software publisher, so a web contact form is usually both appropriate and more useful than an actual e-mail address.

However, there should always be a physical mailing address. If there is a web contact form and nothing else, don't buy the product. Don't even bother to download the free trial version. There's no point spending time evaluating a free trial from a company who will not be there for support later.

Look for the price of the product. Usually, it's on the front page. You might have to click a 'buy' button to see it, or to see a local currency option. If there's no price, but only a 'contact sales' link instead, that's typical of large corporate or enterprise products, not generally affordable for a single user.

Next, it's time to try-before-you-buy. There will generally be a free trial edition of the product.

Why is it Free?

When software is free, there is a reason. It could be any of these—find out which of these applies to any program before you download it:

- Free Trial: These are usually program versions that are free to try, with a limitation such as limited-time functionality, or a reduced feature set.
- Free Lite Edition: The lite editions generally are not time-limited, but will have fewer features than a full, paid version of the product. It's free because the publisher wants to sell you the 'Pro' or 'full' version.
- Free to Use, or 'Freemium': Many publishers give away programs that are useful to the potential customers for their main product. These are generally small single-purpose

programs that will help gather attention for the main product sold by the company. Or they are free products with some paid features. Again, it's free because it brings attention to another, paid, product or add-on service from the same publisher.

- Open Source: There are many versions of Open Source; some include rights to re-use the program code in other projects, and some don't. Large open-source projects are frequently the works of hundreds of contributors working towards creation of a larger project. Open Source programs are frequently excellent, or they could be abandoned projects from many years ago.
- Sponsored Product: These products include either advertising within the product, or other product installations from third-party aggregators or monetizers in the setup program. These products will show offers to install other products during the download or installation, and each option will have an on-screen option to include the additional offer. Caution— usually, these 'offers' are already set to install, and you uncheck the option to skip each offer—there may be several. Avoid the 'sponsored' category; these are products not worth buying, by their own admission.

In general, programs require payment to programmers if they took a lot of work to create. If a program is free, there's a reason, whether it's shared labor (open source), or promotional (free trials and some 'free to use' giveaways), or sponsored by either advertising or install offers.

If you look at what you're downloading, and where you're downloading from, and know whether it's a free trial or a sponsored product, you already have a pretty good idea of whether a program is coming from a professional developer. It's like any other business decision: know who you're dealing with, always.

Reminder: Windows End of Support

The March 2018 version of Windows 10 will reach end of support this month, on November 12th. Windows 7 reaches end of support on January 14th, 2020. After the end of support date, there will be no more patches for product flaws or security issues, and these versions of Windows will not meet compliance for regulated fields, including financial, government, and medical offices.

There's more on the end of Windows, and how to identify which version of Windows 10 is running, in the [PC Updater News](#) from July, available on the back issues list, here:

<https://www.pc410.com/subscribe>

Windows upgrades are available, and do not require replacing computers, and for computers with solid-state drives, usually don't require any hardware changes.



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