

COMPUTER SHAREWARE FOR \$5 OR LESS.

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The IBM PC and IBM-compatible machines are the ultimate tool for the small business. With a PC, you can instantly access individual records for your customers, write letters and marketing materials, keep track of your books, and more.

You can't do it without software, though. Software are the computer programs you need in order to do anything with your computer.

Unfortunately, most business software is quite expensive, into the hundreds of dollars. There is a way, though, to get professional quality IBM computer software for \$5 and less. The software is a special type called SHAREWARE.

Shareware programs, in most cases, are distributed directly by the author of the program.

Why would they want to do this?

It is much easier for their program to get wide distribution if they do it themselves, rather than if they try to get a major company to produce and distribute it. Many shareware programs are as good, if not better, than commercial programs (the ones you buy at a computer store).

What's better, the pretty much unwritten rule in the shareware industry is that you shouldn't charge more than \$5 for a shareware disk. If you know where to look, though, you can get the programs for FREE!

Shareware is meant to be shared, hence the name. It's OK for you to copy a shareware disk and give it to a friend, unlike commercially released programs, which are protected by copyright.

What this means, is that you can get PC-WRITE, a word processor that rivals WordPerfect, the industry leader, for free. WordPerfect, on the other hand, costs over \$400.

Other great shareware programs include FILE EXPRESS (a database, great for customer mailing lists, and inventory records) and AS-EASY-AS (a spreadsheet, for accounting and bookkeeping). All these have the features of a professional program.

So, where can you get these programs? There are dozens of shareware dealers like Software Labs (800-569-7900), which sell programs by the disk, usually for \$5 per disk. Some programs, like the ones mentioned above, are so big they come on more than one disk, and may be priced differently than single-disk programs.

There's also a way you can get these programs for free. How? Through bulletin board services that offer free sharewares.

First you'll need a modem, which lets you connect your computer to the phone line. Then, you'll need a "terminal program," which turns your computer into a terminal which can communicate over the phone. The best terminal program to use would be QMODEM.

Call computer bulletin board services, which have programs you can "download" (transfer) through the phone line into your computer. The best sources for these programs would be America On-Line.

A shareware program is meant to be a trial program. If you like the program, and use it a lot, you should REGISTER it with the author. Registration is outlined in the program itself, or the documentation that comes on the disk.

You will have to send the author a payment, varying from as low as \$5 to a high of \$100 (very few are more than that). For registering, you will usually get a package of items from the author that can only be gotten by registering.

This usually includes a copy of the latest version of the program, sometimes with extra features, and a printed instruction manual. Items might include free or low cost updates to the program when available, phone support from the author, or other programs the author has written.

It really is worth it to register the program. After all, you've gotten the opportunity to inexpensively try the program to make sure it will fill your needs. You will get a full-fledged software package at a much lower price than the commercial equivalent. Also, you will be supporting the author, so he or she will be able to continue upgrading the program and/or writing new programs.

Registration fees are how the shareware author makes a living, and it's unethical to use shareware permanently without registering.

With shareware, you get the best of both worlds. You get to "try the software on for size," without getting stuck with a \$300 program you won't use. Once you find the program for you, you can register it and have a professional quality program that still costs a fraction of the competition's programs. Any way you look at it, shareware makes sense!