



Nothing Says Holiday Cheer Like Free Software

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To save money this holiday season, you could break out the construction paper and rubber cement and make something really, um, nice; or you could take a quick cruise on the Web, download a few free applications, put them on a thumb drive and really make someone's holiday. It's your choice. No pressure. Put down the safety scissors, please.


So you want to give the best this holiday season? How about a nice bundle of free software 📦? Hold on, this isn't a lesson in Scrooge 101 but a way to give some really good software on a shoestring budget, or to lend a hand to charities, struggling college students, underprivileged kids, even help out the un-geeks who want to do more on their computer but haven't a clue about software.

There are tons of folks out there who could really benefit from a bundle of free software. Here are a few ideas to leave a free, but meaningful, package under the tree!

With or Without the Wrapping



First, pick up some [USB](#) 🔍 drives or CDs so you'll have something to put the software on. Add brightly colored paper, some ribbon and a bow, and voila! You have a proper present or stocking stuffer! OK, so those cost a little dough, but not that much really, a [1 GB USB thumb drive](#) costs about US\$10; a 2 GB costs \$20. A stack of CDs runs about \$20 at [Office Depot](#) (NYSE: ODP) 🔍 -- so really just mere pennies per disk.

If you don't even want to spend a single shiny penny, include URL links on an e-mail 📧 holiday or greeting card. Just be sure and tell the recipient to look for the card in their e-mail -- otherwise they might delete it unopened because of the recent rash of e-greeting card virus 📧 attacks.

You can also play Santa yourself and show up with your list in hand. Many people would appreciate a little help with the installation process, so you can just load the software for them -- or even install a Linux  distro like [Ubuntu](#) or [Fedora](#) that comes bundled with lots of basic applications most people will find helpful. Installing Linux is so easy these days, almost anyone can do it -- but you can keep that piece of news totally secret!

Where to Shop

Your shopping opportunities for free software are almost limitless, here's a quick guide:

Start with [PortableApps](#) or [Puppy Linux](#). PortableApps lets people take their applications and data with them. That's handy for business  people who travel often, or for people who use public computers at libraries or at school. Almost everyone will appreciate Portable Apps and the long list of on-the-go open source  applications available for download on its site.

Puppy Linux is additive, pure and simple. It is a very tiny, fully featured Linux distribution that works extremely well on anything from older systems to the latest ThinPCs. If booting from CD, it keeps working even after the CD is removed. But you can also boot from a flash card, hard disk, USB key drive, or a recordable CD/DVD. Puppy fits on a 64 MB ramdisk! It runs from RAM memory with the Seamonkey Web browser, AbiWord word processor, gFTP client, Gnumeric spreadsheet and any number of applications available in simple free downloads. Puppy Linux is also friendly and fun - - even to people unfamiliar with Linux!

Adding to the smorgasbord of freebie applications are [Sourceforge](#), [Filehippo](#) and [OnlyTheBestFreeware](#). These sites are filled to the brim with both fun and useful open source applications. Just try not to get caught up playing with it all while you're supposed to be shopping for someone else!

If you are looking for even more open source freebies, you can always browse the embarrassingly long list on [Wikipedia](#).

Bundle Bonus

If you're really looking to deliver a holiday hit, bundle free software so that the recipient has a complete computing package. A good basic bundle would include:

1. Firewall: [Zonealarm](#) from zonelab
2. Anti-spyware: [Avast](#) or [AVG Anti-Spyware 7.5.1.43](#)
3. Browser: [Mozilla Firefox](#)
4. E-mail: [Thunderbird](#)
5. Office Applications: [OpenOffice](#)
6. Creation Suite: [Blender 3D](#)

7. Games: Choose one or several from [Wikipedia's list](#) or [this list](#), according to the interests and skill level of the recipient.

To add a little more zing, try gifting bleeding-edge bonuses with your bundle. One example: [Audacity](#), a free, cross-platform sound editor, is relatively new on the scene so it's best for advanced users, at least for now. You can download it free from [PortableApps](#).

[Songbird](#) is another cool pick, although it is not quite fully developed or bug-free, it packs a wallop of promise, touted by many as the "Firefox of media players." You can sign up to be notified by e-mail the minute Songbird is fully ready. With a little luck, it'll be in time for Christmas!

The beauty of bundling is that you can customize your gift or make it one size fits all. Either way, open source stuffs more than stockings -- it fills the heart to give a gift that keeps on giving to so many people. Your gift may be free -- but it's definitely not a Scrooge move! Happy holidays! **EGT**