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**Pros and Cons of Using FREE Software in Your Business**

**By Cavyl Stewart**

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It's easy to understand why you might be drawn to the allure of free software. After all, it is free and free is always a good price to pay. But before you plunk down your hard-earned no money and possibly put your business at risk, consider the following.

Most of the free software that you will find is not supported. There will be no one at the other end of the software. What does this mean to you and your business? It means that if you have a technical support issue and you need help fast, that help will be hard to find, if you are able to find help at all.

Some of the more popular free software does have available user supported help groups. These are groups of users who congregate out there in Cyberspace and are sporadically available to provide assistance to others. You can always try to send an email message to the developer if you can find the developer. But because of its very nature as a FREE item, no one is under any obligation to help you with your issue, quickly or otherwise.

It's also important that you understand the motivation behind developing free software. First, there are some programmers who just have too much time on their hands. These individuals will just create free software to give them something to do. Programmers are notorious problem-solvers, and creating software is a great way to accomplish this.

Some developers create software and offer it for free out of the goodness of their heart. Hard to believe in this day and age, but it happens. And there are other programmers who get a feeling of

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altruism when they create software. They offer it for free with the hopes that the masses will marvel at their creation.

Other software developers, notably in the Linux world, write and distribute free software under GNU or Open Source licenses. And some of these packages are popular, mainstream and 100% free. The workhorse, Apache Server software program, is a good example of this.

However in the case of most windows-based free software, (except for the good-hearted programmers mentioned above), there most often is an ulterior motive for giving software away for free.

Some free software packages have advertising engines which rotate banner or text ads while you are using the program and, while some of them are quite forthright and honest about this, others deliver their advertising bomb through Trojan horse back doors which sneak onto your computer without your knowledge. In most cases, this simply results in unwanted advertising that you have no idea where it came from, but in other cases you could very well end up with software that's designed to steal your passwords, financial info or worse.

Some of the more popular free software for your business, including Open Office which, unbelievable as it may seem, is an almost complete free replacement for the MS-Office package, including a spread sheet and a word processor, has no strings attached. It's just free.

FreeCRM.com, a web-based customer relationship management program, offers absolutely free fully-enabled accounts for small businesses. Larger businesses, with multiple employees requiring access to the system, pay just a nominal fee.

So to sum this up --- here's some free advice. If you are thinking about using a free software program for your small business, fire up your Internet, go to Google and look up the name of the free software. You will find everything you need to know, both the good points as well as the bad points, about that particular package. Then decide whether it's right for your needs.

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## Should Outside Cats Use A Collar

By John Marcus

Most cat owners find themselves in a quandary over whether or not to use a cat collar on their outdoor cats. The debate still reigns over the pros and cons of outfitting an outside cat with a collar, but many veterinarians and cat experts agree that collars are the best way to go. However, before you decide, take a look at these pros and cons:

Pros:

- Cat collars can hold identification and registration tags. This is critical in case your outdoor cat becomes lost or is picked up by a concerned individual. Also, collars can hold bells or other noise generating items to scare away potential prey.
- Many cat collars are equipped with reflective material. Whether the collar is made completely out of reflective material or only contains a small strip, this will help your cat to become more visible in the dark. Cats, especially those of dark color, can become invisible at night, which is a potentially dangerous situation.

Cons:

- Cat collars can easily snag and cause your cat to become hung or stuck on branches, fences, or anything else in the great outdoors. Some cats have actually been strangled when their collar has gotten caught and cut off the animal's air supply.
- Your cat may not be comfortable wearing a collar or the collar may be too heavy for the animal.

Given these pros and cons, consider choosing a collar that will maximize the positives and minimize the negatives. For example, there are many collars on the market that are specially designed to break away or unclasp when the cat is hung. These collars are considered strangle-proof and release when approximately seven pounds of pressure is applied. This way, the cat can break him—or her—self free from any snare.

Furthermore, there are many different types of collars on the market. Bring your feline friend with you to the local pet-friendly pet store and try on several different types of collars until you find one that best fits. Avoid choosing a harness for outdoor cats unless you plan on walking the cat on a leash. If this is the case, only allow your cat to wear a harness while supervised, as most are not snare-proof.

On a whole, collars are encouraged on cats that spend their time outside and inside. In addition to providing visibility to your animal, the collar will hold valuable identification information that will protect your cat and assist you in finding your pet.

John Marcus Specializes in Cat Collars

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