

Free stuff

A selection of resources available completely free of charge.

If you know where to look, there are a great many things you can get for free for your organisation especially if it is a registered charity. Below I have listed some of the things I've come across, but do [contact me](#) if you know of any others.

Click on the links below for information on...

[Free software](#)

[Free phone calls](#)

[Free professional services](#)

[Free help from students](#)

[Free stuff from businesses](#)

[Money saving tips.](#)

[Working from home](#)

[When I survey....](#)

[Software](#)

An excellent site for getting free software is [ask the e-consultant](#). Over 450 different programmes are listed and sorted into categories. Just click on the category you want and take your pick!

If you can't afford Microsoft Office, try using the MS-compatible OpenOffice. It is number 40 in the [ask the e-consultant](#) list of open source business software, or just type 'Open Office' into Google to find its link. This free software includes its own version of Word, Excel, and Powerpoint. Documents created by the programme can be read by the equivalent MS Office programmes without any apparent problems.

If you need to create some pdf's but Adobe's costs are putting you off there is a free alternative! Try [pdf995](#). I have used it to create pdf's from all MS Office products, Internet Explorer, our database, and our finance package with absolutely no problem. It does keep displaying adverts whilst processing unless you pay for a licence, but that's only a minor niggle.

If you are more interested in turning pdf's or other documents into different formats, then give [CometDocs](#) a whirl. Simply upload your document into the web-based converter, tell it which format you want to convert to and wait for the document to pop back into your email's inbox duly converted.

For nearly free software including Microsoft products, take a look at Charity Technology Trust's CTXchange programme which distributes donated software to charities via an on-line portal. All you pay is a small administrative charge. Click [here](#) for more details.

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[Telephone calls](#)

Download the relevant free software from [Skype](#) and you can talk to other skype users free of charge using your computer's Broadband connection. You will need to buy a suitable headset if you wish to speak to somebody else, but skype also has a 'chat' facility which allows you to type free messages for immediate reply. Skype also allows you to call landlines and mobiles in the UK and abroad more cheaply than most other telephone providers.

Our staff are now dedicated skypers and find the service very reliable. However, the sound quality is sometimes less than perfect.

If you have no sound card or headset, but want to make free or cheap calls try [jajah](#) instead. The technology is the same as Skype but you don't need to download any software as it all works via your telephone's own landline or mobile network. Just register on their website to start phoning. When you want to make a call, type in the telephone number you wish to contact. Your own phone will then ring. When you pick it up you will hear a ringing tone and your contact should answer (if they're at home). Calls from your landline or mobile to fellow jajah users are free in the UK and Europe, otherwise calls from landlines to landlines in the UK are charged at 2p per minute and to Europe at 11p per minute at any time of the day or night. As with Skype, payment is made by buying credits with your debit or credit card.

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[Professional services](#)

ProHelp is national network of over 1,000 professional firms who give their time and expertise for free to local community groups and voluntary organisations. They include accountants, IT consultants and solicitors(!). Click [here](#) for more details.

Outside IT support can sometimes be very expensive or difficult to find. But the TechSoup Internet community has developed a way of having hundreds, if not thousands of IT experts at your beck and call FREE OF CHARGE. Click [this link](#) to find out how.

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[Colleges](#)

Many colleges are looking for organisations who will take on students for short-term work experience. Specialist students are also keen to try out their new skills - for instance, why not let a photography student take pictures for your next newsletter or annual report?

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[Businesses](#)

Businesses often want to raise their profile by looking for a local charity to support by donating goods, services or even money. Networking within your local Chamber of Commerce could help here. In addition try talking to companies with whom you already have a relationship.

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[E-newsletters](#)

An excellent e-newsletter to subscribe to if you're serious about saving money is [Money Saving Expert](#). Run by journalist and broadcaster Martin Lewis it contains an amazing amount of money saving ideas.

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[Working from home](#)

Don't have a laptop but want to work from home occasionally? There is free software available which will link you from your home computer to your work computer via your Broadband connection. I use the free version of [logmein](#), but there are others available. From the logmein homepage click on 'create an account' and follow the instructions. It only takes a few minutes to set up. When you connect up from home, your PC at work must be switched on. Once you have logged in you will see on your home computer's screen a replica of your work computer's screen and you will be able to do from your home computer anything which you would normally do on your work computer except printing hard copies. There is an upgrade available for a small fee which will allow you to print out on your home printer, however, I have found the free copy adequate for my needs. If I need to print something out I simply email the file from my work email address to my home email address. The connection response time is sometimes a bit slow, but it depends upon the speed of your Broadband connection. For computer network users - please check with your system administrator before installing this type of software as it may interfere with other software on the network.

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[Survey Monkey](#)

If you want to find out the views of your members, donors, employees, or anybody else on your database without the hard graft of sending out survey forms and spending hours wading through the results, try [Survey Monkey](#). This web-based tool is all you need to design, conduct and process surveys. And the best bit is it does all the boring bits for you. There is a free version which is all you should need for most surveys, or for \$19.95 a month you can upgrade to the super-duper version. Having used it myself I can say it is one of the most user-friendly sites I have ever come across.

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For more information, please contact [David Wright](#).