

A DEFINITION OF SHAREWARE

Shareware is a distribution method, not a type of software. Distribution channels include commercial shareware/freeware disk distribution companies, computer bulletin boards, on-line services and networks, user group libraries, and sharing of programs between friends (hence the name). Shareware distribution makes fitting your needs easier and helps you avoid costly mistakes because you have a chance to try software before buying it. Because the marketing expenses are low, prices are low.

Shareware authors are accomplished programmers, just like commercial authors, and the programs are of comparable quality. In fact, many successful shareware programs are now available through regular retail stores and catalogs. In both cases, there are programs that meet your needs, and those that don't. Since sales depend on your satisfaction with the program *before* you buy, Shareware authors can't depend on advertising hype or impulse buying.

Shareware authors usually provide technical support. As with large software companies, the quality of support varies. Unlike large software companies, it is not unusual to be able to talk directly with the Shareware author for technical support, problem reports, and new feature requests. Because shareware companies are usually smaller, they can often be more responsive to requests for special features.

Federal and international copyright laws apply to Shareware just as they do to commercial software. The copyright holder extends specific rights to users and distributors as stated in a license agreement. The author grants specific rights to individuals and corporations to copy, distribute, and evaluate the software so that Shareware distribution can happen. License agreements vary, so be sure to read the license agreement that accompanies your program.

If you try a Shareware program and continue using it, you are expected to "register". Not all registrations involve paying a fee, but most do. With registration, you can get anything from the simple right to continue using the software you already have to a "registered" version of the program with a printed manual and additional incentives. Some programs offer several alternatives for varying fees. The license agreement for the registered version of a program usually restricts copying and distribution, but you can continue passing along the Shareware version.

Note that the fee paid to a disk distributor is for copying the disk, shipping, handling, and other expenses. You have paid for the disk, but not the software on it. Similarly, if you download a program, paying for connect time fees and phone bills does not constitute payment for the software. The registration fee is a separate payment, usually paid directly to the author, that is made once you have decided that the software meets your needs. Shareware has the ultimate money-back guarantee -- if you don't use the product, you don't pay for it.