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Windows Start Menu
Microsoft

[15 Must Have Free Microsoft Downloads](#)

For testing but not only

Microsoft offers a plethora of software that users can download and install without paying a single cent to the company. However, the software giant hasn't centralized all its free offerings into a single location, a move which would streamline access to the resources it is delivering. That's why I included below a list with a consistent collection of free software products which can be grabbed free of charge, with the vast majority available through the Microsoft Download Center.

As far as I'm concerned the list needed to start with Windows client and server operating systems. In one way or another, packaged as ISO or VHD images, Microsoft is offering customers the chance to test drive, and even use, feature-complete versions of its platforms, again, completely free. In some cases, Microsoft is making it easier for customers to test drive a Windows release before buying, while in others it is actually offering the OS on top of an existing license.

However, the list doesn't stop with Microsoft's operating systems. The Redmond company is also providing free downloads of its "other" cash cow, the Office productivity suite, along with its development platform and tools, security solutions and additional offerings. Users will be able to find on the list both finalized products, as well as software that is still in development. As far as pre-release products are concerned, while the overall quality of the products is extremely high, customers should keep in mind that they might still run into issues.

1. Windows 7 Enterprise 90-day Trial - "It is designed specifically for IT Professionals, so that you can test your software and hardware on a final version of the product. In addition, it provides the opportunity for you to become more familiar with the key improvements over previous versions of the Windows operating system, and experience firsthand how Windows 7 can make your PC environment more productive, secure, and manageable," Microsoft notes.

Available in English, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish, Windows 7 Enterprise 90-day Trial is good for a 90-day testing period, after which it will expire. Microsoft plans to discontinue downloads of free Windows 7 Enterprise on March 31st, 2010, but only if supplies don't run out first.

Windows 7 Enterprise 90-day Trial can be downloaded from [here](#).

2. Microsoft Windows 7 90-Day Eval VHD - "This is a preconfigured virtual machine set contained within the Virtual Hard Disk (VHD) format. Windows Server 2008 Hyper-V, Microsoft Hyper-V Server 2008, or the R2 versions of these products is required to use this virtual machine," the company said.

Microsoft Windows 7 90-Day Eval VHD is available for download [here](#).

3. Windows Server 2008 R2 - The Standard, Enterprise, Datacenter, and Web flavors are available in Chinese (Simplified), English, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish, while the version for Itanium-based systems is only delivered in English, German, French, and

Japanese. Windows Server 2008 R2 was released to manufacturing concomitantly with Windows 7 in mid-2009, and the best course of action for customers is to test drive the server and client platforms together in order to truly benefit from their evolution.

"Windows Server 2008 R2 builds on the award-winning foundation of Windows Server 2008, expanding existing technology and adding new features to enable organizations to increase the reliability and flexibility of their server infrastructures. New virtualization tools, Web resources, management enhancements, and exciting Windows 7 integration help save time, reduce costs, and provide a platform for a dynamic and efficiently managed datacenter. Powerful tools such as Internet Information Services (IIS) version 7.5, updated Server Manager and Hyper-V platforms and Windows PowerShell version 2.0 combine to give customers greater control, increased efficiency and the ability to react to front-line business needs faster than ever before," the software giant states.

Windows Server 2008 R2 is available for download [here](#).

4. Windows XP Service Pack 3 (SP3) - Through the Internet Explorer Application Compatibility VPC Image downloads, Microsoft is offering three copies of XP SP3 for download. Users need to know that the three releases are actually VPC Hard Disk Images for XP: IE6-XPSP3.exe (Windows XP SP3 with IE6 VHD file. Expires April 1, 2010); IE7-XPSP3.exe (Windows XP SP3 with IE7 VHD file. Expires April 1, 2010); IE8-XPSP3.exe (Windows XP SP3 with IE8 VHD file. Expires April 1, 2010). Downloads are available [here](#).

5. Windows XP Mode and Windows Virtual PC - are two extra features that Microsoft delivered for Windows 7 with the Release Candidate Build of the operating system. The downloads are free for users running Windows 7 Professional and Ultimate SKUs, and provide a virtualization solution and a free virtualized copy of Windows XP SP3. Combined, Windows XP Mode and Windows Virtual PC are designed to make it easier for customers to adopt Windows 7 even though they might still need to be running XP legacy applications incompatible with the latest version of Windows.

Windows XP Mode RTM and Windows Virtual PC RTM are available for download [here](#).

6. Windows Vista - Microsoft was, at one point, offering free downloads of Windows Vista Enterprise Evaluation Edition, just as it is doing with Windows 7 today, but the offerings have been discontinued. Still, two free copies of Vista continue to be up for grabs via the Internet Explorer Application Compatibility VPC Image: IE7-VIS1.exe+IE7-VIS2.rar+IE7-VIS3.rar (a Vista Image with IE7 VHD file. Expires 120 days after first run) and IE8-VIS1.exe+IE8-VIS2.rar+IE8-VIS3.rar+IE8-VIS4.rar (a Vista Image with IE8 VHD file. Expires 120 days after first run). Downloads are available [here](#).

7. Windows HPC Server 2008 - in order to get their hands on the next iteration of Windows for supercomputers users will have to join the Windows HPC Server 2008 R2 Beta program on [Microsoft Connect](#). But for those that want to test Microsoft's platform for the high performance market, the plain vanilla Windows HPC Server 2008 is also available as a free download.

Windows HPC Server 2008 is available for download [here](#).

8. Windows Home Server - Users might have already come across reports of the next generation of Windows Home Server, codename Vail, which has been leaked in the wild. But Windows Home Server 'Vail' is a very early development build of the next gen WHS,

and so the best thing to do for customers is to grab the Windows Home Server Power Pack 3 (PP3) ISO from the software giant and test it.

Windows Home Server Power Pack 3 Evaluation is available for download [here](#).

9. Office 2010 - Microsoft will release Office 2010 for purchase in June 2010, the company confirmed to Softpedia, but until the productivity suite hits the shelves, customers can download and test Office 2010 Beta Build 14.0.4536.1000 released in November 2009. Over two million people have already grabbed Office 2010 Beta since its introduction in late 2009.

Office 2010 Beta 14.0.4536.1000 is available for download [here](#).

10. Office 2010 "the Rest" - There is more to Office 2010 Beta Build 14.0.4536.1000 than just the Word, PowerPoint, Excel and Outlook components. In fact, the product is accompanied by a comprehensive collection of software, all available in either Beta or trial releases, including [Visio Premium 2010 Beta](#), [Exchange Server 2010](#), [SharePoint Server 2010 Beta](#), and [Project Professional 2010](#).

11. Visual Studio 2010 and .NET Framework 4 - In less than a month Microsoft will provide early adopters with the Release Candidate (RC) builds of Visual Studio 2010 and .NET Framework 4, with the availability deadline planned for April 12. But for the time being, users will have to content themselves with the Beta 2 releases of Microsoft's next generation development platform and tools.

Microsoft Visual Studio 2010 Professional Beta 2 and Microsoft Visual Studio 2010 Ultimate Beta 2 are available for download via this [link](#).

.NET Framework 4 Beta 2 is available for download [here](#).

12. Expression Studio 3 and Silverlight 4 - since we are on the topic of development tools, Microsoft is also offering free downloads of Expression Studio 3. Customers will be able to access both the entire suite, or individual components such as Expression Web 3, Expression Blend 3 + SketchFlow, Expression Design 3 and Expression Encoder 3. Silverlight 4 has been released as a developer only Beta in November 2009, at the Professional Developers Conference in Los Angeles.

Silverlight 4 Beta is available for download [here](#).

Microsoft Expression Studio 3 Trial is available for download [here](#).

Microsoft Expression Web 3 Trial is available for download [here](#).

Microsoft Expression Blend 3 + SketchFlow Trial is available for download [here](#).

Microsoft Expression Design 3 Trial is available for download [here](#).

Microsoft Expression Encoder 3 is available for download [here](#).

Microsoft Expression Blend Preview for .NET 4 is available for download [here](#).

13. SQL Server 2008 R2 - "SQL Server 2008 R2 delivers several breakthrough capabilities that will enable your organization to scale database operations with confidence, improve IT and developer efficiency, and enable highly scalable and well managed Business Intelligence on a self-service basis for your users. Download the SQL Server 2008 R2 November CTP, as well as Microsoft's complete Business Intelligence platform, including the new PowerPivot for Excel 2010 add-in now," the software giant explained.

SQL Server 2008 R2 November CTP is available for download [here](#).

14. System Center Essentials 2010 - "Microsoft [System Center Essentials 2010 RC](#) provides IT professionals in mid-sized organizations a unified physical and virtual IT management experience. It enables you to better secure, update, monitor, and troubleshoot from a single console, so you can efficiently and proactively manage your IT environment in three ways: By providing a single solution with a single console for managing your physical and virtual servers, client computers, hardware, software, and IT services for a unified experience. By enabling you to proactively manage your IT environment with smart alert notifications of IT issues, providing expert diagnostic information to accelerate problem diagnosis and integrated tasks to quickly resolve issues before they cause downtime. By being easy to deploy and maintain, simplifying complex management tasks, like creation of virtual servers, software deployment, update management, and inventory collection for increased IT efficiency and security," Microsoft stated.

System Center Essentials 2010 is available for download [here](#).

15. Kodu - "is a new visual programming language made specifically for creating games. It is designed to be accessible for children and enjoyable for anyone. The programming environment runs on the Xbox, allowing rapid design iteration using only a game controller for input," reads an excerpt from the official description. "The core of the [Kodu project](#) is the programming user interface. The language is simple and entirely icon-based. Programs are composed of pages, which are broken down into rules, which are further divided into conditions and actions. Conditions are evaluated simultaneously."

Kodu Beta for PC is available for download [here](#).

Of course, the array of free solutions offered by Microsoft spans well beyond the 15 (or so) examples I included above. You might even have your own free software from the Redmond company that you consider an essential download (such as Internet Explorer 8, Microsoft Security Essentials, Windows Essentials). If so, please feel free to contribute to the list by leaving a comment in the section below.