

By: J. B. Games Editor

Valve Offers Steamworks for Free

A new service for game developers and publishers

First of all, don't get too excited yet: it's not a [free game](#), nor something that you should download right away and have fun with. But, in the long run, it is something that will most likely bring a lot of benefits to the game world: Steamworks is a complete suite of publishing and development tools ranging from copy protection to social networking services and server browsing, everything via [Steam](#), in the end. The first thing you should know about this "Steamworks" is that it is the same suite of tools used for Half Life 2 and The Orange Box and it is free for any developer or publisher interested to use it. So this actually means that the way PC games are purchased could see a nearly complete move towards the online market. Because it is safer, Valve says, at least regarding the levels of piracy. Basically, Valve offers services like a strong encryption system which "takes anti-piracy to a new level with strong encryption that keeps your game locked until the moment it is released." This probably means (since they didn't specify that, we can't be 100% percent sure we're right) that games could be released anywhere using the classic methods (game shops) but the downloadable executable will be only available on Steam. A big hit for the pirates or, at least, a big delay for them. Also, this service offers a few other goodies for the developers, such as key based authentication, which allows territory-specific deliveries, a multiplayer matchmaking system, voice chat and other social networking services, as well as the option to have online beta tests and so on. So, there could be a few major consequences if Valve's Steamworks will turn out to be as big as it sounds: first, we'll have more smaller, independent developer studios using this service, which would further mean that we'll get the chance to try some very original games and second, we'll have a bigger and stronger Valve who can keep an eye on every single promising developer, as well as gain even more users for their Steam service. But, since everything is free and we, the gamers, will get to enjoy the final product, it is really OK.