

I Hate Subscription Software! However...

Shôn Ellerton, November 13, 2019

Greedy software vendors have milked the concept of subscription software; however, there is a silver lining.

A **AUTOCAD**

1 YEAR
A\$2,670.00
Only A\$222.50 per Month

Office 365
Home
Office 365 Home Monthly Subscription
\$13.00

Adobe Acrobat Pro DC
Adobe Acrobat Pro DC (1-Year Subscription)
\$263.88

Ps
Adobe Photoshop
A\$343.07/yr
incl. GST

ALTERYX DESIGNER
\$5,195
/user per year

Remember the days you can buy all software outright? Install it, plug in the licence key and you're good to go?

Of course, you remember. There's still a lot of software out there which you can buy outright but many of the popular suites of software we're all so familiar with have gone down the insidious path of software-as-a-service (SaaS). In essence, you don't own the software, but rather, merely rent it.

If my memory serves me well, it was Adobe that became one of the pioneers of adopting the activation of software over the Internet ensuring that you can only run only one licenced copy at a time. Microsoft started doing the same in the vain hope that it would reduce the distribution of hacked and pirated copies on peer-to-peer and newsgroup services. Added to this, software vendors started to ask for higher and higher prices to purchase the software thus creating the perfect breeding ground for software piracy.

Enter software subscription pricing

Not content with selling software outright to buyers and offering substantial discounts on upgrades, Microsoft's Office 365 is the most well-known embodiment of subscription software. Allowing up to five machines at a time, the monthly cost at first glance doesn't seem to unreasonable. However, the reality is that most of us are probably not going to be loading the software on more than two machines at a time, let alone five. Over a time period of a few years, you can rack up quite a significant outlay just for renting the software. Software vendors claim that subscription presents best value as all updates are

included in the years to come. You'll always be up-to-date! However, how many of us have been totally content using a fully paid-up version of Office for five or more years which has never been updated?

Fair play to Microsoft insofar that, as part of the subscription, you have access to 1 TB of storage. Storage costs *are* legitimate subscription service items as storage infrastructure takes physical space, is being maintained, powered and continuously being patched by a third party. Moreover, Microsoft are starting to, again, offer full licences of most of their products at reasonable prices.

However, I do have an issue with Adobe's Photoshop as an example of what can only be described as self-indulgent greed. Forking out the best part of \$350 AUD for an annual plan or \$500 for a full version lifetime seems incredibly excessive. CorelDRAW is another offender and can be yours for 'only' \$30 per month. AutoCAD, a package I was once very familiar with, has always been expensive at around the \$2-3K mark for a full licence; however, the price is now around \$2700... per annum!

It's not difficult to understand how they get away with exorbitantly high subscription prices. Much of this software is considered industry standard. Engineering firms are highly likely to use AutoCAD and graphics offices are likely to use Photoshop. Both pieces of software are highly advanced and require advanced skillsets and familiarity with users to use them effectively. Moreover, the vendors provide support and training to businesses ensuring that, along with pushy and convincing sales techniques, that their software is, by far, the best and only one to use.

Hopping onto the subscription software bandwagon

Unfortunately, many other software vendors have hopped onto the bandwagon of subscription software including those distributing smartphone apps, many of which, will never need to be upgraded to fulfil the function of what they're needed to do. I once downloaded a reasonably good smartphone video editing app which was simple to use. The free version allowed up to a limited number of minutes and was watermarked throughout. I found this understandable. I decided that I liked the product and proceeded to buy it; however, I was disappointed that I could not buy it but had to fork out \$4.50 per month to use it. I was prepared to pay up to \$50 for the app, but the sheer greed of the vendor got the better of me, and I simply deleted it and looked elsewhere. With success I might add.

It now seems normal to subscribe to software

Another reason for the success of subscription software, at least for the time being, is that many of us are being conditioned in believing that much of this software *should* be a subscription service. We are getting confused as to what services really should be subscription services. For example, why does a photo editing program like Photoshop need to be a subscription service? I can't even imagine why Adobe Acrobat Pro is being sold at around \$250 per annum considering there are equivalents out there for a fraction of the price. However, movie streaming services like Netflix or high-resolution audio streaming services like Tidal rightfully justify having subscription costs. They have continuously updated new material to watch or listen to. You don't expect (or want) to have continuously new software provided to you for a subscription charge, do you?

If you are thinking about buying subscription software, have a real think if the software justifies itself as being justifiably subscription-based. Is it, for example, an online cloud accounting service like Xero or Quickbooks Online? In this case, if your answer is yes, you would be right. You are using their infrastructure to store your data. If it's a PDF writer or a drawing program? I highly doubt it.

Continuously spruiked by the vendors, so many of us have become naturally accustomed to believing that subscription software is justified by all the research and development that goes in to supply updates, most of which comprise of software patches to address security issues. Or so they claim to say.

To finish up with a silver lining

We're in the heart of the age of greedy subscription software; however, there is a big silver lining in all this. It has opened out a massive opportunity for other less well-known vendors to develop and sell equivalent *or better* products at a fraction of the price.

You name it. PDF writers, drawing packages, word processors, photo-editing software, music composing software. Only by doing a little research, one can find incredibly good software and for yours at only a fraction of the cost. Some are even free and rely on the goodwill of others to supply a donation.

The world of expensive subscription software is the trend at the moment; however, as with most things, it may come full circle back to competitive software pricing which is yours to own.