

Releasing your software

Please feel free to correct my text and add anything I have missed.

Are you ready to release your program? You probably have not included all the things that a program needs to be successful especially if you are considering selling it. I have listed things that is best to include when releasing your program to make it more successful.

First off you need to test your program. This is not just simply running the program to see if it works. You have to do everything and anything the users could do. Also try to break the program by doing things wrong. This way you will eliminate as many bugs as possible. After this you should give your program to other people to test. People other than yourself are likely to find more bugs. Also when the program is released, it is best to have a method by which people can tell you about bugs they find. You could release a beta version of your software. A beta version is a version of the software that has not been fully tested. Releasing a beta version of your software means many people are using your software and are in fact testing it for you. You must find away for your users of the beta version to submit bugs to you. Once you have the bug reports you can fix the problem.

Now you need to consider what other files are needed by the program. Make sure all these files are in the right place and that they are the right files. Make sure that the files are the right version.

A help file/manual is a must have. In the help file/manual there must be information on how to use the program. The help file/ manual will also have steps on what to do if the program is not working properly. Some answers to problems can be included in the help file if they are commonly occurring problems. A question and answer section, generally called a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section, helps to make your help file/manual more user friendly. An example of an FAQ entry is shown below:

Q. How do I open an image file?

A. Click on file in the menu and then click open and select the image file you wish to open.

You could have an online Manuel or help file. This would mean you could change it and the users don't have to download a new version. Links to web pages with software that can be used to create help files can be found on the [Help Makers](#) page.

After you have all the files together, you need to make an installation package. Installation packages make it easy for the files to be put on the user's computer in the correct place and add a shortcut to the start menu and the desktop. You can get software that creates installation packages for you. A free example is *Install Creator* by Click Team. You can find this free installer at http://www.clickteam.com/English/install_creator.htm . More can be found on the [Installer Creation Systems](#) page.

Once you have created the install package you need to copyright your program as well as its title and your company name. There is nothing worse than having spent years creating a program and then someone comes and takes that program and sells it as their own.

(would be useful for someone to explain how to copyright your program in more detail as i have never done so.)

A notable icon for your program is good. If the program opens and creates files, then have the same icon for these files.

Now you must have a way to distribute your program. Lots of today's programs are downloaded off the internet. This may be ok for small programs but if your program is large, for example over one gigabyte, then it is best to use some other method. CDs and DVDs are good methods by which to distribute your large programs. The CD/DVD must have an attractive box if it is going to be displayed on the shop selves. You must also consider preventing people from being able to copy the contents of the CD/DVD on to a new CD/DVD. If they could copy the CD/DVD then they could give out the copies for free or sell them.

You must create a website for your software or place information about that software on a website. The website will allow people to look at information about the software. You should include a way to buy the software from the website as many purchases are done over the web now. The website could contain screen shots of the program and maybe a demo or trial version which will allow the users to try before they buy, attracting more potential customers. If you have a demo you should not include all the features of the program. Describing but omitting some of the better features in the demo which will encourage the users to purchase the full version. Also include a popup window whenever the user closes the demo. This 'nag window' should state what is in the full version and provide a link to the website where the full version can be purchased. Trial versions should be a short period of time in which the user can evaluate the product. In general, 60 days is a reasonable evaluation or trial period. Another method is to limit the number of times the user can use the product.

After you release your program be sure to provide updates whenever you find bugs in your program. This is often referred to as a *patch* for the program. You can get a patch making program from

http://www.clickteam.com/English/patch_maker.htm

The patch should contain only the files that have been changed, not a complete package of all files. This is to reduce the amount the user has to download. The files should also be updated into the correct place and the updated program should have a different version number.

Finally you are ready to release your program. One last step: Ask yourself "Is my program good enough?" If the answer is 'no,' you will not make money and you will have wasted time, money and other resources releasing the program. If your program is FREE then that's great. Everyone likes free software. Just be sure not to leave yourself thinking "I should have sold it not made it free."

Another consideration maybe to release the software as an open source project. This means you release your program and also release the code. Other programmers can take your program and improve it. Many open source software exists today and it is becoming more and more popular. The best thing about open source projects is many people work on a program improving it so the program is produced faster.

Many open source projects can be found at <http://sourceforge.net/>

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