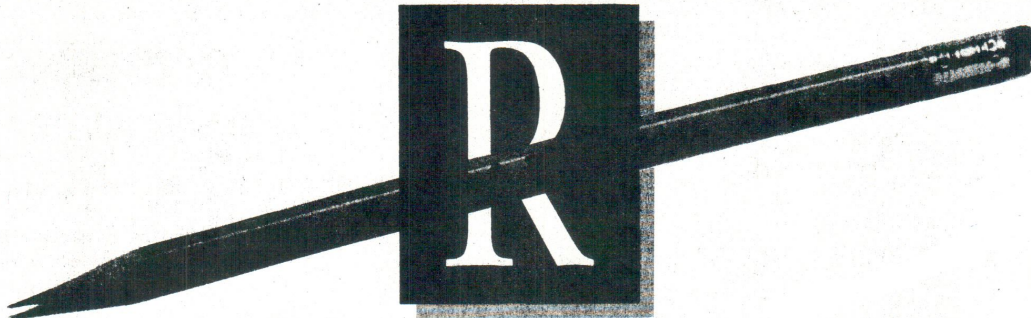


THE RESOURCE CENTER



By MARGARET MORABITO

Inexpensive educational software is a major force behind the use of computers in the home, and it can help make your hardware investment pay off without pushing you deeper into debt. Low-cost software is also a boon to schools on restrictive budgets.

Most of this software is called "public domain," which refers to the fact that it's been released for access by whoever wants it, either for free or at a minimal price. The programs can be legally duplicated and distributed on disks or on-line.

Professional programmers sometimes donate work to the public domain, and so do many unknowns, who may create gems that are worth far more than you'd pay for a commercial program. Public domain programs run the gamut from excellent to useless, but with time and effort you can find the great ones.

What Is Public Domain?

If you're not sure what public domain is, it may clarify it more to learn what it's *not*. A common, but mistaken, belief is that programs from computer magazines are free software for you to copy and hand out to your friends. Unfortunately, magazine programs are usually copyrighted and belong to the magazine that published them. Most magazines don't relinquish their ownership and consider copying their programs for distribution illegal.

Readers of this column have been fortunate; *RUN* gave me special permission last year to release to the public domain some of the best edu-

Low-cost, high-quality educational software is not a pipe dream. You just have to know where to find it.

cational programs its readers had sent in. If other computer magazines followed suit, they could greatly help the proliferation of good educational programs.

Another mistaken belief is that if a program isn't copy-protected, it's in the public domain. While most commercial software companies build in copy-protection schemes that prevent you from making duplicates, a growing number of companies believe copy protection isn't worth the bother. However, the programs from these companies are still under copyright, should not be copied and definitely are not in the public domain. The documentation that comes with a program will usually say if the manufacturer forbids copying for distribution.

Freeware

Another category of low-cost educational software is freeware, a hybrid between public domain and commercial. Freeware is not copy-protected; in fact, the author encourages you to copy and distribute it. These programs carry an internal message that identifies the programmer, provides his or her address and requests that you send money if you like the program and plan on using it. You're morally obligated to pay for what

you use, but there's no legally binding contract between you and the programmer.

If you do send money to the programmer, you usually receive documentation, any updates that occur and help from the programmer as needed—things you don't get with most public domain software.

Finding Low-Cost Software

Though low-cost software is plentiful, it can be hard to find if you don't know where to look. The big ads in computer magazines are from commercial software companies, and the software you usually find in stores is also from commercial sources.

Read the small ads. People who distribute public domain software usually don't have the money to run flashy ads, but they may run a small black-and-white classified ad in the back of your favorite computer magazine. They also send flyers out to user's groups, for many such groups compile public domain programs onto disks that they sell at low cost to their members. In some cases, such software is distributed by large companies and is sold in retail outlets.

Wherever you get it, this software is usually priced at about \$10 for a diskful of programs. The number of programs on the disk will vary from around 12 to 30, depending on whether the supplier needs or wants to make a profit. Your first step should be to write or call the public domain source and request a catalog of its programs.

Another source of information is a book entitled *How To Get Free Software*,

by Alfred G. Press, 1984.

Downloading

On-line networks and bulletin boards often offer public domain software. You can have a modicum of public domain software, you can have a modicum of public domain software, you can have a modicum of public domain software. You pay on-line for the software, but it's a subscription fee, not a phone bill. A local bulletin board is usually free.

A recent survey of bulletin boards whether software is commercial or public domain and whether it's claimed that it's public domain only if it was illegally distributed.

This problem needs to be solved. If a program is actually a scale copy of what only a few people should follow.

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by Alfred Glossbrenner; St. Martin's Press, 1984.

Downloading

On-line networks and local bulletin boards often maintain large libraries of public domain programs. If you have a modem and a good terminal program, you can download (capture) this software from these databases. You pay only for the on-line time (if it's a subscription network) and your phone bill (if it's a long-distance call). A local BBS can provide you with totally free software.

A recent controversy arose over whether software on the on-line networks is considered in the public domain and thus available for copying and distribution. CompuServe claimed that its programs were available only to its subscribers, and that it was illegal to download, copy and then distribute them elsewhere.

This problem demonstrates the need to be sure that an on-line program is actually in the public domain before assuming you can do large-scale copying. Most folks download only what they need and then use it only at home. That's the plan you should follow.

If you've downloaded a program you'd like to distribute throughout

your school, for example, and you're not sure this is proper, ask the manager of the on-line database to put you in touch with someone at the network who can authorize it.

QuantumLink, a national network for Commodore owners, maintains large databases of public domain educational software in its Learning Center. This software includes a 27-disk series of programs in all subjects and for all ages put out by Commodore Business Machines several years ago. You can also find this CBM software sold on disk at mass merchandisers who sell Commodore computers, and through mail-order ads.

In addition, I've built several libraries of quality educational software you can download from The Resource Center and Tutoring Center areas of QuantumLink's Learning Center. The programs in these two areas are not from Commodore and have been written by a wide variety of people who are committed to education.

Renting Commercial Software

A low-cost way of benefitting from commercial educational software is to rent it. Renting eliminates the problem of laying out the full purchase price and then discovering the program doesn't really fit the bill.

Rental costs vary, but they run about \$5 to \$12 for a two-week tryout period. There are several national mail-order companies and retail stores that rent software.

Let's Work Together

With so much educational software available, both commercial and public domain, the problem of sifting through it all and finding the worthwhile programs is difficult. School systems should consider forming groups of teachers and parents to take on the task of locating and evaluating this material. A school on a tight budget could come up with some valuable tools to use with its students, and it could share both disks and information about programs with others.

There are associations that evaluate commercial educational software, such as the Educational Products Information Exchange (PO Box 839, Water Mill, NY 11976). State and national organizations committed to handling the wealth of public domain and freeware programs would also be helpful.

Of course, user's groups could be most helpful in evaluating educational software. They could publish their results and then distribute them through a central agent, such as The Resource Center. I encourage you to share your evaluations and recommendations of public domain programs with me. I'll publish your findings in future columns. ■

If you're using Commodore computers for educational purposes (at home or in school) and would like to share your experiences through The Resource Center, write me a letter detailing the equipment you're using, subject areas you teach, grade level or age of your students, software you're using and any other information you feel like including.

Also, if you'd like to donate public domain educational programs to The Resource Center for sharing with other educators or parents, please send along a disk with a brief description of the program. Send correspondence and disks to:

*Margaret Morabito
The Resource Center
c/o RUN Magazine
80 Elm St.
Peterborough, NH 03458*

You can also leave mail in my on-line mailboxes: CompuServe (70616,714) or QuantumLink (MARGM).

Table 1. Sources of free and low-cost educational software.

CompuServe Information Network 5000 Arlington Centre Blvd. PO Box 20212 Columbus, OH 43220	Paceware, Inc. PO Box 64-A Pompano Beach, FL 33074
QuantumLink 8620 Westwood Center Drive Vienna, VA 22180 800-392-8200	Kidware PO Box 9762, Dept. F Moscow, ID 83843
Commodore Business Machines 1200 Wilson Drive West Chester, PA 19380	Clearinghouse for ESL Public Domain Software 201 Gordy Hall Ohio University Athens, OH 45701
Toronto Pet Users Group (TPUG) 5300 Yonge St. Willowdale, Ontario Canada M2N 5R2	Public Domain Solutions PO Box 832 Tallevast, FL 34270
Public Domain Users Group PO Box 1442-FA Orange Park, FL 32067	Wedgewood Software Rental 5316 Woodway Drive Fort Worth, TX 76133
Adams Software Company PO Box 1792 Springdale, AR 72765	Rent-A-Disk Frederick Bldg. #345 Huntington, WV 25701
64 Gold 3219 Folsom St. San Francisco, CA 94110	National Public Domain Software Rental Center 1533 Avohill Drive Vista, CA 92084