

FREE? MAYBE NOT...



Most of us know that being on the internet opens the door to hackers, malware and viruses that can infect - even erase – information on our computers and devices as well as enable criminals to have access to our most confidential details. As a precaution we are recommended to install anti-virus software but therein lies the dilemma: must we pay for it or not? Using antivirus software is a key part in keeping the information safe on your computer and not falling victim to identity theft or acquiring a virus while surfing the web. But is it worth it to shell out €40 or more a year for a commercial antivirus program? Would you drive your car without insurance? The concept is the same.

The **FEATURES** of these free/paid programs vary – many advanced features are not included in the free versions, giving the anti-virus companies the chance to lure “free” users into upgrading to a “paid” version. Users of the “free” version tend to be bombarded with pop-ups, banner ads and other advertising gimmicks to get them to upgrade. Often out of frustration, the user ends up buying the paid version anyway. What users do not realize is that even though they have had no problems with the “freeware”, what can be ongoing is behind the scenes, such as phishing which they do not see.

The **level of SUPPORT** between free/paid programs also varies greatly. Companies that offer “paid” software are able to hire more personnel globally to help users with any problems – both from their call centers and their technical departments. “Free” software programs usually have limited support: web forums, knowledge bases and tutorials, little or no personal contact with knowledgeable personnel or technicians. You certainly get what you pay for in this circumstance.

If you use a computer that does not access the internet or is used for playing games and other applications, then “free” software will suffice. But for anything more, for protection of sensitive data, internet banking and online purchasing, the protection rendered by “paid” software is really a necessity. The additional peace of mind a “paid” alternative gives has no equal.

As most people depend more and more on their computers for all their transactions, it behooves them to be more aware of the dangers lurking on the internet and to protect themselves as much as possible. But having said that, it should also be acknowledged that **NO** anti-virus program will protect the user when they have accepted an email that is already infected, or visit a website against the warnings put forth by the anti-virus program. Ultimately it is still the user’s responsibility to be watchful and wary of everything that enters their cyberworld.