



E-BIZ INSIDER: SOFTWARE WANTS TO BE FREE

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NetPROFIT

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Free samples are often given away with the hope that potential customers will try a product, like it, and continue buying. Software developers sometimes use this approach, offering trial versions of their product with either limited functionality or an expiry date.

And then there's Open Solutions, a Newmarket, Ont. developer of business automation software. It recently began giving away a full version of its Sales Automation software, Ascent/32, to anyone who downloads it from their website. No strings, no expiration date, no limitations.

John Graham, Open Solutions director of business development, says, "This is a guerrilla marketing tactic that will help us compete with the bigger players in the market: Maximizer and Act, for example."

The company hopes sales managers will try the software and like it so much that they'll buy the network version (about US\$395 per network plus US\$135 per workstation) for their entire staff, allowing the whole sales team to share leads, client info and other data.

They might even be impressed enough to purchase a custom software package, or Open Solutions' ResQ Enterprise Software package (US\$20,000 and up), designed for large corporations.

After a week on the freebie market, almost 500 copies had been downloaded. How will that translate into sales? "We've had 20 requests for pricing," says Graham, "but it's too early to tell, since many users are still evaluating the product."

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