

CHAPTER 5



A Directory of Family History Software and Tools



Family history has become a real passion and big-time hobby for millions of people today all around the world. Alex Haley called it “a hunger, bone-marrow deep, to know our heritage”. Family history helps you discover a sense of identity and family pride in your life. It can also help unite and strengthen bonds between family members.

Whatever your reason for tracing your own family roots and stories, genealogy software can become one of your most valuable and indispensable tools. Software helps you discover your ancestors, organize and store your information (such as family photos, scrapbooks, health and personal data, reunions, etc.), measure the progress of your research, share your information with family and friends, provide tons of tools to make it easier, and much more. Software programs today are fun and interesting for the whole family, and no longer just about names, charts, and graphs.

In this Directory, you’ll learn where to find comprehensive reviews that will help you make an informed decision about which software is right for you. Selecting the right software program can make all the difference in how much satisfaction and information you will derive from your family history quest. And the right software will help make your journey fun and much easier.

INSIDE THIS CHAPTER:

Which Software is the Best? . . .	111
Popular PC Software Programs . . .	112
Web-Based Software	117
Mac Software	118
Handheld Software (See Chapter 9)	192
Software Tools and Utilities to Make it Easier	118

Suggested Activities

1. Educate yourself about the different family history software programs available. Read the reviews herein of the various programs.
2. Try different free demos if you wish. Make a decision on which one(s) you want to purchase.
3. Go on a treasure hunt. Discover some of your buried treasure in the web sites provided.
4. Persevere in searching for your ancestors and understanding what their life was like.

Which Software is the Best?

The most often asked question today by people interested in family history software is “*which one is the best?*” This question is difficult to answer because what is right for me may not work as well for you. Everyone has different needs and preferences. There may be features in a particular family history program that I may not use, e.g. web-site creation or multi-media scrapbooking, but may be very important to you.

Some people even use more than one program to meet their needs. For example, you may prefer a primary, heavy duty program for your everyday use, and a different program to generate well-designed charts. Each program has its own strengths and weaknesses; each program does certain things well and other things not-so-well.

And they are always changing and upgrading. New features and options are constantly being introduced. They offer a wide variety of options including the way they format data, the types of charts they print, their ability to help you organize your research, and their capacity to store photographs and documents. They can even assist you in your research by letting you keep a research log or to-do list right with your family data. With dozens of software programs, and hundreds of features available, which program(s) should I choose?

First of all – whether you’re just starting out, or upgrading your existing software program – take some time and effort to make your decision; it’s well worth it. You may want to consider making a list of features that you want or need, then prioritize that list to decide which are most important to you. As you gain more understanding and knowledge your list may change and grow.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you decide which features you may want or need.



Software Features

- **What do you want to do** with your family history information? Are you just looking for a basic program to organize names, dates and events? Some program basics may include: planning tools, data recording, analytical tools (search features, custom lists, flags, custom data fields, multiple note options, etc.), source documentation, reports, charts, publishing, multimedia, internet, portability, additional tools and convenience items.
- **What about charts and reports?** Do you want to create beautiful family trees to decorate your home; do you want to include photos, audio and video with your data? What kind of charts and reports would you like your software to be able to print?
- **Do you plan to create a family Web site** to share your information with family and friends? The popular software programs offer you the ability to upload your family tree data online right from your computer program, and help you create a simple family Web site.
- **Will you want to write a family history book** using your information? Some software programs offer more features for printing a family history book than others.
- **If you’re a member of the LDS Church**, do you want to take your ancestors with you to the temple? If so, you will want to use software that helps track the special ordinance information.

Consider downloading one or more of the *free* family history programs, or trying the demo or trial versions of several programs to see how each one works for you; download and use several different ones to find the one that feels right. Many software vendors have free trial or demo versions available to try out. Some software companies offer their basic software for free, and then charge for the more advanced features. It won't take long for you to learn which ones offer the features you need and are the most intuitive for the way you work.

You may want to read reviews by experts and users' comments. You can do a Google search to find articles about a particular software

You may want to read reviews by the experts on the dozens of software programs available before you purchase.



Reviews by Experts

Top Ten Reviews.com - <http://genealogy-software-review.toptenreviews.com>

Provides detailed product reviews, ranking, and side-by-side comparisons of ten family history PC software programs. They did not review or compare any free programs, web-based programs, or Macintosh programs, but they provide helpful buying guides, articles explaining how to get the most out of a product, and an easy way to buy them. Here's the criteria they used to evaluate the genealogy software they offer:

- **Ease of Use / User-Friendliness** – It's easy for beginners and experienced computer users alike; the program should be well organized and easy to navigate.
- **Ease of Installation & Setup** – The software should be straightforward and simple to install and setup on your computer, without any errors or confusing steps.

program and read users' comments. Also, look at the publisher's Web sites for details and other web sites for users' message boards and e-mails.

There are many excellent family history programs available to meet your needs. Get the scoop on all the latest versions of the most popular family tree software programs in this software roundup.

Popular PC Software Programs

Legacy Family Tree.com - www.legacyfamilytree.com Free/\$\$\$

An easy-to-use, user-friendly, full-featured software program. Super-intuitive and includes all of the standard features you could want: GEDCOM import/export, a wide variety of reports, global search and replace, auto-

- **Feature Set** – It should include all of the features necessary to research and organize your family tree including reports, charts, searching capabilities, web access and insightful ways to store data.
- **Help/Documentation** – The developer should provide ample help in the form of FAQs, email and phone support, online course and product tutorials so anyone can learn to use the program and conveniently access customer support.

GenSoftReviews.com - www.gensoftreviews.com

A new site that allows people to review and rate all the software packages.

About.com Review - http://genealogy.about.com/cs/genealogysoftware/a/software_2.htm

Kimberly Powell, a professional genealogist, Web developer, and author of *Everything Family Tree*, did an excellent genealogy software review and ratings of popular software in 2007.