Downloading a program from the Web

I mention free software in the book and you might have thought that I was pulling your leg but, in this case, there is such a thing as a 'free lunch'. Free software, or "freeware" as it is known, thrives on the Web for several different reasons.

First, in spite of this age of cynical materialism, there are many altruistic people out there who simply enjoy creating good programs for the fun of it and the sense of community with other like-minded souls. Freeware also places the programmer's work in the shop window of the commercial operators. These companies will often employ them on a freelance basis to solve particular problems they may be having with their own products. Freeware can also be viewed as apprentice's work like that of an aspiring silversmith. Last but not least there are many individuals and organisations who object to the monopolies held by multinational software developers and wish to offer alternatives to expensive commercial programs.

Freeware is not the same as 'shareware'. Shareware is a kind of halfway house between the full retail product and the freeware alternative. These programs may be free to download and install but a limit is put on the length of time they can be used after installation or prevent the use of certain aspects of the program until a small fee has been paid to the programmer. These fees are rarely more than £30 and can be very good value for money.

The program I want to use in this exercise is a freeware program developed by one of the huge multinationals mentioned above – Google. It is called Picasa and is a very good example of the quality freeware that is available on the Web.
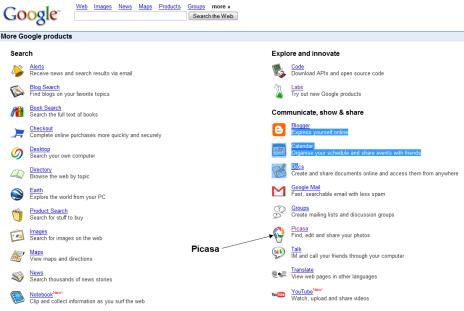
Picasa:

This is a powerful image cataloguing and simple photo manipulating program that we will be using in a later tutorial. I will take you through the various steps of downloading and installing the program.

1. Close any programs you may have running on the task bar at the bottom of the screen.
2. Connect to the Internet, launch Internet Explorer and call up the Google home page at www.google.co.uk .
3. At the right hand end of the menu options click on the link to "More >>" which will bring you to the page looking like Fig. 17.1

4. You thought that Google was just a search engine, didn't you? This next page shows how much more Google can do and the offering we are interested in is Picasa in the right hand column under "Communicate, Show and Share". Click on the Picasa link.

5. You could take time out here to find out a bit more about Picasa by following a few of the links on this page but, eventually, I want you to click on "Download Picasa".

6. The program should start to download to your computer within a few seconds. The process will take a varying length of time depending upon the speed of your Internet connection – dial-up will take over ½hr while a fast broadband connection will complete the job in less than 10 seconds. In normal circumstances I would allow about 5 minutes.

7. Now we have to find where the program set-up files have been stored. In most cases you will find a Picasa icon on your desktop but other computers may have dropped them into the Downloads folder. Other alternatives will ask you to Open or Run the installation program. Having found the icon, double click on it and let the computer do its work. You will still have to answer some questions similar to those we dealt with in the previous tutorial on loading programs but there is one little difference that might have you scratching your head for inspiration. When we were loading the program from a CD in the previous tutorial we either clicked on Yes, Next or Accept. When Picasa installs – and you will find this with other programs as well - you will find that on the agreement screen the word "Next" is greyed out and unavailable for use. There is no point in furiously clicking on the grey Next button until you have implied your consent to the agreement by clicking on the radio button beside the acceptance option. Once you have done this the Next button becomes available for use and you are on your way again.

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8. The setup program finishes either by installing another Picasa icon on your desktop or by replacing the Picasa setup icon.
9. If you have opted to start the program as soon as the installation is complete then it will run automatically as soon as you click on Finish.

I would suggest that you do not opt to start the program immediately as this exercise has been about downloading and installing programs from the Web and, as in the case of Photoshop Elements in the previous tutorial, you may become confused as Picasa starts searching through your computer flashing up little images as it sets about its task. You may think it has become a runaway process and your computer is going to bite the dust within the next 3 minutes. This action is perfectly normal and will stop eventually and you can close it in any of the normal ways but I would suggest clicking on the **X** sizing button at the top right corner of your screen.