

# Savvy Consumers: Beware of



*Ed Latham*

What happens when you join “free” with “premium”? You get “freemium” – a popular business model from the online world. How does it work? You sign up for free anti-virus software, for example, and then get prompted to buy the premium version. Or you start playing a free game online and then get enticed to make small purchases to advance your game. Another business model that allows companies to give products away for free is they include advertising. In this model, the free content provides a forum in which you, the consumer, is “sold” to the advertiser. “Free” products are becoming more and more common in education. Teachers and students are learning to take advantage of these resources, but it’s a good idea to beware of the get-something-for-nothing model.

## Watch Out for Freemiums

Using the freemium model, companies are offering teachers many “free” educational tools. The hope is that the teacher finds the tool or resource effective and will then buy the other parts available for small fees. This is very clever as it relies on individual teachers throwing \$2, \$5 or even \$10 into a tool she can use to help her learners find success.

## How to Handle those Ads?

One strategy for navigating free content is to train yourself to ignore the commercial interruptions. Many students are experienced gamers and users of online sites, so they may already be adept at ignoring ads. For others, a Web page cluttered with advertising may be very distracting. In this case, there are helpful online tools, such as <www.readability.com>, which strip the ads from the Web page and present only the text.

Ebook sites have many inappropriate banners or even content categories. In this case, you can simply download the book to a device or PDF file so that you are not reading it within the site.

## Be a Savvy Consumer

All the “free” online content requires us to be more savvy as we navigate the Web. You can find good content on the sites that use the “freemium” model, but it can take a lot of time and effort to navigate around the micro purchases that you will be prompted to buy. When the business model is to make money via advertising, you have to ask how that affects the content on the site. Consciously or unconsciously, the content developers will want the site to be a “friendly” environment for the ads, so the content they offer may be narrower than it should. Still, if we learn the safe ways to consume advertising-based content, we will find many opportunities to take advantage of useful educational tools and resources.

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## More on Free

### Some Websites are free because they are funded by grants or by tax dollars:

- Annenberg Learner: [www.learner.org](http://www.learner.org)
- ESL Literacy Network: [www.esl-literacy.com](http://www.esl-literacy.com)
- Independent Television Service: [itvs.org](http://itvs.org)
- Language Resource Centers: [www.nflrc.org](http://www.nflrc.org)
- Library of Congress: [www.loc.gov/teachers/](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/)
- Literacy Information and Communication System: [lincs.ed.gov](http://lincs.ed.gov)
- National Endowment for the Humanities: [edsitement.neh.gov](http://edsitement.neh.gov)
- Teaching Tolerance: [www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)
- Zinn Education Project: [zinnedproject.org](http://zinnedproject.org)

**What are some ways you should be savvy about grant- or tax-dollar-funded sites such as these?**