

BUG-BYTES

THE MONTHLY ONLINE NEWSLETTER OF *COMPUTER BUGS*

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FABULOUS FREEBIES

SOMETIMES FREE IS GREAT

FREWARE



There is a saying “That there is no free lunch.” We have to modify that saying somewhat when we are talking about computer software. There are some very useful free software programs, and also a lot of bad and dangerous free programs. The trick is to decide which free software will be useful to you, and of those which are good and safe, and which free software should be avoided at all cost.

Search with Google, or your current favorite search engine, and search for reviews about the software you are considering downloading. Armed with that information, you can avoid nasty surprises.

You don't have to pay for 'Free' software. For instance, in a collegial manner, some software writers enjoy sharing their brainchildern with others, and they don't expect any kind of payback.



Other free software publishers may offer free software versions as a way to attract you to their web sites where they offer a range of software products for which you do have to pay. In those cases they may

offer more advanced versions of their free software, with additional capabilities, or with useful bundles.

Antivirus software is an example of this type of offering. Vendors, such as AVAST, AVIRA, and AVG offer internet security software that bundles antivirus, firewall, malware and spam filters. However, you have to pay for the more capable bundles. The advantage of bundled software is that the individual modules are designed to work seamlessly with each other. A plus is that you only have to go to one source for updates.

Some freeware comes with hooks. For example, a free program may add a modest signature line to outgoing e-mail to advertise their product. *SpamFighter* is one such example.

Then there are free software products that include malware (adware, spyware, and keystroke loggers) as a means to generate income for their firms. The worse of the lot include 'phone home' capabilities that compromise your personal data and which track your computer's usage. Some of these programs offer 'fun' but they give you pain instead. Beware!

SHAREWARE

Shareware vendors offer specialized software at very low prices. Much of their software, but not all, is written by single individuals. One outstanding example is AKGbackup by www.akgupta.com. This is an extremely fast and easy way to backup your all of your files. The program requires that JAVA be installed on your computer. You get the free

JAVA program from Sun. The author suggests that you voluntarily make a small contribution for his program. However, if you are strapped for cash, just tell him so, and he will send you the program anyway.

NOTICE

I use, have used, or have tested the following freeware programs and can recommend their use. The list of programs is not exhaustive, but it does demonstrate that lots of good free software is available. Download only those programs that appeal to you and to the way you work. You may be pleasantly surprised at what you find here.

FREE SOFTWARE SUMMARY

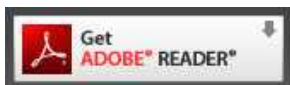
I will briefly describe the following free software.

Adobe Reader
Ashampoo Clip Finder
Avast!
AVG
Avira
Belarc Advisor
Bullzip PDF
CCleaner
Comodo
Copernic Desktop Search
CuteSendIt
DriverMax
FastStone Image Viewer
Foxit Reader
GIMP
Irfanview
Magical Jelly Bean Key Finder
Notepad++

OpenOffice
 PC-Decrapifier
 PC Inspector™ File Recovery
 PC Inspector™ Smart Recovery
 Personal Software Inspector
 Picasa
 Photo Resizer
 Skype
 SpamFighter
 Startup Inspector

FREE SOFTWARE DETAILS

The following programs are free of spyware (at least when I tested or last used them), and they are very useful programs.



Adobe Reader

reads PDF files. PDF stands for Portable Document Format. Adobe created PDF to enable users to share documents that can be viewed on any computer or operating system as long as the software is installed.

Adobe Reader is designed for businesses and includes many plug-ins that are not needed by home users. Now, there are many PDF readers. *Foxit Reader* is light version that takes up little space on a hard drive and opens very quickly.

Ashampoo Clip Finder is used to locate and capture videos from YouTube and similar sources. Think of this free program as a video search engine.



www.ashampoo.com

Avast, Avira, and AVG publish free antivirus programs, and each publisher also offers internet security suites that bundle antivirus, spyware blocker, spam filter, and a firewall

into their own integrated packages. These more capable bundles are for-pay products.

For consumers who want to only use free products, Consumer Reports recommends a combination of Avira antivirus, Microsoft Windows Defender and SpamFighter. Add Comodo for a good free firewall.

www.avira.com

Belarc Advisor scans your computer and produces a very useful report. The report lists the equipment and software you have.



www.belarc.com

Bullzip PDF is a print driver. It 'prints' to a file to produce a PDF version of any document that you normally print.



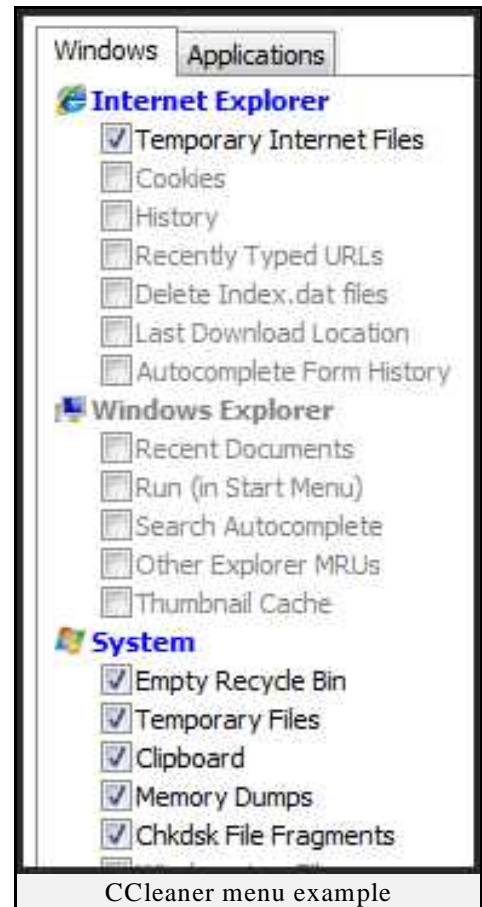
CCleaner easily removes unwanted temporary files, old clipboard files, memory dumps, Chkdsk fragments, and cleans out your recycle bin.



However, for safety sake, I recommend that only a small number of the options be checked. Personally, I check only the items shown in the screen shot at the top right.

I once made the mistake of checking the option (not shown) to remove Old Prefetch data. That is not recommended. Now Vista will not use the ReadyBoost feature to speed up loading Windows. I am really sorry I experimented with that option.

www.ccleaner.com



Comodo offers a highly-rated free firewall. It adds another layer of security to stop hackers from compromising your computer. Check the Comodo web site for other free programs as well.

C·O·M·O·D·O
 Creating Trust Online™

www.comodo.com



Copernic Desktop Search is a popular search tool used to search your computer for data, music, graphic files, e-mail messages, and contacts. It updates in the background. Unlike the Windows search program, you are not aware it is even operating in the background.

www.copernic.com

CuteSendIt answers the question, "How can I send very large files?" E-mail is not designed to send very large files. In fact, many ISPs, or your software, restricts file attachments to keep such files small.

CuteSendIt uses File Transfer Protocol (FTP) to upload your large files to their server. You provide your e-mail address, the e-mail address to which you want to send the file, and browse to the file you want to send.

CuteSendIt sends the url address for your file to your recipient. They just click on the url and the file is downloaded to their computer just like any large file.

www.cutesendit.com



DriverMax scans your computer drivers and lists the updates that are available. It works with both XP and Vista. The downloads are free.

Review the suggested updates. I recommend that you pass on updates that are beta releases, or where the reported success rate for installing the updates is very low.



www.drivermax.com

FastStone Image Viewer is an easy way to resize images, to do some light editing, to convert images, to create slideshows with many transitional

effects, and to view your photo collection. See FastStone Image Viewer and FastStone Photo Resizer

www.faststone.org

FastStone

Foxit Reader is a very fast to open and small footprint PDF reader. For most home owners it is all that you will ever need to view PDF files.

<http://www.foxitsoftware.com/>



GIMP is a an advanced photo editing program that has some of the features of programs like Adobe Photoshop. However, it can't compete with Adobe Photoshop Elements or Jasc's Paint Shop Pro. Then again, the latter two products cost just under \$100.

<http://www.gimp.org/>



GIMP Tools



Irfanview is a popular graphics converter, viewer, and simple full screen slideshow. The program also plays audio files.

<http://www.irfanview.com/>

Magical Jelly Bean Keyfinder quickly locates Microsoft registration keys, such as for the operating system and Microsoft office. If you can't find your registration information, this product can save your bacon.



For example the product located these keys on my main computer. Not shown are the keys that displayed in a drop down window to the right of the screen shot.

<http://www.magicaljellybean.com/>

Notepad++ is beefed up replacement for Windows' Notepad, with many more features.



<http://www.magicaljellybean.com/>



OpenOffice is a free office suite similar to Microsoft Office. It opens Microsoft documents, PowerPoint slide presentations, and Excel files.

www.openoffice.org

PC-decrapifier removes junk promotional files and unnecessary programs from new computers. Start out fresh.



Go to this address to see a list of what the program finds.

<http://pcdecrapifier.com/>



Convar's PC-Inspector File Recovery locates and recovers lost files. The program works with Windows XP and Vista.

The program supports the following file formats: ARJ AVI BMP CDR DOC DXF DBF XLS EXE GIF HLP HTML HTM JPG LZH and MID

<http://www.pcinspector.de/default.htm?language=1>



PC-Inspector Smart Recovery is designed to recover deleted photos from digital camera film cards.

Recover data from Flash Card™, Smart Media™, SONY Memory Stick™, IBM™ Micro Drive, Multimedia Card, Secure Digital Card or any other data carrier for digital cameras.

www.pcinspector.de/Sites/smart_recovery/info.htm?language=1



Secunia's **Personal Software Inspector** scans your computer

for insecure software programs. In addition it identifies end-of-life programs, and list all of your patched programs.

The program provides easy to use links that enable you to manually update your at risk software.

http://secunia.com/vulnerability_scanning/personal/

Picasa 3 is the latest version of this



very popular photo manager and editor. It offers even more easy to use features

including the ability to share uploaded albums with friends.

Play the video showing what is new at

<http://picasa.google.com/>

FastStone Photo Resizer

makes short work of resizing photo images to send to friends either in e-mail messages, documents, or as prints.



In addition, the program converts photos, renames, crops, rotates, changes color depth, adds text, and adds watermarks to single images or to batches of photos.

It is now possible to preview conversions before the changes are final.

<http://www.faststone.org/FSResizerDetail.htm>



Skype lets you make free phone calls from Skype-user to Skype-user via your computer, or to make low costs calls to landline standard phones. For computer to computer calls, a headset with microphone is required, or a video cam with built in microphone.

With a web cam, you can see your caller if they are also equipped with a web cam.

There is even a cellphone to cellphone plan. Go to the following site for more information.

Skype and similar services use the Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP). If you regularly have big long distance phone bills, take a look Skype's subscription rates. For example, unlimited calls in the US and Canada are \$2.95 per month to cellphones and landlines.

Similarly, Charter and Quest, and other broadband internet provides, offer bundles with VOIP services.

www.skype.com



Spamfighter is a popular spam locker for Outlook Express and Windows Mail. The program automatically filters spam and phishing messages. The

free version prints a small signature line at the end of your outgoing e-mail messages. Their web site offers a free version and a paid pro version with additional features.

www.spamfighter.com



Startup Inspector provides information to help you decide which programs are necessary at startup and which are not.

The application scans your computer and lists the programs that are asking permission to load at startup.

Except for your internet security program (antivirus, spyware, spam, firewall), very few programs are necessary at startup. Startup Inspector codes the programs it finds with the following codes. This makes it easier to decide which programs to uncheck.

Notice that only the starred items are required by your system.

It is amazing how many fewer problems you have, and how fast your computer starts after you pare down the list of programs that start whenever you start your computer.



Startup Inspector has a database of about 6300 programs. Thus, it may show many unknown programs. However, it still gives you useful information.

Remember, except for you internet security program almost all other programs are optional at startup. If you uncheck a program and find that you later want it to load at startup, just reopen *Startup Inspector* and check that item.

<http://www.windowsstartup.com/>

COMING ATTRACTIONS

Reviews of great software that is priced under \$100



New month, I will cover what I believe are some great software products priced under \$100.

Do comparison price shopping with www.pricegrabber.com and www.amazon.com. Use the power of the internet to keep your options high and your cost of software ownership low. Be sure to check for current rebates which may make the price you pay even lower. As example, look up *Photoshop Elements 7* at Amazon.com. Notice that they offer

both a discounted price for the product plus a rebate offer. The price after rebate at the time I looked was \$54.99 for those upgrading *PS Elements*.

SAMPLE REVIEW

Adobe Photoshop Elements 7 is a very popular photo editing and photo managing software package. It provides advanced editing functions for serious photographers. For instance it includes a clone tool and special effects like teeth brightening, making skies bluer, and a photo scene cleaner. *Photoshop Elements* provides tools that are not available in free photo editing packages, and provides many of the tools that are also part of the professional *Photoshop* package.

