

John's Ten Favorite Utility Programs

In the course of working with computers, there are certain tasks that are boring and repetitive to do. Most are related to maintenance of your computer. Below are my favorite utility programs that make life easier.

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I always tell clients to avoid downloading software from the Internet. But there are always exceptions to the rule, and my list of utility programs below are just too good to pass up. Better yet, all items in this list are free as of June, 2011.

#1: C-Cleaner

When it comes to maintaining your computer - cleaning up junk files, dead-end registry entries, or removing old software is generally not at the top of anyone's "fun" list. But at least this program makes it much easier. It is the Swiss Army Knife of utilities, combining a temp files, junk files, and cookie cleaner, plus a registry cleaner, and a software uninstaller that is faster than any others I have used. Download at <http://www.piriform.com/ccleaner> , no cost.

#2: Malwarebytes

If you need to rid your computer of spyware or malware, go to www.Malwarebytes.org and download their excellent spyware/malware remover. Fast, safe and effective, it removes spyware with just a quick scan. One caution: Malwarebytes is not a virus or worm remover, it is mainly effective against the typical spyware, scareware, or browser hijackers and pop-ups. You still need a good anti-virus program...

#3: Microsoft Security Essentials

Microsoft has done a great service for home-based users - a free anti-virus program. Download it from <http://www.microsoft.com/security/pc-security/mse.aspx> . Note that it is only an anti-virus scanner, you still need a spyware scanner. Additionally, MSE does not run in server-based domains, as it is intended for non-business home users.

#4: Sophos For Mac

Sophos, a London, UK based company has launched a free version of their excellent anti-virus scanner for Apple Mac users: www.sophos.com. Time was that Mac users did not need an anti-virus program, and Apple's official position is that anti-virus software is not needed. However, given recent reports of viruses on the Mac, it does not hurt to be prepared anyway.

#5: K-9 Web Content Filter

I recently heard from a fellow computer guy about K-9. This product is so good, I can hardly believe the publisher BlueCoat, Inc. gives it away. If you want to control web access by filtering out certain websites, this is the product for you. It can be considered a "cloud-based" service, as there is almost no software on your computer at home. All configuration is via the web, and the filtering is done on BlueCoat's servers. Easy to setup, you simply need to supply an email address to receive the activation codes. Once setup, you can filter by categories or specific web sites. <http://www1.k9webprotection.com/> . Free for home users, Paid version for businesses.

#6: Recuva

Also from the folks who created C-Cleaner, Recuva can un-delete files you accidentally erased or deleted. It works best if you install it prior to deleting files, so the sooner the better. It does a great job, and I have had about a 95% success rate. Install it now and be ready when the inevitable occurs. <http://www.piriform.com/recuva> Free for home users.

#7: Belarc System Advisor

If you need to know the details of your computer system, you need a program that can inventory what's installed, what license codes were used, how much RAM is installed, and so on. Belarc's excellent utility does all that and more – it can tell you what security updates are needed and can link to the updates directly. A great utility to keep your systems up-to-date. <http://belarc.com/>, free for home users.

#8: NetStumbler / InSSIDer

If your wireless network suffers from problems with weak signals, dropped connections or other maladies, you need to know more details about your signal, and other signals in the area. NetStumbler and InSSIDer both search out and list all wireless signals that reach your home or office and detail such things as channels used, and signal strength. From this information, you can adjust your own WiFi router to use a different channel, or re-orient it to a different place to optimize your signal strength. You will need to install these on a laptop or desktop that has a working Wireless adapter.

NetStumbler: <http://www.netstumbler.com/downloads/>

InSSIDer: <http://www.metageek.net/products/inssider/>

#9: SuperScan3, SuperScan4

Both versions of SuperScan help you out with network issues – they are great for finding and listing devices on your network. I find both to be handy to check for network printers that have “gone rogue”.

SuperScan 3: <http://www.mcafee.com/us/downloads/free-tools/superscan3.aspx>

SuperScan 4: <http://www.mcafee.com/us/downloads/free-tools/superscan.aspx>

#10: Open Office

While it is not really a utility program, I include Open Office because it can open nearly any spreadsheet or word document from any manufacturer, and can also save files in any format. Open Office also can be a direct replacement for Microsoft Office 2003 – and like everything else in my list, it's free. www.openoffice.org

Summary: Well, now the secrets are out. I use these programs daily to protect computers, troubleshoot problems, improve network operations, or just to cleanup junk and old programs on my PC's.

As always, if you have questions or comments, please call or email me, and Thank You for reading my newsletter!