

Utility software

Ontrack SystemSuite 4.0

Utility packages might not represent the most glamorous side of computer software, but we all know that PCs are prone to being more than just a little temperamental. It's therefore a good idea to have some tools at your disposal for when things inevitably go wrong. Utilities can also come in handy for speeding up older computers, and usually have several useful tricks up their sleeve to help your system run smoothly, efficiently and safely.

Ontrack's SystemSuite 4.0 labels itself as a 'complete solution for PC maintenance and security' and, with its army of over 50 tools and utilities for all manner of tweaks, improvements and protection against data loss or other nasties, it's easy to see why.

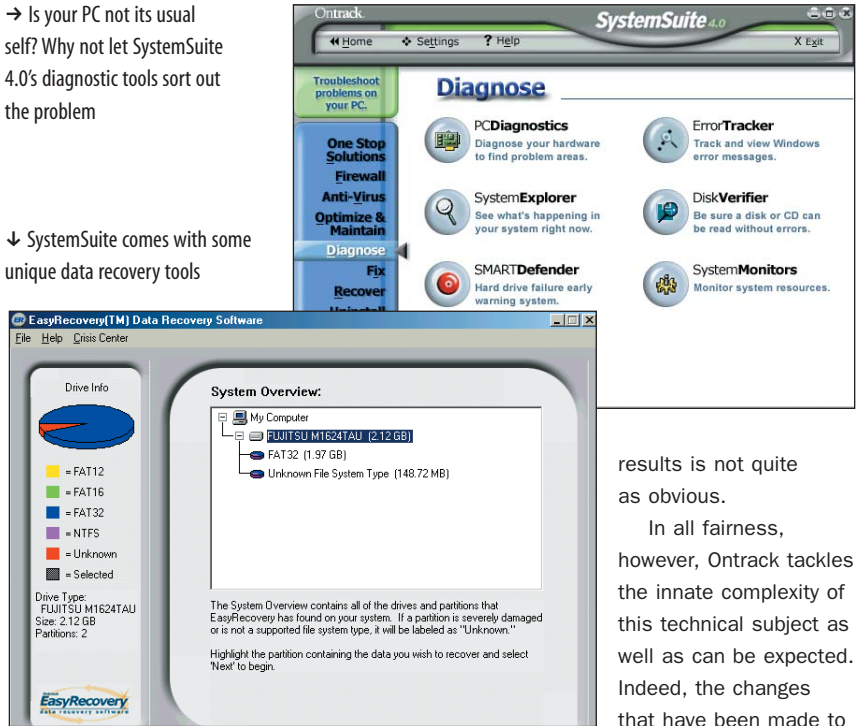
Ontrack'll fix it

What do you need to keep your PC ticking over nice and smoothly? Well, SystemSuite kicks things off with Fix-It Utilities as the main part of its central hub. This application is designed to maintain and improve the performance of your PC, see the full review on page 71. Also included in the package are VirusScanner Pro, CrashProof, EasyUninstall, Crisis Centre, DataEraser and, as an added bonus, PowerDesk Pro file manager.

Each program tackles its specialised area with aplomb, whether it's keeping your PC free of viruses, removing unwanted clutter from your hard disk or working to protect your applications

→ Is your PC not its usual self? Why not let SystemSuite 4.0's diagnostic tools sort out the problem

↓ SystemSuite comes with some unique data recovery tools



results is not quite as obvious. In all fairness, however, Ontrack tackles the innate complexity of this technical subject as well as can be expected. Indeed, the changes that have been made to the interface only serve

from a costly crash. More elaborate tools help you recover lost and corrupt data or permanently remove information from hard disks – both tasks that neither of SystemSuite's competitors (from McAfee and Symantec) can claim to be able to perform.

Version 4.0 sees the welcome addition of a personal firewall. NetDefense is a well-presented and easy-to-use program that runs in the background. It allows you to specify which programs are allowed access to the internet, while preventing intruders from accessing your PC from afar. In these days of unmetered web access, broadband and always-on connections, it's a wise move to have something like this on your side.

Easy PC

Ontrack hasn't ruined its intuitive and familiar approach, although even experienced computer users may find themselves baffled by certain areas. It's all very well running EasyUninstall to check if there are any redundant files floating around on your system, for example, but interpreting the

to improve such matters. Its customisable control panel arranges programs into logical categories by the kind of tasks that you might want to perform (diagnose and fix problems, optimise, recover data) and the layout of the instruction manual reflects this. Additionally, a one-stop solution section includes wizards to guide you through a variety of common problem-solving activities with a couple of clicks. Other improvements to SystemSuite 4.0 include the obligatory compatibility with Windows XP and an error tracker that keeps a useful log of any software problems that you might encounter, such as program crashes or freezes, and attempts to diagnose them.

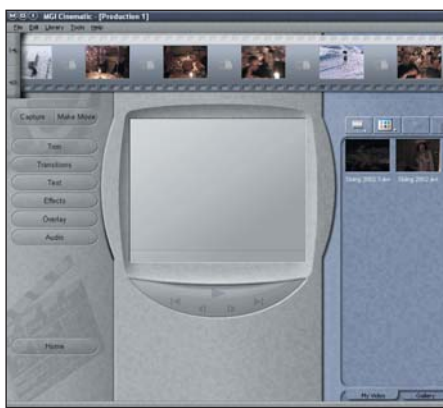
Verdict

Protection for your PC is a vital investment and SystemSuite 4.0 is certainly an impressive utilities package. With the recent addition of a personal firewall, SystemSuite has almost every eventuality covered. It's also well priced compared to other similar products, while offering you more for your money. ■

Jonathan Parkyn

Video-editing software

MGI Cinematic 1.1



↑ CineMagic creates professional looking movies, but for the best results you need to be a proficient camcorder user

It turned our amateur attempts into a professional-looking montage set to music.

Cinematic offers three paths to create your film – CineMagic, StoryBuilder and Work on your own. The latter needs little explanation – this basic video-editing tool allows you to create a film then add your own soundtrack, text, transitions and special effects.

CineMagic employs a drag-and-drop method to build stylish mini-movies. Simply select your video footage, add an audio track and decide what style of movie you want from the five options, which range from action to nostalgia. The software then analyses your footage, creates a film out of the best bits, and sets it all to your chosen music.

We were impressed by the resulting movies, but there are some frustrating elements to overcome – such as the need to provide movie footage that's twice the length of the audio you want. If your camera skills aren't up to much, then it's inevitable you'll end up with duff footage in the final film.

StoryBuilder is simpler still, and sets your footage to a template. You choose the theme – such as holiday or Christmas – and it adds titles and music. This is by far the easiest option, but also the cheesiest.

MGI's Cinematic 1.1 is designed to take the pain out of video editing, hiding the complexity of the process to leave even the most inexperienced user with a polished final movie. And it does just what it says on the box.

MGI Cinematic 1.1

System requirements: 500MHz Pentium III processor; Windows 98 SE/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 40MB hard disk space; min resolution of 1,024x768@16bit colour.

MGI: 0800 973 830
Website: www.mgieurope.com
Price: £34

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use							7			
Features						6				
Value for money								8		
Overall							7			

Verdict
Cinematic is a real beginner's tool, making editing and displaying video footage a breeze. But, by keeping it simple, what you can achieve is limited and you will soon find yourself looking to upgrade. ■

Ursula Tolaini

Video-editing software

CyberLink PowerDirector



↑ PowerDirector features a dial button to toggle between video, image, audio, production, capture and other modes

and some clever live Mpeg editing sets this package apart from the rest. You can tell by the low price and chunky interface that PowerDirector is aimed at the everyday PC user rather than the pretentious, amateur film-maker. It's all very clear and simple: your project library of media files is shown in a window on the left and there's a preview window and attribute dialog box on the right. By dragging media files to the iconised sequence strip across the bottom of the screen, you build your movie. To save you hunting through the menus, a dial button in the top right of the screen lets you switch between various modes such as playback, audio, video capture and so on.

Underneath this simplicity lies CyberLink's proprietary SVRT (smart video rendering technology). This saves you vast amounts of disk space when capturing, editing and processing your movies by keeping it all in Mpeg format from start to finish, rather than the more conventional approach of converting DV (digital video) to AVI format and then back again at the end. Unfortunately, what you save in disk space you may have to make up for in processing power: to capture video to Mpeg-1 you'll need a 700MHz Pentium III, and for Mpeg-2 you'll need a 1GHz machine at least. Another disappointment is the limitation of audio editing on a per-clip basis, with only one audio track available for stretching across an entire movie. But for under £60, you can't expect everything.

CyberLink PowerDirector

System requirements: 450MHz Pentium II processor (Pentium III or 4 for Mpeg-2); Windows 98/2000/Me/XP; 128MB RAM; 25MB hard disk space.

Thompson Partnership: 01889 564 601
Website: www.gocyberlink.com
Price: £60

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use								8		
Features						6				
Value for money								6		
Overall							6			

Verdict
PowerDirector's low-end feature set won't woo the more serious amateur video editor. Unfortunately, its high-end processing demands could put off entry-level users as well. ■

Alistair Dabbs

Desktop publishing software

Adobe InDesign 2.0 beta



Adobe originally launched InDesign in 1999 in a bid to challenge QuarkXPress as the professional designer's DTP (desktop publishing) package of choice. In the event, neither InDesign 1.0 or 1.5 failed to lure vast numbers of users away, but it could be a different story with InDesign 2.0.

See things clearly

The big news for designers is InDesign 2.0's transparency support. Just tug on the percentage slider in the Transparency palette, and any selected object gradually loses its opacity. Not only does this apply to filled vector shapes and rules you've drawn on the page, but placed EPS (encapsulated PostScript) graphics, live editable text and bitmap images. The edges of any of these page elements can be feathered and any object given a customisable soft-drop shadow.

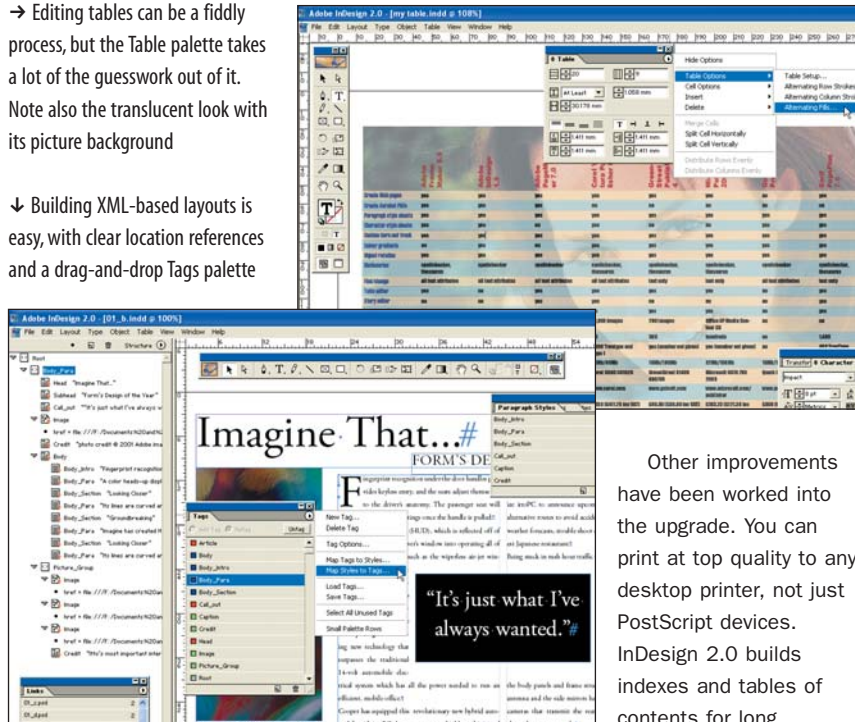
The support for cut-out images is impressive. InDesign makes use of the actual pixel transparency attributes of cut-outs with transparent backgrounds, rather than generating a clumsy clipping path. At last, you can drop cutouts of people with frizzy hair directly over other backgrounds right on the page rather than having to busk it all in Photoshop. In magazine design terms alone, this is nothing short of revolutionary.

Designing made easy

Another key new feature is the ability to create and work with tabular data. Instead

→ Editing tables can be a fiddly process, but the Table palette takes a lot of the guesswork out of it. Note also the translucent look with its picture background

↓ Building XML-based layouts is easy, with clear location references and a drag-and-drop Tags palette



Other improvements have been worked into the upgrade. You can print at top quality to any desktop printer, not just PostScript devices. InDesign 2.0 builds indexes and tables of contents for long documents. It can also

of providing a table tool as in QuarkXPress 5.0, InDesign 2.0 works with a floating Table palette that can create tables from any frame on the page. Tables are then edited by dragging on the row and column edges, spreadsheet-style, and cells merged and divided just as you might in a web design package.

You can even import tables from Word and Excel files, preserving the layout formatting on the way, or you can apply InDesign's own formatting options which includes row and column colour striping, dividing rules and rotated heading text rows. Of course, cells can contain text or pictures in any combination, which could make for some interesting layout potential.

In addition to these design features, Adobe has built in a clean approach to XML (extensible markup language) for repurposing standard layouts for print and electronic publishing. You'll still need the services of a skilled XML coder, but establishing the core XML-tagged layouts is just a matter of dragging and dropping from the Tags palette on to your pages. Linking tags to your document style sheets can also be done with a few clicks.

embed multipage document links, internet URLs and location anchors which are preserved when exporting to HTML (hypertext markup language) and PDF (portable document format). Even without XML, this means you can produce fully linked and referenced electronic documents from your original print layouts with no need for post-processing in a web design package or Adobe Acrobat.

Not least, the program offers many of Illustrator's drawing tools, beautiful typography, multistep gradient fills, multiple layers and support for 21 languages, including spelling and hyphenation dictionaries. To top it all, InDesign 2.0 runs much faster than it used to. This is an upgrade that even hardened QuarkXPress users will be crazy to ignore.

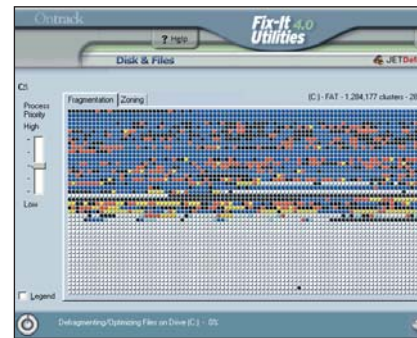
Verdict

More than an upgrade, InDesign 2.0 is a DTP revolution in itself. It offers improved performance, superb new design features and support for complete electronic documents including XML – and it's more than £250 cheaper than QuarkXPress. ■

Alistair Dabbs

Utility software

Ontrack Fix-It Utilities 4.0



↑ JetDefrag – one of Fix-It's programs – easily defragments your hard drive, but it's a little slow

They say that prevention is better than cure. If that's the case, then no PC should be without a system diagnosis and problem-solving utility suite. Similar to the offerings from McAfee and Symantec, Fix-It ensures your PC runs both better and faster. Armed with a battery of diagnostic tools, you can perform and schedule a whole raft of activities designed to maintain and improve performance. A full diagnostic check on our test machine soon revealed problems. Our recently fitted motherboard, for instance, didn't pass Fix-It's scathing scrutiny. Neither did our system's Registry, which also needed some attention.

Fix-It has always been a serious piece of kit and this latest version – with additional features like support for Windows XP, one-step wizards, clock synchronisation, Windows error message tracker and automatic update notification – is no exception.

The only feature that caused us concern was the clock synchronisation. This feature synchronises the PC clock with that of an atomic clock on the internet. We tried connecting to numerous time-servers worldwide, but found they would not communicate with our PC. After several attempts we managed to connect to a server in the UK and USA. Unfortunately, on synchronisation, both gave inaccurate readings of one hour in advance of the correct time.

Once you've got everything fixed and running correctly, the bundled virus scanner should keep you safe from malicious programs. Topping things off, there's PowerDesk – a Windows Explorer replacement.

Verdict

A must-have application that's brimming with diagnostic tools,

Ontrack Fix-It Utilities 4.0

System requirements: 486 PC (Pentium recommended); Windows 95/98/2000/Me/XP/NT; 16MB RAM; 60MB hard disk space.

Ontrack: 00800 1012 1314
Website: www.ontrack.co.uk
Price: £34

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use									8	
Features									7	
Value for money									9	
Overall									8	

Fix-It Utilities 4.0 will keep your system running smoothly and trouble free.

Fix-It, fortunately, proves that it takes more than defragmenting the hard drive to keep your PC in tip-top condition. ■

John Barnett

HTML authoring tool

Macromedia HomeSite 5.0



Visual web editors

are all very well, but there are times when you have to roll up your sleeves and hand-code your HTML (hypertext markup language).

WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) is a

rather loose term when applied to web pages, given that HTML was never really designed as a layout language. What you see, invariably, is not necessarily what you get and sometimes there's no alternative than to go in and tweak things by hand.

Of course, HTML is simply text so any basic text editor will do. Even the sparse Windows Notepad can be used (and sometimes is). However, for any reasonably sized project it's simply too basic. What you need is an editor that understands HTML, understands web page design and simplifies the task as much as possible, without interfering where it's not wanted.

HomeSite is one such product. What started as a shareware project by Nick Bradbury was later purchased by Allaire, and then taken on by Macromedia when it took over Allaire. Macromedia isn't new to HomeSite; as Dreamweaver users will know, it bundles a copy with it.

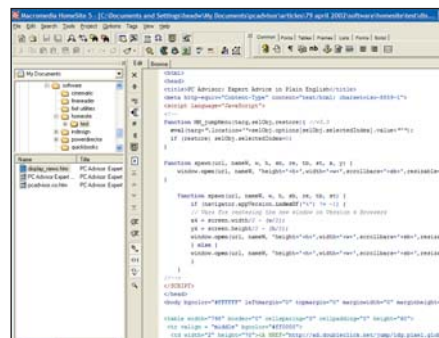
HomeSite's first advantage is that it knows HTML (plus other web languages) and any code you type is colour-coded. This makes it easier to see the layout and spot mistakes. As soon as you start typing a tag HomeSite recognises, the program offers possible options and will also add closing tags for you.

HomeSite also has an extensive Help section, giving details on options for various tags. Automated tools like CodeSweeper and Link Verification make sure your pages are correct and up to date.

Verdict

Although the changes to 5.0 aren't spectacular, if you're after a simple and intuitive HTML editor, HomeSite is an excellent choice. It doesn't do much automatically, but that isn't necessarily a bad thing. ■

Will Head



↑ Macromedia HomeSite 5.0 colour-codes HTML and other code for you, so you can easily see what's what

Macromedia HomeSite 5.0

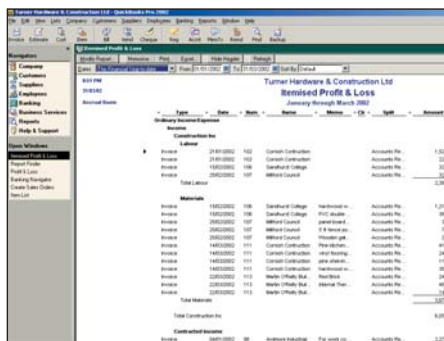
System requirements: Pentium II processor; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP/NT 4.0; 64MB RAM; 40MB hard disk space.

Macromedia: 01344 458 600
Website: www.macromedia.co.uk
Price: £67

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use									9	
Features									9	
Value for money									9	
Overall									9	

Small business accounting software

QuickBooks & QuickBooks Pro 2002



↑ QuickBooks's financial analysis and reporting capabilities allow you to track profit and loss per customer

QuickBooks and QuickBooks Pro from Intuit share many of the same design goals – principally ease of setup and use – as the popular personal finance package Quicken. An Interview Wizard takes

you through the setup process for your business accounts, offering lots of explanations and warnings to simplify a potentially complicated process.

Once QuickBooks is up and running, flowcharts and templates help to lessen the workload involved in running a business. As we all know, accurate records and VAT tracking are essential if you want to simplify encounters with the tax or VAT man, as well as make a profit. QuickBooks doesn't just manage your accounts: it now handles credit card transactions, managing small numbers of transactions easily and cheaply.

Invoices can be emailed with a link that integrates into the QuickBooks credit card service, encouraging earlier payment of bills. Financial analysis and reporting also helps you get paid faster by providing a clear picture of cashflow. Payroll can be integrated using an online subscription service provided by Intuit.

As to the differences between the two packages, Pro has extra facilities for sales order processing, delivery notes, multicurrency dealings, integration with ACT and Microsoft Word and Excel. This is useful for time management, better looking forms and more elaborate analysis. Pro also includes more tools for estimating, time and job costing, and comes in a five-user version with full audit trailing and access controls.

Intuit QuickBooks & QuickBooks Pro 2002

System requirements: 166MHz Pentium processor; Windows 95/98/2000/Me/XP/NT 4.0; 32MB RAM; 145MB hard disk space.

Intuit: 0845 606 2164

Website: www.quickbooks.co.uk

Price: QuickBooks 2002 £111, QuickBooks 2002 Pro £213, QuickBooks 2002 Pro (five-user) £677

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use									7		
Features									8		
Value for money									8		
Overall									8		

Verdict

QuickBooks and QuickBooks Pro are mature and stable packages. They are capable, flexible and offer lots of help – both in the programs and online. A good choice for small businesses in need of financial organisation. ■

Andrew Doran

Optical character recognition software

Abbyy FineReader Pro 5.0

OCR (optical character recognition) is the process of turning a printed page into editable text. FineReader's Scan and Read Wizard is the quick way to get going. Pop a page in a scanner and the



↑ FineReader complements high OCR accuracy with automatic page 'zoning', spell checking and text editing

software interprets and translates its contents with zero intervention. The finished page may then be exported into Word, Excel or Internet Explorer, or saved as a PDF (portable document format) file. Alternatively, you can use OCR on an existing image file. FineReader supports BMP, Jpeg and TIF formats, but balks at resolutions of less than 300dpi (dots per inch).

As you'd expect, the clearer, bolder and bigger the typeface on the source material, the better the results. Under optimal conditions, we were impressed with FineReader's abilities. Its built-in spellchecker homes in on suspect misreadings, and the integrated text editor lets you tweak and perfect the text as you work. Top marks, then, for accuracy and ease.

Like other OCR programs in this class, FineReader attempts to preserve columns, text blocks and precise page layouts. This may not matter a great deal – in many cases, you'll be content with not having to retype the source material – and perhaps it's just as well: FineReader certainly stumbled in our tests. However, it's not alone in this, and we've yet to see an OCR program that can perfectly replicate a complex page.

Nice touches include batch conversion (OCR translation of lots of pages) and support for over 100 languages. Abbyy has also released a fully fledged Mac version of FineReader Pro 5.0. It's just a shame about the £25 price difference.

Abbyy FineReader Pro 5.0

System requirements: 133MHz Pentium processor; Windows 95/98/2000; 32MB RAM; 90MB hard disk space; Twain-compliant scanner; Internet Explorer 4.0.

Abbyy: 01279 323 766

Website: www.abbyy.co.uk

Price: £60

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use									8		
Features									8		
Value for money									9		
Overall									8		

Verdict

OCR software tends to promise more than it delivers. That said FineReader Pro 5.0, is an adept, attractive and affordable alternative to better-known brands like OmniPage and Presto. ■

Kyle MacRae