

Internet security software

BitDefender Professional 6.5 and Norton Internet Security 2003

With the growing popularity of broadband, an increasing number of PC users are spending more time online. Couple this with a rise in reports of new viruses, including password-stealing programs, and the idea of installing some kind of internet security software makes sense. With packages starting at under £30 there really is no excuse for leaving your PC unprotected; allowing access to your private data could cost a lot more.

The latest products offering their services are BitDefender Professional edition and the 2003 release of Norton Internet Security. Along with antivirus components both offer firewall facilities, privacy options and other features that aim to keep your system safe.

BitDefender Professional 6.5

Hailing from Romania, BitDefender Professional bills itself as an antivirus and personal firewall solution. The software comprises six modules: the oddly named Murphy Shield, BitDefender Live, Quarantine, Scheduler, BitDefender P2P and Shell Extension. Most of its functions are accessed through the Murphy Shield application.

After a speedy installation BitDefender logs on and ensures you've got the most up-to-date virus definitions. Once it's finished you're free to adjust the various settings – by default the system is set to medium protection. This is particularly recommended if you use the web through a LAN (local area network), as privacy and internet content filters are disabled but everything else is in place.

This fairly painless procedure sets up adequate protection for your PC. The firewall blocks unauthorised access to your data, while incoming emails and removable media are scanned. You can even visit most websites without Bit Defender bombarding you with questions. The full path and filename of any programs that require a web connection are usefully displayed, making it easy to decide whether they should be allowed access or not. In addition, the list of applications granted entry can be examined and reconfigured at any time.

→ Controlling which applications have internet access is easy with BitDefender

↓ BitDefender's interface is clear and easy to use



Crank up BitDefender to its high protection setting and things become much more intrusive. With the Active Content filter enabled, visiting anything other than a basic website becomes a pain. You'll need to go through this for just about every link you click on. However, if you want the highest level of protection this is the only way.

Perhaps even more annoying, especially for home users, are prompts that ask about specific IP (internet protocol) addresses rather than site names. Unless you know what these are, it could lead to confusion.

One thing that doesn't confuse is BitDefender's interface. SoftWin has done its best to make options as clear as possible and every feature is easy to configure. This is partly because many options are simple clickable checkboxes, but it's also down to a sensible layout. We'd like to see more detail on cookies, though – for example, creation and last access dates. Interestingly, however, in a few of our tests some items appeared in our cookie folder even when cookie blocking was switched on.

While most functions are configured through Murphy Shield, a separate BitDefender Professional program



provides more antivirus features. From here you can choose the type of data scanned, perform a test on drives and files, set up a schedule

for regular checks and generally tweak options to suit your requirements.

Should a virus get on to your system BitDefender can either delete, cure or move it to quarantine for further inspection. The Live module ensures virus definitions are updated regularly and offers a unique self-repair facility that can download clean bits of BitDefender if it becomes corrupted – a smart move. BitDefender also keeps an eye on the behaviour of programs, allowing it to detect potential viruses before they are formally identified.

This Professional edition includes the P2P module, which detects viruses sent over popular peer-to-peer chat systems such as ICQ, MSN Messenger, NetMeeting and Yahoo Messenger. Sadly it doesn't work with AIM (AOL Instant Messenger), one of the most popular chat applications in our experience.

Norton Internet Security 2003



Designed as a complete internet security suite, Symantec's latest Norton offering includes spam filters and an ad blocker as well as traditional antivirus and firewall facilities. While junk mail and pop-ups aren't really

a security risk they can be incredibly annoying, so these protection features are welcomed with open arms.

We've reviewed plenty of Norton packages, including AntiVirus (January 03) and Personal Firewall (February 03), and both work in a similar way to their BitDefender counterparts. The firewall offers users three preset levels of security, with custom settings if you prefer, and lets you set internet access rights for each program on your system.

In use, Norton's default settings are slightly less intrusive than BitDefender's with automatic rules for applications such as Internet Explorer and Outlook.

Intrigued by our experience with BitDefender's cookie blocker, we discovered again that even with the privacy options set to block all cookies some items still appeared in the Windows' Cookie folder. The only way we stop cookies appearing was by tweaking Internet Explorer's own security settings.

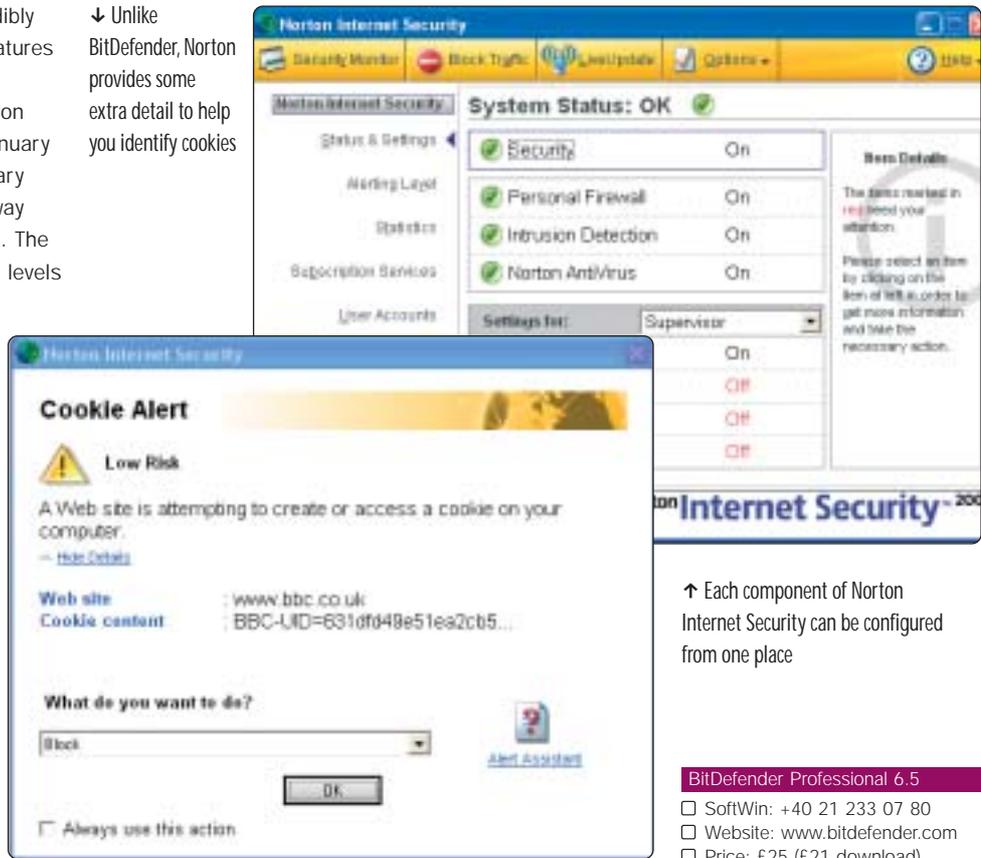
Further investigation revealed that in these programs 'block' means to stop the cookie functioning properly, rather than keep it out of the system. The only way to stop them completely is to use your browser.

Norton's privacy filter adds extra security by monitoring things such as credit card numbers, address details and so on, though in practice this can cause problems with registration and shopping online. As with BitDefender, the firewall becomes more intrusive as you increase security. You can put it on an automated setting, have it give you full alerts or opt for an in-between setting. Certainly for home users there's no reason to move from the recommended options.

In terms of its virus protection features Norton is superb as usual, with straightforward options and controls that are accessible from either the firewall or antivirus modules. Both incoming and outgoing email are scanned along with any drives and, like BitDefender, this program looks for unusual application behaviour to track down unknown viruses. Symantec's application can't automatically repair itself like BitDefender, but the Live Update feature keeps virus definitions and applications up to date.

The 2003 version of Antivirus includes protection for instant messengers – MSN, AIM and Yahoo are supported.

↓ Unlike BitDefender, Norton provides some extra detail to help you identify cookies



↑ Each component of Norton Internet Security can be configured from one place

BitDefender Professional 6.5

- SoftWin: +40 21 233 07 80
- Website: www.bitdefender.com
- Price: £25 (£21 download)

System requirements

Pentium processor; Windows 9x/Me/NT/2000/XP; 32MB RAM; 20MB hard disk space.

Ease of use



Features



Value for money



Overall rating



Norton Internet Security 2003

- Symantec: 01628 592 393
- Website: www.symantec.co.uk
- Price: £43

System requirements

150MHz Pentium; 48MB RAM (98/Me); 64MB (2000); 300MHz Pentium II and 128MB RAM (XP); 90MB hard disk space; Internet Explorer 5.01 or later.

Ease of use



Features



Value for money



Overall rating



In terms of its interface Norton Internet Security is more complex than BitDefender, though this is down to the number of options available. Settings are easily changed and different user profiles can be set if the PC is shared. Other security options, such as ad blocking and spam filtering, take seconds to configure with preset and recommended settings given. The 2003 suite also includes a parental control option to stop minors accessing inappropriate material. In our tests it worked well for surfing unsuitable sites but it doesn't tackle image searches in Google or AltaVista.

Verdict

With security more important than ever it's good to find that BitDefender Professional and Norton Internet Security provide a high level of protection at little cost. What's more, these programs are easy to configure and offer automatic virus definition updates. However, many of the features are available either in Windows XP, Internet Explorer or ZoneAlarm – the last two applications being free.

While BitDefender is cheaper, Norton Internet Security 2003 offers better value as a more rounded package suitable to both home and small business users. ■

Chris Cain

Interactive image creation software Scalado ImageZoom Pro 2.0



ImageZoom will appeal to web designers who wish to create interactive images that, as the name suggests, can be zoomed into. At its simplest, you load high-resolution images into ImageZoom and divide them into sections that can be enlarged when clicked on, along with transition effects between multiple images. This is useful if you wish users to view an object in an online shop, for example. For such general tasks the program is easy to use. It is the sort of thing you could do in Flash or Java (both formats that ImageZoom can export to) but it would involve specialist programming and the effects would probably be more erratic.

ImageZoom does, however, have a quirky interface. Dialog boxes appear to have been designed as an afterthought and offer potentially confusing choices. We were also disappointed to see that Flash output is locked. This is understandable – Scalado is protecting its code – but the impressive effects would be even better if they could be imported into Flash for further fine-tuning.

The Professional version includes database support, indicating its intended audience in e-commerce: click on a hotspot and dynamic details can be brought up on the web page. This is for experts only, however, as you receive limited help for setting up an online database to use with your files. ImageZoom is also hungry for memory, so ensure your PC is up to scratch.

Verdict

ImageZoom does its job well, but its interface is sometimes inelegant and the Professional version is only for experienced web designers. For other users who may like to experiment with interactive images, a standard version is available for £49 (download) or £69 (boxed). ■

Jason Whittaker

Scalado ImageZoom Pro 2.0

- Scalado: +46 46 286 4250
- Website: www.scalado.com
- Price: £269, £239 download

System requirements

400MHz Pentium II; Windows 9x/Me/NT/2000/XP; 256MB RAM; 50MB hard disk space.

Ease of use



Features



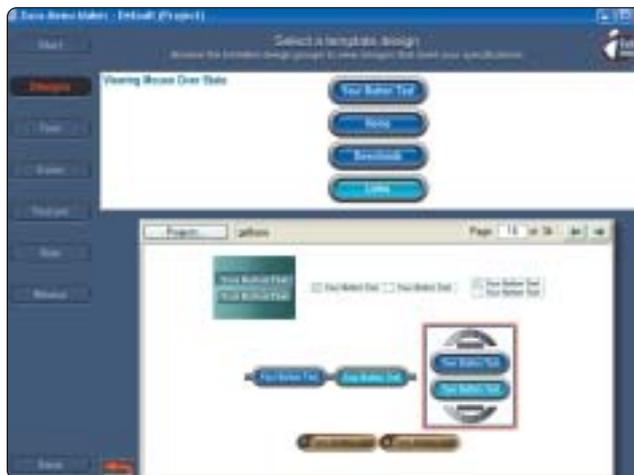
Value for money



Overall rating



Web design software Xara Menu Maker 1.0



Menu Maker is a bit of a one-trick pony, but concentrates on performing that trick well: creating dynamic menus for a website. Unlike ImageZoom, this program takes a wizard-driven approach to creating graphical menus that incorporate JavaScript and DHTML (dynamic hypertext markup language) effects such as cascading options and transparency.

At first glance this approach appears slightly restrictive – Xara includes dozens of templates, for example, but these cannot suit all websites. At each stage, however, you have a dialog box that allow you to tweak just about everything in a menu (including loading your own graphic designs). You will need to try things out, though, as the default graphics are rather fussy.

Menu Maker does pretty much everything it says on the tin and, if you are willing to experiment with various designs, you can create extremely sophisticated effects. Experienced users can also load the created script files into a text editor for further fine-tuning, while the program integrates with Dreamweaver and FrontPage.

Verdict

Anyone involved in web design on a regular basis will find Menu Maker a welcome addition to their design software outfit. If you are an experienced professional, don't be put off by Xara's user-friendly interface: this is a program that allows you to manipulate just about every aspect of your files. If you only intend to create one website, £20 is a little expensive, otherwise Menu Maker is highly recommended. ■

Jason Whittaker

Xara's wizard-driven approach makes creating dynamic menus a breeze

Xara Menu Maker 1.0

- Xara: 01442 350 000
- Website: www.xara.com
- Price: \$29 (approx £20)

System requirements

Pentium processor; Windows 9x/Me/NT/2000/XP; 64MB RAM; 21MB hard disk space.

Ease of use



Features



Value for money



Overall rating



Email/web-content filtering system SurfControl Web & E-mail Filter 4.5

It's clear from the off that SurfControl is aimed at the business rather than consumers. Options to install either SMTP (simple mail transport protocol) or Exchange 5.5 email filtering are not likely, nor intended, to enamour the average Windows user. Moreover, the maker recommends that SurfControl is installed between an internet firewall and a dedicated email server. Translation: this is not a program for the little people. If, on the other hand, you're an IT administrator and regularly find yourself neck-deep in users' nefarious network activities, then SurfControl could fit your company's core-values mission statement.

Big brother's watching

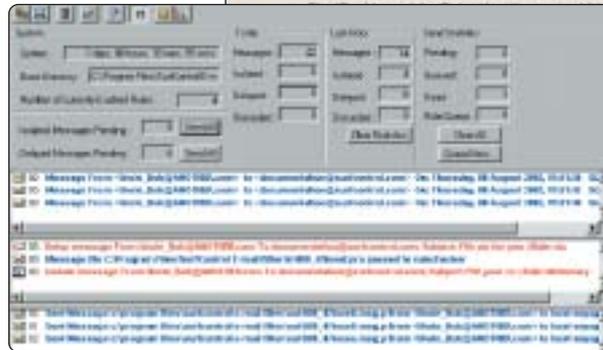
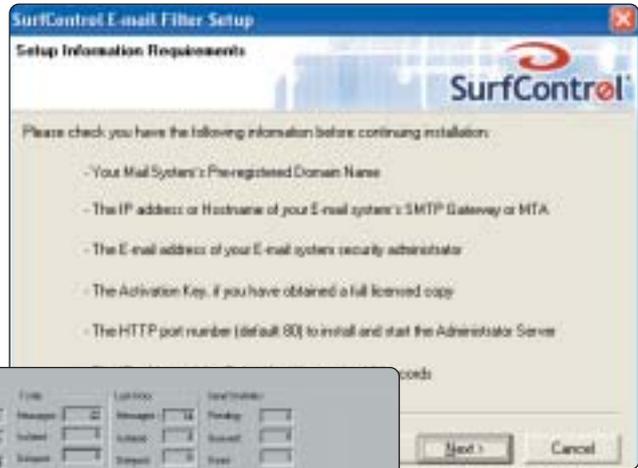
The complete SurfControl system comprises both email- and web-filtering tools, but for this review we're focusing purely on the messaging side of things. With a £6,240 price tag for the typical target market (500 or more users) a phased installation is likely anyway and, with both moral and legal concerns in mind, most companies consider monitoring staff's email usage paramount.

From a network administrator's point of view, SurfControl's installation is straightforward. As mentioned, the step-by-step process begins by offering the option of SMTP or Exchange 5.5 integration, with subsequent screens serving as a reminder of the program's corporate credentials. If phrases like 'IP address of the Relay Host if not using MX records' make you dizzy, you're probably out of your depth. However, few technical types will need to pause for breath in order to finish the job.

Depending on your company's gameplan, though, the post-setup configuration could take a whole lot longer. It's not unknown for firms to serve up to their staff half-baked email-filtering (or 'acceptable use') policies the moment a message-monitoring tool like SurfControl is installed. But people are understandably opposed to being snooped on so the developers of this program suggest that, to keep a happy office, a period of discreet observation of company email traffic is in order. To facilitate this, SurfControl's Real Time Monitor window allows an appointed administrator to indulge in some electronic eavesdropping.

Once a message profile has been ascertained and allowable content determined, work can begin on defining the filtering rules. An acceptable-use policy might forbid the use

→ Administrators prepare, others beware with SurfControl



← SurfControl's Real Time Monitor allows an administrator to snoop on co-workers' emails

of the company email system for non work-related messages. To enforce this, SurfControl's Rules Administrator could be instructed, for example, to prevent the passing on of emails containing repeated strings of the '>' character – a telltale sign of email humour that's been forwarded from worker to worker.

Of course, in a large organisation a one-size-fits-all approach to email filtering is unlikely to work. For example, some departments in a pharmaceutical research company involved in field trials with patients testing a new impotence remedy might find it impossible to operate with an email system designed to filter out messages containing ostensibly 'rude' words. To counter this, SurfControl administrators can deploy a Virtual Learning Agent. This forces SurfControl's rules to consider context when filtering: words and phrases that in isolation appear to violate a policy might prove innocent when checked against the Virtual Learning Agent's database.

Verdict

If you're in the market for a company-wide email-filtering system then any one recommendation is likely to warrant little more than a checkbox tick in a wider feasibility study. Even so, in our view, SurfControl is worthy of a positive mark – so add it to the list of maybes. ■

Scott Colvey

SurfControl Web & E-mail Filter 4.5

- SurfControl: 01260 296 200
- Website: www.surfcontrol.com
- Price: £12.48 per install, based on 500 users

System requirements

600MHz Pentium III; Windows NT4 (with SP 6a)/2000 Server (with SP2)/2000 Advanced Server (with SP2); 256MB RAM; 1GB hard disk space; MDAC 2.5 (with SP1); TCP/IP & internet/external DNS configured and email system with SMTP or MTA.

Ease of use



Features



Value for money



Overall rating



Email software

Eudora for Windows 5.2

Qualcomm's Eudora for Windows 5.2 concentrates on the ever-rising tide of unsolicited and malicious email, otherwise known as spam, which accounts for close to a fifth of the 20 billion emails sent each day. This extra surge in messages is irritating for all users. Not only do we pay increased access charges to service providers, but we also have to deal with emails that range from irritating and offensive to, in the case of malicious viruses, downright destructive.

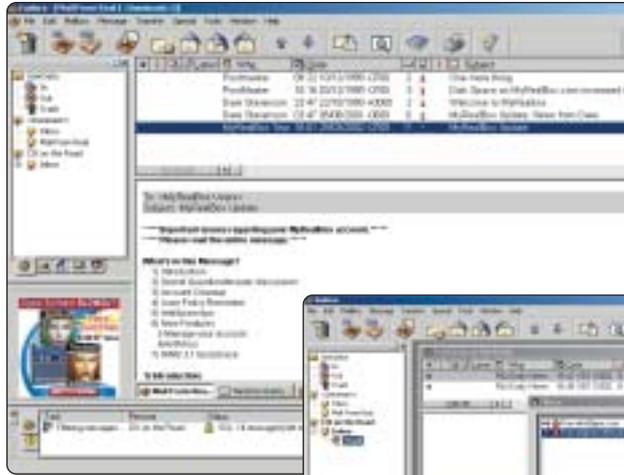
Eudora 5.2 isn't a magic bullet but it does have a host of measures that can be deployed to reduce spam. The two notable new features are Kerberos, a secure authentication protocol, and more sophisticated filtering options so you can easily sift out the messages you want to read.

Kerberos is uninteresting for most home and small business users but is widely used in large organisations which can now add Eudora to their list of supported email applications. Kerberos support also benefits employees who need to connect with their company mail server from remote locations. Eudora supports several other secure authentication and encryption methods for collecting and exchanging email.

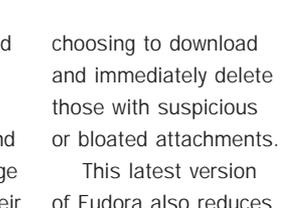
Put the rubbish out

The application's updated filter system enables you to consign spam to trash while prioritising important personal and business emails. Though you can subscribe to services which prefilter mail for spam, there's a chance a vital message might be discarded without your knowing. Setting up local filtering yourself avoids this problem at the expense of a little extra work. Eudora's spam filters compare names, email addresses and even nicknames against your address book or any subset of contact addresses you have created. Filtered messages from business contacts or family and friends can then be directed to the main inbox or subfolders, colour-coded if desired.

Eudora 5.2 gives you full control over message collection, allowing you to download all emails or email headers (with subject, address and sender details). You can also restrict the size of attachments that will be downloaded on first collection. These refinements help avoid downloading infected emails and reduce download times when collecting mail while away from base. You can inspect messages before



← Eudora 5.2 offers SSL encryption for your email message – if your ISP supports it, that is



choosing to download and immediately delete those with suspicious or bloated attachments.

This latest version of Eudora also reduces the risks associated with malicious and virus-infected emails by avoiding the security flaws in Outlook Express or Outlook which make them so attractive to unsavoury characters in the first place. It's hard to switch once you have been using an email application for a while but Eudora tries and mostly succeeds in being helpful – it can import messages and addresses from Outlook 98 and 2000; Outlook Express 4.0 and 5.0; and Netscape Messenger 4.73 and 6.0 on Windows.

There is a learning curve, but Eudora is fairly easy to set up and use, the interface is uncluttered and the Setup Wizard can help you import your settings from an existing mail account to get started.

Eudora is available as a 6MB download and can be used in any one of three modes. The cut-down Light version and the fully featured, ad-sponsored version (shown above) are both free. The ad-free version costs \$39.95 (about £26) direct from the Eudora website or can be ordered on CD from the UK agent, Soft&Net, for approximately £47. A Macintosh version is also available.

Verdict

Eudora successfully combines immense flexibility and reasonable email security with a friendly interface. If you can live with the adverts, it's also free. ■



↑ Filter known spam direct to trash with a few clicks on the mouse

Eudora for Windows 5.2

- Soft&Net UK: 0870 787 2126
- Website: www.eudora.com
- Price: approx £47, \$39.95 (£26) download

System requirements

Pentium-class processor; Windows 95/98/NT/2000/Me/XP; 10MB hard disk space; internet email account (POP or IMAP); access via modem or network.

Ease of use



Features



Value for money



Overall rating



Terence Green