Antivirus protection and internet security tool

McAfee VirusScan 7.0 (2003) and Firewall 4.0 (2003)

Traversing the internet's highways and byways unguarded is a foolhardy endeavour. What with new viruses appearing daily and any number of unscrupulous individuals attempting to gain access to every net-connected computer they find, the web is a hazardous environment to explore undefended. It is therefore a good idea to invest in some protection, such as an antivirus application – to ward off electronic infections – and a firewall program designed to act as a shield against hack attacks. If you are a safety-conscious surfer, in the market for such armaments, then McAfee has two new offerings to tempt you: VirusScan 7.0 and Firewall 4.0.

Both these programs have many loyal users who want to upgrade. So what is to be found in these '2003' editions? To be frank, not a whole lot – as with most applications approaching maturity.
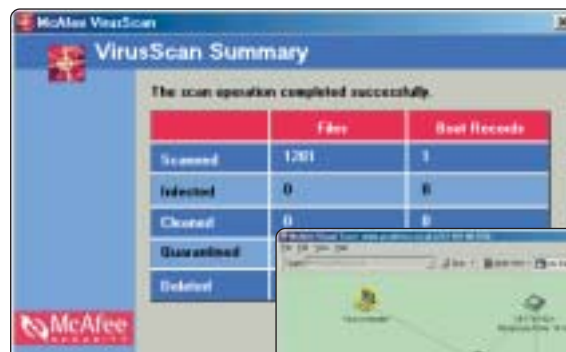
VirusScan 7.0

The key improvement to VirusScan is Hostile Activity Watch Kernel (Hawk, for short). In English, this means that it is on alert for signs of modern viruses, such as double file extensions and mass-mailing activities. Also new is Script Stopper, which is designed to spot the hallmarks of viruses like the infamous I Love You strain and halt them in their tracks. Only time can tell whether these features will find success; virus-detecting techniques are only ever as intelligent as the last outbreak.

Other than that, VirusScan is as before: straightforward protection against electronic infections. The program can be scheduled to regularly perform full file and system checks, while the Instant Updater feature ensures virus information is always up to date. A year's worth of virus information is included, after which you can purchase an additional year for £3.40, which is extremely good value compared to the competition.

Paranoid PDA users will be pleased to know that VirusScan 7.0 extends to palms. Whenever you synchronise, your pocket pal will be inspected for contagions.

Firewall 4.0

Firewall 4.0's improvements are more visible. On installation, the program scans various aspects of the host computer, looking for security holes. It also treats users to a visual trace of given domains, including those classed as hack attacks.

The graphical aspect of this may be gloss but the underlying application provides a useful insight into the internet. McAfee also bows to the growing popularity of home networking by including specific protection for locally connected computers.

In operation, VirusScan and Firewall are virtually identical. Their browser-like interfaces are mirror images, so master one and the other is tamed, too. Assuming the programs do their job well, you'll rarely need to look at their workings; they are both intended to function straight out of the box.

Even so, there will be times when interaction is required. Firewall 4.0 allows for tweaking, with every single aspect of its net-traffic-filtering capability being customisable. Unfortunately, the whys and hows aren't always clear. For example, while the program allows users to set up rules to control port usage, there is little guidance on how to do so: either you know what you are doing, or you'll have to rely on Firewall's defaults to maintain your security. On the plus side, the 'Block all' button provides one-hit emergency reassurance that all net activity has been halted. If you detect suspicious goings-on, this provides you with the ability to act first and ask questions later.

Verdict

These two products work hand in hand to protect users from the internet's nefarious aspects, and they do a commendable job. However, while all improvements are welcome, existing McAfee application users will find little incentive to upgrade. ■

Scott Colvey

← VirusScan reports its findings: all clear on this occasion

↓ Firewall 4.0's Visual Trace mode tracks down the intruder

VirusScan 7.0 (2003)

☐ McAfee: 08000 927 160
☐ Website: www.mcafeeathome.com
☐ Price: £26

System requirements

100MHz Pentium; Windows 98/Me/Pro/2000/XP; 32MB RAM; 55MB hard disk space.

Ease of use

Features

Value for money

Overall rating

Firewall 4.0 (2003)

☐ McAfee: 08000 927 160
☐ Website: www.mcafeeathome.com
☐ Price: £21

System requirements

100MHz Pentium; Windows 98/Me/Pro/2000/XP; 32MB RAM; 30MB hard disk space.

Ease of use

Features

Value for money

Overall rating

Utility software
Norton SystemWorks 2003

Another year, another fresh release of SystemWorks. Many of us raised on flaky Windows 95, 98 or Me machines will have had cause to be grateful to SystemWorks for saving the day in the past, but does the suite still merit a place on a Windows XP system?

The program interface has been carried over virtually unchanged from 2002, with the utility modules grouped together under four headings – Norton Utilities, Norton AntiVirus, Norton CleanSweep and Web Tools – along with a rather uninspiring Extra Features section. Each section expands to reveal a subset of related components. We won't dwell upon the AntiVirus component here because it is reviewed in depth on page 78, suffice it to say that it integrates smoothly with the 'feel' of the suite and, sensibly, comes with full antivirus protection measures enabled by default.

Saving days
Taking centre stage in the control console is a confidence-building One Button Checkup that runs through a quick series of exploratory scans on demand. But the real lynchpin in SystemWorks is, as always, Norton Utilities, a collection of seven system maintenance utilities.

Two of these – Speed Disk and Disk Doctor – essentially duplicate and enhance Windows' own Disk Defragmenter and Scan Disk (or, in the case of XP, Chkdsk); and a third, UnErase Wizard, is little more than a super-safe Recycle Bin. It is also a tad superfluous given that SystemWorks ships with Roxio GoBack, a powerful disaster recovery program that lets you 'roll back time' to restore critical system settings and/or recover files and folders.

In short, you really don't need both GoBack and UnErase Wizard protecting your files from accidental mishap. GoBack, incidentally, duplicates and (significantly) enhances the System Restore utility built into Windows Me and XP.

By contrast, the fourth Utilities module, Wipe Info, is a file shredder that can permanently delete sensitive information from your computer. Set the number of 'wipes' – that is, how many times a file is overwritten with fresh, meaningless data – to suit your personal paranoia.

Second opinion
So far, so good. But when it comes to WinDoctor, a heavy-duty diagnostic program, we really must pick a few nits. On the first scan it identified some 176 'problems' with our (perfectly functional) computer. Close inspection revealed that these were mainly broken shortcuts, invalid ActiveX references and a whole heap of Registry errors. At such a juncture all you need is a quick fix, so we duly hit the Repair All button. WinDoctor spruced up the Registry in no time but then left us with two apparently intractable issues.

The first, we think, (WinDoctor was none too clear on the matter) involved a missing icon required by a PowerQuest program. Lost for a solution, we instructed WinDoctor to ignore this error in future scans. This did the trick in a head-in-the-sand kind of way, but it hardly felt like the problem had been solved.

The second, seemingly more serious, problem was a stark alert: 'c:\winnt\System32\mapis rvr.exe cannot access a necessary file gapi32.dll'. WinDoctor was stumped, and so were we, until we consulted the Microsoft Knowledgebase: "This error message is falsely reported by WinDoctor in most cases. If there are no problems with Windows or any programs, you can safely ignore the message." We followed up with a search on Symantec's own support website and this
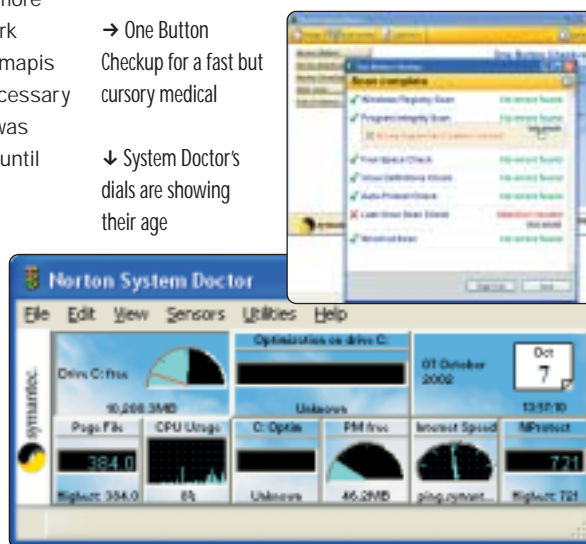
was confirmed: "This appears to be a problem with WinDoctor, and not with the Microsoft files mentioned. It is probably safe to simply ignore the problems so WinDoctor will not keep detecting them."

What is galling here is not so much that WinDoctor is fallible but that this particular error was identified as far back as 2001 and has still not been addressed.

Equally frustrating, in our opinion, is the System Information module. Why, for instance, is it necessary to identify a P4 processor as a "Genuine Intel Family 15 Model 1 1.6"; or Windows XP Home edition as "5.1 (Build 2600)"? This kind of techno-babble is simply meaningless to the average person, especially if you are using System

← SystemWorks has a familiar, logical interface

↓ Virus and program updates are automatic with LiveUpdate

→ One Button Checkup for a fast but cursory medical

↓ System Doctor's dials are showing their age

Information for its avowed purpose of finding out something useful about your computer. Why, too, did the program fail to recognise our USB mouse ("Mouse Not Present" indeed!) and get our monitor's resolution and colour depth settings hopelessly wrong? Our confidence was fast evaporating.

The final component in Utilities is System Doctor, a configurable panel of sensors and alerts that keeps a watchful eye over your computer's every move and warns of potential trouble. It is intriguing for, oh, about five minutes and might be useful as a diagnostic tool in the event of a real problem, but again it could sorely use a crash-course in plain English.

Good housekeeping

Next up is the CleanSweep section. For the uninitiated, CleanSweep monitors new program installations so that you can backup, restore and cleanly delete these programs later. However, there is no great need for such an approach if software abides by the standard Windows install/uninstall routines, which is the norm with XP-compliant programs.
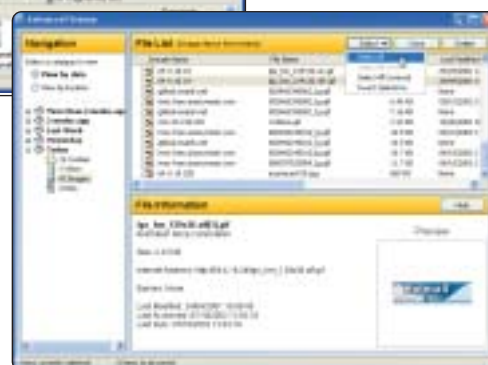
What struck us first as curious and then as downright careless was the inclusion of Internet Cache and Cookie Cleanup modules in the CleanSweep section. These are undeniably useful utilities but both then appear again (in a slightly different form, but to exactly the same effect) in the very next section, Web Tools. True, CleanSweep includes additional modules for removing ActiveX components and plug-ins, both of which are absent from Web Cleanup, the main module in Web Tools; but Web Cleanup offers far greater control over the cleaning process and is certainly our module of choice. Quite frankly, such duplication and fragmentation of resources is messy and unnecessary. Moreover, Internet Explorer allows you to carry out such housework without the need for any external tools.

The second module in Web Tools is the imaginatively entitled Connection Keep Alive. This simple and far-from-unique tool sends

packets of information to your ISP every minute or so to keep a dialup internet connection ticking over during periods of inactivity.

One notable oddity: so long as your computer's Bios settings are configured appropriately, you can use the SystemWorks CD-ROM as an emergency startup disc; but if you want to create your own set of emergency floppy disks, the tool from which to do so is absurdly buried in a sub-folder on the installation disc.

And another: while the manual and Help menu both described a promising method to create a set of 'Rescue Disks' (more duplication, presumably), the requisite button simply didn't exist.

Verdict

For all the harshness of our comments, SystemWorks is not a bad program. Indeed, as utility suites go, it is still up there with the best of them. But it lacks cohesion in some quarters, it promises more than it delivers in others, and it offers little beyond improved Windows XP-compatibility to merit replacing an older version. ■

Kyle MacRae

← Speed Disk is a souped-up defragmenter

↓ With Web Cleanup, you can view your cached files and cookies before selectively deleting them

Norton SystemWorks 2003
☐ Symantec: 020 7616 5600
☐ Website: www.symantec.co.uk
☐ Price: £51 (Professional £68)

System requirements
233MHz Pentium II; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 64MB RAM (128 for Windows XP); 150MB hard disk space (plus 200MB for GoBack, with an additional 10 percent of remaining hard disk space reserved for history files).
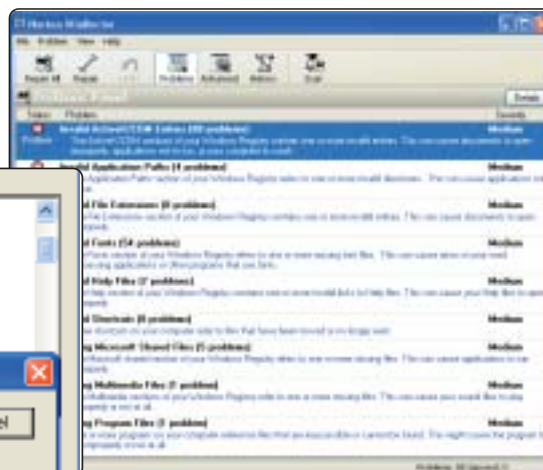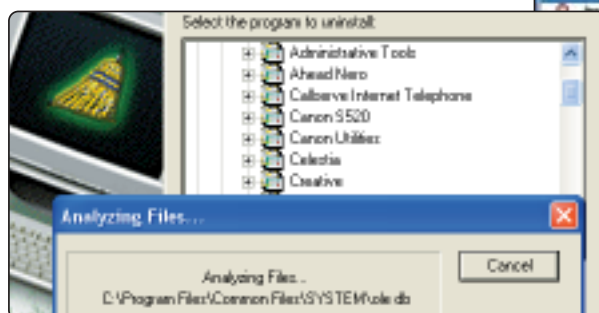
Ease of use

Features

Value for money

Overall rating

→ WinDoctor induces hypochondria but doesn't always provide the cure (far right)

→ CleanSweep gets shot of unwanted software but makes a backup first (right)

Desktop publishing software
Corel Ventura 10.0

Pagemaker might be the program that coined the expression 'desktop publishing' (DTP), but the original page layout software for personal computers was, in fact, Ventura Publisher. In the mid-1980s it was developed by Xerox and ran under a pre-Windows, early-DOS, graphic interface called Gem. Despite a loyal user base and backing by new owner Corel, the product has increasingly lost ground to other DTP packages over the years. But with Ventura 10.0, Corel may just have hit on a version which could, deservedly, revitalise its fortunes.

Background reading
For readers unfamiliar with the program, here is a quick run-down. Ventura is a page layout package intended primarily for business publishing. Despite enjoying certain graphics tools nabbed from the CorelDraw engine, such as Bezier vector editing and special object fill styles, its strongest features concern the management of long documents with complex indexes, footnotes and so on. It is ideal for preparing textbooks, manuals and general technical documentation, favouring production management over freeform graphic design.

Now, with version 10.0, Ventura is pushing further into the high-end FrameMaker territory, while offering the package at £125 cheaper than its competitor. Key to Ventura's rebirth is its handling of data in XML format, which the major publishing houses and newspapers are already using to archive and repurpose

content. This means Ventura can now join the big league where text and graphics are tagged up and stored in XML databases ready for simultaneous publishing to print, web and electronic publications.

Ventura's implementation includes an XML Mapping Editor which maps XML tags to a Ventura document's own style sheets (slightly confusingly, also known as 'tags'). This means you don't necessarily need external DTDs (document type definitions) to validate the XML, just as long as it is well formed. However, it is a one-way process. Unlike the XML features in FrameMaker 7.0, or QuarkXPress 5.0 and Adobe InDesign 2.0 for that matter, Ventura 10.0 does not allow you to mark up a document with XML tags for export – it can only import XML. Corel's thinking is true XML workflows start with text and

← Ventura 10.0 favours precision layout control over freeform graphic design

↓ A Service Bureau Profiler lets you set up extensive preferences for each prepress bureau and job type

graphics created outside the page layout program – but this does mean someone will need to do all the tagging with an external XML editor, such as XMetal 3.0.

Export duties
Still, it is a shame there is no 'round-trip' support for XML, especially since you can export other electronic data formats from the program. Ventura 10.0 can publish files directly to HTML and CSS formats for standard web and CD-based electronic documentation. It now also exports to Acrobat PDF, maintaining embedded page and web links on the way and converting tables of contents and indexes to PDF bookmarks. This is all built-in: you do not need your own copy of Acrobat Distiller. You can also optimise the PDFs for print production, embedding page bleed marks and so on, and bring PDFs into your layouts as individual graphics.

Our only major disappointment with the PDF support is its limitation to the PDF 1.3 (Acrobat 4.0) format. Of course, certain aspects of PDF 1.4 (Acrobat 5.0) format would not be supported in Ventura 10.0 anyway, such as object transparency. Another missing feature which would have been extremely useful is the ability to assign encryption to protect exported PDFs from being changed without permission. This is essential for all commercial publishers of electronic documentation.

↑ Well-formed XML data can be styled up at import, even if no DTD is available

← Corel's colour management interface links device profiles intuitively

Very much in Ventura 10.0's favour, though, is a built-in preflighting engine. 'Preflighting' is jargon for a routine of automated checks on a document about to be output, ensuring that nothing is missing or in the wrong format. This is an enormous time-saver, especially if you are about to sign off a 700-page manual based on multiple chapter files. The preflighter appears as a tab in the Publish To PDF and Print dialog windows, alerting you to common issues, such as missing fonts, picture problems, page irregularities and so on. The list of checks is not comprehensive, but our output tests showed that documents passed by Ventura 10.0 were also passed by industrial prepress preflighters.

Ventura 10.0 also introduces the concept of tags (style sheets, remember) for tables. This means you can import or manually set up tabular data, then apply a table tag for immediate top-to-bottom styling for the entire object. Ventura tables also sport highly valuable real-world formatting features, such as slanted top rows and, unlike QuarkXPress, allows you to hide row and column lines completely.

Added extras

Less obviously useful, although still impressive, is the way you can now apply filter effects to placed bitmap images directly in your pages. No commercial publisher in their right mind would trust these on-page filters in preference to editing the original image in Photoshop. Perhaps it is intended as a bit of fun and for convenience in more mundane projects, such as in-house publications or electronic documents not intended for print.

Beyond these new functions, there are many existing features in Ventura 10.0 which we continue to adore, such as CorelScript macro recording (similar to Photoshop Actions), the Navigator (which lists embedded and imported objects per page across multiple documents in a publication), the Equation Editor (for mathematical layouts) and the curiously usable Tag Window (for managing character, paragraph, table, frame and all other style sheets).
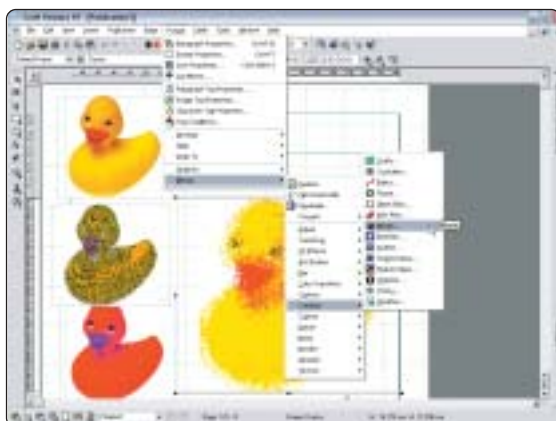
Additionally, plenty of small background utilities, such as the new, intuitive colour management interface are welcome, and we can't possible turn up our noses at the 1,500 TrueType and Type 1 fonts included in the box. We are also very pleased to see Corel finally embrace proper PostScript-clean output to replace the previous quirky implementation, now even supporting Adobe's In-RIP Trapping system.

Corel must now demonstrate an appreciation of the kind of user Ventura 10.0 is aimed at and temper the program's features accordingly. Ponytailed graphic designers will probably hate its regimented approach to column layout and lack of support for transparency or OpenType fonts. Everyday users might be confused by the extensive functionality. But project managers, production staff and technical editors will like its powerful control over complex content. For the publisher of meaty content, Ventura 10.0 could be just what you are looking for.

Verdict

For the first time in many years, Ventura actually feels like a robust and powerful challenger to the high-end DTP packages from Quark and Adobe. Its renowned handling of long and complex documents is now boosted with better PostScript support, built-in PDF and web output, more prepress features, and integration with XML databases. As a designer's program, however, it is a bit limited by today's standards. ■

Alistair Dabbs
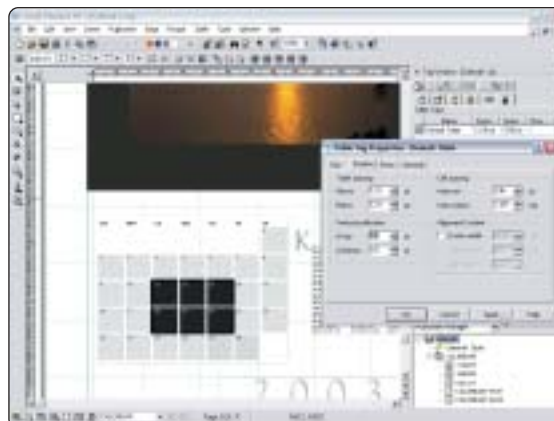
⤒ Ventura 10.0 introduces style sheets for tables, which it calls Table Tags

↖ You can now apply a range of plug-in filter effects to place bitmap images on the page
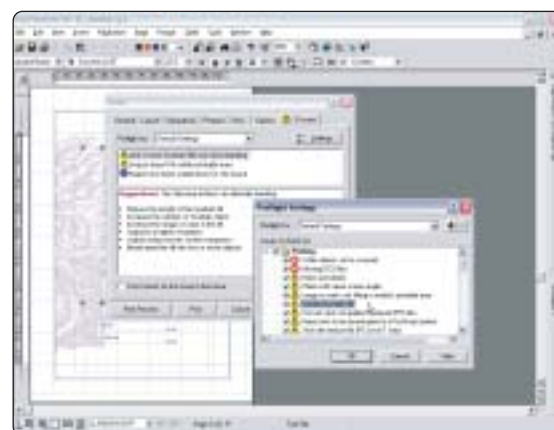
⤒ A new built-in preflighter tab checks for errors and offers corrections

Ease of use
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □ □

Features
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □

Value for money
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □ □ □

Overall rating
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □ □

Music editing software
Cubase SX

← You can edit audio sounds such as drum loops in the Sample Editor

Steinberg's Cubase VST (virtual studio technology) sequencer software has long-been the package every PC musician wants. With rival company Emagic now selling its Logic Audio software purely for Mac users and Cakewalk's Sonar not offering the same functionality, Steinberg has found itself with a virtual monopoly on professional audio and Midi music production software. Steinberg has products to suit a range of users and we are looking at Cubase SX, the newly released flagship product that we believe will be the last word in music production on a PC for some time to come. It is an expensive piece of kit and novice home users need not apply, but PC users who want the best need look no further.

Cubase SX is a complete solution for composing, editing and mixing multitrack audio or Midi via an array of powerful built-in tools. Be warned, though, it has hefty recommended system requirements and a good sound card is essential, preferably one with a dedicated Asio (audio stream input/output) driver to keep potential latency issues in check. The package also comes with a dongle – a hardware key that ensures SX can only be set up on one PC. It fits into a USB port so check you have a spare port on your PC.

Cubase SX is a complete system overhaul for Steinberg, from the friendly graphical user interface right down to the engine itself. Rather than use the previous Cubase engine, Steinberg opted for its own audio-based Nuendo engine, providing superior audio capabilities. The Midi engine is also new and comes with a 32bit mixer plus a wealth of plug-ins to enhance composition.

What we really appreciated about the package though, aside from the superior engine and support for high-quality 24bit, 96KHz audio, was the added feature set. SX offers some important functions that were missing from previous packages and it is hard to see how users ever did without them. The unlimited undo/redo function is absolutely fundamental when creating music and it works brilliantly in conjunction with the offline process history. This means you can navigate the entire history of a track to any point in time and revert to the saved track. If you don't like the result of your tinkering you can always return to the source recording.
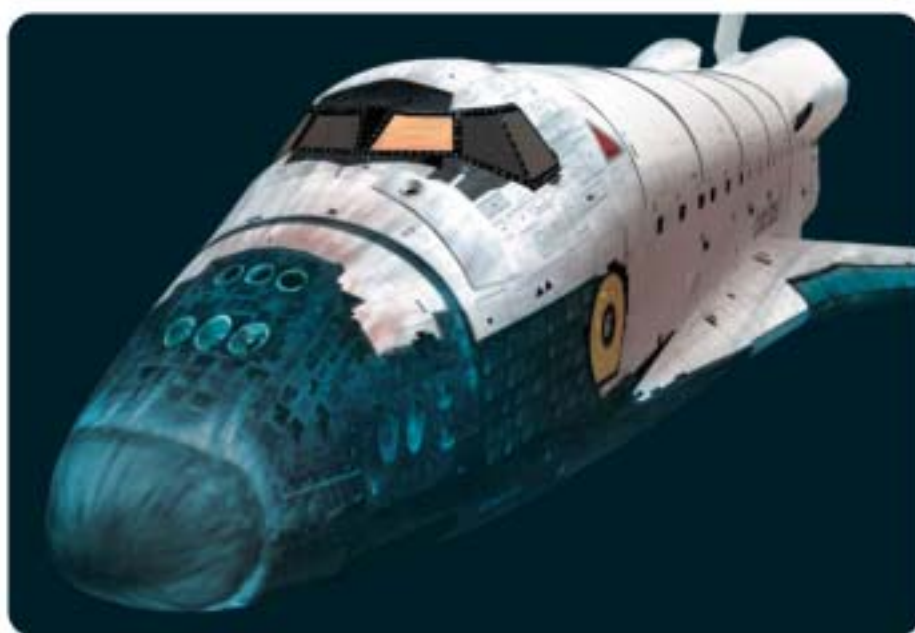
†£28 a month standard. Additional activation and equipment costs app p. Subject to availability & survey. BT line required. Min. 12 month term from activation. Other conditions apply.

One of the most serious problems with all sequencers is the drain on the processor. It is easy to overload your PC, which can result in pops and clicks on the tracks you create. Cubase SX overcomes the problem with offline audio processing. Usually when you mix down audio with plug-ins it is processed in real time, which strains the processor, but the Cubase SX method frees up processor power. You can use the built-in audio editor to add plug-ins much faster than mixing down in real time.

Cubase SX does suffer from a difficult learning curve if you have never before used any Steinberg sequencer software, so a little patience is required before you can fluently move around the software. We were impressed with the sensible addition of user-definable shortcut keys: navigating the software's various menus and options with a mouse and keyboard is only so fast and once you are *au fait* with SX you will want to use a speedy setup. With so many pop-up windows the display can get confusing and Steinberg has not offered

support for Windows 98 – but these are small detractions from what is an excellent buy.

Verdict

Cubase SX is an incredibly powerful and intuitive sequencer package with superb functionality. It comes loaded with virtual instruments and extras so users won't need any other software to produce high-quality recordings. Some may balk at the cost but compared to hiring a professional studio it is worth every penny. ■

Spencer Dalziel

← Along with an added feature set, the package supports high-quality 24bit, 96KHz audio

Cubase SX
☐ Steinberg: 0800 169 1341
☐ Website: www.steinberg-ag.net
☐ Price: £451

System requirements
500MHz Pentium II; Windows 2000/XP; 256MB RAM; 500 MB hard disk space.

Ease of use

Features

Value for money

Overall rating

Antivirus software
Symantec Norton AntiVirus 2003

➔ Norton AntiVirus 2003 can now scan instant messages for viruses

PC emulator
Connectix Virtual PC for Windows 5.0

← Virtual PC allows you to run an entirely separate Windows system on the same PC
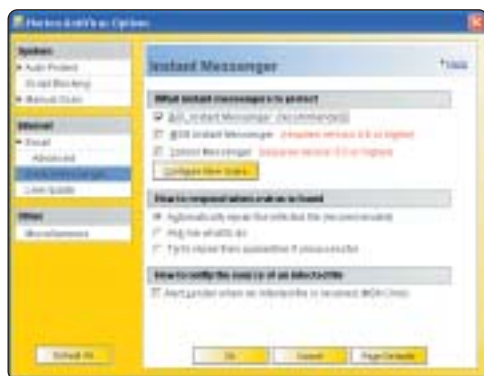
Another year, another version of Norton AntiVirus. This version builds on the protection package's solid reputation, adding new features to keep your computer safe from the latest threats.

If this is the first time you've used Norton AntiVirus, installation is time-consuming, as it is recommended that you scan your system for bugs before putting the software on your PC, which requires you to boot from the CD. With our Windows XP PC this involved disabling other boot options from within Setup. The scan itself took more than five hours to check the 60GB hard drive.

Once this is complete, using the software is simplicity itself. However, this precaution isn't necessary if you are running an older version of the software and are simply upgrading.

So why upgrade? There are some useful new features in 2003. It allows you to scan IMs (instant messengers) for bugs. It also automatically detects and deletes worms and Trojan horses, which have formed the basis of many recent viruses. It not only checks for these in messages coming into your PC, but it also makes sure you don't send these bugs out, either.

Bugs are dealt with automatically, so you can keep working as the software cleans them up in the background. You can password-protect your option settings, so no one can tamper with them, and you can keep track of information on alerts, errors and so on.

As with previous versions, 2003 includes automatic update, which will check for new virus definitions online. This is free for the first year, and then costs £21 for each year of updates. This is a touch cheaper than upgrading the software, but then you won't get any new features that are added.

Verdict
Symantec's experience is evident in this package. It does just what it says on the box, providing you with an easy-to-use means of protecting your computer from the latest threats from virus writers. ■

Ursula Seymour

Norton AntiVirus 2003
☐ Symantec: 020 7616 5600
☐ Website: www.symantec.com
☐ Price: £40; upgrade £25

System requirements
300MHz Pentium processor; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 70MB hard disk space.

Ease of use

Features

Value for money

Overall rating

Virtual PC for Windows seems like a bit of a strange idea at first. After all, you already have a fully functional PC, why bother emulating another?

However, there are groups like programmers, web developers, system administrators and trainers that could certainly find a use for such a program.

As the software fully emulates PC hardware it provides a separate environment to your normal desktop, allowing you to run the same operating system in a different configuration or a completely different environment. Windows XP installed without a problem but we had difficulties with Windows 3.11 and 95 as the installation kept hanging and we couldn't progress any further.

Emulation also has its downsides – namely speed. To get an idea of the performance hit, we ran WorldBench 4 on a PC without Virtual PC installed and then ran it on an emulated computer on the same PC. The difference was big: 127 versus 46.

Each PC you want to emulate needs to store its files somewhere. Virtual PC's approach is to store all the individual files within one big file. However, if you wanted to create a 2GB disk for your Virtual PC you wouldn't need to allocate 2GB of disk space straight away. Virtual PC can use dynamic disk files, so the file only occupies the minimum amount to begin with and grows as necessary. There's also improved interaction with the emulated PCs so now the supplied Virtual PC Additions software lets you drag and drop files between your actual PC and emulated PCs.

Verdict
Virtual PC removes the need to set up a separate PC or mess around with multiboot configurations. But while we had no problems with XP, the fact that Virtual PC hanged consistently while installing 3.11 and 95 during our testing makes it hard to recommend ■

Will Head

Connectix Virtual PC
☐ Connectix: 01908 542 777
☐ Website: www.connectix.com
☐ Price: £115

System requirements
400MHz Pentium; Windows 98/Me/NT4/2000/XP; 32-256MB of RAM depending on emulated PCs; 50MB-2GB hard disk space per emulated PC.

Ease of use

Features

Value for money

Overall rating