

Utilities suite

Norton SystemWorks 2004 Pro

There's a lot to like in the latest version of Norton SystemWorks. The 2004 incarnation of this PC tools bundle comprises the newest releases of Norton Utilities, Norton AntiVirus, Norton CleanSweep and Norton GoBack Personal Edition. On a value-for-money basis, SystemWorks 2004 is a winner - it's £40 cheaper than buying the items separately.

Installation takes an age - at least 10 minutes and a remarkable 200MB of disk space. To its undying credit, Symantec includes that increasing rarity in its software - a printed user manual that's not a PDF file on disc.

So what's new?

Truly new features are thin on the ground and even the front-end manager appears only cosmetically different in this version. The biggest addition is Norton Password Manager, which stores login information for various websites in a 128bit AES (advanced encryption standard) file. It can also collate personal information such as names, addresses and credit card details to complete online forms automatically.

This is a timesaver but it would have made more sense to combine it with Privacy Control and bundle it with Norton Internet Security. Much of its functionality is duplicated by the free Google Toolbar.

Seek and destroy

Antivirus is the area of biggest change. It can now detect and destroy spyware, adware and hacking tools on your hard disk. Other changes



include the ability to scan incoming compressed files and the loss of the virus encyclopedia, which is now online only. The annual subscription to the definition service has been bumped up to \$20 (around £12).

Norton AntiVirus remains of a high order. It hasn't failed the VB100 test since 1999 - a much better track record than rival McAfee. You can still use the CD-ROM to run an antivirus scan on an infected PC, but this doesn't work on NTFS (NT file system) partitions because it can't see them.

Verdict

It's old wine in new bottles, but the tools in SystemWorks 2004 are still among the best anywhere. This suite is a good way to get a bundle of Norton products at a discount, but if you have last year's version there's no need to upgrade. Roger Gann

↑ Norton Password Manager stores personal information to complete online forms automatically

Norton SystemWorks 2004 Pro

- Symantec: 01628 592 222
- www.symantec.co.uk
- £80 inc VAT (standard £60 inc VAT)

System requirements

300MHz processor; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 200MB hard disk space

Good points

Good value; top-notch essential PC tools; excellent antivirus protection

Bad points

Minor upgrade; make-weight items; product activation

EASE OF USE



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VALUE FOR MONEY



OVERALL



Production Activation

The other major addition to this year's model is Product Activation, which works along the lines favoured by Microsoft. Just like Microsoft's requirement for Windows XP and Office, you must activate all Norton 2004 programs after installing them. But it's not quite the same deal - you have to activate your software within 15 days of installation, either by running a wizard that activates the program over an internet connection or by phoning Symantec.

A software wizard takes you through the activation process. You enter a software key and the wizard sends this key and the configuration of your PC to Symantec's servers. They then respond with a code that activates your package. You must reactivate the program if you upgrade your PC hardware or

move the software to a different system. However, Symantec permits you to activate each application up to five times which it expects will be sufficient for most users.

The introduction of this feature has not gone smoothly, though. Symantec has admitted that several thousand users of Norton AntiVirus 2004 have experienced problems activating the product using the Product Activation code. In some cases, users are prompted to re-enter the code each time their computer restarts. After a number of reboots, the product displays a message saying: "The trial period has expired. This product has been disabled because you have not activated it."

At the time of writing, the company has yet to post a fix for this glitch.

Mac operating system

Mac OS X 10.3 Panther

Apple's transition to Mac OS X has been slow. With last year's OS X 10.2, codenamed Jaguar, it came of age as a user-friendly, attractive operating system with industrial-strength features.

Version 10.3, codenamed Panther, makes some improvements. Its £99 price tag may sound steep for a single-point OS upgrade but don't be fooled by the name. Apple wants to retain the marketing value of the OS X name, which is why it isn't called OS 11.0. There are enough features to warrant a full upgrade.

Keeping up with the Gates'

With more than 150 new features (although many too minor to mention), Apple is playing catch-up with Microsoft and mimicking Windows XP. For example, if an application quits unexpectedly the system will offer to send an error report to Apple.

Fast User Switching is one key feature, letting you change quickly between user accounts without logging out of the active one or shutting down applications. Windows already does this and in typical Apple fashion Panther does it with a graphical flourish - the accounts appear to form sides of a cube and the screen seems to rotate between the two when you switch.

Finder, the Mac equivalent of the Windows desktop, has also been redesigned. A new toolbar down the lefthand side of Finder boxes mimics the Taskpane in Windows and adds functionality such as the ability to add shortcuts to favourite locations and instant access to network volumes from within any window. If you're a .Mac subscriber you get instant

access to your iDisk from the toolbar. And if you're not online you can have a local copy of your iDisk which synchronises with the remote server whenever you connect to the web.

My favourite feature in Panther is Exposé, which lets you instantly access any open window or the desktop. In All Windows mode, every open window shrinks to thumbnail size so you can see everything. Application Windows mode does the same for windows of the active application, while Desktop mode moves all open windows to the edge of the screen so you can see what's on your desktop.

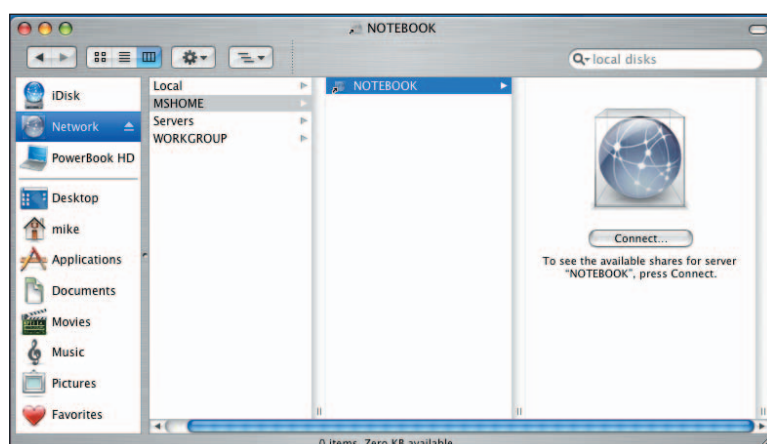
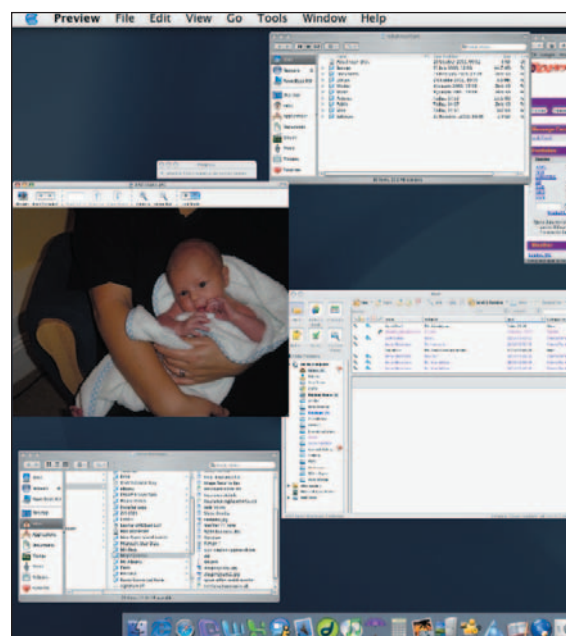
Exposé makes it easier to drag files from one window to another or locate an item you want to attach to an email. I've only been using it for three weeks and I can't imagine computing without it.

And the rest

Other new features include File Vault, an easy way to keep all the files in your home folder secure with AES (advanced encryption standard) 128bit encryption. You also get the iChat AV instant messaging client, one of Apple's coolest recent releases, plus advanced font management, better PDF support and improvements to the OS' Unix underpinnings.

Verdict

Panther is arguably the best OS X release to date. It's a little frustrating that Apple keeps making us pay so much to stay current, but having spent some time with this release, I'd have to conclude that it's worth it. ☒ Mike Hirschhorn



top: FileVault allows you to store the files in your Home folder under AES 128bit encryption

above: Exposé lets you see a thumbnail view of all the open windows on your system

left: Finder has a sidebar in every window for quick access to shortcuts

Mac OS X 10.3 Panther

- Apple: 0800 039 1010
- www.apple.com/uk
- £99 inc VAT

System requirements

Any Mac with a G3, G4 or G5 processor; at least 128MB RAM; built-in USB ports

EASE OF USE



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VALUE FOR MONEY



OVERALL



PCADVISOR
GOLD

Interactive encyclopedia

Encarta 2004 Premium Suite

Encarta gets better with each release and when it comes to touting a wealth of interactive multimedia content, no one can keep up with Microsoft. This DVD version costs £40 more than

the other recent Encarta flavours but it is money well spent. In part, this is due to video content from a deal with the Discovery Channel. But it's about so much more than the quality of the content - it's about the user-friendly way the information is accessed too. The ultimate reference guide? It's the closest thing you'll get to it on your PC.

The sheer mass of data contained in Encarta could be daunting. Equivalent to a 60-volume print encyclopedia, this version brings together Encarta Encyclopedia Plus 2004, Encarta World English Dictionary and Thesaurus, bilingual dictionaries, a virtual atlas and 34,000 articles with virtual tours, timelines and a host of UK-specific content. Fortunately, the navigation system contains a visual browser with simple prompts displayed on your screen and we found it a joy to use, making sifting through information a cinch.

The interactive timeline is also good fun. You enter a date and follow all the important events from that year. It's easy to see how you can spend hours at your PC following a spiral of interesting facts. Like most people, though, we jumped straight to the Discovery footage which makes the other video clips pale in comparison. As a tool for teachers or pupils we think it will prove invaluable and Microsoft has added to this by offering the Study Centre - an impressive place where students can build reports and projects.

The only down side to Encarta that we found was Microsoft's low system requirements. You'll need a mid-range system to run it with no slowdown on the multimedia displays, especially the visual tours.

Verdict

Encarta is the best reference guide on the market and avoids sensory overload by being easy to navigate. This version is costly, so we recommend opting for the CD incarnation if money's tight. A treat for all except door-to-door encyclopedia salesmen. ☒ Jane Francis



↑ Encarta's navigation system contains a visual browser with simple prompts

Encarta 2004 Premium Suite

- Microsoft: 0870 601 0100
- www.microsoft.com
- £69.99 inc VAT

System requirements

333MHz Pentium II or equivalent; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 1.6MB hard disk space; 4MB graphics card

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Graphics package

CorelDraw Essentials 2.0

Corel is an established name in creative circles. Its Draw package is one of the best-known semi-professional titles and Essentials 2.0 is a well-priced cutdown version of the suite. As well as drawing tools there are

some for editing and retouching digital photos, as well as templates with preset designs that you can edit as you choose. In this sense, Essentials is similar to Adobe Photoshop or its slimmer sibling Elements.

Essentials itself forms the backbone of the product and it's the place to start if you want to create newsletters, posters, web banners or stationery. Having specified a page size or opened a template to work on, you add and arrange regular or irregular objects, applying properties and resizing as you wish. Objects can be grouped and ungrouped so they can be moved together, while the Arrange function lets you specify how layers and graphics should interact with each other.

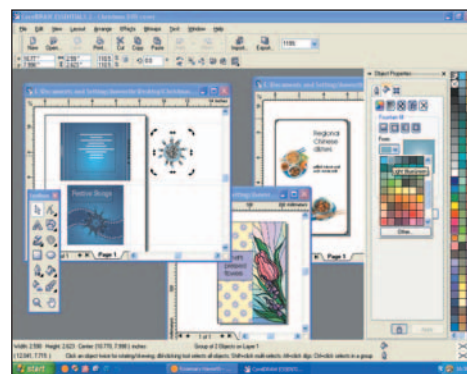
If you've used an image-editing or graphics package before, it will take no time at all to find your way around the floating toolbars and editing functions. There's also a tutorial for novices, so you can't go too far wrong.

Photobook is where images acquired from a digital camera or via the 'Twain acquire' option are edited. This can be done by cropping, resizing, rotating and reshaping all or part of an image. The same Selector tool is used to duplicate and group objects to be manipulated. You can also apply masks, fills and filters to your photos and impose text over the top.

When you're happy with your retouched images they can be stored and organised in Corel PhotoAlbum. Here they can be renamed for easy retrieval and batch converted into groups or different file formats.

Betraying the entry-level market for this product, Corel suggests that images stored in your PhotoAlbum be used in slideshows, screensavers and wallpaper or emailed to friends.

Essentials is easy to use but boasts good-looking templates, tools and features on which to cut your design teeth. And if you load up the Big Box of Art CD, which contains 100,000 images, you'll have more than enough material to keep your creative urges sated for a long time. ☒ Rosemary Haworth



↑ Essentials lets you duplicate its preset designs, arrange objects and resize them as you wish

CorelDraw Essentials 2.0

- Corel: 0870 774 0202
- www.corel.com
- £54.60 inc VAT

System requirements

200MHz Pentium II or equivalent; Windows 2000/XP; 64MB RAM; 160MB hard disk space; 8MB graphics card

EASE OF USE



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DVD-authoring software

Sonic MyDVD Studio 5.0 Video Edition

It's fair to say that DVD-authoring programs walk a fine line between ease of use and performance, especially when you include video capture and editing. But Sonic believes it has the answer in the form of MyDVD Studio 5.0 Video Edition. At £45 inc VAT, this entry-level DVD creator may not challenge high-end authoring applications but there are some unexpected additions.

Sonic has put the emphasis on accessibility, so the software boots up into an obligatory wizard screen that lets you choose between creating a new project, transferring video directly to a blank DVD or modifying a disc that you've already created. While the last two options are undoubtedly useful, you'll probably spend most of your time in the first because this contains the primary tools such as video capture, basic editing and DVD or VCD authoring.

Assuming you have the requisite hardware, MyDVD Studio 5.0 will capture from either analogue or digital sources and provides timecode and image analysis-based scene detection routines. Alternatively, you can simply import the video assets you want to include on your DVD/VCD, with support for AVI, QuickTime and Windows Media files.

Tools of the trade

Basic editing tools are included, along with a handy collection of transitions and filters for use with your video, and Sonic has opted for the more accessible storyboard view rather than a timeline. There's also a titling tool for adding subtitles, captions or credits to your work, but without roll or crawl options.

The main interface is extremely simple, with dedicated buttons down the side for capture, get movies, add slideshow and add sub-menu. An indicator in the bottom lefthand corner shows the space remaining on your chosen media.

MyDVD Studio 5.0 opens one of its own menu templates by default but they are easily changed using the Edit Style option. This brings up a panel where you can choose the background image (or video for motion menus), the background music track and the button style. Menus have a 60-second limit before

looping, with your background audio being cut to this size or to the length of your background video. However, while you can alter typefaces, font sizes and colours, the type and button layouts are fixed and the range of styles available is extremely limited.

Stills show

Undoubtedly the best feature here is the Slideshow option, where you can easily build a running video of still images. You can select a transition - Sonic has wisely chosen Crossfade as the default - as well as the duration of each still. Select the image to be used as the menu thumbnail and rotate any that you may have shot in portrait. As well as adding your own background music, MyDVD Studio 5.0 can synchronise the stills to the beat - although it's understandably ropery when it comes to ambient tracks.

For an even more direct approach, the Direct-to-DVD Wizard lets you cut to the chase, asking you to choose a menu style and project title before capturing video straight from your camcorder to your DVD. Buttons and submenus are automatically created for groups of six clips at a time and then your project is burned to disc. If you're not happy with the result, you can always use the 'Edit existing open DVD disc' option to make changes afterwards.

There are many aspects here that we really like. Digital Audio (AC-3) support is a surprising and useful addition to the feature set, as is the ability to create motion buttons from sections of the clip that they link to. However, while simplicity is important, we feel that output options such as manual bit rate selection, variable or constant bit rate encoding or even dual-pass encoding should have been added. Even novices may find themselves wanting more than a slider with Good, Better and Best transcode settings.

Verdict

MyDVD Studio 5.0 Video Edition is a good product, especially worthy of note for complete newcomers to DVD



↑ MyDVD Studio 5.0 has three main tools: project creation, direct-to-disc and edit existing disc

authoring. But despite features such as digital audio, slideshow creation and support for multiple file formats, the chances are that even beginners will soon find themselves looking for more flexibility in menu layout and greater control over output than is offered by this software. ☒ Laurence Grayson

Sonic MyDVD Studio 5.0

- Purchase from <http://estore.sonic.com>
- www.mydvd.com/www.sonic.com
- £45 inc VAT

System requirements

800MHz Pentium III; Windows XP SP1; 128MB RAM; 10GB hard disk space; Media Player 7.1 or later; recordable CD or DVD drive

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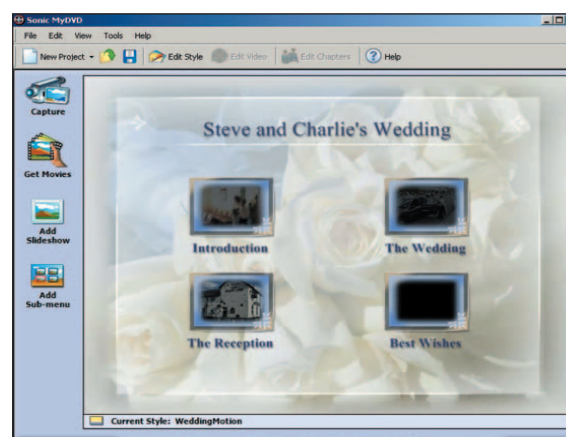
VALUE FOR MONEY



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↓ Creating a DVD motion menu is simple but some users may want more control over the layout



Video-editing software

Combustion 3.0

In terms of PC video editing, it is easy to assume that the mid to high level is covered by Adobe Premiere and After Effects, with dedicated systems such as Avid getting the occasional look-in.

Software developer Discreet, however, has introduced a package worthy of attention. It is pricey and novice users will balk at the difficult interface, but a bit of patience pays dividends. If you have time and money, this could well be the solution to your video-editing dilemmas.

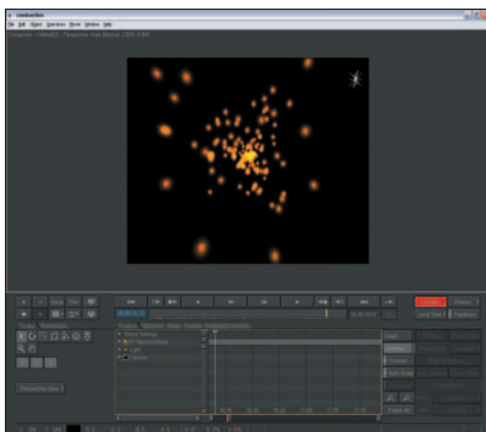
It has only been a short while since Discreet attempted to move into the mid-range professional market with the first release of Combustion, a compositor and video-effects tool that offered many of the features available in Flame, the package used in effects houses around the world. But the interface for Combustion has been tweaked for version 3.0 and will look strange to new users. It is designed for output across multiple monitors so that its clean and elegant workspace can be used extremely efficiently. Don't expect any handholding but if you will be working in professional editing suites you will also have little trouble moving between Combustion and higher-end systems.

The latest release adds new tools for painting into clips, plus expressions for setting up complex animations without key framing. Selections and masks can be fully animated as before and the program includes high-end tools for colour correction, audio and motion tracking – for example, to remove unwanted jitters or scale and rotate footage. All these tools are desirable but it's the particle effects system that is the real bonus. A range of presets enables you to set up 2D effects such as sparks, smoke and lights, which will easily match anything from a high-end 3D package.

Verdict

With recent price cuts, Combustion is worth considering because Premiere Pro and After Effects combined are nearly half as much again. Now that Discreet is aggressively targeting mid-level professionals, it is a real alternative to Adobe for desktop editing.

✉ Jason Whittaker



↑ Combustion includes a state-of-the-art particle generator to create clouds, smoke or fire

Combustion 3.0

- Discreet: 01252 456 669
- www.discreet.com
- £852 inc VAT

System requirements

850MHz PIII or higher (1.7GHz recommended); Windows 2000/XP; 256MB RAM (2GB recommended); 2GB hard disk space; 1,024x768 display

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Genealogy software

Legacy Family Tree Deluxe 4.0

Searching for long-lost family has become a somewhat involving pastime for many internet users and a lot of programs have cropped up to cater for amateur genealogists. Some people soon give up when they realise they're

unlikely to ever track down a rich, old and mad aunt who is willing to bequeath the family fortune to them. But for everyone else, today's software has so much more to offer.

Legacy Family Tree Deluxe 4.0 is one of those easy-to-use packages that contains a surprising amount of material for little cost. You still have to do all the groundwork and data entry, but collating information when you're searching for your ancestors is all part of the fun.

The software doesn't take much time to install and, while we appreciated the essential training video, we would have preferred to see a hard copy for reference in the bundle. We were also a bit put off by the option to buy extras before you even open the program. However, this was a small point in an otherwise good package.

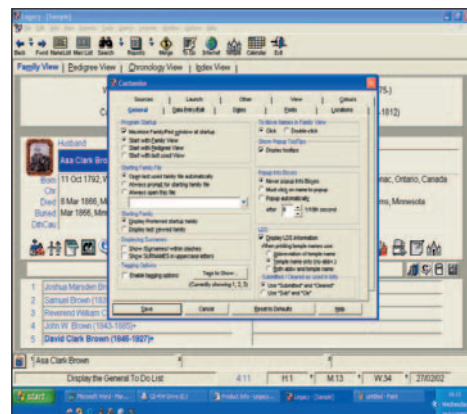
Open up Legacy Family Tree Deluxe 4.0 and you'll see it has everything you need to start tracing relatives and collecting information about your family in a comprehensive selection of layouts. This particular version offers access to 125 million names from the UK and Ireland and 3.5 million images from census, marriage and christening records – not forgetting a wealth of other registration indexes. Once you start harvesting data, you can organise, track and share that information and Legacy will generate charts and reports. Of course, it's Gedcom (Genealogical Data Communications) compliant, which means you can exchange information between one genealogical software program and another.

Legacy Family Tree Deluxe 4.0 has the edge over rival applications because of the way the information is presented. Four main views – family, pedigree, chronology and index – make viewing or editing data much easier.

Verdict

There will always be a lot of detective work in genealogy but Legacy Family Tree Deluxe 4.0 lightens your workload by way of its comprehensive layout.

Factor in the low price and you have a good package on your hands. ✉ Jane Francis



↑ Legacy Family Tree Deluxe 4.0 contains a surprising amount of material for little cost

Legacy Family Tree Deluxe 4.0

- Mindscape: 01293 582 640
- www.mindscape.co.uk
- £29.99 inc VAT

System requirements

300MHz PII or equivalent; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 60MB hard disk space; 16MB graphics card

EASE OF USE



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File transfer service Creo Tokens

As the move towards digital media gathers pace, more and more people want to transfer digital files. And what better way to do this than via the internet?

Hmmm... Have you ever tried to send a large attachment by email? It can be a tad unpredictable and many mail servers bounce emails with attachments larger than 2MB. So if you routinely want to send bigger files than this you're in schtuck. You can use FTP (file transfer protocol) but this can be a pain, especially if you haven't a scintilla of interest in FTP and just want to get at a file.

A software developer with its roots in the digital imaging world, Creo recognises the problems faced by creative professionals – an issue that is set to worsen as file sizes mushroom. Its answer to the problem is Tokens, a delightfully simple and effective way to transfer large files and folders. Put simply, it transforms the sender's PC into a file server.

Tiny tokens

The sender emails the recipient a tiny token file, about 1KB to 2KB in size, that has the actual file size displayed as part of the token's name. Having installed the free Creo Redeemer client at their end, all a recipient does is drag the token out of the email and drop it on to the Redeemer window to initiate the transfer – it's that simple. If they haven't got the Redeemer, download instructions are provided.

Creo Tokens can get around firewalls too. If the transfer is blocked it is automatically re-routed via the Creo Relay Service, which essentially

pumps it out via Port 80/HTML to Creo and then on to the recipient. The Token Creator licence includes one year's 5GB per month use of the Relay Service.


Preparing a file for transfer at the sending end is just as simple. The sender first installs Creo Creator. Once it's launched, simply drag and drop the file to be transferred on to Creator. The file is compressed and encrypted, using 128bit AES (advanced encryption standard) encryption. A 'token' is then created.

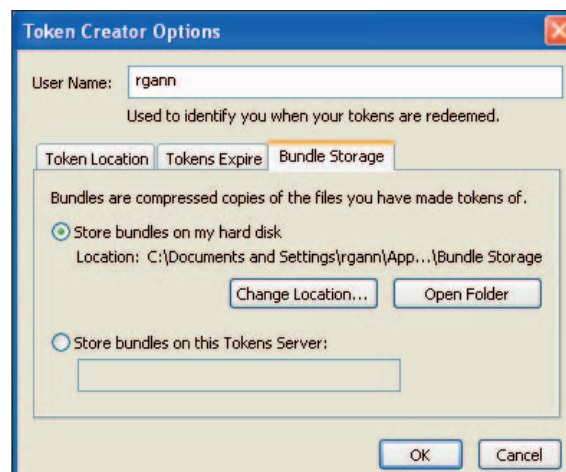
You can also configure it to automatically create a new email with the token attached. Apart from that, the configuration options are strictly limited. You can apply a time limit to a token so that it can't be transferred once expired but that's about it.

Server service

For workgroup scenarios there is Creo Tokens Server, which comes with 10 Creator licences as standard and runs as a service under Windows XP or 2000. Small workgroups should have no problem running it, just like the standalone product. The server makes it easy to share large files from laptops because it stores the files en route to the recipient.

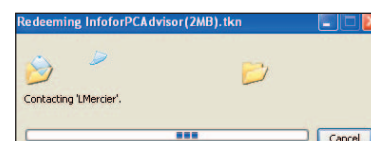
Verdict

Tokens provides a reliable, secure and, above all, simple cross-platform file-sharing solution. This idiot-proof solution to the problem of sending vast multi-megabyte files over the internet combines the ease of email attachments with the flexibility of FTP.  Roger Gann



↑ In keeping with its idiot-proof ease of use, Creo Tokens doesn't give you many options

➤ A Token file transfer in full flood. Not much to it, eh?



Creo Tokens

- Creo: 01252 713 921
- www.creo.com/tokens
- Redeemer free; Tokens Creator £30; Tokens Server £395

System requirements

Windows 9x/2000/XP or MacOS 9/X



Good points

Easy to use; little training required; free redemption of tokens; gives mail servers a breather



Bad points

Browser support restricted to Internet Explorer 5.0 or later; broadband essential; no Linux support

EASE OF USE



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Alternative DIY solutions

Although Creo Tokens is incredibly simple to use and works very well, there are cheaper DIY solutions available. The simplest method would be to use an FTP (file transfer protocol) server. All you have to do is send the recipient an email containing a URL link, pointing to the file on the FTP server you want them to download. When they click on the link, Internet Explorer launches and a Windows Explorer view will be displayed. The recipient can now simply use drag and drop to copy the file to their local machine – a process that's as quick and efficient as Treo Tokens.

The easiest FTP server to use would be the one provided by your ISP. Many typically offer 30MB of web space which ought

to be plenty for most of your file-transfer needs, although you would of course have to upload the files to be transferred first.

A better solution, obviating that initial upload, would be to run an FTP server on your local machine. Most server operating systems come with such a server as standard but if you run a standalone PC you could use any of the FTP freeware available. These include War FTP Daemon, (www.jgaa.com), a free-for-commercial-use FTP server that runs on all Windows platforms bar Server 2003. You could also use the upcoming WinZip 9.0 to compress and encrypt your files.

Drawbacks? Such a scheme wouldn't offer the same security of Creo Tokens, nor would it pass through firewalls.