

40 great online freebies

The web is not only an invaluable source of information, it is also home to a huge number of useful applications that can make your computing time much more fulfilling and save you splashing out on software unnecessarily. Scott Colvey presents a roundup of some of the best programs and resources online



Our pick of the freebies are also on the cover disc

There might not be such a thing as a free lunch but did you realise that it's possible to obtain all the computer software you'll ever need without paying a penny? We're not advocating software piracy: the means we have in mind are all above board and legal.

From the earliest days of computing, programming enthusiasts and altruistic software firms alike have offered some of their wares at no cost. This type of deal is known as 'freeware' and is funded in a variety of ways. Commercial companies often give away older or cut-down versions of their programs in the hope that, later on, you'll pay to upgrade to a more advanced edition. Other firms might include advertising space in application windows, meaning you'll be fed a string of commercials as you work. Lone developers, meanwhile, appeal for donations from those who intend to continue using their software.

This adds up to a lot of gratis software goodies. Whatever your needs, be they business or leisure, the chances are that there's a free program to suit – you just have to know where to look. We've rounded up 40 of the best software freebies available on the web. All you need in order to benefit is an internet connection and a few spare hours to spend downloading our recommendations. So read on and then log on. It could save you a small fortune.



Office and productivity

EZVoice 1.1

If you run a small business or operate as an over-burdened, one-man-band outfit then a program like EZVoice could help you maintain a professional front on the most demanding days. This freeware application is a PC-based voicemail system that apes the automated switchboard facilities favoured by big businesses the world over. In other words, if you're too busy to pick up the phone EZVoice will answer calls for you, directing clients to leave a voice message. Much more than just an answerphone, EZVoice will deposit messages in any one of up to 10 mailboxes.

- Download size: 1.53MB
- Download from: www.internetsoftsolution.com

OpenOffice.org 1.0.1

If you only wish to download one business software giveaway, make sure it's the must-have OpenOffice.org. It contains common office software applications, including a word processor, spreadsheet program and presentation tool – there's even a basic drawing package thrown in for good measure. OpenOffice.org is a spin-off version of Sun Microsystems' newly commercial StarOffice suite. StarOffice 6.0, the latest edition, will set you back about £49. However, if you're happy to forgo professional support, OpenOffice.org 1.0.1 can be yours for no more than the the cost of a hefty download.

- Download size: 50.5MB
- Download from: www.openoffice.org

ProjectTime 2.1

Do you fancy automating the tracking of time spent working on projects for multiple clients? ProjectTime could be just what you need. It isn't an advanced project-management system, but for simple needs it's spot on. Set up a list of project names and ProjectTime will keep track as you flit between them and produce reports to accompany invoices.

- Download size: 4.7MB
- Download from: www.comperio.net/software/default.htm



↑ ZipltFast lets pre-XP users compress and browse existing compressed files quickly and easily

→ VicMan Photo Editor offers many of the same features as Paint Shop Pro – and it's free

ZipltFast 2.0

Windows XP might have built-in support for compressed (ZIP) files but that still leaves a lot of pre-XP users who need an efficient way to manage archived material. Our favourite cost-free compression companion is ZipltFast, a program that lives up to its name. Its simple intuitive interface means that browsing existing files and creating new compressed files is child's play. ZipltFast also handles all the common compression formats. A word of caution, though: unless you tell it otherwise, ZipltFast will alter Internet Explorer's home page to point to a portal of the developer's choosing.

- Download size: 2.08MB
- Download from: www.zipitfast.com



Graphics tools

MylMager.com

If your graphics manipulation needs are quite basic – for example, preparing images for use on a personal website – then you needn't bother downloading a dedicated software package and going through the slog of learning its foibles. MylMager.com is a web-based service that allows you to perform a variety of simple image-editing tasks online, prior to posting the results directly to your ISP's FTP (file transfer protocol) server for publication on the web.

You don't even have to register before use: just log on to www.mylimager.com, upload an image to work on and away you go. Quick, simple and, best of all, free.

Download size: not applicable

Download from: www.mylimager.com

Ulead PhotoExplorer 6.0

Once you've tweaked your snaps to perfection thanks to some handy image- and photo-editing utilities, you'll want a way of organising your picture store into some sort of browsable catalogue. Ulead's excellent PhotoExplorer tool is just the job. Fire up the program and it will prepare thumbnail overviews of images on your PC's hard disk. On top of basic editing tools, such as cropping, rotation and colour correction, PhotoExplorer allows you to view image collections as a slideshow. The program can also be used to acquire photos directly from digital cameras or scanners.

Download size: 6.17MB

Download from: www.ulead.co.uk/pex/freeware.htm

VicMan Photo Editor 6.991

If you've read elsewhere that Paint Shop Pro is available free, don't believe it. Jasc's fine image-editing suite can be downloaded without payment, but you are required to cough up a hefty sum if you choose to continue using it beyond a month. VicMan's Photo Editor, on the other hand, is completely free – and offers many of the same facilities, such as nifty filtering and transformation effects.

Sadly, though, there is one potentially frustrating limitation in the free edition of Photo Editor: image size is restricted to a maximum resolution of 1,000x1,000 pixels. If you want to work on larger images, you'll have to fork out \$29.95 (around £19) for the Pro version.

Download size: 3.76MB

Download from: www.vicman.net

WinMorph 2.01

This program's huge impact is belied by its tiny download size. The concept is simple: WinMorph takes one image and, through a series of intermediate image 'morphs', turns it into another. The execution is just as straightforward, requiring the user to do little more than choose the start and end images and a few key co-ordinates.

Of course, if you wish to tweak the settings – number of frames, compression rate and so forth – you can. The end result is saved as an Mpeg movie, but only by trying the software for yourself will you appreciate just how good it is.

Download size: 707KB

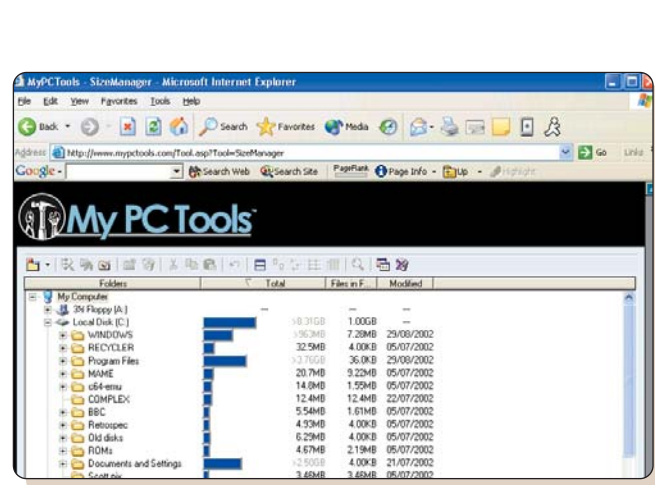
Download from: www.debugmode.com/winmorph



System maintenance

CNet CatchUp 1.31

A defining characteristic of the latest applications is that they're so very big.



Complex and capable programs tend to contain millions of lines of computer code and that can mean trouble. If there happens to be just one error lurking within those countless commands it could cause a PC to crash. Trouble is, many programs are often include bugs when released. That's why an online inventory service like CNet CatchUp comes in very handy. Following the shortest of downloads, the site catalogues the contents of your hard disk and then

informs you as and when relevant software fixes and updates become available.

Download size: 137KB

Download from: catchup.cnet.com

MyPCTools

Ontrack is perhaps best known for its range of software utilities, but the company is also responsible for the MyPCTools website where there's a variety of online data-recovery services and

← Ontrack's MyPCTools site offers a number of free PC utilities which are designed to manage files and folders, diagnose hardware faults and recover lost data

diagnostic tools. Also available on the site are a number of PC utilities that are free to use following a simple registration process. The applications are designed to manage files and folders, diagnose hardware faults and recover lost data. Some are more proficient than others, but at this price it's hard to argue.

Download size: not applicable

Download from: www.mypctools.com/freeware.asp

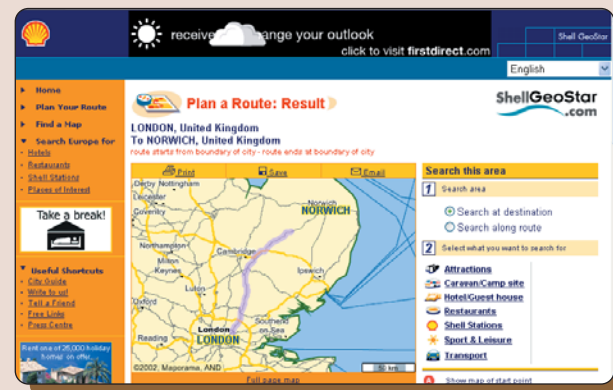
Startup Control Panel 2.6

Some software applications have an inclination to worm their way into the inner workings of Windows, placing quick-launch icons on the Taskbar or clearing a path to launch themselves automatically during startup. Keeping track of such activities can be difficult, but install Mike Lin's Startup Control Panel and you'll be back in charge in no time. This valuable little gem gives you a window to an otherwise-unseen side of Windows, allowing you to

Miscellaneous must-haves

Before we set to work compiling this feature we'd forgotten how many fantastic software freebies there are to be had on the internet. Here are 12 freebies that didn't fit into any category but are must-haves nonetheless.

- <http://toolbar.google.com> **Top of our also-rans list is the Google toolbar which anchors the web's favourite search facility to your browser's control bar. Now you can search without delay.**
- www.bbc.co.uk/newsline/download/bbtick1.exe **For news reports, download the BBC's News Ticker. This tiny tool scrolls up-to-the-minute headline quick links across your screen: just click to connect to the full story.**
- www.popupstopper.net **If you're beset by pop-up ads on your web travels, Pop-up Stopper will clear the way ahead.**
- www.analogx.com/contents/download/system/maxmem.htm **AnalogX's MaxMem utility periodically purges unused areas of your PC's memory, boosting performance.**
- www.ceruleanstudios.com **IM (instant messaging) might be the new email but until the likes of AOL and Microsoft can agree some common interconnection standards, an IM tool like Trillian can help stitch things together.**
- www.pc-telephone.com **If you prefer to talk rather than type chat, PC-Telephone is the place to go. It can pave the way to making cheap international calls and PC-to-PC calls are free.**
- www.cursorarts.com/ca_aifw.html **Fancy beautifying the Windows interface? ActivIcons will help.**
- www.speedbit.com **We recommend Download Accelerator Plus, a free-of-charge utility to manage multiple downloads.**



↑ Unsure of how to get to Norwich from the centre of London? Use Shell's GeoStar site which will plot the quickest route for you

- www.sampspade.org **You'll find one of our favourite (if somewhat niche) online services here. If you want to find out anything technical about domains and destinations on the web, this is the place to do it.**
- www.shellgeostar.com **For real-world travels, Shell's GeoStar site will plot a driving map between any two places in Europe – fantastic stuff.**
- <http://artem-volkov.chat.ru> **For a little light relief from all this online activity, Tetris 4000 is a modern take on the classic dropping-blocks game.**
- www.risoftsystems.com/store/waterfalls.asp **Alternatively, if you'd prefer to chill out passively then the Living Waterfalls screensaver is a serene scene indeed.**

choose which of your applications launch and how and when they do so.
Download size: 66KB
Download from: www.mlin.net

The Partition Resizer 1.3.4

Playing with hard disk partitions isn't something we'd recommend for the faint of heart. If you're intent on making more efficient use of available storage space, though, a program like The Partition Resizer makes a slow and tricky job a whole lot simpler. It's not pretty – the DOS-based interface harks back to the darker days of computing – but then partitioning has never been an attractive procedure. However, for carving up hard disks of up to 2TB (terabytes) quickly – that is, 2,048GB – it functions perfectly.
Download size: 98KB
Download from: www.zeleps.com



Internet and security

Ad-aware 5.83

Here is not the place for an in-depth discussion of so-called spyware disguised as pop-up ads or useful software applications, but suffice it so say it's an undesirable facet of the web. If you want a light shined

on the parts of your computer software setup that might be reporting your online activities to interested commercial outfits, then a program like Ad-aware will be the torch. This gratis gopher burrows through a PC's folder structure, rooting out suspect software components as it goes. Every home PC should have one.
Download size: 871KB
Download from: www.lavasoftusa.com

Kaspersky Labs Anti-Virus Lite 4.0

We'll be blunt about this: you shouldn't cut corners when it comes to antivirus protection for your computer. Free antivirus software is about as viable as a Saharan sand shop. Keeping the protection level (or virus-definition data) up to date is a time-consuming business and antivirus software firms need some way to fund this activity. Still, if you're intent on doing everything the no-pay way then Kaspersky Labs will throw you a lifeline. The firm's acclaimed Anti-Virus Lite application is available free of charge. However, the complimentary version of the software will only scan for viruses, it won't remove them.
Download size: 9.1MB
Download from: www.kaspersky.co.uk

McAfee.com SecurityCenter

This McAfee web service is the internet security equivalent of Ontrack's MyPCTools computer

maintenance site (see page 167 in this article). After an automated

but unmeasured download (it takes around 30 minutes using a 56K modem, so we estimate it's about 5MB), the software carries out an audit of your PC's internet protection procedures and issues marks out of 10. If you've installed some of the other software we've recommended in this feature, such as ZoneAlarm (see below), then you should score highly. Otherwise, prepare for an electronic rebuke.
Download size: around 5MB
Download from: www.mcafee.com

ZoneAlarm 3.0

If you're a web addict, you need a firewall. This is a piece of software that acts as a gatekeeper between your PC and the outside world. Should a malicious hacker target your computer for an electronic attack of some form, an effective firewall will intercept and prevent the intrusion. Without a doubt, the best free firewall is ZoneAlarm. It's not hugely configurable (if you're a technical tinkerer you'll probably want to pay for the Pro version) but for everyday protection from the nefarious aspects of the web, it can't be faulted.
Download size: 3.4MB
Download from: www.zonealarm.com



Email management

Cloudmark SpamNet 1.0

This program takes a novel and effective approach to spam handling. Rather than relying on an individual user to highlight unwanted messages, the SpamNet software draws on a community database to shift suspect messages straight into a local Spam folder – users can then check that the folder's contents are genuine undesirables. Back at users' inboxes,

received junk email can be flagged as spam and reported to the Cloudmark server – whereupon it drops into the SpamNet database. Genius. Sadly, just at the moment it only works with Outlook 2000 and XP.
Download size: 1.56MB
Download from: www.cloudmark.com

ePrompter 2.0

This program is something of a grower: when ePrompter is first installed, you might wonder exactly why you bothered. The interface is small and ugly and it eschews many Windows conventions. However, what this application lacks in good looks it more than makes up for in uncluttered usefulness.
If you already rely on another email program to consolidate messages from various types of account (like POP3 and web-based mail services) it will be of limited appeal. However, if you want a simple way to manage multiple email accounts, ePrompter 2.0 comes with our heartiest recommendation.
Download size: 940KB
Download from: www.eprompter.com

Eudora 5.1.1

Most email users rely on Microsoft's Outlook (or the free Outlook Express) to handle their email. However, there are



↑ ePrompter may not be particularly good looking, but it's just the thing if you need to manage multiple email accounts

other, some say better, options. One of our favourite free email suites is Eudora, simply because it's more flexible than Microsoft's offering.

Eudora runs in one of three user-selectable modes. In Sponsored mode all the program's features are accessible, but the software displays adverts. If this isn't to your taste, Light mode removes the commercials – and quite a few features at the same time. The final option? Stump up \$35 (around £23) and you get all the features and no ads.
Download size: 6.17MB
Download from: www.eudora.com

MailWasher 1.33

These days even occasional emailers find themselves plagued by junk messages, otherwise known as spam. Of course, a simple way of dealing with such unsolicited email is to hit the Delete key as soon as they arrive.

However, if you receive a high volume of email this is hardly an efficient or convenient remedy.

MailWasher can stop spam messages before they ever reach your computer. By communicating directly with your ISP's POP3 mailbox, the program can remove suspect emails before your valuable time is wasted downloading them. Though not ideal for novices, those deluged by spam should take a look.
Download size: 1.53MB
Download from: www.mailwasher.net



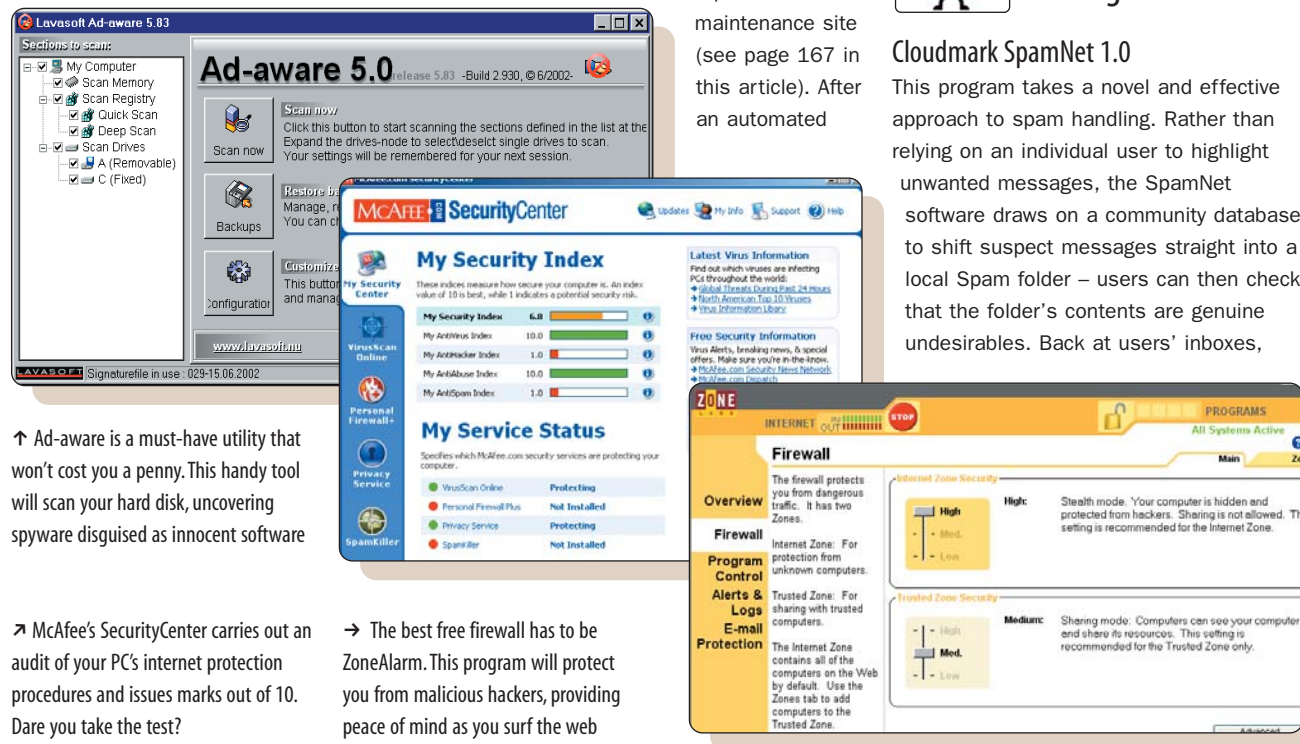
Leisure and lifestyle

Celestia 1.2.4

There are some programs that simply shouldn't be free – and Celestia represents the pinnacle of this elite band of freeware. It's hard to describe quite how impressive this tour-of-the-galaxy tool is. From the remarkably detailed commentaries to the glorious graphics, Celestia is a joy from start to finish (though it's unlikely you'll ever reach that oh-so-distant point). If you want to learn more about our corner of the universe, Celestia is an experience that really shouldn't be missed.
Download size: 11.2MB
Download from: www.shatters.net/celestia

CDRipper 2.0

If you've got an MP3 or some other form of digital audio player, the chances are it came with 'ripping' software. These are programs that capture tracks from compact discs and turn them into



↑ Ad-aware is a must-have utility that won't cost you a penny. This handy tool will scan your hard disk, uncovering spyware disguised as innocent software

➤ McAfee's SecurityCenter carries out an audit of your PC's internet protection procedures and issues marks out of 10. Dare you take the test?

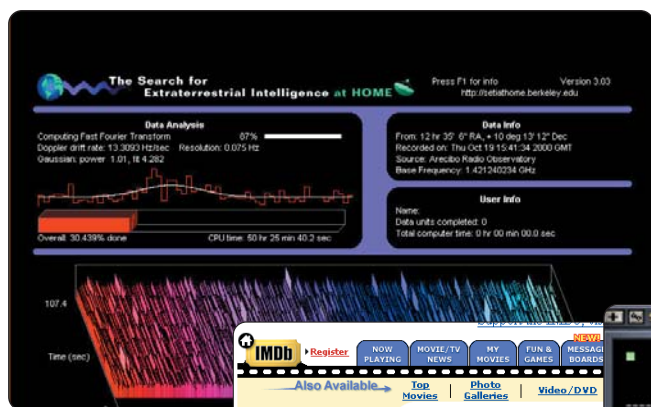
➔ The best free firewall has to be ZoneAlarm. This program will protect you from malicious hackers, providing peace of mind as you surf the web



↑ Eudora is a flexible email suite that offers three user-selectable modes depending on your needs

➤ Celestia will blow you away – discover the universe with this in-depth tour of the galaxy

➔ CDRipper 2.0 allows you to transfer CD tracks to your hard disk



↑ Take part in the Seti@home project and you too can search for extraterrestrial life

→ Want to impress your friends with your inexhaustible knowledge of the film industry? Log on to The Internet Movie Database and get cramming



digital audio files. However, you don't need to have an MP3 player to benefit from MP3 audio files. A program like CDRipper 2.0 enables you to transfer CDs to your computer's hard disk, so you can enjoy music without the need to mess about with disc changes.
Download size: 1.26MB
Download from: <http://redsphere.idz.net>

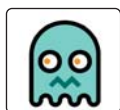
Genealogy.com

Many people make a hobby of tracing their ancestry and, while much of the research grunt-work requires trips to libraries and public records offices, computer software has a useful role to play too. Entering data into a structured, electronic database can ease subsequent updates and alterations. Genealogy.com works hand-in-hand with Family Tree Maker, a commercial software product, but it also provides a free-of-charge online database facility. It's a relatively basic application, but it certainly does the job.
Download size: not applicable
Download from: www.genealogy.com

Seti@home 3.07

If you've ever looked up to the night sky and wondered just what's out there, then you're not alone. The Seti (Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence) is a non-profit institute dedicated to searching for signals from outerspace – and you can help.
Download the Seti@home screensaver and, along with millions of others around

the world, your PC will sift through chunks of 'noise' from space, hunting for signals from intelligent life forms. As yet, none have been detected in the PCA offices.
Download size: 773KB
Download from: www.setiuk.com



Entertainment and games

Electrotank.com

For sheer simplicity, an online gaming site like Electrotank is hard to beat. Registration requires nothing more than an email address and password and then it's on to the entertainment. Electrotank's most popular offering is Mini Golf, a twee pitch-and-putt game that can be played alone or against others. This is just the beginning, though: elsewhere on the site you'll find pool, tic-tac-toe and numerous other simple-but-addictive time-wasters.
Download size: not applicable
Download from: www.electrotank.com

Mame 0.61

Mame (multiple arcade machine emulator) is a fitting moniker. The program emulates arcade games of old, using software 'images' of original hardware (specifically an arcade machine's ROMs) and it does so perfectly. However, while some manufacturers of ancient arcade hardware have placed their wares in the public



↑ You'll find a host of addictive games at Electrotank including the ever-popular pitch-and-putt



← For music, radio and video playback, Media Player is good, but Winamp is better

domain, many have not so be careful not to download ROM files illegally.
Download size: 2.76MB
Download from: www.mame.net

The Internet Movie Database

Every web-connected film fan should bookmark the Internet Movie Database. Without doubt, this (primarily) free service is the ultimate entertainment industry resource, keeping meticulous tabs on every mover and shaker in the business and all the non-entities besides. Search by movie title, television show or actor to bring up exhaustive details of cast, crew or careers – it is remarkable. The paid-for part of the site, IMDb Pro, is aimed at industry workers who demand even more depth, but it's unlikely you'll need it.
Download size: not applicable
Download from: www.imdb.com

Winamp 3.0

Yes, Windows has Media Player and, yes, the latest version of Media Player is pretty good. However, in our opinion, Nullsoft's Winamp is still the better option – and it's free. The program's main attraction is its community spirit. Unlike Media Player users, Winamp fans aren't passive in the development of the software. Once you've downloaded the program, explore the Skins section of the site to see the facelifting work of other users.
Download size: 3.34MB
Download from: www.winamp.com ■