

Technology

By Joe Dysart

Speed Demons

Get back in the Web's fast lane with the latest utilities.

If surfing the Web these days feels more like running cross-country in a wet jogging suit, it's time to tweak your PC. The following programs will do just that—make your Web-cruising experience faster, more productive and more enjoyable.

TuneUp Utilities® 2004, by TuneUp Software GmbH (www.tuneup.com) (\$39)

This is one of those programs you don't need to fully understand to appreciate. Essentially, having TuneUp Utilities is like always having your own PC mechanic at the ready, continually sniffing around for problems and pointing out how to banish them. All this sniffing and pointing results in a faster computer and, ultimately, improved Internet performance.

Some of this software's key functions include cleaning up your PC in one click, pointing out performance-sapping programs you don't need to run at all times, freeing up PC memory and accelerating your Internet connection.

Net Boost Pro, by 3B Software (www.3bsoftware.com) (\$29)

This program is designed to speed up Web surfing by fine-tuning both Windows and your modem. The result: faster downloads; faster skipping from one website to another; and better performance playing online games when you really should be working.

QuickClean™, by McAfee (www.mcafee.com/us/) (\$24.95)

One of the most prominent PC software makers, McAfee has been making products like QuickClean for years, with outstanding results. This little gem essentially goes on "space patrol" inside your PC, eliminating every performance-slowng file it can find.

Specific file types that don't stand a chance of survival include unnecessary programs, files and folders; cached Web pages; browsing histories; cookies; old attachments; unneeded ActiveX controls; and drags on your registry—a core component of your system. QuickClean also has a "shredder" feature, which permanently wipes away files that you never, ever want to see again.

Google Desktop Search, by Google (www.desktop.google.com) (free)

The same search engine technology that makes it so easy to find things on the Web can now also be used to find whatever you're looking for on your PC. Google Desktop Search (GDS) indexes your entire PC and calls up files as you need them. The bonus is that GDS has also been perfectly integrated with Google's online search engine. So if you can't find what you want on your PC, you can give the Web a try as well.

AOL Instant Messenger (AIM®) Triton, by America Online (<http://beta.aol.com/projects/tritonbeta>) (free)

If you simply must have the latest and greatest software releases before anyone

else, Triton is for you. The program, which is still in the testing stages, is a kind of AOL Instant Messenger Pro, in that it attempts to consolidate a number of AOL services in one interface.

Specifically, you'll find links to Instant Messenger, AOL Voice Chat and AOL Mobile Instant Messenger. In future versions of Triton, the program will expand to include AOL Video Instant Messenger, file sharing and multiplayer online gaming. Essentially, Triton is a handy tool that enables you to get around faster on AOL.

ACT!® 2005, by Sage Software (www.act.com) (\$229)

Primarily an excellent contact management software package, ACT! 2005 gets special mention because of a recent upgrade to its interaction with Microsoft Outlook®. The change enables users to work seamlessly and productively between the two programs.

For example, ACT! allows users to take e-mail text from Outlook and drop it in an ACT! customer profile with just a few clicks. Plus, the close interaction between the two enables users to work in ACT! while viewing new e-mails as they arrive in Outlook. In the end, all the changes mean less pointing and clicking and greater efficiency while working on the Web.

HotSpot Zone (<http://cnet.jiwire.com>) (free)

Leave it to CNET to come up with a handy search tool that will ferret out

the wireless Internet hot spot closest to you. Simply enter in your zip code, click “go,” and the online application shows you where you can crack open your wireless notebook to get a Wi-Fi Web connection. The program also searches for Wi-Fi hot spots in a number of other countries.

Omea RSS Reader, by JetBrains (www.jetbrains.com/omea/reader) (free)

This is a Web cruiser’s revenge against slow-loading websites. Use this software to grab new article headlines posted on a website, quickly download them and present them for viewing on your timetable. You no longer have to visit each website to track informational

changes. Instead, the software automatically alerts you to changes.

In practice, the Omea RSS Reader, like many RSS (Really Simple Syndication) readers, looks very similar to an e-mail reader on your PC screen. The difference is that Omea serves up a list of clickable headlines (rather than clickable e-mail subject lines). Simply tap on a headline and Omea will go to the appropriate website and bring back the full article.

For more information on RSS and how it significantly reduces the amount of time you spend schlepping from one website to another, check out “RSS: What It Is, Where to Get It, How to Make It, How to Use It” (<http://interleaves.org/~rteeter/rss.html#where>). Another great resource is “RSS: Your Gateway to News

& Blog Content” by Danny Sullivan (<http://searchenginewatch.com/sereport/article.php/2175281>).

Thanks to these performance-enhancing programs, you’ll be skipping around the Internet with lightning speed, and your PC will ultimately run better too.

Joe Dysart is an Internet speaker and business consultant based in Thousand Oaks, California. He can be reached at joe@joedysart.com.

© 2005 by IDEA Health & Fitness Inc. All rights reserved.
Reproduction without permission is strictly prohibited.

MICROSOFT SYSTEM RESTORE

(www.microsoft.com/windows) (free with Windows purchase)

If you have ever wanted to go back in time and do things differently, this utility is for you. A free program that’s included with every copy of the most recent version of Windows, Microsoft System Restore enables you to completely erase your hard disk, reinstall Windows and start anew. As you might expect, a freshly installed version of Windows generally does a lot to speed up the performance of an aging PC.

If you’re very lucky, the computer retailer who sold you your computer included a package of “System Restore” disks specially designed to do the job. If you can’t find those in your neatly ordered cabinet of “Programs I Use,” call your PC manufacturer and they’ll send you a set, usually gratis.

Once you have the complete set, simply save all the data you don’t want to lose, verify that you have copies of any programs you’ll want to reinstall on your machine, take a deep breath and slide in the first disk. From there, you’ll be prompted to feed the remaining disks one by one.

If this is the first time you’ve done a complete system restore, you may also want to call your PC manufacturer’s tech support line, explain what you want to do and have the tech rep walk you through it. If your warranty has expired, you can still get the same service from Microsoft tech support, but they’ll charge you a small fee. Generally, it’s a good idea to do a complete system restore every 90 days.