

MBTS TEKJOURNAL

Volume 6 Number 6

August 2008

AT A GLANCE

Last month I was testing a trial copy of Nitro PDF Professional when I created the mail out version of the newsletter. I took it for granted that everything worked because the document was in fact created. Never assume anything. At the bottom of each page was a disclaimer that I had used Nitro to create the PDF that was sent out. I did not mean this to be an advertisement nor endorsement for this product. It was a human oversight.

From the vendor's website "The complete, affordable PDF solution. Nitro PDF Professional gives you all the features of PDF at an extremely competitive price. Quick and easy PDF creation, powerful text, image and layout editing features, intuitive commenting tools and robust, comprehensive security functionality are just the highlights." There is a Quick Tour option on the website and anyone looking for the ability to create and modify PDF's this may just be the application you're looking for. <http://www.nitropdf.com/index.asp>

THIS Month we look at applications for Tweaking Performance, Security, Disk & File Tools, Media, Internet Tools, and some miscellaneous stuff. Most of the applications are freeware or may ask for a small donation if you so desire (but are not obligated to offer). If we include some that do have a cost, it will be blatantly pointed out.

We have tested most of the applications included here, but not all. If you see something of interest, access the site, read about the app, and make your own decision. We cannot assume any responsibility for the stability of your systems should you choose to

UTILITY APPLICATIONS

We spend a great deal of time searching the Internet for applications to help us fix problems that occur on your systems. As a result, we also uncover a lot of applications and util-

ity programs that may be beneficial to other users as well. For the past few years that we have published a newsletter, we have tried to publish at least one dedicated to these unique programs. Once included, the programs are then added to our Help Website so you may always find them. Here is the current crop:

Performance Tweakers

When your computer was brand new your expression was probably, "Wow, is this thing fast!". Now that it is a little older you may want to figure out how to tweak it to provide some of that old zip. Wear and tear, overheating from improper cleaning, and over crowded registry and disks will cause systems to slow down. Applications can't speed up computers that suffer from overheating due to dust, but they can clean up the other stuff.

Alacrity PC - <http://alacritypc.kensalter.com>

AlacrityPC allows you to get the most from your Windows PC by shutting down unnecessary services and programs before you run a resource intensive application like a game. When you finish, AlacrityPC will automatically restart the programs and services, returning your PC back to its original state. It can also perform additional optimizations like Defragmentation of memory. (small donation requested) (We don't play games and don't have really intensive applications, so we don't personally use this utility)

PDF SpeedUp - <http://www.acropdf.com>

Don't be alarmed when you access this site and see the author wanting \$ 69 for the product. Scroll down the page a bit to find the freeware.

PDF SpeedUp allows you to significantly speed up the time it takes to load Adobe Reader. If you notice that when the Reader starts it loads many plug-ins which you may or may not need, this program simply disables the plug-ins and loads only the absolute necessary ones so the program starts quickly.

There is also a Speed up for Photoshop.

Process Lasso -

<http://www.bitsum.com/prolasso.php>

"Process Lasso is a unique new technology intended to automatically adjust the allocation of CPU cycles so that system responsiveness is improved in high-load situations. It does this by temporarily lowering the priorities of processes that are consuming too many CPU cycles, there-by giving other processes a chance to run if they are in need. This process priority optimization is useful for both single and multi-core processors. No longer will a single process be able to bring your system to a virtual stall." (Donation Requested)

System Explorer -

<http://systemexplorer.mistergroup.org>

System Explorer is like Windows Task Manager on steroids. It is not a program for the faint of heart and may provide too much information for some users. But if you want to find out what is happening on your computer RIGHT NOW, this is your tool. (Donation Requested)

Quicksys RegDefrag -

<http://www.regdefrag.com>

Does the Registry fragment like your hard drive?

Adding and removing programs, surfing the Internet, cleaning temp and cache folders, in short using your computer for what it was designed for will clutter up your Registry. What do you do with a cluttered desk or room in your house? You clean it up.

Make Backups of all your important data before performing this task as your system may not start again depending on what is removed. This utility can also backup your Registry before you start cleaning.

SysInternals - <http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/sysinternals/0e18b180-9b7a-4c49-8120-c47c5a693683.aspx>

The Sysinternals Troubleshooting Utilities have been rolled up into a single Suite of tools. This file contains the individual troubleshooting tools and help files.

Security

SniffPass - http://www.nirsoft.net/utills/password_sniffer.html

Passwords are easily forgotten. You key them in once and never think about them again until your system crashes. If you are a tech and working on a system, chances are good the user didn't tell you the passwords you needed to know. This site may just help you. SniffPass is small freeware utility that listens to your network, capture the passwords that pass through your network adapter, and display them on the screen instantly.

Click on the Passwords button on the left to see all the password recovery tools.

PeerGuardian 2 -

<http://phoenixlabs.org/pg2>

Do you use Peer to Peer software like Bit Torrent, LimeWire, or others? Do you want to stop users from looking over your shoulder to see what your downloading? Then check out this product.

PeerGuardian downloads a list of "suspect" IP addresses IP's" and prevents them from connecting to any software running on your computer.

BARTPE - <http://www.nu2.nu/pebuilder>

When your PC doesn't boot it is generally due to a hardware problem, but may be virus related. So how do you boot a dead system?

This little utility is your answer. "Bart's PE Builder helps you build a "BartPE" (Bart Preinstalled Environment) bootable Windows CD-Rom or DVD from the original Windows XP or Windows Server 2003 installation/setup CD, very suitable for PC maintenance tasks."

All the instruction for creating your boot CD are on the website. Read it carefully and follow the directions.

One item that will take a little work (I am currently investigating this feature) is the area for plug-ins. Plug-ins allow additional functionality like AV and Spyware searches to be included in your build.

AntiVir Personal - <http://www.free-av.com>

The major problem with Anti Virus software is the free stuff generally doesn't work that well, and the paid stuff can be quite expensive.

The Basic protection version (free) Protects your computer against dangerous viruses, worms, Trojans and costly dialers. It is rumoured on the web to be better than the free version of AVG, but I still prefer to pay for and use Webroot's Spysweeper with Anti Virus. http://www.webroot.com/En_US/consumer-products-antivirus.html

XP Anti Spy - <http://www.xp-antispy.org/>

Who says conspiracy theorist are wrong? On the Internet anything can happen. xp-AntiSpy provides a simple list of checkboxes that easily disables all the individual elements of WinXP that you think might be "spying" on you - Automatic Updates, Codec downloads, etc.

HostsMan - <http://www.abelhadigital.com>

Microsoft keeps track of computer names and IP addresses in a special file called the Hosts file. The Hosts file is usually used to bar access to certain sites. Depending on the number of sites, editing this file can be painful with only Notepad as an editor. Hostsman is a better choice in editors of this file.

For more information of the Hosts file and how to block unwanted sites, refer to the following - <http://www.mvps.org/winhelp2002/hosts.htm>

Media Files

Calibration Aider - <http://www.imagingassociates.com.au/color/software/calibrationaider.jsp>

Is your monitor showing you everything it can? This application may help you realize the full potential of your monitor.

ColorPic - <http://iconico.com/colorpic/>

Selecting colours to display on the Web can be a real hassle. Programs don't use a standard selection process. Some are Hex and others decimal. Screen resolutions are now large enough that selecting the exact pixel to grab a colour from is next to impossible. ColorPic magnifies the screen where the cursor is

grabbing colours, displays the value in hex and decimal and remembers the 10 previously selected colours. This could be a dream come true for some users.

doPDF - <http://www.dopdf.com/>

At the beginning of the newsletter I mentioned Nitro PDF Professional for creating and editing PDF files. If all you want is something to create PDF's, this may be the right tool for the job. It is small and uses no resources when idle. It installs as a print driver so any application that can select a printer can make a PDF instead of a paper copy.

DVD Tools

Almost every system today comes with a DVD burner allowing you to copy and make your own DVD's. How many actually know how?

DVD Shrink 3.2 - <http://www.dvdshrink.org/>

This app has been around forever and still works great. Pop your DVD to copy into the drive, fire up DVD Shrink, the disk gets read, and pressing the Backup button lets you copy the original disk to a new disk. This program does have trouble with copy protected material.

DVDFAB HD Decrypter - <http://www.dvdfab.com/free.htm>

This program performs the same function as the front end of DVD Shrink, but without the copy protection problems. Pop in your disk, Click Start, and your movie is decrypted to the target folder. Now you can use DVD Shrink to open that folder and record the contents back onto a DVD.

AVI 2DVD - <http://www.trustfm.net/divx/SoftwareAvi2Dvd.php>

If you have created an AVI video file from another source, or downloaded one from the Internet (like Bit Torrent), this little app can create the DVD for you. And it is freeware. ** NOTE ** Download from a Mirror Site - it's easier.

Disk Tools

IObit Defrag - <http://www.iobit.com/iobitmartdefrag.html?Str=download>

We mentioned this in a previous issue and it is still the best FREE defrag utility we have found. Once installed, there is an auto defrag component that runs in the background when your computer is resting (as long as you're logged on).

HD Tune - <http://www.hdtune.com/>

HD Tune is the do-it-all utility for hard drives. Within its single, tabbed dialog box, you can run a comprehensive speed benchmark, show detailed information about your drives (such as model number, manufacture date, etc.), check hard drive health parameters via its S.M.A.R.T. attributes, scan the disk surfaces for physical errors (nondestructively, of course), and display your hard drive's temperature.

Copernic Desktop Search 2 -
<http://www.copernic.com/en/products/desktop-search/index.html>

I have never been a fan of Desktop Search Engines. After all, how much stuff can you have on your hard drive that you need a search engine to find it? However, there are some systems that have multiple hard drives and not everything is stored in the My Documents folder. This application will probably only appeal to XP users as the search engines built into Vista are great.

ISO Recorder - <http://isorecorder.alexfeinman.com/isorecorder.htm>

Here is a little app that some might want to play with. If you download an ISO image from Bit torrent and want to turn it into a CD, this is the app for you. If you want to create an ISO image to distribute, this is your app. Visit the site, read the content, decide for yourself.

Customizations

Tiny Spell - <http://tinyspell.m6.net/>

Who among us won the Spelling Bee all the way through school? Everyone needs help periodically or their spelling when their spelling is phonetically correct but just doesn't look right. Enter Tiny Spell! This little app lives in your System Tray and monitors everything you type on your computer. When it identi-

fies a misspelling it offers solutions. The American English Dictionary contained in the app has over 110,000 words.

Tray It -
<http://www.teamcti.com/trayit/trayit.htm>

Here is a great utility that everyone will probably want, especially if you are like me and have a lot of applications open at the same time. When your Task Bar gets too cluttered, run this app, hold down the control key when minimizing your program and it magically appears as an icon in the System Tray. Click on it to make it the focus Window again.

Internet Tools

Fire Tune -
<http://www.totalidea.com/product.php?Product=FireTune>

If you use Firefox you probably know about the ability to change the settings using about:config in the address bar. This utility edits the settings for you to gain the most speed and versatility out of Firefox as it is installed on your system.

Free Download Manager -
<http://www.freownloadmanager.org/>

I have trouble believing that you can actually download faster than what your ISP connection allows. But here is an application that claims to help. The premise of the program is that it "automatically divides large downloads into separate segments, attempts to grab each individually, and then stitches them together once they're all downloaded." You may not see any difference in download speeds, but if you use High Speed Lite, you might.

Komodo - <http://www.comodo.com/>

Here is a site I literally tripped over and it claims to have 5 applications that are free and will always be free. Right! But who knows... The applications include Firewall, AntiMalware, AntiVirus, Website Authentication, and Email Security Certificate. I haven't tried any of these, but now I know what to do on the next rainy day we get. §