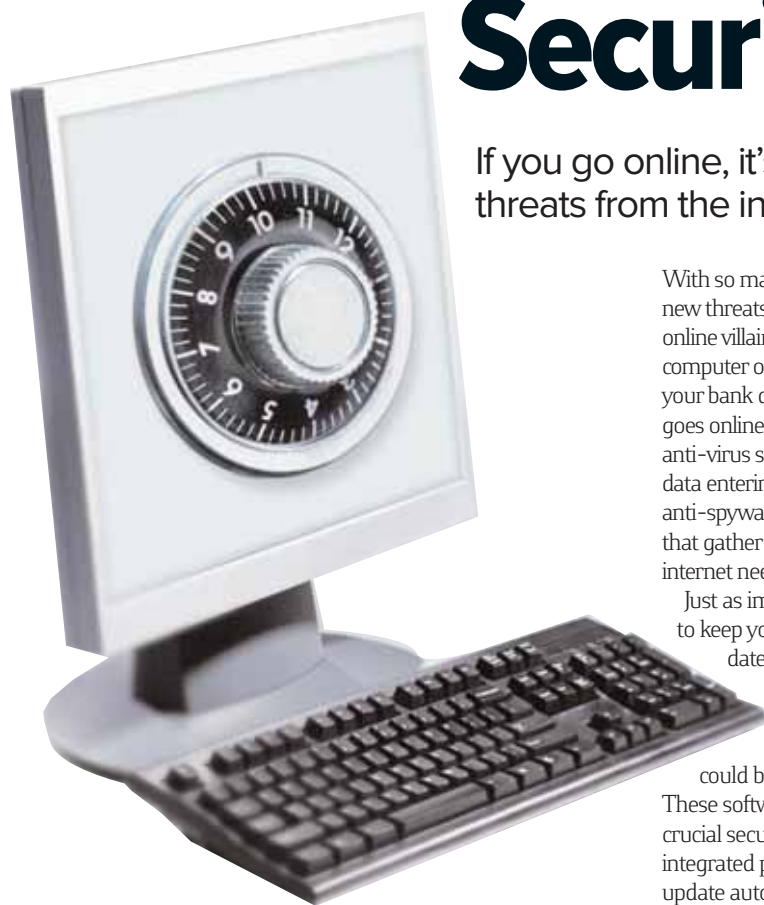


Security essentials

If you go online, it's vital to install software to guard against threats from the internet. We test the latest programs



With so many stories in the media about new threats from computer viruses and online villains trying to break into your computer or dupe you into giving away your bank details, it's a wonder any of us goes online at all. But, provided you install anti-virus software, a firewall (to inspect data entering and leaving your PC) and anti-spyware (to protect against programs that gather information about you), the internet needn't be a scary place.

Just as importantly, though, you'll need to keep your security software up to date. And if regularly updating all these programs sounds like too much of a housekeeping headache, a security suite could be just what you're looking for. These software bundles provide every crucial security program in a single, integrated package, which you can set to update automatically in one go.

Nice and easy

If you have a Mac, your choice of security software is simple. Macs are currently far less prone to viruses than Windows PCs, so the built-in firewall that comes with Apple Leopard is all you need for now.

PC owners, on the other hand, will need security software. And it's all very well if the software can track down a virus on your computer, but it's not much good if the program's so complicated that it's hard to work out what you're meant to do about it. Thankfully, all our Best Buy suites do a good job of protecting your PC and don't bamboozle you with confusing messages and alerts.

Free software

Alternatively, rather than forking out about £40 a year for a suite, you could consider downloading free software instead. Our sister magazine *Computing Which?* found several free programs that were just as good at combating threats as the packages you buy off the shelf.

However, there are several aspects to be aware of before you opt for the free security software route – see 'Home free', opposite, for more details.

If you want to see the full results of all of our security software tests, either read *Computing Which?*, September 2007, p42, and January 2008, p34, or go to www.which.co.uk and check out the 'Computers & internet' section.

Contacts

Microsoft
www.onecare.live.com

Symantec
020 7616 5600;
www.symantec.co.uk

Trend Micro
www.trendmicro.com

FREE DOWNLOADS

Avast!
www.avast.com

AVG
free.grisoft.com

Avira AntiVir
www.free-av.com

ZoneAlarm
www.zonealarm.com

Microsoft Defender
www.microsoft.com

Ospam
www.Ospam.com
(Ospam begins with the number zero, not the letter 'o')

Spybot Search and Destroy
www.safer-networking.org

Which should you choose?

Best free programs

ZONEALARM FREE

A firewall is the most important security program to have, and ZoneAlarm is the best of the freebies. You can choose any of the Best Buy anti-virus programs in 'Home free', opposite, and use Windows Defender for your anti-spyware.



Easiest to use

MICROSOFT WINDOWS LIVE ONECARE £40

All our Best Buy suites are easy to use, but Microsoft Windows Live OneCare is the easiest for those who are familiar with the look and feel of computers with Microsoft Windows.



Best extra anti-spyware

WINDOWS DEFENDER FREE

Install at least two anti-spyware programs. Got a suite? Add Windows Defender. Otherwise, combine Windows Defender and the second-placed Spybot Search and Destroy. (Activate real-time protection on one program only.)



OUR RESEARCH

We assess how easy it is to install, update and use the software. We expose the programs to viruses and spyware and assess how effective each is at detecting and removing them. Time constraints prevent us from conducting a long-term test of anti-spam programs, but we are able to measure how good the programs are at learning to filter out junk emails.

Home free **Free security programs may require a little extra effort, but they can be just as effective as paid-for suites**

Free security programs are better suited to confident computer users. Unlike paid-for security software, you don't usually get access to a telephone helpline and have to download, install and set each program's updates separately. However, our tests found that the Best Buy free software did as good a job of protecting your PC as the paid-for suites.

It's crucial to make sure you download the right program – see 'Contacts', opposite, for website details.

Our Best Buy programs

Of the free anti-virus programs on test, AVG, Avast! 4 and Avira AntiVir are the easiest to use – although some of the menus are a little tricky to find your way around.

Microsoft Defender is the simplest free anti-spyware

program on test. It offers real-time protection too, so, as well as cleaning spyware off your PC, it prevents it from getting in.

We recommend installing more than one anti-spyware program, as no single program will detect everything. But make sure you activate real-time protection on only one of the programs, as they could conflict with each other.

Windows XP's built-in firewall doesn't check outgoing data, and the one that comes with Vista isn't as comprehensive as ZoneAlarm – the best free firewall we tested. ZoneAlarm will check incoming and

outgoing data, so it'll help prevent infections and let you know if a hacker is trying to extract data from your PC.

It tends to flash up lots of warning messages – which can be confusing – although you can tone this down by adjusting the settings.

Cutting spam

We wouldn't shout about the free anti-spam software we tested, although Ospam (pronounced zero spam) was the best of the bunch. In our tests it caught lots of unwanted emails, but we found that it was a little awkward to use.

TWO FOR £3

Computing Which? is the UK's only completely independent computing magazine. Offering impartial advice and product reviews, it's an essential read.

To receive two issues for £3, please call 01992 822800.



89% Panda Software Panda Internet Security 2008 £43

WHICH? **BEST BUY**

This is another program that is easy to use, and less experienced computer users shouldn't have a problem finding their way around Panda's menus. However, if you're looking for some of the suite's more advanced functions, you may have to search that little bit harder. It's cheapest at Amazon.

WE LIKE Reports about your computer's safety status are very clear and reassuring.



Available www.amazon.co.uk (boxed), www.panda-software.co.uk (boxed and download) **Minimum system requirements** Windows XP, 256MB Ram recommended, 160MB hard disk space. If you have Vista, check www.panda-software.co.uk for the requirements for your version

91% Symantec Norton Internet Security 2008 £50

This latest version of Norton is a real improvement on its predecessor. Messages and menus are clear, and it's simple to use – just install the suite and set it to update automatically. It's cheapest at Comet and PC World.

WORTH KNOWING You need to download the anti-spam and parental control software separately; it's free from www.symantec.co.uk



Available www.amazon.co.uk (boxed), Comet (boxed), www.symantec.co.uk (boxed and download), PC World (boxed) **Minimum system requirements** Windows XP (SP2), 256 MB Ram and 350MB hard disk space. If you have Vista, check www.symantec.com to see the requirements for your version

90% Microsoft Windows Live OneCare £40

If you're looking for an easy-to-use suite and you're familiar with the screens and menus of Microsoft's programs, opt for Windows Live OneCare.

An updated version launched too late for our test results – you can view the full results online in March. It's cheapest at www.tesco.com

WE LIKE A good choice for Vista users.



Available www.amazon.co.uk (boxed), www.onecare.live.com (download), PC World (boxed), www.tesco.com (boxed) **Minimum system requirements** Windows XP, 256MB Ram and 600MB hard disk space. If you have Vista, check www.onecare.live.com for the requirements for your version

Trend Micro's spam filter is very effective and easy to use

89% Trend Micro Internet Security Suite 2008 £40

Like all the other Best Buys in this test, Trend Micro is a strong security suite.

Importantly, the software's alerts and warnings are clear and they're not overly frequent. We like the spam filter as it is effective and easy to use. It's cheapest at Amazon.

WORTH KNOWING The spam filter is switched off by default, but it is easy to switch on.



Available www.amazon.co.uk (boxed), www.trendmicro.com (download) **Minimum system requirements** Windows XP, 512MB Ram recommended, 300MB hard disk space. If you have Vista, check www.trendmicro.com for the requirements for your version