

PC MAGAZINE

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SPECIAL ISSUE: ANNUAL UTILITY GUIDE

● Inside Track:
Dvorak Uncovers
Microsoft's
Secret MP3 Plans

● Trends:
Why You'll Soon
Rent Software
Over the Internet

● Best Web Sites
For PC Shopping

● Everything You
Need to Know
About DVD Drives

● First Looks:
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Your Own Videos

● After Hours:
8 Filtering Tools
To Create a Kid-
Friendly Web

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- Micrografx's iGrafx
- Neopost's Simply Postage
- MetaCreations Headline Studio 1.0
- IBM NetObjects TopPage
- FastTrack Schedule 6.01
- Casio Cassiopeia E-15 and Phillips Nino 200



THE INDEPENDENT GUIDE TO PERSONAL COMPUTING AND THE INTERNET

VOL.18 NO.9 MAY 4, 1999

MAKE YOUR PC WORK BETTER

The Complete

PC Toolkit

Lets You

- Improve Performance
- Protect Your Network
- Focus on Business,
Not Play

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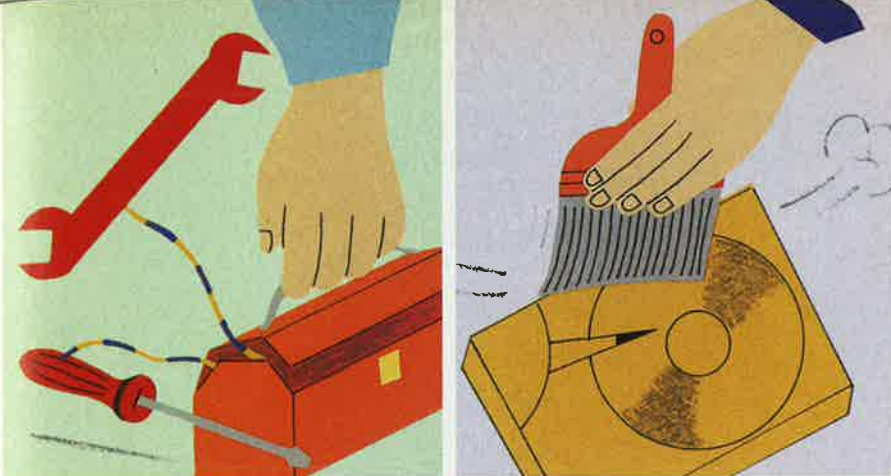
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SERVICE YOUR PC ONLINE

By Edward Mendelson



The Internet changes everything, and utilities are no exception. Today, you can perform online many of the system chores that once required dedicated software.

Online update services such as Symantec's Norton LiveUpdate Pro and Network Associates' Oil Change have been around for some time. But more exciting online tools are arriving. Trend Micro's HouseCall, Intel AnswerExpress Support Suite, and Network Associates' McAfee Clinic are suites that include services such as virus scanning, online backup, and technical support. Online services offer some advantages over software, letting you keep programs, hardware drivers, and virus definition files up to date. But there are disadvantages. An online virus scanner, for instance, can't keep a constant vigil for invading viruses; it can only tell you if your system has already been infected. Online utilities services won't replace software, but they can be useful in a pinch. ☐

HouseCall

Free. Trend Micro Inc., Cupertino, CA; 800-228-5651, 408-257-1500; www.antivirus.com.

● From the makers of PC-cillin, Trend Micro's HouseCall is a free service that scans your hard disk for viruses through a Web browser.

To start a scan, you simply go to www.antivirus.com and click on HouseCall. If you use Microsoft Internet Explorer 3.0 or later, an ActiveX control downloads automatically, displays a list of drives on your system, and lets you select one or more drives to scan in a single step. A separate program running outside the browser performs the scan and displays the results. If you use Netscape Communicator or Navigator 3.01 or later, the same functions are performed within the browser by a Java applet.

In testing, HouseCall correctly detected a "joke" program that scrambles DOS screens. But it also reported three false positives when scanning old DOS utilities. Fortunately, when we told the program to clean the false positives, it did nothing to the files.

HouseCall is fine for a quick scan when you need it, but it is not a replacement for a standalone antivirus program.

Intel AnswerExpress Support Suite

First three months, \$49.95; then \$9.95 a month. Intel Corp., Hillsboro, OR; 888-795-7357; www.answerexpress.com.

● Despite its name, Intel AnswerExpress Support Suite is not really a suite but a combination of software, online services, and telephone support. The initial fee (\$49.95) covers three months of virus scanning, online backup (provided by Connected Online Backup), and telephone support that responds to e-mail queries about more than 200 apps.

AnswerExpress's weak point is its virus scanning, which runs off-line in either continuous-protection or on-demand mode. At the time of our testing, the most recent virus definition file was dated July 1998.

And the program automatically attempts to clean files without giving you other options.

The virus-scanning module also crashed on our system, which gave us an opportunity to test AnswerExpress's technical support. The technicians were highly knowledgeable and instantly identified the problem: a conflict with the latest version of a Windows support file. Intel promises that this bug will be fixed in the next version, due out by mid-1999. The new version will also have a new virus-scanning engine.

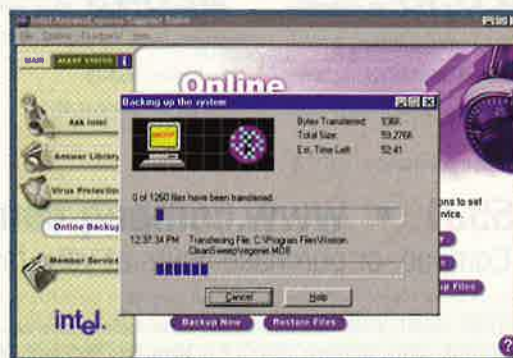
Strictly as a technical support service, Intel AnswerExpress Support Suite is a good choice for small to medium-size businesses. As a utilities service it is weak.

McAfee Clinic

\$5.95 a month. Network Associates Inc., Santa Clara, CA; 408-988-3832; www.mcafee.com.

● Like Intel AnswerExpress Support Suite, Network Associates' McAfee Clinic offers a combination of services and support for a per-month fee. In this case, the services include virus scanning, hard disk cleanup, and disk optimization. The support section is an online library of information and links but does not include e-mail or telephone support.

Everything in Clinic works within the browser window. The introductory version supports only Internet Explorer



Intel AnswerExpress Support Suite, the most versatile of the services we tested, includes online backup.

(any version), but the final service, due out by the time you read this, should also support Netscape Navigator.

On the virus scanner page, you select the drive or folder you want to scan from a Windows Explorer-like list. During testing, scan-



ning proceeded quickly and accurately, without triggering false positives.

The QuickClean module identifies files (and broken shortcuts) for deletion. Most of the files QuickClean listed were expendable, but all the shortcuts and some of the temporary files were not. Worse, QuickClean is an all-or-nothing proposition: You can't remove individual files or categories of files from its list.

McAfee Clinic's virus scanner is one of the best available online, but the QuickClean and Advisor technical support features still need some work. Stick with a standalone antivirus program; you'll get more protection and save money.

Norton Web Services

\$29.95 a year or \$3.95 a month. Symantec Corp., Cupertino, CA; 800-441-7234; www.nortonweb.com.

● If you've ever used a Symantec utility, then you're probably familiar with the LiveUpdate feature. The same technology is used in Norton LiveUpdate Pro, the central feature of Norton Web Services that offers program updates and computing tips from ZDNet (the online division of *PC Magazine's* parent company). As a feature, LiveUpdate Pro has earned kudos for its ease of use; on its own the service is not as compelling.

You register for LiveUpdate Pro

Oil Change provides lots of details on potential upgrades, but many turn out to be old versions of the applications.

through your browser, then download the LiveUpdate Pro application, which scans your system and checks the Web for updates. The main screen is a dialog box with tabs for updating software, hardware drivers, browsers and plug-ins, and miscellaneous shareware.

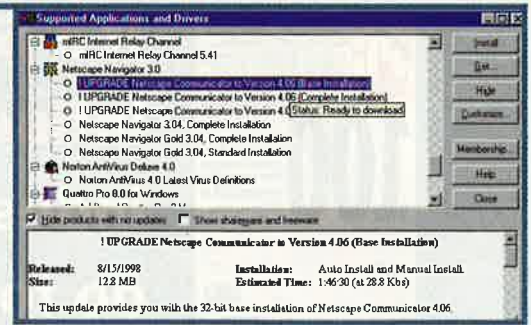
On our tests, the program worked slowly, and although it offered an extensive list of updates, some of these were really downgrades; LiveUpdate Pro proposed to upgrade our system to DirectX 6.0 when 6.1 was already installed, and tried to replace Sound Blaster drivers with older ones.

LiveUpdate Pro is great in its supporting role as a feature of Symantec's utilities. But it doesn't have the right stuff to play a lead part.

Oil Change

\$29.95 a year. Network Associates Inc., Santa Clara, CA; 801-492-2700; www.mcafee.com.

● One of the spoils of Network Associates' takeover of CyberMedia, Oil Change is a software update service. In lieu of a browser-based interface, Oil



Change provides its own application.

After using a wizard interface to register with the service, you click on the program's Start button to download a current list of updates, and the program then scans your disk for applications it can update.

Like LiveUpdate Pro, Oil Change ran into some difficulties on our tests. The package failed to scan our system with total accuracy and didn't offer the latest upgrades. For example, it offered to update with old versions of Netscape Navigator and AOL Instant Messenger. Worse, it mistakenly identified Adobe Acrobat 3.02 as Version 3.0 and offered to upgrade it to Version 3.01.

Given that many applications, including Microsoft Windows, now offer built-in updates, a standalone update service has to do a great job to justify its price tag. Oil Change doesn't meet that test. **PG**

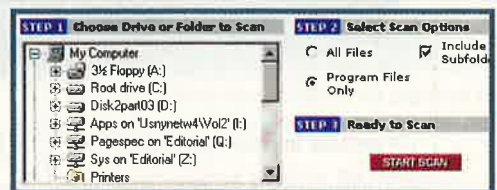
HOW TO USE AN ONLINE VIRUS SCANNER

By taking advantage of technologies such as ActiveX, utilities vendors can provide many of the same features online that are usually found in software. In this example, we used McAfee Clinic to scan a folder on our hard disk for viruses.

1 TO START, point your browser to www.mcafee.com and log on to the service.

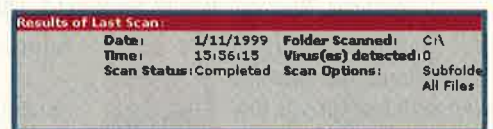


2 ONCE YOU SELECT VirusScan Online, McAfee Clinic automatically downloads the required ActiveX control and opens VirusScan—if you're using IE. If you're using Navigator, you must first download a Java applet.



3 YOU CAN THEN SELECT the drives and folders that you'd like

to scan for viruses. Click the Start Scan button to initiate the process.



4 VIRUSSCAN ONLINE REPORTS on its progress. If it detects a

virus, you can choose whether to disinfect it or delete the file.