

PC

MAGAZINE

DIGITAL EDITION

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APRIL 2011

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The Verdict
From Our
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**The Ultimate
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FREE SOFTWARE



100 Great Apps That Won't Cost a Cent

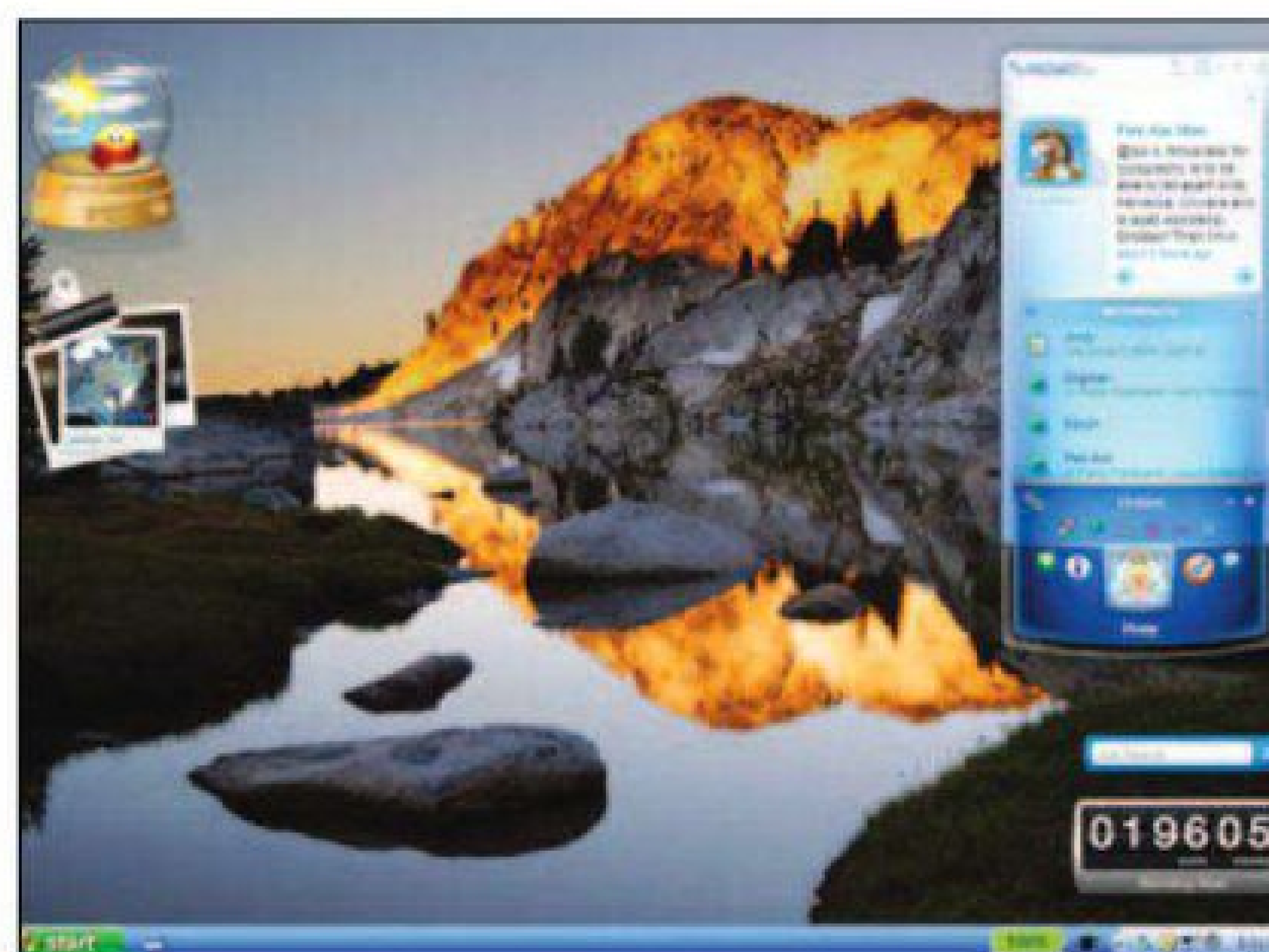
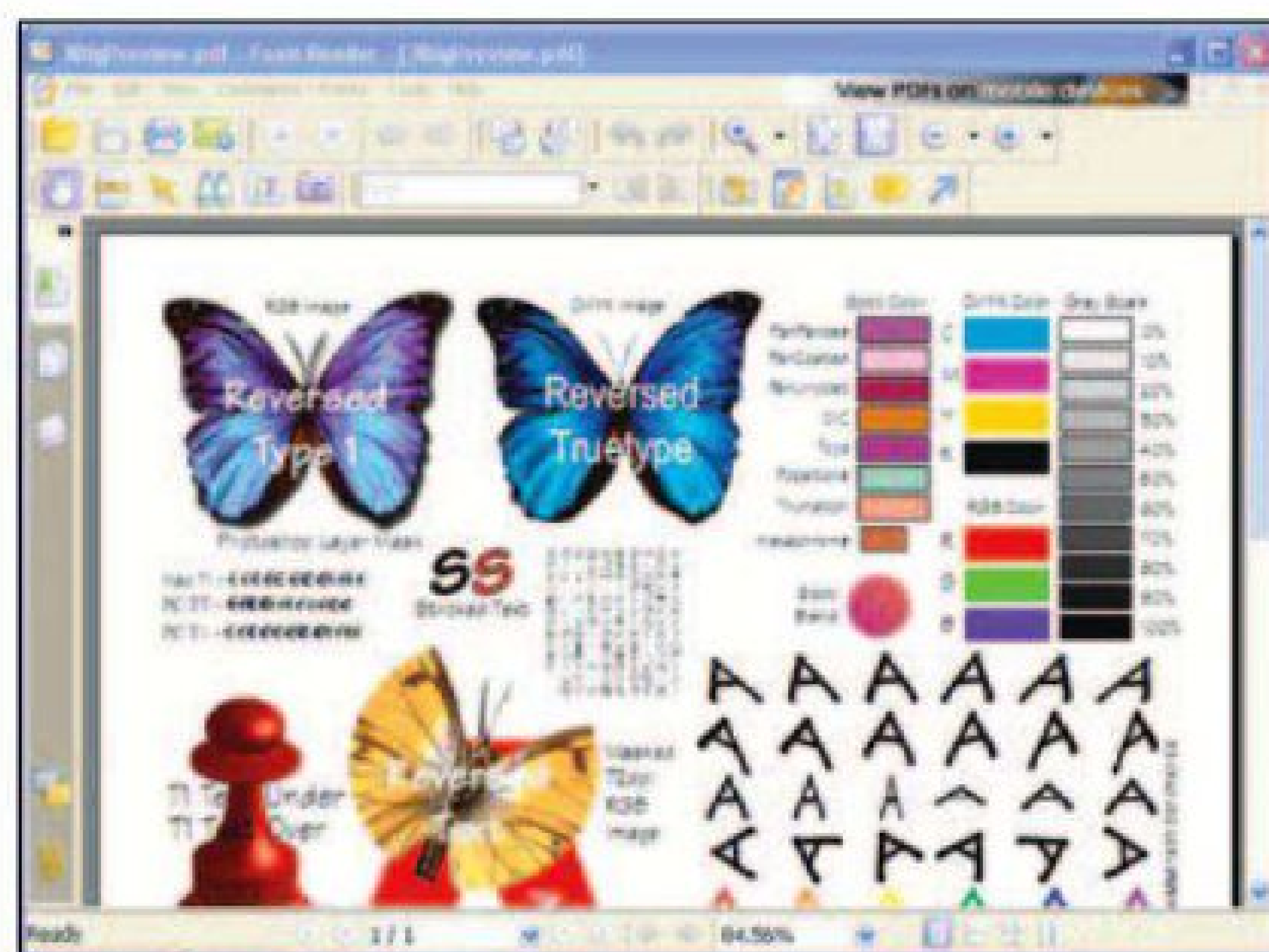
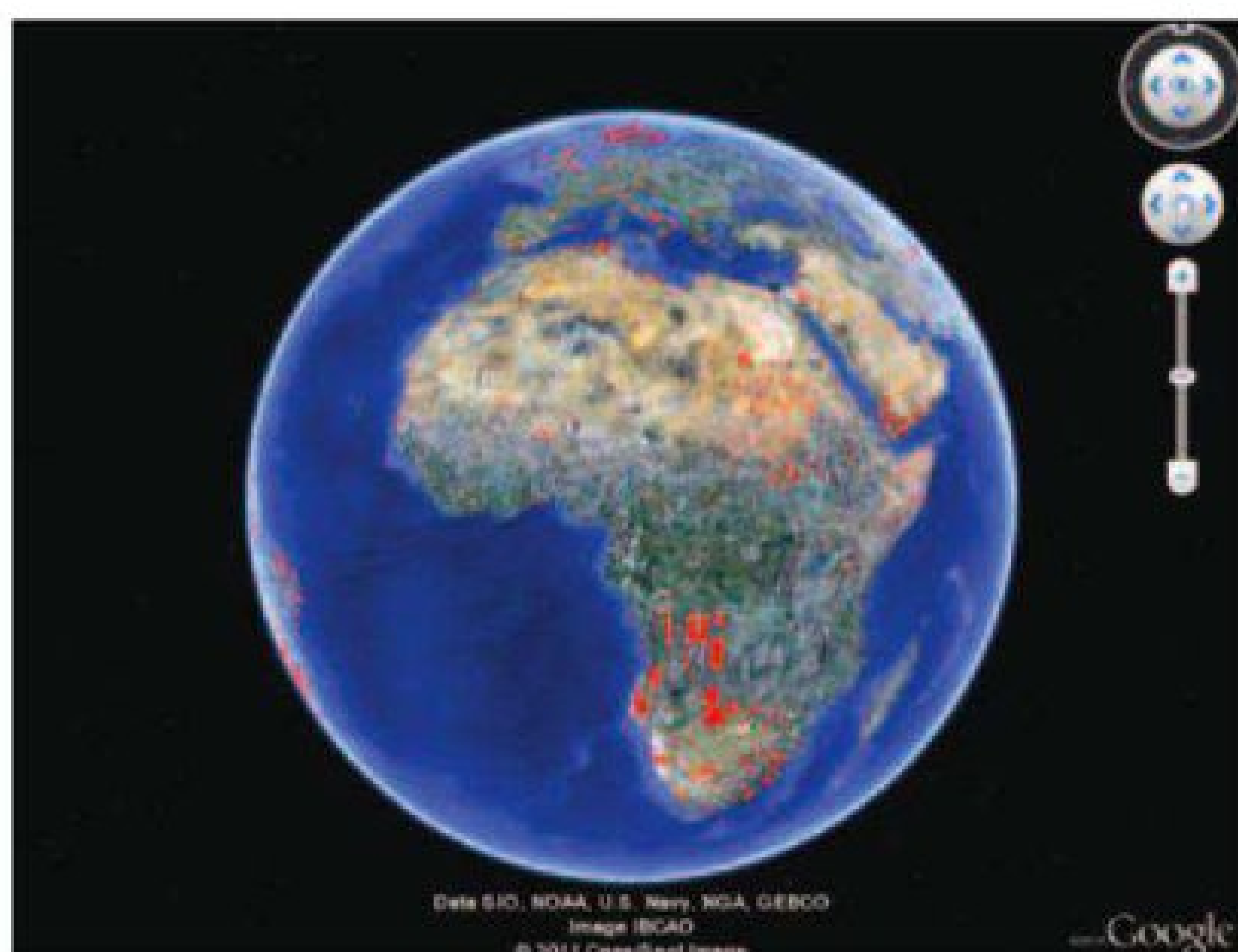
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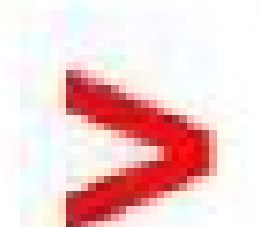
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FIRST WORD LANCE ULANOFF

IBM's Watson Makes Our PCs Look Bad

When the disembodied voice of IBM's Watson answered its Final *Jeopardy!* question correctly, I knew something had changed forever.

It wasn't so much that the super computer had beaten the tar out of its two flesh-and-blood competitors, but that over the three-day *Jeopardy!* competition Watson had become a personality. Its clipped, computer-generated voice was never particularly endearing, but I'm sure viewers were listening for any nuance that might hint at some sort of emotional intention or response.

Over a 72-hour period, Watson transformed from a rack of powerful servers to a character that would soon perform other feats of intellectual strength. Naturally, this has led to countless stories about the deeper meaning of this triumph of technology over man. As a member of this industry, I felt something too—a subtle shift of the tectonic plates below our everyday lives.

And yet, as I watched this momentous

occasion unfold, my son's brand new computer sat beside me, updating its Windows 7 64-bit installation with 25—count 'em, 25—separate updates. It continued this activity for well over an hour, long after *Jeopardy!* finished airing—and I realized that in the world of everyday computing, we still have a very, very long way to go.

As I complained on Twitter about the need to update a brand-new computer in this fashion, some of my Twitter followers leaped to my computer's defense and counseled patience and understanding. Getting these updates is a good thing, they told me. They pinned the blame on OEMs that have to seal the system and OS image at some point to deliver the new PC to market. Problem is, this is a new model, and I ordered it direct from ASUS. It didn't sit on some retailer's shelf for months or even weeks. ASUS got the order and delivered it within days. I agree that Windows should be fully up-to-date when you use it, but there has to be a better way.

Granted, IBM's Watson is a super com-

No average PC can be expected to match Watson's computational feats, but I would just be happy if new computers simply worked without intervention from Day One.

puter, so no average PC can be expected to match its computational feats, to talk to you in the same way, or understand its own needs as clearly as a computer that can figure out the odd "answers and questions" format Jeopardy! favors. But I would just be happy if new computers simply worked without intervention from Day One. We wouldn't accept this from any of our other products. Imagine if your brand new car required that you change its tires before you could drive it around?

Smart, But Not Smart Enough

Here's another example with the very same computer and I think it illustrates how far we've come and how far we still have to go with desktop computing. For some unknown reason my Norton Internet Security (NIS) 2011 installation on the new ASUS laptop was not functioning properly. The Sonar part of the NIS system protection would not turn on. Symantec's in-product, automated support helped me identify the problem and did, with some gentle prodding from me, guide me to a solution. I had to uninstall and reinstall the security software. Doing so is not simple because security software is designed to fight malware that might disable or even uninstall

it. So, yes, there's a special app to help you remove Symantec's own products. As you might expect, it comes from Symantec. I followed Symantec's instructions and tried to install the removal tool, but Symantec's software-guided support was unable to answer this simple *Jeopardy!*-style question: "64-Bit." The correct answer? "Which version of Windows 7 is Lance's computer running?" As a result, the support process led me to a 32-bit removal tool, which my system could not run. I eventually found the 64-bit one. Once I ran that, restarted the system, and selected the right software to reinstall, Symantec did not make me re-input my serial number. That was smart.

So a little bit of intelligence in there, but not nearly enough. Where's the self-awareness? Where are the super-smarts? IBM's Watson would have figured all this out in a nanosecond, but then it would not have had these problems in the first place.

Microsoft, Symantec, ASUS and every other tech manufacturer, be warned: IBM and Watson have just put you on notice. Your customers have seen the future on *Jeopardy!*, and they're gonna want it now.

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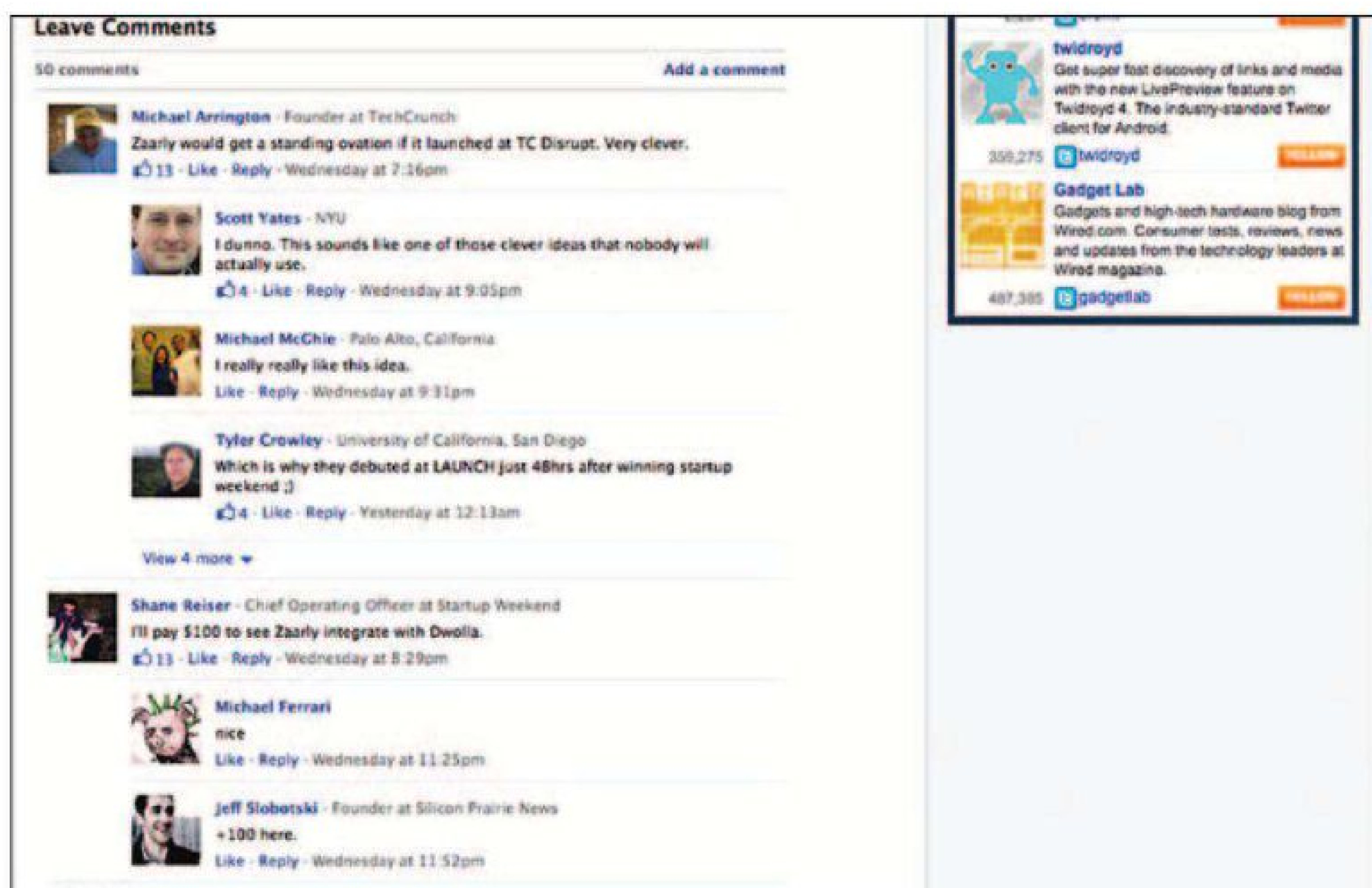
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FrontSide

What's New from the World of Tech



COMMENT KILLER? The updated Facebook Comments area on sites like TechCrunch, above, has more people thinking twice before posting. Comments have dwindled since it was put in place.

Is Online Anonymity Dead?

An update to Facebook's Comments plug-in has some concerned.

Facebook last month updated its Comments Box plug-in to allow for more personalized chats on third-party sites. Yet many are concerned the update will discourage frank discussions.

The update was intended to make comments more relevant. Users of a particular site see any comments from their Facebook friends first, and Facebook adds public information about users next to their names. To push more traffic to third-party sites, Facebook also added links to those partner

sites on its own news feeds and Pages.

All this is helpful for those interested in tying their general online activities with Facebook. But what if you don't want your comments on a site to be visible to your 450 Facebook friends? By default, the "Post to Facebook" box underneath the comments widget on third-party sites is checked. You can uncheck it to have your thoughts remain on that page only, but people on that site will still see your Facebook profile picture; if they click on your name, it will

take them to your Facebook profile.

A week after TechCrunch, a site known for its vocal commenters, adopted Facebook Comments as an experiment, it noticed a dramatic drop in the number of comments, which it said was “completely expected and not a bad thing.” The move has driven away posters of useless and nonsensical comments, the site said, because they know their identities can now be revealed.

Still, some are concerned that the switch will result in the death of online anonymity. Part of the appeal of the Web is that you can privately research and discuss just about any topic. If this system moves to Web sites that cover sensitive topics, will people be less likely to use the Web to seek help or voice their true feelings? Yes, a user

could uncheck that “Post to Facebook” box, but someone will inevitably forget.

“The problem with tying Internet-wide identity to a broadcast network like Facebook is that people don’t want one normalized identity, either in real life, or virtually,” tech entrepreneur Steve Cheney wrote in a recent blog post. “People yearn to be individuals ... They are emotional and have an innate need to connect on different levels with different people.”

Comments on TechCrunch seem to bear this out. “Since whatever I comment is now indexed and permanently searchable by my name, why the hell would I comment on anything?” one reader wrote.

Facebook did not immediately respond to a request for comment. —Chloe Albanesius

10 Most Violent Video Games, Ever

Video games often have been blamed for inspiring violence. And while the latest studies suggest that violent video games aren’t harmful to most kids, the Supreme Court will decide in June if selling violent games to minors should be illegal.

Several titles over the years have arguably pushed the boundaries of decency. Here is our list of the 10 most violent video games of all time:

10. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2010)
(pictured, right)
9. *Postal* (1997)
8. *Mortal Kombat* (1992)
7. *Grand Theft Auto III* (2001)
6. *MadWorld* (2009)



5. *Manhunt* (2003)
4. *Splatterhouse* (2010)
3. *Soldier of Fortune* (2000)
2. *God of War III* (2010)
1. *Dead Space* (2008)

—Jeffrey L. Wilson

Xbox 360 Successor, With 3D, in the Works?

A job listing on Microsoft's site has many wondering, and hoping.

The blogosphere is abuzz at the possibility of Microsoft developing a next-generation Microsoft Xbox 360, after the company posted a job listing for an experienced hardware engineer to join its Xbox team.

In the listing for a "graphics hardware architect," Microsoft said it was looking for someone to oversee "next-generation console architectures from conception through implementation."

"The responsibilities include architecture analysis, key technology selection, architecture specification, communication and collaboration with extended Microsoft teams and partner companies," the listing reads. "The ideal candidate should have a broad background in 3D graphics rendering architectures and algorithms (ideally with gaming applications in mind), 3D software pipelines, and physics. The candidate should also have a solid understanding of graphics hardware implementation, including design methodologies and production yield and cost analysis."

As PCMag editor Eric Griffith recently noted, there's nothing stopping Microsoft from embracing 3D gaming on the Xbox 360, given that the console is already 3D-capable from a technical standpoint.

Although it's hard to imagine Microsoft



Microsoft Xbox 360

leaking future products on its careers page, why else would it be looking to hire such a candidate? The listing is certainly more substantive than a recent job post from Apple that fueled rumors of an upcoming Apple television set.

Microsoft launched the Xbox 360 in May 2005, four years after the first Xbox debuted in June 2001. The Xbox 360 hasn't been short of demand. In January, Microsoft warned of Xbox 360 and Kinect shortages when December sales surged 42 percent, year on year, with 1.9 million consoles sold. However, the Nintendo Wii still outsold the Xbox with 2.3 million units sold.—Sara Yin

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First

Apple iPad2

Still the King Of All Tablets



The clear standout in the ever-widening sea of tablets, the Apple iPad 2 brings a slimmer, lighter design, faster processing, dual cameras, and FaceTime video chat to a tablet that already had a leg up on the competition. No other tablet available truly rivals the iPad 2, which easily wins our Editors' Choice for tablets.

The iPad 2 has a less boxy feel than its predecessor, with rounded, narrow edges. Its 9.7-inch LED-backlit, multitouch-enabled display remains unchanged from the first iPad, in terms of size and 1,024-by-768 resolution. The front panel is still covered by glass, but now the screen is framed in either glossy black or glossy white.

Apple claims that the new 1-GHz, dual-core A5 processor is up to nine times faster than the A4 chip for graphics processing. We did notice significant improvement over the A4's already strong graphics processing.

The addition of cameras—a front-facing, VGA-quality camera and a rear-facing HD (720p) video camera, which also captures still images—is very welcome. Don't expect great pictures in low-light scenarios, but the iPad 2's camera is more about capturing the moment and having fun than taking high-quality images.

The bad news is there's still no Flash video support. Technically, the Motorola Xoom has no Flash support either—but Motorola claims this will be remedied in a matter of weeks. Apple claims that the future of Web video is HTML5, and video from sites like ESPN.com and CNN, which use HTML5, play on the iPad 2 without a hitch.

Apple rates the iPad 2's battery life at 10 hours. Our continuous video-playback run-down test of the Verizon model, with the screen brightness on high and Wi-Fi on, yielded 7 hours 30 minutes—so you can definitely watch an entire film (or two) on a full

Looks

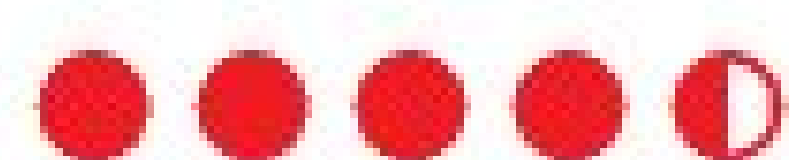
OUR RATINGS KEY:

- EXCELLENT
- VERY GOOD
- GOOD
- FAIR
- POOR



Apple iPad 2

Wi-Fi-only: \$499 for 16GB, \$599 for 32GB, and \$699 for 64GB; **Wi-fi+3G (hardware only):** \$629 for 16GB, \$729 for 32GB, and \$829 for 64GB



PROS Thinner than the original. New A5 chip offers faster graphics processing, general performance. Dual cameras for video chat, HD video recording, and stills. 3G versions available on AT&T and Verizon Wireless.

CONS Camera image quality not great. Still no Flash video support. No earbuds included.

charge, and possibly even more if you turn the brightness down and Wi-Fi off.

If you have the original iPad, should you upgrade? If having a camera on your tablet is important to you, then yes, but all other improvements are incremental. For everyone else considering the iPad 2 over other tablets, the Motorola Xoom shows tremendous promise and even edges past the iPad in a few areas (cameras and multitasking to name a couple). Still, the iPad 2 simply offers far more apps and a better user experience, and it operates more gracefully and seamlessly with your media than Android devices.—*Tim Gideon*

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Motorola Xoom (Verizon Wireless)

The Best Android Tablet Available (But It's No iPad)

As the first Android 3.0 device, the Motorola Xoom is a showcase for Google's tablet-focused Honeycomb OS. In theory at least, there isn't much the iPad can do that the Xoom can't. But not so fast.

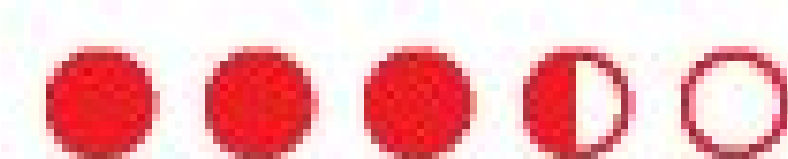
The Xoom's support for Adobe Flash—the most enticing advantage over the iPad—wasn't ready at press time. Also, the Android Market's functionality on the Xoom is buggy at times, and the selection of apps doesn't come anywhere near what you'll find in Apple's App Store. Meanwhile, the newly launched iPad 2 includes front and rear cameras (though still no Flash support).

As it stands, however, the Motorola Xoom is the best Android tablet available right now. It's just that, this early in the tablet game, that doesn't necessarily mean you should buy it.

The Xoom is available for \$599.99 with a two-year agreement from Verizon Wireless. The monthly charge for 3G service is \$20 for up to 1GB of data. And both Verizon and Motorola promise that the Xoom will

Motorola Xoom (Verizon Wireless)

\$599.99 list



PROS The first Android tablet with Google's tablet-specific Honeycomb OS. Fast. Beautiful, highly responsive touch screen. HDMI output for television/computer-monitor viewing.

CONS User interface seems overcomplicated at times. While promised in the future, there's no support for Flash video or SD cards at launch. Android Market on the device is buggy. Few high-quality, must-have Honeycomb apps.

be compatible with Verizon's 4G LTE network in the future. While 4G upgrades will be free, Motorola reps were unsure about the logistics.

Measuring 9.8 by 6.6 by 0.5 inches, the 1.6-pound Xoom has a 10.1-inch, 16:9 1,280-by-800-pixel touch screen. The Xoom integrates 802.11n Wi-Fi, is Bluetooth 2.1 +EDR HID compatible, and sports 32GB of internal storage and a dual-core 1GHz Nvidia Tegra 2 processor.

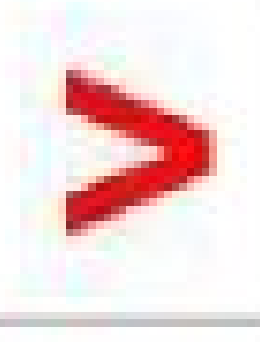
The Motorola Xoom is beautiful and has tremendous potential, with an intuitive user interface, excellent screen quality, and some very useful apps and



features, like Talk and the dual cameras with a built-in flash. But it has plenty of room for improvement, and it's no match

for the original iPad or the new iPad 2.
—Tim Gideon and PJ Jacobowitz

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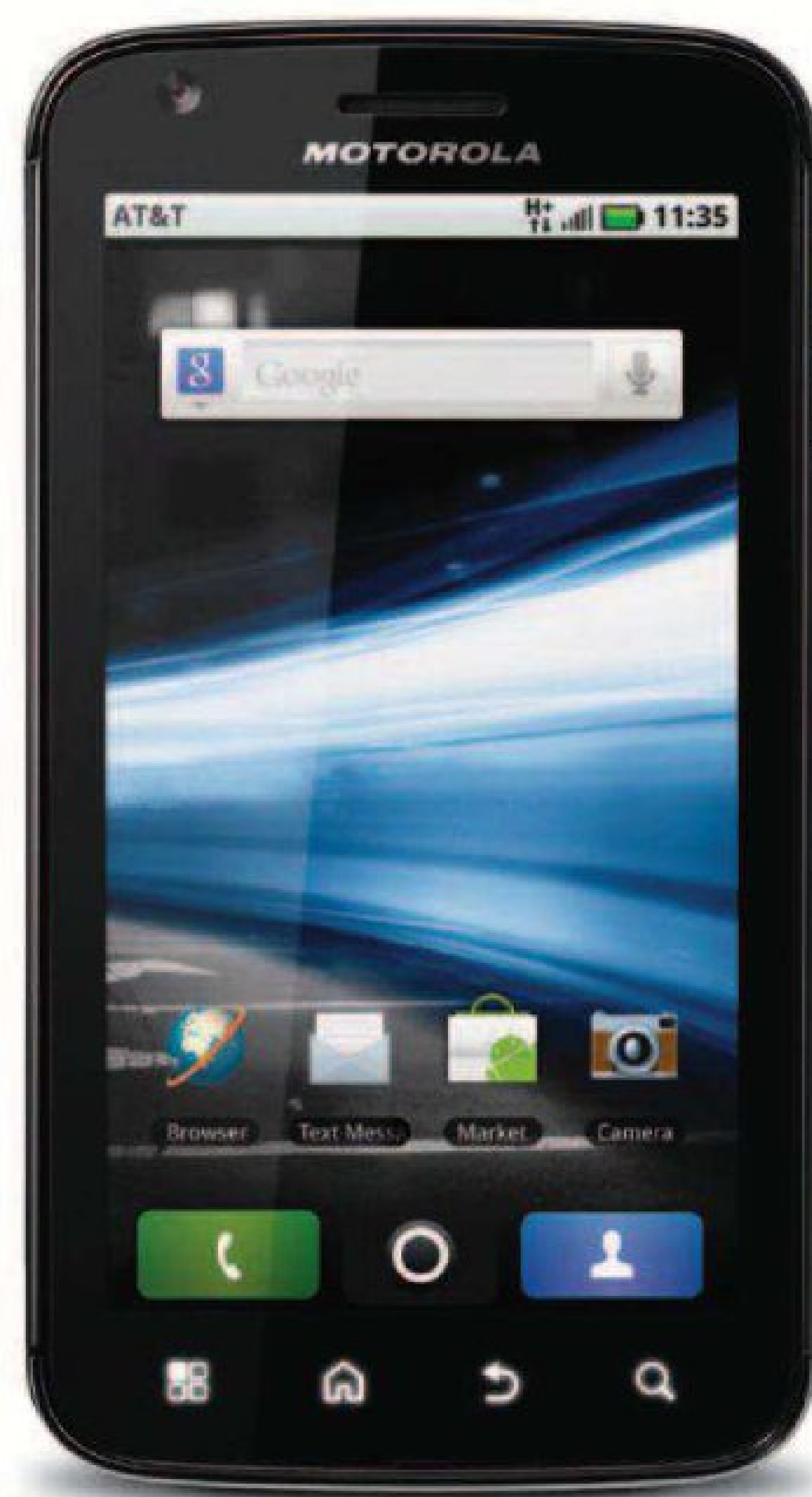
Motorola Atrix 4G (AT&T)

A Pricey Look At The Future

This powerful cell phone is at the forefront of a technology revolution, with the ability to transform into a laptop or a desktop. Someday we might all carry a little brain in our pocket that pops into a dock and becomes a desktop, a laptop, a tablet, or a phone, all sharing the same CPU, and storage. But today, these options are pricey with the Atrix.

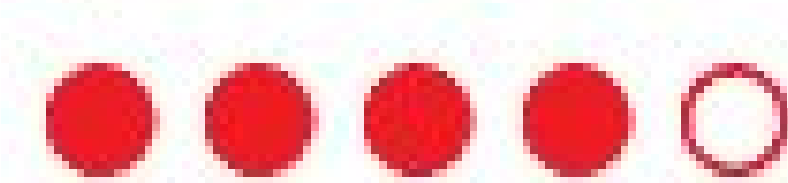
Standing alone, the Atrix is a solid Android phone, but the optional laptop and desktop docks are what make the Atrix a game-changer. The laptop dock looks like a true notebook, but is just a shell that you plug the phone into. Suddenly, the dock comes to life with a full-fledged version of Linux that's running Android in a window. The desktop dock is a small cradle with three USB ports, an HDMI port, a power port, and a headphone jack.

Now for the bring-down: The laptop dock costs \$500, or you can pay \$300 and be tied to a \$20-per-month, two-year supplement on your Atrix service plan (costing you \$540 in the end). The desktop dock is a better deal, at \$190 for the dock, a mouse, a



Motorola Atrix 4G (AT&T)

\$199.99 direct (with two-year AT&T contract)



PROS Very fast and powerful. Gorgeous screen. Optional docks turn the phone into a desktop or laptop PC.

CONS Buggy. Laptop dock is fatally overpriced.

keyboard, and remote control.

As a phone, the Atrix has some bugs that make it not ideal for beginners. The HTC Inspire 4G and Apple iPhone 4, which remains our Editors' Choice for AT&T smartphones, have more stable and mature interfaces. But for adventurous types, the Atrix simply does what no other smartphone does, and that alone is impressive.

—Sascha Segan

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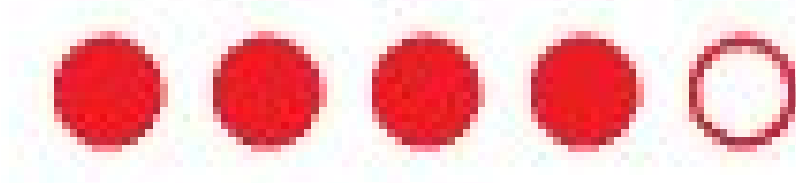
Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF2

Compact In Size, But Very Fast



Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF2

\$699.95 direct



PROS Compact body and lens. Simple to use. Good image quality. Minimal shutter lag. Fast autofocus. Variety of HD video-recording formats. Responsive touch screen.

CONS Low-light performance isn't as good as that of some competitors. Image sensor is not true APS-C size. Proprietary USB port.

The 12-megapixel Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF2 might just be the best Micro Four Thirds camera you can buy. This compact interchangeable-lens camera has a body size that's comparable to a small point-and-shoot, but its images and speed rival that of a D-SLR. The GF2 also spices things up by offering a touchscreen and the ability to shoot real 3D photos via the optional Panasonic Lumix H-FT012 12.5mm f/12 3D G Lens (\$249.95 direct, ●●●●○). Still, it's tough to recommend the GF2 over our Editors' Choice pick, the Sony NEX-3 (\$549.99, ●●●●●), which offers similar size, a lower price and larger image sensor.

Like all Micro Four Thirds cameras, the GF2 offers D-SLR-like speed and image quality, but in a compact body. This is achieved by using a larger image sensor.

The Panasonic GF2 can power on and shoot in an impressive 1.27 seconds, and can continuously shoot at 3.2 frames per second. And there's almost no shutter lag. The snappiest aspect, though, is the camera's autofocus. When using the optical view-

finder, top-of-the-line D-SLRs can autofocus and shoot in a few milliseconds, but when using the LCD in Live View, they slow to a crawl. The GF2 takes beautiful images, too. It crushes any compact point-and-shoot, and is more comparable to D-SLR cameras, though true D-SLRs and other cameras with APS-C size sensors (Sony NEX-3) do offer slightly better image performance.

The DMC-GF2 with 14mm f/2.5 lens is an impressive camera. Both its still images and video look fantastic, plus it's easy to operate and nicely compact. If you're looking for maximum performance, however, the Sony NEX-3 packs a bigger image sensor into a comparable body size at a lower price. —PJ Jacobowitz

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Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch (Thunderbolt)

The Fastest, Most Advanced Laptop We've Ever Tested



As fate would have it, an Intel chipset glitch delayed shipments of almost every laptop manufacturer, save one. Apple, which typically drags behind when it comes to transitioning to new technology, is now among the first to launch laptops with Sandy Bridge (known officially as second-generation Core CPUs). As a result, the Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch (Thunderbolt) is the fastest laptop on our bench.

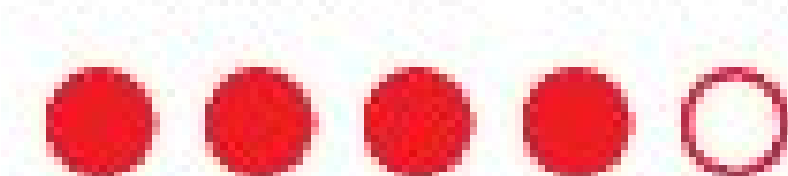
It also introduces Thunderbolt, a promising new connection technology; the last time Apple led the way in this department was with FireWire.

With Intel's second-generation Core architecture, this isn't a mere brain transplant where you swap out one processor for another—it's a multi-organ makeover. The MacBook Pro 15-inch (Thunderbolt) is equipped with a quad-core processor—a 2.2-GHz, Intel Core i7-2720QM. This is a first in MacBook Pro history.

On our PCMark Vantage test—a gauge of overall performance—the MacBook Pro

Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch (Thunderbolt)

\$2,199 direct



PROS Quad-core Core i7 processor is a first. AMD Radeon HD 6750M is a powerful GPU and works with Apple's Automatic Graphics Switching technology. Gorgeous unibody enclosure. Thunderbolt is in its early stages, but it looks promising. Webcam now streams in HD and works with FaceTime app. Backlit keyboard. Multiple screen options. Glass Clickpad has no equals.

CONS Pricy. Lack of Thunderbolt devices to take advantage of the new interface.

15-inch scored 8,315, outpacing the Asus N53SV-A1 (7,257), which has a second-generation 2-GHz Intel Core i7 2630QM CPU and 4GB of memory. It crushed the previous Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch (Core i5), particularly in Cinebench 11.5 (5.07) and Handbrake (1:53) tests, where the gains were doubled. Suffice it to say, it was a massacre, but I suppose being first with new technologies on our labs bench has its advantages.

Thunderbolt, an I/O technology from Intel (codenamed Light Peak), lives inside the

SPECS 2.2-GHz Intel Core i7-2720QM processor; 750GB hard drive; 4GB RAM; AMD Radeon HD 6750M and Intel HD Graphics 3000; 802.11n wireless; 15.6-inch widescreen; 5.5 pounds; Mac OS X 10.6



mini-Displayport. When it's connected to a Thunderbolt-equipped peripheral, transfer rates can hit a theoretical 10Gbps—roughly 21 times the speed of USB 2.0 and FireWire 400, 12 times that of Firewire 800, and twice that of USB 3.0. I'll contain my excitement fully until compatible peripherals ship, but Thunderbolt has mounds of potential.

Another exciting twist is the MacBook Pro's new HD Webcam sensor, which means no more grainy, stretched video feeds when they fill the screen. The streams are broadcast at a resolution of 1,280 by 720 (720p), which is about three times the resolution of the Webcam in previous MacBook Pro models. Video chatting with the FaceTime app,

over a Wi-Fi connection, was free of distortions. This isn't the only laptop with an HD Webcam, though. Dell, Lenovo, Sony, and HP laptops also come equipped with them.

It's still early in the game, as scores of laptops will eventually arrive with Intel's second-generation chips and graphics chips as powerful as those in Apple's new laptops. But for now, the Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch (Thunderbolt) is the fastest shipping laptop to date. Add the Thunderbolt technology and FaceTime HD Webcam, and you have a technological tour de force. It is our new Editors' Choice winner in the desktop replacement laptop category.—*Cisco Cheng*

>> [CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)



Dell Inspiron i580-8139NBC

Fast and Expandable At a Great Price



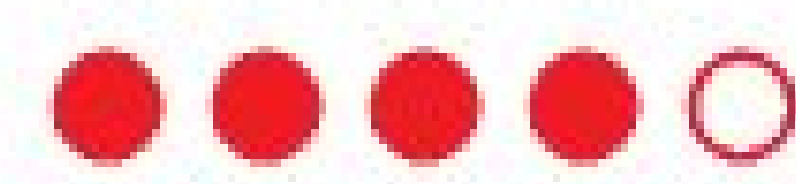
Sometimes you don't need the most cutting-edge technology in your desktop. Sometimes what you need is class-leading functionality for a great price. That's what the Dell Inspiron i580-8139NBC offers. It has an Intel Core i3 processor with Intel GMA HD graphics, a 500GB hard drive, and 4GB of RAM in a minitower chassis. The desktop is basic, fast, expandable, and inexpensive.

The interior has ample room for future upgrades. If you fill up the 7,200rpm 500GB drive, the system can handle another hard drive, plus you can install a Blu-ray optical drive in the future once they get cheaper.

Customers who buy this system from Staples can avail themselves of several services the retailer offers. This includes setting the new system up, data transfer from your old PC to your new one, software installation, and tech support and protection plans that range in price from \$14.99 to \$169.99.

Dell Inspiron i580-8139NBC

\$499.98 list



PROS Good price. Speedy Core i3 processor. HDMI port. Expandability. No bloatware.

CONS No USB 3.0. No Wi-Fi. Only 30-day McAfee SecurityCenter

The i580-8139NBC's Intel Core i3-550 processor with built-in Intel GMA HD graphics helped it gain class-leading scores on our multimedia benchmark tests. It completed the Handbrake video encoding test in 2 minutes 23 seconds and Photoshop CS5 test in 4:15. These are some of the quickest times from recent entry-level and mainstream desktops.

The Dell Inspiron i580-8139NBC is a traditional desktop without many bells and whistles. But its speed, expandability and lack of bloatware make it our new entry-level desktop Editors' Choice.—*Joel Santo Domingo*

[>> CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)

SPECS 3.2-Ghz Intel Core i3-550 processor; 500GB hard drive; 4GB RAM; Intel GMA HD graphics; Blu-Ray Disc player; Microsoft Windows 7 Home Premium

Corsair Graphite Series 600T

A Midtower Case With Elegant Appeal



Cases usually fall into one of three categories: the ostentatious, the bizarre, or the bland. Hardest to find, however, are those that make a strong statement quietly, bolstered not by gimmicks but by rigorous attention to quality. The Corsair Graphite Series 600T midtower is just this kind of case. It doesn't boast a single amenity you haven't seen before, yet makes you look at many of them in new or more approving ways. Considering what you get, it's not an outstanding bargain, but its intricate devotion to every detail, both inside and out, make it our Editors' Choice pick for PC cases.

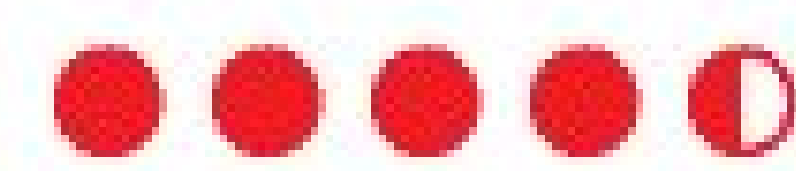
The 600T has a tool-free philosophy that extends to its eight expansion slots and its drive bays. The four 5.25-inch bays have one of the best schemes we've seen yet: Just push in a drive until it clicks, and you're done. The six 3.5-inch bays require a bit more work. Keep a Phillips screwdriver handy; you may need it.

The 600T has front-panel connectors (located on the top front of the case) that offer headphone and microphone jacks,



Corsair Graphite Series 600T

\$159.99 list



PROS Attractive. Very roomy. Excellent for routing interior cables. Easy-open doors. Mostly tool-free construction.

CONS Very wide. No side-panel fan. Hard drive bays potentially inconvenient. Expensive given feature set.

four USB 2.0 ports, one USB 3.0 port, and one FireWire port, plus a fan speed adjustment dial. On the rear panel, you'll find a 120mm exhaust fan and two grommets for routing liquid-cooling piping into and out of the case.

How is the case to build in? Terrific. There's plenty of room for keeping cables well out of the way.

The Corsair Graphite Series 600T may be priced more for gamers and luxury DIY hounds, given its feature set, but it's a case that will not disappoint.—*Matthew Murray*

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Netgear N600 Wireless Dual Band Gigabit Router (WNDR3700)

A Speedy, Versatile Router



A simple setup process, a strong feature set, and excellent throughput make for a killer combination for the Netgear N600 Wireless Dual Band Gigabit Router (WNDR3700). It will appeal to tech-savvy home users and business IT types alike.

The N600 is a dual-band router with a maximum theoretical throughput of 300 Mbps. In real-world usage, if a wireless router can achieve half its theoretical throughput, that's superb performance. The N600 comes closer than any router I've tested to that level of throughput in benchmark results, hitting a maximum throughput of 121 Mbps. That excellent signal also remained fairly steady whether testing right next to or 30 feet away from the router.

The N600's setup is dead simple with the new Genie app, though some basic knowledge of wireless networking is required. The Genie app has great graphics that illustrate how to connect the router to a network.

The N600 comes bundled with a stand so that the router can be operated in an upright position. The front panel features two buttons: one for WPS, and the other to disable the wireless signal with just a touch. Its back

houses four Gigabit Ethernet ports, a WAN port, and a USB port for attaching external storage. Inside is an Atheros AR7161680 MHz MIPS 32-bit processor, 8MB flash and 64MB RAM. Wi-Fi specs include a 2.4-GHz Atheros AR9223 2x2 MIMO radio and a 5-GHz Atheros AR9220 2x2 MIMO radio.

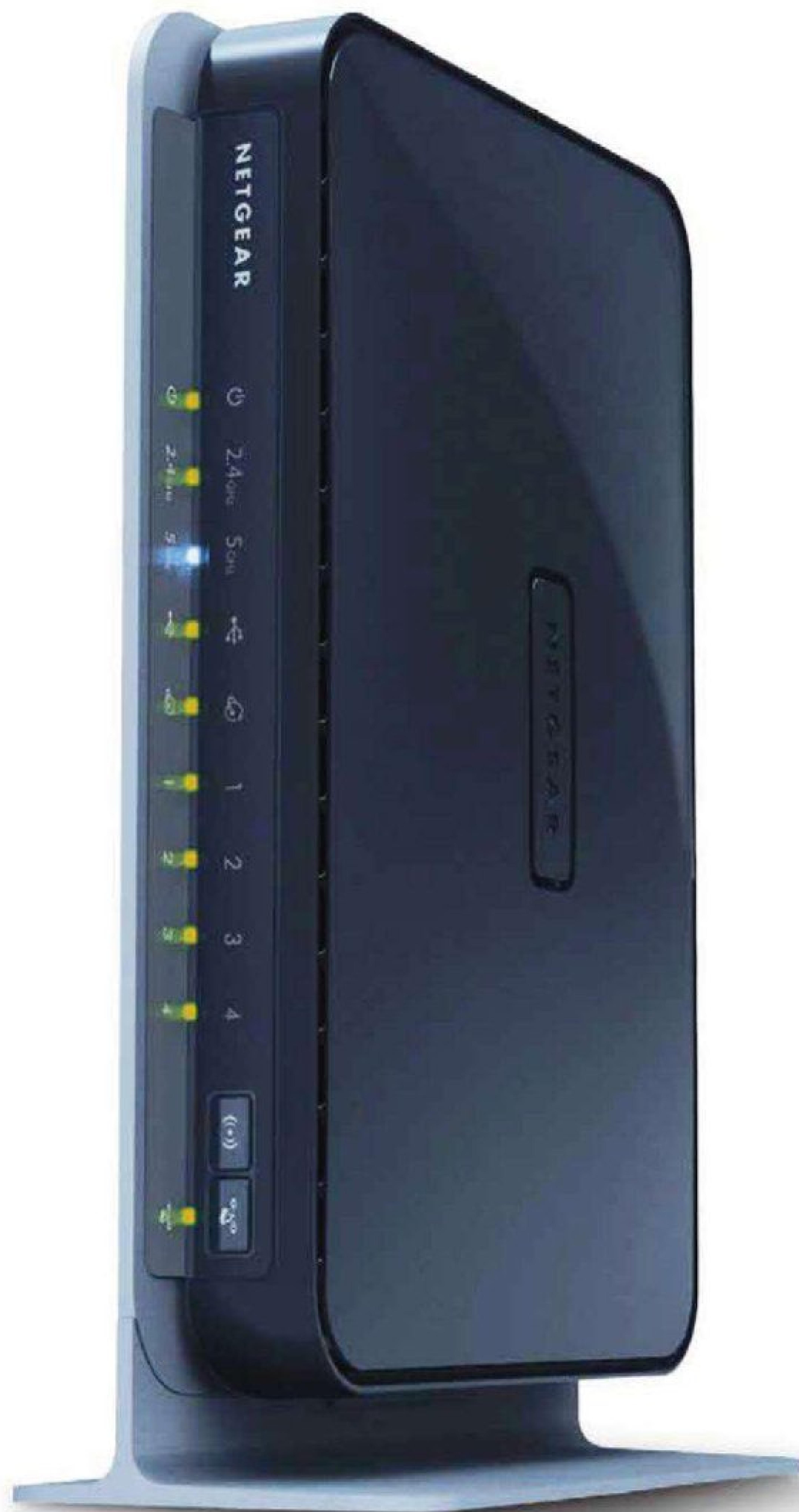
Lots of Extra Features

The N600 will delight wireless networking geeks because there are just so many features to fiddle with, such as an area in the management interface for IPv6 settings, so whenever your ISP deploys IPv6, all you need to do is enable IPv6 in the router. It also offers guest-network functionality, a media server, UPnP and WPS. A Traffic Meter allows you to set up a monthly limit on all Internet traffic and configure the Internet LED to flash or have Internet access disabled altogether once that limit is reached.

It's been some time since we have seen new and noteworthy routers from Netgear. With the N600, the vendor is back in the router game with a vengeance and is sure to give Cisco Linksys a run for the money.

—Samara Lynn

[>> CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)



Netgear N600 Wireless Dual Band Gigabit Router (WNDR3700)

\$169.99 list

● ● ● ● ●

PROS Amazing throughput. Improved setup with Genie app. Loaded with features.

CONS Setup process a bit slow. Setup still requires some tech savvy. Slow file copying via USB connection.

NEC MultiSync E231W

A Great Display For Green Offices



The NEC E231W is a terrific choice for business users looking to cut back on power consumption to maintain a green office environment. This 23-inch monitor uses energy-saving LED backlighting, Intelligent Power Management, and multiple ECO modes to help conserve power, and it will even track your electricity costs.

The 1920-by-1080 TN+ panel is framed by thin (.75-inch) bezels, but its 2.8-inch thick cabinet is fatter than most LED monitors, such as the 1-inch thick HP 2310e (\$299.99 list, ●●●○○○).

There are three ECO mode settings; you can change brightness settings from 0 to 80 percent for mode 1 and 0 to 40 percent for mode 2. The default setting for mode 1 meets the requirement to make the E231W EnergyStar 5.0 compliant and is ideal for typical viewing. The E231w also has a carbon footprint meter that will show you how much it cost to run the monitor based on the US national average of 11 cents per kWh

NEC MultiSync E231W

\$259 direct

●●●○○○

PROS Good color, text, and dark-grayscale performance. Fully adjustable stand. Energy-efficient.

CONS Some backlight seepage. No USB ports or speakers. Weak light-grayscale performance.

(you can adjust the cost per kWh as necessary).

In addition to its low-power characteristics, this 23-inch display offers solid color, text, and dark grayscale performance, and its flexible stand allows you to position the panel for optimal viewing in both portrait and landscape modes. The E231W is not flawless; it struggles at the high end of the grayscale and there's noticeable backlight bleed along the top and bottom of the screen. It also lacks USB ports, which can be a deal breaker for some. Still, if energy efficiency is a priority for your business, the E231W is a strong choice.—*John R. Delaney*

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Lenovo ThinkStation C20

Workstation For High-End Projects



The Lenovo ThinkStation C20 is touted as the smallest dual-CPU professional workstation desktop PC. It is as compact as a run-of-the-mill business desktop yet packs enormous power and expandability.

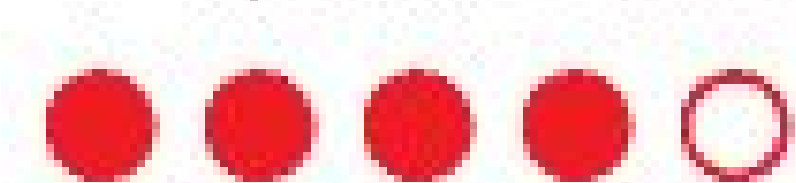
The C20's interior is somehow both spacious and compact: the chassis has expansion space for two additional internal hard drives, two PCI cards, two PCIe x16 cards (one is electrically x4), a PCIe x1 card, and four memory DIMM slots. The system is densely packed: airflow is intelligently designed and plentiful, but there isn't a lot of wiggle room around components in a maxed-out configuration.

Externally, the C20 is well connected, with 10 USB 2.0 ports and an eSATA port for external hard drive connections. The desktop also has a pair of SPDIF-in and SPDIF-out ports (one port each), for professional-quality digital audio connections.

The workstation has excellent performance, thanks to its two Intel Xeon E5640 processors and 512MB Nvidia Quadro FX

Lenovo ThinkStation C20

\$4,618 direct



PROS Dual CPU Xeon power. ISV certification for many professional programs. Rack-mountable. Compact for a full-blown workstation. Capable of driving two 30-inch panels simultaneously. Card Retention. 3-year warranty. Quick and easy to service.

CONS Pricy. No USB 3.0 or FireWire. Could use more memory slots.

1800 graphics card. The C20 performed quite a bit faster than the Apple Mac Pro (Xeon E5620) on the multimedia benchmarks yet slower on the 3D tests.

The C20 is certainly your choice if you use ISV-certified programs like AutoCAD, Maya, PRO/Engineer, or SolidWorks. While the ThinkStation E20 remains our entry-level workstation Editors' Choice, the C20 is our new mainstream/high-end workstation Editors' Choice.—*Joel Santo Domingo*

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SPECS Two 2.67-GHz Intel Xeon E5640 processors; 500GB hard drive; 4GB RAM; nVidia Quadro FX 1800 graphics; Dual-Layer DVD+/-RW drive; Microsoft Windows 7 Professional Edition



Norton 360 Version 5.0

Top-notch Security V



The fact that you're reading this article means you probably have above-average computer skills; a tricked-out, high-powered security suite won't frighten or baffle you. But if you're installing security for a less-technical relative or friend, you'll want something a little friendlier, like Norton 360 Version 5.0. Norton 360 offers the same protective features as Norton Internet Security 2011 does. It just doesn't flaunt them.

Norton 360's installation is quick and simple. Click one button to accept the EULA and launch the install, then sit back; it doesn't need any more from you.

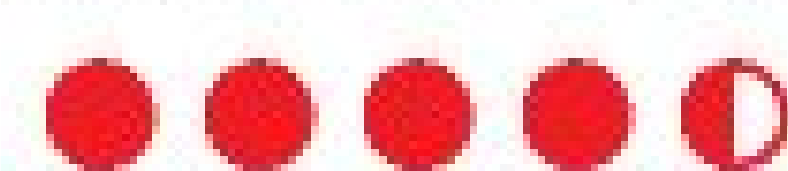
A Top-Notch Firewall

Adding a firewall is the first step toward turning a standalone antivirus into a security suite. Norton 360's firewall is truly excellent. Symantec was one of the first vendors to stop confounding users with incomprehensible firewall queries. Its firewall handles virtually all protective tasks without bothering the user beyond an occasional transient popup that doesn't require any response. In testing the firewall I attacked it with over two dozen exploits generated by the Core Impact penetration tool, and it actively blocked every single one. The firewall is also impressively tamper-proof; I couldn't find



Norton 360 Version 5.0

\$79.99 direct for three licenses



PROS Best firewall. Consistently high lab results. Top scores in PCMag's malware-removal testing, improved scores in malware blocking. Very low performance impact. Simple, effective spam filtering. Top phishing protection. Local and online backup.

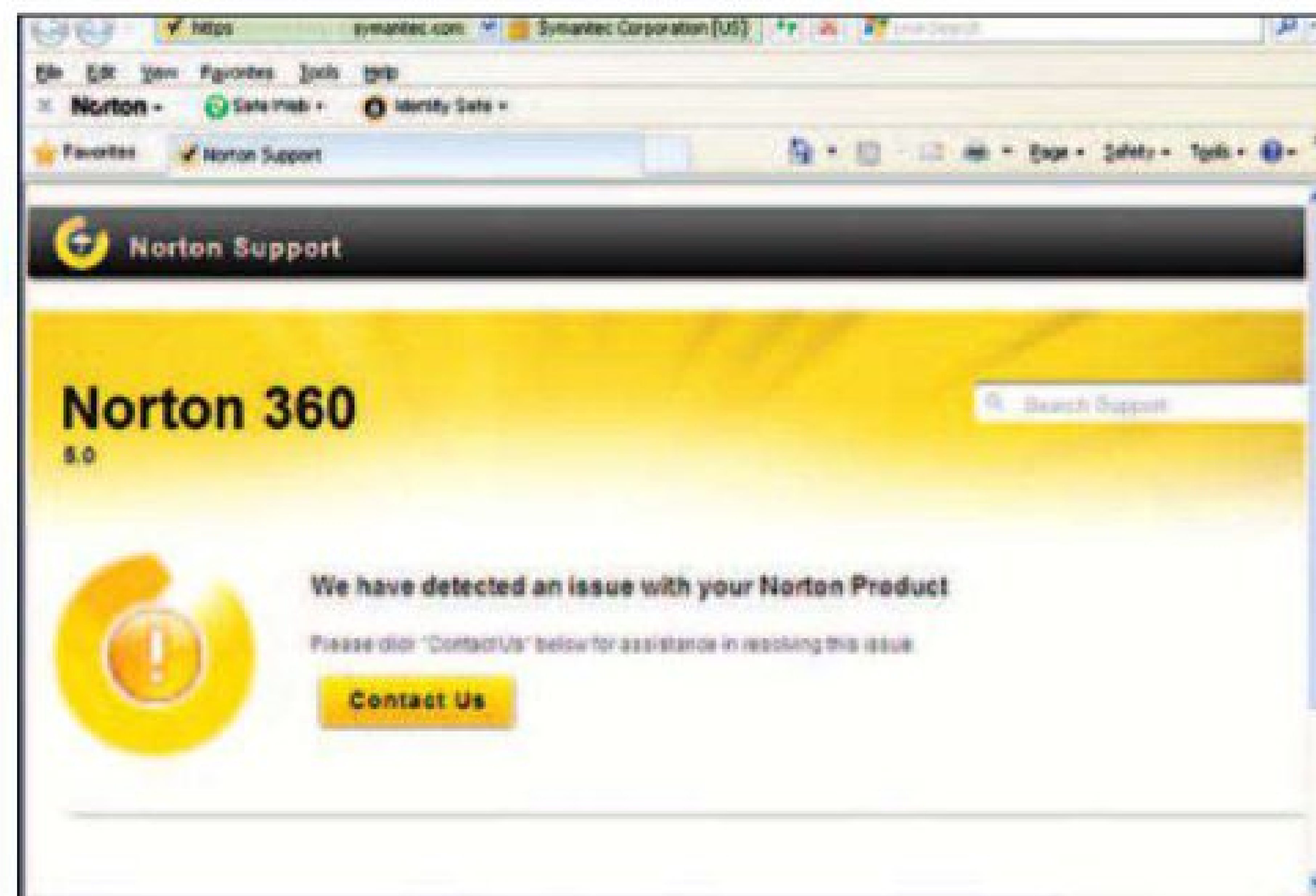
CONS Parental control lacks features found in Norton Online Family Premium. Beaten by some in PCMag's malware-blocking tests.

any way that a malicious program could disable it. At present I consider this the best firewall of any security suite.

Malware Cleanup, Blocking

I tested Norton 360's ability to clean up malware-infested test systems, the same systems on which I tested Norton Internet Security 2011 last September. I expected

With a Friendly Face



improved results, and I wasn't disappointed. As with Norton Antivirus and Norton Internet Security, the Application Rating scan identifies known good files that need not be scanned, which reduces the time for a full scan to just a couple minutes.

Norton 360 also turned in better scores than Norton Internet Security in my malware-blocking tests. For these tests I install the product on a clean system, attempt to launch malware samples, and chart the product's response. Between Norton Safe Web blocking malicious sites and Download Insight blocking dangerous downloads, Norton 360 blocked almost 80 percent of the samples still available for download.

Effective Antispam

Many users already have spam stripped from their e-mail by their ISP or Web-mail

provider. If you're in the dwindling group that lacks this benefit, Norton 360's anti-spam will do a good job without requiring any user intervention. There's no training required; all you need to do is agree when it offers to integrate with Microsoft Outlook or Outlook Express. Those using a different e-mail client probably aren't the target audience for Norton 360.

Your Best Mega-Suite

Norton 360 is what I call a mega-suite. It has absolutely everything you'd expect in a security suite and also includes backup and system tuneup. All of Norton 360's features work well together. It's not vastly different from the previous edition, but it is more efficient, and it remains PCMag's Editors' Choice for mega-suite.—Neil J. Rubenking

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Google Chrome 10

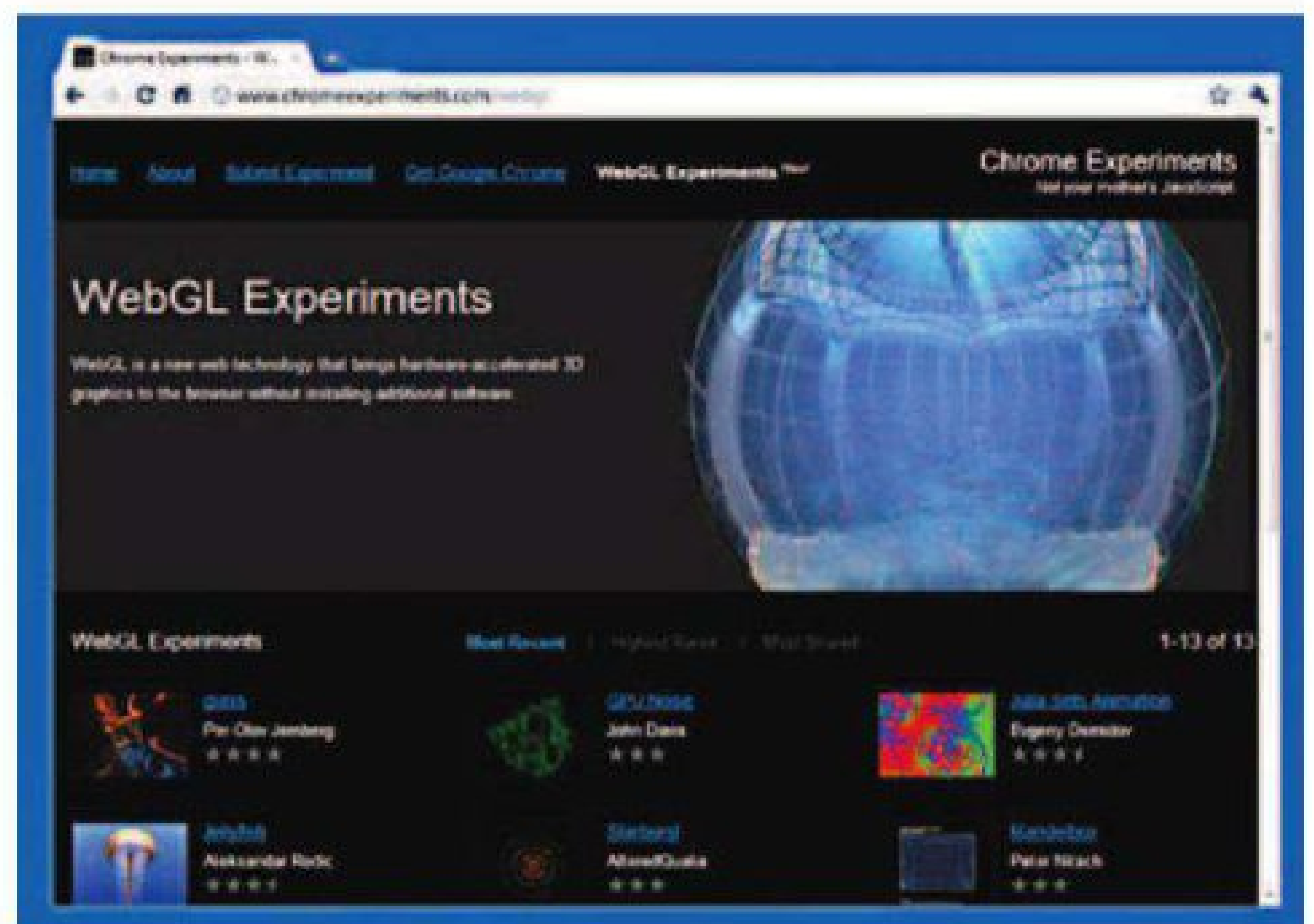
A Fast, Fluid Browser That's Tough to Beat



Google's Chrome Web browser is hard to keep up with, in more ways than one. This latest release, version 10, appears less than a month after the previous version, and its JavaScript performance has once again leapfrogged ahead of the competition.

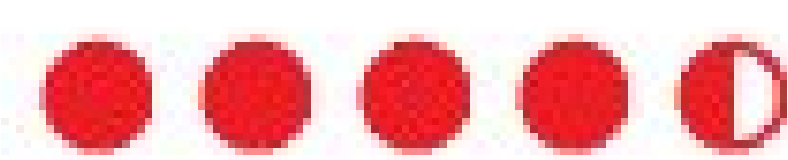
The settings interface has been revamped, too, and security has been enhanced by placing the included Flash Player in a secure "sandbox." Chrome's groundbreaking, minimalist application window continues to let the Web page shine unimpeded, which has influenced the designs of all those competitors.

Chrome Instant is one of the niftiest things to be added to Chrome in a while. Start typing a Web address in the Omnibar, and before you're even finished, a page from your history or a search result page is displayed below in the main browser window. I just type "PC," and PCMag.com is already loaded. The idea was first implemented in Google search's Instant feature, but I think it's even more useful in the browser than in search, where I usually ignore it and finish typing my query anyway: Most sites we visit, we've visited before, so having them ready to go before you even finish typing is



Google Chrome 10

Free



PROS Super-fast JavaScript performance. Instant site prediction. Easy installation. Excellent tab implementation. Themes. Extensions for customization. Bookmark and preference syncing. Tab process isolation. Strong support for HTML 5. Built-in Flash player and PDF reader.

CONS Paranooids won't want to give Google another way to collect data about them.

a big speeder-upper.

Chrome's blazing speed, extension capability, excellent tab functionality, Instant feature, built-in Flash and PDF reading, and syncing capabilities make it a delight to use. Because of all this, Chrome remains our Editors' Choice for Web browsers. —Michael Muchmore

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Paragon Hard Disk Manager Suite 2011

Hard-Disk Management You Can Count On



Many computer users need a disk-management utility for a variety of reasons. They work with large quantities of data, use massive files that must be easily backed up and recovered, or need to boot to more than one operating system on the same machine. For these needs, there's no better choice than Paragon Hard Disk Manager Suite 2011.

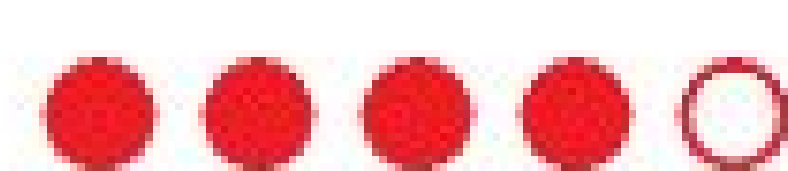
Designed for homes and small offices, Paragon creates, resizes, merges, splits, clones, and defragments partitions. It adds data-management tools like one that copies files or folders from a drive and burns a copy to optical media.

Paragon's suite is the only partition manager I've found that's technologically up to date and has built-in support for the new Advanced Formatting scheme used on most solid-state disks (SSDs) and almost all large-capacity hard disks (1.5TB or larger). When advanced users install a new large-capacity disk, they typically copy their existing data to it by transferring a cloned copy of their older hard disks. If you clone an older partition to a new large-capacity disk, you're likely to end up with an inefficient disk layout, because the old, XP-era formatting method stores data in a way that slows down disks that use the newest tech-



Paragon Hard Disk Manager Suite 2011

\$49.95



PROS Powerful, reliable, feature-packed partition management. Provides wizards for basic tasks, and a full interface for advanced features. Supports OS X partitions and the new formatting standards used for very large disks.

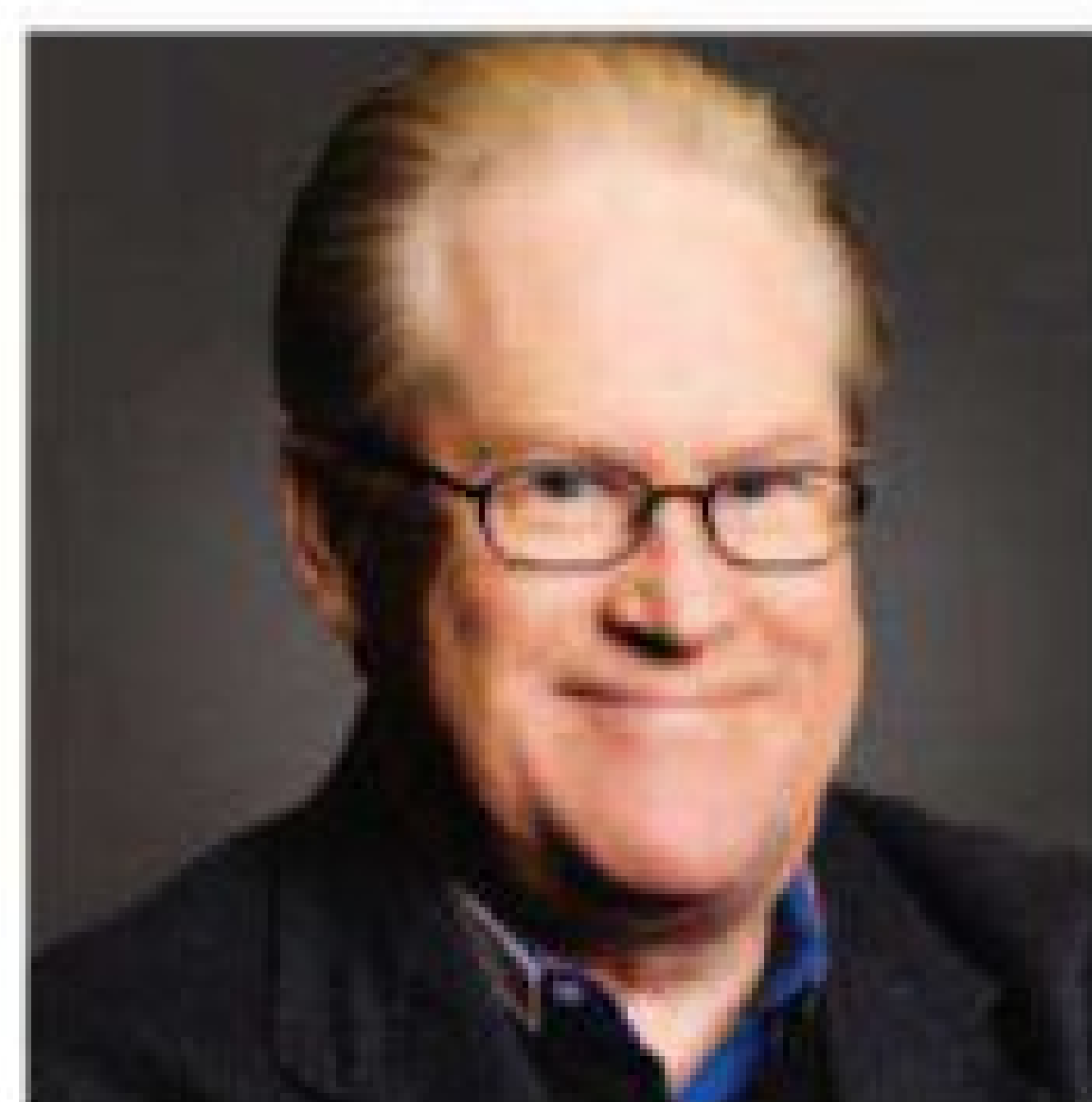
CONS Some clunky interface features.

nology. Paragon's software automatically realigns existing data when cloning an older drive to a new one.

If you need a more powerful partitioning utility than what's built into Windows 7, you need this suite, our Editors' Choice for harddisk management utilities. It has never failed me yet, and I sleep better because I have it.—*Edward Mendelson*

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JOHN C. DVORAK

DIY: The Nigerian Scam E-Mail

We've all seen the Nigerian scam letter. You know, the one from the rich relative of some famous person who just died. The relative who got your name mysteriously, but no matter, he is offering you a 10-percent commission if you can do some simple chore to help this person sneak a huge sum of money out of the respective country. You need simply to take possession of the money—like \$50 million—then hand it over to the letter writer. You then get to keep \$5 million.

Apparently a lot of people fall for the scam and lose a lot of money in the process. They give out bank account information and set up a conduit for money exchange that allows the scammers to simply drain their accounts dry in a flash.

Nigeria is where the scam not only originated, but still flourishes, some say under government approval. Apparently the scam does indeed net millions of dollars every year.

The scam letters have evolved to some degree. One of my all-time favorite versions is a letter supposedly from the FBI telling me that they are on the trail of Nigerian scammers and could I help them? All I need to do is pretend to fall for the scam and go through the process, then let the FBI nab the guy with the goods.

The most recent version supposedly comes from a famous woman dying of cancer while trying to unload a few million dollars, and she could sure use your help spending the money before she dies. I got two of these in one day recently. One from a Mrs. Wu Chan and the other from Kristen Lynne Boyd. Generally speaking, the names used often have some Internet creds, and I suppose the idea is that you can look them up on the Net, find a reference to them, and confirm that they are indeed sick or rich or married to some rich guy.

The creativity never ends and no government seems to be able to do anything to stop it from going on forever with all sorts of amusing variations. I am actually sur-

I am surprised that someone in Nigeria doesn't sell a Mad-Libs version of the letter. You add various details and then plug it into a script.

prised that someone in Nigeria does not sell a Mad-Libs version of their standard letter. You add various details in a random fashion and then plug it into a script. Here's how it would work:

- A. Explain how you got the name of the recipient (e.g. a friend, a search, etc.)
- B. Pick the name of a rich person
- C. Describe a terrible situation the person is in (e.g. about to die, marooned, in prison)
- D. Decide on an arbitrary amount of money in the millions or billions of dollars
- E. Pick a percentage "commission" that will be due the recipient

Now, insert answers here:

Dear one, (insert item A). So I trust this will remain confidential since I have a business proposition of the MOST URGENT NATURE. You see I am (insert item B) and circumstances beyond my control, namely the fact that I (insert item C) have necessitated my transferring (insert item D) to the United States. This must be done within the next 30 days. The money is held at the Bank of West African States in Burkino Faso in my name and needs to be transferred to a Western bank immediately.

I do not know what the future holds for me. Therefore, I decided contact you, to solicit your support and assistance to kindly assist me with the distributions of

these funds to Churches, Schools, Charity Homes, Less Privileges and Public Hospital in your State. For this service I am offering you (insert item E) of the total funds transferred to your bank. If you are willing and have interest to assist me on this please get in touch with me email me for more details.

*Yours sincerely,
(insert item B)*

Now add an email, generally Hotmail, Yahoo! or Gmail, where the sucker can write for further instructions. Sometimes a phone number is used.

Every so often I read one of these letters and wonder if I should move to Nigeria and open up shop spamming everyone to see what happens. It is a form of writing, after all.

I'm sure that these scammers are not studying each other's work in such a way that one day a canonical Nigerian scam letter will appear which will incorporate all the best of all the letters that came before. A letter so good that an untold fortune will be collected from suckers all around the world. It would be a good project for someone.

Now that I think of it, this might already be going on! Keep an eye out.

DVORAK LIVE ON THE WEB John's Internet TV show airs every Wednesday at 4 p.m. ET on **CrankyGeeks.com**. You can download back episodes whenever you like.





PETER PACHAL

Amazon Prime, Netflix: Where's the Selection?

Recently Amazon added Instant Videos to its Amazon Prime service, giving members the ability to stream over 5,000 movie and TV show titles. Hot on the heels of that story, Netflix then worked out a deal to stream a big portion of the CBS library of TV shows on its service. Looking at what the two developments involve, you'll notice a similar pattern: in both cases, the vast majority of the content is very old.

The news about video coming to Amazon Prime was initially exciting since the service (which most people had probably dismissed because it really only offered getting your Amazon junk delivered a day or two sooner) costs less per month than Netflix, and even Hulu Plus. Now people have a reason to give Amazon Prime a second look.

If you do, though, you'll wonder why you bothered. As exciting as it may be to have another video-streaming service to subscribe to, Amazon Prime Instant Videos suffers from the same problem as other subscription-based video services: selection, or

rather the lack thereof.

First of all, the offerings on Prime Instant Videos are a mere subset of what's on tap from Amazon. If you own one of the over 200 devices (TVs, Blu-ray players, and set-top boxes) that can access the Amazon video widget, you probably already know that you can watch movies and even recent episodes from many TV series—in HD—from the service (for an a la carte fee, of course). In total, Amazon offers 90,000 titles for streaming, according to a rep, which makes the 5,000 Prime videos feel not-so-prime.

One Episode Counts as a Whole Title

Then there's the issue of what Amazon considers a "title." It turns out every single episode of a TV series counts as a title. So looking at, say, *24*, which had eight seasons with 24 episodes each, that counts as 192 titles. When you start racking up whole TV seasons, you hit the 5,000 mark pretty quickly.

Finally, which titles are actually on offer? A cursory look shows movies like *Risky Business*, *Best in Show*, *The Mask*, *Starman*,

It seems Amazon has designed its Prime membership for people who wander aimlessly into video stores on a whim. A market, surely, but hardly a “prime” one.

Roger & Me, and *Enter the Dragon*. And those are just the recognizable ones—mining even further there are plenty of unknown straight-to-video flicks there, too. For TV, Amazon features *Doctor Who* Season 4, *Farscape* Season 1 (nice to know they’re nerds, too), and *Nova*. Titles from the past two years (movie or TV) are few. It seems Amazon has designed its Prime membership for people who wander aimlessly into video stores on a whim. A market, surely, but hardly a “prime” one.

I’m sort of singling out Amazon a little too much here. Even putting the CBS deal aside, if you browse the titles that Netflix offers for streaming, you’ll find that many of the movies and TV shows from the last couple of years—the ones you probably really want to watch—are available only on disc.

Hulu: The Exception that Proves the Rule

All of this serves to underscore the weakness of the video-streaming model. While technology has improved greatly in the last few years—an HD episode of *24* that I streamed recently from Amazon looked good and crisp and didn’t have any buffering problems—the selection of media you get via subscription hasn’t. Hulu is kind of the exception that proves the rule,

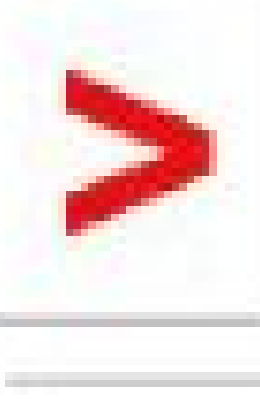
but its offerings have been curtailed since its launch in 2008—savagely, if you look at what’s available on devices outside of PCs.

Will we ever see a video subscription service that actually serves up recent, top-quality titles? Maybe, though studios would want you to pay for the privilege, and my guess would be the bill would end up somewhere in the neighborhood of what your monthly cable bill costs (just for TV, not voice or Internet). To make room for such premium content, I could see services like Amazon offering a different “tier” for the better selection of titles (“Prime” and “Really Prime”?).

And therein lies the problem. Once a monthly subscription rate goes above about \$15 a month, it just starts to look too damned high, no matter what’s on offer. Presumably the bean counters in Hollywood have done that math, too, and have concluded that the a la carte model makes them more money.

But we could all be wrong. Maybe the volume of customers would make the model sustainable at somewhere close to \$15. My advice to any intrepid studios mulling a subscription model that includes recent titles: Don’t knock it till you’ve tried it.

TALK BACK TO PETER E-mail your thoughts to peter_pachal@pcmag.com.





SASCHA SEGAN

Sprint, T-Mobile Merger Is a Bad Idea, But It Could Possibly Work

Analysts are targeting Sprint and T-Mobile for a merger because both are struggling to gain subscribers. But simply merging the two companies would be a total disaster.

Let's start with technology. The companies use different, totally incompatible radio networks and have different 3G and 4G spectra. Sprint is still struggling with the iDen network it acquired as part of its disastrous 2005 merger with Nextel. Managing the "synergies" of that merger set the company back competitively by years.

The combined entity would have to deal with 850-, 1700-, 1900- and 2600-Mhz spectra and iDen, CDMA, WiMAX, GSM, HSPA+ and potentially LTE radios. There is absolutely zero room there for efficiency, and tremendous room for headaches.

Let's not count out the inevitable opportunity cost when a company spends a year with its head up its rear end dealing with a

merger. We saw this with Sprint/Nextel, with AT&T/Cingular, and with HP/Palm; basically, innovation and even marketing grind to a halt for six months to a year as everyone involved figures out what their new titles are and how to merge incompatible back-end computer systems.

Zooming out a bit, this merger would be positively awful for America. Fewer competitors mean fewer options and higher prices, and the inevitable danger of a merger means we're at risk of AT&T and Verizon sawing up the ailing, combined company and stamping out all possibility of price competition in the future.

T-Mobile and Sprint have both been innovators, too, and essentially killing one of them would reduce the level of innovation in US wireless. Sprint has always been on the cutting edge of data services, and T-Mobile has done some great things with pricing and service plans. A single company can only go in one direction, which means

T-Mobile and Sprint have both been innovators, and essentially killing one of them would reduce the level of innovation in US wireless.

we'd see fewer of these options, choices, and ideas in the market.

How the Merger Could Work

But there's one way this merger could work. It would still be bad for competition and probably raise prices nationwide, but it wouldn't be an utter disaster.

Sprint and T-Mobile could form a joint venture to develop an LTE network. Let's call it SprinTmobile. It would also buy Clearwire, which is a mess, needs cash, is mostly owned by Sprint anyway, and has a lot of spectrum, which this merger would need.

Sprint and T-Mobile would operate totally independently as the LTE JV gets up and running. Any attempt to create synergies would probably be a mess. The two companies then slowly transition their business over to the new JV. This would take about ten years, because the "merger" would only really take off when we can have single-mode, LTE-only phones. The real path would only start becoming clear around 2015. With Clearwire's gigantic block of nationwide spectrum, SprinTmobile could later spin off or sell off its AWS 1700 spectrum to raise money.

The "old" Sprint and "old" T-Mobile would offer their customers strong incentives to move over to SprinTmobile products, slowly turning down their networks and turning

various resources over to the new, single SprinTmobile entity. Consider the plan complete around 2018.

It's a risky path, and it would still reduce competition. But it wouldn't result in years of administrative dithering and an attempt to merge incompatible networks like the Sprint/Nextel disaster did.

Merge This Instead

One last, irrelevant point: if you want to merge some wireless carriers, the obvious choice is to merge MetroPCS and Cricket. It's totally absurd that this hasn't happened yet. The two companies have mostly non-overlapping, not quite national networks with the same technology, similar marketing strategies, and a common problem of not quite enough spectrum or scale. Combined, they would have about 15 million customers and cover much of the country.

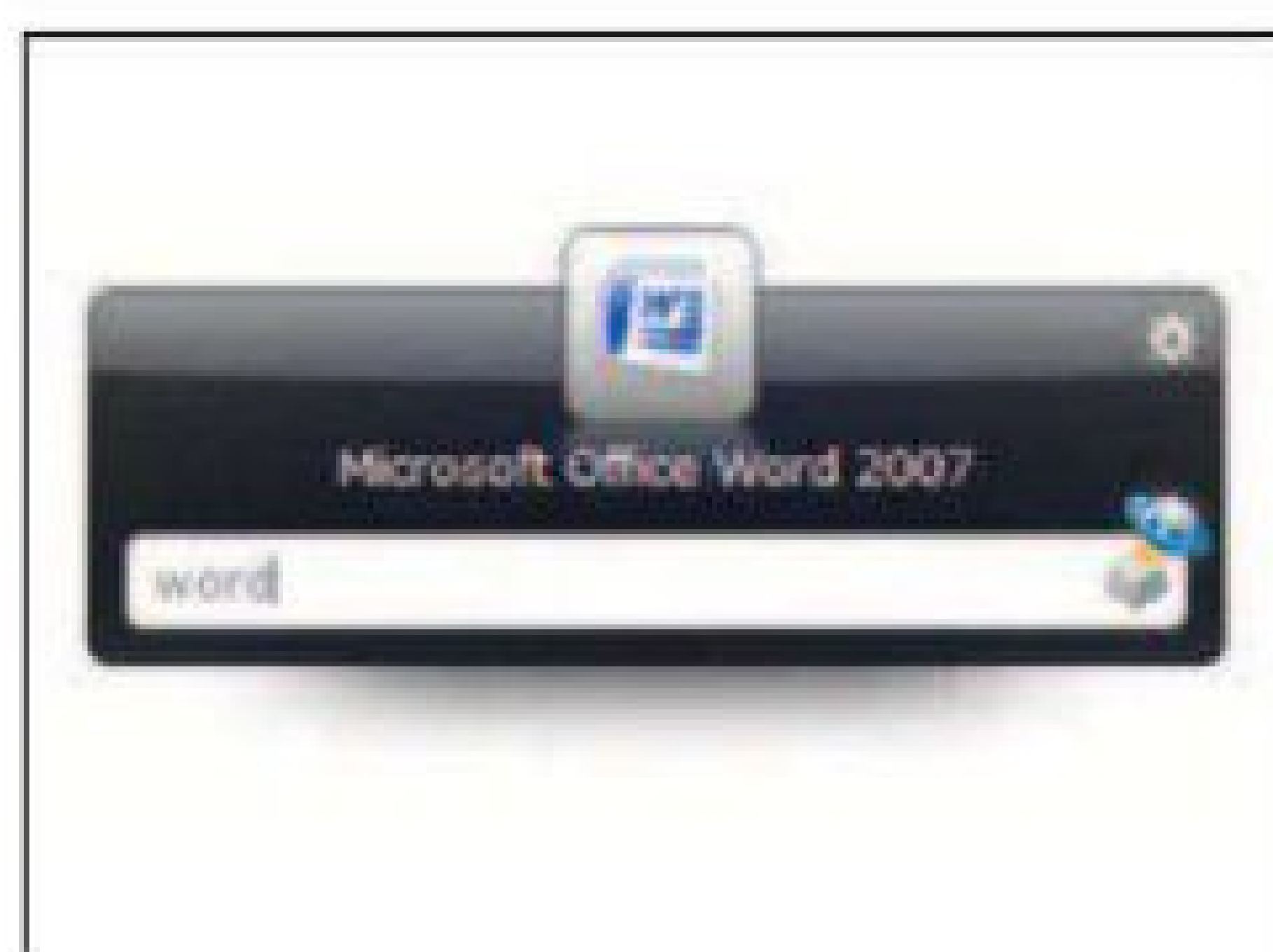
Many people have suggested this merger in the past, and as far as I can tell, it only hasn't happened because the two executive teams personally don't like each other. Time to set aside the hatchet, guys, and give us a fifth national option. That would be a better use of the M&A world's time than trying to force Sprint and T-Mobile together.

STAY PHONE-SMART Keep up with the latest on smartphones by reading Sascha's column at go.pcmag.com/segan.

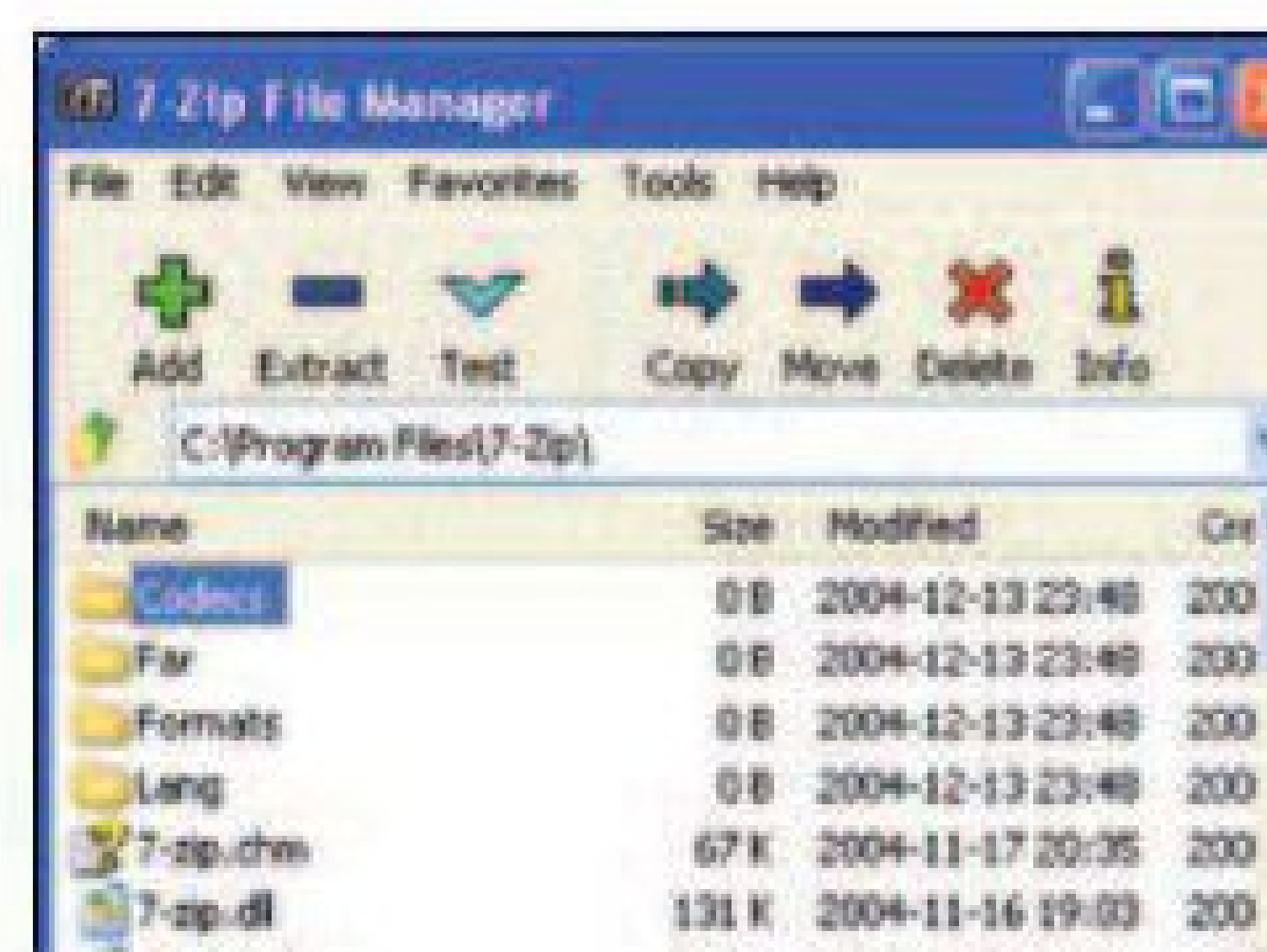
The **BEST FREE** SOFTWARE of 2011



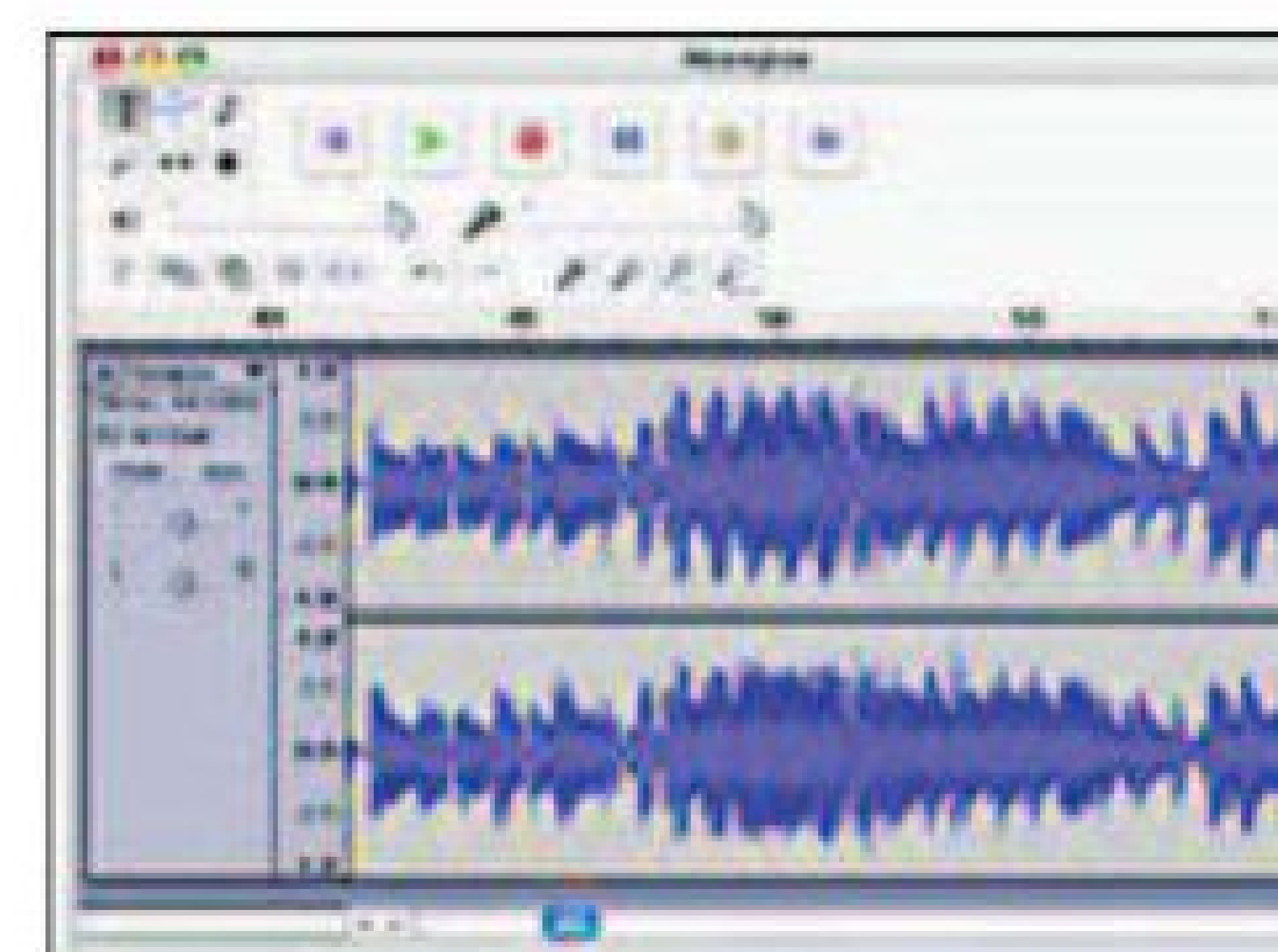
34 Anti-Malware



34 App Launchers



34 Archivers



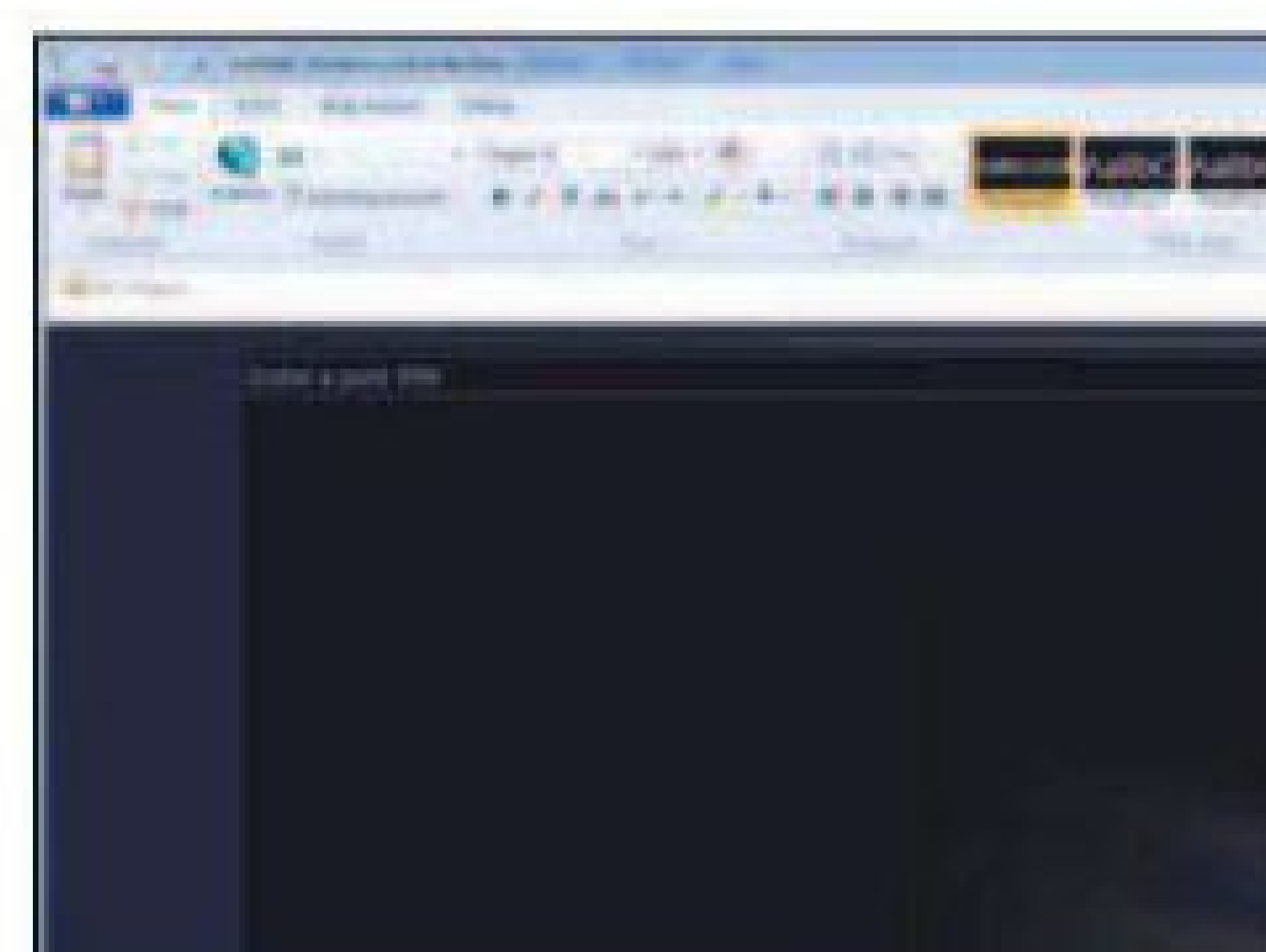
35 Audio



35 Backup/Sync/Storage



36 BitTorrent



37 Blogging

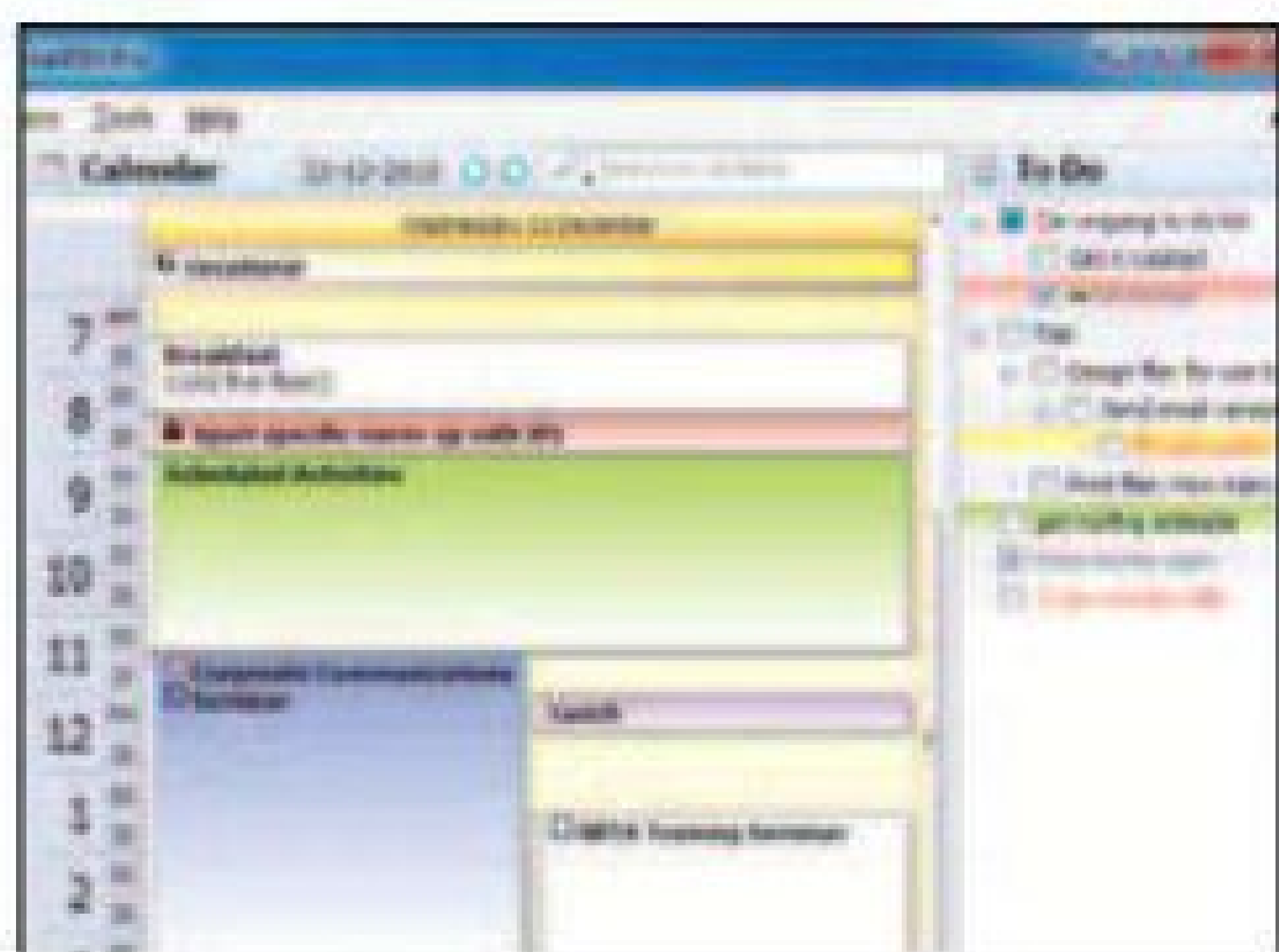


37 Browsers

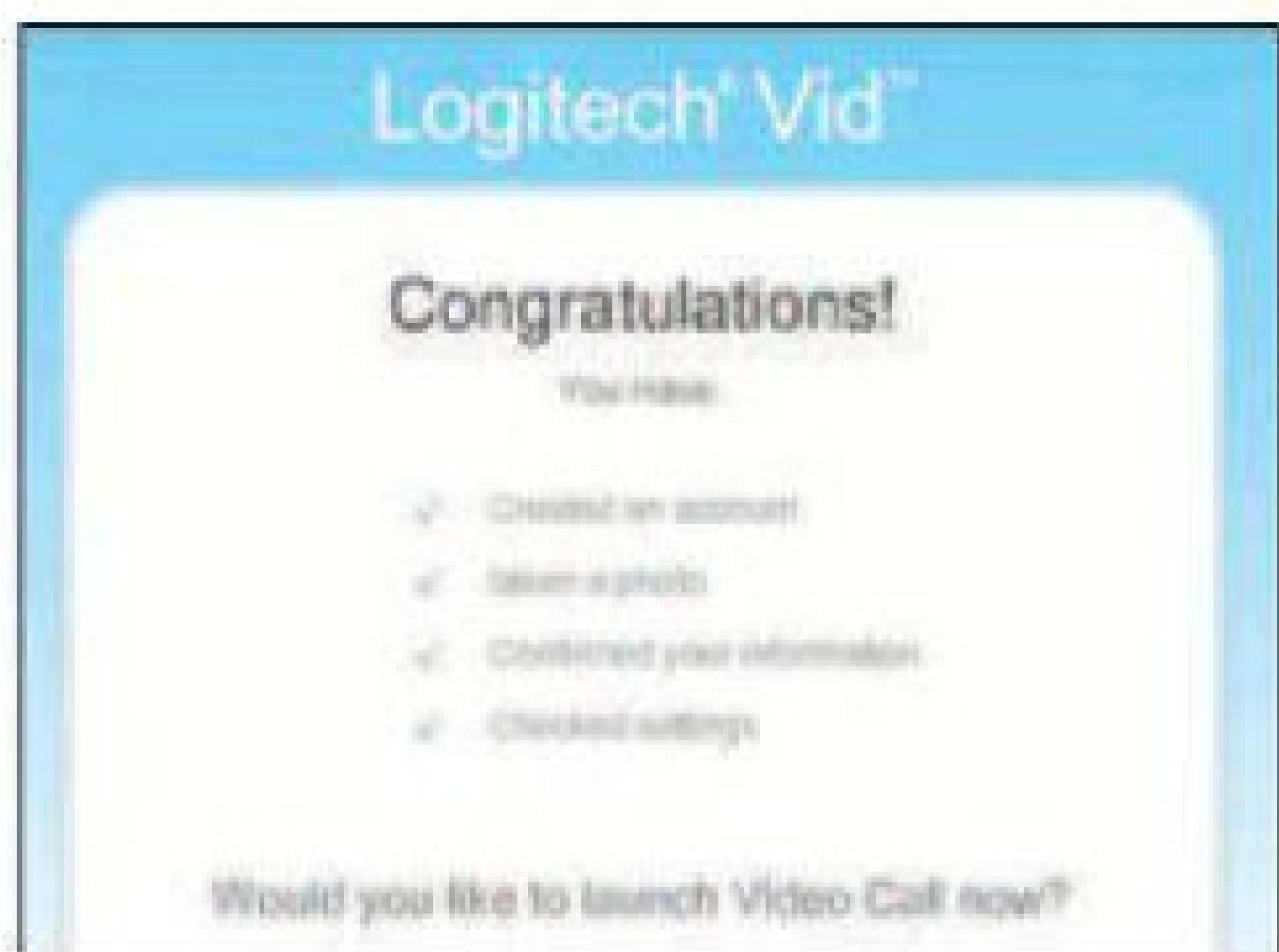
Got Windows? **These 100 free products** are yours to download and install to help you with just about any computing job you can imagine. *By Eric Griffith*

Every year at this time, we take a look at what is worth installing on your PC that you don't have to pay a cent for—totally free software that does the job as well as or maybe even better than the big boys. That's not to say programs from Microsoft, Adobe, and hundreds of other developers aren't worth the price, but you should stay aware of your options. You don't always need a sledgehammer to drive in a tiny nail, after all.

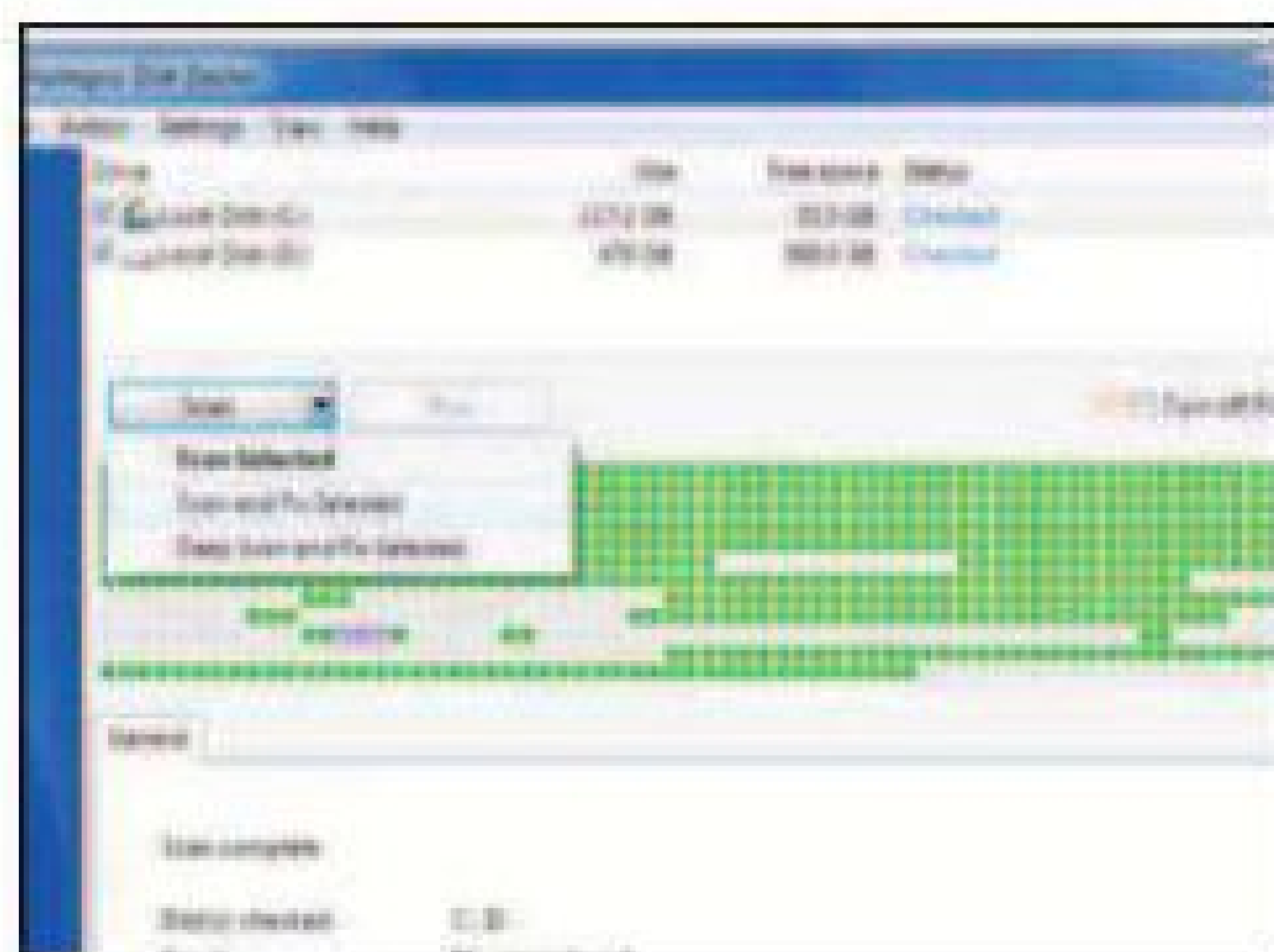
These top 100 picks are primarily made up of productivity apps for Windows users (mainly Vista and Windows 7, with some XP tools as well)—the kind you download and install to your hard drive. However, some also offer free versions for Mac and Linux; some offer a complimentary Web version; some offer a mobile (smartphone) version; and some are portable, meaning you can put the app on a USB Flash Drive and run it from a Windows computer without running a full installation.



38 Calendar/PIM



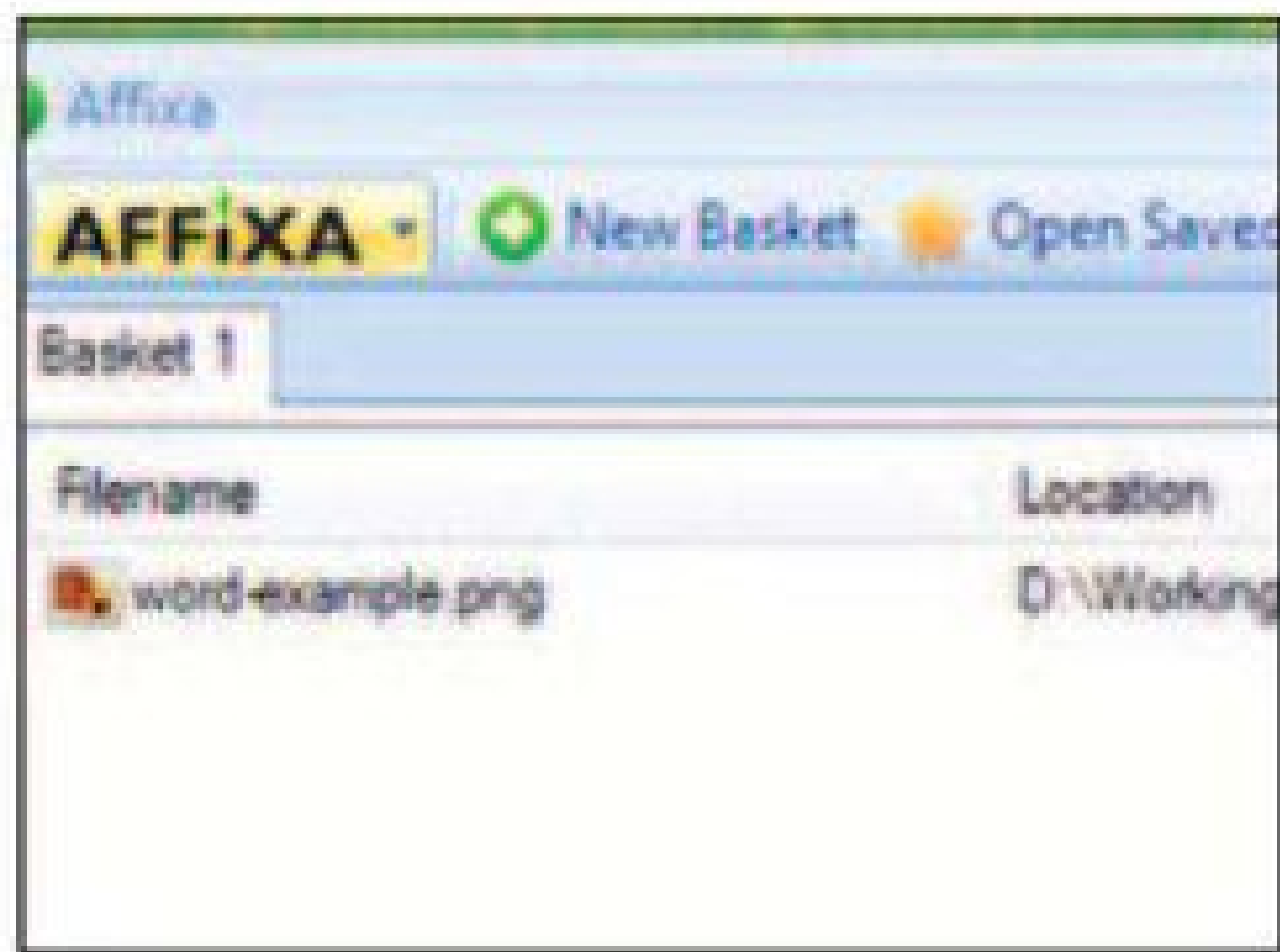
38 Conferencing/VoIP



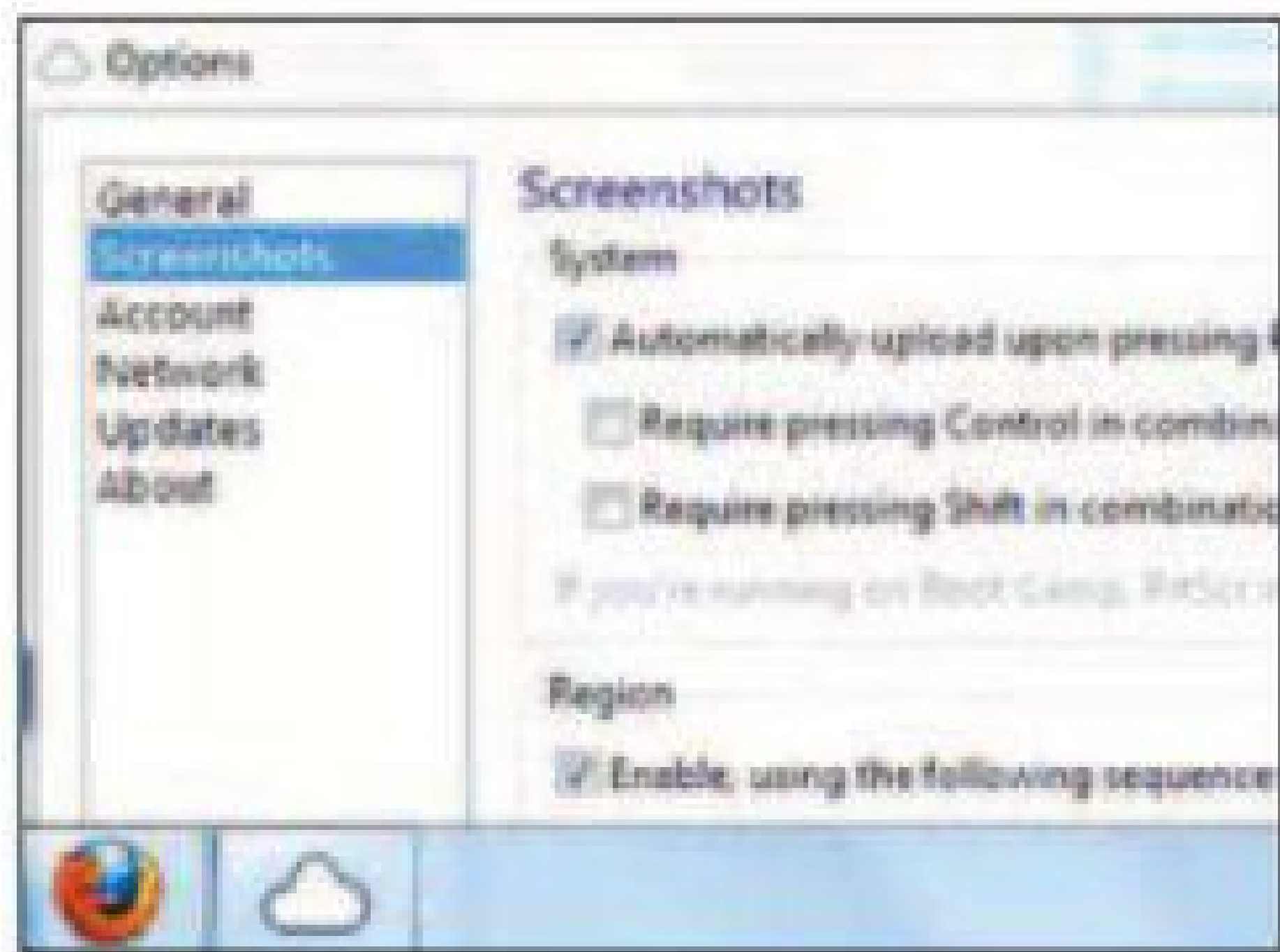
39 Disk Utilities



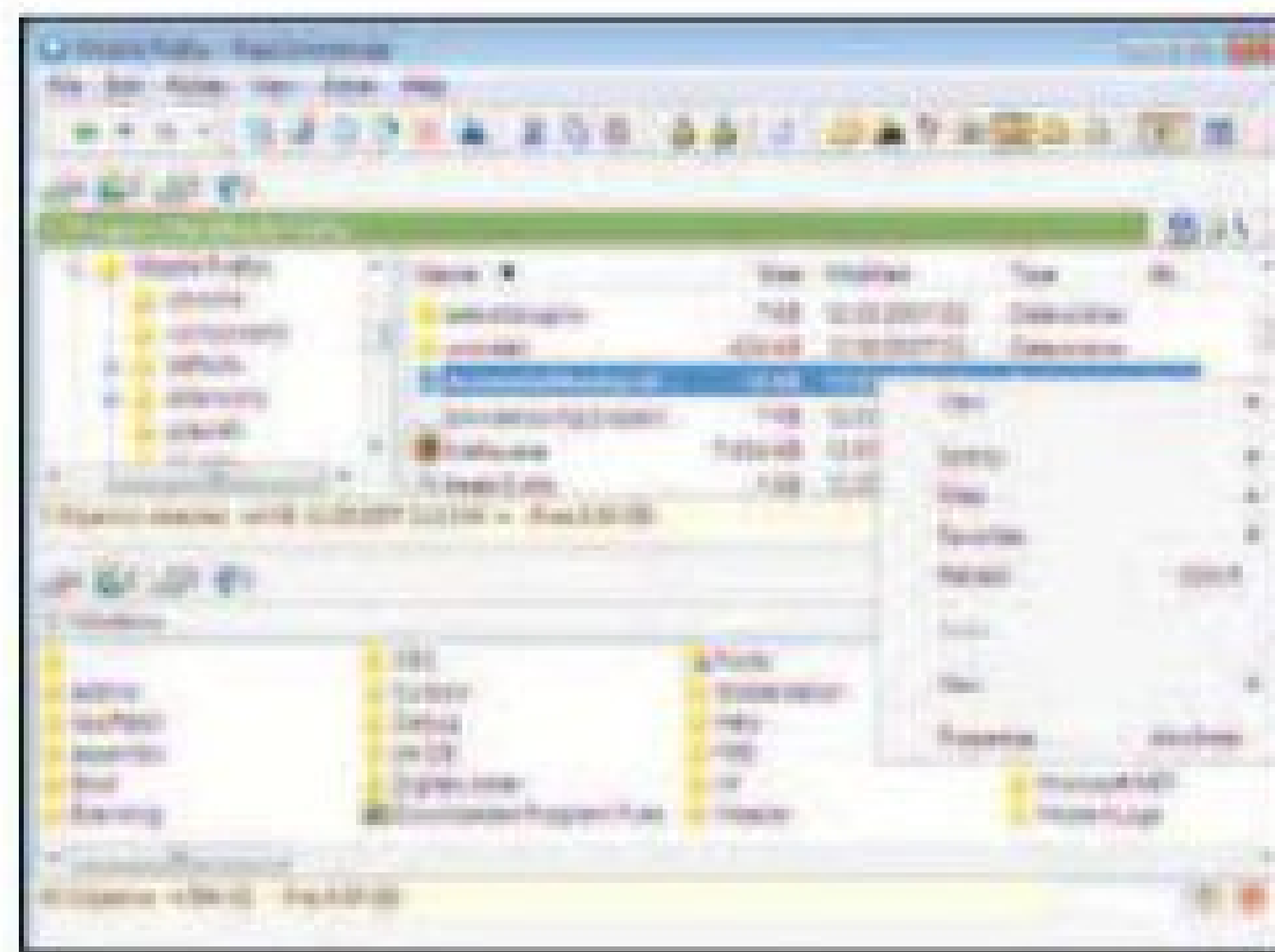
39 Displays



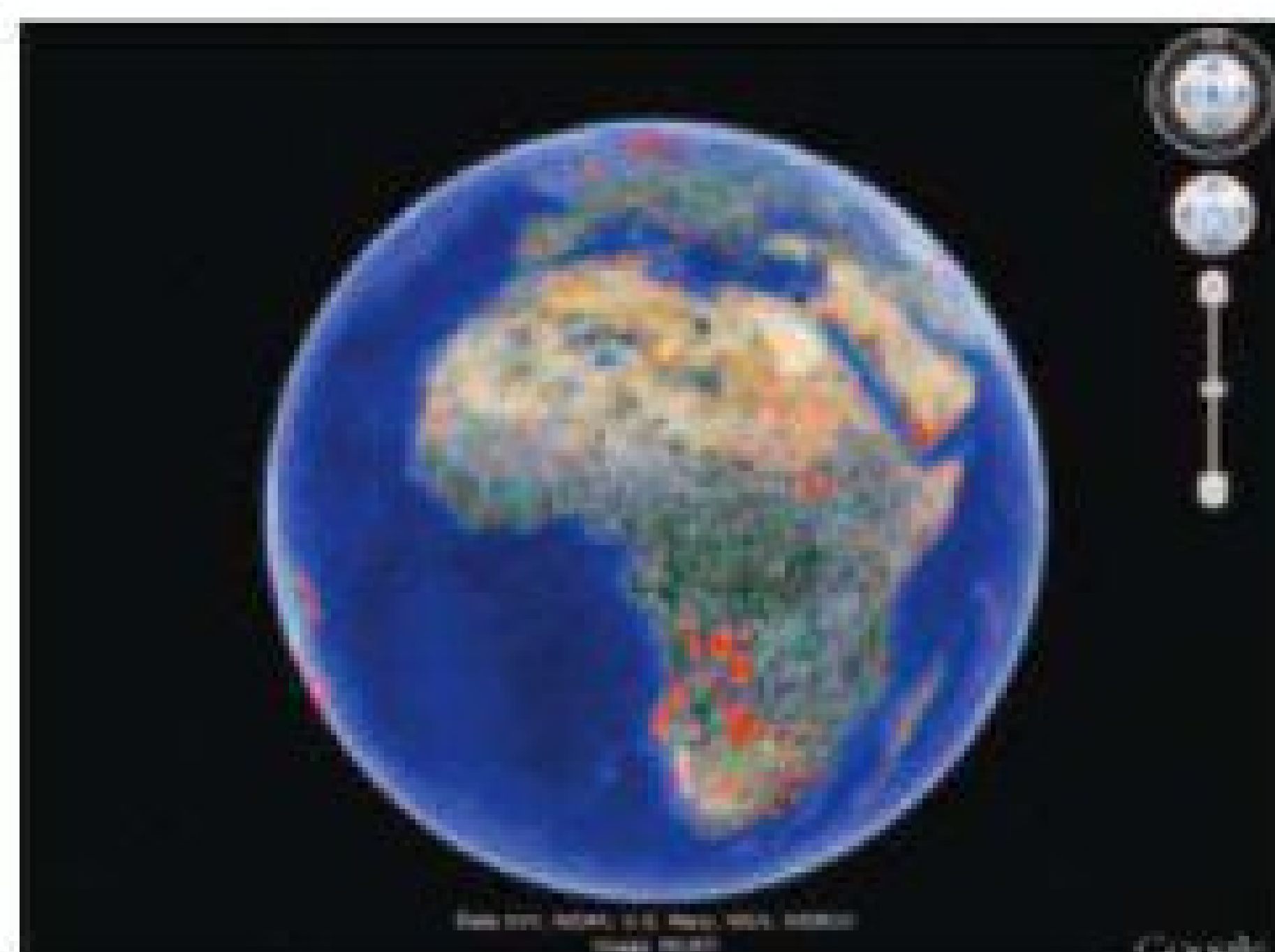
40 E-mail/Collaboration



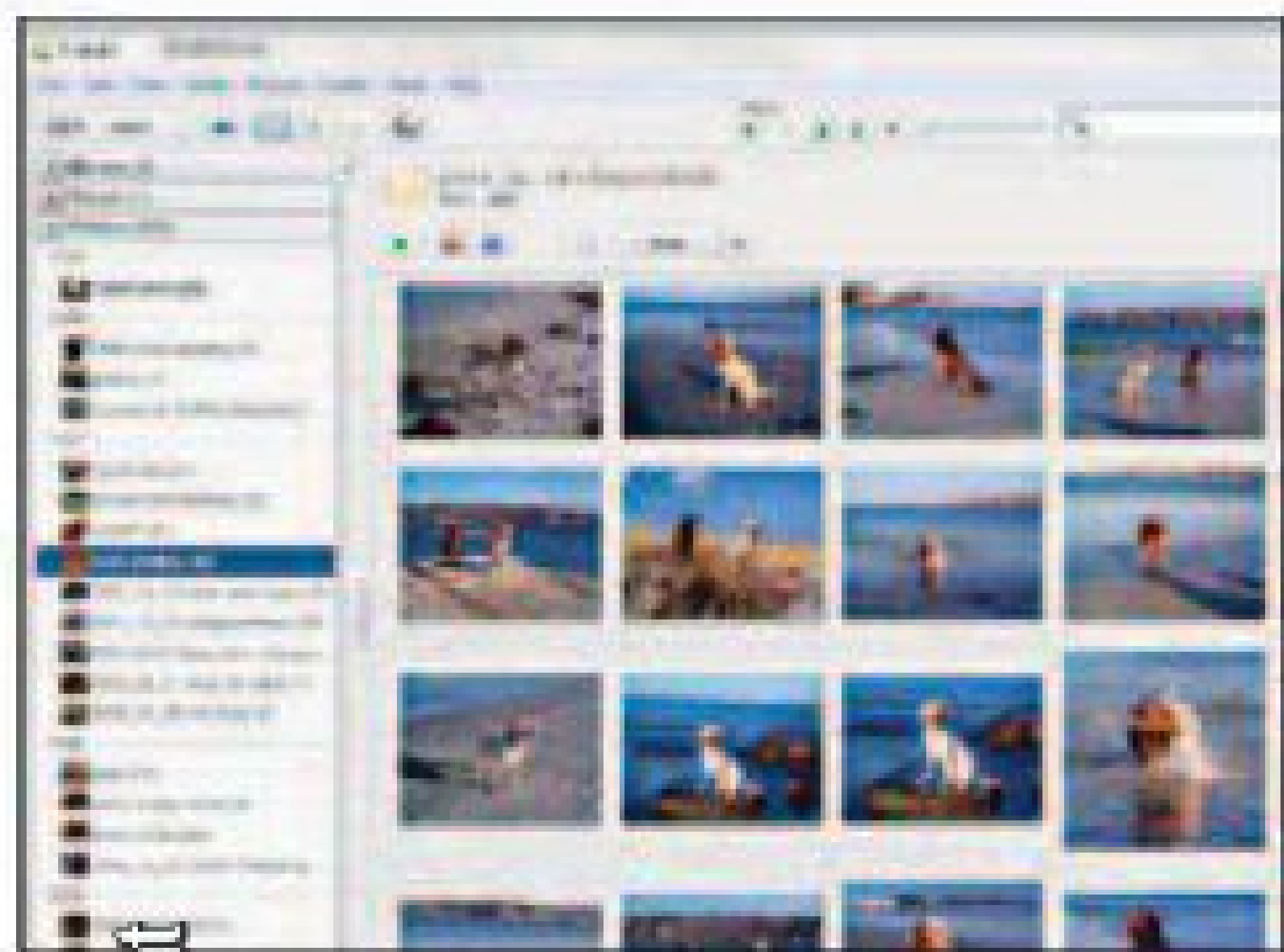
41 File Transfer



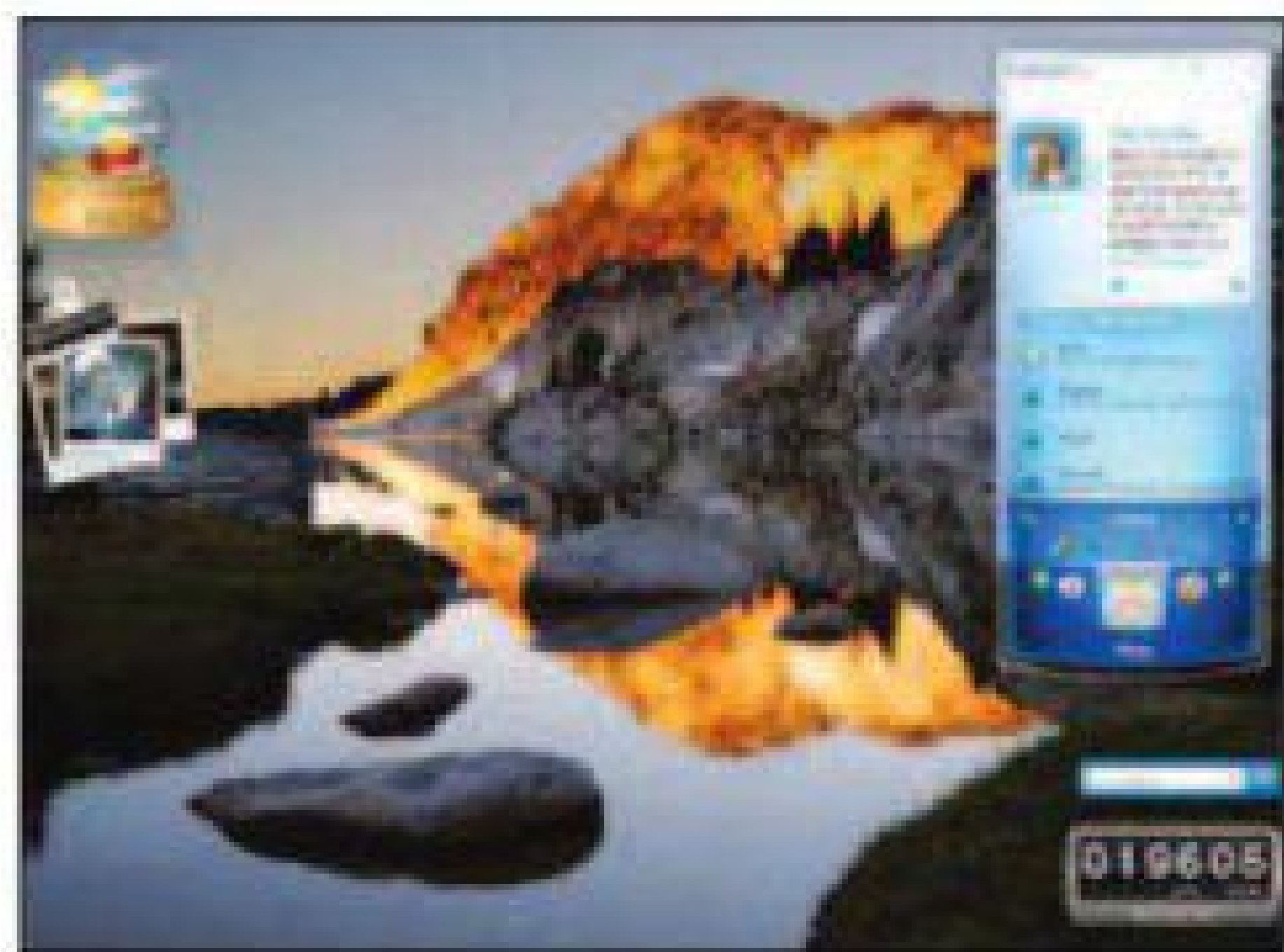
41 File Viewers/Converters



42 Fun/Home



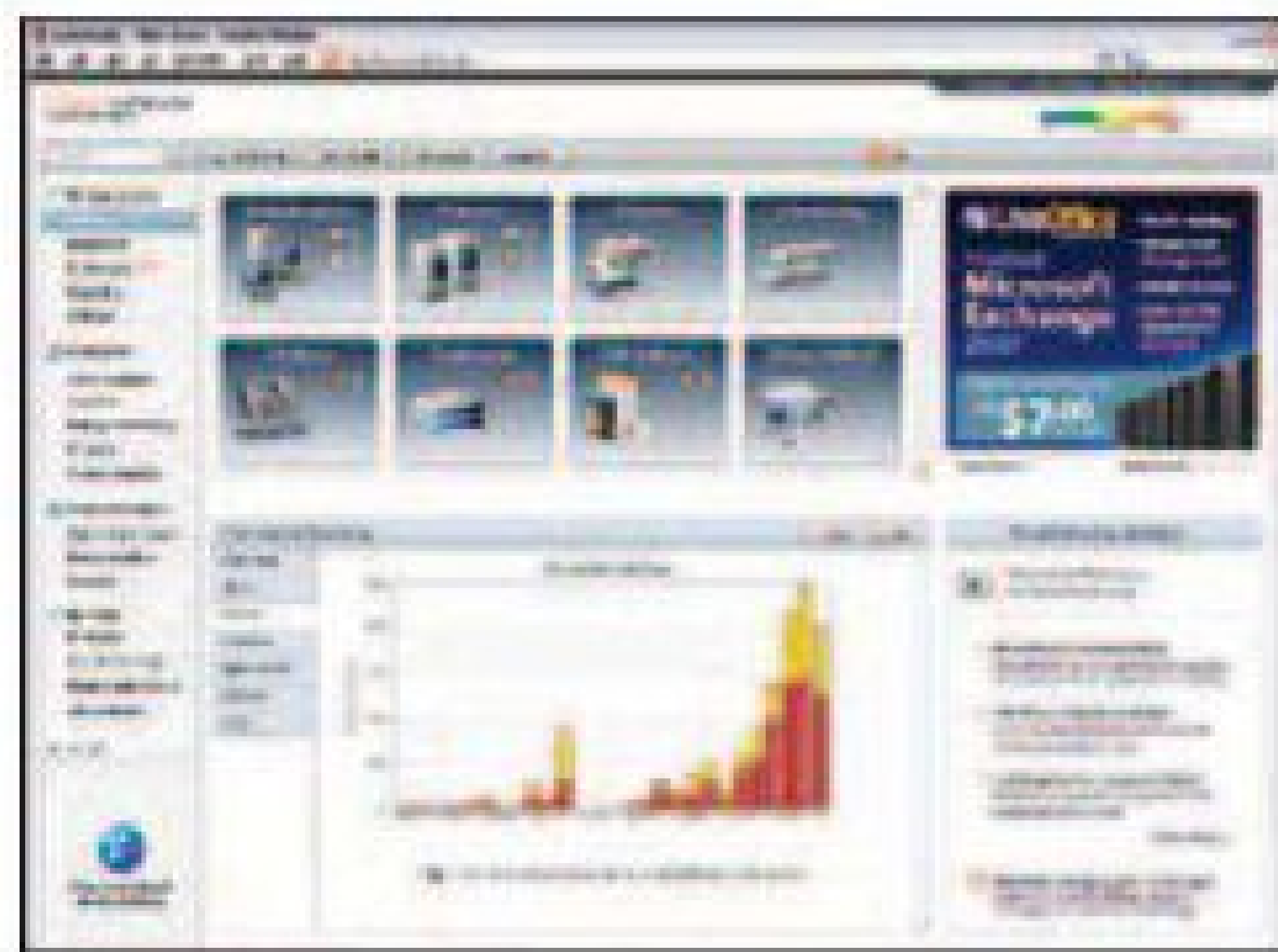
43 Graphics



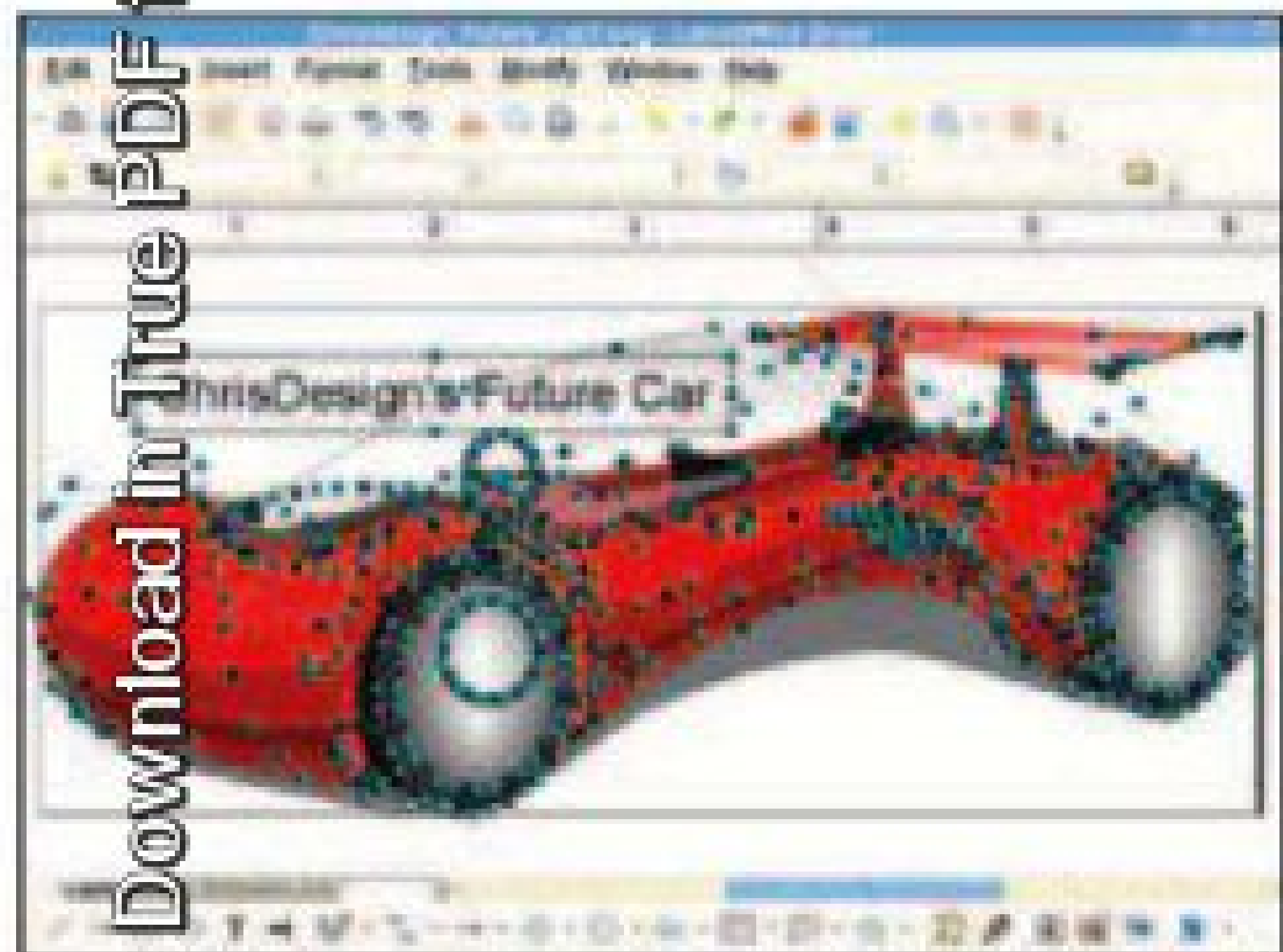
43 Instant Messaging



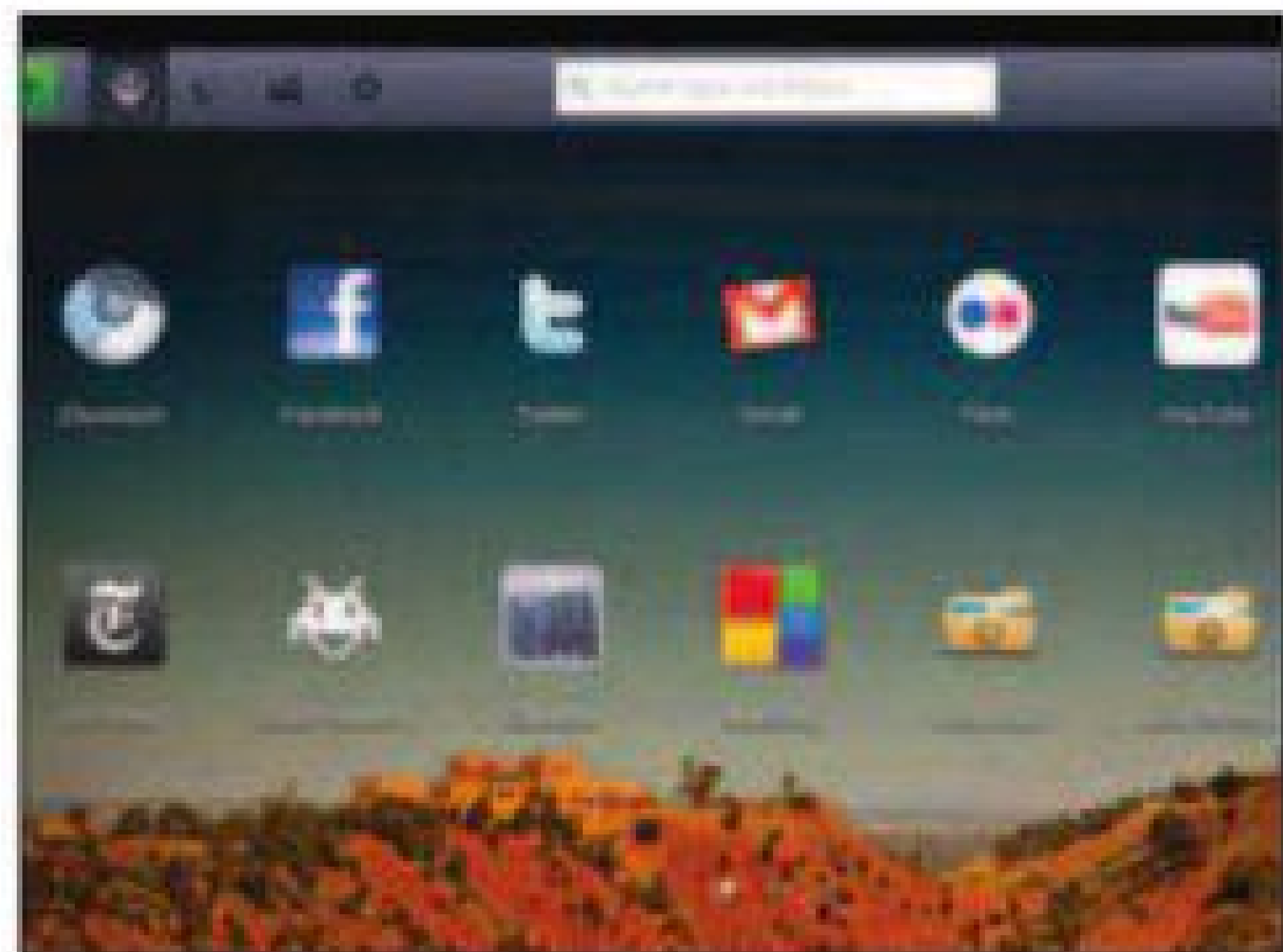
44 Media Managers



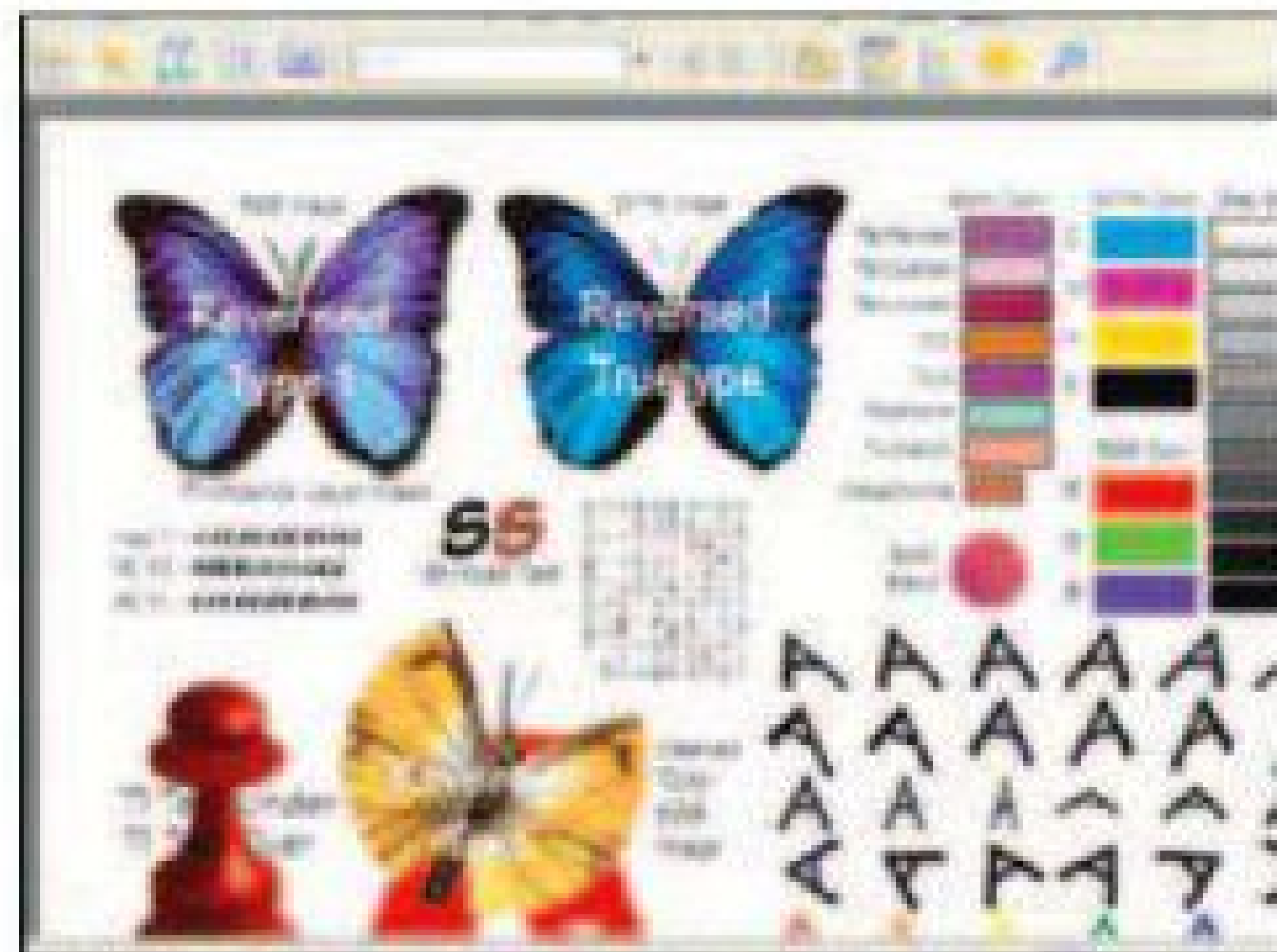
44 Networking



45 Office



45 Operating Systems



46 PDF Readers



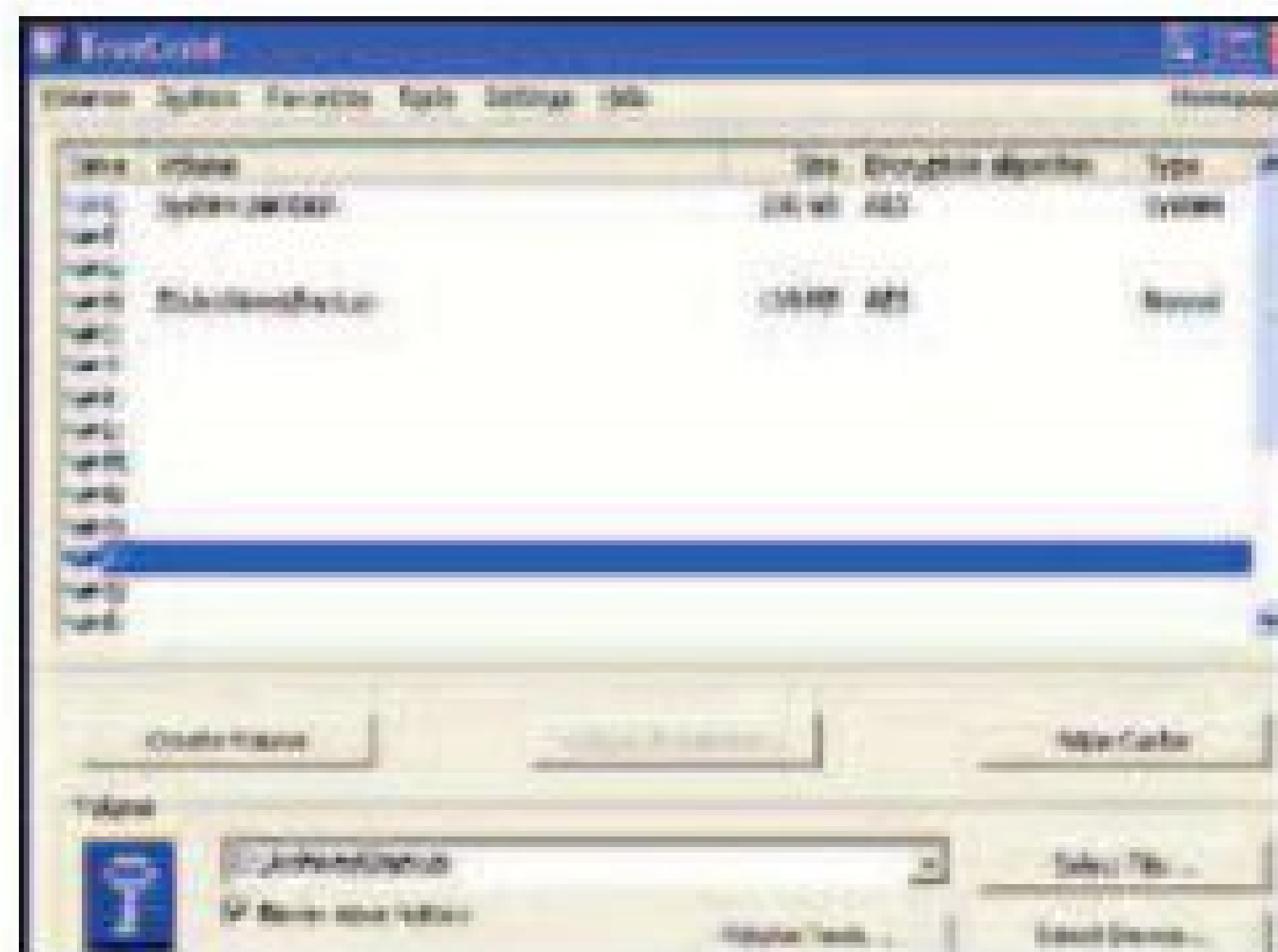
46 Printing



47 Remote Access



47 Search



48 Security/Encryption



48 Social Networking



48 System Utilities



49 Uninstallers



49 Video



50 Virtualization

ANTI-MALWARE

Ad-Aware Free Internet Security

http://www.lavasoft.com/products/ad_aware_free.php

WINDOWS Our new Editors' Choice in free anti-virus, Ad-Aware Free is effective at not only finding malware but also at blocking it (two things that don't always go together). Our reviews revealed it to be almost as good as the Pro version.

AVG Anti-Virus Free

<http://free.avg.com/us-en/homepage> **Windows**

AVG Anti-virus Free gets top marks at independent labs, and in our tests it does a great job of finding and removing malware, though isn't the best at keeping an already clean system clean.

Panda Cloud Antivirus

<http://www.cloudantivirus.com/en/>

WINDOWS It's no longer our Editors' Choice, but Panda still impresses with its ability to keep a computer clean from infection by using a cloud-based signature list of viruses that's kept up-to-date—no download to your computer necessary.

APP LAUNCHERS

Launchy

<http://www.launchy.net>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX No matter what system you use, you can start using Launchy as your launch pad. If you prefer to use the keyboard to get around, this skinnable tool

can help get your computing up to speed.

ObjectDock

<http://www.stardock.com/products/objectdock/>

WINDOWS Don't let the Mac users have all the fun. ObjectDock replicates the look of the Mac's dock with animated icons for all your apps and can replace the Windows taskbar as your way of accessing open programs.

ARCHIVERS

7-Zip

<http://www.7-zip.org>

WINDOWS The user interface of 7-Zip won't bowl you over, but the power to pack files into 7z, TAR, ZIP, and more will. That pales in comparison to the amazing number of archives it can unpack, and the amount it can compress is better than many of the big names.

IZArc

<http://www.izarc.org/>

WINDOWS Portable Of course, IZArc can make and unpack compressed archives, but it also looks inside image files like ISOs. The interface is as easy as dragging a file to the IZArc icon to get going, even if it's on your USB flash drive.

PeaZip

<http://peazip.sourceforge.net/>

WINDOWS | LINUX | PORTABLE Create archives or unarchive contents with a right-click using multilingual PeaZip, and use extensions to

add support for new archive types.

AUDIO

Audacity

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | PORTABLE Audacity works on any desktop platform to record and edit your audio files, then output them to formats such as MP3 (with an plug-in). It's perfect for those getting started in sound production but also a favorite among the pros.

MP3 Skype Recorder

<http://voipcallrecording.com>

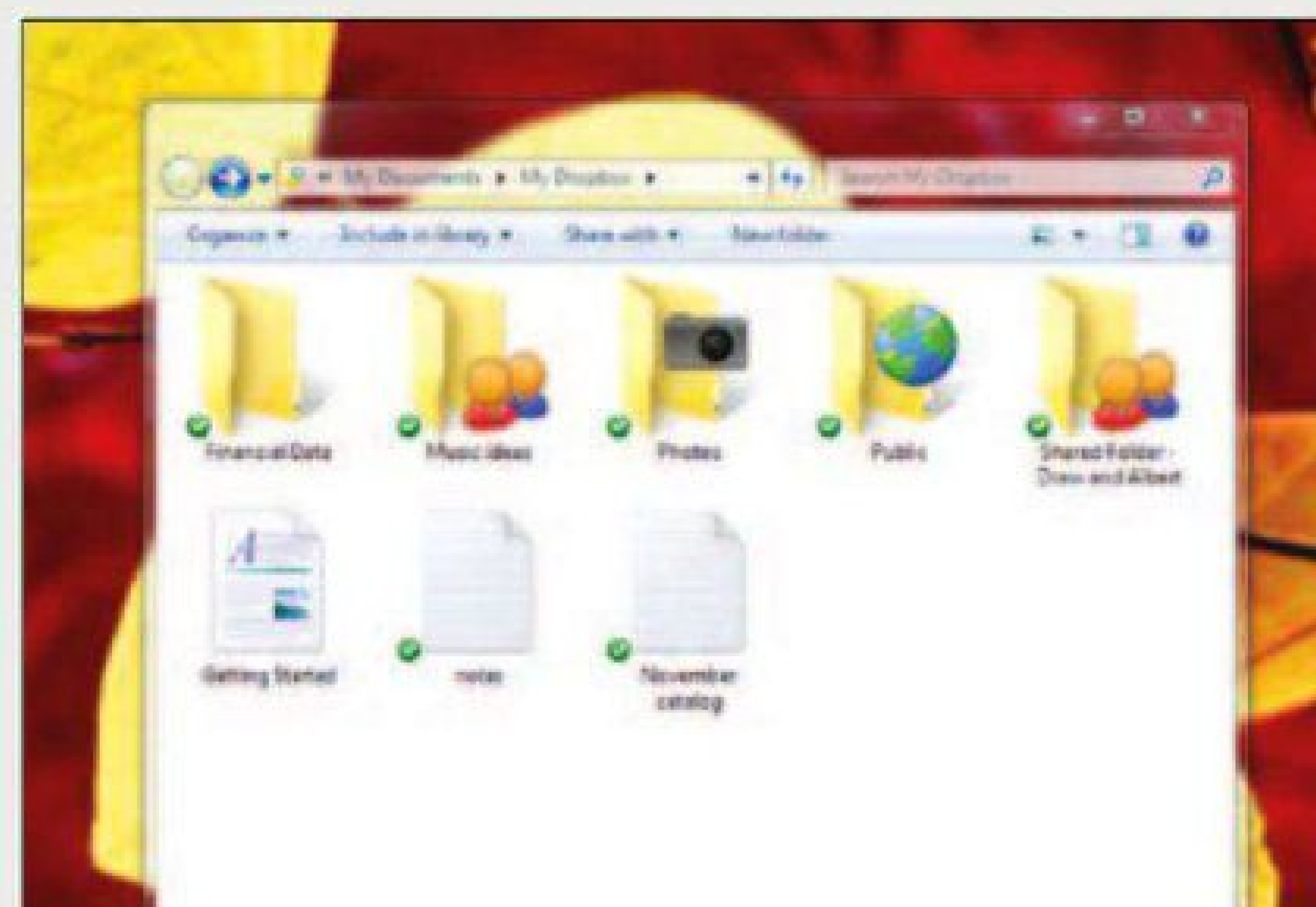
WINDOWS This one-trick pony—it records Skype calls (even those to landlines) to MP3 format—does the trick perfectly. Calls can be saved in mono or stereo and in the bit-rate you choose. There also are no limits to the length or size of the call or resulting audio file.

BACKUP/SYNC/STORAGE

Clonezilla

<http://www.clonezilla.org>

This open-source software doesn't install on your system—it's a LiveCD that you put on a disk and boot your computer from, and then you use the old-fashioned interface to do a complete clone of your hard-disk drive. It's probably overkill for home, but does the trick when you have to replicate a drive on multiple systems.



BACKUP/SYNC/STORAGE

Dropbox

<http://www.dropbox.com>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | WEB | MOBILE Our favorite synchronization tool is the perfect example of set-it-and-forget-it. You put files into the designated Dropbox folder on your computer, and install the software on all the computers you want. As long as the contents of that folder stay within the confines of your allotted space (starting with 2GB, but you can add more with referrals), it remains free. Files are also accessible on the Web and on smartphones running iOS, Android, and BlackBerry.

DrivelImage XML V2.13

<http://www.runtime.org/driveimage-xml.htm>

WINDOWS Imaging an entire hard drive is a great way to back up anything and everything. DrivelImage XML does it with “hot images” made even when you're using the hard drive, storing them in XML files you can access from other tools.

Gladinet Cloud Desktop Starter Edition

<http://www.gladinet.com/>

WINDOWS | WEB Use up that online storage



BLOGGING

ScribeFire <http://www.scribefire.com/>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX It's not an installed piece of software—ScribeFire is actually a browser extension for Firefox, Chrome, Safari, and Opera—but it's got the power of one, providing a space for crafting blog entries that you can post to just about any blog platform.

you're wasting with Gladinet's software—it works like a network drive so you can store files on Microsoft SkyDrive, Google Docs, Box, and others that could cost you. The new Cloud Sync feature syncs data across multiple computers, a la Dropbox; Mirrored Cloud does the same across multiple online storage spaces.

MozyHome Online Backup

<http://mozy.com/home>

WINDOWS | MAC The current leader in online backup doesn't offer unlimited storage to paying customers anymore, but fortunately, the free service for individuals has not changed. You can still back up as much as 2GB online for free, and the service runs quietly in the background so you can leave it unattended.

SugarSync

<https://www.sugarsync.com/free/>

WINDOWS | MAC | WEB | MOBILE Like its competition, SugarSync offers a free edition with no strings attached, as long as you don't go over the limit. You can sync across an unlimited number of devices, including smartphones. The best part: The limit for free is 5GB, not 2.

Syncplicity Personal Edition

<http://www.syncplicity.com>

WINDOWS | MOBILE | WEB Synchronize an unlimited number of files and folders on two computers (three to five will cost \$15 a month), with up to 2GB stored online. Syncplicity works seamlessly with documents in cloud-based Google Docs and Zoho.

Windows Live Mesh

<http://explore.live.com/windows-live-mesh?os=other>

WINDOWS | MAC Having 2GB of online space for backup is a good start. But 5GB is a better start, and that's what you get with Live Mesh, Microsoft's competitor to Dropbox. You can also sync files to the 25GB you get for storage on SkyDrive.

BITTORRENT

uTorrent

<http://www.utorrent.com/downloads/>

WINDOWS | MAC | PORTABLE While similar to sister software BitTorrent, uTorrent is for the advanced user looking to branch out with extension apps and experiments with the

entire protocol. Plus, it's wicked fast.

Vuze

<http://www.vuze.com/>

WINDOWS | MAC Our new favorite BitTorrent client is Vuze, because it does much more than file transfer. It has an attractive interface, and it goes the extra mile to transcode (legally!) downloaded video to play on your game console, Apple device, TiVo, and other devices.

BLOGGING

Windows Live Writer

<http://download.live.com/write>

WINDOWS This favorite word-processing tool for bloggers now sports a ribbon interface (a la Microsoft Office) for those who want a Word-esque interface for composing posts for blogs run by Movable Type, WordPress, TypePad, and more (even social networks and sharing sites).

BROWSERS

Google Chrome

<http://www.google.com/chrome/>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX Chrome has quickly turned into the browser to beat. It's our Editors' Choice for multi-platform Web browsing due to its amazing performance, built-in support for Flash, PDFs, extensions, and HTML5. It's already taken 10.7 percent of the browser market, so don't be left behind.



BROWSERS

Firefox

<http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | MOBILE | PORTABLE

Mozilla's flagship product remains a favorite due to its extensible architecture—it perfected the browser plug-in long before anyone else—and constant updates to increase performance and usability. The upcoming release of version 4 promises an even better user interface, faster JavaScript engine, and more.

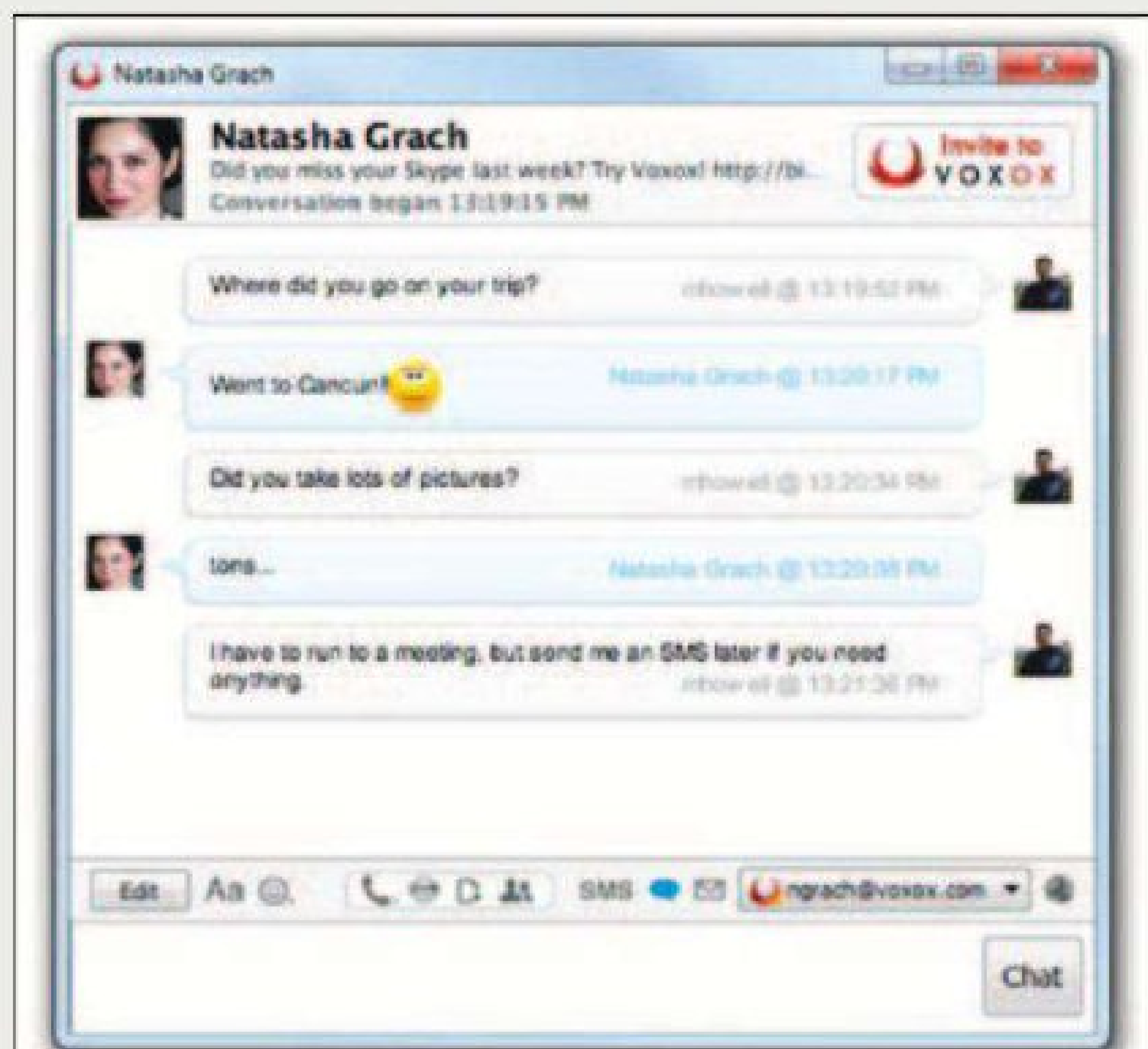
Microsoft Internet Explorer

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/internet-explorer/default.aspx>

WINDOWS Version 9 of the world's most popular Web browser is coming soon, but version 8 has been no slouch in the features department, especially in security updates (that's the price you pay for popularity). It's more standards-compliant but can still show pages designed for the older IEs that weren't. IE9 promises some barebones UI changes as Google Chrome's influence continues to be seen, plus major strides in privacy for users.

STORE/EGG.COM





CONFERENCING/VOIP

VoxOx 2

<http://www.voxox.com>

WINDOWS | MAC | MOBILE Every type of communication you can imagine is part of the VoxOx unified hub: phone, e-mail, text, chat, SMS texting, social networking, you name it; even, dare we say it, faxing. It even translates for you on the fly and takes messages. The product of a phone company, VoxOx will even give you a free phone number to use for incoming calls (you do pay a tiny fee for outgoing calls to POTS lines).

Safari

<http://www.apple.com/safari/download/>

WINDOWS | MAC | MOBILE There are lots of terrific browsers out there, and Apple's (which isn't only for Apple devices) is definitely one of them. It now sports a reader view to hide page clutter, built-in RSS reading, and great support for HTML standards, and it continues to improve its JavaScript performance. All in all, Safari is a worthy alternative to the big names on any desktop.

CALENDAR/PIM

Essential PIM

<http://www.essentialpim.com/>

WINDOWS | PORTABLE Again, mimicking the look of Outlook is a tried-and-true approach for a PIM, and Essential PIM does the same, organizing notes, contacts, tasks, and appointments in a color-coded screen.

Lightning

<http://www.mozilla.org/projects/calendar/lightning/>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | PORTABLE Lightning isn't a standalone program, but a powerful extension for the Thunderbird e-mail software to give it all the capabilities of Outlook, specifically a powerful calendar you can sync with Google and a task list.

CONFERENCING/VOIP

Logitech Vid

<http://www.logitech.com/vid>

WINDOWS | MAC Logitech's own ultra-simple video-calling service, ostensibly just for their webcams, is a free download. The software now supports 720p high-definition resolution on calls between people with HD webcams, assuming the PC is powerful enough.

Skype

<http://www.skype.com>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | MOBILE | PORTABLE Skype's main function, serving as a PC-to-PC audio phone, is always free. So are audio conference calls. So is IMing between users. So is

STORE.MAG.COM

video calling from PC-to-PC. You only pay for Skype if you need to call landline phones, send SMS messages, or want to get multiple people on a video conference.

DISK UTILITIES

Auslogics BoostSpeed

<http://www.auslogics.com/en/software/disk-defrag/>

WINDOWS Now with the Auslogics Disk Defrag included, new BoostSpeed goes the extra steps to clean the drive and reclaims deleted files as it defrags both the hard drive and the registry. In total, it's 18 utilities in one. It's free for up to three systems in your home or office.

Easeus Partition Master

<http://www.partition-tool.com/personal.htm>

WINDOWS Now ready for 64-bit versions of Windows as well, Partition Master can chuck up (or reintegrate) your hard drive as you see fit, all from within Windows—no need to reboot into some DOS-esque utility. It works on drives as big as 4TB. It will even migrate data from one disk to another, and can recover deleted or lost partitions as needed.

Smart Defrag 2

<http://www.iobit.com/iobitsmartdefrag.html>

WINDOWS Defragging can take a long, long time, but Smart Defrag was made with large hard drives in mind to avoid long wait times. The interface is about as easy to master as they get (pick a disk and go), and it will also



DISPLAYS

Fences

<http://www.stardock.com/products/fences/>

WINDOWS Desktops are easy to make messy with a billion icons vying—

unsuccessfully—for your attention. Fences gives you a way to corral those icons in discrete spaces on the desktop, so you know right where to put the cursor to get what you want.

run in the background, keeping your computer fast when you don't even know it.

DISPLAYS

DisplayFusion

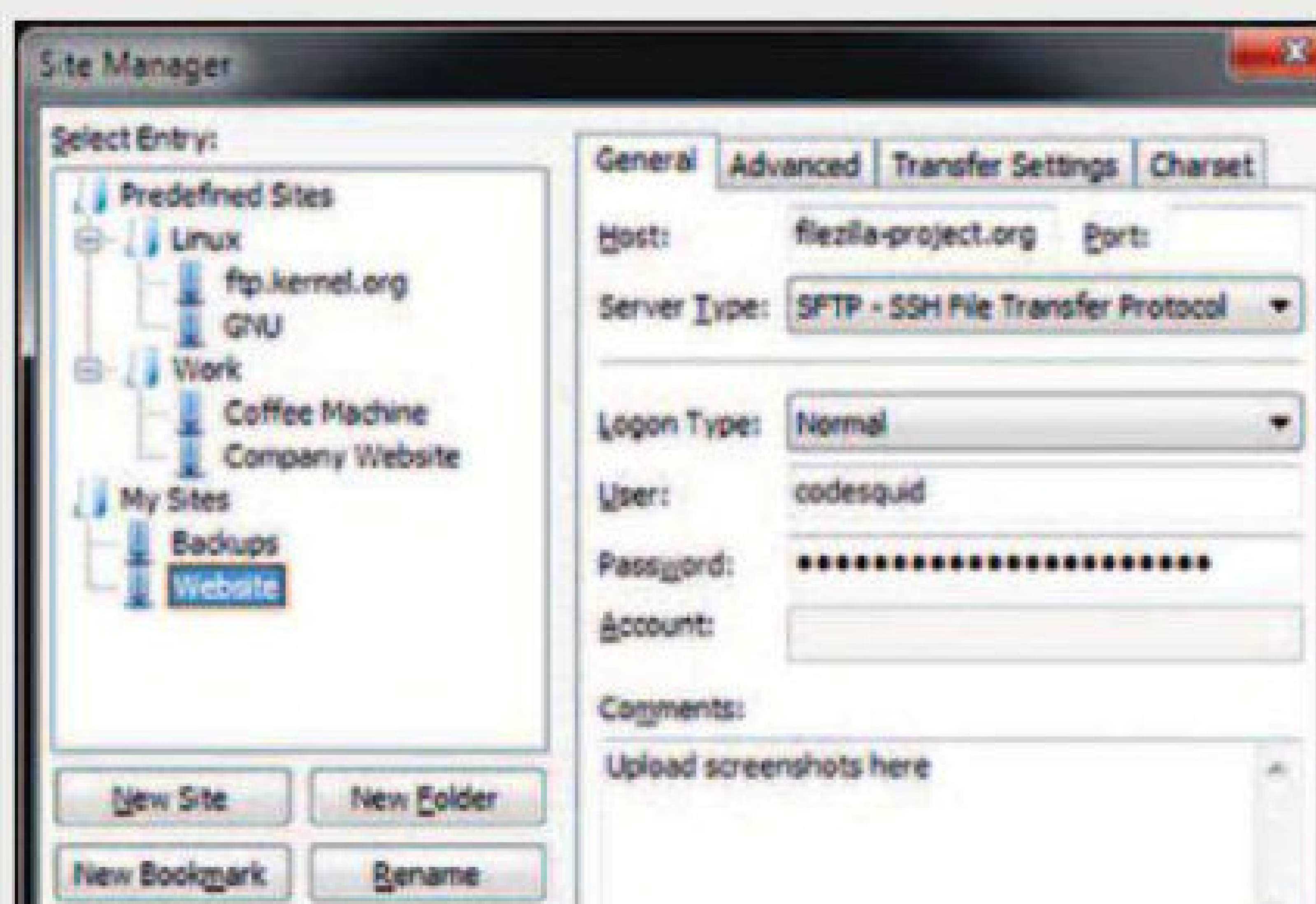
<http://www.binaryfortress.com/displayfusion/>

WINDOWS When you have multiple monitors, Windows sometimes treats them like one big screen. DisplayFusion gives you back some control, with individualized wallpaper, title bars, and hotkeys. The Pro version offers a lot more for \$25.

Sysinternals Desktops

<http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/sysinternals/cc817881>

WINDOWS This tiny 60KB utility from Win-



FILE TRANSFER

FileZilla

<http://filezilla-project.org>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | PORTABLE Once a computer science project, FileZilla has matured into a premier open-source FTP client.

dows Sysinternals (owned by Microsoft) is a simple way to set up four virtual desktops on your system. Use hotkeys to switch between each desktop, or click the desktop object for a running app to switch to its screen immediately.

E-MAIL/COLLABORATION

Affixa

<http://www.affixa.com>

WINDOWS The constantly upgraded Affixa, which incorporates the functions of the former gAttach and yAttach, is a full-purpose client for Gmail (even the Google App version) and Yahoo!Mail, and it sits right on your desktop. Affixa offers a storage service for your e-mail attachments and integration with desktop e-mail programs like Outlook and Thunderbird. The \$3.20 per year Pro version supports multiple accounts.

Evolution

<http://www.dipconsultants.com/evolution/>

WINDOWS | LINUX Novell's Evolution has been the e-mail client of choice on many Linux distros for years. It's popular enough to make the unique path of being ported to Windows. Like Outlook, it will work with Exchange servers and has the usual mix of contacts, calendars, notes, and task lists.

PostBox Express

http://www.postbox-inc.com/express_features

WINDOWS | MAC This free version of Postbox—built on Mozilla's work—seeks to take on Thunderbird with a slick interface and search, plus the ability to import all Thunderbird settings and messages. It also offers a unified inbox for multiple accounts, a quick reply box on messages, and support for add-ons for Thunderbird, including Lightning (see PIMs).

Thunderbird

<http://www.mozillamessaging.com/en-US/thunderbird/>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | MOBILE | PORTABLE Still the best desktop mail going if you eschew Outlook or other costly e-mail clients, Mozilla's Thunderbird 3.1 has an easy migration tool to upgrade from previous versions, browser-like tabs for reading e-mails, and the best collection of add-ons in the business.

Zimbra Desktop

<http://www.zimbra.com>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX You don't need the Zim-

bra services (of which there are many) to use this desktop client with any POP/IMAP e-mail accounts you have, not to mention as a full PIM. In fact, Zimbra connects to just about any e-mail, even Web-based e-mail accounts like Gmail and Yahoo!Mail.

FILE TRANSFER

FluffyApp

<http://fluffyapp.com>

WINDOWS Mac users have CloudApp for drag-and-drop uploading; Windows users now have FluffyApp for the same thing. Configure where you want files to go, drag them to the icon in the system tray, pick from the menu of locations, and the app handles the rest instantly.

FILE VIEWERS/CONVERTERS

FreeCommander

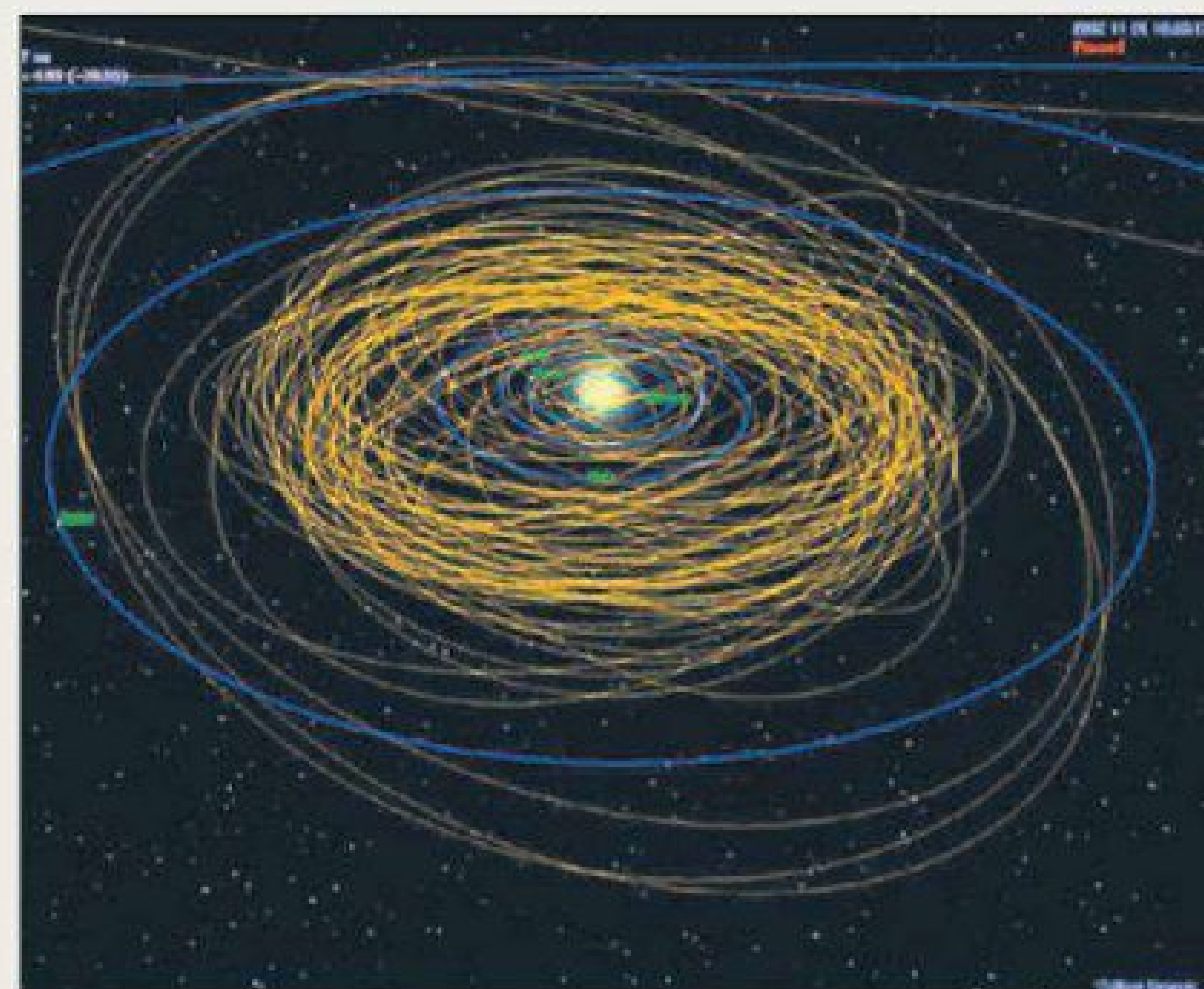
<http://www.freecommander.com>

WINDOWS | PORTABLE Get rid of Windows Explorer and start using a replacement that has tabs, dual panes, a file viewer, archive handling, multi-file renaming, FTP support, and more. All of this and more are in FreeCommander.

IrfanView

<http://www.irfanview.com>

WINDOWS IrfanView has been converting and viewing graphic files—and video and audio—since 1996. This tiny download supports plug-ins for viewing even more.



FUN/HOME

Celestia <http://www.shatters.net/celestia/>
WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | PORTABLE Why use planetarium software that only allows you to see space from Earth? Celestia goes 3D to show you 100,000 stars and solar systems from other angles.

SecondShell

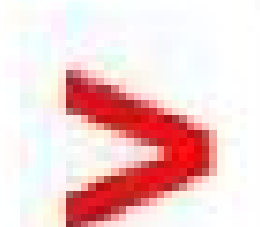
<http://www.secondshell.com>

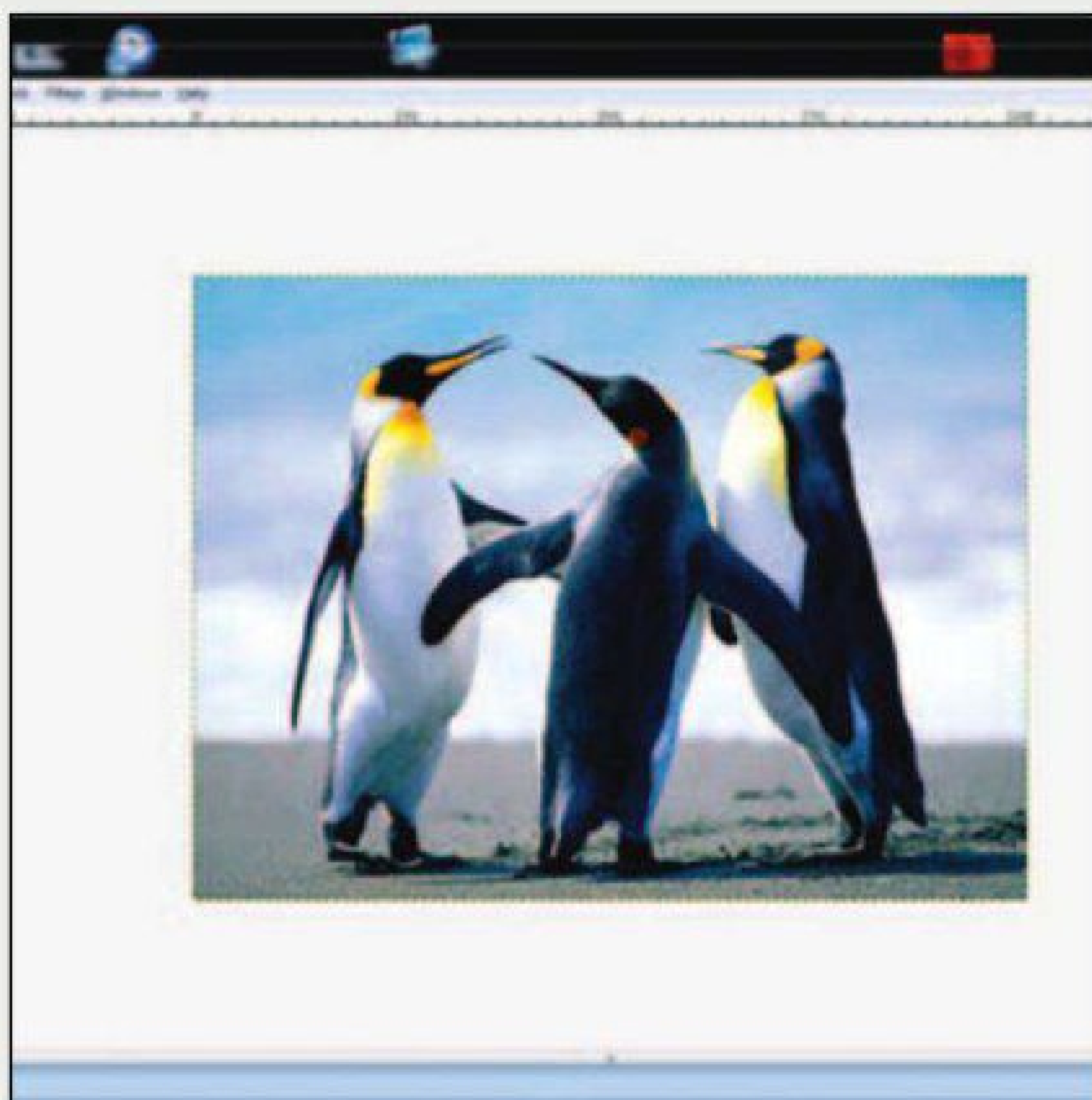
WINDOWS This tiny app gives you more control over your windows from the keyboard. You get keystrokes to resize, move, minimize, and close windows and apps without touching a mouse. Use Alt+Right-click and you can use the mouse to resize a Window anywhere you click, not just on the edges.

xplorer2Lite

<http://zabkat.com/x2lite.htm>

WINDOWS Some call it the premiere Windows Explorer replacement, as xplorer2lite has more features than you can imagine: folder compare/sync, file previews, its own text editor, tabs for navigating, file renaming, and more. And that's just the free version. (Pro will cost you \$30.)





GRAPHICS

GIMP

<http://www.gimp.org>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | PORTABLE Open-source, multi-language GNU Image Manipulation Program is a well known Photoshop alternative and our Editors' Choice among free image editors. It can be a little too complex for newbies, but experienced users should check out its high-end tools, which far outstrip the price. There's a separate download site if you want GIMP for Mac OS X.

FUN/HOME

Google Earth

<http://earth.google.com>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | WEB Mobile Version 6 of this amazing app lets you fly anywhere in the world, provides 3D views of major metropolitan buildings, and zooms right in to help you find local businesses. Old maps can take you back in time. And you're not

limited to land, as you can also explore the ocean, the surface of the moon and Mars, and search the heavens, using the integrated Google Sky.

Kindle

http://www.amazon.com/kindle-store-ebooks-newspapers-blogs/b/ref=topnav_storetab_kinc?ie=UTF8&node=133141011

WINDOWS | MAC | WEB | MOBILE Amazon wants to sell books, so it makes its Kindle software available everywhere. The cool Whisper-sync feature means you can start up on the same page you left off, no matter how much you switch devices.

Nook

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/u/nook-for-pc/379002322/?cids2Pid=34762>

WINDOWS | MAC | MOBILE Just like Amazon, Barnes & Noble wants to sell books. Lots of books. So it's made Nook software available on every platform it can. A nice difference on the PC version is that you can access the BN store via the Nook software to buy books without going out to the Web site, and it's all in color. And that last-page sync is available here, too.

Sweet Home 3D

<http://www.sweethome3d.eu/index.jsp>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | WEB Create a 2D floor plan of your home or office, and Sweet Home 3D will, as the name implies, convert it into a three-dimensional digital room you can explore before you move your furniture.

GRAPHICS

FastStone Image Viewer

<http://www.faststone.org/FSViewerDetail.htm>

WINDOWS All the major image formats are supported by FastStone Image Viewer for not just viewing, but also editing and converting files.

Google Picasa

<http://picasa.google.com>

WINDOWS | WEB Google's image and video manager is also an image editor, even supporting RAW images. The online component, Picasa Web Albums, gives you an easy place to share pictures with anyone, any time. It consistently remains our Editors' Choice for entry-level photo organization.

Paint.NET

<http://www.getpaint.net>

WINDOWS You'll be hard put to find a better Photoshop clone than the fast, easy-to-master Paint.NET. It needs .NET installed to work, but when it's running it offers everything any modest image editor would require.

INSTANT MESSAGING

Pidgin 2.6.6

<http://www.pidgin.im>

WINDOWS | LINUX | PORTABLE The open-source, multi-protocol Pidgin works with IM networks big and small, with plug-ins for many others.

Trillian Astra



INSTANT MESSAGING

Digsby

<http://www.digsby.com>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX The multi-protocol Digsby is back on top as our Editors' Choice pick for instant messaging, due to a clean, customizable interface, plus the usual extras we've come to expect: audio and video chat and integrated social networking. It even includes access to e-mail inboxes.

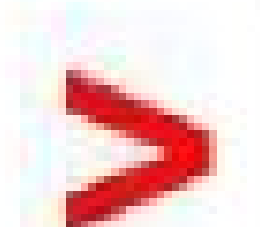
<http://www.trillian.im>

WINDOWS | MAC | WEB | MOBILE Trillian Astra gets high marks as a multi-protocol tool with social networking and e-mail integration—in other words, taking on Digsby head-to-head. It also takes on sites like Meebo, with its Web-based option. Few can beat the breadth of functions Trillian now offers. You can get even more with the \$15 Pro version.

Windows Live Messenger 2011

<http://explore.live.com/windows-live-messenger?os=other>

WINDOWS | MOBILE Perhaps eternally known as MSN Messenger, the new edition for Windows Vista/7 only gets an honorable mention as one of our best products of 2010 because of a new design with tabbed chat windows, photo sharing, and even full-





NETWORKING

AnchorFree Hotspot Shield

<http://hotspotshield.com>

WINDOWS | MAC This handy software protects you at a Wi-Fi hotspot, so no one can see what you're surfing if they have a sniffer tool. The ad-supported Hotspot Shield VPN also doubles as a great way to get connected to the U.S. when you're traveling. That can be important when you have to access sites that are limited to U.S. IP addresses.

screen HD video calls. Facebook integration doesn't hurt either.

MEDIA MANAGERS

Apple iTunes

<http://www.apple.com/itunes/>

WINDOWS | MAC Love it or hate it, iTunes is the best-known music and video manager going, due in no small part to the fact that it's the main software for managing iPods and iPhones. It's also managed to stay our Editors' Choice because of the easy-to-use interface, huge store for buying music, vid-

eos, and apps, the ability to rent video, and well, there's Ping, which we expect someone will use someday.

Songbird

<http://www.getsongbird.com>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | PORTABLE | MOBILE

Acting as the media manager for non-Apple devices is just the beginning of what Songbird does. It's also a music player that can play many DRMed files, even those bought on iTunes. In fact, anyone coming from iTunes will understand the interface instantly. It even has a music store.

NETWORKING

LogMeIn Hamachi2

<https://secure.logmein.com/US/products/hamachi2/>

WINDOWS You can connect up to 16 client systems simultaneously with Hamachi's zero-configuration virtual private network (VPN), providing secure connections between the systems in question.

SpiceWorks

<http://www.spiceworks.com>

WINDOWS Think you can't find a way to manage a small- to mid-sized network on the cheap... or cheaper? SpiceWorks trumpets that it "Costs nothing. Never has and never will." It makes money by showing you ads and connecting users to networking experts, but meanwhile the software will make you feel like an expert with a network inventory and map of users unrivaled at this price.

OFFICE

LibreOffice

<http://www.libreoffice.org>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX When cracks began to show in the OpenOffice.org group, LibreOffice was born as a new fork to make a vendor-independent office suite. LibreOffice includes a word processor, spreadsheet, presentations, drawing, database, and equation editor; it supports extensions, document templates, and imports from other file formats.

Notepad++

<http://notepad-plus.sourceforge.net/uk/site.htm>

WINDOWS | PORTABLE Notepad++ is like a developer's tool, complete with color-coded text that's great for actual code, not to mention a tabbed interface, macros, and built-in FTP support.

OpenOffice.org

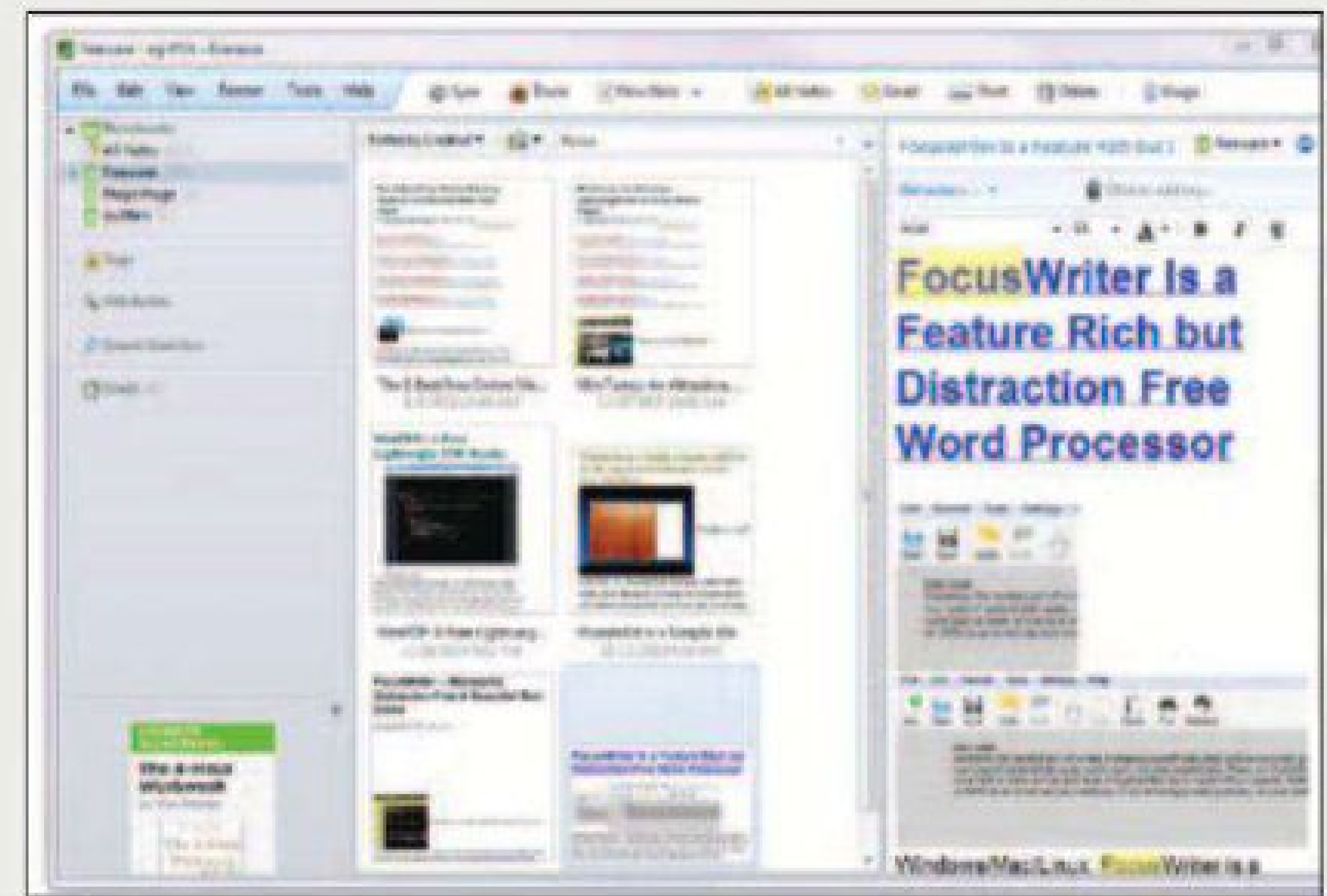
<http://www.openoffice.org>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | PORTABLE Despite the appearance of LibreOffice, it turns out that OO.o hasn't gone anywhere yet. You can still get the suite (now technically run by Oracle) that includes word processor, spreadsheet, presentations, drawing, and a database that all run on every desktop operating system, or from a USB Flash drive on Windows.

WriteMonkey

<http://writemonkey.com>

WINDOWS Perhaps the best distraction-free,



OFFICE

Evernote

<http://www.evernote.com>

WINDOWS | MAC | WEB | MOBILE If there's something you see on the Web that's worth making a note of, Evernote is there for you. It stores what you collect publicly or privately, with tags for easy finding later, with just a click in your browser. Then you can access notes online, on the desktop, or your phone whenever you like.

full-screen, "zen" text editor you'll find for free, WriteMonkey has lots of nice bells for the serious writer. That includes an infobar you can customize to show document info, or just hit a key to get all the stats on your work. You can set a constant position for your work cursor, so you never hit the bottom of the page.

OPERATING SYSTEMS

Jolicloud

<http://www.jolicloud.com>

An extra-light-weight version of Ubuntu for the netbook crowd, JoliCloud is meant to be fast and to go online, giving equal time to Web apps and desktop apps. You can get



OPERATING SYSTEMS

Linux Mint <http://www.linuxmint.com>

Version 10 (codenamed “Julia”) of this distro—which claims to be the most widely used OS in homes behind Windows, Mac, and Ubuntu—has a number of desktop choices, an improved menu system, and is focused on making multimedia as easy as possible.

it to dual-boot with Windows, run by itself, or test it out inside your Google Chrome browser.

Ubuntu

<http://www.ubuntu.com>

Whether you pick the desktop or the net-book edition of Ubuntu 10.10 (“Maverick Meerkat” to its friends), you’ll find the popular Linux-based OS is making great strides to be a serious mainstream competitor. It’s had a complete cosmetic overhaul from color scheme to fonts. Every user gets 2GB of storage on the Ubuntu One cloud service, multi-touch support, and of course all the apps you need to get computing quickly.

PDF READERS

FoxIt Reader

<http://www.foxitsoftware.com/pdf/reader/>

WINDOWS | PORTABLE FoxIt has long been a favorite PDF reading alternative. In addition to its “no bloat” claim⁵⁵s, the software also lets you annotate PDF files and convert PDF contents to text.

Nuance PDF Reader

<http://www.nuance.com/imaging/products/pdfreader.asp>

WINDOWS Another PDF reader that wants to do a lot from a small package, Nuance lets you view a summary of comments in the file, Silverlight-based embedded media, and multiple layers in graphics, and it provides easy conversion of PDF to formats used by Word and Excel.

PrimoPDF

<http://www.primopdf.com/index.aspx>

WINDOWS Nitro’s PrimoPDF simply makes PDF files from any file you can print. It does it fast via drag-and-drop, so you don’t even have to open the file in the original software.

PRINTING

PrinterShare

<http://www.printershare.com>

WINDOWS | MAC | MOBILE With PrinterShare installed, anyone else with the software—even on phones—can print to your printer right over the Internet, and you can print to theirs.

REMOTE ACCESS

LogMeIn Free

<https://secure.logmein.com/US/products/free/>

WINDOWS | MAC Next time someone across the country asks you for tech support, here's a solution: take over their computer. As the name implies, you remotely log in for free, then take control of the other computer. Access requires an account with LogMeIn.

TeamViewer

<http://www.teamviewer.com/index.aspx>

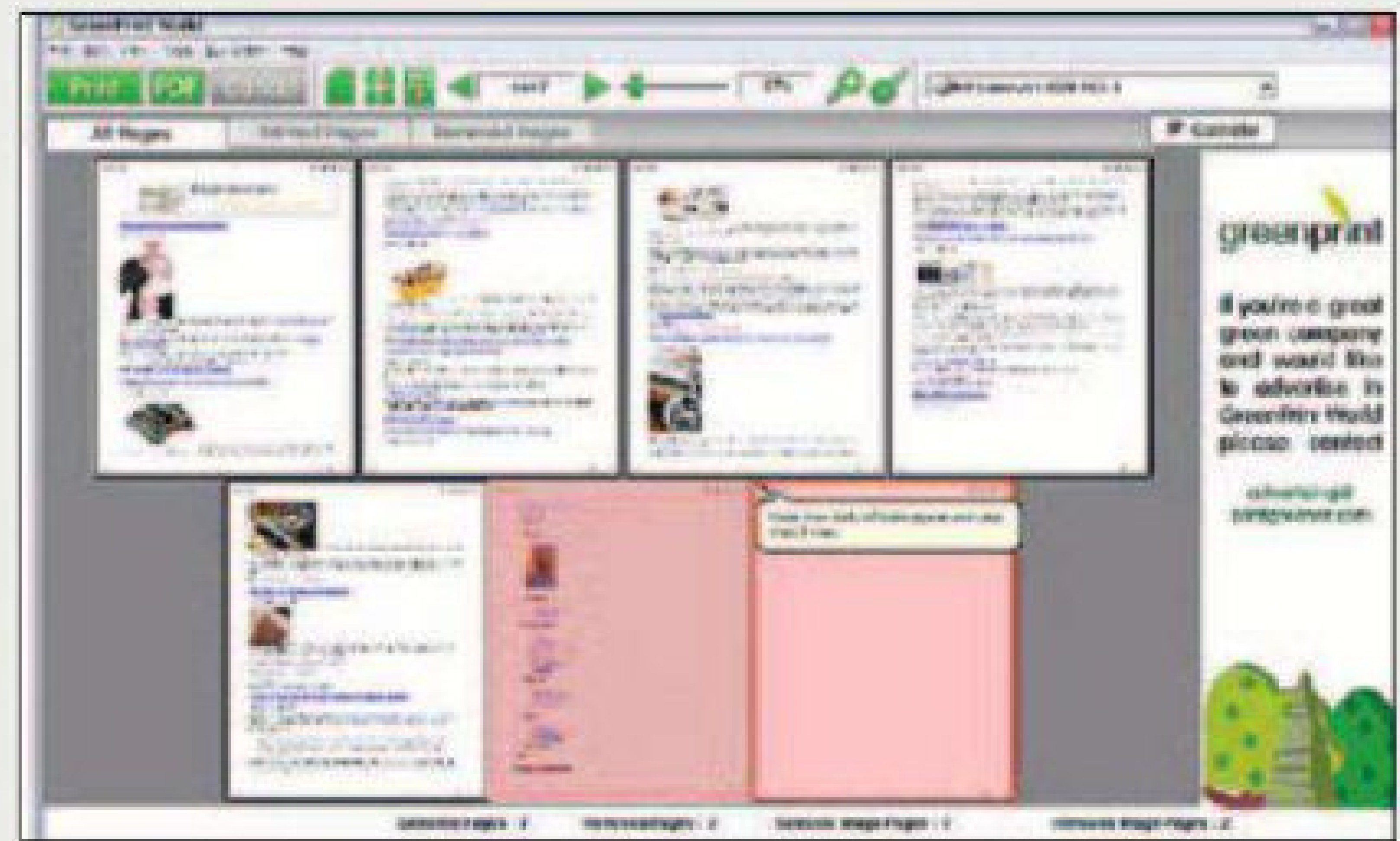
WINDOWS | MAC | MOBILE | PORTABLE Forget all the annoying network settings; TeamViewer just works to give you remote access to and control of another PC, or it lets you show your screens to someone else. Someone has to be on both ends so you can get the access code generated by the software, but once you input it, seeing what's on the remote machine is a snap. Accessing a single system for non-commercial use is totally free.

SEARCH

Google Desktop 5

<http://desktop.google.com>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX Searching the Web is fast and thorough on Google, and Google now brings that same capability to your hard drive with Google Desktop. A search online incorporates all of your files in the results. Plus, it offers the ability to put Google Gadgets right on your computer desktop.



PRINTING

GreenPrint World

<http://www.printgreener.com>

WINDOWS

The GreenPrint World utility for home users looks like a printer to your computer. Go into the utility and pick your actual printer, and it steps in to help you stop the printout of useless info, or it sets certain pages to monochrome in graphical preview, saving you as much as \$100 a year in waste. It will even send the file to a PDF you don't have to print at all.

Copernic Desktop Search Home

<http://www.copernic.com>

WINDOWS | MOBILE Practically the grandfather of this extensive kind of search, Copernic takes a look not only at everything on your hard drive (though network drives are only searched in the Pro version), but also the contents of those files; it even looks at attachments to e-mails. myCopernic apps for smartphones extend the search even further, as do agent add-ons for the major Web browsers.

SECURITY/ENCRYPTION



SECURITY/ENCRYPTION

LastPass

<http://lastpass.com>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | MOBILE With a 5-star rating, our security expert considers this an almost perfect product for managing your passwords for every phone and every browser, with just about every feature you could want. (If you desire multi-factor authentication, you can upgrade to the equally awesome Pro version).

services like Salesforce.com, Ning, Google Buzz, and many more.

TweetDeck

<http://www.tweetdeck.com>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | MOBILE TweetDeck runs on all the major desktop OSes, using the same popular, multi-column interface to show off Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and MySpace updates. You can even access multiple Twitter accounts, track hot trending topics, and manage your Twitter lists. You can sync your TweetDeck column setup across multiple PCs and even to the mobile apps.

SYSTEM UTILITIES

TrueCrypt

<http://www.truecrypt.org>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX With TrueCrypt you can encrypt everything on a partition or drive (even your main C: drive) in real-time, or create a virtual disk you fill with data you want to protect.

CCleaner

<http://www.piriform.com/ccleaner>

WINDOWS Windows frequently needs a good dusting, and CCleaner will take care of it, searching out all the files and registry entries you no longer need that were left there by apps or browsers.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

Seesmic Desktop

<http://www.seesmic.com/products/desktop>

WINDOWS | MAC Why access just one social network on your desktop when a tool like Seesmic Desktop lets you access them all? It supports more than 50, including the big names: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. There are also unique integrations with

Recuva

<http://www.piriform.com/recuva>

WINDOWS We all delete the wrong file sometimes. And we all empty the recycle bin too soon sometimes. Recuva (as the phonetic name implies) is there to help you in times like this; It recovers the files you just deleted, plus those files you lost in a tragic crash, even on a memory card or USB storage device.

Soluto

www.soluto.com

WINDOWS Do you feel like your Windows boot time is spiraling out of control, with all of those unnecessary programs loading and making you wait? Get a handle on it with Soluto. It counts down for you how long startup is taking and gives you a graphically beautiful interface for turning off those extra programs you don't need, or at least delaying them so your startup goes a little faster.

UNINSTALLERS

Revo Uninstaller

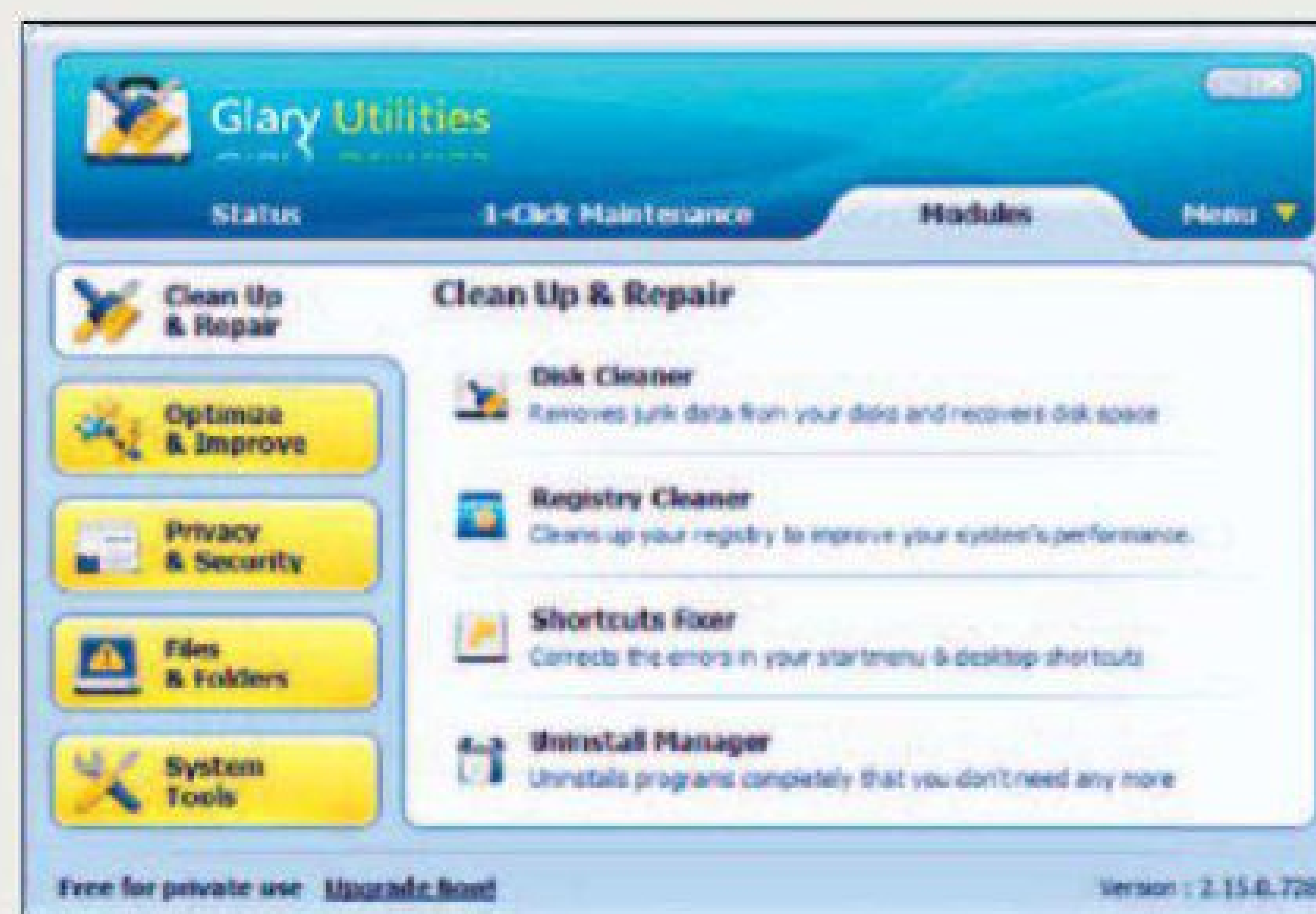
<http://www.revouninstaller.com>

WINDOWS Uninstalling programs with their own uninstallers tend to leave things behind. Revo will run that for programs you want to be rid of, then it will go back and check for extras to delete, even bits left in the registry. It's worth the extra steps to get cleaned up.

SlimComputer Free

<http://slimcomputer.com>

WINDOWS Like PC Decrapifier, SlimComputer Free exists to turn new computers into the speed demons that they should be, by eliminating the extra crud installed by the PC vendors. The data it uses is crowd-sourced by other users, so the software can easily tell what promotions, toolbars, and other useless stuff you don't need. It does all the work for you, essentially.



SYSTEM UTILITIES

Glary Utilities

<http://www.glaryutilities.com>

utilites.com

WINDOWS | PORTABLE This set of utilities includes just about everything you'd want to help you keep Windows up to snuff. It cleans the registry and hard drives, uninstalls programs, manages startup programs, erases your online tracks, shreds files, kills duplicate files and empty folders, and has a full-process manager. You can run it all from a USB flash drive, too.

VIDEO

Hamster Free Video Converter

<http://videoconverter.hamstersoft.com>

WINDOWS A clean interface doesn't even begin to describe this slick little utility for converting videos so you can watch them anywhere. Presets cover both the codecs and the devices you want to target. (Beware of the Bing tools in the installation if you want to keep your current settings, however.)

Miro

<http://www.getmiro.com>





VIDEO

CamStudio <http://www.camstudio.org>

WINDOWS If you ever needed to give a tutorial over and over again by showing what you're doing on a computer screen, you need to make a screen-cast. CamStudio will do that, creating an AVI or SWF video file of your actions, complete with your audio commentary, that you can then send or upload to share with others.

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX Version 3.5 is an open-source HD video player and podcast collector. It gathers new episodes of shows instantly and has a BitTorrent client and RSS reader built in. Miro pulls HD versions when available, even from sites like YouTube. Since it can download videos instead of streams, you can take your programs on the road with you when you lack Internet access.

VLC media player

<http://www.videolan.org>

WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX | PORTABLE Why download codecs to get all those various videos to play when the VLC media player has just about every codec in the world built in? It plays almost everything, even DVDs and streaming media from a mic or webcam.

Windows Live Movie Maker 2011

<http://download.live.com/moviemaker>

WINDOWS This is our PCMag Editors' Choice for simple video editing. Live Movie Maker joins video clips and photos or easily trims clips in a simple interface that only works with Windows Vista/7. It lacks the extras like chroma key or picture-in-a-picture, but you probably won't miss them if you embrace the simplicity inherent in the product.

VIRTUALIZATION

Spoon

<http://www.spoon.net>

WINDOWS Spoon turns your Web browser into application space. It lets you run apps like OpenOffice, Paint.NET, Skype, VLC player, and many more, including many games, in a browser tab as if they are Web apps, rather than installed Windows apps. You could even run another browser, like Opera, inside your primary browser.

VirtualBox

<http://www.virtualbox.org>

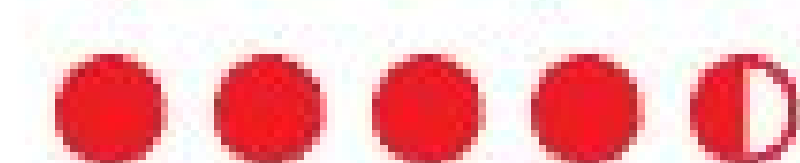
WINDOWS | MAC | LINUX As long as the OS you want to try supports Intel x86 or AMD64/Intel64 virtualization, you can probably run it as a "guest operating system" on any host system with VirtualBox. The shared folders feature means both host OS and guest OS get access to the same files.

Want more? You can find over 100 more of our favorite free apps by clicking here.



SOS Online Backup Home Edition 4.7.4

\$9.95 per month for up to five PCs



PROS One account covers multiple PCs. Can back up external and network drive. Good iPhone app. Share files via link. Wizard helps choose what to back up. Search backup set. Local backup app included. All files archived, never deleted.

CONS No Mac or Linux version. Some issues with 64-bit Windows and network drives.

SOS Online Backup Home Edition 4.7.4

Personal Backup Champ



SOS Online Backup has been a favorite of ours for years, and the company continues to improve its online backup service. We like its abundance of useful features and its clear, friendly interface, and its new pricing plan is a plus, too: \$9.95 a month for five PCs and up to 50GB of data. This looks good even compared with all-you-can-eat services like Carbonite, which charges \$4.95 a month for just one PC.

The wizard interface of SOS hasn't changed much, but there's an added "So Simple" system scan for commonly desirable backup files—office documents, images, music, and video. Or there are several other ways you can choose which specific files you want to back up.

For critical files, you can enable SOS's Live Protect feature, which will watch the file and immediately send update information to the backup servers. I only wish you

could designate folders as well as files for live protection.

The default scheduling option is once daily in the wee hours. But you can increase this to hourly. Of course, only file changes will be uploaded, so only the first upload will require an enormous data transfer.

Performance-wise, SOS Online Backup did well; it never noticeably slowed down my PC. Processing and uploading a 100MB batch of mixed test files took 22 minutes, similar to the times of MozyHome 2.0, iDrive, Carbonite, and Norton Online Backup.

With its reasonable price, Live Protect, versioning, and many more unique capabilities, SOS Online Backup Home Edition remains our Editors' Choice for personal online backup. But if you don't think 50GB is enough to cover all your home PCs, you may be happier with a competitor like Mozy or Carbonite.—*Michael Muchmore*

[>> CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)

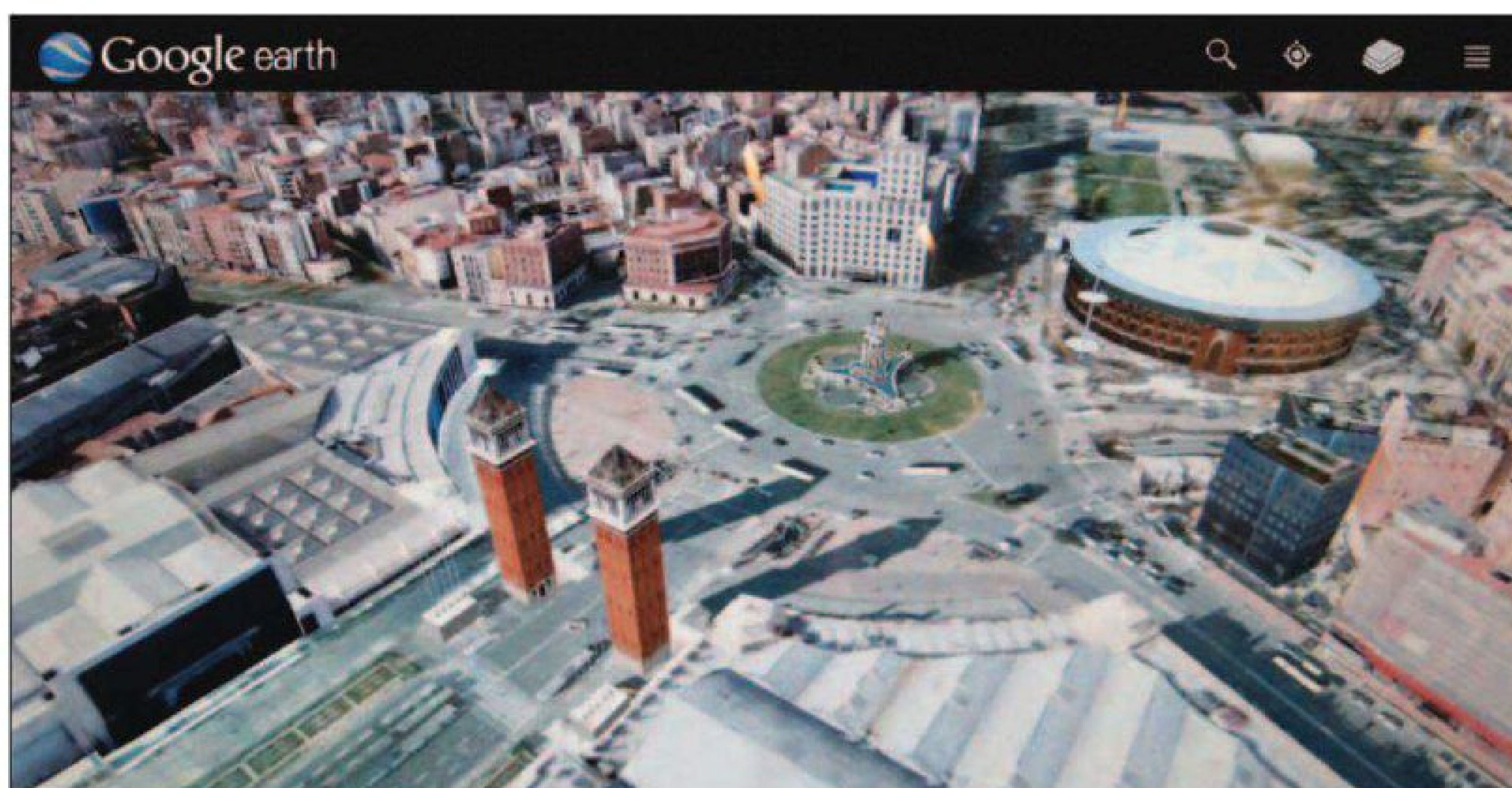
10 BEST APPS

FOR GOOGLE ANDROID 3.0 HONEYCOMB

Honeycomb apps were all the rage at this year's Mobile World Congress. Here are our 10 favorites.

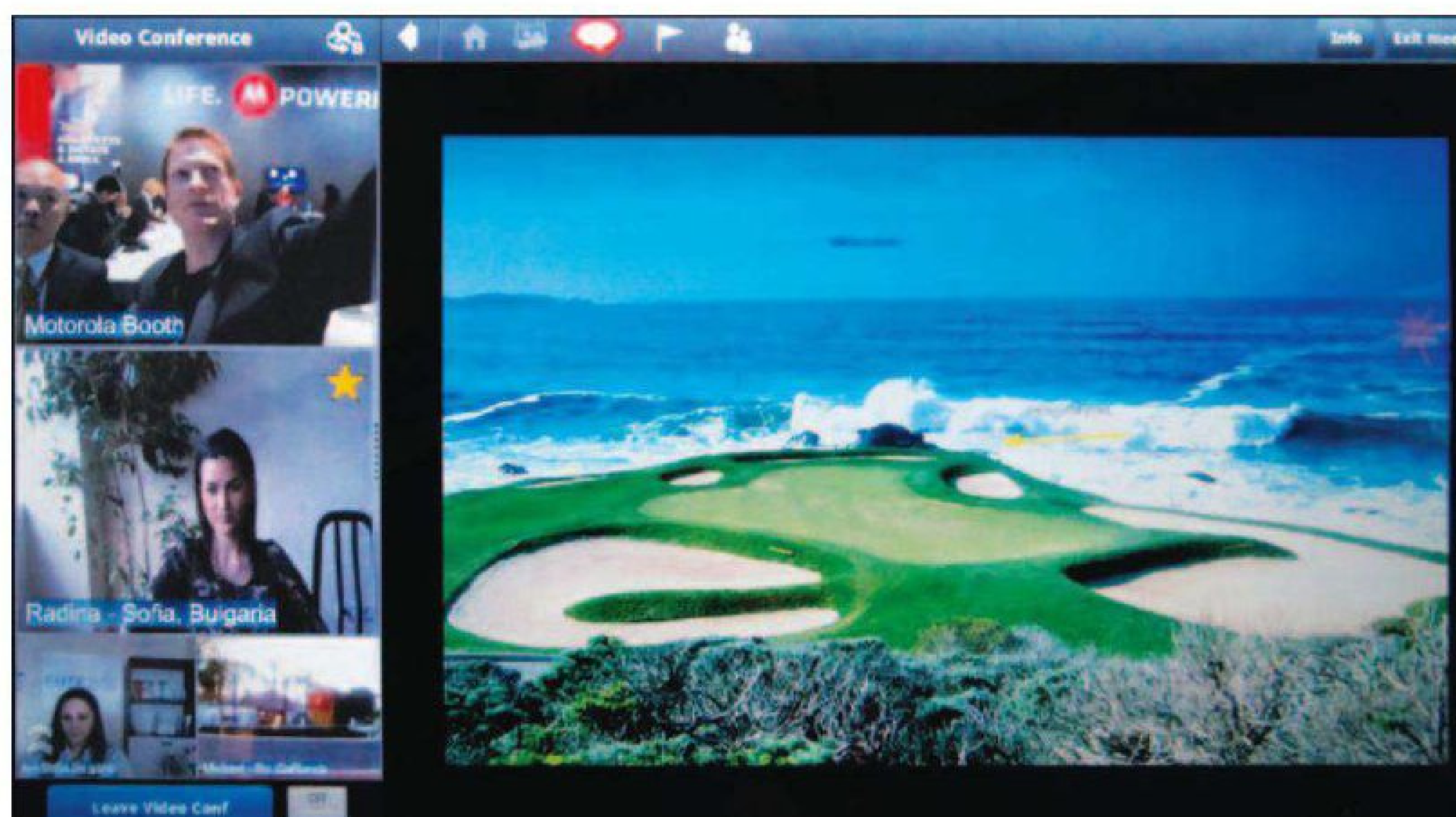
By Sascha Segan

This year's Mobile World Congress in Barcelona was the first big coming-out party for tablets running Google's Android Honeycomb operating system, and Google's huge booth was crammed full of Honeycomb apps. I was wowed by how some of the apps leveraged tablets' big screens to offer new experiences that are impossible on phones. That's the kind of thinking the platform will need to succeed. Following are the 10 apps that impressed me the most at MWC.



1 GOOGLE EARTH FOR HONEYCOMB

The view of Google Earth isn't cramped at all on Honeycomb tablets, and you feel like you're really swooping over the 3D buildings and terrain.



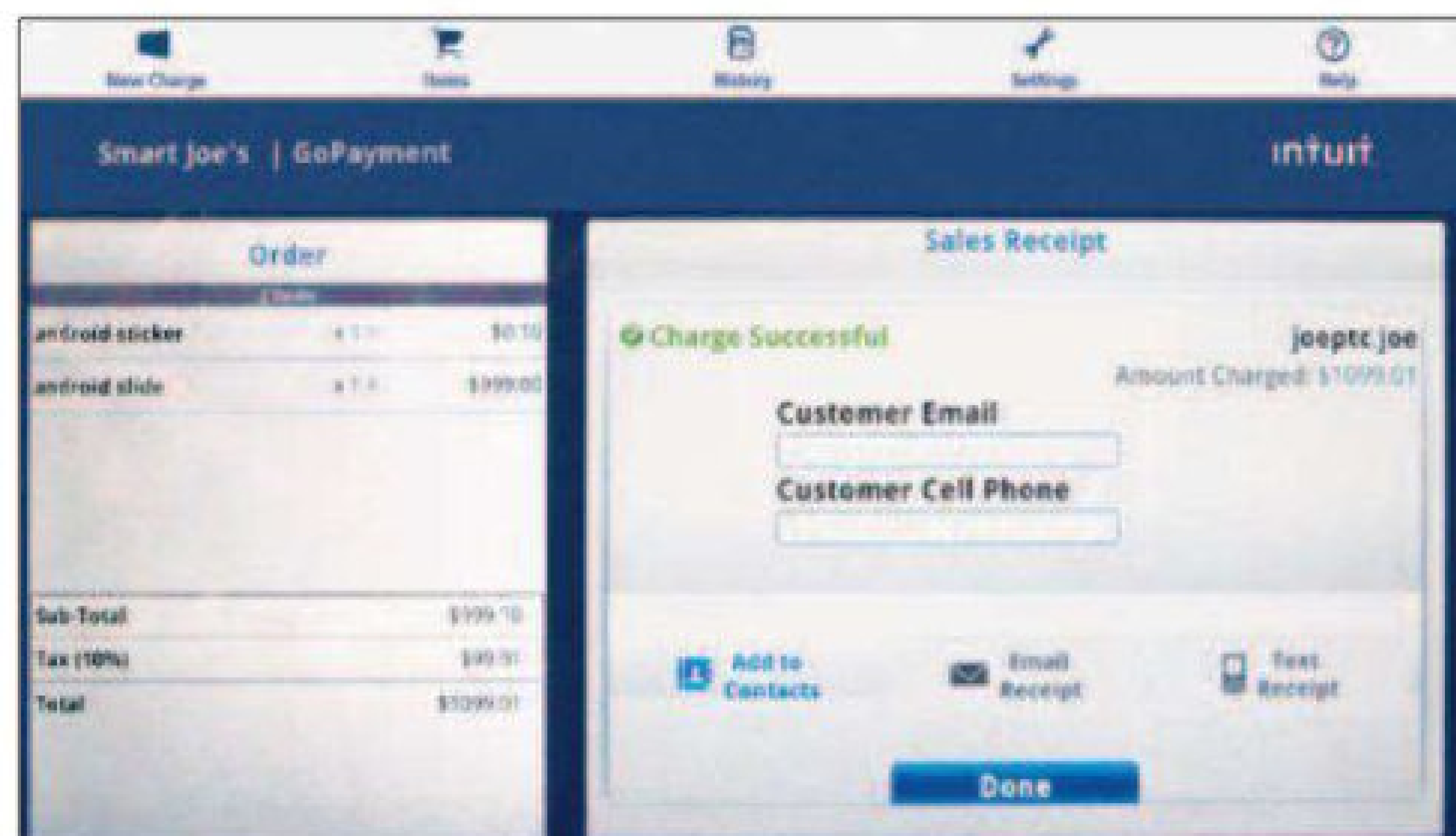
2 FUZE MEETING

Fuze Meeting offers multi-party video conferencing and collaborative meeting software on Honeycomb. Over a Wi-Fi connection, it's pretty smooth.

THE 10 BEST APPS FOR GOOGLE ANDROID

3 INTUIT GOPAYMENT

Intuit's new GoPayment app, along with a dongle that attaches to the Motorola Xoom tablet, lets Honeycomb tablets read credit cards and take payments.



4 WEATHERBUG

This weather app has been rewritten for Honeycomb. The sliding weather panels aren't the big draw for me, but the temperature heat map makes good use of the big screen.



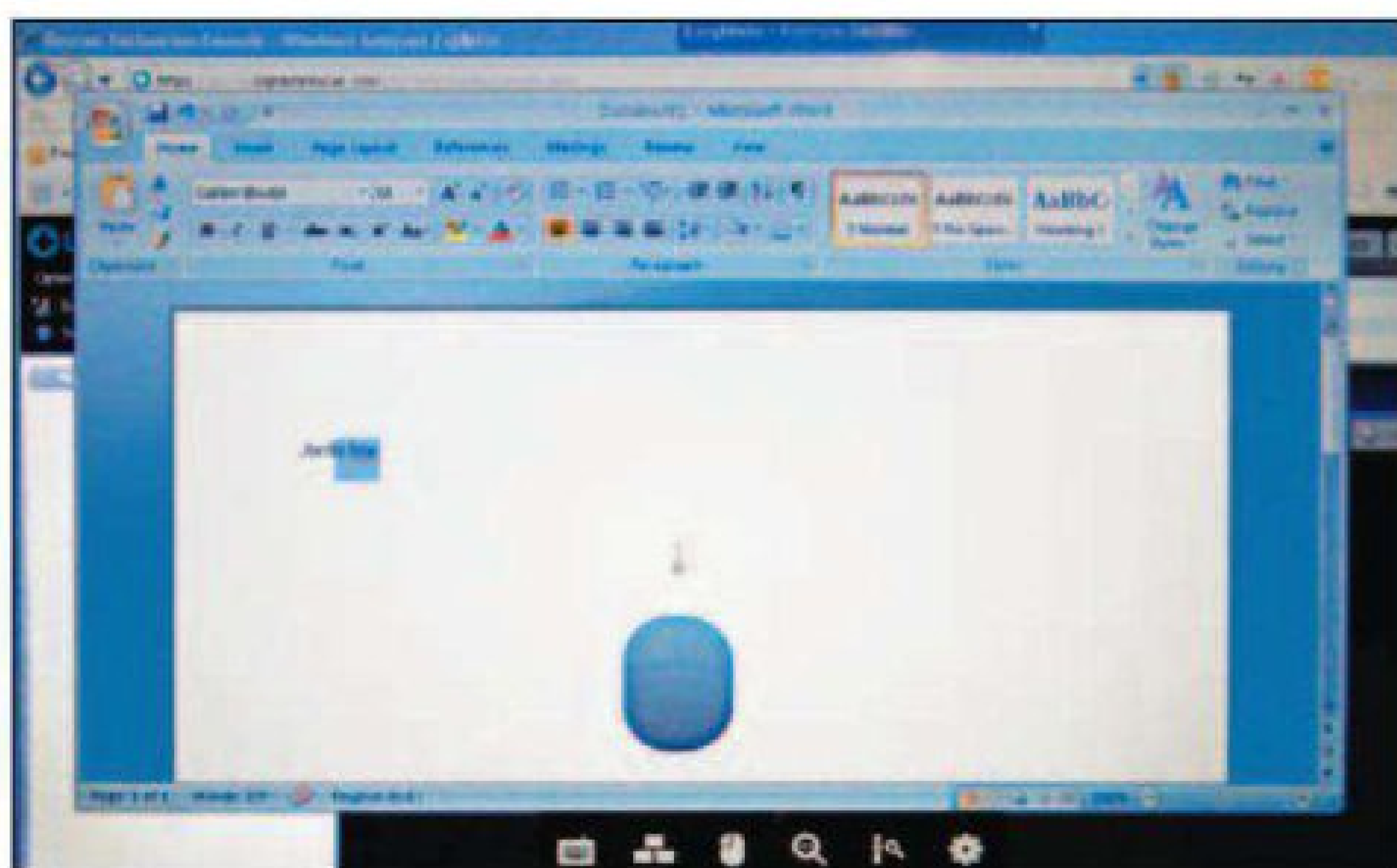
5 GREAT BATTLES MEDIEVAL

There were half a dozen Honeycomb games at the Google booth. Great Battles Medieval had the grandest sweep, using the tablet's big screen to show a battlefield full of enemies in a way that just wouldn't work on a phone.



6 LOGMEIN

The big screens of Honeycomb tablets let them act as windows to full desktop PCs. LogMeIn is a virtual desktop app that can show what's happening back on your computer at work.



7 QUICKOFFICE

QuickOffice is bringing Microsoft Office-compatible apps to Honeycomb. Here, a demonstrator is editing an Excel spreadsheet, including inserting a new formula.

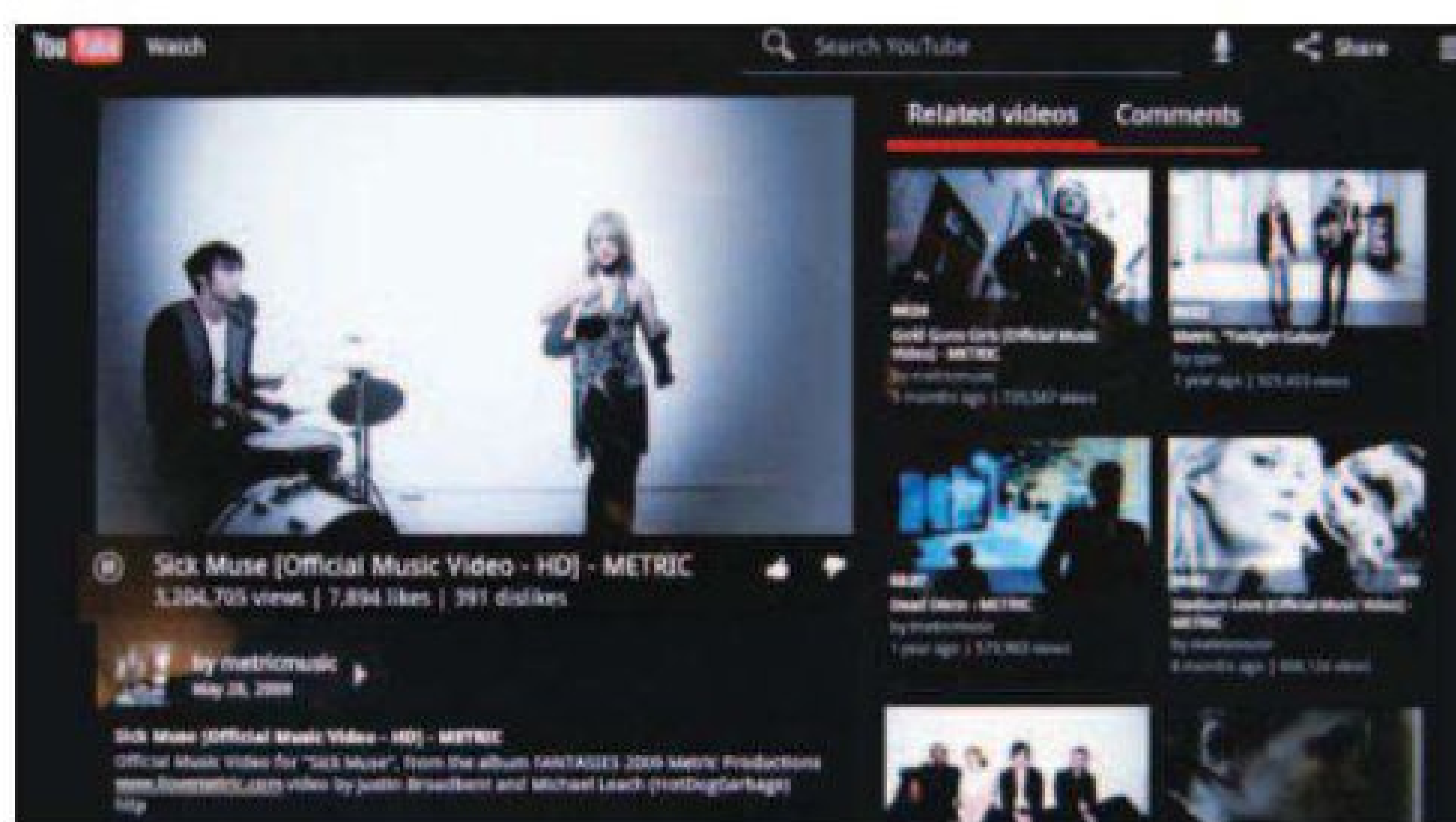
	A	B	C	D
10	% Growth	2009	2010	
11	Acoustic	10.7%	36.2%	

8 CNN

CNN's Honeycomb app turns the venerable news Web site into a virtual magazine. Stories have text, images, and video mixed in.

9 YOUTUBE

Google's own YouTube looks great on Honeycomb. With the added screen real estate, you can watch a video and search for the next one to watch at the same time.



1 10 PULSE NEWS

Pulse News uses a big Honeycomb screen to make RSS reading a more visual experience. When you open a story, meanwhile, your feeds can stay visible on the left-hand side. ■



Solutions

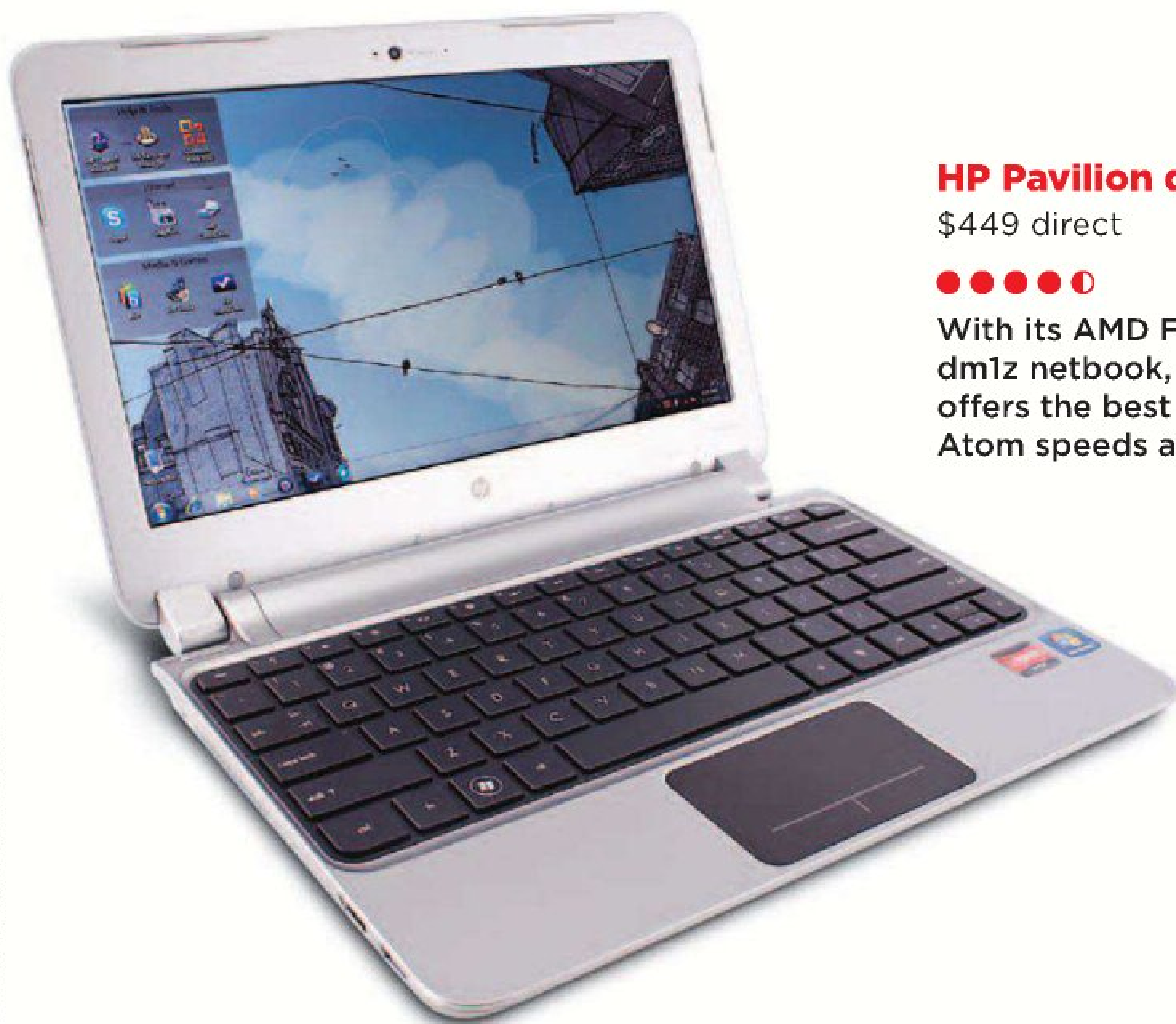
How to Buy A Netbook

With fast processing, impressive features, and an attractive price, netbooks are hard to resist. Here's how to pick a model that suits your needs.

By Cisco Cheng

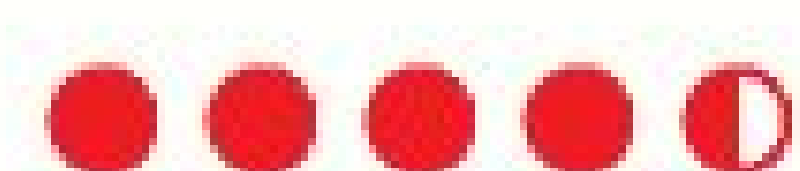
The first batch of netbooks to hit the scene was greeted with awe and surprise. Tiny laptops were once sold at a premium, but these could be had for half the price of a typical system and seemed incredible. Since then, the stakes have risen: The Apple iPad has proven that it can be the secondary Web and e-mail device, and in response to that, PC makers have shifted their attention from netbooks to tablets. Competition has grown more fierce, too. Netbook makers are including more features, bigger screens and keyboards, and faster parts—all while slashing prices like a Walmart special. These devices, which are already in many households, are also becoming increasingly popular among small business professionals and college students.

The choices, meanwhile, are coming from all sorts of household names, like Samsung, Sony, Toshiba, Dell, and HP. As a category, netbooks are such a diverse group that it's hard to come up with a single, all-encompassing definition. The best indicators that you're dealing with a netbook are a low price, light weight, and low-powered components. Likely the system will have a screen on the smaller side and a basic feature set. Still, netbooks vary in screen size, typing experience, and specialty features. And now the war is heating up between Intel and AMD at the component level. Despite all the look-alikes, there are certainly differences that warrant further explanation. Luckily, this netbook-buying guide does just that.



HP Pavilion dm1z

\$449 direct



With its AMD Fusion APU, the HP Pavilion dm1z netbook, an Editors' Choice winner, offers the best of both worlds: faster-than-Atom speeds and great battery life.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)

Larger Screens, Bigger Keyboards

It's generally easy enough to tell a netbook from other laptops, but to distinguish between systems, you'll need to do a little homework. In the past, screen sizes defaulted to 10-inches with 1,024-by-600 resolutions on almost every single netbook. These days, netbooks are breaking away from this trend. Oversized netbooks like the HP Pavilion dm1z and Lenovo ThinkPad X120e are sold with 11.6-inch widescreens, while the Lenovo IdeaPad S12 (lon) and the Asus EeePC 1215N are ship-

ping with 12-inch ones. And their resolutions, as a result, are upped to HD-capable ones (1,366 by 768).

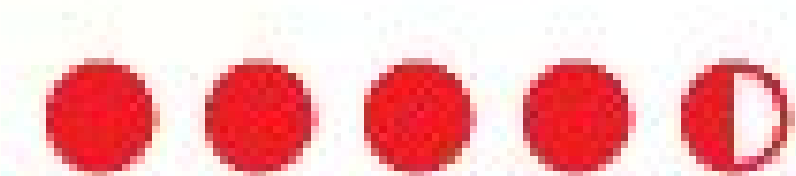
Once upon a time, full-sized keyboards were few and far between, but now they exist in netbooks as small as 10 inches. Case in point: The HP Mini 5103, Lenovo IdeaPad S10-3, and Acer Aspire One AOD255-1203 each squeezed one into its 10-inch frame. The vast majority of netbooks don't have full-size keyboards (they usually range from 89 to 93 percent of a full-size), but expect that to change very quickly.





Samsung NF310-A01

\$400 street

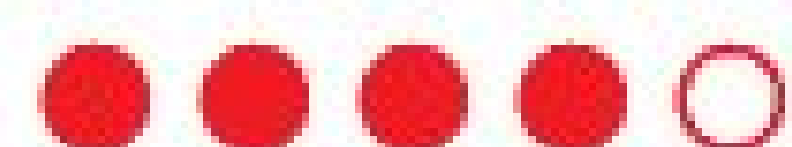


With the latest dual-core Atom processor, high-resolution screen, and a great user experience, the Samsung NF310-A01 is our new Editors' Choice for netbooks.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)

Asus EeePC 1015PEM

\$370 street



Asus doesn't raise the price of its 10-inch EeePC 1015PEM netbook, even though it now runs on a dual-core Intel Atom processor.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)



Usual Array of Features, Some Exceptions

You will find an abundance of USB ports, Webcams, card readers, and built-in Wi-Fi. Netbooks don't include optical drives or have great-sounding speakers, but they can acquire an Internet connection in more than one way. An 802.11n WiFi chip and Ethernet port can be found in most netbooks, taking care of both your wireless and wired needs. Embedded 3G modems, which can use cellular signals to acquire

broadband speeds, are available in the HP Mini 5103, Lenovo Thinkpad X120e, and the Acer One D255 (through AT&T). Mobile broadband is also available in USB form, which can be attached to any one of the three USB ports that come with every one of these netbooks. An HDMI port, which simultaneously transmits audio and video to a flat-panel (via a cable), can be found in the HP dm1z, the Lenovo X120e, and the Asus 1215N.

Atom Platform, Mostly

You'll also find the Intel Atom platform, made up of the Atom processor, integrated graphics, and memory (usually 1GB) in almost every netbook. Although the Intel Atom processor is the most energy-efficient netbook processor out there, it's not the fastest. AMD is making waves with its new Fusion APUs, a combination of CPU and graphics cores on a single die—plenty of speed, minus the merciless battery drains. These processors can already be found in netbooks like the HP dm1z and the Lenovo X120e.

Intel is already into its fourth generation of

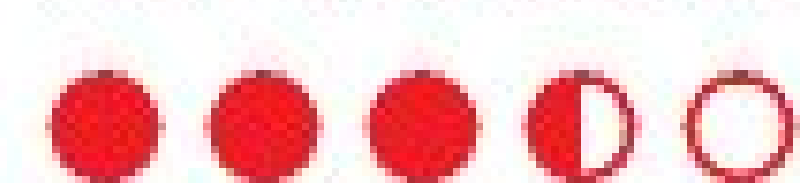
Atom processors, the most recent of which are the Atom N455 (1.66 GHz) and the N475 (1.83 GHz). These are single-core processors that have been updated with DDR3 memory support. The dual-core version—the Atom N550 (1.5 GHz)—has also rolled out on the Acer D255-1203, the HP 5103, and the Samsung NF310-A01, improving performance by up to 20 percent (over the single-core Atom) without impacting battery life.

Battery, Hard Drive Considerations

Standard netbook batteries have standardized on 6-cell (48 to 63WH) units, but

HP Mini 210-2070nr

\$349.98 list



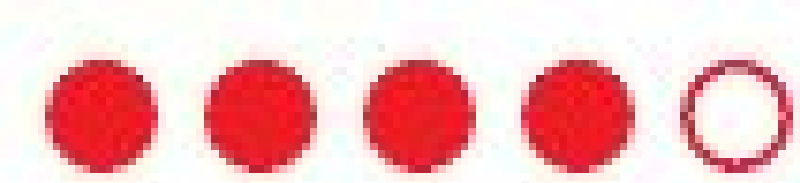
There's nothing special about the HP Mini 210-2070nr netbook's looks or performance, but it'll give you a full day's worth of battery life and comes with a fast hard drive.

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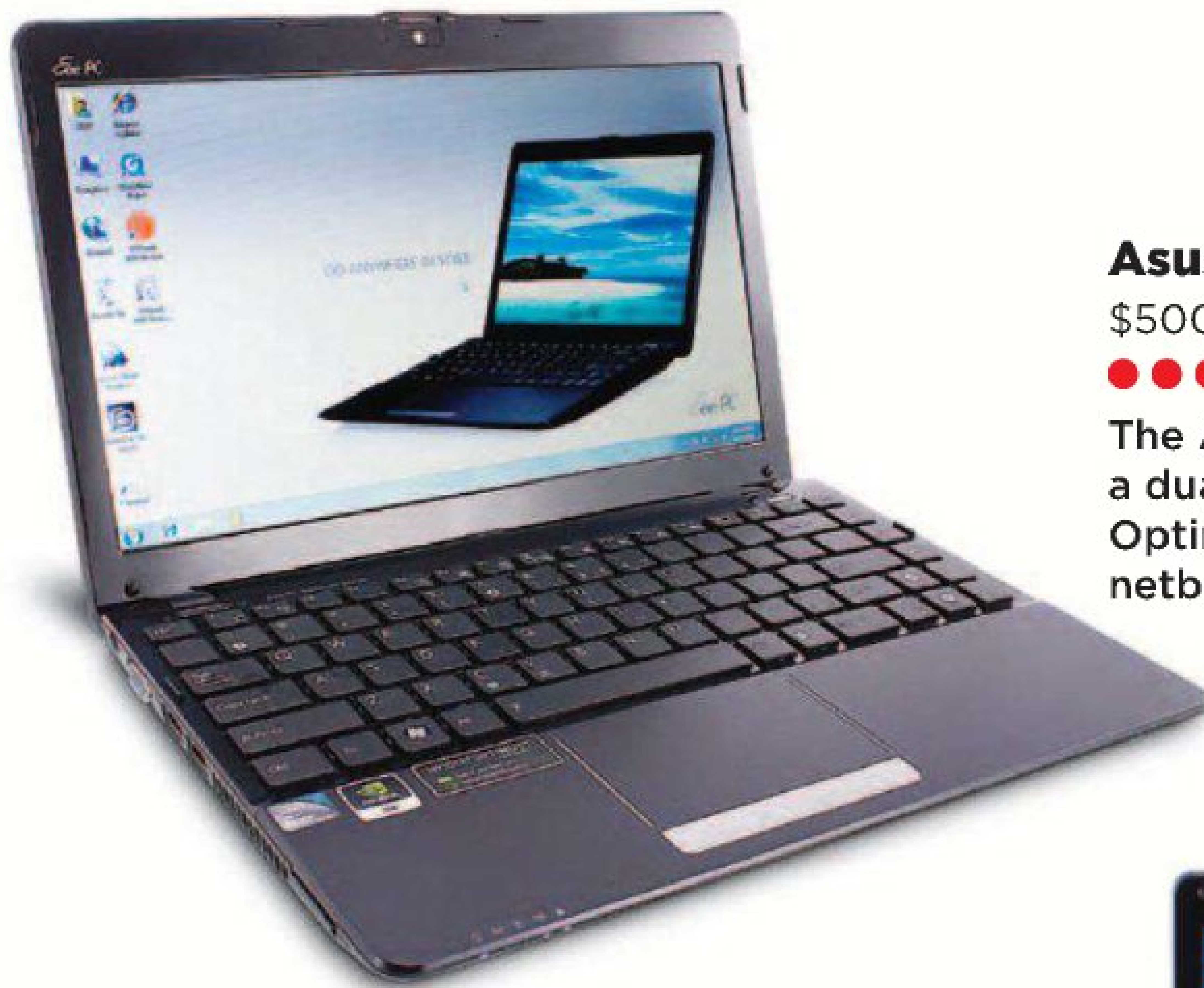
HP Mini 5103

\$650 street



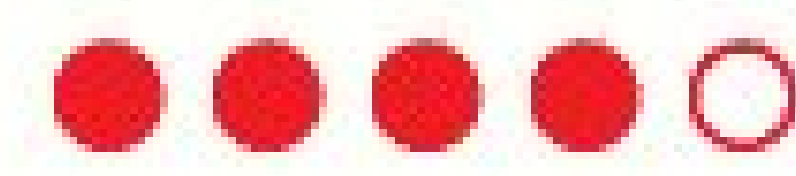
With its dual-core Atom CPU, touch screen, big battery, and 2GB of RAM, the HP Mini 5103 is the most tricked-out netbook money can buy, but it doesn't come cheap.

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Asus EeePC 1215N

\$500 street

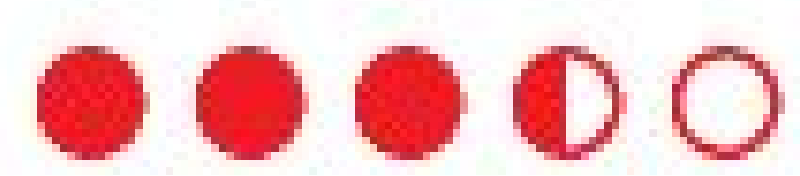


The Asus EeePC 1215N is updated with a dual-core Atom processor and Nvidia Optimus technology, trumping all other netbooks in speed and graphics power.

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Asus EeePC 1201N

\$500 street



The ASUS EeePC 1201N is the best 12-inch netbook in the market, even though it only has 4 hours of battery life.

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some vendors might try to sneak in a 3-cell battery (~30WH), so be wary of this. Our battery tests have shown that the smaller batteries will get you anywhere from 2 to 3 hours of battery life on a single charge, while the bigger ones range between 6 to 9 hours. If your activities include trips abroad and all-day classes, don't settle for anything smaller than a 6-cell battery.

You'll also find two hard-drive choices, solid-state drives (SSDs), and spinning hard drives. The consensus is that spinning

drives offer the best gigabyte-per-dollar ratio, and most of them start with at least 320GB of storage space. While SSDs have faster transfer speeds, are durable, and have longer life spans, they command much higher premiums than their spinning counterparts. In an extreme case, upgrading to a 128GB SSD in the HP 5103 will cost you an additional \$450, more than the entire price of our review system.

Many of these netbooks will run fine on 1GB of memory. Most Intel-based net-

books can be upgraded to 2GB, provided you can make this simple upgrade yourself. Fusion-based models, like the HP dm1z and the Lenovo X120e, start with 3GB and 4GB, respectively, and can be upgraded to a whopping 8GB. For light 3D-gaming and full 1080p HD video playback, several of these netbooks are built around Nvidia's ION platform or use ATI's Mobility Radeon graphics cards.

What You Can Do With Them

Don't underestimate the capabilities of these machines. Netbooks are not just limited to Web surfing, compiling spreadsheets, or word processing. You can offload your photos from a digital camera and edit them using a program like Adobe Photoshop Elements 7. With lots of patience, you can transcode videos to another format or edit them

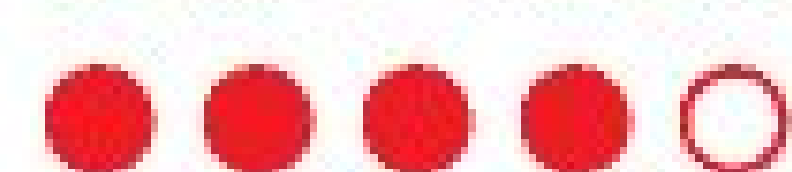
using complex video-editing packages.

You can run your entire music library off of a program like Apple iTunes or Windows Media Player. A netbook can play video from sites like YouTube or a movie from an external USB drive, unmarred by distortions and lag. Businesses, too, are considering these pint-size laptops because you can run various e-mail clients, put them on a network, install a VPN client, and secure them with antivirus and antispyware suites.

At the price points we're seeing in the netbook market—namely \$300 to \$550—sex appeal isn't off limits either on a netbook. The HP 5103 has a sleek-looking aluminum frame, while the Toshiba NB500 Series uses interesting colors and textures. As for the future of netbooks: As long as manufacturers can keep the price down, the sky is the limit. ■

Lenovo ThinkPad X120e

\$580 direct



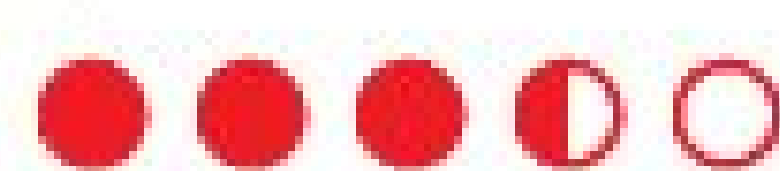
The Lenovo ThinkPad X120e, with its AMD Fusion APU, is arguably the best netbook for business, but it comes at a premium.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)



Lenovo IdeaPad S12 (Ion)

\$650 direct



The Lenovo IdeaPad S12 (Ion), Lenovo's Ion netbook, comes with smooth HD playback, but not without some sacrifices.

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Top 10 Ways To Make the Most Out of Word And Excel 2010

Both of these programs drive us crazy sometimes by not doing what we want them to do. Here are 10 tricks to help you get exactly what you want from your documents and spreadsheets.

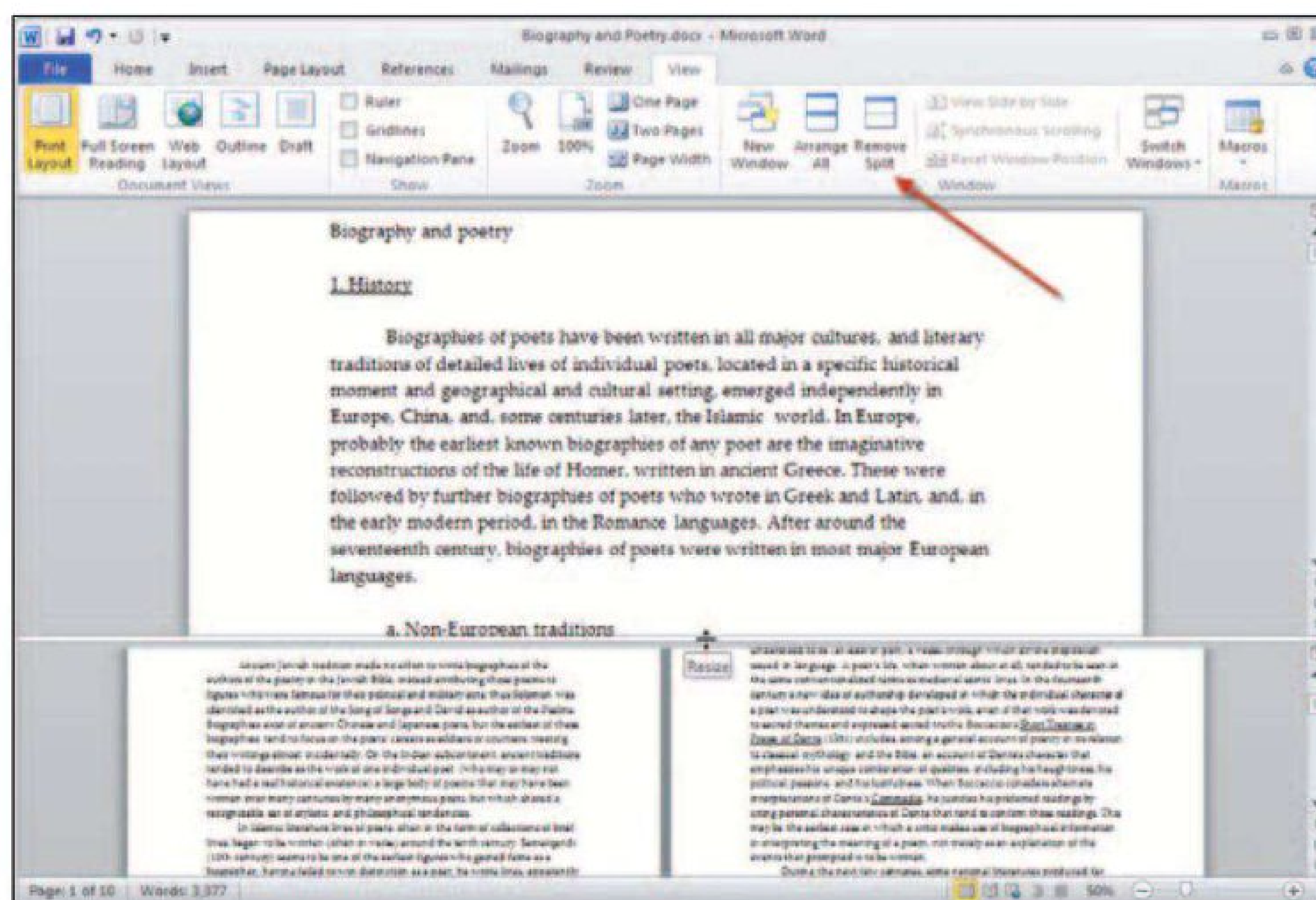
By Edward Mendelson

Have you ever had Word insert a horizontal line across your page when you only wanted to type a few dashes? Just about everyone in my family has tried and failed to wrestle that unwanted horizontal line out of a Word document. It might not sound like a big issue, but once it makes its way into your doc, good luck finding help from Microsoft on how to get rid of it.

This is just one example of annoyances that happen in Word and Excel, with very

little explanation. Some software vendors like Adobe provide help systems that work like improved versions of traditional software manuals, with every item carefully explained. Microsoft, in contrast, provides with you a kind of information supermarket, with huge essays about topics you don't care about, dozens of selections when you only need one, and no consistent way to find the information you want. When I need help with Office, I don't click the Help button on the upper right of the ribbon—I go to Google or Bing. Curiously, Google is more likely than Bing to send me to useful pages at Microsoft.com.

The following offer convenient ways to do things that Office doesn't offer much guidance about, either on its menu or on its ill-conceived online help system, which has a bad habit of not telling me what I need to know. All of these tips work with the 2010 versions of Word and Excel, and many work with previous versions as well.



1] EDIT TWO SECTIONS OF A DOCUMENT AT THE SAME TIME

1. OPEN THE OFFICE WINDOW ON TWO DIFFERENT VIEWS

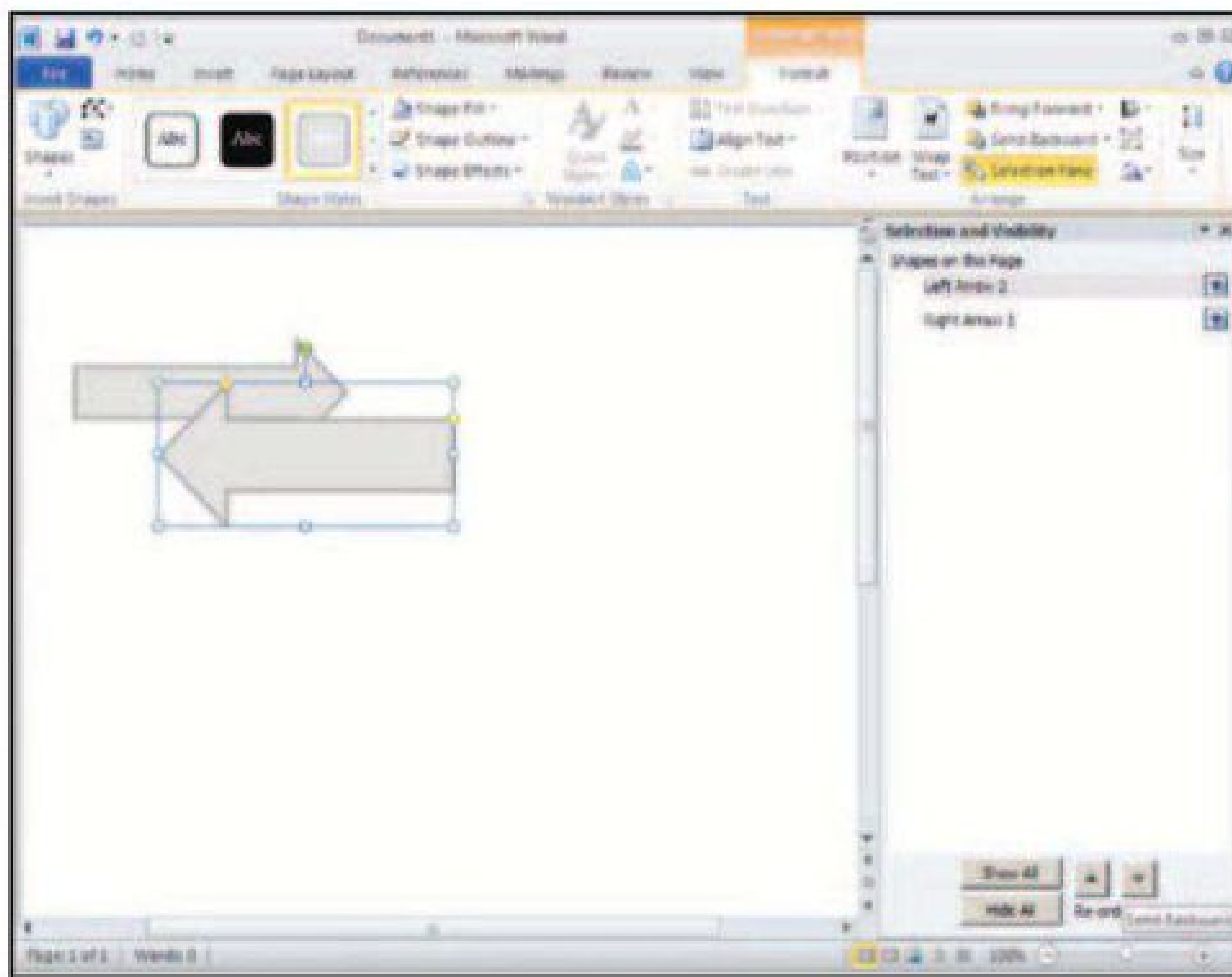
Here's a tip that applies to both Word and Excel in slightly different ways. By splitting the document window into two separate panes you can view and edit two widely separated parts of a document at the same time. That means you can work on the first chapter of your novel in the top pane and the last chapter in the bottom pane, and jump between them simply by clicking the mouse—or by tapping F6 to cycle between the two panes, the ribbon, and the status bar. Word even lets you change the zoom level in the two panes, as shown here, so that you can view multiple pages in one pane while viewing full-size text in the other. You can split the window by dragging the splitter bar at the very top of the vertical scroll bar, or

open the View tab on the Ribbon and select Split (or Remove Split to restore a single window). Excel has a similar split-window feature but unfortunately doesn't let you choose different zoom levels in each pane.

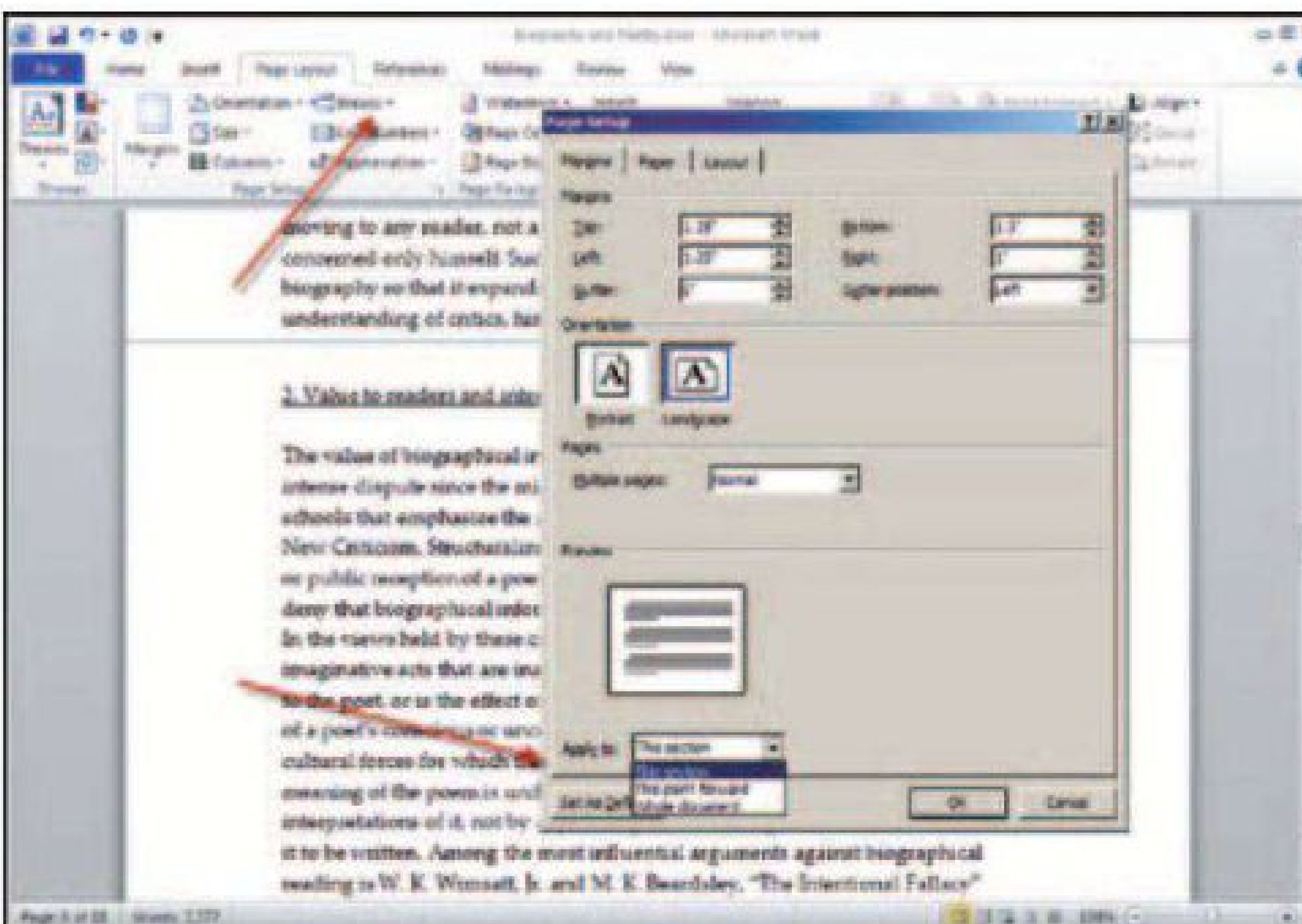
2. MOVE OR HIDE SHAPES IN A WORD DOCUMENT

Here's a tip that's probably familiar to PowerPoint users, but may be new to many Word or Excel users. When you insert multiple shapes in a Word document or Excel worksheet, the easiest way to move them forward or backward in relation to each other is to use the Selection Pane on the Drawing Tools tab in the Ribbon. The Drawing Tools tab only appears when you're working with a graphic. The Selection Pane also makes it easy to select a shape that's





2] MOVE SHAPES WITH DRAWING TOOLS



3] MIX PORTRAIT AND LANDSCAPE FORMATS

hidden behind another shape—just select it from the list on the page, and then use the arrows at the foot of the pane to move it forward or backward. A similar pane makes it easy to maneuver shapes in PowerPoint.

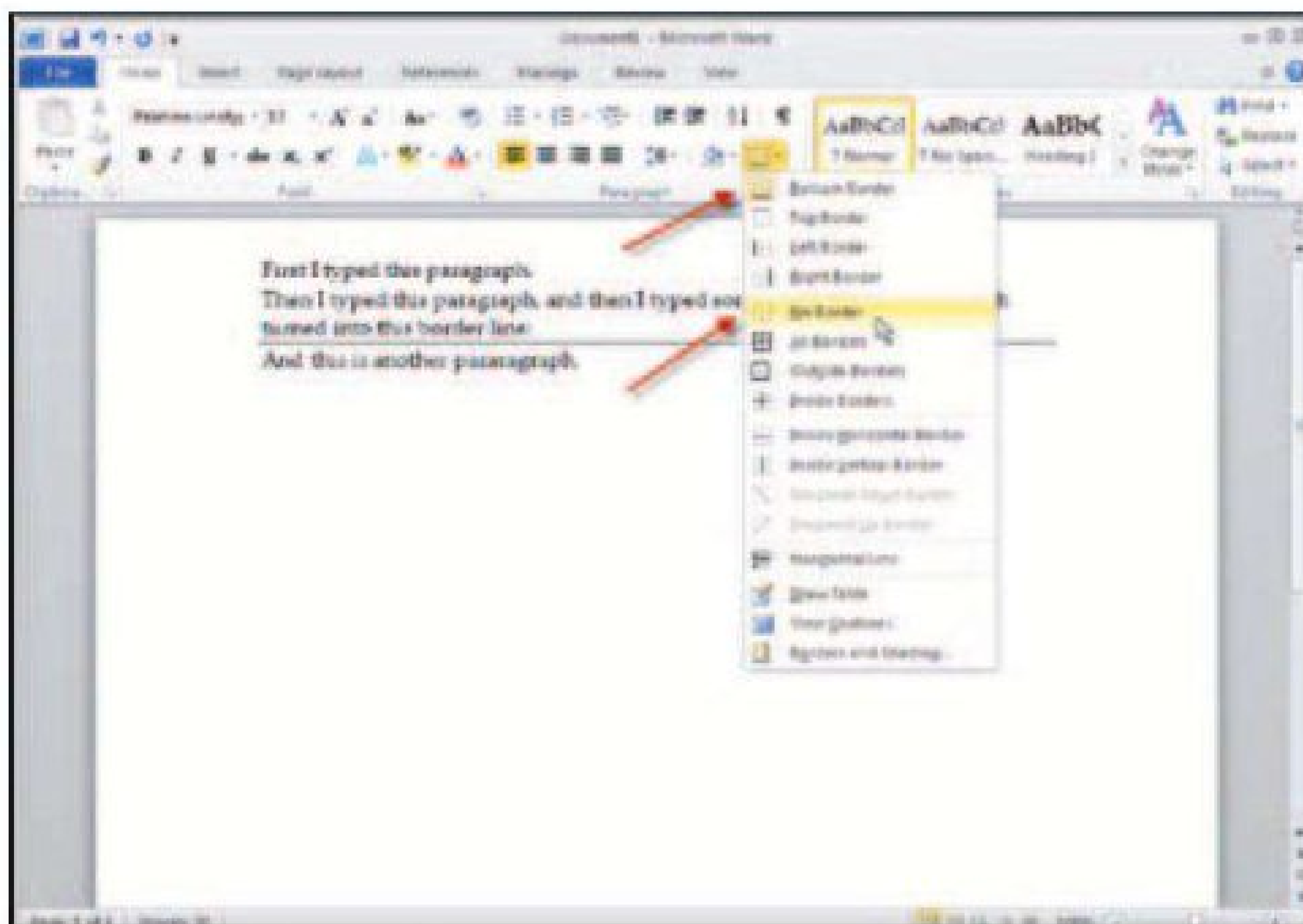
3. COMBINE PORTRAIT AND LANDSCAPE PAGES IN A WORD DOCUMENT

Microsoft Word expects you to organize your documents in a highly-structured but not very intuitive way. If you want to format most of a document in portrait mode,

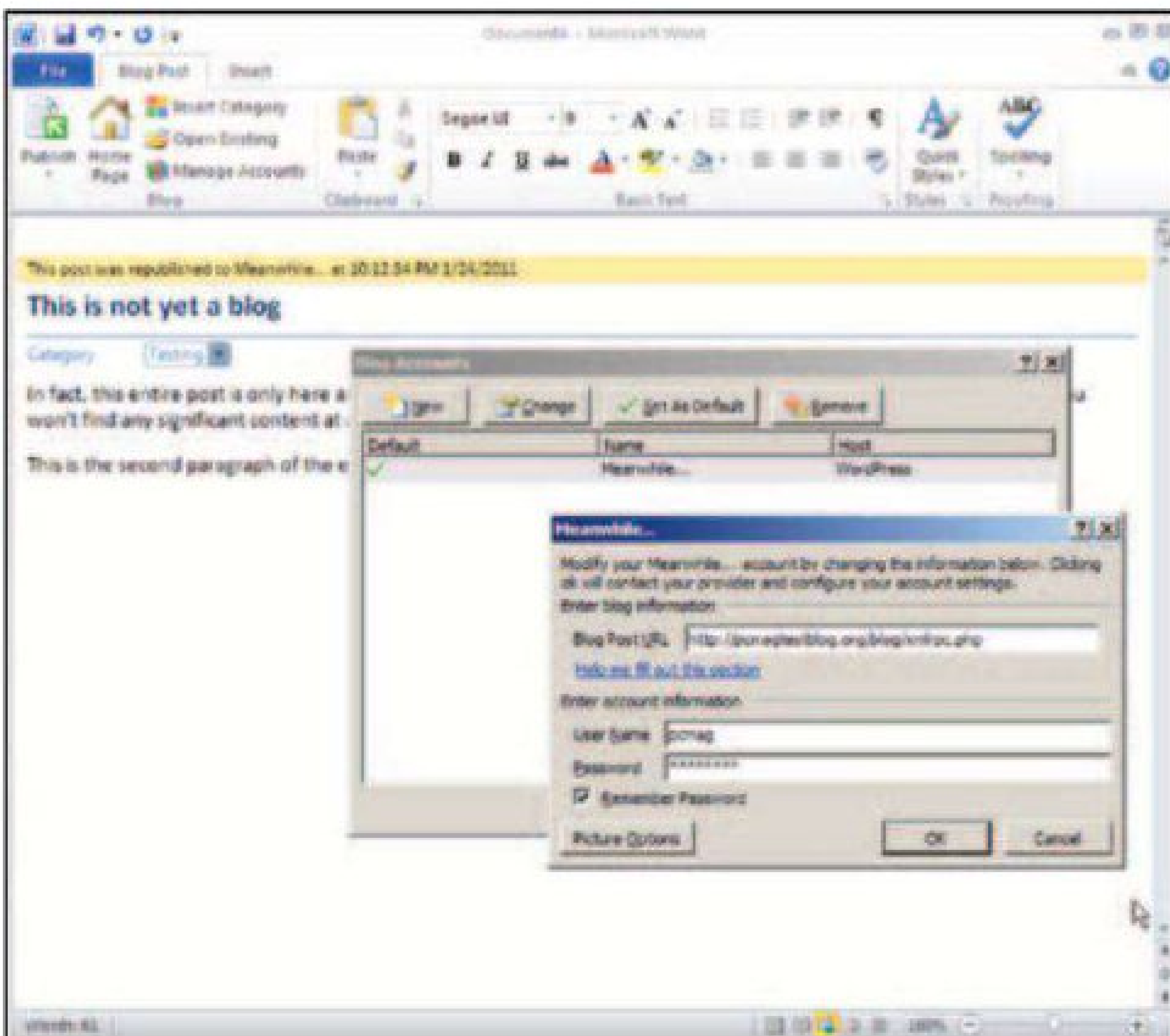
but one or two pages in landscape, you can't simply change the orientation of the current page. Instead you need to insert a section break before and after the text you want to format in landscape mode, and then apply landscape orientation to the section that you created. Place the insertion point at the point where you want landscape orientation to begin. On the Page Layout tab, choose Breaks, then, under Section Breaks, choose New Page. Then move the insertion point to the end of the text you want to format in landscape, and insert the same kind of break. Then put the insertion point anywhere between the two breaks; return to the Page Layout tab, and click the down-pointing arrow at the lower right of the Page Setup group. In the Page Setup dialog, on the Margins tab, select Landscape orientation, then go to the "Apply to" dropdown and select This Section.

4. FIGHT BACK WHEN WORD DRAWS A LINE ACROSS THE PAGE

Maybe it's happened to you. It's certainly happened to someone you know. You're typing in Word, and you type a series of dashes or hyphens—and suddenly Word's autoformat feature inserts a horizontal line across the page, and you can't get rid of it. You can't select it; you can't delete it. Some victims of this feature simply abandon the document with the line and start a new one instead. Here's how to get rid of that line. Word has inserted a border at the bottom of the current paragraph. To remove it, click inside the paragraph; go to the Home tab



4] REMOVE UNWANTED BORDERS EASILY



5] POST TO A BLOG DIRECTLY FROM WORD

and click on the Borders icon at the lower right of the Paragraph group. On the pop-up menu, the first item—Bottom Border—will be selected. Click on No Border, and the border will disappear. You can prevent these borders from appearing by going to File, Options, AutoCorrect Options, then choose the AutoFormat as You Type tab, and in the section “Apply as you type,” remove the checkmark next to Border Lines.

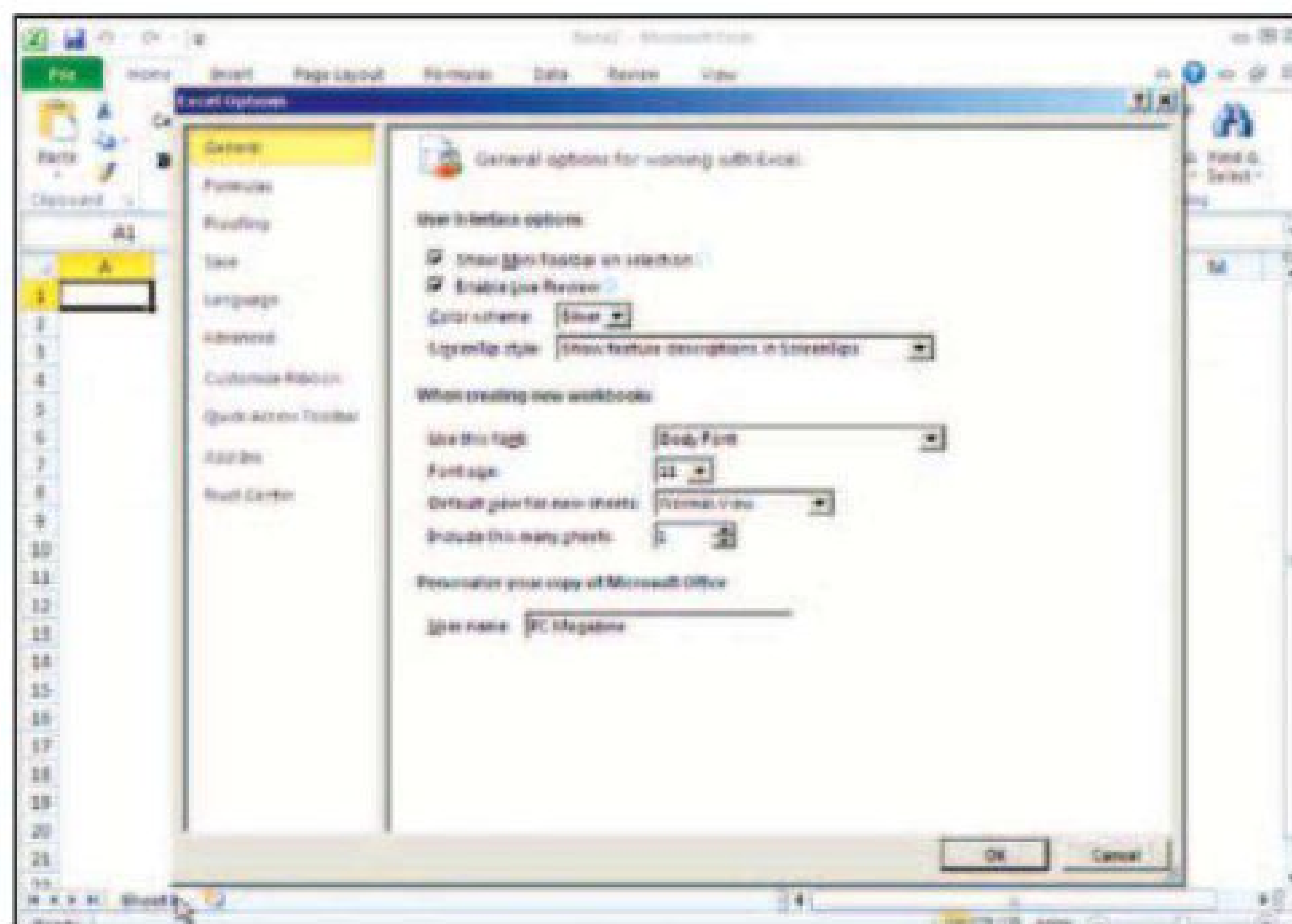
5. USE WORD TO WRITE AND POST TO YOUR BLOG

Word 2010 includes a feature that lets you post to a blog directly from Word’s editing screen. Here’s how it works. From Word’s File menu, choose New, then select Blog Post from the gallery of document types. Word opens a document with a placeholder title, a horizontal line, and an empty space for typing your blog post. Type in a title and a posting, and click Publish on the Blog Post tab of the Ribbon. The first time you post, a wizard will walk you through the process of entering your blog’s URL, your username, and your password. Click OK and your posting will appear on your blog. The Ribbon also includes a Manage Accounts button that lets you revise or add to your list of hosting sites.

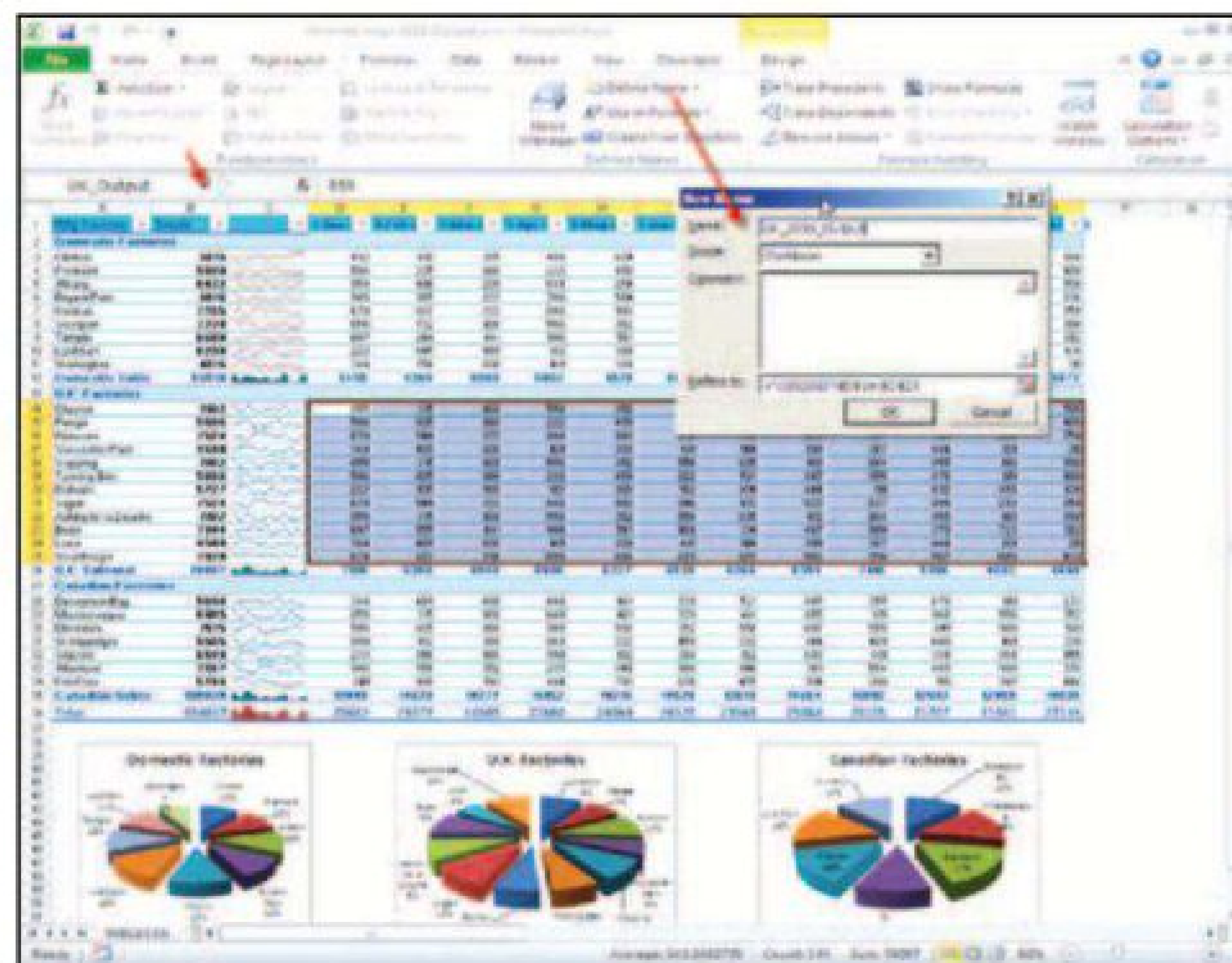
Microsoft seems to have lost interest in this feature, because it no longer works reliably with some services, such as Blogger, and continues to list Windows Live Spaces as a provider, though Windows Live Spaces no longer exists. But the blog-post feature is smooth as silk with other services, such as WordPress. (Here’s a funny coincidence: Blogger is owned by Google; WordPress partners with Microsoft.) Microsoft wants you to use its free Windows Live Writer instead of Word, but I prefer not to clutter my disk with multiple programs when a single one gets the job done.

6. CUSTOMIZE EXCEL’S DEFAULT WORKBOOK

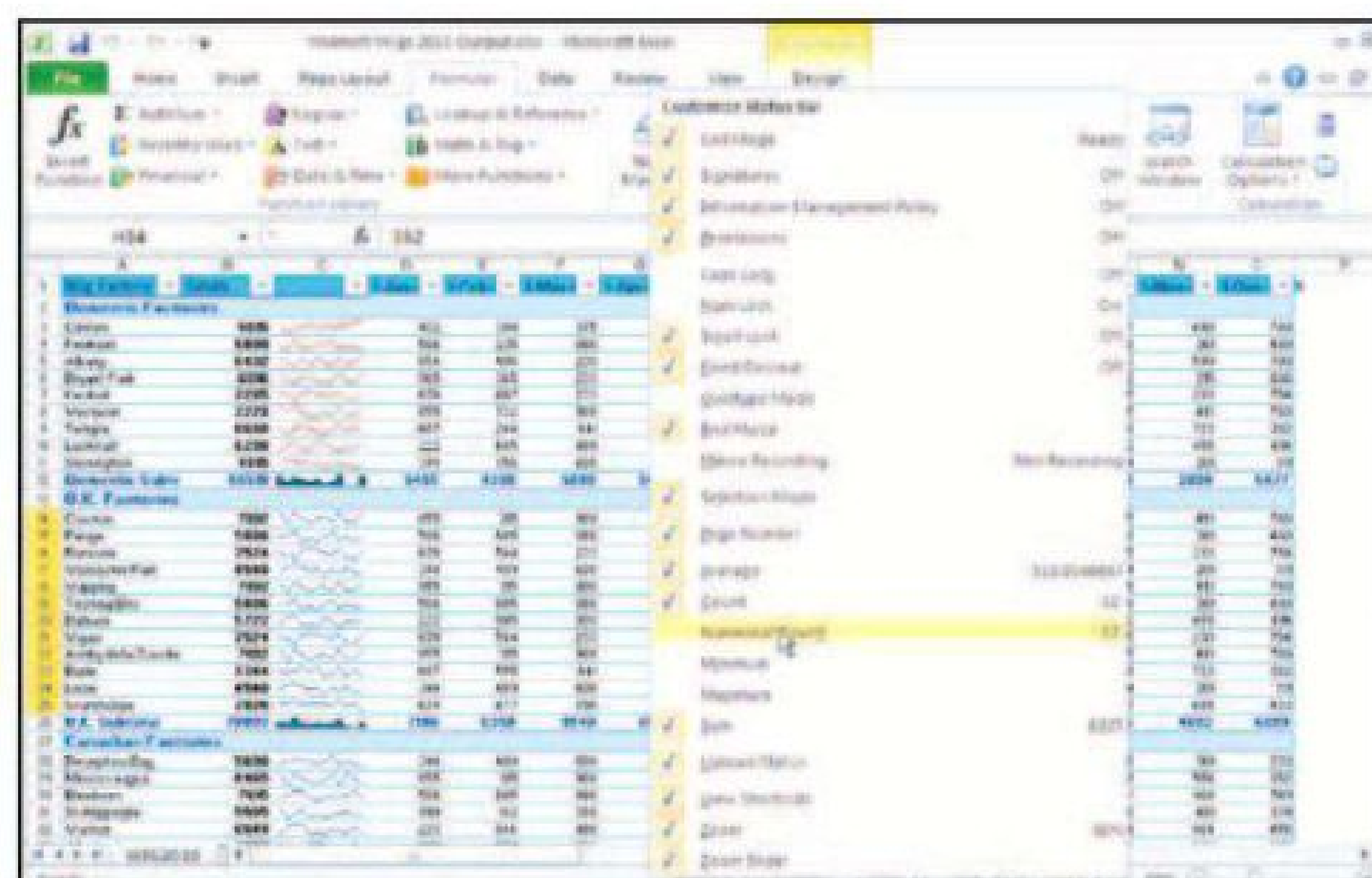
If you like to keep your Excel workspace clean and efficient, you’re probably mildly



6] LIMIT THE NUMBER OF SHEETS IN YOUR EXCEL WORKBOOK



8] GIVE CELL BLOCKS A NAME



7] CUSTOMIZE YOUR STATUS BAR IN EXCEL

bothered that Excel always creates new workbooks with three sheets, when you probably only need one. Change Excel's default settings by going to the File menu, then General, and then adjust the settings under "When creating new workbooks." You can specify the default font and size, whether to open in normal or print-layout view, and the number of sheets to create.

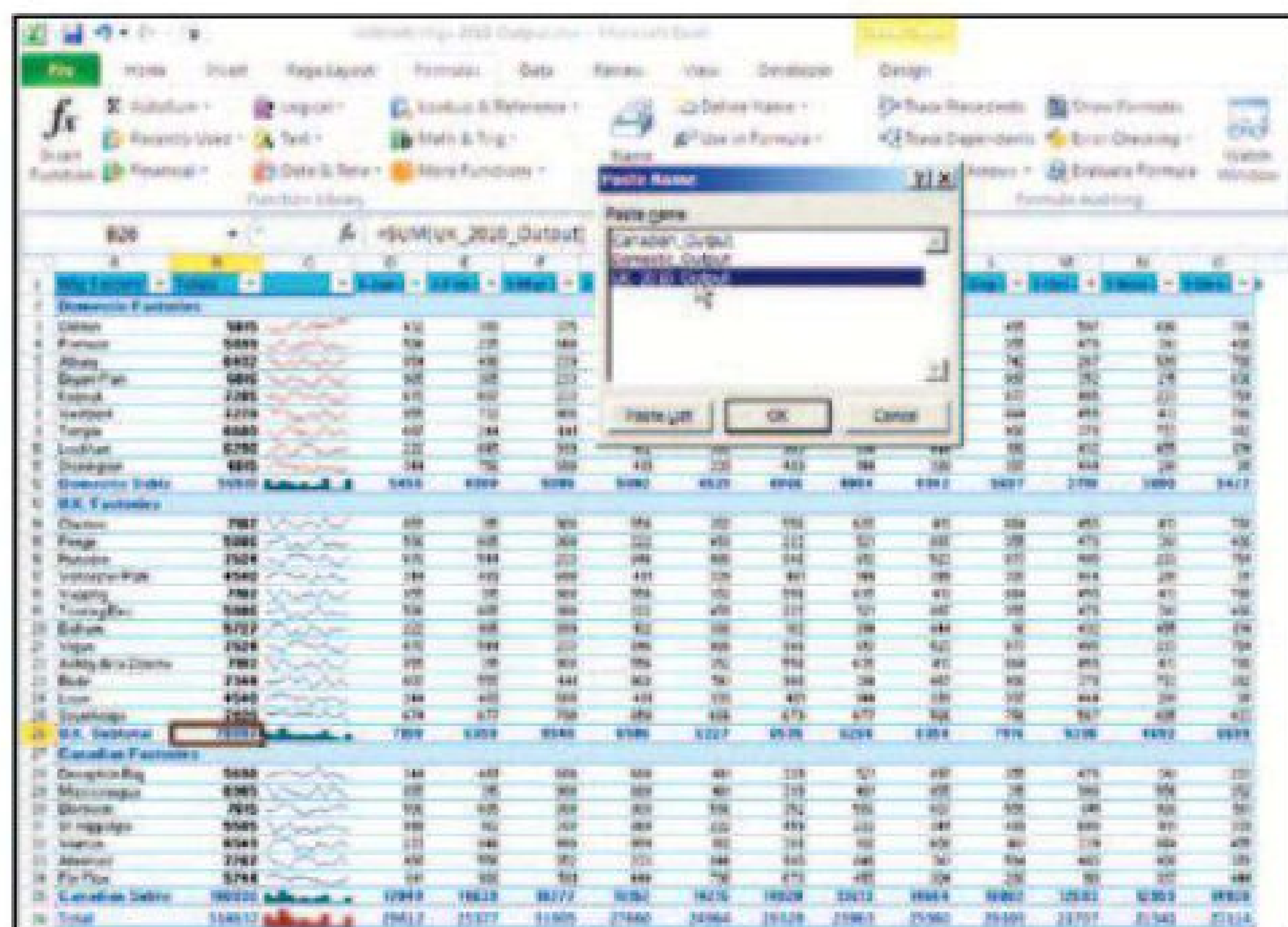
7. GET MORE INFORMATION FROM EXCEL'S STATUS BAR

It's easy to ignore the wealth of data that

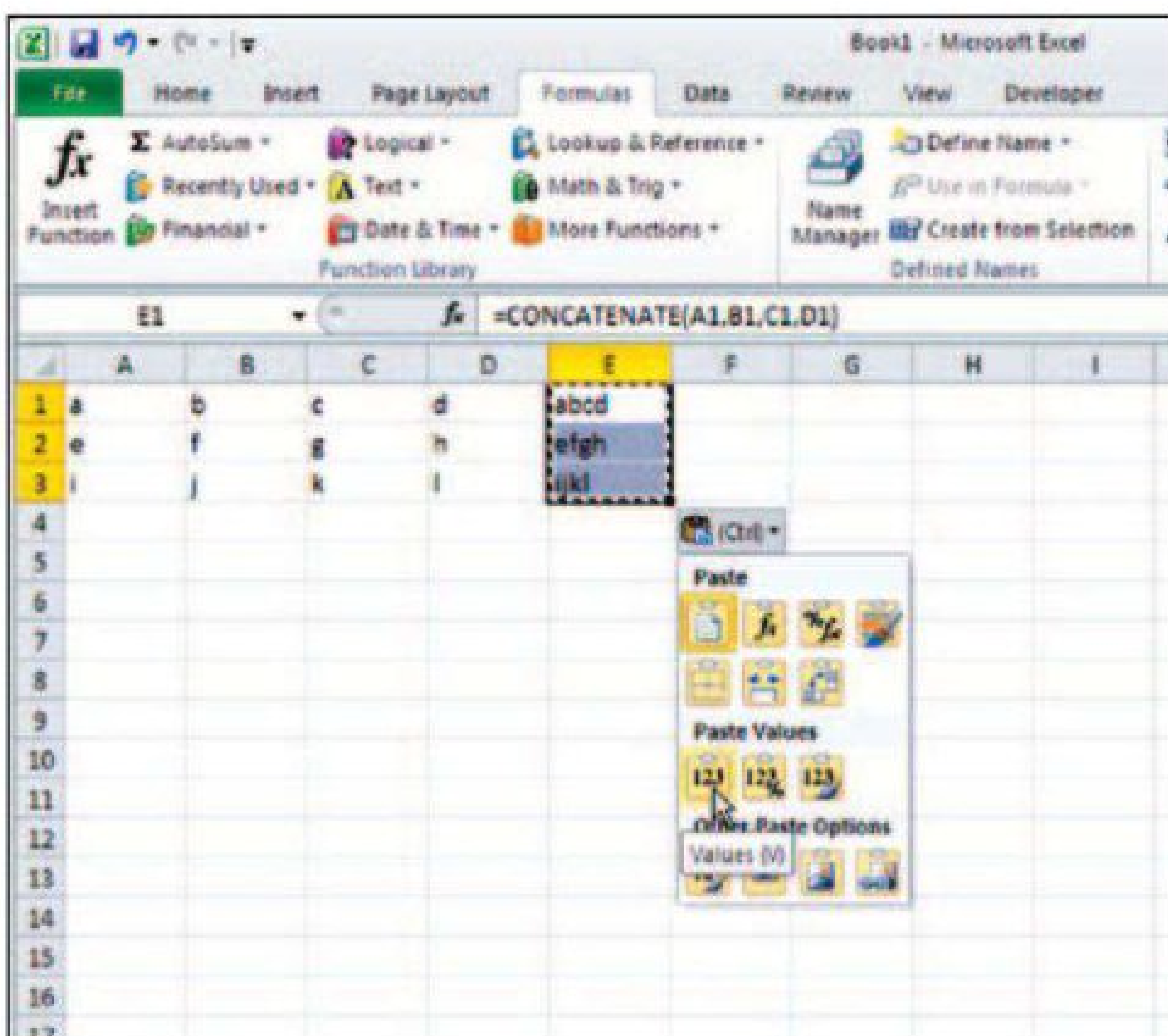
Office apps provide at a glance on the status bar. By default, Excel's status bar displays, among other things, the Average, Count, and Sum of the selected cells. But if you right-click on the status bar, a menu lets you customize the display. You can add, for example, the Minimum and Maximum of the currently selected items, or the "Numerical Count"—which means "the count of cells with numeric data," as opposed to "Count," which means "the count of cells that contain anything."

8. GIVE A NAME TO A RANGE OF DATA IN EXCEL

Just as it's easier to remember your parents' names than their Social Security numbers, it's easier to work with a range of data by name than by its cell addresses. Select a block of cells. On the Formulas tab in the Ruler, click on Define Name. Enter a name—or use the one that Word suggests—and take a moment to enter an explanatory comment about the range so that you'll be able to remember why it's there. Now,



9] SIMPLIFY FORMULAS WITH RANGE NAMES



10] TURN NEW DATA INTO STATIC TEXT

whenever you want to select a range of data, you can find its name in the dropdown list available from the Name box at the left of the formula bar. Note that any spaces you include in a named range gets converted automatically to an underscore character. Read on for one use of named ranges.

9. USE A NAMED RANGE IN A FORMULA IN EXCEL

One major convenience of a named range

is that you can use it in a formula instead of a set of cell addresses. Press F2 to open the formula bar, start writing or editing your formula, and place the cursor where you would normally use cell addresses. On the Formula tab in the Ribbon, click on Use in Formula and either select one range name from the dropdown menu or select multiple names from the Paste Name dialog box shown here.

10. CONVERT AN EXCEL FORMULA RESULT INTO STATIC TEXT

I often want to keep the results of formulas or calculations, and I want to discard the original data that went into the results. For example, I often import columns of text data, then use the Excel's Concatenate function to combine two columns of data (for example, first and last names) into a third column (full names), and then I want to delete the now-redundant material in my original two columns. If I merely deleted the original two columns, the results in the new column would disappear with it, so I need to convert the new column into static text first. To do this for a single cell, select the column or cells that you want to convert to static text, press F2 to open the formula bar, press F9 to evaluate the formula, and the Enter key. To do this for multiple cells, select the cells you want to convert, press Ctrl-C to copy them to the clipboard, press Ctrl-V to paste, and, then, from the dropdown Paste menu, select the first icon under Paste Values to paste the result of the formula in place of the formula itself. ■





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