First things First
What to do when you buy or rebuild a PC
Robert Petrilak, August 2006

If you just bought a new PC or are rebuilding yours, here are a few ideas on what you need to install to get you started.

If it's a new PC, the first thing to do is get rid of a lot of the junk they installed at the factory. Many new PC's come with all kinds of trial software installed. Check your desktop for short cuts to these programs. Go to Add/Remove programs in the Control Panel to remove this software.

OK, now all we have is a clean install of Windows. Our first step is to go to the Microsoft update site and install any updates and security patches that have been issued since the copy of Windows you have was issued. Go to Start/All Programs and select Windows update. Check that Automactic updates is set to On and use Express Update to download and install all critical updates and patches. You may have to reboot after some of these, so keep checking the site until it finds that no additional updates are required.

Our next step is to make sure your computer is protected from outside threats. We need to install antivirus, Adware/Spyware software and a firewall. If you already have purchased an Internet Security Suite like Norton or McAfee, you can install these. Please note, that many of these suites will slow down your computer unless you have a fairly new processor and at 512MB of RAM. Many Internet providers (ISP's) also provide this software for free. AOL, Comcast, Earthlink and many others offer this so check their web sites. I have found however, that many of these are not as complete as the commercial versions and some have caused user problems. All of these are also available as FreeWare products. I use them on my systems and have found them to be as good or better than what the ISP's offer and in some cases better than the commercial products. All you need to do is download each one to build a layered solution.

Listed in this paper are my recommendations for free antivirus, AdWare/Spyware and Firewall protection. Also listed are additional free programs that will improve your computing experience and save you a ton of money in the process. This list is not complete in any way. It is what I load on systems when I rebuild them. There is software available for just about anything you want to do. Just do a Google search and include the most often used search word according to Google search statistics, FREE.

Antivirus

There are two very good free antivirus programs available, AVG Free Edition and Avast!. I prefer the AVG interface and quick updates. If you are on Dial Up, AVG's small file size updates are a big benefit. Both products use a lot less systems resources than Norton or McAfee but are not complete security suites. If you add an anti-trojan on demand scanner such as Ewido, you can reach a level of protection almost equal to the best commercial products. Just make such you run the scanner once a week. Ewido also has a free on-line scanner you can use on the same download page.

AVG   http://free.grisoft.com/freeweb.php/doc/2/
Avast! http://www.avast.com/eng/avast_4_home.html
Ewido http://www.ewido.net/en/download/

McAfee AVERT Stinger

Stinger is a standalone antivirus utility that is a helpful tool when cleaning an infected system. It is not a replacement for antivirus software. It will remove about 60 of the most troublesome viruses. Make sure to turn off system restore when you run it as system restore locks many files and can prevent the removal of some viruses.

Stinger http://vil.nai.com/vil/stinger/

Spyware/Adware

For Windows XP service pack 2 users, Windows Defender (Beta) is an excellent program. It runs in the background like antivirus programs so you don't have to run weekly scans. I don't know of any programs that are better than 90% effective so I recommend you run at least two anti Spyware programs. Two additional choices are Adaware SE Personal and Spybot search and destroy. These are on demand scanners so you will have to run them manually once a week. These programs also work with Windows 98 SE and ME. If you use Spybot, turn on the Tea Timer as this will give you some active protection.

Microsoft Defender http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyID=435bfce7-da2b-4a6a-afa4-f7f14e605a0d
Adaware http://www.lavasoftusa.com/software/adaware/
Spybot http://www.safer-networking.org/en/index.html

Firewalls

The firewall included with Windows XP is a one way firewall. It blocks incoming threats, but doesn't check for out going activities that could allow your computer to send information out to the Internet without your knowledge. Three recommended products to replace the XP firewall are Sunbelt Kerio Personal Firewall , Zone Alarm and Comodo. The Kerio free product is the same as

the paid one but some advanced features are turned off after 30 days. Zone Alarm is a good product but not as strong as its paid version or Kerio. Comodo is a very strong product and includes intrusion detection. The product is a little "techie" so back up before you install it. For ease of use, Zone Alarm gets my nod. Which ever you choose, your better off than using the XP firewall.

Kerio http://www.sunbelt-software.com/Kerio.cfm
ZoneAlarm http://www.zonelabs.com/store/content/company/products/znalm/freeDownload.jsp
Comodo http://www.personalfirewall.trustix.com/

Web Browser

It's a good idea to install a second web browser on your computer. What if Internet Explorer (IE) or AOL's browser crashes and you need to get to the Internet to fix the problem? Without a second working browser, you're out of luck. I prefer Mozilla Firefox. In fact, I use this as my primary browser as it is, to date, stronger and attacked less than Internet Explorer. It also has some nice features not currently available in IE. This is a great browser. After you install it, check the site for additional add-ins.

http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox/

Spam Filters

Most ISP's and web-mail programs (yahoo mail, Gmail, AOL, etc.) have pretty good spam filters built in. If however, you are still getting too much spam and are using a POP 3 mail client such as Outlook, you can install a separate spam blocker. Two good programs that are easy to install are SpamBayes and K9. Both need to go through a training cycle so it takes a little time for them to become effective. Again, if you are only getting a few spam e-mails a day, I don't think it's worth the effort to install additional filters. One of the best ways to prevent spam is to have multiple e-mail accounts. Set up your personal account and only give the address to friends. Set up a second account to use for other purposes like registering on web-sites.

SpamBayes http://spambayes.sourceforge.net/
K9 http://www.keir.net/k9.html

Registry Cleaner

Registry cleaners can sometimes cause more problems than they fix. For that reason, I like one that is very conservative and uses blacklists of values that should not be changed. One such program is EasyCleaner. This is a suite of tools that also includes a duplicate file finder, temporary file and disk cleaner, cookie cleaner, checks startup items, services and more.

EasyCleaner   http://personal.inet.fi/business/toniarts/ecleane.htm

Office Suite
Looking to install Microsoft Office on your computer and don't have a few hundred extra dollars lying around? Install Open Office instead. It has everything your looking for, is compatible with MS Office files and it's free. Open Office is supported by the Open Software community and is updated on a regular basis.

Open Office   http://www.openoffice.org

Startup Program Manager

Many programmers believe their program is so important that they write it to startup as soon as you start Windows. Most of the time you don't want or need this program to run until you need to use it. To clean out startup programs you can go to Start/Run, type in msconfig and select the Startup Tab. Then uncheck the programs you want to stop. The problem is, it's hard to determine want you don't want. A program called Autoruns performs the same function but gives you more information on each program and allows you to right click on the program and do a Google search that gives you more information. To use it, download it to a new folder, unzip it, and run it from the folder. The program doesn't need to be "installed", so you can run it from a CD or Flash drive.

Autoruns http://www.sysinternals.com/Utilities/Autoruns.html

PDF Writer

To create PDF files, you need a program that will convert your files to the PDF format. This is very useful for sending files to others that may not have the program you created them with on their computer. Adobe Acrobat is the primary program used for this, but there are two free programs I like that do an excellent job. PDF Creator and CutePDF work by installing a pseudo printer on your system that creates the file when you select print from the file menu and then select the PDF printer. Both programs work well. I use CutePDF and have never had a problem.

PDFCreator http://sourceforge.net/project/showfiles.php?group_id=57796&package_id=53473
CutePDF http://www.cutepdf.com/products/cutepdf/writer.asp

Photo Editor and Organizer

If you're like me, I don't want to spend a lot of time touching up my digital photos. If you're into photo editing, buy Photoshop. If you just need to do simple things like crop, lighten, color correct, remove red eye, etc. Picasa 2 is for you. It's simple to use and has all the features you are likely to ever need. When Picasa frist starts, it asks you if you want it to find your pictures. If you say yes, it will find <u>everything</u> on your computer that is a picture. If all you pictures are in you're my Pictures folder and are organized, you might consider saying No.

http://picasa.google.com/download/index.html

Things everyone needs

If you brought a new computer, most of these are already installed. You might want to check the sites to see if there has been an update since these were installed at the factory. If you just reformatted your drive and are doing a clean install of Windows and your programs, you need to install these.

Acrobat Reader http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html
Flash http://www.adobe.com/shockwave/download/index.cgi?P1_Prod_Version=ShockwaveFlash
Shockwave http://www.adobe.com/shockwave/download/download.cgi
Java runtime http://www.java.com/en/download/index.jsp
Apple Quicktime http://www.apple.com/quicktime/win.html Note, Quicktime also downloads iTunes. If you don't want this, go to add/remove programs to delete it after the install is complete.

Windows Power Toys

Microsoft has a bunch of free Windows add-ins that are very useful. I recommend you download and review at least the following.

HTML Slide Show Wizard
Tweak UI
Image Resizer
CD SlideShow Generator

There is a complete explanation of each on the site.

They can all be found at:
MS Power Toys http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/powertoys/xppowertoys.mspx

OneCare Live free scanner

Windows Live OneCare is a new offering from Microsoft that is "The All-in-One Protection and Maintenance Service for Your Windows XP-based PC. " It lists for $49.99 but you can find it as low as $10 with rebates. At this time, I cannot recommend it as I and others have had problems with the install. In fact, I had to get a special removal tool to get it off my system when the install failed and then had to do a system restore to an earlier date.
Microsoft does however offer a free on-line scan of your system which works well. I recommend doing this and waiting for Microsoft to fix the install issues before putting any money down on the counter.

OneCare free scan http://safety.live.com/site/en-us/default