Software Hidden on your Computer

When you purchased your computer, it came with a treasure-trove of software, some of which might still be buried. You've most likely found and organized the programs you use frequently: your web browser, your e-mail program, and maybe the software you use for instant messaging, listening to music, and performing common tasks such as word processing.

But there's more to your machine than meets the eye. Most computers have dozens of applications that go undiscovered because they're not stored in obvious places. And, if you've added a peripheral such as a printer to your PC, you may have automatically installed some helpful applications. So, have fun with it and you can discover everything from games you downloaded and forgot about to great software that—unbeknownst to you—came with your computer.

Unfortunately, there's no road map available to help you unearth these potential treasures. But the next time you've got a few minutes and want to explore uncharted territory, try these software-finding tricks, both for Windows and Macintosh systems.

Here are a few searching methods. Use them all or pick the one that works best for you. These instructions are for Windows XP users, but if you're using a version of Windows other than XP, don't worry—these instructions can still guide you.

- **Option 1** Browse the Program menus. Click on Start > All Programs, and then move your mouse over the Programs menu and submenus, which are indicated with little arrows. Because most installation programs show up here automatically, this is a good way to get a bird's-eye view of the applications on your computer.
- **Option 2** Use Windows Explorer. Click on Start > All Programs > Windows Explorer (not Internet Explorer or MSN Explorer). Using this tool, you can browse your computer's directories one by one. Tip: Many files have obscure names, but you can make the applications easier to find by clicking Tools > Folder Options and selecting the View tab. Then, remove the check from the option "Hide File Extensions for Known File Types," so that you can see all file extensions. The application files you're looking for will have ".exe" extensions. To sort these files separately, click on View > Arrange Items > Type.
- **Option 3** Use the Search utility to search for all application files automatically: Click on Start > Search > All Files and Folders. Type ".exe" into the text field, then click the Search button. The generated list should contain every application file contained in the specified drive or directory.

If you're using **Windows 98**, here's a quick tip for finding hidden programs. Go to My Computer, then click on View > Folder Options and select the View tab. Select the "Show all files" checkbox.

It can be challenging to identify files with nothing more than an obscure file name to go by. You can get more information by right-clicking on the file name or icon and selecting Properties from the menu that pops up. On the Version tab, you can usually find the file name, size, location, and information about who originally created it.