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Desktop Edition



Want some free antivirus software? Click here

David Coursey,
Executive Editor, AnchorDesk
Monday, July 14, 2003



How would you like some free antivirus and firewall software? Well, I have some for you today, and it's pretty good stuff. My hope is that those of you who have one or more unprotected machines will take advantage of this generous offer and make the world safer for the rest of us, who are tired of getting viruses sent by other people's infected computers.

HERE'S THE DEAL: The folks at Panda Software have long offered their antivirus and firewall software to IT professionals for free, in the hopes that someday those pros will buy the enterprise versions for their companies or at least become familiar with the Panda brand.

Last Thursday, the Panda people told me they'd extend that same offer to AnchorDesk readers. I wanted to pass that along to you as soon as I could, to give you the chance to get the software before Panda comes to its senses and rescinds the offer.

Getting the software will require a little, um, creativity on your part. But before I get to the how, let me explain the why.

The Panda people realize that competition in the North American antivirus and firewall market is pretty strong. The Norton and McAfee brands seem to have things pretty well sewn up. But the Panda people--based in Spain--think there is an opportunity to do cool things on the enterprise level, to solve an entire company's problems with software that propagates itself and its updates across the corporate network.

So they've had a giveaway program in place for some time, whereby IT professionals--the target market for the enterprise version--could download the [desktop version](#) of Panda's antivirus software for free.

ONE OF THE great things about software is that while creating the first copy is very expensive, the second and all subsequent copies are free. Sure, you can spread development costs over every copy distributed, but the money was actually spent only to produce the first one.

Since Panda actually sells its home software in other countries and because the total development work is underwritten by sales of enterprise products, they can afford to use their desktop software as a loss-leader here in the U.S.

The (paid) alternatives

If you'd rather not lie about working in IT, you've got plenty of for-pay antivirus apps to choose from. ZDNet reviewers rank these two the highest.



Norton Antivirus 2003 Pro

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If you would like to download a free, fully functional copy of the software, which automatically updates itself daily, start by going [here](#). There, you'll find a form that asks you to "prove" you're an IT professional.

If you aren't an IT pro and feel queasy about pretending that you are, please note that many of us have been doing this for years, faking qualification cards to get free magazine subscriptions. Also, you'll be spoofing with the permission of Panda's marketing department: The Panda execs I met with said they are perfectly OK with AnchorDesk readers spoofing their form to get the software.

I recommend unchecking the "Subscribe to W2KNews" link at the bottom. You can't uncheck a box that says Panda will be sending you promotional materials, however.

Of course, if you really are an IT professional, the Panda folks hope you'll give them a real e-mail address and maybe even consider buying their enterprise software someday.

I'VE ONLY recently started using the desktop version myself, and it takes a while to decide if antivirus software is really doing the job. So I can't honestly say more than that I've been favorably impressed.

Panda seems to be particularly good at rooting out viruses lurking in places other software has missed. For example, a scan of my main Windows machine found numerous instances of the Klez.H virus lurking in my spam folder. What apparently happened is the spam filter got in line ahead of my [Norton antivirus software](#) in looking at incoming messages. This shunted many infected e-mails into the spam folder and Norton never got the chance to see them.

Now, a virus in the folder that only gets deleted isn't the same thing as a live virus on your system, but I was still very happy to get rid of them. You can try this test yourself by using a free scanner that is available on the front door of Panda's [Web site](#).

ZDNet's reviewers were mostly impressed with [Panda's desktop software](#), too, noting the program's easy-to-use interface, built-in firewall, and ability to scan both incoming and outgoing e-mail. They dinged its mediocre scores in some tests and its relatively high price tag.

At least you won't have to worry about that last part.

This is the same software Panda sells in other parts of the world and it looks state of the art to me. So if you need antivirus and/or personal firewall software, please feel free to take advantage of this special offer.

But do it soon. At some point, the link will be taken down so things don't get too out of hand.

What antivirus app(s) do you use now? Are you happy with it/them? Are you going to take advantage of the Panda Software offer? [TalkBack](#) to me!

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Desktop Edition



Who's really responsible for hacker attacks

Robert Vamosi,
Senior Associate Editor,
CNET/ZDNet Reviews

Monday, July 14, 2003



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Good con artists are rarely spontaneous. They take time to observe their victims' behavior, then find subtle ways to exploit the predictable foibles of human nature. And, while the resulting scams may seem elaborate, once they're explained, you see how simple they really are.

The same is true with criminal hackers online. The best hacks have been accomplished without special tools or technology. What hackers need is time--to map target networks and then locate convenient ways in.

More often than not, hackers gain entrance to networks not through gaping software or hardware security holes, but through some sort of human error. Sometimes it's something as simple as forgetting to change the default password on a router. Famed hacker Kevin Mitnick [made a career](#) out of breaking into corporate systems not with technically complex exploits but with basic "social engineering."

A NEW BOOK from Syngress Press, [Stealing the Network: How to Own the Box](#), supports the theory that most hacks are the result of human, not computer, weakness. The authors relate a number of fictional scenarios in which corporate networks are broken into because humans left them vulnerable.

The book doesn't delve deeply into what motivates hackers. I think today their primary objective is making money, not becoming famous. In the early days of the Net hackers committed exploits to boost their ego. Now, I think, the threat of arrest has left only a few serious criminals attempting break-ins again and again. For their specialized skills, some people are willing to pay--especially if the hacker is able to turn over 20 million credit card numbers or the latest software release from a major developer.

There are more subtle reasons for online crime, as well, such as revenge. The book tells the (fictional) story of an out-of-work IT tech who decides, after a year of unemployment, to get back at his former company. He stalks one of the company's HR employees, and eventually discovers a Post-It note containing a remote dial-in access number and password that the staffer carelessly leaves behind in a cybercafe. When the dial-in number fails to provide the sort of access he wants, the unemployed man forges a security ID out of discarded company letterhead, clear plastic coating, and electrical tape (to suggest a magnetic strip along the backside) and gains physical access to the company headquarters and ultimately the server room itself.

WHILE THE BOOK depicts extreme behavior, the scenarios are realistic. For instance, in one story a hacker is able to steal software code because a system administrator names the servers after their functions--FTP server, mail server,

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staging server, and so on. This is something that occurs in real life, and makes the life of a criminal hacker that much easier. A reoccurring mantra in the book seems to be, "I'm not hacking the system. I'm hacking the people who designed it."

Stealing the Network is not for computer novices, as many technical terms are not fully explained. Still, for anyone with a modest understanding of computer security jargon and network architecture, it's a good read.

There are other books that seek to dispel the mystery behind criminal activity on the Internet, too, such as Osborne/McGraw-Hill's *Hacker's Challenge Two*. The latter describes fictional attacks, then asks the reader to figure out what happened before flipping to the back of the book for the "real" explanation.

SOME COMPLAIN that these books are bad for security--that they glamorize hackers and empower those considering online crime to be more effective. I disagree. These books do not pass on any new information; they stick to material that's already been reported on by the government or the media, or is readily available on Haxor sites.

On the contrary, I believe these books can help improve the state of computer security by making more individuals and companies aware of how online crimes are actually committed--and thus enabling them to better protect themselves in the future.

Do you think fictional--or actual--security exploits should be publicized? Why or why not? [TalkBack to me!](#)

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Home & Entertainment Edition



Find the FTP client that's right for you

Jason Parker,
Contributing Editor,
ZDNet Downloads

Monday, July 14, 2003



If you maintain a Web site or transfer files with any type of server regularly, you likely already use a File Transfer Protocol (FTP) client to upload and download files.

But how do you know the app you're using is the best choice for you? Or, if you're looking for your first FTP client, how are you to pick the right one from the hundreds available?

I've tried a number of different clients and found many that work quite nicely. Here are my three current favorites.

FTP Commander offers a side-by-side interface to let you easily drag and drop files to and from a specified server. It also has all the advanced features you might need and comes with a long list of servers you can explore for files and documents. (Shareware/Windows)

FTP Desktop is an FTP client that looks like Windows Explorer. Don't let the simple interface fool you, though--it performs all the most important functions, such as batch uploads/downloads and background transfers, as well as executing your custom FTP commands. (Shareware/Windows)

Transmit, an excellent client for Mac OS X, offers drag-and-drop support, file synchronization, and contextual menus for easy navigation. It also offers a built-in text editor for on-the-fly editing. (Shareware/Mac)

Whether you're looking for your first FTP client or just want to switch from your current one, check out these programs--they won't let you down.

What are your favorite FTP clients? [TalkBack](#) to me!

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Home & Entertainment Edition



Satellite radio: Why you gotta get 'It'

David Coursey,
Executive Editor, AnchorDesk
[Friday, July 11, 2003](#)



You may not believe this, but it's 1:50 a.m. and I've gotten out of bed and come downstairs to write this column just so I can tell you how much I love *It*. No, not the column. Or almost falling down the darkened staircase as my size 12.5s slid out from under me.

No, I'm here to tell you how much I love *It*, a special program that's been running continuously for the past 10 days on [XM Satellite Radio](#), in which every record that's made the pop music charts since the Depression is being played back in chronological order.

As you read this, the program has reached the 1970s. *It* probably has about 10 more days to run--24 hours a day, commercial free--before it reaches the present. At that point, I'm hoping *It* will start again from the top for a second run.

Lest you think this is a column about a radio show, let me tell you what it's really about: Satellite radio is saving a dying medium, one which I happen to love very much.

LYING IN BED for the past couple of nights, I've listened to music that I haven't heard since it played on **KLIF**, the great Top 40 station of my misspent Texas youth, stuff I never thought I'd hear again. Because the songs are running chronologically, *It* is like listening to the music as it happened. Heard in the correct temporal context, even songs I don't like make some sense.

Then there are the tunes that etched themselves into my psyche--and hopefully no one else's. Does anyone besides me remember the words to the [Neon Philharmonic's](#) "Morning Girl" or "Where's the Playground, Susie?" by [Glenn Campbell](#)? These gems are scattered among better-known hits from the Beatles, the Temptations, the Supremes, Creedence Clearwater, and others--and I love them all.

I'm only sorry I didn't find *It* earlier. I started listening to *It* when the program was in the mid-1960s and immediately wished I'd started earlier. I'm fine about missing the late 1950s through the Beatles, but am sorry I missed the 1930s and '40s. I'm planning to continue listening until just after disco and before rap and hip-hop (which, like most sensible people, I detest).

I've had an XM Radio for about 9 months, since my former colleague Desmond Crisis introduced me to the [Delphi SkyFi](#)

David's fave radio

The radio that makes *It* possible: Delphi's isn't the only XM hardware. But it's the satellite unit David likes best.



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[receiver](#), which I've written about [previously](#). There are many things I like about XM, but *It* is the best so far.

This show is better than the old American Top Forty programs with Casey Kasem they played during the holidays. It's better than all the Bob Hope programs from the 1940s and '50s they ran to celebrate the great comedian's 100th birthday recently. It's even better than *The Monster*, a recent history of country music special, or the Frank Sinatra channel.

It is not, however, as wonderful as the Old Time Radio channel or the "decade" channels (one each for the '40s to the '90s) that made *It* possible.

YES, I KNOW I'm gushing. But, truth be told, I love radio, which I think of as magic, a lot more than I love computers, which I think of as smart dirt. (Computers are silicon, silicon is sand, sand is part of soil, and soil is dirt, hence computers are smart dirt). Of all the technology I've purchased lately, the XM Radio is the probably the best--it's certainly made me the happiest.

XM is subscription radio. But that's CD-quality audio, delivered by satellite, more than 100 channels, many commercial-free, for \$10 a month. The SkyFi receiver can be moved from car to car or from a vehicle into the house. Mine lives on a bedside table, plugged into the AUX input of a Bose Wave Radio. The sound quality is excellent.

XM competes with [Sirius](#). When I was checking out both, I liked the programming mix on XM better, but I'm sure Sirius has many good things to be said for it.

THE BEST THING about XM (and this applies to Sirius as well) is that it's saving radio. When the only thing decent on your local airwaves is the NPR station, the satellite services come to the rescue. My friend Andy bought a SkyFi two weekends ago because there's no country music on in the San Francisco area; XM has something like five channels of the stuff.

There are also channels for jazz, classical, world music, and new age, as well as a few dozen talk and news channels. One of the reasons I got XM to begin with was because when I moved to the sticks last November, I lost the San Francisco NPR station that plays the BBC World Service overnight. With XM I have the BBC 24 hours a day--a real blessing during the Iraq War.

XM and Sirius are both a whole lot better than the dreck radio monopolists like Clear Channel spew forth these days. Because I'm paying for XM, the company's main goal is to keep me happy. I no longer have to put up with stations that cram 18 minutes of commercials into every hour and make money by selling whatever's left of my attention span.

Regular readers of this column know that my other favorite entertainment devices are [my iPod](#) and any of several personal video recorders, known collectively as [TiVos](#). But my TiVo comes with a near \$100-a-month bill from DirecTV. For about one-tenth the money, XM is probably a better deal, though I'd have a hard time getting rid of either.

For my \$10, I can lie awake nights, listening to comedy and drama from the '40s and '50s or music from the '60s and '70s. I can go channel surfing and find something I've never heard before. It's almost as fun as when I used to spin my shortwave receiver dial until almost dawn.

Until XM came into my life, listening to commercial radio had convinced me the Buggles were right, that video really did kill the radio star. But with XM, I've found out something different--that radio is being revived. And there are a hundred XM channels that prove it.

What do you think? Have you heard satellite radio? Are you happy with what you hear over the airwaves?
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Mobile Tech Edition



Why laptops shouldn't replace desktops

David Coursey,
Executive Editor, AnchorDesk
[Wednesday, July 9, 2003](#)



[Tell us your opinion!](#)

I was not thrilled last week to see that [sales of notebook computers](#) are now larger than the sales of desktops.

Not that I don't understand the attraction. Notebooks are, after all, romantic computing--in the sense that notebooks allow you to take your computer to someplace more romantic than your office. That is, as long as it's a romantic place indoors--notebook screens don't work outside, at least not for me.

So I guess taking a notebook to sunny Bora-Bora to write my columns on the beach is out of the question (and my travel budget).

THANKS TO the wonders of Wi-Fi, I can now sit here in my easy chair writing this column in my den. I could take it down to the Starbucks over by the mall--except that the town I live in is so small that our Starbucks (of which there are two) aren't yet "wired" for wireless. But the coffee shop downtown is, and I could head there if I really wanted to get out of the house.

But what if I left my notebook there by accident? While a thief might (or might not) have trouble getting at the data on the machine, one thing is certain: I would have no access to the data. What would this cost me?

That's just one of the downsides of notebook computing--and, therefore, one of the reasons I don't think portables should replace desktops as our primary PCs.

Of course, it's possible to lose data on a desktop. But I think the average desktop is a much more secure data repository than the average notebook. Why? Besides the omnipresent danger of loss/theft, a notebook is also much less likely to be backed-up than a desktop. And, though I can't prove it, the rough-and-tumble nature of laptop life does seem to do in their hard drives faster than a placid desktop existence.

MICROSOFT HASN'T done much to help in this regard. It would be nice, for example, if when I plopped my laptop on the desk, it would automatically synchronize files with one or more desktop machines, which themselves would background sync among themselves. That way, I'd have copies of my important files living on all my machines; if one machine crashed, I'd still be covered. To me, a computer that never

Laptop replacements

Forget that trendy laptop: Go with a nice, old-fashioned, perfectly secure desktop. Here are three our reviewers like, in budget, midrange, and high-end flavors:



Dell Dimension 2350

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loses a file is real "trustworthy" computing.

While Redmond doesn't love us enough to do all it could to prevent data loss, Cupertino apparently does. Apple already offers data backup through its iDisk online storage service. Yes, the service costs money, and, no, it isn't perfect. But every morning at 2:00 a.m., all my important documents are backed up to Apple's server in the sky.

Later this year, Apple will enhance iDisk to automatically make background copies of files while you are working, essentially doing a real-time synchronization of your important information. I already use iDisk as a repository of stuff I simply can't afford to lose, like chapters of the book I'm working on.

There are PC-based services that do this, though I doubt any are as integrated into the operating environment as Apple's. The only one I can recommend from personal experience is [Connected](#). I'm

also a big fan of [CMS Peripherals](#)'s automatic backup system, which backs up Windows machines or Macs and can, in some cases, create fully bootable copies of your desktop or notebook hard drive.

Yes, you could always buy an external hard drive and back up your laptop using traditional utilities. But that violates the principle that the best protection just happens, regardless of what you do.

THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE about notebook computing that bothers me: Companies that give employees notebooks instead of desktops. For the security reasons I've already mentioned, I'm not wild about the idea of hauling your work computer to and from the office every day. Yes, companies could back up these machines, but I doubt many make the effort.

It is also a real pain to realize you left the notebook at home, just as you sit down in the office. If given the choice, I'd rather opt for a desktop at the office, and work at home using either my own desktop, notebook, or both (as my budget allowed). That's how much I like finding my work computer already there when I arrive at the office.

My work machine should be set to store my files on a network server, which automatically gets backed up, making a hard-drive crash much more survivable than it would be otherwise.

You know why I think laptops are outselling desktops? Because they wear out faster and need to be replaced more frequently. Desktops, on the other hand, can be used pretty much until they rust—or until Microsoft provides enough new OS or application features to convince buyers to upgrade.

One way Microsoft could do that: Follow in Apple's footsteps and make data harder to lose.

What do you think? Do you use a laptop or desktop at work? Are you happy with what you've got? Take my QuickPoll above and [TalkBack](#) below!

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Quick Poll

What's your principal work computer?

- A desktop
- A laptop

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Desktop Edition



Junk e-mail vs. canned meat: What's in a name?

David Coursey,
Executive Editor, AnchorDesk

Monday, July 7, 2003

[Tell us your opinion!](#)

I'm quite ready to answer the "What did you do over the holiday?" questions that follow every long weekend. I can tell my coworkers that over the Fourth of July, to celebrate freedom, I fed some spam to the fire gods.

And then my friends and I ate the spam. Or make that **SPAM**, the capital letters used here to distinguish the canned meat product from unsolicited commercial e-mail (aka UCE). It's an important distinction because it's ending up [in the courts](#).

Hormel, which manufactures **SPAM**, doesn't like the way some companies are using its brand to describe their, well, anti-spam products. Hormel is suing a company that calls itself **SpamArrest**. If I were [iHateSpam](#)! or any of several other products and services, I'd be concerned. ([SpamNet](#), anyone?)

THE SPAM PEOPLE are not without a sense of humor. If you and I refer to UCE as spam, that's cool with them. They say doing so doesn't detract from the value of their trademark. But they allege that SpamArrest does.

According to Hormel's [Web site](#), "Use of the term 'spam' was adopted as a result of the Monty Python skit in which a group of Vikings sang a chorus of 'spam, spam, spam...' in an increasing crescendo, drowning out other conversation. Hence, the analogy applied because UCE was drowning out normal discourse on the Internet."

People past a certain age may now stop singing along.

Hormel does not "object to use of this slang term to describe UCE, although we do object to the use of our product image in association with that term. Also, if the term is to be used, it should be used in all lowercase letters to distinguish it from our trademark SPAM, which should be used with all uppercase letters."

INTERESTINGLY, Hormel says the use of the slang term doesn't effect the strength of its trademark. Its lawyers cite a federal court case involving the *Star Wars* trademark owned by LucasFilms. Lucas wanted the White House and others to stop using the name to describe the Strategic Defense Initiative, better known as, well, *Star Wars*.

Top-rated spam fighters

There are all kinds of products that promise to filter out unwanted commercial e-mail. Here are the three that ZDNet reviewers like most, in order of preference:



McAfee.com SpamKiller 2.90

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The court found that such slang usage did not weaken the trademark and refused to stop its use. Hormel has other examples as well: Mickey Mouse, used to describe something unsophisticated; Teflon, used to describe President Reagan; and Cadillac, used to denote something as being high quality (as in, "It's the Cadillac of...").

For their part, the SpamArrest folks say this whole issue amounts to legal mystery meat and that they are doing nothing wrong. The case will end up being heard in a Washington D.C. court that specializes in trademark issues.

I think the SPAM people have a point here. I never thought the reference was to the Monty Python bit, but just to something that everyone seems to have eaten but no one seems to like.

EXCEPT ME, of course. I like SPAM. So did Uncle Joe Stalin, who considered it a wonderful meal when it was sent the starving Russian people during World War II. SPAM holds a place of honor from its role in WWII and Korea, not to mention the breakfast plate of many an American, sidled up next to a couple of eggs over easy.

As for the legal action, I'd hate to see a day when some kid asks, "Why did they name a canned meat after junk e-mail?" I'd hate to see the meaning of SPAM and spam become so co-mingled that the meat product's trademark is damaged. After all, what did SPAM do to deserve all this?

So over the weekend my guests and I drank a toast to SPAM and then dropped slices of it onto the grill to make SPAM burgers. As it sizzled, we imagined all that junk e-mail being sent to its death, perhaps along with the people who sent it. And as a special way of honoring the people who send spam, I used not the SPAM made from [ham](#) but the kind made from [turkey](#).

Yes, I know the bird deserves better treatment. But "turkey" isn't a trademark. And "SPAM" is.

What do you think? Is Hormel wrong to go after companies that use the word "spam" in their product names? What's your favorite way to block unwanted commercial e-mail? [TalkBack](#) to me!

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