

# The Best Free Software

157 software tools. No fees. No expiration dates. No problems. Sometimes even no downloads. No kidding. *By Eric Griffith and PC Magazine staff*

We did the math: If you bought popular apps instead of trying their gratis counterparts, at the manufacturers' list prices you'd be out \$5,183 and change! Why spend money when you can get what you need for nothing? Sometimes, you do get what you don't pay for.

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## Hall of Fame

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**Adobe Reader** [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)  
**Windows | MacOS | Linux | Mobile** This simplest of Adobe's PDF programs lets you do just about anything PDF-related (besides create new ones), including online collaboration. It includes a host of features to aid users with disabilities.

**AIM** [www.aim.com](http://www.aim.com)  
**Windows | MacOS | Linux | Web** One of the most widely used pieces of free software ever, AOL Instant Messenger offers a ton of capabilities.

**Audacity** [audacity.sourceforge.net](http://audacity.sourceforge.net)  
**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Whether you're recording or editing, Audacity is all about audio in practically any format.

**Firefox** [www.mozilla.com](http://www.mozilla.com)  
**Windows | MacOS | Linux** This PC Mag Editors' Choice Web browser has been on top of the heap since version 1.5 came out in late 2005.

**GIMP** [www.gimp.org](http://www.gimp.org)  
**Windows | MacOS | Linux** The GNU Image Manipulation Program (GIMP) does most of what Photoshop does; the Gimp-shop project ([plasticbugs.com](http://plasticbugs.com)) even makes it look like Photoshop.

**iTunes** [www.apple.com/itunes](http://www.apple.com/itunes)  
**Windows | MacOS** When you're attached to the top media player in the land (iPod), success is a given. iTunes continues to build sales and refine its organization of songs, video, games, podcasts, and more.

**OpenOffice.org** [www.openoffice.org](http://www.openoffice.org)  
**Windows | MacOS | Linux** You can spend a lot for Microsoft Office or nothing for this suite with full-function word processor, spreadsheet, database, presentations, even an equations editor.

**Skype** [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)  
**Windows | MacOS | Linux** You'll pay to call regular phones, but if you sign up all your friends, Skype provides easy (and even international) calls and video-conferencing for nothing.

**Thunderbird**  
[www.mozilla.com/thunderbird](http://www.mozilla.com/thunderbird)  
**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Mozilla's no-cost e-mail alternative is extensible, fast, and easy to master. And a wealth of free

add-ons means there's not much this program won't do, from calendars to encryption.

**Ubuntu** [www.ubuntu.com](http://www.ubuntu.com)  
**Linux** This Linux-based OS comes with many of these Hall of Fame products (Firefox, OpenOffice.org) preinstalled. (See "OS Wars," page 87.)

**WinAmp** [www.winamp.com](http://www.winamp.com)  
**Windows** After a decade of playing music, the "skinnable" WinAmp has several versions, including one with full CD ripping and burning.

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## Operating Systems

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**ajaxWindows** [www.ajaxwindows.com](http://www.ajaxwindows.com)  
**Web** A virtual operating system (aka Web OS), it uses Asynchronous JavaScript and XML (AJAX) programming to mimic the look and feel of a Windows desktop in Firefox or IE. It stores files (using Gmail) and runs its own applications, plus Web apps like Meebo and Google Maps. If you can launch a Web browser, you can get work done through ajaxWindows.

**eyeOS** [eyeos.info](http://eyeos.info)  
**Web** This Web OS has ultra-simplified applications, including an RSS reader, satellite maps, a word processor, even

a browser—yes, for browsing the Web while on the Web.

**Freespire 2.0** [www.freespire.com](http://www.freespire.com)

**Linux** This community-driven OS is based on Linspire (formerly Lindows)—a Linux distro that looks like Windows, with an emphasis on compatibility with other platforms.

**Glide** [www.glidedigital.com](http://www.glidedigital.com)

**Web | Flash** Sleek style sets this Web OS apart, as does the ability (using a separate utility) to sync files, bookmarks, and e-mail from your real OS.

**gOS** [www.thinkgos.com](http://www.thinkgos.com)

**Linux** Ubuntu-based and powered by Google's apps (just don't call it Google OS), gOS comes with the \$200 PCs from Wal-Mart, but you can download it for any PC.

## Antivirus/Anti-Malware

**avast! 4 Home Edition**

[www.avast.com](http://www.avast.com)

**Windows** Spiffy-looking avast! notifies you by e-mail or IM if it catches a virus. You can't schedule scans, but its recovery database can help if a virus damages your files.

**AVG Anti-Virus Free Edition**

[free.grisoft.com](http://free.grisoft.com)

**Windows** Its control center is awkward, but AVG scans files on demand, upon access, on a schedule, and in e-mail. Its rescue disks will help you recover from disaster.

**Avira AntiVir Personal Edition**

**Classic** [www.free-av.com](http://www.free-av.com)

**Windows** AntiVir scans files on demand, upon access, and on a schedule; it doesn't scan e-mail attachments until they're saved, but it does go to work on rootkits. It's especially good at co-existing with other security software. Like most good AV software, it has the Virus Bulletin's VB100% award and certification for virus detection from ICSA Labs.

**HijackThis** [www.trendsecure.com](http://www.trendsecure.com)

**Windows** Run HijackThis, save a log, and then post the log on sites that support the program. You'll quickly get personalized expert help to remove any malware.

**TRY THIS FIRST | FINANCE**

**mint** [www.mint.com](http://www.mint.com)

**Web** Mint isn't like Quicken, where you enter in all your transactions. Instead, it syncs with your bank and credit card accounts online, checks your spending habits, and tells you how to improve to save money. If you're not paying attention to your spending, it'll send you regular alerts to inform you where your money has gone (nice for making sure you haven't been ripped off).

**NanoScan** [www.nanoscan.com](http://www.nanoscan.com)

**Windows | Web** In less than a minute, NanoScan can analyze all processes running on your computer and identify viruses, Trojan horses, spyware, or other malicious programs.

**ThreatFire AntiVirus**

[www.threatfire.com](http://www.threatfire.com)

**Windows** ThreatFire detects the bad guys by their behavior, not by outdated virus signatures. It's surprisingly accurate and a good companion to standard antivirus apps.

**Trend Micro HouseCall**

[housecall.trendmicro.com](http://housecall.trendmicro.com)

**Windows | Web** Use the venerable HouseCall online scanner to get a second opinion, or use the app for cleanup when malware prevents installation of a local antivirus utility.

## Firewalls

**Comodo Firewall Pro**

[www.personalfirewall.comodo.com](http://www.personalfirewall.comodo.com)

**Windows** This protective dragon for XP and Vista keeps hackers out of your system, controls which programs can access the Net (its whitelist of about one million means you get fewer pop-ups), and blocks tricky "leak test" techniques. It's both tough and good-looking.

**ShieldsUP!** [www.grc.com](http://www.grc.com)

**Windows | Web** Be sure your firewalls are keeping your always-on Internet connection hidden from attackers. ShieldsUP! provides a quick confirmation.

**SmoothWall Express**

[www.smoothwall.org](http://www.smoothwall.org)

**Linux** Got a spare PC running a Pentium 200 MHz or higher with 128MB of RAM? Turn it into a dedicated network firewall with this open-source download.

**ZoneAlarm Free** [www.zonealarm.com](http://www.zonealarm.com)

**Windows** The free edition remains a useful protector against hack attacks and against programs that abuse your Internet connection.

## Security

**EULalyzer** [www.javacoolsoftware.com](http://www.javacoolsoftware.com)

**Windows** Wonder what you're agreeing to when you click "I Accept"? Don't worry; just drag EULalyzer's target icon onto the EULA for a quick report on any troublesome language.

**Hotspot Shield** [www.anchorfree.com](http://www.anchorfree.com)

**Windows** Create an instant virtual private network (VPN) tunnel between your laptop and the router at any Wi-Fi hot spot to protect your data from snoops on the public airwaves, even if you're using

extra encryption. If you're on a network that limits the use of certain apps (such as Skype), the VPN could give you unfettered access. It even works with your wired connection for an extra layer of security.

#### **Kruptos 2** [www.kruptos2.co.uk](http://www.kruptos2.co.uk)

**Windows** Kruptos makes a file accessible only to someone who knows the password; it includes a file shredder.

#### **PC Flank** [www.pcflank.com](http://www.pcflank.com)

**Windows | Web** While ShieldsUP! tests your firewall's ability to stealth all ports, PC Flank performs surgical strikes that emulate specific malware attacks to verify that your firewall blocks them.

#### **SendShield** [www.sendshield.com](http://www.sendshield.com)

**Windows** This Outlook add-on strips out extra info and tracked changes in Word documents attached to messages.

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## Finance

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#### **GnuCash** [www.gnucash.org](http://www.gnucash.org)

**Linux** Linux users can track their bank accounts, stocks, and expenses in this financial program using a double-entry accounting method.

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## Office

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#### **AbiWord** [www.abiword.com](http://www.abiword.com)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Volunteers keep this open-source word processor alive. It closely mimics the look and feel of Microsoft Word 2003 and earlier.

#### **Adobe Buzzword** [www.buzzword.com](http://www.buzzword.com)

**Windows | Web | Flash** Adobe takes on Google with this online word processor built (naturally) in Adobe Flash. The interface is splashy; controls are simple.

#### **Gliffy** [www.gliffy.com](http://www.gliffy.com)

**Web | Flash** An online-only diagramming tool with more options than you can flowchart. The free version is limited to five diagrams.

#### **Google Docs** [docs.google.com](http://docs.google.com)

**Web | Mobile** Google's slickly designed office suite offers online shared word processing, spreadsheets, and presentations—and best of all, finally a solid alternative in the office-suite space to the totally dominating Microsoft.

Upload or e-mail your current documents for storage and editing.

#### **IBM Lotus Symphony**

[symphony.lotus.com](http://symphony.lotus.com)

**Windows** A much prettier version of OpenOffice.org, Symphony is prepped for presentations, spreadsheets, and word processing in a single window (but lacks OO's drawing and database modules).

#### **KompoZer** [www.kompozer.net](http://www.kompozer.net)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** A full WYSIWYG Web-page authoring tool akin to Dreamweaver, KompoZer integrates an FTP site manager for file uploads.

#### **NeoOffice** [www.neooffice.com](http://www.neooffice.com)

**MacOS** This version of OpenOffice.org has the same great tools and price (free), but with an interface designed specifically for the Mac OS.

#### **Notepad++**

[notepad-plus.sourceforge.net](http://notepad-plus.sourceforge.net)

**Windows** Notepad++ handles text—especially source code—in ways the basic Windows Notepad could only dream of, with embellishments like tabs and color coding.

#### **Scribus** [www.scribus.net](http://www.scribus.net)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** This open-source page layout tool has features comparable to big names like Pagemaker, plus support for PDFs and scalable vector graphics (SVG).

#### **Windows Live Mail** [get.live.com](http://get.live.com)

**Windows** Live Mail not only reads your Hotmail, but also can check POP, IMAP, or HTTP mail accounts. It works as an RSS feed reader and a newsreader.

#### **Zoho** [www.zoho.com](http://www.zoho.com)

**Web | Mobile** Zoho features every tool you could want—word processing, spreadsheet, presentations, database, even a wiki—and several you never knew you needed. Some are also available off-line.

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## Calendar/PIMs

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#### **Backpack** [www.backpackit.com](http://www.backpackit.com)

**Web** Backpack is more than a to-do list site. Your five easy-to-update pages send reminders via e-mail or SMS and

include a whiteboard for online collaboration.

#### **EssentialPIM Free**

[www.essentialpim.com](http://www.essentialpim.com)

**Windows** Imagine taking the e-mail out of Microsoft Outlook to get a killer personal information manager (PIM). That's what EssentialPIM is all about.

#### **Google Calendar** [calendar.google.com](http://calendar.google.com)

**Web | Mobile** Featuring seamless integration with other Google products, sharing capabilities, and SMS reminders, this Web app does for calendars what Google did for search.

#### **Lightning**

[www.mozilla.org/projects/calendar/lightning](http://www.mozilla.org/projects/calendar/lightning)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** To be more like Microsoft Outlook, Thunderbird needs a calendar. Lightning provides that, plus a to-do list. It can even sync with Google Calendar.

#### **Power Calculator**

[www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/power toys/xppowertoys.msp](http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/power toys/xppowertoys.msp)

**Windows** This XP-only PowerToy replaces the lame Windows calculator with a mathematical powerhouse.

#### **Remember The Milk**

[www.rememberthemilk.com](http://www.rememberthemilk.com)

**Web | Mobile** Never forget another grocery item, or anything else, using this extensible online task manager. It'll send reminders via e-mail, SMS, and IM.

#### **Sunbird**

[www.mozilla.org/projects/calendar/sunbird](http://www.mozilla.org/projects/calendar/sunbird)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Sunbird is Mozilla's standalone calendar for tracking events and upcoming tasks. It's a sister to Lightning, which adds the same functions to Thunderbird.

#### **30 Boxes** [www.30boxes.com](http://www.30boxes.com)

**Web** One of the best-looking online calendars, 30 Boxes features easy-to-grasp pop-ups for adding events and viewing schedule details.

#### **Yahoo! Calendar** [calendar.yahoo.com](http://calendar.yahoo.com)

**Web** Track your schedule and share it with friends, then sync your calendar with Outlook or your phone. It's a great place to back up a handheld.

## Backup/Sync

**Allway Sync** [www.allwaysync.com](http://www.allwaysync.com)  
**Windows** Sync files between your PC and an external drive, filtering by folder, file name, or file type. The program displays warnings about questionable files before syncing.

**Drivelmage XML** [www.runtime.org](http://www.runtime.org)  
**Windows** Make an image of your entire hard drive for backup and restore purposes.

**FolderShare** [www.foldershare.com](http://www.foldershare.com)  
**Windows | MacOS** Install the utility on multiple computers, create an online account where you identify each computer, and pick folders to synchronize. Up-to-date data becomes available on all those PCs whenever you make a change in a folder, with sync taking place in the background so you're never disturbed, just happy to find your files wherever you work.

**MozyHome Free** [www.mozy.com](http://www.mozy.com)  
**Windows | MacOS** MozyHome provides automatic online backup for up to 2GB of your data.

**PassPack** [www.passpack.com](http://www.passpack.com)  
**Web** Pack away all your passwords in this secure online vault; it even logs you in to Web sites.

**SyncToy v2.0**  
[www.microsoft.com/downloads](http://www.microsoft.com/downloads)  
**Windows** Make sure folders across your networked computers contain the same files, even on drives that change location and name.

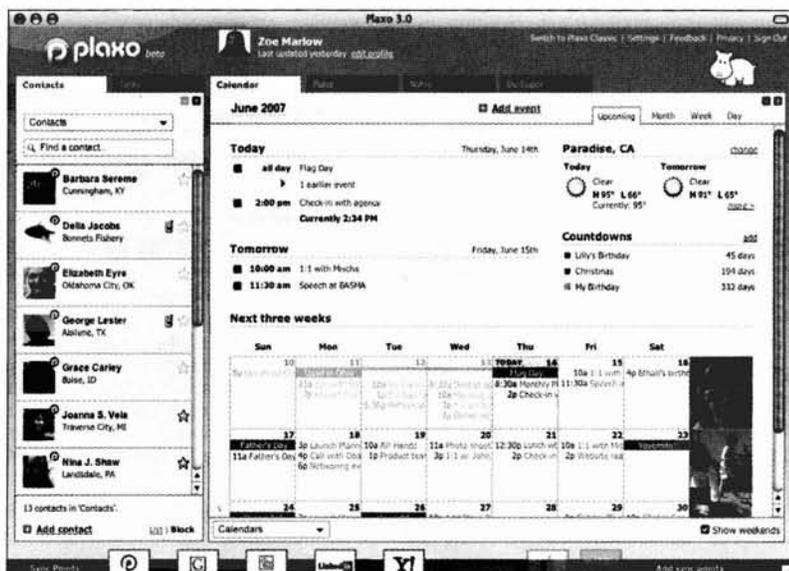
**WinClone** [www.twocanoes.com](http://www.twocanoes.com)  
**MacOS** Bootcamp users: Now you can clone (back up) your Windows XP/Vista partition for reinstall on a new Mac.

## App Launchers

**Launchy** [www.launchy.net](http://www.launchy.net)  
**Windows** Launchy launches (duh) applications, files, folders, or searches via a command-line-esque interface.

**ObjectDock** [www.stardock.com](http://www.stardock.com)  
**Windows** Organize your application shortcuts in a toolbar that mimics the

## TRY THIS FIRST | CALENDAR/PIMS



**Plaxo** [www.plaxo.com](http://www.plaxo.com)

**Web** Perhaps the ultimate online address book, Plaxo is enhanced with the superpowers of a social network and plug-ins for many Web-based services like Flickr, YouTube, Twitter and LiveJournal for sharing across the Internet.

look and feel of the Macintosh dock, complete with icon animations. It will even mimic Windows Taskbar buttons. Add in extras (docklets) like real-time clock and weather forecasts, even a fully functional Windows Start button and Recycle Bin, to get everything you need.

**QuickSilver** [www.blacktree.com](http://www.blacktree.com)  
**MacOS** This open-source launcher takes plug-ins that allow it to do almost anything you want in the MacOS.

## Utilities

**Absolute Uninstaller** [www.glarysoft.com](http://www.glarysoft.com)  
**Windows** Replace the Add/Remove Programs control panel in XP to get batch uninstalls and clear out leftovers that Windows frequently misses when uninstalling.

**CCleaner** [www.ccleaner.com](http://www.ccleaner.com)  
**Windows** The extra C is for crap, and that's what CCleaner gets rid of: all the detritus left behind in the course of using Windows.

**CoolMon** [www.coolmon.org](http://www.coolmon.org)  
**Windows** CoolMon displays all of your system's vital statistics, including use of your CPU, RAM, and hard drives, internal PC temperature, and more.

**Defraggler** [www.defraggler.com](http://www.defraggler.com)  
**Windows** Defragment your entire hard drive—or just one heavily fragmented file at a time.

**DriverView** [www.nirsoft.net](http://www.nirsoft.net)  
**Windows** DriverView lists every single device driver running on your system, with extra info on each.

**Eraser** [www.heidi.ie/eraser](http://www.heidi.ie/eraser)  
**Windows** Shredders are popular in the office, so why not have the digital equivalent? Eraser adds a right-click menu that will do away with a file or folder forever.

**FileZilla** [www.filezilla-project.org](http://www.filezilla-project.org)  
**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Download this FTP client for accessing multiple sites or to use as an FTP server. In both cases, FileZilla has convenient drag-and-drop support.

**Glary Utilities** [www.glaryutilities.com](http://www.glaryutilities.com)  
**Windows** Glary offers a ton of utilities for cleaning, optimizing, and securing Windows in one package.

**Microsoft Virtual PC 2007**  
[www.microsoft.com/windows/virtualpc](http://www.microsoft.com/windows/virtualpc)  
**Windows** Install anything—DOS, OS/2, or any earlier version of Windows—as a virtual machine. It'll run in a separate window on your Vista or XP desktop.



**DESKTOP**  
**EverexTC2502 gPC**  
 \$199 street  
[www.everex.com](http://www.everex.com)  
 Green or Google, it doesn't matter what the "g" stands for. Just know that this is the lowest-cost desktop on the market today. Available at Wal-Mart.



**MONITOR**  
**Sceptre DCL20A 20" Widescreen LCD**  
 \$159.99  
[www.tigerdirect.com](http://www.tigerdirect.com)  
 TigerDirect offers the occasional bargain display, such as this 20-inch screen with \$50 instant rebate.



**LAPTOP**  
**ASUS color Eee PC 2G Surf**  
 \$299 direct  
[eeepc.asus.com](http://eeepc.asus.com)  
 This tiny Linux notebook has just a smudge of a screen (7 inches), but you won't find a better combination of price and functionality.

## Free (Okay, Cheap) Hardware

Manufacturers of even the most basic devices generally don't give anything away. And you're not likely to find breakneck performance at bargain prices. But it is possible to get fully computerized without spending a fortune. Read on to find the best tech bargains around the Internet.

### SandBoxie [www.sandboxie.com](http://www.sandboxie.com)

**Web** Place a layer of "transient storage"—a sandbox—between your applications and your hard disk to stay safe.

### SecureZIP [www.securezip.com](http://www.securezip.com)

**Windows** Compress and decompress files on the fly, even in e-mail through Outlook integration, and encrypt archives as desired.

### Task Killer [www.rsdsoft.com](http://www.rsdsoft.com)

**Windows** Stop any Windows process dead; this is handy for clearing frozen applications.

### TinkerTool [www.bresink.com](http://www.bresink.com)

**MacOS** Get access to additional preference settings in Mac OS X to turn on hidden features.

### Uniblue ProcessScanner

[www.processlibrary.com](http://www.processlibrary.com)  
**Windows | Web** You can do the Ctrl-Alt-Delete salute in Windows to see what's bogging down your PC, but can you understand the results? ProcessScanner, coupled with the online Process Library, provides extra information on each process (like whether it autostarts or not, and who makes the software in question), and even lists the security risk to your system for running it.

## Downloads

### BitLet.org

**Web** Who needs a BitTorrent client? Just find the torrent metafile link on a tracker site, plug it in at BitLet.org, and let it retrieve the file as if you were downloading it from a regular Web site.

### Universal Extractor [www.legroom.net](http://www.legroom.net)

**Windows** See what's inside any archive file—ZIP, RAR, even EXE.

### uTorrent [www.utorrent.com](http://www.utorrent.com)

**Windows** The tiniest BitTorrent client around (only 214K) comes with all the torrent download features you crave.

## Interface Enhancement

### Battery Status

[users.rcn.com/tmtalpey/BattStat](http://users.rcn.com/tmtalpey/BattStat)  
**Windows** This app runs in the system tray and takes advantage of smart battery support in XP/Vista to provide loads of info on laptop-power usage.

### Google Desktop [desktop.google.com](http://desktop.google.com)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Let Google index and search your hard drive contents. The sidebar adds graphical widgets to your desktop.

### miniMIZE [aquaria.za.net](http://aquaria.za.net)

**Windows** miniMIZE puts thumbnails of your minimized applications on the desktop for easier access.

### Quero Toolbar 4 [www.quero.at](http://www.quero.at)

**Windows** Replace the Internet Explorer address bar to integrate ad blocking and make IE7 look more like IE6.

### Vista Drive Icon

[drvicon.sourceforge.net](http://drvicon.sourceforge.net)  
**Windows** Add one of Vista's best features to XP: smart drive icons showing the current capacity of each hard drive.

### XYplorer [www.xyplorer.com](http://www.xyplorer.com)

**Windows** Multiple tabs and improved

search enhance and replace the boring old Windows Explorer.

### Yahoo! Widgets [widgets.yahoo.com](http://widgets.yahoo.com)

**Windows | MacOS** Fill your desktop with tiny interfaces for everything from stock picks to RSS feeds to weather forecasts (using Doppler radar!) to Wi-Fi sensors to remote desktops to countdown clocks—to name a few. Pick from over 4,300; some are more useful than others, but almost all are interesting to look at.

## File View/Conversion

### Foxit Reader [www.foxitsoftware.com](http://www.foxitsoftware.com)

**Windows** Perhaps the fastest PDF reader around, Foxit includes a free annotation tool. Add-ons enable support for new file formats and UI languages.

### Samuraj Data [view.samurajdata.se](http://view.samurajdata.se)

**Web** You can display PDF files in your Web browser when no other reader is available.

### ScanR.com

**Web | Mobile** Instantly perform optical character recognition (OCR) on pictures by e-mailing them from your phone to ScanR.com.

### YouConvertIt.com

**Web** This site turns just about any file into a different kind of file, even online videos from YouTube. It also converts units of energy, force, length, and more.

### ZamZar [www.zamzar.com](http://www.zamzar.com)

**Web** File conversion is no longer a complete nightmare. Just go to ZamZar, upload a file, choose from a long list of

**PRINTER****Lexmark Z1300**

\$29.99 direct  
www.lexmark.com

Since it includes an ink cartridge worth \$18.99, the actual price of this compact color ink jet printer is arguably around \$6. Out of ink? Buy a new printer.

**CAMERA****JAZZ JDC5 QVGA 3-IN-1 Digital Camera**

\$10 street  
audio-discounters.com

Small enough to hang on a keychain, this tiny shooter uses a single AAA battery to capture images measuring 352 by 288 pixels.

**MEDIA PLAYER****Coby MP-C833 128MB MP3 Player**

\$10 street  
www.cobyusa.com

It plays MP3s and WMA files and has all the music control buttons you'll need, plus it doubles as a USB thumb key for file storage.

**MOBILE PHONE****Motorola C139 from Tracfone**

\$14.99 direct  
www.tracfone.com

It may lack the sex appeal of an iPhone, but the C139 makes calls. They'll cost you 10 cents per minute, prepaid.

**SCANNER****Canon CanoScan LIDE 25**

\$49.99 direct  
www.usa.canon.com

This no-frills, three-button flatbed scans pictures at 1,200 pixels per inch over a slow but workable USB 1.1 connection.

extensions (including image, doc, music, video, and compression types), and enter your e-mail address. When it's done, ZamZar will send you the converted file.

## Networking

**LogMeIn Hamachi** secure.logmein.com

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Instantly create a free, peer-to-peer VPN connection between your computer and other people's. Download the software, create a network with a unique name, give it to friends you want to join, and start sharing files with them—even your iTunes folder.

**NetStumbler** www.netstumbler.com

**Windows** Use it to detect any Wi-Fi network in your vicinity and see if it's open for use, or just use it to troubleshoot your own.

**PrinterAnywhere**

www.printeranywhere.com

**Windows** Share your printer with others over the Web; in turn, send jobs to other shared printers, no matter their location.

## Blogging

**Blogger** www.blogger.com

**Web | Mobile** Blogger was one of the first blog-publishing tools. Years after Google bought it, it remains one of the best, especially for newbies. Create a brain-dead simple weblog and let Blogger host it (with a blogspot.com name) using the slew of provided templates, or use it to publish a blog on your own domain.

**w.bloggar** www.wbloggar.com

**Windows** This post and template editor can handle multiple blogs, across multiple blogging systems.

**Windows Live Writer** get.live.com

**Windows** Live Writer is not a word processor, but a universal, WYSIWYG blogging tool more powerful than most blog services' own tools.

**WordPress** www.wordpress.com

**Web** It lacks the simplicity of Blogger or Vox, but the commercial offshoot of WordPress.org offers some of the best tools of any hosted blogging service.

## RSS Readers

**Google Reader** reader.google.com

**Web | Mobile** Google Reader is arguably the best RSS/newsfeed reader on the Internet. Read feeds while off-line or on your mobile phone.

**Netvibes** www.netvibes.com

**Web** This is a handsome combination of online RSS reader and podcast aggregator, with some widget apps thrown in.

## Instant Messaging

**Meebo.com** www.meebo.com

**Web** This polished Web app aggregates your AOL, Gmail, ICQ, Jabber, Windows, and Yahoo! buddy lists into a single, Web-based instant-messaging and chat-room experience. Meebo is building in extras, such as games you can play with IM buddies, as well as video and audio chat you'd find with your regular IM client software.

**Pidgin** www.pidgin.im

**Windows | Linux** Open source tackles instant messaging in this client, which supports more IM networks than you've ever heard of.

**Trillian** www.ceruleanstudios.com

**Windows** Access all your IM accounts (AIM, ICQ, Windows Messenger, Yahoo!, and more) from a single interface that also logs all your conversations, if you desire.

## Communication

**GizmoProject** www.gizmoproject.com

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Gizmo competes with Skype to offer free, peer-to-peer, over-the-Internet phone and video calls, but uses open standards.

**Gmail** www.gmail.com

**Web | Mobile** What to do with nearly limitless e-mail storage space—that's the enviable quandary of Gmail users, who can store up to 5.5GB worth of e-mail and chats. And the amount is constantly growing. Other perks include advanced search options, real-time updates, and "conversations," in which e-mail chains are stored in one continuous thread for easy perusal.

**Mail Redirect** addons.mozilla.org

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** This add-on for Thunderbird lets you bounce a message to the proper recipient without revealing that you got the message first.

**ooVoo** www.oovoo.com

**Windows | MacOS** ooVoo video chat is more P2P than Skype (no supernodes!),

with a better picture. It supports up to six co-videoconferencers, file transfers, and group text chat.

**SightSpeed** [www.sightspeed.com](http://www.sightspeed.com)

**Windows | MacOS** SightSpeed has better video quality than ooVoo, but in a less attractive interface. More than two video chatters will cost you, as will file transfer and group chat.

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## Audio

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**Juice** [juicereceiver.sourceforge.net](http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Aggregate all your favorite podcasts in one place for easy listening.

**Levelator**

[www.conversationsnetwork.org/levelator](http://www.conversationsnetwork.org/levelator)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Levelator adjusts the levels of your audio files to give the perfect balance.

**Reaper** [www.cockos.com/reaper](http://www.cockos.com/reaper)

**Windows | MacOS** The name is short for Rapid Environment for Audio Production, Engineering, and Recording. That pretty much says it all.

**Wavosaur** [www.wavosaur.com](http://www.wavosaur.com)

**Web** A low-price and low-profile audio editor, Wavosaur doesn't even need installation. Just click the executable to start processing and recording sounds. It lacks some of the features of full programs like Audacity, but for quick-and-dirty MP3 editing it can't be beat.

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## Video

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**Cinelerra** [www.osalt.com/cinelerra](http://www.osalt.com/cinelerra)

**Linux** This is professional video-editing software for the Linux crowd.

**Eyespot.com**

**Web** Upload your clips, mix via drag-and-drop, and share your finished videos in one spot.

**HandBrake** [handbrake.m0k.org](http://handbrake.m0k.org)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Convert your DVDs to MPEG-4 video (or just the audio) for backup purposes.

**Jing** [www.jingproject.com](http://www.jingproject.com)

**Windows | MacOS** Jing shares what's showing on your monitor with others online, or records it for future viewing.

**Jumpcut.com**

**Web** This online app provides Flash-powered video editing.

**Miro** [www.getmiro.com](http://www.getmiro.com)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Miro combines BitTorrent downloads with video playback to become the next best thing to your DVR.

**MythTV** [www.mythtv.org](http://www.mythtv.org)

**Linux** Use your Linux box as a homespun digital video recorder (DVR).

**Songbird** [www.songbirdnest.com](http://www.songbirdnest.com)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** The open-source answer to iTunes (from the makers of WinAmp) plays your music and videos.

**TVersity** [www.tversity.com](http://www.tversity.com)

**Windows** Turn your computer into a server to stream video and audio to just about any device on your network.

**Ustream.tv**

**Web** Our reviews call this the absolute easiest way to broadcast live video from your webcam across the Internet.

**Videora Converter** [www.videora.com](http://www.videora.com)

**Windows** Convert nearly any video you can find online (or on DVD) for use on any video-capable iPod or iPhone.

**VLC media player** [www.videolan.org](http://www.videolan.org)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Forget Windows Media Player. VideoLAN's open-source VLC can replace it, and nearly every other player, too. VLC supports almost every audio format and video codec imaginable and doubles as a server for streaming your music and video to other PCs. Change its skin to make it look like the player you want—even WMP.

**YouTube Uploader**

[www.youtube.com/multifile\\_installer](http://www.youtube.com/multifile_installer)

**Windows | MacOS** If you've got a lot of YouTube videos ready to go online, upload them to the site all at once with the Uploader.

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## Graphics

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**IrfanView** [www.irfanview.com](http://www.irfanview.com)

**Windows** IrfanView previews images (or even audio and video) and then converts or optimizes them without opening a separate editor.

**Paint.NET** [www.getpaint.net](http://www.getpaint.net)

**Windows** This program is probably the closest thing to Photoshop you can get free, courtesy of a student project.

**Picasa** [www.picasa.com](http://www.picasa.com)

**Windows | Linux** Google's photo manager makes it easy to get pictures off a digital camera, organize them, and even edit and share them.

**Picnik** [www.picnik.com](http://www.picnik.com)

**Web | Flash** Instantly edit pictures in this Web site. Upload images from your computer, Flickr, Picasa, or elsewhere.

**pikifx.com**

**Web** Another online pic editor, pikifx.com emphasizes special effects such as added text and borders.

**rsizr.com**

**Web | Flash** With one of the best Web interfaces yet—all in Flash—rsizr.com incorporates smart resizing to avoid distortion.

**Splashup** [www.splashup.com](http://www.splashup.com)

**Web | Flash** Another beauty with a Flash interface, Splashup sets itself apart with multi-image editing and a full-screen mode.

**Windows Live Photo Gallery**

[get.live.com/photogallery](http://get.live.com/photogallery)

**Windows** Windows Live Photo Gallery gives Picasa (above) a run for its money, with many of the same photo-enhancing and sharing features—red-eye reduction, exposure adjustment, cropping, color, sharpen, and auto-adjust. What's more, Microsoft serves up histogram adjustment, panorama creation, and photo-CD burning.

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## Browsers

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**Flock** [www.flock.com](http://www.flock.com)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Another browser based on Mozilla, Flock emphasizes interaction with social networks and services. It also accepts many add-ons from the Firefox browser.

**Maxthon** [www.maxthon.com](http://www.maxthon.com)

**Windows** Replace IE or Firefox (but still use their rendering engines) with this highly customizable, multilanguage, tabbed beauty.

### Opera [www.opera.com](http://www.opera.com)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux | Mobile** Possibly the nimblest and most usable of all the browsers available, Opera did tabs first and still does them best. Added usability features like Speed Dial and Tab Preview keep popping up in new versions.

### Prism [labs.mozilla.com](http://labs.mozilla.com)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Prism is a site-specific browser, meaning you simply load a Web app (Gmail, for instance) and let it run like any other application on the desktop.

## Browser Add-Ons

### DownThemAll [www.downdthemall.net](http://www.downdthemall.net)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** You don't have to download one item at a time from a Web page anymore. DownThemAll manages batch downloads, splitting files into pieces so they arrive faster.

### Foxmarks 2.0 [www.foxmarks.com](http://www.foxmarks.com)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Foxmarks can synchronize your Firefox bookmarks across multiple PCs, even multiple operating systems.

### Googlepedia

[code.google.com/p/googlepedia](http://code.google.com/p/googlepedia)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** In Firefox, Googlepedia loads the most relevant Wikipedia entry it finds alongside your Google search results.

### Google Toolbar [toolbar.google.com](http://toolbar.google.com)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** The toolbar brings Google's search and other functionality directly to IE or Firefox. It offers extras like auto fill, spell-checking, and one-click RSS feed subscriptions.

### Greasemonkey [www.greasespot.net](http://www.greasespot.net)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Add this extension to Firefox and then extend it again with thousands of scripts that change the appearance and functions of almost any Web site.

### IE7Pro [www.ie7pro.com](http://www.ie7pro.com)

**Windows** Adds a load of extras to IE7, including control over tabs, spell-checking, ad blocking—even Greasemonkey-esque scripts (see above).

### IE Tab [ietab.mozdev.org](http://ietab.mozdev.org)

**Windows** Do you prefer Firefox but still

**TRY THIS FIRST | RSS READERS**

**Bloglines** [www.bloglines.com](http://www.bloglines.com)

**Web | Mobile** Keeping track of your daily Web news reading can be a nightmare. This Ask.com-owned news aggregator is one of the cleanest and most straightforward methods for keeping your RSS feeds under control, and the new beta version features a great new interface that steals some of the best features of Google Reader.

need to look at some sites in IE? IE Tab will load a site in a Firefox tab using the IE rendering engine.

### ScribeFire [www.scribefire.com](http://www.scribefire.com)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** This Firefox add-on sets up an interface for instant blogging on just about any blog system.

### Tab Mix Plus [addons.mozilla.org](http://addons.mozilla.org)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Take total control of how tabs work in Firefox. Adjust how they look, revive those you closed by accident, send tabs to new browser windows—essentially any tab action you can imagine.

### Zotero [www.zotero.com](http://www.zotero.com)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Zotero makes it easy to keep track of all your research on the Web, including how to cite it in future reports.

## Games/Fun

### Eyezmaze.com's Grow [eyezmaze.com](http://eyezmaze.com)

**Web | Flash** It's not a single game but a series that involves choosing "growing" items that are added to an online environment.

### Geni.com [www.geni.com](http://www.geni.com)

**Web | Flash** Share your genealogy with everyone in the family. They can con-

tribute more individual profiles until your family tree is complete.

### Google Earth [earth.google.com](http://earth.google.com)

**Windows | MacOS | Linux** Fly over familiar terrain or foreign lands with Google Earth, a searchable database of satellite images and geographical data—even images of the heavens. You can go a step further with all sorts of downloadable, gee-whiz applications from scientists, media outlets, and other third-party developers to trick out your Earth-moving experience.

### Google Maps [maps.google.com](http://maps.google.com)

**Web | Mobile** This interactive mapping tool goes beyond driving directions. View destinations in Street View, Satellite, or Terrain modes; check traffic updates; or look up info on nearby businesses.

### Kongregate [www.kongregate.com](http://www.kongregate.com)

**Web | Flash** Only 2,598 free games (as of this writing) to keep you busy online? Bring 'em on.

### Second Life [www.secondlife.com](http://www.secondlife.com)

**Windows | MacOS** This 3D virtual world has hundreds of thousands of denizens. Access is free, but you'll pay a bit if you want to get some real estate, or even fancy clothes for your avatar. □