



20 Free Programs You Should Have on Your PC in 2012

By: Christopher B. Hopkins

While you may have mastered installing apps on your smartphone, you may not be as resourceful in finding good (free) software for your computer. For Windows, there is no single walled garden of an “app store” where you can quickly find and test small programs. Nonetheless, there are a number of free PC apps which you should have installed on at least some of your computers. Many publications offer lists of favored free programs (e.g., <http://gizmo.do/vPVmpv>) but few collections are geared towards lawyers. The list below includes recovery tools, virus/malware protection, audio, image, and system analysis tools – apps which help you practice law, develop Powerpoint presentations, and generally avoid tech problems. To find and download these programs, Google their names or visit a reliable site like Download.com.

Audacity: this application will allow you to edit audio files as well as convert them into different formats (e.g., mp3, wav, aif). In discovery, I have received audio recordings of 911 calls, speaking events or even witness statements which are produced in odd file formats. Audacity will not only allow you to open nearly any audio file, you can also edit long segments of silence/static or even isolate select quotes. Best of all, you can save into a more recognizable format, like mp3.

AVG 2012: a free, routinely updated anti-virus program which runs silently in the background. It verifies downloads, Internet links, and scans your PC.

Belarc Advisor: sometimes it is important to know what exactly is inside your computer – including software product keys. Do you have enough memory or hard drive space? Will your current video card run Trial Director or something graphically intensive? This app generates a thorough report.

CCleaner: Arguably the most important app on the list. CCleaner will scour your hard drive for temporary files, abandoned pieces of software, lost registry items, and other internal digital detritus left behind by daily use. It is the oil change for Windows. Use it monthly.

Cropper – Windows 7 includes “Snipping Tool” to capture and “snip” part of the screen to save as an image file. But, if you are using a prior version of Windows, download Cropper which serves the same function. Perfect if you need a screenshot to paste into a Powerpoint presentation.

Exif Pilot: digital photographs have hidden metadata including dates, camera, settings, and even GPS locations. Access (or purge) this data from photos using Exif Pilot. The paid version allows you to process photos in batches and log the information to Excel files.

Freemaker Video Downloader (Free YouTube to MP3 Converter): YouTube recently announced that it is sharing three billion videos per day. Certainly there is something on YouTube is worth downloading and playing later. Find the video on YouTube and Freemaker will automatically convert it to an mp4 video which you can play on your computer or smartphone. Just need the audio? Free YouTube to MP3 Converter does exactly as its name implies.

IrfanView (for video, VLC Media Player): We often exchange digital images in JPEG, TIFF or GIF formats. But converting among those formats – or opening more unusual file formats – is best accomplished with IrfanView. If it is an image file, IrfanView can open it. It also is a fairly small (and therefore

fast) application; consider setting this as the default for all image files. Video files, as well, exist in a myriad of formats outside of the usual mp4. Open essentially any moving-picture file using VLC Media Player which, as you might guess, also makes for a pretty good movie watching program for your laptop.

Recovery Toolbox for Outlook (Gmail Backup): If your computer crashes while Outlook is in the middle of something, you run the risk of corrupting essential email files. Recovery Toolbox can fix problems which Outlook cannot solve on its own. Gmail, meanwhile, does not have a standard backup function so you will need a small program called Gmail Backup.

Recuva64 – Need to “un-delete” something? This small program may be your last hope to resurrect a deleted file.

Revo Uninstaller – sometimes when you “uninstall” an application, it leaves pieces behind. Worse, some applications do not readily have an uninstall option. Revo does the job correctly.

Spybot Search & Destroy – second to Ccleaner, this may be the next most important app on our list. Scour and remove cookies and nefarious malware from your machine (use monthly).

StalledPrinterRepair – if a printer problem arises, this efficient app clears the printer queue quickly so you can try again. Surprisingly faster than right-clicking the printer icon and trying to clear the logjam that way.

SyncBack FreeWare – a simple backup program which will do either a straight-backup (a copy) or synchronize (make two drives or folder mirror one another). Do a backup of your drive once and then synchronize monthly.

WinDirStat – if your harddrive is filling up, this utility shows you the files which are consuming the most space so you can determine the problematic data hogs.

WinPatrol – clean and protect your PC from malware and bad internet sites using this free app. Also disables start-up applications, monitors the registry, and generally let’s you know of unusual activity.

WizMouse – if your mouse has a scroll wheel, you need this small app which allows you to scroll a window without having to click on it first – just roll the pointer over the window and it will scroll. Also allows you to use the mouse wheel in any app. Hard to describe but it’s an app you did not know you needed until you try it.

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