

Windows Software I Use

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Now here's an odd topic for discussion. This document lists the software that I personally use on a regular basis. I make no pretense at telling you what *you* should use, because I don't know you. I won't insult you by pretending I know what you need better than you do. I'm also not going to list software here just because it's an alternative to the stuff you got with the computer. I'm not into alternatives for the sake of alternatives: I'm into what's best for *me*.

So why should you care what software I use? You shouldn't. You should care what *you* use. I'm presenting this information so that you can see why I use what I do, and you can decide whether it's right for you. Keep in mind that this isn't a list of stuff I installed once and thought was cool... it's what I actually, regularly use.

So who am I? I'm a software developer, project manager, and consultant. I have some very specific needs, but typically I'm a (mostly) business user. I use my computer for the majority of each day. I'm an [open source](#) proponent and a Linux user, but I'm not a fanatic and I'm not religious about it. I also use Windows, recommend it when appropriate, and make a living developing it. Nevertheless, I think the difference between free (as in beer) and free (as in freedom) is an important one, so I will choose open source software over freeware or shareware or commercial software, all other things *nearly* equal. I will use commercial software if it's sufficiently better than the alternative. I *always* pay for the shareware I use, and I *sometimes* donate to open source projects. I have two open source projects of my own, and they're listed here, not out of nepotism, but because I actually use them.

Typically I'll use a number of labels to categorize the software here:

1. **FOSS:** Free Open Source Software. This is software under an open source license such as the GNU GPL. The software is typically available for free, and the source code is always available for no additional cost. Most importantly, you have the right to modify and redistribute the software.
2. **CSAS:** Commercial Source-Available Software. This is commercial software where the source code is available, though often at some additional cost. You do not have the right to redistribute the software.
3. **Gratis:** The software is available at no cost, but you don't get the source code.
4. **Shareware:** The software is available on a "try before you buy" plan. You try it, and if you like it, you pay for it. Some shareware is paid for on the honor system, some has reduced functionality unless registered, and some contains nag screens if you don't register. *Shareware is not free.* IF YOU USE IT, PAY FOR IT!
5. **\$\$:** Commercial Software. The source code is not available.

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In General:

Cratchit.org Small Business PowerPack for Windows

<http://www.cratchit.org/PowerPack>

This is my collection of Free and Gratis software, gathered onto a CD. Many of the packages in this list are represented on this CD, where the licensing allows redistribution. I think it's an absolute must have... your mileage may vary.

GNUWin II (FOSS)

<http://gnuwin.epfl.ch/apps/en/bestlist.html>

This isn't a software package; it's a website. But it has a nicely rounded list of some of the best open source software that works on Windows. Some of it is listed here. But if you're looking for more, definitely check this site out.

The Open CD

<http://theopencd.org/>

Another CD collection. This is generally more “professional” in appearance than GNUWin II, though not as far reaching. I recommend downloading the ISO and burning the CD. It contains a “run from CD” copy of Ubuntu Linux so you can see what all the fuss is about.

Browser Plug-ins

I include browser plug-ins as a separate category because they're important, and I don't use every one that's available. Obviously I use the usual suspects -- Flash, Shockwave, etc. -- and I'm not going to list them here. Generally if a site requires a plug-in that's only there so I can see their 3D bouncy, spiny logo, I give it a pass.

DjVu (Gratis, FOSS)

<http://www.djvuzone.org/download.html>

DjVu is a document publishing format, similar to PDF in purpose, but better in many ways in function. DjVu docs are small and very, very fast on the web. There are lots of technical reasons to use it, which are better described on djvuzone.org than by me. You can see for yourself by installing the plug-in and going to the technical papers page of the website... the tech papers are available in DjVu format. I list this as both Gratis and FOSS because, since it's an open specification, multiple implementations are available.

InternetTIFF (Gratis)

<http://www.internetiff.com/docs/try.htm>

I use this for browsing the US Patent & Trademark Office.

Java 2 (Gratis)

<http://java.sun.com/j2se/downloads/>

It's Java. 'Nuff said.

MusicNotes Viewer (Gratis)

<http://www.musicnotes.com>

I'm a musician, and this allows me to view and print sheet music purchased from MusicNotes.com.

Noteworthy Composer Viewer (Gratis)

<http://www.noteworthysoftware.com/nwc2/viewer.htm>

This allows me to view sheet music that was generated with Noteworthy Composer. Noteworthy is used by our community theatre's music director.

OrgPlus Viewer (Gratis)

<http://www.navigocorp.com.au/orgviewer.htm>

Most people wouldn't need this, but I do, since we use OrgPlus at my largest client.

The browser plugin allows me to navigate organization charts created by OrgPlus.

(<http://www.orgplus.com>)

SmartDraw Viewer (Gratis)

<http://www.smartdraw.com/product/viewer.htm>

SmartDraw beats the pants off of Visio. I use it myself.

SVG (Gratis)

<http://www.adobe.com/svg/>

This adds support for scalable vector graphics to my browser. Expect this format to replace Windows Metafile format (WMF) in the near future with respect to portable clip art.

Visio Viewer (Gratis)

<http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyID=3fb3bd5c-fed1-46cf-bd53-da23635ab2df&displaylang=en>

Though SmartDraw is better, Visio is more popular. Hence, I use the viewer. I don't use any of the other Microsoft Office viewers because I have OpenOffice.org with which to open those files.

Educational

I use just a smattering of educational software, even though I have three kids and I work with computers for a living. A good bit of that has to do with the fact that I don't underestimate, as most educators do, the value of a good book. I could easily go off on my rant about entrusting tools, rather than teachers, with the education of our young, but I'll skip right past that and on to the software that *is* useful. Basically, educational software comes in three flavors for me: tools that do what an instructor simply *can't* (that is, simulation tools); tools for testing and rote practice (like typing tutors or flash cards or games that amount to the same thing); and reference materials (for which Google and Wikipedia are the only really necessary modern sources).

Astronomy

Cartes du Ciel: Astronomy (FOSS)

<http://www.ap-i.net/skychart/index.php>

Also known as Sky Charts. This is just a great astronomy program, much better than many of the commercial programs I've seen and used. I first read about it in *Astronomy* magazine, and I'm thoroughly, thoroughly impressed. You can automatically update the charts from public NASA data, and it reads and displays several commercial data formats.

Celestia (FOSS)

<http://www.shatters.net/celestia/>

<http://www.celestiamotherlode.net/>

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/celestia>

GNUWin II lists this as a game: well, it is and it isn't. It maps the local star systems into 3D space so you can actually move around among them as if you were in a virtual spaceship. This includes moving around within the local solar system, so if you want to visit the moons of Jupiter or Saturn, have at it! What makes it like a game is that, due to the fact that this is FOSS, you can modify it. There are add-ins (at [celestiamotherload](http://www.celestiamotherlode.net/)) that allow you to visit many fictional places, such as Star Trek's planet Vulcan, or the

Babylon 5 space station. This is absolutely amazing top-quality software, and the fact that it's free is just icing on the cake.

Virtual Moon Atlas (FOSS)

http://www.astrosurf.com/avl/UK_index.html

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/virtualmoon>

Virtual Moon Atlas is a companion program to Cartes du Ciel. It is exactly what it says. It comes in two varieties. If you have a decent 3D card and a fast computer you'll want the full version, as it models the moon quite completely. If you have an older machine you'll want to use the "lite" version, which pretty much limits you to some predefined views. You can point and click on any feature and get a full description, stats, and history of it.

Ebook Readers

I could have put these in a number of places, but they're under Educational software because most of my books are reference, although I've got a good bit of fiction. There are a number of sources for eBooks including [Project Gutenberg](#) and [Usenet](#).

Foxit PDF Reader (Gratis)

http://www.foxitsoftware.com/pdf/rd_intro.php

I've just stopped using the Adobe Reader in favor of Foxit. Why? Because hyperlinks in Acrobat launch Microsoft Internet Explorer regardless of your default browser settings. That's stupid. If I wanted to use MSIE I wouldn't have changed the settings and I wouldn't have installed Firefox. So Adobe made me angry... angry enough to actually look at what's in the Acrobat Reader directory. It handles FDF forms. Great, I've never actually seen one used. It has a QuickTime plugin. I have never once received or seen a PDF with a movie in it, nor have I ever met anyone who has. It has a WEBBUY API. Now *that* just pisses me off. I have Fair Use rights that I insist on protecting, so I avoid DRM limited software. So I went looking for a replacement and found Foxit. Foxit is under 2.5Mb in size and it requires no installation. It fits on my USB data thumb with my other utilities and must-haves. It does what I expect and *only* what I expect. And you can bet that when I need to replace my aging Acrobat 4.0, I'll consider the Foxit Editor first.

Microsoft Reader (Gratis)

<http://www.microsoft.com/reader/downloads/pc.asp>

Yet another Reader. I'm not thrilled about this one, but it does have text-to-speech capabilities, and that's a plus. On the other hand, it looks horrible and the file format is non-portable. It's this non-portability that explains why I have the reader. Sadly, some ebook vendors put their wares in .LIT format, and this is the only game in town.

Palm Reader (Gratis)

http://www.ereader.com/product/detail/15007?software=eReader_for_Windows

Oddly, there are a number of ebooks that are only available for PalmOS. I'm at a loss to explain why. This reader allows you to view .PDB files. PDF is preferable, though.

Games

I don't play that many games, but there are a few that I do play regularly.

Arcade

Armagetron (FOSS)

<http://armagetron.sourceforge.net/>

A networked multi-player lightcycle game in the style of the movie *Tron*. My kids and I play this and play this and play this... Multi-platform.

Frozen Bubble (FOSS)

<http://www.frozen-bubble.org/>

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/fbe-win32/>

This is just a really, really cool way to waste time. It's based on Puzzle Bobble, but with cute penguins. It's a little bit of a bear to install for your average Windows user (you have to install Perl and SDL first), but it's worth it. As the website says, "You need this game." Multi-platform

Boardgames

Der Bringer Chess (Gratis)

<http://chess.kearman.com/bringer/bringer-index.html>

I like chess, and this is small enough to fit on my USB data thumb.

Zillions of Games (\$25)

<http://www.zillions-of-games.com/>

If you like boardgames, you'll love this. For just under \$25, you get to play over 1000 boardgames and variants, including classics like chess, backgammon, checkers, and many, many more. It's worth every dime.

Card Games

PySol (FOSS)

<http://avitous.net/software/pysol-windows/index.shtml>

You will never play that stupid Windows solitaire again. I absolutely guarantee it. As a matter of fact, you'll probably not need any other single-player card game again. This has hundreds of solitaire variants. Multi-platform.

Interactive Fiction

Remember the old Infocom text adventure games? Well, these play those. More importantly, they open up a vast new array of *interactive fiction*. Start with *Baf's Guide to the Interactive Fiction Archive*: <http://wurb.com/if/>.

Do it.

Frotz (FOSS)

<http://www.cs.csubak.edu/~dgriffi/proj/frotz/>

This is an open-source implementation of the Z-machine interpreter made famous by Infocom.

Gulxe (FOSS)

<http://www.eblong.com/zarf/glulx/>

A 32-bit version of the Z-machine. It can play huge games that include graphics, richtext formatting, and sound.

TADS (FOSS)

<http://www.tads.org/>

I don't like TADS as much as the Frotz or Gulxe. I really don't know why. It does have laudable design goals, in that it uses HTML for formatting, the language is Java-like, and it “degrades gracefully”... that is, you can program all the multimedia features you like and it will still work on interpreters that don't recognize them. I still don't like it. But since there are a number of IF titles written in TADS, I have the HTML TADS for Windows interpreter, since it can run the multimedia games.

Strategy & Tactics

FreeCiv (FOSS)

<http://www.freeciv.org/index.php/Freeciv>

A turn-based strategy game, very similar to Civilization, only this is, of course, free, and it runs on multiple platforms. It also allows network play with live opponents. Your goal is no less than World Domination. Just like Bill Gates, but with soldiers and weapons instead of lawyers and software.

The Battle for Wesnoth (FOSS)

<http://www.wesnoth.org/>

A turn-based fantasy strategy and tactics game, similar to Final Fantasy Tactics. You can play large campaigns, and networked multiplayer campaigns. This is much more tactics-oriented than [FreeCiv](#), and the game is comprised of scenarios, each of which have a definite beginning and end.

Lovely, and multi-platform: Windows, Linux, MacOSX, etc.

Graphics & Multimedia

Image Editing & Paint

The GIMP: graphics manipulation (FOSS)

<http://www.gimp.org/>

The GIMP is the GNU Graphics Manipulation Program. It's an image processor that provides much of the functionality of a program like Photoshop. It's hugely powerful and even scriptable. The only thing that I don't like about it is a dearth of drawing tools. So typically I'll use something like PaintShop Pro or ImageForge to get the image close to what I want, then polish it in the GIMP.

Image Assistant (Gratis)

<http://www.extralabs.com/products.htm>

This is a neat little program I got for a specific project. I needed to resize roughly 500 photographs to make a photo directory. I originally did it by scripting the GIMP, but needed a simpler method for the end users to interact with. This is perfect for preparing thumbnails for websites.

ImageForge (Gratis)

http://www.cursorarts.com/ca_imffw.html

This is the freeware version of ImageForge. It's a loss-leader for other CursorArts products. This version isn't very easy to find on their website, so I've provided a link directly to it. Nevertheless, you'll may want to take a very close look at IconForge and perhaps the commercial versions of ImageForge. Frankly, I didn't buy those because I've got several years of use invested in Paintshop Pro, and I'm happy with it. I also don't keep it on my PC, but I keep the ImageForge freebie on a USB data thumb and run it directly from there. There are no restrictions on commercial use, and it occasionally comes in handy when I need to edit an image and I'm with a client that doesn't have a decent graphic editor.

Inkscape: SVG Editor (FOSS)

<Http://www.inkscape.org>

I don't know what to say about this, except that it produces the most amazingly beautiful scalable graphics.

PaintShop Pro (\$99)

<http://www.corel.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=Corel3/Products/Display&pfid=1047024307383>

I use Paintshop Pro, but I have to qualify that. I stopped upgrading at version 5, because, for the most part, it does what I want. Since I have the GIMP available to tweak images, I don't see any value in upgrading. I didn't even know PSP was bought by Corel until recently. That's sad, because PSP *was* the competition for Corel's own over-bloated Photoshop software. That said, if you're looking for something commercial, look at this. It has an animation editor as well. What recommends it over the GIMP is the additional drawing tools. What recommends it over the ImageForge freebie is multiple layers. However, since I found Paint.net, it's on my desktop mainly as an image converter, since it understands more formats than Paint.net.

Paint.Net (FOSS)

<http://www.eecs.wsu.edu/paint.net/>

Everything that I wrote about Paintshop Pro applies to Paint.net, except that PSP opens more file formats, has a better color replacer tool, and supports plugins. These are significant enough that I can't get completely rid of PSP yet, but I'm keeping Paint.net around for its potential. I've seen it described as "as powerful as the GIMP," but without scripting and plugins that's not really the case. It is easier to use, though, and has some shape tools that the GIMP doesn't and should.

Picasa (Gratis)

<http://picasa.google.com/index.html>

This is a beautiful image cataloging program that happens to have some rudimentary photo editing features (red-eye reduction, cropping, rotation, enhancement). For serious photo work you'd want to use any of the other packages I've mentioned, but Picasa will certainly find any images on your drive, including those you've lost or forgotten.

SmartDraw: vector drawing (\$197)

<http://www.smartdraw.com/exp/ste/home/>

This is much better than Microsoft Visio and has been for a long while. One of the really great features is that you get thumbnails of your drawing shapes prior to loading them. Hell, you get thumbnails prior to *installing* them! The thumbnails are black-and-white prior to installation, and color after. The installation can be done from the CD, but why bother? Just double-click and SmartDraw will pull the templates from the web and install them on demand.

Icon Editing

IconLab (FOSS)

<http://wildfiredesign.spector-music.com/iconlab/>

A simple and powerful icon editor. (replaces Randy's Freeware Icon Editor on this list).

Movie Viewers & Codecs

Divx (Gratis)

<http://www.divx.com/>

Divx is a new codec for encoding .AVI files. It's also a player that will play these files.

Media Player Classic (FOSS)

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/guliverkli/>

This is everything that Windows Media Player *was*, and then some. It focuses on playing music and videos well, and has none of the stupid skins and other bloat that plagues Windows Media Player. With this you'll want to install *RealAlternative* (http://www.free-codecs.com/download/Real_Alternative.htm) and *QuickTime Alternative* (http://www.free-codecs.com/download/QuickTime_Alternative.htm)

PowerDVD (\$40, but I got mine free with the drive)

http://www.gocyberlink.com/multi/products/main_1.html

Although Media Player Classic can play my DVDs, I find that PowerDVD gives me smoother playback (even when the MPC priority is set to higher than normal priority). I prefer PowerDVD to the InterActual player that ships on some DVDs.

Music

WinAmp (Gratis)

<http://www.winamp.com>

It's a media player. I use it in place of Windows Media Player for most purposes, partly for the Internet TV.

Music Write 2000 Standard Edition (\$79)

<http://www.voyetra.com/site/products/musicwrite/serieshome.asp>

I write music, and Music Write does help with that. I didn't actually buy this (it was a birthday gift), but it would certainly have been on my short list.

PrintScreen Enhancement

Gadwin Printscreen (Gratis)

<http://www.gadwin.com/printscreen/?prmscr>

This is a great improvement over the Windows printscreen functionality. While there are more feature-filled commercial printscreen programs out there, I haven't seen enough difference in functionality to choose one of them over this. I'm not a dedicated tech writer who captures screenshots for a living, so I use this. Gadwin Printscreen, plus a good drawing program, gives me most of that functionality anyway. It's a loss leader for Gadwin's commercial offerings (Diagram Studio and GEFoms), so check them out, too... you might like them.

Internet & Networking

General

No-IP DUC (Gratis)

<http://www.no-ip.com>

No-IP.com offers a great service for those of us who do not have a static IP address: dynamic IP name resolution. In short, you install a small program called *DUC*. This periodically updates your account at No-IP with your current IP address. Now, when you want to access your computer remotely, instead of guessing the IP address, you can consistently use *youraccount.no-ip.com* to refer to your computer. This is a great utility for anyone hosting online games, file transfers, or remote access.

eMail

Letterbox: mail notification (Gratis, \$15)

<http://www.ultima-thule.co.uk/>

This is just a little system tray applet that sits there and periodically checks for mail on my POP server. I use this because NotesMinder (which comes with Lotus Notes) only checks my Notes server for mail. Since I have mail from multiple sources, I use this instead. According to the author, "*LetterBox is either freeware or shareware - it's up to you which.*" If you register, then entering the registration code will remove the word "UNREGISTERED" from the title bar.

WinMail Parser

<http://wmparser.winmailserver.com>

If you're not using Microsoft Outlook and you trade emails with people who do, chances are you've received, at one time or another, a winmail.dat file instead of a readable message. Either through thoughtlessness or callous disregard of standards, Microsoft uses a non-standard mail packaging format called TNEF. Wmparser.exe will read these files so you can finally read those messages.

File Transfer

BitTorrent (FOSS)

<http://www.bittorrent.com/index.html>

BitTorrent is peer-to-peer file sharing, but beyond that, it's a little difficult to explain. Most file transfers are done from a *server* to a *client*. If there are a lot of clients trying to attach to one server, somebody's going to be left out, like the runt of the litter competing for mother's milk. Instead of being limited by the speed of any one humongous server, BitTorrent gets bits and pieces of a file from all of the other people on the Internet who both have the file and are running BitTorrent. The end result is that you're getting your bits from whoever has them, and the more people who do, the faster your downloads become. The true beauty of this is felt by the people who distribute the files, since this "distributed distribution" (if you'll pardon the redundancy) really reduces the load,

bandwidth requirements, and costs of running a server.

FileZilla (FOSS)

<http://filezilla.sourceforge.net/>

FileZilla is a truly exceptional FTP client. One of the nicest of its many features is that, when connecting to a previously visited site, it will return you to the same directory you were in last time. That's great for those of us who update websites by hand. FileZilla's interface looks horribly complicated at first glance, but thankfully you can turn off many of the bells and whistles. The functionality is comprehensive.

FileZilla Server (FOSS)

<http://filezilla.sourceforge.net/>

I used to use FTP Serv-U. However, FileZilla is truly free and has all of the advantages of the version of Serv-U I was using. Namely, it's got very good, granular security and it's very simple to install and configure. It saves you beaucoup memory, since in order to install the FTP service in Windows 2000 you have to bring along the rest of IIS. I'm not interested in administering and patching all of that bloat just to move files. FileZilla has a nifty leg up on Serv-U, as well... FileZilla recognizes that you may be running your FTP server behind a NAT firewall on a machine with a dynamic IP address, and it automatically adjusts it's IP so your passive FTP continues to work.

Instant Messaging & Chat

Kvirc: IRC client (FOSS)

<http://www.kvirc.net/>

Internet Relay Chat is another under-rated, “underground” feature of the Internet. Newbie lamers think Yahoo! Chat is “chat”, but it's johnny-come-lately. There are *thousands* of IRC servers out there, and *thousands* of channels, and precious little censorship. If you need to find something *really* obscure, this is the place.

GAIM multi-service instant messaging client (FOSS)

<http://gaim.sourceforge.net/win32/index.php>

This replaces Trillian (<http://www.trillian.cc/>) on my list of recommendations. I've had some problems with the advanced features of Trillian (such as file transfers and video), to the point where I can't use those features anyway. That being the case, the more humble yet seemingly more stable Open Source GAIM edges out the commercial Trillian. Like Trillian, GAIM connects to nearly everybody, but GAIM is actually more far-reaching! It is compatible with AIM and ICQ (Oscar protocol), MSN Messenger, Yahoo!, IRC, Jabber, Gadu-Gadu, SILC, Novell GroupWise Messenger, Lotus Sametime, and Zephyr

networks. **I'm leaving the previous Trillian description below for comparison.**

Trillian: multi-service instant messaging client (\$20/Gratis)

<http://www.trillian.cc/>

Even though this has a free edition, I bought the Pro edition. Cerulean Studios just really deserves the money. They call it “The Swiss Army Knife of Instant Messaging” and they ain't kiddin'. Trillian connects to MSN, AIM (AOL), YIM (Yahoo), IRC, ICQ, and Jabber chat servers. Just one client, and *all that connectivity!*

Keep in mind though, that a jack of all trades is a master of none, which is why I also use KVIrc. There's a smattering of functionality for each of these services that's not supported by Trillian. In almost every case, it's functionality I don't use. For instance, Trillian is pretty immune to the stupid “boot codes” and viruses that many Yahoo! users “enjoy.”

Newsreaders

40tude Dialog (shareware/gratis)

<http://www.40tude.com/dialog/>

There is much more to the Internet than the World Wide Web. Usenet is one of those under-appreciated features. Often Usenet is referred to as “discussion groups”, and can be found on Google Groups. However, Google Groups is just a window onto the wide world of Usenet. On the other hand, 40tude is a really good newsreader. While Mozilla Thunderbird, Netscape Mail, or Outlook Express all allow you to browse Usenet, 40tude has much better support for multi-part messages and handles more encoding schemes. This is shareware for commercial users and freeware for private use.

Remote Access

Cygwin: X Server (FOSS)

<http://x.cygwin.com/>

Cygwin provides a free X server for Windows. This isn't the easiest thing to install though, and I often use it for its secondary purpose, which is to allow the use of Unix programs under Windows. Up to recently (when I determined to use OpenOffice.org for document editing) I used it to run LyX. Occasionally I still need it to read LaTeX and LyX documents.

PuTTY: Terminal Emulator (FOSS)

<http://www.chiark.greenend.org.uk/~sgtatham/putty/>

Not only is this a really good Telnet client; not only is it a really good Secure Shell (SSH)

client; it also is a damned good xterm emulator, and I can tunnel an X-server session through it. I use it when I want to remotely configure my Linux servers from my Windows box. And since SSH is secure and Telnet isn't, if you're still using Telnet on your servers then you should stop it. *Bad dog!*

RealVNC: Secure Remote Control (Gratis)

<http://www.realvnc.com>

There are FOSS versions of VNC, but I happen to like this one for use on Windows. The installation is easy and the UI is clean.

Voice Over IP

Express Talk: IP soft phone (gratis)

<http://nch.com.au/talk/index.html>

This is an IP-Softphone. Basically, it's telephone. On my computer. Using my Internet connection. And it's free. Great for trimming long distance costs. I used to use Xten, but Express Talk has a prettier interface and a much streamlined setup process. I suggest for the SIP service that you subscribe to <http://www.freeworlddialup.com>. It's also free.

Web Browsing

Apache Web Server (FOSS)

<http://www.apache.org/>

Yes, I run a local web server, and it's Apache. This is handy for deploying web-based applications.

Mozilla Firefox: browser (FOSS)

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

This is the only browser to use. Actually, I have to keep Microsoft Internet Explorer (MSIE) around for business sites that are ActiveX enabled, but there is no way in hell I would ever use MSIE to “explore” the Internet. It's just too dangerous. Besides having *tabbed browsing*, Firefox has *extensions!!* Adblock, Dictionary Search, downloadTHEMall!, FireFTP, Image Zoom... I couldn't do without them.

Panicware Pop-up Stopper (Gratis)

http://www.panicware.com/product_psfree.html

Since I only use MSIE on pre-vetted sites, and Firefox has its own pop-up stopping feature, I only use this in the event that I'm running a program in which some totally dumb-assed, misguided programmer decided to embed the MSIE HTML component and then allow it to link to the Web, or decided to launch MSIE directly from their help instead of launching the default browser (that would be you, Adobe).

Office/Productivity

Accounting

Personal Accounting: MoneyDance (\$29.99)

<http://moneydance.com/win>

It's cheap, it does the personal finance thing. OK. I'll be happier when GNUCash compiles for Windows.

Corporate Accounting: No Recommendation

Really. They all suck, without exception. I used to deal in SBT Database Accounting, and it was great. I don't recommend it since SBT was bought out by people who just didn't "get it" and who ruined the market for vertical resellers.

Hey! Wanna get your product name in this spot? Then show me an Open Source (or affordable source-available) accounting package that doesn't rely on five thousand loosely coupled components to operate (browser, web server, application server, database, library, scripting language... I want a solid accounting package, not a Rube Goldberg nightmare). Make it as easy to install and use for 10 users as it is for one. Give it a real, honest-to-god user interface instead of slapping in some Web pages. Give it open, well-documented back-end storage.

Calculator

Excalibur (Gratis)

<http://www.geocities.com/dbergis/freeware.htm>

I'm just going to quote the download page here:

Excalibur for Windows 32-bit version is a freeware full featured RPN-only calculator. This is a serious calculator for serious users. Powerful RPN entry. 300 Functions (scientific, business, conversion, computer science, physics, complex numbers, geometry, vectors, etc). Full 4 or 8-level stack. International support for different comma and decimal point formats.

Programmable, macros, registers, custom button banks, etc.

Basically, Windows ships with the cheap plastic calculator that you get free as a promotional item. *Excalibur* is the calculator I *need*. You basically have to see it to

understand why it's so much better than that sub-standard minimalist Windows calculator. Once you learn the RPN notation (no parentheses required!) it's a piece of cake.

PDF generation

CutePDF (Gratis, \$50)

<http://www.cutepdf.com/>

The patent status of the PDF format is such that Adobe no longer has a monopoly on it. That's Good News™. It means that there are a lot of free PDF generation products out there now. Normally I would use GhostScript to install this functionality on a Windows box, just as I use under Linux, but that has historically been a pretty inconvenient matter. And guess what? CutePDF uses GhostScript under the hood! It makes the installation process much smoother and it makes using the thing smoother, too. The CutePDF Writer (a virtual print driver) is free, and if you need the full-up functionality (which I don't), there's CutePDF 3.0 commercial version for about fifty bucks.

GhostScript (FOSS)

<http://ghostscript.com/>

CutePDF uses GhostScript to create PDFs. On its own, though, GhostScript provides a number of very useful scripts for converting and manipulating PDFs and PostScript files.

Database

MySQL (FOSS)

<http://www.mysql.com/>

This provides backend databases functionality for OpenOffice.org (and many other database applications).

Desktop Publishing

Scribus (FOSS)

<http://www.scribus.org>

This may seem redundant at first blush. After all, don't I already have a word processor listed? Well, yes, I do. But a word processor isn't desktop publishing. And even though you can do some limited desktop publishing with Inkscape, that's not a full-featured DTP, either. The difference is a matter of degree, but a package like Scribus separates the content from the layout more than lower-end packages do. You can do layout and then

fill in the text from external documents, including Word, OpenOffice.org, HTML, text, or other formats (this is the sort of thing you'd do in creating a magazine or newspaper... your writers will just submit stories they wrote on their word processors... these are then typeset in Scribus). This interoperability makes Scribus a great addition to the OpenOffice.org-based office. It also allows images to be edited in-line using the GIMP.

Scribus, compares very well (I'm told) to Adobe Pagemaker, except that Pagemaker costs \$500 and Scribus is free. Scribus could use some more templates, though... additional free templates are being posted to <http://www.scribustemplates.org/>. Have a look at Mike Salsbury's review: <http://mikesalsbury.com/mambo/content/view/230/1/>.

Also I should mention that Scribus has *excellent* support for creating PDF files. It can create fully featured files with thumbnails, transparency, layers, JavaScript, etc. It really does follow the desktop publishing paradigm, not only with regard to paper publishing, but modern interactive documents as well.

Groupware

In my opinion, only Lotus Notes and programs built on the Notes platform deserve the title of Groupware. I've tried Outlook and it's pathetic. I've tried Groove and it's weak. I've tried several web-based products, and dislike them *all* intensely: most of them have you posting files to a server, and I have a philosophical problem with placing critical company data on servers that are outside your control. I've *tried* to try other “groupware” products, but they think that calendaring and file sharing is the cat's meow. They all miss the point when it comes to workflow.

Notes is *sui generis*. Accept no substitutes

Lotus Notes 6.5 (\$140)

<http://www.lotus.com/products/product4.nsf/wdocs/noteshomepage>

<http://stores.ebay.com/Alacrinet> (*yes, eBay. It's about the easiest place to find prices*)

I had a hard time deciding where to categorize Notes.

Notes is a “thneed”. (For the literature-deprived among you, read <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thneed>). That is, it does just about everything. It's an email client. It's a calendar. It's a newsreader. It's a database. It's a contact manager. It's a collaboration platform. It's a development platform. For a very good overview of the product, read http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lotus_Notes.

People who think that Notes is about email and is somehow equivalent to Microsoft Outlook are being horribly insulting to Notes and undeservingly flattering to Outlook. I use Notes every day and I wrote Cratchit.org VIC CRM in Notes. And I have recently been in a situation where I was required to use Outlook as often. No comparison. There is quite literally nothing else on the market that's equivalent to Lotus Notes.

“I know collaboration software. I've worked with collaboration software. And you,

Microsoft Outlook, are not collaboration software.”

Cratchit.org's VIC Customer Relationship Management (FOSS)

<http://www.cratchit.org/VIC>

VIC stands for *Vital Information Center*. I use it each and every day, and don't know what I'd do without it (I say this even though I wrote it). It has the following integrated features:

- **Contact Management:** Company information and personal information can be stored, and you can even nest companies to an unlimited extent. This integrates with web mapping services so you can get directions to the client location using Google, MapQuest, MapsOnUs, or Expedia.
- **Calendaring / Journaling:** You can schedule meetings, phone calls, to-dos, etc., and record your minutes right in the scheduled event.
- **Correspondence:** All correspondence is filed in one place, be it email, fax, or printed letter. All correspondence is automatically filed, including incoming emails.
- **Contract Management:** this is a unique feature. Since VIC was originally written for a consultancy, this allows you to register contracts that you've negotiated between two other parties, and even generates “tickler” emails to remind the parties that the contract is up for review or renewal.
- **Library:** this provides a place to publish policies and procedures, sales and product brochures, company news, or any other generally useful information. You can categorize it however you like.
- **Free-form Notebook:** Sometimes you just need a simple notepad. This allows you to store notes and categorize them however you like.
- **Sales Register:** This simple sales register acts as a simple Sales Order and Accounts Receivable package.
- **Project Management:** This is used to manage sales opportunities or any other kind of structured project.

VIC CRM is written in Lotus Notes. So while it's open source, the platform will cost you. When I say I use “Lotus Notes”, what I really mean is that I use VIC CRM on top of Lotus Notes. The VIC “My Activities” page is my home page in Notes, and all of my email is sent through VIC, not the Lotus mail template.

Planning

Freemind: mind mapping software (FOSS)

http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Main_Page

So now you're thinking, "What the heck is mind mapping software," aren't you? OK, I'll take a stab at a quick definition. Think about an outline. Everything sort of branches off of the single root "node" (a node is where it branches). When you're looking at a complicated outline sometime after you've built it is that it's not immediately clear which items branch directly off of the root node, and which branch elsewhere. When you're looking at a certain level, then you miss the "relatedness" of the items because they're visually too far away from the previous level. Mind maps indicate the relatedness of the data in a very visual way by discarding that linear treeview for a more organic-looking structure. It's possible to do some of this with a collapsible outline editor, which is what, "back in the day" (the mid-1980s), we used to call a "thought processor." It still gets pretty messy, and Freemind can clear that up.

Normally I have rule of thumb: I consider any software doomed if you have to have to take a class to understand it. (This is why you don't see any "concept mapping" software listed here. Good gravy, that's convoluted!) Now, every definition I've seen of mind-mapping -- even at <http://www.mind-mapping.co.uk/> or on Tony Burzan's website (and Burzan originated the stuff in the first place) -- fails miserably in the definition and seems to indicate that you need a course in how to do it. In fact, these people charge real money to conduct such classes. You'd think that if they understood it themselves, they could explain it better than that. I'm with Albert Einstein: "*You never truly understand a thing until you can explain it to your grandmother.*"

I was ready to apply my rule of thumb and discard this software until I realized that the people pushing the concept commercially and academically do understand the product. They're simply over-educated and over-familiar with it to the point of having lost all connection with their audience. They've simply lost the communication skills necessary to explain their concepts to those who don't yet have their peculiar vocabulary.

This software is basically an efficient outliner. Conceptually it's the same thing as the treeview control you see in your Windows Explorer, only you have great freedom of control and labeling the content. As such, you get a much better visual representation of where the concepts came from and what they mean. From that point on, this became useful.

Skipping all the classes, high-dollar mapping tools, and academic buzzwords, Freemind is a very neat way to get organized.

KeyNote: outliner (FOSS)

<http://www.tranglos.com/free/keynote.html>

OK, I'm going to bend my rule on this one. Normally I wouldn't include anything that I don't use regularly. But I just found out about this recently, and I would use the hell out of it if I didn't already use Lotus Notes databases for the same purpose... and I might find uses for it even then. I'm thinking of embedding keynote files in my "Notebook" databases.

Keynote is a RichText editor. That doesn't sound like much, until you see that it allows

you to store gobs of RTF docs in one keynote file. The authors describe it as a “*Tabbed notebook and personal information manager, with tree structure and strong encryption.*” Basically, it can take the place of one of those “thought processors” I wrote about earlier. Or it can be an outline editor for taking notes in a seminar. Or whatever.

You can arrange the notes in an outline treeview, rearrange them however you like by dragging them, assign icons, fonts, and colors to them, etc. It's a lot like mind mapping in that respect (and I was informed about this by the Freemind website). It's better for keeping complicated content than Freemind, though. The end result is something that looks for all the world like a Windows help file, only fully editable. And you can export the individual node content to RTF docs.

Open Workbench: project management (FOSS)

<http://www.openworkbench.org/index.php>

Open Workbench (OWB), from Niku, is *the* serious competition for Microsoft Project. Previous versions had trouble running on Windows XP, but with the latest release they seem to have sorted all of that out. This is written in Java, so it's best to have the latest JVM installed on your machine.

Office Productivity

OpenOffice.org: general purpose productivity (FOSS)

<http://www.openoffice.org/>

OpenOffice.org is an open source alternative to Microsoft Office, and I much prefer it to Office. Like Microsoft Office, it has a bunch of components, so here's an overview of them and how I think they compare:

- **Writer:** (Word Processor. Compare to Microsoft Word) The only thing that Writer lacks that I'd like to see is a dictionary/thesaurus. This is completely compensated for by [WordWeb](#). On the other hand, Writer has character styles, and Word has nothing like it. Writer also doesn't have Word's tendency to reformat your text randomly. For features, Word gets the prize. But OpenOffice.org Writer steals it back with its solidity and better handling of styles. Plus, Writer can save documents as fully featured PDF files.
- **Draw:** (Vector Drawing tool. Nothing in Office compares) Microsoft Office doesn't have anything like this, really. There is Visio, but that costs a truckload of money and isn't really part of Microsoft Office, so that's not a fair comparison. Draw is a fairly high-powered vector drawing tool that you would use in many places where Visio would normally be used. Sadly, Draw lacks a really good shape library. Since it doesn't recognize the SVG format, it makes importing shapes from <http://www.openclipart.org> a cumbersome. In the future, there will be support for SVG, but in the meantime you're left with just WMF. Fortunately,

most current clip art collections are in WMF format.

- **Base:** (Database. Compare to Microsoft Access) Actually, comparing Base to Access is comparing apples to oranges. They both allow you to work with databases. Beyond that they're nothing alike. MS Access uses a proprietary format in which all the data and logic are in a single file, and it also allows you to link to external data. OpenOffice.org Base is a tool that allows you access to back-end databases such as MySQL, PostgreSQL, or SQL Server. The bottom line is that you need an SQL database to be installed as well. Base also provides a form generator that allows easy access to the back-end data. I haven't worked with this as much as I probably should, since it's not portable to Microsoft Office users.
- **Calc:** (Spreadsheet. Compare to Excel) This compares very favorably. I've got no complaints except that the Basic code isn't terribly transportable between Excel and Calc. Since the spreadsheet is the most highly scripted component of OpenOffice.org or Microsoft Office, I make the mention..
- **Impress:** (Presentation Graphics. Compare to PowerPoint) Again, this compares very favorably. Personally, I think that anyone who spends time on presentation graphics should be taken out and shot. Twice. Presentations should be about informing, not impressing, and if you're trying to do the latter you need a real job.
- **Other stuff:** OpenOffice.org lacks the orgchart component that came with Microsoft Office 97 and 2000 (and which no longer ships with Office), but since it contains Draw, that's not much of a loss. (If you want an easier charting app for a small organization you can use OrgPlus Express.) On the other hand, OpenOffice.org's Math tool is much better than Microsoft Equation. And OpenOffice.org's Gallery makes multimedia much easier to use.

OrgPlus Express (Gratis)

<http://www.orgplusexpress.com/>

Microsoft Office 97 and 2000 shipped with Microsoft OrgChart, which was actually a cut-down tool created by HumanConcepts. Although it no longer ships with Office, there's a better replacement in OrgPlus Express. I've used the full product to do a major automated orgchart job for a client and am thoroughly impressed. If your organization is 30 people or less, then OrgPlus Express should do the job.

Note: OrgPlus Express can't be run as a standalone program... it must be called by something else. Even though the HumanConcepts website says that it requires Microsoft Office 2000 or better, what they *mean* is that the little toolbar doesn't appear otherwise. In point of fact you can embed an OrgPlus Express chart in OpenOffice.org or any other application that supports OLE automation. A word of advice, though... if you go to any trouble with the background, then you'll want to save the file as an OrgPlus file (for later editing), and then as a JPEG image. That way your background won't be cropped around the objects and it looks better when inserted into the document.

The website also mentions that the free OrgPlus Express is a “limited time offer”.

WordWeb: dictionary & thesaurus (Gratis)

<http://wordweb.info/>

This seamlessly provides the missing dictionary/thesaurus capabilities for OpenOffice.org or any other Windows program that require them. It has a lot of extras as well.

Text-to-Speech

ReadPlease: Text-to-Speech (Gratis/\$60)

<http://www.readplease.com/>

I often paste text into the gratis version of ReadPlease so it can be read to me while I'm doing something else. The “plus” version, which allows you to start reading at any point, costs around \$60. If you want to improve the voices, then AT&T sells “Natural Voices” (which are excellent!) for \$25 or \$35 for the 8k or 16k quality, respectively.

Text-Reader Bookshelf: text-to-speech (\$29)

<http://www.text-reader.com/>

So why do I have a second text-to-speech reader if I already have ReadPlease? I use them differently. When I'm using ReadPlease I paste the text into the tool and it reads it. On the other hand, I use Text-Reader Bookshelf to read text files that I've pulled down from Project Gutenberg. Bookshelf formats the plain text to look like a printed book and reads it aloud on demand. Nifty, and it's easier on the eyes than using Notepad.

OCR

Textbridge: OCR (\$79)

<http://www.scansoft.com/textbridge/>

This actually came with my scanner. But it's very useful to get softcopy text from a hardcopy printout.

Programming

Editing

Hex Editor: Hex Workshop (\$50)

<http://www.bpsoft.com>

This is a full-featured hex editor that will edit files, and logical and physical drives. It's very cool.

Textpad: text editor (\$30 Shareware)

<http://www.textpad.com/>

This plain-text editor is the most used piece of software I own, after Lotus Notes/VIC CRM and Firefox. I think it was worth every cent of the registration price, and then some.

The features here are *just right*, as opposed so some others, and I'll give you a “for instance”: EditPlus contains a “seamless web browser”. This is just bloody stupid. It's a security breach waiting to happen, since – even if you've selected a different web browser as your default – the “seamless” browser touted here is really the HTML control from Microsoft Internet Explorer. There's no reason why you shouldn't open up a file in your regular browser, as you do with Textpad. The reason that dumb features like this are included in software is because you actually score extra for it when you submit your software to sites like C|Net downloads or Tucows. Yes, boys and girls... take it from someone who's software is listed there. They really and truly do pad your score if your software does stuff that's *unrelated to its primary function*, so be wary of 5-star rated software. In the case of Textpad, though, you can't go wrong.

Installation

Install Creator (Gratis, \$149)

http://www.clickteam.com/English/install_creator.htm

This is the very professional-quality installer that I use with Cratchit.org TimeTool. I use the freeware version since TimeTool is FOSS and doesn't generate any income to justify a commercial installer. The freeware version has a small ad included as part of the installation wizard.

Programming Languages

Typically, if I'm programming, it's in a language provided by the client. There are a few that I think enough of to purchase myself, though.

ASIC (\$Abandonware?)

<http://www.qbasic.com/c1.shtml>

This is a fantastic little under-rated text-only programming language. As BASICs go, this is more basic than most. It has some very severe restrictions, such as only allowing one operation per line, and not allowing multiple lines. However, this makes for an exceptionally fast and efficient compiler, though if you want to do anything terribly fancy you'll need to code to the DOS API. The original Cratchit.org TimeTool was written in ASIC. (<http://www.cratchit.org/TimeTool.htm>). There have been no releases of ASIC for many years.

Delphi Personal (Gratis)

http://www.borland.com/downloads/download_delphi.html

Borland released Delphi 6 for personal use. I got mine on a CD attached to a magazine, so I really don't know where to download it, but the key is available through the above link. Delphi is basically a very modernized Turbo Pascal (the Linux version is called Kylix). For rapid application development it's tough to beat.

Lazarus (FOSS)

<http://www.lazarus.freepascal.org/>

Lazarus is a replacement for Borland Delphi. It's now gotten to the point where it's really interesting, despite the lack of a Coolbar control. Also, it's gotten difficult to find the Personal edition of Delphi. Lazarus will be the language of the next release of Cratchit.org TimeTool.

Microsoft FoxPro (\$649)

<http://msdn.microsoft.com/vfoxpro/>

FoxPro is the best software Microsoft ever bought and tried to kill, and it stands apart from the Visual Studio. It's really a killer rDBMS and development platform. Very fast, very flexible. It can be used to develop local applications, or it can be used as middleware in a larger application with disparate data sources on the back end. It also makes a great ad-hoc query tool and report writer. I've written inventory control systems, personnel systems, accounting systems, utilities... even a full medical office system in FoxPro.

Lotus Notes Programming Utility: NotesPeek (gratis)

<http://www-10.lotus.com/ldd/sandbox.nsf/0/6bcca234153471348525689a0070bc43?OpenDocument>

This is a browser for Notes data. From the sandbox page:

NotesPeek presents the information in Notes databases as it is available through the Notes

API. NotesPeek is based on a containment hierarchy: Notes servers have databases, databases have documents, documents have items, etc. For the most part, this containment hierarchy is that presented by the API. Selecting a line in the tree view on the left will display information about that line in the text view on the right. NotesPeek displays almost all of the data available through the Notes API. Where data cannot be interpreted because its format is not documented, it is displayed as a hex dump.

Obviously this is of great interest to me as a Notes developer. Most people would yawn.

Lotus Notes Programming Utility: ZapNotes (gratis)

<http://www-10.lotus.com/ldd/sandbox.nsf/0/8aa14311cb0c51c388256aa400804e4e>

Lotus Notes starts a lot of background tasks. If it crashes, it can leave those tasks running. Typically, ordinary users recover from this by re-booting their machines. Power users recover by starting the Task Manager and deleting the orphaned tasks. REAL power users run ZapNotes and allow it to clean up what Notes left behind automatically.

Xbasic (gratis)

<http://xbasic.sourceforge.net/>

XBLite for Windows (gratis)

<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/xblite/index.html>

An integrated compiler, IDE, and runtime environment. If cross-platform capabilities are what you're looking for, then try Xbasic. If you're looking for integration with a pure Windows environment with the appropriate look and feel, then XBLite.

These are great for those programs that you would have written in BASIC if Microsoft had continued to supply a bloody programming language with the OS.

Text Comparison / Merging

WinMerge (FOSS)

<http://winmerge.sourceforge.net/>

WinMerge is just very cool. It's your usual visual diff tool (it displays the differences between two text files), but goes one step farther. WinMerge will move text from File A into File B, or vice-versa. It's great for folks like me who work on FOSS and need to identify and merge in changes that other people have made.

Database query

WinSQL (Gratis for the Lite version, otherwise \$249)

<http://www.synametrics.com/SynametricsWebApp/WinSQL.jsp>

With WinSQL you can:

- Submit SQL Queries to any ODBC compliant databases
- Get metadata for tables, views, stored procedures, triggers, rules, etc.
- Learn how to write SQL statements by using wizards that build SQL for you
- Transfer data from one source to another
- Reverse engineer a database
- Draw E/R Diagrams
- Generate test data with millions of meaningful rows
- Find structural differences between two databases
- Find data differences between two tables in different databases

Of course, I don't need to do all of those things, and I'm not paying \$250 to do it (not that I'd complain if someone else bought it for me!) But I do need to do casual database queries. If I'm not at a machine with Visual FoxPro then WinSQL Lite fills the bill. You connect with an ODBC data source, you enter your SQL statements in a Query window and read the results in a Results window. You can browse the database in the Catalog window. I don't typically need to see schema differences, and data differences can be gotten easily with properly crafted queries.

Security

General

AccessEnum (Gratis, source code available)

<http://www.sysinternals.com/Utilities/AccessEnum.html>

From the website:

While the flexible security model employed by Windows NT-based systems allows full control over security and file permissions, managing permissions so that users have appropriate access to files, directories and Registry keys can be difficult. There's no built-in way to quickly view user accesses to a tree of directories or keys. *AccessEnum* gives you a full view of your file system and Registry security settings in seconds, making it the ideal tool for helping you for security holes and lock down permissions where necessary.

Read Mark's Windows IT Pro Magazine [article](#) that describes how to use AccessEnum.

TcpView and TDiMon (Gratis)

<http://www.sysinternals.com/Utilities/TcpView.html>

<http://www.sysinternals.com/Utilities/TdiMon.html>

Though this is a networking utility its usefulness clearly puts it in the Security category. TcpView (and its command-line equivalent, Tcpvcon) display all of the active TCP and UDP 'endpoints' in your system... in other words, who's connected to what, and how.

TDiMon monitors network activity in realtime.

Anti-Spyware

Ad-Aware (Gratis, \$25)

<http://www.lavasoftusa.com/software/adaware/>

This is very nice search-and-destroy software. Ad-Aware is designed to provide advanced protection from known Data-mining, aggressive advertising, Parasites, Scumware, selected traditional Trojans, Dialers, Malware, Browser hijackers, and tracking components. It works, too. Ad-Aware SE is gratis, the Plus edition is very reasonably priced.

Autoruns (Gratis)

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

I previously used Startup.exe (below) for myself. I still recommend it for casual users, but if you're a professional, Autoruns is far, far better. It lists not only all of the same information as Startup.exe, but also services, Explorer and Internet Explorer add-ons, and gobs of other info. A must-have.

MRU-Blaster (Gratis)

<http://www.javacoolsoftware.com/mrublaster.html>

This is a nifty little program to help maintain your privacy on a shared machine. It blows away the "most recently used" program lists that are kept by your computer. This also includes plug-ins to clean your Temporary Internet files and cookies. I run it on machine startup, as I don't have much use for the permanent storage of "temporary" files.

Startup Monitor (Gratis)

<http://www.mlin.net/StartupMonitor.shtml>

This runs in the background and doesn't even take up space in the System Tray. What it does do is monitor all of your startup files and startup registry keys. When another program tries to change these files, then the startup monitor pops up a dialog informing

you of the attempt and asking for your authorization. It's the kiss of death to malware that may have made it through AVG and Ad-Aware!

AntiVirus

AVG Anti-Virus (Gratis, \$50)

<http://free.grisoft.com>

Nice, solid anti-virus software. I found this after going through McAfee (too dumb), Symantec (too flaky), and Panda (loved the look, but it ran away with all my CPU cycles). I've had no problems at all with AVG, and that's exactly the way utility software should be. AVG runs nightly when I'm sleeping and checks behind me to make sure I haven't slipped up in my safe browsing.

Encryption

Windows Privacy Tools (FOSS)

<http://winpt.sourceforge.net/en/>

This is really, really cool. Windows Privacy Tools (WinPT) is a collection of multilingual applications for digital encryption and signing of content (such as mail messages or personal files). WinPT is GnuPG-based, compatible with OpenPGP compliant software (like PGP) and free for commercial and personal use under the GPL.

Time Management:

Alarm Clock: Citrus Alarm Clock (Gratis)

<http://www.ornj.net/software/citrus/>

This is just a timeclock. What's neat about it is that you can set as many alarms as you like, and they can repeat on any schedule you like. Since I have a lot of simple reminders that I want to be available even when Notes isn't running, I use this. Oh, and each alarm can play a different sound. I like waking up to Benny Goodman's "Sing, Sing, Sing with a Swing" (it starts off with a *killer* drum solo!)

Time Clock: Cratchit.org TimeTool for Windows (FOSS)

<http://www.cratchit.org/TimeTool/>

I wrote this. Cratchit.org TimeTool for Windows is a simple tool I use to keep track of the projects on which I work. Basically, it amounts to a timeclock. It's not fancy or complicated, but it does the job for me.

The interface consists of a listbox in which your projects are displayed, and a toolbar that's used for administration. When you want to work on a project, highlight it. When you want to work on a different project, highlight that one. TimeTool keeps track of how much time is spent on each project.

Now here's the cool part. You don't need to keep the software running! When you exit the program it saves its current state so that you can shutdown your computer. When you start it again to change tasks, it compares the current date/time to the previously saved state and shows the elapsed time as if the program had been running.

Utilities

Backup and Data Recovery

Cobian Backup (Gratis)

<http://www.educ.umu.se/~cobian/cobianbackup.htm>

This is an excellent backup utility that uses standard zip archives for compression. Cobian Backup has very flexible scheduling and file selection abilities, and can send backups to a

CD Burning and ISO management

CDBurnerXP Pro (Gratis)

<http://www.cdburnerxp.se/>

This creates data CDs and DVDs, burns Audio CDs, rips audio files from CD, creates CDs from ISO images, allows you to make ISO images, and can print covers. There's only one thing it doesn't do easily... make direct copies. The publishers don't want it, as a free utility, to be accused of being a pirating tool. Nevertheless, you can make copies by first creating an ISO file, then burning the ISO to disk.

Du (Gratis)

<http://www.sysinternals.com/utilities/du.html>

Linux has a command called DU which is *really* handy for finding out where your disk space is going. This is an implementation for Windows. It's a command-line utility; for best results redirect the output to a file and then pull it into a good text editor like TextPad for sorting and searching.

DVD43 (Gratis)

<http://www.dvd43.com/>

I don't and won't pirate software, and I insist on paying for the shareware I use (otherwise I use a free alternative). On the other hand, I know for a fact that the United States Constitution and Title 17 (dealing with copyright) grant me certain rights of Fair Use. This software restores some of those rights that are denied me by copy protection.

IsoBuster (\$26)

<http://www.isobuster.com/>

IsoBuster is a great data recovery tool that will allow you to browse an entire ISO image or CD, regardless of what the operating system allows you to see. If the data can be recovered this will do it.

Junction (Gratis, with source code but no redistribution rights)

<http://www.sysinternals.com/Utilities/Junction.html>

Linux users know what symbolic links are... basically, they're multiple entry points in the file system to the same directory. Windows' NTFS file system supports symlinks, but Microsoft, in a telling demonstration of how dumb they think you are, left this capability out of the user interface, relegating it to developers (it's called *linkd* in the Win2K resource kit). Junction allows you to create and maintain symlinks.

Miscellaneous

DOSbox (FOSS)

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/dosbox/>

This may sound silly, but it's an X86 emulator for Windows. I know what you're thinking... Windows runs on an X86 already. True, but Win2K and XP no longer support a "DOS Mode". DOSbox provides that sort of compatibility, which is especially useful when you want to run an old DOS program (such as a game) that's no longer supported. As a big ol' added plus, it works on Linux and FreeBSD, too!

DOSPrint (Gratis)

<http://www.andtechnologies.com/dosprint.html>

This little utility is *excellent*. I needed it when a client's computer just *would not* map a Novell drive to a DOS port (you simply wouldn't believe the number of customers that still use DOS-based accounting systems). DOSPrint will take any available Windows printer and map it to any available DOS port. Simple, small and beautiful. This comes in two varieties, packaged together; one is DOSPrintUI.exe, which you run on demand; and DOSPrint.exe, which runs as a Windows service.

My Uninstaller (Gratis)

<http://www.nirsoft.net/utils/myuninst.html>

From the web page:

MyUninstaller is an alternative utility to the standard Add/Remove applet of Windows operating system. It displays the list of all installed application, and allows you to uninstall an application, delete an uninstall entry, and save the list of all installed applications into a text file or HTML file.

MyUninstaller also provides additional information for most installed applications that the standard Add/Remove applet doesn't display: product name, company, version, uninstall string, installation folder and more.

Now, why do *I* use it? Because Add/Remove Programs, though prettier, sometimes winds up leaving entries that can't be deleted. *My Uninstaller* gets rid of those, and does the job more quickly than Add/Remove Programs. Furthermore, you can sort by any of the column names listed above. That's neat when you want to get rid of multiple entries for a single company.

Process Viewer: PrcView (Gratis)

<http://www.teamcti.com/pview/prcview.htm>

From the web page:

PrcView is a *process viewer* utility that displays detailed information about processes running under Windows. For each process it displays memory, threads and module usage. For each *DLL* it shows *full path* and *version* information. PrcView comes with a *command line* version that allows you to write scripts to check if a process is running, kill it, etc.

Registry Editor: Registrar Lite (Gratis)

<http://www.resplendence.com/reglite>

There's so much wrong with RegEdit that I don't know where to begin. *Registrar Lite* is worth the download, if for nothing else, because of the excellent search facility that lists all matching entries at once.

Startup Control Panel (Gratis)

<http://www.mlin.net/StartupCPL.shtml>

From the web page:

Startup Control Panel is a nifty control panel applet that allows you to easily configure which programs run when your computer starts. It's simple to use and, like all my programs, is very small and won't burden your system. A valuable tool for system administrators!

What's really nice about this is that it gathers all of the possible locations from which a program can be launched into one easy interface. That's three registry keys and two files. Rather than removing the reference to a program, you can simply disable it by unchecking it. This makes it easy to disable a program temporarily.

Xplorer² Lite (Gratis)

<http://zabkat.com/>

I found this program while looking for a solution to a stupid Windows Explorer problem. I had uninstalled a program (Irfanview, which I *don't* recommend) and Windows promptly forgot how to open folders. Following all of the best advice from Microsoft I was only able to get it to open the folders in separate windows (which is not at all what I prefer). A download and a few registry tweaks later and I was using Xplorer² instead. You probably don't need to do the registry tweaks, because you probably don't have my problem.

Xplorer² comes very close to the fantastic [Konqueror](#) file manager of Linux's [KDE desktop](#). I've used it to completely replace my Windows Explorer (to the extent that I get Xplorer² when I click on "My Computer"). Some features worth noting: You can have two panes of icons (each showing a different directory) as well as a tree list, and you can input a DOS command directly into the file browser (which makes it easy to issue a batch command without having to navigate a DOS window). It has rule-based filters, can set comments on files, synchronize panes, set bookmarks, and generally do a lot of nifty stuff that Explorer can't. The pro version also has built-in desktop search.

What it *can't* do is the following: display a web page in a pane; display more than 2 panes; display a preview in any pane (though there is a small preview pane). Konqueror does all of these functions as well.

All in all, though, Xplorer² is definitely worth the download.