

# THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE ARE FREE

*by Ron Hirsch - Boca Raton Computer Society*

I'm sure that we've all heard the expression "the best things in life are free". That was coined many, many years ago, and certainly did not refer to anything in the computer software industry, which didn't exist back then.

In the early computer years, a new frontier arose, called shareware. These were software products that individuals, and very small companies created, and offered to the computer users at no charge. If you liked the product, and kept it installed on your machine, then you were requested to send in a small payment to the author. This was an "honor system. As such, many people kept the software installed, but never sent in anything.

Then, a new form was introduced called "trialware". One type allowed you to download and install the program, and use it for free for say 30 days. This allowed users to try out things before deciding whether to pay for it. After the free period, the program would no longer function.

Another form of trialware blocked some of the key features, but allowed the user to run the program forever, without those features, and without paying. Usually, the blocked key features were really needed to use the program, so it was useless without them. Paying the registration fee gave you a key to gain full access to all features.

In recent years, amazingly, the marketplace has been flooded with a large number of programs, that are truly freeware. And, many of these programs are top quality, elaborate and full-featured software that may even have become a leader in its field. Often, such programs also offer a "paid" version which has some added capabilities which are nice to have, but may not be absolutely necessary.

**This article will concentrate on the free programs that I feel are superb examples of security software that everyone should have.** All of them do offer an "upgrade" to a higher level version, and at a nominal cost. And three of the four "Pro" versions are one time charges only - pay the small fee now, and get all future upgrades and enhancements free for life.

## MALWARE IS RAMPANT OUT THERE IN THE COMPUTER FIELD

There is a large group of worldwide computer hackers out there, who are constantly working at creating all sorts of malicious software to attack your computer. Their main objectives are to glean personal data from your computer, and use it to further their own self interests of stealing money, and anything else they can, surreptitiously. And, there are many others whose aim is to crash your computer, just to show the world who's boss. There are even those who want to screw up your computing activities. And then they offer you an expensive software package to remove all the harm that they've done. Needless to say, this society of hackers are never punished enough when caught. My recommended punishment is too horrendous for me to publish here.

Fortunately, there are many free programs out there that can serve to dramatically reduce your exposure to these scum. Information on these program is presented below. All offer their free version, and for a small fee, you can upgrade to their "pro" version. Some require you to initiate the regular scans for "problems", while the pro version can have scheduled scans, and also operate in real time, constantly on guard, keeping tabs on what's happening on your machine.

I personally have the paid versions of all these programs, as the added cost is easily worth the price to me, and I want to keep those companies in business. If you are in the "novice" class of computer users, I suggest you consider the paid versions. Then you will not have to concern yourself with the task of regular scans, important for three of them, as they will be automatic once the program is installed. And most of these programs, in the free

and paid versions, do auto updates, so you don't have to worry about that either. Because of the large amount of threats out there, regular updates are a necessity.

In addition to these security products, I also keep Windows Defender, and Windows Firewall active. All of these appear to coexist nicely.

Remember, there is no single piece of “protection” software that can absolutely give you perfect protection. And even with all of these, something can occasionally sneak through. So don't say to yourself that you don't need any of this, since you are using another well known security protection software package.

## **MALWAREBYTES**

This is an amazing piece of anti-malware software. And, unbelievably, it has several updates each day. The auto-updating feature only looks once daily, which should be fine. The other amazing feature is that there is a forum for this program, which is moderated by someone very knowledgeable, who actually posts replies within minutes to questions posted on the forum. And furthermore, you can get this forum help, even with the free version. The registration cost is \$24.95 for the “pro” version which has realtime protection. The free version requires that you initiate a scan to search for malware, while the paid version requires that you manually do the scan.

Site to download free version of Malwarebytes

<http://www.malwarebytes.org/mbam.php>

Forum for Malwarebytes

<http://www.malwarebytes.org/forums/>

## **SUPERANTISPYWARE**

While this may appear to be the same thing as Malwarebytes, it is not really. Spyware can take many forms, including malicious, and nuisance. Here again, the paid version gives real time protection, and the paid version only works when you run it to search for problems

Site to download free version of Superantispyware

<http://www.superantispyware.com/download.html>

## **WINPATROL**

I discovered this software some years ago. It stands guard, and notifies you when anything attempts to install software which will run at startup, and advises users of changes that programs may be trying to put onto your system. In addition when run, it gives you a tabbed window with a dozen different screens that you can view. The one that I view the most is the “Startup Program” window. This provides a listing of all software that runs when you boot up. Much of this is of course stuff that Windows runs, and needs. But there are usually a large number of software items, that other programs installed, some (most?) of which you probably don't want or need.

But, when you read the filename of an item in question, such as HPZTSBxx.EXE, you can ask yourself what this is. But WinPatrol makes your life easier. I bought the paid version many years ago. When I just double click on the filename, WinPatrol opens up an Internet window, with details on the file in question, and a commentary on its safety et al. The large database for this is all on the WinPatrol site, on the Internet, so the user does not have to do any updating of that database. The free version offers a minimal amount of info, while the paid version offers detailed info.

Let's assume that when you read what the files does, you feel you don't need or want that function. You then have the option of disabling it, or removing it from the startup menu.

When I first installed WinPatrol, I was amazed at the amount of stuff that was installed in the startup listing. Just about any software you might install, adds in stuff to the startup list, without asking you for permission. With WinPatrol installed and running (recommended), anytime a program tries to install startup “stuff”, you will get a message on your screen re that attempt. And in that message, there is a box to click on to get information on what this startup program is. Often, the program is necessary for the software/hardware to properly run, so it must be accepted. But very often, it will be something you really don't want, such as automatically contacting you re sales, and promotions, regularly checking for updates, or a speed loader to reduce the load time for something like Adobe Reader. With WinPatrol, you can always say yes for now, and later go to the listing on the Startup tab, and change it whenever desired.

Site to download free version of WinPatrol

<http://www.winpatrol.com/download.html>

## **AVG ANTIVIRUS**

AVG is one of the most popular anti-virus programs. And AV software is something that every user must have, and must keep updated. The free version is a very powerful program, and it updates the virus database daily. As I noted earlier, no program can be perfect, at any price. But I feel that AVG antivirus, especially the paid version, is about as good as it gets. It's updating can be set to automatic, and its many features make the paid version a very good shield. This is the only program in my listings here that requires paying periodically (every 2 years) to renew the paid license version. Of course, the free version is just that - no charges ever.

Site to download AVG free version

<http://free.avg.com/download>

## **SUMMARY**

There are of course, many programs out there, free and paid to protect your system. I have chosen here to promote the ones that I use, and that I feel are important. You may have a totally different list of security software already in place, and are very happy with. I am not suggesting that you change all that to what I've presented here. But hopefully you will consider adding in some more protection via one or more of the four I've discussed.

## **TWO ADDITIONAL CAVEATS**

For years I have been preaching that users should not leave their machines on overnight, or during any lengthy period of inactivity. Most users have their Internet connection “on” all the time also. This is a great combination to attract hackers.

And, with the typical power used by a home computer, the cost for electricity is about \$18 per month, to leave the system on all the time. This is over \$200 per year, which is a tidy sum. Take the “GREEN” approach, and also the safer approach. Turn off your system when it's not in use.

I always turn off my computer whenever it will be inactive for 15 minutes or longer. And, as I have discussed in the past, I also installed a switch in the ethernet cable line feeding my computer. When I am working, and do not need any online capability, I turn that switch to “OFF”. That way, the outside world cannot access my system, and do anything malicious. If your Internet modem has a “standby switch”, you can also use that.

**If you find this material useful, you may want to download this article in PDF format, from our web site [www.brcs.org](http://www.brcs.org). This allows readers to keep the material either as a PDF file, and/or print it out, and place it in a looseleaf notebook for future reference.**