



It's Not Lunch, But It's Free

Free software should be downloaded from the Internet with caution. Users must beware of viruses and spyware.

But some offerings promise great utility, come from responsible sources and contain no hidden dangers. If you are wary of files offered at third-party sites, and you use virus and antispyware scanning, you can obtain software that will enhance your Internet experience and even protect your computer. Your Internet Service Provider (ISP) is one trustworthy source.

Best of all, this software is free, offered as a service to customers, to entice new clients or to promote sales of versions of the same product with more features.

Disclaimer: Neither the author nor ARIZONA ATTORNEY recommends or guarantees any particular software.

Here are some of the more intriguing offerings.

ANTISPYWARE—Spyware has become so widespread and so harmful that no computer should be without protection. Free protective software includes Ad-Aware (www.lavasoft.com) and Spybot Search and Destroy (www.spybot.info/en/index.html).

Cox offers free software to its customers (www.cox.com/highspeed-internet/spyware.asp). Qwest offers links to two independent sources of free antispyware (www.qwest.com/internet/dslhelp/spyware_detection.html).

ANTISPAM PROTECTION—Many programs are offered, but at least one promises a high level of protection based on “challenge-response.” The recipient’s challenge requires as a condition of completing delivery of the e-mail that the sender enter certain characters in a response. This requires that the sender (1) be human, not a computer, and (2) make a decision and effort to send the particular message. This software is free from www.spamresearchcenter.com. Check your ISP and firewall software, too, to see if they offer free antispam filtering.

SPECIALIZED FORMAT READER—Documents formatted as PDF files, or portable document format files, can only be read with Adobe Reader (www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html). Many court opinions and other published documents are in PDF because they are not merely plain text but image files that convey the original document. The Adobe Reader is a must-have for serious researchers.


FREE E-MAIL—A second e-mail account can help counter spam and a permanent account is helpful if you change Internet Service Providers. Two of the best known are Yahoo and Hotmail, from mail.yahoo.com and www.hotmail.com. But there are many more, some of them listed at sites such as www.emailaddresses.com and www.fepg.net.

BANDWIDTH METERS—Your ISP promised very, very fast downloads. How fast is your service? Bandwidth meters test your speed and provide the result. Some require a software download, and some do not. You can find some here:

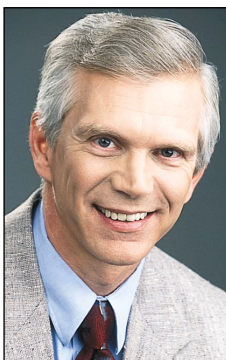
- http://reviews.cnet.com/70047254_70.html
- www.searchplanet.us/bandwidth%20speed.html
- http://reviewszdnet.com.com/Bandwidth_meter/70047254_160.html

FIREWALLS—Firewalls prevent unwanted intrusions into your computer. Free firewalls include: ZoneAlarm Free, Tiny Personal Firewall, Sygate Personal Firewall and Kerio Personal Firewall, all of which are available through www.pcworld.com/downloads. Other sources for many utilities such as firewalls are <http://downloads.zdnet.com> and www.itprodownloads.com.

POPUP BLOCKERS—Are you spending time chasing those little popup windows with your cursor to close them? You can try Pop-Up Stopper Free or Pop-Up Defender, both downloadable at www.pcworld.com/downloads or ISmart Popup Stopper at www.itprodownloads.com. Check with your ISP, too, to learn whether it offers optional popup blocking. Cox offers this feature (www.cox.com/highspeed-internet/blocker.asp), and so does Qwest, if you order its service with MSN Premium.

ENCRYPTION—If you are sending confidential messages via the Internet, you should consider encrypting them to prevent interception by third persons. PGP (“Pretty Good Privacy”) is an advanced “public key” type of encryption. Such programs require that the recipient have both the program and the “public key” to decode messages. PGP is free only for non-commercial use from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (<http://web.mit.edu/network/pgp.html>). PGP for commercial use is sold at www.pgp.com/products/index.html. 

Questions or tips about the Internet? E-mail them to sidebar@cox.net.



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