ROM

Newsletter of the Guildford PC User Group

Editor's Bit
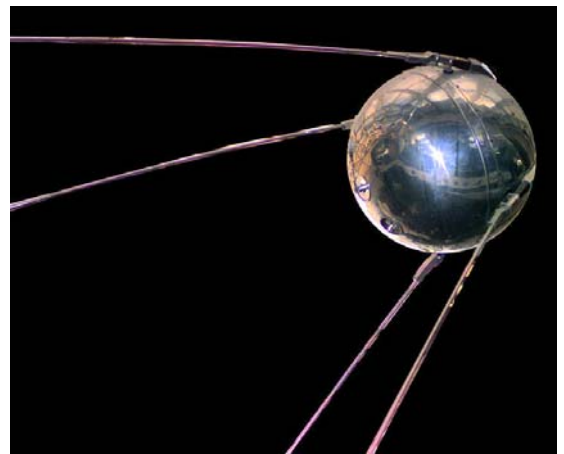
A Big 50th Anniversary

We seem to have anniversaries of one sort of another on a regular basis, the 25 years since the Falklands conflict, the Queen's Silver Jubilee, death of Diana etc, but on 4thth October the fiftieth anniversary of one particular event is celebrated which inaugurated one of the most important features of the 20th Century, an event I still vividly remember from 50-years ago, namely the launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik-1.

As I am one who uses a SatNav to negotiate the wilder parts of the UK that don't appear in a car atlas (I did it recently when I had to visit an obscure address in Windlesham), for those who don't know Windlesham it's an odd place whose main geographical features seem to consist of narrow streets, even narrower lanes, ordinary houses side-by-side with opulent multi-millionaire villas, cars parked on both sides of the road, and in my case the approaches to my destination were along never ending narrow lanes with barely enough room for one car to pass at a time, so quite ghastly! However, Sat-Nav got me there — but I digress. Because fifty years ago this month the Soviet Union stunned the world with the launch of Sputnik-1, the first artificial satellite.

Launch

On 4th October 1957 an R-7 Semyorka rocket lifted off from the Baikonur Cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, carrying Sputnik, the Earth's very first artificial satellite. Sputnik was named from the Russian phrase for "Simple Satellite" (Sputnik Zemli). This date symboli-

cally marked the dawn of Space exploration, and beat the Americans into space by several months, but perhaps the most amazing thing about the spacecraft is that it only took around a month from inception to launch.

In the post-WWII years, rocketry was still an imprecise science. Great leaps were being made on both sides of the Atlantic. In the USSR the world's first interconti-

ROM is now only available as a full-colour .pdf download from the Group web page at:
www.guildfordpcusergroup.co.uk

NEXT MEETING — Monday 8th October 2007 at 7.45 p.m.

Francis Jacques
Microsoft Access & Excel

Those who remember Francis's brilliant Excel demo from last year will be pleased to know he's back.

A keen cyclist and chartered accountant, Francis will be showing how he organises a Bicycle Race with the help of Microsoft Access and Excel to process entries, organise handicaps, produce a start sheet, create envelopes and after the race a result sheet.

Spread the word and please bring a friend — coffee, tea & chocolate biscuits are free.

Meetings are held on the 2nd Monday of each month at 7.45pm at the Stoughton Youth Club and Community Centre (opposite "The Royal" — Pub) Worplesdon Road (A322), Guildford.

Forthcoming Meetings

Monday 12th November 2007 at 7.45 pm
  Wireless Printing. Look no wires! — the latest wireless printing technology in action.
Monday 10th December 2007 at 7.45pm
  Christmas Quiz
Monday 14th January 2008 at 7.45pm
  In arrangement

(Continued from page 1)

nental ballistic missile, the R-7 Semyorka (SS-6 "Sapwood" in NATO parlance) was being developed as part of the arms race against the USA. The R-7 proved its ability to propel several tons of payload over great terrestrial distances, and calculations showed it could launch a smaller mass into orbit. So the go-ahead was given to develop and launch a satellite.

Sputnik-1 was launched on the night of 4th October 1957. The Soviet Union had initially planned a heavier and more complex design for the first satellite. However, under pressure to launch in the International Geophysical Year, the simple and aesthetically pleasing design for Sputnik-1 was chosen.

The satellite was a sphere of aluminium 23-inches (58 cm) in diameter and weighed 184 1b (83.6kg), with four long protruding antennas and it circled the earth once every 96 minutes. The sphere's skin was just 2mm in thickness and it was filled with pressurised nitrogen gas. Internally, the payload consisted of batteries (which made up most of the weight) and a pulsing 1-watt radio transmitter operating on 20MHz and 40MHz. The transmitter was intended to convey simple telemetry about the capsule's temperature and internal pressure by varying the transmitted pulse lengths. Sputnik's mission was largely political — the famous "beep-beep" signal was broadcast on a frequency that anyone with a good shortwave radio could pick up, thus ensuring the widest possible audience, but it was also used to study the physical properties of the upper layers of the Earth's atmosphere.

In October 1957 I was a young RAF airman serving at RAF China Bay on the east coast of Sri Lanka and as soon as the radio frequencies being used were published we tuned in the ATC HF radio and listened to the "beep-beep" signals as it passed overhead. Word soon got around and each time Sputnik was in range a crowd of eager airmen gathered to hear the "beep-beep" signal.

The Reaction

The launch of the world's first satellite grabbed headlines across the globe — except, strangely, in Russia. On the day of the launch, Pravda only carried a small report buried in other news. Western papers, on the other hand, trumpeted about the event: the New York Times, for instance, ran a three line banner headline:

"SOVIET FIRES EARTH SATELLITE INTO SPACE; IT IS CIRCLING THE GLOBE AT 18,000 M.P.H.; SPHERE TRACKED IN 4 CROSSINGS ACROSS THE U.S."

Other papers carried similar headlines. This response took the Soviet Union by surprise, but the following day saw much more reaction in the official Russian press, with a far more triumphant tone to the headlines. After 57 days aloft, Sputnik-1 re-entered the atmosphere and was destroyed. Sputnik-1 was followed a month later on 3rd November 1957 by the launch of Sputnik-2 which carried a small dog, called Laika (meaning "barker"), the first living creature in space (it died on re-entry).

The Americans responded by launching their Explorer-1 satellite a few months later in January 1958.

Subsequent Developments

For a while the USSR held the lead in space -the first man (and woman) in orbit, the first object to orbit (and land on) the moon. But all the while the USA was racing to develop its own space technologies.

By December 1958 the US had placed its first communications satellite into orbit (Project SCORE) and in 1962 Telstar provided a useful transatlantic link with sufficient bandwidth for television signals. And of course by the end of the sixties, the Americans had put men on the moon.

Today, satellites are taken for granted. We can receive TV via a dish pointed at the Sky satellite; most of our internet and telephone traffic is carried around the world by satellites; we see weather pictures from space, use our SatNavs to navigate and use Google Earth to gawp at our houses as seen from space.

But unless you were there at the time there was nothing like the excitement of tuning in a radio to hear the bleeping signal that came from that little aluminium sphere, the first man-made object in space — so Happy 50th Birthday, Sputnik!

Secretary's Meetings Notes

Monday 10th September 2007 - Symantec Ghost 12. On Monday evening 10th September Tony Hawes demonstrated Symantec Norton Ghost 12.

Ghost as a file transfer / back-up program was created in the late 1990s, GHOST being the acronym for "**G**eneral **H**ardware-**O**riented **S**ystem **T**ransfer".

In ROM Aug/Sept 2007 Tony reviewed this latest version of Ghost designed to work with Windows Vista and XP. The previous version, Ghost 10 was reviewed in ROM Apr/May 2006. An "official" version of Ghost 11 was not released by Symantec; they instead released Norton "Save and Restore" compatible with Windows XP and Windows Media Centre Edition. "Save and Restore" is essentially an enhancement of Ghost 10, with the addition of features to allow backup and restoration of individual files. Symantec released a Vista compatible version (Save and Restore 2) earlier this year to coincide with the release of Windows Vista. However both versions of "Save and Restore" are less well featured versions of Ghost 12 that was demonstrated.

As Tony explained, every computer, no matter how carefully maintained is still subject to disaster, whether by viruses, Trojans, faulty files, hard drive failure or some other catastrophe. A regular back up routine should therefore have a high priority. Tony demonstrated by backing up his laptop's hard drive to an external hard drive and proved how easy it was for Ghost 12 to backup files, folders or the entire internal hard drive including the operating system and subsequently be recovered.

By booting from the Ghost 12 CD that comes with the program, he demonstrated how the system could be booted into a reduced Windows interface with a Ghost recovery application, from which it's possible to choose a backup recovery point that allows backups to be recovered even when the computer could not be otherwise booted up.

Also shown was the Ghost 12 facility that allows the cloning of one hard disk to another. A useful facility when it comes to upgrade a small Drive C hard drive

to a new much larger drive. This facility clones the whole drive: operating system, files, applications, the lot, and as demoed it works.

He also gave a demonstration of Seagate's FreeAgent Go. This is a small external 160GB hard drive which includes software that lets you download from your desktop computer your working files like Word, Excel etc., carry them around and work on them elsewhere. Later these updated files can be synced to the appropriate files on your main computer when you return to base. To keep your data safe FreeAgent Go includes an application that offers strong file encryption to protect your content, and allows you sync your files from several PCs — an interesting concept.

Save £561! — Office 2007 Ultimate Edition only £38.95!!!

Microsoft is offering Office 2007 Ultimate edition for a fraction of the regular price to students from now until April 2008.

The price of Office 2007 Ultimate edition is officially £599.99 but the student pricing means eligible students can get it for just £38.95.

If the whole Office 2007 suite at £38.95 is too much for your pocket there is an alternative student offer that allows students to buy a valid one-year subscription licence of Office 2007 for £12.95.
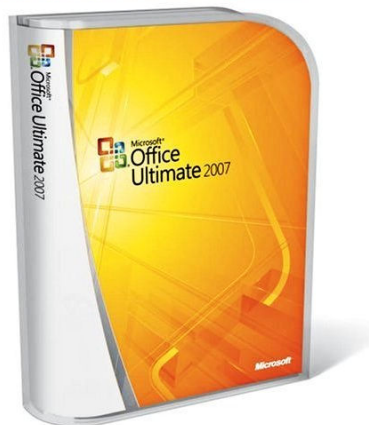
How it works

Students should download the trial version of Office 2007 and install it (see the link in the next column). The trial version will work fully for 25 application launches only. A trial DVD can also be ordered.

Then buy the 'perpetual licence' from the promotion website — you'll be sent an Office 2007 product key to your '.ac.uk' email address. Use that key to 'unlock' your trial version for regular use.

Who can get it?

Students must hold a valid email address at a U.K. educational institution ending in .ac.uk:

(for example: joe.bloggs@rhul.ac.uk)

AND

Be actively enrolled with at least 0.5 course load.

Students must also be able to provide proof of enrolment status (i.e. student card) upon request by Microsoft. If unable to provide proof of enrolment, users will be required to pay the full retail price of Office Ultimate 2007 (approximate ERP £599.99)

So if you're a student and want to save £561 on Office 2007 head over to:

http://www.theultimatesteal.co.uk

What's Included

Microsoft Office Ultimate 2007 (£38.95) With a perpetual license, includes the following applications:

- Access 2007
- Excel 2007
- InfoPath 2007
- Groove 2007
- OneNote 2007
- Outlook 2007 with Business Contact Manager
- PowerPoint 2007
- Publisher 2007
- Word 2007

Nuance's OmniPage 16 — OCR Software Reviewed by Tony Hawes

OVERVIEW

OmniPage 16 Professional

OmniPage 16 Professional allows business professionals to achieve new levels of productivity by eliminating the manual reproduction of documents. Precision OCR analysis, layout detection, Logical Form Recognition (LFR) technology, and advanced security features quickly turn office documents and forms into over 30 different PC applications for editing, searching and sharing.

Custom workflows handle large volumes of documents with a click of the mouse or the push of a button on your scanner or All-in-One device. Robust tools enable you to print to PDF, turn text documents into audio books and add digital signatures to your electronic documents.

OmniPage, the world's most accurate OCR software, now includes PaperPort, the world's most popular desktop document management software. Additionally you get PDF Create! our industry-standard PDF creation software. Both integrate seamlessly for a total document solution.

OmniPage 16 Standard

Don't waste your time re-creating paper documents. Typing a typical 20 page, 6000 word document, takes about 150 minutes for the average person. OmniPage can re-create the same document as an editable digital document in your favourite format in less than 2 minutes. And millions of customers and independent labs agree - OmniPage delivers maximum productivity with greater than 99% character accuracy.

OmniPage makes it easy to re-use existing documents with prefect formatting. Converted documents look exactly like the original – complete with columns, tables, bullets and graphics.

Best of all, any scanning device can now benefit from the power of unlocking and sharing information stored on paper as accurately reproduced digital documents. OmniPage provides the quality and features to get more work out of your current scanner or all-in-one device.

Background

We referred in the last issue of ROM as to the capabilities of the latest version of OmniPage (OmniPage 16). So I'm not going to repeat all the of what was said then but just remind you of some of the major new features claimed by Nuance as to the programs capabilities and then describe how the release version performed in practice.

Its high accuracy and patented innovations have made OmniPage Professional the world's best-selling desktop OCR application for years. The new release of OmniPage Professional strengthens the heart of OCR by deliv-

(Continued from page 3)

ering a 27 percent increase in document conversion accuracy and speed increases of up to 46 percent. Better still, Nuance has integrated its newest technology to take advantage of today's pervasive dual-core processors to deliver an amazing 97 percent speed improvement when comparing OmniPage 15 on a single core system making OmniPage 16 up to 50 percent more accurate and more than 46 percent faster than alternatives.

What's New

OmniPage Professional 16 is also the first desktop OCR application to provide native support for the new open standard Ecma Open XML file formats used by the 2007 Microsoft Office system. Also OmniPage Professional 16 is the first OCR application to provide input and export support for the XML Paper Specification, or XPS, an important new 'electronic paper' format for scanning, sharing, archiving and indexing documents for search applications. Increased speed and accuracy, a simplified user interface, enhanced forms capabilities, XPS and Office 2007 support – all of these features offer time savings benefits to large organizations or individuals. By automating the paper-to-digital conversion and archiving of every kind of document – including letters, contracts, spreadsheets, magazine articles, research reports, technical manuals and more. It works with Windows Vista, Microsoft Office 2007 and Microsoft Office Share-Point Server 2007.

In Use

Installation is straightforward and allows you to choose which applications to install. For example if you've Office 2007 installed it can output OCR'd documents in Office 2007's XPS .DOCX rather than Words .DOC format; you can also choose whether to install the included PaperPort 11 application (Nuance's document management application) and PDF Converter 4 which converts documents to PDF format.

Unlike previous versions which came with only one workflow template, OmniPage 16 now allows you to choose the:

- Classic View that looks like and is similar to previous versions of OmniPage
- Flexible View with panels stacked in a tabbed view and
- Quick Convert View, ideal for novices as this converts a document easily with a couple of clicks and without any indepth knowledge.

Another feature is the included "How To" guides that show you how to scan and OCR a document and output it as a document for saving (and editing) if required. As the How to Guides show, probably better than I can describe, how to process a document, I attach screen grabs showing the various options available, from start to finish.
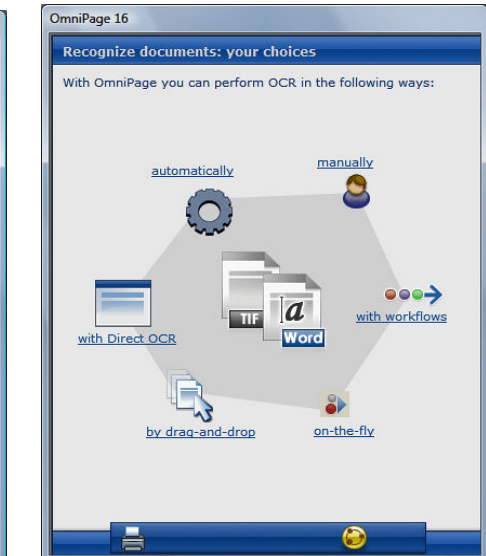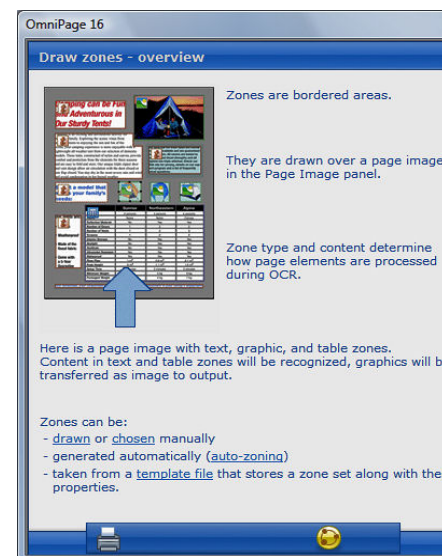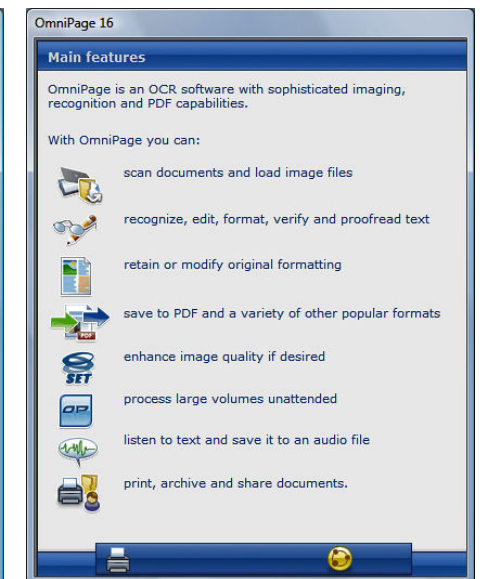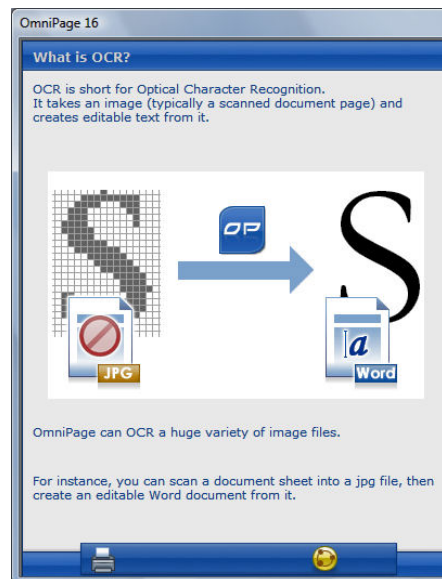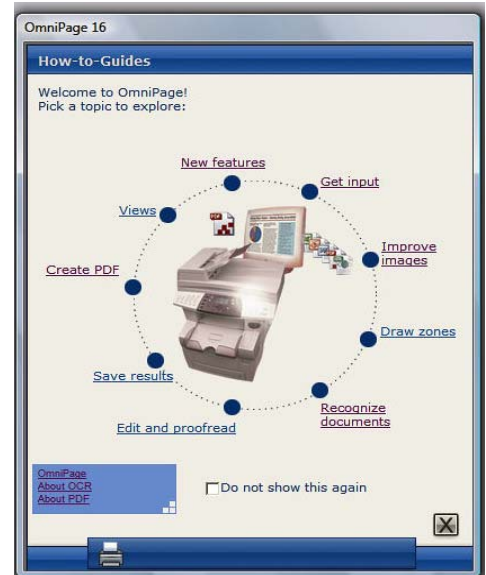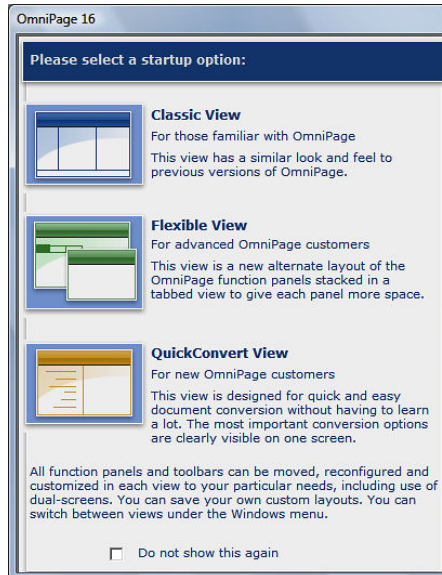
So how did I get on in the real world of OCR'ing a document?

My first scan was of a standard hard-copy Press Release that I wanted to use in ROM. This was simple, I used the Quick Convert View / Process and let OmniPage 16 do its

stuff. See next page bottom right.

Editing and Proofreading Overview

This section discusses the following:

Text Editor Views

Verifying

The Text Editor

Proofreading

Speech mode

Editing

Formatting

Save results (1)

Save to a wide range of file types. Your options include:

Recognition results	Images
documents	image file
spreadsheets	image-only PDF and XPS
audio files (.wav)	

Images and Results together

OPD: the OmniPage file type for storage or later use.

Use Multiple to save both image and text in one operation.

You can also attach your results to e-mails.

Creating PDF files

OmniPage Professional includes a program PDF Create! that gives a higher level of control in creating PDF files. Start this program

- in the ScanSoft program group (Windows Start menu)

- in the shortcut menu of selected files

- in the PDF Create! menu or toolbars of target applications

- by choosing File > Print from any print-capable Windows application and choosing ScanSoft PDF Create!

You can

create one PDF per file

overlay files as one PDF

combine files into one PDF

Resulting PDFs are viewable, searchable, printable, and editable in a PDF editor.

Digital Camera (1)

1. Connect the camera.

2. Download pictures.

3. Click Load Digital Camera Files in the Get Page drop-down list. If you use this, 3D Deskew and resolution enhancement are performed on images.

4. Use the SET tools in the Image Enhancement window to check the automatic 3D Deskew. If necessary, adjust the detected grid lines to match image contents.

Digital Camera (2)

Digital camera pictures should be taken with at least 4 Megapixels.

Advice for good results:

20-25 cm / 10-20 "

1. Lighting: Clear, even lighting with good contrast is important (no shaded parts).
2. Stable camera position: Use a tripod or other steadying device.
3. Camera axis: perpendicular to the page.
4. Correct distance: Minimum: around 20-25 cm / 10-20 inches. In macro mode it can be much less.
5. Resolution (pixel density): Depends on camera resolution, distance between camera and page, and character size. The higher the resolution, the sharper the image.

Improve images

Automatically

Some image enhancing operations can run automatically. Auto-deskew and auto-despeckle during image loading can be specified in the Tools > Options > Process panel. Auto-brightness and auto-rotation (orientation) during scanning can be specified in the Tools > Options > Scanner panel.

Manually

You can enhance the quality of images (scanned or loaded) using the SET (Scanner Enhancement Technology) tools.

Click this button in the Image toolbar to display the Image Enhancement window with the SET tools.

Crop - removes everything outside selected area

Rotate - rotates by 90, 180 or 270 degrees or flips image

Deskew - straightens image

Improve images for OCR and photos

Use the following SET tools to enhance the black-and-white images created by OmniPage for OCR:

Despeckle - removes dots, spots up to 1 or 2 pixels large.

OCR Brightness - this optimizes the OCR images generated from color or grayscale originals. This tool has no effect if the original image was B/W.

Dropout color - this enables a chosen color to be dropped when preprinted color forms are scanned or loaded. Then the fixed texts and boxes etc. can be dropped from the images, leaving only the respondent data visible and ready for OCR.

3D Deskew - this lets you view the results of 3D deskewing and modify them if necessary. It is designed for digital camera input.

Use these SET tools to improve photos or pictures. Adjust settings on the sliders.

Brightness and Contrast

Hue / Saturation / Lightness

Resolution

A standard scan of a paper document — Original scanned document on the left, OCRd version on the right — a perfect 100% error-free copy in editable format

I next imported an image, a .JPG of a document I'd copied with my camera at the National Archives at Kew. Not as accurate as the paper scanned document, but more than adequate for my purposes — think of all that typing if one had transcribed it by hand! OmniPage has tagged in yellow unrecognised letters. The relative lack of accuracy can be put down to the less than optimal camera resolution; OmniPage suggests an 8MP camera whereas my camera is a only 5MP.

3D Capture

And finally a chance to see how well the 3D Capture for Digital Cameras feature works.

3D Capture automatically corrects for the distortion of the angle and rotation of the camera, as well as for the curve of the page in an open book – making OmniPage 16 a practical solution for digital camera capture.

On the whole this works well, although the output had some difficulty in recognising a couple of words as can be seen in the before and after example below of the photo of an open book with a deep spine and skewed image.
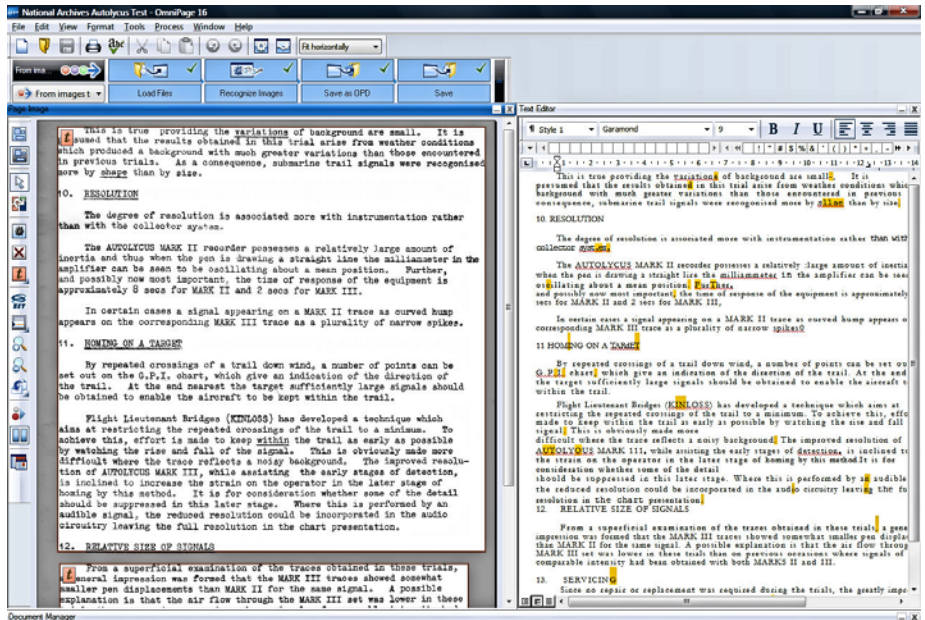

Photo image (.jpg) as processed by OmniPage 16. Original on the left, output on the right. Note highlighted unrecognised letters.

Original photo. Of a book with a deep spine and deliberately skewed for test purposes

Conclusions (and Emily!)

I haven't had time to review the "Create PDF" or "PaperPort" features but will do so later, I was however, impressed with the ease with which I was permitted to review the OCRd output by using the speech module (F10). The text is read aloud by "Emily", a lady with a somewhat deep but pleasant English accent that has a hint of American in the timbre of her voice. Her dulcet tones made proof reading a pleasure!

With its many new and improved features OmniPage Pro 16 is an impressive piece of work, I'm not sure that the results I obtained really justify the claim that its up to 27% better than earlier versions, but it is still accurate enough for my purposes. The new 3D Capture and De-skewing feature with its ability to recognise and convert into readable text otherwise problematical images is in my view an excellent and worth-while bonus.

If you don't need the PaperPort or Create PDF features the standard version is very much cheaper.

Pricing and Availability

OmniPage 16 Professional. £220.48.

OmniPage 16 Standard version £68.98

Prices from Amazon.co.uk and include VAT and delivery.

Photo of book de-skewed by OmniPage 16. Note how the words nearest the margin and almost unrecognisable deep in the spine have been processed — which apart from a few mistaken letters / words — provide an impressively accurate transcription of the poor original.

NewsBytes

NERO 8

Preliminary details from Nero's press release.

"Nero 8 – Create and Manage Your Digital Life"

Nero 8, the newest version of the world's best-selling multimedia suite, brings the digital world to your PC. Now it's easy to organize and manage all your multimedia files, as well as create and edit new digital content. Nero's sleek design and user-friendly tools make completing projects fun and enjoyable.
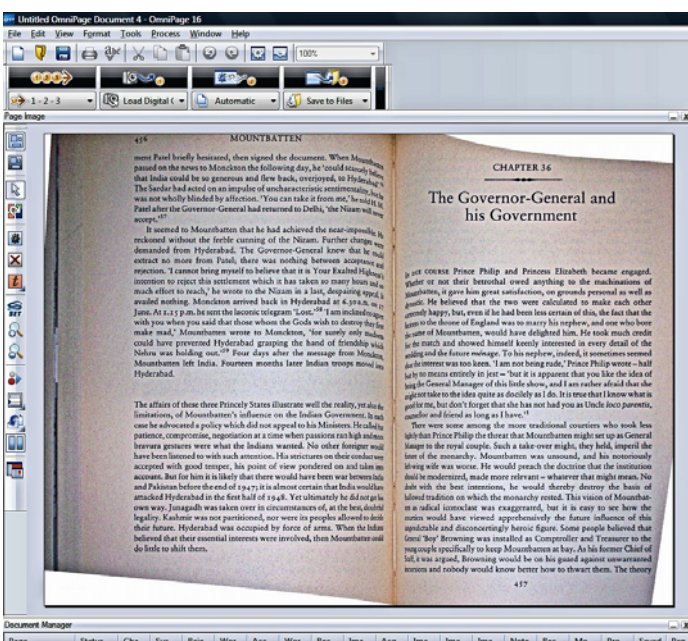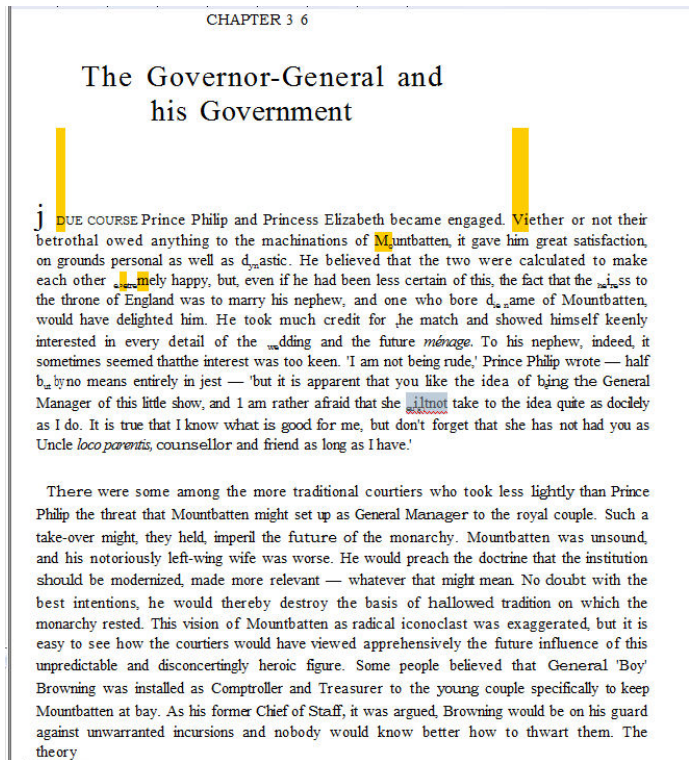
- Direct access to all features from the project launcher
- High Definition format support
- Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 streaming features
- Blu-ray Disc and HD DVD burning support
- SecurDisc data protection support
- Copy a disc with just one click
- Graphics optimized for Windows Vista
- Continual free updates

New! Nero StartSmart makes creating projects simple and fun. Nero StartSmart, the project launcher for Nero 8, lets you directly access features and perform one-click functions. The intuitive interface makes creating and managing digital projects easy and enjoyable. Optimized for use with Windows Vista, Nero StartSmart even has an integrated newsfeed system.

New! Easy data recovery. Now you can recover and save your data on rewritable discs quickly and easily before further disc damage occurs.

New! Online Service. Want to share your life online? With Nero 8, you can import and share photos and videos with one click to and from online communities such as My Nero, YouTube, and MySpace.

New! Fast application start-up. With Nero 8, applications now start faster than ever before!

New! Video editing features. The features within Nero 8 bring you even more opportunity to author and manage your video files. Use a variety of new menu templates and edit your High Definition videos easily with professional results.

Home Entertainment. With Nero Media-Home, you can organize and oversee all your multimedia files directly on your TV set in the comfort of your living room. Use your PC as a video recorder. With EPG support in Nero 8, you will never miss another episode of your favourite show!

Stream photos, videos, and music over an Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 and enjoy High Definition quality in every room in the house!

Optimised for Windows Vista. Nero has a variety of features that make working with Windows Vista even better. Such as copy discs with just one click with the Nero DiscCopy gadget in the Windows Vista Sidebar. Find your audio, video, and photo files on the first attempt, even without having to open a single file! The Rich Preview window on the right-hand side of Windows Explorer displays the contents of each file with a single click! Price £49.98 at Amazon.co.uk.

Laurence Fenn will be reviewing Nero 8 in the next issue of ROM.

LOGITECH

Logitech have launched a whole raft of new 2007/2008 products. At a recent press launch a couple of new products in particular caught my eye that I've listed below, but there are many others that can be seen at Logitech's web site at:

http://www.logitech.com

Logitech QuickCam Pro 9000

Get razor-sharp images with Carl Zeiss optics and premium autofocus

The Logitech QuickCam Pro 9000 webcam combines Carl Zeiss optics with autofocus technology for improved image quality, even in the most extreme close-ups. Additionally, a five-element glass lens, true two-megapixel sensor that can capture eight-megapixel photos and High-

Definition (HD) video make the video communication experience better than ever before.

Key Features

- Carl Zeiss optics ensure the highest quality images
- Five-element lens – containing two glass elements – provide pixel-perfect sharpness and reduced distortion
- Premium autofocus system automatically tracks motion and refocuses images in less than three seconds without the inconvenience of manual focusing
- True two-megapixel sensor can capture eight-megapixel photos (with software interpolation)
- Support for 720p HD video format
- Webcam can record to disc at resolution of 960 x 720 (4x3)
- Record video at up to 30 frames per second
- Logitech RightLight 2 technology adjusts intelligently to produce the best possible image, even in difficult lighting situations such as side lighting or back lighting
- Integrated mic with Logitech RightSound technology eliminates echo and background noise
- Logitech Video Effects software allows personalized conversations by using 3D avatars, face accessories and fun filters that mimic actual facial expressions and motions
  Price: £69.99

Logitech Keyboard Design Delivers Comfort in a Familiar Shape

The new Logitech Cordless Desktop Wave and the Logitech Wave Keyboard feature the innovative Logitech Comfort Wave Design, which increases keyboard comfort for Mac and PC users who want to do more, more comfortably.

Logitech combined three elements in its new design to enhance comfort without requiring people to change the way they type: an innovative wave key-frame design, a U-shaped constant curve and a cushioned, contoured palm rest. In comparison to ergonomic keyboards, people can use a Wave keyboard immediately – there is no learning curve. The Comfort Wave Design guides hands and cradles fingers to create a naturally comfortable

typing experience.

Logitech AudioHub Notebook PC Speakers

Logitech Notebook PC Speakers Deliver Exceptional Audio in a Breakthrough, Compact Design

The AudioHub combines a unique 2.1 one-piece speaker system and three integrated Hi-Speed USB ports in a compact design that fits neatly behind most notebooks.

AudioHub back view

AudioHub front View

Logitech AudioHub in situ

Offering notebook users exceptional digital audio, the AudioHub speaker system features an adjustable one-piece, three-chamber speaker system with an integrated subwoofer that creates balanced audio with clear highs and solid lows. And a useful Mute button turns off the sound without cutting power to the integrated USB hub.

To help people manage their peripherals, the AudioHub offers three built-in Hi-Speed USB ports. And when people want to take their notebooks with them, the AudioHub makes it easy to disconnect their setup by simply unplugging the USB cord attached to the computer.

On the base of the AudioHub, a convenient cable management system allows people to easily pass cables from their devices to a USB port. Along the back of the AudioHub, a cable hook efficiently manages cable clutter.

At just three and a half inches in height, the AudioHub presents a sleek, low-profile design that fits almost anywhere in the home – even in the living room. And the AudioHub speaker system's unique adjustable-width speakers effectively position the satellites around most notebooks.

Pricing and Availability

The Logitech AudioHub notebook speakers are expected to be available beginning in October, for a suggested UK retail price of £169.99.

MCAFEE

McAfee has launched what they call "The Most Comprehensive Protection Available"

McAfee's next-generation security is available in three different suites: McAfee Total Protection 2008, McAfee Internet Security Suite 2008, and McAfee VirusScan Plus 2008.

McAfee Total Protection is the most comprehensive consumer security product on the market and features all of McAfee's protections in one suite.

It provides real-time protection against viruses, spyware and hackers, along with McAfee SiteAdvisor advanced warning protection. Specific technologies include anti-virus, anti-spyware, a two-way firewall, anti-phishing; McAfee SystemGuards, which watch the PC and warn about specific behaviours that may signal virus, spyware, or hacker activity; Rootkit scanning, which detects and removes rootkits and other malicious applications that hide from Windows and other anti-virus programs; Script Scanner which blocks malicious scripts and other exploits while a consumer surfs the Web; and Shedder, which allows users to digitally "shred" confidential files. It also provides protection against online identity theft, and offers anti-spam protection, and parental controls that allow parents to set individual time limits and restrictions for each child, and includes powerful image analysis that prevents children from viewing inappropriate images.

In addition to all of the features listed above, McAfee Total Protection also offers powerful security features like Link Checker that checks the safety of links in popular email and instant messaging applications along with Protected Mode that blocks access to dangerous 'red' and 'yellow'-rated Web sites without a password. In addition, McAfee Total Protection provides features like Easy Network that makes it easy for consumers to set up and manage home networks and share printers and files. McAfee Total Protection also includes Network Manager that allows consumers to view the security status on other PCs connected to the home network and fix security issues with a single mouse click. A backup feature is also included that protects and restores files, photos and vital records on an external hard drive or recordable CDs or DVDs.

McAfee Internet Security Suite 2008 includes all of the protections above with the exception of Link Checker, Protected Mode, and Easy Network.

McAfee VirusScan Plus 2008 is McAfee's entry level suite, featuring anti-virus, anti-spyware, a two-way firewall, anti-phishing, McAfee SystemGuards, Rootkit scanning, Script Scanner and Shredder.

All McAfee suites include PC health features to help consumers eliminate the clutter from their computer, and McAfee's unique security-as-a-service model.
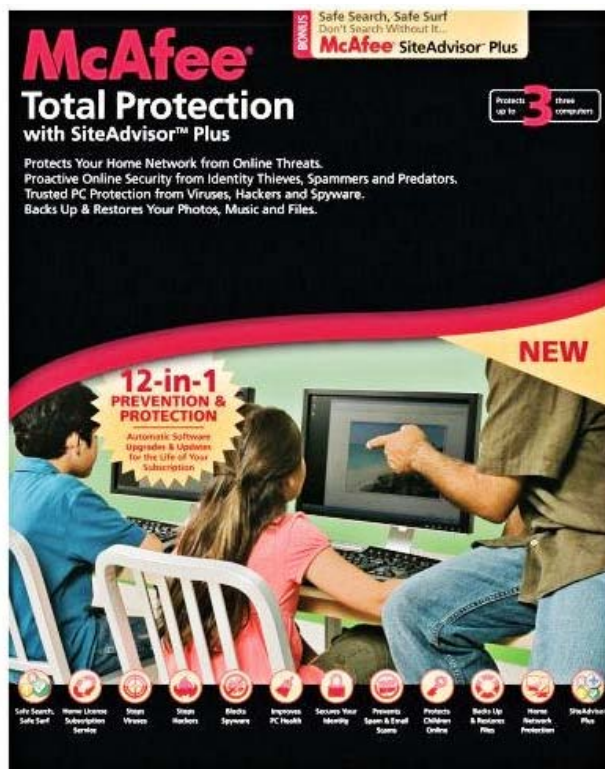
Pricing and Availability

McAfee Security Services are available at retail outlets with pricing as follows:

McAfee Total Protection 2008 £45.99 for up to 3 users. Additional licenses for family members are available for an introductory price of £5 for each license.

McAfee Internet Security Suite 2008: £37.99 for up to 3 users. Additional licenses for family members are available for an introductory price of £5 for each license.
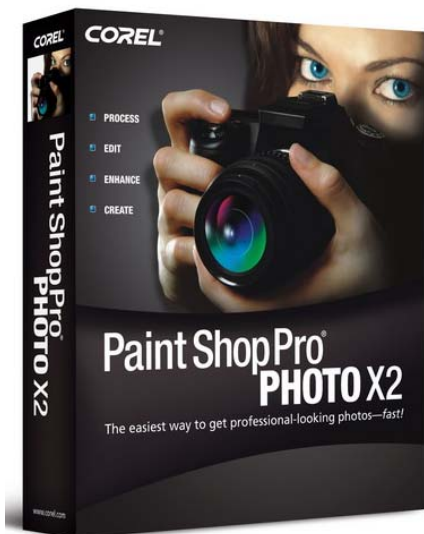
McAfee VirusScan Plus 2008: 1-User: £30.99, 3-User: £34.99. Additional licenses for family members are available for an introductory price of £5 for each license.

Prices from Amazon.co.uk and include VAT and free delivery. Lower upgrade pricing is available.

Corel Paint Shop Pro Photo X2

Reviewed by Laurence Fenn

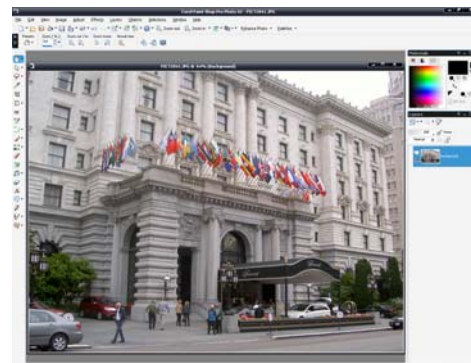Editing with the new Graphite interface (left) and without (right).

I have watched in interest the development of Paint Shop Pro from its humble beginnings in 1992 as a shareware product by JASC Software. Corel took over the company in 2004 and have continued to develop the software in competition to the vastly more expensive Adobe Photoshop. Whilst some of the features of the new X2 version are an improvement over the XI release of last September, some are not.

Apart from the fact that version 12 (as this is) should be written as XII if Corel are going to stick to their roman numeral numbering, I found a few problems with the software just after installation. As with the other versions, it takes no notice of any previous versions on your system, so you can install version X2 (as I will call it) along with the previous XI or any other previous incarnation. Some software packages will see previous versions installed on system and offer to remove them during the installation. There's no good or bad thing about this, but with a graphics program you're unlikely to need to have several different versions.

Photo Downloader

A system tray icon appeared which turned out to be the photo downloader. Designed to help transfer photos from cameras and memory cards, this is a duplication of the functions of software usually included with digital cameras (certainly with the ones I have owned or reviewed). If the software is aimed at people who don't know much about editing pictures, they are not going to know how to remove any automatic downloading program included with their own camera. I don't bother with the docking station (and subsequent automatic photo downloads) with my camera as I have a card reader. I put in the SD or Compact Flash card from the camera and Win-

dows detects it and asks what I want to do with it. The Photo Downloader replaces the autorun feature, and can detect pictures on CDs, cameras and memory cards. It can copy the pictures to a folder of your choice, with a subfolder named after the date or your own, and it can also rename the pictures. You can decide to start X2, Express Lab or Windows Explorer to view the pictures.

Alternative Interfaces

Running the program for the first time shows the new Graphite interface. Rather than using the standard coloured interface that all your other programs will use (based on any theme you may have set), this uses a dark grey background with white writing, designed to make the photos look their absolute best while the user edits them. Several programs 'skin' themselves to make the interface look different, but call me old fashioned, but I prefer the look of the normal interface. Thankfully, you can just untick the 'use Graphite Interface' option in a drop down menu to use the normal menu colours. It can make a difference to how your photo looks just by the fact you have a dark background on the interface and workspace.

HDR Photo Merge

A new feature is the HDR Photo Merge. Some cameras allow you to takes several pictures with different exposures and this function allow you to merge them together to create a composite image with greater shadow and highlight. This technique is known as bracketing, and will only work with certain cameras or if you use a tripod when taking your shots. As my camera is one of those old fashioned types that can only take one picture at a time with the settings I make, I couldn't test this feature for myself. If I want to create a high contrast image I'll edit an existing one rather than combining several shots. Other graphics programs have this feature as well, but this is not something the average consumer will need.

Express Lab

Express Lab

Express Lab is a new function that places Paint Shop Pro's main photo editing tools into a simpler interface. You can select it from the menu or within the Organiser. I found that Express Lab only works if the Organiser is allowed to catalogue the folder where the images are. As I had several compilation discs of images I did not want to catalogue, I set a general folder of just the drive letter to stop the Organiser slowing down my computer as it searched the drive for the pictures. When I started the Express Lab and clicked on Get Photos, you have the choice of Folders or Organiser. The latter will only show the folders you have told it to add to the catalogue (or rather the ones you have not excluded). The former shows the folder structure from My Computer and allows you the select any folder. I did this, but Express Lab did not open any pictures as I had set an exclude rule.

The following file functions are available: File Save, File Save As, Normal Viewing, Fit Image To Window, Zoom, Pan Tool, Straighten tool, Crop Tool, Smart Photo Fix, Makeover Tool, Clone Brush, Red Eye Tool, Rotate Right, Rotate Left, Delete and Help Topics. There is no sharpening tool and no resize tool. One of the common tasks I need is to resize a set of images for publishing on the web, but you cannot use Express Lab to do this. When you exit the Express Lab, the last image you were working on is left loaded in

X2. This is not surprising as I'm sure the Express Lab is using the main program to make the edits, but presenting the user with a different interface.

"Thinnify" Function

Apart from improving the touch up features like the sun tan effect, Corel have added a Thinnify function to make people look thinner. It works by reducing the width of a subject that you click on, without reducing the width of the entire image. The selective reduction graduates the effect but the background is affected slightly. It doesn't work unless the person is standing and by themselves and is really a gimmick. Depending on how the subject is positioned you can end up with someone who looks thinner but has shortened legs or fat arms. To really produce this effect you would to need to cut out the person as a separate layer and alter that. Then you would need to clone the original picture to remove the subject. It can be done, but it is a complex task, so I suppose the one click option is a quick simple method.

The Eye Drop is supposed to remove bloodshot eyes, but I found it very inaccurate. The only option you have is strength (from 1 to 100) even though there is a size option shown but is not active. Clicking on the red part of the eye did whiten the eye, but the effect leaked onto the face, sometimes lightened the whole face. The Toothbrush tool, used for whitening teeth, has exactly the same effect on the picture. I had more success removing the red lines using the Blemish tool.

Black and White Film Effect

The Black and White Film effect has changed to give you a complete choice of filter colour. Before you only had a drop down of Red, Green, Yellow, Orange, Blue or None with a strength amount and two controls of Brightness and Clarify to adjust the contrast. The contrast of the final image can be enhanced and depending on the tone of colours certain objects will stand out more. The effect could also be done using the contrast or histogram function to change the tone, and then reduce the saturation; this does most of that in the one dialog.

Watermark Function

The Watermark function has added a Visible Watermark function to the Embed and Read options. This allows you to select an image and place it in a corner, centre it or even tile it and select the size, opacity and whether to use an emboss effect. If you use a bitmap or image without any transparency, it does not detect or allow you to select a transparent colour. I created a simple copyright notice and saved it as a PNG file with a transparent background. It only worked if I used a light colour for the writing; otherwise the entire background was

Watermark Function

loaded as black as well as the writing (resulting in just a black rectangle). It is far easier to create a new layer on your image and create your watermark there as you have more flexibility

The Organiser

The Organiser catalogues your photo collection, but I found it slowed my system down considerably. I foolishly organise my photos so I know where they are, and organise the folders appropriately so I don't need to catalogue them. If I want to browse the photos to find a particular one then this is fine, but I don't need the program to search for all the photos. I especially didn't like the option of it searching for the photos even when the program was closed down. I tend to collect my photos and then burn them to a DVD when I have around 4.36 GB worth and then start the process again, so I don't have my entire collection on the hard disk. Despite this, the program was noticeably slower until I set an exclusion to prevent the program from cataloguing the entire hard disc. Not everyone has a super fast system, and even though my system is not that slow, the default settings almost made the program unusable.

Resize Dialogue

The resize dialogue has been redesigned, and I found it less helpful than before. You cannot easily see the percentage change you are making when resizing the image, which I found useful. You do have a sharpen control, which I suppose will mean I don't have to unsharpen an image after making it smaller, which I used to do in the previous version.

The Crop tool has changed slightly as you cannot grab the side of the rectangle to change the area you want to crop. You can only use the anchor points at the corners and the middle of the sides. You can crop to a new image,
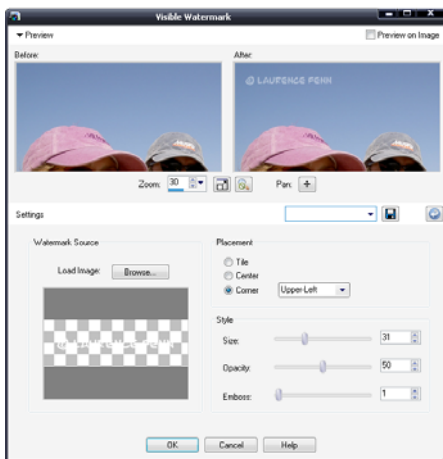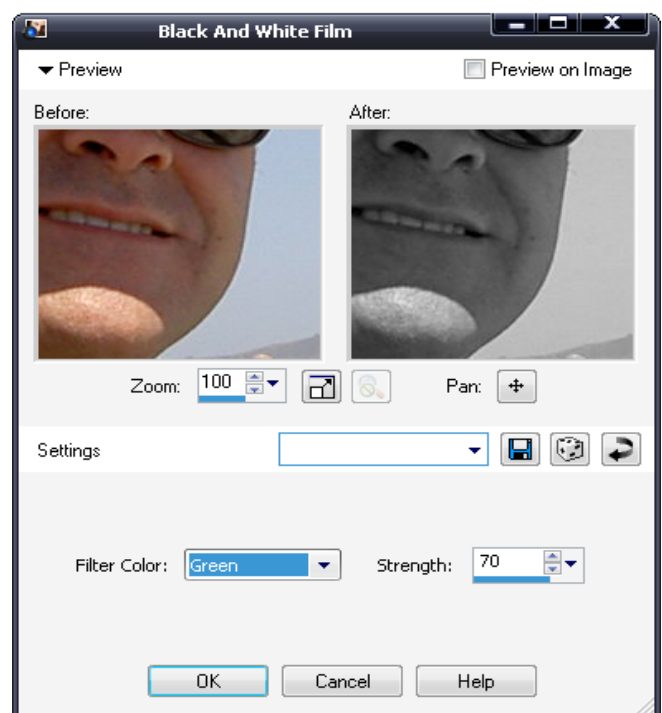
Black & White Film effect in X2 (left) and previous version (XI — right).

which is quicker than the old method of making a selection and then doing a copy and paste as new image. If you scan in several photos at once, you can crop the image into the individual images.

Layer Styles

Layer Styles is a new feature that lets you apply a style to the layer. This effect changes according to the contents of the layer. Previously if you added some vector text to an image, it had to be converted to a raster layer (so you couldn't edit the text) if you wanted to apply an effect to it. Now you can select the Layer Styles tab on the layers palette and tick a box to add Reflection, Outer Glow, Bevel, Emboss, Inner Glow and Drop shadow effect. You can adjust the size, opacity and colour (actually spelt color in the dialog) and in those of Bevel, Emboss and Drop Shadow you can change the direction by moving a pin on a
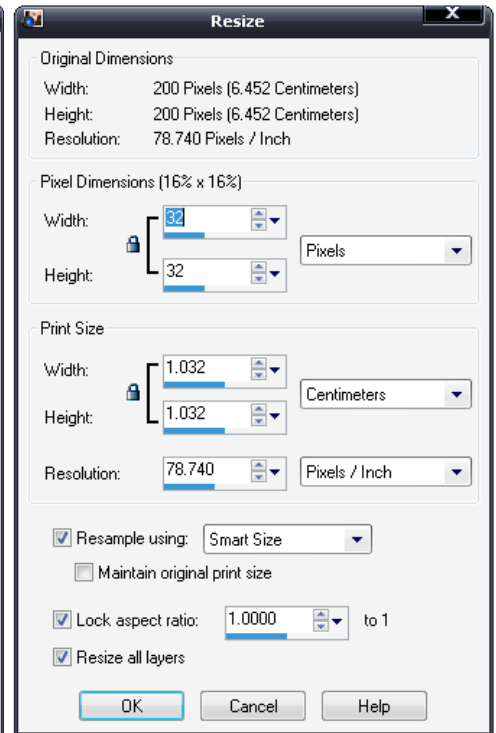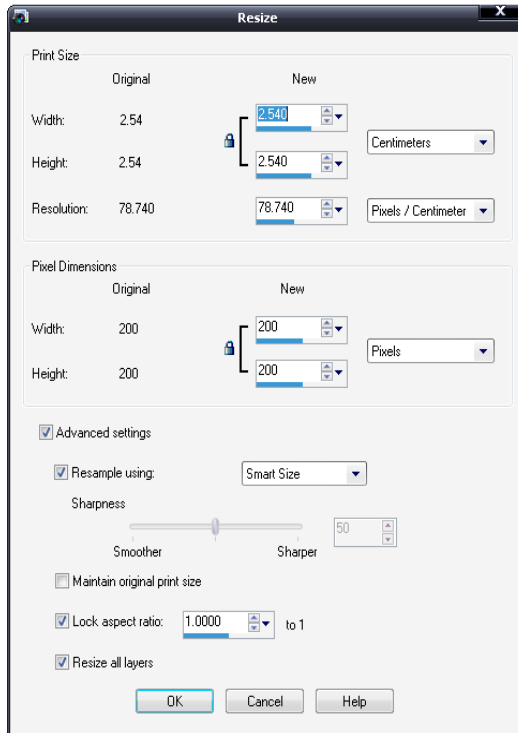
Resize Tool X2 (left) XI (right).
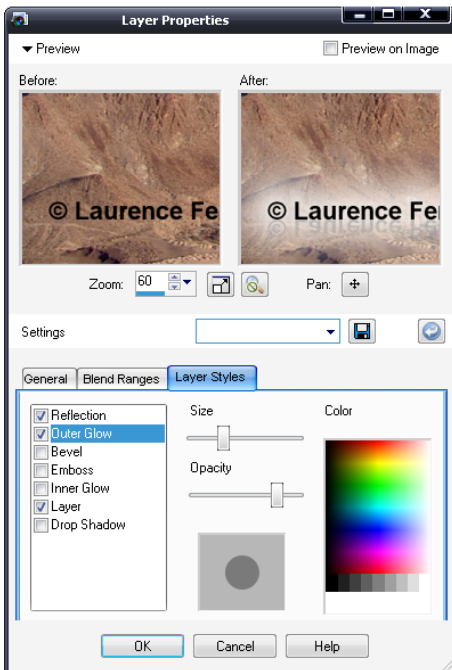
Layer Styles Tab

sphere. This is much smaller than on the controls dialog for these effects when you select them from the 3D Effects menu, and does not include the vertical and horizontal offset which you can use to fine tune the position. I could not create a drop shadow effect that was even close to the text layer I added using the Layer Styles, but the other effects were fine.

Save For Office gives you optimisation for Desktop Printing, Professional Printing and Screen or email which changes the maximum dimensions of the image as well as the dpi (for image quality). You can choose the filename of course, but are limited to BMP, JPG, PNG, TIF or WPG file formats in the dialog. This has also been

added to a Special Copy function, so you can copy and paste images directly into documents, having them optimised before you paste them in.

Auto-Preserve Originals prevents you from losing the original image if you have edited it, by creating a new folder in the folder where the image is. The original image is copied there, and the editing version replaces the image in the original location. If you open up the edited version, you can restore to the original version, but this cannot be undone. Your edits will be lost as the original file is copied over your edited copy. I would have thought a simple re-name with a copy in the same directory would have been an easier option rather than creating another directory.

After going through the settings and turning off the Auto Preserve, stopping the Organiser from cataloguing my images (even after the program has been closed, which it will try to do unless you tell it not to) and stopping the Photo Downloader, I found that saving images seems to take longer for a while, whether I'm editing an existing image or saving a new image that I've just scanned in. The images did not have any layers and the format I chose was JPG. The program will warn you if you save an image with layers in a format that does not support it but I couldn't see any reason why the program would take so long to save any image. Editing the image exactly the same way using version XI and then saving it was much quicker, but I had completely switched off the Organiser in that version. It was only the next day when I started editing existing images did the save feature seem quicker. It may have a been a bug in my system, but certainly the extra programs and services set to run automatically by the default settings of X2 did-

n't help.

Conclusions

I couldn't really recommend upgrading from XI to X2, as the changes are minimal and the tweaks to some of the functions are minor. The new interface can make a difference to the way you see your photos but that's not a good enough reason to upgrade. However, if you do not have a previous version, then Paint Shop Pro Photo X2 (and I wish they would come up with a shorter name) it is excellent for editing your pictures, and is cheaper than the main competition of Photoshop. You still get the Learning Centre which guides you through the many functions if you do not know what to do, and there are always the Lynda.com training videos on the CD.

Corel MediaOne Plus

Paint Shop Pro Photo X2 also includes the new Corel MediaOne Plus program for making slide shows and collages from photos and video. Or rather it was supposed to, but at the time of release (at least with the review copy I was trying) it is not included on the disc. It is available as a special download, but when I installed X2 it had not yet been released. A few weeks later I saw it was available on the web site, but I could not find a link to download it, even after registering X2. Despite mentioning that the program is available as a special download on the PSPX2 page, there was no link to follow, only one for the trial Starter version. I had to send an email to support, but within the day Corel had sent back a link to a page with a serial number and a link for the 240Mb download.

Pricing and Availability

£68.99 inc VAT and Free delivery from Amazon.co.uk

F-Secure Internet Security Suite 2008

Reviewed by Tony Hawes

This is the time of year when anti-virus and security suite vendors launch their latest offerings to see us through the following 12-months. Symantec Internet Security Suite 2008, McAfee Total Protection 2008 and F-Secure with Internet Security 2008 are just three that I've been told of. I was recently asked to review F-Secure's Internet Security Suite 2007, so said yes, I'd give it a go to see how it compares.

I'm a great believer in simplicity and an easy to install and use Anti-Virus package complete with a Firewall, AntiSpam, AntiPhishing and possibly a couple of other enhancements is an attractive proposition and would suite me down to the ground. According to F-Secure's publicity their Internet Security 2007 has all the tools required to protect my computer from possible nasties that want to access and infect my computer and steal all my personal details.

F-Secure's Claims

- **Protects your computer against viruses, worms and unknown attacks.** With daily automatically updated virus protection from the world-renowned F-Secure Data Security Laboratory and F-Secure DeepGuard technology that protects you against zero-day attacks and other future threats, you can safely use your computer, now and tomorrow.

- **Detects and removes spyware from your computer.** F-Secure Internet Security detects and removes secretly installed software from your computer better than ever before, ensuring that your system is running smoothly and clean of spyware.

- **Protects your computer against hackers**. You can keep your private data to yourself with the personal firewall that stops hackers from breaking into your computer.

- **Helps you stay free from spam e-mail and phishing attempts.** F-Secure Internet Security filters unwanted spam and e-mail schemes designed to steal your private information.

- **Protects your children against unwanted Internet content.** F-Secure Internet Security ensures that your children or teenagers do not enter objectionable sites or surf the Internet when you are not around.

Installation

My routine before installing new review software is to create a System Restore point so that should anything go wrong I could quickly revert the computer back to its original configuration, so having done this I

F-Secure Internet Security 2008 — Main access screen

went ahead and installed the program.

Installation was straightforward and essentially the only real option was whether I'd like to install the parental control module, but as young and vulnerable children don't have access to my computer I declined this option. The install routine also checked and suggested that my current AntiVirus and Firewall application should be replaced by theirs — which I agreed to.

In Use

Once installed it went online to update the virus definitions/signatures and then suggested I do a full scan of my computer, again I said yes, and knowing with the number of files and amount of data on my computer that this would take a while, went and had lunch. Lunch finished F-Secure was finished too with no anomalies or reports of any iffy or infected files to be found.

After this updated definitions are downloaded daily, with no apparent impact on speed or performance with updates being done in the background with no manual intervention necessary.

File Scanning

F-Secure's anti-virus (AV) and Spyware detection scans files on access and on demand, the later such as if you want to check a particular source such as a CD etc for infected files. You define what you want the AV to do should it find an infected file such as Delete it, Quarantine it , report it to F-Secure etc. When doing a virus and spyware scan, F-Secure utilises their BlackLight rootkit protection technology just in case a rogue (or even legitimate) program attempts to hook itself surreptitiously deep inside your OS.

AntiVirus Routine Scans

To maintain a good AV routine, scans can be scheduled to run daily, weekly, or monthly. If you are working on your computer and don't want to be interrupted scans can be delayed with an option for the scans to be delayed until the system has been idle for 5, 15, 30, or 60 minutes.

Incoming and outgoing e-mails are scanned automatically for viruses just in case something nasty has been aimed at you without your knowledge.

DeepGuard Technology

F-Secure DeepGuard technology is a new feature that greatly reduces the risk of previously unknown zero-day threats being able to do damage. Instead of just analysing new programmes once when they enter the system, F-Secure DeepGuard will persistently monitor the behaviour of software in a real-time mode, scanning for suspicious program behaviour and stopping activities that might pose a risk. It combines several proactive technologies together, bringing an exceptional level of protection against any previously unknown threats.

Free Update to 2008 Version of F-Secure Internet Security.

During my tests F-Secure launched the 2008 version of Internet Security. I downloaded the latest version and installed it over the exiting 2007 version with no trouble at all, which means I now have the most up-to-date version installed. The information box showed that my licence would still expire one year from the date of the original 2007 version installation so no free extension then!

To start with I received a number of pop-up

boxes on screen as software tried to access the internet looking for updates etc. But gradually these dropped off as the program learnt that these were legitimate operations.

AntiSpam

As a Vista user there is a problem with F-Secure's AntiSpam options. As most readers will know Microsoft Vista replaced Outlook Express as its e-mail client with Windows Mail, and although F-Secure identifies and can import the address book of friends whose e-mails should be allowed through without checking for spam, this only works with Windows XP and Outlook Express.

Vista's Windows Mail address book of "friendly" correspondents cannot be imported — yet. However, a call to F-Secure's help desk and what sounded like an Indian gentleman probably in Bangalore told me the facility of being able to import a list of 'friendly' addresses from Windows Mail would feature in a future release of Internet Security Suite, so we'll have to wait for this.
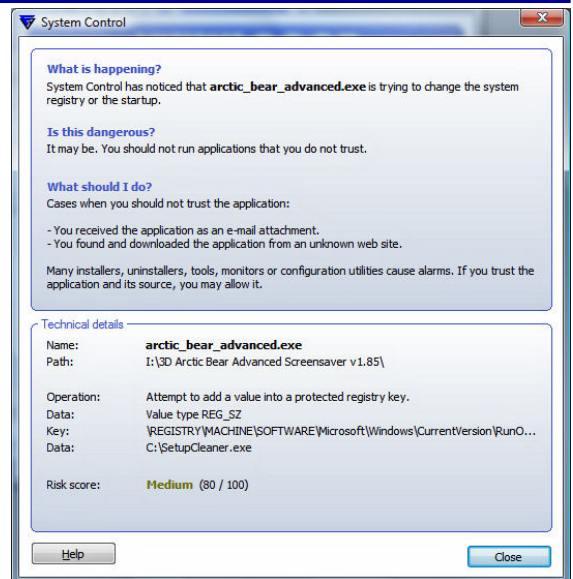
AntiSpam does however work in Windows Mail but only by scrutinizing every incoming message, both friendly from known and trusted correspondents others possibly malign from unknown senders for signs of Spam, and this takes an inordinately long time, so I just switched the AntiSpam feature off and will await the release of the Windows mail capable AntiSpam application.
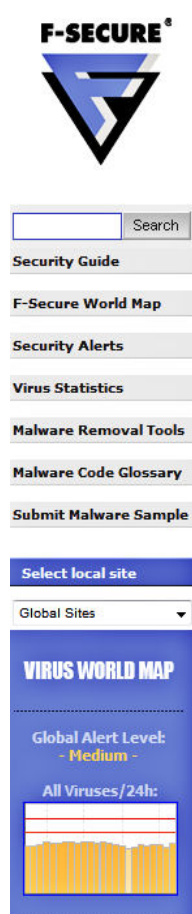
Trojan.

As a test I have a known and nasty Trojan on a CD that I always put into my CD drive to see whether a security / anti-virus program identifies it. F-Secure 2007/8 identified it immediately, see screen shots alongside.

Conclusion

Apart from the AntiSpam feature that doesn't like Windows Mail, Internet Security seems to do all that's necessary to keep your computer and its contents secure and away from prying eyes. The interface is logical and easy to use. Like its rivals such as Symantec Norton Inter-

Threat Identified! — A Trojan contained in an infected file on a CD is identified.

Clicking on the blue link in the screen shot (left above) and a connection is made to F-Secure's web site and the information page on the relevant virus as shown here.

net Security Suite 2008 and McAfee's Total Protection 2008 packages, F-Secure Internet Security Suite 2008 comes with a three-computer licence at no extra cost therefore making it ideal for home use where the kids may have their own computer and Dad or Mum probably have a notebook that needs protecting too, so a bonus point here.

Pricing and Availability

F-Secure Internet Security Suite 2008 is currently available for download from F-Secure direct with a 20% discount off the list price of £39.95, making the price you pay £31.95 inc VAT. This is for a one-year three-computer licence. A free 30-day trial is also available so if interested why not download the trial version to see whether it's suitable for your purposes? F-Secure's Web Site is at:

http://www.f-secure.co.uk/

Strong Passwords — How to Create and Use Them

by Geoff Arnold

Inroduction

As recent reports show, identity theft is a major problem and one way crooks and criminals can get your details is by accessing your computer and stealing your data and personal particulars. A proven method of deterring thieves is by passwording access to your computer and accounts. However, with a little thought you can make the thieves task much harder by ensuring the passwords you use are too hard for them to guess or crack by the use of sophisticated password cracking methods.

Your passwords are the keys you use to access personal information that you've stored on your computer and in your online accounts.

If criminals or other malicious users steal this information, they can use your name to open new credit card accounts, apply for a mortgage, or pose as you in online transactions. In many cases you would not notice these attacks until it was too late.

Fortunately, it is not hard to create strong passwords and keep them well protected.

What Makes a Strong Password?

To an attacker, a strong password should appear to be a random string of characters. The following criteria can help your passwords do so:

- Make it lengthy. Each character that you add to your password increases the protection that it provides many times over. Your passwords should be 8 or more characters in length; 14 characters or longer is ideal.
- Many systems also support use of the space bar in passwords, so you can create a phrase made of many words (a "pass phrase"). A pass phrase is often easier to remember than a simple password, as well as longer and harder to guess.
- Combine letters, numbers, and symbols. The greater variety of characters that you have in your password, the harder it is to guess. Other important specifics include:
- The fewer types of characters in your password, the longer it must be. A 15-character password composed only of random letters and numbers is about 33,000 times stronger than an 8-character password composed of characters from the entire keyboard. If you cannot create a password that contains symbols, you need to make it considerably longer to get the same degree of protection. An ideal password combines both length and different types of symbols.
- Use the entire keyboard, not just the most common characters. Symbols typed by holding down the "Shift" key and typing a number are very common in passwords. Your password will be much stronger if you choose from all the symbols on the keyboard, including punctuation marks not on the upper row of the keyboard, and any symbols unique to your language.

Words and Phrases

Use words and phrases that are easy for you to remember, but difficult for others to guess. The easiest way to remember your passwords and pass phrases is to write them down. Contrary to popular belief, there is nothing wrong with writing passwords down, but they need to be adequately protected in order to remain secure and effective.

In general, passwords written on a piece of paper are more difficult to compromise across the Internet than a password manager, Web site, or other software-based storage tool, such as password managers.

Create a Strong, Memorable Password in 6 steps

Use these steps to develop a strong password:

1. Think of a sentence that you can remember. This will be the basis of your strong password or pass phrase. Use a memorable sentence, such as "My son Aiden is three years old."
2. Check if the computer or online system supports the pass phrase directly. If you can use a pass phrase (with spaces between characters) on your computer or online system, do so.
3. If the computer or online system does not support pass phrases, convert it to a password. Take the first letter of each word of the sentence that you've created to create a new, nonsensical word. Using the example above, you'd get: "msaityo".
4. Add complexity by mixing uppercase and lowercase letters and numbers. It is valuable to use some letter swapping or misspellings as well. For instance, in the pass phrase above, consider misspelling Aiden's name, or substituting the word "three" for the number 3. There are many possible substitutions, and the longer the sentence, the more complex your password can be. Your pass phrase might become "My SoN Ayd3N is 3yeeRs old." If the computer or online system will not support a pass phrase, use the same technique on the shorter password. This might yield a password like "MsAy3yo".
5. Finally, substitute some special characters. You can use symbols that look like letters, combine words (remove spaces) and other ways to make the password more complex. Using these tricks, we create a pass phrase of "MySoN 8N i$ 3 yeeR$ old" or a password (using the first letter of each word) "M$8ni3y0".
6. Test your new password with Password Checker. Password Checker is a non-recording feature on this Web site that helps determine your password's strength as you type.

Password Strategies to Avoid

Some common methods used to create passwords are easy to guess by criminals. To avoid weak, easy-to-guess passwords:

Avoid sequences or repeated characters. "12345678," "222222," "abcdefg," or adjacent letters on your keyboard do not help make secure passwords.

Avoid using only look-alike substitutions of numbers or symbols. Criminals and other malicious users who know enough to try and crack your password will not be fooled by common look-alike replacements, such as to replace an 'i' with a '1' or an 'a' with '@' as in "M1cr0 $0ft" or "P@ssw0rd". But these substitutions can be effective when combined with other measures, such as length, misspellings, or variations in case, to improve the strength of your password.

Avoid your login name. Any part of

your name, birthday, social security number, or similar information for your loved ones constitutes a bad password choice. This is one of the first things criminals will try.

Avoid dictionary words in any language. Criminals use sophisticated tools that can rapidly guess passwords that are based on words in multiple dictionaries, including words spelled backwards, common misspellings, and substitutions. This includes all sorts of profanity and any word you would not say in front of your children.

Use more than one password everywhere. If any one of the computers or online systems using this password is compromised, all of your other information protected by that password should be considered compromised as well. It is critical to use different passwords for different systems.

Avoid using online storage. If malicious users find these passwords stored online or on a networked computer, they have access to all your information.

The "Blank Password" option

A blank password (no password at all) on your account is more secure than a weak password such as "1234". Criminals can easily guess a simplistic password, but on computers using Windows XP, an account without a password cannot be accessed remotely by means such as a network or the Internet. (This option is not available for Microsoft Windows 2000, Windows Me, or earlier versions) You can choose to use a blank password on your computer account if these criteria are met:

- You only have one computer or you have several computers but you do not need to access information on one computer from another one
- The computer is physically secure (you trust everyone who has physical access to the computer)
- The use of a blank password is not always a good idea. For example, a laptop computer that you take with you is probably not physically secure, so on those you should have a strong password.

How to Access and Change Your Passwords

Online Accounts

Web sites have a variety of policies that govern how you can access your account and change your password. Look for a link (such as "my account") somewhere on the site's home page that goes to a special area of the site that allows password and account management.

Computer Passwords

The Help files for your computer operating system will usually provide information about how to create, modify, and access password-protected user accounts, as well as how to require password protection upon start-up of your computer. You can also try to find this information online at the software manufacturer's Web site. For example, if you use Microsoft Windows XP or Vista, online help can show you how to manage passwords, change passwords, and more.

Keep your Passwords Secret

Treat your passwords and pass phrases with as much care as the information that they protect.

- Don't reveal them to others. Keep your passwords hidden from friends or family members (especially children) who could pass them on to other less trustworthy individuals. Passwords that you need to share with others, such as the password to your online banking account that you might share with your spouse, are the only exceptions.
- Protect any recorded passwords. Be careful where you store the passwords that you record or write down. Do not leave these records of your passwords anywhere that you would not leave the information that they protect.
- Never provide your password by e-mail or based on an e-mail request. Any e-mail that requests your password or requests that you to go to a Web site to verify your password is almost certainly a "phishing" fraud. This includes requests from apparently trusted companies or individuals. E-mail can be intercepted in transit, and e-mail that requests information might not be from the sender it claims. Internet "phishing" scams use authentic-

looking but fraudulent e-mail messages to entice you into revealing your user names and passwords, steal your identity, and more.

- Change your passwords regularly. This can help keep criminals and other malicious users unaware. The strength of your password will help keep it good for a longer time. A password that is shorter than 8 characters should be considered only good for a week or so, while a password that is 14 characters or longer (and follows the other rules outlined above) can be good for several years.
- Do not type passwords on computers that you do not control. Computers such as those in Internet cafés, computer labs, shared systems, kiosk systems, conferences, and airport lounges should be considered unsafe for any personal use other than anonymous Internet browsing. Do not use these computers to check online e-mail, chat rooms, bank balances, business mail, or any other account that requires a user name and password. Criminals can purchase keystroke logging devices for very little money and they take only a few moments to install. These devices let malicious users harvest all the information typed on a computer from across the Internet—your passwords and pass phrases are worth as much as the information that they protect.

What to do if Your Password is Stolen

Be sure to monitor all the information you protect with your passwords, such as your monthly financial statements, credit reports, online shopping accounts, and so on. Strong, memorable passwords can help protect you against fraud and identity theft, but there are no guarantees. No matter how strong your password is, if someone breaks into the system that stores it, they will have your password. If you notice any suspicious activity that could indicate that someone has accessed your information, notify authorities as quickly as you can. Get more information on what to do if you think your identity has been stolen or you've been similarly defrauded.
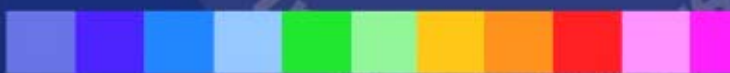
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E-mail: info@epson.co.uk
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