Windows Secrets Ultimate Utilities List

Simple, cheap/free utilities are arguably the most important software we install on our PCs. In fact, when Windows users set up a new system, they often start by installing their favorite collection of helper apps.

Windows Secrets contributors regularly recommend useful utilities in their columns. Here's our occasionally updated list of essential and interesting apps.

There are a few words of caution we usually note when installing new utilities. First, because there are endless varieties of Windows systems, any installed software might have unexpected effects. As we've said many times, make sure you have a current system backup before setting up any new application. That's especially the case for system cleaners. (We've recommended only one such product, Piriform's CCleaner [site].)

Next, free utilities are often supported by ads or unrelated software offers. For tips on safely downloading free utilities and other apps, see our June 13, 2013, Top Story, "Avoiding those unwanted free applications."
(Note: In the following lists, we've linked each product to its information/download page online. All products have been recommended by Windows Secrets contributors.)

The Windows Secrets Top 10 utilities

When we set up a new PC, here are the first 10 utilities we install.

- Malwarebytes Anti-Malware (free/paid)
- Secunia Personal Software Inspector (free; application updating service)
- Piriform CCleaner (free/paid; diagnostics and repair)
- 7-Zip (free; file compression/encryption)
- KeePass Password Safe (free; see excellent alternatives below)
- Foxit Reader (free/paid; PDF reader/creator)
- VideoLAN VLC media player (free)
- IObit Start Menu 8 (free; start-menu replacement for Windows 8)
- IrfanView (free; image editor)
- Skype (free/paid; Web-based communications)
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Editors' favorites

- Microsoft Mouse without Borders (free)
- Dropbox (free/paid; cloud storage/file synching)
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Diagnostics and repair

Total system

- ITSTH WhatsMyComputerDoing (free)

- BillP Studios [WinPatrol](#) (free/paid)
  Hard drive

- PassMark [DiskCheckup](#) (free/paid)
- Paragon [Drive Copy 14 Pro](#) (paid)
- Paragon [Hard Disk Manager](#) (paid)
- EFD Software [HD Tune](#) (free/paid)
- [Paragon Alignment Tool](#) (paid)
- Paragon [Partition Manager](#) (free/paid)
- [Parted Magic](#) (paid; partitioning, erasing, rescue)
- EaseUS [Partition Master](#) (free/paid)
  Mobility
- Softpedia [CoreTemp](#) (free)
- Softpedia [MobileMeter](#) (free)
- [SpeedFan](#) (free)
  For advanced users
- Empty Loop [Unlocker](#) (free; file access)
- MS Sysinternals [Autoruns](#) (free)
- MS Sysinternals [Process Explorer](#) (free)
- MS Sysinternals [Process Monitor](#) (free)
- [WinDirStat](#) (free; drive inventory)
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Entertainment
Imaging applications

- [GIMP](#) (free)
- [Greenshot](#) (free; screen-capture tool)
- CodePlex [Image Resizer](#) (free)
- [Mp3tag](#) (free; music metatag editor)
- [Paint.NET](#) (free)
- [PhotoFiltre](#) (free)
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General Utilities

- Mythicsoft[Agent Ransack](#) (free)
- Avanquest [PowerDesk Pro](#) (paid)
- [Copernic](#) (free/paid; desktop search)
- [DOSBox](#) (free; MS-DOS emulator)
- [Dropbox](#) (free/paid; cloud storage/file synching)
- [ISO Recorder](#) (free)
- [Nitro Pro](#) (free trial/paid; PDF creator)
- Jujuba's [PC Benchmark](#) (free; Win8 performance tests)
- [Pdfcrowd](#) (free/paid; webpage-to-PDF conversion)
- Karen Kenworthy's [Replicator](#) (free).
- TechSmith [Snagit](#) (free trial/paid; screen capture)
- Microsoft [SyncToy](#) (free)
- [TeamViewer](#) (free trial/paid; remote access/control)
- Jam [TreeSize Free](#)

- Oracle VirtualBox (free)
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Security

Browser addons

- NoScript (free; Script blocker for Firefox)
- Codefocus Donotlink (free; search-site privacy service)
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Encryption

- Boxcryptor (free/paid; not recommended on Win8)
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Firewall checkers

- HackerWatch Probe (free)
- ShieldsUP (Gibson Research Corporation; free)
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Networking

- Metageek inSSIDer (free)
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On demand antivirus scanners

- ESET Online Virus Scanner (free)
- Microsoft Malicious Software Removal Tool (free)
- Microsoft Safety Scanner (free)
- Trend Micro HouseCall (free)
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Online password checkers

- How secure is my password?
- How big is your haystack? (Gibson Research Corporation; free)
- Password Meter (free)
- Microsoft Safety & Security Center page (free)
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Password recovery

- Offline registry tools and password resetter
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Password vaults

- AgileBits 1Password (paid)
- LastPass (free/paid)
- Siber Systems RoboForm (free/paid)