

## Programs Included With a New Computer

Are they good enough to stand on their own?

The Windows operating systems already comes with a useful collection of pre-installed programs and even some games. But one of the first things that people do is download a butt-load of new programs as soon as a brand new system is plugged in the wall and connected to the Internet. This article looks at some of the programs that are included with most new systems and then asks the reader to consider if they're sufficient.

NotePad and WordPad. All Windows systems include the two text editors, "NotePad," and "WordPad." Notepad is a plain text editor while WordPad is a rich text editor. Both files are capable of opening plain text, however WordPad can open Windows Write files (an earlier version of WordPad) as well as rich text files. WordPad can also save documents as plain text, rich text, and MS Word documents. So with WordPad having the ability to read and create rich text; embed objects (sound, pictures, and video); and manipulate fonts, we have to wonder if other word processors, which do the same thing, are really necessary. Although WordPad is certainly no match for Microsoft Word's internal spell and grammar checker or Word's Internet linking capabilities, we believe it's a great introduction to word processing in general for computer novices.

Address Book. There are hoards of advanced contact database programs floating around the Internet and on store shelves, but Windows provides a completely competent contact database of its own simply known as "Address Book." This small compact utility allows users to organize contacts by name, location, group, or number and it give users ample space to fully describe each. Compared to Microsoft's Access database program, its user-friendly Address Book is a Godsend to new computer users.

Calculator. Calculator has been a Windows accessory even from its first debut in Windows 1.0. For the life of us, we can't figure out why anyone other than a rocket scientist would want to install a different version than this free one that comes pre-installed. Windows calculator has two interfaces: an easy one, and a scientific one. So perhaps a rocket scientist could fare well with Windows Calculator after all!

Paint. Windows' Paint program allows users to make changes to existing graphics, or create brand new ones at no additional cost. Interestingly, we can count at least ten different graphics packages that are more popular and widely used than this free one. While it doesn't offer as many editing tools, it does provide the essentials and it can open/save graphics in .bmp, .gif, and .jpg format (the latter two being the most commonly format used for Internet eye candy).

Media Player. Real Player and QuickTime are the first programs we think of when we think about multimedia. But Windows Media Player, also free and pre-installed, does a fine job at transmitting Internet-bound sound and video. With this application, you can easily listen to .wav files, .midi files, and even tune into a little Internet radio if you like.

System Tools. Although there are too many to list here, Windows provides more than a handful of useful utilities that will monitor system resources, organize files, repair damaged disks, and more. Yet and still, you can easily find similar tools for sale at computer outlets and download libraries.

What's going on here?

The truth of the matter is that the programs pre-installed are great tools for the beginning computer user. At some point down the road, usage will dictate a need for more powerful applications. We may need a word processor that can convert a document into an HTML page or PDF document. We may need a calculator that solves geometric problems. Or we may need a multimedia tool that lets us create our own videos as well as watch them. These capabilities aren't included with new systems, but there's no reason why we can't exploit the tools that we're given to their fullest.

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