

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 180: More Good, Free Programs

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There are sooo many good, free programs out there that make your life easier. Here are just a couple.

I personally dislike the search function in XP, and find it even worse in Windows 7. Microsoft's search tools are clumsy, non-intuitive, take a long time to use, and even then, they often miss what I am looking for. A very useful (free) alternative is **Effective File Search**, version 6.0.1. Install it, make a shortcut icon on your desktop, and you have a quick, complete search tool to use. It is really fast! Get it at <http://www.sowsoft.com/search.htm>.

If you have a home network, get **Wireless Network Watcher** (version 1.56), from NirSoft <http://www.nirsoft.net>. Don't let the title fool you – it is not just for wireless connections. Rather, it will show you your cable connections and your router, as well. It displays the IP Address, Device Name, User Text (what you choose to type in as a descriptor), MAC Address, Network Adapter Company, Device Info, First Detected Date, and Detection Count. You can also elect not to show any of the above to clean up the display to your liking. You can even select the IP Address range to scan in the Advanced Options menu. This can reveal connected computers that are not yours, if in the IP scan range. Network Watcher is a quick and easy way to keep tabs on your network.

Why buy Microsoft Office? In this day and age, there are at least two free office suites that are equal to Microsoft's word processor, spreadsheet, presentations and drawing utilities. Open Office (129 Mb download) has been around for many years, and will do the job. Libre Office (183 Mb download) is virtually the same. Of course, both programs will read Microsoft documents just fine and will save to Microsoft formats as well. Major Geeks (www.majorgeeks.com) rates them essentially the same in features and abilities, and claims a flip of a coin is a good way to decide between them. Deciding against Microsoft is a no-brainer, just owing to the cost. Deciding between the two free alternates Open Office and Libre Office is a no-brainer if you have a coin to flip. I kind of like Libre a bit better. Hit www.majorgeeks.com, Top Freeware Picks (panel on the right) for a link to the latest versions.

The latest versions of Word, Libre Office and Open Office all will create PDF files (Portable Document Files), but I like to have that ability with any file that I might want to convert to PDF format, not just DOC files. The easy way to do that is to use a PDF creator program, and there are dozens available. Most of these will install as a printer driver, available whenever you enter the print dialog in any program. Thus, if you select Print in a simple text file, one of the choices will be a PDF printer driver. Select it and a PDF file will be created. My favorites are dopdf (www.dopdf.com/download.php) and Doro pdf (get it at www.majorgeeks.com under Office Tools). Both are excellent and I keep both on my main machine, and use them both.

Happy computing!