



The Essential Utilities for Effective Business Computing

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One of the benefits of membership in the StarNet Cooperative involves the access to the collective experience of its members in dealing with new software technologies. Many of the members have found that these productivity tools have enabled them to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace, or at the very least enabled them to lower costs as they reduce the amount of paper-based systems used by previous generations.

Gaining access to these potential gems assumes that you have the necessary tools installed on your computer so that you can either view your documents in the proper format or have access to programs that can give you access to these tools, which can boost your productivity.

I've always felt that every computer should have a minimum set of tools to allow different companies to share information between them. I've compiled such a list to help you insure that you and your company are best able to access these documents with a minimum of hassle.

Also, in order to insure that your company's budget is not decimated trying to load all of these useful packages, I've added a set of symbols at the end of each description to help you decide which solution best fits your budget:

"O!" will denote free programs

"\$" will show programs with a street price less than \$30

"\$\$" will denote programs valued from \$31 to \$100

"\$\$\$" will denote all programs between \$101 and \$200

"\$\$\$\$" will show programs which will set you back more than \$200.

If you are viewing this document on a computer you can simply click on the related hyperlinks, which are colored, underlined words embedded in the document that can take you to the related webpage where downloads are available on your browser. *Tip: you may have to press the "Ctrl" key on your keyboard at the same time you click on the hyperlink to access the link.

If you have printed this document, all the relative website addresses are listed after the description of the various utilities.



First off, the top ten essential programs no computer should be without:

1. **A Word Processor.** OK, I know this is pretty basic, but there may be some who don't realize that there are several options out there for creating and/or viewing documents. The dominant program continues to be Microsoft Word, which is bundled with either the Works or Office suites. Others may be using WordPerfect, or another company's product. Although most will convert Word documents to a usable form, several program codes are lost in the transition, which may affect readability when advanced features are used. Solutions are as follows:
 - a. [Word 97/2000 Viewer](#) (0!) – Microsoft's free utility to allow you to view any Word document, but not to edit it. It does not specify compatibility with XP versions, however.
Go to: <http://office.microsoft.com/downloads/2000/wd97vwr32.aspx>
 - b. Microsoft Word (part of the Works Suite) (\$\$\$) A cheaper package than the full Office suite, it contains Word and Excel, but not PowerPoint or Access. Mainly geared towards the Home and Small Office environment.
 - c. Microsoft Word (Office Suite or as a Standalone Product) (\$\$\$\$) Available in "Professional" which includes all of the Office programs and the "Small Business" version, which excludes PowerPoint and Access.
2. **A Spreadsheet.** One of the first "killer apps" of the PC on its release 20 years ago, it is still, in one form or another, the foundation for most of our critical business applications.
 - a. [Excel 97/2000 Viewer](#) (0!) – Once again, Microsoft's free utility to allow you to view any Excel spreadsheet, but not to edit it. Also, no stated XP compatibility.
Go to: <http://office.microsoft.com/downloads/2000/wd97vwr32.aspx>
 - b. Microsoft Excel (Works Suite) (\$\$\$)
 - c. Microsoft Excel (Office Suite or as a Standalone Product) (\$\$\$\$)
3. **Presentation Software.** A surprisingly large number of users don't have access to this type of program, but many salesmen now pitch their wares by using this type of program to demonstrate their product(s). Although, you may not necessarily need the full program to create a presentation, you will probably need a viewer to gain the ability to properly load the slideshow.
 - a. [PowerPoint 97/2000/2002 Viewer](#) (0!) Good news here, the free viewer DOES offer compatibility with all generations from Office 97 through the XP suite. Like the other viewers, it allows you to view presentations, but does not allow you to create or edit them.
Go to: <http://office.microsoft.com/downloads/2000/Ppview97.aspx>
 - b. PowerPoint (Office Suite or as a Standalone Product) (\$\$\$\$)
4. **Adobe Acrobat** is a program that has been used for everything from creating instruction manuals to blueprints. It comes in two flavors:
 - a. [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) (0!) – The free viewer which will allow you to open all attachments ending in the letters ". pdf". It also allows you to view Photoshop Slideshows and Electronic cards.
Go to: <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>
 - b. Adobe Acrobat – (\$\$\$\$) The full version of the program.

5. **ZIP Compressed File Extractor.** In order to reduce the size of download file, many sites will compress the file, which is often called “zipping” it. Many manufacturers offer different programs, which can “un”, zip these compressed files, although WinZip seems to be the most popular. WinZip features built-in support for CAB files and for popular Internet file formats such as TAR, gzip, UUencode, BinHex, and MIME. ARJ, LZH, and ARC files.
 - a. [WinZip \(Evaluation Version\)](#) (0!) Although this is technically free (it uses the honor system), it is intended to be a free test of the program to entice you into paying for...
Go to: <http://www.winzip.com/ddca.htm>
 - b. [WinZip \(Full Version\)](#) (\$) For \$29, you can sleep well at night knowing that you have paid the creators of this program for their efforts.
Go to: <https://secure.safesite.com/cgi-bin/wzc1?wzbn>

6. **AutoCad** software. Used for years by architects, it has finally trickled down to subcontractors, as the General Contractors try to rid themselves of blueprint reproduction costs. Instead of receiving a rolled set of prints, you may find yourself receiving a CD-R disc with the blueprints burned onto it. Although some architects have resisted this in an effort to maintain control of their creations (CD’s can be duplicated too cheaply and easily), look for the GCs and large end users to push these changes through. Solutions include:
 - a. [Autodesk Volo View](#) (0!) The free viewer which will allow viewing (AND PRINTING!) of files (DWG, DXF™, and DWF (ePlot and eView) .
Go to: <http://usa.autodesk.com/adsk/servlet/index?siteID=123112&id=837403>
 - b. Autodesk AutoCad (\$\$\$\$) The full version which will allow you to create files.

7. **AntiVirus Software/FireWall Protection.** The moats around your computer system, which will protect you against all those who would do you harm or seek to poke around your system. Norton and McAfee are the current market leaders in this area. Those of you with a hardware based firewall (such as a Cable/DSL router) can probably do without a software-based firewall but I would still recommend one as it increase your level of protection by watching what programs are sending information back and forth from the internet. Antivirus software IS a must though, as anyone who uses the net, exchanges files on a floppy or CD, and/or opens email is vulnerable. I prefer a subscription-based service that includes regular updates over the net to protect you from new threats, which are created daily.
 - a. [McAfee FreeScan](#) (0!) – A free program that will scan your computer for viruses but doesn’t address any viruses you find. It WILL direct you to fee based services should it find an unwelcome guest on your hard drive.
Go to: <http://www.mcafee.com/myapps/mfs/default.asp>
 - b. [McAfee Clinic](#) (\$\$ per year) An annual subscription that will regularly scan your computer for viruses and will quarantine any infected files. It also includes a suite of utilities to keep your computer operating smoothly: OilChange, which will check any installed software for updates. Uninstaller, which will totally remove unwanted software from your computer (some program uninstallers don’t always clean your registry properly or leave folders behind). FirstAid, which addresses

such problems as such as poor file system performance, poor CD-ROM performance, and poor graphics performance.

Go to: <http://www.mcafee.com/myapps/clinic/default.asp>

- c. [McAfee Personal Firewall Plus](#) (\$\$ per year) Ideal for dial-up or broadband (DSL, cable) Internet connections, It not only blocks online thieves but lets you trace the source of hacker attacks, avoid future threats and alert the proper authorities (including ISPs or law enforcement).

Go to: <http://www.mcafee.com/myapps/mpfp/default.asp>

8. **Windows Update/Office Update.** Continuing the moat metaphor, Microsoft's products are under daily attack from hackers looking to exploit weaknesses. In an effort to counter these attacks and close the security breaches they create, Microsoft regularly posts patches, which attempt to remove these vulnerabilities.

- a. [Microsoft Windows Update](#) (0!) Your starting point. Note that some updates must be loaded separately from other updates. Resist the urge to save time by delaying a restart of your computer, and reboot your computer each time a new update is downloaded.

Go to: <http://v4.windowsupdate.microsoft.com/en/default.asp>

- b. [Microsoft Office Update](#) (0!) The link to the page which will update your office files.

Go to: <http://office.microsoft.com/ProductUpdates/default.aspx>

9. **Google.** Yahoo originally was the place to go to scour the web for the relevant info you need on any topic. The only problem was that you would often have to scan through pages of results to find the info you really wanted. Through some programming wizardry they are able to return relevant results just about every time. They are also expanding into the news arena by compiling a page of news in a USA Today-like format, which is supposedly compiled entirely through technological means without editors. A little known feature.... If you type in a ten-digit phone number of a business or residence and it is the primary number at that address, it will give you the person/company and the address. A link will also let you print a map to that location.

- a. [Google Search](#) (0!) The link to the search engine

Go to: <http://www.google.com/>

- b. [Google News](#) (0!) The first place to search for news on any event or topic.

Go to: <http://news.google.com/>

10. **Trillian.** The best kept secret on the net. Many people use Instant Messenger programs to chat with friends and colleagues in pop up windows. AOL had the biggest success pushing this technology in the mid 90's as all AOL members were able to converse with one another as they could consult their "buddy lists" to see which friends were online and available for chatting. ICQ and IRC (Internet Relay Chat) were also early pioneers and eventually MSN and Yahoo added their own iterations as well. Unfortunately, none of these 5 methods were compatible. Until now. Cerulean Studios' Trillian is a free program that will link ALL of these disparate services together. AOL members can chat with MSN members, Yahoo with AOL, etc. Multiple users can get into a conference by inviting users to chat in their open window. You can even send files back and forth (provided one or both of the users are not behind a firewall).



- a. [Trillian](#) (0!) The free version of the program. It is full featured and includes all of the core features of the Trillian Pro program but does NOT come with technical support. If you have any problems, there is a [forum](#), which can lead you to other users who can help you address any hiccups you may encounter. Sometimes AOL will modify their Instant Messenger client, which can affect Trillian in the short term. An updated version is usually made available whenever this occurs.
Go to : <http://www.ceruleanstudios.com/trillian/index.html>
- b. [Trillian Pro](#) (\$) For \$25 you add live technical support, and several other features. In Cerulean Studio's breathless words, "Trillian Pro v1.0 is packed with over 100 **compelling new features** and fixes — like a brand-new plug-in system that extends Trillian's functions from hundreds to infinity, an enhanced Yahoo! medium that enables conferences and of course video (webcam) capabilities, a revamped Connection Manager that lets you manage individual accounts at ease with total control, MetaContacts that efficiently clean up your contact list, and adorable animated emoticons that you'll soon feel lonely without (all of which can be enabled or disabled at your discretion)".
Go to: <http://www.ceruleanstudios.com/trillianpro/index.html>

That sums up the Big 10 must haves technologies. There are also several other programs and websites that provide some real utility:

Roxio CD Creator. (\$\$) New computers are now shipping without the venerable 3.5" Floppy Disk Drives. As just about all data is emailed or copied to CD-R/CD-RW disks, the devices have become obsolete. However, it is not always easy to transfer files to CD. Roxio's program streamlines the procedure and allows you transfer music and data files easily and quickly. It also provides programs to help you design jewel boxes (the case that your CD's sometimes come in) to increase the professionalism of your creations.

[Weatherbug](#) . (0!) A live Weather station on your PC. See current temperatures, forecasts, precipitation radar, and even National Weather Service Severe Weather alerts for your immediate area. This free version forces you to choose a "sponsor" which will splash their messages and links on your main weather page. The upgraded program, [WeatherBug Pro](#) , (\$ per year) will banish the ads from your program's "skin" (the main screen), add historical data, and enable you to customize your "skin" to your taste.
Go to: <http://www.weatherbug.com/aws/index.asp>

Roxio Go Back: (\$\$) Those of you familiar with Windows System Restore know that it is a feature that can save you from corrupted files and even human error as it allows you to go back in time and return your computer to a state it was in before a "catastrophe" strikes. Instead of having to reload Windows as when a critical file was corrupted, you merely choose a "safe point" to restore your computer to a working state. Be aware however, that this WILL destroy any data, which was created or modified AFTER the safe point. Roxio's Go Back adds more flexibility and stability while giving you an opportunity to restore to an earlier safe point while booting up your computer.

[Ad Aware](#) - (0!) An invaluable program that will help you sniff out "Spy ware" which reports your surfing habits to various websites as well as "Ad Ware" which tracks your



shopping activity as well as your surfing. This will help sniff out and eradicate these programs as well as the “cookies” they use to park their snoop ware on YOUR computer. Programs like Gator (the worst offender), or Kazaa (one of the most popular) can perform any of the following WITHOUT your permission or knowledge: substituting their browser for yours, parking programs which drag down performance, and overlaying THEIR ads over the ads you see on webpages you visit (i.e. Overlaying a Chevy hyperlink over a Ford hyperlink on an automotive website)

Go to: <http://www.lavasoftusa.com/software/adaware/>

[StarNet's Main Home Page](#) (0!) Don't forget an important resource, which can help you sell a new client or find access to our Vendors offerings as well as your fellow members. Don't forget the [StarNet Member Console](#), which is not just for entering rebates. Access meeting minutes as well as new vendor announcements, installation or product questions, committee notes, and even a place for Product Needs and Wants to help you track down that discontinued product you are looking for or to let your fellow members know about rare items YOU may have available.

[Microsoft TweakUI](#) (0!) A nifty tool that will allow older systems (sorry, XP users, your platform isn't supported) to customize their Windows operating system. Although not officially supported by Microsoft, it IS on their servers so you should feel comfortable using it. You can repair damaged icons, modify your autorun features, and even adjust your “paranoia” settings by setting it to delete your temporary internet cache, Address Bar and Document history on exit, or any previous “Find File” searches you may have done.

www.microsoft.com/networkstation/downloads/PowerToys/Networking/NTTweakUI.asp

And finally, for your perusal, I offer you some “after-hours” sites to visit. We DO NOT endorse or condone using these programs or sites on company time, as there are severe drops in office productivity which WILL occur.

[MLB.TV \(Major League Baseball TV\)](#) (\$ PER MONTH) Although ALL games are not available, 60% of out of market games broadcast can be watched LIVE on your computer (but you are subject to local blackout rules). Only Broadband users should consider this as Dial Up Modems will not be able to handle the bandwidth (a smaller picture with less resolution is available for 56K modem users, but watching a game on a 3 inch by 2 inch window is a lesson in frustration). Although the picture does suffer from a LOT of pixilation and compression artifacts (no one will get rid of their satellite dishes for this service), even blowing up the picture to full screen will present a watchable image. Live audio feeds are also available for just about all games, and you CAN listen to your local games with that service.

Go to: http://mlb.mlb.com/NASApp/mlb/mlb/video/mlb_tv.jsp

[Broadband Reports](#) (0!) If you are having trouble with your broadband internet connection, try this site to help you troubleshoot the problem. They explain all that is required to keep your systems working smoothly and can help you rate the various broadband providers to help you separate the wheat from the chaff.

Go to: <http://www.broadbandreports.com/>



[DBSTalk](http://www.dbstalk.com/) (0!) For those of you have thrown the dreaded cable company out of your households (or plan to) and have added those pizza sized satellite dishes to your roof, here is a resource to discuss with fellow users upcoming events, programming, and technology as well as troubleshoot problems you may encounter.

Go to: <http://www.dbstalk.com/>

[MSNBC HighSpeed](http://www.msnbc.com/m/hs/ie/hs.asp?id=&p=&lnk=) (0!) If you are blessed with a broadband connection, check out this site when major news breaks. You can access MSNBC's live TV feed via your media player at times, while watching other press conferences live when they happen during slower news days.

Go to: <http://www.msnbc.com/m/hs/ie/hs.asp?id=&p=&lnk=>

If you have any troubles accessing any of these sites, feel free to drop me an email at BobMurdoch@msn.com and I will do my best to help you overcome whatever difficulties you may be facing.

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