



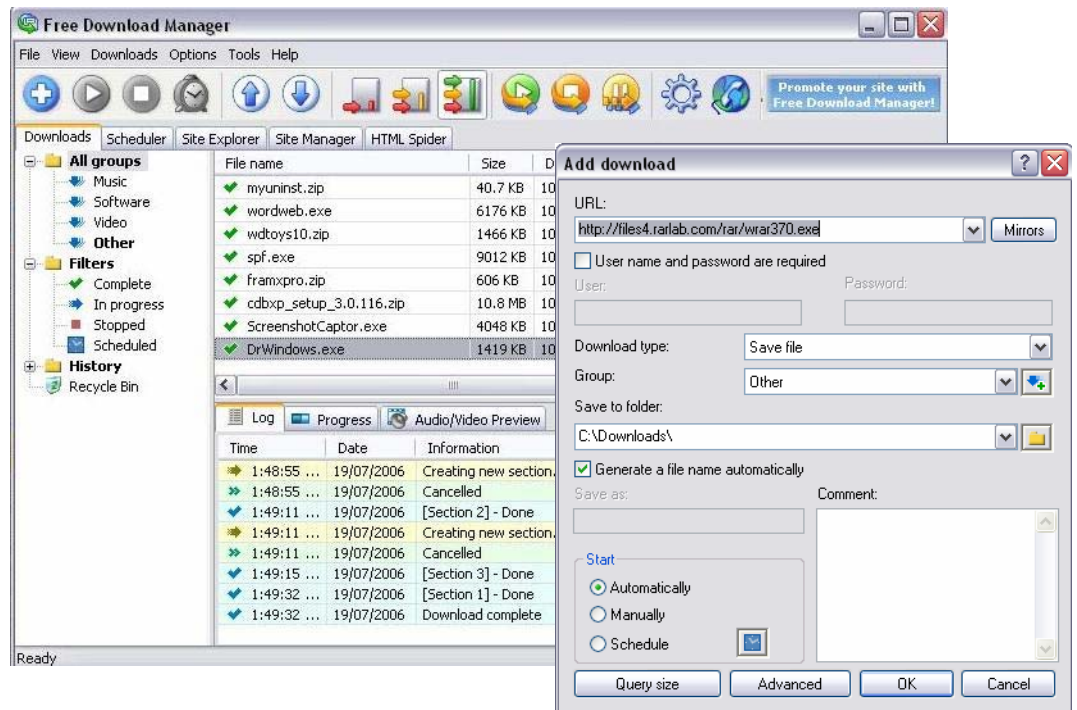
## TECHNOLOGY INSIGHTS

# Super Software – Technology Tested Essential Utilities—a dozen handy housekeeping tools

The faster our broadband gets and the bigger the disk drives on our PCs, the more garbage we accumulate. The tools Windows provides are few and crude, but which among the thousands of apps on the web are the ones that do a first-class job? We've tested and selected the best ones for ease of use, reliable performance and value. Most of the apps listed here are freeware and we make clear where that's not the case. A definition of the different types of 'wares' available on the web is given at the end of the article.

## 1. Downloading software

First we need a piece of software that downloads programs reliably and puts them in an accessible place. It's best to create a folder on your C drive in Windows Explorer called Downloads (if there isn't one already) and select that as the default destination. **Free Download Manager** makes the rest easy.



## 2. House Cleaning

It's not just intrepid surfers who accumulate garbage—Windows tends to gather stuff like a collector, from temporary internet files to fragments left by various programs. EasyCleaner and CCleaner are pretty efficient vacuum cleaners for cleaning up the dust and lint accumulated by the system.

**CCleaner's** interface is a minimalist painting with a list of places you want it to clean, and boxes you tick. The few buttons on offer need no explanation and no Help menu or User Guide is provided.

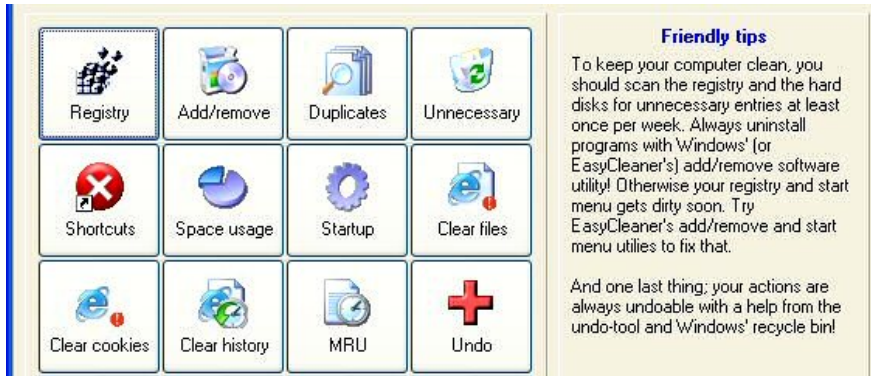
**EasyCleaner** is verbose by comparison. There's plenty of explanation and guided help on offer, along with more cleaning options. A duplicate finder shows you all the doubles you have for various files but, unless you're desperate for disk space, leave it alone or you'll get lost in the maze. The garbage that's accumulated on a PC's hard disk doesn't slow it down, it merely takes up disk space.

These are our own opinions.

We have no commercial arrangements with vendors.

For more reviews, please contact TECHNOEDGE.

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Another option best left alone is cleaning the Windows XP registry, with these or any other programs. Lots of commercial Registry Cleaners promise to restore your PC's as-new performance, but the benefits are as dubious as the risks are real – see Briard's piece [Cleaning Windows](#). Here's the link for EasyCleaner: <http://personal.inet.fi/business/toniarts/eccleaner.htm>.

### 3. Performance Tuning

Defragmenting a PC's hard disk(s) is essential when running Windows. It improves performance since the files and folders on a disk are easier to find when they're in order—it doesn't take long before XP's file system resembles a messy office after a Christmas party.

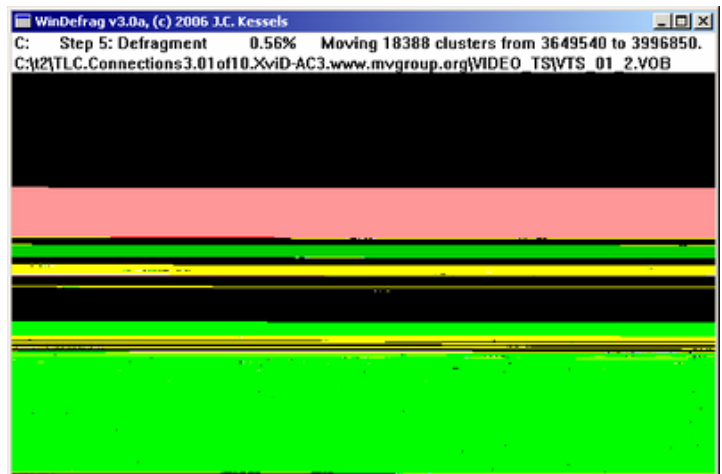
Regular defragging also improves the life of disk drives because they don't have to work as hard. Another bonus is that antivirus scans run a little faster on neat drives. With big hard drives common fare these days, virus scans and defragmenting can take hours.

Sadly, the free programs in this group are a mixed bag and not as slick as the big name commercial offerings—*Diskeeper*, *Perfect Disk* and *O&O Defrag*. These offer lots of options and gorgeous interfaces for the money, but they don't always do a better job (they can throw in the towel when the drive is too full or the files too big).

*JKDefrag* is as good as any of the commercial defraggers, if not better. It's also fast but installing and using it can be tricky (it's a command line program).

It's best to download this GUI for it (it's another hard worker with no dress sense).

<http://www.emro.nl/freeware/>



The gui is an .exe file which means you don't need to install it. You can put it on the desktop or in your utility files. Click on the globe and it loads down the defrag utility (which is only 400KB in size) and gets it going post haste. This link is also helpful:

<http://www.freewaregenius.com/2007/07/31/jkdefrag-gui>

A company called *Sysinternals* (recently acquired by Microsoft) makes some outstanding software tools, among them a defrag utility called *contig*. It's another command line program but someone else has written a GUI that makes it more attractive. You can find both of them here:

[http://easy-beginnings.wikispaces.com/space/xmla?v=rss\\_2\\_0](http://easy-beginnings.wikispaces.com/space/xmla?v=rss_2_0)

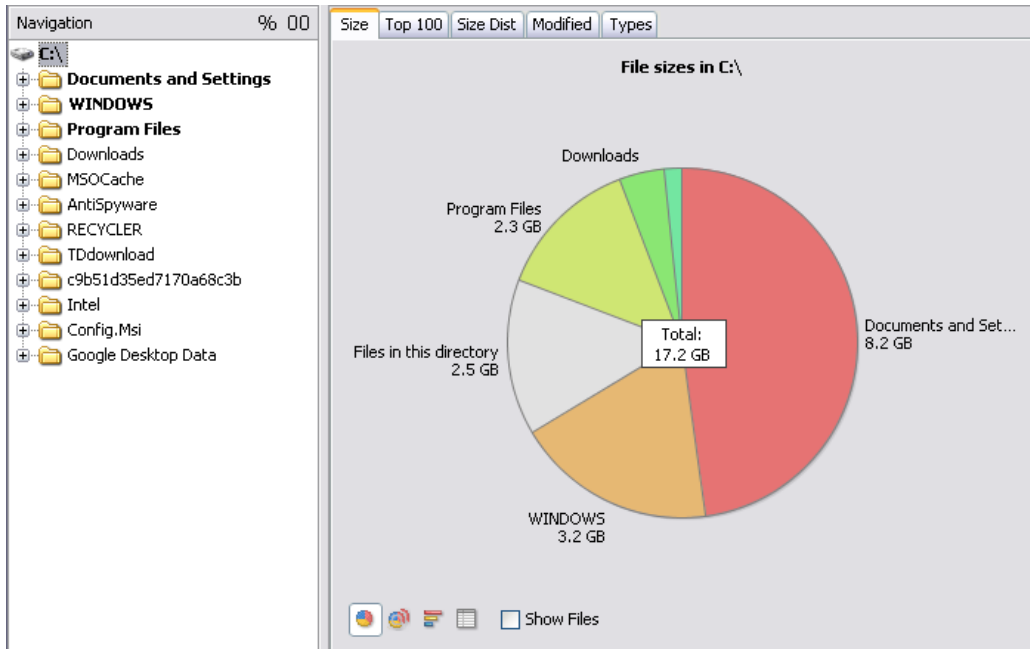
If you prefer to stick to the big names, there's a way of getting *Diskeeper 9* for free, but it means downloading 90mb of Intel utilities and extracting DK v8 and upgrading it to v9—

<http://www.intel.com/design/motherbd/software/idu/>

The easy option is to use the defrag utility provided in Windows XP (All Programs> Accessories>System Tools). It's an ancient 'lite' version of Diskeeper but it works.

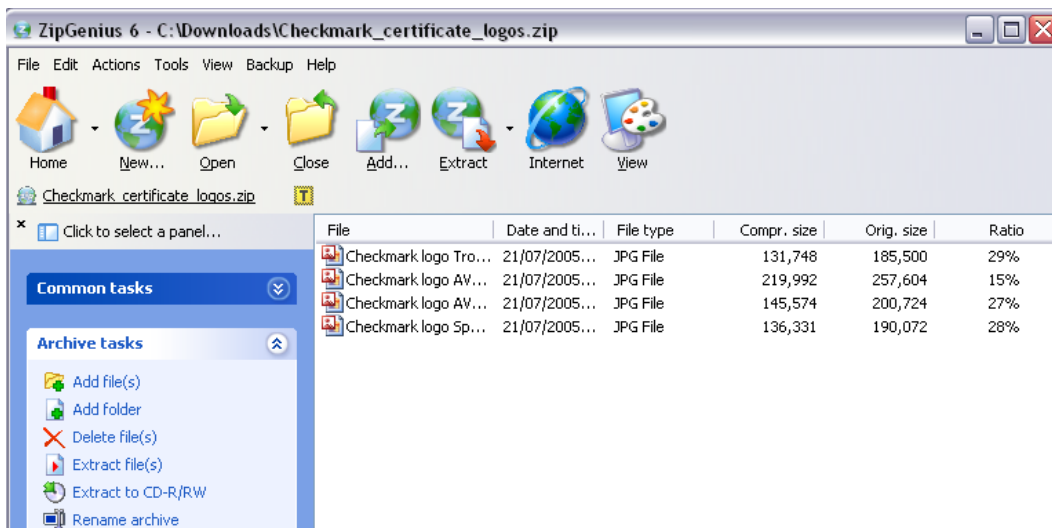
#### 4. Seeing Clearly

**JDiskreport** gives you pie chart views of what folders/files are eating up your disk space. The program lets you drill down to any level you choose; it's very simple to install and use.



#### 5. Compression/Archiving

Compression (zipping/unzipping) is useful for archiving (and saving disk space), for compacting large files before emailing them and for extracting zip files. There are loads of good free choices but **Zip Genius** is the stand-out for ease of use.



#### 6. Deleted or Lost Files

**PCInspector File Recovery** is a free program that can 'undelete' files you've deleted permanently. The good news is that deleting files only removes the links to them; the data often remain intact. The bad news is that other people can find stuff on your computer that you've deleted, from potentially embarrassing personal files to sensitive company data.

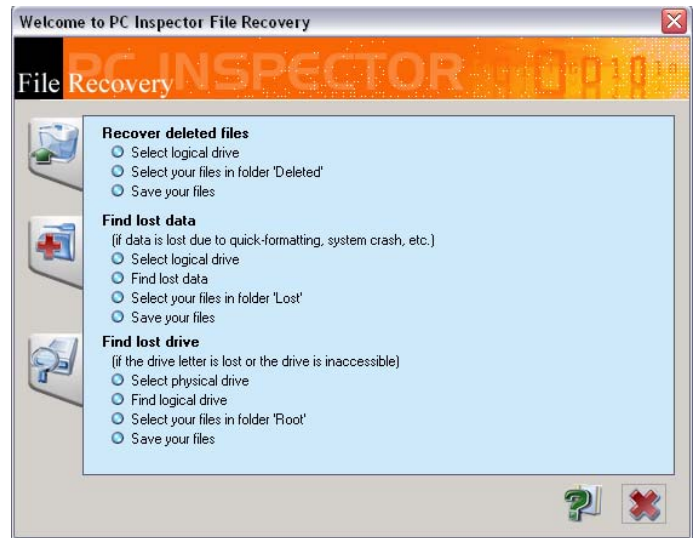
The program scans the chosen disk drive and shows all the files it finds, including deleted ones. It can't retrieve everything as some of the files are ghost entries that have been overwritten too often.

The interface isn't the easiest and the English isn't the best at times, but we tend to overlook those flaws in an emergency.

You can find the program here:

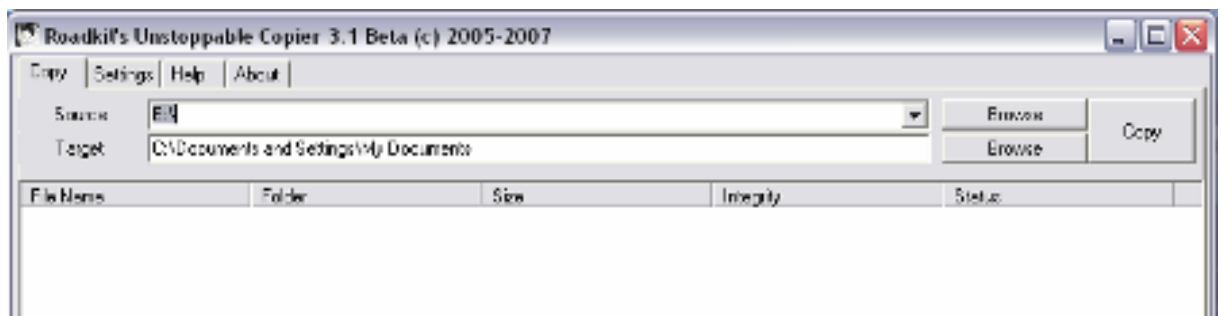
[http://www.pcinspector.de/file\\_recovery/](http://www.pcinspector.de/file_recovery/)

Click on the English option and most of the instruction will become reasonably clear.



## 7. Retrieving Data from corrupt media

There are times when you want to retrieve data from media that have been physically damaged, like CDs or DVDs that have been scratched or hard drives afflicted by bad sectors. **Unstoppable Copier** will try to recover every readable piece of a file and join the pieces together. The url might be off-putting— <http://www.roadkil.net/unstopcp.html>—but by all accounts the program does a great job. It's another hard worker in plain attire but easy to use—just select the drive you want to retrieve data from and the destination, and hit COPY.



## 8. Wiping Data Completely

Police and intelligence agencies use file recovery software to retrieve evidence on seized PCs which the owner thought long gone. To wipe files fully before handing your PC to someone else or giving it to charity or chucking it into a council cleanup, it's best to use a program like **ERASER**. It overwrites sensitive data several times with carefully selected patterns and make them illegible. <http://sourceforge.net/projects/eraser/>

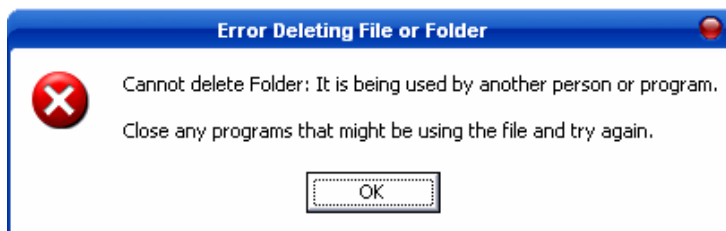
## 9. Securing your Data

**True Crypt**— <http://www.truecrypt.org/> - is useful when you must keep data safe from prying eyes. The program will encrypt a disk partition or a whole disk drive. It does the encryption on-the-fly, that is data are automatically encrypted or decrypted before they are loaded or saved, without any user intervention.

No data stored on an encrypted volume can be read (decrypted) without using the correct password/keyfile(s) or correct encryption. keys. The user chooses what parts of the file system are encrypted, at file, folder or partition level.

## 10. Unlocking Files Windows won't open

Every Windows user is familiar with this message, and there's nothing you do can persuade Windows to see reason. Variations on the theme include: 'Cannot delete file: 'Access is denied' and 'Make sure the disk is not full or write-protected' and 'The file is not currently in use'.

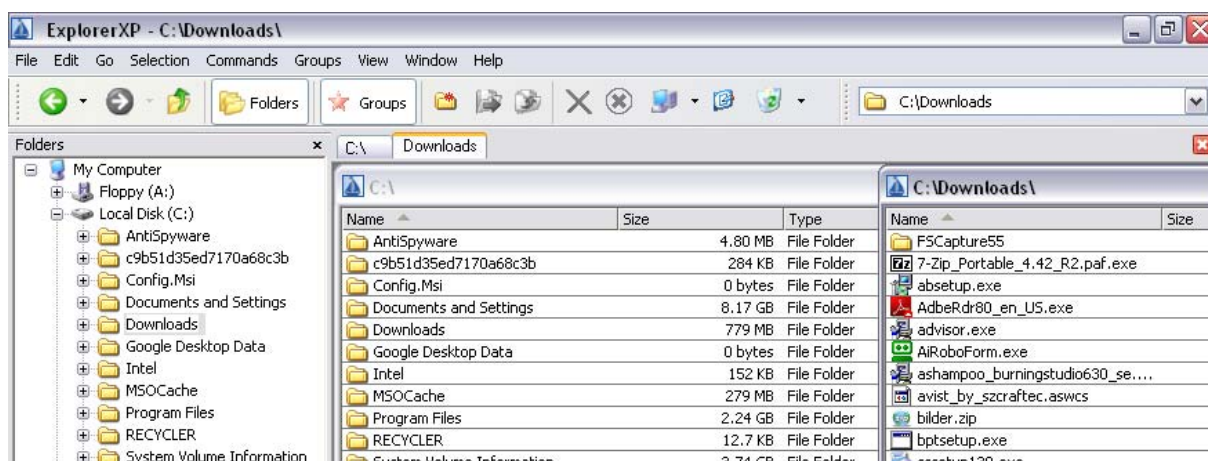


**Unlocker** is a blunt instrument that trumps Windows' high hand. It's implemented as a Windows Explorer extension that let's you right-click on the troublesome file, choose Unlocker from the menu and enforce your will on it. You can download Unlocker here:

<http://ccollomb.free.fr/unlocker/>

## 11. File Managers

This is a big category with many contenders, mostly because Windows Explorer is so limited—it has neither tabs nor a dual-pane option, and it takes forever to calculate the size of large folders. If these are your main beefs, ExplorerXP makes a good substitute.



A second free choice for more serious users is **xplorer2 lite**, which also offers two pane drag-and-drop operation and many more advanced features. <http://zabkat.com/x2lite.htm> Power Users love **xyplorer** for its flexibility in searching and automating file operations, its multi-tabbed interface and its many layout options. XYplorer is to file managers what Firefox with all the extras is to internet browsers— <http://www.xyplorer.com/>

xyplorer is no longer free but it's more than worth the \$US 30 if you need its features. The last free version of xyplorer (2006) is still available here (page 22 on the website) <http://www.321download.com/LastFreeware/page22.html#XYplorer>

## 12. Disk Partitioning

This kind of software lets you create, destroy, resize, move and copy disk partitions and the file systems they contain. With today's large capacity disk drives, partitions are one way to keep data in manageable sections. This is an advantage when scanning for malware or making drive image backups.

Good commercial programs are available from Norton and Acronis, but **GParted** is a great free alternative from the Open Source side of the world - <http://gparted.sourceforge.net/> It's fairly easy to use and can be burnt to a CD, which makes it possible to work with disk drives when the operating system is being difficult.

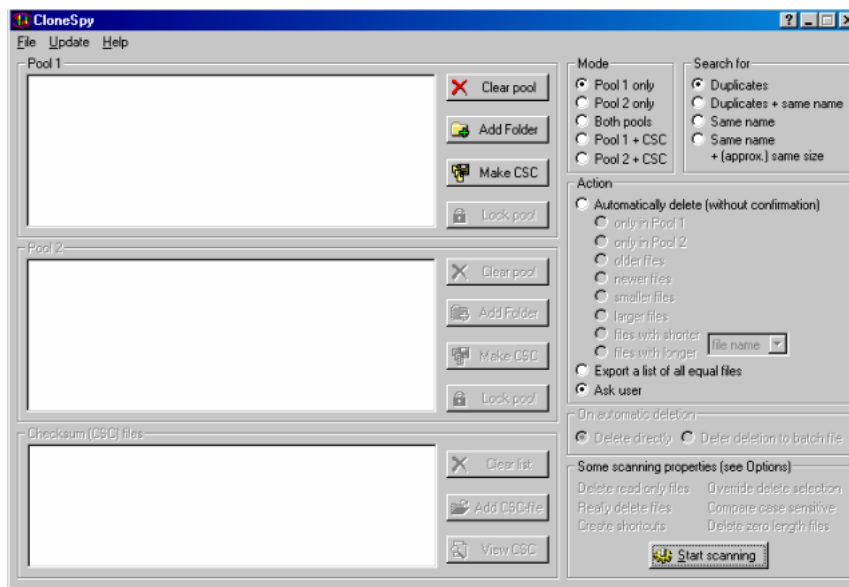
Partitioning is also useful when installing a second operating system alongside Windows. There is an element of risk in disk partitioning so, if you're thinking of installing Linux, it might be easier to let a user-friendly distro like Ubuntu do the work (it uses GParted).

### 13. Getting rid of Duplicate Files

If disk space is running out, one way to free up some extra is to get rid of all the duplicates of documents, photos, music and videos we tend to accumulate. **CloneSpy** tracks down duplicate files with the same name or content, letting you choose which to keep.

It's a simple matter of choosing the folders you want checked, but be warned: CloneSpy will most likely find thousands of duplicates, which would take days to wade through.

It's best to concentrate on big files like large PDFs, high resolution photos and video clips. Word documents tend to be tiny unless they contain photos, so they're not worth the time it takes to claw back a few megabytes of disk space.



### Summary

As always, we've tested the software we cover here and checked expert reviews, but we recommend caution before downloading and installing programs and trying them out:

- Backup all vital data
- Create a System Restore Point
- Follow the instructions for installation and operation of any software

Freeware or donationware	Free but our contributions will ensure further development
Shareware	should be called trialware since you can try before you buy
Abandonware/ Orphanware	freeware no longer being developed or supported by the developer
Betaware	A work-in-progress version of a product
Crippleware	A free version of a commercial program with some functions disabled
Nagware	Trialware or crippleware usually stacked with ads for the commercial product
Adware	It is what it says
Spyware, malware	Software to avoid like the plague
Webware	Software like Google Apps
Warez	Stolen, pirated or illegal software