

The Best Antivirus Software for 2011

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The last time I rounded up 2011 antivirus software, just six commercial AV tools and four free ones had been released. Security vendors have been working overtime cranking out antivirus software, and I've been busy reviewing it. Now that I've had a chance to look at eight more commercial antivirus products and a couple more free antivirus offerings, for a grand total of 20 AV apps, some very clear trends in the AV business have become apparent. I'll talk about those, and I'll also give you a rundown on AV in general, and let you know which ones--free and paid--are the best choices for you.

Note: As always, when I say "antivirus," I mean a utility that protects against all kinds of malicious software, not just viruses. Trojans, spyware, rootkits, keyloggers, adware, scareware--a proper antivirus must handle all of these.

Standalone or Suite?

Many of this year's products blur the line between standalone antivirus and security suite. In the past the presence of a personal firewall has been one defining suite element; not any more. There's a fully-functional firewall inside Panda Antivirus Pro 2011. eScan Anti-Virus 11 and McAfee AntiVirus Plus 2011 also offer firewall protection. Norton AntiVirus 2011 doesn't include a complete firewall, but its intrusion prevention feature is more effective against exploits than most full-blown suites.

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MoreSpam filtering is another component typically found in a suite. The spam filter built into BullGuard Antivirus 10 is reasonably accurate and unusually helpful at setup time. eScan also offers a spam filter, but it's not something you'd want to inflict on your Inbox.

BitDefender Antivirus Pro 2011 offers full remote management of other BitDefender installations across the network. McAfee can monitor other installations remotely and fix problems. Panda and Norton can at least let you know when another installation has problems, though they won't fix those problems remotely.

BitDefender includes a very effective phishing prevention tool. The LinkScanner component in AVG Anti-Virus Free 2011 also works to block phishing sites, as does McAfee's SiteAdvisor. AVG and Norton both scan the links on your Facebook pages to protect you from Facebook scams and viruses. BitDefender and Kaspersky Anti-Virus 2011 both check your system for security vulnerabilities, though BitDefender takes the concept a bit farther.

Outpost Antivirus Pro 7.0 and BitDefender can block transmission of user-defined private data, a feature usually found only in suites. Ad-Aware Pro Internet Security 8.3, AVG, Kaspersky, and McAfee will tune system performance and wipe out traces of computer and Internet use. Sometimes it's hard to remember that the product is "only" an antivirus, not a full suite.

The true standalone antivirus isn't dead, however. For example, F-Secure Anti-Virus 2011 sticks to the business of virus protection without any sign of morphing into a mini-suite. Double Anti-Spy Professional v2 does the same, but cranks up its ability to detect threats by using two distinct antivirus engines.

[Adjustable Interfaces, Built-in Support](#)

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Some users want to hear about every little security event, but most prefer a product that just does the job, without making a fuss. Ad-Aware appeals to both with a choice of simple or advanced mode. BitDefender goes even further. Not only can its users choose basic, intermediate or expert view, they can build a personal collection of their most-used tools.

Webroot AntiVirus with Spy Sweeper 2011 totally focuses on keeping everything as simple as possible. It updates automatically, scans while the system is idle, and interacts with the user through a completely redesigned interface. All the detail a tech-savvy user might want is available, but hidden when not needed.

The user interface for Trend Micro Titanium Antivirus + 2011 discards the standard landscape-orientation window for a skinny vertical panel that takes up minimal space. McAfee, too, has switched to a vertical interface.

Norton reserves a panel across the bottom of its main window for interaction and communication with other security components. Initially the panel shows an interactive world map of security activity, but it can also connect with Norton Safe Web for Facebook or with your Norton Online Backup account.

Built-in and automated support features grace many of these tools. BitDefender includes a search box for help topics right on its main screen; a built-in tool will gather system information and contact an agent for chat-based support. Norton's one-click support system gathers diagnostics and offers relevant FAQs or chat-based support. Kaspersky's built-in support tool can send diagnostic reports to the company and process purpose-built scripts to fix specific problems. Panda's PSCAN lets remote analysts request samples and push fixes without requiring full chat-type interaction. BullGuard offers built-in access to e-mail and live chat support with a message center to manage your support interactions. eScan links to live chat and online help.

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