

Programs Compared

Can free antivirus software protect you? Or is it worth paying for a full-blown AV app? We look at the benefits--and pitfalls--of free and paid antivirus products.

By Nick Mediati, PCWorld Nov 29, 2010 9:00 pm



Depending on whom you ask, paying for antivirus software is either a good investment or a total ripoff. In reality, neither viewpoint is accurate. You can find plenty of good reasons to choose a paid antivirus product, and plenty of good reasons to go with a freebie.

We teamed up with security testing company [AV-Test](#), to find out what you get--or don't get--with free antivirus, and when it makes sense to subscribe annually to a fee-based program.

Antivirus, Deconstructed

Four basic levels of antivirus products exist: free, paid antivirus, suites, and "premium" suites. As you move up the ladder from free antivirus to premium suites, you typically get more features, such as identity theft protection, firewalls, parental controls, and system performance tools.

Free antivirus software usually provides a bare minimum level of protection. It will scan for malware, and often can perform automatic scans, too. Some free apps may have additional protection tools such as a browser add-on that checks for bad links--and [Comodo's free Internet Security Premium](#) has a firewall. But such features are usually limited to paid antivirus products. Some free apps offer behavioral malware detection, which finds malware based on how it acts on your PC--a good way of detecting brand-new malware outbreaks. (Behavioral detection is standard on paid products.)

Paid antivirus straddles a middle ground between the basic freebies and the feature-packed security suites: They typically offer more comprehensive security tools (such as parental controls and identity

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TOP 10 ANTIVIRUS PROGRAMS FOR 2011


PAID ANTIVIRUS PROGRAM	PCW Rating	Antivirus/antispysware detection			Infection cleanup		Scan speed (in seconds) ³		Design score	Bottom line
		Signature-based detection of malware	Real-world malware blocking: Fully blocked attacks	Real-world malware blocking: Partially blocked attacks	Successful cleanup of active malware components ^{1,2}	Successful cleanup of active and inactive malware components ¹	On demand ¹	On access ¹		
1 Symantec Norton AntiVirus 2011 \$40 for one year/one PC find.pcworld.com/71019	★★★★★ SUPERIOR	98.7%	96.0%	0.0%	80.0%	60.0%	121	272	Very Good	Norton AntiVirus 2011 is a great choice thanks to its strong malware detection and its smooth interface.
2 BitDefender Antivirus Pro 2011 \$40 for one year/three PCs find.pcworld.com/71020	★★★★★ SUPERIOR	97.5%	68.0%	20.0%	80.0%	70.0%	126	327	Very Good	BitDefender is good at detecting malware and disinfecting PCs, but had some difficulty in blocking brand-new malware.
3  G-Data AntiVirus 2011 \$30 for one year/one PC find.pcworld.com/71022	★★★★★ SUPERIOR	99.4%	84.0%	4.0%	80.0%	60.0%	111	336	Very Good	G-Data AntiVirus 2011 is a solid package, with strong malware detection, blocking, and removal capabilities.
4 Kaspersky Anti-Virus 2011 \$40 for one year/one PC find.pcworld.com/71023	★★★★★ SUPERIOR	95.7%	88.0%	4.0%	80.0%	50.0%	103	310	Very Good	Kaspersky Anti-Virus 2011 blocks new malware attacks and is easy to use, but it slows system performance excessively.
5 Trend Micro Titanium Antivirus+ 2011 \$40 for one year/one PC find.pcworld.com/71467	★★★★★ VERY GOOD	98.4%	88.0%	8.0%	80.0%	60.0%	187	249	Very Good	Trend Micro provides solid, simple protection; advanced users, however, may find its lack of customizability frustrating.
6 Avast Pro Antivirus 5 \$40 for one year/one PC find.pcworld.com/71021	★★★★★ VERY GOOD	94.8%	80.0%	4.0%	70.0%	30.0%	90	220	Very Good	Avast Pro Antivirus 5 sports a slick interface, but its middling detection performance prevents it from ranking higher.
7 Panda Antivirus Pro 2011 \$40 for one year/one PC find.pcworld.com/71468	★★★★★ VERY GOOD	99.8%	84.0%	12.0%	80.0%	60.0%	262	427	Very Good	Panda Antivirus Pro 2011 is an effective defender, though it's one of the slower antivirus products we tested.
8 Avira AntiVir Premium 2011 \$26 for one year/one PC find.pcworld.com/71469	★★★★★ VERY GOOD	99.0%	80.0%	4.0%	80.0%	50.0%	96	247	Good	Avira put up decent scores in detection and blocking, but its interface needs a makeover, and it may slow your PC.
9 Eset NOD32 Antivirus 4 \$40 for one year/one PC find.pcworld.com/71470	★★★★★ VERY GOOD	89.2%	84.0%	0.0%	60.0%	10.0%	90	240	Good	Although Eset NOD32 Antivirus 4 is fast, its malware detection and cleanup capabilities are lacking; blocking was average.
10 GFI Vipre Antivirus 4 \$30 for one year/one PC find.pcworld.com/71471	★★★★★ VERY GOOD	97.9%	60.0%	16.0%	70.0%	40.0%	101	260	Good	GFI (formerly Sunbelt Software) offers a fast app, but we found it ineffective at blocking new malware; its design is cluttered.

CHART NOTES: Prices are as of 1/1/11. ¹Test conducted at default settings. ²Cleanup of active malware files. Does not include removal of Registry changes or inert files. ³Time to scan 4500MB of data.

CONSUMER ANTI-MALWARE PRODUCTS GROUP TEST REPORT

AVG Internet Security 9
ESET Smart Security 4
F-Secure Internet Security 2010
Kaspersky Internet Security 2011
McAfee Internet Security
Microsoft Security Essentials

Norman Security Suite
Panda Internet Security 2011
Sunbelt VIPRE Antivirus Premium 4
Symantec Norton Internet Security 2010
Trend Micro Titanium Maximum Security

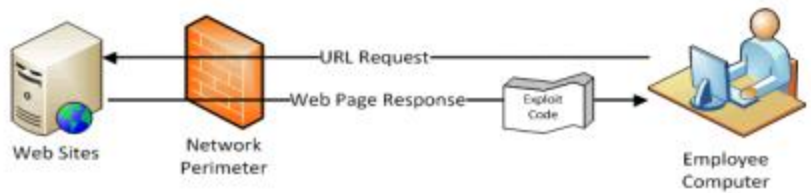


Carlsbad, CA

METHODOLOGY VERSION: 1.5
SEPTEMBER 2010

All testing was conducted independently and without sponsorship.

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These exploits represent the newest and most serious threats, since they occur silently, without user awareness, when a user visits a malicious website. However, they are currently in the minority, but growing at a fast pace.

3.2 RESULTS

Exploit protection amongst the products ranged between 3.4% and 74.6% - in other words, generally poor. Over half of the AV products stop less than 50% of the exploit attacks. Put differently, a cybercriminal would have between 25% and 97% chance of successfully attacking your machine.

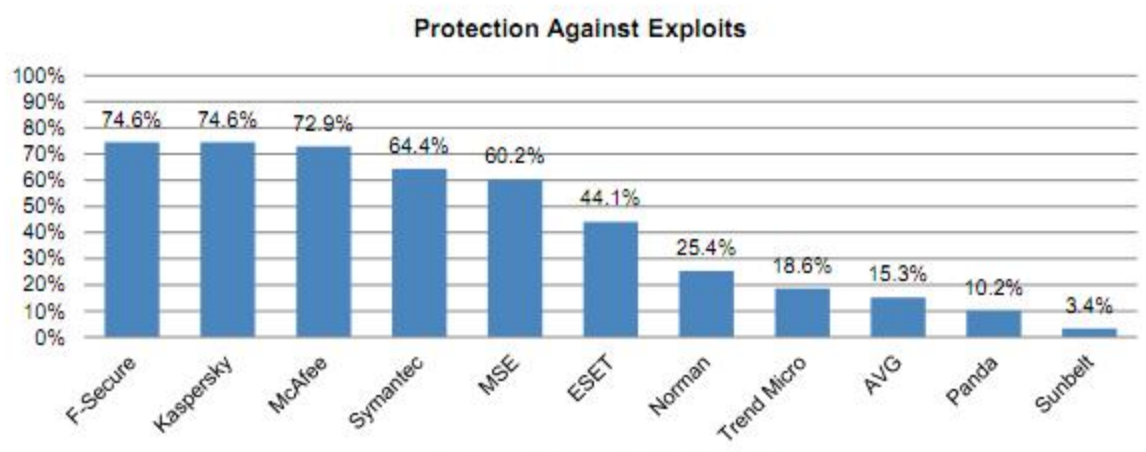


FIGURE 6: EXPLOIT BLOCK RATE

Testing the Effectiveness in Blocking Socially-Engineered Malware



Table 1 below provides detailed results used in Figure 1 above, as well as the Protection Over Time results from Figure 2 above. Products are sorted by Total Blocked.

Product	Blocked on Download (A+B)	Additional Blocked on Execution (C)	Total Blocked
Trend Micro	79.0%	11.1%	90.1%
McAfee	72.4%	12.8%	85.2%
F-Secure	66.6%	13.8%	80.4%
Norman	60.3%	16.9%	77.2%
Sunbelt	57.0%	18.3%	75.3%
Microsoft	54.6%	20.3%	75.0%
Panda	53.8%	19.3%	73.1%
Symantec	54.6%	17.7%	72.3%
Kaspersky	49.5%	21.8%	71.3%
Eset	38.7%	21.3%	60.0%
AVG	28.7%	26.1%	54.8%

TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE OF MALWARE CAUGHT BY PRODUCT

Overall, the Trend Micro and McAfee products are well ahead of most of the competition in protecting against web-based socially-engineered malware. F-Secure also ranked fairly high. Perhaps surprisingly, Microsoft Security Essentials, a free product, ranked higher than half of the competition (paid products), including Symantec's market leading product.

2.4 TIME TO PROTECT HISTOGRAM

Approximately half of the products tested caught less than half of the malware upon first introduction to the test. For all malware that was not caught initially, we measured the time to add protection for each sample. This was achieved by continuing to test each sample every 6 hours throughout the test and noting when protection was added. The "Time-to-Protect" graph represents an important metric of how quickly vendors are able to add

January 13, 2011 | 141 Comments

The Best Antivirus Software in 2011

If you're still not running antivirus protection, you should be. We'll help you choose a free or premium solution.



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The Best Protection

I torture-tested all of these products, challenging them to clean up 13 malware-infested systems and to block malware from attacking a clean system. Interestingly, the most effective [antivirus](#) products in my tests were not those that bulked up with added features. Webroot and Ad-Aware Pro offered the best [protection](#) overall, especially against rootkits and scareware. [Spyware Doctor with AntiVirus 2011](#) also scored very well in my tests. Ad-Aware Pro joined Webroot to become our shared Editors' Choice for standalone antivirus. For full details on how I test antivirus products see [How We Test Anti-malware](#).

- 2011 antivirus malware removal chart
- 2011 antivirus malware blocking chart

Recent Free Antivirus Releases

Commercial security vendors seem to have standardized on a "fall model year" plan, like car manufacturers. The free antivirus products tend to come out with an update whenever it's convenient. I've reviewed a half-dozen free products since summer, some very good, some not so good.

[Panda Cloud Anti-Virus 1.1](#) has actually matched the top commercial products in some of my tests. For example, Panda Cloud Antivirus and Ad-Aware Pro share the highest detection rate in my malware blocking test. With its extremely minimal user interface and [cloud-based](#) detection system it's a good

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October 15, 2009
Spyware Doctor with
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Antivirus for 2011 malware blocking chart

Antivirus for 2011 malware blocking chart

MALWARE BLOCKING	Free	Malware		Keyloggers		Rootkits		Scareware	
		%	score	%	score	%	score	%	score
Ad-Aware Pro Internet Security 9.0		94%	9.2	86%	8.2	100%	10.0	89%	8.9
BitDefender Antivirus Pro 2011		77%	7.5	71%	5.0	100%	7.3	56%	5.6
BullGuard Antivirus 10		77%	7.7	86%	7.6	89%	8.1	56%	5.6
Double Anti-Spy Professional v2		89%	8.9	86%	8.2	100%	10.0	89%	8.9
eScan Anti-Virus 11		80%	7.9	57%	4.9	78%	7.2	78%	7.8
F-Secure Anti-Virus 2011		83%	8.1	71%	5.4	100%	8.8	78%	7.4
G Data AntiVirus 2011		83%	8.2	79%	5.0	89%	7.0	67%	6.7
Kaspersky Anti-Virus 2011		89%	7.8	79%	5.8	89%	7.4	78%	6.6
McAfee AntiVirus Plus 2011		89%	8.9	71%	7.1	78%	7.8	78%	7.8
Norton AntiVirus 2011		86%	8.4	79%	7.9	78%	7.8	78%	7.8
Outpost Antivirus Pro 7.0		80%	7.1	64%	5.4	78%	7.2	67%	5.3
Panda Antivirus Pro 2011		89%	8.8	71%	5.8	78%	7.0	67%	6.7
Spyware Doctor with AntiVirus 2011		89%	8.5	93%	9.2	100%	9.9	78%	7.8
StopSign Internet Security 1.0		74%	6.7	43%	3.3	67%	5.9	56%	5.6
Trend Micro Titanium Antivirus + 2011		74%	6.9	57%	4.5	78%	6.4	44%	4.2
TrustPort Antivirus 2011		83%	7.8	71%	5.2	89%	7.7	67%	6.6
Webroot AntiVirus with Spy Sweeper 2011		91%	9.0	100%	9.0	100%	9.2	89%	8.9

Ad-Aware FREE Internet Security 9.0	Y	91%	9.0	86%	8.1	100%	10.0	89%	8.9
AVG Anti-Virus Free 2011	Y	86%	8.3	71%	5.4	78%	6.6	78%	7.2
Comodo Antivirus 5.0	Y	94%	8.9	100%	9.3	100%	9.4	100%	9.2
digital defender free 2.0	Y	69%	6.3	29%	1.8	33%	2.8	56%	5.3
Immunet Protect Free 2.0	Y	80%	7.0	64%	5.4	78%	5.4	67%	6.4
Malwarebytes' Anti-Malware 1.46	Y	77%	7.7	29%	2.4	44%	3.9	89%	8.9
Panda Cloud Anti-Virus 1.1	Y	94%	9.1	79%	7.0	89%	8.3	78%	7.2

Green denotes best two; red denotes worst two

Antivirus for 2011 malware removal chart

Antivirus for 2011 malware removal chart

MALWARE REMOVAL	Free	Malware		Keyloggers		Rootkits		Scareware	
		%	score	%	score	%	score	%	score
Ad-Aware Pro Internet Security 9.0		91%	7.4	86%	6.4	100%	7.3	88%	8.4
BitDefender Antivirus Pro 2011		77%	6.3	71%	4.4	100%	6.6	56%	4.8
BullGuard Antivirus 10		76%	6.3	71%	3.6	100%	5.8	50%	4.3
Double Anti-Spy Professional v2		94%	7.6	86%	6.9	100%	8.3	88%	7.8
eScan Anti-Virus 11		82%	6.1	79%	4.1	89%	3.6	75%	5.6
F-Secure Anti-Virus 2011		83%	7.0	79%	4.1	100%	5.9	78%	6.8
G Data AntiVirus 2011		82%	6.2	86%	4.6	100%	5.7	63%	4.5
Kaspersky Anti-Virus 2011		74%	5.6	29%	1.6	67%	4.8	67%	5.0
McAfee AntiVirus Plus 2011		82%	6.6	79%	4.3	89%	5.7	63%	5.6
Norton AntiVirus 2011		89%	7.9	86%	6.9	89%	7.7	78%	7.8
Outpost Antivirus Pro 7.0		80%	6.1	64%	4.6	89%	6.9	67%	5.3
Panda Antivirus Pro 2011		89%	6.8	79%	4.2	100%	6.1	78%	6.4
Spyware Doctor with AntiVirus 2011		89%	7.8	93%	7.4	100%	9.1	78%	7.7
StopSign Internet Security 1.0		62%	4.4	21%	1.3	33%	1.4	63%	5.3
Trend Micro Titanium Antivirus + 2011		26%	1.7	50%	2.8	44%	1.3	33%	2.4
TrustPort Antivirus 2011		82%	6.3	79%	4.1	100%	5.3	63%	4.9
Webroot AntiVirus with Spy Sweeper 2011		83%	7.0	93%	7.8	100%	8.0	89%	7.3

Ad-Aware FREE Internet Security 9.0	Y	91%	7.3	86%	6.0	100%	6.4	88%	8.0
AVG Anti-Virus Free 2011	Y	85%	6.5	86%	4.9	100%	5.7	75%	6.3
Comodo Antivirus 5.0	Y	76%	5.1	71%	3.6	78%	2.8	75%	5.5
digital defender free 2.0	Y	63%	3.5	29%	1.0	33%	1.0	56%	3.0
Immunet Protect Free 2.0	Y	54%	3.6	23%	1.5	0%	0.0	44%	3.6
Malwarebytes' Anti-Malware 1.46	Y	80%	7.3	29%	1.9	56%	4.0	89%	8.1
Panda Cloud Anti-Virus 1.1	Y	86%	5.9	79%	4.1	89%	3.3	67%	5.8

Green denotes best two; red denotes worst two

Introduction

At the end of every year, AV-Comparatives releases a summary report to comment on the various anti-virus products tested over the year, and to mention again the high-scoring products of the various tests. Please bear in mind that this report looks at all the comparative tests of 2010, i.e. not only the latest ones. Comments and conclusions are based on the results shown in the various comparative test reports of AV-Comparatives, as well as from observations made during the tests (<http://www.av-comparatives.org/comparativesreviews>).

Overview of levels reached during 2010

It is important that readers understand that the STANDARD level/award is already a good score, since it requires a program to reach a certain standard of effectiveness. Many programs that are not listed on AV-Comparatives would not reach this required level; therefore the ones that are included in our tests can be considered to be a selection of very good and high-quality anti-virus products.

Below is an overview of levels/awards reached by the various anti-virus products in AV-Comparatives' tests of 2010.

	On-Demand Test February 2010	Retrospective Test February 2010	On-Demand Test August 2010	Retrospective Test August 2010	Performance Test November 2010	PUP-Test November 2010	Dynamic Test August-November 2010
avast!	ADV+	ADV	ADV+	ADV	ADV+	ADV	ADV
AVG	ADV	ADV	ADV	N/A	ADV+	N/A	ADV
AVIRA	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+
BitDefender	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	STD	ADV+	ADV
eScan	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	N/A
ESET NOD32	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV	ADV
F-Secure	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+
G DATA	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV	ADV+	ADV
K7	STD	ADV	STD	ADV	ADV+	ADV	N/A
Kaspersky	ADV+	ADV+	ADV	ADV	ADV	ADV	ADV+
Kingsoft				N/A	ADV+		
McAfee	ADV	STD	ADV	N/A	ADV+	ADV+	N/A
Microsoft	ADV	ADV+	ADV	ADV+	ADV+	STD	N/A
Norman		STD	STD	N/A	STD	STD	STD
Panda	ADV	ADV	ADV	ADV	ADV+	ADV+	ADV
PC Tools	ADV+	STD	ADV+	ADV	STD	ADV+	ADV
Sophos	ADV	ADV	ADV	ADV+	ADV+	N/A	N/A
Symantec	ADV+	ADV	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+	ADV+
Trend Micro		STD		N/A	STD	ADV	ADV
TrustPort	ADV+	ADV+	ADV	ADV	ADV+	ADV+	N/A

ADV+: ADVANCED+
ADV: ADVANCED
STD: STANDARD
Grey: TESTED

Grey+N/A: vendor did not want to get awarded/evaluated

Black+N/A: vendor did not take part

Although STANDARD is already a good score, tests in which a STANDARD award (or lower) was reached indicates areas which need further improvement compared to other products. ADVANCED also indicates areas which may need some improvement, but are already very competent.