

# Doctoring up the new Windows

third-party software for Windows XP.

by Joe DeRouen

When Microsoft released Windows XP, there was already a plethora of software available for the new operating system, just waiting for its release. To date, just about every major software house has made patches available to upgrade existing products and make them compatible with Windows XP. Several have already released new packages exclusively for the OS.

But what about the smaller publishing houses and the shareware developers? Traditionally, shareware and third-party developers have been able to release software that's less expensive, is updated more often, and usually performs just as well or better than the big guns. Support for Windows XP is no exception. In this month's column, we'll take a look at several new shareware and third-party products that can help you get the most out of your Windows XP system.

## customizer XP

>[www.tweaknow.com/](http://www.tweaknow.com/)<

Several different programs out there exist to help you customize the look and feel of your Windows XP interface, but few are as easy to use as the aptly titled Customizer XP. The program, from Tweak Now, is a utility designed to optimize and control your Windows XP PC's performance.

Using a graphical user interface, the utility allows you to modify many hidden Windows registry settings simply by clicking the provided checkboxes. Among other things, the program can help you improve the speed of your Internet connection, clean unused files from your PC, and add or remove Windows startup items.

The Windows startup manager is one of the highlights of the program. It allows you to quickly and easily control what Windows XP does at startup, all without editing text or running hidden program files. Best of all, since everything is controlled via buttons and radio boxes, the software leaves very little room for error. Advanced users will also appreciate the ability to safely alter hidden Registry settings that affect Windows XP's appearance and performance.

Whether you're new to the Windows OS or have been around since the days of DOS, Customizer XP will enhance your ability to control your operating system while helping you get the most out of your system. Customizer XP is shareware and sells for \$23.75.

## RAM Idle

>[www.tweaknow.com/](http://www.tweaknow.com/)<

RAM managers seem a little passé these days. After all, most systems come with at least 128MB of RAM, and you can always add more as you need it. There is, however, something to be said for making the most out of what you do have, and the more efficiently your system uses its available RAM, the better the system will run as a whole. Enter RAM Idle.

RAM Idle, also from Tweak Now, is a memory management program designed for Windows XP. (There are also versions for other Windows flavors.) RAM Idle provides an easy-to-use interface that enables your applications to load faster and more responsively by making more physical memory available to the system. You can use it to free up a selected amount of physical memory when the minimum level (which you set) is reached, as well as to free up a selected amount of physical memory at regular intervals. You can also free up physical memory manually as needed, giving you

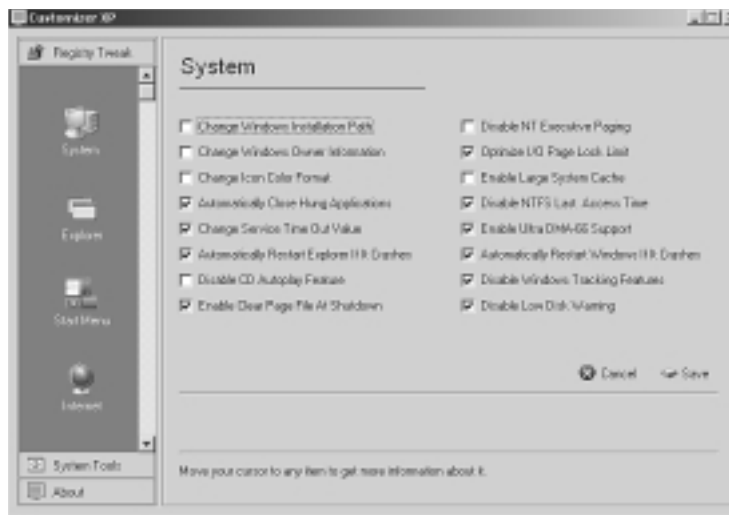
more control over your RAM on the fly.

The program includes various additional features, such as the ability to display free memory in the tray icon, show the percentage of RAM used at any given time, and manually free blocks of RAM using a simple pop-up menu.

Because you're able to constantly monitor free memory, it's very easy to see which programs take up the most of your resources, and deal with them accordingly. RAM Idle has an unlimited trial time and costs \$16.75 to register.

Panda Antivirus Titanium  
>[www.pandasoftware.com/](http://www.pandasoftware.com/)<

Sure, McAfee and Norton are the big



Customizer XP gives you graphical control.

names in antivirus software, but there are several different alternatives out there if you don't want to play with the big boys. Panda Antivirus Titanium, from Panda Software, is one of the best, and it actually manages to beat McAfee and Norton in at least a couple of areas.

The software works well out of the box, and can be up and protecting your PC with a minimum of hassle. If you're experienced with antivirus software, however, and want to explore more

## PANDA ACTUALLY BEATS MCAFEE AND NORTON IN SOME AREAS.



Panda's Titanium

sophisticated features, Panda allows you to change all sorts of settings and configurations. Unlike with McAfee's VirusScan, for example, you can choose to disallow access to services such as telnet and FTP, helping to secure your system against attacks.

Best of all, I've been running the program for weeks without it interfering with any of the other software packages on my system. As anyone who's used antivirus software for any length of time knows, that's a sterling recommendation.

Easy to use but full of features that even the most experienced power user will appreciate, Panda Antivirus Titanium is a viable alternative to the name brands in the antivirus industry. If you have a spare \$25 and want to try something new on your Windows XP system, give it a try.

## HelioBar XP

>[www.sycory.com/](http://www.sycory.com/)<

HelioBar XP is a very simple utility that restores the desktop space normally reserved for your Windows XP taskbar.

The program renders the taskbar transparent, revealing to the world the full length and breadth of whatever background image you have hiding beneath.

The program is fun to use because you can control the level of transparency (up to 100 percent, though full transparency would pretty much make the taskbar useless) and even make the background itself transparent. You can launch the program at Windows XP startup or activate it on the fly when you need it.

And that's the sum total of the program. Simple in scope, HelioBar XP can improve the aesthetics of something you probably stare at several hours a day at least five days a week. It's fun to experiment with the transparency and find the level that works best for your taskbar and the background image behind it. The program is shareware, expires 15 days after installation, and costs \$14.95 to register.

## SpellCheck Anywhere

>[www.spellcheckanywhere.com/](http://www.spellcheckanywhere.com/)<

Have you ever been frustrated by the lack of a spell-checking function in one of your Windows XP programs? Some spreadsheets, for example, don't allow you to spell-check cell entries—although there's just as good a chance that you'll misspell a word in a spreadsheet as in a Word document.

SpellCheck Anywhere changes all that, and then some. Not only does the program endow virtually any Windows XP program with spell-check ability, it also allows you to check the spelling on Internet forms, instant messages, Web-based e-mail, and search engines on the Web.

The program also comes with HNotepad, a utility that enables you to take and copy notes independent of any program you happen to be running at the time. Both programs are called with hotkeys (F11 and F12, both of which can be changed), are quick to learn and easy to use. If your spelling could use a little improvement and you don't want to cut-and-paste words into Word to spell-check them, SpellCheckAnywhere just might be the answer to your prayers.

A fully functional evaluation version of SpellCheckAnywhere (which expires after 15 days) can be downloaded from the company's Web site; the program costs \$19.97 to register.