

Welcome to your safe suite

Fearful of hackers, phishers and viruses?
Symantec's Norton 360 security service
seems to be the answer - but at a price



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Whenever I think about the internet and PC security, a saying attributed to science fiction writer Steven Brust springs to mind: "Just because they really are out to get you doesn't mean you aren't paranoid."

The "they" in this case are the virus and worm writers, hackers, spammers, phishers and pharmlers intent on stealing your personal information and money.

While the security features built into Vista are a big improvement, for instance, on earlier Microsoft operating systems, you still need third-party protection if you plug into the internet. Fortunately there are many third-party security tools, including free or low-cost options.

Examples of excellent "point" (single-function) products are Zone Lab's free ZoneAlarm firewall (www.zonelabs.com), Grisoft's free AVG antivirus software (www.grisoft.com) and Webroot's \$30 anti-spyware package, Spy Sweeper 5.3 (www.webroot.com).

But so-called "blended" threats have emerged and these require the installation of individual security tools that may not work together and can cause crashes. In response, most leading security software companies, including Symantec, McAfee, Trend Micro, Zone Labs and Kaspersky Lab, have built internet security suites by bundling tools into a single software package.

This is a good approach but first-generation suites

were often strong in one area by being weak in another. Some were tightly integrated, others loosely assembled. Spurred perhaps by Microsoft's entry into the PC security business with Windows Live OneCare, big suite vendors have begun to address these issues.

Symantec has responded with its long-awaited Norton 360 all-in-one security suite/subscription service. I have been testing a pre-launch "beta" version for months and downloaded the final version last week. So far, I am impressed - though at \$80 for a one-year subscription that can run on three PCs, Norton 360 is much more expensive than most.

I set out to find whether Norton 360 delivers on its promise of 360-degree protection and whether its price premium is justified.

It combines all the standard security suite features, including anti-virus, anti-spyware, firewall, intrusion protection and anti-phishing. But it also incorporates Symantec's PC back-up technology and a module designed to eliminate the need to buy, manage and update multiple products.

It builds on Symantec's popular Norton Internet Security 2007 suite, but aims to make fewer demands on users. The company says it designed Norton 360 to work as automatically as possible. Mostly, it succeeds. The suite installed smoothly, the interface is simple, clean and intuitive, and it is designed to consume fewer system resources than most suites.

Like Norton Internet Security 2007, anti-spam and parental controls are offered as an add-on, minimising system slowdown for users who do not need them.

Among its other innovations, Norton 360 includes Symantec's new Sonartechnology, which will stop so-called zero-day attacks by detecting and preventing malicious behaviour.

To protect online transactions, Norton 360 taps the anti-phishing technology built into Norton Confidential. A green bar across the top of the browser reveals the status of a website, blocking known phishing sites while allowing access to "safe" authenticated sites and flagging sites whose status is uncertain.

But my favourite new element is the back-up feature. PC users know the importance of backing up but it is a chore that many still avoid. By building a variety

THE BREAKDOWN

Norton 360

Pros: Easy to use, tightly integrated and comprehensive security service with solid local and online back-up features.

Cons: More expensive than the competition.

