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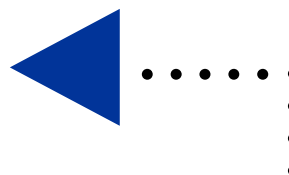


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Our Picks for the Best Free Software!

**Vol 8 Issue 4
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**Yahoo
opens up a
new search
platform**

**Microsoft
Cuts the
Price of
Vista**

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Headlines

Yahoo opens up search with web-based solution

<http://arstechnica.com/news.ars/post/20080226-yahoo-opens-up-search-but-not-far-enough.html>

As Yahoo tries to stave off a determined Microsoft takeover, the company has announced one of its most interesting new search innovations in recent memory. By opening up a new search platform for third parties to build upon, Yahoo search results will soon offer a lot more relevant information in the form of images, restaurant reviews, and virtually anything else developers can dream up.

Announced on the official Yahoo Search Blog, the company's new open search platform will allow third parties to build browser plug-ins that can augment Yahoo search results and insert additional relevant data. As you can see in the example Yahoo provided, crowd-sourcing local review site Yelp has added a restaurant rating, contact information, and links for reviews and photos to a Yahoo search for "Higuma Japanese Restaurant."

Amie Street's pricing, social features attract indie artists

<http://arstechnica.com/news.ars/post/20080225-amie-streets-pricing-social-features-attract-artists.html>

As the major record labels finally come to terms with DRM-free music, indie labels continue to blaze new paths in the realm of digital distribution. Amie Street, one of the first online music stores that offered DRM-free downloads, has long been a popular destination for independent artists to sell their music, and now even more "top" indie artists are hopping on board to make use of Amie Street's unique pricing structure ...like everything else released through Amie Street, everything will start out as a free download. But don't think it'll stay free for long—the more people that download the songs, the higher the price gets. The popularity-driven pricing structure tops out at 98¢ per song, along the same lines as a song you would buy from iTunes or Amazon MP3.

Amie Street began to make its way into mainstream consciousness almost a year ago when a number of major artists from Nettwerk Music Group signed on. This included Barenaked Ladies, Avril Lavigne, Sarah McLachlan, and Paul Van Dyk, all of which were received well by the Amie Street community...the

company has received some significant funding from Amazon and has grown a lot since the early days, allowing it to continue adding artists to its repertoire.

Amazon's investment in Amie Street seems odd at first, given the company's own DRM-free music business (which also sells music from independent labels). But Amazon could have other things in mind for Amie Street, like incorporating its pricing structure and social networking features into Amazon's own store...

Unity under the sea: Google invests in new undersea cable

<http://arstechnica.com/news.ars/post/20080226-unity-under-the-sea-google-invests-in-new-undersea-cable.html>

Google announced today that it plans to join five other international companies in building an additional undersea cable between the US and Japan. The need for the cable itself is unsurprising, given that trans-Pacific bandwidth needs grew by 63.7 percent between 2002 and 2007, but the fact that Google is joining the consortium of Bharti Airtel, Global Transit, KDDI Corporation, Pacnet, and SingTel is unusual. Google is insisting, however, that this new move does not signal a change in focus for the company.

Once completed, the newly-minted "Unity" five-fiber-pair cable...will increase total data transfer capacity between the US and Asia by around 20 percent, but Unity is designed for expansion. Although it will initially offer five fiber pairs, the line can be expanded up to eight fiber pairs, for a total bandwidth of 7.68Tbps...

Cost estimates for the 6,000-mile (10,000-km) cable from...Japan to Los Angeles...put the total expense at around \$300 million. As one partner out of six, however, Google's total cost expenditure on the effort is relatively small (by Google terms, anyway), and the payoff going forward could be huge.

While Google probably doesn't have any plans to compete with the telecom industry, owning a piece of the cable gives it a say in how that cables assets are deployed and how/when bandwidth capacity is upgraded. Google, like most tech companies, has big plans for the Asian market, and owning a share in the cables that make that market more accessible is a logical step for the company to take.

STAFF PICKS - The Best Free Software

There is no substitute for quality commercial software but sometimes there are alternatives and various open source and freeware applications that are well worth checking out. We've compiled our staff picks for the top free software that you may want to try. Staff polled include Matt, Ian, John, Bob and Phil. Below are our picks for the best free software in various categories.

Antivirus

The staff is split with equal recommendations for both **AVG Anti-Virus Free Edition**, and **Avira AntiVir Personal Edition Classic**.

<http://free.grisoft.com/>

AVG scans email, files on demand, files upon access, and can be scheduled to update and run periodically. Recommended for it's ease of use and that it doesn't put a heavy strain on system resources.

<http://free-av.com/>



AntiVir will not catch email attachments until download, but it scans files on demand, on access, can be scheduled as well. It's also recommended for it's ability to catch undocumented viruses and can catch rootkits. It's also noted

for working well alongside other security programs.

<http://avast.com/>

Bob also recommends avast!. It can't be scheduled, but it has some unique features like notification by email or IM of infections.

Anti-Spyware

<http://www.safer-networking.org/>



It's unanimous, **Spybot Search and Destroy** is the recommendation of all five staff members. It cannot be scheduled but it's relatively fast and good at catching a wide range of spyware and tracking cookies.

Several staffers recommended running it in conjunction with other anti-spyware programs including **AdAware**, **SpywareBlaster**, and **Microsoft Windows Defender**.

Music

<http://www.winamp.com/>

WINAMP 5.52

For music playback not everyone had a suggestion, but **WinAmp** was the popular choice. WinAmp, currently at version 5, has been around for almost as long as the mp3 format itself and is a great utility for playing CDs, mp3s, internet radio, and even CD ripping and burning. **iTunes** and **Windows Media Player** are other options.

Word Processing/Text Editing



<http://www.openoffice.org/>

This was another category with an obvious winner. All five staff members recommended

OpenOffice.org. OpenOffice.org includes technology developed by Sun Microsystems for their StarOffice software. It includes full-functioning word processor, spreadsheet, and database applications and works with many formats native to MS Office including .doc.

Web Browsing

Web browser recommendations were spread out. **Mozilla Firefox** and **Opera** tied for the top, while John sung the praises of **Safari**.

<http://www.mozilla.com/>

Firefox is inarguably the most popular of the non Internet Explorer browsers, featuring better standards compliance and more features than IE, it's a quantifiably better browsing experience.

<http://www.opera.com/>

Opera is fast and highly innovative with many interesting features. Incidentally and not surprisingly it was the first to introduce the now popular tabbed-browsing.

<http://www.apple.com/macosx/features/safari.html>

Safari is the highly capable default browser for Apple Macintosh computers and a PC version is available.



Archiving/Extracting

<http://www.izarc.org/>

Izarc was the champion of this category. It will handle the regulars like .zip, .rar, and .7z, as well as almost any other archive file type.

<http://www.7-zip.org/>

Other recommendations included **7-zip**, a fully featured archiving program despite it's name, it

deals well with other formats.

<http://www.extractnow.com/>

ExtractNow is great for extracting multiple files, even large numbers at one time.

<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~nulifetv/freezip/>

Freezip is liked for being small and simple to use. – END

Headlines - cont.

It's Windows Vista! Only Cheaper!

<http://blogs.pcworld.com/techlog/archives/006570.html>

Okay, now this is unexpected: Microsoft is slashing the price of some retail versions of Windows Vista, effective when the SP1 version rolls out later this year. Vista Ultimate's full version will go to \$319 from \$399 (an upgrade is now \$219, down from \$259); Home Premium's upgrade is now \$129, down from \$159. The Microsoft site has an interview with an exec who talks about the news.

Who will benefit from this development? Basically, folks with Windows XP machines who have chosen not to upgrade to Vista until now because they found it pricey. But it's not as easy as that: Most of those people probably have PCs they bought in 2006 or before, and while some of those aging machines will run Vista well, many won't. (If you bought a Windows XP computer in 2007, I have a hunch you did so specifically to avoid Windows Vista, and therefore today's news means little or nothing to you.)

I certainly hear some grumbling about the cost of Vista--especially Ultimate, which, even at its new price, is pretty expensive compared to Apple's \$129

Max OS X 10.5 "Leopard." But I'm curious whether there are really that many people out there who have been itching to buy a Vista upgrade--and have a PC potent enough to run it well--but haven't done so yet.

One also wonders what's motivating Microsoft to cut prices. The company says that research showed that a cheaper Vista would appeal to more computer users beyond early adopters and geeks. Logical enough. But did it misjudge the public's willingness to fork over \$300 for a piece of software when it initially priced Vista? And is the price drop a sign of panic, or a confident statement that it thinks Vista has mass appeal?

Today's news doesn't affect the price of new Windows Vista computers. And I have a sneaking suspicion that for every Microsoft customer who's psyched by the prospect of a lower-cost Vista, there are several who'd be far more thrilled if the company undid its announced plans to discontinue Windows XP on June 30th. (I've rarely if ever run into anyone who's told me that he or she thinks Windows Vista is a major argument for buying a new computer--but a lot of folks have worriedly asked me if it's still possible to buy an XP box.)

Shutdown - Install and run

http://www.rinkworks.com/stupid/cs_freedisks.shtml

One night working at technical support, this old lady called and told me that she received our disk and said that she's afraid of it.

* Tech Support: "Well ma'am, there is nothing to be afraid of. It's for your computer."

* Customer: "Well, I don't have a computer. The directions say 'install and run'. I'm too old to run."

* Tech Support: "Ma'am, could you please hold?"

I need a brief pause to scream with laughter.

* Tech Support: "Ma'am, I can assure you that you are ok."

* Customer: "Ok. Should I call the police?"

* Tech Support: "No, ma'am, just throw it away."

* Customer: "Well, there is a silver thing that slides across, and it clicks. What is that?"

* Tech Support: "It is safe to throw it away. It's for a computer, ok?"

* Customer: "But is this a bomb?"

* Tech Support: "No, ma'am, just throw it away."

* Customer: "Now?"

* Tech Support: "Yes, if you like."

* Customer: "Son, you saved my life! Thank you, and have a nice day."