

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 133. My Favorites

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This is not an article about My Favorites in Internet Explorer. Rather, it is about Stan's favorites – good websites that I have come across and made part of my personal bookmark repertoire.

Where do you go to get new programs? Some people just buy them in a store for safety. Everyone knows programs you buy in a store are safe – no spyware or viruses, correct? Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! Even Microsoft's stuff has been infected in past years. Moreover, there are lots of programmers out there that have written software themselves to solve one or another of their own problems, and they sometimes happily share them with others, free! So, all you need is a safe site, where you can peruse freeware and shareware to see if something will work to solve your problems, too.

My absolute favorite website for this was mentioned briefly in #132. Major Geeks (www.majorgeeks.com) is a no-nonsense, well-organized, safe place to peruse and download the latest and greatest. They clearly label shareware (and the cost) and freeware. They also test all files for spyware, trojans and viruses. Furthermore, they test all files for quality – checking to see if the programs do what is claimed. That doesn't mean that every program you get there is wonderful – just that it will more or less do what it says it will do and it will not contain any malware. Updated and organized daily, this site is the best I have come across. I routinely check it once a day for new stuff. But that is not all.

When you have this site on your screen, look at the Info section on the right panel. Click on Top Freeware Picks. There you will find the best of the freeware, organized in handy lists – antivirus, antispyware, rootkit detectors, firewalls and so on, three or four programs in each category. Although they don't explicitly say so, I believe they are listed in quality order. For example, nothing in the world currently beats Zone Alarm for firewall software, and it is first in their list.

One of the more recent additions to this site is the Auslogics Disk Defragmenter. This handy utility beats the defragmenter that comes with Windows hands down! It is F A A S T! So fast, that it makes a quick defrag job a pleasure. While it does not reorder the sequence of files on your disk, it does the really important job (defragmenting all files) really quickly, thus it keeps your machine humming at top speed. Everyone should have a copy of this program, and should use it at least every couple of days. A wonderful freebie! Anyway, be sure to explore [majorgeeks.com](http://www.majorgeeks.com) – it is well worth your while.

If you are really into freeware, explore Last Freeware Files (www.321download.com/lastfreeware/index.html). This site lists lots of great freeware that has since become either shareware or pay-for software. While these are largely older versions, many still do the job just fine and may solve a problem at no cost to you.

One of my favorite electronics sites is at www.freebyte.com/electronics. You can find printed circuit board and circuit design stuff, pinouts and data sheets for integrated circuits, parts sources, electronics tutorials and much more. This is a fun site to peruse. I bet you will find something interesting to download here!

Like to homebrew? Harry's Homebrew Homepage (<http://web.telia.com/~U85920178/>) contains lots of circuits and projects, and links, too!

Have you received notice from a friend that a new virus has hit the web? Something like "don't open any emails from lotteryresults.com" or your computer will go up in smoke? Check it out with Symantec

(Norton Antivirus) at www.symantec.com/enterprise/security_response/threatexplorer/risks/hoaxes.jsp to see if it is a hoax. Chances are, it is.

If you are an ARES/RACES member with an upcoming public health/hospital exercise on bioterrorism involving anthrax, where do you go for basic medical information? The best source is our own Center for Disease Control (<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/>), where you can find everything you wanted to know about this and other diseases, as well as other types of threats. Bookmark this one!

Putting up antennas? Go to <http://www.ocarc.ca/coax.htm> to check feed line loss. An on-screen calculator will show you that 100' of Radio Shack (Tandy) RG58 will transfer only 16 watts of power out for 50 watts of power in at 146 MHz, for a 1:1 SWR. This will drop to 14 watts for a 2:1 SWR, and 12 watts for a 3:1 SWR. Handy, Tandy!

Need a driver for a device hooked up to your computer? (Device drivers are little software programs that let your computer's Operating System talk to a device and vice versa, in a way they can both understand). Or, do you just want to check if there are any new ones for your machine? Go to <http://www.driversguide.com>. Log in with the name: **driver** and the password: **all** to let you get started. This is great site to solve software problems, and probably contains the largest database of stuff, anywhere.

Thinking of upgrading? My lady Nancy (KC9FZK) reminds me that QRZ (www.QRZ.com/p/testing.pl) has up-to-date practice exams for all levels of ham radio. She upgraded to General in Jan '06 on the first try after using this site to get her ready (along with readings). Her next goal is to upgrade to Extra this winter.

Probably the most important site you should visit regularly is Microsoft's Windows Update (unless you already have your machine set for automatic updates). No matter what version of Windows you use, it is vitally important for you to at least keep your machine safe with the latest security updates. This site will also occasionally provide you with a new device driver, specifically for your machine, as a bonus. Simply click Start, Windows Update to get there. The first time you do it, check **Express** to look for high priority updates you need, and watch the pretty green squares crawling across your screen while the software checks your machine. By all means, let it download and install any updates it finds! When you check next (a week or two later), check **Custom**. That will look for any possible device drivers that need updating, as well as the critical updates. Hey, I am not fond of Microsoft, but this site is necessary, safe and is done very, very well. Microsoft knows that the site has to be good or many people would not use it, and they do want folks to keep their systems updated and safe.

Do that majorgeeks.com site. You will be pleased. Happy computing!