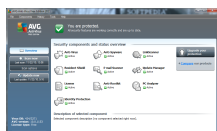


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[AVG Free Edition 2011](#)

With over six million downloads, AVG Free Edition is the [second most downloaded antivirus on Softpedia](#). Around the globe, it is dubbed the most downloaded free security product ever, although today this does not reflect its popularity.

Back in the day, this version of the formerly-known Grisoft, now AVG Technologies Czech developing company, was a hell of a kickoff for raising awareness on the AVG product line. Over the years, the free edition of the product has evolved from a simple tool designed to detect viruses to almost a full-fledged security instrument capable of nailing and pushing all sorts of malware off the system.

Installing the latest edition of the application does not require too much effort, although you have to pay attention to the process if you don't want all the components on the system. Depending on your computer skills, you can opt between a quick install, which is fit for most of the users, and a custom one, recommended to more experienced users who need a special configuration of the application.

When selecting the type of the installation, the developer also lets you decide whether you want the AVG 2011 gadget on the system or not. It is nothing but an extension to the most important options in the program: starting a scan, updating the program and calling PC Analyzer component to start checking the computer for performance issues such as registry errors, junk files, fragmentation level or broken shortcuts.

If you go for a custom installation process, you will be able to pick additional protection components you want: email scanner (checks email messages for malware), LinkScanner or Identity Protection (behavioral detection component). Further steps in the installation process include deciding on the integration of AVG Security Toolbar in [Firefox](#) and [Internet Explorer](#). This provides visual alerts for LinkScanner, shows notification for incoming emails (Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail and POP3), news from around the world and local weather as Yahoo! Weather reports it.

The current edition brings a new smart scanning engine, which is designed to lower the times required to complete a full system check-up. During our tests, the power of this tool was revealed at the second scan of the entire test system, which took just eight minutes and two seconds to finish. The first complete system checkup timed 1 hour and 21 minutes. Essential to reduce the scan time to such low values is the fact that the application will verify only the files that have been changed.

As far as the detection goes, this year's AVG Free Edition managed to record quite a high score, missing only 10 malware items out of 336. Crunching this into percentage, the result shows a 97% detection rate.

Resource usage chart showed little stress on the CPU, averaging somewhere around the 50% value and rarely peaking above 80%. For a better management of system resources, the application comes with the possibility to adjust the process priority for the scan in

progress.

You can choose from four levels, user sensitive being the most appropriate if you want to get some work done on the computer while AVG scans it. The beauty of this option is that resource usage allotted for the scan increases when you're not using the PC and lowers when activity is recorded. The other three levels available (low, medium and high) simply allow you to set a balance between resources used and speed of the task: the higher the process priority, the more resources will be engaged and the speedier the file processing.

False positives were the only concern during our testing, as the application managed to wrongfully label some perfectly valid items as malicious. Among these there was [PicPick](#), [The Big Bad Launcher](#) and an application built with the help of [Autolt](#) scripting language.

The first two apps were detected by the behavioral analysis protection module, while the third was picked up upon access and labeled as being infected with Autoit.TIX worm, which has no description in [AVG's virus encyclopedia](#), nor a danger-level bar.

As for the options offered, the only ones were sending it to the vault, open its folder or ignore it. Important to know is that using the third alternative will cause AVG to block access to the file, but not kill the process if it is already running (subsequent scans should detect it, though).

From "Overview" panel of the main application window, you can control the way AVG performs and behaves for almost each featured module. A basic set of options is available, allowing you to turn the modules on or off, which can be accessed with no effort. It also lets you adjust how the modules work by enabling or disabling certain components.

Finer tweaking can be done in the "Advanced settings" panel. Compared to what antivirus configuration means today, this is an intricate maze of options for the beginner user. On the other hand, an average one, accustomed to antivirus products, will have no problems with this window and adjusting the settings their way.

The choices here offer great granular control for more experienced users, allowing them to manage how each component in the application behaves. Identity Protection can be configured to prompt you on detecting malware or it can be instructed to proceed directly with an automatic action (quarantine detected threats or just known ones). Also, you can create a whitelist for programs AVG should not alert you about.

Virus Vault can be set up with regards to its size and the age of the items that should be deleted in order to make room for new ones. Additionally, you can impose a limit on the amount of items to hold.

Although LinkScanner search-shield and surf-shield components can be enabled/disabled from "Overview" window, this can also be achieved from "Advanced settings" panel. However, the latter provides another setting, that lets you enable a LinkScanner approved stamp for any MySpace or Facebook message verified by this component (applies to messages containing links).

The advantage of LinkScanner is that it initiates a dynamic inspection of accessed web

content. This means that content is downloaded in real time from the web and checked, thus ensuring user protection when surfing to any location on the Internet.

Regardless of the scan type you choose, these offer a wide range of customization settings which include automatic measures for healing/removing infections, and reporting potentially unwanted programs and spyware threats. More personalization choices include scanning for tracking cookies, looking inside archives, enabling heuristics for enhanced detection, exclusion of user-defined extensions or adjusting the system resources management.

The scan types available in the product include verifying the entire system, starting a checkup straight from Windows Explorer context menu, examine only user-defined locations, or you can start examining the system for rootkits. Any of this can be scheduled to run at a preset time and date. Multiple schedules are supported.

One way to get your computer infected is via email messages. [AVG Free Edition 2011](#) does not overlook this, and shows options for verifying both incoming and outgoing email and their attachments for malware. The subject line can be modified with a custom text string in the case of infected messages, while a certification text can be added at the end of any email to guarantee to the viewer that it is threat-free.

"Advanced settings" screen is also the home for personalizing the way resident shield acts and the type of files it should investigate. The available settings let you enable heuristics, reporting potentially unwanted programs, scanning files on closing them, scanning items referred in the registry or the boot sector of removable media.

Configuring the entire application may look like a pretty tough job, but it is actually an easy task. The options are mostly self-explanatory, so referring to the documentation is unlikely, even for a less knowledgeable user. However, compared to the general trend of keeping free antivirus' setting down to a minimum, AVG Free Edition is a bit complicated.

New to this issue of AVG Free is the PC Analyzer component, designed to verify the performance of the system. It scans the registry for errors, detects junk files, measures fragmentation level and checks for broken shortcuts. Fixing all encountered errors is limited to paying customers, as the tool is actually available as a [separate download](#) and encompasses a huge range of instruments ready to bring your PC in mint condition.

Speed, detection and usability is what this new build of AVG focused on. The application managed to offer faster scans after the initial one completes, it recorded high malware detection rate, and does not require a rocket scientist to handle and configure. It would look like the company achieved its goal, but there is still the problem with false positives and minor glitches that pop up here and there.

The Good

Installation process has been greatly improved by reducing the number of steps the user has to go through. This, combined with the high detection rates it recorded during our tests, smart-scanning feature, which lowers scan times, makes for a fine progress of the application.

For easy management of the program, "Overview" panel displays all the components and some light configuration options for almost each of them.

The duration of the scans can be shortened by switching the process to a higher priority. Alternatively, you can adjust it to use minimal system resources while you're doing some computer work and run in high priority when you're away.

The Bad

Some users may feel the need to adjust the thoroughness level of the scan, but most of them would love to know how long scanning takes. AVG 2011 Free Edition does not sport a progress bar, and the only hint to finishing the task is checking the folder currently under analysis.

You're in for quite a wait when accessing Virus Vault to see the threats picked up by AVG. The window's vertical scroll disappears if you resize the window to a smaller value.

After checking the Virus Vault, the user interface would always become non-responsive.

The Truth

AVG 2011 Free Edition incorporates 200+ changes designed to increase speed, detection rate and ease of use. It brings a numerous number of protection layers that cover even the security of your web surfing on any website.

During our tests, the only downside was the behavioral protection with false positives.