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Ad-Aware's scan and remove capabilities
Lavasoft

[Ad-Aware Pro Internet Security I](#)

Interface, scanning and resource usage

Just as Lavasoft has already accustomed its users by taking eight months to bake a new version of its flagship product, Ad-Aware, it could not disappoint this year either, especially with the fierce competition and every security product struggling to adapt to the new trend in malware attacks. In the past years viruses have lost their touch and spyware and spam took the number one spot as the most vicious cyber disease. So this should be Ad-Aware's lucky ticket as spyware is its specialty and this is the fight it has prepared all this time for.

Regarding the editions up for grabs, nothing has changed. You will benefit from the same three versions, two paid products (Plus and Pro) with features to match their price and a free one, designed for every user out there. For the paid editions prices are \$26.95 and \$39.95, respectively, the differences between them consisting in the amount of features available. The Pro version is, of course, the full-fledged Ad-Aware that comes with the complete rack of options.

The amount of new features added to this new iteration of the award-winning Ad-Aware is quite impressive, as they have been thought to improve comfort as well as detection and removal of malware. The Neutralizer for instance is an advanced removal tool cut off to combat malicious code that attempts to restore itself after computer restart. Another example is the Download Guard for [Internet Explorer](#) (is installed separately and scans your downloads for malicious code), which warns you upon malicious file download so that you can take the appropriate measures before the system is infected.

Do Not Disturb mode is tailored to offer comfortable protection to the user eliminating galling interruptions while playing games or watching movies. But the one feature that will be welcomed by all users is the introduction of Genotype Detection Technology.

This is the backbone of this new Ad-Aware that elevates the application to a whole new level. It's a new malware detection system based on heuristics, which helps proactively protect the system from threats that have not yet been created. It works by cross-referencing the samples already in Ad-Aware's database and tracking dominant and unique properties, thus being able to discover new variants of malicious code.

Its benefits surpass detection and extend to minimizing the application's effort of uncovering threats, thus putting less strain on the machine, because it uses one-pass scanning. This feature actually offers minimum impact on system resources and at a very quick rate.

Interface & Scanning

Lavasoft did nothing daring this time and preserved the exact same looks as the [Anniversary Edition](#), offering a clean-cut interface, crisp, with uncomplicated, easy to spot menus. The new features are easily reached in the four main areas dominating the upper part of the main window.

And yet, despite maintaining the same appearance as before, this Ad-Aware actually provides two ways to interact with it: Simple and Advanced modes appeal to a larger audience covering the needs of even the computer-impaired customers. To make an idea of

how simple the Simple mode is, it is so light that the schedule function was a drag, so it had to be cut off. Scan types are reduced to only two (Smart and Full), eliminating Profile Scan, which lets you customize the threats to look for and the sections to search. It is so simple, that there are no settings to be made and Ad-Watch's real-time protection cannot be turned off, for neither processes nor registry or network. So simple that no professional user would dare use it.

Just like in the anterior version of the application, the first menu on the list is Main and, as its name suggests, it is the primary screen to look at and find out if the system has been penetrated by malware. If all's green, then there is nothing to worry about. From here you can proceed to scheduling and customizing the scans by creating profiles, or skip to Ad-Watch, the real-time monitor in Ad-Aware.

Main is also the menu where you can see overall, or detailed statistics on the activity of the software (malware detected, how it was handled or Threat Analysis Index (TAI) rating). If you want to start from scratch, statistics can be easily reset from the lower part of the screen.

Scanning in Advanced mode has not been modified, making available the Smart Scan (fast system check in the most critical sections), Full Scan (searches every nook and cranny of the system) and Profile Scan (searches for malware according to user-defined set of rules) which lets you select the areas to look into, as well as determine the files that should be verified.

Scan menu shelters four tabs that allow selecting the type of verification you want to be run, setting up a schedule, managing quarantined items and creating an ignore list out of the detected items. For each of the items pertaining to the same family of malware, the application provides a set of options meant to restore or remove the threats.

Although all this sounds like a pretty well laid plan, there is one impediment, though, in both Ignore List and Quarantine: there is no option to set an action for all the items in the list, not just for those pertaining to the same family. On a clean machine this is not at all a major drawback, but on a heavily infected system with malicious code pertaining to various families, this is a great pullback as there is no automatic handle to deal with all detected threats.

Testing the scan times, this version of Ad-Aware did quite well on the job. An on-demand scan on a 2.51GB folder filled with 139 folders containing 14,517 spyware samples took about two hours and 47 minutes. System was not strained at all during the procedure, the application recording a peak of 50% CPU usage, while RAM settled for a comfortable 95MB for the operation to run smoothly. Considering today's demands for operating systems and average software to run smoothly, these values are well within the acceptable system resource usage boundaries.

As for the cleaning procedure, we ran into a bit of a jam as it seems that the application is not used to dealing with such amounts of malware because after 51 minutes of waiting Ad-Aware still did not complete the cleaning process. Neutralizer, the new advanced removal tool, is clearly slowing down the cleaning procedure and, from what we've seen, it also leaves a mark on the overall system performance (RAM usage reached constant values of a bit more than 400MB).

Resource usage was merely a problem on our test computer, a 2GHz Core 2 Duo equipped with 2GB of RAM, but lower specced computers may run into some trouble. Also, some good time after giving the go for the cleaning procedure, the system tray icon still showed "Preparing to clean" status when hovering the mouse over it.

Repeating the test with a database of 329 samples showed that it was no fluke messing up the evaluation and that this kind of behavior is normal at the current stage of Ad-Aware. Unfortunately, because of the cleaning problem we could not establish the removal rate accurately. However, an estimated detection rate could be laid down, and in our case it was of at least 98%.

Another issue was present in Quarantine tab when the amount of items contained exceeds window boundaries. In this case, the application was unable to retain the action we selected after simply scrolling to see more items. No matter what we chose, after scrolling the action would revert to the default "Do Nothing." Multiple selection has not yet been implemented in the suite, so applying the same action to a larger number of malware families is out of the question.

The Good

Ad-Aware Pro Internet Security inherited the ease of use and clear-cut interface from the Anniversary Edition, making navigation from one menu to another a cinch. The Advanced and Simple modes make it convenient to handle for experienced users and beginners alike.

The scheduling function is all comprehensive and permits planning scans and actions to be performed automatically. This way you no longer get your hands dirty with malware and leave the entire chore to Ad-Aware.

Creating your own scan profiles is an extremely flexible option to start the search for particular files in specific areas of the computer. Combine this with scheduling and you've got yourself an automatic malware detection and elimination system.

The Bad

Cleaning option takes a while to complete, even if there is a small amount of threats to deal with. During the process we encountered elevated usage of system resources, compared to scan mode.

We faced unresponsive times, especially when trying to restore items in the quarantine. Scrolling in quarantine window annuls your action of choice, changing it to the "Do Nothing" default.

In some cases, when running spyware on the test computer Ad-Aware was slow in reaction allowing [Windows Defender](#) to pick up the threat first and notifying.

The Truth

Doubling the security offered by Ad-Aware with the default one in Windows (Windows Defender) or the free [Microsoft Security Essentials](#) definitely strengthens the security layer

of your system.

At the current stage Ad-Aware still has rough edges that compete with the smooth running of the application. After completing our testing, it remains in the top ten list of antispware utilities.

[Check out TrackSweep, Toolbox and settings](#)