



settings to select specific areas and the possibility to add particular folders from a local drive. All this can be achieved from the Settings panel under the Scanning section. Here you can create multiple scan profiles and choose the necessary options for a flexible protection. It is here also where you can pick the heuristics detection level (Mild, Medium or Strict) or integrate Ad-Aware's scan function into Windows' right click menu.

Ad-Aware allows you to select the files that should be detected during system checkup. The options include rootkits, spyware heuristics and archives. Also, for faster scan, operation users are allowed to set the maximum size of a file to be verified or enable the verification of executable files only.

As any respectable malware fighter on the market, Ad-Aware brings a set it and forget it feature under the form of a scheduler. This allows for planning computer scans at any time and with any frequency as well as choosing any of the scan types available. Multiple schedules can be created and the actions are independent from one another.

Testing the scan function proved that Ad-Aware had improved resource usage and moved pretty fast during the process. The downside came at eliminating detected items because it took its time throwing them out of the system. The recorded time was in some cases higher than the scanning time.

The application provides the scan results together with quite a large set of details. Ad-Aware gives the family a detected malware pertains to, the number of nasties found of the same family and the threat level presented. Pressing the two down arrows at the end of the family listing will unfold it and show all the threats found as well as the location on disk and a brief description of the threat (how it affects your computer).

Actions for eliminating the malware include quarantine, removing it from the computer, repairing the item, adding it to ignore list or allowing it once. You can set the same action for all detected scumware in a family or customize it for each and every one of them.

The downside comes when trying to remove them from quarantine because there is no option to be applied to all contained items and you have to set the action for each and every one of them before hitting the "Perform Actions Now" button. Another drawback is the lack of the pause button, this leading to your inability to suspend the scanning and re-engage it at a later time. More on the negative side, there is absolutely no form of estimating the completion time for the current job.

On the upside there is the possibility to set a restore point before getting rid of all threats found. This way you can revert the process and restore all deleted files in case some application is affected by the lack of an Ad-Aware detected file.

Testing Ad-Aware's detection showed that the application is still one of the best choices when it comes to securing the system against spyware. We ran our tests on a spyware database of 604 nasties of all kinds and types and Ad-Aware managed to nick into 96% (that is 580 of them).

Anti-virus protection on the other hand is not that efficient and the lack of experience in this field shows. Our first test included a database of 527 carefully selected nasties and

Ad-Aware detected only 104 of them so the percentage recorded was a mere 19.7%. During a second test, on a much larger database composed of a bulk of 4312 infected files, Ad-Aware managed to find 3184 infections raising the percentage to almost 74%. Taking into consideration that the anti-virus is a pretty recent addition and knowing the high spyware detection level, Ad-Aware makes for a great malware fighter.

Extras: TrackSweep and Toolbox

TrackSweep is designed to erase all traces of your web browsing. It works with the three most important competitors on the market (Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox and Opera) and includes emptying areas such as cache, cookies, history, last typed URLs and tabs.

Using it is as simple as selecting the items to be reset and clicking the Sweep Now button in the lower part of the application window. Should one of the affected browsers be open, TrackSweep will alert you and ask you to close it and re-initiate the sweeping process for the opened web browser. The cleaning process for all the other browsers will continue unhindered. It would be great if the name of the application were given so that you know exactly what it's all about.

TrackSweep works like a charm and does its job rigorously, efficiently cleaning all browser areas with the least effort possible.

In the toolbox included only in the Pro version of Ad-Aware you will find a process manager, a startup manager, a hosts file editor and ThreatWork. These are all standalone applications developed to help you optimize computer performance and have a better look at how certain processes are launched on the system.

Process Watch, the process manager included in the tool chest, is built up pretty simple, yet provides the necessary information for you to take an informed decision when terminating a process or letting it run. Details displayed consist in process ID number, amount of RAM it uses, number of threads opened, CPU priority, date and time of its creation and full path to its location.

When selecting an item in the list the application automatically shows the modules it loaded and its threads and their priority. Of course, this level of detail is not just for any user and few are those capable of interpreting all the data.

Managing running processes and their modules can be achieved by simply accessing their context menu. Thus, terminating a process, its tree, suspending and resuming it, setting a different CPU priority or accessing its detail page are all a right click away. If an unknown process is running, the application makes available the possibility to google it directly.

Making your operating system boot faster is generally a job for a startup manager. In Ad-Aware you will be able to deal with both startup services as well as applications. Interface-wise, AutoStart Manager does not fall too far from Process Watcher and simplicity is still the general trait of the app.

AutoStart Manager lists all services loading at startup with brief details on them, such as the manufacturer, if it is signed, CPU and RAM usage. Context menu options are few and allow only disabling the service and accessing its properties page where you can find the file name, startup location and a description. Automatic Google search is preserved. With the application list things are exactly the same, nothing more, nothing less.

For another level of system protection Ad-Aware's Toolbox makes available a Hosts File Editor. The tool permits configuring the Hosts file to block ads, banners, cookies and even hijackers. Simply add the IP of the server supplying the above mentioned nags and the connection will be cut off keeping your system ad-free.

A search box is available for fast tracking either a host name or a specific IP address. More than this, you can write-protect the Hosts file and export the list in a TXT document.

ThreatWork is the last instrument of Ad-Aware's Toolbox. It lets you send suspicious files to Lavasoft and contribute to the enlargement of the threat definitions, thus improving detection. No confidential details that could lead to tracking you down or compromise your privacy are transmitted and drag and drop is the fastest method to add your files.

## The Good

Anniversary Edition is definitely something else. The interface has shrunk since last year but all menu items are still within easy reach and you benefit from a pervasive view over system status. Statistics show the threats detected per date and the action taken on detected items (removed, quarantined, repaired, added to Ignore list or allowed to run once).

Scan module brings the Profile Scan component, which lets you practically customize what to be scanned. You can create multiple scan profiles as well as plan multiple scan schedules.

TrackSweep will erase all traces you leave behind after web surfing sessions; all traces are eliminated with a single click of a button.

Toolbox has been added a startup manager that takes care of both user applications and services and ThreatWork, a suspicious file submission service. Both of them are easy to use and contribute to improved detection and operating system load.

During our tests on spyware detection Ad-Aware scored the highest and got very close to 100%. Grouping malware in families and providing a brief description of the way they affect the system is a great idea.

SmartSet offers you the recommended action when detecting malware. It is an automated solution for dealing with the nasties, which takes into account TAI rating.

Before eliminating all found objects, you can set a system restore point so there is a safety net in case something heads South and an application needs a deleted file.

## The Bad

Although it is a great idea to include an antivirus to double system protection and cover a larger pool of areas, it comes with a low detection level.

The scan mode does not provide an estimation for job completion. All you have is the duration of the scan as it is running. Adding at least a progress bar would be great. Also, if you have to eliminate a greater number of malware families you will have to provide an action for each and every one of them if you do not want to go with the recommended

action.

## The Truth

Although this year's interface is not as wide as the one from last year (the difference is of about 120 pixels) Lavasoft managed to provide an easy to use screen with all the options, menus and functions within easy reach.

Oddly enough there is still room for improvement, especially with the virus detection. On the upside spyware detection still performs at the highest standards and clearly shows the 10 years of experience.

The set of tools provided in the Pro version, though not advanced, make for a good standalone instrument that can contribute to the system optimization.

This year's Ad-Aware summed up changes starting with the interface and continuing with the scanning modules and tools integrated in the toolbox. The antivirus seems to be the drag-down in the application but it doubles as another layer of protection and this can't be but good. However, it does not rule out the use of a professional anti-virus product just yet.

[Take a look at Ad-Watch Anniversary Edition.](#)