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Network Magic start screen

Painless, Choreless Network Setup

SoHo easy administration

Taking care of a computer network with more than two machines is a bit of a hassle, especially for the inexperienced. And if you are using XP, the plot thickens even deeper as each computer has to be part of the same domain, and you still won't see all the devices. In Vista, all this hassle is gone as the Network and Sharing options practically make all the connections for you. For those still glued to the old reliable XP, there is still a solution as long as you are willing to accept a third party software. Network Magic is exactly what it sounds like. There is no trouble at all in setting up your home or office network. Everything seems to fit perfectly into the equation, hassle free. The full version of the application is \$29.99 (one time fee), for a 3rd computer license. You can use the application after the seven days trial period expires, but not full featured. With the first launch of the program, it'll start the Network Magic wizard which sets up your network in a jiffy. It starts with detecting your router, continues with giving your computer a friendly name (user defined), lets you set up the shared folders and that is it, your network is ready for use. The interface is extremely user friendly letting you easily go to Network Tasks, Map, Shared Folders, status Center or Network Advisor. The first step is Network Tasks which is divided into three main sections: access connectivity area (troubleshooting, Internet speed test and adding new device to the network), sharing section (folder sharing in the network or on the web, set up remote access, printer sharing and troubleshooting) and protection segment (wireless protection change, network health and security alerts, network history and reports). If you are not sure what to access first, take a look in the lower left hand corner and hover the mouse over "Not sure where to start?" section. All the areas in need of attention will instantly be highlighted. If you are itchy for folder sharing on the web or remote access, first check if your router is supported by the application. Network Map is a bit more functional than that available in Vista's Network and Sharing Center. It will display all the elements of the network but switches or hubs will be displayed as Network device without any other identification element. During our testing on Vista it failed to recognize several of our network computers, but that is no biggie because you can operate a change in the icon and name of the device with no problem. Information box in the right hand provides useful details about the connected device/machine, like manufacturer (where available), description, model, network IP address, subnet mask and MAC address. Some of these details can help you pinpoint the connected device and identify it as an authorized connection or not. Shared Folders section will display all the elements the other users divvy up. In the right hand part of the screen there are some details of the selected folder (number of files inside, size of the folder, restrictions, and network address). In case of network problems Status Center is at your service making available the condition of the home network and Internet connection as well as the status of the devices in the network. Network Magic shows if the recognized devices have the application installed and checks the status of Windows firewall (on or off). Also, if your connection is wireless connection there is no worry as the program can access the router and let you make the necessary settings as well. The help is overwhelming in this sense as they teach you how to protect your home network and wireless connection. If you want to know exactly your download/upload pipe's capabilities, suffice to access turn to speed test. A number of 8 USA based locations are ready to assist you in testing the broadband connection speed. For more accurate results I suggest you read carefully the instructions before proceeding to action. After external speed test you are invited to run a local speed check. Unfortunately there will be no values available for local activity. Let's see what you get after the seven days trial period is over. Wireless Network

Protection, Automatic Printer Sharing, Easy File Sharing, Internet Connection Repair, Remote Access to Files, PC Shield, Daily Internet Use Report (sent directly to your email), Speed Tests and Add A Device Wizard are all off limits after evaluation period completes. That leaves you with Network Map, Network Health and Security Alerts, Personalized Home Network Advice, Network Activity Monitor and Wireless Connection Manager. That's a pretty good bargain as the network setup chore is eliminated and you can easily manage your wireless connection. **The Good** Setting up a home network is a cinch, no more hassle, no more drama. Just install the application and all the devices are thrown in the network. The wizards assist you in setting up the network painlessly and fast. Network Magic concentrates all the ease of setting up a home network and managing it into one nifty package. To make folder sharing even more comfortable and easier, you can use the add to Network Magic Folders option in Eindows Explorer context menu. No more hassle, no more pain. **The Bad** Not all the machines in the network were properly identified and the switches/hubs were not recognized. To use Network Magic to the maximum you will have to comply with the router support of the application. **The Truth** It may not be suitable for large computer networks (licenses go as far as 8 computers) but for a home network it is perfect. The user can monitor if a certain machine is updated or if the firewall is turned on or off just by consulting the Health and Security Alerts section. Activity Monitor shows the time a machine has left the network so you can keep good tabs on user activity as well. *Here are some snapshots of the application in action:*