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Privacy Killer

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Privacy Killer strikes again

The trouble with private files is that it all it takes for them to become public is a simple mistake for the computer to fall into the wrong hands. Well, this, and the fact that you have not erased your traces with an adequate instrument and simply relied on the efficiency of Shift+Del for the job can lead to loss of important information or just details you do not want to share with others, such as browsing habits, downloaded files, opened documents, etc. All this trouble can be easily fixed by using software solutions specially designed to eliminate all the tracks you leave behind after using the computer. And such solutions are all over the Internet, all you have to do is to choose a good one. There are suites that automatically clean the special areas of the computer known to shelter information on your activity on your computer and securely eliminate it, as well as apps that offer just a solution for shredding any file you want. But a combination of both would be quite the instrument you need. With Privacy Killer things are pretty simple as it combines the two features and comes with even more functionality thanks to the additional tools it makes available: registry cleaner, startup manager, cookie manager and uninstaller. The application maintains its \$39.99 price and for trying it out it's still 15 days and the same limitations are imposed: maximum of 2MB file shred, themes are reset upon restarting, schedule function is disabled, hotkeys cannot be changed, only one item per session is removed with StartUp Manager and Uninstaller. Luckily, the developer sent us a license for unlocking the full version and we could test it unhindered. Since the [last reviewed version](#), there have been some notable changes in the application, both in terms of looks, as well as in the list of features. Users familiar to the software will notice that "Others" menu in main application window has been replaced by Plugins section which provides a list with default plugins that come with Privacy Killer. If in other areas of the app all you had to do for selecting an option was to simply check the box, in this section you will have to double your effort and click twice for selecting a specific plugin in the list. Privacy Killer's default support for cleaning traces of third party programs is not that limited, as it offers a total number of 50 plugins. Unfortunately, there are many different versions of the same software, so the real number of apps it can clean is reduced to about 30. But it seems that there will be support for more apps in the future and you will be able to download from developer's website. But not quite yet, as at the moment of testing the page was temporarily unavailable. But, despite all the limitations that come by default with Privacy Killer's support, there is plenty of room for customizing the application and showing it the paths to the locations that need purging. Plugin Manager is the simplest way to do it, as it permits adding registry entries as well as locations on disk which Privacy Killer should clean. This way you can extend the trace cleaning options to more than what is offered by default. As for the other sections in the main application window, everything stays quite the same, and you will benefit from cleaning of specific Windows areas (such as Clipboard, Recent Documents list, Start Menu and Search History, temporary folder, log files, memory dumps, etc.) or IE/AOL, Firefox, Netscape and Opera browsers (temporary folder, cookies, auto-complete forms, cache, download history, etc.) or toolbars. In the case of browsers that are not detected on the system, all options will be disabled. Media players also leave a list of last played files behind and Privacy Killer can take care of several of them quite responsibly. And I am sure that you are using at least one of those on the list: Windows Media Player, DivX player, RealPlayer, QuickTime player, Winamp, PowerDVD, VirtualDub player or AVI Preview player. Among the tools Privacy Killer brings to your system, there is Cookie Manager, a very handy instrument that allows you to segregate the cookies you need from the useless ones and

preserve them on the system. These will not be deleted during the cleaning process and you'll be able to continue your browsing unhindered. File shredder is capable of getting rid of the files on your computer securely, meaning that it should delete the data you feed it beyond recovery. But during our testing, we successfully outsmarted the application and recovered all the files with very little effort. It turned out that the utility does not shred the files in the sense that these are overwritten with random data, but only renames them and change the extension to TMP. So recovering them and re-instating the original extension could do the trick of recovery just fine. StartUp Manager shows all processes starting with Windows and, more than this, also alerts the user of invalid elements, offering to eliminate them from the list. Additional functionality of the instrument is infused by its capability of adding new items. The warning displayed in the lower part of the window is not to be taken lightly by novices, as all process are shown, including system ones and eliminating one of them could create dysfunctions in the well running of the system. Security of your privacy extends to registry entries which could give away your habits, but Privacy Killer comes prepared and brings a Registry Manager able to look in certain areas of the registry for traces. The sections of the registry checked by the application are Application Paths, Installation files, ActiveX/COM components, Shared DLLs, Software Keys, Unused file extensions, Help files and Uninstall files. This is not much, but Privacy Killer is very efficient at rooting out invalid elements with a simple initiation of the scan process and then hitting "Repair" button will do the trick. Uninstall Manager is designed to help you for a clean uninstall of no longer wanted software and removing left-over registry entries as well as files on disk. The application is great for the actual uninstall job, but fails to list installed programs properly. The issue consists in the fact that it lists double entries. All installed software is on the list, but some items may be listed twice. Also, after running application's uninstaller, it will take a while for Privacy Killer to be ready, as it will also look in the registry. The downside is that this is not marked in any way and for all an average user could tell the app is simply non-responsive with no apparent reason. Privacy Killer covers as many aspects of your secrecy as possible and leaving your computer unattended and unprotected is definitely one of the situations. For this, the software brings its own screensaver, protected by a user-defined password. Getting by this screen is absolutely impossible unless you reset the system. No Alt+Ctrl+Del can bypass it as your mouse is blocked in the password field and you cannot move freely on the screen. Configuring the application is no rocket science and all options are perfectly comprehensible. Privacy Killer can start with Windows and place itself in system tray. Also, it is configurable to clean all the traces when it starts, when browser is closed or Windows shut down. This way, all traces are removed automatically, even if you forget to initiate the action. In Application Settings section, the user can apply the password for Privacy Locker and enable the homepage anti-hijacker, an option that alerts you whenever the homepage of installed browsers is changed. The moment there is an attempt of this kind, a message will pop up informing you on the aspect and offering to revert the change. Suite's shredding tool can be set for a total number of times to shred a file, but it seems that this option is not too effective as during our testing we could recover shredded files, as only their name and extension were changed and not overwritten with random data. So there is actually no algorithm used in the process. The most important functions of the application can be accessed via user defined hotkeys. Actually these are bosskeys (kind of like panic buttons) designed to hide specific programs or for urgent initiation of some actions. Thus, you can use specific keyboard combinations for automatically eliminating all traces, for hiding/showing web browsers, instant messengers, enable Privacy Killer's screensaver or put the application in stealth mode and hide all above mentioned software. The only clue that all that is running are their processes. However, it seems that there is more to this Global Panic button than it seems, as in my case it also hid Thunderbird. All traces can be eliminated automatically by the suite according to user's terms due to the scheduling function incorporated. You can program the cleaning session either daily at a certain hour, or at a specific time and specific days of the

week. This way, you get to impose the frequency of the process. An automatic software update is also available so you no longer have to check for new versions. As for the looks, there are six themes available by default you can switch to at any moment. The trouble with some of them is that they hinder the view to the options you make in PlugIns window (darker themes are not recommended in this sense, as you can't tell which items are checked, just how many of them, due to the counter in the lower part of PlugIns window). Privacy Killer suite does a great job with destroying all traces pointing out your activity on the computer. It's user friendly interface should pose no trouble, regardless of the type of user harnessing it, as configuring it is generally a matter of checking some boxes. Plugin Manager is the star of this version as it permits the user to add custom locations in both the registry and on the disk to be cleaned. Also, there are 50 plugins available in this edition, for taking care of history files in about 30 different applications. **The Good** You can remove traces either for all sections of the main application window or for each one individually with just a click of the mouse. The suite can be set to start cleaning the remains of your activity and, when done, to close itself or shut down or restart the system or log off the current user. Useful cookies can be preserved on the system and just the useless ones are deleted. StartUp Manager detects invalid entries and offers elimination option. Uninstall process is thorough enough to clean up application's traces in the registry. The utility also comes with a search bar for faster finding of the desired apps. **The Bad** Applying darker themes will will cause additional effort to see which items are checked in PlugIns window (information tip at the bottom shows only the number of items checked). Uninstaller may display double entries for some programs, an effect with the cause in wrongly reading the registry keys (during our testing Privacy Killer's uninstaller showed this anomaly in the case of .NET Framework 1.1 and Kaspersky 6.0 for Workstations). The shredder does not overwrite deleted files but only changes the names and the extension. This is pretty good protection, but recovering them is possible and from this to finding the right extension is just one step. Uninstalling the suite leaves lots of traces in the registry, so I suggest not to use Windows' tool for the operation, but a third party uninstaller that can also clean up the mess left behind. Creating a backup of the registry right before deleting all detected invalid registry items resulted in application's display of an error message saying it could not make a copy of registry changes. It happened more than once for the uninstaller to leave folders belonging to uninstalled software on disk, and deleting them manually completed the job. **The Truth** Privacy Killer's new version still needs some brushing up in some areas, but I am convinced that the developer will proceed to fixing the issues as soon as possible. On the overall, this version is quite reliable and brings a very important feature, Plugin Manager, which gives the user the flexibility of customizing the locations that are cleaned by Privacy Killer. There are some issues to be fixed (shredder feature is one of them) but the general behavior of the application is a good one and a finishing touch is all it needs. From what I understood, they are currently undergoing some changes so there will be some problems with connecting to their servers and some of their pages may not be available for now, but all these will be fixed in the shortest time. *Here are some snapshots of the application in action:*