

Iolo System Mechanic 8 - PC

Will this tune up your PC?

by Chris Hall published on 26 September 2008

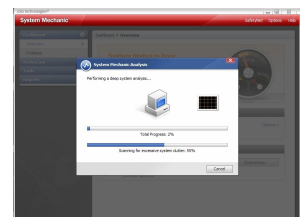
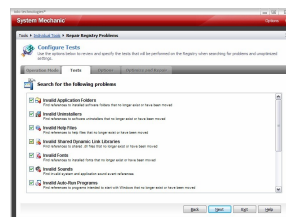
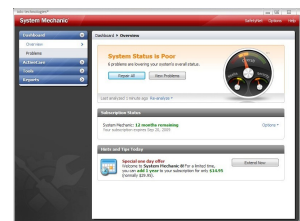
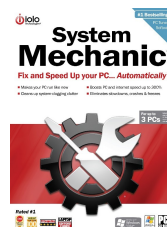
After you've lived with your PC for a year or so, you'll probably notice that the performance has dropped off considerably. Without the benefit of an IT department to regularly run the various system tools to optimise your computer, it could slowly grind to a halt. System Mechanic from Iolo has, for a number of years, offered a solution.

The software offers a wide number of tools to cover many aspects of basic PC maintenance. These are divided into several main areas down the left-hand side of the window: Dashboard, ActiveCare, Tools and Reports. Each of these options then provides you with a number of options or tools.

To set things running you need to carry out a scan through the main Dashboard window and two options are available, Basic or Deep. The software suggests a Deep scan would take 7-8 minutes, but this varies very much on your system and we found it was nearly double this. Once a scan has been done, you are presented with a gauge to show you the health of your system and present your options for repair.

The nice thing about System Mechanic is that you can opt for the automatic repair option, or if you want to know exactly what has been identified, you can take the more advanced route and address each individual problem. This degree of control is useful for some of the optimisation tools as you could find that some identified elements form part of another running program, such as some of the Symantec processes for Norton Antivirus, and some of the power management tools from our laptop manufacturer.

ActiveCare allows a number of background system clean-up tools, each of which can be individually enabled or disabled, so you can opt to have these things run whilst the system is idle, such as a startup optimiser or spyware scanner.



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Chances are that you'd rather run these tools yourself, but this does give the option for automating the process. The Internet Security option detects your firewall and antivirus software, but the "More Info" button sneakily takes you online to suggest an upgrade to the Pro suite of System Mechanic, which contains these tools as well.

Tools is the area of most interest as this gives you access to each of the different components, from the basic to the more advanced. Power Tools essentially groups them together and presents a combination of tools at a single button press, for example, PC Accelerator. You'll find that these areas overlap a great deal, so if you are running ActiveCare, you may well have performed all the actions under the Tools menu already, ditto if you have taken a repair option based on your initial scan. However, this does mean you can get to exactly what you want. Direct access to each tool can be found under Individual Tools.

The final Reports category gives you a number of summary reports with additional options to fix or optimise the different areas. A neat History option lets you see what you have done, changes made, as well as a SafetyNet option that allows you to roll back changes should you encounter problems.

Much of the focus seems to be on cleaning up your system and removing clutter, which works very well and is simple to use. Other options of particular appeal include a registry cleaning utility, which will perform a number of tests allowing you remove invalid entries from the registry.

You'll also find a neat startup optimiser which can allow you to disable particular elements, either things you don't want automatically starting, or aspects of removed software, but these should be used with caution as it is easy to disable something you actually want.

At a glance

What is it?

PC tuning utility

Good

Brings all tools into one place, various levels of control, easy to use

Bad

Duplicates many existing system tools, basic level can affect some other software items, ongoing costs

Verdict

Whilst it is a neat piece of software, the real decision will be whether you consider it valuable enough to buy the ongoing subscription

Price £29.99

Our score

8/10

Your score

2/10

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It is also a shame that the hardware scan option goes no further - like identifying drivers and so on - as one glaring omission from a title of "system mechanic" seems to be the option to find and fix hardware problems or out of date drivers. With that in mind, if you are having regular errors with your hardware configuration then there is a good chance that System Mechanic will do nothing for you.

VERDICT

Of course, many of the tools you'll find here duplicate system tools you'll find in Windows as standard, so advanced users might question the value. Actions that remove temp files or defragment your system are easy to find, however, the startup optimiser is something that many users would never find in msconfig, or never want to touch. Other tools can be found for free online.

At £29.99 for the standard version, or £49.99 for the Professional, for a 1-year subscription, you might decide that this is just too much to pay for a heavy duplication of some existing tools. However, the real strength of System Mechanic is that it brings all things under one umbrella, so instead of fishing around for a whole load of different tools, here, there and everywhere, it can be done quickly and easily.

With varying levels of control for advanced or novice users, we found that all the tools ran quickly and efficiently, finding and fixing problems. Whilst it is a neat piece of software, the real decision will be whether you consider it valuable enough to buy the ongoing subscription.