

SECTION: REVIEWS

ZoneAlarm Internet Security Suite 7

By Davey Winder | 23 April 2007 10:47AM | **Anti Virus** | www.manac.com.au | <http://www.zonelabs.com> | price at time of review \$63

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Ease of use:	★★★★★★
Features:	★★★★★★
Value for money:	★★★★★☆
Overall Rating:	★★★★★★

In Short

A best-of-breed approach to Internet security pays off. This flexible and resource-friendly suite returns to the A-List.

Specifications

Requires Windows 2000/XP

With this release, Check Point (maker of ZoneAlarm) addresses the most common criticism of any all-in-one security solution: “wouldn’t I be better protected by adopting a best-of-breed approach?” Gone is the Computer Associates-driven engine, replaced with Kaspersky Antivirus 6, which we called “hugely impressive”. After the initial lengthy check, this remains one of the fastest AV scanners we’ve seen, and it certainly helps speed up ZoneAlarm while increasing its ability to handle viruses. Improvements include more effective removal capabilities, faster scanning and hourly signature updates.

Although not new to this release, the spam filtering is provided by MailFrontier, which remains a Microsoft Outlook/Outlook Express tool – disappointing if you wish to protect additional mail clients. The anti-spam performance is also down slightly from the last version, reflecting the problems with image-based spam included in our current spam zoo. False-positive rates remain low, however, and filtering can be manually tweaked, including an option to more aggressively weight messages with embedded images for removal. The MailSafe protection continues to impress, ensuring suspect attachments are

quarantined to prevent infection. It will alert you if more than five messages are sent within a two-second interval by default, although you can configure this to allow for your circumstances.

The firewall is improved significantly. Rootkit and kernel-level threats are all covered, and a new pre-install scan automatically configures common applications on your PC so they'll work without interruption. The OS-level firewall layer, monitoring more than 30 behaviours of every program on your PC, and with the ability to stop (and block) a malicious program from running, continues to impress. The firewall now also features a new Auto-Learn mode, which reduces the number of alerts significantly. After two weeks, this reverts back to the usual ask mode, but by now knows your usage patterns so doesn't need to ask much at all.

Check Point has resisted using Kaspersky's spyware engine, sticking with its own in-house-developed tool. Promising tweaks to provide deeper system scans and more robust removal, our spyware tests bear this out. The site-blocking feature helps, preventing access to known spyware sites. It's also clever enough to block previously installed spyware trying to get online for updates, or to transfer personal data.

Disappointingly, only US-based users get the advanced Identity Protection Center services, covering real-world credit card monitoring in IRC channels, offline credit rating checks and finance application monitoring. Australian users are left with the standard myVAULT personal data protection, which flags when your details are about to be transmitted to unauthorised destinations.

But there's ultimately plenty to like, from the very useful three-minute Flash-driven tutorials, to the uninstall icon that appears within the Windows Control Panel, removing all traces of ZoneAlarm. Then there's the yet-to-be-bettered application interface itself.

Unlike some suites, which are cutting back on features to reduce system resource impact, ZoneAlarm remains both feature packed and resource light. There are category-driven parental controls should you need them, IM security built in and even a gaming mode to prevent alerts spoiling your fun. All that's potentially missing are data-shredding and backup tools.

The vocal and helpful online support forums ensure any problems are ironed out quickly, and even on bottom-line value for money it stacks up well. It costs less than F-Secure Internet Security 2007 both single licences (\$63 from www.zonelabs.com), and a three-user pack (\$100 from www.manac.com.au). ZoneAlarm also provides more features, a firewall that's almost as quiet as Norton's, and is even more user-friendly than F-Secure.


Bear in mind that the initial release of ZoneAlarm isn't Vista compatible, so check on the current status of that if you're thinking of taking the plunge. But for XP installations, this is clearly the best Internet security suite we've seen and, as such, it reclaims its place on the A-List.

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