

# Peer to Peer (P2P) Software and Networks: File Swapping Software

## Review

By Aaron Turpen

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File Swapping Software Review  
by Aaron Turpen of Aaronz WebWorkz

Several years ago when I was an Internet newbie, I had signed up for an AOL account. AOL was itself new at that time, having only been around for a year or two. One of the greatest benefits of joining was the instant community available: and the instant access to the file-swapping network that was built by its users.

First, a chat room would be established with the words "file," "FS," "file trade," etc. in the title. As AOL began to get wise to this and disallow those types of names, the names evolved into "warez" and other more slangish terms for file swapping.

In these chat rooms, individual users would post things like "I'm looking for..." and post the file type, description, etc. Usually these were band and song titles, pornographic picture types, specific files for applications (like DLLs), cracks for games, and so forth.

Someone who may have something the person wanted would begin a conversation to wrangle a trade. Files were usually swapped via email, but other connections (like private chat rooms with file upload facilities) were also made.

The world of file sharing took a big change when Napster came along. With the idea of direct connections over a network, came faster file sharing, more robust search options, and the ability to share multiple files with multiple users. All legal issues aside, this was considered a huge breakthrough. I remember the first few times I used Napster and how exciting it was to be able to trade files quickly (well, relatively quickly, I was still on a 33.6K dialup connection).

Peer to Peer (P2P) file sharing has come a long way since then. There are hundreds of networks, thousands of software programs for connecting, and a multitude of ways to find trouble with them.

I haven't used P2P systems in a long time. Mostly because I was tired of the half-finished files, the bogus filenames that had nothing to do with what was actually being traded, the multiple legal problems, and now the more prevalent use of spyware and adware to "fund" these programs.

I have occasionally fired up Kazaa or a Gnutella program to surf for new music. For instance, recently during software testing of ES5 (see below), I was looking for tracks from the new album by the band Disturbed. I downloaded two or three, listened to them, and decided to buy the album. I did this with their last album and have done it with many other bands as well: I consider music files online to be a "try before you buy" opportunity.

I decided that for most P2P file sharing, there are really three categories of things commonly traded: music, porn, and software. So in testing each of the pieces of software below, I gauged them on speed of delivery (avg. download speed), number of items available (from those three categories), and how easy the software was to use. Ratings for these are given on an A-F scale (A being best, F being worst). In watching for spyware and adware, I used the latest version of AdAware (<http://www.aaronzwebworkz.com/adaware.html>) and SpyHunter (<http://www.aaronzwebworkz.com/spyhunter.html>), scanning before installation and after installation of the P2P software in question. I also downloaded five or six files per category from each system (where I could) to test for "schill" files (files that say they are one thing but are something else or just random data).

Each of the software titles below are available on CNet.com and TuCows.com for download. They are either freeware or shareware and are presented here in alphabetical order.

#### GNapster (v.0.2.1)

This one gets its name from...you guessed it, Napster. It's a pretty good utility and works fairly well, but the network is pretty empty compared to many of the larger networks available. I had a lot of trouble with downloads ending early (without completion), especially when downloading larger files. Most files smaller than eight megabytes came through OK, though. This might be a good starting point for the beginner.

File availability: music – B, porn – C, software - B

Speed: C

Ease of Use: A

AdAware and SpyHunter made a lot of noise upon installation of this one.

#### Grokster (v1.6)

There wasn't much here that couldn't be found through Google or Yahoo! and installing the software was an ad-driven nightmare. About the only good thing I can say about it is that it is easy to use once you've got it installed. Tip: don't install any of the "extras" it asks you about during install...they're all adware.

File availability: music – C, porn – D, software - C

Speed: B

Ease of Use: B

Both AdAware and SpyHunter went zonkers after installing this one.

#### Kazaa Lite

This version of the software for connecting to one of the top P2P networks (Kazaa) supposedly has no spyware. It is a modified version of the Kazaa Media Desktop (below), but without all of the

extras (good and bad). Using this software isn't bad, but novices will probably find it somewhat confusing. The network was pretty good with fast download speeds and reliable connections. Many of the files downloaded, however, were schill files (not what they said they were) – especially music files. Overall, there is a ton of stuff available on this network, but don't be surprised if you have to download a particular file three or four times before you find one that is really what you're after. For this reason, I lowered the Speed rating below.

File availability: music – A, porn – B, software - A

Speed: C

Ease of Use: C

While claiming that this does not contain spyware or adware, AdAware immediately gave warning upon installation of this software. Travel at your own risk. It should be noted that this software has many patches available around the Internet that may or may not alleviate the spyware/adware problem.

Kazaa Media Desktop (v.2.5.1)

A much more robust version of Kazaa Lite, this software has lots of cool features, like improved privacy protection, multiple simultaneous searches, etc. This is easily the best way to surf the Kazaa network. As with Kazaa Lite, however, schill files abound.

File availability: music – A, porn – B, software - A

Speed: C

Ease of Use: A

AdAware popped up a few warnings, but SpyHunter found this one clean.

Koala DC (v0.4)

This software uses the Direct Connect protocol. It has some useful features and fast loading times, but the network itself is what's dragging it down. The software really would be better off if it could connect to a more-used network like Kazaa or Gnutella.

File availability: music – C, porn – D, software - C

Speed: B

Ease of Use: A

Not a peep from AdAware or SpyHunter!

LimeWire (v3.5.7)

This software utilizes the popular Gnutella network for sharing. It's very well-made and does an awesome job, including lots of cool features. While there are a few confusing aspects to the software, they aren't anything that will stop even novices from using it first-try with success. The Gnutella network is one of the best known P2P networks around. Watch out for schill files when looking for music, however, and be aware that this is one of the networks specifically being targeted by RIAA.

File availability: music – B, porn – A, software - A

Speed: B

Ease of Use: A

Both AdAware and SpyHunter gave no warnings after install.

Morpheus (v3.3)

This is one of the better of the P2P software I tried. It runs very well, is fast, easy to understand, and has cool extra features (like the ability to search for specific file types). With all of this, it's too bad their network is so pathetic. File availability is OK, but not great and good luck keeping your connection to a file host long enough to get it downloaded. Disconnecting users, slow speeds, and similar problems plague anyone looking for large files on this network.

File availability: music – A, porn – B, software - C  
Speed: D  
Ease of Use: A

Both AdAware and SpyWare gave no warnings after this software was installed.

OneMX (v1.06)

This software uses the eDonkey network, a protocol under the GNU public license. On the whole, I'm thoroughly unimpressed. While this was a pretty small download and fairly easy install, this software is clunky, crashed repeatedly, and the network is full of emptiness once you do get a search to work.

File availability: music – D, porn – F, software - C  
Speed: D  
Ease of Use: D

On the up-side, no worries from AdAware or SpyHunter on this one.

Phex (v.0.7.3)

This one was a disaster. It installed fine to start with, but I only got it to function properly once – and then I was confused by its primitive (old-school Mac-like) interface. It runs through the Gnutella network, but I wasn't able to run it well enough to give a rating for file availability or speed.

File availability: music – ?, porn – ?, software - ?  
Speed: ?  
Ease of Use: D

AdAware and SpyHunter found nothing wrong here.

Swapper.NET (v4.1)

This is a utility for using Gnutella. It's very fast, easy to install, and very easy to use. I would say that of all the software tested, this is the best one for beginners. It also does pretty well on local networks (like my in-office/home wireless network), which many of the others don't. Other than some of the occasional schill files you'll find on Gnutella, this is a pretty good piece of software for those who don't need a lot of bells and whistles.

File availability: music – B, porn – B, software - A  
Speed: B  
Ease of Use: A

AdAware and SpyHunter gave this one a thumbs up.

ThinDivide (v3.65)

This is a great Gnutella-enabled client with lots of good options. It will take a little time for the novice to master, but is worth the trouble if you plan to spend a lot of time swapping. It integrates with the largest number of Gnutella clients of any of the software reviewed as well, giving you a much higher availability of files on the network.

File availability: music – A, porn – B, software - A

Speed: B

Ease of Use: C

AdAware had a cow after this was loaded, so be careful. SpyHunter stayed silent.

WebMedia Spider Suite (v3.2.15)

This software is nothing short of awesome. It uses the Gnutella network, but has some really cool extras. This suite is three separate programs that each of the three pieces of software specialize in a specific activity or file type: one for searching (massively), one for pictures and video (with a built-in player), and a media manager (for sound, video, etc.). All three are very cool and can be used separately or in tandem.

File availability: music – B, porn – B, software - B

Speed: B

Ease of Use: B

AdAware and SpyHunter gave clean bills of health – not surprising as this is shareware, not freeware.

XoloX Ultra (v1.57)

This one uses the Gnutella network, but seems to have a specialty in porn. It is ad-driven, but not maliciously so (ads only appear on some screens and are almost all some kind of adult content). While this software supposedly has parental controls, they don't work all that well. It does have a nice external virus scan utility, though.

File availability: music – C, porn – A, software - C

Speed: B

Ease of Use: B

AdAware and SpyHunter had nothing to say after I installed this one.

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Aaron Turpen is the proprietor of Aaronz WebWorkz, a full service company catering to small business on the Internet. Sign up for his free weekly, ad-free newsletter at

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