

Single Product Review



Microsafe Premium Security Suite

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Content

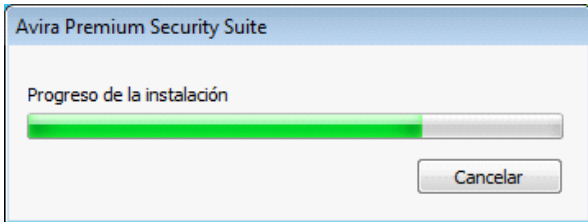


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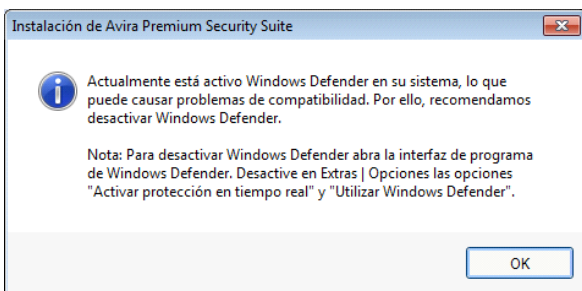


Installation

Start the installation by double-clicking the set-up file. First, the installation files are unpacked:



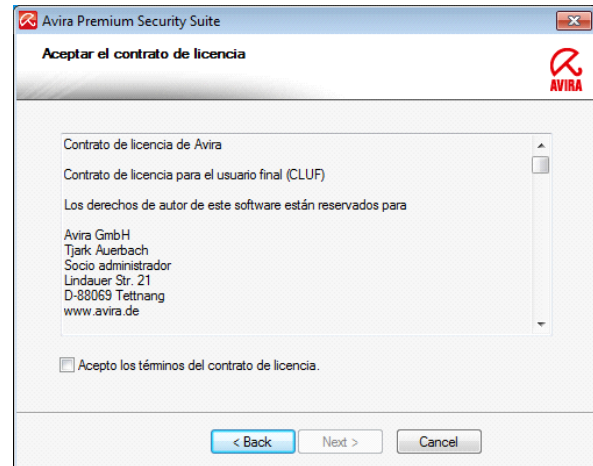
As we are installing on Windows 7, Microsafe setup warns us that Windows Defender is running, and should be disabled to prevent conflicts. There are brief instructions on how to do this.



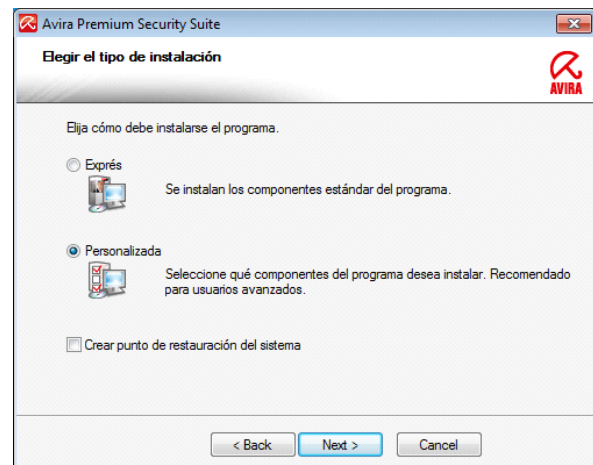
The welcome page of the setup wizard then appears:



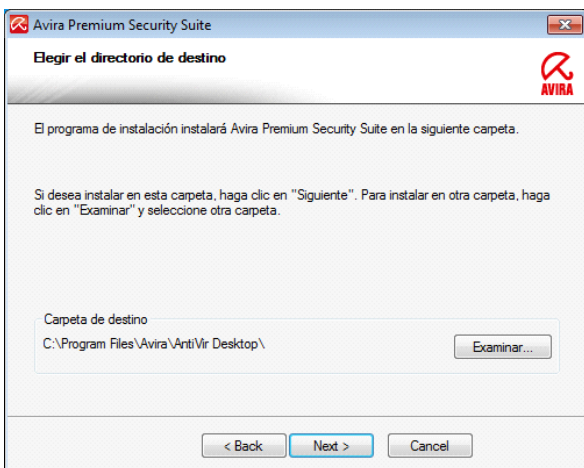
The next step is to accept the terms of the obligatory licence agreement:



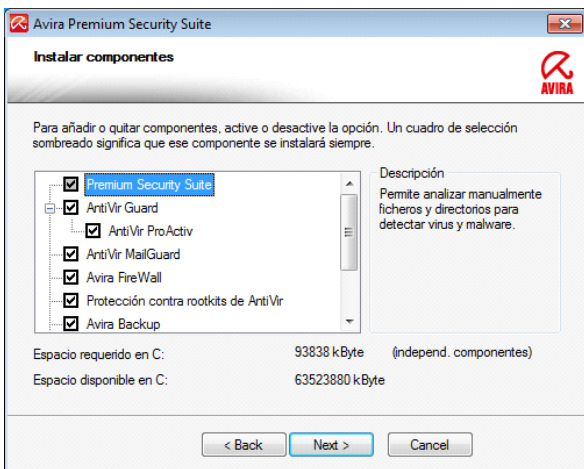
Having accepted this, you now need to choose an installation type. There is a choice of Express or Custom, and the useful option of creating a system restore point, so that in the event of setup being interrupted, you can return your system to its starting state. In order to see what other options are available, we decide to use the Custom installation.



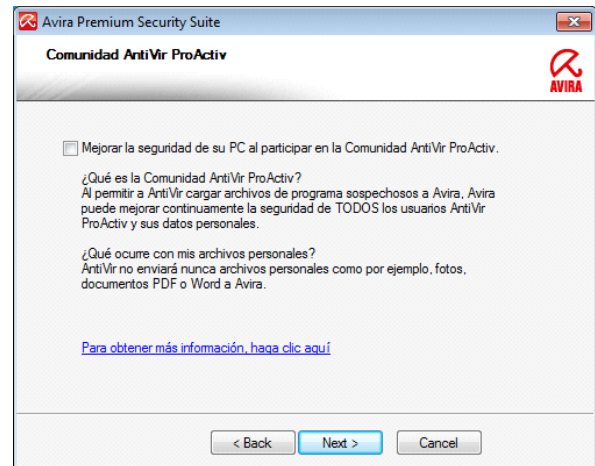
The next step is to choose the installation folder:



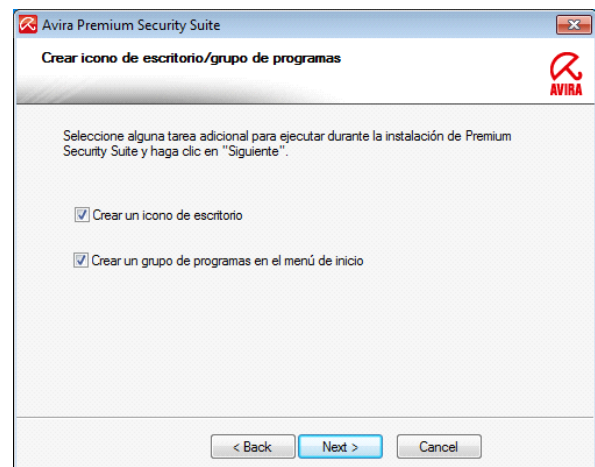
We opt for the default folder. We were particularly pleased to see that the next step enables us to choose which components of the suite are to be installed. This means that it is possible e.g. to deselect Microsafe's firewall, and use the Windows firewall instead.



We leave the default choice of components unchanged, and proceed. We are then asked whether we want to participate in Microsafe's community network. Like many other antivirus manufacturers, Microsafe enables information on malware found on the user's computer to be sent to the manufacturer for analysis, thus helping to improve detection rates. There is an assurance that no personal data will be collected, and a link to click on to obtain more information:



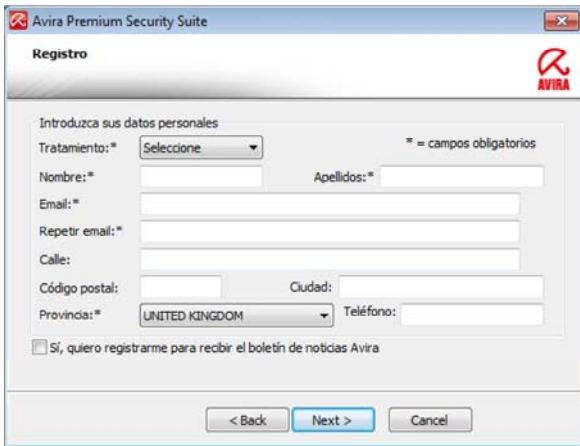
Having completed this step, we then need to decide on whether to create a desktop icon and Start Menu shortcuts for Microsafe:



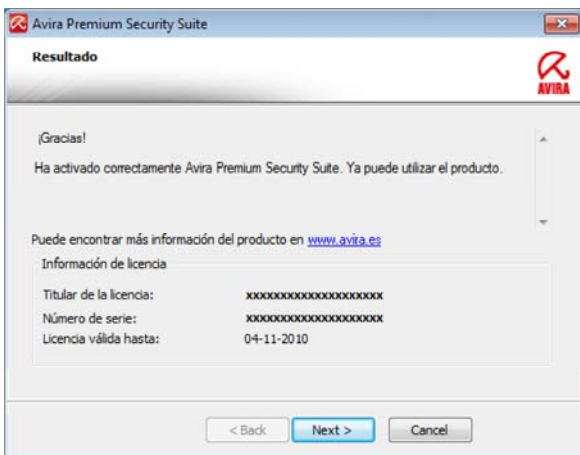
Next, we are asked whether we want to enter a licence to activate the full product, or run it as a time-limited trial version. We opt for the latter.



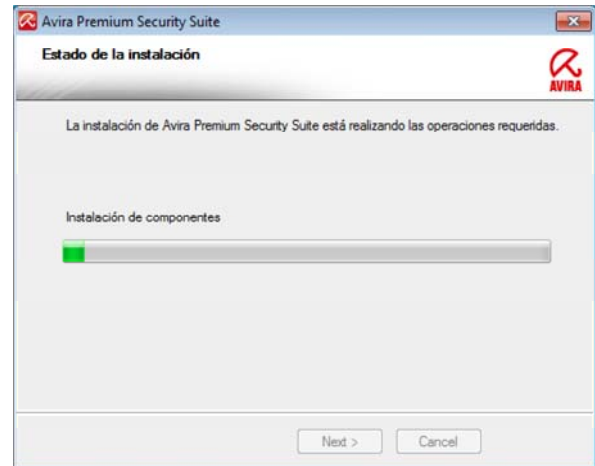
There is also a button in this dialog box for configuring a proxy server, if necessary. Next, we are required to enter basic registration data (name, email address and country are compulsory):



We are then informed that the product has been activated and can be used. We can see the expiry date of the licence; as we are using a trial version, this is 30 days from the date of installation.



The installer now has all the information it needs, and file copying begins:



This stage is quickly completed, and the wizard informs us that installation is complete. A restart is suggested to complete the installation, although this option can be deactivated if necessary:

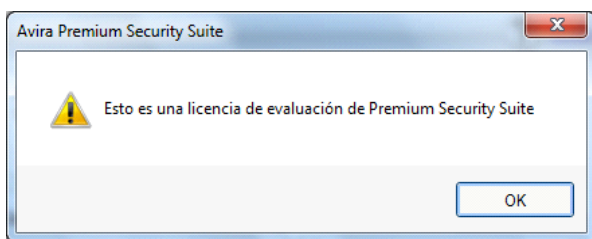


We leave the restart option enabled, and click on Finish. The computer restarts. This initial setup process is quick and simple, and we find the choice of Express or Custom installation excellent. The Express installation would omit the steps for the installation folder, component selection and shortcuts, using default values for all three. This is a sensible option for inexperienced users. Equally, the Custom installation is ideal for experienced users who want to make their own decisions on these options.

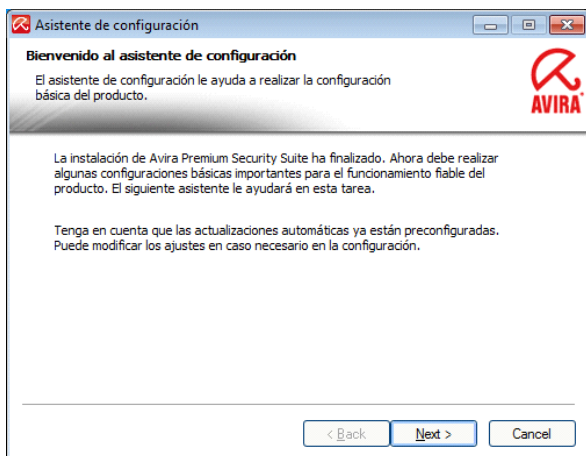
Before we leave the subject of installation, we should mention that the Microsafe applet in the Programs and Features section of the Windows Control Panel allows not only uninstalling the program, but also changing the installed components, so that a feature not installed initially can be added later, or vice versa.

Configuration

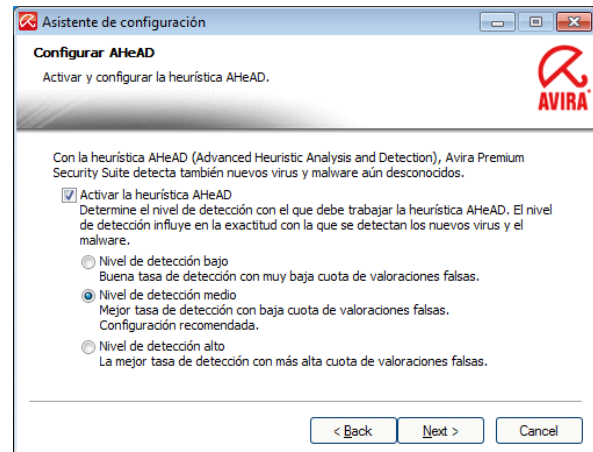
When we have logged on again, we are greeted by a message reminding us that we are using a trial version of Microsafe:



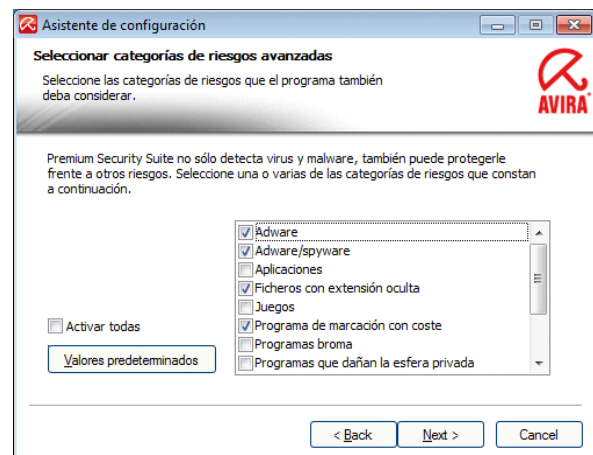
The Microsafe configuration wizard then starts:



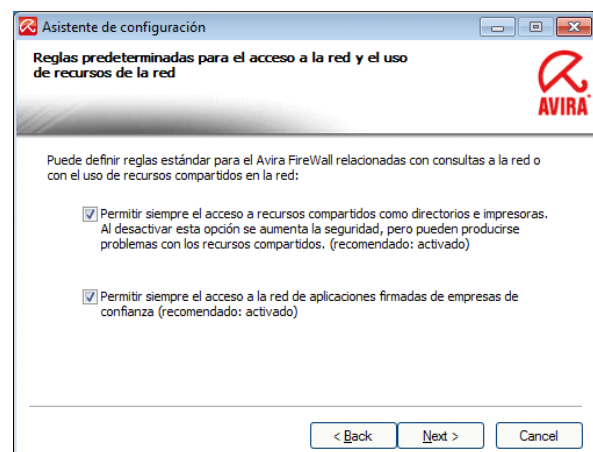
Clicking on Next brings us to the next page, where we can configure heuristic detection. Heuristics can be set to high level (very high malware detection, but also a high rate of false positives), medium, or low (less effective malware detection, but very few false positives), or disabled altogether. We leave the default setting, heuristics enabled at medium level.



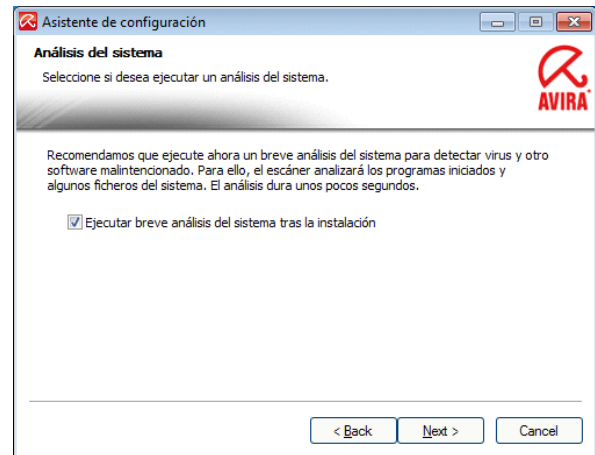
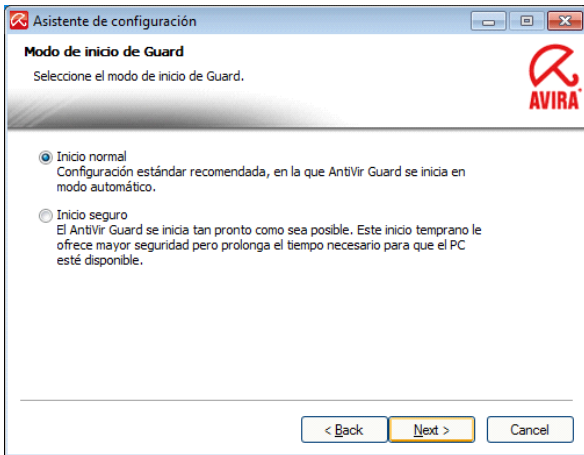
The next step enables detailed detection options. There are buttons to select all threats, or return the selection to default values:



We leave these options at the default setting, and continue. We now can choose to allow file and printer sharing on the PC, and to allow signed applications of trusted vendors outgoing network access. Both options are enabled by default.

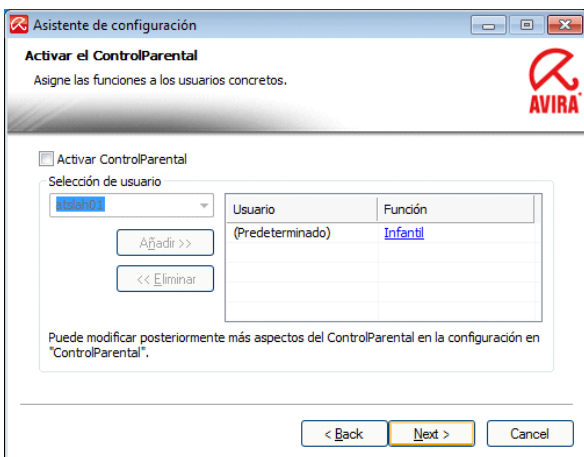
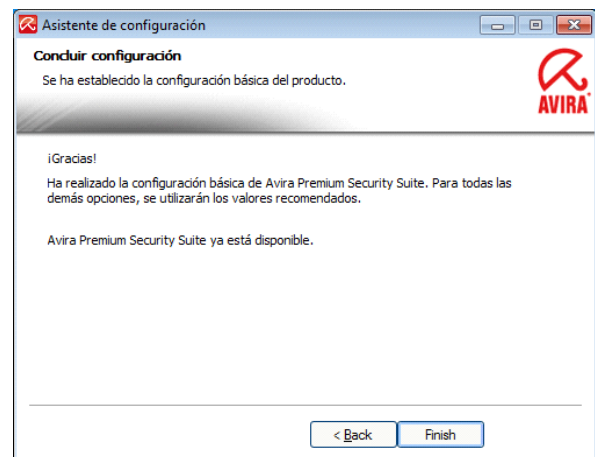


The following page asks us to choose between Normal and Secure start-up options. Secure start starts the Microsafe program earlier in the boot processes, which increases security, but also boot time. We leave it set at the default Normal start.



We leave this at the default setting, enabled, and click "Next". The wizard informs us that it has finally finished:

The next option is parental controls. By default, these are deactivated, but can easily be activated by ticking a box. There is then a very simple mechanism for assigning roles such as "child" to the different Windows users on the system:

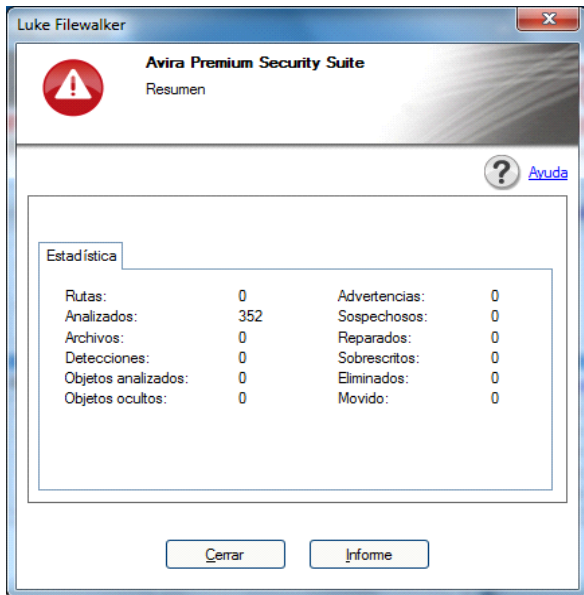


We click on "Finish". We see that a quick scan has started automatically:

Configuration is now almost complete, we just need to decide whether to perform a quick scan on completion:



When this has finished, the results are displayed:



We can now be sure that there are no immediate threats in the operating environment.

Microsafe is now installed and configured. We note that the post-installation configuration provides expert users with all the options they could want to fine-tune protection. However, we feel that some options may prove challenging to inexperienced users. Providing Express and Custom options, as in the setup wizard, would be ideal here; the Express option could shorten the procedure for non-experts, by leaving out options for areas such as heuristics and start-up scans, and using default values for these.

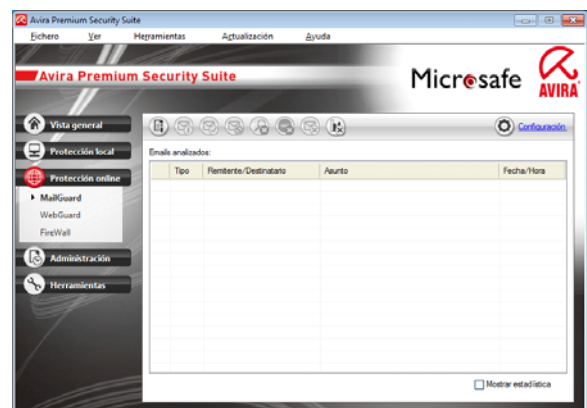
User Interface

We open up the Microsafe program window by double-clicking the shortcut on the desktop. All important system information is displayed very clearly in the main part of the window:



Here we can see that real-time file and online protection are enabled, and that virus signatures are up to date. We were pleased to note that Microsafe updated itself automatically after the installation without any user intervention. The three points above are displayed with tick (checkmark) icons in green circles, clearly indicating all is well. Similarly, the licence expiry date is shown with an exclamation mark in a yellow circle, indicating a moderate warning, as there is only a month until the expiry date. Finally, the date of the last full virus scan is shown at the bottom of this section; in this case it is noted that this has not yet been carried out. As well as providing information, this section also enables the most important tasks to be carried out, by clicking on links in the appropriate section. The update status section has a link to start a manual update, and the system scan section has a link to carry out a complete scan. Thus the essentials of the interface are easily found on the opening page, which is ideal for inexperienced users.

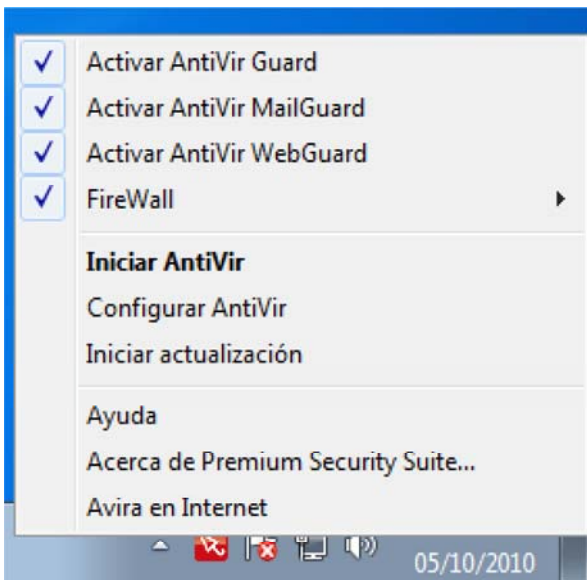
The rest of the interface is simple and clear, and uses a design which is found in many other modern security programs. On the left-hand side of the window is a menu panel, with 5 main menu buttons: Overview, Local protection, Online protection, Administration and Tools. Clicking on each menu button produces a small sub-menu of related options. For example, clicking on the Online Protection menu button drops down the options MailGuard, WebGuard and Firewall:



The main section of the window then provides various buttons for configuring the options in the relevant area. These allow experienced users to make detailed changes. Finding the right option is largely very easy, as the main menu buttons are clearly labelled, with the possible exception of the backup feature, which is found under Tools. In short, the menu panel on the left provides quick and easy access to all the main configuration areas of the program.

We liked the fact that Microsafe has also included a traditional horizontal menu bar at the top of the window. Users who prefer an old-style interface can access all the features of the left-hand panel by clicking on the view menu, and then the relevant option. This opens exactly the same page as the buttons on the left, and expands the sub-menu in just the same way.

Right-clicking on the program’s icon in the Windows notification area produces a context menu with the most essential status and configuration options:

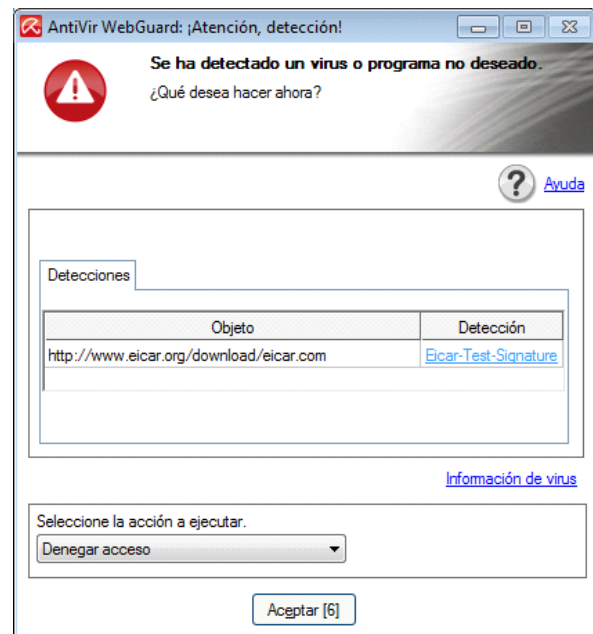


This enables the user to see the state of the system in an instant, open the main program window, or start an update.

Reaction to threats

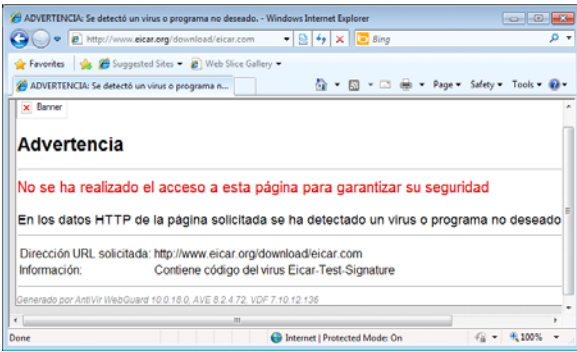
To test how Microsafe reacts when a threat is detected, we attempted to download the EICAR test file, a harmless piece of code which antivirus software is programmed to recognise for testing purposes.

Immediately after we clicked on the link, Microsafe played a warning sound and showed this alert message:



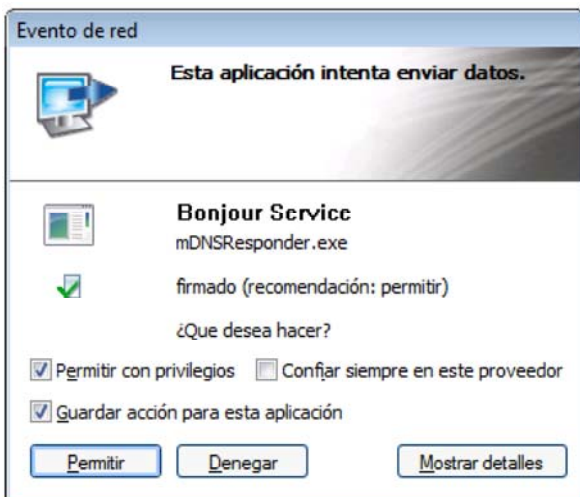
The box shows the threat found and its source, and shows a recommended course of action (in this case, Deny Access). The action to be taken can be selected from a drop-down list, but after 10 seconds, the default option is carried out. We find this type of warning dialog to be excellent, as an inexperienced user is not required to make a decision, but an expert has the chance to change the action taken if necessary.

We noted that having blocked the attempted download, Microsafe also blocked the webpage from which it had originated, thus warning the user of the source of the threat:



In summary, the program reacted instantly to the “threat”, with an audible warning and alert box that is ideal for both expert and non-expert users, and blocked the “infected” web page – an excellent reaction all round.

While we were testing Microsafe, a dialog box appeared, asking us whether to allow network access for Apple’s Bonjour service:



For advanced users, this dialog is ideal. It tells us the name of the file responsible, with a button for more details, lets us permit or deny access, and remember this action in the future if we want. However, this may be a bit much for beginners. We feel the type of dialog box used for virus alerts, with a clear default action that is carried out automatically after 10 seconds, would be ideal here too.

Summary

In conclusion, it can be said that Microsafe Premium Security Suite has been extremely well engineered in most respects. Installation is straightforward, with options for both experts and non-experts. There is no lack of configuration options in the configuration wizard, meaning that expert users can tailor the system exactly to their requirements. Virus updates are downloaded quickly and automatically. The program interface is a clear, simple design, giving inexperienced users instant access to the few features they really need. More detailed options are available to experts, through either a modern web-like menu panel, or an old-style menu bar for traditionalists. Reaction to threats is instant, with an optimal warning message that requires no interaction, but can still be configured by experts. Our only concern with the program was that inexperienced users might find the configuration wizard and firewall warning messages rather challenging. However, if the Express/Custom option found in the installation wizard were also implemented in the configuration process, and the optimal warning messages used for malware detection were extended to the firewall, Microsafe could offer a suite that was outstanding for both experts and non-experts to use.

We note that Microsafe are proposing to offer free insurance against the failure of their product, which we believe is a first among antivirus manufacturers. The insurance will be provided to customers who register their purchase on the Microsafe website, regardless of which distributor or country the Microsafe suite was purchased from. Customers who register for the insurance will be covered for costs up to €150, where the manufacturer accepts that there has been a problem with the suite.

On-Demand Test Results

The on-demand detection rate of Microsafe Premium Security Suite is very high (99.8%) and shows a low rate of false alarms in our tests of August 2010. For more information, please have a look at the report on our website¹. As Microsafe is a rebranded AVIRA-Clone presently in Brazilian/ Portugese and Spanish Language only, you can compare with the results of AVIRA.



¹ http://www.av-comparatives.org/images/stories/test/ondret/avc_od_aug2010.pdf

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AV-Comparatives e.V. (October 2010)