

by *Ralph Lee Scott*

Finding Lost Files

If you're like me, you have gotten a new computer with a bigger, more powerful hard drive in the last few months or perhaps you have updated your old system. You probably have more and more files stored on your system. Finding a specific file or document can sometimes be a hard, time-consuming task. With increased storing of digital files such as pictures and music, your hard drive gets more and more cluttered and files may get lost. Even though Microsoft has included a find function (ctrl f) on software packages such as Exchange, Outlook, Word, and Excel, I have found that when I search for documents or e-mails I frequently get the lost-file message: "Search complete. There are no files to display." To help you locate files that you know are there, but cannot find, a number of software vendors now offer products to find the files that, for whatever reason, you have lost.

Probably the best known software of this type is called "x1" (www.x1.com). X1 offers a free demo (requires Macromedia Flash Player) and a 15-day-trial test version. X1's slogan is "Search as it's supposed to be." Simply type in the words or phrases that you recall being anywhere in the file or e-mail and x1 will find it very quickly. When I asked x1 to search for a bibliography handout that I often have trouble locating on my computer, it was able to locate it quickly by just typing in the part of one title listed on the handout. Locating e-mail is just as fast. I remember having a reference question about a specific book that I answered last month, but I could not remember the name of the person sending the e-mail request. Just typing the name of the author produced the e-mail in about one second.

When you first start to use x1, it creates a database of all your files. When you ask a search question, the database is rapidly searched by e-mail, file name, attachment, or contact list. Being able to search files for the text of specific .pdf documents is an important feature of the x1 software. X1 interfaces with Outlook and Eudora, although x1 recommends that you not use Outlook with the Word formatting feature turned on (i.e., use HTML format in Word). X1 also allows Outlook users to open, print, forward, delete, or add people to their contact lists.

Your computer can be set to load x1 automatically at startup, at which point the software begins looking through the selected files for the terms you need to find. After you have finished with x1, you can minimize the program in your icon tray, where it will be instantly available again for searching. If you constantly look up the same term (say looking through incoming mail for invoices, etc.), you can save the search and automatically re-launch it. X1 even has a print function that enables you to print e-mails and files from the x1 screen. Also x1 can be set to update its database automatically when you receive new e-mails and create new files. You can also use Boolean logic operators (and, or, not) to refine your search topic (for example, "invoices not Microsoft"). You can also limit the search by file type (.pdf), date, size or a number of other criteria. The speed at which xl retrieves requested documents is impressive. The current cost for a single-user license is $99.

There are several other vendors that sell similar software. HotBot has a freeware version (www.hotbot.com/tools/desktop). Another product, "Nelson Email Organizer (www.caelo.com), sells for $39.95; however, it appears only to build indexes for e-mails. A higher-priced ($199) system, dtSearch (www.dtsearch.com), works similarly to x1, but has a more intuitive page design. One of the drawbacks of these systems is that they are prone to glitches and crashes. X1 was fairly stable, but it does have its problems with Outlook. For example, if you unplug your network cable and even though you have closed Outlook, x1 will still try to find it. Music and graphic images can only be found via the file name. If you name your favorite music file 00301.mp3, you will be out of luck, unless the music features the new group "301"! In the final analysis, the occasional glitches are outweighed by the speed with which the software can index and locate documents on your computer.