

# An OPCUG Product Review

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## Finding Free Disk Space with BleachBit

by Alan German

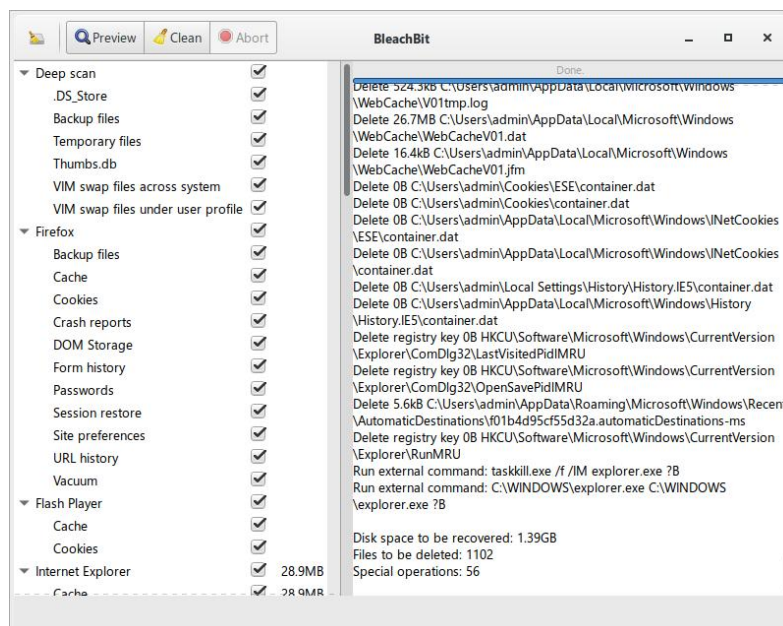
A number of my presentations at recent Q&A sessions (<https://opcug.ca/qa/>) have focussed on creating free disk space by locating and removing temporary files using tools available from Microsoft. However, a suggestion was made that I should give BleachBit a try.

I have used this program previously, but only on my Linux systems, and I wasn't aware that a Windows version was available. BleachBit seemed to work reasonably well under Linux, although I found it to be a bit of a black box. So, I was curious to see how the Windows version would function.

First, a note of caution for anyone wanting to obtain BleachBit. The home page of the web site has a number of ads and download links, with most of the latter having nothing whatsoever to do with downloading BleachBit! I assume that the developer is using such links to generate revenue since BleachBit is a free, open-source offering.

Nevertheless, I find the huge blue *Download* button to be rather disingenuous as one would normally assume that this is the way to download the relevant software. It's not! And, even clicking on the *Download* item in the main menu doesn't make the situation any clearer. So, take a deep breath after loading this second page; ignore the continue and start-now buttons; scroll down the page and find the tiny link for *Windows* under the heading *Installation package*. Sure, the text is explicit, but it's buried among all the other garbage on the page. Not a good start.

Installation is simple. Running the program produces a window with a whole raft of software categories and file locations that can be checked for processing. A *Preview* button sets the program in action and the right-hand window is populated with the results for items that can be removed and an indication of the disk space that will be freed.



My first time running BleachBit, with all the available categories and sub-categories checked, showed that 1102 files could be deleted and 1.39 GB of disk space recovered. Note that 56 "Special operations" are indicated – whatever these are!

Collapsing the categories displayed the disk space to be recovered in the various sections. For example, the space available on my hard drive was 28.9 MB for Internet Explorer (a program that I don't use), 1.06 GB for System, 297.7 MB for Windows Defender, and 5.6 KB for Windows Explorer.

However, this action also revealed some additional items of concern.

For example, with the Thunderbird category checked, BleachBit issued warnings that “Index - Deleting the index will reset the configuration of columns in the message list” and “Passwords - This option will delete your saved passwords”. Similar warnings were generated for the listed web browsers. Clearly, disabling such items would be a wise course of action to prevent the loss of custom displays and stored passwords.

A detailed review of the options showed some more interesting features. For example, there were multiple listings for Firefox – even though Firefox is not installed on my computer! However, no disk space was listed to be recovered in this section, which seems reasonable given that Firefox isn’t available. BleachBit wanted to “Vacuum” a number of files in Thunderbird’s profile folder, including `abook.sqlite` which is the main address book (database) for my E-mail client. It said vacuum rather than delete but, there is no indication of what vacuum actually does. Many files from `C:\WINDOWS` were marked for deletion or vacuuming. These included a number of `.log` and `.pf` (pre-fetch) files, which are probably transient and would be rebuilt as necessary. However, the bulk of the proposed files were from the `SoftwareDistribution\Download\` folder, mostly with names that I didn’t recognize.

Given the level of uncertainty about the process, my preference for running BleachBit was first to make a full disk image of my system in order to facilitate rapid recovery should things go south with the disk cleaning operations. Next, I unchecked all of BleachBit’s categories and then enabled them one by one, reviewing any warning messages as these were displayed. Deep Scan produced several such warnings; however, these merely indicated that some operations might be slow. Options that were declined (unchecked) were *Thunderbird – Index, Passwords and Vacuum* (at least until I could research what this latter option does!) – and *Windows Explorer – Shellbags* (a completely non-intuitive title for an option that would have reset the position of my carefully-arranged desktop icons).

Preview now told me that the 1.39 GB of space could be recovered by deleting just 1102 files, with only 47 special operations. With my backup disk image safely stored on an external USB drive, I was ready to press *Clean* and confirm that I wished to *Delete*.

A bunch of red text appeared in the right-hand window as processing continued. I think I saw several “Access denied” messages scroll past. But, then the display of listings in the window stalled. Perhaps those slow operations were taking place. Indeed, it appears that I had inadvertently left wipe free disk space set, a process that is time consuming but almost certainly provides no real benefit.

Time to try another of the control buttons – *Abort*. This time, with 487 MB of disk space still to be recovered, I unchecked *System – Free disk space* before restarting the program. More red text scrolled by and the display stalled once again. When the smoke cleared, only 84.1 of disk space had been freed and 20 error messages mostly indicated that access had been denied to various files associated with Windows Defender.

The final test was to turn off all the (slow) Deep Scan options; however, processing still took some considerable time and then things really went haywire. BleachBit didn’t close down properly and sat unresponsive on the task bar. Closing down Windows was similarly unsuccessful, with rotating dots, rotating, seemingly forever – or at least until the power button was held down for ten seconds.

Do you remember that disk image backup? Time to use it!

So, the bottom line is that BleachBit is one open-source program that I can’t recommend. It just has too many items that need tweaking in order to avoid unwanted consequences. But my main problem with this software is that it is too much of a black box – and a black box that seemingly doesn’t always function as designed.

Bottom Line

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BleachBit (Open-Source)  
Andrew Ziem  
<https://www.bleachbit.org>

