

A lot of business users and home computer users automatically turn to [Microsoft Word](#) every time they want to create text that needs to be saved. Word is a great fully-featured “word processing package” but using it often seems like using a sledge-hammer to crack a walnut, and it doesn’t necessarily offer a good solution in terms of organising snippets of information and finding them again in a hurry. Indeed, a lot of people would argue that Word has now become too clever and complicated for its own good, confusing average users with a plethora of options while not answering the real-world needs of data storage and retrieval.

Think, for example, of wanting to record notes about household things such as car maintenance records, or recipes, or anything else where you want to record information that you might just need to find again in the future. It seems to me that the trick is to make it as easy as possible to do the recording while, at the same time, making it as easy as possible to find something in, say, a year’s time.

Let’s take this a bit further by adding the possibility of including images (including [screen captures](#)), links to web pages, and links to files on your own computer. What we are beginning to see now is not just a program for recording text but an entire “information management system”.

Microsoft does have its own program for this kind of need. It’s called OneNote and it’s included in all [Microsoft Office](#) packages. However, in all the years that I’ve been providing computer support in London I have never heard a single client mention it. I’ve been testing it for myself for the last three months or so. If I decide it’s worth using I’ll write a blog post on it, but I have to say that so far I’m finding it a bit irritating and possibly resource-hungry. On the other hand, it does seem quite powerful and useful.

In the meantime, the program I use for this kind of thing is one called “[Treepad](#)”. Indeed, I write these blog posts using Treepad and then copy and paste them onto [my website](#). The reasons for using Treepad in this context are:

- I can concentrate on creating the text without worrying about formatting etc.
- I can easily drop images into the text that I might want to include in the blog post.

I also use Treepad for all kinds of computer technical notes that I may never need again or that I might just need one day. I have found that the really important thing is that the effort of writing down and saving information like this is only repaid if it’s easy to find it again. That also means that it has to be easy to do the recording. Treepad is excellent in these respects.

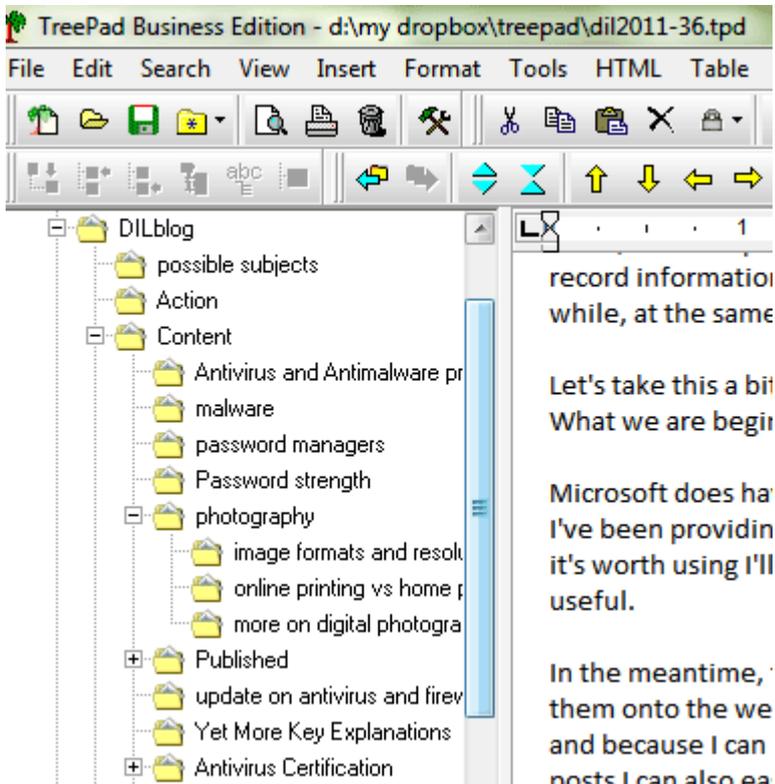


Figure 1 - Treepad - showing the tree structure on the left and part of an article (the contents of a node) on the right

Treepad is basically a text manager that allows you to organise content in a “tree structure”. On the left of the screen is the structure, and on the right is the content of the particular “node” that is currently selected. Nodes can be “nested” inside nodes in much the same way that Windows organises folders within folders (see Figure 1). By the by, you can see from the top of Figure 1 that I keep my Treepad files in my Dropbox folder so that they are always available on all my computers - [see my blog about Dropbox](#).

But it is not only text that can be entered into a node. We can also paste images, hyperlinks to programs or data files on the same computer, hyperlinks to websites, and links to other nodes in the same Treepad data file. It’s very easy to use and it’s powerful.

The only major gripe that I have with Treepad is that there is no inbuilt “tagging”. By that, I mean the ability to define each node as belonging to one or several user-defined “definitions” or “groups”. For instance, I might want to tag the content of nodes with “computer support London” or “silver surfer pc training” or “one-to-one computer training” or “blog ideas” so that all nodes with one or more specific tags can be selected easily. This is not absolutely critical, though, as there is a search routine, so I try to remember to add the words that I would like to treat as tags to the top line of the content of nodes. If I then search for a specific word it will list all nodes that include that word.

	Name	Locati...	Path
1	dil2011	Article	dil2011
2	Content	Article	dil2011/DILblog/Content
3	Buying A Laptop	Article	dil2011/DILblog/Content/Publi
4	microsoft scam	Article	dil2011/DILblog/Content/Publi
5	Blog	Article	dil2011/DILblog/Content/Antiv
6	Great freeware - Te...	Article	dil2011/DILblog/Content/Grea
7	Moving a blog	Article	dil2011/Dilswweb/Moving a blog
8	Rescue CDs	Article	dil2011/T echnical/Rescue CD
9	(new node)	Article	dil2011/T echnical/(new node)

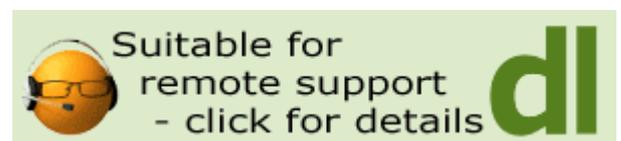
Figure 2 - Treepad Search Results

Figure 2 shows the results of searching my Treepad file for “AVG”: I can then click on any selected node to see it in its entirety.

Treepad is available in several versions. There is a [free version](#) so it costs nothing except a bit of time to give it a try. If you are the sort of person who is forever mislaying bits of information that you think should be easily accessible on your computer then it could pay you to have a look at it. I’ve been using the “Business” version for several years.

I started looking at Microsoft’s OneNote because it appears to be a more sophisticated program (you can scan documents directly into OneNote for instance), but I find its text handling a bit, shall we say, idiosyncratic (ie annoying) so I don’t know yet whether I would recommend it. Treepad is beginning to look a bit long in the tooth but it’s easy to use and repays the minimal effort required to use it.

I’m going to have a look at how good Treepad might be as a password manager program as I know that most of my IT clients do not have a simple, effective, consistent way of storing these and could do with a bit of well-aimed computer advice on the subject. Watch this space....



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