

# ZoomWare—A Review

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ZoomWare is described by its developer as “...an affordable and easy to use magnification program for your computer...(that) provides a gentle boost of magnification....”

Full US retail price is \$149 for an electronic download or \$175 for a shipped box (including shipping). A free evaluation copy was provided by the developer, Ai Squared (<http://www.aisquared.com>), via the Association of PC Users Groups (APCUG). ZoomWare has its own web site, <http://www.getzoomware.com/>.

Check the system requirements before purchasing this product, or downloading a trial version. For Windows XP, a 1 GHz Pentium 4 processor, Windows XP SP2 and 512 MB RAM are required. Vista requires even more capability.

I installed ZoomWare on a Dell Inspiron 6000 laptop with a 1.5 GHz Pentium M processor, 2GB of RAM, and Windows XP/Pro SP3.

With two minor exceptions, installation is straightforward. The first exception is that the Microsoft product .NET Framework is installed along with the ZoomWare application (for anyone interested in more information on the .NET product, connect to [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/.net\\_framework](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/.net_framework)). I call this a minor exception because it is a surprise. The installation of .NET occurs first in the installation sequence, although it is transparent to the user once the installation is complete. Expect installation times of several minutes for both .NET and ZoomWare.

The second minor exception is that upon the first launch, ZoomWare is enabled. That is a little disconcerting, and probably confusing for the casual and/or inexperienced computer user. A better approach, in my judgment, is to leave ZoomWare off upon first launch.

Once installed, the program is, indeed, easy to use. You enable (or disable) the zoom feature using the center button. You zoom in or out using the buttons on either side of the enable button.



When zoomed in, you move the mouse to see different parts of the display. Here is a view of my desktop without any zoom (ZoomWare disabled).



Here is a view of my desktop with (first level) zoom.




When you zoom in (and not before), you have three view choices:

- Full View
- Large Lens
- Small Lens

The graphics in this review were all captured using the Full View. The “Lens” options create a rectangle (smaller or larger) which you move over desired areas of the display using the mouse.

Here is a sample of part of this review with zoom:

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Perhaps it is not clear from that sample that zoom has been applied. Only the first magnification level was applied (there are 4 levels—1.25, 1.5, 1.75 and 2)

There are a variety of “Enhancements” available:

Color:

- Normal
- Reverse Video
- Tint (shown with options)



Pointer:

- Various sizes and colors are available.



Cursor:

- Note the middle option adds colored triangles to the cursor (with several color choices).



Note that, unlike most other programs, there is no menu visible. There *is*, however, a menu, which is displayed when you click on the Menu button:



So much for the mechanics of using the program. I have a number of, admittedly subjective, observations to offer.

So far, based on limited testing, I have found no conflicts with other applications.

The display performance seems to be slower with ZoomWare enabled (even without zoom applied). I have not (and cannot) measure the difference, but the conclusion remains.

Using the zoom feature takes a little practice. Not surprisingly, there is an interaction between the zoom feature and the scroll bars of any application. Moving the mouse changes the visible portion of the display (and therefore, depending on mouse movement, the scroll bar(s) may not be visible). That can be

discouraging—especially to inexperienced computer users—at least until they get used to the display changes that are tied to mouse movement.

Perhaps the more important issue is whether an application such as ZoomWare can (or should) take the place of using the zoom feature built into almost all applications today. Or, whether it should take the place of the Windows accessibility options (one of which is a screen magnifier of limited capability)—or both.

The answer to that question will require a judgment by the user. ZoomWare offers a trial period, and I strongly recommend that any potential user take advantage of that offer. Based on my experience with computer users that have some level of visual impairment (including myself), I estimate that the usefulness of a program such as ZoomWare will depend on:

1. Degree of visual impairment. If the impairment is simply mild near- or farsightedness, with no other medical issues (color blindness, cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration, etc.), perhaps an inexpensive set of reading glasses is an acceptable (and less expensive) solution, together with the computer's operating system accessibility features.
2. Knowledge Level. For new or inexperienced computer users that also have some mild visual impairment, a program such as ZoomWare may be the necessary stimulus for that user to expand their computer knowledge—and, in fact, stimulate them to use the computer where they would not otherwise do so. Under these conditions, the zoom feature is much more likely to be effective, in my judgment, when used with one of the ZoomWare cursor enhancements (and possibly one of the color and/or pointer enhancements).

That leaves open the question of the remainder of computer users with mild visual impairment. The one difference between using an application's built-in zoom feature (and/or operating system accessibility features), and using a program such as ZoomWare is that ZoomWare allows the user to magnify selected areas of a display in combination with additional visual enhancements. Only the individual user can decide if that is worth \$149.

In the past, screen magnification software was expensive. For those needing more than the "gentle magnification" provided by ZoomWare, it still is. A search using Google and the exact phrase "screen magnification software" provided over 18,000 results. Connecting to just a very few of those links will verify that statement. Even at \$149, ZoomWare is a bargain compared to the earlier screen magnification programs, although ZoomWare offers fewer features and a smaller magnification range compared to those earlier programs.

Here are three web sites (there are probably more) that will help you determine if a screen magnification program will be useful to you. They provide descriptions of screen magnification software, including advantages and disadvantages. These web sites are definitely worth viewing for those considering the purchase of screen magnification software:

1. Tech Connections: [Computer Magnification](http://www.assistivetech.net/index.php/Computer_magnification), ([http://www.assistivetech.net/index.php/Computer\\_magnification](http://www.assistivetech.net/index.php/Computer_magnification)). This document is dated 2001, but has a valid discussion of advantages and disadvantages of different screen magnification technologies.

2. American Foundation for the Blind: [Magnification Programs](http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=4&TopicID=31&DocumentID=1387) for the Computer Screen, (http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=4&TopicID=31&DocumentID=1387).
3. RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) UK: [Screen Magnification Software](http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public_screenmagnification.hcsp), (http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public\_screenmagnification.hcsp).

My conclusion is that ZoomWare works as advertised. Is the software useful? Any potential user will need to make that evaluation using a trial version and the information in the web sites listed above.