

digital download pc games sites



The most popular desktop gaming clients, ranked.

Is Steam really the best you can do on PC? Maybe, but there are decent alternatives.

Before Valve required Half-Life 2 players to download an annoying client called “Steam” in order to play its now classic FPS, PC had no neat-and-tidy desktop application for purchasing, sorting and accessing games software. Since then, Steam has become so ubiquitous that it basically is PC gaming in the eyes of many. Of course, it isn’t. There are many alternatives, and given Steam’s astonishing growth and confusing approach to curation, plenty are wondering whether there are any viable alternatives.

While nothing comes close to Steam’s catalogue size, there are viable alternatives: especially if you’re after a more focused, curated storefront. But then, there’s UPlay. How about the Windows Store? We’ve listed the major clients available on PC below, in order of preference.

1. Steam

You might have heard of Steam. It’s come a long way since Counter-Strike version 1.4 released exclusively on the platform in 2003. It’s evolved from a Valve shopfront into a clearing house for upwards of 100 games per week. It’s fully-featured and growing, and if you game on PC, you’ve almost certainly got it installed.

The sheer breadth of its digital inventory makes installing the client a no-brainer. While many major publishers like Activision, Electronic Arts and Bethesda have moved, or are moving, away from Steam in favor of their own clients, it still boasts an astonishingly massive and diverse range of games, whether you’re into shooters, visual novels, anime sex games or meditative exploration games. Valve’s also making inroads into streaming, and it’s recently launched its own answer to the hugely popular Discord voice chat application. There’s very little you can’t do on Steam. So what are the setbacks?

Curation is one of them. Steam, for all of Valve’s talk, still hosts a lot of questionable games, whether offensive or just downright low effort (Unity asset flips still pop up from time to time). There’s a good argument to be made that Steam’s nigh ‘everything goes’ approach is noble, since it’s good to make space in the world for material we might not strictly categorize as “good” or even “a game”. Add to that, Steam’s algorithmic recommendations, and chances are you won’t see bad stuff anyway. Still: algorithms aren’t useful if you want to expand outside your comfort zone, and at the moment, GOG Galaxy and itch.io arguably offer a better browsing experience for that purpose.

Steam isn’t a necessary evil per se: it’s massive and chock-a-block full of games. What more could you want? Maybe a more focused experience. If so, read on.

2. GOG Galaxy.

Good Old Games was originally conceived as a storefront for DRM-free retro PC games, the type that you’d once have had trouble buying, let alone running. Since a lot of these games required DOS emulator DOSBox to run, each purchase would come bundled with that free software. GOG Galaxy is especially great if you’re into running these older games: if you own Simcity 2000 and open it from the client, it’ll automatically boot DOSBox and the game seamlessly.

Of course, GOG is no longer exclusively about retro games: the storefront has a huge selection of modern indie games, not to mention CD Projekt’s catalogue (they own GOG, didn’t you know). There are fewer games from blockbuster publishers -- so don’t expect anything modern by EA, Ubisoft etc -- but GOG is famously a stickler for curation, as a recent report about a Zachtronics game initially not making the cut demonstrated. Meanwhile, an initiative called GOG Connect aims to help you transition your Steam library to GOG, assuming you prefer the Galaxy browser. This is limited to a tiny handful of games at present, and it’s hard to say whether the project will gain traction.

Whatever the case, it’s clear GOG has aspirations for its client, and it’s definitely a less fussy and complicated affair than Steam. The lack of heavy-handed algorithmic personalisation, combined with GOG’s internal curation, means you’re hardly going to encounter something as dire as a Unity asset flip on the front page of its store. If you’re into indies, old games and... The Witcher 3, it’s feasible that you can start your library here, rather than on Steam.

What about GOG Galaxy 2.0?

The closed beta for GOG Galaxy’s next evolution is gathering attention for its promise to ‘unite all launchers’ in the embrace of a gentler, more versatile launcher. GOG Galaxy 2.0 won’t get rid of other launchers entirely, but its library management tools and integrations collates every game from every library and allows you to mess with any sort of metadata, images, and tags you like. You can even launch games from other launchers within GOG Galaxy 2.0. Features that close launchers once an associated game closes are on the way too. Cross-platform chat and friend functionality have been promised as well. Toss in all the open source extensions the community makes, and GOG Galaxy 2.0 could very well top this list some day. We’ll just need to see all those big ideas come to fruition.

3. Xbox (beta)

Microsoft rolled out the beta version of this Xbox launcher alongside the launch of Xbox Game Pass for PC. As a result, booting the app takes you straight into the current Game Pass library, which at this point is pretty decent. But the app is also a store and launcher, meaning it’s useful if you want to buy games outright and never touch the subscription service.

First thing’s first: it’s no Steam. The library isn’t as big and the functionality isn’t great, though it compares favourably to the Epic Games Store launcher. The social aspect has text and voice chat, providing access to any friends you have using a Microsoft account (which is one and the same).

with your Xbox Live account, nowadays), but it's definitely no replacement for Discord.

It's heads and shoulders above the Microsoft Store, obviously, which by the way is still a going concern if you fetishise lousy software. But the Xbox app is definitely a satisfactory experience, with a decent library, a bargain subscription service, and a sleek interface.

4. Epic Games Store.

Who could have thought a mere game launcher could be so contentious? Well, it doesn't help that Epic Games started snagging exclusives before its launcher had virtually any useful functionality to speak of: it didn't even have a search function at launch. It has a very long way to go before it can rival Steam, but whether you like it or not, the Epic Games Store is here to stay and it has improved a fair bit over the months. Still to come are achievements, cloud saves and much more, but as of July 2019 it's still pretty barebones and, frankly, not a great deal of fun to use.

Again, it's a work in progress. The store itself is a real pain to use, since it doesn't have any filter options, nor any genre silos. Worse still, pre-orders tend to sit at the top of the list, eliminating any desire you might have to browse for games to play now. If browsing and discovering is what you want to do, Epic Games Store just isn't good for it. There is a search function now, at least. The owned library is simply, elegantly presented as a simple alphabetical list of games, but again, some filters are much needed. As for its social networking functions... well, you can add friends and text chat with them. That's it.

Of course, if you want to play certain exclusives like *The Outer Worlds* or *Borderlands 3* at launch, you'll need to get the launcher regardless of whether you want it or not. That's the rub, for folk vehemently against the Epic Games Store. It'll almost certainly improve, though.

5. Itch.io.

This is a desktop client for the popular indie game storefront Itch.io. It's useful for the way it manages and organises your installs: downloading games from the itch.io website usually results in a mess of various executables and zip files in your downloads folder. Use the client, and you can download and uninstall any title without needing to worry where the files actually end up. It's hardly a feature per se, but it's uniquely useful for a storefront that specialises in tiny games with tinier storage footprints. Apart from that, all the features you'd expect are here: searching by popular tags, browsing within price brackets, and access to a decently populated itch.io discussion community. If you play a lot of games from itch.io it's a no-brainer to get the client, and if you've yet to sample the bite-sized gaming morsels the storefront specialises in, now's the time to check it out. Overall, a functional client for a unique storefront.

6. Origin.

This is Electronic Arts' dedicated client: you'll need to have it installed if you want to play a modern EA game. In its favour, it's a more feature-rich enterprise compared to similar clients from Bethesda and Ubisoft. For starters, Origin has a storefront boasting an impressive list of games that aren't published by EA, from big names like CD Projekt, Ubisoft and Capcom, through to smaller indie publishers like Playdead and Kalypso (that said, EA games are hugely foregrounded). Origin also supports Origin Access, EA's subscription service which offers up a ton of games for a monthly fee. The bulk of these games (upwards of 100) are EA games, though also include titles like *Batman: Arkham Origins*, *Cities Skylines*, *The Witness*, and more. You also get access to new EA games like *Battlefield V* before everyone else.

Whether you believe Origin Access is good value, or not, will determine the value of the Origin client. It's serviceable, and the storefront isn't bad, but it can barely hope to reach the inventory size of something like Steam. Perhaps, if you've only interest in big name indies and triple A games and want something with quality control, that won't matter to you.

7. Battle.net.

Since the release of *Destiny 2*, Blizzard's Battle.net client has expanded to include Activision's recent stable of online games: *Destiny 2* (until September, at least) and *Call of Duty: Black Ops 4*. When it comes to assessing the quality of Battle.net, the first and most obvious question is: do you want to play a Blizzard game? If the answer is "yes" then tough luck -- whether you like it or not, you're gonna need Battle.net.

As for the experience itself, it's fine. It's lightweight enough that if you're only keen to play *Hearthstone*, it's not going to get in the way with long boot up times and persistent interruptions. It's possible to stream straight to Facebook from the client, and all the in-client streaming options are geared towards pushing you in that direction. It's a decent place to stream Blizzard-centric esports too, for example the *Overwatch League*. It's a tidy and functional client and, if you disagree, a necessary evil anyway.

8. UPlay.

UPlay is good for one thing: playing Ubisoft games. It's actually not good for a single other thing. Occasionally Ubisoft will offer a free game to UPlay account holders, and occasionally the publisher will run decent sales on Ubisoft titles. But overall you're not really going to install UPlay unless you want to play a Ubisoft game. UPlay is widely mocked, and it's easy to see why. If you buy a Ubisoft game on Steam, it'll launch Uplay and then launch into the game itself. It's not a gamebreaker, it's just damn annoying. Unless you love earning Uplay points, for some reason, UPlay is just a boring fact of life if you want to play a Ubisoft game. A shame *Siege* and *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey* are as good as they are.

9. Bethesda Launcher.

It's been easy enough to ignore the existence of Bethesda's launcher: while games like *Elder Scrolls Legends* have required *bethesda.net* accounts, it was possible to play them via Steam without the need for a separate client. But the honeymoon is over: *Fallout 76* will require the launcher, and will be the only digital storefront selling the game.

It's a barebones client—simply a desktop storefront for Bethesda games—but increasingly, the publisher's answer to Battle.net. Even the "streams" menu option shuttles the user to a Twitch web browser page, likewise the "community" menu option. There's no reason to recommend it, then, unless you're definitely going to play Fallout 76 and, presumably, any other forthcoming online Bethesda games.

10. Windows Store.

When it comes to gaming, the Windows Store is good for two things: playing Microsoft-published games, and as fodder for condescending jokes about Microsoft. The worst thing about Windows Store is that it's oblivious to what kind of games enthusiast you are. A lengthy browse throws up a ton of cheap smartphone-esque games (Hidden City: Hidden Object Adventure! Candy Crush Soda Saga!), among which you'll find scattered the odd flagship Microsoft-owned game like Minecraft, Gears of War, Halo and Forza. Stuff like Ark: Survival Evolved and We Happy Few are there—and other notable publishers including Warner Bros and Capcom are getting involved—but the storefront is definitely geared towards folks who put hundreds of hours into Minesweeper in the '90s. Nothing wrong with that, but I'd wager that most people are looking for one or the other, not both. You won't be leisurely browsing the Windows Store, then. It's a clunky affair with virtually no useful curation. One to avoid unless you're into Forza.

Also, there is absolutely no need to use the Windows Store for games now that the Xbox app exists.

The 8 Best Free PC Game Websites of 2021.

Here are some of the best online resources and websites dedicated to freeware and free PC games. Some are dedicated to freeware games only and offer downloads to homebrew games, clones, and older commercial games that have been released as freeware. Other sites offer a mix of content, including online browser-based games (HTML5 and Flash) and downloadable games.

These are a great place to start if you're looking to find some free PC games online!

Best for Fan Remakes of Classic Games: Acid-Play.

Fan remakes of classic games.

Reliable search feature.

Poor categorization by genre.

Acid-Play is one of the more reliable free gaming websites around. It offers more than 860 downloads. All games listed on AcidPlay.com are reviewed and given a percentage rating. The reviews and ratings are a great guide for determining the quality of the free game.

Best for Pure Freeware: Caiman.us.

Helpful links to other gaming websites.

No recent updates.

Caiman.us is a pure freeware website. You won't find any demos or shareware here. It has more than 4,000 games and is one of the most frequently updated freeware gaming websites.

Best for Out-of-Print Games: Home of the Underdogs.

Technical information about emulators.

Great source for learning about underrated PC games.

Some outdated game links.

Outdated interface and design.

Home of the Underdogs is a freeware and abandonware site offering a vast number of titles for download. It's a virtual gold mine for many classic out-of-print games, with a library of over 5,000 titles. The list is fairly impressive, and the site is updated quarterly. Home of the Underdogs has gone through a number of fan-supported redesigns and relaunches, leading to multiple sites hosting some (but not all) of the games found on the original.

Home of the Underdogs doesn't provide game downloads. Instead, it offers details on thousands of games and a search option to find where you can obtain the games.

Best for Unique Indie Games: Reloaded Abandonia.

Games you won't find anywhere else.

Detailed reviews of indie titles.

Some broken download links.

Reloaded is a free computer game site dedicated to remakes of classic and retro video games and community-made freeware games. Layout and navigation are very nice, with screenshots and descriptions of all games listed in its directory.

The site also offers information and links for many older retail games that have been seemingly abandoned by the original copyright holders.

Best Commercial Site for Free Games: Steam

All games are compatible with commercial game controllers.

Thriving user community.

Steam client can't capture gameplay footage.

Customer service and technical support get mixed reviews.

While many think of Steam as the primary online platform and store for purchasing PC games, it also offers hundreds of free-to-play games. Some may be free during an early access period while still in development. Others are fully released titles offering in-game microtransactions. That being said, a vast majority of the free-to-play PC games offered on Steam don't require any payment for access to full functionality and gameplay.

With more than 500 games listed, there's bound to be something for everyone: RTS games, shooters, or online shooters, to name a few. Popular titles available through Steam free of charge include Dota 2, Team Fortress, Path of Exile, and more.

The Best Game Streaming Services for 2021.

Do you want to play popular video games, but don't own a console or gaming PC? These top services let you access remote hardware to play games on almost any device you already own.

Related Game Streaming Service Picks:

Video games require processing power, and that power is expensive. The new consoles start at \$300, and gaming PCs can easily cost several thousand dollars. There's a less expensive alternative that's slowly picking up steam, though.

Game streaming services let you play as if you have a gaming PC or console right in front of you, only they're located in a server rack somewhere else in the country. These services give you access to big gaming power for a monthly fee; all you need is a modest PC or mobile device to play. We're here to walk you through how these services work, how much they cost, and which are the best ones we've tested so far.

What Is a Game Streaming Service?

Game streaming lets you remotely access hardware on the service's servers. You use a client to log into a powerful PC over the internet, and the games you play run on that PC instead of your own hardware. The client simply provides a live feed of the video and audio coming from the server hardware, and sends all of your inputs to that server to translate into gaming commands. Essentially, you're controlling a computer that isn't in front of you, and seeing everything that computer displays.

How Do You Stream Games?

As you can imagine, you need a fast network connection for these services to be useful. If your internet is slow or inconsistent, the inputs you send won't come through properly, and you'll experience gameplay lag and glitches. More than a fraction of a second of lag between your commands and the system responding can make a game unplayable.

Depending on the game streaming service, you'll need an internet connection with speeds that are at least 5Mbps to 20Mbps. You don't need a wired hookup, but it helps, as does 5GHz Wi-Fi. You don't want to skimp on your router for these services, and you should seriously consider a fiber connection if it's available in your area.

With a fast and consistent connection, gameplay can feel instantaneous, with input lag of milliseconds. This makes most games perfectly playable, though it might still be too slow for competitive gaming. If you're controlling a multiplayer shooter or fighting game, every frame can make a difference, and you might not want to rely on a streaming service in those cases.

What Is the Best Game Streaming Platform?

Most services feature Windows 10 clients, which effectively let you turn even a cheap work laptop into a high-end gaming PC. PC clients have the added benefit of supporting Ethernet connections, as well as Wi-Fi. Every publicly released game streaming service is available on Windows 10 in some form, either as a dedicated app (GeForce Now, PlayStation Now, Shadow) or in a web browser (Stadia, Amazon Luna). Xbox Game Pass Ultimate's cloud gaming feature doesn't have a Windows 10 client (its coming to the Xbox app later this year), but you can give it a try via web browser.

You can also use a smartphone to play games on most streaming services. Every service except PlayStation Now has an Android app, though the iOS game streaming ecosystem is a lot shakier with some disputes on letting certain services run on iPhones and iPads. Just remember you'll be playing console and PC games on a smaller smartphone or tablet screen, which can feel awkward.

Several of the services also have straight-to-TV options, with extra hardware. For example, Google Stadia features a Stadia controller that you

pair with a Chromecast Ultra to access Stadia on your TV (the service still doesn't work yet with Chromecast with Google TV, but functionality will be added later this month). PlayStation Now works on any PlayStation 4 or PlayStation 5. Amazon Luna works with Amazon Fire TV devices.

What Else Do You Need?

You almost certainly need a gamepad. Stadia works best with the Google Stadia Controller, but it's compatible with the Xbox Wireless Controller, the Sony DualShock 4, and some Bluetooth controllers. Amazon Luna works with some Bluetooth gamepads, but the Luna Controller is the best way to play over that service. GeForce Now works best with an Xbox Wireless Controller, but you can also use any XInput-compatible wireless gamepad. PlayStation Now is compatible with DualShock 4, DualSense, and Xbox controllers.

Shadow, meanwhile, works with any gamepad that's compatible with Windows 10, but you'll also want a keyboard and mouse. After all, you're accessing a Windows 10 PC directly, so the ability to move a pointer and enter text is useful. You can use a touch screen and on-screen keyboard if you're using the Shadow Android app, but if you want to get the most out of a Windows PC, you really need a mouse and keyboard.

Ready to stream video games? Here are the best game streaming services we've tested.

5 best game download services.

Ten years ago, the mere suggestion of downloading a game digitally would have left most PC gamers aghast.

"What of my phone bill!?" "Won't the Boutique of Electronics close down as a result!?" "Who is this Horatio chap, and what does he want with my daughter?"

Fortunately, we soon got out of the early-millennial way of thinking and accepted digital downloads as the way forwards. As with all other shifts in the games industry, the PC led where others will surely follow. Digital distribution platforms, such as Steam, basically nabbed the iTunes model and applied it to gaming. Very successfully.

We've actually reached a point where physical media is becoming less and less relevant. Physical copies of recent games such as Deus Ex: Human Revolution and Modern Warfare: Black Ops have merely been containers for a Steam code and a bit of data, the rest of which is downloaded online.

The opinion seems to be that the majority of PC gamers don't care about boxed goods, and would rather be able to play their games on the day they're released than have to wait around with a Gregg's pasty waiting for their local branch of GAME to open.

In turn, every other platform is getting in on the digital download malarkey. It seems that neither the PlayStation Network or the Xbox Live Arcade were quite ready for just how massive digital downloads would be, and the tiny file size limit (350MB on Xbox Live, last time we checked) has stopped console downloads being as big as the PC.

In the meantime, the PC is still the best platform for digital downloads, and there are a fair few contenders to Valve's crown. The most important is likely to be EA's Origin, which is playing host to the company's upcoming uber-blockbuster, Battlefield 3. In fact, the war game won't be enjoying a Steam release at all, although it will be available on a few other digital distribution platforms.

We've rounded up five of the biggest and most interesting platforms, and given them a run for their money in terms of download speeds, design, and content. We've left out more specialist services such as Good Old Games and Blizzard's Battle.net as the titles on these sites often aren't available anywhere else, which would hardly make for a fair comparison.

1. Steam

The original game download service, launched by Valve in 2004. The decision to release Half-Life 2 on the service in 2005 saw PC gamers downloading Steam en masse, and subsequent releases saw it expand in popularity. Forbes estimates that 50-70 per cent of PC gaming's \$4billion income comes through Steam.

It's not without its problems, though. If you haven't set Steam to offline mode, and find yourself without an internet connection, you won't be able to access any of your games. Plus it occupies a shady area of UK distance selling regulations, which state that you're allowed seven days to try out products bought online - Steam doesn't offer refunds.

With an apparent 70 percent cut for big publishers who get their games on Steam, it's an attractive option. DRM for Valve and some third-party titles is supplied via Steamworks, with publishers able to stick other forms of protection on top of their games. The latter can prove to be a bit of a nightmare, especially if it's Fallout 3's Games for Windows Live or GTA IV's Social Club.

Valve has absolutely nailed the user experience. Everyone who plays PC games has Steam, and its chat and social features are second-to-none. However, surprisingly, we found our download speeds lagged a little. There's also no incentive program to keep you coming back, and Steam keys can now be sold by third-party sites.

Steam has set the high water mark for PC game download services, and it has also sneaked onto the PlayStation 3 and Mac. It's also got a humongous catalogue of 3,710 games - but it's going to face some tough competition as other publishers cash in on digital revenue.

2. Origin.

EA's brand-spanking-new web store is rather like its old one, only with an original name. It's aiming to match its "leading competitor [read: Steam] by 2012", and it - somewhat unsurprisingly - only stocks EA titles. Even though it's still in its nascent stages, Origin is fairly fully formed.

But Origin has stirred controversy recently - particularly when it comes to its relationship with Steam

The decision to make Battlefield 3 an Origin-exclusive seemingly didn't go down too well with Valve, and Crysis 2 has been pulled from Steam - although EA believes this to be a mere coincidence.

The plot thickens when you realise that Valve and EA have a mutually beneficial relationship - the manufacture and distribution of Valve's boxed products is silently handled by EA.

As a client, Origin is nicely laid-out and easy to use. The games seem generally cheaper than on Steam, too with Dead Space 2 costing £19.99 on Steam and £14.99 on Origin. Download speeds are solidly impressive, and the fact that you don't have to go through the Origin layer to access your games is a boon to anyone who likes gaming on the move.

EA has big plans for Origin, such as an iPhone version and potential cross-compatibility across upcoming consoles. It's still got a long way to go before it can compete with Steam, but it's slick and smooth enough to be a serious contender.

Battlefield 3 will either define or sink it, and our money's firmly on the former - at the end of the day, most gamers aren't going to worry too much about where their game comes from, as long as they can play it.

3. Direct2Drive.

Started originally by IGN, Direct2Drive has recently been purchased by US game rental service Gamefly. Gamefly itself is launching an online rental service soon, so Direct2Drive has been slightly neglected, but it's still an interesting online game shop.

Direct2Drive doesn't have a client as such, instead it installs a basic "shop" which redirects to the website, as well as GameSpy Comrade for online matchmaking and chats.

It's a slightly hotchpotch system, but it just about works. With over 1,500 titles, its catalogue isn't lacking, although we had problems getting a decent download speed.

Some titles - such as Deus Ex: Human Revolution - simply consist of a Steam key to get the game, which is a tad annoying.

Unlike Steam, most games simply require a one-time activation to get them working, so there's no fretting about being offline. The downside is that many titles use the infamously Draconian Securom DRM, but apparently the support team will send out more access codes if you run out.

There's some other goodness, too. Direct2Drive promises to price-match any game you've bought if you find it on a competitor's site for cheaper. It will also refund your game if you request your money back within a reasonable amount of time, and haven't activated the title.

Direct2Drive is definitely due an overhaul, though, and hopefully Gamefly's ownership will give it the lick of paint it so desperately needs. If Gamefly can also bring its rental program - which gives you unlimited games for a monthly fee - to the UK, it could be the unique selling point it needs to muscle in on Steam, Gaikai and Onlive.

4. Green Man Gaming.

Probably the most interesting and innovative service in our round-up, Green Man Gaming is a British start-up. On the surface, it looks like any other download service, and to some extent it pretty much is. Where the Green Man stands out is in its trade-in policy.

Although a trade-in system may seem a tad odd on digital products, it does actually work. If a game gets the go-ahead from publishers, it's listed and sold through Green Man Gaming's site. You can download and play the game to your heart's content, but if you get bored, or just don't like it, you can trade it in for a certain value - usually about 25% of the price you paid for it. Bigger games don't feature the trade-in system, but you can still put your credits towards them.

Prices on Green Man Gaming fluctuate, and getting good prices is almost a game in itself - one user invested just 4p at the site's start, and now has £30 of credit for the site. Green Man Gaming reckons that, in essence, you're spending less money to get more games.

Although the range is currently a little sparse, it's an interesting paradigm for online gaming, especially in these days of wallet-watching credit crunches. Its Capsule software is a little clunky, and its slightly esoteric shopping system may go over the heads of some users.

The site's success lies on people using it, and more trade-ins make it better for everyone. If it takes off, it could well prove to be an underdog challenger to Steam's throne - unless Steam decides to nab the trade-in system for itself.

5. Games for Windows Marketplace.

Microsoft has beaten around the bush with its Games for Windows Live platform for ages now, and seems to have finally decided to integrate it with its Xbox portal. This could be part of some grand plan for the next Xbox console, but at the moment it's in a no-man's land of games services.

Like it or not, you've probably already got Games for Windows installed if you've got Dirt 3 or Dead Rising 2 - even if you bought them via Steam. It feels a tad sneaky, and the sheer number of hoops you've got to go through to get games running makes for some major ball-aches. DLC

is similarly ineffective, and we still have nightmares about getting the add-ons for Fallout 3 working.

The Games for Windows Marketplace catalogue currently stands at a pitiful 166 titles. Among these you'll find the triple-AAA likes of Dirt 3 and Bioshock 2 , but recent releases have been thin on the ground. It obviously works well enough for some publishers: Codemasters has released F1 2011 via Games for Windows Marketplace. It makes sense for Microsoft's own games: Fable 3 and Age of Empires are there too.

Microsoft clearly still has a vested interest in PC gaming, what with it owning that whole Windows thing. Games for Windows Live does look rather spiffing; the MSN-style messenger and wholly-cribbed-from-Xbox achievements system work well. However, right now it seems to be more of a promotion for the Xbox as a gaming platform than a fully-fledged service.

Verdict.

Green Man Gaming comes a close second to Steam. On paper, Steam ticks all the right boxes, with decent download speeds, a huge catalogue of games, and a straightforward user interface. There's also the fact that just about every PC gamer on the planet uses it, and it's established itself in the very bedrock of gaming.

But Steam is only our number one for the moment. In the coming months, especially with the release of Battlefield 3 , there could be some rather huge shifts in gaming clients, and the way we use them.

Each service we looked at has its own unique selling point, from Origin's cross-platform mechanics to Games for Windows Live's apparent integration with the upcoming Windows 8.

Steam might never be toppled, but it could see a sizable share of its user base migrate to other platforms.