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**p58**

ISSUE 438 | 10 – 22 DECEMBER 2014

# Computer **active**

Your friendly guide to technology

# STOP OLD HARDWARE KILLING YOUR PC



**Fix hidden faults that strike without warning p50**

- ✓ Fix your processor
- ✓ Fix your memory

- ✓ Fix your hard drive
- ✓ Extend your PC's life

**PLUS**

**CREATE TIME-LAPSE VIDEOS  
ON YOUR TABLET** page 40

**BUILD A  
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New free tools **page 35**





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Bryan Water, OC3D.net

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Ryan Martin, eTeknix.com

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Zardon, KitGuru.net

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## From the Editor

Much to my girlfriend's dismay, I take great pleasure in wearing clothes until they are on the verge of disintegration. I only throw away an item of clothing when it's indistinguishable from a dishcloth, never because it has apparently fallen out of fashion. It's good to get your money's worth, after all.

I have a similar attitude towards computing. I never buy a computer unless I'm confident I'll still be using it in 10 years (at least), albeit perhaps not in the same capacity as on day one. And, as we explain in our Cover Feature, to get that lifespan from a PC you need to regularly check the health of the components inside.



It pays to fear the worst because many problems have hidden symptoms. To prevent small faults becoming fatal, use the programs we recommend. They analyse your hard drive, processor, battery and memory for early warning signs. Pay attention to the results, and your PC should last well into the next decade.

**Daniel Booth**

[editor@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:editor@computeractive.co.uk)



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**£239**

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# STOP OLD HARDWARE KILLING YOUR PC

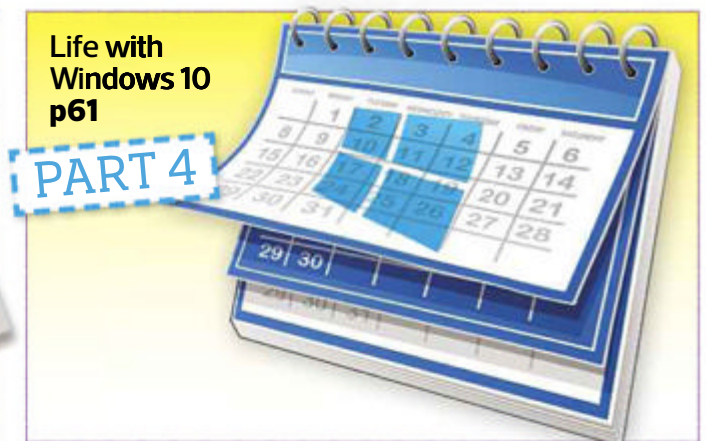
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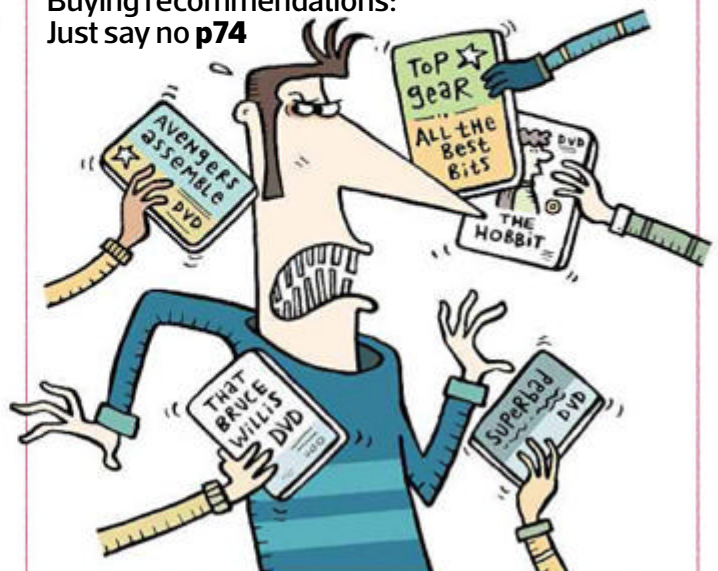
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## Computeractive offer of the fortnight

**Kaspersky Internet Security 2015 page 68**



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## Facebook condemned for not revealing 'kill soldier' comment

Facebook has come under fire from Lee Rigby's family after it was revealed that the site didn't pass on to security services an online comment made by one of the fusilier's murderers expressing a desire to "kill a soldier".

Rigby's sister Sara McClure said Facebook had "blood on its hands" because it had hosted exchanges between Michael Adebowale (pictured below right), serving life for the horrific murder, and an Al Qaeda extremist codenamed Foxtrot.

She said: "I suppose it has given me someone to blame, but I'm not sure that's what I wanted. Knowing it could have been prevented and it wasn't prevented. I blame the failings of MI5 and the internet companies. Mainly the internet companies".

Her comments came after a report by the Commons Intelligence and Security Committee found that Adebowale, expressed online an "intent to murder a soldier in the most graphic and emotive manner" five months before the attack outside Woolwich Barracks in 2013.

Facebook couldn't have passed on Adebowale's comment to MI5 because it



had been unaware of it, despite having previously disabled five of his accounts because he had discussed terrorism. At no point did Facebook contact the security services.

In total Adebowale had 11 Facebook accounts, but GCHQ has still only been given access to six of them.

The committee's report accused internet companies including Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Apple of "providing a safe haven for terrorists" because of a lack of cooperation with UK authorities. It noted that these companies feel obliged to protect their users' privacy, but they should override this principle "where there is a possibility that a terrorist atrocity is being planned".

"If Adebowale's exchange with Foxtrot had been seen by MI5 at the time, then we

believe that the investigation would have increased to Priority 1, unlocking all the extra resources this would have entailed," the report states.

"This is the single issue which – had it been known at the time – might have enabled MI5 to prevent the attack."

Despite Facebook's failings, the 192-page report concluded that the British intelligence agencies could not have prevented the murder.

David Cameron also criticised Facebook, telling internet companies they had a "moral duty" to act because "their networks are being used to plot murder and mayhem".

A Facebook spokesman said: "Like everyone, we were horrified by the vicious murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby. We don't comment on individual cases but Facebook's policies are clear, we don't allow terrorist content on the site and take steps to prevent people from using our service for these purposes".



### COMMENT

For too long tech companies have appeared insufficiently concerned about terrorists using their websites and communication networks to organise attacks and spread hate. It's worrying that Facebook closed five of Michael Adebowale's accounts, but was under no legal obligation to inform security services. We agree with the Prime Minister that websites have a "moral duty" to reveal terror-related discussions, and urge these companies to suggest ways they can report them to help prevent such appalling acts of brutality on our streets.

However, former MI6 director Richard Barrett said that it would be "almost impossible" for Facebook to pass on every terror-related comment made on the site. Over 125 million comments are made on the site every day. He also questioned the legality of such a move.

Civil liberty groups also called for a measured response to the report.

"The Government should not use the appalling murder of Fusilier Rigby as an excuse to justify the further surveillance of the entire UK population," said Jim Killock, executive director of the Open Rights Group.



**You'll like this...** Four webcam hackers in the UK were among 15 arrested across Europe ([www.snipca.com/14598](http://www.snipca.com/14598))



**...but not this** UK newspaper websites, including the *Telegraph's*, were hacked by the Syrian Electronic Army ([www.snipca.com/14599](http://www.snipca.com/14599))



# Windows 10 to support best-quality music files

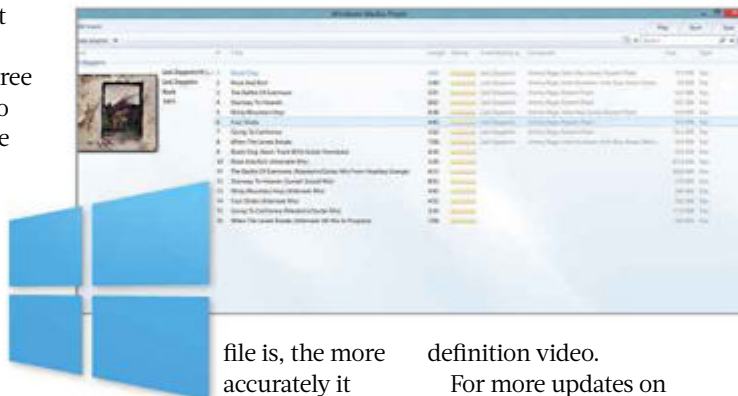
Microsoft has revealed that Windows 10 will include native support for FLAC (Free Lossless Audio Code) audio files, the first version of the operating system to do so.

This means you won't need to download third-party software or **plugins** to play FLAC files.

The news was broken on Twitter in late November by Microsoft's director of program management Gabriel Aul ([www.snipca.com/14596](http://www.snipca.com/14596)). In the tweet he included a screenshot (see image) of the new Windows Media Player supporting FLAC.

FLAC is preferred to MP3 by many people because, unlike the latter, it compresses audio without sacrificing any sound quality – a method called 'lossless'.

The more 'lossless' an audio



file is, the more accurately it reproduces

music as it was recorded in the studio or live at a concert.

Previously, to play FLAC files in Windows you had to install a program such as VLC Media Player ([www.snipca.com/14597](http://www.snipca.com/14597)) and MusicBee (<http://getmusicbee.com>).

The news follows Aul's confirmation in early November that Windows 10 will support MKV files, which is a popular format for high-

definition video.

For more updates on Windows 10 follow Aul on Twitter (@GabeAul). Microsoft plans to unveil more details about Windows 10 at an event in January, according to sources close to the company. Plenty of information about the operating system has already been announced, but reports suggest the event will be "more significant".

• **Turn to page 61 for part 4 of Jane Hoskyn's First 100 Days of Windows 10**

## Smashed your screen? Call for the smartphone doctor

A new site has launched that promises to fix cracked smartphone and tablet screens by sending a technical engineer to your home.

The site, called iCracked (<https://www.icracked.com>), offers same and next-day services. Prices vary, depending on the device and the severity of the damage, but should on average cost around £80. Typical fixes take between 15 and 30 minutes, and are covered by a lifetime warranty.

You can request a visit from an engineer (which the site calls iTechs) on the company's website. At launch there are only 30 iTechs in the UK, all in the London area. The company aims to expand into other towns and cities over the next

six months.

Alternatively, you can choose to post your device to an iTech for repair or sell it to the company.

Other problems the iTechs



can fix include water damage, jammed buttons, broken ports, battery failure and camera damage. However, the company only fixes Apple and Samsung Galaxy devices.

Since it launched on a US university campus in 2010, iCracked has grown to the point where it uses 600 iTechs. The company runs background checks on every engineer it adds to its network. Once your phone has been repaired, you can rate the quality of the work on the iCracked website.

Cracked screens are a common problem. A recent survey found that 31 per cent of Brits have cracked their phone screens at some point, while 17 per cent currently use a phone with a smashed screen.

## IN BRIEF

### GOOGLE REMOVES 'KILL GAYS' GAME

Google has removed from its Play Store a game in which players kill gay people, but not before it had been downloaded over 10,000 times, and received over 200 five-star reviews. The game, Ass Hunter, appeared on the Play Store on 5 November, though it's been available online since 2006, usually as a Flash game that can be played on PCs.

### SHARE KINDLE EBOOKS WITH OTHERS

Amazon has added a feature to its Kindle e-reader software that lets you share ebooks across devices with other people. When sharing an ebook, each person will only see information relevant to them, such as how far they've read and any annotations they've made. To use the feature, called Family Library, you must set up what Amazon calls a 'virtual household', which comprises up to two adults and up to four children. Learn more at [www.snipca.com/14588](http://www.snipca.com/14588).

## Tomorrow's world

Researchers at Swinburne University, Australia, have developed a new type of DVD technology that stores 212,000 times the amount of data of a standard 4.7GB disc. Using two lasers to write data on a scale of nine nanometres (one ten-thousandth the diameter of a human hair), it allows a mammoth 1,000TB to be stored. Until now, it had been impossible to write data on a scale of less than 500 nanometres.

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The 3XS Performance GT is an affordably-priced gaming rig that includes a dual-core Intel Pentium G3258, which we overclock up to 4.4GHz for improved performance. Also included is a 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 760 graphics card, 8GB of 2133MHz Corsair DDR3, a Z97 motherboard and 1TB hard disk.



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The 3XS Gamer 20i is a super-fast gaming PC thanks to its combination of quad-core Intel Core i7 4790 CPU running at 3.6GHz with added Hyper-Threading plus a 4GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 970 graphics card. These components are installed in an Asus Z97-K motherboard along with a 1TB hard disk.

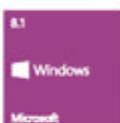


### 3XS Graphite LG156 Gaming Laptop

- Intel® Core™ i5 4210M processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M
- 15.6in 1,920 x 1,080 screen
- 500GB WD 7200rpm hard drive
- Windows 8.1

**£826** Inc VAT

The LG156 is 15.6" mid-range gaming laptop that includes a NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M graphics card. The LG156 has won multiple awards in the press for its performance and value for money. The LG156 is ready for next-day delivery and has a 2 Year Warranty.



### 3XS Graphite LG1720 Gaming Laptop

- Intel® Core™ i7 4710HQ processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 3GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 970M
- 17.3in 1,920 x 1,080 screen
- 500GB WD 7200rpm hard drive
- Windows 8.1

**£1055** Inc VAT

The LG1720 is a 17.3" high-end gaming laptop that includes a choice of powerful NVIDIA GeForce GTX 970M or 980M graphics card, ensuring silky smooth frame rates in all games. The LG1720 is ready for next-day delivery and has a 2 Year Warranty.



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## IN BRIEF

### FREE WI-FI IN TESCO STORES

Tesco customers in the UK will soon be able to connect to BT Wi-Fi for free in their local stores, thanks to a deal struck between the two companies. Upon entering one of the participating stores, customers will be able to connect instantly to BT Wi-Fi by selecting 'Tesco Wi-Fi' or 'BT' in their device's network settings. The service is being rolled out to 806 Tesco stores.

### NOW E-CIGARETTES GIVE YOU MALWARE

E-cigarettes may be better for your health than real ones, but it seems they can make your PC sick. Writing on Reddit's 'Tales From Tech Support' forum ([www.snipca.com/14533](http://www.snipca.com/14533)), a security worker revealed that an e-cigarette's USB charger had infected a computer after being plugged in, leading to a "data security breach at a large corporation". The e-cigarette was apparently bought cheaply on eBay from a Chinese seller.

## Couple 'fined' for writing bad hotel review to get money back

Trading Standards officials have said that the owners of a Blackpool hotel will refund a couple the £100 it 'fined' them for posting a negative review on TripAdvisor.

Tony and Jan Jenkinson, from Whitehaven in Cumbria, paid £36 to spend one night in a double room at the Broadway Hotel on their way to visit family in Oxford.

Mr Jenkinson was so disgusted by the quality of the hotel that, on 30 August, he posted a one-star review headlined: "Filthy, dirty, rotten, stinking hovel run by muppets!".

His review goes on to say the shower was "filthy", the wallpaper was "peeling off", the breakfast was "inedible" and the carpet was "thin, dirty and stained". When the couple went down for breakfast the staff "were standing around messing with their mobile phones".

There are over 230 reviews of the hotel on TripAdvisor, only 16 of which award the



maximum five stars, or 'excellent'. More than 130 reviews award one star, or 'terrible'.

A few days after posting the review Mr Jenkinson noticed that the hotel had charged his credit card £100. At the time the hotel's policy stated: "For every bad review left on any website, the group organiser will be charged a maximum £100 per review".

The couple complained to Cumbria Trading Standards

officials, who contacted their counterparts in Blackpool. Gillian Campbell from Blackpool council said that officials "have spoken to the hotel owner and asked for the policy to be removed, which has now happened".

You can read Mr Jenkinson's review on TripAdvisor at [www.snipca.com/14569](http://www.snipca.com/14569), and see photos of the hotel taken by guests on the Daily Mail's website: [www.snipca.com/14570](http://www.snipca.com/14570).

## What's new from Google

### WATCH GOOGLE'S KARATE ROBOT

Anyone worried that robots will eventually rule the world won't have their fears allayed by a YouTube video ([www.snipca.com/14450](http://www.snipca.com/14450)) showing one such automaton – nicknamed 'Ian' – balancing on one leg like a karate expert. It has been built by Boston Dynamics, a robotics company Google bought in December 2013, and is part of a research project to develop robots that can replace humans in dangerous situations, such as fighting fires.

### SWIM WITH SHARKS, WHALES AND TURTLES

Divers in Australia have taken some stunning underwater photos for Street View. You can see close-up images of dolphins, sharks, turtles and whales, which were shot in Sydney Harbour, off Bondi Beach and at the Great Barrier Reef. Also new on Street View are 21 national parks in New South Wales. To start exploring visit Google's official Australia blog ([www.snipca.com/14571](http://www.snipca.com/14571)).



### NEW ANTI-SHAKE SPOON FIGHTS PARKINSON'S

We've not had to wait long for Google's first 'smart' spoon following its purchase in September of Lift Labs, a US company that makes anti-shake utensils. The new Liftware spoon uses hundreds of algorithms to sense how a hand is shaking, instantly adjusting itself to make sure no food is spilled. Google says shaking is reduced by 76 per cent. Watch a video demonstrating how it works at [www.liftlabsdesign.com](http://www.liftlabsdesign.com).

## The Definitive Guide to Google Hidden Tools

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## Question of the Fortnight

# Will Amazon kill Royal Mail?

The Royal Mail reports huge drop in profits as Amazon launches its same-day delivery service

It's not been a good end to the year for Royal Mail. In November it announced that profits fell by 21 per cent between March and September, causing its share price to dive. The company said it's facing growing pressure from rivals, including Yodel and Whistl (formerly TNT), that are muscling in on Royal Mail's delivery routes by offering businesses cheaper prices.

Royal Mail claims that increased competition from these companies is threatening its ability to fulfil its role as universal service provider. In this role the company is legally required to make deliveries six days a week, across the whole of the UK, and offer the same postage prices to everyone, regardless of where they live. This is of particular benefit to people living in areas so remote that delivering items there is unprofitable for companies.

However, in the past couple of months a more



Mail chief executive Moya Greene said: "When an online retailer the size and scale of Amazon decides to build its own delivery network, that changes the market for everybody".

Amazon has extended an olive branch of sorts. In late November, it joined Royal Mail's Local Collect program, which means Amazon

Mail doesn't have the resources to come up with innovative delivery methods, referring to Amazon's plans to start using drones to deliver small items to the doorstep. Greene said such "disruptive" ideas can only be executed by "a very big company with a lot of money to invest in technology".

Now that the Government doesn't fund Royal Mail, Greene warns that its ability to carry out its universal service obligations is "at risk".

But Ofcom, which regulates postal services, says Royal Mail is exaggerating the risk. "Protecting the universal service is at the heart of Ofcom's work, and our own evidence clearly shows that the service is not currently under threat," a spokesperson told *Computeractive*. "Like BT did years ago, Royal Mail has to adapt to working efficiently as a private company."

Yet the role Royal Mail plays

## THE FACTS

- Royal Mail says that making deliveries six days a week at a consistent price across the UK is unsustainable
- Royal Mail says its 21-per-cent drop in profits is due to competition from companies such as Whistl and Yodel
- Pass My Parcel, Amazon's new same-day delivery service, delivers items ordered before 11.45am by 4pm

in our lives is different to that of most private companies. In many areas, postmen are trusted members of the community, and act as an extra pair of eyes to watch over a neighbourhood. An example of this is the Royal Mail's recent introduction of a feature to the handheld scanners used by postmen that shows photos of local missing people.

There are signs that Royal Mail is adapting to stay alive. For example, Parcelforce (Royal Mail's parcel delivery service) will start offering deliveries seven days a week from next summer.

But many people fear that in its new-found focus on delivery speeds Royal Mail will lose sight of the services that make it a treasured national institution. Even if its new strategy is successful, Royal Mail's need to compete could threaten its role at the heart of local communities.

“The Royal Mail's capacity to deliver six days a week is 'at risk'”

serious threat has emerged in the shape of Amazon's Pass My Parcel service ([www.snipca.com/14517](http://www.snipca.com/14517)), which delivers items ordered before 11.45am by 4pm that day. Might the online retail giant, so often blamed for the demise of the high street, also kill Royal Mail?

Bosses at Royal Mail are worried. Last month Royal

customers can pick up their parcels from 10,500 post offices around the UK. But with Royal Mail admitting that Amazon is its most important customer (accounting for 6 per cent of all its parcel deliveries), it's clear that the company is becoming increasingly dependant on the online retailer.


Greene added that Royal

# Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Email: [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/computeractive](https://www.facebook.com/computeractive)  
Twitter: [@ComputerActive](https://twitter.com/ComputerActive)  
[www.twitter.com/computeractive](https://www.twitter.com/computeractive)

## Prosecute people who post sick jokes on Facebook

 Warren Matthews' letter in Issue 436 raised some very important issues regarding so-called "internet trolls" and the Government's desire to deter such abuse by increasing the level of penalties that a court can impose.

Unfortunately, one of the biggest downsides to the internet is that it has become a platform for the bigoted, the terminally deranged and the downright nasty. On many online forums it seems that to express a particular opinion will not result in a simple disagreement or constructive debate, but rather in an explosion of vitriol and insults against the person who made the original comment.

However, as Warren said, where do we draw the line? Personally I would have no hesitation in prosecuting anybody who posts a sick "joke" to a Facebook page set up in the memory of a person who has died in tragic circumstances. I would extend that to any person whose threats are genuine and a cause for concern to the intended victims. But I'm not sure it's a criminal offence to simply be antagonistic and confrontational. Perhaps the answer is that we all need to learn to respect the opinions of others without feeling the need to fly into a rage simply because somebody has a different viewpoint to you.

Steven Sneade

## How to really block nuisance calls


 As you point out in News, Issue 436, the present laws covering nuisance phone calls are ineffective. The Telephone Preference Service (TPS) is also toothless and not worth the effort. For example, I have a regular caller who, according to my logs, phones me from the UK but 'via Bermuda'. This is presumably to pretend that they are calling from abroad, thereby escaping the TPS regulations. Threats of tighter regulations and higher fines are worthless; they will be no more enforceable than the present regime, and I for one have no confidence in them.

But I have solved the problem of nuisance calls by installing a call-management device called TrueCall CallBlocker ([www.truecall.co.uk/](http://www.truecall.co.uk/)

[call-blocker](#)). I've not had a single nuisance call since I installed it in September. Nor, according to the logs, have I missed a single call from someone I wanted to hear from. It is absolutely brilliant and anyone being pestered should get one.

Tim Boddington

## Annoyed by endless web forms

 I want to tell you about a pet peeve of mine (something for Stuart Andrews to write about?) regarding my ISP. I'll spare them their blushes by not naming them. In any case, they are not the only organisation guilty of this particular sin.


To contact them you have to use a 'web form'. It has many mandatory fields (which seem to cover everything up to grandmother's inside leg measurement). When they reply, it is from a 'No-reply' address, so, if I want to respond, I have to go back through the web-form rigmarole again. And, of course, the original query left nothing in my 'Sent' email box, so unless I went to the trouble of doing a 'Copy/Paste' job to save the details, I have to re-type the query from memory.

For a communications company, this

seems like a pretty poor communications system. It couldn't just be designed to deter queries and problems, could it?

Dave Major


## What's wrong with re-selling poppies on eBay?

 I never thought I would end up agreeing with Nigel Farage, but he does have a point when he said that people who bought the ceramic poppies on display at the Tower of London should be able to resell them on eBay (News, Issue 437). I don't really see what the problem is. Charities aren't losing out on money because the poppies have already been bought. You could argue that people reselling the poppies are being cynical, or opportunistic. Others may say they're showing some money-making savvy.

I realise it's a very emotional argument,



## NHS digital revolution will be 'an embarrassing mess'

 Governments love gimmicks, don't they? I'm referring to Jeremy Hunt's plans to let doctors prescribe apps to patients (News, Issue 437). If I'm ill, the last thing I would want from a doctor is an app to clutter up my phone. I just want to get better, which means getting first-class healthcare. Give me medicine and short waiting times, not apps which are confusing to use.

Does the NHS really need a 'digital revolution', anyway? I can see that checking my health records online could be useful, but I doubt it'll end up being worth the money spent on it. I'd rather see increased investment to train more nurses and make better cancer treatment more widely available. I'm



also sceptical about Mr Hunt's boast that these plans will save up to £10bn. As we've seen too many times, the Government is institutionally programmed to over-spend on IT projects. And their record for keeping our data safe is abject, too. I predict an expensive, embarrassing mess.

Frank Moorhouse



and that some people think these resellers are being disrespectful to the war dead. But they bought the poppies in the first place, and therefore donated money to charity, without realising how hugely popular the display at the Tower of London would be. I doubt their intention was to wait a few months, then make a profit on eBay.

Like Mr Farage, I was thinking about buying one on eBay. I wouldn't have spent silly money, but would have expected the seller to make a bit of a profit. I think eBay has over-reacted, probably fearful of offending armed forces charities.

James Marlowe

### See the poppies from the air

I want to share a superb video of the poppies at the Tower of London I found on YouTube ([www.snipca.com/14456](http://www.snipca.com/14456)). It's been shot by a drone, so it gives a magnificent aerial view of the display. I am very grateful to have found the video, because I was too frail to travel from Scotland to London to see the display. It's so beautiful and moving, and makes me think of my poor granddad who died in the trenches.

Dorothy Loft

### Don't be glib about web addiction

Josephine Marley's dismissal of Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) (Issue 437) is undermined by a crucial admission: she's never met anyone suffering from it. Well, I have met people who have ruined their lives from spending too much time online. In one case, a friend of mine lost his life savings on gambling websites, while a relative's daughter failed her A-levels because she spent all her time socialising online, rather than revising.

In the former case, the problem wasn't the internet as such. He wasn't addicted to the web, but addicted to gambling. However, it's wrong to overlook the internet as a contributing factor because it makes non-stop gambling so easy (at least high-street bookies have to close at the end of the day). I don't know whether the girl who failed her A-levels was technically 'addicted' to the internet, as doctors would classify it, but I would argue that her life has been severely damaged as a result of being obsessed with the internet. That sounds like addiction to me.

Now, I don't disagree with Josephine that the damage caused by drink and drugs can be terrible, but she's wrong to

## STAR LETTER

### Name and shame people who use their phone while driving

I've read a lot of letters about 'smartphone zombies' in *Computeractive* this year, and I find them as annoying as the next person. But I'd like to talk about a greater annoyance – and a much greater danger – and that's the irresponsible idiots who use their phone while driving.

I know this is now illegal, but the problem is that it has yet to become anti-social, in the same way that drink-driving is. Therefore the drivers who continue to use their phone probably don't realise how despised their behaviour is. This frustrates me. We need to be less tolerant, and make sure they know how socially unacceptable their actions are.

In the past month or so, I've seen dozens of people yakking away behind the wheel. Whenever I can, I try to grab their attention and stick my fingers to my ears with a look of disgust on my face. Normally they look at me oblivious to what they're doing wrong. They probably don't even know it's illegal. In this age of ubiquitous phone use and human rights, it would probably be beyond their comprehension.

Most shockingly, I've even seen people use a tablet while driving. I saw



one woman with a tablet balanced on her lap. I saw her glance at it while paused at traffic lights.

People gazing at their phones as they walk down the street may be irritating, but at least they are only likely to harm themselves. Nobody else will be hurt when they bump into a lamp-post or fall down a manhole. But we shouldn't make jokes about 'carphone zombies'. When their behaviour backfires, it could kill. I think the Government should pay for a campaign to remind people that using your phone while driving is illegal. The emphasis should be on how selfish and arrogant these people are. Let's make sure it's not just seen as criminal behaviour, but also immoral and thoughtless. Maybe they should even be named and shamed.

Arthur Marshall

### The Star Letter writer wins a *Computeractive* mug!



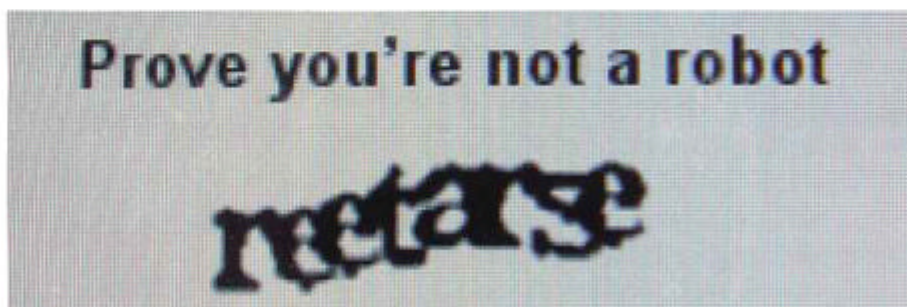
turn addiction into a competition. And she's doubly wrong to blithely suggest that web addiction can be solved by unplugging the computer. Glib attitudes like that trivialise what is fast becoming a serious problem.

Stephen Johnson

### Crude Captchas

Re: Stuart Andrews' rant against Captchas (Issue 436) – one of the first I saw (below) insulted me! Nowadays, they're random letters, but I always live in hope that something like this will appear.

Mrs A Thorne



# Consumeractive

## Can you help with my 'buggy' Samsung TV?

**Q** Like Stephen Bartlett in Issue 435, I've got a tiny bug stuck behind the screen of my Samsung UE40F6200 TV, bought from Currys in March. The lady I spoke to at Samsung said this isn't covered by the warranty because it's an "act of God". Currys is also refusing to cover the cost of a repair. Can you help me?

Simon Sims

**A** We'll certainly do our best to help Simon. As you can see from the Case Update on the opposite page, Samsung has already resolved one reader's problem with a bug stuck in a TV by replacing the screen under warranty, after originally refusing. We're certainly not impressed by Samsung's claim that the bug represents an 'act of God' (it's hardly an earthquake or lightning strike!). We'll let Samsung know about Simon's complaint, and if Samsung refuses to help Simon, he can still go after Currys using the Sale of Goods Act.

We've contacted Currys about Simon's complaint, and also pointed out that we're getting emails about this problem from other readers. We'll let you know what the companies say about this strange bug invasion.



## Why is delivery to the Scottish Highlands so expensive?

**Q** I needed a Newlec Safety Twin Socket in a hurry. I searched the web and found a suitable one at a very good price on an online electrical wholesaler. It said next-day delivery was going to be £3.98, excluding northern Scotland and Northern Ireland. I live in the Scottish Highlands and was horrified to find I was going to be charged £12 plus VAT for delivery. Is this legal?

George Benson



**A** Yes, it is legal, though we can understand why George and others may think it shouldn't be. Delivery rates for mail sent via the Post Office are the same no matter where you live in the UK, but other delivery companies can set different rates for certain areas. All reputable delivery companies make this clear. Parcel Monkey ([www.parcelmonkey.co.uk](http://www.parcelmonkey.co.uk)), for example, warns customers some services "may experience increased prices, delivery times or restrictions".

George says that when he complained to the wholesaler, it told him it used Yodel for next-day deliveries. We asked

Yodel why it charges more for delivery to some areas of the UK. The company said the higher prices "reflect the additional cost" of delivering to remote areas, which may involve air and sea travel. You may wonder why that would affect George, who lives on the mainland, but Yodel, like many couriers, groups the 'Scottish islands and Highlands' as one delivery area.

However, courier services have no control over what retailers will charge for delivery. The more cynical retailers realise that some customers won't know the precise extra cost of delivery to remote areas, and use this to bump up the final fee. Other retailers may absorb more of this cost to undercut competitors. As always, it pays to shop around.



## Can a company refuse to honour its warranty?

**Q** I bought a refurbished HP 6730b laptop from MicroDream (<http://microdream.co.uk>) on 3 August which had a six-month warranty. The charger stopped working in October so I sent it back. The company is refusing to replace it saying I'd removed a sticker and the barcode is "broken". Can it do this?

Susan Tappin

**A** Yes it can, assuming the reasons it gives for not replacing the item comply with the terms and conditions of the warranty. But if Susan



uses the Sales of Goods Act (SOGA) to pursue a refund or replacement, then MicroDream will have to act. Refurbished goods are covered by SOGA because - like new goods - they must be 'fit for

purpose'. Supplied peripherals, such as chargers, are also covered.

However, SOGA says that you shouldn't expect refurbished goods to last as long as new ones. It doesn't specify a time period, but it's reasonable to assume this will be longer than six months. Susan should contact MicroDream quoting SOGA, saying she wants a replacement. If they refuse she could take this to court, but we don't believe it's worth it. MicroDream has offered to send her a new charger for £14, but she can buy one on Amazon for as little as £7.







We stand up for your legal rights

✉ Contact us so we can investigate your case

Email: [consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk)

Write: Consumeractive, Computeractive, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD

Please include both your phone number and address.

Unfortunately, we can't reply to all your letters.

## Can I get a refund from a US eBay trader?



**Q** I bought an Epson Expression Premium Wireless XP-800 All-in-One printer, copier, scanner and fax from the US company Eolution Tech on eBay in August. It has arrived, but the power supply is 120v, which means it won't work in the UK. I wasn't told about this. Additionally, I've found I have to order the cartridges from the US as well because the **firmware** used is different to the English model. What are my rights?

Rupert Adkins

**A** Sadly, Rupert's got no legal case against the seller because he can't use UK consumer law against an American company. And the goods arrived safely and are as described, so he can't claim a refund through eBay's

Money Back Guarantee scheme ([www.snipca.com/14367](http://www.snipca.com/14367)).

We understand Rupert's anger. He thinks the seller should have warned him that the power supply won't work in the UK. But this incompatibility is implied in the fact that the seller is based in the US, and therefore is something the seller wouldn't have needed to make clear. eBay search results display the location of sellers based outside the UK, so buyers are warned.

Rupert could try to recoup some money by reselling the printer on eBay,

making sure he mentions in the listing that it's an American model.



## CASE UPDATES



### Samsung replaces TV ruined by spider

A squashed spider took the starring role in Issue 435, when we reported how one had managed to crawl behind the screen of Stephen Bartlett's 3D 50in Samsung TV. Initially neither Currys – where Stephen bought the TV – nor Samsung were interested in his complaint.

Stephen says that when he contacted Samsung it suggested he tapped the bottom of the screen to make the spider drop out. Not surprisingly that didn't work. Stephen said that Samsung then "washed its hands of the problem". We explained that while we didn't think this was good customer service, Samsung was within its rights to refuse to help because Stephen didn't have a contract with the company. His contract is with Currys, the retailer.

Since then Stephen has emailed us to say that Samsung collected the TV under warranty and replaced the LCD screen.

"I will now be able to enjoy the proper viewing experience once again," he said.

We've asked Samsung to explain its change of mind. Hopefully, the company will also decide to help Simon Sims (see opposite page).



## THIS WILL COME IN USEFUL

### Energy suppliers

#### British Gas

0800 048 0202

Email: [customerservice@britishgas.co.uk](mailto:customerservice@britishgas.co.uk)

Twitter: [@BritishGasHelp](https://twitter.com/BritishGasHelp)

#### EDF

0800 056 7777

Live chat:

[www.snipca.com/14150](http://www.snipca.com/14150)

Twitter: [@edfenergycs](https://twitter.com/edfenergycs)

#### EON

0345 059 9905

Online form:

[www.snipca.com/14151](http://www.snipca.com/14151)

Twitter: [@EONhelp](https://twitter.com/EONhelp)

#### First Utility

01926 320 700

Twitter: [@First\\_UtilityCS](https://twitter.com/First_UtilityCS)

#### Npower

0800 073 3000

Online form:

[www.snipca.com/14263](http://www.snipca.com/14263)

Twitter: [@npowerhelp](https://twitter.com/npowerhelp)

#### SSE

0800 980 8831

Online form:

[www.snipca.com/14152](http://www.snipca.com/14152)

Twitter: [@YourSSE](https://twitter.com/YourSSE)

#### Scottish Power

0800 027 0072

Online form:

[www.snipca.com/14264](http://www.snipca.com/14264)

Twitter: [@SP\\_EnergyPeople](https://twitter.com/SP_EnergyPeople)



# Protect Your Tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

## WATCH OUT FOR...

### Devious new ransomware CoinVault

#### What happened?

Security experts at Webroot spotted a new strain of ransomware that locks people out of their PC files, but allows the victim to choose one file to unlock for free.

It's a cynical, horrible trick. The ransomware, called CoinVault, wants to win your trust – as much as malware ever can – by releasing one file, thereby persuading the victim to believe it will unlock the others if and when the full amount it demands is paid.

It's been compared to a drug dealer who gives someone a free sample of a drug to get them addicted.

After infecting a PC, CoinVault displays the message: "Your personal documents and files on this computer have just been encrypted". Clicking the 'One free decrypt!' button does actually

unlock your file, according to Webroot's Tyler Moffitt. He wrote on the Webroot Threat blog ([www.snipca.com/14500](http://www.snipca.com/14500)): "I suspect that this freebie will increase the number of people who will pay".

CoinVault admits that you can "easily delete" it, but warns that "you will never be able to get your original files back".

#### What should you do?

Other than its free-decryption 'offer', CoinVault is similar to CryptoLocker and CryptoWall, the two deadliest types of ransomware of the past year. It's just as easy to remove: follow the instructions at [www.snipca.com/14496](http://www.snipca.com/14496), but don't click any of the download buttons.



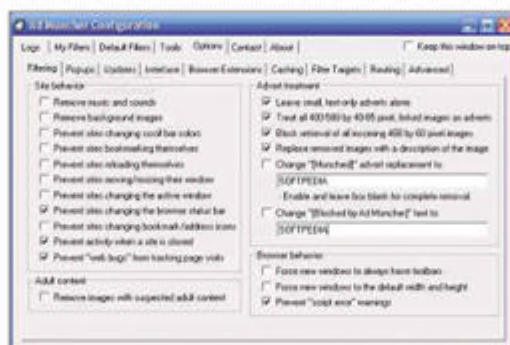
At the moment there's no way of decrypting files locked by CoinVault, so the best piece of advice is one we've given many times – make sure you back up your files to an external hard drive, or to a cloud service. If the files are especially precious, you should probably back them up to both.

## New tools

Ad Muncher  
[www.admuncher.com](http://www.admuncher.com)

We always like it when paid-for software becomes free and doesn't try to smuggle any junk on to your PC as an alternative way to make money. Since it launched 15 years ago, downloadable program Ad Muncher had always been rather pricey (\$29.95 to download, then \$19.95 a year to use). But the developer admits he always felt "slightly uneasy" about charging people to use the program, so he's made it free, and has promised "never ever" to add take payments from companies to install third-party software on your PC.

Because it's a program for Windows (XP, Vista, 7 and 8/8.1), not a browser add-on like most ad-blocking tools we



recommend, Ad Muncher stops adverts appearing across *all* your browsers, and in some programs, including LimeWire, Kazaa and Winamp. It also has advanced configuration tools (see screenshot) that, among other actions, let you block images "with suspected adult content".

## ScamWatch

READERS WARN READERS

### Council tax scam

Having read all the warnings about scams in *Computeractive* over the years, I thought I'd always easily spot them. But I almost fell for one in November. The email claimed to be from my local council (Tonbridge & Malling), and said I was in debt because they hadn't been able to process my last council tax payment. The email urged me to update my details by clicking a link, and I almost did. But then a little alarm bell went off, and I phoned the council to check. They confirmed it was a scam, and I breathed a huge sigh of relief.

Maureen Freeman

Warn your fellow readers about scams at [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)



# WIN 1 OF 10 devolo dLAN 500 Wi-Fi Starter Kits

In this exclusive competition, we've teamed up with powerline experts devolo to give away 10 dLAN 500 Wi-Fi Starter Kits

**Worth  
£79.99  
each**

Instantly cure your weak Wi-Fi with the devolo dLAN 500 Wi-Fi Starter Kit. The kit consists of two adapters – simply connect one of the units to your router and plug the other in an electrical socket in an area of the home where your Wi-Fi signal is weak. This adapter will act as a new Wi-Fi hotspot, so you can use all your favourite wireless devices, from smartphones to tablets, in any room. The adapter also features an Ethernet port so you can connect a device by cable.

The 500 Wi-Fi provides a more reliable signal than a conventional wireless booster because the signal is transmitted via your power circuits, which means it isn't weakened by thick walls or obstacles. The 500 Wi-Fi also benefits from devolo's 'Wi-Fi Move Technology', which allows devices to connect automatically to the Wi-Fi access point with the strongest signal as you move through your home.



To enter, please email your address to [cacomp@dennis.co.uk](mailto:cacomp@dennis.co.uk) with 'devolo' in the subject line by midnight 22 December.

For more information on devolo visit [www.devolo.com/uk](http://www.devolo.com/uk), 'like' devolo's page on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/devoloUK](http://www.facebook.com/devoloUK)), and follow the company on Twitter ([@devoloUK](https://twitter.com/devoloUK)).

**devolo**  
The Network Innovation

# Best Free Software

Brilliant new programs that won't cost you anything

## PC-CLEANING TOOL

### CCleaner 5.0

[www.snipca.com/14572](http://www.snipca.com/14572)

**What you need:** Windows XP, Vista, 7 or 8



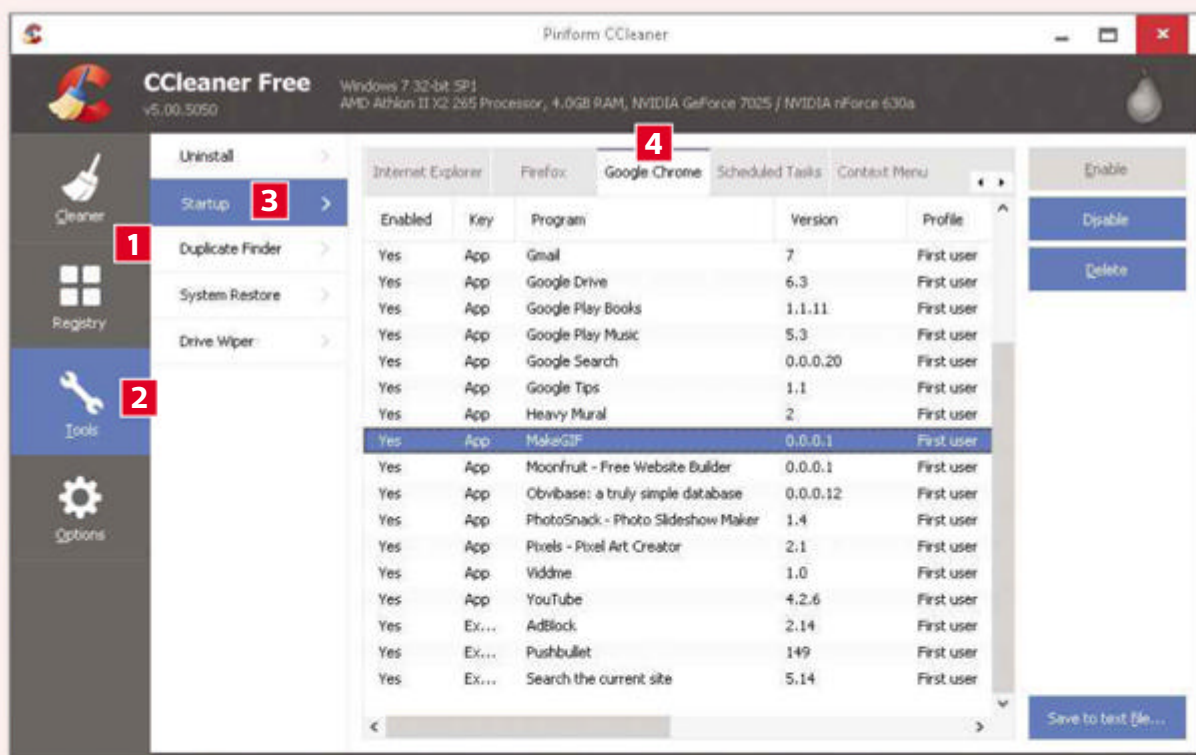
Piriform's junk-removal tool wasn't broken and certainly didn't need fixing, but even its most loyal fans (including us) will agree that it needed a lick of paint. This new version doesn't mess with the components we've come to know and trust, but repackages them with a clean new look.

Newcomer Clean Master ([www.snipca.com/14534](http://www.snipca.com/14534)) has proved a big hit with readers following our cover feature in Issue 436, and in part that's down to its modern, intuitive interface. It simply looked more relevant and easier to use than CCleaner, whose design hadn't changed in 10 years. CCleaner's revamp now makes it look fresher than its rival.

CCleaner hasn't changed much underneath – and for that, we're grateful. There's the same unbeatable set of tools for

deep, systematic cleaning of different areas of your PC, such as the Registry, internet **caches** and Windows' startup list, and you can still uninstall programs, remove temporary files and destroy sensitive data. The Startup section now supports Chrome as well as Firefox and IE, so you can see how many Chrome **plug-ins** run automatically when you start your browser (see screenshot below).

CCleaner comes in two 'builds': a standard version for installing on your hard drive, and a portable version that has all the same tools but won't update automatically. We use the standard version on our main PC and keep the portable version on a USB stick for running on laptops and older PCs. You can download both from the link above.



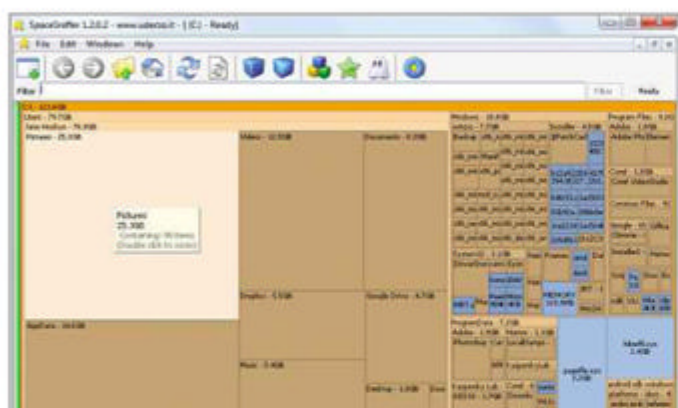
**1** CCleaner's main tools are listed on the left. Click Cleaner to remove cache files, temporary files and other junk, and click Registry to remove obsolete Registry files.

**2** Click Tools to find CCleaner's Uninstall tool, Duplicate Finder, System Restore and a Drive Wiper tool that securely wipes free space on your hard drive.

**3** The Startup tool lets you manage processes that run automatically when you start your PC, including Windows services, scheduled tasks and browser plug-ins.

**4** Click Google Chrome to manage your Chrome plug-ins. Select a plug-in (MakeGIF in our example) and click Disable to prevent it running when Chrome starts.





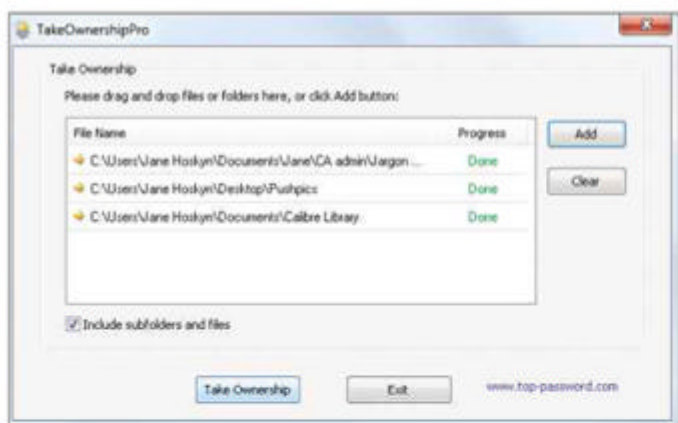
#### HARD-DRIVE TOOL

## SpaceSniffer

[www.snipca.com/14544](http://www.snipca.com/14544)

**What you need:** Windows XP, Vista, 7 or 8

Prepare to behold your hard drive as you've never seen it before. SpaceSniffer made us gasp with delight as it built a stunning collage of our drive, using Treemap technology ([www.snipca.com/14546](http://www.snipca.com/14546)) to reveal which folders are taking up most space. Large items are large rectangles and small items are small rectangles, and the map updates in real time as you add and delete items. Double-click any rectangle to see the items it contains. You can use SpaceSniffer to scan any connected drive or partition. To download the portable program, click the top link in the Release column ('SpaceSniffer v1.2.0.2') and extract the contents of the ZIP. For more information go to [www.snipca.com/14545](http://www.snipca.com/14545).



#### FILE PERMISSIONS

## TakeOwnershipPro

[www.snipca.com/14542](http://www.snipca.com/14542)

**What you need:** Windows XP, Vista, 7 or 8

Windows has an unpleasant habit of taking away your access to certain files and folders, even when you're logged in as an administrator. This small program gives it back. It's quick and easy to install, and just as easy to use. Drag files and folders on to the program windows, then click Take Ownership to restore your permissions to rename, delete or otherwise change them.

## WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

We tell you what software to use

## What railway simulator should I use now?

**Q** I used Hornby Virtual Railway (HVR) to help me plan my model railway, but it won't work on my new PC. I've tried Trainz and RailWorks, but they're just not the same. Can you help?

Rob Turner

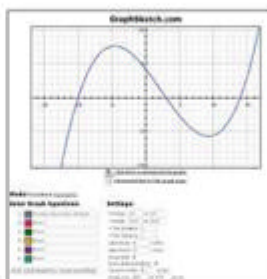
**A** HVR was so popular that there's a whole forum dedicated to surviving its demise ([www.snipca.com/14550](http://www.snipca.com/14550)). One person recommends Train Simulator 2015, formerly called RailWorks. The PC DVD costs £21.47 ([www.snipca.com/14552](http://www.snipca.com/14552)) and you can add routes at [www.railsimulator.com](http://www.railsimulator.com). But we suspect you'd prefer AnyRail, which focuses on track design rather than flashy graphics ([www.snipca.com/14554](http://www.snipca.com/14554); free trial, then £35). You might also like the free downloads and advice at UKTrainSim ([www.uktrainsim.com](http://www.uktrainsim.com)).



## Is there any free curve-drawing software?

**Q** I read your review of CorelDRAW (£67) in Issue 436 and wondered if you could recommend a free alternative for making sine-wave drawings.


Hugh Rogers



**A** Drawing software, like photo-editing tools (see page 58), needn't cost money or even require a download. Free online tool Graph Sketch (<http://graphsketch.com>) generates a graph or curve based on equations you've entered.

There's even a link to a printing site that will turn your graph into a "mathematically generated poster" (<http://posters.lardbucket.org>). For more sophisticated tools, there's a free version of Serif DrawPlus ([www.snipca.com/14548](http://www.snipca.com/14548)), but you'll need to register.

Incidentally, if you have Excel, try the curve-drawing trick explained in this YouTube video (it doesn't work in PowerPoint, despite the title): [www.snipca.com/14547](http://www.snipca.com/14547).

 Do you need our advice on what software to use? Just email us at [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)

# Reviews

New products tested by our experts

**TABLET** | £319 (Wi-Fi-only) from [www.snipca.com/14429](http://www.snipca.com/14429)

## Google Nexus 9

Google's latest Nexus tablet is the best yet, but it's more expensive than we expected



Google is always full of surprises. The Android maker has discontinued its popular Nexus 7 tablet, replacing it with the Nexus 9 which has a larger 9in screen. The screen size isn't the only thing that's increased – the 16GB Nexus 9 costs £319. This is almost twice as expensive as the Nexus 7 and the same price as Apple's iPad Mini 3 (see our review, page 27). With price no longer an advantage, the Nexus has its work cut out for it against such stiff competition.

### Build and screen

Although the Nexus 9 is built by HTC, it doesn't look like any of HTC's other Android devices. Instead its plain, gently curved plastic casing looks like a larger version of the Nexus 5 phone (see our review, Issue 412).

Although it's the same price as Apple's mini tablet, the Nexus 9 weighs just 425g, which is much closer in weight to the 10in iPad Air 2 (see our review, Issue 437). However, unlike Apple's sturdy metal tablets, the Nexus 9's plastic casing flexed under pressure so easily in our test that the rear plastic panel started to pop off, separating it from the rest of the casing. This is because the rear panel is held in place only by a series of plastic clips rather than industrial glue or screws.

Such shoddy construction may have been acceptable in a very cheap tablet, but not at this price.

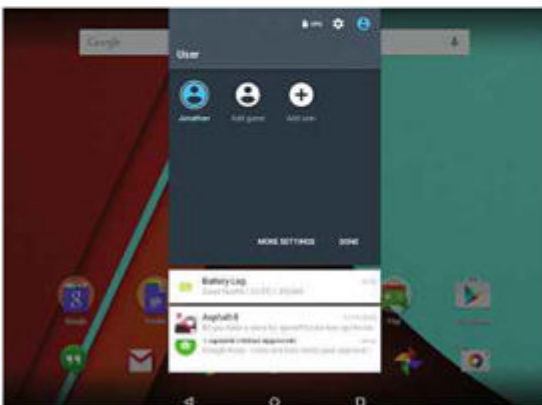
It's not all bad, though. Despite the thin borders surrounding its screen, the Nexus 9 is surprisingly comfortable to hold for long periods of time. This is due to its easy-to-grip plastic rear and its slanted edges, which have a raised metal rim that give your fingers much-needed purchase.

“Screen quality, performance and battery life are great”

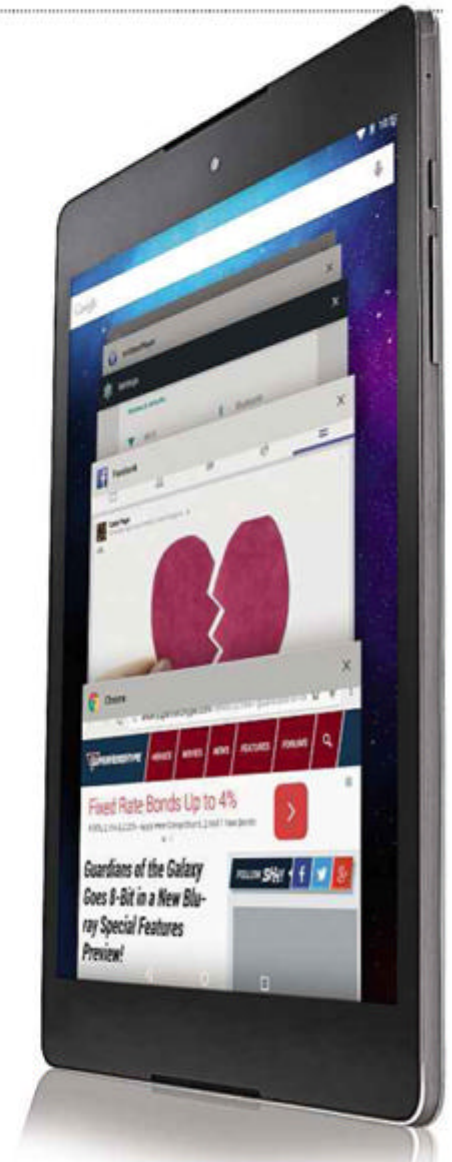
The 9in screen looks great. Text is very sharp and images are exquisitely detailed thanks to the high **resolution** of 2048x1536 pixels. Unlike almost every other Android tablet, the Nexus has an **aspect ratio** of 4:3 instead of 16:9. Although this means widescreen videos have thicker black bars, it's a better fit for reading because a 4:3 aspect ratio more closely matches that of a printed page. In any case, both colour accuracy and contrast were spot-on and the screen is dazzlingly bright too.

### Processor, speaker and camera

The Nexus 9 is the first Android device to have a **64bit processor**, the **dual-core** Nvidia Tegra K1. It's very fast and will be even faster when more 64bit apps are made that can run on the tablet. It sped through our benchmark tests, particularly excelling in our 3D graphics test which is unsurprising because Nvidia makes outstanding graphics cards. The Nexus 9 should be



Guest mode lets friends and family use your Nexus 9 without having to log into their Google account



able to run demanding apps with ease for some time to come.

Responsiveness wasn't quite as good as performance, with the touchscreen occasionally lagging behind our finger movements, but it was still better than the Nexus 7. We had no complaints about battery life. The Nexus 9 lasted just under 12 hours when playing videos continuously, which is impressive.

The speakers are among the loudest we've heard on a tablet. You'll still need external speakers or headphones for the best audio quality as they're lacking in bass, but they're more than good enough for enjoying podcasts, YouTube videos and online radio.

Using a tablet as your main camera may be increasingly common, but we'd only use the Nexus 9 as a last resort. While it produced reasonably





sharp and detailed shots in bright sunlight, it falls behind the best smartphones in even moderately dim conditions, such as a grey and overcast wintry day. Fine details are lost and **noise** is very noticeable.

### Android Lollipop

Hardware is only half the story, of course. As with all Nexus devices, the Nexus 9 will receive Android operating system updates as soon as they're available, whereas Android tablets from other manufacturers often have to wait weeks or months for the latest features and bug fixes – if they receive them at all. The Nexus 9 is the first Android tablet to come with the latest version of Google's operating system pre-installed – 5.0 Lollipop.

Lollipop looks very different from previous Android versions, especially compared to the heavily customised variants from the likes of Samsung and LG. The interface has been decluttered and re-organised with many interface elements resembling stacks of cards, similar to how Google Now looks. The system font is easier to read and there's better use of animations and bright colours, all of which makes Android look more attractive and feel much more logically organised.

Other changes in Lollipop aren't as eye-catching, but are still welcome. You now have much greater control over notifications. You can easily customise

which apps display notifications and you can mute them for when you don't want to be disturbed. Oddly, the shortcut for this do-not-disturb setting, which Google calls Interruptions, isn't in the Notifications drawer alongside all the other settings shortcuts. Instead it appears as a separate palette at the top of the screen when you press one of the volume buttons.

One small but welcome touch is an estimate of how long it will take the battery to fully charge which appears on the lock screen when the tablet is plugged into a charger. The ability to have multiple user accounts, which has been present in Android since version 4.2 Jelly Bean, is now joined by guest mode (see image below left). This allows you to instantly switch to a locked-down account so visiting friends and family can go online using your tablet without the palaver of logging in with their own Google account (if they even have one).

### Conclusion

The Nexus 9 is let down by its flimsy build quality, but it's still a good tablet in spite of this. Screen quality, battery life and performance are all top-notch, while Lollipop is the best version of Android yet. The Nexus 9's biggest rival isn't the iPad Air 2 or the somewhat overpriced iPad Mini 3, but the now bargain-priced iPad Mini 2. It now costs just £239, yet has a sturdier metal casing and equivalent performance, battery life and screen quality. Just as importantly, the selection of tablet apps on iOS remains better than it is on Android, although the gap has narrowed. Unless you're a die-hard Android fan, the iPad Mini 2 is a much better buy.

### HOW WE TEST

*Computeractive* is owned by Dennis Publishing, which owns a hi-tech facility for testing the latest technology. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Dennis Publishing also owns the magazines *PC Pro*, *Computer Shopper*, *Web User*, *Micro Mart* and *MacUser*, and the website Expert Reviews ([www.expertreviews.co.uk](http://www.expertreviews.co.uk)). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

### FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

### OUR AWARDS



We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.



Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Great Pick award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

### PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

**VERDICT:** A good Android tablet, but build quality is very disappointing, and better, cheaper alternatives are available



**ALTERNATIVE:** Apple iPad Mini 2 **£239** Sturdier build quality, a superior selection of apps and a lower price make this 8in tablet far better value



### SPECIFICATIONS

8.9in 2048x1536 pixel touchscreen • 2.3GHz Nvidia Tegra K1 dual-core processor • 2GB memory • 16GB storage • Nvidia Kepler graphics chip • Android 5.0 Lollipop • 425g • 228x154x8mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty • [www.snipca.com/14430](http://www.snipca.com/14430)

# Reviews

GRAPHIC-DESIGN SOFTWARE | £70 from [www.snipca.com/14250](http://www.snipca.com/14250)

## Xara Photo and Graphic Designer 10

Sophisticated graphic design at a family-friendly price

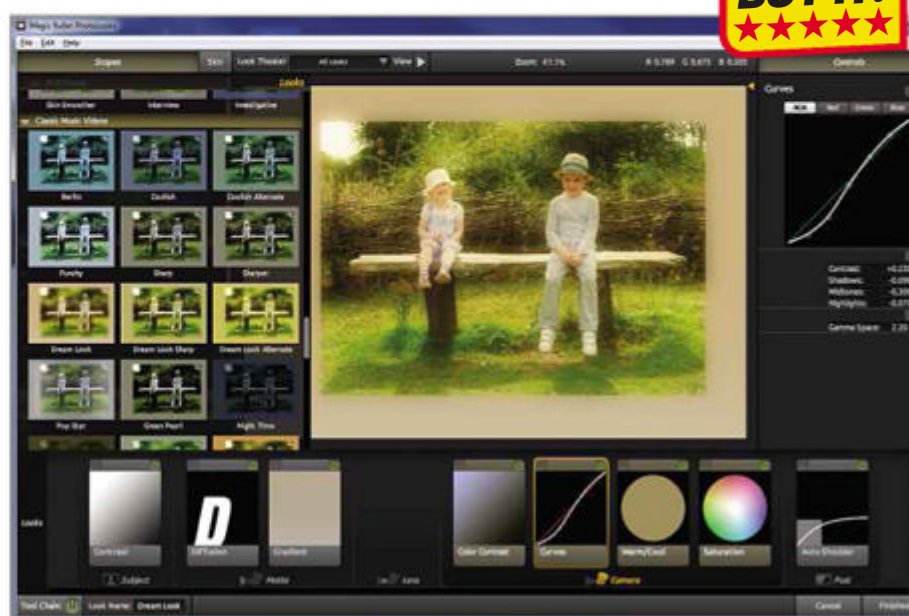
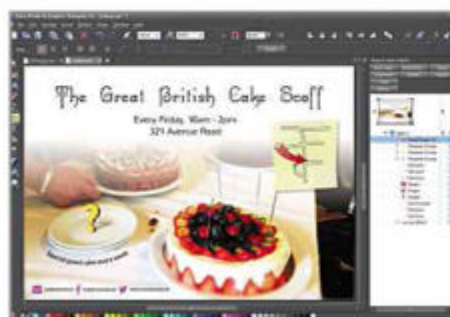
Xara Photo and Graphic Designer is a one-stop-shop for all sorts of graphic-design projects. Its **vector**-illustration tools are ideal for logos, diagrams and drawings. Its **bitmap** tools can manipulate photos by adjusting colours, applying effects and performing edits, such as removing unwanted objects from a scene. It can handle desktop-publishing tasks too, because it has comprehensive text-formatting tools and support for multiple-page documents that lets you create newsletters and party invitations, for example. It can even turn its hand to designing entire websites or just specific web graphics, such as banners and buttons.

Xara has definitely improved colour correction for photos in this update, with

“The photo-editing tools cut out the need to jump back and forth between a number of programs”

the ability to reveal details otherwise hidden in shadows or washed out in highlights. It's now possible to enhance a limited range of colours with just a couple of clicks (make grass greener or turn a red car blue, for example). There's also a superb new suite of one-click creative effects which Xara calls Magic Bullet Looks. They look very stylish and you can, if you want, customise each effect extensively.

Oddly, the program makes you import



photos into a document rather than opening them directly. While this is fine when you want to incorporate a photo into a project, it's unnecessarily long-winded for simple photo-editing tasks. The very basic support for **RAW** camera files is another notable weakness when compared to dedicated photo editors such as Adobe Photoshop Elements. Even so, Xara's photo-editing tools are still useful because they cut out the need to jump back and forth between a number of programs when working on a graphic-design project.

The illustration tools are relatively simple compared to rivals like CorelDraw (see our review of the latest Home and Student edition, Issue 436), but they're extremely precise and quick to use. You can create complex illustrations by drawing freehand, creating and combining simple shapes, and producing smooth curved lines using the difficult-to-master but very precise **Bezier** tool. Version 10 introduces SmartShapes, a selection of pre-drawn arrows, speech bubbles and text stickers that can also be edited for your needs. We hope Xara adds more

### REQUIREMENTS

Windows XP SP3 or later • Intel Celeron • AMD Sempron processor or faster • Minimum 500MB of memory • Minimum 300MB of available hard-drive space [www.snipca.com/14250](http://www.snipca.com/14250)

SmartShapes in future, but it's a great start.

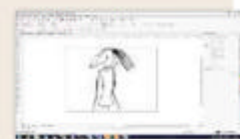
Elsewhere, there are hundreds of new stock symbols and icons covering everything from play and recycle graphics to logos for major companies, including Facebook, Skype and Android. However, the new Content Catalog is disappointing. It hosts a huge range of free downloadable templates, clip-art, button designs and so on, but with no search facility it can take ages to find something suitable.

Overall, this is an impressive suite. The uncluttered interface is straightforward to use and the software is extremely responsive, with the exception of the Magic Bullet Looks. Still, with a price that's well within the reach of home users, it's a great program for a wide range of creative design tasks.

**VERDICT:** Lots of powerful, easy-to-use tools for all sorts of graphic-design projects

★★★★★

**ALTERNATIVE:** CorelDraw Home and Student X7 £67 A very similar suite of graphic-design tools that's not quite as easy to use, but more powerful





**LAPTOP** | £425 from [www.snipca.com/14452](http://www.snipca.com/14452)

## HP ProBook 450 G2

An inexpensive Windows 7 laptop with a fingerprint reader

Windows 7 laptops are now hard to come by, let alone ones that are inexpensive and attractive, all of which makes the HP ProBook 450 G2 pretty compelling on paper. Although it's aimed at businesses, it comes with a classy soft-touch rubber lid and metal wrist rest at a price that many people can afford.

The 450 G2's classy appearance isn't matched by its build quality, though, as the plastic casing bends and creaks under pressure more than we'd like. It's also quite heavy, weighing 2.2kg, rising to 2.5kg with the charger – so it's not ideal for use on the move. One reason it's so heavy is its built-in DVD writer – an increasingly rare feature in modern laptops.

If you do need to use it while out and about then at least battery life is reasonably long at seven and a half hours, although we've seen other laptops at this kind of price that last even longer. We expected more from the battery because the 450 G2 has a power-efficient Core i3 4030U processor. This 1.9GHz dual-core processor isn't the fastest we've seen in a laptop at this price, but it's fast enough for most everyday computing tasks.

Adding more memory or replacing the 500GB hard drive with a larger model or SSD is straightforward enough. The bottom panel is easily removed and gives quick access to the interior of the laptop, where you can add up to 16GB of memory.

Although the 15in screen has a relatively low resolution (1366x768 pixels), it's bright with surprisingly good colour accuracy and contrast. It also has a matte finish, which minimises any reflections and distracting glare from overhead lighting.

The touchpad is large and accurate, but the buttons feel spongy. A bigger problem is that the touchpad often failed to register gestures, such as swiping two



fingers to scroll up and down. Even when it did register, scrolling was far too fast – even after we tweaked the touchpad's settings.

The expansive width of the laptop accommodates a number pad alongside the keyboard without HP having had to reduce key size. However, the keys feel spongy and lack sufficient travel, so typing isn't as comfortable and accurate as we would like. One useful extra is the fingerprint reader, which lets you log into Windows using your fingertip rather than a password. It's not as reliable and quick as the fingerprint readers built into recent iOS devices because you have to swipe your finger slowly and firmly across the reader, but it's still handy to have.

The HP ProBook 450 G2 is by no means a bad laptop, but there are Windows 7 laptops with better keyboards, touchpads, battery life and performance, such as the Toshiba Satellite Pro R50-B-12U (see our review, Issue 436), which costs a little more but is far better value.

**VERDICT:** Not bad, but the 450 G2 is simply outclassed by other similarly priced laptops

★★★★☆

**ALTERNATIVE:** Toshiba Satellite Pro R50-B-12U  
£520 More expensive, but otherwise better in almost every way



### SPECIFICATIONS

1.9GHz Intel Core i3 4030U dual-core processor • 4GB memory • 500GB hard drive • DVD writer • Intel HD 4400 integrated graphics chip • 15.6in 1366x768 -pixel screen • 802.11b/g/n • Windows 8.1 • 2.2kg (2.5kg with charger) • 25x375x263mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty [www.snipca.com/14453](http://www.snipca.com/14453)

## The best... iPhone 6 Plus cases

### Griffin Survivor All-Terrain

£40 from [www.snipca.com/14501](http://www.snipca.com/14501)

A bulky and robust case. The All-Terrain completely encases your phone in three layers of plastic and rubber that's water- and dust-proof.



### Xqisit iPlate Glossy

£17 from [www.snipca.com/14502](http://www.snipca.com/14502)

A plain, hard plastic case available in a range of colours. Large cut-outs ensure the camera, buttons and speakers aren't blocked.



### QDos Saffiano

£25 from [www.snipca.com/14503](http://www.snipca.com/14503)

A filofax-style case made of leather and suede. The flap protecting the screen has an inside pocket for business and payment cards, while the phone itself is held in place by a rigid plastic mount.



### Xqisit iPlate Ultra thin

£17 from [www.snipca.com/14504](http://www.snipca.com/14504)

An extremely thin plastic case that only provides protection from scratches and scuffs, but adds very little extra bulk to an already big phone.



# Reviews

**LAPTOP** | £1300 from [www.snipca.com/14379](http://www.snipca.com/14379)

## Lenovo Yoga 3 Pro

A wafer-thin and ultra-light laptop with Intel's latest power-saving processor

The Lenovo Yoga 3 Pro is expensive but it has the latest technology, including a super-high-resolution screen, and is easily one of the thinnest and lightest laptops we've ever seen. Even with the lid closed, the entire laptop is only a tad thicker than its USB ports. It weighs just 1.1kg, rising to 1.3kg with its charger, so carrying it around all day is pretty much effortless.

There are two main reasons the Yoga 3 Pro can get away with such incredibly slender dimensions. The first is the slimline hinge, which resembles the metal wrist strap of a men's watch (see image below). It not only looks striking,

“Its screen has a whopping super-high resolution”

but does away with much of the bulk you normally find in a laptop hinge. It is still as sturdy and flexible as those on previous Yoga laptops. You can fold the screen back entirely and use the computer as a tablet, stand it on its edges like a tent or position the keyboard so it acts as a stand for the screen.

The other reason is that the Yoga 3 Pro is the first laptop to use one of Intel's latest energy-saving processors, the Core M 5Y70. Code-named Broadwell, it's so power-efficient and generates so little excess heat that the Yoga 3 Pro only requires one cooling fan and a reduced-size battery, which lasted an impressive 11 hours 19 minutes in our test.

The trade-off is performance. Paired with 8GB of memory the Core M 5Y70 was respectably fast in our image-editing benchmark test, but was noticeably slower than other similarly priced ultra-portable laptops when editing video and running multiple programs simultaneously. While it's

still faster than laptops running an Intel Atom, Celeron or AMD E-series processor, we think it would have done better if it wasn't for the processor's overly conservative use of its Turbo Boost feature. This temporarily increases the processor's speed from 1.1GHz to 2.6GHz as and when needed. However, the laptop rarely used the feature, even when struggling with our demanding multiple-programs test. This at least ensured the laptop never overheated, cooled as it is by just a single small, very quiet fan.

The Yoga 3 Pro's 13in screen has a whopping super-high resolution of 3200x1800 pixels. While there aren't many Windows programs optimised to take advantage of so many pixels, some big names have recently signed up. Chrome and CorelDraw are just two of the recent arrivals. The more programs get optimised the better because standard programs either look very blurry or have unusably small text and controls.

Regardless of this, the screen is very bright with great colour accuracy and excellent contrast.

The keyboard is one of the best we've used, with big keys that have enough travel and feedback for fast, comfortable typing. Annoyingly though, the top row of F-keys have been merged with the number keys. You have to press the Fn key to activate the F-keys which will irritate frequent users of keyboard shortcuts. While the touchpad is large and accurate,

gestures such as swiping two fingers to scroll up and down felt very juddery. We were impressed by one small, but very useful design feature. The charging connector doubles as a USB 2.0 port – an efficient use of limited space on such a thin laptop.

The Yoga 3 Pro is an impressive demonstration of Intel's new power-efficient Core M processors, but there are ultra-portable (albeit slightly heavier) laptops with even longer battery life that use Intel's previous-generation Haswell processors. Unless you need the thinnest and lightest laptop possible, there are others that represent better value. Even so, we're looking forward to seeing future Core M-based laptops.

### SPECIFICATIONS

1.1GHz Intel Core M 5Y70 dual-core processor • 8GB memory • 256GB SSD • Intel HD 5300 integrated graphics • 13.3in 3200x1800-pixel screen • 802.11ac/a/b/g/n • Windows 8.1 • 1.1kg (1.3kg with charger) • 12x299x228mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty [www.snipca.com/14379](http://www.snipca.com/14379)

**VERDICT:** Good battery life and a great screen, but the iffy touchpad and so-so performance hold this laptop back

★★★★☆

**ALTERNATIVE:** Apple MacBook Pro Retina 13in £1199 A little heavier and thicker, but battery life, performance and high-resolution software support are better





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\* Chillblast won more awards in the leading IT press publications PC Pro, PC Advisor and Computer Shopper combined than any other retailer 2010-2013

\*\* World's fastest PC as tested by PC Pro Magazine - <http://www.pcpro.co.uk/reviews/desktops/371152/chillblast-fusion-photo-oc-iv>

# Reviews

**E-READER** | £169 from [www.snipca.com/14451](http://www.snipca.com/14451)

## Amazon Kindle Voyage

Simply Amazon's best e-reader yet

Amazon has a reputation for incredibly cheap devices, from its Fire tablets to its Kindle e-readers. We were therefore a tad surprised when the company launched a luxury e-reader, the Kindle Voyage.

At £169, the Voyage is Amazon's most expensive e-reader yet, costing £60 more than the excellent Kindle Paperwhite (see our review, Issue 411). This may seem a lot to pay for an e-reader, but Amazon has pulled out all the stops and made this its best one yet.

For starters, the design is far superior, and not just in terms of its looks. It is modelled on the Kindle Fire tablets, not previous e-readers, and is all the better for it. Unlike the Paperwhite, which has a raised plastic border around the screen, the front face of the Voyage is completely flat, making it easier to swipe your finger across the touchscreen to turn pages. If you prefer to use buttons then Amazon has provided pressure-sensitive page-turn controls on either side of the screen. You can even set the sensitivity of these controls to avoid accidental presses.

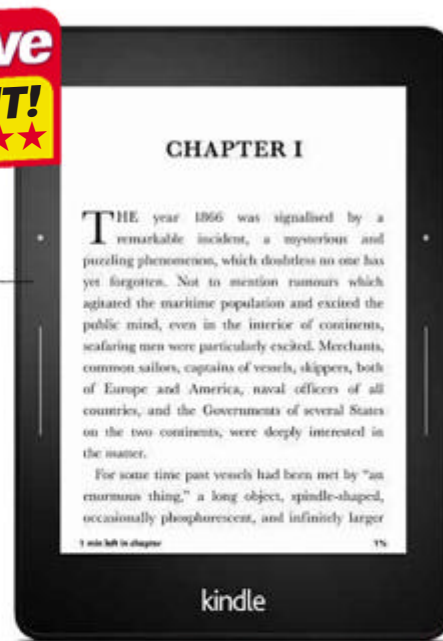
The 6in screen is the best we've seen yet on any e-reader. Its impressive

resolution (1430x1080 pixels) means text is far sharper than on the Paperwhite's 1024x768 display, which looks blurry in comparison. Our only gripe is that we couldn't fine-tune the text more. There are only six fonts, and most of these are unattractive. They can be displayed in only eight sizes, which is disappointing. This is a shame because more options to customise text would help users take full advantage of the ultra-detailed screen.

The Voyage's backlight is the first we've seen on an e-reader that adjusts itself to suit the conditions around you. More commonly found on tablets and smartphones, it's a feature that's way overdue. It works very well, almost always giving you the most suitable contrast.

Amazon's menu system is simple and easy to navigate, and the Voyage reacts quickly to your presses, taps and swipes. The screen refreshes faster than any other e-ink screen we've seen.

The power button is on the back, which otherwise comprises angled panels that make the device easy to grip. The Voyage is slimmer and lighter than the Paperwhite, though not massively so. There's 4GB of storage, enough for thousands of books, but no card slot to expand upon this. You are of course



locked into buying ebooks from Amazon, but you do get the benefit of a huge selection of titles at competitive prices.

The Kindle Voyage's easy-to-grip exterior, pin-sharp display and automatic backlight all combine to make it the best e-reader around. It's not cheap, but if you're a serious bookworm it's worth every penny.

**VERDICT:** Simply the best e-reader yet, although you have to read lots of ebooks to justify the high price



**ALTERNATIVE:** Kobo Aura H2O £140 If you don't want to be tied to Amazon or love reading in the bath, then buy this waterproof e-reader instead



### SPECIFICATIONS

6in touchscreen • 1430x1080-pixel resolution • 4GB storage • No card slot • 802.11b/g/n Wi-Fi • 162x115x7.6mm (HxWxD) • 180g • Supports AZW, ePub and PDF ebooks [www.snipca.com/14451](http://www.snipca.com/14451)

## WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

### How do I overcome my limited Wi-Fi signal?

**Q** I have several terabytes of photos on my computer that I need to back up, so I read your review of the Synology DS414j NAS with interest (see Issue 427). However, I live in an old cottage with thick stone walls that heavily limit the range of my Wi-Fi and make it difficult to lay down Ethernet cables without a lot of mess and fuss. Is there anything I can do or is using a NAS in my home out of the question?

Judith Trilby

**A** HomePlug adapters let you use your electrical mains to network your PC and a NAS. However, the performance you'll get from this type of network will greatly depend on the age and condition of your mains wiring. The distance between the two devices will also have an impact on its effectiveness. The best HomePlug adapters we've seen are the Devolo dLAN 650 Triple+ Starter Kit (£100 from [www.snipca.com/13655](http://www.snipca.com/13655)).

If your mains wiring isn't good enough for fast transfer speeds using

HomePlugs and you don't need to share your photos between multiple PCs, then an external hard drive connected to your computer will be simpler and faster than a NAS. The 3TB Seagate Backup Plus desktop USB3 hard drive (pictured) is a good choice and costs just £85 from [www.snipca.com/14466](http://www.snipca.com/14466).



Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)



**TABLET** | £319 (16GB, Wi-Fi-only) from [www.snipca.com/14454](http://www.snipca.com/14454)

# Apple iPad Mini 3

A sleek, light and fast 8in tablet but with a heavy sense of déjà vu

Apple and Google may be fierce competitors in the tablet market, but the two companies have taken very different approaches with their latest mini tablets. While the Nexus 9 (see our review, page 20) has a new design that's completely different from the previous Nexus 7, the iPad Mini 3 is merely an updated version of the iPad Mini 2. The Mini 3 is in fact so similar to its predecessor – which is still available to buy – that you could easily confuse the two.

The Mini 3's most significant new feature is its fingerprint sensor. As with the iPad Air 2 (see our review, Issue 437) and recent iPhones, this lets you unlock your tablet with your fingerprint instead of using a passcode. You can also use this sensor to access apps and authorise purchases from Apple's online stores, which is all very convenient, especially if you struggle to remember passcodes. The fingerprint reader worked instantly in our test and, almost without exception, with no need for repeated attempts.

Surprisingly, aside from the new colour option (it's now available in a gold casing – see image above), that's it as far as new features go. In some ways this isn't a bad thing. The slender and lightweight metallic casing is as rigid and robust as ever. Its exceptional build quality puts the flimsy plastic chassis of the Nexus 9 to shame. And the battery lasted an impressive 11 hours when playing videos on a loop – a decent score that's only one hour less than that of the Nexus 9.



While the 8in display is still dazzlingly bright and as sharp as ever thanks to its high resolution of 2048x1536 pixels, colour accuracy is a little off. We also found this flaw on the Mini 2 and while most people won't notice it unless they have very sharp eyes or edit a lot of photos, it's still a shame that Apple didn't take this opportunity to fix it.

We're also a little disappointed to see that Apple has once more combined the 1.3GHz A7 dual-core processor with 1GB of memory. While this still makes the Mini 3 one of the fastest mini tablets available, the new A8X triple-core processor and 2GB of memory in the Air 2 make that tablet even faster, so Apple excluding them here is baffling.

Despite the minimal changes, the iPad Mini 3 is still a very good tablet. But the problem here is that the iPad Mini 2 is

still available and the 16GB model is a real bargain at £239, which is £80 less than the equivalent Mini 3. Unless you're not good at remembering passcodes, or don't even bother with them, it's not worth paying the extra money for the Mini 3 and its fingerprint reader. The only other reason to opt for the Mini 3 over the Mini 2 is if you need lots of built-in storage. The Mini 3 is available in 16, 64 and 128GB versions, while the Mini 2 is only available in 16 and 32GB options.

## SPECIFICATIONS

7.9in 2048x1536-pixel screen • 1.3GHz Apple A7 dual-core processor • 1GB memory • 16GB storage • iOS 8.1; 331g • 200x135x7.5mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty [www.snipca.com/14455](http://www.snipca.com/14455)

**VERDICT:** A good mini tablet, but it's very similar to the iPad Mini 2, which is better value for most people



**ALTERNATIVE:** Apple iPad Mini 2 £239

If you can live without the fingerprint reader and lots of built-in storage, buy the Mini 2. It's otherwise identical to the Mini 3 but costs a lot less, making it a real steal



# Reviews

PHOTO-EDITING SOFTWARE | £79 from [www.snipca.com/14260](http://www.snipca.com/14260)

## Adobe Photoshop Elements 13

A friendly photo-editing powerhouse

Photoshop Elements has evolved from a program aimed at people whose main hobby is photography to anyone who has some photos to edit. It includes an Organizer module for keeping track of all your photos and videos, plus Quick and Guided editing modes that present a simpler interface for accomplishing common, everyday tasks.

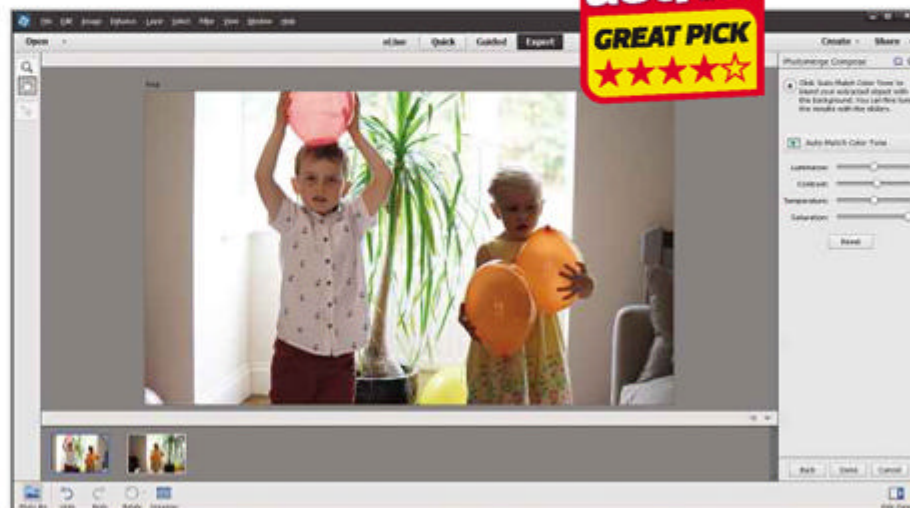
This latest update continues in the same vein. This is best illustrated by a new tool in Guided mode called B&W Color Pop, which turns your photo black and white apart from a particular area or object which remains in full colour – a very striking effect. That area can be defined either by selecting a colour in the sidebar or by clicking directly on the image.

You can refine your selection further by using the Fuzziness control, which specifies the range of colours selected, and the Refine Effect option which allows parts of the image to be added or subtracted from the selection using brush strokes. Finally, there's an Increase Saturation button for adding some extra punch.

“It has a tremendous set of advanced editing tools”

The results look attractive and the walkthrough is easy to follow. However, as with nearly all the Guided mode walkthroughs, this is a technique that was already possible in Expert mode. The simplified controls are welcome, but novices would learn more from being shown how to achieve the same results in Expert mode. That way, the skills would be transferable to other tasks.

The new Photomerge Compose tool also takes the form of a walkthrough, although it's oddly tucked away in a submenu in Expert mode. It helps you cut out an object or person from a photo, with the help of the Refine Edge tool for complex shapes such as hair. The object or person is then pasted into another photo, resized and moved into place. You can then



modify the shape of the cut-out using the Hide and Reveal brushes to help it blend into its new location – a nice touch. Finally, there are controls to match the colours to the new surroundings, either automatically or manually.

However, over-using these colour-matching controls makes the cut-out pasted object become heavily pixelated, so they should be used carefully.

As with the Guided edits, the Photomerge Compose tool makes a complex task more accessible – but only if you follow its strictly prescribed way of doing things. The existing controls in Expert mode are more flexible and worth getting to grips with.

Other new features include Facebook Cover creation, helping users design a Facebook profile and cover images that complement each other. There are some attractive templates, and it's easy to delete the cheesy boilerplate text such as “Love brings peace and power to your life”.

The Refine Selection Brush adds yet another way to select and cut out parts of a photo, allowing you to nudge the edges of a selection back and forth without having to switch manually between Add and Subtract modes.

Selecting the Crop tool now brings up a palette offering four Crop Suggestions. These are supposed to make the photo

look its best, but we didn't spot any artistic merit to them. It's much better – and not at all tricky – to experiment with cropping manually.

As is the case with recent Photoshop Elements updates, there's little here to tempt advanced users to upgrade. That's unsurprising, though, because the software already provides a tremendous set of advanced editing tools, second only to Photoshop CC. There is now support for the RAW files of the latest cameras, but if that's not needed, then advanced users can save their pennies and stick with the previous version (see our review, Issue 410).

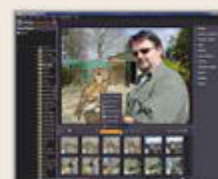
The new features in version 13 are more likely to appeal to casual users who want to get creative with digital images but aren't sure where to start. However, we wish there was more here to help casual users turn into experts.

**VERDICT:** Minimal improvements yet again, but Photoshop Elements is still a powerful and affordable photo-editing program

★★★★★

**ALTERNATIVE:**  
Ashampoo  
Photo  
Optimizer 6 £10

A far less powerful photo editor, but good enough for basic editing tasks



### REQUIREMENTS

Windows 7 or 8 • 1.6GHz processor or faster • 2GB of memory or more • at least 5GB of available hard-drive space [www.snipca.com/14260](http://www.snipca.com/14260)



**PRINTER** | £90 from [www.snipca.com/14464](http://www.snipca.com/14464)

# HP Envy 5640

A good-looking multifunction printer that falls short

HP usually only applies its Envy brand name to the more stylish laptops and printers in its range, so it's no surprise that the curvy Envy 5640 looks good. This inkjet multifunction printer (MFP) can print, scan and copy, but it can't send or receive faxes. Its paper trays are hidden neatly away behind the smart, curved front when not in use, while the SD card slot – handy for printing photos without using your computer – is behind a tidy oval porthole.

This MFP doesn't just look good, it has plenty of features too. It supports wireless networking so you can print and scan from Android and iOS devices. It can print automatically on both sides of a sheet of paper, which is a great way to save money and produce professional-looking documents. In addition to the standard paper tray there's a second one for 6x4in photo paper.

There are some lovely touches to this MFP that give it an expensive feel. These include the paper output tray that extends automatically and scanner bed that pivots on sturdy hinges let you access the interior and insert ink cartridges. However, the bundled cartridges will only manage 200 black pages and 165 colour, according to HP. This is fairly meagre and we only just made it through our tests before the colour needed replacing. It printed a total of 41 pages of colour graphics, three A4 photos at top quality and seven borderless 6x4in photos. Fortunately, you can replace both cartridges with extra large versions rated for 415 and 600 pages respectively. Using these, running costs work out at around 8.6p per page of text and graphics, which is a little expensive, but hardly exorbitant.

The Envy 5640 wasn't especially fast when connected over USB. It printed text



documents at a rate of 8.3 pages per minute (ppm). Switching to draft quality increased the printing speed to 10.9ppm. Colour pages printed more quickly at 4.3ppm. Photos were quick to print, even at the very highest quality – a single borderless 6x4in print took just 80 seconds. Scans were slow though, capturing an A4 sheet at 300dpi took 24 seconds, while scanning a 6x4in photo at a more detailed 600dpi took 42 seconds.

Print quality was generally very good, with sharp black text and punchy colour graphics. Scans were disappointing, however, with photos in particular looking artificial – due, we suspect, to various image-quality enhancements in HP's basic scanning software that can't be turned off.

Despite its attractive design, then, this MFP is a disappointment. The supplied ink is meagre, scan quality is poor and the device itself is a touch expensive. Canon's PIXMA MG5650 has similar features, generally performs better and costs about £15 less.

**VERDICT:** It looks great and prints well, but poor scans and high running costs undermine HP's Envy 5640

★★★★☆

**ALTERNATIVE:** Canon PIXMA MG5650  
£77 This MFP is not only cheaper but also has better print and scan quality as well as lower running costs



## SPECIFICATIONS

4800x1200dpi maximum print resolution • 8ppm colour/12ppm mono quoted speeds • 1200x1200dpi maximum scan resolution • USB • Wi-Fi • One-year warranty [www.snipca.com/14465](http://www.snipca.com/14465)

## COMING SOON

### DEC 2014/JAN 2015

A leaked product listing on the US Google Play store shows that Google's Project Tango tablet is nearing release. It can create a 3D model of the space around it using special cameras. Like the current version of Google Glass, it's likely to be a beta version aimed at developers.



### JANUARY 2015

Google's Project Ara is an ambitious initiative aiming to develop an upgradeable smartphone based on a design of blocks that are easy to move around. The first Ara phones and blocks will likely be beta versions.



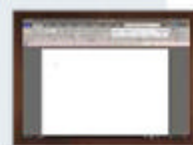
### SPRING 2015

Echo is Amazon's voice-activated personal assistant. It's similar to Siri and Cortana, but is built into a standalone device for your home, not into a phone. UK pricing and availability yet to be confirmed, but it costs \$200 (£126) in the US.



### SPRING 2015

Microsoft is rumoured to be readying a version of Office for Windows tablets. Leaked screenshots have so far only revealed a tweaked traditional keyboard-and-mouse interface rather than the expected touchscreen interface.



## NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE  
23 Dec



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## LAPTOP

**Apple MacBook Air 13in 128GB**  
**£849** from [www.snipca.com/10020](http://www.snipca.com/10020)  
**Tested:** Issue 402



Apple's latest MacBook Air isn't cheap, but it's the best lightweight laptop available. It has excellent battery life, a comfortable keyboard, a sensibly sized screen, a sturdy and classy build and great bundled software.

**ALTERNATIVE:** **Asus Chromebook C200**  
 A cheap Chrome OS ultra-portable laptop with a bright screen, lengthy battery life and great keyboard. £200 from [www.snipca.com/13460](http://www.snipca.com/13460)

## DESKTOP PC

**Palicomp AMD Kaveri Evolution**  
**£500** from [www.snipca.com/11804](http://www.snipca.com/11804)  
**Tested:** Issue 422



A budget PC with a fast overclocked processor. It also has good upgrade potential and comes with a surprisingly good 24in monitor, as well as a quality USB keyboard and mouse.

**ALTERNATIVE:** **Braebo Hemera A**  
 A cheap, complete PC system that's powerful enough for basic tasks. £350 from [www.snipca.com/12606](http://www.snipca.com/12606)

## TABLET

NEW ENTRY

**Apple iPad Mini 2**  
**£239** from [www.snipca.com/14467](http://www.snipca.com/14467)  
**Tested:** Issue 416



Apple's mini tablet from last year is now available at an even lower price. The only thing it lacks compared with this year's Mini 3 is a fingerprint sensor and the option of lots of built-in storage. Otherwise, it's an absolute bargain.

**ALTERNATIVE:** **Apple iPad Air 2** An incredibly thin and lightweight 10in tablet with a fingerprint reader, an excellent screen and selection of apps. £399 from [www.snipca.com/14309](http://www.snipca.com/14309)

## PHONE

**Motorola Moto G 4G**  
**£160** without contract from [www.snipca.com/14162](http://www.snipca.com/14162)  
**Tested:** Issue 432



Motorola's budget Android smartphone is an absolute steal. It's very responsive, well made, fast and has a good screen. Plus, it's now been updated with 4G and a microSD card slot.

**ALTERNATIVE:** **Apple iPhone 5s** An excellent smartphone with a great camera and performance. £459 without a contract from [www.snipca.com/10171](http://www.snipca.com/10171)

## DIGITAL CAMERA

**Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF6**  
**£300** from [www.snipca.com/12607](http://www.snipca.com/12607)  
**Tested:** Issue 405



This compact interchangeable lens camera is small and reasonably priced, yet it has well-designed controls, a wide range of available lenses and shoots excellent quality photos. The GF6 really is unbeatable value.

**ALTERNATIVE:** **Fujifilm XF1** If you don't need the flexibility of removable lenses, this slim compact is a great choice. £130 from [www.snipca.com/13701](http://www.snipca.com/13701)

## E-READER

**Kobo Aura H20**  
**£140** from [www.snipca.com/13859](http://www.snipca.com/13859)  
**Tested:** Issue 435



A waterproof e-reader with an easy-to-read, high-resolution touchscreen that's easy on the eyes and great for reading in the bath. There's no 3G version, but, unlike the Amazon Kindle, you can buy ebooks from independent retailers that use the ePub format.

**ALTERNATIVE:** **Amazon Kindle Voyage**  
 The best Kindle yet, with a sharp, extremely responsive touchscreen and easy-grip design. £169 from [www.snipca.com/14451](http://www.snipca.com/14451)



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## SECURITY SOFTWARE

### Kaspersky

Internet Security 2015

£39.99 from [www.snipca.com/14221](http://www.snipca.com/14221)

Tested: Issue 437



Kaspersky Internet Security 2015 has won our past four antivirus tests, making it the year's standout performer. The 2015 edition is available at an exclusive reader discount on our Software Store. Click the link above for a three-device licence, or buy a 1-device licence for just £17.99 at [www.snipca.com/14212](http://www.snipca.com/14212).

**ALTERNATIVE: Norton Internet Security 2014** Great antivirus software, but sometimes blocks legitimate software. £24 from [www.snipca.com/14479](http://www.snipca.com/14479)

## SMART TV

### Samsung UE32H6200

£360 from [www.snipca.com/13101](http://www.snipca.com/13101)

Tested: Issue 427



A stylish 32in smart TV with great picture quality and apps for all the terrestrial TV catch-up services. It has plenty of extras, too, such as recording-to-USB storage, 3D, playing media files stored on a NAS or USB stick, and plenty of HDMI ports.

**ALTERNATIVE: Sony KDL-42W705B** Excellent image quality, stylish looks and a 42in screen. £450 from [www.snipca.com/12931](http://www.snipca.com/12931)

## COMPETITION

### Win 1 of 2 Livescribe wifi smartpens

You can't beat a Livescribe smartpen as the ideal Christmas gift for any gadget-loving note-taker. They let you easily capture everyday written and verbal notes and make them accessible anytime, anywhere. Whenever you're connected to a Wi-Fi network, notes and audio will automatically be transferred from your Livescribe wifi smartpen to your Evernote account. To enter, email your address to [acomp@dennis.co.uk](mailto:acomp@dennis.co.uk) by midnight 22 December.



**The Livescribe wifi smartpen** is available now priced £159.99. For more information visit [www.livescribe.com/uk](http://www.livescribe.com/uk) and follow Livescribe on Twitter @livescribe.

## SECURITY CAMERA

### Y-cam HomeMonitor HD

£140 from [www.snipca.com/11646](http://www.snipca.com/11646)

Tested: Issue 420



A home-security camera that's well priced and easy to set up. Plus, it has great picture quality, useful apps and there's no need to subscribe to any extra services. It's a worthy successor to the original HomeMonitor, our previous favourite security camera.

**ALTERNATIVE: D-Link Wireless-N Day & Night Camera** A good-value security camera with excellent night vision. £101 from [www.snipca.com/12741](http://www.snipca.com/12741)

## ROUTER

### Trendnet TEW-812DRU

£69 from [www.snipca.com/14166](http://www.snipca.com/14166)

Tested: Issue 427



An incredibly fast 802.11ac router that's also one of the cheapest we've seen. It's superb and it's the router to buy if you're ready to make the jump to 802.11ac.

**ALTERNATIVE: Linksys WRT1900AC** More expensive, but even faster and with loads of features too. £210 from [www.snipca.com/12928](http://www.snipca.com/12928)

## MULTIFUNCTION PRINTER

### Canon Pixma MG4250

£50 from [www.snipca.com/12457](http://www.snipca.com/12457)

Tested: Issue 382



This budget multifunction printer (MFP) isn't the fastest available, but it's cheap to buy and inexpensive to run. Just as importantly, both prints and scans look great. Unless you need faster print speeds or separate ink tanks for each colour, this MFP is the one to buy.

**ALTERNATIVE: Canon Pixma MX535** An MFP aimed at small offices with duplex, ADF and fax, but also good photo print quality. £70 from [www.snipca.com/12909](http://www.snipca.com/12909)



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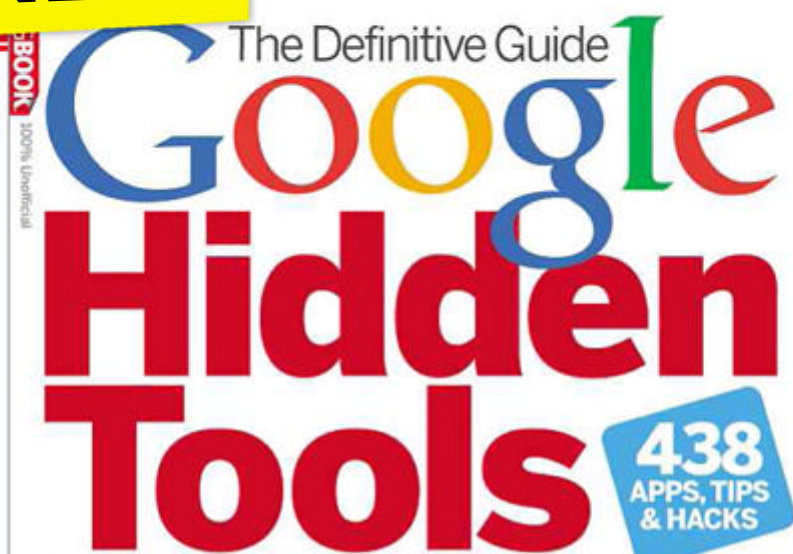
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# Workshops & Tips

PULL OUT  
& KEEP  
Issue 438

14 pages of easy-to-follow workshops and expert tips

**35** Build a photo family tree for free  
**38** Make your files organise themselves

**40** Create time-lapse videos on your tablet  
**42** Create your own keyboard shortcuts

## PLUS

**43** Readers' Tips  
**44** Phone & Tablet Tips  
**46** Make Windows Better

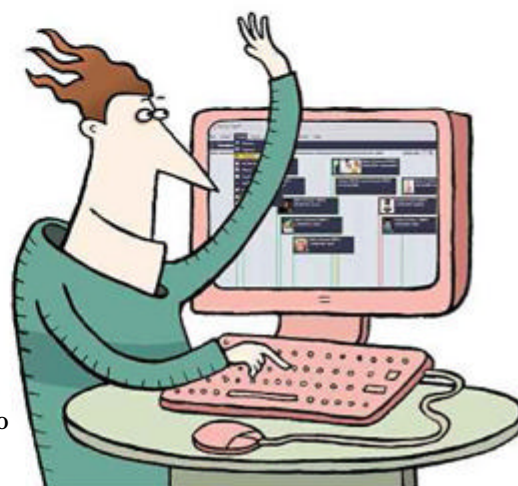
**47** Make Office Better  
**48** Secret Tips For... Windows Safe Mode

## Build a photo family tree for free

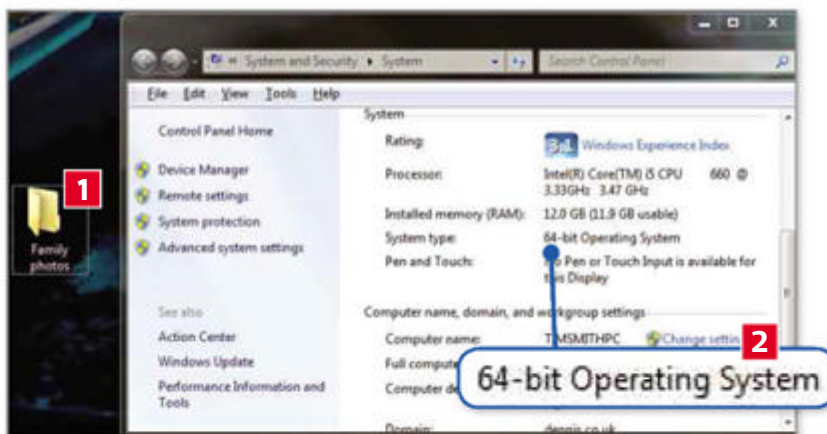
**What you need:** My Family Tree; Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8 or 8.1  
**Time required:** 25 minutes

There are lots of free genealogy programs but My Family Tree is the easiest to use. You can include as much (or as little) detail about each family member as you like (including their photo), and the program will automatically build your photo family

tree based on the information you provide and how each person is related to you. You can then see summaries of your data (for example, grouping family members according to the decade they were born) and plot each relative's details on a timeline.

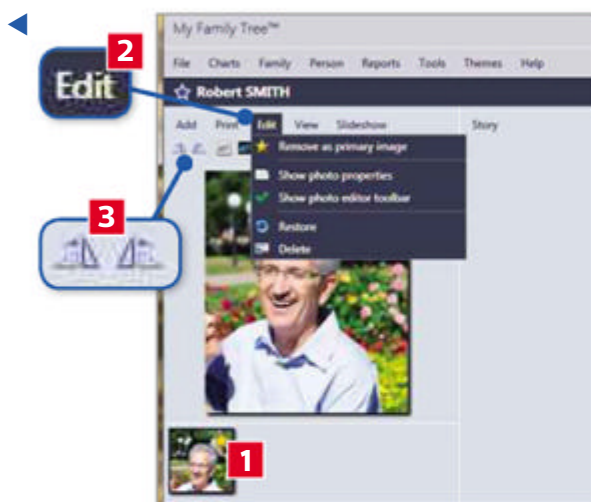


**STEP 1** To make life easier, we recommend you first save all the photos you want to include in your family tree in a folder on your Desktop **1**. Before installing My Family Tree, check whether you have a **32bit** or **64bit** PC. Right-click My Computer on your Desktop, click Properties and then look next to 'System type' **2**. Now go to [www.snipca.com/14516](http://www.snipca.com/14516). Click the orange My Family Tree button if you have a 32bit PC or the purple My Family Tree (x64) button if you have a 64bit PC. Click the setup file and follow the instructions to install and open My Family Tree.



**STEP 2** Click 'Start a new family tree'. First, add your own details. Select Male or Female, then type your name and your birth place **1**. To add your birthday, click the small calendar icon beside 'Birth date' and then click the same icon **2** between the date and time fields. By default, the calendar is set to the current date, so click the month at the top (to show all months), then click the year (to see the past 12 years). Click the arrow on the left to navigate to the year you were born, click it, then the month and then your date of birth. Enter your birth time (in the 24-hour format) **3** if you know it and then click Add.

# Workshops



**STEP 3** You'll now see a main screen with a stick figure representing the person you're adding (you). To replace the stick figure with your photo, tap 'Photos and story' at the top right and drag your photo from your Desktop folder into the pane at the bottom left **1**. If you want to delete or replace your photo, click Edit **2** and then click Delete. If you need to rotate the image, click Edit, 'Show photo editor toolbar', then the 'Rotate clockwise' or 'Rotate anticlockwise' **3** icon. Click Back at the top right when you've finished.



**STEP 4** Now click the 'Create relationship' dropdown menu on the right to see the relationship options for other members of your family (Father, Mother, Spouse, Brother, Daughter and so on) and select one. You'll see a screen similar to that in Step 2 where you can fill in their personal details. If you're not exactly sure when someone was born but have a rough idea, click the calendar icon beside 'Birth date' **1** and then tick 'Date range?' **2**. Enter the date range within which you think that person was born. For options to add adoptive or foster parents, click the dropdown menu beside Natural, click one of the options and then click Add **3**.



**STEP 5** You'll now see a line linking you with the family member you added. To add a photo for this person, click their stick figure, then click 'Photos and story' **1** and repeat Step 3. If that person is deceased, you can add their 'Death date' and 'Death place'. Click Details **2** and untick Living to see these two options. Click Done when you've finished. By default the photo thumbnails in your family tree are quite small, but you can zoom in on them by clicking and dragging the zoom slider **3**.

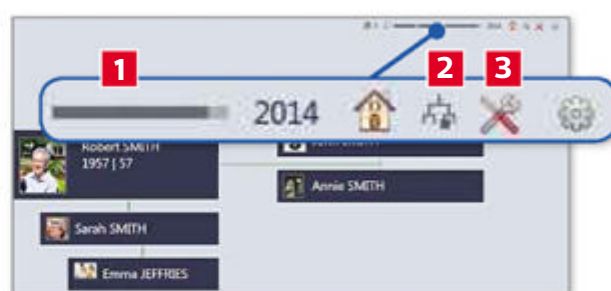
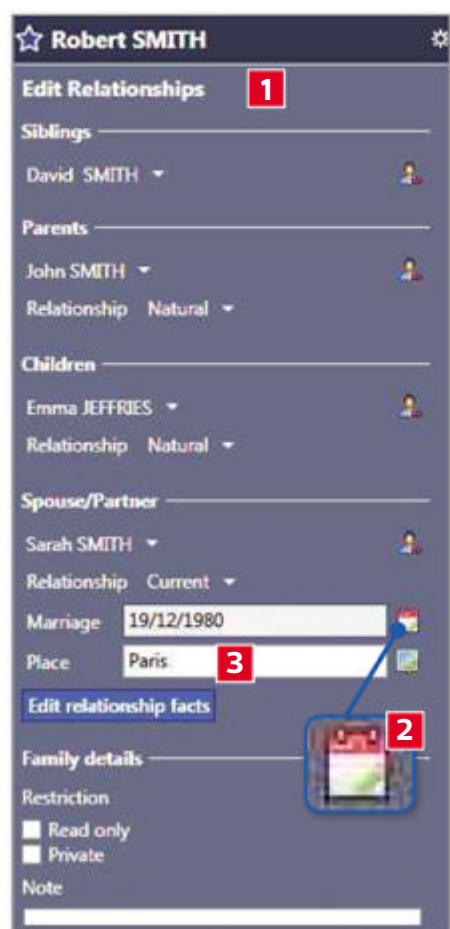


**STEP 6** Repeat Step 4 to add more family members to your family tree. To display relationship links within your family tree, click the stick figure/photo of the family member on the left and use the 'Create relationship' dropdown menu. As you do this, you'll notice that spouses/partners are linked by a green semi-circle **1** and offspring are linked by a vertical line **2**. Click any person to see his/her direct family (parents, spouse and offspring). To see your entire tree, click your name in the Family list **3**.



## Build a photo family tree for free

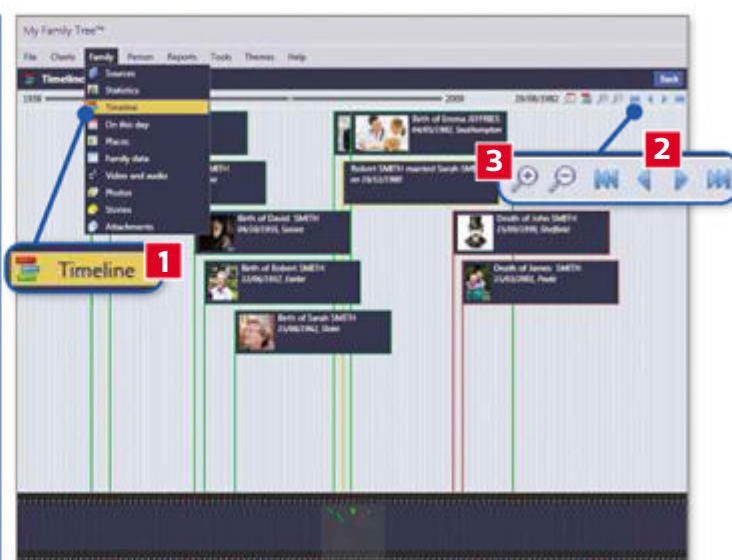
**STEP 7** To add an anniversary, click the person involved, then click Relationships to see a list of that person's relationships based on the information you've entered **1**. Click the calendar beside Marriage **2** and select an anniversary date. Click the Place field **3** to add the wedding location, then click Done at the bottom. You can also add a video or audio recording of a relative. Click their photo and then click 'Video and audio' on the right. Now drag and drop the video or audio file into the bottom pane to add it. You'll see a field that lets you add a title, description and rating. Click Back when you've finished.



**STEP 8** There's a timeline slider **1** (not to be confused with the timeline feature in Step 10) that makes it easier to navigate around your family tree. By default, this is set to the current year. Click and drag it to the left to go to an earlier date. Any relatives who were born after that time (or had died before it) will be greyed out. Click any family member, then click the Ancestry icon **2** to see their direct family (parents, spouse and offspring) as rectangular tiles (see screenshot). By default, all surnames are capitalised, but if you want to change that, click the Settings icon **3** and untick 'Display surnames and capital letters'.



**STEP 9** My Family Tree has other useful tools. For example, click Family **1** and then click Statistics to see statistical breakdowns of your family tree **2**, including the number of males, females, marriages, divorces and children. Click the Births tab to see statistics relating to the percentage of your relatives born in each month and decade, as well as the earliest and latest recorded births. Click the Children tab **3** to see how old parents were when they had children and who were the oldest and youngest parents.



**STEP 10** A brilliant new feature is the family timeline. Click Family, then Timeline **1** to see a timeline featuring each family member's birthday, date of death (when applicable) and where these events took place. To move forward or back in this timeline view, use the scroll wheel on your mouse or the front and back buttons **2**. Alternatively, you can keep clicking the zoom out option **3** until you see every member on the timeline. To save your family tree, click File at the top left, 'Save as', name the file and then click Save. ●

## Make your files organise themselves

**What you need:** DropIt; Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8 or 8.1

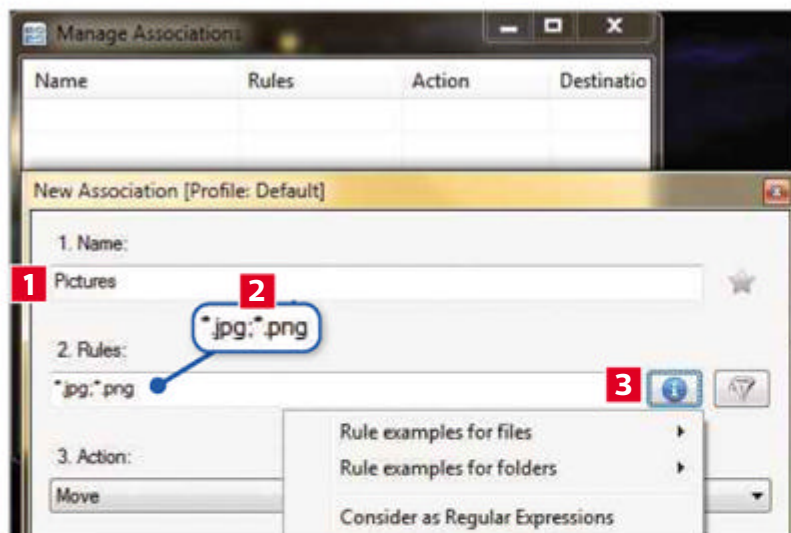
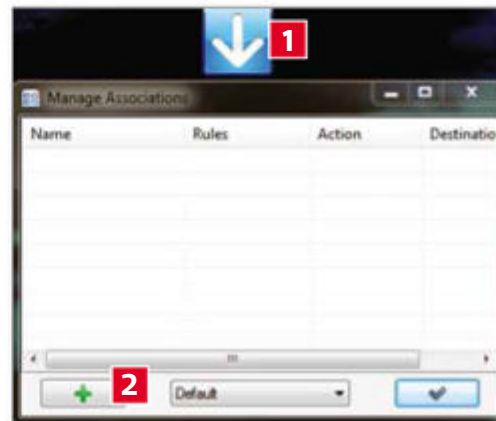
**Time required:** 20 minutes

**D**ropIt is a fantastic free program that lets you organise files in bulk into any folder. You create rules (which are called 'associations') for that folder – for example, to only move music of a particular genre. You can then drag any

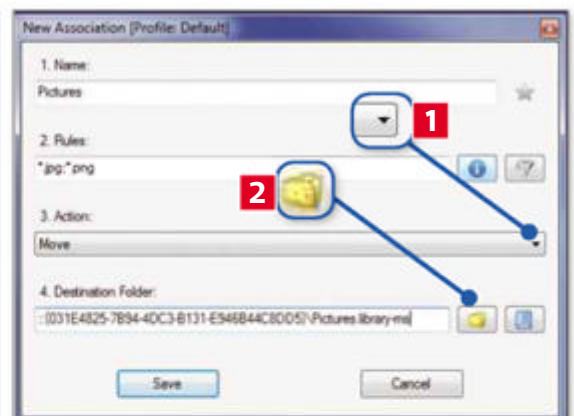
other folder on the DropIt icon and it will scan and organise these files into the destination folder based on the associations you created. We'll show you how to organise your photos and music.



**STEP 1** Go to [www.dropitproject.com](http://www.dropitproject.com), click the Download option and then click Download v8.0 under Installer Package. Click the setup file that downloads to your computer and follow the steps to install it. Open DropIt and you'll see a blue square icon with an arrow **1**. We'll first show you how to create an association so that only pictures of a particular format are moved to the default Pictures folder on your PC. Right-click the DropIt icon, click Associations and then click the New Association ('+') button **2**.

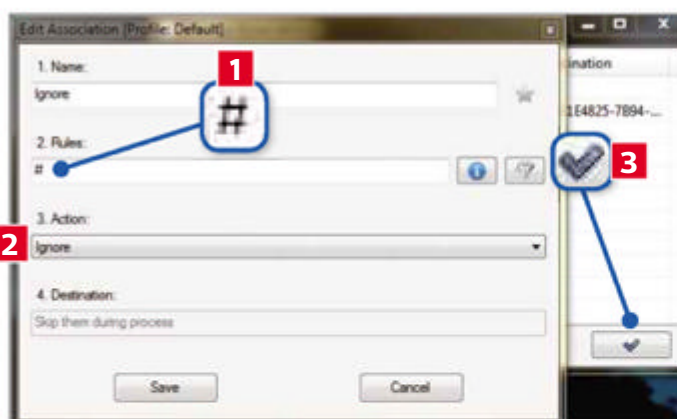


**STEP 2** In the New Association window, type Pictures (or something similar) in the Name field **1**. In the Rules field, type **\*.jpg;\*.png** **2** (the most common image file formats). You can add other image file formats but you must separate each one with a semicolon and an asterisk (for example **\*.gif**). To better understand the different rules you can apply to your files, click the blue 'i' icon **3** and move your cursor to 'Rule examples for files' and 'Rule examples for folders'.

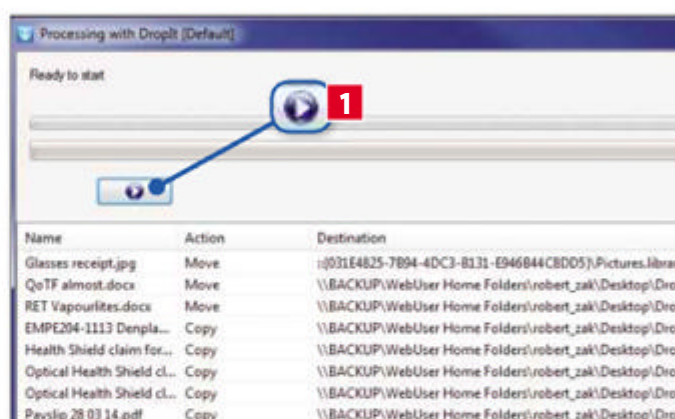


**STEP 3** Leave the Action dropdown menu **1** as it is because it's set to Move by default. In the Destination Folder box, click the Search icon (yellow folder) **2**, then navigate to the Pictures library on your PC (in the left-hand pane), click Select Folder and then Save. The New Association window will close and you'll see this added to the list in your Manage Associations window. If you want to edit this association, right-click it, click Edit, make your changes and then click Save.



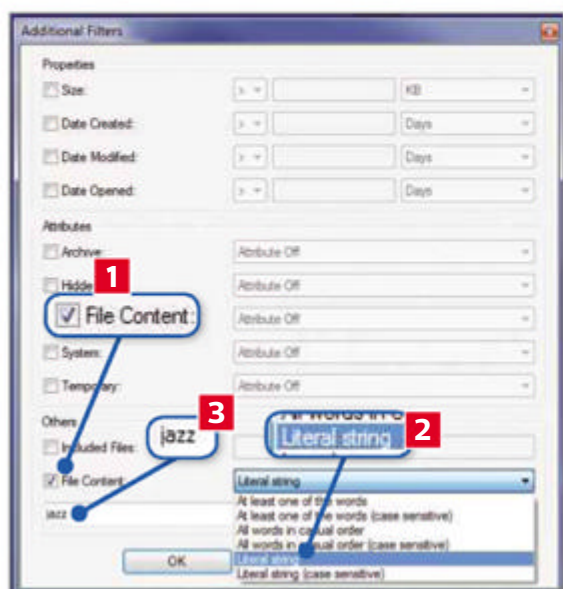
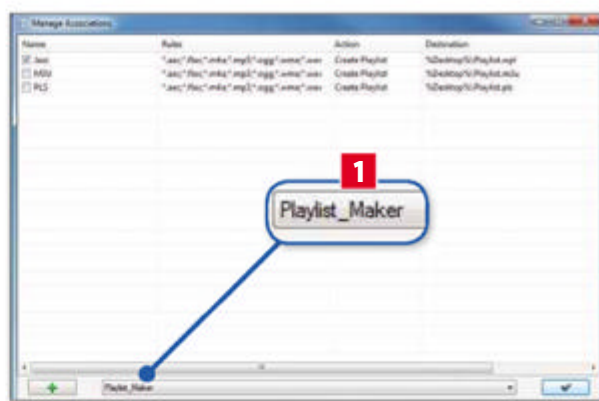


**STEP 4** You now need to create an association for DropIt to ignore all other file types from the folder you're dropping into it, otherwise DropIt will constantly ask you whether you want to create associations for those other file types. Click the New Association ('+') button, then type **Ignore** in the Name field. In the Rules field, type a hashtag (#) **1**. Click the Action dropdown menu, select Ignore **2**, then click Save. Next, click the bottom-right tick **3** to close the Manage Associations window. Now all files that aren't .jpeg or .png files (or whichever files you create in the first association) will be ignored.



**STEP 5** Drag and drop any folder containing image files to the blue DropIt icon on your screen. DropIt scans the folder, producing a list of all the file formats that conform to your association (.jpg, .png, and any others you may have added). Click the Start button **1** to move these files to your Pictures folder. When that's finished, click Done (denoted by a tick). Open your Pictures folder to confirm that your files have been moved safely.

**STEP 6** The association we created for your Picture folder was automatically saved in DropIt's Default profile, but DropIt has many preset profiles (each with their own set of associations) that you can customise. We'll now show you how to organise a playlist of jazz tracks using DropIt's Playlist\_Maker profile. Right-click the DropIt icon, then click Associations. In the Manage Associations window, click the dropdown menu at the bottom and then click Playlist\_Maker **1** to see three preset associations for this profile. Right-click any of the associations and click Edit. In the new window, rename the association Jazz, leave the Rules field as it is (because it will already contain the most popular music file formats). Choose a destination folder for your playlist by clicking the yellow folder icon at the bottom right, clicking the relevant folder and then Save.



**STEP 7** Now click the grey Additional Filters icon (a funnel symbol in the Rules section). You'll see a list of additional filters you can use to organise your files. Tick File Content **1**, click the dropdown menu beside it, select 'Literal string' **2** and type **jazz** **3** in the text field below. Click OK and then Save. You'll now see Jazz listed as an association in the Playlist\_Maker profile. Untick both the other associations, create an Ignore rule (see Step 4) and then click the tick mark below. Now drag the folder where you keep your music to the DropIt icon. Once the scan has finished, click the Start button to see all your jazz tracks in your destination folder. ●

## Create time-lapse videos on your tablet

**What you need:** Lapse It; Android or iOS phone or tablet **Time required:** 20 minutes

**S**tandard video shoots 24 frames (images) per second. In a time-lapse video, one image is captured every few seconds, letting you film a subject or scene over a relatively long period of time. You can then play the sequence back

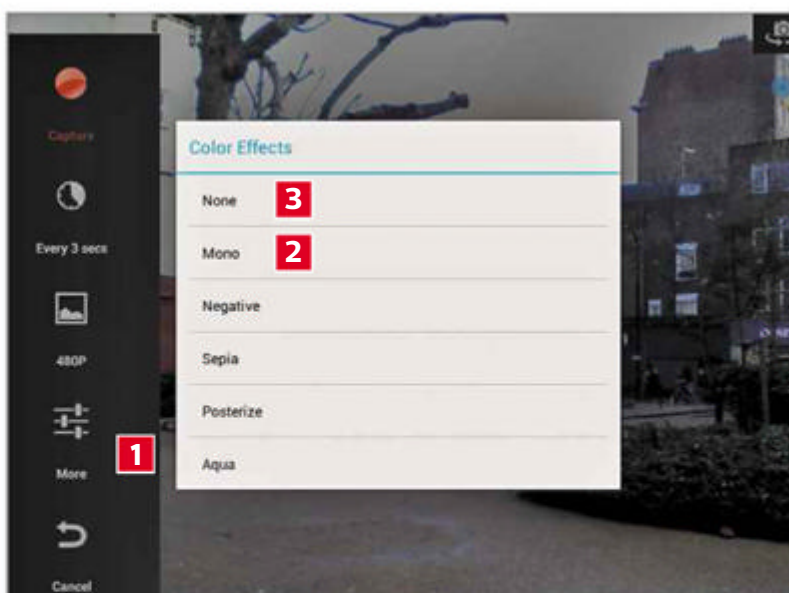
as a shorter, speeded-up version. Lapse It is the best free app for creating time-lapse videos and adding effects to them. It also lets you share the videos by email or on video-streaming sites, such as YouTube.



**STEP 1** There are two versions of Lapse It – Free and Pro. The free Android version (used in this Workshop) has more features than the free iOS version. Download and install Lapse It from [www.snipca.com/14531](http://www.snipca.com/14531) (Android) or [www.snipca.com/14532](http://www.snipca.com/14532) (iOS). Open the app and tap New Capture at the top right. You'll see a screen with six options at the side **1** and a rotate icon **2** (for taking a time-lapse video using your front-facing camera). First, we'll tweak Lapse It's default settings.



**STEP 2** By default, Lapse It captures an image every two seconds. To change this interval, tap 'Every 2 secs'. To set it to take an image once every three seconds, for example, type **3** **1**, tap Seconds **2** and then tap Set **3**. Next, tap More on the left, Focus Mode, then Continuous-video (it's set to Auto by default).



**STEP 3** Tap More **1** again, then tap Flash Mode. By default, the app's flash is set to Auto. If you're shooting in dark conditions, tap On to use the flash every time a photo is taken, or tap Torch to keep your flash on throughout the recording (recommended for short-interval shooting). Tap More again, then Colour Effects to see a list of effects. Tap any effect to apply it. Try Mono **2** if you want a retro-style black-and-white feel, or tap None **3** if you'd rather have no effect.





**STEP 4** Now tap More once again, then Scene Mode **1**, which gives you effects designed for certain types of scene, including Landscape, Night, Snow, Sunset and Fireworks. If you're not happy with any of your new settings, tap Cancel **2** to return to the main screen and make changes. Tap Capture **3** to begin recording your time-lapse video.



**STEP 5** You'll see a timer **1** at the bottom right with a figure indicating the number of frames captured (16F indicates 16 images) and the recording time (in minutes and seconds). To pause your recording, tap the screen, then tap Pause **2**. This is useful if you want to change the video's point of view or its settings mid-way through the recording. For example, you might want to shoot half your time-lapse video with one effect and the other half with another. Once you've tweaked your setting, tap Capture and the recording will continue from where you left off. To finish recording, tap the screen and then tap Stop **3**.



**STEP 6** You'll now see a viewing screen displaying your video with five options below. Tap the Play icon at the top left to play your video. To trim the video (change its start and end points), tap Trim and then tap the Trim slider **1** to turn it on. Now drag the marker from the start **2** (or end) and you'll see the image on the video change in the viewer. Release the slider at the position you want to start (or end) your video. To add an effect, tap Effects **3**, select one and then tap Play to see how it looks.



**STEP 7** Once you're happy with your video, tap Render. Next, tap 'Render name' at the bottom left and name your video **1**. Tick 'Use awesome render engine' **2** and then tap Create Video **3**. Once that's done, tap Play to view your video or Publish to share it by email or on social media. Watch your video at any time by opening the app, tapping Gallery and then tapping the video. ●

## Create your own keyboard shortcuts

**What you need:** AutoHotkey; Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8 or 8.1

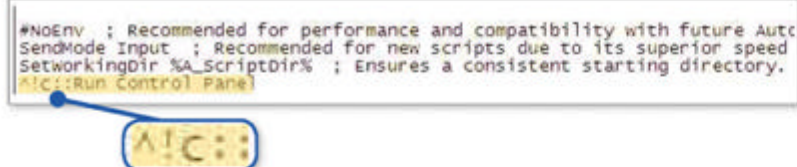
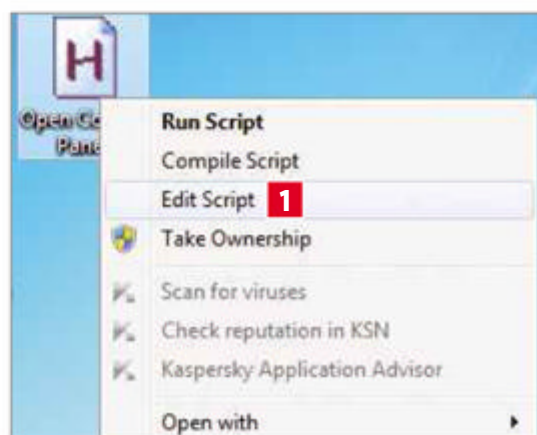
**Time required:** 15 minutes

Over the years, we've recommended plenty of programs that let you create your own keyboard shortcuts to open your favourite programs. But did you know you can do this using Notepad with the help of a free tool

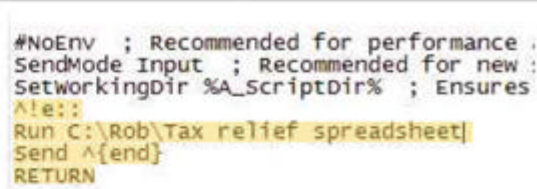
called AutoHotkey? We'll show you how to create keyboard shortcuts to open the Windows Control Panel. We'll also explain how to jump straight to the last cell you amended when you open an Excel spreadsheet.



**STEP 1** Go to [www.autohotkey.com](http://www.autohotkey.com), click Download AutoHotkey, then the setup file and follow the instructions to install it. You first need to create a new AutoHotkey 'script' - this is the file you need to customise in Notepad to create your keyboard shortcut (also called hotkeys). To do this, right-click any blank space on your Desktop, move your cursor to New, then click AutoHotkey Script. Give the script the name of the action you want to perform using the keyboard shortcut - for example 'Open Control Panel' - and press Enter. Now right-click the file and click Edit Script **1** to open it in Notepad. Don't delete any of the text in Notepad as this is necessary for your hotkey to work.



**STEP 2** To create a keyboard shortcut for opening the Control Panel, click the line below the last line of text (starting SetWorkingDir...). Type **^!c::Run Control Panel**. This will create a shortcut for Ctrl+Alt+C, where ^ refers to Ctrl, ! refers to Alt, and the :: separates the hotkey from the command. By replacing 'Control Panel' and the letter after the Ctrl+Alt command, you can create a shortcut for any program you want (including Word, VLC Player and so on). Press Ctrl+S on your keyboard to save the file, then close Notepad. Now double-click the Open Control Panel script on your Desktop. An 'H' will appear in the notifications area in your Taskbar, indicating the script is running, so just press Ctrl+Alt+C on your keyboard to open your Control Panel.



**STEP 3** You can also use AutoHotkey to create a series of commands. For example, to open an Excel spreadsheet and go straight to the last cell where you entered data. Create and open a new script (see Step 1). To create multiple commands, you need to enter each command on a separate line. On the line below the last line of text, type **^!e::** (which is the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Alt+E). On the next line, type **Run** followed by a space and then the file's location. To add your file's location to Notepad, open the folder containing your file, click a blank space in the long bar at the top of Windows Explorer, press Ctrl+C, then in Notepad press Ctrl+V. On the line beneath that, type **Send ^{end}**, which is the command to always send you to your last position in your Excel file. On the final line, type **RETURN**. Save and close Notepad. Double-click the AutoHotkey script to use that keyboard shortcut.

### NEXT ISSUE

- Identify programs that crash your PC
- Get paid-for iPad apps for free
- Fix 50 Windows 8 problems in one click
- Stop Russian hackers using your webcam

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23 Dec

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## TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

### Schedule CCleaner to run every week

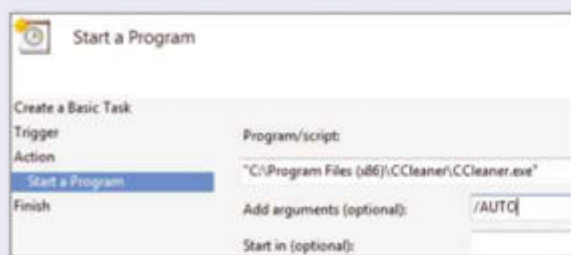
Ever since *Computeractive* introduced me to the wonderful CCleaner, I've been using it religiously to declutter my PC. I particularly like the way it keeps random error messages to a minimum and deletes internet cookies that may leave bits of personal information on my PC for hackers to exploit. I use it so often, in fact, that I decided to make it run on a schedule.

Click the Start button, type **task scheduler** and press Enter. Click Create Basic Task at the top right and name it 'Run CCleaner'. Click Next, choose how often you want CCleaner to run (I recommend weekly) and then keep clicking Next until you reach the 'Start a Program' screen. In the 'Program /script' field, click Browse and navigate to the CCleaner setup file (it will have a .exe suffix) on your PC. You should find this by navigating to **C:\Program Files (or Program Files x86)\CCleaner\CCleaner.exe**. In the 'Add arguments' field, type **/AUTO** (see screenshot) and click Next. Next, tick the 'Open the

Properties' box and click Finish. Finally, tick the 'Run with highest privileges' box. If you prefer CCleaner to run when you're away from your PC, click the Conditions tab and set CCleaner to run only if your PC has been idle for a certain amount of time (such as 1 minute, 5 minutes, 10 minutes and so on) by clicking the first dropdown menu.

Once you've finished setting the schedule, click OK. You should now see 'Run CCleaner' at the top left of your Task Scheduler library. If you ever want to tweak or stop your scheduled scans, right-click Run CCleaner in the Task Scheduler library and click Properties or Delete – depending on what you want to do.

Eric Tyler



The winner of every Tip of the Fortnight wins this exclusive Computeractive mug!



#### YOUTUBE

##### Watch age-restricted YouTube videos without signing in

After reading your Secret Tips for YouTube (Issue 437), I decided to give something back to *Computeractive* with a very useful tip of my own. Now in my fifties, I can safely say that I'm well past the age of being asked to prove my age when I buy a bottle of wine at my local off licence.

That being the case, I find it annoying that YouTube asks me to sign into my non-existent Google account every time I try watching an age-restricted video. Fortunately, I've discovered a way around this irritation. Next time you're denied permission to watch a video, delete the term 'watch?' from the video's URL (in the URL bar), and replace the = with a /. For example, to watch a restricted video at [youtube.com/watch?v=Hbe5K9yKZsU](http://youtube.com/watch?v=Hbe5K9yKZsU) (this is a made-up URL for demonstration purposes only), you should change it to [youtube.com/v/Hbe5K9yKZsU](http://youtube.com/v/Hbe5K9yKZsU).

An even simpler way to watch this video is to replace the 'www.' in the address bar with 'nsfw', so the video URL should read: [nsfwyoutube.com/watch?v=Hbe5K9yKZsU](http://nsfwyoutube.com/watch?v=Hbe5K9yKZsU). Disclaimer: This advice is not intended for under-18s!

David Weston

#### SOCIAL NETWORKING

##### Remove annoying people from your Facebook News Feed

Not wanting to come across as rude or offensive I accept a lot of Facebook friend requests, even from people I barely know. Sadly, there's a price to pay for my unwillingness to offend and that's having my News Feed bombarded with posts that are of little interest to me. Thankfully, I recently read that Facebook has introduced an easier way to see which of your Facebook friends post the most and then 'unfollow' them, so their posts don't appear on your news feed. This is a real godsend because now I neither have to remove them as friends nor read their mundane ramblings.

To do this, move your cursor to News Feed in the top-left corner of your Facebook homepage, click the cog that appears and then click 'Edit settings'. You'll see a list of all the people, groups and pages that have appeared most in your news feed over the past week. Find the people whose posts you'd like to remove from your News Feed and click the Following button beside their name to unfollow them. If you change your mind later, repeat the steps, find their name in the Unfollowed list below and then click Follow.

Deirdre Richards

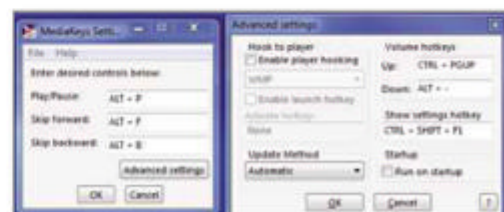
#### MUSIC PLAYBACK

##### Control music and volume using keyboard shortcuts

I have a standard keyboard that I'm perfectly happy with. But if there's one thing that I felt I lacked, it was the ability to manage music playback and control the volume on my PC (for any media program) by using keyboard shortcuts.

Rather than buy an entirely new keyboard with dedicated buttons for this, I discovered MediaKeys ([www.snipca.com/14428](http://www.snipca.com/14428)), a simple program that lets you create keyboard shortcuts to control music playback and your PC's volume. Once you've installed and opened it, click the text boxes for functions such as Play/Pause and type the key combinations you'd like to use (see screenshot below). To control your volume, click 'Advanced settings' and do the same for 'Volume hotkeys'. Click OK to activate your shortcuts.

Adam Walewski



# Phone and Tablet Tips

Brilliant things to do on your device

## ANDROID

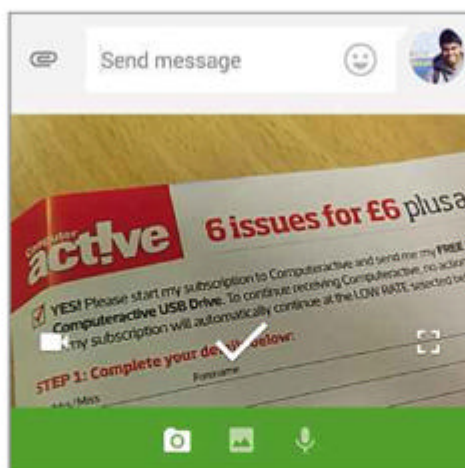
### Change your default messaging app



Google has now released a new, free messaging app called Messenger (not to be confused with Facebook Messenger), which is based on its Android 5.0 'Material Design'. You can use it on any device running Android Jelly Bean and it's easy to set it as your default messaging app.

Download the app from [www.snipca.com/14487](http://www.snipca.com/14487), open it and then tap Yes. Messenger will begin importing your messages from your phone's default messaging app. Tap the yellow '+' symbol at the bottom right to start composing a new message. Tap a recipient's name in your phone's contacts to add them. You can add more recipients by tapping the '+' symbol again.

If you have MMS enabled, you can send a photo or audio message. Tap the attach (paper clip) icon at the bottom left (beside the text field), which will activate your device's camera. Tap the tick mark to take a photo (see screenshot above right) and the small triangle icon to send it. To send a photo that's already on your device, tap the Gallery icon (two mountains) at the bottom, then tap the photo. To record and add an audio message, tap and hold the microphone icon, speak your message and then release the icon. Tap the small triangle icon to send these messages.



If you want to set Messenger as your default messaging app, tap the three dots at the top right and then tap Settings. Next, tap the first option, 'Change your default SMS app', then tap 'Default SMS app' and select Messenger. Tap Yes to confirm.

## ANDROID

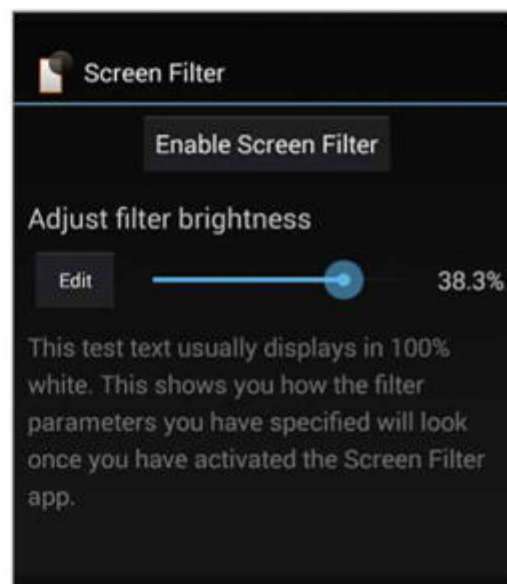
### Make your device easier to read in the dark



You can adjust your device's brightness by tapping Brightness in your notification panel (swipe down from the top of your device), and then moving the slider. If you find that your device's lowest brightness setting is still too bright for you (especially if you like to use it in the dark but don't want to suffer from eye strain), you should

install the free app Screen Filter ([www.snipca.com/14488](http://www.snipca.com/14488)), which will reduce your device's brightness even further.

As soon as you open the app, you'll notice that your device's brightness is automatically reduced. To customise the app's default brightness setting, go to your notification pane and tap Screen Filter. Next, tap and move the slider to adjust the Screen Filter brightness (see screenshot below). The dummy text below the slider indicates how brightly text will be displayed on your device. Tap Enable Screen Filter to activate the setting you want. To disable Screen Filter, simply tap its option in your notification panel.



## Best New Apps

What you should install this fortnight

### Google Maps

Free

Android: [www.snipca.com/14490](http://www.snipca.com/14490)

iOS: [www.snipca.com/14491](http://www.snipca.com/14491)

Google's updated maps app is based on its new 'Material Design'. Tap the circular blue arrow icon at the bottom right and type your start and end points to get directions. 'Explore around you' at the bottom to see local restaurants and attractions.



### Crop on the fly

Free

iOS: [www.snipca.com/14492](http://www.snipca.com/14492)

Videos shot in portrait mode will always appear with black bars to the left and right when viewed on a PC's media player or on YouTube. This app finds all the videos recorded in portrait mode on your device, then lets you convert them to landscape by dragging the cropping box slider.

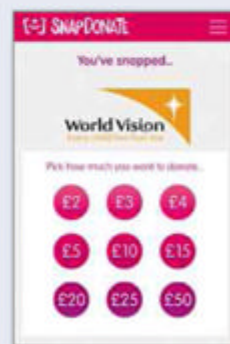


### SnapDonate

Free

Android: [www.snipca.com/14493](http://www.snipca.com/14493)

SnapDonate lets you donate money to over 13,000 UK charities. You can either select one of the charities from the app or take a photo of a charity's logo and let SnapDonate identify the charity for you. All your donations are made securely through the fundraising platform, JustGiving.





iOS

## Download iPhone apps on your iPad



There's an easy way to download iPhone-only apps to your iPad.

The slight downside is that images may not be as quite as sharp (because they are optimised for the smaller iPhone screen), but the difference is hardly noticeable. Also bear in mind that your ability to use any features in an app that let you make calls or send messages will be restricted.

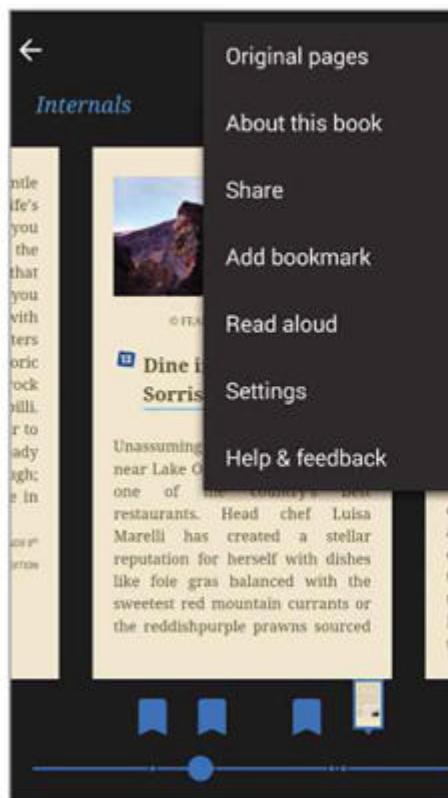
Open the App Store on your iPad and type the name of the iPhone app you want in the search field at the top right. Next, tap the iPad Only dropdown menu at the top left then tap iPhone Only. You'll now see search results containing iPhone apps. Tap Free or the price button below the app to install it. Open the app and use the circular 1X/2X icon at the top right to toggle between a smaller iPhone-size view or the larger view that fits your iPad's screen.

ANDROID

## Use Play Books' new navigation tools



The Google Play Books app ([www.snipca.com/14489](http://www.snipca.com/14489)) has been updated to make it easier to navigate between pages and see your bookmarked pages. The new



navigation includes thumbnails of each page that you can swipe left or right.

Open a book and tap any page to see a thumbnail image of it, with a blue slider at the bottom. Google calls this 'skim mode'. Swipe across the thumbnails to see other pages and tap a page thumbnail to read it. Use the slider at the bottom to jump to any location in the book (this is similar to using the scrubber bar on a music player app to jump to a particular position in a track). To bookmark a page, tap the three dots at the top right in skim mode and then tap 'Add bookmark' (see screenshot below left). A bookmark icon will appear just above the page's position on the slider.

iOS

## Delete messages older than 30 days



You can read any old text message from a particular contact by tapping their name in your Messages app and tap the conversation entry. Having too many old messages, however, takes up a lot of space on your device and slows it down. One way to make sure this doesn't happen is to use a new feature Apple introduced in iOS 8. It automatically deletes messages older than 30 days or one year.

Open Settings, scroll down and tap Messages. Next, tap Keep Messages, change it to 30 Days (or 1 Year) and then tap Delete to confirm.

## Games With Kids

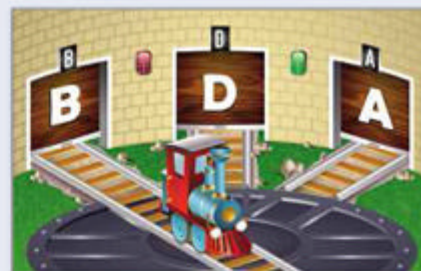
What to play together on your phone and tablet

AGES 0-5

### Kids ABC Letter Trains

£1.86 [www.snipca.com/14494](http://www.snipca.com/14494) (Android)

This app uses games to teach your toddler how to identify, write and pronounce each letter of the alphabet. For example, they can drag a train across a track shaped like letters to learn how to write it. Every game is followed by a small test to reinforce what they've learned.



AGES 6-10

### Amazing World Atlas

£1.80 [www.snipca.com/14495](http://www.snipca.com/14495) (Android)

£1.99 [www.snipca.com/14499](http://www.snipca.com/14499) (iOS)

Created by Lonely Planet, this app has five games aimed at improving your child's knowledge of the world. Our favourite is Capital Match, which shows you a country on a map with its flag and asks you to select its capital city.



AGES 11-16

### Glow Hockey 2

Free [www.snipca.com/14497](http://www.snipca.com/14497) (Android)

Free [www.snipca.com/14498](http://www.snipca.com/14498) (iOS)

Challenge your teenager to a game of air hockey. Choose the colour of your puck, paddles and board. Stop your opponent scoring while trying to score yourself by sliding your paddle from side to side across the pitch. The game is better suited to a tablet's bigger screen.



## WINDOWS 7, 8, 8.1

### Pin network connections to your Taskbar



There are times when you may need to disconnect from the internet – for example when your Wi-Fi signal is weak and you need to restart your router. In Windows – particularly Windows 8 – it can be a bit fiddly accessing your network connections.

If your Wi-Fi signal is temperamental, it's a good idea to create a shortcut for your network connections and pin it on your Taskbar. Right-click any blank space on your Desktop, move your cursor to New and then click Shortcut. In the box that appears, type: `explorer shell:::{7007ACC7-3202-11D1-AAD2-00805FC1270E}`, then click Next. Name your shortcut (for example, 'Network Connections') and then click Finish. The shortcut will be added to your Desktop with a Windows Explorer icon.

To change this icon, right-click it, click Properties and then click Change Icon. Type `ncpa.cpl` in the field at the top and then click OK (to access the Windows Network Connection icon). Click OK, Apply and then OK again. Finally, right-click the network connection shortcut and click 'Pin to Taskbar'. To reposition it on your Taskbar, click and drag it wherever you want.

## WINDOWS 7, 8, 8.1

### Open any sub-folder or Taskbar item in a new window



By default, when you open any sub-folder on your PC it will open in the same window as its main folder (or drive). But there's an easy way to set it so that it opens in a new window. This is very useful when you want to drag and drop files from one folder to the other. Open any folder (or drive) on your PC and keep the Ctrl key pressed while double-clicking any of its sub-folders to see them in a new window. Minimise and reposition both windows so that they fit side by side on your Desktop. You can now drag and drop files from one folder to another.

In a similar way, you can also launch a new window of any open item on your Taskbar (such as a new browser session or Word document). To do this, simply press the Shift key while clicking that Taskbar item.

## WINDOWS VISTA, 7

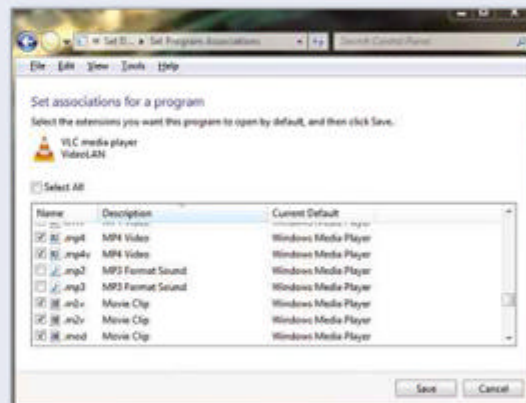
### Set default programs for file types



There's an easy way to set the default programs (for browsing, emails, and so on) on your PC. You can also set a default program to open a particular file type (such as music or video files). Click the Start button and then type **default programs**. Next, click 'Set your default programs'. You'll now see a list of all the programs on your PC on the left.

We'll first show you how to set your default email program, using Outlook as an example. Click Microsoft Outlook on the left, then click 'Choose defaults for this program' at the bottom, tick Select All at the top left, and then click Save at the bottom right.

Setting a default program for a particular file type is especially useful if you have programs (such as photo editors Paint and Paint.NET) that do a similar job but you feel one is better for editing .JPG files and the other is better for .PNG files. In this case, you can set Paint to open JPEGs and Paint.NET to open PNGs by default, for example. This is also useful if you want to set two media players as defaults for music and video files respectively. For example, if



Windows Media Player is currently your default player for both music and video files, you can set VLC as the sole default player for video files.

To do this, click 'VLC media player' on the left, then click 'Choose defaults for this program' below. You'll now see three columns – Name (this refers to file extensions, such as .mov and .mp3), Description (explaining what those extensions mean) and Current Default (stating your current default program for that extension). Click the Description header to organise all your files based on description. Tick all the files with the words 'video' or 'movie clip' in their description (see screenshot above) and then click Save at the bottom.

## WINDOWS 8, 8.1

### Disable the login screen when your PC wakes up

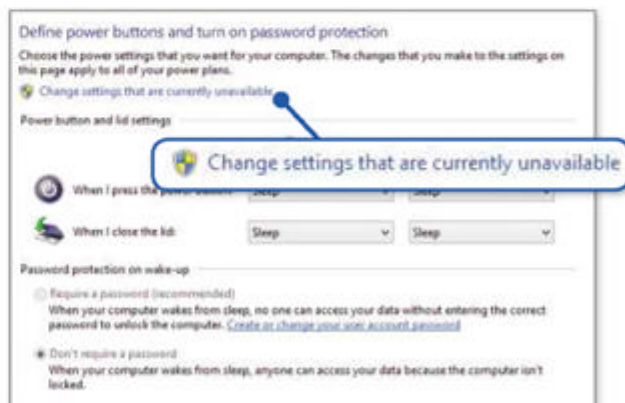


We highly recommend locking your PC with a password. However, it can be frustrating

having to type this password each time you want to log into your PC after you wake it up from Sleep or Standby mode. Luckily, Windows 8 has an option to disable your password login screen when waking from these modes. Type **control panel** in the Modern tile interface and press Enter. Click Power Options, 'Require password on wake-up' in the left-hand pane, and then select the

'Don't require a password' option.

If this option is greyed out, click 'Change settings that are currently unavailable' (see screenshot below) to activate it, select the option, and then click Save.





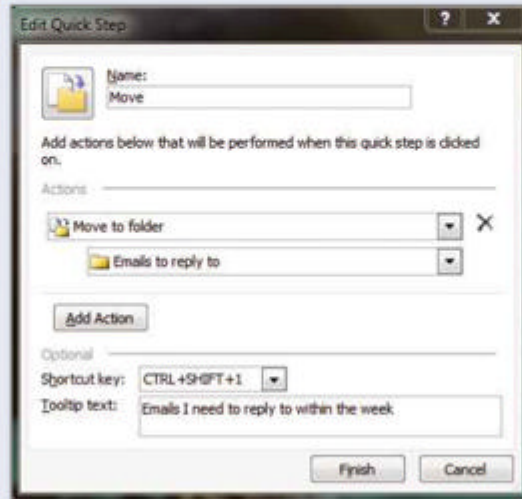
### OUTLOOK

## Move multiple emails with one click



Using Outlook, you can carry out a whole series of actions with one click (called 'Quick Steps'). These actions include moving or copying emails to any folder, batch-deleting emails, and batch-marking emails as read or unread. In this example, we'll show you how to set up a Quick Step to move multiple emails to any folder with one click (or by using a keyboard shortcut).

Click Create New in the Quick Steps section of the Home tab. Give your Quick Step a name (for example, Move). In the first Actions dropdown menu, select 'Move to folder'. A second dropdown menu will then appear prompting you to choose which folder you want as the



destination. Click the dropdown menu and select the folder you want.

Alternatively, you can create a

keyboard shortcut for this action. Click the 'Shortcut key' dropdown menu and choose one of the available key combination options. In the 'Tooltip text' field, type a hint describing the action you just created and then click Finish.

You'll see this Quick Step added as an option in your Quick Steps box. Move your cursor to it to read the tooltip description you just typed.

Now any time you want to move an email to the folder you selected, click that email (or select multiple emails by pressing Ctrl and clicking all of them) and then click Move (or whatever you named the Quick Step) in the Quick Steps box.

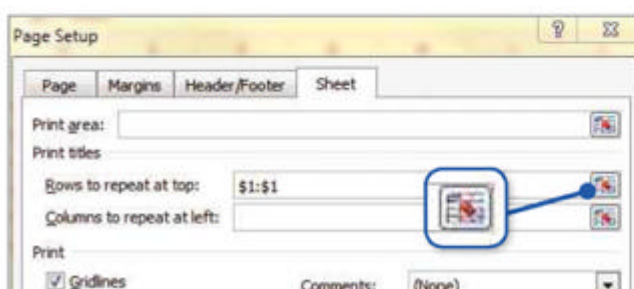
### EXCEL

## Print an Excel spreadsheet with column headings on every page



If you've ever printed data from an Excel spreadsheet on more than one page, you'll notice that the column headings only appear on the first page, which can be frustrating. Thankfully, there's an easy way to add these headers to every page you print.

To do this, click the Page Layout tab at the top, then in the Page Setup section click Print Titles. Next, click the small box with the red arrow in the 'Rows to repeat at top' section (see screenshot below). Move your cursor to the left of the row containing the column headings (usually row 1) and click it to highlight your headers. A numeric value representing this column will now appear in the box. Click the small box with the red arrow to return to your Page Setup window with this value.



By default, Excel doesn't add gridlines to printouts, but if you want to add them, tick Gridlines in the Print section. Click Print Preview to see how your print-out will look, then click Print.

### WORD

## Add and refresh the date and time in your document



One of Word's lesser-known functions lets you set a date and time in your document that can be set to be automatically updated each time you make changes to it.

Click anywhere in the document where you want to insert the date and time (right at the start or end is probably best). Next, click the Insert tab, then Date & Time (in the Text section). Click the Language dropdown menu and select 'English (UK)' to see a list of UK date and time formats – it's set to 'English (US)' by default. Now click the Set As Default button and then click Yes (to set the UK date and time formats as your default).

Select one of the options on the left, which include a number of different formats (date only, date and time, time only and so on). If you're likely to

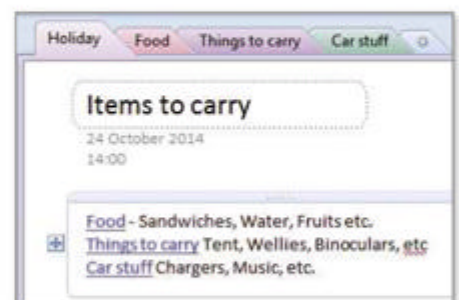
make changes to that file in the future and want your selected format to update automatically, tick 'Update automatically' below. Finally, click OK.

### ONENOTE

## Create links to other sections of your notebook



There's an easy way to create links to other sections of your notebook. To do this, type two open square brackets (next to the P key), followed by that section's name and then two closed brackets. For example, type `[[that section's name]]` to create a link to it.



In our screenshot above you'll see we created links to the Food and 'Things to carry' sections by typing `[[Food]]` and `[[Things to carry]]` in our Holiday section. As soon as you type that, the text is then converted into a link (see screenshot) that you can click to open that section.

# Windows Safe Mode

Boot to Safe Mode automatically, run it in Windows 8, and remove malware from your PC

### Use Safe Mode to remove malware more quickly

There are a number of reasons to run antivirus programs in Safe Mode. It runs fewer processes than normal mode, so it's harder for any malware lurking on your PC to affect these and cause crashes or interrupt virus scans. Another reason is that scans run faster than in normal mode, while being just as thorough. Our favourite antivirus program – and the winner of our past four Antivirus Megatests – is Kaspersky Internet Security 2015 ([www.snipca.com/14212](http://www.snipca.com/14212)). If your PC is particularly slow, then you should consider using Malwarebytes Anti-Malware ([www.snipca.com/14312](http://www.snipca.com/14312)), which is a faster alternative and uses less memory. You can install any antivirus program in Safe Mode, just as you would in normal mode.

### Open Safe Mode in Windows 8

Booting to Safe Mode on a Windows 8/8.1 PC is not as straightforward as it is in earlier versions. This is because Windows 8/8.1 doesn't register the F8 key stroke as your PC is booting. Instead, in the Modern tile interface, click the Power



Open Safe Mode in Windows 8/8.1 by pressing the Shift key when you restart your PC

button at the top right, hold the Shift key on your keyboard, then click Restart.

Your PC will boot to a blue screen (see screenshot above) with several options. Click Troubleshoot, 'Advanced options', Start-up Settings, and then click Restart to boot to a Startup Settings screen. Select option 4, 5 or 6, depending on which version of Safe Mode you want to boot to (the 'with networking' option is probably most useful because it gives you internet access).

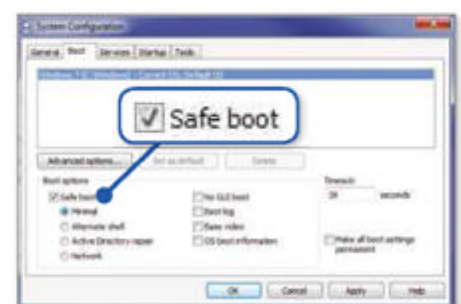
### Find out what's causing your PC to crash

If your PC crashes regularly, then booting

to Safe Mode can help identify the problem through a process of elimination. Safe Mode doesn't use drivers for your motherboard, graphics card, sound card, and other hardware, so if your PC crashes while you're in Safe Mode, then you know it's not one of your hardware drivers causing the problem. If you're crashing in Safe Mode, you could have Registry errors, in which case you should use CCleaner ([www.snipca.com/14446](http://www.snipca.com/14446)) in normal Windows mode to fix them. In the worst case scenario, you may have damaged hardware (such as your hard drive or RAM) that might need replacing.

### Boot to Safe Mode by default

Because of its minimal requirements, Safe Mode can be a faster way to carry out basic activities on your PC – such as web browsing and running antivirus scans (see first tip). If your PC is slow in normal mode or blighted by malware, you can get Windows to boot to Safe Mode by default every time you switch on your PC. In normal mode, click the Start button, type `msconfig` and press Enter. Click the Boot tab, then tick the box next to 'Safe boot'. Select Network if you want internet access in Safe Mode. Click Apply, OK and restart your PC. To boot to normal mode again, repeat the process and untick the 'Safe boot' box.



Tick the 'Safe boot' box and select Network for Windows to automatically boot to Safe Mode

### Use your printer in Safe Mode

By default, your printer won't work in Safe Mode. But there's an easy way to change this. In Safe Mode, click the Start button, type `cmd`, right-click its search result and then click 'Run as administrator'. In Command Prompt, type `REG ADD HKLM\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\SafeBoot\Network\Spooler /VE /T REG_SZ /F /D Service` (see screenshot below) then press Enter. Next, type `net start spooler` in Command Prompt and press Enter to start your printer. Every time you boot to Safe Mode, you'll need to type `net start spooler` into Command Prompt for your printer to work.

```
C:\Users\robert_zak>REG ADD HKLM\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\SafeBoot\Network\Spooler /VE /T REG_SZ /F /D Service
```

Make your printer work in Safe Mode by typing this into the Command Prompt





## SpaceX

What sounds like the latest film in a series of blockbusters, is actually a tech company with very big plans

### What is it?

A space-transport company based in California, founded by billionaire entrepreneur and tech pioneer Elon Musk (pictured, below). He co-founded PayPal in 2000, which two years later he sold to eBay for \$1.5 billion. He used some of that money to launch SpaceX ([www.spacex.com](http://www.spacex.com)) that same year.

### So it's definitely not a *Thunderbirds* spin-off?

No, though its mission would befit a Gerry Anderson show: "to revolutionise space technology, with the ultimate goal of enabling people to live on other planets". In March 2011, Musk said that he hopes to send people to Mars within 10 to 20 years.

SpaceX has already achieved much in its short life. In 2010, it became the first private company to put a spacecraft in orbit, then return it to Earth, while in 2012 it became the first to dock a spacecraft with the International Space Station. It's also developing 'space taxis' for Nasa, in order to put US astronauts into orbit.

Its latest venture is to launch a fleet of micro-satellites, which once in orbit would provide the world with low-cost, unrestricted internet. In November, Musk tweeted to confirm the existence of the project, following a story in *The Wall Street Journal*.

### How soon will it launch?

Probably not until the end of this decade.

The company would need to build a factory to make the satellites, which will only be possible if technical and financial hurdles can be overcome. The project also requires regulatory approval from US authorities to use specific bands on the communication spectrum.

But the biggest challenge is to build satellites that each weigh less than 250



pounds (half the weight of the smallest currently used), and cost less than \$1 million to build. The whole scheme could cost as much as \$1 billion, with a fleet of 700 satellites proposed initially.

Such a fleet could provide blanket internet coverage around the world, helping bring the web to developing nations and remote locations previously unable to get online. Naturally, Musk's own SpaceX company would be used to put the satellites into orbit.

For updates on the project, follow Musk on Twitter (@ElonMusk). He regularly tweets about SpaceX's achievements, as well as news on Tesla Motors, the electric-car company he co-founded.



Elon Musk hopes to deliver satellite broadband worldwide

### Are any other companies planning similar schemes?

Yes, two in particular. You may have heard of them - Google and Facebook. In June, it was reported that Google plans to spend £1bn to launch 180 satellites. The company also runs Project Loon ([www.google.com/loon](http://www.google.com/loon)), which aims to

provide internet access using hot-air balloons - not as high-tech as satellites, but still an ambitious project.

Facebook, meanwhile, confirmed in March that it had hired scientists from Nasa to "build drones, satellites and lasers to deliver the internet to everyone". Both companies want to be the biggest company delivering satellite internet to the 4.8 billion in the world without access to the web.

### So will I be able to use this satellite internet?

Probably not, unless you relocate to a remote African village. But some companies do deliver satellite broadband to the UK, such as Tooway ([www.tooway.co.uk](http://www.tooway.co.uk); from £15 a month) and Avonline (<http://avonlinebroadband.com>; from £9.95 a month). As long as you can attach a dish to your home, you can get satellite broadband up to 22Mbps, making it an effective way to get reasonably fast speeds in areas without cable broadband. Also, because it doesn't use a phone line, you don't need to pay line rental to BT. However, set-up fees are around £50, and you have to buy a dish and other equipment, which could cost up to £300.

# STOP OLD HARDWARE KILLING YOUR PC

Your PC is only as healthy as the hardware inside it. Barry Collins reveals how to diagnose problems with your hard drive, processor and other components

## KEY POINTS

- Discover what can go wrong with your PC's hard drive, processor and memory
- Use free software to spot these problems before they happen
- Discover hidden Windows tools that monitor your hardware's health
- Know when to replace your laptop battery
- Fix or replace ageing and malfunctioning components before they kill your PC

**P**eople sometimes treat their PC like a toaster: if it stops working properly, they throw it out and buy a new one. In most cases, that's a big waste of money and an even bigger waste of perfectly good hardware. It's like sending a car to the scrapheap because it needs a new exhaust.

One of the best things about the modular design of PCs is that if one component fails it can often be replaced. The key is to work out when (and where) you've got a problem and knowing how to fix it.

Here, we'll show you how to detect and anticipate problems in your PC's hardware before it kills your computer stone dead. We'll cover key PC components such as your hard

drive, memory, **processor** and even your laptop's battery, starting with those elements that are likely to fail first. We also reveal the warning signs that your hardware is at death's door.

Then we'll look at the best free tools for getting advance warning of potential failures, so you can fix any problems before they get serious enough to put your PC out of action. A couple of the tools we mention give you a broader overview of your PC's health and its components' specifications, so you know what to buy if anything needs to be replaced.

Follow our advice, and you might get a few more years of good service from a PC that would otherwise be heading for the local tip.



## FIND AND FIX HARD-DRIVE PROBLEMS

### What can go wrong with your hard drive?

Hard drives (also known as disks) are sensitive instruments. They're thin, spinning platters of glass with a head (a piece of metal wrapped in wire) that moves over their surface at incredible speed. All that separates the head from the glass is a magnetic field. Given their fragile build, it's amazing that hard drives work for as long as they do, especially in laptops that are routinely bashed about.

Modern hard drives are much more durable than they used to be, but your hard drive is still the PC component that's most likely to fail because of its age. A study of 25,000 hard drives by cloud-storage company Backblaze ([www.snipca.com/14472](http://www.snipca.com/14472)) found that failure rates rose sharply after three years. Based on the company's tests, the average lifespan of a hard drive is six years. So if you bought your PC before 2009, it's starting to creep into the danger zone.

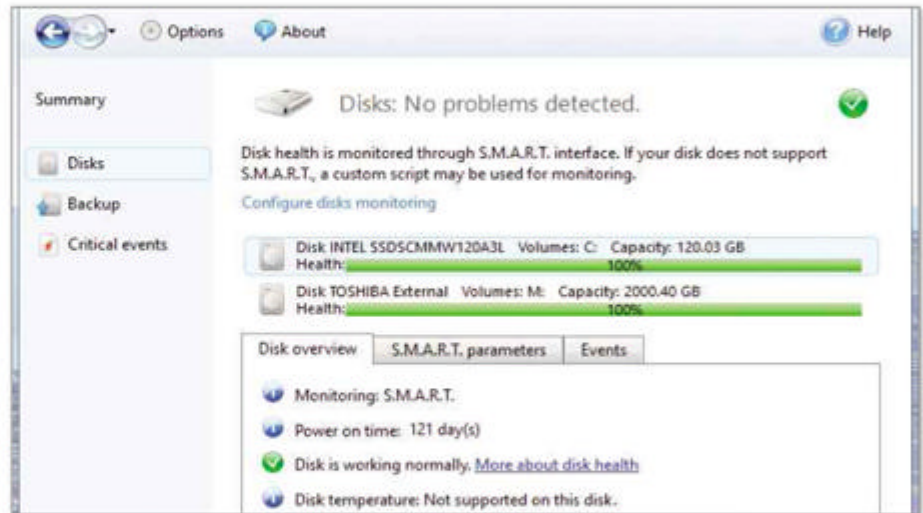
The first sign of a failed hard drive is usually an on-screen message warning you that your operating system is missing. This is because Windows is installed on the primary hard drive, so if the drive fails your PC can't boot. Make sure that you back up your important files in case your hard drive ever does fail.

### Spot hard-drive problems before they happen

Acronis Drive Monitor ([www.snipca.com/14473](http://www.snipca.com/14473)) is a free tool that keeps an eye on the health of your hard drives. You'll have to provide your email address before downloading the program, and the setup wizard includes an offer for Acronis's backup software, but the box isn't pre-ticked, so leave it that way.

Drive Monitor runs quietly in the background, processing information from your PC's built-in SMART system, which measures your hard drive's current health and warns of potential problems. The program gives you a health score for your PC's primary hard drive and any other drive connected to your PC, whether it's a traditional external hard drive or **solid-state drive** (SSD). There's no real cause for concern until your drive-health score dips below 70 per cent.

If Drive Monitor notices something wrong with one of your drives, it issues a pop-up alert on your Desktop. Don't worry if it routinely flags up 'low risk' events – we found it to be a little



Keep an eye on your hard drive's health using Acronis Drive Monitor

over-sensitive.

Also bear in mind that although the SMART warning system is useful, it's no clairvoyant. It won't predict every single hard-drive failure. Indeed, sometimes your best warning system is your ears. A hard drive that's making a strange noise may be on its way out. Data-recovery company Data Cent has a marvellous library of sounds recorded from various makes of failing hard drives ([www.snipca.com/14474](http://www.snipca.com/14474)). Give them a listen and they might help you diagnose a particular problem.

### Replace your hard drive

If you get serious warnings from Acronis Drive Monitor about the health of your hard drive, or you hear it making ominous sounds, it's time to prepare a replacement.

Start by fitting a secondary hard drive. If you're using a traditional Desktop PC, there will probably be spare hard-drive bays into which you can fit a secondary drive. You can then clone the current primary drive on to the secondary drive, and tell the computer to boot automatically from the secondary drive. Alternatively, start afresh and install Windows and all your software on your new drive, and restore your files to it from external hard drives or other backups.

When buying a new hard drive to fit as a secondary drive, first make sure you have the right size (typically 3.5in) and the right connections. You can find this information and other PC specifications by running Speccy (see page 52).

Most PCs bought within the past few years will use the Serial ATA (**SATA**) connection interface, rather than the



If your PC is making a strange noise, Data Cent's sound library can help you work out what's wrong



YouTube has some great tutorials on replacing PC components

old-fashioned **PATA**. This YouTube video ([www.snipca.com/14475](http://www.snipca.com/14475)) takes you through the process of installing a new SATA hard drive on to a Desktop PC.

You can also replace many laptop hard drives. Look for a screwed-on panel on the base of the laptop, usually showing a small cylinder icon. You'll need to clone the data from the old drive to the new one, but many new laptop drives come with a caddy that you can plug into your laptop's USB port to complete this process. ►

## FIND AND FIX PROBLEMS WITH YOUR PC'S PROCESSOR

### What can go wrong with your processor?

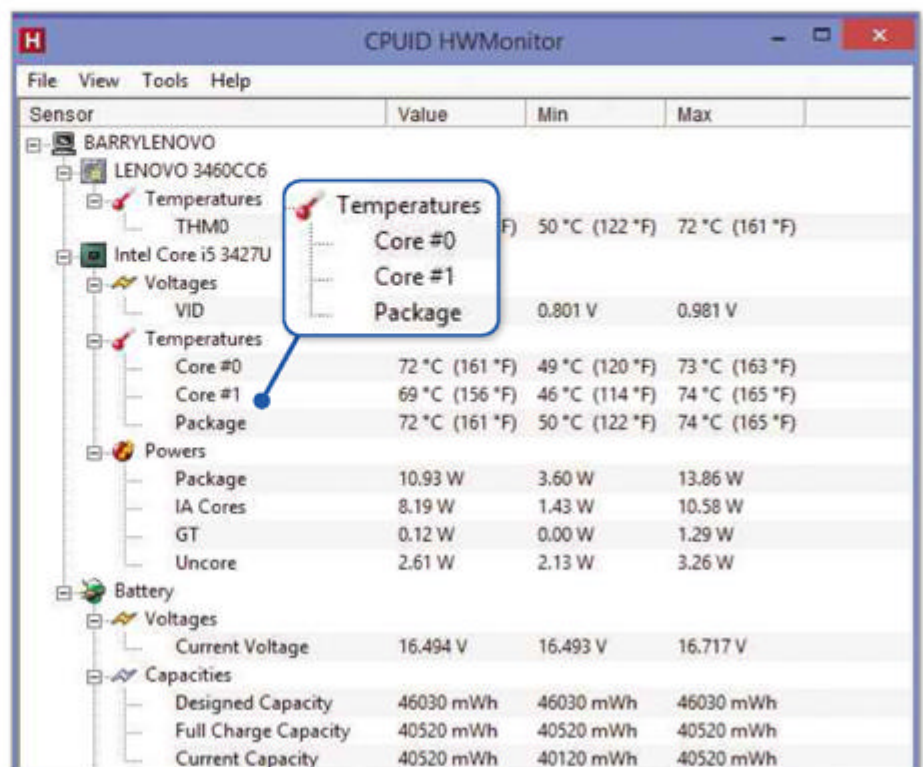
The problem you're most likely to face with your processor (central processing unit or **CPU**) is overheating. If your PC regularly crashes when you're doing something demanding, such as editing video, or when you've simply had it running for a couple of hours, your processor may be getting too hot. When this happens, many processors shut down automatically to prevent damage.

Overheating can also affect other components, including your **graphics card** and hard drive. If you ignore an overheating problem for too long, you could end up with fatally damaged components and an operating system that no longer works.

### Spot processor problems before they happen

There are several free tools that monitor your processor's temperature, and our favourite is HWMonitor ([www.snipca.com/14477](http://www.snipca.com/14477)). To download it, click '1.25 setup' on the right of the page.

Like Acronis Drive Monitor, HWMonitor runs in the background without using much memory. The program records the current, minimum and maximum temperatures of your processor for the entire time it's running, and also monitors the overall temperature of your PC's motherboard. The processor temperatures are the second set of figures



Use HWMonitor to check the temperature of your processor's package and cores

on the HWMonitor listings, usually under the heading Intel or AMD, depending on the make of your processor.

You're not only given the overall temperature for the processor 'package', but also for each individual core within the processor (see screenshot). Normally, overheating problems will affect the whole processor, but if one core is

consistently much hotter than the others, it may indicate that the processor is faulty.

The best way to see if your PC is overheating is to briefly run something demanding, such as a high-resolution video or game, and see what effect it has on the processor.

Processors can heat up to 80 degrees Celsius when they're being pushed hard, ▶

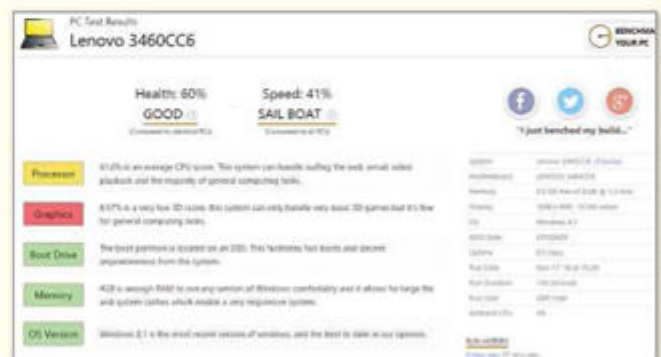
## CHECK YOUR PC'S HEALTH WITH ONE CLICK

Most of the tools and tips we mention in this feature focus on specific PC components, but sometimes you just want a quick, general overview of your computer's health – and there are lots of excellent tools for this job. The best two, in our opinion, are UserBenchmark ([www.userbenchmark.com](http://www.userbenchmark.com)) and Speccy ([www.snipca.com/14486](http://www.snipca.com/14486); click the tiny green 'Piriform.com' link under 'Download from:').

UserBenchmark is a free portable tool that downloads extremely quickly and can scan all the hardware on any computer for a quick insight into its health. It won't give you a detailed diagnosis of what's wrong with your PC, but it will tell you how well it's performing compared with other users' PCs. The lower your percentage rating, the less well you compare.

UserBenchmark is used by a lot of PC-builders who enhance their PCs specifically for playing games, so don't worry if your PC is slower than most. However, if you score is 20 per cent or lower, your hardware may need fixing or upgrading.

Speccy also scans all your PC hardware and delivers a more detailed report than UserBenchmark. It also gives you a



Find out how your PC's health compares with those of other users using the free tool UserBenchmark

comprehensive list of all your components, which comes in very handy if you need to replace something. This list is also useful when you buy a new PC, because it lets you check that you've got all the components you paid for.



# WI-FI

**Finally** in any room\*



- ✓ Better than any Wi-Fi repeater
- ✓ Enjoy Wi-Fi in any room\*
- ✓ Best reception for smartphones and tablets



#### dLAN® 500 WiFi Starter Kit

- Unpack, plug in, get started
- Improves Wi-Fi reception and range
- Engineered in Germany
- 3-year manufacturer's warranty

\* Required: broadband Internet connection, router and active power sockets within one property.



More information:  
[www.devolo.co.uk/wi-fi](http://www.devolo.co.uk/wi-fi)  
Tel.: +44 (0)1865 784344  
Email: [sales@devolo.co.uk](mailto:sales@devolo.co.uk)

**devolo**  
The Network Innovation

but they usually cool down again once the intensive activity has stopped. If HWMonitor indicates your processor is running at these high temperatures after the activity has stopped, you almost certainly have a cooling problem.

### Keep your processor cool

If you're using a Desktop PC, check the PC has enough space for ventilation. Don't push the back of the PC flush against a wall, for example, or keep it inside a small cupboard, because that won't give the hot air generated by your PC an outlet. Also check that the air vents at the back of the PC aren't clogged with dust.

If that's all fine but your PC is still overheating, it's time to open up the PC casing and check the fans are clean and working properly. You'll probably find at least one main fan inside the case, and another one sitting on top of the processor. Check that the fans are running properly when you switch on your computer, and are not covered with dust or fluff. If they are gummed up, switch the computer off and clean the fan blades. In our cover feature in Issue 424 we explained how to give your PC's interior a good clean.

If the main fan doesn't turn at all, its power cord may simply have come loose from the power supply. Check the thin cord running from the fan to the power

supply to ensure there are no loose connections. If the fan has failed completely, it's a fairly inexpensive replacement, but it's probably a job for your local repair shop unless you know your way around the inside of a PC case.

Laptop-cooling problems are much harder to fix because of the restricted access you have to the internal components. Check that the air vents on the side of the laptop are free of dust, and, if they aren't, use a low-power mini-vacuum to suck it out. Also avoid placing the laptop directly on insulated items such as duvets or sofas, which can make them overheat.

## FIND AND FIX PC MEMORY PROBLEMS

### Spot memory problems before they happen

Memory (RAM) problems can be erratic and difficult to diagnose. Chances are, you'll get no advance warning when something's going wrong, as you would with a failing hard drive. The first sign is usually random crashes or a PC that refuses to boot altogether, and this is often caused by faulty sticks of RAM ('chips') that you'll need to replace.

The biggest challenge is identifying the faulty memory modules in the first place, but once again there's a free tool that can do the job – and this time you don't even have to download it. There's a little-known tool tucked away inside all versions of Windows from Vista onwards that will run a check for you.

First, close all your running programs and save any open files. Press Win+R to open Run, then type `mdsched` and press Enter to open the Windows Memory Diagnostic tool. It will ask you if you want to restart your computer immediately to run the test, or run it when you next start your PC. Click the top option, and your computer will

reboot and start the test.

The test takes a little while – just under 15 minutes on our reasonably high-powered laptop – but it shows you the results as it progresses. But you don't need to watch the results in real time because if Windows finds any problems, it will alert you with a notification when your PC restarts after the test. Click the notification at the bottom-right corner of your Desktop to read the full report.

### Find out which chip is the problem

If you're using a Desktop PC or a laptop with multiple sticks of RAM, you may be able to identify and replace the faulty chip.

Start by running Crucial's free portable tool System Scanner ([www.snipca.com/14478](http://www.snipca.com/14478)) to find out how many different memory slots are in your PC and what type of memory they use. Click the light grey 'scan your system' button, then tick the terms and conditions box and click 'download the scanner'. When you run the program's setup (.exe) file, the scan will run in your default browser (it took

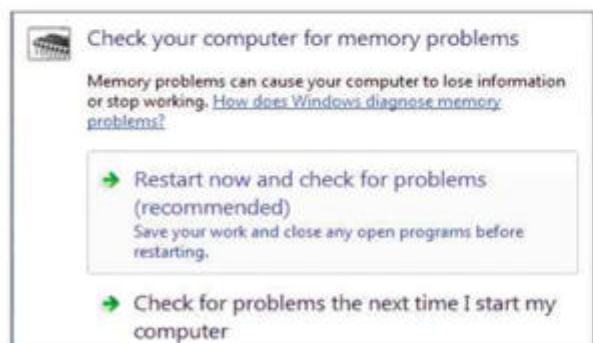
about five minutes on our old Desktop PC in our office). After the scan finishes, a web page will open with information about your installed memory, including its make and model and the number of slots your PC has. The page also offers to sell you recommended components (Crucial is a hardware company, after all) but you don't have to buy anything.



### Get information about your PC's memory and slots with Crucial System Scanner

If you have multiple chips, and you're confident you can replace them yourself, you can identify the bad chip by removing them one at a time. Switch off the PC, remove one of the chips, then switch it on and see if the problem has been resolved. If the PC continually crashes when one memory chip is in place but not the other, you know which one is causing the problem.

Sometimes the crashes may not be caused by a faulty chip, but by a chip that's come loose in its socket. This is highly likely to be the case if you've recently moved your PC to a different room or it's had an accidental knock. Check each stick of RAM is seated properly, and ensure the little clips at each end of the RAM sockets are tightly in place.



Use the Windows Memory Diagnostic tool to find problems with your PC's RAM

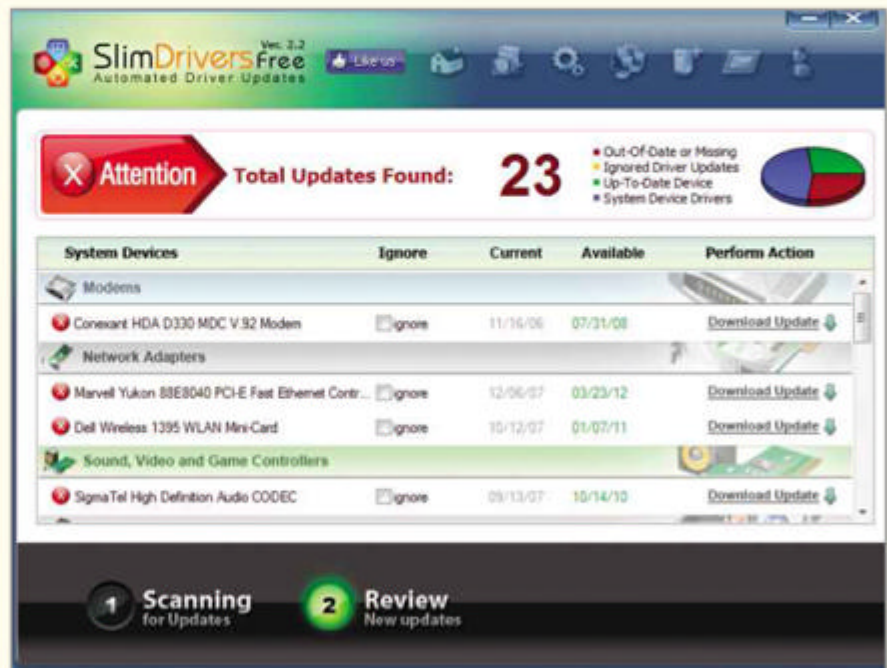


## FIX HARDWARE BY FIXING ITS DRIVERS

Sometimes it's not the hardware itself that's faulty, but the software that drives it. Windows drivers are automatically kept up to date, so if you're having driver problems you should check your Windows Update settings. On Windows 7 or later, go to the Control Panel, click 'System and Security', then Windows Update and click Change Settings. Make sure Windows is set to install recommended updates as well as the essential security updates.

In Issue 436 (page 60), we showed you how to use the free program SlimDrivers ([www.snipca.com/14485](http://www.snipca.com/14485)) to find and update old drivers. When you're looking at the summary of results, focus on the most important drivers: graphics cards (or 'display adapters'), network adapters and hard drives.

Installing the updates recommended by Windows or SlimDrivers should ensure you're up to date, but it may not resolve all your driver problems. If you see error messages warning you that Windows can't find a driver or there's some other driver problem, make a note of the driver in question and visit the manufacturer's website to check for the latest drivers.



Use SlimDrivers to identify which of your PC components need new drivers

The best way to find specific drivers is to type the exact component name into Google (for example, 'AMD Radeon HD 6990'), followed by the word 'drivers'. We

recommend using the manufacturer's official website, rather than third-party sites, to minimise the risk of downloading unwanted junk.

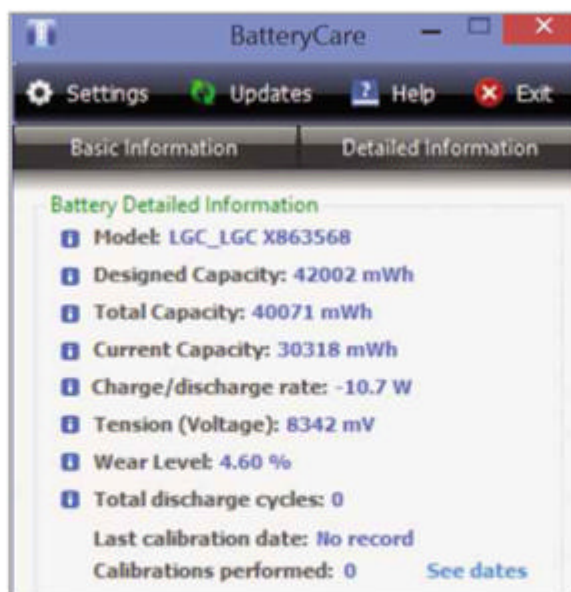
## FIND AND FIX LAPTOP BATTERY PROBLEMS

### Test the health of your laptop's battery

There are dozens of free tools that claim to measure the health of your laptop's battery, but many do no more than the power-management options already built into Windows (here's an explanatory video from Microsoft: [www.snipca.com/14480](http://www.snipca.com/14480)).

One tool definitely worth looking at is BatteryCare ([www.snipca.com/14481](http://www.snipca.com/14481)). This battery-health monitor was created by developer Felipe Laurencio after he "damaged two laptop batteries in less than a year" ([www.snipca.com/14508](http://www.snipca.com/14508)) and couldn't find a tool to help him manage battery-discharge cycles. You will need to be vigilant when installing it, to avoid inviting unwanted extras onto your computer. Click the green BatteryCare Free Download button, run the installer and click 'I do not accept' when adware (in our case a game based on *The Godfather*) is offered. We did this, and sure enough BatteryCare was installed on its own, with no *Godfather*.

Once installed, BatteryCare sits in



Discover detailed information about your laptop's battery using free tool BatteryCare

your system tray and gives you loads of information about the state of your battery. When the laptop isn't charging, the icon shows a percentage battery charge, along with the time left (in hours

and minutes) until the battery is likely to run out. Right-click the icon, click Show and go to the Detailed Information tab for a closer look at your battery.

Perhaps the most telling statistic is the Wear Level, which shows how much capacity the battery has lost since it was new. So a Wear Level of 50 per cent means your laptop will run for half the time on one battery charge, that it did when it was new. Once you start getting past 80 per cent (which means the battery only lasts 20 per cent of the time it did when new), your laptop will last for next to no time on battery power. That's when it's time to think about replacing it.

The BatteryCare website also has some excellent information on how to look after your laptop battery ([www.snipca.com/14482](http://www.snipca.com/14482)). The old advice that you



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should fully run down a battery before recharging it no longer applies to today's laptop cells – it's better to top up little and often. However, once every 30 cycles or so you should fully discharge and recharge your battery to maintain the accuracy of the battery gauge. The BatteryCare tool keeps count of these cycles on its Basic Information tab, so you know when it's time to do a full rundown.

If you're running Windows 8/8.1, you can check your battery health using the built-in Battery Report tool. Go to Start, type **cmd** and press Enter to open the Command Prompt, then type **powercfg /batteryreport** (including the space) and press Enter. This instantly saves a file called Battery Report ('battery-report.html') on your PC, in the location shown in the Command Prompt (see screenshot). This file includes a wealth of statistics on how quickly your battery drains and its current capacity versus its intended capacity, plus a current estimate of your laptop's battery life when fully charged.

```

Command Prompt
Microsoft Windows [Version 6.3.9600]
(c) 2013 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

C:\Users\User>powercfg /batteryreport
Battery life report saved to C:\Users\User\battery-report.html.

C:\Users\User>_
    
```

Get a battery report for your Windows 8/8.1 laptop by typing a simple command

## Replace a dead laptop battery

It's not unusual for people to throw out perfectly serviceable laptops because the battery has reached a state where it lasts about as long as the spearmint taste on chewing gum. But in most cases, the battery can simply be replaced.

Replacing your laptop battery is extremely easy if your laptop's back is removable. Even if your laptop is a sealed case with no detachable battery panel, you should be able to remove the battery

if you're good with a screwdriver and have a steady hand.

Buying a new laptop battery can get expensive if you go for the official manufacturer's unit – some cost £150 or more. There is a thriving market in generic compatible batteries, but beware of very cheap rip-offs sold on eBay. Lithium-ion batteries (the type used in laptops) are very volatile. Badly made ones can lead to burns and fires.

If you're going to buy a generic battery, go to a reputable vendor such as Laptops Direct, which has a useful online battery-finding tool ([www.snipca.com/14483](http://www.snipca.com/14483)), or Maplin ([www.snipca.com/14484](http://www.snipca.com/14484)) – though the 'Shop by Rating' box in the left-hand menu has the most baffling ratings we've ever seen. Make sure to match the battery with your exact model of laptop, not just the brand. Even laptops in the same product family can use different types of battery. **ca**



Buy laptop batteries from reputable retailers – and match the battery with your laptop model

Installed batteries	
Information about each currently installed battery	
	BATTERY 1
NAME	45N1071
MANUFACTURER	SMP
SERIAL NUMBER	5192
CHEMISTRY	LiP
DESIGN CAPACITY	46,030 mWh
FULL CHARGE CAPACITY	40,520 mWh
CYCLE COUNT	-

Windows 8's built-in Battery Report tool reveals your battery's specifications and health

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using tools Microsoft hides from you

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# Edit photos using **FREE ONLINE TOOLS**

You no longer need software to turn your photos into masterpieces. **Jane Hoskyn** reveals the free web tools that outclass expensive Desktop programs



**P**hoto-editing programs are digital dinosaurs. They clog up your hard drive, take ages to open and, if you want advanced tools that aren't incredibly difficult to master, they cost a pretty penny.

Online photo editors have advantages far beyond saving money and space. When you edit online, you're working on a virtual version of your photo. This means you can make fine-tuned edits and add dramatic effects without degrading the original file. You can do whatever you want to your photo without destroying it, and export as many versions as you like.

Web tools also bridge the gap between storing, editing and sharing photos. If all

your pictures are stored in Google Drive and shared in Facebook albums, it makes far more sense to edit them online, too. Many of the tools we mention here let you import photos directly (and securely) from your online accounts.

## **Get Photoshop-style tools for free**

If you want professional results without shelling out nearly a tenner a month for Photoshop (PSE, [www.snipca.com/14505](http://www.snipca.com/14505)) or a one-off £66.43 for Photoshop Elements ([www.snipca.com/14506](http://www.snipca.com/14506)), you have a couple of options. You could switch to Gimp ([www.gimp.org](http://www.gimp.org)), which is free but huge and hard to master, or

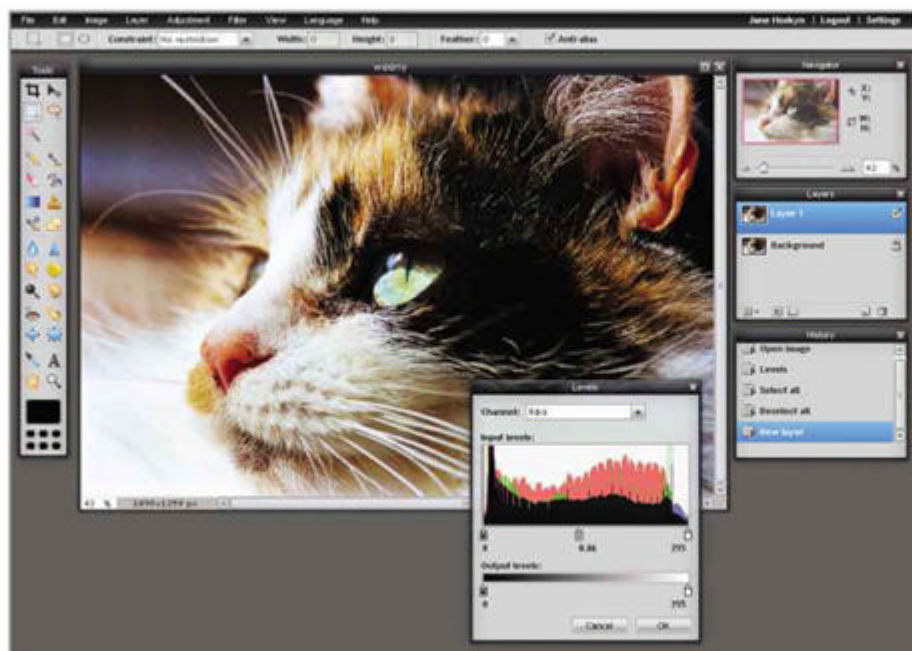
use the brilliant web tool Pixlr Editor ([www.snipca.com/14445](http://www.snipca.com/14445)).

Pixlr is the one online photo editor that can seriously claim to rival PSE or even the full version of Photoshop for sophistication and ease of use. Its main window looks similar to PSE, with familiar menus File, Edit, Image, Layer, Filter and View containing all the expected options such as Undo and Redo, 'Free transform', 'Gaussian blur', 'Flatten image' and so on. The menus aren't quite identical – there's no Select menu (those options are under Edit), and Pixlr's equivalent to PSE's Enhance menu is called Adjustment. This is where you'll find the key editing options such as Levels, Curves and 'Brightness & Contrast', along with 'Auto levels' if you're in a hurry.

The editing window also contains a Photoshop-style Tools sidebar with Lasso, 'Spot heal' and so on, and boxes on the right for working with layers and managing your edit history. You can also add text, resize photos, retouch, cut out selections, warp and draw – all like PSE. To find out more about these tools, click Help to open a detailed help site and FAQ in a new tab.

If Pixlr were just a free copy of Adobe's program, that'd be enough for us to recommend it. But we actually prefer it to PSE. It's much faster, it's easier to learn and customise, and it doesn't litter your PC with program folders and files like Adobe does.

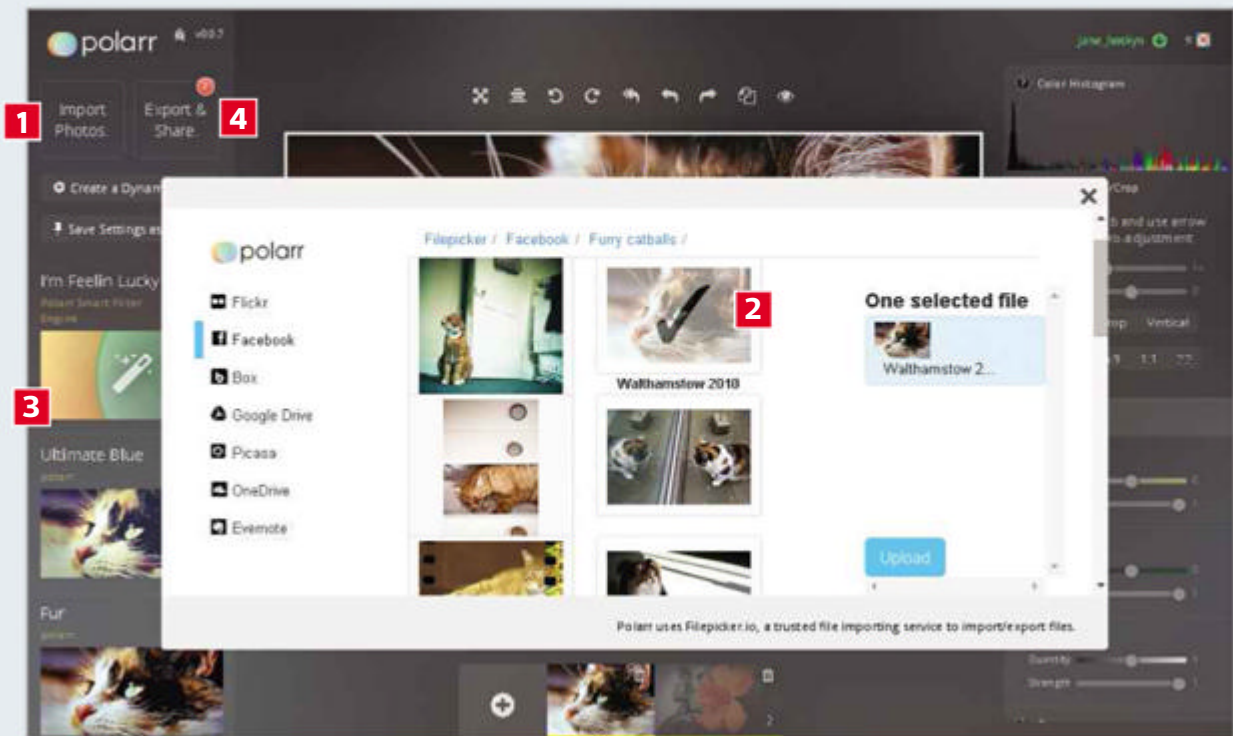
It also gives you loads of photo-import options. You can upload a file from your PC, paste it from your Clipboard, type an image URL (ending with a photo file



Free website Pixlr Editor has similar tools as Photoshop Elements, but more speed and convenience



## Add filters to your Facebook photos using Polarr



**1** To import one of your Facebook photos for editing in Polarr, hover over Import Photos, click the cloud icon, click Facebook, then accept the permissions to link Polarr to your Facebook account.

**2** Click a Facebook album in the list that appears, then click a photo to select it. You can select multiple photos, but opening them all at once in Polarr may slow down your browser. Click Upload.

**3** Scroll through the filters on the left and click one to apply it, or click 'I'm Feelin' Lucky' to apply a random filter. Use the sliders on the right to adjust colour, exposure, contrast and more.

**4** Hover over 'Export & Share' then click the Facebook icon to save your edited photo back to Facebook, with a privacy level that you choose. It won't overwrite the original.

extension such as '.jpg' or '.png' instead of the usual '.html') or import it securely from your Facebook, Flickr or Picasa account. This is a huge advantage and saves you having to download photos from your online albums before editing them.

Pixlr has just launched a free downloadable Windows version ([www.snipca.com/14539](http://www.snipca.com/14539)), which may suit you better if your broadband connection isn't fast or stable enough for online editing.

### Edit photos you've stored online

Free new online tool Polarr ([www.polarr.co/editor](http://www.polarr.co/editor); note that it's '.co', not '.com') maintains a dishonourable tradition of photo websites with silly names ending in 'r' (see also: Pixlr, Flickr, Tumblr). Indeed, it has its own Tumblr blog (<http://polarrist.tumblr.com>) and it's getting a lot of attention as the new tool on the block.

Like the popular app Instagram

(Android [www.snipca.com/14509](http://www.snipca.com/14509); iOS [www.snipca.com/14510](http://www.snipca.com/14510)), Polarr's focus is on fast filters and even faster sharing. It makes it particularly easy to edit photos you've stored online, then share the results. You can import photos from several services that Pixlr doesn't support, such as Dropbox, Google Drive, Box, OneDrive and Evernote as well as Flickr, Picasa and Facebook. The import process requires a few clicks (see screenshot above), but it's much quicker than downloading a photo from the web to edit in a Desktop program.

Polarr is no Pixlr in terms of Photoshop-level tweaking, but there are sliders to adjust colour and exposure, and tools for cropping and rotating. This is all easy to do and Polarr's filters look fantastic, but we found the site to be quite unstable. Most online photo editors are based on Flash, but Polarr uses the newer WebGL (Web Graphics Library), which your PC or browser may not

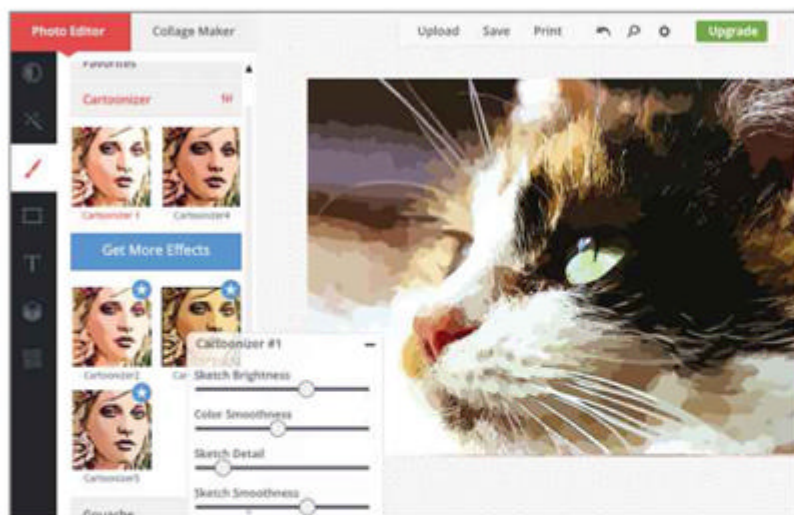
support. For more on Flash and WebGL, see the box on page 60.

### Transform your photos with fun effects

Polarr looks fabulous but is limited by its reliance on WebGL. If this frustrates you try using free Flash-based tool BeFunky ([www.befunky.com/create](http://www.befunky.com/create)) instead. This brilliant all-rounder also lets you import photos from Facebook and Flickr and has good editing tools, but its greatest strength is its range of filters, textures and special effects.

To get started, upload or import your photo and click the icons in the grey sidebar on the left. (Incidentally, BeFunky is one of very few modern photo editors that doesn't have a dark grey editing background. We like that touch of independence.) The wand icon opens scores of categories of filters that are at least as good as those in Polarr or Instagram (we particularly like the

## Edit photos using free online tools



BeFunky is the best tool for fun effects, but you can use it for collages and serious editing too



Cycle quickly through loads of filters, effects and frames using Pixlr-o-matic

flattering colour boost of OrtonStyle), and you can adjust each filter to suit the photo. There are so many filters that we recommend saving your favourites for quicker editing later (right-click a filter thumbnail and click 'Add to Favorites').

Click the brush icon to explore inventive effects such as Cartoonizer, Oilpainting and Inkify, and click the hashes icon at the bottom to try some textures and fantastic light effects. If you click the box icon, you'll open up a world of stickers and emoticons that you may love or hate. You have been warned.

You can save your work as you go along (you'll need to create a free account for

this, or sign in via Facebook), download the finished product to your PC or share it via many online services, including Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, Flickr or Pinterest. Alternatively, create your own BeFunky Gallery ([www.befunky.com/explore](http://www.befunky.com/explore)).

The one downside to BeFunky is that some of its effects can take several seconds to load. For instant gratification, use Pixlr-o-matic ([www.snipca.com/14457](http://www.snipca.com/14457)). This sister tool to Pixlr Editor lets you overlay your photo with filters, frames and special effects (some beautiful, some bizarre) for dramatic results with one click.

Pixlr-o-matic has just two import options: click 'webcam' to take a picture with your PC's camera (if it has one), or 'computer' to upload. Click the thumbnails to try out filters, or click the dial to experiment with effects and frames. When you're happy, click 'save' to export the results, then carry on adding more filters if you want.

### Create photo collages and slideshows

BeFunky recently added a Collage Maker tool for turning a batch of photos into a mosaic. Select photos from your computer or Facebook, drag them onto and around the collage window, then click Edit to play around with effects and layout. You can download your creation as a JPEG (small, better for emailing) or PNG (large, better for printing).

One tool BeFunky doesn't have yet is a slideshow maker, which is a shame because most slideshow tools start asking for money as soon as you want to create slideshows more than a few seconds long. The best exception is Slidely (<https://slide.ly>), a slick new online tool that lets you create collages and galleries as well as slideshows, using photos stored in your online accounts as well as from your PC. You can add your own music, share your slideshows online and even turn your videos into photos and collages - and it's all free. **ca**

## FLASH... AARGH!

Most of the sites we mention here use Flash to power their editing tools and animated effects. Flash is especially evident in Pixlr-o-matic, where a pretty (or pretty annoying) ripple effect does little other than hog memory and show off the site makers' Flash skills.

Most Flash-based web tools, including all those we mention here, are completely safe. But some Flash content is not. If hackers embed malware in a Flash advert and it plays automatically in your browser,



Polarr may not work unless you enable WebGL in your browser

the malware gets into your PC. So set plug-ins as 'click to play' in your browser settings, but add your most used and trusted Flash-based tools to the list of sites that always allow plug-ins.

Polarr's WebGL technology has its downsides, too. Like its video counterpart **HTML5**, WebGL is more powerful and versatile than Flash, so developers love it (you can see some award-winning WebGL sites here: [www.snipca.com/14518](http://www.snipca.com/14518)). What's more, it doesn't install any plug-ins on your PC.

But you can only really benefit from WebGL if you've got a fast PC, an up-to-date browser and a compatible **graphics card**. WebGL hogs even more memory than Flash, and it's much less widely supported. You may have to enable it manually before you can use Polarr (see screenshot), but it will still fail to work if your graphics card doesn't support WebGL.



# First 100 days of Windows 10



In the latest instalment of her Technical Preview diaries, Jane Hoskyn loses her internet and gains infinite virtual desktops

## Day 44: Another update

If you like Windows updates ('please wait while we install update 3 of 1,900'), you're going to love the Windows 10 Technical Preview. Six weeks in and it's already on to Build 9879.

I should add that Windows 10 builds are like dog years times ten – this is only the third one Microsoft has issued. Still, that's one major system update every two weeks, which is enough to make me permanently unsure about what, if anything, I'm going to see next time I switch on my laptop.

## Day 45: Where's my Wi-Fi?

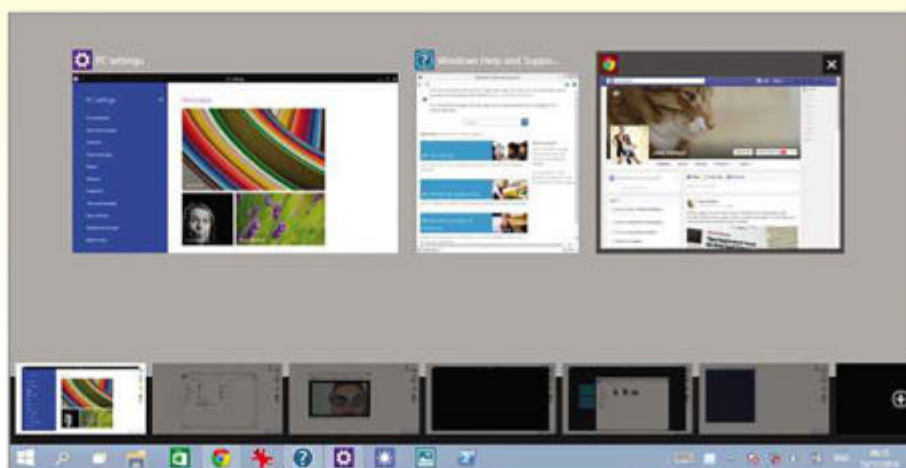
Oh, here we go. The latest update has made my laptop forget that it contains a Wi-Fi card. "Windows did not detect any networking hardware," it says here. And because this PC is basically a sheet of plastic, it doesn't have an Ethernet port either. What kind of PC doesn't have an Ethernet port? That's where the internet comes from!

Microsoft has issued a *very* important Patch Tuesday security update (see News, Issue 437), and my laptop can't download it, because it can't download anything. Which, I suppose, means it can't download malware either. A quick scan with Avast confirms that I'm bug-free, which is some comfort.

On my work PC (a proper PC, with proper ports) I ask Google what's going on with my laptop's Wi-Fi. The good news is that it can be fixed by downloading drivers. The bad news is – how? I can install them using my work PC and a USB stick, of course, but I'll spare us both the tedium of describing that. Or, indeed, of doing it at all.

## Day 50: Infinite desktops

Virtual desktops look like an excellent way to amuse myself in Windows 10 without a net connection. We've already explained how to set up virtual desktops (see our Workshop in Issue 437), so let's

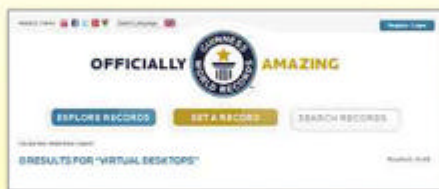


Group your programs into virtual desktops in Windows 10

dive straight in.

The workshop says there's no limit ("yet") on the number of desktops you can create, and according to the Guinness World Records website ([www.guinnessworldrecords.com](http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com)) no-one has yet set a world record for the most virtual desktops on one computer. Red rag to a bull. Can I create infinite virtual desktops and set a whole new world record?

I open a batch of programs, click the Taskbar icon that looks like an underfed pack of cards, click the '+' sign and repeat, many times.



Could Windows 10 make Jane the first person to set a world record for virtual desktops?

## Day 57: Unhappy memory

I've run out of combinations of programs to add to my fast-growing desktop empire, and I can't download more software because I can't get online. No problem – time to find that USB and fill my laptop with portable programs. I love portable programs and think they're the

future of software (along with online tools, see page 58), so I'm more than happy to clog up my **processor** with virtual desktops full of them.

My processor, sadly, doesn't agree. You'd have thought it would be grateful for something to do, given the lack of Wi-Fi, but no – as soon as I'm up to 30 desktops my laptop freezes. So I delete a few of them and put my 'infinite' target on hold.

Actually, a modest number of virtual desktops suits me better, because this is all about control and organisation. A quick swipe in from the left opens a neat row of thumbnails, each of which hosts a batch of windows that fit well together (Photoshop, IrfanView and my Pictures folder, for example). It stops me feeling overwhelmed, even when I have lots of programs running at once. I only wish it were this easy to create more space at home. Virtual kitchen cupboards, anyone?

## Windows 10 so far: 7/10

This is a tricky one to score. Virtual desktops are a fantastic addition and very easy to create. However Windows 10 does appear to have killed my Wi-Fi card.

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# Problems Solved

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### Are these Windows Malicious Software Removal Tool updates legitimate?

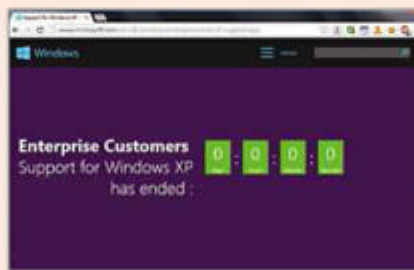
**Q** I know that support for Windows XP stopped in April and I assumed that updates would cease. However, for some time now Windows Update has been offering me monthly updates for something called 'Windows Malicious Software Removal Tool'. With some hesitation I have allowed these to be installed. All the information and graphics appear to be genuine and I am obviously pleased that Microsoft is still looking after users of Windows XP. However, I am concerned that these updates are still being issued after being told that all XP updates would cease. So, I have some questions. Are these updates in fact genuine? How long will they continue? Could malicious software be made to masquerade as genuine Windows XP monthly updates and, if so, what precautions should we take to identify them?

John Hale

**A** Yes, these updates are genuine – but be very clear that they are not updates for or to Windows XP itself. Instead, at some point in the past you have installed a free Microsoft programme called Malicious Software Removal Tool.

As its name suggests, the Malicious Software Removal Tool (MSRT) looks for and removes malware. It does this automatically, once a month, after the update has been downloaded from Windows Update and applied.

Although Microsoft has ended support for Windows XP, MSRT itself remains a current tool. Indeed, while you won't find the company shouting about it, all Windows users (including those with XP) are still able to download, install and benefit from the limited protection offered by MSRT – you'll find it available at [www.snipca.com](http://www.snipca.com).



The Windows Malicious Software Removal Tool but must be used with caution

[com/14190](http://www.snipca.com/14190). We say MSRT's protection is 'limited' because it is updated and runs just once a month which – while better than nothing – is very far from ideal. As for how long these updates will last, unless Microsoft changes its mind, then support for MSRT will end on 14 July 2015. You can keep an eye on the support status of both Windows XP and MSRT at [www.snipca.com/14191](http://www.snipca.com/14191).

Your last question is particularly interesting, not least because it has already happened. In 2012 hackers found a way to 'spoof' Microsoft's electronic authenticity certificates, allowing them to hijack Windows Update in order to issue an apparently legitimate update that was in fact malware. Dubbed Flame, this was a very serious flaw that Microsoft fixed quickly – but it highlights just how vulnerable XP might be going forward.

Hackers could at any time find a new, serious flaw in XP, including the ability to spoof Windows Update. In such circumstances Microsoft might decide to once more patch its 'unsupported' operating system, but it is under no obligation to do so. Therefore you continue to use XP at your own risk.

If you do continue to use Windows XP, then you certainly should not rely solely on MSRT for protection: install good security software that is updated regularly, such as Avast Free Antivirus ([www.avast.com](http://www.avast.com)).

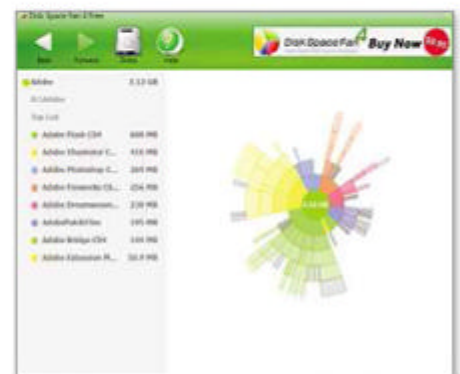
### How do I find a massive backup file?

**Q** I have a 500GB external hard drive that I use to back up my PC. My strategy is to keep the previous backup on this drive until the new one is complete, before deleting the oldest of the two. During the last successful backup I accidentally managed to copy the redundant backup file to some unknown place on my PC's main hard drive. The result is that I now have just slightly less than 10 per cent of its total capacity left. I really have no idea how to find this large file that's now lost on my hard drive.

Alan J Blackburn

**A** We're assuming you don't know the name of the file? You could look at the current backup file to see if the name – or even just part of it – is persistent, and then use Windows Explorer (or File Explorer in Windows 8/8.1) to search for it. Press Windows key+E to launch Windows Explorer, click the C: drive in the left-hand pane and then type the file name (or part of it) in the Search box at the top right.

Alternatively, we'd suggest downloading a free tool such as Disk Space Fan 4 Free ([www.diskspacefan.com](http://www.diskspacefan.com)). After spending a few minutes indexing your drive, this tool lets you drill down through the drive structure visually, based on folder size – so you'll very quickly locate your missing-in-action monster file.

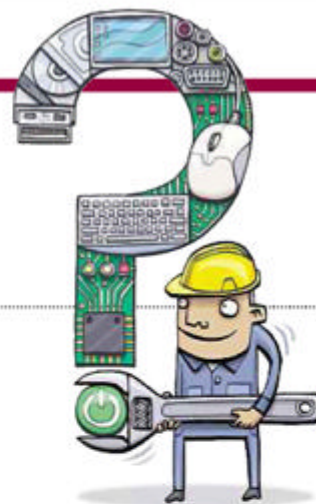


Use Disk Space Fan 4 Free to locate a file lost somewhere on your hard drive



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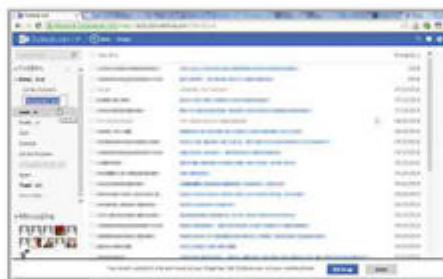


## How do I search Outlook.com's Junk folder?

**Q** I have used Hotmail (well, now Outlook.com) for many years and have never before had the need to look in the Junk folder. Recently, though, someone sent me a message that I couldn't find. Guessing that it might have inadvertently ended up in the Junk folder, I went to use the search box to look for it – but the box was greyed out. I couldn't find any way to activate this box, even though it works fine when I select the Inbox or other folders. I did eventually find my missing message but, with thousands of spam emails to wade through, it took me a while. Why does the search box grey out when I click Junk? And how in the future would I be able to search this folder for missing messages?

Simon Barford

**A** Bizarrely, Microsoft's explanation for this behaviour is that it is "by design", meaning that its programmers have intentionally disabled the ability to search within the



Create a temporary folder to search through Outlook.com's Junk folder

Junk folder. The company goes on to explain that this is because junk emails might "contain abusive materials, hoax stuff, links/files that may carry a virus or other malware".

While that's true, it's a lame excuse for disabling the search facility in the Junk folder: searching for an email from a known sender would present no more risk of a malware than would searching the Inbox folder for the same.

Microsoft's suggested 'solution' is to add trusted contacts to Outlook.com's Safe Senders list. To do this, first click the

cog icon at the top right, choose Options and then, under the 'Preventing junk email' heading, click the 'Safe and blocked senders' link. Now click 'Safe senders', type a trusted email address into the box and click 'Add to list'. The company also suggests that Outlook.com users can offer suggests for future features at [www.snipca.com/13957](http://www.snipca.com/13957).

However, as a workaround you could create a new 'temporary' folder, copy all the junk messages into it and then use the search tool within this temporary holding pen. To try this, right-click in the left-hand Folders pane, under Inbox, and choose 'New subfolder'. Type a name and press Enter. Now click Junk, tick the box at the very top of the message list and then click 'Select everything in your junk folder'. Now right-click in the message area, choose Move and then pick the temporary folder just created.

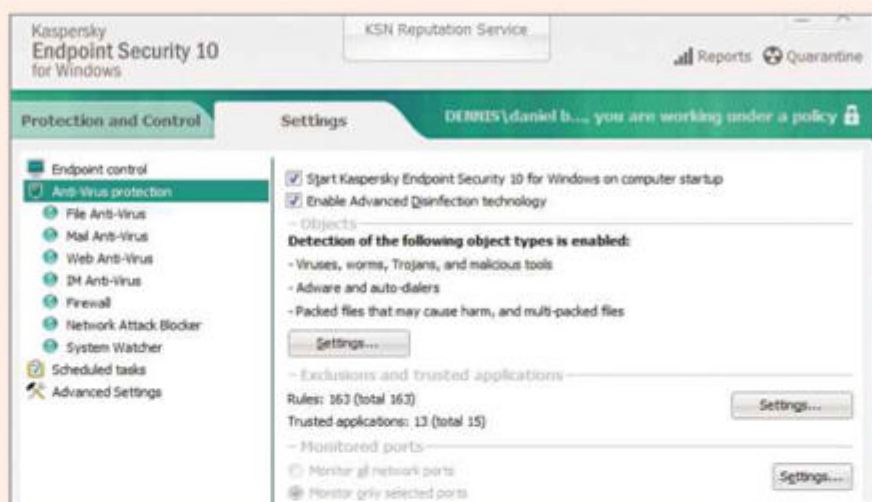
## Why are my backups so slow?

**Q** Using either Windows 7's Backup and Restore tool or a third-party backup program, the backup process takes forever – I've waited for two days and still the progress bar reaches only 65 per cent. I'm sure this isn't right, so any suggestions you might be able to make would be greatly appreciated.

Paul Rundell

**A** We can think of a couple of possibilities. The most likely is that your security software is performing some form of real-time checking of new files, as they arrive on your drives. It might be that files copied to an external drive are flagged by your security software as 'new' and therefore subject to these live scans, which would slow things to a crawl.

To test this theory, temporarily disable



Temporarily disable your security software if your backup process takes an unusually long time

your security software and then perform a backup. If it works more quickly (meaning no more than a few hours, we'd say), re-enable your security software and then look for the real-time scanning options. You might not want to disable them permanently, but you could do so each time you need to do a backup.

Alternatively, try changing the USB port to which your external backup drive is connected. This is because there's the (small) possibility that your PC has one or more outdated USB 1.1 ports, which are much too slow to handle the vast data transfers required for backups.

# Problems Solved

## How do I change Excel's default comments font?

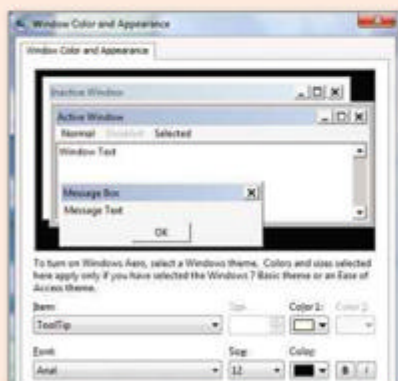
**Q** I have a desktop computer running Windows 7. I use Excel 2010 and have to insert a large number of comments into many individual cells. On my setup the font Excel uses is Tahoma, with a point size of nine. I want to change this to 12-point Arial without going through the Format Comment procedure every time. Is there any way to do this?

John Cleverley

**A** Excel's comment system makes use of a Windows element known as ToolTips, which you might have experienced when hovering over some tool icons: a little box appears with a name label or description. You can change the font used by ToolTips, which will achieve the result you want, but understand that all ToolTips will be displayed in the chosen font.

To do this in Windows 7, first right-click a blank part of the Windows Desktop and choose Personalize from the pop-up menu. Now click Windows Color at the bottom followed by 'Advanced appearance settings'. In the Windows 'Color and Appearance' dialogue box, select ToolTips from the Item dropdown menu. Now choose the font (Arial) and size (12) and click OK.

You might need to restart Excel or your PC for the changes to take effect.



Go to the Windows 'Color and Appearance' dialogue box to change Excel's fonts

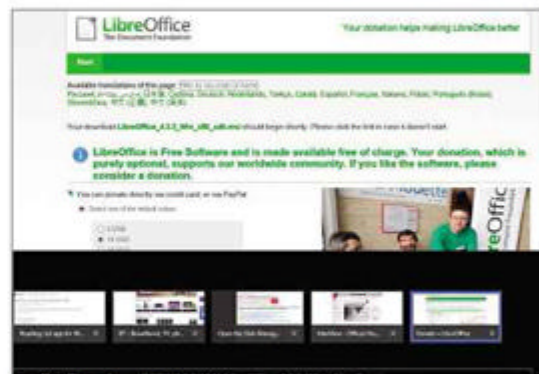
## How do I launch LibreOffice in Windows 8.1?

**Q** As per your recent suggestion I downloaded LibreOffice, but I cannot find it on my Windows 8.1 laptop. At the end of the download it reported 100 per cent complete, but I can't find it. Should there have been an icon on the Windows Desktop?

Tony Baker

**A** We're not sure, but from your description it sounds like you've downloaded LibreOffice, but have not yet installed it – so you can't find the downloaded file? This wouldn't be any surprise, particularly if you're using the Modern version of Internet Explorer (IE), because it's far from obvious how or where to find downloads.

The answer is first to launch IE then press Windows key+Z to display the address bar/toolbar. Now click the spanner icon and click 'View downloads'. Click the LibreOffice download and then click Run and follow the prompts to



To find LibreOffice after downloading it, launch IE, press Windows key+Z, click the spanner – then 'View downloads'

install the program. The program's icon should now appear on the right-hand side of the Start screen and (if you selected the option during install) also on the traditional Windows Desktop.

If you have already installed it but simply can't find the program's icon, then from the Start screen, type 'Libre', then right-click LibreOffice in the list of results and choose 'Pin to Start' (and/or 'Pin to Taskbar' if you'd prefer to launch it from the Windows Desktop).

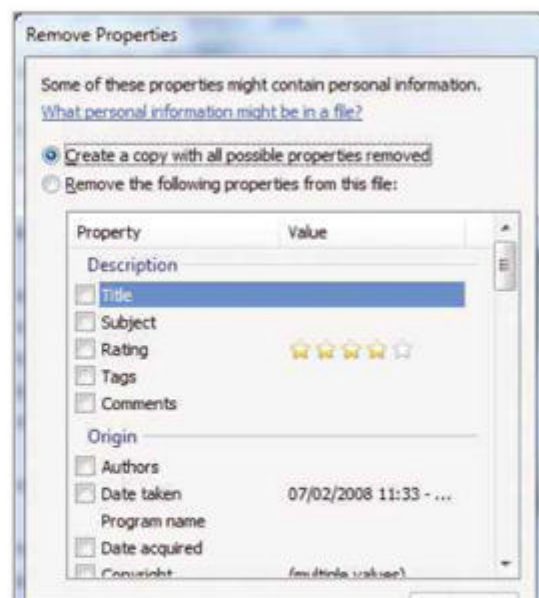
## How do I wipe photo metadata?

**Q** Can you advise a quick and safe way to remove metadata from my photos before I post them online? I know that I can do it in Windows, but the method is slow and seems restricted to only a handful of metadata fields.

Alan Haynes

**A** It is possible to speed up the process in Windows. For example, to work on all the images in one folder, in Windows Explorer use Ctrl+A to select them, then right-click the selection and choose Properties. Select the Details tab and then click the 'Remove Properties and Personal Information' link at the bottom of the Properties dialogue box. You now have the option to select 'all possible' metadata properties, or selected fields.

However, if you really want to get rid of all metadata quickly then you're better off



Select Properties and then amend the options to speed up the process of removing photo metadata

using a free tool, such as JPEG & PNG Stripper from Steel Bytes ([www.snipca.com/14094](http://www.snipca.com/14094)).



## Should I root my Nexus 7?

**Q** With tablets trying to take over the world, I've been looking into getting a Nexus 7. Even 32GB isn't enough for me, so I planned to use a USB stick via an on-the-go (OTG) cable. However, further investigation shows that I'd need to root the device first. I've found loads of websites explaining how to do it, but it's not clear to me whether this is 100-per-cent legal or would invalidate the warranty. What's the best way to proceed?

Kevin Williams

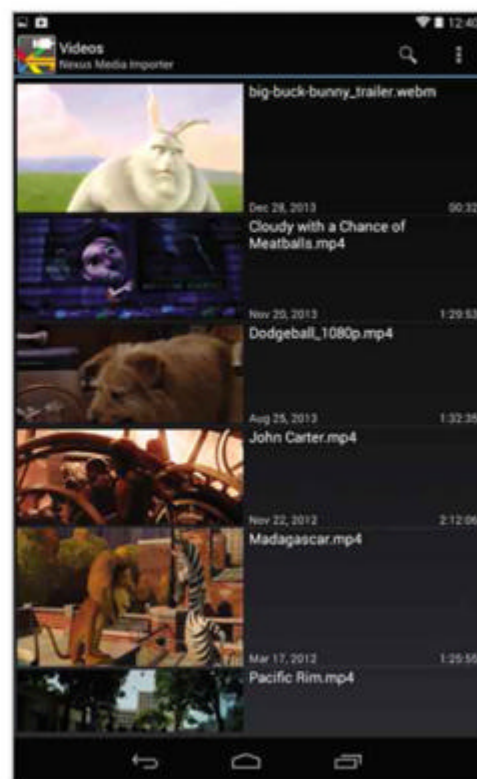
**A** These are questions with surprisingly complicated answers. This is not the place for an in-depth analysis, but we're happy to offer you a summary.

Rooting could be illegal if the process breaks embedded digital-rights-management (DRM) code, which the Nexus 7 certainly has when new. However, we're not aware of anyone in

the UK having been successfully prosecuted for doing this, so there's no precedent.

It's a similar story for the warranty, where Google (or your chosen retailer, with whom you'll have a contract) could reasonably argue that some faults are the result of changes to the device's supplied firmware. However, the Sales of Goods Act ([www.snipca.com/14099](http://www.snipca.com/14099)) would be unlikely to support a vendor who blamed inherent hardware faults – such as a loose headphone socket – on the rooting process.

As the rooting process changes with each new version of Android, we'd suggest searching online for the latest advice if or when you're ready to proceed – as indeed you've already done. If you decide not to go ahead, Nexus Media Importer is a popular paid-for app that actually works with OTG cables on unrooted Nexus 7s. It costs £2.62 from [www.snipca.com/14002](http://www.snipca.com/14002).



Nexus Media Importer is a useful paid-for app if you choose not to root your Nexus 7

## How do I use my Excel spreadsheets on my iPad?

**Q** At 75 years old I've just acquired an original Apple iPad. My problem is I want to use some of my Excel spreadsheets on the iPad, but I'm at a loss as to how to do this. One way would be to use iTunes, but I have no idea what program to install on the iPad. I don't want to use the iPad version of Excel as I understand I can't print out from it. The Excel files I want to transfer have been built using the 2003 and 2007 versions of the program.

Allan Huckle

**A** We're afraid that you might be out of luck, at least if you want to use your iPad to edit your spreadsheets. Apple stopped issuing updates for the original iPad in 2011, barely a year after the tablet launched. While that doesn't mean your iPad is useless, it does mean that you're denied access to the very many modern apps that would let you do what you want – including the iPad version of Excel – because few will now work with versions of iOS older than 6 or 7. Indeed, the newest apps will work only

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3	September 2013	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
4	October 2013	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
5	November 2013	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
6	December 2013	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
7	January 2014	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
8	February 2014	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
9	March 2014	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
10	April 2014	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
11	May 2014	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
12	June 2014	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
13	July 2014	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
14	August 2014	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
15	September 2014	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
16	October 2014	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
17	November 2014	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
18	December 2014	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
19	January 2015	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
20	February 2015	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
21	March 2015	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
22	April 2015	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
23	May 2015	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
24	June 2015	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
25	July 2015	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

Use Google Drive on an original Apple iPad to view Excel files in the Safari web browser

with the just-released iOS 8. Your iPad is forever stuck at iOS 5.1.1.

The best idea we can offer is to sign up for a Google account (if you don't already have one, with Gmail, say) and then upload your Excel files to Google Drive (<https://drive.google.com>). You'll

then be able to view them in the Safari web browser on your iPad. If you have a printer that's compatible with Apple's AirPrint technology, you might even be able to print, as iOS 5.1 does support this – visit [www.snipca.com/13972](http://www.snipca.com/13972) to see a list of compatible printers.

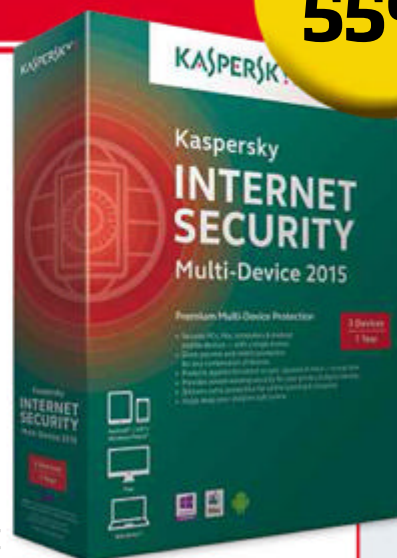
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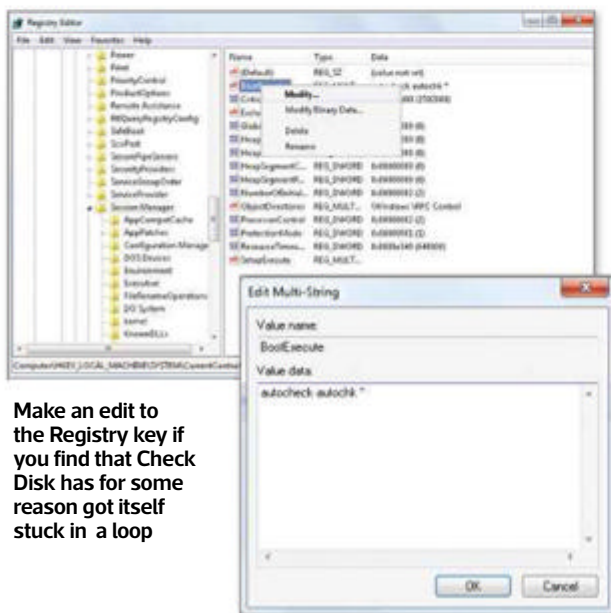


# What's ChkDsk and how do I stop it running every time I launch Windows?

**Q** Every time I switch on my PC I get a black screen with white print, which says something like 'ChkDsk is running a scheduled scan'. This seems to take a very long time. To my knowledge I have never

scheduled such a scan, so I wonder where it came from. Regardless, I can find no way of stopping this happening. What might have happened here, and how do I stop it?

Norman Hillier



Make an edit to the Registry key if you find that Check Disk has for some reason got itself stuck in a loop

**A** ChkDsk is short for 'Check Disk', which is a component of Windows that, as its name suggests, checks your computer's disk drives for errors. Usually, it would run only when requested or following an unexpected shut down of Windows, such as during a power cut or crash.

So, our first question would be whether you're shutting down your PC correctly? If you're simply switching off the power at the mains then this would explain why

Check Disk keeps appearing. Forgive us if you already know this, the correct way to shut down Windows 7 is to click Start followed by Shut Down. In Windows 8, open the Charms bar (Windows key+C), click Settings followed by Power and then 'Shut down'.

If you are shutting down correctly, then Check Disk has for whatever reason got itself stuck into a loop. To fix it you'll need to edit a Registry key, so back up your PC before proceeding. Click Start, type **regedit** and press Enter. Now right-click regedit.exe and choose 'Run as administrator'. Navigate to **HKEY\_LOCAL\_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\Session Manager** and, in the right-hand pane, right-click the BootExecute entry and choose Modify. Now delete the trailing forward slash and full stop ('./') from 'autocheck autochk \* ./' so that it reads 'autocheck autochk \*' and click OK.

Close the Registry Editor window, restart your PC and Check Disk should bother you no more.

# Why can't I print from some websites?

**Q** I have an Epson printer connected via USB and a laptop running Windows 7. For some reason I find myself unable to print documents, such as bank statements, from secure website (ie websites that begin with 'https'). I can copy and paste statements into Microsoft Word and print from there. I can also print from other applications without any bother. Any thoughts on a fix?

Cyril Killen

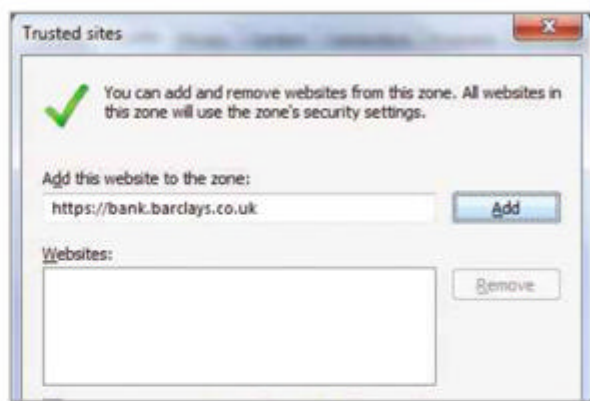
**A** You didn't say which web browser you're using, but we're guessing Internet Explorer (IE), as we can think of a couple of scenarios that might prevent printing from within IE.

First, try running IE as an administrator. Right-click the icon you use to launch it and choose 'Run as administrator' from the pop-up menu. Now try printing from a problematic website.

If that doesn't work then you can try

disabling IE's Protected Mode before adding individual websites to the browser's 'Trusted sites' list. To do the former, click the cog icon at the top right and then choose 'Internet options'. In the Internet Options dialogue box, select the Security tab and clear the box labelled 'Enable Protected Mode (requires restarting Internet Explorer)'. Restart IE and try printing.

If it works, then we'd suggest re-enabling Protected Mode and then adding your banking websites to the aforesaid 'Trusted sites' list. To do this, return to the Security tab in the Internet Options dialogue box and then click the 'Trusted sites' icon. Now click the Sites button. The last site you visited should be in the 'Add this website to the zone' field, so just click Add. Repeat for other affected websites.



Add individual websites to 'Trusted sites' to get them to print

## NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE  
23 Dec

- How do I uninstall a program that refuses to uninstall?
- Why aren't images showing in Outlook?
- How do I remove the Yahoo toolbar?
- ...And many more

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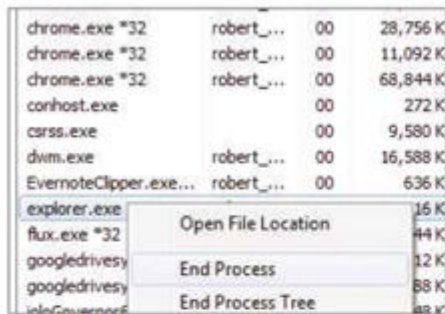


# Windows Taskbar

Stop pinned folders disappearing, restore missing system tray icons and fix a misbehaving Taskbar clock

## Your Taskbar disappears

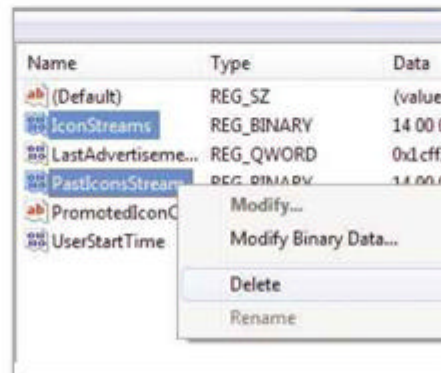
If your Taskbar suddenly disappears or becomes unresponsive, try pressing the Windows key on your keyboard. If that doesn't make it reappear, you should restart the 'explorer.exe' process. This refreshes Windows (much like the Refresh button refreshes a web page) and should get rid of any glitches that made the Taskbar disappear. Press Ctrl+Alt+Delete, click Task Manager, go to the Processes tab, then scroll down to 'explorer.exe' in the list. Right-click it, then click End Process (see screenshot below). This will make your Desktop icons disappear (the Explorer process is responsible for these as well as the Taskbar). Click File in Task Manager, New Task, type **explorer**, then press Enter. Your Desktop icons and Taskbar should now reappear.



End then restart the 'explorer.exe' process to fix a missing or unresponsive Taskbar

## System tray icons go missing

If you notice that some of the icons in the system tray have disappeared (check by clicking the small arrow towards the right side of your Taskbar), it may be because the tray icon history is too full. You can fix this with a small Registry tweak. Click the Start button or go to the Start screen and type **run**, press Enter, then type **regedit** and press Enter. In the Registry Editor, navigate to the following key: **HKEY\_CURRENT\_USER/Software/Classes/Local Settings/Software/ Microsoft/Windows/CurrentVersion/TrayNotify**. Click TrayNotify, then in the



Delete the highlighted Registry entries to restore missing system tray icons

right-hand pane right-click IconStreams and click Delete, then do the same with PastIconsStream (see screenshot above). Next, go to Task Manager and restart the 'explorer.exe' process (see previous tip).

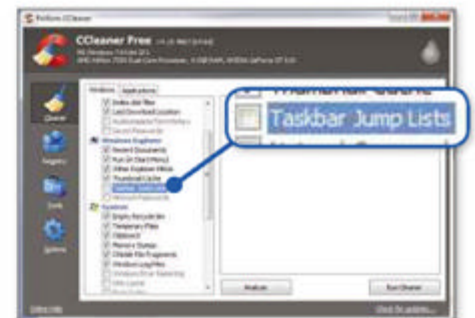
## Taskbar Properties won't open

When you right-click the Taskbar, then click Properties, you'll see plenty of useful options for customising your Taskbar (set it to auto-hide and enable smaller icons so you can pin more to it, for example). If you click Properties and see an error message telling you to "contact your system administrator", you need to change the permissions on your PC. Click Start, type **run** and press Enter. In the Run box, type **regedit**, press Enter, then in the Registry Editor navigate to **HKEY\_CURRENT\_USER/Software/Microsoft/Windows/CurrentVersion/Policies/Explorer**. In the right-hand pane, right-click the NoSetTaskbar Registry entry and click Delete.

## Pinned folders disappear from Explorer shortcut

One of the most useful shortcuts on the Taskbar is the Windows Explorer icon. If you right-click this, it shows you a 'jump list' of your most frequently accessed folders, as well as any folders you've already pinned there permanently. If your frequent and pinned folders disappear

from this list, it could be because you're using a Registry cleaner, such as CCleaner or PrivaZer, that has wiped the list during one of its clean-ups. If you're using CCleaner, open it and go to the Cleaner tool. On the Windows tab, scroll down to Windows Explorer in the list and untick Taskbar Jump Lists (see screenshot below). In PrivaZer, click OK on the homescreen, then untick Start\_JumpLists.



Untick Taskbar Jump Lists in CCleaner to prevent your pinned folders disappearing

## The displayed time on your Taskbar keeps changing

If the time displayed on your Taskbar keeps changing, even though it's set to the right time zone and you keep correcting it, then it may be because the time on your system BIOS is wrong. Windows' clock is synced with 'time.windows.com', a private NTP (Network Time Protocol) server, from which companies get their time data. If Windows can't get online and connect to the server, however, it uses the time from your system BIOS clock.

You can correct your system BIOS clock when you boot your computer. When you switch on, the very first thing displayed on your screen – the Boot screen – should include an option to press a key (usually Delete or one of the Function keys) so you can enter the BIOS. Navigate through the options to the clock, then when you've highlighted it use the number keys to correct the time.





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9		EE: Fibre Broadband & Calls	<b>£19.95</b> (£5 for 3 months)	<b>18</b> months	<b>38Mbps</b> max speed	∞ unlimited	<b>£194.55</b>
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# Jargon Buster

**32bit** A measure of how much information a computer can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

**64bit** A technology that processes information in larger chunks. Most modern computers are 64bit.

**Aspect ratio** A measurement of the shape of a display. Traditional computer screens are 4:3. Widescreen displays are 16:9 or 16:10.

**Beta** A version of software that's being tested. Beta versions are often released so problems can be ironed out.

**Bezier** A tool for creating smooth and precise curved lines in illustration programs – essential for creating more complex shapes.

**BIOS** Basic Input-Output System. Essential software built into every PC that connects the vital components. It's visible for a few seconds when the PC starts.

**Bitmap** A type of image file made up from a grid of pixels. Bitmaps have a fixed size and cannot be resized without losing quality.

**Cache** A temporary space for storing information. Can be memory used on a computer processor, or space on a hard drive used by a web browser.

**Cookie** A small text file stored on your computer by a website. Used to store browsing preferences, website login details and so on.

**Dpi** Dots per inch. A measure of printed image quality, or the size an object will be shown on screen.

**DRM** Digital Rights Management. Software that limits the copying of a file.

**Dual core** When two processors are combined into a single chip.

**E-ink** Electrophoretic ink. A special type of ink used to display content in electronic devices.

**Feedback** The tactile response that the keys on a keyboard give when they've been pressed.

**Firmware** Basic software stored on a device, such as a music player, to control its operation. Can sometimes be upgraded in a process often called flashing.

**Gigabit Ethernet** A very fast networking standard that can transfer data at up to 1,000Mbps.

**Graphics card** A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

**HDMI** High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals. It is found on many new TVs, media PCs and high-definition products such as Blu-ray disc players and the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 games consoles.

**HTML5** The latest version of the Hypertext Markup Language used to create most web pages. HTML5 includes extra commands that allow for more complex designs.

**Integrated graphics chip** A device that has a chip for processing graphics data built on to its motherboard, rather than having a separate graphics card.

**IP Address** Internet Protocol Address. A unique set of numbers, separated by full stops, used to identify computers and websites on the internet. For example, Google's IP address is 74.125.224.72

**Jailbreak** Modifying an iPhone, iPod or iPad to get around Apple's restrictions.

**Metadata** A set of data that gives information about a file.

**MMS** Multimedia Messaging. A system for sending images and sounds between mobile phones without using email.

**NAS** Network-attached storage. A hard drive attached to a network that can be shared by other PCs.

**Noise** Visible dust-like speckles that appear in some camera and TV images. In photos, they are caused by the camera's own sensor. In TV images, they can be caused by the TV's processor or by a flaw in the broadcast signal itself.

**Open source** Software that can be modified by anyone, rather than just by the employees of the company that created it.

**Partition** A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives. Once partitioned, each section is treated by Windows as though it were a completely separate, smaller hard drive.

**Plug-in** A program that adds extra features to your web browser or to other applications, and is loaded only when it's needed.

**Processor** The processor – or central processing unit – is the brain of a computer. Processors now are tiny and are capable of carrying out millions of calculations every second.

**Quad core** A computer that has four processors on a single chip, which allows it to operate faster than standard (single-core) PC.

**RAM** Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on. Its capacity is measured in megabytes (MB): the more memory your PC has, the more things it can process simultaneously and the faster it will seem. Any information in Ram will be lost when the PC is switched off.

**Ransomware** Malware run by hackers who take over your PC and demand a payment to release it.

**Raw** A format for digital photos that stores the image exactly as the camera captured it, without compression or optimisation, but which is not compatible with all image editors.

**Registry** The part of Windows that stores information on all hardware and software installed on your PC. The Registry can be edited to tweak settings but incorrect changes can damage the PC.

**Resolution** The amount of detail shown in an image, whether on screen or printed.

**Root** To perform tasks on Android devices that aren't permitted by the manufacturer.

**SD card** Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

**SIM** Subscriber Identity Module. The smart card used by all digital mobile phones. The SIM card carries the user's identity and phone number for accessing the network.

**SLR** Single-Lens Reflex. A type of camera in which the same lens is used for viewing subjects in the viewfinder and for taking pictures.

**Spyware** Software installed (usually surreptitiously) to monitor and report back on a computer's use. Spyware can also be used to record keyboard strokes and change settings.

**SSD** Solid-state drive. Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts. Faster but more expensive than conventional hard drives.

**System Restore Point** The collection of system files stored by System Restore on a given date and time to which Windows can revert if a problem occurs.

**Trackpad** A small, touch-sensitive pad, usually a couple of inches square, which acts as an alternative to a mouse on some laptops. It works by sensing fingertip pressure.

**Travel** The distance the keys of a keyboard have to be pressed before the keystroke is recognised.

**USB 2.0** Faster successor to USB that's used by devices such as external hard drives.

**Vector** Vector graphics are described (eg 'a line from x to y') rather than comprising a finite number of dots. Because they are rendered as smooth lines, they can be enlarged to any scale without a loss of quality, unlike bitmapped images which will become jagged when blown up.

**WebGL** A method for displaying 3D and 2D graphics inside your web browser by using JavaScript instead of a plug-in such as Flash.

**Wizard** A step-by-step process that helps you choose settings.

# The Final Straw



STUART ANDREWS is  
Computeractive's Mr Angry

In this issue, Stuart Andrews will be ignoring all...

## Dodgy recommendations

There are many things I love about our all-digital, on-demand media age. I'm just old enough to remember when watching a movie at home meant waiting four years for it to be shown on TV, so instant-streaming video services are manna from heaven for a film buff like me.

Having grown up in a town where Woolworths was the only record store, I'm still flabbergasted by the choice available from the likes of iTunes and Amazon, while Spotify never ceases to amaze me. And while I like to support my local bookstore, I do have a Kindle Fire and a Kindle eBook reader and I'm not ashamed to use them. Convenience, price and choice count for a lot.

But there's one thing that sours the whole experience, and that's the obsession these stores and services have with making dubious recommendations

put me off the stuff I've paid good money to enjoy.

Why? For a start, they're obtrusive and annoying. I like to choose what I'm going to read, watch or listen to. I don't like the idea of some algorithm picking apart my tastes then deciding what I might want to read or watch next. I find

Amazon particularly irritating on this count. I can't even pick up my Kindle Fire and start reading without it recommending another three books I might like to read instead.

It's like a restaurant where my main goes cold because the waiter keeps shoving the dessert menu in my face.

And these recommendations are so often clumsy or wildly inaccurate. Listen, Netflix, I can see why watching *Saving Private Ryan* might lead you to believe that I'd also like other World War II dramas. But how on Earth do you get from there to *Avengers Assemble*, *The Hobbit: Desolation of Smaug* or the Bruce Willis asteroid disaster, *Armageddon*? And why throw in tasteless 'comedies' (*Step Brothers* and *Superbad*) and – strangest of all – *Top Gear*? I guess there are some tanks in *Saving Private Ryan*, but surely that's where the similarities end?

I'm even less keen on the recommendations that tell you what's 'trending' near you or popular with your Facebook friends. I have lots of 'friends' on Facebook, only 20 per cent of whom I'd actually count as *real* friends. Most of those have awful taste, so why should I care what they think? Meanwhile, as someone who lives in a rural area where



The Rolling Stones are still considered edgy, does it really matter what's the hottest thing near me?

Even when these recommendations get things right, it just seems creepy. Last week, I listened to a new album on Spotify, only to get an email recommending 10 other albums, eight of which I already own. Have they got someone upstairs rifling through my record collection as I write?

I don't know. What I do know is that I wish these stores and services would spend a little less time analysing my habits and trying to hurl stuff at me, and a little more making the stuff I know I want a little easier to find. Curating content, putting the best stuff up-front, getting it in the right genre and linked to relevant things seems a smarter move than trying to predict what I'd like to enjoy next. Perhaps someone might recommend this approach to them?

✉ Do you agree with Stuart?  
Let us know at [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)

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for what I should read, watch or listen to next. I'm sure some people find them useful and for websites they're an essential mechanism for flogging further content, or for keeping users 'engaged'. Otherwise, like the overgrown toddlers we've all become, these customers will be distracted by something new and shiny elsewhere. Me, though? I hate them. They





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