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Computer **active**

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Your friendly guide to technology

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From the Editor

Every week I receive emails from readers despairing at how many nasty extras came bundled with their latest download. It's making many of you think twice about clicking that download button. Happily, not everything you want to do on your PC requires software. For example, you can speed up your PC using utilities you've already got on your computer, or by using web tools that require no installation. Jane Hoskyn reveals the best in our Cover Feature (page 50).

We'll never stop recommending software because for some tasks nothing else will do. But we'll always point out which ones come with junk, and which should be ditched for



superior online alternatives.

One piece of software you should definitely try is Spartan, Microsoft's exciting new browser (see page 38). Internet Explorer has been a faithful servant over the years, but it's time to try something new. Even Chrome and Firefox users will be impressed.

Daniel Booth

editor@computeractive.co.uk



THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

82 seconds

How quickly a phishing campaign lures its first victim after launching - **p9**



192

Number of dodgy Chrome extensions Google has removed - **p16**

£45

Price of the five-star HP Officejet Pro 6230 printer - **p23**

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLS

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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Make Your PC **FASTER**

Without Having To
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Computeractive offer of the fortnight

Kaspersky Internet Security 2015 page 68



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XP users: switch to Chrome for extended support

Google will keep supporting its Chrome browser on Windows XP until at least the end of 2015, the company has pledged. Google was originally planning to withdraw support for the operating system at the end of April, but says it will now continue to deliver updates.

Writing on the Chrome Blog (www.snipca.com/16211), Mark Larson, director of engineering for the browser, said: "Millions of people are still working on XP computers every day. We want those people to have the option to use a browser that's up-to-date and as safe as possible on an unsupported operating system".

Microsoft stopped supporting Windows XP on 8 April 2014, although the company did issue an emergency fix for the operating system the



following month. Internet Explorer 8, released in 2009, was the last version of Microsoft's current browser to support Windows XP PCs, and that hasn't been updated since 2011.

Despite extending support for XP, Larson stressed that computers running it are "inherently in danger of being

infected by malware and viruses". Google will continue to "strongly encourage everyone to update to a supported, secure operating system".

You can download the latest version of Chrome at www.google.co.uk/chrome.

In April Microsoft released the first version of its new

COMMENT

This is good news for anyone prepared to risk browsing the web on an XP PC, though we still recommend upgrading to a more recent version of Windows. It's also another attempt by Google to win the hearts and minds of the millions of people who felt abandoned by Microsoft when XP support ended. In his blog post Mark Larson writes: "We know that not everyone can easily switch to a newer operating system". The implication is clear: we understand your needs better than nasty old Microsoft.

Spartan browser, which will eventually replace IE. Learn how to use it in Windows 10 on page 38.

Age UK's 'no friends' ads respond to Facebook

Age UK has made its own version of recent Facebook adverts in its latest campaign to highlight loneliness among the elderly.

The posters display the words 'no friends' over images of solitary old people (see right).

They are a direct reference to the current Facebook adverts that celebrate the

beneficial effects of friendship and end with the word 'Friends' on screen (watch one at www.snipca.com/16231).

As part of the ad campaign Age UK is encouraging people to donate £3 by texting 'HELLO' to 70007.

Marianne Hewitt, Age UK's head of brand, said: "It's time we took loneliness seriously as

a threat to a happy and healthy later life. We need to do more to support older people to stay socially connected: this is a big part of our job at Age UK and everyone can help by being a good friend or neighbour to the older people they know".

Age UK runs a befriending service to help combat



loneliness among older people. Find out more at www.snipca.com/16232.



You'll like this...

Google has created an audio-visual tour of Abbey Road Studios (www.snipca.com/16218)



...but not this

Hackers could use onboard Wi-Fi to crash planes says a report (www.snipca.com/16217)

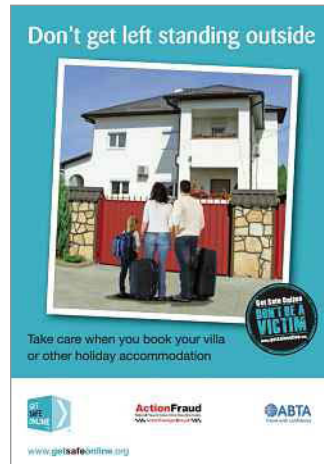
Beware fake travel websites when booking holidays, police warn

Holiday-makers have been warned about the dangers of online fraud when booking trips this summer.

It comes as a new report reveals that more than 1,500 cases of holiday fraud were reported to the police in 2014. Scammers stole around £2.2m from duped travellers, with the average loss being £889.

Many tourists only find they've been swindled when they arrive at their accommodation to discover that no booking was actually made.

The findings come from the City of London Police, who have joined forces with Government-supported organisation Get Safe Online and the UK travel association ABTA to highlight some of the



scams tourists face in the coming months.

They have published a free downloadable PDF (www.snipca.com/16198, see image) offering advice on how to spot holiday scams.

The most common type of crime is fraudsters setting up

fake websites and adverts to trick people into believing they are dealing with a legitimate holiday company.

Most people who are defrauded pay in ways that mean they won't get their money back, such as by bank transfer.

People booking caravan holidays in the UK are also targeted by fraudsters posting fake adverts on Facebook, Gumtree and Craigslist.

Another tactic used by scammers is to lure victims by offering them 'free' holidays at a seminar, where they are sold a fake timeshare.

If you've been a victim, or if you're worried about a booking you've made, call Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or use its fraud-reporting tool: www.snipca.com/16197.

IN BRIEF

CLASSIC QUIZ SHOWS NOW ON IPLAYER

You can now watch episodes of classic BBC game shows on the iPlayer, including *Ask the Family*, *Call My Bluff* and *What's My Line?*. The collection, 'curated' by *Pointless* presenter Richard Osman, also contains an episode of *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?* from 1954. In the show teams of archaeologists and historians had to identify objects from museums. You can watch all the episodes at www.snipca.com/16196.

WINDOWS 10.1 DETAILS LEAKED

Windows 10 may still be in its Preview stage, but details of its first update, codenamed Redstone, have already leaked online. According to Brad Sams of the website Neowin (www.snipca.com/16201), Redstone will be released in two waves in 2016, first in June and then October. He suggests that the name Redstone is taken from the name of a mineral in the popular PC game Minecraft, which Microsoft bought last year.

Ryanair steward steals passenger's camera - then flogs it on eBay!

A Ryanair steward has been sacked after he was caught selling on eBay a £500 Nikon camera left behind in the cabin by a passenger.

The Portuguese-born Fernando Miguel Andrade Viseu was rumbled when Aaron Galloway, a 23-year-old teacher from Brighton, went on eBay to buy a replacement camera, only to find his own one being auctioned (see screenshot).

It had received 25 bids, and had reached a price of £320. The auction had just 35 minutes left to run when Galloway spotted it.

He immediately contacted the seller, saying: "I am assuming that you work for



Ryanair as the cabin gets checked after the flight and your location is Stansted".

Galloway later said: "I was pretty surprised because actually he could have ignored me and there was nothing I could have done. But he said he was really sorry."

The seller admitted to being a Ryanair steward, and confessed to the theft. He apologised to Galloway and pleaded with him not to tell the police.

He offered to meet Galloway at Stansted to hand over the camera.

But Galloway told the police, who raided Viseu's home. They found the camera as well as a Kindle that

didn't belong to him.

Viseu pleaded guilty to the thefts in court. He was given a community order by Chelmsford magistrates and ordered to do 100 hours of unpaid work. He was also told to attend a six-month drug-rehabilitation programme.

Galloway said he was "angry" with Ryanair: "How can they not notice someone just taking things off the seats?" he asked.

Tomorrow's world

You can tell a lot about where technology is heading by the patents that are awarded to companies. Google's latest is for the development of 'methods and systems for robot personality', which would let people download a type of artificial intelligence that best suits their current mood. Feeling sad? Just download a happy robot pal to cheer you up. Read more at: www.snipca.com/16199.

IN BRIEF

PAY TO REMOVE YOUTUBE ADVERTS

YouTube looks set to launch a subscription service this summer that lets you pay to remove adverts. They revealed the news in an email to owners of YouTube channels. YouTube hasn't confirmed how much it'll cost to remove adverts, but reports suggest around \$10 (about £7). You can already prevent adverts from playing by using an ad-blocker, such as Adblock Plus (<https://adblockplus.org>).

EE LAUNCHES WI-FI PHONE CALLS

EE customers can use the company's new WiFi Calling service (www.snipca.com/16121) to make phone calls and send texts over the internet if they can't get a mobile signal. It's currently available only on the Samsung Galaxy S6, S6 Edge and Microsoft Lumia 640 phones, with iPhones on the way. For more details see our sister website Expert Reviews: www.snipca.com/16137.

Web watchdog removes 31,000 child-sex abuse pages

The number of web pages found to contain images of child sexual abuse rose by 137 per cent in 2014, according to the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF, <https://www.iwf.org.uk>).

In its annual report, published in mid-April, the IWF said it removed 31,266 URLs hosting photos and videos of children being sexually abused in 2014, up from 13,182 in 2013.

The IWF said that the increase was due to the new powers it was given last year by the Government. These allow the watchdog to actively seek criminal content, rather than merely waiting for it to be reported by the public.

Tracking down criminal content was also helped by an increase in funding last year that meant the IWF could recruit eight web analysts, taking the total to 12.

Around 0.3 per cent of abusive imagery removed was hosted in the UK, a total of just 95 URLs. Most of the



images identified (around 56 per cent) were hosted in North America. The IWF said it "repeatedly chases" law agencies in other countries to take down images.

The watchdog, which was set up in 1996, is funded by 117 companies and organisations, including technology giants Facebook and Google. Its aim is to find and take down criminal content online, focusing on the sexual abuse of children.

IWF CEO Susie Hargreaves said there was still "a huge amount" of criminal content

online. "We've got a long way to go until we see the peak of this problem," she said.

She added that too many internet companies refuse to accept there was a major problem. "It is not good enough for those companies to allow the burden of responsibility to fall on a socially responsible few," she said. "This year will ensure they have nowhere to hide as we will be targeting them."

You can report images of child sexual abuse via the IWF's website: www.snipca.com/16155.

Facebook's confession time: it *did* track people without accounts (anyone surprised?)

Facebook is fixing a bug it has blamed for tracking the browsing habits of people, even if they don't have an account.

It follows a report commissioned by a Belgian data-protection agency that claimed people were being tracked by Facebook even if they just clicked one of the site's 'Like' or 'Share' buttons on another website (see News, Issue 447). These buttons appear on over 13 million websites.

At the time Facebook dismissed the report, saying it contained "factual inaccuracies".

But in a statement titled 'Setting the Record Straight on a Belgian Academic Report' (www.snipca.com/16107), Richard Allan, Facebook's Vice President



of Policy in Europe wrote: "The researchers did find a bug that may have sent cookies to some people when they weren't on Facebook. This was not our intention – a fix for this is already under way".

However, he also wrote that the report "gets it wrong multiple times in asserting

how Facebook uses information to provide our service".

He also disputes eight claims made by the researchers, including the accusation that Facebook "surreptitiously uses cookies to track people everywhere on the web".

Allan insists that, actually, Facebook is "transparent" about how it uses cookies and how they "improve your experience" on the site.

Like many sites, Facebook places cookies on users' devices in order to 'remember' you when you visit the site, so you don't have to sign in every time.

However, it also uses cookies to track your browsing in order to show adverts it thinks will appeal to you.

Chat to your doctor on Skype, say Liberal Democrats

Patients would be able to speak with GPs via Skype, as part of a £250m plan announced by Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg in early April.

Clegg said that doctors could treat minor ailments and discuss a patient's progress this way. But party officials insisted that patients wouldn't be forced to use Skype.

The Lib Dems also want to make it possible for patients to order repeat prescriptions and book appointments online.

The proposals are part of the party's plan to create a "paperless" NHS that is "fit for the challenges of the 21st century".

To fund the changes the party says it would sell £250m of redundant NHS assets, such as unused NHS land and buildings.

Clegg took aim at his political opponents when announcing the plans, saying:



"Both Ed Miliband and David Cameron have ignored the experts on this. Only the Liberal Democrats have listened".

However, David Cameron has already proposed introducing Skype appointments. Speaking at the Conservative party conference in October 2013 he said: "Many hard-working people find it difficult to take time off

to get that GP appointment, so having these pilot schemes is a very positive step forward".

Introducing Skype appointments is widely seen as a way of ensuring more people get to speak to a doctor when they need to. According to the last GP Survey in 2013-14, 15 per cent of people trying to make an appointment to see their GP were unable to get one.



Would you feel comfortable talking to your GP on Skype?
Let us know at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Phishing attacks take 82 seconds to work

On average, it takes just 82 seconds after the launch of a phishing campaign to trick its first victim, according to a new report on cybercrime.

Around half of victims who open a malicious email do so within an hour of receiving it.

The Data Breach Investigations Report (www.verizonenterprise.com/DBIR), compiled by US broadband company Verizon, aims to expose the cyber-threats companies face. It found that phishing remains the most effective method of attack.

After analysing 80,000 attacks in 2014, researchers found that in many companies around 25 per cent of people who received a phishing



email opened it. This may not be enough to infect a PC, but clicking a link or attachment in the email often is. The report found that 11 per cent of people did this.

Bob Rudis, author of the report, said that poor security procedures within companies were largely to blame. He urged them to teach staff how

to spot fake emails.

"Training your employees is a critical element of combating this threat," Rudis said.

By doing so, he insisted, companies would be treating employees as "tools in the fight rather than as lambs to the slaughter".

The report also found that cybercriminals took advantage of companies using old software that contained security flaws. Around 99 per cent of the vulnerabilities exploited by hackers had been known about for over a year, with one of the "worst and most commonly used" dating back to 1999.

IN BRIEF

NEW KOBO E-READER CHEAPER THAN KINDLE VOYAGE

Kobo has announced a new e-reader with a resolution better than Amazon's Kindle Voyage but costs £59 less. The Glo HD, which is available from 1 June priced £110, has a screen resolution of 1448x1072 pixels, slightly more than the Voyage. However, at 9.2mm, it's chunkier than the Voyage, which is 7.6mm thick. It also weighs six grams more. We will review it soon.

AMAZON SUES SITES SELLING FAKE REVIEWS

Amazon has filed a lawsuit in the US against websites that allegedly sell fake four- and five-star reviews to companies. The bogus reviews get added to items the companies are selling on Amazon in order to boost sales. Amazon says the websites sell reviews in packages up to 100 and add them to items gradually to avoid raising suspicion. The websites also replace any reviews removed by Amazon.

DELL LAPTOP COMES WITH UBUNTU

Dell has released a version of its lightweight XPS 13 laptop that's pre-installed with Ubuntu Linux. It comes with Dell's 'infinity display', a 13.3in touchscreen that has 5mm bezels around the edges. There will be two versions on sale in the UK, one with a 256GB SSD, the other with 512GB. See Dell's US site for more details: www.snipca.com/16170. Read our review of the Windows version of the XPS 13 on page 29.



Named & Shamed

Jane Hoskyn puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software stuffed with junk

WARNING - Junk ahead

Junk offender: KC Softwares

At first glance, KC Softwares (www.kcsoftwares.com) looks like a brilliant independent champion of free software, similar to NirSoft (www.nirsoft.net). And it could be, if only its installers weren't riddled with unwanted extras.

Its program SUMo (Software Update Monitor, www.snipca.com/16203), for example, sounded perfect for this issue's Best Free Software. Windows gave me a 'red shield' warning when I opened the installer, but that's fairly common. Alarm bells only really sounded when I read this in the setup wizard: "By clicking Next you agree to initiate the installation process, which will include a small piece of software used to verify your acceptance of our partner's disclosures".

Woah there! What small piece of software? What partners? I'm agreeing to nothing, pal.



KC Softwares' setup wizards ask you to 'accept' a bundled partner program

KC and the unwanted extras

Was I being over-cautious? I asked my colleagues for advice. It turned out that our Technical Editor, Sherwin Coelho, had also tried installing SUMo. "It comes bundled with extras and there's no obvious way to opt out of installing them at setup," he said. In other words, that

'Next' button opens the floodgates to a pack of PUPs. I don't think I'll be clicking it, then. I don't need SUMo (third-party software updaters are nice, but not necessary) and I certainly don't need another PUP on my computer.

Out of interest I checked a couple more KC installers, including the impertinently named KCleaner (www.snipca.com/16205), and saw exactly the same message in the setup wizard.

When an installer mentions "partners", it's talking about marketing partners who pay to have their own products bundled in the installer. Normally there's an option to decline, as with the Bing extras that commonly come with Skype, but as Sherwin discovered (so the rest of us don't have to), KC's installers don't give you that choice. These are not the kind of partners you want in your life, or in your computer.

What are they talking about?

What they say

Google Research (www.snipca.com/16206):

"By building on robust multi-language OCR and incorporating large-scale neural-networks and approximate nearest neighbour search, Google Handwriting Input supports languages that can be challenging to type on a virtual keyboard."



What they mean

Google's free new Handwriting Input app (Android, www.snipca.com/16207) lets you "type" by writing, and recognises various languages.

Jane's villain of the fortnight Binkiland

Binkiland. Sounds nice, doesn't it? A green and pleasant land full of rabbits from *Harry Potter* (www.snipca.com/16165).

Unfortunately, life is not like *Harry Potter* and Binkiland is deeply unpleasant. This browser hijacker first hitched a lift into my PC a couple of months ago when I tested the screen-recording tool CamStudio, and it's since proved to be the most tenacious piece of junk I've ever encountered.

I clean the living daylights out of my PC every couple of days with AdwCleaner, Malwarebytes, CCleaner and JRT (Junkware Removal Tool), but Binkiland won't go. It's there every morning, like a facial feature you wish

you could chop off. It pretends to be friendly, too, which makes it all the more reprehensible – and its "easy removal guide" (www.snipca.com/16200) is a bad joke.

By the way, *The Simpsons* creator Matt Groening created a rabbit called Binky years before JK Rowling did. Matt's Binky featured in a cartoon called *Life in Hell* (www.snipca.com/16209) – which sounds more like the Binkiland I know and loathe. To find out how to get rid of it, I'm afraid you'll have to stay tuned.

✉ Want to nominate a villain of the fortnight? Email us at editor@computeractive.co.uk

Question of the Fortnite

Would age restrictions for online porn ever work?

It's unclear whether newly announced Conservative plans to stop under-18s accessing web porn would be effective

Technology rarely becomes an election issue, but in early April the Conservatives pledged that if elected they would force porn websites to verify the age of their users. It would apply to websites based both in the UK and overseas, and would be managed by a new regulatory body.

However, many experts think such legislation is pointless because users would simply get round the restrictions.

Writing on the Conservatives' Facebook page (www.snipca.com/16080) Culture Secretary Sajid Javid said: "In 2015 anyone, regardless of their age, is only ever two clicks away from the kind of material that would be kept well away from young eyes in the high street".

He compared the ease of watching sex online with the



similar way to how betting sites restrict access.

Another plausible idea is an online ID system run by a Government-approved organisation with no connection to the porn sites themselves. These can be expensive to set up and are difficult to maintain, but Javid points to such a system run by

be willing to give the Government personal details that tell them which porn sites they visit?

There are other obstacles. Emma Carr, from privacy campaigners Big Brother Watch, told *Computeractive's* sister website Expert Reviews that trying to regulate overseas websites would be tough: "With the vast majority of sites that would need age verification being hosted outside of the UK, it wouldn't be possible to enforce this measure across the board".

She's undoubtedly right. Why would a porn site based in California sign up to proposals from the UK Government? ISPs in the UK would have to block access to any site that refused to comply, just as they already prevent access to sites that provide illegal downloads of films and music. But people simply get round this by using **VPNs** or **proxy servers** to disguise their location. Under-18s would surely do

THE FACTS

- The Conservatives say that if elected they will force hardcore pornography sites to check that users are over 18
- They have suggested implementing an electronic ID system to confirm a user's identity
- Betting websites already use technology that confirms its users are 18 or over

“Under-18s would surely use VPNs to disguise their location and access porn”

difficulty of buying a pornographic DVD or magazine. The point is hard to argue with: don't let children access online what they wouldn't be able to buy in a shop.

But how would the age-verification system actually work? Javid didn't say, though one possibility would be to force users to register with their credit card in a

the Finnish government, so presumably it's an approach he's considering.

The Government already runs a similar scheme, called Verify, in which companies including Barclays and Royal Mail independently confirm the identity of people who want to access a Government service online (explained at www.snipca.com/16082). But how many people would

likewise to access porn.

It's for these reasons that some experts accuse the Tories of naivety. Javid admits that children will always find ways to circumvent age restrictions, but argues that such behaviour shouldn't deter Government from introducing them.

The battle is a familiar one. Those against the plan say the internet is so different from past innovations that old laws shouldn't apply. Instead of blocking access, they say, we should educate children about the dangers of web porn. Supporters dismiss the idea of treating the web as a special case. Javid says "it is right that we have the same rules applying online as we do offline".


Perhaps the key point is that while it may always be possible for children to access porn, it should be made as hard as possible – the online equivalent of the newsagent's top shelf. Javid's proposals would certainly do that.

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind


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www.twitter.com/computeractive

'Appalled' that Clean Reader had to remove ebooks


 I'm appalled that the couple running the Clean Reader app have been forced to stop selling ebooks (News, Issue 447). What's most outrageous is that authors were annoyed by the app's censorship, as though censorship is of itself a bad thing. That's utter nonsense. An app that replaces swear words with 'cleaner' alternatives is, of course, involved in censoring, but in doing so it's acting no differently to a TV channel dubbing words so a film can be broadcast before the watershed. Authors should be more realistic, and understand that a 'toned down' version of their book for younger (or more delicate) eyes is not a crime against freedom of expression.

Arnold Callaghan

Clean Reader 'had no right' to sell censored ebooks


 I publish my own ebooks, and would be horrified to find out that someone selling them changed my words just because they considered some it 'profane'. I guess they have every right not to sell my books if they don't like the language. But they have no right to keep selling a doctored version of the book. Who are they to tell anyone what should be censored? And if you are going to censor something, at least do it with half a brain. How can 'groin' be any kind of suitable alternative for 'penis'?

Catherine Shaw

 I hope Clean Reader starts selling ebooks again, because I'd be very tempted to buy *The Joy of Sex* from it. Their mad censoring should make it unintentionally hilarious, not to mention totally incomprehensible.

Guy Coleman

What to buy for Windows 10 - desktop PC or laptop?

 I have been reading with interest all the *Computeractive* articles about Windows 10 – and I'm in! When it is released I shall buy a new machine and grapple with Microsoft's new operating system. But my dilemma is, do I buy a desktop PC or a laptop?

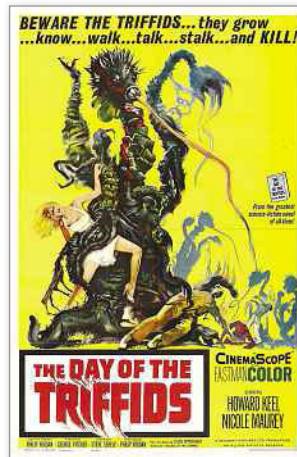
I have a self-built desktop PC which,

quite frankly, has seen better days. Over the years bits and pieces have been replaced or added, but its time has finally come, and the release of Windows 10 seems a good time to 'bite the bullet'. Three years ago I bought a laptop and, to be honest, the desktop PC now gets very little use – until I need to use a DVD drive, which my laptop lacks. I also tend to do a lot on my Samsung Galaxy S5 smartphone.


So do I need a new desktop PC? There are clear advantages to having one (the repair options are better, and it's easier to upgrade), but the use my current desktop PC gets is so limited that I am minded to go for a shiny new laptop complete with optical drive. The sheer portability of a laptop, given that I have a strong fibre-optic broadband connection at home and excellent Wi-Fi, wins the day... I think!

As an aside, recently I was in a Currys/PC World store looking at laptops and noticed that there were no desktop PCs on display. I circled the store four times to make sure. So perhaps there is no dilemma after all!

John Lattimore




Watch 1962 *Day of the Triffids* film

 Like *Computeractive* editor Daniel Booth, I was a frightened little boy watching the BBC's 1981 adaptation of *The Day of the Triffids*. Seeing the credits again on YouTube will probably give me nightmares for the rest of the year. Did you know you can also watch the 1962 US film on YouTube (www.snipca.com/16087)? It's nowhere

near as good as the BBC TV series, and the ending is pathetically simplistic – but it's still worth watching. Just don't expect it to be as scary as the poster (see above left). I've watched episodes of *Gardners' World* that have terrified me more.


Daniel Shepherd

Computer 'cock-ups' help me learn things

 As someone who has done many daft things over the years on their PC, I was reassured by Stuart Andrews' Final Straw column in Issue 447 in which he confessed to being a bit of a wally from time to time.

If someone as technologically savvy as

Dual-boot with Linux to keep using XP

 How glad I was to see in Letters, Issue 447, the reply by Arthur Evans that effectively countered the blinkered view expressed by Harry Powell concerning Windows XP in the previous issue. While using XP for internet activity can lead to security risks, it is possible to limit these with a little care. XP is an excellent and capable operating system, far superior to Windows ME that preceded it and to Windows Vista that followed.

I run two desktop computers: one is a refurbished Windows 7 system while the other, older PC runs XP. Last summer I set up XP to dual-boot with the Linux distribution Precise Puppy 5.7.1 (www.snipca.com/16094, see screenshot) and disabled internet



activity. It works very well. Linux is reasonably risk-free for internet activity, while XP is still available for my offline activity and use of my printer, scanner and other peripherals, which would not work on Windows 8/8.1 and probably not on Windows 10 either.

Chris Nother

he clearly is can forget to plug computers in, then I feel a lot better about my years of computer cock-ups. It's probably my own fault because I don't like to rely on the advice of so-called experts (with the exception of *Computeractive*). Instead, I like to learn things through trial and error. In my case, that has meant *lots* of errors, but it also means a greater sense of reward when you get something right. The key is knowing what kind of errors you can get away with without destroying your PC. That's a constant learning curve. I've probably become more cautious as I've got older (I'm now well into my eighties), but I still like to live dangerously every now and then.

Vernon Byrne

The reality of rural broadband

✉ I regularly smile at the misconceptions of townies regarding how we live out here in the sticks! Maurice Warwick claimed in Issue 447 that broadband should be a utility available to everyone, but what do we have now in the way of utilities? Here in Knighton, Powys, we do not have water from a utility company. Instead, we have to pipe our own from a natural spring in the hill behind us (I'm not complaining because it's chemical-free, pure and sweet). We do not have sewage pipes from a utility. Instead, we use septic tanks that we have to supply and maintain. We do not have natural gas from a utility. Instead, we have to buy it in bottles or use oil that we buy in advance.

We do have the pleasure of electricity and I am always grateful to the electricity companies who get us back up and running whenever we have a power cut. And we do have a provider of mobile signals – as long as we stand on the table with one foot in the air. But most importantly, whatever happens, we have a phone line. It gives us 10Mbps broadband, which is rare around here. Others are not so lucky, so when people say we have a right to these utilities, well, we don't! It is all a question of where you live. Super-fast broadband? Maybe after the water, sewage and gas!

Eric Martin

The truth about Facebook, the Pope and bears

✉ Well I never. So it looks like Facebook tracks what people do online, whether you have an account or

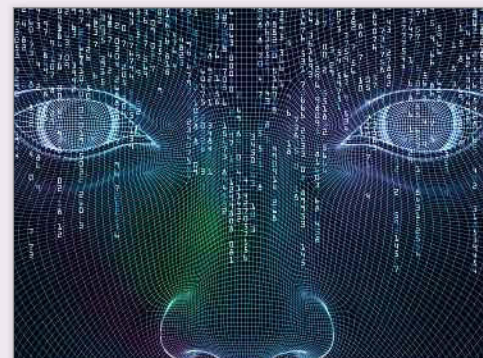
STAR LETTER

Rise of robots 'will make us richer and live longer'

✉ In Issue 447's 'Question of the Fortnight' you ask 'When will robots take over from humans?'. It was an interesting read, but I believe the fear of a robot mutiny is overblown. Ever since the uprising of the Luddites during the Industrial Revolution we've had doomsday predictions that machines will make humans obsolete. But instead the march of technology has made all of our lives richer (both financially and emotionally). I can see why some people are unsettled by the rise of robots, but I'm prepared to bet it will improve our lot overall, making us more prosperous and enabling us to live longer through medical advances.

It's true that technology will make certain trades redundant, but you can't un-invent technology, nor can you artificially stifle innovation in order to preserve jobs that are no longer needed. You can't run a cost-benefit analysis of any new technology to see whether it will cause a net loss of jobs. Take driverless cars. I can see these eventually replacing taxi drivers, but does that mean the jobs of taxi drivers should be protected? Of course not.

More realistic is the danger of robots



gaining a consciousness that can somehow take over the resources humans depend on, such as electricity. Imagine an artificial intelligence that thought it knew better how to run a nuclear power plant, and wouldn't let its human creators past the login screen.

But I still see this as an extremely remote threat. Besides, we solved the problem of preventing robot domination back in the Sixties, when the Daleks first appeared on our screens. The answer is simple: never build a robot that can climb stairs! If robots ever start planning a revolution, just move Parliament to the top of the Shard. Oh, wait – I forgot about lifts. . .

Patrick Kelly



The Star Letter writer wins a *Computeractive* mug!

not (News, 447). In other breaking news, the Pope has decided to stick with Catholicism, and bears have admitted they prefer to relieve themselves in woods, rather than in public toilets. As you were.

Mark Salmond

Free iPads for MPs? A 'sensible' idea

✉ Such is the anti-politics feeling in the UK that I'm sure you'll get loads of emails from readers complaining about free iPads for MPs (News, Issue 447). But I would like to swim against that tide of cynicism. It's sensible for the people representing this country to use the best available technology. The

kneejerk moaners would soon kick up a fuss if it was revealed that our MPs were stuck in the tech dark ages. And the key question is: why shouldn't MPs get free iPads? Isn't it the same as office workers being provided with a computer from their employer? If we want our MPs to do good job, we should equip them with all the technological tools they need.

Alistair McDonald

On the other hand...

Regarding free iPads and laptops for new MPs, can someone please tell me when the Monster Raving Loony party was elected to power?

Maurice Hardwicke

Consumeractive

Who's responsible for delivery left with neighbours?

Q I ordered a kimono from Kays catalogue (now called K&Co, www.kandco.com), but it never arrived. The courier claims to have delivered it to a neighbour, but I don't know these people. They're saying they've not got it. What can I do now?

Akiko Chiba

A Akiko obviously didn't give permission for the kimono to be left with strangers, so she should complain to K&Co and demand they send her a new one, or give her a refund. The law is clear on this matter. If you give instructions for a parcel to be left with a specific neighbour, then the retailer is not responsible if it goes missing before you get it. But if like Akiko you didn't give permission to do this, then the retailer is in breach of contract. In this case, it must send you a replacement or give you a refund. We'd also advise people to be careful about letting couriers leave parcels in a 'safe place', such as a garden shed or behind bins. If you agree to this then neither the retailer nor courier is responsible.

K&Co.

CASE CLOSED

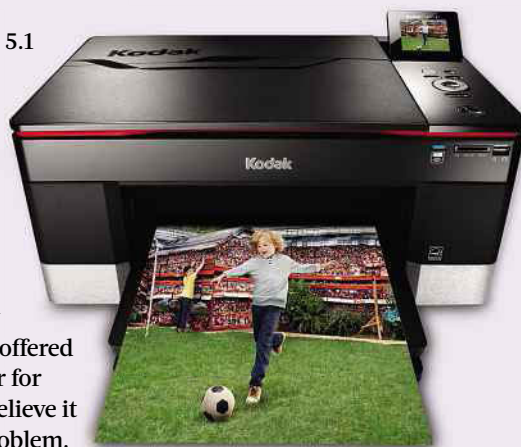
Can Kodak refuse a refund for a faulty printer head?

Q I bought a Kodak Hero 5.1 printer in 2013 but after seven months it stopped working. Kodak sent a replacement, but this stopped printing completely in March. Kodak sent a free replacement printer head, but this doesn't work. Kodak now says it's the printer that's faulty and not the new head, and has offered to sell me a replacement printer for £51. I don't like this offer and believe it is the printer head that's the problem. But I was told I'd have to pay for one this time and if it doesn't work I couldn't have a refund. Is this right?

Andrew Bromfield

A No, it's not right. Although Kodak doesn't have to give Andrew another free printer head because too much time has passed since he bought the printer, it would need to refund him if he bought a head and it turned out to be faulty. But he would need to send the printer head back within six months of purchase. If Kodak disagrees that it's faulty, it would need to prove this.

Buying a new printer head, which would cost Andrew £21 plus postage,



may appear to be his most sensible option. However, Kodak may have talked itself into giving Andrew a free printer because it insists the printer itself is faulty, not the printer head. But for this to be the case, the fault must be inherent, not a result of wear and tear or accidental damage. We've told Andrew that before he makes a decision, we'll ask Kodak if it does actually believe the fault is inherent. With that admission from Kodak, Andrew will be legally entitled to demand a repair or replacement. If this isn't possible, Kodak will have to offer a pro-rata refund.

CASE ONGOING

What can I do about a repair that's taking months?

Q In June 2014 I bought a 48in Samsung TV from Argos. After a couple of weeks it stopped working so a local technician tried to repair it. This didn't fix the problem so I took it back to Argos, where we found the technician had botched the job. Because Argos hadn't performed the repair, the warranty was now invalid, so I agreed to pay for Argos to send it to another company for repair. But months later this company still has the TV, claiming it can't get the required parts, and hasn't even told me how much the

repair will cost. What can I do?

Jim Jackson

A Jim should write to the repair company asking it to return the TV to him at its own cost because it's in breach of contract. Making him wait months for a quote and repair is unacceptable. Jim told us that the

company says it can't find a new screen for his TV. But, of course, if it does return the TV unrepared, that doesn't solve Jim's problem. We'll try to help him find a repair company that can do the job, but we need more details from Jim about the TV. Once we've got those, we'll ask Samsung for advice, specifically whether they can recommend a repair company near Jim that is capable of fixing the TV.



CASE ONGOING



We stand up for your legal rights

✉ Contact us so we can investigate your case

Email: 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 be made to pay to return an unwanted graphics card?

Q On 24 January I ordered an Nvidia GTX 970 graphics card for £266.45 from Electrohut.com. But the company's sent a totally different card, a Radeon 290X, which is of no use to me. Electrohut said I could return it, but at my own risk and expense. The company's now ignoring all correspondence from me - including emails and a letter sent by recorded delivery. Can you help?

Peter Carter

A We'll try to help, but we think Peter may end up having to take legal action against Electrohut. Let's clear up the main point first. Electrohut must pay for Peter to return the graphics card because it sent him the wrong one. It must also refund

Peter in full.

However, it's worrying that Electrohut has ignored all Peter's correspondence. We tried to track down the company, but its website has been removed. Investigating further, we found some posts on internet forums suggesting that the company is a scam. We'll try to get some response from Electrohut. In the meantime, if Electrohut continues to ignore Peter, he should report it to Trading Standards by filing a complaint on the Citizens Advice website Advice Guide (www.snipca.com/15966). We also think Peter should write another letter to Electrohut, again sending it by registered post, saying that if he doesn't get



a response to his complaint within seven working days, he'll take the matter to the small claims court.

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE



Reader gets Currys refund after recording his chat with them

Whenever you are pursuing a refund, it helps to have as much evidence at your disposal. That's why *Computeractive* reader Chris Newbon recorded a phone

conversation he'd had with Currys, during which they said they would refund him if a second repair of his laptop failed. Faced with this proof, Currys refunded the full amount of £899, a result which had seemed in doubt when we reported Chris's case in Issue 447.

At the time, Currys was repairing for the second time the HP Envy laptop he bought there in December 2014. Unfortunately, the repaired laptop lasted less than 24 hours. Chris returned to the store, where he was told that the laptop would have to be repaired a *third* time. Annoyed by being stuck in an endless repair loop, Chris played to the sales assistant the recording of the conversation he'd previously had with a customer representative over the phone. This did the trick, and Currys finally refunded him.

Chris was smart, but he shouldn't have had to resort to this. In future, anyone who ends up in a similar position will be protected by the new Consumer Rights Act, which is now law,

and will come into full effect on 1 October. This entitles customers to a refund after just one failed repair. Read more at www.snipca.com/16003.



THIS WILL COME IN USEFUL

Microsoft contact details

Customer service
0344 800 2400

General support
Homepage: <https://support.microsoft.com>
Live chat: www.snipca.com/15858
Twitter: @MicrosoftHelps

Internet Explorer
Support forums: www.snipca.com/16001
Twitter: @IE

Microsoft Store
0800 026 0329

Office
Support forums: www.snipca.com/16000
Twitter: @Office

Skype
Support forums: www.snipca.com/15842
Twitter: @SkypeSupport

Windows
Support forums: www.snipca.com/16002
Twitter: @WindowsSupport

Windows Phone
Support forums: www.snipca.com/15857
Twitter: @LumiaUK

Xbox
Live chat: www.snipca.com/15841
Support forums: <http://forums.xbox.com>



Protect Your Tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Chrome extensions that steal your info

What happened?

Google recently removed 192 **extensions** from the Chrome Web Store (<https://chrome.google.com/webstore>), after they were revealed to be stealing sensitive data from millions of users.

The move follows a report from the University of California, which worked with Google to measure the dangers of dodgy extensions. After analysing more than 100 million visits to Google's web pages, researchers found that five per cent of people were using at least one malicious extension that steals personal information, such as login details, or bombards users with adverts.

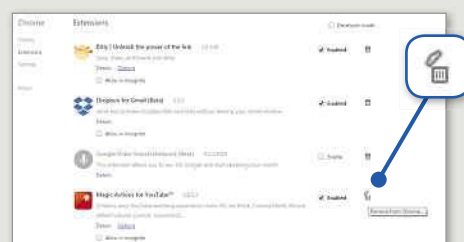
One of the extensions Google removed is Webpage Screenshot, after Swedish security firm ScrapeSentry found that it copies all your browsing history and sends it to an **IP address**

registered in the US.

The makers of the extension, which had been downloaded 1.2 million times, argued the data was gathered for a legitimate reason – to understand who was using the app, and to help improve it. Google disagreed, saying accessing your full browsing history isn't required for that.

What should you do?

What you certainly *shouldn't* do is panic and ditch all your Chrome extensions, because the vast majority are safe. Instead, try a tool that scans them, such as our favourite junk-remover AdwCleaner (a free download from www.snipca.com/16022), which will highlight any potentially dangerous extensions. To remove unwanted extensions, click Chrome's top-right



menu (three horizontal lines), then Settings. On the next page, click Extensions in the left-hand menu, the bin icon next to the extension you want to remove, then Remove.

Your chances of being infected in future should decrease because Google is now scanning Chrome extensions for 'ad-injecting' behaviour, which plasters horrid adverts over web pages as you browse. Read more on Google's Online Security Blog (www.snipca.com/16085).

New tools

Dashlane Inbox Scan
www.dashlane.com/scan

There's a very good reason hackers go after your email inbox – they hope to find some passwords lurking there, such as in confirmation emails you've forgotten to delete. With Dashlane Inbox Scan, however, you can get there first. It scans your email accounts (Yahoo, AOL, Google and Hotmail) for passwords and login details that would be visible to hackers, giving you an 'Inbox Score'. You can then download a PDF of the passwords it found (keep this somewhere safe – or shred it).

Giving an external tool permission to scan your inbox may sound unsafe, but Dashlane's access is only temporary. It's perfectly safe, though Dashlane will



email you after the scan to promote their free password manager. Read Dashlane's blog (www.snipca.com/16084) for more info.

This is the second Dashlane tool to impress us this year. In Issue 440 we recommended its Password Changer, which lets you update your passwords on around 70 websites with one click. Try it at www.snipca.com/14692.

ScamWatch

READERS WARN READERS

Unpaid toll-road fee scam

I recently received an email regarding an unpaid "toll-road" fee. It said: "Dear Andy. You have not paid for driving on a toll-road. Please, do not forget to service your debt. You can review the invoice in the attachment. Sincerely, Henry Walters, E-ZPass Manager". The use of my first name was interesting, and the toll-road angle is a new one to me. Apart from a few odd words, the email was quite believable (but still obviously fake, as a toll-road charge would have included my car details). Be warned, though: it seems scammers' English is getting better and better.

Andy Worall

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

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BCUninstaller 1.6

www.snipca.com/16144

What you need: Windows 7 or 8/8.1

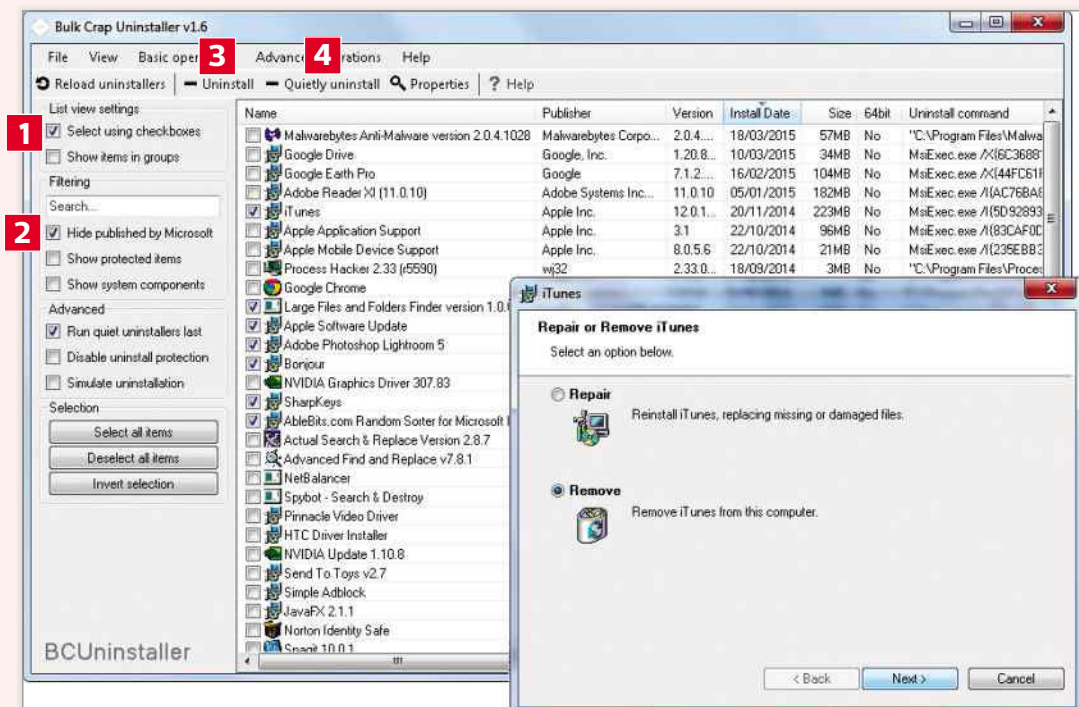
BCUninstaller (the C stands for 'crap', like in CCleaner; the B stands for the less indelicate 'bulk') is a tiny new fish in a very crowded pond. We've already got Revo Uninstaller, GeekUninstaller and a stack of others (see our Cover Feature in Issue 427), not to mention Windows' built-in uninstaller. So why bother with this 794KB minnow instead?

Despite its size and portable nature, BCUninstaller is unusually quick and powerful. It can remove batches of programs at once, then scan your Registry for leftover files and get rid of them, too. It does all this from a packed but tidy program window, which has options to exclude Microsoft programs from a scan and even disable 'uninstall protection' programs that refuse to go without a fight. Other tools include 'Simulate uninstallation', which lets you see how a program's removal would affect your PC before you actually go through

with it, and (for some programs, at least) a Quietly Uninstall option that skips annoying 'are you sure?'-type pop-ups during removal (see below).

BCUninstaller doesn't need installing. Just click the blue Download File link, extract the contents of the ZIP file, then double-click the program file ('BCUninstaller.exe') to run it. Unlike some installable uninstallers, it doesn't litter your system with files and won't try to take over your built-in uninstall tool.

Now for the bad news. BCUninstaller is very new and still has a few bugs. Because it's portable, you should be able to run it from any folder you want, but it wouldn't run at all after we moved it to the 'junk removers' folder on our Desktop (also now home to DriveCleanup – see opposite). So we downloaded the program again and it worked fine.



1 Once BCUninstaller has finished populating its list (this can take a minute or two), tick 'Select using checkboxes' so you can select multiple programs to remove.

2 Tick 'Hide published by Microsoft' to filter out built-in tools. Don't tick 'Show protected items' or 'Show system components' – these may be vital for your PC.

3 Tick the items you want to get rid of, then click Uninstall. Certain programs (such as iTunes, above) will ask you to click further confirmation buttons.

4 Alternatively, click Quietly Uninstall to skip the extra buttons. To see if a program supports this, right-click it, click Properties and check QuietUninstallPossible.



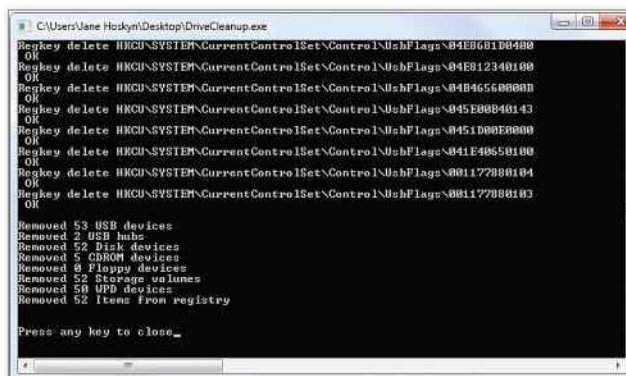
FLIGHT SIMULATOR

FlightGear 3.4

www.flightgear.org

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7 or 8/8.1

The team of volunteers behind this huge **open-source** program must have noticed our feature on flight simulators (Issue 443), because this new version appeared as soon as the issue went on sale. There are four new aircraft to add to the choice of 400-plus, including a North American P-51D Mustang, one of the best-known fighter jets used by the US Air Force during World War II (www.snipca.com/16169, see above). There's also now a moving map and a screenshot tool in the program's built-in web **server**.



SYSTEM TOOL

DriveCleanUp 1.0.0

www.snipca.com/16166

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7 or 8/8.1

Run this new portable tool on your old XP PC and you'll be amazed. Not by fancy graphics or flashy tools – the program works via the **command line** and its window couldn't be simpler – but by the sheer volume of rubbish that flies through it. DriveCleanUp isn't interested in **cache** junk, temporary files and other stuff that CCleaner removes; instead it goes after settings and Registry entries left on your PC by USB sticks, hard drives and other 'disk' devices that have long since been disconnected. It's fast, powerful and very easy to use. Click the blue 'drivecleanup.zip' link, then extract the contents of the ZIP, open the appropriate folder (**32bit** or **64bit**, depending on your PC type). Right-click the EXE, select 'Run as administrator', then sit back and watch those useless files fly.

WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

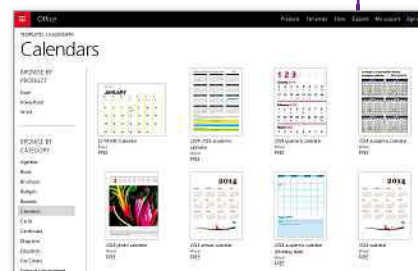
We tell you what software to use

What's the best calendar software?

Q I've stopped using Microsoft Outlook for email, but I miss its calendar tools. I used it to design and print my calendars, with repeat dates and different designs for each month. What should I now use instead?

Bob Cowx

A You don't say what email software you're using now, Bob, but if you've switched to the online version of Outlook you may like its own calendar tool (<https://calendar.live.com>). Like the Desktop version it lets you set up repeat events and print in various formats. It also has free design templates (www.snipca.com/16174) and a great user guide (www.snipca.com/16173). Google Calendar (<https://www.google.com/calendar>) is worth a try, too – and don't miss its experimental features such as Gentle Notifications and background photos (www.snipca.com/16175). Both these calendar services are free and all your data is encrypted. They far outclass any Desktop programs we've looked at.




Heard the one about the terrible joke software?

Q Is there a tool that generates jokes? I want to choose a subject (say, 'mother-in-law' or 'holiday' or a combination) and click to see jokes including those terms. Is there such a thing?

John Baddeley

A Sadly it seems computers are very bad at telling jokes. Some joke-generators have been useful, such as the pun-writing program designed to help kids with learning difficulties (www.snipca.com/16181), but most are too poor to recommend. Type keywords into Bad Joke Generator (<http://thesurrealist.co.uk/joke>), for example. You won't laugh. SearchQuotes (www.searchquotes.com) isn't bad for finding witticisms on various subjects, and Greg Dean's interactive tool (<http://ijokewriting.com>) will help you improve your joke-telling skills.



 Do you need our advice on what software to use? Just email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Reviews

New products tested by our experts

SET-TOP BOX | £79 from www.snipca.com/16093

Google Nexus Player

Android comes to your TV

The Nexus Player is Google's new set-top box for playing online video on your TV. It's the first device to run Android TV – a version of the popular mobile operating system designed to be used on your telly. While the Nexus Player is the first of its kind, it won't be the last – Sony's upcoming 2015 range of smart TVs, for example, will use Android TV.

The Nexus Player is a plain black device made by Asus, who made the Nexus 7 tablet (now discontinued), and is the shape and size of an ice-hockey puck. It's very easy to set up. Connect it to your TV using an **HDMI** cable (not included) and then follow the straightforward instructions to connect it to your wireless

“Unless you're heavily invested in Google's services, there's no compelling reason to buy one”

network and enter your Google account details. You have to use Wi-Fi because it has no **Ethernet** port.

The Nexus Player isn't Google's first video-streaming device for the home. It comes in the wake of the now defunct Google TV set-top boxes, which were made by various third-party manufacturers. Its interface was essentially a poorly designed web browser controlled using a fiddly mini keyboard and touchpad (see our review of the Sony NSZ-GS7 Google TV, Issue 382). There is also, of course, the more popular and better Chromecast (see our review, Issue 421), which is still available as a cheaper alternative to the Nexus Player.

Interface and controls

Unlike those devices, the Nexus Player is more like other streaming set-top boxes such as the Apple TV and Roku 3

(see our reviews, Issues 372 and 411 respectively). The home screen consists of three horizontally scrolling rows of icons. The first row features videos and music you've recently played as well as suggestions based on this content. The second row displays your apps. You'll not

be surprised to learn that the apps for Google's own streaming video and music services are pre-installed. The third row provides access to the settings.

Everything is controlled using the Bluetooth remote control (included), which works well enough, although its sharp edges make it feel cheap. The only problem we encountered was when we pressed play/pause on the remote while using a video app and it controlled music

playback instead. Although you can use the remote to type search keywords using the on-screen keyboard, this is a laborious process and it's far easier to use your voice instead. Much like the Amazon Fire TV (see our review, Issue 439), when you're on the home screen press and hold the mic button on the remote then speak into the microphone built into the remote.

The accuracy of the speech recognition depends on the quality of your internet connection because it uses Google's **servers**, but we found it generally excellent. It's also pretty smart – saying 'Chinatown' or 'Roman Polanski film noir' will get the same, correct results. You'll see options for renting or buying the film as well as information about the film and its director and stars, all from the web, shown as a series of cards.

What you can watch

You'll get the most out of the Nexus Player if you've already bought tracks from Google's music store, subscribe to Google's Spotify-like music subscription service (Google Play Music All Access) or if you've already bought or rented TV shows and films from Google's video store. As the Nexus Player is linked to your Google account, all purchased media, playlists



HOW TO WATCH ONLINE TV IN YOUR LIVING ROOM

	Media centre PCs	Smart TVs & smart Blu-ray players	Streaming set-top boxes	PVRs	ISP set-top boxes and PVRs
Examples	Intel NUC, Raspberry Pi	Panasonic Viera, Sony Bravia (2014)	Amazon Fire TV, Chromecast, Roku, AppleTV, Android TV	YouView	Sky+, Virgin Tivo
Pros	Flexibility – can play any online content and your media files	Convenience – no extra hardware required so no switching between input sources on your TV	Easy to use; cheap	Can record and pause live TV; no subscriptions required	Inexpensive; can record and pause live TV; easy to use; often exclusive content included for free
Cons	Requires a lot of initial setup; expensive; all the maintenance and hassle of a PC	Choice of apps often limited; interfaces quite fiddly to use; manufacturers may discontinue support for older models	Often works best with or requires manufacturer's own services and other devices; choice of apps sometimes limited	Choice of apps beyond terrestrial TV catch-up services often limited; interfaces can be fiddly to use	Requires subscription; apps for rival services often unavailable

There are plenty of dedicated devices for streaming online video on your TV. The table above summarises the pros and cons of each type

and unviewed rentals will show up automatically in the relevant app.

The Nexus Player is far less useful if you don't use Google's media stores often – or at all. While you can download other video and music apps from the Android TV-specific version of the Google Play store, the choice is currently very limited. There's Netflix and Sky News, but none of the terrestrial TV catch-up services, such as BBC iPlayer, and no other video-subscription services are available. You can play your own video files, as long as they're stored on a networked computer or NAS, using apps such as Plex.

There is a workaround – the Nexus Player can also be used like a Chromecast. In other words, you can use the iPlayer app on your iOS or Android device to play BBC programmes on the Nexus Player. As with a standalone Chromecast you're not streaming video from your mobile device to the Nexus Player. Instead the app on your device acts as a remote, while the Player does all the hard work. This is no more than a stop-gap solution though because the range of Chromecast-compatible apps is only slightly wider than the app selection for Android TV.

Another limitation is that when you use voice search on the home screen,

you'll only see results from Google's services. But you can at least use voice search within individual apps, so you're not stuck with the onscreen keyboard.

All apps, whether Google or not, use the same basic interface – a panel on the left-hand side shows menus and navigation options (such as categories), while the right-hand side shows you the music or video titles you're browsing. You can set a password to access the Nexus Player or set age-related parental controls to prevent children from watching anything you don't want them to see. Oddly though, you can't customise the order of the apps as they appear on the homescreen.

Conclusion

The Nexus Player is by no means a bad streaming set-top box. It's very easy to use, especially if you use voice search, but unless you're heavily invested in Google's video and music services then it currently falls behind all of its major competitors in its selection of available content. Android TV has a lot of potential, but for now there are few compelling reasons to buy one.

SPECIFICATIONS

1.8GHz Intel Atom quad-core processor • 1x HDMI • 802.11ac/a/b/g/n • 235g • 120x120x20mm (HxWxD)
www.snipca.com/16092

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PRICES

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

VERDICT: Easy to use, but you have to use Google's video and music services and stores to get the most out of it



ALTERNATIVE:

Amazon Fire TV £64 Not without flaws

of its own, but this voice-controlled streaming set-top box has access to a far wider choice of video and music



Reviews

SMARTPHONE | £575 without contract from www.snipca.com/16059

HTC One M9

A powerful and classy-looking Android phone, but its beauty is only skin deep

Many new Android phones have flashy technologies like curved screens, but HTC has taken a different route with its latest phone, the One M9. It looks almost identical to its predecessor, the One M8 (see our review, Issue 421), with HTC opting to change most of its internal components and software instead.

Like previous One phones, the One M9 looks very classy and feels exceptionally robust thanks to its brushed metal construction.

While previous One phones were a little slippery, HTC has added a ridge around the edge of the M9's screen to give your fingers extra grip – a small but helpful change. It's still a very big phone, though, and if you have small hands you'll find it hard to use one-handed.

One of the biggest disappointments in the M8 was its camera. Its 'ultrapixel' sensor took better quality shots in low light than other phones of the time, but with a big catch: large amounts of detail were lost, both in low light and on

“Android Lollipop's 'do not disturb' features are buried, making them harder to get to”

brightly lit shots. The M9 has a standard 20-megapixel sensor instead, but it's still flawed. While photos taken in dim conditions were well lit with noise kept to a minimum, they were prone to blurriness and fine details were lost. Flesh tones in portraits, even those taken with plenty of light, were a little smeared and looked unnatural. Only landscape shots were consistently good.

The 5in screen's image quality is top notch. It's bright with good contrast and colour accuracy. Touch-sensitivity wasn't quite spot-on, though, sometimes lagging



behind our finger movements, which is disappointing for a phone at this price.

We had no complaints about performance, though. Its eight-core processor, paired with 3GB of memory, sprinted through our demanding benchmark tests. The phone's metal casing did become noticeably warm as a result, but not uncomfortably so.

Call quality on O2's 3G network in London's West End was generally good. Callers did sound a little quiet to us, but we sounded loud and clear to them despite the sound of a building site in the background. However, battery life was disappointing, coming in at just under 24 hours when we used the phone for calls, photography, web browsing and Google Maps. This is a very average score.

The M9 is one of the first Android phones to come with Android 5.0 Lollipop pre-installed, but HTC has added its own custom interface on top. There are some useful features, such as the ability to silence the ringer by flipping the phone

over and a Kid's Mode so your little ones can use your phone but with restrictions you control. But there is also lots of fluff, such as the option to have the icons and other parts of the interface change colour to match your wallpaper. Most irritating of all, Lollipop's handy 'do not disturb' features are buried in the settings app, making them harder to get to.

We don't mind that HTC has only slightly changed the casing of the One M9 – it's a strength of the One series, after all. The mediocre camera and battery life are less easy to forgive, and while performance, screen and call quality are up to scratch, many other phones also share these advantages. Unless looks are everything, you can get better elsewhere.

VERDICT: Modest improvements over its predecessor and some gimmicky, annoying tacked-on software make for a smartphone that's only fair value

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Sony

Xperia Z3 £465

without contract

A waterproof 5in Android phone with lengthy battery life



SPECIFICATIONS

5in 1920x1080-pixel touchscreen • 1.56GHz Qualcomm Snapdragon 810 eight-core processor • Adreno 430 graphics chip • 3GB memory • 32GB storage • 4G • nano SIM • microSD • Android 5.0 Lollipop • 157g • 145x70x10mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/16060

PRINTER | £45 from www.snipca.com/16064

HP Officejet Pro 6230

A no-nonsense office inkjet printer

HP's Officejet Pro 6230 is a no-frills inkjet printer aimed at small offices and the home. There are even cheaper printers available, but the 6230 remains a bargain as it supports wired and wireless networking, so is easy to share among multiple users on a network.

It also offers automatic **duplex printing** – good for saving paper with minimal effort.

It's not built for heavy use, with a recommended monthly load of up to 800 pages – or about 40 per working day. There's also no screen or USB port, so you can't print directly from a USB stick without using a computer.

“It's cheap to buy and inexpensive to run, making it a good choice if you're on a tight budget”

The large top panel opens to give easy access to the paper path for clearing any jams. This is also how you reach the four ink cartridges. Using high-capacity replacements good for 1,000 black pages or 825 of colour, running costs work out at 5.4p for a page of mixed text and graphics and 1.6p per page of just black text. Although not the cheapest we've seen, these costs are still very competitive for such a cheap printer.

The paper-input tray is sturdy, but can only hold 225 pages and can't be replaced with a higher capacity one, nor is there a manual feed for one-off jobs on other types of paper stock. You can, of course,

SPECIFICATIONS

1200x600dpi maximum print resolution • 10ppm colour and 18ppm mono quoted speeds • Ethernet • USB • Wi-Fi • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/16065



print from your Android and iOS mobile device either by using the dedicated apps on your phone or tablet, or by emailing files directly to the printer.

The Officejet Pro 6230 is a speedy printer, delivering 25 pages of black text at 17.6 pages per minute (ppm) and 24 pages of colour graphics at a slightly less impressive 4.4ppm.

It was less competitive when duplex printing, needing nearly four minutes to print 10 sides on five sheets of A4. Plus, the results were noticeably fainter than with one-sided prints. Otherwise, print quality was very good, with sharp black text and smooth colour graphics. Draft printing is no quicker than standard quality, but the results, though more faint, would still be adequate for formal letters if ink saving was paramount.

There's a lot to like about the HP Officejet Pro 6230. It's cheap to buy and inexpensive to run, making it a good choice if you need to print moderate volumes of office documents or letters on a tight budget.

VERDICT: A no-frills inkjet printer that's cheap, fast, and inexpensive to run

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: Canon Maxify MB5050
£135 A more expensive MFP with colour print quality that is only so-so, but it offers even lower running costs, more flexible paper handling and a much higher monthly usage load



Accessories

Ikea Markus

£125 from www.snipca.com/16150

A comfortable, smart-looking and easy-to-assemble office chair, with tilt and swivel but no height-adjustable arm rests.



Logitech MX Master Wireless Mouse

£80 from www.snipca.com/16151

A comfortable wireless mouse that can work with up to three different computers via Bluetooth and its own wireless dongle. It has six programmable buttons and a second scroll wheel for navigating websites and virtual desktops. It's also incredibly accurate and responsive.



Leef iBridge

£48 from www.snipca.com/16149

A USB 2.0 stick that also has a Lightning connector so you can transfer files between your PC and your iOS device. It's not especially fast (large and small files copy over at around 11MB/s), but its curved design means it doesn't stick out awkwardly when plugged in.



Samsung External Battery Pack (11,300mAh)

£65 from www.snipca.com/16152

This power bank for your smartphone or tablet has a built-in retractable microUSB cable and is available in plain and animal-themed versions. It added 47 extra hours of video playback to our Moto G phone.



Reviews

PC MONITOR | £203 from www.snipca.com/16108

ViewSonic VG2437Smc

A 24in monitor with a built-in webcam

The ViewSonic VG2437Smc is a **1080p** 24in monitor with a built-in webcam and microphone. If you use Skype often, then reducing your cable clutter will be an attractive proposition. The webcam's video quality isn't great, but it's good enough for Skype. Unfortunately, it's poorly positioned. In order to position your face in the centre of the frame, you'll need to tilt the monitor forward, which makes viewing the screen quite awkward. The built-in microphone is useless – our video-chat volunteer found it almost impossible to hear us. Likewise, the speakers are unremarkable. While they're loud enough, they sound very flat and lack bass.

Image quality was a very mixed bag.

SPECIFICATIONS

23.6in • 1920x1080-pixel resolution • 1x VGA port • 1x DVI port • 1x DisplayPort • 2x 3.5mm audio inputs • 1x 3.5mm audio out • 2x USB2 • 450x557x240mm (HxWxD) • 5.2kg www.snipca.com/16147

Excellent contrast let us pick out details in dark areas of high-resolution photographs and videos. Also, it has extremely wide viewing angles, so a colleague sitting next to us could still read onscreen text without any problems, even when viewing the screen from a 45-degree angle.

Sadly, colours weren't particularly vibrant and distinct dark patches marred the edges and corners of the screen, which is disappointing at this price.

There is a handy two-port USB hub at the rear of the monitor. It also has some useful ergonomic features: the stand is height adjustable and you can easily swivel the monitor with one hand.

The ViewSonic VG2437Smc has some useful features, but the poor quality of its microphone and the awkward placement of the webcam negate the convenience of having them built-in, while image quality just isn't up to scratch for a monitor this



expensive. Unless reducing cable traffic is absolutely vital, a separate monitor and webcam would be better value.

VERDICT: A disappointing monitor with below-average image quality and a terrible microphone

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ALTERNATIVE:

Dell U2215H **£150** A 22in monitor also with built-in webcam, but superior – though far from perfect – image quality



PRINTER | £176 from www.snipca.com/16105

HP Colour LaserJet Pro M252dw

A stylish colour laser printer for the home or small office

HP's attractive and compact Colour LaserJet Pro M252dw is the laser printer-only version of the M277dw **MFP** (see our review, Issue 447). At its base you'll find a simple 150-sheet paper tray. Above that there's a slot into which you feed envelopes and other non-standard stationery. Sitting on top is an excellent colour touchscreen used to set up the printer and control features such as printing directly from a USB stick. Other features include automatic double-sided printing and support for printing via the internet or from mobile devices.

HP says that the M252dw can print 18 mono or colour pages per minute (ppm), and it got reasonably close to that in our

SPECIFICATIONS

600x600dpi maximum print resolution • 18ppm colour and mono quoted speeds • USB2 • Ethernet • Wi-Fi • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/16106

tests. It delivered the first full page of black text 17 seconds after we sent the job from our PC, taking 30 seconds in total to complete the five-page text document. Surprisingly, five pages of colour business graphics were produced in less time. It managed 20 pages of text at a rate of 14.6ppm.

As we'd expect from a laser printer, the text looked superb, but we weren't blown away by the quality of the graphics, which had a blue tint and were overall quite drab. We experimented with different colour settings in the **driver**, but couldn't improve the results.

The M252dw takes four toner cartridges, with each available in a standard or high-yield capacity. Using the latter, print costs are competitive at 9.2p per page of text and graphics.

The M252dw is a good colour laser, but

an inkjet equivalent would be cheaper to run. Unless you need to print a lot – this printer has a high maximum monthly load of 2,500 pages – the HP Officejet Pro 6230 would be a better buy (see our review, page 23).

VERDICT: There's plenty to like about this stylish printer, but its colour print quality is a letdown and an inkjet would be cheaper to run

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ALTERNATIVE:

HP Officejet Pro 6230 **£45** An inkjet printer that's cheaper to buy and run, although it has a lower monthly usage load





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- Microsoft Windows 8.1

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Reviews

DASHCAM | £180 from www.snipca.com/16055

RoadHawk DC-2

A well designed dashcam that's worth every penny



Dashcams are video cameras designed to be mounted on your car's dashboard or rear-view mirror, guaranteeing you a record of events in case of an accident. You can also use them to record road trips through scenic countryside.

Thanks to built-in GPS, videos are automatically tagged with the location where they were shot, so you can easily prove where a recording was made.

Unusually for a dashcam, the Roadhawk DC-2 doesn't have a display. This minimises potential distractions for the driver, and while we were concerned that mounting the unit correctly without a screen would be tricky, in practice it was no problem at all. Roadhawk supplies two types of mount, a strong adhesive pad and a regular suction-cup mount, and both are easily adjustable.

Video quality is among the best of any dashcam we've seen. In daylight, distortion caused by the wide angle view of the lens was minimal, details were sharp and the image was rock-steady thanks to the **optical stabilisation**.

SPECIFICATIONS

1080p video resolution • no screen • accepts SD, SDHC and SDXC storage cards up to 64GB • 98x68x26mm (HxWxD) • 125g
www.snipca.com/16056

We had no trouble making out number plates on passing vehicles, even in footage taken on the motorway at 70mph.

Night-time recording is less impressive. Our footage had a lot of **noise**, and the windscreen appeared to have a sparkly effect that made it look like it was raining when conditions were perfectly dry.

However, better quality night-time footage would invariably mean more expensive camera components, which would increase the price.

There are other minor niggles. The lights that indicate the DC-2 is recording and has latched on to a GPS signal are hard to see in bright daylight. The DC-2 is also relatively chunky, and was awkward to fit behind the rear-view mirror in one of the cars we tried it with.

GPS co-ordinates aren't displayed at the bottom of the video image, as with other dashcams. You have to install Roadhawk's dedicated PC software to view the location on a Google Map alongside the video. This software can also be used to change the camera's image-quality settings.

It's also disappointing that the camera can't be connected directly to your PC –

you have to remove the SD card and pop it into your computer.

It's worth noting you can attach an external GPS antenna in case a heated windscreen or special coating affects the satellite signal. You can also hard-wire the unit directly into your car's electrical supply rather than using the included cigarette lighter adapter for power.

Overall, the Roadhawk DC-2 offers a great balance between features, video quality and distraction-free driving. It's not cheap at £180, but this well designed camera is worth the money.

VERDICT: The Roadhawk DC-2 is a distraction-free dashcam that produces superb daytime footage

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: GoPro Hero4 Black Edition £370 Even better video quality from this tiny camera, but it's expensive and isn't designed specifically as a dashcam, so you'll need to buy all the required accessories separately



WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

What's the best non-click mouse for my podcasts?

Q I record a regular podcast about stamp collecting, but my listeners complain that the sound of my mouse buttons clicking is far too distracting. Is there a mouse with silent buttons that you could recommend?

Rene Wagner

A The best 'noiseless' mouse that we've tested is the Nexus SM-5000 (£19 from www.snipca.com/16101 – see photo), which is

unrelated to Google's similarly named range of Android devices. The buttons on this wireless mouse emit approximately 35 decibels of noise, which is around one-third that of a standard mouse.

It's worth remembering that if you use a laptop, you can simply tap the surface of the touchpad instead of pressing the physical buttons to activate onscreen controls. Tapping your computer's touchscreen, if it has one, is another free and quiet alternative to a noisy mouse.



✉ Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

SECURITY CAMERA | £217 from www.snipca.com/16110

Icontrol Piper nv

A home-security camera that sees in the dark and alerts you to any problems

Icontrol's Piper nv must have the highest specifications of any home-security camera we've ever reviewed. Its high-resolution and night-vision camera capabilities are only the headline acts of a list of features that includes motion, temperature and humidity sensors; a two-way intercom; and an ear-splitting siren. What's even more impressive, it can act as a controller for home-automation devices that are compatible with the Z-wave standard. So with extra equipment you could use it to remotely control lights and other devices. Z-wave compatible devices aren't very widespread though.

If that all sounds a tad intimidating, the good news is that it's very easy to set up. Simply install Piper's app on an iOS or Android mobile device and it will quickly detect the camera and configure

“You'd be hard-pressed to identify intruders unless they got close to the camera”

it for your Wi-Fi network. Once this is done, you can choose how Piper behaves if it detects sound or motion when you're at home, out of the house for a short time, or away on holiday. Options include recording video of an intruder in the act, notifications via text or a phone call, setting

off a siren, or activating any Z-wave devices you have – switching on a light, for example.

The app charts your home's temperature, humidity and other vital signs over time, which could

be useful if you have a pet and want to make sure they're not too hot or cold. Pet owners can adjust the motion sensitivity to avoid false alarms. You can watch live video within the app, though all recorded videos triggered by an event are stored on Icontrol's **servers** (free storage is included for up to 1,000 30-second clips). Unusually, the Piper nv has a battery backup and a small amount of onboard storage, so it remains active in the event of a power cut or sabotage, storing up to five video clips until they can be uploaded.

Piper's motion- and sound-detection features and notifications worked reliably in our tests, but in some respects we found it disappointing. Icontrol claims that the Piper nv records video in 'enhanced' high-definition (HD), but the quality of live video and recorded footage was very poor in both daylight and at night. We also tested the standard Piper camera, which costs about £70 less. It has no night vision and records lower-resolution video. Its image quality was similarly disappointing. You'd be

SPECIFICATIONS

3.4 megapixel video resolution • Night vision • Microphone • Speaker • 105 dB siren • 266g • 158x88x61mm (HxWxD, on supplied stand) www.snipca.com/16111



hard-pressed to identify intruders unless they got obligingly close to the camera.

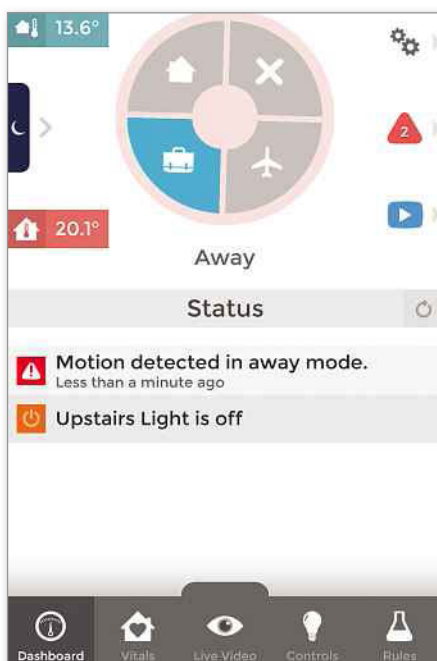
Frustratingly, you can't download and save recorded videos, to hand them over to the police, for example. There's no PC or Mac software or even a web interface that would let you watch or configure your camera if you lose your mobile device. The net result is unclear videos you can watch only on your mobile device.

Despite the Piper nv's obvious potential, it's expensive, and it simply isn't good enough at the basics. Instead we'd recommend the Y-cam Home Monitor HD (see our review, Issue 420).

VERDICT: A great list of features and undoubted potential can't make up for the terrible video quality, especially considering its price

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Y-cam HomeMonitor HD
£142 A home-security camera that's very easy to use and has great video quality



You can receive alarm notifications through the Piper app, via text message or even in a phone call

Reviews

VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE | £50 from www.snipca.com/16078

Corel VideoStudio X8 Ultimate

A versatile video-editing package let down by its frustrating interface

Corel VideoStudio X8 Ultimate, the latest version of Corel's video-editing software, could never be accused of being short of features. It gives you 21 video, four audio and two text tracks to work with, has support for 3D video and can handle resolutions up to 4K.

It also comes with a huge number of effects and transitions as well as the ability to animate clipart and text. Videos, photos and text can even be animated along curved paths.

There are modules for converting a drawing into an animation, setting effects to track moving subjects around the frame, varying the playback speed, creating stop-motion animations and recording what happens on screen in other Windows programs as a video file. And when you're done you can create DVDs of your videos complete with animated menus and subtitles, although Blu-ray authoring now comes as a £6 optional plug-in.

At the other end of the scale are two

“Little effort has gone into maintaining consistency from one part of the program to the next”

new features aimed at beginners. Instant Project mode provides glossy templates complete with animated intro and end sequences – just drag and drop your video clips into the project and VideoStudio X8 Ultimate will do the rest. If that's not simple enough there's also a standalone program called Fast Flick, which simplifies the editing process into three steps: select a template, add media and export. Fast Flick also lets you trim clips, customise text and change the music if desired, but this is optional.

Instant Project and Fast Flick both have their uses, but with repeated use you'll quickly get through the limited supply of templates on offer, while the lack of



precision over how your footage is used will make the resulting videos seem increasingly clunky and formulaic.

For all its features, what VideoStudio X8 doesn't provide is a streamlined interface. As the features have built up over the years, it seems little effort has gone into maintaining consistency from one part of the program to the next, and as a result some basic tasks are surprisingly difficult to figure out.

This latest update adds yet more features to the pile, though most are useful. The Freeze Frame command, for instance, converts the current video frame into a standalone photo, while Audio Ducking automatically reduces the volume of music tracks when dialogue is detected in the video soundtrack.

A new Lens Correction effect removes the lens distortion typical on footage recorded by actioncams and dashcams. Projects can now be merged, and it's easier to keep track of which clips have been used in which projects. Also new is the ability to blend the colours of videos stacked on top of each other, as are sophisticated controls for adding green-screen effects.

These features are clearly aimed at advanced users, but in truth VideoStudio isn't cut out for these kinds of advanced editing techniques. Video clips overlaid

on top of the main video can wander out of sync when you edit the main video, while control panels often disappear from view when you adjust the position of the playback bar. The interface can become unresponsive when working with complex projects, and playing back video from some cameras is sometimes juddery.

The export options aren't particularly intuitive either, meaning it's far too easy to export using the wrong settings and end up with videos that don't play properly. For example, the new shake-reduction tool is impressive, but we couldn't export footage using it until we matched the project and export settings – something that's hard to do.

There's lots to like about VideoStudio X8 Ultimate, but attempting to use it for anything more than basic editing reveals its weaknesses and frustrations. We much prefer editors with fewer extras but more polished core editing tools.

VERDICT: Lots of interesting features, but a lack of refinement means the weaknesses outweigh the strengths

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE:
Adobe Premiere Elements 13 £60

A powerful video editor that caters superbly for both beginners and experts



SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Windows 7 or later • 1.83GHz Intel Core Duo processor or faster • minimum 2GB of memory
www.snipca.com/16078

LAPTOP | £1099 from www.snipca.com/16079

Dell XPS 13 (2015)

A thin Windows 8.1 laptop with a stunning screen but unimpressive battery

Dell's latest version of its XPS 13 ultra-portable laptop is also known as the XPS 13 Infinity because the borders around its 13in screen are incredibly narrow – so much so, in fact, that it doesn't appear to have any borders at all. It's closer in size to an 11in laptop, and much more compact than rival 13in ultra-portables.

The XPS 13 may be slender, but it's also remarkably sturdy. Thanks to its metal and carbon-fibre construction, there's only slight flexing in its lid. It's also very light at 1.3kg (or 1.5kg with the charger).

The downside to its tiny size is that the XPS 13's small battery lasted just 10 and a

“There's a lot to like about the Dell XPS 13, but average battery life counts against it”

half hours in our tests, which was shorter than many rival 13in ultra-portables.

This is a shame as the XPS 13 is a good laptop in many other ways. The 13in screen is very bright and has a super-high resolution of 3200x1800 pixels. Windows programs that support this resolution look great with sharp, print-like text and detailed graphics. Some programs still haven't been updated with this support, but the situation has improved over the past year. Colour accuracy and contrast are both very good.

It's not perfect, though – the backlight seeps out in places, viewing angles are more restricted than we expected and the



brightness isn't perfectly even.

But we have no complaints about performance. The 2.4GHz Intel Core i7 5500U dual-core processor and 8GB of memory make this laptop fast enough for use as your main computer. The processor's cooling fan can get a little noisy, but it's not too intrusive.

The 256GB SSD is welcome considering smaller 128GB SSDs are common in other ultra-portables at this price.

The keyboard is one of the best we've used on any laptop. The keys are large and have plenty of travel and feedback, so typing is fast and accurate. The touchpad, though, is less impressive. It's large and accurate, but gestures such as swiping two fingers to scroll felt jerky and laggy, and the built-in buttons beneath the pad sometimes failed to respond.

There's a lot to like about the 2015 Dell XPS 13, but its average battery life and annoying touchpad count against it. Although pricier and not perfect either, the Toshiba Kira 107 (see our review, Issue 447) is a better ultra-portable laptop.

VERDICT: Well-built in many ways and competitively priced too, but a few design flaws let it down

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Toshiba Kira 107 £1300

A slightly lower-resolution screen and much more expensive, but with noticeably longer battery life



COMING SOON

MAY 2015

Microsoft has announced the Surface 3, a cheaper and lighter version of the Surface Pro 3 tablet. It'll have a 10.8in 1080p screen, the new Atom X7 processor and weigh 622g. Unlike the Surface 2, it will use Windows 8.1 – not Windows RT.



SUMMER 2015

The Asus Chromebit is a Chrome OS PC the size of a USB stick that plugs into your monitor's HDMI port. It will cost \$100 in the US with UK pricing to be confirmed.



AUTUMN 2015

The Dell Venue 10 7000 is the 10in version of the Venue 8 7000 Android tablet (see our review, Issue 447). Its 'barrel edge' will house a bigger battery and a magnetic connection for its optional Bluetooth keyboard.



AUTUMN 2015

Apple is rumoured to be working on a 12in iPad Pro, which will reportedly come with a stylus and the ability to run multiple apps on screen side by side.



NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE
13 May

Acer Revo One RL85

A compact and attractive mini PC



Amazon Fire TV Stick
A cheap and tiny streaming set-top box

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SPECIFICATIONS

- 2.4GHz Intel Core i7 5500U dual-core processor
- 8GB memory • 256GB SSD • Intel HD 5500 integrated graphics chip • 13.3in 3200x1800-pixel touchscreen • 802.11ac/a/b/g/n • Windows 8.1 • 1.3kg weight (1.5kg with charger) • 15x304x200mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty

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www.snipca.com/14981



Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Asus X555LA-XX290H
£300 from www.snipca.com/16158
Tested: Issue 446



Asus has made all the right choices with this budget Windows 8.1 laptop. Its comfortable keyboard, fast performance, respectably lengthy battery life and bright screen are all the more impressive given its low price.

ALTERNATIVE: Asus Chromebook C200
A cheap Chrome OS ultra-portable laptop with a bright screen, lengthy battery life and a great keyboard.
£175 from www.snipca.com/16159

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Kaveri Evolution
£500 from 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: Chillblast Fusion Rhino
A very powerful and compact PC sold without a keyboard, mouse or monitor.
£929 from www.snipca.com/15252

TABLET

Apple iPad Mini 2
£239 from www.snipca.com/14467
Tested: Issue 416



Apple's mini tablet from 2013 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 A
thin and lightweight 10in tablet with a fingerprint reader, an excellent screen and peerless selection of apps. £399 from www.snipca.com/14309

PHONE

Motorola Moto G 4G
(second generation)
£150 (without contract) from www.snipca.com/16160
Tested: Issue 436



Moto G 4G has been updated with a 5in screen, 4G and a microSD card slot. The 3G version has dual SIM slots.

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

DIGITAL CAMERA

Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF6
£230 from 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: Sony A5000 A rival CSC with better low-light performance, although its controls and range of available lenses aren't quite as good.
£251 from www.snipca.com/15854

E-READER

Kobo Aura H20
£140 from www.snipca.com/15490
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

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Kaspersky Internet Security 2015

£17.99 from www.snipca.com/14212

Tested: Issue 437



Kaspersky Internet Security 2015 has won our past four antivirus tests – an unprecedented set of results. The 2015 edition is available at an exclusive reader discount on our Software Store. Click the link above for a one-device licence, or buy a three-device licence for just £39.99 at www.snipca.com/14221.

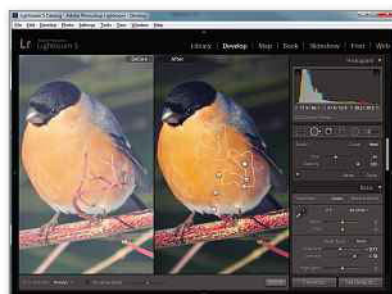
ALTERNATIVE: Norton Internet Security 2014 An affordable program, but sometimes blocked legitimate software. £30 from www.snipca.com/15115

PHOTO EDITING

Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 5

£99 from www.snipca.com/16161

Tested: Issue 402



Lightroom is a consistently elegant, powerful and fast photo-management program packed with sophisticated features. If you want to keep on top of your photos and make them look great, there's no better software to do it with.

ALTERNATIVE: Adobe Photoshop Elements 13 A fast and polished photo-editing program with excellent advanced editing tools. £80 from www.snipca.com/16162

PC MONITOR

Dell UltraSharp U2412M

£205 from www.snipca.com/15271

Tested: Issue 378



An exquisite monitor with superb image quality, an adjustable stand, a high resolution and even a built-in USB hub. It costs a little more than other monitors, but it's money well spent. It's easily the best value monitor we've seen and is the one by which all others are judged.

ALTERNATIVE: AOC i2360PHU A good quality budget 23in monitor that's easily adjustable and has a built-in USB 2.0 hub too. £155 from www.snipca.com/15274

SECURITY CAMERA

Y-cam HomeMonitor HD

£147 from 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. £74 from www.snipca.com/15275

ROUTER

Trendnet TEW-812DRU

£112 from www.snipca.com/15855

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. £200 from www.snipca.com/14950

NAS

Synology DiskStation DS213j

£119 from www.snipca.com/16163

Tested: Issue 404



This NAS enclosure has it all – fast performance, easy configuration and plenty of extra features. It's not perfect – disk installation is a little fiddly and it's a tad pricey – but there are few other NAS devices we would rather buy.

ALTERNATIVE: Synology DS414j A four-drive NAS that's generally fast and easy to set up and use too. £250 from www.snipca.com/15493

WEB DESIGN

Serif WebPlus X8

£50 from www.snipca.com/15278

Tested: Issue 443



WebPlus X8 is one of the best programs available for designing a website without having to write a line of code. It comes with lots of templates, with more available for purchase if you need them. It also has lots of specialist tools for building a small business website.

ALTERNATIVE: **JimdoPro** This browser-based program for creating websites is slick and feature packed, but lacking in high-quality templates. £60 a year from www.jimdo.com/pricing

PRICE
DROP

SMART TV

Samsung UE32H6200

£330 from www.snipca.com/16016

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. £400 from www.snipca.com/12931

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 3

iWALK Extreme TRIO backup battery 10000mAh

The iWALK Extreme TRIO backup battery lets you charge up to three devices wherever you are, making it ideal for travelling. Its LCD display shows a battery meter, device-charging current, and the charge time remaining. It has a built-in Apple Lightning cable, letting you charge iPhones and iPads. And because it also comes with a micro USB cable and a USB port, you can use it with Android devices. The smart-circuit protection prevents the devices from being overcharged. To enter, email your address to cacomp@dennis.co.uk by midnight 12 May 2015.



The iWalk is available in two versions: 10000mAh costs £64.99, and the 6000mAh is priced £49.99. For more information visit www.iwalkuk.com

MULTIFUNCTION PRINTER

Canon Pixma MG4250

£50 from 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**

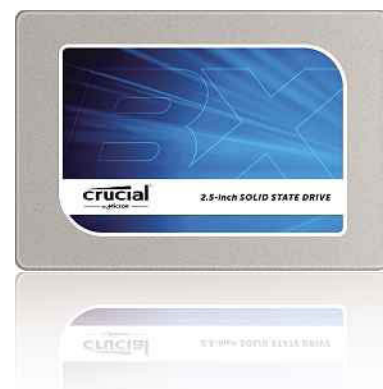
An MFP aimed at small offices with duplex, ADF and fax, but also good photo print quality. £68 from www.snipca.com/12909

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Crucial BX100 1TB

£318 from www.snipca.com/16017

Tested: Issue 445



A blindingly fast, high-capacity SSD at a lower price than ever before. If you've been put off buying a SSD because of the cost, then now is finally the time to take the plunge.

ALTERNATIVE: **Samsung 850 Pro**

256GB An even faster SSD, but it's much more expensive per gigabyte. £124 from www.snipca.com/16164

HOMEPLUGS

Devolo dLAN 1200 Triple+ Starter Kit

£119 from www.snipca.com/15369

Tested: Issue 444



Devolo's latest HomePlug adapters are the fastest we've ever seen. They're also well designed too, with a passthrough socket so you can still power another device and the design should avoid skirting boards and other obstacles.

ALTERNATIVE: **Devolo dLAN 650 Triple+**

Starter Kit These HomePlug adapters have a sensible, space-saving design as well as three Gigabit Ethernet ports for connecting devices to your network. £80 from www.snipca.com/16019

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Graphics: NVIDIA GTX960 2048MB GDDR5
Memory: 8GB DDR3
Storage: 120GB SSD / 1TB SATA III Hard Drive
Operating System: Windows 8.1 (64Bit)
+ FREE Witcher III Game!



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GLADIATOR REDSTONE

OPTIMISED FOR



Processor: Intel Pentium K G3258 3.2GHz Dual Core
Graphics: NVIDIA GTX750 1024MB GDDR5
Memory: 4GB DDR3
Storage: 500GB SATA III Hard Drive
Operating System: Windows 8.1 (64Bit)

Quick Code #63385

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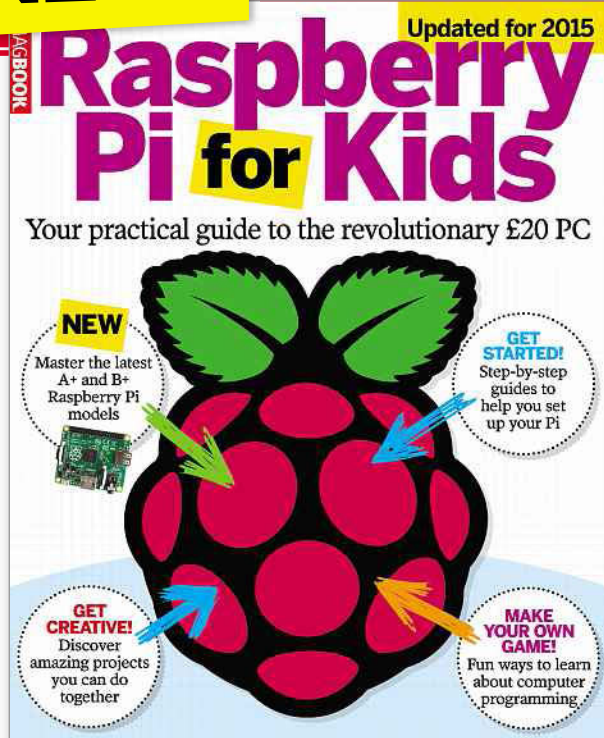


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Workshops & Tips

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

35 Transfer huge video files in seconds
38 Try Microsoft's new Spartan browser

40 Add music and videos to your documents
42 Make free mobile phone calls forever

PLUS

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

47 Make Office Better
48 Secret Tips For... Firefox

Transfer huge video files in seconds

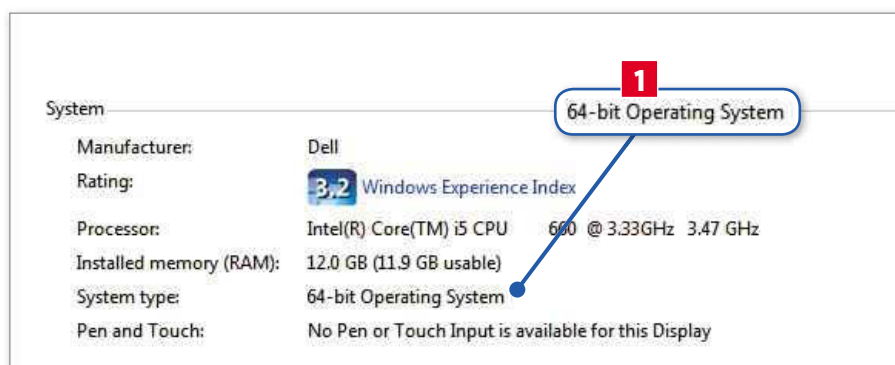
What you need: BitTorrent Sync; Windows 7, 8, 8.1 **Time required:** 40 minutes

BitTorrent may have a bad reputation for being used mostly by people illegally sharing pirated material, but it's actually the best way to share large files. Unlike cloud services, BitTorrent Sync establishes a direct connection between devices without third-party connections,

making sharing faster and more secure. The latest free version has an improved interface and is the best program if you want to transfer huge video files in seconds. We'll show you how to do this by sharing and syncing folders between devices (PCs, phones and tablets).

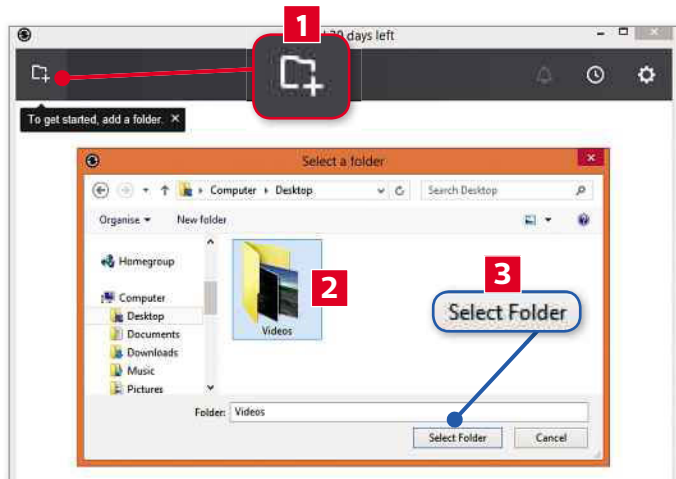


STEP 1 For convenience, you should first create a folder on your Desktop and drag the video files you want to share into it. Before downloading BitTorrent Sync, you need to determine your version of Windows (**64bit** or **32bit**). To do that, right-click Computer on your Desktop or Start menu, then click Properties and look next to 'System type' **1**. Now go to www.snipca.com/16220, scroll down and click the Free Download button that corresponds to your PC's version.

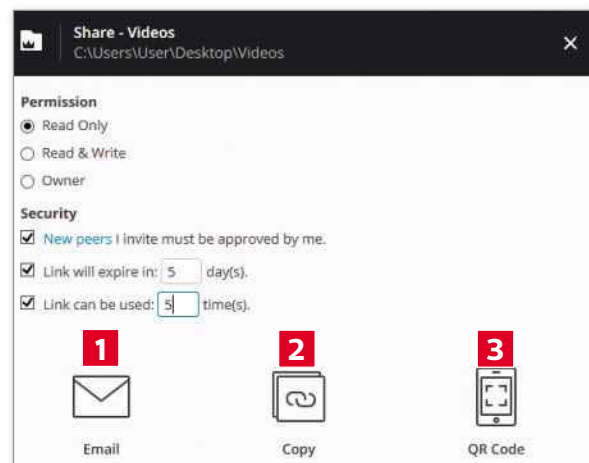


STEP 2 Click the downloaded setup file, Run, Yes, then Install. Tick the T&C box, then click Continue. When you see a screen notifying you that you have access to Sync Pro for 30 days for free, click Continue. On the next screen, click 'This is my first Sync 2.0 device'. Now type your name in the box provided **1**, then click 'Create identity' **2**. You'll now see a simple screen with icons at the top.

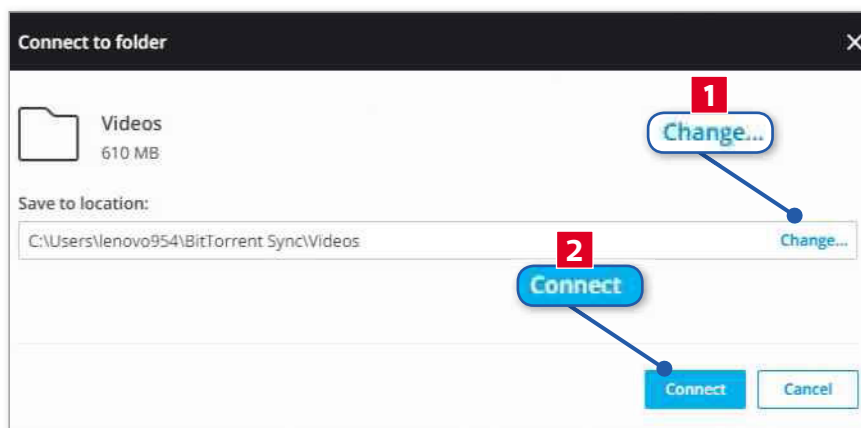
Workshops



STEP 3 To add your video folder, click the top-left folder icon with a '+' symbol **1**, navigate to the folder on your Desktop **2**, then click Select Folder **3**. To share it using a link, move your cursor to the folder in BitTorrent Sync, then click Share on the right. In the Security section (see screenshot for Step 4), you can set how long you want the link to be active for by ticking the second box and typing the number of days (the default is three). Likewise, set the number of times the link can be used by ticking the third box and typing the amount (the default is one).

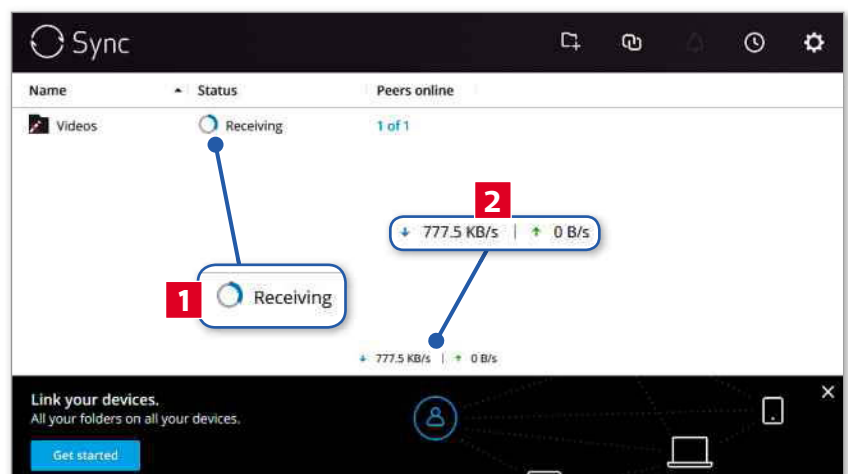


STEP 4 There are three ways you can share the folder. Clicking Email **1** opens a pre-written email in your default program containing a link to the folder and stating when and after many uses it will expire. Clicking Copy **2** lets you paste and send the link to anyone via your email or social-media account. QR Code **3** is useful if you want to sync the folder to your mobile device (we'll show you a better way to do this in Step 9).

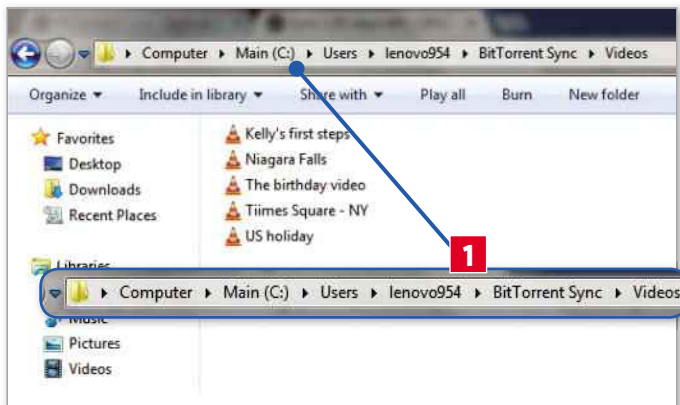


STEP 5 When the person you send the link to clicks it, they'll be taken to the relevant web page, from where they first need to install BitTorrent Sync (following Steps 1 and 2). After installation, they need to re-click the link, then click 'I already have Sync 2.0' on the web page that opens, followed by Launch Application. They'll now see the option to connect (sync) the folder to their PC. If they want to change the default destination of this folder, they can click Change **1**, navigate to the folder of their choice, click Select Folder, then Connect **2**.

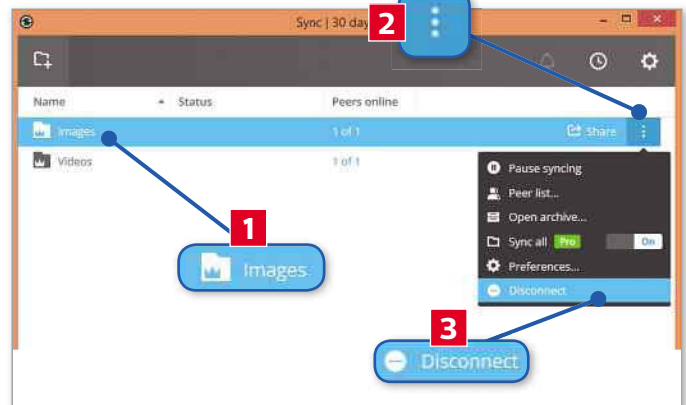
STEP 6 They'll now see the folder you shared along with a 'Pending approval' link beside it, which they need to click. As soon as they do that, you'll receive a notification within BitTorrent Sync telling you that the person wants to access the shared folder. Click the green tick icon to grant access. They will then see a message in their PC's notification area telling them the transfer has begun. Clicking this message will open BitTorrent Sync from where they can track the transfer progress. The circular icon **1** indicates the transfer progress, and they can also check the transfer download speed **2**. We transferred a folder containing five large video files in under two minutes.



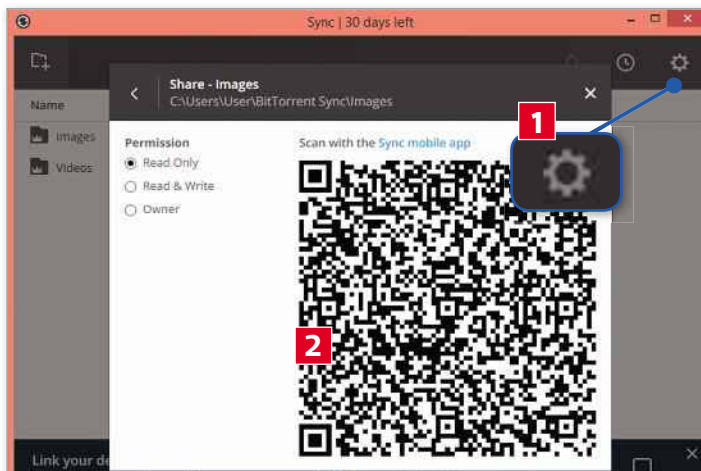
Transfer huge video files in seconds



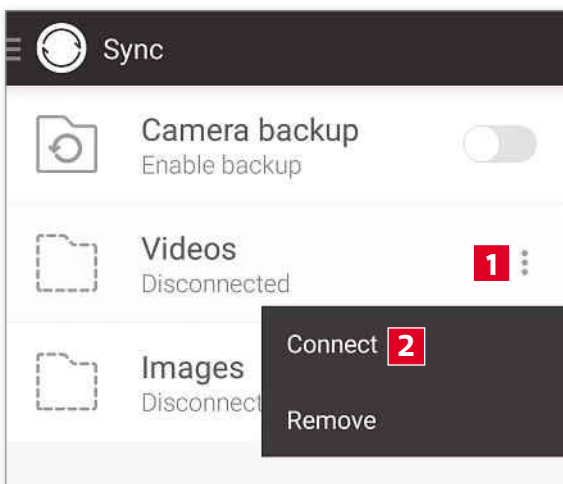
STEP 7 When the transfer is complete, they can access the shared files from the BitTorrent Sync folder on their PC (usually in their Users menu on their C Drive **1**, unless they changed this in Step 5). Both of you can click History (the small timer icon at the top right) in BitTorrent Sync to see a detailed list of events (including when each file was added and when they finished syncing). From now on, any files you add to the synced folder on your Desktop will automatically sync to that person's PC. You don't even need to use BitTorrent anymore. They'll see a message in their PC's notification area when new files are synced.



STEP 8 By repeating steps 5 to 7, you can create multiple new folders and share them with as many people as you want. To stop syncing files from a particular folder you've shared, move your cursor to that folder **1**, click the three dots **2**, then Disconnect **3**. If you want to delete all the files in that folder on your PC, tick 'Delete files from this device', then click OK. The person you've shared the files with will still have access to them.



STEP 9 To sync the folders you've added to BitTorrent Sync on your PC to your phone or tablet, download the free Sync app. We'll use the Android app here (www.snipca.com/16221), but it works exactly the same on iOS (www.snipca.com/16222). First, open BitTorrent Sync on your PC, click the options icon **1**, 'My devices', then click 'Link device' at the bottom to see a QR code on your screen **2**. Now open the app, tap 'Link a device already running Sync 2.0', then point the device at the QR code on your PC.



STEP 10 All the folders added to BitTorrent Sync on your PC will appear on your device, but they'll be disconnected by default. To connect and download individual files, tap the three dots beside the relevant folder **1**, then tap Connect **2**. Next, tap the folder to open it, then any of the files within to begin downloading them to your device. You can also sync files from your device to your PC. To do that, tap the '+' symbol at the top right, then tap Image, Audio or Video, then the file you want to sync. You'll see a message in the notification area of your PC telling you when you receive the file. ●

Use Microsoft's new Spartan browser

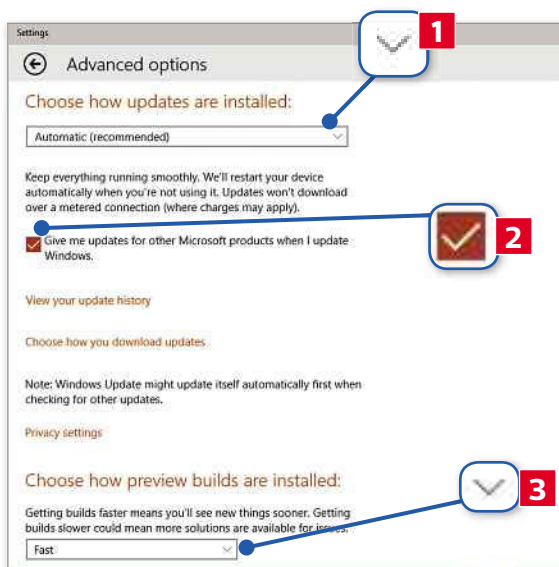
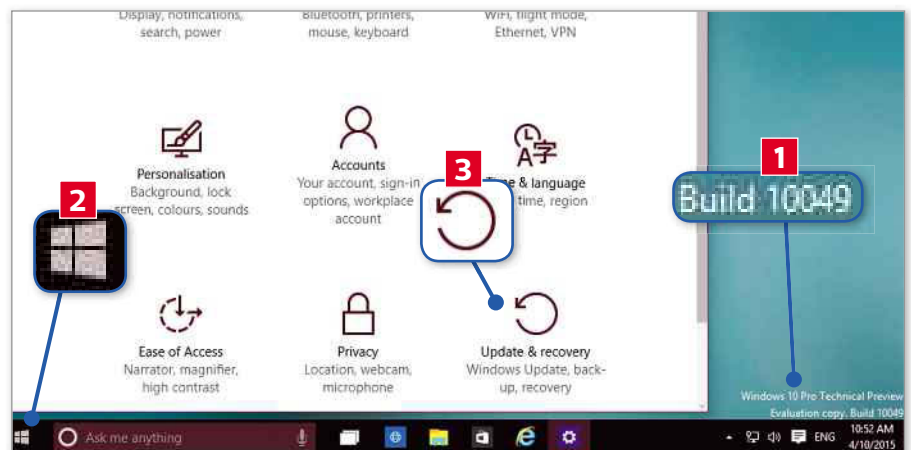
What you need: Windows 10 Technical Preview **Time required:** 2 hours

Installing the latest version of the Windows 10 Technical Preview means you can use Microsoft's new browser, codenamed Spartan. This will be the default browser when Windows 10 is released later this year, so it's a good idea to get a feel for it

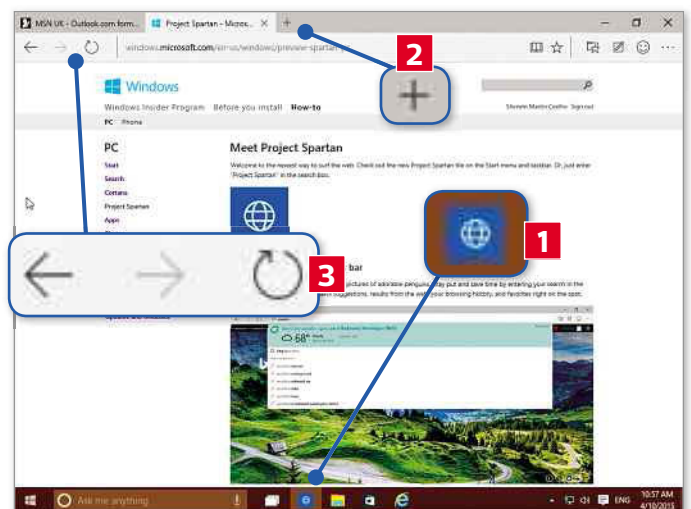
now. While it's currently not quite the finished article, we'll show you some of the great features you can try safely. These include Reading List, which lets you save web articles to read later, while 'inking' lets you draw and type on web pages using your cursor.



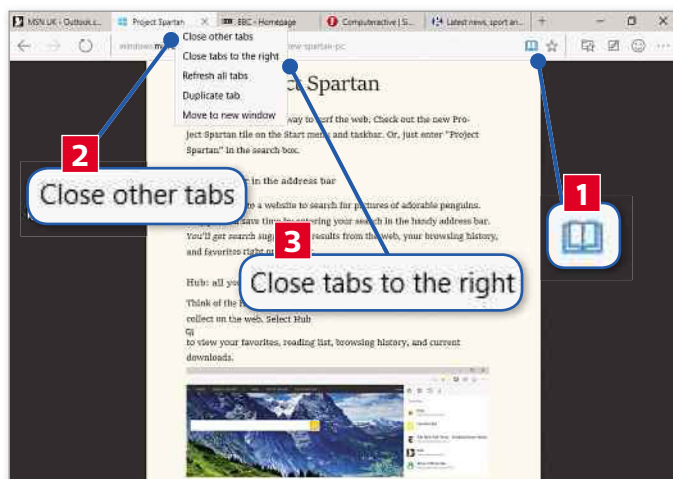
STEP 1 If you still haven't installed the Windows 10 Technical Preview, refer to our lead Workshops in Issues 443 and 444 for instructions. You can only use Spartan with the latest version of the Windows 10 Technical Preview (Build 10049). Your build number is displayed at the bottom right of your screen **1**. To update your version of Windows 10, click the Start button **2**, Settings, 'Update & recovery' **3**, then the 'Advanced options' link.



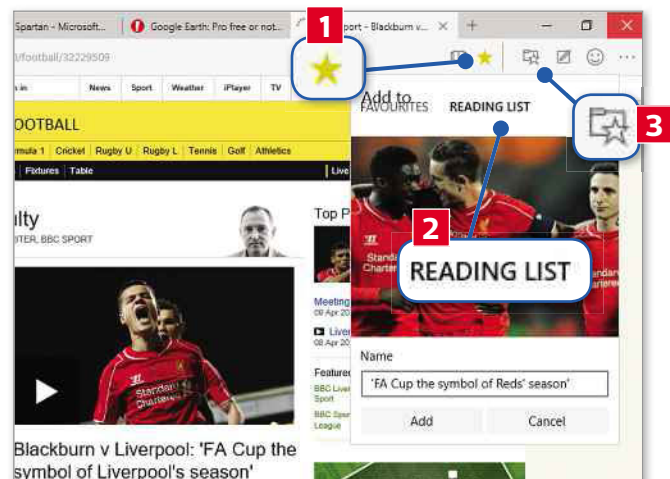
STEP 2 Choose 'Automatic (recommended)' **1** from the dropdown menu at the top, tick the box below **2**, then select Fast from the dropdown menu at the bottom **3**. Now click the top-left Back button, then 'Check for updates'. Windows will now download the latest Preview. This can take a few hours, depending on your internet connection. When that's done, Windows will restart several times before automatically booting to the latest version.



STEP 3 Once it's booted up, you'll see the Spartan icon (a blue square with a circle inside) pinned to your Taskbar **1**. Click to open it. Click the '+' symbols **2** to open new tabs and the three options at the top left **3** to go back a page, go forward and refresh. Open a new tab (you can also press Ctrl+T), click the URL field at the top and start typing to see a list of Bing web search results that you can click.



STEP 4 Spartan has some great features that you won't find in other browsers by default. Reading View removes all adverts and links from a web page, displaying just the article and its images. Click the book icon **1** whenever you're reading an article to turn it on. You can close down multiple tabs by right-clicking a tab, then clicking 'Close other tabs' **2** (leaving open only the one you're on) or 'Close tabs to the right' **3**.

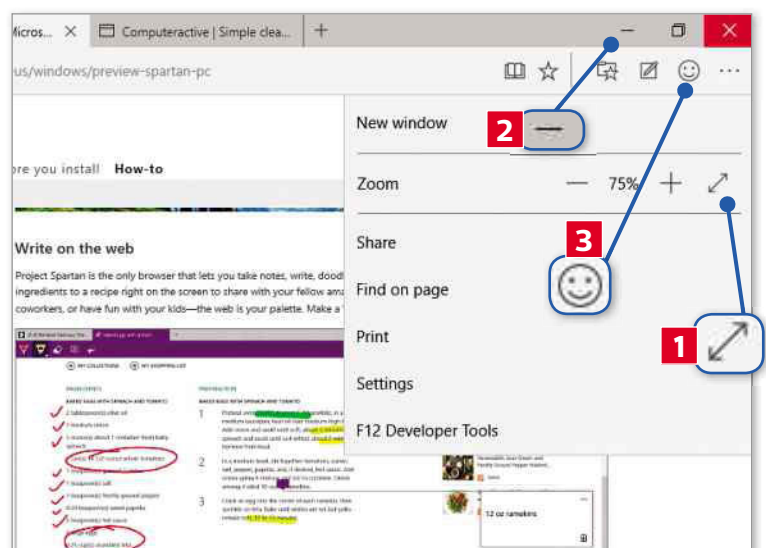


STEP 5 It's easy to bookmark websites to your 'Favourites' or add articles to a Reading List (to read later). When you're on a website or article you want to save, click the star icon **1**. To add the site to your favourites, rename it (optional) by typing in the Name field, then click Add. To add an article to your Reading List, click Reading List **2**, rename it (optional), then click Add. You can access these by clicking the Hub icon **3**. Click the star icon to see your favourites and the icon with five horizontal lines to see your Reading List.



STEP 6 Inking (the ability to draw and type on a web page) is another feature you won't find in other browsers unless you install third-party extensions. Click the pen and notepad icon at the top right to open a new bar on your browser. Click the pen or highlighter options **1**, select a colour and marker size, then draw or highlight the area using your cursor. The eraser icon (next to the highlighter icon) lets you delete any markings. Click the text box icon **2**, then click where you want to insert a text box that you can type in **3**. The scissors icon lets you create and crop a screenshot of the web page using your cursor. To save these changes to your favourites, click the floppy disc icon at the top right. To save them to your Reading List, click the Share icon **4**, then Reading List. Click Exit.

STEP 7 Click the three dots **1** for more options. For example, click the Expand icon **2** to see Spartan in full-screen mode. Use the plus and minus icons to zoom in and out of a web page. To find a specific word within the page, click 'Find on page' and type the word to see all instances of it highlighted. Click Settings for options to change the display mode (Medium, Light and Dark) and the font size in your Reading View, as well as to clear your browsing data. Click the smiley icon **3** to submit your feedback to Microsoft. ●



Add music and videos to your documents

What you need: LibreOffice Fresh; Windows XP, Vista, 7 or 8

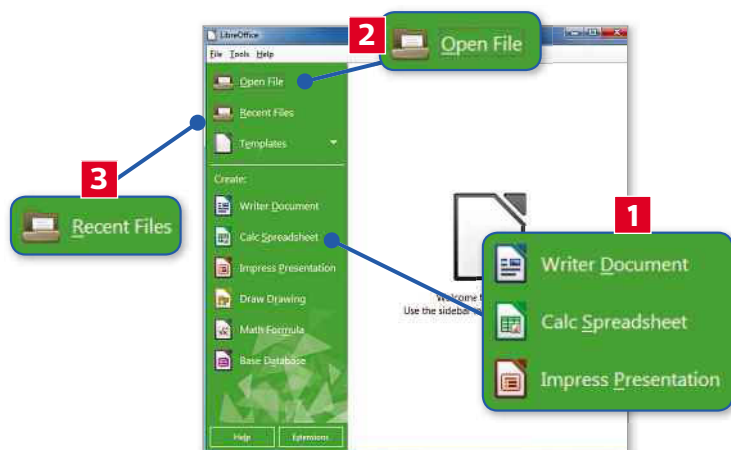
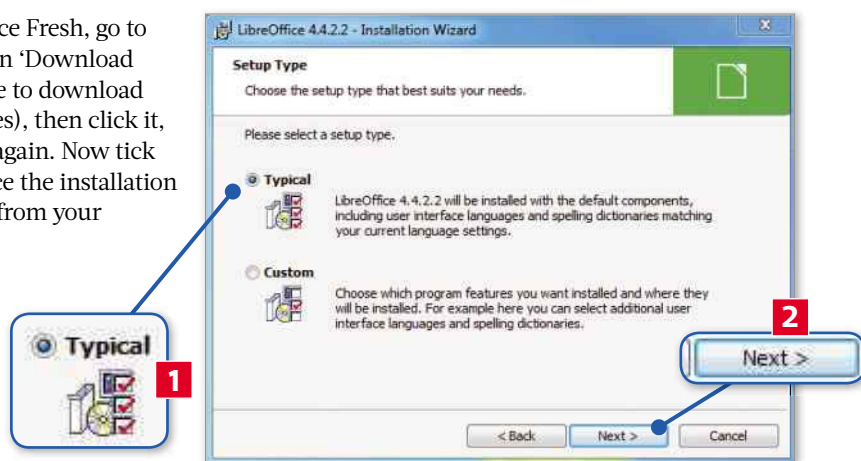
Time required: 40 minutes

Microsoft Word may be the most popular word processor, but it has its limitations. For example, you can't add audio and video files to a Word document then play them from within it. One word processor that can, however, is

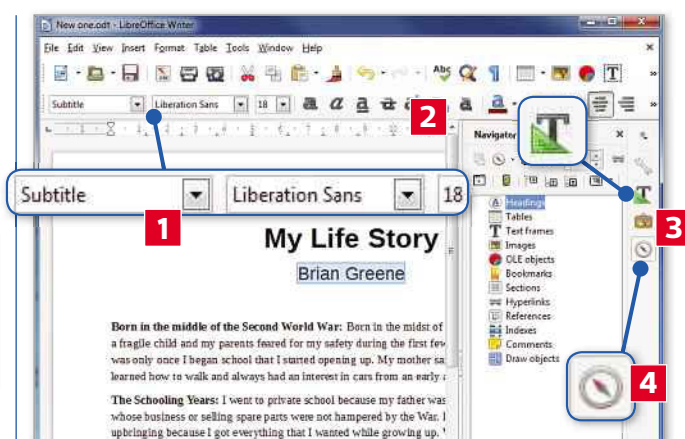
Writer Document – the equivalent to Word in the latest version of the free LibreOffice Fresh suite. Adding music and videos can be useful whether you're writing your life story or just want to liven up your document.



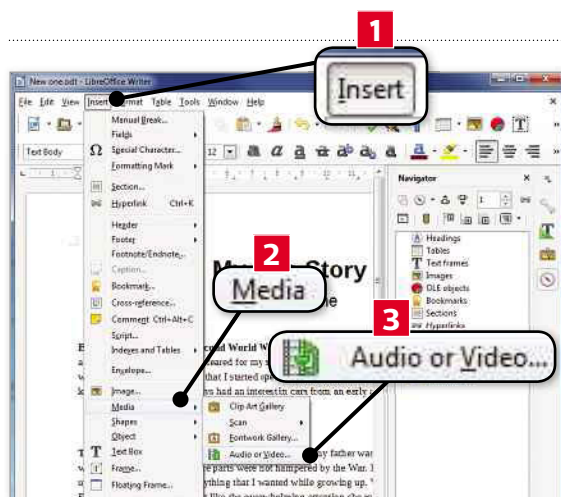
STEP 1 To download the latest version of LibreOffice Fresh, go to www.snipca.com/16088 and click the green 'Download Version 4.4.2' button. Wait for the setup file to download (it's a 214MB file, so this can take up to a few minutes), then click it, click Run, Next, select Typical **1**, then click Next **2** again. Now tick 'Create a start link on desktop' and click Install. Once the installation is complete, click Finish, then open LibreOffice 4.4 from your Desktop.



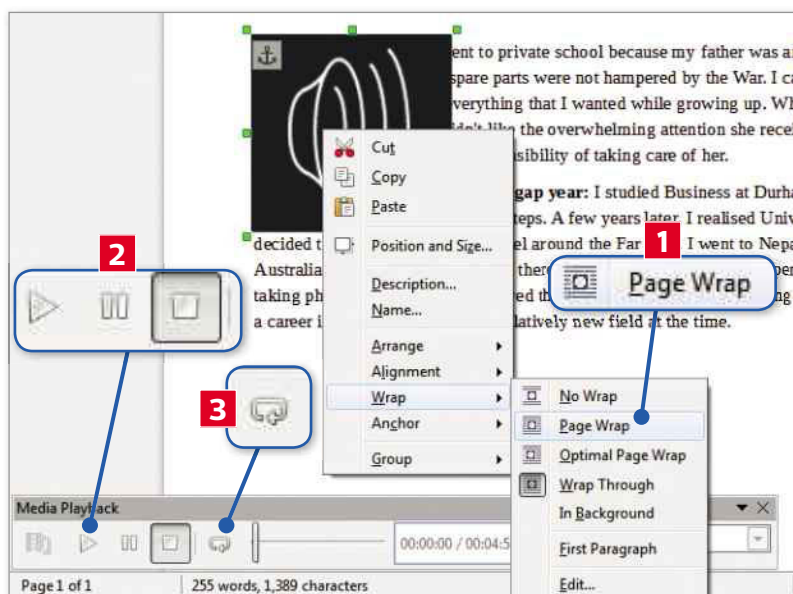
STEP 2 You'll see six LibreOffice programs listed at the bottom left. Writer Document, Calc Spreadsheet and Impress Presentation **1** are LibreOffice's equivalent of Microsoft's Word, Excel and PowerPoint. You can open any Microsoft Office file in LibreOffice by clicking Open File **2**, navigating to the file you want to open, clicking it, then clicking Open. Clicking Recent Files **3** displays a list of the files you last opened.



STEP 3 Click to open Writer Document and you'll see it looks similar to Word. If you've used it before, you'll notice the interface has undergone a makeover. You can change your font style, type and size using the dropdown menus **1**. The new panel on the right has three options for making quick edits: 'Text' **2** lets you choose from a range of text styles (such as headings or subtitles) and formatting options (such as bulleted or numbered lists); 'Gallery' **3** lets you add graphic icons from a range of categories (including Arrows, Environments and Text Shapes); lastly, 'Navigator' **4** lets you add things like tables, bookmarks and comments to your document.

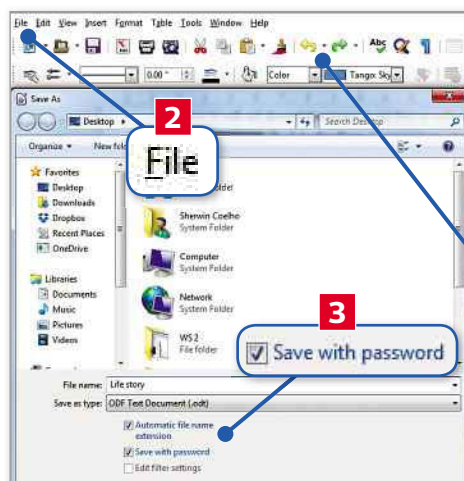
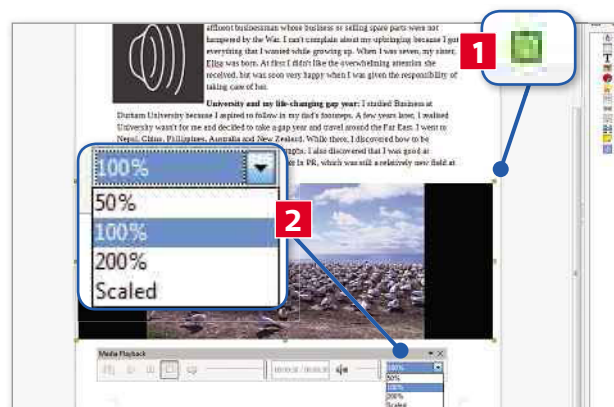


STEP 4 We'll now show you how to add music. Move your cursor to a new line in your document, click Insert **1**, move your cursor to Media **2**, then click the 'Audio or Video' option **3**. Now navigate to the music file you want to add, click it, then click Open. If you see an error stating 'The format of the selected file is not supported', then convert the file to MP3, WAV or WMA audio formats. To do this, we recommend the free online website, CloudConvert (www.cloudconvert.com). Follow our Workshop in Issue 444 for instructions.



STEP 5 On adding your file, a square speaker icon will appear in your document. If this icon is covering any text, right-click it, move your cursor to Wrap and click Page Wrap **1**. Now click and drag the icon wherever you want on the page and text will automatically appear around it. Clicking the icon launches a Media Playback bar at the bottom of the page for controlling audio playback **2**. Click the Repeat icon **3** if you want to play the track on loop. The slider on the right lets you change the track's volume.

STEP 6 The process for adding a video file is much the same. Move your cursor to where you want the video to be placed, click Insert, move your cursor to Media, click 'Audio or Video', select the video, then click Open. Most common video file formats (such as AVI and WMV) are supported, but some (like MOV) aren't. As with unsupported audio files, if your video's format is not supported, convert it using CloudConvert. When you first add a video, it will cover most of your text and you'll only be able to see half the video. Click and drag the green squares in the corners of the video window **1** to resize it. You can also resize it by clicking the dropdown menu and selecting one of the preset values **2**. Now right-click the video, move your cursor to Wrap, then click Page Wrap so you can reposition the video without it obstructing any text.



STEP 7 Usefully, Writer Document lets you see a list of all the changes you've made to your document, and undo them. To do that, click the yellow Undo dropdown menu **1**, move your cursor down the list to select the actions you want to undo, then click to undo them. You can redo actions in the same way by clicking the green Redo dropdown menu. To save your file, click File **2**, then Save As. Name the file and navigate to where you'd like to save it. To password-protect it, tick 'Save with password' **3**, type and confirm a password you want, then click OK. ●

Make free mobile phone calls forever

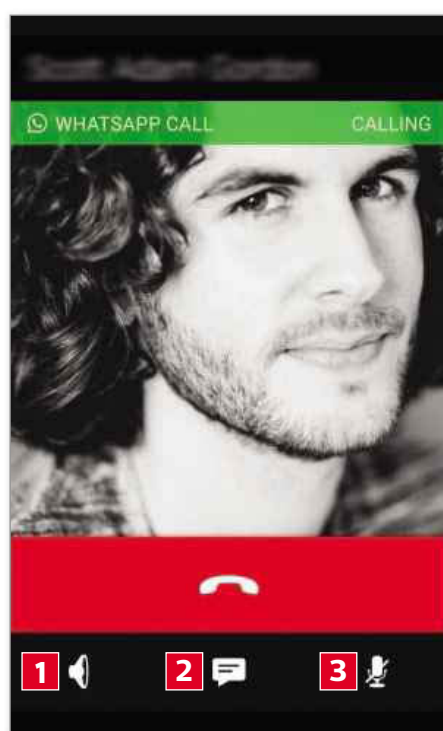
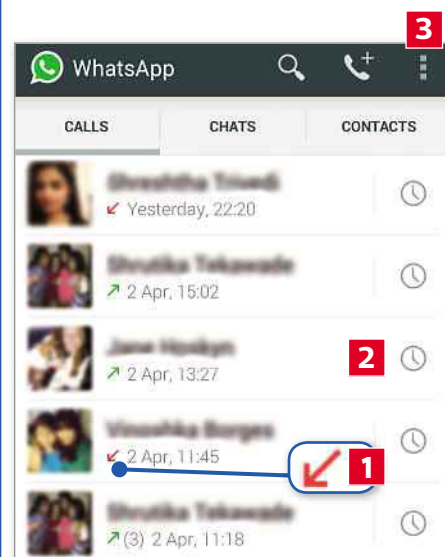
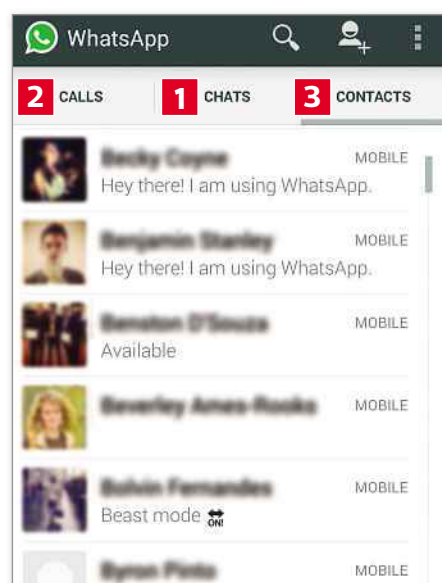
What you need: WhatsApp Messenger; Android phone **Time required:** 10 minutes

WhatsApp Messenger, one of the best free phone messaging apps, now lets you make free voice calls to anyone that uses the app. Though you can only make and receive calls using an Android phone at the moment, the company says

iPhone users will get this feature soon. Calls are made via your phone's internet connection, so ensure you're in an area with Wi-Fi connectivity to get the best call quality. You can also make calls on 3G and 4G, though these are less reliable.



STEP 1 If you don't have WhatsApp on your Android phone, install it from www.snipca.com/16045 and follow the instructions to set it up (it costs \$1 per year after the first 12 months, which are free). If you do already use it, you'll need to ensure you have the latest version to make calls. To update it, open the Play Store app, tap the three lines at the top left, 'My apps', then tap Update All at the top right. All your phone's apps – including WhatsApp – will get updated to the latest versions. Open the app. Whereas previously all your conversations were listed in a single (Chats) section **1**, you'll now see two new sections: Calls **2** and Contacts **3**.



STEP 2 To call someone using WhatsApp, tap the Contacts section, then the search icon at the top, and type that person's name. Tap to open their conversation window, then tap the Call (telephone) icon at the top right. You'll now see a screen with four options. To put your call on loudspeaker, tap the speaker icon **1**. The text message icon **2** lets you use WhatsApp's messaging service during a call (useful if you need to send a photo or reply to another message, for example). The microphone icon mutes your mic **3**. Tap the red call button to disconnect the call.

STEP 3 The Calls section displays a log of all your WhatsApp calls. The small arrows **1** denote the call status: a red down arrow indicates a missed call, a blue down arrow indicates a call you answered, and a green up arrow indicates a call you made. Tap the timer icon beside any call entry **2** to see that call's duration. To delete a call entry from the list, tap the Bin icon at the top right (after tapping the timer icon). To delete your entire call log, tap the three dots **3**, then tap 'Clear call log'.

NEXT ISSUE

- Explore space using Google Earth
- Identify programs that crash your PC
- Turn your phone into a scanner
- Launch multiple programs with one shortcut

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TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

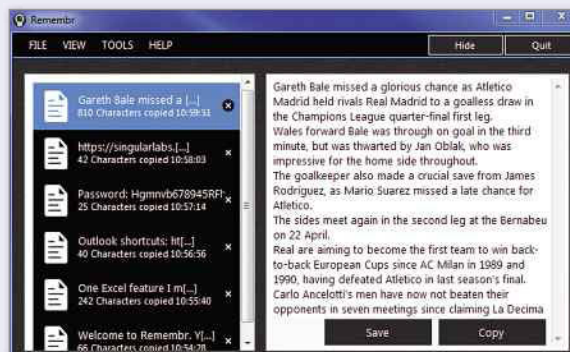
Copy and store text to a clipboard to paste later

I find myself using the keyboard shortcuts Ctrl+C (Copy) and Ctrl+V (Paste) all the time, whether it's copying text from one program to another, sending interesting URLs to friends via email and social media, or pasting passwords to sign into my accounts. I even like to copy any great quotes I come across online and save them to my 'diary of quotes'.

Thankfully, I stumbled upon a brilliant free clipboard manager called Remembr, which has recently been updated with a more user-friendly interface. It saves any text you copy – for example, from Word or from a website – to a list. When you're ready you just click any text in the list and paste it at

your leisure, which means I don't have to paste text immediately after copying.

To download Remembr, go to www.snipca.com/16156, click the blue Download button. Click the downloaded setup file, Run, Yes, then Next. Select 'I accept the agreement', click Next again (three times). Tick 'Create a desktop icon', click Next, Install, then Finish. Now any text you copy will be saved to Remembr (opened via a black lightbulb icon on your Desktop). Click the text you want in the list on the left (see screenshot), then



click Copy at the bottom right and paste it. To delete any text entry from Remembr, simply close it on the list (press 'x' beside it).

Doug Oldwell



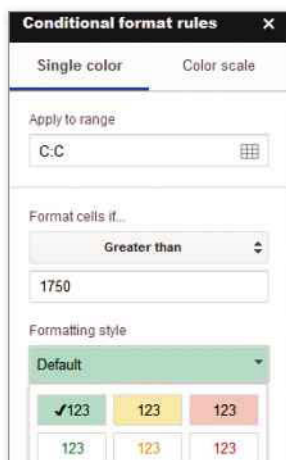
The winner of every Tip of the Fortnight wins this exclusive Computeractive mug!

SHEET FORMATTING Format cells with shared values in Google Sheets

✓ Last year, I bought a new Windows 8.1 PC after bidding farewell to my faithful old XP machine. Unfortunately, it didn't come with Microsoft Office pre-installed. As I only need it for Excel, I switched to the free online version of Google Sheets (www.docs.google.com/spreadsheets) instead. The only Excel feature I really missed in Sheets was Conditional Formatting, which lets you automatically format cells in a column that share certain criteria (numerical value or common words, for example). I was so pleased when Google recently made this feature available in Sheets.

To use it, move your cursor to the column header (A, B, C, and so on) whose cells you want to format, click the dropdown menu that appears, then click the new 'Conditional formatting' option at the bottom. You'll see a 'Conditional format rules' pane on the right. Click 'Add new rule'.

To set your formatting criteria, click the 'Format cells if' dropdown menu and



select what you want (see screenshot left). Options include 'Text contains', 'Greater than' and 'Less than'. You'll now see a new field where you can type the shared criteria (numbers or words) of the cells you want to format. Next, click the 'Formatting style' dropdown menu and select the style you want for the cells (options include cell colours and text colours). Click Done to format those cells.

Matthew Robinson

BROWSER Mute noisy Firefox tabs quickly

✓ In Issue 445, I found Emma Kay's tip very interesting. She explained how to convert the speaker icon on noisy Chrome tabs into a button that you can click to mute the noise. As a Firefox user, I wondered if there was a similar option in my favourite browser. Unlike Chrome, Firefox doesn't display the speaker icon on noisy tabs by default.

But after some research, I found a free Firefox **add-on** that adds a similar speaker icon to any noisy tab. As with Chrome you can mute the tab by clicking

the icon. Open Firefox, then go to www.snipca.com/16157, click '+ Add to Firefox', then click Install Now. Next, close and reopen Firefox. Any noisy tabs will now display the speaker icon. Click it to mute that tab.

Dora Field

PHOTO EDITING Edit photos you've uploaded to Flickr

✓ It doesn't seem many people use Flickr (www.flickr.com) nowadays, but I still love using it to upload my photos. Until fairly recently, I didn't realise you could actually edit photos you've already uploaded to Flickr, and what's more, it's very easy to do.

Log into Flickr, move your cursor to You at the top left, then click Photostream to see all the photos you've uploaded. Now click the one you want to edit, click the 'Edit photo' option (it's the third icon from bottom right and looks like a pencil on a notepad), then click 'Edit in Aviary'.

You'll now see various editing options above your photo, including Enhance, Effects, Frames, Crop and so on. Clicking any of these reveals further changes you might want to make, simply by selecting the relevant tool. After making your edits, click Apply, Save, then Replace to save the changes to your photo.

Frank McFadden

Phone and Tablet Tips

Brilliant things to do on your device

ANDROID

Set recurring reminders using Google Keep



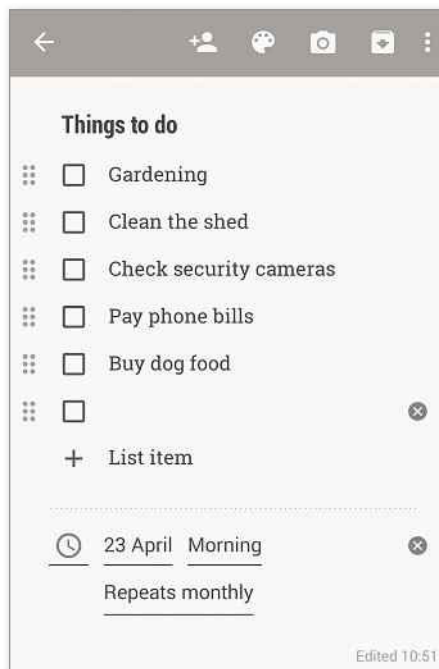
Google Keep, one of the best free note-taking apps, now lets you set recurring reminders. It's a great way to remember those tasks you need to carry out on a regular basis, whether it's every day, once a week, or every month. We'll show you how to create a note with a list of things to do, then set a recurring reminder for it.

To create a note, open Google Keep (www.snipca.com/16122), then tap the '+' symbol at the bottom right. You'll see four icons. The mic icon lets you dictate a note, the camera icon lets you add a photo to your note and the notebook icon lets you type a note. To create a list-based note, tap the three horizontal lines.

Tap Title and name your note (see screenshot right). Now tap the checkbox, type your first list item, then tap '+ List item' to add another checkbox. Repeat this until your list is complete. To reposition items, tap and hold the six dots beside the checkbox, then drag it up or down.

Next, tap 'Remind me' at the bottom, then 'Does not repeat'. Select one of the options from Daily, Weekly, Monthly or Yearly. Now tap Tomorrow and select a day or tap 'Select a date', tap a date on the calendar, then tap Done. Next, tap Morning, then choose when you want to be reminded. Options include Morning, Afternoon, Evening and Night. If you

want to be reminded at a specific time, then tap 'Select a time' and move the watch sliders to set that time. A reminder notification will now appear at the time and frequency you've set.



ANDROID

Stop new apps cluttering your homescreen



Whenever you install a new app, it places its icon on your homescreen. If you feel you already have enough icons on your homescreen, there's an easy way to

prevent more from being added. Open Google Play, tap the three lines at the top left, Settings, then untick 'Add icon to Home screen - For new apps'. Any new apps' icons will now be added to your app drawer (accessed via the circular icon with six dots).

ANDROID & iOS

Quickly find attachments from a specific Outlook contact



In Issue 444, we showed you how to use the new Outlook app (see 'Use Outlook on your tablet' Workshop). The app has now been updated with new features, including an improved People section. It works on both Android (www.snipca.com/16123) and iOS (www.snipca.com/16124), but we'll show you how to do this on an iPad.

Open the app, then tap People at the bottom. While previously this section only listed your contacts, it now lets you quickly see all emails, files (attachments) and events (calendar invitations) received from a particular contact. Tap the person's name on the left, then tap the blue Mail, Files or Events links to see the relevant content (see screenshot above right).

If you want to write an email to that person, tap their email address. If you added that contact's address/postcode, you'll see a link under the Home section. Tap this to see that contact's address in Bing Maps.

Best New Apps

What you should install this fortnight

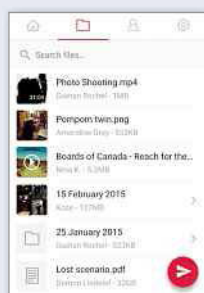
Infiniit Free

Android: www.snipca.com/16126

iOS: www.snipca.com/16127

Infiniit is the fastest way to send files to other people's devices. Its transfer speeds are much faster than using cloud-storage services. There's no limit on the number of

files you can send or on the file size. You can also transfer files between your devices and PC by downloading the free PC program from www.infiniit.io.



AZ Screen Recorder Free

Android: www.snipca.com/16133

If you use a device running Android Lollipop (5.0), then this is the best app to record whatever you do on it. You can pause or stop a screen recording and select the video quality. It records audio playing on your device and spoken dictations (using your device's mic).



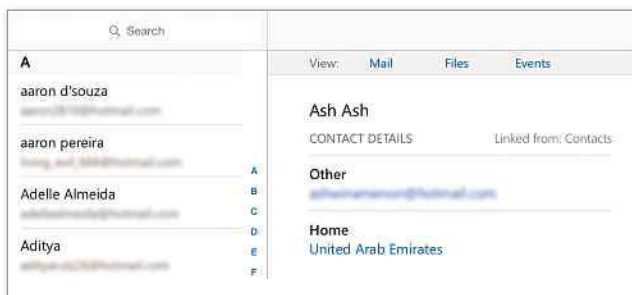
Snapseed Free

Android: www.snipca.com/16134

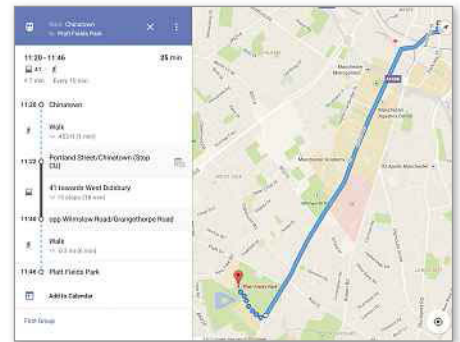
iOS: www.snipca.com/16135

One of the most popular photo-editing apps just got even better. It now has a tool that lets you save the edits you make to one photo, then apply them to other photos with one tap. It also has five new filters including Glamour Glow, which was previously paid-for.





updated, tap Open. You'll notice the app is now full screen (concealing the top bar on your device). You can get directions to a location by tapping the blue arrow at the bottom right, then typing your location into the search box.



iOS Trim unwanted video footage on your iPhone and iPad



If you often shoot videos on your iPhone or iPad, there will be times when you need to cut out unwanted sections from the start or end of your footage (called 'trimming'). This can not only improve your finished video but will result in a smaller file, which makes sending or sharing it faster and easier.

First open the Photos app and play your video. Tap the screen as it's playing to show your video timeline at the top. Tap either end of the timeline and drag it toward the opposite end (see screenshot below). Tap the Play/Pause icon at the bottom to play this trimmed video. When you're happy with your edit, tap Trim at the top right, then 'Save as New Clip'.



iOS Make the most of Google Maps' new features



The latest version of Google Maps (www.snipca.com/16125) for iOS lets you view maps in full screen (without distracting battery, time and signal icons). There's also a quicker way to get directions and you now see colour-coded sections of your route according to which modes of transport you use or, for example, different train companies.

To update the app, open the App Store, tap Updates at the bottom, then tap Update beside Google Maps. Once it's

But there's a new, slightly faster way. Tap the search box at the top, type **directions to** followed by your location address or postcode, then tap Search.

Tap the bus icon at the top to see all available routes using public transport, then tap the route you want to take. The route will be broken down into colour-

coded sections on the map according to how you travel. For example, bus routes may be represented in blue or red, walking routes in a blue dotted line, while London tube routes will be represented by the designated colour of the particular line (see screenshot above).

Games With Kids

What to play together on your phone and tablet

AGES 0-5

ABC Gurus

£1.49 www.snipca.com/16128 (iOS)

Designed by pre-school teachers, ABC Gurus will help your toddlers learn about letters of the alphabet. They tap a letter on a grid, then colour and decorate it using items such as crowns, eyes, moustaches and mouths. They'll then see a small animation of a word that begins with that letter.



AGES 6-10

Endless Reader

Free www.snipca.com/16129 (Android)

Free www.snipca.com/16130 (iOS)

This educational app makes learning to read fun. Your child completes sentences by dragging words to their correct outline. As they drag the word, they'll hear it spoken. With every completed sentence, an animation will illustrate its meaning.



AGES 11-16

Stick Cricket 2

Free www.snipca.com/16131 (Android)

Free www.snipca.com/16132 (iOS)

This addictive game is all about timing. Tap the arrow on the left or right to hit the ball and score runs. In this new version, you need to complete missions (such as chasing a target in under 5 overs) to unlock better gear, including bats and shoes. You can also play as your favourite international cricket team.



WINDOWS 10

Change your default programs in Windows 10

There's an easy way to change your default programs in Windows 10. For example, if you find Internet Explorer sluggish, you can use Spartan as your default browser (see our Workshop on page 38 to learn about the Microsoft's new browser). Alternatively, you can try Chrome or Firefox – both browsers worked fine when we installed them in the latest version of the Windows 10 Technical Preview.

To set a default program, click the Start button, Settings, System, then Defaults. You'll see a list of all your current default programs for your 'Web browser', Email, 'Music player' and so on. Click any default program to see the other installed programs that can carry out that action (see screenshot above right), then click the program you want to set as your default.



WINDOWS VISTA, 7, 8, 8.1

Add any folder to your Start menu

By default, Windows doesn't let you add folders on your PC to your Start menu for quick access, but there's an easy way to enable this using a simple Registry hack. First, open your registry editor by clicking the Start button, typing **regedit**, then pressing Enter.

Now navigate to the follow Registry key by clicking the dropdown arrows to each key's left: **HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT\Folder\ShellEx**. Click the arrow beside ShellEx to expand it, then right-click ContentMenuHandlers. Move your cursor to New, click Key and name it **{a2a9545d-a0c2-42b4-9708-a0b2badd77c8}**. Finally, press Enter and close the Registry Editor.

Now navigate to the folder you want to add to your Start menu, then keeping

WINDOWS 8, 8.1

Edit photos using the Photos app

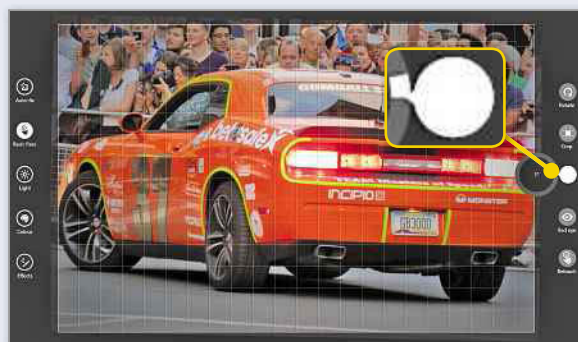
The Windows 8 Photos app has lots of useful options for editing your photos. We'll show you how to crop, straighten and increase a photo's brightness.

The fastest way to open the app is from the Modern tile interface, where you type **photos**, then press Enter. You'll see your photos on your PC listed. Click the one you want to edit to open it. Click the photo again to see options at the bottom, then click Edit at the bottom right.

The app opens in the Auto-fix section, which lets you choose from a list of pre-set effects on the right. To crop your photo, click 'Basic fixes' on the left, then Crop on the right. You'll see an extendable frame on your photo. Click and move it to reposition the frame over your

photo or click and drag its edges to expand or contract the frame. Click Apply at the bottom right when you've finished.

To straighten your photo, click Straighten (below Crop), then click the circle icon (see screenshot) and drag it up or down. To make your photo brighter, click Light on the left, then Brightness on the right. Click the circle and move it down to make your photo brighter (moving it up makes it darker).



the Shift key pressed, right-click the folder. You'll now see a new option 'Pin to Start Menu', which you should click.

WINDOWS 7, 8, 8.1

Keep a specific window on top of others on your Desktop

If you have many programs open on your Desktop, it would be helpful if you could set one program so that its window always remains at the front, and any other program you open subsequently remains behind it.

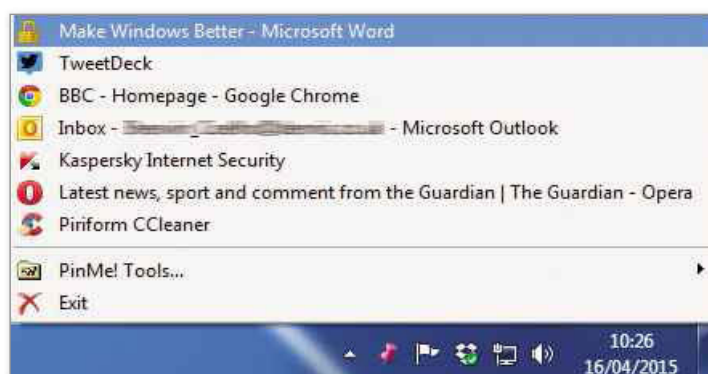
This is useful if, say, you want to copy text from one program (for example,

Chrome) into Word without having to continually minimise the latter.

We'll show you how to do this with a Word document using the free portable tool PinMe. To download it, go to www.snipca.com/16183, then click the grey Windows Download button at the top. Click the downloaded zipped file, then the PinMe! Folder, the PinMe setup file, then Run. You'll now see a small red pin icon in your notification area. Click it to see all open programs on your PC. Now click the Word document you want to appear at the front.

Any program you now open will do so behind your Word document. It's a good

idea to resize the document, so you can see the programs open behind it. Click the 'Restore Down' icon (to left of the 'x' close icon), then click and drag the edges of the document window. To use the document normally again, click the pin icon in your notification area, then click Microsoft Word (represented by a lock icon – see screenshot left).



Make Office Better

Expert tips for every program

OUTLOOK.COM

Customise the email actions that appear in your inbox

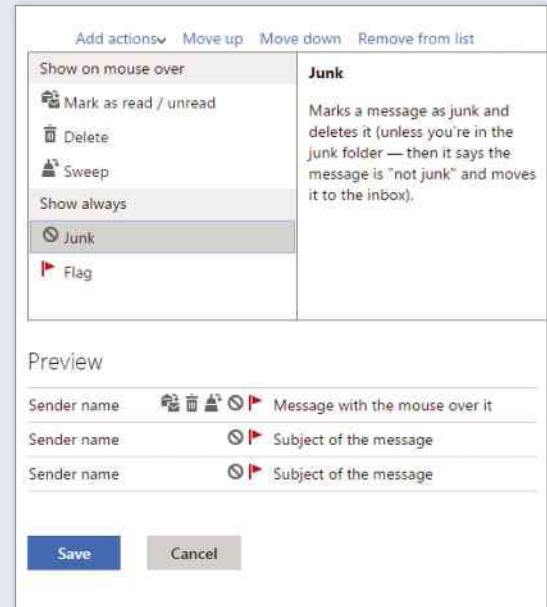


Emails in your Outlook.com inbox have a flag icon beside the subject line, and moving your cursor to any email in the list reveals two more icons – ‘Mark as read’ and Delete. But did you know that you can add more actions, and also edit the order in which they appear?

Click the cog icon at the top right (next to your name), then click Options. Now click the last option – ‘Instant actions’ (in the Customizing Outlook.com section). You’ll see a box with two columns (see screenshot). The left box has two sections – ‘Show on mouse over’ (actions that appear when you move your mouse over an email) and ‘Show

always’ (the action that’s shown by default). Click an action in this column for a description of what it does in the column on the right. To add other actions (options include ‘Move to’, Categorize, Sweep, Junk and Archive) click the ‘Add actions’ dropdown menu and select the one you want.

You can rearrange the order in which your actions appear by clicking ‘Move up’ or ‘Move down’, and remove an action by clicking ‘Remove from list’. The Preview section below gives you an idea of how your list of actions will appear in your inbox. When you’re happy with your changes, click the blue Save button at the bottom left.



OFFICE ONLINE

Edit Office files from within your browser



Following a recent integration with Microsoft Office Online, Dropbox (the free cloud-storage service) now lets you edit any Word, Excel or PowerPoint file from within your browser. This is very useful, especially if you want to edit an Office file that you’ve saved to Dropbox from a PC other than your own.

If you don’t have a Dropbox account, go to www.dropbox.com, click ‘create an account’ and sign up for a free account, which gives you 2GB of storage space. You can either save Office files to Dropbox by dragging and dropping them to the Dropbox website in your browser or by installing the free PC program from www.dropbox.com/install.

Once your account is set up, log into the Dropbox website, click the file, then click Open at the top right. The first time you do this you’ll need to click Allow to grant Microsoft Office Online access to your Dropbox files. The file will now open in the relevant Office Online program you’re using.

When you’ve finished editing, click ‘Save and return to Dropbox’ at the top left. To download this edited file to your PC, click it in

Dropbox, then click the Download option at the top. You can also access it via your Dropbox PC program.

POWERPOINT

Give your presentation’s images more interesting shapes



You don’t need to edit images before you insert them into PowerPoint because the program has many useful tools that let you do that. One tool lets you customise your image into any number of shapes, adding a nice personal touch to any presentation.

Click the Insert tab, then Picture (at the top left), navigate to the image on your PC, then click Insert. Now, click the Crop dropdown menu at the top right, move your cursor to ‘Crop to Shape’ and select a shape from one of the sections (including Rectangles, Basic Shapes and Block

Arrows – see screenshot below left). To resize the shape, click any of the circles on its corner edges and drag them. Now click and drag the shape to reposition it within your slide.

OFFICE

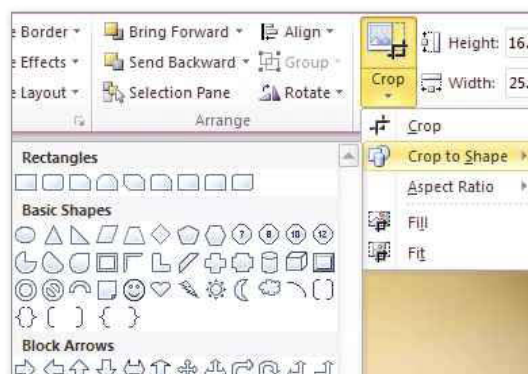
Use the font resurrected after 35 years for free



The story of the font Neue Haas Unica is very interesting. Released in 1980, it was an instant hit for its elegant style, but because of legal disputes at the time, it never became fully available. Now, 35 years later, it’s been given a new lease of life by a reputable font designer.

Even though you need to pay for the full Neue Haas Unica font package (\$99), you can install and use one of its fonts (Neue Haas Unica Thin) for free. Go to www.snipca.com/16208, then click Thin at the top left to see the font. If you want to read its story in more detail, scroll down and click the blue ‘Read more’ link.

To download the font, tick ‘I have read and accept the license document’, then click Free Download. Open the downloaded zipped file, the NeueHaasUnicaThin folder, double-click the file ending in .otf, then click Install. You can now use the font in any Office program by navigating to it from the Font dropdown menu.





Firefox

Customise web fonts, create search shortcuts and access hidden settings

Hack Firefox using free extensions

Firefox supports far more – and far more inventive – extensions than Chrome or Internet Explorer (IE). This is largely due to its **open-source** design, which allows developers to access its **source code**.

We like Classic Theme Restorer (www.snipca.com/16194), which lets you restore favourite lost Firefox features, including the old Firefox button. 'Theme Font & Size Changer' (www.snipca.com/16195), lets you change web-page fonts to a more readable style – or less readable, if you prefer! You'll find plenty more tweaking tools in Mozilla's directory (<https://addons.mozilla.org>) – or go straight to www.snipca.com/16193 to see users' favourites.

Incidentally, you don't have to go through the menu icon (the three lines) to visit your secure 'Add-ons' page (where you manage your extensions); simply type **about:addons** into the address bar.

Add hidden toolbar buttons

If you're a Firefox newcomer, you may not realise how much you can do from the main toolbar (Menu Bar). To see all the extra buttons you can add, click the menu icon, then Customise. This opens an 'Additional Tools and Features' page, where you'll see more options such as Full Screen, New Private Window (for



Jazz up your browser and add toolbar tools from 'Additional Tools and Features'

browsing anonymously, much like Chrome's Incognito Mode) and Share This Page. Click and drag any item on to the Menu Bar to pin it there, and drag items from the toolbar to remove them.

To spruce up Firefox with an attractive theme, click the Themes dropdown menu at the bottom of the page. Hover over one to see a preview (such as Space Fantasy in our screenshot above) then click to add it.

Click the green Exit Customise button to save, or click Restore Defaults to undo all your changes.

Block Mozilla's interruptions

Firefox just can't stop improving – there's been a new version almost every month for the past six months. To make sure you tell everyone about this, its latest version (37, www.snipca.com/16185) includes occasional pop-ups urging you to rate the browser and 'like' it on Facebook.

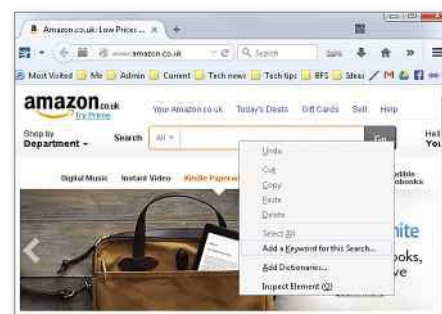
But you can opt out with a simple settings hack. Type **about:config** in the address bar and press Enter. You'll then be warned off going any further ('Here be dragons!') because the **about:config** page contains deep, important settings that Firefox doesn't want you to touch. Untick 'Show this warning next time' and then click 'I'll be careful, I promise!'. Scroll down to 'browser.selfsupport.url', right-click it and click Modify. Delete the contents of the 'string value' text field and type "" (open quote, close quote) instead, then click OK.

Search within sites using keywords

Firefox lets you use a website's own search tool without having to open the site each time.

First visit the site in question (Amazon, for example), then right-click its search box and click 'Add a Keyword for this Search' (see screenshot below). Type a keyword (say, **amazon**) in the Keyword field, then click Save. Now type the keyword in your Firefox address bar, followed by your search term. For example, we typed **amazon computeractive** into the Firefox address bar, and it instantly opened a page of Amazon results – just as if we'd searched on Amazon itself.

Keywords can be anything you like, but they can't contain any spaces or special characters. So Wikipedia could have the keyword 'wiki' and PC Pro (www.pcpro.co.uk) could have the keyword 'pcpro'.



Give a website a keyword so you can search it from the Firefox address bar

Hunt for Easter eggs

The geeky kind, we mean – those in-jokes hidden in websites and programs by their developers. Here are some Firefox favourites.

ROBOT

'Add-ons' isn't the only page you can access by typing **about:** into the address bar. Type **about:robots** then press Enter and see who greets you.

TRY AGAIN

Click Try Again after going to 'about:robots'. That'll teach you. Oh, and look at the tab.

BOOK OF MOZILLA

Type **about:mozilla** in the address bar, press Enter and prepare to be baffled.

BOUNCING UNICORN

Open 'Additional Tools and Features' (see 'Add hidden toolbar buttons' tip above) and drag all optional items from the right-hand pane to the left-hand pane, then click Exit Customise. Now we challenge you to find the bouncing unicorn (clue: see screenshot).



What's All the Fuss About...



Windows Hello

Microsoft wants to turn you into a walking password

What is it?

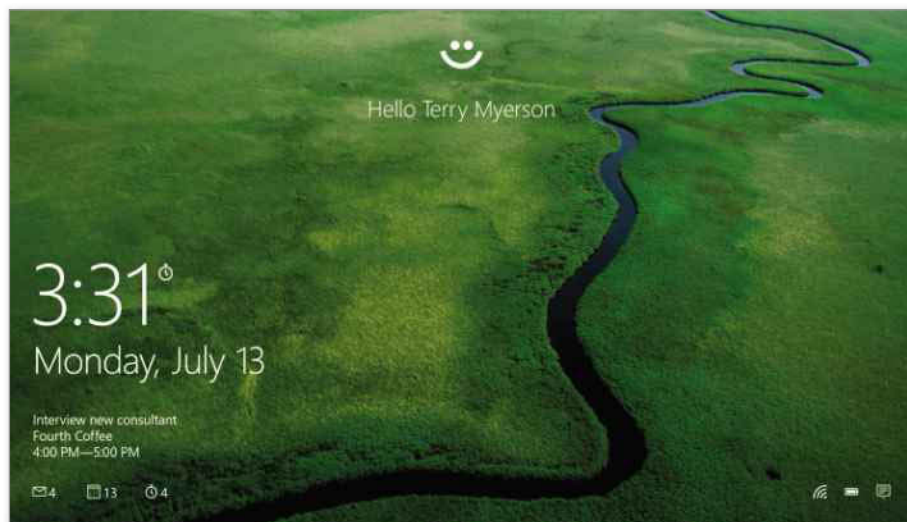
Microsoft's new biometric-authentication technology, which lets you sign into Windows 10 using your eyes, face and fingers. It recognises unique physical characteristics, such as your iris pattern, fingerprints and facial features, thereby saving you from the tyranny of passwords. When you sign in, you'll be greeted with a reassuring smiley face and a friendly 'Hello' (see main image – Terry Myerson is Microsoft's Executive Vice President of Operating Systems).

Will it mean the end of passwords?

Microsoft desperately hopes so. On its blog announcing Windows Hello (www.snipca.com/15972), Microsoft's Joe Belfiore wrote that passwords "are easily hackable and even when complex they are not effective, but most of us want something easy to remember, so we either choose a simple password or end up noting it down somewhere, making it less secure".

But will it really be safer than passwords?

So Microsoft insists, claiming that its security is so strong that "government, defense, financial, health care and other related organizations" will want to use it. Microsoft says that it's secure enough to prevent hackers from signing in using a photo of your face, or by trying to impersonate you in other ways. This is doubly important because of Microsoft's other biometric system, codenamed Passport.



Wait a minute – I'll need a passport to use Windows Hello?

No. Passport is a system that extends biometrics to let you sign into websites, apps and online services. Once Windows Hello confirms your identity by scanning your fingerprint, iris or face, Passport will automatically sign you into any website, app or service you use. Microsoft insists this is safe because Passport doesn't transmit images of your face or fingerprint online. But Passport's success will depend on Microsoft persuading developers to integrate it into their products.

Can I try either system now?

You can try the fingerprint technology if your PC or Windows Phone has a sensor to read it. But you'll have to wait for Windows 10 to arrive later this year to buy a computer that can recognise your eyes and face. These will come with Intel's infrared RealSense 3D camera built in.

How does that work?

By using depth-sensing technology to track the location and position of objects. It captures unique features on your face in a wide range of lighting conditions (see screenshot left, and watch

Microsoft's demonstration at www.snipca.com/15997). But there is a drawback.

What's that?

Computers with this camera are likely to be expensive. Thankfully, you won't have to sign into Windows 10 this way – you'll still be able to use passwords. Until prices for these computers fall, most people will continue to use passwords.

Are other companies building similar technology?

Yes, with many having joined the FIDO alliance (<https://fidoalliance.org>), a non-profit organisation whose mission is to "reduce the reliance on passwords to authenticate users". Both Apple and Samsung already make phones with fingerprint sensors, while Google is working on a mobile-payment system that uses biometrics. Banks are pushing the technology even further. Last year, Barclays demonstrated a scanner that identifies individuals by recognising the pattern of veins in their fingers, and Halifax has trialled a system that measures a person's heart rate. With so much innovation taking place in biometric technology, it's clear that we're rapidly heading into a password-less future.



Windows Hello relies on infrared cameras that can recognise your face even in poor lighting

Make Your PC **FASTER**



Without Having To Download Anything

You don't need software to speed up your computer. Jane Hoskyn explains how to boost your PC using built-in programs and brilliant free online tools

Your PC is probably stuffed with software that claims to speed it up. You've got Registry cleaners, driver updaters, boot defraggers and more, plus any assorted extras that hitched a lift when you installed them. And what are they all doing? Slowing your PC down, of course, by clogging up space and running in the background.

OK, some PC-boosting software is

worth having, at least if you keep it updated and know how to get the best out of it. CCleaner and AdwCleaner are notable examples. But they're the exception that proves the rule.

Open Windows Explorer (latterly File Explorer, but we'll stick with Windows Explorer for now) and scroll through the Program Files folder. If you've had your PC for a few years and you're a confident software downloader, we bet there's a whole landfill's worth of "PC speeding" program clutter in there. You're probably using a fraction of it, and it certainly isn't speeding up your computer.

Why you don't need software

Most PC-boosting programs make a song and dance of doing what you can already do by yourself, such as removing startup items. So we'll start this feature by revealing how to speed up your PC using

tools you've already got, including Registry Editor. You'll get exactly the same results as if you'd used a third-party program, but without any system-slowness (or even malicious) program junk.

Once we've covered the basics of streamlining Windows, we'll reveal our favourite new third-party tools for speeding up your PC – and not one needs downloading. These tools, which include a brand new free online program from the makers of CCleaner, are part of a move towards free browser-based software that works in complete isolation from Windows, so it doesn't matter what operating system (OS) you're running, how good your processor is or how much hard-drive space you have. All you need is an internet connection. We won't be including any warnings about dodgy installers or unwanted extras, because we won't need to.

KEY POINTS

- Speed up Windows by editing the Registry
- Boost your PC using secret Control Panel settings
- Deep-clean your hard drive using free online tools
- Keep your system running faster by using online tools for everything

USE YOUR PC'S BUILT-IN TOOLS TO MAKE IT FASTER

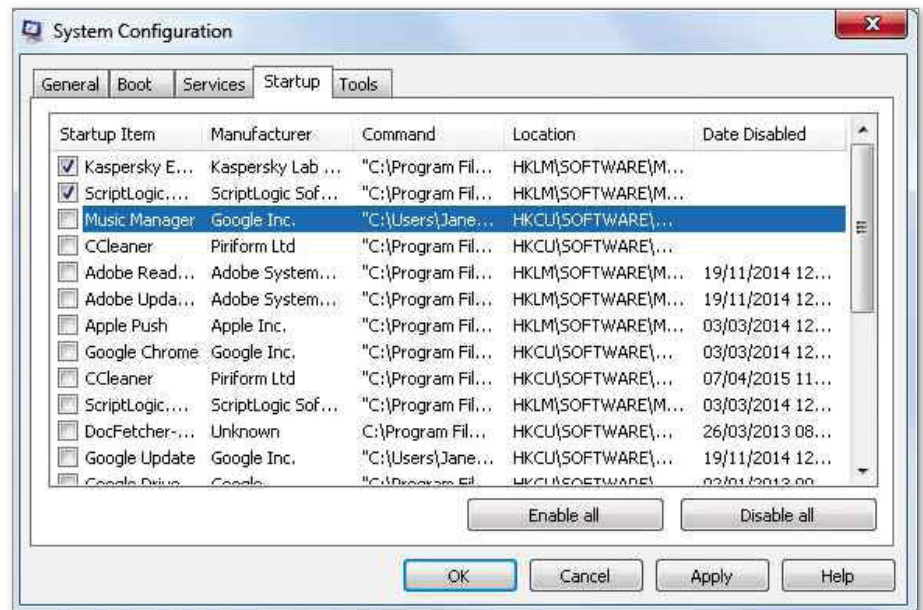
Make Windows start faster without Autoruns

If you usually put the kettle on after switching on your PC, because you have time to make (and perhaps even drink) a cup of tea before Windows is ready to use, your startup is too slow. It's almost certainly caused by too many programs and processes launching automatically at the same time as Windows.

You can clear unwanted startup items using free tool Autoruns (www.snipca.com/16096), whose detailed program window lets you investigate and manage all your PC's startup processes. It's great, but you don't have to use it. In fact, if you're really serious about wanting a faster PC, you should dispense with all third-party downloads like Autoruns, and use the tools you've already got.

First, find your Startup tab. In Windows 7 it's part of the System Configuration tool, better known as MSConfig (type **msconfig** into Start and press Enter). In Windows 8/8.1, it's in Task Manager. Browse the list and in Windows 7 untick any items you don't need (see screenshot above right), or in Windows 8/8.1 right-click and select Disable, then restart your PC.

How do you decide what to remove and what to leave? Windows 8/8.1 includes an Autoruns-style 'Search online' option in the right-click menu for any startup item. Windows 7 doesn't, but there are free online tools that will help you. Should I Block It? (www.shouldiblockit.com – see screenshot below) has a searchable database of 167,796 (at the time of



Disable startup items in the Startup tab – no need to download extra software

writing) processes and files, with details of what they do and how important they are. To find out what Autoruns says about any process without having to download Autoruns, search the startup database at Pacman's Portal (www.snipca.com/16098).

As a general rule, don't disable any startup items associated with your antivirus or **processor** (usually listed as Intel or AMD). Also leave hardware processes for trackpads, audio and so on. The likes of Google Music Manager, iTunes Helper and Adobe Reader can go straight away – there's no good reason for them to start with your PC. If you use Chrome you'll notice lots of Google

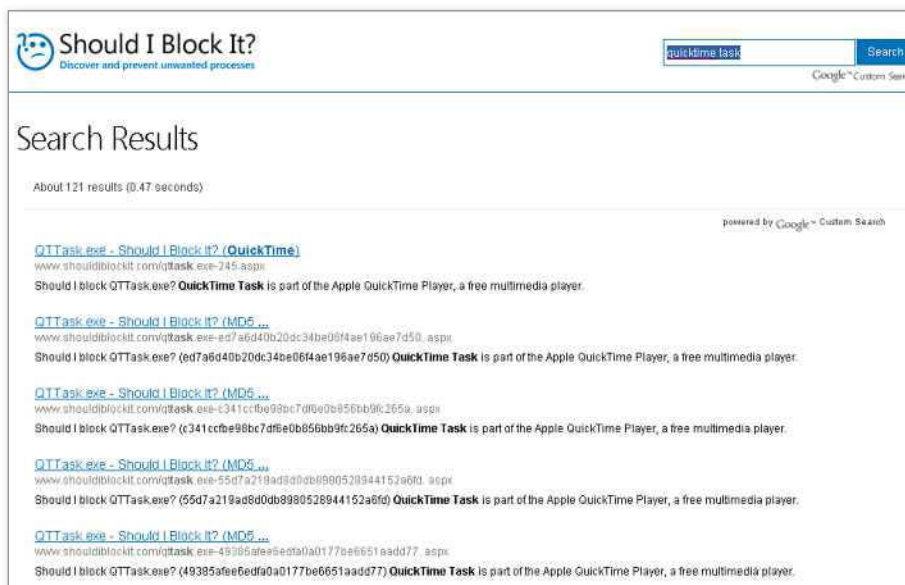
Chrome entries in the startup list. Some are useful, such as Google Update, but none of them need to run at startup. Remove them all.

If a program keeps adding itself to your startup list (we've often find this happens after trying to disable it using Autoruns), turn to Registry Editor (Regedit), the ultimate built-in tool for deep control of your PC. Create a **system restore point** first, then type **regedit** into Start, press Enter and click Yes. Navigate to MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run, then click the Run folder to see certain startup items in the right-hand pane. To prevent a program running at startup, right-click it then click Delete. This doesn't remove the program from your PC; it just stops it running at startup.

Set up a boot defrag without Defraggler

Defragging (defragmenting) tidies up the space on your computer's hard drive letting Windows find data stored on it more quickly, so it's a very effective way to speed up your PC. A boot defrag is a super-charged defrag, doing its work before any other processes (including Windows itself) start running. It's therefore able to include files that Windows normally locks, resulting in an even greater speed boost.

Some free defragging tools, such as Defraggler (www.piriform.com/defraggler) and **open-source** program UltraDefrag (www.snipca.com/16097),



Investigate any startup process or file using free online tool Should I Block It?

have boot-defrag options. But on most PCs you can set up a boot defrag via the Registry without installing software.

Open Regedit and go to:

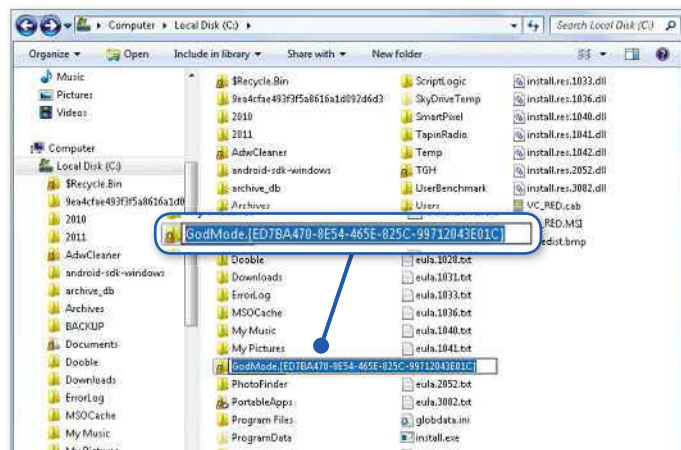
MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Dfrg\BootOptimizeFunction. If your PC supports boot defrag, you'll see Enable in the list on the right. If it's set to 'y', your PC is already set to defrag when it boots. If it's set to 'n', double-click Enable and change the 'Value data' to 'y' (see screenshot right). Restart your PC to run the boot defrag.

While this will speed up your PC, don't leave it to run every time you switch on your computer because it will slow down your startup. The first time you do it, it may take hours to complete. So make the Registry edit described above then restart your PC last thing before you go to bed. Then go back into Regedit next day and change the BootOptimizeFunction value back to 'n' to prevent it running every time you start your PC.

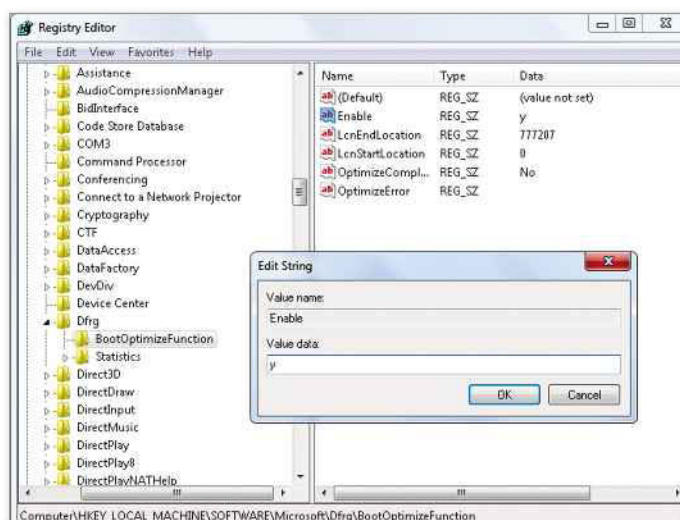
Optimise your PC without Glary Utilities

You don't need a large, memory-hungry program like Glary Utilities (www.snipca.com/16100) to clean up your hard drive and boost your PC's power. Instead, unleash the hidden performance settings you never knew your PC had.

All these settings appear in the God Mode folder – a souped-up version of the Control Panel (it's often called the 'Master Control Panel shortcut'). You have to activate it manually, but it's easy to do. Open Explorer and navigate to 'C:' (it may be hidden inside the Computer folder in Windows 7). Double-click the C: folder to open it, then right-click on a blank space inside the window and select New, then Folder. Type the following string as the folder's name: **God Mode**. {ED7BA470-8E54-465E-825C-99712043E01C}



Activate God Mode by creating a new folder inside C: and renaming it using a special string



Set up a boot defrag in the Registry to speed up your PC – but don't leave it to run every time you switch on

99712043E01C} (see screenshot below left). Press Enter, and you'll see the folder is simply named God Mode (in fact, you can call it anything you want: the important part is the string of letters and numbers within curly brackets). If you'd rather paste the string instead of typing it, copy it from Wikipedia (www.snipca.com/16103).

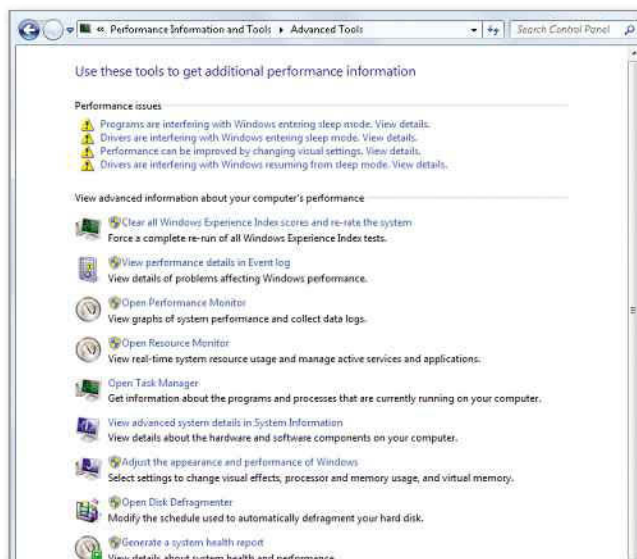
Double-click the folder to see an index of settings for all areas of your PC, from icons to internet. There's so much in the God Mode folder we could devote a whole feature to it (and probably will in a future issue), but for now we'll stick with 'Performance Information and Tools'. Scroll down to this header, then double-click the 'Use tools to improve performance' link to open your PC's 'Performance Information and Tools' window.

This window contains a further wealth of information including your Windows Experience Index score, which roughly rates your computer's power; a link to the built-in Disk Cleanup tool; and – most useful of all – an 'Advanced tools' link

that takes you to even more tools, such as Performance Monitor and Resource Monitor, virtual memory settings, Disk Defragmenter and system health report. Any current problems affecting your PC's speed appear at the top of the Advanced Tools window (see screenshot below); click one for more information and advice on fixing it.

Save yourself all these clicks next time by creating a Desktop shortcut to 'Performance Information and Tools'. In the main God Mode index, right-click 'Use tools to improve performance' and select 'Create shortcut'. You can do the same for any item in the index.

While you're in God Mode, investigate the links under Administrative Tools (especially 'Defragment your hard drive' and 'Diagnose memory problems'); Device Manager ('Update device drivers'); and 'Programs and Features' ('Turn Windows features on or off'). All will go a long way to improving your PC's speed.



See all your PC's built-in performance-boosting settings in one place under Advanced Tools

SPEED UP YOUR PC USING FREE ONLINE TOOLS

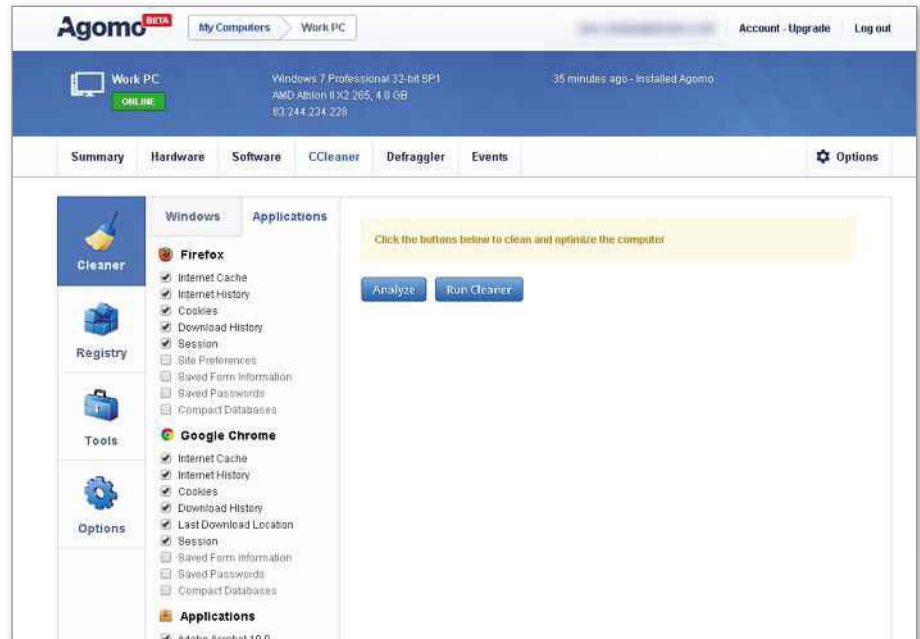
Use CCleaner and Speccy without downloading them

Free tool Agomo (www.piriform.com/agomo) is a new stablemate for CCleaner, Defraggler and Speccy – or perhaps a replacement for all three. It cleans your hard drive like CCleaner, defrags your PC like Defraggler and reveals what's slowing down your PC like Speccy. But unlike those tools, Agomo works solely in your browser.

How can an online tool possibly clean your hard drive, I hear you ask? That's like scrubbing the floor with thin air, surely. We were none the wiser after watching the site's introduction video (www.snipca.com/16109), which assumes we've all got multiple computers and insists on pronouncing Agomo "a-GO-mo".

At the time of writing Agomo is in limited beta, so we had to request an invitation (click 'Sign up now' for yours). The link arrived by email two days later and took us straight to our secure Agomo account, where we were greeted by two Download buttons. Download buttons? This is supposed to be an online tool! Curiouser and curiouser.

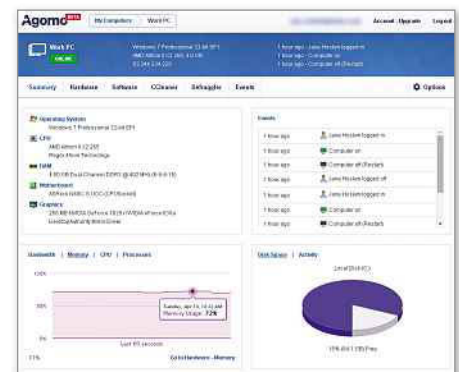
The download, it turns out, is simply an anchor that connects your PC (or PCs – up to three) securely with your Agomo account. It's small (6.2MB) and quick and safe to install. There's no program window at all, just a system-tray icon that you click to open Agomo in your browser,



Clean your PC from anywhere using CCleaner online, part of Piriform's new tool Agomo

where you have to sign into your encrypted account. Agomo's security is so tight it wouldn't even let us sign in automatically using our password manager PassBox (www.snipca.com/16116).

Once you've logged in, click your PC's name to visit its Speccy-powered Summary page (see screenshot right), where you can check your hardware specifications as well as your current hard-drive space and activity. There's also a graph that monitors your RAM, CPU, processes and bandwidth in real time.



Your Agomo Summary page reveals current memory usage and other info at a glance

Hover over the graph to see how hard your PC was working at any given moment in the past 60 seconds.

Click the CCleaner tab to see the familiar CCleaner program window in your browser. The Agomo version of CCleaner has the same tabs and buttons as the installed version and it works just as if it were installed. Because it's online, you can run it remotely by logging into Agomo from another PC – say, your laptop in the garden, or a relative's PC. The main downside of its online nature is that it doesn't support plug-ins such as CCEnhancer (www.snipca.com/16112) – at least not yet.

You can use Agomo to schedule a clean while you're away. This is useful if, like us, you find your PC mysteriously fills with clutter when you don't use it for a few days. Much of this clutter is generated automatically by software and browser

'ONLINE' TOOLS TO AVOID

Agomo may be the future of PC-cleaning software, but it's currently the only genuine product of its kind. Beware imitators.

Anvisoft's new tool Cloud System Booster (www.snipca.com/16118) is described on software listings site AlternativeTo (www.snipca.com/16119) as a free online product. But it's actually just a free trial for a conventional installable program that costs \$22.98 (£15.70) and happens to have an online dashboard. Shame, we'd rather got our hopes up.

Still, at least Cloud System Booster isn't malware, unlike FileLab Windows Cleaner (www.snipca.com/16114, see screenshot, but approach with caution). This tool claims to let you clean your Registry



from the comfort of your browser. Its web 'app' won't even open in the latest versions of Chrome and Firefox, so we searched Google for solutions and got a slew of results containing the dreaded words 'How to uninstall FileLab Windows Cleaner'. You shouldn't go anywhere near it because it can't be uninstalled in the usual way (as explained at www.snipca.com/16117). Let's just say we're very relieved it didn't open in our browser.

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You can buy the 2014 Back Issue CD now on Amazon (£15) at www.snipca.com/14981, or search for 'computeractive cd'

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Bethers2603 ★★★★★

I would recommend this product to anyone who enjoys this magazine as much as I do

Dave ★★★★★

I have the full set apart from No 2, and they just sit on a shelf till I want them. Very good for reference

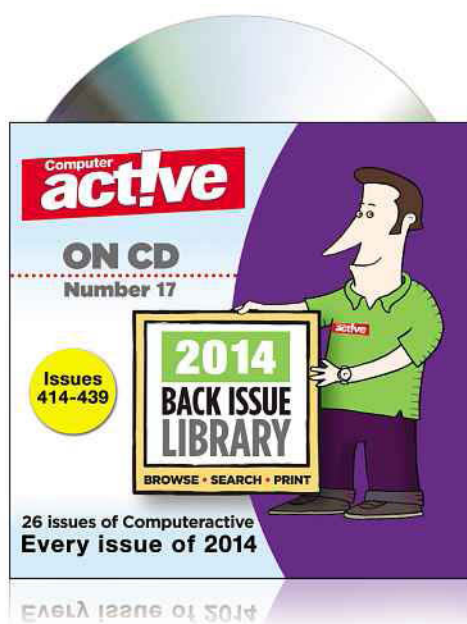
Sproggit ★★★★★

I can now recycle all the mags I've collected over the past 12 months

Col Chris ★★★★★

Very good. I would like a Back Issues CD for every year in the future

Mr Pimlott ★★★★★



Due to my own fault, I thought the disk was faulty. I contacted Computeractive, they contacted me immediately, established my error, and then later checked with me that all was well. Excellent customer service not often seen today

David ★★★★★

I always get these, as they save storage space and make searching easy

Nephron8 ★★★★★

Easy to use, does what it says on the tin!

Allan Feeney ★★★★★

Back by popular demand!

We've ordered a new batch of the **2013 Back Issue CD**, which you can now buy on Amazon at www.snipca.com/16010, or search for 'computeractive cd'

All quotes taken from reviews left by customers on Amazon. Visit www.snipca.com/14981 to read more.

PLUS



extensions, and it piles up like dust when your back is turned, so schedule a clean to run before you get home.

There's also a Registry cleaner in Agomo. Click CCleaner, then Registry. Untick any parts of the Registry you don't want checked, then click 'Scan for Issues' to find and remove obsolete and out-of-date files clogging up your Registry and slowing down your PC.

Agomo isn't the finished article, but early signs are excellent. It puts all your most useful third-party PC-boosting tools in one place, away from your long-suffering hard drive – and you can run them from anywhere. Stick with the installable version of CCleaner if you love CCEnhancer, but otherwise Agomo is a great new substitute for all your standard Piriform tools.

Remove browser junk

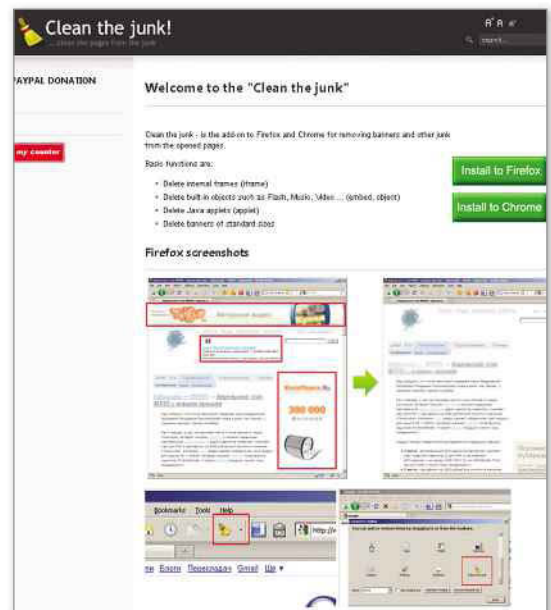
You could have the fastest broadband known to humanity, but you won't get the best out of it if your browser is full of junk. First, use CCleaner in Agomo to get rid of **cache** junk and useless extensions. Be ruthless – you don't need all those extensions (called 'add-ons' in Firefox and Internet Explorer), and most are doing nothing other than draining your PC's resources.

Make room for one free extension, though: 'Clean the junk' (Chrome and Firefox, www.snipca.com/16136). It strips away all the unnecessary rubbish that

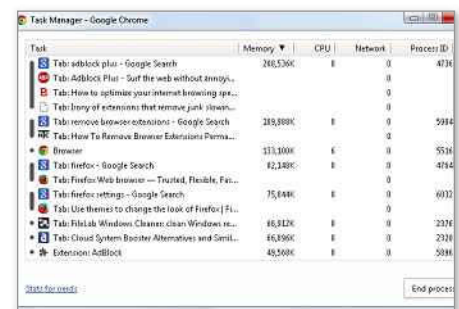
makes web pages take so long to open, such as frames, embedded video players, **applets** and banners (including advertising banners). 'Clean the junk' isn't an advert-blocker like Adblock Plus (<https://adblockplus.org>); it doesn't scan automatically for advertising content in the way that Adblock Plus does. This means you'll see some adverts, but it also means your pages will load much faster. Adblock Plus, for all its benefits, will slow your browser down.

Beyond that, the best tools for keeping your browser running fast are already built into your browser. Chrome, Firefox and IE all let you disable or remove extensions, delete search engines, clear your cache and even prevent plug-ins running automatically, just by clicking a box or two in your browser settings (click the three lines icon in Chrome and Firefox, and click the cog icon in IE). Chrome even has its own Task Manager. Press Shift+Esc to open it, then click the Memory column header to see the most memory-hungry processes (usually open tabs) at the top. Select a process and click 'End process' to close it; Chrome will continue running.

For tips on boosting Firefox using its own hidden tools, turn to page 48.



Remove browser-slowing extras with free extension 'Clean the junk'



See what's slowing down Chrome and close selected processes using its own Task Manager

KEEP YOUR PC FAST BY DOING EVERYTHING ONLINE

Use Word and Excel online – for free

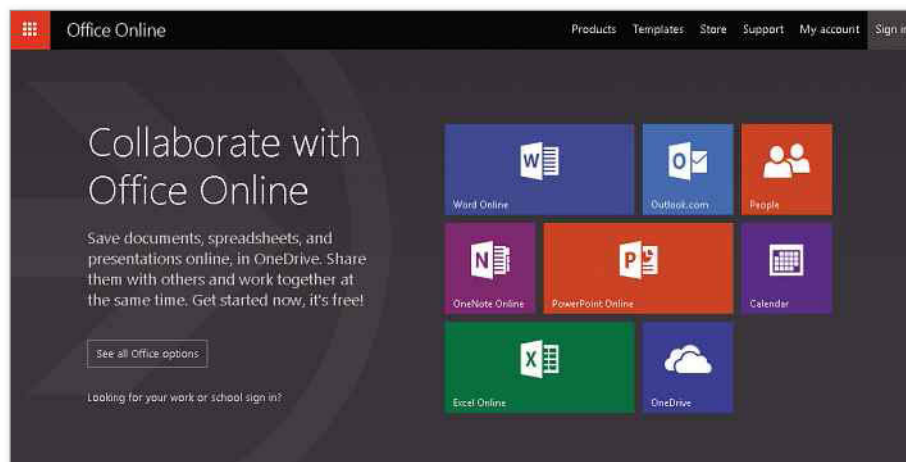
Do you really need that enormous, memory-hogging office suite on your PC? Unless your broadband connection is terrible, no you don't. This Cover Feature

was written entirely using Google Docs (<https://docs.google.com>), which integrates seamlessly with Google's secure storage service Drive (<https://drive.google.com>) and doesn't require anything to be installed on your PC (except your

browser, of course).

As I'm writing, my work is saved automatically every few seconds; I don't notice it happening. If my computer crashes or my Wi-Fi cuts out (which happens often), my work is saved automatically in my browser, from where I can pick it up and carry on working from my home PC, my office PC or my laptop. It's all encrypted (hence the 's' in 'https'; it stands for 'secure' – see www.abbreviations.com/HTTPS), so no one at Google, on the internet or in a hacker's bedroom can see what I'm writing. Which is just as well.

Microsoft Office is now available online, too. Like Google Docs, Office Online (<https://office.live.com>) is free and doesn't install anything on your PC. It comprises web-based versions of Word, Excel and PowerPoint, as well as the new note-taking tool OneNote (www.snipca.com/16139). All your work is



Huge office programs like Word and Excel are now free online

saved automatically and securely in your Microsoft account, and you can access it via the company's online storage service OneDrive (<https://onedrive.live.com>; see Secret Tips, Issue 445), and also now in Dropbox.

When you create or edit a document using any of these online tools, no files are saved to your PC unless you want them to be. For example, I can export versions of this feature to my Desktop or Documents folder as I'm going along, in whatever format I like: DOCX, DOC, TXT, PDF and many more. I'd rather not, because it'd clutter up my PC unnecessarily – and less clutter means more speed – but it's good to have the option.

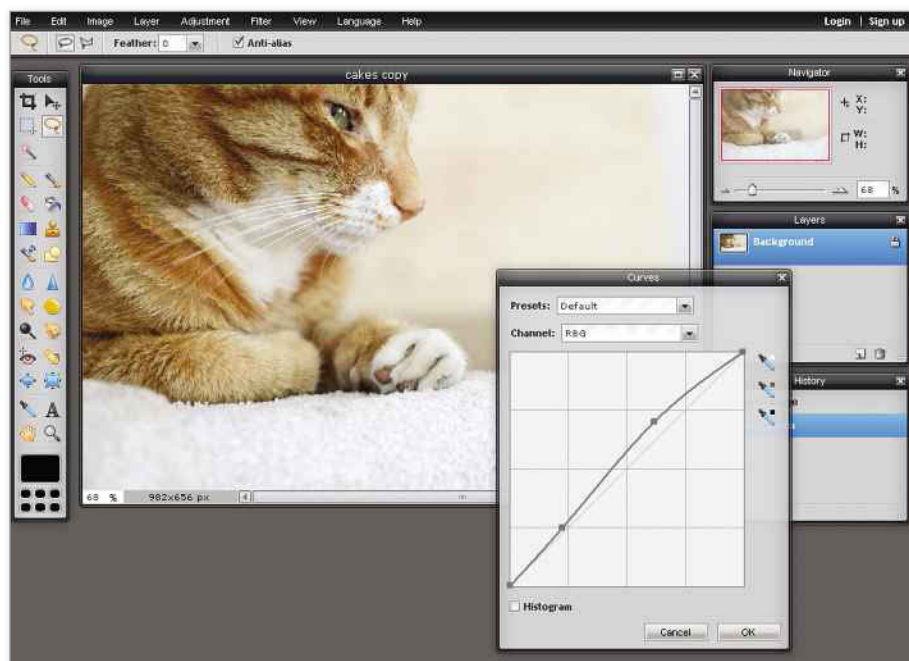
Switch to an online photo editor

Photo- and video-editing programs are – after office suites and antivirus software (which you will need to install) – the biggest space-gobbling, memory-hogging albatrosses on your poor PC's back. Fire up a mammoth like Adobe Photoshop on an average Windows 7 computer, and all other programs will grind to a halt.

Luckily for your processor, there's now a decent choice of free online photo-editing tools that won't slow or clog up your PC and browser. Pixlr (www.snipca.com/16143) is the best of the bunch, as we revealed in Issue 438 (page 58). Its layout will be instantly familiar if you've ever used Photoshop or Photoshop Elements, and it includes advanced features like layers, curves and filters. Enable Adblock Plus to get rid of the annoying full-column advert on the right.

BeFunky (www.befunky.com/create) is less professional-looking but more fun. Import your photos from Facebook and Flickr to jazz them up with filters and effects. You can even create your own Befunky Gallery (www.befunky.com/explore).

To edit short videos or turn your photos into a video slideshow, try the excellent free site Magisto (www.magisto.com). We'll look at free online video editors in more detail.



Use advanced photo-editing features like curves and layers for free using online tool Pixlr

Convert any file without software

'Have you ever wanted to convert files without the need to download software?' asks free web-based tool Zamzar (www.zamzar.com). Yep, often. Unlike much installable conversion software, Zamzar is properly free and lets you convert between hundreds of formats, from AZW3 (Kindle ebook file) to WAV (Windows audio file). Check for supported file types at www.snipca.com/16141.

Zamzar's conversion process requires a few clicks, but it's a lot faster and safer than grappling with a software installer. Drag one or more files (up to 100MB) on to the page, choose an available format type, then wait for an email containing a link to download the converted file. You must download the file within 24 hours – after that, it's deleted from Zamzar's server.

If you'd rather save the new file to Dropbox or Google Drive, use free tool CloudConvert (<http://cloudconvert.org>). Like Zamzar it supports hundreds of formats including video and audio formats, ZIP and RAR archive files, documents and spreadsheets. It's free for



Convert photos, documents, ebooks and other files using web-based tool Zamzar

up to 25 'conversion minutes' per day, which is plenty for everyday use. After that, it's €9 (£7) a month.

You can even convert printed or handwritten notes to editable text without dedicated software. Free site OnlineOCR (www.onlineocr.net) uses optical character recognition (OCR) technology to "see" the text in JPGs, including scanned letters, and convert it to a Word, Excel or plain text document. **ca**

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13 May

Things to do with an old XP PC

PART 3 Create your own NAS device

This issue, Jonathan Parkyn explains how to convert your spare PC into a network storage device

Why a NAS is useful

A **NAS** (network attached storage) device is an external hard drive that connects all the devices on your home Wi-Fi network. You can back up photos and other files to a NAS just as you would to a normal external drive, but you can then access the files from your phone or tablet, even when your PC is switched off.

You can also use a NAS to stream music, photos and videos to your PC, mobile devices and even to a smart TV. Most NAS systems also let you access your files securely over the internet when you're not at home – like having your own personal cloud.

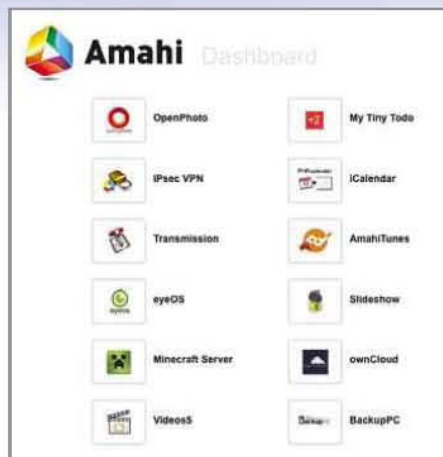
Pre-built NAS devices cost up to £200, but you can convert a PC to a NAS for free.

What you need

An old computer already has almost everything you need to make a NAS: **processor**, memory, large hard drive and a network connection. The only other thing you need is free software.

It's no longer safe to use Windows XP, particularly when you're connecting it to a network. Instead, use a dedicated NAS operating system such as Amahi (www.amahi.org), a Linux-based NAS operating system that's designed for home users. Its free version has everything you need and is easy to use, and there's plenty of advice on Amahi's **wiki site** (www.snipca.com/16048). Amahi also has free apps for linking your phone or tablet to your NAS (Android www.snipca.com/16046, iOS www.snipca.com/16047).

To run Amahi on your old PC, it will need to have at least a 1.0GHz Pentium 4 or AMD **CPU**, 512MB **RAM**, 4GB free



Amahi is a free Linux-based NAS operating system that lets you use your NAS in many ways

hard-drive space, a CD/DVD drive and a wired (**Ethernet**) network connection. You'll need a monitor, keyboard and mouse to set it up (see below), but you won't need them after installation is complete. Note that installing Amahi will wipe XP, so make sure you've backed up any personal files first.

How to install Amahi

Open a web browser on a Windows 7 or 8/8.1 PC, go to www.amahi.org and click Get Started Now, then create a username and password. Click the link in the email you'll be sent to verify your profile. In the web page that opens, click 'Configure your HDA'.

Now click Start, type **cmd** and press Enter to open the Command Prompt window. Type **ipconfig** and press Enter. Type the IP address listed under Default

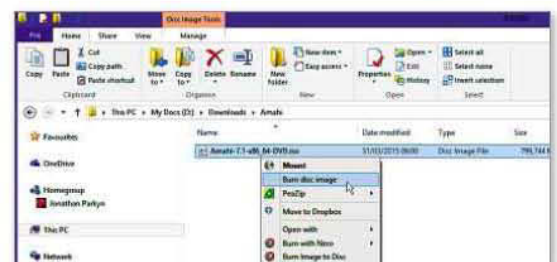
Gateway into Your Existing Network

Gateway on the Amahi web page. Leave the second IP address as it is. Click Next, then Next again, then 'Create your HDA profile'. Make a note of the install code.

Next, start up your XP computer (making sure it's disconnected from the internet). Click Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, and then System Information. Under System Type, if it says 'x64-based PC', go to your Windows 7 or 8/8.1 PC, then to the Express CD page on the Amahi wiki site (www.snipca.com/15969) and click 'Amahi 7.1 Express CD Direct (http) 64bit download' listed under 'Download via HTTP'.

Still on your Windows 7 or 8/8.1 PC, insert a blank DVD, right-click the **ISO file** you downloaded and choose 'Burn disc image'. Go to the wiki's installation instructions (www.snipca.com/15998) and watch the video. If your System Type is listed as 'x86-based PC' in the step above, a more complex installation procedure is required (www.snipca.com/15999).

After installing Amahi you can configure it to suit your needs: automatic backup, photo and video sharing, remote access and more. Find out how to do all these on the Amahi wiki site. **ca**



Download your NAS software to a Windows 7 or 8/8.1 PC first, then burn it to DVD

Back up your tablet & phone

Your tablet and phone hold many important photos, videos and messages, but it's all too easy to lose them. **Barry Collins** shows you how to back up all your mobile devices for free



Your mobile phone is probably full of very personal information about you. It may contain your only copy of important text messages from family and friends, along with their contact details – not to mention any photos or videos you have taken using the device.

The sentimental value of mobile phone data made headlines recently when Virgin Media accidentally wiped a voicemail from the phone of Yorkshireman Stan Beaton, aged 68. It wasn't just any voicemail. It was from Stan's late wife, Ruby, and he'd kept it for 10 years since her death in 2003. After Virgin managed to restore the message, Stan said: "It's just a wonderful, wonderful sound that I thought was lost forever" (www.snipca.com/16066).

Stan's story had a happy ending, but phone and tablet data can't always be rescued so easily. The only way to guarantee you'll be able to restore lost messages, contacts, photos and other mobile possessions is to keep them backed up.

Use the backup tools you've already got

Most Android phones and tablets come with a manufacturer's backup tool built in. You're asked if you want to use it when you switch on the device for the first time. These tools aren't the most powerful Android backup services available – they're not even the most powerful free ones. But they're there on your phone already and are generally easy to use, so they should be your first port of

call to ensure your most important data (such as Wi-Fi passwords) is kept safe.

If you missed your manufacturer's backup tool during setup, or chose not to enable it, open the list of apps on your device and look for apps featuring the name of the manufacturer. For example, HTC's utility is called HTC Backup (www.snipca.com/16067), while Samsung's is called Kies (www.snipca.com/16068).

Motorola devices such as the Moto G have a Google backup tool built into their settings. Go to Settings, 'Backup & reset' then tick 'Back up my data' to link the service to your Google account (see screenshot below).

For iPhones and iPads, use Apple's built-in backup service iCloud (www.snipca.com/16069).

Tap Settings on your device, then tap iCloud to set it up. You'll need to log in using your Apple ID and then select which types of data (photos, contacts, messages and so on) you wish to back up. You get 5GB of storage space for free, which should be enough unless you have hundreds of photos and videos; if you do need more, 20GB costs 79p per month. You can also back up your iPhone and iPad to your PC, although this does involve the dreaded iTunes (download free from www.snipca.com/16075).

Back up messages and call logs

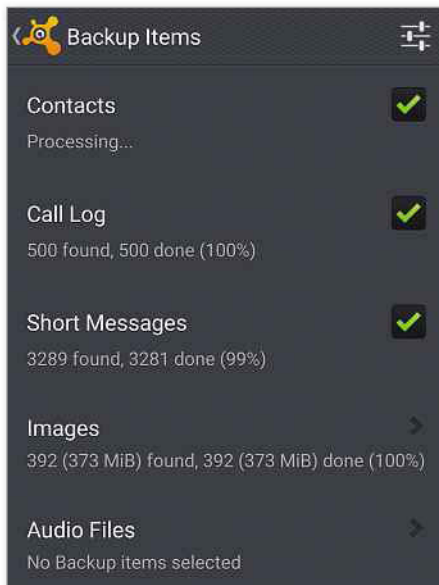
Other important stuff on your mobile device include your text and voice messages, and call logs. These can contain vital information, such as proof that you did actually make a call to the police after a road accident, and precious memories such as family messages.

The best Android app for keeping all this information safe is Mobile Backup & Restore (www.snipca.com/16070) from antivirus company Avast. You'll need to register for a free Avast account when you first install the app, but once that's done, it will automatically start backing up your contacts, call logs and text messages. All your data is encrypted, so no-one can intercept or read it, including hackers and Avast employees.

You can check the status of your backup at any time using a secure area of the Avast website (<https://my.avast.com>). Log in, click the name of your device, then click backed-up items at the bottom-right to make sure all is present and correct.



Android phones and tablets have a basic backup tool built in



Keep all your mobile data backed up securely using Avast's free Mobile Backup & Restore app for Android

Back up photos and videos automatically to Google

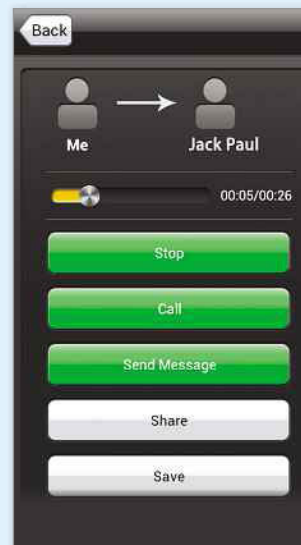
The free Google+ app (Android www.snipca.com/16073, iOS www.snipca.com/16074) has an Auto-Backup feature that automatically saves any photos and videos you take using your phone or tablet, as well as those you receive via text message. The files are saved to your Google account, which gives you 15GB of storage space for free, or 100GB for \$1.99 (£1.34) per month.

To enable Auto-Backup, open the Google+ app, tap Settings, then tap Auto-Backup and make sure the slider is switched to On. Files can be saved via Wi-Fi only so there's no possibility of running up huge mobile data bills. To find your backed-up photos and videos, go to the Google+ site (<https://plus.google>.

RECORD AND KEEP YOUR CALLS

You can record your phone calls and voicemails if you use an Android phone, but not if you have an iPhone, due to the more protected nature of the iOS operating system.

The choice of free call-recording apps available to Android users is huge. We like Call Recorder (www.snipca.com/16071, see screenshot), which automatically records all incoming and outgoing calls as temporary files, then lets you save any



you want to keep as MP3 files on your phone's SD card. The similarly named Call Recorder ACR (www.snipca.com/16072) – also free – supports a broader range of file formats and lets you password-protect your recordings for added security, but isn't supported by all Android devices.

While it's perfectly legal to record your own phone conversations, it's pretty unethical to do so in secret. You should ask the other person's permission first.

www.snipca.com) on your PC, log in using your Google account and choose Photos from the dropdown menu at the top-left.

Drag and drop Android files in Windows

You can connect your Android phone or tablet directly to your PC via USB and access its files, just as if they were stored on an external hard drive.

The first time you connect your phone and PC in this way, a pop-up message will ask what you want Windows to do with the device. Choose 'Open Device to View Files'. You may also need to tweak the USB settings on your device for this to work. The exact path for doing so will differ depending on your device, but it's usually Settings, Storage, then the three dots at the top-right of the screen. Tap

'USB computer connection' then 'Media device (MTP)'.


Now when you connect your phone and PC using a USB cable, you should see it pop up in Windows (File) Explorer like any other external storage device. From here you can manually drag and drop files to create backup copies on your PC.

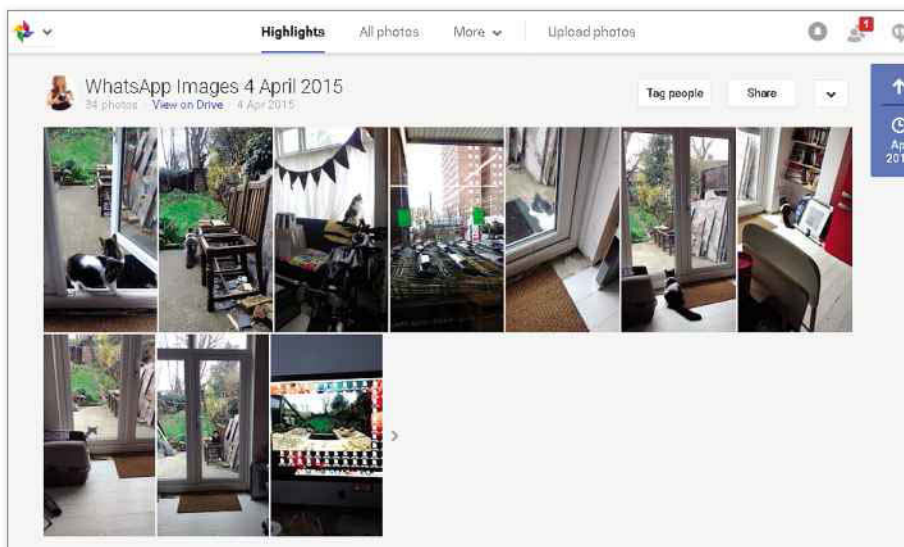
Back up Android apps to your PC

Basic app data is saved using the built-in Android tools mentioned earlier. However, to make sure a certain app or game's data is fully backed up and accessible from your PC, use the free Helium tool (www.snipca.com/16076).

First install the app on your Android device, then follow the instructions to install the companion PC program (www.snipca.com/16077). Once this is done, tap Settings in the Helium Android app, then 'PC download'. A long URL that starts 'http://192' will then appear on screen. Type this into your PC's browser, select the apps you want to back up, then click Start Backup.

This generates a backup file that you can store safely on your PC's hard drive. If your phone or tablet is later wiped and you need to restore your app data, drag the Helium backup file back into the Restore window using the same URL as before, and follow the instructions on your phone.

Helium's restore process is powerful but doesn't require that you **root** your phone or tablet. Never use an app that does require rooting – it makes your device vulnerable to hacking. 



Back up all your mobile photos and videos automatically using the free Google+ app

Get Wi-Fi in your shed

Is your Wi-Fi not up to the demands of springtime browsing? Jonathan Parkyn reveals how to extend your router's signal to your garden and beyond



If an Englishman's home is his castle, then his shed is his private country residence – a secluded sanctuary where you can sit and read the newspaper in peace. But what if that newspaper is online? And what if your router's Wi-Fi signal barely stretches to your patio, let alone to the end of the garden or garage?

Here we'll look at the easiest and most effective ways to extend your signal so it covers your whole house and garden, as well as any outhouses you may have. Some involve buying gadgets to give your Wi-Fi a boost, but other tricks can make your Wi-Fi reach further for free.

Bear in mind the effectiveness of each suggestion will depend on various factors, including the layout of your home, the

capabilities of your existing router and the distance you need to cover.

Move your router

Let's start with an easy trick that costs nothing. Wi-Fi signals get weaker the further you are away from your router, and the more barriers – such as walls – there are in between. Often, all you need to do for a stronger signal is to reposition your router so there are fewer walls and less physical distance between you and it.

Admittedly, it won't always be possible to put your router in the best possible position. It has to remain fairly close to a phone socket or cable box in order to connect to broadband. But even moving it slightly – raising it higher off the ground, for instance – can offer a surprisingly big boost.

Make your own parabolic reflector

Parabolic reflectors, like those used in satellite dishes and radio telescopes, can really boost a wireless signal. You could buy one, like the TP-Link TL-ANT2424B (www.snipca.com/16040), though this will set you back around £40 and requires your router to have a special (type N) connector.

Instead, why not make your own reflector for free using kitchen foil and a piece of cardboard? There's a free template to download and print at www.snipca.com/16041. You'll need to experiment to get the best results, especially if your router's antenna is internal. When we tried it, we noticed a small directional boost which, if we aimed the reflector correctly, was enough to reach slightly further into our garden.

Others have reported better results, and considering it won't cost you anything it's certainly worth a try.

Switch Wi-Fi channels

If there are too many other networks (your neighbours' Wi-Fi, for example) using the same **channel** as yours, your Wi-Fi's quality and range will suffer. One way to potentially fix this is to switch to a less congested channel.

First, find the least congested channels that are available to you. The free tool WifiChannelMonitor (www.snipca.com/16061) is a portable PC program that lets you compare the speed of all 13 available Wi-Fi channels and see who's using them. Alternatively, Wifi Analyzer is a free Android app that lets you compare channels from your phone or tablet (www.snipca.com/16042).



Compare congestion on Wi-Fi channels using the free Android app Wifi Analyzer

Next, switch to your chosen channel using your router's configuration utility. You can usually reach this via your browser – see your router's instructions for details. Navigate to the Wi-Fi settings page, look for the channel selection option, then choose a channel and save your changes. Finally, reboot the router.



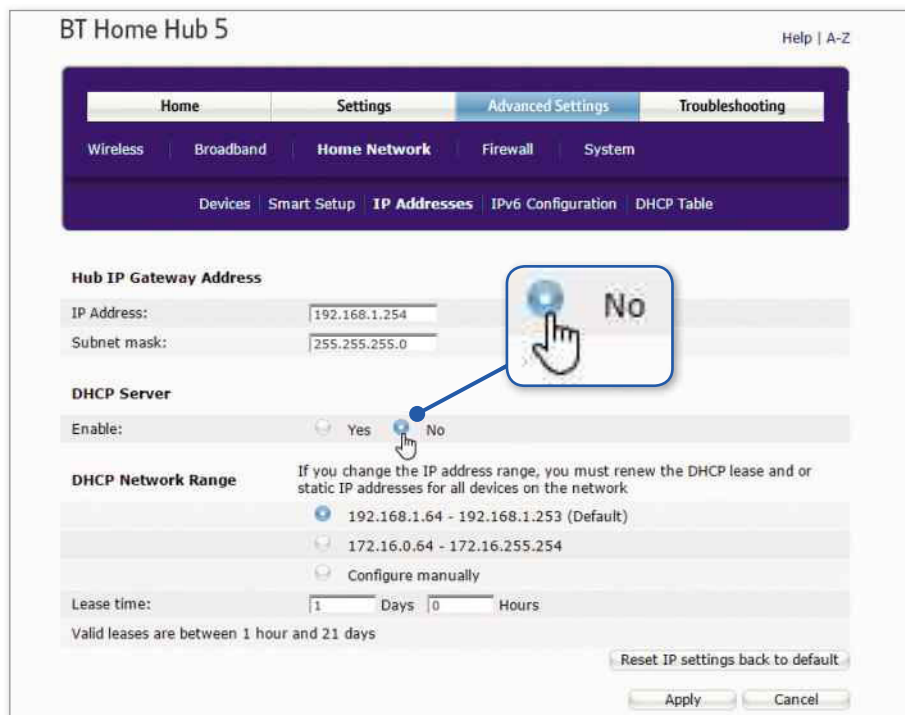
A homemade reflector could be all you need to make your Wi-Fi coverage go further

Convert an old router into a Wi-Fi extender

Wi-Fi extenders act like outposts for your router. Place one of these devices in your conservatory or back room to boost your Wi-Fi to cover your garden, or upstairs to cover your loft. A new Wi-Fi extender costs around £50 (BT's 11ac dual-band extender, for example, is £49.99: www.snipca.com/16044), but if you have an old router hanging around you may be able to turn it into a Wi-Fi extender for free.

Precise instructions will depend on the router, but here's the basic gist. Access your current main router's configuration utility as mentioned on the previous page, then make a note of its **IP address**, **Wi-Fi name (SSID)**, **channel**, **security type** and **password**.

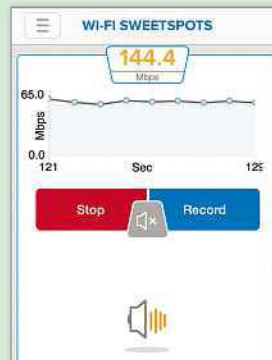
Next, switch off your main router and attach your old router to a PC via an Ethernet cable. You may need to reset the old router to its factory settings (there's usually a button on the back for doing this). Access the old router's configuration utility, and on the Wi-Fi settings page enter the details you copied from your main router. Save these settings, then head to the IP Addresses (or similar) page. You'll need to disable DHCP on the old router (see screenshot below) and assign it a fixed IP address. You can find out more about this by searching for 'fixed IP' or 'static IP' on your ISP's or router manufacturer's site (here's a useful page from Linksys, for example: www.snipca.com/16062).



Disable DHCP and copy over your existing wireless settings to convert an old router into a ready-made Wi-Fi extender

TEST YOUR WI-FI'S RANGE

The WiFi SweetSpots app (Android www.snipca.com/16052, iOS www.snipca.com/16053) is a free and convenient way to test your router's range. Make sure your phone or tablet is connected to your Wi-Fi network, then open the app and tap Start. You'll see a real-time graph



representing the current connection speed in Mbps. Walk around your house and garden to see how your connection speed is affected by your position, and where you get the best coverage. The app even has an audio mode that beeps when you hit a sweet spot, just like a metal detector.

Restart the router, then disconnect it from your PC and place it closer to the garden than your main router. Connect it to your main router using a long Ethernet cable, which you can buy for around a fiver on Amazon (www.snipca.com/16063), or more powerful but more expensive Powerline adapters, such as TP-Link's PA411KIT AV500 Starter Kit (£25, www.snipca.com/16050), then restart both routers. Once they're both up and running, test the Wi-Fi signal strength in your garden.

Choose a Powerline adapter with built-in Wi-Fi

The most effective way of getting Wi-Fi into your shed is to use Powerline adapters with built-in Wi-Fi, such as TP-Link's AV500 Passthrough Powerline




Boost your wireless range to cover just about any size of garden using Devolo's dLAN 1200+ WiFi ac Starter Kit

WiFi Kit (£78, www.snipca.com/16049).

If your shed has a mains power supply of its own, simply plug one of the units into a power socket near your router and connect it via an Ethernet cable, then plug the other unit into an electrical socket in your shed.

If your shed isn't connected to the mains, you can still use Powerline devices to boost your Wi-Fi signal from the back of the house. For a smaller garden, the TP-Link AV500 might still do the trick if you plug the wireless unit into a socket in your conservatory or back room. For a big garden, you may need something more powerful, such as Devolo's new dLAN 1200+ WiFi ac Starter Kit (£155, www.snipca.com/16051). That may seem expensive, but it's very fast, using the latest wireless technology to provide access over an extremely wide range.

To give you a rough idea, we tested the wireless range of the TP-Link AV500 in a real garden. It gave us stable Wi-Fi at usable speeds (around 30Mbps) up to a distance of 15 metres. In the same environment, the Devolo unit was able to provide the same stability and speeds up to a distance of 40 metres. 

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Problems Solved

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

How do I wipe everything from my old PCs?

Q I have two Dell Vostro 220 tower computers, which are about five years old. A local computer company is willing to give me a cash allowance for both in exchange for a laptop which will be more beneficial to me. I want to ensure both computers are wiped of all my personal information.

What's the best way to do this? I know the shop would do it but I'd feel happier doing this myself before handing them over. One of the PCs contains a lot of customer information on Windows Live Mail, which I'd like to retain in order to return to my old company. Can I somehow download that information to a USB drive?

Rob Clark

A We'll start with your Windows Live Mail (WLM) question, because obviously you'll want to save that information before proceeding. Launch WLM, click the blue down arrow to open the menu, point to 'Export email', then click 'Email messages'. Now choose the format you'd like. Microsoft Windows Live Email will obviously save them ready for importing back into WLM, but Microsoft Exchange might be better if your old firm uses Outlook, for example. Make your selection, click Next, Browse and then select an empty folder on your USB drive (or create a new one). Next, select the 'All folders' option, then click Next, followed by Finish.

Now use Windows Explorer (Windows key+E) to check that the file has indeed been saved to the specified drive. We'd also suggest taking a second backup copy, because there'll be no way back once you've wiped your computers' drives.



Use the free tool Active KillDisk to create a boot disk of your PC so you can then wipe its contents

To do the wiping, we'd advise using a tool like Active KillDisk (www.killdisk.com), which is free but does require registration. With this, you'll be able to create a **boot disk** that you'll use to launch your PCs without Windows, thus enabling their drives to be entirely and securely wiped.

So, install KillDisk then launch its Bootable Disk Creator utility (see screenshot above). You'll be offered the option to do this immediately after installing, but if you miss it, you can do it from the Start menu. Next, complete the registration process, then click the link that's emailed to you.

KillDisk is able to create either an **ISO file** for burning to CD/DVD/Blu-ray or a bootable USB drive. The latter is quicker and easier if you have a USB drive, but you might need to change the boot priority in your **BIOS** or select the USB drive from the Boot menu when the PC starts up. Click Next, then follow the wizard's prompts to complete the process.

Now reboot your PC with the bootable USB or CD/DVD/Blu-ray inserted. When KillDisk appears, select the relevant drive (in your case almost certainly 'Fixed Disk0'), then click Kill or press F10. Choose an erase method from the list (the multiple-pass options are the most secure, but do take longer) and, when you're certain you want to continue, click Start.

How do I launch the Computeractive Back Issue CD's Search function?

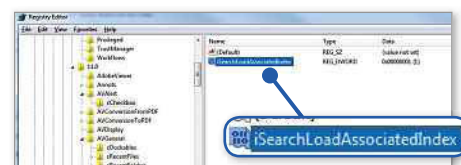
Q I have received the 2014 *Computeractive* Back Issue CD, which I bought from Amazon (www.snipca.com/14981). However, when I click the large red LAUNCH SEARCH panel, nothing happens. I have Windows 7 and Adobe Reader installed. Is this a fault with the CD or can I sort it?

Alexander Henderson

A This is not a fault with our CD, but a quirk of how Adobe Reader launches the index file required for the LAUNCH SEARCH button to work.

Basically, the first time you launch an Adobe index file (either from the CD or previously) Adobe Reader presents a dialogue box asking for permission to do so – with Load and Cancel options. Click Load and all will be fine. However, if you get confused or worried by this dialogue box and click Cancel, then that can cause this problem. If the 'Don't ask me again' box is also ticked, it becomes permanent.

Surprisingly, the only solution is a Registry fix. Back up your PC first, then click Start, type **regedit** into the search bar and press Enter. Navigate to this key: **HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Adobe\Acrobat Reader\11.0\AVAlert\AVAlert\cCheckbox**. Now right-click **iSearchLoadAssociatedIndex** in the right-hand pane and choose Modify. The 'Value data' field should read '1'. Change this to '0' then click OK. Close the Registry Editor window, restart your PC, then try our CD again – this time clicking the Load button when the dialogue box appears.



If Adobe Reader can't launch an index file, try this Registry tweak

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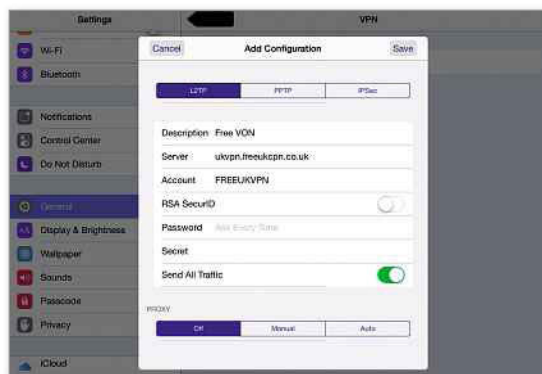
Can I use my UK betting account abroad?

Q I have a Bet365 account (with the .co.uk version of the website). I spend a lot of time in the US, but when I try to log into my account, it detects where I am and prevents me from accessing it. Is there a way around this? I'm trying to do this using an iPad.

Ray Clarke

A Yes, the way around this is to use a virtual private network (VPN) to fool the website into thinking you're connecting from a UK-based server. If you read last issue's Problems Solved, you'll have seen our reply to Carlton Mealin, explaining how to set up a VPN on Android.

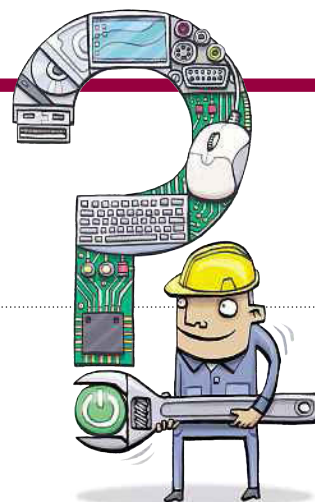
Our advice to you is very similar – try using free services, such as Free UK VPN (www.freeukvpn.co.uk) – however, setup is obviously different on an iPad. In the latest version of iOS, launch Settings then tap General, followed by VPN. Now tap Add VPN Configuration and type the login details for your chosen VPN service. For FreeUKVPN, for example, the user name to type into the Account field is



Use a free VPN service like Free UK VPN to bypass local geographic restrictions online

'FREEUKVPN' and 'ukvpn.freeukvpn.co.uk' into the Server field. The password changes regularly, so visit the Free UK VPN website for the latest code. Tap Save, slide the VPN switch to the On position, then tap the name of the connection just configured. You'll now be able to visit the website without any problems.

However, in your particular case you should consider carefully the rules laid down by your bookmaker, plus local gambling laws. For example, Bet365's



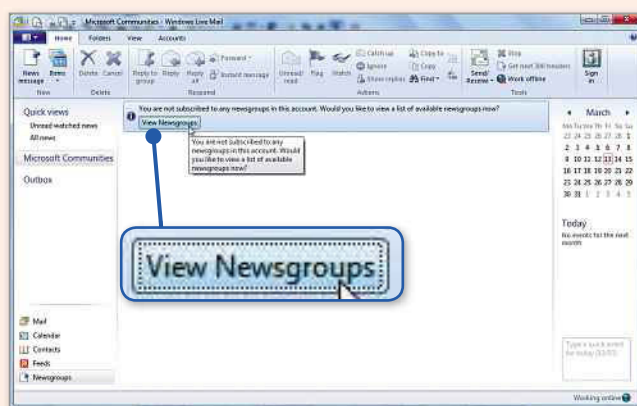
terms and conditions (www.snipca.com/15696) state: "Internet gambling may be illegal in the jurisdiction in which you are located. If so, you are not authorised to use your payment card to complete the transaction. However, any bets/wagers accepted from such jurisdictions will stand – win or lose".

That suggests that Bet365 will honour and pay out if you bet when in the US, but by doing so you might be breaking local laws. We don't know where you travel in America, or the types of bets you like to place, but the country's online-gambling laws are something of a muddle. Some states have laws that ban certain types of online gambling, while others only ban outsiders from placing bets. So, do your research if you want to stay on the right side of local law.

How do I access newsgroups without Outlook Express?

Q For a while now I have accessed newsnet via Outlook Express on my Windows XP PC. However, it seems Microsoft wants to force everyone to use their more modern operating systems. So, I've moved to Windows 7 with Outlook for email. I have looked in vain for a method of accessing newsnet in Outlook. Have I missed it somewhere? If not, how am I supposed to access newsnet with Windows 7?

Roger Jefferyes



In Windows 7, download Windows Live Mail to get access to the Usenet newsgroups

A When you say 'newsnet' we think you're conflating two terms that are little-used these days – 'newsgroups' and Usenet. For the benefit of readers who may not know it, Usenet is an old bulletin board-style

system organised into thousands of individual newsgroups. Outlook Express has a built-in tool for subscribing to newsgroups, which it calls simply 'News'.

Windows 7 does not have a built-in

way to access newsgroups, but you can do this with Microsoft's Windows Live Mail (WLM) tool, which is a free download from www.snipca.com/15768. Setup is not hugely different from Outlook Express: just click the Newsgroups heading in the left-hand pane, then click the View Newsgroups button in the right-hand pane (see screenshot left).

WLM will spend a few minutes downloading a list of all newsgroups. Now select the ones you're interested in reading before clicking the Subscribe button, followed by OK. You can now view your subscriptions by clicking the aforementioned Newsgroups heading.

Problems Solved

Why do Word documents open with gibberish?

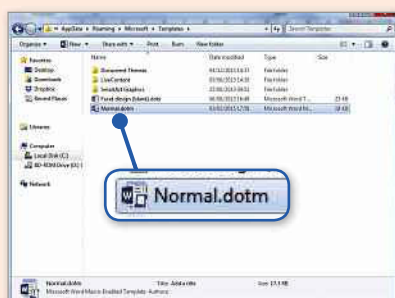
Q I have used Word 2013 for a couple of years without any problems. However, recently when I launch it and open a new document, that new document contains loads of weird gibberish. It's easy enough to delete this nonsense, and then I can carry on seemingly without bother, but this isn't normal. What could be causing this and how do I fix it?

Susannah Lock

A This is almost certainly down to corruption in Word's default document template, which is stored as a file called Normal.dotm. It could be that your PC suffered a crash mid-save, or that you accidentally saved some meaningless text while editing the Normal.dotm file (though that's not very likely).

Either way, the cause doesn't really matter, because the fix is easy. All you need to do is delete the existing Normal.dotm file and then Word will create a new one the next time it launches.

Its location can vary but it's typically found in C:\Users\USERNAME\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Templates, where USERNAME is your Windows user name. So, press Windows key+E to open Windows Explorer (or File Explorer in Windows 8/8.1), then click to select Normal.dotm and press the Delete (Del) key. Now launch Word and your new documents should be squeaky clean.



Delete the Normal.dotm file to resolve corrupted new Word documents

Why is my laptop freezing?

Q I have an HP 620 laptop with Windows 7. I am meticulous about keeping my security software up to date and I've downloaded several of your suggestions on anti-malware protection. Even so, recently my machine started to freeze, and the only way to restart it is to switch off at the on/off button and restart in Safe Mode. After this happened a few times, I noticed that it only occurs when my laptop is on battery power. Any thoughts?

Michael Rook

A This could be caused by dodgy drivers, or possibly a fault with your laptop's processor being inadvertently revealed by your laptop's power settings.

Before you do anything else, visit your laptop's home page at www.snipca.com/15799 to grab all the latest drivers. We'd suggest starting with the BIOS and chipset updates, because these are most likely to fix any underlying manufacturing bugs.

Next, check the power settings to see what your laptop does when running on battery. In Windows 7, click Start, Control Panel, 'Hardware and Sound', then Power Options. Now click the 'Change plan



Tweak your PC's power settings to isolate problems while in battery mode

settings' link under the active plan, followed by 'Change advanced power settings'. Set all battery-saving options to their minimum levels to see if that remedies the problem. If it does, re-enable them individually to isolate the cause.

Finally, enter your PC's BIOS (typically tap F2 or Delete after switching on), then look for a SpeedStep option. Disable it if it's there, as there's a small chance your processor harbours a fault that's revealed when Intel's SpeedStep technology slows down processing to save power.

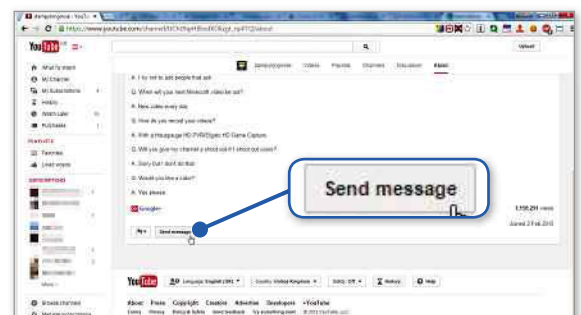
How do I download YouTube clips?

Q There are times when I'd like to download and keep a YouTube video on my PC. Is this legal? And, if so, how do I do it?

Harry Craik

A The answer is: it's easy to do, but in almost all cases it is illegal. Or rather, it's illegal if you don't have the permission of the copyright-holder (usually the person who uploaded the clip). To request permission, click the About link on the user's page, then scroll down to find the Send message 'M' button. Click the button, then type your request.

As for saving videos, there are any number of ways to do this, as we revealed in Issue 447's Cover Feature ('Record Classic TV & Film From The Web'). Other tools you could consider include



Request permission from the copyright-holder before you download a YouTube video

the Video Downloader Professional browser extension for Chrome (free from www.snipca.com/15731). Alternatively, you can simply copy the YouTube's video's URL from your browser's address and paste it into a dedicated website such as SaveVid.com (www.savevid.com). After a few moments SaveVid will present a download link, which you can click to save the video to your computer.

How do I add repeat reminders in Android?

Q I own an unlocked Moto G phone, running Android version 4.4.4. My phone updates to the latest Android version automatically, which is fine, but on this current version I can no longer set more than one default reminder for a calendar appointment. Previously, I could, for example, set a reminder for 24 hours in advance and another for one hour in advance, which I found very handy for dealing with my various 'senior moments'. Am I missing something?

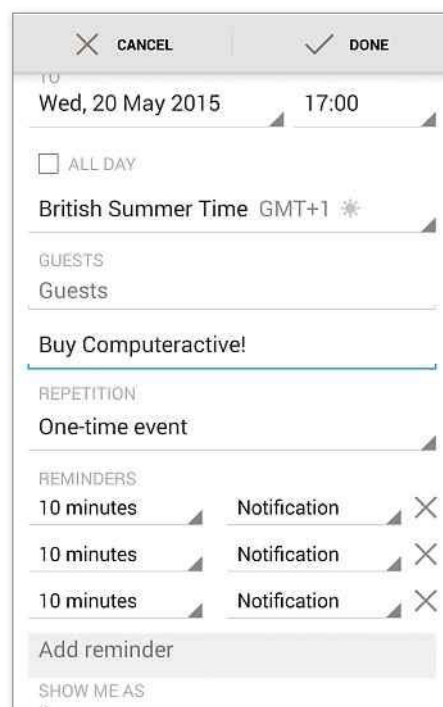
Tony Hopkin

A We're not entirely sure but yes, we reckon you're missing something.

We don't know which version of Android you were using prior to 4.4.4, but you may have noticed that its

interface has been evolving to become increasingly 'flat' in style, with labels replacing 'buttons' and colourless symbols replacing their richer, more detailed forebears. It's a design choice that results in more space and less clutter, but some people do find the 'tap targets' harder to spot – and we think that's your problem.

The Google Calendar app that's part of Android 4.4.4 does still let you add multiple reminders, but the option for doing so is a flat label in grey text. As Android 4.4.4 also uses grey text for non-tappable headings, this option doesn't exactly jump out at you. So, create your appointment as normal and then swipe up to access the REMINDERS heading. Directly under the first reminder is the 'Add reminder' option label – tap this to solve your problem.



Set calendar appointment reminders more easily by swiping up to access Reminders

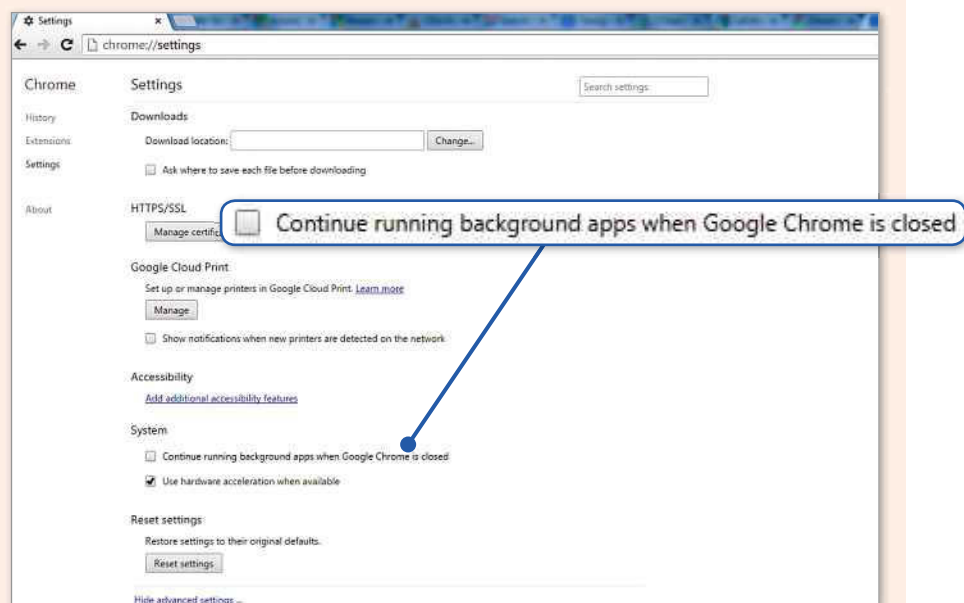
How do I close Google Chrome completely?

Q Despite reading *Computeractive* for many years, this is the first time I've emailed for help. When I run CCleaner I always see the message: "Google Chrome needs to be closed to clean the internet cache". Does that mean Google Chrome is running in the background all the time, collecting my surfing details and so on? To close Google Chrome, I click the red X in the upper-right corner. Is there another way to close it down?

Dr U C Hutter

A Unless you shut down Chrome in a specific way – or disable a feature that we're about to explain – then it will indeed keep running in the background, which is why CCleaner is unable to do its job.

Chrome likes to keep running in the background so that some of its services – including Chrome synchronisation, and services related to Chrome apps or **extensions** that you may have installed – are able to keep working.



Make sure Google Chrome's background services are disabled when you close the browser window by tweaking Chrome's settings

You can disable these selectively (until the next time you launch Chrome), or on a permanent basis. To do the former you need to exit Chrome in a particular way – click the menu button (three horizontal lines), then select Exit. If you forget to click the red X, but still want to disable the background services, then you can right-click the Chrome icon in the Notification Area of the Taskbar, then remove the tick from 'Let Google

Chrome run in the background'.

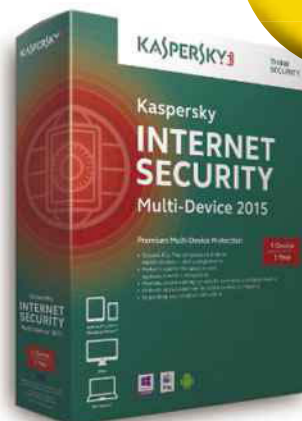
To make the change permanent, launch Chrome then click the menu button and choose Settings. Now scroll down to find and click 'Show advanced settings'. Now scroll all the way to the bottom to find the System section, then clear the tick from the box labelled 'Continue running background apps when Google Chrome is closed'.

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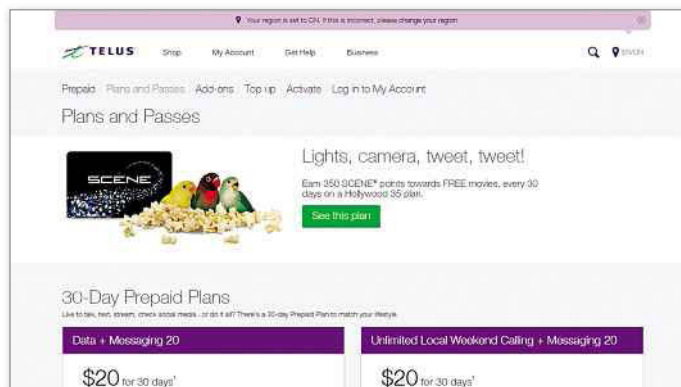
Issue 415 22 January; Issue 425 11 June; Issue 430 20 August; Issue 437 26 November

Problems Solved

How do I get mobile internet in Canada?

Q My wife and I are going on holiday to Canada for a couple of months and would like to keep in touch with our family by email. We use a **Mi-Fi** mobile hotspot when we're on holiday in places where free Wi-Fi is not available. We would like to use the same method while we drive across Canada, but want to avoid incurring huge **roaming** charges. Do you have any advice for me so that I stay online without the roaming bills?

David Thow



Keep extortionate roaming charges at bay when abroad by buying a data SIM locally

A For a variety of reasons data in Canada can be expensive, particularly if you're roaming on a SIM registered with a UK-based operator. For example, Three (www.three.co.uk), which is one of the UK's cheaper providers, charges £6 per megabyte (MB) for data roaming in Canada. That's an astonishing £6,000 per gigabyte (GB), or roughly £3,000 if you wanted to download a 30-minute episode of *EastEnders*, say.

Even if you avoid frivolous usage,

£6/MB is still likely to prove prohibitively expensive even for just email: sending or receiving a single high-resolution digital photograph could cost you over £20. Sadly, Three is by no means unusual: Canada is just an expensive place to use mobile data.

Your best bet is to shop for a data SIM once you get there – you'll probably be able to pick one up at your destination airport. We can't recommend particular carriers or deals but, as an example, Telus (www.telus.com) offers a pre-paid 30-day

plan for CAD\$20 (about £10.50) that includes 100MB of data. That works out at about 10.5p/MB, which is still expensive, but affordable for light emailing.

Incidentally, 'pre-paid' means a no-commitment deal, like the pay-as-you-go (PAYG) plans that you're probably familiar with in the UK. So, buy a suitable SIM, pop it in your mobile hotspot, use it for the duration of your stay, topping up the credit when necessary – and then bin the SIM when you head home.

How do I fix my fast-draining iPhone battery?

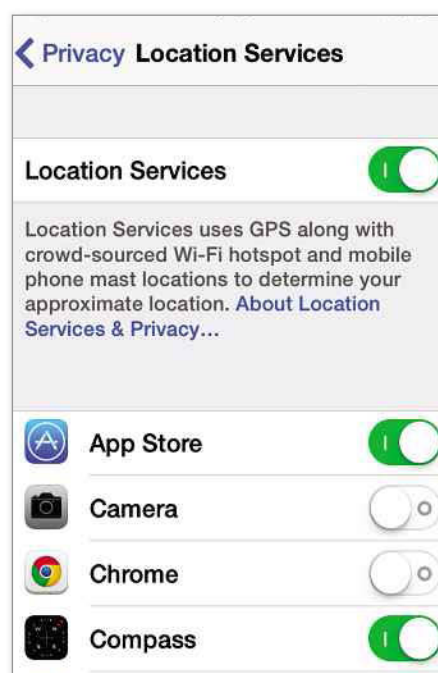
Q I bought an iPhone 5 a couple of years ago that has been mostly fine. Recently, though, I've noticed that the battery is running down extremely quickly, so sometimes I can't even get through the day. It seems to have happened all of a sudden, so I wonder if it might be an app that I've installed or some setting I've messed up? I'm certainly not using the phone any more than normal?

Tim Simmonds

A There are very many things that can cause a smartphone battery to drain more quickly than before. However, from your description and date of purchase we have our suspicions that you might own one of the handsets that Apple has acknowledged as having an inherent fault.

So, before you do anything else, visit Apple's iPhone Battery Replacement Program web page (www.snipca.com/15744), type your iPhone's serial number (to find this tap Settings, followed by General, then About) and click Submit. If your phone is indeed affected, you'll be entitled to a free

battery replacement, which can be carried out in a few minutes in any Apple retail shop – so just make a Genius Bar



Turn off Location Services on your iPhone's apps to conserve battery life

appointment (you'll find the link on the aforementioned web page).

If not then check that you haven't accidentally enabled the Bluetooth option on the Control Center pane, which is accessed by swiping up from the bottom of the screen. White is on, and grey is off. There are many other battery-drain options, but this is the easiest power hog to enable by accident.

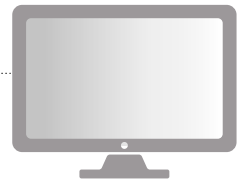
Also check that you haven't granted a new app the ability to use location services, as these deplete the battery very quickly. Tap Settings, Privacy, then Location Services to see what apps have access.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE
13 May

- How do I secure my Windows files?
- How do I change brightness in Windows 8.1?
- How do I capture screenshots of my DVDs?
- ...And many more

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Your PC display

Fix weird colours, enable the highest resolutions and right a rotated display

There's nothing on screen

If your PC display is completely blank, first check all the cables, including the power (we've all occasionally forgotten to flick the switch on). Next, look for a Source button, which is often to be found on a panel on the front of modern monitors. You might have accidentally hit this while switching on, resulting in your display switching to a different video source. Also remove all cables other than power and the one to the PC, to eliminate the possibility that your monitor is prioritising a different source.

Picture is rotated or upside down

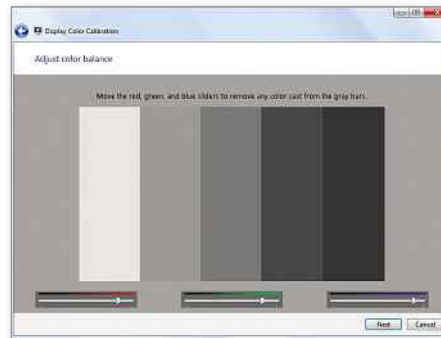
Many graphics card drivers have built-in keyboard shortcuts that let you rotate your display's orientation. This is very useful if you want to use your monitor in portrait mode (www.snipca.com/16083) or for some other custom setup. On the downside, these shortcuts are easy to execute by mistake when you meant to press other keys. To flip the display back to normal, press Ctrl+Alt+up (the 'up' arrow to the right of your main keyboard) or Shift+Alt+up. It's usually pressing the wrong combination of these keys that caused the problem in the first place.

Display has a coloured tint

If your display has a blue, green or red overall tint, either permanently or just sometimes, check the cable to your graphics card as it may be loose. Push both connections firmly home and use any retaining thumb-screws to keep them in place. If this doesn't fix the problem, see the next tip.

Colours don't print accurately

Colour calibration is a measure of how accurately your monitor displays colour and contrast. It's a bit like white balance in digital photography. If you've edited photos to look perfect on your PC, but they look too pink or too green when viewed on any other display or when you print them, it's because your screen's



Windows has a built-in calibration tool that can compensate for any lighting condition

calibration is off. You can fix it using Windows' built-in calibration tool. Go to the Control Panel, click 'Hardware and Sound' followed by Display and then 'Calibrate color'. Follow the prompts in the wizard, clicking Next at each stage. Calibration is also very useful for tweaking your display so it looks right under artificial ambient lighting.

Can't use maximum resolution

If Windows won't display at your monitor's maximum **resolution** there are a couple of possibilities. First, confirm your graphics card is actually up to the job: it might be limited to a resolution lower than that of the display. In this case, the only solution is a new graphics card. Another possibility is that you're using an older single-link DVI cable, which limits resolution to 1920x1080 pixels. If so, a dual-link cable is your solution. Count the pins on the connector to check: a dual-link cable has 25, a single-link just 19.

Dual displays are mixed up

When you set up a second display you might find your mouse pointer thinks the one physically on the left is on the right, and vice versa. Also, the mouse

pointer might not move smoothly off the sides of either display, appearing to get stuck near the top or bottom of one edge. The answer is to use the Control Panel to adjust their relative position. Click 'Appearance and Personalization' then 'Adjust screen resolution' under Display to open the Screen Resolution page. Click Identify, and Windows will display a large '1' and '2' on the thumbnail image of each monitor. Now drag and drop these thumbnails in the Control Panel window until they match their real-world positions, including any height difference. This will fix the sticky edges.

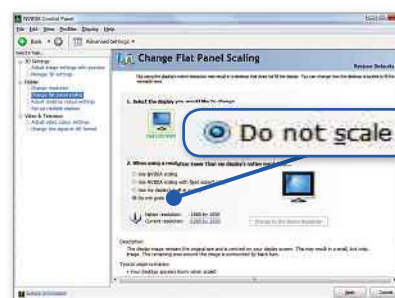


Use the Screen Resolution page in Control Panel to fine-tune the position of each screen in a multi-display setup

Windows doesn't fill the display

This happens when Windows is not set up to use the monitor's 'native' resolution, which means the total number of physical pixels (or dots) that make up the displayed image. Right-click the Windows Desktop and choose 'Screen

resolution' then set the Resolution setting to its maximum. If Windows still seems too small (or too big) for your display, look in the graphics card's drivers for a scaling option, and disable it – this job is often best left to Windows anyway.



Disabling your graphics card's scaling mode can help if your Windows Desktop looks shrunken or oversized



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CL38 Colour 12ml	£12.99
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CL511 Colour 11ml	£15.99
CL513 Colour 15ml	£16.99
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CL1526 B/C/M/Y/GY 9ml	£9.99
PG1525/CL1526 set of 5	£46.99
PG1550 Black 15ml	£10.99
CL1551 B/C/M/Y/GY 7ml	£8.99
PG1550/CL1551 set of 5	£42.99
PG40 Black 16ml	£14.99
CL41 Colour 12ml	£18.99
PG50 Black 22ml	£21.99
CL51 Colour 21ml	£25.99
PG510 Black 9ml	£11.99
CL511 Colour 9ml	£15.99
PG510/CL511 Combo	£24.99
PG512 Black 15ml	£16.99
CL513 Colour 13ml	£20.99
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LC980 / 1100 Set of 4	£3.99
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LC985 CMY	£2.99
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No.57 Colour 24ml	£12.99
No.58 Photo 24ml	£12.99
No.78 Colour 36ml	£9.99
No.88XL Black 58ml	£9.99
No.88XL CMY 17ml	£8.99
No.110 Colour 12ml	£10.99
No.300XL Black 18ml	£14.99
No.300XL Colour 18ml	£16.99
No.336 Black 10ml	£7.99
No.337 Black 24ml	£10.99
No.338 Black 24ml	£10.99
No.339 Black 34ml	£12.99
No.342 Colour 12ml	£10.99
No.343 Colour 21ml	£12.99
No.344 Colour 21ml	£14.99
No.348 Photo 21ml	£12.99
No.350XL Black 34ml	£14.99
No.351XL Colour 21ml	£16.99
No.363 Black 20ml	£6.99
No.363 CMY/PC/PM 6ml	£4.99
No.364 Black 19ml	£6.99
No.364 PB/CMY 5ml	£5.99

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No.22 Colour 5ml	£14.99
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No.56 Black 19ml	£19.99
No.57 Colour 17ml	£28.99
No.110 Colour 5ml	£19.99
No.300 Black 4ml	£10.99
No.300 Colour 4ml	£12.99
No.301 Black 3ml	£9.99
No.301 Colour 3ml	£11.99
No.301B/C Combo	£17.99
No.336 Black 5ml	£12.99
No.337 Black 11ml	£18.99
No.338 Black 11ml	£18.99
No.339 Black 21ml	£25.99
No.342 Colour 5ml	£14.99
No.343 Colour 7ml	£20.99
No.344 Colour 14ml	£28.99
No.348 Photo 13ml	£23.99
No.350 Black 4.5ml	£11.99
No.351 Colour 3.5ml	£14.99
No.363 Black 6ml	£13.99
No.363 CMY/PC/PM ea.	£9.99
No.363 Set of 6	£39.99
No.364 Black 6ml	£7.99
No.364 PB/CMY 3ml ea.	£6.99
No.364 Set of 4	£22.99
No.364XL Black 14ml	£14.99
No.364XL PB/CMY 6ml	£13.99
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No.26 Colour	£12.99
No.27 Colour	£11.99
No.28 Black	£11.99
No.29 Colour	£12.99
No.31 Photo	£11.99
No.32 Black	£9.99
No.33 Colour	£11.99
No.34 Black	£11.99
No.35 Colour	£12.99

Lexmark Originals	
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No.15 Colour	£20.99
No.32 Black	£22.99
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EPSON

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At Premier Ink, we stock two types of cartridges for Epson printers - **Originals**, which are made by Epson, and **Compatibles**, which are made by a UK company called **Jet Tec**. Using **Jet Tec Compatibles** is a way of saving money, without compromising on the quality of your prints. Here're the results from two independent ink tests that agree...

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- Total Digital Photography Magazine

"What we're looking at here is not only the best choice of ink for the R300 printer, but also the best ink in this group test, period. There's just no getting away from the superb combination of performance and pricing"

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Digital

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★★★★★

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T008 Colour	£23.99 46ml	£4.99 50ml, 3 for £13.99	SX420W, 790, 890, 900, 915, 915
T009 Colour	£29.99 66ml	£4.99 70ml, 3 for £13.99	Photo 900, 1270, 1290
T026 Black	£39.99 16ml	£3.99 20ml, 3 for £10.99	Photo 810, 830, 830u, 925, 935
T027 Colour	£29.99 46ml	£4.99 50ml, 3 for £13.99	
T040 Black	£44.99 17ml	£3.99 20ml, 3 for £10.99	C62, CX3200
T041 Colour	£39.99 37ml	£4.99 46ml, 3 for £13.99	
T050 Black	£32.99 15ml	£2.99 16ml, 3 for £7.99	440, 640, 660 Photo 700, 1200
T051 Black	£36.99 24ml	£2.99 26ml, 3 for £7.99	740, 760, 800, 850, 860, 1160
T052 Colour	£36.99 35ml	£3.99 39ml, 3 for £10.99	440, 640, 660, 740, 1160
T053 Colour	£26.99 43ml	£3.99 48ml, 3 for £10.99	Photo 700, 750
T0441-4 Set of 4	£44.99 9ml	£14.99 3 sets for £42.99	C64, C66, C84, C66, 1160
T0441 Black	£19.99 13ml	£3.99 13ml, 3 for £13.99	CX3600/3650, CX6400, 6600
T0452-4 each	£9.99 8ml	£3.99 13ml, 3 for £10.99	
T0481-6 Set of 6	£69.99	£19.99 3 sets for £57.99	R200, R220, R300, R320, R340
T0481-6 each	£15.99 13ml	£3.99 13ml, 3 for £10.99	RX500, RX600, RX620, RX640
T0540-9 Set of 8	£109.99	£35.99 3 sets for £99.99	Photo R800, R1800
T0540 Gloss	£8.99 13ml	£3.99 21ml, 3 for £13.99	
T0541-9 each	£14.99 13ml	£4.99 21ml, 3 for £13.99	
T0551-4 Set of 4	£34.99	£14.99 3 sets for £42.99	Photo R240, R245
T0551 Black	£8.99 8ml	£3.99 8ml, 3 for £10.99	RX420, RX425, RX520, RX525
T0552-4 each	£8.99 8ml	£3.99 8ml, 3 for £10.99	
T0591-9 Set of 8	£99.99	Check Website.	Photo R2400
T0591-9 each	£12.99 13ml	Check Website.	
T0611-4 Set of 4	£34.99	£14.99 3 sets for £42.99	D68, D88
T0611 Black	£8.99 8ml	£4.99 8ml, 3 for £13.99	DX3800/3850, DX4200/4250
T0612-4 each	£8.99 8ml	£3.99 8ml, 3 for £10.99	DX4800/4850
T0711-4 Set of 4	£34.99	£14.99 3 sets for £42.99	SX2021, SX1001/105/115/200/202/515
T0711 Black	£8.99 7.4ml	£4.99 7.4ml, 3 for £13.99	SX400/454/15515, D789/12210
T0711-4 each	£8.99 5.5ml	£3.99 7.4ml, 3 for £10.99	SX400/454/15500/6000/7400/8400
T0791-6 Set of 6	£74.99	Check Website.	Photo 1400
T0791-6 each	£12.99 10ml	Check Website.	
T0801-6 Set of 6	£51.99	£19.99 3 sets for £57.99	P50, R265/285/360, RX560/585
T0801-6 each	£8.99 7.4ml	£3.99 7.4ml, 3 for £10.99	R685/650, PX700/710/800/810
T0870-9 Set of 8	£74.99	Check Website.	Photo R1900
T0870 Gloss	£7.99 11.4ml	Check Website.	
T0871-9 each	£7.99 11.4ml	Check Website.	
T0961-9 Set of 8	£74.99	Check Website.	Photo R2380
T0961-9 each	£9.99 11.4ml	Check Website.	
T1281-4 Set of 4	£29.99	£14.99	S22, SX125, SX130, SX235W,
T1281 Black	£7.99 5.8ml	£4.99 5.8ml	SX420W/425W/435W/445W,
T1282-4 each	£7.99 3.5ml	£3.99 3.5ml	BX305F
T1291-4 Set of 4	£42.99	£16.99	SX235W/420W/425W/435W/445W,
T1291 Black	£10.99 11ml	£5.49 11ml	SX525W/526W/625FWD/642W,
T1292-4 each	£10.99 7.7ml	£4.49 7ml	BX305F/320F/525W/625FWD
T1571-9 each	£20.99 25ml	Check Website.	R3000
T1591-9 each	£14.99 17ml	Check Website.	R2000
T5801-9 each	£14.99 80ml	Check Website.	Pro 3800, 3880
No.16 Set of 4	£24.99	£14.99	Workforce WF-2010W, 2510WF,
No.16 Black	£6.99 5.4ml	£4.99 5.4ml	2520NF, 2530WF, 2540WF
No.16 CMY, each	£5.99 3.1ml	£3.99 3.1ml	
No.18 Set of 4	£22.99	£14.99	Expression Home XP30,
No.18 Black	£6.99 5.2ml	£4.99 5.2ml	XP102, 202, 205
No.18 CMY, each	£5.99 3.3ml	£3.99 3.3ml	XP302, 305, 402, 405
No.24 Set of 6	£44.99	No.24XL Set of 6 £69.99	Expression
No.24 B/L/C/M, ea	£7.99 5.1ml	No.24XL B/L/C/M, ea £11.99 9.8ml	Photo
No.24 CMY, each	£7.99 4.6ml	No.24XL CMY, each £11.99 9.8ml	XP750, 850
No.26 Set of 4	£30.99	No.26XL Set of 4 £54.99	Expression
No.26 Black	£8.99 6.2ml	No.26XL Black £14.99 12.1ml	Premium
No.26 Photo Black	£7.99 4.7ml	No.26XL Photo Black £13.99 8.7ml	XP600, 605,
No.26 CMY, each	£7.99 5.4ml	No.26XL CMY, each £13.99 9.7ml	XP700, 800
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7		Plusnet: Fibre Broadband & Calls	£14.99 (£3.99 for 6 months)	18 months	38Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£113.88
8		EE: Fibre Broadband & Calls	£19.95 (£9.95 for 6 months)	18 months	38Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£179.40
9		Sky: Fibre Broadband & Calls	£20.00 (HALF PRICE for 6 months)	18 months	38Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£180.00
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Ofcom

Broadband Genie's helpline is powered by Simplify Digital, the Ofcom-accredited switching service

Jargon Buster

1080p Of the common types of high-definition video, this is the best quality: 1920x1080 pixels.

32bit A measure of how much data a computer can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels

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

Add-on See Extensions.

Applet A small program, often one that runs within a larger program to perform a specific task.

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

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.

Boot disk When it starts the computer looks on one disk for instructions. This is normally the hard disk, but in case of problems other boot disks can be used.

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.

Channel Wi-Fi routers can communicate on multiple frequencies. Each individual frequency is known as a channel. If your wireless reception is poor, it might be due to nearby routers using the same channel as you. Changing your channel can help.

Chipset A group of microchips. Often used to refer to the chips used on a computer motherboard that link the processor with other components.

Command line A way to control a computer by typing instructions one at a time. In Windows this is called the command prompt.

CPU Central Processing Unit. Another term for a PC processor.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with hardware or devices.

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

Duplex printing Printing on both sides of a sheet of paper.

Eight-core A standard processor has one core, but most modern processors are dual-, quad- or even eight-core, making them faster.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired PC networks.

Extension A program that adds extra features to your browser.

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

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.

IP address Internet Protocol Address. A unique set of numbers, separated by full stops, used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

ISO file A type of image file that contains all the data from a CD or DVD disc.

MB/s Megabytes per second.

Megapixel A measure of the amount of detail that can be recorded by a digital image. A one-megapixel image is made up of a million dots (pixels).

MFP Multifunction Printer. A combined printer and scanner.

Mi-Fi A wireless router that acts as a mobile Wi-Fi hotspot.

Micro USB A miniature version of USB, often found on smartphones, tablets and portable hard drives.

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.

OCR Optical character recognition. Software that converts a picture of text into editable text.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone, rather than just by the employees of the company that created it.

Optical stabilisation A mechanism built into digital cameras that compensates for any shaking or vibrations that occur during shooting.

Plug-in A small 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.

Proxy server A computer that sits between your computer and the internet and filters the connection. Sometimes used simply to remove internet threats such as viruses, but can also be used to block access to websites and internet services as well as masking the identity of a computer, giving its user anonymity on the internet.

PUP Potentially Unwanted Program. A program that may not be desired, despite the user consenting to it being downloaded. Examples include unnecessary plug-ins, toolbars and browser hijackers.

QR code Quick Response Code. A two-dimensional barcode that can be read using smartphones and dedicated QR-reading devices.

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).

Resolution The amount of detail shown in an image, whether on screen or printed.

Roaming charge Fee incurred for using your phone to receive data through overseas mobile networks.

Root To perform tasks on Android devices that aren't permitted by the manufacturer.

Sensor The part of the camera that captures each image. Analogous to a piece of film on a film camera.

Server A computer on a network, such as the internet, that distributes information to other PCs.

Source code Program instructions written by a programmer in a high-level language that is readable by people but not computers.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts. Faster but more expensive than conventional hard drives.

SSID Service Set Identifier. A name used to identify a wireless network.

SSL Secure Sockets Layer. A technology for keeping information secure and secret when sent over the internet.

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.

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.

USB 3.0 A faster version of the USB standard used to connect devices to a computer.

VPN Virtual Private Network. A technology for keeping all internet communication safe and private even on insecure networks.

Wiki site A collaborative website that users can easily edit.

The Final Straw



STUART ANDREWS is
Computeractive's Mr Angry

This issue Stuart Andrews wants to avoid being lynched by...

Social media mobs

Last month, Facebook removed one of the emoticons it lets people use to tell their friends how they're feeling. Called the 'feeling fat' emoticon, it was a smiling, double-chinned yellow blob to illustrate the kind of happy, slightly guilty feeling you might have after stuffing down an unnecessary pudding following a hefty main course.

Facebook did this because 16,000 signed an online petition to get the chubby-cheeked emoticon dropped from the list of options. It was seen, in the



one form of body-shaming hatred on the Internet".

"Body-shaming hatred"? Is that *really* the effect of using a silly emoticon to share the fact that you've eaten more than you should?

But then social media seems to be the new home of bonkers political correctness; a place where everyone who doesn't meet your nutty righter-on-than-thou criteria can be pilloried and shamed. It's a place where Benedict Cumberbatch can't make a pro-equality point, albeit using dated, inappropriate terminology, without being cast as a racist.

Social media is now both a minefield and the modern equivalent of the old market-square stocks. Put a foot wrong and you can be accused of micro-aggressions: innocent or well meaning actions that are seen by overly PC types as an attack on their rights. There are endless stories of people being sacked after making a bad joke on social media, or – in one case – overheard by someone using social media. Sure, some of these jokes are abhorrent, but do these people deserve to have their whole life ruined?

Even the websites themselves are going crazy. In the US, Facebook has increased the number of gender options from the traditional two (men and women) to 51. Yep, fifty-one! Apparently, male, female and trans-gender – a selection which would seem to cover most bases – isn't enough to describe the full range of

gender identities. You see, it doesn't do enough to differentiate those who are 'pan-gender' from those who are 'gender questioning' from those who are 'gender nonconforming' or 'intersex' (did you get all that?). In fact, it doesn't do enough to differentiate those who see themselves as male from those who see themselves as cis-male, which means you are both male and have the gender identity 'commonly associated with males'.

This all drives me potty, yet there's equally stupid stuff coming in from our right-wing chums. Those who liked the good old days when women/gays/immigrants had their place and knew it are just as likely to go on Twitter, send death threats to left-wingers and complain when they're told off that they're now being victimised and that it's a free-speech issue. Neither is true.

And that's when I remember: social media isn't really a place for fighting social injustices or changing the world – it's a place for those who love the sound of their own voice, and particularly the way it sounds when shouting in outrage. It's a place for self-righteous monologues, not real discussion, and where surfing the next wave of overblown public anger is a major thrill. As usual, then, the tech that should be bringing out the best in us brings out the worst.

“

Facebook and Twitter
seem to be the new
home of bonkers
political correctness

”

words of Facebook's explanation/apology, as "reinforcing a negative body image, particularly for people struggling with eating disorders".

In some ways, I don't have a problem with this. There are people out there with eating disorders, and they already have – if they'll forgive me – enough on their plate. Facebook has now replaced 'feeling fat' with 'feeling stuffed', giving those who have indulged in shameless gluttony a way of sharing that on Facebook without offending anyone.

Yet I can't help feeling Facebook has capitulated to a kind of manic over-sensitivity. Reacting to Facebook's move, the petition's leader described how "as someone who struggled with body image, I feel so happy that I've helped eliminate

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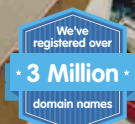
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