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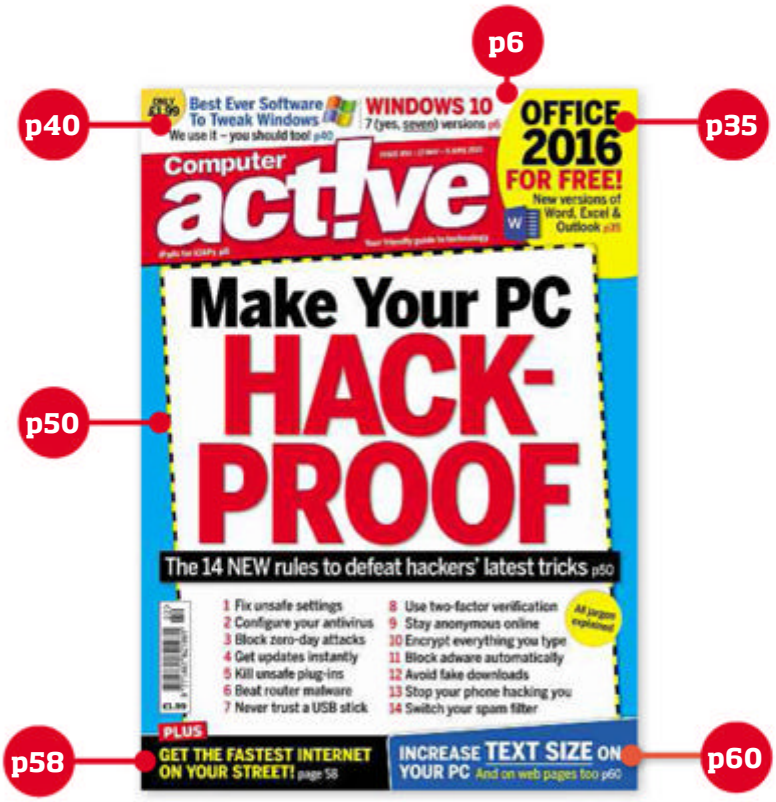
From the Editor

I've been warning people about the threat hackers pose from the moment I started writing about technology. They are a shadowy, permanent danger, a remorseless blob of villainy eager to prey on the vulnerable. Their entire reason for existing is to devise new ways to defeat security defences and trick victims. Just think what good they could do if they channelled all that energy into something positive. Protecting yourself goes beyond installing an antivirus and hoping it keeps you safe. As hackers learn new tricks, you have to respond by learning new methods of self-defence. Let Jane Hoskyn be your teacher – in our Cover Feature (p50) she reveals the 14 new rules you should follow.

On another note, I should mention that our 2014 Back Issue CD is selling fast. When I last checked, we only had 379 left, and at this rate they will sell out by July. You can buy it on Amazon at www.snipca.com/14981 or by searching for 'computeractive cd'.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk



THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

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Average number of hours Brits spend online every week – *p8*

£240
Termination fee Virgin is charging a reader – *p12*

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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Computeractive offer of the fortnight

Kaspersky Internet Security 2015 **page 68**

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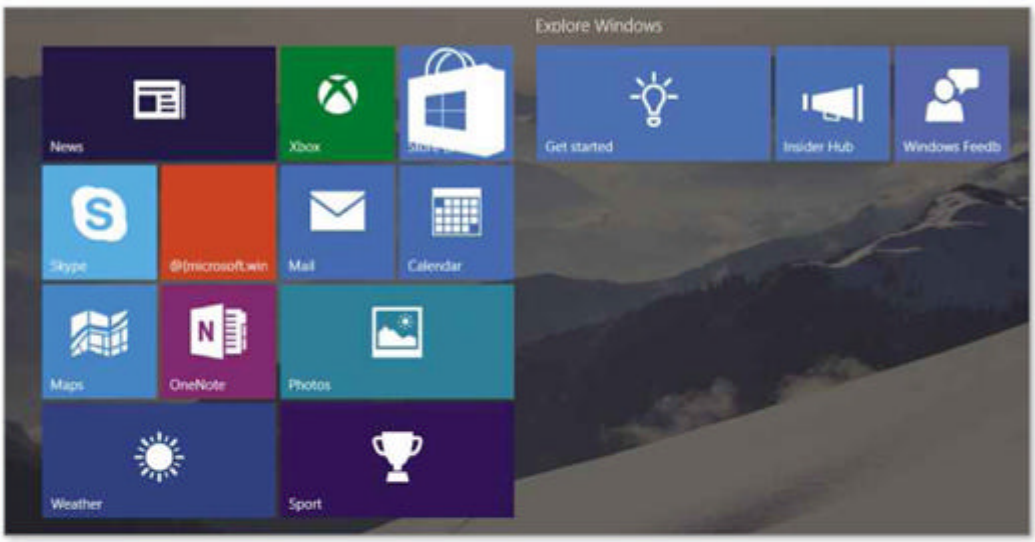
News

The top stories in the world of technology

Microsoft announces seven editions of Windows 10



Microsoft has said that it will release seven versions of Windows 10 later this year, but has yet to reveal how much people on XP and Vista will have to pay to upgrade. Anyone using Windows 7 or 8.1 can upgrade for free during the first 12 months after launch.

Tony Prophet, a vice president at Microsoft, revealed the editions in a blog post (www.snipca.com/16539). He confirmed that existing Windows 8.1 users will upgrade to the equivalent Windows 10 edition for free – so Home will upgrade to Windows 10 Home, while Pro users will upgrade to Windows 10 Pro.

Prophet wrote: "We designed Windows 10 to deliver a more personal computing experience across a range of devices. An experience optimised for each device type, but familiar to all".

What's less clear is which edition of Windows 10 users on each version of Windows 7 will upgrade to. When it launched in 2009, Windows 7 was available in six consumer editions. One possibility is that Windows 7 Home and Home Premium users will receive free upgrades to Windows 10 Home, while Windows 7 Professional and Ultimate will be upgraded to Windows 10 Pro.

Windows 10 Home is the most basic version, but has all the tools that most people will need. It comes with Microsoft's new browser Edge (which will replace Internet Explorer), the voice-activated assistant Cortana and Windows Hello, which recognises your face, eyes and fingerprint to let you sign in.

Windows 10 Pro is aimed at small businesses and people who use Windows primarily for work. There will also be versions of Windows 10 for phones and tablets, for larger businesses, for schools and for devices connected to the web, such as cash machines and lifts (see box left).

Microsoft says Windows 10 will arrive "this summer" in 190 countries and in 111 languages. There has been much speculation about the release date, with our sister website PC Pro predicting that it will launch on 23 July: www.snipca.com/16541.

All seven versions at a glance

Windows 10 Home: Desktop PC edition aimed at the public
Windows 10 Pro: Designed for small businesses
Windows 10 Enterprise: Contains advanced features for larger organisations
Windows 10 Education: Aimed at teachers and students
Windows 10 Mobile: Built for smartphones and small tablets
Windows 10 Mobile Enterprise: Phone and tablet version for businesses
Windows 10 IoT Core: Used on internet-connected devices

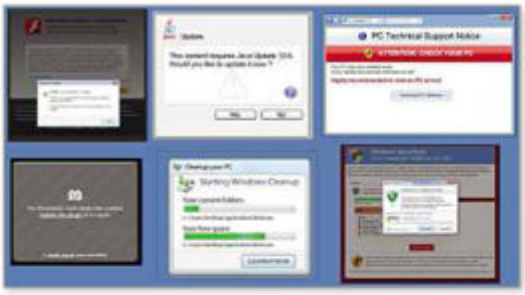
COMMENT

Microsoft rarely keeps things simple, so we're not surprised that there are seven versions of Windows 10, although the only edition most *Computeractive* readers will need is Home. What's frustrating is that while Microsoft has confirmed so many technical details about Windows 10, we still don't know its release date, or how much XP and Vista users will have to pay. We're putting money on late July, and for a top Microsoft executive to belatedly realise that XP and Vista users should also get Windows 10 free.

☺ ***You'll like this...*** Google will restrict how much personal data apps can access (www.snipca.com/16517)

☹ ***...but not this*** Hackers plastered child-abuse images on a Holocaust memorial website (www.snipca.com/16518)

Internet Explorer to block adverts that contain dodgy downloads



Microsoft has said it will strengthen the anti-phishing tools in Internet Explorer (IE) to crack down on misleading adverts that trick users into visiting malicious websites or downloading harmful software.

The company has improved the criteria that IE's SmartScreen Filter uses to detect dodgy adverts. Internet Explorer will now block adverts that "mislead or deceive, or confuse with the intent to mislead or deceive".

In a blog post on its Malware Protection Center website (www.snipca.com/16499), Microsoft wrote that there "has been a recent increase in the number of online advertisements that are intentionally misleading in nature". The blog contains screenshots of six examples of misleading adverts (see image above). These include fake security warnings, and prompts to update Java and Shockwave Flash.

The extra protection will also be added to Edge, Microsoft's new browser that comes built into Windows 10 and will eventually replace IE. The changes come into effect on 1 June.

As well as deceitful adverts, Microsoft says IE will block misleading downloads and indistinguishable content. The former are downloads that start automatically when you click an advert. Users are tricked, Microsoft says, because they are expecting to be taken to another web page from where they can click a button to download the software.

Indistinguishable content is classified by Microsoft as that which deliberately blurs the line between being an advert and editorial content.

With SmartScreen Filter switched on, you'll see a warning when IE or Edge encounters an advert that breaks Microsoft's rules. There are examples of these warnings on the blog post.

Both Mozilla's Firefox and Google's Chrome also warn you when you're about to do something that leaves you at risk online, such as download malicious software.

Visit Microsoft's FAQ page for SmartScreen Filter to learn more: www.snipca.com/16500.

Meet the world's cheapest (and smallest) computer – just £6!

Soon you'll be able to buy a computer and get change from a tenner. Californian company Next Thing is seeking investment for its C.H.I.P. micro-computer, a rival to the phenomenally successful Raspberry Pi. In its most basic form C.H.I.P. will cost only $9 (around £6).

C.H.I.P. is a single-board computer, measuring just 2.3 inches by 1.5 inches, and comes with a 1GHz processor, 512MB RAM and 4GB of storage.

It has Wi-Fi built in, plus Bluetooth 4, USB and microUSB ports and a 3.5mm audio output. Like the Raspberry Pi, it runs Linux and connects to a PC monitor, mouse and keyboard for basic computing tasks.

You can use it to browse the internet, learn coding skills, watch videos, play basic games and work on spreadsheets or word documents with its built-in LibreOffice application.

Investors are backing the computer on Kickstarter (www.snipca.com/16511), a crowdfunding website that companies use to raise money for projects. Within days investors had pledged more than $1.2m, smashing the $50,000 target. It's due to go on sale in 2016.

C.H.I.P. is more powerful than the first versions of the Raspberry Pi, which ran at 700MHz with either 256MB or 512MB of RAM. However, you'll need to buy accessories for the C.H.I.P. to match what the new Raspberry Pi B+ can do. Postage fees from the US will add more to the overall cost.

IN BRIEF

USE SKYPE TRANSLATOR WITHOUT SIGNING UP

You can now use the Skype Translator preview without signing up. Until now, it had only been open to people agreeing to test it. The service translates between English, Italian, Spanish and Mandarin in real time as you speak with someone, displaying a transcript of your conversation on screen. Download it from www.skype.com/translator (for Windows 8.1 and 10 only). Read more on the Skype blog: www.snipca.com/16492.

WEBSITE FIGHTS COUNTRYSIDE CRIME

A website has launched to help fight crime and anti-social behaviour in the countryside. The National Rural Crime Network (www.nationalruralcrimenetwork.net), run by 20 police forces across England and Wales, is encouraging communities to report their experiences of crime. It says that rural crime is "underestimated, under-reported and not fully understood" and that preventing it requires different measures from those used in towns and cities.

Tomorrow's world

It's early days for the device, but Microsoft's HoloLens already feels like the first properly useful virtual-reality headset. A recent demonstration from Microsoft showed how you could use it around the home. You can open floating Windows Desktops with a flick of the hand, and command video screens to follow you around. Watch the future in action at www.snipca.com/16400.

IN BRIEF

FIND OUT AMBULANCE WAITING TIMES

You can now find out the average ambulance waiting time in your area on a new online map (www.ambulanceresponsetimes.co.uk). Built by digital agency Totally Communications following a Freedom of Information request, the map shows that people living in East Anglia face some of the longest waits in the UK. To use the map, type your postcode into the search box, then press enter.

UK WEB USE DOUBLES IN 10 YEARS

The average time Brits spend online every week has doubled in the past 10 years, according to an Ofcom report (www.snipca.com/16487). People aged 16 and over now browse the web for 20 hours, up from just under 10 hours in 2005. The rise is being driven by more people using mobile devices. Sixty-six per cent of people now go online using a smartphone (30 per cent in 2010), while 39 per cent use a tablet, up from five per cent.

Let people watch BBC iPlayer across Europe, says EU

You may soon be able to watch iPlayer when abroad without having to disguise your location.

Currently, to access iPlayer in another country you need to use a proxy server or a VPN to 'trick' the service into thinking you're in the UK.

But the European Commission wants the iPlayer, and other TV-streaming services such as Netflix and Sky's Now TV, to be freely available throughout the EU. In effect, it wants to demolish the 'geo-blocking' restrictions that prevent BBC Licence Fee-payers from watching their favourite shows when on holiday. It would mean that you'll be able to access any digital content you've bought in the UK while you're in any other EU country. The proposals would cover music too, letting you play tracks wherever you are.

The plans are part of the Commission's Digital Single Market Strategy, which aims to introduce new rules that boost the use of online goods and services. Part of this will be an EU-wide copyright system that allows TV services to show the same films and programmes everywhere.

The BBC cautiously welcomed the plans, saying: "We note the Commission's interest in making services more portable to UK users while temporarily travelling in Europe, and will begin work to look at the technical and legislative implications".

The EU also wants to abolish the practice of geo-blocking, which prevents customers from certain countries from buying products online, and charges customers more based on their location. EU officials used car-rental services as an example, saying that "customers in one Member State pay more for the identical car rental in a given destination than online customers in another Member State".

A week after the EU made its proposals, the BBC confirmed it was closing the 'global' version of the iPlayer, which charges users in western Europe, Australia and Canada subscription fees to watch programmes. It will close on 26 June.

Apple launches OAP-friendly iPad - but only in Japan

Apple has launched an iPad especially designed for older people. The device, currently on sale only in Japan, has larger text and contains simplified software that's been designed by IBM.

FaceTime, Apple's video-calling tool, is one of the programs to have been adapted to make it easier for senior citizens to use. The iPad also comes with health apps that remind the user to take medication, perform regular exercise, and attend hospital appointments.

Apple has increased the size of buttons within apps to make them easier to see. It has also added adjustable settings that people with visual or hearing impairments can tweak to make the tablet easier to use.

The company's boss Tim Cook said the iPad will launch in other countries if it's a success in Japan. He said that the device "will dramatically improve the lives of millions of people, and that at the end of the day is what it's all about". Cook hopes to sell five million iPads to the over-65s in Japan by 2020.

The company chose to release the iPad in Japan in part because of the country's ageing population. Around 25 per cent of the population is over 65, a figure experts say could rise to 40 per cent by 2050.

"Japan really respects its elderly and the wisdom of the elderly, so it's no surprise that this initiative begins in Japan," Cook said.

Would you be more likely to buy an iPad aimed at pensioners? Let us know at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Question of the Fortnight

Will Windows 10 be the final version of the OS?

We all know there won't be a Windows 9, but it looks like Windows 11 will never appear too. Does this represent the end of Microsoft's landmark releases?

Whenever Microsoft launches a new version of Windows, we get lots of emails from readers reluctant to upgrade because it means having to learn a new operating system (OS). As a result, many readers stick with operating systems, such as Windows XP, that carry severe security risks. But would you be more tempted to upgrade if you knew the latest version of Windows would be the last one you'd ever need to master? Microsoft hopes so.

THE FACTS

- Microsoft says that Windows 10 will be the "last version" of the operating system – there will be no Windows 11
- They will now treat Windows as a "service" to be updated in an "ongoing matter"
- Business experts say this will help Microsoft test new features to see if people like them

In early May, Jerry Nixon, a Microsoft development executive, said that "Windows 10 is the last version of Windows". Microsoft confirmed this a few days later, saying: "Windows will be delivered as a service bringing new innovations and updates in an ongoing manner".

> "Instead of spending millions on a new OS every couple of years, Microsoft will continuously update Windows 10"

This marks a major change in Microsoft's Windows strategy. Instead of spending millions developing and marketing a new operating system (OS) every couple of years, the company plans to continuously update Windows 10. New features will be gradually added, rather than arriving in one big package several years apart. Some experts see Microsoft moving to a system similar to that operated by Linux distros such as Ubuntu, where regular updates are drip-fed to users.

Ageing hardware could be a problem, though. Naming each version of Windows made it easy for Microsoft to draw a line under an OS, helping them to say clearly that only computers meeting the new version's minimum specifications would be able to run it. If everything from here on is just "Windows", Microsoft is going to have to find another way of telling users that their hardware isn't up to scratch.

One solution is for Microsoft to copy Apple and Ubuntu by giving each update a distinctive codename. Apple launched OS X in 2001, with the X representing '10'. Since then, it has added a different name to every update, starting with large cats (stretching from Cheetah in 2001 to Mountain Lion in 2012), before moving on to locations in California (Mavericks in 2013 and Yosemite in 2014). Ubuntu's tradition is to use what sound like alliterative animal cartoon characters, including Gutsy Gibbon and Saucy Salamander (see the full list at www.snipca.com/16485).

But ultimately, Microsoft hopes people will eventually call its OS 'Windows', omitting the version number, and only referring to the codename when they need to. Chrome users already do this. Google has launched 42 versions of Chrome since launching it in 2008, but nobody says they use 'Chrome 42' – they just use 'Chrome', hardly noticing the background updates.

Whatever naming policy Microsoft chooses, business experts agree that ditching landmark releases is a smart move. Steve Kleynhans, who works for technology analyst firm Gartner, said that it will give Microsoft the freedom to experiment with new features, without having to commit to them. If users dislike a new tool, it will be easier for Microsoft to change it.

"Every three years or so Microsoft would sit down and create the next great OS," Kleynhans told the BBC. "The developers would be locked away and out would pop a product based on what the world wanted three years ago."

Microsoft's great challenge is to add significant features without disrupting the overall feel of Windows. If Microsoft can pull this off, it should mean far less hype every few years about so-called giant leaps in computing, and more focus on improvements that will be genuinely useful.

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind
Email: letters@computeractive.co.uk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/computeractive
Twitter: @ComputerActive
www.twitter.com/computeractive

We got it wrong – plane and simple

In your write-up of FlightGear (www.flightgear.org) in Best Free Software, Issue 448, you referred to the P-51 Mustang Jet. It was in fact a piston-engined aircraft. During my National Service (1953-55) in the Fleet Air Arm I flew in the Sea Prince, Firefly, Fairey Gannet and the Grumman Avenger. In 1964, I joined the RAF as an air-traffic controller. Your magazine is still excellent value for money – keep up the good work.

H R Morris Sqn Ldr RAF (Retd)

CA says Mr Morris is absolutely right, as are several other readers who emailed us to highlight the same error. We clearly need to swot up on our aviation knowledge, starting by reading the Wikipedia page on the P-51 Mustang: www.snipca.com/16397.

Broadband success for my Yorkshire village

I've been subscribing to *Computeractive* for a few months now and have read a lot of letters from people bemoaning the lack of broadband speed, particularly in more rural areas. I would like to give my more positive story.

Last year, I noticed in my village of Hirst Courtney, just outside Selby in North Yorkshire, that new telegraph poles had been installed and a company was laying underground fibre cables. After checking the BT website every day for months, I finally saw the news I'd been waiting for. Instead of the usual, "Sorry you can't get Infinity right now – your current speed is 1.5Mbps", I got the slightly misleading message "Sorry you can't get Infinity right now – you could get 300Mbps".

Superfast North Yorkshire (www.superfastnorthyorkshire.com/home) have been upgrading networks around the county and it was decided that, because our village cabinet was over two miles away, they'd install FTTP (Fibre to the Premises) to our village of 60 houses. I plumped for BT Infinity 3 at 200Mbps. I'm now downloading and streaming like mad.

My point is this: if you want to improve your internet access then perhaps you should lobby your councils and MPs and get them to take a look at the Superfast North Yorkshire model. I really can't praise enough the work they've done, both in my village and around the county.

Tony Turner

Let's encourage GPs to use Skype

I think Harold Rigden is overreacting to the supposed 'threat' posed by Skype (Star Letter, Issue 449). As a retired GP, I think it's a brilliant idea to give patients an alternative to visiting a surgery. So many patients used to visit me for trivial reasons. I always thought I could have answered many of their questions over the phone. Skype, in my opinion, is a superior alternative to the phone, and therefore to be encouraged.

I do appreciate Mr Rigden's concern that some doctors would rely on Skype too much. But as long as it's used sensibly and responsibly, and as long as patients are educated about not abusing it, I can see Skype becoming an essential part of the patient-doctor relationship. We should encourage it.

James Ellison

Poor advice in shops mirrored by public ignorance

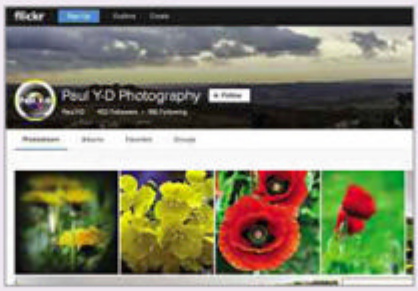
I laughed along with Stuart Andrews' jokey mocking of poor tech advice in shops (The Final Straw, Issue 449), but it works both ways. In a previous life, I worked as a shop assistant in a tech store, and I met lots of members of the public who were a few gigabytes short of a hard drive (to put it politely).

I can give you three examples to redress the balance. Once, admittedly in the early days of the internet, someone seriously asked me what would arrive first – an email or a written letter. Another time, after I rightly told a computer user that she needed antivirus, she said that her PC couldn't be hacked because she was the only person who ever used it. I tried to explain that she could be hacked while browsing the web, but she refused to

You can make friends and swap tips on Flickr

I tend to disagree with Frank McFadden (Readers' Tips, Issue 448) who said: "It doesn't seem many people use Flickr nowadays". Although he uses it, he ought to take a proper look. He might be surprised. Flickr (www.flickr.com) has many, many thousands (if not millions) of members worldwide, both amateur and professional.

There are groups and categories covering every possible subject imaginable, which one can join and submit pictures to. I have been a member of Flickr (for free) for years, and have 1TB of storage, which I will never ever use up. My photos draw comments from all over the world. These lead to contact and the exchange



of info and tips. One can make friends all over the world, too. It is quite encouraging to know that someone half a world away is looking at my photos and appreciating my images. My photostream at Flickr is www.flickr.com/photos/squirrelspants (see screenshot).

Paul J Yorke-Dunne

believe me. But most absurd of all, someone asked me whether he could use a laptop on a table. I think he honestly thought it was powered by a mysterious energy radiating from his lap!

I say all this not to mock the public, but to make the point that while staff can be ignorant, many customers can be worse.

Paddy Wilson

Amazon 'will lose business' over £20 free-delivery limit

Avaricious Amazon just gets greedier and greedier. I refer to your news story in Issue 449 about Amazon increasing the minimum price you have to pay in order to get free delivery. Over the years, I've bought many items from Amazon, but I don't think any order cost more than £20. Under Amazon's new rules, that means I wouldn't have got them delivered free. I know that books under £20 remain free, but I stopped buying books on Amazon years ago. You can get them much cheaper second-hand in local charity shops, which has a double benefit – you save money and you help support a good cause. I urge everyone to do the same.

I predict Amazon will lose a lot of business over this. Some of my friends had already boycotted Amazon because of its dubious tax schemes. I thought my friends' response was a bit high-minded, because the more tax Amazon saves, the cheaper they can make their prices. Or so I thought. I am now going on a six-month Amazon detox. If I can shop online safely and cheaply without Amazon during that time, I'll never use it again.

Simon Hennessey

It's not just Amazon that thinks we're made of money. Despite its name, Poundworld also thinks our wallets are bulging. I love hunting for bargains at my local Poundworld in Basildon, so thought I'd give its new site a go: www.pound worldplus.co.uk. It has loads of things for £1, plus deals it says are online only. But the minimum price you have to spend is £20! I can't be the only person who thinks this is a perverse policy for a shop that prides itself on selling everything for £1. Also, delivery costs £3.95, no matter what you buy. I suppose you could stock up on cheap toothpaste for the next year, but who wants to do that?

Frank Morrison

Careless couriers left me with a soggy bottom

I agree with your sound advice to the question "Who's responsible for delivery left with neighbours?" (Consumeractive, Issue 448). You advise people not to let couriers leave deliveries in a "safe place". From bitter experience, there's no such thing as a "safe place". I've had a box of wine left out in the pouring rain, which left it with a soggy bottom through which the bottles would have disappeared had I not been vigilant.

More worryingly, on occasions I've had a courier deposit parcels inside (not behind or under) my recycling bin in spite of (1) written complaints (which remain unanswered); (2) no authority given for them to do so; and (3) the fact that the bin is for the disposal of rubbish! Technically, and practically, speaking the parcels were not 'delivered' as the bin is the property of the local authority not the householder. I could have been on holiday and the parcels consigned to the tip if we'd asked our neighbours to deal with our bins during our absence. And don't get me started on couriers who don't give me time to get to the front door!

Ian Nicholson

STAR LETTER

Give me back Windows 98 – the Morris 1000 of operating systems

Picture the scene. Joe Soap goes into his local car dealership and buys a new car. It gives him many years of trouble-free motoring. Then out of the blue, he's contacted by the dealership and told that in a few months he won't be able to drive it any longer because the manufacturer has brought out a new model. He'll be expected to buy it, and just to make sure he can't use his present one he won't be able to buy any spare parts for it or insure it.

Obviously, such a scenario just wouldn't happen, not in the motoring fraternity at least, but it happens all the time in the computer world. People who are happy using an operating system they've been accustomed to are forced to dump it, and then spend a packet on something they neither need nor want.

We're told it's because of all the advancements and security aspects that have been built into this 'new wonder'. Personally, Windows 98 SE gave me all the necessary computing power I needed. It was the Morris 1000 of the computer world - certainly not first away at the traffic lights, but it was simple, effective and dependable, and did everything I asked of it.

I now realise when buying my first computer I was in fact signing up for a self-taught Masters degree course in computer science. The operating systems these days are so complicated, so finely tuned that the smallest error can throw them off balance, resulting in many hours of prodding, deleting, downloading and scanning to rectify something we didn't expect, don't understand but need to fix.

Sitting at the PC is no longer the pleasure it used to be. My PC has developed a temperamental mind of its own that somehow knows when I'm wearing the wrong colour socks, and acts accordingly to this affront to its intelligence.

Give me back my Morris 1000. Perhaps it wasn't intellectually mighty, but then neither am I!

Dave Crew

The Star Letter writer wins a *Computeractive* mug!

Consumeractive

Do I have to pay Virgin's early-termination fee?

I've been a Virgin Media customer for a while, but I'm moving to an area which doesn't have the company's services. I signed up to a new 12-month contract in December 2014 and because I am ending the contract early, Virgin is charging me a termination fee of £240. I feel this fee is disproportionate. Do I have to pay it?

Trevor Gibbs

A Yes, Trevor will have to pay this fee because he's broken his contract with Virgin. The only way he wouldn't have to pay is if Virgin hadn't been providing an acceptable service at his old address.

Although we dislike early termination fees, the amount Virgin is charging doesn't appear to be disproportionately expensive compared with other ISPs. Virgin would have calculated it based on how much Trevor was paying monthly for his broadband, phone and TV, and how long he had left on his contract.

Trevor can challenge the amount and should ask Virgin for a breakdown of the charges in a deadlock letter (see 'MacBook' case right). If he's still unhappy, he can approach the ombudsman CISAS (www.cisas.org.uk) for an independent ruling.

CASE CLOSED

Is this £300 MacBook warranty worth the money I paid for it?

Q **I bought an Apple MacBook from PC World in August 2014. At the time I also took PC World's Care Plan, which cost £300. The MacBook has been trouble free, but the charger unit has failed. PC World told me it would be replaced within three to five days, but I need my Mac for work so I can't wait this long. I went to PC World to ask for a free replacement which I believe the care package untitled me to, but the sales assistant refused. In the end I had to buy one. I believe the cost of the Care Plan is totally unjustified. What do you think?**

David Southworth

A It's hard for us to say whether the £300 David paid for the Care Plan represents good value for money, because we don't know what else the warranty covers. But because the Care Plan is an extended warranty, David can cancel it and get a partial refund. He won't get a full refund because this is only applicable if you cancel within the first 5 days.

David should write to PC World asking to cancel the warranty. Hopefully the company will work out what proportion of the warranty he's had the benefit of and refund him the balance. If he's not happy with what PC World offers, or if it refuses a refund, he should take the matter to the Financial Ombudsman Service (www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk). If it gets to this stage, he should ask PC World for a deadlock letter, which will confirm the company's final position. If you're in a similar position, use this template for writing deadlock letters: www.snipca.com/16362.

We've put David's complaint to PC World for a response, but as always in cases such as this, the devil is in the details - and these details will be buried in the terms and conditions of the Care Plan.

CASE CLOSED

Can I get a refund after 'misleading' software adverts?

Q **I bought Roxio's 'Easy VHS to DVD 3' software for £49 because I saw an online advert that claimed I could record to a PC in several ways, including from any type of camcorder. However, the adapter that came with the software doesn't fit any camcorder I have. I was also charged import tax, although when I paid, the order said all import costs were covered. Roxio won't reply to my emails, so can you help?**

David Lee

A We think we can, but it may be difficult because it's David's word against Roxio's. It's crucial that he is able to prove that the information in Roxio's advert was misleading. However, this will be tricky because David claims that Roxio has since changed the advert to state that it works only with VHS, Hi8 and Video 8 formats. David's camcorder uses a different format, and therefore is incompatible with Roxio's software. The same applies to David's claim about import tax - he would need to provide proof to validate his claim.

It's very disappointing that Roxio hasn't replied to David. We've emailed the company to ask why, and to discover the truth behind the allegedly misleading advert. Roxio isn't a small company - it was bought by software giant Corel in 2012. We would expect better customer service from such a reputable outfit. We'll let you know what it tells us, assuming it does get in touch.

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.

Do I have any rights apart from voting with my feet?

Q My Canon iP4850 printer, which I bought in September 2011, has stopped working. The only thing Canon suggests is taking it to my repair centre, which would be expensive. This is the third Canon printer I've owned and all have died within three to four years. Apart from voting with my feet and never buying another Canon printer, what rights do I have?

John Kenny

A John should use the Sale of Goods Act to pursue a refund, which gives him up to six years in which to seek redress for inherently faulty goods. But because he has owned the printer for more than six months, the onus is on him to prove that the fault is inherent. Before six months, the retailer would need to prove that the fault was caused by wear and tear or an accident, rather than having existed since it was made.

To prove this, John would almost certainly have to pay for an independent technician to inspect the printer. Canon has suggested sending it to his nearest repair centre (which can be found on this map: www.snipca.com/16333), but he's reluctant to do so because of how much it would cost. We've asked Canon if, as a goodwill gesture, it will pick up the printer or send a pre-paid postage label so John can send it to the repair centre. We hope Canon agrees to do this because John has stayed loyal to the company, despite having experienced many problems with its printers. It's the least Canon should do.

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATES

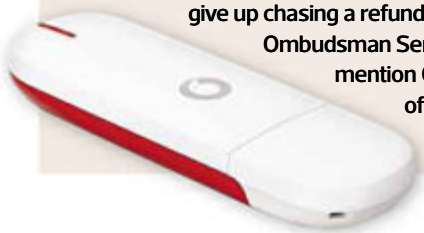
Confident of mass refunds for Vodafone TopUp customers

We would like to thank all the Vodafone 'TopUp and Go' customers who got in touch with us following the company's refusal to refund outstanding credit on its 180-day dongle.

After first examining Vodafone's decision in Issue 432 when reader Brian Patterson complained to us about the company, we asked other disgruntled customers to get in touch. We've now passed on all those claims to Vodafone, who said in February that they would refund customers. Therefore we'll revisit this case only if they refuse. If that does happen, we shall refer the case to Ofcom, the communications regulator, though customers who have got in touch with us will need to give us further permission to pass on their details. Ofcom has said it's unhappy about Vodafone's decision to initially refuse refunds, so it should view the case sympathetically.

Instead of approaching Ofcom, you could take your case to the Ombudsman Services (www.ombudsman-services.org). Some Vodafone customers have told us they got a refund from the company after doing this.

There are two lessons to learn from this case. One is to always ask companies whether they deactivate devices if you don't use them for a period of time. And second is to never give up chasing a refund. With Ofcom and the Ombudsman Services on your side, not to mention Consumeractive, you can often force companies to cough up.



THIS WILL COME IN useful

TV services' contact details

BT TV
0800 800 150
Help: www.bt.com/help
Twitter: @BTCare

Blinkbox
0207 092 8700
Contact and live chat: www.snipca.com/16240
Twitter: @blinkbox

Freesat
0345 313 0051
Email: customerteam@freesat.co.uk
Help: www.freesat.co.uk/help
Twitter: @freesat_tv

Freeview
03456 505050
Help: www.freeview.co.uk/help
Twitter: @FreeviewTV

Netflix
0800 096 6379
Help and live chat: https://help.netflix.com
Twitter: @NetflixHelps

Sky TV
03442 411 653
Help: http://help.sky.com/
Twitter: @SkyHelpTeam

Virgin TV
0345 454 1111
Twitter: @virginmedia

YouView
0333 313 2278
Help and live chat: http://support.youview.com
Twitter: @YouView

Protect Your Tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

The 'suicide bomber' virus

What happened?

Security experts identified a deadly new virus that destroys files on your PC if it thinks it has been detected by your antivirus software.

Researchers at Cisco, who named the virus Rombertik, said that the malware carries out regular checks to find out if it's been exposed (read their blog post at www.snipca.com/16405). If it believes it has, it tries to delete the infected computer's Master Boot Record (MBR), a part of the hard drive containing key files that Windows examines before loading. Rombertik then restarts your computer, which is plunged into a continuous restart loop because the MBR is now missing.

This self-destructive behaviour has led some experts to dub Rombertik 'suicide bomber' malware. Cisco's analysts said that Rombertik's aggressive response to being identified made it a "unique" type of malware. If undetected, Rombertik steals the victim's login data and other confidential information.

What should you do?

Like many viruses, Rombertik attacks a PC after being downloaded as an attachment on a phishing email. Cisco's security team said that some of the emails purport to be business enquiries from Microsoft. In the example cited by Cisco (see image), the email appears to come from David Perlmutter from 'Windows Corporation' (there is a real David Perlmutter, but he's an American author of health books, not a Windows employee: www.snipca.com/16406). So, as always, don't click any attachment that arrives on an unexpected email. If Rombertik does delete files from your MBR, you'll need to reinstall Windows.

It seems unlikely that Rombertik will spawn copycat malware because viruses tend to avoid acting in an obvious way. They prefer to lie low unspotted, silently stealing information over a long time.

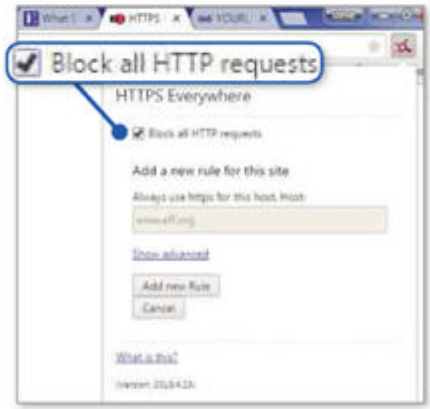
New tools

HTTPS Everywhere
www.snipca.com/16407

One of the most effective ways of ensuring you stay safe online is to only type your passwords and credit-card details into websites whose URL begins with the prefix 'https'. The addition of that 's' is crucial. It means that the website uses a form of encryption called 'Secure Sockets Layer', which keeps your data safe from hackers.

To make sure your browser always sends you to the 'https' version of a website, install the free HTTPS Everywhere add-on, which has just been updated to cover thousands more sites. It works in Chrome, Firefox and Opera, but not Internet Explorer (whose users have once again been overlooked).

The add-on runs in the background, quietly keeping you safe. You can tweak it so it blocks web pages that don't use 'https' - just tick the 'Block all HTTP requests' box (see screenshot). The HTTPS Everywhere logo in your toolbar will turn from blue to red. Doing this keeps you very safe online, but you may find it disrupts your web browsing.



ScamWatch
READERS WARN READERS

Call-blocking scam

In April, I got a call from an Asian-sounding woman who said she was from the Telephone Preference Service (TPS). She confirmed my name and address and said I qualified for a new piece of kit that fits between my wall socket and phone to help block nuisance calls. It would cost £1.99 a month. I told her in all the years I've been registered with the TPS it had never prevented a nuisance call, so I don't intend paying them for not doing their job. The line went dead. Initially, it sounded plausible until she said the kit blocked all nuisance calls.

Ted Chiverton

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

pcspecialist

PC Specialist recommends Windows 8.1

Get a PC that's more **you**

Infinity 7850K

- AMD A10-7850K APU
- ASUS® A88XM-PLUS
- 8GB HyperX FURY RAM
- Integrated AMD Radeon™ HD 8000
- 2TB Hard Drive
- **Windows 8.1**
- 3 Year Standard Warranty

THIS SPEC FROM £499*

Vanquish HAF III

- Intel® Core™ i5-4590
- ASUS® H81-Gamer
- 8GB HyperX FURY RAM
- 2GB NVIDIA® GeForce® GTX 960
- 120GB Kingston SSD
- 1TB Hard Drive
- **Windows 8.1**
- 3 Year Standard Warranty

THIS SPEC FROM £769*

Minerva

- Intel® Core™ i5-4690K
- ASUS® RoG MAXIMUS VII RANGER
- 16GB HyperX FURY RAM
- 4GB NVIDIA® GeForce® GTX 970
- 120GB Kingston HyperX 3K SSD
- 2TB Hard Drive
- **Windows 8.1**
- 3 Years Warranty

THIS SPEC FROM £999*

Predator X99

- Intel® Core™ i7-5820K
- ASUS® Z99-S
- 16GB HyperX FURY RAM
- 8GB AMD RADEON™ R9 295X2
- 240GB HyperX 3K SSD
- 2TB Seagate SSHD
- **Windows 8.1**
- 3 Years Warranty

THIS SPEC FROM £2,299*

Optimus Nebula

- Intel® Core™ i7-4720HQ
- 17.3" Matte Full HD LED
- 8GB HyperX IMPACT RAM
- 2GB NVIDIA® GeForce® GTX 960M
- 120GB HyperX 3K SSD
- 1TB Hard Drive
- **Windows 8.1**
- 3 Year Standard Warranty

THIS SPEC FROM £849*

Defiance 17

- Intel® Core™ i7-4720HQ
- 17.3" Matte Full HD LED Screen
- 16GB HyperX IMPACT RAM
- 4GB NVIDIA® GeForce® GTX 980M
- 240GB Kingston SSD
- 1TB Hard Drive
- **Windows 8.1**
- 3 Year Standard Warranty

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MEDIA CENTRE

MediaPortal 1.11.0

www.snipca.com/16417
What you need: Windows Vista, 7 or 8

Things had been looking pretty shaky for Windows Media Center (WMC) for some time now. The brilliant tool came built into Windows 7 and let users watch DVDs, record TV, pause live broadcasts, stream media and more. But, despite attracting a fiercely loyal following, Microsoft demoted WMC to paid-for, add-on status in Windows 8 – the Pro Pack upgrade (which includes WMC) currently costs £100 at the Microsoft Store. Worse still, Microsoft recently admitted that Windows 10 wouldn't come with WMC. The good news, however, is you can get a great alternative to WMC for free.

MediaPortal is an open-source media-centre program that can do everything WMC did and more besides. It'll play video files, DVDs and – if you have a Blu-Ray drive – HD movie discs. If you have a TV tuner, you can use MediaPortal to record TV. You can turn your photos into instant slideshows and stream your music library, complete with on-screen album art. MediaPortal's interface is designed for large-screen TVs and its system requirements are fairly low (Pentium 4 2GHz CPU and 1GB RAM), making it ideal for anyone considering converting an older PC into an all-in-one media box for their living room.

The latest version of MediaPortal adds a number of enhancements, including the ability to display detailed information about TV shows, as well as improved support for your remote control, meaning you can flick through channels, recordings and files from the comfort of your sofa.

1 MediaPortal's default interface is sleek and easy to use, but there are dozens of alternative free skins you can download instead (www.snipca.com/16428), so you're bound to find a style that suits you.

2 To watch and record TV, you'll need to set up your PC's TV tuner. MediaPortal's extensive wiki sites (www.snipca.com/16429) can guide you through this and any other configurations and customisations.

3 An improved installer automatically downloads all the plug-ins and codecs you need to play different movie and music file formats. Further optional plug-ins let you add functions, games, tools and more.

4 Install the latest version of the OnlineVideos extension (www.snipca.com/16430) and you can stream video from BBC iPlayer, Amazon Prime, YouTube and dozens of other online sources from within MediaPortal.

PC-OPTIMISATION TOOL

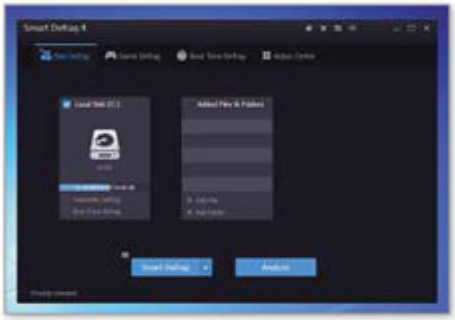
Smart Defrag 4

www.snipca.com/16432

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

Whether you've got a speedy new SSD or a traditional hard drive, optimising your PC's storage can help your computer run faster and more efficiently. And, while Windows has its own defrag tool, Smart Defrag 4 offers not only a sleek new interface, but also a smarter new defrag engine, which runs quietly in the background, continually working to improve performance. Other great features include optional boot-time defrag, a tool for improving gaming performance, automatic junk removal, customisable schedules and Trim tools for SSDs.

Smart Defrag 4's developers, IObit, have a a reputation for bundling junk with their free programs, but as long as you deselect the option to 'Install Advanced SystemCare Free' during installation, you won't get any annoying clutter.



OFFICE SUITE

DriverMax 7.57 Free Edition

www.snipca.com/16435

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

Who has the time to check that all their PC's drivers are up to date? DriverMax not only scans for out-of-date drivers with a single click, but it can also download them too. The latest version of the tool speeds up the process further still with faster download times. DriverMax is free, but you'll need to take care when installing to avoid junk – choose Custom Installation (Advanced) when prompted and untick the two boxes below. Also make sure you untick the 'I accept' box when prompted to install TuneUp Utilities.

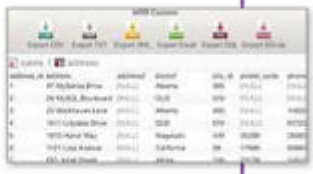
WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

We tell you what software to use

How can I open MS Access files on a Mac?

Q **I built an accounts database in Microsoft Access on my old laptop, but the Apple MacBook Pro I've just bought won't run MS Access. Do you know of a compatible database program that will run on OS X? And do you know if MS Office 2016 for Mac will include Access?**

Arthur Morgan



A As far as we know, Microsoft has no plans to make a Mac version of Access. There are, however, ways to view and export Access databases to Mac-friendly formats. For older MDB files (Access 2003 and earlier), you could use MDB Explorer (£7.99, www.snipca.com/16419). If you need support for the newer ACCDB format (Access 2007 and up), then MDB ACCDB Viewer (£13.99, www.snipca.com/16420) will do the trick. Both programs can export to formats that can be opened and edited in free database programs, such as Base – part of OpenOffice for Mac (www.openoffice.org).

Is there an alternative to iTunes?

Q **I read with interest your advice in Issue 447 regarding transferring photos to an iPad without iTunes. Is there any chance that something similar might work for transferring MP3 files from my PC to my iPod? The only other program I know that does this is MediaMonkey, but I don't really like this.**

Tim Hudson

A MediaMonkey (www.mediamonkey.com) is certainly one of the best free alternatives to iTunes. But, as long as you're using either a 'classic' (scroll wheel) iPod or an iPod Touch with iOS 4.3 or earlier, you can also use Foobar2000 (www.snipca.com/16421) with a couple of free plug-ins – iPod Manager 0.6.9.6 (www.snipca.com/16422) and Nero AAC Codec (www.snipca.com/16423). Extract both plug-ins (you may need PeaZip for this – free from http://peazip.sourceforge.net), then drop the foo_dop.dll file into **C:\Program Files\Foobar2000\Components** and the neroAacEnc.exe file into **C:\Program Files\Foobar2000**. Start Foobar2000 and go to File, Preferences, Tools and click iPod Manager. On the Mobile Device tab, put a tick next to 'Enable mobile device support'.

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

TABLET-LAPTOP | £499 (128GB, Wi-Fi-only, excl. keyboard cover and stylus) from www.snipca.com/16387

Microsoft Surface 3

Microsoft's lightest tablet yet – but it's lightweight in other ways too

Microsoft's latest tablet-laptop hybrid, the Surface 3, is both a trimmed-down version of the Surface Pro 3 and the successor to the Surface 2 (see our reviews, Issues 431 and 415 respectively). Whereas the Surface 2 only ran Windows RT, and was thus limited to running apps downloaded from the Windows Store, the Surface 3 runs the full Windows 8.1, so in theory you can run any Windows program you want.

Performance

Running Windows 8.1 is now possible because Microsoft has switched from the ARM processor used in the Surface 2 (and similar to the processors used in smartphones) to the new Intel Atom x7-Z8700 quad-core processor. We've been hugely underwhelmed by the slow performance of older Atoms in other Windows tablets and laptops, so we weren't expecting much from this new processor.

The x7-Z8700's performance during our test was much quicker, closer to that of a Core i3 processor than to older Atoms. But it was still noticeably slower than any comparably priced Core i3 laptop. Even though the x7-Z8700 is paired with 4GB of memory, it sometimes

> "It feels like a series of half-measures and compromises"

slowed down when running multiple programs or web apps simultaneously. Sometimes it was even so slow, it began to have a negative effect on what is otherwise a flawless touchscreen, causing it to become unresponsive. For this reason, we would never consider the cheaper £419 version of the Surface 3 which comes with less memory – just 2GB.

This flawed performance makes the Surface 3's ability to run software not downloaded from the Windows Store a less attractive proposition, because there's no guarantee it will run smoothly. It's adaptability is still useful – for installing the drivers needed to use printers and scanners connected to the tablet's full-size USB 3.0 port, for example.

Stand and keyboard

Like other Surfaces, the Surface 3 is made of metal and feels robust. There's a built-in stand offering the choice of three viewing angles (compared to the Surface 2's two angles). And yet this falls short of the Surface Pro 3's stand, which can be adjusted to almost any angle you want. It's baffling that the Surface 3 doesn't use this stand. It means that a comfortable viewing angle can be hard to come by – we found ourselves getting neck ache constantly when using the Surface 3.

You can attach a keyboard to the bottom of the Surface 3 and thereby use it like a laptop. The keyboard snaps magnetically into place and doubles as a screen cover. Although a couple of the keys, such as the left shift and # keys, are smaller than we'd expect it's still makes for a comfortable typing experience. The keys are large with plenty of feedback and travel, so touch typists will be able to work far faster than if they used the onscreen keyboard. Annoyingly, the cramped touchpad is fiddly to use.

One big problem comes when you try to use the Surface and its keyboard on your lap. The keyboard is rigid enough and provides firm support when working from your lap in most situations, but not if you like to rest it on crossed legs. Another problem is that the keyboard adds 250g of weight to the 600g tablet. Although this is the lightest Surface yet and would be considered featherweight for a laptop, it makes an already hefty tablet even trickier to hold for long

periods of time. Even so, the keyboard is so crucial to making best use of the Surface that we think it should be included by default. It actually costs an extra £110, which is a bit steep.

Screen and stylus

Another accessory that costs extra (£44) is the stylus. It's useful for sketching and jotting down quick notes. You can press the button at the cap end of the stylus to open Microsoft's OneNote app – even if the tablet is asleep. However, there's always a slight lag between pen movement and the stroke being registered on screen, which can be exacerbated by the performance and responsiveness problems mentioned above. It's therefore not best suited for fine, detailed artwork that requires very precise strokes.

Like the Surface Pro 3, the Surface 3 has an aspect ratio of 3:2 instead of the 16:9 more common on other Windows tablets and laptops. Although this means widescreen videos will be be framed in larger black bars at the top and bottom, this aspect ratio is more suitable for magazine or book pages, so reading feels more natural. The screen is very bright with good colour accuracy and contrast, although viewing angles were tighter than we expected. Text looks sharp, although not quite as crisp and print-like as on tablet screens with resolutions that exceed the Surface 3's 1920x1280 pixels.

SPECIFICATIONS

10.8in 1920x1280-pixel touchscreen • Intel Atom x7-Z8700 quad-core processor • 4GB memory • 128GB SSD • Windows 8.1 • 600g (850g including keyboard) • 267x187x9mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/16387

Battery life

The battery lasted around 11 hours, both when playing videos on a loop and scrolling through a long text document. These are good scores, compared to other tablets and most laptops. Unlike other Surfaces, the Surface 3's charger uses a micro USB connector, which brings it in line with other tablet chargers. This means you can also use USB power banks if you run out of battery while out and about. The charger could be better designed however. The bulk of it hangs downwards and its USB port faces downwards too. This made it a very tight fit in wall sockets located above potential obstructions such as skirting boards and kitchen worktops.

Conclusion

Because the Surface 3 has evolved from previous Surfaces, it's no surprise that it continues to feel like a series of half-measures and ill-considered compromises. The average performance of the Atom processor and the design of the keyboard cover and stand greatly limit its usefulness as a laptop. Meanwhile, performance and responsiveness problems drag down the stylus (one of the features intended to set the Surface apart from other tablets). Its heavy weight and the poor selection of touchscreen apps available from the Windows Store diminishes the Surface's appeal as a tablet. The Surface 3's USB port and ability to run multiple apps onscreen simultaneously are great features, but they would have to be very important to you to put up with all the numerous flaws that come with them.

HOW WE TEST

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

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

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

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

OUR AWARDS

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

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

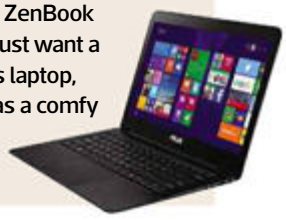
PRICES

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

VERDICT: Despite welcome features and improvements, the latest Surface is still far from the perfect laptop-tablet hybrid Microsoft claims it is

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Asus ZenBook UX305 £649 If you just want a lightweight Windows laptop, this superb model has a comfy keyboard and lengthy battery life



PHONE | **£760 (without contract)** from www.snipca.com/16443

Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge

The latest Galaxy is dramatically different

We weren't exactly blown away by Samsung's previous attempt at a curved-screen Android phone, the Galaxy Note Edge (see our review, Issue 446), but the company clearly believes there's a future in this technology. Whereas the Note 4 was curved on its right-hand edge only, the new Galaxy S6 is curved on both sides.

The S6 Edge's curved screen is far less pronounced than the one on the Note 4, barely measuring half a millimetre (half that of the Note 4). Nonetheless, the S6 Edge has almost all the same curved-screen features as its predecessor, such as the ability to display notifications, a news ticker and a bedside clock.

> "It has a gimmicky screen, but a top-notch performance and superb camera"

Sadly, much as with the Note 4, we found these gimmicky curved-screen features of little use. The S6 Edge does add the ability to swipe in from the edge to see a list of your five favourite contacts - tap the contact to get in touch via a list of options that include calling, texting and social media. You can also assign a colour to each favourite contact so that the edges light up (in that chosen colour) whenever they contact you. It would have been nice if Samsung had added similar swipe controls to commonly used apps, because this would have made the large 5in screen easier to use for those with smaller hands.

Even taking away the curved screen (and there is a curve-less version simply called the Galaxy S6), the S6 Edge is still a dramatic departure from older Galaxy S phones. The metal and glass construction looks classier and feels more rigid than its plastic predecessors. However, there's no longer a microSD card slot and the battery is now sealed in place.

The inability to add extra storage isn't a huge problem as the Edge comes with either 64 or 128GB of storage built in. The sealed battery is a concern because it only lasted 18 and a half hours when connected to O2's 3G network in central London and used for calls, web browsing, GPS and taking photos. This is below average, but it did fare much better when playing videos on a loop, clocking up a lengthy 15 hours 18 minutes. Moreover, the battery is quick to recharge with its included charger - just 10 minutes charge gave an extra two hours of video playback.

We've got no complaints about the speedy performance of the eight-core processor or the very smooth, almost flawless responsiveness of the touchscreen. The colour accuracy, contrast and sharpness of the screen are also top notch. The fingerprint reader built into the home button is much better than the one in the Note 4 and S5 (see our review, Issue 423). It now works almost instantly because you no longer need to swipe your finger slowly and deliberately over the home button.

The 16-megapixel rear camera is hugely impressive. It took sharp, well-lit shots in low light with a minimum of noise. One or two colours looked a little off in bright daylight, but otherwise we couldn't fault the superb image quality. Even the front camera (usually an afterthought) impressed us with its reasonably clear footage during a Skype call in poor light conditions.

Despite its gimmicky curved screen and underwhelming battery life, the Galaxy S6 Edge is one of the best Android phones available due to its superb camera, top-notch performance and smooth responsiveness. It's very expensive though. The curveless but otherwise identical Galaxy S6 is better value at £200 less.

SPECIFICATIONS

5.1in 2560x1440-pixel touchscreen • 2.1GHz + 1.5GHz Samsung Exynos 7420 eight-core processor • Mali T760MP8 graphics chip • 3GB memory • 64GB storage • 4G • Nano SIM • Android 5.0 Lollipop • 132g • 142x70x7mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/16441

VERDICT: There's a lot to like, but the curved screen remains gimmicky and the price is sky high

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Sony Xperia Z3 £390 (without contract) Its camera isn't as good, but this waterproof 5in Android phone does have longer battery life

LAPTOP | **£849** from www.snipca.com/16388

Apple MacBook Air 13in (early 2015)

The latest version of Apple's most popular laptop

Apple's 13in MacBook Air was for some time right up there among our favourite laptops. When it came to weight, durability, battery life and comfort it was simply peerless. However, there are now Windows ultra-portable laptops (such as Asus' ZenBook UX303LA – see our review, Issue 442) that are just as good. More competition comes from Apple's very own, more generously equipped MacBook Pro Retina range, which has become more affordable of late (see our review of the latest 13in model, Issue 449). Yet, rather than overhaul the Air in response to rivals that have upped their game, Apple has chosen to merely tweak this latest version.

The most significant change is that the Air now has a Broadwell Core i5 processor, the dual-core 1.6GHz 5250U. It's a tad faster than the Haswell Core i5 in the previous generation Air, so you'll have no problems using this laptop as your main PC. The model we tested struggled a little with our image-editing test – due mainly to the disappointingly small 4GB of memory. We'd expect more in a laptop at this price, especially as you can't fit more memory yourself. To get

> "It's still a great laptop, but it's no longer out on its own"

the maximum possible (8GB) you'll have to specify this when ordering from Apple. The same rule applies to the SSD, if you want more than 128GB of internal storage.

Thanks to the large battery and power-efficient processor, battery life was exceptional. The Air lasted just under 21 and a half hours in our light-usage test, and 11 hours 17 minutes in our more demanding test playing YouTube videos. It's lightweight too at 1.3kg, so the Air is ideal for use on the move.

Although we'd prefer the backlit keys to give a little more feedback when pressed, their generous size and travel make them very comfy to type on. The touchpad is one of the best we've seen on any laptop. It's spacious, accurate and responds well to gestures, such as swiping with two fingers to scroll. It doesn't have the new pressure-sensitive features found in the new MacBook Pro Retina's touchpad, but we don't miss them.

Although some will be disappointed by the 13in screen's 1440x900-pixel resolution, instead of the more common 1080p, we actually think this is a good thing. 1080p in a 13in screen can make text small and hard to read – especially if your eyesight is not what it was. While the display is very bright, it's a shame Apple hasn't improved the colour accuracy, which remains so-so at best.

Thankfully, Apple has left the casing design almost entirely unchanged. The metal build is still slender, sturdy and attractive. Only the Thunderbolt port (for connecting super-fast external storage) has changed – it now uses the faster Thunderbolt 2 standard. Thunderbolt devices are still pretty rare though, so this is unlikely to change your life.

SPECIFICATIONS

1.6GHz Intel Core i5 5250U dual-core processor • 4GB memory • 128GB SSD • Intel HD 6000 integrated graphics • 13.3in 1440x900-pixel screen • 802.11a/b/g/n/ac • Mac OS X 10.10 Yosemite • 1.3kg (1.6kg with charger) • 17x325x227mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/16389

Because the MacBook Air runs OS X, you'll have to buy new software if you're switching from Windows for the first time. This can be expensive, but Apple has bundled some useful free software to get you started. There's the iWork office suite, the basic but sufficient Photos app and the surprisingly sophisticated iMovie video-editing program.

The latest MacBook Air is still a very good laptop, but it's no longer the best available. If you don't need the longest battery life and can tolerate an inferior touchpad design, then a similar Windows equivalent (such as the ZenBook UX303LA) is a cheaper realistic option. If you can afford to spend £150 more, buy the 13in MacBook Pro Retina instead. It offers almost all of the same benefits, but with a superior quality screen and faster performance.

VERDICT: Still a very good laptop, but the Air no longer stands out from the crowd as it once did

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Apple MacBook Pro Retina 13in (early 2015) £999 300g heavier, but comparable battery life, faster performance and a superior screen quality make this lightweight laptop a great all-round option and better value

HOMEPLUGS | **£160** from www.snipca.com/16408

Devolo dLAN 1200+ WiFi ac

Blisteringly fast HomePlug adapters with built-in Wi-Fi

The Devolo dLAN 1200+ WiFi ac is not only one of the few HomePlug adapters to have Wi-Fi built in, but it's also one of the few to have the latest 802.11ac wireless technology. This has a theoretical top speed of 1,200Mbps, while most rival adapters offer maximum speeds of around 300Mbps.

Both adapters in this kit have passthrough power sockets, so you won't lose the wall socket they're plugged into. Though they are wider than a standard plug, they won't block adjacent sockets. The bulk of the adapters points upwards from the socket, neatly avoiding potential obstructions such as chunky skirting boards.

The first adapter is designed to sit next to your router and has a single Gigabit Ethernet socket. The second adapter has two ports so you can connect a couple of wired devices, such as your smart TV and printer.

With the adapters plugged into wall sockets one metre (1m) apart we saw transfer speeds of 325.22Mbps, and at 10m apart they reached 158.45Mbps. These are exceptionally fast and easily quick enough to stream 1080p video from a NAS to a smart TV.

Over 802.11ac Wi-Fi, we saw 279.62Mbps at 1m away. At 5m we saw an impressive 195.73Mbps, and at 10m we saw a speedy 135.73Mbps. However you connect to it, the Devolo dLAN 1200+ WiFi ac is incredibly quick. It's not cheap, but it's nonetheless great value if you need to copy or stream large amounts of data to both wired and wireless devices on your home network.

SPECIFICATIONS

Theoretical maximum speed of 1200Mbps • 2x Gigabit Ethernet ports • 152x76x40mm (HxWxD) • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/16409

VERDICT: It's expensive, but the Devolo dLAN 1200+ WiFi ac networking kit is a great way to extend your Wi-Fi range

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: Devolo dLAN 1200+ Starter Kit £119 If you can live without built-in Wi-Fi and a second Ethernet port, buy these cheaper, faster HomePlug adapters

HARD DRIVE | **£148** from www.snipca.com/16526

Toshiba Canvio Basics 3TB 2.5in

A lot of storage in a small package

As its name suggests, the Canvio Basics 2.5in is Toshiba's no-frills portable hard drive. It comes in a plain black plastic casing with no extras, such as backup software. What it lacks in looks and accessories, it more than makes up for in storage capacity – at 3TB, it's easily the largest-capacity portable hard drive we've ever tested.

Because this drive has a USB 3.0 connection, it performed well in our benchmark tests. Large files were copied at an average speed of 116MB/s, while small files were copied at a speed of 43.1MB/s. While the small-files speed is a little slower than we expected, these are both nonetheless very fast scores.

Although there are cheaper, lower-capacity versions of the Canvio Basics – 500GB, 750GB, 1TB and 2TB – the 3TB option is still very good value at just 5p per gigabyte.

VERDICT: Lots of fast storage in a pocket-sized casing

★★★★★

HARD DRIVE | **£65** from www.snipca.com/16530

Toshiba MQ02ABD100H

A hard drive and SSD in one

The snappily named Toshiba MQ02ABD100H is a hybrid drive that's supposed to give you the capacity of a hard drive and the speed of an SSD in one handy package. It has a SATA3 connection and at 9.5mm thick it should fit in most laptops, apart from very thin ultra-portable models.

You store all your files on the 1TB hard drive, while an 8GB SSD works in the background caching the files you use most often, increasing the speed at which you can open and copy them. It copied large files at an average speed of 102MB/s, which is around 25 per cent faster than a standard laptop hard drive, but there was barely any improvement at all when copying small files, managing an average speed of 33MB/s.

The MQ02ABD100H is inexpensive at 7p per gigabyte, but the almost identically priced 1TB Seagate Laptop SSHD (£65 from www.snipca.com/16531) was much faster in all our tests, making it a better-value hybrid drive.

VERDICT: Not a bad hybrid drive, but simply outclassed by the competition

★★★☆☆

PRINTER | **£109** from www.snipca.com/16413

HP Officejet Pro 8610

A good MFP let down by dubious software

If you're setting up a small office at home or in the workplace, a budget of £150 gives you a surprisingly good choice of inkjet multifunction printers (MFP). One of the latest models from HP is the Officejet Pro 8610, which can print, scan, copy and fax, and which connects to both Wi-Fi and wired networks. It's got high-spec features include a 35-page automatic document feeder (ADF) for multi-page copies or faxes, and automatic duplex (double-sided) printing.

The Officejet Pro 8610 has excellent build quality as well as a smart, uncluttered appearance. This is because everything is controlled using the colour touchscreen, which negates the need for any buttons. The touchscreen is responsive with an easy-to-use interface. On the front there's a USB port, so you can print files on – or scan files to – a USB stick without needing to use your computer. You can print wirelessly from

> "A great choice if you want a smart, economical printer"

mobile devices using Apple's AirPrint technology or HP's ePrint app.

This is an impressively fast printer, spitting out almost 20 pages per minute (ppm) of black text in draft mode and 16ppm at the Normal quality setting. It's also exceptionally quick when printing colour, racing through our mixed-graphics test at 7.2ppm. We did notice in the results of our graphics test that HP has sacrificed a little print quality to achieve these speeds. Although the results were generally of a high standard, colours were less vibrant when compared with other HP printers.

Photocopies were unusually good, with near-perfect exposure and reasonably accurate colours, but the lethargic ADF made creating multi-page copies something of a slow process, not helped by the loud buzzing sound throughout. Although HP quotes a maximum optical resolution of 1,200dpi for this scanner, we couldn't select anything higher than 300dpi in HP's Windows driver. The driver is also over-simplified; you need to go into its advanced settings just to change the paper size, for example.

But this MFP has one crucial thing going for it – low running costs. Sticking to the XL versions of HP's cartridges, the black component of a full-colour page costs 1p, while the colour part costs 3.4p.

It's just a shame the HP Officejet Pro 8610 is saddled with frustrating software, but even so it's still a great MFP. It's a good budget alternative to more expensive small-office MFPs like Epson WorkForce's range, and a great choice if you want a smart and economical MFP.

SPECIFICATIONS

4800x1200dpi maximum print resolution • 14.5ppm colour and 19ppm mono quoted speeds • 1200x1200dpi maximum scan resolution • Ethernet • USB • Wi-Fi • 300x499x469 (HxWxD) • 12kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/16414

VERDICT: A fast, flexible and very affordable MFP

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Canon Maxify MB5050 £146 A faster MFP aimed at small and home offices that's equally cheap to run and has useful cloud features

The best... Photography accessories

Joby GripTight

£25 from www.snipca.com/16532

This compact mini tripod has an adjustable grip for securely holding your smartphone. Although bulky, the grip folds up neatly for transportation. Usefully, the bendable legs can grip on to unusual surfaces such as railings and branches.

Manfrotto Pixi

£18 from www.snipca.com/16533

Although its rigid legs mean this mini tripod isn't as versatile as the GripTight, you can easily swivel and rotate its ball-shaped mount to hold your camera, giving you more flexibility when framing your shot. It works with any camera with a standard tripod fitting.

Manfrotto Off Road Backpack 30L

£169 from www.snipca.com/16534

This spacious, sturdy and water-resistant backpack is perfect for outdoors enthusiasts. It has a rigid, padded camera compartment that can be removed if you need extra space. It has plenty of pockets as well as hooks for walking sticks and tripods.

Manfrotto 190 Go

£159 from www.snipca.com/16535

The 190 Go is the most compact full-size tripod we've tested. It weighs just 1.7kg and, when folded up, measures just 45cm in length. Yet it extends to a maximum height of 146cm and its aluminium legs are very rigid.

SMARTPHONE | **£128 without contract** from www.snipca.com/16426

Microsoft Lumia 640

A great-quality budget smartphone

Microsoft's Windows Phone has always been a distant third behind iOS and Android in popularity, even though it has been available on some high-quality, low-cost phones. This latest Lumia is one of the first to be released under the Microsoft brand – the company has decided to phase out the Nokia name.

The 640 is as stylish and sturdy as previous Lumias. It may be plastic, but it's well-made, glossy and available in blue, orange, black or white. The back panel comes away easily, letting you access the battery. Hidden behind that is a microSD slot – essential for boosting the meagre 8GB storage.

> "It has a lot going for it, except the choice and quality of its apps"

The responsiveness of the 640's touchscreen is almost flawless – something which can't always be said of Android phones at this price. Despite the phone's quad-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 400 processor, performance wasn't quite top notch because of the insufficient 1GB of memory. This will limit its appeal for those who want to play games, which use a lot of resources. The choice and quality of apps available for Windows Phone still lags far behind those for iOS and Android (although this could change with Windows 10, see box below).

The 640's camera is okay in an emergency, but it's unlikely to be your first choice if you take a lot of photos due to its below-average image quality. Even in bright daylight, the focus was a tad soft and it really struggled to capture accurate colours when the weather was slightly overcast. It fared better indoors, but only in bright lighting. Photos taken in low light were far too dark.

It lasted a touch under 40 hours when connected to Vodafone's 4G network in central London and used for photography, web browsing, calls and GPS. This is an exceptional score. It also fared well when playing videos on a loop, lasting just over 10 and a half hours. Call quality was also impressive, with callers able to hear our voices loud and clear above the racket of a nearby building site effectively suppressed.

Despite its poor camera, the Lumia 640 has a lot going for it. Its battery life, build quality and responsiveness are all very impressive for such an affordable smartphone. Its biggest letdown is its software – the continued lack of choice and quality when it comes to apps. For this reason alone the second-generation Motorola Moto G (see our review, Issue 436) remains our favourite budget phone, even though it too has a few niggles. Nevertheless, if your app requirements are modest then the Lumia 640 is a pretty good option.

SPECIFICATIONS

5in 1280x720-pixel touchscreen • 1.2GHz Qualcomm Snapdragon 400 quad-core processor • 1GB memory • 8GB storage • 4G • MicroSD slot • MicroSIM • Windows Phone 8.1 • 145g • 141x72x9mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/16426

VERDICT: Lengthy battery life, smooth performance and a sturdy build – all at a low price

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Motorola Moto G 4G (second generation) £150 A well-made budget Android phone with great battery life, although its touchscreen isn't as responsive as the Lumia's

WINDOWS 10 ON PHONES

The smartphone version of Windows 10 is rumoured to be released by the end of the year. One of its most significant new features is Continuum for Phones. Connect a screen, keyboard and mouse (wireless or wired) to your phone and you can use an interface that looks exactly like the Windows 10 Desktop. Apps like the revamped built-in version of Office will automatically be adjusted for use on a bigger screen with a keyboard and mouse.

This is made possible by Windows 10's 'universal' apps. These should, in theory, work across all Windows 10 devices (from phones to PCs), adjusting their interfaces as necessary. There will also be plenty of other, smaller but no less welcome features such as a moveable, resizable keyboard and a reorganised, simplified Settings app.

intel

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NAS | **£100** from www.snipca.com/16523

WD My Passport Wireless

A wireless hard drive for photographers and film buffs

Wireless hard drives are effectively portable NAS devices designed specifically for use with tablets and smartphones. They tend to be much of a muchness, but the My Passport Wireless has a feature that sets it apart from the others. It has an SD card reader, letting photographers quickly back up their photos while out and about. You can set it to automatically import the contents of an SD card as soon as you insert it. It does this intelligently, only importing newly shot images.

> "It's great for photographers and entertaining on long journeys"

Annoyingly, it's not waterproof, and if you use your smartphone as your main camera, you can't easily upload photos to the drive without jumping through lots of hoops. You can of course stream videos and music wirelessly to your tablet or smartphone, which is useful if your mobile device's built-in storage is almost full. From a full charge, the battery will last around six hours when streaming video.

If you're at home, you can configure the My Passport to connect to your home network. It will appear to computers, network media players and smart TVs as an UPnP media server. We encountered several problems, however. Unlike the iOS version of the app, the Android app is little more than a file browser so you'll need a separate video-player app. There were occasions where the My Passport's Wi-Fi network went to sleep and we had to restart it to reconnect, which was very irritating.

The speed and strength of the Wi-Fi connection weren't outstanding; we measured 2.5MB/s from point-blank range and 0.4MB/s from a distance of 25 metres. We were still able to stream HD video to three devices within close proximity simultaneously. So if you have a few family members all wanting to access their own content, the My Passport will be up to the job.

Files are loaded on to the My Passport Wireless from your computer over USB. As the drive has a USB 3.0 port, this worked very quickly. Large files were copied at an average speed of 100MB/s.

The WD My Passport Wireless is a handy portable NAS, whether you're a keen photographer on the move or just want to keep the kids entertained on a long car journey. The fiddly apps and Wi-Fi sleep problem count against it though.

SPECIFICATIONS

465GB formatted capacity • USB3 • 802.11b/g/n • SD slot • 22x86x127mm (HxWxD) • 260g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/16524

VERDICT: A useful wireless hard drive but with some annoying flaws

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Adata DashDrive Air AE400 £22 An adapter that lets you wirelessly connect SD cards and USB sticks to your mobile device

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

Which printer should my daughter buy?

Q **My daughter is a student teacher and is looking for a colour printer that will be able to cope with reasonably heavy use, but doesn't cost the earth in terms of ink. It would preferably be AirPrint-compatible so she could print from her iPhone and iPad. Any ideas?**

Eliot Jordan

A If your daughter wants to scan as well as print, the Canon Maxify MB5050 is a good choice (£146 from www.snipca.com/16489). This AirPrint-compatible MFP is fast, printing our text test at 21.4 pages per minute (ppm) and our graphics test at 6.3ppm. Running costs are low with a page of text and graphics costing 4.1p to print; a plain text page costs just 0.9p. Colour print quality was a little drab, though. It has a recommended monthly page volume of 1,500 pages.

If your daughter doesn't need a scanner or has less to spend, then the printer-only HP Officejet Pro 6230 is a good alternative (£51 from www.snipca.com/16490, see photo above). It's slower than the Maxify at 17.6ppm for text and 4.4ppm for graphics, but print quality is better. Running costs are also a little higher, but not extortionately so at 5.4p for a page of text and graphics and 1.6p for plain text. It has a recommended monthly page volume of 800 pages.

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

SMART TV | **£400** from www.snipca.com/16399

Finlux 48FT3E242S-T

A big TV at a surprisingly low price

Finlux, a Turkish company previously owned by Nokia, have been making HD TVs since 2006, and its 48FT3E242S-T is the biggest and most attractive smart TV we've seen for less than £400. The borders around the screen are narrower than we'd expect at this price, while its sleek metal stand is a welcome change from the usual chunky plastic ones. The 48in screen is the only available size, but this shouldn't be a problem unless you have a very cramped living room.

While the display is not as bright as on some TVs we've tested, we were still able make out details without any problem in our brightly lit test room, including darker scenes in movies and TV shows. We were also pleased with the TV's wide viewing angles and impressive contrast levels.

However, you'll need to give the picture settings a little tweak to optimise image quality. Without this adjustment, videos will look a little blue-ish and washed out. There is a noise-reduction setting which is designed to improve lower-resolution broadcasts (from standard definition TV channels, for example), but we found it didn't make a huge difference.

The TV also supports 3D and comes with two pairs of 3D glasses. The only image-quality problem we encountered here was a small amount of ghosting on subtitles. This didn't prevent us from reading them, but it was annoying, and there are no 3D settings you can tweak to compensate.

The remote control (see photo right) has dedicated buttons for opening the Netflix and YouTube apps. Pressing the Hub button takes you to the main TV interface, where you'll find additional apps for BBC iPlayer, Flickr and a handful of other, lesser-known services. There's no All 4 (Channel 4's TV service), ITV Player, Demand 5 or Amazon Instant Video, but the interface is at least a doddle to navigate and loads in no time.

> "It's a bargain for such a large TV with this level of image quality"

The remote control itself would benefit from a better design. Its buttons don't provide much feedback, while some are too spongy and stiff. Still, thanks to its generous dimensions, at least you won't lose it down the back of the sofa.

While the TV isn't exactly crammed with connections, the three HDMI ports, SCART, VGA and composite inputs should be more than enough for most people. Wi-Fi is built in so you don't have to mess about with Ethernet to access online-video content. Oddly, the S/PDIF connector is coaxial rather than the more common optical S/PDIF, which means you won't be able to connect most S/PDIF-equipped soundbars. Fortunately, you can use an HDMI-equipped soundbar as an alternative.

The 48FT3E242S-T has a few flaws, but these are forgivable because £399 is a bargain for such a large TV with this level of image quality. An equivalent TV from one of the market-leading brands would cost about £100 more. However, if you don't mind paying that extra, you will get a few extra benefits. The 48in Samsung UE48H5500, for example, guarantees a wider selection of smart-TV services and a digital S/PDIF output, which are worth the additional expense. Otherwise, the Finlux 48FT3E242S-T is a great choice.

SPECIFICATIONS

48in • 1920x1080-pixel resolution • 3x HDMI • 2x USB 2.0 • 1x SCART • 1x composite • 1x VGA • 1x Ethernet • Wi-Fi • Freeview HD • 720x1084x220mm (HxWxD) • 16kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/16399

VERDICT: The Finlux 48FT3E242S-T is a bargain. It looks smart and has great picture quality, though app support is quite limited

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Samsung UE48H5500 **£499** A 48in smart TV with apps for all the major terrestrial TV catch-up and film subscription services

WEARABLE TECH | **£170** from www.snipca.com/16415

Microsoft Band

Microsoft's first wearable computer works with more than just Windows Phone

While Google and Apple have been concentrating on smartwatches, Microsoft has taken a different approach with its first wearable computer. The Microsoft Band isn't the most imaginatively named or attractive-looking device, but it's certainly bursting with technology.

As well as the ubiquitous feature showing how far you walk or run every day, the Band has heart-rate, UV and skin-temperature sensors, as well as its own GPS. This means you can leave your smartphone at home when you go for a run or bike ride, then sync your data with your phone once you're back home.

The Band is 'water resistant', but you won't be able to wear it in the shower. Light rain is about all it's designed to withstand, which is disappointing for a fitness-focused wearable. The black rubberised band is, however, sweatproof; if only the clasp and screen weren't so chunky and ugly.

> "Its unique features are undermined by design flaws"

You'll need to measure your wrist carefully before picking one of the three sizes. The Microsoft Band is one of the least flexible wearables we've ever strapped on – its rigid, bulky wristband leaves little room for wrist movement. You'll also need to wear it fairly tightly so that the heart-rate sensor can get a reading.

The 1.3in touchscreen is bright enough to read outdoors and for the most part it's very responsive, although it occasionally mistakes swipes for taps so you end up inadvertently changing a setting. The Band's tile-based interface is reminiscent of Windows 8 and Windows Phone, so it'll be familiar to many. You can customise the order and colours of the tiles using the free companion app, Microsoft Health, which is available for iOS, Android and Windows Phone from www.snipca.com/16425. Your smartphone will need to have Bluetooth LE (also known as Bluetooth 4) though.

You use the app to track your pace, distance and calories burned, as well as to view maps showing you routes you've covered. Bizarrely, there's no way to see data from the Band's special sensors. We couldn't find skin-temperature readings or data from the sensor that's meant to measure sweat and stress.

The app doesn't provide tips, suggest goals or provide encouragement, but you can compare your health statistics (anonymously) with people of similar height and weight to give you a better idea of your general level of fitness. You can use the Band with other fitness apps such as RunKeeper (for walkers and runners) and Strava (for cyclists), but it's best to do so from the start because there's no way to export data from Microsoft Health to other apps.

The Band has some non-fitness-related features, but they work best with Windows Phone. You can see notifications from your paired smartphone, but dismissing notifications on your phone won't dismiss them on the Band if you're using Android or iOS. There's a built-in mic, but you can only dictate replies to texts and emails on a Windows Phone, which also gives you the option of using the mic to control Cortana, Microsoft's personal assistant.

You charge the battery using the included USB cable, which attaches magnetically. The battery lasted around 48 hours in our test, in line with Microsoft's claims, but only as long as you don't use GPS. A 90-minute bike ride with GPS turned on reduced the battery life to around 30 hours. Frustratingly, if the battery dies completely before you sync the Band to your smartphone, you will lose all your data.

The Microsoft Band measures some genuinely useful fitness information, but it has numerous design flaws. It'd be great if it worked better with other apps but, more disappointing still, it's uncomfortable to wear because of its bulky, rigid and non-adjustable strap. If you want to keep track of your fitness or motivate yourself to be active more often, then you're better off choosing another fitness tracker.

SPECIFICATIONS

1.3in touchscreen • ARM Cortex M4 processor • Fixed wrist strap • 60g • Requires Android 4.4, iOS 7.1 or Windows Phone 8.1 smartphone or later

www.snipca.com/16416

VERDICT: Plenty of features and works with Android and iOS , but it's hardly sleek or comfortable to wear

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Fitbit Flex £70 A sleeker, cheaper fitness tracker that's far more comfortable to wear, but its sensors aren't as accurate

WIRELESS HARD DRIVE | **£94** from www.snipca.com/16513

Seagate Wireless Mobile Storage

A wireless hard drive for movie-watching travellers

Having to cherry pick which TV shows and movies to store on your low-capacity smartphone or tablet can be a pain, especially if you're about to embark on a long journey. Seagate's Wireless Mobile Storage is an elegant solution to this problem. Multiple users can wirelessly stream files stored on this portable 500GB hard drive and it can run on battery power for up to six hours.

Setting it up is simple. First, you'll need to copy your files to it, either over USB from your computer or wirelessly from your smartphone or tablet. You then play your files via a web interface on your PC or laptop or – more likely – using Seagate's app for Android, iOS or Windows Phone (free from www.snipca.com/16512).

> "We had no problems streaming video to three devices simultaneously"

We had no performance problems when streaming video to three devices simultaneously, so if you're on a long road trip individual family members can each watch different videos on separate devices. The Android version of the app can play MP4 and MKV video files, while the iOS version can handle MP4 and QuickTime. For any other file formats you'll have to use a third-party video player app. You can also set the app to automatically back up photos from your mobile device.

Wireless range and speed aren't exceptional, but they are good enough for streaming video smoothly. Video files will initially take several seconds to load even if you're right next to the wireless hard drive. We measured speeds of 2.4MB/s at close proximity, which dropped to 0.4MB/s at a distance of 25 metres. You should, therefore, try to stay as close to it as possible. File-transfer speeds over USB are slow because it only works at USB 2.0 levels. When copying large files, we saw overall file-transfer speeds of 27MB/s.

The Seagate Wireless Storage is a satisfactory wireless portable drive, but there's little to set it apart from the competition, apart from its wide choice of colours (black, green, white, red and blue). It's baffling and disappointing that it doesn't have USB 3.0. The 500GB version of the WD My Passport Wireless (see our review, page 26) is better value as it not only has a USB 3.0 port, but also an SD card reader.

SPECIFICATIONS

465GB formatted capacity • USB2 • 802.11b/g/n • 125x125x225mm (HxWxD) • 281g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/16514

VERDICT: An easy-to-use and colourful way of adding wireless storage to your mobile device, but the lack of USB 3.0 is disappointing

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Corsair Flash Voyager Go 64GB £24 If you need more storage on only one Android device, this USB stick (which is USB-On-The-Go-compatible) will do the trick

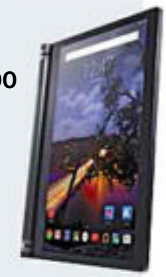
COMING SOON

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 still to be confirmed.

AUTUMN 2015

The Dell Venue 10 7000 is a 10in tablet that will cost $500 in the US (UK pricing hasn't been set). Its 'barrel edge' will house a bigger battery and a magnetic connection for its optional Bluetooth keyboard.



AUTUMN 2015

The Samsung Galaxy S6 Active, will be a water-, dust- and shock-proof version of the Android phone. Aside from a bigger battery, it's rumoured to have the same specs as the Galaxy S6.

AUTUMN/WINTER 2015

The next generation of Windows Phones running Windows 10 will be able to act as full-blown PCs when connected to a monitor or TV.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 10 June

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The £200 mini PC

Apple MacBook Retina
The first laptop with USB Type-C

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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. £200 from www.snipca.com/16353

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Kaveri Evolution
£500 from www.snipca.com/16354
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 the 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

PRICE DROP

Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF6
£219 from www.snipca.com/16355
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 H2O
£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

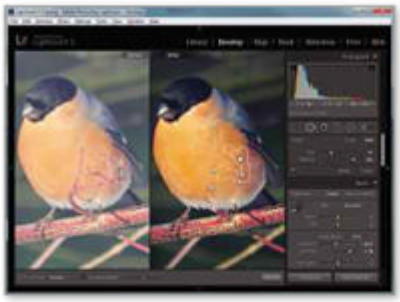
Kaspersky Internet Security 2015 has won our past four antivirus tests – an unprecedented set of results. The 2015 edition is available at an exclusive reader discount on our Software Store. Go to the link above for a one-device licence, or buy a three-device licence for just £39.99 at www.snipca.com/14221.

ALTERNATIVE: Avast Free Antivirus Almost as good as Kaspersky, but sometimes blocked legitimate software Free from www.snipca.com/16493

PHOTO EDITING

Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 5

£110 from www.snipca.com/16356
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. £64 from www.snipca.com/16357

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. £168 from www.snipca.com/16494

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

£115 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 DS215j

£143 from www.snipca.com/16187
Tested: Issue 449

This two-drive NAS enclosure has it all – fast performance, easy configuration and plenty of extra features. Its only flaw is that installation is a little fiddly – but if you want quality network storage, then this is the obvious choice.

ALTERNATIVE: Synology DS414j A four-drive NAS that's generally fast, easy to set up and use. £260 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

SMART TV

Samsung UE40H5500

£434 from www.snipca.com/16544
Tested: Issue 446

A 40in 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, 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/16496

COMPETITION

Win a Synology DiskStation DS215j

Synology's DiskStation DS215j, which won our five-star Buy It! award in Issue 449, is one of the best NAS drives we've ever tested. It has room for two desktop hard drives with a maximum capacity of 12TB, (2 x 6TB drives, which are the largest currently available). It achieved extremely fast speeds when copying both large and small files, peaking at 94.3MB/s. To enter, email your address to cacomp@dennis.co.uk by midnight 9 June 2015.

The **Synology DiskStation DS215j** is available now priced £143 from www.snipca.com/16187. For more information on Synology's products visit www.synology.com and follow Synology on Twitter @SynologyUK.

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: Epson Expression Photo XP-760 A MFP aimed at photographers with an excellent scanner and peerless photo print quality. £110 from www.snipca.com/16497

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

PRICE DROP

Crucial BX100 1TB

£285 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 is much more expensive per gigabyte. £111 from www.snipca.com/16498

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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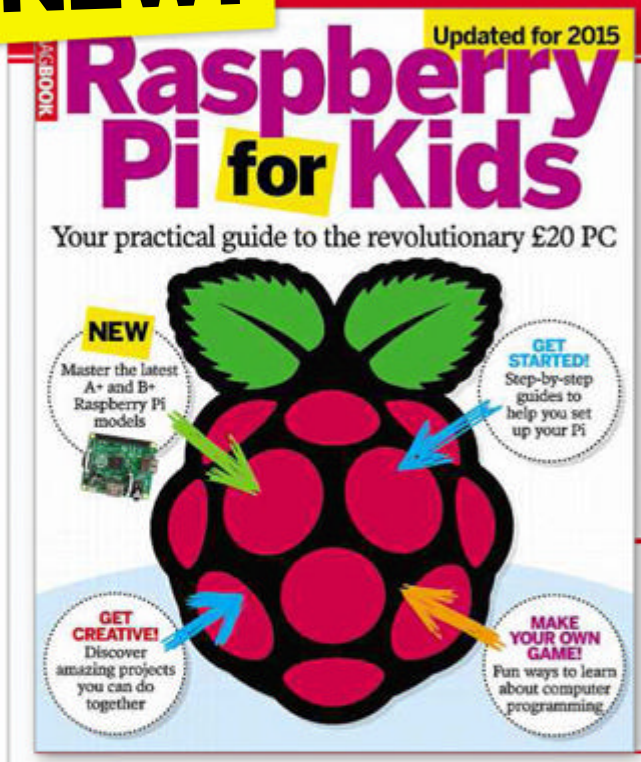
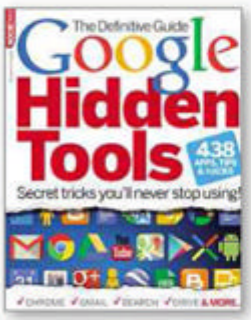


RASPBERRY PI FOR KIDS

The Raspberry Pi is the incredible £20 British computer that's taking the world by storm. It's ideal for children of all ages to experiment, play games and learn valuable skills. We've updated this 148-page book for 2015 to include instructions on mastering the new Pi models (A+ and B+), helping children learn the coding skills needed to excel at the new school curriculum. We take you step by step through the basics of setting up and configuring the Pi and introduce many fun projects for families.

BUY IT NOW FROM AMAZON
at www.snipca.com/14658

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO GOOGLE HIDDEN TOOLS



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Workshops & Tips

PULL OUT & KEEP Issue 450

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

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40 Tweak every part of Windows in one click
42 Instantly transfer files from a USB stick

PLUS
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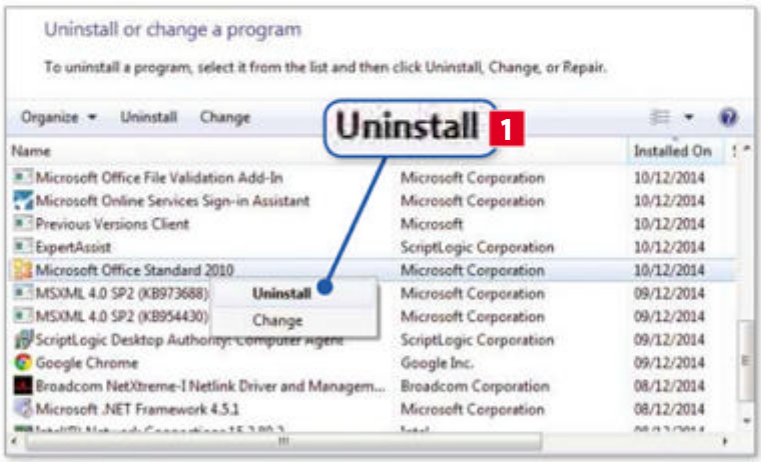
44 Phone & Tablet Tips
46 Make Windows Better
47 Make Office Better
48 Secret Tips For... Google Maps

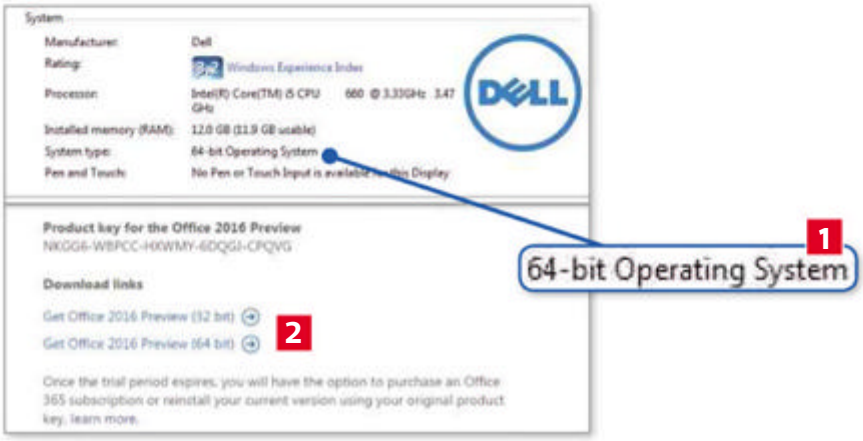
Try Office 2016 on your PC for free

What you need: Office 2016 Preview; Windows 7, 8 or 10 **Time required:** 1 hour

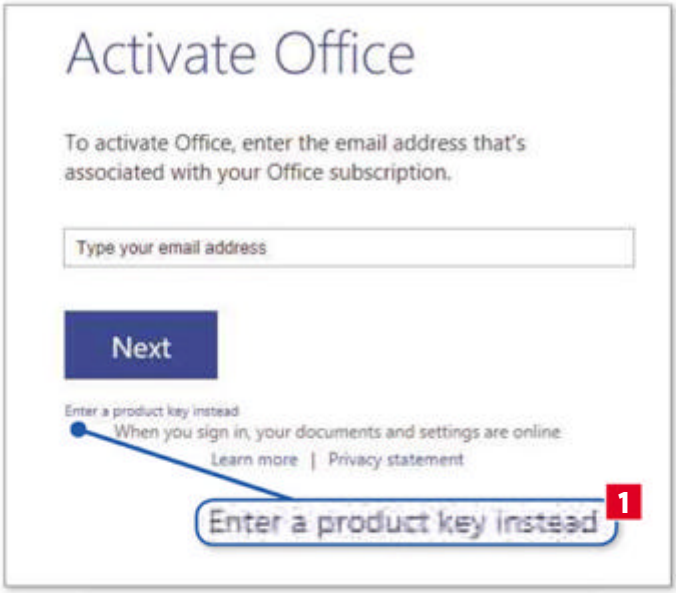
Microsoft has released the new Office 2016 Preview, which you can now install and use on your PC for free. We'll show you some of the new features in the Word, Outlook and Excel 2016 Previews and explain how to submit feedback to Microsoft on how Office 2016 can be improved in the final version. Although many of the programs look and feel similar to Office 2013, Microsoft will regularly update them with new features up until its final release later this year.

STEP 1 While you can use the Office 2016 Preview for free until its full release at the end of the year, you can't use two versions of Office on your PC simultaneously. Therefore, in order to install the Office 2016 Preview, you first need to uninstall the existing version of Office on your PC 1 via your Control Panel. Before doing so, make sure you have the installation CD for your current version of Office, so that you can re-install it later if necessary. If you don't have the CD (and its 25-digit Product Key), then the safest way to try the Office 2016 Preview is on Windows 10. See the lead Workshops in Issues 444 and 445 to learn how to install Windows 10 safely.

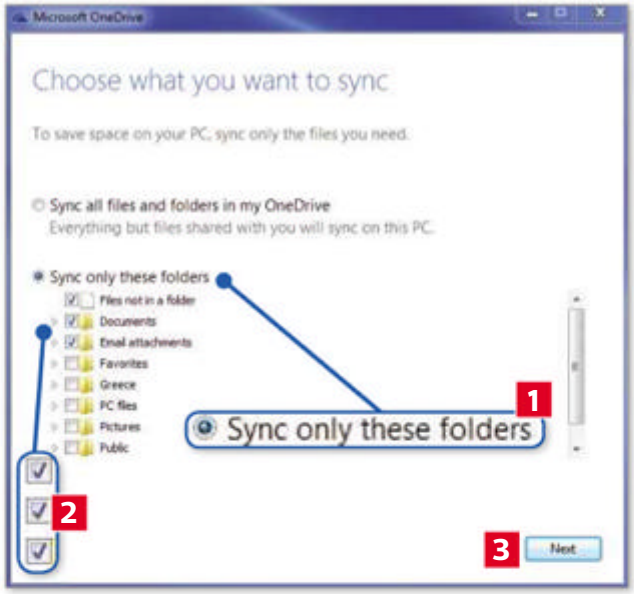




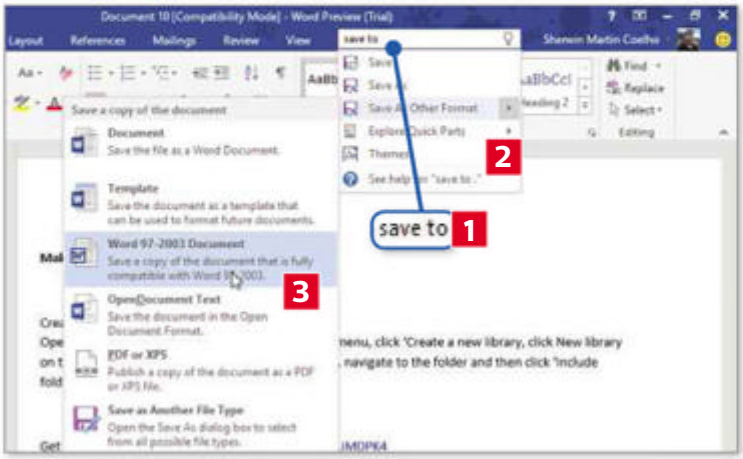
STEP 2 There are two versions of the Office 2016 Preview (64bit or 32bit). To find which version your PC's operating system is, right-click Computer, click Properties, then look under 'System type' 1 in the System section. Now go to www.snipca.com/16424, scroll to the middle section, then click the relevant 'Get Office 2016 Preview' link 2. Open the downloaded setup file, and click Run to install it.



STEP 3 Open Word 2016. In the Activate Office window that appears, click the small 'Enter a product key instead' link 1. Type NKGG6-WBPCC-HXWMY-6DQGJ-CPQVG in the Product Key field, then click Install. Next, select Office Open XML formats, then click OK. If you're not logged into your default email account on your PC, you'll be asked to log in using your Microsoft (Outlook or Hotmail) account. When it opens, you'll see a list of documents saved in your OneDrive account (this is where Office 2016 saves any new files you create).

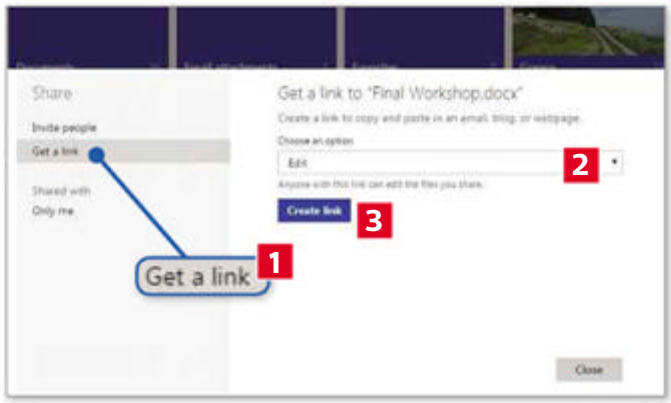


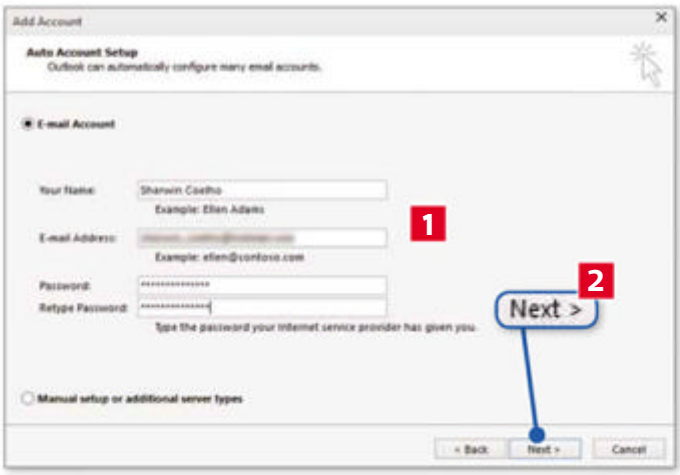
STEP 4 If you don't have OneDrive installed on your PC, you'll be prompted to install and set it up. Click 'Use the express OneDrive settings', then 'Get started'. Next, select 'Sync only these folders' 1, tick the OneDrive folders you want to sync to your PC 2, click Next 3, then Done. Now open Word 2016, then click 'Blank document' in the middle to open a new document. If you use Office 2013, you'll see the familiar Ribbon interface, with tabs at the top.

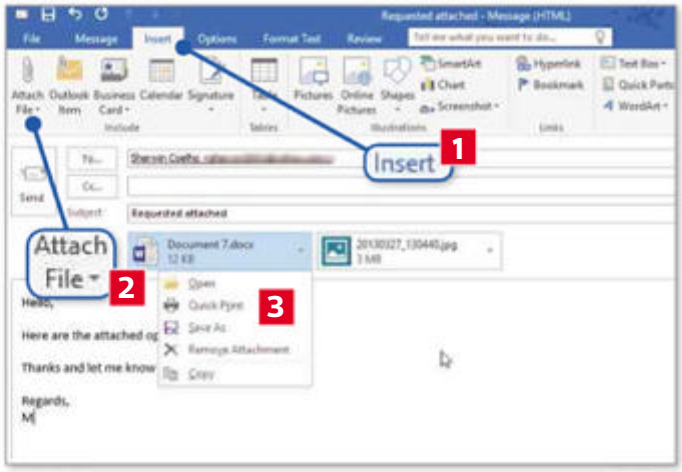


STEP 5 One of the new features in Office 2016 is the 'Tell me what you want to do' search box 1. Consider it Microsoft's reincarnation of Clippy, the personal Office Assistant that was discontinued with Office 2003. Type anything you want in this search box to see relevant options 2 with dropdown menus offering more specific options 3. The next time you click inside this search box, you'll see a list of all your searches in a 'Recently Used' column.

STEP 6 Another new feature of the Office 2016 Preview is 'Collaboration'. This lets you share a file, then see the changes others make to it as they're working on it. It's currently only available in Word 2016, but will be added to Excel and PowerPoint with future updates. You can't share a document from within Word at present, but you can share it using your OneDrive account. Log into OneDrive (www.onedrive.live.com), right-click the file you want to share, click Share, then 'Get a link' 1. Ensure the dropdown menu is set to Edit 2, then click 'Create link' 3. Send the link to your collaborator. Now, you'll see their name next to any changes they make in real time as they're editing the document.

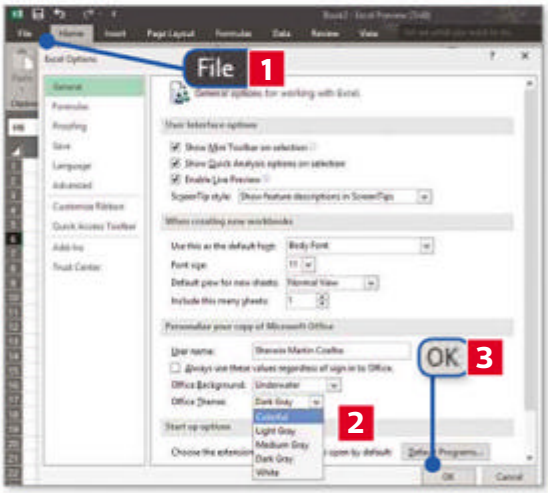




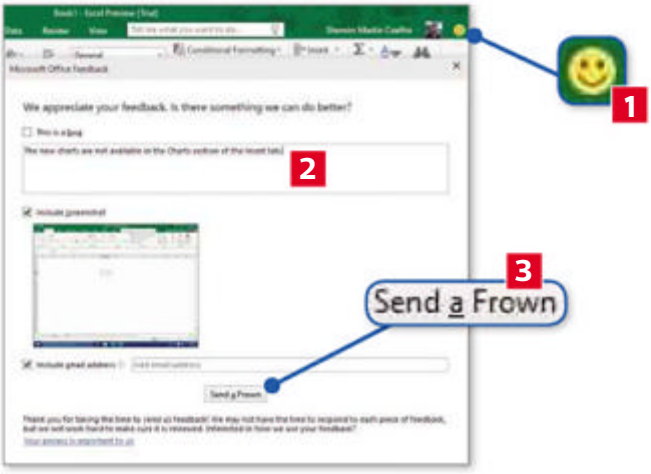


STEP 7 Now to set up Outlook 2016. Open Outlook 2016 Preview, then click Next. In the 'Add an Email Account' section, select Yes, then click Next. Type your login information 1, then click Next 2. Enter your login details again if you need to, then click Finish (after you see a message saying your account is configured and ready to use). The interface is similar to Outlook 2013, but with the new 'Tell me what you want to do...' search box at the top.

STEP 8 After using Outlook 2016 Preview for a few days, you'll see a new Clutter folder (below Inbox) in the left-hand pane. This will contain emails that Outlook deems as low priority. Click New Email at the top left to start composing one. To attach a file, click the Insert tab 1, then click the Attach File dropdown menu 2. You'll see a list of files in your OneDrive account. To add a file from your PC, click 'Browse this PC' at the bottom, then navigate to and attach the relevant file. Click the new dropdown menu beside any of the attached files to see further options 3. Finally, click Send.



STEP 9 For the Excel 2016 Preview, Microsoft is planning to introduce new types of charts and graphs, but these are not yet available. One small addition to Excel (and the other Office programs) are new background theme colours. Open a program (Excel in our screenshot), click File 1, Options at the bottom left, then the Office Theme dropdown menu 2. Whereas Office 2013 had only three options here (White, Light Gray and Dark Gray), the Office 2016 Preview has added two more – Medium Gray and Colourful. The latter changes your theme to its corresponding program colour – Word is dark blue, Excel green and PowerPoint orange. Select the one you want, then click OK 3.



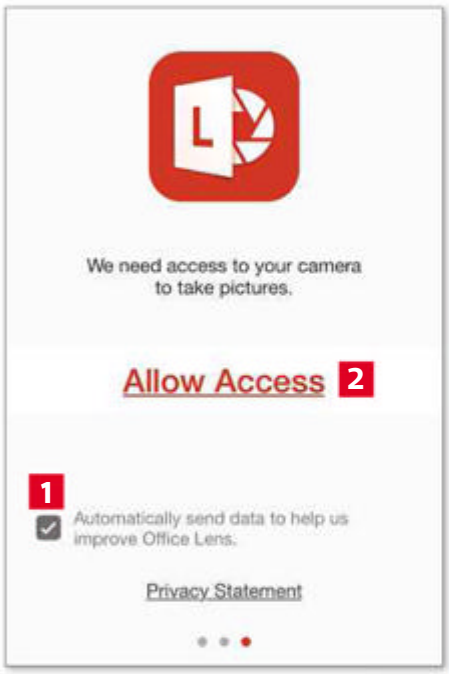
STEP 10 The Office 2016 Preview lets users test the suite, then provide suggestions for improvements before the final version is released. There are two ways to leave feedback: by sending a 'smile' when something works perfectly or by sending a 'frown' when it doesn't. Click the smiley-face icon at the top right 1 to see both options, then click the one you want. Type your feedback in the box below 2. Tick the boxes below if you want to include a screenshot and your email address. When you've finished, click the 'Send a Frown/Smile' button 3 to submit your feedback.

Turn your phone into a scanner

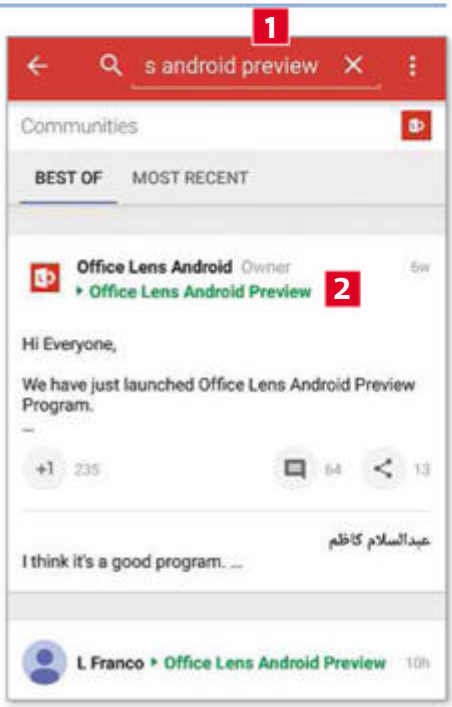
What you need: Office Lens; Android phone or iPhone **Time required:** 20 minutes

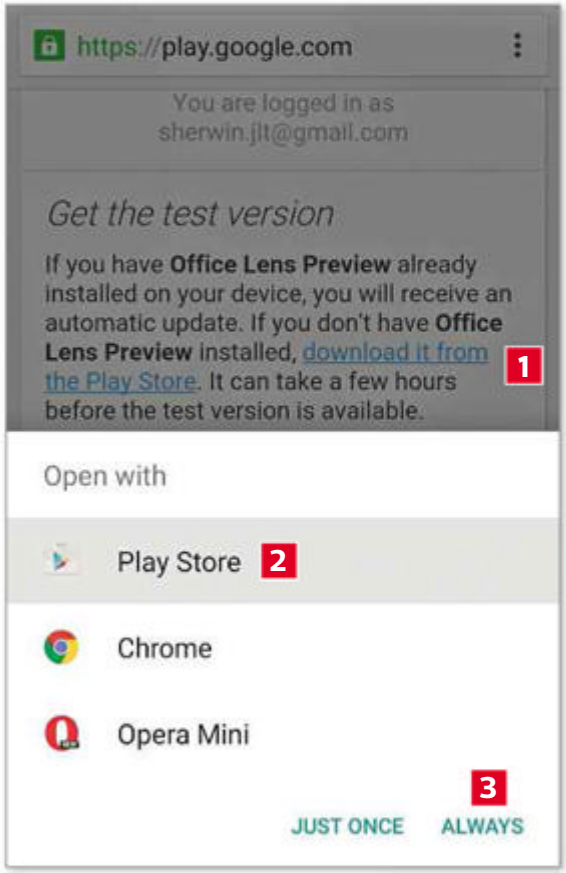
Not everyone has a scanner but with Microsoft's new free app, Office Lens, you don't even need one. This brilliant app lets you take a photo of any document with your phone and then converts it into a scanned file. Because the image quality is so good, you can even use it to make a digital copy of your receipts and printed photos. You can install and use the iOS app immediately, though the Android app needs a little setting up before using.

STEP 1 Install the iOS app from www.snipca.com/16516, then open it and swipe across the introductory screens. On the third screen ensure the box is ticked 1, then tap Allow Access 2. iOS users should now skip to Step 4. At the time of writing, you couldn't install the Android app directly from the Play Store because it's still only available as a Preview version. To install it, you need to join the Office Lens Android Preview Community on Google+, then become an 'app tester'. We'll explain this process in Steps 2 and 3.



STEP 2 First, open Google+ (the app with the red G+ icon) on your device and log in with your Gmail account. Now tap Home at the top, then the search field, type office lens android preview 1 and tap Enter. Now tap one of the green Office Lens Android Preview links 2 On the web page that opens, tap the red Join Community button, then tap Yes or No (when asked whether you want to display this information to other people in your Google+ profile).



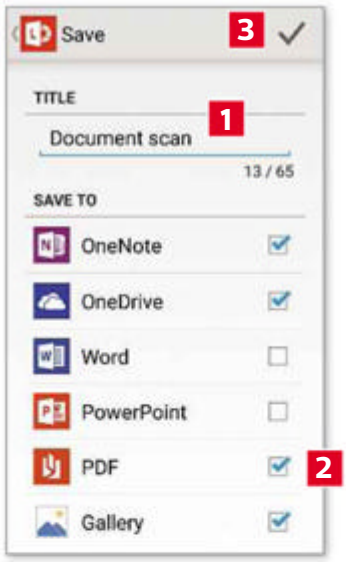


STEP 3 Now scroll down the page, then tap the 'Become a Tester' link, select Chrome, then Always to open the link in your browser. Next, tap the blue Become A Tester button, then tap the 'download it from the Play Store' link 1, select Play Store 2, then Always 3. Now tap Install, then Accept to install Office Lens on your device. Finally, tap Open (to launch the app) and Accept. Swipe across the introductory screens. On the final screen ensure the box is ticked (to send anonymous data usage to Microsoft), then tap 'Start using Office Lens'.

STEP 4 Now point your camera at your document (we're using a page from the last issue of *Computeractive*). You'll see a white border around it 1. Don't worry if the borders don't fit precisely – we'll show you how to correct this in the next step. If the document appears blurry, tap the area within the document to set the focus 2 and sharpen the image. Tap the camera icon 3 to take your photo. Now continue to Step 5 below.

STEP 5 Regardless of which angle you take your photo from, it appears as a rectangular scanned file (see screenshot). If you think the file's borders aren't cropped correctly, then tap the Crop icon 1 to see four white dots on each corner. Zoom into the image using the expand gesture if you need to. Position each dot correctly on the document's corners, then tap the tick icon at the bottom to finalise the image. When you're happy with your scanned file, tap the floppy disk icon 2 to save it.

STEP 6 Name your file 1. In the Save To section below you can choose where you want to save it by ticking the relevant boxes. OneNote and Gallery are ticked by default, but you should also save it to OneDrive. Tick PDF 2 if you want to save it as a PDF file. This PDF will be saved in the 'office lens' folder in your Pictures folder in OneDrive. Tap the save tick 3 when you've finished. The first time you do this, you'll be prompted to log into your Microsoft account, after which you'll see the file- transfer progress to each of your chosen destinations. Tap any of the items to open them within that location.

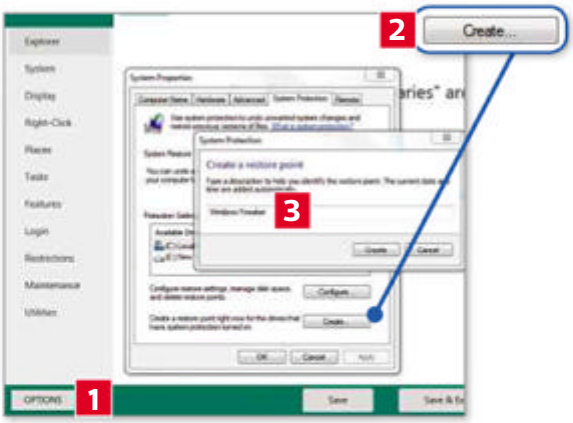


STEP 7 In most cases, the default app settings should give you a high-quality scanned file. However, there are a few tweaks you can make if needed. For example, open the app, then tap the flash icon 1 to toggle between automatic flash and flash off. If you're scanning a printed photo or text written on a whiteboard, tap the mode icon 2 and select the relevant mode. You can change your camera's resolution by tapping the three dots 3, then tapping Resolution and setting it higher (or lower). Recent History (also accessed by tapping the three dots) keeps a list of all your scanned files.

Tweak every part of Windows in one click

What you need: Windows Tweaker; Windows 7 or 8 **Time required:** 30 minutes

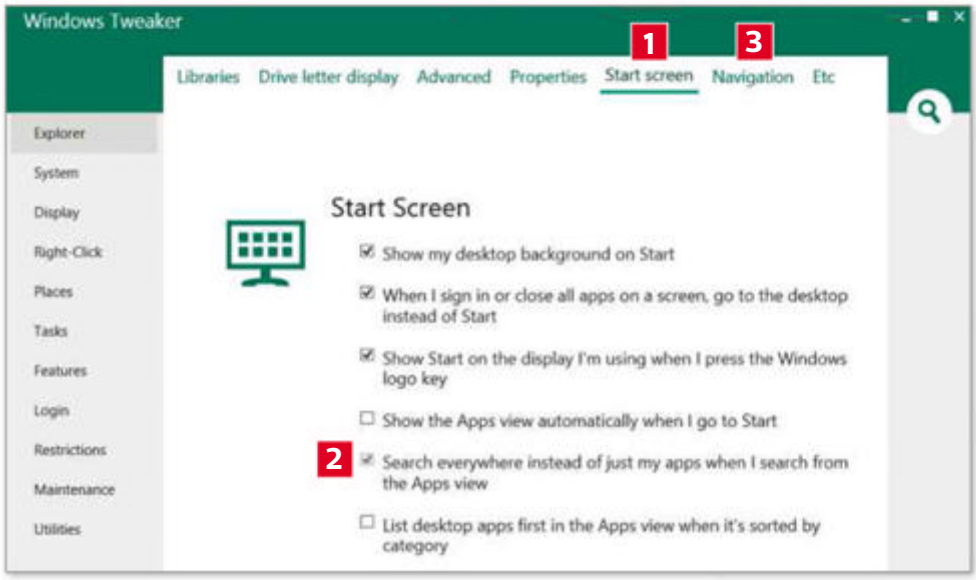
Making simple tweaks to Windows – for example, adding items to your right-click menu or preventing your PC from rebooting after updates have installed – can be daunting without a certain amount of technical know-how. To simplify these tasks use Windows Tweaker, a free program that lets you make over 100 tweaks to your PC by selecting options and ticking boxes. You can then apply all these changes to your PC with one click. It's one of the easiest programs we've ever used.

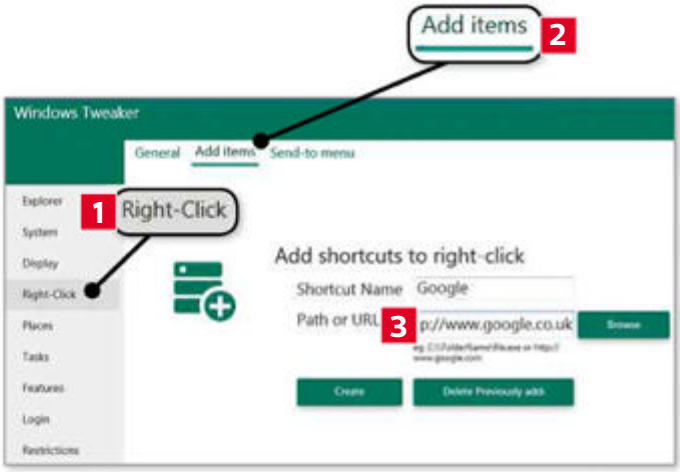


STEP 1 Download the program from www.snipca.com/16433 by clicking the Download Installer button. Click the downloaded setup file and follow the instructions to install it. You should first create a system restore point so you can roll back any changes later, if you need to. In Windows Tweaker, click the Options button 1, then 'Create system restore point'. In the System Properties window that opens, click Create 2, type a description 3, click Create in the System Protection window, then Close.

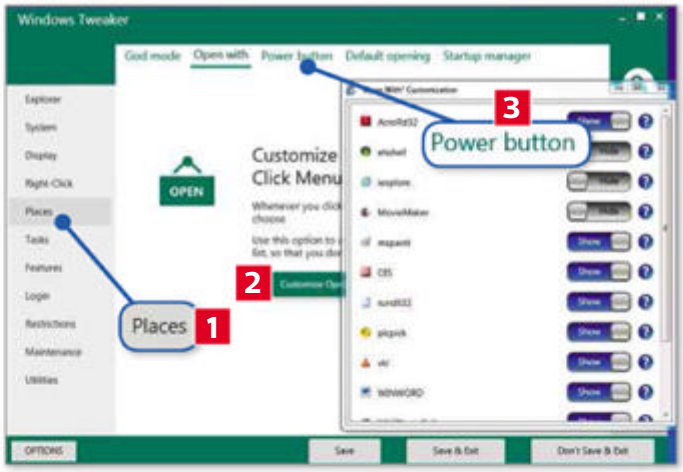
STEP 2 Windows Tweaker contains a simple screen with clear instructions. The sections on the left 1 represent areas of your system you can tweak. The tabs at the top 2 represent specific items within those sections. You can also use the search icon 3 to search for, then tweak specific areas of your PC (for example, the Start menu). Click the relevant option to begin tweaking it.

STEP 3 We'll now show you how to carry out some of the most common PC tweaks. If you use a Windows 8 PC, click the 'Start screen' tab 1. Here, for example, you can tick the first box to display your Desktop background on the Modern tile interface. Tick the fifth box 2 if you want to search your entire PC when typing in the Modern tile interface. Now click the Navigation tab 3. Here you can switch the Charms bar on and off by ticking or unticking the first box.

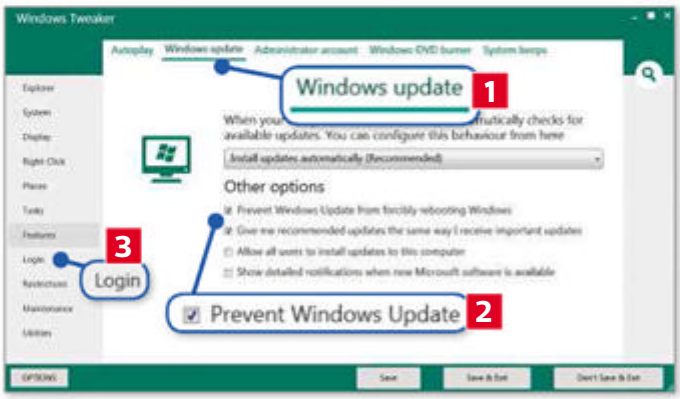




STEP 4 Windows Tweaker makes it easy to customise your right-click menu. Click the Right-Click option 1, then the General tab to see a list of actions (including 'Copy to Folder' and 'Move to folder'). Simply tick the relevant boxes to add these to your right-click menu. Next, click the 'Add items' option 2 to add a program or website to your right-click menu. Name your right-click shortcut in the Shortcut Name field. In the 'Path or URL' field 3, type a URL (for example, http://www.google.co.uk) or click Browse and navigate to a program's setup file (usually in the Program Files folder on your C: Drive), then click Create.

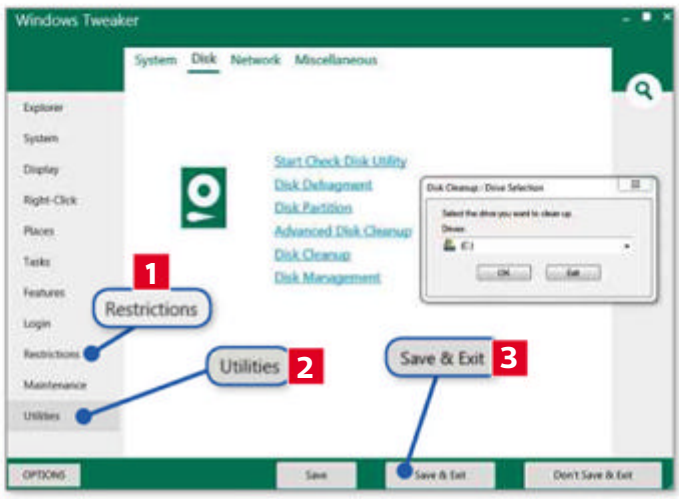


STEP 5 Whenever you right-click a file, then move your cursor to 'Open with', you'll see a list of the programs on your PC that can open that file. If you want to limit this list to those programs you prefer to use, then click the Places option 1, the 'Open with' option, click the Customise Open With button 2 and click the sliders beside the programs you want to hide. The 'Power button' 3 tab lets you change your PC's power button from the default 'Shut down' to Sleep, 'Log off' or Lock. Click the 'Startup manager' option, then the Launch Startup Manager tab to see all the third-party programs that launch with your PC. Click all the sliders to turn them off and make your PC boot faster.

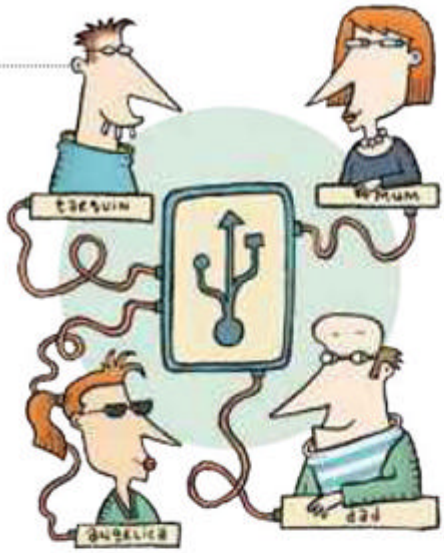


STEP 6 Next, click the Features option, then the 'Windows update' tab 1. Tick the first box 2 to stop Windows rebooting your PC after an automatic update has been installed. You can also prevent other users from updating your PC by unticking the third box. If the Windows error-alert sounds annoy you, click the 'System beeps' tab and tick 'Turn off System Beeps'. Likewise, to prevent Windows from playing the Windows start-up sound whenever you boot your PC, click the Login option 3, the 'Startup sound' tab and untick the box.

STEP 7 Click the Restrictions option 1 to see further changes you can make to File/Windows Explorer, your Start menu and your Taskbar. The Utilities option 2 contains four tabs – System, Disk, Network and Miscellaneous. Clicking the links within any of these options opens that system window on your PC, from where you can make any changes you want. When you've finished making your changes, click Save & Exit 3, then Restart Now to restart your PC with all the tweaks that you've made.



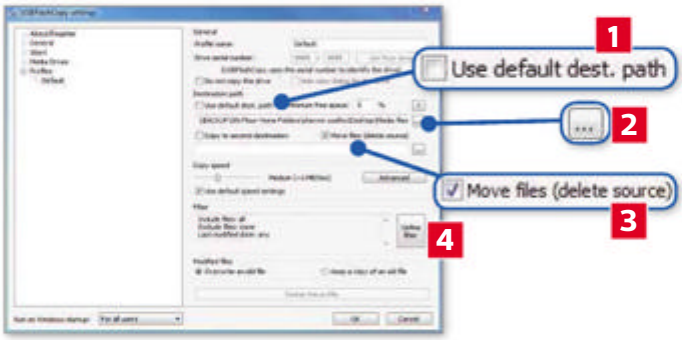
Instantly transfer files from a USB stick



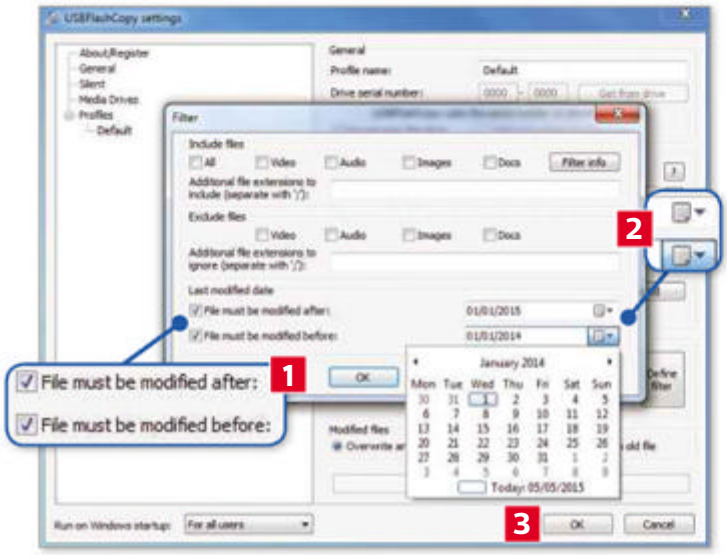
What you need: USBFlashCopy; Windows 7 and 8 **Time required:** 10 minutes

USBFlashCopy is a brilliant, free portable tool that, with just one click, copies files from any USB stick, hard drive or memory card you connect to your PC. In this Workshop, we'll show you how to tweak its Default 'profile' (setting) to save the copied files to a folder of your choice. You can also choose to move the files (rather than copy them), and filter the files you copy according to their format or the date they were last modified.

STEP 1 Go to www.usbflashcopy.com and click the 'Download (No installer)' link below the main image. Click the downloaded setup file, Run, then double-click the USBFlashCopy icon in your notification area 1 to open it. First, click the 'Run on Windows startup' dropdown menu and select 'Just for this user' or 'For all users' 2. Next, click the Default 3 option under Profile. The program creates a folder in your My Documents folder called Removable Media Backups, where your copied files will be stored.



STEP 2 If you want to copy the files to another folder, then untick 'Use default dest. path' 1, click the button with three dots 2, select an alternative folder, then click OK. If you want to move the files (thereby deleting them from your USB storage device), tick 'Move files (delete source)' 3 and click OK. Click the 'Define filter' button 4 to see the types of files you can copy. Untick All at the top right, then tick the specific file formats you want to copy. You can also exclude certain file formats by ticking them in the 'Exclude files' section.



STEP 3 You can limit the transfer to files modified (created, changed or updated) before or after a certain date. To do that, tick 'File must be modified after' or 'Files must be modified before' 1, click the calendar dropdown menu beside that option 2, then choose the date(s). Click OK in the Filter window when you've finished, then OK 3 in the main window. Now insert your USB storage device into your PC, then click the 'Use default profile' button to transfer the files on it according to the parameters you set.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 10 June

- Sharpen your blurry videos for free
- Fix Office programs with new Microsoft tool
- Send photos from tablet to PC without email
- Block junk when installing software

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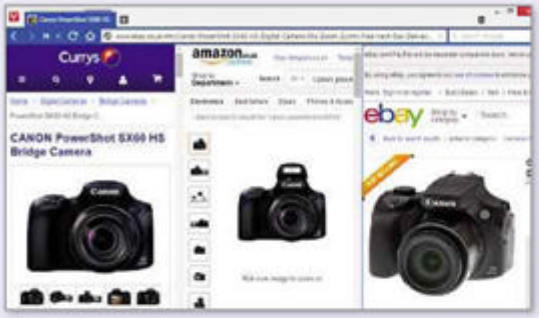
TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Compare multiple shopping sites in the same window

Thanks to your Workshop on Vivaldi (see the 'Browse the web faster than ever Workshop in Issue 446), it's now my default browser. The other day I was prompted to install the latest version of the Vivaldi Technical Preview (www.snipca.com/15345).

Version 3 improves on many of the features mentioned in the Workshop, but its standout feature is the new option to see multiple websites within the same window. Vivaldi refers to this as File Tab Stacking. Where this feature really shines is when you want to compare prices for shopping or holiday deals, because it saves you having to switch between tabs or browsers.

First, open the websites you want to compare in different tabs. Now click any of the tabs and drag it over any other (the 'main tab'). Wait until the main tab turns grey, then release your mouse. Now repeat this by dragging the other tabs to the main tab. You'll only see the main tab, but above it you should see small tiles containing your other tabs/websites.



Now right-click the main tab, then click Tile Tab Stack. You'll now see all the websites separated into vertical columns, but in one window (see screenshot). Use the scroll bars on the side and bottom to navigate the sites. To separate them into individual tabs again, simply right-click the main tab, then click Ungroup Tab Stack.

Alan Worthington

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

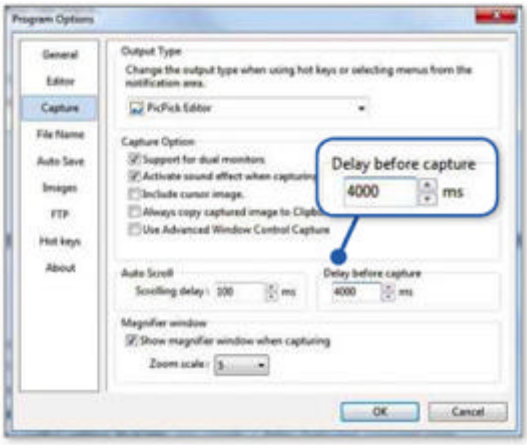
SCREEN CAPTURE

Set a delay before taking a screenshot

The other day I was trying to take a screenshot of a program with several dropdown menus using PicPick (www.snipca.com/15176) - the free screen-capture program that you've highly praised in previous issues. However, I noticed that every time I pressed the Print Screen key on my keyboard to take a screenshot using PicPick, the program I was trying to capture would close. After some tinkering around, I found a solution.

PicPick has a useful (but lesser-known) setting that lets you set a time delay between pressing Print Screen and when a screenshot is taken. Open PicPick, click File at the top left, Program Options, then click the Capture option on the left. You'll see a 'Delay before capture' field which is set to 0 by default. This field is measured in 'ms' (milliseconds), so to create a delay of one second, type 1000 into the field. I find that a four-second delay works best, so type 4000 into the field, then click OK (see screenshot below left). Now, when you press the Print Screen key, the screenshot will be taken after four seconds, giving you enough time to navigate to whichever screen you need to.

Frank Hudson



MUSIC STREAMING

Recover deleted Spotify playlists

My teenager daughter was listening to music on Spotify on my phone the other day and she accidentally deleted two of my playlists, each of which had over 100 songs. I gave up hopes of getting those playlists back until my friend told me how to recover deleted playlists.

Go to www.spotify.com/uk on your PC, click Log In at the top right, log into your account, then scroll down and click 'Recover playlists' on the left. You'll see all your deleted playlists listed. Click Restore to restore them to your account, and thereby to all your devices.

Michael Mason

PRODUCT KEY RECOVERY

Find the product key for your version of Office

I read that Microsoft has now made the Office 2016 Preview free for everyone to download and use (See the lead Workshop on page 35 to learn how to install and use it safely). I was about to give it a go when I read that before installing it, you first need to uninstall your current version of Office.

Microsoft have not stated until when you can use the Office 2016 Preview for free, but a useful website mentioned that you should ensure you have the installation CD for your current Office version, along with its 25-character product key, in case you need to re-install this version later. The problem is I have my Office 2007 installation CD, but the product key is blurred out.

Luckily, I found a free program called Magic Jelly Bean Keyfinder that can tell you your Office key in a second. Go to www.snipca.com/16488 and click the Download button below Magic Jelly Bean Keyfinder. Click the setup file and follow the steps to install the program. When it launches, click your version of Office on the left to see the 25-letter CD Key. Copy and keep this safe in case Microsoft makes Office 2016 a paid-for version after release and you need to reinstall to your current Office version.

Alison Moore

Phone and Tablet Tips

Brilliant things to do on your device

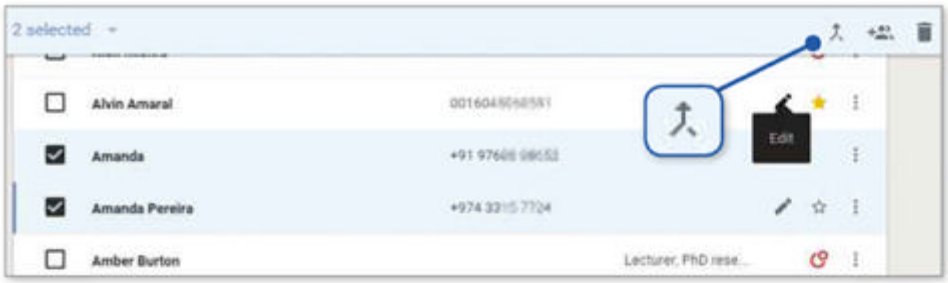
ANDROID

Get notified of new apps as soon as they're released

Google has introduced a new option that lets you pre-register for new apps and games before they're released. So the next time you read or hear about a forthcoming Android app you'd like to try, you can set up an alert that tells you as soon as it's available to install.

In a lot of cases, a developer will add their forthcoming app to the Play Store before it's available. In this case, you can simply search for the app, open it and tap the Pre-Register button.

At the time of writing, the only app available to pre-register is a game called Terminator Genisys: Revolution (see screenshot below). When you search for it (or any future apps) using the Play Store search bar, you'll see a Coming Soon option below the app. Tap the game, then tap Pre-Register, then Understood. As soon it's released you'll see a notification on your device. Tap it to open the app within the Play Store, then install it.



ANDROID

Edit your phone's contacts from your PC

Editing your contacts on your phone can be fiddly and time-consuming because your phone's keyboard is so small. However, because any Gmail contacts on an Android phone are automatically backed up to Google's servers, a quicker way to edit your contacts' details is via the new Google Contacts Preview on your PC.

On your PC, go to www.google.com/contacts and log in using the Google account you use on your phone. Moving your cursor to any of the contacts in the list reveals more options. For example, to delete contacts, simply tick the box next to those you no longer need, then click the Bin icon at the top right.

If you have two or more entries for the same person (perhaps with different numbers or email addresses), then you should merge them. To do that, tick both entries of that person, then click the Merge icon (an arrow with two ends) at the top right (see screenshot).

To edit a contact's details, move your cursor to their entry in the list, then click the small pen icon on the right. You'll see options to edit their existing details or add more – including a photo, nickname, email address, phone number, address and birthday. Click Save at the top right when you've finished. To add a new contact, click the circular blue '+' button at the bottom right of the page then add their details. You can also mark a contact as a favourite by clicking the star icon on the right. These contacts will then appear in your app's Favourites section.

ANDROID & iOS

Use the new Opera Mini browser

The free Opera Mini web browser app (Android: www.snipca.com/16460; iOS: www.snipca.com/16461) has recently been updated with a number of new features, including a redesigned interface. Open the app to see the 'Speed dial' – a list of tiles for websites that you can tap to open. You can add any of your

Best New Apps

What you should install this fortnight

BBC News
Free
Android: www.snipca.com/16464
iOS: www.snipca.com/16465

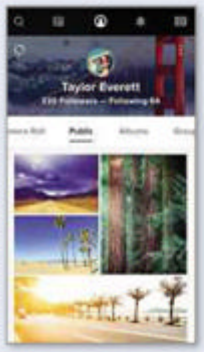
The BBC News app's new 'compact mode' lets you reduce the size of its tiles so you can see more news items. Another new feature lets you see items you've added to the 'My News' category as 'carousels' that you can quickly swipe across. To activate these features, go to Settings and tick the first two boxes.

FotoFox
Free
Android: www.snipca.com/16468
iOS: www.snipca.com/16469

If you're running out of space on your device, then you should install this brilliant new app, which compresses your photos and videos to only 10 per cent of their size. The original files are stored on FotoFox's secure servers and accessible within the app, from where you can download them with one tap.

Flickr
Free
Android: www.snipca.com/16466
iOS: www.snipca.com/16467

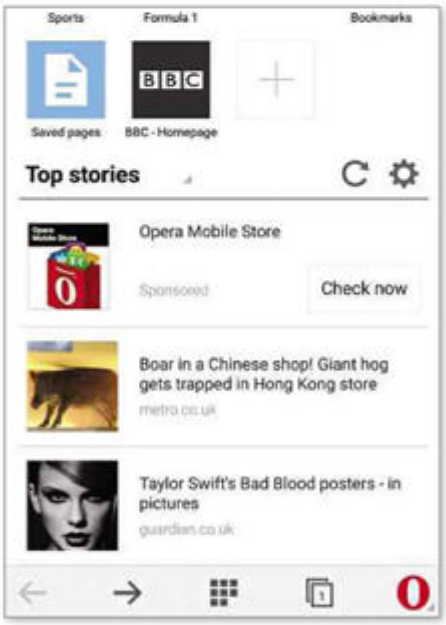
Flickr now automatically uploads all the photos and videos on your device, which is a great way to make use of its 1TB of free space. It also has a new 'timeline' design, making it easier to categorise, share or delete multiple photos at once. You can also edit photos and add effects from within the app.



favourite websites to this list by tapping the '+' symbol at the bottom, then typing the website's URL.

On Android, below these tiles you'll see all the latest news stories (see screenshot below). On iOS, swipe to the right to access this section (called Discover). These stories are gathered from 13 news categories (including Business, Entertainment, News, Science, Sports and Technology). Tap the cog icon to see all the categories, then tap those you want to exclude from your news feed.

Start typing a search term or website name in the search bar at the top and you'll see a list of relevant results, which you can tap to open. By default, Opera Mini compresses your data, which is particularly handy if your mobile plan comes with a limited data allowance. Click the red 'O' icon at the bottom of your screen to see how much data the app has saved you compared with other mobile browsers.



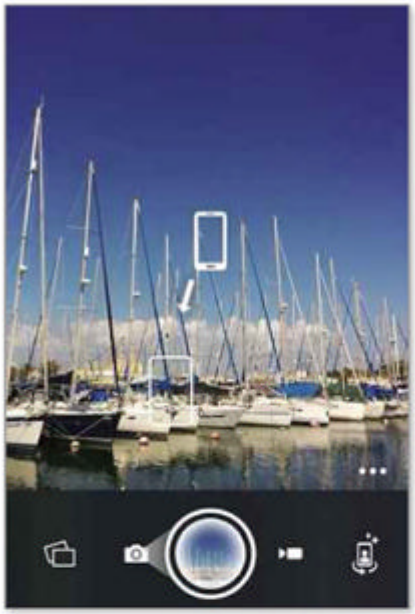
ANDROID & iOS

Take better photos on your device

Cameras on phones are getting better all the time, but all photographers need some help to take the perfect picture. Camera 51, the free Android app (www.snipca.com/16462) that's recently launched on iOS (www.snipca.com/16463) provides expert assistance. It analyses the subject matter of your photo, then – using some of the traditional principles of photography – tells you exactly which angle to take the picture from for the perfect shot.

When you point your camera at an object, you'll see a small phone icon on your screen. After a few seconds, the app analyses the subject matter, then places another rectangular icon on your screen. You need to move your camera, changing the angle of the shot. When both icons merge entirely, you're ready to shoot.

Open the app, then tap Start to launch your device's camera.You'll see the phone icon on your screen, then the rectangular icon with an arrow indicating which direction to point your device for the best shot (see screenshot right). When you manage to merge both icons, you'll hear a sound and see a thumbs-up sign. Now tap the circular icon at the bottom to take your photo.



Games With Kids

What to play together on your phone and tablet

AGES 0-5

The Joy of Reading

£2.99 www.snipca.com/16471 (Android)
£2.99 www.snipca.com/16472 (iOS)

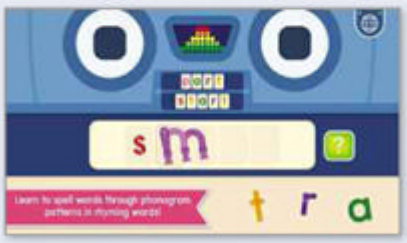
This app features nine games designed to help your kids learn to read and write. Our favourites involve tracing letters on screen with your finger and completing a word by tapping letters in a list. You can create a profile for each child to track their progress.

AGES 6-10

Endless Wordplay: School Edition

£4.49 www.snipca.com/16473 (iOS)

The interactive lessons in this app will make spelling fun for your kids. The app uses sequences of similar-sounding and rhyming words to help your kids learn and memorise spellings. After correctly spelling a word, the app's characters will then describe its meaning in an animation.

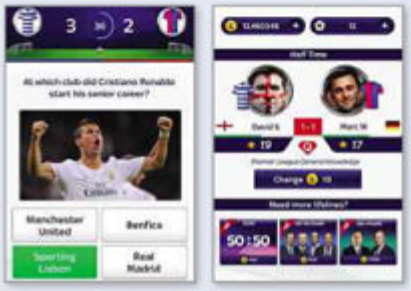


AGES 11-16

Sky Sports Soccer Quiz

Free www.snipca.com/16474 (Android)
Free www.snipca.com/16475 (iOS)

Challenge your teenager's knowledge of football with this new quiz app. There are loads of categories to choose from, including Premier League, International and Transfers. Each correct answer wins you virtual coins, which you spend on 'lifelines'. These include 50:50 and asking Sky Sports pundits Gary Neville and Jamie Carragher for help.

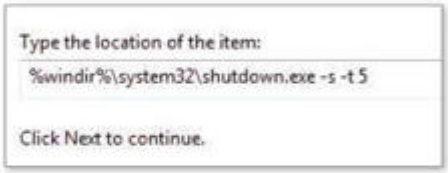


WINDOWS 7, 8

Shut down your PC with one click

Shutting down your PC often requires at least three clicks, but there's an easy way to speed up this process. This involves creating a Desktop shortcut that you click to shut down your PC.

To create this, right-click any blank area on your Desktop, move your cursor to New, then click Shortcut. In the Shortcut field, type %windir%\system32\shutdown.exe -s -t 5 (here 's' stands for shut down and 't 5' means your PC will shut down after 5 seconds – see screenshot below). You could in theory replace 't 5' with 't 0', but it's always a good idea to give your PC a few seconds to close any processes that may be running in the background.



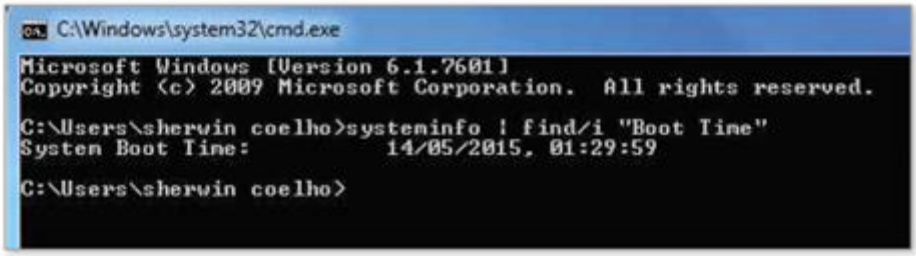
Now click Next, name the shortcut whatever you want, then click Finish. You'll see a small icon on your Desktop with the name you assigned. Clicking it will immediately start closing your programs and processes and shut down your PC. You can even pin this shortcut to your Taskbar by right-clicking it, then clicking 'Pin to Taskbar'.

WINDOWS VISTA, 7, 8

Find out when you last booted your PC

If you want to know exactly when your PC last booted up (if you suspect it's restarting without your knowledge, for example), there are two ways to do this. The first is to press the Windows key on your keyboard, type cmd, then press Enter to open Command Prompt. Type systeminfo | find/i "Boot Time", then press Enter. After a few seconds, you'll see the exact date and time your PC last booted up (see screenshot below).

You can also find out for how long your PC has been switched on (in days, hours, minutes and seconds) using Windows Task Manager. Press Ctrl+Alt+Delete, then click Start Task Manager. Now click the Performance tab and look in the System section at the bottom right. The Up Time field tells you for how long your PC has been switched on.



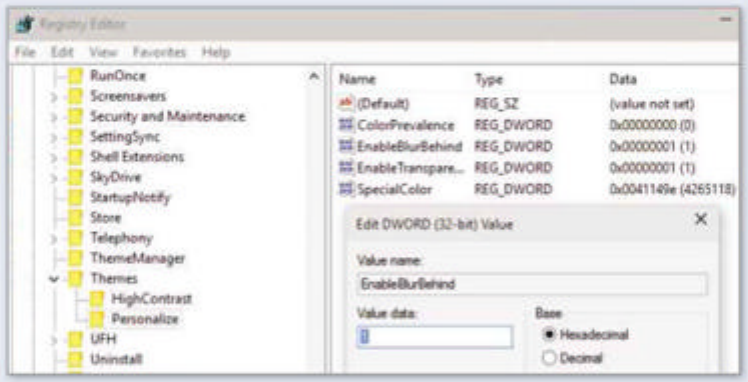
WINDOWS 10

Make your Start menu and Taskbar transparent

Microsoft is rolling out updates to the Windows 10 Technical Preview thick and fast. One feature in the latest Build (10074) lets you make the Start menu and Taskbar transparent. This effect, called Aero Glass, is in the Windows 7 Start menu and Taskbar, but not in Windows 8.

First, check your Windows 10 Technical Preview Build number at the bottom-right corner of your screen. If it isn't Build 10074, you need to update your version. To do that, click the Start menu, Settings, 'Update & security' at the bottom, then click the 'Advanced options' link at the bottom right. Select 'Automatic (recommended)' from the dropdown menu at the top, tick the box below, then scroll to the bottom and select Fast in the dropdown menu below. Now click the back icon in the top-left corner, then Install.

When your PC reboots after updating, check to see whether your Taskbar is transparent. If not, you can enable the effect from within the Registry Editor. Click the search field at the bottom, type <regedit>, press Enter, then Yes to open the Registry Editor. Now navigate through the following keys by clicking the dropdown menus beside each one: **HKEY_CURRENT_USER_\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Themes\Personalize**. Double-click the EnableBlurBehind key and change its value to 1 (from the default 0) in the 'Value data' field (see screenshot). Next, double-click the EnableTransparency key, change its value to 1, then click OK. Finally, restart your PC to see the changes.



WINDOWS 7, 8

Remove a user account you no longer use

If one of the Windows user accounts on your PC is obsolete, then it's a good idea to remove it to free up space on your PC. To do this you need to be logged in as the Administrator (main account) on your PC. Once you've done that, click the Start button, type user account, then click 'Add or remove user accounts'. Now click the user account you want to remove, then 'Delete the account'. You'll see a message prompting you to save that user's files in a new folder on your Desktop. If you want to do that, click Keep Files, then Delete Account.

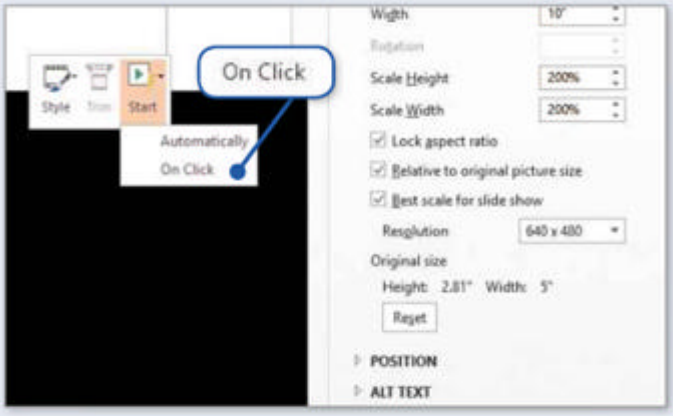
Make Office Better

Expert tips for every program

POWERPOINT

Insert a YouTube video into your presentation

It's easy to add a YouTube video to your presentation using PowerPoint 2013. First, open your presentation, click the Insert tab, then click the Video dropdown menu at the top right and select Online Video. You'll see two options – YouTube and 'From an Embed Code'. We'll show you how to use the latter option.



Open YouTube in your browser, then find your chosen video. Next, click the Share option below the video's title, then the Embed tab, and copy the provided link. Now return to PowerPoint, paste this link into the 'Paste embed code here' field and click the small arrow to the right of the field to insert it into your presentation. Longer videos may take a while.

When that's done, you'll see a black outline of the video on your slide. Right-click this, click the Start dropdown menu at the top right and select Automatically or On Click (see screenshot). The former plays the video as soon as your slide begins, whereas the latter requires you to click your slide to begin playing it.

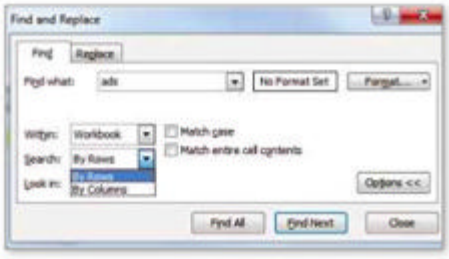
By default, the video appears as a small window. To make this bigger, right-click the video outline, then click 'Size and Position' at the bottom. Now tick 'Best scale for slide show' in the pane on the right, then click and drag your video to the middle of your slide. Finally, double-click the video to see the YouTube controls.

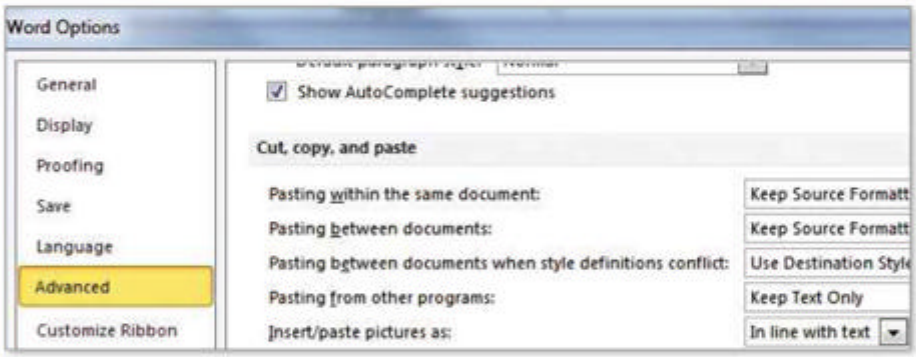
EXCEL

Search for a word by rows or by columns

All Office programs have powerful search options, and Excel's is no exception. For example, did you know you can search for a specific word within every sheet of your file and arrange your word searches by row or by column?

Open the Excel file you'd like to search, press Ctrl+F on your keyboard to bring up the 'Find and Replace' window, then click the Options button at the bottom. Type the word you want to search for in the field at the top. Now set the Within dropdown menu to Workbook (it's set to Sheets by default). Similarly, you can specify whether you want to carry out the search column by column, or row by row, by setting the Search dropdown menu to either By Columns or By Rows (see screenshot below). Now keep clicking the Find Next button to see all instances of that word based on the criteria you set.





WORD ONLINE

Edit PDFs without any software

You can now view and edit PDFs on your PC within your browser using Word Online, meaning you don't need to install any third-party programs such as Adobe Reader. Bear in mind, while Word Online works well with PDFs containing only text, it may not be ideal for editing more complex PDFs containing images.

First, go to www.onedrive.com and log in with your Microsoft (Outlook or Hotmail) account. Now drag the PDF you want to edit into OneDrive. After it uploads, double-click the document within OneDrive to open it in Word Online in a new tab. Next, click the 'Edit in Word' button at the top right, then click Convert to change your PDF into an editable Word document. When that's done, click Edit, and make your changes using the tools available in Word Online. After you've finished, click the File tab at the top left, Save As, then 'Download as PDF'.

WORD

Change text formatting when pasting from a website

When you copy text from a website and paste it into Word, the text will be formatted exactly as it appears on the website. If you want to paste the text in the same format as the rest of your Word document, then there's an easy way to do this. In Word, click the top-left File tab, then Options. Next, click Advanced on the left and scroll to the 'Cut, copy and paste' section. Finally, click the 'Pasting from other programs' dropdown menu, select Keep Text Only (see screenshot above), then click OK.

Google Maps

Load maps quicker, send directions to your phone and locate a missing Android device

Make Google Maps load faster

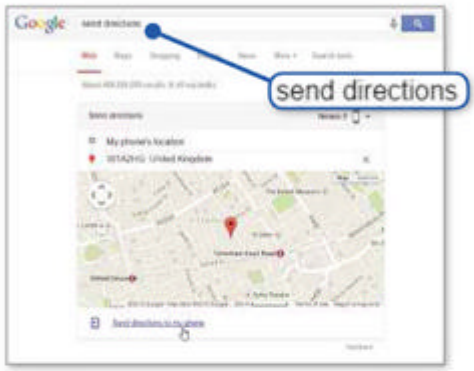
Until recently, those who didn't like last year's changes to Google Maps (maps.google.co.uk) were able to revert to the old-style interface by clicking the question-mark icon at the bottom right and selecting 'Return to classic Google Maps'. That option has now been removed. But you can switch to a new hidden Lite mode by going to https://www.google.co.uk/maps/lite, which disables some of Google Maps' features, notably 3D views, Google Earth, distance measuring and My Maps. The benefit is that maps themselves load much faster. To switch between Lite and normal mode, click the lightning bolt icon and select 'Switch to Lite mode' or 'Switch back to full Maps'.

If you remain unconvinced by the new Google Maps – or its Lite version – it's still possible to switch to proper classic mode by visiting www.google.com/lochp. However, you'll be greeted by an ominous message informing you that 'This version of Google Maps is updating soon'. You have been warned!

Send directions from your PC to your phone

A brilliant new Google Maps feature lets you send directions from your PC to your Android phone or tablet. In fact, the feature is so new that it still hasn't been fully rolled out beyond the US. But by adapting the URL, UK users can try it too. First, make sure you have the latest version of the Google app (www.snipca.com/16401) installed on your device. Open the app, tap the menu button (three horizontal lines) and select Settings, then 'Now cards'. Make sure 'Show cards' and 'Show notifications for card updates' are both switched on. Next go to www.snipca.com/16403, sign in with your Google account and make sure 'Your searches and browsing activity' is switched on.

Now go to google.co.uk, type send directions into the search box and press Enter. At the end of the URL in the address bar, type &gl=us and press Enter again. Now you should see a Google map at the top of the search results. Type an address or postcode in the 'Where do you want to go?' box and press Enter. Make sure the correct device is selected in the top right, then click 'Send directions to my phone'.



Send directions from your PC to your device by tweaking your Google Maps app settings

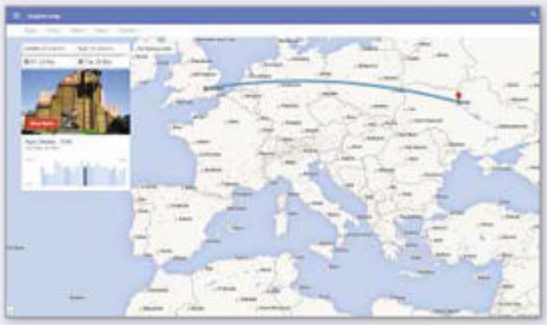
Find your lost or stolen Android device

You can now locate a lost or stolen Android device using Google Maps. For this to work you need to be signed into Google using the same account as the one you use for your phone or tablet. On your device, enable Location services in Settings. You also need to open the Google Settings app, tap Security and check that 'Remotely locate this device' and 'Allow remote lock and erase' are both enabled.

To locate your device, go to www.google.co.uk on your PC, type find my phone or find my tablet into the search box and press Enter. Re-enter your Google password if prompted and allow Android Device Manager to use location data. You'll see a map at the top of the search results which, after a few seconds, will show your device's location. For a full map with further options, click your device. If it's nearby you can click Ring to help you track it down. Alternatively, you can click Lock or Erase to block access or delete all data. Click the target icon to re-locate your device if it has moved.

Plan air travel with Google Flights

It's not technically part of Google Maps, and it's one of the lesser known Google services, but Google Flights (www.google.co.uk/flights) – which has recently benefited from a redesign – is a great way to plan a journey by air and get the best deals on fares, using a Google map as your reference. Click 'Expand map', then click your destination on the map and use the other criteria (stops, price, airlines, times, and duration) to refine your search. Then click 'Show flights' to browse and book tickets.



Use Google Flights to quickly plan your journey overseas and get some great deals on air fares

Next issue Secret Tips For... Autoruns

Periscope

Meet the app that turns your iPhone into a live-streaming webcam

What is it?

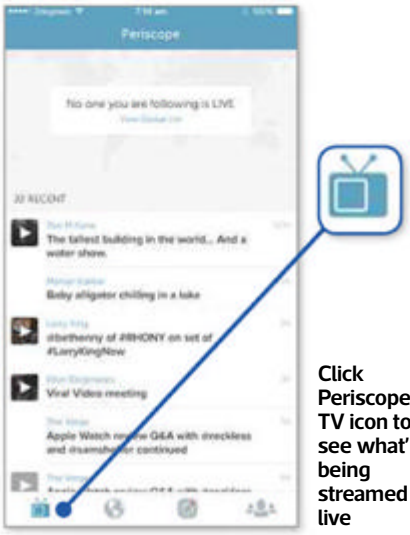
A free iOS app (www.periscope.tv) that lets anyone, anywhere broadcast ('stream') live video on the web, and lets anyone, anywhere watch it. Its creators (getting carried away as tech entrepreneurs tend to) said they wanted to build "the closest thing to teleportation". Despite this daft hyperbole, many web experts are predicting a live-streaming "revolution".

Will that happen?

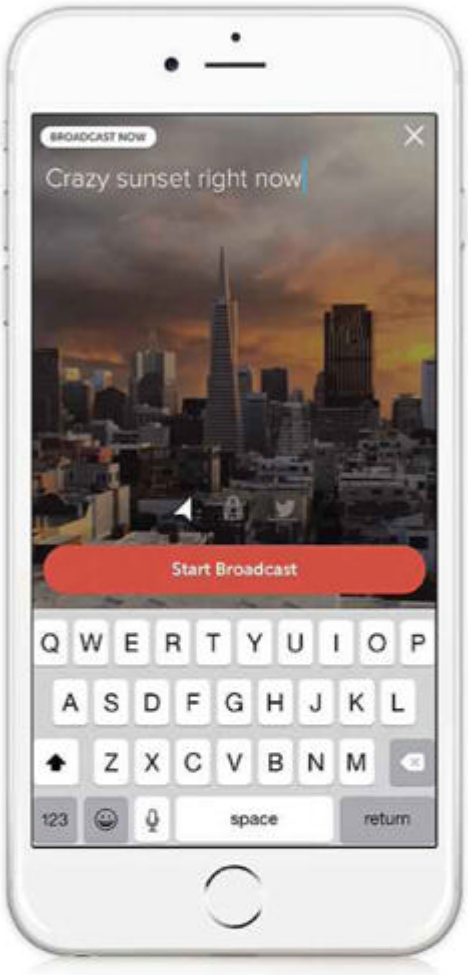
Probably, because the app's potential is huge. Twitter, who bought Periscope for a reported $100m earlier this year, says that over one million people signed up within 10 days of Periscope launching in late March. Every one of these could be streaming their lives as we speak.

But what if I don't want to stream my life online?

We wouldn't blame you. There are too many annoying exhibitionists online as it is. But you shouldn't worry too much about what *you* will stream. As with many things online, you're more likely to use Periscope as a consumer than as a producer – in other words, as someone watching video rather than creating it, just as there are more people reading blogs than writing them.



Click Periscope's TV icon to see what's being streamed live



So what kind of videos can I watch?

That's the key question. There's no doubt that Periscope will eventually pull in attention-seeking celebrities with little to say. Russell Brand will probably start ranting on it soon. No doubt politicians will follow suit if Periscope becomes a way to reach young people who no longer use "traditional" media.

Are you trying to put me off it?

Well, we're just being honest about its pitfalls before coming to what it does brilliantly – which is broadcast live news. Just think: any event that happens anywhere can now be instantly streamed live online, as long as a bystander has an iPhone (an Android app is coming soon). Periscope has already been used this way. In March, a fire in New York was streamed online, while a month later people at the Baltimore riots broadcast them live. When used in this way Periscope does justice to the app's slogan: "explore the world through someone else's eyes".

And not all celebrity use of Periscope would be irritating drivel. Jeremy Clarkson, for example, could bypass TV completely and review cars direct from his front room. Stephen Fry could read passages from his last autobiography. David Dimbleby could broadcast behind the scenes at *Question Time*.

Can videos be streamed privately?

Yes. Unlike its rival Meerkat (http://meerkatapp.co), Periscope has a private mode that lets you broadcast to a select group of people. Families and friends can use it to share special moments, such as weddings and birthdays. While on holiday, your children could share with you a stunning sunset as it happens, in all its orangey glory (see main image).

That sounds better. So how do I find out what's being streamed?

By installing the app on your iPhone or iPad then tapping the TV icon, or by clicking any of the Periscope links on Twitter. You can watch any recording made in the past 24 hours.

Is broadcasting video on Periscope actually legal?

Yes, as long as it doesn't infringe copyright. Periscope has already banned people it caught live-streaming programmes as they were being shown on their TV. The Premier League and Sky Sports must be worried because a football fan at a match could broadcast it live online. Video quality would be poor, but it's better than nothing.

Make Your PC HACK-PROOF

Antivirus alone is no longer enough to keep malware off your PC.

Jane Hoskyn counts down 14 new rules to beat hackers' latest tactics

Happy birthday to the word 'hack', coined 60 years ago by the Tech Model Railroad Club at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). Then, as now, the word simply means to tinker with technology, which is one of our favourite things to do (and definitely one of the MIT model railway enthusiasts' favourite things to do). But criminals are pretty keen on it too, and they're having a particularly busy year.

As if to celebrate hack's 60th, malicious hackers have conjured up an array of new ransomware, Trojans, rootkits and other disastrous gifts for your PC. They're even offering The Moon, a nefarious new type of worm that infects routers. Thanks, but no thanks.

Much of this vile stuff can be removed from your PC, but malware-removal is a stressful, time-consuming and difficult business. Far better to stop it getting there in the first place.

Hack-proofing your computer is the tech equivalent of sticking masking tape all over your home's nooks and crannies before painting a wall. It's a pain, and can feel like a waste of time (did you plan to spend Sunday configuring your router's firewall? No), but it'll save a much bigger headache later on.

The bedrock of any hack-proofing is, of course, a carefully chosen and configured antivirus (AV). But AV can't block all threats, and to assume it can is to leave yourself vulnerable to attack. In fact, your AV may be worse than useless if it's not set up properly. And no AV suite in the world can save you from criminals who hack *you*, by tricking you into downloading dodgy files that you and your AV think are safe. Read on to discover their latest tricks and find out how to beat them at their own ever-evolving game.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Fix Windows settings that hackers exploit
- Tighten your AV using advanced settings
- Get essential software patches as soon as they're released
- Ditch programs and plug-ins that hackers love
- Deadlock your accounts and encrypt your browsing
- Block dodgy adware and phishing malware

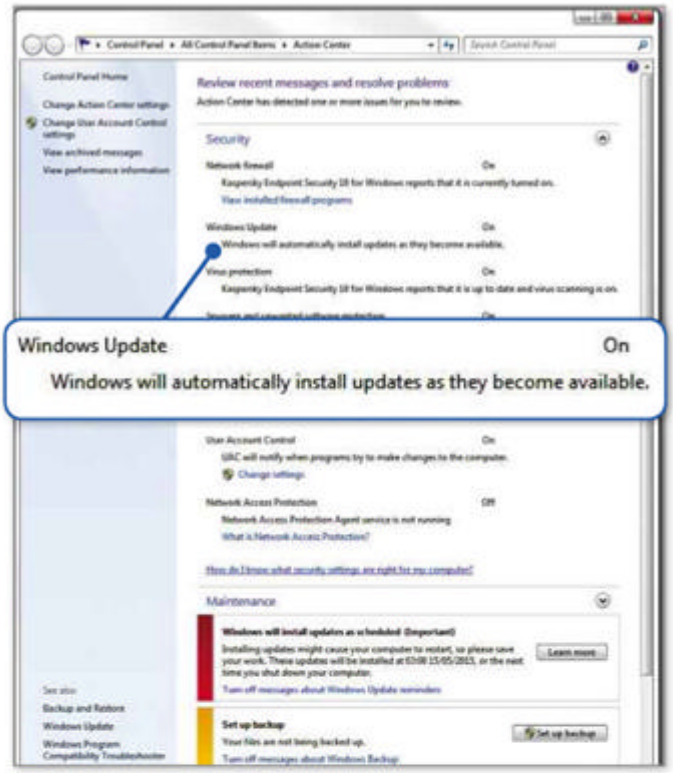
STOP HACKERS BREAKING INTO YOUR PC

1 Fix unsafe Windows settings

All the third-party security tools in the world are a waste of space if your PC's built-in settings are leaving a window (no pun intended) open for hackers.

First, visit the Control Panel's Action Center for an overview of your security settings. To get there quickly, type review into Start and click 'Review your computer's status' (Windows 7 or 8/8.1). In the window that opens, click the tiny arrow to the right of Security to see information, including your AV status and internet security settings.

Check that Windows Update is set to 'On'. This is as important as AV in defending your PC from hackers. If Windows Update is set to 'Off', type update into Start and press Enter, then click 'Change settings' and select 'Install updates automatically (recommended)' from the dropdown menu.



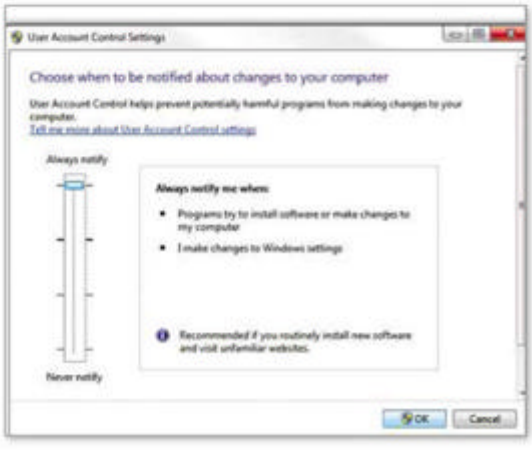
Check that vital Windows security settings are switched on in the Action Center

Another key item is User Account Control (UAC). This is the Windows service that litters your screen with 'are you sure?'-type messages and dims your screen when you install software. Many people disable UAC to make installing programs slightly less tedious. However, if you do this, you're giving hackers full administrative control over Registry-level changes to your PC. You may as well invite hackers round for tea and wear your credit-card number as a bowtie.

To fix this, click 'Change settings' in Action Center or type user into Start and click 'Change User Account Control settings'. Drag the slider to the top ('Always notify'), then click OK and restart Windows. 'Never notify' is one of the most dangerous settings you can inflict on your PC.

Microsoft has released a 'Fix it' tool (www.snipca.com/16515) that scans your Windows security set-up and automatically fixes unsafe settings. Click 'Run now', save the file and click to run it. If UAC is set up properly, you'll have to click 'Yes' in the 'Do you want to allow the following program...?' pop-up. As we've explained, it's well worth the extra click.

Note that the 'Fix it' works in all version of Windows since Windows 2000, but for safety reasons you should download it using a PC running Windows 7 or later.



Set User Account Control to 'Always notify' to help keep malware off your PC

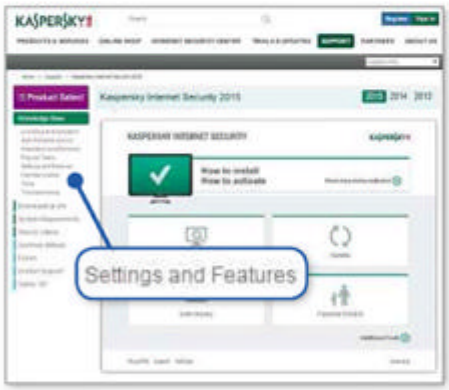
2 Configure your antivirus

To find out what AV you should be using now, see the latest quarterly test results from our team at Dennis Technology Labs (www.snipca.com/16503; click Download Home Anti-Virus Protection). Winner, again, is Kaspersky Internet Security (normally £39.99; reader offer £17.99 from www.snipca.com/16486). Norton Security is currently in second place and Avast Free Antivirus is third.

Choosing the right AV is only the first step, however. Its default settings may not protect you against all threats, especially if you regularly download from the web. Go to Settings and switch to a higher security level.

If your PC is quite old or slow, set a lower security level, but run a full scan first. Then find a postponed scan option and set it to run regularly when you're not busy with your PC.

Also look for a setting that lets you create rules for protected file types (here's how to do it in Kaspersky, for example: www.snipca.com/16508). Creating rules means you'll see warning messages when you try to access certain files and programs, but – like User Account Control pop-ups – they give you vital control over your PC's sensitive data, and can help block file-encryption malware such as ransomware and cryptovirus infections.



Look for advanced configuration instructions on your AV's website

Make full use of your AV's companion website. Bookmark its configuration guide and forum. (If the website doesn't have either of these, choose a different AV.) For Kaspersky Internet Security, go to the Knowledge Base (www.snipca.com/16504) and click 'Settings and Features'; for Norton, go to the Configuring Norton Internet Security page (www.snipca.com/16505); and for Avast, go to the Avast FAQ (www.snipca.com/16506).

3 Block zero-day attacks

If your AV includes a Cloud Protection option, enable it. This aims to give you instant protection from internet threats the moment they're discovered.

However, some threats aren't discovered fast enough for your AV to protect you. Zero-day attacks happen when hackers discover a vulnerability in a program or plug-in before the software makers can find and patch the flaw.

To guard against these attacks, use an anti-exploit tool that works separately from your AV. Malwarebytes Anti-Exploit (MBAE, www.snipca.com/16510) is a free, small tool that works like an invisible shield around your browser, keeping attackers away from any potential vulnerabilities in your PC's software or operating system (OS).

MBAE runs in the background from the moment you install it, but it's designed not to conflict with your AV or firewall (it's not a substitute for those tools, either). When we tried it, we didn't notice our browser slowing down or suffering any other side effects.

Click Get My Free Download and run the installer. It automatically installs a free trial of MBAE Premium, which throws its invisible shield around Word, Excel, VLC and Windows Media Player as well as all common browsers; you don't have to hand over any payment details to get the trial. When the free trial is over, you'll switch to the free version without needing to do anything. MBAE works on all versions of Windows from XP onwards – including Windows 10.

Use Malwarebytes Anti-Exploit to block zero-day attacks that your AV hasn't even heard of

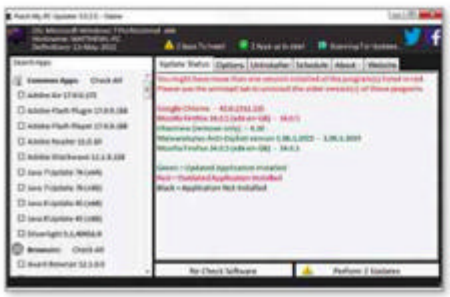
4 Get software updates instantly

Once a flaw has been discovered, the race is on to patch it and keep hackers out. This is why software and OS updates are such a vital part of your hack-proofing strategy. To get updates as soon as they're issued, set Windows Update to install automatically, using the steps on page 51.

Shockingly, Microsoft no longer includes Word and Excel in Windows Update by default unless you're running Office 365. This oversight left millions of Word users vulnerable to remote code execution attacks last year (www.snipca.com/16522). To stay safe, you need to add Word and Excel to the automatic update schedule by yourself. In Windows 8/8.1, type updates into Start and click 'Choose whether to automatically install Windows updates', then tick 'Give me updates for other Microsoft products when I update Windows'. In Windows 7, go to Windows Update, click 'Change settings', then tick 'Give me updates...'.

While you're in Windows Update, click 'Check for updates' to find patches that have fallen through the net, then install any that are available. If an update won't install, use the free Windows Update Automated Troubleshooter (www.snipca.com/16521, click 'Run now').

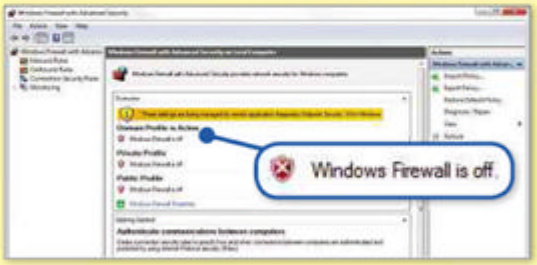
Don't rely on Windows Update alone. Free portable tool Patch My PC Updater (www.snipca.com/16519) scans your PC for other missing updates and flags out-of-date versions in red text. You can then install all available updates with one click. Patch My PC doesn't quite cover all programs, but it will help you keep more than 100 of the most commonly exploited third-party programs and plug-ins updated safely, including Java and Flash, both of which have been hit by zero-day attacks in recent weeks and had to be patched to limit the damage.



Patch My PC Updater scans for outdated software and plug-ins that hackers can exploit

HOW CONFLICTS HELP HACKERS

Antivirus suites and firewalls are designed to run constantly in the background, blocking threats. If there's more than one AV or more than one firewall running on your PC, they will conflict and prevent each other working – which is a gift for hackers.



ONLY USE ONE FIREWALL

Disable Windows Firewall if you've got a third-party firewall installed and enabled. Type firewall into Start and press Enter. Click Windows Firewall Properties and choose Off from the 'Firewall state' dropdown box if you have another firewall running. If you don't have another firewall, make sure 'Firewall state' is set to On.

Many AV suites automatically switch off Windows Firewall if they have their own firewall (see screenshot).

BEWARE WINDOWS DEFENDER

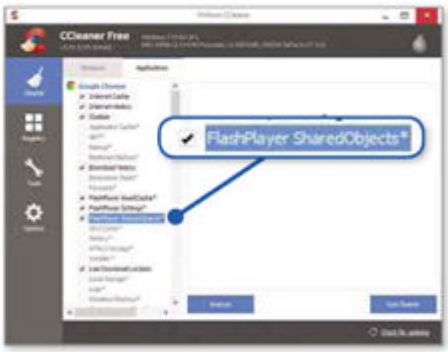
This built-in tool describes itself as anti-spyware and claims not to conflict with other tools. This is dangerously untrue. Defender has a background-running component that you must disable to avoid conflicts. Type defender into Start and press Enter. Click Tools, then Options and untick 'Automatically scan my computer'. Click Save and restart Windows.

COMPLETE YOUR SET OF SCANNERS

It's fine to use more than one manual security tool that you can run independently of each other. Three of our favourite security scanners don't conflict: AdwCleaner, CCleaner and Malwarebytes Anti-Malware Free. These tools remove malware rather than monitoring and blocking it, so they won't make your PC hack-proof in the way that a good AV or firewall will. But they're very useful for removing junk that sneaks through your defences.

5 Uninstall unsafe plug-ins completely

Updating browser plug-ins is hazardous in itself. Bogus Flash and Java updates have been used to spread malware, including CryptoLocker. If you really want to keep your plug-ins, set them as click-to-play and set your browser to update them automatically. Never, ever attempt to update Flash by clicking a link in a video.



Clear out plug-ins using CCleaner to slash your risk of being hacked

Even better, ditch plug-ins altogether. They're increasingly unnecessary. YouTube has dumped Flash for a new default video format, HTML5, which doesn't require extra software and is much safer (www.snipca.com/16527). Java is nearing extinction (there's even a website called Java Is Dead: www.snipca.com/16528) and these days you'll rarely come across a site that requires it.

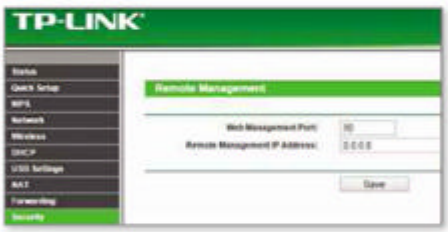
Remove unwanted plug-ins and extensions manually from your browser, or disable any you can't remove. Then remove their residual files and settings using CCleaner, ideally in conjunction with free tool CCEnhancer (www.snipca.com/16529), which adds extra items that CCleaner can clean including Flash Player leftovers.

6 Beat router malware

Last year thousands of Linksys routers were infected by a self-replicating worm with an inappropriately pleasant name, The Moon (www.snipca.com/16536). Linksys soon issued a patch (www.snipca.com/16537), but the precedent was set: hackers can now break into your PC via your router. And they don't care if it's made by Linksys, TP-Link or Father Christmas.

To hack-proof your router, go to its setup page (here's how: www.snipca.com/16542) and make sure remote management is switched off. If the remote IP address is '0.0.0.0' (as in our screenshot below), it's off. Change the device password (the default is usually 'password') to something much stronger. Make sure the router's firewall is enabled (it won't conflict with your system firewall) and that its firmware is up-to-date. The manufacturer's website will have details of the latest firmware.

You can add an extra layer of protection to your router by hiding your IP address with a virtual private network (VPN), which we'll discuss on the next page.



Guard your router by setting its remote management IP address to '0.0.0.0'

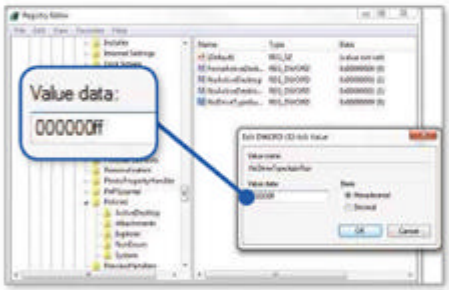
7 Never trust a USB stick

We love USB sticks. Who doesn't? You can store 64GB on one for under 15 quid (www.snipca.com/16538). That's pretty lovable.

But in the league of hazardous peripherals, USB sticks are far ahead of routers. All a hacker has to do is put the USB stick in his or her computer and paste malware into it – much easier than attacking a router remotely.

Get into the habit of scanning all removable storage devices for malware before you open them. The easiest way to do this is right-click the device in Explorer and select 'Scan for viruses' (or similar), which triggers your installed AV to run a manual scan.

Next, edit the Registry to disable AutoRun, the Windows service that opens a selected program automatically when you connect a device. Type regedit into Start and press Enter. Navigate to **HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Policies\Explorer**, then right-click in the right-hand pane, click New and then 'DWORD (32-bit) Value'. Type 000000ff under 'Value data', then click OK and restart your PC.



Disable AutoPlay in the Registry to prevent USB sticks opening automatically

STOP HACKERS STEALING YOUR IDENTITY

8 Use 2-factor verification

Why would a hacker spend time and expertise breaking into your PC when they can log straight into your bank account by guessing your password?

Your first defence against identity theft is to use better passwords, and to use a different username and password for every online account, and for Windows. But even the strongest passwords are not enough to protect your most sensitive accounts. You need to back them up with another layer of protection known as two-factor verification (aka two-factor authentication or '2FA'). You've probably experienced two-factor verification already, in the form of text messages that contain a special code you have to enter to log into, say, your bank account. Your initial response may be: "Oh what are they asking for now?" and even fear that you're being scammed, but this is now a well-established process and is incredibly useful in protecting your accounts.

Find out which of your accounts supports two-factor verification

Free site Two Factor Auth (https://twofactorauth.org) lists online accounts that support two-factor verification. Click the little document icon next to a site's listing for more details. You can also use the site to submit a request for two-factor support for accounts that don't already have it.

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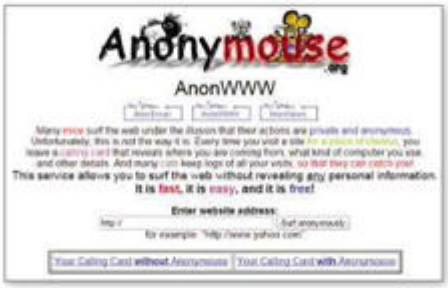
9 Stay anonymous online

We tend to discuss virtual private network (VPN) software in the context of beating internet restrictions. Free VPN tool Hola (http://hola.org), for example, lets you watch US-only shows on Netflix, as we revealed in our Cover Feature in Issue 441.

But VPNs and proxy tools (which are technically different, but do the same thing) aren't just for naughty rule-breaking. They're also extremely good for security. They work by disguising your IP address, so websites can't track you – and nor can hackers. When you hide your IP address, you effectively hide your identity, and even mask the fact that you're online at all.

If you're using Chrome, you don't even have to download Hola, just add the extension (www.snipca.com/16545). Hola also has extensions for Firefox and Internet Explorer (IE), and once they're installed they work in the same way as the Chrome extension. However, you have to download them to your computer first from the Hola website, so the process is a bit more finicky. Firefox users should also try the free extension ZenMate (or 'ZenMate Security & Privacy VPN 4.1.7', to give it its full name; www.snipca.com/16546), which is well-rated by users and has a strong emphasis on security.

If you've tried a VPN and it keeps struggling to connect you to a server, try the free proxy service Anonymouse (http://anonymouse.org) instead. Anonymouse works completely online and doesn't even need adding to your browser, let alone downloading to your PC. Just visit the website (make sure you include the 'e' at the end of 'anonymouse' in the URL), click the UK flag, type in a web address, then press Enter to access it. Behind the scenes, Anonymouse will redirect you through a safe proxy server that disguises who and where you are.



Hide your location and identity with the Anonymouse proxy server

10 Encrypt everything you type

Epic Privacy Browser (www.epicbrowser.com) is a free Chrome-style browser that encrypts everything you do, so no-one or nothing can read it. It also automatically blocks adverts and cookies, and clears your history and cache every time you close it.

If you'd rather not replace your browser, try the free version of extension Disconnect (https://disconnect.me), which works in Chrome, Firefox and IE. It blocks third-party tracking cookies and gives you control over a site's encryption level from an easy-to-use toolbar menu.

Also look at Reset The Net (www.snipca.com/16540), a new privacy project from a consortium of companies including Google and Mozilla. The group has created a free software Privacy Pack (https://pack.resetthenet.org) to help you encrypt your data and communications. One of the bundled programs is Tor (www.torproject.org), a free open-source program that cloaks everything you do in a proxy, offline as well as online. Tor has an air of illegality because it's been used by people who want to hide for dishonest reasons, but it's not illegal in itself – in fact it's the ultimate line of defence against identity theft.

Download free encryption tools from privacy consortium, Reset The Net

HOW STRONG ARE YOUR PASSWORDS?

We regularly read stories about the death of the password. It's going to be replaced by pictures of your face, fingerprint scanners, brain waves or whatever. But we bet you a fiver you'll still be using passwords a decade from now.

Two-factor verification tools and password managers such as PassBox (www.snipca.com/16543) are no excuse for sloppy passwords. Don't let these extra layers of safety lull you into a false sense of security. Your passwords must still include a mix of capital and lower-case letters, numbers and, if allowed, special characters. Free online tool Passwords Generator (http://passwordsgenerator.net) will help.

To test its strength, type it into free online tool How Secure Is My Password? (https://howsecureismypassword.net).

The page is encrypted (hence the 's' in 'https') so no-one, including the site's developer, can see what you write. In real time, the site reveals how long it would take an average PC to crack your login, simply by guessing strings of characters. The password we used for roughly five years when we first went online, back in the late 90s, scored '0 days' – in other words, it was instantly crackable. No, we're not going to tell you what it was.

STOP BEING TRICKED INTO DOWNLOADING MALWARE

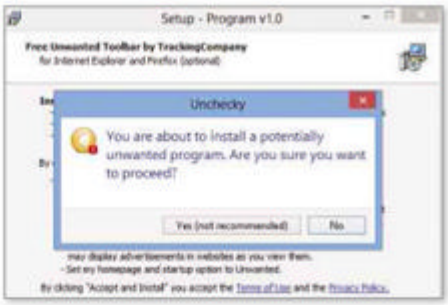
11 Block adware automatically

We love free software, but we hate installing it. Our hearts are in our mouths every time we open an installation wizard, because we're braced for the adware it might install – sometimes openly, and sometimes by stealth.

Most PUPs (potentially unwanted programs) that come bundled with free software are not malware, but some of them are, and it shouldn't be up to you to tell the difference.

Free program Unchecky (http://unchecky.com) can help you avoid PUPs by automatically opting out of bundled extras when you're installing programs. It's extremely easy to use and, in our experience, effective. It's not completely infallible, though. Adware, such as the horrendous regenerating search engine Binkiland, sometimes sneaks through in installers that don't include any opt-outs at all, and may not be picked up by Unchecky.

To avoid the menace of PUPs, use portable versions of software wherever ▶

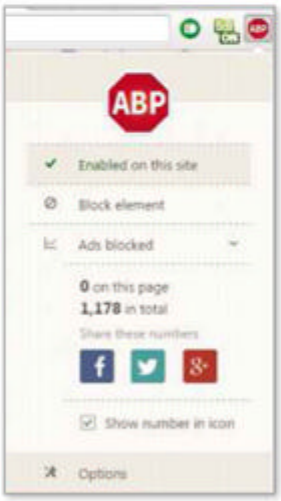


Automatically block PUPs by scanning program installers with Unchecky

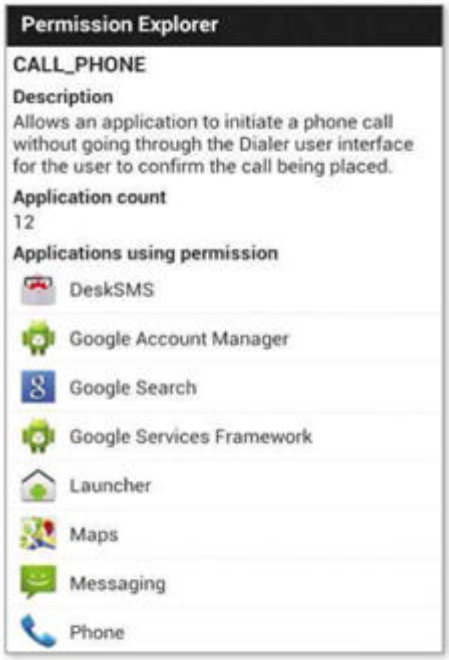
you can. First, upload the program file to free online tool VirusTotal (https://www.virustotal.com) to make sure it's safe, and keep an eye out for updates. Portable programs may sidestep the installer problem, but they don't update automatically.

12 Avoid fake downloads

Download buttons aren't always what they seem. Go to a popular software site such as Download.com, and you'll see a blizzard of buttons saying 'Free download!', 'Download now!' and so on – but many are just adverts. Sometimes, these adverts are laced with adware or even malware. They're a very easy way for hackers to trick you into downloading unwanted rubbish to your computer, but they're also very easy to block. Simply use a free advert-blocking extension such as Adblock Plus (https://adblockplus.org), which works in Chrome, Firefox, IE and even Android's browser. Adblock Plus automatically blocks adverts on most websites, but you can click its bookmarklet to allow an advert through if you want. It's a fantastic little extension that'll change the way you see the web.



Block all adverts, including malicious fake Download buttons, with Adblock Plus



Check your permissions at a glance with free Android app Permissions Explorer

13 Stop your phone hacking you

Your phone and tablet are hotlines to your PC. Your browser automatically syncs between devices, your email works across all platforms and you transfer files to and from your tablet and phone to your PC. They're not really separate devices at all.

So if malware gets into your tablet or phone, it gets into your PC too. As we've seen, adverts can easily be embedded with malware, and adverts on fiddly phone and tablet screens are especially easy to open by accident. Adblock Plus can't yet block adverts in all mobile apps, sadly. As soon as there's a free, safe advert-blocker that effectively blocks ads on tablet and phone screens, we'll let you know.

Meanwhile, you can help hack-proof your phone and tablet by being very careful about the permissions you give to apps. Apps are extremely easy to build, and they're a popular way for hackers to trick you into giving them full access to your contacts list, social posts and even your private messages.

Free, open-source Android app Permissions Explorer (www.snipca.com/16547) lets you double-check the permissions you've given your installed apps, and lets you see which apps allow in-app purchases. "No permission required to use this app," says the developer. "No ads. Does only what you want it to do." If only all apps were like that.

14 Switch your spam filter

After 15-odd years of using email, you probably know that your spam filter doesn't work very well. It blocks important messages from your insurance company, and fails to block dodgy business pitches written entirely in Korean.

It's easy to joke about this, but it really matters. Spam and phishing emails are as popular as ever among hackers, who embed malware in their links and attachments. This is how the drive-wiping malware Rombertik was spread (see Protect Your Tech, page 14).

To guard against it, improve your spam defences with a third-party spam filter. Online service Spamfence (www.spamfence.net), which is free for personal use, works with your installed email program (Outlook, for example) and redirects incoming messages through a secure and powerful spam filter. Similarly, OpenDNS (https://www.opendns.com) works online and is free for personal use, and offers extra protection against phishing sites and spam. ca

Block more spam and phishing emails with free online tool Spamfence

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TWEAK YOUR PC'S SOUNDS

Fed up with your bleeping computer? Jane Hoskyn reveals how to make Windows sound like anything you want

Make your keyboard sound like a typewriter

What sound do you prefer: a clackety-clack typewriter or a bleeping Windows PC? The typewriter, right? Thousands of you clicked the link for free typewriter sound-simulator Qwertick (www.snipca.com/16449) after we mentioned it in Best Free Software (Issue 444). Run it to simulate the sounds of an old typewriter when you press your PC's keys.

Qwertick only works on Windows 7 or earlier, so for Windows 8/8.1 we'd recommend ClicKey (www.snipca.com/16459). Type a letter to choose one of the 26 sound-effect settings ('a' is the default).

Type a letter when you open ClicKey to choose one of the 26 sound-effect schemes

Swap Windows' system sounds

Windows helpfully lets you change its system sounds and even swap them around. Type sound into Start, click Sound, then the Sounds tab. Select an 'event' in the Program Events window and then browse the Sounds dropdown menu. These sounds range from the familiar (Windows Logoff, which you can re-assign to Windows Logon if you want – and vice versa) to the novelty ('tada'). Click Test to hear a preview, then click Apply to assign that sound to that event.

In Windows 7 and earlier you can change all your system sounds in one go by switching your 'sound scheme'. In the Sounds tab, select an alternative from the Sound Scheme dropdown menu and click OK.

Make your PC bark like your dog

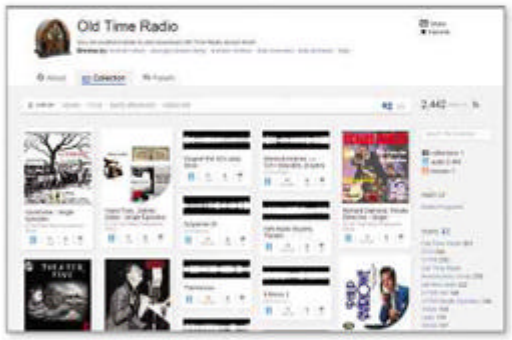
With a couple of extra clicks, you can turn your system sounds into anything you want. And we mean *anything*.

First, you need a sound file. Freesound (www.snipca.com/16482) has all sorts of free clips to download, from 'alien sound effects' to synthesizers. Windows Sounds (www.snipca.com/16478) has system sounds from old PCs. For classic radio jingles and adverts, head to The Internet Archive (www.snipca.com/16481).

Alternatively, make your own sound clips using Windows' built-in tool (type sound into Start and click 'Sound recorder'). If you don't have a PC mic, use your tablet or phone, and a free app such as Smart Voice Recorder for Android (www.snipca.com/16476) or Voice Record Pro for iOS (www.snipca.com/16477). The recording doesn't have to be your voice, of course – it could be your dog or cat, grandchild, car engine or lawn mower. Save it as an MP3 file on your PC.

Now go to the Sounds tab (as described in the previous tip), click a program event, then Browse, and navigate to the MP3 file on your PC. Click Apply and then click OK.

You can use audio files for more than just system sounds. Facebook Notification Sound Changer (www.snipca.com/16448) is a free Chrome extension that lets you change the Facebook alert to any sound file you choose. Perhaps a recording of you shouting "Oh, not again!" (just a suggestion).



Download free radio jingles and set them as your Windows system sounds

Play piano with your keyboard

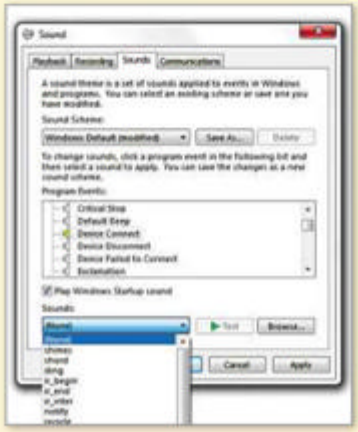
There are oodles of free online tools for turning your keyboard into a musical instrument, albeit only when your browser is open. Our favourite is Virtual Piano (http://virtualpiano.net), a free Flash-based website that lets you play the piano with your computer keys. Try some Beethoven and upload a screen recording to YouTube (www.snipca.com/16456) – or even the theme to *Game of Thrones* (www.snipca.com/16455).

Free extension Plink (www.snipca.com/16451, Chrome only) lets you compose music by moving your mouse. If you prefer sounds of the ambient variety, switch on gentle rain or background café noise with free online tool Rainy Cafe (http://rainycafe.com). ca

MAKE YOUR PC SHUT UP

The quickest way to silence Windows is to mute the volume. Go to the Volume icon in the notification area and drag its slider right down. You'll never hear another peep.

But some peeps are useful. Take a selective approach to silencing your PC, and keep only those sounds you want to hear above the din – error messages and low-battery alerts, for example. Go to the Sounds tab and select a program event, then choose '(None)' from the Sounds dropdown menu (you may have to scroll to the top). Click Apply each time, then OK. Your muted events will still be listed in the box, but minus their speaker icon.



Get the fastest internet on your street

Is your broadband slower than your neighbours'? **Jonathan Parkyn** reveals how to keep up with the Jones's internet speeds – without paying extra

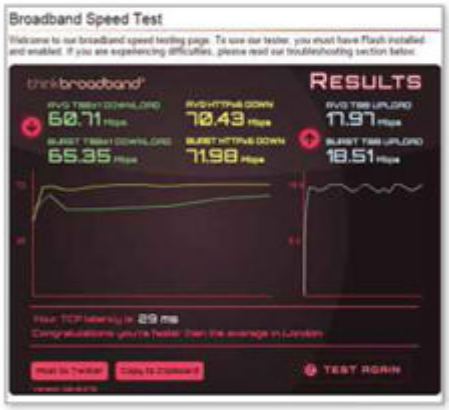
Have you ever had the sneaking suspicion that your friends and neighbours all have faster broadband than you? You may even worry that other people on your street are slowing down your broadband by leeching (stealing) your Wi-Fi.

If so, you'll be pleased to hear there are quick and easy ways to find out how your internet speeds compare with your neighbours', and how to get an extra speed boost if you're stuck in the slow lane – without spending any extra cash.

Check your actual internet speed

While there are many free online broadband speed checkers, the bad news is they don't all deliver accurate results. Only last month, BT had its knuckles rapped by the Advertising Standards Authority for the accuracy of its online postcode checker (www.snipca.com/16394).

You'll get more reliable results from a free independent tool like the USwitch Broadband Speed Test (www.uswitch.com/broadband/speedtest), or the more detailed Think Broadband Broadband Speed Test (www.snipca.com/16304). The Think Broadband test is actually two tests – a standard web-protocol (HTTP) measure and a TBB protocol test that pinpoints certain variations in performance. Run the tool at different times of the day for a couple of weeks and keep a record of the results. If the speeds regularly fall short of what your internet service provider (ISP) promised, use them as evidence when pursuing your complaint (see box below).



Get accurate measurements and use them to back up any complaints to your ISP

Discover your neighbour's internet speed

USwitch's free Broadband StreetStats tool (www.snipca.com/16305) is a searchable UK map that displays the results of other people's broadband speed tests, using the Uswitch Broadband Speed Test. Enter your postcode to view your area.

Property site Rightmove also offers a free speed tool (www.snipca.com/16306) that reveals the sort of speeds people in your area are getting. The site

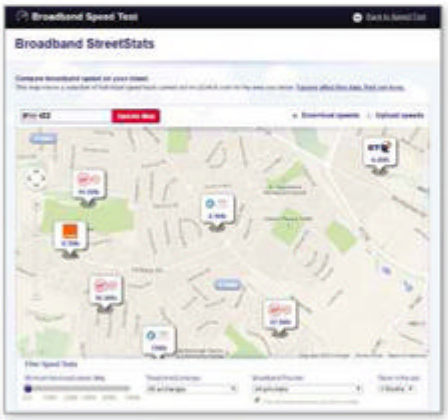
HOW TO COMPLAIN IF YOUR SPEED FALLS

If you've made a record of the speeds you're getting at various times of day and they fall short of what your ISP has promised, contact its support team and present them with your evidence. Explain that the speeds you're getting are much lower than those you were promised.

Be prepared to be walked through a series of troubleshooting steps, and keep a record of all your communications. If your initial call doesn't yield results, then write a formal letter of complaint to your ISP, including a log of your speeds and the steps you've taken so far. Say that you believe the provider may be in breach of contract, and give them a reasonable timescale to rectify the problem.

If you still get no satisfaction, consider taking your complaint to a dispute-resolution scheme such as CISAS (www.cisas.org.uk) or Ombudsman Services (www.snipca.com/16309). If you're having problems with a broadband-speed dispute, drop us a line at consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk.

pools data from a number of ISPs and calculates an average that takes into account factors including type of connection available, distance to the exchange and contention ratio (the number of people in the area using the same connection). We found that its superfast broadband checker wasn't very accurate, but click the 'see standard speed' link and you should get a rough idea of what ADSL speeds you could reach.



Discover what broadband speeds other people in your neighbourhood are getting

Check if someone's leeching your Wi-Fi

If a neighbour, or even a passerby, is secretly using your Wi-Fi, your broadband speed will suffer. You can check whether this is happening by logging into your router's configuration utility (this usually involves typing an IP address into your browser; check your router's manual), then logging in with a username and password. Next, look for a Status (or similar) section, then look for a list of connected devices. This may be called 'DHCP device list' or similar, and it's a list (or map) of the IP addresses

Check your router's list (or map) of connected devices to see if someone is using your Wi-Fi

of all the devices attached to your network.

Now turn off all the other internet-connected devices in your home. That includes your mobile phone, tablet, laptop, games console and all PCs except the one you're using. Refresh the device list. Now how many IP addresses do you see? If you see more than one, you may have a leech.

To banish leeches, ramp up your network security. Go to the wireless or WLAN section of your router's configuration utility and look for the security settings. Switch these on if necessary and select WPA2 as the encryption type, then enter a new password. You may also want to change the SSID (network name). Most routers have the option of hiding the SSID. Once that's done, save your changes and restart your router, then reconnect your devices using your new SSID and password.

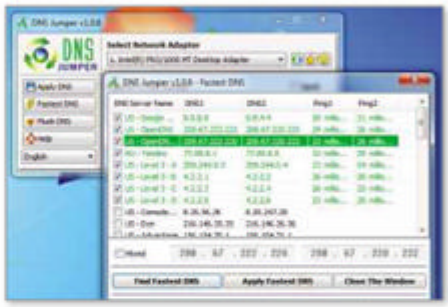
Find out if you're being throttled

Some ISPs are guilty of limiting broadband speeds for certain types of internet activity – mainly file sharing, but sometimes for things as basic as streaming video or even downloading emails.

To establish whether this is happening to you, go to M-Lab's internet measurement tools (www.snipca.com/16307). Click Transparency to go straight to the best tests for detecting throttling. The Glasnost tool is particularly useful and tests for program-specific speed limits (you'll need Java installed on your PC to run it). It's worth running the tests at different times of day for a more representative measure.

Switch to a faster DNS server

DNS servers are like big online databases that connect your PC to web pages when you click a link or type a web address. Some DNS servers are much slower than others, so switching to a faster one is a quick way to speed up your browsing. A great tool for identifying and switching to a faster DNS server is 'Dns Jumper' (www.snipca.com/16308). Download it, then extract the ZIP file and double-click the DNSJumper.exe file to run the portable program. Click Fastest DNS to check which server works best for you (this will be highlighted in the list that appears). To switch to it, click Apply Fastest DNS.



Change to an alternative DNS server for an instant speed boost

Get the best out of your router

Turning your router off and on again really can help solve numerous Wi-Fi problems, including slow broadband, so that should be the first thing you try.

Upgrading your router's firmware can often provide faster speeds. Log into its configuration utility and look for the firmware options, usually found in the Maintenance (or similar) section. Read your instructions carefully – upgrading firmware can damage your device if it's not carried out correctly. Check that ADSL microfilters (the little dongles that sit between the router and phone socket) are connected properly, as these can cause problems. Also visit your service status page (usually on the ISP's support site) to see if there are any current disruptions that be might affecting speed.

If broadband slowdowns only seem to happen on wireless devices such as tablets, then you could have a problem with Wi-Fi coverage or congestion, rather than with broadband itself. Is your router getting a little long in the tooth? If so, it might be time to upgrade. Newer devices support faster broadband protocols (such as ADSL2+) and wireless standards (such as 802.11ac). Before shelling out money, however, check with your ISP. It may be willing to supply you with a new router for free, especially if you're having problems and you've lodged a complaint. ca

MAGNIFY WORDS On Your PC

Tiny on-screen text can make your Windows PC hard to use. **Jonathan Parkyn** finds the best free tools for making words in emails, web pages and programs easier to read

Have you ever struggled to read the tiny text on a web page, or wished Windows' menus, shortcuts and dialogue boxes used larger letters? You can always increase text size by reducing screen resolution (read Microsoft's tips at www.snipca.com/16440), but this tends to leave text and icons looking fuzzy, and makes your Desktop cramped and over-crowded.

A much better solution for people with varying degrees of visual impairment is to use a magnifying tool to enlarge portions of the screen as and when needed. Many of these tools can be used for free.

Use Windows's built-in Magnifier

All versions of Windows since 98 have come with a built-in tool that can enlarge either the entire screen or specific portions of it (up to 16x magnification). In both Windows 7 and 8/8.1, press the Windows key, then type magnifier and press Enter to launch the tool. In most cases, you will instantly see your screen change to display an enlarged section of your Desktop. Dragging your mouse to the edges of the enlarged section will let you pan around the Desktop. This is Magnifier's default 'Full screen' mode, but it has two other modes and a number of customisations you can use to get it working in a way that suits you.

You should see a magnifying-glass icon somewhere on your screen. Click this to reveal a small toolbar. You can change the level of magnification by clicking the plus and minus buttons. Click Views to select the magnification mode. Besides 'Full screen', you can choose Lens or Docked. Docked mode adds a magnification bar that you can drag to where you like (see screenshot below). This bar displays a window showing a fixed enlarged section of your screen that moves with your cursor around the Desktop. Lens mode, meanwhile, enlarges the area immediately around your cursor.

One of the limitations of Windows 7 is that 'Full screen' and Lens modes only work on PCs running the Aero display theme (www.snipca.com/16442). If you've opted for a Basic, Classic or High Contrast theme (see box opposite), only Docked mode will be available to you. Windows 8/8.1 doesn't suffer from this restriction.

Windows Magnifier has three modes – 'Full screen', Lens and Docked

Explore advanced Magnifier settings

A Settings (cog) icon also appears in the toolbar when you click the magnifying glass. Click this and you'll see a dialogue box with further useful options. You can set the increments by which clicking the plus and minus buttons increase/decrease the zoom level. Tick 'Turn on color inversion' to make the area you're magnifying easier to read by inverting the colour scheme (black text on white becomes white text on black, for example).

In Docked and 'Full screen' modes, you can also alter the tracking options. For example, you may choose to move the magnified area using keyboard navigation or the text-insertion cursor instead of –

QUICK WAYS TO MAKE YOUR SCREEN EASIER TO SEE

✓ CHANGE THE THEME

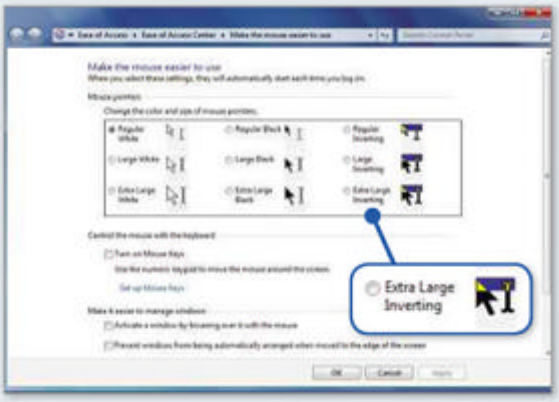
A high-contrast colour scheme can make text much easier to read, and Windows has a few high-contrast themes built in. Right-click your Desktop and select Personalize. Scroll through the themes in the main area of the screen until you see the High Contrast selection, then try out each one to see which works best. Each theme can be customised using the options below.

✓ MAKE YOUR CURSOR EASIER TO SEE

Press the Windows key, type change how your mouse works and click the link that appears. Here, you can make your cursor bigger, change it from white to black, or invert its colours to make it stand out more (see screenshot).

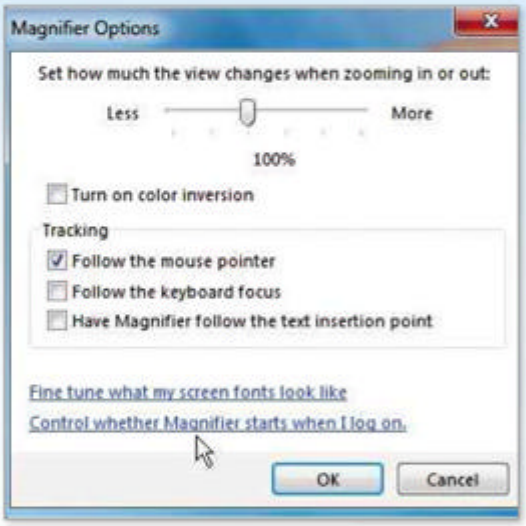
✓ INCREASE ICON AND TEXT SIZE

Right-click your Desktop and select 'Screen resolution', then click 'Make text and other items larger or smaller'. In Windows 7, choose a larger setting and click Apply. In Windows 8/8.1, use the slider to set the size you want and click Apply. Windows 8/8.1 also has an option to change text size only in title bars, menus, message boxes, icons and so on (the bars, menus, boxes and icons themselves will remain the same size).



✓ ZOOM INTO WEB PAGES

Some web pages use ridiculously small text. To make this instantly easier to read, hold down the Ctrl key and use the scroll wheel on your mouse (or the plus and minus keys on your keyboard) to zoom in and out of the page.



Use Magnifier's options to set the tool to start every time you log on to your PC

or as well as – your cursor. This is particularly useful if you're typing a document. In Lens mode, the tracking options are replaced by sliders that let you change the size and shape of the magnified area around your cursor.

In all cases, you'll see an option at the bottom of the dialogue box saying 'Control whether Magnifier starts when I log on' (see screenshot above). Click this to open another window, then tick the 'Turn on Magnifier' box and click OK (twice). From now on, Magnifier will start automatically whenever you turn on your PC.

Get full-screen magnification in older versions of Windows

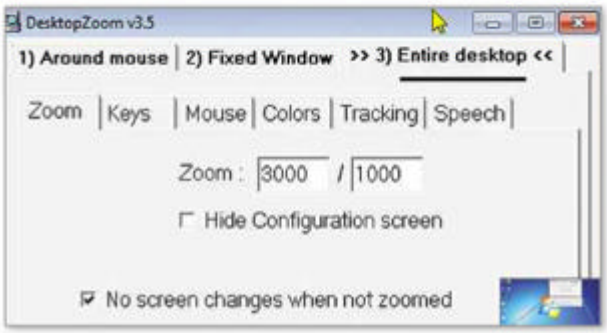
Full-screen magnification was only introduced in Windows 7 and, as mentioned earlier, it only works if you've enabled running Aero. But if you're running an earlier version of Windows, or if you want to use Windows 7 with a high-contrast display theme, then you can still get full-screen and lens-style magnification by using a free third-party tool such as Lightning Express (www.snipca.com/16436). Click the Launch button, run the downloaded file and you'll see a small toolbar similar to that on the Windows Magnifier.

The plus and minus buttons let you control the level of magnification, the chequered icon lets you switch to inverted colours within the magnified area, and the blue square icon with the white dot lets you switch between modes (full-screen, lens mode or off). The red pointer icon lets you switch to a high-contrast colour cursor that's easier to see.

Lightning Express is simple, free and effective. The drawback is you can't permanently install it. Instead of having to go to the site and downloading the tool every time you want to use it, you can add a shortcut to your Desktop. On the Lightning Express website, scroll down to the blue Lightning Express link and drag it to your Desktop, clicking OK if prompted.

Zoom in using other free tools

If neither Windows Magnifier nor Lightning Express suits your needs, there are plenty of other free screen-magnification tools you can try. Desktop Zoom (www.snipca.com/16437), for example, provides a very useful navigation window when in full-screen mode, which lets you instantly see which area of the Desktop you're currently enlarging (see screenshot left).



DesktopZoom makes it easy to navigate your Desktop when in full-screen magnification

If you make a lot of presentations or edit photos regularly, you should try ZoomIt (www.snipca.com/16438), which is designed as both a zoom and annotation tool. For a simple lens-style magnifier with zoom levels up to a whopping 32x, try Virtual Magnifying Glass (www.snipca.com/16439). ca

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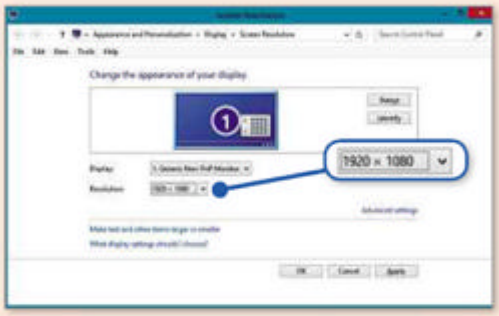
Problems Solved

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

How do I make Windows fit my HDTV?

Q Due to physical constraints I am having to use an HDTV as a monitor, but my Windows Desktop is larger than the visible portion of the TV screen, to such an extent that the Windows Taskbar is off the screen and is therefore impossible to use. I am using Windows 8 at the moment, but I also want to load Windows 7, as a dual-boot option – and I foresee the same problem there. Do you know what's going on here? And is there any way I can reduce the size of the Windows Desktop so that the whole of it is within the 'visible' area of the TV's screen?

Terry Couch



Adjust your screen-output settings to use a second monitor or TV screen

A There's likely one of two things going on here. The first is something that TVs do called overscanning. In simple terms, this means that your telly might be set up to intentionally crop details from around the border of the source image. This sounds like a very odd thing to do – and it is, up to a point – but there are historical and current reasons why this happens.

With old cathode-ray tube (CRT) televisions, it was impossible to know with total precision where on screen the electron gun's beam would strike the phosphors that made up the picture. By making the gun 'overscan', such that the beam would end up firing electrons on screen areas without phosphor, it was much more likely that the whole display would be lit. Some detail was lost around the edges but the viewer wouldn't be any the wiser, because the whole screen displayed a picture.

But that was a problem unique to CRTs, so you might with justification wonder why many modern TVs still overscan? The answer is, precisely because overscanning has historically been necessary, some broadcasters still encode information in these overscanned lines – and that information would appear as rubbish if displayed. So, many modern TVs are still set up to overscan, which is the most likely cause of your problem. If so, the solution is to look through your TV's settings for an option such as Overscan (switch it off), or 'Pixel Match' or '1:1' (switch these on).

Alternatively, the problem could be down to what your PC is outputting: either the Windows Desktop is too large for the TV's resolution or your graphics card's scaling options are set incorrectly. From Windows 8/8.1's Start screen click the Desktop tile, then right-click the Desktop and choose 'Screen resolution'. Now select a resolution that's equal to (or lower than) that of your TV. For an HDTV, this will almost certainly be 1920x1080 pixels (see screenshot above).

If this doesn't fix the problem, then you should look at the scaling option in your graphics card's drivers. Follow the above instructions then click the Advanced Settings button and look for a tab for your graphics card. Click it to see what's available. If you've set the resolution to 1920x1080, then we'd advise disabling any scaling options you find here.

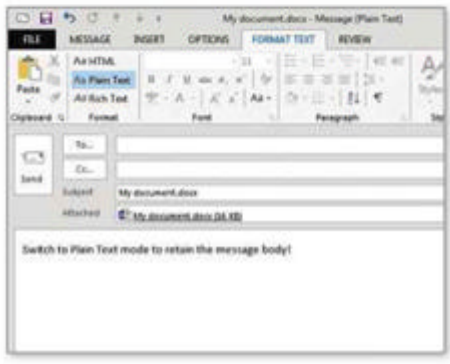
Why does Outlook strip out the message text?

Q My husband upgraded from Office 2007 to 2013 a month ago, and has recently discovered a problem when emailing an attachment from within Word – something he did regularly in 2007 and wants to continue doing in 2013. When using Word's 'Send as Attachment' and emailing via Outlook 2013, the attachment is sent but any accompanying message is not. I checked the Sent Items folder and the message area is blank. The recipient also receives a blank message but does receive the attachment. It works fine when we attach the file from within Outlook. What's going on and how do I fix this?

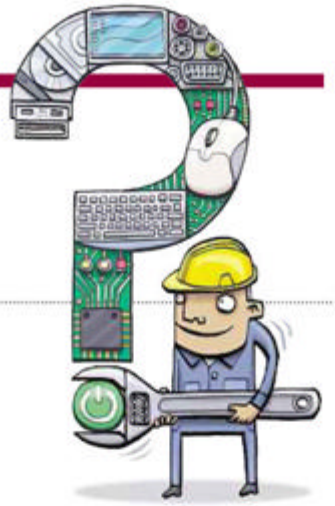
Rae Drysdale

A This is a bug for which there's currently no permanent fix. Microsoft is supposedly working on one, but it has been for a while now – so don't hold your breath.

In the meantime, there is a workaround. When you use the 'Send as Attachment' option and the Outlook's new message window appears, click the FORMAT TEXT tab on the ribbon and then click Plain Text in the Format group. If you've already typed the message and included formatting then Outlook will display a warning that formatting will be lost – but you'll have to accept by clicking Continue. You can now send your message in the normal way and the body will arrive intact at the other end, along with the attachment.



Use the Plain Text mode to ensure messages are sent with Outlook attachments from Word



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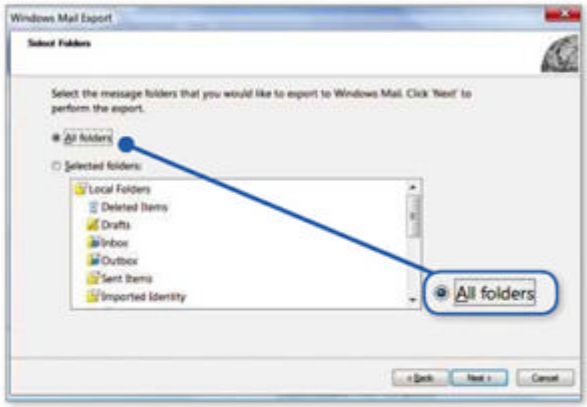
How do I get Freeserve email to work in Windows 8.1?

Q My email address is a Freeserve one that I've had for years. My main computer runs on Windows 7 and I collect and send my emails via Windows Mail. I have a new Windows 8.1 laptop, but this does not have Windows Mail. I don't want to change my email address if I can help it, but I understand that the POP email system used by Freeserve is not compatible with Windows 8.1. How do I get around this without setting up a new email address in Gmail or whatever? And how do I copy over the folder system I'm used to?

Jim Bannatyne



Export your email messages and folders from your old email program into Windows Mail

A You're right that Windows 8.1's Modern-style Mail app doesn't support the older POP email protocol and therefore won't work with Freeserve, which was originally launched by Dixons (www.dixonsretail.com) but is now owned and managed by EE (www.ee.co.uk) as a 'legacy' service.

Fortunately, there's an easy solution in the shape of Windows Live Mail (WLM), which is Microsoft's free and more recent version of Windows Mail that works with Windows 8.1 – download it from www.snipca.com/16089. Setting up your Freeserve account is straightforward, and you'll be prompted to do so when you first launch WLM. The necessary email-server details are on EE's website at www.snipca.com/16090.

You can preserve your current emails and folder arrangement by first exporting your email database from Windows Mail and then importing it into WLM. In Windows Mail on your Windows 7 computer, click File followed by Export, then Messages. Now select Microsoft Windows Mail and click Next. Click Browse to choose a destination for the exported email folders (a USB memory stick would be a good idea), click Select Folder then click Next. Choose the 'All folders' button (see screenshot) and click Next.

When the exporting has finished, switch to WLM on your Windows 8.1 PC, click the blue button at the top left to open the File menu then click 'Import messages'. Select the appropriate file format (options include Microsoft Outlook Express 6, Windows Live Mail, and Windows Mail) and then click Next. Choose Windows Mail then click Browse, navigate to your USB stick and click Next. Choose 'All folders' again and click Next. Your imported folders will be placed in a folder called 'Storage folders' in the left-hand pane: now just drag and drop to rearrange messages and folders to your liking.

How do I download all my photos from Picasa Web Albums?

Q For years, I've used Picasa Web Albums for uploading and sharing photos. I no longer trust Google with my privacy so I'd like to move to something else, but I can't find an easy way to download all my photos. I can download shots individually, but obviously that would take forever. I understand that the Picasa software for Windows would let me download whole albums, but I have thousands of photos in hundreds of albums so that would also take forever, and anyway I don't want to install more Google software. Do you know of any other way to get my photos all at once?

George Fitzgerald

A Yes, you can use Google's Takeout service to do this. Visit www.google.com/takeout and log in if prompted. If you want to download only your Picasa Web Albums photos, click the 'Select none' button and then click the switch next to Picasa Web Albums so it turns to a green tick, then click Next followed by 'Create archive'.

Google Takeout will now gather your data ready for download, which could take a long time for thousands of photos. Either wait for it to finish and click the 'Show downloads' button, or forget about it and wait for Google to email you a download link.

Use Google's Takeout service to download your Picasa Web Albums photos

If your photo archive is bigger than 2GB then you'll have to download multiple compressed zip files. To access your photos, right-click on each and choose Extract or Extact All.

Problems Solved

How do I get a Google Earth Pro licence key, so I can plan my fell walks?

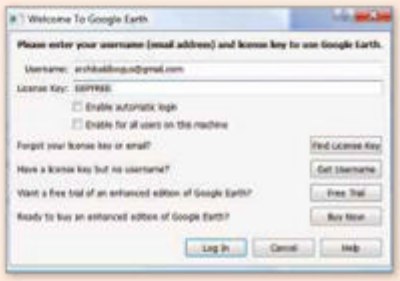
Q Having often used Google Earth for planning fell walks, I was pleased to read in your pages that Google Earth Pro is now free. Hoping this would show moorland pathways in greater detail, I followed your download link and instructions. However, the page failed to show any yellow banner to obtain the licence key.

I have managed to download and install the program on to my computer but it will not proceed until I enter my email address and the licence key. I have no idea how to obtain this. I never needed a key for the basic Google Earth. Can you help me obtaining a key?

Stan Sharpe

A Google has changed the process since we first covered this. Existing users of Google Earth Pro have had their licence keys extended indefinitely, so they will no longer expire. However, anyone downloading Pro can use it by simply signing in your email address and typing 'GEPFREE'.

So launch Google Earth Pro type your email address (or even a fake one – it doesn't seem to matter) and then type GEPFREE into the License Key field and click Log In. There's nothing more to it.



Log into Google Earth Pro using your email address and the licence key GEPFREE

How do I burn photos with Windows 8 and 10?

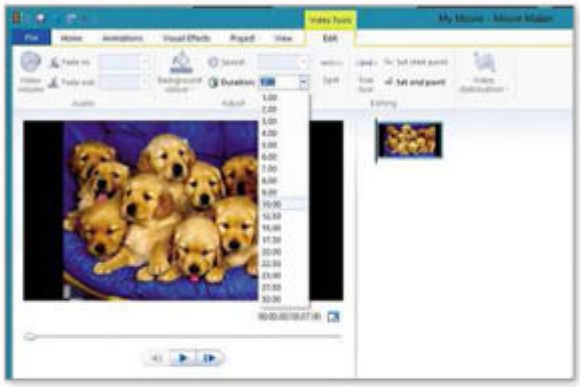
Q I was over the moon to read about a way to burn DVD movies with Windows 8.1, in Issue 443's Problems Solved (page 69). However, I would like to include both photos and videos in my movie, which I don't seem to be able to do with DVD Flick. Any suggestions? Also, will it be possible to burn to a DVD in Movie Maker in Windows 10?

Sheila Drury

A We think you missed at least part of the point of our original reply, which is that DVD Flick can be used for authoring (burning) discs using video files created by Windows Movie Maker (WMM). So, you can still use WMM to build your projects – and WMM offers the ability to include both photo and video clips.

If you're not sure how to use this feature, it's simple. When building your video project in WMM, click the 'Add videos and photos' button and then choose a photo instead of a video clip. To tweak how it appears in the final video click the Edit tab. For example, you can have the still photo appear for a specific amount of time by choosing a figure from the Duration dropdown menu (see screenshot). Now just save your project as a video in the usual way, then add it to DVD Flick as described in Issue 443.

We don't know if the final version of Windows 10 will let you burn to DVD but the Technical Preview does not.



Add photos to your personal movies in Windows Movie Maker and set how long they appear in the final edit

How do I stop myself clearing Android notifications?

Q I have a habit of resting my thumb near the top right of my Nexus 5 phone, and therefore keep tapping the button that clears my notifications when I pull down that pane. Is there any way to remove this button or see old notifications?

Alicia Johnson

A One option would be to install a different launcher to change the layout of Android, but we reckon that's overkill. A better solution would be to add a widget that lets you summon dismissed notifications with one tap on a home-screen icon. To do this, first tap and hold on any blank spot on any home screen. Next, tap WIDGETS then swipe to find 'Settings shortcut'. Tap and hold this then drag the shortcut to where you'd like it. Tap Notifications and that's it.

Next time you accidentally clear your notifications, just tap this Notifications icon to see what Android wants you to know.

Avoid wiping your notifications by creating a dedicated icon on your homescreen

Is swapping hard drives a safe way to install Windows 10?

Q I have just downloaded the Windows 10 Technical Preview and obviously would like to try it. I have a spare 350GB hard drive and I'm wondering if I should first remove my Windows 7 PC's 500GB hard drive and then replace it with this spare, blank hard drive. Would it be straightforward to install Windows 10 on it? And when and if I want to change back, am I right in thinking that I just swap the hard drives over again and I will be back with my original Windows 7 setup, with all my settings and programs intact?

Tom Liversage

You can replace your existing hard drive with a blank one and install Windows 10 on that, then swap drives to return to the old OS

A Yes, this should work without problem – so long as you don't change the hardware configuration in any meaningful way.

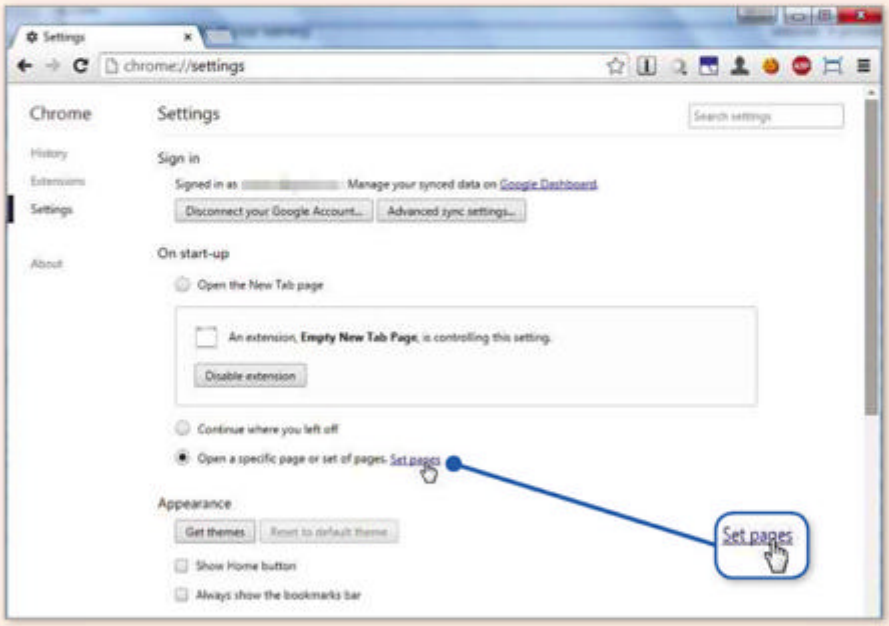
For example, if you swapped to the 350GB hard drive to install Windows 10 and at the same time decided to upgrade the memory and graphics card, say, then when you revert to the 500GB hard drive that contains Windows 7, that operating system will detect the hardware and might demand reactivation with Microsoft. Even this isn't a problem because it's usually entirely automated, or at worst, will involve a short explanatory call to Microsoft by dialling a phone number displayed by Windows.

However, if it's just a straight drive swap and nothing else then all should be fine: each drive and each operating system will be entirely self-contained and unaware of the other, so you can proceed with confidence.

Why does Outlook.com give me these error messages?

Q This is a problem that's been driving me nuts for months. Every time I open Chrome, my Outlook.com page pops up as normal followed immediately by two error messages: "Something happened at our end. Please refresh browser or close it and sign in again", followed by "Outlook.com was not able to complete this request. Microsoft may contact you about any issues you report". Despite this, everything works quite normally. Also, I have to repeatedly click on the error messages to close them. Any ideas, please?

Peter Marsh



Update your start-page bookmark in Chrome's settings to avoid error messages

A We're not sure of the exact technical cause, but this problem is related to Chrome's Bookmarks feature. It doesn't affect everyone, and nor does it affect all setups, but we managed to replicate the problem by setting up Chrome so that it launched displaying Outlook.com as its default start page using a bookmark to www.hotmail.co.uk (Hotmail being the old name for the Outlook.com service).

This sounds just like your problem, so in this instance the solution is to replace the outdated start-page bookmark with one that directs to Outlook.com. To do this, click Chrome's menu button (three horizontal lines at the top right), then choose Settings. Now, in the 'On start-up' section, choose the 'Open a specific page or set of pages' button and then click the adjacent 'Set pages' link (see screenshot). Type www.outlook.com and click OK.

Alternatively, you might be visiting Outlook.com by using a Chrome bookmark. If that's the case, click the Chrome menu button then point to Bookmarks and choose 'Bookmark manager'. Right-click your existing Outlook.com/Hotmail bookmark, choose edit and then update it to read www.outlook.com, then press Enter to finish.

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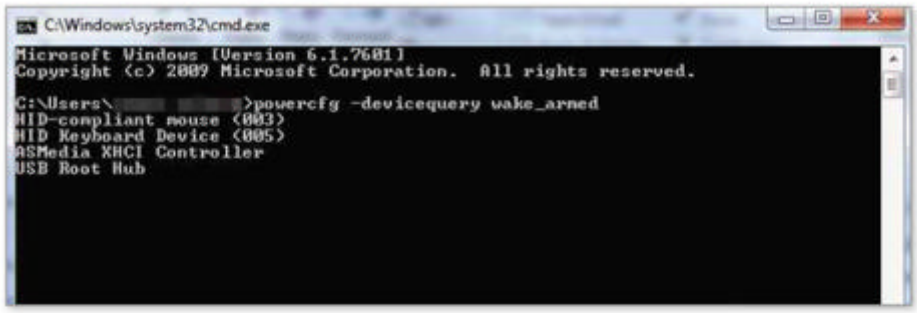
Issue 415 22 January; Issue 425 11 June; Issue 430 20 August; Issue 437 26 November

Why does my laptop keep waking up by itself?

Q Whenever I shut down my Windows 7 Dell laptop using the Hibernate option on the Start menu, it will often start up again within a few minutes by itself. Do you have any idea why this is happening and what I can do to make it stay in Hibernate mode until I need it again?

Mollie Walsh



Use the Command feature to find out which devices are waking your PC from hibernation

A Depending on the setup, a Windows PC can be brought out of hibernation using a variety of methods, from tapping the laptop's power button or keyboard key to simply moving the mouse. We're assuming you'd remember pressing a physical key so the mouse is the mostly likely culprit here: even a small draft caused by shutting your office door, say, could move the mouse a fraction.

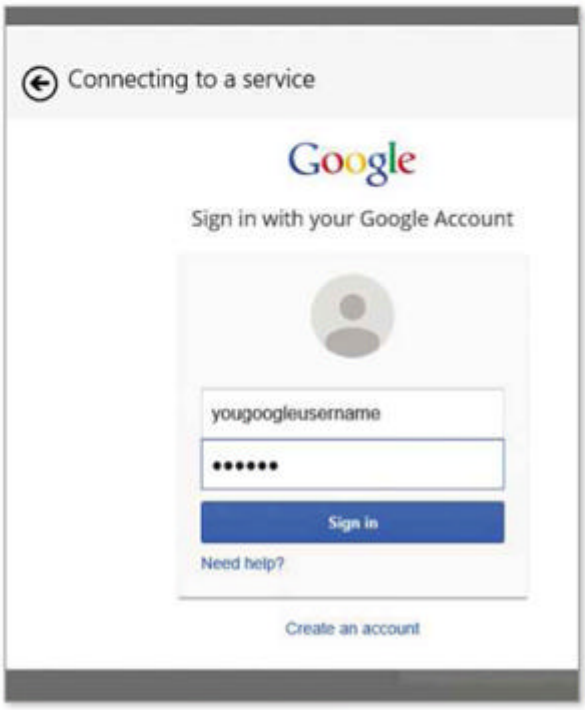
This is easily fixed, though the fix takes some finding. In Windows 7, click Start, Control Panel, then 'Hardware and Sound' followed by Mouse under the 'Devices and Printers' heading. Now select the Properties tab, click to select your mouse in the Devices list then click the Properties button. Now select the General tab and click the 'Change settings' button. Choose the Power Management tab then clear the tick from the 'Allow this device to wake the computer' box. Click OK twice.

If this doesn't resolve the problem, you'll need to do some more legwork to track down the cause. Click Start, type cmd into the search box and press Enter. In the Command window that opens type powercfg -devicequery wake_armed. This will display a list of all devices that are able to wake your PC. If you now type powercfg -lastwake you'll be shown which one did the waking. What to do next depends on the specific devices, but stopping it from waking your PC will be very similar to the mouse instructions above: use Control Panel to look for the offending device and then look through its settings for an option to stop its hibernation-disturbing behaviour.

How do I access Gmail contacts on my Windows 8.1 tablet?

Q I have an HP laptop running Windows 7 and use Gmail to send and receive emails. I also have a Toshiba tablet running Windows 8.1. Can you advise a method for copying my email contacts from my laptop to my tablet? The only way I've been able to send emails from my tablet is to type the recipients' email addresses in their entirety. I would like to simply click 'To...' to bring up my list of contacts and then merely select the contacts I wish to send to.

Frederick Grove



Connect your Gmail account to the People app for easier access to your contacts in your device's email program

A You need to 'connect' your Gmail account to Windows 8.1's People app, which will synchronise the contacts so that they're available in exactly the way you describe.

From the Windows 8.1 Start screen, tap the People tile. If you've never before used this app you'll be offered the option to connect to Google (and other services), so just tap it. Otherwise, swipe left from the far right of the screen to open the charms bar then tap Settings followed by Accounts. Now tap 'Add an account' followed by Google. Tap 'What else happens when I connect' to find out what information will be shared and how. If you're happy to proceed, tap the Connect button at the bottom. Type your Gmail username and password then tap Sign In.

Gmail will now display a warning explaining that you're about to share information with Microsoft – tap Accept. Tap Done and you've finished: your Gmail contacts will now be available in the People app (and by tapping To in the Mail app).

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE 10 June

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- Will I be able to run Windows 95 programs in Windows 10?

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CCleaner

Avoid error messages, download missing definitions and fix problems with Windows after cleaning

Error messages during installation

If you're trying to install CCleaner for the first time, you may see an error message if you're not logged into Windows using an administrator account. Select an administrator account when prompted, and then type the correct password. Alternatively, log out and log back in as an administrator.

You may also see an 'Abort, Retry, Ignore' dialogue box when trying to update or install CCleaner in Windows XP or Vista. Exit CCleaner, wait a few moments then click Retry.

CCleaner doesn't clean up all user accounts

CCleaner doesn't clean every account by default. If necessary, reinstall CCleaner and choose the option to make it accessible to all users when it appears. Alternatively, install it for individual user accounts as and when needed. If you choose the latter option, you'll need to log into each user account in turn before running CCleaner.

CCleaner's portable version won't launch

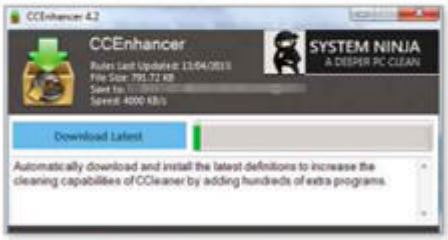
There are several things that can prevent the portable version of CCleaner (www.snipca.com/16391) from working. First, make sure you're launching the correct file for your version of Windows, because the portable edition comes in 32bit and 64bit versions. Trying to launch CCleaner64.exe on a 32bit machine will result in an error message (see screenshot below). If you see a Security Warning message, click Run. If the User Account Control (UAC) dialogue box then appears, click Yes. Finally, you need to be logged in as an administrator for all CCleaner's features to work.

Cleaning process is slow

If CCleaner slows to a crawl, you may have intentionally (or inadvertently) enabled secure-file deletion. To check, click Options followed by Settings and then look in the Secure Deletion section. Select 'Normal file detection' for the fastest speed, or 'Secure file detection' and 'Simple Overwrite (1 pass)' for safer deletion that's still pretty nippy.

CCEnhancer's definitions aren't added

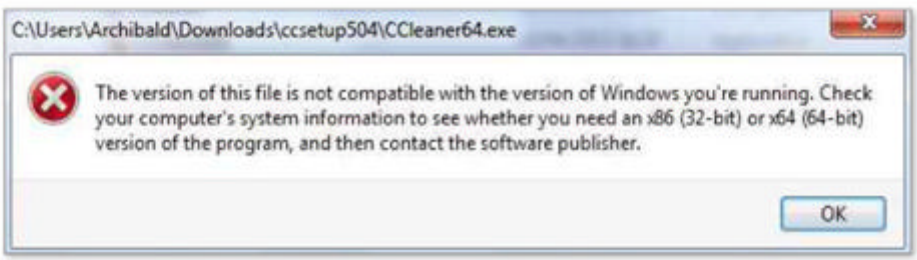
If you've installed the excellent free CCleaner plug-in CCEnhancer (www.snipca.com/16390) and are wondering why its extra definitions haven't appeared in CCleaner itself, it's because CCEnhancer doesn't actually come with any definitions – you have to download them separately. Launch CCEnhancer then click the blue Download Latest button, and then launch (or restart) CCleaner.



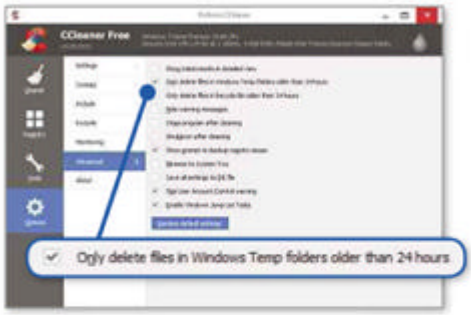
Click Download Latest in CCEnhancer to ensure you've got the plug-in's latest extra definitions

Some temporary folders aren't deleted

There's a hidden option in CCleaner that preserves recent temporary files. This is enabled by default, so to ensure everything is deleted, click Options, Advanced, then clear the tick from the 'Only delete files in Windows Temp folders older than 24 hours' box. There's a similar option below it for the Recycle Bin, if you're having the same problem with that.



You'll see an error message if you try running the wrong portable version of CCleaner



Untick 'Only delete files in Windows Temp folders...' to ensure CCleaner deletes everything

Firewall tries to block CCleaner

CCleaner has to access the internet to download updates, and so does CCEnhancer. This may occasionally trigger warning messages from your firewall. Once you've read the warning, click the relevant button (Allow, Yes or Continue) to let the program proceed. This typically occurs only once, but if it happens repeatedly look in your firewall for an option to activate exceptions for CCleaner and CCEnhancer.

Windows goes wrong after running CCleaner

The most likely cause is changes made to the Windows Registry. Before cleaning the Registry, CCleaner offers to make a backup: you should always click Yes, so you can return to your previous state if things go wrong. By default, these backups are stored in your My Documents folder, so use Windows Explorer or File Explorer to navigate there then double-click the most recent backup – it'll have a REG (.reg) file extension. When the Registry Editor dialogue box appears, click Yes to confirm the restore. If Windows won't even launch then, restart in Safe Mode (tap F8 after your computer powers up then use the arrow keys and Enter to choose Safe Mode) then follow these instructions.

Next issue Fast Fixes for... System Restore

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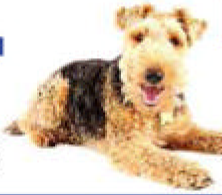

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T041 Colour	£39.99 37ml	£4.99 46ml, 3 for £13.99	
T050 Black	£32.99 15ml	£2.99 16ml, 3 for £7.99	440, 640, 660 Photo 700, 1200
T051 Black	£36.99 24ml	£2.99 26ml, 3 for £7.99	740, 760, 800, 850, 860, 1160
T052 Colour	£36.99 35ml	£3.99 39ml, 3 for £10.99	440, 640, 660, 740, 760, 1160
T053 Colour	£26.99 43ml	£3.99 46ml, 3 for £10.99	Photo 700, 750
T0441-4 Set of 4	£44.99	£14.99, 3 sets for £42.99	C64, C66, C84, C86,
T0441 Black	£19.99 13ml	£4.99 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	£4.99 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	S20/21, SX100/105/115/200/205/215
T0711 Black	£8.99 7.4ml	£4.99 7.4ml, 3 for £13.99	SX400/405/415/515, D78/92/120
T0711-4 each	£8.99 5.5ml	£3.99 7.4ml, 3 for £10.99	DX4000/4400/5000/6000/7400/8400
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	/685/650, 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	£9.99 11.4ml	Check Website.	
T0961-9 Set of 8	£74.99	Check Website.	Photo R2880
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 5.9ml	£4.99 5.9ml	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	SX525WD/535WD/620FW, B42WD,
T1292-4 each	£10.99 7ml	£4.49 7ml	BX305F/320FW/525WD/625FWD
T1571-9 each	£20.99 25ml	Check Website.	R3000
T1591-9 each	£14.99 17ml	Check Website.	R2000
T5801-9 each	£41.99 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 C/M/Y, 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 C/M/Y, 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 Photo XP750, 850
No.24 B/LC/LM, ea	£7.99 5.1ml	No.24XL B/LC/LM, ea	£11.99 9.8ml	
No.24 C/M/Y, each	£7.99 4.6ml	No.24XL C/M/Y, each	£11.99 8.7ml	
No.26 Set of 4	£30.99	No.26XL Set of 4	£54.99	Expression Premium XP600, 605, XP700, 800
No.26 Black	£8.99 6.2ml	No.26XL Black	£14.99 12.1ml	
No.26 Photo Black	£7.99 4.7ml	No.26XL Photo Black	£13.99 8.7ml	
No.26 C/M/Y, each	£7.99 4.5ml	No.26XL C/M/Y, each	£13.99 9.7ml	

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4	EE	EE: Broadband & Calls	£9.95 (£2.95 for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited **	£35.40
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6	TalkTalk	TalkTalk Fibre Broadband	£10.00 (£5 for 6 months)	18 months	38Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£90.00
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8	EE	EE: Fibre Broadband & Calls	£19.95 (£9.95 for 6 months)	18 months	38Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£179.40
9	sky	Sky: Fibre Broadband & Calls	£20.00 (HALF PRICE for 6 months)	18 months	38Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£180.00
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Jargon Buster

1080p High-definition video, this is the best quality: 1920x1080 pixels.

32bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once.

64bit A technology that processes information in larger chunks.

802.11ac A standard for wireless networks that allows for higher transfer speeds than 802.11n.

Add-on See Extensions.

ADSL Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line. A technology that converts a standard phone line into a broadband internet connection.

Aspect ratio A measurement of the shape of a display.

Bookmarklet A small, very simple program stored as a bookmark in your web browser.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

Coaxial A type of cable where one wire is surrounded by insulation, which is then surrounded by another wire.

Codec Short for Compressor/Decompressor. A file that tells a PC how to record or play a media file.

Composite A cable with three connectors which is used to display standard-definition video.

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

CPU Central Processing Unit. Computer processor.

Crowdfunding A process where a company gets the financing to launch a new product from prospective customers online.

CRT Cathode-ray tube. The technology used in older, non-flat-screen TVs and computer displays.

Definition A file downloaded by an antivirus program, telling it how to spot the latest threats.

Distro A version of the Linux OS and the programs that go with it.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with another device.

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

Dual boot To set up a PC with two operating systems.

Eight-core A PC that has eight processors on a single chip.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired PC networks.

Exposure The amount of light collected by a camera's sensor.

Extension A program that adds extra features to your browser.

Feedback The response the keys on a keyboard give when pressed.

Firewall A piece of software or hardware that prevents unauthorised access to a PC.

Firmware Basic software stored on a device to control its operation.

Ghosting On TV screens, the appearance of a second image that's a facsimile of the first.

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

HD High-definition. An increase in display or visual resolution over a previously used standard.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits HD video/audio signals.

HDTV High-definition television.

IP address Internet Protocol Address.

MB/s Megabytes per second.

Megapixel Amount of detail that can be recorded by a digital image.

MFP Multifunction Printer.

MicroSD A type of memory card.

Micro USB A small version of USB, found on phones, tablets.

MKV Matroska. An open-source type of video file.

NAS Network-attached storage. A hard drive attached to a network.

Noise Dust-like speckles that appear in photos and TV images.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone.

Optical resolution The true amount of detail a scanner can 'see' as it passes across a document.

Optical S/PDIF Sony/Philips Digital Interface. A standard for transferring digital audio data between devices. S/PDIF sockets can be both optical and electrical.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to your web browser.

POP Post Office Protocol.

PUP Potentially Unwanted Program. A program that may not be desired, despite the user consenting to it being downloaded.

Processor The brain of a computer.

Proxy server A computer that sits between your computer and the internet and filters the connection.

Quad core A PC that has four processors on a single chip, which allows it to operate faster than single-core computers.

QuickTime A video file format developed by Apple.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area.

Ransomware Malware run by hackers who take over your PC and demand a payment to release it.

Remote Code Execution When a hacker is able to start a program running on a remote computer.

Resolution The amount of detail shown in an image.

Rootkit Software that gives a hacker administration rights and access to a computer.

SATA3 Serial ATA. An interface for connecting hard drives to a PC.

Scart A standard connector for video and audio signals.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

Server A PC on a network, such as the internet, that distributes information to other PCs.

Skin A different, purely cosmetic appearance for an application.

SSD Solid-state drive.

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.

TBB Protocol An internet speed test that involves a single download. Most speed tests involve multiple downloads.

Travel The distance the keys of a keyboard have to be pressed before the keystroke is recognised.

Trim A feature built into SSDs that improves their performance.

Trojan A malicious computer program that's disguised as a different, harmless program.

TV tuner An expansion card that enables a PC to receive TV signals.

Two-factor verification A system that uses two different means to identify the user.

UPnP Universal Plug and Play.

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.

VGA Video Graphics Array.

VPN Virtual Private Network.

Web apps Programs that aren't stored on your computer, but on a web server instead and run through your web browser.

Wiki site A collaborative website that users can easily edit.

Worm A program that transmits and copies itself over a computer network, such as the internet.

Bust more jargon on our Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/14981

The Final Straw

STUART ANDREWS is *Computeractive*'s Mr Angry

This issue Stuart Andrews is left traumatised by. . .

Tickbox confusion

In the good, old-fashioned world of high-street shopping, I can be pretty sure that I've bought a hedge trimmer, a cinema ticket or groceries without having given the retailer permission to hound me on the phone or post a brochure through my door on a daily basis. But is the same true in the world of digital sales and goods? Sadly not, and it all comes down to the tricky tickbox.

You'll find it lurking somewhere on the checkout page. Sometimes it says something simple: 'tick here if you want to receive further offers by email'. At other times, though, it says 'tick here to opt out of' the same. To make it worse, you might get one box saying 'tick here to opt out of receiving further offers from carefully selected partners', followed by another that says 'tick here to receive further offers from us'.

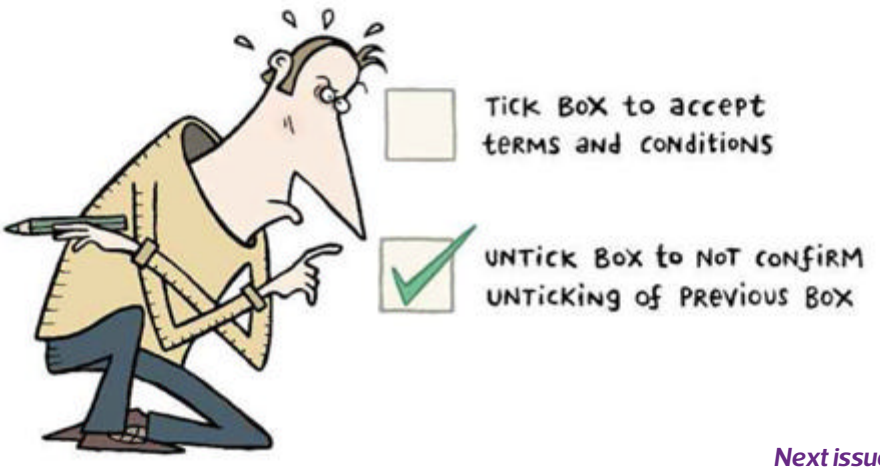
You may have to tick a box that says 'I accept the terms and conditions', but not tick the box that says (and I'm paraphrasing) 'please clog my inbox with spam'. You'll even find sneaky variations on a theme, such as 'tick here to opt out of our mind-blowing offers, like the miserable git you are' beneath 'tick here to receive more offers, because you like saving money and you're surprisingly good looking too'.

Sometimes the tickboxes are lurking at the bottom of the web page, beneath the point where most of us care to scroll. At other times the text is padded with nonsense and rendered in some ludicrously illegible font: the digital version of the classic small-print trick. Either way, the blasted tickboxes seem hellbent on befuddling those with poor vision, poor judgement, poor concentration or – in my case – all of the above.

> "Tickboxes seem hellbent on befuddling those with poor vision, poor judgement, poor concentration or – in my case – all of the above"

If you're lucky, you'll end up with weekly or daily emails alerting you to the existence of people you don't know, events you don't care about and products you don't want. If you're unlucky, you'll end up with those things, plus cold-callers and unwanted texts. But the tickboxes I hate most are the ones you get when you install some apparently useful bit of software, asking you to opt in or out of some hideous, malware-crammed browser add-on. A moment's inattention can be disastrous, and instead of getting Google, I get some homepage full of dodgy security tools.

Unsubscribing to an email newsletter is a painful process, but uninstalling software can be a darn sight worse. I like to think I know enough to spot what's happened then go and fix it, but how many people end up living with a toolbar or homepage they don't want because they missed that crucial tick? These evil tickboxes prey on our inability to focus on the small print, and while the authorities occasionally make an effort to put a stop to their confusing practices, the bad guys always seem to keep one step ahead. All we can do is double-check each tickbox, and make damn sure we know exactly what it means.



Man shoots computer – I know how he feels

Last week, I read that a man in Colorado Springs, USA, might face the wrath of the law for taking his PC outside and putting eight bullets through its vital parts (see the damage at www.snipca.com/16315). Apparently, the hapless Lucas Hinch lost the plot when the Ctrl+Alt+Delete keyboard shortcut consistently failed to work. I hope the judge goes easy on him. Sure, he'd discharged a firearm within the city, but who among us hasn't wanted to do the same at some point? Maybe he could enter a plea of self-defence. After all, I'm sure my Windows 8 laptop is out to get me through soaring blood pressure, aneurysm or cardiac arrest.

Do you hate tickboxes too? Let us know at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue Stuart can't be doing with silly tech gimmicks

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