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Microsoft's surprise decision p8

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ISSUE 463 | 25 NOV - 8 DEC 2015

Your friendly guide to technology



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The 15 Most Important NEW Programs p50

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**WHAT YOU SHOULD NEVER
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Best new tools explained - step by step page 35

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From the Editor

One of the things I look forward to after the launch of a new version of Windows is the release of software designed to fix problems within it. I'm always impressed by the ingenuity of the tools, and the speed with which developers build them. Microsoft will disagree, but I also love the lack of deference shown towards Windows:

'Thanks for the new operating system guys – we'll take over from here'.

You'll find this rebellious spirit in many of the programs that comprise our top 15 for Windows 10 (Cover Feature, page 50), most notably in tools that let you change its privacy settings and remove pre-installed Desktop



apps. We've also included classic programs that have been revamped to work with Windows 10.

Once you've read that, turn to page 35 for our Workshop on using the tools that arrived in the operating system's first substantial update. Please let me know your thoughts on the changes Microsoft has made.

Daniel Booth

editor@computeractive.co.uk



THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

55%

Proportion of PCs worldwide running Windows 7 – **p8**



10 years

How long Amazon gift cards last for – **p14**

£200

Price of Toshiba's new four-star laptop – **p22**

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.

Contents

25 Nov – 8 Dec 2015 • Issue 463

In this issue...

50 Best free software for Windows 10

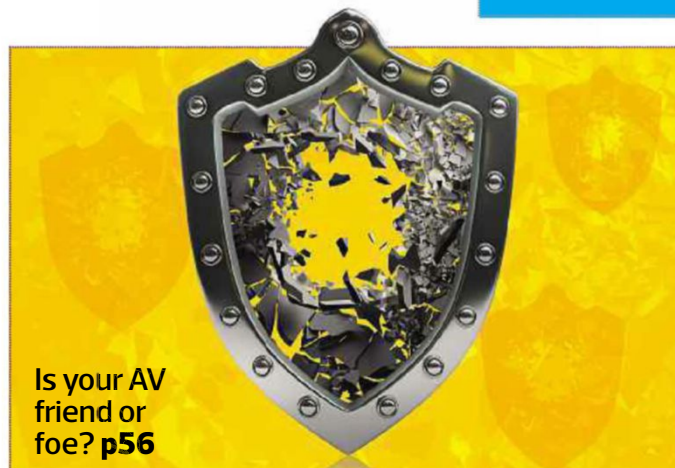
We suggest the software you need to download to enhance your experience of Microsoft's latest OS

56 Security tools you should stop using

Not all security software is good for your PC's health. We explain what to avoid to keep your computer fit

60 Who's selling your data?

It's not just security firm AVG that sells your data to advertisers. Some of tech's biggest names are making money from your details



In every issue...

6 News

11 Question of the Fortnight

Will terrorists be able to read your emails?

12 Letters

14 Consumeractive

16 Protect Your Tech

18 Best Free Software

Foobar2000 1.3.9

30 Buy It!

32 Competition

Win MAGIX Rescue Your Videotapes 8 software

49 What's All the Fuss About?

Machine learning

64 Problems Solved

69 Fast Fixes

iPad

73 Jargon Buster

74 The Final Straw

Stuart Andrews dishes the dirt on mucky keyboards

Filth at your fingertips p74



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See page 62
for our special
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Toshiba Satellite
C40-C p22



Google Nexus 5X p23



Apple TV (2015) p28

Workshops & Tips

14 pages of brilliant workshops and expert tips

35 Master Windows 10's updated tools

38 Use Skype without installing software

40 Set how programs run on your PC



42 Stop anyone reading your Facebook posts

43 Readers' Tips
Customise keyboard shortcuts

44 Phone and Tablet Tips
Create a video montage quickly

46 Make Windows Better
Put images on your photo folders

47 Make Office Better
Add Google Drive tab to Office

48 Secret Tips For...
Outlook.com

Reviews

20 Tesco Windows Connect 10

A cheap tablet with Windows 10 – but don't drop it on your foot

21 Palicomp Intel i5 Revolution

Hard-working desktop PC is tailor-made to satisfy your needs

22 Toshiba Satellite C40-C

A Windows 10 laptop for £200? What's not to like...

23 Google Nexus 5X

Google's latest Nexus phone attempts to take a bite out of Apple's lead

26 Epson WorkForce WF-100W

A pricey printer that you can use wherever you go

28 Apple TV(2015)

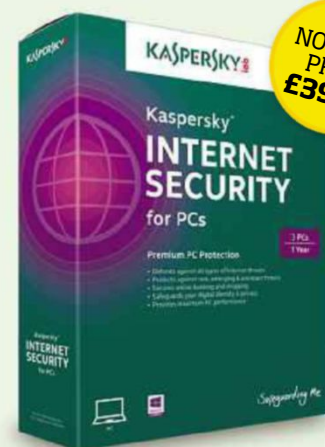
Carry on streaming, with Apple's latest set-top box

29 Adobe Photoshop Elements 14

Adobe's photo-editing software aims to put novices in the picture

READER OFFER

Kaspersky Internet Security 2016



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from www.snipca.com/17874

Windows 10 update 'deletes programs Microsoft doesn't want you to use'

Microsoft's first major update for Windows 10 appears to be deleting several key programs from users' computers. It also seems to be reinstalling built-in Desktop apps that users have removed.

These side effects are not mentioned in Microsoft's blog post announcing the update (www.snipca.com/18740).

Complaints first surfaced on the Windows 10 forum on Reddit (www.snipca.com/18741). Angry users reported that the update, codenamed Threshold 2 and released on 12 November, removes without warning certain programs if it finds them on your system, including CPU-Z, 8gadgetpack, SpyBot and HWMonitor (see box below for more).

It's thought Windows 10 does this because it thinks the programs are incompatible with the update. However, many users have recovered lost programs and used them with the updated operating system (OS) without any problems.

Several of the affected



programs are tools that help you monitor your system. Some users have suggested that Microsoft is wiping software it wants you to replace with its own products.

Many are *Computeractive* favourites, and popular with readers. In Issue 462's Cover Feature 'Make Your PC Live Much Longer' we recommended CPU-Z and HWMonitor. In the same issue we suggested installing 8gadgetpack - see the 'Use Windows Desktop gadgets safely' Workshop.

Thankfully, it's easy to find out whether the update has removed any programs. The update creates a folder called 'Windows.old' in your C: drive, where it places the

deleted programs. You can recover them from there.

Update brings back apps you've deleted

Another unexpected consequence of the update is that it reinstalls Windows 10 apps that users have deleted.

The OS comes with many apps pre-installed, which some users have found surplus to requirements. Clearly Microsoft wants them to reconsider that decision.

The move angered many people on the Reddit forum (www.snipca.com/18742), with one writing: "Frankly, it's pathetic to see that the update basically was Microsoft's subtle way of working their

COMMENT

Once again Microsoft has shown that the two words most likely to strike fear into a PC user are 'Windows update'. We don't expect every update on every PC to run smoothly - there will always be flaws. But removing software and reinstalling apps isn't a bug; it's a sign that an arrogant Microsoft thinks it knows better than you how you should run your PC. We've postponed the planned Cover Feature of our next issue to focus instead on how you can regain control over updates.


default bloatware back on to my system". Others were angry that the update also changed some PC settings they had customised, reverting to Microsoft's defaults. You can restore your settings in Windows by clicking System, 'Default apps', then choosing what you want.

Read our special report on stopping and controlling Windows updates in our next issue (out Wed 9 Dec) and our Workshop on the update's new tools (p35).

SOFTWARE REMOVED BY THE UPDATE

- | | | | |
|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------------------|
| • CPU-Z | • Cisco VPN | • F5 VPN | • JavaEclipseMars |
| • Speccy | • SATA drivers | • HWMonitor | • Adobe Creative Suite |
| • 8gadgetpack | • SpyBot | • PC meter | • Android Studio |

 **You'll like this...** Classic BBC shows are now available to buy as downloads (<http://store.bbc.com>)

 **... but not this** Security researchers have found the first case of Linux ransomware (www.snipca.com/18733)

Slow broadband in your rural home? Tough!

If you live in the countryside, you have no right to demand fast broadband, a free-market campaigner has said.

Speaking on Radio 4's *PM* show, Mark Littlewood – the director of the free market Institute of Economic Affairs – said that by choosing to live in remote areas, people had forfeited the right to receive fast broadband.

His comments came after Prime Minister David Cameron pledged to make sure that by 2020 all UK homes and businesses would be able to get 10Mbps broadband speeds.

The Government plans to introduce a Universal Service Obligation for broadband to place the service on a similar footing as gas, water and electricity.

It would give people the legal right to request an



“affordable” service, no matter where they live (read more on Gov.uk: www.snipca.com/18726).

Cameron said: “Access to the internet shouldn't be a luxury, it should be a right – absolutely fundamental to life in 21st-Century Britain”.

But Littlewood disagreed, saying: “If you choose to live in a rural area... you have lots more space and better fresh air. But I'm afraid one of the downsides is it is harder to connect you to the internet”.

He added: “I don't think it's fair and reasonable that those

who bear the high property costs of living in the city should now effectively subsidise those who make different lifestyle choices”.

Countryside campaigners welcomed the Prime Minister's commitment to fast broadband, but warned that it was too little, too late.

Suzanne Clear from the National Farmers' Union conceded that a 10Mbps minimum would “improve matters”, but she said what the countryside really needed was ‘super-fast’ speeds, generally accepted to mean 24Mbps and above.

She claimed that rural communities and farmers will “fall behind” if they can't get speeds faster than 10Mbps.



Should fast broadband be a legal right? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

IN BRIEF

DOWNLOAD GOOGLE MAPS TO USE OFFLINE

Google has updated the Android version of its Maps app, letting you get directions on your phone or tablet when you don't have an internet connection. It means you can now download an area to use offline, and search it just as you would online. However users have been warned that some of the map downloads are huge: London, for example, is 380MB. Read more on Google's blog: www.snipca.com/18712.

STOP USING CHROME ON XP AND VISTA

People using Chrome on Windows XP and Vista have been advised to switch to another browser after Google said it will end support for those operating systems in April next year. Announcing the news on its Chrome blog (www.snipca.com/18714), Google said that Chrome will still work on XP and Vista, but will stop receiving updates and security fixes. Safe alternatives include Opera and Firefox, though the latter has some restrictions on XP: www.snipca.com/18715.

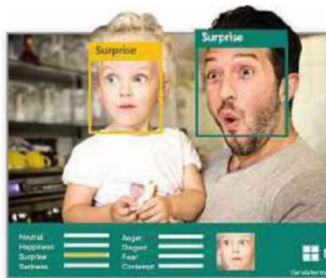
Microsoft can now 'read' your emotions

The next time a Windows problem makes you frown, you should take a photograph of yourself to see whether Microsoft recognises your frustration.

A new artificial-intelligence tool on the company's Project Oxford website (www.projectoxford.ai) ‘reads’ the emotions on faces in photos. Microsoft is inviting people to test it by uploading photos of themselves.

To use the tool, called Emotion Recognition, visit www.snipca.com/18721 and either type a URL for an image, or click the folder icon to upload a photo from your PC.

The tool will then look for facial expressions that express a range of emotions, including happiness, sadness,



surprise, fear and disgust.

Microsoft says that the tool is “experimental”, and therefore “not always accurate” – although early reports online were mostly positive.

Launched in April, Project Oxford is a set of facial-recognition tools that can be used by other companies to build programs and apps.

It first hit the headlines with the launch of <http://how-old.net>, a website that estimated how old you are based on a

photo of your face.

Microsoft wants such tools to promote the company's ‘machine learning’ technology, in which computers ‘teach’ themselves how to identify sounds, words and images (see page 49 for Google's latest developments in this field).

In its blog post announcing Emotion Recognition, (www.snipca.com/18720) Microsoft said that these systems “get smarter as they receive more data”. In the case of emotions, computers may be able to recognise how different people express certain feelings.

It's been suggested that app developers could use this to let you sort your photos by how happy a particular person looks in them.

Tomorrow's world

Japanese company NEC may have found a solution to the problem of crumb-infested keyboards – typing on your arm. It has developed a virtual keyboard that is projected on your arm when you wear a special pair of glasses and a smartwatch. Stuart Andrews for one will be pleased (see *The Final Straw*, page 74). Watch how it works at www.snipca.com/18713.

IN BRIEF

BECOME A BBC WEATHER REPORTER

The BBC has launched an online community for the one thing guaranteed to get British people talking: the weather. On the Weather Watchers site (www.bbc.co.uk/weatherwatchers) you can create your own weather report, adding photos if you wish. It will be placed on a UK map, where you can see reports posted by others.

MICROSOFT ENDS UNLIMITED ONEDRIVE

Microsoft has scrapped unlimited storage in OneDrive for Office 365 subscribers after “a small number of users” abused the online service. The company has introduced a new cap of 1TB, claiming that users were backing up their film collections in OneDrive. These were taking up 75TB in some cases. Microsoft said that in 2016 it will also cut the limit for non-subscribers from 15GB to 5GB, but won’t start deleting excess files for at least 12 months.

Don’t upgrade to Windows 10, say Dell and HP

Leading PC manufacturers are telling their customers not to upgrade to Windows 10, potentially incurring the wrath of Microsoft.

Some advisors working in the technical support teams for Dell and HP are telling people on Windows 7 and 8.1 to stick with their existing operating system (OS).

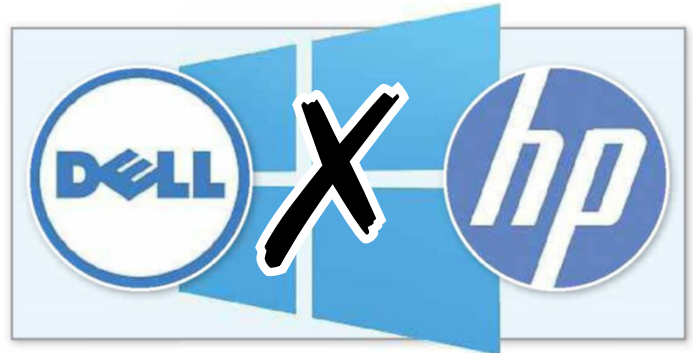
This was uncovered by US website Laptop Mag, which phoned several advisors working for Dell and HP to examine the quality of help.

They accused many advisors of failing to “understand core features of the new OS”.

When asked for assistance with a touchpad’s scrolling direction on an Inspiron 15 5000 laptop running Windows 10, a Dell employee told the caller to revert to Windows 8.1.

The Dell advisor also said that the company had received many calls from people having problems with Windows 10.

Laptop Mag claimed that another member of the help



team told them there are “a lot of glitches in Windows 10”.

HP was even more dismissive of Windows 10. An advisor told the caller that he doesn’t recommend customers upgrade to the OS.

After failing to revert the caller’s PC to Windows 8.1, the advisor suggested re-installing the OS using a USB recovery stick.


Dell responded to Laptop Mag’s report by saying: “As Windows 10 continues to evolve, we sometimes recommend a customer revert to their previous operating system to troubleshoot a specific issue they’re having”.

The company also said it

had “a continuous feedback loop with Microsoft” in which it shared problems raised by users.

HP was more realistic about the role of its tech support team. Mike Nash, the company’s vice president of customer experience, said: “At the end of the day, the person’s job is to get the PC running”.

He added that in such a scenario, it’s the advisor’s job to return the customer to something with which they are familiar.

 If you need technical help with Windows 10, email our Problems Solved team: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Microsoft to ban sales of Windows 7 and 8.1 computers in 2016

You now have less than 12 months to buy a new Windows 7 or 8.1 computer.

In an unexpected move, Microsoft told manufacturers that from 31 October 2016 they can’t sell PCs or laptops running either operating system (OS).

From that date you’ll only be able to buy computers pre-installed with Windows 10. It will be the first time since the days of Windows XP that manufacturers will be restricted to selling only the latest version of the OS.

The deadline applies to all

versions of Windows 8.1, and the Professional version of Windows 7.

Microsoft had already ended sales of Windows 7 Home on 31 October last year.

The company confirmed the new deadline by updating its



‘Windows life cycle fact sheet’: www.snipca.com/18700. It doesn’t affect Microsoft’s security support for Windows 7 and 8, which is due to end in 2020 and 2023 respectively.

Microsoft’s decision represents the confidence they have in the popularity of Windows 10. Latest estimates suggest that 120m devices now run the new OS.

However Windows 7 remains the world’s favourite OS, running on 55 per cent of PCs according to NetMarketShare’s analysis for October: www.snipca.com/18701.

The world’s gone mad!

Two of the world’s most popular modern gadgets merge in the Jupiter (<https://vaporcade.com/jupiter>), which is a smartphone that you can smoke. It has a vaporizer built in at the top, letting people puff away while they send tweets, post photos to Instagram and update their Facebook status (here’s ‘proof’ it works: www.snipca.com/18650). It may catch on, though only if people start preferring smoke signals to text messages.

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Named & Shamed

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

WARNING: Junk ahead

Junk offender: Unofficial Android apps and dodgy cheap tablets

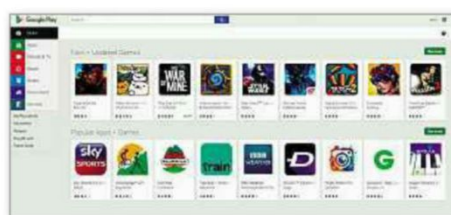
This issue's Named & Shamed page is like a *Generation Game* conveyor belt of Android junk (too young? Google it).

First up is cheap Android tablets. The excellent Nexus 9 (www.snipca.com/18749) is described as a "budget" tablet – but its £200 price tag is still a big dent in your pocket. Why spend that when you'll find a wide choice of Android tablets being sold on Amazon for under £100?

The reason is that many of these super-budget tablets are unbranded Chinese imports that are stuffed with much more than the Marshmallow operating system (OS).

The hidden cost of 'budget'

In November, Cheetah Mobile Security (www.snipca.com/18745) found that more than 30 Chinese budget tablets came pre-installed with the Trojan Cloudsota, which installs malware on the tablet as soon as you start using it. This



Only install Android apps from Google Play Store

malware has two main functions: it gives cybercriminals remote control of your tablet, and it removes any antivirus (AV) apps that you install.

It's not just knock-off tablets that come with unwanted contents. In September, Cheetah's researchers discovered the 'Ghost Push' Trojan in thousands of apps (www.snipca.com/18744). By November it was an epidemic. Researchers from mobile-security firms including Cheetah and Lookout found more than 20,000 instances of malicious apps whose creators had repackaged them to look like big-name apps including WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter.

If you downloaded one of these fakes, the malware would automatically root your tablet or phone, then install itself as a system app that's impossible to remove.

Stick to Google Play

All the malicious Android apps had one thing in common – they were distributed by third-party app stores, not the Google Play Store. Security firms won't name the third-party stores in question, but you'll find many "alternative" app sources on sites like this: www.snipca.com/18747.

To be safe, only ever download Android apps from the Play Store. Google takes a very hard line on dodgy apps. If an app is found to be "malicious, inappropriate (or) infringes copyright" (www.snipca.com/18732), it's removed from the Play Store immediately. And if you're in the market for a budget Android tablet for Christmas, stick with brand names you know – and check www.expertreviews.co.uk/tablets.

What are they talking about?

What they say

BBC Media Centre

(www.snipca.com/18731):

"People will be able to sign in and create simple digital weather reports to now-cast whatever the weather is doing where they live."



What they mean

The BBC's new free online tool, Weather Watchers, enlists your help in crowdsourcing weather data. But who came up with the hideous phrase "now-cast"? May they never be smiled at by Carol Kirkwood again.

Jane's villain of the fortnight

TalkTalk

Why kick a company when it's down? The telecoms giant suffered a disastrous cyber-attack in October, with 157,000 users' details accessed and 15,600 users' bank details stolen. Many had large sums of money stolen – but TalkTalk's response has been pathetic.

TalkTalk faced a £35million bill, likely to rise significantly following compensation claims. So to mollify customers, it offered them all a free upgrade. Oh, thanks.

Customer Ian Rimmington, who lost £3,500 in the hack, escalated his case



and did indeed receive cash compensation – of £30.20 (www.snipca.com/18750).

That's 30 pounds 20 pence, in case you wondered if I'd got my dots and zeroes wrong.

As you may know, the criminal mastermind turned out to be a 15-year-old who, laughably, sued newspapers for trying to identify him. TalkTalk has achieved a remarkable feat – looking almost more villainous than him.

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

Question of the Fortnight

Will ISIS terrorists be able to read your emails?

The Government has been accused of creating a 'back door' for hackers

Many privacy campaigners have attacked the Government's new Investigatory Powers Bill for giving security services more access to our data. But a greater threat could lie in the ease with which terrorists may soon be able to read your emails.

The concern is that by weakening the encryption used in communications, the bill will end up benefitting an ISIS jihadist more than it will a GCHQ spy working to keep us safe.

The debate centres on the strength of encryption used by messaging services. Some companies, including Apple and WhatsApp, use end-to-end encryption (often called E2EE), a security system in which the only person able to decode a message is the intended recipient. No spy or hacker can read it en route.

Although Home Secretary Theresa May insists that E2EE hasn't been banned, there remains confusion about the bill's wording. It gives security services the power to remove "electronic protection applied by a relevant operator".

Many people have interpreted this as the beginning of the end of E2EE, which would perhaps be welcomed by David Cameron. Speaking after the *Charlie Hebdo* murders in January, the Prime Minister said that "we cannot allow modern forms of communication to be exempt... from being listened to".

But any such move would face fierce resistance from some of the world's biggest



“If you decrypt messages for the good guys, you can't avoid doing so for the bad guys, too”

technology companies, including Apple. Talking to the *Daily Telegraph* in November, Apple's boss Tim Cook said that if you ban encryption, the "good people" would suffer most because terrorists, hackers and fraudsters would be able to take advantage. Cook said it's like opening a "back door" into your emails, and predicted "very dire consequences".

Although the bill is a watered-down version of the so-called Snooper's Charter, abandoned last year following opposition from the Liberal Democrats, it still gives spies power to read your messages. All communications

companies, including Internet Service Providers and other mobile phone networks, must now let intelligence agencies access a person's phone and computer if a judge issues a warrant.

Of course, this is only helpful for security agencies if those messages haven't been protected by E2EE. If terrorists increasingly use this form of deep encryption, the spies chasing them will put pressure on the Government to ban companies building it into their messaging services.

Many members of the public may be relaxed about this, reasoning that it will help to prevent terrorist atrocities. But they will undoubtedly feel

THE FACTS

- Apple boss Tim Cook says the Government's Investigatory Powers Bill may give criminals access to your emails
- The bill forces ISPs to help security services hack into suspects' phones and computers
- Cook says messaging services should use end-to-end encryption, as Apple's iMessage does

uneasy that it also gives access to hackers and criminals. If you decrypt messages for the good guys, you can't avoid doing so for the bad guys, too.

Cook called for the public to lobby the Government to backtrack. He added: "You can't weaken cryptography. You need to strengthen it. You need to stay ahead of the folks that want to break it".

Should Cook win public support, it may come as a result of the new powers being abused, as previous legislation has been. In 2000, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act was introduced to let GCHQ conduct mass surveillance of communications. But - incredibly - some councils used it to spy on families who they thought were lying about their address in order to push their children into their preferred primary school.

So instead of fears over terrorists, maybe it will be the intrusive actions of civil servants that triggers a public backlash.

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Email: letters@computeractive.co.uk




Facebook: www.facebook.com/computeractive



Twitter: @ComputerActive

www.twitter.com/computeractive

Annoyed by Microsoft's Windows 10 download

 Like most other Windows 7 users I have had a Windows 10 file loaded on to my machine. I agree with many other people that this is an arrogant move by Microsoft. Also, I am not best pleased that the 8GB download took me over my monthly BT contract limit of 20GB. BT is now charging me £5.60 for the privilege! I thought I was consenting to Microsoft sending me updates to Windows 7, not any updates that take their fancy.


Roger Phipp

Windows update made my PC go 'pop'

 I know that some people are complaining about Windows 10 being unstable, but I like it. However there is one slight problem and it's all to do with updates. One time I was using my laptop and suddenly I heard a 'pop' sound as the screen went black and the laptop shut down. I switched it back on, thinking that it was overheating, but that wasn't the case as my laptop was lukewarm. I then saw a blue screen saying 'Windows is installing updates'. When they finished, I had a look at my settings regarding updates and saw it clearly stated: 'Windows will install updates when the computer is not in use'. So why did it update it when I *was* using it?

Michael Fernandes

Dodgy adverts on the Daily Mail's website

 I read in Issue 461 (News, page 7) that there may have been 'malware' on the *Daily Mail's* website. Perhaps my experience may interest you.


While I was on the website one day in October, I clicked a link on an article to see a series of photographs. After one or two photos, I saw a screen saying that there was a serious virus infection on my computer and advising me to contact a company with Microsoft-trained engineers who would sort it for me. Nothing that I tried would delete the screen. I couldn't even exit from Google. The only thing that I thought could work was to click the 'not interested' button on the advert, but I think that would have told the scammer that he'd contacted someone. Instead I switched off my



computer. When I switched it back on, a pop-up came on advising me that the computer had had a mishap and Google asked me whether I wanted to resume where I'd left off. I declined.

Peter Ratigan

Microsoft will make money from adverts, not subscriptions


 I think John Revell is guilty of being alarmist in Issue 462 when he predicts that Microsoft will start charging you to use Windows 10. Microsoft may make some daft decisions,

but not *that* daft. It would be a spectacular own goal to trick people into upgrading for free, then sneakily introducing a fee to keep it free.

We've already seen how Microsoft intends to make money through Windows 10: advertising. Why do you think they want to get the operating system on to one billion devices? It's so they can charge companies a fortune for little adverts on the Start screen. Imagine how much a company such as Tesco or Amazon would pay for that slot.

Stephen Mayhew

Don't encourage Microsoft to end IE support

 Not so fast William Oldham ('End IE support to boost Edge', Letters, Issue 462). Microsoft already terminates support too early, without you encouraging it to get a move on. I'm still happy using Internet Explorer, and don't want to be 'bullied' into trying another browser just because some people think IE isn't cool any more. I know



Does anyone actually use Cortana?

I agree with Stuart Andrews (The Final Straw, Issue 461) that Cortana is, at the moment, a waste of space. I can't get it to recognise anything I say, even with my false teeth in! My question is this: does *anyone* actually use these overhyped, voice-recognition tools, either on phone or PC? Every day I see hundreds of people using their phone. They take photos. They play games. Sometimes they even make phone calls. But I've never seen someone hold it close to their mouth and say, 'Will it rain tomorrow?' Likewise, I've never seen anyone speak to their PC, but that's because I haven't hacked their webcam to spy on them. The only people I ever see use a PC are, in order of technical expertise, my grandson, my son, my nephew, my brother, his wife and *my*



wife (sorry love).

So, I want to ask *Computeractive* readers: apart from swearing when your PC freezes, do you actually speak to your PC? And does it obey what you say? If you can persuade me that Cortana works, I may give it another go.

Harold Lewis

people talk about Chrome this, and Firefox that, but IE has never let me down. I suppose I'll have to switch eventually, but I won't do so until I *have* to.

Dot McParland

Don't be afraid of Windows 10

✉ As a very satisfied Windows 7 user, I've been interested in all the comments and advice about Windows 10, and the problems some readers have had with the upgrades. After reading these, I had decided not to upgrade until 2016, when hopefully all the bugs had been sorted.

Imagine my feelings then when just over a week ago, the hard drive on my six-year-old PC gave up the ghost. Luckily, I back up all my important files to an external hard drive, so I was not worried on that score. But buying a new computer with Windows 8/8.1 or 10 pre-installed filled me with apprehension.

I've been using Windows PCs since the mid-1980s, moving up through Windows 3.11, 95, 98, 98SE, XP, Vista and Windows 7. All these worked adequately, including the much-maligned Vista, so I thought I would buy a new laptop with Windows 10 – an Acer Aspire with 4GB RAM and a 1TB hard drive. And I have to say that I am pleasantly surprised at how I adapted to Windows 10. Certainly, I had to rid the machine of some dross that I did not want, and install all my old programs, but it all went without a hitch. So, my advice to all those who are fearful of the change to Windows 10 is – don't be! It is a good operating system and, provided you do not want to run really old (32bit) programs, it will be fine.

Roy Phillips

My Nokia phone is '3T': telephone, text and torch

✉ I do agree with Shaun Hawking when he praises the neat, easy-to-hold Nokia phone (Letters, Issue 461). As everything he says is true, why does he not continue to use it? I own a PC and an iPad and use the internet constantly, but like Shaun and Stuart Andrews (The Final Straw, Issue 460), I don't feel the need to use a



large, unwieldy phone.

I upgraded from Shaun's model last year to a newer Nokia, the 105 RM-908 (see photo left). It can be slipped into a pocket and does the job. And they are still available to buy new, for a few pounds. When people witter on about 3G and 4G on their phones, I tell them that my phone has 3T: telephone text and torch! It may not impress anyone, but it suits me.

Sheelagh Wurr

✉ Using my old Nokia phone in public made me feel rather old fashioned, so a

STAR LETTER

Windows 10: Put off by Microsoft's 'Del Boy' marketing

✉ I've read a lot of your warnings about how Microsoft is trying to force Windows 10 on to people. There's no doubt Microsoft is being more aggressive than ever before, but I wasn't worried because I always thought that if I had my wits about me I would be able to thwart the company's efforts and continue using Windows 7.

But now I am worried, after reading in Issue 462 (News, page 6) that Microsoft plans to automatically download Windows 10 on to my PC. How arrogant and presumptuous. I'm not saying Windows 10 isn't a good operating system, and I'm sure I'll upgrade eventually. But I want to do so in my own good time, when I've made sure my computer is ready.

Microsoft's pushy attitude reminds me of those restaurant owners abroad who thrust menus in your face as you walk past. My wife and I make a point of never going into those places. You do wonder how good the food can be if the owners feel the need to badger holidaymakers non-stop. I'm sure Windows 10 is better than a dish of half-cooked chicken that gives you



food poisoning, but Microsoft's Del Boy marketing does feel a little desperate.

Richard Hinnigan

CA says Has Microsoft gone too far this time? Many of you think so. Richard was just one of several readers to email us to complain about Microsoft's highly controversial decision. Microsoft's current policy on Windows updates has such serious repercussions for everyone using the OS – old versions and new – that we've postponed the planned Cover Feature for our next issue. Instead, we're going to examine what Microsoft is *really* up to, and tell you how to stop and control Windows updates. It will be on sale from Wednesday 9 December.



The Star Letter writer wins a Computeractive mug!

few months ago I bought one of these 'modern' phones; not the size of a football pitch, but certainly the size of a tennis court. After about one month, realising my blood pressure was going through the roof trying to use it, I put it – no *threw* it – into a drawer and went back to my old Nokia. What a relief to get rid of the damn thing! Now I feel quite smug when I use my old phone in public.

But then I decided to download Windows 10 on my computer. That went smoothly and I have had absolutely no problems using it. In fact, I love it. So I do embrace new technology, but think manufacturers have lost the plot with these hi-tech phones.

Roger Thompson

Consumeractive

What can I do about my out-of-date Amazon voucher?

Q My partner bought me a £20 Amazon Gift Card for my birthday last year, but I forgot to use it for a while. When I tried to use it recently, I found it had expired. I had no idea it had an expiry date. Is this legal?

Jennifer Malka

A Yes it is, although we share Jennifer's dismay. Paid-for vouchers often come with an expiry date, although the terms must comply with contract law. Jennifer would have had a case only if Amazon hadn't made it clear there was an expiry date.

However, it seems Jennifer was given an old voucher. It was bought in 2012, when vouchers had a 12-month expiry date. In July 2013 Amazon increased this to 10 years, so anyone who now receives a voucher has no excuse for not spending it within the allowed time (read Amazon's terms at www.snipca.com/18504).

If you feel cheated by an unfair 'use-by' period, there's no harm contacting the company asking for an extension or a refund. These are the kind of requests companies sometimes like to agree to as goodwill gestures.



Can I get TalkTalk to pay for fraud alerts?

Q In August, TalkTalk warned me about a hack (not the huge hack reported in October). It said my data was secure and that I wouldn't need to do anything. But then the company sent me a letter saying my data *had* been hacked and urged me to change my passwords and alert my bank. Do I need to do this?

TalkTalk also suggested I pay for a subscription with a credit-monitoring agency such as Experian, which would alert me if it spotted any sign of identity theft. But this costs £14.99 a month! I find TalkTalk's advice unreasonable, so can I ask it to pay for this subscription?

Mark Brough

A Changing passwords is always a hassle, and we understand Mark's exasperation, but he should create new ones straight away. It's just not worth taking a risk.

TalkTalk has had a terrible few months, culminating in the well-publicised hack in October. It has said it will refund customers only if they can prove they lost money as a result of the hack.



The company may change its policy and relax the criteria for refunds, but it will almost certainly never agree to pay indefinitely for a customer to receive alerts about possible fraud. However, Mark doesn't have to subscribe to the paid-for services offered by Experian. Instead he should consider registering with Noddle (www.snipca.com/18507), which, for £20 a year, sends its customers emails whenever it detects suspicious activity. TalkTalk says it will pay for a year's worth of these if you use the code **TT231** on Noddle's website (more info at www.snipca.com/18517).

The situation with the TalkTalk hack may change after we've gone to press, but the company will obviously try to minimise any compensation it may need to pay. The Information Commissioner's Office says that customers can only claim this if they can prove they have "suffered damage" – such as financial loss – as a result of the hack. It seems likely TalkTalk will stick to this official policy, because it knows that customers will find it hard to prove that the theft of money from their account is linked to the hack.



Can I force Vax to honour a misprinted warranty?

Q I bought a Vax carpet cleaner online and found it came with a six-year 'parts and labour' guarantee, provided I registered on Vax's website (www.vax.co.uk/registration). Vax has since said this was a printing error and that the guarantee lasts only two years. Can I force Vax to honour six years instead?

Brian Kirk

A Sadly not. While some companies will honour prices and guarantees printed in error,

they're not legally obliged to. The only time this would change is if the customer claimed that incorrect details influenced their decision to buy that product. A court may then decide that the company has to honour the terms even if it's an honest mistake. But Brian told us that the guarantee hadn't influenced his purchase, so he won't be pursuing the complaint.

It's worth remembering that the courts take a dim view of customers trying to profit from a company's honest mistake. If the price difference is obviously wrong – such as £29.99 for a £299 TV, a mistake



Argos made online in 1999 – then there's almost no chance that a judge would support your case.





✉ **Contact us so we can investigate your case**

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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.

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Can I get compensation from BT for slow broadband?

Q For months I was pestered by BT to upgrade my broadband because it claimed I was exceeding my monthly allowance. In fact, this happened only once, but I agreed to upgrade to a guaranteed speed of between 8 to 17Mbps. However, I can get only 4Mbps – if I'm lucky. Do I have a case for compensation and a reduced price for the remaining five months of my contract?

Edgar Mills

A We think Edgar has a strong case, and we'll explain why. He told us that when he first complained to BT, the company said that his current (low) speed is all he could expect. But this isn't the speed BT told Edgar he would get if he upgraded.



Wondering whether he was misled by a BT employee, we put Edgar's postcode into the broadband-comparison tools run by uSwitch (www.snipca.com/18487) and BT (www.snipca.com/18510). Both said that Edgar can get 17Mbps with BT, so he has evidence on his side.

We've told Edgar that he should use the new Broadband Code of Practice (www.snipca.com/18511) to argue his case.

Introduced by Ofcom in June, the new rules state that ISPs must make sure you don't receive speeds that are below the "minimum guaranteed". If you do get lower speeds, Ofcom's new regulations allow you to cancel your contract early without a penalty fee. In Edgar's case, BT's advertised minimum speed is 8Mbps, double what he is actually getting, so he is entitled to switch without charge.

If Edgar wants to stick with BT, he should ask for some money back as compensation. If BT refuses, he should ask the company for a 'deadlock' letter that outlines its position, and then take his case to the Communications Ombudsman (www.ombudsman-services.org/communications.html).

CASE ONGOING

LEGAL UPDATE



Plagued by nuisance phone calls? It's now easier to complain

It's now easier than ever to complain about nuisance phone calls. The Telephone Preference Service (TPS) has changed its rules so you no longer need to name a company that's pestering

you. Before, you needed to tell TPS the time of the call, the phone number of the call, and the company name. Now you need only report the first two.

This is welcome news because callers sometimes don't tell you which company they represent, previously making it impossible for you to report them.

If you register with the TPS, companies are forbidden to call you unless you have given consent. But some companies – labelled 'rogue marketers' by the TPS – ignore this.

We're not the only ones pleased by this news. Rachel Aldighieri, managing director of the Direct Marketing Association said it was "fantastic". She called rogue callers "a menace and a waste of time" and said they give a bad name to the numerous responsible marketing companies that she represents.

You can register your phone number with TPS on its website (www.tpsonline.org.uk). It's relatively straightforward, though you do need to provide your email address. The TPS says this is so it can send you an email with a link that you need to click, in order to activate your registration. You'll be taken to a TPS web page saying: "The registration has been successful". TPS says the only other occasions it will use your email address is to tell you about changes to its service.

THIS WILL COME IN USEFUL

Important FAQ web pages

Adobe Flash Player
www.snipca.com/18377

Apple ID
www.snipca.com/18376

BT Wi-fi
www.snipca.com/18382

CCleaner
www.piriform.com/ccleaner/faq

Cortana
www.snipca.com/18385

EBay
www.snipca.com/18381

Google Chromecast
www.snipca.com/18516

Google Earth
www.snipca.com/18378

Java
www.snipca.com/18380

Microsoft Edge
www.snipca.com/18518
Ofcom
<http://ask.ofcom.org.uk>

Office 365
www.snipca.com/18375

Outlook.com
www.snipca.com/18384

Ubuntu
www.snipca.com/18383

Telephone Preference Service
www.snipca.com/18515

Upgrading to Windows 10
www.snipca.com/18373

Windows Update
www.snipca.com/18374



Protect Your Tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

USB sticks that are lying around

What happened?

Security researchers warned people about plugging unfamiliar USB sticks into their computers, after conducting an experiment showing that many people can't resist the temptation.

CompTIA (www.comptia.org), a US computing trade organisation, placed 200 USB sticks in busy public locations across Chicago, Cleveland, San Francisco and Washington DC. Around 40 of these sticks were picked up by members of the public and plugged into a device. They then clicked web links and opened files stored on the stick. Some even sent emails to addresses they found on the stick, asking whether it contained a virus.

CompTIA's president Todd Thibodeaux highlighted the dangers of such seemingly "innocuous" actions. He

said that "each has the potential to open the door to the very real threat of becoming the victim of a hacker or a cybercriminal".

It's wise advice. Research has shown that many discarded USB sticks contain viruses. In 2011, Sophos examined 50 sticks bought at a lost property auction in Sydney, discovering that 33 were infected. Surprisingly, not one stick was encrypted.

What should you do?

Our advice is simple: if you don't know where a USB stick has been, never plug it into your PC. We all know that curiosity killed the cat – well, it can kill computers too. Also check whether your antivirus software has the option to automatically scan USB sticks when



you plug them in. If so, switch it on.

And remember that the threat exists in reverse. If someone finds your USB stick and risks plugging it in, they could get access to your personal data. To prevent this you should encrypt each USB stick you use. We recommend VeraCrypt, which is free from <https://veracrypt.codeplex.com>.

New tools

Google's Transparency Report
www.snipca.com/18444

Technology companies are great at inventing things, but rubbish at explaining how they work. Their jargon-littered gobbledegook often feels like it was written by a computer that has been specifically programmed to confuse every human being alive.

Google has been guilty of abusing the English language, but it's getting better. Its latest attempt at plain speaking comes in the shape of simpler warnings whenever you happen upon a malicious website while using Chrome. Google has provided this service since 2006, but it hasn't always clearly explained the dangers.

In order to "demystify" these warnings, Google has added a new Safe Browsing Site Status section to its



Transparency Report – a service that aims to "shed light on how laws and policies affect internet users". If you see a warning on a site, type its URL into the 'Status of' box (like 'example.com' in the screenshot), and you should see a jargon-free reason why Google says 'avoid'. Read more on Google's Online Security Blog: www.snipca.com/18443.

ScamWatch

READERS WARN READERS

Not fooled by 'Ocado' scam

My husband got an email from 'Ocado customer services' – the address was 'customerservices@ocado.com' and the subject line was 'Your receipt for today's Ocado delivery'. It said the receipt for today's delivery is attached, and that the goods would be delivered between 10 and 11. We have started ordering groceries online, but didn't open the attachment. The scam was plausible: correct punctuation, no spelling mistakes and a believable email address. After a little research, it seems clicking the attachment downloads Dridex, which steals your bank-account details.

Pam Crane



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

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MEDIA PLAYER

foobar2000 1.3.9

www.snipca.com/18661

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10



If you've upgraded to Windows 10 and miss Windows Media Player (see our feature in Issue 462), or if you just don't like iTunes (and who could blame you?), then Foobar2000 could be just the media player you need.

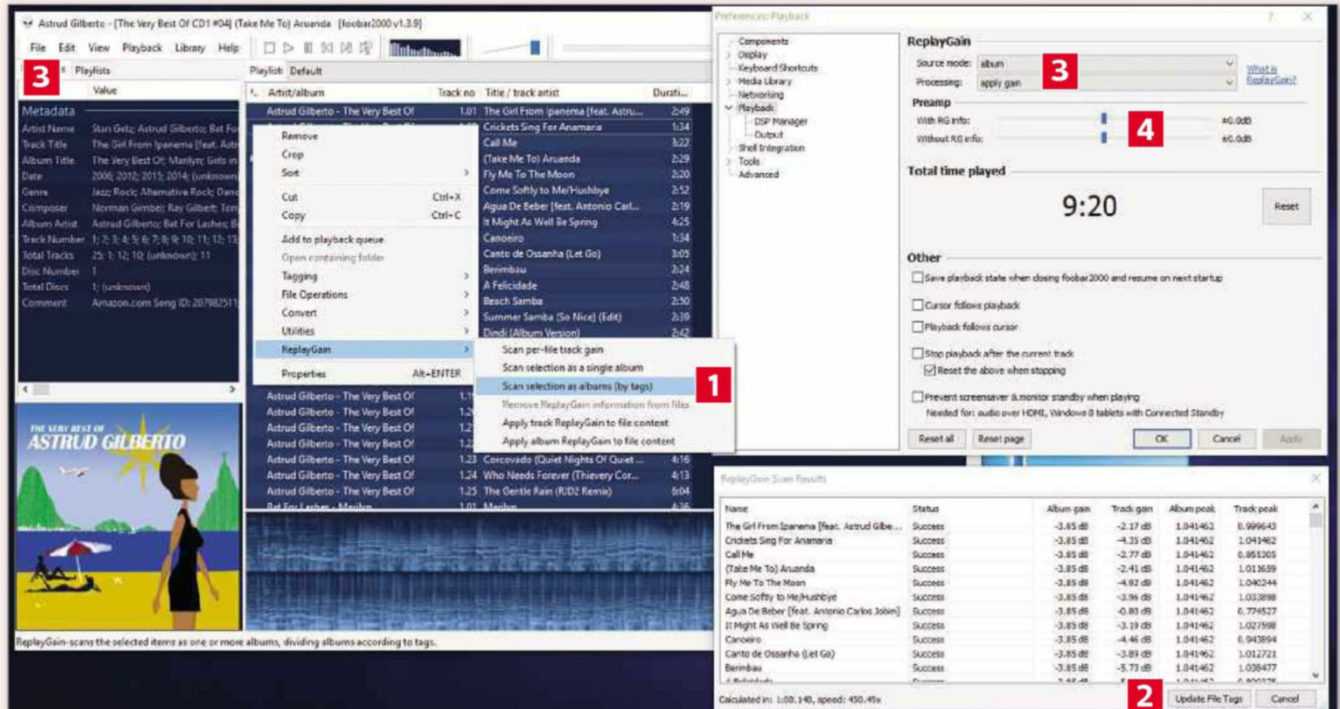
It's better suited to playing music than watching video, but it provides wide format compatibility and lots of very useful tools for listening to your digital album collection.

Foobar2000 won't add any junk to your PC when you install it. In fact, during setup you can opt for a portable installation, which doesn't add anything to your system Registry at all – though this option doesn't support file association, meaning that Foobar2000 won't open when you double-click an audio file.

Unlike iTunes, which forces you to use an interface that's

limited at best, Foobar2000 lets you choose from a selection of layouts. It's easy to change this or customise the program's appearance further should you wish to – just click File, Preferences, Display and then work through the options.

The program can even cut out the gaps between tracks on albums, so you get a seamless stream of music. The 18-channel equalizer (click View, then Equalizer) is very handy, too. The new and improved ReplayGain feature automatically evens out the volume of songs. This can vastly improve playlists where older and newer songs are mixed together – older tracks tend to sound quieter by default. iTunes has a similar feature, but we think Foobar2000's works much better – simply follow the steps below.



1 Click a track, then press Ctrl+A to select all the songs. Right-click and select ReplayGain, then 'Scan selection as albums (by tags)'.

2 Once the scan is complete, a window will open displaying the results. Click the Update File Tags button in the lower right-hand corner.

3 When the update is done, click File, then Preferences. In the window that opens, click Playback and check that 'album' and 'apply gain' are selected under ReplayGain.

4 Try listening to a variety of songs. If you're still not happy, open the Playback Preferences again and use the sliders under Preamp to adjust levels.



WORK CHECKER

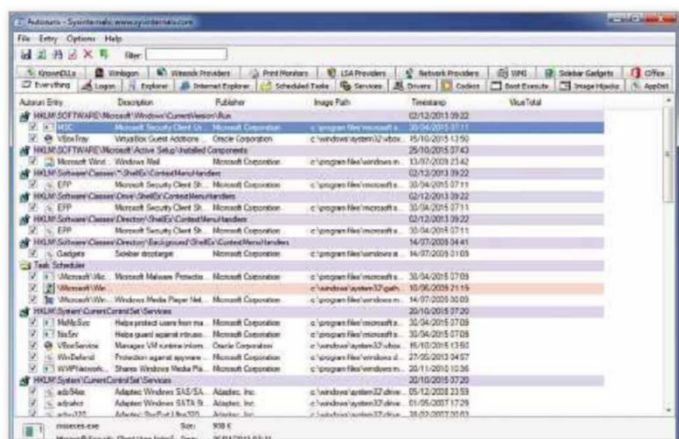
WordWeb 8

<http://wordweb.info>

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10

This brilliant tool, which now works in Windows 10, lets you look up words in a dictionary or thesaurus from within any program. When you're browsing a web page, for example, and you see a word you want to check, press Ctrl and right-click the word to see definitions and synonyms. You can even hear how it's pronounced, by clicking the musical-note icon.

During installation you'll see a message about paying after 30 days – ignore this. The tool is free for home users. At the bottom of the download page it says "WordWeb is fully functional, and free if you satisfy the licensing conditions", which are outlined at <http://wordweb.info/free/licence5.html>.



STARTUP MANAGER

Autoruns 13.5

www.snipca.com/18663

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10

Like CCleaner, Autoruns is another essential tool that's now been updated for Windows 10. It lists every process, program, driver, service and more that runs when you boot your PC.

Its 20 tabs make Autoruns look a bit daunting, but it's surprisingly simple to use. Click an item for more information or right-click and select Search Online. To disable an item, untick it. Be cautious about disabling items related to Windows processes and security. To re-enable an item, tick it again. In the new version you can disable Office add-ins and font drivers, too.

WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

We tell you what software to use

How can I translate Japanese magazines?

Q I'm looking for a Japanese-to-English translation tool that will help me to read Japanese magazines. Can you recommend a software program that will let me scan in the text then translate it into English?


Peter McCullagh

A If you have a smartphone or tablet with a camera, your best solution is the free app Google Translate (Android www.snipca.com/18667; iOS www.snipca.com/18666). Its built-in optical recognition (OCR) technology uses your device's camera to provide an instant translation of any text you photograph.

The camera function doesn't work with all languages, but Japanese text is supported. Tap the languages at the top so that Japanese is first and English is second. Then tap the camera icon. Align the text on the screen – using your camera flash can help get a clearer image – then tap the red camera button. The tool will scan for Japanese text and highlight any it finds. Use your finger to select the text you want translated, then tap the blue arrow next to the English text that appears at the top to see the full translation.

If you want to use your PC instead, scan a Japanese page and save it as a JPEG file. Then go to the WeOCR Project's free Japanese recognition page (www.snipca.com/18664), click 'Choose file' under 'Japanese character recognition – beta', upload the JPEG and click Recognize. Then you can copy and paste the text into Google Translate (<https://translate.google.co.uk>).



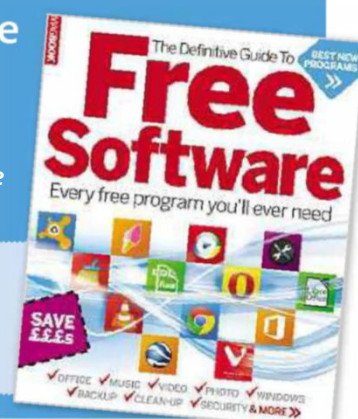
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Reviews

New products tested by our experts

TABLET | £99 from Tesco www.snipca.com/18585

Tesco Windows Connect 10

The cheapest way to use Windows 10?

It's not particularly surprising to see a very cheap tablet these days. Tesco's own Hudl 2 is already popular, and a good buy if you want something like an iPad at a fraction of the price (£99 from www.tesco.com/hudl). But the Windows Connect 10 is something else, because instead of a mobile operating system like Android, it comes with Windows 10, letting you run the same kinds of apps as you would on a PC.

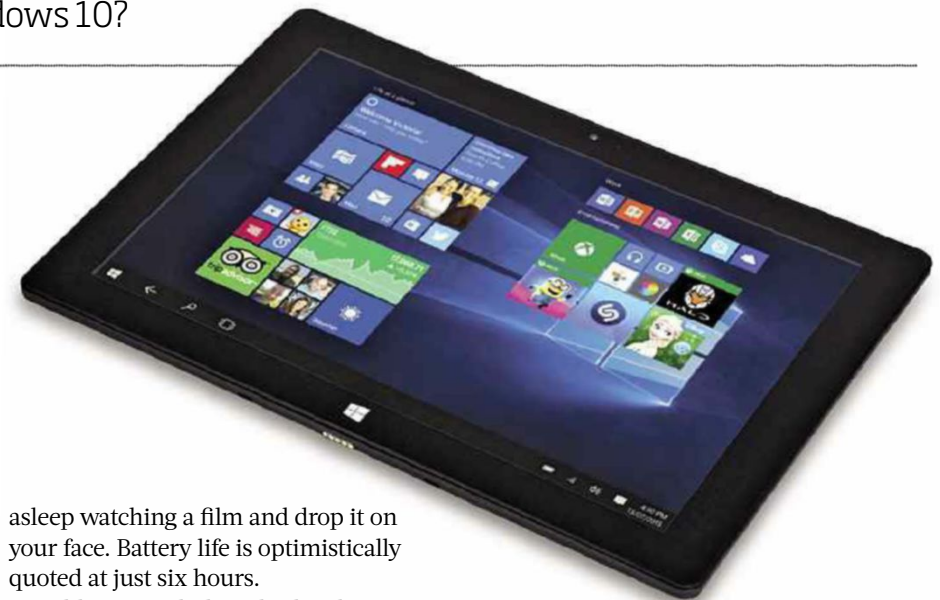
We can't remember a time when it's ever been possible to buy a complete, ready-to-use computer system with the latest version of Windows for under £100. It's only possible now because Microsoft has strategically reduced the fee it charges manufacturers for Windows 10 to encourage its use on tablets. For screens smaller than nine inches, it's free; for this 10in model, Tesco is probably paying about a tenner. That leaves less than £90 to make the hardware and, presumably, a profit.

“It's a big plastic brick that doesn't respond well to taps and swipes”

Does it show? Need you ask? The Windows Connect 10 is not a slim aluminium shard; it's a big plastic brick. In fact it's much thicker than most laptops, let alone tablets, and at 806g it weighs more than both of Apple's current tablets (the iPad Air 2 and iPad mini 4) put together. The rubbery back panel makes it unlikely you'll drop it on the floor, but trust us, you don't want to fall

SPECIFICATIONS

1.83GHz Intel Atom Z3735G quad-core processor • 32GB flash storage • 10in 1280x800-pixel screen • 2-megapixel rear camera • 0.3-megapixel webcam • MicroSD slot • 802.11n Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.0 • Windows 10 Home • 177x270x51mm (HxWxD) • 806g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18585



asleep watching a film and drop it on your face. Battery life is optimistically quoted at just six hours.

Unlike an iPad, though, this device runs Windows. Just about. Its **processor** may be made by Intel, but it can't keep up with the chips in laptops and desktop computers, and it comes with just 1GB of memory. Even navigating around the operating system is a bit of a challenge, and running more than one app at once – the kind of thing that's supposed to be a benefit of a desktop operating system – feels decidedly sluggish. You can browse the web, but pages load slowly and scroll jerkily. And this is not the machine for you if your taste in games is more ambitious than Cut the Rope. The 10in touchscreen has a **resolution** of 1280x800 pixels, which looks fairly coarse and is close to the bare minimum that Windows apps can deal with. The display isn't very bright, so you can't use it comfortably under strong light, and colours don't look particularly vibrant. Although it understands the same taps and swipes as any other tablet, actually getting it to respond takes real effort. There's a camera on the back, and another on the front for selfies, but the less said about their quality the better.

As for the 'Connect' part, we're stumped. Some tablets can join phone networks to get on the internet anywhere; this one can't. Some have **802.11ac** Wi-Fi for higher speed and

better reception; this one just has the old **802.11n**. It does include a USB port for memory sticks and other accessories, plus **MicroUSB** with a USB On-The-Go adapter for more. You can connect a monitor or TV to the **Mini HDMI** socket, and there's a **microSD card** slot that you could use to double the 32GB of storage for a few pounds, although it doesn't accept higher capacities.

The Windows Connect 10 is, in short, no better than you'd expect for the price – except the fact that it exists at all. If you need a very basic Windows machine to carry around, and either don't type much or don't mind taking a Bluetooth keyboard too, this could be the answer.

VERDICT: Don't expect too much, but this is a usable Windows 10 computer for under £100 – just

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: Linx 1010 **£170** This new version of the Linx 10 tablet comes with Windows 10 (upgrading from earlier versions is trickier on a tablet) and has twice the Connect 10's memory



PC | £700 from Palicomp www.snipca.com/18569

Palicomp Intel i5 Revolution

A speeded-up Windows 10 desktop

If this computer looks familiar, that's because the case it's built into, from South Korea's Zalman Tech Co Ltd, is used by several British PC manufacturers.

Between 120mm fans front and back, it has a generous amount of room for expansion inside – as you'll see if you peep through the window in its side panel.

One thing you won't see is the Intel Core i5 processor, because it's hidden behind yet another big fan, which in turn is mounted on a giant finned heatsink. While they were shopping around in South Korea, they should maybe have skipped the PC cases and just built this machine into an LG fridge-freezer.

Why such a big chill factor? Because, rather than charge you more for Intel's latest 'Skylake' processor, Palicomp has used an older 'Haswell' model, but cranked up its speed from 3.5 to 4.5 gigahertz (billions of cycles per second). It's pulled the same trick with the Nvidia GeForce GTX 960 graphics card.

After a factory check to make sure it's not going to melt through your desk or form its own supernova, this should work fine, and in our tests the overclocking



paid off. The i5 Revolution almost matched equivalent Skylake PCs in demanding tasks, and ran a full range of Windows software smoothly. The latest 3D games at high quality in Full HD were no problem, either. And the fans weren't too loud.

A standard 1TB hard drive comes installed, along with a DVD writer, often omitted from PCs these days. Inside, there are two memory slots in addition to the 8GB fitted (the maximum is 32GB). Only one spare SATA3 connection is left for an extra drive, but there's also an M.2 port for a fast SSD. Wi-Fi is optional and costs extra. With five USB 3.0 and four USB 2.0 ports, there's plenty of scope for external peripherals.

You can pay £100 less for just the PC, but £700 gets you a Samsung LS24D300HS 24in monitor, keyboard and mouse. The screen has fair colour accuracy, covering 92 per cent of the sRGB range, although it hasn't got great contrast and only looks its best from straight on. The slim keyboard and ergonomically shaped mouse are basic, as you'd expect when they're effectively being thrown in for free.

SPECIFICATIONS

4.5GHz Intel Core i5 4960K quad-core processor
• 8GB memory • 1TB hard drive • 2GB Nvidia GTX 960 graphics card • 24in 1920x1080-pixel monitor
• 5x USB 3.0 ports • 4x USB 2.0 ports • Gigabit Ethernet port • HDMI port • 2x DVI ports • DisplayPort
• Windows 10 Home • 465x192x430mm (HxWxD) • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/18569

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.

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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: The Revolution just goes to show how your money can go further with a built-to-order system rather than an off-the-peg branded PC



ALTERNATIVE: Vibox Exile £700

This neater tower PC isn't quite as fast. Its Asus monitor is slightly smaller, but has better colour, and the keyboard and mouse are sturdier



Reviews

LAPTOP | £200 from Co-op Electrical www.snipca.com/18526

Toshiba Satellite C40-C

A Windows 10 laptop for half the price of an old iPhone

Yes, this really is a Windows 10 laptop for 200 quid (it comes with 8.1 so you do need to install the free upgrade yourself). Still, with a 14in screen and full-size keyboard in a sleek black case, it looks as good as any other laptop out there. And it works. Did we mention it's £200? They even give you a penny change. It's hard to resist handing it back with a polite 'No, no, you keep it' as you sprint away before they change their minds.

It would be remiss of us not to subject the C40-C to the same rigorous test procedure as every other laptop. But really, we are in a more forgiving mood when the price tag is so modest.

Sure, the **processor** is barely as powerful as the one in an iPhone. Not the current iPhone. Not even last year's. The iPhone 5s from the year before. If you're not impressed, try buying an iPhone 5s. With the same 32GB of storage as the C40-C, it'll cost you just over twice as much. The screen is nine times smaller, and good luck with all your typing.

In practice, the C40-C's **dual-core** Intel Celeron chip and minimal 2GB of memory can just about cope with basic programs. Don't open too many at once, or it'll stutter to a halt; and trying to run serious 3D games would just be cruel. But if you simply need a portable machine that can handle office software, email and web browsing, it'll do that all day long – literally: the battery lasted us 11-and-a-half hours.

At 1.7kg and nearly an inch thick at its widest, the wedge-shaped chassis is

chunkier than a MacBook Air, but still easily portable, and the screen is bigger. And, guess what, it's a quarter of the price. Like the Air, it has no DVD drive or hard drive. The meagre 32GB of **flash storage**, of which Windows itself eats up more than half, is your only on-board file space. That's enough for plenty of Word documents, but not a lot of photos or videos.

“A very portable, cheap laptop with good battery life”

There is an **SD slot** for memory cards, but the card sticks out when inserted, so it doesn't feel very safe. Although it's frustrating to see this, when recessing the slot by half a centimetre would have solved the problem, SD cards aren't really the answer anyway: they're neither as fast nor as reliable as an **SSD**.

As with Chromebooks (the only other kind of laptop you'd get for this price), the idea is that you'll keep most of your stuff 'in the cloud' – on Microsoft OneDrive, Google Drive, Dropbox or whatever service you prefer – accessed over the built-in Wi-Fi. There's also a single fast **USB 3.0** port – which you could use to attach an external hard drive or memory stick while at your desk – as well as two **USB 2.0** ports, which would be ideal for a mouse except they're both on the left-hand

side, while about three-quarters of people are right-handed. Duh.

Unlike Chromebooks, the C40-C runs proper Windows programs. The screen is no better than you'd expect, with a modest 1366x768-pixel **resolution** and an annoyingly reflective finish, but it's adequate and reasonably bright. The keyboard and touchpad both work well, and although the case is plastic, it's not too flimsy.

What can we say? For the money, the C40-C was never going to get a bad write-up from us unless it exploded or turned out to be an empty egg box with a Windows start screen painted on the lid. And it didn't.

SPECIFICATIONS

1.6GHz Intel Celeron N3050 dual-core processor • 2GB memory • 32GB flash storage • 14in 1366x768-pixel touchscreen • Webcam • 802.11n Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.0 • USB 3.0 port • 2x USB 2.0 ports • HDMI port • Windows 8.1 Home (upgradable free to Windows 10) • 23x344x244mm (HxWxD) • 1.7kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18527

VERDICT: This is by no means the ideal laptop, but has good battery life, it's pleasant to handle and it is very cheap



ALTERNATIVE: HP Stream 13 £199 This smaller machine has similar specs and is the 'fun' alternative, but the screen is dull and battery life is much shorter



PHONE | £339 from Google Store www.snipca.com/18570

Google Nexus 5X

A true Android contender

Every computer – and that’s what your phone is now, of course – needs two basic parts to function: the hardware and the operating system. They might both be made by the same company, like Apple, which only makes devices for its own software, and vice versa. Or one company might make the operating system and let others build the hardware that runs it.

Google’s mobile operating system, Android, works the second way. Most smartphones and tablets that aren’t made by Apple are based on Android, which Google gives away free. But Google does make an own-brand phone, under the name ‘Nexus’. Or rather, it pays others to make it. The 5X model is built by LG. A bigger Nexus, the 6P, is also available, made by Huawei.

“It’s easy to use, with a great camera but limited storage”

The 5X comes in blue-grey, black or white plastic. It’s slim, light and easy to grip, but feels decidedly downmarket compared with Apple’s aluminium efforts. Like iPhones, it has no microSD card slot for extra storage, and the basic 16GB is barely sufficient when you consider Android takes up about 6GB of it. That said, it’s £200 cheaper than the latest iPhone, with a bigger display that matches the Full HD resolution of Apple’s Plus model.

Apple was criticised for the lens ring that sticks out a millimetre from the back of the iPhone. Google has decided to make a feature of it with a bulbous porthole. The camera takes great pictures and copes relatively well in low light. Like

SPECIFICATIONS

5.2in 1920x1080-pixel screen • 12.3-megapixel rear camera • 5-megapixel front camera • 16GB flash storage • 802.11n Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.0 • 3G/4G • Android 6 • 147x73x7.9mm (HxWxD) • 138g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18570



the iPhone 6s, it can shoot 4K-resolution video, but you don’t get slow motion. Below the camera is the 5X’s fingerprint sensor, which unlocks the phone but doesn’t work with a digital payment system like Apple Pay.

Google hasn’t attempted to take on Apple’s super-fast processors here, but the 5X’s Snapdragon chip runs the new Android 6.0 (Marshmallow) smoothly. It’s not ideal for the most demanding 3D games. Battery life will barely get you through a day, but at least it charges very quickly via the neat USB Type-C port.

The Nexus 5X is a strong rival to our favourite affordable Android phone, Motorola’s Moto X Play. The latter has a slightly bigger screen and much better battery life, comes in more colours, supports micro SD cards and is tougher. The Moto X is not as fast, and the camera isn’t as good, but it costs £80 less.

VERDICT: It’s a bit of an ugly duckling, but overall we like the 5X, and it’s good value. Consider the 32GB option to avoid running out of space

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Moto X Play £260

This more attractive phone costs significantly less and its storage isn’t restricted, but choose the 5X if the better camera, fingerprint sensor and higher performance are important to you



The best... Desktop/mobile USB sticks

**Sanho
Gmobi iStick**

£61 for 32GB
from Amazon
www.snipca.com/18678

USB sticks are a handy way to store and transfer files, but don’t fit most mobile devices. The iStick is a solution for iPhone and iPad users. It has an Apple Lightning plug on one end and a USB plug on the other. You can’t access files directly from apps on your device, but the iStick app makes it fairly easy to open them. Plugged into a computer, the drive appears like any other USB stick.



Leef Bridge 3.0

£28 for 32GB from Amazon
www.snipca.com/18689

This tiny drive has a Micro USB connector for Android devices with OTG (‘on the go’). This is a standard feature supported by numerous apps. An Apple version, the iBridge, is pricier and relies on its own app (£59 from Amazon www.snipca.com/18688).



SanDisk iXpand

£45 for 32GB from Amazon
www.snipca.com/18690

This drive works similarly to the iStick, and is also for Apple users only, but is cheaper. It has its own battery to avoid draining power from your device; this will need recharging, but lasts days not hours.



Adam Elements iKlips

£53 for 32GB from Scan
www.snipca.com/18691

This Lightning drive is designed to work much faster with USB 3.0 computers, and can store files bigger than 4GB, which others can’t. It has no battery and is good value for money.



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Scan V1 Value System Home / Office PC

- Intel® Pentium® G3240 processor
- 4GB Corsair DDR3 1333MHz memory
- 500GB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Windows 10

£310 Inc VAT

The V1 is a very capable entry-level system perfect from basic home/office tasks. It's based around the dual-core Intel® Pentium® G3240 processor, 4GB of RAM plus a 500GB hard disk.



Scan V15 Value System Home / Office PC

- Intel® Core™ i5 4460 processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 1TB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Windows 10

£490 Inc VAT

The V15 ups the ante by including a quad-core Intel® Core™ i5 4460 processor, so it makes light work of office and multimedia applications.



Scan G20 Value System Gaming PC

- Intel® Pentium® G3240 processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 750 Ti SSC
- 1TB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Windows 10

£479 Inc VAT

Thanks to its dual-core Intel® Pentium® G3240 processor and NVIDIA GTX 750 Ti SSC graphics card the G20i is our most affordable gaming PC. It even includes surround sound!



Scan G30i Value System Gaming PC

- Intel® Core™ i5 4460 processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 960 SSC ACX
- 1TB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Windows 10

£659 Inc VAT

The combination of quad-core Intel® Core™ i5 4460 processor and NVIDIA GeForce GTX 960 SSC ACX graphics card ensures that the G30i can play any game you throw at it.



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winning 3XS team



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Scan 3XS Gamer 20i Gaming PC

- Intel® Core™ i7 4790 processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 2133MHz memory
- 4GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 970 SC ACX
- 1TB Seagate HDD
- Windows 10
- 3 Year Premium Warranty

£989 inc VAT

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



Scan 3XS Vengeance Gaming PC

- Intel® Core™ i7 6700K processor overclocked up to 4.7GHz
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 2133MHz memory
- 4GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980 SC
- 250GB Samsung 850 SSD & 2TB HDD
- Windows 10
- 3 Year Premium Warranty

£1479 inc VAT

This high-end gaming system includes a Intel Core i7 6700K CPU which has Hyper-Threading and is overclocked up to 4.7GHz plus a 4GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980 graphics card, 8GB of 3000MHz Corsair Vengeance DDR4, an Asus Z170 Pro Gaming motherboard, 256GB SSD and a 2TB hard disk.

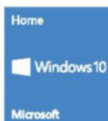


3XS LG15 Performance GTX

- Intel® Core™ i7 6700HQ processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 960M
- 15.6in 1,920 x 1,080 screen
- 1TB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Windows 10

£859 inc VAT

The LG15 Performance GTX is a 15.6" mid-range gaming laptop that includes a NVIDIA GeForce GTX 960M graphics card plus your choice of Intel Core i5 or i7 CPU, up to 16GB of RAM and multiple hard disks and SSDs.



3XS LG15 Carbon G-Sync

- Intel® Core™ i7 6700 processor
- 8GB Corsair 2133MHz DDR4 memory
- 6GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 970M or 980M
- 15.6in FullHD or 4K screen
- 1TB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Windows 10

£1389 inc VAT

The LG15 Carbon G-Sync is a 15.6" high-end gaming laptop that includes a NVIDIA GeForce GTX 970M or 980M graphics card with your choice of Intel Core i5 or i7 CPU, up to 32GB of DDR4 and multiple hard disks and SSDs plus NVIDIA G-Sync for tearing and stutter free gaming.



Scan Computers recommends Windows.

3XS Custom Series

Our 3XS Custom Series is a range of computers designed to offer the best performance for a variety of applications, with a particular focus on games. We build Custom Series PCs to order, so we can configure and tailor make an individual PC just the way you want it. We can also overclock the processor, so you get a faster PC without a substantial increase in price. All 3XS Custom Series PCs are covered by a three year warranty as standard with the first year on-site.



Scan 3XS
Overclocked



Built by award
winning 3XS team



3 Year
Warranty

3XS SYSTEMS

Reviews

PRINTER | £186 from Amazon www.snipca.com/18597

Epson WorkForce WF-100W

Print anywhere, at a price



Portable printers are a strange breed. They're generally simpler, flimsier and print less well than full-size models, yet they cost more. That's partly because they're aimed at business users who'll cheerfully spend their boss's money. It's also because printer manufacturers don't make money selling printers, they make money selling ink, and a portable machine is likely to get used less, bringing in smaller profits over its lifetime.

But a lot of people might find a portable printer very handy, so it's good to see one that isn't exorbitantly expensive and is actually light enough to carry around. Unlike some rivals, the WF-100W comes with a rechargeable battery, so you're not limited to using it where you can find a power socket, although it does work from the mains as well. The battery isn't huge – it lost 50 per cent of its charge when we printed 25 pages – but it can be charged from a USB

SPECIFICATIONS

5760x1440dpi maximum print resolution • 4ppm colour and 7ppm mono quoted speeds • 20-sheet paper input • USB • 802.11n Wi-Fi • 61x309x154mm (HxWxD) • 1.6kg • Three-year warranty
www.snipca.com/18598

port, which gives you some flexibility.

Built-in Wi-Fi means you can connect to your laptop or a network wherever you are, or print from your iPhone or iPad using Apple's AirPrint. The paper input flap folds around the printer and clips shut, so you don't need a separate carry case. To keep things compact, there's no output tray; instead pages pile up neatly on any flat surface. A colour screen makes settings easy to manage.

As a portable device, then, the WF-100W is quite practical. It won't double as your main printer, though. The fastest it'll go is just over six pages of text per minute, or two colour documents, while full-page photos take much longer. On battery power it's even slower. Our Word documents looked very clear; photos, not so much. And it can only remember one Wi-Fi network at a time, which would be very annoying if you were regularly switching between home and elsewhere.

The WF-100W's cartridges contain just over one teaspoon of ink apiece, and only last 250 black or 200 colour pages. It

also needs a £4 'maintenance pack' to replace the waste ink collector after every half-dozen refills. Adding all this up, you're paying over 12p per colour page on top of the price of the printer, which is more than four times the cost of a basic desktop inkjet printer.

Even so, this is one of the best options we've seen for mobile printing. Just remember it'll be no use unless you pack plenty of A4 paper too.

VERDICT: Don't choose this printer for any reason except portability, but if that's what you need, it's a decent buy



Canon Pixma iP110 **£188** This printer is slightly faster for text and has better battery life, but at 2.2kg it's noticeably heavier



WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

What's the best gaming monitor?

Q I'm looking for a screen for gaming. I think a 144Hz model for around £200 would fit the bill. There are so many to choose from, but which should I pick?

Scott Lomax

A The measurement you're talking about is the 'refresh rate' (how many times per second the screen can update the picture). It's important for conveying the fast-moving action in games. If

your PC's **graphics card** can render more frames per second (fps) than a standard monitor's 60Hz, it will give you crisper motion. A mid-range system with a decent card, such as the Nvidia GeForce GTX 960, should reach 60fps in demanding games on high settings.

The monitor's lag (latency) is also important: it's no good having a fast-moving display running a noticeable fraction of a second behind your PC. Two popular 144Hz monitors with quick response times are the Asus VG248QE



(£210 from Amazon www.snipca.com/18571, see

image) and the BenQ XL2411Z (£210 from Amazon www.snipca.com/18572).

The BenQ model has a great motion blur-reduction system and can cut blue light to reduce eye strain. The Asus has higher contrast and built-in speakers. There are newer, bigger, more high-spec options, but they're more expensive.

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

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Reviews

TV-STREAMING BOX | £129 from Apple www.snipca.com/18620

Apple TV (2015)

The iPhone of television

Apple's boss, Tim Cook, used to say Apple TV was a "hobby". Now he calls it "the future of television". That's a pretty big step up. This new version is still a little black box that you plug into your telly to watch programmes from the internet. Plenty of other boxes do that without so much hype. So what's new?

Setup is straightforward, especially if you have an iPhone or iPad with iOS 9.1. Connect the Apple TV to the mains, attach it to your HDTV with an **HDMI** cable (bought separately), then plonk your i-things down next to it and the two will say hello to each other. Type your Apple username and password and you're done. Without an iPhone, you'll have to enter some details using the remote control.

You'll then see the Home screen's big friendly icons. Two usher you to Apple's iTunes Store, for buying or renting films and TV shows. You can also listen to tracks from Apple Music if you have a subscription. You can play iTunes purchases from your Mac or PC over Wi-Fi, and show your photos from iCloud.

“A new icon brings you the App Store, where thousands of compatible apps are appearing”

This is all very Appley, but the new box also works independently of other fruit-branded products. A new icon brings you the App Store, where thousands of compatible apps are appearing. Games are an obvious draw, even for those of us who'd never bother with an Xbox. Crossy Road, a cartoonish

take on the classic Frogger, is simple and fun, and multiplayer mode is hilarious. Or try Shadowmatic, where you rotate levitating shapes to cast shadows in recognisable forms. For more excitement, Geometry Wars 3 is a dramatically pretty shoot-'em-up. Many games are free, and none of them cost more than £8.

There are educational and informative apps, too. Touchpress Classical Music Reimagined displays an orchestra, a musical score and a visualisation with dots pulsing as each musician plays. Carrot Weather provides forecasts from a grumpy robot. If you're likely to download a lot of apps and videos, you can pay an extra £40 to double the built-in 32GB of storage, but you can always delete them and reload them later free of charge.

Apps also serve as TV channels, and this is what could change how we watch telly. Previously, there were icons for a few stations that had partnerships with Apple. Now the system is open to anyone. Whether they broadcast free, such as BBC iPlayer, or require a subscription, such as Netflix, there's scope for the home screen to fill up with all the channels you'd expect on Sky or Virgin cable, and more.

A week after launch, we found only a limited selection in the UK: we could get Now TV, Sky's pay-monthly service, but not ITV or Channel 4. It's unlikely TV companies will ignore the opportunity for long, and with apps such as YouTube you'll never be stuck for something to watch. Apple TV still doesn't support **4K resolution**, which



might start to be a problem when you're choosing your next TV.

The included Siri Remote is a lightweight rectangle with six clicky buttons and a rather skiddy touchpad. You can also talk to it, but ask it to find you a video, and it only searches iTunes and Netflix; that's something Apple needs to work on. While you're watching, you can tell Siri to skip forwards or backwards, or even ask 'What did he say?' to replay the last bit with subtitles. We're hoping for a 'What was he in?' function that tells you where you had previously seen a familiar face.

VERDICT: It's not so much the future of TV as the present but better. More UK broadcasters need to get apps out, but the new Apple TV is good as it stands, especially if you like a bit of casual gaming

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Amazon Fire TV £80
This other little black box has more UK channels at the moment, but fewer great apps. It works best if you have an Amazon Prime subscription



SPECIFICATIONS

32GB flash storage • HDMI 1.4 port • 0/100 Ethernet
• 802.11ac Wi-Fi • 35x98x98mm (HxWxD) • 425g
www.snipca.com/18621

PHOTO EDITING | £79 from Adobe www.snipca.com/18693

Adobe Photoshop Elements 14

Photo editing made simpler – but there's not much new

Photoshop Elements is related to Adobe's top-end, image-editing program, but it's not just a cut-down version. Instead, it focuses on introducing tools and techniques to beginners. That makes it worth considering if you've looked at more advanced software and felt lost. On the other hand, it's expensive for a program you might grow out of.

You get a choice of Quick, Guided and Expert modes. Expert is like proper Photoshop, but with fewer tools. There's help with tricky jobs such as cutting around people's hair when removing backgrounds, and a new Dehaze function for shots lacking contrast. Quick is for simple one-click fixes. Guided walks you through more complex processes. There are lots more Guided options in this version, covering tasks such as adding a motion blur to suggest speed.

The results are mixed. Simpler examples don't offer much you couldn't have figured out, and more ambitious ones don't always come out well. You'll be happiest here if you're looking for fun effects rather than professional results. A new tab – eLive – shows you tutorial videos, which are interesting and helpful.

As well as editing, Photoshop Elements can manage your photo collection. The Organizer lets you sort pictures in many different ways. Facial recognition automatically spots your friends and family in photos after you've identified them once, and you can find pictures by where they were taken. There's now a quick way to set the location of batches



of photos if it wasn't recorded when you took them.

Photoshop Elements is a fairly capable creative photo editor with a useful, different approach. Its biggest problem is its price. Windows users can get more tools by buying Serif PhotoPlus X8 for the same amount or Corel's PaintShop Pro X8 for less, so the only reason to consider Elements is for its teaching and hand-holding features. On the Mac, for half the price, Serif Affinity Photo is a more powerful image editor, though again a little more daunting at first.

Adobe itself sells full Photoshop, with the Lightroom photo-management program, on a subscription that costs £103 a year for both Mac and Windows. If you've already got Elements 13, there's not enough to justify an upgrade, especially because it costs a ridiculous £65.

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Windows 7, 8 or 10 or OS X 10.9 or later • 2GB memory • 5GB hard-drive space • Internet connection for installation www.snipca.com/18694

VERDICT: There's not enough new in this upgrade, and Elements is beginning to feel like a starter program at a professional price

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE:

Serif PhotoPlus

X8 £80 This comprehensive photo editor is a good option for newcomers who need help



COMING SOON



WINTER 2015

Asus' forthcoming VivoStick (around £100) joins the band of PCs that are so small they barely exist. It's a dongle that plugs into an **HDMI** port with Windows 10, 2GB of **RAM**, 32GB of storage, two **USB 2.0** ports and a headphone jack.



WINTER 2015

Apple has added a **4K-resolution** display option to its 21.5in iMac range (£899, www.snipca.com/18266), while the Asus Zen AiO S PC (pictured) is available soon from £800. The latter offers more specifications and comes in two sizes with regular or 4K screens.



WINTER 2015

Printers can be cheap, but ink is dear, partly because it comes in cartridges that the print head carries around as it prints. Canon's Pixma G series pumps ink from tanks that can be refilled. Launched in India (from £100), the printers will compete with Epson's EcoTank (£180).



WINTER 2015

As Apple's iPad Pro (pictured) arrives to challenge Microsoft's Surface Pro 4, others will join the battle of the supertablets. Samsung may be among the contenders, with leaks revealing a prototype 12in slab running Windows 10 with stylus support and a 4K screen.



NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE
9 Dec

Acer Aspire R11

Windows 10 convertible with a hard drive for under £250



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www.snipca.com/14981 *At time of press



Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Asus X555LA-XX290H
£289 from www.snipca.com/18151
Tested: Issue 446



Asus has made all the right choices with this budget Windows 8.1 laptop (upgradeable to Windows 10). Its comfortable keyboard, fast performance and lengthy battery life 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.
£210 from www.snipca.com/17296

DESKTOP PC

PC Specialist Trion 960
£650 from www.snipca.com/17254
Tested: Issue 454

You could spend less on a usable PC, but this solid tower system has great all-round performance, including a decent Nvidia GTX 960 graphics card. A 120GB SSD and 1TB hard drive offers speed and space, but Wi-Fi costs £15 extra.



ALTERNATIVE: Palicomp Intel i5 Elite
For £50 less, this is a similar PC in many respects, but compromises on graphics with the cheaper GTX 750 card. £600 from www.snipca.com/17297

TABLET

Apple iPad Mini 4
£319 from www.snipca.com/18100
Tested: Issue 460



The 2015 update to Apple's 7.9in tablet greatly improves the screen and camera, boosts performance, and makes it worth the £100 extra over the iPad mini 2 (still a good budget buy). Go for the £399 64GB version if you can, though.

ALTERNATIVE: Apple iPad Air 2
The 9.7in option is still slim and light, also has Touch ID and Apple Pay, and the range of apps beats Android. £399 from www.snipca.com/18139

PHONE

Apple iPhone 6s
£539 from www.snipca.com/18240
Tested: Issue 461



It may look like last year's model, but this update is stronger and faster, with a higher-resolution camera, time-saving 3D Touch features and an excellent screen. The bigger 6s Plus has better battery life.

ALTERNATIVE: Moto X Play Motorola's fun phone may be plasticky but it runs Android 5 smoothly. The screen, camera and battery life are all big pluses. £250 from www.snipca.com/17934

DIGITAL CAMERA

Sony A5000
£249 from www.snipca.com/18505
Tested: Issue 428



This compact system camera (CSC) is an affordable way to get into shooting with interchangeable lenses. The APS-C sensor gives great image quality for the money though the controls are a bit basic.

ALTERNATIVE: Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ330 If you prefer to do it all with one lens, this combines 24x zoom with a bright f/2.8 aperture. £492 from www.snipca.com/18436

E-READER

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£110 from www.snipca.com/17776
Tested: Issue 458



With a new high-resolution screen, the affordable Kindle lacks only automatic brightness adjustment and page-turn buttons (you have to swipe the screen). It's great value as long as you're happy to buy your books from Amazon.

ALTERNATIVE: Kobo Glo HD As good as the Paperwhite, but with more storage, and slightly more compact, this is the independent e-reader to pick. £110 from www.snipca.com/17889

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Synology apps available on

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SECURITY SOFTWARE

Kaspersky Internet Security 2016

£19.99 from www.snipca.com/17874

Tested: Issue 437



Kaspersky Internet Security 2016 has won our past six antivirus tests. Compatible with Windows 10, the 2016 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/17903.

ALTERNATIVE: Avast Free Antivirus

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

WEB-DESIGN

Xara Web Designer Premium 11

£70 from www.snipca.com/16955

Tested: Issue 453



This visual web-design program makes creating sites more like laying out a document than writing **HTML** code, and sites can be 'responsive', meaning they look right on both big and small screens without extra work. A basic version is also available for half the price.

ALTERNATIVE: Serif WebPlus X8

Comes with lots of templates, but creates separate desktop and mobile versions instead of responsive sites, and can be slow to use. £90 from www.snipca.com/14964

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 5 **MAGIX Rescue Your Videotapes 8** software



The eighth version of MAGIX's Rescue Your Videotapes software includes a new video converter and now supports all analogue video sources and DV tapes. It comes with a full set of accessories, including a SCART cable for connecting to your PC. With one-click controls and easy-to-follow tutorials, it remains the simplest way to digitise your videos. To enter, email your address to cacomp@dennis.co.uk with 'rescue' in the subject line by midnight 8 December.

MAGIX Rescue Your Videotapes 8

is available to buy now priced £59.99. For more information visit www.magix.com/gb, follow @MAGIX_INT on Twitter and 'like' www.facebook.com/MAGIX.

MULTIFUNCTION PRINTER

PRICE DROP

Canon Pixma MG6650

£62 from www.snipca.com/17334

Tested: Issue 455



It may look like something that James Bond would have to defuse, but this low-cost, all-in-one printer is an excellent choice. Running costs are reasonable too – buy the XL cartridges and running costs work out at 7.7p per colour page or 2.4p for black and white. This makes it very affordable to run.

ALTERNATIVE: Canon Pixma MX495

It's slow, and black ink is pricey, but this cheaper MFP has a paper feeder and fax too. £40 from www.snipca.com/17174

SOLID-STATE DRIVES

Crucial BX100 1TB

£235 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. £110 from www.snipca.com/16498

SECURITY CAMERA

PRICE DROP

Y-cam HomeMonitor HD

£109 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. £86 from www.snipca.com/15275

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: RADEON R9-380 2GB Graphics Card
: 8GB DDR3 1600MHz Memory
: 1TB SATA III Hard Drive
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FROM **£589.99**



PHANTOM 700 GAMING PC

: INTEL i5-6500 3.20GHz Quad Core SKYLAKE Processor
: NVIDIA GTX 960 2GB Graphics Card
: 8GB DDR3 1600MHz Memory
: 1TB HDD / 8GB SSD Seagate Hybrid Drive
: Microsoft Windows 10 (64Bit)

FROM **£689.99**



WARBIRD 1000 GAMING PC

: INTEL i7-4790 3.60GHz Quad Core Processor
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: Microsoft Windows 10 (64Bit)

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Edited by Sherwin Coelho

PULL OUT
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Issue 463

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

35 Master Windows 10's updated tools
38 Use Skype without installing software

40 Set how programs run on your PC
42 Stop anyone reading your Facebook posts

PLUS

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

47 Make Office Better
48 Secret Tips For... Outlook.com

Master Windows 10's updated tools

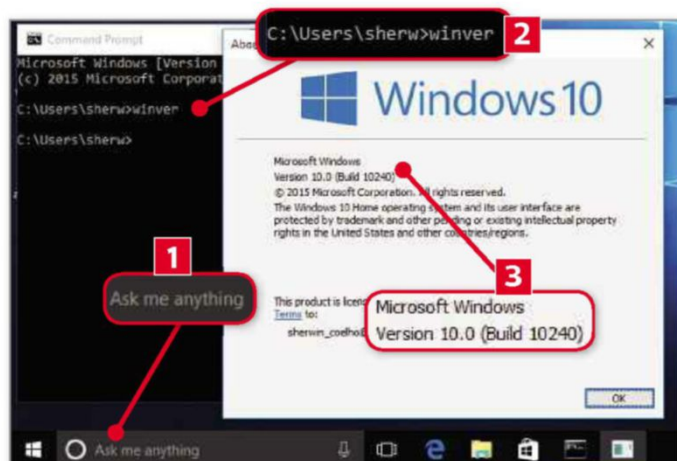
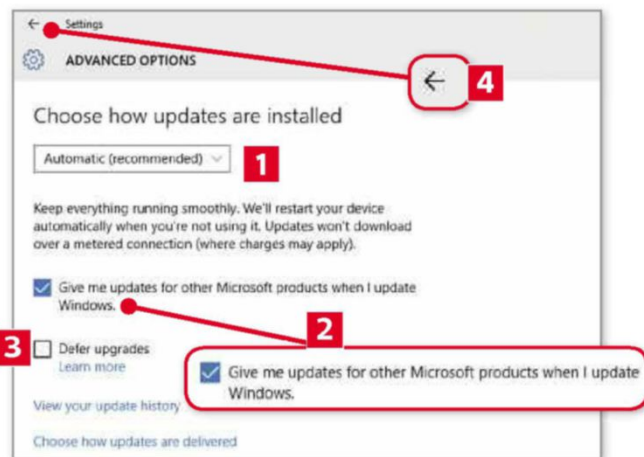
What you need: Windows 10 **Time required:** 1 hour

On November 12, Microsoft released its first major update to Windows 10. Originally codenamed Threshold 2, it was simply called the 'November update' when it arrived. The update aims to address problems relating to storage space and printer connectivity.

It also adds new features to the Start menu and Microsoft's new browser Edge. We'll show you a couple of ways to install this update and take you through some of its useful new apps and features. However, first read our News story on the update's side effects (page 6).

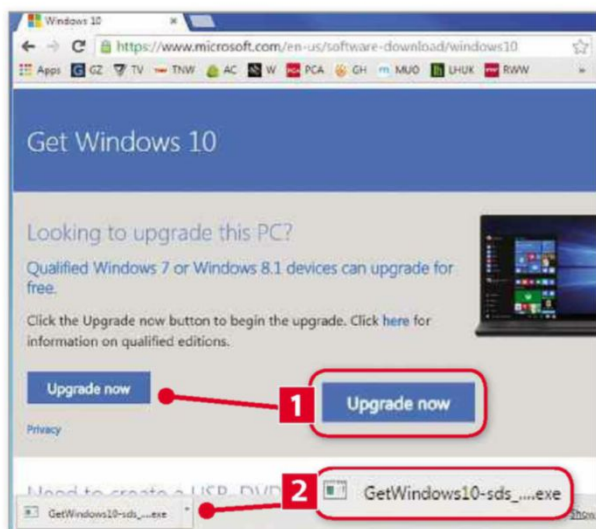


STEP 1 To update your Windows 10 PC, open the Start menu, click Settings, 'Update & security', then click the 'Advanced options' link. Next, ensure the dropdown menu at the top is set to 'Automatic (recommended)' **1**, 'Give me updates for other Microsoft products when I update Windows' is ticked **2** and 'Defer upgrades' is unticked **3**. Now go back **4**, then click 'Check for updates'. The update could take anything up to an hour to download. Your PC will then restart several times while it's being updated.

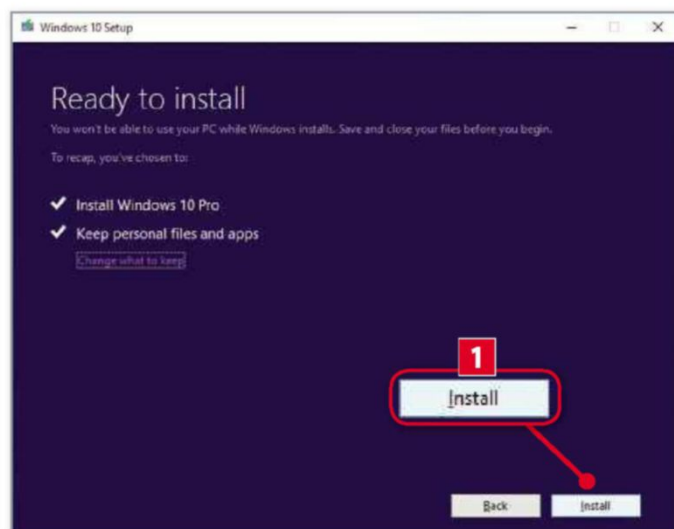


STEP 2 To check your Windows 10 version, type **command prompt** into the search field **1**, then press Enter to open it. Now type **winver** into Command Prompt **2** and press Enter. You'll see a new window displaying your Windows version **3**. If it shows 'Version 1511 (Build 10586)' then you have the latest Windows 10 version (with the November update), so skip to Step 5. If it says 'Version 10.0 (Build 10240)', it means you're still have the previous version of Windows 10. There are a few reasons why you may not be able to update to the latest version, which we will now explain and hopefully resolve.

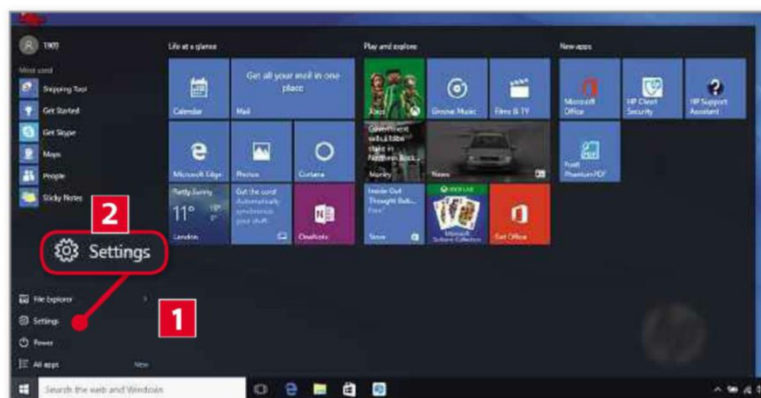
Workshops



STEP 3 If you've recently upgraded your PC to Windows 10 (from Windows 7 or 8), you may not be able to get the November update. This is because Microsoft gives users 31 days to roll back their PC to their previous operating system before they can update it further. However, there is a way to force your Windows 10 PC to update to the latest version. Only do this if you're sure you don't want to go back to Windows 7 or 8. First, go to www.snipca.com/18730 and click the 'Upgrade now' button **1** to download Microsoft's Windows 10 migration tool. Now click the downloaded setup file **2**, then click Run.

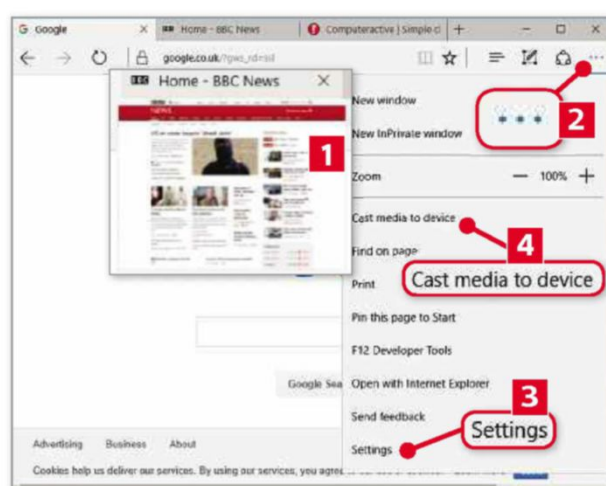


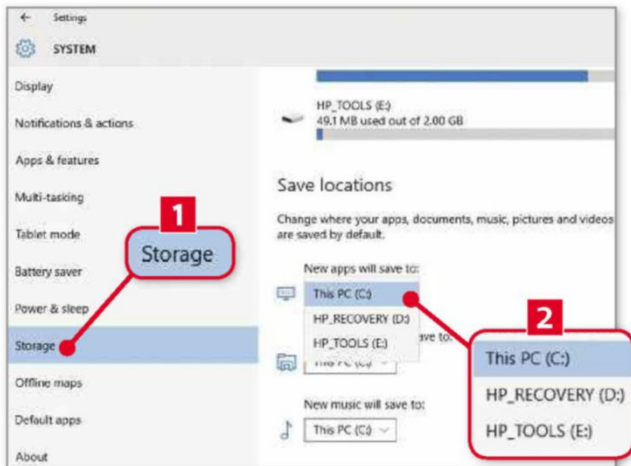
STEP 4 This tool will download and install the most up-to-date version of Windows 10. You'll be prompted to click buttons such as Accept or Next. At the end of the verification process, click Install **1** when prompted. Your PC will now restart several times and you'll see the Updating Windows screen that displays the progress of your update.



STEP 5 At first glance, your updated Windows 10 Desktop won't look different but if, for example, you open the Start menu, then click and drag its right edge **1**, you'll notice four columns (previously two) of apps in the live-tile section on the right. You may also see adverts on the Start menu, but it's easy to get rid of these. Simply click Settings **2**, Personalisation, Start, then click the 'Occasionally shows suggestions in Start' slider to turn off adverts (called 'suggestions' by Microsoft).

STEP 6 Next, open Windows 10's new browser Edge and open a number of websites in separate tabs. Now move your cursor over any tab to see a new tab preview tile **1**. If you have more than one Windows 10 PC, you can now sync your Edge passwords, favourites and Reading List across your devices. To do that, click the More button **2**, then Settings **3**. Now click the Sync slider to turn it on and log in with your Microsoft account when prompted. If you have a device (such as a TV) with Miracast or DLNA enabled, you can now stream media from Edge to this device (similar to using a Chromecast). Click the new 'Cast media to device' option **4**, then select the device you want to stream to.





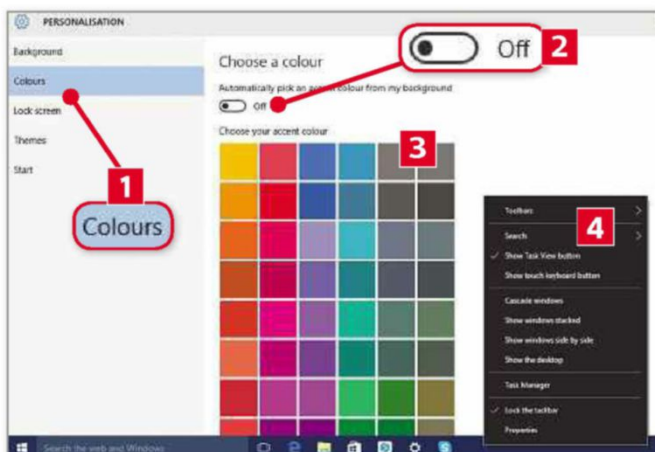
STEP 7 After upgrading to Windows 10, many readers complained that it was eating into their PC's storage space and that they were facing problems setting their default printer. Thankfully, the November update addresses both problems. You can now store downloaded apps to other drives on your PC so they don't clog up your C Drive. Open Settings, click System, then Storage **1**. Now click the 'New apps will save to' dropdown menu **2** and choose an alternative drive. You also can set your last-used printer as your default. To do that, open Settings, Devices, then click the 'Let Windows manage my default printer' slider to turn it on.



STEP 8 The update also adds four new apps to Windows 10. This integrates Skype's messaging, calling and video features across three apps - Messaging, Skype and 'Skype video' **1**. Open the apps and log in with your Microsoft account. The best new feature lets you respond to incoming Skype calls/text messages directly from your notification centre. The fourth new app is Sway **2**, Microsoft's presentation tool, which we regularly cover in Make Office Better (page 47).



STEP 9 Microsoft has also added a useful Find My Device option. Open Settings, 'Update & Security', click Find My Device **1**, then 'Sign in with a Microsoft account' **2** and enter your login details. Your PC will now save a log of your device's location every few minutes. If you lose it or suspect it's been stolen, simply go to account.microsoft.com/devices **3** on another device, click 'Sign in' and log in with your Microsoft account. Now click the 'Find my device' link beside your PC to see its last-recorded location as a blue pin on a map.



STEP 10 The November update also offers a few cosmetic improvements. For example, previously, your Desktop program tiles had a bland white title header. You can now change this to any colour. Right-click anywhere on your Desktop, click Personalise, then click Colours **1**. Click the 'Automatically pick an accent colour from my background' slider **2** to set your title header to the same colour as your PC's background wallpaper. Alternatively, select an option from the colour palette **3**, then click the 'Show colour on Start, taskbar and action centre' slider below. Finally, right-click your Taskbar or Start menu to reveal a black context (right-click) menu **4**, which was previously white before the November update. ●

● Also read our next Cover Feature: 'Stop and control Windows updates' – out Wed 9 December

Use Skype without installing software

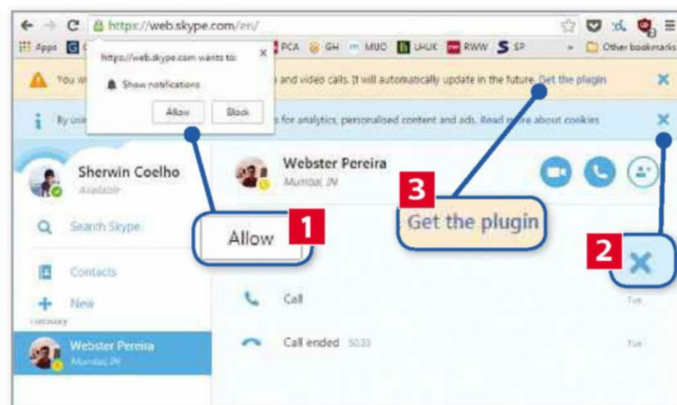
What you need: Any version of Windows (XP to 10) **Time required:** 25 minutes

Microsoft has recently added some excellent new features to Skype, including Skype Web and Skype Links. The former lets you make and receive free Skype calls directly from your web browser, meaning you don't need to install Skype on your PC. The

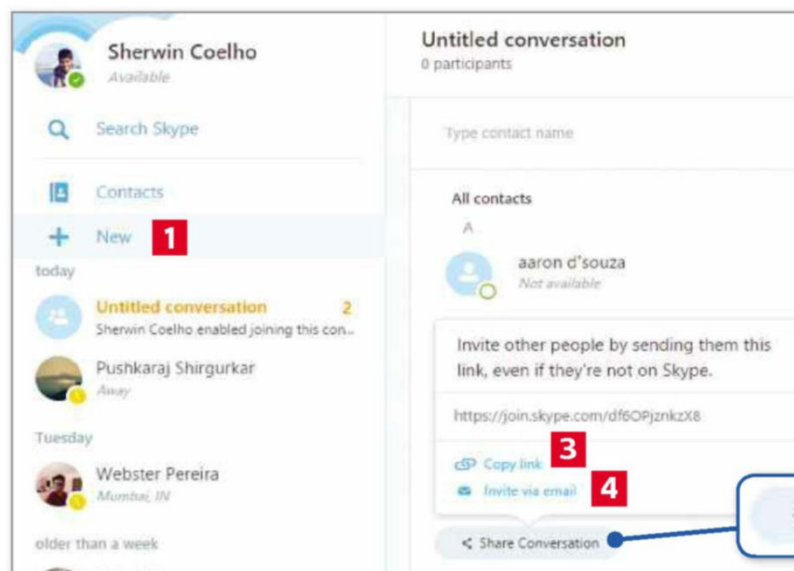
latter lets you start a Skype conversation (video, audio or text) and invite up to 25 people to join it. Recipients can join this conversation directly from their browser (even if they don't have a Skype account) simply by clicking a link that you send them.



STEP 1 We'll first show you how to use Skype Web. You can use it within any web browser, but we'll use Chrome. Go to <https://login.skype.com>, enter your Skype login details **1**, tick 'Keep me signed in' **2**, then click 'Sign in'. If you don't have a Skype account, click the 'Create new account' link **3**. You'll need to create a Skype username, set up a password and provide some personal details, including your name, email address and country of residence.



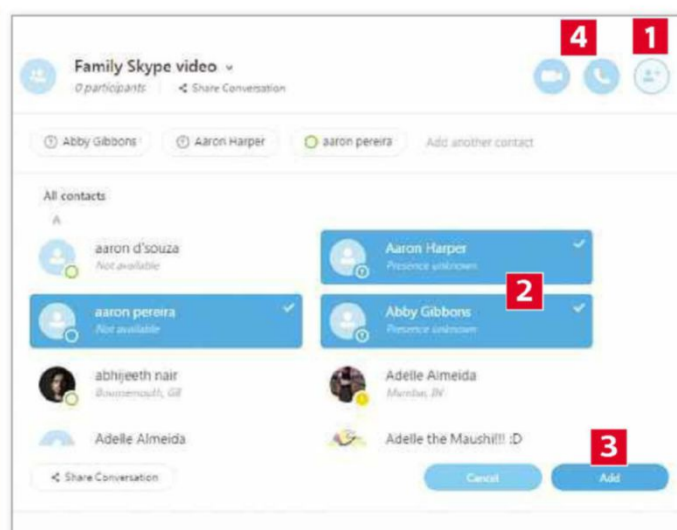
STEP 2 After logging in, click Allow **1** in the pop-up window to see Skype notifications (as orange dots) on your browser tab, then close the cookies warning **2**. Before using Skype Web, you'll need to install the Skype **plug-in**. Click the 'Get the plugin' link **3**, then the Add Extension button. Now click the green Get Plugin button to download the file to your PC. Finally, click the downloaded 'SkypeWebPlugin.msi' setup file to install it.



STEP 3 We'll now show you how to use Skype Links to invite people without a Skype account (or whose Skype username you don't know) to join your conversation. First, click New **1**, then click Share Conversation **2**. You'll see a link generated. Click 'Copy link' **3**, then paste and share it with others (via Facebook, for example). Alternatively, click the 'Invite via email' **4** link to open a new email within your default email program. This email contains a pre-written message asking recipient(s) to click the link and join the conversation. Send this to your chosen recipients.

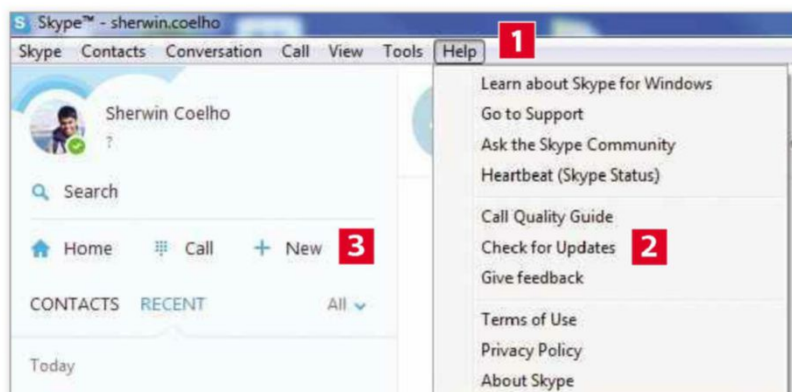
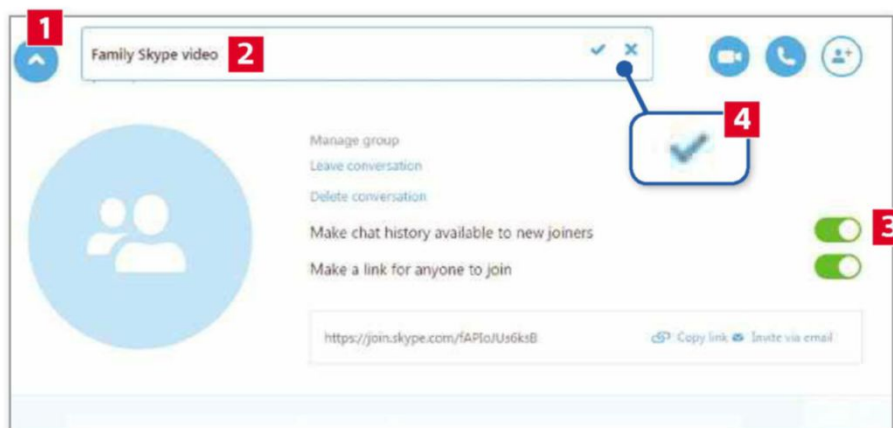


STEP 4 The recipient clicks the link to open a new Skype tab in their default browser. They should then tick 'Remember my choice for all links of this type', click Launch Application, then Join Conversation at the bottom. They should now type their name **1** and click Join to enter the conversation. Alternatively, they can log in using their Skype account **2** (or create one **3**). If they want to join the conversation using their phone or tablet, they will need the Skype app (Android: www.snipca.com/18683; iOS: www.snipca.com/18684) installed and have a Skype account. After tapping the emailed link on their device, they have to select the Skype app to join the conversation.



STEP 5 Adding existing Skype contacts to your conversation is easier. Simply, click the 'Add people' icon **1**, select the contacts you want to add **2**, then click Add **3**. Select video or voice call using the top-right icons **4**, or type in the field below to exchange text messages. By default, you are restricted to sending photos to your group. To send other files (for example, Word documents or PDFs), click the image icon in the text field, then change the dropdown menu at the bottom right to 'All files'. Now select the file you want to send, then click Open.

STEP 6 By default, your group conversation will appear in your contact list on the left as 'Untitled conversation'. To change that, click the dropdown menu in the main conversation window **1**, and rename your conversation by typing in the field at the top **2**. Any new member joining the conversation won't be able to see previous text exchanges within it, but you can easily change this setting by clicking the 'Make chat history available to new joiners' slider **3**. The link and options at the bottom let you add more people to the conversation.



STEP 7 You can also use Skype Links via Skype's Desktop program. If you have it installed, ensure you update it because the feature is only available in the latest version. To do that, click Help **1**, then 'Check for Updates' **2** and follow the steps. If you don't have Skype installed, download the latest version from www.skype.com/download by clicking the green 'Get Skype for Windows desktop' button and following the steps to install it (untick the boxes that set Bing and MSN as your search engine and home page during setup). After logging into your account, click the '+New' button **3**, then copy or email the link (see Step 3 onwards). ●

Set how programs run on your PC

What you need: Advanced Run; Any version of Windows (XP to 10)

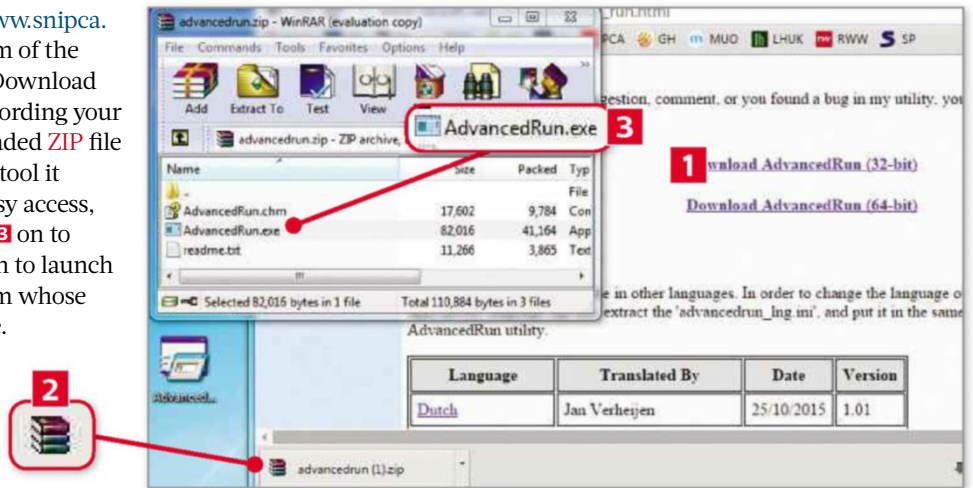
Time required: 25 minutes

Programs on your PC open and run according to their default configuration. That might mean, for example, a program always opens in full-screen mode or in a small window, maybe even with access limited to your PC's administrator.

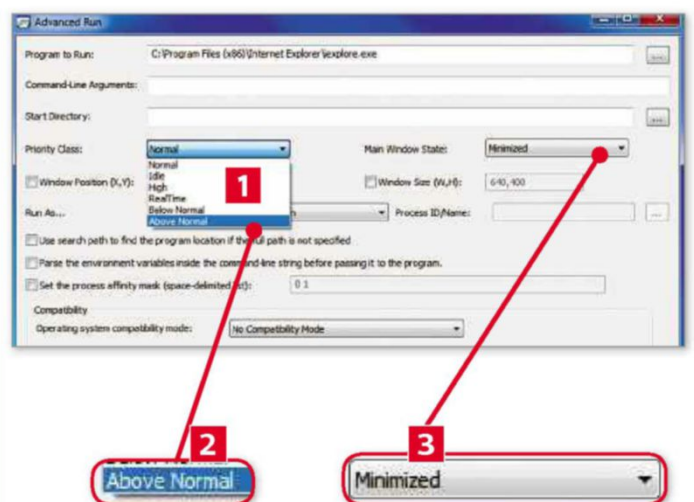
To beat these restrictions use Advanced Run, a new **portable tool** from NirSoft that lets you take control of how your programs run and launch. It also has useful configuration settings that will stop programs crashing.



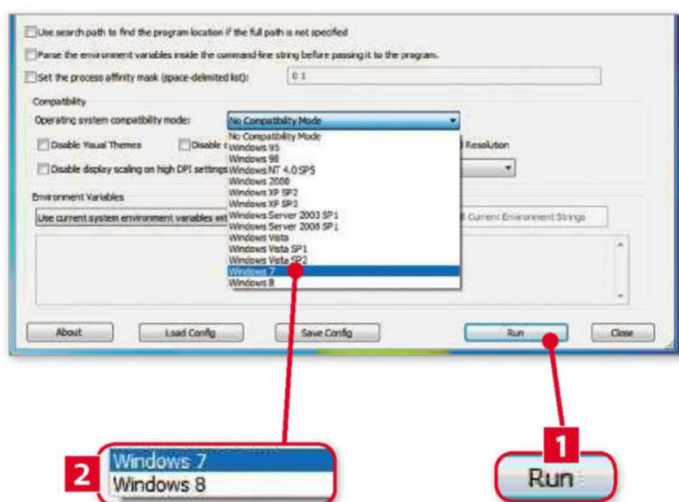
STEP 1 To download the tool, go to www.snipca.com/18335, scroll to the bottom of the page, click one of the purple 'Download AdvancedRun' links (32bit or 64bit, according your PC's version) **1**, then open the downloaded ZIP file **2**. Because Advanced Run is a portable tool it doesn't create a Desktop icon. So for easy access, you should drag and drop its setup file **3** on to your Desktop. Open this, then click Run to launch the tool. You now need to add a program whose default run settings you want to change.



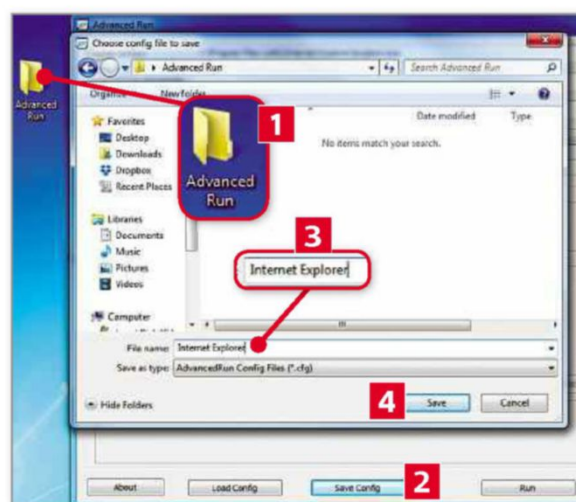
STEP 2 For our first example, we'll set Internet Explorer (IE) to always run in priority mode (meaning your PC will dedicate maximum resources to it, resulting in fewer crashes) and in a minimised window. First, you need to add IE to Advanced Run and the easiest way to do this is to use IE's Desktop shortcut. In Advanced Run, click the three dots beside the 'Program to Run' field **1**, select Desktop on the left **2**, click IE in the list of Desktop shortcuts **3**, then click Open **4**.



STEP 3 The Priority Class dropdown menu is set to Normal by default, but it has six options **1**, ranging from Idle to Above Normal. This sets how much of your PC's resources is dedicated to IE. For example, if you notice that IE takes time to open or crashes regularly, then set the Priority Class to Above Normal **2**. The Main Windows State dropdown menu lets you specify whether you want IE to open in a maximised state (full-screen) or minimised state (on the Taskbar). Click the latter **3**.

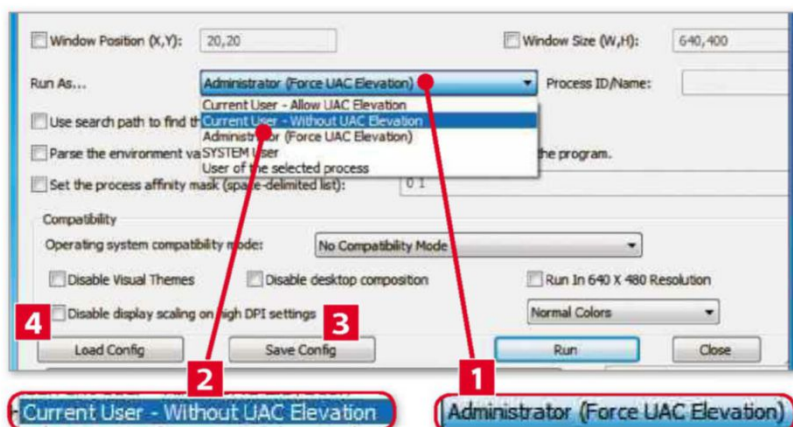
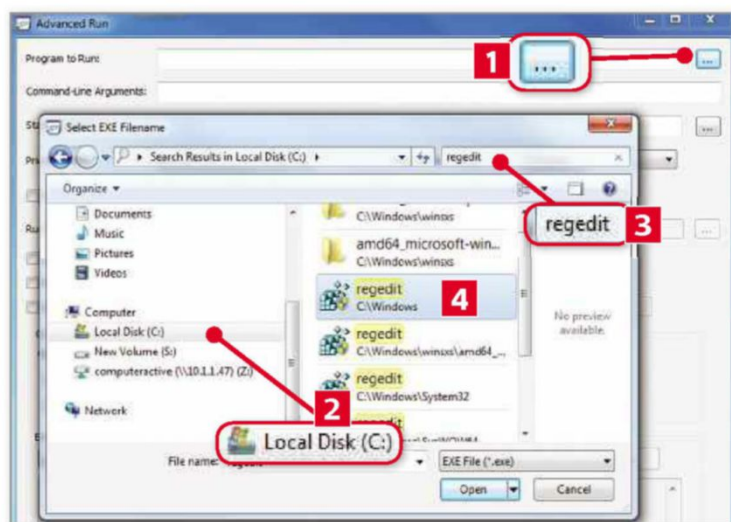


STEP 4 Now click Run **1**, then Yes. IE will open as an icon on your Taskbar (until you click it to maximise it) and should be less prone to crashes. If you've recently upgraded to Windows 10 and experienced problems with IE, try using Advanced Run's 'compatibility mode' to simulate how IE used to run on your previous operating system. Click Advanced Run's 'Operating system compatibility mode' dropdown menu, select your previous operating system from the list **2**, then click Run.



STEP 5 You should now save IE's configuration settings in Advanced Run. To do that, create a new folder on your Desktop and name it Advanced Run **1**. In the Advanced Run window click the Save Config button **2**, navigate to the folder you created on your Desktop, name your file Internet Explorer **3** (or something similar), then click Save **4**.

STEP 6 You can open and control certain programs and tools only if you are the PC Administrator. Advanced Run lets you set these programs so they automatically run in Administrator mode, meaning you won't need to click any annoying UAC (User Account Controls) prompts every time you launch them. We'll show you how to do this using the Registry Editor (one of the biggest UAC-prompt culprits). Open Advanced Run, click the 'Program to Run' button **1**, select C Drive **2**, then type **regedit** in the top-right search field **3**. Next, click to select the 'C:\\Windows' search result **4**, then click Open.



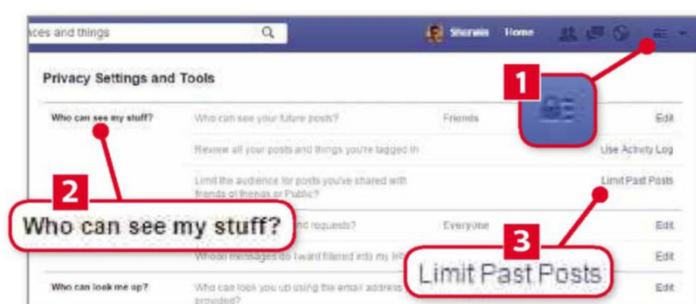
STEP 7 Click the Run As dropdown menu and select 'Administrator (Force UAC Elevation)' **1** to avoid further UAC prompts. If you want to stop other people making changes to your PC's Registry, select 'Current User - Without UAC Elevation' **2**. Finally, save your new configuration **3** (see Step 5). Using these steps, you can change the configuration settings of any program on your PC. If any of your programs' configurations revert to their defaults, simply open Advanced Run and click the Load Config button **4**. Next, navigate to the program's saved configuration file (in the Advanced Run folder on your Desktop), click Open then Run to reload it. ●

Stop anyone reading your Facebook posts

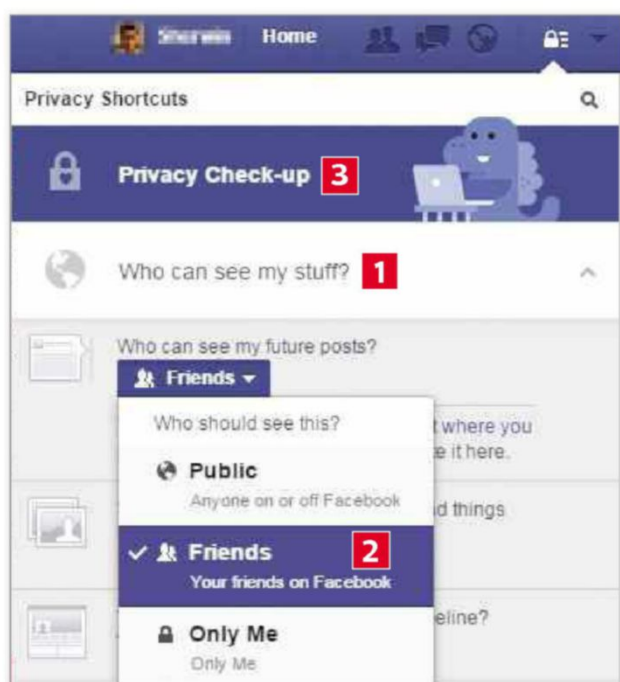
What you need: Facebook account **Time required:** 10 minutes

A few years ago Facebook added a dropdown menu below the Update Status field that let you decide whether you wanted to make your posts 'public' or share them only with friends. Prior to that, anything you posted on the social network was public by default.

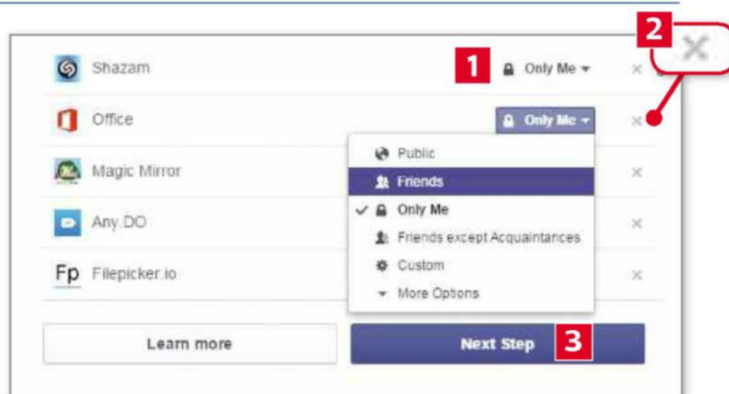
Facebook has now updated its search function so that all your public posts (along with around two trillion others) can be 'universally' searched for and read by anyone using the site. We'll show you what settings you need to change to stop strangers reading your posts.



STEP 1 We'll first show you how to change the status of all your previous Facebook posts so that only your Facebook friends can read and search for them. Log into Facebook (www.facebook.com) on your PC, click the padlock icon at the top right **1**, then click the See More Settings link at the bottom. In the 'Who can see my stuff' section **2**, click the Limit Past Posts link **3**, then click the Limit Old Posts button. Finally, click Confirm, then Close.



STEP 2 To stop making anything you post in future public, click the padlock icon again, then click the second option – 'Who can see my stuff?' **1**. Now click the 'Who can see my future posts?' dropdown menu and set it to Friends **2**. To increase your privacy further, select Privacy Check-up **3**, ensure it is set to Friends, then click Next Step. You'll now see a list of PC programs and mobile apps connected to your Facebook account (usually because you've logged into them using your Facebook account or because you've updated your Facebook status using those items).



STEP 3 By default, all items should be set to Friends or Only Me (meaning no one else can see that you use them) **1**. However, it's worth scrolling down the list and changing any that may be set to Public. If you notice any items in the list that you no longer use, you should delete them **2**. Click Next Step **3** when you've finished. In the final section, you'll see dropdown menus for all the personal info that appears on your profile page (phone number, email address, birthday and so on). Change their values to 'Only Me' or Friends (according to your preference). Finally, click Finish, then Close.

NEXT ISSUE

- Fix Windows 10 problems in one click
- Resume broken downloads
- Stop your router being hacked
- Download Google Maps to use offline

Subscribe to Computeractive at getcomputeractive.co.uk

ON SALE
9 Dec

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Create your own keyboard shortcuts

A few days ago, I stumbled upon a brilliant free tool called Hot Key Plus that lets you produce your own keyboard shortcuts (hotkeys) to launch any program or file on your PC. Unlike other similar programs I've tried, this tool has no adverts, is easy to use, works on all Windows versions and is just 36KB, so it doesn't take up much space on your hard drive.

To download it, go to www.snipca.com/18619 and click the blue 'hotkeyplus100.zip' link at the top of the page. Click the downloaded zipped file, then launch the HotKeyPlus.exe setup file and click Run. The tool runs in your Taskbar's Notification Area, so double-



click its icon to open it (see screenshot).

To create a new shortcut, click Add. You'll see a basic Edit Hot Key window. To choose the program or file you want to create a hotkey for, click Browse,

navigate to that item's location, then click Open. Now click inside the tool's Hot Key field and press the key you want to use. Next, tick the Modifier keys you want to use in conjunction with it. Finally, click OK twice.

Press your hotkey to check that the item launches. The only reason it may not work is if the hotkey you created clashes with one of Windows' default keyboard shortcuts (see a list at www.snipca.com/18622). In that case, simply reopen Hot Key Plus, select the item in the list, click Edit, then change that item's hotkey.

Trevor Adams



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

APPOINTMENTS

Convert Google Calendar to the UK date format and count down to your next event

My memory isn't what it was, so my daughter suggested I start using Google Calendar, so I can add events/appointments on my PC and receive reminders via the app on my phone (www.snipca.com/18628).

A great idea, I thought. But when I opened it I was immediately thrown by the fact that dates in Google Calendar appeared in the US format (month/day/year). Google are, after all, an American company, but I wondered if I could change this. Thankfully, it was fairly easy. Go to www.calendar.google.com on your PC, log into your Google account, click the cog icon at the top right, then click Settings. Now click the 'Date format' dropdown menu and change it to the UK style (day/month/year).

Another useful tool is a countdown of days and hours until your next calendar event. To activate this, click the Labs link

at the top left of the Settings screen, scroll to the bottom, select Enable in the 'Next meeting' section, then click the Save button (see screenshot below left). The countdown appears in a panel on the right in the online version of Google Calendar.

Ray Ford



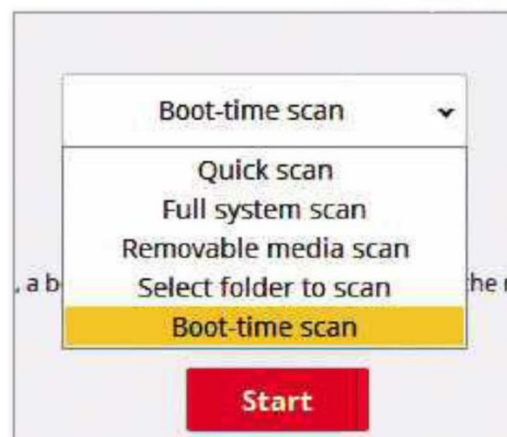
PC OPTIMISATION

Scan your boot process to start your PC quicker

I found your Fast Fixes for Avast in Issue 461 (page 69) extremely useful. Whilst delving into Avast I discovered that there's an option to scan your PC's boot process. Unlike other scans, which launch immediately, this one starts when you next boot your PC. Do it only when you have time to spare because the boot scan can take a few hours.

To set the scan, open Avast, select Scan, 'Scan for viruses', click the dropdown menu, select 'Boot-time scan', then click Start (see screenshot above right). Avast found only one Trojan during my boot scan, but deleting this significantly decreased my PC's boot time – from eight minutes to under two.

Virgil Wizard



WINDOWS 10 TROUBLESHOOTING

Delete PDFs in Windows 10

I had a smooth experience upgrading to Windows 10, but the only niggle I encountered was that I couldn't delete any PDFs after upgrading. Every time I tried, I saw an error message telling me the file couldn't be deleted because it was in use. However, this definitely wasn't the case.

I even made sure that Adobe Acrobat (the PDF reader I use) was closed. I found this very frustrating because I had many old PDFs that I wanted to delete to make space on my PC.

Thankfully, I found a simple solution. On selecting the file, just press Shift+Delete to permanently delete it from your PC. Problem solved.

Peter Matthews

Phone and Tablet Tips

Brilliant things to do on your device

ANDROID & iOS

Create a video montage in minutes

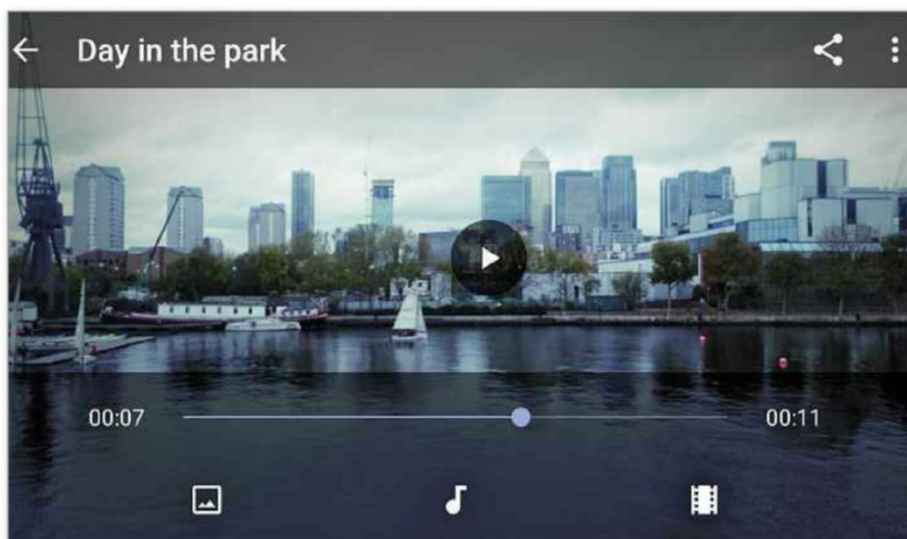


A video montage is one of the best ways to record an event, but creating one can be time-consuming because you have to edit photos and videos on a timeline, create transitions between the various elements and add an appropriate soundtrack.

Thankfully, Google Photos (Android: www.snipca.com/18636; iOS: www.snipca.com/18637) automates this process for you. The app creates a stunning montage (with smooth transitions and music) from the media files of your choice. You can then customise the whole thing, changing the soundtrack and transitions if you want, and even re-ordering the elements within your montage.

Open the app, tap the '+' symbol at the top right and select Movie. Now tap to select the photo and video files you want to use, then tap Create. After a few seconds, you'll see your montage. Name the montage by typing in the blank field at the top, then tap the play icon to watch it.

Below the video slider, you'll see three icons (see screenshot above right). The icon on the left lets you choose from 17 transition styles (including Vintage, Cinema and Documentary). The middle icon (musical note) lets you change your soundtrack. This contains six sections



(including Reflective, Upbeat and Dramatic) – each has at least nine tracks you can use. The film-reel icon on the right lets you re-order the media elements within your montage.

Tap the tick icon after making any changes to watch your edited video, then tap the same icon again to save the video to Google Photos.

items within your device's Settings. Whereas previously you were immediately greeted with a list of options when you opened Settings, you now have a search bar at the top, which helps you quickly locate the setting you want. For example, type **update** in the search bar and you'll see the option to check and update your iOS version. Alternatively, type terms such as **bluetooth** or **passcode** to see options for those settings.

iOS

Use iOS 9's new Settings search field



iOS 9 comes with a number of new features. We covered some of the more significant changes in Issue 460's Secret Tips and on these pages over the past few issues. One of the minor changes is the ability to search for specific

WINDOWS PHONE

Use Cortana to make calls and send text messages



Much like Google Now on Android and Siri on iOS, Cortana on Windows Phones lets you

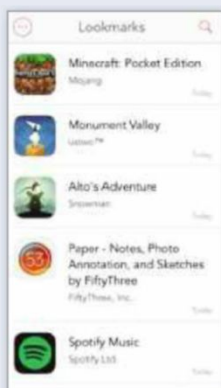
Best New Apps

What you should install this fortnight

Lookmark Free

iOS: www.snipca.com/18641

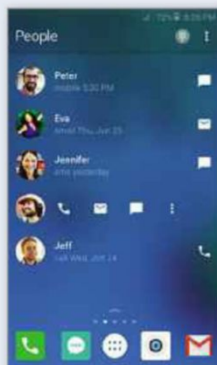
If you often come across brilliant apps when you're online, but tend to forget their names when you want to download them later then install Lookmark. It lets you save any apps you find to a list, so you can download them when you want. It also comes as a Chrome browser extension (www.snipca.com/18647).



Arrow Launcher Free

Android: www.snipca.com/18640

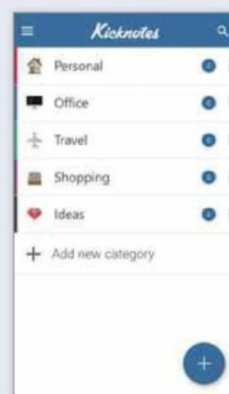
Microsoft doesn't just make apps for its own devices, it has also come up with this Android **app launcher**, which learns how you use your device and then displays those apps you use the most. Likewise, it arranges your phone contacts based on the people you call often. It also displays a different **high-resolution** wallpaper image each day.



Kicknotes Free

Windows Phone: www.snipca.com/18642

Kicknotes is the best Windows Phone note-taking app we've used. It lets you dictate notes, then automatically converts them to text. You can also type or draw on it. What's more, you can set a passcode for the app, then use it to safely store sensitive information.



make calls without opening your phonebook. Simply open the Cortana app, tap the mic icon at the bottom right, then say who you want to call. For example, say 'Call John'. If you have two contact numbers for that person, Cortana will ask you which one to call. Simply specify which one – 'Work' or 'Mobile', for example – to carry out the call. You can also say 'Call John on speakerphone' to start a hands-free call.

You can also use Cortana to send a text message by tapping the mic icon, then saying, for example, 'Text John I'll be 20 minutes late'. If it doesn't understand what you're saying, you'll get an option to reselect the contact and repeat your message.

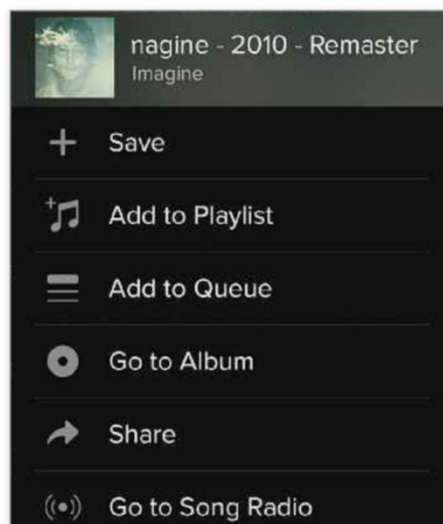
ANDROID & iOS

Create playlists to listen to offline with Spotify Premium



Our favourite music app is Spotify (Android: www.snipca.com/18638; iOS: www.snipca.com/18639). It has over 30 million tracks, which is enough for any music fan. If you subscribe to the Premium version (free for the first month, then £9.99 a month), you can create offline playlists. This is useful because it means the app won't eat into your mobile-data allowance and you can listen to music even if you're somewhere with no mobile network or Wi-Fi.

To create an offline playlist, open the app, tap Playlists, the '+' symbol at the top right, name your new playlist, then tap Create. Now simply search for songs you want to add to this playlist. Tap the three lines at the top left, Search, then type the name of the track (or artist) you



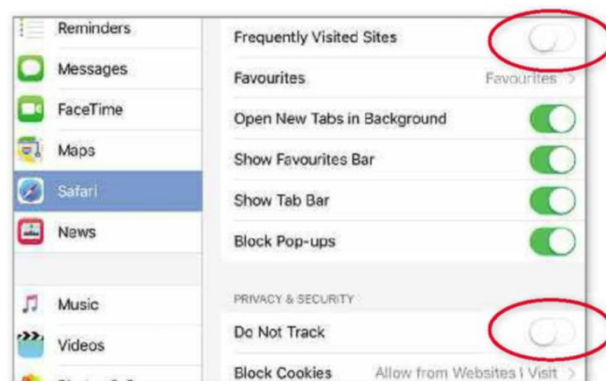
want. Once you've found it, tap the three dots beside it, then tap Save (see screenshot). Now tap the three dots again, tap 'Add to Playlist', then select the playlist you created. Repeat the process to add as many tracks as you want.

iOS

Remove frequently visited websites and secure your privacy



Whenever you open the Safari browser on your iPhone or iPad, you'll see a web page listing the websites you've frequently visited. You can change this so it opens on your homepage instead. To do this, open Settings, scroll down, tap Safari, then



untick the Frequently Visited Sites slider (see screenshot above).

By default, Safari monitors your online activity (including your location, the websites you visit, and so on). To stop Safari tracking you, tap the Do Not Track slider to turn this feature off (see screenshot above).

Games With Kids

What to play together on your phone and tablet

AGES 0-5

The White Book

79p www.snipca.com/18643 (iOS)

In this fun new game, your toddler selects one of the coloured paint pots. Using their finger they paint a blank screen with that colour to reveal hidden animals, which they can then tap to play with.



AGES 6-10

Magic Jigsaw Puzzles

Free* www.snipca.com/18644

(Android, iOS and Windows Phones)

Solving jigsaw puzzles is a timeless pastime, and this app helps your child simulate the experience digitally. There are over 5,000 puzzles with five difficulty levels. You can also create your own puzzles using the photos on your device.



AGES 11-16

Minecraft: Story Mode

£3.92* www.snipca.com/18645 Android

£3.99* www.snipca.com/18646 iOS

Minecraft is renowned for letting you build your own world, but this new game gives you a mission for the first time. Your character (Jesse) must solve puzzles, build items and collect coins. The aim is to find the legendary 'Order of the Stone' and you have four characters to help you.




*Contains in-app purchases

Make Windows Better

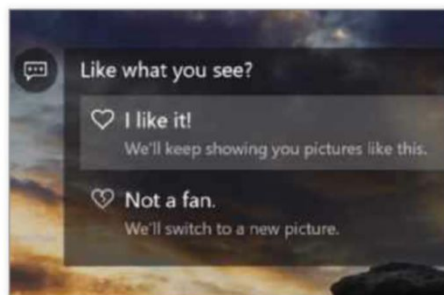
Clever tips for every version

WINDOWS 10

Put Bing images on your PC's lock screen


 The Bing website (www.bing.co.uk) is renowned for its 'Image of the day' – a high-resolution image featuring a specific theme (places, animals, festivals, and so on). But did you know that Windows 10 has a feature called Spotlight that lets you display some of these breathtaking Bing images on your PC's lock screen? As each image displays you can like or dislike it, and Microsoft will tailor future images based on your choices.

To enable Spotlight, right-click any blank area on your Desktop, click Personalise, then select 'Lock screen' on the left. Next, click the Background dropdown menu and select 'Windows spotlight'. Now whenever you lock your PC (Windows key+K), you'll see a Bing image with two options at the top right – 'I like it!' and 'Not a fan' (see screenshot below). Click one of these options to give feedback to Microsoft for future image suggestions.



WINDOWS VISTA, 7, 8, 10

Put images on your photo folders for easier searching

 If you keep loads of photos on your PC's hard drive, it's a good idea to assign a 'cover' photo to each folder to help you find the images you're looking for at a glance. This involves converting the standard folder icon into a photo of your choice. The complication is that the folder-cover photos need to be in the less common ICO format while photos on your PC are likely to be JPG or PNG files. Thankfully, there's an easy-to-use website to convert them.

Go to www.icoconverter.com, click 'Choose file' and select the photo you want as your folder cover. Tick all the boxes in the Sizes section, select '32 bits' in the 'Bit depth' section, then click Convert to download the converted photo to your PC.

WINDOWS VISTA, 7, 8, 10

Video record what you do on screen

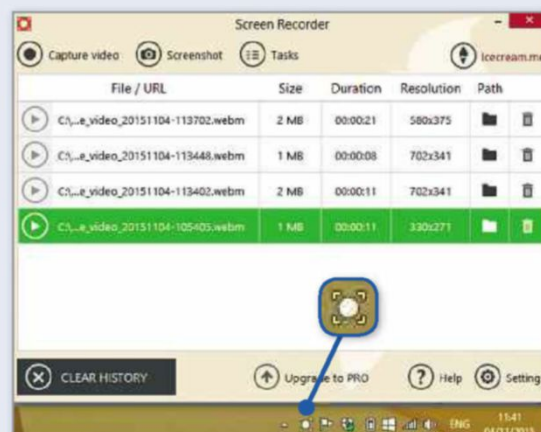


In Make Windows Better in

Issue 462, we showed you how to use Windows 10's Game Bar – a built-in tool that lets you record whatever you do on your PC as a video. There are several free third-party programs that let you do this in any version of Windows, but the best is Screen Recorder.

To download it, go to www.snipca.com/18587, click the green Free Download button, then run the downloaded setup file to install it. The program's main screen displays two options – 'Capture video' and Screenshot. Click the former to see a 'Select area to record' prompt. To video your whole screen, simply click and drag your cursor to select its entirety, then click the Rec button at the bottom.

A pop-up message will appear informing you that in the free version of Screen Recorder you are restricted to a maximum of 10 minutes per recording, but this should be more than enough for your needs. Close the



pop-up and you'll see a three-second countdown, after which whatever tasks you carry out will be recorded within your selected area. Click the Stop button when you've finished.

To access your recordings, open Screen Recorder, which sits in your Taskbar's Notification Area (see screenshot). Double-click any file in the list to open its folder location. You can watch your recording using any media player, including Windows Media Player and VLC. You can then share these with others via email or cloud-storage services, such as OneDrive, Google Drive or Dropbox.

Next, navigate to the folder you want to add an image to, right-click it, then click Properties at the bottom. Click the Customise tab, then the Change Icon button at the bottom. Now click Browse and navigate to your converted photo (in your Downloads folder). Finally, click Open, OK, Apply, then OK again to replace the folder icon with your cover photo.

WINDOWS 7, 8, 10

Restore missing Windows Desktop icons



It's likely your PC won't have Desktop icons for handy Windows tools that you use regularly, such as Computer, Control Panel and Network. However, there's an easy way to add these to make



life easier. First, right-click any blank area on your Desktop, then click Personalise.


Next, if you use Windows 7 or 8, click 'Change desktop icons' at the top left; or if you use Windows 10, click Themes on the left, then 'Desktop icon settings' (in the Related Settings section). You'll now see a 'Desktop icons' tab with five boxes (see screenshot above). Tick the icons you want, then click Apply and OK to see them on your Desktop.

OFFICE

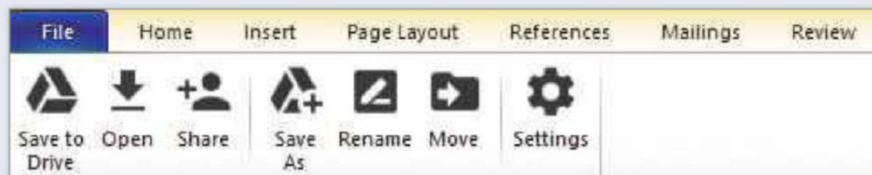
Add a Google Drive tab to your Office programs

OFFICE

Delete saved versions of files to free up space

 If you use Google Drive as your primary cloud-storage service, you'll be pleased to know that Google has released a new Google Drive **plug-in** for Microsoft Office. It adds a dedicated tab to Office, which lets you quickly save a file or document to your Google Drive account and quickly access any Office file/document stored there. You'll also see Google Drive as a third option (alongside Computer and OneDrive) in Office's Save As menu.

Before installing the plug-in, close any




Office programs on your PC. Next, go to www.snipca.com/18592, click the blue Download button, then 'Accept and Install', run the downloaded setup file, then click Close once installation is complete. Now open any Microsoft office program. After a short time, you'll see a Google Drive window. Click Get Started, log in using your

Google account details, click Allow, then Done.

You'll now see a new Google Drive tab in your Office programs. Click it to see seven options (see screenshot). Open any new Office file and press Ctrl+S to see Office's Save As menu, which will now include Google Drive in its listed locations.

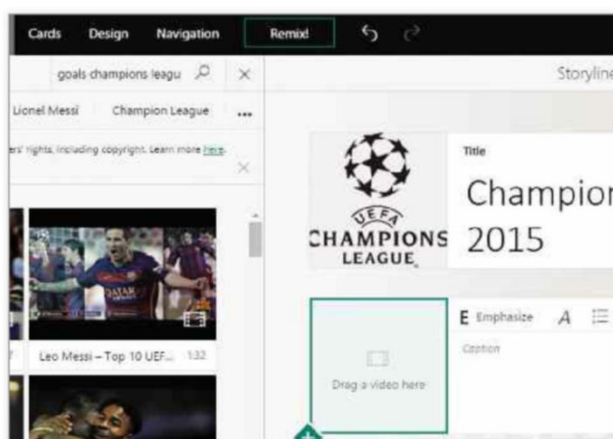
EXCEL

Calculate total or average values across multiple cells

 There's an easy way to quickly work out the total (or average) value of cells within any given row. To do this, select the relevant cells, right-click inside the selection, then click Quick Analysis. You'll see a menu with five tabs. Click Totals to see options including Sum and Average. Move your cursor over the option you want and you'll see the calculation in the cell directly below your selected row. Click the option (Sum or Average) if you want to insert the answer in that cell.

your PC crashes, you have the option to restore the file you were working on at the time to the last version that Office saved. The downside is that these cached files take up space on your PC. Therefore, it's worth regularly checking them to see if you still need any, and deleting those you don't.

To access these files, open any Office program (we'll use Excel to demonstrate), click File at the top left, then click Info. Now click the Manage Versions buttons to see two options – Recover Unsaved Workbooks and Delete All Unsaved Workbooks (see screenshot below left). Click the first option to open the folder containing your cached files. Open the files and save to your PC any you may still need. Next, repeat the steps above, but click Delete All Unsaved Workbooks. The same process applies to Word and PowerPoint.




Create New.

Type the sway's title at the top, then click the Video option on the left to add a new section to your sway. Next, click 'Add a video', then select YouTube from the list of options that scroll in from the left. Based on the title you chose, you'll see a list of suggested YouTube videos, but type a more specific search term in the top-left search bar to see more relevant results.

Now simply click and drag the video you want into the 'Drag a video here' tile (see screenshot above). Type whatever you want in the caption field (optional). Click the new Play button at the top right to start playing your presentation, press the right arrow key to move to your video slide, then click the play icon to begin playing it in full-screen mode. By default, the video caption is hidden, but click the small rectangular icon at the top-right of your video to reveal it.

OFFICE


Delete saved versions of files to free up space

 Even if you don't regularly save your work (by pressing Ctrl+S), Office will periodically save versions of your files as **cached** files, which can be very useful. If, for example,



SWAY

Liven up your slideshow with a YouTube video

 It's easy to add a YouTube video, along with a caption, to your presentations in Sway. To do this, first go to www.sway.com, click 'Get started', log in with your Microsoft account, then click



Outlook.com

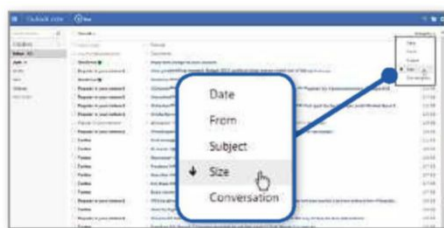
Stop others knowing when you're online, sort your inbox automatically and delete messages permanently

Use Gmail or Yahoo keyboard shortcuts

Do you use Outlook.com email with a Gmail or Yahoo account? You can make Outlook.com use the same keyboard shortcuts. Click the cog icon at the top-right of the Outlook.com window, choose Options followed by 'Keyboard shortcuts' under 'Customising Outlook.com'. Now select the relevant button (Yahoo or Gmail) and click Save.

Free up storage space

Free Outlook.com accounts have a 5GB limit for message storage. That can soon fill up if you send and receive large attachments. When you hit the storage limit, Outlook.com asks you to delete messages or pay for more space. Deleting



Free up space by sorting your inbox by size and deleting messages with large attachments

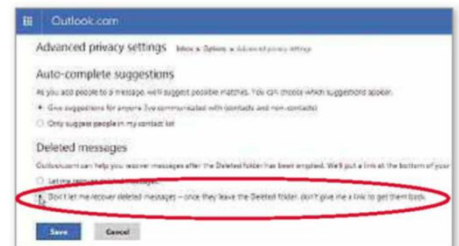
large attachments is the quickest way to reclaim space. And the quickest way to find these space-hogging emails is to click the down arrow next to 'Arrange by' above the message list, choose Size and then repeat to change the sort order to largest first. Now just tick unwanted big messages and click Delete.

Recover deleted messages

Have you ever clicked the Empty button in the Deleted folder and then instantly regretted it? Scroll down to the very bottom of the page to find and click the 'recover deleted messages' link, and Outlook.com will instantly restore as many messages as it can. Of course, doing this might represent a security risk. So if you'd prefer Outlook.com to permanently delete messages, read on.

Delete messages permanently

The above tip demonstrates that Outlook.com's Delete function doesn't always do what it says on the tin. To ensure it does, click the cog icon, followed by Options and then 'Advanced privacy settings'. Choose the 'Don't let me recover deleted messages' button, then click Save.



Enable this option to permanently delete messages in your Outlook.com account

Stop others seeing when you're online

If you use your Outlook.com email address to log into Microsoft's messaging services, such as Skype, then you might not realise that by default Outlook.com will show when you're online by default. You can't disable it on a permanent basis, but you can for each Outlook.com session. Click your username at the top right and then choose Invisible. If you leave it set to Available, a green bar appears next to your name – indicating that your contacts can see that you're logged in.

Let people know when you're away

Ever received one of those automated messages that tells you a jet-setting friend is away for a while? Outlook.com lets you set up similar boasts of your own. Click the cog, Options, then 'Sending automated holiday replies'. Choose the 'Send holiday replies to people who email me' button, then type your message in the window below. We suggest ticking 'Only reply to your contacts' to prevent Outlook.com telling strangers you're away. Click Save.

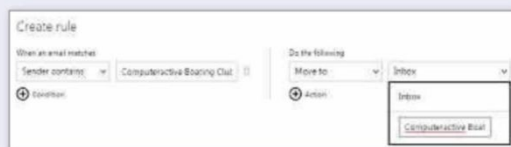
Work faster with the Reading pane

Enabling Outlook.com's Reading pane lets you see your emails' contents without having to open them. Click the cog icon then, in the 'Reading pane' section, choose either Bottom or Right. You can resize the pane by hovering over the split line until it changes to a double-headed arrow, then just click, drag and drop.

Set up inbox 'rules'

Managing a busy inbox is much easier with 'rules'. These are if-this-then-that commands that govern what happens to emails – for example, "If I receive a message from my boating club, then move it to the Boating folder".

In Outlook.com, rules consist of conditions ('if') and actions ('then'), and they're easy to set up. First, click the cog icon, then choose 'Manage rules'. Click the New button to open the 'Create rule' dialogue box, with the Condition section on the left; Action on the right.



Under 'When an email matches' click to choose the condition type, such as 'Sender contains'. In the adjacent box, type the content that'll trigger this condition – such as your boating club's email address. You can add more by clicking the Condition button below. Follow a similar procedure on the right to set an action, such as 'Move to' and then the folder of your choice. Finally, click 'Create rule'.

Machine learning

Computers don't need us any more – they can teach themselves everything they need to know

What is it?

A way of programming computers so they can learn from data and adapt accordingly, without human input. Normally, PCs require precise commands to carry out a task, such as fixing a particular problem. Machine learning goes a step further by telling computers how to develop problem-fixing skills. In other words, the computer can get on with solving a problem before we even know it exists.

How does it work?

It's powered by algorithms that can make predictions based on patterns within data. For example, email services can learn from your actions which messages are important, and which you're not interested in. If you always open emails from a specific person, then the algorithm will make sure it never sends those to a spam folder.

Why is it making news now?

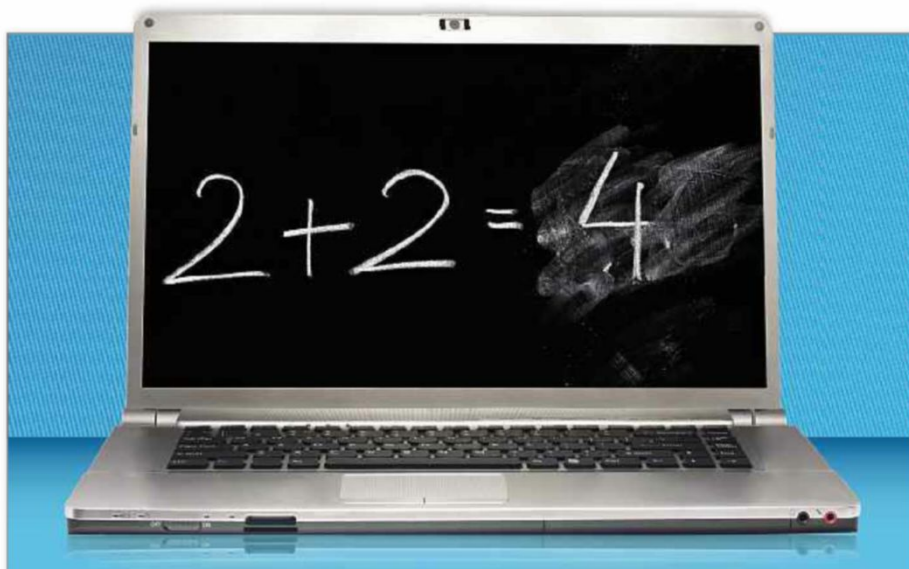
Because Google is getting very serious about it. The company's CEO Sundar Pichai said that the potential of machine learning is forcing the company to rethink everything it's doing, from search services to YouTube.

In order to sell more adverts presumably?

Undoubtedly. Pichai wasn't just chatting casually down the pub – he was addressing investors in Google's parent company Alphabet, as it announced its financial results for the third quarter of 2015. Google makes most of its money from advertising, so Pichai was keen to emphasise that it's working on new technology in that area.

Don't adverts already use machine learning?

Yes. Marketing systems are built to automatically learn what you're interested in based on what you do online, then show you related adverts.



Google wants to make this faster, more accurate and – crucially – more profitable.

But as advertising systems benefit from machine learning, so will Google's other services – those adverts need to appear somewhere, after all. Over the past two years Google has used machine learning to improve its voice search, email filtering and language translation. In Google's vision of the future everyone has an Android phone that learns what you need to know before you know yourself. It will show you – unprompted – info such as traffic updates, sports results and reminders about important appointments.

That's all very useful, but more valuable is the potential of machine learning to save your life.

How can it do that?

By recognising signs of cancer more accurately and quickly than doctors can. Several medical studies have shown how computers can be programmed to 'read' cancer scans, then deliver a diagnosis. This wouldn't be possible without computers teaching themselves how to group photographs into categories. Driverless cars work in the same way, being controlled by a computer that learns to recognise the difference

between, say, a tree and a pedestrian.

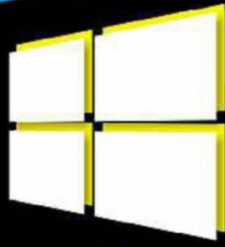
Machines have already been built that can recognise photos in order to write appropriate captions. They are good with words, too. During Wimbledon this year, a computer automatically turned match statistics into news reports.

Is it related to artificial intelligence?

Yes. In fact many experts consider machine learning to merely be a subset of artificial intelligence (AI). The ultimate test of AI is whether it can fool a person into thinking it's actually human. To do this, it requires machine-learning skills, such as recognising voices and understanding the context of a question.

Which other companies are using it?

All the usual suspects: Apple, Microsoft, IBM and Facebook. They are investing big in so-called 'personal assistant' services that respond to your voice commands. These use algorithms to adapt to the vagaries of human speech, helping them understand accents – from inner-city Glasgow to the Yorkshire Dales – and the slang associated with different dialects. 'Ee by gum, that sounds impressive.



WINDOWS 10 BEST FREE SOFTWARE

If you've upgraded to Windows 10, you'll want to know the best software to download for the new operating system.

Barry Collins has tested hundreds to find the best 15

Whenever a new operating system (OS) launches, software developers work all hours to bring their existing programs up to date. Or at least, they *should* do. Those who don't quickly see people desert it and look for alternatives that haven't been mothballed.

In this feature, we've picked 11 essential programs and Desktop apps that have risen to the challenge posed by Windows 10. Each one has been improved to work with the new operating system, taking advantage of the features

Microsoft has introduced. We've also chosen four programs that have been built *since* Windows 10 was launched. Their developers saw the flaws that needed fixing, and the features that needed tweaking.

But we're as fussy as you are when it comes to software. Wary of **PUPs**, 'free' rip-offs and programs that start running by themselves, we set strict criteria when choosing our 15. They all met the following conditions:

- Completely free. They all work without payment, though some offer paid-for

versions with extra features.

- Updated/new for Windows 10. They're all compatible with the new operating system and sometimes contain tools specifically built for it.
- No PUPs. None of our recommendations force you to install unwanted extras (though you may need to untick some boxes during installation).
- No resource hogs. Most of these programs won't automatically run by themselves. Those that do need to run at start-up are relatively lightweight and so won't unduly hamper performance.



CLASSIC PROGRAMS UPDATED FOR WINDOWS 10

1 OutDateFighter

Download from

www.spamfighter.com/outdatefighter

There are two very good reasons for keeping your installed programs up to date, especially when running a new operating system. First, the software may need an update to work flawlessly with the new OS. Second, it ensures you're not missing out on any key security fixes, which is especially important for web browsers and software that require regular patching (we're looking at you, Adobe Flash Reader).

OutDateFighter takes care of this problem for you. It quickly scans your system to see what you've got installed and then searches its database of more than 1.2 million applications to check if there's a newer version of them (we needed to update Notepad++ and 7-Zip – see screenshot top right).

If it finds an update, you can download and install it within the program, rather than searching junk-riddled websites to find the installer. All downloads are checked for viruses.

What we really like about OutDateFighter is its integrity. The download page isn't trying to sneak other software on to your system, the installer has no pre-ticked boxes for other apps, and it doesn't automatically set itself to run every time you start Windows. It's a lightweight freebie that does no more or less than it promises.

2 Xodo PDF Reader and Editor Desktop app

Download from the Windows Store

www.snipca.com/18439

The PDF is the format that refuses to die. Even as we move into the brave new world of Windows 10, we cannot get by without insurance companies sending policies to sign as PDF documents, or bank statements sent in the format.

But we don't mind too much because we use Xodo's excellent PDF Reader and Editor. All its editing tools appear when you right-click within a PDF. These let you underline parts of the text (see screenshot second from top) or add your own comments – handy if you've downloaded a PDF manual for a printer, camera or other piece of hardware and want to make your own notes. Switch to Outline mode, and all those underlined pieces of text are listed separately, meaning you don't need to wade through



OutDateFighter told us we had to update 7-Zip and Notepad++

a 150-page document to find the information you need.

If you've got a touchscreen laptop or tablet, you can even sign contracts using your finger or stylus.

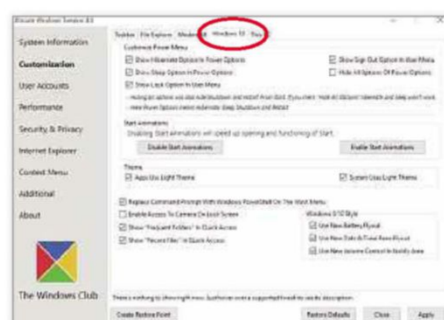
3 Ultimate Windows Tweaker 4

Download from

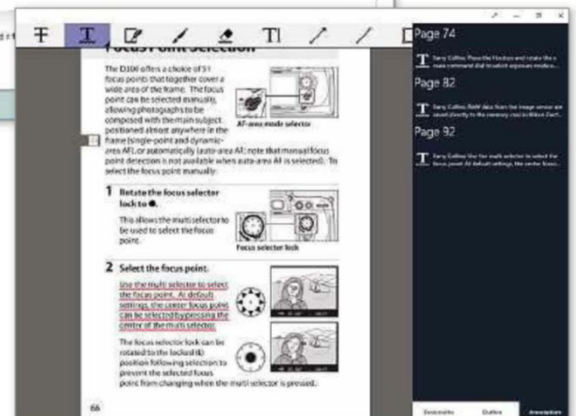
www.snipca.com/18462

Originally launched to help Vista users smooth the rough edges of that mostly woeful OS, Ultimate Windows Tweaker (UWT) has regenerated for the Windows 10 era. In this fourth version, you make changes by clicking the Customization option in the left-hand menu, then selecting the Windows 10 tab.

Here, for example, you can disable the whooshy animation that plays when you open the Start menu, making it launch quicker. You can also tweak the colours of Windows 10 apps and menus, and switch off the new "fly out" menus for battery power and volume controls, going back to how Windows 7 did things. We also like the Context Menu tweaks, which let you add shortcuts to, say, the Calculator or



Click the Windows 10 tab in Ultimate Windows Tweaker to change settings within the OS



Right-click a PDF in Xodo to underline text in red

Shut Down option when you right-click your Desktop. Restart your PC to apply these changes.

One final point. Where there are tweaks, there are potential problems, so sensibly UWT creates a System Restore point when you run it. That safety net gives you the confidence to experiment with the changes without having to commit to them.

4 Driver Booster 3

Download from

www.iobit.com/en/driver-booster.php

If you've upgraded existing hardware to Windows 10, one of the first things you'll want to do is check that your device **drivers** have been updated to cope. Recently upgraded to support Windows 10 systems, IObit's Driver Booster 3 lets you fix troublesome drivers in one hit.

As with all IObit software, take a little care during the installation. We had to untick a box threatening to install another of the company's tools, IObit SystemCare Free, and decline a newsletter.

It's not the first time we've wanted to put IObit on the naughty step – and it surely won't be the last. But there's a reason why we tolerate this behaviour, ►

and it's this: IObit's tools tend to be very effective. Driver Booster, for example, found seven out-of-date drivers, five of which Glary Utilities, a similar program, missed. It then downloaded the updates in one go, faster than you could say: 'OK, come down off the naughty step now'.

The software automatically creates a **System Restore point** before installing new drivers so that, should something go horribly skew-whiff, you can revert to a working state. The whole process – from installation to fixing drivers – took a little under 10 minutes in our tests, which is the kind of no-fuss maintenance we like.

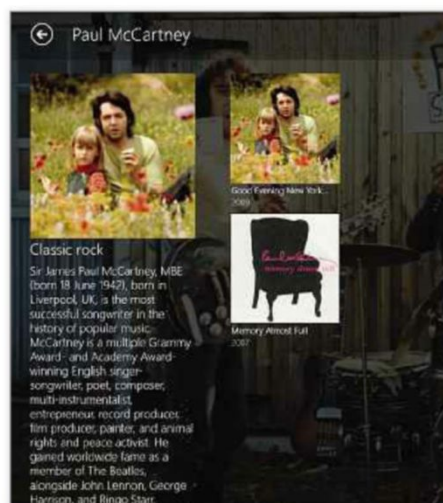
5 Plex Desktop app

Download from the Windows Store
www.snipca.com/18434

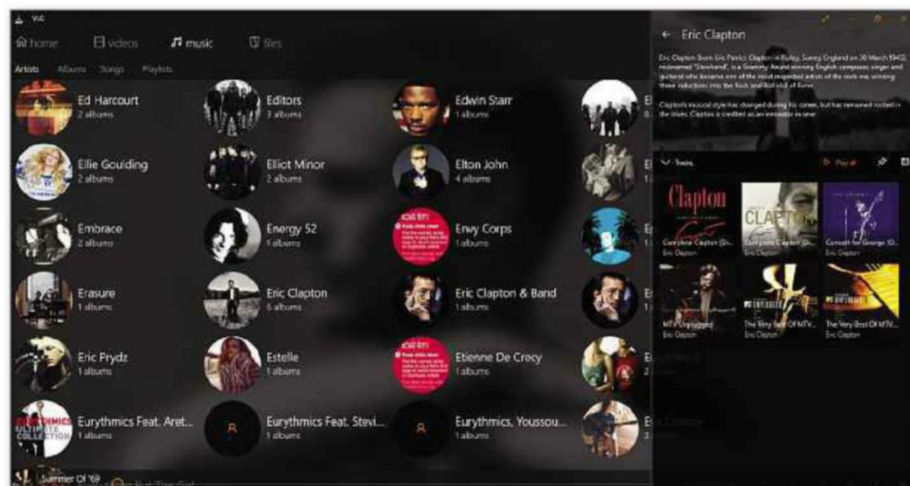
Plex is the home media-server software that keeps getting better and better, and the latest version of its Windows Store app raises the bar even further. It's one of the first "universal" Windows apps, meaning it can be installed on PC, laptop, tablet and (eventually) Windows phones, providing a familiar look and features across each device.

Plex works like this: download the server software from <https://plex.tv/downloads> and install it on your main media PC – the one that stores all your music, video and photos. Then install the Plex app on your other devices and stream every track, video clip and photo that's stored on your PC, either across your home network or even from outside the home.

The Windows 10 makeover of the app is beautifully designed and easy to use, whether you're using a regular PC or swiping with your fingers on a Windows tablet. A huge music collection can be sorted by album, genre, play count and



All you need is Plex – it plays your music, videos and photos



Select an artist in VLC and you'll see their tracks and a biography on the right

many other criteria. Photo collections are easily skimmed through, and as long as there's no heavy traffic on your home network, everything feels fast, as if the files were stored on that device, not a remote PC. Streaming from outside the home requires a decent broadband connection at both ends of the chain.

6 VLC media player Desktop app

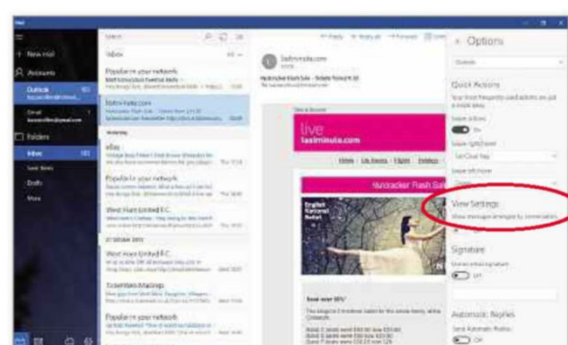
Download from the Windows Store
www.snipca.com/18429

The days of a catch-all Windows Media Player have long gone. Disappointingly, Windows 10 splits music and video into two separate built-in Desktop apps, neither of which are worth getting excited about. But we *like* getting excited about software, especially when it's as impressive as VLC.

VLC hasn't always got things right. Its Windows 8 app was a bit messy, but then so were many things associated with that operating system. Happily, the Windows 10 version has been revamped to make it wonderfully easy to play music and video.

Select an artist and a pane emerges from the right with a list of their tracks and albums, along with a short biography (we rather like a bit of Eric Clapton – see screenshot above). Once the track is playing, the song, album and artist names scroll over background graphics, creating a slick-looking screensaver.

VLC still isn't perfect. It crashes from time to time, and gets confused by the compilation albums in our iTunes collection, listing each artist's tracks as a separate album. But coupled with the (also free) VLC software (www.videolan.org/vlc) you get the best of both worlds:



The much-improved Mail app now lets you turn off the annoying 'conversation' view

an extraordinarily powerful program that plays the DVDs that Windows 10 no longer supports, and an eye-catching Windows Store app for basic music and video.

7 Mail Desktop app

Pre-installed with Windows 10

If there were football-like awards for software, Microsoft's Mail would win the Most Improved Player gong. Originally introduced with Windows 8, Mail was, frankly, a rubbish way of scanning your inbox. Now, it's right up there with the best mail **clients** for Windows.

Visually, it *really* looks the part. The new background images provide a pleasing contrast between menu items on the left and the reading pane on the right, and everything is beautifully spaced. The Live Tile in the Windows 10 Start menu shows little previews of unread messages, meaning you don't even have to open the app to see what's lurking in your inbox.

We're not big fans of the Conversation View, where messages on the same topic from the same sender are grouped together in the inbox. But Microsoft must have sensed our disapproval, because it added the option to turn it off in a recent



update. Just click the Settings cog, Options and deselect the option to 'Show messages arranged by conversation' (see screenshot previous page). Job done.

8 Audible Desktop app

Download from the Windows Store www.snipca.com/18435

Audiobooks are wonderful things. They don't just give you the very words that the author wrote, but also the intonation and emotion behind them – especially if it's the author providing the narration. Alas, audiobooks are often fearsomely expensive, but you get one of your choice for free if you download Audible's revamped Windows Store app and sign up for a trial. That freebie book is worth around £25, but if that's all you want don't forget to cancel the free trial before the 30 days are out. If you forget, you'll be charged £7.99 for next month's subscription.

This is another "universal" app, designed for phones, tablets and PCs. You can see that design in action if you shrink the app window to a small square on your screen, with the buttons and menus cleverly rearranged and resized to fit the available space.

The Audible app has some brilliant features. We love the snooze option, which lets you leave the book playing for 10, 15 or 20 minutes – or until the end of the current chapter – before it pauses the playback. The button-free mode on tablets and touchscreen laptops lets you swipe back on the player to rewind 30 seconds and re-listen if you momentarily dozed off (happens to us all the time, after a busy day downloading!). On a non-touchscreen



CCleaner wiped Edge files and found 10,000MB rotting in our Recycle Bin!

PC, use your mouse and keyboard to do this.

9 CCleaner

Download from www.piriform.com/ccleaner

CCleaner has been turving the clutter from our hard drives for years. Now, at version 5.1, it has been freshly tuned to watch out for junk left behind by Windows 10 apps. Click the Applications tab and you'll see redundant data in apps such as Bing News, Sports and Travel, which are pre-loaded with Windows 10.

It doesn't stop there. CCleaner also ejects unnecessary files from the new Edge browser, Microsoft's replacement for Internet Explorer. It even rummages through Windows 10's built-in antivirus app, Defender, to see if there's stuff it can safely jettison.

It still looks in the more obvious places, too. We thought we were pretty good at regularly emptying our Recycle Bin, but CCleaner found more than 10,000MB of unwanted digital photos and other files

WINDOWS 10 APP STORE: 3 MOST IMPORTANT TIPS

1. If you have more than one Windows 10 device – a PC and a laptop, say – you don't need to pay twice for the same app. Once you've bought it on one device, switch on the other, open the Store, click your profile photo next to the search bar and select My Library. Click the down arrow next to the app to download, without paying again.

2. You can make sure the children (and grandchildren) don't run up horrendous bills in the Store by ensuring any purchase requires a password. Click your profile, then Settings and make sure the slider 'Always check that it's me when I buy things from Store' is set to 'on'.

3. By default apps are set to automatically update. If you want to change this, perhaps to prevent your internet connection from being hogged by a big update, click your profile, Settings, then switch off 'Update apps automatically'.

(see screenshot above). Good riddance!

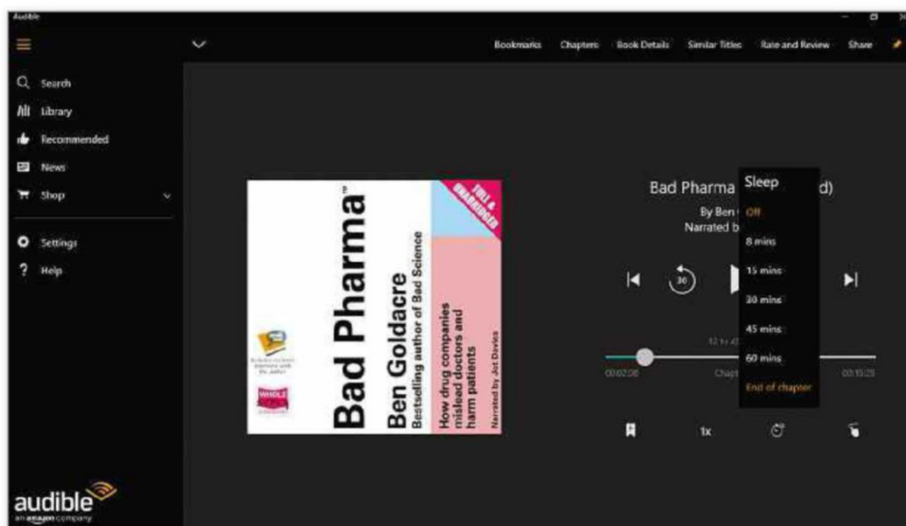
The only thing we don't like about CCleaner is the website you download it from – it takes more clicks than it should, and contains a booby-trap. Here's the long-winded process: first, click the green 'Download Free Version' button at the top. That shuffles you to the bottom of the page, where you have to click the green 'Free Download' button. That takes you to another page where you can compare the free and paid-for versions. Click the green 'Download' button and – third click lucky – your download begins. Phew.

But keep your wits about you. When you click that button to start the automatic download, another page appears with a temptingly big, green 'START DOWNLOAD' button. You don't need to click this. On some of our visits to the site, that button has been an advert.

10 AdwCleaner

Download from www.snipca.com/18466

Full marks to AdwCleaner, one of our favourite ever programs, for updating within a fortnight of Windows 10 launching. Since then it has been updated a further 13 times (probably more by the time you read this) in its ceaseless mission to remove new types



Audible lets you 'snooze' audiobooks for several minutes

of adware. Recently it has targeted junk within Firefox and Chrome - removing unwanted browser **extensions** from the former, and eliminating privacy-compromising adware from the latter.

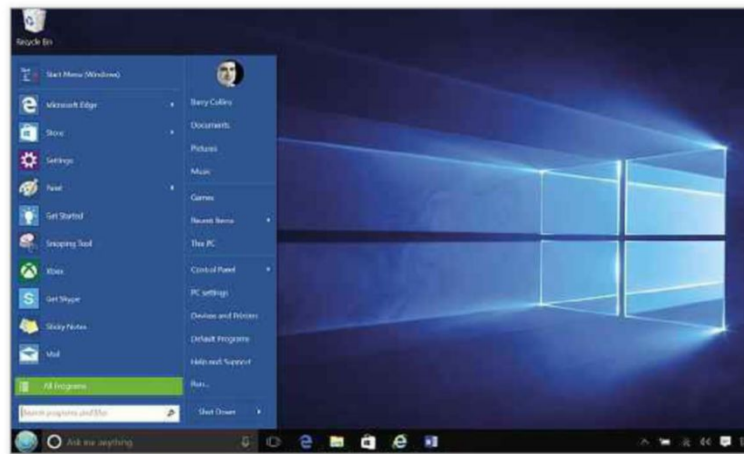
For such a powerful tool, AdwCleaner is pleasingly unobtrusive. Unlike many of its rival programs, which seep into every corner of your system, it's so lightweight that you may even struggle to find it after installation. If you need help, type **adw** in the Taskbar search menu and it should appear.

11 Classic Shell

Download from www.classicshell.net

Make no mistake: the default Windows 10 Start menu is a darn sight better than Windows 8's. But we do understand why some of you may yearn for the Windows 7 menu, especially if you have no love for the tiles that come with the new Windows Store apps. If that sounds like you and you've yet to download Classic Shell, please pay attention.

Classic Shell let Windows 8 users place a Windows 7-style (or even XP-style) menu on to their Desktop, in the



Windows 10's Start menu is great, but Classic Shell makes it look even better

kind of 'up yours Microsoft' defiance that we can't help but admire. You can now do likewise in Windows 10. Once installed, right-click the remodelled Start button, choose Settings, and tweak the options to get your Start menu just right. Doing this lets you control what appears in the shortcuts menu on the right, change the colour of the skin and choose which power option (ie Shut Down, Restart, etc) should appear by default.

Unlike some other Start menu replacements, Classic Shell blends beautifully into Windows 10's look and feel, and you can still access the live tiles of the default Start menu by clicking a link or holding down Shift when you click the Start button.

Any drawbacks? Well, we're not big fans of what it does to Windows Explorer. But that's a minor niggle. Everything else can be switched on or off until you find a set-up that works for you.

THE BEST NEW PROGRAMS

12 SODAT Privacy Protection Tool for Windows 10

Download from www.snipca.com/18514

Left to run on its default settings, Windows 10 takes several liberties with your privacy. Results from your Start menu searches are automatically beamed back to Microsoft's mothership, location tracking is switched on, and Windows automatically assigns you a personalised ID so that it can show adverts targeted at your interests.

There are also some annoyances that aren't a particular threat to your privacy. You'll be constantly prompted

for feedback on what you think about Windows 10 and its apps, for example. And Windows 10's diagnostics tool tracks how you use your PC so Microsoft can "improve the products and features customers use most often and to help solve problems" (read more on the company's website: www.snipca.com/18453).

If all that makes you feel uneasy, use SODAT to plug these holes in one go, doing what the Windows 10 installation screens should have done in the first place. It presents an objective explanation of Microsoft's privacy settings, giving you

the relevant details so you can confidently decide which boxes to select. Once you've made your selections, click Apply and SODAT will do the dirty work, saving you from burrowing through various settings menus. Like 10AppsManager, SODAT doesn't need to be installed on your PC - it runs straight from the download.

13 10AppsManager

Download from www.snipca.com/18446

10AppsManager is a useful little one-hit wonder that's probably best used on new Windows 10 PCs or when you first

Worried about privacy in Windows 10? Change Microsoft's settings using SODAT



10AppsManager lets you remove apps you don't want to use



upgrade to the operating system. There's not a lot to it – just a single screen from where you can remove any of the pre-installed apps.

Among the pointless apps it offers to remove for you are shortcuts to download Skype and the latest version of Office which remain on your PC even after you've installed them. You can also get shot of the Get Started guide (which is useless once you're up and running), the Camera app (not much use on a conventional laptop or desktop PC) and the Xbox app (worthless if you have no interest in gaming).

10AppsManager doesn't install itself on your system – simply unzip the download package and run the application. Once you've performed the tidy up, bin the 10AppsManager folder and the job's done, without anything being left behind on your PC.

14 EarTrumpet

Download from www.snipca.com/18448

This ingenious little tool is so new that the download link is hosted on GitHub, a site where developers share their work. Nevertheless, it worked perfectly in our tests, so we're happy to recommend it before any further updates.

EarTrumpet provides volume controls for every audio-playing app on a

DOES THE W10 STORE HAVE A FUTURE?

The Windows 8 Store soon became a graveyard, with app developers shunning possibly the most unpopular version of Windows ever created. Have things improved with Windows 10? Sort of. Developers are keener now to build apps for the OS, but the vast number of people using iOS and Android means they concentrate first on phones and tablets. Even Microsoft made iOS and Android versions of Word and Excel before releasing them as Windows apps!

But Microsoft is fighting back. One of the reasons it made Windows 10 free is to attract enough users to convince

developers that, financially, it will be worth their time and effort building apps for the OS. With more than 110 million devices now running Windows 10, that strategy looks like it could succeed.

Microsoft also introduced 'bridges' – Project Astoria (for Android) and Project Islandwood (for iOS) – to make it easier for developers to **port** their apps from iOS and Android to Windows. These **open-source** tools should help to boost the number of apps in the Windows Store, though for now it remains a sparsely stocked corner shop compared with the luxury department stores run by Google and Apple.

Windows 10 PC. Once you've installed it, you'll see a little ear-trumpet icon in the system tray near the clock, giving you a volume slider for every program that's capable of producing audio. This allows you to eliminate one of the biggest annoyances of modern computing – websites that automatically play audio adverts in the background. Now you can turn your web browser's volume down to zero and leave your music running, without the risk of The Kinks' *Sunny Afternoon* being spoiled by a cheesy voiceover (see screenshot below).

It's also handy for managing apps

that need to be left running in the background, letting you control the volume of Skype ring tones, for example.

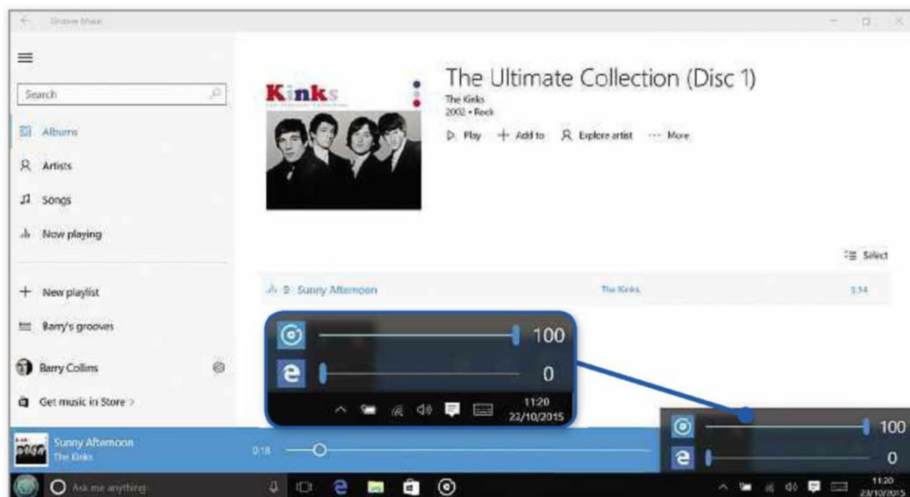
15 WiFi Analyzer Preview

Download from the Windows Store www.snipca.com/18449

Working out what's going on with an erratic Wi-Fi connection is a dark art. WiFi Analyzer helps you to uncover the mystery by showing you the strength of your router's Wi-Fi, and whether any neighbouring networks are elbowing yours out of the way. Click the Analyze button at the top and you'll be presented with a graph showing any overlap between your Wi-Fi and others within range.

Most of today's routers, such as the BT Home Hub, automatically assign the Wi-Fi channel but they often make bad decisions. WiFi Analyzer recommends which channel you should be on for the minimal possible risk of interference. If you have a **dual-band router** with a 5GHz option, click the little aerial icon at the bottom of the screen to see how that band looks – it should be clearer.

There's just one caveat. When we checked, WiFi Analyzer was a free preview. We hope it stays free, but even for a small fee it would be good value for money. **ca**



EarTrumpet gives you a volume slider for programs

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Security tools you should stop using



Security tools are powerful programs that can have serious side effects. Jane Hoskyn reveals the tools and apps that aren't worth the hassle

Just because something calls itself a 'security tool', that doesn't mean it's going to keep you secure. It's a bit like the building trade – anyone can call themselves a builder, then charge you the earth to mess up your house and cause you untold stress.

As we've seen from the AVG data-selling scandal (see News, Issue 461), security tools don't always have your best interests at heart. We'll talk more about data-selling in our feature on page 60, but for now what we're really interested in is tools that don't work as well as they should – leading you to think your PC is protected when it's not. Then there are the tools with empty promises and unwanted side effects.

Here's what you should avoid.

Ineffective security guards

We'll start with AVG because it's been hitting the headlines lately for the reasons mentioned above, and because its results in our lab tests remain well below par.

AVG's free antivirus (AV) suite (<http://free.avg.com>) is popular, and many of you may have installed it on your PCs. It's also been around for years – since 1991, in fact, when it was launched in Czechoslovakia as Anti-Virus Guard.

So it's had plenty of time to get its act together, but it still falls short. In the newly released quarterly test by our security team at Dennis Technology Labs (DTL, <http://dennistechnologylabs.com>), AVG came second-to-bottom of the league table – faring even worse than Microsoft Security Essentials (MSE), whose poor performance is legendary. Bottom of the list was Bullguard Internet Security (£49.95, www.bullguard.co.uk).

Neither Bullguard nor AVG, nor any other badly performing AV, is a scam – they're better than no AV at all. But of the 100 threats our lab team threw at them under controlled conditions, they missed eight. That's not good enough to keep you safe, so the danger is they'll create a false sense of security.

DTL's head Simon Edwards says that poor AV is like an ineffective security guard: "Even if the security guard was not intentionally malicious, he could be completely incompetent. I'd choose a more consistently strong product" (read more on his blog at www.snipca.com/18695).

Free doesn't mean good

Don't assume that just because a security product is free, it's worth a go. At best, it's a waste of your hard-drive space. At worst, it makes you assume you're safe and may even conflict with other security tools installed on the same computer (see box opposite).

There are much better free AV suites. Avast Free Antivirus (www.avast.com) experienced a blip in our latest lab test, but over the past three years it has consistently been in the top half of our leaderboard, ranking close to paid-for AV products such as ESET Smart Security.

For a step-by-step guide to replacing AVG with Avast, see our Workshop in Issue 462 (page 42).

Hard-to-remove AV tools

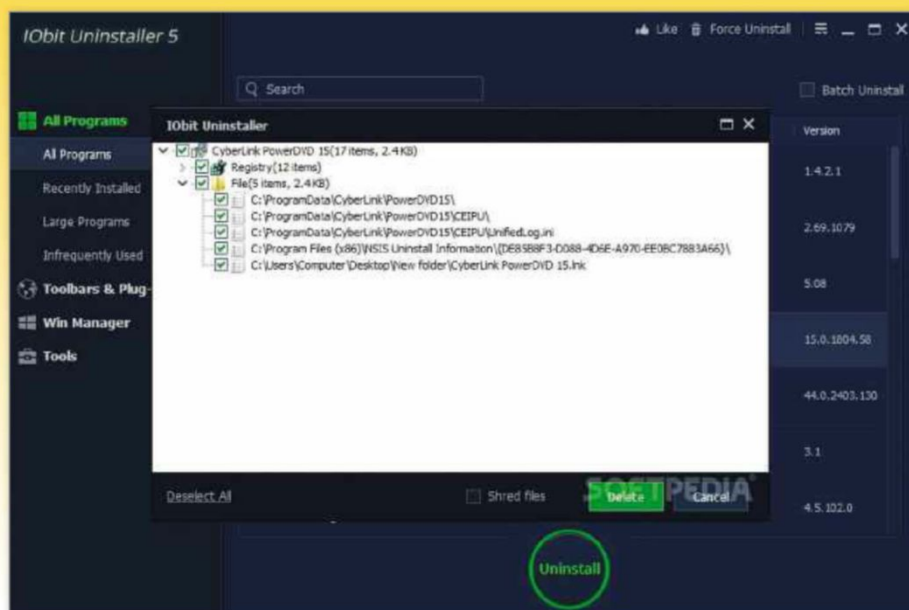
By their nature, installable security tools dig deep into your operating system (OS) and Registry to keep every area of your PC safe. But one side effect of this is that they can be difficult to remove from your PC.

At the risk of picking on AVG, it is a prime example. Once you've installed it, it may not get off your computer without a fight. If you uninstall it using your built-in 'Uninstall a program' tool, oodles of junk files will be left behind. Many users have even reported that it won't uninstall at all (www.snipca.com/18698).

An AV you can't remove is like a plaster



AVG, like MSE, doesn't keep you safe enough and creates a false sense of security



IObit Uninstaller lets you remove all Registry traces of any installed tool

cast that won't come off. It does its job (more or less), slows you down in the process and then refuses to leave.

More worryingly, it reminds us of malware. Browser hijackers such as Binkiland dig their heels in when you try to uninstall them, no matter what adware-removers and malware-blitzing tools you chuck at them. Wiping your PC is often the only way to get rid of them.

The ideal solution is to avoid ineffective AVs in the first place, but that's no help if you're stuck trying to uninstall the thing. So we'll recommend a tool we used to dislike intensely: IObit Uninstaller (www.snipca.com/18668).

IObit used to pack its program

installers with PUPs and other unwanted extras that sometimes ignored your efforts to opt out of them. But IObit seems to have learned its lesson, and IObit Uninstaller now loads on to your PC without a hitch (provided you download it from IObit's site, and not a **download mirror** such as the dreaded Cnet).

The program is powerful, easy to use and extremely efficient, removing all leftover junk, including Registry entries left behind by programs. You can decide which Registry entries to keep, but if you're planning to install a new AV tool we'd recommend obliterating every shred of your old AV in order to avoid conflicts (see box below).

Ransomware 'medicine' you don't need

All security software – much like medicine – has side effects. AV slows down your PC with its powerful background processes. This even applies to Kaspersky Internet Security, our lab tests' consistent winner (see page 5 for our Reader Offer). In that case it's a price worth paying, but in other cases you're suffering side-effects of tools you don't actually need.

In our Cover Feature in Issue 460 we named **ransomware** the worst malware ever. Because it's becoming increasingly prevalent, there's been an opportunistic flood of anti-ransomware tools, such as the free CryptoPrevent (www.snipca.com/18655). Tools like these make your computer work very hard trying to get rid of a specific piece of malware that may not even be on your PC.

Our Problems Solved team has received a number of letters reporting crashes and unexpected error messages after installing CryptoPrevent. Worse still, readers have reported finding the tool difficult to remove.

Security apps you no longer need

The most effective anti-ransomware tool we've tested is a free Android app by Avast. Avast Ransomware Removal (www.snipca.com/18657) is specifically designed to remove CryptoLocker and Simplotter ransomware from your tablet. It's good at its job – but only if it has that specific job to do. If there's no

WHY TWO AVs ARE WORSE THAN ONE

Common sense would suggest the more security tools you've got, the safer you are. But if there are two AV products installed and running in your PC, that means war – and you'll be the first casualty.

This is what we mean by 'conflicting' AVs. Any installed AV suites run constantly in the background. In a worst case scenario, if two are running at the same time they will identify each other as infections and effectively cancel each other out. At best, according to Simon Edwards, "they'll badly affect your PC's performance. It's very unwise."

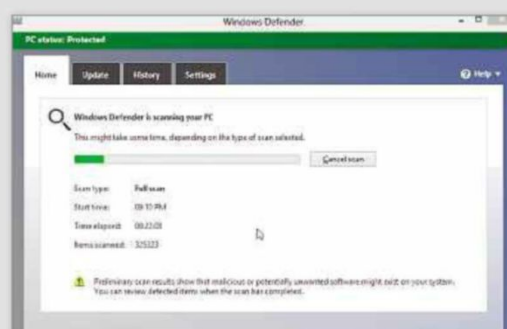
This is why we never recommend installing AVG or MSE as a "spare" AV simply because they're free. They'll make your computer crash, and they may even prevent your main AV from working properly.

AVOID CONFLICTS WHEN SWITCHING AV

If your current AV has expired and you want to install a different one, or you simply want to switch AV products, you should uninstall the existing one first.

Microsoft's built-in security tool Windows Defender (see screenshot) will protect you in the interim. Defender is not exactly the most powerful of security tools, but it's a useful safety net while you're between AV programs.

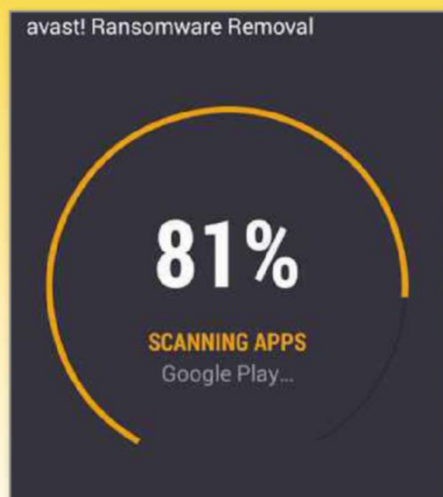
Once you've removed the old one (completely, using IObit Uninstaller), install the new one and run a full scan with your new AV. Windows Defender will disable automatically once your third-party AV is up and running.



Conflict problems don't apply to portable malware-removers like the free version of Malwarebytes Anti-Malware (www.snipca.com/18658) and adware-removers like AdwCleaner (www.snipca.com/18659), because they don't run constantly in the background. Just make sure to use the current version, so they can catch and kill the latest threats.



Security tools you should stop using



Avast Ransomware Removal, like CryptoPrevent, is only useful if you need it

ransomware on your device, the app serves no purpose and just clogs up space, battery and **processor** power. If you are infected you can still download the app to your device from www.snipca.com/18657 via your PC.

As a rule, if a tool has a specific purpose, only download it for that purpose. You wouldn't eat a bowl of prescription drugs for breakfast if there was nothing wrong with you. If you do solve a problem using a security tool specially designed for that purpose, uninstall it afterwards.

Fake security apps

Just as the ransomware epidemic has brought tools swarming out of the woodwork, it's also triggered a flood of **phishing**. Cybercriminals have created ransomware-themed phishing emails, web pages, fake apps and other bait containing malware.

Android users should be especially careful. Windows can be protected by powerful AV, and iOS is effectively a



Fake app Virus Shield did nothing for your safety and made its creators thousands of pounds

sandbox that helps keep nasties out. But Android's more open, versatile nature makes it a bigger target for malicious apps, including fake security apps that do nothing other than empty your wallet.

Virus Shield is the best-known example. This app, which has no AV capabilities at all, topped the Google Play Store charts a year ago after fooling thousands of people into downloading it for \$3.99 (£2.65). The website Android Police exposed the scam (www.snipca.com/18685) and Google took the unusual step of refunding everyone who'd bought the app – coughing up around £160,000.

In October, security firm ESET found that malicious apps were installed more than 200,000 times in one month after bypassing Google Play Store security (www.snipca.com/18682).

We still urge you to install apps from official sources only, but these examples show that even Google can be hoodwinked into hosting dangerous apps.

Furthermore, never root ('jailbreak')

your tablet or phone if required to do so by any app. It makes your phone unstable, much more vulnerable to threats and voids your warranty.



Safely scan for malware in XP by creating a bootable rescue USB

How to make AV work in XP

Many AV suites still work in Windows XP, which is no longer protected by Microsoft (see Issue 424). However, no AV can keep you completely safe in an unpatched, unsupported OS.

Instead, use a portable security tool that you can download using Windows 7 or later, then run it in XP from a USB stick.

Both Kaspersky and Avast let you create **bootable** versions of their AV programs. This means you can run them from a USB stick and remove infections before Windows even starts up.

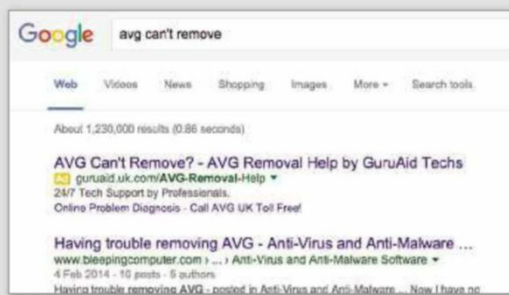
For Kaspersky's 'Rescue Disk' (www.snipca.com/18046), insert a USB stick (256MB minimum) and then click 'The ISO image of Kaspersky Rescue Disk 10' and 'The utility for recording Kaspersky Rescue Disk 10 to USB devices'. For Avast (www.snipca.com/18699), click 'Create Rescue Disk on a USB drive or CD' and follow the instructions. **ca**

PC HELP THAT'S ALL PAIN AND NO GAIN

When we searched Google for 'avg can't remove', the top result was an outfit called GuruAid, complete with a reassuring UK web address. You'll see GuruAid in Google results for many PC problems.

Don't be fooled. GuruAid is neither UK-based nor helpful – it's a money-making scam. The firm, based in Connecticut, USA, demands your credit-card details before handing over any advice. Its phone number is "toll-free", a US phrase that means the call is free (but only from inside the US). In the next issue of

Computeractive, we send our Final Straw columnist Stuart Andrews to investigate GuruAid. Will he be happy about the experience? Don't bet your mortgage on it...



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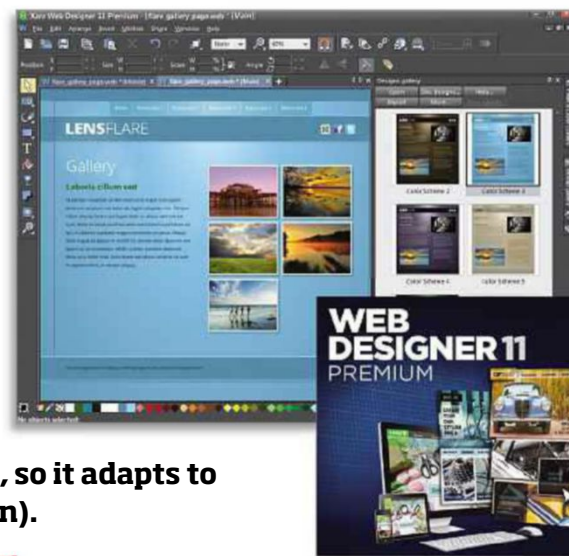
Computeractive has teamed up with Xara to offer **10 readers** the chance to win a full copy of Xara Web Designer 11 Premium.

Web Designer 11 Premium is not like other web-design packages. Its template-based design gives you the complete freedom to make amazing web pages – no coding required!

WEB DESIGNER 11 PREMIUM KEY FEATURES

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PRICE DROP! The Definitive Guide to Windows 10

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Who's selling your data?

AVG isn't the only company selling your data. Jane Hoskyn reveals the trusted tools that share your secrets – and explains how to stop it



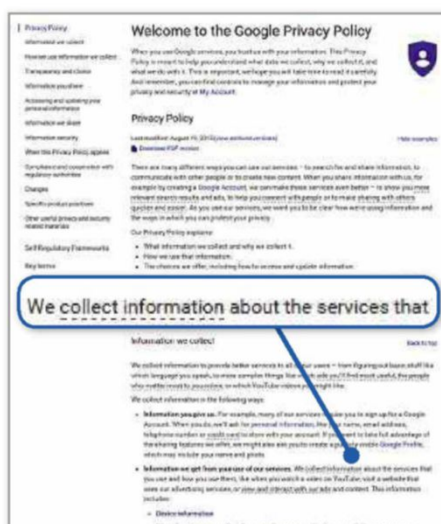
Security firm AVG admitted selling your data to advertisers (see News, Issue 461), who then use this data to target you with adverts for products you may (or may not) want.

When confronted about this abuse of customers' privacy, AVG did the digital equivalent of a shrug. Everybody does it, they said – it's the way free services work. That may be true in a cold business sense, but it's an insult to customers. Sharing your secrets for financial gain betrays your trust.

We've covered AVG in detail in our feature on troublesome security tools (see page 56), so here we'll focus on the other companies that hand out your data – and reveal what you can do about it.

Google

While newspapers get their knickers in a twist over the new Snooper's Charter ('Investigatory Powers Bill', www.snipca.com/18599), we're more worried about commercial snooping – like the kind of data-hoovering Google has indulged in for years.



Google harvests your data and gives it to advertisers – as stated in its Privacy Policy

Google's snooping is not about safety – it's about money. "They're gobbling up everything they can learn about you and trying to monetise it," Apple boss Tim Cook said in June (www.snipca.com/18600). Cook didn't name names, but "they" were widely

assumed to be Google and Facebook.

Last year, Google started including users' names and photos in adverts for products they'd rated – without asking or even notifying them. Then came reports that Google is ditching cookies for new tracking technology that makes it easier for advertisers to target you (www.snipca.com/18601).

This is the web's new business model. Google is candid about this in its Privacy Policy (www.google.com/policies/privacy). Gmail, Chrome, YouTube and other Google services are free, because you "pay" by letting them give data about you to advertisers, for whom this data is extremely valuable. Security expert Bruce Schneier of Harvard University sums up this new economy: "You're not [these companies'] customer, you're the product, and you're being improved for their actual customers: their advertisers" (www.snipca.com/18602).

Facebook

Facebook fosters a private atmosphere. Google (Gmail aside) never feels like a place you can share secrets with your friends. Twitter, too, feels far more public (Twitter's own data-selling habits are well documented: www.snipca.com/18603). Only on Facebook do you feel safe to discuss health problems and post photos of your grandchildren.

But the truth is Facebook isn't private at all. In its new Help Center, a page patronisingly titled 'Common Myths About Facebook' states: "No, we don't sell any of your information to anyone and we never will" (www.snipca.com/18605). Right, but it does share

DOES ADBLOCK PLUS SELL YOUR DATA?

"Ad Blockers in iOS 9 Are Selling Your Personal Data" screamed recent headlines (www.snipca.com/18581). Please don't let that put you off using advert-blockers – they're a vital privacy tool. The story was actually about the difficulty of changing app permissions in iOS, and used a fake advert-blocking app as an example.

Adblock Plus, our favourite free advert-blocking extension, has a clear

and reassuring Privacy Policy (<https://adblockplus.org/privacy>). The tool stores data about ad-blocking activity, but only locally on your PC – not on its servers.

However, if you use other extensions in the same browser, they may grab data from Adblock Plus for their own servers.

Adblock Plus recommends using private or incognito browser modes if you don't want data stored anywhere.

KEEP YOUR DATA PRIVATE

Investigate data brokers

Sites that sell your private data to advertisers are often called data brokers. Around 50 brokers are listed on the site StopDataMiningMe (www.stopdatamining.me). Many online forms on the 'Opt Out List' can only be used in the US. Some listed companies have UK branches (for example, www.experian.co.uk), which you can contact for opt-out information.

Tighten Google settings

You can use CCleaner to remove all your Google and Chrome data, but as we saw in Issue 462 (see page 60) this may leave you unable to open Chrome.

Instead, remove selected cookies, browse incognito, add the Do Not Track extension (www.snipca.com/18629; see screenshot) and consider using a VPN.

Tighten Facebook settings

Facebook's new Privacy Check-Up tool (click the padlock, top-right) doesn't prevent Facebook harvesting – nay, owning – your data. Your ultimate opt-out is to delete your account. Download all your posts and photos first (www.snipca.com/18614).

Tighten Windows settings

Microsoft's new About Our Ads page



(www.snipca.com/18630) lets you opt out of certain 'interest-based, (targeted) advertising. It doesn't stop Microsoft gathering and storing your data, though.

Tighten Amazon settings

Use the Advertising Preferences page (www.snipca.com/18626) to control what's shared with advertisers and sellers.

your data with advertisers in return for targeted advert deals. That sounds like selling to us.

Facebook's terms (www.facebook.com/terms) are a bewildering mess of legalese, but they are more clear about what happens to your data. "You give us permission to use your name, profile picture, content, and information in connection with commercial, sponsored, or related content served or enhanced by us," it says (see screenshot below). Hence the creepy targeted adverts you see next to your News Feed.



Facebook's jargon-packed Terms page reveals your data will be shared

Windows 10

A couple of years back, Microsoft claimed Google employees read people's private messages and sold the juicy bits to advertisers (www.snipca.com/18611). Not true: Google's data-collection is automated, and no-one reads your emails except their intended recipients.

Shockingly, Microsoft is now failing to practice what it preached by doing exactly what it accused Google of. Its privacy policy (www.snipca.com/18612)

says: "We will access, disclose and preserve personal data, including... the content of your emails (and) files in private folders". It also assigns you a personal advertising ID for sharing data with advertisers and 'data broker' middlemen.

Windows 10 also spies on your settings, PC hardware, app choices, Cortana activity and even keystrokes (read Microsoft's License Terms at www.snipca.com/18610). Some reports claim it does this even if you can switch off all your data-collection settings (www.snipca.com/18607).

Microsoft claims this snooping is all for the greater good – law enforcement, bug fixing and so on – but they use it to target you with Start menu ads, too. They've also started installing targeted software on your PC without your permission.

In September, Windows boss Terry Myerson responded by insisting Microsoft "takes steps to avoid collecting (identifiable) information such as your name, email address or account ID" (read his blog post at www.snipca.com/18608). "Takes steps" is hardly the reassurance we wanted.

Amazon

What's an advertiser's dream? The power to know what you're thinking, right now. That's what Amazon gives them, by sharing your search data instantly.

In 2012, the shopping giant started automating the process of monitoring users' activity and sending it to advertisers, who then post targeted adverts. Sounds long-winded, but it happens in the blink of an eye. One moment you're browsing

for lawnmowers; next moment you're looking at a sidebar of hedge-trimmer adverts posted by third-party advertisers.

Firefox

Mozilla's open-source browser was advert-free until earlier this year, when it introduced Suggested Tiles (www.snipca.com/18627) – essentially targeted adverts. So it does share your data with advertisers.



Firefox's new Tracking Protection tool lets you keep more data to yourself

However, it goes further than its rivals in letting you control the data you share. Just before we went to press, Firefox released a new Tracking Protection feature (www.snipca.com/18624) that lets you limit the data it collects (see screenshot above). If you use this feature together with Private Browsing (www.snipca.com/18625), you'll block adverts, analytics trackers and 'share' buttons that social-networking sites use to collect saleable data.

Remember, though – Firefox is not a unified beast. It supports thousands of extensions ('add-ons') whose developers' attitudes to your privacy can vary. Check an extension's small print – including sneaky mentions of in-app purchases – before you add it to Firefox. **ca**

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Problems Solved

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

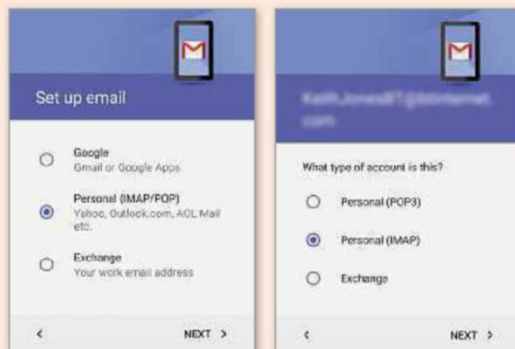
How do I send from a different email address on Android?

Q I use BT email and receive messages on my Android phone and tablet. My BT account allows several sub addresses, which I use to separate various activities. When using the Android devices, these sub addresses are not available to send from, although all emails to all accounts appear in my inbox. Also, if I delete emails from an Android device, or send an email from my device, these actions remain on that device – the email is not deleted on my main or other Android device email account, nor does a copy of a sent email appear in my main (browser) email or any other Android account Sent folder. I can only keep my emails in sync if I open the browser to send or delete emails, which is an inconvenience. Is there some way that all of these devices can be kept in sync?

Keith Jones

A That's two questions for the price of one. We'll deal with them in reverse order because you need to sort the synchronisation first.

Your messages and actions aren't kept in sync is because your email app has been set up to use BT's **POP3 servers**. This is an archaic email protocol that's akin to a physical mailbox: when you remove the post, it's gone. Similarly, if you use your phone to pick up POP3 email, then later attempt to connect with your tablet, the mailbox is empty. There's actually a way around this particular annoyance, but to stick with the analogy, once you've collected letters, a physical mailbox has no way of knowing what happens to them next. If you tear up and bin them, the mailbox is oblivious. That's POP3.



Use the IMAP email protocol rather than POP3 to keep your emails in sync across various devices

IMAP is a more recent versatile alternative that keeps copies of messages on the server, and allows two-way communications between the server and your devices – so it knows if you delete or reply to a message, and stores this information to sync with other devices.

You didn't tell us which email app you use, but Android's 'stock' tool is now Gmail, which works with any email service – including BT's. All you need to do is tweak the settings on all your devices to use BT's IMAP servers, which you'll find at www.snipca.com/18190. In the Gmail app, tap the menu button (three horizontal lines), then tap Settings. Either tap an existing account to modify its settings, or tap 'Add account' followed by 'Personal (IMAP)', then follow the instructions to supply BT's IMAP server details and your login credentials.

Finally, your sub addresses. With BT, these operate as distinct addresses, so you'll have to set up each as an individual account and be viewing all messages in a unified inbox. But when you create a new message, your email app populates the From field with the default address, which is presumably your main one. To change this in the Gmail app, for instance, just tap the down arrow to the right of the default email address, then tap to choose a different account.

Why does my display show rotating colours?

Q Every time I switch off my computer or if it enters sleep mode, a series of solid colours flashes up on the screen in rotation. I have tried to apply Windows screensavers, but the same happens. Even after I have turned off my PC in the normal way, the solid colours continue if the screen is still plugged in – even with everything else switched off. I am running Windows 7. What could possibly be sending these colours to the display?

John Cuthbert

A We don't know what monitor you have, but the fact that this happens when the display is the only thing that's plugged in tells us pretty much all we need to know: this is your monitor's built-in screensaver kicking in. Not all displays do this, but in the absence of an input source, such as a PC, one way to prevent **burn-in** is to rotate the display with full-screen colours.

You can probably disable this somewhere in the display's settings, to have the screen remain black or simply go into standby. Use the physical controls on the front of your monitor to navigate its on-screen menus, looking for a screensaver option.

Alternatively, you might be able to tell the display to go to sleep after a set period: this is a completely effective screensaver, which also saves you a small amount of money on your electricity bills.



Prevent rotating colours appearing on your screen by tweaking your display's settings

Our experts solve all your tech problems

✉ Email us your problem and we'll try to help: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

What is this CMOS checksum error message?

Q I have a Windows 7 computer that has developed a fault on boot up. When I switch it on, it displays a message saying: "CMOS checksum error – Defaults loaded". I can proceed by pressing F1, as instructed, and then Windows loads fine with no further problems. However, when I click Computer there's a floppy disk drive labelled 'A:' – but I don't have a floppy disk drive installed! I did install an additional hard drive about five years ago following instructions in *Computeractive*, and it's never given me any trouble.

George Rees



A CMOS checksum error appears when a computer's backup battery needs to be replaced

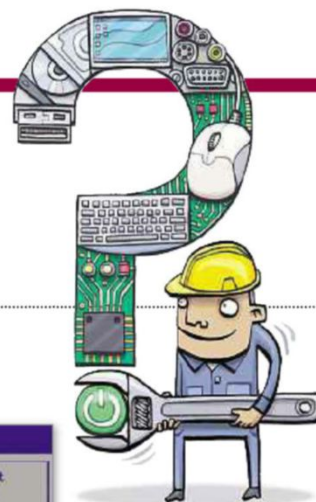
A Your PC's CMOS backup battery has almost certainly died – or is on the way out – because these cells tend to run dry after a few years, and we know your PC is at least five years old.

Carefully open your PC and look for the disc-like battery about the size of a 10p: they're almost always type CR2032, which are cheap and widely available. You might need to remove a retaining

screw to release the battery, but otherwise replacing a dead one is much like replacing any other battery.

When you've done that, start your PC and access the BIOS, usually by tapping F2 or Delete (Del). The 'Defaults loaded' part of the message is a result of a BIOS check failing: something literally doesn't add up, so the BIOS restores all its settings to their factory condition. This happens

when the battery dies. Because the BIOS defaults include a floppy drive, which your computer doesn't have, it then detects a discrepancy. You helpfully sent us photos of your BIOS's various screens, so we can see that this is indeed what has happened. This has put your computer into a failure loop at boot, as well as making Windows think there's a floppy drive when there isn't. The solution is to use the cursor (arrow) keys and Enter to move to the System Information page, step down to the 'Drive A' entry and set this to Disabled (or Off). Press F10 to save and then Escape (Esc) to exit. Restart your PC and we reckon all will now be well.



when the battery dies. Because the BIOS defaults include a floppy drive, which your computer doesn't have, it then detects a discrepancy.

You helpfully sent us photos of your BIOS's various screens, so we can see that this is indeed what has

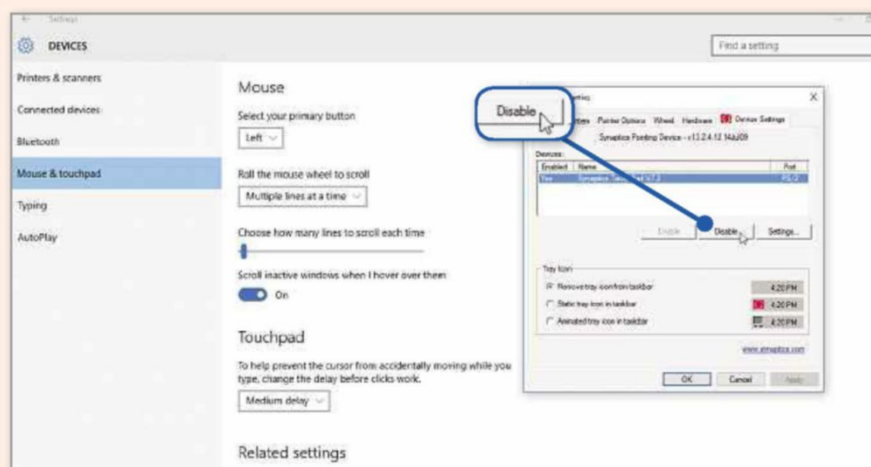
How do I disable my touchpad in Windows 10?

Q I have been using my laptop for two years with the touchpad disabled, as I prefer to work with a mouse. I have just installed Windows 10, which has re-enabled it. I can't find a way to disable it again. Can you please advise?

William Hickmott

A You can still do this via the normal Control Panel, accessed via the pop-up that's displayed when you press Windows key+X. However, it's better to find the option through Windows 10's Modern-style Settings screen, as there are additional modes that you might find useful.

Click Start followed by Settings, and then Devices followed by 'Mouse & trackpad'. Here you'll see a Touchpad section with a dropdown menu: if you open this and choose 'Long delay' your touchpad should be much less sensitive to accidental taps, so you might want to



A laptop touchpad can be disabled via Windows 10's Modern-style Settings screen

leave it enabled.

If not, click 'Additional mouse settings' under 'Related settings', then select the tab that relates to your touchpad (often labelled Device Settings). Depending on your device manufacturer, you may find a box

labelled something like 'Disable when external USB mouse is connected': a tick here will disable your touchpad when a mouse is plugged in, giving you the best of both worlds. If there's no such tickbox, just click the Disable button followed by OK to confirm.

Problems Solved

Can I reuse set-top box hard drives?

Q I have two hard drives in redundant equipment, including a Sky box that I no longer use and a YouView box that just sits around the house doing nothing. Is it possible to use these hard drives for storage? How would I remove them and what could I use to encase them safely? Would I need special software to access them? I think they are both 500MB drives, and that's a **gigabyte** of free storage that'd be a real blessing to me.

Jack Pilkington

A As long as you've got a screwdriver set and a bit of patience, there's nothing stopping you. Both these boxes come in various models, but all use standard hard drives, with the most recent boxes using 3.5in or 2.5in **SATA** hard drives. Extracting them can be tricky, but it really just takes perseverance, and perhaps a pair of wire cutters to release tight cable ties.

You won't need to do anything special to make them work with your PC. Either fit the drives inside your PC or you could buy a suitable-sized external caddy to connect them via USB, such as this £18 example from Amazon – www.snipca.com/18272, pictured below.

In Windows, just use Explorer to format them: right-click the drive, choose Format and follow the prompts.



An extracted hard drive can be stored in an external caddy

How do I unify Windows 10 Mail's inbox?

Q I plucked up the courage to follow Issue 456's helpful guide to upgrade to Windows 10. I am still getting used to it, but so far I am impressed. One problem I've encountered is with Windows Mail. I have three different email accounts that I have successfully added to Windows Mail and all three send and receive mail. However, I have to go into each account separately to check their inboxes. I would like to be able to see all the inboxes of all three accounts at once so I can see the unread messages. I could do this in Windows Live Mail, so how can I do it in Windows Mail?

John Killoch

A For accuracy, we need to point out that Windows 10's Modern-style email app is simply called Mail – not Windows Mail.

To answer your question, the new app doesn't offer a unified inbox. In fact, nor does Windows Live Mail (WLM). However, that program does include a 'Quick views' option that can be configured to provide a view that amounts to the same thing.

Microsoft might add a similar option to



WLM can be found in Windows 10 by clicking Start followed by 'All apps' then scrolling down

Mail in the future, but in the meantime, because you upgraded to Windows 10, WLM should still be on your PC – and it works just fine with Windows 10. If you can't find it, click Start followed by 'All apps', then scroll down to find the WLM entry: right-click and choose 'Pin to Start'.

Can I hide my Facebook Groups?

Q I'm not obsessed about privacy and accept that by using Facebook a lot of my personal information is visible to my friends. I've been through my Facebook privacy settings and am happy with what people see on my page, except for one thing – Groups. I'd rather my Facebook friends didn't see what Groups I subscribe to. I couldn't find any option to hide these in the privacy settings. Is it possible?

Kevin Ayers

A Yes, you can do this, but as with almost everything relating to privacy on Facebook, it isn't easy tracking down the necessary option.

First, log in then view your profile page by clicking your name at the top. Now hover your mouse cursor over the More link under the Update Info button, then click Manage Sections. Scroll down to find the Groups box, click to clear the tick, then click Save.



Head to Manage Sections to change the privacy settings for Facebook Groups

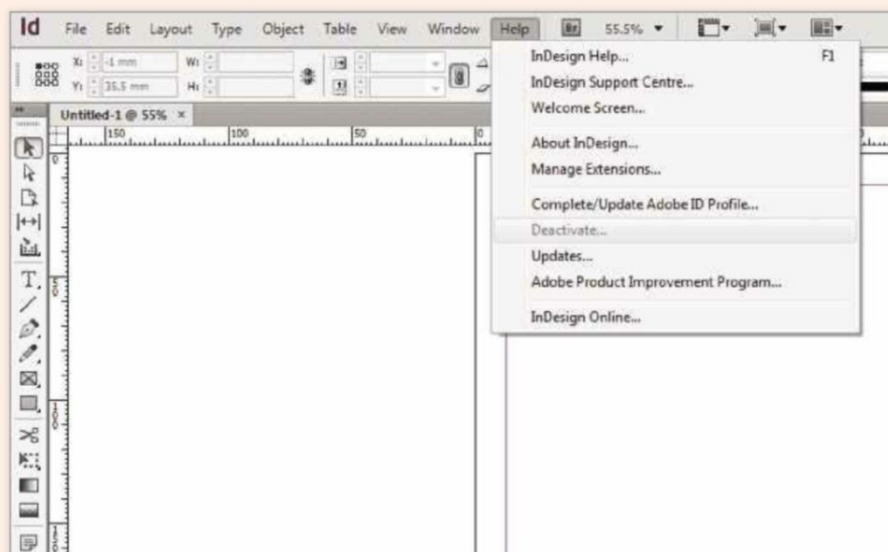
Would a recovery disc wipe my software?

Q I have a troublesome Sony Vaio laptop, with Sony concluding that a full recovery is required. I'm worried that this will remove all my software. Specifically, I need to keep my Adobe Creative Suite (CS) because I used my last activation code on this Vaio laptop, and the program cost me a small fortune. Would a full recovery remove this software?

Zoe Badger

A Yes, in short. Recovery discs will typically restore a computer to its factory or shop condition, and that means wiping everything on the hard drive – including all your applications and personal data.

However, if you have all the original installation discs and back up your personal stuff, using a recovery disc shouldn't stop you accessing everything afterwards. In specific regard to CS, we think you may have misunderstood



Deactivate Adobe Creative Suite before running a recovery disc on a faulty laptop

Adobe's licence terms. It states that a single licence allows you to install CS on two computers. Your activation codes aren't "used up", but merely in use, one on your Vaio and the other presumably on a second computer.

All you need to do is deactivate the

Vaio's CS installation before running the recovery disc, and then reactivate when you reinstall it. Just click Help followed by Deactivate and then follow the prompts. To reactivate, the process is much the same – just choose Activate instead, then type your CS serial number.

How do I move Windows 10's OneDrive folder?

Q I've had to abandon an otherwise-successful upgrade to Windows 10 because I couldn't stop it from downloading my OneDrive files on to a C: drive that's too small. How do I change the location of my OneDrive folder to another drive? I keep my operating system and programs on C: and I use my D: drive for everything else. In Windows 8.1 it was easy to change the location of the OneDrive folder, but I can't work out how to do that in Windows 10.

Jackie Chapman

A You can still do this, but the process has become rather convoluted in Windows 10, as you must now 'unlink' your PC from your OneDrive account, then move the folder before setting up OneDrive afresh.

First, create a new folder called OneDrive on your D: drive, in whatever location you want. Now right-click the OneDrive icon in the notification area on the far right-hand side of the Windows Taskbar, then choose Settings. If you

can't see this icon, click the up-pointing arrow to see more icons. Select the Settings tab then, in the Unlink OneDrive section, click the Unlink OneDrive button.

Surprisingly, no confirmation is required – though nor is any data lost. Instead, OneDrive immediately shows its



To change the location of a OneDrive folder, you must 'unlink' your PC from OneDrive

'Welcome to OneDrive' box, ready for you to set it up anew. Click 'Get started', type your Microsoft account password, then click Next. On the 'Introducing your OneDrive folder' screen, notice the 'Your OneDrive folder is here' message – then click the Change button alongside. Use the Browse box to navigate to and select the OneDrive folder created on your D: drive, then click OK. When the warning box appears, click 'Use this location'. Click Next, choose your sync options, then click Next followed by Done.

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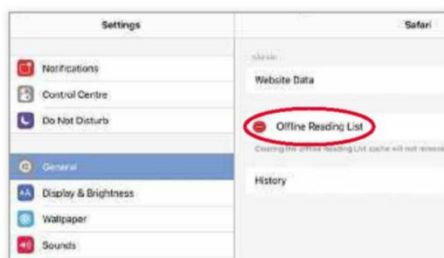


iPad

Access the App Store when you can't, fix sudden slowdowns and make space for upgrades without deleting apps

Not enough space to update

It's frustrating when you want the latest iOS but don't have enough free space to install it. Deleting apps frees up space, of course, but just giving Safari a spring clean may give you the space you need. Tap Settings, Safari, and then 'Clear History and Website Data', followed by Clear to confirm.



Clearing Safari's history and Reading List can free up space for upgrades

Still not enough? You could clear your Reading List too, because this stores loads of data for offline viewing. In Settings, tap General followed by 'Storage & iCloud Usage', Manage Storage, then Safari. Next, tap Edit followed by the red minus sign next to Offline Reading List (see screenshot above). While you're here, tap through the other apps to see if they too have data you can delete without uninstalling the whole app.

iPad suddenly runs very slow

One day your iPad is racing along, the next it slows to a crawl, and even typing seems to take forever. This sudden drop-off in performance happens when your iPad's available storage falls below the 200MB mark. This can happen when your device uses free space as a **cache** when its own working memory (or **RAM**) is full. A quick solution is to free up storage space by deleting old or unused apps. Launch Settings, then tap General, 'Storage & iCloud Usage', then

Manage Storage. If the Available figure is hovering around or below the 200MB mark, go through the list of apps below and tap any unwanted app, then Delete App (twice).

'Charger not supported' message

Many of us have a number of USB chargers that we use interchangeably. Plug a non-Apple charger into your iPad and it will probably display a message warning you that charging is not supported. Chances are, the device will charge anyway, and your iPad will not be damaged. However, avoid using dirt-cheap unbranded chargers because these can be poorly made and therefore dangerous. If you are using a genuine Apple charger and this message still appears, use a can of compressed air to clean both the iPad's socket and the charger plug, and make sure the connection is pressed firmly home.

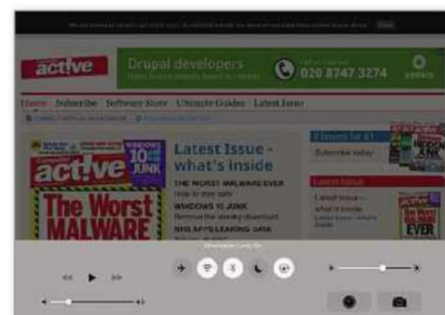
Can't sign in to the App Store

This can happen for a variety of reasons. One fix is to reboot your iPad by holding down the power and home buttons for around 10 seconds (or until the screen goes blank and is replaced by the Apple logo). If you still can't log in, your iPad might be suffering a failed app installation. Swipe through your home pages looking for a greyed-out app icon with the message 'Waiting': tap this icon to prompt the installation to continue. If

the App Store still won't let you in, try resetting your iPad's settings (this won't wipe any personal data). Tap Settings followed by General, then swipe to the bottom and tap Reset. Now tap Reset All Settings (see screenshot below left) and, if you have one set, type your PIN to confirm.

Screen has stopped rotating

On older iPads you might accidentally flip the physical volume/rotation switch on the side of the device. You can control what this switch does in Settings, by tapping General and then either Lock Rotation or Mute, under 'USE SIDE SWITCH TO'. On iPads with iOS 7 or later, you may have inadvertently switched on rotation lock via Control Centre (the panel that appears if you swipe up from the bottom-middle of the screen). If the padlock icon here is coloured white, tap it to allow rotation.



If the screen won't rotate, swipe up from the bottom to access the Control Centre icons



Using the Reset All Settings doesn't wipe personal data and could get you back into the App Store

Charging is really slow

Are you using the original charger that came with your iPad? If not, perhaps you're using your iPhone's charger, or a different charger entirely? iPhone chargers output power at just 5 watts (w), while iPad chargers deliver at either 10 or 12w, which helps to charge your iPad's battery faster. So, if you connect your new iPad Mini 4 to an old 5w charger you can expect it to take around double its usual time to charge.

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Jargon Buster

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

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels

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

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

802.11n A standard for wireless networks that allows for high transfer speeds.

Add-in Microsoft's name for tools that can be added to Office software.

Analytics trackers Tools that advertisers use to track what people do on a website.

App launcher An app that changes how the Android home screen looks and works, especially for managing and opening apps.

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

Bootable A DVD with system files on it so it can be used to start up your computer.

Burn-in Damage to a computer or television screen which occurs when a very bright image has been displayed for too long.

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

Client On a computer network client computers are connected to and retrieve data from a server.

CMOS Complementary metal-oxide semiconductor. Both a type of image sensor chip used in digital cameras and chip on computer motherboards that stores the date and time.

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

Crowdsourcing Obtaining ideas, information or money from a large group of people, usually online, rather than from more traditional sources.

Download mirror A website that contains the same downloadable software as others, bundled in a branded installer.

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

Dual band Some Wi-Fi routers have two wireless radios working on the 2.4 and 5GHz frequencies or bands. Some routers work on both bands simultaneously.

Extension A program that adds extra features to your browser.

Flash storage A data-storage device that includes flash memory with an integrated USB interface.

Gigabyte A measure of storage capacity equal to 2^{30} (1024) bytes.

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

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

Heatsink A block of metal used to help dissipate the heat from a computer chip.

HTML Hypertext Markup Language. The language used to write most web pages.

ICO file An image file format for PC icons in Windows that can be scaled appropriately.

IMAP Internet Message Access Protocol. A method for email that lets the user manage messages stored on a remote server.

JPEG Joint Photograph Experts Group. A common type of image file created by most digital cameras.

M.2 A standard specification for internal PC expansion cards and connectors.

MicroSD A small type of memory card.

Micro USB A miniature version of USB, often found on smartphones, tablets and portable hard drives.

Mini HDMI Downsized version of the HDMI cable and connector to accommodate smaller devices.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone, rather than just by the employees of the company that created it.

Overclocking Making a processor work faster to improve performance at the cost of it getting hotter and requiring more power

Phishing A form of internet fraud that tries to trick you into revealing personal details.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to your web browser or to other applications, and is loaded only when it's needed.

POP3 Post Office Protocol 3. A system for remotely accessing and retrieving email from an ISP. Most email applications and ISPs use POP3.

Port To adapt a program to run on a different operating system for which it was designed.

Portable tool Software that runs directly from a USB stick and therefore doesn't need to be installed on a PC.

Processor The brain of a computer – capable of carrying out millions of calculations every second.

PUP Potentially Unwanted Program. A program that may not be desired, despite the user consenting to it being downloaded. Examples include unnecessary plug-ins, toolbars and browser hijackers.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

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

Resolution The amount of detail shown in an image, whether on screen or printed.

Root To perform tasks on Android devices that aren't permitted by the manufacturer.

Sandbox A virtual container that you can run programs in safely.

SATA Serial ATA. An interface for connecting modern hard drives and optical discs to a computer.

SATA 3 Also known as SATA 600. The latest and fastest version of the SATA interface for connecting internal storage devices to a computer.

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

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

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors, printers and the internet.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts.

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

USB Universal Serial Bus. A standard that allows quick and easy connection of external peripherals to your PC.

USB 2.0 Faster successor to USB that's used by devices such as external hard drives.

USB 3.0 An even faster version of the USB standard used to connect devices to a computer.

USB Type-C A tiny physical connector that can support various USB standards, such as USB 3.1 and USB power delivery (USB PD).

VPN Virtual Private Network. A technology for keeping all internet communication safe and private even on insecure networks.

The Final Straw



STUART ANDREWS is
Computeractive's Mr Angry

This issue Stuart Andrews wants to come clean about his...

Filthy keyboard

Lord knows I'm not the world's tidiest man, and my desk would give most efficiency gurus the shivers. It's crammed with paperwork, mysterious cables, numerous CDs and an abandoned mug of coffee that seems to have transformed into primordial ooze. It has several books open, face-down, and the small tin that has held USB sticks now hosts discarded chocolate bar wrappers. Yet there's only one thing on my desk that I'm actually ashamed of, and that's my keyboard.

There's nothing wrong with the keyboard itself – it's the nicest one I've ever owned. At one point it was shiny aluminium with bright white tile keys. Now it's some kind of grim, dirt-encrusted metal with keys in various shades of black, grey and brown. The space, shift and ctrl keys look like Albert Steptoe has been wiping his used handkerchiefs on them.

I know what you're thinking: messy desk, grumpy demeanor, keen interest in computers – this guy is probably averse to soap and showers. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. While I'm not OCD in my cleanliness, I'm pretty scrupulous when it comes to personal hygiene. I don't come in straight from doing the gardening and start typing. Nor do I pop out, take my socks off, go barefoot trail-running, then return to my desk and type with my toes. Why then, should my keyboard leave you thinking that I do all those things... every day?

I know I'm not alone in my keyboard curse. In the days when I used to work in magazine offices I saw many gruesome keyboards caked with grime, most belonging to perfectly nice and even fragrant people. You could see them cringing in embarrassment when you sat at their desk or lay fingers on their keyboard, knowing that you must be wondering if they swept chimneys in their spare time.

I also know that you *can* clean



keyboards, and that there are dusters, wipes, gels, brushes, compressed air cans and even tiny vacuum cleaners dedicated to this task. Every now and then I give mine a quick wipe, but this only seems to make it collect filth faster. A few weeks later, it's as bad as ever. What is it about keyboards that attracts so much dirt?

“
Space, shift and ctrl
look like Albert Steptoe
has been wiping used
handkerchiefs on them
”

Of course, it's not the only way keyboards have annoyed me. I've had keys that mysteriously stop working and keys that stick. I've had noisy keyboards that have kept my wife awake at night, guaranteeing me even more furious looks than usual. I've had keyboards that insisst on tyyyyyping certtain lettters multiplllllllle timmmes, but sporadically,

making it hard to tell if something's really wrong. I've been annoyed by stupid layouts where vital keys have been shrunk, moved or hidden. And that's without dealing with all those stupid virtual keyboards that leave you wondering why, with all this technology, we haven't found a better way of entering text into a phone.

I've seen keyboard trends come and go, from those ergonomic efforts with their wavy shapes, split layouts and weird typing angles, to the currently trendy chiclet style (see what you're missing at www.snipca.com/18371). I've tried soft keys, clicky keys, low-profile keys and backlit keys. I've even used the horrific, fuzzy-felt touch keyboard of the original Microsoft Surface – and it was only 75 per cent as hideous as you might have read. When it comes to bad keyboards, I'm something of a connoisseur.

I've even had one laptop go kaput because our cat kept clawing the keypad until the keys flipped off. Yet nothing horrifies me as much as the current keyboard grime. I'm attached to my keyboard. It's the quickest way I know of getting what's up here in my head into a form other people understand. I guess there's only one answer. I'll buy it in black and hope the dirt doesn't show.

✉ Is your keyboard even filthier?
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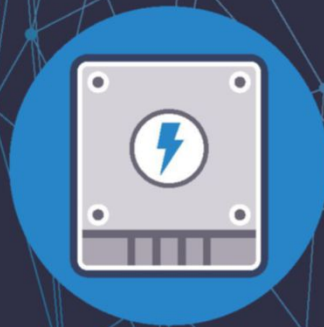


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