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your money p16 >>>

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ISSUE 465 | 23 DEC 2015 – 5 JAN 2016

Your friendly guide to technology

Pensioner 1 - 0 Apple p8

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From the Editor

One of the lamest cliches in technology journalism is to drool over a new product and yell: 'This changes everything!'. It's actually not easy to drooling and yelling at the same time, so I try not to use the cliché, but 2015 was a year in which, well, everything *did* change.

The reason? Microsoft made Windows 10 a free download. Now that thousands of you have upgraded, we'll continue to show you how to get the best out of the operating system throughout 2016. And when problems arise with updates, we'll explain how to fix them.

One thing that, sadly, didn't change in 2015 – and won't in 2016 – is the threat posed by malware and online scams. In our Cover



Feature, we expose the sinister new tactics criminals will use next year. Our advice will help you to stay safe.

I sincerely hope hackers have a miserable Christmas. But I'd like to wish all *Computeractive* readers a very merry Christmas. May you have a joyful time.

Daniel Booth

editor@computeractive.co.uk



THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

60,000ft

How high Facebook's laser drones fly –
p49



80,000

Number of computers in the deadly Dyre botnet –
p16

1.5m

Number of rural homes stuck on slow broadband –
p8

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

23 Dec 2015 – 5 Jan 2016 • Issue 465

In this issue...

50 Don't get hacked in 2016
After a turbulent year for online security, we tell you how to protect yourself over the next 12 months

57 Windows 10: the biggest controversies
The launch of Windows 10 has been far from smooth. We give our verdict on where Microsoft has gone wrong

60 What's the fastest browser for your tablet?
Don't get stuck with your tablet's default browser. We run through the alternatives to boost your device

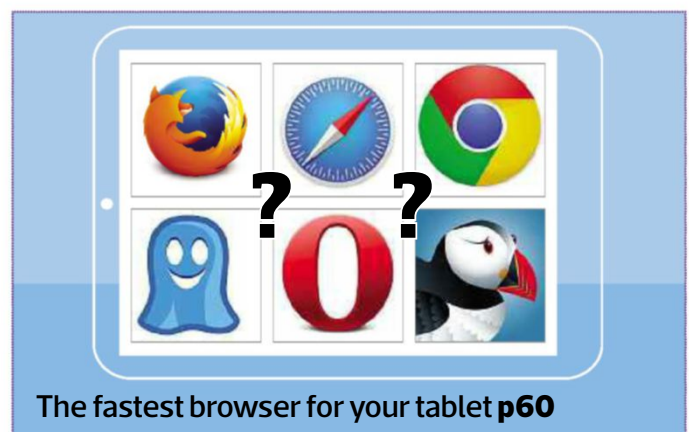
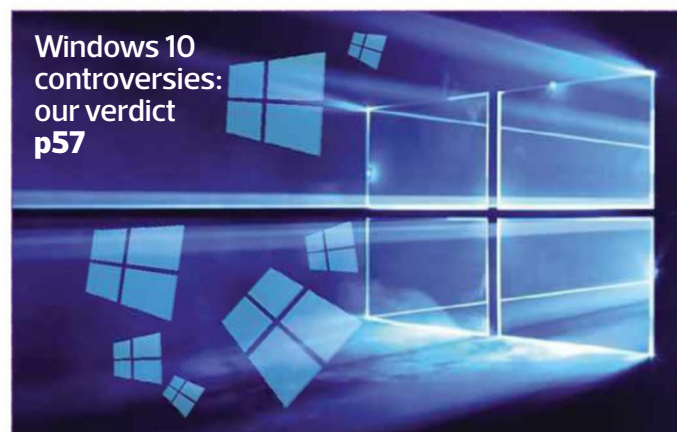
Don't Get HACKED IN 2016

COVER FEATURE P50

Hackers will target you every day - non stop

+ HOW TO STOP THEM p50

! YOUR ANTI-VIRUS WON'T BE ENOUGH



In every issue...

6 News

11 Question of the Fortnight
Are any computers still safe to use?

12 Letters

14 Consumeractive

16 Protect Your Tech

18 Best Free Software
Spencer

30 Buy It!

32 Competition
Win a Linksys RE6400 Wi-Fi Range Extender

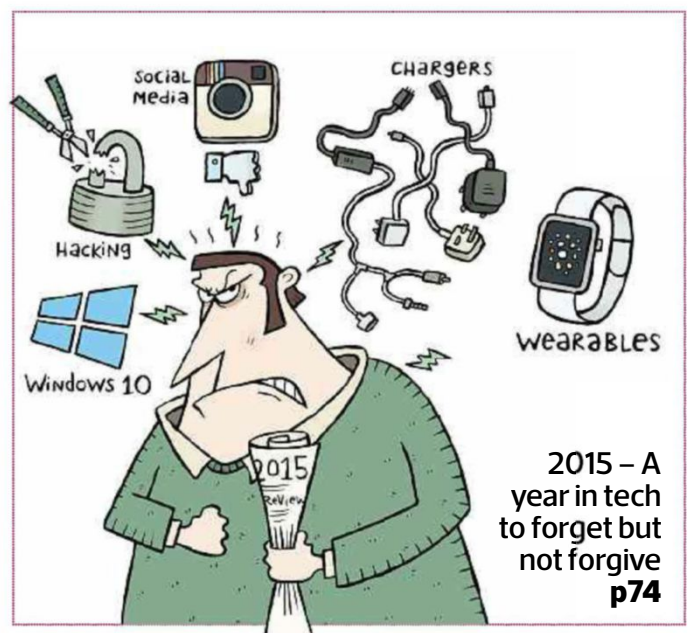
49 What's All the Fuss About? Laser drones

64 Problems Solved

69 Fast Fixes
Windows Live Mail

73 Jargon Buster

74 The Final Straw
Stuart Andrews bids an unfond farewell to 2015



**Subscribe
NOW!**

See page 62
for our special
subs offer



Microsoft Surface Pro 4 **p20**

Reviews

20 Microsoft Surface Pro 4

The best Windows tablet to date – but you'll pay through the nose

21 Acer Aspire R11

Acer's bargain hybrid struggles to cope with Windows 10

23 Apple iMac 21.5in

Apple's latest computer is style and substance in one great machine

26 Vodafone Smart Speed 6

A £50 Android smartphone – but no choice of network provider

Apple iMac 21.5in **p23**



Vodafone Smart Speed 6 **p26**



27 The Computeractive Awards 2015

With Christmas upon us, we announce our awards for this year's crackers and turkeys in the world of tech products

28 What we want in 2016

We compile our wish list for developments we'd like to see in consumer tech in the coming year

Workshops & Tips

14 pages of brilliant workshops and expert tips

35 Switch to a new PC without losing anything

38 Monitor your home online when away

40 Never miss a software update in 2016



42 Master CCleaner's brilliant new tools

43 Readers' Tips
Monitor your fitness on your PC

44 Phone and Tablet Tips
Save Skype videos to your phone

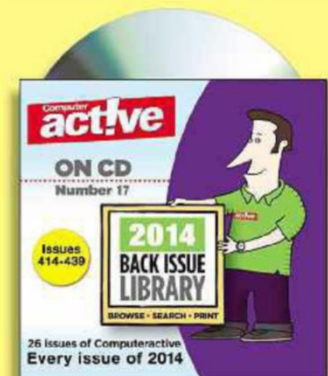
46 Make Windows Better
Use your PC's on-screen keyboard

47 Make Office Better
Add grouped images to your Sway

48 Secret Tips For...
Stellarium

Computeractive 2014 Back Issue CD

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Microsoft 'changes your PC's settings' for Windows 10

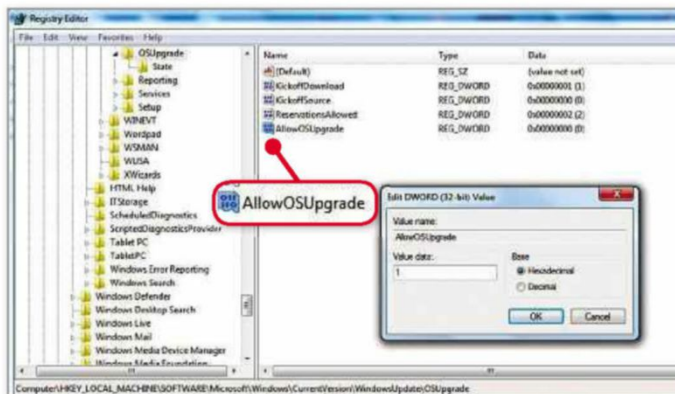
Microsoft has been secretly changing the settings of Windows 7 and 8.1 computers in order to prepare them for a Windows 10 upgrade.

The claim comes from Josh Mayfield, the creator of GWX Control Panel (<http://ultimateoutsider.com/downloads>), a free program that lets 7 and 8.1 users prevent Microsoft's 'Get Windows 10' message from repeatedly appearing.

This message pops up if you have Microsoft's 'Get Windows 10' (also known as GWX) Desktop app installed on your PC. Microsoft says the app "helps users understand their Windows 10 upgrade options and device readiness" (find out more at www.snipca.com/19098).

Microsoft has frequently updated the app with unexplained changes, and reinstalled it on PCs after users have removed it. Speaking to the website Computerworld, Mayfield said that people using GWX Control Panel had told him that Microsoft was reversing a setting that turned off the message. He said that the 'AllowOSUpgrade' setting (see screenshot) was "getting flipped back on on a number of peoples' PCs, and it keeps re-setting itself at least once a day if they switch it back off".

Mayfield suggested that this was due to repeated updates Microsoft is installing on to older computers.



Just what is Microsoft up to?

Mayfield suspects that it signals the start of an even more aggressive Microsoft campaign to persuade users of Windows 7 and 8.1 to upgrade.

He added: "This is new behaviour, and it does leave your PC vulnerable to unwanted Windows 10 upgrade behaviour".

He's also concerned about changes to the Windows Update tool on Windows 7 and 8.1 PCs. One of these, Microsoft said, "enables support for additional upgrade scenarios from Windows 7 to Windows 10" and improves the ability of the company to "monitor the quality of the upgrade experience".

Mayfield claims Microsoft's explanations don't tell the whole truth. He said that the latest changes tell Windows Update whether a PC can be upgraded to Windows 10.

He thinks that Windows

Update and the new versions of the Get Windows 10 app are working together to "lay the groundwork for something".

Mayfield didn't elaborate, but one possibility, considered likely by experts, is that Microsoft will re-categorise the Windows 10 upgrade as a 'recommended' update.

Microsoft has admitted that it intends to do this next year, a controversial decision that inspired our 'Stop & Control Windows Updates' Cover Feature in Issue 464.

It means that Windows 10 will be automatically downloaded on to PCs running 7 and 8.1, though Microsoft says you'll be "clearly prompted" to choose whether or not to install it.

That will anger Windows users, including Mayfield, who built GWX Control Panel so he could remain on Windows 7 without being incessantly urged to upgrade.

Mayfield says that his

COMMENT

Microsoft clearly doesn't believe in the lure of playing hard to get. It is behaving like an admirer whose refusal to take no for an answer has gone from slightly charming to incredibly annoying – and even a bit creepy. What's next? Phone calls at midnight from a tired and emotional Bill Gates urging you to just give Windows 10 a chance? We remain convinced that Windows 10 is a great operating system that everyone should upgrade to. But people shouldn't be bullied into it. Microsoft needs to back off.

program monitors 10 Windows settings that leave a Windows 7 or 8.1 PC "potentially vulnerable to unexpected Windows 10 upgrade behaviour".

Microsoft keeps altering those settings, and overrides changes you've made using GWX Control Panel, Mayfield said. Any changes Microsoft makes to how Windows 10 will be upgraded are detected by GWX Control Panel if you set it to run on 'Monitor Mode'.

Read Issue 466 (out Weds 6 Jan) for our Cover Feature on regaining control over Windows settings



You'll like this... Chrome for Android now blocks malware and phishing sites (www.snipca.com/19092)



... but not this Con men are trying to fool people into claiming compensation for a Microsoft scam (www.snipca.com/19093)

Want to see your GP? Then book an appointment online

Patients should be encouraged to use the internet to book appointments with their GPs, a new report says.

It also says they should use the web to order repeat prescriptions and access their medical records

The recommendations are part of a review by Martha Lane Fox into how NHS staff and patients can better use digital services.

The former internet entrepreneur and Government adviser said that by 2017 10 per cent of patients at every GP practice should be using online services to carry out basic tasks.

She also recommends that free Wi-Fi should be provided at every NHS building to help patients “self-monitor” their condition using apps approved by doctors.



Fox – a campaigner for greater internet access – was asked by Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt to examine how there could be “more digital inclusion across the NHS”.

He said that her proposals will be backed by “new investment of £1 billion in health technology announced in the autumn statement”.

Some of this money should be used to improve the digital skills of NHS staff, Fox says.

The plans were welcomed by Tim Kelsey, NHS England

national director for patients and information. He said that “digital health tools can dramatically improve people’s lives and wellbeing”.

But the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) warned that poor internet access in rural areas would hinder the plans. Dr Imran Rafi from the RCGP said that this problem needed to be addressed “as a matter of urgency”.

He said that the Government shouldn’t give GPs more responsibility “at a time when the profession is under such huge workload and resource pressures”.

Dr Rafi was cautious also about GPs recommending health apps for patients, calling for the introduction of a system to ensure they are “safe and reliable”.

IN BRIEF

STOP USING FLASH SAYS FIRM THAT MAKES IT

Adobe has begun to give up on Flash, its notoriously unsafe browser **plug-in**. In an online announcement (www.snipca.com/19078), Adobe said that it will now encourage web developers to use **HTML5** instead. This is much safer than Flash, and is built into websites, so you don’t have to install anything to play web content. Adobe says support for Flash will continue, but expects HTML5 to be “the web platform of the future”.

AMAZON ADDS NIGHT MODE TO FIRE TABLETS

Amazon has added a ‘night-reading’ mode to its 2015 range of Fire tablets. A new software update includes a tool called Blue Shade that filters the amount of blue light emitted by the screen. This light, which is known to disturb your inner body clock and disrupt sleep patterns, is replaced by a soft red hue. Read Amazon’s instructions to make sure your tablet can receive automatic updates: www.snipca.com/19083.

Take BBC iPlayer on holiday with you

You may soon be able to watch BBC iPlayer anywhere in Europe after the EU announced new proposals to remove international restrictions.

The new laws, which will need to be approved by the European Parliament, will make customers’ online subscriptions ‘portable’ within the EU.

This would mean you’ll be able to sign into any of your online accounts when you are in any EU country, letting you access services such as iPlayer, Spotify, iTunes, Netflix and Sky’s Now TV.

Currently you’re allowed to access some of these only when you’re in the UK, though millions of people use **VPNs** to disguise their



location, allowing them to watch and play streaming services in any country.

The EU hopes the changes will be implemented in 2017, which is also when it wants to ban **roaming charges**.

“People who legally buy content – films, books, football matches, TV series – must be able to carry it with them anywhere they go in Europe,”

said Andrus Ansip, the EU’s vice-president for the Digital Single Market.

The BBC welcomed the proposal, saying it was “interested in being able to allow UK licence-fee payers to access BBC iPlayer while they are on holiday in the EU”.

However it pointed out that for EU-wide access to work “complex technical issues” would need to be resolved.

The BBC also said that the UK Government would have to “modernise” the licence fee to include catch-up TV. This would let the BBC verify that people who wanted to watch iPlayer abroad had paid the licence fee.

Netflix and Sky said they were studying the details of the proposals.

Tomorrow's world

As part of its relentless mission to deliver items faster, Amazon has been testing flying drones. It has released a video, presented by Jeremy Clarkson, to make this sound as normal and unthreatening as possible (watch it at www.snipca.com/19018). A *Star Trek*-style Transporter to beam items directly to your home can only be months away.

IN BRIEF

UK HAS WORLD'S 4TH-BEST INTERNET

Only South Korea, Denmark and Iceland have better internet connections than the UK, according to a new report. The research, from the International Telecommunication Union, measures internet speed and the percentage of computer users. The UK's fourth place globally is up from 10th five years ago, and higher than Japan (11th), Germany (14th) and the US (15th).

FIREFOX CUTS ANNOYING TILE ADS

Mozilla says it will stop showing adverts that appear as tiles when you open a new tab in Firefox. The company introduced its Sponsored Tiles in November 2014, expanding it in September 2015 to include adverts based on your browsing history. But in a recent blog post (www.snipca.com/19041) Mozilla said it would end the "experiment" after proving "that advertising can be done well while respecting users".

Half of all rural homes have sub-10Mbps broadband

Around half of the UK's rural areas are still receiving broadband speeds of less than 10Mbps.

The figures come from Ofcom's annual Connected Nations report (www.snipca.com/19042), which every year analyses the state of communications and wireless networks in the UK. It shows that 1.5 million people in the countryside are still stuck with speeds under 10Mbps.

Ofcom regards 10Mbps as the minimum speed "necessary to deliver an acceptable user experience". But around 20 per cent of people can't even get 5Mbps. However, Ofcom says that overall "good progress" has been made in providing broadband across the UK.

Superfast broadband, considered by Ofcom to be 30Mbps and above, is now used in 27 per cent of homes – around 7.5 million. This is up from 21 per cent (around 6 million homes) in 2014.

But this means that millions



of people still aren't taking advantage of the faster speeds available because Ofcom says that 83 per cent of homes – approximately 24 million – could sign up to 30Mbps packages if they wanted to.

The availability of 30Mbps-plus broadband has been driven partly by BT rolling out its fibre network nationwide, and by more homes switching to Virgin Media's faster packages.

In addition, the Government's Broadband Delivery UK programme has continued to extend superfast service into areas that companies won't consider

because they don't see them as commercially viable.

Ofcom also said that how people set up their Wi-Fi and position their router, rather than poor broadband, are often to blame for slow speeds. It said that placing routers too near to other electronic devices, such as a lamp, a microwave oven or even Christmas tree lights, causes enough interference to reduce speeds.

To help users find out what's causing such problems, Ofcom has released a Wi-Fi-checker app for iOS and Android. It is free to download from www.snipca.com/19043.

Pensioner sues Apple - and wins!

Apple has been ordered to pay £2,000 damages to an iPhone user after a shop assistant in one of the company's stores wiped all his videos and photos.

On 11 December 2014, Deric White, 68 from London (pictured), took his faulty iPhone 5 to the Apple Store in Regent Street.

After examining Mr White's phone, a staff member returned it saying the problem had been "sorted". But it was at this point that Mr White



discovered that his photos, videos and other data had been deleted.

District Judge Ruth Fine, sitting at London County Court, ruled that Apple was "negligent in the treatment of the claimant's telephone". She awarded Mr White £1,200 in

compensation, and £800 in court costs.

White told the *Evening Standard* that, having fought cancer, he "was not going to get defeated by Apple".

He said that "his life" was saved on the phone. Among the content he lost were treasured photos and videos from his honeymoon, including a "favourite video of a giant tortoise biting my hand in the Seychelles".

He added: "I did this for the common man. I would say to anybody who has got a gripe with Apple – don't let them boss you about".

The world's gone mad!

Parents in the US are naming their babies after filters offered by photo-sharing website Instagram, which is used by more than 400 million people worldwide (including a plethora of selfie-loving celebrities). The popularity of the name 'Lux', which is an affect that changes a photo's brightness, rocketed by 75 per cent in 2015 (it's a boy's name, apparently). Popular for girls was 'Valencia', a filter that artificially fades a photo to make it look older.

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Named & Shamed

In a one-off special, **Jane Hoskyn** puts the boot into Microsoft's unreadable, jargon-stuffed predictions for 2016

WARNING - gobbledegook ahead

Jargon offender: Microsoft

I know it's not easy to predict the future, but is that any excuse to use horrific jargon when doing so? That's Microsoft's crime in its '16 predictions for 2016' web article (www.snipca.com/19065).

The actual start of the article refers to the company's "anthology" of short stories, released in November. Annoyingly titled 'Future Visions' (annoys the heck out of me anyway), it features work by "some of today's top science-fiction writers" and is still available for free from Amazon as an ebook (<http://news.microsoft.com/futurevisions>).

But after that gentle introduction, the article begins to drown in jargon and excruciating management-speak. Microsoft presents it as a collection of predictions from 16 "leading thinkers within our Technology and Research organisation". That sounds simple enough, even though 16 doesn't sound like an awful lot when, as Microsoft admits, it has "more than 1,000 scientists



It's beautifully illustrated, but Microsoft's 2016 predictions report is jargon

and engineers who work across multiple disciplines in research labs around the world". And yet with all that brain power, they still use the absurd phrase "we leave a lot of innovation ketchup in the bottle" to refer to technology research that doesn't reach its full potential.

To be fair to Microsoft, the 'ketchup' metaphor belongs not to someone from the company, but to Rafael Reif, president

of MIT (MIT Massachusetts Institute of Technology). But computing experts obviously love a bit of Heinz on their bacon sandwiches, because Microsoft picks up Reif's bottle, slaps it hard on the bottom, and introduces its experts' predictions by asking: "What innovation will emerge from the ketchup bottle in 2016?"

What makes it sad, or hilarious, is that these people have no idea how foolish they sound. It could have been written by David Brent, Ricky Gervais' wonderful creation from that brilliant sitcom *The Office*.

Mercifully, one or two of the experts' prophecies do make sense and are easy to understand. For example, Microsoft Research Engineer Lili Cheng says: "More kids' first jobs will be virtual rather than in a physical place. This will cause us to rethink the way we work". Most of the others, though, are riddled with jargon. I've tried to decipher the three worst below.

What are they talking about?

Doug Burger (Director of Hardware & Devices, Microsoft Research)

"2016 will be the year that reconfigurable computing (ie FPGAs) go mainstream in the datacentre, as a first-class compute accelerator."



What they mean

Computers, including big company **servers**, will increasingly use high-performance software and hardware that results in much faster **processor** power.

Brian LaMacchia (Director of Security & Cryptography, Microsoft Research)

"Hopefully by 2026 we will have deployed a new quantum-resistant public-key cryptosystem in all of our in-use security protocols and will be well on the way to deprecating a few remaining quantum-vulnerable cryptosystems."

What they mean

This one is all about security, both personal and national. As we discuss in our Cover Feature (page 50), hackers are getting more adept at cracking encryption ('cryptosystems') and next year Microsoft and national governments will move to a new, tougher level of encryption.

Krysta Svore (Senior Microsoft Researcher)

"The confirmation and demonstration of a topological qubit will be a key technology breakthrough for quantum computing in 2016."



What they mean

Quantum computing may help Microsoft develop super-efficient solar cells, revolutionise artificial intelligence (AI) and even develop groundbreaking medicines. Find out more in this jargon-free article: www.snipca.com/19069.

Question of the Fortnite

Are *any* computers still safe to use?

A triple-whammy of security flaws leaves millions of PC users at risk of attack

If you were horrified by the security holes Dell recently admitted were built into its computers (see News, Issue 464), we've got even more bad news. Since then security experts have exposed flaws in PCs and laptops made by Lenovo and Toshiba - plus *another* bug in Dell machines. Left unfixed, these can be exploited by hackers to take over your PC after they've tricked you into visiting malicious websites or opening infected email attachments.

Following the Lenovo Superfish scandal in February 2015, the latest flaws are further evidence that the built-in tools manufacturers are cramming into their computers are riddled with security defects.

In terms of the number of people affected, the most serious new flaw concerns the Lenovo Solution Center (LSC), a pre-installed tool found on many of the manufacturer's bestselling PCs and laptops. Lenovo is the world's biggest PC manufacturer, accounting for 21 per cent of all computers sold in 2015 (see Wikipedia for new and historical statistics related to PC sales: www.snipca.com/19061). The company sold around 50 million computers in 2015, which leaves a vast number of people at risk of attack.

Launched in August 2015, LSC lets users check the overall health and security of their machine (check Lenovo's site for more information: www.snipca.com/19057). But in December a hacker who calls himself 'Slipstream/RoL'



“It's further evidence that the tools manufacturers are cramming into their computers are riddled with security holes”

on Twitter (@TheWackOlian) posted details online of how the LSC could be exploited by cybercriminals.

To make matters worse, he did this before informing Lenovo, giving other hackers a chance to take advantage before the company could release a fix. Security researchers at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University investigated the alleged flaw and confirmed that LSC contains “multiple vulnerabilities”.

Lenovo's response was quick, but not particularly helpful. On its support page (www.snipca.com/19055) the company said it was “assessing” the accusations and would provide a fix “as rapidly as possible”. Until

then, Lenovo said, worried users should uninstall LSC.

But Lenovo failed to say which specific models were affected by the flaw, prompting security experts to urge users to play it safe and remove LSC from all ThinkPad, IdeaPad, ThinkCenter, IdeaCenter and ThinkState computers.

One crumb of comfort is that the security hole can't be exploited without you first launching LSC. If you've left it untouched since buying your computer, you don't need to worry – though you should still uninstall it.

Both the Dell and Toshiba flaws that have come to light also involve built-in tools that help you maintain the health of your PC. The Toshiba

THE FACTS

- Dell, Lenovo and Toshiba PCs have all been shown to contain security flaws hackers could exploit
- Details of the flaws were published online before the manufacturers had time to fix them
- Lenovo says you should uninstall its Support Center tool to avoid being hacked

Service Station automatically searches for software updates “and other alerts” that, the company claims, you need to install on your computer.

Dell's System Detect, meanwhile, is a repeat offender. It's meant to make it easier for users to fix problems when contacting the company's support website. However, Dell was forced to update it in November after admitting it contained an unsafe security certificate that hackers could exploit. Just a few days later Slipstream/RoL claimed that despite this update, System Detect was still unsafe.

At the time of writing neither Dell nor Toshiba had commented on the alleged flaws, but you should check that you're using the latest versions of both tools (Dell www.snipca.com/19062; Toshiba: www.snipca.com/19063).

Between them Lenovo, Dell and Toshiba sold almost 100 million computers in 2015. That's a lot of people now wondering whether it will ever be safe again to switch on their computer.

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind



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www.twitter.com/computeractive

Unsurprising that older people are more cautious

 I don't think we should be surprised that older people take online security more seriously than young whippersnappers. Even if it were true that older people know less about technology (and I would dispute this), they are more cautious and less trusting than people under 30. There's no real mystery behind this. As you get older, you just take fewer risks – on the internet as well as in the 'real' world.


I remember well that feeling of youthful invincibility. When you're a teenager, you think nothing can hurt you. You kid yourself into thinking that you're going to live forever. That feeling evaporates over time. I'm now 75, and feel less invincible, and therefore I take fewer risks in life. Maybe you get a bit more paranoid, too. My default setting when I'm online is to not trust anything. That attitude may be over the top, but it sure keeps you safe!

Douglas Allott

 Young people tend to be a lot more relaxed about the inevitability of crime, which may explain why they don't treat online security very seriously. When reading your news story I was reminded of something my 19-year-old grandson said to me. He lives in what I would call a 'dodgy' part of London and therefore accepts that he will probably be mugged at some point. Indeed, he and his mates think it's been a good year if they only get mugged once. He just shrugs, and says it's just part of life. I don't think older people are as blasé as that.

Pat Goddard

Binning the Tesco Connect


 I have to agree with your verdict on the Tesco Connect 10 (Reviews, Issue 463 – see image above right). If anything, two stars was a bit generous. I bought it a few weeks ago, and it was my first tablet. I've been using my son's iPad on and off, and thought I really should get my own tablet. But I didn't want to break the bank. I made the mistake of thinking you could get iPad quality on a £100 tablet. I guess I should have realised this wouldn't happen, but I'll put it down to a beginner's error. I'm binning the



Connect 10, but I still can't afford an iPad, so I'll get an Android tablet next, probably Google's Nexus.

David Shaw

Keeping the Tesco Connect

 I bought one about two weeks ago, and feel the review in Issue 463 was unfair and not a true reflection of the tablet. OK, it is slightly bigger than the few other Windows 10 tablets available, but it is not a "brick". In fact, it is very comfortable to hold and use, and starts quickly.


I've never had problems seeing anything on screen, even when I've used it while in bright sunlight. The battery life is very good when you're browsing the internet, sending emails, or word

processing (although heavy apps do tend to drain it). It also comes with free versions of Word Mobile, Excel Mobile and PowerPoint Mobile, more than other tablets on the market.

It's unfair to compare it with Apple products when they cost 3–4 times as much. Overall I'm more than happy with it.

Stephen Ellis

Windows 10: only shutting down makes me feel safe

 Over the years I've preferred to put my computer into sleep mode when I'm not using it, simply because the start time is far quicker than full shut down.

Since installing Windows 10, I have become rather concerned about privacy as Microsoft seems to have access to my laptop at any time, day or night – even in sleep mode. I've noticed on a couple of occasions that my screen was blank but on, and the my PC's LEDs were lit and flickering. Checking what was happening I found that Windows was updating while my laptop was asleep.

I unchecked the option to allow remote access in settings but this made no difference. Now I have to

Yahoo can 'get stuffed' about blocking access to emails

 I can't be the only person shocked by Yahoo's decision to prevent some of its US users from reading their emails if they use an ad-blocking tool (News, Issue 464). I didn't start blocking adverts until about a year ago, when I finally got fed up with marketing videos that flood my screen, selling products I will never want.

A decade or so ago, internet adverts were less annoying. They were simple, static ads that couldn't offend anybody. They didn't suddenly open into loud videos, or pop up just because you moved your mouse over a particular word. I was happy for them to be there,

because it kept websites free. But it's all changed since then. Websites no longer care about ease of use. They just want the money from advertisers. Frankly, Yahoo, you can get stuffed. I'm going to switch to another service.

Michael Holt



completely shut down my computer to feel my security is no longer being compromised.

Michael E Weaver

Crackers to think Microsoft is charitable

✉ Are you sure Steve Jacobs isn't Bill Gates in disguise ('Microsoft is generous, not aggressive', Letters, Issue 464)? It's absurd and naive to say Microsoft is being charitable by extending support for Windows 7 until 2020. Mr Jacobs is crackers if he thinks that Microsoft cares a jot about Windows 7. If they could, Microsoft would pull the plug on it tomorrow, then on Windows 8.1 the day after that, and force everyone to use Windows 10 forever. In fact, given the company's erratic behaviour recently, I wouldn't be surprised if they did just that.

Jeremy Edmonds

Windows 10 has made me smell

✉ It started off so well. Three weeks ago, when my hard drive died, I was persuaded by my local PC shop to let them do a clean install of Windows 10 (I recall their highly technical endorsement to be "do it! do it! – it's the best operating system ever").

Well I have to say, I am impressed. All my programs and hardware migrated without a hitch (even my old Epson scanner), but there is a problem. You see, I have (or rather had) a routine. And being an older person, this routine was set in stone: get up, switch on computer, shower, start work on computer. Unfortunately, with a 25 second start-up, I no longer have the time to shower. So I apologise to anyone in my immediate vicinity, but it's Microsoft's fault!

Susan Bentley

Forget Windows 10 - XP still does everything I need

✉ I and other users of Windows XP have never criticised or made fun of readers keen to update to Windows 8 and Windows 10 – even though some of them have called us "dinosaurs" and suggested that XP should be killed off. But there are good reasons for staying with XP despite it being an old operating system.



Windows 7, a much improved version of Vista, is very good. I have a computer running Windows 7, but I prefer XP Pro on my Dell Dimension 5100. Instead of improving Windows 7, Microsoft created yet another new system –

Windows 8, which was almost as unfit for purpose as Vista.

Now we have Windows 10 and while some readers are happy with it, others have found quite a few shortcomings and defects. What makes the situation worse

STAR LETTER

PC sales are falling because customers are less gullible

✉ In your Comment on the Dell computer flaws (News, Issue 464), you mention that scandals like these are partly responsible for the fall in PC sales. You may be right, and when I do buy my next PC (maybe next year), I will certainly think twice about choosing a Dell or Lenovo model. I don't like the way these companies seem to take their customers for granted.

But I suspect there's another reason behind the decline in computer sales: PC users are not as gullible as they once were. I remember being completely bamboozled by computers back in the 1990s, when I bought my first one. I wouldn't say I was conned by the PC salesman, but he certainly sold me an expensive dud. The problem was, I didn't feel confident enough to question his dubious sales pitch.

But that was a long time ago. Since then, like millions of other people, I have been on a steep learning curve. I have discovered more about computers than I ever thought possible, thanks mostly to a combination of curiosity, perseverance and, of course, the tips and advice in *Computeractive*.

If I met that salesman now, I'd feel knowledgeable enough to sell *him* a



computer. It all means that I take every exaggerated claim from computer manufacturers with a pinch of salt. I don't automatically swallow every boast about record speeds or massive memory.

As a result, people like me don't feel bullied into buying a new PC every five years – although Microsoft bullying us to upgrade to Windows 10 is another story. We now know through 20 years of PC experience (30 for some people) that computers don't become obsolete overnight. We can resist the marketing spin from companies because we no longer get intimidated by vacuous salesman. If anything, these days they get intimidated by us!

Anthea Crayford

The Star Letter writer wins a *Computeractive* mug!



is that Microsoft is forcefully downloading Windows 10 to Windows 7 users, and dictating what users should or shouldn't have on their PCs.

What Microsoft fails to understand is that, just like some people do not need to drive a Maserati or a Rolls Royce and are happy with a Ford or a Nissan, the same principle applies to computer systems. That is why I am happy with XP. It has everything I need and is, when backed up with protection, 100-per-cent reliable. I use Avast, Malwarebytes Anti-Malware, Malwarebytes Anti-Exploit, F-Secure and AdwCleaner.

Tom Tottis

Consumeractive

Can I get a refund for a dodgy download?

Q I mistakenly bought from Currys a download of Microsoft's Office 365 University, instead of the ordinary version. It wouldn't download to my PC, but Currys refuses to give me a refund, insisting it *has* been downloaded. Can I get a refund?

Richard Newsam

A Let's get the legal stuff out of the way first. Based on what Richard has told us, he's not entitled to an automatic refund because he has attempted to download the software. The law says that after buying software, you have 14 days to ask for a refund, but only if you haven't downloaded the program.

However, he can still claim for an unsuccessful download. Currys must repair or replace the download. Only if this isn't possible can Richard get a refund, but Currys has complicated the case by insisting the

program was downloaded without a problem. Amid this confusion we've asked Currys to investigate, possibly to see whether it can help Richard get the software working.

CASE ONGOING

Do I have any legal rights for a faulty prize?

Q I was lucky enough to win an Acer Aspire E laptop in a Breeze FM radio competition in January this year. However, several weeks later it started to randomly switch itself off. I've sent it back to Acer for repair three times, but the problem is still ongoing. I initially picked up the laptop from a shop in Petersfield, Hampshire called Syn-Star (<http://syn-pc.co.uk>). They say they aren't liable to offer a replacement, while Acer says I'm entitled only to another repair under the warranty. Are my rights affected because the laptop was a prize not a purchase?

Jan Mclean

A Unfortunately, Jan doesn't have any legal rights, despite her local Trading Standards office saying that the Sale of Goods Act (SOGA) applies in her case. We double-checked this with the Trading Standards Institute, which said that because the laptop is a competition prize, Jan doesn't have a legal contract with any of the parties concerned: Breeze, Acer or Syn-Star.

This may sound unfair, so we'll explain why. For a contract to exist between a customer and a retailer, a 'consideration' must have taken place;

this usually means money has changed hands, which hasn't happened in this case. The short of it is because Acer donated the laptop, it hasn't formed a contract with Breeze or Syn-Star – and none of these has formed a contract with Jan.

However, there could be hope for Jan. Syn-Star says it has asked Acer to replace the laptop as a goodwill gesture, rather than repair it again. As for Breeze, it told us it wasn't happy to hear about the problems Jan has had. It was apologetic, but said it couldn't be held responsible because the prize had been arranged through a third party. Also, Breeze's terms and conditions don't protect its winners for prizes that are inherently faulty (www.snipca.com/18865).

CASE ONGOING



Is Tesco ignoring consumer rights?

Q I've got two questions about Tesco's mobile-phone service. Can I get a reduced monthly charge using the same phone once the two-year contract is finished and the phone has been paid for? Also, isn't Tesco responsible for repairs to the phone after the 12-month warranty has expired?

Will Clemments

A Some companies will drop the monthly fee once the phone has been paid off, so Will should ask Tesco and renegotiate a new contract. He should be able to use the same phone and SIM card.

As for repairs after a warranty ends, Tesco must carry one out if the phone is inherently faulty. Tesco is wrong to simply say that after 12 months the

TESCO

customer has to pay for a repair. Because an inherent fault may not appear for quite a while, the law gives you up to six years (five in Scotland) to seek a refund. The retailer is allowed to deduct some money depending on how long you've used an item.

CASE CLOSED



✉ Contact us so we can investigate your case

Email: consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk

Write: Consumeractive, Computeractive, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD
Please include both your phone number and address.
Unfortunately, we can't reply to all your letters.

We stand up for your legal rights

Can I get a refund for a faulty battery?

Q I ordered from Dell an Inspiron 15 5559 laptop, but it came with a US power cable and adapter. I eventually got the correct cables, but now the battery is refusing to charge. I've spent so long on the phone to Dell being passed from pillar to post. Am I entitled to an automatic refund?

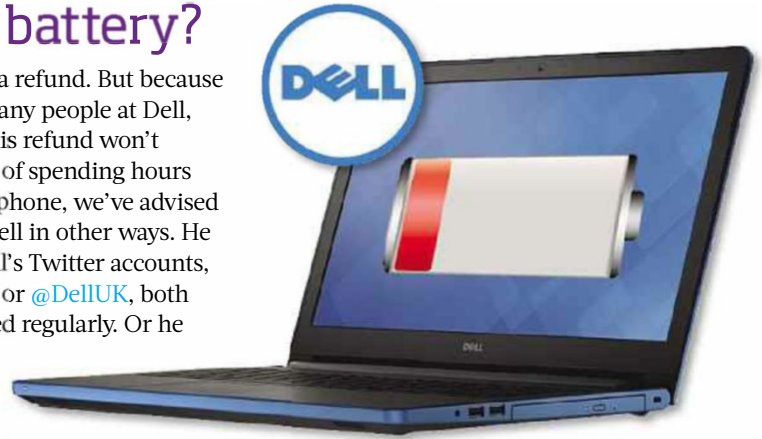
Adrian Morris

A We understand Adrian's frustration, but we're sorry to say he's not entitled to a refund. First, Dell is allowed to offer a repair or replacement. This is because more than 30 days have passed since purchase. Within 30 days, he would have been able to force Dell to refund him.

Happily though, during his numerous phone conversations with Dell, Adrian

has been promised a refund. But because he's spoken to so many people at Dell, he's worried that this refund won't materialise. Instead of spending hours hanging on the telephone, we've advised Adrian to contact Dell in other ways. He could try one of Dell's Twitter accounts, such as @DellCares or @DellUK, both of which are updated regularly. Or he could even go straight to the top and contact the company's chairman and founder Michael Dell (@MichaelDell).

Contacting companies is one of the best reasons to use Twitter. Any problems reported by customers can be seen by millions of people on Twitter, so companies are keen to nip them in the bud.



Adrian could also try Dell's live-chat support (www.snipca.com/18866), which is open Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm.

We've emailed Dell to contact Adrian as a matter of urgency to arrange a refund, or supply a replacement battery.

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE



Google stays shunt about Android update 'breaking' tablets

It may be easy to get answers from Google when you search online, but less so when you want the company to comment on Android devices broken by updates. We've spent the

past month badgering Google on behalf of readers such as Paul Spicer, whose case we covered in Issue 460. Since it updated to Android 5.0 (Lollipop), his Nexus 7 tablet keeps getting stuck on the Google logo.

Despite contacting many of our sources at Google, including David Drummond, the company's Senior Vice President of Corporate Development and Chief Legal Officer, we couldn't get an official comment. This leaves Paul and thousands of others with a broken tablet, because there is no law that allows customers to seek a refund for damage caused by a software update.

As a last resort, customers could force a group litigation, in which several related claims can be judged collectively. It can be an effective way to fight back against faceless companies that are hard to deal with. Google has been targeted this way before, when three people in the UK sued the company for tracking their browsing habits (www.snipca.com/18867).

However, lawyers specialising in group litigation warn that any such action would be a time-consuming process and potentially very expensive. But if you're in a similar position to Paul Spicer – and we know thousands are – you may get somewhere if you email David Drummond en masse at daviddrummond@google.com.

THIS WILL COME IN USEFUL

Check which software version you're running

Adobe Flash Player
www.snipca.com/18806

Internet Explorer
www.snipca.com/18807

Adobe Reader
www.snipca.com/18821

Norton
www.snipca.com/18820

Avast
www.snipca.com/18818

Office
www.snipca.com/18813

Chrome
www.snipca.com/18812

Opera
www.opera.com/docs/history

Firefox
www.snipca.com/18809

Outlook
www.snipca.com/18819

Google Maps app
www.snipca.com/18814

Skype
www.snipca.com/18815

Java
www.snipca.com/18808

Windows
www.snipca.com/18810

Kaspersky
www.snipca.com/18817

Windows Media Player
www.snipca.com/18816



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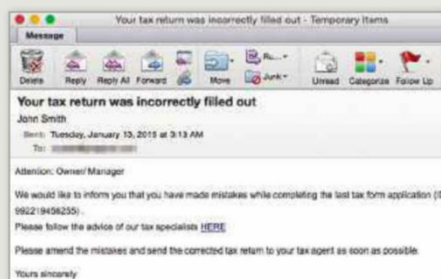
Banking trojan targeting Windows 10

What happened?

Windows 10 users were warned to be extra vigilant after a new version of a deadly banking trojan emerged with the aim of specifically attacking Microsoft's latest operating system.

First spotted in June 2014, the Dyre malware (also called Dyreza) has been compared to the notorious Zeus trojan, which hackers have been using since 2007 to steal money from bank accounts.

Dyre works by allowing hackers to intercept unencrypted web traffic. Victims think they are securely connected to their banking website, but any log-in information they type will instead be seen by the criminals behind the attack. Analysis has found that it has targeted UK-based customers of Citibank, Natwest, RBS, Barclays, Lloyds TSB and Bank of America.



It has remained a severe threat throughout 2015, although until November it had not targeted Windows 10 users, focusing instead on XP, Vista, 7 and 8. Proof of its new strategy was provided by Danish security company Heimdal (www.snipca.com/18840), which said that 80,000 Windows PCs worldwide are now part of the Dyre botnet. This number is likely to rise sharply now that over 110 million

Windows 10 PCs are at risk.

Heimdal also said that the new version of Dyre attacks Edge, Microsoft's new browser, and its long-term replacement for Internet Explorer.

What should you do?

Dyre spreads through phishing emails, so as always be deeply suspicious of any unexpected messages you receive. In particular, look out for dodgy emails that contain a .EXE file and claim to be from a tax consultant (see screenshot). Delete it immediately – it's probably infected with Dyre.

It also sends emails with PDF attachments, hoping to exploit out-of-date versions of Adobe Reader. Make sure you're using the most version of the software by checking at www.snipca.com/18842.

New tools

Privazer 2.39.3
<http://privazer.com>

Even before Microsoft confirmed that Windows Media Center (WMC) wouldn't be part of Windows 10, we were recommending that you use VLC Media Player (www.videolan.org) instead. No other media program makes it as easy to play music and video. If you followed our advice, and have used the program a lot, you'll probably have some leftover VLC files scattered throughout your PC doing nothing except taking up space.

You could try to get rid of them by using the latest version of Privazer, which has been updated specifically to tackle VLC files (like us, the developers must think that millions of people have made the switch from WMC to VLC).



Privazer is a reputable PC-cleaning tool; one to consider if you find that CCleaner doesn't work for you. It has also been updated to remove junk left by Edge, Microsoft's new default browser in Windows 10, including files that show what you've downloaded online and websites you've visited.

ScamWatch

READERS WARN READERS

Fooled by fake iTunes invoice

I bought my first iPhone a few months ago, which was probably why I was targeted by an Apple-related email scam. The email – from 'iTunes Store' – contains an invoice for £42.99 for an app I'd apparently paid for, a sat-nav tool called TomTom Western Europe. But I'd never pay that much for an app. It's a clever scam because you urgently feel the need to click the 'iTunes Payment Cancellation Form' link at the bottom of the invoice. I did this, and was asked for my bank details. It became obvious at that point that it was a scam.

Roger Clarkson



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



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START MENU TOOL

Spencer

www.snipca.com/18930

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



This portable tool restores all the missing shortcuts and hidden tools you used to see in your Start menu before Windows 8/8.1 or 10 sidelined them. It puts them back exactly where you want them, in a single, easy-to-access Windows XP-style menu.

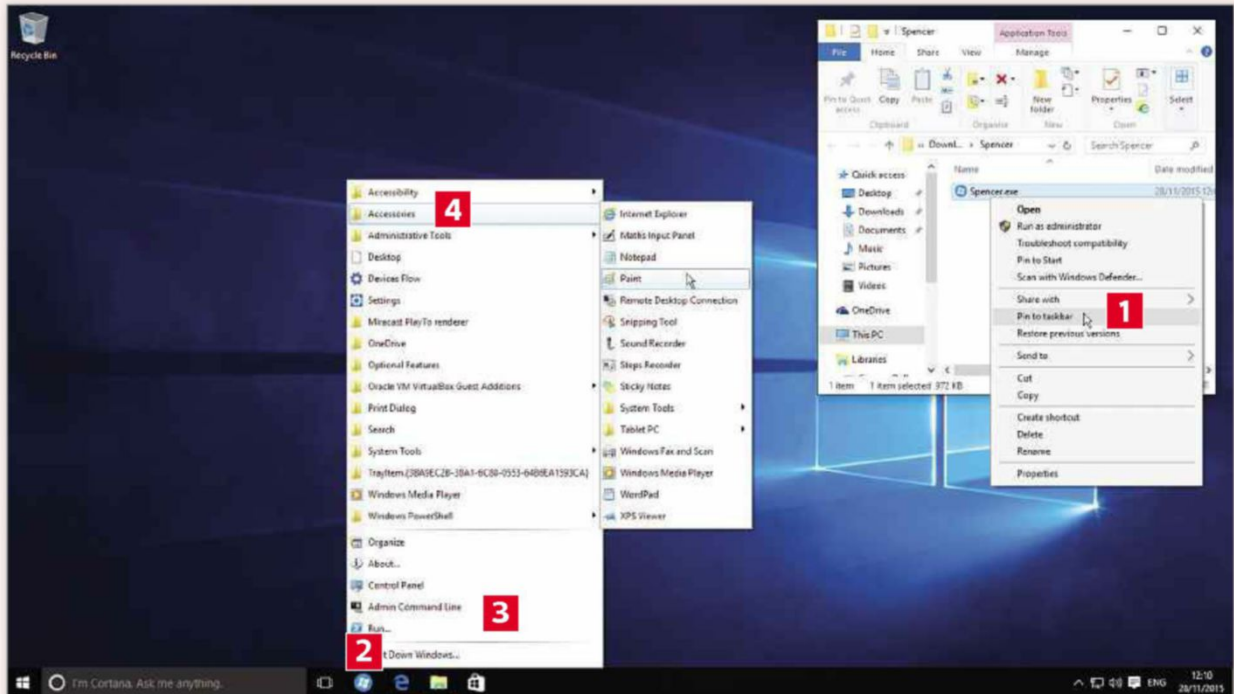
It doesn't replace your Start button or give you loads of customising features – for that, you'll need the powerful free tool Classic Shell (www.classicshell.net). Instead, Spencer (which is much easier to use than Classic Shell) adds a secondary Windows icon to your taskbar.

Click this icon and you'll see the familiar menu of installed programs and tools, including the old Accessories menu, where you'll find traditional Windows tools such as Paint, WordPad and Sound Recorder.

Spencer also provides quick access to the Control Panel, the Accessibility menu and the Print dialogue box, as well as the Run tool and an administrator-level Command Prompt. These tools are still there in Windows 8/8.1 and 10, but they're buried in Start menu sub-menus or Start Screen tiles.

If you run Spencer in Windows 8, it'll add a handy Windows 7-style 'Shut down' button to the menu. In Windows 10, the tool also provides quick links to many of Windows 10's updated tools – including OneDrive and Windows Defender – as well as old favourites.

Besides being easier to use than Classic Shell, Spencer also has the advantage of not having to be installed. However, to get it to work, you'll need to create a shortcut, as we explain below.

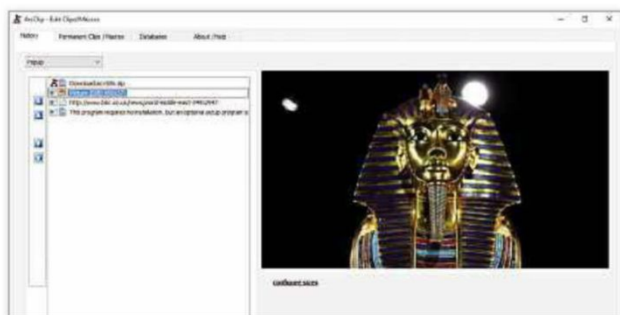


1 After downloading Spencer's ZIP file from the site, extract its contents and then right-click the program file ('Spencer.exe') and select 'Pin to taskbar'.

2 Click and drag the Spencer icon to your taskbar and drop it as far to the left as possible. In Windows 10 this will be just to the right of the Task View button.

3 Click the icon to see Spencer's Start menu – it's similar to All Programs in XP. In the lower section, you'll see direct links to Run and other admin tools.

4 Higher up, you'll see all your installed programs and tools in alphabetical order. Just as in XP, click Accessories to find Paint, WordPad and more.



CLIPBOARD MANAGER

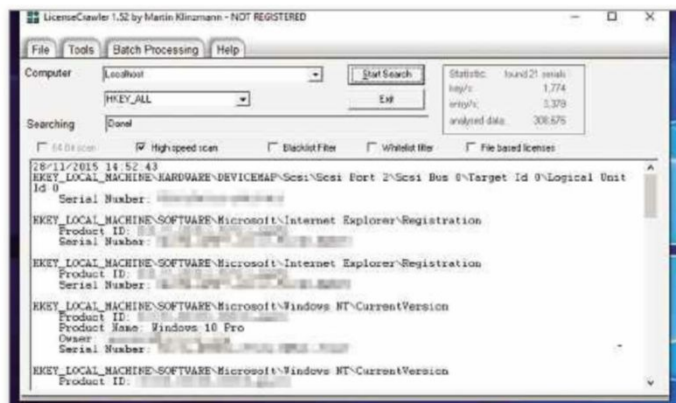
Portable ArsClip 5.6

www.snipca.com/18932

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

Windows' built-in clipboard tool is pretty limited. When you copy something – text, a photo or a link, for example – it's held temporarily for you to paste somewhere else. But as soon as you copy something else, the original item is overwritten.

ArsClip replaces Windows Clipboard with a tool containing all the features you wish the original had. You can monitor, view and edit your clipboard history, set certain items to stay on the clipboard permanently and, in the new version, assign keyboard shortcuts for specific items. You can download an installable version, but we prefer the portable version because it's quicker and easier to get started with.



LICENCE KEY FINDER

LicenseCrawler 1.52

www.snipca.com/18933

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

Portable tool LicenseCrawler lets you scan your PC for all your licence numbers (also known as product keys) and back them up for safekeeping. Without the licence numbers that came with your paid-for programs, you may not be able to install them again after, say, wiping your PC or buying a new computer.

To download the ZIP file, click the 'Mirror Server (1)' link at the bottom of the list of [download mirrors](#) at the link above. Extract the ZIP's contents, open the folder inside, right-click 'LicenseCrawler.exe' and then click 'Run as administrator'. Ignore the advert – the program is completely free for home use.

WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

We tell you what software to use

What program should I use to organise my messy files?

Q I have two PCs, a tablet, a phone and two external hard drives, full of documents, photos, music, videos and other files. I seem to have multiple duplicate backups of everything, everywhere.

I need a program that can do a sweep of everything, grabbing one copy of every file and putting them in one place, then ideally sorting the files by type. Can you help?

Ethel Trueman

A This is a maddening problem that afflicts many of us – but amazingly, there's no single program that will magically sort them.

First, use a free tool like Duplicate & Same Files Searcher (www.snipca.com/18945 – see our Workshop on page 40 of Issue 453. Unlike most “free” duplicate-finders it won't charge you to remove the duplicate files it finds.

The problem of files spread across all your devices can be alleviated, if not completely solved, by using a secure online storage service. Microsoft OneDrive (<https://onedrive.live.com>, pre-installed in Windows 8.1 and 10) provides 5GB of free storage; Google Drive (www.google.com/drive) offers 15GB free; and Dropbox (www.dropbox.com) offers 2GB. It's worth paying a couple of pounds a month for extra storage; check the sites for storage options and prices.

If you install the Windows versions of any of these storage tools, they will create a special folder on your PC. Move all your files into the folder, making sub-folders for documents, music, photos and so on. These folders will sync across all your devices (as long as you install the corresponding mobile apps), ensuring that all your files sync automatically, are stored in secure online servers and can be accessed from any device.



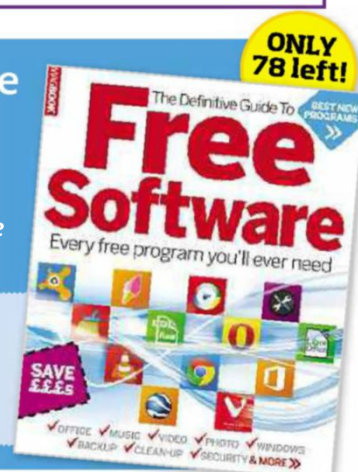
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Reviews

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Microsoft Surface Pro 4

The portable computer redesigned

Why should you care about the Surface Pro 4? It's just another Microsoft tablet that's mostly aimed at business users, and it's very expensive. True – but it's a real milestone for portable PCs. It takes an idea that computer makers have been trying to get right for years, and finally makes it work.

The Surface Pro 4 comes with Windows 10, while most tablets run mobile operating systems like Google's Android or Apple's iOS. There are plenty of apps available for those, but not Windows' range of full-scale office, creative and specialist programs. Other Windows tablets are much bulkier than this, like laptops that have been chopped in half.

At 8.5mm thick and 786g, this is a proper tablet, thinner and not much heavier than the original iPad but with a broader 12.3in screen. Our model had an Intel Core i5 **processor**, similar to those normally found in laptops and desktop PCs. This needs a fan to cool it, so the Surface Pro 4 doesn't quite have the 'magic slab' feel of an iPad Air. You'll hear a soft mechanical whir that gets louder the harder it works.

You can save £100 and lose the fan by choosing a less powerful Intel M3 chip. The point of the i5 is that you get a fully capable PC. It wouldn't be ideal for jobs like video editing, but web browsing and office tasks zip along very smoothly. We even managed to run 3D games by turning down their quality settings. With only 4GB of memory, you'll see some

delays if you run a lot of programs at once, and the 128GB of **flash storage** is only enough for a limited amount of files, photos and videos. Doubling those specifications increases the price to £1,079.

You'll also need to consider buying the Type Cover (£110). It's a floppy clip-on rather than a rigid laptop keyboard, but because the tablet has a built-in kickstand, it's possible to arrange the two on your lap and type comfortably without a desk. The Type Cover also includes an excellent touchpad, so you don't have to keep swiping the touchscreen.

One thing that doesn't cost extra is the Surface Pen stylus. It's not quite as sophisticated as Apple's Pencil, a £79 add-on to the iPad Pro, but it does draw thicker lines if you press harder. The Pen works really well with Microsoft's free OneNote software, which you can use to organise documents and web pages with your own scribbled notes. The display is so fine that you'll want to set Windows 10's display scale to 200 per cent, otherwise icons and labels will only be readable by ants. Colours look great, covering 97.5 per cent of the **sRGB** range; contrast is high, and brightness can be turned up to almost blinding levels.

Besides an 8-**megapixel** camera on the back, there's a webcam on the front that supports Windows 10's 'Hello' feature. This recognises your face, so when you look at the tablet it unlocks itself. A full-size **USB 3.0** port lets you plug in

accessories, and there's a **microSD card** slot for extra storage. Decent speakers are built in. The supplied mains adapter has a spare USB port (omitted from the M3 model) to charge other devices. Once charged, our Surface Pro 4 kept going for just over seven hours, impressive for a Windows system.

We won't deny it: unless you're spending someone else's money, the Surface Pro 4 costs too much. It also froze on us a couple of times, requiring a restart. But it does prove a tablet could replace your main PC.

SPECIFICATIONS

2.4GHz Intel i5-6300U dual-core processor • Intel HD Graphics 520 • 4GB memory • 128GB flash storage • 12.3in 2736x1824-pixel touchscreen • 8-megapixel rear camera • 5-megapixel webcam • MicroSD slot • USB 3.0 port • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Windows 10 Pro • 292x201x8.5mm (HxWxD) • 786g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18906

VERDICT: The best Windows tablet so far. If you're not tempted yet, just wait until something this powerful gets a bit cheaper

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Surface 3 £449 The smaller Surface is a better deal for most users, although the Pen costs extra



LAPTOP | £220 from PC World www.snipca.com/18918

Acer Aspire R11 (R3-131T)

Life in plastic's not fantastic

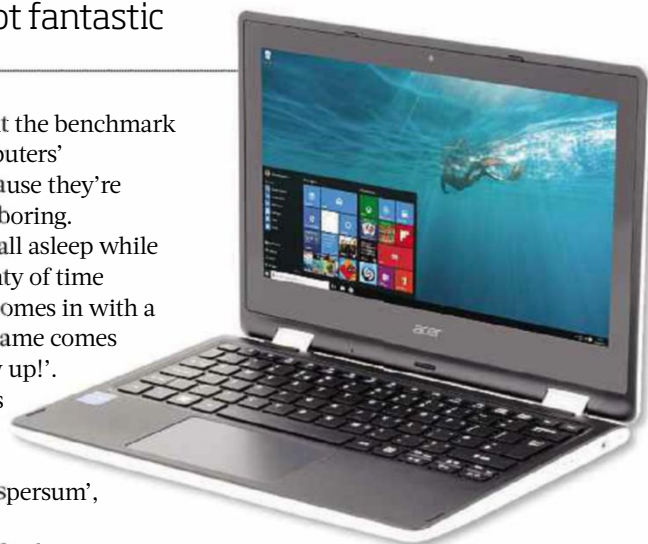
We don't often talk about the benchmark tests we use to rate computers' performance. That's because they're boring. Really, seriously boring. Sometimes we actually fall asleep while doing them. There's plenty of time for sleeping when a PC comes in with a Celeron **processor**. The name comes from the Latin for 'hurry up!'. Presumably this is Intel's little joke. We prefer to think of it as an abbreviation of 'Cornu aspersum', the garden snail.

Here's a case in point. Mid-range desktop PCs score 50-odd in our usual round of tests. Fancy ones get over 100. The Aspire R11, equipped with the recently introduced Celeron N3050, managed 7. Yes, seven. If processors were Eurovision Song Contest entries, Celeron would be the UK. To be fair, it's not Montenegro. But don't buy this laptop expecting Sweden on a budget.

For everyday stuff like web browsing and video playing, it's fine. The R11's tiny 2GB of memory means there'll be pauses when switching back and forth between apps – this isn't helped by the sluggish mechanical hard drive. But its 500GB capacity does give you a decent amount of room for documents, music, photos and videos, unlike some budget laptops with fast but small **flash storage**.

Despite traditional features like this and a full set of ports, the R11 is slim and reasonably light. It's unashamedly plasticky, but solid – in fact, it feels like the sort of protective case you might buy for a more delicate machine.

So it's easy to carry, and with a battery that lasted us more than nine



hours of light use, you won't have to come back early.

The 11.1in screen isn't great, with limited brightness and contrast and colours too dull for graphical work such as photo editing. That's to be expected in this price bracket, and shouldn't matter too much for most purposes. At least its rigid hinges keep it firmly propped at your chosen angle. It's also a touchscreen, and can be folded all the way back against the keyboard for use as a tablet. Install the free upgrade to Windows 10, with its neat Tablet mode, and this works well, but it's too bulky to compare to a dedicated tablet.

As a laptop, the R11 is pleasant to use, with a comfortable keyboard. When used this way, it makes more sense to move the cursor with the touchpad rather than swipe the screen. Unfortunately, we found the touchpad didn't work reliably with Windows 10, even after we'd found and installed a new **driver** from its maker's website (www.snipca.com/18919).

Acer says it's working on this, but for now it means we can't recommend the R11. If you come into possession of one, stick to Windows 8.1.

SPECIFICATIONS

1.6GHz Intel Celeron N3050 processor • 2GB memory • 500GB hard drive • Intel HD Graphics • 11.1in 1360x768-pixel screen • Webcam • SD card slot • 1x USB 2.0 port • 1x USB 3.0 port • Gigabit Ethernet port • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.0 • Windows 8.1 (free upgrade to Windows 10) • 21x298x211mm (HxWxD) • 1.58kg • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/18918

HOW WE TEST

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

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

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

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

OUR AWARDS



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



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

PRICES

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

VERDICT: A practical hybrid at an attractive price, but its difficulties handling Windows 10 means you're better off looking elsewhere



ALTERNATIVE: Toshiba Satellite C40-C £200 It doesn't fold into a tablet and has just 32GB of flash storage in place of a hard drive, but the touchpad works



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DESKTOP PC | £899 from Apple Store www.snipca.com/18761

Apple iMac 21.5in (2015)

The cheapest iMac gets even better

It was once the plucky underdog, but after 31 years the Apple Macintosh is more popular than ever. This update to its 21.5in all-in-one incarnation brings the option of an ultra-sharp, **4K-resolution** display, but that's a bit of a red herring. Most people will be fine with the standard Full HD model, which has an excellent screen and now comes with a faster **processor**, improved graphics and a bigger hard drive for the same price as before.

“OS X, Apple's equivalent of Windows, runs smoothly, and the free apps are elegant and easy to use”

That price still looks quite high, however. We've tested plenty of Windows desktop PCs that come with a monitor for £200 less and outperform the iMac. What you're getting with the Apple is not so much a PC as a piece of designer furniture. The solid aluminium case – smoothly curving at the back to an outer edge thinner than an iPhone – is one of the most beautiful objects you can buy for under £1,000.

Its major flaw is that there's no easy way to get inside it and, unlike the 27in version, it doesn't have a hatch for memory upgrades. 8GB will be enough for most tasks, but if you want 16GB you have to order it up front at a ridiculous £160 – four times the normal cost of the chips. You might be better off spending that on swapping the 1TB hard drive for 256GB of **flash storage**. The mechanical drive gives you plenty of space, but makes the iMac feel slower than a MacBook.

While you're considering upgrades, there's also a £1,049 model with a superior 2.8GHz **quad-core** Intel i5 processor and slightly faster graphics. Stick with the basic £899 configuration and it's, well, basic. If you're into 3D

games, the Intel Iris Pro 6000 **graphics card** will cope with quite a few, but may struggle with new ones, and many of those available for Windows don't exist for the Mac.

For other purposes, OS X, Apple's equivalent of Windows, runs very smoothly, and the free apps – including the iMovie video editor and GarageBand music studio, as well as rivals to Word, Excel and PowerPoint – are elegant and easy to use. Thousands of other apps are available to download from the Mac App Store and elsewhere, including Mac versions of Microsoft Office, Adobe's creative software and so on. The supplied mouse and compact keyboard are excellent as long as you don't need a number pad; a full keyboard and gesture-sensing Magic Trackpad are optional extras.

Should you discover a few hundred quid down the back of the sofa and feel tempted by the new 4K edition, it starts at £1,199 and comes with an even faster 3.1GHz quad-core i5 processor as well as the enhanced Iris Pro 6200 graphics card, which is just as well, since pushing 9.5

million pixels around (4096x2304) is a lot of work. You certainly won't be running games at full resolution, but apps look great, and you can adjust the scaling so that you see all the detail in your work without text and icons becoming tiny. Considering how much a decent 4K monitor costs by itself, this machine isn't bad value, but if the display is so important to you, 21.5in may feel too small. The 27in **5K** iMac starts at £1,449 and supports up to 32GB of memory, which you can upgrade yourself.

If you want a good-looking computer that minimises hassle, there's a lot to be said for the iMac. Price aside, the question is whether to stay with the majority of users on Windows or switch to Apple's software platform. Macs can also run Windows 10, but only with extra cost and fuss. If that's what you want, you'll get better value elsewhere.

VERDICT: There's little incentive for most people to stray from Windows 10, but if Apple appeals, this is a lovely all-in-one system

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Mac mini **£569** Choose this if you prefer to add your own monitor, but avoid the underpowered £399 model.

More models are expected soon

SPECIFICATIONS

1.6GHz Intel i5-5250U quad-core processor • 8GB memory • 1TB hard drive • Intel HD Graphics 6000 • 21.5in 1920x1080-pixel screen • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • FaceTime HD camera • 2x Thunderbolt 2 ports • 4x USB 3 ports • Gigabit Ethernet • OS X 10.11 El Capitan • 450x528x175mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18762



Crafting PCs the Scan way: Specification. Service. Satisfaction.



Scan V1 Value System Home / Office PC

- Intel® Pentium® G4400 processor
- 4GB Corsair DDR4 2133MHz memory
- 500GB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Windows 10

£299 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® G4400 processor, 4GB of RAM plus a 500GB hard disk.

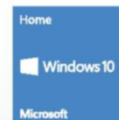


Scan V15 Value System Home / Office PC

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

£469 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!

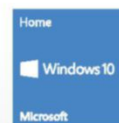


Scan G30i Value System Gaming PC

- 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

£675 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.



Windows 10. Do great things.



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A range of computers perfectly suited for the home/office. These affordable PCs are very flexible workhorses, capable of every task, from email/web surfing to high-end applications such as photo editing, video encoding and gaming. All of our Value Systems are pre-built and soak-tested so are ready to ship for next-day delivery.



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Fully soak tested



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compatible



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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

£985 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-P 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

£1319 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

PHONE | £50 from Vodafone www.snipca.com/18946

Vodafone Smart Speed 6

An Android smartphone for 50 quid

There's plenty of choice when it comes to phones. Some people like iPhones; others prefer Samsungs. Google's Nexus series and Sony's Xperias are popular. One bloke in Norwich has a Windows Phone. You pays your money and you takes your choice. Or in this case, you mostly skip the first part. At £50, the Smart Speed 6 is cheaper than phones used to be before they put computers in them. That's on pay-as-you-go (PAYG), with no contract or obligations. The only catch is it's exclusive to Vodafone, which isn't the cheapest network and may or may not have good reception where you live.

It seems incredible that you can spend as little as this and get a phone that's ready to play videos, browse the web and run Android apps. Surely the Smart Speed 6 must be a bar of soap with a picture of a screen stuck on it? But no – we tried it. The display is quite coarse, and only 70 per cent of the sRGB colours look like they're supposed to, but for a budget phone it's not bad, as long as you're not using it in bright sunlight.

SPECIFICATIONS

4.5in 854x480-pixel screen • 8GB flash storage • 5-megapixel rear camera • 2-megapixel front camera • 802.11n Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.0 • 3G/4G • microSD card slot • Android 5.1 • 132x65x10mm (HxWxD) • 146g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18947

Samsung's excruciatingly named Galaxy Young 2, which costs about £20 more, is much worse.

Android 5.1 runs pretty smoothly, coping well with most apps and websites. Complex sites may stop and start while loading and scrolling, and you can't really play any but the most basic games, but with a battery that lasted us nearly 11 hours of video playback, the Smart Speed 6 is quite practical for most purposes.

The built-in 8GB of storage is ludicrously small, especially with 3.4GB already taken up by Android, but less than a tenner will buy you a standard 32GB microSD card to slot in. As you'd expect, the 5-megapixel camera is poor, not helped by the inability to tap a point to focus on. Still, it does have a flash, and the 2-megapixel front camera is usable for video chat, though rough and ready if you want it for selfies.

For £50, you don't get Apple-quality aesthetics. The Smart Speed 6 is a full centimetre thick all the way across, and the camera sticks out even more. The front panel has a clumsy row of pointless 'soft keys' below the small 4.5in display, and the silvery coating of the plastic back isn't fooling anyone. At least it's plain, except for Vodafone's apostrophe logo



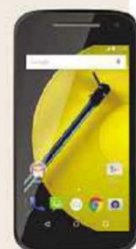
plonked in the middle, mercifully in black and not bright red.

Of course, Vodafone is banking on taking your money in call and data charges. But with PAYG, it's up to you how much you fork out. At the lowest up-front price we've seen, it's hard not to regard this phone as a bargain.

VERDICT: Vodafone is working hard to entice customers, and this is a great deal as long as the network suits you



ALTERNATIVE: Motorola Moto E (2nd gen) £90
This similarly specified phone is dearer, but looks more stylish and has a better screen



WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

What's the best easy-to-use budget tablet?

Q Tesco's Hudl 2 tablet has suddenly vanished from shelves. I'd planned to buy one as a Christmas present along with the 'Hudl for Dummies' book. Could you give me any pointers on an alternative for under £200? Game playing and camera are not a priority, but the ability to quickly pick up the controls and features is.

Robin Stevenson



A Although you're not into games, Nvidia's new gaming tablet the Shield Tablet K1 (£150 from www.snipca.com/18922 – see image left), similar in size to the discontinued Hudl 2, is exceptionally good value and comes with fewer unnecessary complications than many general-purpose Android tablets. If a smaller screen would suffice, the older but still good Nexus 7 is now sold for as little as £115 (www.snipca.com/18926 – see image

right) updated to Android 5 (Lollipop).

For a little more money, the Asus ZenPad S 8.0 (£170 from www.snipca.com/18927) is an excellent 8in tablet.



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

THE **Computer active** AWARDS 2015

After a year of testing new devices, our Reviews team step out of the laboratory to reveal their best and worst of 2015

BEST TABLET THAT'S NOT AN IPAD

Lenovo Yoga Tab 3 Pro

Check the nation's Christmas wish lists and you'll find one tablet more than any other – Apple's iPad. This year it gained some serious rivals, like the Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 and Asus ZenPad S, but our award goes to Lenovo's £399 Tab 3 Pro. Besides a kick stand that doubles as a wall hanger, it comes with a built-in cinema projector. To be honest, we'd only use this projector if our TV exploded, but let Lenovo have its moment. After all, if there was an iPad that also made tea, who'd be churlish enough to complain that it wasn't very good tea?



WORST DEVICE

Amazon Fire Phone

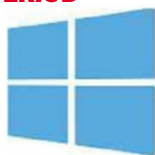
Amazon is better known for selling things than making them. After the Fire Phone debacle, that's unlikely to change anytime soon. Despite some handy features for a £400 phone, the Fire OS software did nothing particularly well except – you guessed it – try to sell you even more things from Amazon. Even the home screen devoted most of its space to listing items you might like to buy. Mercifully, Amazon has discontinued the Fire Phone, but its Kindle tablets and Fire TV boxes have taken on the burden of selling you stuff you don't really need.



LONGEST GESTATION PERIOD

Windows 10

Announced on 30 September 2014 and released on 29 July 2015, Windows 10 arrived only 25 days quicker than the average blue whale calf. In fact its development began even earlier. Counting from the release of Windows 8.1, it exceeded the 22-month pregnancy of an African elephant; and going back to Windows 8, it's on a par with the 42-month gestation of the frilled shark (see image left).



LEAST EAGERLY ANTICIPATED DEVICE

BlackBerry Priv

Yes, BlackBerry still exists. Yes, it's still making phones festooned with pinhead-sized keys that can only be pressed by the tiny nimble fingers of the ring-tailed lemur. They will be excited about the Priv, a brand new phone named after an outside toilet. Those of them, that is, with a spare £559 in their furry little pockets.



MOST EXCITING PROCESSOR

Intel Core M

Be honest: you're not that excited, are you? Most of us will never see the silicon inside our PCs unless we have an expensive accident. But we do care about the results. Thanks to Intel's Skylake Core M processors, as used in Apple's 12in MacBook, it looks as if we've finally arrived at a point where PCs can be as thin and light as we like without performance being compromised. Well done, science!



MOST CONFUSING PRODUCT

TV streamers

A box that plays video on your TV from the internet, or from your PC or mobile device. Sounds simple! All you have to do is choose one. As 2015 bites the dust, your main options are – deep breath – the Apple TV (third generation), Apple TV (fourth generation), Google Nexus Player, Google Chromecast (2015), Amazon Fire TV Stick, Amazon Fire TV with 4K Ultra HD, Roku Streaming Stick, Roku 2 (fifth generation), Roku 3, Roku 4 or Nvidia Shield. These each work with different devices and services; some run apps and games; some have their own storage; and hardly any support the DLNA streaming protocol that was previously standard. What a mess!



MOST DOOMED PC CATEGORY

Convertible laptops

As 2015 began, laptops were hardly flying off the shelves. Even tablet sales seemed to be stalling. What enticing new approach could regain consumers' attention? Why not combine a laptop and a tablet? Who could resist two things that didn't particularly interest them? And so the convertible arrived: a laptop with a touchscreen that folds all the way back to create something that looks like a tablet if you're a long way away and don't have to lift it. If the PC industry has one resolution for 2016, it should probably be to quietly forget all about them.



WHAT WE WANT IN 2016

So much for 2015, but what do we want in 2016 and will we get it? Our head of reviews Adam Banks dusts off his crystal ball and tries to predict future tech trends

PCs

What we'd like to see...

A \$1 computer

OK, I moan elsewhere in this piece about computers being too cheap to work properly. But there's more than one kind of computer. The Raspberry Pi is a series of stripped-down PCs designed to run Linux software and sold as a bare circuit board. Previous models have been priced at \$25 or \$35 (about £16-£23), and the latest, the Raspberry Pi Zero, costs just \$5 (it's always been priced in dollars). You can't run demanding software on it, but it's good for lots of fun projects.

What we'll probably get...

It's not (raspberry) pie-in-the-sky to imagine that the price of a basic but usable board will fall even further next year, and that opens up a lot of possibilities. Think about a primary-school class all building their own computerised gadget as simply and affordably as baking a pastry-covered fruit dessert.



Maths quiz: if a Raspberry Pi Zero costs \$5, what do you get for \$1?



Will phones remain faster and smoother than PCs?

What we'd like to see...

Performance keeping up with features

I've got an iPhone 6s. Its **processor** is as good as the one in my laptop. Its camera can shoot video at ultra-sharp **4K** resolution. And yet I can't edit this on my PC, because my PC is too slow. This is getting silly. PCs are supposed to be your all-in-one work station. If they're not even as clever as phones, what's the point?

What we'll probably get...

Not a lot. Intel was planning to have brand new processors in 2016, but now they won't be here until 2017 because it couldn't squash the silicon fast enough. Slightly faster chips will arrive around September instead. I might switch the camera back to **1080p** HD.

What we'd like to see...

Better use of processing power

When choosing a PC, you have to consider which has the most power: the main processor (CPU) or the graphics processor (GPU). Thanks to the games industry, today's **graphics cards** offer amazing computing power at very reasonable prices. That power shouldn't only benefit gamers. GPUs can also help with things like photo and video editing, and even with general tasks, but software has to be designed to make use of them. At the moment, it mostly isn't.

What we'll probably get...

GPU manufacturers and software developers have been talking for years about 'GPU computing'. With the help of Microsoft, Apple and other big software makers, 2016 should see more effort to make it happen. If all our programs harness a PC's GPU, we'll get more out of our hardware.



A fast graphics card ought to benefit more than just gamers

What we'd like to see...

More expensive laptops (yes, really!)

At the moment, the trend is for PC makers to push down prices to chase the smaller amounts of money we seem to be prepared to spend. The trouble is, when they sell a laptop for £200, they can't afford parts that can run multiple Windows 10 programs smoothly.

What we'll probably get...

Writing about computers for 25 years, I've seen this cycle before. Manufacturers compromise on performance to shave another tenner off their cheapest models, consumers buy them,

they don't work well, there's no profit in it, and nobody's happy. Last time it was netbooks, which Apple's co-founder Steve Jobs said weren't "better at anything". Chromebooks, using Google's web-based software, make a better argument for a cheap PC, and we'll see them developed further in 2016. With standard Windows PCs, we all need to think twice before jumping on the cheapest price, and spend a few more quid on something that actually works better. Manufacturers will follow our lead.

Chromebooks are OK, but we can't expect a £200 PC to do everything



Mobile devices

What we'd like to see...

Joined-up thinking

Most households have some combination of the following: desktop PC, laptop, Mac, smartphone and tablet. Of course, we want access to our files, photos, videos and music on all of them. So hardware and software makers try to provide ways of doing just that, but regularly fail. It's obvious we need better synchronisation. Can we not act like a James Bond villain and kidnap a bunch of computer scientists and force them to make this work?

What we'll probably get...

More tinkering. But at least we've seen Apple and others introduce 'family accounts' to make sharing easier, and next year should see more progress in ironing the bugs out of syncing.



Would Bond villain Blofeld make our devices talk to each other?



Need help? Yes! Why is this so complicated?

What we'd like to see...

Mobile tariffs that make sense

It's still a nightmare choosing a mobile plan, whether it's on a contract or pay-as-you go. It's hard comparing like for like and you're only ever given half the information you need. So I get umpteen megabytes of this and a squillion free minutes of that, but only when I top up and roll over and sit and beg? Maybe Ofcom, the Government's regulator, could come up with a clearer way of selling phone services and make everyone stick to it.

What we'll probably get...

As BT takes over EE and Three buys O2, we might have fewer choices to confuse us. On the other hand, prices could go up. That's why UK and EU competition authorities are looking at the O2 takeover, although they've given BT the go-ahead.

What we'd like to see...

The same software on desktop PCs and devices

iPhones and iPads run Apple's iOS, and most other phones and tablets run Google's Android. These mobile versions are easier to use than Windows or Apple's OS X, but also more limited. Microsoft, meanwhile, is putting full Windows 10 on its tablets and a cut-down version on phones, which kind of misses the point.

What we'll probably get...

It's rumoured that Apple will combine iOS with OS X, and Google will mix Android and Chrome OS (as on Chromebooks). But we don't expect this to happen in 2016. What will happen is more desktop features shoehorned into phones and tablets, and more complex PC tools to make desktops look cleaner and simpler.



Microsoft's Lumia 950 runs Windows 10, but not as you know it on your PC

Printers

What we'd like to see...

Cheaper ink

You can buy a colour printer for less than the cost of a set of ink cartridges. That's crazy. And a lot of your money is wasted, because the cartridges are tiny, overpackaged and inefficient. We need a better system.

What we'll probably get...

Ink tank printers. Epson is already selling them from under £200, and Canon is following suit. Others will jump on the bandwagon. Instead of teaspoon-sized cartridges, these use big bottles of ink that could last a couple of years. It'll save a lot of needless waste.



Ink tank printers could save you a fortune

What we'd like to see...

Everyone shutting up about 3D printing

Oh it's so amazing, you can print anything! No you can't. Have you ever tried using a 3D printer? Even if you can make head or tail of setting it up, it takes all night to print a model the size of a golf ball, half of which looks melted. Forget Arthur Dent's problems with the machine that could make anything except tea. Not even Douglas Adams' imagination could conjure the acute disappointment that is 3D printing.

What we'll probably get...

365 days of press releases about pesky 3D printers. The Las Vegas CES show in January should bring new models for 2016, and new technologies are expected to emerge during the year, including HP's Multi Jet Fusion. But will it be good enough to change our minds about 3D printing?

3D printers have got much simpler and cheaper. They're still awful



Buy It

Find out what other products we liked in 2014.
Buy our **Back Issue CD** (now only £12.57*):
www.snipca.com/14981 *At time of press



Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Asus X555LA-XX290H
£330 from www.snipca.com/18151
Tested: Issue 446



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

ALTERNATIVE Asus Chromebook C200

A cheap Chrome OS ultra-portable laptop with a bright screen, lengthy battery life and a great keyboard.
£250 from www.snipca.com/17296

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Shockwave
£500 from www.snipca.com/18748
Tested: Issue 464



Proving that you don't need an Intel processor, Palicomp has built an excellent PC around AMD's Athlon X4 860K and Radeon R7 370 **graphics card**, narrowly beating Chillblast's Fusion Drone.

ALTERNATIVE: CCL Nebula 200i

A great all-round Intel i5 system in an attractive cube-shaped case.
£600 from www.snipca.com/18844

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

ROUTER

Trendnet TEW-812DRU
£112 from www.snipca.com/15855
Tested: Issue 427



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

ALTERNATIVE: Linksys WRT1900AC

More expensive, but even faster and with loads of features too. £176 from www.snipca.com/14950

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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SMASH IT!



*Terms and Conditions apply

**Source: 1227 Quite Interesting Facts to Blow Your Socks Off



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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 seven 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 Linksys RE6400 Wi-Fi Range Extenders

Using the Linksys RE6400 Wi-Fi Range Extender you can boost your home Wi-Fi in areas where the signal is weak. It helps to eliminate dead spots in distant bedrooms, cellars and even in the back garden, helping you enjoy uninterrupted streaming, smooth online gaming, and more. It's easy to set up and works with any router. To enter, email your address to cacomp@dennis.co.uk with 'linksys' in the subject line by midnight 5 January.



The Linksys RE6400 Wi-Fi Range Extender is available to buy now for £59.99. For more information visit www.linksys.com/gb and follow on Twitter @Linksys.

MULTIFUNCTION PRINTER

Canon Pixma MG6650

£75 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. £48 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

Y-cam HomeMonitor HD

£90 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. £84 from www.snipca.com/15275

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Thank You!



We want to say a special thank you to everyone who has given our 2014 Back Issue CD a five-star review on Amazon. That includes...

El Jay "Len" ★ ColChris ★ Mr I Pimlott ★ Bill Daniels 1973 ★ Lizzy
★ Dave Harper ★ Sproggit ★ Mr K Meyler ★ Enid ★ MalcolmW ★
A Watt ★ John B ★ Sidlev ★ Artie G Artie ★ John Smith
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Broom ★ Leslie John Bell ★ Clive Reynolds ★ Andreos Greco



Thanks for all your kind words – we really appreciate it.
And thanks in advance to everyone who posts a review.

Our 2014 Back Issue CD is still on sale on Amazon:

www.snipca.com/14981 (or search for 'computeractive cd').

It costs £15, but Amazon often discounts this to around £12.

You can also buy the 2013 CD at www.snipca.com/16010.

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FROM **£689.99**



PHANTOM 800 - Intel Gaming PC

- : Intel i5 6600K 3.50GHz Quad Core Skylake CPU
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- : 16GB DDR4 - 2400MHz
- : 250GB SSD + 2TB SATA III Hard Drive
- : Microsoft Windows 10 (64Bit)

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

35 Switch to a new PC without losing anything
38 Monitor your home online when away

40 Never miss a software update in 2016
42 Master CCleaner's brilliant new tools

PLUS

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

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

Switch to a new PC without losing anything

What you need: Laplink PCmover Express; Any Windows version (XP to 10)

Time required: 60 mins

Upgrading from a Windows 7/8 PC to Windows 10 is a pretty straightforward process. However, if you've recently bought a new Windows 8 or 10 PC, transferring your files and folders to it can be quite cumbersome. To make the process easier, Microsoft

has teamed up with software company Laplink to make its PCmover Express program (normal price £19.95) a free download until 31 August 2016. We show you how this easy-to-use program lets you wirelessly transfer folders and files to your new computer.



STEP 1 To use Laplink PCmover Express (LPE) to transfer your files and folders wirelessly, both your old and new PC need to be connected to the same Wi-Fi network. To install the program on your old Windows PC (XP, Vista, 7 or 8), go to www.snipca.com/18909 and click the 'Download now' button **1**, then run the downloaded setup file **2**.

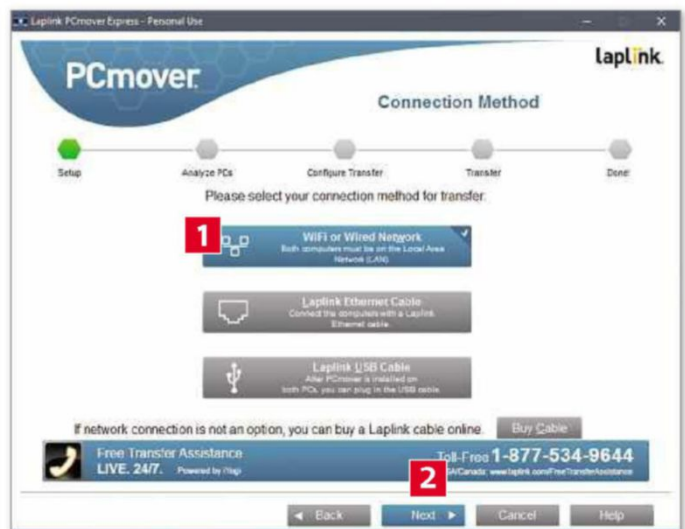


STEP 2 To run LPE, you need a program called Microsoft Visual C++. If you don't have it installed, you'll see the Windows InstallShield Wizard. Click Install. After that's finished, click Next to start installing LPE, accept the licence agreement, then click Next again. In the Customer Information field, enter your name, email address and type **Personal** in the organisation field **1**. Change the Country dropdown menu to **United Kingdom** **2**, then click Next **3**. Finally, click Next, Install, Next, then Finish to launch the program.

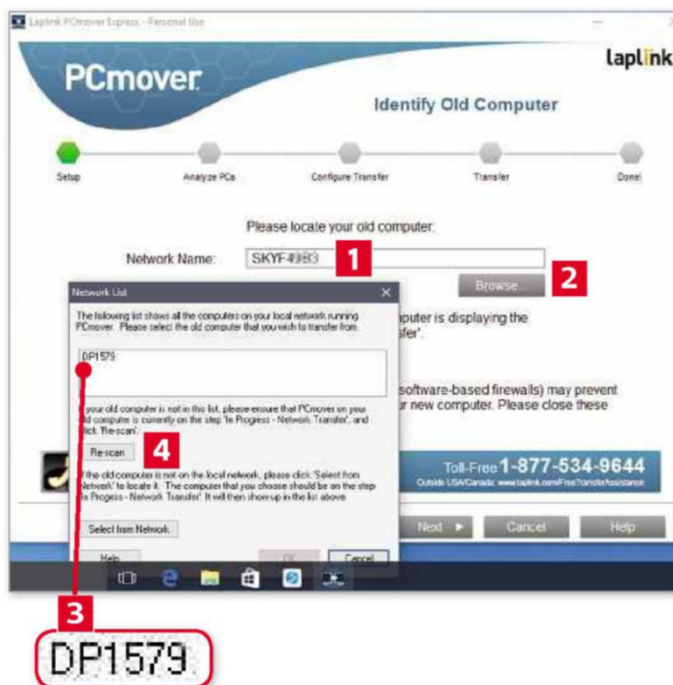
Workshops



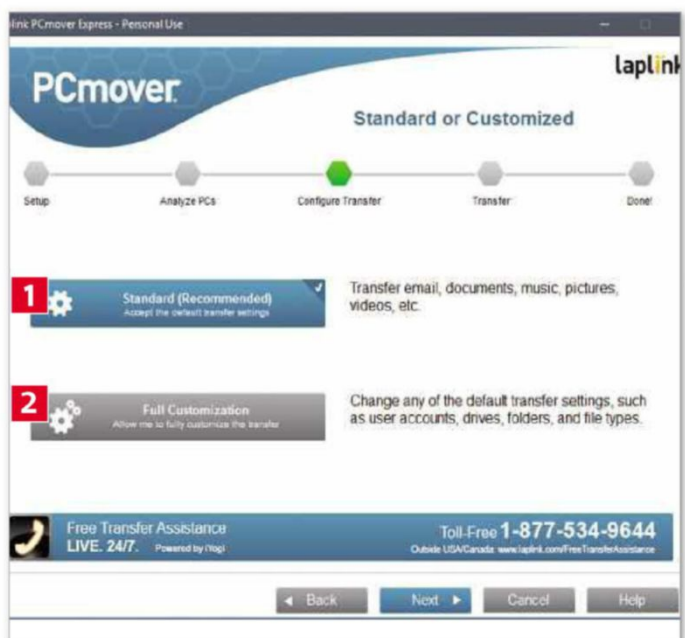
STEP 3 When LPE launches, you'll see a list of PCmover Tips. Click Next at the bottom (twice). Now select Old **1**, then click Next **2**. On the next screen, select 'WiFi or Wired Network' and click Next again. The program will now analyse the files and folders on your PC. After the analysis is finished, you'll see a 'Go to the new computer to proceed' message. From here, everything you do will be on your new PC.



STEP 4 Install LPE on your new PC (see Step 1). When you get to the Customer Information field, enter the same details (see Step 2), click Next (twice), then Install. Finally, click Next, then Finish to launch the program. When the program launches, click Next at the bottom twice. Now select Windows 8.1 or 10 (depending on which OS your new PC runs), then click Next. You now need to re-enter your name and email address, then click Next. Finally, select 'WiFi or Wired Network' **1**, then click Next **2** again.

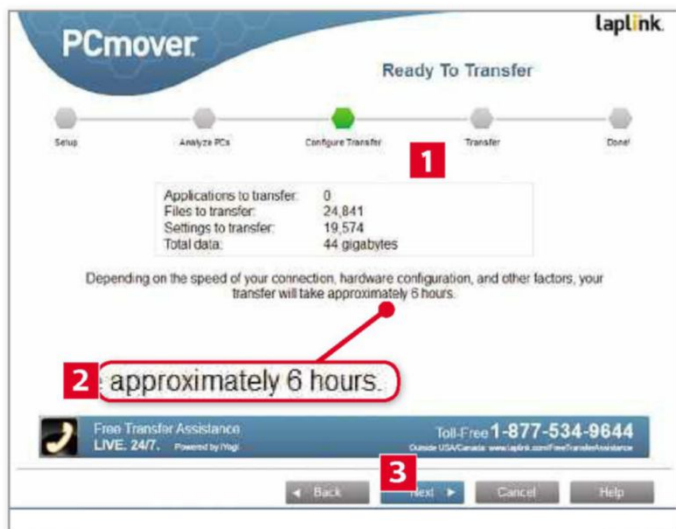


STEP 5 Now enter your broadband network's name (you'll find this on your router - for example, SKYABC123 **1**), then click the Browse button **2**. You should now see your old PC listed **3**. Select it, click OK at the bottom, then click Next. If your old PC doesn't appear in this list, check the status of LPE on your old PC. If you see an 'In Progress - Network Transfer' message, it means LPE is still analysing your old PC. In that case, go back to your new PC and click Re-scan **4**. You'll now see your old PC listed. Select it, click OK, then Next.

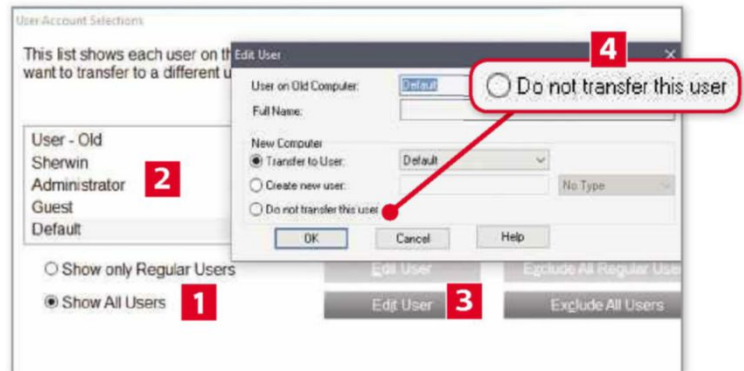


STEP 6 LPE will now analyse the data you want to transfer from your old PC. This can take a while, but you can track its progress via the green bar at the bottom. After that's finished, you'll see two transfer options. Standard (Recommended) **1** transfers your email, documents, music, photos and videos and is more straightforward (see Step 7). Full Customization **2** lets you change your default transfer settings - for user accounts, drives, folders and file types - giving you more control over what you transfer (see Steps 8-10).

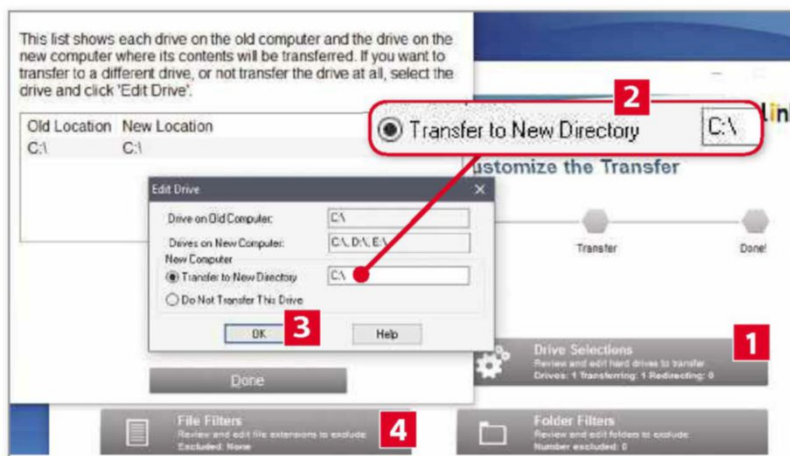
Switch to a new PC without losing anything



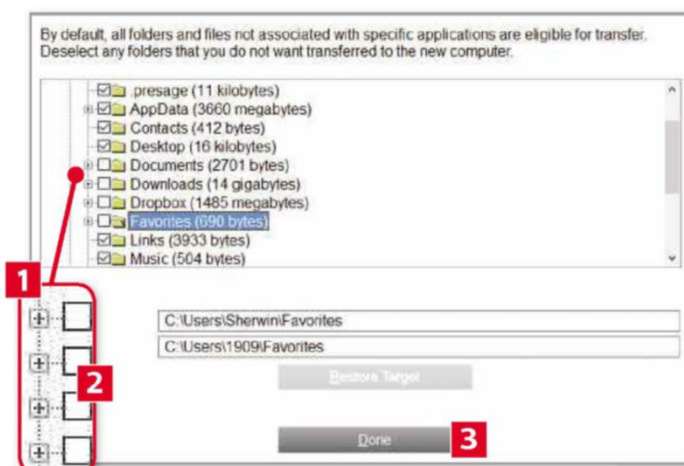
STEP 7 Select Standard (Recommended), then click Next. PCmover now analyses the speed of your internet connection, the configurations on both PCs and the total amount of data to be transferred **1**. Based on these factors, you'll see an estimate of how long the transfer will take **2**. As you can see from our screenshot, it estimated around six hours for 44GB of content using our moderately fast Wi-Fi connection. Click Next **3** to begin transferring your files.



STEP 8 To have greater control of your file transfer Select Full Customization, then click Next. You'll see a screen with four options (User Account Selections, Drive Selections, File Filters and Folder Filters). Click User Account Selections. By default, LPE only transfers the old PC's administrator account. But if you have more than one user account, select Show All Users **1**. If there's a user account you don't want to transfer, select it **2**, click Edit User **3**, select 'Do not transfer this user' **4**, then click OK. Finally, click Done.



STEP 9 Next, click Drive Selections **1**. By default, data from the C: drive on your old PC will transfer to the same drive (C) on your new PC. To change the destination drive, click Edit Drive, change the drive letter in the 'Transfer to New Directory' field **2**, click OK **3**, then Done. Next, click File Filters **4**. Here you can select which file formats (if any) you want to exclude from your transfer. Some common formats (TMP and DOC files) are listed with boxes you can tick/untick. To exclude other formats, click the Add button, type the file format (such as .JPG), then click OK. Repeat this to add more formats to exclude, then click Done.



STEP 10 Finally, click Folder Filters. Here, you'll see a tree dropdown menu containing all the folders and sub-folders on your old PC and the storage space they consume (in MBs). By default, all folders and sub-folders are ticked, but if there are any you don't want to transfer, simply navigate to them using the tree dropdown menu **1**, untick them **2**, then click Done **3**. Now click Next on the screen with the four options. Based on your changes from Step 8 onwards, LPE will calculate the total data to be transferred and give you an estimate of how long the transfer will take. Click Next to begin transferring your data to your new PC. ●

Monitor your home when you're away

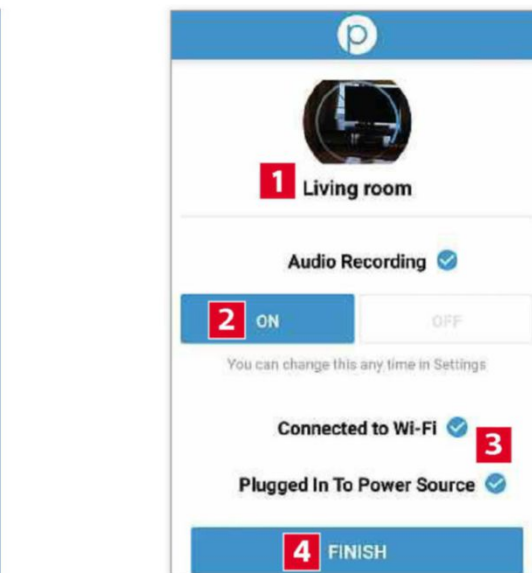
What you need: Android phone; Windows PC **Time required:** 25 minutes

Home-security products can make us all feel a little safer, but they tend to be fairly expensive. By contrast, Perch is a new, free app and web service that lets you convert any spare Android device or PC into a handy security camera.

This is a brilliant way to remotely keep an eye on what's going on in your home when you're out or in another room when you're indoors. You can set the app to send you alerts when motion is detected in your home.



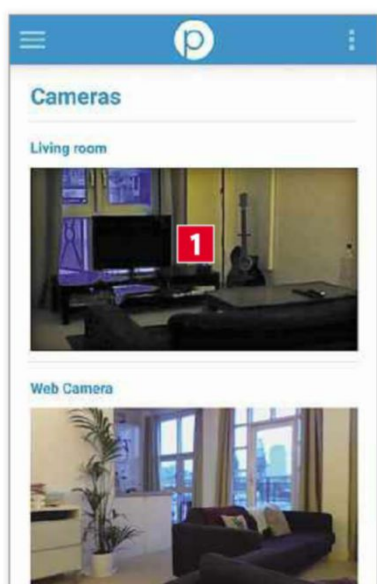
STEP 1 In this Workshop, we'll show you how to set up an Android device and PC as security cameras, which you can monitor on your main Android phone or tablet and a second PC. First, ensure both devices to be used as cameras are connected to their chargers or plugged in and connected to your home Wi-Fi network. If you only want to use a PC as a camera, skip to Step 3. To set up your old Android device as a camera, install the Perch – Simple Home Monitoring app from www.snipca.com/18920. Open the app, tap Sign Up, enter your email address **1** and a password (twice) **2**, then tap Sign Up again **3**. Swipe through the introductory screens, then tap Next.



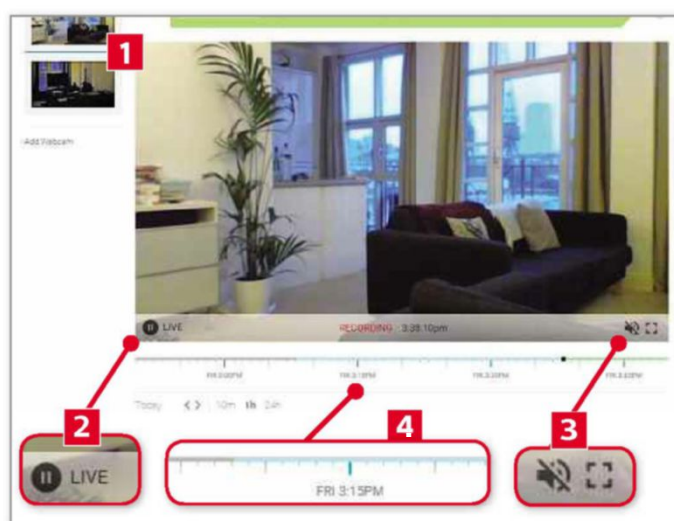
STEP 2 Now name the area of your home that you want to monitor (for example, 'Living room' **1**). Tap the Audio Recording buttons **2** to turn audio on or off. Next, tap the tick icons below to confirm you're connected to Wi-Fi and to a power source **3**, then tap Finish **4**. Your device's camera will now turn on. Position your device to monitor your chosen area.

STEP 3 We'll now show you how to set up your PC as a security camera. If your PC doesn't have a webcam built in, connect an external one to it. Open your browser (Perch recommends using Google Chrome), and go to www.getperch.com, click Sign In at the top right and log into your account. If you didn't create an account in Step 1, then click Sign Up and create one. Close the introductory screen, click Add Webcam **1**, then click Start Webcam. Your device's camera will turn on. Click the 'Click to start recording' button, then position your PC's camera to face the area you want to monitor.





STEP 4 To remotely monitor your live feeds on your main Android phone or tablet, install the app from www.snipca.com/18920, tap Sign In and log into your account. You'll now see the camera feeds you've set up **1**. Tap the one you want to monitor. Compared with an Android device, monitoring your recordings from a PC has many more features.

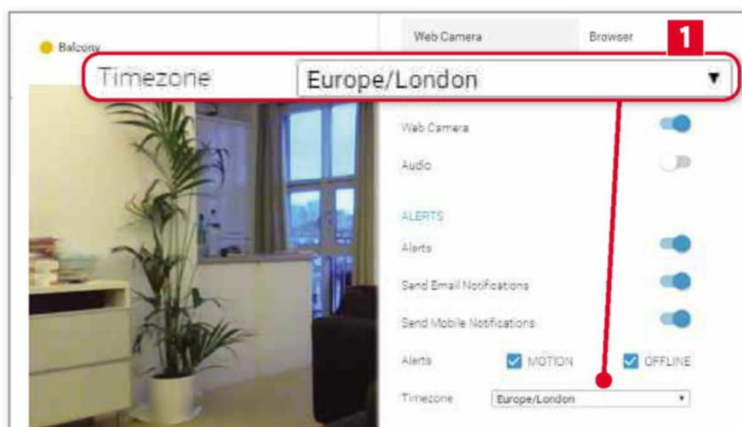


STEP 5 You have more options when you monitor your feeds on a PC. On your main PC, go to www.getperch.com in Chrome, click Sign In and log into your Perch account. You'll now see your camera feeds at the top left **1**. Click to select the one you want to watch. Move your cursor over the video to see more options. Click the Pause icon **2** to pause your feed. You can also turn the video audio on/off and watch it full screen **3**. To watch what was going on at an earlier time in your feed, click that point on the timeline **4**.



STEP 6 The best feature of Perch is that it lets you select a specific area of your camera's view and set it to notify you when motion is detected within that area. To set this up, open Perch on your PC, select a feed from the top left, then click the 'Add a custom zone' link at the top of the video feed. Now name the alert zone whatever you want **1**, then click the Action dropdown menu and ensure Email and Phone Notification are both ticked **2**. Now tap to select the squares in the grid that correspond to the area you want to monitor for motion detection **3**. Finally, click Save **4**, then OK.

STEP 7 By default, alerts are set to the US east coast (New York) time zone. To change this, click the Settings icon (cog) at the top right of your recording, then change the timezone to Europe/London **1**. Now whenever there's any movement detected, you'll see a 'Motion detected' app notification and an email will be sent to you (with a link to your video feed). Tap the notification/email link to see the live feed from that camera on your phone, tablet or PC. ●



Never miss a software update in 2016

What you need: Patch My PC Updater; Any version of Windows (XP to 10)

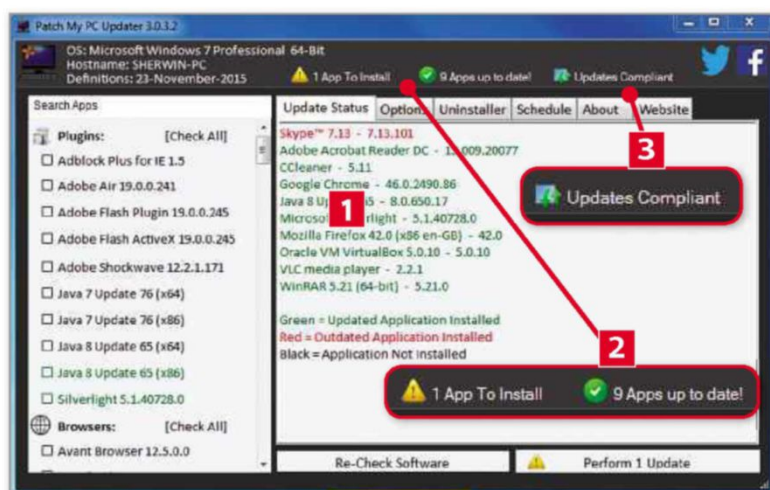
Time required: 30 minutes

Using out-of-date programs can put your PC's security at risk. To avoid this danger in the year ahead use Patch My PC Updater, a free, portable tool that scans your PC for out-of-date programs, then lets you update them with one

click. The program can also batch-install popular software and batch-uninstall programs on your PC. We'll show you how to set it to run automatically on a schedule so your PC will always be safe in 2016.



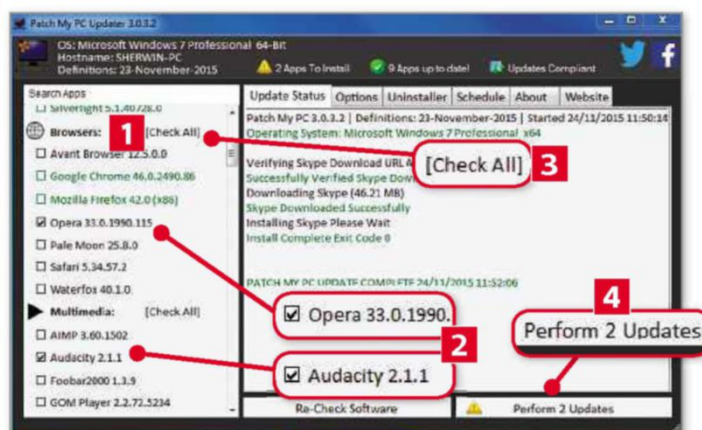
STEP 1 To download Patch My PC Updater (PMPU), Go to www.snipca.com/18875, click the blue Download Patch My PC Updater button, then run the setup file. You'll see a window listing all your PC's programs (in red, green or black) **1**, along with a breakdown of your programs' status **2**. Before updating any programs, you should update your PC. To do that, close any open programs on your PC (except Patch My PC Updater), then click Updates Compliant **3**. The program will check for any available Windows updates and apply them to your PC. Your PC will restart automatically after that's finished.

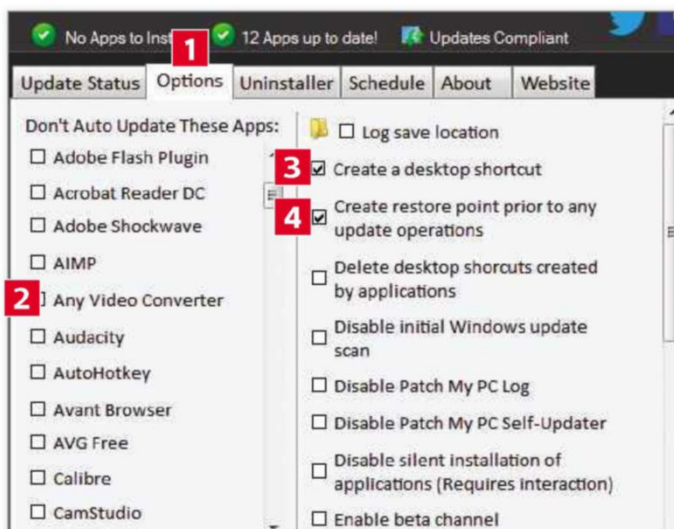


STEP 2 When your PC restarts, open PMPU (from your PC's Downloads folder). As you'll see from the information key **1**, any programs listed in red require updating, while those in green are up to date. Click Re-Check Software **2** if you want to run the scan again. To update programs, click Perform Update **3**. In our case, PMPU downloaded and installed the latest version of Skype without us needing to open it.

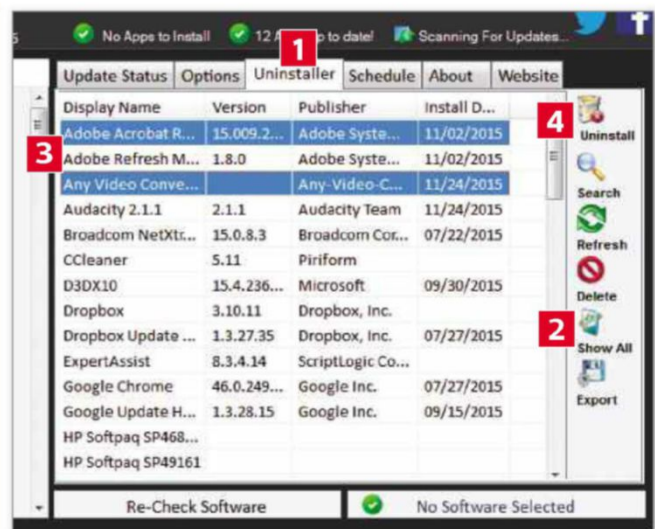


STEP 3 PMPU can also batch-install a selection of popular PC programs. Scroll through the list of categories on the left (Browsers **1**, Multimedia, Utilities, etc), then tick the programs you want to install **2**. Click Check All **3** if you want to install all the programs in a particular category. Once you've done that, click the Perform Updates button **4** to install your selected programs. PMPU installs the latest versions of these programs from their official sources. None contained any unwanted extras when we installed them.

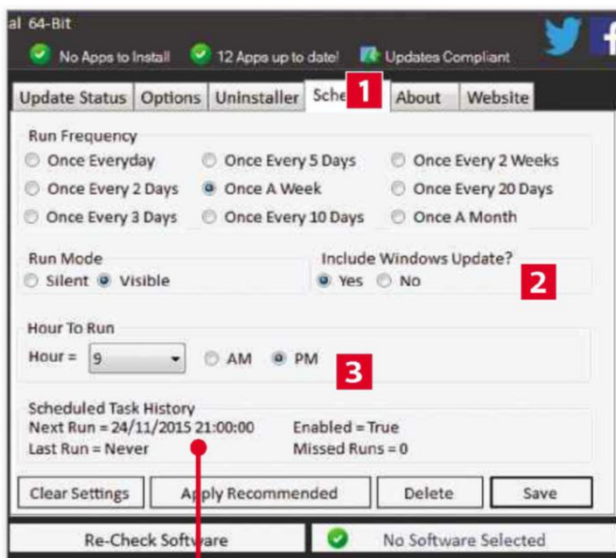




STEP 4 Next, click the Options tab **1** to see a list of tick boxes. Don't tick any of the programs on the left **2** because this will stop them updating automatically. The boxes on the right contain a list of actions. For example, PMPU doesn't create a Desktop shortcut by default, so tick 'Create a desktop shortcut' **3** to add one. You can also set it to create a **system restore point** before updating any programs **4**. The list includes options to restart your PC after updating your programs, run Windows update after updating and shut down your PC after updating.

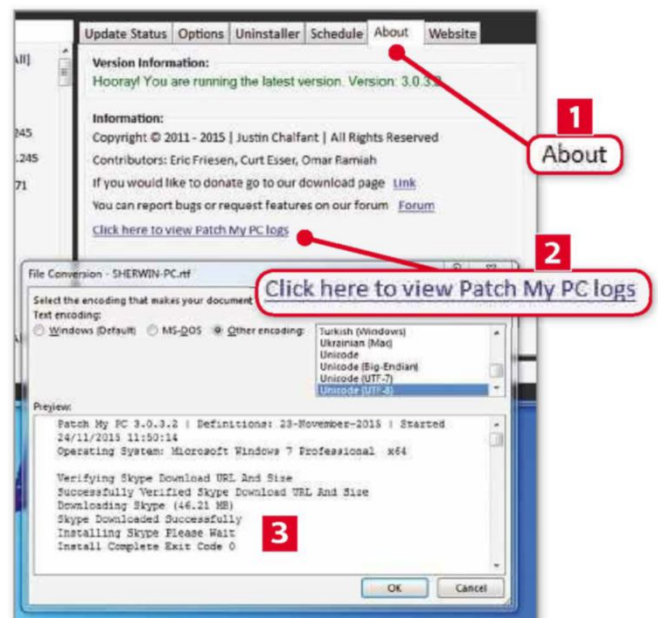


STEP 5 Next, click the Uninstaller tab **1** to see all the installed programs on your PC. By default, PMPU doesn't list Microsoft programs and Windows updates, but you can add them to the list by clicking Show All **2**. To uninstall multiple programs in one go, press the Control key, click to select the ones you want to uninstall **3**, then click Uninstall **4**. You may need to click Yes/No prompts to confirm you want to uninstall the programs and their leftover files.



Next Run = 24/11/2015 **4**

STEP 6 To set PMPU to run on an automatic schedule, click the Schedule tab **1**. If you see a message prompting you to download a 'Dynamic-link library file', click Yes. Next, select a time interval in the Run Frequency field. The Run Mode section lets you set whether you want PMPU to run in the background or as an active window. You can also choose to include or exclude Windows updates when the program runs **2**. In the section below, select a time when you want PMPU to run **3**, then click Save at the bottom right. You'll now see when the program is next scheduled to run **4**.



STEP 7 Finally, click the About tab **1**. Here you'll see the option to install the latest version of PMPU if you're running an older version. Click the 'Click here to view Patch My PC logs' link **2** to see a list of all updates and installations you've made using the program **3**. Because PMPU is a portable tool, you can copy and paste its setup file from your PC's Downloads folder to a USB stick, then run this on any other PC. ●

Use CCleaner's excellent new tools

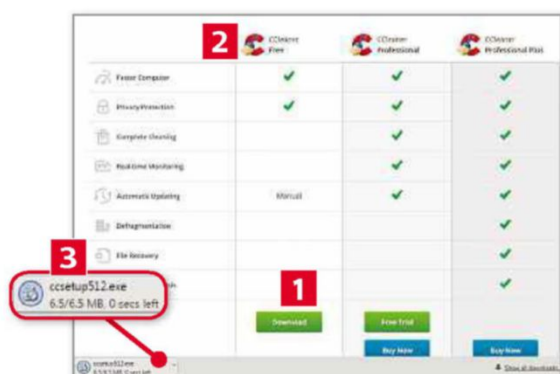
What you need: CCleaner; Any version of Windows (XP to 10) **Time required:** 15 minutes

We make no secret of the fact that CCleaner is our favourite program when it comes to ridding our PC of unwanted junk, and recent updates have added new features that make it even more indispensable. It's now easier to

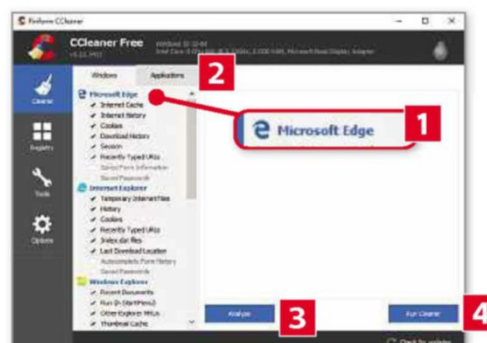
install and update the program, and has added support for Windows 10 apps and programs. Its various tools have been improved to clean out more junk than ever and it will now also speed up all your browsers, including portable ones.



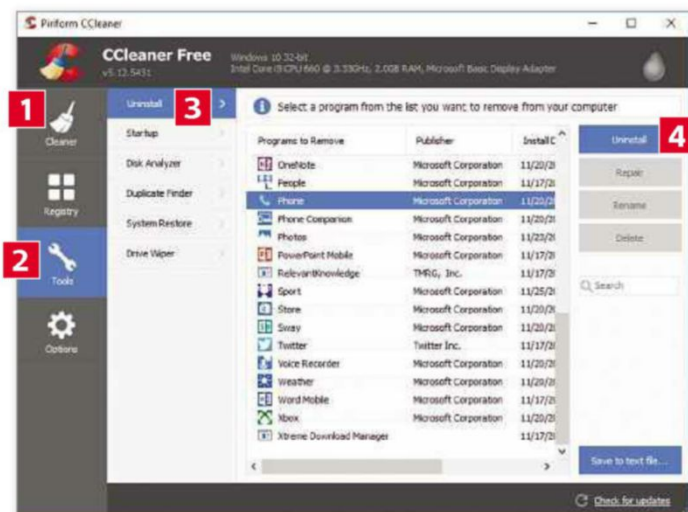
STEP 1 The free version of CCleaner doesn't update automatically, so you need to update it manually. We've previously had gripes about how long-winded this process is (see page 53 of Issue 463's Cover Feature). Thankfully, the latest version makes it all much easier. To install/update the program, go to www.snipca.com/18900 and click the Download button **1** below the Free version **2**. Run the setup file **3**, click Next, Install, then Finish to launch or upgrade to the latest version.



STEP 2 Unlike the previous version, this latest incarnation doesn't request permission before launching on Windows 10. Users of Windows 10 will also notice that Microsoft Edge has been added to CCleaner's Windows tab **1**. Click the Applications tab **2**, scroll to the bottom, and you'll notice that CCleaner now cleans Windows 10's built-in apps (including Bing News, Bing Sports, Skype and OneDrive) and installed programs (such as Avast and Windows Defender). If you use Microsoft Office 2016, you'll see its programs listed here as well.



STEP 3 CCleaner is now better equipped at removing junk from the latest versions of Chrome and Firefox (on all Windows versions), as well as junk from portable browsers. We noticed significantly faster browsing speeds after running the Cleaner **1**. Next, click Tools **2**, then Uninstall **3**. Windows 8 and 10 users can then uninstall any Microsoft programs they don't want (such as MSN Weather, MSN Sports and Music, for example), as well as other installed programs. To do this, select an item, then click Uninstall **4**.



NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE
6 Jan

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TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

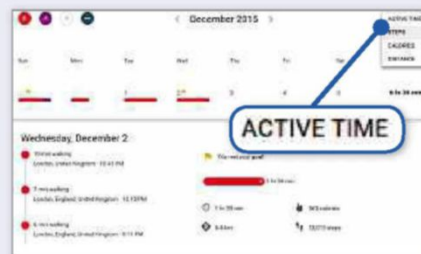
Monitor your daily activity on your PC

To keep my diabetes and cholesterol levels under control, my doctor recommended I walk at least an hour every day. I followed your Workshop in Issue 453 ('Record how many steps you walk'), so I'm familiar with the brilliant Google Fit phone app for Android (www.snipca.com/19001) that tracks your daily activity.

I recently noticed that the Google Fit website (fit.google.com) has changed to make it easier to monitor your activity on your PC. Go to the site on your PC, log in with your Gmail account, then scroll to the calendar at the bottom.

You'll see orange lines (of varying lengths) beneath each day. Simply click any line to see a detailed breakdown of your activity for that day in the section below.

These orange lines represent the amount of time you walked. You'll also see how many calories you burned, the distance you covered and how many steps you took. You can change the default orange reading (from the time you walked) to one of the other measurements by clicking the Active Time dropdown menu at the top right (see screenshot). If you feel a little



overwhelmed by the amount of information, simply click the coloured icons at the top left (walking, running and so on) to hide those measurements.

Greg Drake



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

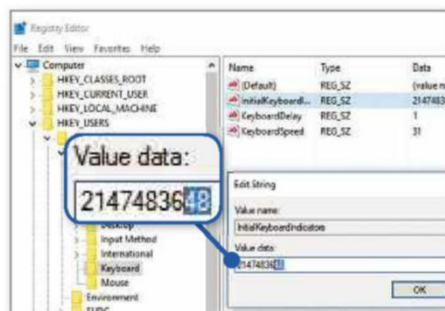
WINDOWS 10 PROBLEMS

Regain control of your 'Num Lock' key in Windows 10

After upgrading to Windows 10 recently I noticed that my 'Num Lock' key had been disabled. This was frustrating because the login password for my PC contains several numbers. Thankfully, I managed to re-enable that key using a simple Registry hack.

On your Desktop, press the Windows key+R to open the Run box, type **regedit** into the box, press Enter, then click OK to open your Registry Editor. Now navigate to the following path using the dropdown menus on the left: **HKEY_USERS/DEFAULT/Control Panel/Keyboard**. In the right-hand section, right-click 'InitialKeyboard', then click Modify. You'll see a sequence of numbers (2147483648) in the 'Value data' field (see screenshot below). Change the final two digits in this sequence (48) to 50, click OK, then restart your PC. Your 'Num Lock' key will resume working properly.

Stephen Main



ADDITIONAL PC MONITOR

Turn your old iPad into a second PC monitor

I recently retired after working for over three decades as journalist. I had always worked in my office on a computer with two monitors and found it difficult making the transition at home to a PC with only one monitor. I read about an app in *Computeractive* (see Phone and Tablet Tips, Issue 451) called Duet Display that lets you turn a spare iPad into a second PC screen. Its price tag (£11.99) may seem steep for an app but that's a fraction of what you'll pay to buy a new PC monitor. Impressively, it works with most iPad versions (2 and later) and most Windows versions (7 and later).

And so I retrieved my old, forgotten iPad 3, dusted it down, then updated it. I still had the stand for it so I was able to position it beside my PC. You can buy an iPad stand for under £10 on Amazon, if you don't have one.

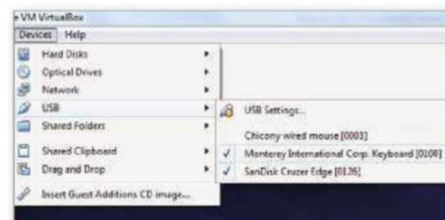
First, install the Duet Display app (www.snipca.com/18997) on your iPad. Next, on your PC, go to www.duetdisplay.com, click the blue Download PC button, then run the downloaded setup file. Now, connect your iPad to your PC using a USB cable. As soon as you do this your iPad will turn into a second PC monitor. I'm now able to use the iPad's screen exclusively for email, while using my PC monitor to keep up with the news and do other work.

Michael Weaver

VIRTUAL DRIVE

Access your external drives in VirtualBox

I'm tempted to upgrade to Windows 10, but I'm reluctant to give up on my Windows 7 PC just yet. So I followed your Workshop in Issue 457 about running Windows 10 in a **virtual drive** using the free program VirtualBox (www.virtualbox.org). The problem was that I keep many of my programs and files on external USB drives, but VirtualBox doesn't automatically display external devices connected to your PC. After a little digging around, I found there is a way to make VirtualBox display these.



First, insert a USB drive into your host PC. Now open VirtualBox and click Start to launch your virtual operating system. When that's done, click Devices at the top left of VirtualBox, move your cursor to USB, then click to select the USB device you inserted into your PC. A tick will appear next to it to indicate that it's active (see screenshot above). You should now be able to access your USB drive from your virtual PC.

Brian Day

Phone and Tablet Tips

Brilliant things to do on your device

ANDROID

Save Skype video messages to your phone



The Skype Android app (www.snipca.com/18976) has been updated with lots of new features. You can now save video messages to your phone; search for specific content within an exchange to find a conversation; and forward media files (photos, documents and so on) from one contact/group to another.

Open any conversation containing a video message, tap the message, then tap the new 'Save to gallery' option (see screenshot below) to save it to your device. To search for a particular conversation based on its content, simply tap the search icon at the top right, then type any words that may have been exchanged within it to see a list of relevant conversations. To forward media files that you've received to another person or group, simply tap to select the file, tap the new Forward button, then select the person or group you want to send it to.



ANDROID & iOS

Record details from business cards in OneNote



Using Microsoft's brilliant Office Lens app you can take a photo of a business card and save all the information on it as links within OneNote. With OneNote open on your phone, tablet or PC, you can then tap these links to call or email that person, and even get directions to their address.

First, open Office Lens (Android www.snipca.com/18977; iOS www.snipca.com/18978) and swipe across the options at the bottom until you reach Business Card. Now point your camera at the business card, then tap the shutter icon to take a photo. Tap Retake if the photo is

not clear, or the crop icon if you need to trim the image, then tap Done (see screenshot below left). Finally, tap OneNote, then Save.

You can now access the saved contact's details by opening OneNote on your phone or tablet (Android www.snipca.com/18994; iOS www.snipca.com/18995), PC or via its website (www.onenote.com). Log in with your Microsoft account details, if prompted. You'll see a new Contacts section. Click it to see all your business cards added as notes with links below the various fields. Click the relevant link to carry out an action. For example, click the email link to write a new email, or the address link to get directions in Bing Maps.



WINDOWS PHONE

Download podcasts to enjoy offline



Windows Phones' Podcasts app lets you download radio shows

and podcasts over a Wi-Fi network, so you can listen to them when you're offline. Open the Podcasts app, swipe across until you reach the Get Podcasts section, then type the name of the show (for example: type **football weekly** – the Guardian's podcast). Next, tap the show/podcast's name to open it, then the '+' symbol at the bottom to

Best New Apps

What you should install this fortnight

Adobe Premiere Clip

Free

Android: www.snipca.com/18981

iOS: www.snipca.com/18982

Adobe Premiere Pro is one of the best PC-based video-editing programs. This app brings the same features to mobile devices. Drag and drop your videos on a timeline, trim them, add transition effects and add your own music. Its 'Sync to Music' feature will then sync your music to your footage.

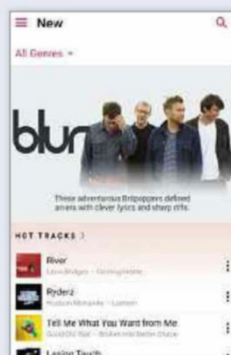


Apple Music

Free

Android: www.snipca.com/18983

Launched on iOS five months back, Apple Music is now available for Android. The app simplifies the otherwise time-consuming process of transferring all your music from iTunes to Android, letting you access your iTunes collection (and 30 million other tracks). It's free for the first three months and £9.99 per month thereafter.



BBC Store

Free

Windows Phone: www.snipca.com/18984

The BBC says that its new Windows 10 PC and phone app is "the most comprehensive collection of BBC programmes ever made available to buy". It has over 7,000 hours of the best current and classic drama, comedy, entertainment and documentary shows. Episodes cost around £1.89 each and complete series around £7.99.



add it to your favourites list.

To download an episode, go back, swipe to the Favourites section, then tap the show/podcast to see available episodes. Tap one, then tap the download button at the bottom. You can now listen to that show even if you're offline.

iOS Disable Facebook notifications on iPad



If you access your Facebook account on more than one device, receiving the same notifications on both can be annoying. There's an easy way to block Facebook notifications on your iPad. Open Settings, scroll to the bottom, tap Facebook on the left, Settings (see screenshot below), Notifications, then tap the Allow Notifications slider to turn it off.

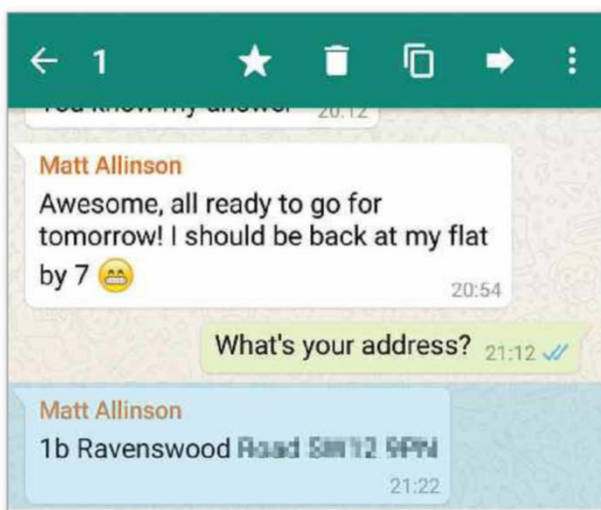


ANDROID & iOS Save WhatsApp messages to read later



WhatsApp Messenger is our favourite messaging app because it lets you send text messages, photos, videos and even voice notes, as well as make phone calls, to any other user for free. The app (Android www.snipca.com/18979; iOS www.snipca.com/18980) was recently updated with a new feature that lets you save any message (or media file) to read later – similar to bookmarking a useful webpage. For example, if someone sends you an address or postcode, it's handy to save this so you can find it easily when you need it.

First, open any WhatsApp conversation (person or group), then tap and hold the relevant message (or media file) until it's selected. Now tap the star icon at the top of your screen (see screenshot above right). You can save as many items as you want using this method. To access your saved content, go to the main



screen (listing all your WhatsApp conversations), tap the three dots at the top right, then tap 'Starred messages'.

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO ANDROID

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at www.snipca.com/18829

Games With Kids

What to play together on your phone and tablet

AGES 0-5

The Good Dinosaur: Dino Crossing

Free www.snipca.com/18986 (Android)

Free www.snipca.com/18987 (iOS)

In this game (inspired by the Disney Pixar film), your toddler needs to help Arlo (the dinosaur) and Spot (the little boy) cross treacherous terrain by swiping up, down, left and right. You have to collect berries to unlock other characters from the film.



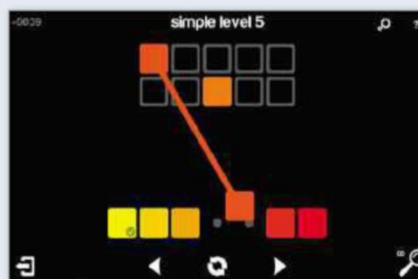
AGES 6-10

Blendoku*

Free www.snipca.com/18988 (Android)

Free www.snipca.com/18989 (iOS)

In this game (with over 475 levels) you need to rearrange tiles according to colour gradation. So, for example, drag the yellow tile to the far left, the red tile to the far right, then order the tiles in between.



AGES 11-16

CSR Classics*

Free www.snipca.com/18990 (Android)

Free www.snipca.com/18991 (iOS)

You may never be able to afford a vintage car, but at least you can now race them. In this game, you start off with a broken shell of the car. Win races for money, then restore your car and take part in tournaments across the world to upgrade and win better automobiles.



*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS VISTA, 7, 8, 10

Batch-update your files more quickly



If you tend to keep previous versions of documents and spreadsheets in a different folder from the current versions of the same files, there's a quick way you can update them. This method is especially useful if you want to update backup files on a USB stick or in a cloud-storage folder on your PC - for example, Dropbox, Google Drive or OneDrive.

First, open both folders (containing current and previous versions). Next, select all the current file versions (press Ctrl+A), and drag and drop them into the other folder. In the Copy File window that opens, tick 'Do this for the next X conflicts' at the bottom, then click 'Copy and Replace' at the top (see screenshot below).



WINDOWS 10

Identify the programs that eat up your broadband data



Windows 10 offers a quick way to keep track of how much data you're using, which is useful if you have a monthly broadband data limit. It also lets you check which programs are devouring more data than they should.

Open the Start menu, click Settings, Network & Internet, then click 'Data usage'. You'll see a circular graph showing how much data you've used in the previous 30 days. Next, click the 'Usage details' link to see your programs listed alongside the amount of data they used (in descending order) in that time period. If you notice there are programs using data that shouldn't be, you should consider uninstalling them.

WINDOWS VISTA, 7, 8, 10

Use your PC's hidden on-screen keyboard

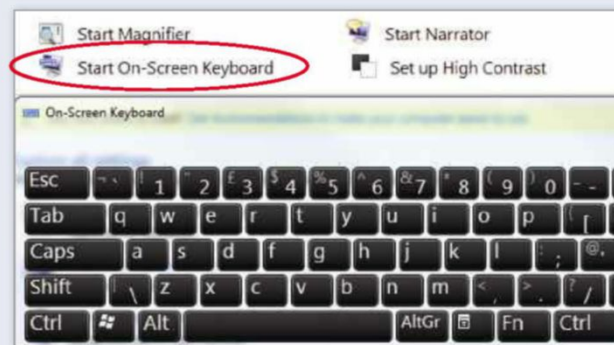


If your keyboard suddenly stops working, don't panic. There are any number of possible causes and most can be remedied very easily. If your keyboard is connected to your PC via a USB cable, then check that it's connected properly. If the connection is fine, run CCleaner and restart your PC.

If neither of these methods work and you need to use the keyboard urgently, then you should use your PC's on-screen keyboard. It's a handy, albeit more cumbersome alternative because

you have to click the keys using your mouse. To access it in Windows 7, open the Start menu, then click Control Panel. In Windows 8 and 10, right-click the Start button, then click Control Panel. Now click the 'Ease of Access' link at the bottom right, 'Ease of Access Center', then click Start On-Screen Keyboard (see screenshot).

If you're trying to log into your Windows 7 or 8 PC (by typing your password) and your keyboard isn't working, click the 'Ease of Access' button (a circular icon) at the bottom left, tick 'Type without the keyboard (On-Screen Keyboard)', then click Apply to bring up the keyboard. In Windows 10, click the 'Ease of Access' button at the bottom-right of your login screen, then click On-Screen Keyboard to activate it.



To uninstall programs in Windows 10, go back to the main Settings screen, click System, 'Apps & features', select the faulty program/app, then click Uninstall.

WINDOWS VISTA, 7, 8, 10

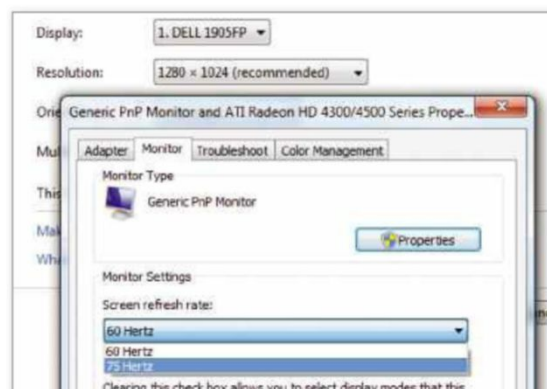
Fix your flickering CRT monitor



Today's LCD screens (flatscreen displays) are stable and aren't prone to the dreaded flickering that plagues older monitors. But if you are still using an old-style CRT (cathode ray tube) monitor, then your screen may suffer from occasional flicker - especially after you've run a Windows update or switched on your PC for the first time in a while. This flicker can cause you eyestrain and headaches, so it's a good idea to fix it. Thankfully, it's easy to do this by changing your screen's **resolution** and **refresh rate**.


Open your Control Panel, click 'Appearance and

Personalisation', Display, then click the 'Change display settings' link at the top left. Now click the Resolution dropdown menu and set it to the highest level using the slider. Next, click the 'Advanced settings' link at the bottom right, the Monitor tab, then change the 'Screen refresh rate' dropdown menu to '75 hertz' (from the default '60 hertz' - see screenshot below). Click Apply, then OK. If this fails to resolve the problem, it might be time to buy new monitor.



SWAY

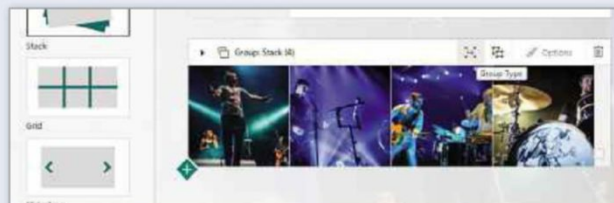
Add a group of images to your presentation

 Adding images in Microsoft's online presentation tool Sway was never rocket science, but it has now become even easier.

Go to www.sway.com and log in with your Microsoft account. Next, click Create New, give your presentation a title, then click Picture on the left to add photos. Now click the 'Add a picture' thumbnail, then either select Upload and grab the photos you want from your PC, or select Bing (or Flickr) to see a list of copyright-free images you can use. By default, each image appears in a separate section. Click inside each section to

caption that image.


To group your images, tick the box at the bottom right of each section, then click Group. You'll now see the Group Type options slide in from the left (see screenshot). This lets you arrange your images in a stack (whenever you click the main image it moves to the back to be replaced by the next in the stack). You can also arrange your photos as a grid (collage) or as a slideshow (with buttons to the left and



right of the main image). Select the one you want. By default, your images appear as small thumbnails within your presentation. To enlarge them, click Options on the right, then select Intense. Now click the Preview section on the right to start playing your presentation.

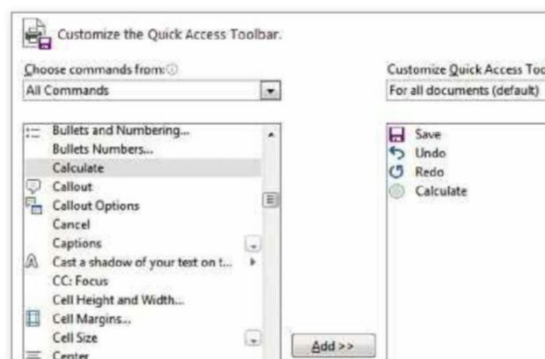
OUTLOOK

Stop important emails landing in your Junk folder

 If you notice that important emails are ending up in your Junk Email folder, you should tweak your settings. Outlook 2010 onwards has a useful feature called Safe Senders that lets you specify which email addresses (and domain names) should never be sent to your Junk folder. You can also set the feature to automatically direct all emails from people in your contact list and people you have emailed in the past to your Inbox – so they never end up in Junk.


To do this, click the Home tab, the Junk dropdown menu (in the Delete section), then click 'Junk E-mail Options'. Now click the Safe Senders tab, then tick the two boxes below – 'Also trust e-mail from

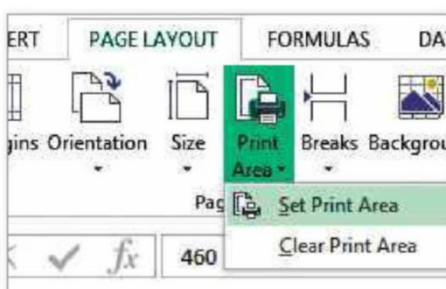
my Contacts' and 'Automatically add people I e-mail to the Safe Senders list' (see screenshot below left). Next, click the Add button on the right and type any other email addresses that aren't in your contact list. Finally, click Apply, then OK. Emails from anyone in your Safe Senders list will never appear in your Junk folder again.



EXCEL


Print only a section of your spreadsheet

 Printing an Excel spreadsheet with a lot of data can run into several pages. But if you only want to print a specific section of your spreadsheet, there's an easy way to do this. First, open the spreadsheet and click and drag your mouse to select the section you want to print. Next, click the Page Layout tab, the Print Area dropdown menu (in the Page Setup section), then click Set Print Area (see screenshot below). Now click OK and press Ctrl+P to see the print preview of the area you selected, then click the Print button.



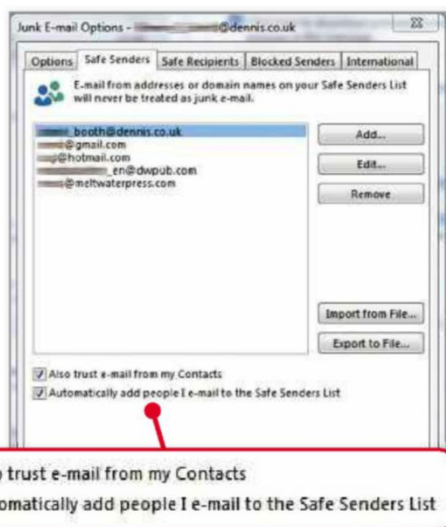
WORD

Add a calculator to your document

 If you often work with documents full of mathematical calculations, it's a good idea to add Word's built-in Calculate command to your Quick Access Toolbar (QAT) – the bar at the top left, above the File, Home and Insert tabs.

First click the small down arrow above the Insert tab, then click More Commands. You'll see two columns: the left column lists unused QAT options; the right contains options already on your QAT. Click the 'Choose commands from' dropdown menu on the left and select All Commands. Scroll down the list on the left, select Calculate, then click the Add button (see screenshot above). You'll now see a small grey circular icon on your QAT.

Now type any equation within Word (for example, 971*647, with an asterisk as a multiplication symbol), select it, then click this grey icon. At the bottom left of your document, you'll see a message: 'The result of the calculation is: 628,237'.





Stellarium

Hidden tools for the brilliant free astronomy program

Auto-hide your cursor

That little pointy arrow is handy for navigation but gets in the way when you're trying to observe the night sky, so use the option to hide it after a set amount of time. Press F2 to open the Configuration window then select the Navigation tab. In the Control section, tick 'Mouse cursor timeout', then type a duration in seconds into the box on the right.

Enable location-specific light pollution

It may sound odd to suggest switching on the lights, because stargazing works best when man-made illumination is extinguished. However, by having Stellarium apply accurate light-pollution levels for your locality, what you see on screen will better reflect what you can (or indeed can't) see in the skies above you. Press F4 to open the View window, then select the Sky tab and tick 'Light pollution data from locations database'. The effects are rated from one to nine on the Bortle scale (www.snipca.com/18706). Alternatively, to see the night sky in all its glorious darkness, leave this box clear and set the 'Light pollution' figure to '1'.

Make your own keyboard shortcuts

Hovering your cursor over the toolbar buttons shows the relevant keyboard shortcut – but did you know there are dozens of hidden keyboard shortcuts? Pressing G, for example, removes the ground to give the effect of floating in space; and pressing either of the square-bracket keys adds or subtracts a solar week. There are loads of these time-savers, and pressing F1 will show the full list (see screenshot above right). You can even edit the shortcuts from here: click the 'Edit keyboard shortcuts' button, select a shortcut, click in the 'Primary shortcut' box, type your shortcut and then click Apply. If you make a mistake, click Restore Defaults and start again.



To see a list of keyboard shortcuts or create your own, press F1 to open this settings window

Add new landscapes

Stellarium includes a selection of landscapes, which you can set by pressing F4 and then selecting the Landscapes tab. It's also easy to add more.

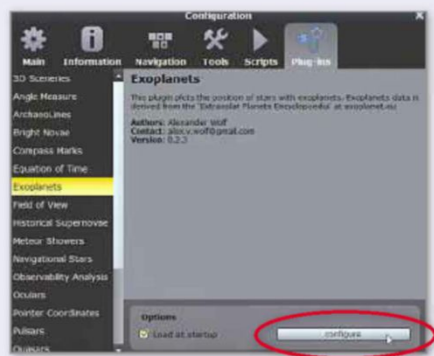
First visit www.snipca.com/18710 to find one you like, then click to download its ZIP file. Next, return to Stellarium's Landscape tab and click the 'Add/remove landscapes' button. Now click 'Install a new landscape from a ZIP archive', navigate to the downloaded ZIP file, select it, then click Open. If you're feeling adventurous and have good image-editing software, like the free GIMP (www.gimp.org), you can even create your own landscapes. The process isn't difficult but it does involve quite a lot of steps – so follow the guide on the Stellarium [wiki site](http://www.snipca.com/18711) at www.snipca.com/18711.

Power up with plug-ins

You can do even more with Stellarium with browser-style **plug-ins** that add useful or fun features. In fact, most of the available plug-ins are installed with the program – but only a few of them are enabled by default.

To switch on more, press F2 then select the Plug-ins tab. To have Stellarium plot exoplanets automatically, for example, click Exoplanets, then 'Load at startup'. Note that some plug-ins also have a 'configure' button (see screenshot) that lets you fine-tune how they work. If the button text is white (rather than black), the button isn't clickable, because there are no additional options.

There are a few more plug-ins that



can be downloaded, though installation methods vary – and some plug-ins work only with certain versions of the program. Find out more at Stellarium's Plug-ins page (www.snipca.com/18709).

Capture screenshots instantly

Have you framed a nice scene or want to print the view for reference? Press Ctrl+S to snap an instant screenshot, which by default is saved to the C:\Users\YourUsername\Pictures\Stellarium folder. To change the save folder, tap F2 to open the Configuration window, then select the Tools tab and click the folder icon in the Screenshots section.

Anchor Stellarium's toolbars

Stellarium's toolbars slide into view as your cursor rolls over them, and disappear automatically when the cursor has moved away. That's typically what you'd want, but during configuration it's handy to have them fixed in place – and you can do that by clicking the tiny arrow icons that appear on the grey strips in the corner of each toolbar.

Laser drones

Can't get fast broadband? Here's one crazy-sounding solution

Are they the villains in the *Doctor Who* Christmas special?

Well, they would make a nice change from Daleks. And they wouldn't have any trouble with stairs.

Why's that?

Because they are drones (the clue is in the name), and can fly at heights of 60,000 feet – almost twice as high as aeroplanes. But they do have one thing in common with Daleks.

Which is?

They are controlled by a sinister organisation intent on enslaving the human race: Facebook. Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook's answer to Davros, if you will) wants the solar-powered drones to beam the internet into millions of homes as part of his mission to "connect the whole world".

Are they in the sky already?

No, but there have been test flights in secret locations in the UK, as Zuckerberg announced at the end of March (www.snipca.com/18734). Called Aquila 1, the test drone (above right) was built over a 14-month period in Somerset. It has a 142-foot wingspan, wider than a Boeing 737. But Facebook says that its carbon-fibre design means it weighs less than a Toyota Prius.

How do they work?

Data is sent from the ground to a drone, which then transmits an internet signal by laser to other drones. The final drone in the chain then sends this as a radio frequency to terminals placed within a 100-mile diameter on ground. This is sent to computers to provide internet access.

How easy is that?

It's pretty "freaking" hard, to use Jay Parikh's words. He should know – he's Facebook's Vice President of Engineering. The relatively simple part is keeping the drones aloft for three months at a time. Much harder is beaming internet signals



between drones 200 miles apart. Parikh came up with a startling analogy: "If I took a US dime [18mm in diameter] and I walked 11 miles away from you, and then you had a laser in your hand, you would have to hit that dime".

Doesn't Google have something similar?

They are testing drones, but – like Amazon's rival drones – these are for delivering items, not the internet. Instead, the company has something bigger up its sleeve – a fleet of 180 satellites capable of sending broadband down to Earth. That's some way off, though. For the moment, Google is focussing on balloon-powered internet.



Google is already providing internet access from balloons floating at 60,000 feet

Balloons? The kind you see at kids' parties?

Not quite. Filled with helium, these 'superpressure' balloons look like giant jellyfish (see photo below left), and float at the edge of space. Work on Project Loon (www.google.com/loon) began in 2013 with the launch in New Zealand of 30 balloons, each carrying a computer, Wi-Fi radios and GPS technology. Sri Lanka and Indonesia will soon become the first countries to receive internet by balloon on a mass scale.

Is it only for developing countries?

That seems to be Google's aim. The company wants the balloons to help bring internet access to the billions of people who live without it – around two-thirds of the world's population.

But Facebook see their drones delivering web access in remote areas of the UK and other advanced countries, using artificial-intelligence technology to identify areas with no internet coverage. Despite different approaches, both companies agree on one thing: the more people who get online, the more money they can make. Profits will be as sky high as any drone, balloon or satellite.

Don't Get HACKED IN 2016



Hackers are changing tactics in 2016 – and you're in more danger than ever. Jane Hoskyn reveals next year's threats and what to do to stay safe

2015 was the most dangerous year in malware history. You already know that, because we told you in our Cover Feature in Issue 460 (The Worst Malware Ever). We also said "and 2016 will be worse", but you may have missed that bit – especially if you were in an understandable hurry to get

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Find out why hackers are moving on from malware ...and why that's *not* good news
- Beat the new ransomware that locks your backups
- Encrypt your files and even your OS
- Stop using programs that are no longer safe
- Know hackers' phishing traps so you're not caught out

on with reading the feature.

So let's drag it up again, shall we? While you're setting the table for Christmas dinner – or perhaps relaxing with your favourite magazine while you digest your figgy pudding – we're here to remind you that 2016 will make 2015 look about as digitally dangerous as a festive game of charades.

Serving up trouble

You'd be forgiven for assuming your security troubles are over now that Windows 10 is here. New year, new operating system (OS), new instant automatic updates – and no unpatched security holes. Meanwhile antivirus (AV) software is more powerful than ever – with even the once-useless Microsoft Security Essentials performing brilliantly in our latest lab tests.

So what's the problem? No offence, but

cybercriminals are not as interested in your PC as they were. In 2016, they're going after company **servers**. That may sound like someone else's problem but it's potentially disastrous for you, and over the next couple of pages we'll explain why.

We can't see into the future, but the UK's top security experts can – because they closely following the habits of cybercriminals every day. So for this feature, we spoke to several security specialists and discussed their predictions, most of which were frighteningly similar.

We'll explain their predictions and how each of these threats may affect you. In the second half of the feature we'll show you what you must do to avoid being one of the millions of people who will have their money and secrets stolen by hackers next year.

HACKERS' NEW TACTICS FOR 2016

Database burglary

PC malware is so 2015. OK, it's not gone away – and one particular form, **ransomware**, is a bigger threat than ever – but in 2016, hackers will be playing a much bigger game.

Every single security expert we spoke to for this feature predicted that server attacks would be the cybercrime theme of 2016. That means hackers are now aiming to break into servers (essentially vast computers, such as those used by Google or Amazon to store and manage data) instead of people's PCs.

So you're off the hook, right? Wrong, very wrong. By breaking into servers instead of PCs, hackers can steal millions of people's private data – passwords, bank details, emails and much more.

In our Cover Feature on The Worst Malware Ever we briefly mentioned server bugs (also known as flaws or security holes) such as Heartbleed (<http://heartbleed.com>) and Shellshock (aka Bash, www.snipca.com/19010). Criminals look for these flaws in servers and, once they find them, they use them as a kind of cyber fishing net, harvesting huge bounties of people's data.

Stealing card details

In early December, pub chain JD Wetherspoon revealed it had been hit by hackers who stole the card details of 100 customers, along with the personal details of around 650,000 database members, including names, dates of birth, email addresses and phone numbers.

The hack actually happened last June using the company's old server – but Wetherspoon waited until early December to release details, possibly for legal reasons.

According to the pub chain, the stolen card details couldn't be used on their



Wetherspoon emailed all its customers after admitting the hack in early December

own to steal money, and they're largely correct. You can't use most debit or credit cards to withdraw money or buy anything without either having them in your hand and knowing the PIN or security code on the back.

Wetherspoon has emailed all affected customers and published an FAQ on its website (www.snipca.com/19011).

Exploiting weak website security

If a site's server is poorly protected, it might as well be a shop built out of cardboard with a hole in it. In November, hackers discovered a server flaw that easily allowed them to plunder the database of VTech (www.vtech.co.uk), a Hong Kong-based company that makes tablets and other gadgets for children. A large and lucrative market, as you'd expect – hence its 4.8 million-strong customer database.

But the site's security was so weak that hackers broke in easily and found a goldmine of sensitive information about customers, their children and their grandchildren. Shockingly, this information included the kids' home addresses, names and dates of birth, as well as all the registered customers' security questions and passwords.

Despite being a popular and trusted company, VTech failed at basic security measures. For example, customers' secret security questions and answers were stored in **plain text**. It's a reminder that no matter how big and professional a company may seem, it may be far more vulnerable than you realise.



More than 100 customers of pub chain JD Wetherspoon had their card details stolen

Encryption lock-picking

When hackers discovered the Heartbleed flaw in password manager LastPass last June (www.snipca.com/19004), they thought they'd hit the hacking jackpot. But they were foiled by the server's security measures.

LastPass uses extremely robust encryption techniques that make all stored data undecipherable even to the most prodigious hacker. The only way to translate strongly encrypted gobbledegook into recognisable words and numbers is to unlock it using software that's tied securely to your account. No other human, not even the boss of LastPass, can unlock and read your list of stored passwords.

If the LastPass attack had been successful, it would have been devastating. A LastPass haul of passwords is priceless. The Hatton Garden jewellery raid, which happened around the same time, would have looked like a child shoplifting sweets by comparison.

However, a hacker sees a short-term disappointment as a long-term challenge. As we speak, cybercriminals are working on ways to pick the most complex encryption locks – and 2016 may well to be the year they crack it.

If hackers steal hundreds of card details or passwords, what would you expect they'd do with them? Use them, right? Actually, no. In some cases they sell them on the black market to evade capture. But they're much more likely to use them to blackmail the affected company into paying to get the stolen details back. And because those companies value your custom and their reputation, they often pay up.

Of course, blackmail is most effective when the stolen details are particularly sensitive or embarrassing. For example after stealing details of 480,000 customers of cosmetic surgery specialist Harley Medical Group, the hackers



Weak security on sites like VTech lets hackers raid a goldmine of sensitive data

blackmailed the company to get the data back (www.snipca.com/19005).

What's even more scary is when hackers blackmail you personally, as with the attack on Ashley Madison (www.ashleymadison.com), the infidelity dating service. Hackers plundered the server in August and stole the personal details of no fewer than 32 million registered users. Each user received an email from the criminals, threatening to expose them unless they paid an extortionate blackmail fee. Many users couldn't afford to pay and, a month later, the hackers carried out their threat by posting users' names online (www.snipca.com/19008).

Three months later, security expert Graham Cluley says: "I still get emails most days from people who were listed in Ashley Madison's database that are worried after receiving demands for cash".

Ransomware on the rise

Ransomware is malware-meets-extortion, and it remains the biggest cyber-security threat we've ever seen. The number of ransomware attacks has risen "significantly" during the last three months of 2015, according to Simon Edwards, head of our security team at Dennis Technology Labs (DTL, www.dennistechnologylabs.com). "It's not going anywhere soon, because it's an effective way to get people to cough up cash," Edwards told us.

Unlike the ambitious server-pillaging strategies we've talked about so far, ransomware tends to infect smaller devices: typically your PC, tablet and phone. So far, hackers haven't been able to infect a big company server with ransomware – but that's their plan for 2016. So you could find your bank and

card details held to ransom, with disastrous consequences.

Meanwhile, hackers are sticking with PC and mobile ransomware because it works. If you see a big notice on your PC screen telling you every file on your PC has been locked or encrypted and you have to pay £400 (often in the online currency **bitcoin**) by a certain date to get them back, you'd justifiably panic – and when people are panicking or scared they'll often pay to make the problem go away. Ransomware hackers understand human nature and exploit it very well.

Ransomware that targets backups

The best defence against ransomware, or any type of data theft, is to keep your data backed up automatically using a **NAS drive**, or a paid online service such as Carbonite (www.carbonite.com), which Simon Edwards recommends.

Carbonite's basic personal plan costs \$47.99 (£31) per year to ensure you've got a secure second copy of all your data, all automatically up to date – and we think

that's good value to protect priceless data. Here are dozens more services, reviewed and rated by our sister site Expert Reviews: www.snipca.com/19015. If you use one of these services you're hit by ransomware or other data-corrupting malware, you can wipe your PC and install the stored backup.

Now for the bad news. The more canny among you will have twigged already. Online backup services have to keep your backed-up data somewhere – on a server, of course. The servers of sites like Carbonite, and other security-focused backup services like SOS Online Backup (www.sosonlinebackup.com; \$7.99/£5.28 per month), are fiercely protected by layers of the tightest encryption measures available, and would be extremely hard for a hacker to breach. But the hackers are working on it.

"We've already seen versions of ransomware that can affect NAS drives," says Simon Edwards. "Slowly corrupting backups over time, and then demanding a ransom to make them work again, may be a strategy we see in the future."



Password manager LastPass narrowly escaped a disastrous server attack in June



Members of infidelity site Ashley Madison are still being blackmailed by hackers



Ransomware demands money to unlock files – and it'll be much more prevalent in 2016



Hackers haven't managed to crack Carbonite's super-tight defences – but they're working on it



DDoS hackers stole sensitive financial data from 157,000 TalkTalk users in October

DDoS attacks

If your bank's website is shut down for hours, it may have been hit by a **DDoS** (distributed denial-of-service) attack – and these are growing fast. They are sometimes pure vandalism, inflicted on sites to make a political point. Greek banks recently suffered a spate of DDoS attacks coupled with blackmail – the last thing the country's banks need at the moment.

But criminals also use DDoS attacks to steal your money. In October, DDoS hackers plundered TalkTalk's server in an attack that affected 157,000 users. The stolen booty included 28,000 card details; 15,656 bank account details; and 15,000 dates of birth, plus hundreds of thousands of names, phone numbers and email addresses.

If there's any reassuring news here, it's that the card details were partially

obscured, and therefore couldn't be used for a spending spree. But the 15,656 bank details could be used in cyber theft.

Even if a DDoS attack simply kicks a site offline for hours, it could cause financial chaos. What if a vital mortgage payment was due to leave your account and it didn't, because the site was down? Or you can't access your pension or savings for days on end?

HOW TO BEAT HACKERS' NEW TRICKS

Back up, and back up again

Despite hackers' attempts to crack encrypted backups, backing up all your data is still your best defence against server theft, ransomware or any type of malware that steals or corrupts your data. (Of course, it's also your best defence against a PC that conks out one day.)

The closest you'll get to guaranteed peace of mind is to double-back up. As well as using an automatic back up service such as Carbonite to keep your backups up to date, also regularly back up your PC to an external hard drive. The hard drive backup should include your software licence numbers and an **ISO** of your OS. You can create an ISO for all current versions of Windows by using Microsoft's Media Creation Tool (www.snipca.com/19028). Copy it all to another external drive for good measure and keep them in a safe place at home (just not next to a radiator, please).

Keep your software up to date

Windows XP is the best-known example of a product that's well past its end-of-support date and is now dangerous to use, but it's by no means the only one.



Create an installable backup copy of your entire OS using the Media Creation Tool

Hackers actively look for security holes in unsupported software, and use them to funnel ransomware into your PC, along with threats we talked about in Issue 460, such as **Trojans**, worms and spyware. Indeed, an old banking Trojan that hackers first used in 2007 has re-emerged specifically to target Windows 10 users (see Protect Your Tech, page 16).

As you may know, many companies, local councils and banks still run Windows XP, which makes it much easier for hackers to break into their servers. Microsoft extended support for the special Windows XP Embedded OS – used by many of the UK's 70,000 cash

machines – until 16 January 2016 (www.snipca.com/19034). Banks must upgrade their systems before then. Write to your bank, your council and your MP demanding to know what OS they're using and pointing out that your security is at dire risk if they're still using XP.

Windows 10 patches itself automatically, of course. It is possible to switch off these automatic updates using Registry hacks, and defer them if you're part of the Insider Program, but please don't. You may feel that you're having patches forced down your throat, but they are designed to keep your PC safer than ever. Criminals are getting more and ►

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more sophisticated, and it only takes a second for a hacker to exploit a flaw and infect your PC with ransomware.

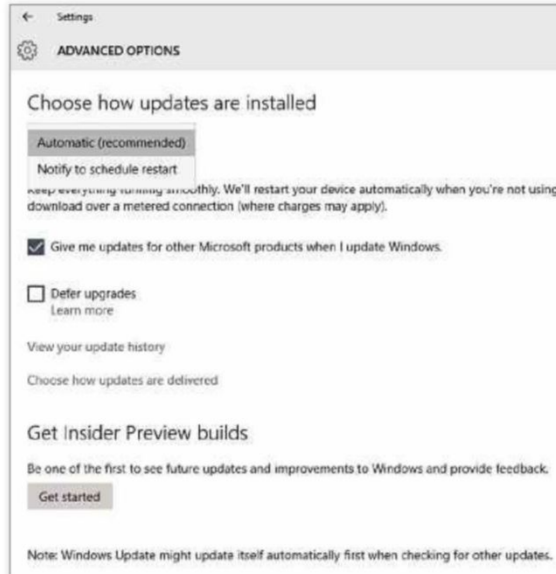
Look at your other installed programs and **plug-ins** as well, whatever version of Windows you're using. If you're near their end-of-support dates, it's time to update, upgrade or uninstall completely. See the box below for info and advice on keeping your programs, OS and even your devices up to date and safe.

Don't be caught by a phish

Phishing will remain a huge threat in 2016. Most of the scammers' attempts to trick you will take the form of what's known as 'clickbait' – links, attachments, headlines, photos and adverts on websites that you just can't resist clicking.

Clickbait isn't all dangerous – some of it just leads to substandard online content. But if you click a tempting link or download an enticing attachment that's actually a phishing attack, it could be deadly for your PC. Click or open it, and it'll automatically download and install malware, including ransomware and Trojans.

Phishing will soon become just as much of a threat to company servers as it is to individuals' PCs. If any worker in a company falls victim to a phishing attack, it could give cybercriminals access to a



Don't switch off or defer Windows 10 Update – it's there to keep hackers out

huge database of company data and customers' personal and financial details.

Clickbait doesn't have to be a fake advert promising a £1 iPad. Criminals also exploit global events. In November, security researchers at Symantec, maker of the excellent Norton Security antivirus (AV) suite, discovered spoof 'terror alert' emails that claimed to come from the Dubai Police Force. The emails tricked people into downloading the Jsocket Trojan, which gave hackers remote access to PCs (or, in the worst case, the PC's network server).

Less alarming, Google founder Larry Page (yes, 'signed' by Larry himself) sent an unknown number of people a 'Google



Google boss Larry Page wants to give you £950,000! No he doesn't – it's a hacker's phishing trap

Official Notification Letter' in early December, congratulating them on winning £950,000. Unfortunately, of course, it wasn't Larry at all, and there was no £950,000 windfall, just a PDF attachment that downloaded malware to victims' PCs. See the box over the page for our rundown of 2016's biggest dates and events. This isn't just to help you fill in your calendar – these are the dates when phishers know you're most likely to click links and be lured by adverts and offers that seem too good to be true.

Double-lock your passwords and keep them safe

Many people understandably grew wary of using password managers after the (albeit unsuccessful) attack on LastPass. Even experts got nervous. 'I'd rather write mine down than store them on someone's server,' said one security expert whose name we won't reveal, to save his home from a ransacking.

Other experts remain open-minded. LastPass was attacked by very determined ►

WHEN WILL YOUR SOFTWARE BE UNSAFE?

Here are links to pages where you'll find lists of end-of-support dates for programs and Windows versions that many of you use. Make a note of any important impending dates and check the sites' support pages to find out how to update or upgrade your tools and stay safe.

Internet Explorer (IE) users (124 million of you worldwide) – pay special attention! After 12 January 2016, all versions of IE prior to IE 11 will be completely unsupported. So if you're on an older version of IE after mid-January, you're an open target for hackers. Read more on Microsoft's site: www.snipca.com/19036.



WINDOWS

Windows lifecycle fact sheet:

www.snipca.com/19026

Windows Phone lifecycle fact sheet:

www.snipca.com/19027

- Windows Vista: extended support ends 11 April 2017
- Windows 7: extended support ends 14 January 2020

- Windows 8: mainstream support ends 9 January 2018; extended support ends 10 January 2023
- Windows 10: mainstream support ends 13 October 2020; extended support ends 14 October 2025

SOFTWARE AND DEVICES

- Adobe Acrobat and Reader: www.snipca.com/19020
- Google Chromebooks and Nexus tablets: www.snipca.com/19021
- Internet Explorer: www.snipca.com/19022
- Office 2013: www.snipca.com/19023
- Office 2016: www.snipca.com/19024
- Ubuntu: www.snipca.com/19025

hackers who didn't get away with a single password. Hackers may be ramping up their efforts, but so are LastPass and other free password managers like Dashlane (<https://www.dashlane.com>) and PasswordBox (www.passwordbox.com), who employ the world's best security-software developers. Using them, and backing up your passwords in an encrypted file (see next tip), is all much safer than writing your passwords on bits of paper.

If web-based password managers still make you nervous, use an installable program instead, such as the free, open-source tool KeePass (<http://keepass.info>) or the more sophisticated but somewhat more expensive 1Password (www.snipca.com/19030; \$49.99/£33).

You can make your passwords safer by coupling them with a secondary security code (which works like a PIN) sent to your phone. This is known as **two-factor authentication**, and you can find a list of sites that support it at <https://twofactorauth.org> (see screenshot above right).

Encrypt your data

Windows 10 has built-in tools that encrypt that by default encrypt some of your stored files and other data. This means if someone breaks into your PC or server they won't be able to read the data.

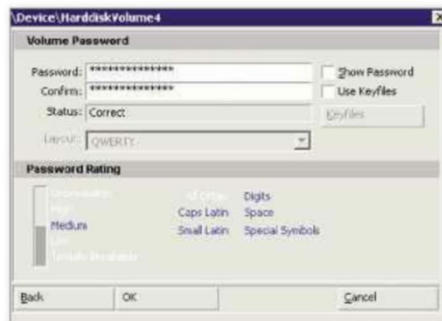
However, you'll notice we said "some" of your files. If you want to encrypt all your data, you'll need to shell out for Windows 10 Professional edition. Other modern systems, including Android, iOS, Chrome OS and Mac OS X, offer full, free integrated encryption tools for all users.

What's more, Windows 10 only encrypts your data if you sign in using your Microsoft account. Your recovery key is then uploaded to Microsoft's servers, so you can recover your files if you're ever locked out of your PC. But if all our talk of server-raiding hackers has made you wary, there are third-party options – and they work with Windows 7 and 8/8.1, too.

The most popular third-party encryption



Check which sites use two-factor authentication at <https://twofactorauth.org>



Encrypt some or all of your files and drives using free program DiskCryptor

tool has long been TrueCrypt (<http://truecrypt.sourceforge.net>), but its makers have withdrawn it for now while they work on improving the program's code.


So we've moved on to the free, open-source tool DiskCryptor (www.snipca.com/19040), which claims to be the only available tool that lets you encrypt all your drive partitions, including the system ('boot') partition (Microsoft explains system partitions here: www.snipca.com/19039).

To get the program, click the grey Download button and then click 'installer'. Save and run the installer, accept the agreement and then click Next. There's no adware to worry about, but there are further options, such as adding a Start menu shortcut and Desktop icon, neither

2016'S BIGGEST PHISH

A phishing trap could catch you on any day of any year, but big events and product launches are phishers' favourite opportunities to dangle their bait. Put these 2016 dates in your diary and be extra wary of clicking links and attachments:

- Jan: Samsung Galaxy S7 launch
- 27 Feb: 6 Nations Rugby, England vs Ireland, Twickenham
- Feb–March: 6 Nations continues
- 6 March: Mothers' Day
- 16 March: Chancellor delivers Budget
- 27 March: Easter Sunday
- 29 March: England v Holland football friendly, Wembley
- March/April: Microsoft Surface Book UK launch
- 21 April: The Queen's 90th birthday
- 23 April: Saint George's Day
- 24 April: London Marathon
- 2 May: Princess Charlotte's 1st birthday
- 21 May: FA Cup Final 2016, Wembley
- 11 June: Trooping the Colour, London
- 10 June–10 July: Euro 2016 football tournament
- 27 June 27–10 July: Wimbledon Tennis Championships
- 22 July: Prince George's 3rd birthday
- 28 July: Microsoft ends free upgrade period for Windows 10
- 5–21 Aug: Rio Olympics
- 7–18 Sep: Rio Paralympics
- 10 Sep: Last night of the Proms, Royal Albert Hall
- September: iPhone 7 launch
- 8 Nov: US Presidential election
- 13 Nov: Remembrance Sunday

of which is necessary. To complete installation you have to restart your PC – this is common in programs that let you control your system so deeply. The DiskCryptor site has a Forum and a particularly useful FAQ to help you get started and give your files the highest level of protection, for free. 

NEXT ISSUE On sale Wednesday 6 January

ON SALE
6 Jan

Windows 10 settings

All the hidden settings you must turn off to stop Microsoft killing your PC

Plus



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Windows 10: The biggest controversies

...and our verdict on each

Windows 10 is great – but it's not been without its clangers and scandals. Jonathan Parkyn delivers our verdict on every one

On the surface, Windows 10 feels like a return to Windows 7. But underneath the comfortably familiar Desktop and Start menu lurk a number of radical changes – not all of which have been well received.

We've had a lot of good things to say about Windows 10, but since (and even before) its release, Microsoft's new operating system (OS) has found itself mired in controversy.

We know from your letters that you have strong feelings about some of them. Now it's time to tell you what *we* think.

Aggressive upgrade nagging

Anyone still using Windows 7 or 8.1 will be familiar with the Windows 10 nag screen that pops up when you boot your PC. If you thought that was annoying, you won't be happy to hear that Microsoft's persuasion techniques are about to reach a whole new level.

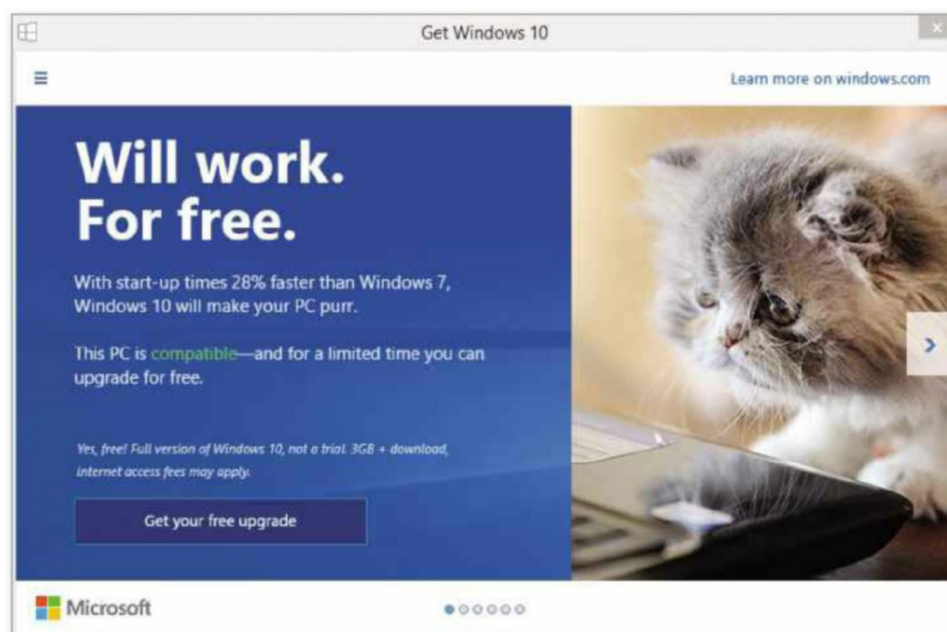
According to a recent blog post by Microsoft's Terry Myerson (www.snipca.com/18845), Windows 7 and 8.1 users can expect to find Windows 10 re-categorised as a 'Recommended Update' at some point in early 2016. Basically, this means if you've set Windows 7 or 8.1 to install updates

automatically, you could suddenly find Windows 10 installing itself – whether you want it or not.

OUR VERDICT

It's in Microsoft's interests to have everyone running Windows 10, but the company is assuming that it's in *our* best interests too – and that's a very patronising stance.

Windows 10 is a great OS, but there are plenty of users who are happy with Windows 7 and 8.1 – and even Windows 8 – so we think the company's bullying tactics are completely out of order.



The cute kittens don't fool us – Microsoft's nagging is just unacceptable

Compulsory updates

As you'll know from our Cover Feature in Issue 464, Windows 10 has snatched away your control over Windows Updates. In Windows 7 and 8/8.1 you could configure updates (timing, program exclusions and so on), but in Windows 10 you have a 'take it or leave it' scenario: switch off Windows Update entirely, or give it full reign, letting it install whatever it wants, whenever it wants.

The first option isn't even really an option. Switching off Windows Update means you never get security patches, leaving you wide open to malware. So you've really only got one choice: keep Windows

Update switched on and accept what you're given.

The first significant update (following numerous incremental patches and tweaks) came in November. Predictably, it unleashed a whole new set of problems, including a serious glitch that results in the upgrade getting stuck at the 44 per cent mark. Refer to Issue 464's Cover Feature for more on these problems.

OUR VERDICT

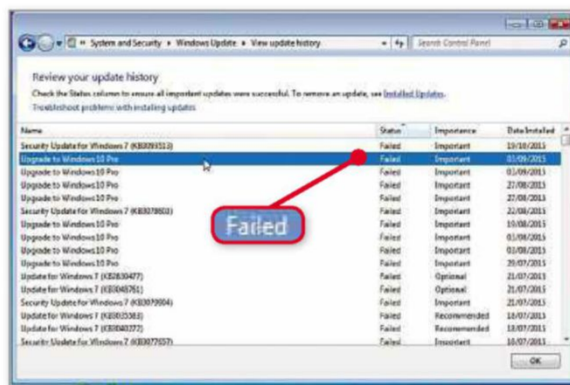
We find it unacceptable that Microsoft doesn't tell you anything about what's in an update. That makes us feel insecure – what will it do? What if my PC can't handle it? Moreover, automatic updates should at least work. Microsoft must address its apparent strategy of releasing unfinished updates that may contain glitches.

Users of the Professional, Enterprise and Education editions of Windows 10 can defer updates until bugs are ironed out, but most of us are Home users – and we should have the same option.

Downloading Windows 10 without your permission

Many Windows 7 and 8.1 users – including those who never reserved the Windows upgrade – have suddenly found massive Windows 10 installation files sitting on their PC's hard drive. This is because Microsoft smuggled these files in without asking. And when we say massive we mean up to 6GB of storage space and bandwidth. Thankfully, there are ways of uninstalling these files (see our Workshop on page 42 of Issue 460).

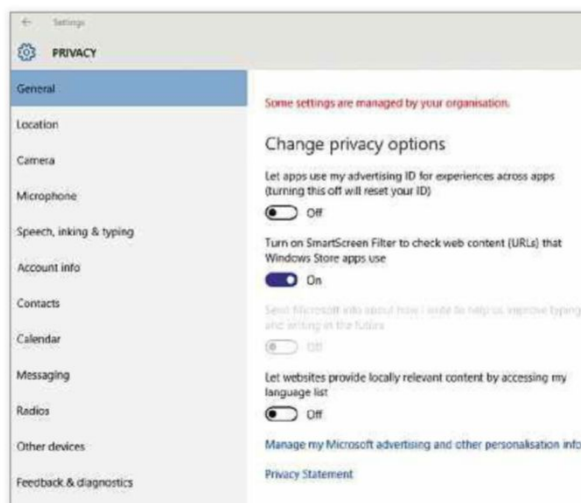
There have been cases, however, in which the unwanted Windows 10 download has quietly attempted to install itself, sometimes several



If Microsoft has tried to install buggy files on your PC, they'll be marked as 'Failed'

times. To see if your PC has been affected, open Windows Update, click 'View update history' and see if there are any 'Upgrade to Windows 10' updates listed as Failed (see screenshot above).

In a recent report (www.snipca.com/18846), a Microsoft representative stated that automatic installation attempts are caused by a bug which the company claims has been corrected. However, a Windows 7 PC we tested for this feature still showed that the optional Windows 10 upgrade was automatically selected for installation in Windows Update.



Windows 10 gathers your information even if you tell it not to

OUR VERDICT

Microsoft's intention – to make the upgrade Windows 10 process quicker and simpler – appears to be benign. And the failed installation bug (assuming it genuinely is a bug), is an unfortunate by-product of an ill-conceived strategy.

But the initial assumption on Microsoft's part that no one will mind massive files being downloaded to their PCs without their consent is

arrogant and misjudged. What if you don't actually want to upgrade? And what about people who are on capped or metered broadband connections? That 6GB could push you over your monthly data allowance and cost you money as well as hard-drive space.

Is Windows 10 spying on you?

On its launch, many critics slammed Windows 10 for its blatant disregard for users' privacy. Left to its default settings, the new OS and its apps will happily gather all manner of personal data, including your current location and virtually anything you type on your keyboard.

In most cases it's possible to opt out of tracking and other background data-gathering aspects of Windows 10 via the Privacy section of the Settings app. But even if you disable all the data-collection settings you can find, it won't stop the OS from collecting *all* information about you.

Microsoft's Corporate VP Joe Belfiore admitted in a recent interview (www.snipca.com/18847) that Windows 10 includes enforced data-collection elements that users can't opt out of. He claims these are strictly

limited to your PC's performance and how you use it, and "are not personal information or are not related to privacy".

OUR VERDICT

Data collection is nothing new. Windows users have shared basic performance information with Microsoft for years via the Customer Experience Improvement Program, though it's possible to opt out of this (this page about the scheme in Office is particularly useful: www.snipca.com/18905). Meanwhile, smartphones,

A CONTROVERSIAL GESTURE

Windows 10 was involved in another outrage just before its main release in July, when it emerged that the new OS would support the controversial 'middle finger' emoji.

The offensive symbol has been available for more than a year as part of the current emoji standards (yes, there are 'standards'; Wikipedia has some interesting links: www.snipca.com).

[com/18910](http://www.snipca.com/18910)). However, the finger was not included in previous versions of Windows.

This may all sound in bad taste, and be assured the controversial character is not actually included in Windows 10's on-screen keyboard (here's how to enable it: www.snipca.com/18911). The only way to use it is to copy and paste it from somewhere else.



tablets and online services, such as Google, routinely collect information about us and our activities (see our 'Who's selling your data?' feature in Issue 463).

But Windows 10 ramps things up by several notches compared with previous versions of the OS, and we're not happy that so many data-collection settings are enabled by default. But there is an argument that protecting our privacy is, to a large degree, our own responsibility. If you're worried about your privacy in Windows 10, then we'd encourage you to follow our previous advice on opting out via Settings. You may also want to read Microsoft's Windows 10 privacy FAQ (www.snipca.com/18848).

Nagging users not to leave Edge

A recently leaked preview build of Windows 10 (Build 10568) displayed 'nag' screens that attempted to dissuade users from changing their default web browser from Edge (which we don't like much) to Chrome or Firefox (which we do) or any number of lesser-known, but faster browsers that are perfectly suited to tablets (see our feature on page 60). The nag to 'Give Edge a shot' (see screenshot below) smacks of an admission of defeat, and is accompanied by a hard-sell of reasons to stick with the browser.

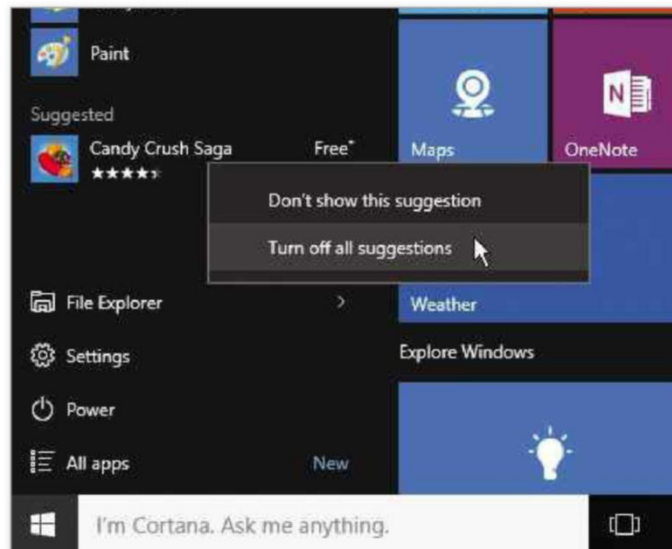
OUR VERDICT

The "please like Edge... please" nag (OK, we're paraphrasing) is pathetic, frankly. What may seem pathetic today could become more heavy-handed tomorrow. We wouldn't be surprised to find Microsoft making it harder to avoid having Edge as your default browser in Windows 10.

Aside from being dictatorial, Microsoft's behaviour may turn out to be legally dubious. After all, it wasn't long ago (2009) that Microsoft was taken to court by the European Commission and fined nearly £400 million for exactly



Microsoft is fiercely promoting its browser Edge – and we think it's crossing a line



Microsoft is now littering your Start menu with adverts for products you don't want

this type of anti-competitive practice. You can find many more examples of Microsoft's legally questionable practices on this Wikipedia page: www.snipca.com/18907.

Start menu adverts

The big November update brought fresh new features to Windows 10 – though not all were welcome. Among the most annoying is the inclusion of adverts (Microsoft prefers to call them 'suggestions') in the Start menu.

You can get rid of them – though probably not permanently – by right-clicking the advert and selecting 'Turn off all suggestions' (see screenshot above). In the window that opens, click the slider next to 'Occasionally show suggestions in Start' to switch this feature off.

Cortana and Edge also make money through advertising, which may explain why Microsoft is so desperate for you not to switch to another browser.

OUR VERDICT

Adverts are part and parcel of our lives these days, especially online, where they basically subsidise free services. But that doesn't always make them OK. Your Start menu is *your* Start menu, configured and customised to suit you. To find it littered with adverts for silly games feels intrusive, especially if you're used to hiding adverts online by using ad-blockers such as Adblock Plus (<https://adblockplus.org>).

The sudden return of adverts on your computer, especially in your Start menu, can actually feel scary, because unexpected content is often a sign of malware. Microsoft's adverts are safe but disconcerting.

This is likely to be just the start of the invasion of adverts on your Desktop, in your Taskbar and elsewhere in the OS. "Free" is never really free, after all.

Hidden costs

As if it's not enough that Microsoft takes a 30 per cent cut of all apps sold in the Windows Store, all Windows 10's default Microsoft apps – Groove Music, Films & TV and so on – nudge you to buy or rent music, films and other content. Meanwhile, many of Microsoft's free apps – such as Word Mobile and Solitaire (now Microsoft Solitaire Collection, www.snipca.com/18909) – attempt to push you towards coughing up for premium versions or ongoing subscriptions.

Even simple DVD playback can cost you dear in Windows 10. If you've upgraded from Windows 7 Professional, Ultimate or Home Premium, you can get Windows DVD Player free "for a limited time" (www.snipca.com/18968). If you upgraded from any other version (including Windows 7 Home), the app will set you back £11.59 (www.snipca.com/18969). We strongly suggest you switch to the excellent free media player suite VLC instead (www.videolan.org/vlc).

OUR VERDICT

These hard-sell tactics are just plain rude. Worse, they're sneaky and potentially extortionate. Inexperienced users might easily be swayed by entreaties to cough up cash to remove adverts. Many users with less confidence see Microsoft as the voice of authority, and will do whatever it tells them. **ca**

What's the fastest browser for your tablet?

Still using Safari on iPad and Chrome on your Android tablet? **Tim Danton** reveals how to boost your device by ditching its default browser



Firefox fans around the world rejoiced when, on 11 November, the browser's creator Mozilla released a free Firefox app for iOS. If you own an iPad, iPhone or iPod Touch, you can now use Firefox as the main browser on your device.

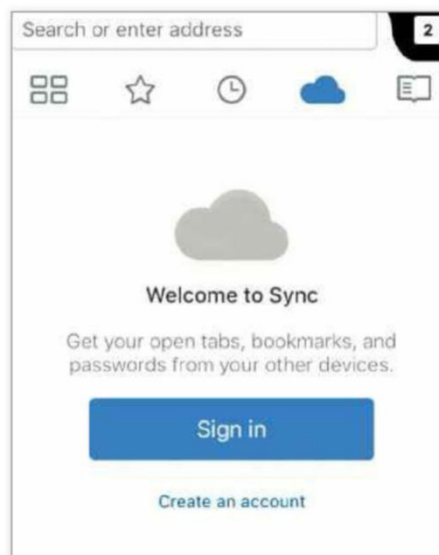
And yet, just because the Firefox app is hot off the press, don't assume it's better than others. With more and more browsers available for your tablet and phone, this is the ideal time to "shop" around (but not pay anything – all the browsers we feature here are free).

Changing your browser could be all you need to breathe new life – and speed – into your old phone or tablet. We tested this theory by running a number of browsers on Android and iOS tablets and phones to speed-test them in everyday use. Here we reveal which browser may give your device the biggest boost.

Speed up and sync with Firefox

The new iOS version of **open-source** browser Firefox (www.snipca.com/18883) doesn't make any amazing speed claims – and it's not in a position to. Apple requires all third-party browsers to use Safari's WebKit rendering engine (<https://www.webkit.org>). This rendering process is what turns a site's **HTML** code, photo files and so on into a readable layout for your device.

As a result, Firefox and Safari, which is pre-installed on all iOS devices, performed nigh-on identically in our speed tests. However, Firefox was four times faster than Safari in the SunSpider WebKit benchmark test (www.snipca.com).



Tap the cloud icon to sync Firefox for iOS across devices

[com/18882](http://www.snipca.com/18882)), which measures browser speeds running JavaScript, a coding language used by many sites (not the same as the dreaded **plug-in** Java).

Firefox also raced ahead of Chrome on the iPad in our tests, opening pages around 30 per cent more quickly. However, on Android, there's little reason to abandon Chrome for Firefox. Chrome comes pre-installed on most Android devices; if it's not on yours, download it free from the Google Play Store (www.snipca.com/18948). Chrome took just a few seconds to load web pages that were full of links and banner ads, while Firefox took up to a minute.

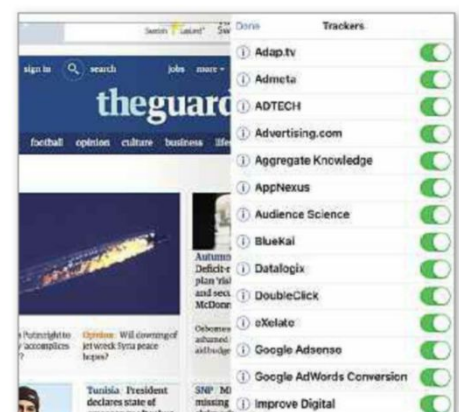
One advantage of using Firefox in iOS is that it synchronises your bookmarks, passwords and history with other

devices. Open a new tab in the browser on your iPad or iPhone, then tap the cloud icon and sign in or create a free Firefox account.

Go private with Ghostery

Your every move is being tracked online. You know that – and you know from our 'Who's selling your data?' feature in Issue 463 that sites and tools store data about your activity, and some even sell it to advertisers.

To find out exactly what sites are up to, switch to Ghostery (Android www.snipca.com/18885; iOS www.snipca.com/18886). A ghostly blue character sits at the top-right of the window and reveals how many trackers are loaded on each page. Click the character and you can select which trackers to block (see screenshot below). On poorly programmed sites, this could make browsing a little quicker too, because these sites sometimes download



Ghostery lets you see and control how much you're being tracked by sites

What's the fastest browser for your tablet?



Opera Mini is very fast in Android and saves data when you're out and about

advertises (which track you) before legitimate page content.

If you've been using the privacy-focused search app DuckDuckGo (Android www.snipca.com/18887; iOS www.snipca.com/18888), you can make it your default search engine in the Android version of Ghostery. Open Ghostery, tap the three dots to the right of the ghost, then tap the cog icon and you'll see the option for DuckDuckGo.

Slash data costs with Opera Mini

Opera Mini (Android www.snipca.com/18893; iOS www.snipca.com/18894) is a special treat for Android tablet users. Its tiny 3.3MB download size is reflected in its nimble speed. On your Android tablet or phone, tap the red 'O' logo, then Settings. Here, you'll find a 'Data savings' option that can save both time and money by reducing image quality and compressing videos – ideal when you're travelling.

Opera Mini isn't quite so impressive in iOS. For one thing, it's much less mini; once installed it weighs in at over 30MB. In our speed tests over Wi-Fi, its results were almost identical to Safari and Chrome.

There are other time-saving features in Opera Mini, in both Android and iOS. Recent history links pop up by default when you create a new tab. There's also a handy 'Discover' option that picks out interesting stories from sites such as the BBC, Metro and The Telegraph.

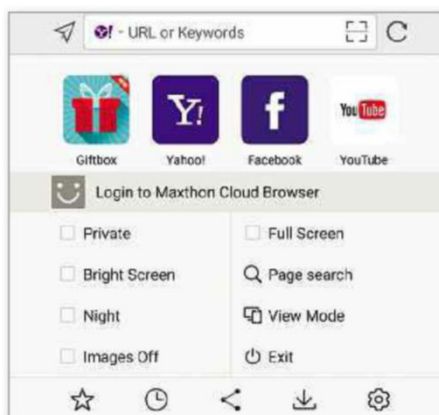


Puffin is much faster for accessing US content, and it includes safe Flash support

Fly to the US and back with Puffin

Puffin (Android www.snipca.com/18889; iOS www.snipca.com/18890) takes a completely different approach to most browsers. Rather than rendering pages on your tablet and phone, it does so on a US-based server and then streams images and videos to your device. In our SunSpider test, Puffin blitzed the opposition with a score 10 times faster than Firefox and almost 50 times faster than Safari.

The downside is that UK sites load much slower than US sites. When we tried viewing UK sites like BBC News (www.bbc.co.uk/news), Puffin was no quicker than Safari. When we tried a US site such as TV channel CNN (<http://cnn.com>), whose type of content is similar to the BBC's, Puffin loaded it several seconds faster. This makes Puffin a fine



Maxthon's Cloud Browser is lightning quick on PC, but its mobile apps are sluggish

A CLOSE CONTEST, BUT OPERA MINI WINS

No new browser will make an old tablet fast again. The age and specifications of your device, as well as your home internet speed and mobile-data connection, are big factors.

Even so, you're losing out if you stick with Android's default Chrome and Apple's default Safari browsers. You can cut mobile-data costs with Opera Mini, safely access Flash content using Puffin and protect your privacy with Ghostery. If pushed to choose one, we'd use the Android version of Opera Mini.

We'd also like to give a nod to Opera Coast (iOS only www.snipca.com/18896) and UC Browser (Android www.snipca.com/18897; iPad www.snipca.com/18898), all of which performed well in our tests.


choice if you use VPN tools to pretend you have a US IP address – so you can watch US Netflix – but less so if you're a fan of BBC iPlayer, for example.

Puffin's other selling point is that it supports Flash. The mere mention of the word "Flash" makes any sensible PC user nervous, thanks to the plug-in's history of security problems. But Puffin's Flash files don't go anywhere near your device – all the video rendering takes place on Puffin's servers. It stays up to date with the latest versions so you don't have to. At the very worst, any potential threats would hit Puffin's machines, not yours.

PC winner Maxthon can't keep up on tablets

Maxthon (www.maxthon.com) and its even faster little cousin Maxthon Nitro (www.maxthon.com/nitro) are unbeatable for speed when used on your computer, but the story is quite different on your tablet and phone.

Maxthon's apps (Android www.snipca.com/18949; iOS www.snipca.com/18950) struggled to compete with all the other browsers we tested, including the defaults. It lagged a few seconds behind Chrome in Android and Safari in iOS, even when loading quite basic pages.

Don't write it off, though. If you're more of a PC user than a tablet and phone person, and you love Maxthon's speed on your computer, install it on your other devices so you can sync your bookmarks and even your open tabs. 

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- STEP 3** Choose whether to create an optional  account
- STEP 4** Enter your **Apple ID password** to confirm



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Problems Solved

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

What's slowing my shutdown?

Q My PC runs Windows 7. Whenever I shut it down I have recently started getting a message saying that Windows is 'Waiting for background programs to close', with the option to force shut down. The PC does shut down, and it also launches fine the next time. However, I'm worried that if I continue with this it will affect my PC in some way. I'm a photographer and have recently installed Adobe Lightroom via Adobe's Creative Cloud. Could this be to blame?

Peter Richardson

A It's certainly possible that your Adobe addition is causing this, but we doubt you have much to worry about.

The message you're getting is entirely normal, and it's just one that Windows displays when the computer takes longer to shut down than it expects. As you've noticed, when Windows shows this alert it also offers you an emergency escape route in the form of a 'Force shut down' button. It sounds like your computer does eventually shut down, and we don't think you've yet felt the need to click this button.

Indeed, doing so is best avoided: clicking 'Force shut down' can actually cause problems, as Windows will force applications to terminate when they're doing something. If a program is in the middle of saving a document, say, then

you might have to wave goodbye to that work. So, it's always best to wait – even if that means hanging on a minute or two.

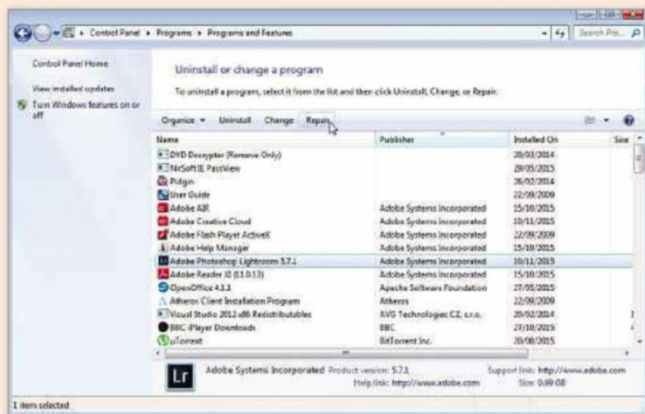
The time for action is if or when the 'Waiting for background programs to close' message never disappears, or otherwise takes more time than is reasonable. You didn't tell us for how long your PC displays this message, but if you don't want to wait, then there are a few things you can try.

High on the list of suspects is your newly installed Adobe software, but uninstalling it won't help your photography work. Instead, try the Repair tool, because it's possible that something related to the installation or the program didn't go to plan, or some program files may have been corrupted. Click Start followed by Control Panel, and then click 'Uninstall a program' under Programs. Select Lightroom in the program list, then click the Repair button and follow the prompts.

If that doesn't help, open Event Viewer: this lets you see what Windows is up to as it attempts to shut down. Click Start, type `eventvwr.msc` and press Enter. Double-click Windows Logs in the left-hand pane and then click System. Now look through the list to find events around the time you tried to shut down, and click any highlighted with red or yellow icons. We can't tell you exactly what to do here because it'll depend on what

information is displayed in the pane below, so search on Google to find solutions.

Repair programs in Control Panel if you suspect they are slow to shut down



Is this mystery file related to Windows 10?

Q I have upgraded my PC to Windows 10. After doing so, I came across a file called 'MP10Setup.exe'. This file occupies 12,456KB of space on my hard drive, and I have no idea what it is. Do you know? Is it safe? Or should I delete it? I have spent hours in contact with Microsoft trying to find the answer, but to no avail. I'd like to remove it to free up space.

Tony Hunt

A This file has nothing to do with Windows 10. In fact, it's likely to have been on your PC for a very long while, because we're 99 per cent certain that it's the installation file for Windows Media Player 10 (WMP10). This version of WMP was released over a decade ago, so as you can see it's really getting on a bit.

The only reason we're not 100 per cent sure is that we're not convinced you'd have upgraded an 11-year-old PC to Windows 10, so it's possible that you've picked up a virus masquerading as a legitimate download. The file size does exactly match the real WMP10 download, but that's not a guarantee of legitimacy – so don't be tempted to launch it.

The safest thing to do is delete it. But don't expect to free up lots of space: 12,456KB is a mere 12MB – or about one per cent of one gigabyte!



Right-click any problem file you don't need anymore and delete it

Our experts solve all your tech problems

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

Can I install my Kaspersky software on my Android tablet?

Q I have just bought an Android tablet and I'm wondering if I should install antivirus software. I have bought and installed Kaspersky on my desktop PC, and I believe the package covers three devices. Does this mean I can install Kaspersky on my tablet without having to pay extra? And, if so, how exactly would I do that?

Ronald Fearn

A It certainly makes sense to install and use antivirus software on Android devices.

Whether your copy of Kaspersky will cover you for this purpose depends on the specific edition you bought. The standard Kaspersky Anti-Virus and Internet Security licences are for PCs only. If you bought a three-licence version of either of these programs, then you could install it on one desktop PC and two laptops, for example.

But if you bought Kaspersky Internet Security Multi-Device or Total Security Multi-Device then you're in luck, because the licences for both these programs



If you have a spare antivirus licence, use it by entering the activation code sent to you

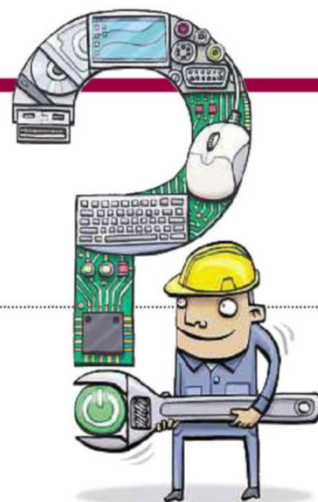
allow you to use them on mobile devices (meaning Android phones and tablets, basically) and Apple Mac computers.

When it comes to installing the tool on your tablet, it's possible to download it directly from Kaspersky's website but the method is complicated. Moreover, doing it this way would somewhat ironically leave your device a little less secure during the process, so we

recommend strongly that you get it from the Google Play Store at www.snipca.com/18589. Just tap Install and follow the prompts.

When you launch the app on your tablet, work through the setup wizard and at the last screen tap 'Purchase a License'. If you do indeed own either of the Multi-Device suites, this is where you can activate the program with one of your spare licences: just tap 'I have an activation code' and then type the code supplied when you bought your copy of Kaspersky.

If you're not eligible to do this then you can either buy one now by tapping 'Purchase a license' and agreeing to pay £9.99 via the credit card registered to your Google Play Store. Alternatively, tap Use Free Version to use the pared-down version of the app: this offers manual scanning and is adequate if you don't install many apps. If you want to pay to upgrade later, tap 'Premium features' and follow the prompts.



How do I read library ebooks on my Hudl?

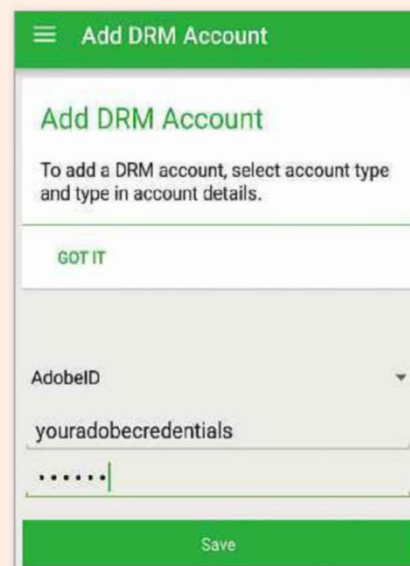
Q I have a Tesco Hudl tablet, as well as a dedicated e-reader. As a nonagenarian, I find the Hudl easier for reading ebooks, but I can't use it to borrow ebooks from my local library. The Adobe Digital Editions (ADE) installed on my PC will only transfer the download to my e-reader, not to the Hudl. I couldn't find an ADE app in the Play Store. Is there a way to transfer these DRM-protected library books to my Hudl?

Besley Simmonds

A If your library supports the free OverDrive reader app for Android (www.snipca.com/18718), you can install this on your Hudl, authorise it with your Adobe credentials and then download ebooks directly from your library.

If not, install the free Aldiko Book Reader app from www.snipca.com/18719. Connect your Hudl to your PC, then press Win+E to launch Windows Explorer. Navigate to the 'Digital Editions' folder on your Hudl. Press Win+E again to open a second Explorer window, then navigate to the folder ADE uses to store ebooks on your PC (such as C:\Users\YourUsername\Documents\My Digital Editions). Drag an ebook from this folder to your Hudl's 'Digital Editions' folder in the first window.

Disconnect your Hudl and launch Aldiko. Tap the menu button (three horizontal lines), then About. Tap DRM Accounts, then Add and enter your Adobe details. Tap the menu button again, then Files. Navigate to the 'Digital Editions' folder, tick the ebooks you transferred, tap the down arrow at the top right, then tap Import to add them to the app.



Add a DRM account with your Adobe details in the Aldiko Book Reader app to read copyrighted material on your Hudl tablet

Problems Solved

Can I delete Windows.old?

Q Having upgraded from Windows 7 to Windows 10, I find that there is a folder on my C: drive called Windows.old, taking up 24.5GB of space. Is it safe to delete it? If so, can I just do this in File Explorer?

Peter King

A If you're happy with the way your Windows 10 setup is working then yes, it's fine to delete this folder. You could do it in File Explorer but the safe way to remove it – and other unnecessary Windows system files – is by using a built-in Windows tool called Disk Cleanup.



Use Windows' built-in Disk Cleanup to get rid of unwanted system files

Press Win+R, type **cleanmgr** and press Enter. Select the relevant drive (C: in your case), then click OK. Now wait for Disk Cleanup to scan your drive. This could take a few minutes.

When the summary screen appears, click the 'Clean up system files' button, then wait for a second scan to complete. Scroll through the 'Files to delete' list to find and tick the 'Previous Windows installation(s)' box. Also, check all the other ticked boxes to ensure you are happy with the other items that are about to be deleted (and if not, clear the ticks). Now click OK followed by Delete Files to confirm.

How do I make Windows 10 apps fill my screen?

Q I have upgraded to Windows 10. It might just be me doing something wrong, but when I click any of the tiles in the Start menu the apps launch but they are not full screen, so I can see my wallpaper in the background. Is this a fault? Is it possible to make Windows 10's apps run in full-screen mode?

Rex Moore

A This isn't a fault, it's how Windows 10 is designed to work. Even so-called Modern-style apps written specifically for Windows 8.1 and 10 now launch into a window, in exactly the same way as programs did in Windows 7 and earlier versions of the operating system.

And, just as in older versions of Windows, you can click an app window's Maximise button to make it fill the screen – it's the small square at the top right, just to the left of the cross. If you do this in a



Apps in Windows 10 will not open in full-screen mode

specific app and then close the app by clicking the cross, that app will launch in full-screen mode the next time you launch it. Clicking the Minimise button (the underscore symbol to the left of the Maximise button) will restore a window to its previous size.

You can also do this using keyboard shortcuts. Pressing Win+up arrow maximises the current window, while Win+down arrow restores it to its previous size. A second tap of Windows key+down arrow will minimise the app to the Windows Taskbar.

How do I amend the Send To menu?

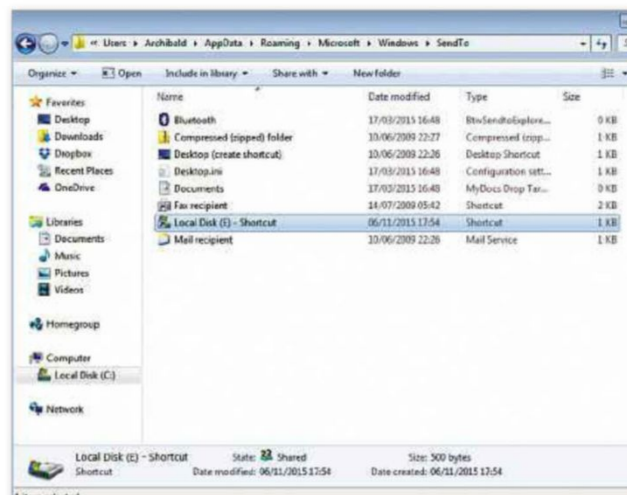
Q I have a built-in 1TB hard drive that's shown as drive E: under Computer. It works fine, but when I use the 'Send To' option on the right-click menu in Windows Explorer, this drive is not listed. I can still copy and paste to this drive, but can I restore its entry in the Send To menu? Do you know why it has disappeared?

Tim Palme

A We don't know why this entry disappeared, but it's pretty easy to add items to the Send To right-click menu. First, press Win+E to open Windows Explorer (or File Explorer in Windows 8.1/10). Now navigate to C:\Users\Username\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows\SendTo (where 'Username' is your own username).

Next, click Start, followed by

Computer, to open a second Windows Explorer window to display all your drives. Locate the E: entry, then click and drag it into the main right-hand pane of the first Explorer window. When the message below the dragged icon reads: 'Create link in SendTo', release the mouse button.



Use Windows Explorer to add items to your Send To menu

Can I get a mini-SIM without the monthly charge?

Q My wife and I are both disabled and want to install an emergency-call system in our home. The system we want requires a mini SIM card, which isn't included. All the mini SIM cards offered locally have a monthly charge, with so many minutes or texts included. As this is for emergency use only, monthly charges would be a waste. Is it possible to have a mini SIM that lets me top up and then make a short call to make sure the line is not deactivated?

David Jarman

A First, let's clear up the SIM size: confusingly, there's no such thing as a 'mini SIM'. There are standard SIMs, micro SIMs and nano SIMs. You didn't tell us what your device is, but we're guessing it'll take either a standard or micro SIM, because nano SIMs tend to be used



only by the latest phones. Some mobile networks supply standard SIMs with perforations that enable them to be snapped down to a smaller size; or you might need to request a specific size – so do check before you order anything.

Most mobile networks offer pay-as-you-go (PAYG) plans that will serve your

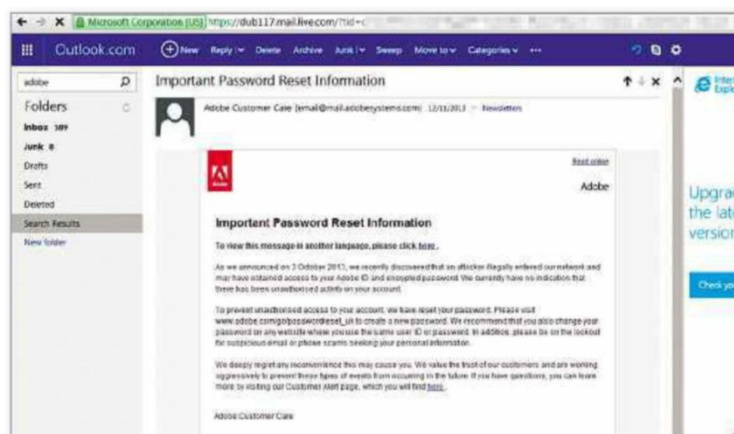
needs. You should consider Three's 321 plan, which offers 3p/minute calls (plus 2p texts and 1p/MB data). You can order a free SIM from www.snipca.com/18717, and then add a minimum £5 of credit. Credit doesn't expire, but you do need to make at least one call every 180 days to keep the account active.

What do I do now that I've been 'pwned'?

Q Reading about the 'Have I been Pwned?' website (<https://haveibeenpwned.com>) prompted me to check my own email addresses. Unfortunately, I found that my main address had been **pwned** in the 2013 Adobe security breach, though not published. I'd forgotten that I had an Adobe account and had received no notification of the breach from Adobe. I'm assuming I submitted my email address during registration of Photoshop Elements. There would have been no credit-card information, but I'm not sure what other information I submitted. It would be very inconvenient to change my email address, and all my finance sites are protected by encryption. Why didn't Adobe contact me? And what should I do?

Andrew Hardie

A We don't know if or why Adobe didn't contact you. Have you checked your spam folders? It's possible that the nature of Adobe's alert meant that your email program



If your email account was stolen in the Adobe hack of 2013, reset your Adobe password

misidentified the company's message as junk. However, with many tens of millions of accounts compromised, a few oversights wouldn't be surprising – so it's probably just unfortunate.

As for what you should do, well – other than changing the login details for your Adobe account, we're afraid there's really not much you can do: your email address is 'out there' and if someone unpleasant wants to exploit it, they will. However, you shouldn't worry too much because there's really not much anyone can do with an email address, other than use it for 'spoofing' (where spammers send out emails purporting to be from you in an effort to fool junk-mail filters).

So, for peace of mind, visit www.snipca.com/18590 to update (or delete) your Adobe account.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE
6 Jan

- How do I stop adverts in Skype?
- How do I stop flicker in slow-motion videos?
- Why won't McAfee protect Microsoft Edge?
- ...And many more

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Here's one Christmas ad that won't make you cry...

No matter how hard we try, we'll never be able to persuade you that security software is a suitable Christmas present for the man on the Moon.

He will always prefer a telescope sent by a little girl with a big heart. In fact, nobody deserves to receive security software for Christmas. Crucial though antivirus is, it's not really a gift that says, 'I love you'.

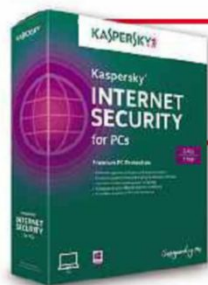
Instead, it's the kind of 'boring but useful' present you should buy for yourself. After all, would you trust your beloved auntie to choose the right software? She's so much better at picking socks.

The right software, as far as we're concerned, remains Kaspersky Internet Security 2016. It's won our past seven antivirus Group Tests, scoring 100 per cent in our most recent laboratory analysis. It's compatible with Windows 10, too.

That's why we've set up an exclusive reader offer for the software, selling it at half price. It is a limited offer, though. Like all the best products at Christmas, it may sell out before the big day.

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Windows Live Mail

Find WLM in Windows 10, make links work and send messages when on the go

WLM disappeared after installing Windows 10

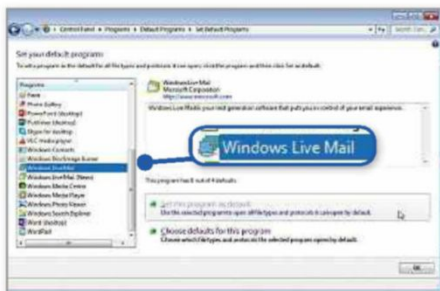
Did you upgrade to Windows 10 on a Windows 7 or 8.1 PC? If so, Windows Live Mail (WLM) is still installed on your PC. To put it back on the Start menu, click Start followed by 'All apps', scroll through to find the Windows Live Mail entry and right-click this, then choose 'Pin to Start'.

However, if you performed a 'clean' upgrade, WLM will be missing entirely. This is because a clean install wipes your PC, and WLM isn't part of Windows 10. Thankfully, it's still available and compatible, and better than the Mail program that comes with Windows 10 – so download it from www.snipca.com/18606.

Links in emails don't work

WLM detects and will automatically block suspicious links – **phishing** attacks, for example. If you're sure a particular link is safe, you can remove the block by double-clicking the affected email to open it, then clicking the Unblock link that appears in the information bar at the top of the message window.

If no links work at all, make sure WLM is your default mail program. Click Start, followed by Default Programs (in Windows 8.1/10, type **default programs**, then click Default Programs). Now click 'Set your default programs'. Select Windows Live Mail in the left-hand pane, then click 'Set this program as default' (see screenshot below). While you're here, follow the same procedure to ensure your preferred browser is set as your default.

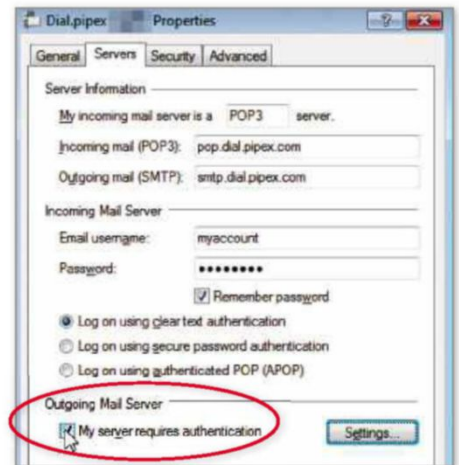


If links don't work in WLM, make it your default email program

You can't send emails

There are a couple of possible causes. If you've never been able to send emails you might've supplied the wrong details for the outgoing **server**. First, confirm these details with your email provider. Now click the down arrow at the top left to open WLM's main menu, then point your cursor to Options and click 'Email accounts'. Select your account, then click Properties. Click the Servers tab and check the details in the 'Outgoing mail (SMTP)' field. Next, click the Advanced tab and check the same field under Server Port Numbers to make sure it tallies.

If you use a laptop and sending emails fails only when you're away from home, select the Servers tab and tick 'My server requires authentication' under Outgoing Mail Server (see screenshot right). Next, click Settings, choose the 'Log on using' button, enter your account username and password and click OK.



Can't send emails? Go to your Properties settings to enable authentication

Attachments won't open or save

Another of WLM's built-in security features applies a block on file types it considers potentially harmful. It's a good idea, but it's not executed well. If you know for certain a blocked attachment is legitimate then temporarily disabling this protection will let you save it. Click the down arrow to open the menu, point to Options, then click 'Safety options'. Now select the Security tab, untick 'Do not allow attachments to be saved or opened that could potentially be a virus' (see screenshot below), then click OK. Save your attachment, then reverse this change.



Clearing this tick box will let you save all attachment types – but use with caution

WLM won't launch or shows error messages

Something may have become corrupted – either the program's own system files or the email or calendar database files. Before reinstalling WLM, try the repair option. Click Start, Control Panel (or Windows+X then Control Panel in Windows 8.1/10), then click 'Uninstall a program' under Programs. Select Windows Live Essentials (or Windows Essentials) in the list then click Uninstall/Change. Click 'Repair all Windows Essentials programs'. When it's finished, restart your PC.

Inbox doesn't sync between PCs

This isn't a fault with WLM but the way your email is set up, using the older **POP** protocol. You could switch the account to use the more modern **IMAP** protocol, which keeps things in sync automatically – check with your email provider for the server details. Alternatively, set up WLM to leave messages on the POP server for a few days – giving your other PCs an opportunity to pick them up before they're deleted. Click WLM's down arrow, point to Options and then click 'Email accounts'. Click your account then click Properties. Select the Advanced tab then tick both 'Leave a copy of messages on server' and 'Remove from server after', and type the desired number of days.

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3		EE: Broadband & Calls	£9.95 (£1 for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited **	£12.00
4		Sky: Broadband	£10.00 (HALF PRICE for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£60.00

Terms & Conditions apply - see ISP sites for details

*First-year cost does not include line rental. Cost is calculated at monthly price x12 with all introductory offers subtracted. Additional charges incurred outside of free inclusive calls not included in first-year cost.

** Fair-usage or restriction policy applies.

Data supplied by www.broadbandgenie.co.uk. Correct as of 1/12/2015

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In the next issue of our sister title Web User...

- **WHAT NOT TO DOWNLOAD IN 2016**
Rubbish software, dodgy apps and unsafe junk
- **WHO'S DOING WHAT ON YOUR PC?**
Track what others do without them knowing
- **SPEED UP YOUR BROWSER**
Find and remove what's making you crash
- **STOP PESTERING ME – GO AWAY!**
Disable the most annoying PC notifications



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Jargon Buster

1080p Of the common types of high-definition video, this is the best quality: 1920x1080 pixels.

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

5K Video with a horizontal resolution of 5120x2880 pixels.

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

Botnet A group of infected computers connected together via the internet, and used to infect other PCs, send junk email and perform other criminal tasks.

Bitcoin A digital asset and payment system. The system lets users transact directly without needing an intermediary.

DDoS Direct Denial of Service. A targeted cyber-attack which brings down a web server and the websites running on it.

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.

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

Emoji A small digital picture or pictorial symbol that represents a thing, feeling, concept, etc.

EXE A program file designed to run in Windows. Named after the file extension .exe.

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

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

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

HTML5 The latest version of the Hypertext Markup Language used to create most web pages.

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

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

ISO A type of image file that contains all the data from a disc.

Megapixel A measure of the amount of detail that can be recorded by a digital image. A one-megapixel image is made up of a million dots (pixels).



MicroSD A type of memory card.

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

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

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

Plain text The contents of a file that's readable as text without being tagged, specially formatted, or written in code.

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.

POP Post Office Protocol. A system for remotely accessing email from an ISP.

Processor The processor – or central processing unit – is the brain of a computer. Processors now are tiny and are capable of carrying out millions of calculations every second.

pwn To compromise or steal an email address, usually for phishing or criminal purposes.

Roaming charge Fee incurred for using your phone to receive data through overseas mobile networks.

Safe Mode A way of starting Windows so that various programs and peripherals are prevented from working. This is useful to help diagnose the cause of problems if a computer is behaving oddly.

SATA 3 Also known as SATA 600. The latest and fastest version of the SATA interface for connecting internal storage devices to a computer.

Security definitions A file downloaded by an antivirus program, giving it details of how to spot the latest threats.

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

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors, printers and the internet.

System restore point The collection of system files stored by System Restore on a given date and time to which Windows can revert if a problem occurs.

Trojan A malicious computer program that's disguised as a different, harmless program. For example, a Trojan may be disguised as a game but it's actually a program that steals your internet username and password.

Two-factor authentication A security system that uses two different means to identify the user. For example, a PIN in addition to a password.

USB 3.0 An even faster version of the USB standard used to connect devices to a computer.

Virtual drive A set of files seen by Windows as a separate hard disk.

VPN Virtual Private Network. A technology for keeping all internet communication safe and private even on insecure networks.

Wiki site A collaborative website that users can easily edit.

The Final Straw



STUART ANDREWS is
Computeractive's Mr Angry

This issue Stuart Andrews wants to bid good riddance to...

2015

So, 2015 is on its way out, and I can't say I'm going to miss it. Sure, my nearest and dearest seem healthy and hearty and I've had some good times. I've also eaten some good meals, read some good books and seen some good films. But throughout the year I've felt this low hum of mild annoyance, mostly caused by the constant drip-feed of mindless hype about technology. Needless to say, when *Computeractive's* illustrious editor asked me to list the five things that had most irritated me this year, I wasn't short of ideas.

“

Social media still provides too many people with an outlet for their own tiresome narcissism or self-righteous indignation

”

Being wound up by Windows 10

Don't get me wrong: Windows 10 is a vast improvement on Windows 8. It might shape up to be the best version of Windows ever. All the same, I was gobsmacked by how unstable it was when it was released, and it's seemed hellbent on winding me up ever since. Across one laptop, two desktop PCs and one tablet I'm still getting updates that don't erm... update and browsers that refuse to launch, then there are the printers that may or may not print. I'm also beginning to think that the 10 refers to the 10 seconds it takes to load, followed

by the 10 minutes of thinking time it seems to need before doing anything useful.

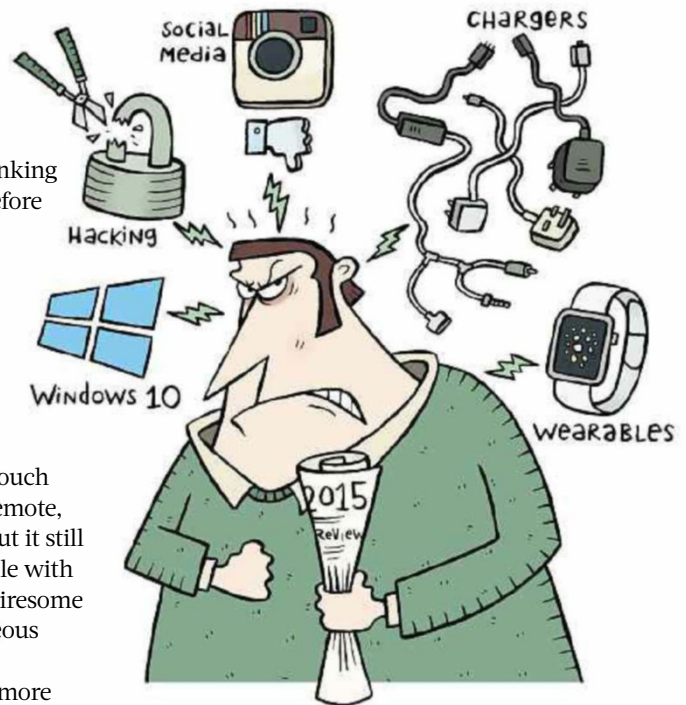
Social-media narcissism

Every year I think that social media can't get any worse. Every year it gets worse. Yes, it keeps families and friends in touch with each other – in a remote, virtual sense at least – but it still provides too many people with an outlet for their own tiresome narcissism or self-righteous indignation.

I'm getting more and more worried about the effects. Last month a big-name Instagrammer, 19-year-old Aussie Essena O'Neill, quit all social-media platforms because her 2,000-odd pictures and posts didn't reflect her reality, but what she called a “contrived perfection made to get attention”. It begs the question: how many other people, not all of them so young, are exaggerating their own lives to make themselves look good? Also, I don't like the way some politicians regard social media as a sounding board as if it reflects views held by the wider public. It doesn't. They're merely preaching to the choir, and the choir is preaching back.

Mass hacking

I'm really hacked off with hackers. Stealing the details of customers from some big-name corporation isn't a blow for freedom; it's just a cheap stunt that causes anxiety to ordinary people. True, a bunch of inept executives might get fired, but what about the folks nervously checking their bank accounts, or fielding calls from fraudsters? Still, it's the execs who really get my goat. If they actually cared about their customers and made security a priority, maybe they wouldn't have got hacked (or sacked).



Pointless smartwatches

I'll admit it – I have an Apple Watch. I both kind-of love it and feel mildly embarrassed by it, and I probably wouldn't have bought it if I hadn't needed to review it. I use it more than I thought I would, mainly as a sort of automatic nagging device to remind me what I need to do and when. All the same, I still struggle to see why most people need one. I can't tell if smartwatches are really the next big thing, or just a prop for smug attention-seekers to show off at dinner parties to people who don't really care.

Too many chargers

The biggest problem with all these devices we're lugging around is that they all need charging, many of them every day. I'm sick to death of charging my phone, my watch and my tablet, and when we go on holiday I need a bag full of different chargers just to keep the family's gadgets all topped up. Can we just agree on one standard and lighten the load a little?

✉ Do you agree with Stuart?
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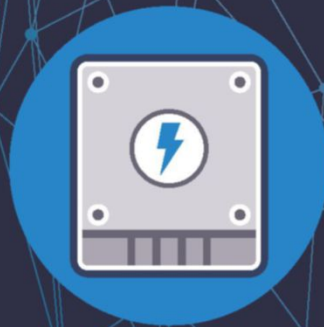


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