






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 Windows 10



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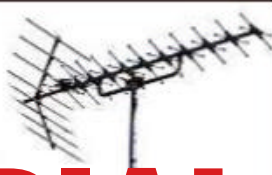
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11 million at risk in UK – check now **p7**



DITCH YOUR

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AERIAL**



Watch & record
your TV on Freesat
instead **page 35**

Computer **active**

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Everything is getting better – **p18**

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Printed in the UK

Most apps don't last very long on my phone or tablet. I'd say it takes me an average of about two minutes to work out whether they're worth sticking with. If it's not immediately obvious how you should use an app – what to tap, what to swipe – then I bin it.

Robert Irvine did a lot of tapping, swiping and binning when researching which apps to include in this issue's Cover Feature, and has found 30 that I'm more than happy to install on my devices.

My current favourite is BirdNET (see page 55). I've recently moved from the suburbs to a

more rural area, and find myself serenaded every morning by an exquisite dawn chorus. BirdNET helps me sort the chaffinches from the goldfinches, and the blue tits from the long-tailed tits.

There's less light pollution out here, so gazing at the stars is more rewarding than before, especially now I've installed Stellarium, while Footpath Route Planner will show me where to spend weekends as lockdown lifts. Please tell which apps you're finding useful.

Daniel Booth

editor@computeractive.co.uk



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£5

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HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

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

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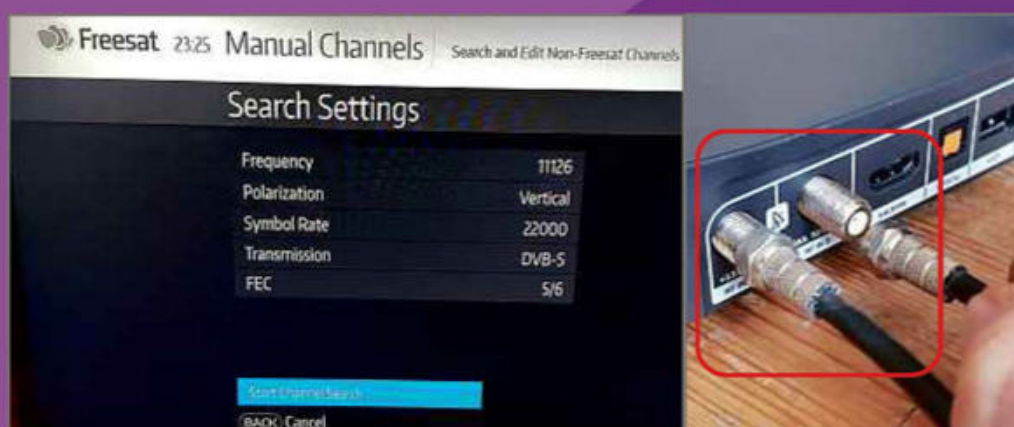


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DON'T PAY FOR APPS!

The 30 best **NEW** phone and tablet apps that are completely **FREE!**



COVER
FEATURE
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Print your own labels (but don't use your printer)



Windows 10 update fixes File Explorer and kills old Edge

Microsoft has released an update that fixes a problem with File Explorer that has been annoying users for nearly 18 months.

After installing the November 2019 Update (version 1909), some people

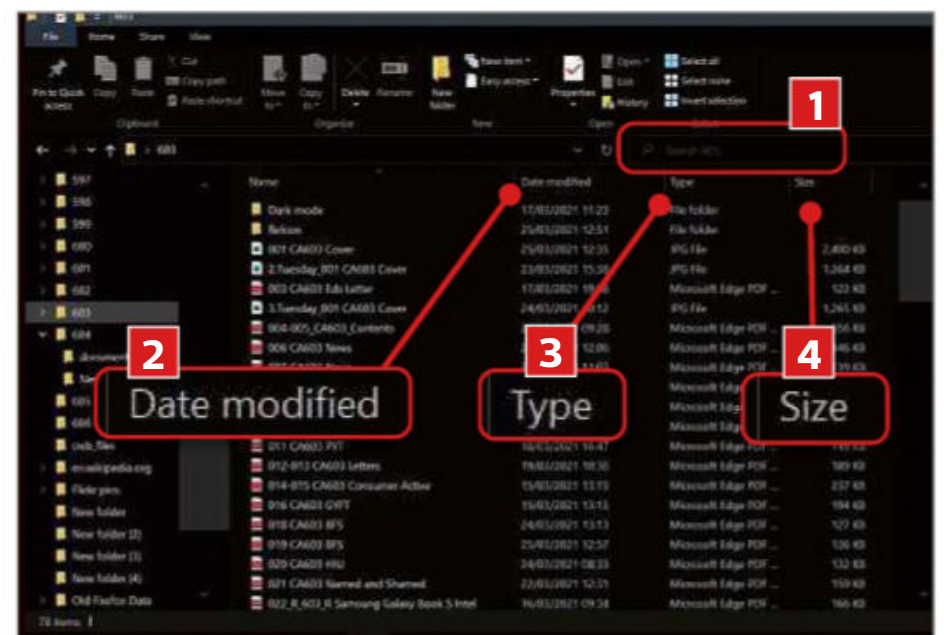
reported that File Explorer's search bar (1 in our screenshot) didn't respond when they tried to filter the results using the 'Date modified' (2), Type (3) and Size (4) options.

Some users also complained that they were unable to right-click and paste text into the search bar with a mouse.

Microsoft said in December 2019 that it was working on a fix, but took until March this year to release it. The update (KB5000842) is for computers running the May 2020 (2004) and October 2020 (20H2) versions of Windows 10.

Microsoft had already fixed the problem in a preview build of the next Feature update, called 21H1, due this spring. It means that the problem will be fixed in any computer upgrading to 21H1.

KB5000842 is an optional update, so you'll need to install it yourself. Press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click 'Update & Security'. Check under the 'Optional quality update



available' heading to see whether you have an update called '2021-03 Cumulative Update Preview for Windows 10 Version 20H2 for x64-based Systems (KB5000842)'. If so, click 'Download and Install'. If not, click 'Check for updates' at the top of the page to see whether it appears.

The update will also probably be part of April's monthly round-up of updates, which was scheduled for 13 April (before we went to press). These 'Patch Tuesday'

updates are installed automatically.

Farewell old Edge

The update also removes from your computer the final version of Edge before it was rebuilt using the Chromium source code (which also powers Google's Chrome browser) and launched in January 2020.

If you haven't already uninstalled it, this old version will still be on your system in the background even if you've upgraded to the Chromium edition of Edge.

Figures released in early April show that Edge has overtaken Firefox to become the world's second most popular browser for Windows computers. According to Statcounter (www.snipca.com/37905), Edge has 8.03 per cent market share, just shading Firefox's 7.95 per cent. Both remain well behind Chrome's 67.14 per cent.

WHAT WE THINK

This problem clearly didn't strike Microsoft as urgent, but File Explorer is pivotal to how most people use Windows. A glitch that might be slightly irritating in less important tools becomes seriously frustrating when it's a part of Windows you can't avoid using. We'll be generous and assume it slipped through the cracks, as the pandemic forced Microsoft – like many companies – to adapt to a new way of working. But we'll be less forgiving when normal service resumes, particular with bugs lurking at the heart of the operating system.

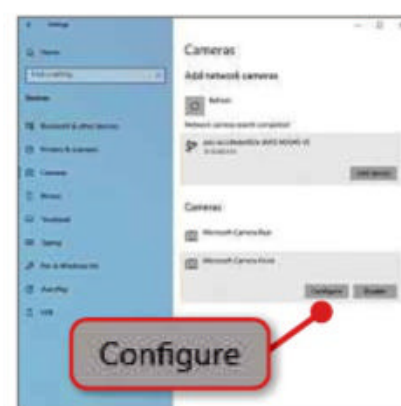
TWEAK WEBCAM SETTINGS IN WINDOWS 10

Microsoft is adding Windows options to make it easier to set up and control your webcams. A recent preview version of the Feature update 21H2, due this autumn, lets you adjust the brightness and contrast to improve the image quality.

To access the options open Settings, then select Devices

followed by Camera. Clicking the 'Configure' button (see screenshot) opens the new controls.

The update, codenamed Sun Valley, is rumoured to be the biggest since Windows 10 launched in 2015. We'll reveal more tools as its release approaches.



You'll like this...

Three is offering "a special gift" if you sign up by the end of July (www.snipca.com/37901)



but not this...

15 per cent of people use easy-to-guess pet names for passwords (www.snipca.com/37900)

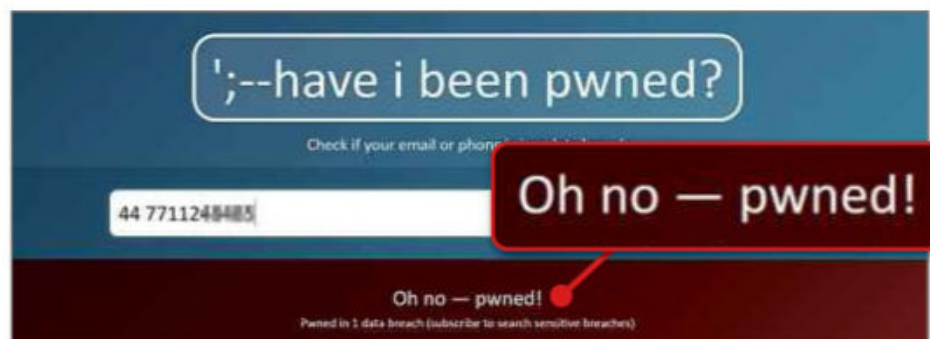
Check whether your phone number is in Facebook leak

You can now check whether your phone number was one of 533 million from a Facebook database that was recently leaked online.

To do so, visit Have I Been Pwned? (<https://haveibeenpwned.com>), then type your number into the search box. You should add the international code (eg, 44 for the UK), then remove the zero from the start of the number and click the 'pwned?' button.

If it has been leaked, you'll see the message 'Oh no – pwned!' (see screenshot) and the number of times it appears in the database.

The site, run by Australian security expert Troy Hunt, has previously let you search only for leaked email addresses. On his blog (www.snipca.com/37890), Hunt said he added phone numbers after seeing "near-unprecedented"



visits to his site once news of the leak spread.

Facebook responded to rising concern by saying it "found and fixed" the breach in August 2019, shortly after it happened. But the data has now been published for free in a hacking forum, making it available for criminals to use. Security experts have warned that the details could be used by scammers to launch mass attacks on the public.

Researchers analysing the data say it covers Facebook users in 106 countries, including 11.5 million in the UK, 30 million Americans and 7 million Australians. It

contains the phone number for Facebook's chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, and co-founders Chris Hughes and Dustin Moskovitz.

The leaked data also includes email addresses and birth dates, though not passwords or private messages.

Facebook has requested users enter their phone numbers since 2011 so it can text a code to their phone (**two-factor authentication**) to confirm they're the real account holder.

Privacy watchdogs from Ireland, the Philippines and Hong Kong are already investigating the leak.

Get satellite broadband in new rural vouchers

People in rural areas applying for a Government grant to pay for faster broadband can now choose satellite services.

It's part of the revamped rural voucher scheme intended to boost speeds in remote areas. The Government has allocated £210m in funding, offering homes £1,500 and businesses £3,500 to help cover installation costs.

In March the Government outlined the details of Project Gigabit, which aims to connect 85 per cent of the UK to gigabit (1Gbps) speeds by 2025. It acknowledged that connecting the most remote areas will prove difficult, and has suggested satellite

broadband as an alternative.

Services are likely to come from OneWeb, which the Government now partly owns, and US firm Starlink, run by tech entrepreneur Elon Musk.

Satellite broadband has often been touted as a way to get faster speeds in rural areas, but customers have been put off by expensive installation costs. The Government hopes that vouchers will make it more attractive.

However, monthly costs are likely to be double that of fibre broadband, while the Government's conditions pose challenges for satellite companies.

It says that services need to be able to deliver gigabit



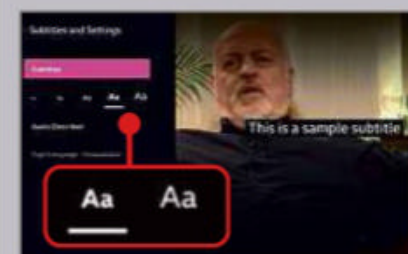
speeds "without the need for future hardware upgrades or modification". Some Starlink customers say they already get speeds up to 200Mbps, while Musk says 300Mbps is the company's ambition for later this year. Although impressive, this is still less than half the gigabit target set by the Government.

To check if you're eligible, type your postcode at <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk>. If you qualify, you'll see a list of providers who are "active" in your area.

IN BRIEF

CHANGE SIZE OF BBC IPLAYER SUBTITLES

The BBC has redesigned its iPlayer app for smart TVs to make it easier to change the size of subtitles. Once you click the controls, now positioned at the top left of the screen, you can select one of the five 'Aa' options to set your size (see screenshot). The BBC says the changes make the app "sleeker and cleaner". Read the BBC's blog for more changes: www.snipca.com/37891.

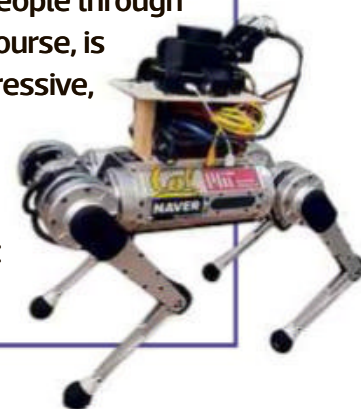


EE'S 5G AVAILABLE IN 35 NEW TOWNS IN THE UK

EE has added 35 locations to its 5G network, including Barnsley, Dundee, Swansea and Worcester, bringing the total to 160. Unlike other networks, EE only announces a place as having 5G if at least 10,000 people live there and it covers "at least a third of that local population as well as the centre". See the full list at www.snipca.com/37892.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

Is this the guide dog of the future? Built by scientists at the University of California, it uses depth-sensing cameras to detect and avoid objects while walking. This video (www.snipca.com/37896), showing it leading two blindfolded people through an obstacle course, is certainly impressive, but what's the point if you can't say 'Good boy!' at the end?



IN BRIEF

ARGOS SENDING £5 E-CARDS TO 114,000

Argos is emailing £5 e-gift cards to 114,000 customers who bought its Breakdown Care extended warranty online between July 2019 and October 2020 after the Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) ruled that it failed to make customers aware of cheaper alternatives. By law, online retailers must link to price-comparison sites when offering warranties for home appliances. Argos is in the process of contacting affected customers.

ASDA PHONE CUSTOMERS MUST GET NEW SIM

Asda Mobile has told existing customers that they need to request a new **SIM** card by 15 September in order to continue using the service. The move follows Asda's decision to switch its network supplier from EE (owned by BT) to Vodafone. Asda says all new customers signing up will be sent the new SIM card. For information and instructions visit www.snipca.com/37863.

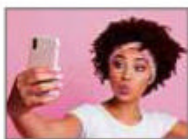
THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!



It's good to see academics keeping busy doing vital work during lockdown.

Associate Professor

Alessandro Soranzo from Sheffield Hallam University recently studied 2,000 selfies shared online and found that women preferred to capture themselves from above, while men favoured the front. You can read the report at www.snipca.com/37852, if you're not too busy pouting into your phone.



Google told to stop making money from pension scams

Google must do more to stop the “immoral” practice of making money from adverts that promote pension scams, MPs have said.

In its ‘Protecting pension savers’ report (www.snipca.com/37853), the Work and Pensions Committee called for the Government to crack down on Google and other tech firms, saying a lack of regulation has led to an “online free for all”.

It comes five years after the introduction of the pension freedoms, which the committee says has put people at risk of a wider range of scams. It pointed out that Google makes money not only from fraudsters advertising, but also from regulators who publish warnings about scams.

Stephen Timms MP, chair of



the committee, said “scammers can advertise with impunity while the tech giants line their pockets from the proceeds of their crimes”.

Between 2017 and 2020 victims of pension scams reported the theft of more than £30m to Action Fraud. However, the committee

said this substantially underestimates the true scale of the problem, and that Action Fraud's reputation has been left “in tatters” by failing to act properly on cases. The Pension Scams Industry Group claims 40,000 victims have lost £10bn since 2015.

The committee called for the creation of a Pension Scams Centre, and it wants online companies to have to check the legitimacy of financial adverts, just as traditional media publishers like newspapers and broadcasters have to.

Google said it takes misleading ads “very seriously”, and claimed that last year it removed 123 million financial scams.

SHOPPERS MUST ‘TAKE MORE RESPONSIBILITY’ FOR SCAMS

Shoppers tempted by bargains that seem ‘too good to be true’ should take some responsibility for falling for scams, a leading banking figure has said.

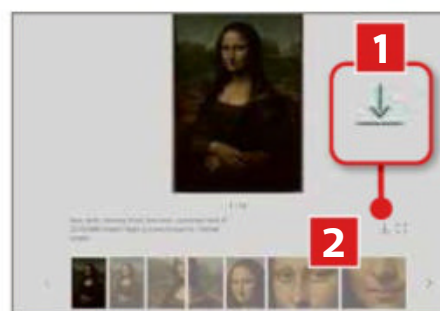
Karen Baxter, managing director of economic crime intelligence at banking trade

body UK Finance, told *The Telegraph* that it's hard to justify reimbursing victims who ignore scam warnings from banks, adding that the whole of society suffers because money from fraud funds criminal gangs.

Browse 480,000 artworks at the Louvre

You can now see artistic masterpieces including *Mona Lisa*, *Venus de Milo* and *Liberty Leading the People* after the Louvre put its entire collection online.

To browse more than 480,000 pieces, all for free, visit <https://collections.louvre.fr> and search by typing into the main box, or scroll down and click a collection – such as Paintings, Sculptures or



Furniture – or a ‘themed album’ like Masterpieces.

Click the link at the bottom of the home page to be taken to an interactive map of the

gallery, letting you browse the collection room by room.

When you open an image you can download it by clicking the arrow icon at the bottom (**1** in our screenshot), while some artworks are captured in closer detail **2**.

The collection contains items on public display in the museum and those in storage, including at its new art facility at Lievin in northern France.

Half of over-75s and more disabled people now use web

The proportion of over-75s using the internet regularly has hit 50 per cent for the first time, according to a major study of UK users.

It's the biggest rise ever

MORE THAN HALF NEVER TURN OFF PHONE

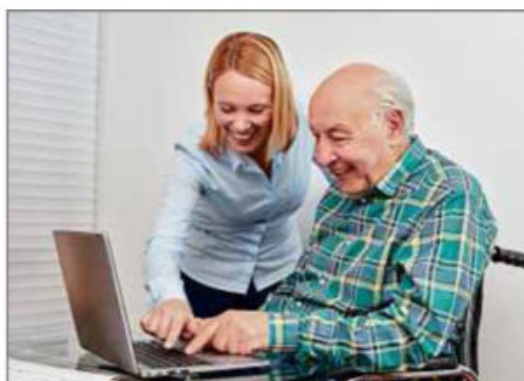
More than half of people never turn off their phone, according to Ofcom's recent 'alternative census', while over 90 per cent say they regularly 'double screen' – which is using a phone, laptop or tablet at the same time as watching TV. A quarter of people admitted arguing during lockdown about who's using the home Wi-Fi network. Read more at www.snipca.com/37883.

recorded in the annual survey of internet use conducted by the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

The 'Internet users, UK: 2020' study (www.snipca.com/37882) also found that only 6.3 per cent of all adults (over 3.3 million) weren't regular internet users last year.

In 2013, 29 per cent of those aged 75 years and over used the internet. This has now risen to 54 per cent, up from 46.8 per cent in 2019.

People aged 65-74 are also using the internet more, though the increase was smaller – from 83.2 to 85.5 per cent. As in previous years, more than 99 per cent of people aged under 44 used the internet regularly.



There was also a significant increase in the proportion of disabled people accessing the internet, from 78 to 81 per cent (a rise from 10 to 11 million). In 2014, this figure was just 65 per cent.

The ONS said that because the survey was conducted between January and March 2020, and therefore mostly before the first lockdown was announced, the data doesn't necessarily indicate that the pandemic changed internet usage.

Broadband compensation to rise with inflation

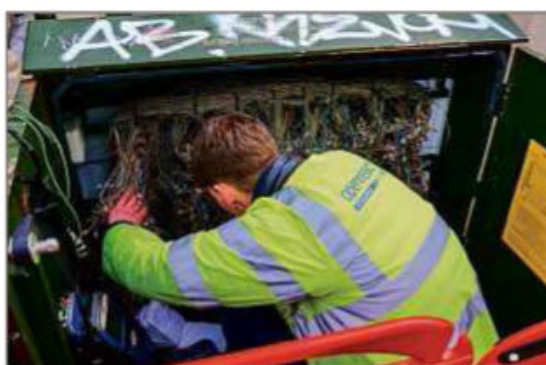
Compensation paid by broadband providers for service problems will rise in line with inflation, Ofcom has said.

Companies have 48 hours to fix a loss of service, after which they currently have to pay you £8 a day for every day the service remains down.

They also have to pay you £25 for cancelled appointments,

and £5 for every day that a new service is delayed.

Ofcom now says that the amount companies have to compensate you will increase on 1 April every year based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rate of inflation as it was on 31 October in the previous year.



The CPI inflation rate stood at 0.7 per cent in October 2020, which means compensation has now increased to £8.06 per day for delayed repairs, £25.18 for missed appointments and £5.04 per day for a delay to a new service.

Ofcom introduced the voluntary scheme in April 2019, since when all major providers have signed up except EE, Plusnet and Vodafone.

IN BRIEF

TELL ALEXA TO CALL RNIB HELPLINE

Amazon Echo users can now say "Alexa, call RNIB helpline" to speak to an advisor at the Royal National Institute of Blind People during the helpline's opening hours (8am-8pm weekdays and 9am-1pm Saturdays). The new service is part of Amazon's range of features to help people with disabilities. For more info, visit Amazon's Accessibility Hub (www.snipca.com/37849) and the RNIB's site (www.snipca.com/37848).

HIDDEN MESSAGE FOUND IN WINDOWS 95

A hidden feature in Windows 95 has been found, more than 25 years after it was launched. It's an example of an 'Easter egg', which is a secret tool or message placed by the makers of a program. It was found by a developer called Albacore on Twitter, who said that typing **MORTIMER** into Internet Mail shows the names of the people who made it (follow the instructions at www.snipca.com/37850). Find more Microsoft Easter eggs on Wikipedia: www.snipca.com/37851.

FREE GOOGLE VIDEO CALLS UNTIL 30 JUNE

You can now make free video calls for any period of time on Google Meet until 30 June, after Google extended the deadline for a second time. Initially it made unlimited calls free when the pandemic began, until September last year. This was then extended to 31 March, and now to the end of June. To make a call visit <https://meet.google.com> and click 'New meeting', or click 'New meeting' in Gmail's left-hand menu.

BT LANDLINE PRICES CAPPED UNTIL 2026

BT's landline-only customers will continue to pay £11.99 a month until 2026, after Ofcom accepted the company's voluntary decision to cap fees. BT reduced its prices in 2018 from £18.99 after Ofcom found that landline-only customers got "poor value for money

compared to those who buy bundles of landline, broadband and/or pay-TV services". The regulator said not raising the price "was particularly important to older customers, since nearly two thirds of customers who only had a landline were over the ages of 65".

Question of the Fortnight

Will the processor shortage lead to higher tech prices?

Covid, storms, droughts and Bitcoin have hit chip supplies

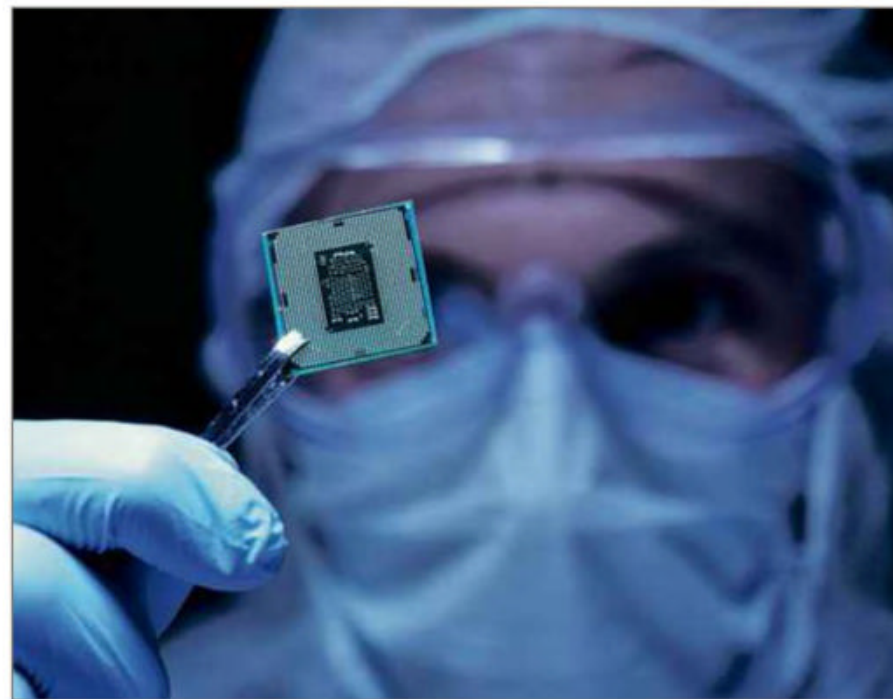
Here's a contender for the world's unfunniest Christmas-cracker joke: why has a mistake from car manufacturers led to rising computer prices? The answer tells us a lot about the interconnectedness of the modern world and how unexpected events can disrupt it.

It starts with the Covid-19 pandemic, takes a twist with surprising behaviour from consumers, encounters unusually cold weather in Texas and unusually hot weather in Taiwan, finds itself in an international trade war, and is knocked off course by what could be the biggest financial bubble in history or a revolution in how we use money. But let's begin with those car manufacturers.

“The bottleneck won't clear until 2022, by which time computers, phones and tablets will probably cost much more”

When the world plunged into lockdown, the Fords, Volkswagens and Nissans of the world cut production drastically because they assumed nobody would be buying new cars. In doing so, they also slashed their processor orders. Modern cars need up to 50 chips to control various components, including many safety features, and to reduce the amount of wires.

At the same time as people stopped buying cars, they started working from home,



and so bought more computers and monitors for their improvised home offices. They couldn't go to the pub or cinema when the working day was over, so they bought new

smart TVs and games consoles instead to stay entertained at home. This sudden lifestyle change led to a huge rise in demand for the processors that power these devices.

Then came the first big surprise. As the initial Covid wave eased and lockdowns were lifted, global demand for cars shot up. Manufacturers rushed to order the processors that a few months earlier they thought they wouldn't need, but found themselves at the back of the queue.

The result was two industries – auto and tech – chasing a finite number of chips amid surging demand. As you'll read in the first paragraph of any decent economics textbook, only one thing can happen when rising demand meets limited supply: prices will increase.

That's been the situation for nearly a year now, not helped by the US-China trade war that has forced some Chinese manufacturers to stockpile processors. But other factors have deepened the problem recently.

Samsung's processor plant in Texas halted production for over a month due to power outages caused by severe winter storms, while Taiwanese factories have closed because the worst drought in 56 years has hit their water supply.

Then there's Bitcoin. The value of the volatile **cryptocurrency** has soared by over seven times in 12 months, driving demand for faster processors that can mine the digital cash.

THE FACTS

- Car manufacturers reversed their decision to cut processor orders when lockdowns lifted last year, leading to a surge in demand
- Tech companies have struggled to cope with increased demand from people needing new devices to help them work from home
- Winter storms in Texas and droughts in Taiwan have forced processor factories to close

All this means major delays in the production of cars, computers, smartphones, routers, **graphics cards**, gaming consoles and almost any other electronic device you can think of.

Some of the world's biggest firms have been affected. Apple had to postpone the launch of its iPhone 12 by two months, while Samsung looks set to scrap the next version of its Galaxy Note phone

Building more factories is the obvious solution, but these are complicated operations that take two years to set up. Most analysts don't expect the bottleneck to clear until 2022, by which time computers, phones and tablets will probably cost much more than they would have had Covid not wrecked the global economy.

If you're planning a major tech purchase soon, you may need some of that money you saved by not going to the pub, restaurant, theatre and cinema.

Protect **your tech**

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

'System Update' Android malware

What's the threat?

A new strain of Android malware attempts to infect your phone or tablet by pretending to be a 'System Update' app (see screenshot). Once installed, it can record your phone calls, take photos, access your WhatsApp messages, and see your browsing history.

It can also search for files with specific extensions, including .pdf, .doc, .docx, and .xls, as well as monitor your location via GPS.

The unnamed malware, discovered by Dallas-based security firm Zimperium (www.snipca.com/37808), is particularly sophisticated because rather than indiscriminately stealing data (like less advanced malware), it's designed to detect certain events before leaping into action.

For example, if it detects that you're making a phone call, it will record the conversation and upload a ZIP file to

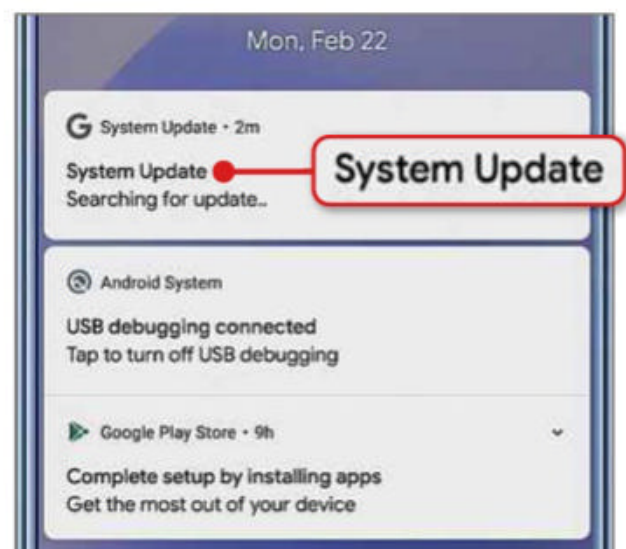
the server that's controlling the malware. Similarly, it responds to new text messages being received and new apps being installed.

It tries to avoid detection by immediately deleting any files it has created on your device as soon as they have been uploaded successfully.

How can you stay safe?

The most important piece of advice is to never install apps from outside the Google Play Store – or at least make sure there's a safe and essential reason for doing so. Zimperium said the app has been available only from unofficial stores, home to countless dodgy apps.

Also pay attention to this app's name: System Update. Hackers know that users fear their devices becoming out of date, so a common trick is to hide malware in apps that promise to update your system. This applies specifically to ageing devices running



old versions of Android because they may not be able to run the most recent editions of apps.

This can be frustrating, but don't be tempted to search for apps promising to deliver that longed-for update. Either wait for new versions of Android to be made available for your phone or tablet, or accept that you may need to buy a new device.

New tools | Default HTTPS in Chrome

One of the most useful keyboard tricks is to type the name of a website – for example, [ebay](http://ebay.com), [wikipedia](http://wikipedia.com) or [amazon](http://amazon.com) – into your browser's address bar, and then press Ctrl+Enter. This adds 'www' and '.com' to the address and takes you straight there.

However, that doesn't necessarily take you to the **HTTPS** (and therefore most secure) version of the site you want. Chrome, for example, would sometimes take you to the less secure HTTP version, particularly if it was the first time you'd visited the site.

This all changes with Chrome 90, which was due to be released in mid April (before we went to press). The browser already switched to the HTTPS version of a site if you typed in the full address beginning with HTTP; now it will be the default option for *all* typed



URLs, including when using the keyboard trick mentioned above.

As well as being more secure, this will make sites load faster because Chrome won't need to redirect addresses from http:// to https://. For the rapidly shrinking number of sites that don't yet support HTTPS, Chrome will revert to HTTP.

As Google explains (www.snipca.com/37886), the change will be implemented in Chrome 90 for computers and Android, but Apple users will have to wait a little longer.

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers



Fake Currys 'Macbook' competition

In the past few years I've been offered the chance to enter competitions run by Asda, Tesco and Amazon. They've all been scams of course. My latest opportunity came from Currys PC World via an email, telling me I've been given the chance to enter their 'Loyalty Program'. If I clicked the link I'd be able to win a new 'Macbook Pro' (note the lower-case 'b' – not a mistake the real Currys would make). I hadn't read about the scam until I checked the *Eastern Daily Press* website: www.snipca.com/37796. Suffolk Trading Standards have warned people about it (I live just outside Ipswich).

Peter Williams



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

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Three increased my bills by 500%!

✉ Issue 602's 'Question of the Fortnight' ('Will broadband and mobile price rises be banned?') made me smile – actually, I nearly laughed. You report that, among other mobile providers, Three increased its prices by 4.5 per cent in April. I've been a Three customer for several years, using their 'pay as you go' **SIM**.

Until 16 March they charged me 3p per minute for calls, 2p for a text and 1p per 1MB for data – very reasonable I thought, and identical to O2 (I have a **dual-SIM** phone and use both services, depending on coverage). On 16 March Three increased my charges to 10p per minute for calls, 10p per text and 5p per 1MB of data – an increase of between 333 and 500 per cent. So much for the 4.5 per cent increase. By the way, my O2 tariff has not increased!

Richard Driscoll

Memo to developers: leave good programs alone

✉ I had to chuckle when I read your comment in Issue 603 (page 6): "It sometimes feels like Microsoft's motto should be, 'If it ain't broke, let's fiddle with it until it is'". It takes me back to my days working for a leading manufacturer of consumer electronics back in the 1980s.

As head of customer services, I was forever trying to persuade the engineers to keep the products (video cameras, video recorders, TVs, radios etc) as simple as possible, and not to change what didn't need to be changed.

But my argument – that the public don't want or need most of the features added to products – was always drowned out by the marketing managers who wanted to hype up these new features in their press releases. It was my department that had to pick up the pieces when these changes caused problems.

Today's software developers seem to be a similar breed to the engineers I dealt with. They just don't seem to know when to leave a good product alone.

Kevin Hornchurch

Thumbs up to Netflix for tackling password sharing

✉ Why does Netflix cracking down on people sharing passwords warrant a *Computeractive* thumbs down (News, Issue 602, page 6)? Surely this is a type of theft and should be stopped. If everyone did this, many programs and other services wouldn't survive, or they'd have to increase prices for the honest majority.

So thumbs up to Netflix (a service I've never subscribed to and never intend to), and any other companies who crack down on this type of behaviour.

Robert Levene

Don't forget 'lonely millions' not connected

✉ Too many banks and other companies assume everyone in this prosperous country has access to a PC and mobile phone. We do not! Nor do we all have children or grandchildren who can and will do it for us. Currently there are around 4.3 million (mainly elderly) people, who do not have sufficient IT skills and equipment, mainly due to poverty and isolation.

Fortunately, my desktop PC has been paid for by the local council because I'm the chair of a committee that ran a Community Centre on their behalf until

the first lockdown in March 2020.

Unfortunately, they don't pay for the broadband, from TalkTalk, which costs around £600 per year.

To keep up to speed with evolving IT, during the past decade I've attended free computer courses on iPads, image editing, PowerPoint, Photoshop and spreadsheet software. Plus for years I've been a reader of *Computeractive*.

In a few weeks' time I will enter my tenth decade, so I know that things are not going to improve and I will have to rely more and more on my internet connection to survive, but what about the lonely millions not connected? Please have a thought for them

Hugh Jenkins

Why do shops always ask for mobile-phone numbers?

✉ My mother-in-law tried to place an order online with Currys PC World for a new TV set. When she got to the checkout, it asked for a mobile-phone number. She doesn't have one and so the system would not let her go any further. I offered to let her use mine but she said no, deciding they "don't want my business" and cancelled. I then did some checking and many companies do the same, making a mobile number mandatory. Surely this is discrimination against people who don't have or can't

From cabinet-sized PCs to smartphones

✉ In the mid-1980s the company I worked for bought a computer-aided design (CAD) system, based on the iconic VAX 11/780 mini computer (pictured). This system ran about six CAD workstations, each connected using three RS232 serial ports.

It also had an enormous 400MB hard drive, which was the size and weight of a small car wheel. I think it also had 4MB of memory on a two-foot square circuit board. It was the size of three or four large filing cabinets and would have cost about £200,000. Processor speed was 1 mips,



which is 1 million instructions per second.

By contrast, an Intel i7 laptop processor would now have a processor speed of about 100,000 mips, and a high-end desktop PC would be 250,000–400,000 mips – though mips would be a very crude measure of computer speed today

and actual performance would be a lot greater.

My current smartphone (a low-end Android model), which cost £200, has 6GB of memory, 128GB of storage and 22,000 mips. How things have moved on.

Michael Albin

use a smartphone.

The latest guilty company is Morrisons, which now requires you to have a phone for instant rewards rather than gathering points for a voucher. There's no way to use the vouchers without a mobile.

Tony Elgar

Don't forget 'no data no fee' recovery services

I was surprised by your advice to Dave Lisle in Issue 602 (Problems Solved, page 68), where you suggested that it wasn't worth having his failed hard drive – containing treasured photos – looked at again.

The reason I say this is that reputable data-recovery companies such as CBL Data Recovery (www.cbldatarecovery.co.uk), with its 'No Data No Charge' guarantee, and Ontrack (www.ontrack.com), which performs an initial evaluation to determine how much data they can recover before you sign up, don't charge without guaranteeing some degree of success – yet Mr Lisle was charged £300 and nothing was recovered.

It's hard to escape the conclusion that probably the drive was never examined, that he was scammed, and therefore the prospects for recovering his treasured photos are quite good if he sends his drive to a genuine data-recovery company. You could have suggested that a second opinion would be a good idea and to use a company that offers a guarantee.

Paul Atkin

I need to switch to headphones only

Issue 602's feature (page 62) on listening to TVs wirelessly on headphones was interesting, but it didn't deal with the main problem for the hard of hearing. As soon as I plug in the headphone connection, the TV speakers are disconnected so my wife is left without sound. I need a system that lets me switch from headphones and speakers (for normal use) to headphones only, so I can watch TV after she has gone to bed.

To use headphones and speakers I have a complicated setup with a splitter on the optical feed to the soundbar, which complicates volume controls. Switching to headphones only means scrambling around the back of the box in the TV centre. There must be a simpler fix.

Chris Innes

STAR LETTER

Use contract rises to leave poor broadband services

There have been several articles recently criticising broadband providers for putting up their prices mid-contract, but these unexpected increases can work to customers' advantage because it gives you the window of opportunity to cancel without penalty a service that you're dissatisfied with.

I took advantage of this in February when TalkTalk told me my contract was increasing above the rate of inflation. I was getting fed up with persistent dropouts in service – usually about 10 times a day – and so jumped at the opportunity to switch to BT. I wasn't after faster speeds, just a more reliable service.

I still had eight months to run on my contract and so normally would have paid an early-cancellation fee, but TalkTalk's decision gave me a legitimate exit route. Other readers should bear this in mind if they're trapped in a



service that's substandard.

On a more general note, I'd always recommend discussing price rises with your provider even if you intend to stay with them. When I told TalkTalk I was leaving, they offered to reduce the increase in an effort to get me to stay. I used this offer as a bargaining chip when talking to BT. In my experience, mentioning the discount one provider will give you encourages the other provider to follow suit. This allowed me to get a much better deal from BT.

Laurie Bunn



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

Don't forget laptops with taller screens

I'm another reader that you have picked up following the sad demise of *Computer Shopper* and happy to be here. Of course most consumers want widescreen laptops for obvious reasons, but I've never understood why business models such as Lenovo's ThinkPad and Dell's Latitude range have 16:9 aspect ratio screens. When typing a report, for example, you

want to be able to see the maximum number of lines.

My wife is an author and has never forgiven Microsoft for killing off her old 4:3 aspect laptop when a certain feature update for Windows 10 was introduced. Fortunately, laptops with taller screens are now coming back on to the market – the Microsoft Surface being the stand-out example, with a 3:2 screen. The Surface is expensive, however, so perhaps you could think about a group review of laptops with taller screens in a future issue?

Roger Bullock

CA SAYS Roger makes a good point, and we'll certainly consider reviewing more laptops with 3:2 ratios, such as the ASUS ZenBook S13 UX393 (£1,269 from Amazon www.snipca.com/37862, pictured left). What do other readers think? Have we unfairly neglected this type of laptop screen?





We stand up for your legal rights

Was Tesco right to insist on phone repair?

Q I bought an IMO Dash mobile phone from Tesco in September last year, intending to use it as an emergency phone. In February, we found that the battery wouldn't keep its charge. I asked Tesco for a full refund because it's inherently faulty, knowing that fewer than six months had passed since purchase. But Tesco refused this, and said I could have only a repair. Can Tesco do this?



Len Aitken

A Yes, Tesco is allowed to do this. Len is entitled to a full refund only if the supermarket is unable to repair or replace the phone.

The right to redress under the Consumer Rights Act is for up to six years after purchase (five years in Scotland). But redress and responsibilities are divided into "short term" and "final right to reject", so what you can demand or have to prove varies.

Your short-term return rights apply if the fault shows up within 30 days of

purchase, and you return the item within that time. You don't have to prove there's a fault, can demand a full refund, and don't have to accept a repair or replacement, whether the goods were bought in-store or online.

But between 30 days and six months your redress falls under the final right to reject. You still don't have to prove a fault, but the retailer is allowed to either repair or replace the item first. Only if this isn't possible can you demand a full refund.

After six months, you must prove the fault is inherent and not accidental damage or fair wear and tear. If a repair or replacement isn't possible, you're entitled to a refund, but the retailer can deduct money from this to reflect the time you've spent using the item.

CASE CLOSED

Can Tesco transfer parents' pet insurance?

Q I wonder if you can help me persuade Tesco to overturn a decision it made not to transfer my parents' pet insurance plan to me after they both died within three weeks of each other. They had two elderly dogs with medical conditions. Do I have any legal right to demand this?

Chloe Brookes

A Chloe, who has five dogs of her own, was in a difficult position at a stressful time, so we wanted to help. We hadn't checked the small print of the plan, which her parents took out online, but we would have been surprised if it allowed the details to be transferred to her.

If she took out another plan, whether with Tesco or another provider, the dogs' medical conditions would be considered to be pre-existing and therefore not covered.

However, after we explained her case to Tesco, the company agreed to let her continue the coverage under her name, saying it was "the right thing to do". Full marks to Tesco for making such a compassionate and sensible decision.

CASE CLOSED

CASE UPDATE

'Right to repair' will give spare parts for 10 years



Manufacturers will soon be forced to provide spare parts for products as part of a new law aiming to make items last longer. The Government hopes the so-called 'right to repair' will help extend the lifespan of products by up to 10 years (www.snipca.com/37783), benefiting not only the environment but also your bank balance because you won't have to fork out for a replacement every time something breaks. It's estimated that the UK throws away 1.5

million tonnes of electrical waste every year.

When the law is passed in summer it will cover 'white goods' only, such as washing machines, dishwashers, fridges and tumble dryers. It's hoped that other goods, including electrical devices like computers, phones and tablets, will be covered by this law within a couple of years.

The measures are part of the EU Ecodesign Directive, which the UK agreed to implement two years ago, whatever the outcome of Brexit. It says manufacturers

must ensure spare parts are available for up to 10 years after a product is purchased, and that they must be designed so they can be fitted with common tools, without damaging the item.

But manufacturers don't have to sell the spare parts directly to consumers – they could limit sales to professional repair teams. Nor are there any restrictions on what price can be charged for spares. We'll let you know when the law is implemented and update our case advice accordingly.

Contact us so we can investigate your case

✉ **Email:** consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk
Please include your name, phone number and address.

Should I report BT to Ofcom for price rise?

Q On 21 February, I updated my broadband package with BT, only to be told a couple of weeks later that the price would increase from 31 March. The amount is higher than the RPI rate of inflation, so do I have grounds for complaint to Ofcom?
Robert Wood



that BT has increased his monthly bill, but it would be illegal only if the small print in his contract stated that there wouldn't be any increases. Because the rise is above the RPI rate of inflation (which was 1.4 per cent in February), Robert can cancel his broadband contract early without paying a fee. If his contract includes a bundle of broadband, landline and TV, he also needs to ensure that the price of the landline and TV package has increased above RPI as well. Ofcom rules don't actually force providers to waive

cancellation fees if bundled price rises are in line with RPI, though firms do often let you cancel without a fee in such circumstances.

We've contacted BT and asked why it couldn't have factored the price rise into Robert's contract, particularly given that he signed it just a month before the increase.

In the meantime, Robert should tell BT why he's unhappy, and ask for the price rise to be postponed. If it refuses, then he's allowed to cancel without paying a fee, as long as he does this within 30 days of being told about it.

CASE ONGOING

Currys' repair has failed three times – what now?

Q A dishwasher I bought from Currys PC World in January has never worked. They sent a technician, who said the heater wouldn't work because it was damaged at the bottom. He came back and fitted some parts, but then the door wouldn't close. A third visit still didn't fix this, so I was promised a replacement. Since February, I've heard nothing from

Currys PC World, so can you help instead?

David Parsons

A Currys PC World owes David a replacement or a full refund – it's his choice. David reported the faulty device within the first 30 days of purchase, so at that point he could have demanded a full refund or a replacement. However, because David did accept a repair, he was then legally bound to accept this to see whether it would work.

After the first repair failed, Currys PC World should have then told him that he



was entitled to a refund or replacement. It certainly should have known that under law it wasn't allowed to subject him to repeated repairs.


David also shouldn't have had to wait so long for Currys PC World to deal with him. The law states that retailers wanting to carry out repairs or offer replacements must "do so within a reasonable time and without significant inconvenience to the consumer". We don't think lockdown is a sufficient excuse for a retailer as big as Currys PC World to have ignored David for so long.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Virgin waived cancellation fee after deadline



 I recently moved house and had to cancel my Virgin Media contract because it didn't supply broadband at my new address. I was hoping to cancel within 30 days of receiving an email telling me my monthly bills were increasing (so I wouldn't have to pay a fee for cancelling early). That plan was thwarted when I was always put on hold for over an hour when phoning to cancel.

I didn't get to speak to someone until a week before I was due to move, and about

two weeks after the 30-day deadline had passed. Fortunately, the man I spoke to was sympathetic when I said that I hadn't been able to get hold of anyone. It was during the January–February lockdown, so I assumed Virgin was having staff problems.

He apologised and said that although technically I should have to pay the fee, he'd waive it because I had been trying to get

hold of someone within the deadline. It was an unexpected parting gift from a company I hadn't always got the best service from.

Alan Mullens

✉ Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact
Virgin Media

- **Online** www.virginmedia.com/help/contact-us
- **Tel** 0345 454 1111

Grow Your Family Tree



Want other members of your family to see your research?
Nick Peers reveals how to...

Build a clickable family-tree book

Reader David Goulsbra asked us whether it's possible to construct a family tree as part of an interactive Microsoft Word document, where clicking a specific person takes the reader to their details page.

The simple answer is yes, but there's some work involved. Think of it like an interactive book, comprising a series of reports generated using your existing genealogy program's tools.

The trickiest part is generating the chart at the beginning of the document, then converting each name into a **hyperlink** that when clicked will take your readers directly to the selected person's entry.

Create a book using RootsMagic

We tested all the book-generating tools in the major programs. The simplest by far is RootsMagic (£19.95, www.rootsmagic.co.uk), which lets you create a book you can edit in Word containing both reports and your choice of chart.

To do this, choose Reports followed by Publisher, and then click 'Create new book'. You'll be prompted to add 'chapters' via the Add button. Click this to insert your choice of reports, charts and other elements such as a cover page

and table of contents.

Each element is its own 'chapter' in the list, and you can make basic changes to the design. Once your book is set up, click 'Publish Book' and RootsMagic will generate the pages and show them in its Report Viewer. If you're happy with the results, click Save and choose the 'Rich-Text File (RTF)' format option.

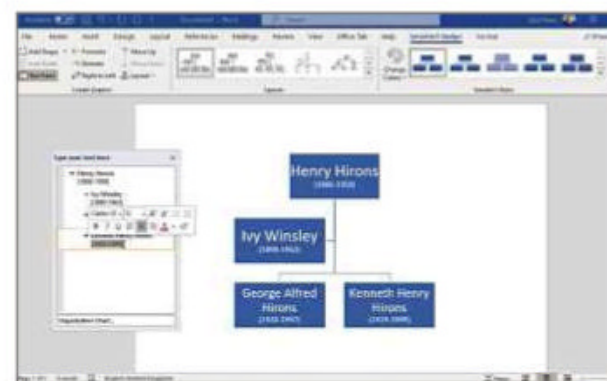
Once saved, the file should open automatically in Word. There's one final step: your chart is imported as an image, but it's easy to convert it into an editable element in Word.

Right-click the image and select Grouping followed by Ungroup, then click Yes when asked if you wish to convert it into a drawing object.

Use Microsoft's SmartArt graphics

If your genealogy tool doesn't let you edit charts in your document, you can insert it yourself in Word using Microsoft's SmartArt graphics. The instructions are too long to explain here, so follow the steps at www.snipca.com/37716. They'll help you make a hierarchical chart like that shown above right.

The final step is to insert the hyperlinks. While some will already be in place (particularly if you've created

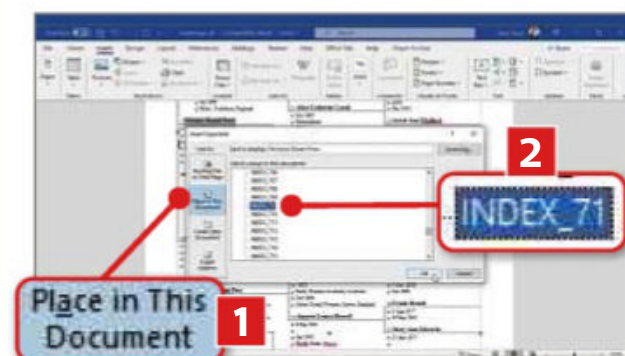


Use Microsoft's SmartArt graphics to build a hierarchical chart in Word

indexes or tables of contents), you'll still need to manually create links for the people in your chart to their relevant pages in the document.

To do this in Word, switch to the Insert tab on the ribbon. Now locate the first person on your chart's entry in the main document and highlight their name, then click the Links button on the ribbon and choose Bookmark. If a bookmark already exists, make a note of it; otherwise, give your new bookmark an easily identifiable name and click Add. Repeat for each person in your chart.

Finally, go to the chart and select the first person's name. Press Ctrl+K to open the Insert Hyperlink box. Select 'Place in This Document' (1 in screenshot below), expand Bookmarks and select their bookmark (indicated by an Index number 2), before clicking OK. Repeat for all the other people in your chart and you should now have a Word document your family can navigate.



Select the correct bookmarks to add hyperlinks to your document

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

My RootsMagic shortcut vanished. After searching my PC, I found a file that let me into the program, but while my individuals were listed, none of the photos appeared. Luckily, I had kept all the photos in a safe folder. What happened?

David Stone

We're not sure precisely what happened, but it sounds like the links to your photos

have become messed up somehow. RootsMagic has a tool that can fix this for you, but you'll need to dig deep to find it: open your file and choose Lists followed by Media Gallery. Click the Tools button and choose 'Fix broken media links' to bring back your photos.



Have a genealogy question for Nick? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

UNLEASH YOUR FULL GAMING POTENTIAL



AMD
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Get the competitive edge you need to unleash your full gaming potential with the 24" and 27" G-Masters offering 0.8ms MPRT and 165Hz refresh rate. Armed with FreeSync Premium you can make split second decisions and forget about ghosting effects or smearing issues. The ability to adjust brightness and the dark shades with the Black Tuner delivers greater viewing performance in shadowed areas and the IPS panel technology guarantees superb image quality.



Fixed stand versions:
24" G2470HSU-B1 & 27" G2770HSU-B1
Version with height adjustment:
24" GB2470HSU-B1 & 27" GB2770HSU-B1



Find your match at
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Best Free Software

Will Stapley recommends new programs that won't cost you anything

SEARCH TOOL

EverythingToolbar 0.6.3

www.snipca.com/37884

What you need: Windows 10

The search function in Windows is slow and, in our experience, often struggles to find certain files or programs even when you type their name in full. In contrast, the **open-source** search tool Everything is both fast and accurate.

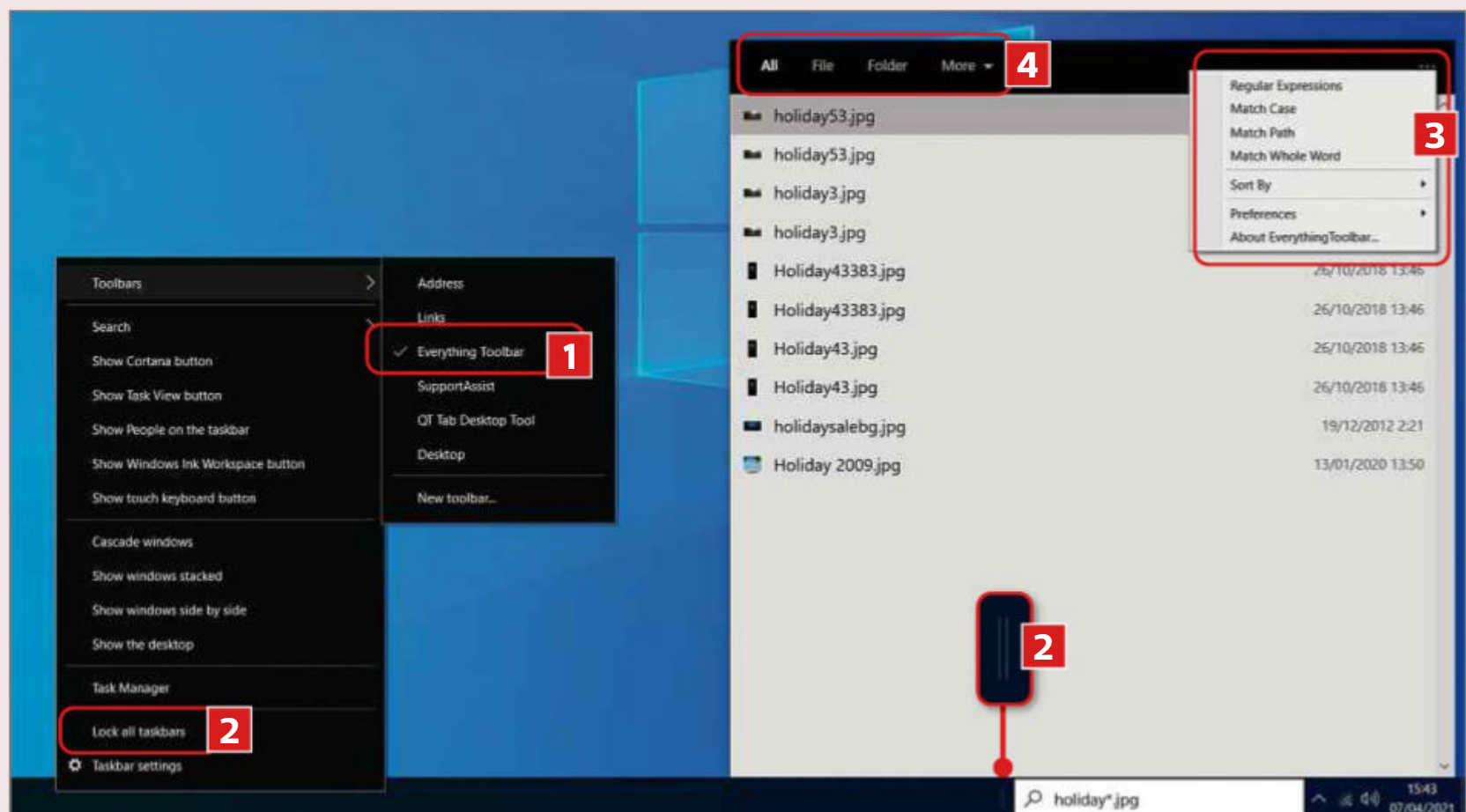
EverythingToolbar is a standalone tool that works alongside Everything, letting you run searches directly from a box on the Windows taskbar. To install it, go to the link above and download the MSI file for the latest release ('EverythingToolbar-0.6.3.msi' at the time of writing). You also need to have Everything installed (from www.snipca.com/37885).

Note that if you've previously installed version 0.6.1 (or earlier) of EverythingToolbar, you need to uninstall it *before* installing this latest version. To do so, open the folder containing EverythingToolbar, then double-click the 'uninstall.cmd' file.

Once you've added the EverythingToolbar search box to your taskbar (as explained below), select it (either by clicking the box or pressing Windows key+Alt+S), then enter your search terms just as you would in the Windows search box.

You can type **wildcards** (such as **holiday*.jpg** to find all **JPEG** images that have file names starting with 'holiday') and the results update as you type. To open a file from the results, either click it using your mouse or select it using your keyboard's up and down arrow keys.

This version adds new features, including the ability to drag files directly from the search results on to your desktop or into other folders. You can also now open the folder containing your search item by highlighting the relevant search result, then pressing Ctrl+Enter.



1 To add EverythingToolbar to your Windows taskbar, right-click an empty section of the taskbar, select Toolbars, then click 'Everything Toolbar'.

2 To reveal the search box, return to the taskbar's right-click menu, untick 'Lock all taskbars', then drag the horizontal bar to the left. Once you've resized the box, click 'Lock all taskbars' again.

3 Click the three horizontal dots top right to change settings such as the sort order of your results, making your searches case sensitive, and changing the EverythingToolbar keyboard shortcut.

4 You can narrow your search results using these filters. The latest version of EverythingToolbar lets you cycle through filters by holding down the Ctrl key, then pressing 0-9.



SYSTEM TOOL

PowerToys 0.35

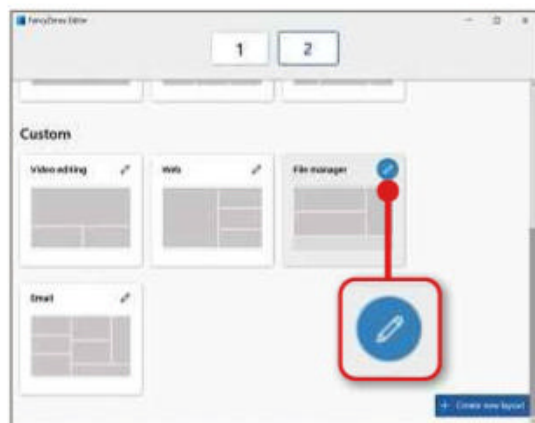
www.snipca.com/37897

What you need: Windows 10

Microsoft's PowerToys continues to get regular updates.

The latest release (download the EXE file at the bottom of the page) improves the FancyZones tool, which lets you better organise your windows by creating

zones on your desktop. You can now assign keyboard shortcuts to each zone template, letting you switch between them quicker. Open the Zone Editor window from the FancyZones tab, then click the pencil icon (see screenshot) next to the layout you want to create the shortcut for. Additionally, PowerToys Run (which lets you run programs via a simple search box) now lets you choose where the search box should appear. Select the PowerToys Run tab, then choose an option under 'Show PowerToys Run on'.



WALLPAPER

SpaceEye 1.21

www.snipca.com/37895

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1 or 10

SpaceEye is a small tool that turns your desktop background into a glorious – and regularly updated – view of Earth from space (click the link under 'Download the installer'). Once installed, the SpaceEye icon (see screenshot) will be added to your system tray – if you can't see it, click the small up arrow to the left of the clock on the taskbar. Click the icon to browse the various satellite image sources. This version adds a small green circle next to each image. Click this to get details such as how often the image is updated (every 10 minutes for some images). Once you've found one you like, click it and your desktop wallpaper will instantly update. Our favourite is Meteosat-11, which is updated every 15 minutes and shows both Europe and Africa.



WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

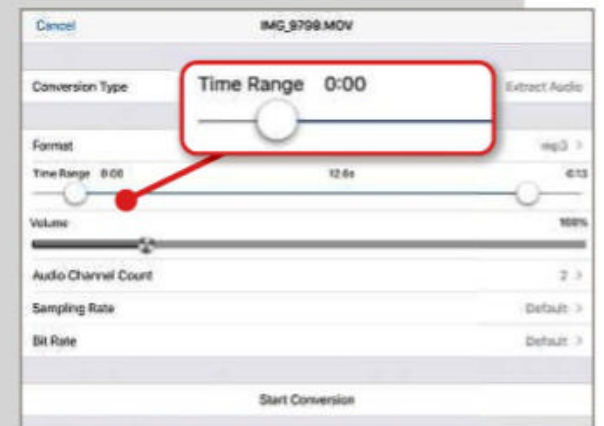
We tell you what software & apps to use

What can I use to extract the audio from an iPhone screen recording?

Q I have made some screen recordings on my iPhone. How can I extract just the audio from these recordings, then export it as a standalone file?

P A B Buckland

A Because the video file is on your iPhone, it's easiest to use an iOS app to extract the audio (rather than a Windows program). Our favourite is Media Converter (www.snipca.com/37894 – it's free, but supported by ads). Once installed, open the app, then tap the '+' button (top-right), then Photo Library. When prompted, tap OK to allow the app to access your photos. Select your screen recording from your photo library (it will most likely be in the Videos folder), followed by Done.



The video will now appear in the Media Converter app. Tap the video, then Extract Audio. You can use the slider to trim unwanted parts from the start or end of the video (see screenshot), and adjust other settings such as the volume. When you're ready, tap Start Conversion. How long the conversion takes depends on the size of your video, but it converted our one-minute clips in seconds. The extracted audio will now appear as a separate MP3 file just below the video. You can listen to the file within the Media Converter app by tapping it, followed by Play.

If you want to transfer the MP3 file to your computer, tap the Transfer button at the bottom. Make sure your iPhone and computer are connected to the same wireless network, then tap the slider next to 'Turn on this service'. Next, enter the listed web address (on ours, it was <http://192.168.1.124:8080>) into a browser on your PC. Finally, click the Download button (small box with a down arrow) to the left of your MP3 file. It will then be saved in your Downloads folder.



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

HOW I USE...

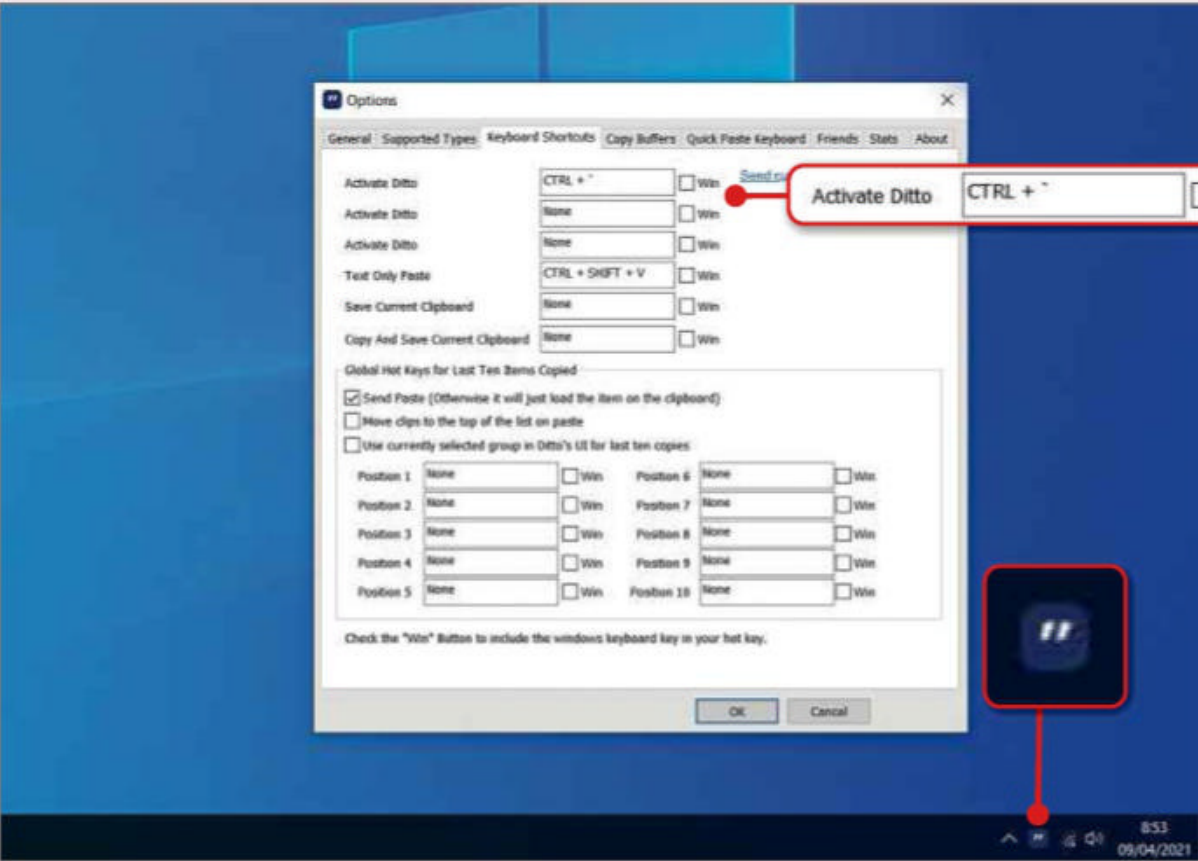
Ditto

Will Stapley reveals why he decided to abandon Microsoft's clipboard tool



I doubt I'm alone in using Ctrl+X (cut), Ctrl+C (copy) and Ctrl+V (paste) more often than any other keyboard shortcuts. It's therefore something of a mystery that Microsoft has done so little over the years to enhance the clipboard tool built into Windows. In fact, the only step forward I can recall is the Clipboard History tool, which arrived with the Windows 10 October 2018 update and stores previous clipboard items. Not that I use it. Instead, I rely on the superior Ditto for my cutting, copying and pasting (www.snipca.com/37899 - click 'Download 64bit' under the Downloads heading on the right).

Unlike Microsoft's tool, which saves only 25 items and lacks any settings to tweak, Ditto stores unlimited items and is packed with features. I've set up some keyboard shortcuts by right-clicking the Ditto icon in the system tray (see main screenshot), selecting Options, then the Keyboard Shortcuts tab. In the Activate Ditto box, I've set Ctrl+` (that's the end quote key, usually under Escape) to open my Ditto



Ditto lets you create keyboard shortcuts, including one to open your clipboard history

clipboard history (also shown in main screenshot). I then simply select the item I want - there's a handy search box at the bottom - and double-click it or press Enter to paste it into the program I'm using.

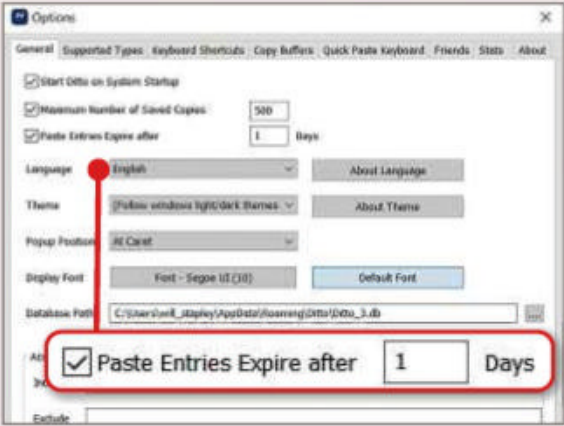
I've also set a Ctrl+Shift+V shortcut in the Text Only Paste box, which provides a quick way to paste my most recent clipboard items as plain, unformatted text - particularly useful when copying formatted text from a web page.

When I first started using Ditto, I was a little nervous about it storing *all* my clipboard items. I use a password manager in my browser to copy and paste login details for my online accounts, so if someone gained access to my PC and opened Ditto, they'd see all

my passwords. It's not a massive risk - my PC is protected by Microsoft's BitLocker encryption tool, so any interloper wouldn't know which account each password was for - but it's still not ideal.

Initially, I got around this by setting Ditto to never save items that I copied to the clipboard while in my browser. To do this, go to Options, the General tab, then enter 'Chrome.exe' and 'Edge.exe' (you can enter as many programs as you like, separating them with semicolons).

However, not being able to use Ditto in my browser soon became annoying. I therefore opted for a less drastic approach and told Ditto to clear clipboard items after one day (go to Options, select the General tab, then tick 'Paste Entries Expire after' and enter 1 in the Days box - see screenshot left). So even though Ditto still saves my passwords, they disappear after a day - which, for me, is a good balance between security and convenience.



You can tell Ditto to delete clipboard items after a set number of days

WHAT I'D LIKE TO SEE IN DITTO

Rather than stopping Ditto saving all clipboard items in my browser, I'd prefer the option to exclude only specific browser extensions (such as

the extension for my Bitwarden password manager). This would let me save my clipboard history for longer, without the worry that my passwords are at risk.

Named & Shamed



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

WARNING: JUNK AHEAD

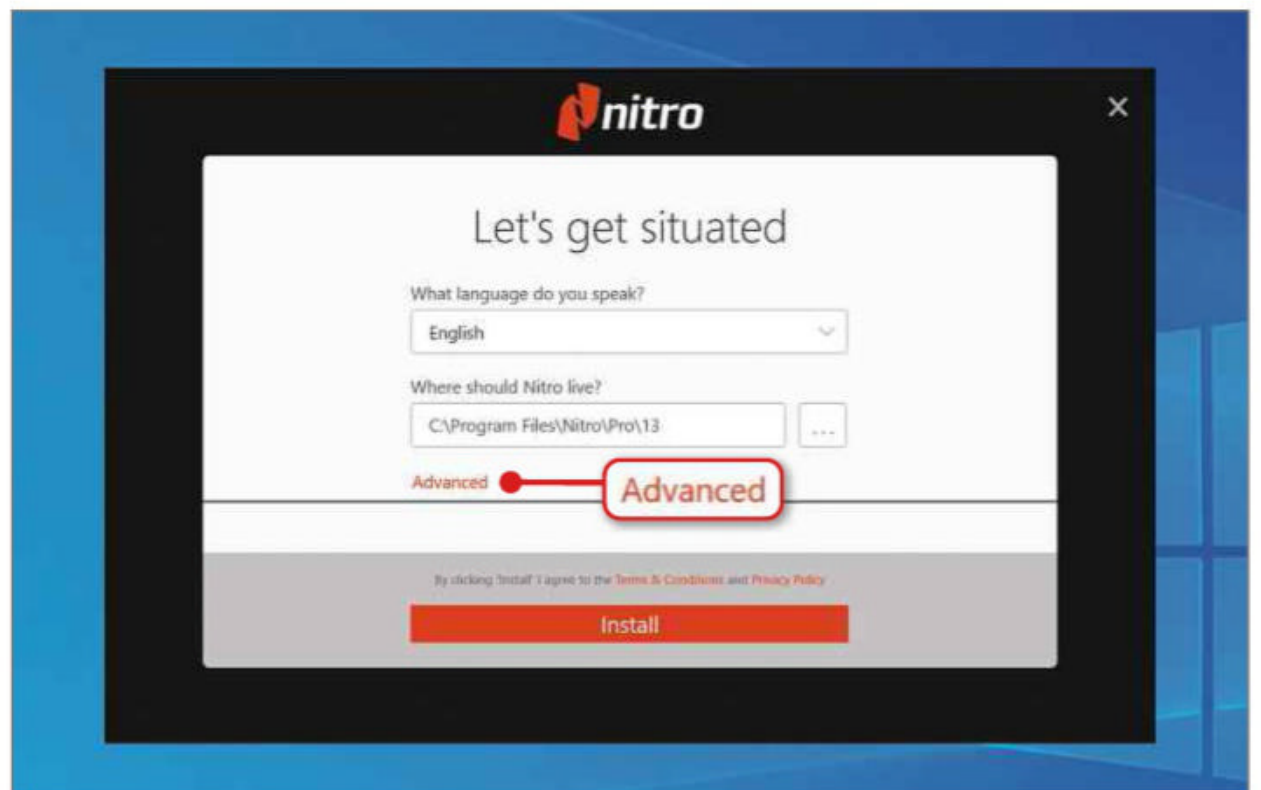
Junk offender: Nitro PDF

Regular 'Named & Shamed' readers may have noticed something of a theme emerging over the past few months. For reasons I've yet to fathom, a growing number of PDF tools have started trying to smuggle junk on to their users' PCs.



Nitro PDF is the latest example of this curious phenomenon. The free version of this PDF reader/editor used to be highly regarded. But now you can't even download it without handing over your name and email address, thereby allowing Nitro to pack your inbox with junk mail. The fact that Nitro PDF recently had 77 million users' details stolen in a data breach doesn't exactly fill me with confidence, either (see Issue 600, page 61).

Those who are happy to keep their spam filter working overtime will find there is no longer any way to download the free version of Nitro PDF – instead you have to download the Pro version, which reverts to the free version after 14 days. That's fine, but it effectively means you're installing a load of tools you won't



Squint and you'll just make out the 'Advanced' link you need to click to avoid junk

actually be able to use in the long-term (unless you pay, of course).

You'll also need to keep your eyes peeled during the installation process. Watch for the hard-to-see Advanced button (see screenshot) on one of the early screens. It's important to click this, then untick the three sneaky pre-ticked options, otherwise Nitro PDF will install

various unwanted add-ons and toolbars.

In my opinion it's not worth bothering with tools like Nitro PDF. If you just want to read PDFs, you can open them in your web browser. And if you need to edit them, I'd recommend DeftPDF Web (<https://deftpdf.com/pdf-editor>), a free, online PDF creator and editor you can use without installing anything at all.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?



WHAT THEY SAY

Ajit Sivadasan, Lenovo

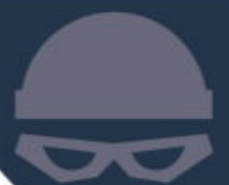
www.snipca.com/37871 "I think the big impact is going to be on retail; it'll go from stocking things and selling them to being more experiential. We will see a lot more collaboration between online and offline, and the experience will become much more omnichannel, where people are able to use the best of both worlds."

WHAT THEY MEAN

No matter how much shopping changes, we'll always find ways to make it sound even more complicated.

JONATHAN'S VILLAINS OF THE FORTNIGHT

Quin Huang & Clarke Morgan-Findlay



This unlikely pair of Londoners were part of a complex **smishing** ring, where money is conned out of victims via fake text messages claiming to be from a bank or credit-card company. Their job was to launder this stolen cash by buying jewellery and designer goods in posh Oxford Street and Knightsbridge shops, which were then sent back to the scam's organisers.

Initially alerted by banking group



Cyber Defence Alliance to a suspicious Facebook account, the Metropolitan Police discovered thousands of

messages, photos, videos and other evidence on the pair's mobile phones, linking the crooks to offences carried out between 2017 and 2020.

Thankfully their shopping spree is over. Huang copped five and a half years in prison, while Morgan-Findlay received two and a half years.

ALL-IN-ONE PC | £1,080 from BT www.snipca.com/37827

HP EliteOne 800 G5

One for all?

We usually think of desktop PCs as large, bulky towers that take up a lot of space, but the all-in-one PCs we've reviewed here and opposite are a different breed. These are pretty much the size of a regular monitor, with the PC built into the back of the screen or in its stand. With just a keyboard and mouse required to control it, an all-in-one takes up far less space than a traditional desktop PC.

While laptops let you choose where you work and can be put away when you've finished, an all-in-one still needs a dedicated space. However, you benefit from a significantly larger screen, a proper keyboard and mouse, and better speakers and webcam.

“It rattles through everyday tasks, while films and TV look and sound great”

The HP EliteOne 800 G5 delivers on this latter feature with a pop-up webcam that's far superior to the average laptop camera. Don't expect extraordinary detail, but video captured at its default 1080p looks crisp and natural. Our only criticism is that the angle is a bit too wide, which is fine if the whole family is trying to fit in the frame, but on your



own you'll need to lean in to fill it.

The built-in microphones are more than good enough for video calls, and while the speakers tend toward the higher frequencies, the bass comes through more clearly than on most laptops. We found them excellent for listening to music, roughly equivalent to a £50 Bluetooth speaker.

We were slightly disappointed by the keyboard and mouse, however. It's convenient to have wireless peripherals, but the quality of these is low for a PC that costs over £1,000.

At 23.8in the screen is generous, particularly if you're moving to this from a laptop. The resolution is only 1920x1080 pixels, but you can still open two documents side by side. Some versions of this PC come with a touchscreen but the one we reviewed (part code: 7AB90ET) uses a non-touch panel.

The screen performed well in our tests, hitting a peak brightness of 380cd/m2 and covering 90 per cent of the sRGB colour standard with a contrast ratio of 1,156:1. It can pivot 90 degrees into portrait mode and is height-adjustable so you can

SPECIFICATIONS

Intel Core i5 9500 processor • 8GB memory • Intel UHD graphics 630 • 23.8in 1920x1080-pixel screen • 256GB SSD storage • Wi-Fi 5 • 1x DisplayPort • 1x HDMI port • 1x USB-C port • 6x USB-3 ports • 1x SD card slot • Windows 10 Pro • 540 x 468 x 180mm (HxWxD) • 8.73kg • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/37827



raise and lower it for maximum comfort.

HP uses ninth-gen Intel Core processors in this range and the model we tested has a six-core i5 9500. With the help of its 8GB of RAM, it rattles through office tasks and is faster than the similarly-priced Dell OptiPlex 7070 Ultra reviewed opposite. It's not a PC for running games, displaying low frame rates in our tests, but films and TV shows look and sound great.

This version of the EliteOne includes only a 256GB SSD, but at least there's a disc drive built into the left-hand side for backups and playing DVDs. You can also connect external drives, with a fast USB-C port providing the best option, though there are six regular USB 3.0 ports. A Gigabit Ethernet port offers a wired alternative to the built-in Wi-Fi.

VERDICT If you're fed up with your laptop, the larger screen of an all-in-one desktop PC like this might be just what you need



ALTERNATIVE Lenovo IdeaCentre AIO 3 21.5in £379

A smaller, cheaper, less-powerful all-in-one if you like the idea but are short on desk space



ALL-IN-ONE PC | £1,307 from Dell www.snipca.com/37795

Dell OptiPlex 7070 Ultra

Clippin' marvellous

The Dell OptiPlex 7070 Ultra is an unusual all-in-one because it isn't built into the monitor. Instead the processor, memory and storage are contained in a separate unit that clips into the stand (pictured below). This is revolutionary for this type of PC because it means you can choose from a range of monitors and even switch it at a later date.

“An all-in-one PC that lets you customise and upgrade”

Our review unit came with Dell's P2719HC monitor, available as a PC and screen bundle for £1,307. However, you can exchange this for a selection of other Dell monitors, varying between 22in and 34in in size, which use the same mounting system. In fact, you can also use any other screen as long as it has an industry-standard **VESA** bracket.

In another break from tradition, the PC's inner workings are accessible and upgradeable. The hardware is enclosed in a compact box that clips into the stand, and can be unclipped and removed just as easily. The **SSD**, memory and 2.5in drive bay are all easily reached, and there's a significant amount of room for expansion.

The stand is attractive, with a square



base, gunmetal finish and clean lines. It's available in either height-adjustable or fixed variants.

Given how space-age the design is, it's surprising to see that it uses an 8th-generation Intel processor, three generations behind the latest models. Our unit came with a Core i7-8665U, and although Core i3 and Core i5 configurations are also available, you won't find one with a more recent processor. Our review unit was backed up by 16GB of **RAM** and a 512GB **M.2 SSD**, although it can be configured with up to 64GB of RAM and twin 1TB SSDs.

Despite being slightly old, however, this quad-core chip performed admirably in our **benchmark** tests. It isn't as fast as the HP EliteOne 800 G5 (opposite) but it happily runs everyday Windows and office software without struggling. The SSD helped keep the device reasonably nippy, but the PC uses Intel's built-in graphics hardware, so don't expect it to cope with much in the way of gaming.

Considering its size, the PC is surprisingly well-equipped with ports. The right-hand side has easily accessible **USB-C**, USB 3.0 and 3.5mm audio jack ports. The underside has another USB-C and two more USB 3.0 ports. However, the PC has to be attached to the monitor using one of these USB-C ports as there's no standard monitor port.

SPECIFICATIONS

Intel Core i7-8665U processor • 16GB memory • Intel UHD graphics • 27in 1920x1080-pixel screen • 512GB SSD • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.0 • 2x USB-C ports • 3x USB 3.0 ports • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • Ethernet • Windows 10 Pro • 256 x 96 x 28mm (HxWxD) without stand and monitor • 525g without stand and monitor • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/37795

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Dennis Publishing, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. 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 phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Dennis Publishing also owns the magazine *PC Pro* and the websites Expert Reviews (www.expertreviews.co.uk) and IT Pro (www.itpro.com). 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 Recommended 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 All the space-saving benefits of an all-in-one PC without losing the ability to choose your monitor or upgrade at a later date



ALTERNATIVE Asus Mini PC PN50 £329 Attach this to the back of a monitor for a similar effect but for a significantly more affordable price



LAPTOP | £650 from Ebuyer www.snipca.com/37814

Medion Erazer Crawler E10

Game for most things

Most gaming laptops, even those at the more affordable end of the spectrum, will usually set you back at least £1,000. This makes the Medion Erazer Crawler E10 something of a rarity. At £650 it's significantly cheaper than the competition, but still packs a surprisingly solid gaming punch.

The specifications include a 15.6-inch Full HD screen, a 10th-generation Intel Core-i5 processor with 8GB of RAM, Nvidia GTX 1650Ti graphics card with its own 4GB of RAM, and a 256GB SSD.

“An affordable, very portable gaming laptop with solid performance but a drab screen”

The Erazer is also well made. Even though it's all-plastic, it feels every bit as solid as more expensive laptops we've reviewed recently. And at 22.7x360x240mm and 2.16kg you'll be able to lug it around without too much effort. We can't say much about the looks other than that it's black and angular.

Medion has made the most of the laptop's bulk by accommodating plenty of ports. On the left there's both a USB 2.0 and a USB 3.0 port, alongside separate 3.5mm mic and headphone jacks. On the right edge is a second USB 3.0 port, a USB-C port, a Gigabit Ethernet connector and an SD card reader.

Around the back and dead centre you'll

find the power input jack, accompanied by Mini DisplayPort and HDMI video outputs. If you intend to use your laptop in a fixed location, hooked up to an external monitor, then having the power and video connectors around the back makes a great deal of sense. When you want to go wireless the Erazer offers Wi-Fi 6 and Bluetooth 5.1 standards.

Undo fifteen Phillips screws and you can remove the base of the laptop. This gives you access to two memory slots, only one of which is in use, and a free 2.5in SATA 3 drive bay, which sits next to the (occupied) M.2 SSD.

The Erazer's keyboard is impressive. Spacious and solid, it finds room for a full numeric keypad to the right. The only real downside is that it offers nothing unique to gamers. Medion has included a keyboard backlight, but it is applied uniformly so you can't assign colours to keys based on their functionality. The slightly offset trackpad is responsive and effective.

The first serious disappointment is the screen. It has a maximum refresh rate of 59Hz, meaning gamers aren't going to see frame rates of more than 59 frames per second (fps). At 264cd/m2 it's sufficiently bright and the contrast ratio is fine at 997:1, but the sRGB coverage is a measly 55 per cent, which is very disappointing. When it comes to the speakers, well, you might be best advised to use headphones.

When you're spending this sort of money you can't expect the latest or most powerful processors and, in this case, you have to make do with a 10th-generation Intel Core i5-10300H. It's good enough



for everyday tasks, but as we expected, our benchmark tests showed that it was no powerhouse. However, thanks to the Nvidia GeForce GTX 1650Ti graphics hardware, most of the more demanding games we tested achieved a maximum of 60fps. More basic games could run faster, but you wouldn't notice because of the screen's maximum refresh rate.

The Erazer doesn't have the loudest cooling fans we've ever heard but it does run them at full speed most of the time. There's no bespoke control panel to manage the cooling and performance parameters, so you're at the mercy of the laptop's own decisions.

In our battery test the laptop lasted seven hours 45 minutes. That's not hugely impressive compared with laptops that have more modern processors, but it isn't a terrible result for a hulking gaming laptop like this.

VERDICT The screen is drab and the speakers are disappointing, but this £650 laptop will play the latest games at 60fps in Full HD, which is an impressive feat

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Acer Nitro 5 £999

This laptop's screen refreshes at 144Hz, so offers smoother movement, but costs £350 more



SPECIFICATIONS

Intel Core i5-10300H processor • 8GB memory • Nvidia GeForce GTX 1650Ti graphics • 15.6in 1,920 x 1,080 pixels screen • 256GB SSD • Gigabit Ethernet • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.1 • 1x USB-C port • 2x USB 3.0 ports • 1x USB 2.0 port • HDMI port • Mini DisplayPort • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • 1x SD card slot • Windows 10 Home • 22.7x360x240mm (HxWxD) • 2.16kg • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/37814

SMART SPEAKER/SCREEN | £90 from Google www.snipca.com/37837

Google Nest Hub (2nd Gen)

Sleep tight

The second version of the Google Nest Hub takes the basic concept of the original (which was launched as the Home Hub – see our review, Issue 541), updates it here and there, and adds one new tool that might significantly change the way you use it.

As with the first version, the latest Hub is a smart speaker with a screen. This means it can be controlled by voice, display information at a glance, play videos and make voice calls. Most people would probably place a device like this in the hub of their house, usually the kitchen, where they could control smart-home devices, display photos, listen to radio and podcasts, and bark instructions at it while their hands are otherwise engaged.

“A smarter screen for the bedroom with improved speakers”

However, Google has added a new purpose to the device. It now employs low-energy radar technology to track your sleep, turning what was once a general-purpose smart screen into a sophisticated alarm clock.

The new device is indistinguishable in looks from the original one, with the same 7in 1024x600-pixel touchscreen, mounted at a slightly tilted-back angle on a fabric-covered base. There are some minor cosmetic adjustments, but you have to really look for them. The sound quality is significantly improved, though.

Like the first Nest Hub, there's no camera, just a pair of microphones and an ambient light sensor, which is used to set the screen's brightness levels and colour. The only controls are a microphone mute switch and a volume

SPECIFICATIONS

Quad-core 64bit 1.9GHz ARM processor • 7in 1024x600-pixel touchscreen • Chromecast built in • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 5.0 • 120x177x69.5mm (HxWxD) • 558g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/37837



rocker. As with other Google Home speakers, setup is carried out via the Google Home Hub app on your phone or tablet. Once set up it connects over Wi-Fi and uses Google Assistant to carry out your voiced commands.

The sleep radar detects noise and motion, including small movements such as breathing. It builds a picture of how disturbed or restful your sleep is and lets you know how you did in the morning. However, although it's available for free at launch, Google is planning to charge for the feature using a paid-for subscription in a year or so, which is annoying. It's an ingenious concept, though you might not need it if you already wear a fitness tracker or smart watch in bed.

It also uses the screen to simulate sunrise colours in the minutes before your alarm goes off, to try and trick your brain into waking you up slowly.

VERDICT For £90 this is a good value smart speaker with added bedroom features, but don't get too used to the sleep tools if you're not willing to pay for them later

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Amazon Echo

Show 10 £240 If you already use Alexa and want a larger screen, consider this alternative



CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

USB



What does it do?

USB (Universal Serial Bus) is one of the greatest PC-related inventions, bringing a standard connection to a wide range of computer peripherals. Before USB came along in 1996, PCs were lumbered with a plethora of different sockets for printers, external hard drives, mice, keyboards and more, whether you used them all or not.

How does it work?

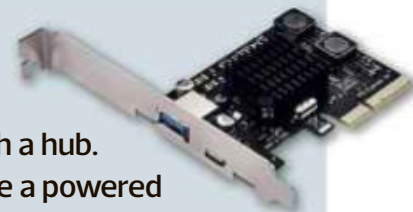
One key element of its success is that it carries power *and* data, so devices that don't require much power, such as mice, keyboards and small storage devices, no longer needed an additional power supply of their own. You can also unplug and swap devices whenever you like (except storage, which can corrupt data if it's in use).

What are the specs?

The first generation of USB, with a maximum speed of 12Mbps, has mostly disappeared. However, peripherals are backwards compatible, as long as they use the same connector, so you can still plug in a USB 1.0 peripheral. Most USB ports are now **USB 2.0** or **USB 3.0**. The key difference being the speed at which they can transfer data: 480Mbps and 5Gbps respectively. **USB-C** is the latest standard, which uses a smaller reversible connector and goes up to 20Gbps.

Can I change it later?

You can't upgrade an existing USB port but you can add more to a desktop PC, with expansion cards such as the Eluteng model pictured (www.snipca.com/37847). You can also convert one USB port into multiple ports with a hub. Make sure you use a powered hub if you need it to connect a number of power-hungry devices. You can't upgrade a USB peripheral to a newer USB version but, as long as you have the right connector or an adapter, an older USB device should always work in a newer port.



Reviews

PHONE | £399 from Amazon www.snipca.com/37807

Samsung Galaxy A52 5G

Middle class

Given that it's almost half the price of the Galaxy S21 (see our review, Issue 599), you could be forgiven for thinking that the Galaxy A52 5G is only half as good. However, Samsung's newest mid-range phone has plenty in common with its pricier stablemates, including a 120Hz screen, four cameras and 5G connectivity.

“This is simply the best phone around at this price”

Samsung has made compromises in design and build quality, with a plastic rear and fairly thick bezels around the screen. It also uses a weaker Qualcomm Snapdragon 750G processor. But with Android 11 installed from the get-go, IP67-rated waterproofing and a large 4,500mAh battery, there's not much else

SPECIFICATIONS

Octa-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 750G • 6GB of RAM • 120Hz 6.5in 2,400 x 1,080 pixels Super AMOLED screen • 64-megapixels main rear camera • 12-megapixels wide camera • 5-megapixels macro camera • 5-megapixels depth camera • 3.5mm audio jack • 8.4x75x160mm • 189g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/37807

you could want from a new smartphone.

At first glance the Galaxy A52 5G looks relatively generic, with a hole-punch lens notch in the top-centre of the screen, which is ringed by those chunky bezels. Look closer and you'll notice handy features like the in-display fingerprint sensor at the bottom of the screen and a 3.5mm headphone jack, which sits next to the phone's USB-C port.

The 120Hz Super AMOLED screen measures 6.5in from corner to corner, with an FHD+ (2400x1080-pixel) resolution and at a density of 405 pixels per inch. It achieves 99.8 per cent of colours in the sRGB standard, which is excellent, particularly at this price. Its brightness peaks at 449cd/m², with perfect contrast as we'd expect from an AMOLED screen.

The processor is accompanied by 6GB of RAM and 128GB of internal storage, which can be expanded via a microSD card. In our benchmark tests it performed around twice as fast as last year's similarly priced Galaxy S51. However, it's a long way behind Apple's latest iPhone SE, which more than doubles the performance of this phone.

Where the iPhone can't compete, however, is in the stamina department. Running for 18 hours 23 minutes in our



video-playback test, the Galaxy A52 5G lasted almost seven hours longer than the iPhone. The phone's cameras produce decent photos, filled with detail, and it manages to cut through the darkness in low light.

VERDICT The Galaxy A52 5G is the best phone around at this price, with many of the trappings of much more expensive models, while only stripping back the least essential features

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Apple iPhone SE £395
Better performance for a similar price but its speed takes a heavy toll on battery life



WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

We solve your buying dilemmas

What's the best USB hub for my TV set?

Q I have a new TV but it only has two USB ports and I need three. I understand I can fit a powered USB hub, but the choice is confusing. Could you possibly recommend both a USB hub and an HDMI hub suitable for connecting to a TV?

David Cawton

A The number of options available is bewildering, but the good news is that you can mostly go for the cheapest option that covers your

needs, because both USB and HDMI are such basic standards. What you can't use is a USB-C hub with both HDMI and USB ports, unless your TV has a USB-C port that can accept video signals.

The key thing you need to find out is which standard the USB and HDMI connections need to be. Most powered USB hubs use USB 3.0, so should be perfectly fine for your needs. RSHTech make a hub with switches on each port



(£29.99 from Amazon www.snipca.com/37812, pictured).

With an HDMI Switch, you need to know whether FullHD (1080p) is sufficient or if you need a 4K-capable model. If FullHD is enough, we'd recommend this HDMI Switch (£8.99 from www.snipca.com/37813), which switches between three sources, effectively turning one HDMI port on your TV into three.

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



£499.99

Impulse

AMD IMPULSE (RYZ7)

AMD Ryzen 5 2600 - 6 Cores (O.C 4Ghz)
ASUS PRIME B450M-A
CORSAIR 8GB DDR4 3000Mhz
INTEL 512GB M.2 nVME 660P
AMD RX 560 2GB
GAMEMAX Expedition
MICROSOFT Windows 10 or 10 Pro



£599.99

mercury

INTEL i5 MERCURY (COF9)

INTEL Core i5 9600K (O.C 5Ghz)
ASUS PRIME Z390-P
CORSAIR 16GB DDR4 3000Mhz
INTEL 1TB M.2 nVME 660P
INTEL UHD 630 Integrated Graphics
KOLINK Stronghold
MICROSOFT Windows 10 or 10 Pro



£1249.99

NAVIGATOR

AMD NAVIGATOR (RYZ8)

AMD Ryzen 5 3600X (O.C 4.3Ghz)
ASUS TUF X570-Plus Gaming
CORSAIR 16GB DDR4 3600Mhz - RGB
INTEL 512GB M.2 nVME 660P
SEAGATE 2TB Sata3 HDD
AMD 5700XT 8GB
CORSAIR iCUE 220T RGB White
MICROSOFT Windows 10 or 10 Pro

palicomp

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Reviews

PHONE | £1,099 from Amazon www.snipca.com/37825

Oppo Find X3 Pro

All change at the top

If you're the kind of person who wants the latest phone with the best features, you might already be used to spending in excess of £1,000 on a smartphone. And you'd probably expect a top-of-the-range Apple iPhone or Samsung Galaxy, so why opt for an Oppo instead? Here, the lesser-known Chinese manufacturer has made a phone to rival its high-profile peers.

Inside, you'll find the latest Qualcomm Snapdragon 888 processor, alongside 12GB of RAM and 256GB of (non-expandable) storage. It runs Android 11, is IP68 rated

SPECIFICATIONS

Octa-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 888 • 12GB of RAM • 256GB of storage • 120Hz 6.7in 3216x1440-pixel AMOLED screen • 50-megapixel main camera, 50-megapixel wide, 13-megapixel zoom, 3-megapixel micro, 30-megapixel front cameras • 5G • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.2 • 8.26x164x74mm (HxWxD) • 193g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/37825

for dust- and water-resistance, can connect to the 5G network in the UK and has a stylish mirrored design.

The large 6.78in QHD+ AMOLED screen has a maximum refresh rate of 120Hz. It's colour accurate (covering 94.9 per cent of the sRGB colour standard) and reaches a peak brightness of 556cd/m².

In terms of performance, our benchmark tests rated it marginally slower than the cheaper Xiaomi Mi 11 (see our review, Issue 602), even though it has the same processor. It's still incredibly fast, however, and is particularly smooth when playing games, even demanding ones. Its battery lasted just 17 hours 11 minutes in our video-playback test, but it can charge fully in just 35 minutes.

The regular cameras are exceptional, with the main 50-megapixel Sony lens taking superb, detailed photos in all



lighting conditions. As well as ultrawide and zoom lenses, it has an interesting 3-megapixel 'Microlens' camera, which works like a photographic microscope.

VERDICT A true alternative to Apple and Samsung's dominant high-end phones, but you can get similar performance elsewhere for less

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Xiaomi Mi 11 £749 Also runs on the Snapdragon 888 processor but significantly more affordable



DUAL-SCREEN PHONE | £1,350 from Currys www.snipca.com/37826

Microsoft Surface Duo

A phone of two halves

The latest device in Microsoft's Surface range is a smartphone, not a laptop. It costs an eye-watering £1,350, but can only run Android apps, not Windows programs. However, it doesn't look like a regular Android phone. Instead it's made from two screens linked down their longest edge, which open like a book into a larger, tablet shape. It's a beautifully crafted object and when you close it, there's a satisfying 'thunk' that's reminiscent of a luxury car door.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 855 • Adreno 640 graphics • 2x 5.6in 1350x2700-pixel resolution AMOLED screens • 6GB RAM • 128GB/256GB storage • 11-megapixel rear camera • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 5 • USB-C charging • Android 10 • 9.9x145x93mm (HxDxW) • 250g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/37826

It's just 9.9mm thick when closed, but thrust the Duo into a trouser pocket and you will notice how much wider it is than a normal phone. It feels odd to make a call on such a device, but its speaker is great and your voice comes through clearly.

The two screens are certainly versatile. You can put the Duo on a table and fold it like a laptop, with the top half acting as a screen and the bottom half as a keyboard. Alternatively, you can have two apps open, either side by side or one above the other, depending on orientation.

The biggest disappointment is if you use it as a single larger screen. The hinge puts a physical gap of 6mm between the two halves, so it isn't the smooth experience you might hope for. What's worse is that Microsoft pretends the gap doesn't exist, so if you're browsing a web



page across both screens, elements of the page disappear into the gap momentarily, before reappearing on the next.

VERDICT Microsoft's foldable Android phone has two connected screens rather than a single seamless panel, and still has a hefty price tag

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Samsung Galaxy Z Fold2 5G £1,449 Samsung's foldable phone doesn't have a gap between the screens, but it's even more expensive



HEADSET | £84 from EPOS www.snipca.com/37873

EPOS Sennheiser Adapt 165T USB II

Loud and clear

If you spend a lot of time taking part in video chats you'll appreciate the EPOS Sennheiser Adapt 165T USB II. This set of professional headphones is specifically designed and calibrated for conversations. They lack the bass levels you'd expect from headphones tailored for music listening, but make up for it in rich vocal detail and a microphone that will also ensure that you're heard.

They feel light on the head, so you don't get the immersion you'd expect of over-the-ear headphones, and **active noise cancellation** is only built into the microphone only, not the pads, benefitting the people you're speaking to. However, that will ensure anything you say should come across loud and clear.

“Ideal for those who spend a lot of time on video calls and need to be heard clearly”

The remote control has a dedicated Microsoft Teams button that lets you jump straight into a call if one shows up on your screen. More usefully you'll also find volume up and down controls, and a mute button for the mic.

One of the headset's best features, however, is that you can disconnect the 3.5mm audio jack connector from the remote (as shown in main image above right) to turn the headset into a standard pair of headphones. You can also get them in a **USB-C** version (the 165T USB-C II) if you need to connect directly to a modern smartphone.

The disadvantage of a wired connection is that you're tethered to your device, but at 2.3m there's plenty of slack. Arguably, too much slack; we're surprised EPOS

SPECIFICATIONS

Noise-cancelling microphone • Inline remote control
• 2.3m cable • 144g • Two-year warranty
www.snipca.com/37873



doesn't follow the lead of the Logitech Zone Wired (see Alternative below) and include a fabric cable tie so that you can shorten it if necessary.

The headset offers clear voice capture and impressive noise suppression on the microphone. We'd prefer a bit more padding on the ears to make them a little more comfortable to wear for long periods, but this does at least ensure they fold flat for carrying around. Importantly, they never become too hot to wear, even after a couple of hours of constant use.

We think £84 is a lot to pay for a set of headphones that don't come with fairly standard features such as noise-cancelling audio. However, if you need crystal-clear clarity in video calls, they can't be beaten.

VERDICT A great headset and mic for those who spend a long time chatting online, but they are expensive



ALTERNATIVE

Logitech Zone Wired **£140** If you want a headset that offers noise-cancelling audio, this Logitech model has it all



DO I REALLY NEED...

Self-deploying laptop feet?

What is it?

Apple has filed a US patent (www.snipca.com/37869) for a new technology that opens and lifts a laptop's casing up and away from the surface it's resting on. These 'feet' are automatically (ie, self) deployed by sensors inside the laptop.

What does it do?

The patent refers to improving air flow. Opening up the inside of a laptop would do this, reducing the need for noisy, power-hungry fans.

What's the catch?

Apple files many patents, few of which see the light of day. We like the sound of this one, though. While Apple has included a lot of diagrams of different types of mechanisms (pictured), we wouldn't be surprised if other manufacturers develop alternatives for Windows laptops.



So can I do without it?

Yes, but opening a device up to create extra air flow may be a relatively affordable way to keep laptops cooler in the future.

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale Weds 5 May

Honor MagicBook Pro 16

16in laptop with new Intel processor for less than £1,000



Xiaomi Redmi Note 10 Pro

Is this the best smartphone you can buy for less than £300?

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Our pick of products that have won the **Buy It** award

LAPTOP

PRICE
DROP

Lenovo Yoga Slim 7
£750 from www.snipca.com/37348
Tested Issue 601



Weighing just 1.16kg, this is an excellent lightweight laptop with a great screen and an AMD processor faster than many Intel rivals. It has two USB-C ports, two USB 3.0 ports and a microSD card reader. Battery lasts nearly 16 hours.

ALTERNATIVE Dell XPS 13 New Intel CPUs and a taller screen make this a more powerful, all-round slim laptop. Prices start at £1,299 from www.snipca.com/36642

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp Intel Mercury
£600 from www.snipca.com/34223
Tested Issue 576



If you don't need advanced gaming, your money's well spent here on a six-core Intel i5-9600K processor overclocked to 5GHz. 16GB of memory and a full terabyte of fast SSD storage round off a powerful PC with good expansion potential.

ALTERNATIVE Chillblast Photo Zen Fast Ryzen 7 CPU plus adequate GPU makes a superb work PC. £1,830 from www.snipca.com/35840

APPLE IPAD

Apple iPad 10.2in
£329 from www.snipca.com/36178
Tested Issue 566



The basic iPad is great value, especially now it's been updated with a powerful A12 processor and iPadOS 14. It includes Scribble handwriting recognition with the £89 Apple Pencil. Storage isn't expandable; consider 128GB at £429.

ALTERNATIVE iPad Mini With an even better, but smaller, screen than the 10.2in iPad, the Mini also supports the Pencil and has 64GB of storage. £399 from www.snipca.com/33050

ANDROID TABLET

PRICE
DROP

Samsung Galaxy Tab S6 Lite
£259 from www.snipca.com/35795
Tested Issue 582



Competing with Apple's cheapest 10.2in iPad, this slim aluminium tablet comes with an S Pen stylus and a generous 64GB of storage at a reasonable price. It's less powerful, but a great buy if you prefer Android.

ALTERNATIVE Amazon Fire HD 8 Now with USB-C and 32GB of storage, this plastic-cased tablet is more limited, with no stylus option, but good for the money. £65 from www.snipca.com/35336

APPLE IPHONE

Apple iPhone 12
£799 from www.snipca.com/36582
Tested Issue 595



The latest iPhone has a modest increase in already exceptional processing power plus even better photos and videos from the front and twin rear cameras. It comes in a redesigned case with aluminium frame and even tougher glass. Consider paying the £50 extra for 128GB of storage.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone SE With a single camera and smaller screen but the same powerful A13 processor and 64GB storage as the iPhone 11, it's great value. £399 from www.snipca.com/34773

ANDROID PHONE

PRICE
DROP

Realme X50 5G
£255 from www.snipca.com/36037
Tested Issue 590



Amazing value for a big 5G phone with three rear cameras (including ultra-wide and macro), a pretty quick Snapdragon 765G processor and a decent IPS screen. There's a fingerprint reader, but no wireless charging or waterproofing.

ALTERNATIVE Google Pixel 5 Cheaper than previous Pixels, this has great cameras, wireless charging and a superb screen. Battery life is 23 hours. £529 from www.snipca.com/36586

Now's the time to tackle your iPhone or Android Smartphone

Are you missing out on everything you could do with it? With these helpful books, there's nothing to fear about using smartphones.

Find out more...

Modern mobile phones – smartphones as they're called – can do so much more than just make phone calls.

From browsing the web wherever you are, checking train times, acting as a sat-nav... And best of all they can make it so easy to keep in touch with family and friends – in so many ways, from sharing photos to making video calls.

But using them isn't always as easy as you'd want – and that's putting it mildly!

Do the manufacturers do it on purpose?

Sometimes it can seem like the manufacturers deliberately make them complicated – and how you do things is often hidden away. It might be easy once you know, but until you've been shown the easy way, it can drive you mad.

In fact only yesterday I was talking to someone whose Mum had got a new all-singing-all-dancing phone – but she couldn't work out how to answer a phone call on it! She's not daft – it's just that it's different from what she'd used before and the phone didn't come with a manual telling her what to do.

Whether you have similar problems or you're trying to do something slightly more advanced, the thing is, it can be easy to use them... once you know how. But until you've been shown, it can be like talking a different language.

That's why we've published two books: *iPhones one Step at a Time* and *Android Smartphones One Step at a Time*.

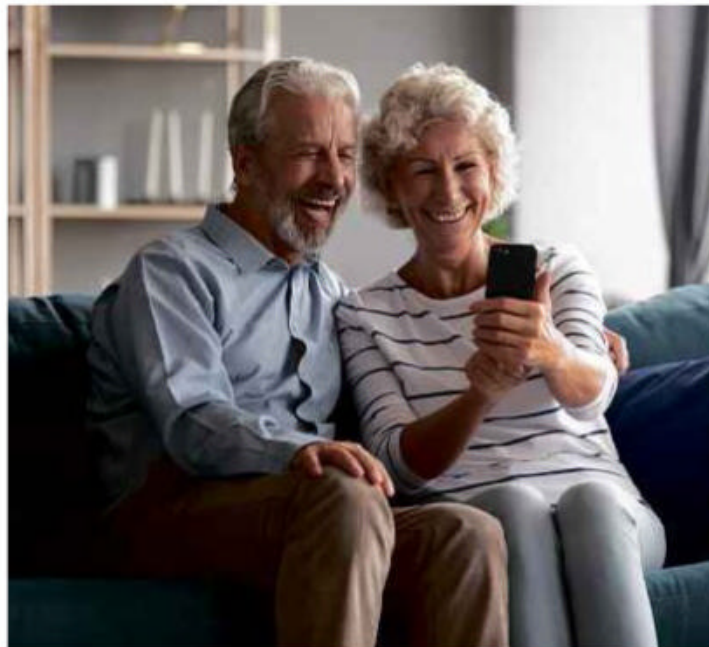
Plain English... and that's not all

They explain how to use the phone, in plain simple language with pictures of the screen showing you exactly where to tap or slide your fingers. No jargon!

What's covered?

I can't list it all here. But amongst other things, you'll discover:

- The basics of controlling it – swiping, tapping, opening apps & so on.
- Send emails from your phone.
- Most phones have a good camera so you can take photos: here's how to use it properly (and for videos).
- Browse the web at home or out and about.



Suitable for iPhones and Android smartphones like Samsungs, and DORO (not sure what phone you have? Best send off for the free info pack)

- Video phone calls – a great way to keep up with family who live a long way away
- Share photos with friends around the world – quickly and easily.
- See updates, photos and video clips from friends and family – as soon as they “post” them.
- Instant messaging and how to use it.
- Make it easier to read the screen.
- How to use it as a sat-nav... in the car or even on foot.
- Choosing and downloading apps.
- And obviously, you can make phone calls and send and receive text messages. (“Voicemail” is covered, too)

All explained nice and simply. (Find out more in the free information pack – read on...)

What one reader had to say:

“Thanks for a fantastic smart phone book. Very pleasant staff as usual.

I think this book should be sold with every smart phone. I have learnt so much from it, the info you get with the phone is non-existent.

Smart phones are quite complex, and your books speak in plain English.”

Only half the story

That's only half the story but I don't have room to explain here. I've put together full

information on the books – who they're for, what they cover and so on.

What's more the books also come with a free gift – no room to explain that here either.

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The books aren't available in the shops or on Amazon – only direct from the publisher. Send off now to get a completely free, no-obligation information pack. It'll explain what the books cover, who they're suitable for and so on – showing you just how it could help you.

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Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the **Buy It** award

EBOOK READER

PRICE
DROP

Amazon Kindle (2019)

£55 from www.snipca.com/31621

Tested Issue 555



Now with built-in light and audiobook support, this budget model is fine for most users, though limited by its 4GB of storage. The Paperwhite (£120) is even sharper, waterproof, and has bigger storage options as well as a cellular data option (£100 extra).

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Clara HD

Not waterproof, but has more lighting options to avoid blue light. £90 from www.snipca.com/32586

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Kaspersky Internet Security 2021

£14.99 from www.snipca.com/21532

Tested Issue 564



Kaspersky Internet Security has won our past nine antivirus tests and the 2020 version is now available at an exclusive reader discount on our Software Store. Go to the link above for a one-year, one-device licence or buy a two-year, two-device licence for just £26.99.

ALTERNATIVE Norton 360 Deluxe

Almost as good as Kaspersky, but blocks more legitimate software. £15 from www.snipca.com/32069

PHOTO EDITING

Serif Affinity Photo

£24 from www.snipca.com/23739

Tested Issue 498



Designed for both full-time professional image retouchers and the rest of us keen amateurs, this is a beautifully designed and comprehensive program for both Windows and Mac users, although so far it performs better on Macs.

ALTERNATIVE Xara Photo & Graphic Designer

For all-round design and drawing plus photo filters, this affordable app has a lot to offer. £50 from www.snipca.com/26514

PC MONITOR

BenQ GL2780

£160 from www.snipca.com/34834

Tested Issue 581



This budget 27in screen offers accurate sRGB colour with good contrast, plus auto brightness and low blue light modes. Speakers are built in. Using TN LCD rather than IPS, it needs to be viewed straight on, but works well for games too.

ALTERNATIVE Philips Brilliance

241B7QPIEB With a great picture, stylish design and speakers, this 24in Full HD IPS is an excellent smaller screen. £190 from www.snipca.com/37096

ROUTER

PRICE
DROP

D-Link DIR-1960

£76 from www.snipca.com/32849

Tested Issue 564



Giving us download and upload speeds of 460Mbps and 375Mbps respectively, this is phenomenal value. Even two floors away we got 329Mbps and 284Mbps. It has four Ethernet ports for wired devices and a USB 3.0 socket to share storage via your network.

ALTERNATIVE Synology RT2600ac

Comprehensive sharing features, controls and plenty of add-on apps complement excellent long-range performance. £198 from www.snipca.com/30710

PRINTER

PRICE
DROP

Epson Expression Premium XP-6105

£122 from www.snipca.com/37271

Tested Issue 554



With many leading all-purpose printers having sold out during lockdown, this white version of the XP-6100 wireless six-ink printer/scanner/copier is a good choice for photos first and text second. It's easy to use and speeds aren't bad, but ink costs can work out high.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-2711

This inkjet printer/scanner/copier isn't cheap but will save you a lot on ink (1p for two colour pages). Photo quality isn't the best, but scans are good. £180 from www.snipca.com/36183

COMPETITION

Win a ViewSonic M1 Mini Plus projector

As we explained in Issue 603's 'How To' (pages 35–37), ViewSonic's M1 Mini Plus is an excellent choice for projecting films and TV at home – while the built-in battery, JBL speaker, and the ability to be charged by a power bank, makes it ideal for outdoor use.

It's incredibly easy to use. Simply plug in a USB stick or connect it to your device via HDMI cable, and start enjoying movies,



photos and music with ease.

You can adjust the stand to offer more flexible projection angles that can satisfy most viewing needs – even ceiling projection. The built-in, fast Wi-Fi lets you cast or screen-mirror content from your smart devices to the big screen instantly.

You can also turn it into a Bluetooth speaker to play your favourite music or output the audio of a thrilling game from the projector to your



own Bluetooth headphones.

To enter this competition, email your home address to **cacomp@dennis.co.uk** with 'ViewSonic' in the subject line by midnight on Tuesday 4 May. Good luck!

You can buy **ViewSonic's M1 Mini Plus** for £229 from Amazon (www.snipca.com/37680). For more information on ViewSonic products visit www.viewsonic.com/uk and follow [@ViewSonicUK](https://twitter.com/ViewSonicUK) on Twitter.

MESH ROUTER

BT Whole Home Wi-Fi
£200 from www.snipca.com/26990
Tested Issue 496



BT's set of three discs, managed from an Apple or Android app, connects to your broadband and spreads high-speed Wi-Fi all around the house. Reception is far better than a single router, and the price is lower than any rival.

ALTERNATIVE Zyxel Multy X
 These two pillow-shaped boxes are powerful enough for most homes and provide four Ethernet ports apiece. £255 from www.snipca.com/27309

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

PRICE DROP

Samsung 970 Evo Plus 500GB
£68 from www.snipca.com/31265
Tested Issue 552



Although its price has fluctuated since we tested it at £99, this is a very fast (over 3GB per second) M.2 SSD unfazed by tests that make others slow to a crawl. Also consider the Adata XPG SX8200 Pro if you find it a bit cheaper.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB
 As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £65 from www.snipca.com/37304

SMART SPEAKER

PRICE DROP

Google Nest Audio
£80 from www.snipca.com/36475
Tested Issue 593



Produces a rich, clear sound, and better understands your questions than Amazon's Echo devices. You can use Google's app to control audio from other units around your home (pair two of them for £160). The clever Ambient IQ tool increases the volume if it detects external noise, such as a hairdryer.

ALTERNATIVE Amazon Echo (4th generation) The latest version of the Echo changes the shape from a cylinder to a ball, which improves sound quality – though the Nest's is still superior. £60 from www.snipca.com/36602

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Workshops & Tips

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

35 Use a Freesat receiver with your satellite dish

40 Stop your browser tracking links you click

PLUS

44 Phone & Tablet Tips

47 Make Office Better

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48 In The Club: Record online meetings

HOW TO... Use a Freesat receiver with your satellite dish

by Will Stapley

What you need: Satellite dish and receiver box **Time required:** 30 minutes

Remember the hassle of fiddling with the dials on your TV just to tune in channels? A slip of the finger and you'd end up with a fuzzy picture and crackling audio.

Digital TV was intended to do away with all that palaver, providing crystal-clear images and audio at the press of a button. The problem is, if you're not in a strong Freeview reception area (check the strength of your local coverage at www.snipca.com/37874), you may find

you're unable to receive certain channels or that a 'no signal' message flashes up in more extreme weather conditions.

If this is your experience (or you just fancy ditching your costly Sky subscription), Freesat could be the answer. A joint venture between the BBC and ITV, Freesat delivers broadly the same service as Freeview, but with one key difference: it uses a cluster of satellites to broadcast rather than the land-based transmitters used by Freeview. Satellite broadcasts are



significantly less susceptible to interference from atmospheric conditions, and you'll receive a strong signal no matter where you are in the UK. All you need is a satellite dish pointed 28.2 degrees East and a suitable set-top box.

1 Identify an existing dish

If you already have a satellite dish installed, precisely which Freesat boxes you can use with it depends on its low noise block (LNB), which is the small unit attached to the arm that protrudes from the dish (pictured right). Your dish captures satellite signals and focuses them on to the LNB, which then sends the signals via coax cables to the receiver box connected to your TV set (such as a Freesat or Sky box).

Satellite dishes installed as part of a Sky Q contract (Sky's latest subscription service, which launched in 2016), have what's known as a wideband LNB – as we'll explain in a moment, not all Freesat receivers are compatible with these.

Older Sky dishes (like the one we use, pictured below) should be compatible with all Freesat boxes. If you're in any doubt as to which dish you have it's a



Our satellite dish has a standard LNB, unlike Sky Q models which have wideband LNBs

good idea to ask a local installer to check.

Note that using anything other than Sky equipment on a satellite dish installed by Sky may invalidate your dish's warranty. This warranty usually lasts only 12 months, but you should still check your Sky contract before connecting a Freesat receiver.

If you don't have a satellite dish, you can expect to pay around £150 to have one supplied and fitted (about the same as for a rooftop aerial installation). We recommend getting quotes from a few local installers and be sure to explain which type of Freesat receiver box you'll be using with it (more on these in a moment) and how many boxes you plan to use, as this will determine the type of dish you need.

2

Choose a Freesat box

Just as with Freeview boxes (see our Cover Feature, Issue 598, page 50), there are several types of Freesat boxes to choose from. One of the cheapest is the **Manhattan SX Freesat HD Box** (£50 from www.snipca.com/37875, pictured on previous page), which lets you watch Freesat channels, but not record them.

The unit has **HDMI** and AV outputs – thanks to the included AV kit (which plugs into the AV port on the rear – pictured below), you can connect it to a TV with a Scart socket. Importantly, the Manhattan isn't compatible with wideband LNBs, as found on Sky Q satellite dishes. An installer may be able to replace your LNB with a compatible model, but this is likely to cost around £100. Despite the Ethernet socket at the rear, the box won't connect to your home network and therefore doesn't support on-demand services such as iPlayer.

Freesat offers its own range of boxes. **The Freesat 4K TV Box** (£125 from www.snipca.com/37876), for example, is more versatile than the Manhattan. It's compatible with Sky Q dishes and includes support for BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and other on-demand services. However, as with the Manhattan box, you can't use it to record programmes.



The Manhattan SX Freesat HD Box can connect to Scart TVs via the AV port



Freesat's 4K Recordable TV Box lets you watch, record and stream TV

How I use Freesat

My rooftop aerial is not ideal. Ever since I had it installed around 10 years ago it's struggled to produce a reliable picture for my TV (even a slight deluge can result in the signal being lost entirely). Recently, it got a lot worse (possibly after a murder of overweight crows decided to use it as a meeting point). When my local repair shop quoted nearly £200 to install a new aerial I decided to resurrect my old Sky dish (a relic from a Sky subscription that I cancelled back in 2014). With my Freesat receiver, I now enjoy perfect reception, even during downpours.

Will Stapley



How do you use Freesat?

Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

To record, you'll need a box with a built-in hard drive, such as **Freesat's Recordable 4K TV Box** (pictured below), which comes in three versions. The 2TB box (£269 from www.snipca.com/37877) lets you record around 500 hours of HD programmes; the 1TB (£229 from www.snipca.com/37878) is capable of 250 hours; and the 500GB (£199 from www.snipca.com/37879) 125 hours.

Aside from storage capacity, the three boxes are identical. They work with all satellite dishes, let you pause and rewind live TV, and support resolutions up to **4K** – though for now 4K content is limited to YouTube, Netflix and the occasional 'experimental' programme on iPlayer (including fantasy drama *His Dark Materials* and wildlife documentary series *Dynasties*). Additionally, if you have a dish with a wideband LNB, you can record up to four programmes simultaneously, which is twice that of dishes with standard LNBs.

If you're cancelling a Sky+ or Sky HD subscription (or just have an old Sky box gathering dust), you can use the Sky box to watch free-to-air satellite channels (it's not Freesat, but you get a similar range of

channels). However, you won't be able to record programmes or access on-demand services. Bear in mind you can't use a Sky Q box without a Sky subscription. Unlike the satellite dish (which is yours to keep), the box is only loaned to you, so Sky will ask for it back when you cancel.

3

Set up your box

Connecting a Freesat box is relatively easy. On our Recordable 4K TV Box, we first connected the cables from our dish. These are similar to rooftop aerial cables, but have screw-on connectors (pictured below), meaning they won't become detached if you move the box around. We then connected the box to our TV via an HDMI cable and our router via Ethernet. The Freesat box has built-in Wi-Fi, but Ethernet provides a more stable connection and frees up our Wi-Fi network for other devices that need it. Finally, we attached the mains power cable.

Like most Freesat boxes, the Recordable 4K TV Box goes through a setup procedure when you first turn it on. Ours detected the internet connection provided by the Ethernet cable. If you're using Wi-Fi, you'll be prompted to select your network and enter its passcode. Next, the box asked for our postcode – this allows it to tune the correct regional



Wires from your satellite dish have screw-on connectors to keep them fixed in place



The Freesat Recordable box provides access to most on-demand services

BBC and ITV channels. The box then scanned for all available channels, which took just over one minute.

4 Watch live and on-demand TV

Once you have your Freesat box up and running, you can browse what's on now and later by pressing the TV Guide button on your remote control. On the Freesat Recordable box, scroll back through the guide and you'll see small arrows next to some programmes that have already been aired – simply select these programmes for the option to watch them via the relevant on-demand service.

Alternatively, you can access iPlayer, ITV Hub and Netflix using their dedicated shortcut buttons on the remote. The On Demand button lets you launch My5, Netflix, Prime Video, YouTube and others (see screenshot above).

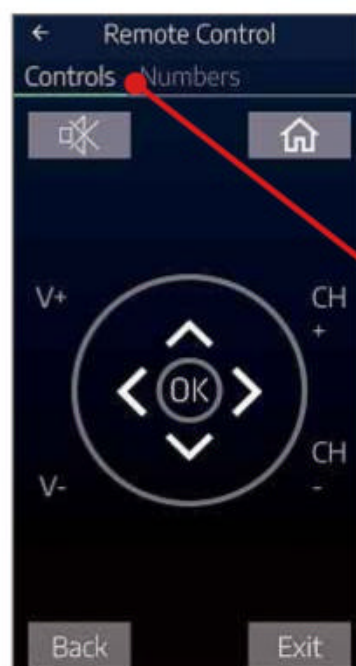
There are, however, two notable absentees: NOW (formerly Now TV) and All 4 (Channel 4's catch-up service). Given that NOW is owned by Sky, a major competitor of Freesat, its omission isn't a huge surprise, but the lack of All 4 is disappointing. In 2018, Channel 4 pulled All 4 and 4 HD (the high-definition version of Channel 4) from Freesat, citing "a very significant cost increase" (TV broadcasters pay Freesat to have their channels on the service). You still get the standard-definition Channel 4, and it is possible – though fiddly – to manually tune 4 HD, as we explain a little later.

5 Record and control via the app

You can control Freesat's 4K TV Box and the Recordable 4K TV Box using its companion phone and tablet app. To do this, you first need to create a Freesat account (at www.snipca.com/37880). Once you've registered, download the Freesat app from www.snipca.com/37881 (scroll down for links to the Google Play Store and Apple's App Store) and log in



You can manually tune Channel 4 HD on a Freesat box, but the process is quite fiddly



You can control Freesat's boxes using the remote-control function in the app

Controls

using your Freesat account details.

Finally, turn on your Freesat box, go to Settings, Freesat Account, then log in there as well. Once the two are linked, you can set your Freesat box to record by selecting a programme in the TV guide in the app, then pressing the 'R' button. To remove a recording from your box, select the Recordings option at the bottom of the app's main menu, long-press the programme you want to remove, then select 'Yes'.

The app also doubles up as a remote control for your Freesat box – tap the TV icon in the top-right corner to enable this mode. Select the Controls tab (see screenshot above) to navigate the on-screen menus, adjust the volume and move through channels. The Numbers tab gives you access to a numeric keypad and playback controls.

6 Receive Channel 4 HD

Although Freesat doesn't offer Channel 4 HD, there is a way to view this channel on Freesat's boxes. Be

aware that you need to switch the box out of Freesat mode and into Manual mode, which temporarily disables recording features, the TV guide, on-demand services and all other Freesat features. These will be re-enabled when you exit Manual mode, but you'll then have to go through the initial setup process again.

If all that hasn't put you off and you're determined to watch *The Great British Bake Off* in HD, go to the Settings menu, System Settings, then select Non-Freesat Mode. Choose the Manual Mode option on the right, then select Add Channels, followed by User Defined. You now need to input the following settings (see screenshot above):

Frequency: 11126

Polarization: Vertical

Symbol Rate: 22000

Transmission: DVB-S

FEC: 5/6

Select 'Start Channel Search' and the box will search for 4 HD. It worked well when we tried it – the box quickly found then displayed 4 HD. When you want to return to Freesat, press the Home button on the remote, then Exit Manual Mode. It's a long-winded process and, in reality, it's best to assume that if you switch to Freesat, you won't be watching 4 HD.

However, that could be about to change. In February this year, Digital UK (the organisation behind Freeview) announced that it plans to merge with Freesat. Because Channel 4 is part of Digital UK (along with BBC and ITV), we're hopeful the move may lead to All 4 and 4 HD reappearing on Freesat. As yet, though, there's no official word on whether this will happen.

Workshop1

Convert your digitised LPs into separate tracks

What you need: Audacity; Windows 8.1 or 10

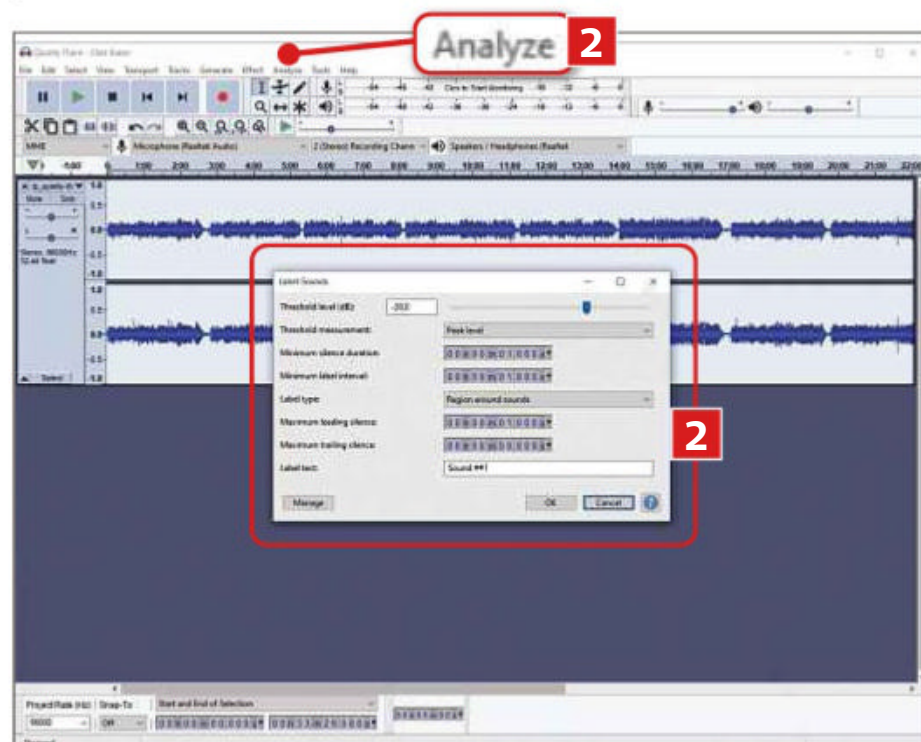
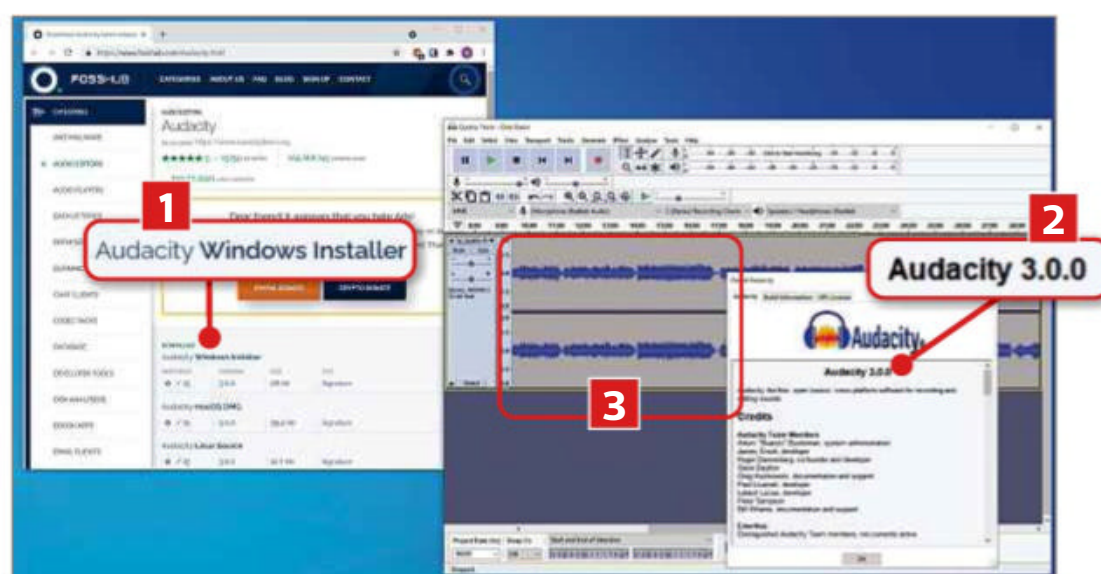
Time required: 30 minutes

Although digitising your LPs and cassette tapes preserves them forever and lets you listen to them on other devices, the recordings themselves can be unwieldy. It means *all* tracks on that album will be

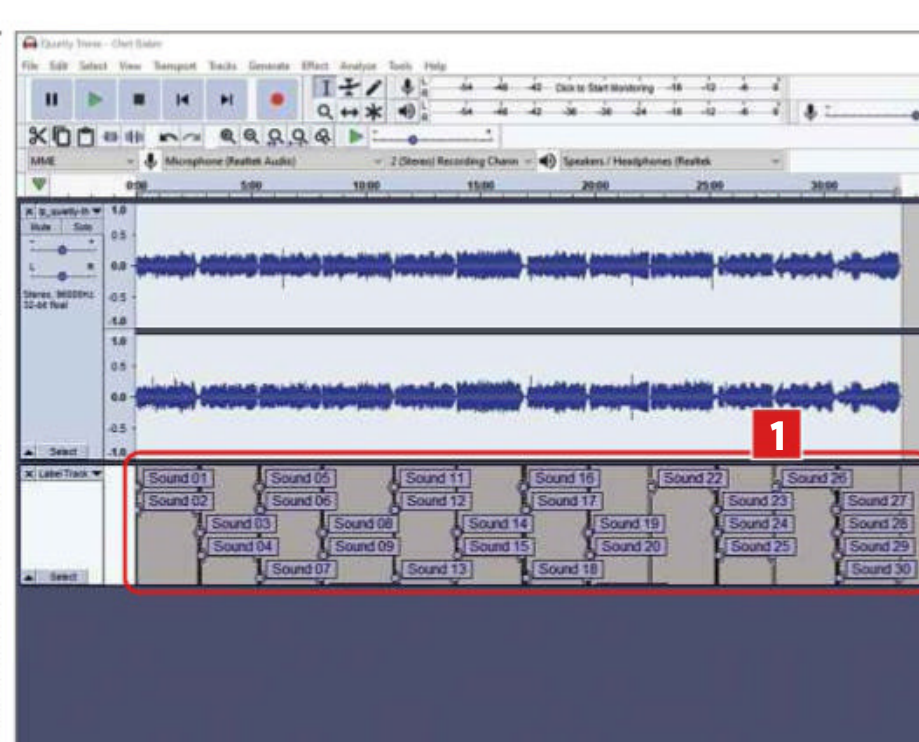
contained in a single recording, making it difficult to skip from one to another. Thanks to its new Label Sounds tool, Audacity can identify separate tracks in each recording, then export them as individual MP3 files.



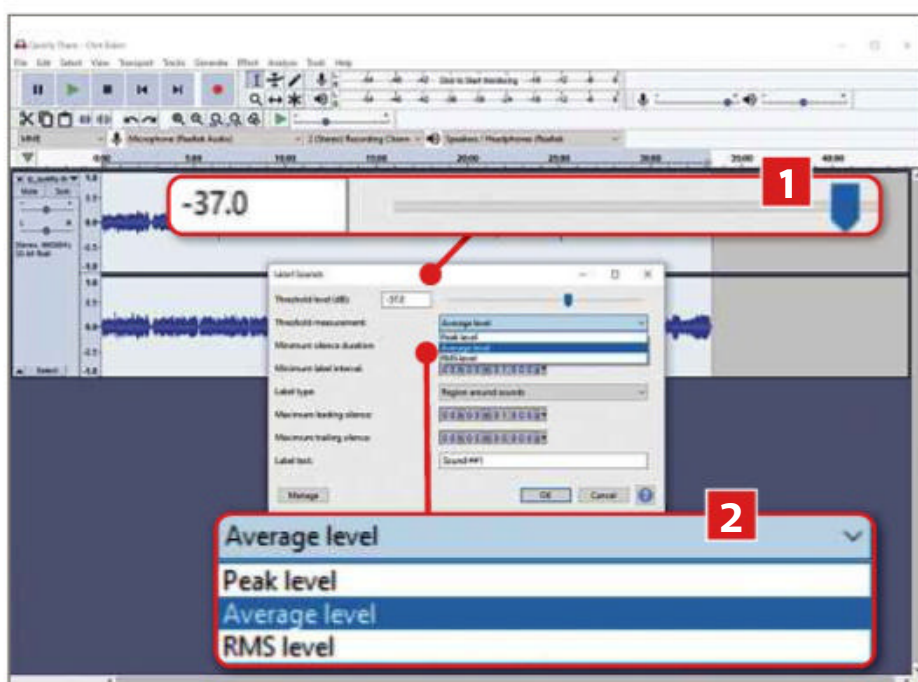
STEP 1 Go to www.snipca.com/37748 and download Audacity by clicking the Audacity Windows Installer link **1**. If you already have Audacity installed, make sure you have the latest version by clicking the Help menu, then 'About Audacity...' – if the version number **2** is lower than 3.00, update Audacity using the link above. Next, load the audio file you want to split into tracks by dragging it directly into the Audacity window or clicking File, then 'Open...'. The waveform for your recording will now appear on screen **3**. In our example, we're using a vinyl recording of Chet Baker's *Quietly There*.



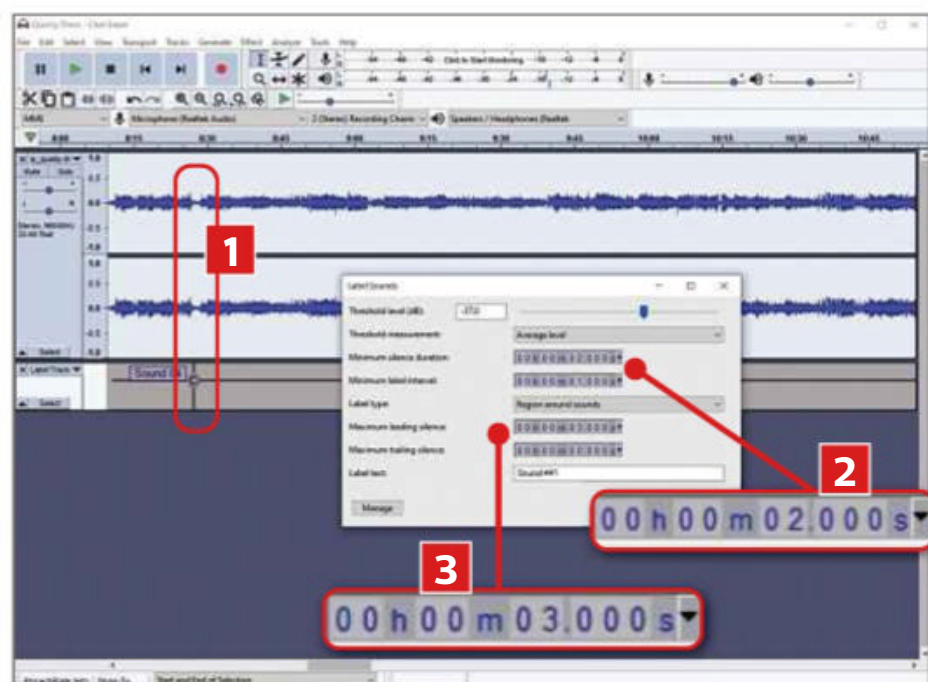
STEP 2 Press Ctrl+A to select the entire recording. Next, open the Analyze menu **1**, then select the 'Label Sounds...' option. The window that opens has plenty of options to fine-tune how the tool searches for the individual tracks in your recording **2**, but for now leave them at their defaults and click OK. Audacity will scan the recording for individual tracks (this only takes a few seconds, even on longer recordings).



STEP 3 A new Label Track section will appear under your waveform. Each label in this section **1** indicates where Audacity has detected what it deems an individual track in the recording. Our LP has twelve tracks, but Audacity has detected thirty (splitting some tracks in two while also wrongly identifying periods of crackle between songs as individual tracks). This is easily fixed. First, use the Undo command (press Ctrl+Z) to remove the labels, then return to the Analyze menu and select 'Label Sounds...' again.

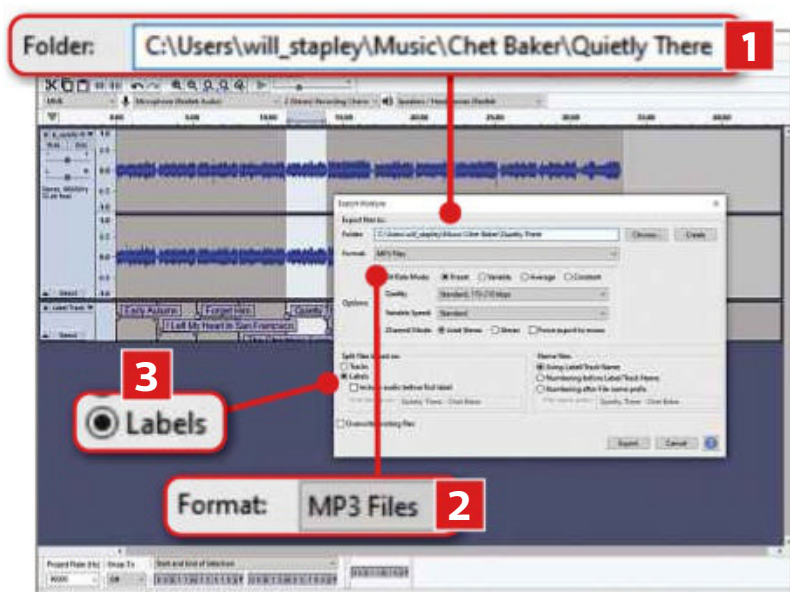
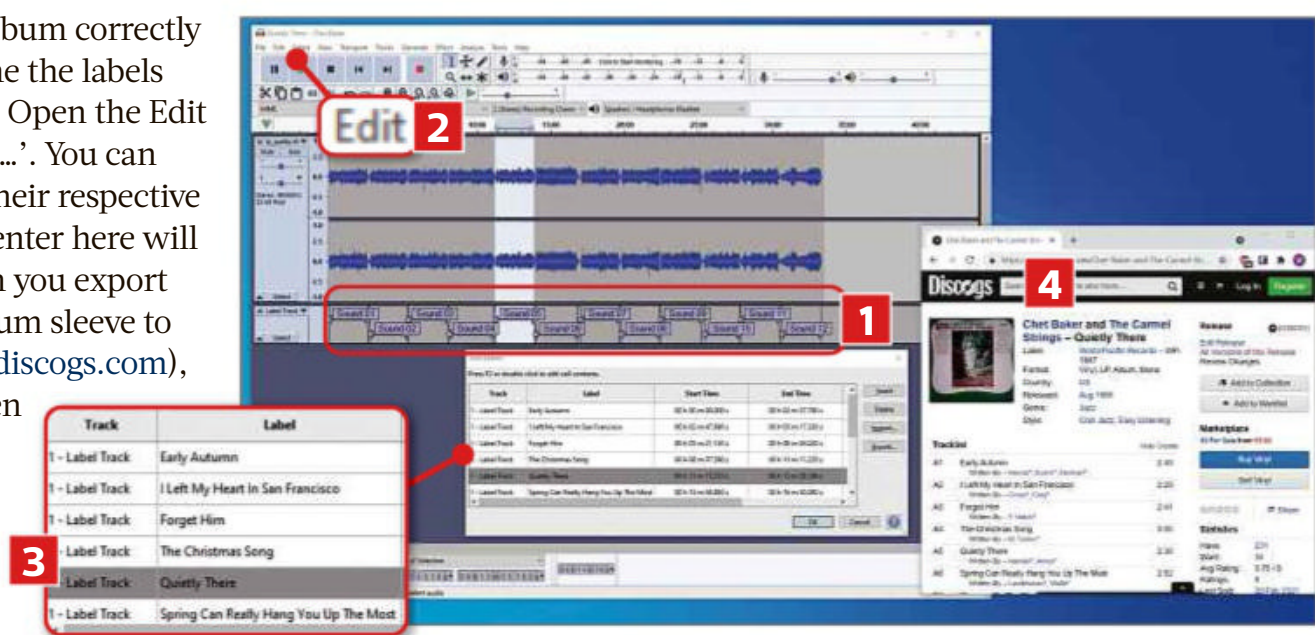


STEP 4 Most labelling errors can be rectified by moving the 'Threshold level' slider to the left (the further you drag it, the quieter the background level must be before the tool identifies it as a break between tracks). In our example, we've set it to -37dB **1**. It's also worth changing the 'Threshold measurement' from 'Peak level' to 'Average level' **2**; this tells Audacity to use the average sound level over 10-millisecond (ms) periods and is particularly effective at preventing the short pops and crackles of vinyl recordings being treated as individual tracks. To test these new settings, click OK.



STEP 5 As you can see, the labels are more accurate, but the tool has mistakenly recognised a quiet section in track 4 as the start of a new track **1**. To fix this, press Ctrl+Z to remove the labels, return to the Label Sounds window, then change the 'Minimum silence duration' setting to two seconds **1** (this means breaks of only two seconds or more will be treated as the start of a new track). We've also increased the 'Maximum leading silence' setting to three seconds **3**, which will result in each track having a few seconds of authentic vinyl crackle before the music starts. Click OK. If the tracks are still being detected incorrectly, try making adjustments to the above settings.

STEP 6 With all twelve tracks of our album correctly identified **1**, it's time to rename the labels using the names of each track. Open the Edit menu **2**, select Labels, then 'Edit labels...'. You can now type the name of each track into their respective label boxes **3**. Note that the labels you enter here will be used for each track's file name when you export them. If you don't have the original album sleeve to hand, go to the Discogs website (www.discogs.com), search for your album in the box **4**, then copy the track names to the relevant boxes in the Edit Labels window.



STEP 7 Now that the tracks are correctly labelled, you can export them as separate files. Open the File menu, then select Export, followed by 'Export multiple...' (or press Ctrl+Shift+L). Choose where to save your files **1**, then select the format you want **2** – we've chosen MP3 as it's the best balance between quality and file size. Next, select Labels **3** in the 'Split files based on' section, then click Export. The export process shouldn't take long (our half-hour recording exported in under two minutes), after which your files will appear in the folder you selected.

Workshop 2

Stop your browser tracking links you click

What you need: ClearURLs; any browser

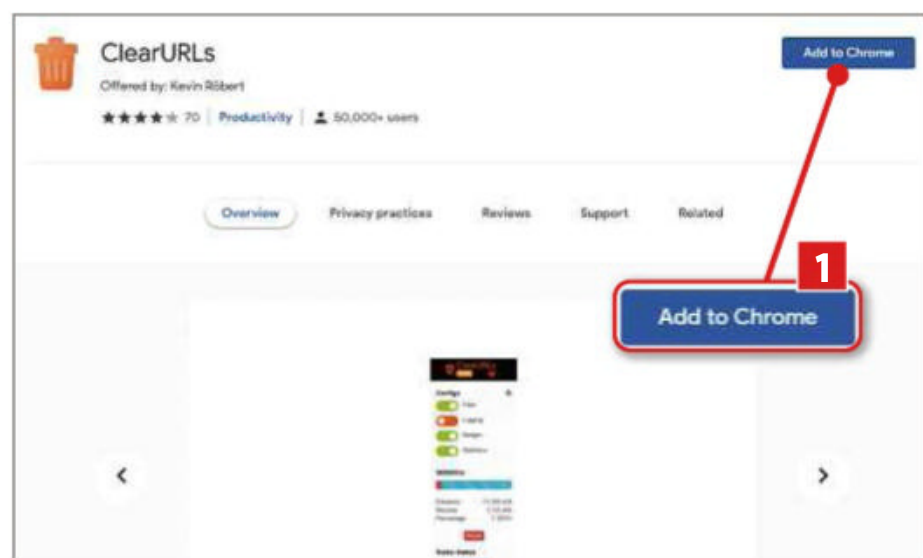
Time required: 20 minutes

Whenever you click a link, the URL that appears in your browser's address bar is often incredibly long. This is because it contains tracking code that reveals information such as the website or email where you clicked it. URL strippers are tools that let you remove this tracking code, but last month Google pulled our

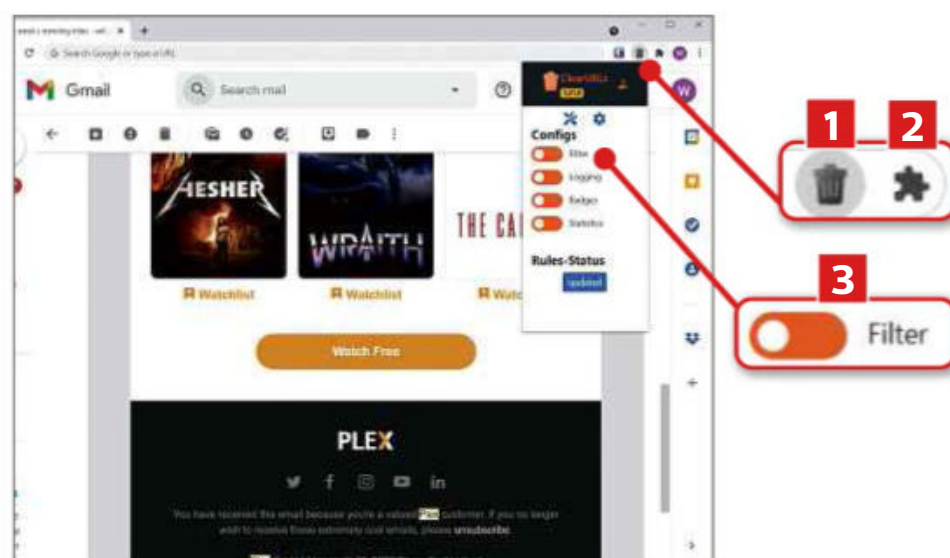
favourite – the **open-source** CleanURLs extension – from the Chrome Web Store. Google has since reinstated it, but it shows how the company is worried about privacy tools that might affect revenue generated by data gathering. Here we explain how to use ClearURLs and how you can install it even if Google makes it unavailable again.



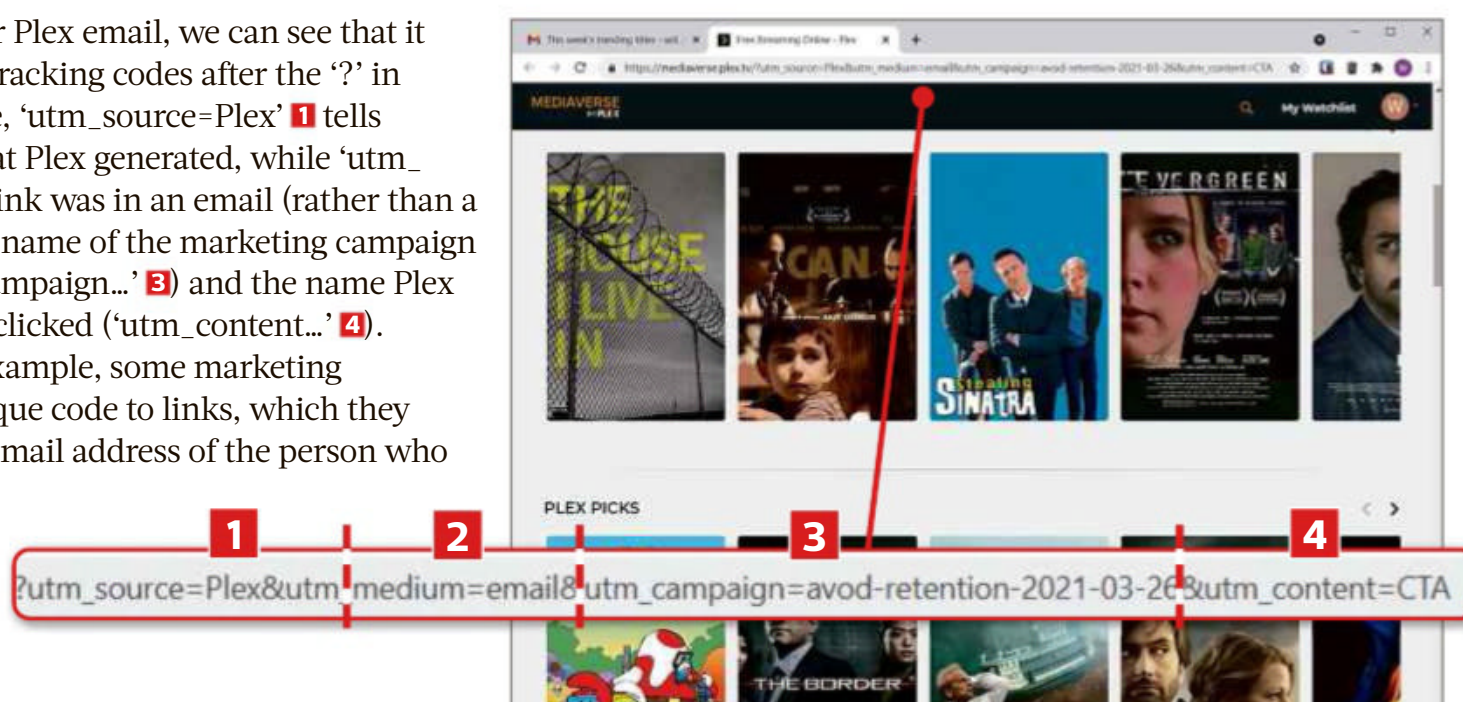
STEP 1 Install the ClearURLs extension on your browser. It's available for Chromium-based browsers, including Chrome, Microsoft Edge and Brave (www.snipca.com/37800 – click 'Add to Chrome' **1**), and Firefox (www.snipca.com/37801). If you haven't set Edge to work with Chrome extensions, you can download ClearURLs from the Edge Add-ons website (www.snipca.com/37802). If the ClearURLs extension isn't available when you try to install it from the Chrome Web Store, Google may have removed it again – skip to Step 6 to find out how to install it yourself.

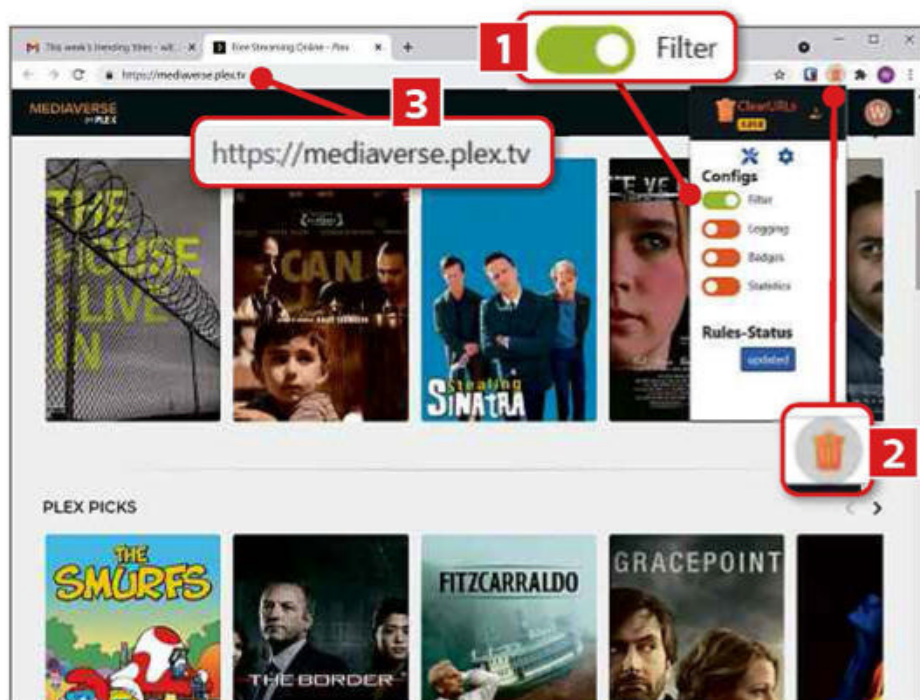


STEP 2 Marketing emails often include tracking codes in links, so to test ClearURLs we're going to use a recent email from the streaming service Plex. First, we want to see what the link looks like without using ClearURLs. Open the ClearURLs extension by clicking its icon **1** at the top-right of your browser (in Chrome, you may need to click the jigsaw icon **2** to reveal it, then click the Pin icon to make it always visible). Next, click the Filter option so that it turns orange **3**. The ClearURLs icon will now turn grey, indicating that it's no longer scanning for or stripping tracking code from links.

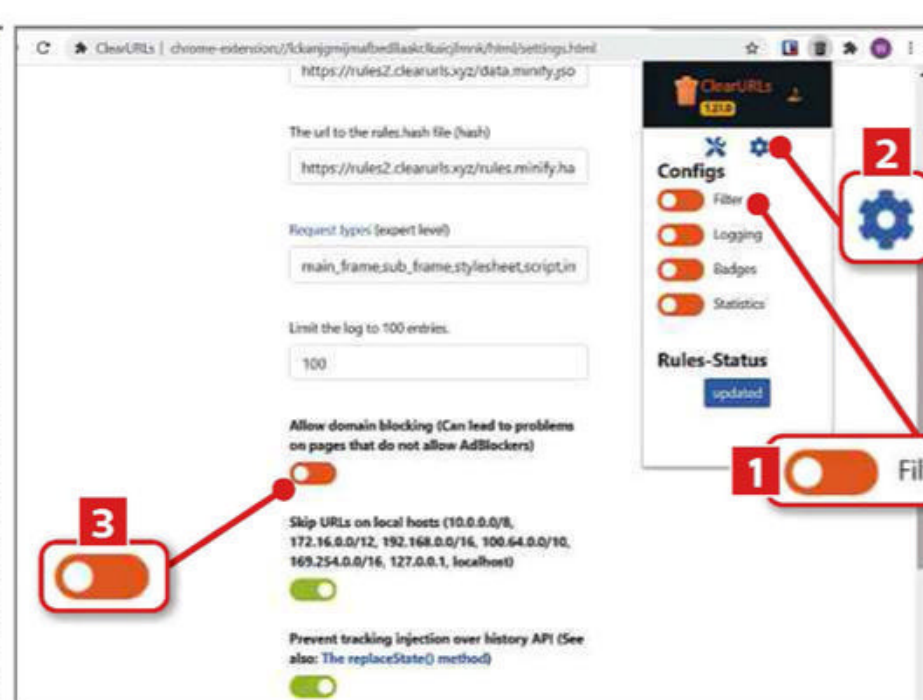


STEP 3 When we click on our Plex email, we can see that it includes a variety of tracking codes after the '?' in the URL. For example, 'utm_source=Plex' **1** tells Plex that you clicked a link that Plex generated, while 'utm_medium=email' **2** shows the link was in an email (rather than a website). We can also spot the name of the marketing campaign the email was part of ('utm_campaign=...' **3**) and the name Plex has given the specific link we clicked ('utm_content=...' **4**). Although Plex hasn't in this example, some marketing companies will also add a unique code to links, which they can then use to work out the email address of the person who clicked the link.

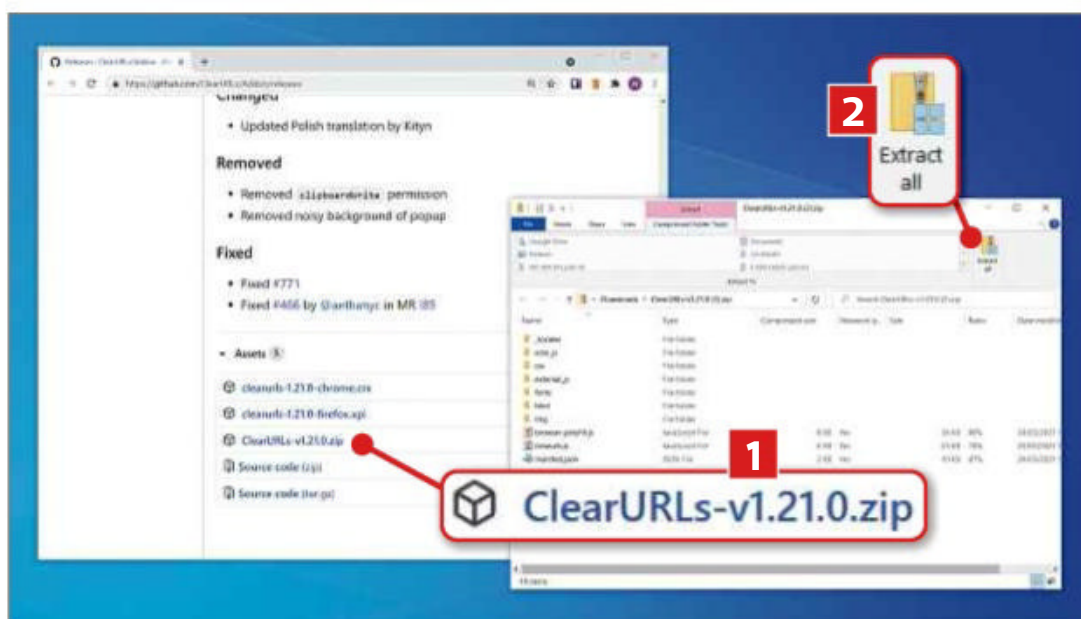




STEP 4 Return to the ClearURLs extension at the top right of your browser, this time clicking the Filter slider so that it turns green **1** (the ClearURLs icon will now turn orange, indicating that URL filtering is enabled **2**). Now when we click the same link in our Plex email, we're taken to the exact same page on the Plex website as before, but ClearURLs has stripped out all the tracking code, making for a much neater URL **3** and, more importantly, one that doesn't reveal which link we clicked to open it.

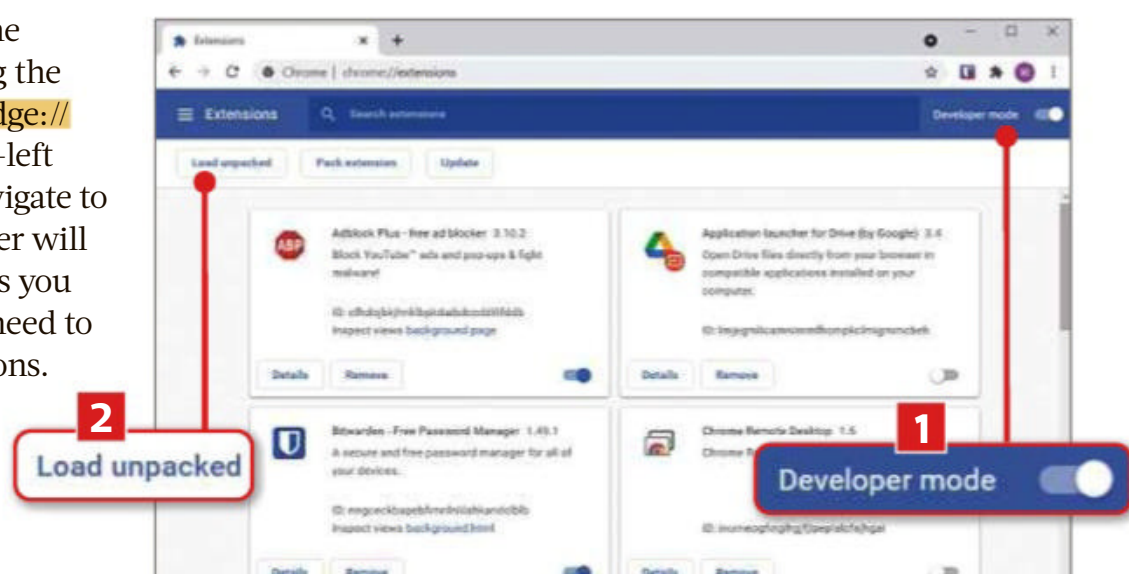


STEP 5 ClearURLs includes other tools to help protect your privacy. Although we haven't experienced any problems using the extension, you may find it prevents some links from loading properly. If so, you can quickly turn filtering off using the Filter switch **1** as before. Alternatively, you can leave ClearURLs running, but turn off its 'domain blocking' feature (this prevents advertising companies from tracking you, but can stop sites that ban ad-blockers from loading properly). Click the cog icon **2** within the ClearURLs extension, then switch 'Allow domain blocking' **3** to off.



STEP 6 If the ClearURLs extension isn't available in the Chrome Web Store, you can download and install it yourself. Go to the developer's website (www.snipca.com/37803) and select the ZIP file for the latest release (at the time of writing, this was ClearURLs-v1.21.0.zip **1**). Open the ZIP file in File Explorer, then click 'Extract all' **2** in the toolbar. Now click Browse, select where to extract the ZIP file to (we created a new folder called 'C:\Program Files\ClearURLs'), then click OK, followed by Extract.

STEP 7 Open Chrome, type `chrome://extensions` into the address bar and turn on 'Developer mode' using the slider **1** in the top-right corner (in Edge, type `edge://extensions`, then enable 'Developer mode' in the bottom-left corner). Next, click 'Load unpacked' **2** at the top and navigate to the folder containing your extracted ZIP file. Your browser will now install the extension as normal. Note that extensions you install in this way won't automatically update, so you'll need to periodically check the developer's website for new versions.



Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Save web pages using Chrome's 'Reading list'

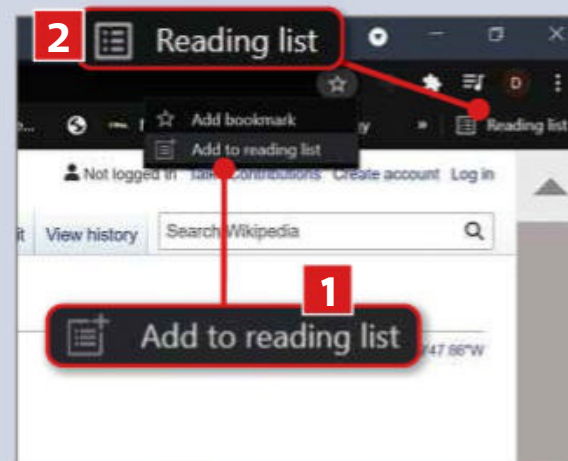
I'm rather keen on Chrome's new 'Reading list' option - I wonder if other readers have seen it? You'll see it by clicking the star icon at the far right of the browser bar. Find a web page you want to save to read later, click the star icon, then select 'Add to reading list' (1 in our screenshot).

Next, look for the 'Reading list' tab (2 to the right of all your bookmarks. Click this and you'll see all the pages you've saved, listed as those you've read and those you've yet to read. When you want to remove a page, just hover over

it and click the X that appears.

If you're signed into your Google Account, the list will sync across your devices. I've been using it to save pages that I come across on my iPhone while walking around, then reopen on my computer a few hours later to read in more comfort on a bigger screen. Apparently, however, it's not available for Android, which seems a bit weird considering it's a Google platform.

By the way, if you can't see the 'Reading list' tab, you'll probably need to turn on your bookmarks bar. You can do this by



pressing Ctrl+Shift+B.

Ruth Harrison



Ruth wins a copy of our 2020 Back Issue CD

Buy it on Amazon www.snipca.com/37026

SOFTWARE

Use Relcon to restore your desktop icons

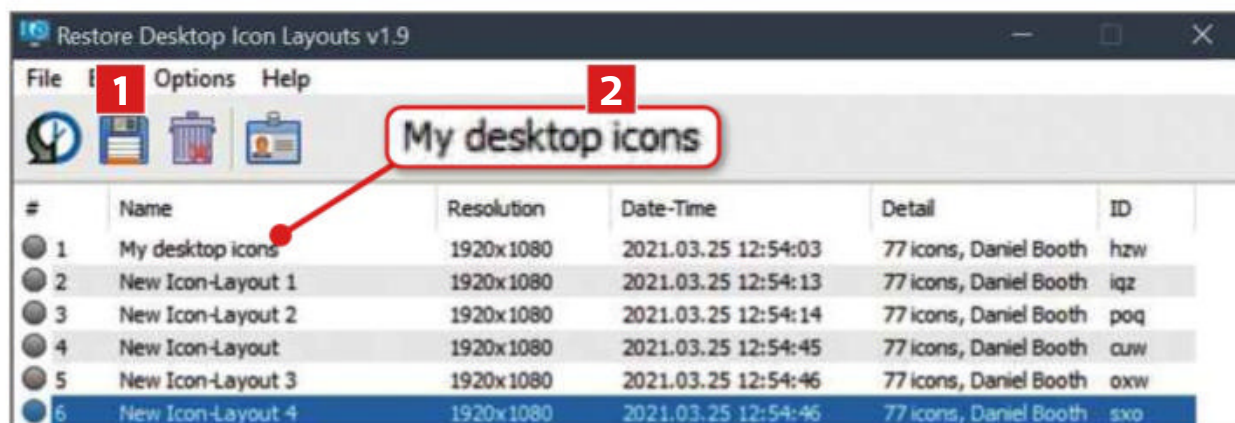
✓ Derek Wellings writes in Issue 602 (page 66) about his icons scattering about his Windows 10 desktop, and you provide an excellent solution. I too have

suffered from this in the past, and your solution has only worked temporarily. I now use a small portable program called Relcon to do the job (visit www.snipca.com/37722 and version 1.9 of the program will download automatically).

This program doesn't need to be

installed, so unzip it into a folder and run the 'Relcon_x64.exe' file (or 'Relcon.exe' if you are running 32bit Windows). Once your icons are where you want them to be, click the Floppy Disk button (1 in our screenshot) to save your layout and give it a name (2). And that's it. If you need to bring back your icons, run the program and this time select the layout you want to restore, followed by the Restore Icon Layout button.

Fraser Drummond



OFFICE

Lose 'Backstage' view when choosing 'Save as'

✓ Thanks for the tip in Issue 602 (page 47) on avoiding the Backstage

Why I stopped using...

PDF software

✓ I've read a lot of discussions in *Computeractive* about the best PDF software to use. I've used many over the years, but these days I prefer using online tools rather than downloadable programs.

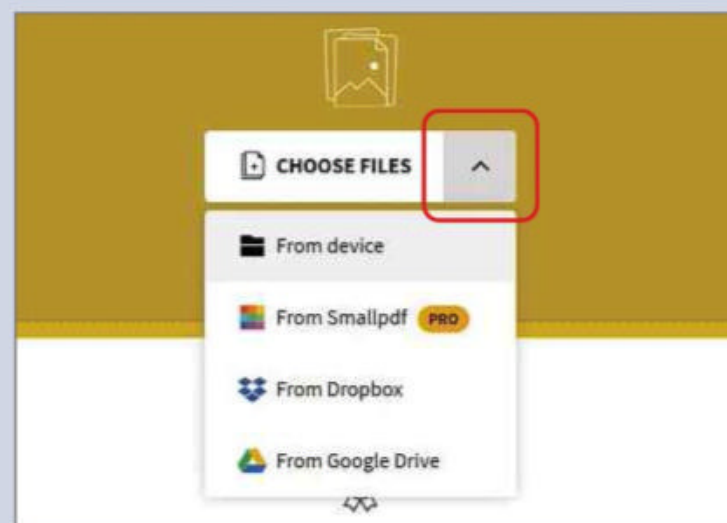
And what I use instead...

I may be wrong, but I don't recall any readers recommending the excellent **Smallpdf** (<https://smallpdf.com>). There's a free version that you can use online, and lets you work on two

documents a day. This obviously won't be enough for anyone running a small business, but it's fine for occasional use.

It gives you 21 tools for free. The most useful for me is the **JPEG to PDF converter** (<https://smallpdf.com/jpg-to-pdf>). You click the dropdown arrow (see screenshot) then choose the JPEG, or drag and drop it. There's an option to add JPEGs directly from Google Drive, which is handy for me because it's where I save most of my files.

Angus Turner



Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk

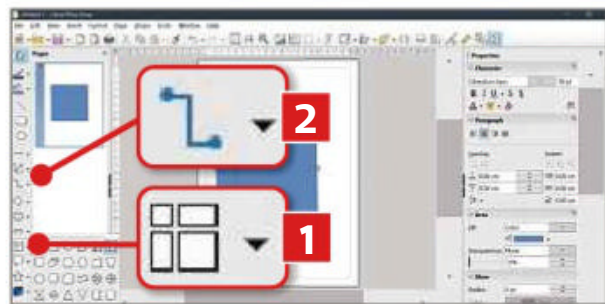
view in Office, though you remark that it “stubbornly remains when you select ‘Save as’”. There’s actually a way to remove Backstage when choosing ‘Save as’. After changing the setting as you describe, you just need to press F12 to bring up the ‘Save as’ box.

Tim Lewcock

SOFTWARE

Make flowcharts in LibreOffice Draw

✓ In Issue 600’s Readers’ Tips David Allen explained how to make flowcharts using Microsoft Word. Being curious, I checked whether you could also do this in LibreOffice Draw (www.libreoffice.org/draw), which is a graphics design program that’s part of the LibreOffice suite. It turns out you can.



Open Draw, then click View, Toolbars, Drawing. Click the small dropdown arrow next to the ‘Flowchart’ icon in the left-hand menu (1 in our screenshot), then select a shape and ‘draw’ it in the document. You’ll see several options on the right-hand pane, letting you change the colour, add a shadow, flip the shape and more. Add a second shape when you’re ready, and then click the Connectors dropdown menu on the left (2). Choose a connecting line, then add it to the document so the shapes are connected. Continue until you’ve finished your flowchart.

Don Palmer

VIDEO CHATS

Check whether your PC can use a Zoom green screen

✓ In Issue 601 (Letters), Roger Hughes says that one of the reasons Skype is better than Zoom is that in the latter you need a green screen to use one of your own photos as a background. In fact, if your PC is powerful enough, you may not need a physical green screen. To do this, you should first check Zoom’s list of processors it supports: www.snipca.com/37704. My laptop is about six years old and can do it, so there’s a good chance newer computers can also.

Robert Bull

Reader recommends...

Canon Pixma TS5151 printer

£60 from John Lewis www.snipca.com/37661

✓ I bought this printer recently, after having a Canon 3550, and it does exactly what you want it to. Setting up Wi-Fi is easy, as is downloading the required software.

But what I couldn’t fathom was the paper tray, which has a slightly clumsy design. I eventually came to terms with it – you just have to be gentle when opening it. Also, the instruction panel sticks out and looks a bit naff.

However, the scanner is silent and fast, while Canon’s My Image Garden software (www.snipca.com/37663) makes it easy to organise and print



photos. It also comes with a second-sheet input section. It’s a great for printer for just £60.

Ken Brown

✉ Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?

Email letters@computeractive.co.uk



BROADBAND

Test your BT broadband speed

✓ I’ve used many broadband speed testers over the years, but the site I’ve found most accurately calculates my BT speed is <https://speedof.me> (see screenshot above). I get just over 39Mbps download and 7.3Mbps upload on a Fibre-to-the-Cabinet (FTTC) broadband service from Now, with a 400-metre copper end section.

Robin Dew

OFFICE

Add captions before printing photos using LibreOffice Writer

✓ Following on from Issue 601’s Workshop on adding captions to photos (page 38), I thought I’d explain how I do it.

All my photographs are A4 landscape, so to add captions I insert the photo into the printer left-edge down, with it facing me. I then open a document in LibreOffice Writer, choosing the landscape option, the font size and

colour. I then write the caption across the page. If I want a caption on the bottom of the page, I drop the cursor near to the bottom and type. When I click ‘Print’ it shows what will be printed.

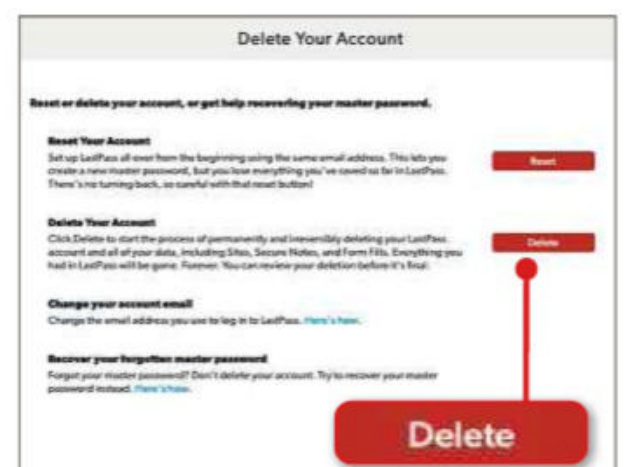
Brian Rich

SOFTWARE

Delete your LastPass account after switching

✓ I took your advice in Issue 601 (page 62) and switched from LastPass to Bitwarden (<https://bitwarden.com>). A few days later it dawned on me that I hadn’t actually deleted my LastPass account. My heart sank because in my experience online services hate you cancelling, and try to make it as tortuous as possible. I was relieved then to find the right section on the site (www.snipca.com/37689), and that the instructions were reasonably straightforward. Click the red ‘Delete’ button (see screenshot below) to get started, and make sure you have your master password to hand.


Frank Taverner

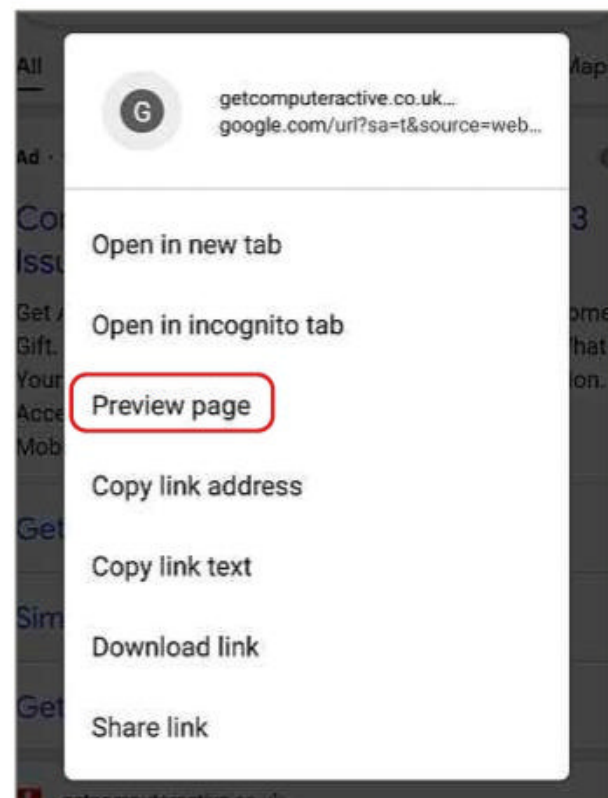


Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID

Preview links in Chrome before you open them

 Browsing the web on a phone or tablet can sometimes feel awkward – it's easy to waste time going backwards and forwards through different tabs, tapping links to see where they lead, only to tap back to the previous page. But the latest version of Chrome for Android has a handy little feature that lets you get a sneak preview of the web page behind a link without actually replacing the page you're currently viewing or opening yet another tab. It's a great way to speed up your browsing. For example, if you're looking for something specific from a



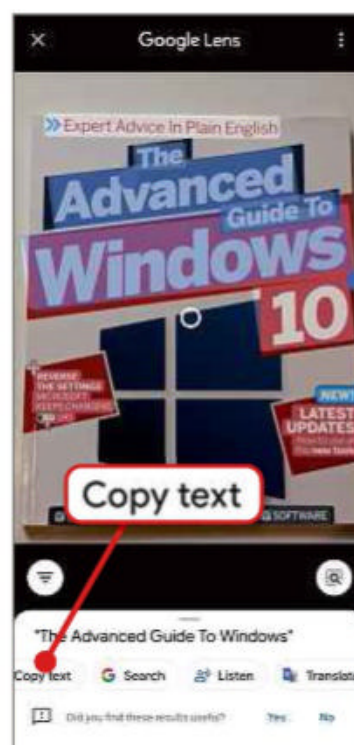
page of Google results, you can preview each link to see where it leads and quickly return to your search if needed.

To preview a web page from its link, long-press the link until a menu pops up – here, tap 'Preview page' (see screenshot below left) and the page will open in a smaller window over the top of your main browser window. It'll work just like a normal web page; you can scroll, tap links and so on. Should you decide you want to open the page in a new tab, tap the icon of a box with an arrow in it in the top-right corner of the preview window. To close the preview window and return to the previous page, tap the X icon in the top right.

ANDROID

Scan and translate text in Google Photos

 If you're an Android user, you'll find that Google Photos has just become a whole lot more useful, thanks to improved Google Lens integration within the app. Google's clever tech now lets you search for text within photos, as well as recognise, extract and translate text – all without having to open the separate Lens app and switch between the two. You'll




need to make sure both apps are up to date, though.

Open Google Photos and browse for an image with text you want to use, then tap the Lens icon at the bottom of the screen. Next, tap some of text within the image and use the handles to select the precise section of text you want to use. A tab will appear at the bottom of the screen, offering you a variety of Lens-related abilities. Tap 'Copy text' (see screenshot left) to copy the text to your clipboard so you can paste it into another document or email.

To run a Google search for your selected text, tap Search. To hear the text read out loud, tap Listen. To translate foreign text, tap Translate (you'll need Google Translate installed for this). Swipe left across the lower tab for the final option: 'Copy to computer'. Tap this to send the text you've selected to a PC – you'll need to be signed into Chrome on your PC with the same Google account for this to work.

iPadOS

Improve your iPad's mouse control

 For many years Apple resisted including mouse support for its iPads, but it finally relented in iPadOS 13.4 (released in December 2020) and

BEST NEW APPS

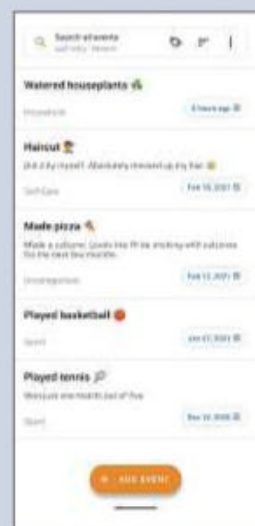
What you should install this fortnight

Last Time

Free

Android www.snipca.com/37791

Last Time is an activity tracker with a difference. Instead of tracking your exercise, it allows you to log your everyday activities, such as when you last had a haircut or ordered pizza. The idea is that you can use it to track your own behaviour, view a timeline of your activity history, set reminders and more.



Doctor Who: The Lonely Assassins

£3.99

Android www.snipca.com/37789

iOS www.snipca.com/37790

Current Doctor, Jodie Whittaker, might be relegated to a cameo, but this adventure game captures the spirit and scares of the long-running sci-fi series, thanks to recognisable faces and enemies from the 'Who-niverse'. You have to piece together a mystery by interacting with characters via a missing person's smartphone.



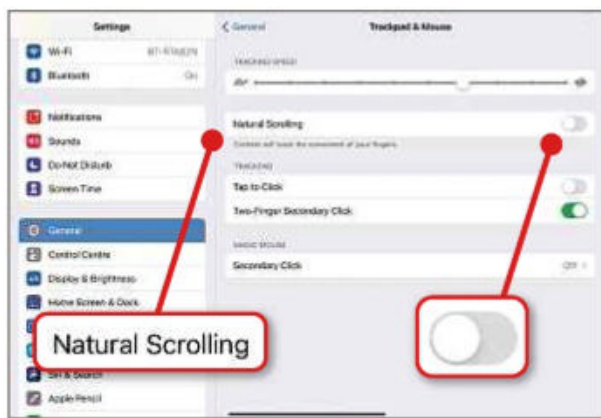
Wateria

Free

Android www.snipca.com/37792

Designed to help you care for your garden and indoor plants by creating watering schedules, setting reminders and so on, the latest version of Wateria adds a handy Google Lens-powered plant identifier into the mix. Tap the double-arrow icon, tap 'Identify plant' and point the camera at the plant you want to know about.





now allows users to pair and control their tablet with pretty much any Bluetooth mouse. Subsequent versions of iPadOS have continued to refine the iPad's mouse support, but if you're used to using a mouse with a computer, there's still one setting you'll need to change in order for mouse control to work the way it should.

By default, Apple inverts scrolling on iPads, which the company claims is the more 'natural' way to scroll. In practice, however, all this means is that most PC users will be constantly scrolling up when they mean to scroll down and vice versa. It's infuriating but, thankfully, there's a very easy way to correct it.

We'll assume you've already paired your mouse with your iPad – if not, you can do so in your iPad's Bluetooth settings. Next, open the Settings app and tap General, 'Trackpad & Mouse'. Here you'll find the Natural Scrolling option is enabled by default – tap the slider to turn this off (see screenshot above) and scrolling will now work the way you're used to.

On the same Settings screen, you can also customise your mouse cursor's tracking speed by adjusting the slider at the top (tortoise is slower, hare is faster). You'll find further ways to make your iPad's mouse control work the way you want by tapping Settings, Accessibility, then Pointer Control. Here you can adjust scrolling speed and make the cursor more visible by making it larger or changing its colour.

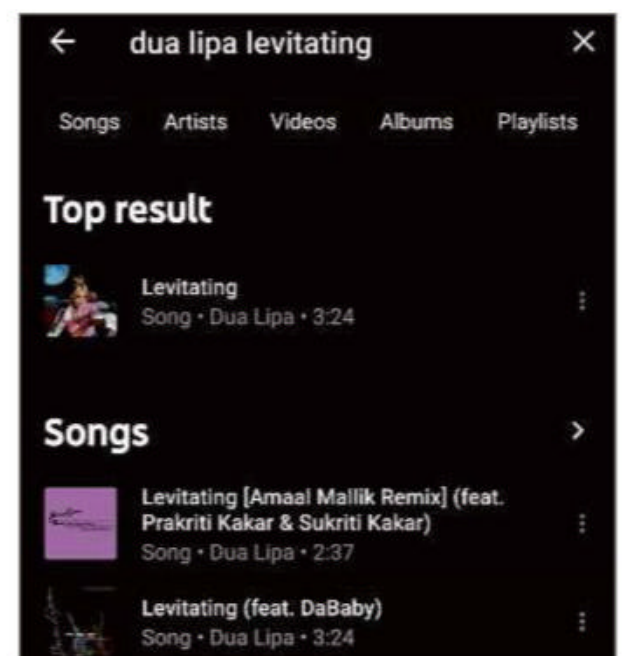
ANDROID & iOS Play songs directly from a search in YouTube Music



Until recently, searching for a song on YouTube Music was a convoluted process. After typing the name of the song you wanted, you'd then have to tap it in the list of search results to open its page, before finally tapping the play button. Thankfully, Google's developers have revamped the app's user

interface so that you can now play any song directly from your search results without having to open the song's page first.

To try this out for yourself, make sure your YouTube Music app is up to date (double-check for any pending updates in the App Store or Google Play first). Then open the app and tap the Search icon (magnifying glass) in the top-right corner. Type the name of your song, then tap Search to bring up a list of matching results. Now you can simply tap any of the items listed under Songs (see screenshot right) to start playing them instantly.



BEST APPS FOR...

Managing photo/video metadata

Google Photos

Free

Android www.snipca.com/37788

Whenever you take a photo or video, your device automatically stores additional information – known as **metadata** or Exif data – along with the image itself. Open a photo in Google Photos and swipe up to reveal a panel of info, including resolution, camera, **aperture**, shutter and **ISO** details as well as date, time and location.

Best For Comprehensive metadata

Scrambled Exif

Free

Android www.snipca.com/37786

Metadata can be very useful but means you can inadvertently give away private information – such as your location – when you share photos online. Scrambled Exif provides a quick way to wipe all metadata from photos before you share them. Open a photo in your usual photo app and tap Share, then select Scrambled Exif from 'Share to apps'.

Best For Removing sensitive data from photos you want to share

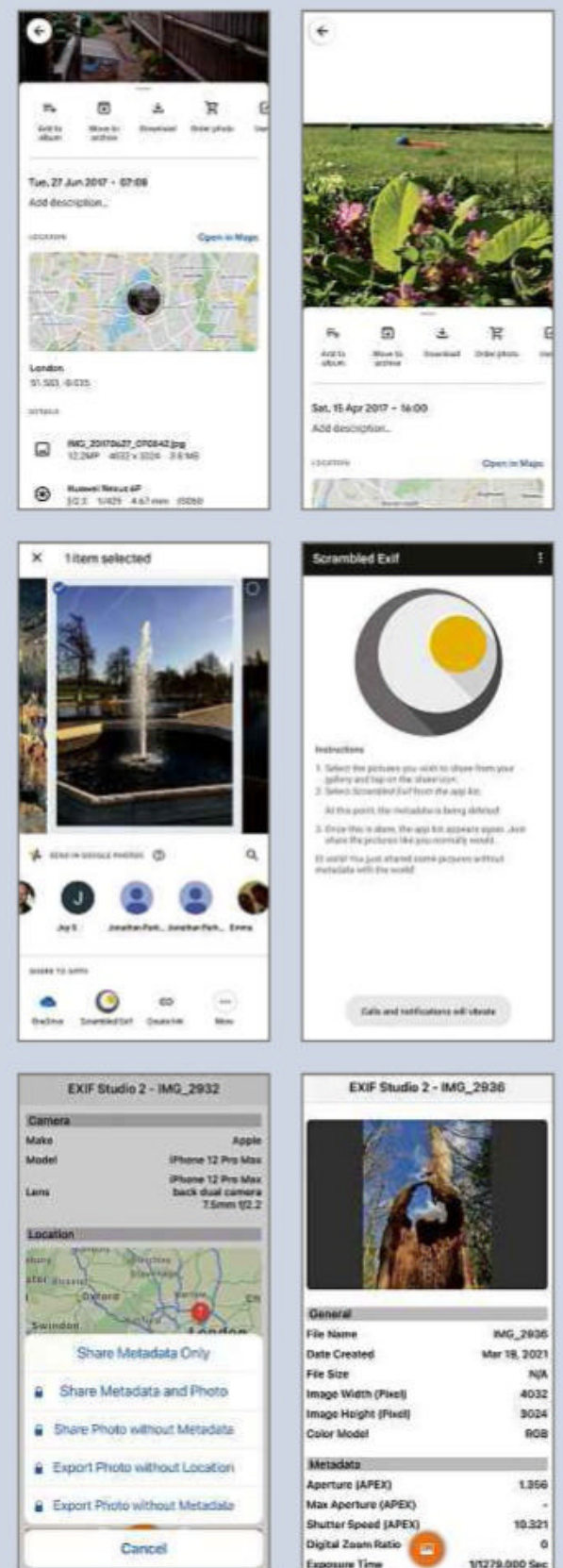
EXIF Studio

Free*

iOS www.snipca.com/37811

A dedicated Exif viewer lets you really dig down into the metadata stored within your photos. Recently updated to version 2.0, EXIF Studio lets you view advanced data (such as the exposure and **white balance** settings used) and export it. Upgrading to Pro (£1.99) unlocks the ability to delete metadata and more.

Best For More advanced data



*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 7, 8.1 & 10

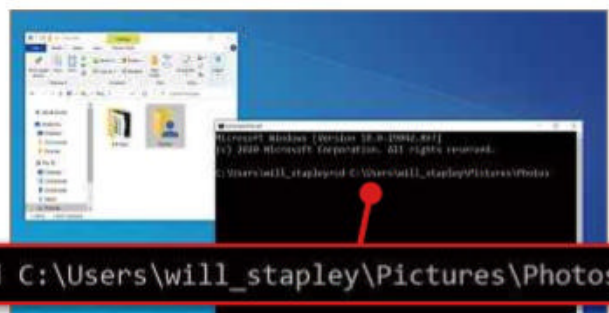
Drag and drop folders into Command Prompt



Command Prompt (click Start, type **cmd**, then press Enter) lets you run powerful commands and tweak them to do exactly what you need. However, typing in long folder locations can be a hassle and is easy to get wrong – just one mistake while typing will result in Command Prompt returning an error.

There is an easier way: simply drag and drop the folder from File Explorer directly into your Command Prompt window. In our example, we'll show how to use this method to change the Command Prompt location to your Photos folder.

With the Command Prompt window open first type **cd** (the 'change directory' command), followed by a space. Next, open a File Explorer window (press Windows key+E), locate your Photos folder, then drag it into the Command Prompt window. The full path of the Photos folder then appears after the 'cd' command (see screenshot below). Next, press Enter, after which the Command Prompt window will change the directory to your Photos folder.

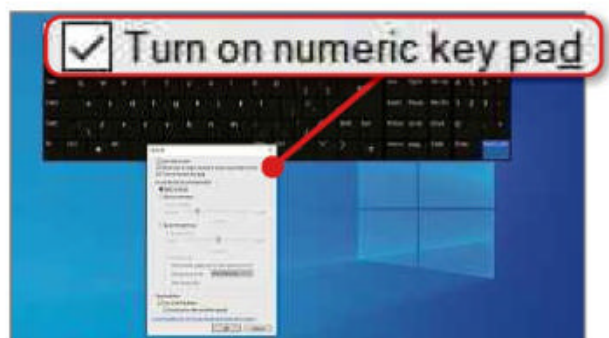


WINDOWS 7, 8.1 & 10

Use Windows' onscreen keyboard

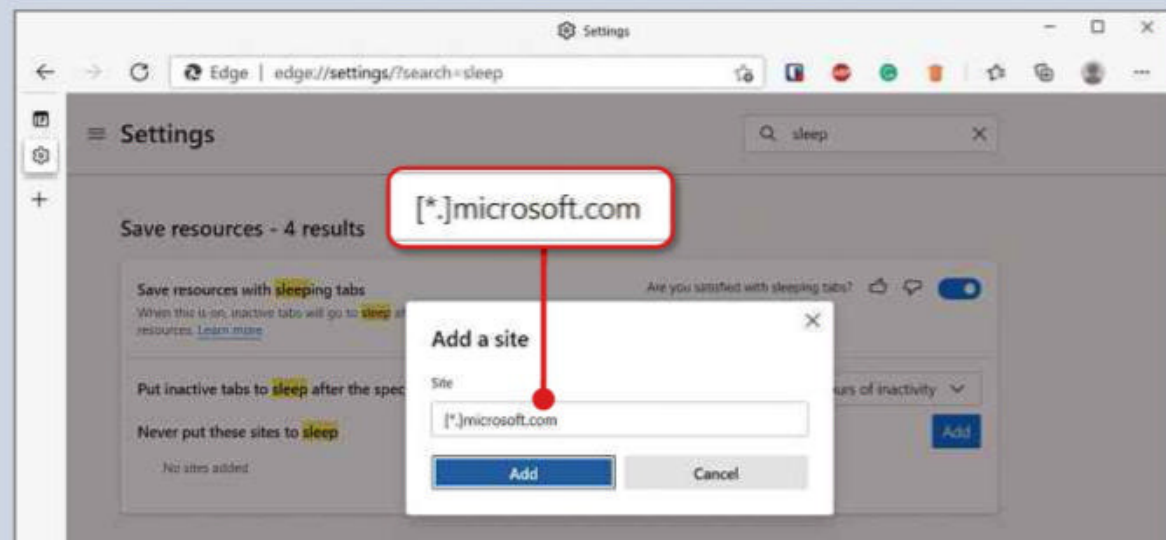


If your keyboard fails or its batteries get drained, you won't be able to type anything. In this situation you can load Windows' secret onscreen keyboard by clicking the Start button, typing **osk** then pressing Enter. The keyboard will appear on screen, and you can type letters and commands simply by clicking the keys. Click the Fade button and the keyboard will become translucent, letting



WINDOWS 10

Stop Edge putting specific sites to sleep



The latest version of Microsoft's Edge browser (89) includes a new feature called Sleeping Tabs that prevents websites that you have open in a tab, but haven't used for more than two hours, from hogging your system's resources. Whenever you return to a tab that Edge has put to sleep, the web page should leap back into life. Sometimes, however, you'll need to refresh the page (by pressing F5) to make it display properly. If you find you're doing this repeatedly for a

specific website, you can tell Edge to *never* put tabs containing that site to sleep. Type **edge://settings** into Edge's address bar, press Enter, then type **sleep** into the search box at the top. Click the 'Add' button next to 'Never put these sites to sleep', then enter the web site's address into the box that appears. If you want to prevent *all* pages on a specific site from being put to sleep, type **[*.]** at the start – so, for example, you'd type **[*.]microsoft.com** for all Microsoft pages (see screenshot).

you see what's behind it. Click 'Nav' and the keyboard turns into a quick-access navigation tool, providing 11 keys including Tab, Enter and the arrow keys (click General to return to the full keyboard). The Options key opens a separate window that lets you adjust settings, including generating a sound with each key press and adding a numeric keypad to the keyboard (see screenshot below left).

WINDOWS 7, 8.1 & 10

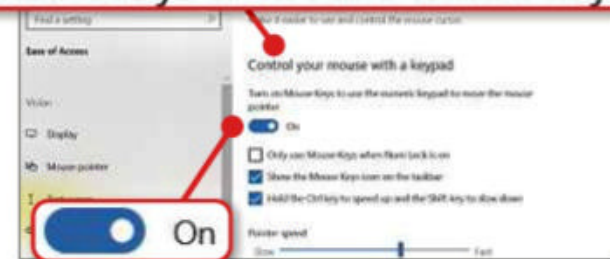
Control your mouse with your keyboard



Above we explained how to control your computer if your keyboard isn't working, but what if your mouse suddenly stops working? Windows can help here too with its Mouse Keys tool.

In Windows 8.1 and 10, open the Settings window (press Windows key+I), then select 'Ease of access', followed by Mouse. Turn on the slider under 'Control your mouse with a keypad' (see screenshot above). You can now use the 4

Control your mouse with a keypad



and 6 keys in your keyboard's numeric keypad to make the mouse move left and right respectively, while 8 and 2 move it up and down. You can also use the 1, 3, 7 and 9 keys to move your mouse diagonally.

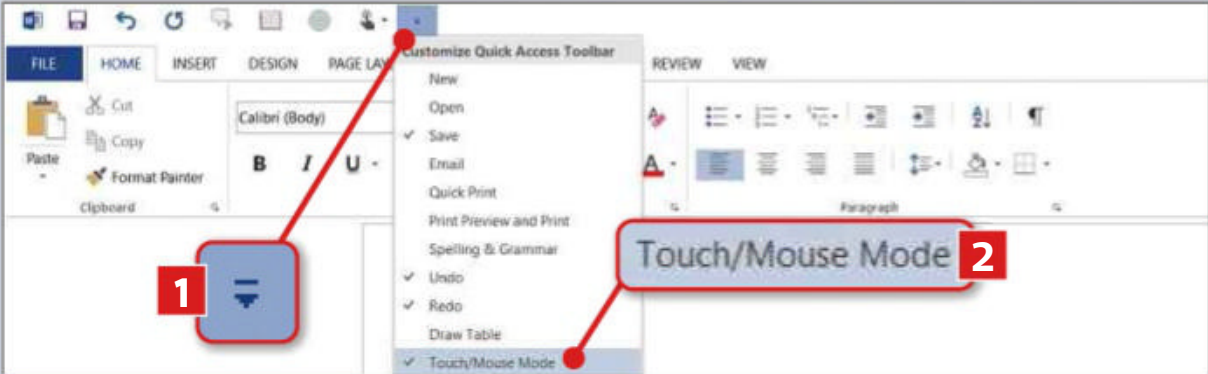
To change how fast the cursor moves, return to the Settings window, then adjust the 'Pointer speed' slider. The 'Pointer acceleration' slider determines how quickly your cursor reaches full speed. Tick the 'Hold the Ctrl' option and you'll be able to give the cursor a speed boost by pressing Ctrl.

To turn on Mouse Keys in Windows 7, open Control Panel, then 'Ease of Access' and click 'Change how your keyboard works'. Now tick the box labeled 'Turn on Mouse Keys', followed by OK.

MICROSOFT OFFICE & LIBREOFFICE

Make your toolbar buttons bigger

 Microsoft Office and LibreOffice are loaded with features. Consequently, their toolbars are stuffed full of shortcut buttons. Depending on the size of your monitor and its resolution, you may find these buttons are so small and cramped that it's difficult to click the one you want. The good news is that you can easily make them bigger. In LibreOffice, open Writer or Calc, then select the Tools menu followed by Options (or press Alt+F12). Next, expand the LibreOffice option in the left menu, then select View. On the right-hand side of the window, click the Toolbar box in the Icon Size section and select Extra Large. Click OK to save your changes.




In Microsoft Office, open Word or Excel, click the Quick Access menu button (this is at top left of the window – 1 in screenshot), then select 'Touch/Mouse Mode' 2. The 'Touch/Mouse Mode' button (and icon of a finger touching a button) will now appear on the right side of the Quick Access toolbar. Click this button once to activate Touch mode,

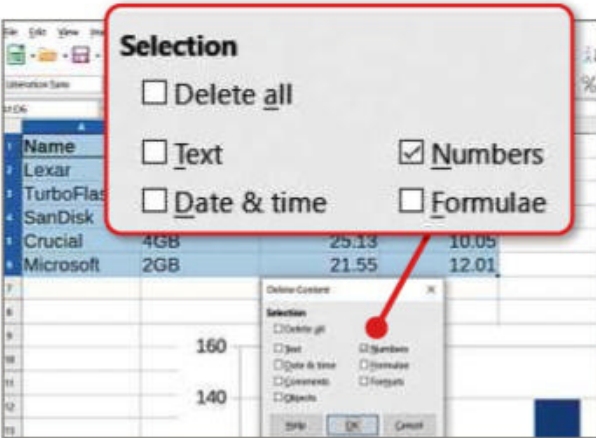
which makes the buttons bigger and with more space between them. Although primarily designed to make the toolbar buttons easier to press for people with touchscreen displays, it works on non-touch computers too. To return to the normal toolbar size, simply click the 'Touch/Mouse Mode' button a second time.

MICROSOFT EXCEL & LIBREOFFICE CALC


Use shortcuts to apply formatting

 Formatting spreadsheet cells is a pain. You have to select the cells, right-click one of them, select 'Format cells...' then choose whichever format you want the cells to use. Depending on the format you want, you may be able to use a keyboard shortcut instead. First, use your mouse to select the cells you want to reformat. To switch the cell format to show two decimal places, press Ctrl+Shift+1. If you want to use the currency format, press Ctrl+Shift+4, while for percentages it's Ctrl+Shift+5 (see screenshot below). These shortcuts work in Microsoft Excel and LibreOffice Calc, and you can return to the original formatting by pressing the shortcut a second time. Excel has a bonus Ctrl+Shift shortcut – press Ctrl+Shift+8 and it will select all cells in the same group as the one you originally selected.

Shortcut	Value
None	5
Ctrl+Shift+1	5.00
Ctrl+Shift+4	£5.00
Ctrl+Shift+5	500.00%




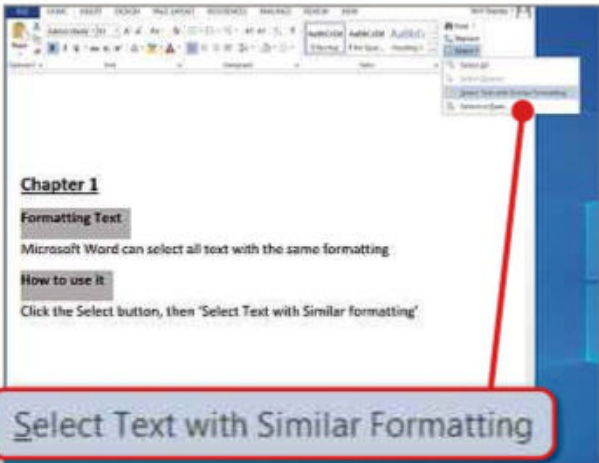
Remove specific cells from a selection

 Deleting the contents of a group of cells isn't tricky – you just select the cells, then press Delete. But what if you want to delete only certain cells in that group? You might want to remove all cells with numbers, but keep those containing text (such as column and row headings). To do this, select the cells as before, but this time open the Sheet menu and select 'Clear Cells...'. In the Delete Content window that opens, untick all options except Numbers (see screenshot above). Click OK. In our example, Excel deleted the numbers in only the Read and Write columns, leaving all other cells intact. You can also use the Clear Cells tool to remove comments, formatting and other items from the selected cells. Just tick the appropriate boxes in the Delete Content window.

MICROSOFT WORD

Select similarly formatted text

 When you're working on a long document, it'll probably have a variety of text styles – bold, underlined, different sizes and so on. Word has a useful tool that lets you quickly select then change all similarly formatted text, which is useful if you want to change all bolded text to underlined, for example. To use it, first select a word or phrase that has the formatting you want to change. Next, select the Home tab in the toolbar. Locate the Editing section (far right), click Select, then 'Select Text with Similar Formatting' (see screenshot below). Word will now scan the entire document, selecting only the text that has the same formatting as the text you originally selected. You can now apply whatever formatting changes are needed to the selection.



In The Club



Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

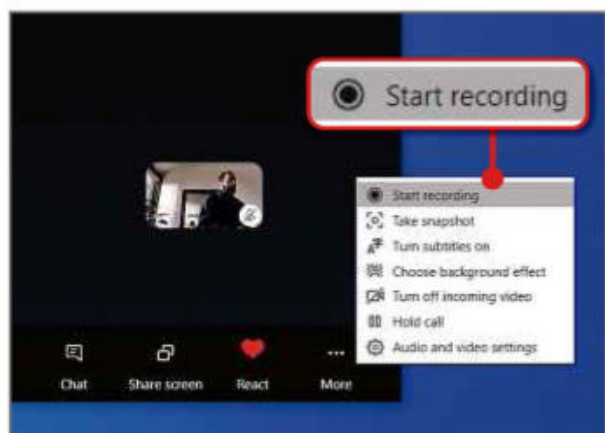
Record and transcribe online club meetings

When you want to document exactly what was said at a club meeting – for example, to create an official record of an AGM or simply to share the content of discussions with those who are hard of hearing – you may struggle to get volunteers to write down the minutes of the meeting. However, if you're using video-chat tools, the process might be easier than you think.

Record your meeting

First, you need to set your online meeting to record. Precisely how you do this depends on the tool you're using. In Skype, click the More button, then 'Start recording' (see screenshot below), then click 'Stop recording' when the meeting has finished. The recording will be saved in your Skype timeline and will remain there for 30 days. To download it to your PC (you'll need to do this in order to transcribe it), right-click the recording then select 'Save as'.

In Zoom, click the Record button at the bottom (this switches to a Pause/Stop button when the recording starts). The recording will be saved to the Zoom sub-folder within your Documents folder.



Click this option to record Skype calls, which you can later transcribe

Generate automatic transcriptions

When transcribing your meeting's recording you have two options: do it yourself or use an automated transcription service. While the latter may sound tempting, automatic

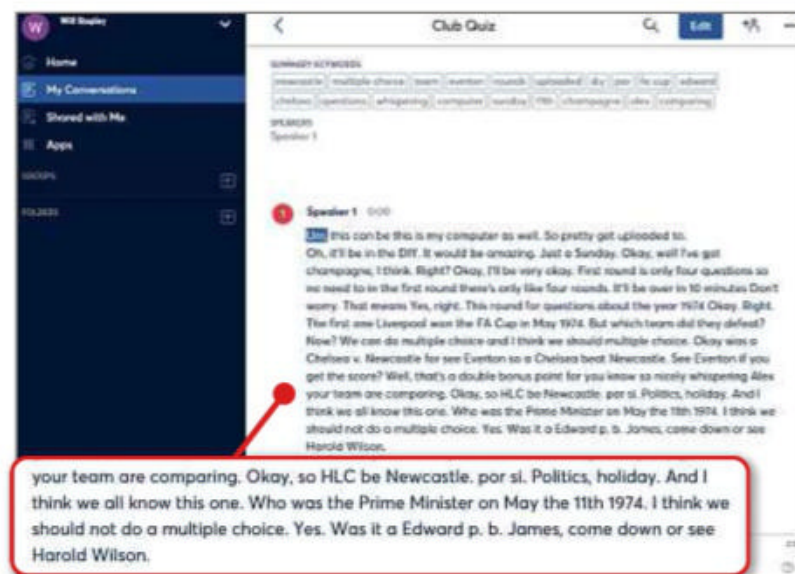
transcription is less likely to produce an accurate record. If meeting participants tend to talk over each other (let's face it, this happens in all meetings, not just in Handforth Parish Council) or have poor-quality microphones (again, very common), the transcription is likely to contain plenty of errors.

We tried to transcribe a Zoom meeting using two popular tools – Otter (www.otter.ai) and Sonix (<https://my.sonix.ai>). Both make it easy to upload Skype or Zoom recordings, but they struggled with our recording of a quiz night (see screenshot above right) – correcting all the errors here would have been more hassle than transcribing the recording ourselves. If you have a high-quality recording where just one person is speaking at a time, you have more chance of getting an accurate transcription, but you'll still have to spend time proofing it.

You can try both services for yourself – Otter offers a free plan that lets you transcribe 600 minutes a month (maximum 40 minutes per recording), while you get a free 30-minute trial with Sonix, after which pricing starts at £7.50 an hour.

Make DIY transcriptions

Given our experience with automatic transcription, we recommend the DIY approach, which involves playing back the meeting recording while typing the exchanges yourself. It's unlikely you'll be able to keep up with the recording, so you'll need to pause it as you catch up. For this we recommend using VLC (<https://www.videolan.org>). Thanks to VLC's global hotkeys (keyboard shortcuts that let you control playback even when you're using another program), you can pause, then resume the recording without having to constantly switch between VLC and whatever word-processing program you're using.

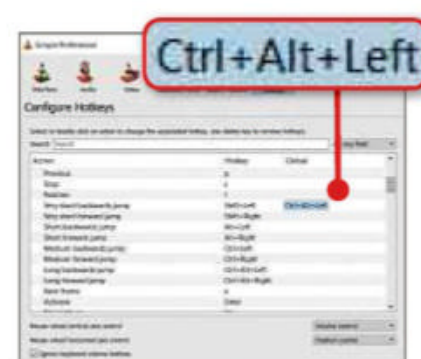


Automatic transcription, such as this one produced by Otter, doesn't work well in noisy meetings using poor-quality mics

To set up the global hotkeys, load VLC then press Ctrl+P to open the Preferences window. Select the Hotkeys option at the top, then scroll down the list of shortcuts to 'Play/Pause'. Double-click the Global box next to this (it will be blank by default), then type a shortcut – we set ours to Ctrl+Alt+Space.

We also suggest setting a hotkey for 'Very short backwards jump' (Ctrl+Alt+Left arrow – see screenshot below). This rewinds your recording by three seconds, letting you quickly recap sections (we find it particularly useful after resuming playback). For even more control, you could create hotkeys for the Slower and Faster shortcuts, which let you slow down sections that you're struggling to decipher, then quickly resume normal speed.

Click OK once you've set your hotkeys, then restart VLC for them to take effect. Next, open your meeting recording in VLC, then switch to the program you want to type the minutes into. When you're ready, use the 'Play/Pause' shortcut, then start typing your transcription. You can then skip back, slow down or speed up playback as required, without leaving your word processor.



VLC lets you set up hotkeys that let you control playback while jotting down the minutes in another program

What's All the Fuss About...

Non-fungible tokens

How digital artists are getting minted and making millions

What are they?

A non-fungible token (NFT) is a digital asset such as a photo, artwork, video, audio file, animation, video-game item or even a social-media post.

So nothing to do with fungi?

No. The 'non-fungible' part means the token can't be interchanged with anything else. This is unlike, for example, swapping 10 x £1 coins for a £10 note, which would be a 'fungible' transaction, because they have the same value.

Each token has its own identification code and contains **metadata** that distinguishes it from other NFTs. Although the digital file's content can be copied and shared, the unique token means its ownership can't be disputed.

What can I do with an NFT?

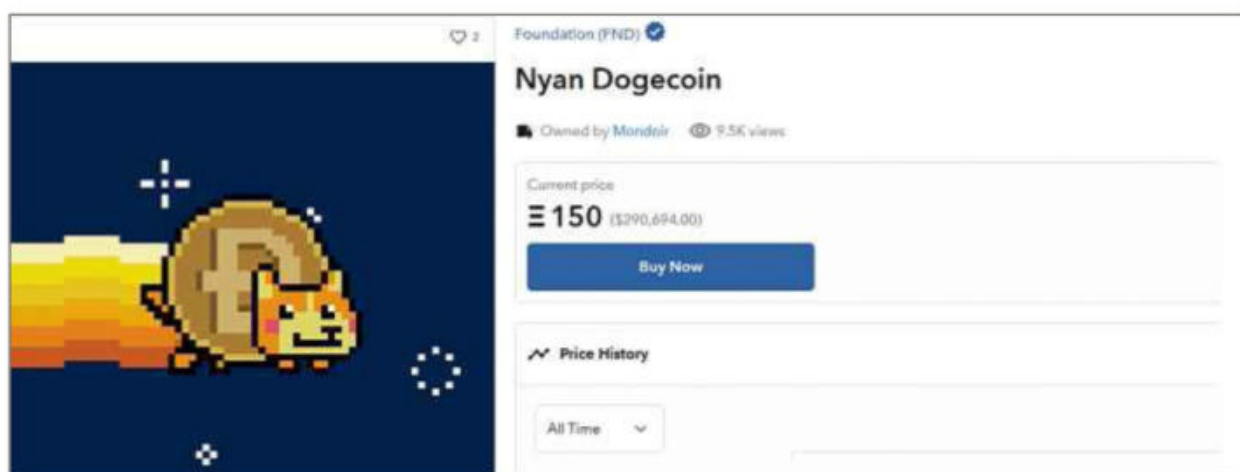
Sell it for lots of money, if you cash in on the current NFT craze. We say 'cash', but NFTs are traded using **cryptocurrency**, most commonly Ethereum. When someone buys your token, the NFT blockchain – a global ledger of transactions – records the transfer of ownership, but still credits you as the creator. Think of it as like purchasing a celebrity's autograph on eBay, complete with a certificate of authenticity. The buyer will now own the autograph, but the signature still belongs to the celebrity who scrawled it.

Who buys things that don't physically exist?

Well, people pay to download music, films and mobile apps, and they don't even own those digital files – they're merely licensing them from the download store. Once you've bought an NFT, it's yours to keep and use however you want – at least until you sell it to somebody else.

How much money are we talking about?

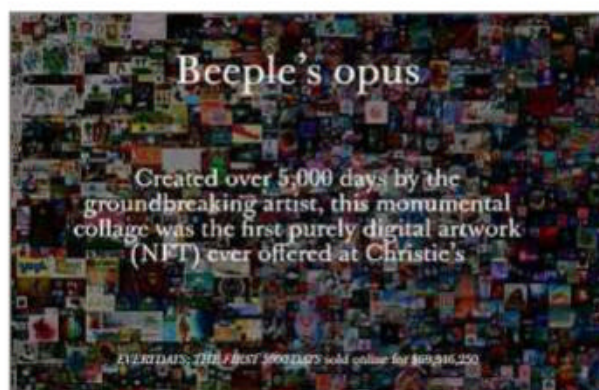
A lot more than you'd imagine. The most lucrative NFT to date is a digital work of art called 'Everydays – The First 5000 Days' by a graphic designer known as



Beeple. This collage of 5,000 of Beeple's pieces (pictured below) was sold by Christie's auction house in February for the astounding sum of \$69,346,250 – just over £50 million (www.snipca.com/37831). The sale instantly made Beeple the world's third most valuable living artist, behind Jeff Koons and David Hockney. The NFT was bought by a "cryptocurrency entrepreneur" called MetaKovan, who said he "won't be selling it anytime soon".

Some folk have more cryptocurrency than sense.

Oh, there's lots more non-fungible madness where that came from. An NFT of the classic internet **meme** Nyan Cat sold for 300 Ethereum (around £402,000) in February, with a special crypto version (see our main image) currently priced at 150 Ethereum. Twitter founder Jack Dorsey earned \$2.9 million from flogging his first-ever tweet as an NFT, while *Time* magazine auctioned NFTs of three covers for 515 Ethereum (around £692,000) apiece. Last month, John Cleese jokingly offered a drawing of



Watch out, Beeple's about – and he recently sold his digital artwork for £50 million

Brooklyn Bridge for 50 cents more than Beeple's record price, to highlight that NFTs are "completely absurd" (www.snipca.com/37832).

Wow. Where can I sell my own digital junk?

There are several online marketplaces for non-fungible tokens, of which the most popular are OpenSea (<https://opensea.io>) and Rarible (<https://rarible.com>). These work much like eBay: NFT creators list their 'crypto collectibles', which include GIFs, domain names, virtual trading cards and even single words, and you can either bid for items or buy them for a fixed price.

To sell your own digital wares, you'll first need to convert – or 'mint' – them into NFTs using the marketplace's 'minting' tool. This requires an Ethereum wallet such as MetaMask (<https://metamask.io>), which you'll also need to send and receive cryptocurrency payments.

Are there risks involved in NFTs?

Other than the inevitable burst of the NFT 'bubble', hackers are targeting marketplaces to steal assets from users' accounts (www.snipca.com/37838), and there's currently no protection for victims. Non-fungible tokens have also been criticised for damaging the environment, because of the large amounts of electricity and carbon emissions involved in mining the cryptocurrencies used to trade them. So bear that in mind when buying a recording of someone's flatulence (see www.snipca.com/37841).

DON'T PAY FOR APPS!

Rubbish apps always end up costing you – whether that's money, your privacy or even just the time you waste installing them. Robert Irvine rounds up 30 brilliant new, free apps that your phone and tablet will love



Don't believe anyone who says they've run out of apps to install on their phone or tablet. According to the latest figures from Statista (www.statista.com), in February this year approximately 29,500 apps were added to the Apple App Store and 88,500 to the Google Play Store – and February's a short month.

Those incredible figures disguise the

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Discover if your neighbours are stealing your Wi-Fi
- Record audio on your phone at maximum quality
- Lock your treasured photos in an encrypted vault
- Manage all your monthly subscriptions in one app

uncomfortable truth that many of these apps are – frankly – awful. Although Apple and Google carry out safety checks to ensure the apps in their stores are free of malware, they don't seem to exercise much quality control and may fail to spot some of the newer tricks being used by dubious developers. Last month, for example, Avast found 204 so-called 'fleeceware' apps in both stores (www.snipca.com/37804) – these con users into paying for extortionate subscriptions.

There are apps that don't work as they claim, others that are labelled 'free' but lock everything bar basic features behind a paywall and some that use hidden trackers to steal and sell your data (see our Cover Feature, Issue 602). However, it's not all grim news, because there are some excellent free apps out there, and in this feature we set out to find them for you.

We've thoroughly tested hundreds of the latest free apps for iOS and Android,

and handpicked 30 of the very best. We've subjected these apps to our stringent quality checks to ensure they are actually free to use (though some do offer extra features through in-app purchases). We've also restricted ourselves to apps that were released (or significantly updated) in the last six months, avoid excessive adverts (other than those needed to support them), only request the permissions they need, and provide clear privacy policies that explain how they handle your data.

We've avoided apps that you're likely to already use. Instead we've focused on brilliant apps you've probably never heard of. Because there are many apps around with similar names, to avoid getting the wrong one we recommend typing the links we provide into your phone or tablet's browser, then tapping the relevant button to download them from your device's app store.

AUDIO, PHOTO & VIDEO APPS

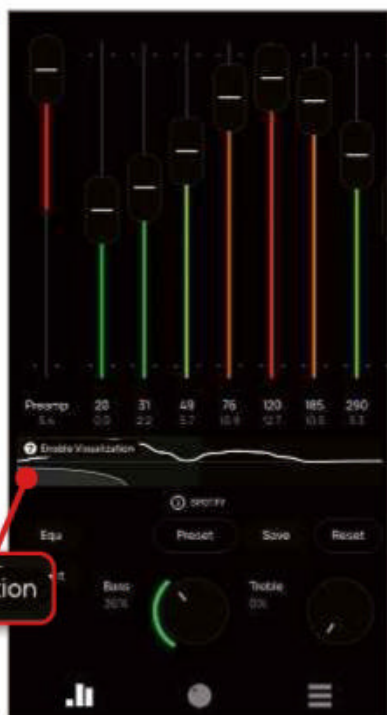
Poweramp Equalizer

Android www.snipca.com/37740



Get total control over how music sounds on your phone or tablet by installing this impressive app for audiophiles. Poweramp Equalizer works with any streaming service or music player you have installed, letting you adjust sliders and twiddle knobs to get songs playing through your headphones or speaker just the way you want. You can delve into the app's settings and add more bands to its **equaliser**, customise its appearance and display visualisations (see screenshot below). The app is currently offering all its features for free, but will eventually lock some behind a £1.79 in-app purchase.

Tweak how your music sounds in Poweramp Equalizer and enable visualisations that match your songs



Enable Visualization

Dolby On

Android www.snipca.com/37731

iOS www.snipca.com/37798



Remember the Dolby Noise Reduction button on cassette players that removed the background hiss from your recordings? This official Dolby app brings the company's sound-enhancing tricks to your phone or tablet. It lets you record superior quality audio and video using Dolby sound technology, which can optimise your microphone levels, reduce noise (see screenshot right) and distortion, and maximise your volume. Once your recording is complete, you can play around with audio styles, adjust the treble and bass levels, trim unwanted sections, and even apply colourful visuals. It's a brilliant tool for recording your own podcasts, music, voice messages and meetings, and has just added an option that enhances the sound of live YouTube streams.

Group Transcribe

iOS www.snipca.com/37762



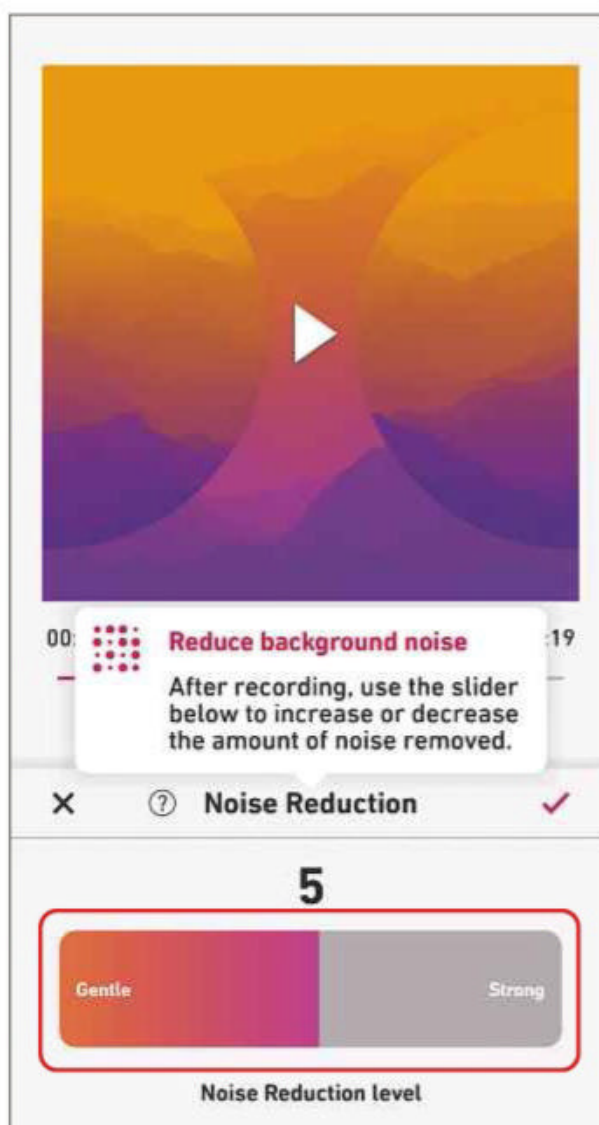
This new app from Microsoft Garage (the division of the company in which employees work on personal projects) removes the hassle of taking notes during meetings, interviews and conversations. Rather than have one person record what's being said, the app delivers a real-time transcription to the iPhones of all participants, which they can save for future reference and share with others. You can invite people to join your meeting by sharing the meeting code or a **QR code** (see screenshot right). The app can recognise and translate conversations into 37 languages, so that nobody misses a word – particularly useful if you have participants who are hard of hearing.

Photok

Android www.snipca.com/37744



Google's Files app (<https://files.google.com>) now offers a 'Safe folder' option that lets you lock sensitive files in an encrypted vault. Photok extends this idea to your photos, protecting private snaps with a password, so that nobody else can access them.

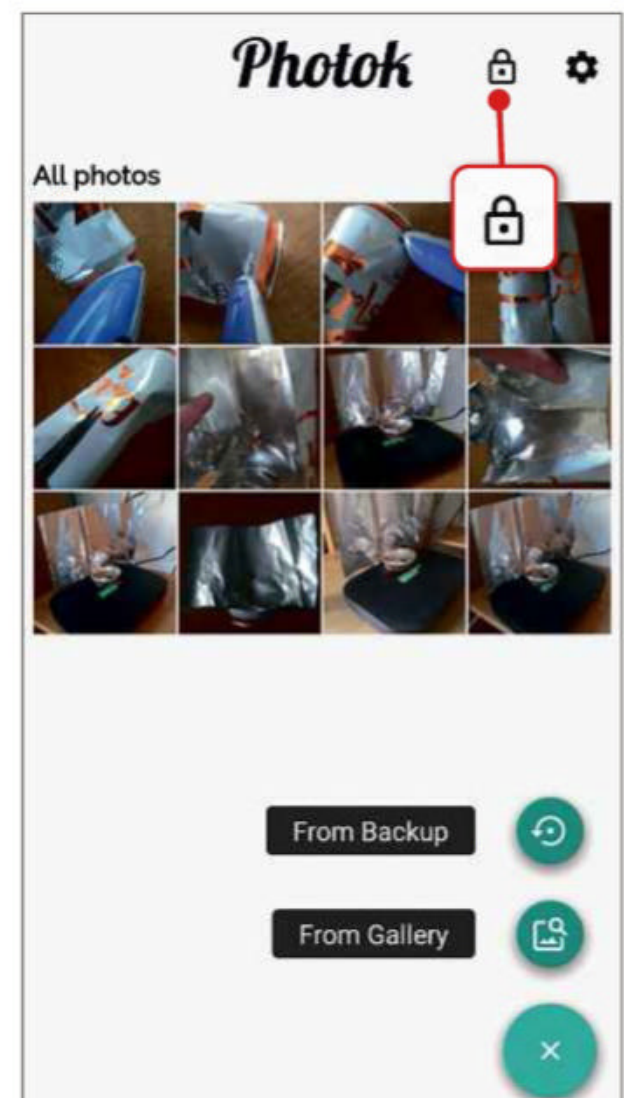


Improve the quality of your audio recordings using Noise Reduction in the Dolby On app

With Group Transcribe you can share your meeting with others, then transcribe it in real time



You can import images from the photo library on your device, delete the original files from your phone's gallery app (they can be restored if necessary) and tap the padlock icon (see screenshot below) to secure them using **AES-256** encryption. Further options include setting Photok to lock automatically after a specific time, hiding its icon in your app drawer and wiping everything in your safe with a single tap.



Photok lets you lock your private photos in a password-protected safe using AES-256 encryption

Pexels

Android www.snipca.com/37756

iOS www.snipca.com/37757



Pexels offers more than three million copyright-free photos that you can use in your own projects, and has just updated its mobile app to make finding, downloading and sharing images (and videos) even easier. Unlike similar stock-photo services, all Pexels content is high quality, completely free and can be modified however you want. It's an excellent way to find pictures for websites, newsletters, presentations and social media, and to get custom wallpaper for your devices. If you're a keen photographer, you can upload your own shots through the app to share with the Pexels community.

PhotoRoom

Android & iOS <https://photoroom.com>



New to Android, this fantastic photo editor removes the background from pictures with a single tap, and automatically crops them to leave just people and objects. This

makes it ideal for creating profile pictures and product shots for your eBay listings. There are options to replace the background with a stylish wallpaper or solid colour, as well as add text and apply effects. The free version of PhotoRoom (a Pro upgrade costs £49.99) places an unobtrusive watermark in the bottom-left corner of images, and locks some templates, but it works incredibly well and lets you easily export and share your designs.

Master Video Downloader

Android www.snipca.com/37835



As we explained in our Cover Feature in Issue 601, Google doesn't allow YouTube downloaders in its Play Store, but Master Video Downloader offers a great way to grab videos from other sites. Choose a service on the home screen – such as Facebook, Vimeo or Instagram – or copy and paste a URL into the search box. When the app detects a video playing on a web page (provided it's not from YouTube), a download button will appear that you can tap to save the clip in MP4 format,

then open in your preferred media player. The app works like a browser, so you can have several 'tabs' open and bookmark video pages to return to later. It even has a built-in ad-blocker and **incognito mode**.

Reelgood

Android www.snipca.com/37750

iOS www.snipca.com/37749



There are so many streaming services that finding the one with a specific show you want to watch isn't easy. Unless you've got Reelgood, that is. Launched in the UK last autumn, it lets you browse and search All 4 (Channel 4's streaming service), BBC iPlayer, Disney+, Netflix, Now TV, Prime Video and many more, then open films and TV shows in the relevant apps. You can also keep track of what you've watched to receive recommendations and notifications when new episodes are available, view ratings from review sites IMDb and RottenTomatoes, and use the Roulette feature for a random selection. The app can even be used as a remote control for LG smart TVs and Roku streaming sticks.

DIGITAL TOOLBOX APPS

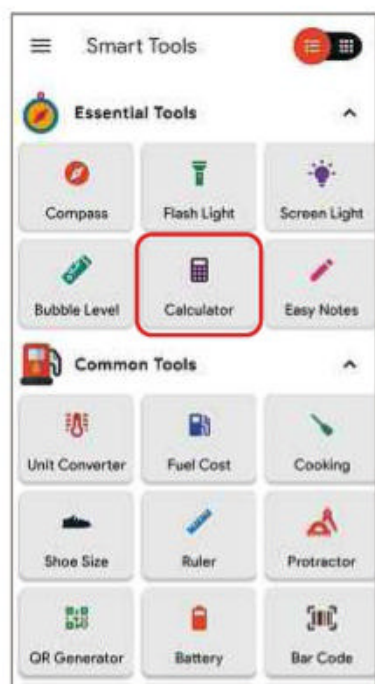
Smart Tools

Android www.snipca.com/37779



This recently updated, multi-function app is packed with useful tools for performing everyday tasks. You get a compass, spirit level, stopwatch, pedometer and much more, each of which you can access with a single tap from its home screen (see screenshot below). The Unit Converter section is particularly handy, covering conversions ranging from temperature and weight to speed and cooking measurements, as are the app's new QR-code generator and barcode scanner.

Smart Tools is packed with useful features for performing everyday tasks, including a calculator



There's even room for musical features such as a virtual piano and metronome. Like many free apps, Smart Tools prompts you to upgrade to its Premium version (a mere 99p) to remove ads and unlock 'special tools', but you can instruct it to 'Never ask again'.

Flashlight

Android www.snipca.com/37797



There are hundreds of free flashlight apps for Android but most are a privacy nightmare, requesting permissions they don't need. We're therefore pleased that this Flashlight has recently been updated to remove *all* permissions. This means it (rightly) has no access to any data on your phone. It is, however, supported by adverts – and sometimes displays one when you turn the main torch on or off – but we like its extra tools, including a Morse code option (type a word or phrase, click Start and your phone's light will emit short and long pulses to spell it out).

Arduino Science Journal

Android www.snipca.com/37833

iOS www.snipca.com/37834



This amazing app lets you view data from all the sensors in your phone or tablet. Created by



Science Journal lets you record data from the various sensors on your device

Google, Science Journal moved to Arduino (an **open-source** software and hardware developer – www.arduino.cc) in August last year. Along with support for more sensors, the latest version has a new 'Getting started' tool in the main menu, letting you quickly set up your first experiment. Depending on your device, you'll find everything from light and sound meters to an accelerometer that shows how fast you're moving. All data is recorded in real time on a graph – tap Record (see screenshot above) to save the data for future reference.

PRIVACY & SECURITY APPS

Quad9 Connect

Android www.snipca.com/37739



As on your PC, when you type a web address on your phone or tablet it's sent to a **DNS** server. This then returns the **IP address** of the website, allowing your device's browser to connect to it. Quad9 Connect protects you against malware, **botnets** and **phishing** by securing these DNS requests. At the touch of a button, it overrides your device's existing DNS settings for mobile and Wi-Fi networks, replacing them with Quad9's own worldwide network of encrypted DNS servers. Quad9 Connect has no ads or in-app purchases, but it's still in 'Early Access', which means you may experience a few glitches (though we found it worked very smoothly).

Hush Nag Blocker

iOS www.snipca.com/37759



Hush Nag Blocker removes the irritating **cookie** and privacy messages that appear when you visit a website for the first time. Rather than just dismiss them, it blocks them for good so you won't be bothered when you revisit a site. It works more like an extension than a standalone app, integrating with Safari, but with no access to your browsing data. To activate it, go to Settings, Safari, Content Blockers and switch on Hush.

Insight Browser

iOS www.snipca.com/37760



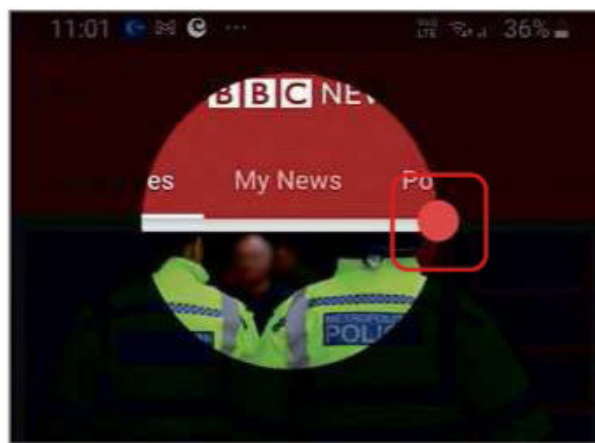
Apple has been making big improvements to Safari's privacy, but Insight Browser is even better at blocking the worst of the web. It's also the first iOS browser to let you install extensions, including such useful tools as a **picture-in-picture** mode for YouTube. Insight also offers built-in ad and cookie blocking. If you prefer it to Safari and you're running iOS 14, you can set it as your default browser by going to Settings, Insight, then Default Browser App.

Privacy Overlay

Android www.snipca.com/37743



This app addresses the problem of people peering over your shoulder when you're viewing something private on your phone. Its overlay completely covers your screen, except for a circular or rectangular cutout that you can move around to continue what you're doing without nosey parkers seeing. Double-tap the red dot (see



Privacy Overlay stops those around you seeing what you're doing on your phone

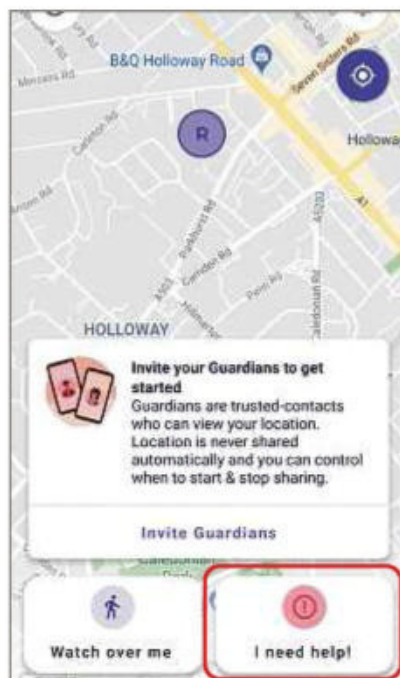
screenshot above) to change the hole's size, and increase or decrease the opacity level of the overlay as required. If the 'permission' box at the top says Denied, tap it to let the app appear on top of others. Privacy Overlay keeps running even when the app is closed – until you turn it off.

Guardians - Personal Safety

Android & iOS www.getguardians.com



This free app from caller-ID service Truecaller helps keep you safe when you're out and about on your own. It lets you appoint trusted friends and family as your 'guardians', then share your current location with them, so they can track where you are on a map. If you feel threatened, have an accident or experience another emergency, tap the 'I need help' button (see screenshot below) to notify your guardians instantly. You can also share details of your phone's current battery status and signal strength, in case they can't get hold of you. To use the app, you need to sign up using your phone number and grant Guardians access to your contacts, phone and location, but its privacy policy is clear and trustworthy.



Guardians lets you inform family and friends when you need assistance

Coming soon! Five apps to watch out for

Google Pay

<https://pay.google.com>

Google 'reimagined' its payment app last November, but only for US users so far. Along with other features, it splits bills and other expenses and provides handy spending summaries. We're hopeful the new app will be launched in the UK this year.

Clubhouse

www.joinclubhouse.com

Clubhouse is an audio-based social network that lets you explore virtual rooms to listen to live discussions and interviews on various topics. Famous users include Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg and Oprah Winfrey. It's currently invite-only and limited to iOS devices, but expect a global and Android launch soon.

Flexcil

www.flexcil.com

Flexcil has already proved very popular on iOS, combining a PDF editor and note-taker in a single app, and making it easy to create, annotate, organise and share documents. The Android version is currently available in **beta** form only (from www.snipca.com/37809).

Stack

www.snipca.com/37840

This new Google app (currently limited to the US) reduces clutter by scanning your bills, receipts and other documents using your Android device. It automatically names and organises the scanned items, identifies key details (see screenshot) and backs them up in Google Drive.



Pikmin

www.snipca.com/37810

From the makers of the hugely popular Pokémon Go, this upcoming game similarly combines **augmented reality** and walking-based rewards. The aim is to grow colourful plant-based creatures called Pikmin from seedlings, then feed them nectar to make them bloom.

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HOBBY & MAPPING APPS

BirdNET

Android www.snipca.com/37742
iOS www.snipca.com/37741



This superb free app for identifying birds by sound finally made it to iOS last December, and is a must for anyone who wants to know what's chirping in their garden. BirdNET has been trained using artificial intelligence to recognise more than 3,000 bird species in Europe and North America. Just record a sample of birdsong using your phone's microphone, trim it to remove unrelated noise and tap Analyze to send the file to BirdNET's servers. Almost instantly, you'll be told the relevant species and you can then tap to read more information about that bird. BirdNET also includes an 'Explore your area' option that tells you which species has been seen and heard near you.

Stellarium

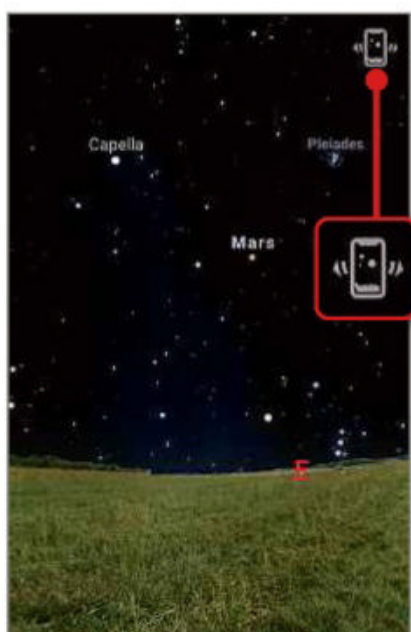
Android www.snipca.com/37845



Using Stellarium to explore the stars on the big screen of your desktop PC is great, but this isn't feasible when you're outdoors at night. Grab the recently updated Android app and you'll have a directory of the stars in your pocket. Tap the phone icon (see screenshot below) and you can identify stars, planets and other objects simply by pointing your phone at them.

As well as making the app run smoother, this latest version (released in March) better calculates sunset and sunrise times at your location. The free version is available on Android only – iOS users have to pay for Stellarium Plus (www.snipca.com/37846), which costs £9.99 and lets you track man-made satellites such as the International Space Station and view 3D models of stars.

Stellarium lets you identify stars simply by pointing your phone at them



Learn to play thousands of songs with MuseScore

MuseScore

Android www.snipca.com/37842
iOS www.snipca.com/37843



Whatever instrument you play (or want to play), you can't be without MuseScore, which lets you view the sheet music for hundreds of thousands of songs. Those marked as Pro require a subscription (£5.49 per month), but there are plenty of free ones, including classics from Beethoven and Bach and those submitted by other users. Press the Play button (see screenshot above) to hear how the song should sound before trying it yourself. Following an update last month, the app is now much faster and gives you greater control over the speed of playback. The regular prompts to upgrade to the Pro version are a little irritating, but it's only a minor gripe with what is otherwise a great app.

Whisk

Android & iOS www.snipca.com/37844

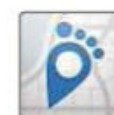


Forget jotting down things to buy for dinner on bits of paper: Whisk lets you find recipes, plan meals and compile shopping lists in one place. You can either search its foodie

communities or pull a recipe from a website into the app, then add all the ingredients to your shopping list with a single tap (removing any you already have). Recipes can be edited, annotated and shared, and include helpful health scores and nutritional information. Whisk was named Google Play's top 'Everyday Essentials' app last year, and has just been updated to let you collaborate on meal plans with friends and family. Although it's a US app, its recipes span the world and you can easily convert units from imperial to metric.

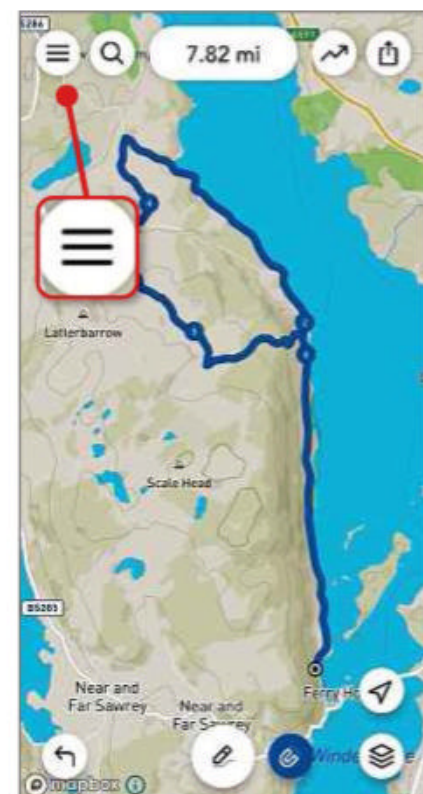
Footpath Route Planner

Android & iOS <https://footpathapp.com>



Now that we're allowed to roam freely again, you can use this app to explore new areas and plot your precise route before setting off (or use it to get back on track if you get lost on an impromptu walk). Tap the draw button, trace with your finger where you want to go on the map and Footpath Route Planner will snap to the nearest roads and trails. You can then press the menu button (see screenshot below) to switch between walking, running, cycling, driving and other activity data.

It instantly calculates the distance of your route, displays the elevation and lets you edit your plan to include points of interest. The free version of the app, which launched on Android last November, lets you save and share five routes. For unlimited saves, map overlays and the ability to download and export maps, you'll need an Elite subscription, which costs from £1.47 per month.



Footpath lets you plan walking, cycling and running routes using your finger

NEWS & INFORMATION APPS

News in Bullets

Android & iOS www.newsinbullets.app



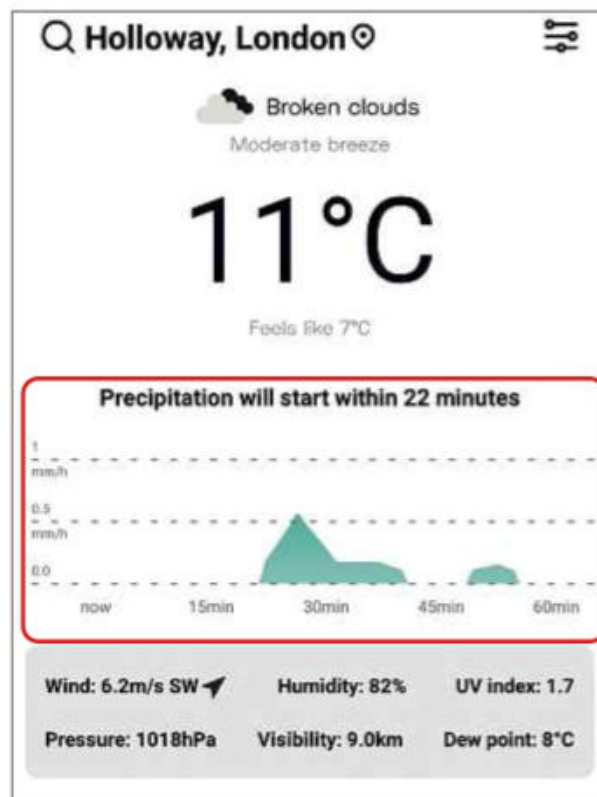
This news aggregator makes it easier to cope with the daily deluge of stories by presenting them as bullet points. Choose the United Kingdom edition, select the topics you're interested in, such as Coronavirus, Government or Travel, and specify sources including BBC News, Reuters, Mail Online and MoneyWeek. News in Bullets will then create your constantly updated feed, which you can quickly thumb through without the chaff and adverts that hamper other news apps. The Breaking News section ensures you don't miss any important stories and articles can be saved to read later.

OpenWeather

Android & iOS <https://openweathermap.org>



Most mobile weather apps suffer from bloated designs, irritating ads and, worst of all, inaccurate forecasts. The brilliant OpenWeather has none of these flaws. It presents a wealth of useful information in a clear, uncluttered way. As well as checking conditions and temperature for today and the next seven days, you can view wind speed, the UV index, visibility, sunrise/sunset times, and much more. We particularly like the estimate of when "precipitation will start" (in other words, when you're likely to get wet), accompanied by a graph (see screenshot above right) – very handy for deciding whether you need a brolly. We found the app highly accurate, but you can submit your own observations to improve its accuracy.



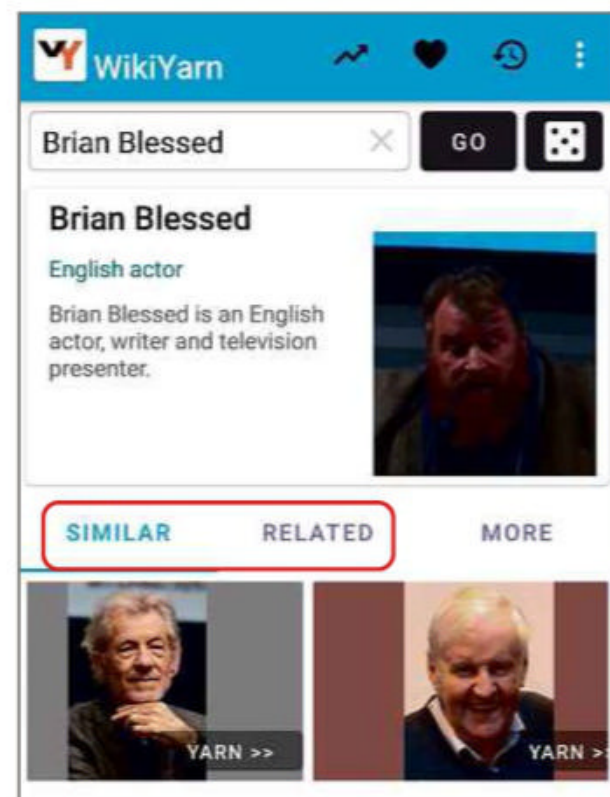
OpenWeather provides accurate forecasts, including when you're going to get wet

The Knowledge

iOS www.snipca.com/37758



Created by the founder of *The Week* magazine, this stylish news app provides a daily digest of the biggest stories from the UK and abroad, along with expert comment and analysis, videos and podcasts, as well as quotes and memes from around the web. On Fridays, there's a special weekend edition that gathers the best content from the last week, spanning categories including shopping, property and culture. The Knowledge provides a neat and carefully curated alternative to other news apps, and it's currently completely free to use. Some features may require a subscription in future.



WikiYarn makes browsing Wikipedia easier and suggests similar and related pages

WikiYarn

Android www.snipca.com/37753



WikiYarn offers a faster and more useful way to browse the online encyclopedia Wikipedia. You can preview articles without opening them, view similar and related articles to the one you're reading (see screenshot above), and explore 'trending' content with a single tap.

Alternatively, you can search the site by category rather than using a specific query. Our favourite tool lets you compare any two articles to see what they have in common – very handy for quiz compilers. Unlike the actual Wikipedia app, WikiYarn is supported by ads, but these don't get in the way.

Will Google follow Apple's lead on app permissions?

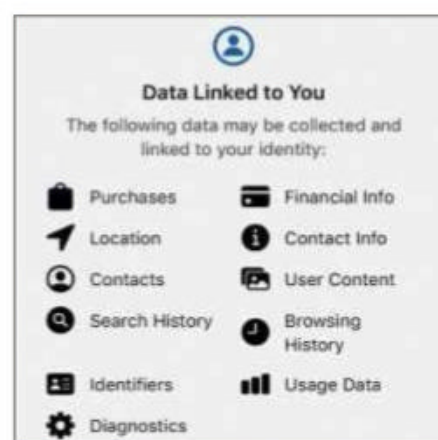
As you'll notice when installing the iOS tools in this feature, most apps in the Apple App Store now provide privacy information. This is presented in the form of privacy 'nutrition labels', which work in a similar way to the calorie, fat and carbohydrate information you see on food packaging, and tell you exactly what an app does with your data.

The most common labels outline the data that's used to

track you and that's linked to you (see screenshot), and Apple now requires all app developers to disclose these details.

This new rule caused controversy earlier this year, when it was revealed that Google hadn't added privacy labels to many of its popular iOS apps, including Maps, Gmail and YouTube (see www.snipca.com/37805).

It has since (and, we imagine, grudgingly) complied, but has yet to introduce similar privacy



information for apps in the Google Play Store. In February, Bloomberg reported that Google was exploring a "less stringent"

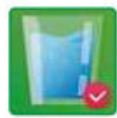
alternative to Apple's label system (www.snipca.com/37806), but details of how this will work and when it will be implemented have not been confirmed.

In the meantime, Android app developers have been asked to declare whether their apps contain ads or request 'high-risk or sensitive permissions', and to provide a privacy policy. We recommend you always check this info before you tap Install.

APPS FOR TRACKING THINGS

Waterful

Android www.snipca.com/37754
iOS www.snipca.com/37755



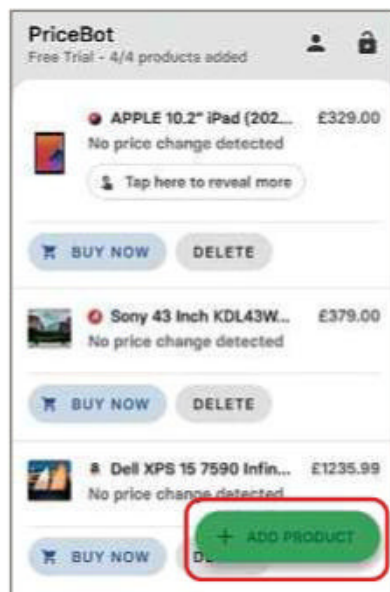
Waterful helps you stay healthy and hydrated by tracking your daily water intake and reminding you when it's time to drink more. Specify whether you lead an active, sedentary or 'normal' life to get a daily goal, then tell the app every time you drink water, tea, juice or milk. Sticking to your goal earns you reward badges, and you can snooze notifications while you sleep. It has no in-app purchases, but it is supported by ads (the ad-free version costs 99p per month). To stop it collecting your usage data, go to Settings, Privacy, Learn More and switch off the personalisation options.

PriceBot

Android & iOS <https://pricebot.buneme.com>



This app lets you track the cost of items at virtually any online store – not just big names like Amazon – so you can buy when the price is right.



PriceBot tracks the price of products you're thinking of buying, so you know when to strike

Simply copy the web address of the product page, then tap Add Product (see screenshot above) and PriceBot will paste the URL from your clipboard into its watch list. Selecting an entry lets you refresh the current price, view the item's price history and set up notifications for when the price changes. The free version lets you track four products at a time, with prices checked automatically every

72 hours. Upgrading to PriceBot Premium for £4.99 removes the limit on items monitored and offers automatic price updates every 24 hours.

Billbot

Android & iOS <https://billbot.app>



From TV to online storage, with so many subscription services available knowing which you're signed up to and how much they cost isn't easy. Billbot lets you manage them in one place, making it easier to track recurring expenses. It supports more than 200 services, including Netflix, Spotify and Sky. Simply tap Add to select one, then enter details such as subscription cost, frequency and next billing date. Tap 'New' if a service isn't listed, then enter the details yourself. As well as calculating how much you've spent this month and year, Billbot can notify you when a payment is imminent. You can change your default currency and profile name by tapping the cat icon in the top-right corner.

SYSTEM APPS

Niagara Launcher

Android www.snipca.com/37733



After two years of beta testing, the first stable version of this attractive Android launcher (a tool that changes how your device's home screen looks and works) was released in February. Rather than clutter your home screen with unnecessary options, Niagara Launcher adopts a minimalist approach, displaying your favourite apps in an alphabetical list.

Tapping the left-hand side of your screen reveals the full selection, or you can choose a letter on the right. Tap the date to open your calendar, and long-press your screen to access further options, including wallpapers, notification settings and **widgets**. You'll need to upgrade to the Pro version (for £4.49 a year) to unlock the

weather widget and icon packs, but you can try this for free for seven days,

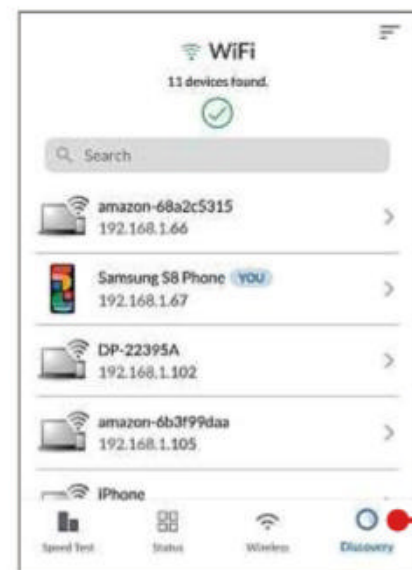
Ubiquiti WiFiman

Android www.snipca.com/37793
iOS www.snipca.com/37794



How fast is your Wi-Fi? Is your router using the least congested channel? Are your neighbours **piggybacking** your network? All these questions and more are answered by WiFiman, a fantastic free (and ad-free) app that provides expert analysis of your Wi-Fi in a simple, recently redesigned interface.

As well as carrying out speed tests, you can monitor all the devices currently connected to your network (tap Discovery – see screenshot above right) and decide whether to change your network's



WiFiman lets you quickly find out which devices are connected to your network

channels based on those your neighbours are using (tap Wireless). The app can also test the performance of your mobile connection, scan open ports and measure the Wi-Fi speed between two devices. It now offers a dark mode, too. **ca**

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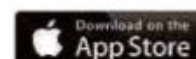
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Should you buy a Chromebook?

Google promotes them as being cheaper, faster and safer than Windows laptops, so why wouldn't you want a Chromebook?

Will Stapley reveals their pros and (significant) cons



Taking their name from Google's Chrome browser, Chromebooks look just like Windows laptops and have similar, albeit typically less powerful hardware inside. The big difference is their operating system. Instead of Windows, Chromebooks run Chrome OS. As we'll explain, this Google-developed operating system isn't as powerful nor as versatile as Windows, but it is less demanding on system resources. Because of this, Chromebooks don't need powerful processors or large amounts of memory, and therefore tend to be cheaper than laptops running Windows 10.

What you can and can't do with a Chromebook

Chromebooks come with Google's range of apps and services pre-installed, including Gmail, Google Docs, YouTube and, of course, Chrome. You can add to these by installing extensions and apps from the Chrome Web Store (www.snipca.com/37815).

Most Chromebooks made in the last couple of years also let you download Android apps (from Google and other developers) from the Play Store, including Skype, WhatsApp and Firefox (see the full list of Chromebooks that are compatible with the Google Play Store at www.snipca.com/37816).

Bear in mind that Android apps are primarily designed to run on smaller phone and tablet screens. Chrome OS stretches them to fill the larger displays of Chromebooks, which can result in small,

hard-to-read text or buttons being located in the wrong place.

Chromebooks are designed to be 'web-first' devices – in other words, they work best when connected to the internet. If you're travelling or your Wi-Fi connection goes down, some apps will simply refuse to run. However, most Google apps have an offline mode, meaning you'll still be able to read and edit documents, access your inbox and write emails, and play videos and music that are stored on your Chromebook (or an attached USB stick).

The latest version of Chrome OS (89), which Google released in March, introduces a range of new features and tools. The most useful is Phone Hub (see screenshot below), which connects your Chromebook to your Android phone (it works with phones running Android version 5.1 or higher). You can then browse any websites you've recently accessed on your phone, read messages, check its battery level and enable its

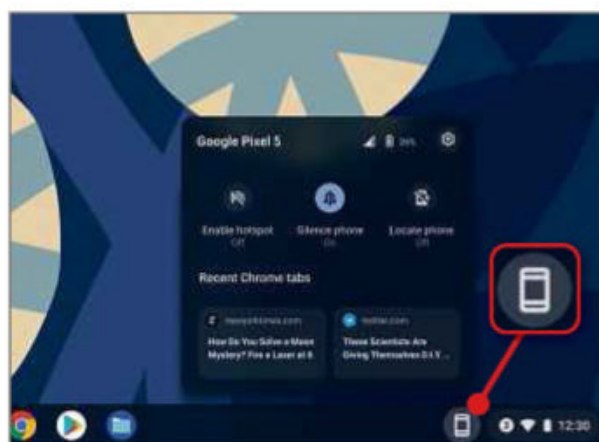
mobile **hotspot**.

The biggest drawback of Chromebooks is that they can't run traditional Windows programs. That means you won't be able to install popular software such as LibreOffice, Audacity, Calibre, Paint.NET – the list goes on. Anyone moving from a Windows laptop is therefore likely to find a Chromebook *very* restrictive.

Performance

One of the cheapest Chromebooks – the Asus C223 (£179 from www.snipca.com/37817, pictured below) – is powered by an Intel Celeron N3350 processor, 4GB of **RAM** and 32GB of storage. These are specifications that would slow Windows 10 to a crawl, but the C223 has no problems running Chrome OS.

Like all Chromebooks, the C223 uses **flash storage** and boots in around 10 seconds. In contrast, a Windows laptop with a traditional hard drive usually boots in minutes, not seconds. Even if your laptop has an **SSD**, Windows still has



Control your Android phone from your Chromebook using the new Phone Hub



Despite its low specifications, the Asus C223 can run Chrome OS smoothly



Google's Pixelbook Go is a powerful machine with a battery that lasts nearly 15 hours

to load numerous startup programs and background services, which usually takes at least 30 seconds. Open more than a handful of browser tabs, however, and the C223 will become sluggish.

To guarantee a smoother performance when carrying out multiple tasks, you'll need to spend more. Lenovo's IdeaPad 3i (£249 from www.snipca.com/37818) has a slightly more powerful Intel N4020 processor and twice the storage of the C223. Google's Pixelbook Go (£629 from www.snipca.com/37819, pictured above) is significantly faster, thanks to its Intel Core M3 processor and 8GB of memory, which ensure that Chrome OS cruises along, even with multiple apps running.

However, even the most powerful Chromebooks aren't suitable for resource-hungry tasks such as video editing. You're also limited to using web-based or Android video-editing apps such as PowerDirector (www.snipca.com/37820), which can't compete with more powerful Windows tools like Shotcut (www.shotcut.org) and DaVinci Resolve (www.snipca.com/37821).

Product	Auto Update Expiration date
Chromebook C223	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223A	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223B	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223C	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223D	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223E	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223F	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223G	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223H	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223I	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223J	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223K	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223L	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223M	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223N	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223O	Jun 2024
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Chromebook C223V	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223W	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223X	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223Y	Jun 2024
Chromebook C223Z	Jun 2024

Make sure you check a Chromebook's AUE before purchasing

The slower processors in Chromebooks do have one big advantage, though: their battery life is excellent. Most will last well over 10 hours on a single charge (we managed nearly 15 hours on the Pixelbook), making them ideal for use on camping holidays or long journeys.

Security

Compared with Windows laptops, Chromebooks are very safe – so safe, in fact, that you won't need to install antivirus software. Each browser tab and app runs within its own **sandbox**, so if you were to visit a website containing malware it wouldn't be able to access your other tabs, apps or personal files. This doesn't mean you're *completely* safe when using a Chromebook – you'll still be at risk of threats from **phishing** emails and dodgy websites, and you'll still be tracked via **cookies**.

Bear in mind too that this enhanced safety is mostly due to the fact that you can install only Google-approved apps – unlike Windows, which lets you install apps from any developer. Of course, if you like to keep a tight rein on your

privacy, the very fact that Chromebooks are so closely linked with your Google account may make you feel uneasy (you can sign in without a Google account by selecting 'Browse as Guest', but it's a temporary account so all data – including any files you created – will be deleted when you log off).

All your data is automatically saved online to Google Drive. Although we've no concerns about the security of Google Drive, you may not like the idea of *all* your personal files being uploaded. If so, you can choose what you don't want to sync by going to Settings, People, 'Sync and Google services', 'Manage sync', then unticking 'Sync everything'.

Lifespan

When you buy a Windows laptop, it will continue to receive updates from Microsoft for as long as Windows 10 is supported. Microsoft hasn't provided an 'end of life' date for Windows 10, so it's safe to assume this is some way off – and even if it is superseded, the upgrade is likely to be free.

With Chromebooks, it's a different story. Each model has what Google calls an Auto Update Expiration (AUE) date. On that date, the Chromebook will stop receiving updates to Chrome OS, including new features and, more importantly, security fixes. You can continue to use a Chromebook that's past its AUE, but it won't be as safe as one that's still being updated.

How long a Chromebook receives updates depends on the model – most vary from between six-and-a-half to eight years. However, the clock starts ticking as soon as the Chromebook is launched, not when you buy it. This means you could buy a Chromebook from Amazon, then discover it has just a couple of years of updates left. We therefore recommend you check a Chromebook's AUE date at www.snipca.com/37822 before buying (the Asus C223 we mentioned earlier, for example, will stop receiving updates in just over three years – see screenshot above).

Chromebook or Windows?

Although Chromebooks are great for browsing the web and running apps, we wouldn't recommend buying one as your main computer. Windows may not be perfect, but it lets you install whatever programs you like and is endlessly tweakable – we'd be lost without it. **ca**

Try before you buy

Chrome OS runs only on Chromebooks, so you can't install it on a Windows laptop. However, you can install a very similar OS called CloudReady. It's based on the same Chromium software as Chrome OS, and looks and operates in a very similar way. In fact, Google recently purchased Neverware, the company behind CloudReady. If you want to try the nearest thing to Chrome OS before committing to a Chromebook, it's a good idea to give CloudReady a test run in a **virtual PC**.

First, download the virtual PC image for CloudReady (from www.snipca.com/37823 – scroll down and click 'Download v83 (64bit) CloudReady...'). To run it, you'll need a virtual PC tool

called VMware Player, (from www.snipca.com/37824 – click the blue 'Try Workstation 16.0 Player for Windows' link). Run VMware, press Ctrl+O, then select the CloudReady image you just downloaded. Now follow the installation process, then double-click the CloudReady entry in the left-hand pane of the VMware window. When we ran CloudReady, it failed to detect our internet connection. To fix this, we had to click Player, then Removable Devices, Network Adapter, 'Settings...' and select the 'NAT...' option.

If you enjoy using CloudReady and want to install it properly on your PC, see How To, Issue 594, page 35 (available on our 2020 Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/37830).

Print your own labels

(but don't use your printer)

Still using your inkjet printer to create labels? **Nik Rawlinson** reveals why a dedicated label printer is faster, more convenient and guarantees perfect, smudge-free labels every time



Once the preserve of offices and post rooms, label printers are increasingly finding a place in our homes. Whether you're a prolific eBay seller with piles of parcels to address, a keen chutney maker looking to give your jars a professional finish, or you just want to identify the contents of storage boxes in the garage, a dedicated label printer is much more compact and convenient than your desktop inkjet printer.

They're not just smaller versions of a regular printer, though. Label printers use rolls, rather than individual pages, and bypass ink and toner entirely. Instead, they rely on a thermal-print process to effectively burn text on the label itself – we'll look at the benefits of this in a moment.

When choosing the one that best suits your needs, you'll need to consider several factors. Here we investigate your options and guide you through the sticky business of picking the right label printer.

What makes label printers different?

Whereas regular printers have input and output trays and use individual pages, label printers use rolls, much like a shop till does. These have peelable backs which, when removed, expose the adhesive surface of each label. The labels themselves are available in a range of sizes, from narrow tapes just wide enough for a single line of text, to

Brother's PT-H110 is a digital alternative to the classic Embosser, but still prints only single-line labels

envelope-sized panels for addresses, barcodes and small banners.

Single-line labels were traditionally used with the classic Dymo Embosser devices, which use semi-rigid tape, a dial to select the letter you need, and a lever to press it into the tape. You can still pick one up (for £15 from www.snipca.com/37764), but Brother's PT-H110 (£37 from www.snipca.com/37767, pictured above) is a more modern and versatile option. It uses heat-sensitive tape to print white text and icons on a range of coloured backgrounds. You can easily change the font size, and the printing process is both quicker – courtesy of the keyboard – and quieter than the traditional Embosser (though we do miss that familiar 'clack').



Why are label printers better than regular printers?

As you'll know if you've ever returned a purchase to an online shop, printing the return label, cutting it out and sticking it to the package isn't exactly convenient. Neither is it efficient: you throw away a lot of surplus paper and can get through yards of sticky tape. Label printers use exactly the requisite amount of paper, and you can do away with that roll of

sellotape entirely.

Besides that, there's no ink cartridge drying out when you don't use it for a long time, and no fiddly toner to refill. However, as you'll know if you've hung on to a shop receipt for a while, the text printed on thermal labels can fade over time. So, if you're printing labels for canned or bottled goods, check them periodically to make sure they don't need refreshing.

There's a supplementary benefit to printing this way: because there's no ink on your label, there's nothing to run if it gets wet. So, unlike with labels printed using an inkjet printer, addresses won't smudge if a parcel gets caught in the rain, nor will the labels on your home-brewed beer be ruined by condensation when you take them out of the fridge.

Does this convenience come at a cost?

While single-line, standalone label printers such as the Brother PT-H110 are relatively cheap, you'll need to spend a bit more if you want to print larger labels. Our favourite is Brother's QL-600R (£59 from www.snipca.com/37765, pictured above right), which connects to your computer via USB.

The labels are 62mm wide but, unlike with most label printers, they're not restricted to a set length – you can print them up to one metre in length. The QL-600R will then neatly cut the labels before churning them out. This makes it



The Brother QL-600R will print and cut labels up to one metre long

perfect for everything from addressing envelopes and parcels to producing small signs. It's fast, too, with speeds up to an impressive 44 labels per minute.

Most label printers connect to your PC via USB, but there are wireless options. Brother's PT Cube PTP300BT (£49 from www.snipca.com/37777) connects to your phone or tablet via Bluetooth using Brother's companion P-touch app (available for Android and iOS devices – see screenshot below). The device itself is highly portable, running off six AAA batteries and small enough to carry around or put in a drawer when you're not using it. However, it's no good for printing address labels because it uses tape that's only 12mm wide.

If you prefer to connect over Wi-Fi from a regular computer as well as a smartphone, the £129 Dymo LabelWriter Wireless (www.snipca.com/37773, pictured above right) performs well and is ideal for sharing across a home network. And because it can process



The Dymo LabelWriter Wireless lets you print labels via Wi-Fi from any device

labels that are up to 62mm wide, it's suitable for printing larger labels such as name tags and addresses.

Naturally, paying more gets you more features, though most at the higher end of the price range are useful only for businesses. The Dymo LabelWriter 450 (£171 from www.snipca.com/37768), for example, lets you load two different label rolls simultaneously, so you could use one for name tags, the other for labels. The Dymo LabelWriter 4XL (£203 from www.snipca.com/37769) integrates with Amazon's service, letting you print labels directly from customer orders – perfect if you're running a small business through the site.

Can you use third-party labels?

Another thing you need to consider is the cost of the labels. You can't load your label printer with plain paper, so check the price of the label printer manufacturer's own labels or tapes – the latter are used by the single-line printers. Also, make sure you find out whether it works with 'compatible' labels from third-party suppliers, which are typically much cheaper. The official site for your printer is unlikely to divulge this information, but you can check compatibility on websites selling these cheaper labels, such as Amazon.

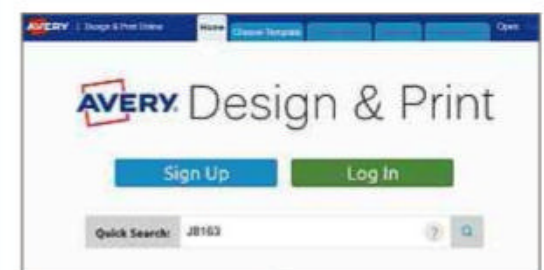
For example, an official replacement roll for the Brother QL-600R mentioned above costs £20, which is one-third of the

Print labels *without* a label printer

As we've explained here, there are several advantages to using a dedicated label printer. However, if you only occasionally print labels, you may prefer to stick with your trusty old inkjet printer. When doing this, it's crucial you use the correct template for your labels, otherwise you'll waste a lot of sheets trying to get the text to fit.

If you're using official Avery labels – or ones listed as being compatible with Avery – you'll find a code (such as L7159) on the label packaging. You can then enter this code on Avery's site at www.snipca.com/37785 and download the associated template. You can also use the code with Avery's 'Design & Print' tool (www.snipca.com/37775 – see screenshot below), which runs in your browser and lets you choose from dozens of label styles to print as they are or use as inspiration.

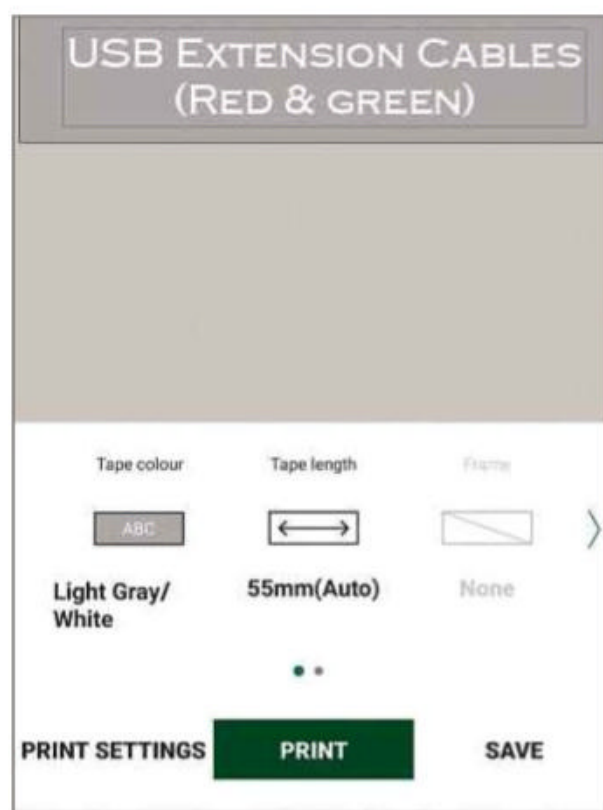
You may be able to use the 'Design & Print' tool even if you don't have official Avery labels. As well as providing their own PDF and .doc templates to download, third-party label suppliers such as Online Labels UK (www.snipca.com/37782) often list equivalent Avery codes for their labels.



price of the printer itself. However, a quick search on Amazon reveals you can get *five* compatible rolls for £18 (www.snipca.com/37784), which reduces running costs considerably.

Some printers read a series of marks on the back of the label carrier paper to detect the start and end of each label (pictured left). If your chosen printer needs these to work properly, make sure they're present on any third-party label rolls you buy (if the rolls are listed as compatible, they should have the correct marks).

Also read through user reviews – we've seen warnings of labels that have become detached from the backing while passing through the printer (particularly when the label and carrier sheet are fairly thick), resulting in jams that take time to free up. **ca**



Brother's P-touch app lets you use your phone to create and print labels on the PT Cube PTP300BT



Make sure any compatible labels you buy have the same marks as your printer's official labels

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Where do I get drivers for my old printer?

Q

I've been a *Computeractive* reader for quite a while and now seek some advice.

Recently, I was given an Epson Stylus Photo 2000P A3 printer. However, I'm unable to source the necessary **drivers**. Epson doesn't list one and any I have sourced from elsewhere come with a warning. Could you advise me as to how I could obtain what I need, please? My PC runs Windows 10.

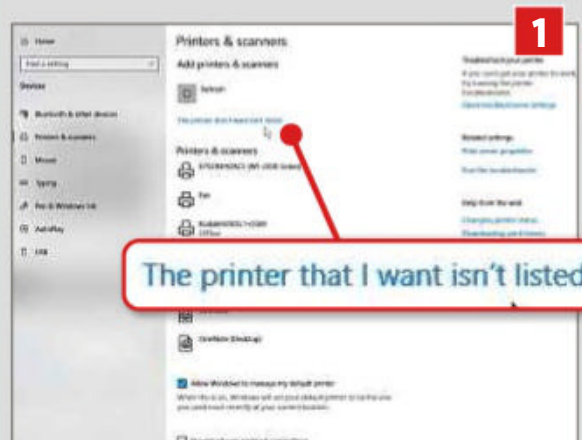
Victor Kidd

A

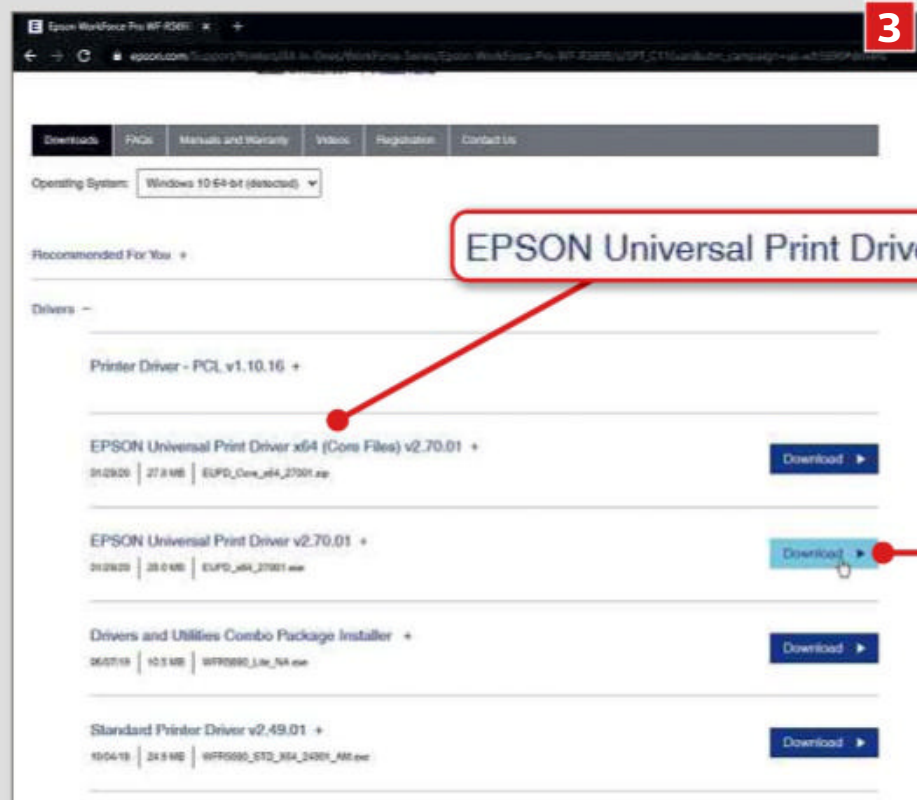
Finding the most recent, safe and reliable drivers isn't always easy, as we explained in Issue 602's 'How not to update your drivers' feature (page 60). Certainly, you should avoid downloading drivers from random websites, as many will be fake and possibly harmful to your computer.

The key problem is that your printer is the best part of 20 years old, and made for the Windows 98/XP era. It seems Epson ceased releasing dedicated drivers for it with those operating systems, though both Windows 7 and Vista apparently offered 'in-box' drivers – meaning that if the printer was attached to a PC running either of those then a driver would be downloaded and installed, via Windows Update.

That's not the case for Windows 10. However, you might have luck in forcing it to find and use an older driver.



To force Windows 10 to use an old driver, select 'The printer that I want isn't listed'



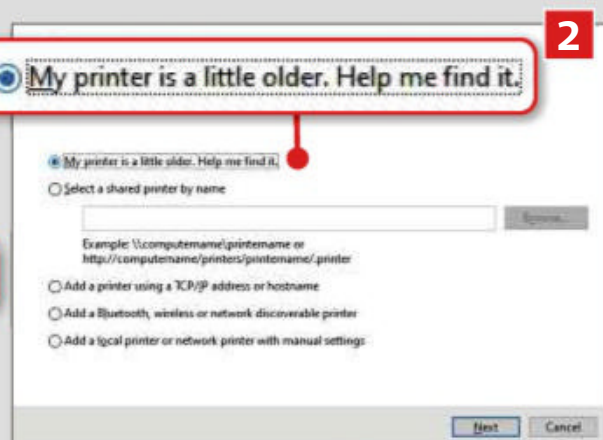
As a last resort, download the Epson Universal Print Driver

To do this, first click the Start button followed by the Settings cog and then, on the left, Devices followed by 'Printers & scanners'. Next, ensure that your printer is connected and switched on, and then, on the right, click 'Add a printer or scanner'. Wait for a few moments while Windows 10 looks for a printer. If it finds yours, then click to select it and then follow the prompts to complete the installation.

If not, then instead click the 'The printer that I want isn't listed' link (see screenshot 1). Then, on the Add Printer box, select the 'My printer is a little older. Help me find it' option 2 and then click Next. Windows might suggest a driver for

a different Epson printer, but don't let that put you off. Instead, click to select it and then click Next. Now type a name for your printer and click Next. Then, just work through the last couple of prompts, clicking Next at each stage. At the last box, you'll have the option to 'Print a test page'. Click that button and, if it works, then click Finish – and that should be that. You might find that not every feature of your old printer is available, but it should now work for everyday printing tasks.

If a test page does not appear, click Cancel. At this point, you're running out of options. One last-gasp idea would be to install Epson's so-called Universal Printer Driver, which you can download at www.snipca.com/37706 3. It's a bit of a misnomer because it doesn't actually work with all Epson printers – and we're not at all convinced it'll work with your 20-year-old model. However, by this stage you'll have little to lose by trying it. Just double-click the downloaded **EXE** file to begin installation and then follow the prompts. You'll find the full instructions for this utility at www.snipca.com/37707.



Next, select the option 'My printer is a little older. Help me find it'

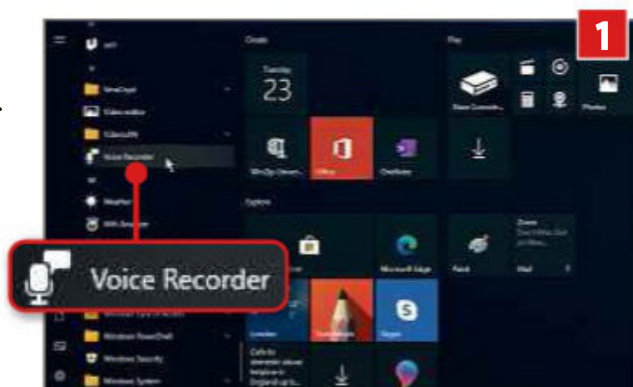
How do I record and email my own audiobook?

Q I've been a *Computeractive* subscriber for several years. I've asked questions before but never had an answer. But I keep trying, so here I go again. A friend in France is blind and listens to audiobooks. I'd like to send her audio of works I've written. I'm not a techie but I have a PC and microphone. I'd like to somehow send her audio on a USB stick or **SD card**. Or could I just email files? How would I do this? I need idiot-level instructions.

John Hopkinson

A We do get an awful lot of questions every fortnight but, as the old saying goes, if at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

What you want to achieve is actually easy but, as so often with computing, that's true only when you know how. Assuming your recording needs aren't complicated – and they don't sound like they are – then Windows 10 has a built-in app that'll do the job. It's called Voice Recorder, and you'll find it by clicking

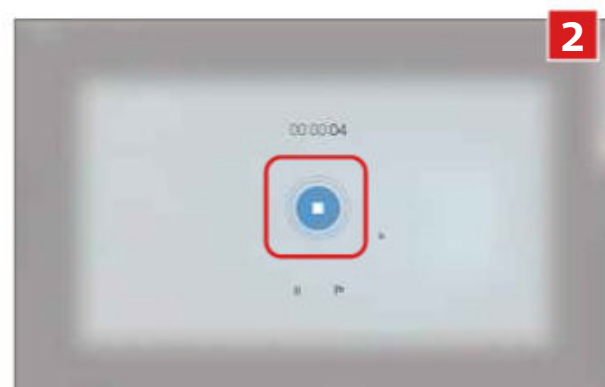


Click the Voice Recorder icon to record audio (1) and the square Stop button to finish (2)

Start and scrolling through an alphabetically sorted list of apps.

Click the Voice Recorder icon (see screenshot **1** – your icon may look slightly different depending on the version of Windows 10 you have) and the app will start listening to and saving as a digital file whatever is picked up by the microphone. In other words, you just need to talk.

When you're done, click the square Stop button **2** and that's that – the recording is made. The Voice Recorder interface will now look a little less empty, with your first recording listed in a



column on the left.

To share a recording with your contact in France via email, right-click its entry in this column and choose Share. Now choose Mail to send it as an attachment in the default Windows 10 Mail app, or click the relevant icon for your preferred email tool.

Alternatively, to copy it to a USB stick or SD card, from the same right-click menu choose 'Open file location'. File Explorer will now open a window to display the recorded file: you can drag and drop it on to your USB stick or memory card in the usual way.

How do I cancel my Kaspersky subscriptions?

Q I hope you can help me to cancel my auto-renewal subscription to Kaspersky. I lost my laptop in a fire last year, so got a new one. The information Kaspersky wants was destroyed, so I have no way of getting it on to my new laptop. What can I do?

Kenneth Parsley

A We have sympathy for your plight but with so little concrete information about what it is Kaspersky wants, there's not a whole lot we can do to help on a technical level. We're guessing that you've lost your Kaspersky account credentials, don't have a backup and can't remember what they are.

Without these, you can't cancel your account via the software or Kaspersky's online portal (<https://my.kaspersky.com> – see screenshot **1**), because these details are required to log in.



If you can't cancel your account on the Kaspersky portal (1), you could stop the direct debit (2)

There are two things we can suggest, though – at least one of which will definitely stop the payments. In the first instance, call Kaspersky's UK customer-service team, on 020 3549 3495. Hopefully, once you've explained the situation, the company's staff will be able to provide a resolution. At the very least, with mutual understanding and



agreement, they should be able to cease the subscription.

If that fails then you can cancel your direct debit **2**, which is your legal right. To do this, contact your bank to make the request. However, be sure to first inform Kaspersky of your intentions, in writing, offering the company a final chance to rectify the situation.

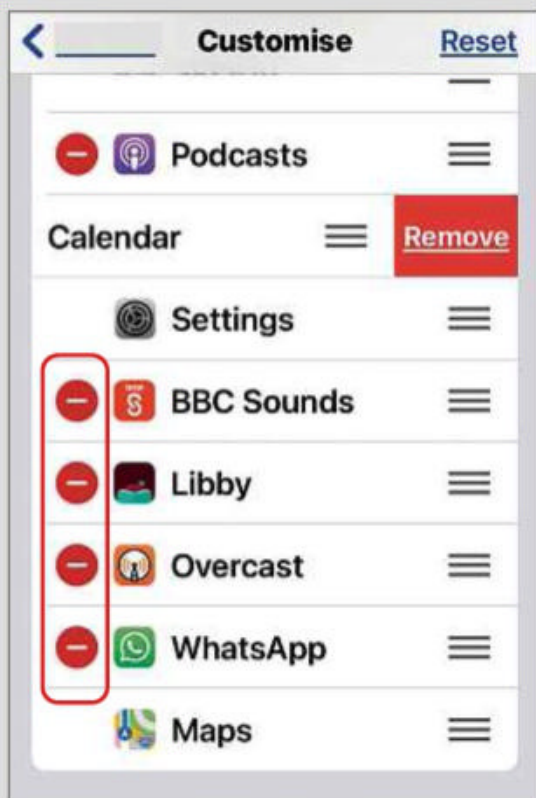
How do I delete apps from CarPlay?

Q My new car supports Apple CarPlay, which connects to my iPhone 8. After a few short trips I've grown to like this. However, the home screen on my car's display shows apps that I am never likely to use while I'm driving, such as Calendar. I've tried removing them by tapping and holding but that doesn't work. I know this isn't exactly a major problem but I'd just like to tidy things up by removing the ones I won't use. Any idea?

Mark Sheldrake

A The appearance of CarPlay, and the way to navigate it, depends on your car and display size. You didn't tell us your car model but that doesn't matter because management of the apps is handled through your iPhone.

So, on that, tap Settings followed by General and then CarPlay. Now tap your car name followed by Customise. Finally, to prevent an app from being displayed on your car's screen, just tap the red minus symbol to its left (see screenshot below), followed by Remove.



Tap the red minus sign next to any app to remove it from CarPlay's display

Do I have to wipe my PC?

Q I'm using a desktop PC running 32bit Windows 10. It runs slowly, so I'm looking to increase the RAM. I've run the Crucial system checker, which advises that I can increase the RAM to 8GB DDR2. However, I'm concerned Windows 10 will not use 8GB, as I've read that the maximum RAM for a 32bit operating system is 4GB. Apparently, to overcome this I'll have to reinstall Windows 10 in 64bit mode, but I don't know if this is correct or even the best solution. I'm nervous because I've never wiped an operating system before. Can you advise the best solution to move forward please?

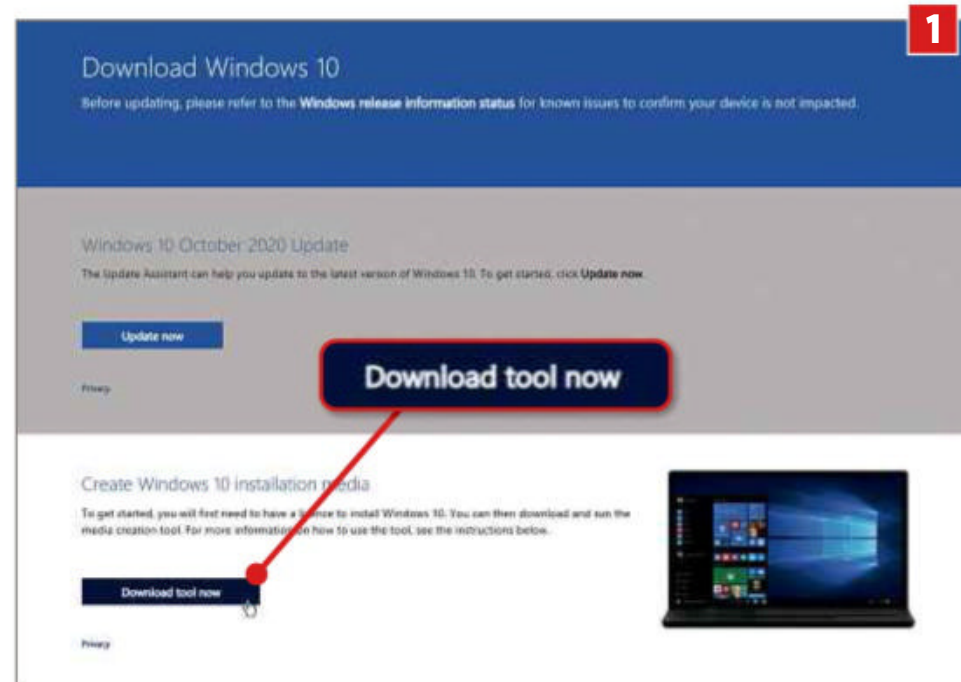
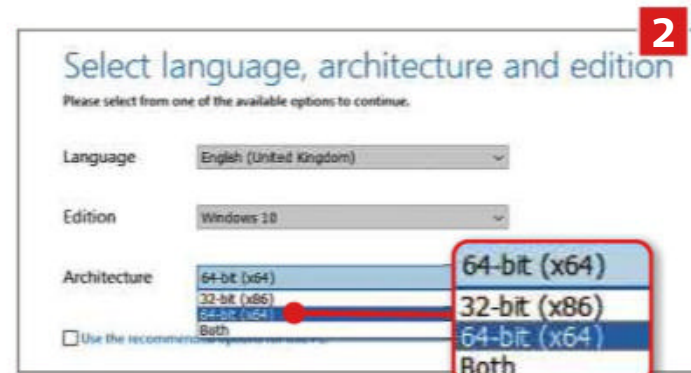
George Wensley

A What you've read is correct: 32bit Windows 10 is unable to use more than 4GB, so upgrading to 8GB without also upgrading Windows 10 to 64bit would be pointless. More RAM is a great way to speed up a PC, so it is a worthwhile upgrade – but only if you go to 64bit Windows 10.

There's really nothing to be nervous about, as such. However, you should be aware – as we believe

you are – that you cannot perform an 'in-place' upgrade from 32bit to 64bit Windows 10. In other words, the process will literally wipe everything on your computer, including all personal files and folders. So, be sure that you have copies of all that stuff before beginning.

Beyond that, you just need to grab the latest version of Windows 10. Visit www.snipca.com/37705, and click the 'Download tool now' button (see screenshot 1). Now double-click the downloaded file to launch the tool and, at the 'What do you want to do?' menu, select 'Create installation media...' followed by Next. Then, clear the tick from the 'Use the recommended options for this PC' box, open the Architecture dropdown menu and choose '64-bit (x64)' 2. Now click Next and follow the prompts to complete the installation.



Download the latest version of Windows 10 (1) and then make sure you select '64-bit (x64)' (2)

Q: Will my old laptop run Windows 10?

A: Issue 580, page 68 – find it on our 2020 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/37026



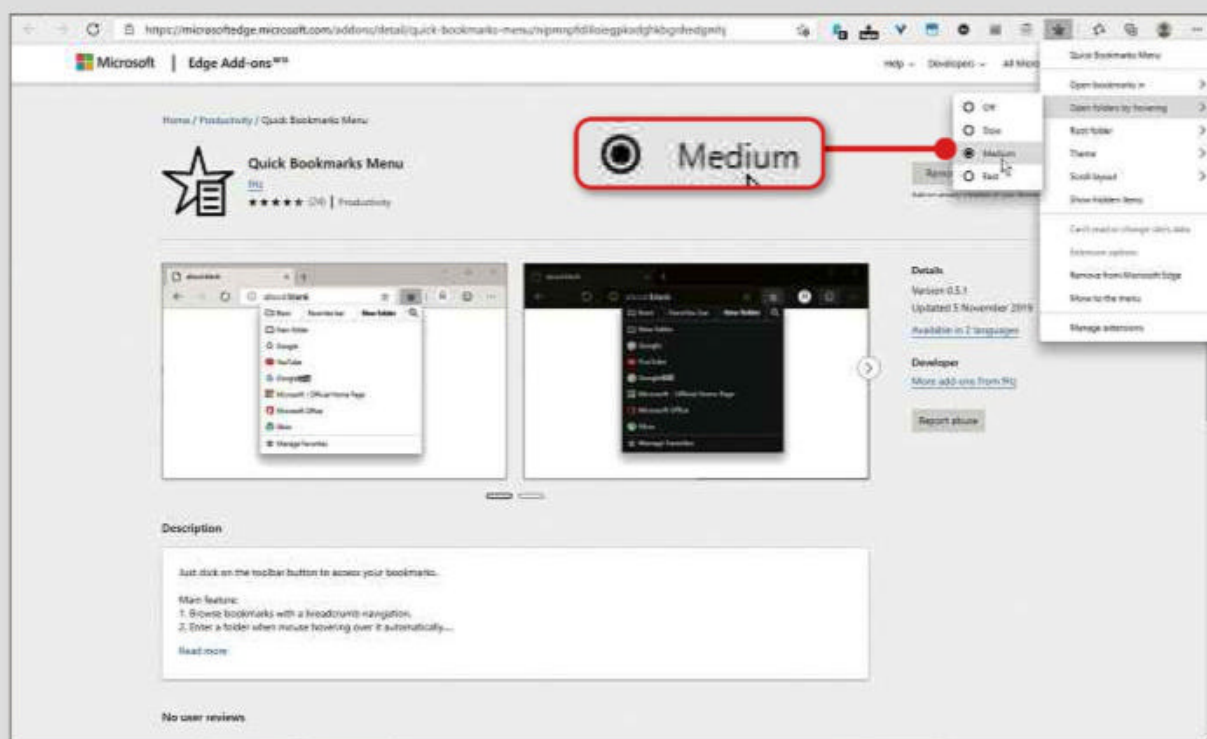
Why can't I hover to select in the Edge browser?

Q I use Edge as my default browser, although I also use Chrome and Firefox. Recently the behaviour of the Favourites menu in Edge has changed. Previously, when I hovered over a folder item in the menu, a submenu would fly out automatically – just as it does in Chrome. Now, to see the submenu, I have to click the folder item for the submenu to appear underneath. This is irritating. I do not know what caused this change, nor can I find a setting to change it back. Can you help, please?

Dave Duncan

A This is certainly an odd change. Right now, we're not sure if it's intentional or a slip-up on Microsoft's part. We're hoping it's the latter and that the company will eventually put it right, restoring the no-click navigation, as before.

Until then, one workaround is to install the Quick Bookmarks Menu add-on, which is a free download from



The Quick Bookmarks Menu extension lets you 'Open folders by hovering' at a speed you like

www.snipca.com/37671 (just click the Get button and then confirm by clicking 'Add extension').

You'll now have a new star icon on your Edge toolbar. If you click this instead of Edge's default star button then you can navigate your Favourites using the

Quick Bookmarks Menu, which offers hover navigation. To tweak how this works, first right-click the Quick Bookmarks Menu's star icon, then point to 'Open folders by hovering' and then just click to choose the desired selection speed (see screenshot above).

How do I delete Chrome shortcuts?

Q I have an issue with shortcuts in my browser. Some seem impossible to remove and new ones appear that I did not ask for. Presumably they are set in the registry somewhere or a configuration file, but I can't find where. I want to delete some persistent miscreants.

Ying-Hui The

A You didn't tell us which browser you use and your screenshot cropped out all the borders. Fortunately, there was just enough detail in the fragment you did send for us to figure out that you're using Chrome.

The good news is that fixing your problem is easy. First, to remove any single shortcut, hover over its icon until a little menu button (three dots) appears (see screenshot 1). Next, click this and then click Remove 2. The shortcut will disappear instantly.

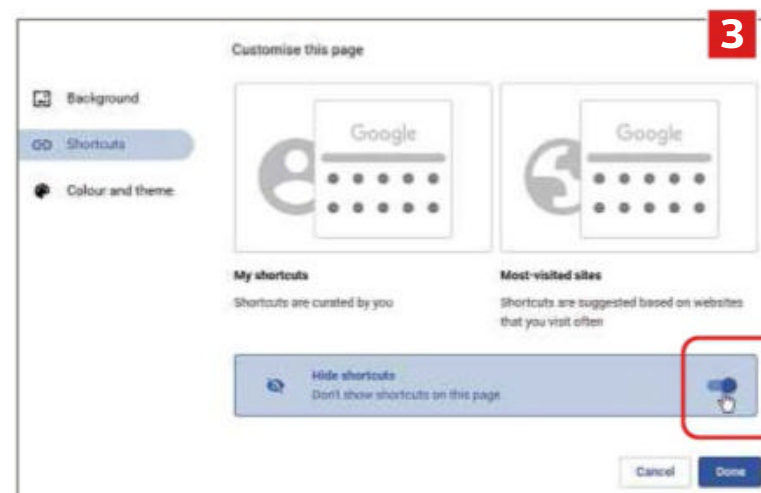
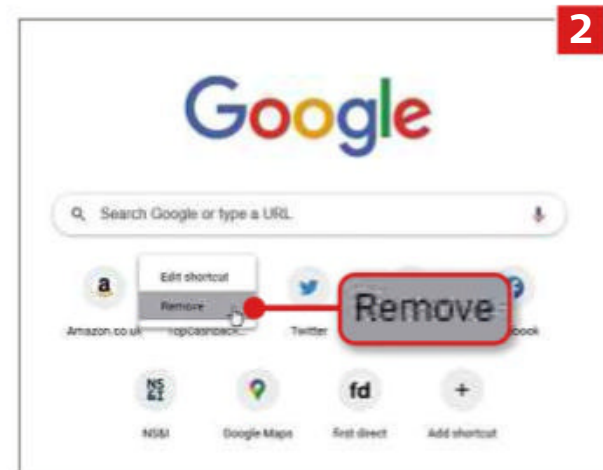
However, if you're a regular visitor to



Go into a Chrome shortcut's menu to remove it (1 & 2), or you can 'Hide shortcuts' entirely (3)

the site, then a new shortcut could just as quickly reappear – as Chrome automatically populates this area with links to the places you go to most often. Apart from not going to these sites, the only other option is to turn off the shortcuts feature entirely, so nothing at all will appear here.

To do that, at the bottom right of the New Tab page, first click the Customise button. Next, in the 'Customise this

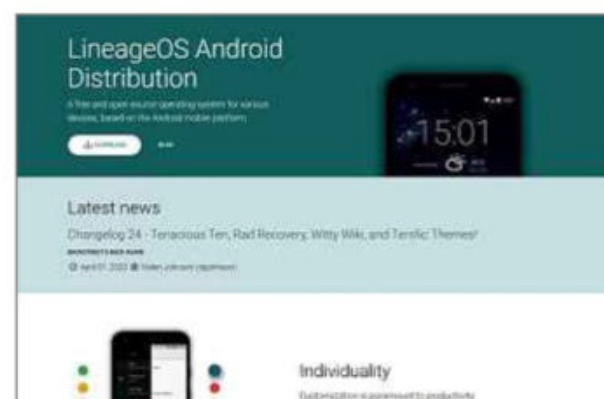


page' box that appears, click to select the Shortcuts tab and then click to flip the 'Hide shortcuts' switch to its On position 3.

Can I update my old tablet to Android 10?

Q I have an old Samsung Galaxy Note GT-N5110 tablet (pictured). It works fine. However, the Android software on it has not been updated since 2017, and is stuck on 4.4.2 (KitKat). This is no longer supported by many apps. Can I update it manually to Android 10?

Mike Mordillo



You can root an old tablet to install LineageOS and run a more up-to-date version of Android

is at www.snipca.com/37708.

A No, we're afraid you can't. Your device is now eight years old and simply does not support official Android versions beyond 4.4. However, that does not mean it has to languish on KitKat.

If you're an adventurous sort and prepared to get your hands dirty, then it's possible to **root** your tablet in order to install something called LineageOS (<https://lineageos.org> – see screenshot above far right). This is an **open-source** alternative to the latest official Android builds. For your device, LineageOS currently works up to version 16, which

is the equivalent of Android 9 (Pie). This will allow you to run many more modern Android apps, though not yet those designed for Android 10.

The rooting process varies for every device. It can be difficult and risks a 'bricked' (ie, broken) tablet. But if you're prepared to give it a go, your starting point should be the relevant XDA Developers page for your device – which

But one final word of warning: while LineageOS will give you a more up-to-date Android experience, for all sorts of technical reasons not all modern Android apps will work with it. In particular, none of Google's own apps will work. The LineageOS developers have created their own versions, dubbed Gapps, that to a very large degree render this detail irrelevant – but you might find other well-known apps will not work in LineageOS on your particular tablet.

Which writing app can I use on my old iPad?

Q I have an iPad 2 that's stuck on iOS 9.3.5, which I know is hopelessly out of date. I would love to use it to be able to finish writing my sci-fi novel from the sofa, but I'm struggling to find a word-processing app that'll run. Do you or any of your readers have any suggestions, other than to get a newer iPad?

Caroline Chapman

A Your options are decidedly limited. This is not necessarily because your iPad 2 would be unable to run a half-decent word-processing app – although at a decade old, it's certainly on borrowed time – but because few developers of such apps still support the particular version of iOS that your device runs on.

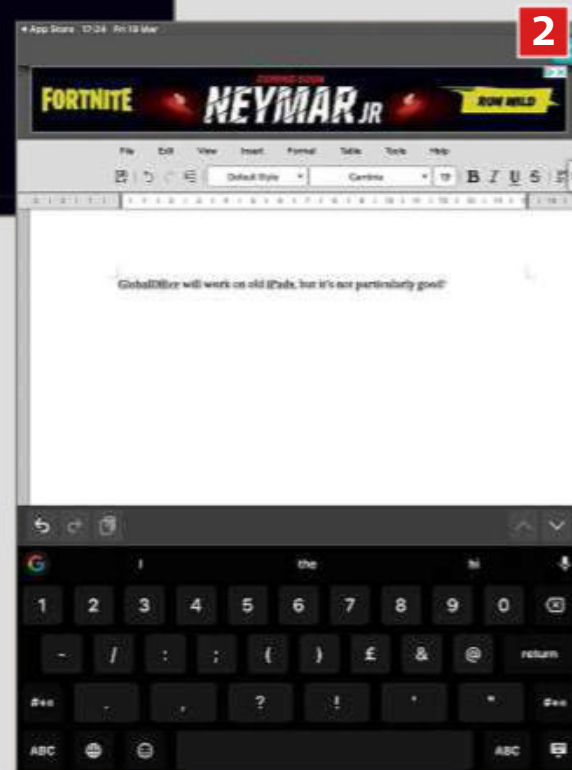
That's down to them, of course, but there simply aren't many word-processing apps available in the Apple

App Store that are still compatible with 9.3.5. Moreover, they've generally been abandoned by their developers, meaning they're unlikely ever to be improved.

GlobalOffice, for example, is a free download from www.snipca.com/37690 (see screenshot **1**). It works with iOS 8 or later, so will run on your iPad and includes a basic word processor. It's limited in functionality. For starters, it works only in portrait view **2** – so if you prefer typing in landscape, you're going to be disappointed. However, as a word-processing app it does deliver on many of the essentials so, if nothing else,



GlobalOffice (1) will work on iOS 8 or later, but is limited and only offers portrait view (2)



it would allow you to bash out a few words from your sofa.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

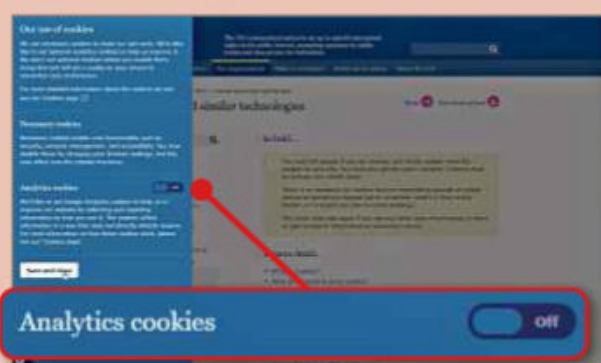
Cookies and spyware?

Q Websites seem increasingly demanding that one accepts cookies. With many it seems that if you don't accept them you cannot access the site, or are restricted. If you say yes with conditions, the list of these is often long and ambiguous, and couched in such terms that I am sure you are still giving them free rein to track you. It feels like **cookies** are being used in a sinister way to infringe my privacy. With this in mind, would you please tell me what the difference is between cookies and spyware?

Barry Warrell

A This is a great question. On the one hand, cookies are totally harmless, but on the other hand sometimes they're not.

For the uninitiated, a cookie is just a tiny text file. It saves a small bit of personal information, such as a username, that relates to a specific website. They're stored on your computer's drive, and can be accessed only by the website that put them there – and only then when you next visit



Cookies consent form (left) with an option to switch off 'analytics', and GDPR guidelines (right)

that website.

As such, any one cookie in isolation is literally harmless. Unlike spyware, they don't 'infect' your computer and then actively snoop on you.

However, some websites have found ingenious or devious ways to use cookies for their own benefit. This generally boils down to using the details stored by cookies to infer information about what you've done online, when and where.


Unfortunately, there's no magic solution to knowing which websites are up to these antics and which aren't. In fact, those displaying 'cookie consent' screens tend to be more trustworthy than those that don't.

This is because they're adhering



to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines, at <https://gdpr.eu/cookies>, by asking what cookies you're prepared to accept on your computer.

When encountering consent forms, we would advise that you accept only 'first-party' cookies or 'essential', as these are the ones generated by the website itself. Deny 'third-party' or 'analytics' cookies, because these will typically come from companies advertising on the website – or at least will be for the benefit of someone other than yourself.

 Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Can I get PDF previews without Adobe Reader?

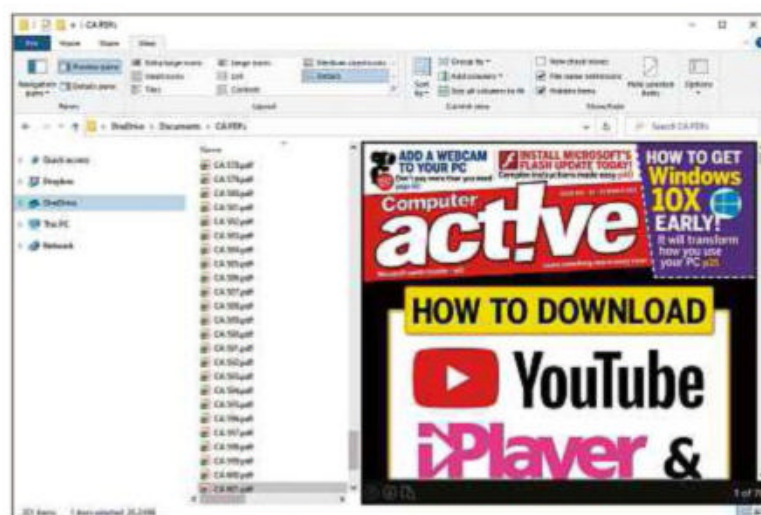
Q I was just reading the 'Stop making these pdf mistakes' feature in Issue 600. On page 60, you recommend not to use a dedicated PDF viewer, such as Adobe Reader, and rely on web browsers instead. I fully share this view. However, I have not found a way to display PDF files in the preview pane of Windows 10's File Explorer utility unless Acrobat Reader is installed. Is there any way around this?

Philippe Martin

A We don't like replying with a no but in this case the answer is that there is no way.

Most likely for licensing and cost reasons, Microsoft

does not include a PDF viewer with Windows 10. Without one installed, File Explorer will not display PDF previews. We find this as annoying as you do, because we regularly make use of the preview pane, but the only solution is to have Reader installed.



It is worth having Adobe Reader just for viewing PDFs in File Explorer's preview pane

Of course, you don't actually have to use Reader for viewing PDFs – as they'll still happily open in your browser. So, you might choose to keep Reader installed just for the File Explorer preview pane but otherwise forget about it.

Next Issue

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Weds
5 May

- How do I change my digital identities?
- Where's my October Update?
- Can I update my Vista laptop? ...And many more

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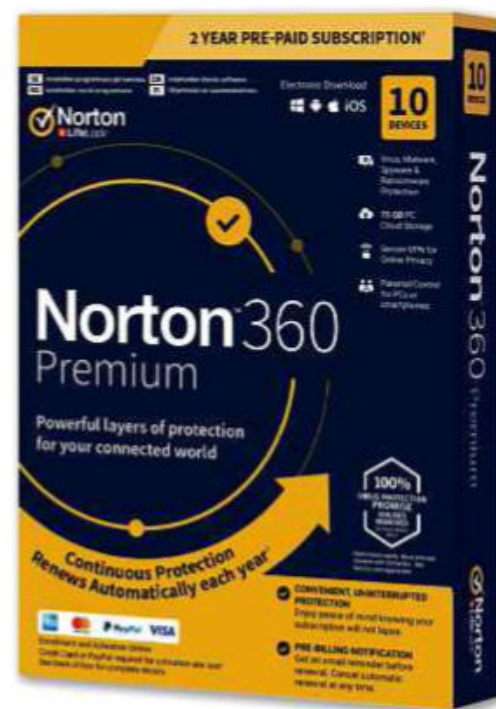
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Is my Outlook being replaced?

Q I'm a long-standing subscriber to your magazine. In Issue 598's 'What's All The Fuss About?' (One Outlook) you identified numerous Outlook versions. However, I use a version installed from an Office Professional disc. This doesn't appear to be mentioned in your article. Is this version also at risk of being replaced?
Fred Williams

A Actually, we did mention the Outlook you use, in the second paragraph, as the 'desktop version' – but the reference was in passing so we guess it was easy to miss.

The good news is that Microsoft has recently announced that desktop Office (and thus desktop Outlook) will see at least one more 'perpetual' release. This means a one-time, no-subscription purchase that'll just keep working.

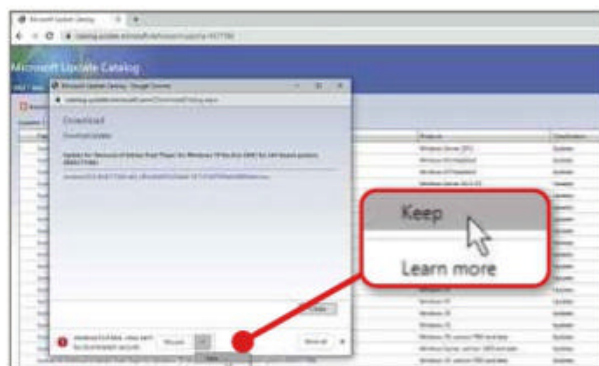
However, any desktop version of Office will eventually fall out of support, and thus become increasingly unsafe to use. The support lifecycle for Office releases is typically 10 years, so we expect Office 2021 – as it'll be called when it arrives later this year – will remain good to use up until 2031.

Be aware your particular version of Office falls out of support earlier. Office 2016, for example – actually released in 2015 – will cease being supported in 2025. So, if you want to continue using Outlook safely, you might need to upgrade to the 2021 version sooner or later.

Why won't KB4577586 update download?

Q I tried following your Workshop in Issue 601 (page 40) to download the KB4577586 update for Windows 10 version 20H2. However, it would not download – I just kept getting error messages. Could you please advise further?

John Perkins



Override Chrome settings blocking an update by clicking this Keep option

A We don't know for sure what the problem is here, as we've tried this multiple times without trouble. Nor are we sure about the specific error message you're receiving.

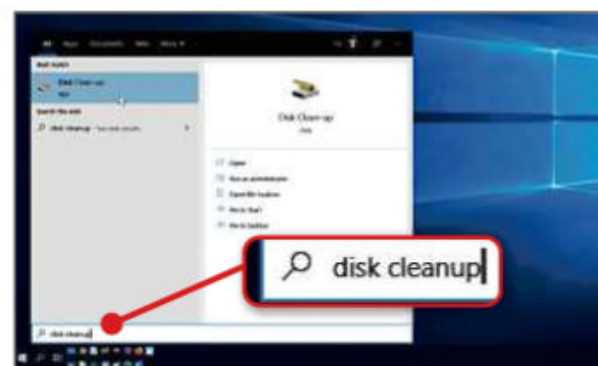
Our guess is that security settings in your browser might be blocking the download. Of course, you should always be careful overriding such protective measures. However, as long as you're sure you're definitely visiting the legitimate Microsoft Update Catalog page (at www.snipca.com/37471), there should be no risk in pressing ahead. In Chrome, for example, when a download is blocked a warning will appear at the bottom of the window. To override it, click the up arrow next to the Discard button, then click Keep (see screenshot above).

Where's Disk Cleanup?

Q Issue 599's 'Remove All Windows Junk' Cover Feature explains how to remove old **system restore points**. I followed the advice but couldn't see the 'Clean up system files' options. What am I doing wrong?

David Legg

A You helpfully sent us a screenshot, so we can see that your mistake was to type **disc cleanup**, not **disk cleanup**. The latter is the actual name of the tool, and is the instruction we published. However, you typed **disc cleanup** into the Start menu. In trying to be helpful Windows offered an option to search the web. You clicked that, thus opening an



Make sure you type **disk cleanup** in the Start menu to clean up your system files

Edge browser window and a Bing search page for 'disc cleanup'. So, repeat our instructions but ensure you type **disk cleanup**, with a 'k' on the end of 'disk', not a 'c' (see screenshot above).

Why can't I download Battery Mode?

Q I read about Battery Mode 4.1 (www.snipca.com/37343) in Issue 600's Best Free Software (page 19), and tried to download it – but I couldn't. I got an error message about an 'SSL overlap'. I emailed the developer but they couldn't help. Any ideas?

Ray Gosh

A This typically indicates a problem with Firefox's SSL security settings, which is the browser you told us you're using. We can't know how or why it happened but a change to one of these settings can lead to this error message. To fix it, we'd suggest restoring any changed settings to their defaults.

First, click in the address bar, type **about:config** and press Enter. Next, in the search box below the address bar, type **ssl** (there's no need to press Enter). Look through the displayed list for any entries highlighted in bold: these are ones that aren't the defaults set when Firefox was first installed. To reset an entry, just click the little curly arrow on its right-hand side. You could work methodically, and try the download after each reset, or just do the lot to put Firefox back to its freshly installed condition.

Jargon Buster

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

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

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

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

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

Active noise cancelling Method for reducing unwanted sound by adding a second sound specifically designed to cancel the first.

AES-256 Advanced Encryption Standard. A form of encryption based on a key length of 256 bits.

AMOLED Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel displays. Most commonly used in smartphones, tablets and smartwatches.

Aperture An opening that controls the amount of light entering a camera lens.

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

Augmented reality Lets you view the real world on a screen and add elements from the digital world.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

Beta A version of software that's being tested. Beta versions are 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.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Contrast ratio A measure of the difference between the darkest and lightest possible shades shown by a screen. Screens with higher contrast ratios are good for watching movies or playing games.

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

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

Cryptocurrency An online currency not backed by any country. The most popular is Bitcoin.

DDR2 A type of computer memory, newer than DDR but older and slower than DDR3.

DNS Domain Name System. A technology that associates computers with their addresses on the internet.

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

Dual-SIM A phone that holds two SIM cards, letting you use services from two different networks.

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

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

Frame rate The number of still images, or frames, shown per second to create a moving image. Higher frame rates make games appear smoother and more realistic.

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

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

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

Hotspot A public area covered by a Wi-Fi network that allows you to access the internet, either free or for a fee.

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

HTTPS Hyper Text Transfer Protocol Secure. The secure version of HTTP, the technology that sends data between your browser and the web.

Hyperlink A clickable link that takes you to a new document or website.

Image stabilisation A mechanism built into digital cameras that compensates for any shaking or vibrations that occur during shooting.

Incognito mode A way of browsing online so your browser doesn't save the sites you visit. However, the sites may still be able to track you.

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IP67 International Protection marking. The '6' denotes that a device is resistant to dust, general dirt and sand. The '7' indicates that it can be placed underwater for 30 minutes at depths of up to 1m without effect.

IP68 International Protection marking. The '6' denotes that a device is resistant to dust, general dirt and sand. The '8' indicates that it can be placed underwater for 30 minutes at depths of up to 1.5m without effect.

ISO The light sensitivity of a camera. Higher ISO numbers allow you to shoot without flash in darker situations.

JPEG Joint Photograph Experts Group. A common type of image file created by most digital cameras. Some image quality is lost with each save.

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

Meme Coined by Richard Dawkins, a meme is a type of behaviour that spreads quickly. These can be videos, photos or catchphrases.

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

MicroHDMI A miniature version of HDMI often found on smartphones and tablets.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

MP4 A type of digital movie file often used for portable players.

NTFS New Technology File System. A file system used by all recent versions of Windows.

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

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

Picture-in-picture Shows video in a small moveable screen while you browse the web or watch TV.

Piggybacking Signing into and using someone's Wi-Fi without getting their permission.

QHD Quad High Definition.

QR code Quick Response code. A barcode that can be read using smartphones and dedicated QR-reading devices.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on. Its capacity is measured in megabytes (MB): the more memory your PC has, the more things it can process simultaneously and the faster it will seem.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn. Slight changes in the image each time it is updated combine to give the illusion of movement. For a steady image, the higher the refresh rate, the less flicker you will see.

Root To perform tasks on Android devices that aren't permitted by the manufacturer.

Sandbox A virtual container that you can run programs in safely.

SATA Serial ATA. An interface for connecting hard drives and optical discs to a computer.

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

SIM Subscriber Identity Module. The smart card used by all digital mobile phones. The SIM card carries the user's identity and phone number for accessing the network.

Smishing Scams that involve text messages sent to phones. The term comes from a combination of SMS and phishing.

Source code Program instructions written in a high-level language that are readable by people but not computers.

Splash screen Conveys an impression of what a document will look like. Also refers to the screen you see when an application begins to load.

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

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts. Faster but more expensive than conventional hard drives.

Super AMOLED Samsung's marketing term for describing a screen that has the layer which detects touch built into the screen, rather on top of it. Samsung claims it reflects one-fifth as much sunlight as the first-generation AMOLED.

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.

Temporary file A file created by a browser to store website data. In the days of limited main memory, temporary files were the only way to store large amounts of interim data that the application was generating. Today, main memory is often used instead.

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

Ultrawide Offering a field of view that's wider than traditional digital cameras.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C A new connector that's reversible, letting you plug it in upside down.

VESA Video Electronics Standards Association. A standard mount for attaching monitors on to stands walls and PCs.

Virtual PC A Windows tool that enables you to run a second 'virtual' operating system on a PC, such as running a version of XP in a Windows 7 computer to use older programs.

Water-cooling Lowering a PC's temperature using water rather than fans.

White balance Adjusts the balance of colours in an image to make it look more natural.

Wi-Fi 6 Wi-Fi standard with speeds up to 10 times faster than 802.11ac. Also called 802.11ax.





Widget A small program such as a calendar that runs on the Windows desktop.

Wildcard A character that can be substituted for one or more characters in a web search, much like the blank tile in Scrabble.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

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Frustrated by slow internet speed, **Robert Irvine** turns to drink and tries to...



Boost his Wi-Fi with a beer can

Last month, I celebrated my 46th birthday, although as it was the second one under lockdown, ‘commiserated’ might be a more appropriate word. Like all good parties, it ended up in the kitchen, where I cooked myself a nice birthday meal, while checking my tablet for birthday greetings and bemoaning the shoddy speed of my Wi-Fi.

Although my flat is hardly huge, my wireless router is about six metres (20 feet) from my cooker, which is apparently too great a distance for my internet connection to handle. I can still get online while I boil the potatoes, but apps load slowly, simple tasks hang and video chats freeze, invariably on the other person with their mouth open, about to offer me a large sum of money.

The following day, partly to avoid a hungover trip to the recycling bank, I decided to extend my Wi-Fi range using a beer can. That might sound like the plan of someone who’d opted for ‘hair of the dog’ over a strong black coffee, but it’s a tip I’d spotted on several how-to sites. It sounded like a cheaper solution than buying a Wi-Fi booster and an easier fix than constructing a ‘parabolic antenna’, a la *The A-Team*. The idea is essentially the same, though: the reflective aluminium of the can interior directs the Wi-Fi signal towards the



Watch your fingers – cutting up cans exposes you to sharp edges



Robert’s homemade Wi-Fi booster looks crude but it worked – sort of

dead spot with increased strength. What did I have to lose – except a fingertip as I cut up the can?

With that safety hazard in mind, I put on gloves before attacking a Carlsberg can with a Stanley knife. I should mention that I washed the can first, not wishing to taint my Wi-Fi with the tang of stale beer, and left it to dry for half an hour. I then carefully sliced off the bottom of the can and worked the knife around the top, leaving it attached to the main cylinder by an inch of metal. This would create a base for the Wi-Fi booster when the can was turned upside down.

I used sharp scissors to cut the can vertically all the way down, directly opposite the base attachment, then peeled open the aluminium to produce a ragged (and jagged) radar dish. Finally, I removed the ring pull from the ‘base’ to prevent wobble, and positioned the booster on the back of my router, with the shiny side facing my kitchen. Annoyingly, my router doesn’t have any antennas, so I was unable to thread one through the drinking hole for extra stability and signal focus.

“

This ramshackle contraption would surely get me sacked from *Blue Peter*

”

The resultant ramshackle contraption didn’t fill me with much confidence, and would surely get me sacked from *Blue Peter* should I ever demonstrate it to the nation’s youth. But all that beer drinking and can cutting would be worth the trouble if the thing boosted my Wi-Fi.

I’d earlier used Speedtest.net (www.speedtest.net) to determine that the Wi-Fi speed in my kitchen was 6.41Mbps. That may not sound terrible, but bear in mind that I pay for an “average speed” of 36Mbps through Now Broadband. I ran the test again with my homemade booster in place, and – incredibly – there was an improvement. I wish I could say that the speed had doubled, but in fact it had only risen slightly to 7.04Mbps.

For the sake of scientific rigour, I repeated the test several times with and without the crude reflector, and the can undoubtedly made my connection a bit faster. Probably not enough to justify the minor wounds to my hands, once I’d removed the gloves, but it did sort of work. Perhaps I’ll ask for a proper Wi-Fi extender for my next birthday.



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