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WELCOME

TAKE OUR 2021 READER SURVEY PAGE 31

From the Editor

As well as a coffee stain and a few cookie crumbs, my keyboard is covered with the countless pinches of salt I had to take whenever Microsoft said that Windows 10 would be the last, final, cross-my-heart-and-hope-to-die version of the operating system. I never believed Microsoft's hype. At some point the inescapable rules of marketing would kick in, and it would realise it needed something 'new' to sell to the public.

And so it has proved. Later this year, probably in October, Windows 11 will arrive. That much we know.

Whether your computer will be able to run it is another question entirely. Microsoft's decision to restrict the new system to machines running TPM 2.0 chips has baffled and outraged many people.

We analyse this in our Cover Feature, and explain how to check whether your computer is ready for Windows 11. We also explain how to replicate its new tools on your computer, even if your machine can't run it. Now, time to clean my keyboard.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

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6 to 12 inches
How far you should keep iPads away from pacemakers – *p8*

19 hours
Battery life of the new Amazon Fire HD 10 – *p24*

£9
Price of crimping tools for reattaching Ethernet connectors – *p69*

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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Group Editor Daniel Booth
Deputy Editor Will Stapley
Production Editor Graham Brown
Art Editor Katie Peat
Contributors Dinah Greek, Robert Irvine, Jonathan Parkyn, Nick Peers, Nik Rawlinson, Andy Shaw

ADVERTISING
Group Advertising Director Andrea Mason
Deputy Advertising Manager Rebecca New

MARKETING AND CIRCULATION
Subscriptions Charline Kuehn
For subscription enquiries ring 0330 333 9493

PRODUCTION
Head of Production
Stephen Catherall
Senior Production Manager
Lawrence Brookes

MANAGEMENT
Managing Director Dharmesh Mistry
MD of Advertising Julian Lloyd-Evans
Commercial and Retail Director David Barker
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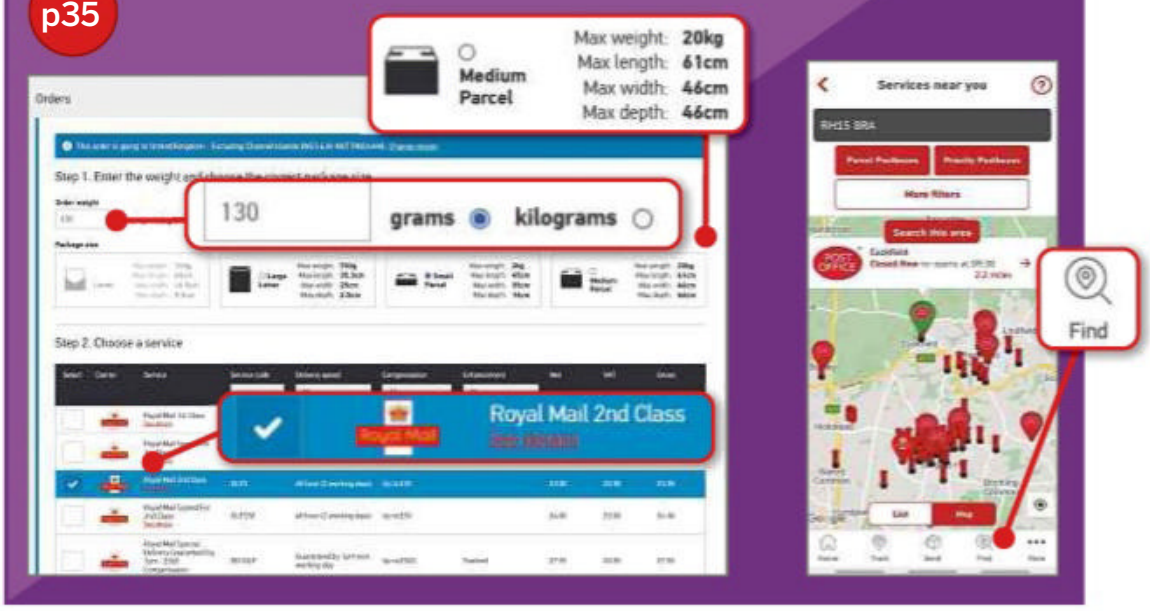


Windows 11 Try All The New Tools Today!

BUT will your PC actually be able to run it? How to check now

Microsoft pulls ‘confusing’ Windows 11 compatibility tool

Microsoft has admitted that its tool for checking whether your computer can run Windows 11 caused confusion because it didn’t provide enough information.

WHAT WE THINK

So the arrival of a new version of Windows has caused mass confusion. Who’d have thought? Sarcasm aside, it’s staggering that Microsoft didn’t realise users would want more details about why their computers couldn’t run Windows 11. It feels like typical ‘we know best’ arrogance, as though Microsoft expects you simply to accept its verdict without further explanation. Still, we commend the company for quickly realising its mistake. There’s bound to be much more to explain in the next few months, so we’ll work hard to keep you informed.

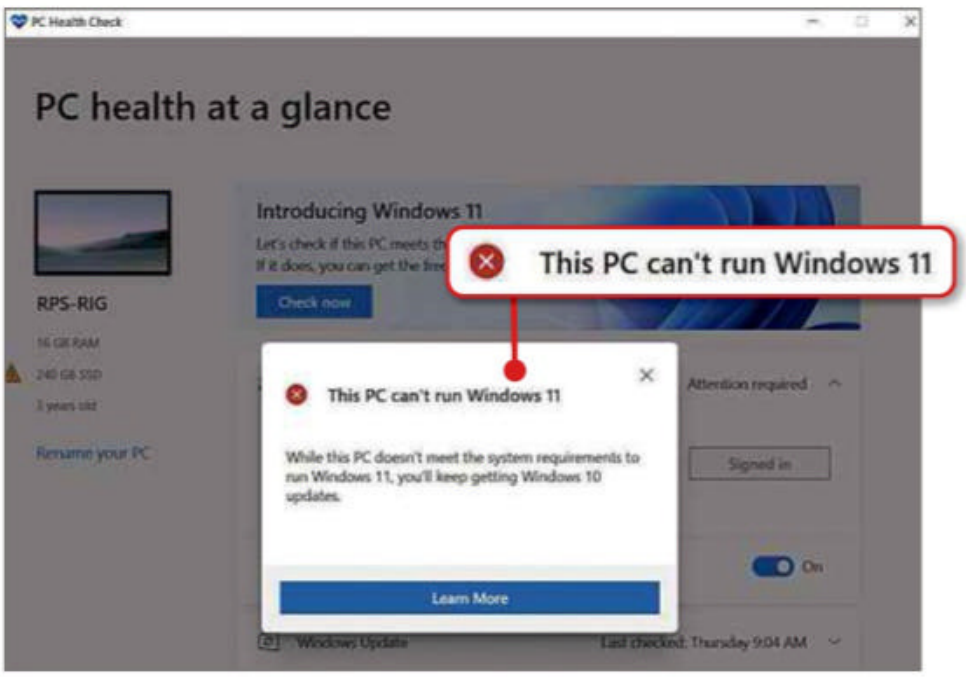
The company launched its PC Health Check tool in late June, when it unveiled Windows 11, and advised users to download it so they could check whether their computer’s specifications would be advanced enough to cope with Windows 11.

But the tool was strongly criticised by frustrated users for not providing details about why their computer wouldn’t be able to run the new operating system.

Instead it showed a message with the heading ‘This PC can’t run Windows 11’ (pictured). It continued: ‘While this PC doesn’t meet the system requirements to run Windows 11, you’ll keep getting Windows 10 updates’.

Microsoft has since removed the tool, saying it will return in the autumn.

Commenting on the tool in a blog post (www.snipca.com/38838), the company said: “Based on the feedback so far, we acknowledge that it was not fully prepared to share the level of detail or accuracy you expected from us on why a Windows 10 PC doesn’t meet upgrade requirements.”



The message was especially confusing for users who felt their PC met the minimum system requirements for Windows 11, as outlined by Microsoft at www.snipca.com/38839. The main reason many new PCs failed the PC Health Check seems to be that the Trusted Platform Module or TPM 2.0 chip hadn’t been activated – we explain how to do this on page 53.

System requirement ‘principles’

Microsoft also addressed criticisms that Windows 11’s system requirements are too high, potentially forcing users to stick with Windows 10 or buy a new computer with more powerful hardware.

It said: “We need a minimum system requirement that enables us to adapt software and hardware to keep pace with people’s expectations, needs and harness the true value and power of the PC to deliver the best experiences, now and in the future.”

Security, reliability and compatibility are the three principles that determine the system requirements, it added.

Microsoft wants all Windows 11 computers to work with Windows Hello, which signs you in using face recognition or your fingerprint. This requires support for TPM.

It also wants PCs to have the latest processors in order to achieve a “99.8 per cent crash-free experience”, and for programs such as Office and Teams to work effectively.

• **If you want to try Windows 11’s new tools and see whether you can run it, turn to page 50**

BLACK IS THE NEW BLUE SCREEN OF DEATH

The infamous Blue Screen of Death will be black in Windows 11, according to the first preview build of the operating system. This will match the new black log-in and shutdown screens. It’s the first change to Windows’ error screen since 2016, when Microsoft added a QR code that you can scan to find out why your computer crashed.

You’ll like this...
Phone network Giffgaff has increased its data at no extra cost (www.snipca.com/38834)

but not this...
Police have warned of a rise in hacked WhatsApp accounts (www.snipca.com/38841)

BT working with OneWeb to give UK satellite broadband

BT has signed a deal with satellite operator OneWeb to explore how they can bring broadband to remote parts of the UK that won't be covered by the Government's £5bn Project Gigabit programme.

They will also examine whether satellites can link up to new mobile masts in order to improve phone signals.

OneWeb, part-owned by the Government, has over 250 satellites in a low-Earth orbit, and says it will start providing services by November. As well as the UK, these will cover Alaska, Canada, northern Europe, Greenland, Iceland, and the Arctic seas.

Long term, it plans to run a system of 648 satellites in order to provide global coverage by around the end of 2022. It will rival Starlink, owned by tech entrepreneur Elon Musk, which has launched more than 1,800 satellites and began providing broadband to UK customers in January.

Satellite broadband has the potential to cover wide areas, but it has always suffered from slow latency, which is the time it takes for a signal sent from a satellite to reach a dish on Earth. This can lead to a stuttering connection, particularly when streaming and gaming.

However, Starlink's satellites orbit at an altitude of 340 miles, which is low enough to sharply cut the latency. Its customers report speeds of around 80Mbps – a target that OneWeb will expect to match when its rival service launches.

Meanwhile, Virgin Media is for the first time using the Government's Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme (www.snipca.com/38782) to extend their Fibre-to-the-Premises (FTTP) network. Residents in the West Sussex villages of Bramber, Steyning and Upper Beeding have been invited to apply at www.virginmedia.com/gbvs.

The company, which has just merged with O2, didn't say whether more areas will soon be covered.

Tax phones and tablets to fund the arts, say stars

Smartphones, tablets and other electronic devices should be taxed in order to set up a fund for the arts, leading creative figures have said.

In a letter to *The Times*, more than 100 signatories, including actresses Olivia Colman, Imelda Staunton and Celia Imrie, called for a levy of between one to three per cent on devices that "store and download creative content".

They argue that the so-called Smart Fund would compensate artists for lost royalties when their work is downloaded and stored by users, such as when a painting is saved as a phone wallpaper or a film is streamed illegally on a laptop.

The campaign is being led by the Design and Artists Copyright Society (DACS), which says the levy would bring the UK into line with 44 countries with similar laws.

However, industry body Tech UK said it sounded like a "new tax" on consumers.

A spokeswoman said: "It is an arbitrary tax on consumers that is hugely bureaucratic to manage, and with no transparency on how funds are disbursed and spent".

She added: "Shoppers buying a new phone or laptop might have a lot of questions about why they should have to pay such additional charges, when they already pay a significant amount of VAT."

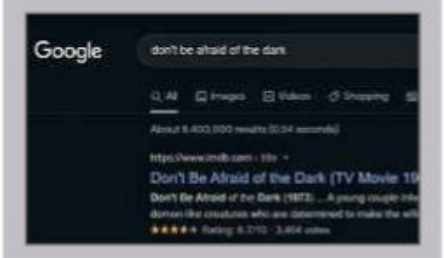
Other signatories to the letter included *Bergerac* and *Midsomer Murders* star John Nettles, *Chocolat* author Joanne Harris, and *Sgt Pepper*'s artist Sir Peter Blake.

Would you be happy to pay more for devices in order to fund the arts? Let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

IN BRIEF

TURN ON GOOGLE SEARCH DARK MODE

Google is finally launching a 'dark' version of its search page, showing white text on a black background (pictured), after testing it for the past few months. To turn it on, click the 'Change theme' icon (a sun) at the top right. If you don't see it yet, keep checking every few days.



SALLY ARMY HACKED BY RANSOMWARE

The Salvation Army has admitted that it has been the victim of a ransomware hack, and is contacting people affected, including staff and volunteers. The charity told the *Register* site that its services for the "vulnerable people who depend on us" continue as normal. It didn't give any details about the type of data hacked or the identity of the attackers.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

Patented by Facebook, this absurd-looking 'artificial reality hat' has a screen fitted to the brim that shows computer-generated images. It claims that as well as visors and baseball caps, the screen can be attached to cowboy hats and even fedoras. Who's spinning in their grave faster – John Wayne or Humphrey Bogart?

IN BRIEF

PEOPLE DON'T KNOW OVENS AFFECT WI-FI

Three-quarters of people don't realise that microwave ovens can interfere with Wi-Fi, while eight per cent think hitting their router can help fix problems, according to a new survey from internet provider Zen Internet. Ovens use the same frequency (2.4GHz) as some routers, so any energy that leaks through the protective shield can affect wireless signals.

GOOGLE BANS SCAM FINANCIAL ADVERTS

Google is clamping down on financial scams shown in its UK search results following pressure from the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). It said that from 30 August any firm advertising financial services must be authorised by the FCA. Last year the FCA issued 1,200 warnings about financial scams online. Read Google's announcement at www.snipca.com/38833.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

Kids faking colds to bunk off school is nothing new, but now they're pretending to have Covid-19 to justify a day (or 10) in bed. Videos spreading online (pictured) show how drops of fruit juice – except grapefruit, apparently – can produce a positive result in lateral flow tests. Bananas.

EE and O2 bring back data-roaming fees within the EU

EE and O2 have reintroduced data-roaming fees for UK customers travelling in the European Union, which means you can be charged extra for using your phone when abroad.

These fees were abolished in 2017, but they weren't included in the UK's withdrawal agreement from the EU. This meant that from January networks were again allowed to start charging customers for using data in the EU, though until now EE and O2, along with Three and Vodafone, had repeatedly said they had no plans to do so.

EE's new policy charges customers a flat daily fee of £2 for using their phone in 47 European countries – whether or not they're in the EU – except Ireland. It said the charges will help them invest in their UK-based customer service and network.

The change doesn't affect existing customers on a contract – only those who sign up to a new deal after 7 July. Customers on Flex or pay-as-you-go (PAYG) plans are excluded too.

Meanwhile, from 2 August O2 will charge pay-monthly customers travelling to the EU £3.50 for every GB of data they use once they go past a 25GB limit. The company said that "less than one per cent" of its customers reach "anywhere near 25GB during occasional travel to Europe".

WI-FI CALLING FOR MORE EE CUSTOMERS

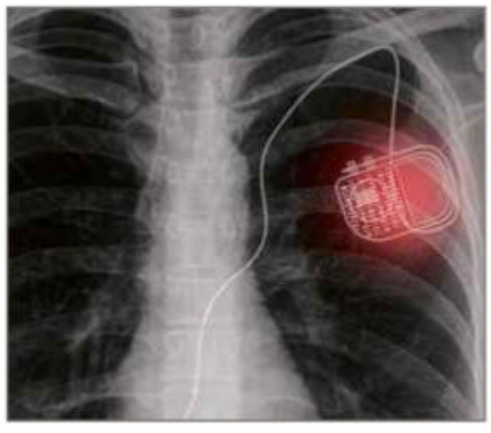
EE is offering Wi-Fi Calling to customers on pay-as-you-go and 'no-contract' Flex packages, letting you make calls via your home broadband. EE is also providing 4G Calling to these customers, which keeps calls on 4G rather than dropping them to 2G or 3G. Both services were already available to EE customers on a monthly contract.

Apple: keep iPads away from pacemakers

Apple has named which of its products should be kept away from people with medical devices like pacemakers and implanted defibrillators.

The list (www.snipca.com/38786) includes the iPhone 12 range, released last year, despite Apple previously saying that the devices were "not expected to pose a greater risk of magnetic interference to medical devices".

In June, the American Heart Association published a small study showing that 11 of 14 pacemakers and implantable defibrillators experienced interference when an iPhone 12 Pro Max was held within 1.5cm, even when the medical device was still in a sealed package.



AirPods earphones are also on Apple's list, along with both the MacBook Air and MacBook Pro, and *all* iPads. Apple said devices should be kept more than six inches (15 centimetres) apart when in normal use, rising to 12 inches (30 centimetres) apart if they're charging wirelessly.

The risk, Apple said, is that "under certain conditions" the magnets and electromagnetic fields used in the products might interfere with medical devices. It gives the example that "implanted pacemakers and defibrillators might contain sensors that respond to magnets and radios when in close contact".

It added that you should "consult with your physician and your device manufacturer for specific guidelines".

Other manufacturers have issued similar advice, including Samsung (www.snipca.com/38788) and Huawei (www.snipca.com/38789).

Watchdog to probe fake reviews on Amazon and Google

The UK's competition watchdog is to formally investigate whether Amazon and Google have broken consumer law by not doing enough to protect shoppers from fake reviews online.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) initially investigated websites last year, assessing whether they had sufficient systems for detecting and removing fake reviews. This raised concerns specifically about Amazon and Google.

Part of its new investigation will look at examples where "the same users have reviewed the same range of products or businesses at similar times to each other and there is no connection between those products or businesses".

It will also examine reviews that suggest "the reviewer has received a payment or other incentive to write a positive review".

The CMA said it could take "enforcement action" against Amazon and Google if it concluded they had broken the law. This could include securing commitments from the sites to change how they handle fake reviews, and may end up "escalating to court action if needed".

It will also assess how to punish people who place repeated fake reviews, and deter them from doing so.

Andrea Coscelli, the CMA's Chief Executive, said: "Our worry is that millions of online shoppers could be misled by reading fake reviews and then spending their money based on those recommendations."

She added: "Equally, it's not fair if some businesses can fake 5-star reviews to give their products or services the most prominence, while law-abiding businesses lose out."

An Amazon spokesman said it devoted "significant resources to preventing fake or incentivised reviews from appearing in our store".

However, last month it accused social-media companies of not doing enough to prevent fake reviews being sold on their sites (see Issue 609, page 8). Amazon said that in 2020 it removed 200 million fake reviews from its pages.

Emergency video services for deaf people coming in 2022

Ofcom is to force all broadband and phone providers to offer a free 24-hour video-relay service to let British Sign Language (BSL) users make calls to emergency services.

Currently, companies have to offer a text-relay service only, approved by Ofcom, though you can also send text messages to 999.

However, these services rely on written English, which can cause problems for BSL users in emergency situations.

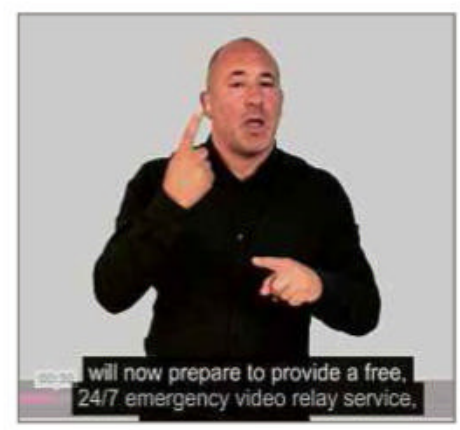
But from June 2022, companies will have to provide a specific app and website for contacting emergency services by video.

Any data that you use to make the call will be 'zero rated', meaning it will be free to use, just like other emergency calls are.

Ofcom says this will let BSL users better describe "the nature of the emergency and understand potentially life-saving instructions from the emergency services".

Using the new system, a deaf person will be able to make a video call to a "qualified and experienced interpreter" in a call centre. People won't have to register to use the service.

Ofcom added that the existing text-relay and 999 services will continue, following feedback from the deaf community.



Firms have until 1 October to submit their proposals for a video-relay service, using Ofcom's criteria.

For more information and a BSL video explaining the news (pictured), visit www.snipca.com/38716.

IN BRIEF

USE 4G AND 5G ON LONDON TUBE BY 2024

There will be full 4G and 5G mobile coverage across London Underground by 2024, in a move that mayor Sadiq Khan said will "stimulate" the city's economy. Transport for London hopes the first fully connected stations will be ready by the end of 2022. All mobile firms will be able to use the new network.

'COVID AIR-PURIFIER' SITE TAKEN OFFLINE

A website selling an air purifier that claims to kill coronavirus cells has been taken offline. The site, called 'Protect-NHS' despite having nothing to do with the NHS, said the £570 Go-Vi Eradicator 19 (pictured) had been proven to kill the virus. However, the Advertising Standards Authority said the claims were misleading and could not be substantiated. Go-Vi Ltd, based in Worthing, disputed the verdict, and has closed the site as part of a "change in their business model".

551 MORE TOWNS TO GET FIBRE BROADBAND

Openreach has added 551 more towns and cities to its list of locations getting full-fibre broadband. It covers around five million homes and businesses in places including Bournemouth, Ipswich, Dunfermline and Wrexham. Work will start later this week, though some areas won't be finished until 2026. Download the full location list from www.snipca.com/38748 – look in the '22/23 – 24/25' column for new areas.

Question of the Fortnight

Will sites censor views that aren't 'politically correct'?

Campaigners say new law will be 'catastrophic' for freedom of speech

You chuckle along to a provocative newspaper column online, then decide to share it on Facebook. A few hours later you check to see who liked the column, but it's not there. Instead, you see a message telling you it's been removed because it contains 'harmful' content. You rightly wonder why a column freely available online, and read possibly by millions, has fallen foul of Facebook.

This is what free-speech campaigners fear will be the "catastrophic" side-effect of the Government's new Online Safety Bill. The law is primarily designed to force social-media sites to remove terrorist material, images of child abuse, and content that incites violence.

> Forcing US companies to police Britons' speech online seems out of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

But crucially, it also covers content that doesn't break the law but is judged to be harmful, such as posts that contain misinformation.

Index of Censorship (www.indexoncensorship.org), a UK group that fights for free expression throughout the world, has launched the 'Legal to say. Legal to type' campaign to oppose the bill, backed by figures including Jim Killock, Chief Executive at Open Rights Group, and Conservative MP David Davis.

It argues that the law will create "two tiers of free speech online", letting journalists write what they like, but censoring the public for sharing the articles, or expressing similar views. It says that because the definition of 'harmful' is so open to interpretation, the law could be used to "regulate ideas that people in the UK should be free to express".

The question of *who* is judging what's harmful is central to campaigners' unease. Sites will have a strong financial incentive to remove harmful content because if they don't Ofcom can fine them £18 million or 10 per cent annual global takings, whichever is greater.

Faced with hefty fines, it's easy to see sites adopting a precautionary approach by removing much more than they need to. Jim Killock thinks that "the threat of colossal fines or even jail time for directors will cause tech platforms to overreact, prompting them to remove content that is perfectly legal".

Index of Censorship said the law turns Ofcom into a "super regulator of free speech", describing it as the UK's first "state regulator over the written word" in over 300 years. It added that the law effectively outsources internet policing from UK courts to Silicon Valley.

The Government has tried to soothe concerns by saying sites will have safeguards to ensure freedom of speech. These include methods that let people appeal against the removal of content. But how many ordinary people with busy lives would be prepared to do that? And what incentive is there for sites to respond promptly?

Mr Davis slammed the bill as a "censor's charter", warning that "lobby groups will be able to push social networks to take down content they view as not politically correct, even though the content is legal".

He added: "The idea we should force Silicon Valley companies to police Briton's speech online seems out of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and is not what our voters expect of us."

His fears are reinforced by the prospect of sites using algorithms to identify and remove comments. Media lawyer Gavin Millar QC, who's also backing the campaign, said algorithms "will make decisions without context, nuance and an understanding of our laws and culture".

Index on Censorship predicts this blunt approach will even trip up "irony-loving Brits", who tend to use sarcasm online more often than other nationalities. If modern algorithms can't deal with the lowest form of wit, then we may have to start saying what we actually mean.

THE FACTS

- Campaigners warn that the Government's Online Safety Bill will give social-media sites too much power to censor us online.
- They say sites like Facebook will use algorithms to identify and remove content that's deemed 'legal but harmful'.
- The main purpose of the bill is to force sites to do more to remove terrorist material, images of child abuse, and content that incites racial hatred and violence.

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Fake ‘Coronavirus Digital Passport’ emails

Scammers are sending emails impersonating the NHS that urge you to apply for a ‘Coronavirus Digital Passport’. The emails claim that this passport is “documentation proving that you have been vaccinated against COVID-19 or you recently recovered from COVID-19”, and will therefore let you “travel safely and freely around the world without having to self-isolate”.

It pretends the passport contains a digital signature that’s embedded in a QR code. This will be scanned by border staff when you enter a country. To get the passport you’re asked to click a blue ‘Get Digital Passport’ link (1 in screenshot), which supposedly takes you to the ‘NHS portal’, but actually sends you to a fake site that asks for your payment details.

How can you stay safe?

Make sure you read the official sources for how to get proof of your Covid jabs.

In England, you can get the NHS Covid Pass through the NHS app (*not* the NHS COVID-19 app) at www.snipca.com/38729 or the NHS website: www.snipca.com/38730.

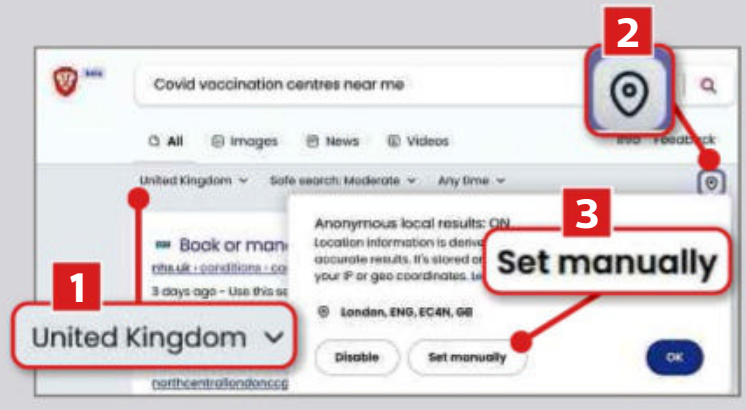
Also, read Gov.UK’s advice on what the pass allows you to do: www.snipca.com/38728.

In Scotland, visit www.snipca.com/38731 for details on proving your ‘vaccination status’, while both Northern Ireland (www.snipca.com/38732) and Wales (www.snipca.com/38733) are working on printed and digital methods of showing that you’ve had the jab. Also make a note that scammers will continue to exploit every aspect of the pandemic until it’s finally over. As scams go, this isn’t especially sophisticated. Yes, it has the NHS logo, but it looks amateurish and has a clumsy formatting error at the bottom where the sentence abruptly ends after ‘QR code;’.

This is followed by a new paragraph beginning with ‘border staff’, starting with a lower-case b 2.

New tools | Brave Search https://search.brave.com

To tackle Google, you have to be Brave. This privacy-focused firm already has a superb browser (https://brave.com) that blocks adverts, trackers and pop-ups. It has now launched a beta search engine that promises to not create advertising profiles based on what you search for.



Brave Search *will* show adverts once it’s out of beta, but these won’t be based on your data, and you’ll be able to turn them off (read more at www.snipca.com/38778). It has built its own index of results, so most of them don’t come from Google or Microsoft (even privacy champions DuckDuckGo uses Microsoft’s Bing for its results).

You don’t need to install Brave to try the search engine – just visit https://search.brave.com in any browser. Change your location to UK (1 in screenshot), then click the map pin 2 and click ‘Set manually’ 3. Now drag the map to where you live. This will make sure your results are local to you.

Brave isn’t the only browser offering better and more private tools than Google and Edge – Firefox, Opera and Vivaldi are all doing so too. We’ll reveal more ways to use them in our next Cover Feature, out Wednesday 28 July.

ScamWatch
Readers warn readers

‘48 hours to avoid being cut off’

I live in Hampshire and recently received an automated call purporting to be a follow up to a missed call. It told me that there had been illegal activity reported on my internet connection, and as a result I would be cut off within 48 hours. It then gave me a couple of options to press to help resolve this issue. Being old but streetwise, I knew this was rubbish and hung up. But it struck me that someone more trusting of automated systems may well have fallen for it. It sounds like the scam Staffordshire Police were warning about back in 2019: www.snipca.com/38712.

John Craggs

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

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

'Desperate bribe' to give poor homes gigabit speeds

Giving low-income households cheaper gigabit broadband is an awful idea ('Question of the Fortnight', Issue 609). At least, it's an awful idea until gigabit is also available to 99 per cent of the population at a fairly affordable price. Nobody likes to be on a low income, but it's not logical nor fair to give them a superior service at a discount. Instead, internet providers should continue to promote their 'basic' packages for people on benefits, keeping them affordable.

The reason it makes more sense to focus on benefits not income is that you avoid having to choose a salary cliff-edge beyond which you're not entitled to a discount. For example, why would it be fair for a household on £25,000 (to pick a reasonable figure) to get subsidised broadband, but not their neighbours on £25,001? Imagine if that latter family can't afford more than 24Mbps, and what they'd think if their neighbour was catapulted up to gigabit.

They're bound to see it as an immoral giveaway, or even a desperate bribe from the authorities to justify the billions they're spending on gigabit infrastructure throughout the country.

Frank Atkinson

Avoid Times New Roman in CVs? Absolute tripe!

While reading your news story regarding Microsoft asking people what the new default Office font should be (Issue 606, page 9), I was reminded of a niggling event that happened at a mandatory CV workshop I attended at my local Jobcentre a few years ago.

The person speaking to us was very clear that we should use only Times New Roman, because employers simply wouldn't read a CV written in other fonts. Nobody queried this advice, though I knew it was absolute tripe. Over the years many unemployed people have actually been told to *avoid* Times New Roman, which is why I opted for Calibri.

It was just another example of IT ineptitude from the Jobcentre and other Government-contracted service providers, who claim to know best.

Robert McMillan

I saw the light after your RAM advice

I'd like to thank you for another 'light bulb' moment you gave me (they occur quite often) regarding your reply to Jeff Barlow in Issue 608's Problems Solved (page 67). I wanted to upgrade the RAM in one of my PCs and went through the same process as Jeff (as it happens, exactly the same modules – Crucial's DDR3 1600MHZ CL11).

Like Jeff, I ordered two of these modules, but not from Amazon. When they arrived, I noticed that the density of the chips was different, but didn't realise the implications. Needless to say, as this PC is not young, they didn't work, and so I sent them back.

On seeing your reply to Jeff, I ordered again but this time from Amazon, and paid attention to the actual code as you highlighted. I received low-density modules and – bingo – they work perfectly. Job done.

Bob Faris

Stop forcing us oldies into tech we don't need

The letter from Simon Kidman (Issue 607) stating that 'councillors should move with the times' is simple age discrimination! Am I correct in assuming that he includes many over-60s who do not have a computer, or want access to the internet?

Why should we be hustled into a way of life that we are not conversant with? For many, technology is moving too rapidly and should not be forced upon us. Give us a break, you youngsters!

Lawrence 'Jeff' Jefferson

Surely there's something better than 2FA?

Like many readers recently, I too hate two-factor authentication (2FA). I first got a mobile phone for emergency use, when working late in unsavoury areas, or when out in my classic car, and to be honest that's all I still want one for.

I was quite happy with a small and 'stupid' (ie, not smart) phone that fitted nicely in my pocket, but the smartphone I have now (free from my brother when my old one died) is an oversized lump that's not comfortable in my pockets.

When I'm in the house, it lives on the charger in my bedroom. When I'm on the computer (which is upstairs), I might need to log in or make some kind of transaction, only to be informed that they have to send a code – meaning I have to get up, then go downstairs and fetch the damn phone. Surely there must be a better way?

Eddie Dicker

What's the Issue...?

I'm a long-time subscriber and in a recent issue I remember reading a small piece explaining how to stop Microsoft's 'weather thing' appearing on my taskbar. I didn't have this on my computer at the time, but it has now appeared, and I want to remove it. Did this advice appear, or am I losing the plot?

John Langley

CA SAYS **You're still in possession of the plot, John. These instructions appeared in Issue 607, page 21.**

I've got loads of old passwords in Edge that I want to delete. Didn't you recently reveal a quick way of doing this?

Andy Mitcham

CA SAYS **Yes we did, in Issue 606, page 11.**

In which issue did you explain how to record TV to a USB stick? I've just been given a dozen empty sticks that need filling with data.

Jacob Frisch

CA SAYS **It was the first tip in Issue 600's 'Hack Your USB Sticks' Cover Feature (page 51). That'll keep you busy.**

Banks and card providers are falling over themselves to introduce two-factor authentication in the name of improved security. The problem for rural dwellers like myself is that having a slow mobile signal means it can take up to half an hour for the code to arrive on our phone. Sometimes I can rectify this by dashing outside and standing in the middle of our farmyard, to the amusement of our sheep. This is made much harder when it's dark and raining. More often than not, the whole thing takes too long and the code-time expires. After the third attempt I usually give up.

Eddie Runswick

Payment cards could solve 2FA headache

I've a suggestion that, while it won't solve the problem of having to type two-factor authentication codes, might help people who could shop online, but who (like me) choose not to: the universal gift card or advance payment card.

We've all seen the cards offered by Amazon, Argos, Virgin, iTunes and more, which can be used only in the relevant 'store'. If, however, the banks invented a universal card that could be bought in local shops and other outlets (including bank branches, if you could find one), the risk of shopping online would be limited to the amount you paid for the card.

If this represented the value of the goods you want, rounded to say the nearest £5 or £10, the card could be used only once or twice (if you wanted two items) and theft of the number would be pointless because it could not be used beyond its value. If therefore I bought a card for £50, my risk in using it is limited to that amount, not to my credit-card limit. If *Computeractive* could get banks and/or the government to go in this direction, you could make a lot of friends!

Joyce Walmsley

STAR LETTER

A new PC for Windows 11? No thanks!

You mentioned in Issue 609 (page 6) that you had always been sceptical about Microsoft insisting that Windows 10 would be the final version of the operating system. Me too. Microsoft seemed to be treating this claim as though it was an incontrovertible law of thermodynamics, rather than marketing hype – not just that there wouldn't be another Windows, but that there simply *couldn't* be because it would somehow go against nature.

But perhaps Windows 10 will be *my* final version because it appears that my new-ish computer (bought only four years ago) isn't powerful enough to run the new Windows 11.

I discovered this by downloading Microsoft's compatibility tool (from www.snipca.com/38761), which produced the blunt message 'This PC can't run Windows 11'. It doesn't say why, beyond a vague reference to 'system requirements'. I've since read lots of complaints online from other Windows users saying their computers – new ones, not steam-powered – won't work with Windows 11.

What's Microsoft playing at? What's

the point in making Windows 11 free then restricting its use to only the most powerful computers? Is it some cynical ploy to help sell new devices?

Well, I've got news for Microsoft: it won't work. Windows 11 would have to give me a free massage every day and prepare breakfast in bed to persuade me to spend around £1,500 on a new computer. I'm perfectly happy with Windows 10, so I'm going to stick with that.

Gordon Webb

CA SAYS **Gordon's surprise and dismay was echoed by many readers who asked us for clarification on the system requirements needed to run Windows 11. We explain it in our Cover Feature – turn to page 50.**

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

Your recommended cable made my mouse mighty again

Issue 607's Cover Feature ('Master Your PC Ports') was an interesting and informative read. I particularly liked at the end your mention that the old Microsoft Serial Mouse (pictured) is now hard to find. I still have mine and it works fully, but I had been keeping it in the drawer as my Windows 10 PC doesn't have a serial port. However, thanks to your recommendation of UGreen's USB Serial Cable (£9.99 from Amazon www.snipca.com/38320), I can use the mouse again.

This got me thinking about other old computer tech that I'm currently using. As I type this, I'm using a 1997 Microsoft IntelliMouse, and still have a CRT monitor (a Compaq 7500).

In my box of computer spares I still have a 1993 Zenith keyboard, in full working order, though it doesn't have any Windows buttons beside the spacebar. I see no need to buy new when my current tech does the job just fine.

Brad Copping

We used Zoom for church and WI meetings

You recently asked readers for examples of how they've used Zoom during the lockdowns.

I'm on the local parish council, so needed to download Zoom for our meetings. I immediately contacted our vicar and joined the Zoom services every Sunday, along with around 100 other people.

Also, as treasurer of our local Women's Institute group, I decided to arrange a weekly coffee morning online for the ladies, as well as our monthly lecture. However, when our group decided it must close, I created a group named Cameo so we could continue afternoon 'Tea and Chat' meetings online.

Phyllis Jones

Consumeractive

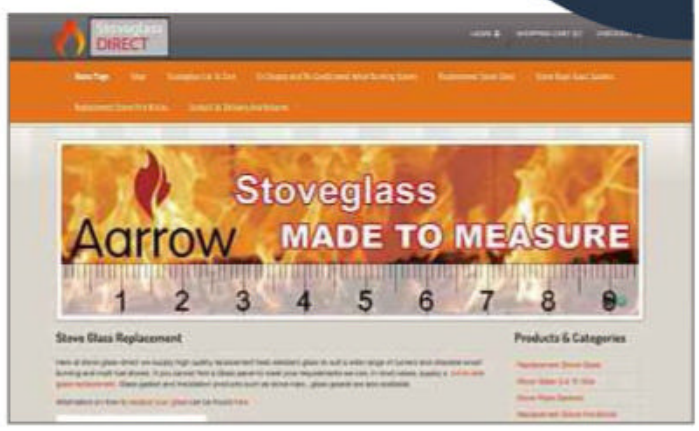
We stand up for your legal rights

I got sites mixed up – can I get a refund?

LEAD CASE

Q I thought I had paid £13.20 for some wood-burning stove parts from a site I've used before, called StoveGlassDirect (https://stoveglassdirect.com). I received an email from the courier Hermes saying delivery was imminent, but nothing has arrived. I since discovered that I mistakenly made the order through a similar-sounding site, called Stoveglass-Direct (https://stoveglass-direct.co.uk, pictured). It's not the same company, and it's refusing to answer my emails. How can I get my money back? Can I get the website to wipe my details? And how can I complain about this site?

Andy Armitage



A Andy's rights aren't affected either positively or negatively by the fact he got the sites mixed up. He's still allowed to reject items within 14 days, and is entitled to refund, repair or replacement if they're faulty. Because he's getting no reply from Stoveglass-Direct, he should ask his bank for a chargeback on his credit or debit card (because the amount is under £100, it doesn't qualify under Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act). If Andy used PayPal, he should make a claim through its Buyer Protection scheme (www.snipca.com/38746).

As for his personal data, Andy can legally compel Stoveglass-Direct to remove it. It has no reason to keep his details once his case has been resolved. He just needs to email the company to make this request. And to complain about the site, he should contact Trading Standards via the Citizens Advice website (www.snipca.com/38749).

We're trying to contact Stoveglass-Direct, which is based in Halifax, and have asked Hermes what happened to Andy's delivery. However, he can't make a claim with Hermes because its contract is with the retailer.

CASE ONGOING

Is retailer or manufacturer responsible for faulty printer?

Q I bought an Epson printer from Amazon seller IT Trade Station (ITS, www.snipca.com/38755) last August, but it has now stopped working. I submitted a returns request through Amazon, which it has sent to ITS. But ITS replied saying I should contact Epson or return the printer to the manufacturer. I just want someone to collect and repair it, or give me a refund, but I don't know which company is responsible. Do you?

Allan Rae

A Yes we do. As the retailer, ITS is responsible for any faulty product it sells. However, because Allan has owned the printer for more than six months he has to prove that the fault is inherent, and hasn't been caused by fair wear and tear. To do this, he'll probably have to pay for it to be independently inspected. If he proves this and returns the printer, ITS will have to refund the cost of this postage and the inspection cost. We'll let ITS know that Allan is considering this. Knowing this often prompts retailers into taking cases more seriously.

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE

Humax admits it can't make reader wait for firmware

Humax has refunded reader Chris Green (see Issue 605) after acknowledging that it has had its one attempt at a repair, and can't force him to wait indefinitely for a firmware update.

When Chris told Humax that the Aura set-top box (pictured) he bought in February was failing to record, made a buzzing sound and had a poor picture quality, it sent him an attenuator which, it hoped, would fix the problems. This counted as Humax's one attempt to repair the box, even though it didn't get its hands on the device.

Chris told Humax that the attenuator made no difference, at which point it had no choice but to refund him. However, it mistakenly thought it was allowed to make him wait for a firmware update that might fix the problems. It was then that he wrote to us, having had no luck getting Humax to respond to his complaints.

It's true that firmware updates can fix problems, but Humax should have tried this before sending the attenuator. It wasn't allowed to offer one solution, then propose another when that failed.

Humax did pick up his box after we contacted it, but he heard nothing about a refund until we nudged the company again. We're disappointed it took so long to act, but pleased that it finally did.

Contact us so we can investigate your case

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

Can Tesco charge more for a SIM-free phone?

Q I needed to buy a new Samsung Galaxy phone to be used on a pay-as-you-go (PAYG) account and found the model I wanted from Tesco. I was told that it would cost £129.99 and be locked to the Tesco Mobile network. However, I wanted to use it on my existing network, which Tesco said would increase the price to £159.99. Is Tesco allowed to charge me an extra £30?

Ken Bickley

A Yes, it is allowed to do this. It's normal and legal for a network to charge more for a phone if you want to 'unlock' it in order to use it on a rival's network (this is called using a phone SIM-free). The cost of the phone is always factored into the cost of your monthly subscription.

Cheaper, older models, often offered with no upfront payment, can look like a bargain. Networks sell these to get you locked into a contract. But before you buy one, you should check whether you can buy an unlocked version, allowing you to switch to a network of your choice. You can then compare the monthly cost of the former's contract with any other contract you can find. Buying a phone unlocked costs more at first, but often saves you money in the long run.

CASE CLOSED

Currys lost my PC *and* data – what should I do?

Q Last year I paid Currys £60 to repair an old HP computer, but it wasn't able to fix it. I got a refund, but then in January I paid it a further £100 to retrieve my data on the PC. However, now Currys says it has lost the computer – presumably along with my data! What am I entitled to?

Mel Latter

A To start with, Mel is entitled to a refund from Currys for failing to retrieve his data, because it failed to complete the task he paid it to do. In addition, Currys might have to pay compensation for causing him 'material' damage (he's lost money or had his identity stolen) or 'non-material' damage (a more general category covering personal distress). If so, then he could take Currys to court and argue his case in front of a judge.

But before taking legal steps, Mel should contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO, https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint). It can't award compensation, but it can give its opinion on whether you have a solid case.

However, it doesn't investigate cases where there has been "an undue delay in bringing it to our attention". It encourages you to raise your case "within

three months of your last meaningful contact with the organisation concerned".

This is an important reminder to keep chasing a company, whether it replies promptly or not.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

CareCo picked up table despite my errors when buying

Last week I ordered a table from CareCo (www.careco.co.uk), who are based in Brentwood, Essex. I wanted to put my laptop on it when I'm sitting on the couch. It arrived within three days and I began to assemble it. However it turned out to be unsuitable for our home – I had misjudged the space needed. Also, it was designed to be used with a chair, something I had overlooked.

I asked CareCo about returning it, noting that the errors were mine. They said that wouldn't be a problem, and suggested their website might have a suitable alternative, but that proved not to be so. I then asked for instructions for returning the table. Again CareCo replied almost immediately, explaining they had arranged for the table to be picked up the following Monday. I'd like to thank them for all their assistance.

Bill Farquhar

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

Contact
CareCo

- **Email** sales@careco.co.uk
- **Phone** 0333 015 5000

Grow Your Family Tree

Think you had relatives that worked in the postal service? **Nick Peers** shows how the web can help you...

Find Royal Mail ancestors

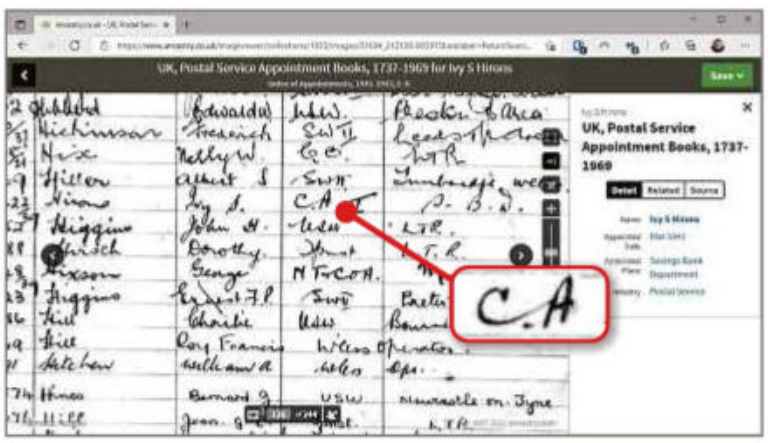
Did any of your ancestors work for the Royal Mail? They may have been posties, worked behind the counter or served in the sorting office. You might know this from stories told by other family members, or perhaps you've found out while examining other records listing their employment – for example, one of the censuses, their service record from World War I, or the 1939 Register.

Trace your ancestors' career path

You should start your search in the Postal Service Appointment Books collection, which covers 1737 to 1969, and lists every employee within the organisation. It's available only with an Ancestry Premium membership (£13.99 per month): www.snipca.com/38556.

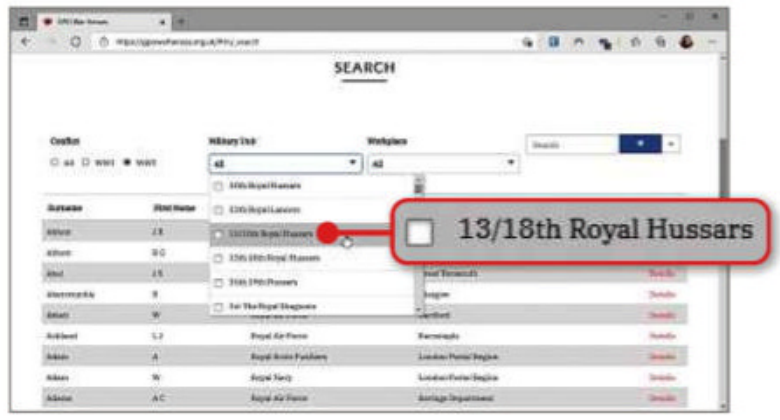
Results reveal the employee's name, as well as when and where they were appointed. Records after 1866 also noted the person's role – click the 'View image' button to the right of a result entry to view a scan of the original document.

Any abbreviated terms are explained in the Postal Museum's Family History Guide (there's a link to it on the collection's main page). We think the 'C.A' in the screenshot below left stands for 'Clerical assistant'.



The Postal Museum's Family History Guide can decipher abbreviations of job titles in the records

Sadly, these are the only employment records available online, but the Postal Museum (based in central London) holds additional resources, including pension records. From 1860 to 1940 these included brief summaries of each employee's career. You can make an appointment to see them in person at www.snipca.com/38680.



Search for ancestors who served and died in war in the Post Office's 'Books of Remembrance'

Check trade union records

Did your ancestor join a trade union? While no membership lists exist online for postal-worker unions, you can download a handy 'family tree' PDF for the Communication Workers Union from the Trade Union Ancestors website (www.snipca.com/38681). This reveals which unions preceded it and when they existed, letting you identify which unions would have been available to your ancestor.

Finally, Post Office employees who served and died during wartime have been commemorated on over 300 individual war memorials across the country, and in two Post Office Books of Remembrance. Both can be viewed online for free.

Start with the Royal Mail's own Memorial Database (www.royalmail.com/memorials/home). Here you can search memorials by keyword (including surname) or browse a map. All results come with a full transcription, a photo of the memorial, and its location on a map should you wish to pay a visit.

You can access the two Books of Remembrance at https://gpowarheroes.org.uk, where you can search for a specific ancestor, or browse a particular section - such as the 13th/18th Royal Hussars shown in the screenshot above. Info includes name, military unit and workplace.

Your **Genealogy** Problems Solved

I'm planning to move from a Windows computer to a Mac. I have a substantial family tree recorded in Family Historian (www.family-historian.co.uk), which is not suitable for Apple computers. Can you suggest alternative Apple genealogy programs?

Stephen Manistre

You could run Family Historian on a Mac using an emulator like Wine (www.winehq.org), but we'd recommend switching to software built specifically for Macs.

You could try Gramps (available for free from www.gramps-project.org), but to get the kind of tools you use in Family Historian you'd be better off with MacFamilyTree (£54.99 from www.snipca.com/38549), which is by far the best Mac genealogy program right now.

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

Next issue: Identify your ancestors' parents

£499.99

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KOLINK Stronghold
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*Sales subject to our terms of sale available online - www.palicomp.co.uk - Configuration issues will be advised by phone - any alternatives will also be advised by phone before proceeding with the order. Systems Custom built then are tested 100% prior to dispatch - dispatched via courier for next working day delivery - other delivery options available online. 0% Finance upto 12 months only - terms online - early settlement fee just £29.00 - apply online or phone. Prices inclusive of VAT and free UK mainland shipping. Q-jump cut-off time 15.00pm.

Best Free Software

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

SYSTEM TOOL

PowerToys 41.4

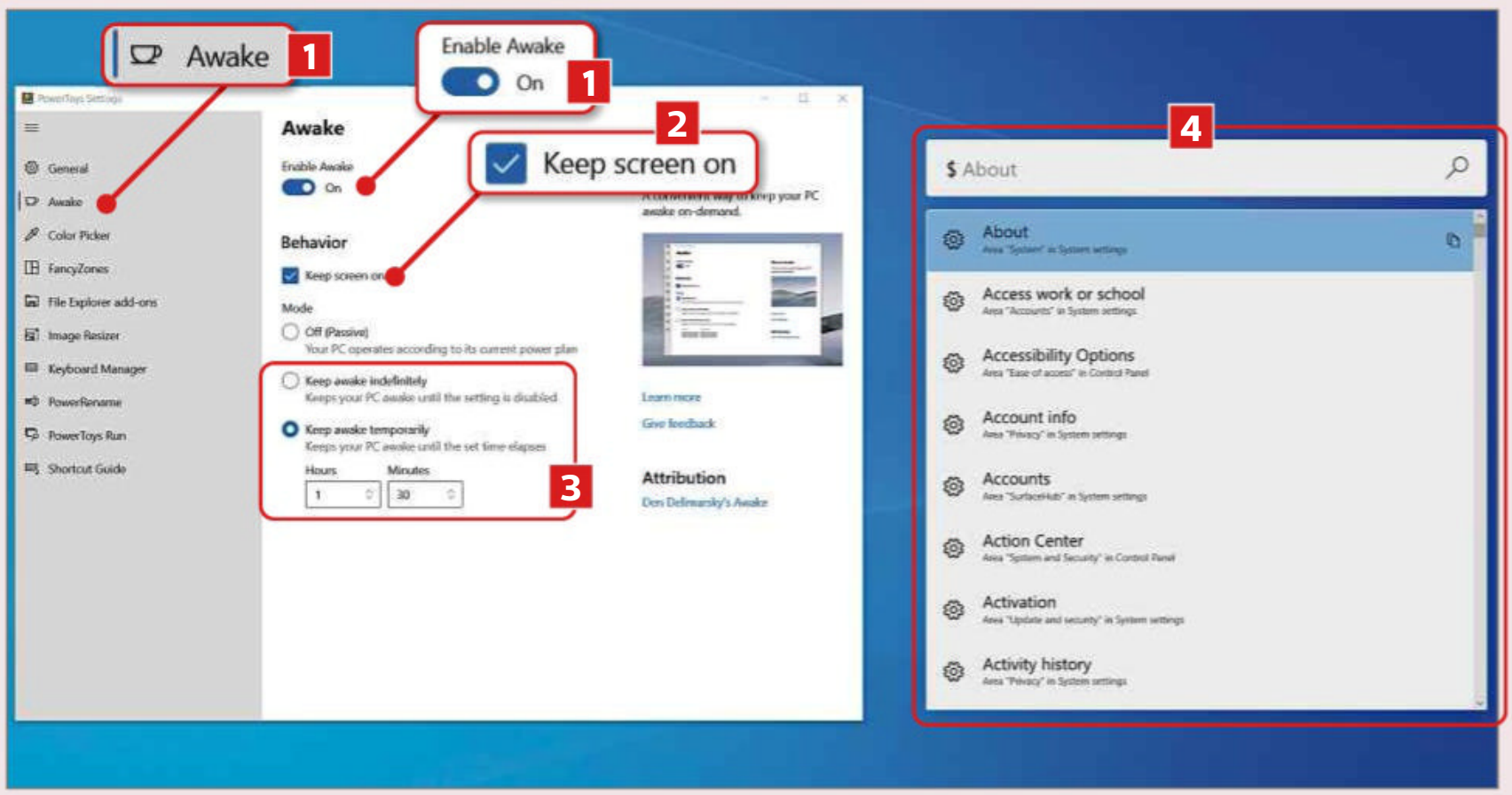
www.snipca.com/38842
What you need: Windows 10

Microsoft's PowerToys suite of system tools has benefited from a number of updates over the past few weeks. To download the latest version, go to the link above then scroll down and click the PowerToys EXE file. If you already have an older version of PowerToys installed you can upgrade within the General tab of the main PowerToys window.

As well as ironing out bugs and improving existing tools, this version adds a tool called Awake, which lets you prevent your computer from going to sleep and your monitor from turning off. This is particularly useful if you're running a task (such as backing up) that doesn't require you to do anything, but is one you'd like to keep an eye on. We explain how to use the Awake tool below.

Version 4.14 also improves the PowerToys Run tool, which lets you launch programs via a small search box. You can now use a selection of new shortcut commands within this search box, including performing quick unit conversions - type %% followed by what you want converted (for example, %% 10lbs in kg). We also like that PowerToys Run lets you quickly search for and open pages in Windows' Settings app (as we also explain below).

FancyZones (the tool that lets you divide your desktop into zones, then drag windows into them so they resize accordingly), now lets you quickly switch between your zone layouts. Simply open the layout editor window by pressing the Windows key+` (the apostrophe key at the top left of most keyboards), then double-click the layout you want to use. You can then drag windows into zones by holding down the Shift key while dragging them.



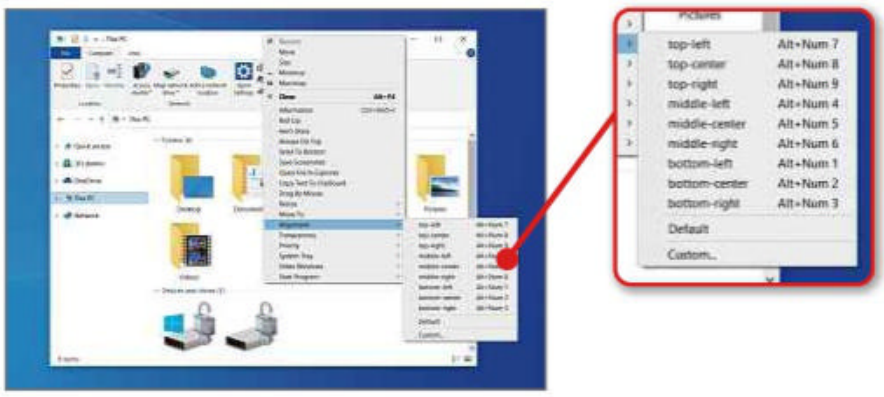
1 To use the new Awake tool, select it in the menu on the left, then click the slider under Enable Awake to switch it on.

2 Awake will keep your computer on, but the default settings mean your monitor will still turn off in accordance with your power settings in Windows. To stop your monitor turning off, tick this box.

3 To prevent your computer from going to sleep for a set period of time, select the 'Keep awake temporarily' mode, then fill in the hour and minutes boxes. Alternatively, select 'Keep awake indefinitely' and it will stay on until you turn Awake off.

4 PowerToys Run now lets you search for pages in the Windows Settings app. Type $ (dollar sign) followed by the page you want, or simply scroll through the list.

DESKTOP TOOL



SmartSystemMenu 2.6.1

www.snipca.com/38849

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1 or 10

Right-click a window's title bar and you'll see the usual Move, Minimise, Maximise and Close options. SmartSystemMenu adds several commands to this menu. Our favourite is the Always On Top option, which ensures the current window is always visible – particularly useful if you're in a video call and want to browse other windows but not lose sight of the person you're talking to. You can also use the tool to organise the windows on your desktop (select Alignment, then choose from a selection of nine desktop positions – see screenshot). This latest version lets you add your own window sizes to the Resize command, which you can then use to quickly make any window exactly the size you want.

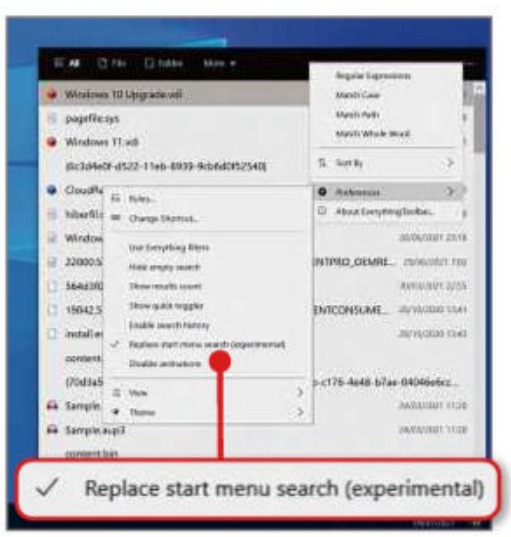
SEARCH TOOL

EverythingToolbar 0.7

www.snipca.com/38847

What you need: Windows 10

EverythingToolbar works alongside the free search tool Everything (install this separately from www.snipca.com/38848), which is a much quicker alternative to the Windows Search tool. This beta release includes a new option that replaces the search box in the Start menu – so if you click Start, then start typing, the search results appear in EverythingToolbar, not Windows Search. To use it, enable EverythingToolbar (right-click the taskbar, select Toolbars, then EverythingToolbar), then click the magnifying-glass icon next to the system tray. In the window that opens, click the three dots (top-right), Preferences, then 'Replace start menu search...' (see screenshot). The developer warns this beta release may have bugs, but it worked well in our tests.



WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

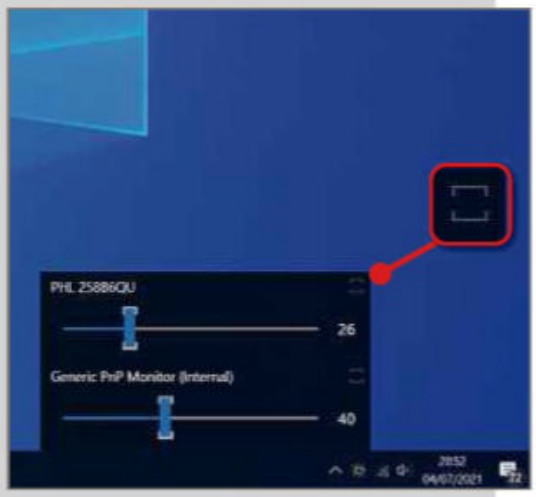
We tell you what software & apps to use

What can I use to dim my monitor's screen?

Q I recently bought a new Dell PC. I'm very happy with everything except for the monitor, which is dazzlingly bright. I tried using the menu buttons to make it dimmer, but I find them fiddly and any changes I make keep getting reset. Can you recommend some free software that will do a better job?

Miles Burton

A Monitorian is a free tool that lets you control your monitor's brightness levels. Version 3.00 launched earlier this month and has a new, cleaner design (download it from the Microsoft Store at www.snipca.com/38843). Once it's installed, you can run it from your system tray – look for the icon featuring a box with eight lines coming from it (click the small up arrow to the left of the system tray icons if you can't see this). Once you've clicked the Monitorian icon a slider will appear, letting you adjust your monitor's brightness level.



If you have multiple monitors, you'll see sliders for each. To change them at the same time, right-click the Monitorian icon and select 'Enable moving in unison'. When adjusting the brightness, you can then click the square-bracket icon (see screenshot) next to those monitors whose brightness you want to adjust. You can also tweak the contrast levels of your monitors - right-click the Monitorian icon and tick the 'Enable changing contrast' option.

You could also try Gammy (click the green button at www.snipca.com/38846), which changes your monitor's brightness depending on what's on screen (for example, increasing the brightness for a website with a black background, then decreasing it when viewing a Word document with a white background). Double-click the Gammy icon (a black circle with a squiggle) in the system tray to adjust its settings, such as preventing Gammy from making your monitor too dim or bright.

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

HOW I USE...

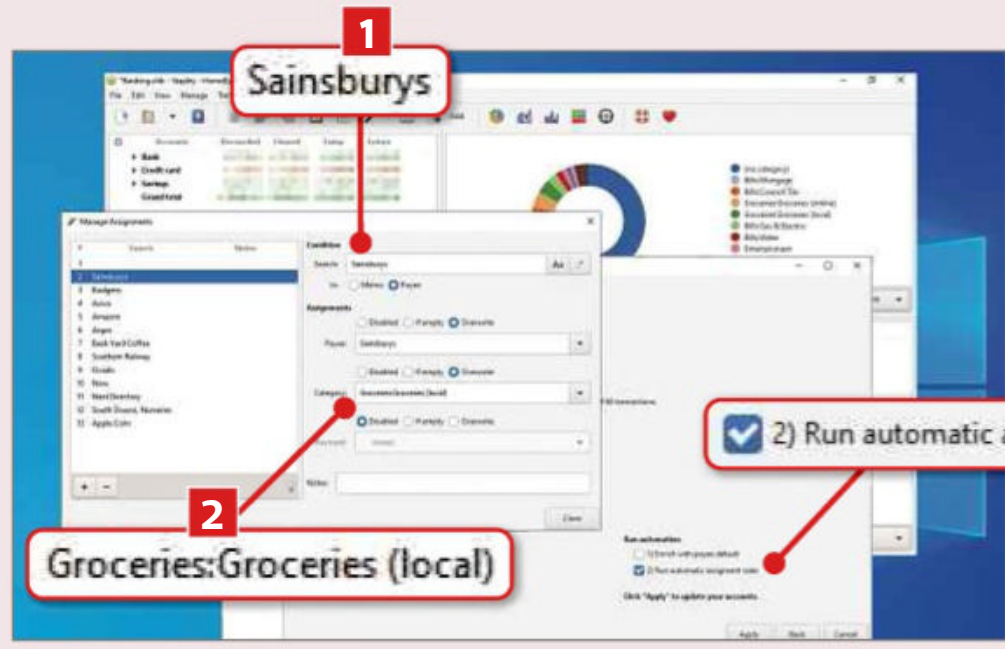
HomeBank

Will Stapley puts his money where his mouse is

There are plenty of online tools to help you keep track of your finances. Many of these link up with your bank accounts to provide real-time transaction updates. That all sounds very handy, but I don't fancy sharing my online banking passcodes with some online tool – no matter how safe they claim to be. Instead, I prefer to keep things simple with HomeBank (www.snipca.com/38840 - click the Homebank EXE link).

Because it works entirely offline, HomeBank needs me to regularly update it with transactions from my various accounts. To do this, I have to export transactions from my accounts using the Open Financial Exchange (OFX) format. The majority of UK banks let you do this, but it's not always made clear how. With my Barclays account, I have to select my account, click 'View transactions', then scroll to the very bottom for the Export All option.

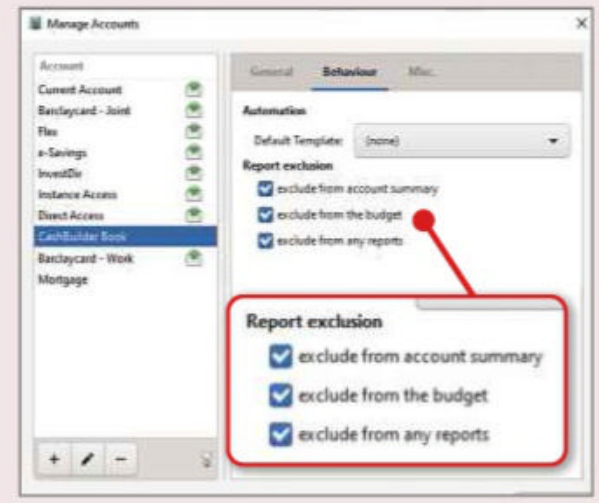
Importing OFX files into HomeBank is easy enough (click File, 'Import...'), but before doing so I recommend you decide precisely how you want to categorise your transactions, because there's no easy way to change categories in bulk once you've assigned them. HomeBank comes with several preset categories, but most are aimed at users in the US (such as Federal Tax Return). I therefore decided to delete all the presets (you can do this while setting up HomeBank – just untick 'Setup categories for my language' when prompted).



Set HomeBank to assign categories to recurring transactions automatically

Creating my own categories took a bit of time, but it was worth it because it lets me generate detailed reports. I have a handful of main categories (Entertainment, Bills, etc), along with numerous subcategories for each ('Days out', Mortgage, etc). This means I can quickly view a broad report on where my money goes, then dive into specific transaction types to reveal just how much I'm spending on freshly roasted coffee beans each month.

I've also set HomeBank to automatically assign these categories to recurring transactions when I import them (select 'Assignments...' in the Manage menu). For each type of transaction, I entered the payee's name (or part of it) in the Search box (1 in our screenshot above) and the appropriate category in the Assignments section 2. When importing transactions, I now just have to remember to tick the 'Run automatic assignment rules' box 3 (we've corrected HomeBank's spelling mistake - can you spot it?)



Exclude specific accounts when generating reports

It's hard not to get carried away with HomeBank. I've loaded it with many accounts, including my mortgage and several savings accounts. However, I don't want my reports to be skewed by these accounts. I've therefore set HomeBank to ignore them when it generates reports. To do this, I opened the Manage menu, selected 'Accounts...', followed by the relevant account, then clicked the Behavior tab. From here, I can tell HomeBank to exclude the account from the summary view, the home screen's budget view and all other reports (see screenshot above).

WHAT I'D LIKE TO SEE IN HOMEBANK

I actually enjoy running reports on my finances, but it's frustrating that HomeBank requires me to create them from scratch each time – selecting the accounts I want to include, the types of transactions and so on. Being able to save custom reports would make things much easier.

Next issue: How I use... BCUninstaller

Named & Shamed

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

WARNING: JUNK AHEAD

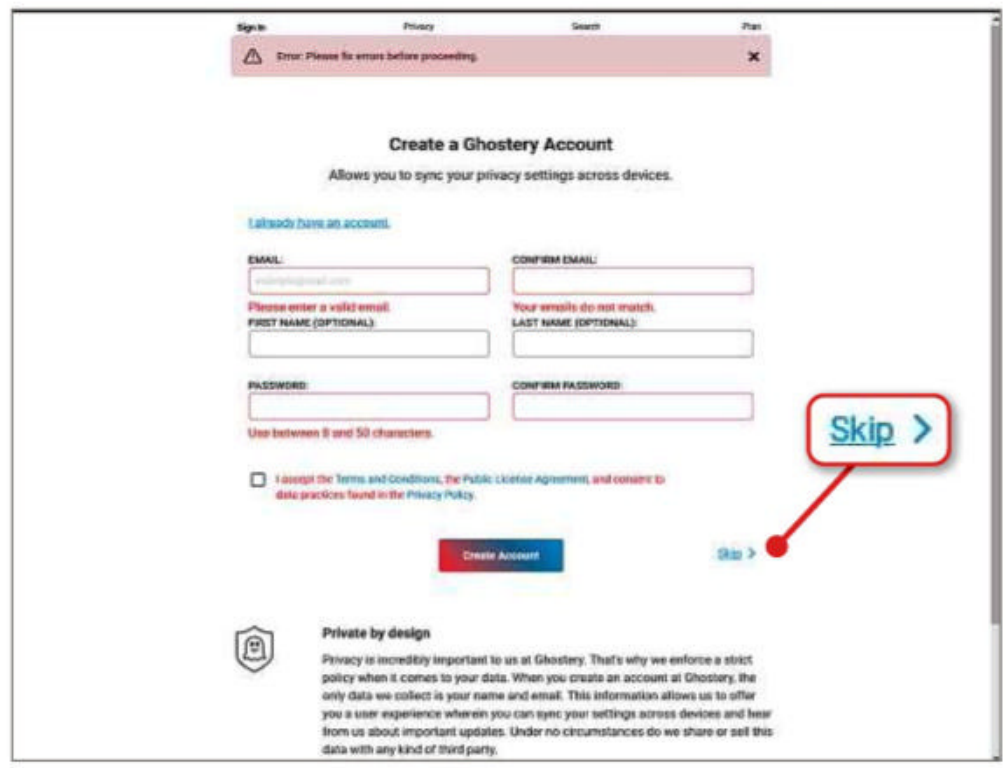
Junk offender: Ghostery Dawn

Question: when does a tool that's supposed to protect you from being pestered by adverts become a nuisance itself? Answer: when it's Ghostery Dawn (www.snipca.com/38790). At least, that's how *Computeractive* reader John Holt felt when he tried the privacy-focused browser. And, having tried it myself, I'm inclined to agree with him.

John wrote to us to complain about Ghostery Dawn's complicated setup process, which he worked through carefully, only to end up with the web browser spamming him with never-ending nag screens.

Ghostery is supposed to be one of the good guys – its browser add-on is a great tool for blocking adverts and trackers – so I was surprised to hear of John's frustrations. My own experience wasn't quite the same, but I was surprised by just how sneaky Ghostery Dawn's setup procedure turned out to be.

First off, you see a form, prompting you to enter your email, name and password to set up an account. Ghostery wants you to think this step is compulsory, making the Skip link almost impossible to notice (see screenshot).



Grab your magnifying glass and you may just be able to see the 'Skip' button

Next, you're presented with a questionnaire aimed at establishing "which privacy plan is right for you". Select the most obvious options here (block ads, block trackers and so on) and leave the search engine on its default (Ghostery's own Glow) and you'll eventually land on a screen with the Ghostery Plus plan pre-ticked. Unless you spot this and actively select the Ghostery Free option instead before clicking Next, you could easily sign yourself up for a £3.59 monthly subscription.

I'm deeply disappointed by Ghostery. A company that positions itself as a protector of your privacy shouldn't be trying to trick you into giving away your personal details and signing up for services you don't want.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Lenovo on its relationship with Microsoft www.snipca.com/38780 "We each furnish one half of the same whole – the body and the soul of the PC, and so the synergies derived from delivering on great software experience along with best-in-class hardware innovations will come to define the next hybrid reality for a brand new generation of PC users."

WHAT THEY MEAN

We're sticking with Microsoft, in sickness and in jargon.

JONATHAN'S VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Afeez Ilesanmi

It's easy to make a few bob by selling your old stuff online. But, as Afeez Ilesanmi proved, it's just as easy to make a quick buck by ripping off eBay and Gumtree sellers. The 35-year-old from Manchester was part of a group of scammers who conned sellers by buying used goods – mostly electrical items – using bogus payment details, then sending them faked PayPal emails to make it look like the payments had been processed. The sellers duly dispatched the items, which were sent to a variety of addresses. The buyers would then either sell the fraudulently obtained items, or harass the sender for a refund (even though the payment never went through in the first place).

At a hearing last month, Ilesanmi pleaded guilty to theft, fraud and conspiracy to commit fraud. He was sentenced to 19 months in prison suspended for two years, with a six-month curfew.

DESKTOP PC | **£499** from PC Specialist www.snipca.com/38777

PC Specialist Aurora-R

Slot machine

Although it comes in a large, full-sized tower case, PC Specialist's Aurora-R is surprisingly light. The chassis is made of thin metal and, as you'd expect from the affordable price, it isn't overstuffed with components. This might leave you concerned that you're buying a big metal case of fresh air, but don't worry – the benefit of the space inside is that there's plenty of room for upgrades in the future.

> "Fast at running Windows and office software, with plenty of slots for upgrades"

The PC is built around Intel's Core i5-11400 processor, an 11th-generation model that offers plenty of single-core speed. It's backed up with 8GB of RAM, supplied in a single memory module. The Asus Prime B560-Plus motherboard has three RAM slots in total, so two are spare and accessible for adding more memory in the future, if you wish.

PC Specialist has also relied on the Intel processor's graphics hardware rather than supplying a separate graphics card, though again there's plenty of room to add one later. The same applies to storage, with a 512GB M.2 NVMe SSD attached directly to the motherboard, but a second slot lying empty next to it for future growth. If you have storage from another PC you want to add yourself, the chassis includes one bay for 3.5in drives and two places to screw in 2.5in drives. There's potential for adding an optical drive, too, with a cutout slot available in front for a CD tray.

There are plenty of ports on the device, with two USB 2.0, one USB 3.0 and two 3.5mm jacks on the front. Around the back you'll find a Gigabit Ethernet port, a USB-C port, another USB 3.0 port and two more USB 2.0 ports (pictured below). To connect your monitor there's a choice of HDMI, DisplayPort and VGA. It only has Wi-Fi 4 hardware built-in, though, which is a bit behind the times.

The processor helped the PC perform well in our benchmark tests. It's fast and fluid when running Windows, and is more than powerful enough to run standard office software and browse the web. It didn't perform as well as more expensive PCs in our demanding multi-tasking benchmark tests, but it doesn't fall short of what we would expect from a PC that costs £500.

By using the built-in graphics of the processor, it's not the ideal build for gamers. We measured frame rates of 38fps in the racing game Dirt Showdown, running at 1080p resolution, which is fine if that's all your monitor can manage. However, it dropped to an unplayable 4fps on more challenging games at 4K resolution with full settings. It should run less demanding games such as Minecraft, which it played smoothly as long as detail settings were Medium or Low. Gamers looking for a bargain still need to spend more than £500 to get impressive results.

We were impressed by how quiet the PC is, producing a gentle purr in moderate use, such as browsing the web or using office tools. It got a little louder in our harder gaming and multi-tasking tests, but in normal everyday use the PC barely makes any noise at all.

SPECIFICATIONS

Six-core Intel i5-11400 processor • Intel UHD Graphics 730 • 8GB memory • 512GB M.2 SSD • 1x USB-C port • 2x USB 3.0 ports • 4x USB 2.0 ports • 1x DisplayPort • 1x HDMI port • 1x VGA port • Wi-Fi 4 • Windows 10 Home • 410x180x365mm (HxWxD) • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/38777

VERDICT An affordable desktop PC built for the future, with plenty of room for upgrading. Runs Windows and office software smoothly, and hardly makes a noise

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Chillblast WAP 2500U Ultimate Micro PC £499.99
With a smaller case at a similar price, this AMD-powered model will take up much less room

LAPTOP | **£1,400** from Amazon www.snipca.com/38710

Huawei MateBook X Pro

A chip not off the old block

Huawei's top-of-the-range laptop, the MateBook X Pro, has had a refresh. While it looks the same as the previous version (see our review, Issue 547) from the outside, this new model includes an updated 11th-generation Intel processor (from 10th-generation).

The body, screen and basic specifications are all similar to that previous version. It's still a slim, light ultra-compact laptop with a 3,000x2,000-pixel 13.9in IPS touchscreen, a 1TB SSD, 16GB of RAM and a strong focus on productivity tasks. The screen's 3:2 aspect ratio means it's better for working on documents and reading web pages than watching widescreen videos or playing games.

> "With a lean design and new processor, this laptop looks good and works hard"

The hardware remains impressive. The 1.33kg weight is light for a 13.9in laptop, and the 304x217x14.6mm dimensions keep it conveniently portable. The metal alloy body is as solid as ever, and the virtually bezel-free screen fills 91 per cent of the lid.

Open the lid and you'll find one of the better keyboards on this type of laptop. Spacious, robust and quiet, it's great to type on. It has a two-stage backlight, and at the top-right corner of the keyboard there's a fingerprint scanner that's both well positioned and perfectly reliable.

The trackpad is large for this size of laptop at 120x75mm. It feels great to the touch, but the click action at the corners is shallow and slightly spongy.

If there's one thing we don't like about the design it's the pop-up 720p webcam that hides between the F6 and F7 buttons (pictured below left). The upward perspective isn't flattering and mostly provides views of your chin and nose.

On the left edge are two USB-C ports (you'll need to use one of these to charge) and a 3.5mm audio jack, while on the right is a single USB 3.0 port. It supports Wi-Fi 6 and Bluetooth 5.1 wireless technologies.

We've tested a few computers with the Intel Core i7-1165G7 processor now and this configuration provided a similar level of performance to the others in our benchmark tests. Only the Razer Book 13 (see Issue 605) outperformed it.

The laptop relies on Intel's integrated Iris Xe graphics processor. As we suggested earlier, this isn't intended to be a gaming computer but it runs games reasonably well at a resolution of 1366x768, but suffered slowdowns when we tried to increase this resolution. The battery life was fine, running for nine hours 43 minutes in our video-playback test.

SPECIFICATIONS

Four-core Intel Core i7-1165G7 processor • 16GB RAM • Intel Iris XE graphics • 13.9in IPS 3,000x2,000-pixel resolution touchscreen • 1TB SSD • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.1 • 2x USB-C ports • 1x USB 3.0 port • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • Windows 10 Home • 14.6x304x217mm (HxWxD) • 1.33kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/38710

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 A solid laptop that looks similar to its predecessor but brings it up to speed with current rivals' performance – shame about the position of that webcam, though.

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Razer Book 13 £1,200
A 13in laptop that's cheaper and a little faster, but more appropriate for games and entertainment

TABLET | **£150** from Amazon www.snipca.com/38713

Amazon Fire HD 10

Burning brighter

Amazon's Fire HD tablets may not be the last word in great design or power, but they do a decent job for a reasonable price. The latest tablet to see an upgrade – the Amazon Fire HD 10 – is the most expensive in the range and has the largest screen (10.1in). There are several options available, but prices start at £150.

There's plenty that's new here. At 9.2mm thick and 465 grams, it's thinner and lighter than ever (the previous model was 9.8mm and 504g). However, this is still fairly chunky compared to rivals, and the thick 15mm bezels around the outside of the screen remain in place. Its corners are neatly rounded, however, and it comes in a choice of colours: black, blue, pink or olive green.

> "A budget tablet that offers a vibrant screen, smooth running and superb battery life"

The ports and buttons are all located on the right edge when held in landscape orientation, with a volume switch sitting above the power button, USB-C charging port and 3.5mm audio jack. The tablet's Dolby Atmos dual speakers are located on the top edge.

The screen is Full HD resolution (1920x1200 pixels) and brighter than the previous model – an increase of 25 per cent according to our tests. It does a great job of reproducing colour accurately, and it looks punchy and vibrant.

The device runs Amazon's Fire OS, which is a version of Android that's effectively locked to Amazon's store for apps, rather than providing the usual access to the Google Play Store. The user interface isn't quite the same as other Android devices and the list of downloadable games and apps is limited by comparison.

However, Fire OS development isn't standing still and this device can now be operated in split-screen mode, running two apps simultaneously. It also comes with Amazon's Alexa voice assistant, which lets you do anything you could do with an Echo Show smart speaker.

The HD 10's RAM has been increased from 2GB to 3GB, and it comes with a choice of 32GB or 64GB of storage. There's also a slot for a microSD card, so you can upgrade this to 1TB. For £150 you get the 32GB version, while the 64GB model costs £190. Both have Amazon adverts on the home screen, though you can remove these by choosing the 'without Ads' option and paying an extra £10 when purchasing.

There's also a new 'Productivity Bundle' available for an extra £60, which includes a detachable keyboard/case and a 12-month Microsoft 365 subscription.

The processor is the same as in the previous version, which is a little disappointing. However, it still runs fairly smoothly, and we found its performance was remarkably snappy and responsive in everyday use.

It should also be able to play most of the games available on Amazon's app store, though with some of the more demanding, graphically intensive games you may need to turn down the resolution or detail to maintain a reasonable frame rate. Battery life is excellent, running for 19 hours in our video-playback test.

Sadly, the disappointing cameras are unchanged. The 5-megapixel rear-facing camera and 2-megapixel selfie snapper have a maximum video resolution of 720p, and neither is anything special. Video quality is grainy and lacks detail, though this hardly sets it apart from many other tablets.

While you can't expect much in the way of audio output from a budget tablet, the Fire HD 10's stereo speakers sounded quite impressive in our tests. There's more than enough volume, with only a hint of tinniness at the high end, and a surprising amount of bass.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core MediaTek MT8183 Helio P60T processor • 3GB RAM • 10.1in screen, 1920x1200-pixel resolution • 32GB or 64GB storage • 5-megapixel rear camera • 2-megapixel front camera • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 5 • USB-C connector • Android 9 (with Fire OS 7) • 247x166x9.28mm (HxWxD) • 465g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/38713

VERDICT Those looking for the big-screen convenience of a decent-sized tablet without paying a fortune need look no further – this is a bargain

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Fire HD 8 £90

If you don't mind a smaller screen, Amazon's Fire HD 8 is a similar tablet at an even lower price

INKJET PRINTER | **£249** from Wilkinson Cameras www.snipca.com/38817

Canon Pixma G650

Six appeal

The Canon Pixma G650 is the newest addition to Canon's G-series of MegaTank printers. It's a multifunctional printer, scanner and copier that uses bottles of ink poured into large tanks, rather than traditional cartridges.

The MegaTank range has always offered great value printing, but it used to be at the expense of print quality. However, the G650 solves the dilemma with exceptional photo-printing. It achieves this by adding two more inks (red and grey) to the usual quartet of black, cyan, magenta and yellow, making six in total.

> "Excellent photograph-print quality at a very reasonable price"

You can connect the printer to a computer using its USB port, or add it to your Wi-Fi network if you want to share it – or also print from a phone or tablet. There's a control panel on top, with large copy buttons to start mono or colour copies, and a handful of buttons to help you navigate the built-in menus.

Printing directly from a computer is straightforward, linking seamlessly with Windows' own print tools. If you want more, Canon's own printer-configuration tools let you access extra functions, such as the option to print on both sides of a sheet of paper.

However, unlike previous models in the series, this can no longer be done automatically. Instead, the printer churns through the first side of every page, then asks you to feed the output back into the rear paper tray. While there's plenty of guidance on which way round to stick

the paper back in, it's not as easy as a printer that can perform this task automatically.

However, any flaws are vastly outweighed by its two core strengths – the quality of its photo prints and the price of printing. We tested the photo printing with our standard test images and the results compare very favourably to good-quality cartridge printers. Next to photo prints from previous MegaTank models, the quality is light years ahead.

The two extra ink colours means it's not quite as cheap to run as the older four-colour models. We worked out that, once you've run through the supplied ink (which will take you some time because the starter bottles will print 3,700 mono pages and 8,000 colour), subsequent prints will cost around 0.4p each for mono and 1p for colour.

That's more expensive than previous MegaTank models, but still significantly cheaper than the average price per page from cartridge-based inkjet printers.

SPECIFICATIONS

4,800x1,200dpi maximum print resolution • 600x1,200dpi optical scanner resolution • 24ppm print speed • 802.11n Wi-Fi • USB 2.0 • 167x445x340mm (HxWxD) • 6.6kg • 1-year warranty
www.snipca.com/38817

VERDICT Finally, an ink-tank printer that can print photos with the same quality as cartridge-based models and still offer great value running costs

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Canon Pixma G3501 £255
The four-colour version isn't as good at printing photos, but it's cheaper to run (0.2p per page in mono, 0.4p in colour)

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Tri-band

What does it do?

Wi-Fi originally used a single radio frequency to transmit data between routers to devices. When this got too busy, a second radio band was introduced, and the routers and devices that could use it were called dual-band. The latest devices now use a third radio band, which frees up more space. The Netgear Nighthawk AC3200 (pictured, £173 from www.snipca.com/38820) is one of the best tri-band routers you can buy.

How does it work?

The original network operated on the 2.4GHz frequency, which doesn't actually have that much space for many devices without them interfering with each other. Dual-band kept the 2.4GHz frequency to cater for older devices but added the 5GHz frequency, which has much more space. Tri-band uses the same 5GHz frequency for its third network, though it remains completely separate. There's more than enough bandwidth available to ensure they don't interfere with each other. Tri-band routers are essentially running these three networks simultaneously, managing which devices are on which network to get the best performance.

What are the specs?

To confuse matters, the new Wi-Fi 6E standard is also tri-band, but uses a new 6GHz radio band instead of a second 5GHz band. If you want your third network to work with existing 5GHz devices, make sure you avoid routers labelled Wi-Fi 6E. Instead, look for routers labelled Wi-Fi 4, 5 or 6. The higher the number, the faster they'll be.

Can I add it to my router?

No, you'll need to buy a new one.

SMARTPHONE | **£299** from Amazon www.snipca.com/38756

OnePlus Nord CE 5G

Going south

OnePlus made its name with decent phones at affordable prices. Although it has recently wandered into more expensive territory, with phones such as the OnePlus 9 (£629, reviewed in Issue 607, www.snipca.com/38258), the Nord CE 5G is back on home turf. Prices start at £299 for 8GB of RAM and 128GB of storage, rising to £369 for 12GB RAM and 256GB storage.

The phone is slim and light, measuring 7.9x159x74mm, and weighing a mere 170g. It can take two SIM cards, which is useful if you're using one phone to mix work and personal calls, but there's no option to expand the storage with microSD. The under-screen fingerprint reader works well and it also comes with a 3.5mm headphone jack.

A few corners have been cut elsewhere to keep the price down, with no dust or water protection and no Gorilla glass to protect the screen from scratches.

The screen is the best feature, though. Measuring 6.43in across the diagonal, it uses AMOLED technology to give vibrant, colour-accurate images that match any phone in its price bracket. It has perfect contrast, and is bright enough to use outdoors on all but the sunniest days.

By using the Qualcomm Snapdragon 750G processor, OnePlus hasn't pushed the boat out in terms of performance. In our benchmark tests it performed a little faster than the Nokia X20 (reviewed in Issue 608, www.snipca.com/38411), though it's disappointing when it comes to games, where we've seen other similarly priced phones outperform it.

On the plus side, this has a positive impact on battery life. The phone ran for 24 hours and 43 minutes in our video-playback test, which is excellent.

The camera setup includes a 64-megapixel main camera, an 8-megapixel ultrawide camera (with a 119-degree field of view), and a 2-megapixel mono camera that's just there to help the others out.

The main camera performs well, especially in good lighting conditions, though it can't rival some similarly priced phones. It captures detailed, colourful images, but it's not brilliant at portrait shots, failing to blur the background enough for our taste.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 750G processor • 8 or 12GB of RAM • 128 or 256GB of storage • 6.43in 2,400x1,080 pixels 90Hz AMOLED screen • 64-megapixel main rear camera • 8-megapixel wide camera • 16-megapixel front camera • OxygenOS based on Android 11 • 7.9x159x74mm (HxDxW) • 170g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/38756

VERDICT Has a good screen and battery life, but other phones in this price bracket are faster and have better cameras

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Xiaomi Poco F3 £329 This Android phone performs superbly well and has a brilliant screen, but doesn't have the best camera

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

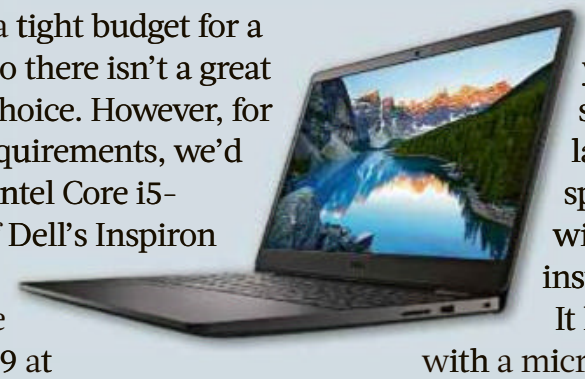
Is there a £600 replacement for wife's Samsung laptop?

Q My partner's 10-year-old Samsung laptop is on its last legs, and as her birthday is coming up I would like to replace it.

She uses it for browsing, shopping and producing flyers for the golf club. We are pensioners and have a budget of £600. She needs something with a minimum 14in screen, microSD card reader, three USB ports and Windows 10. We have discussed a Chromebook but decided against it.

David Blatchford

A £600 is a tight budget for a laptop, so there isn't a great deal of choice. However, for your partner's requirements, we'd recommend the Intel Core i5-1135G7 version of Dell's Inspiron 15 3000 laptop, which is available from Dell for £569 at www.snipca.com/38785. This is one of the latest 11th generation of Intel processors, so will hopefully last as well as her previous model has.



The laptop also ticks all your boxes. It has a 15in screen, which is slightly larger than your minimum specification, and comes with Windows 10 Home installed.

It has all the right ports, with a microSD card reader and a USB port on the right, and two more USB ports on the left.

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

AOC
GAMING

#1

GAMING MONITOR BRAND* IN THE WORLD

Available at: amazon laptopsdirect BOX

AOC branded monitors, which are owned by the parent company TPV, achieved the #1 global market share among gaming monitor companies in 2019
Source: IDC Quarterly Gaming Tracker, 2019Q4

WEBCAM | **£100** from Amazon www.snipca.com/38752

Anker PowerConf 300

A broader perspective

Thanks to the greater reliance on video chats during the recent lockdowns, webcams have become more essential than ever, giving us visual contact with family, friends and work colleagues from the comfort of our homes. Manufacturers are reacting to this demand by bringing out devices with improved features and picture quality – and the Anker PowerConf 300 is a great example of this.

This is a USB-C device, though it also comes with a standard USB adapter, should you need it. Its clip securely mounts it to your laptop or monitor, with a broad range of pivot and tilt to help you find the best angle. It can also be connected to a standard camera tripod.

It can capture 1080p footage at up to 60fps, or drop it down to 720p or 360p if limited bandwidth is a problem. The viewing angle is a very wide 115 degrees, which is great for getting several people into the frame, though it can be cropped and set to a close-up, if you prefer. It can even follow your face as it moves, digitally zooming in when it stays still for long enough. There are two noise-reducing microphones on either side of the unit, which can filter out background sounds.

Video and audio quality are both impressive. The video image is clean and free of graininess, and you can tweak the settings manually to get a better picture if need be. The audio quality uses noise suppression to eliminate the kind of background hiss many other webcam mics pick up, though you're still better off buying a decent USB microphone if you want the very best audio.

SPECIFICATIONS

1080p video resolution • 60fps • Dual microphones • USB-C (USB-C to standard USB adapter supplied) • Windows 10 and MacOS compatible • 30x990x30mm (HxWxD) • 128g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/38754

VERDICT Clear image quality, excellent audio and plenty of features make the Anker PowerConf C300 well worth its price tag

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Logitech C925e Business Webcam £74 This cheaper unit has great picture quality and software but a narrower 78-degree viewing angle

PC SPEAKERS | **£30** from Amazon www.snipca.com/38754

Creative Pebble V3

Great balls of sound

The Creative Pebble V3 is the latest addition to a range of speakers that has been providing audio from PCs since 2017. This version offers Bluetooth 5.0 connectivity, which is rare on speakers costing less than £50.

The package consists of two spherical satellite speakers linked by a 1.35m cable. Each one measures 123x120x118mm, with the right speaker acting as a control hub with a knob to turn the speakers on and off and adjust the volume.

The right speaker also has a non-removable USB-C cable that both powers the speakers and relays audio from your chosen source. Simply plug it into your laptop or desktop PC and you're good to go. If you don't have a USB-C port to spare, a standard USB adapter is included, and there's a 3.5mm audio jack for connecting wired audio devices.

Pairing the speakers to a Bluetooth device is simple - press a dedicated button to enter pairing mode, then connect. Because they're powered by USB-C, however, you will need to have your computer switched on or connect the USB-C cable to a power supply.

You're not going to get sound quality that satisfies audiophiles from a pair of £30 speakers, but these are impressive for the money. Spoken audio sounds great although inevitably the speakers lack bass when playing music.

SPECIFICATIONS

2.25in full range speaker driver • Bluetooth 5.0 • 1.2m USB-C cable (USB-C to standard USB adapter supplied) • 1.2m USB-C cable • 1.35m speaker-to-speaker cable • 123x120x118mm (HxWxD) • 920g • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/38754

VERDICT A set of speakers that take up little desk space and come with Bluetooth that lets you play audio from devices other than your PC

★★★★½

ALTERNATIVE Logitech Z207 £45 With a larger, more traditional design, these PC speakers also come with Bluetooth connectivity

TV STREAMER | **£39.99** Amazon www.snipca.com/38734

Roku Express 4K

Full stream ahead

The Roku Express 4K is the latest addition to Roku's excellent line-up of streaming devices. Designed to plug into your TV and connect to your Wi-Fi, a Roku turns any TV into a smart TV, usually with a better line-up of options and channels than you get from your TV's own smart services.

> "Has Wi-Fi 5, which boosts bandwidth for smooth streaming"

At £39.99, the Express 4K sits neatly alongside Roku's existing products. It's £10 more expensive than the standard Roku Express (which only offers 1080p resolution, not the 4K found here) and is the same price as the Roku Premiere, which also has 4K.

The Express 4K's main upgrade is that it uses the Wi-Fi 5 standard, whereas the Express and the Premiere are restricted to Wi-Fi 4. If you have a compatible router, the added bandwidth and flexibility could provide smoother streaming, particularly with 4K content at up to 60fps. While you can control the Express 4K with your voice using Amazon Alexa or Google Assistant, it doesn't have this feature built into the remote control. That's not a problem if you have a compatible device nearby, such as an Amazon Echo or a Google Nest, but some rival products, such as the Amazon Fire TV 4K, offer it from the remote.

The Roku Express 4K is similar in design to the Roku Express and the Roku Premiere. It's a plain, black plastic box with a curved top, measuring 21x39x86mm. It has an HDMI output, a microUSB port for power (pictured below left), and a reset button on the rear.

Switch it on and you're met with a simple, user-friendly interface that's easy to set up and use. All the key streaming platforms and UK channels are present, including Netflix, Disney Plus, Spotify, Now, Apple TV, Amazon Prime Video, BBC iPlayer, All4, My5, ITV Hub, Sky Store, YouTube and BritBox. There are also plenty more you've probably never heard of. The device displays them all with excellent picture and sound quality.

SPECIFICATIONS

Supports TVs with resolutions from 1080p up to 2160p at 60fps • Wi-Fi 5 • HDMI port • 21x86x39mm • 45g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/38734

VERDICT With all the channels you need, superb picture quality and extra bandwidth, the Roku Express 4K is a brilliant streamer

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Amazon Fire TV Stick 4K £49.99 Slightly more expensive 4K streamer but it comes with Alexa voice control built into the remote

DO I REALLY NEED...

A hanging tablet?

What is it?

Lenovo has announced the Yoga Tab 13 (pictured) and Yoga Tab 11, two new Android tablets with built-in stands. These are made from stainless steel poles, bent into shape and attached to a hinge on one of the longer sides.

What does it do?

The stand can be used to position the tablet at a more convenient angle, so you can place it upright on a table. It can also be extended out and hooked over something, letting you hang your tablet from any secure hook.

What's the catch?

The stand doesn't fold away flat into the tablet, adding bulk to the device. It's harder to slip into a bag and carry.

So can I do without it?

It might be handy to hang your tablet up sometimes, such as in your bathroom or kitchen, but there are already cases with hanging loops that can perform a similar job, such as the Seymcy Shockproof Sturdy Case (£22.99 from Amazon, www.snipca.com/38815).

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale Weds 28 July

Dell Inspiron Small Desktop 3881
An affordable desktop PC in a compact case

TP-Link RE505X
Extend the reach of your Wi-Fi

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Buy It

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Lenovo Yoga Slim 7 (256GB)
£749 from www.snipca.com/38429
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 £950 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. £1,720 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

Lenovo Tab P11 Pro
£500 from www.snipca.com/38585
Tested Issue 609

A fast tablet that comes with a magnetic stand and keyboard that means you can also use it as a laptop. It has an outstanding screen, 128GB storage and a 17-hour battery life, while its excellent dual mics make you sound clear in video chats.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S6 Lite Slower than the Lenovo Tab P11 Pro, but the 64GB storage and decent 10.2in screen make it good value. £280 from www.snipca.com/38606

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

Xiaomi Poco F3
£329 from www.snipca.com/38395
Tested Issue 608

This is a phenomenal phone for the price. It's 5G, has a brilliant screen, and comes with 6GB of RAM and 128GB storage (256GB costs £349). Performance is exceptional – in fact, the only phone under £450 that's faster is the iPhone SE.

ALTERNATIVE Google Pixel 5 Cheaper than previous Pixels, this has great cameras, wireless charging and a superb screen. Battery life is 23 hours. £599 from www.snipca.com/36586

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT...

I'm always keen to know what you think about ***Computeractive***, particularly what you like about it and how you think it can be improved. With this in mind, I'd like to invite you to take part in our 2021 Reader Survey. Your answers will help us continue to improve ***Computeractive*** so we give you more of what you want (and less of what you don't!).

As a bonus, everyone who completes the survey can enter a prize draw to win a £50 Amazon.co.uk Gift Card*.

To take the survey, just visit **www.snipca.com/38795** – it shouldn't take more than five minutes.

If you ever want to give feedback directly, please email me: **editor@computeractive.co.uk.**

Kind regards,
Daniel Booth
Editor

Prize draw open to UK residents only and will end on 25 July 2021. This giveaway is in no way endorsed, sponsored, or administered by Amazon. By entering, you confirm you are 18+ years of age and agree to the terms of use. Full terms and conditions available on our site.
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Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

EBOOK READER

Amazon Kindle (2019)
£70 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. £110 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 £32.99.

ALTERNATIVE Norton 360 Deluxe
Almost as good as Kaspersky, but blocks more legitimate software. £15 from www.snipca.com/32069

WEBCAM

NEW ENTRY

Logitech C925e Business Webcam
£73 from www.snipca.com/38385
Tested: Issue 608

Despite the name, this webcam is also great for home users. Its standout feature is automatically adjusting itself to keep your picture looking sharp. It offers a 78-degree field of view, which is fine for everyday video chats with one person in front of the camera.

ALTERNATIVE Anker PowerConf 300
Good image quality, crisp audio and lots of features. £100 from www.snipca.com/38752

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 241B7QPJEB With a great picture, stylish design and speakers, this 24in Full HD IPS is an excellent smaller screen. £270 from www.snipca.com/37096

ROUTER

D-Link DIR-1960
£120 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 and controls, as well as plenty of add-on apps complement excellent long-range performance. £203 from www.snipca.com/30710

PRINTER

Canon Pixma TS8350
£150 from www.snipca.com/38079
Tested Issue 606

For an affordable general-purpose printer, its photo prints are stunning. They come out in phenomenal detail, with rich, bold colours and deep blacks. It uses six cartridges, so stick to Canon's own reasonably priced XXL cartridges to reduce running costs.

ALTERNATIVE Epson Expression Premium XP-6105 This six-ink printer/scanner/copier is a good choice for photos first and text second. It's easy to use, but ink costs can be high. £90 from www.snipca.com/37995

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 2 Logitech ergonomic keyboard & mouse kits

In this competition Logitech is offering two prize packs, each comprising the Ergo K860 Wireless Split Keyboard and the MX Vertical ergonomic mouse.

Priced £109.99, the Ergo K860 is a split ergonomic keyboard designed for better posture, less strain and more support. You'll type more naturally with a curved, split keyframe that improves typing posture. The sloping form reduces muscle strain on your wrists and forearms – keeping your hands and shoulders relaxed.

Priced £92.99, the MX Vertical mouse is controlled in the handshake position, helping to reduce muscular activity by up to 10 per cent compared with a standard computer mouse. The distinct 57-degree vertical angle reduces pressure on your wrist, and also ensures your thumb is positioned comfortably on the rest.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/38714 and enter your details. It runs until midnight Tuesday 27 July. Good luck!

Visit www.logitech.com to buy the **Ergo K860** and the **MX Vertical**, as well as for information on other Logitech products, including webcams, speakers and chargers. For product updates follow @Logitech on Twitter and 'like' www.facebook.com/UKLogitech.

MESH ROUTER

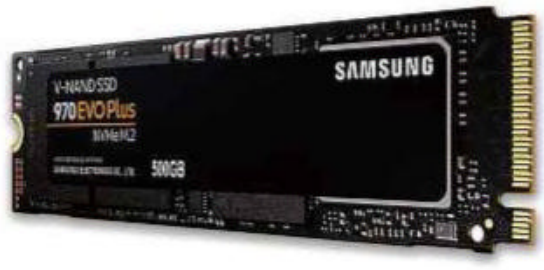
BT Whole Home Wi-Fi
£200 from www.snipca.com/26990
Tested Issue 496

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. £260 from www.snipca.com/27309

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Samsung 970 Evo Plus 500GB
£78 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. £46 from www.snipca.com/37304

SMART SPEAKER

PRICE DROP

Google Nest Audio
£75 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. £70 from www.snipca.com/36602

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Issue 610

Workshops & Tips

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

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38 Automatically switch PC speakers and mics
40 Find out what's taking up space on your drives
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46 Make Windows Better
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HOW TO...

Print postage labels for Royal Mail, eBay and Amazon

by Will Stapley

What you need: Printer (inkjet or laser); Label sheets **Time required:** One hour

Whether you use eBay and other online marketplaces to earn money or simply as a convenient and profitable way to clear the clutter, paying for postage and printing address labels can be a real hassle.

Here, we'll explain how Royal Mail's Click & Drop (C&D) service makes the entire process much easier. By integrating with your online marketplace accounts, it automatically generates labels for you as new orders come in and, depending on which service you choose, and then sends tracking information back to the buyer. You can also use it to send one-off parcels to friends and family.

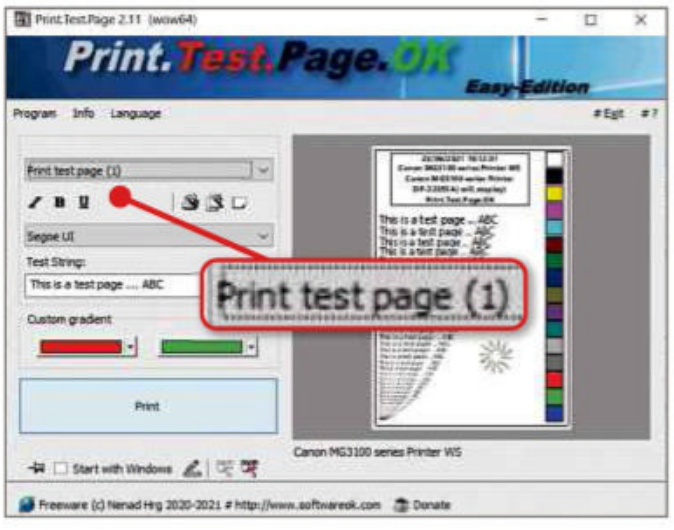
You don't need a dedicated label printer to use the service – just a standard inkjet or laser printer and some adhesive labels will do the job. Better still, for a small fee you beat the Post Office queues and get your parcels collected from your home.

1 Check your printer is properly aligned

Before you print any labels, it's a good idea to check your printer is working properly. Most postage labels include barcodes or QR codes (sometimes both), which allow them to be scanned and tracked while in transit. If your printer's print head isn't aligned correctly, you may find these codes don't print properly and therefore won't work.

Windows does include a tool for printing a test page, but it's only intended to check whether your printer is connected to your computer. Instead, we recommend using Print.Test.Page.OK, which performs a more comprehensive test – download the ZIP file at the top of the list of options at www.snipca.com/38739.

Run the tool, select 'Print test page (1)' from the box at the top (see screenshot below), then click Print. When the test print appears, check each line. If you spot any anomalies (such as text that appears skewed), the print head in your printer needs to be realigned.



Before printing any labels, use Print.Test.Page.OK to check your printer is aligned properly

Precisely how you do this depends on the make and model of your printer. On our old (but still working) Canon MG3150, this is done by repeatedly tapping the Maintenance button (spanner icon) on the printer until the display shows a 'U', then pressing the scan button (labelled Black).

The printer then produces a test page, which you place in the scanning unit before pressing the scan button a second time. It then detects any alignment errors on the scan and adjusts the print head accordingly.

2 Buy the correct adhesive labels

You can print postage labels on standard A4 paper, but it's a lot of work. Not only do you have to print then cut the labels to the correct size, but you also need secure them to your parcel using sticky tape. Adhesive label sheets are much easier to use if you're posting in bulk. And as long as you buy the correct size, the postage label will print perfectly.

It's important to buy labels that are the correct size for use with Royal Mail's C&D service. Avery's J8169 sheets (designed for inkjet printers) are the ideal size and come with four labels per page (400 labels cost £21 from Amazon at www.snipca.com/38740). Avery's L8179 labels (for laser printers) are the same size and cost £28 from www.snipca.com/38741.

3 Set up your Click & Drop account

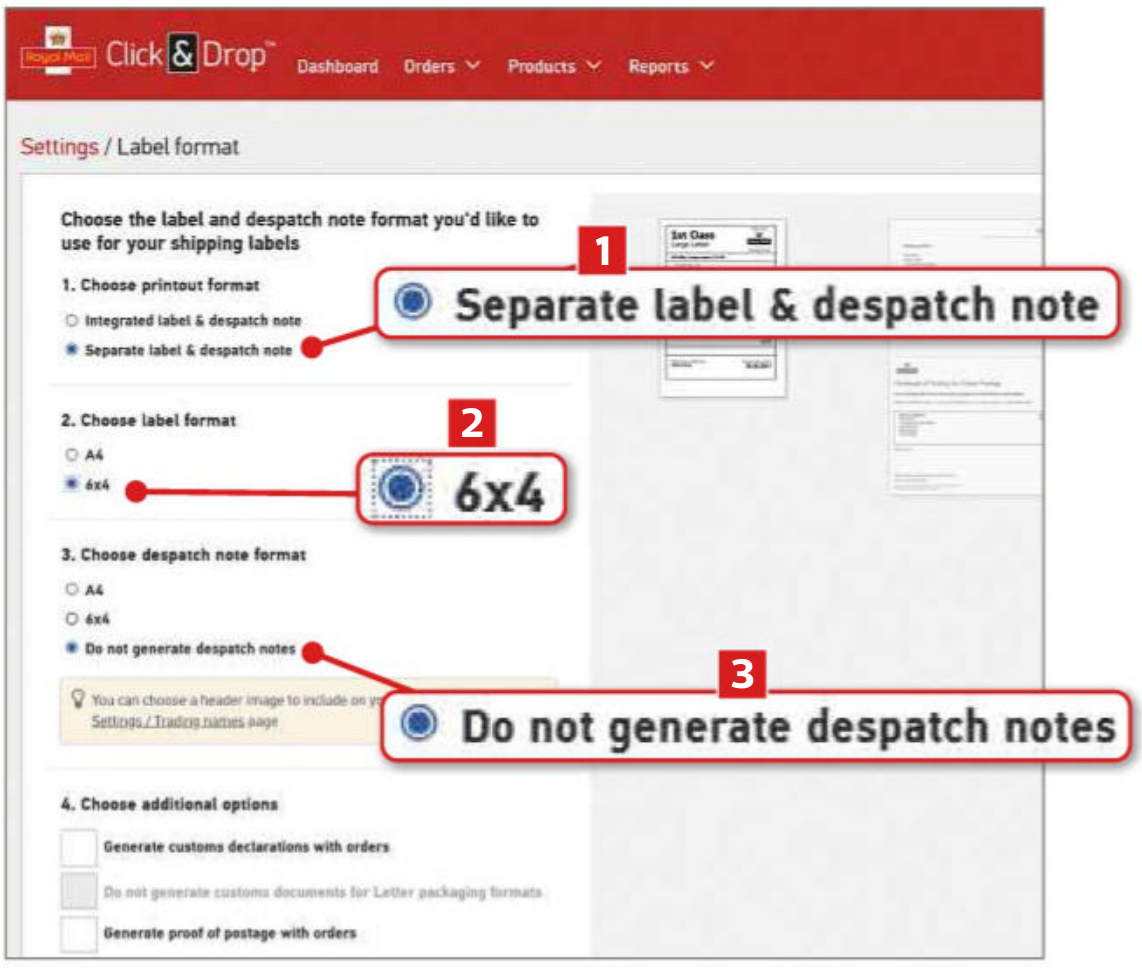
To create your C&D account, go to www.snipca.com/38743 and click the green 'Register for Click & Drop' button on the right-hand side of the window. During the signing-up process, select the 'I'm a personal customer...' option – this registers you for the free C&D service. You'll be sent an email to confirm your account – click the 'Activate account' link, then follow the instructions to finish setting it up.

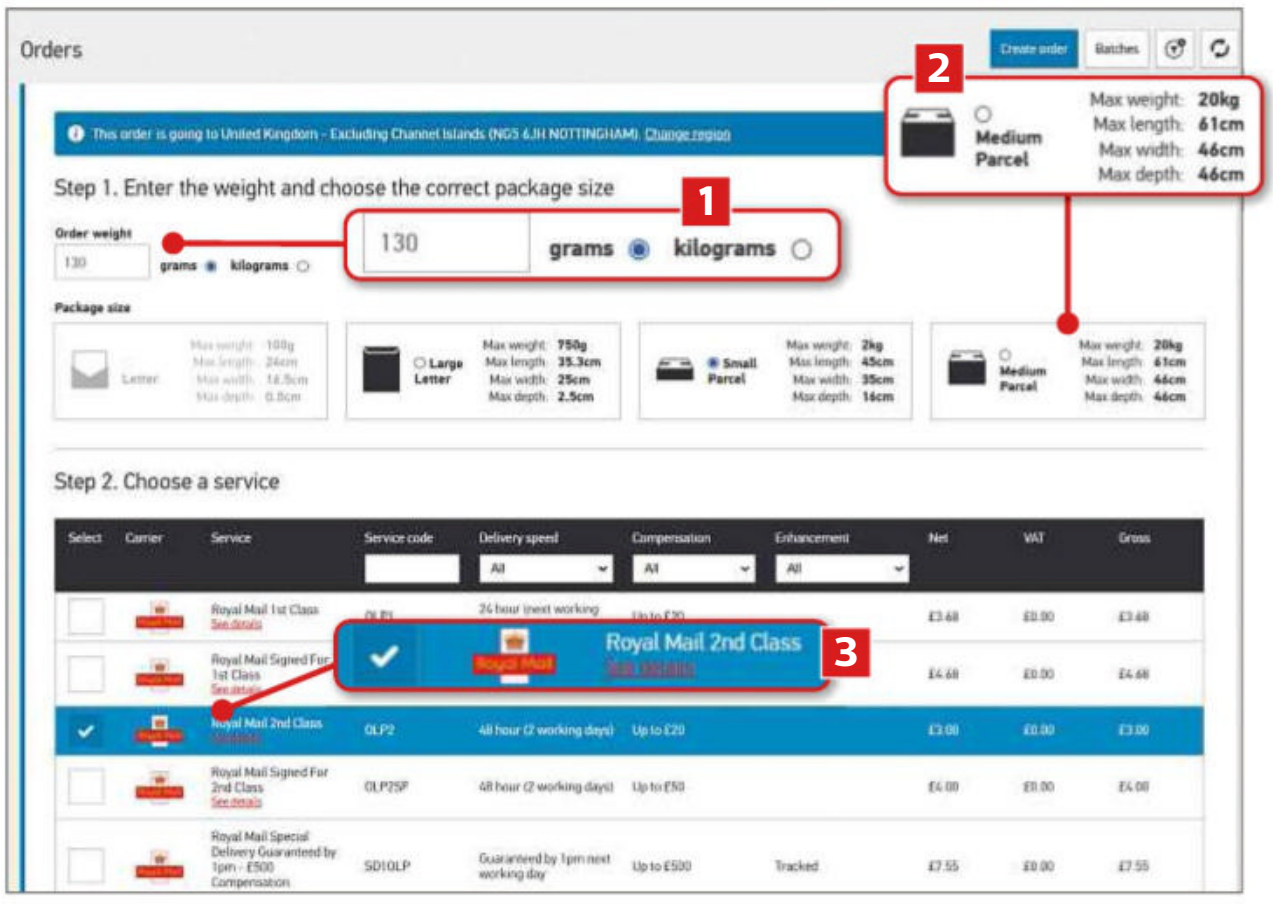
Next, you need to set the size of the labels C&D prints so that they fit the adhesive label sheets you've bought. Click the 'Set your shipping label format' on the home page, or select Settings at the top, then 'Label format'.

The default format prints one label per sheet. If you bought sheets that have four labels on each, select 'Separate label & despatch note' (1 in our screenshot above) and, in the 'Choose label format' section below that, select '6x4' 2 (meaning all labels will measure 6x4 inches).

Unless you specifically want to print despatch notes (which may include details of the order), select 'Do not generate despatch notes' 3.

Change the size of the postage labels C&D produces to ensure they fit your label sheets





Before buying a label, specify the parcel's weight and size, and the delivery service you want

4 Print one-off labels

As well as integrating with online marketplace accounts (more on this later), C&D lets you create one-off labels – perfect if you just need to send a parcel to a friend.

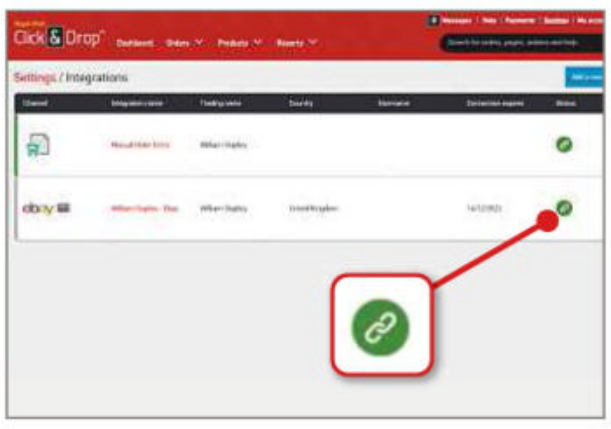
To do this, log into your C&D account, click the Orders menu at the top, then 'Create order'. You can enter the recipient's full name and address here, but it's quicker to type their postcode into the 'Search for an address...' box on the right then choose from the addresses listed.

Once you've finished, you can save the address for future use by entering an appropriate name in the 'Address reference' box. When you next need to send a parcel to this address, you simply enter this name in the 'Search for...' box.

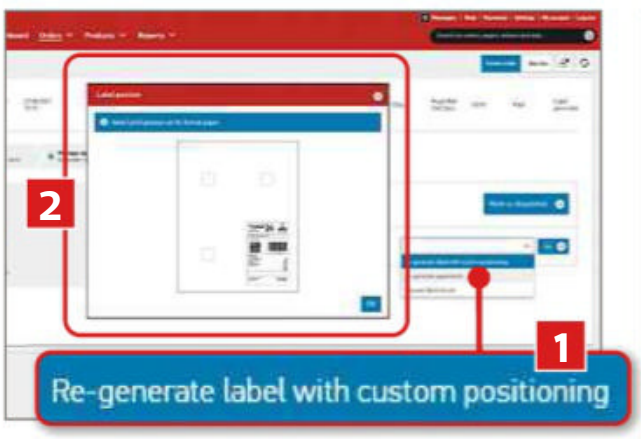
Next, click 'Create order and apply postage', then enter the weight of your parcel (1 in our screenshot left), select the relevant parcel size 2, and the service you require 3, then click 'Apply, pay & generate labels'.

Once you've paid for your labels (it can take up to a minute for payments to go through), they will download as a PDF file, which you can then open in your default PDF reader. Before printing, make sure your label sheet is correctly inserted into your printer's input tray (most printers require you to place the labels face down).

By default, C&D will display the cost of the postage on each label you print.



You'll see this icon when C&D has successfully integrated with your online marketplace account



Choose this option to change where a label is printed on a sheet

If you'd rather keep this information private, click Settings, Miscellaneous, tick the 'Hide postage price...' box, then click Save.

5 Integrate with your marketplace accounts

To link your C&D account with eBay and other online marketplaces, click the 'Integrate your online stores' option on the C&D home page (if you can't see this option, click Settings – top right – then Integrations).

In the window that opens, click the blue 'Add a new integration' button. You'll now see a list of all supported online seller accounts, including eBay, Amazon, Shopify and Etsy. Click the relevant account, enter your details (precisely which options you see here depends on the account you've chosen to link), then click 'Save and connect'.

You'll then be prompted to log into your chosen account and agree to linking it to C&D. The account will now be listed in the Integrations window within C&D. After a couple of minutes, a green link icon should appear (see screenshot above), indicating that C&D has successfully integrated with the account and will start importing details of new orders that require postage.

Whenever you sell an item on one of the marketplace accounts you've integrated, the 'New order' box on the C&D home page will update accordingly. Click this box to review your orders. You can then click a specific entry to check an order's full details, including the buyer's address.

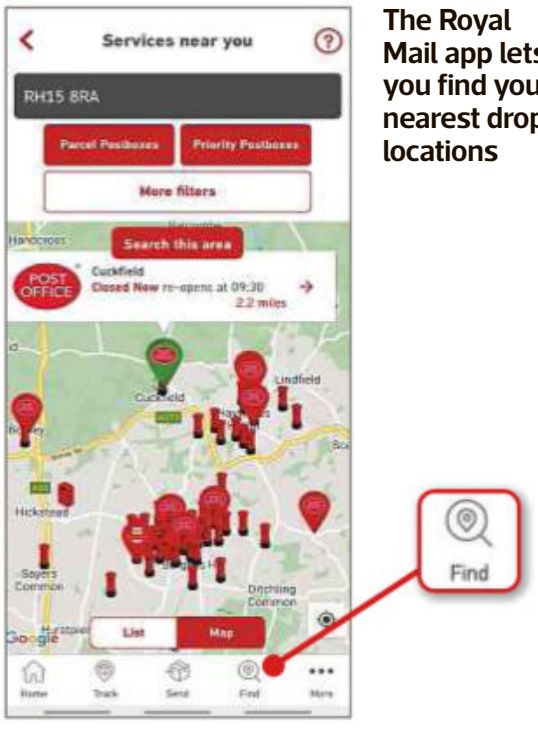
Select any you want to print labels for (by clicking the circle to the left of each entry), then select 'Apply postage' in the box at the bottom. As when printing labels for one-off packages (see Step 4), you now need to enter the package size and other details for each order, before selecting 'Apply, pay...' at the bottom (if you're printing labels for multiple packages, select Apply instead – this lets you pay for them all in one go at the end). As before, your labels will be downloaded as a PDF file.

When printing multiple labels, you may find you're left with a sheet that has one unused label left over. Don't throw these sheets away. Instead, once you've paid for a postage label, discard the PDF that's downloaded, return to the Orders window in C&D and select the item you want to post. In the 'Other actions' box on the right-hand side, select 'Re-generate label with custom positioning' (1 in our screenshot above) then click Go. A window will now appear, letting you choose the position on the label sheet 2.

6 Post your package

With your labels printed and stuck to their respective packages, it's time to post them. If the parcels can fit into a Royal Mail postbox, you can simply drop them in there - the size of the slots on these varies, but they're usually around 25x6cm.

For larger parcels, you can use a parcel postbox, which have a size and weight limits of 44x35x16cm and 2kg. However,



The Royal Mail app lets you find your nearest drop-off locations

PRINT LABELS WITHOUT A PRINTER

If you don't have a printer, or don't want to spend money on label sheets, there is another option: 'Labels to Go'.

This service lets you use C&D to buy postage as explained above, then print the label from a Royal Mail delivery office – you'll just need to open the PDF of your label on your phone, then scan its QR code. There's no additional charge for this service, but it's only available in certain locations.

To find your nearest location, open the Royal Mail app as explained in Step 6, then tap Find, 'Use my location', 'More filters' and select 'Label printing service'.

remember that for proof of postage you'll need to post items at a Post Office branch or Royal Mail sorting office.

You can get proof of postage by arranging for Royal Mail to collect your parcels from your home. The service costs 72p per parcel. To use it, go to the Orders section of C&D, select what you want to post, then select 'Book collections' in the bottom-right box'.

Alternatively, you can take your parcels to a Post Office branch or Royal Mail sorting office. You can find the nearest location for all these options using the Royal Mail app, which is available for Android and iOS devices at www.snipca.com/38744. Sign into the app using the same details you used for your C&D account, then tap Find at the bottom (see screenshot left), and click 'Search now' in the 'Services near you' box, followed by 'Use my location'.

Standard postboxes are indicated by pillar-shaped icons and parcel postboxes by rectangular icons, while the pin icons show Post Office branches and Royal Mail sorting offices (use the filter buttons at the top to narrow what's displayed). Tap any icon to reveal additional information, such as opening hours and when the next collection is due.

Once you've posted an item, don't forget to mark it as dispatched in your C&D account. Click the 'Order ready for despatch' box on the home page, select the order, then click 'Mark as despatched' (if you've sent multiple items, tick the boxes next to each, select 'Mark as despatched' in the bottom-right box, then click Go).

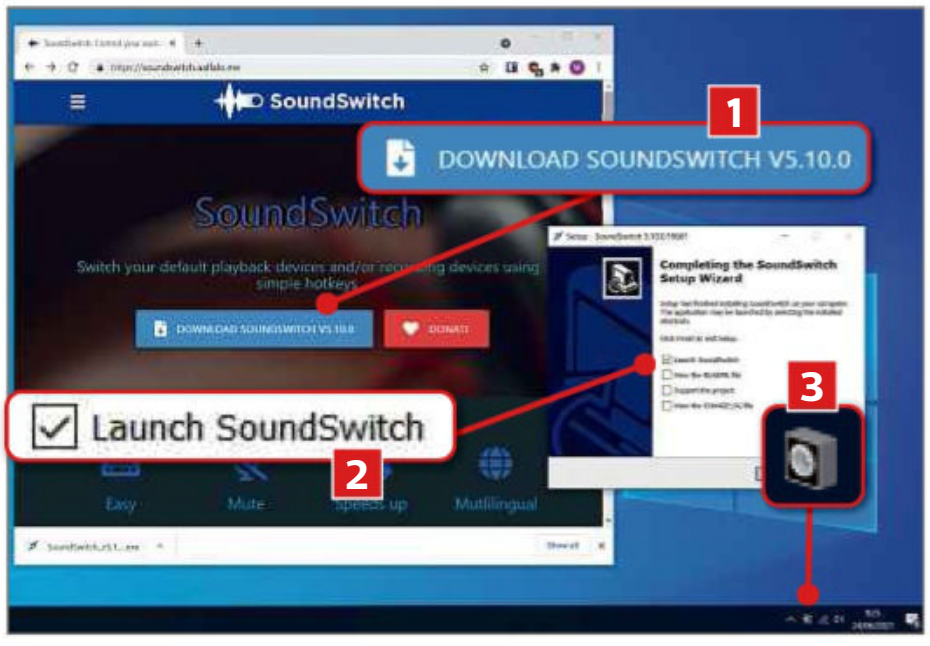
Next issue: Change your default font on phones, Windows, Kindle and more

Automatically switch between your PC's speakers and mics

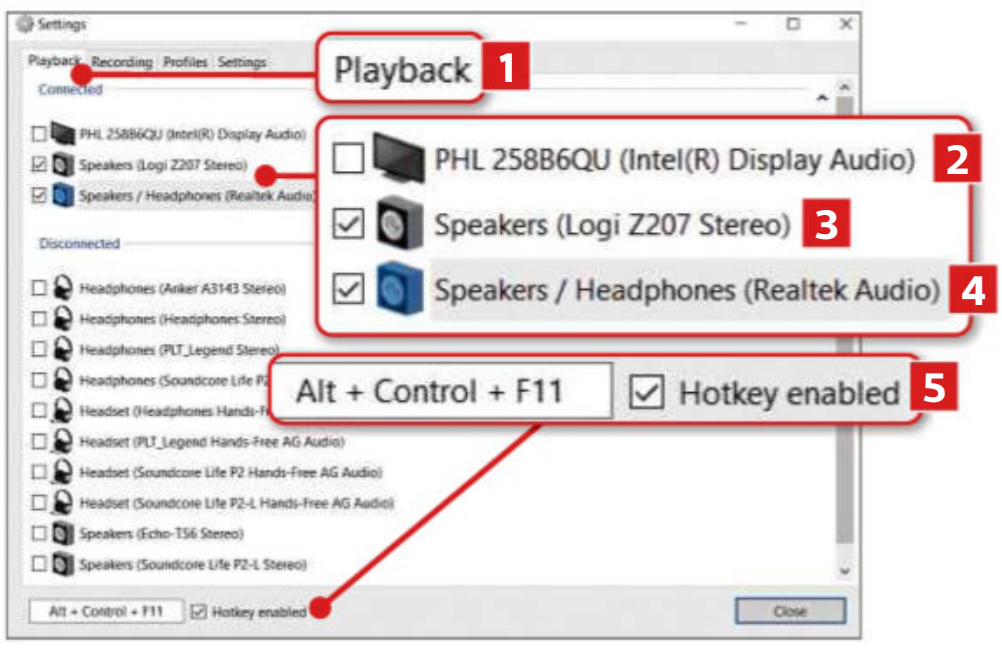
What you need: Windows 7, 8.1 or 10
Time required: 30 minutes

You probably have multiple speakers, headphones and microphones attached to your computer (those built into your laptop, Bluetooth headsets and so on). Windows lets you set default devices for playing and recording audio, but it's not so easy to quickly switch between them. To do this, you need SoundSwitch. This clever program lets you switch using keyboard shortcuts and set up profiles so that Windows switches automatically when you open a specific program.

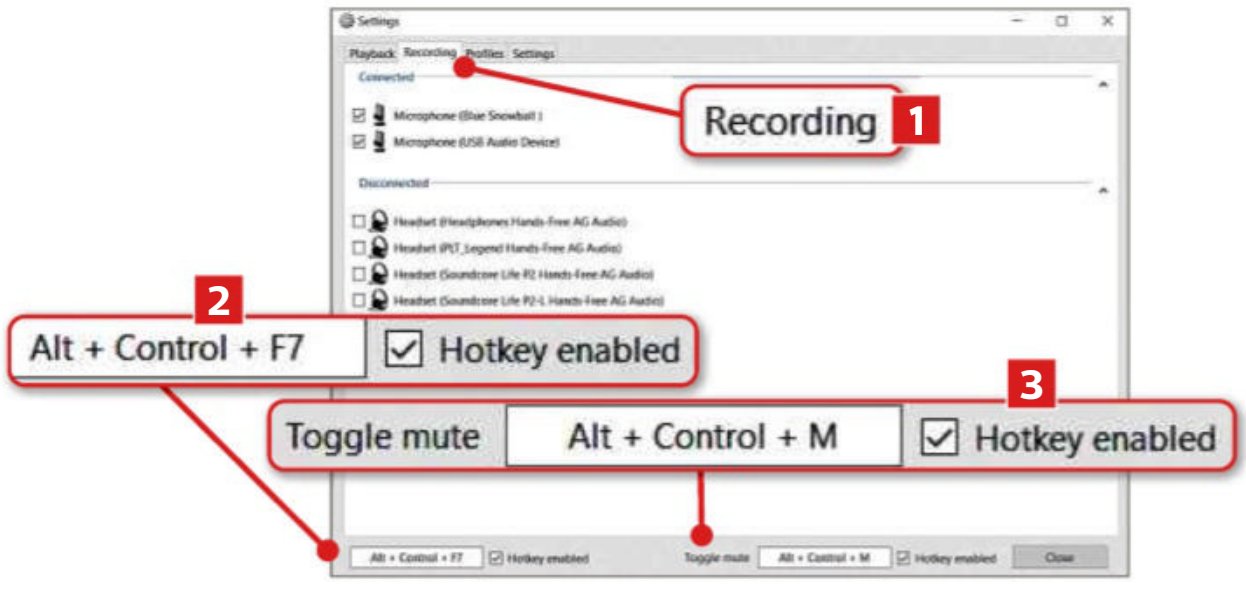
STEP 1 Go to www.snipca.com/38745, click the blue 'Download SoundSwitch...' button 1, then run the EXE file that downloads. Follow the installation through and, in the final step, untick all options except Launch SoundSwitch 2. The SoundSwitch window should now appear. If not, right-click the SoundSwitch icon in the system tray 3 and select Settings. Don't worry if you see pop-up windows saying that SoundSwitch can't register certain keyboard shortcuts – we'll explain how to change these shortcuts in a moment.

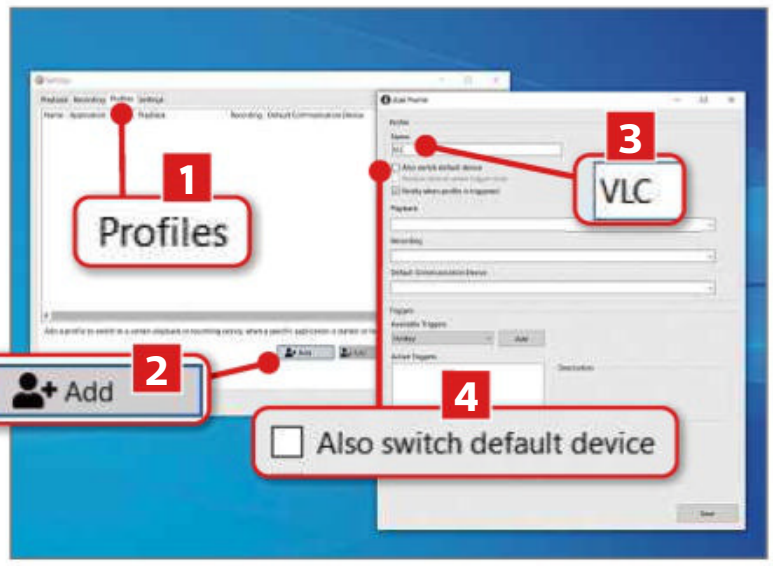


STEP 2 To use a keyboard shortcut to switch between multiple speakers, select the Playback tab 1. The 'Connected' section shows all speakers currently attached to your computer. On our laptop, it shows three speakers - one attached to our monitor 2, a set of Logitech Bluetooth speakers 3, and the built-in speakers 4. In the Disconnected section, you'll see all speakers previously connected to your computer. Tick the speakers you want to be able to switch between. You can then use the keyboard shortcut displayed at the bottom 5 to cycle through them. To change this shortcut, click the box, then enter your chosen key combination.



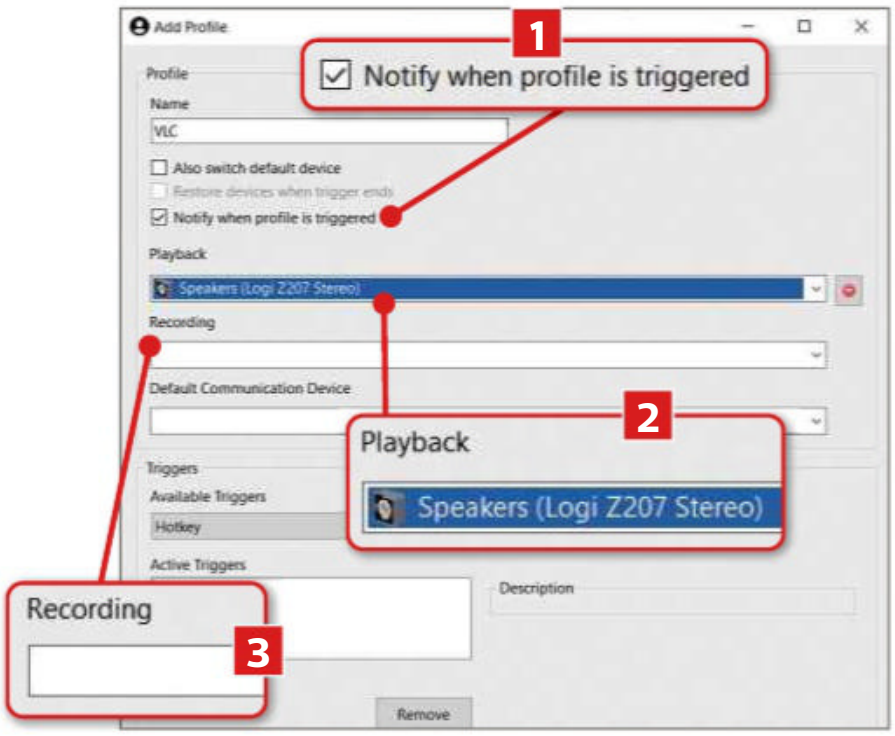
STEP 3 The 'Recording' tab 1 shows similar options for microphones attached to your computer. As with your speakers in the Playback tab, you can select the ones you want to switch between and change the shortcut in the box in the bottom-left corner 2. SoundSwitch also lets you quickly mute and unmute your currently selected microphone (useful if you want to ensure you can't be heard during a group video call). This feature is disabled by default – to enable it, tick the 'Hotkey enabled' box 3 in the 'Toggle mute' section. The default shortcut is Alt+Ctrl+M (as before, you can change this).





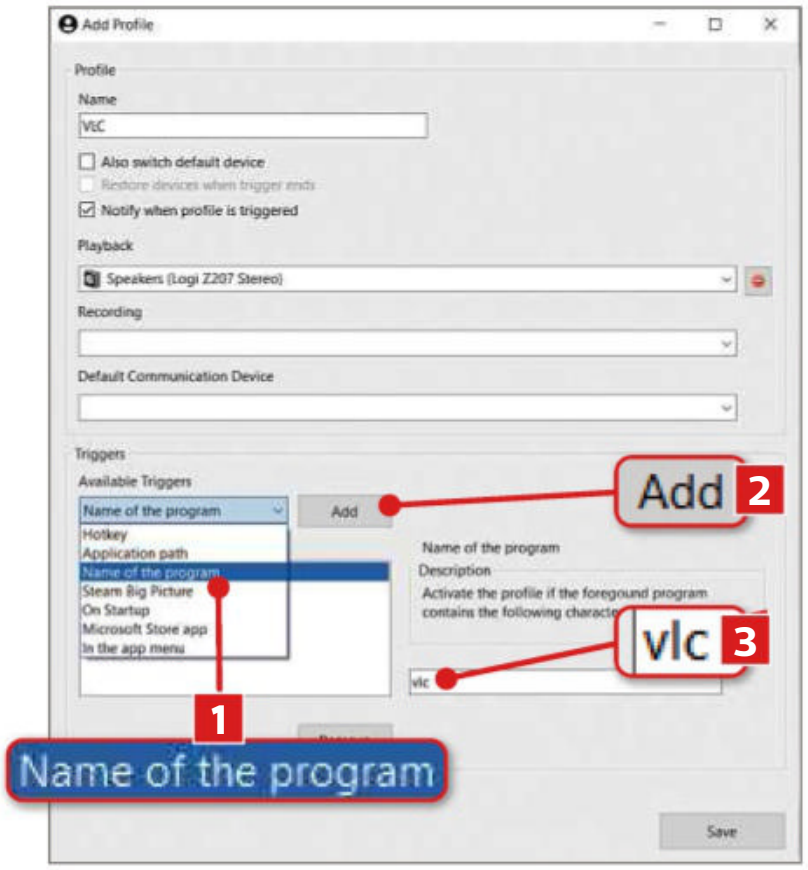
STEP 4

SoundSwitch also lets you set up profiles that switch automatically. In our example, we want to play all audio from our media player (VLC, www.videolan.org) through our large Bluetooth speakers, but leave all other audio (Windows notifications and so on) playing through our laptop's speakers, which are currently set as the default. In the Profiles tab 1, click Add 2, then give your profile a name – we'll call ours VLC 3. Because we don't want the profile to play *all* audio through our speakers, we'll leave the 'Also switch default device' box 4 unticked.



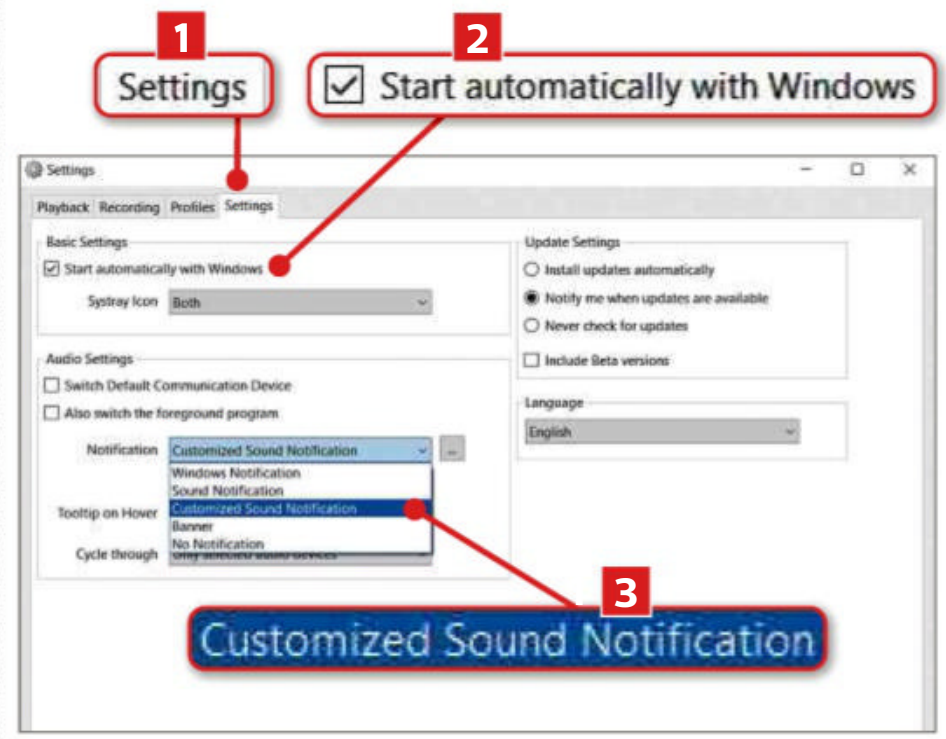
STEP 5

SoundSwitch shows a pop-up window each time a profile is activated. We'll show you how to customise these notifications in a moment, but you can untick the 'Notify when profile is triggered' box 1 if you want to turn them off. Next, in the Playback dropdown menu, select the speakers you want to use for this profile – we'll select 'Speakers (Logi Z207 Stereo)' 2, which are our Bluetooth speakers. The Recording box 3 lets you set the microphone for this profile, but we'll leave this blank because we want to only *listen* to audio in VLC, not record it.



STEP 6

The 'Triggers' section lets you specify what needs to happen in order for the profile to be activated. We want the profile to activate when we open VLC, so we selected 'Name of the program' 1 from the Available Triggers dropdown menu, then clicked Add 2. In the box that appears at the bottom of the window, type the name of the program - for our profile, we'll type vlc 3 here. Click 'Save' when you've finished, then close the Add Profiles window. You can now test the profile by opening the program that you specified as the trigger.



STEP 7

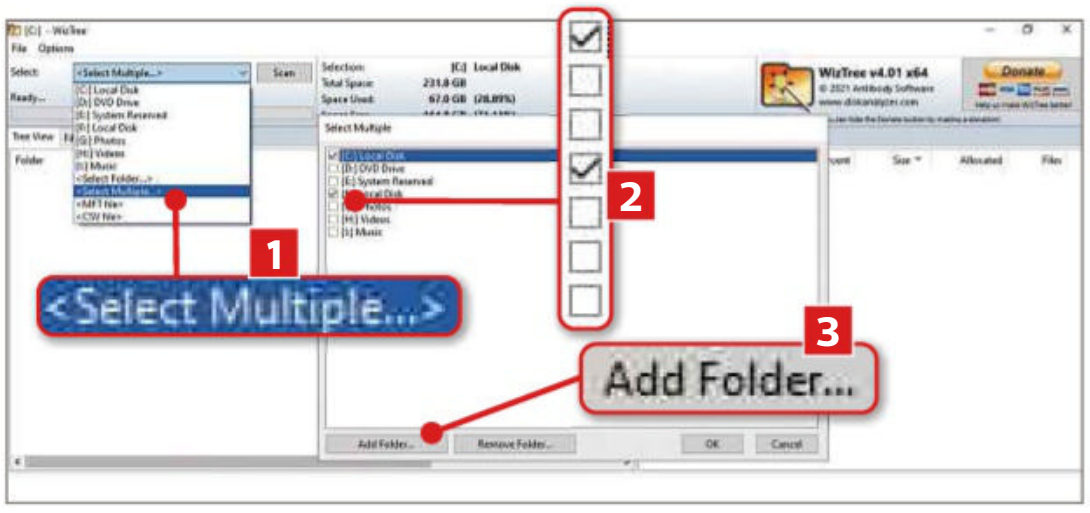
Once you've created your profiles, it's best to set SoundSwitch to start when you turn on your computer. Select the Settings tab 1, then tick the 'Start automatically with Windows' box 2. While in the Settings tab you can also change the style of the notification that appears when you switch between your audio devices, click the Notification dropdown menu (to hide the banner and instead play a sound of your choice, select Customized Sound Notification 3). Click 'Close' once you've made your changes – SoundSwitch will continue to run in the background.

Find out what's taking up space on *all* your drives

What you need: WizTree 4; Windows 7, 8.1 or 10
Time required: 15 minutes

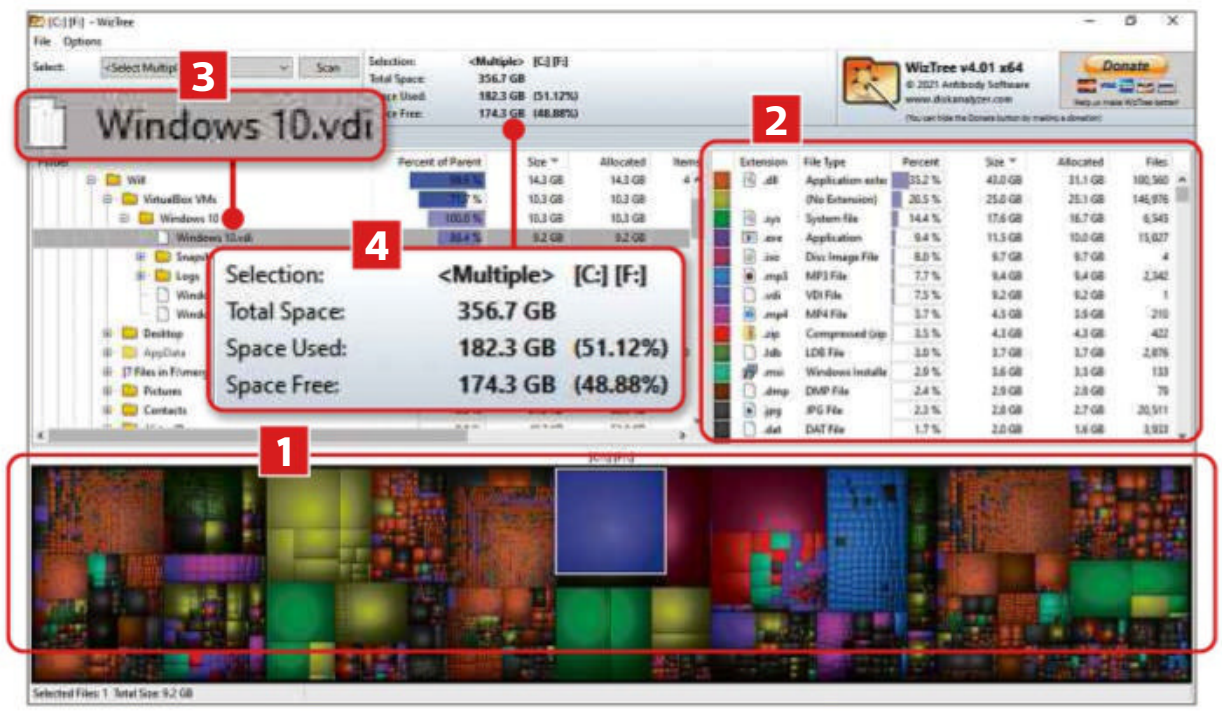
WizTree is a great free tool for identifying which files and folders are taking up the most space on your hard drive. The latest (fourth) version, which was released last month, adds a new feature that lets you scan multiple storage devices in one go (including partitions, internal and external hard drives, and even USB sticks), then quickly identify the space-hogging files on each – all within a single window.

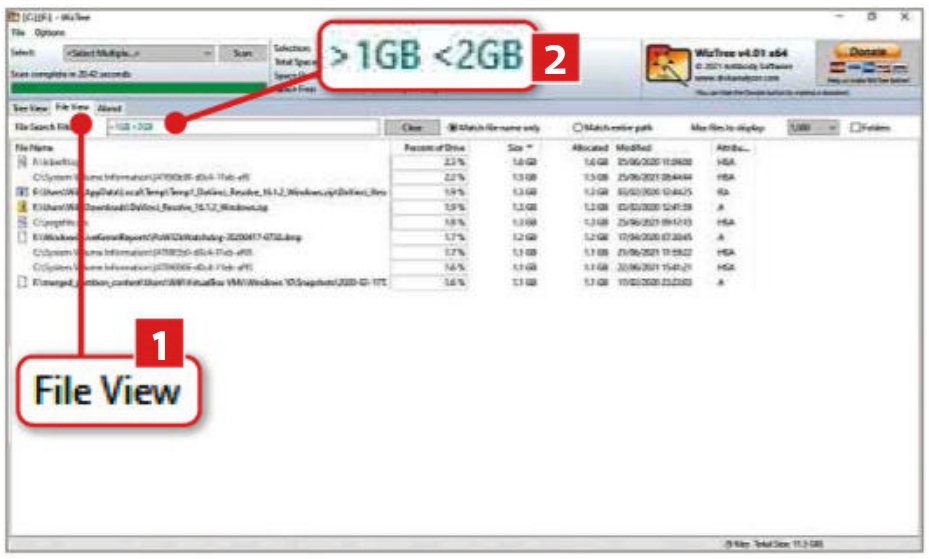
STEP 1 Download the latest version of WizTree (this was 4.01 at the time of writing) by going to www.snipca.com/38760 and clicking Download Installer 1. If you already have WizTree installed, click the 'View updates' button at the top-left of the window to update to the latest version. Make sure you've connected any external hard drives that you want it to scan and that they're switched on (if you've split a single drive into partitions, WizTree will load these automatically). Next, run WizTree by searching for it within the Start menu.



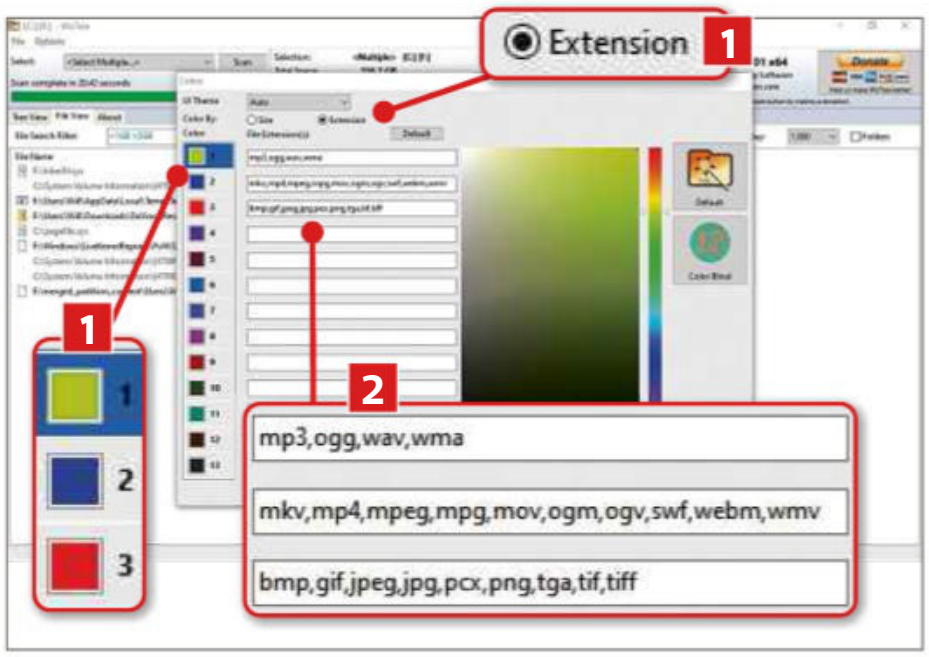
STEP 2 To get a complete picture of *all* your hard drives, open the Select dropdown box and choose 'Select Multiple...' 1. In the window that appears, tick the drives you want to include in the scan 2. If you want to include only a single folder on a specific drive, click 'Add Folder...' 3, navigate to that folder, then click Select. Once you've made your selections, click OK. WizTree will now scan all the drives you selected. How long this scan takes depends on the number of drives you selected and their size, but it usually lasts only a few seconds.

STEP 3 WizTree will now display a 'treemap' graphic in the bottom pane 1. Each box represents a file on one of your drives – the bigger the box, the larger the size of the file. The key in the top-right pane 2 lets you see the file extension each colour relates to. The top-left pane displays a folder view of your drives 3, along with size details for each folder. Click a box in the treemap graphic and the folder pane will update to show the size of the file and the folder it's located in. At the top of the window, you'll see an overview of the combined capacity of all your selected drives, along with the current used and free space 4.





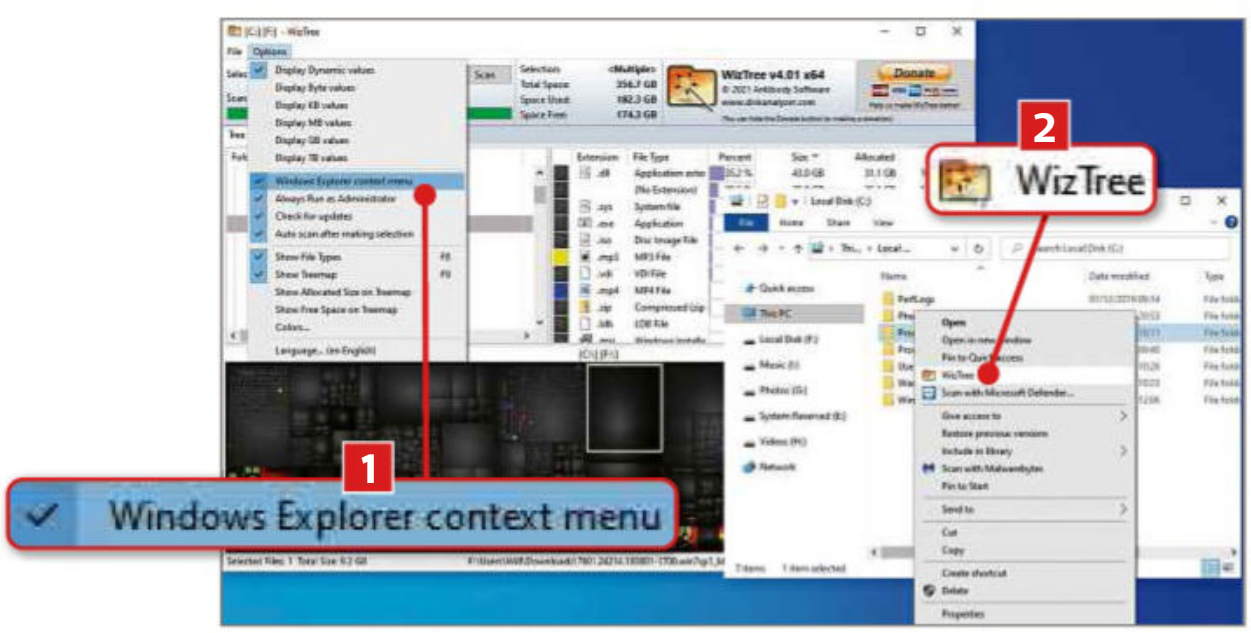
STEP 4 The latest version of WizTree also lets you search for specific files across multiple drives based on criteria such as file name, size, extension and more. Select the File View tab 1 in the top-left pane, then type a search into the File Search Filter box. For example, to show only ZIP files, type *.zip. Alternatively, if you want to hunt down all files over 1GB in size, type 1GB. You can also combine search terms, so for all files larger than 1GB but smaller than 2GB, you'd type >1GB <2GB 2. The results update as you type, so there's no need to press Enter after each search.



STEP 5 You can tweak the treemap in WizTree so that it displays only those files you're interested in. From the Options menu, select 'Colours...'. Next, select 'Extension' 1 - this tells WizTree you want to colour each file by its extension. In this example, we're interested in finding out how many photo, music and video files are stored on our hard drives and how much space they take up. We've therefore entered common file extensions (separated by commas) for each of the file types in the top three boxes 2 and given each a different colour 3. Click 'OK' to continue.

STEP 6 The treemap will now update according to your settings (if you can't see it, select the Tree View tab 1). In this example, all our various media files are clearly visible, with all other file types coloured black 2. If you want to return the treemap to its original format, go back to the Colours settings window, click the Default button at the top 3, then select Size 4. The larger Default button on the right 5 lets you revert to the default colour coding.

STEP 7 Sometimes you'll want to narrow your WizTree scan down to a single folder (and any sub-folders contained within). To do this, first open the Options menu, then make sure 'Windows Explorer context menu' has a tick next to it 1 – if not, click this option to select it. Now close WizTree, open File Explorer (press the Windows key+E) and navigate to the folder you want to scan. Finally, right-click the folder and select WizTree 2. When WizTree loads, the treemap will display only the files and folders within the one you selected.



Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Buy a wideband LNB for better Freesat reception

Following Colin Pengelly's tip in Issue 607 ('Buy an eight-way LNB for multiple Freesat setups'), I've done a similar installation. After having problems in the Redditch area, and with an oak tree blocking the signal, my Humax box (which apparently has weak tuners for Freeview) kept losing the signal for certain stations. I then decided to change to a Freesat dish with a new low-noise block (LNB) that had wideband connections and four normal connections.

The LNB came on a new dish I bought for £39.99 from eBay (www.snipca.com/38635, pictured), and I bought a new Freesat box also. Now I can record four channels at once via wideband and have four spares for my other TVs (these work on Freeview without the Humax), which I can swap over at a later date.

It gives me the best of both worlds, though I find Freesat far superior as my channels are now all in order (ie, all the film channels together). It doesn't make the programs any better though!

Andrew Bennett

Andrew wins a copy of our 2020 Back Issue CD **Buy it on Amazon www.snipca.com/38164**

BROWSERS

Make Edge's download bar appear at the bottom

A couple of months ago Microsoft Edge started to show the download bar at the top of the screen rather than the bottom. This confused me for a while – I kept looking for the bar at the bottom, where it had previously been, and where I prefer it.

I worked out how to move it back to the bottom. You need to search for Edge on your computer, then right-click the result and choose 'Open file location'. This will open File Explorer, showing the Microsoft Edge entry. Right-click this, then select 'Open file location' again.

You should now see 'msedge.exe', which is Edge's executable file. Right-click this and select 'Send to' followed by 'Desktop (create shortcut)'. Now close File Explorer and look for the 'msedge.exe' shortcut on your desktop. Right-click it, select Properties and then open the Shortcut tab at the top. Next, click the Target box, place the cursor after the last set of quote marks, and press Space. Now type this (or cut and paste it from our Pastebin page – www.snipca.com/38634):

--disable-features=msDownloadsHub

(see screenshot left). Finally, click Apply, then OK at the bottom.

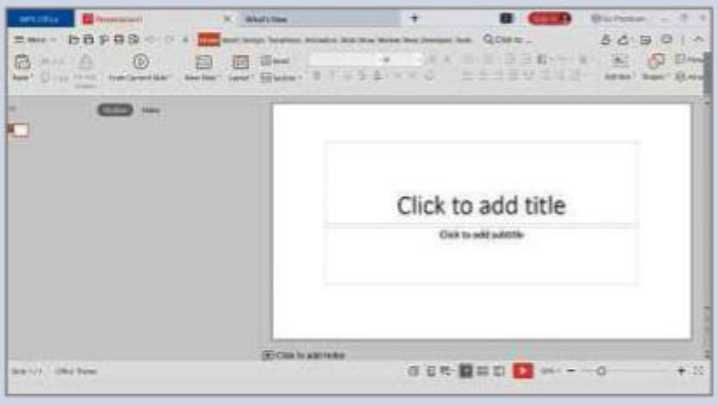
From now on, whenever you open Edge using this desktop shortcut, all downloads will appear at the bottom. If you use other Edge shortcuts, the download bar will be at the top, which is now Microsoft's default choice. I wish they hadn't changed it.

Colin Oatley

Why I stopped using...

PowerPoint

I'm on a cost-cutting blitz, and one of the things I'm ditching is my subscription to Microsoft 365. The only tool I used much was PowerPoint, and I'm sure it has more features than I ever needed.



And what I use instead

I used the long lockdown months of January and February to master **WPS Presentation**, which is part of WPS Office (www.wps.com, pictured). It looks similar enough to PowerPoint to make newcomers feel at home. For example, the tools are neatly organised in a ribbon at the top. You can easily import PowerPoint files into WPS.

I've been using WPS for six months now, and I've yet to miss PowerPoint. Maybe I never will. All the tools I want are here: transitions, animations, embedding videos and more. The only downside is the inevitable adverts, but that's what keeps it free. Thankfully, I don't find them distracting.

Philip Daley

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

Handy hints and tips from your fellow readers

Email us your tips: letters@computeractive.co.uk

HARDWARE

Use digital-to-audio converter to listen to TV headphones

In Issue 606's Readers' Tips, Robert Finch mentioned that you can use a stereo or headphone amplifier to get separate volumes for headphones and a TV. I came across a similar problem when I recently bought a new TV. I wanted to listen to the TV through headphones but not disturb those in the next room. Unfortunately, when buying the TV I neglected to check whether it actually had a headphone connection. It turned out not to have one!

To resolve this, I bought a digital-to-audio converter on eBay (though it's also available on Amazon for £13.99: www.snipca.com/38539, pictured above). This connects to the optical port on the TV, and works in a similar way to the amplifier that Robert suggested.

Robert Aindow

OFFICE

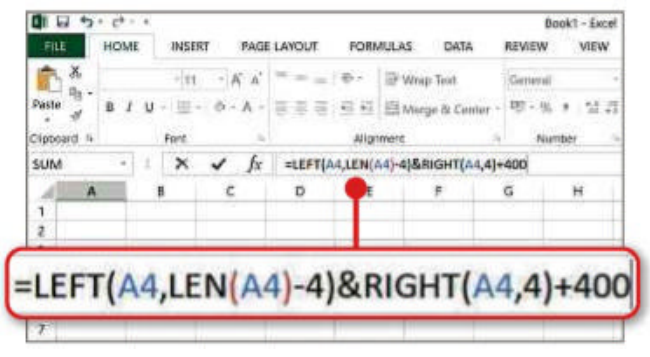
Add 400 to calculate pre-1900 dates in Excel

In Issue 608's Readers' Tips, Dave Duncan suggested that a way around the difficulty of recording and calculating dates before 1900 in Excel spreadsheets was to add a thousand years to the date, perform the various calculations, and then subtract the thousand years. Can I suggest that it would be even better to add and subtract 400 years (added to the end of the formula in the screenshot below)?

By a quirk of the Gregorian calendar, adding 400 years does not change the original day of the week. So, if you want to know which day of the week was the Battle of Waterloo (18 June 1815), Excel will show that 18 June 2215 will be a Sunday, so that battle was fought on a Sunday too!

However, be aware of the switch from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian. In Britain that occurred in September 1752, when the day after Wednesday the 2nd was Thursday the 14th, which prompted the outcry: "Give us back our 11 days!". The Julian calendar inserted leap years every fourth year without exception. The Gregorian calendar refines this so that a year that's evenly divisible by 100 (such as 1900) is a leap year only if it is *also* divisible by 400.

Mike Trace



Reader recommends...

Canon Pixma TS8350

£150 from Amazon www.snipca.com/38079

Your Group Test of printers in Issue 606 (pages 24-25) caught my eye, particularly your review of Canon's Pixma TS8350, to which you gave top marks.

I've owned one since last August, and it's everything you say about it, and more. I say more, because while you said it was great for printing photos, you didn't mention that it also prints directly on to CDs. In fact, it's the third Canon printer I've owned that prints directly on to CDs.

The price you quote is good, because mine cost me more (I notice that the RRP on Amazon is actually £149.99, so you found it for £30 cheaper). As a wee extra, I'd recommend sticking to the manufacturer's cartridges. I've found them superior to compatible replacements.

Alan McIlwaine

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk

ONLINE SHOPPING

Track your Amazon purchases in a spreadsheet

Issue 608's Cover Feature on finding Amazon bargains was very useful. I'm the founder of a money-saving newsletter that's now 20 years old, but your feature taught even me new tips.

If you shop on Amazon as much as I do, it's helpful to keep track of all your purchases. You could manually update an Excel spreadsheet I suppose, but I prefer the Chrome extension Amazon Order History Reporter (www.snipca.com/38358), which creates a spreadsheet of what you've bought. This includes the cost of each item and total for the year.

To use it, log into Amazon then click the 'Account & Lists' menu at the top right, followed by Your Account, then the Your Orders box at the top left. Next, click the extension's icon in your toolbar (it's an orange A – 1 in the screenshot above), and select a year 2. You'll see your purchases listed. Click the blue 'download spreadsheet' link 3 and the data will be downloaded as an Excel spreadsheet 4.

Heather Whitelaw

I was disappointed that you made no mention of Smile in your article on Amazon. Buying with Amazon Smile (https://smile.amazon.co.uk) enables you to nominate a charity that receives a percentage of the purchase price as a donation. Thanks for your very informative magazine.

Don Burge

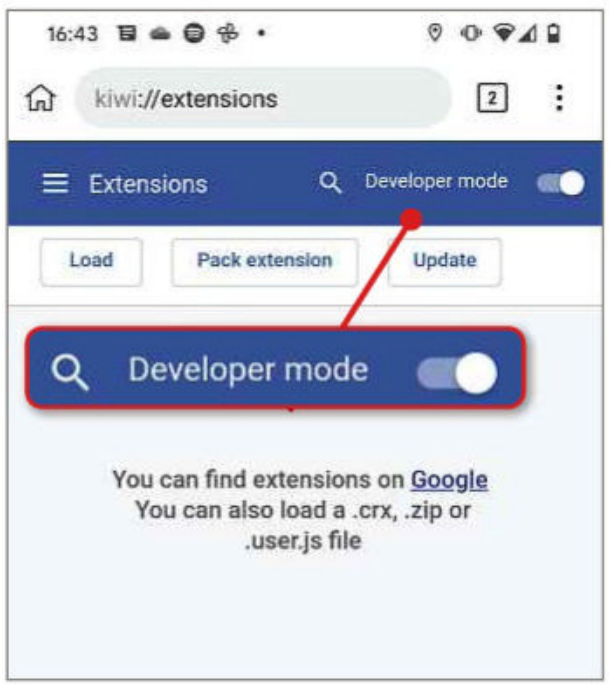
Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID

Bypass Google's restrictions to use browser extensions

Currently, Google doesn't offer a way to add browser extensions to the Android version of Chrome, but there is a way to get around this.

First, you need to install the latest version of Kiwi browser from the Google Play Store (www.snipca.com/38717). Kiwi is based on the same Chromium code as Chrome itself. Once installed, launch the app, then tap the menu button (three dots) and select Extensions. Here, look for the 'Developer mode' option in the top right (see screenshot below) and tap the slider to switch this on. Next, type https://chrome.google.com/webstore/category/extensions into the address bar then tap Enter. This will open the Chrome Web Store, letting you browse or search for the extension you want. Tap the extension to open its main page, then tap the 'Add to Chrome' button, followed by OK.



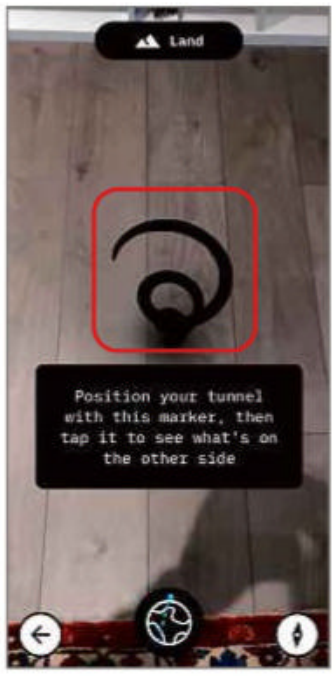
To manage any extensions you've installed, tap the menu button (three dots), then select Extensions – you'll be able to update, disable or remove the extension from here. Bear in mind that Chrome extensions aren't optimised for Android and may not look or work as intended.

ANDROID

Tunnel to the other side of the world with Google's Floom

Ever wondered where you'd come out if you were able to drill right through the planet to the other side? Well, with Google's fun new experimental web app, Floom, you can find out. The app, which only works in Chrome for Android devices, uses the power of augmented reality (AR) to show you a virtual view of what's on the other side of the world from wherever you happen to be at the time.

To use it, open your Chrome browser, then type floom.withgoogle.com into the address bar and tap Enter. Tap 'OK, Got it' to agree to Google's terms, then tap the 'Let's go!' button. Next tap Continue, then allow Floom to access your location when prompted. Tap the 'Explore!' button, then tap Allow to let the app track your movement. Point your camera at the ground and you should see a virtual drill bit in the middle of the screen (see screenshot left).



At the top of the screen it will state whether there's land or water on the other side of the planet. Move your device around, pointing it at the ground until you locate some land, then tap the drill bit to create your tunnel. A virtual hole will open in the ground with a view of the other side of the Earth.

You can change where the tunnel takes you by tapping the view to return to the drill bit, then pointing your device somewhere different and tapping the drill again. Note that Floom may not work on older devices that don't support Google's ARCore technology.

iOS

Lock tabs in Chrome for iOS using Face ID

If you use incognito mode in the iOS version of Chrome, you can now make your browsing even more private – by locking your incognito tabs with Face ID, so that they can only be viewed by you alone. You'll need a Face

BEST NEW APPS What you should install this fortnight

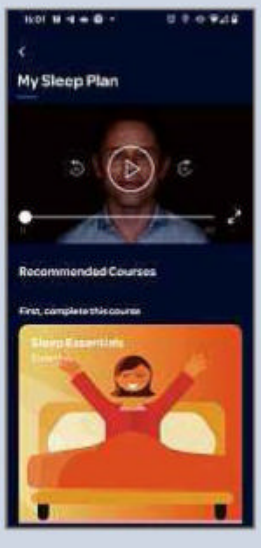
Sleep School

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/38720

iOS www.snipca.com/38721

If you suffer from restless nights, it can often feel like you need to relearn how to sleep. This app offers a series of courses designed by doctors and neuroscientists, with daily lessons to help retrain you to sleep better. Sleep School is free for seven days, after which it costs £30 per year.



GB News

Free

Android www.snipca.com/38718

iOS www.snipca.com/38719

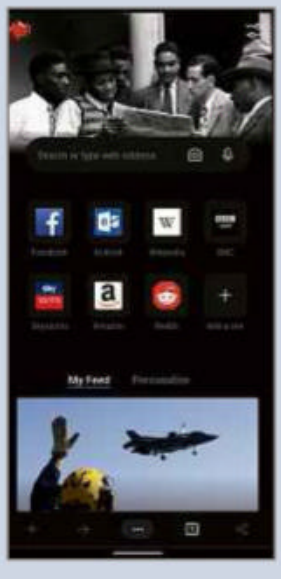
Britain's newest news channel also delivers current affairs via Britain's newest news app, allowing you to tune in live or watch catch-up clips of Andrew Neil, Alastair Stewart , Neil Oliver and others on your phone or tablet as well as your telly. The app also lets you browse or search by your favourite presenters.

Microsoft Edge Beta

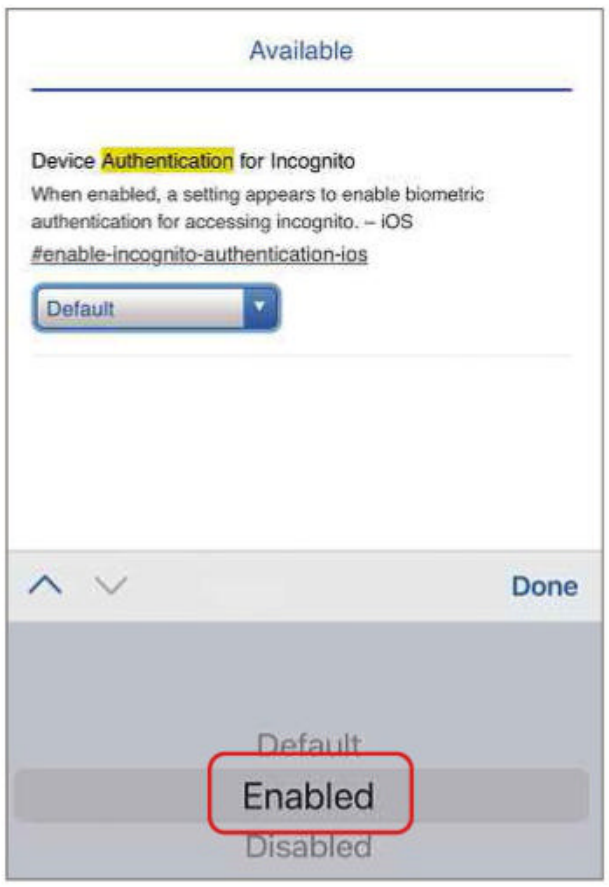
Free

Android www.snipca.com/38722

Microsoft has finally released a beta version of Edge for Android, letting you try new tools before they arrive in the full version. It may have the occasional bug, but should be a lot more stable than the Canary version (www.snipca.com/38737), which is for advanced and confident users only.



*Contains in-app purchases



ID-compatible iPhone for this, and you'll need to update Chrome via the App Store. Because this is still an experimental feature, you'll also need to tweak Chrome's hidden 'flag' settings to unlock it.

Open Chrome and type chrome://flags into the address bar, then tap Go. In the 'Search flags' box, type authentication. The 'Device Authentication for Incognito' option will appear below – tap the dropdown menu next to where it says Default and select Enabled (see screenshot above), then tap Done.

Close and restart Chrome, then tap Menu (three dots), Settings, followed by Privacy. Here you'll see a new option: 'Lock incognito tabs when you close Chrome'. Tap the slider to switch the setting on. Now, every time you open your Chrome incognito tabs, you'll see an 'Unlock with Face ID' prompt – tap this to unlock your incognito tabs with your face.

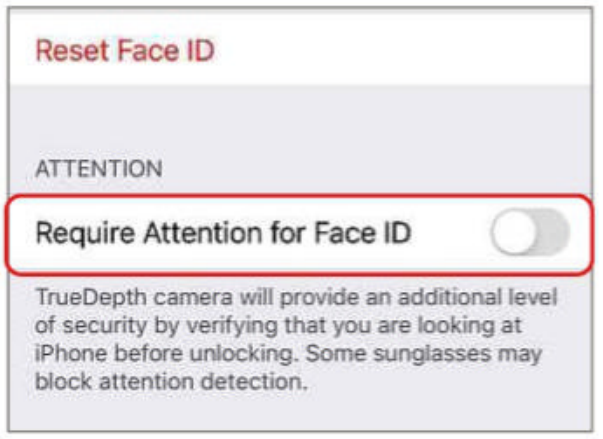
iOS

Make Face ID work when wearing you're sunglasses

Whether you're lucky enough to get yourself abroad for a holiday or you're planning to make the most of the great British summer, the chances are you'll be popping on a pair of sunglasses at some point. And when that happens, the clever face-detection systems built into your iPhone may suddenly seem a whole lot less clever and a lot more annoying.

Apple's Face ID is designed to work for glasses wearers whether they're wearing them or not. But, depending on the type of sunglasses you wear, you may find that the system struggles to recognise you and may refuse to unlock your device. Darker and mirrored sunglasses appear to be particularly bad. But there is a fix.

Tap Settings, then 'Face ID & Passcode' – you'll be prompted to enter your passcode to gain access to these settings. Here, scroll down to the Attention section and you'll find a setting labelled 'Require Attention for Face ID'. This setting is intended to provide an extra layer of protection by verifying that you're looking at your screen before unlocking your phone. But Face ID's cameras can be confused by sunglasses that make it hard



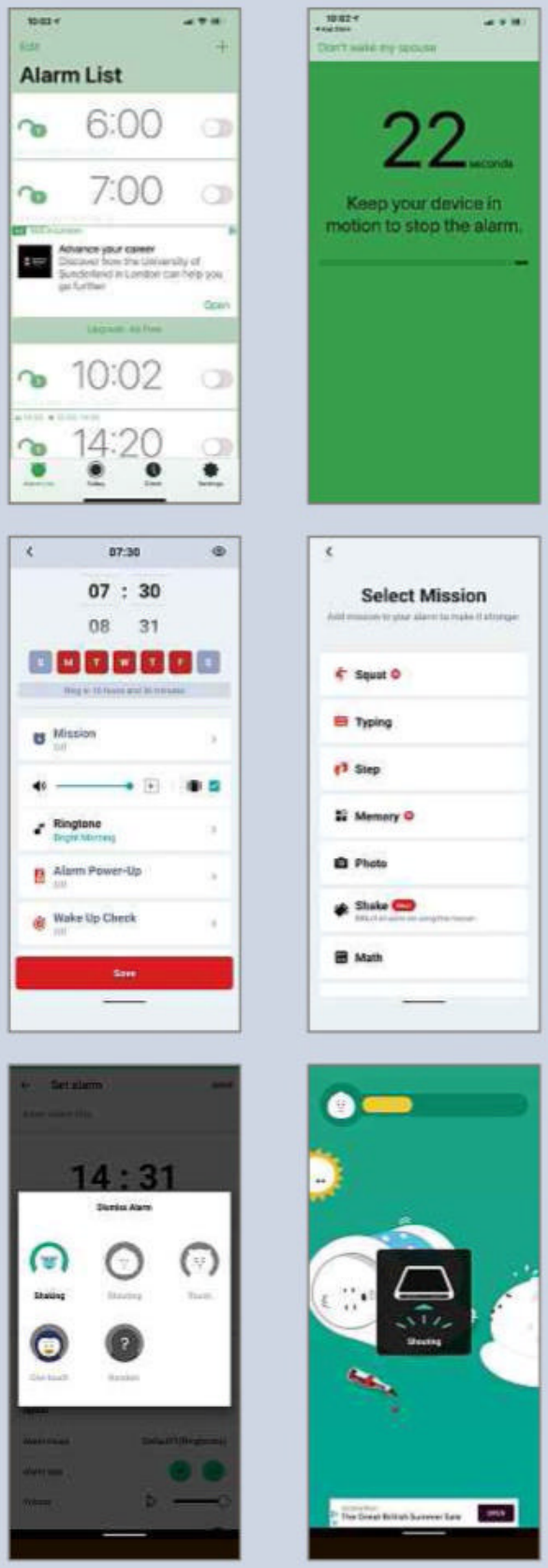
to see your eyes. Temporarily disabling this setting (see screenshot above) will make it easier to continue using Face ID to unlock your device during the summer months.

BEST APPS FOR... Waking you up

Motion Alarm Clock
Free*
iOS www.snipca.com/38723
If you struggle to get out of bed in the morning, this iOS-only app offers a novel solution. Rather than simply tapping the screen to dismiss the alarm, you need to prove that you're not just going to fall back asleep again by picking up your device and moving it around it for several seconds.
Best For Those who easily doze off again

Alarmy
Free*
Android www.snipca.com/38725
iOS www.snipca.com/38726
Alarmy has loud ringtones to rouse heavy sleepers, or soothing sounds for those who prefer to wake up gradually. You can opt to stop your alarm using a variety of 'missions', including solving maths problems or scanning barcodes. Premium users (from £2.46 a month) can silence alarms by typing phrases or taking a certain number of steps.
Best For Those who like early-morning tasks

Shake-it Alarm
Free
Android www.snipca.com/38724
As the name suggests, you'll need to be awake enough to give your device a good shake if you want to silence your morning alarm. Alternatively, you can choose to dismiss your alarm by shouting at your device long enough so that it fills up a progress bar or by tapping the screen continually until it stops ringing.
Best For Those who need longer to wake



*Contains in-app purchases

Make Windows Better

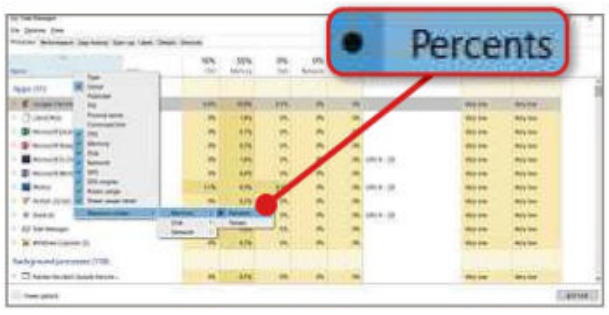
Expert tips for every version

WINDOWS 7, 8.1 & 10

Get percentage views in Task Manager

Windows' Task Manager is great when you want to find out why your computer might be running slow. Press Ctrl+Shift+Escape to open it, then select the Processes tab. In the Apps section, you'll see all programs that you currently have open, along with information on how much strain they're placing on your computer's resources (processor, memory, hard drive and more).

By default, the CPU (processor) figure is shown as a percentage, but the Memory, Disk (hard-drive activity) and Network are all displayed as values. However, you can see them all as percentages, so you can tell exactly what proportion of your computer's resources each one is using. Right-click the column header, select 'Resource values', then hover over the Memory, Disk and Network options and set each one to Percents (see screenshot below).

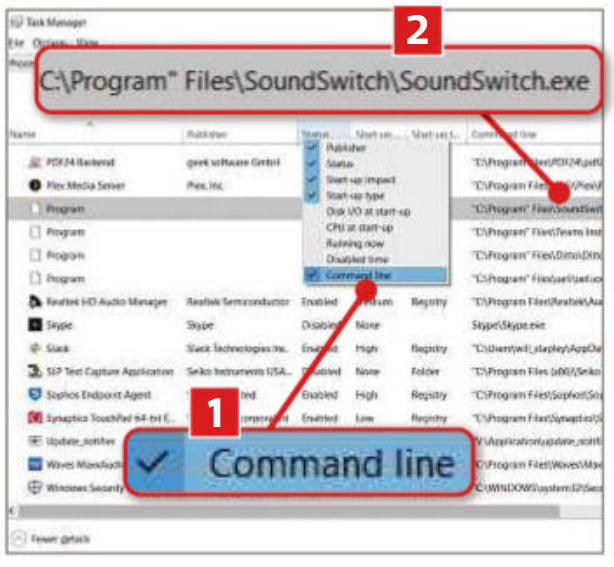


WINDOWS 7, 8.1 & 10

Identify anonymous startup items

You can also use Task Manager to check (and change) which programs are set to start when Windows boots. Click the Start-up tab, then use the column headers to organise the list of programs by Name, Publisher, and 'Start-up impact'. Right-click any programs you don't want opening when Windows boots, then select Disable.

In some cases, you may spot entries that are unhelpfully labelled as Program, often with no information in the Publisher column. To get a better idea of what these entries relate to (and whether it's wise or not to disable them) right-click the column header and select the 'Command line' option at the bottom (see 1 in our screenshot below left). The 'Command line' column will now be visible, showing the folder containing the startup program 2 – this should make clear which program it belongs to.

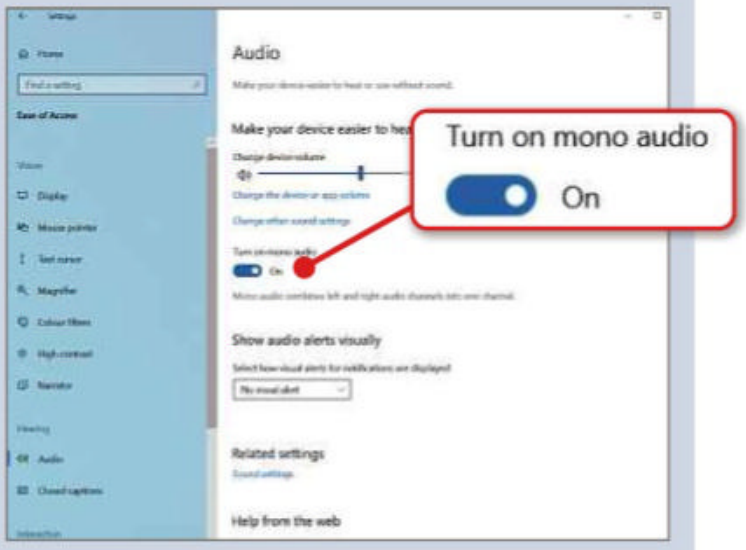


WINDOWS 10

Switch your PC to mono audio

Stereo speakers – whether external or built into your laptop – make the audio from your computer sound more immersive. However, there are times when switching to mono audio is handy. If you want to listen out for the doorbell while catching up on a podcast, for example, you may opt to use only one earpiece on your headphones. When using stereo, this would mean you lose out on half the audio (which could be a problem if you're listening to an interview where the interviewer is on the left audio channel and the interviewee on the right). You would experience a similar problem if one of your laptop's built-in speakers developed a fault.

Windows 10 lets you manage this by quickly switching from stereo to mono. Open Settings (press the Windows key+I), then select 'Ease of Access'. Scroll down the menu on the left-hand side of the window to the Hearing section, then click Audio. On the right, you'll see a slider called 'Turn on mono audio' – click this to turn it on (see screenshot). You'll now hear the same audio through one of your speakers or earpieces as you would when both are being used in stereo.

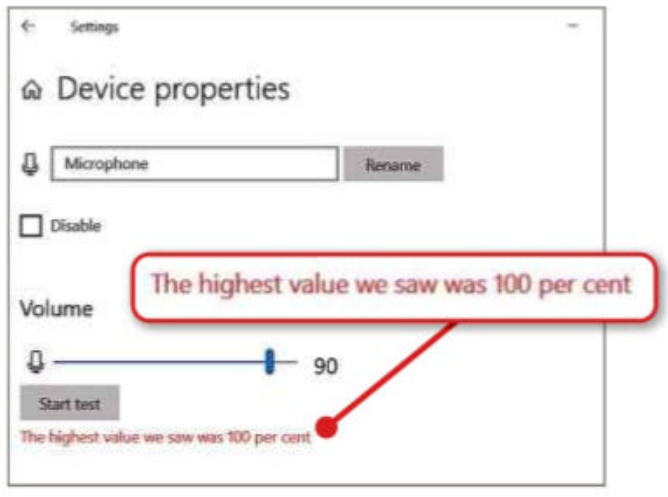


WINDOWS 10

Avoid distortion in video and voice calls

When you're making a voice or video call on your computer, having a mic that's too quiet or too loud will soon irritate the other people on the call.

Windows 10 includes a useful tool to test and tweak your microphone's volume level. Open Settings, then select System, followed by Sound. Scroll down to the Input section on the right, then make sure your microphone is selected in the 'Choose your input device' box (if not, click the box to select it). Next, click the blue 'Device properties' link.



In the window that opens, click 'Start test', then begin talking as you would during a call. Click 'Stop test' when you've finished. Windows will analyse the recording and tell you the highest value it recorded (from 0 to 100 – see screenshot above). If the number is between 90 and 100, your microphone may distort your voice.

To avoid this, drag the slider to the left a little (this makes your microphone quieter), then repeat the test. We recommend aiming for a maximum value somewhere between 80 and 90, which will prevent distortion but ensure you're heard on your calls.

LIBREOFFICE WRITER & CALC

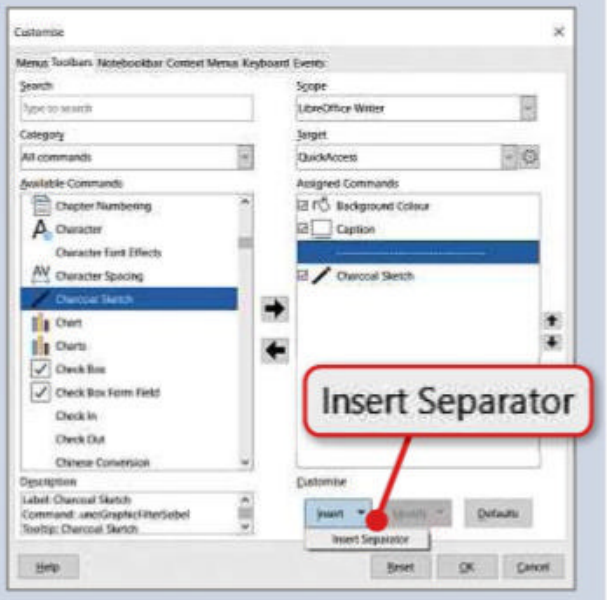
Add a Quick Access toolbar to LibreOffice

Microsoft Office has a Quick Access toolbar that lets you add your most commonly used tools to the top-left corner of the window's title bar. To customise this, click the small down arrow to the right of the default Quick Access buttons.

LibreOffice doesn't have this feature, but you can create something similar. First, open Writer or Calc, then open the Tools menu and select 'Customise...'. When the Customise window opens, select the Toolbars tab, click the cog icon (next to the Target box), then 'Add...'. Give your toolbar a name (such as QuickAccess), then select LibreOffice Writer or Calc – this means your toolbar will appear in all your documents, not just the one you currently have open.

Click OK, then use the Search box to find the commands you want to add to your toolbar. When you find one, select it in the box on the left, then click the right-pointing arrow. Repeat this to add as many commands as you like. To remove a command from your toolbar, select it in the box on the right, then click the left-pointing arrow.

If you add many commands, it's worth dividing them into sections. To add a section divider, select the command that you want the divider to appear immediately after, then click Insert, followed by Insert Separator (see screenshot). You can then move the divider by clicking and dragging it. To delete a divider, right-click it, then select Remove.

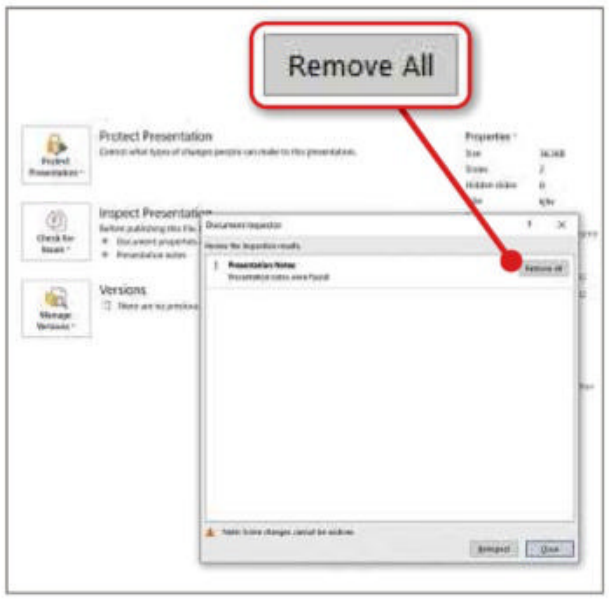


MICROSOFT POWERPOINT

Remove notes from your slides

PowerPoint lets you add speaker notes to each slide in a presentation. These notes will be visible on your computer when you're presenting, but won't be shown on the screen you're presenting with. However, should someone ask for a copy of your presentation after the event, providing them with the original PowerPoint file means they'll also see all your notes.

Don't waste time deleting each note individually. Instead, save a copy of your presentation, then open it in PowerPoint. Next, click File, Info, 'Check for issues', then Inspect Document. In the window that opens, untick all boxes except Presentation Notes, then click Inspect. PowerPoint will now scan your slides for notes and, if it finds any, will display a Remove All button (see screenshot below left). Click this, then Close. You can now save your presentation, then send it on to interested parties, minus your notes.



MICROSOFT EXCEL

Fill each row with alternating colours

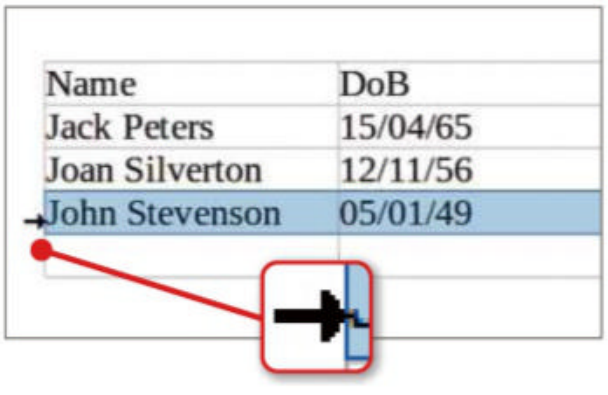
When you have a large spreadsheet, browsing the data along a single row isn't always easy – especially on a printed copy. Excel lets you make things clearer by filling each row with an alternating colour. Using your mouse, select the cells you want to colour, then select the Home tab and click 'Format as Table' (in the Styles section of the toolbar, see screenshot below). Choose the style you want to use (the options are split into Light, Medium and Dark categories), then click OK. Your cells will now be coloured accordingly. If you add new rows or columns to your spreadsheet, Excel will automatically apply the appropriate colours.

MICROSOFT WORD & LIBREOFFICE WRITER

Manage tables in documents

Word and Writer let you add tables to your documents, but adding and removing rows can be fiddly – unless you use these tools' handy shortcuts.

To add a row, select the cell in the bottom right-corner of the table, then press Tab. A new row will now appear at the bottom of the table (you can repeat this to add more rows, as required). To remove a row, move your mouse so it sits just to the left of the relevant row - the cursor will change to a standard pointer (Word) or a right-pointing arrow (Writer – see screenshot below). Click the left mouse button to select the row, then press Shift+Delete to remove it. If you want to leave the row in place and delete only its contents, press Delete.



Name	DoB
Jack Peters	15/04/65
Joan Silverton	12/11/56
John Stevenson	05/01/49

In The Club

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

Create a live photo-sharing session for your club

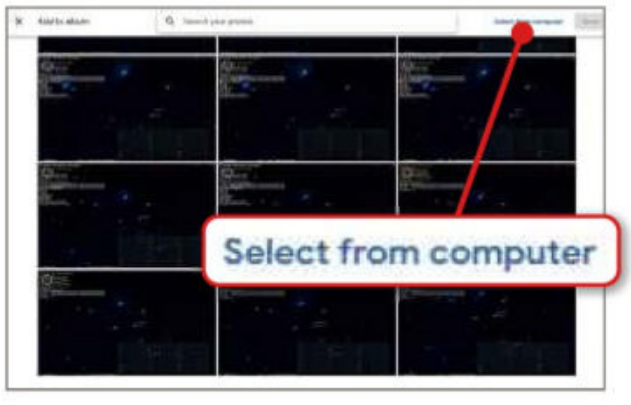
Inviting your club's members to share photos during an online meeting is a great way to improve engagement. There are lots of ways to do this, but our favourite is to use the photo-sharing tool in Google Photos. You'll need a Google account to create the shared album, as will anyone who wants to add photos. You can set up a Google account for free at www.snipca.com/38837.

Create a shared album

Before you can share photos, you need to create an album to store them in. Open Google Photos in your browser (https://photos.google.com), log in to your account, then locate the Library section in the menu on the left and select Albums. In the top-right corner of the page, click the 'Create album' link, then enter a suitable name for it in the 'Add a title' box. This will be visible to everyone you share the album with.

You can add photos to your album straight away by clicking the blue 'Add photos' button. If you already have some photos in your Google Photos account that you'd like to add, select them by clicking the small circle in the top-right corner of each, then click Done. Alternatively, if the photos are on your computer, choose 'Select from computer' (see screenshot below) to upload them directly to your shared album.

You can now share your album by hovering over its icon – which will be grey if you haven't yet uploaded any photos to it – then clicking the three vertical dots that appear in the top-right corner and selecting 'Share album'. Next, enter the email addresses of the people you want to share the album with. If you've created a Google Group for your club (as we explained in Issue 600, page 48), enter your group's email address here to add everyone in one go. Once you've added your recipients, write a suitable message in the box at the bottom, then click the blue Send button (arrow icon). The people you've invited will receive an email containing a link to the shared album.



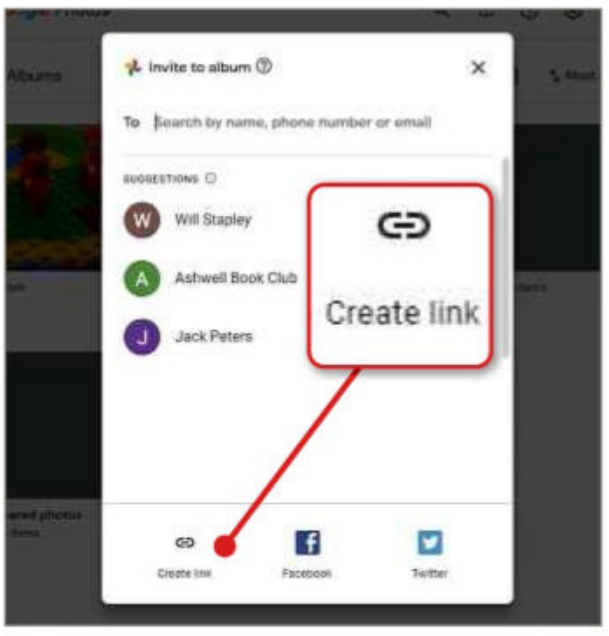
Upload photos directly from your computer to your shared album

If you want to add lots of people, you may find it easier to click 'Create link' (see screenshot above), then paste the link into an email and forward it to your club's members. The only disadvantage to this method is that you lose control over who has access to your shared album, because people can easily forward the link to others.

Everyone who has access to the shared album will be able to view the photos in it. They can also add their own by clicking the 'Add photos' button in the top-right corner.

Present the photos

A good way to present your photos during a video call is to share the browser tab in which Google Photos is running. To do this in Zoom, click Share Screen at the bottom of the window, then select your browser window within the Basic tab. To do the same in Skype, click the 'Share screen' option (open the 'More...' menu if you can't see it).

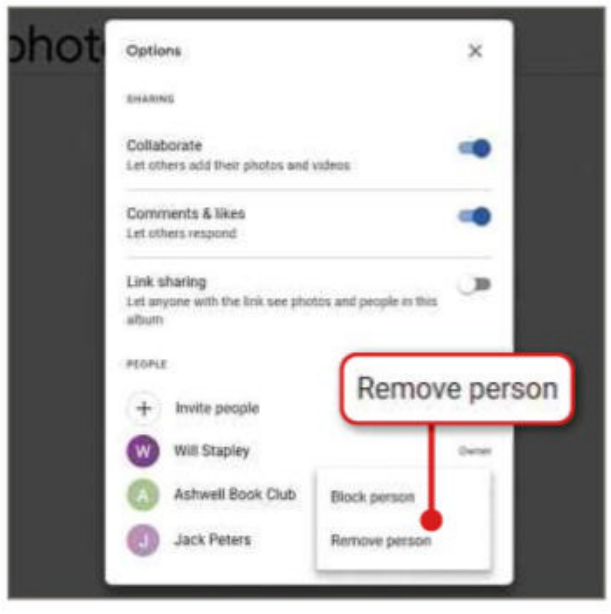


Share your album using a link, though recipients could easily forward it to others

Bear in mind that photos will appear in your shared album as soon as people submit them, which means you won't get a chance to vet them first. If you want a little more control over what appears, you can download selected photos from the shared album (click a photo to open it, then press Shift+D to download), move them to a new folder on your computer, then open them in an image viewer such as the Photos app. You can then share this window instead of your browser tab during the video call.

Manage access to your shared album

Once you've created your shared album, you can add more people by opening it, then clicking the '+' button at the top. To remove people, click the three vertical dots next to the name of the person you want to remove and select 'Remove person' (see screenshot below). Note that when you remove someone, any photos they have submitted will be deleted from the shared album.



When you revoke someone's access to the album, their shared photos are deleted

Next issue: Set up an online to-do list for meetings

What's All the

Fuss About...

Data voids

Google wants to warn you about unidentified search results

What are they?

Online searches that produce little or no reliable results, creating a vacuum in which someone with malicious intent can spread misinformation. Data voids can occur because the search query is obscure or hasn't been typed very often, but it also happens when a news story is breaking.

Can you give an example?

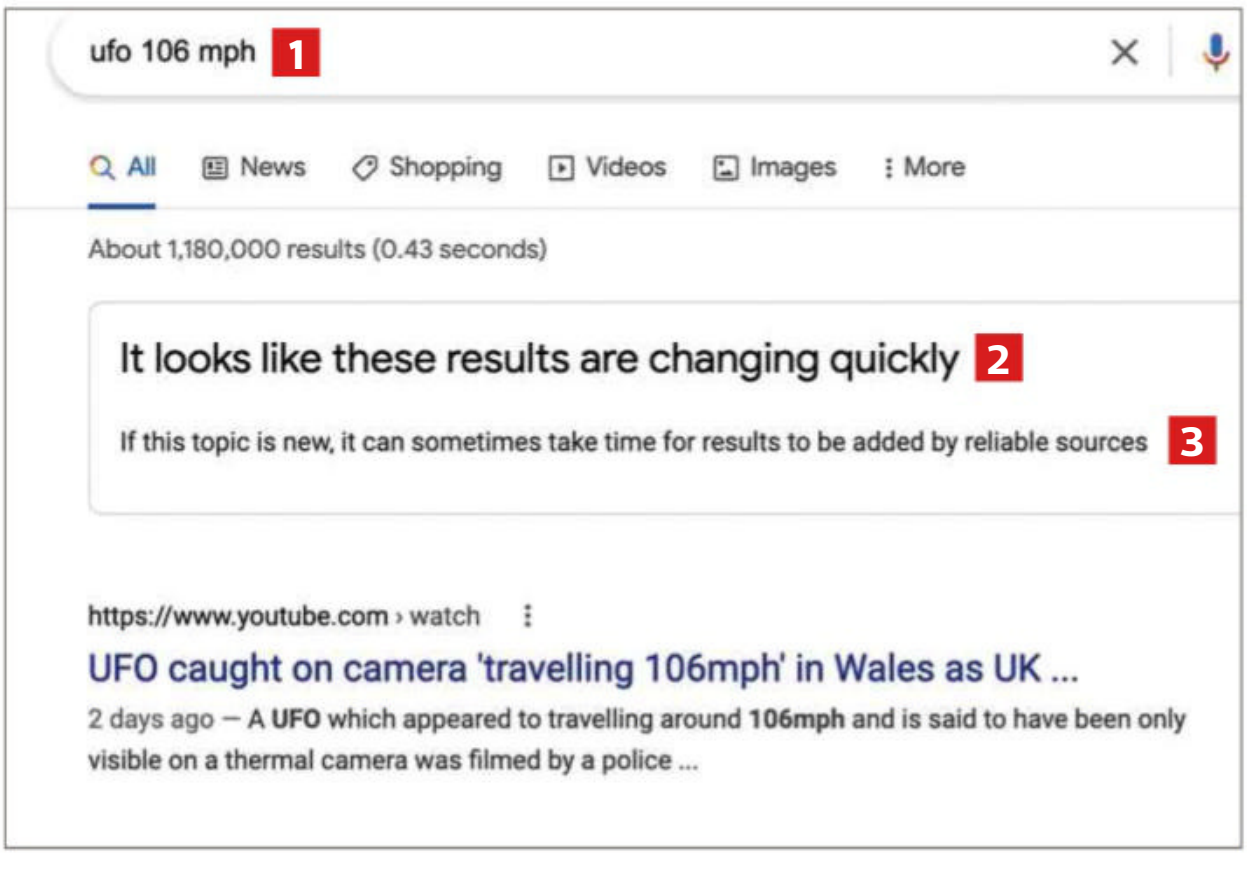
Yes – or rather, Google can. In a recent blog post (www.snipca.com/38806), it referred to the search term 'ufo 106 mph' (1 in screenshot right), which became suddenly popular in 2016 following reports that a police helicopter had filmed a flying saucer in Wales. It's precisely the kind of rumour that spreads quickly through social media, prompting people to search online for more details. The problem is that reputable news outlets usually haven't had time to research and fact-check such claims, and therefore have yet to publish an article about it. Into that gap can step someone keen to spread lies, linking a hastily written – and highly misleading – article to the search term. It's easy, for instance, to imagine a blogger claiming that the UFO sighting "proves" that governments are suppressing proof of alien life.

Does Google have a plan to tackle this?

Yes. It has trained its algorithms to "detect when a topic is rapidly evolving and a range of sources hasn't yet weighed in". In such cases it will tell you that "these results are changing quickly" 2, and advise that with new topics it can "sometimes take time for results to be added by reliable sources" 3.

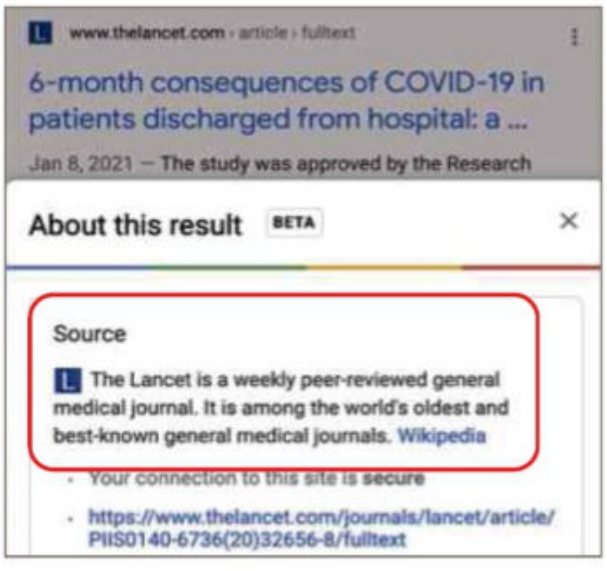
Why is Google doing this now?

Two reasons: the Covid-19 pandemic and last year's US election. It didn't specifically mention these in its blog, but both events triggered a wave of misinformation that ranged from mostly harmless speculation to dangerous lies. Google was criticised for not warning people about these, so it has responded with measures to reinforce the legitimacy of its results.



What else has it done?

In February it added a description taken from Wikipedia about where a search result has come from. On its blog (www.snipca.com/38808) it gave the example of a search about coronavirus producing information from *The Lancet*. Clicking the three-dot menu next to the result brings up a box with this description from Wikipedia (see screenshot below): "The Lancet is a weekly peer-reviewed general medical journal. It is among the world's oldest and best-known general medical journals." Google says this info (available only in the US at the moment) helps you "make a more informed decision about the sites you may want to visit and what results will be most useful for you".



Google quotes Wikipedia to tell you more about where a search result comes from

Isn't all this giving Google too much power?

Some will think so, particularly those who think Google (and other tech giants) shouldn't be the judge of what's considered reliable. Many people are angry that until May Facebook was removing posts that claimed Covid-19 leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology – a theory that is now gaining credibility among scientists and government officials. Google won't want to make a similar mistake, and is careful to state that it isn't actually commenting on the accuracy of results, only that it's a quickly changing situation and more detailed information may emerge later.

So, just to check: *was* a UFO filmed travelling at 106mph?

We'll reply as soon as we can remove this alien probe from our nostrils.

IS YOUR COMPUTER COMPATIBLE? PAGE 52

Windows 11 Try All The New Tools Today!

They said it would never happen, but Microsoft is releasing a follow-up to Windows 10. But will your computer be able to run it? Will Stapley shows how to check, and explains how to try the new tools now

Back in 2015 at the launch of Windows 10, Jerry Nixon, a Microsoft 'developer evangelist' (whatever that means), said: "Windows 10 is the last version of Windows". The big idea was for Windows 10 to receive regular feature updates, negating the need for a brand new operating system every three or so years.

We've learned not to believe everything Microsoft says, and we weren't alone in thinking the company was unlikely to stick to its word on this. Sure enough, last month Microsoft announced that it will release Windows 11 later this year.

You've probably got lots of questions about what this means for you.

Is it free? Will it work on your computer? Will you be forced to upgrade? Over the next few pages, we'll cut through all the marketing hype to answer these questions, and explain everything you need to know (including how Microsoft seems confused about what your computer needs to run Windows 11, and how to check whether yours is compatible).

We expect that, like us, you're eager to play with Windows 11, so we'll explain how to install the preview release of the operating system on a virtual PC. This means you can mess around with Windows 11 as much as you like, safe in the knowledge that whatever you do won't affect your existing Windows 10 installation.

We'll also reveal Windows 11's best new features and show you how to get the same (or similar) tools right now in Windows 10.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Check whether your PC has the required hardware to run Windows 11
- Hack the registry to get access to the latest preview build
- Install software to get Windows 11's tools on Windows 10
- Search for and enable your computer's TPM chip

WINDOWS 11: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

What's new in Windows 11?

Windows 11 includes major changes to how the desktop looks, along with a range of new tools and features.

Visually, the most obvious change is that the Start menu and program icons sit in the centre of the taskbar. You can shift these back to the left side of your taskbar if you like, but we enjoyed its new position when testing a preview release of Windows 11 (find out how to install this on page 55).

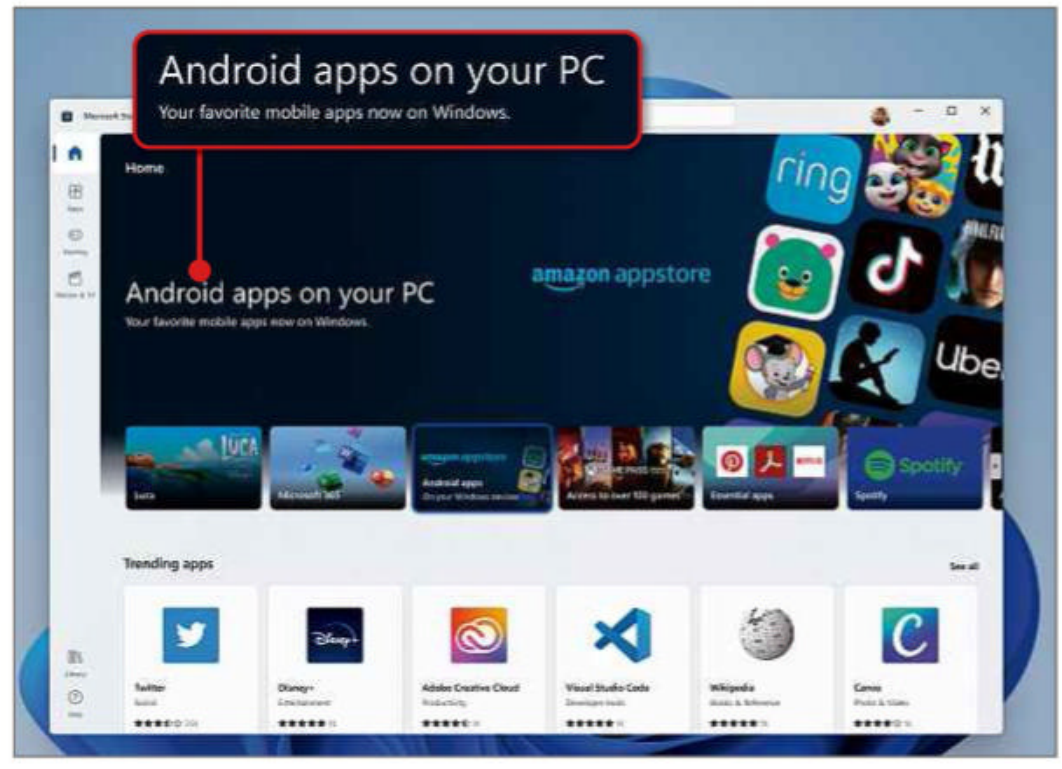
The Start menu also gets a refresh, and slides up into view when you click the Start button (1 in the screenshot below). The animated live tiles of Windows 10 (which continuously update to reveal further information, such as how many unread emails you have) are replaced by smaller, static icons 2 with more spacing between them, mimicking the icons on phones and tablets.

Microsoft has changed the appearance of windows on the desktop, giving them a slightly translucent background and colours that match your desktop theme. We like the curved corners on each window, which helps them blend in with the desktop.

Aesthetics aside, one of the biggest new features in Windows 11 is that you can install and run Android apps. You have to download them via the Amazon App Store (see screenshot above right) instead of Google Play, so you don't have the same selection of apps as on your phone (around 700,000 apps compared with Google's 3 million), but most of the big names are there.

Windows 11 also lets you organise the windows on your desktop using a new Snap tool (see screenshot below right), access a range of widgets (similar to desktop gadgets in Windows 7) and benefit from smaller, less intrusive updates, which Microsoft claims will be 40 per cent faster than those in Windows 10.

We'll take a closer look at all the new features – and how to get equivalents of them in Windows 10 – a bit later.



The updated Microsoft Store in Windows 11 will let you install Android apps

Will it work on my computer?

Shortly after announcing Windows 11, Microsoft released the PC Health Check tool to let you check whether your computer was compatible with the new operating system.

However, Microsoft removed it following criticism that the tool marked some computers as incompatible without explaining why.

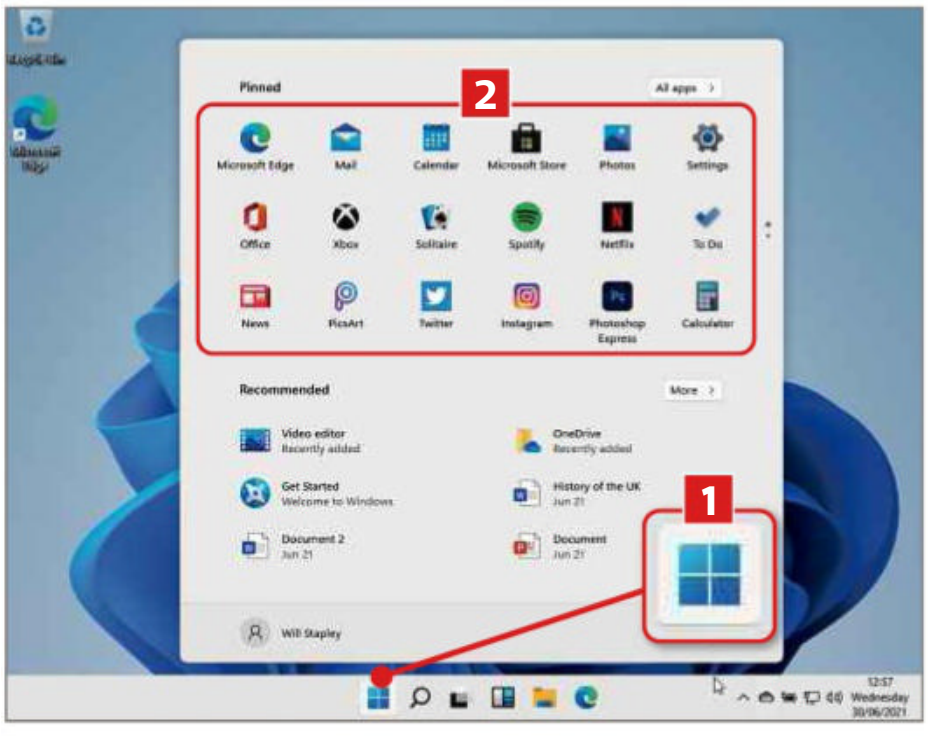
We suspect Microsoft is also having a rethink about the minimum system requirements, which at present will leave many computers stuck on Windows 10. Microsoft says it will release an improved version of the tool "soon" (you can check whether it's available yet at www.snipca.com/38799).

If your computer was built in the past four years, there's a good chance it will run Windows 11. Anything older than that might need to be upgraded or replaced.

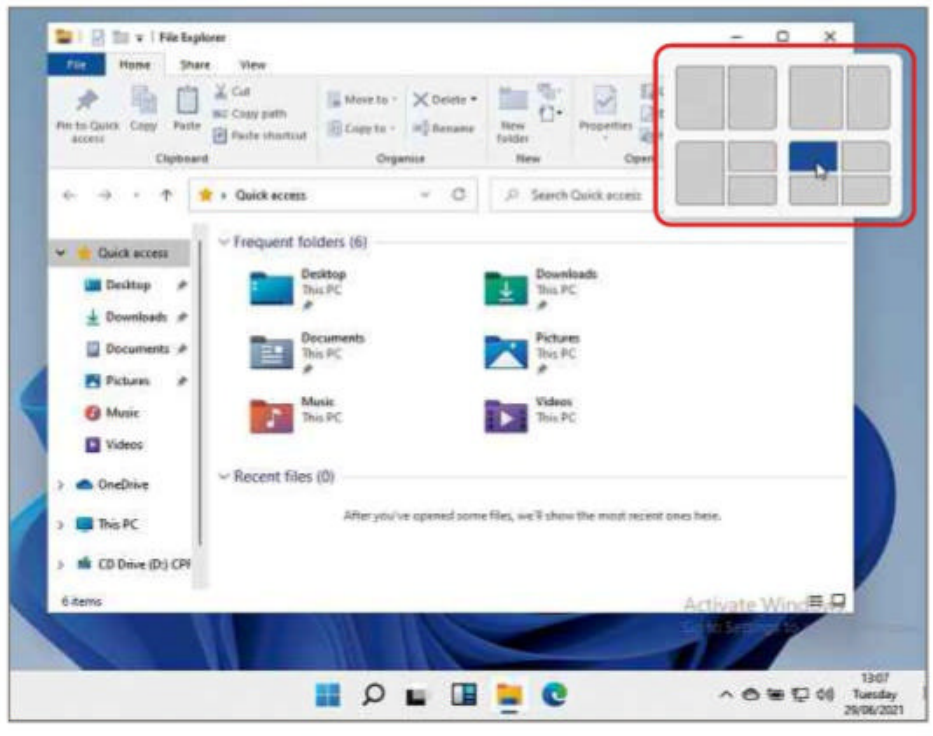
On page 52, we explain Windows 11's minimum system requirements and reveal a more reliable way to check whether your computer is compatible.

When can I get it?

Microsoft says new computers with Windows 11 will be available to buy by Christmas. It might be even earlier, with rumours of an October launch, while other reports suggest 11 November (11/11).



The Windows 11 desktop features a new, centre-aligned Start menu



The new Snap tool lets you quickly resize windows on your desktop

We think the latter is more likely, giving Microsoft more time to iron out bugs, but still get new Windows 11 computers on the shelves before Christmas.

However, if you're upgrading an existing computer from Windows 10, you'll need to wait. Microsoft will roll the Windows 11 update out gradually, starting in early 2022.

How much will upgrading cost?

Upgrades from Windows 10 to Windows 11 will be free. Microsoft says this free offer will last one year from the release of Windows 11, but we expect it to be available for much longer (despite officially ending the free Windows 10 upgrade in 2016, Microsoft still lets you upgrade from Windows 7 or 8.1 via www.snipca.com/38798).

Will my old devices still work?

Microsoft says all hardware (graphics cards, printers and so on) that works with the latest version of Windows 10 *should* continue to work in Windows 11. Yes, that's a big 'should'.

We know from bitter experience that Windows 10 Feature updates can prevent older hardware from working properly, so we'd be surprised if Windows 11 doesn't create a few problems of its own.

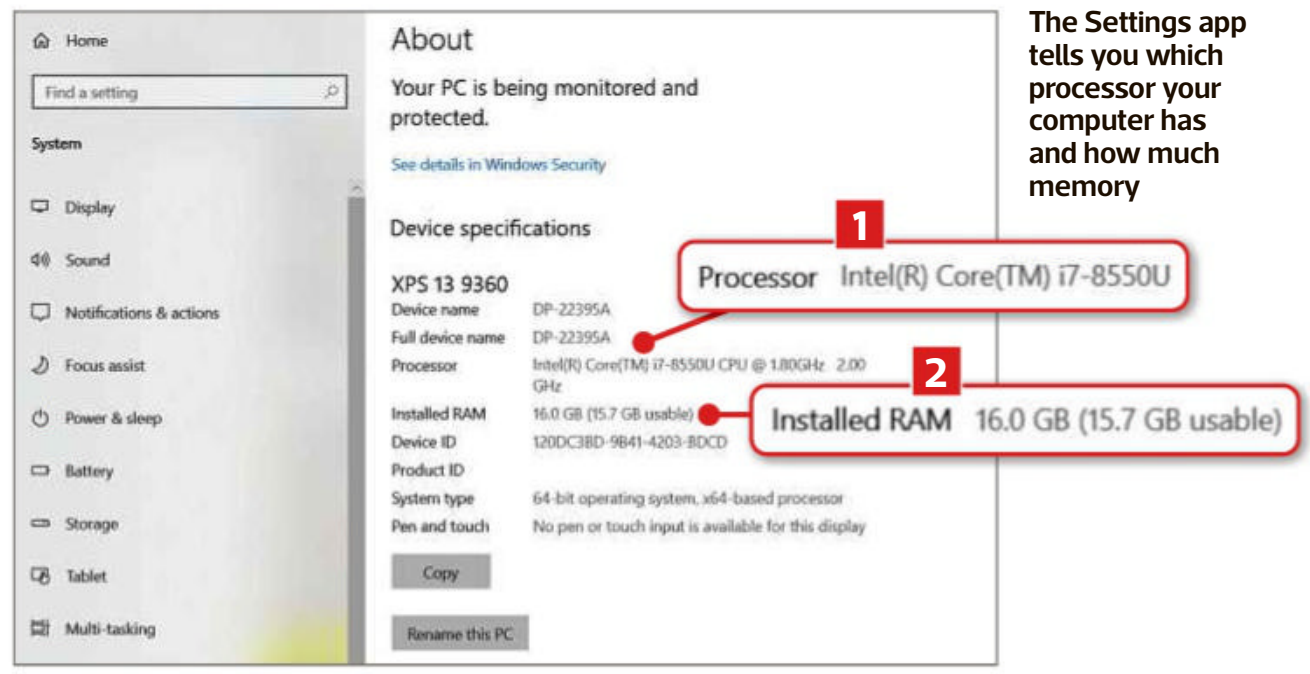
Can I stick with Windows 10?

There's no requirement to upgrade to Windows 11 – you can refuse the free upgrade when offered and continue using Windows 10. Microsoft will continue to support Windows 10 until 14 October 2025, though we suspect it might extend this if it judges that, as the deadline approaches, too many computers worldwide are still running Windows 10, which would mean certain hardware becoming unsupported (and unsafe).

However, it remains to be seen how hardware manufacturers react to the demise of Windows 10. Some smaller manufacturers might decide to stop producing driver updates for Windows 10 before support ends in 2025, instead choosing to concentrate on Windows 11, which would mean certain hardware (webcams, graphics cards, printers etc) becoming unsupported in Windows 10. Also, as we head towards 2025, some new hardware – particularly processors – may work only with Windows 11, so you wouldn't be able to install them on your existing Windows 10 computer should you decide to look for a faster processor.

WINDOWS 11: CHECK WHETHER YOUR PC IS COMPATIBLE

Here, we'll explain the minimum system requirements for Windows 11, and how to check whether your computer meets them. Although we cover upgrade options below, don't rush out to buy components (or even a new computer) if your PC or laptop isn't up to scratch. Microsoft has admitted that it is still investigating precisely what hardware can run Windows 11 (read the blog post at www.snipca.com/38800), so we wouldn't be surprised if it relaxes the system requirements over the next few months, allowing less powerful computers to upgrade to Windows 11.



The Settings app tells you which processor your computer has and how much memory

Processor and memory

Microsoft has released a list of compatible processors for Windows 11. You can view the supported Intel processors at www.snipca.com/38804, and AMD processors at www.snipca.com/38805.

To check which processor you have inside your computer, open Settings (press the Windows key+I), select System, then About. Your processor will be listed on the right-hand side of the page (1 in screenshot top right). Once you have this, go to the Intel or AMD list (as above) and check whether it's there.

If not, you could upgrade your processor, but it's neither quick nor easy (on most laptops, it's impossible). However, we think many of you will want to try in the next few months, so we'll explain how in a forthcoming issue.

We expect Microsoft to add more processors to these lists over time. It may even change it from 'compatible' lists to 'recommended' ones, meaning you'll be able to use older processors but with a warning that Windows might run slowly.

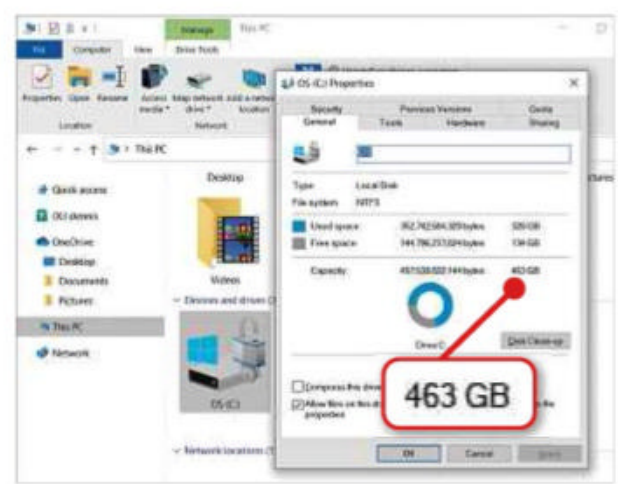
Windows 11 requires a minimum of 4GB of memory to accompany your processor (double that of Windows 10). You can check how much your computer has in the 'Installed RAM' section of the About page 2.

Memory upgrades for laptops and PCs are both relatively cheap (4GB costs around £20) and easy to carry out. You just need to make sure you buy the right type for your computer.

Crucial's Advisor tool (www.snipca.com/38811) scans your computer to show what type of memory is compatible with it. You can then buy your memory modules directly from Crucial or shop around for the similar memory elsewhere.

Hard drive

You'll need a hard drive with a capacity of at least 64GB on which to install Windows 11, which is more than three times what Windows 10 requires. This shouldn't be a problem because it's highly unlikely that your hard drive is smaller than 64GB. To check, open File



You can check the size of your computer's hard drive in File Explorer

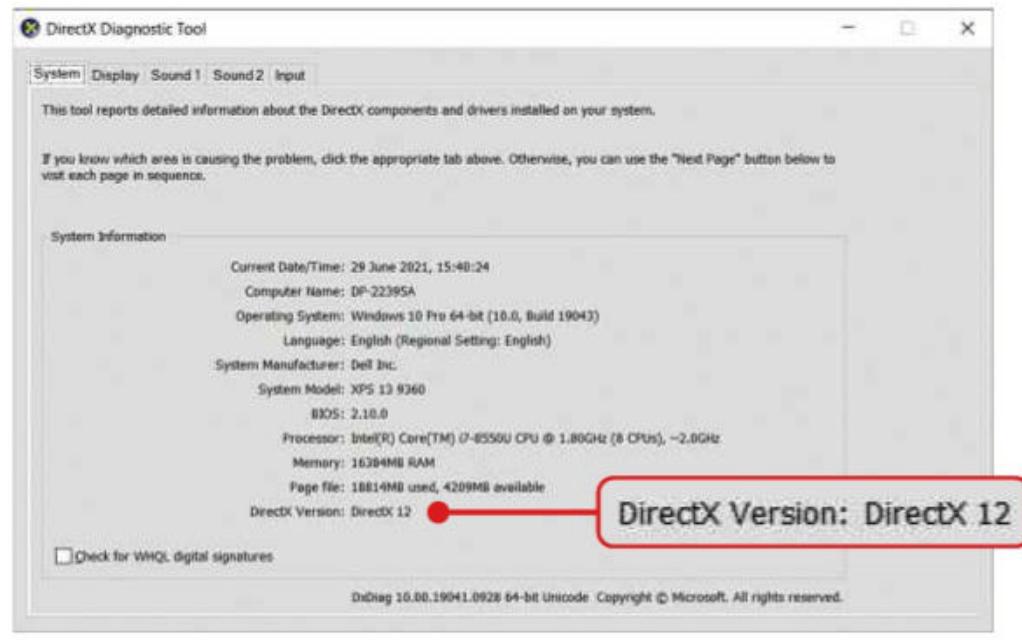
Explorer (press the Windows key+E), select 'This PC' in the menu on the left, then right-click your C drive and select Properties. You'll see your hard drive's total size listed next to Capacity in the General tab (see screenshot below left).

If you need more storage, Crucial's Advisor tool – as mentioned earlier – will recommend compatible upgrades (Crucial's 500GB SSD costs just £39 from www.snipca.com/38812).

Graphics card

Microsoft hopes the new Xbox app in Windows 11 will prompt more of us to play games, and has upped the graphics requirements accordingly. You'll need a graphics card that supports DirectX 12, which helps boost frame rates in games. To check whether your computer's graphics card supports this, click Start, type dxdiag, then press Enter. The DirectX version of your graphics card will be listed in the System tab (see screenshot above right).

If your PC's graphics card doesn't support DirectX 12, you can replace it with one that does relatively easily. You can get a DirectX 12 card for under £50 (such as Nvidia's GeForce GT 710 – £42 from www.snipca.com/38809). However, upgrading a laptop's graphics is extremely difficult, bordering on impossible. Hopefully, Microsoft will reconsider the requirement for a DirectX 12 graphics card. Not everyone is interested in gaming, after all.



Windows 11 requires a graphics card that supports DirectX 12

Trusted Platform Module

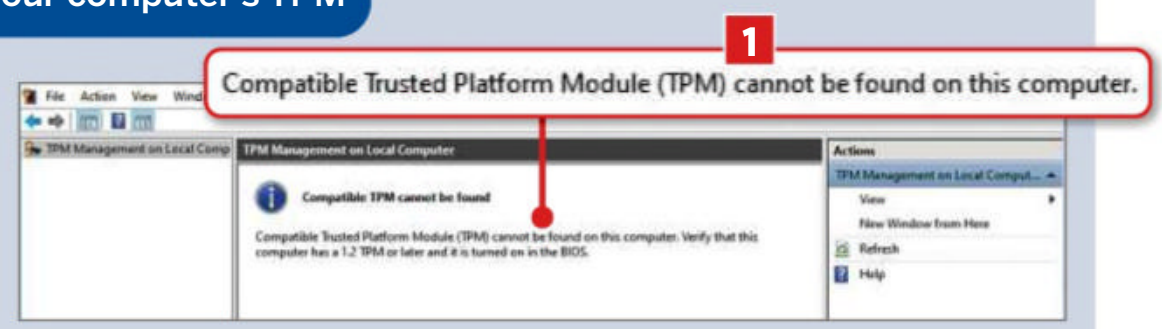
Finally, Windows 11 requires your PC to have a Trusted Platform Module (TPM), which helps secure your computer by storing encryption keys. The good news is that most computers built in the past eight or so years have a TPM (on some it's built into the processor, others have a separate TPM chip on the motherboard). There are two versions (TPM 1.2 and 2.0), and Microsoft originally said Windows 11 would work with both. However, a few days after Windows 11 was announced, it quickly changed its mind, saying Windows 11 would be compatible with TPM 2.0 only. Additionally, on some computers you have to enable the TPM in the BIOS for Windows to see it.

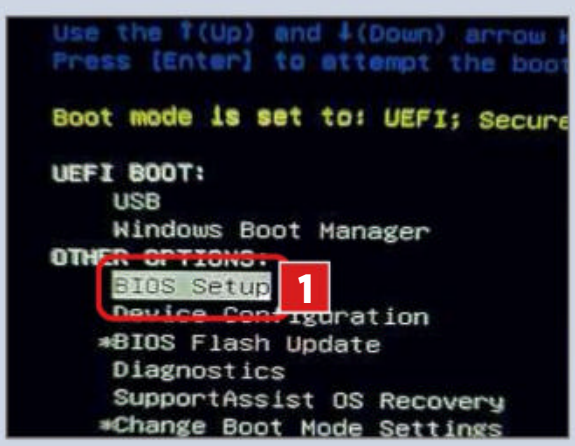
Confused? You're not alone. We'll try to clarify things in our Mini Workshop below, where you can check whether your computer has a TPM, enable it (if necessary) and check what version it is.

If yours has a TPM 1.2, it's worth checking your computer manufacturer's support site because some let you upgrade to TPM 2.0 via a firmware update (such as on some Dell computers – www.snipca.com/38810).

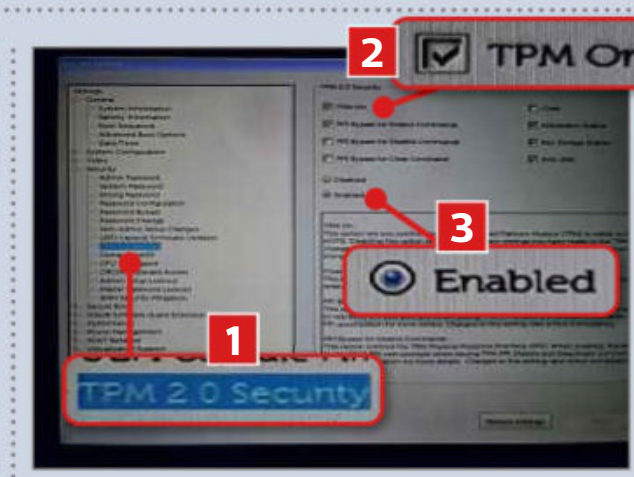
WORKSHOP How to check for and enable your computer's TPM

1 To check whether your computer has a TPM, click Start, type tpm.msc, then press Enter. If you have a TPM, you'll see which version (as shown in Step 4). If instead you see a message saying it can't be found 1, continue to Step 2.

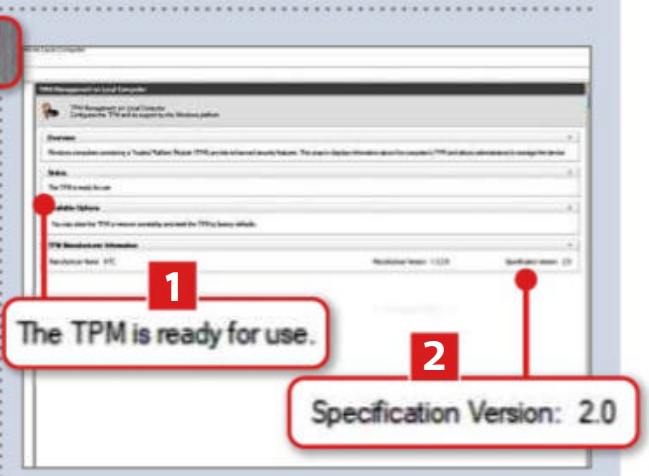




2 How you access the BIOS depends on your computer, but you usually have to press a key shortly after turning it on (look for a message telling you which key to press). On our Dell laptop, we have to press F12, then select BIOS Setup 1.



3 Open the menu labelled Security (or similar), select the option for TPM 1 (on some computers, this might be called PTT), then make sure your TPM is turned on 2 and Enabled 3 (if you can't find these settings, your computer may not have a TPM – contact your manufacturer to check).



4 Save your changes, exit the BIOS, reload Windows, then run the same command as in Step 1. You should now see that Windows recognises your TPM 1 and states whether it's version 1.2 or, as on our laptop, 2.0 2.

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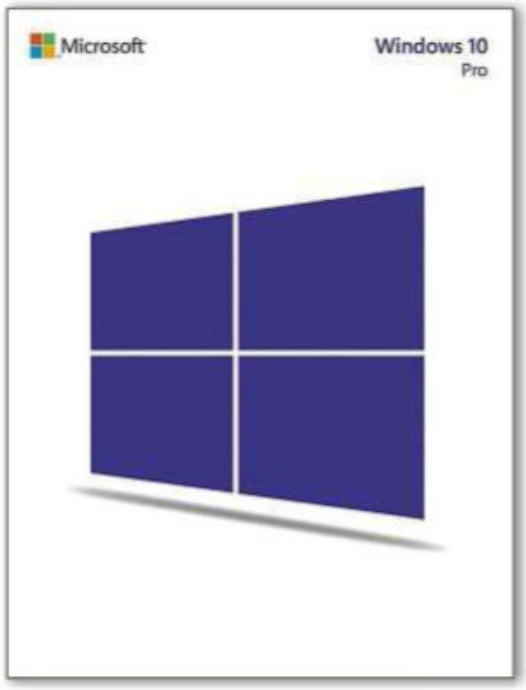

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

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INSTALL THE WINDOWS 11 PREVIEW

Microsoft has released an early preview of Windows 11, but you need to be part of its Windows Insider Programme (or 'Program' – Microsoft flip-flops with its spelling of this) to install it.

We don't recommend installing the preview build over your existing version of Windows 10. Like most previews, it's likely to contain bugs and flaws, which may eventually force you to revert to Windows 10 – and that would mean reinstalling from scratch. Instead, it's best to install Windows 11 on a virtual PC, which you can run alongside your existing Windows 10 installation. We'll explain how to do this. Bear in mind that virtual PCs borrow system resources (such as memory, hard-drive space and processor power) from your main PC, so you'll need a reasonably powerful computer with a minimum of a quad-core processor and 8GB of memory.

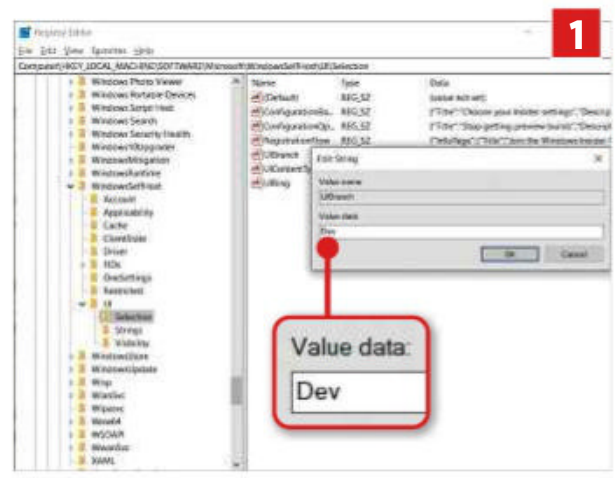
Create your virtual PC

To get Windows 11 you first need to install Windows 10 on your virtual PC using an ISO file (this doesn't affect your existing installation of Windows 10). To get this, go to www.snipca.com/38818, click 'Download tool now', then run the program that downloads. Follow the installation process, selecting 'Create installation media' when prompted, followed by 'ISO file', then choosing where to save the file (make a note of this location as you'll need it later). The download can take up to one hour, so in the meantime you can get on with creating your virtual PC.

Download and install VirtualBox from www.snipca.com/38819 (click the 'Windows hosts' link). Run the program, then select the Tools menu on the left, followed by the blue 'New' button. Give your virtual PC a name, select Windows 10 under Version, then click Next.

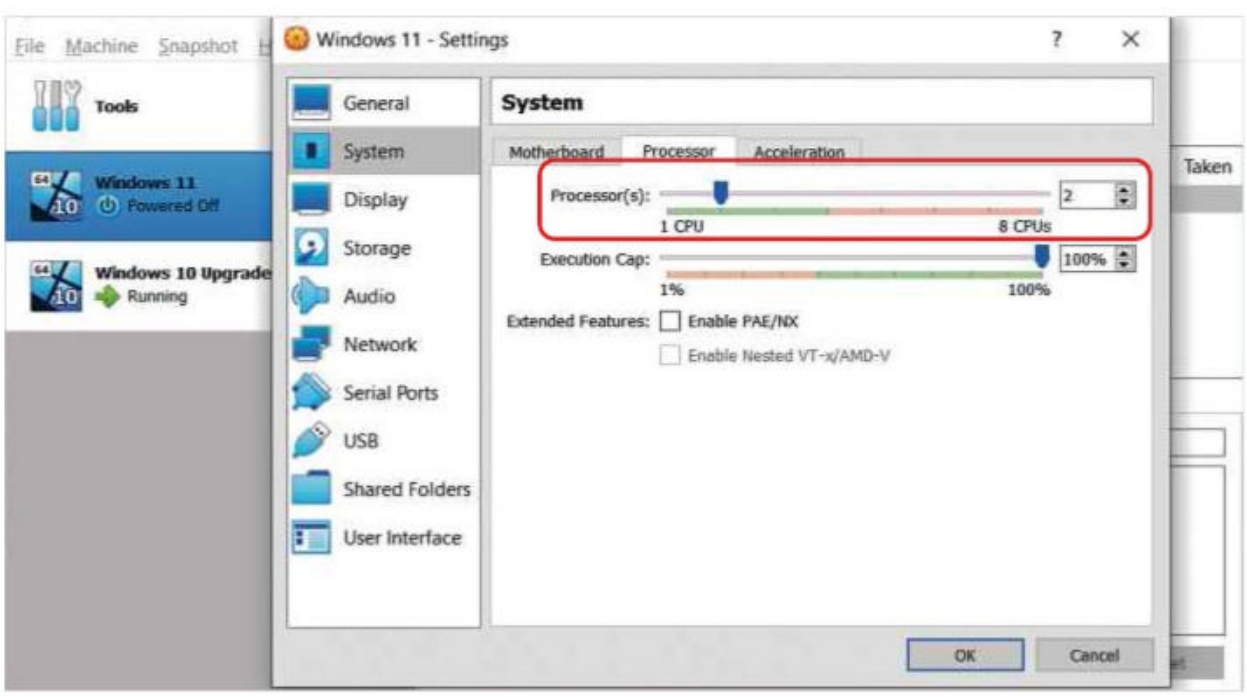
Leave all the settings at their defaults except the memory (select 4,096MB for this) and hard disk (select at least 80GB). Windows 11 also requires a minimum of a dual-core processor, so right-click your virtual PC from the menu on the left, then select Settings, System, followed by the Processor tab. Now drag the Processor slider to the 2 position (see screenshot below). You can give it more cores, but this will slow down your main computer. Click OK to save your changes, then run your virtual PC by double-clicking it.

Your virtual PC will now boot within a separate window and ask you to supply an ISO file. Assuming the Windows 10 ISO file that you started downloading earlier has finished, locate and select it – otherwise, put the kettle on and give it a few more minutes. Once it's got your ISO file, the virtual PC will run through the standard Windows 10 installation process. Follow this through, using a Microsoft account when prompted to sign in (you'll need this to access the Windows Insider Programme).



You can force Windows to let you into the Dev Channel using a registry hack

Sign up to the Insider Dev Channel and the Windows 11 preview should download



Windows 11 requires your virtual PC's processor to have at least two cores

Become a Windows Insider

In your virtual PC, click the Start button, type windows insider, then press Enter. Click 'Get started', select your Microsoft account from the list, then read and accept the terms.

On the next screen, click the box under 'Choose your Insider settings'. If you see an option labelled Dev Channel, select it, then skip to the 'Upgrade to Windows 11' section below. If not, you need to delve into the Windows registry by clicking Start, typing regedit, then pressing Enter (because we're doing this on a virtual PC, any changes to the registry won't affect your main PC).

First, navigate to the **HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\WindowsSelfHost\UI\Selection** folder, double-click the UIBranch value on the right, then change the 'Value data' entry to Dev (see screenshot 1 above). Next, go to **HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\WindowsSelfHost\Applicability**, then double-click BranchName and change it to Dev. Also check the ContentType value is set to Mainline and the Ring value to External (if not, edit them accordingly). Finally, restart your virtual PC.

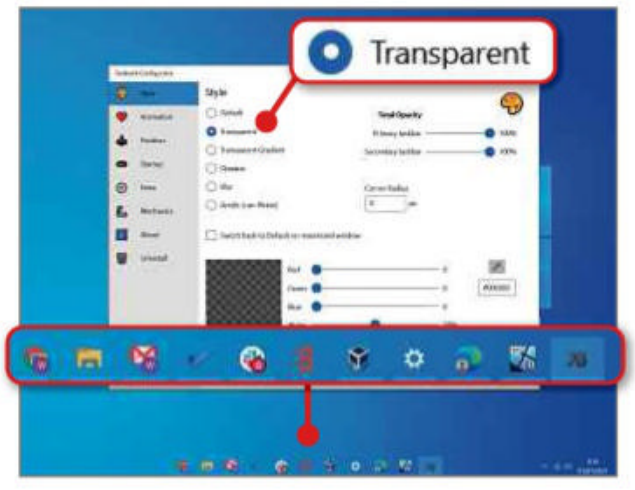
Upgrade to Windows 11

On your virtual PC, open Settings (press the Windows key+I), select 'Update & Security', then click 'Check now'. Windows should now locate the Windows 11 preview build and start downloading it (see screenshot 2 above – this took just over one hour on our virtual PC). Once it's downloaded and installed, click 'Restart now' and wait for the update to complete. Your virtual PC will then boot into Windows 11.

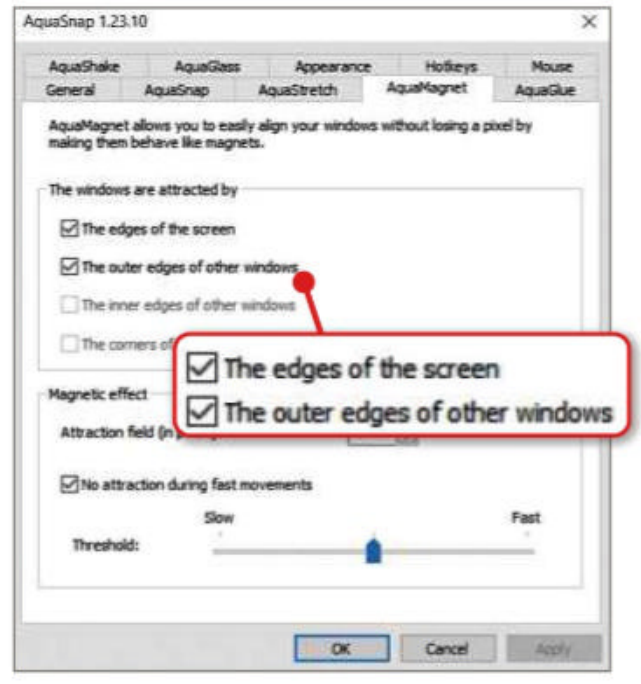
Centre your taskbar icons

It might not be a groundbreaking change, but Microsoft's decision to centre the taskbar icons gives the desktop a fresh feel. If you like the look of it, there's no need to wait for Windows 11 – TaskbarX does the same job, if not better, on Windows 10. To download it, go to www.snipca.com/38827, then scroll down and click the 'Portable Zip x64' link (if you're running 32bit Windows, select 'Portable Zip x86' instead). Open the ZIP file, extract its contents to a folder on your hard drive, then run TaskbarX.exe. Your taskbar icons will now appear in the centre of the taskbar, just as in Windows 11. The only difference is that the Start button remains on the left-hand side of the taskbar (we actually prefer this since it's easier to quickly drag your mouse to the corner of your desktop to open it).

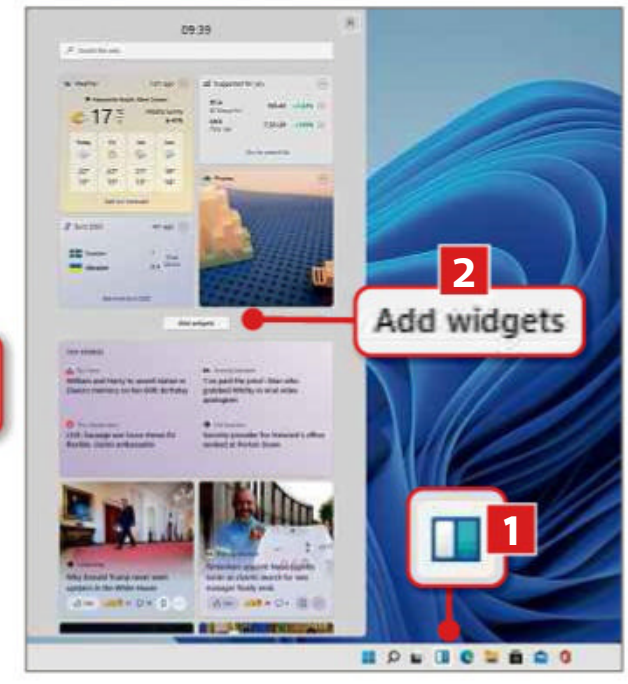
TaskbarX also lets you tweak the taskbar further. Return to the folder where you extracted the ZIP file and run 'TaskbarX Configurator.exe'. In the window that opens, you'll find options to change the appearance of your taskbar on multiple monitors, change its animated effects and make it transparent (as we've done with ours - see screenshot below).



Use TaskbarX to centre your taskbar and make it transparent



The AquaMagnet feature in AquaSnap lets you snap windows to each other



You can add widgets in Windows 11, but there's only a small selection to choose from

Snap your windows

One of our favourite features in Windows 11 is its improved Snap tool, which lets you choose how to resize and position windows simply by hovering over their maximise button. When the Snap grid appears, you can choose from four layouts, then select which section you want the window to occupy.

You can achieve a similar effect in Windows 10 with AquaSnap (www.snipca.com/38826), which is free for non-commercial use – just make sure you select the Personal Edition when installing. Once installed, you can quickly resize windows by dragging them to different parts of your desktop. AquaSnap also makes windows transparent as you move them, allowing you to see more clearly where you're placing them on your desktop. We particularly like the AquaMagnet feature, which makes it much easier to place two windows next to each other. As you move one window close to another, it will snap into place alongside it. To enable it, open the AquaSnap settings, select the AquaMagnet tab, then tick the top two boxes - see screenshot above left. The free version of AquaSnap doesn't work with multiple monitors - for that you need the Professional version, which costs £13.

Alternatively, if you want to create your own window-layout templates, try FancyZones, which is part of Microsoft's PowerToys suite (www.snipca.com/38828 – click the EXE file to download it). From the Settings window in PowerToys, select FancyZones, click 'Launch layout editor', then choose from the range of templates or create your own. Once you're done, hold Shift when dragging a window and your layout template will appear, letting you drag the window into the appropriate section. Turn to page 18 for details of the latest version of PowerToys.

Install widgets

The Widgets feature in Windows 11 lets you scroll through news stories, weather reports and financial information on your desktop – just click the new Widgets icon on the taskbar (see 1 in the screenshot above). You can add more widgets (click the 'Add widgets' button 2), but the options are limited to news, recent photos, traffic updates and a few others. We were hoping for a bit more, such as real-time information on memory usage and Wi-Fi speeds. Microsoft may decide to allow widgets from other companies, but it killed off a similar tool in Windows 7 after it discovered a security flaw that hackers could've exploited to infect computers.

Last month, Microsoft started rolling

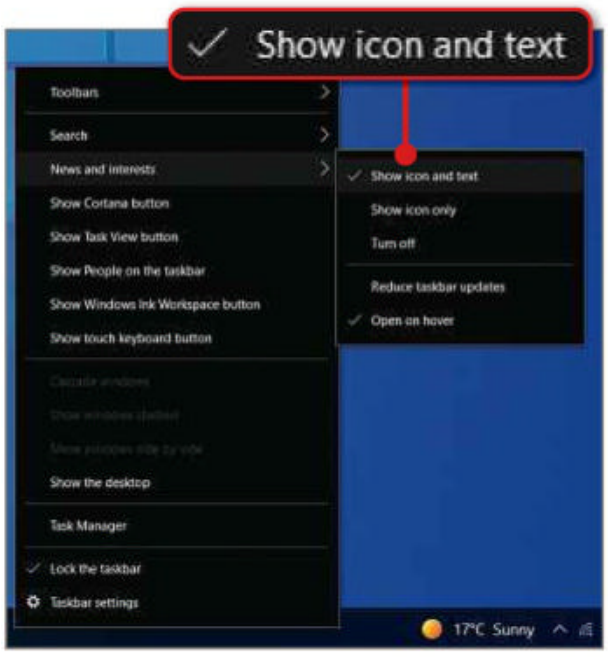
What Windows 11 means for *my* computers

I have four computers: three laptops and a desktop PC. As things stand, I'll be able to install Windows 11 on only my four-year-old Dell XPS 13 laptop (it has TPM 2.0).

The rest fail Microsoft's stringent system requirements in various ways. Of these rejects, only my 2014 Dell E6410 laptop has a TPM, but it's the 1.2 version. Thanks to recent SSD upgrades, they all run Windows 10 perfectly well, and I'm reasonably sure there's nothing in Windows 11 that they won't be able to cope with (even if it means I have to turn off some of the animated effects).

I know I'm not alone in discovering (with some dismay) that most of my computers aren't compatible with Windows 11. Come on, Microsoft, don't send our old computers to an early grave!

Will Stapley

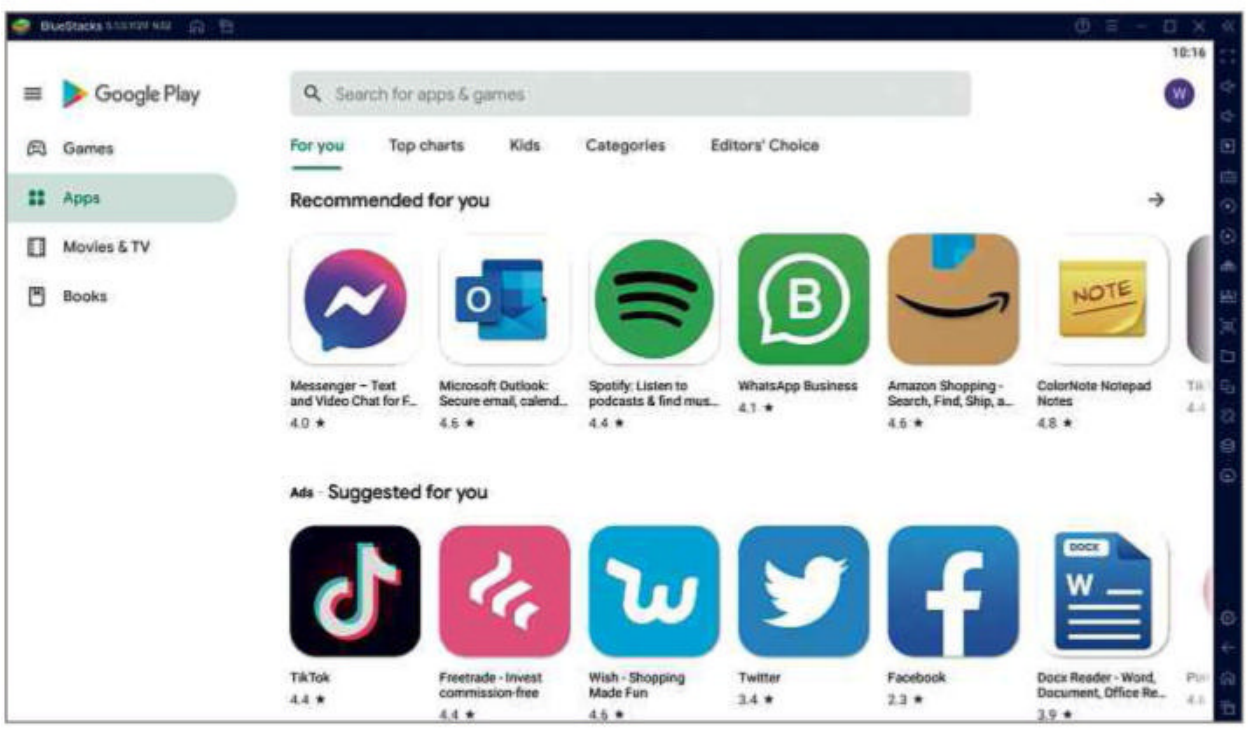


Click 'Show icon and text' to see the 'News and interests' widget

out a Widgets-style tool for Windows 10 (called 'News & Interests'), which you can enable by right-clicking the taskbar, selecting 'News and interests', then 'Show icon and text' (see screenshot above). If you can't see these options, scan for and install the latest Windows updates by going to Settings, 'Update & Security', then clicking 'Check for updates'.

Get Android apps

Microsoft has some way to go with its Android apps feature for Windows 11 (see page 51). When we tested the preview build, the Microsoft Store didn't have an option to view or install apps. The good news is that you can get Android apps in Windows 10 right now using a free tool called Bluestacks (www.bluestacks.com). Once you launch Bluestacks (see screenshot below) and sign into your Google account, you can browse the Google Play Store just as on your phone or tablet. As long as you use the same Google account in Bluestacks as on your mobile devices, you'll be able to sync data across them.



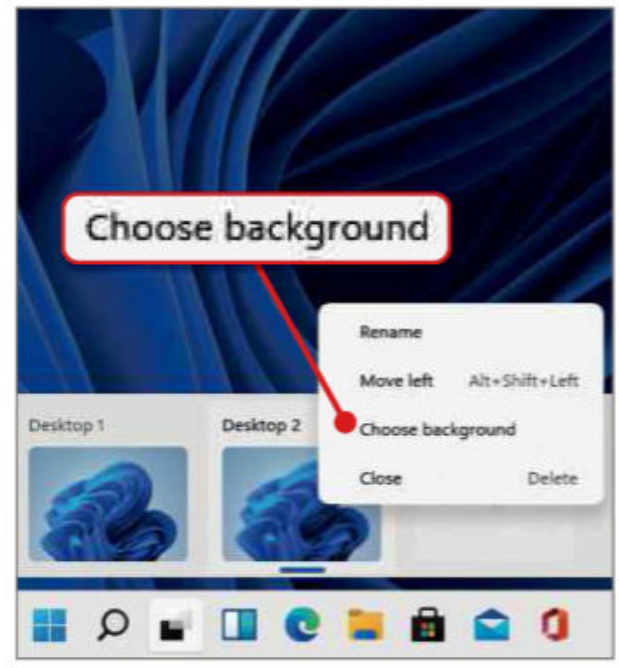
You can install Android apps on Windows 10 using Bluestacks

Customise your virtual desktops

If you've got only one monitor, your Windows desktop may become cluttered with all your open programs.

Windows 10 includes a virtual desktop tool that lets you create multiple desktops (for example, one for browsing, another for work).

Press the Windows key+Tab, then 'New desktop' to create a virtual desktop, then switch between them by pressing the Windows key+Ctrl, along with the left and right arrow keys. Windows 11 improves on this by letting you use different wallpaper on each virtual desktop, making it easier to recognise them (press the Windows key+Tab, right-click the virtual desktop you want to change, then select 'Choose background' – see screenshot above right).



Windows 11 lets you assign different wallpaper images to each virtual desktop

Is Microsoft finally hanging up on Skype?

Microsoft bought Skype in 2011, and added it to Windows 8.1 two years later. It now comes with Windows 10, but has suffered countless problems in recent years, with users complaining of poor-quality calls, frequent drops in connection and other bugs. In Windows 11, Microsoft appears to be finally cutting the cord with Skype and replacing it with its Teams video-chat tool. Although Teams was originally designed as a collaboration tool for businesses (offering video chats, integration with Office and other work-related tools), Microsoft made it free to home users in May this year, with video meetings for up to 300 users. You can download it from www.snipca.com/38825.

There's no sign of the new version of Teams in the preview version of Windows 11, but Microsoft says it will be built into the operating system, letting you start video chats directly from the taskbar.

We also suspect Microsoft will see sense and give it a less businessy name (it's currently referring to the new version as 'Teams 2.0'). Of course, you'll still be able to install Skype on Windows 11 by downloading it from the web, but we wouldn't be surprised if Microsoft kills it off over the next few years. ca

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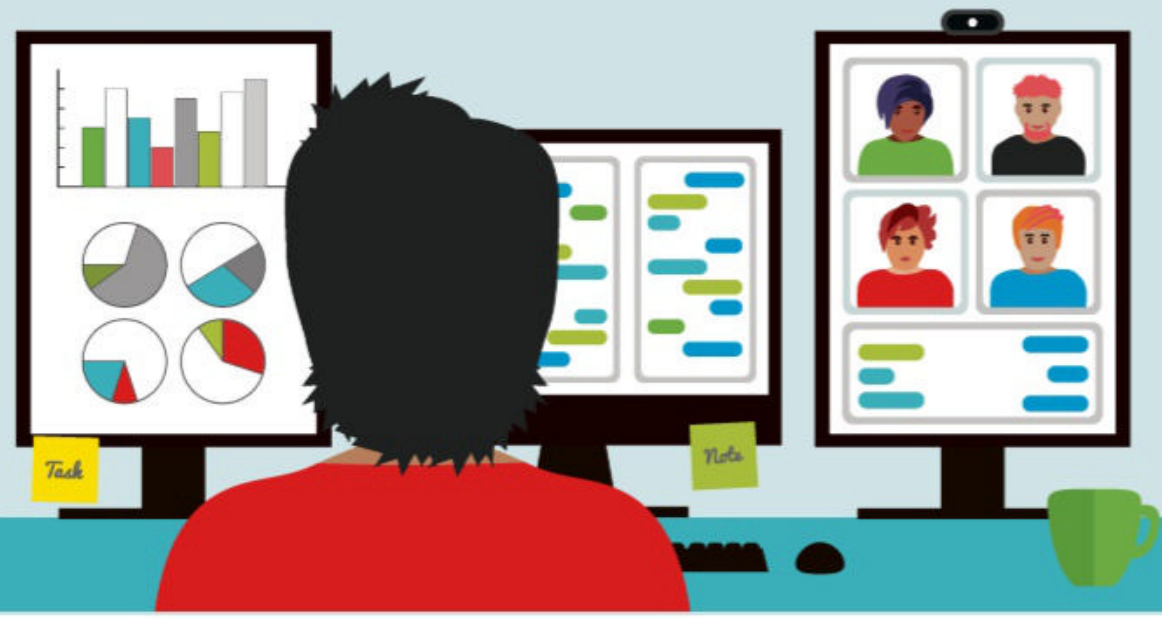
Why You Need A Portable Monitor

Ever wish there was an affordable and easy way to get more screen space for your PC? **Jonathan Parkyn** explains why a portable monitor could be the convenient, cost-saving solution you're looking for



Laptops are brilliant, but they're not as easy to upgrade as desktop PCs, especially where the screen is concerned. Until recently, if you wanted more screen space, you'd either have to connect your laptop to a desktop monitor or find the money to buy a new model with a larger screen. Portable monitors, however, offer a third option. They let you expand your existing device's screen whenever you need to, without being tied to a desk.

If you use a desktop PC and want to add screen space you could buy a second, static screen to sit next to your current one. But opting for a portable monitor brings added flexibility and convenience. You'd plug it in only when you needed it, then fold it away neatly when you don't.

We recommend every device featured here, though not all of them will suit your needs – so read our descriptions carefully.

Choose the right size and weight

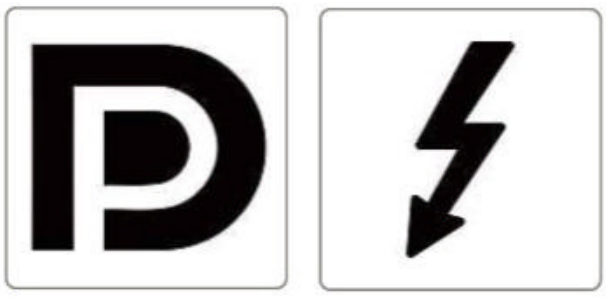
Portable monitors are available in a variety of sizes, from 10in tiddlers, right up to big 22in beasts. Smaller monitors are aimed at specific areas of the market. Gechic's 11.6in On-Lap 1101P (£238 from www.snipca.com/38764), for instance, can be used with a computer, but it's primarily designed for photographers, and comes with a mounting kit for attaching it to a tripod or SLR camera rig.

The sweet spot for most PC users will be somewhere between 13 and 17 inches. If you're going to connect your laptop to a monitor, then match your existing screen's dimensions as closely as possible. You'll almost certainly need one that's light enough to carry around.

A smaller screen doesn't always make for a lighter device, however. Take Wimaxit's 14in portable monitor (£220 from www.snipca.com/38801) – it weighs over a kilo, whereas Asus's sleek ZenScreen MB16AC 15.6in model (£199 from www.snipca.com/38766) clocks in at just 590g, so make sure you check each model's weight before you buy (they're both excellent choices – pictured below). Weight may be less of a deciding factor if you'll be using the screen mostly at home.

Consider power, connections and compatibility

For a monitor to be truly portable, it must be powered independently. Some models require you to plug them into a wall socket, which is fine for using in the house. But if your monitor can't be untethered from the mains, then – in our mind – it can't really count as portable.



Look for a D icon (for DisplayPort) or a lightning-arrow icon (for Thunderbolt)

Most portable monitors are able to draw their power from the computer they're plugged into, usually via USB. Many models, including the 16in ViewSonic VG1655 (£260 from www.snipca.com/38767), let you connect to a USB-C port for power and HDMI for video. Ideally, your computer will have a USB-C connection that supports video output, as this will provide both power and a video output to your monitor via a single cable. Most portable monitors support both power throughput and video connection via USB-C, but check this before you buy.

The only trouble with this is that not all computers have a USB-C port. And even if yours does, you'll need to make sure it supports video output – some older USB-C connections don't, and it can be tricky to work out whether yours does. Check to see if there are any symbols next to the port – if you see an icon that looks like a 'D' or a lightning bolt with a downward arrow (pictured above), then your port supports DisplayPort or

Wimaxit's 14in monitor (left) is heavier than Asus's 15.6in ZenScreen MB16AC

Thunderbolt, both of which output video.

If you just see the standard USB icon or no icon at all, then your PC's USB-C port may not support a video connection. If in doubt, refer to your PC's manufacturer for advice before buying – especially if you have your eyes on a USB-C-only monitor, such as the Asus ZenScreen MB16AC or HP's 14in E14 G4 display (£262 from www.snipca.com/38768), neither of which have an HDMI socket.

Use battery power instead

Some models come with their own independent power supply. The battery in Asus's 15.6in ZenScreen Go MB16AHP (£300 from www.snipca.com/38769) gives you four hours of screen time. This is useful for laptop owners because it means your screen won't be draining your computer's battery supply when in use. It can connect via USB-C or HDMI for video, too. However, the internal battery adds to the monitor's weight – the MB16AHP weighs 860g, which is much heavier than the Asus MB16AC battery-less model we mentioned earlier.

Another solution is to use a USB-C power bank. The Anker PowerCore+ 26800 (around £80 from www.snipca.com/38770) can power your monitor while you're on the move (see Issue 607, page 60 for more on power banks).

Don't be confused by resolution and other specs

As with many tech devices, portable-monitor manufacturers like to make a song and dance about various specs, but these can confuse the issue rather than help you make your choice. Resolution is a good example. Don't feel obliged to buy a device with a high resolution, such as the EVICIV 15.6in 4K model (£300 from www.snipca.com/38771) because you probably won't need its 3840x2160 pixel count. A Full HD (1920x1080 pixels) model – such as those we've already mentioned – will do just fine.

If you're going to be using your portable monitor as a second screen, you should try to match the resolution of your current display – that way the scaling will be the same on both screens, so icons and text will appear the same size. You can check your current screen's resolution by right-clicking the desktop and selecting 'Display settings', then scrolling down and looking under 'Display resolution'.

It's worth looking for a monitor that uses IPS (in-plane switching) technology, as these tend to provide a wider viewing angle than standard TN LCD panels. Most decent portable monitors should use IPS, and it should say so somewhere in the device's specifications. You should also look for a refresh rate of 60Hz. This will provide a flicker-free display. Again, most devices will offer this but it's worth checking before you buy. Don't worry too much about luminance and contrast-ratio figures, if quoted. In theory, the higher these figures, the brighter and punchier the picture, but we've found these often don't provide a terribly useful guide.

Speakers, touchscreens, ports and stands

Some portable monitors, such as the aforementioned ViewSonic VG1655, include built-in speakers. But assuming you're going to be partnering your new display with an existing computer, this is unlikely to provide much benefit because you'll be able to rely on its own speakers and/or headphone socket.

Potentially more useful are touchscreen monitors like the 15.6in Asus ZenScreen Touch MB16AMT, which lets you tap, swipe and pinch your way around your computer, just like on a tablet. This is a good way to add touchscreen abilities to a computer that lacks them. However, it does push up the price: the ZenScreen Touch, for example, is one of the most expensive monitors we've looked at (£340 from www.snipca.com/38772).

If you're connecting to your PC via USB-C, it's worth looking for a model (such as the HP E14 G4 , £305 from www.snipca.com/38823), which has a second USB-C port that provides throughput for connecting accessories to your PC via the monitor – useful for laptops with limited connectivity.

HP's E14 G4 has two USB-C ports and a tiltable kickstand that keeps it upright

Finally, consider what type of stand you want. Some, such as Asus ZenScreen models, have a foldable smart case that can be turned into a stand to prop the monitor up in either portrait or landscape mode. Others, such as the HP E14 G4, have a tiltable kickstand that folds out from the back (pictured below left).

You'll also find models, such as the 12.5in SideTrak Slide (£240 from www.snipca.com/38773, pictured above), which attach to the side of your existing screen on a hinge, like a wing mirror.

Are cheap portable monitors any good?

Most of the devices we've recommended cost between £200 and £300. At the lower end of the market, you'll find a lot of even cheaper products from lesser-known brands. However, be careful: washed-out colours and poor contrast are typical of cheaper LCD panels.

That said, you can pick up a bargain, such as the AOC i1601Fwux 16in monitor. It ticks a lot of the boxes – Full HD resolution, 60Hz refresh rate, IPS panel – performs well and currently costs £159 (from www.snipca.com/38774). It's a little heavier than some, at 820g, however, and doesn't have an HDMI connection, so you'll need to use a USB-C connection for power and video. ca

Use your phone or tablet as a second screen

A cheaper workaround is to use your tablet or phone as a second screen. Apple users can turn their iPad into a wireless monitor for their MacBook via a feature called Sidecar (www.snipca.com/38784). For PC users, there are tools such as Duet (www.duetdisplay.com), which let you connect both iOS and Android devices to your computer as a second display.

You can also connect phones and tablets to many of the monitors we've recommended. Not all mobile devices support wired connections to external monitors, however, and those that do often require an adapter. You can connect an iPhone or iPad device with a Lightning port to an HDMI-compatible external monitor using a Lightning-to-HDMI adapter (such as this one, for £19: www.snipca.com/38775).

You can attach the SideTrak Slide to your current monitor like a wing mirror

BEST CHEAP SMARTPHONES...

...for everyday tasks

Don’t spend hundreds of pounds on a new smartphone because you feel pressured to buy one. **Robert Irvine** reveals the cheapest handsets that offer everything you need – including Covid passports and WhatsApp – for under £100

There are plenty of valid reasons *not* to own a smartphone. Perhaps you find touchscreens difficult to use, or you need a phone only for calls and texts. But increasingly in today’s world, it’s assumed and required that you have one, for everything from verifying your online accounts to scanning QR codes. Without one, you can be locked out of everyday activities.

Before you grudgingly cave into the pressure to buy a smartphone, either to use as your main handset or a second phone, it’s worth investigating the cheapest available options. Contrary to popular belief, you don’t need to spend hundreds of pounds on an iPhone or Android phone to get ‘smart’ features.

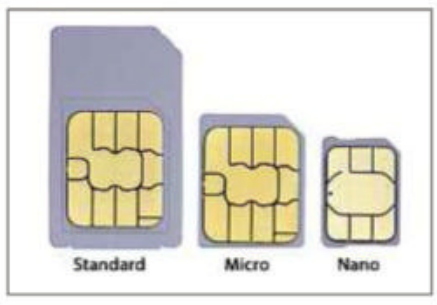
Here we pick the best handsets for under £100 that offer everything you need to cope with modern life. So, with one exception, every phone we recommend does the following:

- **Supports two-factor authentication (2FA)**
- **Shows your NHS Covid ‘vaccine passport’**
- **Lets you easily scan QR codes**
- **Runs WhatsApp and other useful apps**

As you won’t find a new, SIM-free iPhone for less than £399, we’ve focused primarily on Android smartphones. However, we also look at ‘feature phones’ that offer essential internet options, to determine the lowest price you can pay for a smart experience.

Will you need a new SIM card?

All the phones we recommend here are unlocked and SIM-free, meaning you can use your existing SIM card in them – provided it fits. Most smartphones now use nano SIMs, measuring 12.3x8.8mm, or micro SIMs (15x12mm) – see images. However, 2G phones such as the Nokia 5310 don’t support 3G SIM cards from Three and Smarty.



If your old SIM card is too large or small for your new phone, request a new one from your mobile network. Most providers now offer a three-in-one ‘combi’ SIM that lets you pop out the correct-sized card to use.

Alternatively, if you want to use a phone only for the occasional ‘smart’ feature, such as account authentication, activating Wi-Fi on the device will let you connect to the internet without inserting a SIM card – though you will be nagged to do so.

Log into your accounts using 2FA

Many websites now secure your accounts using two-factor authentication (2FA), causing problems for non-smartphone owners. 2FA security codes sent by text message can usually be typed into the browser on your PC or laptop, but sometimes you’ll be asked to tap a link to confirm your identity. You won’t be able to do this if your phone isn’t ‘smart’, and therefore lacks a web browser.

The good news is that you can buy a basic phone with a mobile browser for under £30. **Nokia’s 5310** handset currently costs just £29 on Amazon (www.snipca.com/38654, pictured left) and comes with the Opera Mini browser. It’s a 2G-only phone with a 2.4in (non-touch) screen, so rather slow and small for everyday browsing, and doesn’t work with either WhatsApp or the Covid passport (it’s the exception we mentioned earlier), but works fine for opening account-verification links.

A bigger problem is posed by sites that require you to generate 2FA codes using an authenticator

The Nokia 5310 is only 2G, but includes a web browser for account authentication

At £50, the Alcatel 1C is the cheapest Android phone we've found

app. This is more secure than typing codes sent by text because they're valid only for a short time. However, if you can't install an authenticator app then you may be locked out of your account.

Buying a budget Android phone will solve this dilemma, because you'll be able to download an authenticator app such as Microsoft Authenticator (www.snipca.com/38651) from the Google Play Store. The cheapest we've found is the **Alcatel 1C** (www.snipca.com/38657, pictured above), which costs just £50 and runs the lightweight 'Go edition' of Android 8 (Oreo) – most authenticator apps require only Android 6 or later.

Display your vaccine passport in the NHS app

Although the Government has dropped plans to make 'Covid passports' mandatory in pubs and restaurants, it may still ask you to show them for travel and large events, so if you've had both your jabs it's vital to have the proof to hand. Rather than showing (and possibly losing) your vaccination card, you can use the official England NHS app (www.snipca.com/38658): just tap 'Share your COVID-19 status' on the home screen, choose Continue then select Travel to access your Covid records, which include your vaccination dates and test results. Sadly, this isn't yet available in the NHS app for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - see page 11 for details of how to obtain proof in those countries.

The NHS app works on iPhones running iOS 9 or later and Android devices with at least Android 5, which covers most smartphones from the past six years. The Alcatel 1C, mentioned above, is compatible with the NHS app, but we'd recommend paying £40 more for the **Motorola Moto E6s** (www.snipca.com/38660, pictured above right).

Not only does this gorgeous £90 phone have a large (6.1in) screen for displaying

The Motorola Moto E6s offers everything you need from a smartphone for under £100

your Covid details and the QR code that officials need to scan, but it also captures high-quality photos and videos. This is helpful for the rigorous identity-verification process when you register for the NHS app (www.snipca.com/38691).

The Moto E6s also has a fingerprint reader, so you log into the app and access your Covid-19 records without having to sign in manually every time. It offers 32GB of storage, 2GB of RAM (not 4GB as Amazon says) and 4G connectivity.

Scan QR codes to check in and view information

Phones running Android 9 have cameras that can scan QR codes without you needing to install dedicated apps. If the Motorola Moto E6s is just out of your price range, and you don't mind buying a phone from a Chinese manufacturer, consider the **Xiaomi Redmi 9A** (www.snipca.com/38664, pictured below), which costs £80. This offers the same amount of storage (32GB), an even bigger screen (6.53in) and runs Android 10, though it doesn't have a fingerprint scanner. Its 13-megapixel rear camera, combined with its huge, bright display, make it ideal for scanning QR codes of

The Xiaomi Redmi 9A offers a great camera and large screen for scanning QR codes

The big-buttoned Doro 7030 lets you use WhatsApp and Facebook without a smartphone

any size. Its battery life is impressive, too, lasting up to two days between charges.

Don't worry about finding the right smartphone to scan NHS QR codes, because the NHS COVID-19 app for England and Wales (www.covid19.nhs.uk), and the Check-in Scotland app (www.snipca.com/38813), work on any handset running Android 6 or iOS 13.5 and upwards. Northern Ireland's app (www.snipca.com/38816) uses Bluetooth, not QR codes.

Chat on WhatsApp and Facebook

Both WhatsApp and Facebook are available on many cheap phones that use an operating system called KaiOS (www.kaiostech.com). Based on Linux, this Android alternative allows devices without touchscreens to run apps from the KaiOS app store (www.snipca.com/38668) – though not NHS apps.

Nokia's KaiOS-powered phones include the **6300 4G**, which you can currently buy from its online store for £50 (down from £60) from www.snipca.com/38666. This has a similar design to Nokia's classic handsets, but has been updated to include Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, 4G and the aforementioned apps, as well as a web browser, FM radio and music player.

Alternatively, there's the **Doro 7030** (pictured above), which offers the same big buttons, simple interface and great battery life as the company's other phones for seniors (such as the **Doro 8050** – see our review, Issue 609, page 26). However, because it runs KaiOS it's cheaper than Doro's Android devices. It's just £90 on Amazon at the time of writing (www.snipca.com/38671), and has 4G, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, WhatsApp and Facebook, though it doesn't let you access the KaiOS store. However, it does have GPS, which lets you share your location – a welcome feature in an emergency. ca

Problems Solved

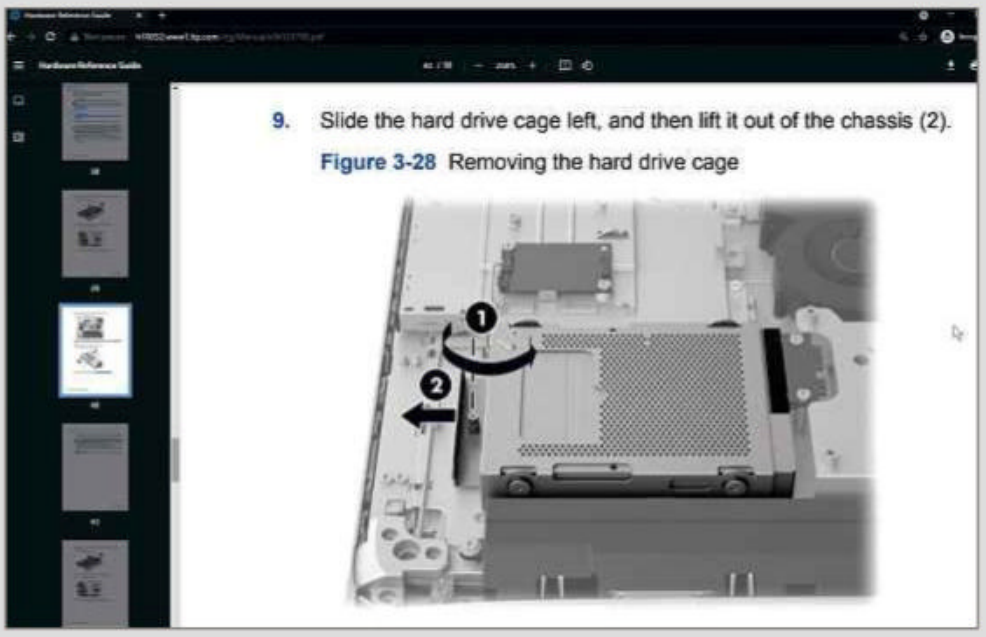
Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Will an external SSD speed up my old PC?

Q I've been investigating external SSDs and have read that they do exactly the same as internal SSDs. I have an ever-so-slow HP Pavilion 23 all-in-one PC and am reluctant to open it up. So, I wonder whether what I've read is true. Could you please explain?

Dr U C Hutter



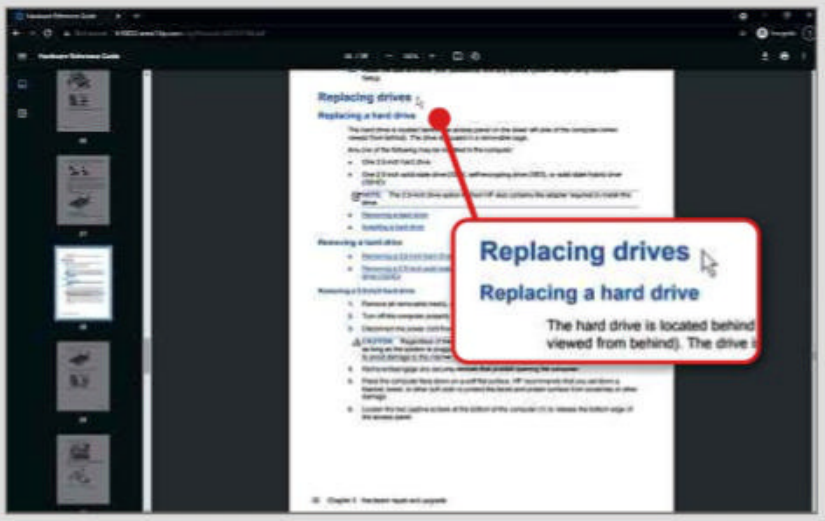
The online manual for the HP Pavilion has easy-to-follow instructions for replacing the hard drive with an SSD

A On the one hand, this is true. On the other, it's codswallop.

The basic components of any two SSDs are the same, regardless of whether they are designed for use inside or outside of a computer. So, in that regard at least, yes – all else being equal, an internal SSD is much the same as an external model.

However, all else is unlikely to be equal. For starters, any drive you connect internally to your PC is likely to use a SATA interface, while an external drive will usually attach via USB. There are multiple different generations of each of these interfaces, not to mention different specification subsets within each generation.

For reasons of space we'll have to greatly oversimplify here. But, suffice to say that, on an older PC like yours, the internal SATA interface's data bandwidth will almost certainly be more than that of the USB ports. In other words, if two otherwise-identical SSDs were connected via SATA III and USB 3.0, the SATA-connected drive would perform better than the one hanging off USB 3.0 – because the USB 3.0 interface would present a bottleneck.



The SSD's storage chips could work faster than the bandwidth available on USB 3.0, which tops out at 5Gbps (compared to 6Gbps of the SATA III interface your old PC probably has).

But it's not even as simple as that, because it is unlikely that an SSD connected via USB 3.0 would ever have the luxury of making use of the full 5Gbps bandwidth, because that's a theoretical maximum – and any number of other devices might eat into what's available at any given time. The internal SATA III interface will generally be much less congested.

Now, if you had a more modern PC, with a USB 3.2 (but 'Gen 2', not 'Gen 1') connector, say, then that bottleneck wouldn't exist – because this newer version of USB can handle up to 10Gbps. USB 4.0 ups this further, to 40Gbps. However, this is all academic, because your PC does not have USB 3.2 or USB 4.0, and retro-fitting either to an all-in-one isn't feasible.

All this brings us back to the real question of whether it actually matters? The answer might be no: while a USB 3.0-connected SSD might perform more slowly than a SATA III-connected SSD, it could still be faster than a traditional SATA III hard drive. Nonetheless, if you really want to speed up your PC by using an SSD we'd suggest biting the bullet and opening up your PC to fit an SSD.

We don't know the exact model you have, but the HP Pavilion 23 service manual, at www.snipca.com/38598, details the process (see screenshots above) – and it's really not all that terrifying!

The best way to speed up an old HP Pavilion might be to install an SSD

Will updating my Mac break Windows 7?

Q I've been running Windows 7 Home Premium inside VirtualBox 2.0 on a MacBook Pro bought in 2015, which runs OS X Yosemite (10.10). It's the only way I can run my specialist Windows software on this lovely, healthy machine. Most of the software I use this way is ticking over nicely. Recently, I've been frustrated as several programs I use natively on the Mac now require me to update to macOS or they won't function properly. I've avoided doing this in case in the process I lose VirtualBox and everything inside it.

I'm wondering if it's safe to update to macOS and apply the VirtualBox updates without losing my Windows 7 setup and files? Or would it mean a complete reinstall of everything, which I wouldn't relish?

Pam Crane

Apple's support page says that a 2015 MacBook will run macOS Big Sur

A Apple's own support page, at www.snipca.com/38599, states that the 2015-era MacBook Pro should be able to run the latest version of macOS (11.3.1), or Big Sur as it's nicknamed (see screenshot above right).

However, as you're currently running such an old version of the operating system, you might have to apply multiple updates in succession, so it could take a while before you reach the end point. So, that side of things should be okay.

Next, VirtualBox. If you really are still running version 2.0 of the product – which was released way back in 2008 – then it too will likely need updating, as we're not convinced that such an old version would run under Big Sur. The latest version (6.1.22) is a free download, from www.virtualbox.org. Again, we don't foresee that a 2015 MacBook Pro upgraded to Big Sur would have any problem running VirtualBox 6.1.22 – though we can of course offer no guarantees for your specific setup.

That just leaves your Windows 7 virtual machine. This is the aspect that's least likely to cause you problems, because the whole thing is contained within a single Virtual Disk Image, or VDI, file. This means it's unaffected by whatever happens 'outside' its confines.

Upgrading from OS X to macOS shouldn't delete this or any other file, and nor should updating VirtualBox. However, to be on the safe side, you can take a backup of the VDI file.

To do this, first go to your MacBook's Finder icon, then open the Go menu and choose Library. Now choose VirtualBox and, within that, you should see your Windows 7 VDI file – so just drag and drop it on to a USB stick or other external drive.

Why does my PC randomly reboot?

Q **Since the last major Windows 10 update, my desktop PC randomly reboots. I've trawled the web for possible causes and solutions but without success. It's really annoying, particularly when I'm in the middle of a large piece of work. Any help you can offer would be much appreciated.**

Byron Tann

A This is one of those problems that, sadly, is incredibly hard to diagnose. However, we have an inkling that the problem is being caused by hardware, not software, and that it's not related to a recent Windows update.

You didn't give us any detail about what happens when your computer reboots, but if it's literally just resetting without warning, then it could be that the power-supply unit (PSU) is malfunctioning or overloaded. The latter could be the case if you've recently fitted a new graphics card, say. PSUs are rated for a certain amount of watts (W) and, if the hardware in your PC exceeds that – even for a moment – then the PSU can 'brown out', causing the computer to reset.

An 850W Aerocool Integrator can supply twice the power of PSUs found in many PCs

There's not a lot that can be done about this, other than fitting a more powerful PSU, such as the 850W Aerocool Integrator (around £67 from www.snipca.com/38600, pictured). This is able to supply more than twice the power of the PSUs found in PCs you can buy from shops.

Alternatively, the existing PSU might be faulty. Again, there's nothing practically that can be done about this other than fitting a replacement.

Problems **Solved**

What's wrong with my mobile battery?

Q My Motorola Moto G4 (pictured below) is a couple of years old. Recently, the battery level started dropping very rapidly. Checking the usage, it's all down to 'mobile standby'. I don't understand this. Any idea what's happened and how I can put it right?

Everard Scriven

A Android has suffered numerous battery-draining bugs so, in the first instance, we'd check that you have the latest available version – which for your phone is Android 8.1 (Oreo). First, launch the Settings app, then tap 'About phone' followed by 'System updates', and then follow the prompts to download any updates.

If that doesn't sort things then the battery has probably reached the end of its useful life. It isn't designed to be replaced by users, but it can be done if you don't want to pay for a professional job. A kit with a battery and all the necessary tools costs around £14 (www.snipca.com/38562, pictured below) and you'll find detailed step-by-step instructions on the excellent iFixit website, at www.snipca.com/38563.

The kit with replacement battery and tools for the Motorola Moto G4

Can I use a TV as a PC monitor?

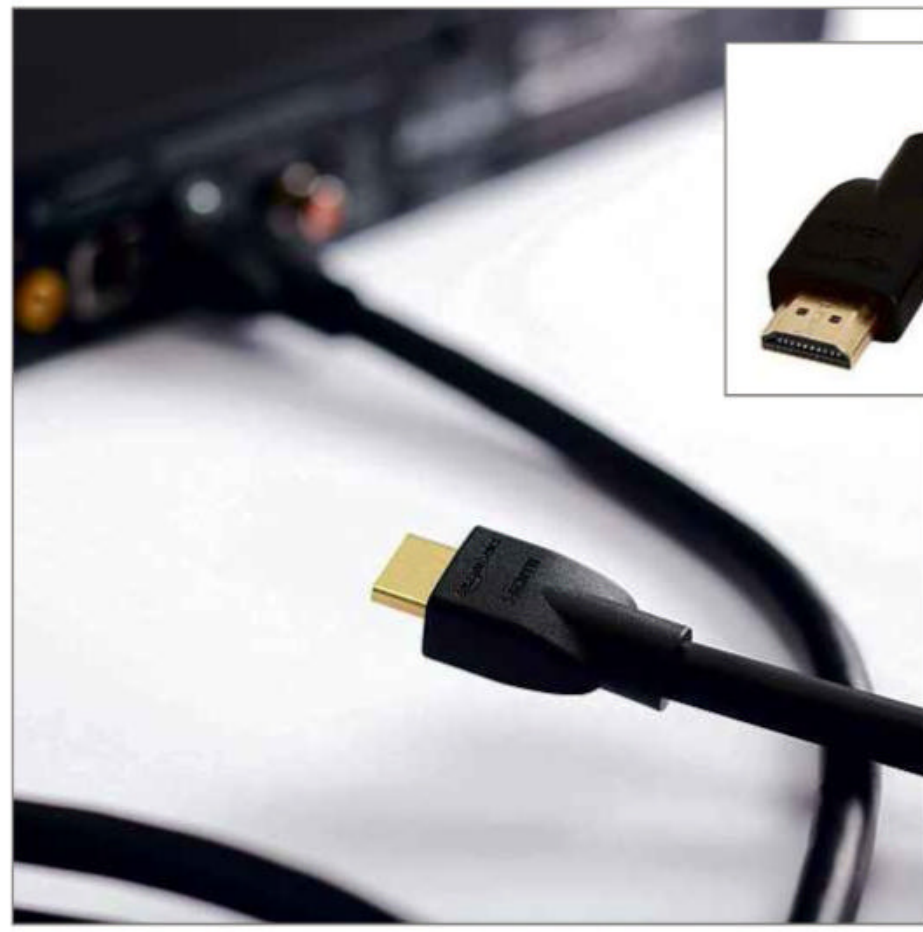
Q I like large monitors because I often have lots of windows and panels open. I currently use two monitors side by side, but I was wondering if a 4K TV would work as a monitor – especially for coding and graphics programming, rather than gaming. Good-quality 4K TVs seem to offer the same resolution as dedicated monitors for lower cost.

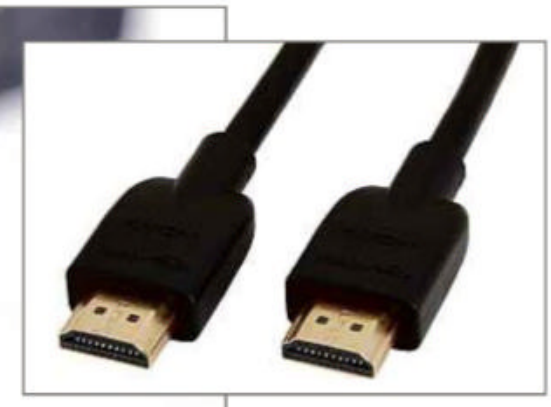
Stephen Heyworth

A If your computer and the TV have the corresponding connections then there's nothing to stop you doing this. Indeed, for precisely the reason you state, it can be a cost-effective way to get a good-quality, high-resolution screen. At the TV end, this will almost certainly mean an HDMI input, while your PC needs either an HDMI or DisplayPort output. Then, you just need an HDMI (or DisplayPort) to HDMI cable, like the pictured Amazon Basics model (around £7, www.snipca.com/38601).

The biggest problem is likely to be 'input lag', where any image processing performed by the TV can slow the time it takes the pictures to reach the screen. When you're watching TV this isn't noticeable, and therefore not a concern. However, 100 milliseconds of input lag, say, might result in the mouse pointer responding to your hand movements a fraction of a second behind real time. That can be a little annoying for everyday apps, but an absolute killer for games – where every millisecond between input and output is vital (because you might lose a life in the time it takes the TV to show the action on screen).

Fortunately, most modern TVs have a mode to minimise input lag, so that the screen acts much more like a traditional computer monitor. Just look through the set's options for a 'Computer', 'PC' or 'Game' mode, and make sure it's enabled.





This cable from Amazon Basics will connect a PC to a 4K TV monitor

Q: Can I make Money 2001 work with Windows 10?

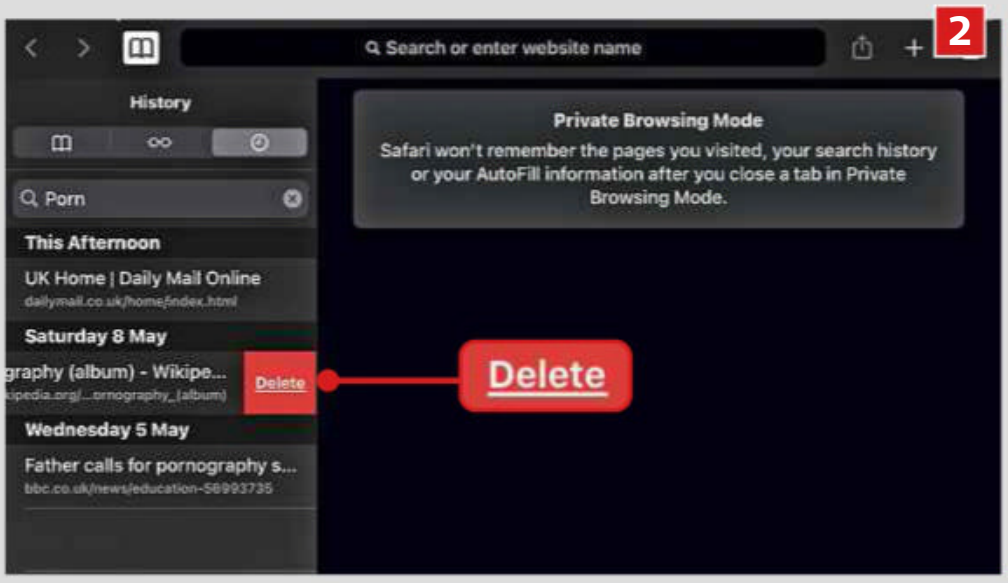
A: Issue 579, page 67 – find it on our 2020 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/38164

How do I remove porn site from my iPad history?

Q I use an iPad for browsing. A while ago, I mistyped a website address and ended up at a porn site. I should be clear that I'm not interested in porn, and I think this address has been set up maliciously to catch out people like me – because I regularly misspell this website. However, precisely because I do that, this porn site appears under the heading Top Hits in Safari. This has the potential to cause embarrassment, even though I've explained to my partner how it happened. I've found the option to clear all of Safari's history in Settings, but it's really just this one item I want get rid of. Do you know if there's a way to do that?

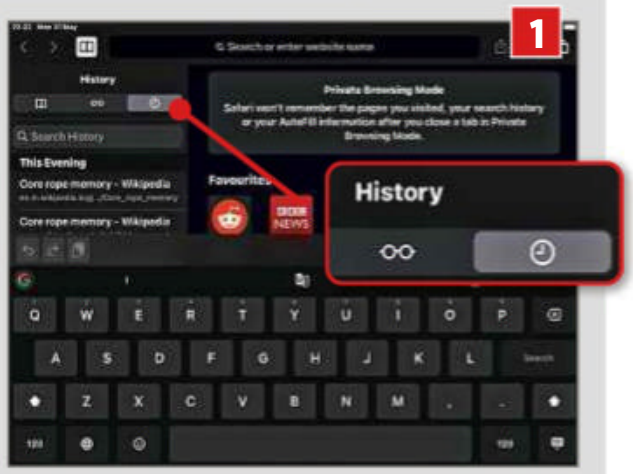
Malcolm Green



Tap the History icon, represented by a clock (1), before selecting and deleting the unwanted search entry (2)

A Yes, but it is one of those options that's frustratingly difficult to locate unless you know where to look.

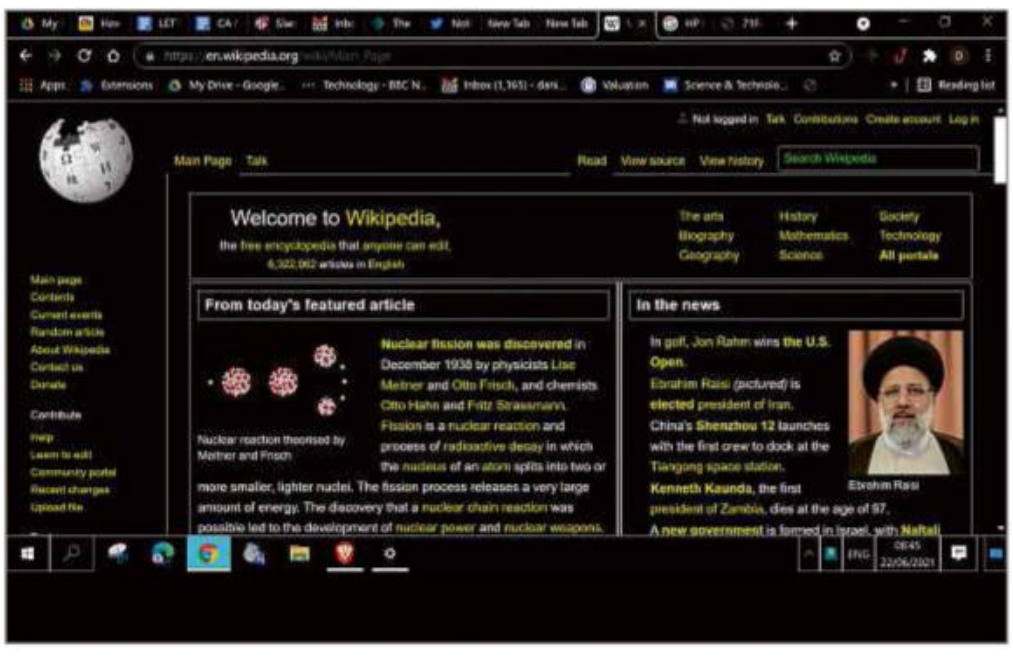
Fortunately, we do know where it is – so here's what to do. First, tap the Bookmarks icon just to the left of the address bar (it's the one that looks like an open book). Next, tap the History icon (see screenshot 1), which resembles a clock. Now, in the Search History box, type the name of the offending website, or even just the first few characters. Finally, in the results list that appears below, swipe your finger from right to left over the unwanted entry and then just tap Delete 2.



Can I make websites easier to read?

Q I'm having increasing difficulty reading the text on many websites, which appear in more of a grey than black font. Is there anything I can do to make it easier to read web pages, perhaps by making fonts bolder?

Allan McGregor

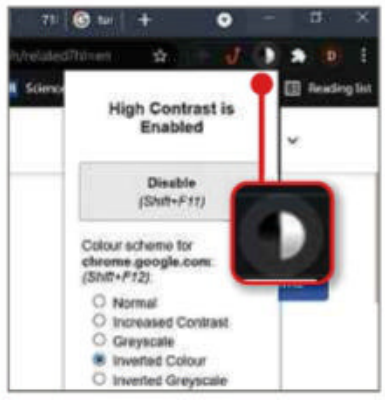


Windows' High Contrast mode can make it easier to read text on a website

A Assuming you're using a Windows 10 computer, there are numerous things you can do. The first and often simplest is to try the zoom function. In any of the main modern browsers, you can control zoom by holding down the Control (Ctrl) button on your keyboard before tapping the plus ('+') or minus ('-') keys – or holding down Ctrl while twiddling your mouse wheel, if it has one.

Alternatively, or as well, you can at any time adjust the High Contrast mode that's part of Windows 10's Ease of Access features for accessibility. To do this, just hold down the left Alt button along with Shift and then tap Print Screen (PrtScn). This puts the whole of Windows, browser and websites and all, into a mode that employs a few high-contrast colours to make text (in particular) much easier to pick out (see screenshot above). To switch it off again, just once more use the left Alt+Shift+PrtScn keyboard shortcut.

Finally, you could download an extension that'll apply similar high-contrast effects just within the browser window. For Chrome (or Edge), for example, Google's own High Contrast add-on will do the job (see screenshot above). It's a free download from www.snipca.com/38605 – just click the 'Add to Chrome' button.



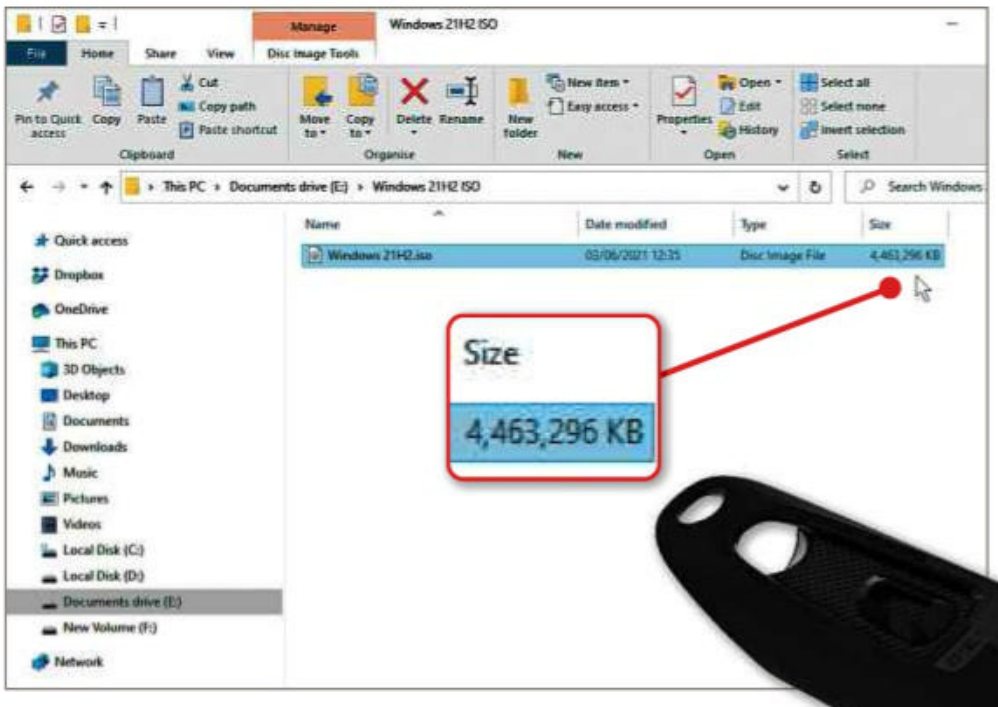
Install Google's High Contrast add-on then click the black-white icon

Problems **Solved**

Why won't Windows 10 fit on to a DVD?

Q I downloaded a Windows 10 Home ISO file that I wanted to burn on to a blank DVD to install on an old desktop PC. However, I found the file was too large to actually fit on a DVD. What on earth is the point of that? I checked on Microsoft's forums and there are lots of moans about this. What's Microsoft playing at?

Adrian Hall



The latest Windows 10 update is below 4.7GB in size (left). Updates that are bigger than 4.7GB will fit on a USB stick (below)

A This isn't a new problem. Various Windows 10 updates have resulted in ISO file sizes that are larger than 4.7GB – which is the space available on a traditional single-sided, single-layer DVD.

We suppose Microsoft's argument would be that USB sticks are so cheap these days that most people would choose that method of installation. The pictured 16GB SanDisk model, for example, costs around £6 from www.snipca.com/38602. It could further argue that any modern machines that have a DVD-writer drive will be able to burn higher-capacity formats, such as dual-layer or Blu-ray. Moreover, as Windows 10 has evolved to add more features, it has inevitably got bigger.

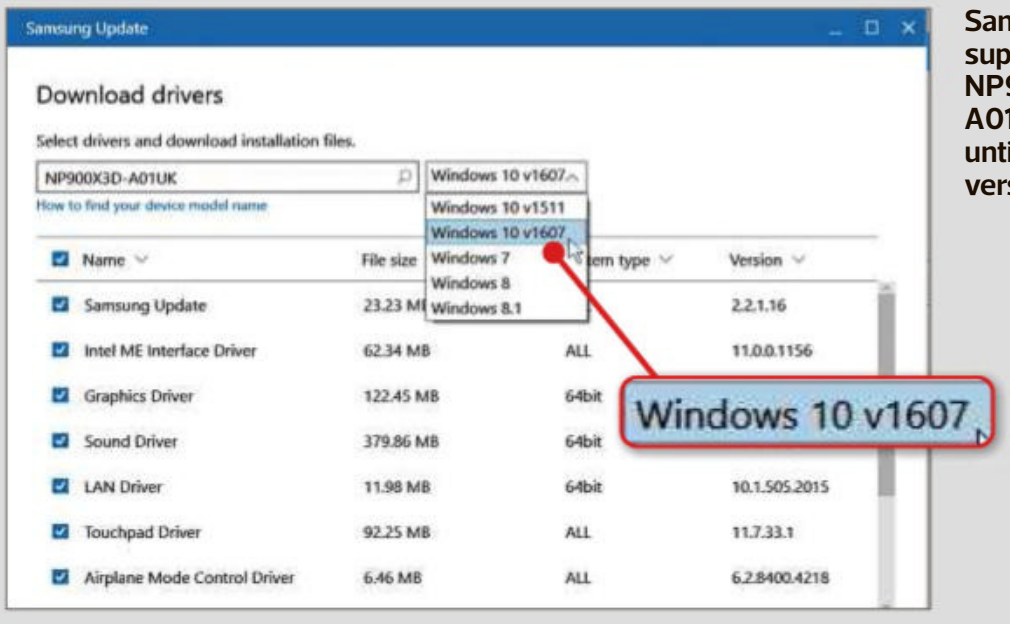
Still, we're not defending the situation – merely explaining why keeping Windows 10's ISO below 4.7GB probably isn't high on Microsoft's priority list. The good news, at least for now, is that the latest update – May 2021, or 21H1 – has an ISO that is once more below 4.7GB (see screenshot above).

So, if you still want to burn Windows 10 to DVD, grab the latest version from Microsoft's download page at www.snipca.com/38603.

Is my laptop incompatible with Windows 10?

Q My Samsung NP900X3D-A01UK laptop came with Windows 8, which I upgraded to Windows 10. It now won't install Windows updates. Eventually, I reinstalled Windows 10, but then the Bluetooth function no longer worked. Samsung told me some of the hardware on my notebook is incompatible with the latest version of Windows 10 and that if I want to solve this I'd have to reinstall Windows 8, or an early version of Windows 10. This seems unsatisfactory. Is my laptop obsolete?

Noel Moore



Samsung offered support for its NP900X3D-A01UK laptop only until Windows 10 version 1607

A This isn't great, but it isn't unusual. For your model, Samsung offered driver support only up to Windows 10 Anniversary Edition, or 1607, released in 2016. Samsung can't be blamed for the fact that Microsoft has since done things to Windows 10 that cause problems for these final drivers, preventing Windows 10 itself from updating. It supplied the machine with Windows 8, and that version of the operating system – which Microsoft will continue to support until 2023 – would continue to download available updates, were it still on your PC. The drivers also continue to work in Windows 8.

So, we're afraid what Samsung says is correct: your machine isn't supported beyond Windows 10 1607. As such, to keep it running safely (at least until 2023), you'd have to revert to Windows 8.

We know that's far from ideal. Clearly, you've installed a newer version of Windows 10, keeping the operating system itself 'safe' until the next major update, but it won't download drivers it considers to be broken or unsafe. That's why your Bluetooth won't work.

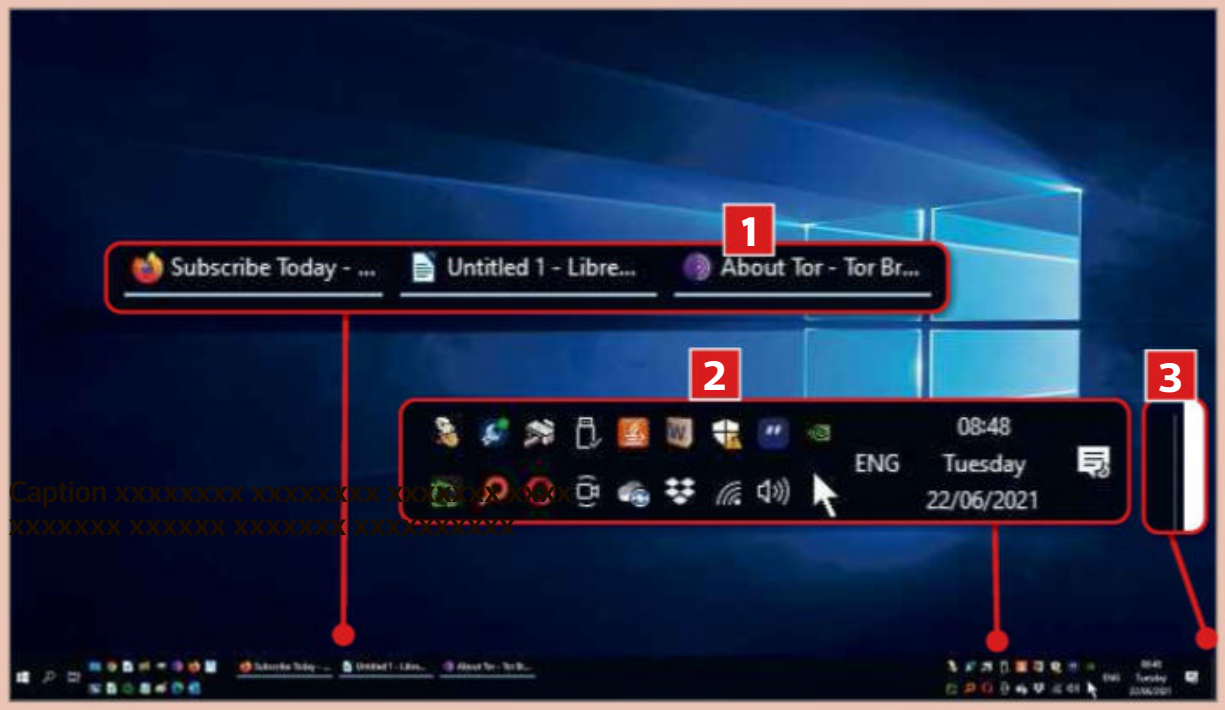
You could use the Samsung Update app (a free download from ww.snipca.com/38604) to force these old drivers to download and install, but there's no guarantee they'll work – or that they won't cause unforeseen problems.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

The notification area and system tray?

Q I've noticed that in your magazine you sometimes call the bit at the bottom right of Windows 10 the 'notification area', but at other times you refer to it as the 'system tray'. I've seen both of these terms online too, so it's not peculiar to you chaps. Why is this? Is there a difference between the two, or is it the same thing? If so, how did it end up having two different names?

Philip Osborne



The taskbar is home to pinned or running apps [1], the notification area [2] and Peek [3]

A Depending on your viewpoint, this is either an old chestnut or a hot potato – or perhaps a bit of both!

So, let's start with a bit of Windows anatomy. The strip at the bottom of Windows 10, and earlier versions, is called the taskbar. It contains several elements, including the Start button on the left side, along with various other buttons – including search and task view, if you have those enabled.

The long bit in the middle is where icons sit for pinned or running apps (1 in our screenshot). Then, on the far right you have what Microsoft now formally refers to as the notification area 2. There's also a tiny vertical strip to the right of this, called Peek 3.

When the mouse pointer is hovered over this, all windows will become transparent to reveal the Windows 10 desktop.

But the key point is the 'formal' name: notification area is what Microsoft today calls this part of the taskbar. The company is also clear that system tray should not be used, as it states in its style guide at www.snipca.com/38552.

Historically, though, in early editions of Windows it *was* known as the system tray. That's the name many seasoned PC users have stuck with. Moreover, despite the company's own style guide, the term system tray appears in plenty of Microsoft's online support pages.

We tend to use notification area because it's both the correct term, and also what readers themselves use mostly. We try to avoid calling it the system tray, though this old name might slip through occasionally.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Can I reattach an Ethernet connector?

Q I want to extend an Ethernet cable to another room. For this I need to drill a hole in the wall, which I'd like to keep as small as possible. Is there a way to just get the cable through without the connection end and subsequently reattach the connector again? Is there a tool to do this or are there specific connectors to attach to the cable afterwards?

Gerard van Zwieten

A Yes, you can do this. The job is certainly a bit fiddly, but it's not particularly complicated. It's just a case of stripping the cable sleeve, ensuring the wires are in the right order, slotting them into a new RJ45 (Ethernet) connector and then crimping to ensure the copper connects with the contacts in the plug.

Dedicated crimping tools to make the job easier are fairly affordable (at around £9, www.snipca.com/38576, pictured), and the Instructables website, at www.snipca.com/38577, has an illustrated guide to the full process.

A crimping tool will make the job of clamping, cutting and stripping Ethernet cables easier

Next Issue

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- How do I pin tabs?
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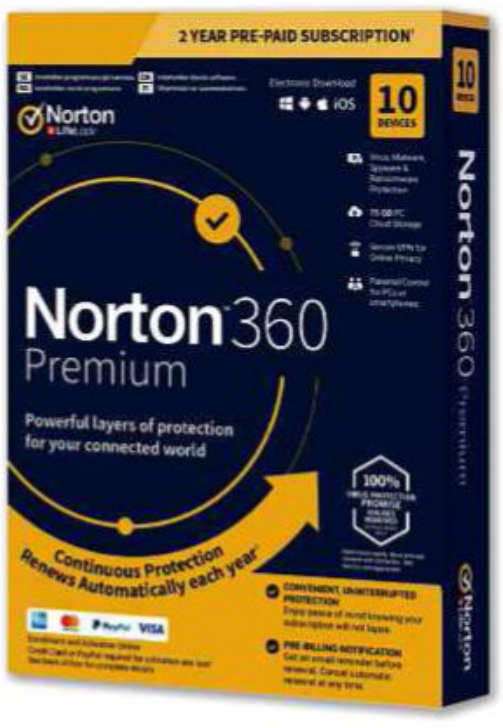

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Is an old mobile phone safe to use as a security camera?

Q **Robert Irvine's Easy When You Know How column in Issue 603 on using an old mobile phone as a surveillance camera got me wondering about security. I like the idea of this, but is it safe to use an old mobile phone this way? Many will no longer receive manufacturer updates, so would it be sensible to install security software?**

Alan Thomas

A This is an interesting question. In a broad sense your concern is valid: an old mobile that no longer receives updates could have flaws that make it vulnerable to attack when connected to the internet. That's true of both iPhones and Android phones, though the former are generally more secure – because Apple controls so much of what can be installed on or done within iOS.

However, in terms of Robert's specific example – using the Alfred service (https://alfred.camera) – the risk is limited. By this, we mean any flaw would need to be specific enough to allow wrongdoers access to the Alfred app's inner workings. That's certainly not impossible, but it isn't likely. Moreover, while older Android and iOS versions might themselves be unsupported, the Alfred app remains a live, supported project.

With Android, for example, Alfred supports some phones running versions as old as 5.0 (Lollipop) – released back in 2014. If some critical flaw were found in Android 5.0 that allowed hackers a way into Alfred, we think that developer Alfred Systems would withdraw the app for that version of Android.

Moreover, it's not unknown for Google or Apple to issue emergency fixes for versions they no longer support because both companies know that many millions of users continue to use old editions – and releasing these fixes is just a good PR move. In short, then, the risk you identify is real but is unlikely to affect Alfred specifically.

Additional security software can be a good idea on Android phones. Any such apps for iOS are largely pointless because – as stated above – Apple controls everything. However, there's no guarantee you'll find reliable security apps that run on very old versions of Android. For example, Avast's popular mobile security app (www.snipca.com/38611) requires at least Android 5.0. Still, if your spare phone is running a version older than that then the Alfred app itself won't run.

if you can't connect your Chromebook to an old printer, set up a generic Chrome printer

How do I get my Chromebook to print?

Q **Thanks for the 'Should you buy a Chromebook?' feature in Issue 604 (page 60). I think it would have been worth mentioning their printing limitations. My new HP printer works well with my Acer Chromebook, but I cannot get my old Canon Pixma iP7250 printer to work with it. When I add a printer in Settings, the Canon is shown on the list, but when I try to set it up, it's not listed and I can't find a PPD file. The Chromebook doesn't recognise the printer's IP address either. I'd be grateful for any suggestions.**

Russ Reid

A Yes, connecting older printers to Chromebooks can be a problem. Canon has stated that it will support Chrome OS (which runs on Chromebooks) in future, but this won't help owners of older printers – like yourself. One option is to try connecting your Canon printer via a USB cable. If that's not possible, we'd suggest choosing one of Chrome OS's generic printer entries (see screenshot left): it may let you use at least some of the printer's basic tools.

Where's my Windows 10 product key?

Q **Thanks for answering my question in Issue 608 about my Windows 10 Pro PC, which has 8GB of RAM (not all of which is usable). I'd like to follow your instructions to upgrade from 32bit to 64bit Windows, with a clean install. However, my version of Windows 10 Pro was an upgrade some time ago so the only product key I have relates to the original Windows 7 Pro. So, how would I upgrade to Windows 10?**

Tom Jones

A When you upgraded from Windows 7 Pro to Windows 10, your old licence would have been subsumed into a new one – for Windows 10. This is a digital licence attached to your Microsoft account and specific PC setup. You can download Microsoft's media-creation tool from www.snipca.com/38613 (pictured below), and use that to perform a clean install of Windows 10 Pro. As the operating system has been previously activated on your PC, you will not be asked for a product key.

Download Microsoft's media-creation tool to perform a clean install of Windows 10

Jargon **Buster**

2G Second-generation mobile network.

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.

360p/720p/1080p/1440p Common types of high-definition video of 1280x720, 1920x1080 and 2560x1440 pixels respectively.

802.11ax Wi-Fi standard with speeds up to 10 times faster than 802.11ac. Also called Wi-Fi 6.

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.

aptX A codec used to compress audio so it can be transmitted over Bluetooth with minimal loss in quality.

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 digital display and add elements from the digital world.

Bandwidth A measure of how much data can be transferred through a connection at one time.

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.

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

Bitrate A measure of data transfer speed, or of the quality of digital video or audio files.

Blue screen of death Technically called a 'Stop error', this is shown when your PC crashes.

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

Clean install An operating system installation that overwrites all other content on the hard drive.

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

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.

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

CSV Comma Separated Value. A standard file format, used for storing tabulated information, that can be opened by most spreadsheet applications.

DDR3L PC memory that works at both 1.5 volts and 1.35. DDR3 only supports 1.5 volts.

DirectX A Microsoft technology required to run many games in Windows.

DisplayPort A new socket for connecting monitors.

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

Drive image File containing the contents and structure of an entire data storage device – a hard drive, for example.

Emulator A program that makes one computer act like another, allowing it to run that computer's software.

Encoder A piece of software that converts media files to a new format, such as converting WAV audio files to MP3.

Encryption key A random string of characters used to encrypt and decrypt sensitive data.

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

Executable file A program file designed to run in Windows. Executable files have the file extension .exe.

Factory settings The original system state of an electronic device. You can restore a device to this state by erasing all the data stored on it and returning its software to its original manufacturer settings.

Firewall A piece of software or hardware that prevents unauthorised access to a computer over a network, such as the internet.

Firmware Basic software stored on hardware, such as a processor, to control its operation.

Fps Frames per second. Used to indicate gaming performance.

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.

FTP File Transfer Protocol. A system for transferring files between computers. Often used when uploading websites.

Geekbench 5 A test for measuring processor speed.

GHz Gigahertz. A measure of how many instructions a chip can process per second. 1GHz is equal to 1,000MHz.

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

Gorilla glass Scratch-resistant glass that's used to protect the screens of tablets and phones.

GPS Global positioning system. Satellite-based navigational system.

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.

HTTP Hyper Text Transfer Protocol. The technology that sends data between your browser and the web

Incognito Mode A browser mode that doesn't save your internet history, so other people using your computer can't see which sites you've visited.

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

IMEI Integrated Mobile Equipment Identity. A unique number used to identify each mobile phone

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better, more accurate-looking colours compared with monitors that do not use this technology.

ISO file A type of image file that contains all the data from a CD or DVD.

LCD Liquid-crystal display. The technology used to create almost all flatscreen monitors.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light. Used on almost all electronic devices, and to provide the backlight for some LCDs.

LNB Low-Noise Block downconverter. Amplifies weak satellite signals, and converts signals from high to low frequencies.

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

Macro An automated series of commands or options that can be run at any time. Handy if you often need to perform repetitive actions.

Metadata A set of data that gives information about a file.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

Motherboard The main circuit board inside every PC into which all other parts connect.

NVMe Non-Volatile Memory Express. An interface that lets solid-state drives work faster.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives. Once partitioned, each section is treated by Windows as though it were a completely separate, smaller hard drive.

Product key Unique serial number issued by software companies that must be typed in before a program will launch for the first time.

QR code Quick Response code. A barcode that can be read using smartphones and dedicated QR-reading devices.

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

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. Any information in RAM will be lost when the power is switched off.

Ransomware Malware run by hackers who lock files on your PC and demand a payment to release them.

SATA Serial ATA. An interface for connecting hard drives and optical discs to a computer.

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.

SMTP Simple Mail Transfer Protocol. A standard for sending email messages. It is now largely reserved for sending messages rather than receiving them.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts. Faster but more expensive than conventional hard drives.

TPM Trusted Platform Module. A computer chip that allows your hardware to perform security-related tasks

Two-factor authentication A system that uses two different means to identify the user. For example, a code sent to your phone in addition to a password.

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.

VGA Video Graphics Array. An older standard socket for connecting a monitor to a computer.

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.

Wideband A satellite dish that can receive a wider range of signals than standard dishes.

Widget A small program such as a calendar that runs on the Windows desktop.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

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Know How

Worried that emailing himself meant he was going mad, **Robert Irvine** instead tries to...

Transfer phone files over Wi-Fi

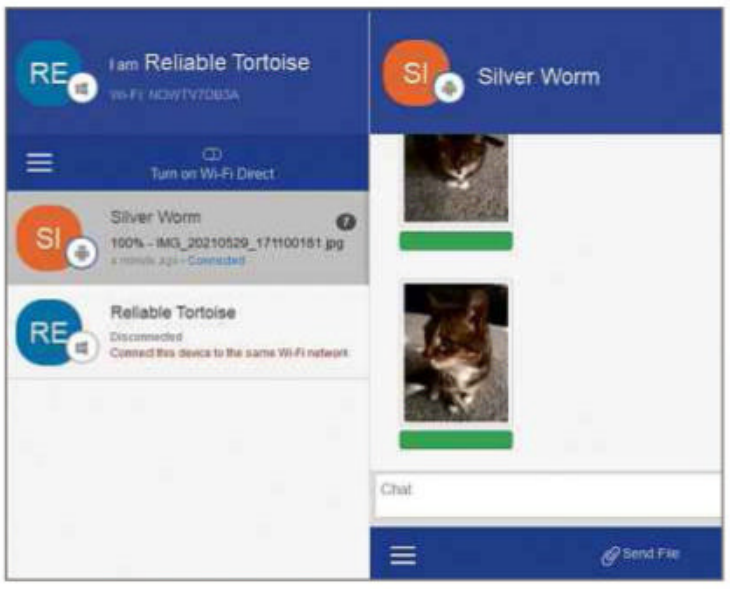
"Talking to yourself during lockdown?" began an article I read recently. "Yes!" I said to myself. "If you live alone, you're not alone" continued the piece, "but it's nothing to worry about". After breathing a sigh of relief, I wondered if the same reassurance applies to taking photos of yourself, emailing yourself and – for the purposes of a feature I wrote last issue – having a video chat with yourself because you don't want to bother anyone else?

In the case of self-addressed emails, I've found it's the easiest way to transfer screenshots I capture on my phone or tablet to my PC. However, it still takes too much time, and can even be worrying when I start writing messages like: "Hi Robert, here are those grabs you wanted. Best wishes, Robert". Surely there's a quicker and saner method of sharing files between devices?

With that in mind, I was intrigued to discover a tool called Feem (https://feem.io), which lets you send files from your phone to your PC over your Wi-Fi network, and claims to be 50 times faster than Bluetooth. Despite its odd name, which brought to mind *Little Britain*'s Dennis Waterman sketches ("write the feem tune, sing the feem tune"), I wanted to see if Feem fulfilled my file-sharing needs. Didn't I, Robert? Yes, you did.

I downloaded Feem's free Android app (www.snipca.com/38637) to my phone – it's also available for iOS: www.snipca.com/38636 – and its desktop program

Robert needed to tweak the Windows firewall to allow Feem access to his Wi-Fi network



Feem eventually made it easy for Robert to send files from Silver Worm to Reliable Tortoise

> "Please don't tell the security police that I disabled the Windows firewall"

(www.snipca.com/38644) to my Windows laptop, and ensured both devices were connected to my Wi-Fi. On Android, I was prompted to grant Feem storage permission and access to my location, but these seemed like reasonable requests.

I liked the quirky names that Feem gave my devices – my phone was Silver Worm while my laptop was Reliable Tortoise – and because they appeared in both apps, I was confident things were up and running. Sadly, for some reason, the Feem desktop program said that Reliable Tortoise was disconnected from my Wi-Fi, even though the Feem mobile app showed it as connected, and told me to "connect this device to the same Wi-Fi network".

This caused me at least an hour's worth of hassle, as I tried tweaking various Wi-Fi settings, restarted my laptop several times and even – shock, horror, please don't tell the security police! – disabled Windows Defender Firewall. Nothing fixed the problem, the air in my flat had turned blue and I was about to abandon Feem, when I thought I'd try sending a file anyway. And it worked!

I simply tapped Reliable Tortoise on my Android phone, chose Send File and selected an image I wanted to transfer to my PC. Helpfully, Feem organises items into categories such as Photos, Videos, Audio and Files, which saves time when browsing the contents of your mobile device. I tapped Send and Silver Worm instantly transferred the picture to Feem on my laptop, where I was able to open and save it. I then tried sending further files and they copied over pronto, too. My only complaint was that the Feem app displays a full-screen ad for its Pro version every time you send a file. This costs $4.99 (£3.54) and gives you features such as sharing files to multiple devices at once, as well as removing all ads.

When I turned the Windows firewall back on, Feem stopped working again, so I deduced that I needed to allow the program network access. I went into the 'Firewall & network protection' section of Windows Security, chose 'Allow an app through the firewall', then clicked 'Change settings' and granted Feem access to my Private and Public networks (see screenshot left).

This did the trick, and though the program still showed Reliable Tortoise as being 'disconnected', this was evidently just a semantic bug. Otherwise, I'm in complete agreement with myself that Feem works like a dream.

Need help with transferring photos and files across your devices?
Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tries to remove metadata from his photos

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