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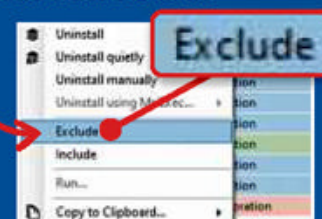
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Computer **active**

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Learn something new in every issue

STOP USING CHROME & EDGE

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WINDOWS 11



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INCLUDED?

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Computeractive
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Every morning, when I turn on my PC, I instinctively click the Chrome icon on my desktop and start browsing. It's only when every web page I open is smothered by adverts that I remember how much I prefer browsing the web in Brave. No ads, no pop-ups, pages load faster. I normally switch to it and stay there all day.

I've got too many Google accounts to stop using Chrome completely, while Edge is much better than it was a few years ago. However, while they remain the world's biggest browsers (for Windows at least),

they're far from the best.

I'm not one for saying that you should always avoid the most popular product in a category – in my view no operating system comes close to Windows – but it's different with browsers. Chrome and Edge have been overtaken by newcomers Brave and Vivaldi, while the original pioneers Firefox and Opera keep adding great tools. Our Cover Feature reveals ways in which all four are superior alternatives. Do you agree?

Daniel Booth

editor@computeractive.co.uk



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File-transfer speed of TP-Link's RE505X Wi-Fi extender – [p24](#)

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

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

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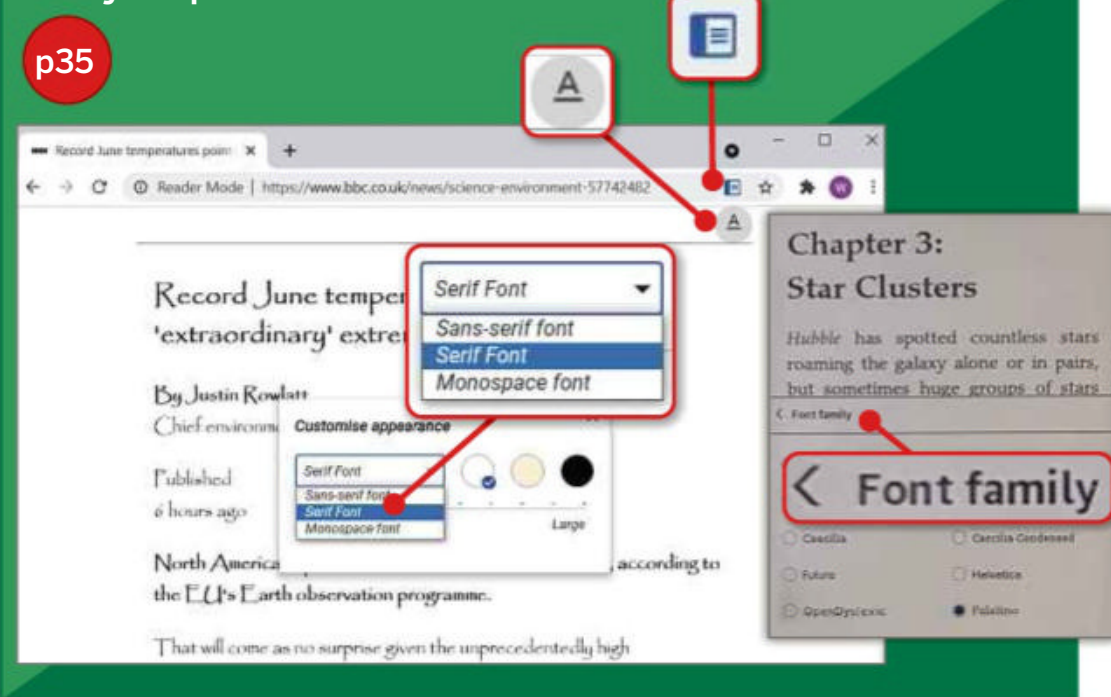


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STOP USING CHROME & EDGE

Switch to the NEW browsers that are **faster**,
more **private** and have **tools you'll love**

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PC makers reveal which devices will run Windows 11

Computer manufacturers have confirmed which of its PCs and laptops will be able to run Windows 11, following confusion over Microsoft's hardware requirements for the operating system.

WHAT WE THINK

Forget Microsoft's failed attempt at explaining whether your PC can run Windows 11, or digging into your hardware to check. For now, these manufacturer lists are as definitive as you're going to get. But Microsoft might still tweak some of its requirements to make more (older) computers compatible. Whatever you do, don't buy a new computer yet just because your existing one can't run Windows 11. As we'll explain in the coming months, you may be able to upgrade your machine – or you may just not need Windows 11 at all.

They include models from many of the world's best-selling ranges, including Dell's Inspiron and XPS (pictured), and Asus's ZenBook and VivoBook.

Windows 10 users have been questioning whether their computer will be able to run its successor after Microsoft said that only machines with a Trusted Platform Module (TPM) on the processor or motherboard will be compatible.

It has revealed other hardware requirements (see www.snipca.com/38958), including 4GB of RAM, a 64GB hard drive or SSD, and a graphics card that supports DirectX 12. Microsoft has also revealed which Intel (www.snipca.com/38804) and AMD (www.snipca.com/38805) processors you'll need.

But it was forced to remove its PC Health Check tool after users complained that it didn't give reasons why their computer was unable to run Windows 11.



Dell, Asus, HP, Lenovo and Acer

Dell lists several hundred compatible computers at www.snipca.com/38956, and provides instructions for finding out which model you have. The list, published in early July, includes most of the company's best-selling devices across all ranges.

If you have an Asus machine, visit www.snipca.com/38965 and click the heading that describes your device (the PC category also covers laptops). Asus explains how to find out your model number at www.snipca.com/38965, and has also named which of its motherboards are compatible: www.snipca.com/38966.

HP's list is less comprehensive, but it has said that its Spectre, Envy and Pavilion computers are "expected to be upgradeable"

to Windows 11 (www.snipca.com/38957).

Similarly, Lenovo doesn't provide a complete list, but you can see a selection of nearly 60 compatible computers, including many IdeaPad and ThinkPad laptops, by visiting the company's UK site (www.snipca.com/38967) and scrolling down to the 'Shop for a new PC' heading. Lenovo's US site lists over 100 computers: www.snipca.com/38968.

Acer provides less detail than its rivals, but it does say Windows 11 will run on "the vast majority of products on the market, including those announced in the past three years". As well as many recent Aspire models, this should mean Acer's Swift 3 laptop (www.snipca.com/38969), which it's promoting as its top choice for Windows 11.

YOU CAN'T UPGRADE FROM WINDOWS 7

Lenovo has said that you won't be able to upgrade directly to Windows 11 from a computer running Windows 7 or 8.1. Instead, you'll need to buy Windows 11 and perform a **clean install** of the operating system, which will erase all the data stored on your computer.

Microsoft hasn't commented on this, but it has confirmed that you'll have only 10 days to roll back your computer from Windows 11 to Windows 10 without losing your data, files and settings.



You'll like this...

WhatsApp will soon still work even if your phone is out of power (www.snipca.com/38960)



but not this...

You need to pay extra to remove adverts from Now TV (www.snipca.com/38959)

BT ‘phases out’ 3G – time to ditch your old phone?

Thousands of people using old phones will be forced to buy a new model after BT announced it will switch off its 3G signal in 2023 – becoming the first UK network to do so.

The company said customers on the EE, Plusnet and BT brands would be “phased off” 3G, adding that it now represents only two per cent of data sent.

The move will free up spectrum to help BT extend its 4G and 5G connections. It aims to add 4,500 square miles of rural 4G coverage by 2025, so customers who can currently get only 3G aren’t excluded. Anyone using 3G would be offered “an attractive deal” to upgrade, a BT spokesman said.

It also hopes to grow its 5G

network “to cover half of the UK population by early 2023, four years ahead of the UK Government’s ambition”, ultimately extending to 90 per cent of the country’s land mass by 2028.

In some remote locations, BT will provide “on demand” coverage through portable cells that can be carried in a backpack and connect to a satellite. It said it wants to make getting a connection as simple as ordering a cab.

3G phones have remained popular with many people, particularly older customers, because they’re seen as easier to use than modern smartphones. Many people use one as a back-up phone for emergencies.



Marc Allera, EE’s chief executive, said the move would affect “hundreds of thousands, but not millions”. He estimated that between two to three million people still use 3G phones across all UK mobile networks.

Read BT’s full announcement at www.snipca.com/38947.

IN BRIEF

MICROSOFT LAUNCHES ‘ONLINE WINDOWS’

Microsoft has launched Windows 365 (www.snipca.com/38948), a ‘Cloud PC’ service that lets subscribers access their Windows desktop online from any other device, including tablets and Apple Macs. It’s being offered to businesses first, for workers to access their “personalised apps, content, and settings” wherever they are. The company hasn’t said whether it will launch a version for home users.

REMOVE APPS STEALING FB PASSWORDS

Google has removed nine phone and tablet apps that have been stealing Facebook passwords. The apps, which have been downloaded over 5.8 million times from the Google Play Store, include tools for editing photos and wiping junk from your device. They were spotted by security firm Dr Web – visit its site for the full list: www.snipca.com/38874. If you’ve installed any, you should remove them without delay.

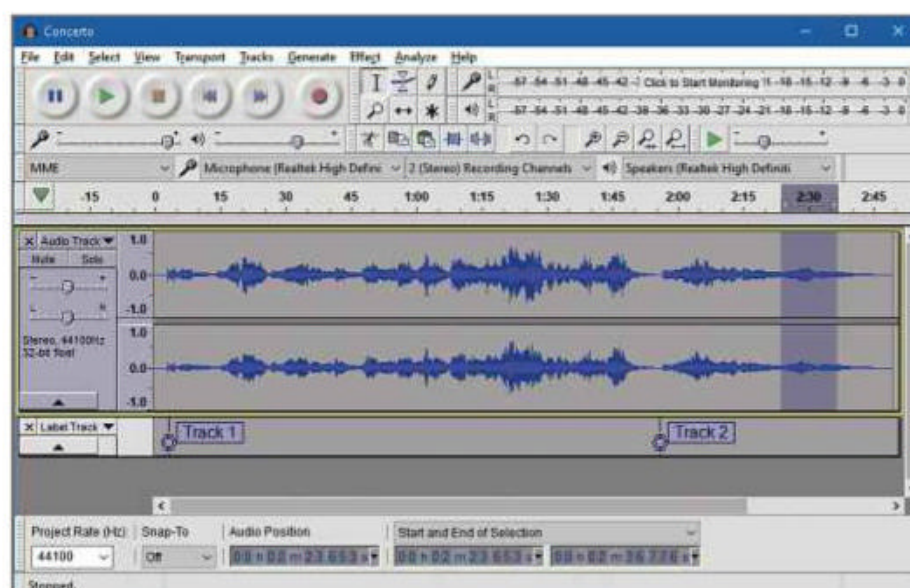
Audacity insists it doesn’t spy on you

Audacity has denied that its new privacy policy gives the software permission to spy on how you use it.

Worried fans of the audio-editing software criticised Audacity’s owners Muse Group for changing its terms and conditions so Audacity can collect “very limited data” about users.

It may share this data with staff members, law-enforcement and government agencies, and “legal representatives of the company”. The policy also allows the company to “occasionally” share user data with its headquarters in Russia.

However, this data doesn’t contain information such as names or contact details that could identify a person. An account profile isn’t required, and IP addresses will be encrypted.



Audacity said it had to update its policy because tools being added to the next version (3.03) require access to the data.

Daniel Ray, Muse Group’s head of strategy, described the policy as being “written by lawyers, to be understood by lawyers rather than the average person”. He claimed



that it contains the standard legal permissions to allow any form of data being sent from user to software.

He said the company doesn’t want users’ personal information, and that data would be shared with its Russian offices only to check whether Audacity had been targeted in a DDoS attack.

TOMORROW’S WORLD

No, this man hasn’t been typing on a keyboard made from barbed wire. Instead he’s modelling a ‘plaster’ that generates electricity from your hands as you sleep. Scientists at University of California, San Diego, say it could one day be used to charge phones, though at the moment it needs three weeks to store enough power.



IN BRIEF

WATCH OLYMPICS ON VODAFONE FOR FREE

Vodafone is giving all pay-monthly customers access to Discovery+ for six months at no extra cost, which means they'll be able to watch the Tokyo Olympics live on their phone, as well as a range of true-crime, documentary and reality channels. Customers can stream anywhere in the UK on up to four devices. Read more on Vodafone's site: www.snipca.com/38872.

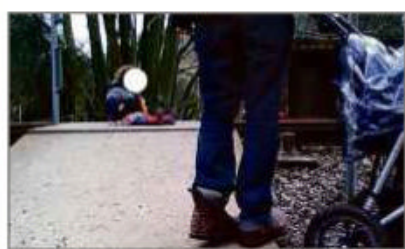
BA PAYS 'RECORD' SUM TO HACK VICTIMS

British Airways has paid an undisclosed sum to around 16,000 people whose card details were leaked in a hack three years ago. It's thought to be the biggest claim for a data breach ever in Britain. Another firm, Your Lawyers, is running a separate claim – you can join its group action at www.snipca.com/38876. In total 420,000 people had their details leaked.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!



Before smartphones and social media, parents used to push their kids on swings in playgrounds. Now they sit them on train tracks and take photos to upload to the web. This mother was shamed by Network Rail after she plonked her daughter on a level crossing at Harlech in north Wales. Officials say lockdown has led to a rise in people taking dangerous pics on tracks.



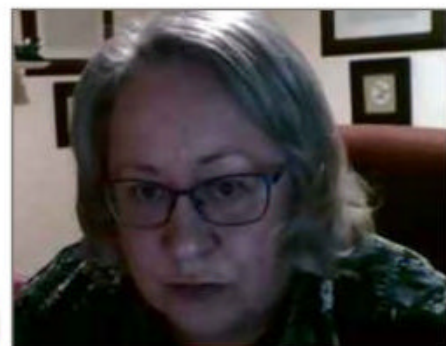
Jackie Weaver urges more over-50s to 'reskill' for IT

Jackie Weaver (pictured below), who shot to fame earlier this year over her handling of a Handforth Parish Council meeting on Zoom, has called for more over-50s to learn new skills so they can work in IT.

She is backing a campaign from the BCS, also known as the Chartered Institute for IT, to encourage more older people to work in computing.

The body has published research (www.snipca.com/38884) showing that despite making up 31 per cent of the UK's overall workforce, only 22 per cent of over-50s work in IT.

In 2020 around 13,000 IT specialists aged over 50 were unemployed, the BCS claims, equating to an unemployment



rate of 3.4 per cent, above the 2.2 per cent for IT staff aged 16-49. This figure has risen from 8,000 in 2019, it said.

Ms Weaver said: "Just as we make assumptions about town and parish councillors being mainly white males, we tend to think of IT being something that is enhanced by youth".

She added that "youth and experience both have a role to play and blinkered reliance on one or the other is a backward step".

Kathy Farndon, chair of BCS Society Board, said that the

Government's plans to introduce a Lifetime Skills Guarantee is a "significant step towards addressing the digital skills gap".

The scheme, outlined in the Queen's Speech in May, offers training to any adult who hasn't already achieved a qualification at Level 3 – equivalent to A-levels. The Government estimates that 11 million adults are eligible – apply at www.snipca.com/38889.



Did you learn new IT skills after 50? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Amazon lets fishmonger use 'Prime Day' slogan

Amazon has apologised to a fishmonger after asking him to remove 'prime day' from his advertising, claiming it breached copyright.

The retailer has registered 'prime day' as a trademarked slogan for its annual two-day event of deals and offers. In late June its lawyers asked Robin Moxon, who owns four shops and a fish smokery in London (pictured), to stop using the phrase on his website because it could make customers think the site was



linked to Amazon.

But Mr Moxon phoned the lawyers to explain that fishmongers had been using 'prime day' for hundreds of years, forcing the company to back down.

He said: "This phrase was being well used probably before Amazon existed in this country and before Jeff Bezos was a

glint in his mother's eye".

He added that 'prime day' was a "nice, neat little phrase" used to promote top quality fish – such as turbot and Dover sole – from trawlers that fish for no longer than a day at a time.

Mr Moxon said he couldn't understand how using the term could affect Amazon's business, and that he found the company's legal action "heavy handed and offensive".

An Amazon spokesman said: "This email was sent in error and we apologise for any inconvenience caused".

Interpol: police and PC industry must fight 'ransomware pandemic'

Interpol has called for police forces and the computer industry to form a "global coalition" in order to prevent a "potential **ransomware** pandemic".

It follows a spate of worldwide attacks targeting companies, as well as schools, hospitals, power stations and other forms of vital infrastructure. In such attacks, hackers encrypt an organisation's data or software so it can't be accessed, and demand a ransom payment to release it.

One of the biggest attacks this year saw hackers disable the Colonial Pipeline, which carries fuel from Houston, Texas to the south-eastern United States. Last month the UK's National Cyber Security Centre reported a rise in hacks targeting schools and universities.

Interpol secretary general Jürgen Stock warned that the threat of ransomware "has



become too large of a threat for any entity or sector to address alone", and fighting it "urgently demands united global action".

Talking at Interpol's High-Level Forum on Ransomware (www.snipca.com/38941), he said: "Despite the severity of their crimes, ransomware criminals are continuously adapting their tactics, operating free of borders and with near impunity".

He called for crime-fighting

bodies to collaborate, just as they do when investigating terrorism, human trafficking and mafia gangs.

Ransomware has become more lucrative for criminals, because they've switched to a 'Ransomware-as-a-Service' strategy, in which they rent malware kits to gangs of hackers.

"Much like the pandemic it exploits, ransomware is evolving into different variants, delivering high financial profits to criminals," Stock added.

Recent research found that in 2020 criminals made \$350m in ransomware payments – a rise of 311 per cent in one year.

Western leaders suspect Russia of harbouring the world's most active ransomware gangs, accusing its authorities of tolerating attacks as long as they target only foreign companies and institutions.

IN BRIEF

BROADBAND FALLS DURING EURO FINAL

Broadband use fell sharply during the Euro 2020 final between England and Italy, as millions of people tuned in to watch the match on their TV set, rather than online. Virgin Media said broadband use during the final was 28 per cent lower than at the same time the previous week, though it rose during half time as people went online to discuss the match.

GOOGLE TO CLOSE 'BACKUP AND SYNC'

Google is closing its 'Backup and Sync' service on 1 October, forcing users to switch to its new 'Drive for desktop' tool to access their files. If you sign into 'Backup and Sync' you should now see instructions on how to move to the new service and reminders that the current tool is about to close. Google is recommending not to uninstall 'Backup and Sync' until after 1 October. Read more on its blog: www.snipca.com/38920.

UK'S FASTEST SUPER-COMPUTER GOES LIVE

Nvidia has switched on the most powerful computer in the UK, and 41st globally. Called Cambridge-1 (pictured below), it can reach a performance of 9,682 teraflops, which means it can execute 9,682 trillion commands a second. Nvidia said in its blog (www.snipca.com/38933) that it will be used to boost the use of artificial intelligence in healthcare, as part of a "digital biology revolution".



Sainsbury's axes CDs and DVDs as streaming takes over

Sainsbury's has said it will stop selling CDs and DVDs as millions of customers turn instead to streaming services like Spotify and Netflix for music and films.

It becomes the first of the four big supermarkets to remove discs from its shelves, though some analysts expect Asda, Morrisons and Tesco to follow suit.

Sainsbury's said it will give the extra space in its stores to "food and popular products like clothing and homewares".

It added that although sales of discs will be phased out, some stores will continue to

sell vinyl records.

CD sales were worth £115m in 2020, but the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) expects sales of vinyl to outstrip CDs this year for the first time since the late 1980s.

A BPI spokesman said: "The CD has proved exceptionally successful for nearly 40 years and remains a format of choice for many music fans who value sound quality, convenience and collectability".

However, he acknowledged that there's a "long-term trend" towards streaming.

In 2020, the amount spent



on video-streaming sites such as Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon Prime jumped almost 38 per cent to £2.9bn, while sales of DVDs and Blu-ray discs fell by a fifth to £372m.

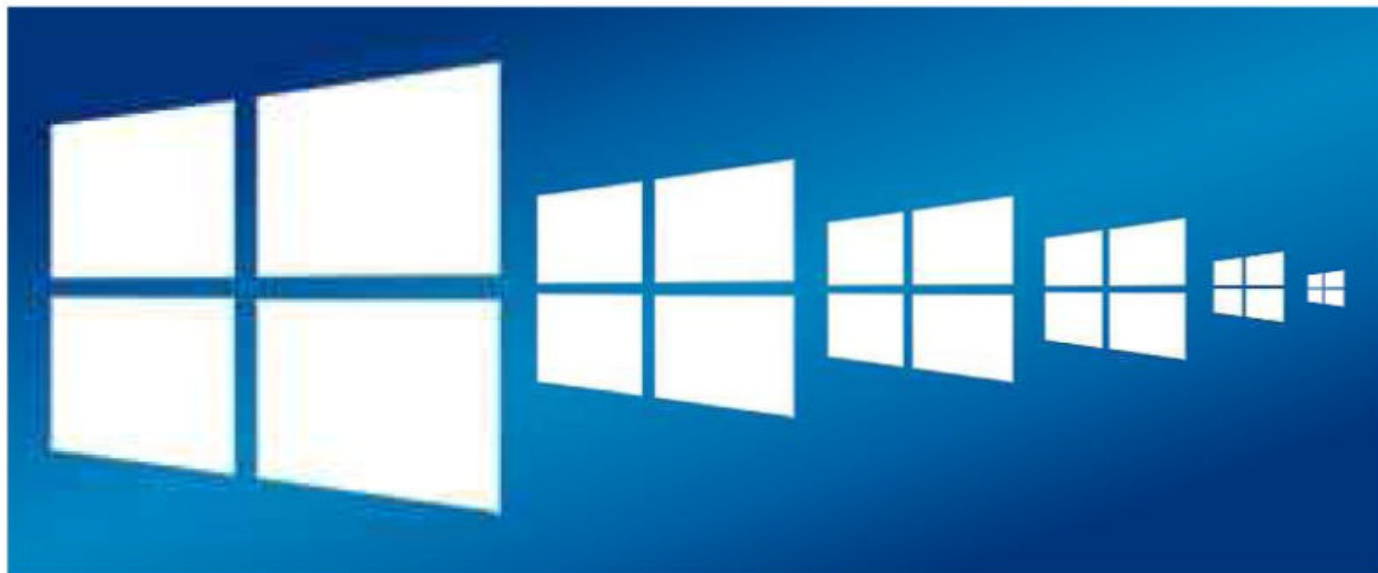


Have you stopped buying CDs and DVDs? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Question of the Fortnight

Why is the next Windows 10 update so small?

Microsoft has already started to neglect the operating system



THE FACTS

- Microsoft's next feature update for Windows 10, called 21H2, will be the smallest yet
- It says it will continue to support Windows 10 until October 2025
- Windows 10 is used by 1.3 billion people worldwide

Welcome to the story of the incredible shrinking updates. It's a curious tale of how Windows 10 releases that once were packed with features and often broke your computer have shrivelled into tiny updates that are barely worth

tainted that many users did all they could to avoid installing it.

Now that we know Windows 11 is coming, you have to wonder whether that disastrous 1809 update was the beginning of the end for Windows 10. Microsoft's

announcing the release (www.snipca.com/38976) mentions just three tweaks, though they're so meagre they hardly deserve that description – 'tweaklets', perhaps?

The only one that will affect you is a minor improvement to **WPA3** Wi-Fi security (welcome but not world-changing). The others are an obscure tool for **machine learning** in Linux, and the following – which we quote in full to illustrate Microsoft's continuing mastery of impenetrable jargon: "Windows Hello for Business supports simplified passwordless deployment models for achieving a deploy-to-run state within a few minutes".

21H2 will be the third successive update to merely scrape the surface of Windows 10, and that's been a relief for those who dread the chaos that updates can cause. Even after installing 21H2 later this year, your version of Windows 10 will essentially be the same as it was 18 months ago.

The update wasn't always going to be so small, though. Earlier this year Microsoft was

trying to get people excited about a radical redesign of Windows 10, codenamed 'Sun Valley', rumoured to arrive this autumn. That new look has now morphed into Windows 11.

This can only be bad news for Windows 10 and the 1.3 billion people who use it. Microsoft says support will last until October 2025, and we expect it to release security fixes up to then and probably beyond. However, it won't be in a rush to add tools that *improve* the system. Why would it? It now has a new priority: get everyone on to Windows 11 as soon as possible. Any feature update that actually *contained* features would send mixed messages.

Microsoft would never be so crude as to say it's abandoning Windows 10, but it will now be the poorer relation. We think differently though. Next issue's Cover Feature (out Weds 11 August) will focus on ways to keep it running safely and effectively for longer than Microsoft wants you to. Yes, Windows 11 looks great, but that's no reason to give up on Windows 10 just yet.

“Microsoft now has a new priority – get everyone on to Windows 11 as soon as possible”

installing. It tells us a lot about Microsoft's plans for the operating system.

So far the most notorious Windows 10 feature update has been version 1809, released on 2 October, 2018. It lasted just four days before Microsoft pulled it in order to fix a flaw that was deleting files from computers. Three weeks later Microsoft confirmed another flaw that damaged files when extracting them from a **ZIP**. It wasn't until 13 November that 1809 was made available again, but by then it had become so

response was that version 1903, released the following May, became the first feature update not to be installed automatically on computers.

Since then, updates have been optional unless you were running a version that Microsoft was about to end support for. They have also contained fewer new features and tweaks, as Microsoft tried to minimise the impact on your computer.

The company has just announced the smallest update yet – version 21H2, due this autumn. Its blog post

Protect **your tech**

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Scams that mimic your phone number

What's the threat?

Anti-fraud specialists have warned the public about an increase in phone scams that appear to come from numbers that are similar to their own.

The National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB), which works with Action Fraud within the City of London Police, said the calls match the first seven digits of the victim's own number.

Action Fraud said that in May the public reported over 2,100 such calls. Of these, just under 70 per cent were from callers claiming to be from HMRC, and referred to the victim's National Insurance account. They typically try to frighten you by saying you have fines to pay. Another scare tactic is for callers to claim they're a police officer, and that there's a warrant for your arrest.

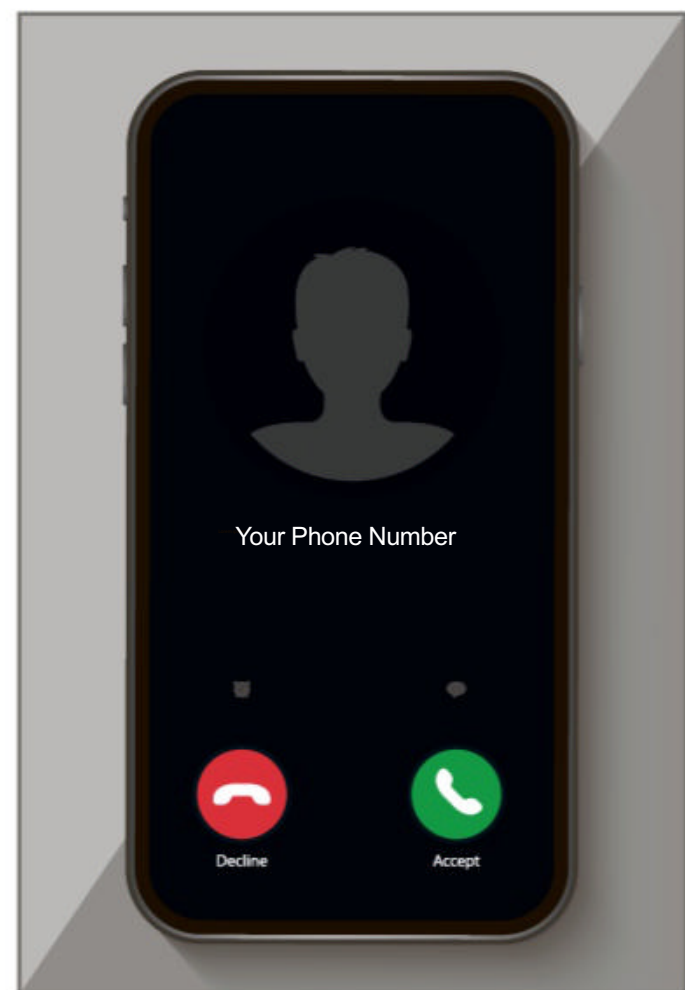
As well as making normal phone calls, scammers have been targeting

victims by making calls through WhatsApp.

How can you stay safe?

As with many scams, your most effective form of defence is scepticism. It may seem surprising or intriguing that a caller is using a similar number, but unless you recognise it you should think twice about answering. It's not an especially sophisticated form of scam, so your best response is to decline the call. However, if you do answer you're asked to press 1 to speak to someone. This is the kind of action that's easy to do without thinking – we do it all the time when phoning banks and companies, for example – so train your brain to wait and think.

Also, remember that HMRC and the police will never notify you about unpaid fines or outstanding warrants by calling or texting you.



New tools | Amazon Ring's video encryption

Amazon's Ring doorbells let you see on your phone who's at your front door, which can provide peace of mind when you're out, but there have been huge concerns that criminals may be able to hack them.

To help ease these fears, Amazon has added **end-to-end encryption** (e2e) to its Ring doorbells, which makes the videos they capture all but unhackable. The only device that will be able to play a video is the phone that receives it. Even Amazon wouldn't be able to view the video.

It's available now on many of the best-selling Ring devices, including the Ring Video Doorbell Wired (£49 from www.snipca.com/38951, pictured), though not those powered by a battery. Check the full product list on Ring's site (www.snipca.com/38950), where



you'll also find instructions on setting it up. You'll need either an iPhone or iPad running iOS 12 or newer, or an Android device running Android 8. You'll also need to update to the latest version of the Ring app (www.snipca.com/38949).

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers

Don't update your Amazon payment info

A couple of days after spending a bit too much money on Amazon (during Prime Day), I got an email saying my account had been placed on hold because my "billing information" didn't match the "information on file with the card issuer". The yellow Update Payment Information button looked tempting, but there were too many spelling mistakes for the email to be genuine ('cancelled' has two l's, not one). I've read too many warnings about similar scams to fall for this. It sounds like I'm not the only one to have received it, according to this tweet from Action Fraud: www.snipca.com/38824.

Iain Andrews



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

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

I'll avoid Microsoft's Windows 11 'mouse trap'

✉ Maybe I'm too gullible, but I believed Microsoft when it said Windows 10 would be the final ever version of Windows. It was one of the reasons I bought a new computer with Windows 10 on it. This was back in 2019. Up to that point I had somehow managed on Windows 7.



I had stuck with Windows 7 because I felt familiar with it, and it still seemed to work as well as ever. At my advanced age, I didn't really want the stress of learning a new operating system, but I was persuaded by Microsoft's pledge that this would be the last system I'd have to learn.

What a fool I was. I've had Windows 10 for less than two years, and already Microsoft is planning its demise. So, when Microsoft said Windows 10 would last forever, they simply meant until they wanted to make more money with a new system. This approach was deceitful and I feel betrayed. There's no way I'm going to be tempted by Microsoft's mouse trap again. I'm sticking with Windows 10.

Norman Gough

Why be angry that Microsoft changed its mind?

✉ Why should I be angry that Microsoft has decided to bring out a new version of Windows? Do they not have the right to change their minds?

Everyone loves to rubbish Microsoft, but what amazes me is how each new system can still run older software. In some cases, programs written for Windows XP can run on Windows 10.

Microsoft isn't forcing people to buy Windows 11. In most cases it will be a free upgrade, and Microsoft will continue to support Windows 10 for at least another four years, by which time many older PCs will probably need replacing anyway.

For those with recent computers that don't have the right BIOS to run Windows 11, I'm sure there'll be a 'quick fix' to sort this out. Even if Microsoft doesn't offer a solution, other clever people will.

John Hewett

CA SAYS Our inbox has been split since Microsoft announced Windows 11. Half

of readers agree with Norman: they feel let down by Microsoft. The other half take John's view that Microsoft can do what it likes, and that it's silly to be angry about it. Where do you stand?

Windows 11 will be 'as big a flop as Windows 8'

✉ As a former branding manager for a large UK firm, I know that one of the golden rules when you launch a new product is to make sure it's available to everyone. Microsoft has broken this rule by imposing such severe restrictions on the kind of hardware that can run Windows 11. A lot of the excitement generated by the announcement of the new operating system has therefore been dampened already. It will be hard for Microsoft to restore this enthusiasm over the next few months. I predict Windows 11 will be as big a flop as Windows 8.

Rod Sanders

Lifetime savings mean we wouldn't get discounted broadband

✉ Issue 609's 'Question of the Fortnight' ('Will low-income families get cheaper broadband?') presented some interesting thoughts, but the issues involved are far more complex than simply giving discounts to families on benefits.

We are a household consisting of two retired people on a low income. We are

on a basic, very cheap broadband package, with a speed of about 14Mbps, which we find adequate. What we need is reliability, which is much better now than it used to be, at a price we can afford. Unfortunately, these deals are becoming increasingly difficult to find. Providers are pushing more expensive, speedier services as an ideal solution, but we can't afford these, and we don't need such speeds anyway.

So, would we qualify for a subsidy scheme? No. Why not? Because although our income is low, a lifetime of prudence means we have some savings. These mean we don't qualify for income-related benefits. Yes, we could spend our savings, but unless the grim reaper intervenes unexpectedly we're going to need care of some description. That will need paying for too, and it's very costly.

So, should we spend carefully acquired savings on gigabit broadband which we don't need, or continue to be conservative in our spending so that we'll have some resources for the rainstorm that probably lies ahead?

Name and address supplied

There is a difference between 'installed' and 'pre-installed'

✉ Reading Edward Moss's letter in Issue 608 about the prefix 'pre' not being needed, it seems to me that the significance of this prefix is not understood. As an IT maintenance and repair technician, I'd say there's an

What's the Issue...?



A while back you recommended a program that could rip speeches from a CD. I now need to do that, but can't recall the software. Was it something like AudioBee?

Duncan Timms

CA SAYS

Close – it's called MusicBee (www.snipca.com/37130). We explained how to use it in Issue 598, page 19.



I've got about 20 PDFs that I need to add my digital signature to. Didn't you explain how to do this recently?

Pat Collings

CA SAYS

We certainly did, using the free software PDF24 Creator (www.snipca.com/38073). Just follow the Workshop in Issue 606, page 40.



File Explorer on my Windows 10 laptop seems to be missing the pane at the top that makes it easier to click through to folders. I seem to recall you fixing the same problem recently. Is that right?

Colin Hogg

CA SAYS

Yes it is – you'll find our answer on page 66 of Issue 607.

important difference between 'pre-installed software' and 'installed software'.

The former has been installed by the computer's manufacturer. This typically includes the operating system itself and specific software required to make the machine operate correctly. These days, there are often added extras, such as antivirus and office software. Pre-installed software has also been tested to make sure it works properly on the machine. If it's ever removed and then needs to be re-installed, the entire operating system may need to be re-installed.

By contrast, installed software are programs installed not by the manufacturer, but by the person using the computer. From a technician's perspective, such software is often what causes a lot of problems. Also, this type of software is usually easy to uninstall, unlike pre-installed software.

Knowing the difference between the two types of software helps technicians to decide whether they can quickly fix a problem, or if it requires to be sent away for repair.

Bob Nickson

CA SAYS Bob's right that the term 'pre-installed' is used to distinguish between programs that are built into a computer, and those you download independently. However, it's often used unnecessarily, particularly to describe computers that "come with pre-installed software". In such cases, there's no need for 'pre' – or even for 'installed'.

Tax phones? Proof that celebrities are out of touch

✉ If you ever needed proof that celebrities are out of touch with normal folk, you had it on page 7 of Issue 610 ('Tax phones and tablets to fund the arts, say stars'). I realise many actors and artists have had it tough during the pandemic, but guess what – so has everyone else!

I've been furloughed, made redundant, re-hired, and made redundant again, all in the space of 12 months, while trying to home-school three children. I had some dark days, but at no point did I expect the average person on the street to be taxed more to compensate for my misery.

It's nothing personal against Olivia Colman or Celia Imrie, because I like them both. But they just need to get off the red carpet and take a walk in the real

STAR LETTER

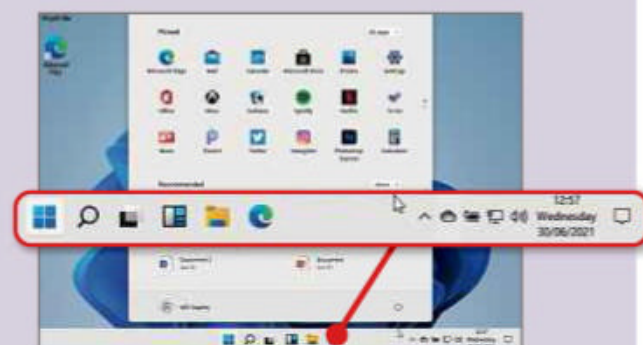
Upgrade to Windows 11? Only if Microsoft makes these changes

✉ I've installed the preview version of Windows 11 on a secondary drive, but I've yet to decide whether to use it on my main drive when it's officially launched. I like it, but Microsoft will still have to make significant changes to persuade me.

The first thing it needs to address is the taskbar (see screenshot), which you should be able to move to the top of the screen. Also, I wish Microsoft would stop hedging its bets between the Settings app and Control Panel. It should give up on the latter (as it clearly wants to do), and move all essential options into Settings. Jumping between the two is a pain.

I was hoping the search function might have improved, but no. It still combines files, settings and web results without actually showing what you're looking for. Another downside is forcing everyone – Home and Pro users – to have a Microsoft account. Not everyone has a need for an account.

So, the jury's out. But I'm hopeful. The whole point of previews is to get feedback about what works, and what needs tweaking. Some of these



problems are bound to be ironed out before the final version is released.

Clive Pound

CA SAYS Clive's view is typical of many readers who have tried the Windows 11 preview. They like it, but with major reservations. We'll let you know what improvements Microsoft makes as the launch date approaches. One of our main concerns is that Microsoft will start neglecting Windows 10 the minute Windows 11 is available. This should worry anyone keen to stick with Windows 10, so in our next Cover Feature (out Weds 11 August) we'll explain how you can keep Windows 10 up to date even if Microsoft abandons it early.



The Star Letter writer wins a Computeractive mug!

world from time to time.

Shaun McCauley

No, don't ditch your TV's remote control!

✉ As a keen reader of *Computeractive*, I was horrified by the 'Ditch your TV's remote' feature in Issue 609 (pages 60-61, pictured below right). I spent 34 years as a TV service engineer trying to get customers to treat remotes nicely, in order to avoid suffering the consequences.

Remotes that come with DVDs and set-top boxes usually have programmable buttons to control the TV, but these are normally restricted to on/off, volume and channel change. The



original remote had all the other features, like tuning, setup and subtitles. That's fine until the transmitter changes or the customer moves home and the original remote is lost, or the batteries have corroded and the remote is beyond repair. That's when the customer finds that the original remote controls are no longer available, so the next solution is a 'universal' remote. But this universal device doesn't have some of the functions of the original.

The best universal remote I ever came across was an A4 clipboard covered with velcro and half a dozen original remotes with velcro patches on the back. It was ideal, difficult to lose and easy to update with new equipment.

Keith Lightowler



We stand up for your legal rights

Can Virgin charge a cancellation fee if I move house?

Q I had to cancel my Virgin TV and broadband in July 2020 because it wasn't available at my new home. Virgin said I'd have to pay a £250 cancellation fee, which in my opinion is unfair because it can't provide the service. I thought I had cancelled, but I'm now being harassed by a debt-collection agency, and the price I now owe has risen to £289.50. Can you help?

Donald MacLeod

A After clarifying details with Donald, we think that he wasn't actually on a contract with Virgin, and therefore was free to leave without an early-cancellation fee. We're therefore going to try to get a full refund, not simply reduce the fee Virgin thinks he owes. The fact that he's moving home is irrelevant. Even if he had stayed put, he'd have been able to leave without a charge. After all, if you're not on a contract, and taking it month by month, how can you cancel it early?

However, if he *had* been on a contract, he would not have been able to use Virgin's inability to provide a service at



his new address as a reason to cancel without paying a fee. There's no legal requirement for companies to be able to offer you a service at your new home.

Just to remind you, there are three conditions for ending your broadband contract early without a fee. First, you can cancel within 14 days of signing up under the Consumer Contract Regulations – though you'll have to pay for any usage during that time. You can also cancel if the service is slower than was advertised, or if the provider increases your monthly fee during your contract above the RPI rate of inflation (you can check what this currently is by visiting www.snipca.com/37268).

CASE ONGOING

Can I get a refund if seller is ignoring me?

Q Last November I ordered a Teclast M18 tablet from Gearbest (www.gearbest.com), which cost £131.82, along with £6.72 insurance and £3.44 postage. It hasn't arrived, and Gearbest won't answer my emails. How can I get my money back?

John Whitehouse

A John paid with his debit card – rather than his credit card – so he can't get a refund through Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act. He could however try a chargeback through his bank (Nationwide), giving it the power to ask the retailer's bank for a refund. The retailer can dispute this, but it would have to prove you have received the goods.

However, John may have left it too late. Banks usually place a 90- to 120-day limit on applying for a chargeback, though because of the Covid pandemic some have extended this to 540 days.

John should check this with Nationwide. If he's unhappy with its answer, he should consider reporting it to the Financial Services Ombudsman (www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk).

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE

Currys pays damages on laptop that lacks features



We often pursue full refunds for readers, but sometimes it's more appropriate to claim for damages. This is an amount of money that can be higher or lower than the original purchase cost, depending on the circumstances.

One situation where you can ask for damages is when you want to keep an item despite it not being as described. In effect, this is like a partial refund, reflecting that the item can't do everything you want it

to. This is what Chris Harvey wanted from Currys PC World after buying an Asus VivoBook Flip TM420 laptop (pictured) for £499 that didn't come with the number pad and backlit keyboard that were listed in the description.

Chris initially wanted a full refund, as he was entitled to (assuming he could prove the laptop wasn't as described). Currys wrongly refused this, saying it couldn't resell



the laptop as new because Chris had used it. He then decided to keep the laptop and ask for an £80 refund. Currys saw sense and agreed to this. It could have refused, but it would then have had to refund Chris in full. Both parties

can feel reasonably happy with this outcome. Chris can carry on using a laptop he likes, while Currys doesn't have to take back a laptop it can't resell as new.

Contact us so we can investigate your case

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

What are my rights on Facebook Marketplace?

Q I regularly buy and sell items on Facebook Marketplace (www.facebook.com/marketplace, pictured), a site similar to eBay in which individuals can sell things. If something is wrong with an item, would buyers be covered by the Consumer Rights Act?

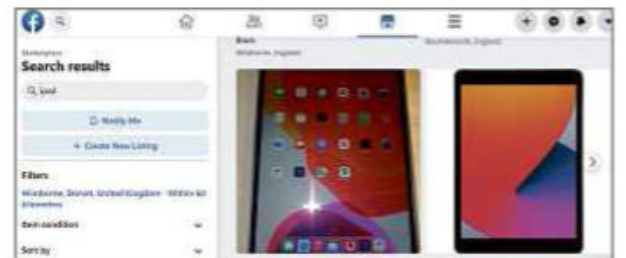
Ben Ward

A As with other selling sites such as Amazon, eBay, Etsy or Vinted, your rights as a buyer depend on who the seller is. You're protected only if the seller is a trader (a registered company) or a sole trader (making an income by selling items or services). They have to

abide by all the main laws that apply to traditional retailers (online and high-street), including the Consumer Rights Act, the Consumer Contract Regulations, the Unfair Trading Regulations and the Consumer Protection Act.

It's often difficult to get redress from sole traders, but you can file a small claim if the sum is worth chasing (as explained by Citizens Advice: www.snipca.com/38853). All goods are covered, though second-hand items are not expected to last as long as new products.

But your rights are weaker if you buy from a private seller. These are people who sell occasionally to make some money,



not to earn a living. They have to stick to the rules set by the sites – so they can be banned for mis-selling – but they're covered by criminal law, not consumer law. They can be prosecuted for fraud – if they lie about what they're selling, for example. But they don't have to follow consumer law when dealing with refunds.

CASE CLOSED

Should I accept Norton's wire-transfer refund?

Q I've rejected Norton antivirus within 14 days of ordering it. I've been trying to get a refund from parent company Norton LifeLock, and posted a refund form off to America. I was offered a cheque, but now the company wants to send me a refund via wire transfer and has asked me to send my bank details. Is this normal?

Anita Spencer



A We've not heard of Norton LifeLock working this way, so it does make us suspicious. Anita would have paid by card or bank transfer, so we'd expect refunds to be processed the same way. It would certainly be easier for Symantec, if nothing else!

Legally, Anita should be entitled to a refund. Under the Consumer Contract Regulations, you have up to 14 days in which to reject goods, including software and other digital content. But this applies only if you haven't downloaded the


software, which counts as using it. This is different to, say, trying on a jumper to see whether it fits – you're not *using* the jumper just by checking its size.

It gets even trickier with antivirus because new versions are often installed automatically by the existing program on your PC. You can prevent this by turning off automatic updates (in the Settings section of your antivirus). Once we get more details from Anita, we'll ask Norton LifeLock whether it has asked to wire the money to her.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Manhattan sent me USB stick to fix problems

 Three years ago I bought a T2-R set-top recorder box from Manhattan. After a short time I had some problems with the picture. I rang the company and it told me the fault was caused by my signal being too strong. They sent me a free attenuator to reduce my signal.

This worked perfectly until recently when suddenly I lost all my recordings. Again I rang them and they said they had an update for the recorder and would send it to me on a

USB stick with instructions on how to rebuild my list of recordings. It arrived the following day with a prepaid envelope to send it back to them in case someone else required it.

Within half an hour I had updated my box and recovered all of my recordings. I posted it back later that day. This company has excellent support service.

Roy Fomes

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



Contact
Manhattan

- **Email** <https://manhattan-tv.com/contact>
- **Phone** 020 8450 0005

Grow Your Family Tree



Using birth indexes, marriage certificates and some clever detective work, **Nick Peers** reveals how to...

Identify your ancestors' parents

Readers Valerie Elson asked us for advice on a mystery that's puzzled her for several years: the identity of a distant relative's parents. George Littlewood first appeared in the 1881 census, aged seven, living with his uncle and aunt – Nathan and Ann France (nee Littlewood) – in Honley, Yorkshire. He stayed with them until at least aged 37, according to the 1891, 1901 and 1911 censuses. Valerie had identified all of Ann's siblings – one of whom was presumably George's father – and had ordered at least one birth certificate that turned out to be the wrong George Littlewood.

Search the General Records Office birth index

We first visited the General Records Office, which is the only site that has updated its database to add the mother's maiden name to birth indexes registered before 1911 (it was only *after* 1911 that the maiden name was recorded by default). Visit www.snipca.com/38735 and log into your account or click 'Register as individual' (all searches of the birth index are free). Once logged in, click the 'Search the GRO indexes' link to start.

If you don't know the exact year of birth, add a couple of years either side to broaden your search

First, select 'Birth', then enter a date (approximate or specific) for the person you're searching for. In the case of George Littlewood, this was around 1874 based on his age being seven when the census was taken on 3 April 1881. Because ages aren't always accurately recorded, we clicked the '0 years' dropdown menu and set it to '+/- 2' (see screenshot above) to widen the search to cover 1872-1876.

Next, enter the person's surname and first name, plus their gender, before clicking Search. In the case of George, we knew his birth would have been registered in the Huddersfield district, which narrowed the list to five people.

Armed with the information Valerie had given us about Ann's siblings, one candidate stood out immediately: a

George Littlewood born in Huddersfield between April and June 1873, whose mother's maiden name was Hutchinson. Ann's brother John married Ann Elizabeth Hutchinson between January and March 1873, and a year later – according to the 1881 census – the couple had twins (Ben and Ella). Perhaps the extra pressure of looking after twins meant they had to hand George over to his childless aunt and uncle?

Corroborate evidence using marriage certificates

Now Valerie had a candidate for George's parents, we were able to confirm the match when she discovered that George married in 1913. The marriage certificate confirms George's own identity from his name, age, profession and address (which matched those on the 1911 census). It listed his father, John Littlewood, as a spinner (see screenshot below), the same occupation as on his 1881 census return. Finally, one of the witnesses was Ben Littlewood, George's younger brother.

Her genealogical mystery solved, Valerie subsequently uncovered a sad end to George's story: he died just two years later on 5 August 1915. His burial record is on Ancestry (along with his marriage certificate), revealing he was buried two years to the day after his wedding.

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

I've downloaded my great-grandfather's unit regiment history from The National Archives (TNA), but it's difficult to read. Is there anywhere else I can find a history?

Liam Spurgeon

You could try signing up for a free account at Forces War Records (www.forces-war-records.co.uk), where you can search for

your ancestor's unit. If there's a match, you'll be given a summary of the unit's history. It's not as detailed as the records held at TNA, but you'll at least get to see which battles and manoeuvres the unit was involved in.



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

John Littlewood Spinner

George's father's name and occupation are on his marriage certificate



#1

GAMING MONITOR BRAND*
IN THE WORLD



Available at:

amazon

laptopsdirect >



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

Best Free Software

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



NETWORK TOOL

LiveTcpUdpWatch

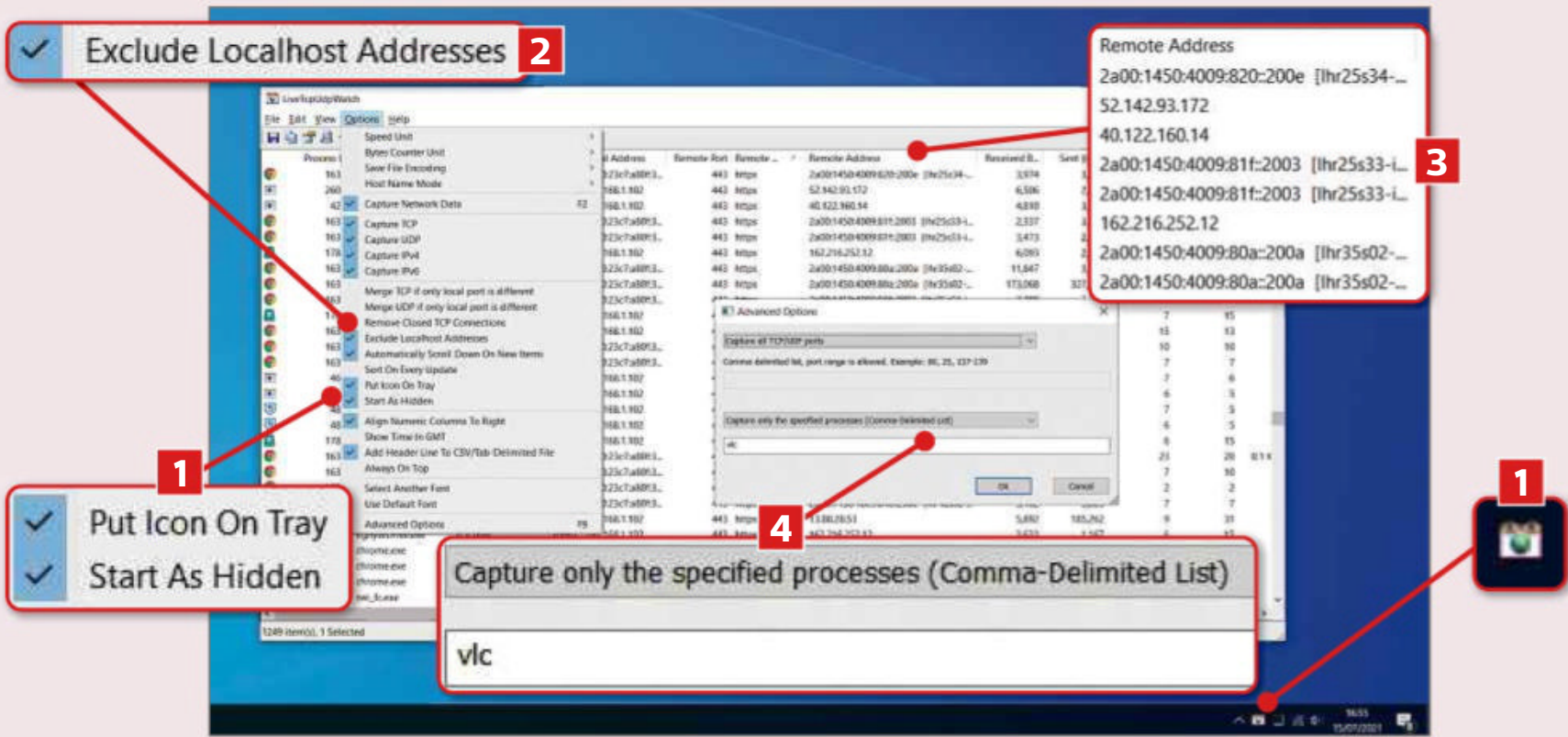
www.snipca.com/38952

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1 or 10

Back in the days of dial-up, your computer would be connected to the internet only for short periods. While today's always-on broadband connections are convenient, they also mean your computer is constantly sending and receiving data via the internet. If you want to get a better idea of which programs are using your broadband, install NirSoft's LiveTcpUdpWatch.

This tool gives you a view of all network activity, including the connections TCP (used when loading websites and downloading files) and UDP (for streaming music and videos). As soon as you run the tool, it starts monitoring traffic. New entries are added to the bottom of the list – to automatically scroll to the bottom, open the Options menu and select 'Automatically Scroll Down...'.
You can tell LiveTcpUdpWatch to show network activity for a single program – particularly useful if you want to monitor whether a program you've recently installed is

sending usage data back to its developer. To do this, you need to enter the **EXE** file name of the program you want to monitor into the Advanced Options window (see **4** below).
NirSoft has added a number of new features over the past few months, including running the program in the background as soon as Windows loads (see screenshot below **1**) and copying the contents of an entry to the clipboard (right-click, then select Copy Clicked Cell).
LiveTcpUdpWatch also lets you see which server a program is connecting to. To use this feature, you need to first download the **ZIP** file for IPNetInfo (another NirSoft tool, available from www.snipca.com/38953), then copy its EXE file into the same folder as LiveTcpUdpWatch. You can then right-click an entry and select 'Check Remote Address...' to get detailed information, including the server's name and where it's based.



- 1** To get LiveTcpUdpWatch monitoring for network traffic as soon as Windows loads, open the Options menu, then tick Put Icon On Tray and Start As Hidden. You can then open the tool from the system tray.
- 2** To see only external traffic (in other words, to and from the internet, not between devices on your home network), open the Options menu and select Exclude Localhost Addresses.
- 3** The Remote Address column tells you the **IP address** that each program is transferring data to and from. To find out more, right-click and select 'Check Remote Address...'.
1 To get LiveTcpUdpWatch monitoring for network traffic as soon as Windows loads, open the Options menu, then tick Put Icon On Tray and Start As Hidden. You can then open the tool from the system tray.
- 4** You can monitor traffic to and from a single program. Press Alt+F9 to open the Advanced Options window, select 'Capture only the specified processes...' and then enter the program's file name in the box (such as 'vlc' in our screenshot).



VIDEO EDITOR

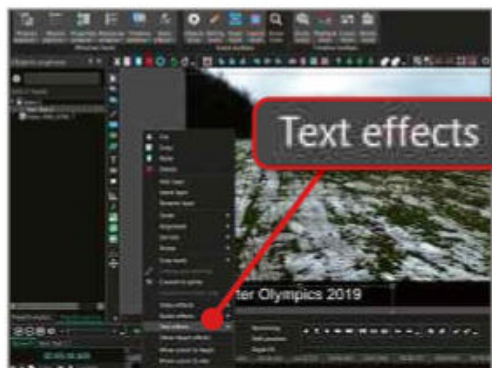
VSDC 6.7

www.snipca.com/38961

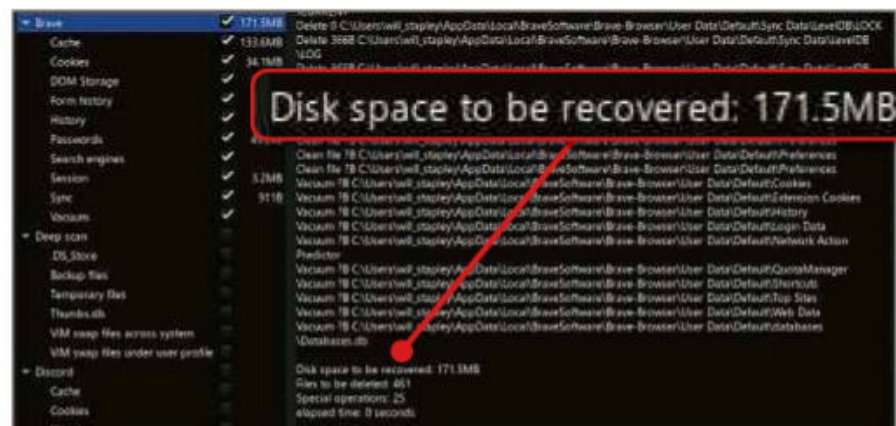
What you need: Windows 7, 8.1 or 10

VSDC might not be as powerful as DaVinci Resolve (www.snipca.com/38963 – see Issue 607, page 19), but it runs well on low-powered computers (including our eight-year-old Dell E4610 laptop, which has an Intel Core i5 processor and integrated graphics).

Although the new video effects in version 6.7 – including the impressive ‘Paper burn’ transition – are for the Pro version only (£177), the free version has a couple of new tricks you might like. For example, you can now add visual effects to text in your videos, including making text appear one letter at a time. Once you’ve added your text, right-click it on the timeline, then select ‘Text effects’ (see screenshot). Additionally, the ‘Objects explorer’ window now includes a search box, letting you quickly find specific items in your project (video files, effects, text boxes and so on).



CLEAN-UP TOOL



BleachBit 4.4

www.snipca.com/38964

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1 or 10

BleachBit (click the ‘BleachBit installer.exe’ link at the URL above) is a simple but powerful tool that removes all your activity history, **temporary files** and other junk from your computer – freeing up space on your hard drive in the process. Version 4.4 adds support for the excellent Brave browser (see our Cover Feature, page 50, for more on Brave), letting you quickly wipe all data contained in Brave’s logs and temporary files. Use the menu on the left to select the items you want to wipe, then click Preview to see how much hard-drive space the cleaning will free up (see screenshot). Finally, click Clean to complete the process.

WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

We tell you what software & apps to use

What can I use to convert WP3 files?

Q I’ve created multiple ‘photo stories’ in the **WP3** format on a previous computer. I now have a new computer and have installed Magix Photostory Deluxe (www.snipca.com/38974). However, it seems I need to convert these files into **WMV** to work on them in the new version of Photostory. How can I do this?

Alan Swallow

A We suspect the problem here is that you’re confusing Microsoft Photo Story 3 (which saves projects in the WP3 format you mention) and the similarly named Magix Photostory Deluxe (which can’t open WP3 files). Microsoft no longer supports Photo Story 3 and doesn’t make the program available for download on its website. However, you can still find it on other download sites.

We don’t usually recommend downloading software from third-party download sites as they can include junk. However,

we checked the version of Photo Story 3 available at Download.com (www.snipca.com/38955) using VirusTotal (www.virustotal.com), which confirms that it’s clean.

When we tried it, the installation process didn’t add Photo Story to the Windows Start menu, so we had to launch the program by opening File Explorer (press the Windows key+E), navigating to the **C:\Program Files (x86)\Photo Story 3 for Windows** folder, then double-clicking ‘PhotoStory3.exe’. You can add a shortcut to your desktop by right-clicking this file, selecting ‘Send to’, then ‘Desktop (create shortcut)’.

When you run the program, select ‘Edit a project’, then open one of your old WP3 files. You can then go through the various steps in Photo Story, with the final step letting you choose where to save the WMV file (see screenshot).



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

HOW I USE...

BCUninstaller



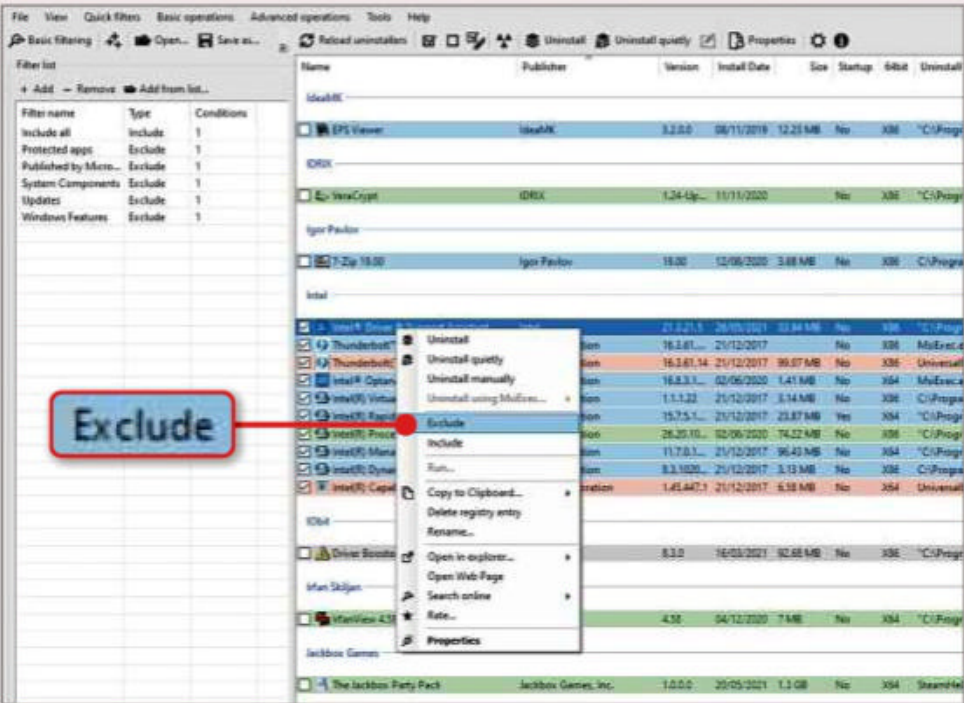
Will Stapley explains how advanced filters make removing junk even easier

I install a huge amount of software – some good (the programs we recommend each fortnight), some awful (the stuff you don’t hear about, unless we’re telling you to avoid it). Consequently, my poor hard drive gets cluttered in no time.

Back in Issue 545, I explained how I use BCUninstaller (www.snipca.com/38938 – click the ‘Installer and Portable’ link) to remove batches of programs in one go. BCUninstaller has benefited from several updates since then, and I’ve also learned some new tricks.

One of my favourite new features lets me create a **system restore point** before it uninstalls anything, meaning I can quickly roll back any changes if necessary. To activate this feature, go to Tools, followed by Settings, select the Uninstallation tab, then tick ‘Create a system restore point before uninstalling’.

I’ve also recently started using BCUninstaller’s advanced filters that, although not new, let me hide



Create a filter to hide programs you don’t want to remove from BCUninstaller

programs from the uninstall list that I’ve no intention of removing. This includes my favourite programs (such as VLC and Paint.NET), plus various Intel and Dell tools that – if removed – would break my laptop.

To do this, I click ‘Advanced filtering’ in the left-hand menu, then I re-order the list of programs by Publisher and tick those I want to hide (if you can’t see these tick boxes, go to Tools, followed by Settings, select the General tab, then tick ‘Select using checkboxes’).

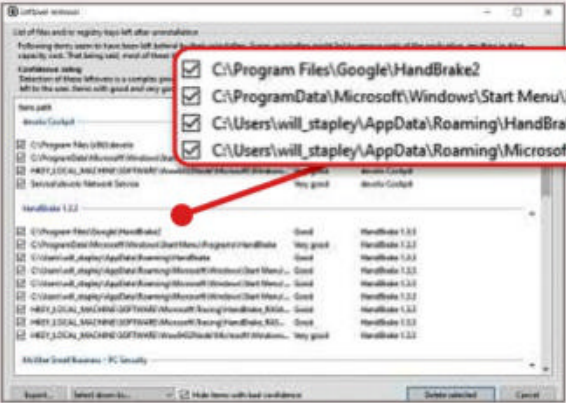
If there’s a group of programs I want to hide, I can select them all by clicking the first then the last program while holding down the Shift key, then ticking one of them. Once I’ve selected everything, I right-click one of the programs, then select ‘Exclude’ (see

screenshot above). The selection is then added to my filter.

I also removed programs that BCUninstaller marks as ‘empty’ – in other words, those that I’ve uninstalled but – for whatever reason – remain in the Windows registry. After selecting these programs, I right-click them, then select ‘Uninstall manually’. I then check the ‘Item path’ (see screenshot left) for each, to make sure they aren’t related to programs I still use, before clicking ‘Delete selected’. If you’re unsure about any, I recommend leaving them in place and instead just add them to your filter, as explained above.

My first attempt at creating a filter didn’t go well after I realised the program clears all filters when you exit it, meaning I had to recreate them from scratch. I’ve since discovered that I have to save the filter (click ‘Save as...’ at the top), then reload it each time I launch BCUninstaller (open the ‘Advanced filtering’ window, click ‘Add from list...’, then locate the saved filter).

Thanks to my cleaning and filtering, every time I open BCUninstaller I see only those programs I might uninstall.



Clean the list of programs in BCUninstaller by removing registry entries left behind by uninstalled programs

WHAT I’D LIKE TO SEE IN BCUninstaller

- It might just be the sheer number of programs I have installed on my computer, but BCUninstaller seems to have got progressively slower at scanning for new programs each time I load it (it now takes around 20 seconds).
- If BCUninstaller let me specify which folders to exclude from scanning (such as those containing programs I want to keep), it would probably help speed things up.

Named & Shamed



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

WARNING: JUNK AHEAD

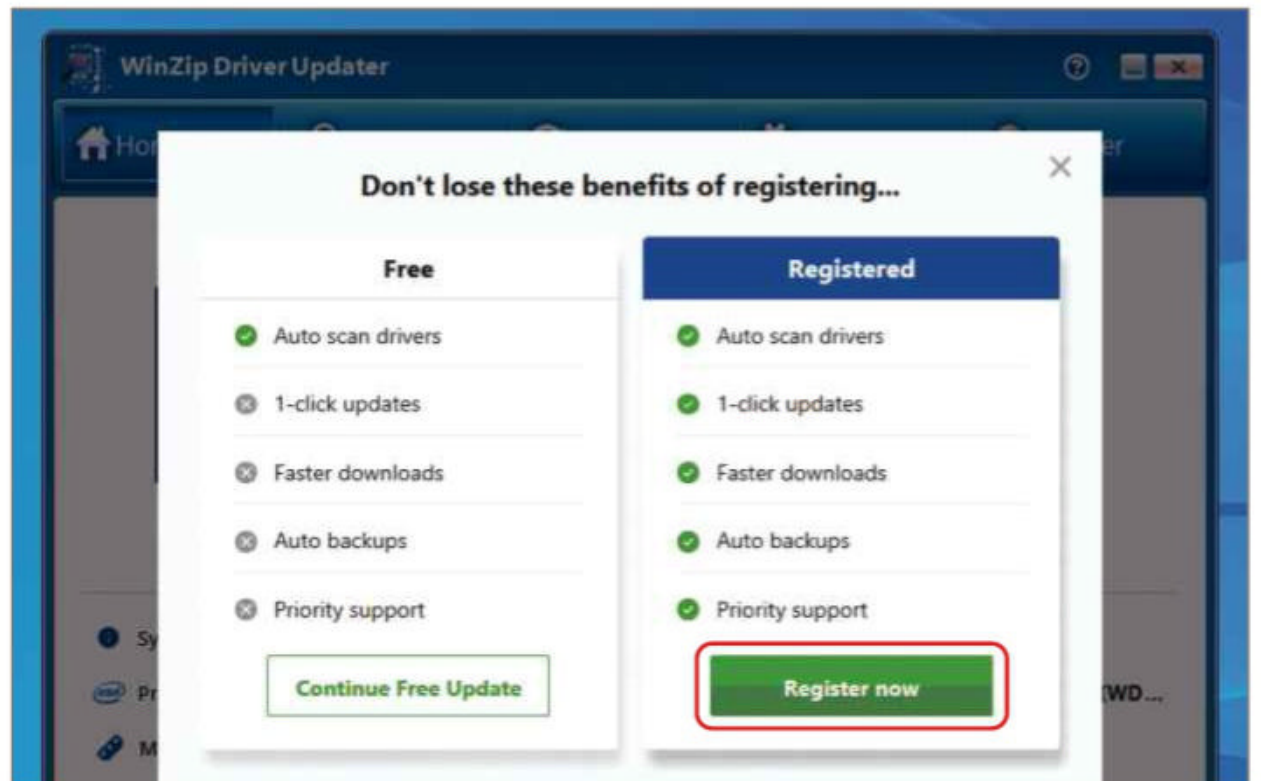
Junk offender: WinZip Driver Updater

I've been known to call out dodgy **driver** updaters in the past (and, yes, I'm looking at you, iObit Driver Booster). But when the program in question bears the respected WinZip name, you'd probably assume that it's a more trustworthy prospect. Don't you believe it.



WinZip has been around for more than 30 years and these days is owned by the equally renowned Corel Corporation. It's still best known for zipping and unzipping files, but has branched into other areas in recent years via a series of "powerful, one-click solutions to take care of your daily PC needs" (according to www.winzipsystemtools.com anyway), including Driver Updater.

Driver Updater is supposed to maximise your PC's performance. In practice it can actually have the opposite effect, largely as a result of it setting itself to launch automatically whenever you boot your PC, slowing down startup and draining resources needlessly in the background. And it does this without



That 'Register now' button looks tempting, but clicking it will cost you £32 a year

asking your permission – you need to click Options and untick 'Run on Startup' and 'Minimize to Tray' boxes if you want to put a stop to this.

Further annoyances include being constantly spammed with adverts for other WinZip products – some of these entirely obscure the program window itself. And the final kick in the teeth is the

way it continually attempts to trick you into upgrading to the premium version (for £32 per year) whenever you attempt to update a driver that's been flagged as out of date. Sneakily, it tries to trick you into thinking you have to click 'Register now' to continue (see screenshot) – but you don't. Just ignore it and leave this tool well alone.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?



WHAT THEY SAY

Jared Spataro, Microsoft 365
www.snipca.com/38894

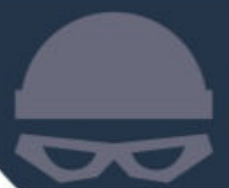
"To work effectively in hybrid and asynchronous models, people need a super-rich canvas that both creates and maintains context before, during, and after the meeting. Fluid components are atomic units of productivity that help you get your work done in the context of chat, emails, meetings, and more."

WHAT THEY MEAN

Good luck staying awake in meetings with jargon like that.

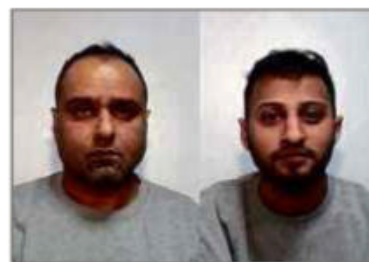
JONATHAN'S VILLAINS OF THE FORTNIGHT

Mohammed and Faisal Fareed



Since time immemorial, fathers and sons have enjoyed spending time together – playing football, going fishing and so on. But Faisal Fareed and his dad Mohammed had a less wholesome idea of what constitutes quality father-son time.

They posted fake adverts for cars on eBay, then lured buyers to Manchester to view the non-existent vehicles



before robbing them of cash, usually under the threat of extreme violence.

A Manchester court heard that the pair carried out or attempted 14

robberies as part of a gang – in some cases wielding hammers and machetes. Like father, like son, 47-year-old Mohammed was sentenced to 20 years behind bars, while 25-year-old Faisal will serve 12 years.

PC | £569 from Currys www.snipca.com/38855

Dell Inspiron 3881

Has the write stuff

These days desktop PCs can come in all shapes and sizes, but this Inspiron model from Dell manages to hit something of a sweet spot – large enough to get things done, small enough not to take up too much room.

Interestingly, the 324x154x293mm (HxWxD) case also includes something you don't see much any more – a DVD drive. This may seem unnecessary to some, but if you like to back up to writable DVDs or have an old collection of discs that you'd still like to access, it's a useful little bonus.

The front of the 3881's attractive black case also houses an SD card slot, a USB-C port, a USB 3.2 port, two USB 2.0 ports and a 3.5mm headphone jack. Around the back (pictured below) there are two more USB 3.2 ports, two more USB 2.0 ports, another audio-out jack, a Gigabit Ethernet port and three monitor ports, including HDMI, DisplayPort and VGA.



“A hard-working Windows PC with DVD drive, but limited room for expansion”

It is powered by a 10th-generation Intel Core i5-10400, which is complimented by 8GB of RAM, a 256GB SSD and a 1TB traditional hard drive. With no graphics card, the 3881 relies on the integrated graphics of the i5 processor. This means it isn't as powerful as a PC with a standalone graphics card, but there is room to add one later should you feel it's necessary.

This definitely had an impact on our benchmark tests, particularly when it came to graphically intensive games. Even in the least demanding 3D titles, we saw frame rates of below 20fps. This makes gameplay feel jerky and unresponsive, so this PC should be avoided by serious gamers.

In general Windows use, however, the six-core i5-10400 chip is more than fast enough to keep things running smoothly, while the 8GB of memory ensures there are no freezes or glitches even if you have multiple browser tabs open and a number of programs running.

Except for the space set aside for a graphics card, the room inside for any future expansion is limited. There are only two slots for memory. One is already occupied by the existing 8GB module, so while it would be simple to boost it to 16GB with a second module, you'd need to replace the whole lot to

SPECIFICATIONS

Six-core Intel i5-10400 processor • Intel UHD Graphics 630 • 8GB memory • 256GB M.2 SSD • 1TB hard drive • 1x USB-C port • 3x USB 3.2 ports • 4x USB 2.0 ports • 1x HDMI port • 1x VGA port • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 4.2 • Windows 10 Home • 324x154x293mm (HxWxD) • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/38855



take it higher than that.

There's probably sufficient storage already for most people's needs, but if you wanted to add another SSD you'd have to use a SATA connection, because the existing drive uses the only available M.2 port. This would require purchasing a 2.5in drive mount kit (such as the £4 Trixex model from www.snipca.com/38873) and screwing it into an existing 3.5in slot.

VERDICT A decent, affordable Windows PC, but limited room for expansion

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

PC Specialist Aurora R £499 A desktop PC with a larger case and more potential for upgrading in the future



LAPTOP | £1,050 from Amazon www.snipca.com/38850

Acer Nitro 5 AN515-45

Game for most things

Acer keeps its Nitro 5 range of gaming laptops regularly updated, and the latest models boast a wealth of high-end specifications mark. The configuration we're reviewing here comes with a Ryzen 5 5600H processor, 8GB of RAM, a 512GB SSD and an Nvidia RTX 3060 graphics card (with another 6GB of built-in RAM).

“Powerful specs but modest screen mean this gaming PC is no all-rounder”

This combination of components performed well in our gaming tests, with impressive frame rates. This is largely thanks to the RTX 3060 graphics, which while not as powerful as hardware you might find in a desktop gaming PC, is excellent by laptop standards. It also got great results when using our Windows benchmarking tools, though its powerful performance does take a toll on battery life – in our video-playback test, the Nitro lasted just 6 hours 30 minutes.

The 15.6in 1920x1080-pixel Full HD screen has a maximum refresh rate of 144Hz, which is fine for playing even the most frenetic games. It has an IPS panel with a matt finish, but was disappointing in our brightness and colour-accuracy tests. It's likely that most gamers will value a high refresh rate over these criteria, but if you wanted more of an all-round PC, you might be left wanting.

The 720p webcam is good enough,



though it doesn't support Windows Hello so you can't use it to log in. There's no fingerprint scanner either, so you'll have to stick with a password or PIN. The speakers are also fairly humdrum – too quiet for our liking, and lacking depth in bass frequencies.

Weighing 2.3kg and measuring 23.9x363x255mm, the Nitro 5 isn't what you'd call compact or light. It's an angular plastic affair, but it feels solid and well put together. You need to take out 11 screws to remove the base panel and access the interior. Here you can reach the Wi-Fi 6/Bluetooth 5.0 wireless card, two DDR4 RAM slots, two M.2 storage slots and a 2.5in SATA 3 storage bay. This promises plenty of scope for future upgrades.

The Nitro 5's keyboard is robust and should stand up to the frantic prodding of gamers. It also has plenty of ports, including three USB 3.2 ports, a USB-C port, a Gigabit Ethernet port, an HDMI port and a 3.5mm audio jack (all pictured below). Charging is done via a DC-in port located on the back.

SPECIFICATIONS

Six-core AMD Ryzen 5 5600H processor • 8GB RAM • Nvidia RTX 3060 graphics card • 15.6in 144Hz IPS 1920x1080-pixel screen • 512GB SSD • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.0 • 1x USB-C port • 3x USB-3.2 ports • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • Windows 10 Home • 23.9x363x255mm (HxWxD) • 2.3kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/38850

LEFT EDGE



RIGHT EDGE



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 laptop equipped with everything you need to play the latest games, while the screen has a fast refresh rate but isn't as bright as we'd like



ALTERNATIVE Dynabook Portégé X40-J-11C £913

A more business-like Windows laptop that, besides a so-so screen, oozes quality in all the right places



Wi-Fi EXTENDER | £50 from Amazon www.snipca.com/38875

TP-Link RE505X

The joy of six

There's a huge number of Wi-Fi boosters available, but the TP-Link RE505X offers something a little different. This is one of the first wireless extenders to support **Wi-Fi 6**. This means it will work with any Wi-Fi 6 router to push your wireless network into the furthest corners of your house, strengthening weak signals and removing the blackspots other routers cannot reach.

It's also compatible with TP-Link's OneMesh system, which means that if you have a compatible router, it can be used as an affordable way to boost this, too. You can check whether your TP-Link router is compatible with OneMesh at www.snipca.com/38877.

The RE505X is a dual-antenna, **dual-band** extender, supporting speeds of up to 300Mbps over Wi-Fi 4 on the 2.4GHz band, and up to 1,200Mbps over Wi-Fi 6 on the 5GHz band. It also works with older Wi-Fi 4 and 5 routers, but if you're not using a Wi-Fi 6 router you might be better off with a cheaper Wi-Fi 5 extender, such as our alternative below right.

Its design is simple. The unit plugs into a wall socket and shows its status using four **LED** indicators: a power light that blinks green during startup then glows blue once the extender is up and



“It increased file-transfer speeds, sending them faster to the other side of our house”

running; a signal LED; and one for each of the 2.4GHz and 5GHz networks.

You can use the signal LED to work out which socket is the best option for your extender. When this glows solid blue, you have a good connection to the router, while red means your connection is weak. If there's no light at all, you're out of range.

The device also has a **Gigabit Ethernet** port, so can double up as a wired access point if you want to connect a PC, smart TV, **NAS** or games console.

We set up the RE505X with a TP-Link AX90 Wi-Fi 6 router (£239 from Amazon at www.snipca.com/38878) using TP-Link's Tether app. Next, we plugged the extender into a socket near the router, ran the app's Add Device tool, connected to the extender's default Wi-Fi network, then selected the 2.4GHz and 5GHz networks we wanted to extend.

We left the app to finish setting up, then unplugged the extender and plugged it in where our signal was weak or non-existent. It's worth trying a couple of different locations to get the best balance between signal strength and connection speed.

The results were impressive. Before we installed the extender, the file-transfer speed over Wi-Fi 6 to the opposite side of our test house was 352Mbps. With the extender installed, this increased to 408Mbps. In comparison, our Wi-Fi 5 network only managed 104Mbps.

There's no doubt that Wi-Fi 6 is already

SPECIFICATIONS

Dual-band Wi-Fi 6 extender • Supports Wi-Fi speeds up to 1,200Mbps • 1x Gigabit Ethernet port • 125x46x74mm (HxDxW) • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/38875



much faster than Wi-Fi 5, but if you are using Wi-Fi 6 and you're *still* having problems with reach, the TP-Link RE505X can definitely help push your signal further.

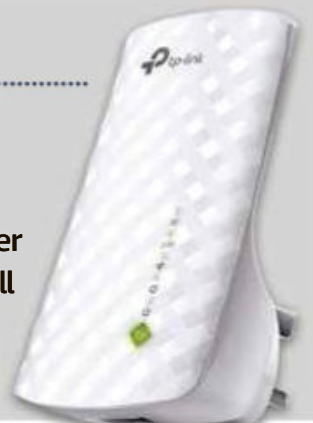
In smaller homes, a lone Wi-Fi 6 router will be enough for most tasks, while in others a mesh router setup will do a better job, particularly as you can expand it with more units later. What this provides is an easy way to spread fast Wi-Fi into a remote corner of the house and at £50 it's very affordable.

VERDICT Ideal if your Wi-Fi 6 network needs that little extra boost to provide stronger signals to a far-flung corner of your home

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

TP-Link RE200
£20 This cheaper alternative is better suited to those still using a Wi-Fi 5 network



PRINTER | £240 from Amazon www.snipca.com/38914

HP OfficeJet Pro 9022e

High-speed prints

The HP OfficeJet Pro 9022e is larger than your average multifunctional inkjet printer, measuring 318x437x396mm (HxWxD), meaning you'll need a decent amount of desk space to sit it on.

In fact, it looks more like the sort of laser printer you'd find in an office than a home-based inkjet. It has a 35-sheet automatic document feeder for the copier function, and two 250-sheet paper trays to help keep your printing workload flowing. There's a slick colour touchscreen to control the settings and the copier function.

“A bulky inkjet that's ideal for a home office and comes with six months of free ink”

It's also the fastest inkjet we've tested, with mono prints outputting at 24 pages per minute (ppm) in our tests, which puts other similarly priced laser printers to shame. It isn't as fast when printing in colour, but it's still no slouch.

The downside is that prints aren't perfect. They're good enough for most office tasks you may need to carry out at home, such as printing letters, documents and school work. However, its photo prints were disappointing, particularly those that included darker areas, which just came out blotchy.

The 9022e comes with a free six-month subscription to HP's Instant Ink service, which takes the hassle out of buying replacement ink cartridges. HP ensures that new cartridges are sent through the post well before your existing ones run out. Once the free six-month period is over, you will need to pay a monthly

SPECIFICATIONS

4800x1200dpi maximum print resolution • 1200x1200dpi optical scanner resolution • 24ppm quoted print speed • 802.11n Wi-Fi • Ethernet port • USB 2 port • 318x437x396mm (HxWxD) • 11.6kg • 3-year warranty www.snipca.com/38914



subscription based on how many pages you expect to print per month.

This can range from 15 pages per month for 99p, up to 700 pages per month for £22.49. The recommended home package is 100 pages for £3.49 per month, which works out at 3.5p per page. It doesn't make any difference whether the print is colour or mono.

If you go over your limit, additional pages will be charged at 10p per page, though unused pages can be carried over and counted against any additional prints you need to make in future months. You can switch subscription levels or quit the service at any time.

Having new ink cartridges posted to you before your current ones run out is genuinely useful, and the subscription service doesn't make the running costs any more expensive than if you were buying your own ink whenever you needed it. The free six-month trial also gives you ample time to work out how many pages you're likely to print every month.

VERDICT A fast, efficient printer that includes a replacement-ink service so you'll never run short

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Canon Pixma G650 £250 Canon's six-colour ink tank multifunction printer is cheaper to run and prints better photos



CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Intel processor generations



What are they?

Intel is constantly working to improve the speed and efficiency across its range of processors, which include its Core i3, i5 (pictured), i7 and i9 chips.



It releases new processors in groups (or generations), which benefit from the latest improvements. The 11th generation was released last year, with the 12th due in late 2021.

How do they work?

Each new generation of processors is given a number. The higher the number, the more recent, efficient and speedy the processor is. It has become particularly useful to know which generation of processor your PC has, because Microsoft recently announced that its upcoming Windows 11 operating system won't work on PCs with an Intel Core processor that's older than the 8th generation.

What are the specs?

Usefully, Intel gives its processors sensible model numbers that tell you which generation they are – just look at the number after the dash. The 10th and 11th generation chips can be identified by the first two digits of their model number (so i7-10710U, for example, is 10th generation, while i5-1135G7 is 11th).

Can I change it later?

You'd need to buy a new processor to move from one generation to the next. It's worth noting, however, that not all processors will be compatible with the motherboards produced for the previous generation. Eleventh-generation processors should work on 10th-generation motherboards but not older ones. Ninth- and 8th-generation processors are also largely compatible with each other, but not with generations before or after. You should always check whether your motherboard is compatible before upgrading to a new processor.

PC MONITOR | £216 from Amazon www.snipca.com/38902

Asus BE24EQK

Two for one, but not one for all

We're used to seeing webcams built into laptops but we don't often see them on desktop monitors. The Asus BE24EQK is an exception and is tailor-made for those who regularly sit at their desk talking to friends or work colleagues on video calls. If you happen to need a new monitor *and* a new webcam, this is a cost-effective way of getting both at the same time. The drawback is, in order to keep the price as low as it has, Asus has had to make a few compromises, including disappointing video quality from the webcam and a monitor stand with limited adjustment options.

“The built-in webcam seems like a sensible idea, but it produces grainy images”

The screen is a 24in IPS panel with a resolution of 1920x1080 pixels, a response time of 5 milliseconds and a maximum refresh rate of 60Hz. It's mounted on a stand that tilts 20 degrees backwards, but lacks any height adjustment, pivot or swivel.

On the rear there's an HDMI port, a DisplayPort and a VGA socket. There's also a 3.5mm audio jack and a USB port – the latter is used to connect the built-in webcam to your PC. The webcam is a 2-megapixel unit, shooting at 1080p resolution (1920x1080 pixels). It can revolve 315 degrees to be pointed either towards or away from your monitor, and tilts 10 degrees up and down to help keep you centered in the frame. It also has a built-in microphone and a privacy shutter you can slide across to switch the camera off when not in use.

The screen itself is reasonably good quality for the price, with wide viewing angles. In our tests it reproduced a decent range of colours from the sRGB standard (87.4 per cent), which is fine for most purposes and certainly for video calls.

The most disappointing element is the webcam, which is usable but far from outstanding. It struggles to cope with anything other than a well-lit room and even then produces grainy images. The

SPECIFICATIONS

23.8in IPS screen • 1920x1080 pixels • 2-megapixel webcam • 1x HDMI port • 1x DisplayPort • 1x VGA port • 4x USB 3.0 ports • 355x540x53mm (HxWxD) • 4.6kg • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/38902



microphone is better, but nothing to write home about, and doesn't compare well to the best standalone webcams.

VERDICT An interesting concept for desktop PC users who make a lot of video calls, but we'd rather pay more for a better quality webcam

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Philips 241B7QUBHEB £290 An even better screen with a more flexible stand and a superior webcam, but it is more expensive



WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

We solve your buying dilemmas

Can I use the Samsung Galaxy Tab S6 Lite for my art?

Q I am an 87-year-old amateur artist and I'm seriously considering the Samsung Galaxy Tab S6 Lite tablet (pictured) to help me with my art. Does the 64GB model take an SD card to increase the memory? And will the 64GB model be sufficient or would the 128GB version be better? I've seen an LTE version instead of Wi-Fi – is there any advantage to this? Is it a better option than the Apple iPad 10.2?

Gilbert Walker



A The 64GB model (£329) should be more than sufficient for your needs, though you can add a microSD card up to 1TB, so it's easily expandable. Having said that, the 128GB version is only £30 more (£359) and is probably worth it for peace of mind –

you'll have to work hard to use up all its storage, mind. The only difference

with the LTE version is that it can take a SIM card, so you can access the web over the mobile network when you're away from Wi-Fi. Most people don't need it and, if you did, you could create a hotspot on a mobile phone instead.

The Galaxy Tab S6 Lite is a better value option than the similarly sized basic iPad because it comes with a stylus, while Apple charges an extra £119 for its Apple Pencil.

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

Now's the time to tackle your iPad (or Android tablet)

Tablets – iPads and Android tablets – can be great once you know how to use them. It's amazing all the things they can do.

And possibly the best thing tablets can do for you is help you keep in touch with family and friends. I don't just mean letting you send emails instead of writing paper letters, though that can be handy.

In just a few taps of the screen you could be talking to them as if they were sat right there beside you.

But when you buy a tablet, there's something missing.

It's not the charger (hopefully!).

It's not a case, though it's usually a good idea to buy one to protect your new tablet.

It's a manual – something to show you how to use the thing. The manufacturers seem to assume that you'll just know how to use it, as if by magic. It's "intuitive," they say.

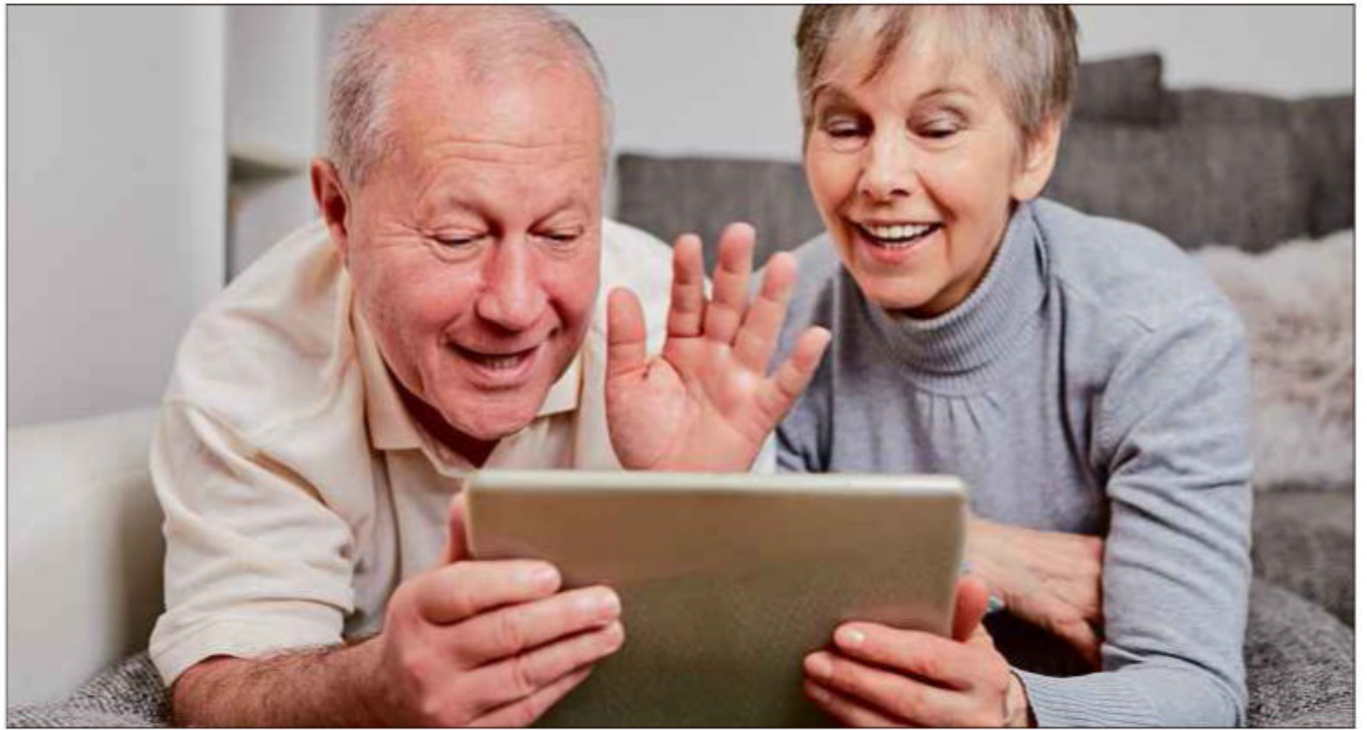
Well, it can be. In parts. But there are other things you simply need to know how to do. It's not obvious that you have to swipe from the top of the screen, pull up from the bottom or tap with two fingers instead of one.

Who would know you had to use two fingers and pull them apart on the screen or rotate them... or that they'd bury the option you want behind three little dots?

Things like that you just can't know – someone has to explain it to you.

But if you do ever find a book about it or get someone to tell you, they always seem to assume you already know how to do it. Daft, really – you wouldn't be asking if you did. But they whizz through it so fast you can't possibly take it in. Not to mention the steps they leave out because "everyone knows that"!

That's where a set of books from a small, employee-owned company based in Cumbria comes in. They're called The Helpful Book Company and lots of their customers say



These helpful books mean there's nothing to fear about using tablets – from sending a quick email to video calling your family and friends.

they certainly live up to their name!

They've published *iPads One Step at a Time* and *Android Tablets One Step at a Time* – and these books have proved hugely popular with all sorts of people who have a tablet – but who aren't experts at using it.

Whether you're frustrated with the very basics, want to know what else it can do for you or wish you knew how to do some of the slightly fancier things, this book might be just what you need.

It explains everything nice and simply, in plain English, without all the confusing jargon and gobbledegook. And it has lots of pictures showing exactly what to do – where to tap the screen and so on.

.....
"Plain English without all the confusing jargon and gobbledegook"
.....

The company has already published books

about computers and smartphones that have helped thousands of people. But they actually started much smaller – the author wrote some notes to help his Mum and Dad on their PC and realised that other people might find them useful too. Several thousand happy people later, he decided to bring out a book on tablets as well – and if you've ever been frustrated with your tablet, it's worth finding out more.

As a small independent publisher, the books aren't in the shops or available on Amazon, but you can get a free information pack telling you about what's covered in the books, who they're suitable for and how to get hold of them.

Just ring 01229 777606 today (lines open weekdays 8am-6pm and Sat 9am-3.30pm). Or post back the coupon below or email your name and address to PC0721@helpfulbooks.co.uk

Yes, please send me a free info-pack about: *iPads One Step at a Time* and *Android Tablets One Step at a Time*
It's free & there's no obligation.

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Address

Postcode

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Quote 'PC0721A'

Post to **The Helpful Book Co, 13B Devonshire Rd Est, Millom, Cumbria, LA18 4JS** or call **01229 777606**

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Reviews

PC SPEAKERS | £155 from Amazon www.snipca.com/38896

JBL One Series 104-BT

Sounds perfect

JBL's original One Series 104 speakers were affordable, compact and sounded great. Now it has gone one better with the 104-BT by adding Bluetooth, which elevates these speakers to near perfection.

You can connect them to a laptop or desktop PC – or indeed any device with an analogue audio output – while its Bluetooth connectivity lets you stream audio from your phone and tablets. Conveniently, there's both a 3.5mm auxiliary input and 3.5mm headphone output on the front of one speaker, while

SPECIFICATIONS

4.5in low-frequency driver • 0.75in high-frequency driver • Front-panel volume control and headphone jack • Bluetooth 5.0 • 1.2m USB-C cable (USB-C-to-standard-USB adapter supplied) • 2m extension speaker cable • 247x153x124mm (HxWxD) • 1.73kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/38754

the headphone output automatically mutes the main speakers when it's in use.

Setting the speakers up couldn't be easier. One of the speakers acts as the master and needs to be plugged into a wall socket. Connect your devices to it, then run the supplied cable over to the extension speaker to connect them together.

What's particularly good is that you can switch between several sound sources, or select All and listen to everything at the same time. This means, for instance, that you can listen to music via Bluetooth while still hearing notifications on your PC, which is incredibly useful.

Audio quality is excellent. If positioned on your desk, the sound is crisp and punchy, and can be turned up louder than the diminutive size of the speakers



would suggest. They won't fill a room with crystal-clear sound, but for the money, they're exceptional.

VERDICT JBL updates its One Series 104 range with Bluetooth, and the result is a superb pair of speakers, ideal for setting up around your PC

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Logitech Z207 £45
Similar PC speakers with Bluetooth that are cheaper but don't sound as good



SMART SCREEN | £120 from Amazon www.snipca.com/38892

Amazon Echo Show 8

A clear improvement

The new version of Amazon's Echo Show 8 smart speaker/screen is a product for the times we live in. Its enhanced video-calling tools acknowledges how important online chats have become during the pandemic. The main change from the previous version is a serious improvement to the front-facing camera, even though it costs the same. It's worth noting, however, that for video calls the Show 8 works well with Skype and Amazon's services, but it doesn't work with Zoom.

The previous Echo Show 8 had a one-megapixel camera, which has been

SPECIFICATIONS

MediaTek MT 8183 processor • 8in touchscreen • 13-megapixel camera with privacy cover • 2in neodymium speakers with passive bass radiator • Wi-Fi 5 • Alexa voice assistant • 99x200x136mm (HxWxD) • 1.04kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/38892

upgraded significantly here to 13 megapixels, which shoots sharper, higher-quality video. Like the larger Echo Show 10 (see our review, Issue 602) it can pan and zoom to follow your face around if you move, though the Echo Show 8 does this digitally by zooming in on your face within the static frame of the existing camera, rather than rotating on its stand for a wider field of view (as the Show 10 does). It's worth noting the smaller Echo Show 5 has also been updated, but this has a resolution of only two megapixels and doesn't perform this zooming trick.

The screen measures eight inches across the diagonal, has a resolution of 1280x800 pixels, and is framed by chunky bezels. It sits on a wedge-shaped, fabric-covered speaker on a thick rubber base. It's a practical design, but the screen can't be tilted or adjusted. The display is touch-

sensitive, so you can access some functions without talking to Alexa.

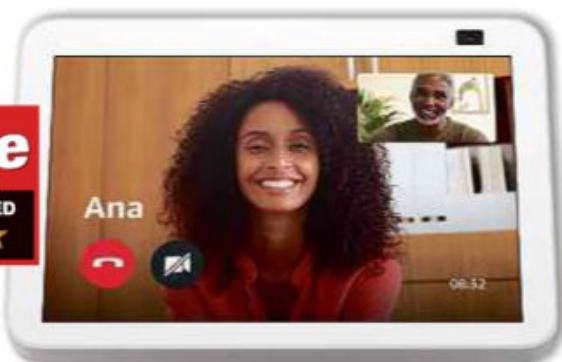
The speaker is reasonably good quality but if you primarily want something to play music on, the latest non-screen Amazon Echo is better (£90 from www.snipca.com/38893).

VERDICT Has a much sharper screen than its predecessor and costs the same, but doesn't work with Zoom

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Google Nest Hub Max £219 Has a larger 10in screen and works with Zoom, but the camera is only 6.5 megapixels



TABLET | £683 from Huawei www.snipca.com/38921

Huawei MatePad Pro 12.6

Not 'appening

The Huawei MatePad Pro is a gorgeous 12.6in tablet designed to take on Apple's ultra-expensive 12.9in iPad Pro (£999). The tablet is so new that it wasn't yet available in the UK at the time of writing, though we expect it to become available very soon. We were also unable to confirm what its UK price will be, though it's on sale on German websites for €799 (around £683).

“A brilliant screen and performance, but limited choice of apps”

The specifications are astounding. It comes with an incredibly sharp 12.6in 2K (2560x1600-pixel) resolution **OLED** screen. It's powered by Huawei's flagship Kirin 9000 processor, supported by 8GB of **RAM** and either 128GB or 256GB of storage. You can boost the storage, but only by using Huawei's own Nano memory cards. However, there remains a big question mark hanging over the device's operating system. Because of security concerns, the US government is still blocking Huawei from using fully supported versions of Android, so this tablet uses Huawei's own HarmonyOS 2 operating system, which it built around the **open-source** version of Android.

While the operating system is slick, usable and an interesting blend of Android- and iPadOS-inspired tools, it can only use apps and games from the Huawei App Gallery – the company's own app store. Sadly, this means you can't access Google apps such as Drive,



YouTube, Chrome and Maps. The full list of available apps isn't anywhere near as comprehensive as the selection you'll find on rival operating systems, which is a huge disappointment.

In our tests the screen performed brilliantly – it's bright and displays colours accurately. The internal hardware runs games and other apps incredibly smoothly. These performance levels don't take too much of a toll on the battery life, which lasted 11 hours 31 minutes in our video-playback test.

Like most tablets, the MatePad Pro can be used with a stylus and magnetic keyboard. The M-Pencil is great for drawing and painting on screen, while the detachable keyboard essentially turns the device into a small laptop (pictured below left). The German version currently comes with these included in the price, so we'd expect to see a similar offer when the tablet arrives here. Let's hope so because the stylus costs €99 (around £85) and the keyboard €149 (£127) if bought separately.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Huawei Kirin 9000E processor • 8GB RAM • 12.6in OLED 2560x1600 resolution screen • 128GB or 256GB storage • 13/8-megapixel rear cameras • 8-megapixel front camera • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.2 • USB-C connector • 10,050mAh battery • HarmonyOS 2 • 185x287x6.7mm (HxWxD) • 609g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/38921

VERDICT The hardware is brilliant and the price is right, but the MatePad Pro is hamstrung by its app store's limitations

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy

Tab S7 Plus **£679** A marginally smaller tablet for a similar price, but it comes with a stylus and can use Google apps



DO I REALLY NEED...

A 'SuperWide' 49in monitor

What is it?

A 'SuperWide' curved monitor from Philips (pictured) that measures 49in across the diagonal. It has an **aspect ratio** of 32:9, and a resolution of 5120x1440 pixels.



What does it do?

It's like having two 24in or 27in monitors side by side, but instead of having a gap between them, this is one big seamless panel. Its Philips' first 49in screen aimed specifically at gamers, and has some impressive gaming specs, including a 165Hz **refresh rate** and 4 milliseconds **response time**.

What's the catch?

It won't be cheap. Philips hasn't revealed the price yet, but it'll probably cost more than its previous 49in model, which was technically inferior and cost £899.

So can I do without it?

You could get two very good monitors for a lot less and still enjoy most of the benefit, particularly if you aren't looking for an immersive gaming experience. Find out more at www.snipca.com/38934.

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale **Weds 11 Aug**

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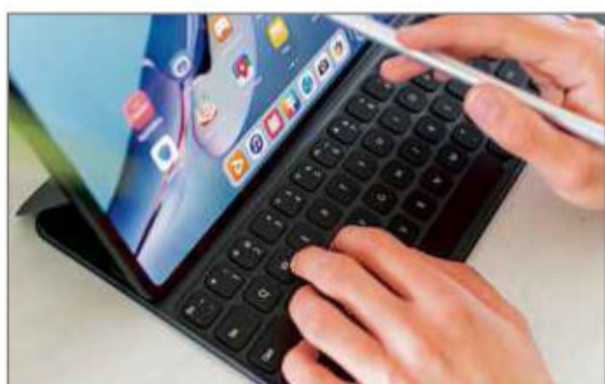


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Our pick of products that have won the **Buy It** award

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 £1,299 from www.snipca.com/36642

DESKTOP PC

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



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

ALTERNATIVE Chillblast Photo Zen Fast Ryzen 7 CPU plus adequate GPU makes a superb work PC. £1,780 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

Lenovo Tab P11 Pro
£600 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
£319 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

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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

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 241B7QPIEB
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
£140 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.

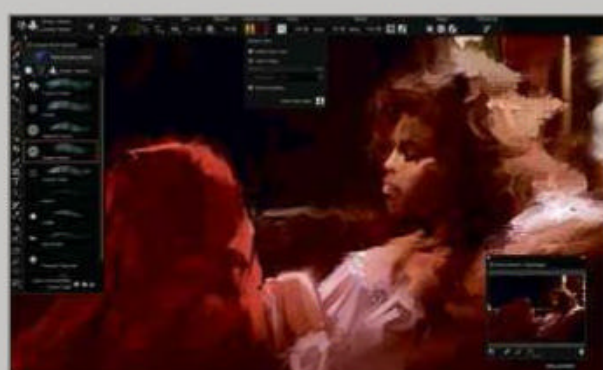
ALTERNATIVE Epson Expression Premium XP-6105
This six-ink printer/scanner/copier is a good choice for photos first and text second. It's easy to use, but ink costs can be high. £90 from www.snipca.com/37995

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 3 Corel Painter 2022

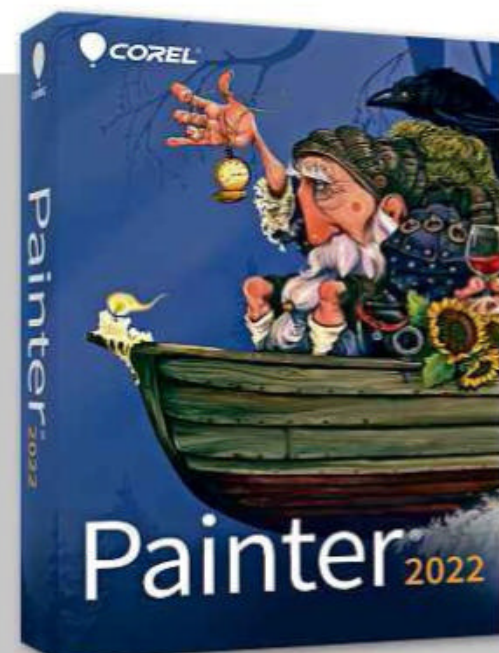
The 2022 version of Corel Painter, designed for Windows 10 and macOS, adds enhancements that accelerate workflows, boost brush performance, and improve layer productivity

The popular brushes are now more versatile than ever. You can change the shape and edge effects, as well as rotate and squeeze them. You can



also create your own dabs, and organise, import and export libraries from the 'Captured dab' panel. The new watercolour brushes make it simple to paint with dry media types, creating mixed-media styles.

The new Brush Size Selector makes it easier to choose a brush. You can add, reorder, delete and adjust the size preview to streamline your workflow, all within the Size Library. You can also run the improved Brush Accelerator so Painter 2022 takes full advantage of your computer's hardware for the best possible painting experience. Some brushes can be up to 50 times faster, while several popular brush engines can be twice as fast.



To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/38742 and enter your details. It runs until midnight Tuesday 10 August. Good luck!

You can buy **Corel Painter 2022** for £359.99 from www.painterartist.com. If you have the 2021 version, you can upgrade for £179.99. For tutorials on how to use Painter 2022 visit www.snipca.com/36682.

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. £265 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. £60 from www.snipca.com/37304

SMART SPEAKER

Google Nest Audio
£90 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. £90 from www.snipca.com/36602

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47 Make Office Better

46 Make Windows Better

48 In The Club: Set up an online to-do list

HOW TO...

Change your default font on PCs, phones, tablets & more

by Will Stapley

What you need: Computer, phone, tablet or ebook-reader **Time required:** One hour

From the classic Times New Roman (popular with the publishing industry) to the sans serif varieties (which ditch extended strokes at the end

of characters and is favoured by most websites), everyone has their favourite fonts. Although there isn't much you can do about fonts on printed pages, you have

more control with digital media. Here, we explain how to ditch the defaults and set your favourite font on your computer, phone, tablet, ebook reader and more.

1

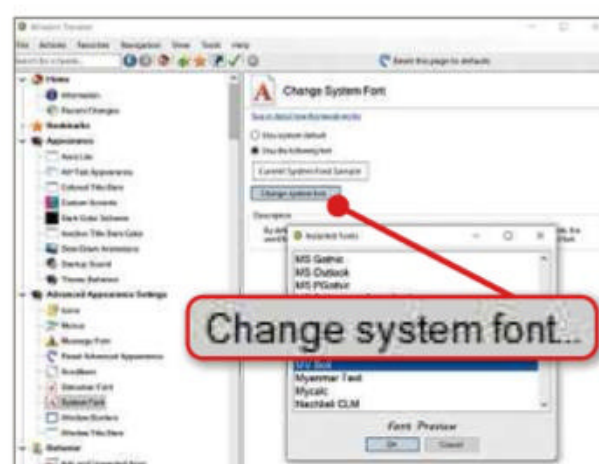
Windows

Changing the size of text in Windows is easy enough - open Settings (press the Windows key+I), select Personalisation, 'Ease of Access', then Display and drag the 'Make text bigger' slider left or right.

However, Windows doesn't include an option to change the font itself. Since the launch of Vista, it has used the Segoe UI font as its default (and this will continue in Windows 11). If you do want to give Windows a new look, there is a way around Microsoft's restrictions.

First, download Winaero Tweaker from www.snipca.com/38881 (version 1.20.1 was released in June and supports the Windows 11 preview). Extract the contents of the ZIP file to a folder on your PC, then run the EXE file

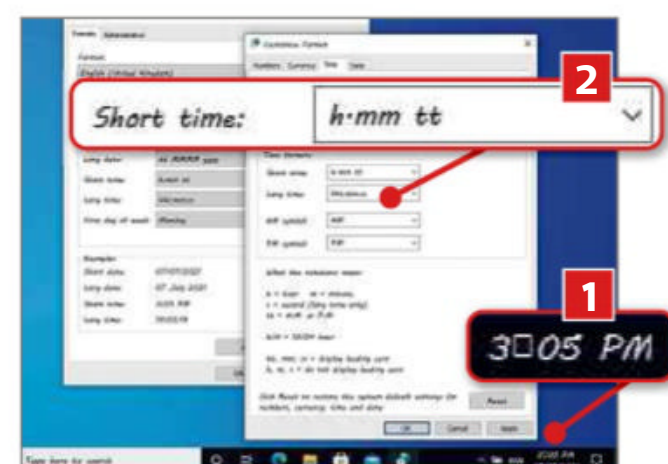
With Winaero Tweaker open, scroll down the left-hand pane to the Advanced Appearance Settings menu, then select System Font. On the right, select 'Use the following font', then click 'Change system font...' (see screenshot above right),



Use Winaero Tweaker to change the default font in Windows

choose a font from the list then click OK. The new font will take effect when you restart your computer. If you later decide you want to restore the default Windows font, return to the System Font page and select 'Use system default'.

Depending on your choice of font, it may cause the clock in your system tray to display a box instead of a colon (1 in our screenshot above right) - this happened when we selected MV Boli as the default



If your chosen font displays a box in the middle of the clock, fix it in Control Panel

font. If this happens with your chosen font, there is a workaround.

Open Control Panel (search for it in the Start menu), then select Region (select 'View by large icons' in the top-right corner of the Control Panel window if you can't see this option). In the window that opens, select 'Additional settings...', then the Time tab. Next, in the 'Short time' box, replace the colon with a character such as a dash or dot (as in our example 2), then click OK. The system

tray clock should now display correctly.

The good news is that Microsoft appears to have sorted this problem with Windows 11 – we used Winaero Tweaker to test several fonts in the preview of Windows 11, and none caused an error with the clock.

2

Android phones and tablets

Depending on the make and model of your Android phone or tablet, you may be able to change its system font – the one it uses in menus and apps (although not all websites, as we'll explain later).

To check, go to Settings, Display then look for a font-related option. On our Samsung Galaxy S20 phone, we selected the 'Font size and style' option, then 'Font style' (see screenshot below). From here, we can see all currently installed fonts (the Samsung S20 only has three: Default, SamsungOne and Gothic Bold). There's also a 'Download fonts' option, which lets you search for and install fonts from the Galaxy Store (Samsung's version of the Google Play Store).

If your phone doesn't have an option to change the system font, you can try installing a new launcher (software that runs your phone or tablet's home screen). This lets you adjust the font on your phone's home screen and in its settings interface.

Our favourite is Niagara Launcher



Change the default font on Android devices to alternatives including Cool Jazz

(www.snipca.com/38891) – you'll need the Pro version (£4.49 per year or a one-off payment of £11.99) to select a different font. Once installed, tap the circle at the bottom of the menu on the right, followed by 'Niagara settings', then Look followed by Font. Next, tap 'Add your own font', then select your font file (if you haven't got any saved, read the box opposite for instructions on downloading them). If you decide you want to return to your old launcher, go to Settings, Apps, 'Default apps' and select it from there.

3

iPhones and iPads

With iOS 13, which launched in 2019, Apple finally allowed you to download custom fonts on iPhones and iPads. However, you can use these fonts with only a small selection of Apple's own apps – such as Apple's Mail and Pages (a basic word processor) – and only when creating new emails or documents. It's a start, but we hope Apple will see sense and give us more control over fonts in future.

The best app for adding fonts to your iPhone or iPad is Adobe Creative Cloud (www.snipca.com/38882). Once you've registered for a free account, you get access to plenty of fonts. Open the app, select the Fonts option at the bottom, then tap Install on any you like. You can then browse all your installed fonts by going to Settings on your iPhone or iPad, then selecting General, followed by Fonts (to uninstall a font, select it, then tap Remove).

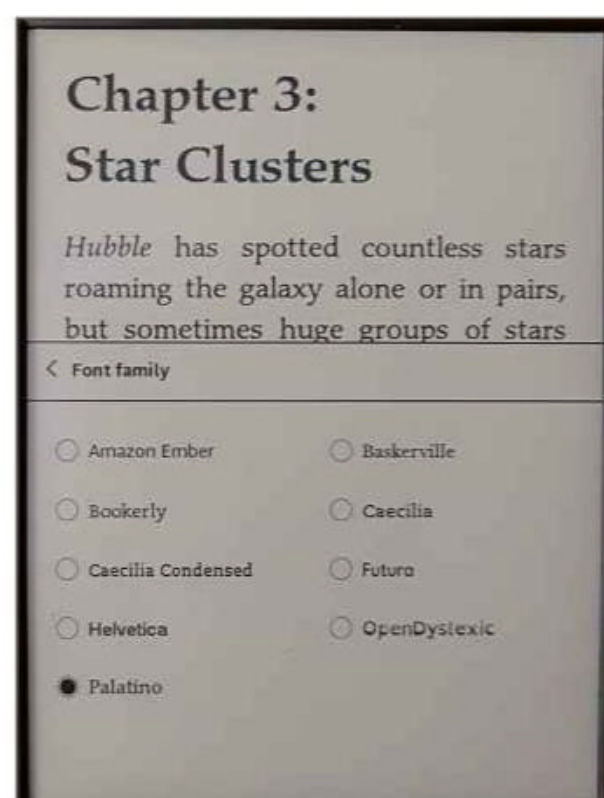
Once you've installed new fonts, you can set them as the default in any supported apps. In the Mail app, open a new email, tap the body section, then the '<' button. Next, tap 'Aa', select Default, then choose the font you want to use for new emails. In the Pages app, tap the More button (three dots), Settings, then 'Font for New Documents'.

4

Ebook readers

Amazon's Kindle ebook readers come with a selection of fonts. To view them, open a book on your device, then tap the top of the screen to display the menu options. Next, tap the 'Aa' button, select the Font tab, then tap 'Font family' and choose from the list of nine fonts (see screenshot above right).

You can add to these by copying fonts from your computer. First, open File Explorer (press the Windows key+E), then navigate to C:\windows\fonts. Each



Amazon's Kindle comes with nine fonts, but you can easily add more

file displays a simple preview of the font, but you can get a better look by clicking the Preview button at the top.

Once you've found the font you want to use on your Kindle, right-click it and select Copy (if you're adding a font that you've downloaded from the web as a ZIP file, make sure you extract it before copying it). Next, connect your Kindle to your computer using a USB cable, then open another File Explorer window. Select 'This PC', then double-click your Kindle and open the Fonts folder. Now press Ctrl+V to paste the font. To use the font, unplug the USB cable from your Kindle, then return to the 'Font family' section on your Kindle (as explained earlier).

The process is almost identical on Kobo ebook readers. The only difference is that you have to create a folder called 'fonts' in the **root directory** of your Kobo in which to copy your fonts. Make sure you type **fonts** (not **font**), otherwise your Kobo won't recognise your new fonts.

5

Office programs

In April, Microsoft announced it was considering one of five new fonts to replace Calibri as the default in **Microsoft Office** (see its blog post at www.snipca.com/38883). You don't have to wait for Microsoft to make up its mind, however.

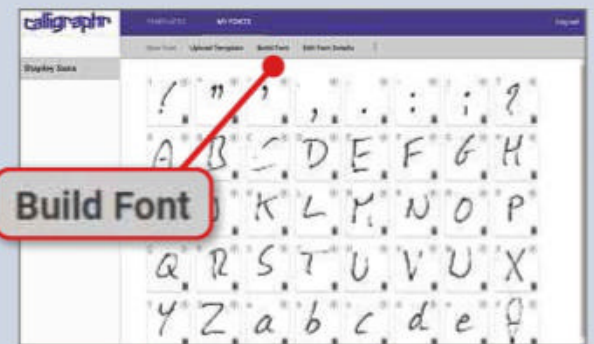
To change the default font in **Word**, open a new document, then press Ctrl+D to open the Font box. Here, choose your new default font (including its size and style). Microsoft 365 subscribers will

Download Google's fonts and create your own

Google has a huge selection of free fonts that you can download and use within Windows, as well as copy to other devices such as your ebook reader (phones and tablets too, but only if they're **rooted**). To browse them, go to <https://fonts.google.com>.

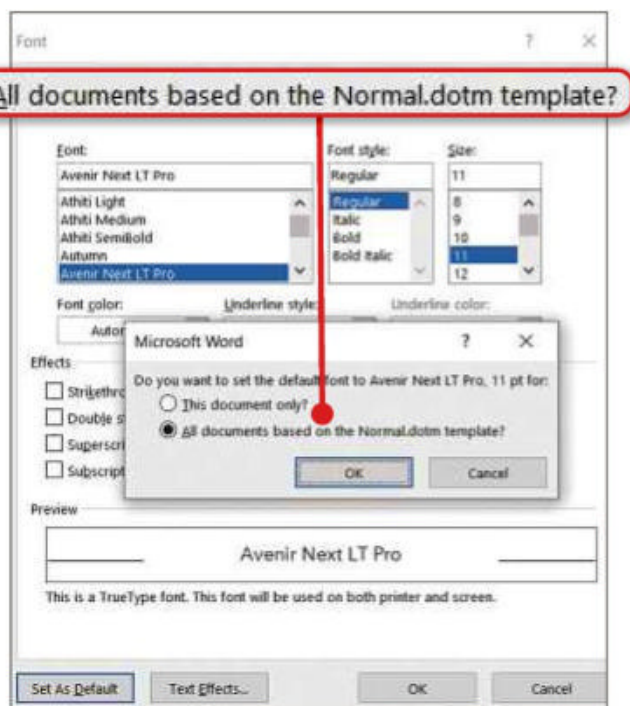
You can narrow the list (for example, to only show those with serifs) then type your own test sentence (into the 'Type something' box at the top) in order to preview them. When you see one you like, select it to read more about it, then click Download. Once the font has downloaded, open the ZIP file, double-click the font, then click Install.

You could also create your own handwritten font. Calligraphr (www.calligraphr.com) lets you print a font template, scribble each character on to it, then scan it back in. Click 'Build Font' (see screenshot) and your font will be created in seconds.



The free version limits you to one font containing 75 characters, but you can increase this to 12 fonts with up to 480 characters each for £5.79 per month (your fonts will continue to work if you cancel your subscription, though you won't be able to create any more).

For a more professional-looking font, you can use FontForge (free from www.snipca.com/38887) to design each individual character on your computer. Creating your own font in this way isn't easy and takes time – check out the tutorial at www.snipca.com/38888.



Microsoft Word lets you change the default font for all new documents

be using the latest version of Word, and can already use the new fonts Microsoft is reviewing as replacements for Calibri (Bierstadt, Grandview, Seaford, Skeena, and Tenorite), but don't worry if you're using an older version of Word – you'll still have plenty of fonts to choose from, and you can download many more (see box above right). Once you've chosen your font, click Set As Default at the bottom and select 'All documents...' (see screenshot above).

Switching default fonts is slightly different in **Excel**. Click File, Options, then select General. Locate the 'When creating new workbooks' section on the right-hand side of the window, then choose your font in the 'Use this as the default font' dropdown menu.

To change the default font in **LibreOffice Writer**, open a new document, then click Tools, Options (or press Alt+F12). In the window that opens, expand the LibreOffice Writer section on the left, then

select 'Basic Fonts (Western)'.

To change the default font for body text, click the dropdown menu next to Default, then choose a font. The box to the right of this lets you set the default size for that font. You can then assign different fonts to other page elements, including headings, lists and captions. Click OK to save your changes, or Default to get everything back how it was.

You can also change the default font in **Notepad**. Open the Format menu then select 'Font...' and change the settings accordingly. You can now exit Notepad and your font settings will remain the

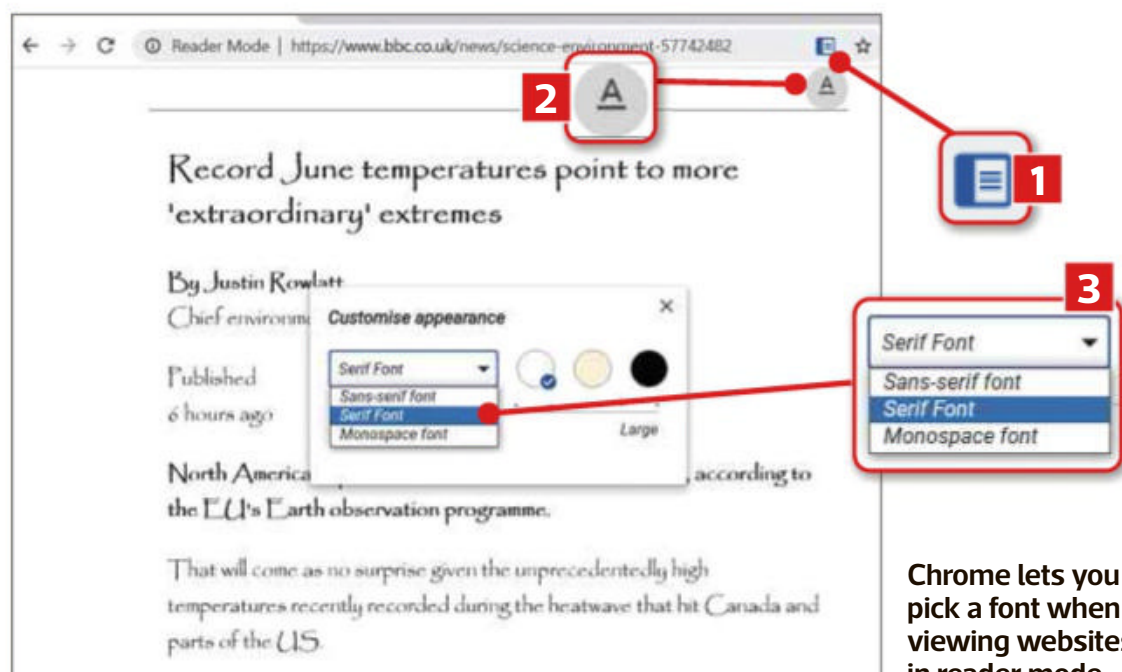
next time you load it (even if you restart your computer).

6 Browsers

Most websites tell your browser which font to use. For those that don't (including Wikipedia), your browser will use its default font. Whichever browser you're using, you can change this default font by going to the Settings page, searching for **fonts**, then selecting 'Customise fonts' (or similar). On other websites, you may still be able to use your chosen font by viewing a site in your browser's reader mode, which removes adverts, pop-ups and other distractions.

In **Chrome**, you first need to enable its reader mode (see how on page 52), then click the page icon in the address bar (see **1** in our screenshot left). Chrome will now display the page using the font as specified in the settings – click the 'A' button **2** to select the one you want to use **3**.

Edge's reader mode (Immersive Reader) doesn't currently let you change fonts, but it will soon. The Canary release (which Microsoft uses to test new features – get it from www.snipca.com/38886) lets you select from three fonts in reader mode – Calibri, Stika and Comic Sans – but not choose from other fonts on your PC. We expect this to appear in the main version of Edge in the coming months.



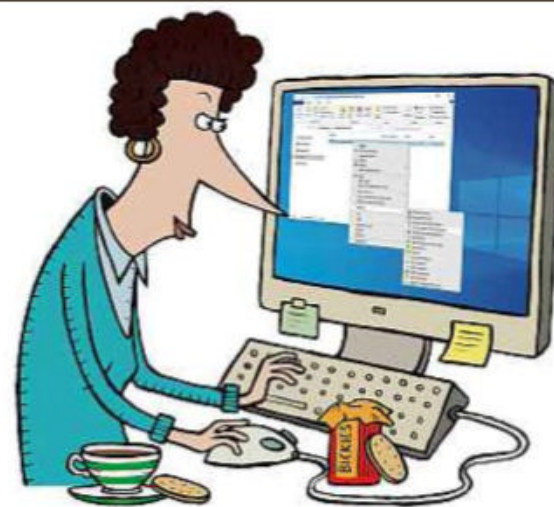
Chrome lets you pick a font when viewing websites in reader mode

Workshop1

Email large files by compressing them first

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1 or 10; PeaZip

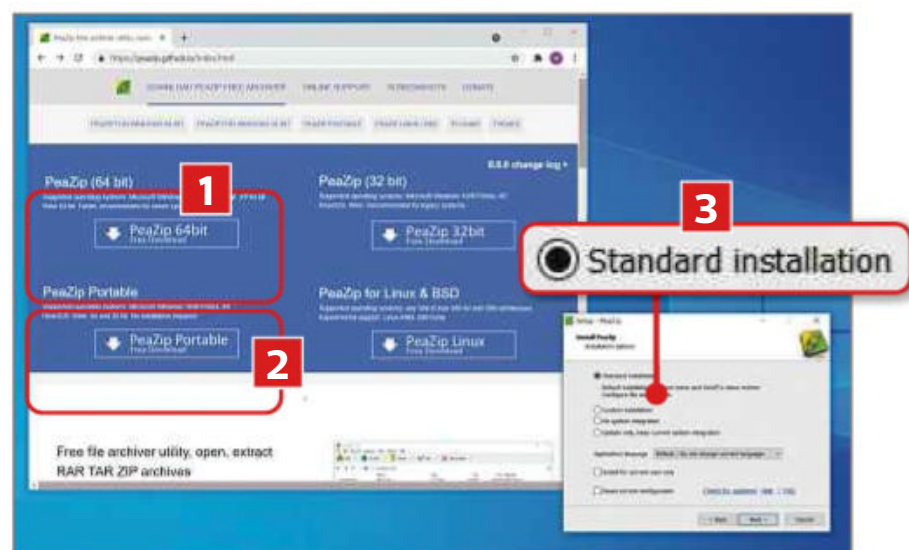
Time required: 20 minutes



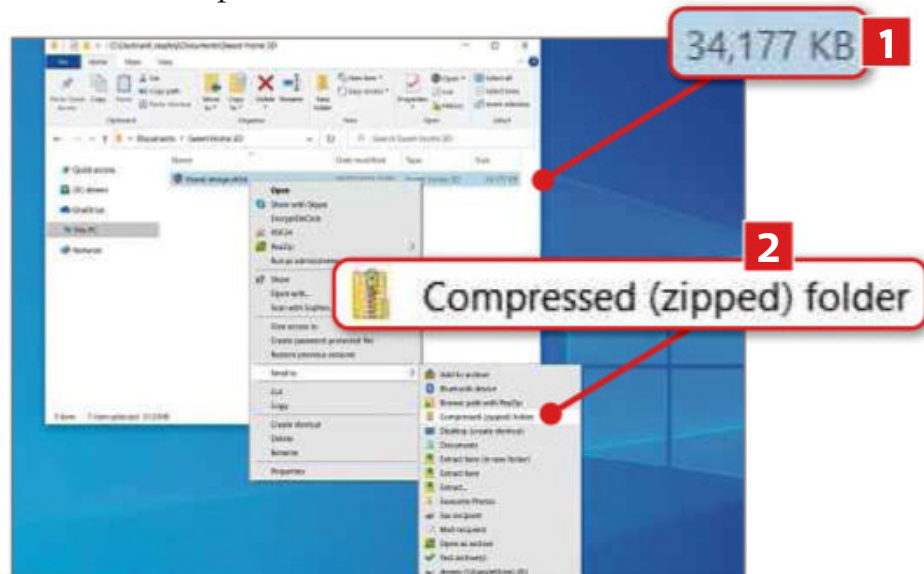
We know many of you still like to send files via email. However, most email providers limit the size of attachments – Outlook.com’s maximum is 34MB, while Gmail and BT’s is just 25MB. There are other ways to share large files – Google Drive and

Dropbox, for example – but they’re not as convenient and you might not want to upload confidential files to an online server. Here, we’ll show you how to compress large files to a fraction of their size before attaching them to your emails.

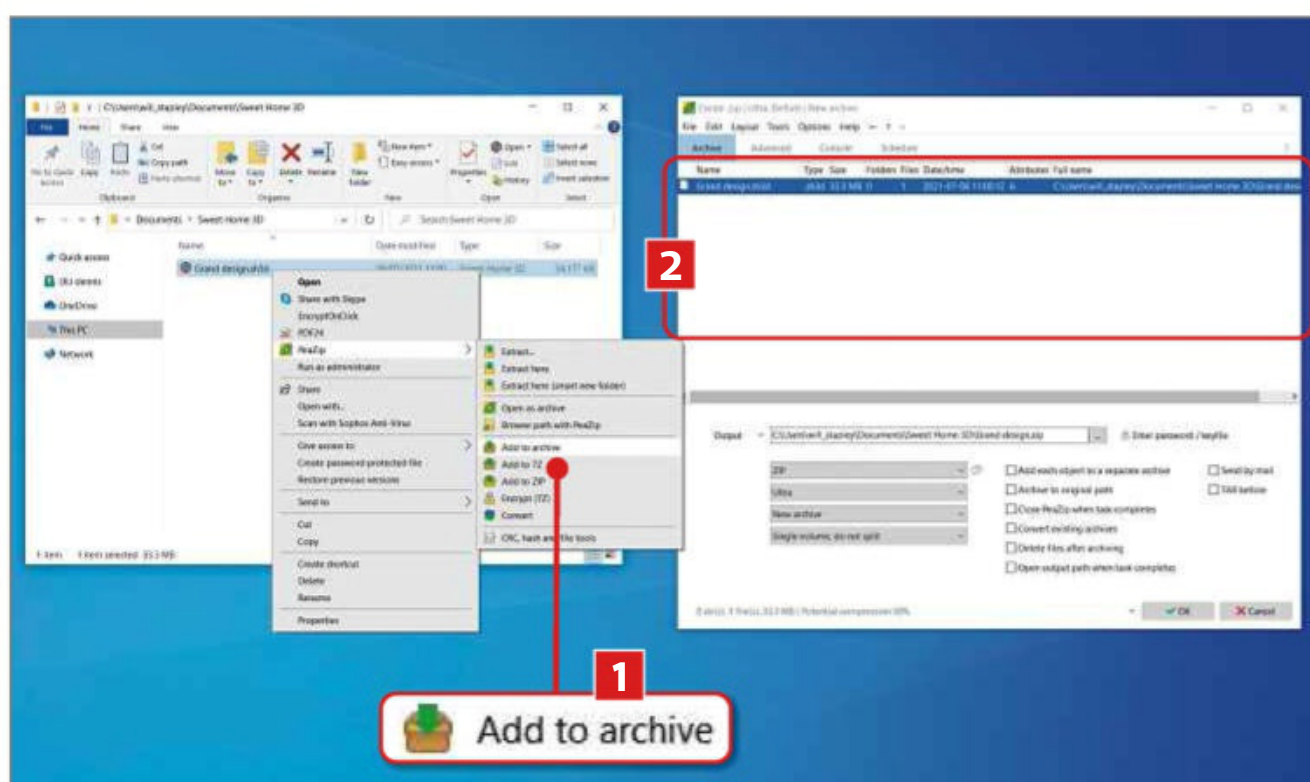
STEP 1 Download PeaZip from www.snipca.com/38895. It’s available as an installable **1** and portable **2** version. The latter lets you run PeaZip from a USB stick. In our example, we’re using the installable version. When prompted, select the ‘Standard installation’ option **3** – this adds PeaZip’s functions to the right-click menu in Windows, which we’ll be using later. You will also be prompted to choose which archive formats you want PeaZip to open by default. We’ve set ours to be the default for all but ZIP files, which Windows handles perfectly well.

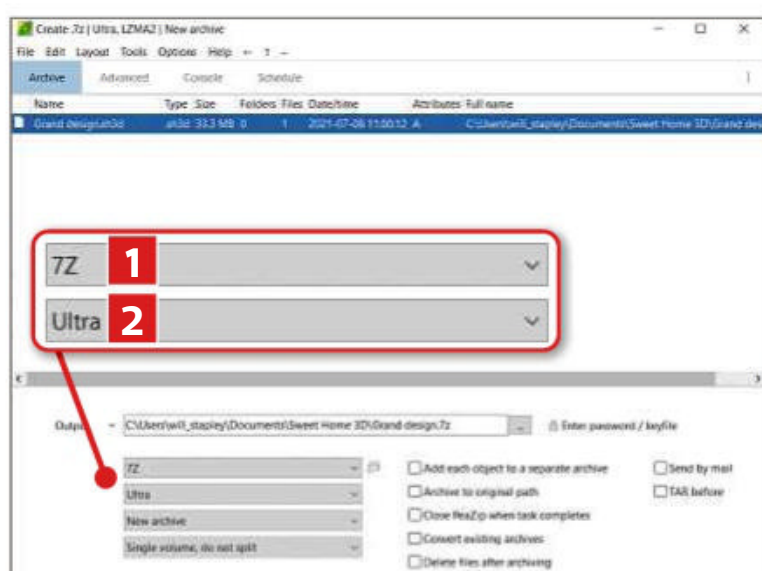


STEP 2 We want to email a plan of our home that we’ve created in Sweet Home 3D (www.sweethome3d.com). The file (called Home.sh3d) is around 34.2MB (34,177KB to be exact **1**), which means it’s too big to send using any of the main email providers. We’ll therefore need to compress the file before emailing. You can compress files using the ZIP format in File Explorer (right-click the file, select ‘Send to’, then ‘Compressed (zipped) folder’ **2**), but it won’t reduce the file size by as much as PeaZip, nor will you be able to secure the file with a password.

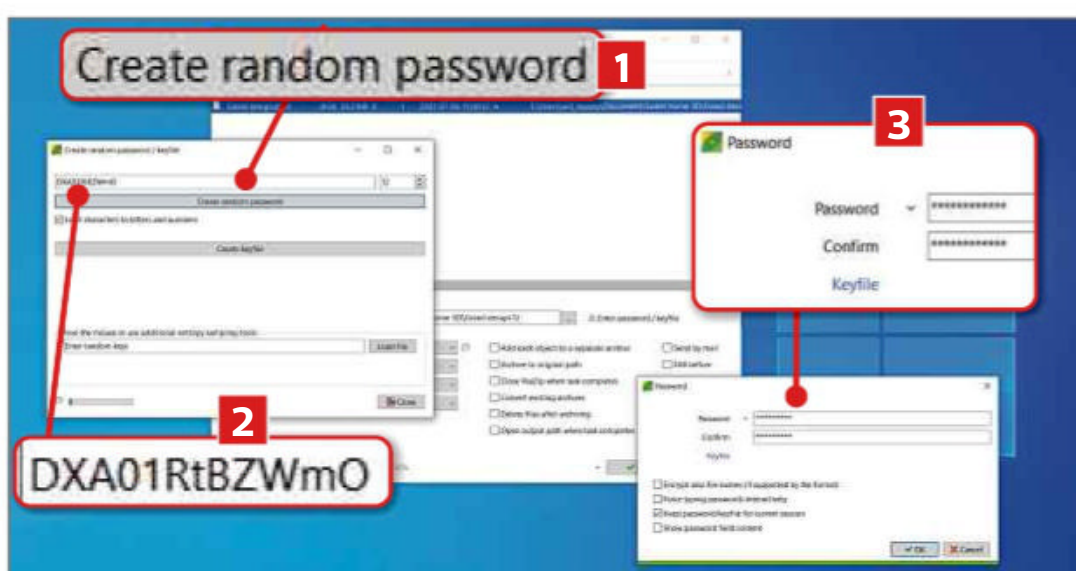


STEP 3 Open File Explorer (press the Windows key+E), navigate to the folder containing your file, then right-click the file, select PeaZip, followed by ‘Add to archive’ **1**. You can add multiple files to the same archive by selecting them all (hold down the Ctrl key while clicking) before right-clicking. PeaZip will now open, showing your selected files in the top section **2**. If you want to add more files, simply drag them into this section. To remove a file, select it, then press the Delete key.





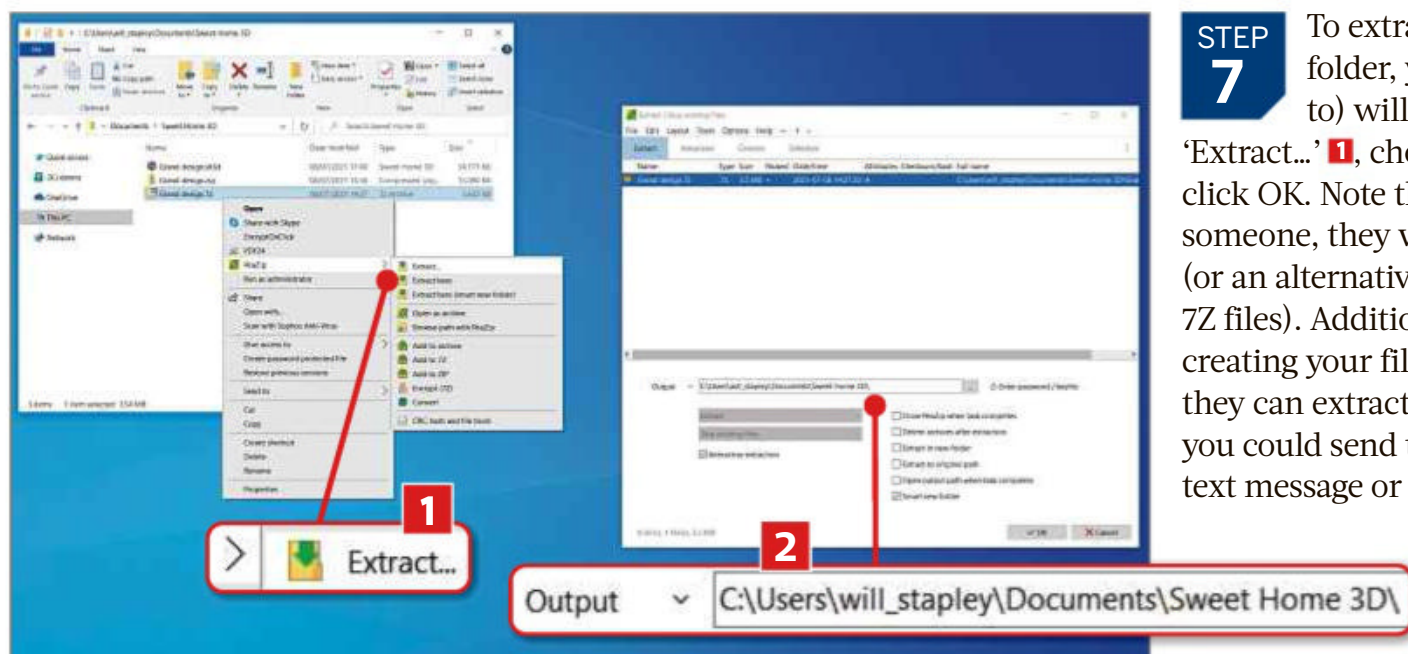
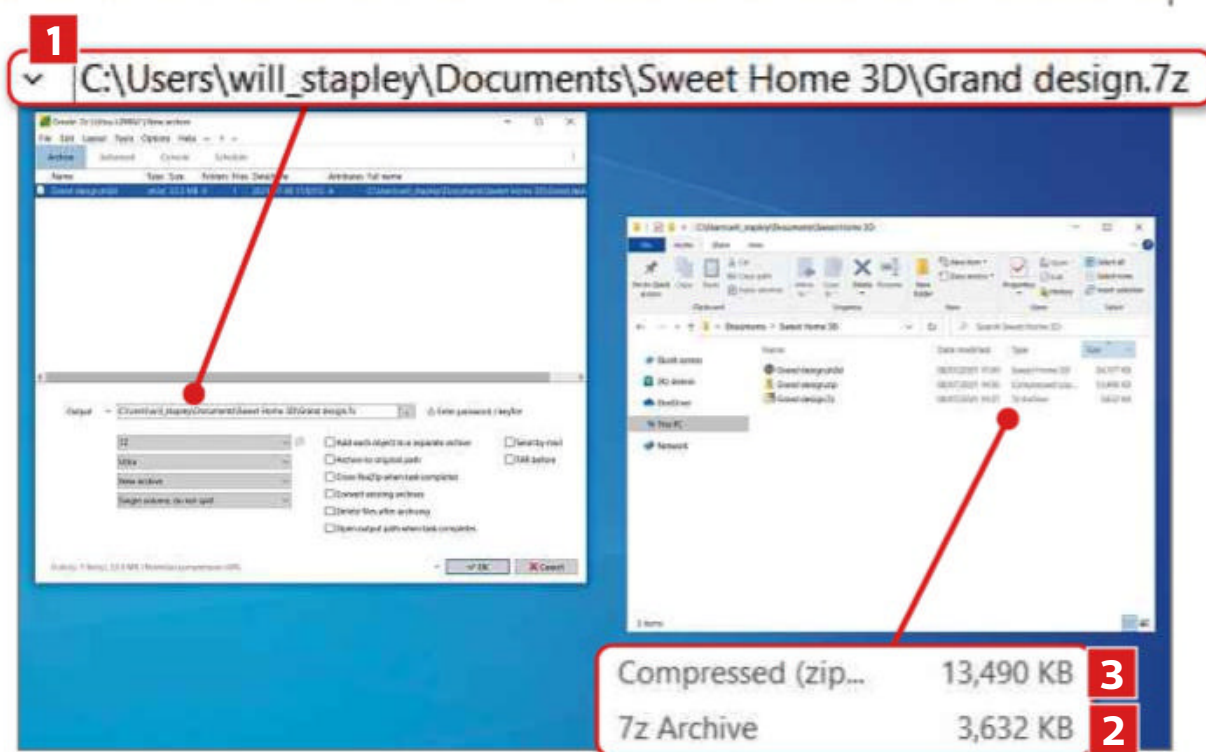
STEP 4 PeaZip lets you choose from several compression formats. The advantage of ZIP is that anyone you send it to will be able to extract its contents without having to install additional software (Windows lets you open ZIP files within File Explorer). However, the 7Z format **1** creates far smaller file sizes, so we're going to use that here. To reduce the file size further still, we'll select 7Z's Ultra compression method **2**. It takes a little longer to create and extract the 7Z file, but by only a few seconds.



STEP 5 PeaZip lets you secure your files with a password. You can tell PeaZip to generate a secure password for you by opening the Tools menu and selecting 'Create random password...' (or just press Ctrl+F). The latest version of PeaZip sets the default password length to 12 characters – you can change this to fewer characters, but we recommend leaving it set to 12 (shorter passwords are easier to crack). Click 'Create random password' **1**, select the generated password **2**, then press Ctrl+C to copy it before clicking Close. Now click 'Enter password...' and paste it (Ctrl+V) into the two boxes **3**.

STEP 6 Make sure you're happy with the name of your compressed file and its save location **1**, then click OK.

PeaZip will now create the 7Z file. It took just over 20 seconds to compress our Sweet Home 3D file, which we could then access using File Explorer and attach to our email. As you can see, the 7Z file is just 3.6MB **2** – an impressive 89 per cent reduction of the original file. In contrast, using Windows to compress it using the ZIP format resulted in a much larger file of 13.5MB **3**. The amount your files are compressed will depend on their format. JPEGs, MP3s and most other media files are already compressed, so adding them to a PeaZip archive is unlikely to reduce their file size by much (if at all).



STEP 7 To extract the file from the compressed folder, you (or the person you email it to) will need to right-click the file, click 'Extract...' **1**, choose where to extract it to **2**, then click OK. Note that if you're emailing the file to someone, they will need to have PeaZip installed (or an alternative compression tool that supports 7Z files). Additionally, if you set a password when creating your file, they'll need to enter it before they can extract its contents. For extra security, you could send this password separately via a text message or WhatsApp.

Workshop 2

Create a USB mixtape

What you need: Audacity; VLC; USB stick

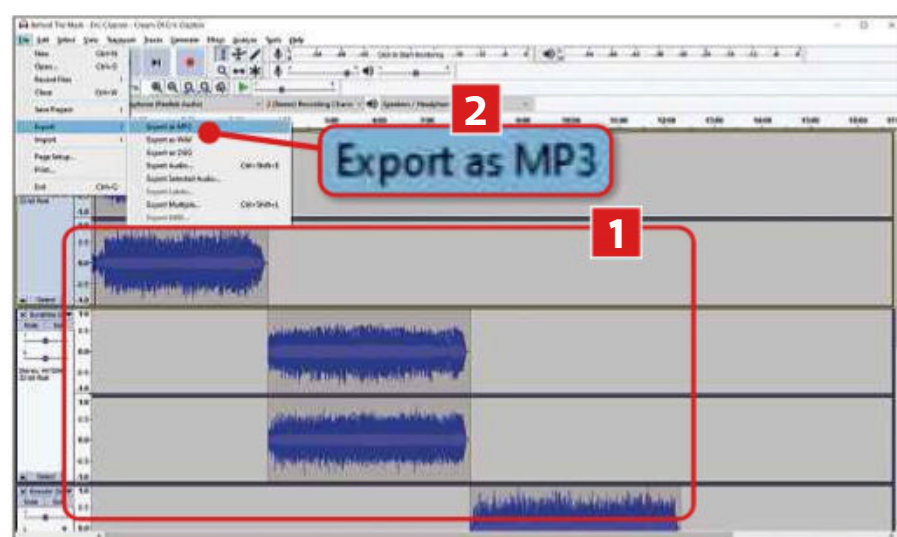
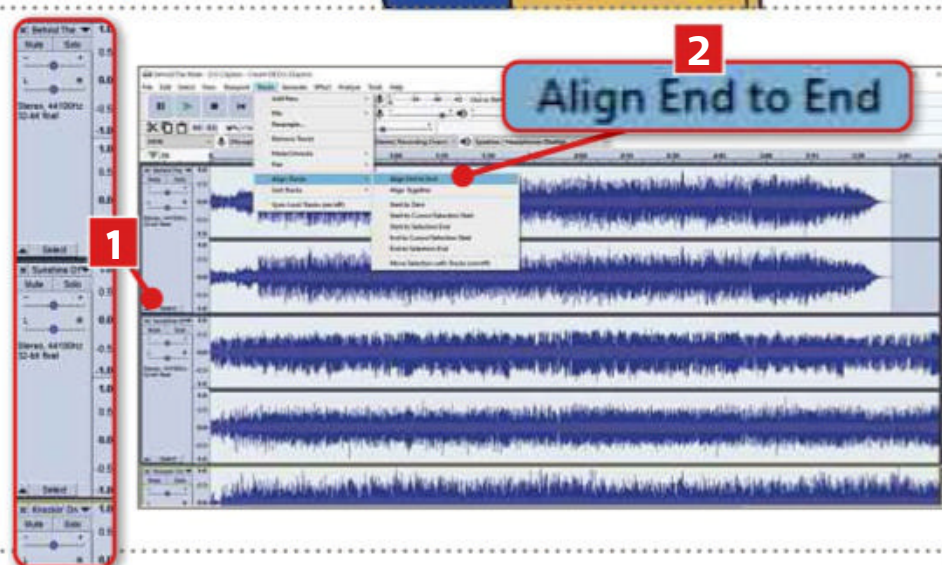
Time required: 40 minutes

Most music may have gone digital these days, but that doesn't mean you can no longer create mixtapes as gifts for friends and family (or to keep yourself). Audacity (see page 9) lets you create a digital mixtape by combining a selection of tracks into a

single MP3 file. You can then give it a personal touch by recording your own DJ-style intro for each song. We'll also explain how to create a **batch file** that plays your mixtape directly from a USB stick, complete with full-screen animated visuals.

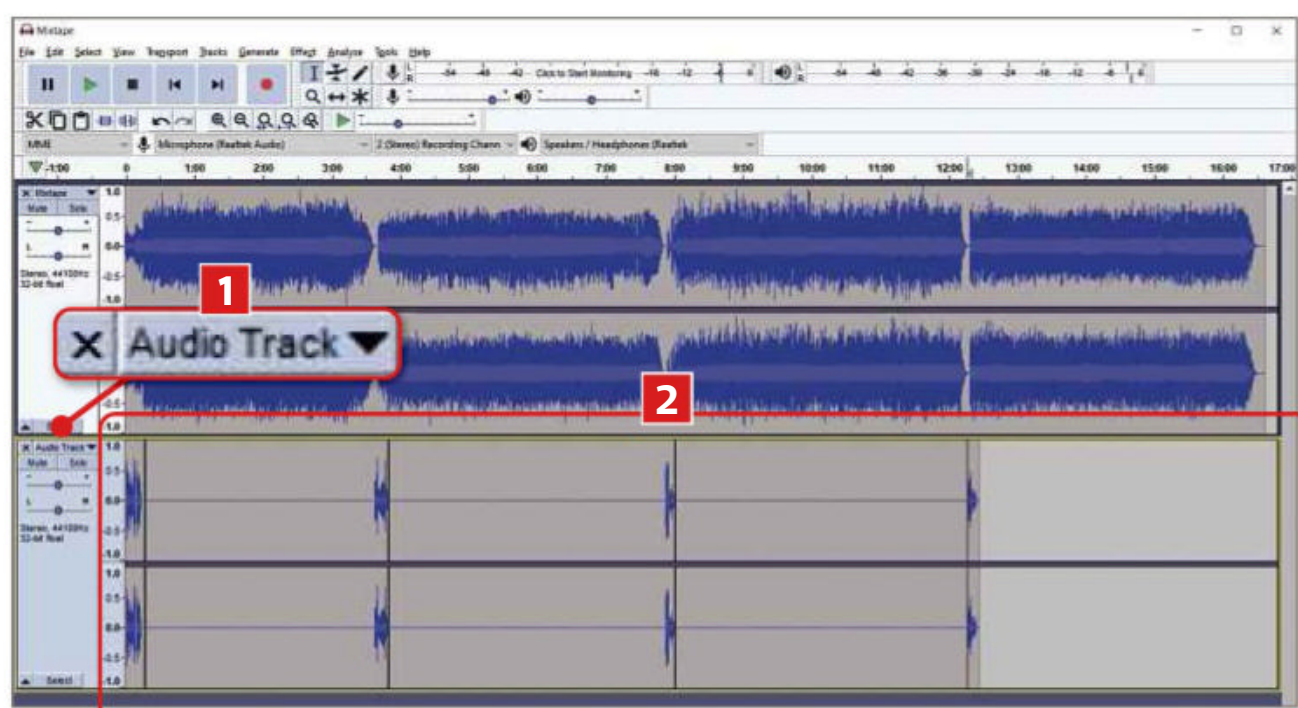


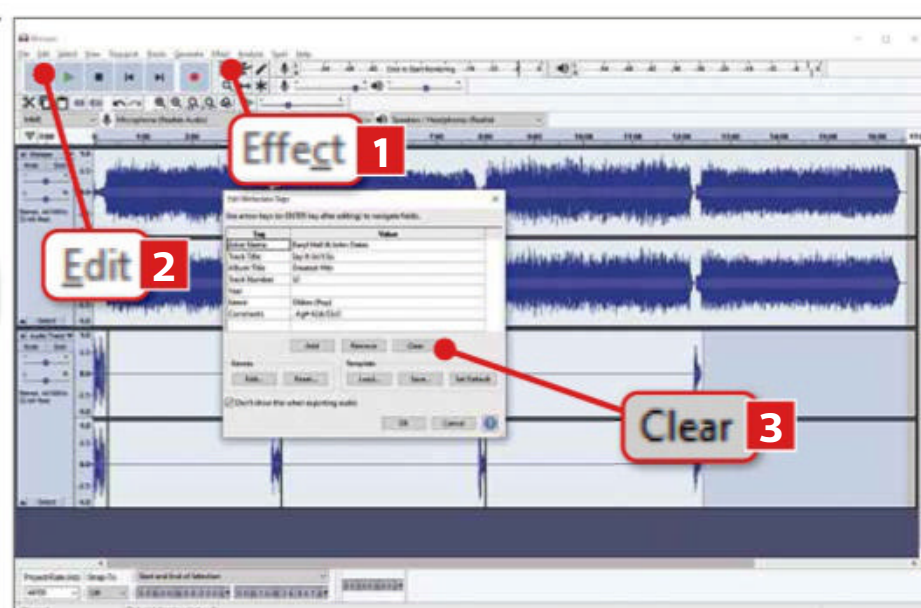
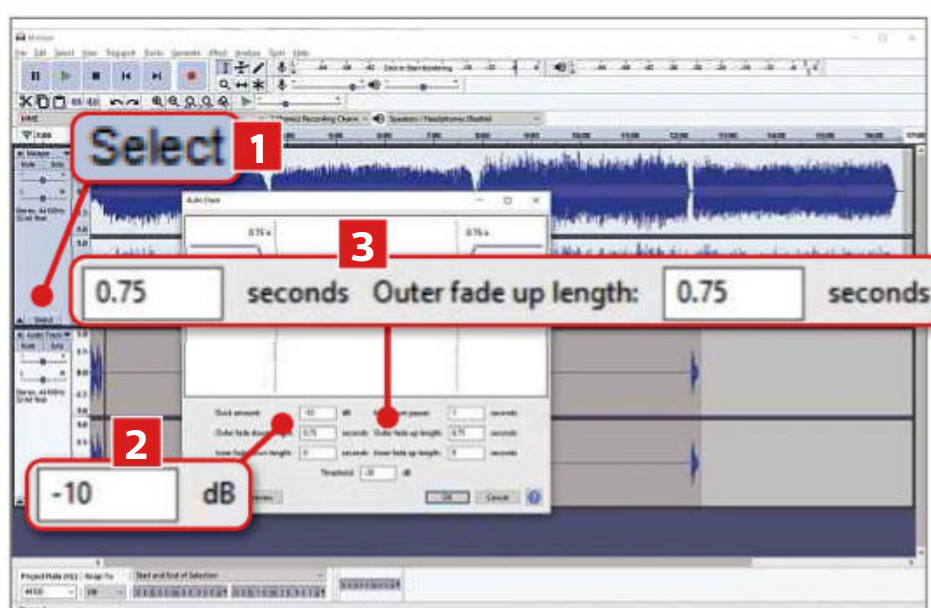
STEP 1 Download Audacity from www.audacityteam.org, then run it. Now open File Explorer (press the Windows key+E), locate the first MP3 to go on your mixtape, then drag it into the Audacity window. This file will now appear as a new track. Repeat this process, dragging the rest of your MP3s over in the order you want them to play. You'll see they are added as separate tracks **1**, meaning if you press Play, all tracks will play at the same time. To get the tracks to play in sequence, select all of them by pressing Ctrl+A, open the Tracks menu, select Align Tracks, then 'Align End to End' **2**.



STEP 2 Although your songs will now play in order, they'll still be displayed as separate tracks within the Audacity window **1**. To merge them into a single track, click File, Export, 'Export as MP3' **2**, give your mixtape a name, then click Yes when asked whether you want the tracks to be 'mixed down' (this means all the tracks will be merged into one). Next, click File, Recent Files and load the MP3 file you just saved (you'll find this at the top of the list). Your songs will now appear as a single track.

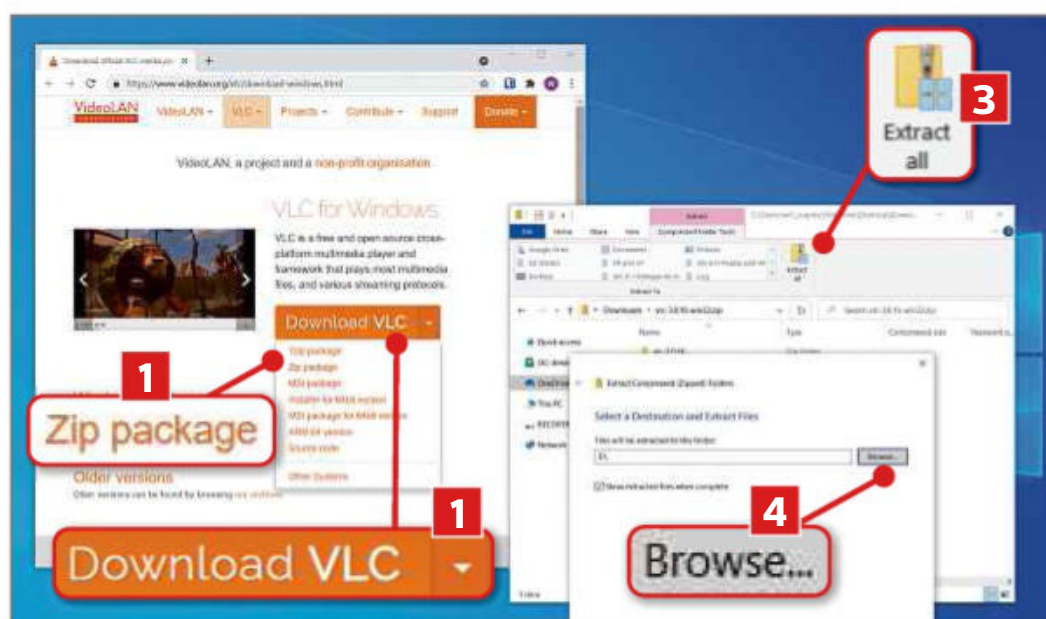
STEP 3 You can now add your own spoken intros to each song (skip to Step 5 if you want to include only music). First, connect headphones to your computer so you can hear your music without it being picked up when recording your intros. To record the intro for the first song, hold down the Shift key, then click Record (red-dot button). Your intro will be saved to a new track called Audio Track **1**. Click 'Stop' when you've finished, then click the section of the track where you want to record the second intro and press Record (don't hold down Shift this time). Repeat this until you've recorded all your intros **2**.





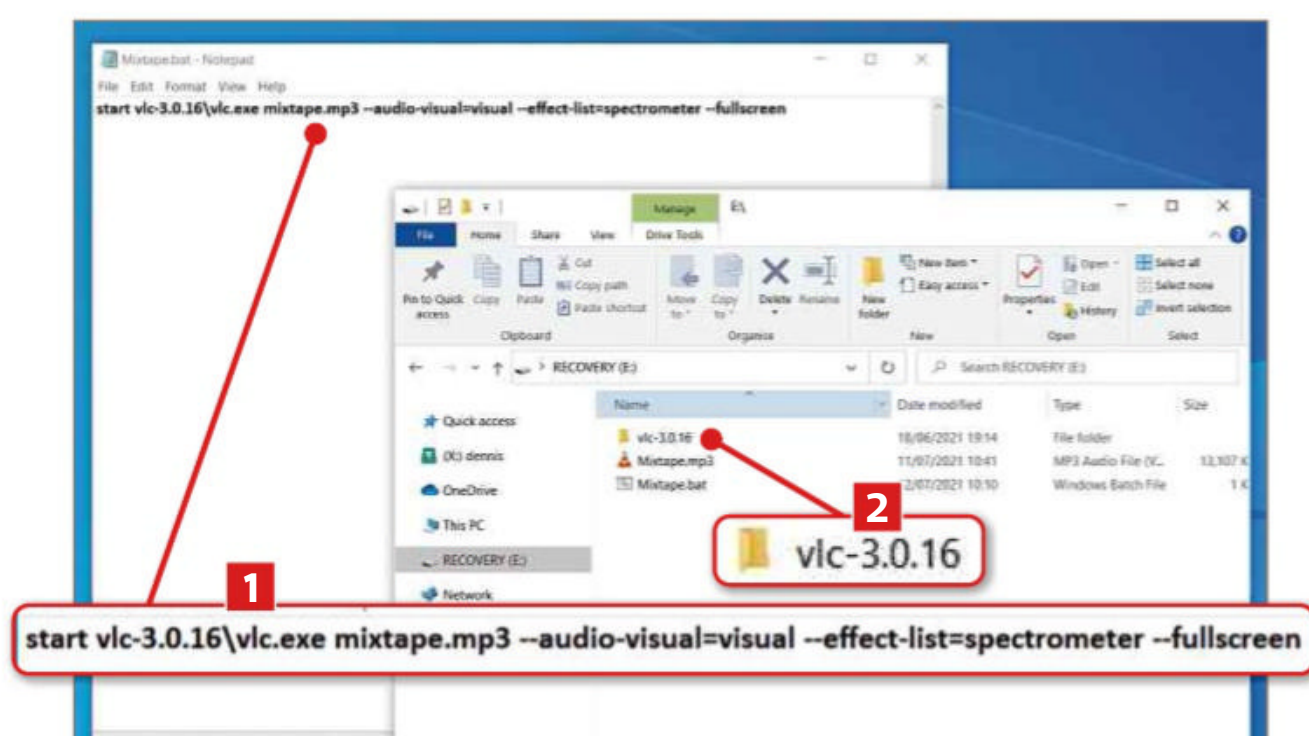
STEP 4 Now you've added your intros, you need to reduce the volume of the music in those moments when you're speaking. Click 'Select' at the bottom-left corner of your music track **1**, then open the Edit menu and select Auto Duck. We find that setting the Duck to -10dB **2** and the fades to 0.75s **3** works best. Click OK when you've finished, then press Play to see how it sounds. If you want to tweak it, press Ctrl+Z to undo the changes, then run the Auto Duck effect again with different settings.

STEP 5 Press Ctrl+A to select all tracks, then open the Effect menu **1**, select 'Normalize...' and click OK. This tells Audacity to analyze the music (and your intros), then adjust the volume so that it's more uniform – useful if some of your songs are louder than others. Your mixtape will also still have the **metadata** (track title, artist name and so on) of the last song you added. It's best to remove this, otherwise your entire mixtape will use this metadata. Click 'Edit' **2**, 'Metadata...', Clear **3**, then OK.



STEP 6 Export your MP3 file as before (click File, then Export), but this time saving it to the **root directory** of your USB stick – in our case, E:\. To play the mixtape on the USB stick, we're going to use the portable version of VLC. Go to www.snipca.com/38908, then click the down arrow next to 'Download VLC' **1** and select 'Zip package' **2**. Once downloaded, open the ZIP file, click 'Extract all' **3**, Browse **4**, then select your USB stick and click Extract. A new File Explorer window will open once VLC has been installed to your USB stick.

STEP 7 To create the batch file for your mixtape, open Notepad (search for it in the Start menu), then type `start vlc-3.0.16\vlc.exe mixtape.mp3 --audio-visual=visual --effect-list=spectrometer --fullscreen` **1** (or copy it from our Pastebin account at www.snipca.com/38909) – changing `mixtape.mp3` to match your MP3's file name. If the version of VLC on your USB stick **2** is named differently to ours, you'll also need to change the 'vlc-3.0.16' part of the batch file accordingly. Finally, press Ctrl+S, call the file `Mixtape.bat`, then save it to your USB stick's root directory. When you run this file, your USB mixtape will start playing with a full-screen visualisation in VLC.



Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Find old BBC shows that include sign language

I've spent the past few days trawling through the BBC's incredible online archive of TV and radio shows, which you mentioned in Issue 609 (page 8). I've been partially deaf all my life, so I was pleased to discover that I could search the index specifically for programmes that include sign language.

First, visit the Programme Index (www.snipca.com/38690), then click the Explore Playable Programmes circle. Now click the 'Turn on advanced filters' slider so it turns blue (1 in our



screenshot), then the Accessibility heading (2). Next, click the eye icon to the left of 'Signed' (3) (there's also an option for 'Audio described', which will interest

people with no or poor sight). To see the results, click 'Apply filters' at the bottom-right of the banner that appears.

I found over 1,300 programmes, which I could then filter further using the options at the top. You can also search for specific *types* of programme with signed language by clicking the Genre heading on the left

and selecting the appropriate eye icon – drama or comedy, for example.

Roger Ferguson



Roger wins a copy of our 2020 Back Issue CD

Buy it on Amazon www.snipca.com/38164

PHONES

Pay 1p for calls and texts through 1pMobile

Like many of your readers lately, I resent being forced to accept invasive technology – in particular, the need for all websites to have my mobile number for **two-factor authentication** (2FA). To stop all and sundry getting my number, I use a dedicated un-smart phone that I keep next to my PC keyboard.

As I seldom use this phone, I signed up with 1pMobile (www.1pmobile.com), which charges just 1p for calls and texts. It costs only £10 to sign up for a **SIM** with £10 credit. 1pMobile uses the EE network, so before you sign up, use EE's coverage checker at www.snipca.com/38822 to make sure you have good EE coverage in

your area. With 1pMobile, I can reuse an old 'dumb' phone I had lying in a drawer, and my landline is still available for normal communications.

Richard Martin

VIDEO

Search YouTube transcripts for specific words

I've just discovered a clever way to search for a specific word or phrase spoken in a YouTube video. If you click the three horizontal dots under a video (1 in our screenshot right) you'll see an 'Open transcript' option. Click this and a box appears in the top-right corner showing the subtitles from the video (2). Next to

each line of text, you'll see a number telling you how many minutes and seconds into the video it appears.

Now simply press Ctrl+F to open your browser's search bar, then type the words you're looking for (3). When you find the phrase you want in the subtitles, just click it to go to that section of the video.

Tony Bates



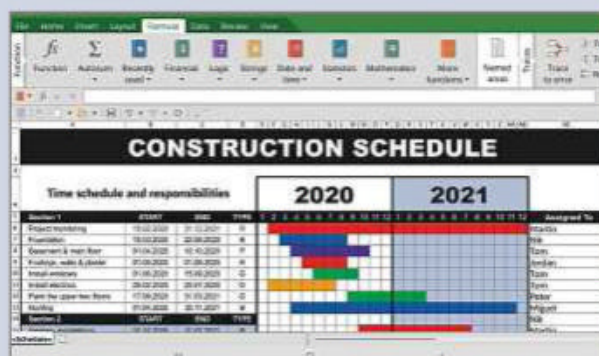
Why I stopped using...

MobiSystems Office Suite for Android

I stopped using the app for MobiSystems Office (www.snipca.com/38821) because I found it difficult to use on my Android phone. I'd first tried it on the excellent Symbian operating system that ran on my E-series Nokia phone, but sadly the Android version is a different story.

And what I use instead...

I switched to **SoftMaker Office 2021**



after reading your review in 'Phone & Tablet Tips' (Issue 608, page 44). This reminded me that SoftMaker produced a similar office suite back in

the days of pocket PCs.

Now I have installed SoftMaker's TextMaker and PlanMaker (pictured), both from www.snipca.com/38403, on my Android phone, and I'm delighted with them for word processing and spreadsheet. I'm getting on much better with these tools than I ever did with MobiSystems.

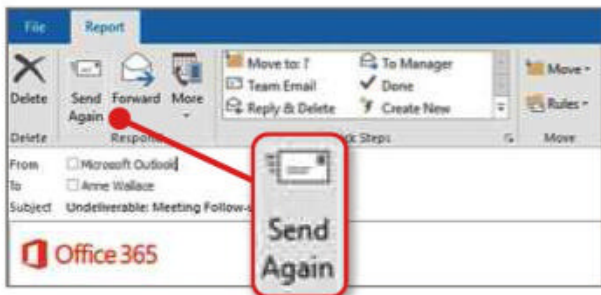
Ted Cross



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



EMAIL

Find your email in Outlook when it bounces back

✓ I've been using computers for years, but Outlook stumped me today. I wrote an email that bounced back because I'd accidentally put a space in the address. I searched everywhere to find the original email, but it wasn't in the inbox, outbox, sent folder, drafts folder or anywhere on my laptop.

Then I discovered that if you click the message telling you that your email was rejected, a menu appears along the top that includes a Send Again button. I'd never seen this before. Click it, and your email pops up, allowing you to enter the correct email address and then resend it. If you think it will bounce back a second time, you now have the original that you can copy and paste into a new email, typing the correct address this time. I hope this saves other readers having to search for emails that have gone missing.

John Beattie

PHONES

Change Android's default messaging so texts are sent

✓ Your readers may not know about a change in Android's texting system that can mean messages are not sent. A recent update changed the default messaging system to Google Chat, which requires a mobile data connection. This means that if you try to send what appears to be a standard text message but you don't have a data connection, the message isn't sent. What's worse is that there's no error message to tell you this.

One solution to this problem is to configure the default message system for



Reader recommends...

Nokia 3.4 phone

£95 from Amazon

www.snipca.com/38673

✓ I found Issue 610's feature on 'cheap but good' smartphones (page 62) to be very enlightening. It reinforced a feeling I've had for a while, which is that you don't need to spend a fortune to get a phone that does most of what you need.

One task you didn't cover was making contactless payments on your phone - and I've got just the device for you: the Nokia 3.4. I bought it late last year for simple tasks such as sending messages, but a friend taught me how to set up contactless payments using Google Pay (<https://pay.google.com>). Now I just tap it against payment readers in shops when making purchases. It's very handy because it means I never have to take my purse



out of my handbag.

The magic part of the phone is the NFC chip. You'll need to check that your phone has one of these if you want to make contactless payments. My friend was surprised that my cheap phone had this chip. She told me you usually have to pay several hundred pounds for NFC.

Helen Millward

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

each recipient to be 'text' rather than 'chat'. To do this, open each recipient's contact details and, on the three-dot menu, select Details, then set the switch to 'Only send SMS and MMS messages' (see screenshot).

I tend to keep my mobile data switched off to avoid going over my data allowance, but I regularly send what I had assumed were text messages. It was only when I discovered that some of my messages weren't arriving that I realised there was a problem. Shocking!

Tom Fry

ONLINE SHOPPING

Phone Amazon to remove two-factor authentication

✓ I share Laurence Rostron's annoyance with Amazon's two-factor authentication process (Letters, Issue 609). It does feel like discrimination to assume everybody has a smartphone. Thankfully, I found a simple remedy. I phoned Amazon on 0800 279 7234 and after a short wait got through to someone in their customer service department. After I'd explained the situation, he asked a couple of security questions and then removed two-factor from my account. I now use Amazon as I did before. Problem solved.

Jim Holloway

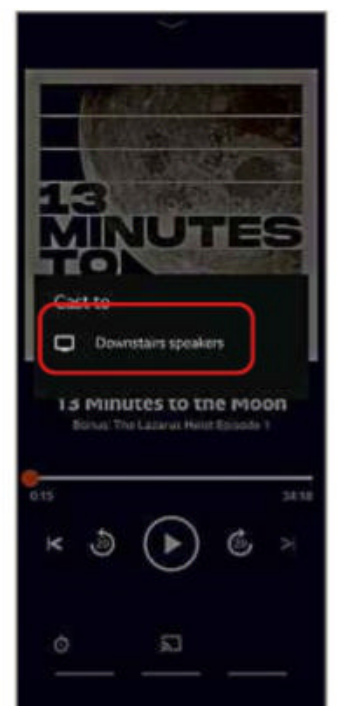
AUDIO

Play BBC radio and podcasts through Google Nest speakers

✓ Following on from Issue 609's Cover Feature, 'Stream Music & Radio Around Your Home', a couple of years ago I had trouble listening to BBC radio through a group of Google Nest speakers. I thought I would have to give up on them, but now I can play BBC radio through my four Google Home Mini speakers by saying "OK Google, stream Radio 4 on Home" (I have grouped all my speakers together in a group called Home). I've been using this command very successfully for over a year.

I can also stream podcasts from BBC Sounds through all my speakers by tapping the Cast icon in the BBC Sounds app on my phone or tablet (see screenshot). I can even control playback by saying things like "OK Google, skip forwards two minutes", which is handy.

Jonathan Mack



Phone and Tablet Tips

iOS Lock your WhatsApp chats with Face or Touch ID

 You can be sure that nobody can remotely intercept messages you send and receive with WhatsApp, because the app provides **end-to-end encryption** for all chats. But what if someone physically managed to get hold of your phone? There's a possibility that if you've left your phone unlocked, someone could simply pick up your device and access all your private discussions within a couple of taps. Owners of iPhones, however, get the option of adding an extra layer of



protection to their WhatsApp chats, by locking them behind either Face ID or Touch ID, depending on which one your model supports.

To locate this little-known security feature, open WhatsApp, then tap the Settings icon. Next, tap Account then Privacy, and scroll down to Screen Lock. Tap this, then tap the switch next to Require Face ID (or Touch ID) to enable it. Below, you'll now see options for how soon you want the app to lock itself. Tap 'Immediately' here (see screenshot left), unless you'd prefer a delay of a minute, 15 minutes or an hour.

From now on, you'll need to verify your identity with your face or fingerprint in order to open the app and view your chats. It's worth noting that, even when WhatsApp is locked, you'll still be able to view and reply to messages from any notifications you receive, as well as answer any voice and video calls.



that's surprisingly enjoyable to play.

To reveal it, open the app and tap the tabs button – an icon with two overlapping squares in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen. If you have any tabs currently open, close these by tapping the 'X' icon for each one until you see the message 'You don't have any open tabs'. Tap 'Done' at the bottom of the screen, then tap the tabs icon again.


Now you should see several

coloured shapes floating around at the bottom of the screen. Flick one of these shapes upwards with your finger to launch the game. You'll see a pair of flippers appear at the bottom of the screen (see screenshot above left) – tap the left or right flipper to whack the ball up the board and hit the floating shapes to score points.

ANDROID Send a group message in Google's Messages app

 If you want to send the same message to multiple people – for example, a party invitation or the arrangements for an evening out – you can save yourself a lot of time and effort by texting all your recipients at the same time in a single group message. Usefully, in Google's Messages app, you can set up

iOS Play a hidden pinball game in Google's search app

 Google has a history of hiding fun little **Easter eggs** in its apps and tools, and the Google search app for iOS (free from www.snipca.com/38862) has one you might enjoy – a secret pinball game

BEST NEW APPS

What you should install this fortnight

WellPaper

Free

Android www.snipca.com/38863

Most of us are guilty of using our devices too much, but this app puts a fun spin on our addiction by creating colourful, modern-looking wallpapers, based on your most-used apps. You need to grant the app permission to access your app-usage data in order to generate the results.



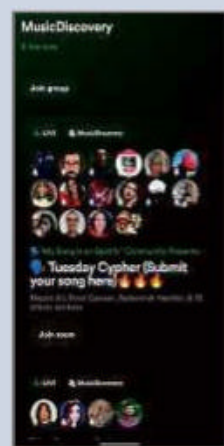
Spotify Greenroom

Free

Android www.snipca.com/38864

iOS www.snipca.com/38865

Music-streaming service Spotify has released a new app, intended to connect fans of music and – rather oddly – US sports with their favourite personalities (and each other), by hosting or joining a live audio conversation. It's early days for this social platform, but Greenroom has the potential to provide access to some very enlightening discussions.



Hue²

99p

iOS www.snipca.com/38871

Looking for a relaxing but challenging distraction? This pleasantly minimalist



puzzle game sees you rearranging a grid of coloured blocks into harmonious-looking gradients – kind of like a 2D Rubik's Cube in pantone shades. The catch is that some blocks are locked in place, so you have to work around them.



a group and save it, should you ever need to send more messages to the same people.

Google's Messages is the default text-message app on most Android phones, so you will probably already have it installed – if not, get it free from www.snipca.com/38861, then launch it. Tap the big blue 'Start chat' button in the bottom right, then tap the 'Create group' icon that appears at the top of your contacts list. Next, start typing names, or scroll through your contacts and tap the people you want to add to the group.

Once you have added everyone you want, tap Next. You'll be prompted to give your group a name – type it in the box (see screenshot above) and tap Next. Now type your message and tap the Send (arrow) button.

ANDROID & iOS See 3D directions in the real world in Google Maps



Whether you have trouble getting your bearings from a standard 2D map, or you just enjoy trying Google Maps' latest innovations, the new version of the Maps app for Android and iOS introduces a feature you'll love – Live View.

This new navigation tool combines the best of Google Maps' directions with an **augmented-reality** live camera view so you can see where you're going in real time. It's currently only available while walking (presumably to stop drivers using it while behind the wheel of their cars)

and you'll need to make sure your version of Google Maps is up to date before you start. Also, Live View only works in areas that are already covered by Street View – so don't expect it to guide you down any private roads or dirt tracks.

To use it, launch Google Maps, then find a nearby location you want to go to. Next, tap the Directions button. Make sure walking mode is selected by checking the transport icons along the top of the map view – tap it if not. Now you should see a Live View button just below the map. Tap this to switch to the new map/live camera mode and follow the on-screen directions (see screenshot right).



BEST APPS FOR...

Keeping a diary

Daybook

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/38866

iOS www.snipca.com/38867

This journal app is easy to use. It lets you add photos to your diary entries and provides useful features, such as a calendar view and passcode protection as standard. Subscribing to its Premium service (£4.49 per month) lets you use it across unlimited devices and unlocks extra themes, printing and more.

Best For Simple diary entries with accompanying photos

Daylio Journal

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/38868

iOS www.snipca.com/38869

Those with busy lives may struggle to write a diary entry every day, despite their best intentions. Daylio is the ideal solution – it's a 'micro diary' app that lets you quickly log various aspects of your day – socialising, hobbies, sleep and food, for example – with simple icons and **emojis** to represent your mood and activities.

Best For Those with little spare time

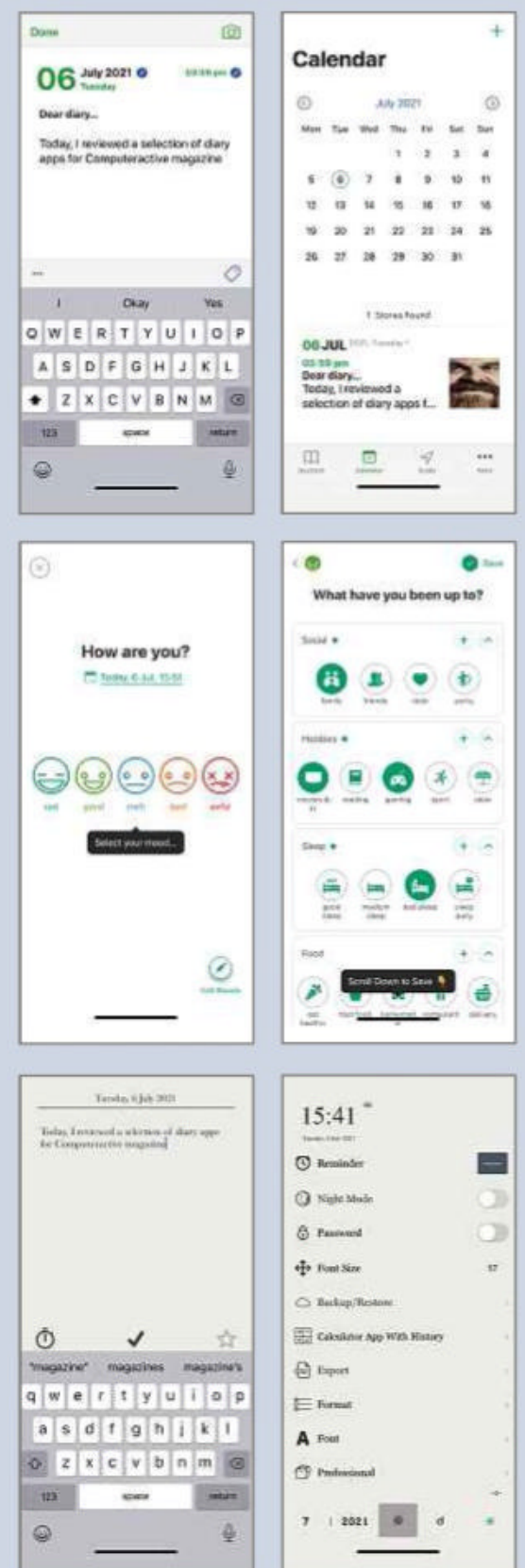
Diary With Password

Free*

iOS www.snipca.com/38870

This app with its beautifully clean interface is ideal for anyone who wants to keep a more traditional diary. You can set yourself reminders and protect it with a PIN for privacy. Upgrade to Premium (for a one-off £4.99 fee) and you can export your diary or back up to iCloud.

Best For Owners of iPhones or iPads who like to keep things traditional



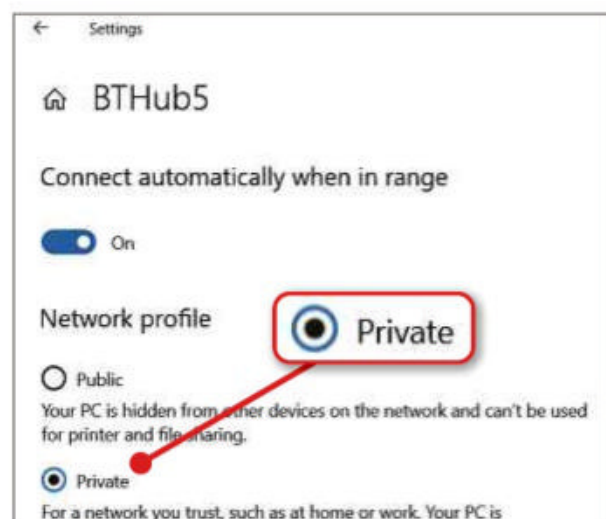
*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 10

Check your computer's network visibility

When you connect a new computer to your home network, Windows will ask you whether you want to make it visible to other computers. We wouldn't blame you for declining this offer, but it actually just means it'll be visible to other computers on your home network – letting you share files, folders and printers.

You can check (and, if necessary, change) this setting by clicking the Wi-Fi icon (an icon of a computer if you're on a wired network) in the system tray, then clicking the Properties link for the network you're connected to. If the network you selected is your home network, select Private in the 'Network profile' section (see screenshot below). However, if you're using a public network such as a Wi-Fi hotspot, make sure it's set to Public – this means other people using the same network won't see your computer, nor be able to share files and folders with you.



WINDOWS 7, 8.1 & 10

Kick people off your PC

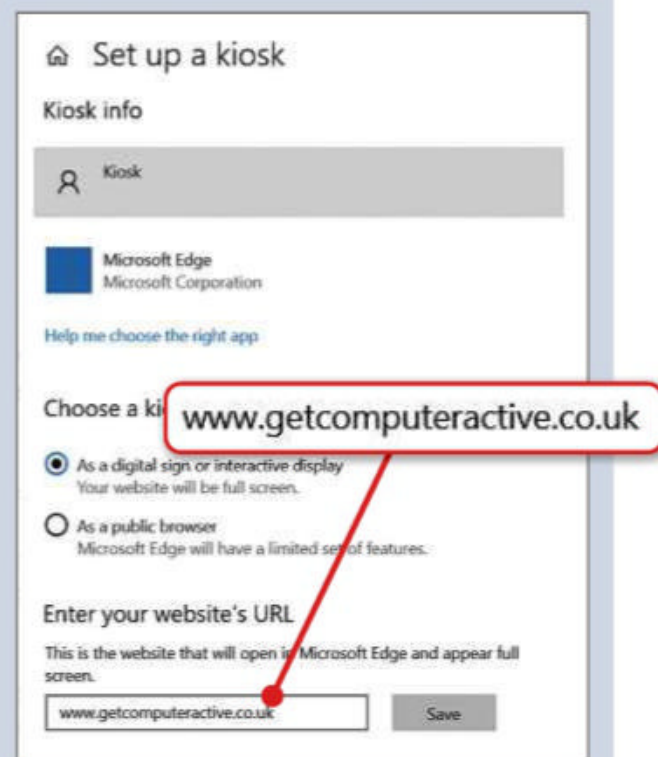
Windows lets you create different accounts for everyone who uses your computer. However, if people forget to sign out, their account will continue using valuable system resources (such as your processor and memory), slowing down Windows as a result. If you're logged in as an administrator, you can sign out of these accounts yourself. Press Ctrl+Shift+Escape to open Task Manager, then select the Users tab. You'll now see all accounts that are currently logged in, including your own. To see what programs are running in a specific account, click it once. You can then close individual programs (right-click the program, then select 'End task') or sign the user out completely (right-click their

WINDOWS 10

Restrict your computer to a single website

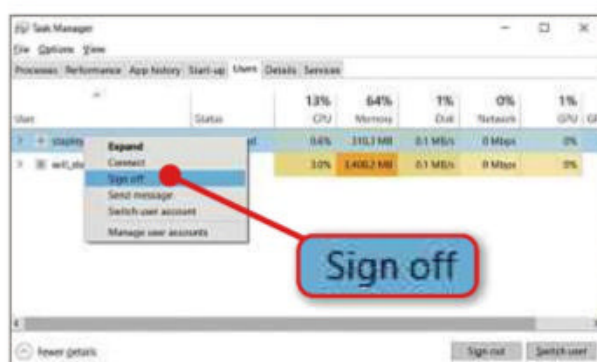
Windows 10 includes a hidden tool that locks the operating system to a single program or website – perfect if you want to let people use your computer at a local event (such as to browse a specific website) without giving them full access to your files and other programs. It's called Kiosk mode and is available only in the Pro version of Windows 10. To set it up, open Settings (press the Windows key+I), then go to System, Accounts and select the 'Other users' tab. From here, scroll to the 'Set up a kiosk' section, click 'Assigned access', then 'Get started'.

You'll now be prompted to create a new user account with which you'll launch the Kiosk mode, then select which app you want to provide restricted access to. To restrict your computer to one website instead, select Microsoft Edge, then choose 'As a digital sign or interactive display' and enter the URL of your site. You'll now



see an overview of your settings. Make sure you entered the correct URL (see screenshot), then press the Windows key+L and log into your new Assigned Access user account. Edge will now display your chosen website in full-screen mode. People using the computer will be able to click on links within the site, but they won't be able to load other websites nor access any other apps or settings on your computer.

To exit Kiosk mode, press Ctrl+Alt+Delete and you'll be returned to the Windows login screen.



username, then select 'Sign off' – see screenshot above). Bear in mind ending tasks and signing out users in this way risks any of their unsaved data being lost.

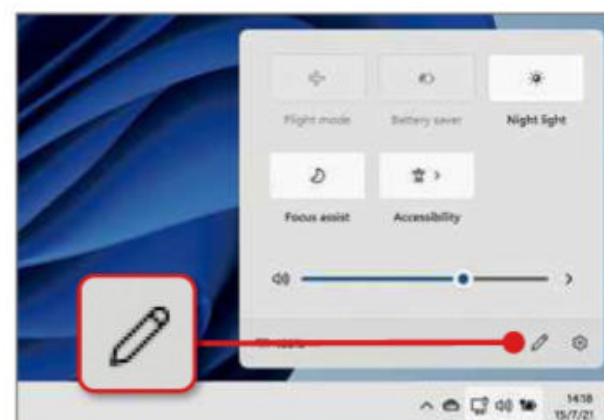
WINDOWS 11

Set your quick settings

Windows 11 won't be officially released until later this year, but you can download the preview version right now. We highlighted the major new features in Issue 610's Cover Feature (including how to download and install the preview release on a virtual PC – see page 55), but there are plenty more features to get used to – including a


redesigned Quick Settings window. To access this in Windows 11, press the Windows key+A. In the window that appears, you'll find buttons to turn on battery-saver mode, use a selection of Accessibility tools (see page 60 for more on these) and select which speakers to activate (click the '>' to the right of the volume slider).

You can add more controls to the Quick Settings window by clicking the pen icon in the bottom-right corner (see screenshot below), while the cog icon takes you to the main Settings app in Windows 11.



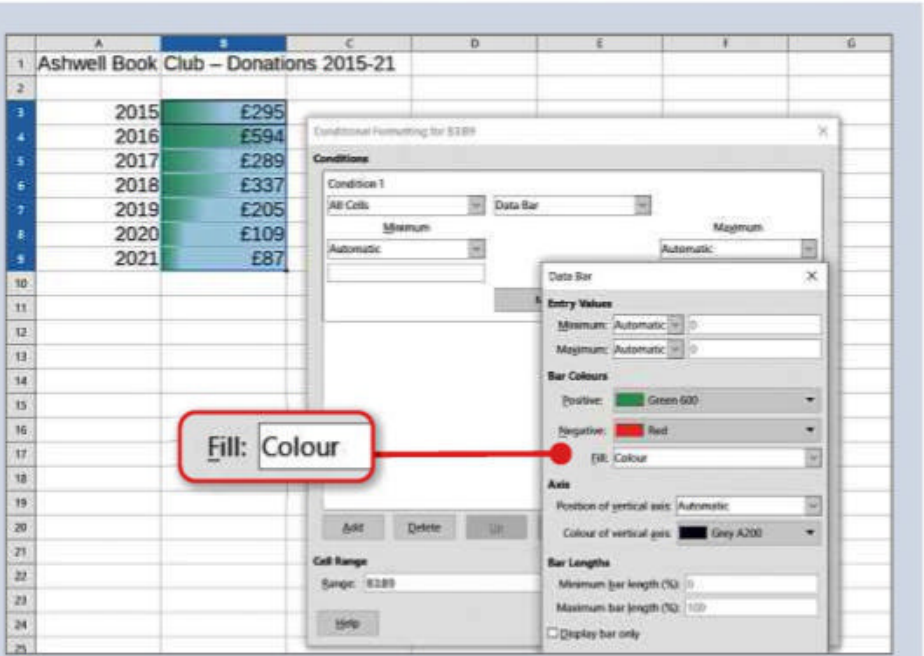
MICROSOFT EXCEL & LIBREOFFICE CALC

Add data bars to cells

 Charts can help you visualise data, but they also take up room on your spreadsheet. Both Excel and Calc let you use ‘data bars’ to visualise data within the relevant cell, taking up less space. In our example, we want to see how fundraising for our local club has fared over the past few years.

To create the data bars in Calc, we select the total donation amount for each year, open the Format menu, select Conditional, ‘Data Bar...’, then click OK. It’s easier in Excel – once you’ve selected the relevant cells, click the Quick Analysis box that appears at the bottom-right corner of the cells, then select Data Bars.

Each cell in your selection will now display a bar relating to the number in it. If you change the value in a cell, the bar will update accordingly. By default, Calc displays bars that fade out



towards the right edge. If you prefer solid bars (as in Excel), right-click your selection, click ‘Conditional Formatting...’, ‘More Options...’, then click the box in the Fill section and select Colour (see screenshot).

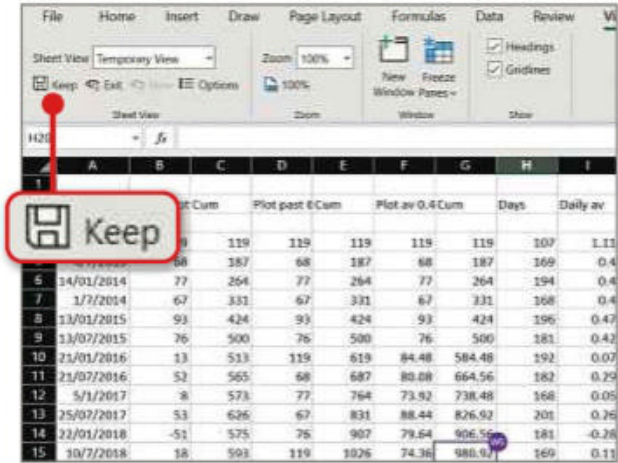
MICROSOFT EXCEL

Hide images and charts


 When you’re working on a spreadsheet that’s full of graphs and images, it can be hard to focus on the data in each cell. Microsoft Excel lets you hide these items while you’re editing your spreadsheet, then make them visible once you’ve finished.

To use this feature, open the Selection window by clicking the Home tab, followed by the down arrow next to ‘Find & Select’ at the far right of the toolbar, then ‘Selection Pane...’ (or press Alt+F10). The Selection Pane will now open, displaying all items in your spreadsheet. To hide an item, click the eye icon to the right of it (see screenshot below); clicking this a second time makes the item visible. Alternatively, click Hide All to conceal all items on the page, then Show All to make them reappear.

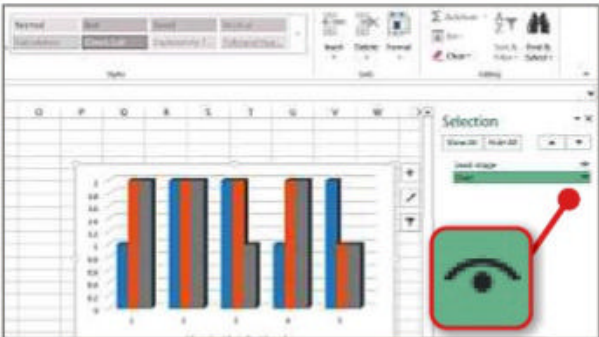
If you have a lot of items on your spreadsheet, you may find it helpful to rename them. To do this, select the item in the Selection Pane, then click it a second time and type a name of your choice. You can also remove an item from your spreadsheet by selecting it, then pressing Delete.



MICROSOFT EXCEL
Create a ‘temporary’ view to see only important data

 When you’re working on a shared spreadsheet, it can be confusing when the order of cells keeps changing as others manipulate the data using filters. Microsoft Excel lets you create a ‘temporary’ view of the spreadsheet so you see only the data that’s important to you. Note that this feature is available only in ‘Excel for the web’ (www.office.com – you’ll need a free Microsoft account) and Excel 2019. The latter requires a Microsoft 365 subscription.

Open your shared spreadsheet, then select the View tab and click New in the Sheet View section of the toolbar (the row and column borders will turn black, indicating you’re using a temporary view). You can now use filters and other sorting tools to manipulate the data, without other users seeing your changes. Also, you won’t see any filtering being applied by your collaborators. However, any changes you or other users make to the actual contents of cells (including




adding and removing cells) *will* be seen by everyone.

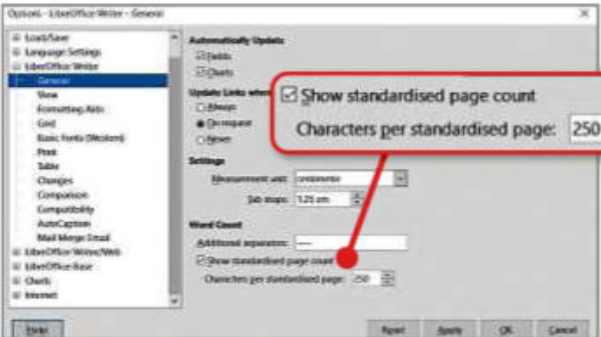
Once you’ve finished, leave the temporary view by clicking the Exit button in the Sheet View section of the toolbar. If you’re likely to return to your temporary view at a later date, first click Keep (see screenshot left), then give it a name.

LIBREOFFICE WRITER

Find out how many printed sheets your document needs

 LibreOffice Writer lets you quickly see how many words your document contains (open the Tools menu, then select ‘Word Count...’). If you’re intending to print the document as a booklet, you can use a hidden feature that lets you also see how many sheets the text is likely to take up when printed.

Open the Options window (press Alt+F12), expand the LibreOffice Writer section, then select General. In the Word Count section, tick the ‘Show standardised page count’ box, then enter the number of words per page you’d prefer (we’ve opted for 250 – see screenshot below). When you next open the Word Count window, you’ll see the estimated number of pages at the bottom.



In The Club



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

Set up an online to-do list for members

An online to-do list will help you to run your club more efficiently and remind members of tasks that still need to be done. There are plenty of free tools available for putting these together – here we explain how to use three of the best.

Gmail Tasks

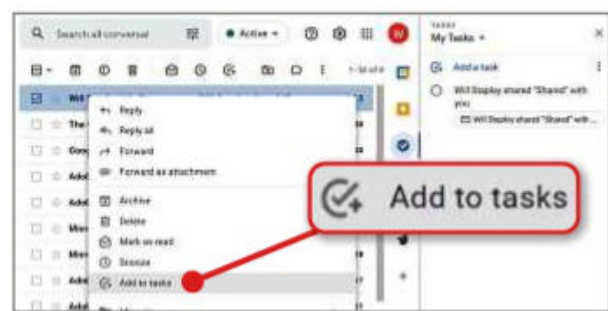


It's hidden away, but Tasks is a simple to-do tool that you can access from your Gmail inbox.

Unlike the two other tools we cover here, you can't share tasks with other people. However, as long as your club has its own Gmail account, anyone with access to that will be able to review, create and complete tasks.

To use it, click the Tasks icon (a pen next to an orange circle) on the right-hand side of the Gmail window – if you can't see it, click the '<' button in the bottom-right corner. Next, click 'Add a task', then enter a name for the task, along with any additional details in the box below (click 'Date/time' to set a reminder).

Your task will now appear in a list below. Once you've completed it, click the circle to its right. You can also create tasks from the emails in your inbox – right-click an email, select 'Add to tasks' (see screenshot below) and a new task will be created and named using the email's subject line.



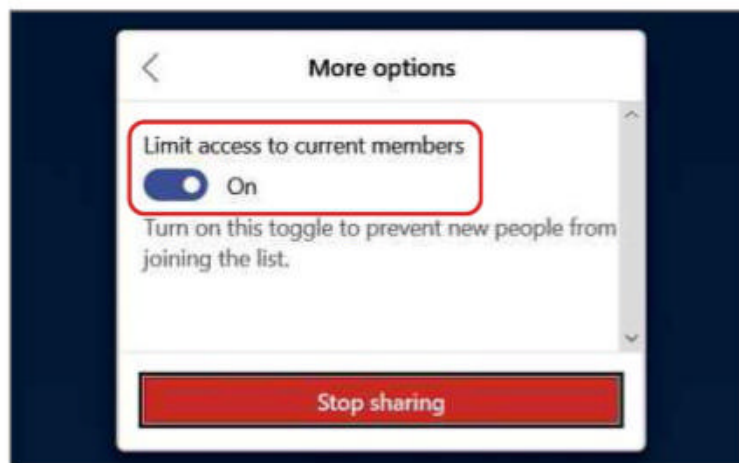
Gmail Tasks lets you create a task based on an email in your inbox

Microsoft To Do



Last year, Microsoft closed Wunderlist – a popular to-do list tool it had bought five years previously. Although this angered fans of the tool, its replacement, Microsoft To Do, has many of the same features.

It works across all devices, so your club



Once all your members have joined your Microsoft To Do list, you can stop new people joining by switching on this slider

members will be able to access it on their PC, laptop, phone and tablet (download the apps from <https://todo.microsoft.com>).

It's also very easy to use. Click 'New list' at the bottom of the menu on the left, then give it a name. You can share the list by clicking the Share button (icon of two silhouettes, top right), copying the link, then emailing it to your club's members. The number under the Share button indicates how many people have joined the list – click this button to see their email addresses or remove them from the group.

If you no longer want to share the list, click 'Manage access', then Stop Sharing. Alternatively, set the 'Limit access to...' slider to On (see screenshot above) to keep your existing members while preventing new people joining the list.

You can add details to each task by selecting it in the list and entering text in the 'Add note' section at the bottom. Click 'Assign to' to delegate that task to a specific member (their initials will then appear next to the item in the list). You can also set reminders for each item, add a due date and mark them as being high priority (by clicking the star icon).

Trello



When you're organising a large club event, you'll need something more powerful than Gmail Tasks or Microsoft To Do. We recommend Trello (www.trello.com). Once you've created a Trello board for your club (click Boards, then 'Create new board...'), you can then add several lists to it, each of which can contain a selection of 'cards' (think of

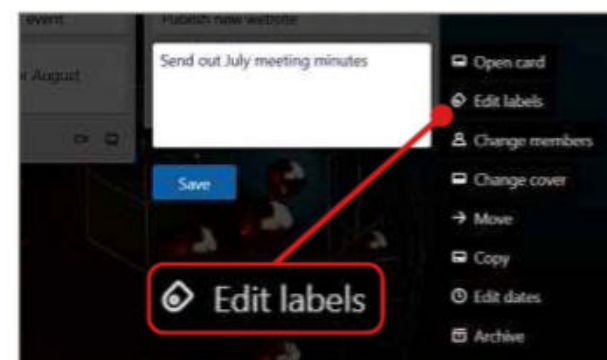
these as your to-do list items). You can then assign each card to a specific member and drag them to different lists as appropriate.

For example, you could have lists of Assigned, In-Progress and Done, then move to-do items along these as they progress. If you have a lot of items, it's worth using labels to colour-code them – click an item, select 'Edit labels' (see screenshot below), then give your label a name and assign it a colour.

To share your Trello board, click the Invite button at the top, then enter an email address or click 'Create link' and share it with your club members.

Earlier this year, Trello added a range of new features that let you see your tasks in different ways (such as in a timeline or on a calendar – click the Board button to see all options). However, you'll need a Business licence to use these, which costs from £9 per month.

For a more in-depth guide on how to use Trello, see Issue 567 (page 48) or take a look at the online help at www.snipca.com/38945.



Manage large projects in Trello by assigning items to several lists and colour-coding them with labels

What's All the Fuss About...



Clippy

It looks like you want a background to your video chat – need some help?

What is it?

Surely you haven't forgotten Clippy? Officially named Clippit, it was the animated paperclip in versions of Office and Windows between 1997 and 2004. It would recognise what you were doing – such as typing 'Dear' when writing a letter – and pop up with messages designed to assist you: "It looks like you're writing a letter. Would you like help?" Poor Clippy was meant to be friendly and accessible, but users found it intensely annoying. It's now widely regarded as one of the worst features in the history of computing.

Ah yes, I had blanked out the horror. Did Microsoft realise its mistake?

Yes, pretty sharpish. Microsoft thought that because humans shouted at their computers as though they were actually alive, they would be soothed by seeing a human-like character offering assistance. But users grew tired of Clippy's constant interference, while some women even complained about its 'leering' eyes (users overwhelmingly saw Clippy as male).

Microsoft quickly accepted defeat, and tried to turn this adverse reaction into a marketing tool by promoting Office XP with the website www.officeclippy.com (now offline), which explained how to turn off Clippy. The unloved paperclip limped on for a few more years, and hasn't been seen since 'Microsoft Office for Mac' was launched in 2004.

Then why are we talking about it?

Because Microsoft is using it as one of four "nostalgic" backgrounds for its Teams tool in Windows 11.

Teams? What's that again?

It's a tool for groups of people – or 'teams' – to work together, aimed at businesses that have a lot of staff working from home. Microsoft has prioritised the tool during the Covid pandemic, adding new video, chat and file-sharing features to help make remote working more productive. This strategy has proved



hugely successful. In March, 32 million people used Teams; now it's 145 million. It's going to be a big part of Windows 11, Microsoft has said, with the option to make calls built into the taskbar. This focus on Teams is the reason why Microsoft plans to exclude Skype from Windows 11 (though you'll still be able to install it from the Microsoft Store).

So what's Clippy got to do with Teams?

Nothing. Which is why it's rather odd that Microsoft has resurrected the tool as a Teams background. It presumably thinks Clippy is seen as such a joke among users that people will enjoy

appearing in front of it during video chats. We're not convinced though, given that many of those who use Teams were barely out of nappies when it was introduced. They may never have seen a *real* paperclip, let alone an animated one.

Is that the background above?

Yes. Clippy looks rather embarrassed to have reappeared. The other three backgrounds (all captured on Microsoft's blog www.snipca.com/38915) also celebrate tools that have either gone or perhaps seen better days: Solitaire, Paint and the default Windows XP wallpaper (called 'Bliss', pictured below left), to which Microsoft has now added a "dappling of dandelions". Remember it?

Indeed. We can't see it without hearing XP's plinkety-plonk start-up sound. Can I use these backgrounds now?

Yes. Click the link at the end of the blog and sign up for a free Teams account, then follow Microsoft's instructions (www.snipca.com/38918). You can also use them in Skype (www.snipca.com/38919). Feel free to email us if you get stuck. We'll promise to be more help than an irritating animated paperclip.



XP's original wallpaper, now with added dandelions

STOP USING CHROME & EDGE



Don't settle for one of the big-name browsers just because Google and Microsoft want you to. Robert Irvine explains why you should ditch their tools for smarter, faster and more private alternatives

With more than 3.2 billion users and a 69 per cent share of the desktop browser market (www.snipca.com/38829),

Google's Chrome is by far the world's favourite means of accessing the web. Microsoft Edge lags a long way behind, with an 8.1 per cent share, but since its relaunch as a Chromium-based browser in January 2020, it's steadily gaining

ground and has overtaken Firefox as the most popular Chrome alternative on Windows PCs (on macOS, unsurprisingly, Apple's Safari reigns supreme).

Both Chrome and Edge are easy to use, offer thousands of useful extensions and let you sync your bookmarks, passwords and browsing history across PCs, laptops and mobile devices. Why would you even consider using anything else to get online?

Well, as we explain in this feature, there are actually lots of reasons to ditch these two browsers that go beyond "I don't trust Google" or "I don't like Microsoft". Despite their popularity, both browsers are deeply flawed, in ways that we'll explain in detail, and have failed to fix persistent problems, while creating new ones for their users.

Happily, there's never been a better time to switch to a different and superior browser, such as the quality and variety

of options on offer – from the ad-blocking champion Brave to the feature-packed Vivaldi, not forgetting the original upstarts Firefox and Opera, both of which remain excellent alternatives.

For every flaw you'll find in Chrome and Edge – from dubious data collection to lack of innovation – there are now several browsers that address those problems and provide many benefits and uniquely useful features. We reveal and review the leading contenders on page 56.

Of course, we're not suggesting that you never use Chrome or Edge again, or you'll risk some websites not working properly, losing data-sync features and receiving slower security updates. But trying a new browser can enhance your online experience in ways you've never imagined, and help you break free from the stranglehold that Google and Microsoft exert on the web.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Block ads and trackers without having to install extensions
- Stop Google and Microsoft tracking you and gathering your data
- Switch to a browser that consumes less memory and power
- Transfer your bookmarks and passwords to a new browser

WHY YOU SHOULD STOP USING CHROME & EDGE

They bombard you with annoying ads

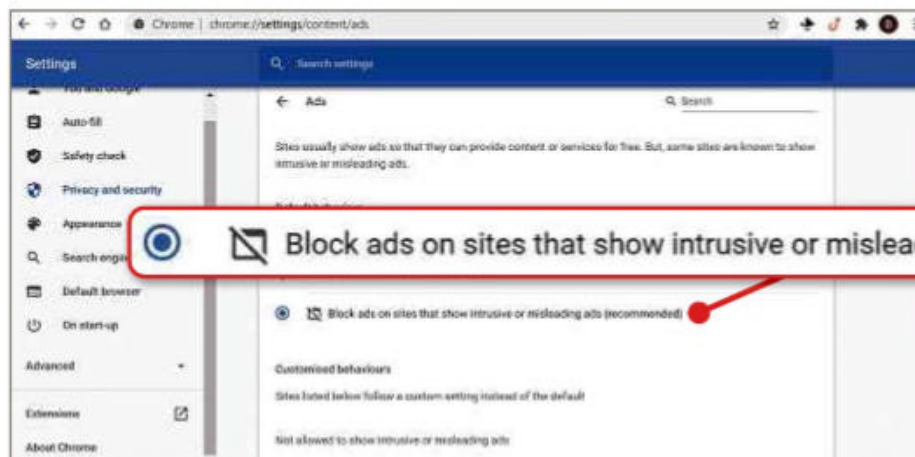
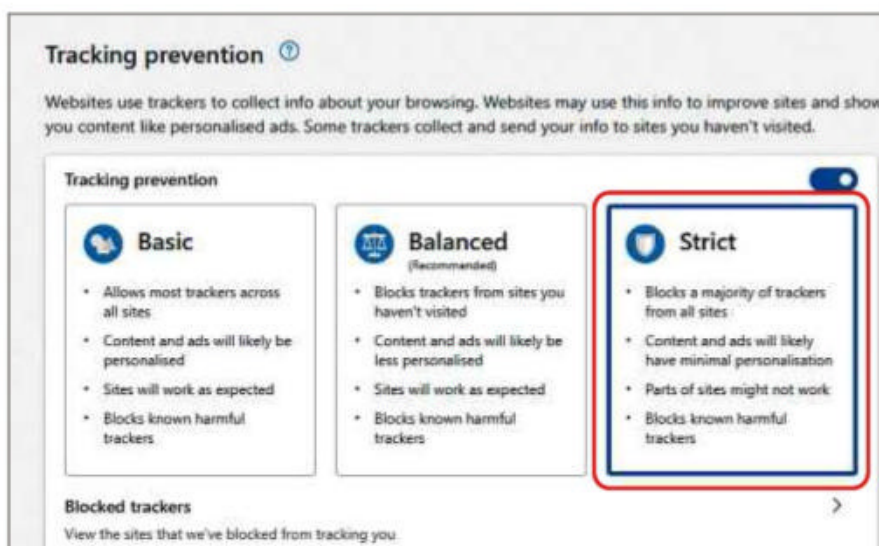
Google added an ad blocker to Chrome in 2018, but it's buried deep in Settings. To see it, click the three dots top right, followed by Settings, 'Privacy and security' then 'Site settings'. Next, scroll down and click 'Additional content settings', followed by Ads. Here you'll see the option to 'Block ads on sites that show intrusive or misleading ads' (see screenshot right).

However, you'd be forgiven for not noticing this feature because it's far from effective – in fact you're likely to see as many online adverts as ever. Google makes most of its money from advertising, so it's not in the company's interest to provide its own alternative to ad-blocking **add-ons** such as uBlock Origin (www.snipca.com/38558) and Adblock Plus (<https://adblockplus.org>).

Most YouTube videos these days have at least one ad before, after and even during playback, particularly when you're watching in Chrome. This suggests to us that the browser's so-called ad blocker is merely a means of forcing websites to adhere to Google's advertising standards – preferably by moving to its Google Ads business platform.

As we'll explain shortly, there are several browsers with far more effective ad blockers, but Edge isn't one of them. Microsoft's browser has the same ineffective option as Chrome to 'Block sites that show intrusive or misleading ads', though you can bolster its ad filtering by switching to 'Strict' tracking prevention. Click the three-dot button in the top-right corner of Edge, choose Settings and select 'Privacy, search and services' in the left-hand column. Select 'Strict' under 'Tracking prevention' (see screenshot below) to display fewer adverts.

Block more ads in Edge by switching its tracking prevention to Strict



Chrome's so-called ad blocker is useless at filtering the majority of online ads

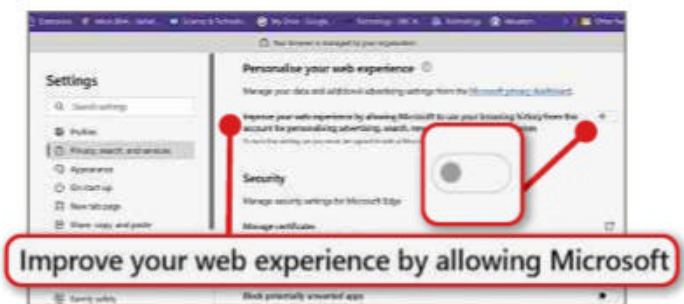
They share your browsing data with Google and Microsoft

We're sure you're aware that Google gathers your data as you browse the web, but you may not realise how much information Chrome secretly shares with the internet.

Even if you don't use the browser's Sync feature, which saves data including your bookmarks, browsing history, passwords and contact details to Google's servers, Chrome still extracts your personal information in the background. This lets Google and its commercial partners target you with ads based on your interests and activities – unless you change specific privacy settings in Chrome.

You can find some of these options by going to Settings, 'Sync and Google services', then 'Other Google services'. Settings you may want to disable include 'Make searches and browsing better' (this shares details of every web page you visit with Google); 'Allow Chrome sign-in' (signs you into Chrome when you use Google services such as Gmail, Maps and YouTube); and 'Help improve Chrome's features and performance' (this sends Google statistical data about how you use the browser).

Additionally, in the Sync section, click 'Control how your browsing history is used to personalise Search, ads and more' and turn off the option 'Include Chrome



Turn off this slider to stop Microsoft using your browser history to show personalised adverts

history and activity from sites, apps and devices that use Google services'. This will prevent Google from using your browsing activity to target you with ads – in theory, at least.

Also remember that although Chrome's **Incognito mode** stops the browser storing details of the things you search for and the sites you visit, this information is still shared with Google. The only way to stop this happening is to switch to a more private browser.

Edge doesn't extract as much of your personal data as Chrome, and doesn't collect your info in its InPrivate mode, but it still shares details of your browsing activities with Microsoft. This is done to personalise advertising and to keep the browser "secure, up to date and performing as expected", which you may regard as an invasion of your privacy.

To limit the data that Edge shares, go to Settings, then 'Privacy, search and services' and disable the options 'Improve your web experience by allowing Microsoft to use your browsing history from this account...' (see screenshot above) and 'Help improve Microsoft products by sending optional diagnostic data...' (these may already be switched off if you've previously tweaked Windows 10's privacy settings).

Microsoft does let you delete browsing info Edge has collected, but it's a well-hidden option that requires a lot of clicking. Instead take a shortcut to www.snipca.com/38905 and follow Microsoft's instructions.

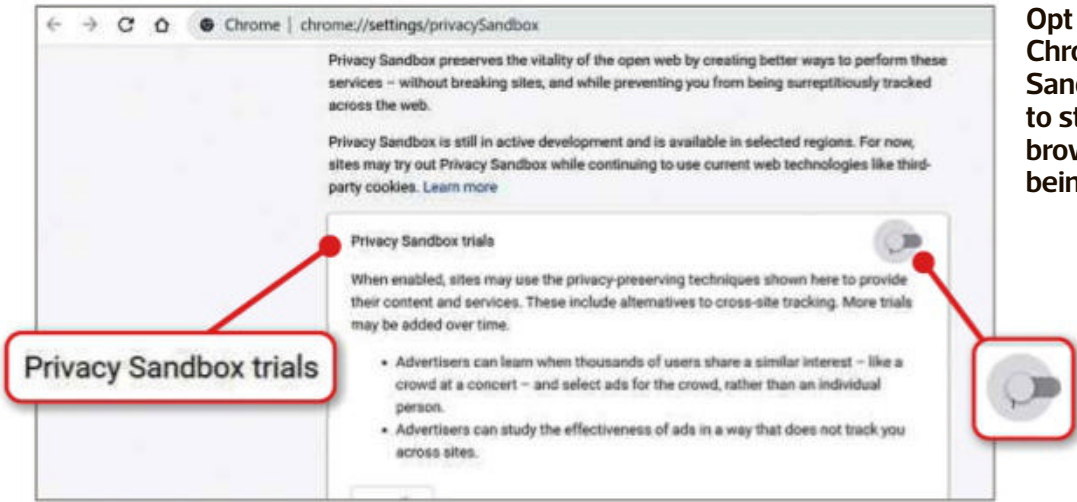
They don't block trackers as well as they claim to

Both Chrome and Edge claim to protect your privacy online by blocking third-party cookies that track you around the web. In truth, their tracking protection falls far short of that offered by rival browsers, as we'll explain later.

Because Google's business model is based on data monitoring, Chrome's treatment of web trackers is predictably self-serving and will soon become even more weighted in its own favour. Google is planning to drop support for third-party cookies in Chrome and replace it with a new tracking system called FLoC (Federated Learning of Cohorts), as part of its Privacy Sandbox initiative (www.snipca.com/38779). This controversial change will allow Chrome to build its own profile based on your browsing activities, which it will share with advertisers so they can show you relevant ads. Google believes that FLoC offers greater privacy than cookies, because it groups you with other Chrome users who have similar interests, rather than using unique identifiers.

However, the system's many critics – including DuckDuckGo, Brave and the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) – warn that it will share your data automatically with companies that pay Google for the privilege, and this is unlikely to be completely anonymous (www.snipca.com/38791). Following this criticism, Google has delayed the rollout of FLoC until 2023, but it's already available in Chrome as part of the 'Privacy Sandbox' trial. Go to Settings, 'Privacy and security', select Privacy Sandbox, then switch off the 'Privacy Sandbox trials' option in the central pane (see screenshot above right).

Microsoft has no plans to introduce FLoC in Edge, but by default the browser is set to use 'Balanced' tracking prevention, which blocks tracking cookies only from sites you haven't



Opt out of Chrome's Privacy Sandbox trial to stop your browsing data being tracked

visited. You can boost your protection by switching this to Strict, as explained earlier.

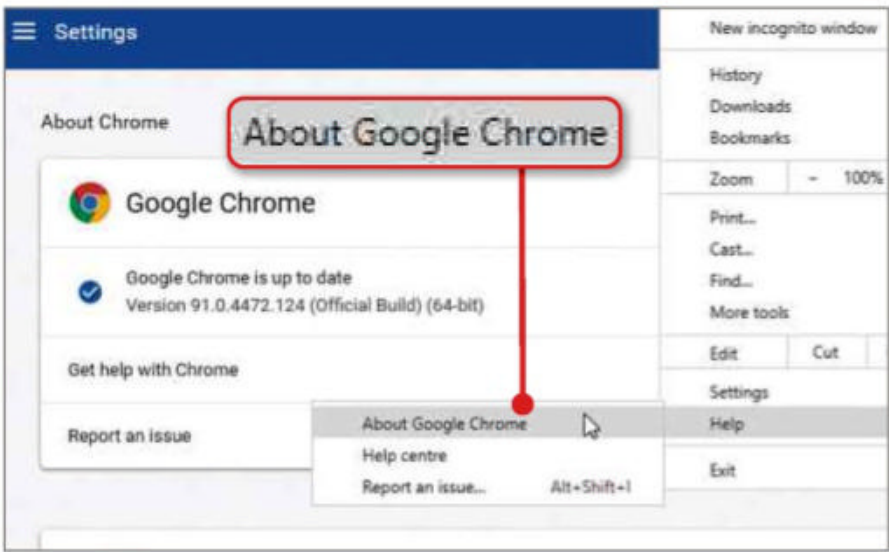
They suffer frequent security flaws

You'd expect the world's most popular browsers, from two of the world's biggest companies, to offer the most reliable protection against hackers, but Chrome and Edge are frequently found to contain serious security flaws. So far this year, Google has rushed to fix at least seven 'zero-day vulnerabilities' in Chrome (these are software security flaws exploited by attackers before the program's developers know about them).

Edge is much more secure than Microsoft's previous browser, Internet Explorer, but is also susceptible to worrying flaws. For example, in June Microsoft patched a vulnerability that could have allowed hackers to inject and run malicious code in any website via Edge's Translate feature (www.snipca.com/38793).

Of course, other browsers suffer security flaws, and because many are now Chromium-based they may even have the same vulnerabilities as Chrome, but the popularity of Google's and Microsoft's browsers makes them a more lucrative target for hackers. It's therefore essential to keep both up to date: select About Google Chrome (see screenshot below) or About Microsoft Edge from the Help section in the main browser menu to install any pending updates.

Click 'About Google Chrome' to update the browser and protect it against security flaws



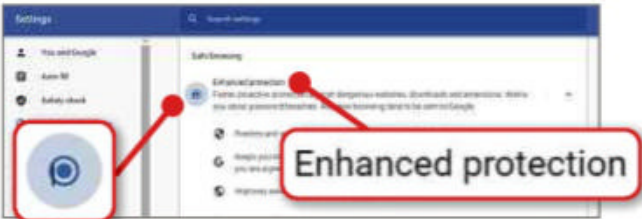
They allow dodgy extensions

Last December, cybersecurity company Avast identified malware in 28 extensions for Chrome and Edge. These could "redirect user's traffic to ads or phishing sites and steal people's personal data" (www.snipca.com/38794). Concerns have also been raised about fake reviews in the Chrome Web Store, which trick users into installing imitations of official browser tools (www.snipca.com/38796).

Extensions are vetted before they're allowed into the stores, but the trouble arises when they're subsequently updated with malicious code that goes unnoticed by Google and Microsoft. This carelessness means that users only learn that their data may have been stolen after the fact.

For some reason, Chrome leaves protection against this risk disabled by default. To turn on Enhanced Safe Browsing, go to Settings, 'Privacy and security', then click Security and select 'Enhanced protection' under Safe Browsing (see screenshot below). In Edge, ensure that 'Microsoft Defender SmartScreen' and 'Block potentially unwanted apps' are enabled on the 'Privacy, search and services' page.

Other Chromium-based browsers let you install potentially risky extensions. But they also offer built-in features, such as VPNs, ad blockers and tab managers, that mean you don't actually need to install so many extensions. Brave, for example, makes you think twice before installing an add-on by warning that you should "only install this extension if you trust the developer", while Vivaldi devotes a section of its forum to the discussion of reliable extensions (www.snipca.com/38797).



Turn on 'Enhanced protection' in Chrome to safeguard against dangerous extensions



Chrome is a notorious memory hog

It's no secret that Chrome uses a lot of system resources – just open Windows Task Manager (right-click the taskbar and select it) and you'll probably see the program at the top of the list for processor and memory usage.

On our PC, it consumes nearly a quarter of the available RAM – 1,734MB of 8GB – across 30 separate processes (see screenshot above right). This is because Chrome uses a separate background process for every tab, plug-in and extension, which is useful if one crashes because it won't affect the others, but adds up to a big strain on your system resources.

Other browsers can also be memory hogs, particularly Firefox. However, as you can also see from our screenshot, Edge's memory usage is less than half of Chrome's when we opened the same tabs in both browsers, and Brave uses even

Process	CPU	Memory	Private	Working Set	Page Faults/sec	IO	Network	Score
Google Chrome (30)	4.3%	1,733.4 MB	0.1 MB/s	0.1 MB/s	Moderate			
Microsoft Edge (40)	0%	845.8 MB	0 MB/s	0 MB/s	Very low			
Brave Browser (26)	0.1%	712.1 MB	0 MB/s	0 MB/s	Very low			
Antimalware Service Executable	0%	120.1 MB	0 MB/s	0 MB/s	Very low			
Task Manager	0.6%	34.4 MB	0 MB/s	0 MB/s	Very low			
Windows Explorer	0.4%	29.3 MB	0 MB/s	0 MB/s	Very low			

Chrome takes up a massive 1,734MB (1.7GB) of our PC's 8GB of RAM

fewer resources. They also demand less processing power – just 0.1 per cent of our CPU compared with Chrome's 4.3 per cent share – which means they won't run down your laptop battery.

They lack the best tools of rival browsers

Chrome was once regarded as the cutting-edge alternative to the staid Internet Explorer. But these days, it seems merely to copy other browsers, and even then it's

slow to do so. For example, Chrome recently added the option to place related tabs in groups, which Vivaldi introduced in 2016. Meanwhile, its 'Reader mode' for decluttering web pages, which comes as standard in most browsers, remains hidden on its Experiments page (type `chrome://flags` in the URL address bar, then type `Reader Mode` in the search box at the top and change the box from Default to Enabled). Chrome doesn't even have a proper dark mode or picture-in-picture for viewing videos in a floating window, both features long offered by Opera, Firefox and Vivaldi.

Edge also lacks many tools offered by the browsers covered in our next section, and it hasn't significantly improved since its Chromium relaunch last year. Also, because it's owned by a huge corporation and tightly integrated with Windows, it will always lag behind nimbler rivals such as Brave and Vivaldi.

WHICH BROWSER SHOULD YOU USE INSTEAD?

Brave

<https://brave.com>



What we like

Although Brave is based on the same Chromium code as Chrome and Edge, and has a familiar, easy-to-use interface, in other ways it couldn't be more different – in that it has none of their flaws. Brave automatically blocks ads, doesn't spy on your browsing history and regularly adds useful features without sacrificing speed. In fact, Brave loads pages with impressive speed and filters unnecessary elements to give you a cleaner, smoother browsing experience.

Its powerful Shields system includes an ad and tracker blocker, which can be boosted with additional filter lists, as well

as options for blocking harmful scripts, fingerprinting (which lets websites identify you), social-media widgets and either all cookies or only those that follow you. It also blocks Google's controversial new FLoC tracking system (see page 52).

We love that Brave's New Tab page 'dashboard' displays the number of trackers and ads (1 in our screenshot below) it has blocked so far, as well as the amount of bandwidth (2) and time (3) it has saved you. If you have problems loading a website, you can switch shields on or off, or tweak their settings, by clicking the lion logo at the right of your address bar (4).

Brave's private mode goes much further

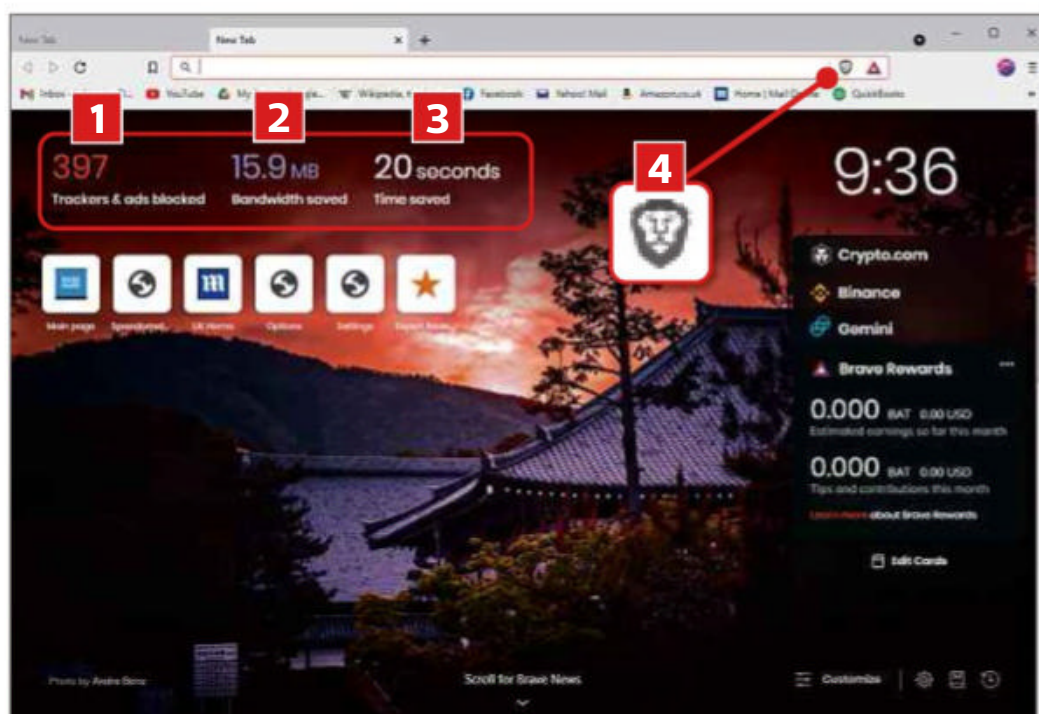
than Chrome's and Edge's by offering anonymous web access through the Tor network. This not only conceals your browsing history, but also hides your location from the sites you visit by routing your connection through several servers, so that nobody can see where you are or what you do. Simply press Alt+Shift+N to open a private Tor window or click the top-right menu button and choose 'New private window with Tor'.

Even in standard browsing mode, Brave automatically switches to the HTTPS encrypted versions of websites (see box on page 57 for more on this), while a recent update adds the new Brave Search search engine (<https://brave.com/search>). Similar to DuckDuckGo (which Brave uses in Tor mode), this lets you search the web without being tracked or targeted by advertisers.

Switch to Brave Search by right-clicking the address/search bar and choosing 'Manage search engines'. In the middle of the page that appears, click the three dots to the right of Brave and select 'Make default' (see screenshot at the top of page 55).

We should point out that, although Brave does a brilliant job of blocking ads – especially on YouTube – it also has its own opt-in advertising system called Brave Rewards. Unlike FLoC in Chrome, this isn't a means of making money from your personal data, but lets you support your favourite websites and content

Brave tells you how many ads and trackers it's blocked since you started using the browser



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creators by giving them tokens you earn by viewing ‘privacy-respecting ads’. Brave Rewards is disabled by default and ignoring it won’t affect how the browser works.

What we don’t like

Brave’s New Tab dashboard contains some elements we could do without, including ‘cards’ showing your Brave Rewards balance and **cryptocurrency** information. Happily, these are easy to remove – just click the three-dot button to the right of the Brave Rewards heading and choose ‘Hide [card]’. Further down the page, there’s a Brave News widget that shows ad-supported news stories – click ‘No thanks’ to remove this. Also, if you don’t want to see sponsored images on your dashboard, click Customize and deselect that option.

Vivaldi

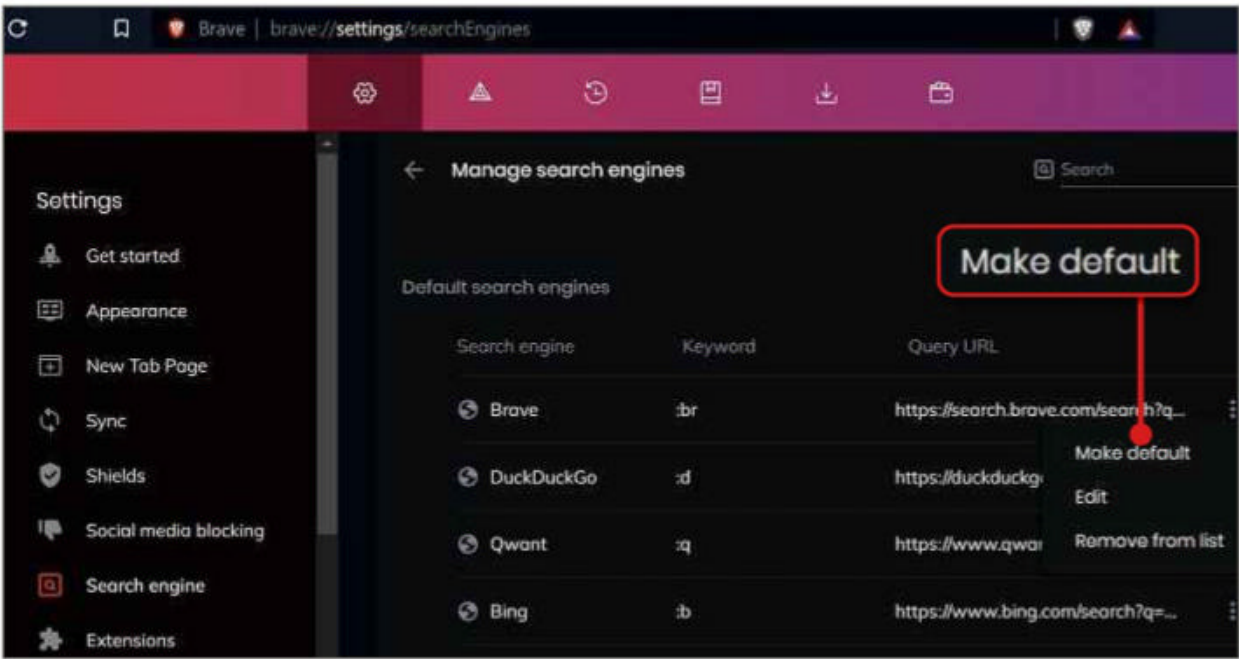
<https://vivaldi.com>



What we like

Vivaldi is a much more innovative and customisable browser than Chrome or Edge. Although it’s not as privacy-focused as Brave, it doesn’t collect or share your data, and offers reliable tracker and ad blocking; to activate this, click the ‘V’ menu button, choose Settings, then Privacy and select ‘Block Trackers and Ads’.

Where Vivaldi trumps every other browser is in its huge choice of features, which saves you installing potentially dodgy extensions from the Chrome Web Store. The latest version, Vivaldi 4,

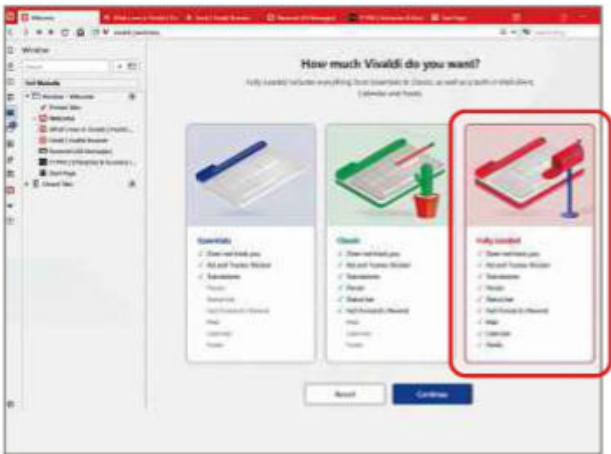


Select ‘Make default’ to search the web in Brave’s new search engine

introduces several major new tools, including an email **client** called Vivaldi Mail, which lets you manage messages from Gmail, Outlook and other mail accounts in a single inbox.

Also new is Vivaldi Feed Reader, which lets you subscribe to **RSS feeds** (a feature long dropped from other browsers) and read them in Vivaldi Mail (see screenshot below); and Vivaldi Translate, a private alternative to Google Translate that translates whole web pages without storing or sharing the details.

We like that when you install or update to Vivaldi 4, you can choose between Essentials, Classic and Fully Loaded modes, depending on the features you need. If you want Mail, Calendar and Feeds, choose Fully Loaded (see screenshot above right) and click Add Mail Account to get started.



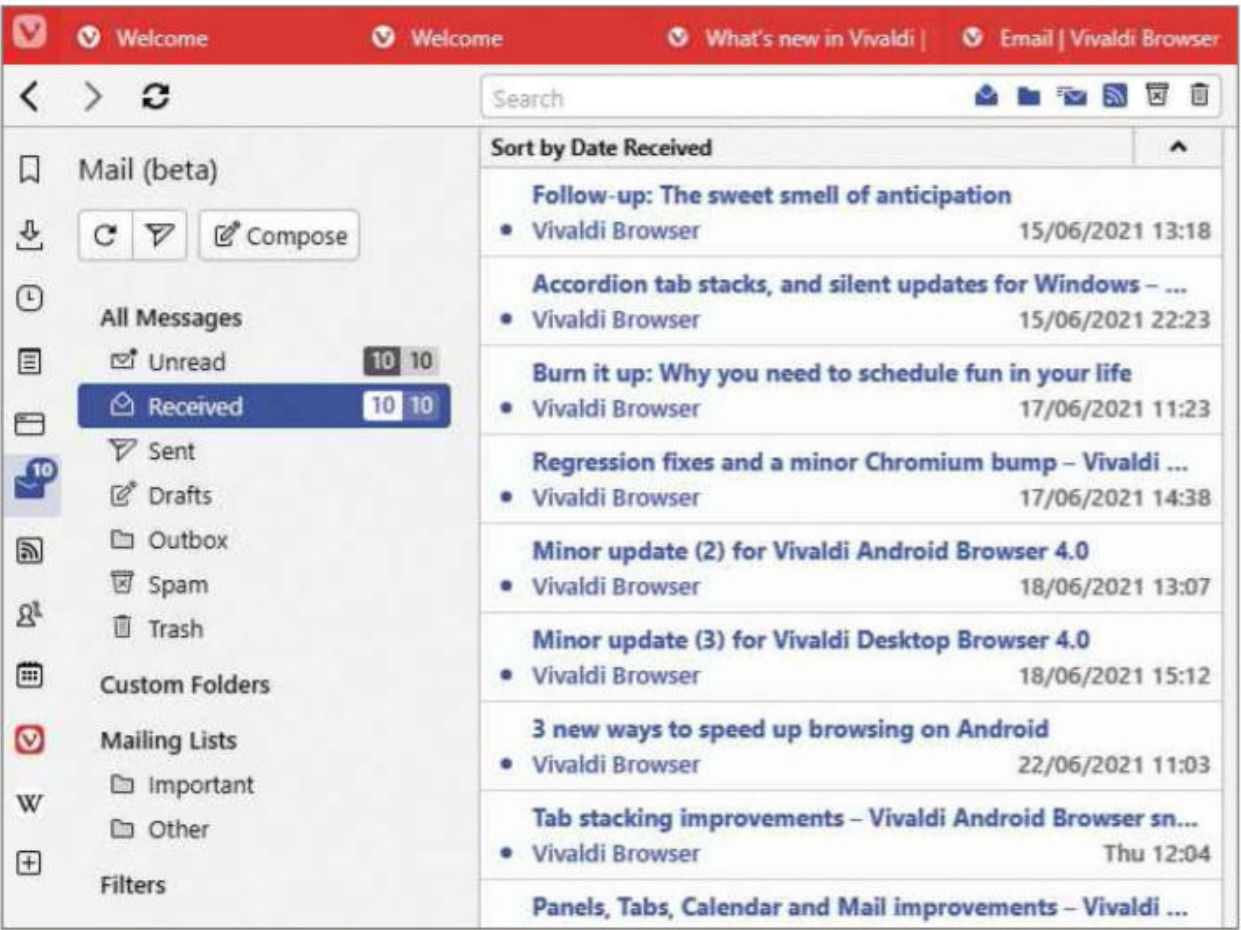
Select the Fully Loaded version of Vivaldi to get all its major features

Other notable tools include stacking and tiling tabs, to easily manage multiple pages; the ability to control the browser using mouse **gestures**; a built-in screen-capture tool; thumbnail previews of tab contents; a choice of stylish themes; syncing of your bookmarks, passwords and settings across devices, and much more.

What we don’t like

Vivaldi comes with several bookmarks and Start Page tiles installed, for companies including Amazon, eBay, YouTube and Booking.com, which you need to remove if you don’t want them. Deleting them is easy – just click the horizontal line at the right of each box. Another box will take its place, which you can also delete in turn until they’ve all gone. You can then add your own sites to this page by clicking the ‘Add New Speed Dial’ box and typing the URL

Its interface is more like Opera than Chrome or Brave, which takes a little getting used to, but the browser’s tidily organised Settings section, handy side panels, comprehensive support pages (<https://help.vivaldi.com>) and friendly community (<https://forum.vivaldi.net>) help to flatten the learning curve.



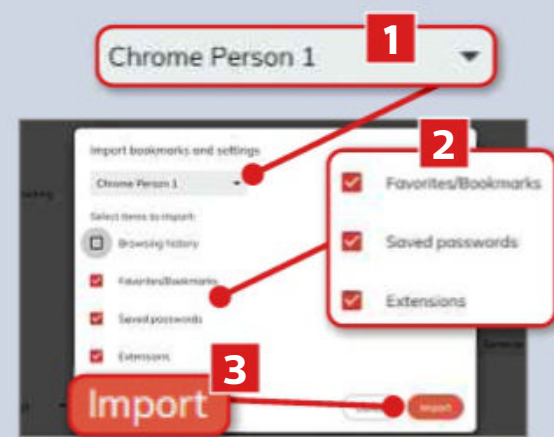
The new Vivaldi Mail client lets you read RSS feeds from websites in your email inbox

WORKSHOP Switch from Chrome to Brave or Vivaldi

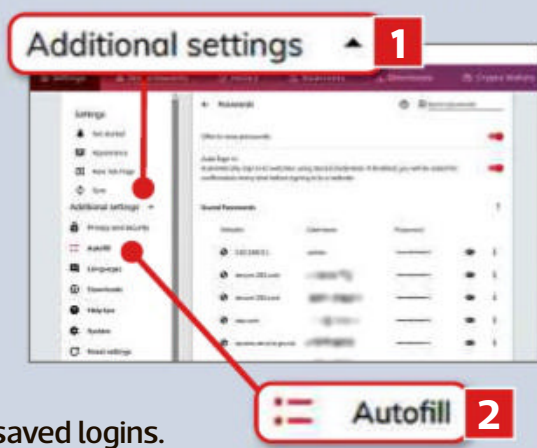
1 Close Chrome if you have it open and launch **Brave**, then click the menu button in the browser's top-right corner. Move your cursor down to **Bookmarks** 1 and select 'Import bookmarks and settings' 2 in the menu that appears.



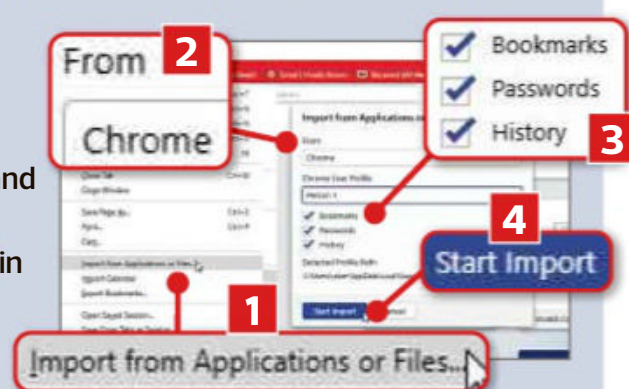
2 When the 'Import bookmarks and settings' box opens, choose your Chrome profile in the list of browsers 1. Select the data you want to import, such as your bookmarks, passwords and extensions 2. Click 'Import' to continue 3.



3 Your imported bookmarks and extensions will appear in Brave in the same places they do in Chrome. To access your passwords, go to Settings, click 'Additional settings' 1 and choose Autofill 2. Click 'Passwords' to view your saved logins.



4 To move to **Vivaldi**, click the 'V' menu button in the top-left corner of the browser and choose 'Import from Applications or Files' 1 in the File menu. Select Chrome in the From menu 2, then select your data 3 and click Start Import 4.



Opera

www.opera.com



What we like

Opera is the original trailblazer. Since it launched 25 years ago, it has introduced all manner of useful features that have subsequently been copied by other browsers. These include Speed Dial tiles, tabbed browsing and pop-up blocking, and it continues to quietly innovate while Chrome and Edge grab all the attention.

Opera's best tool is undoubtedly its free

VPN, which spoofs your IP address so you can browse the web anonymously and access restricted content. To turn this on, click the Opera logo in the top-left corner, then choose Settings followed by Advance. Scroll down and select Enable VPN. You can then click the VPN icon in your address bar to connect and disconnect, and specify where you want to pretend to be browsing from (Europe, Asia or Americas). Unusually for a free VPN, there's no limit on how much data you can use each month.

Further privacy protection is provided by ad and tracker blockers (click the 'Easy setup' button in the top-right corner to access these) and a 'Protect me from malicious sites' option (in Settings, then 'Privacy and security').

Opera's many other features cater to specific online activities, so you'll find some more useful than others. For example, there are sidebar shortcuts to open the web versions of Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram; a pop-out video player that works with YouTube, Vimeo and Twitch; and a music player for Spotify, Apple Music and other streaming services.

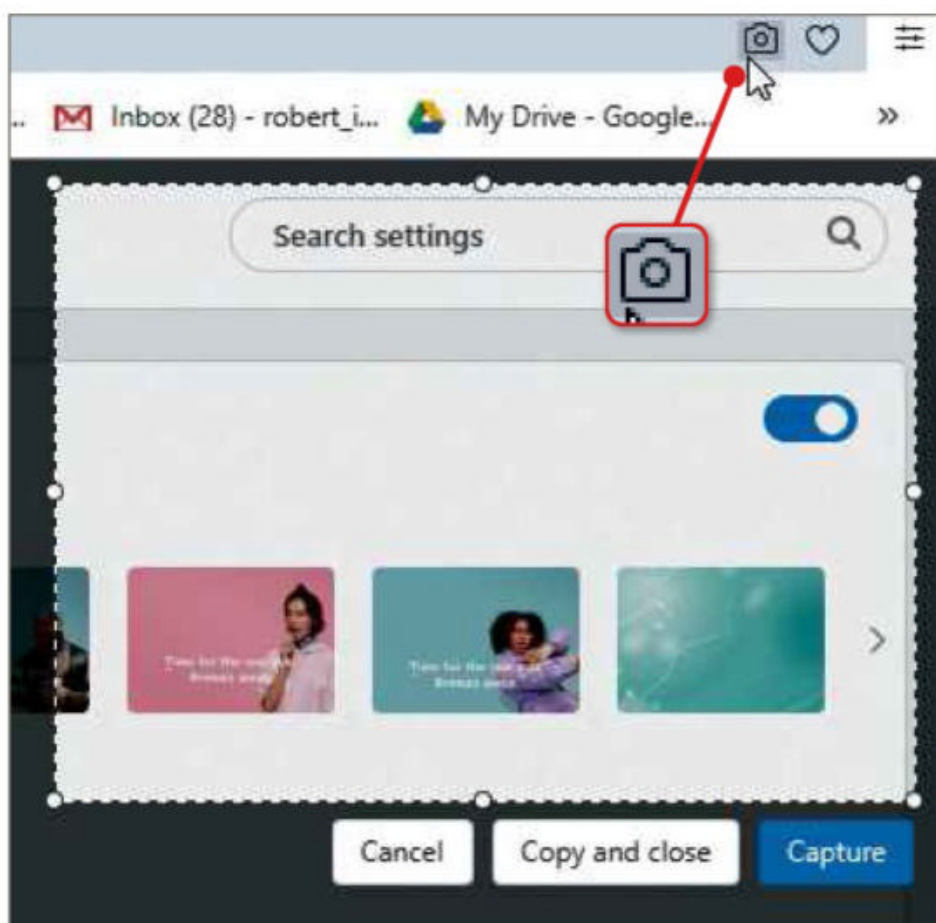
The 'My Flow' tool makes it easy to sync content between your PC and phone or tablet, and we love the handy Snapshot button in the address bar for taking screenshots (see screenshot left).

What we don't like

As with Vivaldi, Opera has a fair amount of junk that you'll probably want to remove through Settings. These include "promotional Speed Dials, bookmarks and campaigns", news stories on your start page, and – our particular bugbear – promotional notifications that pop up in the corner of your screen.

Also, although Opera's headquarters are still in Oslo, it's now owned by a Chinese company, which may raise concerns about the privacy of your data.

Click Opera's camera icon to capture entire or sections of web pages





Firefox

www.snipca.com/38807



What we like

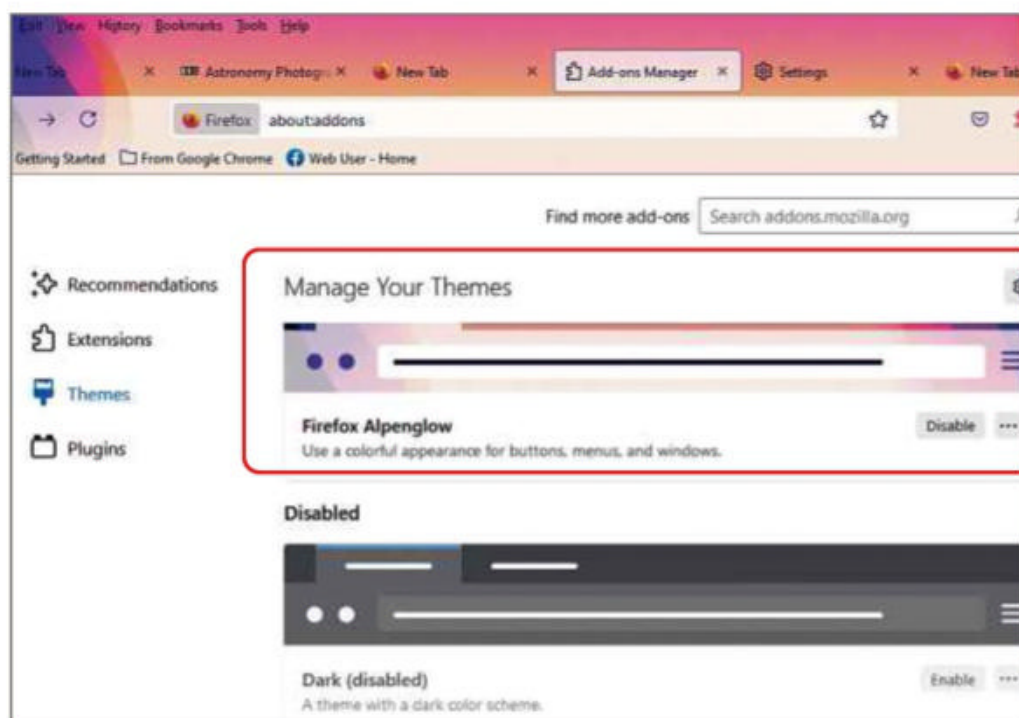
By using its own Gecko **browser engine** rather than Chromium, Mozilla's Firefox provides a genuine alternative to the other browsers here, and isn't affected by Chromium-wide changes and vulnerabilities. Best of all, it's able to offer thousands of useful extensions through its own add-ons store (<https://addons.mozilla.org>), unrestricted by Google's petty rules (such as banning YouTube downloaders) and sloppy security checks.

The recently released Firefox 89 redesigned the browser with a cleaner, more modern look, simplified menus and toolbars that remove lesser used items and prioritise important ones. It also has smarter tabs that tell you, for example, if a video is currently playing.

Notifications have been streamlined, too, so fewer clicks are involved in granting permissions for tasks such as video calls. More emphasis is now being placed on customising the browser, with the Add-ons option renamed 'Add-ons and Themes' ('Firefox Alpenglow' is rather pleasant – see screenshot below).

Additionally, Mozilla has improved Firefox's Total Cookie Protection, which isolates website cookies so they don't follow you to other websites and track

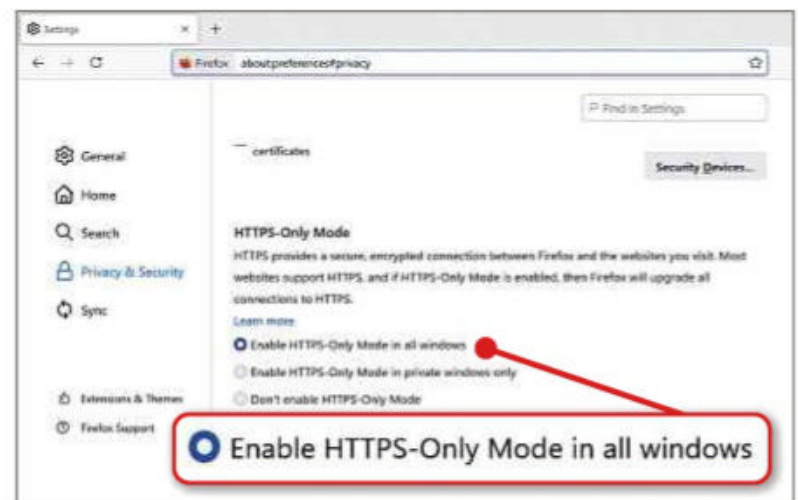
Cheer up Firefox by visiting 'Add-ons and Themes' and applying an alternative theme, such as Alpenglow



Force your browser to use HTTPS websites

Confirming that Brave is leading the pack for browser security, Chrome, Edge and Firefox have added their own versions of its 'Upgrade connections to HTTPS' feature. This automatically redirects you to secure HTTPS websites when you try to access their unencrypted HTTP versions, but Brave is the only browser that turns this on by default.

In Firefox, go to Settings, 'Privacy & Security', then scroll down to 'HTTPS-Only Mode' and select 'Enable HTTPS-Only Mode in all windows' (see screenshot). In Edge, type **edge://flags** into the URL address bar, followed by **Automatic HTTPS**. Turn on this option, then restart the browser. Now go to Settings, 'Privacy, search and services' and enable



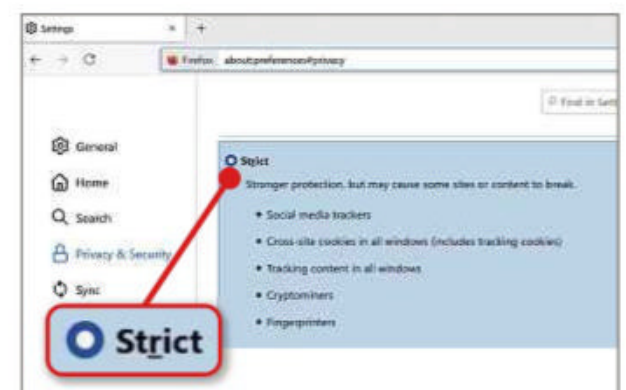
'Automatically switch to more secure connections with Automatic HTTPS'.

Sadly, Chrome users will need to wait, because its new HTTPS-Only Mode is currently only an experiment in the Canary (developer) version of Chrome 93. In the meantime, you can get the same protection by installing the extension **HTTPS Everywhere** (www.snipca.com/38830).

your activity there. This powerful feature now also works in Private browsing mode, too – turn it on by going to Settings, then 'Privacy & Security' and selecting Strict under Enhanced Tracking Protection.

What we don't like

Despite Mozilla's best efforts, Firefox still uses a lot of your memory, second only to Chrome, and it can't compete with the features offered by Brave and Vivaldi. We don't like the 'sponsored shortcuts' and Pocket recommendations that now appear on your New Tab page, though we appreciate that these help fund the browser's development. Both can be turned off by going to Settings, Home, then Firefox Home Content. **ca**



Select 'Strict' in Firefox to stop website cookies tracking you on other sites

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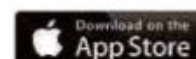
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Get Windows 11's accessibility tools **NOW**

You don't have to wait for Windows 11 to launch to try its exceptional new accessibility tools. **Jonathan Parkyn** explains how you can replicate the features *now* in Windows 10



Ever since Windows 95, Microsoft has made a conscious effort to integrate accessibility features into its operating systems to make it easier to use for people with disabilities. This will continue in Windows 11, as outlined in a blog post (www.snipca.com/38939) by Jeff Petty, the company's Windows Accessibility Leader, who claimed the forthcoming system will be the most accessible ever.

That's great news, but you don't need to wait until Windows 11 launches to improve your accessibility features. By adding free programs and tweaking Windows 10's settings, you can replicate many of those new tools today.

What's new in Windows 11?

As with its predecessor, all of Windows 11's accessibility tools can be accessed via the Settings app, though they're now easier to find and use. For a start, they're in a section called 'Accessibility', not 'Ease of Access'. The icon has changed as well, from that meaningless clock/arrow/wheelchair thing to the more recognisable 'human' accessibility symbol – as seen in the illustration above (it's almost identical to Apple's accessibility icon: www.snipca.com/38944).

Menus and settings have also been redesigned, and several tools have been added or improved. The blog singles out four improvements in particular – new sound schemes for blind users, new contrast themes to make apps and content easier to see, redesigned **closed-caption**

themes, and an improved dictation tool called Windows Voice Typing.

Get your own sound schemes

Microsoft's blog states that Windows 11's new sound schemes – those system noises that indicate errors, notifications, reminders and more – include "different sounds for more accessible Light and Dark Themes". We had a dig into our Insider Preview version of Windows 11 and – unless we're missing something – all this really seems to mean is that the sounds change slightly when you switch between themes.

Other than that, we couldn't find any new options that might improve accessibility for blind or partially sighted users, though it's possible the blog is referring to options yet to be added.

Windows 10 users already have the option to tweak their PC's sound scheme, by using themes or by manually selecting the sounds they want to hear to indicate a particular event. The easiest way to do this is by downloading a theme from Microsoft. These are free and let you customise your desktop by applying a combination of



Microsoft's Mountain Light theme pack contains images of 18 mountains from around the world

wallpaper images, colours and sounds. Click 'Start', Settings, Personalisation, Themes, then click 'Get more themes in Microsoft Store'.

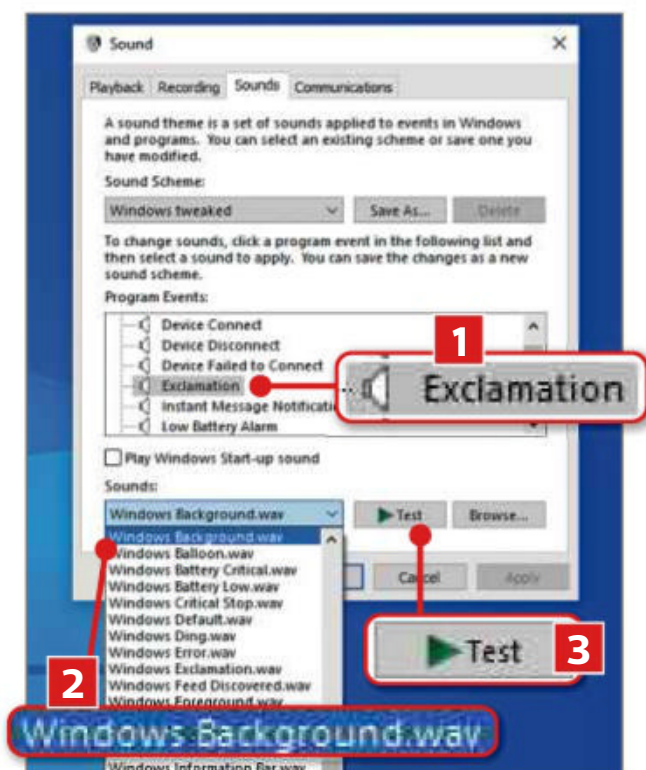
We couldn't find any themes aimed specifically at blind or partially sighted users, but some offer a colour and sound scheme that may make Windows easier to use. It's very much a case of personal taste, but we like Windows Throwback (www.snipca.com/38942), which has high-contrast themes inspired by the first version of Windows in 1985. We also recommend Mountain Light (www.snipca.com/38943, pictured below left), containing spectacular **4K** photos of 18 mountains from around the world.

Unfortunately, there's no way to preview the colours or the sounds other than by clicking Get, then Apply once it's downloaded. Note that some themes don't alter the sound scheme at all.

To manually change your PC's sound scheme, click Start, Settings, Personalisation, Themes, then Sounds. Windows 10 comes with two sound schemes – Windows Default and No Sounds – but you can create your own by clicking Save As, typing a name, then changing the sounds for Program Events below.

Click a sound type – Exclamation (**1** in our screenshot above right), for example, which are sounds played when you try to do something not supported by Windows. Now click the dropdown menu below to select an alternative sound for these **2**. Click 'Test' **3** to hear a preview.

You don't have to stick with Microsoft's



Choose your own sound to indicate a particular action in Windows

own selection of sounds. By clicking Browse next to the Test button you can select any sound file from your hard drive, such as those you've downloaded from the internet – try BigSoundBank.com (<https://bigsoundbank.com>) for thousands of royalty-free sounds.

Get new contrast themes – and more

Elsewhere in Microsoft's Accessibility blog post, it mentions "reimagined High Contrast Themes" that include "aesthetically pleasing, customisable colour combinations" to make Windows easier to see. We took a look at these and, sure enough, they offer a big improvement over Windows 10's high-contrast themes, which look crude in comparison.

The new themes can be found under Settings, Accessibility, then 'Contrast themes' for anyone testing the Windows 11 preview. There are four to choose from: Aquatic, Desert, Dusk (pictured below) and Night sky, which all use different combinations of colours to make text, buttons, program windows and other on-screen elements easier to see.

Sadly, Microsoft hasn't made these high-contrast themes available for Windows 10, so you're stuck with its



'Dusk' is one of four new high-contrast themes in Windows 11

Tell Microsoft what you think

It may often seem like a company that doesn't care what you think, but Microsoft is keen to hear your feedback, particularly on Accessibility tools. Give your opinion

in the Feedback Hub – press Windows key+F to open it. You'll need to sign in, and be aware that comments are made public, so don't include any personal information.

existing tools (under Settings, then Personalisation), which are somewhat limited. There are powerful programs, though, that let you change almost any aspect of your computer's appearance. Our favourite is Winaero Tweaker, which you can download by visiting <https://winaerotweaker.com> and clicking the green Download button.

You may see a Microsoft Defender SmartScreen warning when you run the tool, but Winaero Tweaker is safe to install, so click 'More info', then 'Run anyway'. Browse through the options listed under Appearance and Advanced Appearance Settings to see what you can change. You could create your own high-contrast theme by selecting Custom Accents then going to Start, Settings, Personalisation, Colours and choosing up to eight colours.

Winaero's options go beyond even what Windows 11 offers. Under 'Icons', for example, you can change the horizontal and vertical spacing of your icons, and even the font. You can also make scrollbars, window borders and title bars easier to see. In each section, make your customisations, then click 'Apply changes' to see the results. If you make a mistake, click 'Reset this page to defaults' at the top of each setting, then try again.

Get Windows 11's new closed-caption themes

Windows 11 comes with redesigned closed-caption themes for deaf and hard-of-hearing users (under Settings, Accessibility, then Captions). It has four new themes to choose from: 'White on black', 'Small caps' (large lower-case characters), 'Large text' and 'Yellow on blue'. In each case you can click Edit to launch the new customisation tool that lets you refine the colour of the text and background, as well as the size, opacity, font and effects employed for the text.

Windows 10 has similar options (under Settings, 'Ease of Access', then 'Closed captions'), but there are no themes. They're also harder to tweak because you have to click fiddly dropdown menus. That said, it's relatively easy to recreate Windows 11 themes in Windows 10.



Select 'Small caps' in Windows 10 to replicate one of Windows 11's new closed-caption themes


To get 'Small caps', for instance, just click the dropdown menu under 'Caption style' and select 'Small caps' (see screenshot above), then adjust any of the other settings – background, font and so on – to your liking.

Use a better dictation tool

The final new tool Microsoft mentioned in its blog is Windows Voice Typing, which is a revamped version of the Windows Dictation tool in Windows 10 that lets you enter text with your voice. Make sure your microphone is switched on, then press Windows key+H to launch Voice Typing in the preview version of Windows 11.

Windows 10's Dictation tool works in more or less the same way (and can be turned on using the same keyboard shortcut). The only thing that's missing is the clever automated punctuation offered by Windows 11's equivalent. Other tools offer this, but they're expensive – Dragon Home (www.snipca.com/38946), one of the best, costs £180.

Otter (<https://otter.ai>), however, has various price plans, including a free tier for individual users that's missing a few advanced features and is limited to 600 minutes per month. It's not an exact equivalent of Windows 10's Dictation tool, because you can't use it across the operating system (such as in Notepad or search boxes), but you can cut and paste what you've dictated into Word documents, Outlook emails and so on.

You'll need to sign up for a free account, then you can use Otter via its web portal on your desktop – just log in and click Record – or via a mobile app on your Android or iOS device. 

Boost your TV signal with an indoor aerial

If you can't use a rooftop aerial, there are plenty of excellent indoor alternatives for both your TV and computer. **Will Stapley** reveals how to get the the best possible Freeview signal



A rooftop TV aerial will give you the best chance of a strong Freeview TV signal, but it's not always feasible. Besides the cost (around £250 for parts and labour), other factors may prevent you from using one, such as if you live in a flat. They're also easier to install, and being small and portable, they're also perfect for use with a **TV tuner** attached to a laptop. Before buying one, however, it's important to know how strong Freeview signals are in your area because this will determine what type of aerial you need.

Find your nearest transmitter

Enter your postcode and house number on Freeview's coverage checker page at www.snipca.com/38922 – the name of your nearest transmitter will appear at the top of the results page. You can then use Google Maps (<https://maps.google.com>) to calculate your distance from the

transmitter. Enter the name of the transmitter in the search box, then right-click it on the map and select 'Measure distance'. Next, zoom out (hold down the Ctrl key and scroll your mouse wheel), locate your home address and click it. A line will appear on the map, with the box at the bottom showing the total distance (see **1** in our screenshot below left).

You'll also need to check whether any hills between you and the transmitter will affect signal quality. Click the Layers box (bottom-left corner of the map), then select **Terrain 2** – darker shading indicates hilly areas.

Find the right indoor aerial

If you're under 10 miles from your nearest transmitter and there are no significant barriers in the landscape, you may be able to make do with August's DTA240 (£9.30 from www.snipca.com/38931, pictured above right). This is one of the cheapest and smallest indoor aerials around – its stick-like antenna is just 13.5cm tall.

It has a magnetic base, which means you can attach it to the roof of a campervan when on holiday (it's not weatherproof, however, so you'd need to bring it inside if it rains). Also, the aerial's 1.5m cable means you may need an extension cable to position it in the optimum location (a 10m cable costs £9 from Argos, www.snipca.com/38924).

If you live further from the transmitter, you'll need to go for something a bit more



The August DTA240 is cheap, but only suitable in areas with a strong Freeview reception

expensive, such as One for All's SV9430 (£26 from Amazon, www.snipca.com/38926). Measuring 270x180x60mm (HxWxD), this curved rectangular panel is much bigger than the August DTA240. Its size – along with the built-in filter that blocks interference from nearby **4G** signals – means it's able to pick up weaker transmitter signals (from up to 15 miles away, according to One for All). It also comes with a 1.5m cable.

However, our favourite indoor aerial is the RGTech Monarch 50 (£25 from www.snipca.com/38925, pictured in box right), which is essentially a wire mesh inside a thin sheet of plastic. Get the 'transparent' version and you can attach it to a window, giving it the best chance of picking up a Freeview signal without blocking light or obstructing your view.

Alternatively, you can insert the aerial into the included stand, though we found the unit's lightweight design makes it easy to knock over when used this way. Like the SV9430, the Monarch 50 includes



Use Google Maps to find how far away your nearest transmitter is and what kind of terrain lies in between

a 4G filter, but it also comes with a 4.5m cable, which gives you greater scope when positioning it. Monarch quotes a maximum range of 50 miles, but you'd need to be in an area of flat terrain to achieve this.

Search for channels

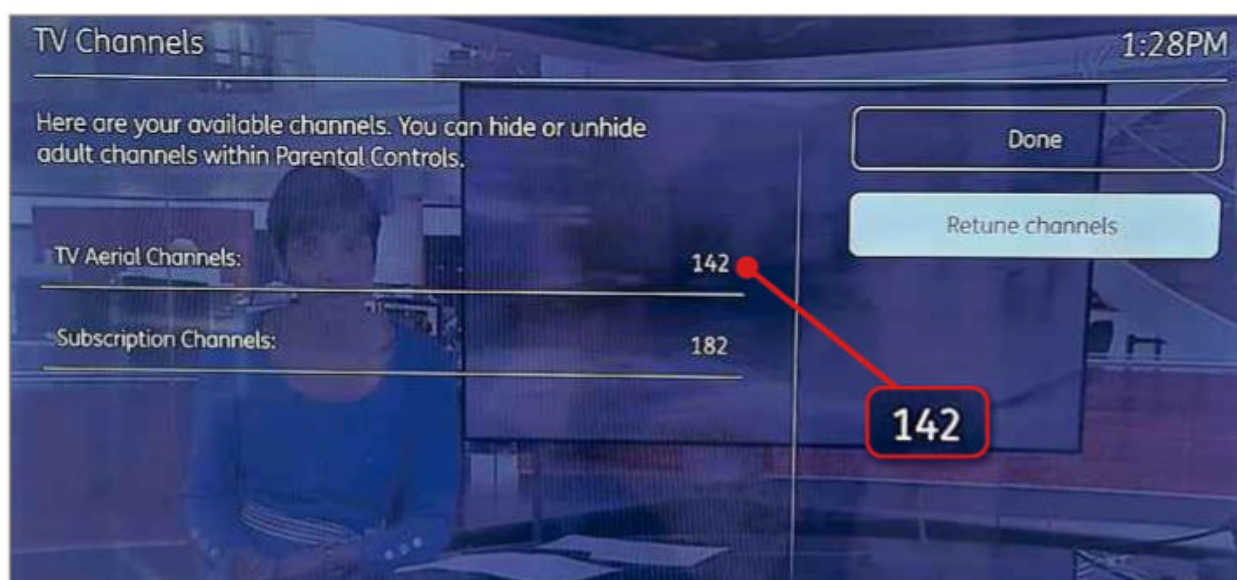
Once you've attached it to your Freeview box, angle the aerial so that it's facing in the direction of your nearest Freeview transmitter (as identified earlier). You then need to retune your Freeview box (set it to scan for available channels). How you do this depends on the make and model of your set-top box.

On a YouView box, go to the Settings menu (press the YouView button on your remote control, then select the cog icon at the top of the screen), then select TV Channels, followed by Retune. This will take a few minutes, after which you'll see a summary telling you how many TV channels the box has found (see screenshot above right).

If you're using a TV tuner attached to your computer, you'll need to retune using the software. On most Hauppauge tuners (such as the WinTV-Solo HD - £43 from www.snipca.com/38940), this means clicking the gear icon, Devices, selecting your tuner, then Tuner Setup.

In areas with a strong Freeview reception, you should find the tuning process locates all available channels on the first scan. If some occasionally break up while watching them, make small adjustments to the angle of your aerial.

Most Freeview boxes can display the signal quality in real time, letting you instantly see the impact of small



Your Freeview box will tell you how many channels it has found after you retune it

adjustments – on YouView boxes, go to Settings, then TV Signal Quality.

Try a different transmitter

You may find the tuning process doesn't find any channels. If so, it's worth taking a look at your neighbours' rooftop aerials to see in which direction they're pointing. If they point in different directions to one another, it may indicate there's more than one transmitter nearby.

You can get more detailed information on nearby transmitters using the map on the UKFreeTV website (www.snipca.com/38927) – click a transmitter (marked with an 'F') and you'll see its area of coverage displayed in green. Don't ignore transmitters that are further away from your location – depending on the terrain, they may provide a stronger signal than those nearby.

Reposition your indoor aerial to match the direction of the rooftop aerials. You'll need to retune your Freeview box each time you change the direction of your

aerial so your box can receive channels from the new target transmitter.

Reposition your aerial

When positioning your aerial, keep it away from large objects and – if possible – place it near a window. You can also try putting the aerial in your loft – this has the advantage of minimising interference from electrical items in your home. And because it's higher, it's more likely to pick up weaker signals. If some rooms in your home have aerial sockets, you'll probably find there's an aerial junction box in the loft. This is intended to be connected to a rooftop aerial, but you can also attach your indoor aerial to it, thereby sending its signal to each TV point in your home (see box below left).

Spreading the signal around your home in this way can weaken it, though, so you may need to use a booster box (£12 from www.snipca.com/38928) with the aerial sockets in certain rooms.

Check you're receiving all available channels

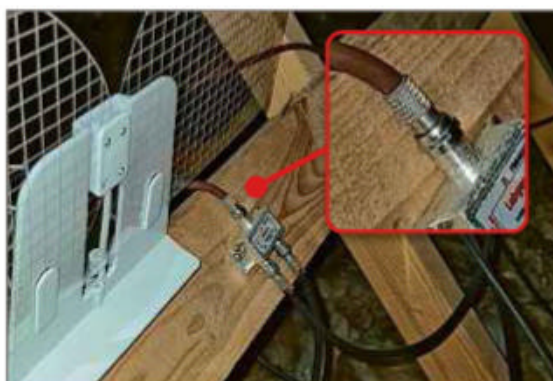
Once you've set up your aerial, it's worth checking that you're getting all Freeview channels. Each channel is broadcast in one of six frequencies known as 'multiplexes' (for the full list of channels and which multiplex they broadcast on, visit www.snipca.com/38929).

Depending on signal strength, your Freeview box may not receive certain multiplexes – and therefore certain channels. To make sure you're receiving all multiplexes, try tuning into a channel from each one – such as BBC News (channel 231), ITV2 (6), BBC One HD (101), Quest (12) and Yesterday (26). If these channels work, your Freeview box is receiving all multiplexes. If not, try repositioning your aerial (or buying a more powerful one), then retuning your Freeview box as explained above. **ca**

How and where I use my indoor aerial

Although I primarily use Freesat for my main TV (see Issue 604, page 35), I recently bought a Monarch 50 aerial for the TV in my bedroom. I was initially disappointed that no matter where I placed the aerial, I achieved only very patchy reception from the Heathfield transmitter, which is around 15 miles away across some fairly hilly terrain. There's actually a much closer transmitter just outside Brighton, but the South Downs does a great job of blocking its signals.

As a last resort, I ventured into the loft and sat the aerial on a timber joist. Retuning my Freeview box resulted in it picking up all 142 Freeview channels with perfect reception. Better still, I connected



the aerial to the existing junction box in the loft (this required a short stretch of coax cable with an F-Type screw-on connector – £3 from www.snipca.com/38930, pictured), which means the Freeview signal goes to all TV points in my home.

Will Stapley

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Why do I have to pay for Apple TV+ content?

Q I bought a new iPad recently, and as part of the deal Apple threw in a one-year trial of its Apple TV+ service (see screenshot right). I wasn't particularly interested in this, but since it was free I decided to sign up. However, I was disappointed to find that almost everything I tapped was either for rent or to buy. I eventually found a few free programmes, but now I'm wondering what the point of TV+ is.

Is there any way to show only the free stuff? Are other services the same as this? I was thinking of trying Netflix, but I'm not paying a monthly fee if I then have to pay extra to watch the things I want to see!

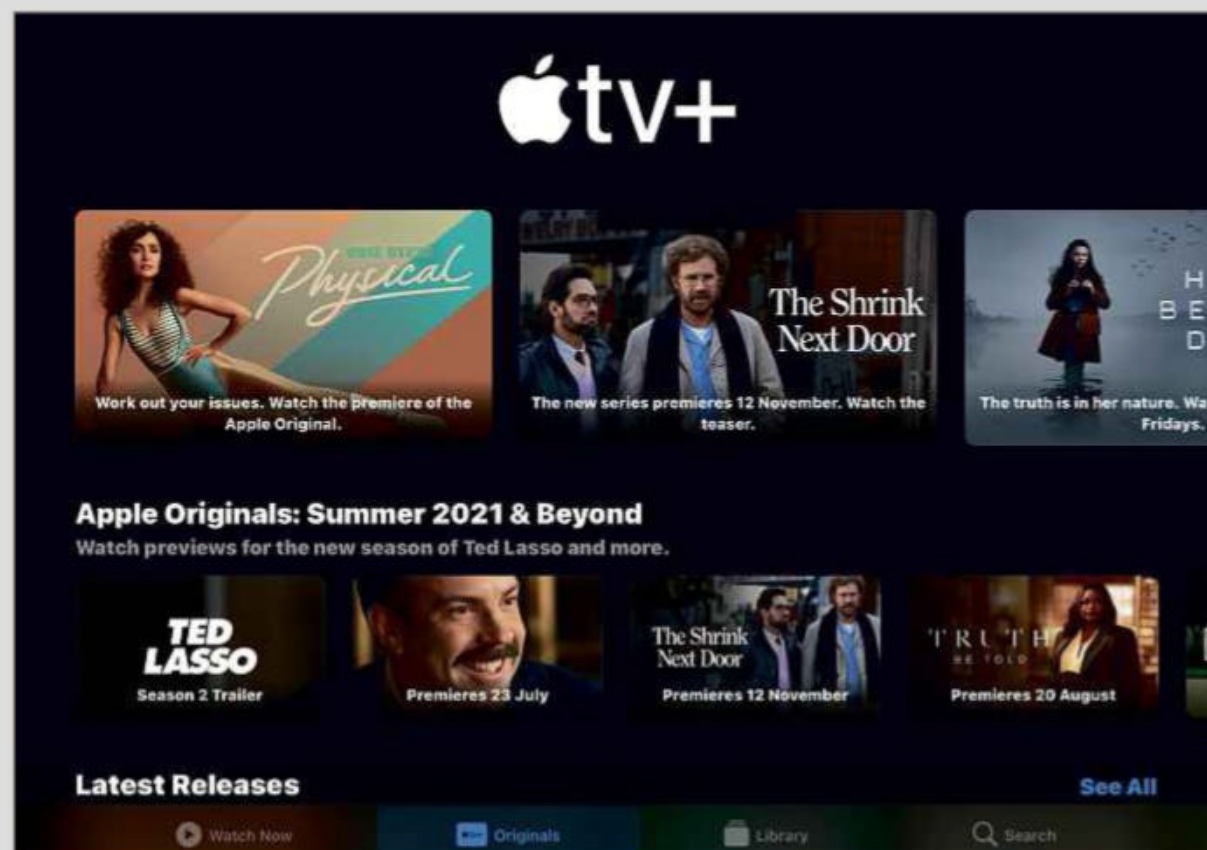
Jonathan Gibson

A TV+ is what Apple executives would probably describe in meetings as a 'long play'. In other words, the company has launched it now in the hope that it will bear fruit in the future.

It seems as if every large company on the planet is rushing to create its own TV-streaming service, with new options appearing every month. Apple TV+ is just one of the many relative newcomers.

Some streaming services, such as Netflix, offer unlimited access to all their content for a fixed monthly fee – so you can watch everything in the Netflix library at no extra cost. Others, such as Amazon Prime, provide a mixture of inclusive content available for no extra charge and stuff that you have to pay extra to watch. You can either rent titles for a couple of days or buy them to keep in your digital library for as long as you have an account with the company.

If you want to see the shows you don't have to pay extra for, open the app on your iPad and tap the Originals



Apple's relatively new TV+ service currently offers only a handful of original programmes

tab at the bottom of the screen.

Of course, the best way for any streaming service to build up a library of content that it can offer without charging extra is to commission original films and TV programmes. This way the company owns the rights, rather than having to license content from other production companies. All the major streaming services are busy doing just that. However, as you've noticed, Apple's library of original content is currently rather limited – and that's the only stuff it includes in a TV+ subscription. Everything else you must pay for, either by renting or buying (see screenshot above right).

This situation will change over time, and no doubt in a few years Apple TV+



Most of the films and TV series on TV+ are available to rent or buy for an additional fee

will have a vast library of original programming to beef up its content. We imagine Apple is offering these generous year-long freebie trials because there's not enough on Apple TV+ right now to convince people to pay for the service.

Why is Disk Cleanup leaving junk on my hard drive?

Q I bought an Acer Aspire laptop, as recommended by *Computeractive*, and it has served me well. However, although I regularly use Disk Cleanup in Windows to get rid of clutter on my hard drive, Avast Antivirus continually informs me that I have junk, which it can remove for a fee! According to Avast, I have anything up to 15GB of junk, including Windows **system restore points** and **log files**. Is there a safe and easy way to remove these – and, if so, why doesn't Disk Cleanup do it?

Michael Young

A We assume you're using Avast Free Antivirus, because it sometimes shows adverts for other products – including Avast Cleanup Premium. There's nothing wrong with Avast's clean-up tool as such, but there's no need to cough up for it either.

That's because the Disk Cleanup tool you're already using can clear out everything your antivirus has flagged up. The specific options for doing so require a little bit of digging, though.

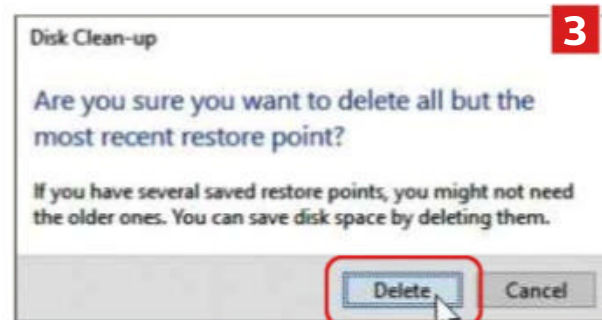
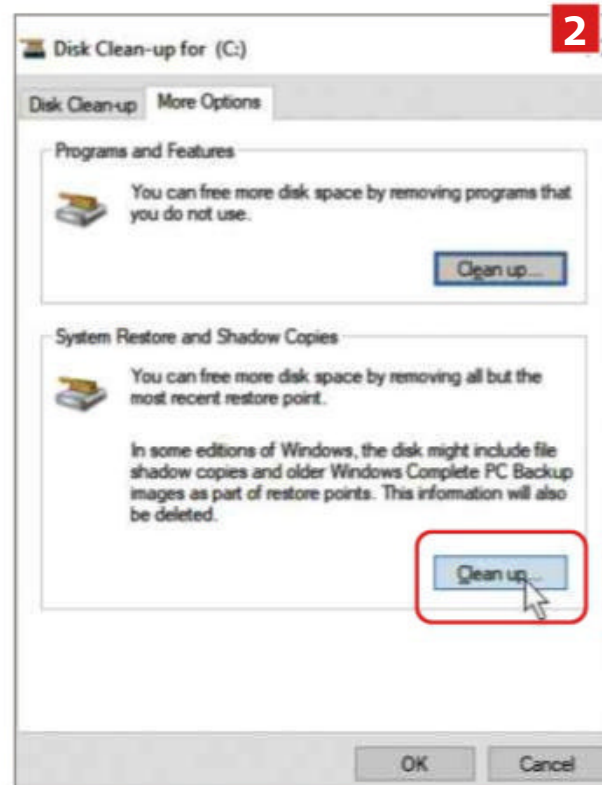
First, launch Disk Cleanup. For the benefit of other readers, click Start followed by Windows Administrative Tools, then choose the relevant drive letter before clicking OK. The box that appears offers tick boxes for all the surface-level stuff Disk Cleanup will erase. If you want to dig deeper, click the 'Clean up system files' button (see screenshot **1**) and select a drive.



Access Disk Clean-up's advanced options by clicking the 'Clean up system files' button

This time, you'll see additional tick boxes – including one to eradicate Windows log files. The option to delete restore points requires further digging. Click the More Options tab, then the 'Clean up' button in the 'System Restore and Shadow Copies' section (see screenshot **2**). Then click Delete to erase all but the most recent restore point (see screenshot **3**).

So that's how you do it, but the question of *whether* you should do it is a different matter. Deleting old restore points won't cause any damage, but there's a reason Microsoft puts them a



little out of reach, and that's because they can be useful if your PC ever hits a spot of bother. Older restore points can return your PC to how it was last week or a month ago, for example.

As a rule, we'd say that unless you're really struggling for storage space, there's little to be gained by removing these potentially useful files.

How do I pin tabs in my web browser?

Q In Issue 609's Problems Solved (page 69), you answered a question from fellow reader David Duncan about how to switch between pinned tabs. I found your answer interesting, but David's question was even more so – because I didn't know tabs could be pinned. How would I go about doing that? I'm a little embarrassed even to ask, because I've been using computers for quite a few years now.

Steven Henderson

A There's no need to be embarrassed. Today's browsers are so full of hidden features that it would be impossible for anyone to know about all of them. You didn't tell us if, like David, you use Chrome but it doesn't really matter because all the popular browsers let you pin a tab by right-clicking it and choosing the relevant option – 'Pin' in Chrome, or 'Pin Tab' in Edge and Firefox (see screenshot). To remove a pin, right-click the pinned tab and choose Unpin or 'Unpin tab'.



Right-click a tab in Chrome, Firefox or Edge for the option to pin it in place

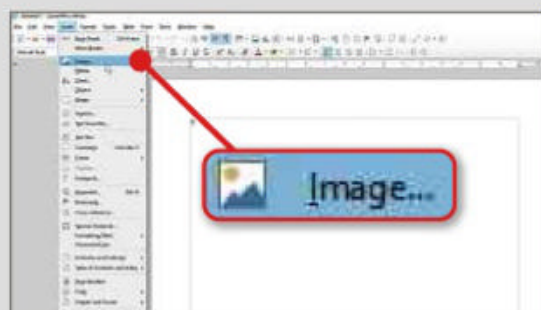
Why can't I insert images?

Q I use LibreOffice 6.2 with Windows 10, and recently I wanted to insert some photos into the text of a document. I tried everything – Insert, Copy, Format, Wrap, Frame and more – but nothing worked. In the end I had to present the document without images. It made me nostalgic for Microsoft Works, which was always easy to use. Can you help?

Dafydd Jones

A We're not sure what's going on here. If we were sitting in front of the screen with you, we'd probably see what the problem is. However, based purely on your description, our guess is that you've simply overlooked the option to insert an image. The Format menu, which is where we think you've been looking, contains submenus that include Wrap and 'Frame and Object'. However, the options within these are not available (in other words, are greyed out) unless you have already inserted an image. Similarly, the Image option on the Format menu isn't for inserting an image but adjusting one you have already inserted (see screenshot).

You say you tried 'Insert', but we're not sure what you mean by that. To insert an image in Writer (the word-processor part of LibreOffice), click the Insert menu (next to Format on the menu bar), then Image (see screenshot below). Only when you've done that can you access all the image-related options mentioned above. That's what we think is going on here, but if we're wrong, feel free to get back in touch.



Click Image in Writer's Format menu to reveal all the options

How do I turn off 'News and interests'?

Q I suddenly have a new shortcut that hogs a couple of inches of space on the taskbar of my Windows 10 PC and expands every time I move the mouse pointer anywhere near it (see screenshot below). I suspect it's part of the latest Windows 10 update. I've tried everything to get rid of this annoying pop-up, including switching off apps, but nothing works. Do you have any suggestions? There doesn't seem to be an off switch.

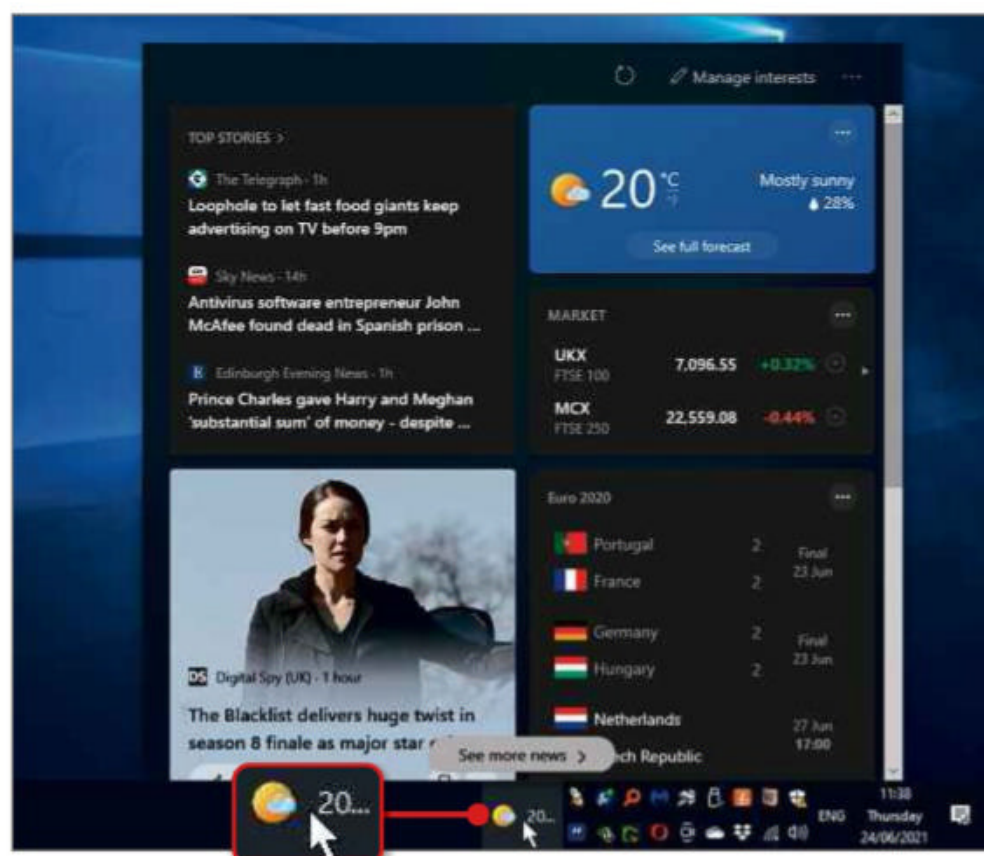
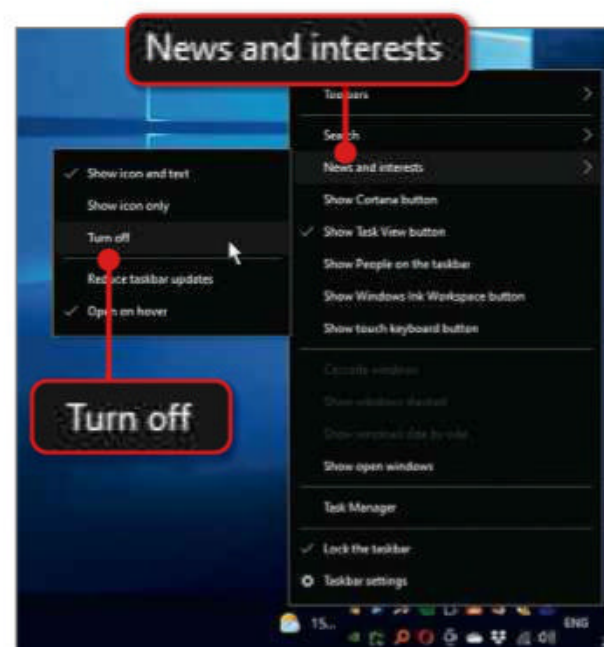
Jack Woods

A Yes, this is the result of a Windows 10 update and, yes, Microsoft has simply plonked this thing on millions of computers without so much as a please or thank you. It's called 'News and interests', and Microsoft is rolling it out in a phased manner – so there's no knowing when any particular user might find this new button on their taskbar.

Fortunately, switching it off is easy when you know how. First, right-click a

blank part of the taskbar, then point to 'News and interests' before clicking 'Turn off' (see screenshot below).

Incidentally, if you're happy with the content that the new button provides but simply don't want it to appear whenever the mouse pointer passes over it – and we quite agree about that – click to remove the tick from 'Open on hover' instead.



If you find Microsoft's new 'News and interest' notification distracting, switch it off from the taskbar's right-click menu

Q: Can I delete this 'Windows 10 Upgrade' folder?

A: Issue 586, page 69 – find it on our 2020 Back Issue CD

Buy it from
www.snipca.com/38164



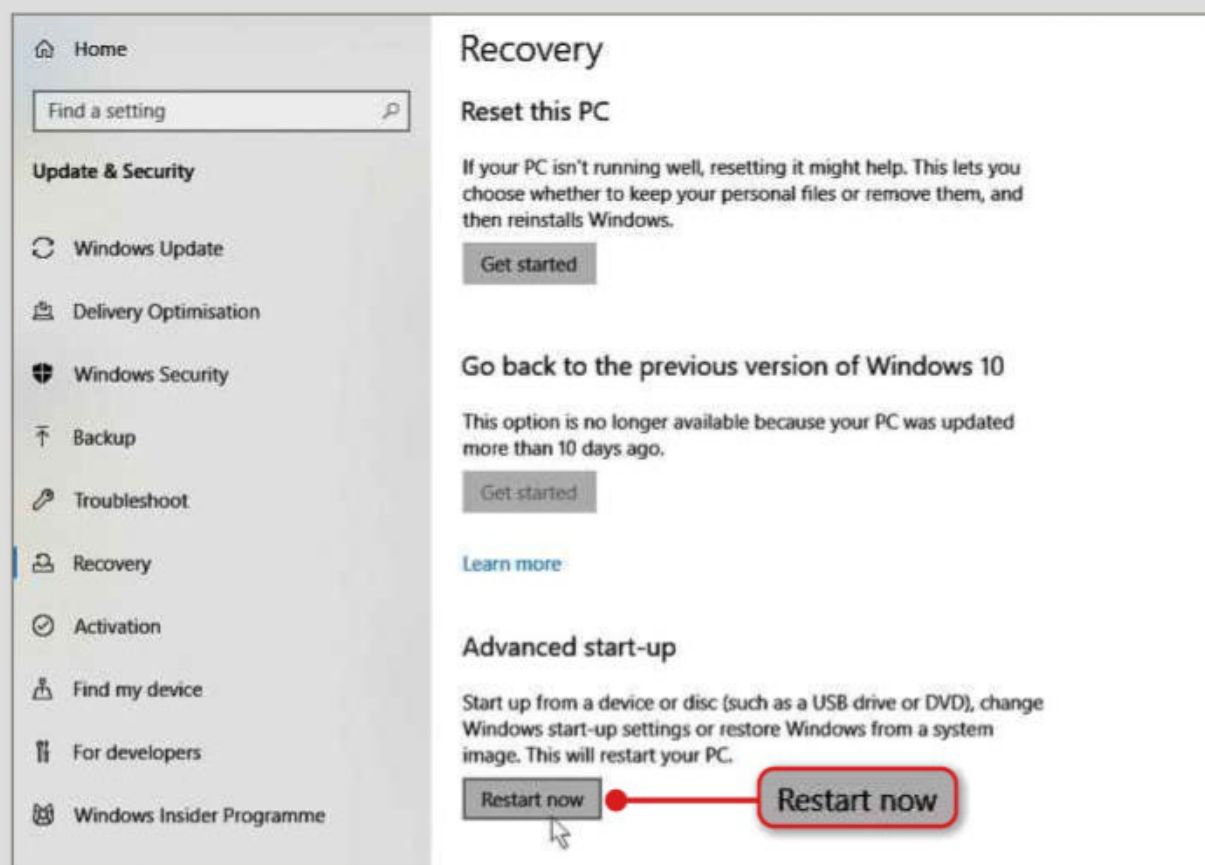
What's interrupting my laptop's boot?

Q When I switch on my Windows 10 laptop, I see a warning headed 'EFI PXE' that tells me boot has failed. If I then click OK, the laptop boots up and operates without any trouble. However, I'm worried this minor inconvenience may eventually become a major problem. Any advice would be appreciated.

Shay O'Gorman

A These messages relate to the Preboot eXecution Environment, or PXE (presumably because the acronym PEE was considered inappropriate). They are telling you that your laptop is trying to boot from a network card or other networked device and is failing. There's nothing to worry about, because the laptop simply boots from your hard drive instead, but we presume you would rather not see these messages.

We can't say how or why this has happened, but you can change the boot method using options within the **UEFI** (hence the 'EFI' part of the message) – or **BIOS**, as many traditionalists still like to call it. How you access the UEFI varies depending on your particular computer, but it typically involves tapping a key such as F2 or Delete (Del) just after switching on. Alternatively,



You can access your PC's UEFI through Windows 10's Update and Security settings

you can access the UEFI from Windows 10. First, click Start followed by the Settings cog, then 'Update & Security' followed by Recovery. Next, under 'Advanced startup', click 'Restart now' (see screenshot) followed by Troubleshoot. Click 'Advanced options', then UEFI Firmware Settings. Click 'Restart' to finish.

Every UEFI is different, but almost all of them use the cursor (arrow) keys and

Enter to navigate and select options. Look for a page headed Boot (or similar) and, within that, an option headed PXE (or similar). Either set this to Disabled or use the cursor keys to move it down the Boot Order list so it's below the **SSD**, hard drive and USB boot options. Finally, press Escape (Esc) to exit the UEFI, then select Yes to save the changes.

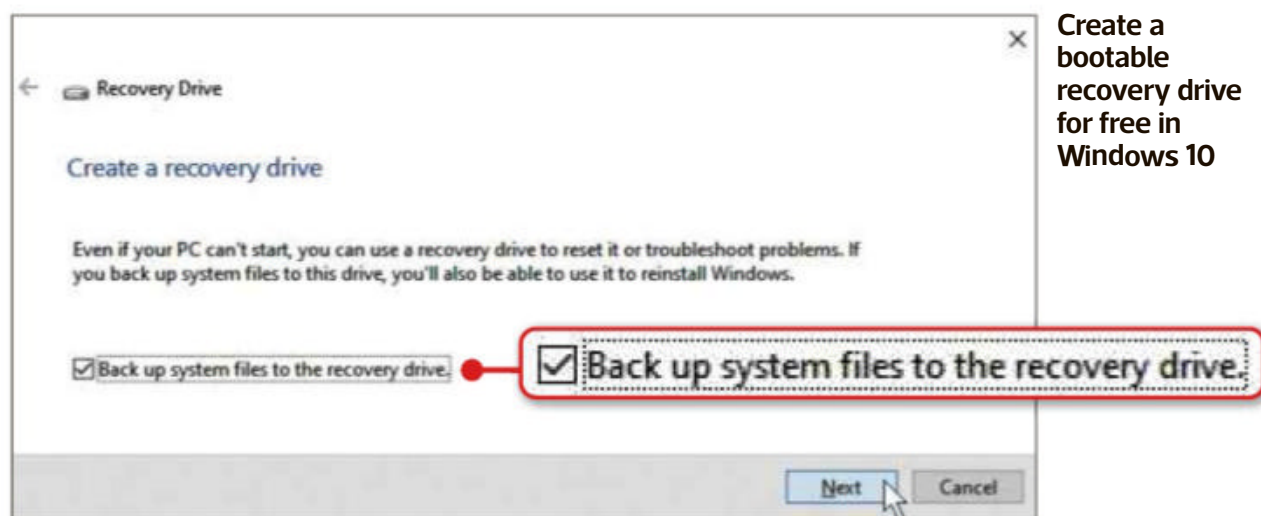
Can I start my PC from a backup?

Q I use the free Paragon Backup & Recovery software to perform automatic weekly backups of my two desktop PCs. I back up the C and D drives of each PC to large external drives. If one of my PCs ever failed to start up, would I be able to boot it from a backup on the external drive? I understand that if the power supply died this would not be an option!

Morley Pecker

A Sadly, backups made by the Paragon Backup & Recovery Community Edition (or CE – the free version) are not **bootable**. This means you can't use them to start up your PC if its boot drive fails. To do that,

you would need to **clone** the boot drive, but CE doesn't offer such a feature. A cloning tool is available in Paragon Hard Drive Manager Advanced, but this product costs around £65. Good free alternatives are available, though, such as Macrium Reflect Free (www.macrium.com/reflectfree), so there's no need to pay for it.



Create a bootable recovery drive for free in Windows 10

Another option is to make a Windows 10 recovery drive. You could use this to get your PC back on its feet, then restore your backups using CE. You'll need a USB stick of at least 16GB. Click 'Start', type **recovery** and click 'Create a recovery drive'. Next, tick 'Back up system files to the recovery drive' (see screenshot above), then follow the prompts.

Problems Solved

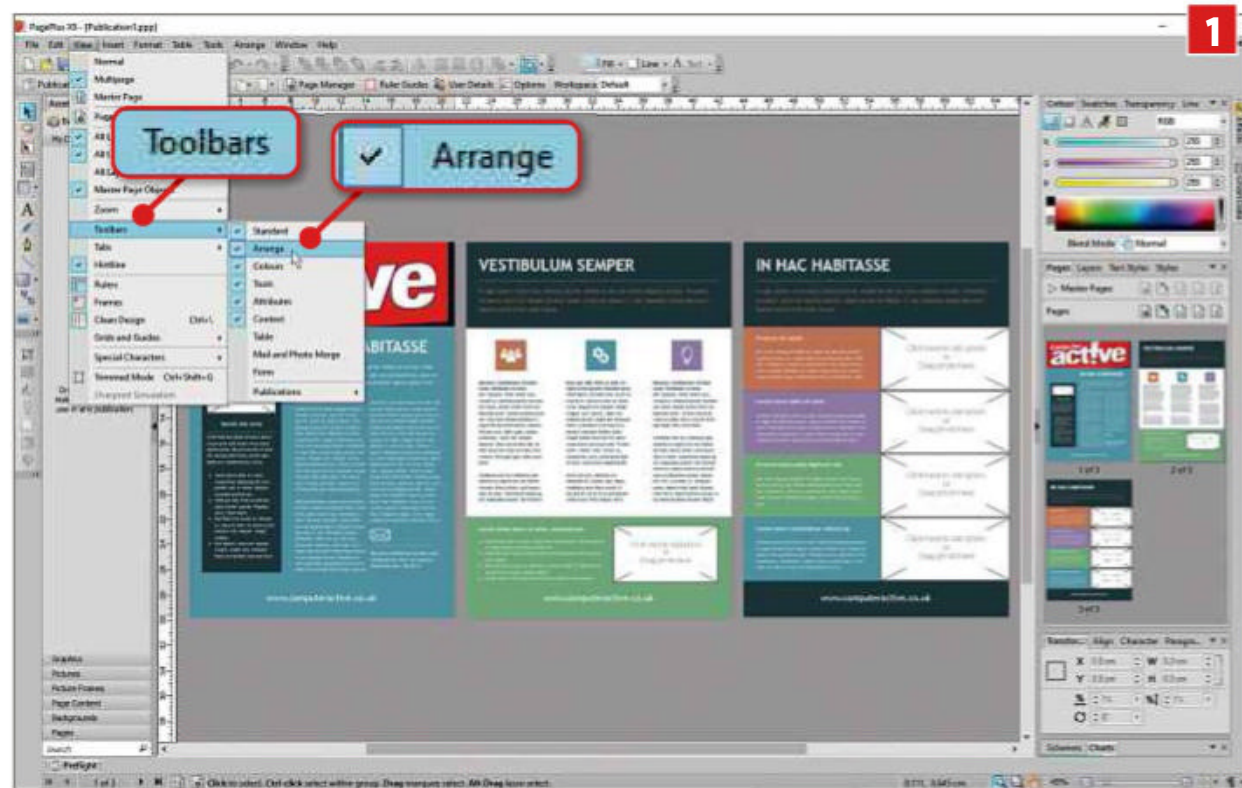
What's happened to this PagePlus button?

Q The Clean Design button in my copy of Serif PagePlus has become greyed out, so I can no longer use it to show margins or guide lines. I know PagePlus has been superseded, but I have lots of files that I still use. Do you know why this might have happened?

Roger Brown

A We had a good look through the last available version of the program (PagePlus X9), but we couldn't find anything that would cause the button to be greyed out. However, we do wonder if by 'greyed out' you actually mean disappeared completely? If so, we think we know what's going on.

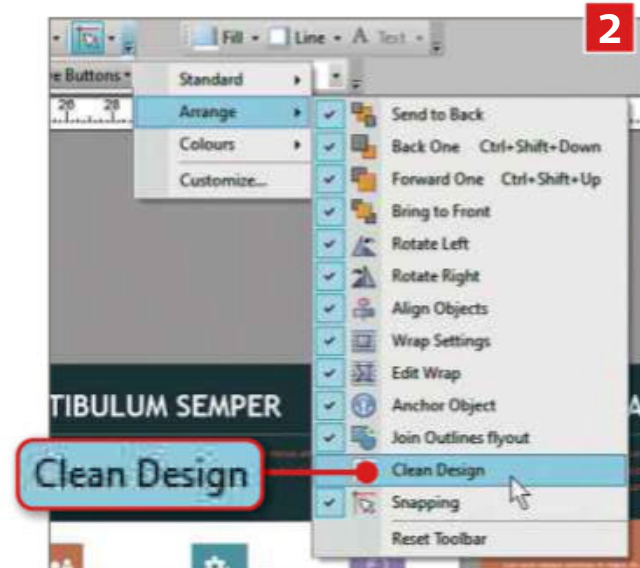
First, make sure the Arrange toolbar is visible. If it isn't, open the View menu, point to Toolbars, then click to tick Arrange (see screenshot 1). Next, at the far right-hand side of the Arrange toolbar, look for the Toolbar Options button – it's a little arrow pointing down. Click this, then click the 'Add or Remove Buttons'



You can add and remove buttons, including Clean Design, in PagePlus's toolbar

option, which is directly below.

You'll note that this new button appears exactly where the Clean Design button lives, so it's not inconceivable that you might have deactivated it accidentally at some point. Now move your mouse pointer to Arrange and, finally, click to tick the Clean Design option (see screenshot 2). Hopefully, your Clean Design button will be back where it belongs.



Can I 'split' the HDMI port on my TV?

Q I connected my laptop to my TV recently because I thought it would be the easiest way to watch some content I'd downloaded. This worked fine, but

it was only while I was scrabbling round the back of my TV that I realised it has just two HDMI inputs, which are taken up by the set-top box and a Now TV stick. Is it possible to 'split' an HDMI port like it

is with old-fashioned audio ports, so I can connect additional devices?

Evan Douglas

A Yes, although with HDMI you're not really splitting an analogue signal so much as switching a digital one. The result is much the same, though. You can attach multiple devices to one of your TV's HDMI ports, then switch between them at will.

The Amazon Basics switch (pictured), for example, has inputs for three devices and a single output. You could connect your Now stick, laptop and a third device to the inputs, then simply press the Select button to choose which one you wish to send to your TV. It costs around £9 from www.snipca.com/38750.



An inexpensive HDMI switch like this one from Amazon can turn a single port into three



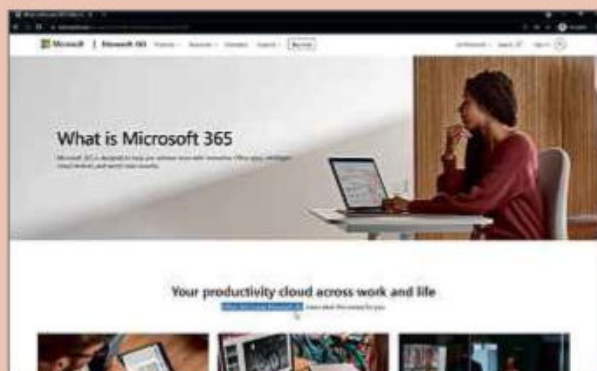
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

Office 365 and the old Office suite?

Q I still use Office 2007, but now that Microsoft no longer supports it, I'm thinking of upgrading. However, I'm confused by the difference between Office 365 and the standard Office suite I've been using all these years. It seems I now have to pay monthly to use the latest software. Why do I have to pay ongoing fees for tools I've been using for years after an initial purchase?

Stephen Downes

A First we should point out that, officially, there is no 'Office 365'. In the mercurial world of Microsoft marketing, it's been subsumed into the subscription service the company now calls 'Microsoft 365'. Microsoft 365 offers a raft of apps and services, including OneDrive online (cloud) storage and access to the desktop and online versions of all the main Office programs. Subscriptions start from £5.99 a month, or £59.99 a



A Microsoft 365 subscription includes access to Office tools, online storage and much more


year.

Don't confuse this with the web version of Office (www.office.com), which until a couple of years ago was called Office Online. Office is the (current) name of a selection of free, online-only Office tools, which you can access if you have a Microsoft account. They're pretty basic and not particularly good, but we're simply mentioning them to help you navigate Microsoft's branding mess.

Then there's Office 2019, which is a

traditional, downloadable version of the suite that you can install on any compatible computer. The company isn't keen on promoting this option, but it's available as a one-time purchase from www.snipca.com/38751, with prices starting from £119.99. Microsoft plans to replace it with Office 2021 later this year, but this will also be available as a one-time purchase.

Office 2019 and 2021 are the modern equivalents of what you have now, and are likely to be supported for years to come – probably a decade for Office 2021. However, these versions won't receive any significant feature updates. Microsoft 365's features are updated regularly and won't fall out of support for as long as the company keeps the service alive. However, should you stop paying the subscription fee, you'll lose access to all tools and services.

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

How do I edit videos on iPad and iPhone?

Q Is it possible to delete sections from the middle of a video on an Apple iOS device? If so, how do I do it?

Jay Siena

A The Photos app that's built into all iPhones and iPads has a few simple video-editing tools, but you can only trim footage from either end of a video, so the opposite of what you want to do.

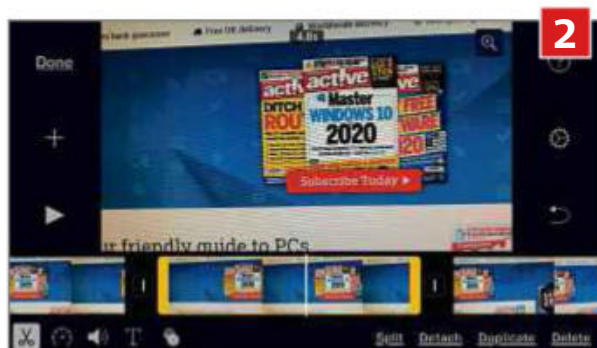
To cut content from the middle, you'll need to use a more sophisticated video-editing app. Fortunately, Apple's own iMovie app can do the job. You may

already have this installed on your iOS device but, if not, you can download it for free from www.snipca.com/38753.

First, in iMovie, tap Create Project followed by Movie. Next, tap to select the video clip you wish to edit (see screenshot **1**). The app will import it into iMovie's editing screen, which has a video-preview pane at the top and a timeline strip across the bottom with a time marker in the centre. If you move your finger across this timeline strip you'll see that you can scroll (or 'scrub') through the video. Scrub through your video to find the start of the section you wish to cut, and position it below the

central marker. Tap the timeline and some new controls will appear. Tap 'Split' to divide your video into two at the central marker.

Now find the end of the section you want to remove and follow the steps to create another split. Your original video will now be divided into three timeline sections (see screenshot **2**). Finally, tap to select the middle section, then tap Delete followed by Done.



Use iMovie on your iOS device if you need to remove sections from the middle of your videos

Next Issue

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- How do I copy Google searches?
- Is this Office 2010 update fake? ...And many more

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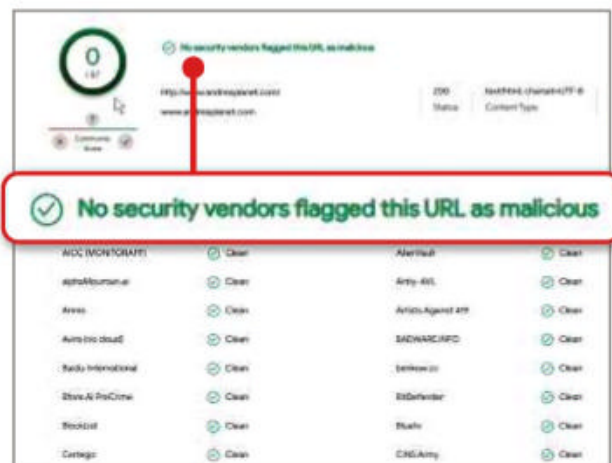
Is AndreaMosaic a Trojan?

Q I subscribe to your excellent magazine and regularly try out the sites and apps you recommend. However, when I downloaded the AndreaMosaic app featured in your 'Turn your photos into mosaics' Workshop in Issue 605 (page 40), my antivirus flagged it as a **Trojan**. I tried twice but got the same result. Is there a problem with this program?

Mike Brameld

A We don't know why your antivirus software is warning you that AndreaMosaic is a Trojan. We've checked the shortcut address we published for the software (www.snipca.com/37973) and it's correct. So, assuming you typed it in correctly, you should have ended up at the legitimate download page for AndreaMosaic.

We've also checked all the download links and passed all the downloadable files through several different antivirus tools, all without any problems. Finally, we ran the entire AndreaMosaic website itself through VirusTotal (www.virustotal.com), a well-known and trusted security website that uses over 70 different scanners. The software came up clean, with zero concerns from the dozens of security companies that contribute to the service. You can see the results for yourself at www.snipca.com/38763 (see screenshot).



The AndreaMosaic site received a clean bill of health from security specialists VirusTotal

We can only assume that your antivirus software is being overcautious and throwing up a false positive – flagging a problem where there isn't one. We don't know which security software you use but, after all the precautions we've taken, you should be safe to click the Ignore or Allow option in your antivirus software, or create an exception for www.andreaplanet.com, which hosts the downloads for AndreaMosaic.

How do I make my ExpressCard work?

Q My laptop has an **ExpressCard** slot, so I was interested to read in your 'Master your PC ports' Cover Feature in Issue 607 that I could put it to good use by adding two **USB 3.0** ports. I bought the CSL-branded 54mm adapter mentioned in the article and followed the instructions that came with it. After plugging it in, however, I received no indication that any **drivers** had been installed.

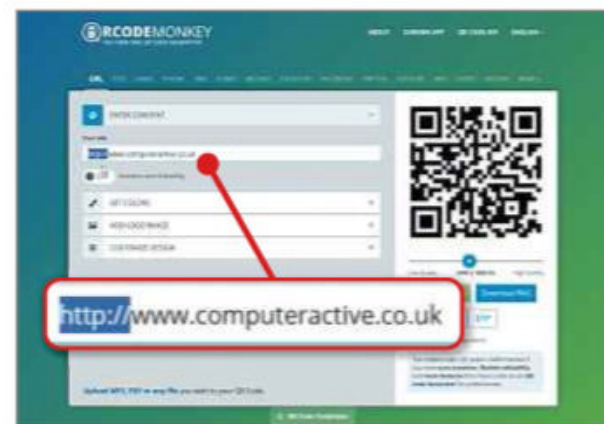
As a result, I can't tell if the adapter is working. I think the company that makes it may have gone out of business, because I haven't received any replies to the emails I sent to the address on the box. Have you any advice? I'd really like those USB ports.

Alan Ashton

A Sadly, poor customer service is rife in this industry, so we're not surprised to hear that the manufacturer hasn't rushed to your aid. That aside, your ExpressCard should have come with a CD containing the drivers. If you didn't get this, you could return the entire package to Amazon for a refund or replacement.

However, a simpler and more effective solution – given that you want to keep the ExpressCard and make it work – is to download the drivers from the company's website at <https://downloads.ganzeinfach.de> (the .de domain shows it's a German firm). The site was still online

at the time of going to press, so there's no indication that the company has gone out of business. Just select the appropriate options from the four dropdown menus, and a list of drivers will appear. Click to download the one with the same model number as your ExpressCard. You should find this number on a label on the underside of the device.



Make sure you enter the full website URL when using QRCode Monkey

Why can't I make QR codes?

Q I've been trying to generate a **QR code** using the QRCode Monkey website (www.qrcode-monkey.com) mentioned in your 'Master and create QR codes' feature in Issue 608). I managed to create QR codes on both my Kindle and Samsung A7 tablet but I've had no joy on my Windows 10 laptop. Any idea why?

David Thow

A We're not sure about this, but it occurred to us that, unlike some QR code-generating apps for iOS and Android phones, the QRCode Monkey website is a bit fussy about how you enter information. If you're creating a QR code for a website URL, for example, it's important to enter the full address – including the **http://** or **https://** at the start (see screenshot above). If you don't do this, the website will display an error message when you click the green Create QR Code button. So, check your entries carefully for mistakes like this before you press ahead.

Jargon Buster

1080p High-definition video: 1920x1080 pixels.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

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

720p A common resolution of high-definition video: 1280x720 pixels.

Add-on A program that adds extra features to your browser.

Aspect ratio A measurement of the shape of a screen. 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 screen and add elements from the digital world.

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

Batch file A list of commands executed in sequence that typically don't require your input.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

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.

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

Browser engine Turns website code into pages you can interact with.

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

Client A program that acts as an interface between PC and server.

Clone A feature found in some backup programs that makes an exact copy of a drive on to another drive.

Closed captions Subtitles that describe *all* the audio, such as noises and music, as well as dialogue.

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

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

Cryptocurrency An online currency not backed by any country. The most popular is Bitcoin.

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

DDR4 The newest, fastest commonly used type of computer memory.

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.

Dual band A router that can work at two radio frequencies, so it can be used in the UK and another part of the world.

Easter eggs Hidden messages or functions in software and on websites. Usually found by accident or word of mouth.

Emoji A small graphic that can be inserted into a text message or email.

End-to-end encryption A way of encrypting messages so that the only people who can read them are the sender and recipient. They can't be intercepted and read by a third party.

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

EXIF Exchangable Image File Format. A method for storing extra information, such as the date, time and camera model, inside digital photo files.

ExpressCard A type of expansion card that slots into a laptop.

Fps Frames per second, normally 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.

Gesture Finger movements on a screen that perform an action, such as pinching to zoom.

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.

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.

Hotspot A public area covered by a Wi-Fi network that allows you to access the internet.

HTTPS Hyper Text Transfer Protocol Secure. The secure version of HTTP, 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.

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology that provides wider viewing angles and better, more accurate-looking colours compared with monitors that don't use this technology.

ISO The light sensitivity of a camera. Higher ISO numbers allow you to shoot without flash in darker situations.

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

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light. Used on almost all electronic devices, and to provide the backlight for some LCDs.

Log file A file detailing the behind-the-scenes events in an operating system, including events leading up to a crash.

LTE Short for 3GPP Long Term Evolution – a standard for very fast transfer of data on mobile networks.

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

Machine learning The science of teaching computers how to learn by themselves, without further human input.

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.

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

NFC Near-field communication. A technology that allows two devices to communicate by being touched together or placed near to each other. Can be used to pay for items in some shops using compatible mobile phones.

OLED Organic light-emitting diode. A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in computer displays and television screens.

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

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software.

QR code Quick Response code. A square barcode that can be read using smartphones and dedicated QR-reading devices.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

Ransomware Malware run by hackers who lock the files on your PC and demand a payment to release them.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

Response time How fast a coloured pixel turns to white and back again.

Root To perform tasks on Android devices that aren't permitted by the manufacturer.

Root directory The top folder in any hierarchy.

RSS feed Really Simple Syndication. A simple format for automatically distributing news headlines and other content from the web.

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

Script A short program stored on a web server to control part of a website.

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

SIM Subscriber Identity Module. The smart card used by all digital mobile phones. It carries the user's identity and phone number for accessing the network.

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

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts. Faster but more expensive than conventional hard drives.

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

Temporary file A file created by a browser to store website data.

TPM Trusted Platform Module. A chip that allows your hardware to perform security-related tasks.

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

TV tuner An expansion card that, when fitted into a PC, receives TV signals.

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.

UEFI Unified Extensible Firmware Interface. A modern replacement for the BIOS, designed to get a PC into a state where it can launch an operating system.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C A new connector that's reversible, letting you plug it in upside down.

VGA Video Graphics Array. An older standard socket for connecting a monitor to a PC.

Virtual PC A Windows tool that lets you 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.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

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

Widget A small program that runs on the Windows desktop.





WMV Windows Media Video. A Microsoft file format for video.

WPA3 Wifi Protected Access. A more secure variant of the security standard for wireless networks.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

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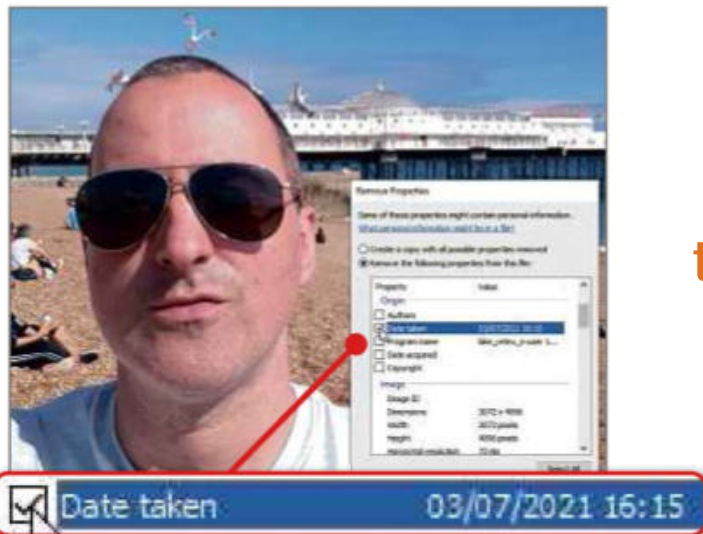
Desperate to stop his camera exposing his web of lies,
Robert Irvine attempts to...

Remove metadata from photos

What a difference four months make. Back in Issue 602 (24 March), I used this column to moan about how boring my photos were because lockdown prevented me from travelling anywhere (yes, poor diddums – I hope I wasn't being tactless in overlooking people's more serious Covid problems). Now that restrictions have lifted, you can't keep me off the trains and in the last few weeks I've been to sunny Brighton, overcast Glasgow and drizzly Salisbury, and have documented my jetset (well, rail-set) lifestyle using the camera on my phone.

These pictures also provide handy 'evidence' when I want to excuse myself from social events and obligations. "Sorry I can't help you move house, I'm currently at the seaside – look, here's me in front of the pier!". At least that trick would work if it wasn't for pesky **EXIF** (Exchangeable Image File Format) data.

This hidden information embedded in photos reveals where they were taken, the camera you used and the *precise date and time* you pressed the shutter button. Such details can undoubtedly be useful – in Issue 602, I explained how you can use them to create a timeline map of your travels – but can cause trouble when you're trying to deceive suspicious friends and family members. To cover my tracks, I decided to find a way to strip



Robert's metadata reveals exactly when he was posing on Brighton beach

incriminating EXIF data from my snaps.

The first method I tried involved using trusty old File Explorer in Windows 10. I right-clicked a Brighton selfie I'd downloaded to my desktop, chose Properties and clicked the Details tab. Here the EXIF data showed that I'd captured the shot at 4.15pm on 3 July 2021 (see screenshot above), using my Motorola phone without the flash on. It also provided the **GPS** coordinates of the photo, and technical details of the exposure time, **ISO** speed and focal length.

To clean up this **metadata**, I clicked the 'Remove Properties and Personal Information' link at the bottom of the window, then selected 'Remove the following properties from this file'. I ticked the box next to 'Date taken' (other boxes let you clear additional metadata), then clicked OK. On returning to the photo's Properties panel, I was delighted to see that my 'dead giveaway' information had been deleted.

Although File Explorer is effective at removing metadata, it's not ideal when you have a lot of photos, as this will involve much right-clicking and ticking of boxes. I therefore looked for a batch-removal tool that could purge EXIF data from multiple images simultaneously, and came across a tiny (360KB) free program with the promising name EXIF Purge (www.exifpurge.com).

I downloaded, extracted and ran the

“
EXIF data causes trouble when you're trying to deceive suspicious friends
”

tool, clicked the Select Images button and chose a folder where I would save copies of the cleaned-up images, so the original files wouldn't be overwritten. I then clicked Purge EXIF Info and the program got to work, quickly confirming that 'EXIF data has been removed from selected images', before showing a small advert (free software, eh?). I checked its claim using File Explorer and all the data had indeed vanished. Result!

However, I still wasn't satisfied. I share most photos from my phone, not my PC, so ideally I needed a way to delete EXIF data directly on my device. I found the solution with a free Android app called Photo Metadata Remover (www.snipca.com/38852), which makes the whole process very easy. I simply tapped Choose Photos on the home screen (see screenshot left), specified an output folder and selected a batch of recent images – you can also choose a whole folder of pics or capture a new shot through the app. Photo Metadata Remover cleared all the EXIF data instantly and offered the useful option to share the results through my usual messaging and social apps.

Now I can confidently send people photos without disclosing when they were taken, which means my post-lockdown life of shirking all responsibilities can continue unabated.

 **Need help removing data from your photos?**
Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

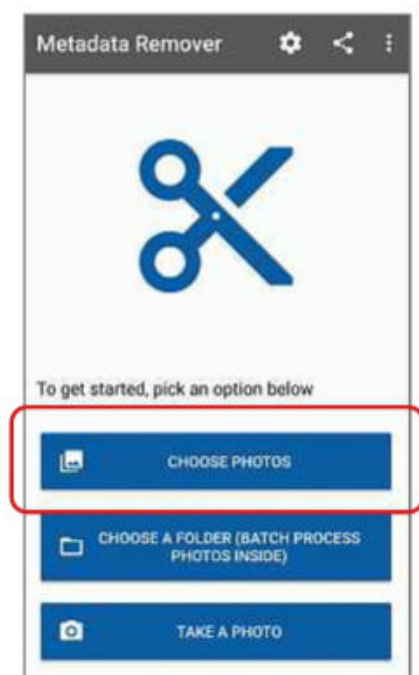


Photo Metadata Remover clears EXIF data from photos in a couple of taps



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