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# **Make** **WINDOWS 10**

# **LAST LONGER**

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Here's a prediction: Windows 11 will finally break the Microsoft curse that sees a good operating system (98, XP, 7) followed by a bad one (ME, Vista, 8). It gets the balance right between keeping what works in Windows 10, ditching what doesn't, and adding new tools to improve the whole experience.

But will it prove popular? Millions of people believed Microsoft when it said Windows 10 would be the last ever version, and will want to stick with it for as long as possible. I can't blame them – Windows 10 is excellent.

Part of Microsoft's strategy will be to let Windows 10 wither and die. Support might remain until 2025, but don't expect new tools or major updates. For that, you'll need to read our Cover Feature, which explains how you can keep Windows 10 safe and speedy for much longer than Microsoft wants you to. It'll help you decide when (or indeed whether) to upgrade, not be forced by Microsoft's nudging and nagging.

Daniel Booth

[editor@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:editor@computeractive.co.uk)



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**£25.18**

How much internet providers must compensate you for missed engineers' appointments – [p15](#)



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## HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

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



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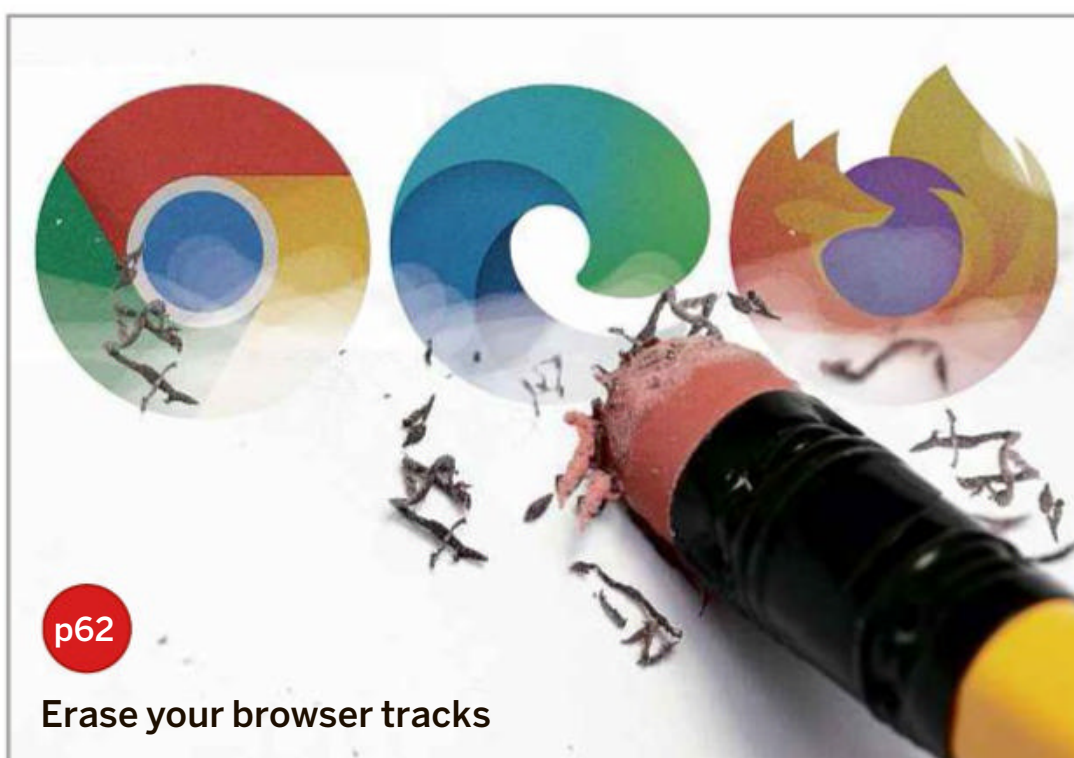


# Make WINDOWS 10

## LAST LONGER

Change vital settings **NOW** – and add new tools!

COVER  
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Erase your browser tracks



# Fake versions of Windows 11 come with malware

**S**ecurity experts have warned that scammers are tricking people into downloading fake versions of Windows 11, which are riddled with malware, adverts and tools that steal your passwords.

## WHAT WE THINK

It's always risky to type 'How to download...' into Google, because scammers will never stop creating websites offering fake versions of popular programs (and those that have been 'cracked' – see page 11). It's safer to type the URL for the download page into your browser. Within seconds of Microsoft announcing Windows 11, scammers would've started devising ways to exploit people's interest. The attempts spotted by Kaspersky are crude, but will be followed by more sophisticated attacks over the next few months. We'll do our best to protect you.

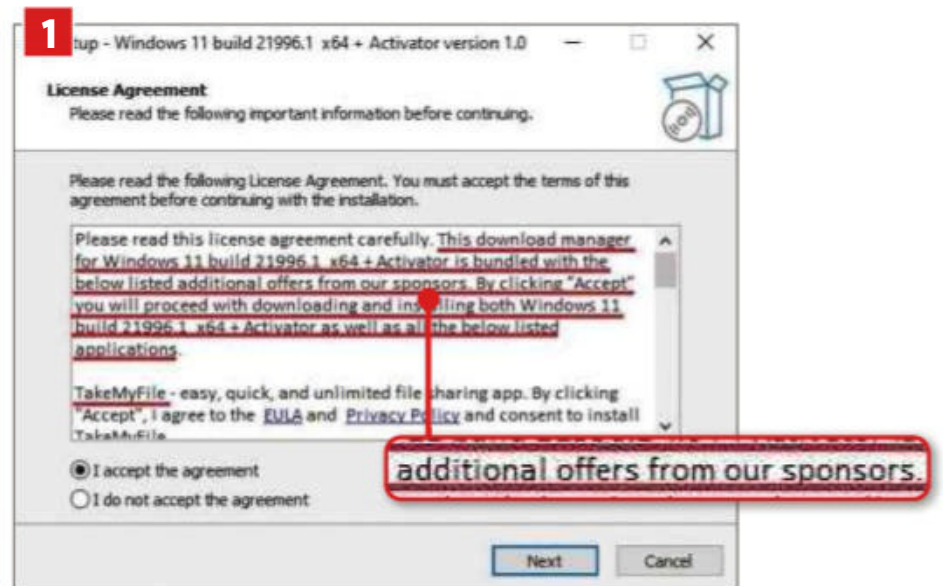
Researchers at Kaspersky said that thousands of computers have already been infected after people searched online for ways to download Microsoft's new operating system.

Some victims have downloaded 1.75GB files that when launched show what appear to be genuine instructions for installing it.

But a closer look shows that the file contains "additional offers from our sponsors" (see screenshot **1**) – in other words, unwanted programs that have nothing to do with Windows 11. Clicking 'Next' and agreeing to the installation secretly downloads **adware** on your computer, peppering your screen with annoying adverts for useless software **2**.

Kaspersky said that some antivirus programs wouldn't identify these adverts as malware, and therefore wouldn't block them.

It's not clear whether these scams do actually install Windows 11, but if so they



won't be official versions of the operating system. The only safe way to get Windows 11 is to install the first **beta** version, which Microsoft released on 29 July. This contains far fewer bugs than the Developer Preview version, released at the end of June.

To install the beta, you'll need to sign up to the Windows Insider Program (<https://insider.windows.com>), though first you should read Microsoft's list of hardware requirements

([www.snipca.com/38958](http://www.snipca.com/38958)) to check whether your computer is powerful enough to run the system.

Microsoft has suggested that Windows 11 will be launched in October. It has told PC manufacturers to get **drivers** ready for the system by 24 September, which should mean it'll be launched the following month.

You can discover what's new in the beta version by reading Microsoft's blog: [www.snipca.com/39060](http://www.snipca.com/39060).

## WINDOWS 11 ALREADY ON 1% OF PCs

More people have downloaded the early preview builds of Windows 11 than those of previous editions of Windows, Microsoft has claimed. Boss Satya Nadella described it as the "beginning of a Windows revolution", while analysts said it's already running on one per cent of Windows computers worldwide. This number should rise quickly now that the beta version is available to install.



**You'll like this...**

Money is being raised to fund a colouring book of old PCs ([www.snipca.com/39058](http://www.snipca.com/39058))



**but not this...**

Scammers are targeting pet owners with fake web adverts ([www.snipca.com/39061](http://www.snipca.com/39061))



# Android users could get £50 in legal action against Google

Nearly 20 million UK Android users could each receive £50 compensation if a mass legal action against Google is successful.

The case, led by the former head of Citizens Advice consumer policy Liz Coll, claims that Google overcharged customers using its apps and services by £920m.

It argues that the 30 per cent cut Google takes from digital purchases on its app store amounts to an “unlawful and unearned tax, imposed on ordinary people without justification”. Developers are forced to pass this cost on to consumers, it alleges, making prices higher than they would otherwise be.

It also argues that because Google includes the Play Store with phones and tablets, customers have little alternative but to pay these



charges – and therefore breaches UK and EU competition laws.

Coll said that customers are “herded” by Google to the Play Store, and that the company controls what’s available with a “vice-like grip”.

The result, she says, is that “competing app stores, which could give the same service at a fraction of the price, never get a look in”.

Apple is facing a similar £1.5 billion lawsuit for charges customers have paid through its App Store. Unlike Apple,

Google does let users download some apps from outside its Play Store, though this process is a lot harder.

Google said its fees were “comparable to our competitors” and pointed out that most Android phones come with more than one app store for customers to use.

The case is due to be heard at the Competition Appeal Tribunal in London. If successful, anyone who has used the Play Store since October 2015 could be due a refund.

## Virgin to make entire network gigabit by 2028

Virgin Media plans to upgrade its entire UK broadband network to gigabit (1Gbps) full-fibre by 2028, as it takes on BT’s dominance of the market.

The company, which merged with O2 earlier this year, wants to connect 14.3 million premises to Fibre-to-the-Home (FTTH) broadband.

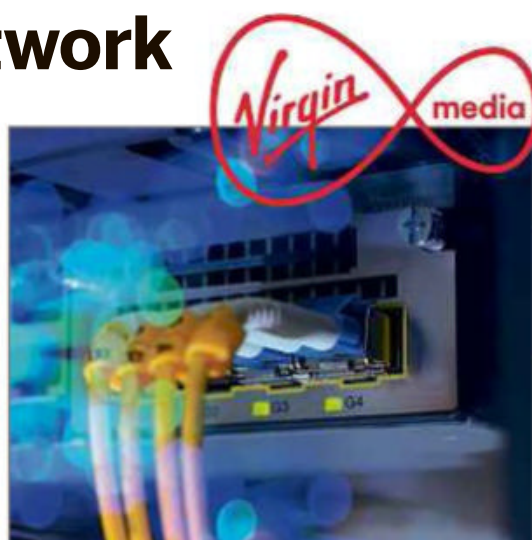
It will install fibre inside tunnels used by its cable network, building upon the 1.2m homes already connected to full-fibre through the company’s Project Lightning.

This will give it more opportunity to offer network access to other providers, such as Sky, Vodafone and TalkTalk, who currently use

Openreach’s cables.

Virgin boss Lutz Schuler said: “This major new fibre upgrade programme will see us begin the next evolution of our network, building on the investment, firepower and leadership we already have and ensuring we’re fibre fit for the future”.

Broadband providers have been told by the Government to deliver gigabit broadband to



85 per cent of the UK by 2025. BT is spending £15bn to upgrade 25m homes and businesses from copper phone networks to full-fibre by December 2026.

### BT’s GIGABIT REACHES 5M HOMES

The number of homes and businesses that can get BT’s 1Gbps broadband has topped five million, according to figures covering April to June. Gigabit

is now available to 5.16m premises, up from 4.6m in the previous quarter; and 860,000 customers have signed up to the service, up from 753,000.

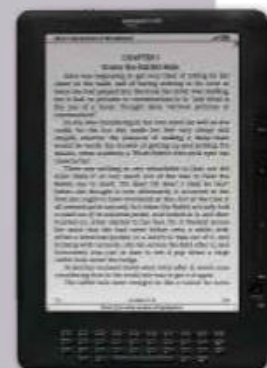
## IN BRIEF

### FLIGHT SIM 2020 GETS HUGE UPDATE

Microsoft Flight Simulator ([www.flightsimulator.com](http://www.flightsimulator.com)) has had its biggest ever update, increasing **frame rates** to make flying feel even more realistic while using fewer PC resources. Its developers have also confirmed they’re planning to add helicopters in 2022.

### OLD KINDLES STOP WORKING IN THE US

Amazon has said that some older Kindles in the US that use **3G** rather than Wi-Fi will soon no longer be able to connect to the internet to download books. It comes as networks around the world start switching off their 3G signals. Amazon hasn’t contacted UK users, but BT has already announced it’s axing 3G in 2023 (see Issue 611, page 7). See which Kindles are affected at [www.snipca.com/39054](http://www.snipca.com/39054).



## TOMORROW’S WORLD



This robot (pictured) may soon be joining sunburnt toddlers and dive-bombing seagulls at the seaside. Built by Dutch engineers with Microsoft’s help, the BeachBot seeks and scoops up cigarette butts discarded in the sand. It’s got a big job – every year 4.5 trillion butts are thrown away. Watch it at [www.snipca.com/38991](http://www.snipca.com/38991).





## IN BRIEF

## VIRGIN MOBILE AXES PAYG PHONE DEALS

Virgin Mobile is scrapping its pay-as-you-go (PAYG) deals, forcing 123,000 customers to switch to a pay-monthly package, or move to a new network. The company said it will start phasing out PAYG between October 2021 and January 2022, and will email customers nearer the time to give the date when their **SIM** card will stop working – though you can find out now by phoning 789.

## JAPAN BREAKS INTERNET SPEED RECORD

Japanese scientists have set a world record of 319Tbps (terabits per second) for transferring data, beating the 178Tbps achieved last August by a team at University College London. Japan's National Research and Development Agency sent data through a fibre cable just over 3,000km, compared with 40km in London last year. The speed of 319Tbps is equivalent to nearly 40,000Gbps.

## THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!



You'd think that videos watched seven *billion* times on TikTok must contain something pretty important, right? Wrong! They're actually part of the daft 'what I eat in a day' trend, in which people desperate to be famous reveal what they've consumed in the past 24 hours. We



hope this young woman had more than that giant-sized McDonald's milkshake.

# DuckDuckGo removes email trackers that target you with ads

**D**uckDuckGo has launched an email service that removes “creepy” trackers from messages that are sent to you.

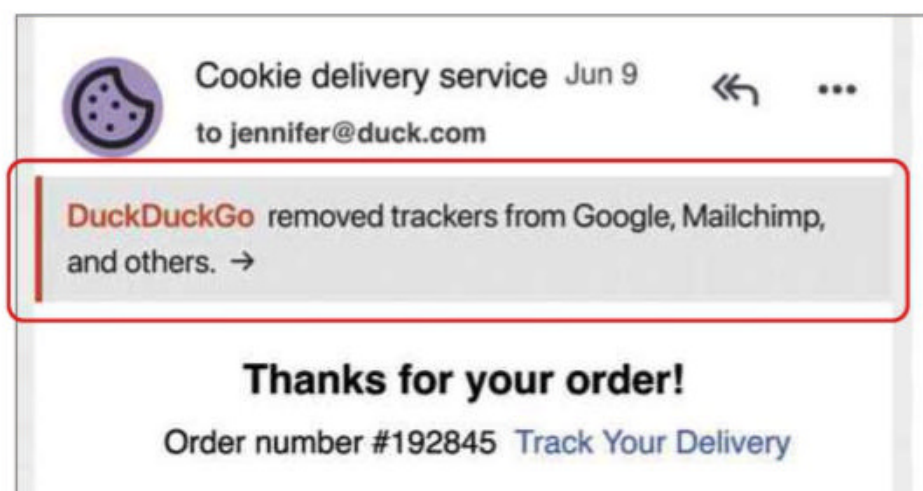


The privacy-focused company claims that 70 per cent of emails contain trackers that tell the sender when you've opened a message, your location when you opened it, and what device you used.

Companies can use this information to create a profile of you in order to target you with adverts.

But DuckDuckGo's Email Protection will wipe these trackers. It works by giving you a free '@duck.com' email address (eg, 'johnsmith1946@duck.com'), which forwards emails to your normal inbox, whether that's Gmail, Outlook, Yahoo or another service.

The company says the content of your emails “is



none of our business”, and points out that it doesn't need to save the messages in order to erase the trackers.

It doesn't even see the sender or recipient's email address. When you get the email, you'll be able to see which trackers DuckDuckGo removed (see screenshot).

To use the service, which is currently in **beta**, you'll have to join the “private waitlist”. Do this by downloading the DuckDuckGo app for Android or iOS (<https://duckduckgo.com/app>), then tapping

Settings, Beta Features, Email Protection, followed by ‘Join the Private Waitlist’.

In its blog ([www.snipca.com/38993](http://www.snipca.com/38993)), DuckDuckGo said: “We're letting new people in every day, but the sooner you join, the sooner you'll be protecting your email privacy”.

DuckDuckGo had considered launching a brand new tracker-removing email service with its own inbox, but concluded it would be difficult to persuade people to switch.

## Fake reviews to be made illegal

**W**riting fake reviews online could be made illegal under government proposals to strengthen protection for UK consumers. New laws might also make it illegal for websites to let bogus reviews appear.

The potential new laws are part of the Government's wider plan to give the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) more powers to tackle bad business practices. These include fining firms that break the law up to 10 per cent of their global turnover.

Ministers want to stamp out other “dodgy tactics” that websites use to rip off



customers. These include ‘dark patterns’, which is when a site manipulates customers into buying or signing up to something they hadn't intended to. An example is when items are added to your shopping basket without you knowing.

Ministers also want to clamp down on businesses paying to have their products appear highly on a trader's website without mentioning they paid for it.

In addition, companies offering paid subscriptions would have to make it clear exactly what consumers are signing up for, and let them cancel easily.

The Government will run its consultation on ‘Reforming Competition and Consumer Policy’ until 1 October. Read more on GOV.UK: [www.snipca.com/38989](http://www.snipca.com/38989).



Have you ever been ripped off online? Let us know: [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)



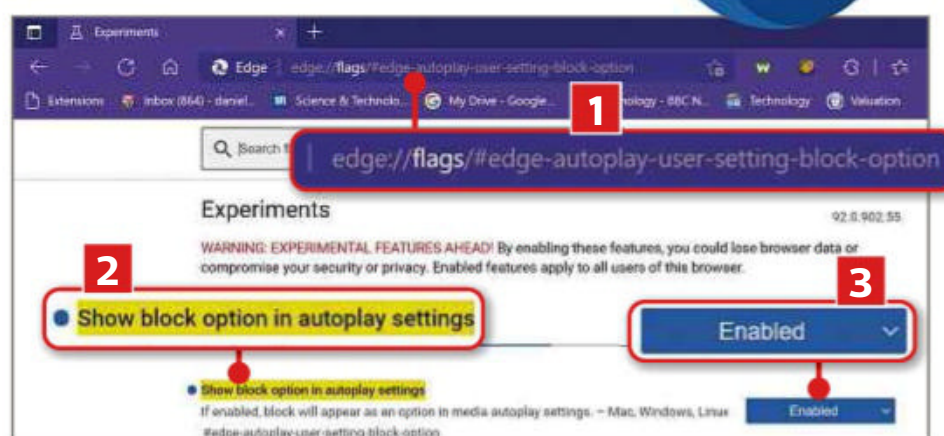
# Edge stops web videos playing automatically

Microsoft Edge now stops audio and video playing automatically when you visit a website.

A new 'Limit' option allows some videos to be played, but only if you've previously visited that site. For instance, if you're a regular YouTube user, videos on that site will still play without you having to press or click anything.

There are two other settings: 'Allow' plays all videos, while 'Block' will prevent everything from playing, even if you have visited a site before.

The 'Limit' option is new in Edge 92, which was released at the end of July. If you want to switch back to Allow, first check that you're running Edge 92. Click the top-right icon (three horizontal dots), then Settings at the bottom of the menu. On the left click



'About Microsoft Edge', and it will check for updates. You'll see the version number in the middle, under the Edge icon.

If you're using Edge 92, go back to the menu on the left and click 'Cookies and site permissions'. Scroll down until you see the 'Media autoplay' heading. Finally, select Allow in the dropdown menu.

To activate the 'Block' option you need to add it to Settings. First type `edge://flags/#edge-autoplay-user-setting-block-`

`option` into Edge's address bar (1 in our screenshot) – or cut and paste it from [www.snipca.com/39034](http://www.snipca.com/39034). The result 'Show block option in autoplay settings' should be at the top 2. Click the dropdown menu to the right, then select Enabled 3 and click the blue Restart button that appears.

When Edge restarts, go back to the 'Media autoplay' heading as explained above, and you should see 'Block' as an option.

## Ofcom to ISPs: promote cheaper deals or we'll take action

Ofcom has said more must be done to help poorer households afford internet access and phone subscriptions, but has stopped short of forcing broadband companies to offer cheap deals for low-income families.

Last month, the regulator published research showing that nearly two million UK households struggle to pay their internet bills. Between January 2020 and January 2021, total debt among broadband and mobile customers increased from £475m to £550m.

Ofcom did acknowledge that some firms have introduced "social tariffs" which, it estimates, can save low-income households more

than £200 a year.

BT, for example, recently launched its £15-a-month Home Essentials package ([www.snipca.com/39031](http://www.snipca.com/39031), see screenshot) for people who receive certain benefits, including Universal Credit. Virgin's Essential service ([www.snipca.com/39032](http://www.snipca.com/39032)) costs the same, though it's available only to those on Universal Credit.

However, Ofcom says companies need to improve how they promote these deals because only 40,000 households have signed up to one – just one per cent of those who are entitled to.

It warned that if firms don't take sufficient action, it thinks there would be a "strong case"



for exploring whether tariffs should be compulsory.

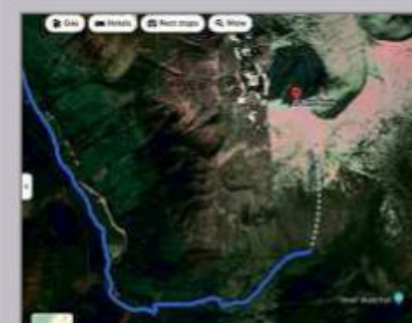
Overall though, it finds customers "are getting better services while prices have been falling". In 2020, the average price for new customers on broadband and landline bundles was nearly 20 per cent cheaper in real terms than in 2015, while speeds rose by 178 per cent. The cost of mobile data has fallen by a similar amount.

Ofcom has asked for feedback from interested parties before deciding what to do.

### IN BRIEF

#### GOOGLE ALTERS RISKY BEN NEVIS ROUTE

Google has updated its route for climbing Ben Nevis after mountaineering groups said it was "potentially fatal". The driving directions on Google Maps took people to a car park where a dotted distance line (pictured below) could be misinterpreted by climbers. Mountaineering charities have advised people not to use Google Maps after several incidents that resulted in "injury or worse".



#### EDINBURGH SEES MOST BROADBAND FAILURES

Edinburgh was the UK's 'broadband outage' capital over the past 12 months, with users suffering on average 175 hours without a connection. The figure comes from research by comparison site uSwitch, which claims that nearly 15 million people lost their connection for more than three hours in the past year – triple the number from a year before. Bristol was second, followed by Leeds – see the full list at [www.snipca.com/39043](http://www.snipca.com/39043).

#### NETFLIX TO ADD PHONE & TABLET GAMES

Netflix has confirmed that it will include games at no extra cost as part of its subscription package. The move is in its "early stages" and will start by offering games for phones and tablets. It didn't say when the service will launch, but sources suggested it would arrive by the end of the year.



# Question of the Fortnight

## Did video chats make people feel lonelier during lockdown?

Many over-60s struggled with the technology or felt overwhelmed

**W**hen the first lockdown began in March 2020, video calls were hailed as a way for loved ones to stay in touch. Tools like Zoom soared in popularity as people swapped physical hugs for on-screen kisses. The media marvelled at this, but did it do more harm than good, particularly among older people?

A new study, published in the journal *Frontiers in Sociology* ([www.snipca.com/39045](http://www.snipca.com/39045)), has found that over-60s who chatted online felt lonelier and more depressed than those who didn't.

The result surprised the report's co-author, Dr Yang Hu of Lancaster University, who said: "We were expecting that a virtual contact was better than total isolation but that doesn't seem to have been the case for older people". He stresses that video chats affected *all* forms of mental



Another painful reason is that a video chat can remind you what you're missing out on. You can't hug a screen, just like you can't hug a memory.

The report, which Dr Hu wrote with Dr Yue Qian at Canada's University of British Columbia, collected data from 5,148 people aged 60 or over

that people who felt more isolated and lonelier tended to make virtual contact more frequently" – getting trapped in a cycle that only made them feel increasingly worse.

Charities welcomed the report. Caroline Abrahams, charity director at Age UK, said: "It's not over the top to point out that in the worst cases, loneliness can kill in the sense that it undermines resilience to health threats of many kinds, as well as leading to older people in the twilight of their lives losing all hope, so they lack a reason to carry on".

Patrick Vernon, associate director at the Centre for Ageing Better ([www.ageing-better.org.uk](http://www.ageing-better.org.uk)), pointed out that while he saw many examples of older people using technology to stay connected in "really positive ways", a lack of confidence "can prevent people from using the internet in the ways that they'd like to".

Frustratingly, the report

### THE FACTS

- A report shows that over-60s who kept in touch during lockdown using video chats were lonelier than those who didn't
- People struggled to learn how to use video tools, or ended up using them too much
- Its authors recommend that if more lockdowns are needed, authorities should let families meet each other safely

**“A video chat can remind you what you're missing out on. You can't hug a screen, just like you can't hug a memory”**

health, not just loneliness.

One of the reasons for this, he says, is that those who were unfamiliar with video tools found it stressful to learn how to use them. But more confident users suffered too because they were overwhelmed by having too many video chats – or “burnout” as Dr Hu calls it.

in the UK and 1,391 in the US – both before and during the pandemic. It's the first to assess social contact and mental wellbeing during lockdown, though the authors don't claim that video chats *caused* loneliness, only that they were associated with it.

Dr Hu called for more research, saying it's “possible

lapses into jargon in its key recommendation: “Policymakers and practitioners need to take measures to pre-empt and mitigate the potential unintended implications of household-centred pandemic responses for mental well-being”.

Translated, this means more should be done to teach older people digital skills. It also advises that if further lockdowns are needed, authorities should set up safe ways for families to meet face to face. This backs up other studies showing that video interaction can boost wellbeing only when supplemented by physical contact.

This approach, mixing video with real meetings, may gain support as the wider effects of lockdown become known – though hopefully we'll never have to put it into practice. Let's hope the days of being restricted to virtual hugs have gone for good.



# Protect **your tech**

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

## WATCH OUT FOR...

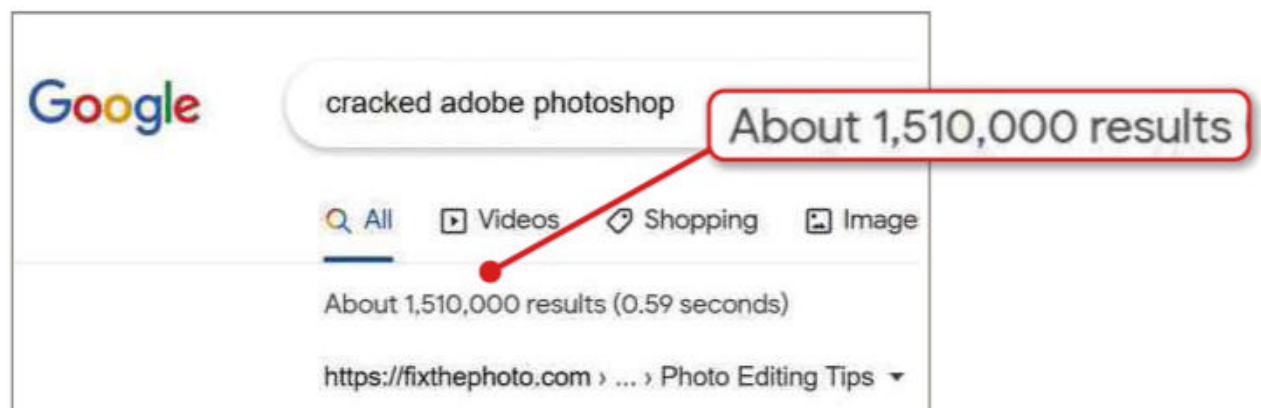
## Malware in 'cracked software' ads

### What's the threat?

A new malware is infecting computers after users click on adverts showing results for 'cracked software', which are paid-for programs that have been illegally hacked to make them free to download. The malware, called MosaicLoader, can install **Trojans** and steal your usernames and passwords, as well as hog your computer resources by mining **cryptocurrency**.

In order to appear genuine, the illegal download has the same file information as the real software, even down to the names and descriptions within file folders.

The criminals behind the attack appear to be exploiting the rise in the number of home workers looking for free versions of expensive programs. Researchers at Bitdefender said the malware is probably the work of a new gang that wants to quickly build an infected network of computers then sell it to the highest bidder on the **dark web**.



### How can you stay safe?

The simplest way to avoid MosaicLoader is to never search for cracked software. Downloading these pirated programs isn't just illegal; it's also extremely dangerous. Even if they don't infect your computer with malware, they'll probably fill it with junk instead.

Antivirus programs usually block cracked software, so make sure you keep yours switched on. It'll prevent you from accidentally downloading anything dodgy.

You can avoid all malicious adverts by sticking only to the software we recommend and typing the URL into your browser. That'll take you to the correct download page, so you won't need to risk clicking any adverts.

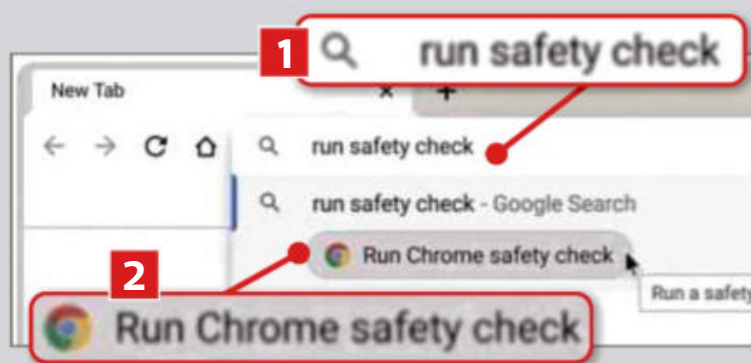
To see the UK's most pirated programs visit [www.snipca.com/38994](http://www.snipca.com/38994). Three big Adobe tools top the list: Photoshop, Illustrator and Premiere Pro. As you can see in our screenshot, searching for cracked versions of Photoshop produces over 1.5 million results.

## New tools | Chrome's security 'quick actions'

Locating the correct option you need in settings can be harder than finding a black circle drawn on black paper placed inside a black box buried deep inside the world's darkest cave.

Google's solution is 'quick actions' that when typed into Chrome's address bar give you the option of clicking straight to the setting. It launched them last November (see Issue 595, page 8), with actions including **wipe cookies** and **edit passwords**.

Chrome 92, released in late July, adds a couple of useful security actions. Type **run safety check** (1 in our screenshot) and then click the button that appears below (2) to assess the security of your passwords and scan for



malicious extensions. You can also type **manage security settings** to access more controls (explained on Chrome's blog: [www.snipca.com/38990](http://www.snipca.com/38990)). Google is rolling these out now, so if you don't see them straight away try again in a few days.

You should already have been updated automatically to Chrome 92. You can check with another quick action – type **update browser** then click the Update Chrome button that appears just below.

## ScamWatch

Readers warn readers



### Beware 'Amazon rewards' survey

I reckon about half of the scams I get – whether by email or text – are urging me to complete a survey to win some highly implausible prize. The latest was promising me "exclusive rewards" from Amazon (£1,000). The email said that the survey would take just 30 seconds to complete. What kind of a survey is that? 'Do you use Amazon? Yes or no?'. It looked so tacky (as you can see at [www.snipca.com/38978](http://www.snipca.com/38978)) that I wasn't fooled for a moment. I guess it must trick some people though otherwise why would the scammers send these emails?

Kevin Oakes



Warn your fellow readers about scams at [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)



# Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

## Microsoft and Google force their browsers on to us

✉ I enjoyed Issue 611's Cover Feature (pictured below) on alternative browsers to Chrome and Edge, but feel you missed out an important reason why you'd want to switch, which is that



Google and Microsoft do almost everything they can to force their browsers on to you. I find this lack of choice the polar opposite of what the internet should be about.

Microsoft in particular has a poor reputation for this. It got into legal trouble years ago for including Internet Explorer with Windows 98, and now tries to pretend that Edge is the only browser worth using. Google follows suit by tying Chrome to Android to such a degree that it takes a real effort to discover and use an alternative browser.

Microsoft and Google rely on people sticking with what they know, which is why it's so refreshing to see *Computeractive* so strongly recommending rivals like Brave and Vivaldi. These smaller browsers are increasingly used by people 'in the know' who are fed up with the bullying tactics of big tech.

Brian Fraser

## Modern tech is making me obsolete

✉ I bought my computer seven years ago thinking – foolishly – that it would last a while. Apparently not. A quick check shows that my processor is too old for Windows 11.

My **graphics card** is fine, however, but as a keen photographer I pay £9.98 per month for Adobe Photoshop and its updates. The latest update won't work because Adobe has decided my card isn't up to the job. Even using a previous (older) version causes it to shut down the card, so that's a waste of nearly £10 a month. Even if I could afford the hundreds of pounds for a new card, my motherboard won't apparently accept one.

My wife and I use Motorola G (first edition) phones and, despite us rarely using them, they now tell us that they've run out of storage (and yes, I've cleared the **cache**).

As retired people we are not in a

financial position to be buying new computers, graphics cards or phones and probably never will be. It appears that I am being made obsolete. Even my wife's pacemaker battery needs replacing.

Chris Prichard

## Windows 11 is an eco disaster

✉ Microsoft's decision to ditch Windows 10 for Windows 11 is a disaster in our 'eco-friendly' world. Every time Microsoft ends support for an operating system millions of functional computers have to be written off because they are too old, or because their hardware is insufficient, to run the new operating system. All this adds to the mountains of electronic waste being generated around the world.

To add to the problems, there's currently a worldwide shortage of microchips – a situation that won't improve if we bin millions of computers at the whim of Microsoft

What's wrong with Windows 10? Why must it be replaced? And how does this fit in with Bill Gates preaching to us all about climate change?

Andrew Nicol

## Fed up with Microsoft's jargon through and through

✉ I wonder if any other readers are as irritated as I am by Microsoft's latest ambiguous message: "We have

committed to supporting Windows 10 through 14 October 2025"?

To us Brits, that means that they will be supporting it "through" the 14 October, 2025, and out the other side, to some unspecified date far in the future.

However, presumably the message is intended for people who read American, and what they really mean is that they will only support Windows 10 to the 14 October, and no later.

What was it George Bernard Shaw said about two nations divided by a single language?!

Angela Thorne

**CA SAYS** Yes, using 'through' to mean 'until' is particularly annoying. There seem to be just as many differences between how Americans and Brits speak as there are between Microsoft employees and normal human beings.

## How much longer can you recommend this PC?

✉ A couple of years ago I started to look for a new desktop PC. I bought *Computeractive* and saw that you recommended Palicomp's Intel Mercury as your Buy It PC. This was back in March 2020, in Issue 576. I've just bought Issue 609 and I notice that the Mercury is still your recommended choice.

I'm amazed. I thought that the world of computing changed faster than, well, the

## What's the Issue...?

✉ I remember reading a simple tutorial, maybe around 12 months ago, on how to use Microsoft's Process Monitor ([www.snipca.com/35662](http://www.snipca.com/35662)). Can you tell me which issue it appeared in please?

Graham Wright

**CA SAYS** Yes, it was in Issue 587, page 57, at the end of our 'Stop Windows spying on you' Cover Feature.

✉ I'm about to buy an **SSD**, but my ageing brain can't cope with all the different formats. Didn't you publish a buying guide to these not so long ago?

David Lorimer

**CA SAYS** Indeed we did, in Issue 597 (pages 62-63). It explains all the jargon you need to know, including the difference between **mSATA** and **SATA**.

✉ My Bluetooth mouse is driving me mad. Sometimes it connects, but most of the time it doesn't. Another reader had a similar problem recently, and I think you fixed it. Is that right?

Carole Sherman

**CA SAYS** Yes it is – we fixed Sidney Butt's mouse problem in Issue 601, page 64.



fastest-changing thing you can think of! The time it took you to produce all those issues in between must have been a lifetime for the hardware made by manufacturers – motherboards, processors, storage etc. But this PC is still the same inside. What's its secret?


David Wilkins

**CA SAYS** Turn to page 30 and you'll see that Palicomp's Intel Mercury is still our top choice. Technology seems to move so fast that we understand where David is coming from, but it's not uncommon for certain devices to remain our favourite for over a year.

One of our principles when reviewing products is to not assume that new is automatically better. Manufacturers would like you to think otherwise, and will try to dazzle you with the latest components and features, many of which you'll never need.

We've reviewed many good desktop PCs since Issue 576, including PC Specialist's Aurora-R (Issue 610, page 22) and Dell's Inspiron 3881 (Issue 611, page 22). However, we awarded both machines four stars, one short of the maximum needed for us to consider it a replacement for the Intel Mercury, which has a better balance of speed, **RAM**, storage and potential for expansion. There haven't been sufficient technological advances in the past year to weaken our recommendation, though Windows 11 is bound to change that soon.


## My 'old-fashioned' ways mean I shouldn't pay 'phone tax'

 I would object to paying extra tax for an electronic device capable of "storing and downloading creative content" (News, Issue 610, page 7) as I have only ever once downloaded from the BBC iPlayer, and don't stream films, music or games. Being old-fashioned, I still watch films on TV or on DVDs, and listen to music on the radio or on CDs. The only game I play is Mahjong, which was already installed on an older PC.

How can I prove that I don't stream or download? Well, obviously I can't. You'll have to take my word for it. I cannot ask the manufacturers to provide electronic devices which cannot download and store such content for people like me, and produce electronic devices which can for those people who want to download such content. It would be far too costly, and they'd refuse to do it anyway.

## STAR LETTER

### Streaming quality can't match CDs and DVDs

 I was taken aback by Sainsbury's decision to stop selling CDs and DVDs (News, Issue 611, page 9). It made me feel like even more of a dinosaur than I normally do. I realise the world is moving towards streaming, but don't people realise this produces inferior audio and video to discs?

You don't have to be an audio snob to detect the difference. I have a Sony stereo, bought about 15 years ago. In stereo years, it's almost as ancient as I am. But despite its age it still produces a better audio quality than anything you'll hear on Spotify or Apple Music. Even if you rip CDs using an excellent tool like Foobar2000 ([www.foobar2000.org](http://www.foobar2000.org)) and play the files on your PC, the quality can't compare with the actual disc.

Before blaming streaming for poor CD and DVD sales, perhaps Sainsbury's (and other supermarkets – they're all just as bad) should examine the pathetic range of titles on offer. It's no wonder people look elsewhere. And I



don't just mean Amazon, but also charity shops. The high street is packed with them these days. Any full-price album or DVD in Sainsbury's can be found for £1 in a charity shop. You may argue that people donating these discs are doing so because they've switched to streaming, but more often it's because they're moving house, or just want to clear the clutter from their shelves.

I realise I'm fighting a losing battle though. Streaming is seen as fast and convenient. If you're young, you expect everything to be available with just one click, and you're happy to sacrifice quality. I'll stick with my discs though, thank you very much.

Garry Bryant




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

So while I sympathise with the artists over lost revenue, because of easy download/streaming, I'm afraid they'll have to come up with another solution.

Maureen Clayson

## When will I get full-fibre?

 I live in an 01702 telephone code area (for Southend), though the exchange isn't nearby. As a result, the area is often the last to get any broadband update (it was also the last to get copper broadband).

Currently CityFibre is installing fibre broadband in Southend, but not in my area (the exchange is only a few hundred yards outside of the borough border). Essex County Council is installing fibre into the rural parts of the county. I live isolated between the two areas.

My broadband is fibre-to-the-cabinet (FTTC), and the

speed is highly variable. I would like to have the stability that full fibre would give. The problem is that I can't get any information on when my exchange is going to be updated to full fibre. Any approaches to Essex County Council, Openreach or CityFibre are greeted with "it is not currently available in your area".

Do you know how I can get information on the timing of fibre installation for any particular area?

Martin Wilkins

**CA SAYS** Yes, for Openreach you should visit [www.snipca.com/38748](http://www.snipca.com/38748), which will download a PDF showing locations where it plans to build full-fibre broadband.

CityFibre has a map (pictured) of broadband projects at [www.cityfibre.com/rollout](http://www.cityfibre.com/rollout), while for Virgin you'll need to type your postcode at [www.snipca.com/39015](http://www.snipca.com/39015).







We stand up for your legal rights

## Does Dell's warranty cover software problems?

**Q** Last October, I bought a £400 refurbished Inspiron 3585 laptop (pictured) directly from Dell, and paid for a two-year warranty. A month ago, when opening my browser, I lost my Virgin Media internet access. Can Dell refuse to help under warranty because the problem is software related, not hardware?

Anthony Robinson

**A** Yes, Dell can refuse a repair, replacement or refund, but only if Anthony is seeking assistance under the warranty, and then only if this policy doesn't cover software. Instead, he should seek help under the Consumer Rights Act (CRA), which gives more legal rights than a warranty, and covers second-hand goods (as well as software).

To use the CRA, Andrew must prove that the laptop isn't fit for purpose. This applies to inherent hardware faults and to problems caused by software installed by the manufacturer. He doesn't have a case though if the fault was triggered by software he installed after purchase.

Virgin has told Anthony there's nothing



wrong with his router or connection, so he needs to ask it to provide him with the proof of this to send to Dell. He could also pay for a technician to inspect the laptop, and then if an inherent fault is found Dell must refund this cost, and either repair or replace the laptop.

Anthony sounds less than impressed with his extended warranty, so he may want to consider cancelling it and getting some money back under the Supply of Extended Warranties on Domestic Electrical Goods Order 2005 (visit Citizens Advice for advice: [www.snipca.com/38954](http://www.snipca.com/38954)). You're entitled to a full refund if you cancel within the first 45 days and haven't made a claim, and a pro-rata (partial) refund after this.

CASE ONGOING

## Can I get refund without proving purchase?

**Q** I bought an Apex M400 keyboard from Currys PC World about two years ago, but now the 'C' key won't work. I believe it had a two-year warranty so I contacted the manufacturer SteelSeries (<https://steelseries.com>), but because I can't prove when I bought it I've failed to make progress. What can I do?

David Charge

**A** David should double-check that he *really* can't provide proof of purchase. He thinks he paid by credit card, in which case the purchase should be recorded on a statement, albeit from a couple of years ago. The most common cause of not being able to prove purchase is when paying with cash or a gift voucher and you lose the receipt.

David should persist with the warranty rather than the Consumer Rights Act because under the latter he would need to show that the problem with the keyboard is an inherent fault, rather than accidental damage or fair wear and tear. This will be difficult given that two years have passed since purchase. While David checks his statements, we'll contact SteelSeries to see if it can help him.

CASE ONGOING

### CASE UPDATE

## Currys refunds reader after Acer's failed laptop repairs



One of our staple pieces of advice is to always approach the retailer before the manufacturer when you have a problem. Stewart Moore will vouch for that. He has finally got a refund of £799 from Currys PC World for a faulty Acer Aspire laptop (see Issue 607), but it took a lot longer than it should have.

When the laptop developed a fault, Stewart sent it to Acer under warranty. It added an SSD to fix the problem, but when it returned the laptop the case was warped. Acer promised

another repair, but stopped replying to his emails. He then asked Currys for help.

At this point, Currys could have rejected his complaint, saying it can't be held responsible for damage (the warping) caused by another company. However, it decided to repair the laptop by replacing the case, and by doing so assumed responsibility. This became relevant when the laptop, once returned to Stewart, started shutting down unexpectedly. This fault could be blamed only on Currys, not Acer.

Currys should then have refunded Stewart, having failed in its one attempt to repair the laptop. Instead it attempted *another* repair. But finally, after we intervened, Currys has refunded Stewart, apologising for what it calls a communications mix-up.

Incidentally, Stewart would've had a case against Acer because any repair – whether or not under warranty – has to be carried out with reasonable skill and care. But it would've been better still had he approached Currys in the first place.



Contact us so we can investigate your case

✉ **Email:** [consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk)  
Please include your name, phone number and address.

## Will I be covered if my Gucci purchase is fake?

**Q** I've wanted a Gucci bag for years and although it's not cheap (£1,300) I'm thinking of buying one from an Amazon Marketplace seller. What are my rights if the bag turns out to be a counterfeit?

Lizzy Turner

**A** It feels like a gamble because Gucci is one of the world's most counterfeited brands, but Lizzy does have a lot of protection. First, there's Amazon's 'A-z guarantee' ([www.snipca.com/38970](http://www.snipca.com/38970)), which will refund her should the bag turn out to be not as

described. If she uses a credit card, Lizzy will be protected by Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act, while she may be able to get a chargeback from her bank if using a Visa or Mastercard debit card.

Lizzy should check where the seller is based because she'll have far stronger protection if they're located within the UK, or even Europe. One way to check the legitimacy of a UK firm is via the Companies House website ([www.snipca.com/38971](http://www.snipca.com/38971)). If they're reputable, you'll see several points of contact: email, phone number, address. Don't trust companies whose only point of contact is through an



online form and a PO Box address.

Counterfeit goods cost international brands millions of pounds every year, so they work hard with Amazon to clamp down on them. Read Amazon's anti-counterfeiting policy for details: [www.snipca.com/38972](http://www.snipca.com/38972).

**CASE CLOSED**

## Can I punish Virgin for delay in fixing problems?

**Q** I have a broadband, landline and TV package from Virgin Media, but they all stopped working on Friday 31 May. The telephone resumed working two days later, but I was told it could be up to eight more days before my internet and TV were working again. This is unacceptable. Although I've



contacted Ofcom, it doesn't seem interested. Isn't there a way to punish Virgin?

Donald C Fergusson

**A** Yes, Donald can take his complaint against Virgin further, though not with Ofcom because it doesn't have the power to take on individual cases. However, it can fine companies if it receives repeated complaints and decides to investigate. In February, for example, it fined O2 £10.5m for overcharging customers ([www.snipca.com/38973](http://www.snipca.com/38973)).

That said, Donald should

have automatically received a refund under Ofcom's Automatic Compensation Scheme. This entitles him to £8.06 for each day the service wasn't working, and £25.18 each for any missed engineer appointments. Companies must also pay £5.04 per day for a delay to the start of a new service.

Donald said he's considering suing Virgin for breach of contract. Before he does this, we'd suggest taking his complaint to the relevant Ombudsman – CISAS ([www.cedr.com/consumer/cisas](http://www.cedr.com/consumer/cisas)). Unlike Ofcom, it can take on a customer's case and force the company to pay compensation.

**CASE CLOSED**

### CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

## Chillblast's photos helped me install my new SSD

 I bought a Chillblast PC seven years ago after a recommendation in *Computeractive*, and it has served me well. As its memory was getting full, I decided to add a 1TB SSD. I had accumulated a large number of photos and correspondence, which I wanted to keep handy for business reasons.

Chillblast advised me to install a Samsung 1TB 870 QVO SSD. To help me install it, Chillblast sent me colour photos of **SATA** power and data cables that I'd need, plus

annotated photos of both sides of my PC's motherboard to show where I could connect the power system, and to a spare available data socket on my motherboard. All this made installation quick and easy.

Despite the many emails we exchanged, Chillblast didn't ask for any payment for their services. Wonderful!

BJ Haworth

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

# Chillblast

Contact  
Chillblast

• **Online form** [www.snipca.com/38898](http://www.snipca.com/38898)  
• **Phone** 01202 068333



# Grow Your Family Tree



Get more details about your ancestors' working lives from organisations they belonged to. Follow **Nick Peers'** guide to...

## Tracing trade union records

There have been over 5,000 trade unions in UK history, with a collective membership running into the tens of millions, so it's likely that some of your ancestors belonged to one. If they were card-carrying members then they'll probably be on file somewhere.

### Search Find My Past's online records

The biggest collection can be found at Find My Past ([www.snipca.com/38854](http://www.snipca.com/38854)), which has over three million records from 26 unions. Searching is free, but you'll need a Plus subscription (£12.99 a month) to actually view the records. Take the time to scroll past the search boxes and review the summary to see which records are available. Once you've done that, enter an ancestor's full name (or just the surname for a more speculative search) and wait for the search tool to

reveal how many potential matches it has found, before clicking the 'View Results' button to review them.

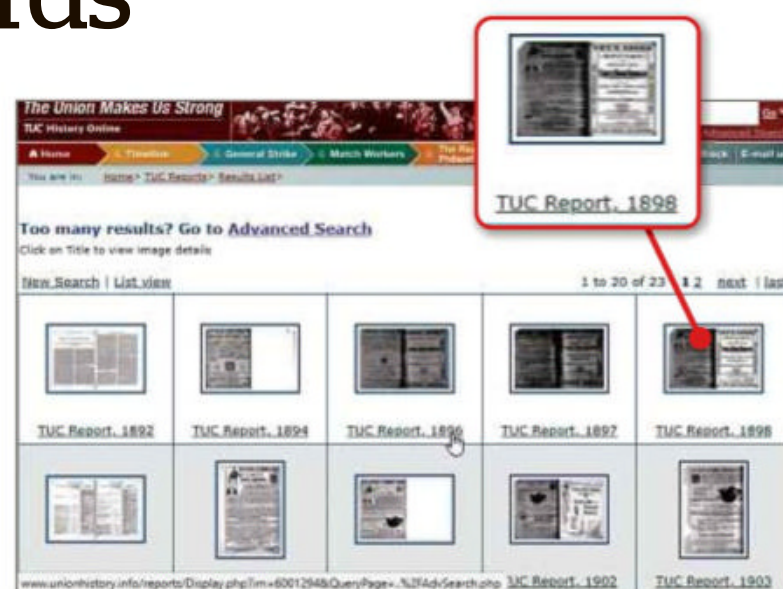
The results show name, admission year, trade, union branch and – in some cases – the person's birth year, which can all be used to confirm a possible match. Click the transcript or image button to the right to view the record in full. As our screenshot below left shows, the original image can be hard to read, so start by viewing the transcript. To do this, click a name at the bottom.

### Visit trade union sites

Find My Past's collection is large, but it's far from complete because most trade union records have yet to be digitised.

For a wider look at the trade union movement, visit The Union Makes Us Strong website ([www.unionhistory.info](http://www.unionhistory.info)), which provides a general history based around topics such as the 1926 General Strike. You can also download scans of annual TUC reports from 1868 onwards (see screenshot above right).

If you know your ancestor's profession from other sources, such as censuses or employment records,

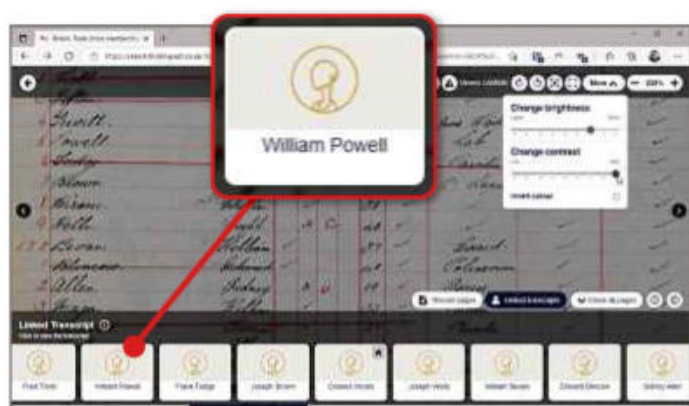


You can download scans of TUC reports from The Union Makes Us Strong website

search the Union Ancestors website's A-Z list of 5,000 trade unions ([www.unionancestors.co.uk](http://www.unionancestors.co.uk)). You'll end up with a list of trade union names, only some of which would have existed during your ancestor's working life. Find out what happened to these by viewing the 'family trees' that reveal how various unions amalgamated into modern-day unions – like the RMT for rail, maritime and transport workers.

If you haven't yet found what you want, you may need to link an old union to its modern-day equivalent and visit its records in person. The richest resources are concentrated in places like the Modern Records Centre at Warwick University ([www.snipca.com/38856](http://www.snipca.com/38856)) and the Working Class Movement Library ([www.snipca.com/38857](http://www.snipca.com/38857)). Also check out the National Library of Scotland ([www.snipca.com/38858](http://www.snipca.com/38858)) for Scottish records, along with the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland's eCatalogue ([www.snipca.com/38859](http://www.snipca.com/38859)) and the Irish Labour History Society ([www.irishlabourhistorysociety.com](http://www.irishlabourhistorysociety.com)).

Finally, visit the National Archives ([www.snipca.com/38860](http://www.snipca.com/38860)) for a wider collection of records held in archives across the UK, along with web links and contact details where applicable.



The original handwritten documents can be hard to read, so click a box at the bottom for a transcript

## Your Genealogy Problems Solved

I've realised I've made an error when editing a family member's details in Family Tree Maker 2019, but I can't remember *where*. Is there some kind of log I can access to help me locate it?

Ann Rye

Click the Plan button and you'll see a Change

Log tab at the top. Switch to this to review the last 1,000 changes to your file, helping you pinpoint your error. You can also use this feature to roll back your file to the point where you made the mistake.



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





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AMD 5700XT 8GB  
CORSAIR iCUE 220T RGB White  
MICROSOFT Windows 10 or 10 Pro

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# Best Free Software

Wayne Williams recommends new programs that won't cost a thing

## BROWSER

### Vivaldi 4.1

<https://vivaldi.com>

**What you need:** Windows 7, 8.1 or 10

Vivaldi's developers don't hang around. A few weeks after its big 4.0 update, which added a translation tool, email client, calendar and RSS feed reader, comes version 4.1 which, while smaller, still contains smart new features.

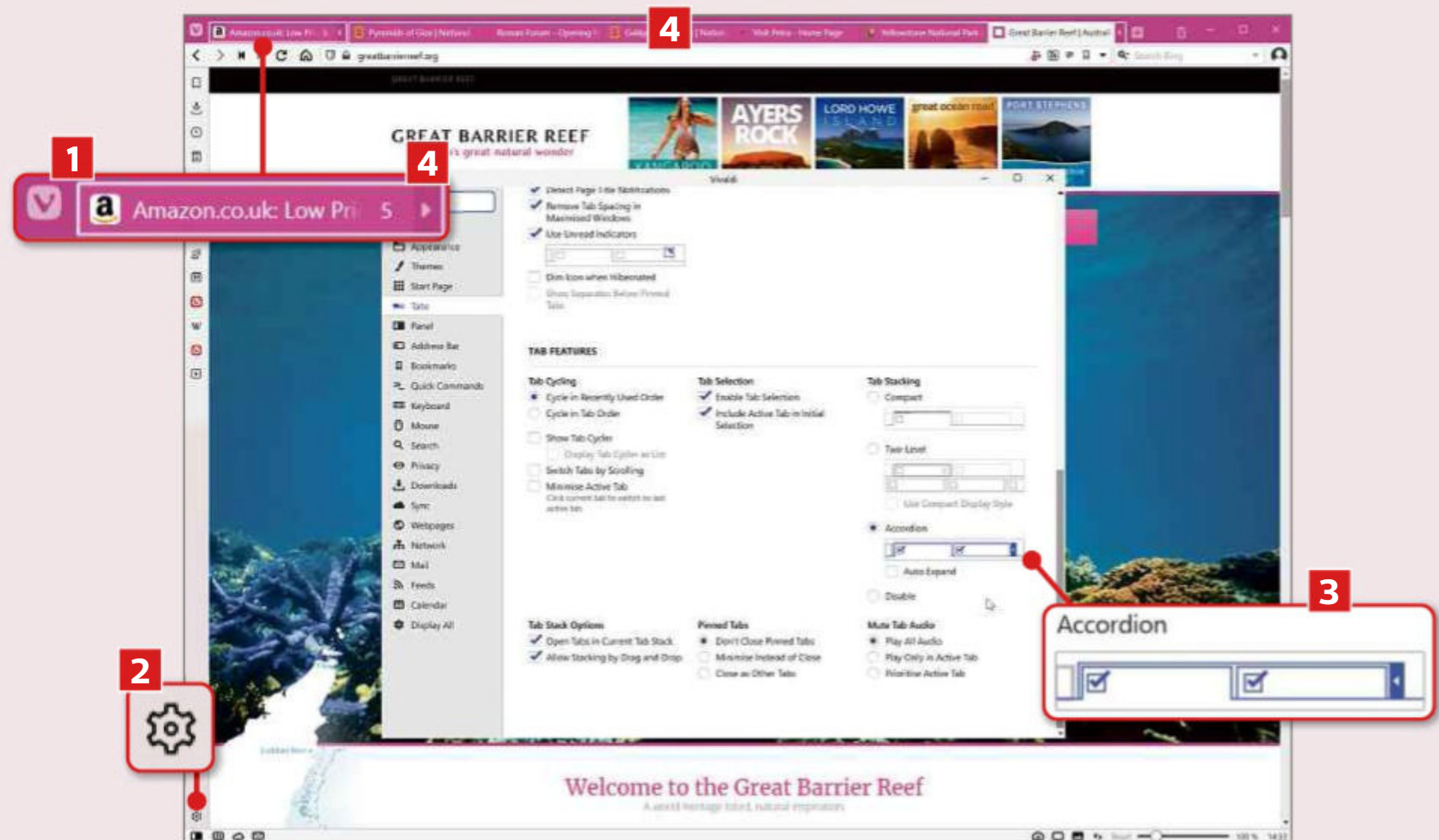
The most useful is the marvellously named Accordion Tabs, which gives you a third (and we think much tidier) way to view your browser tabs when you're using the Tab Stacks option. Tab Stacks lets you place your tabs into groups, freeing up space on the browser's bar.

Previously there were only two views: Compact (giving an indication of how many tabs are in a stack) and Two-Level (showing a second row of tabs below the main one). With the Accordion setting on, your tabs are hidden until you click the arrow button (see below). At this point, the tabs will unfurl to the right.

The other major new feature is Command Chains. These

let you 'chain' together a string of commands, such as having your favourite websites appear as square tiles. To use it, open Settings, select Quick Commands on the left, then scroll down to Command Chains. You'll see three chains already there – 'Open Links and Tile', 'Close Other and Open Defined Tab', and 'Toggle Full Screen and Reader Mode' – but you can create your own by clicking the plus button, and selecting some actions to add using the dropdown menus. There are over 200 commands to choose from (read more on Vivaldi's blog: [www.snipca.com/39047](http://www.snipca.com/39047)).

When you've made your chain, make sure it works by clicking the Test Chain button. If so, you then need to give it a name. You can run the chain by pressing F2 and typing its name, or creating a specific keyboard shortcut for it.



**1** Create a stack by opening related browser tabs, dragging one on top of another, then adding other tabs to it.

**2** To switch to the new Accordion Tabs view, click the cog icon at the bottom of the sidebar. This opens Vivaldi's settings.

**3** Click 'Tabs' in the sidebar, then scroll down to the Tab Features heading and look for Tab Stacking. Select the Accordion option.

**4** The Accordion Tabs view adds a small arrow to the right of the tab stack. Click this and tabs will appear to the right. Click the arrow again to hide them.





## AUDIO EDITOR

### Audacity 3.0.3

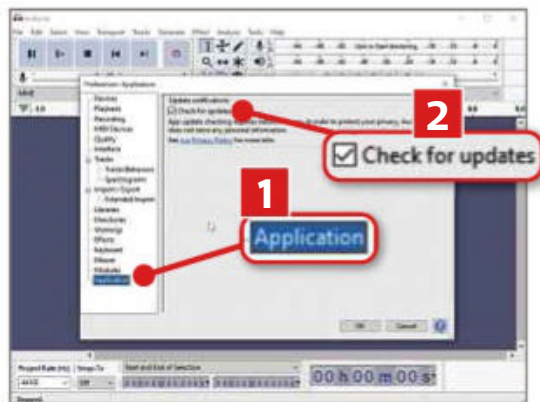
[www.audacityteam.org](http://www.audacityteam.org)

**What you need:** Windows 7, 8.1, or 10

Audacity may have watered down its controversial plans to track how people use the program (see page 7, Issue 611), but the new version does contain two new features that some users do see as invasions of privacy.

One is error reporting, which shows information about any problems with the software – such as files not opening – and gives you the option to send details to Audacity (click ‘Don’t send’ or ‘Send’).

The other new tool checks whether there’s a new version of Audacity available to download. If you want to disable this, click Edit, Preferences, then Application (1 in our screenshot) at the bottom of the sidebar. Finally, untick ‘Check for updates’ (2).



## VIDEO CONVERTER

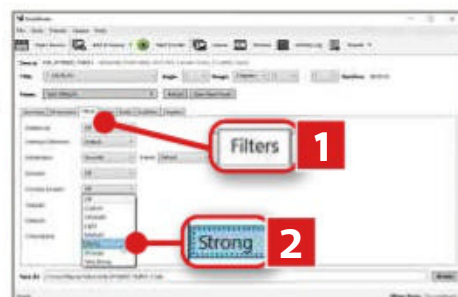
### Handbrake 1.4

<http://handbrake.fr>

**What you need:** Windows 10

There are many different video formats, some of which, by default, will play only on certain devices.

HandBrake solves this problem by converting files to the correct format, as well as ripping DVDs and Blu-ray discs. The latest version adds three filters you can apply to videos before conversion. ‘Chroma Smooth’ makes the colours look slicker, removing any jagged effect. To turn it on, click the Filters tab (1 in our screenshot), followed by the Chroma Smooth dropdown menu, then select the setting you require (2).



The ‘Colourspace Selection’ filter changes the program’s algorithm to use a mathematical method of defining colours (explained on Wikipedia: [www.snipca.com/39046](http://www.snipca.com/39046)), thereby producing more accurate results. The other new filter, called Crop/Scale, uses Intel’s QuickSync **hardware acceleration** software to put less pressure on your computer’s resources when converting. You may be prompted to allow Microsoft .NET 5.0 Desktop Runtime when first launching HandBrake (it won’t run without it). Click the link to download it, choosing the x86 version if your computer is **32bit**, and x64 if it’s **64bit**.

## WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

We tell you what software & apps to use

### How can I improve colour in old videos?

**Q** I have Super 8 video footage taken in Mauritius between 1968 and 1970 that’s been copied to DVD, but the colour is not what it was. Is there any way to improve the colour, as you can with old photographs? I’ve looked online, but can’t see whether any programs will actually do this.

David Butler

**A** Enhancing the colour in a video isn’t as easy as in photos, but it can still be done. The best program to use for this is DaVinci Resolve 17 ([www.snipca.com/38963](http://www.snipca.com/38963)), which is a professional-level video editor that’s been used on many Hollywood films.

The free version offers all the tools you’re likely to need.

Run it, click the New Project button at the bottom, then give your project a name. Drag your video clips from your hard drive to the media pool, then drag the first one you want to edit to



the timeline below. Click the Colour button at the bottom (1 in our screenshot) to open the colour panel.

Use the Curves option (2) to adjust the tonal range (colour and tone, including brightness), and move the sliders to the right to adjust the red, green and blue hues. They will move in tandem, so click the link above them to adjust them separately.

If that sounds like too much hard work, you can ask DaVinci Resolve to try and fix the colours for you. Click the Color Wheels button (a circle with a dot in it (3)), then click the A (Auto Balance) button (4) and wait while it analyses the video and tries to fix any problems.

Save your project at any time by pressing Ctrl+S and export the video by clicking the Deliver (rocket) button (5) at the bottom. Click ‘Add to Render Queue’ to finish exporting your home movie.



Do you need our advice on what software to use? Just email us at [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)



HOW I USE...



# CustomFolder

Wayne Williams' PC desktop is messier than a teenager's bedroom. Here he explains how CustomFolder helps him find what he's looking for

I have a lot of folders and shortcuts crammed on to my desktop – and I mean a *lot*. I've always thought that by storing folders there I could quickly access them and the items they contain, but in reality all I achieved was to create a rather boring version of 'Where's Wally?', where everything but the folder's name looked the same.

But that was before I started using CustomFolder (free from [www.gdzsoft.com](http://www.gdzsoft.com)), which lets you change the colour of folders, rotate them, apply a different icon to represent them, and add emblems such as numbers and coloured circles.

To use it, I right-click a folder I want to change then select CustomFolder in the context menu. By default, this entry is hidden and you have to hold down the Shift key when you right-click, but you can make it visible by going into CustomFolder's settings and ticking the first box.

With a folder open in CustomFolder, I change its appearance by clicking a colour in the palette in the centre, or entering the RGB (Red, Green, Blue) values if I happen to know them. The preview above shows how the new folder colour looks. There are back and forward buttons at the top left that you can click to cycle through the four different folder styles on offer. You can also use the Z and X keyboard buttons for this. Clicking the Rotate button (or pressing V), rotates the folder designs,



Wayne has added the Computeractive logo to the folder where he saves all his work

which is another great way of making them stand out.

My favourite customisation option, which isn't readily obvious, is that you can apply one of your own images to a folder. I've added the *Computeractive* logo to the folder that contains all my work for the magazine. To start, I choose a folder style using the arrow buttons (1 in our screenshot above). I then drag a JPEG image on to the preview pane 2.

You can also do away with the default folder styles and just display an icon. To

do this, I click the Personal Icon Panel button 3 then drag an icon/image (in PNG or ICO format) into the space below the 'Personal icons' heading 4. To apply these icons, simply click them, then click the tick at the top 5 to save the change, and the icon will appear on your desktop 6.

The emblems panel (accessed by clicking the button with a bookmark - 7 in our screenshot below left) lets you add up to nine emblems to an icon. You position it by clicking a number in the pad - 1 is top left, 9 is bottom right 8, and so on. I add my own personalised *Star Wars* emblems (yes, I'm a fan), so the robot R2-D2 sits top right 9. I do this by resizing the original image to 85x85 pixels, then saving it in PNG format and dragging it on to the emblems panel.

The risk with CustomFolder is that you can get carried away with changing folder colours and styles, to the point where you can't find the ones you want because none of them stand out anymore. I try to avoid this with a two-tier system: for folders I don't open often I simply change the colour, while those I open every day have a personalised icon and emblem. It's not perfect, but I no longer waste time wondering where Wally has got to.



R2-D2 9 sits at the top right of Wayne's Computeractive folder

WHAT I'D LIKE TO SEE IN CUSTOMFOLDER

It would be great if it was possible to quickly change the colour of a folder through File Explorer's right-click context menu without needing to go

through the main program interface. Moreover, it would be useful if you could also use this option to remove any changes you no longer wanted.



# Named & Shamed

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



## WARNING: JUNK AHEAD

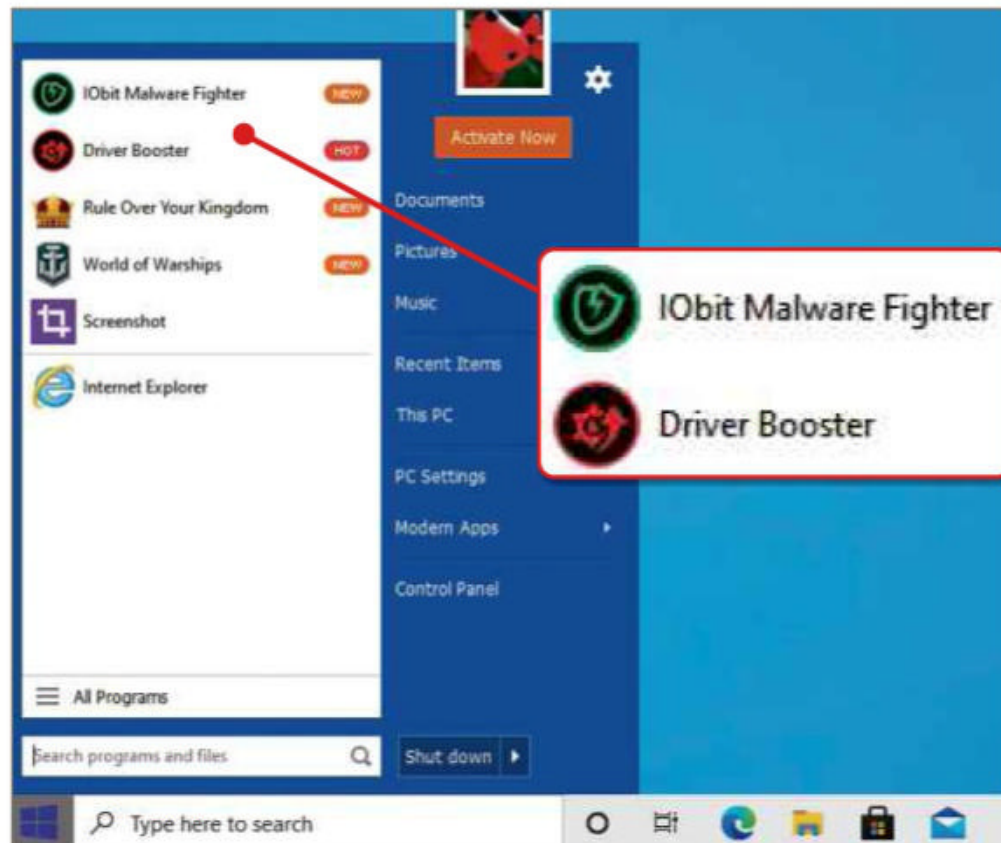
### Junk offender: Start Menu 8



There are loads of great free tools for customising your Windows 10 Start menu, but Start Menu 8 isn't one of them. I came across this offending program while looking for an alternative to Classic Shell for a friend. It's still available to download, but I didn't want to recommend it because it's no longer being worked on, and therefore isn't the safest option.

Start Menu 8 ([www.snipca.com/39035](http://www.snipca.com/39035)) promises many of the same functions as Classic Shell, including letting you change the Windows 10 Start menu to something closer to the traditional Windows 7 equivalent. But there's a problem – several problems, in fact.

The tool is offered as a 'free' download from serial junk offenders IObit. You can tell it's a free download because of the big green button labelled 'Free Download' on its web page. Except, it isn't a free download at all: it's a free seven-day trial, after which you'll need to pay around £6 to continue using it. This isn't revealed until you've gone to the bother of installing the software (precisely the



IObit seems to think that Windows 7's Start menu contained adverts for its own software

type of cynical trick I've come to expect from IObit).

Another fun twist is that, while it does let you turn back time to a simpler Windows 7-style Start menu, it also takes the opportunity to inject your Start menu with adverts in the guise of shortcuts. These include – surprise, surprise – several links to other IObit products (see

screenshot). I don't recall Windows 7's menu containing those.

As you've probably guessed, I didn't end up recommending Start Menu 8 to my friend. I opted instead for Open Shell Menu ([www.snipca.com/39036](http://www.snipca.com/39036)) – a genuinely free tool that doesn't try to trick you or fill your Start menu full of junk.

### WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?



#### WHAT THEY SAY

**Air Chief Marshal  
Sir Mike Wigston**

[www.snipca.com/39029](http://www.snipca.com/39029)

"As a priority, we will establish a space cloud to harvest the terabytes of space-derived data across a truly borderless domain; whilst establishing space-based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance programme to deliver a sovereign multi-spectral constellation."

#### WHAT THEY MEAN

We'll protect Britain with an intergalactic shield of jargon.

### JONATHAN'S VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT Peter 'Severa' Levashov



If you were tasked with sentencing one of the most prolific cybercriminals in history, you'd probably come down pretty harshly. Especially if the offender is Russian spam kingpin Peter Levashov – known as Severa to his hacker friends.

The 40-year-old was behind some of the world's biggest email spam campaigns. He was arrested in 2017 while on holiday in Spain and extradited to the US a year later. But last month,



after serving nearly three years in federal custody, he walked out of a Connecticut courtroom a free man.

He had pleaded guilty to four felony counts, including intentional damage to protected computers and aggravated identity theft. But, despite facing up to 12 more years in prison, the judge decided he'd served enough time and let him off with a supervised release and a potential fine.



**MINI PC** | £500 from Chillblast [www.snipca.com/38987](http://www.snipca.com/38987)

## Chillblast WAP 2500U Ultimate Micro PC

### Size matters

Desktop PCs don't *have* to be housed in space-hogging towers. As long as your requirements are reasonably modest and you're not concerned with having the option to upgrade your machine in future, a decent PC can be surprisingly small and affordable. Mini PCs are very easy to set up and use, and because they sit on your desk their ports are easy to access.

This tiny PC from Chillblast is a good example. With a 130x128mm footprint it isn't much bigger than a coaster. The three **USB 3.0** ports at the front sit alongside two 3.5mm jacks for a mic and headset (see main image). The rear is similarly well connected, with two **HDMI** ports, two **USB 2.0** ports and a Gigabit Ethernet socket (pictured below).



“For its size it coped surprisingly well with demanding tasks”

It's a shame there's no **USB-C** port, because this means the only way to power the PC is to use the supplied external power brick. This just adds to the cable clutter on your desk, which is probably the last thing you need if you were drawn to such a tiny PC in the first place.

Inside it has an AMD Ryzen 5 2500U processor, which is actually getting on a bit now. Unsurprisingly, it was a little slow in our **benchmark** tests, which we

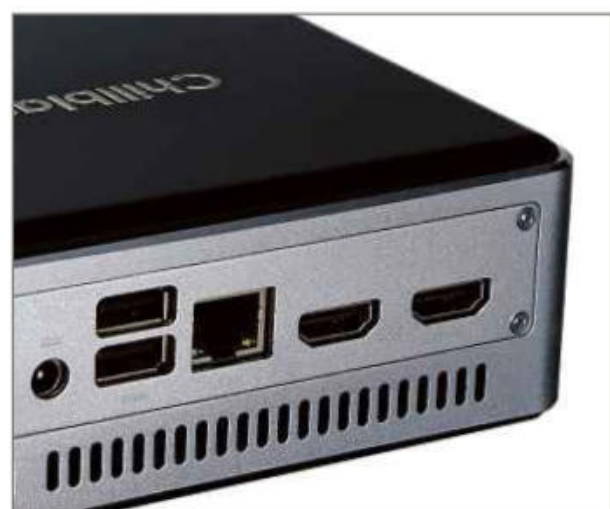
use to compare the Windows performance of all the PCs we review. Compared with similar PCs with newer and more powerful processors, the Chillblast falls behind, which is manifested in slower Windows performance. Its 16GB of **RAM** helps counter this somewhat, but if you're looking for good Windows performance, we'd recommend seeking out a model with a newer processor.

It was more impressive when gaming because it uses graphics hardware built into the processor, rather than space it doesn't have on a separate **graphics card**. It's never going to compete with a larger PC with a dedicated graphics card, but proved surprisingly capable in our tests, running fairly recent games at 30**fps** in **1080p** without needing to turn off the graphical enhancements that make games look better, such as detailed surface textures and 3D lighting effects.

One downside is that it can be quite noisy. It's fine when it's idle or running

simple Windows tasks, but the fans kick in very quickly when it's put under any pressure, such as playing games.

The small case limits future upgrades, but you can still access the interior by removing four crosshead screws from its base. This reveals two occupied RAM sockets (so you'd have to take out all 16GB to increase the amount of RAM), an M.2 SSD and a **Wi-Fi card** (which offers Wi-Fi 5 and Bluetooth 4.2, neither of which is the latest standard). All of these components are easy to replace, however, and there's a free **SATA** socket should you want to add an extra 2.5in SSD. The base includes enough space and all the holders you'd need to screw it into place.



#### SPECIFICATIONS

Four-core AMD Ryzen 5 2500U processor • Radeon RX Vega 8 graphics • 16GB memory • 500GB M.2 SSD • 3x USB 3.0 ports • 2x USB 2.0 ports • 2x HDMI ports • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 4.2 • Windows 10 Home • 52x130x128mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty [www.snipca.com/38987](http://www.snipca.com/38987)

**VERDICT** A mini PC that's remarkably affordable, but better at playing games than running Windows

★★★★★

**ALTERNATIVE** Asus PN51 **£950**

Almost twice the price, but this mini PC is much better at running Windows





**DESKTOP PC** | £1,500 from Currys [www.snipca.com/38977](http://www.snipca.com/38977)

## Acer Predator Orion 3000 PO3-620

### Fair game

The Predator Orion 3000 is an off-the-shelf gaming desktop PC. It certainly looks fantastic, and you can control the colour of its illuminated fan to match your mood or decor. The fan's colour is then synced with the **LEDs** that illuminate the interior of the case (pictured below) and light up the triangular power button at the top. It has an integrated carrying handle and even a pop-out hook for hanging your headphones on.

“This striking gaming PC plays hard and fast, but falls short on all-round performance”

A discreet cover on the front conceals several connection points – a **USB-C** port, a **USB 3.0** port and two 3.5mm audio jacks. Around the back there are four more USB 3.0 ports, two USB 2.0 ports and three more 3.5mm jacks (for headphones, mic and audio out). There's also a **Gigabit Ethernet** port.

Inside, the PC is powered by an Intel Core i7-10700 processor, 16GB of **RAM**, and both a 512GB **M.2 SSD** and a 1TB hard drive. This is an older 10th-generation Intel processor, which is a bit



disappointing (and surprising) in a desktop PC at this price. As a result, in our **benchmark** tests its Windows performance fell short of similarly priced PCs with 11th-generation Intel or the very latest AMD processors.

However, what Acer has saved on its processor has been invested in the graphics. The Nvidia GeForce RTX 3070 **graphics card** runs the latest games at very decent **frame rates**, even when using **4K** resolution or high-quality settings.

We were a little disappointed by the lack of upgrade potential. As is often the case with mass-produced PCs like this, manufacturing efficiency has taken priority over user-friendliness. For example, access to the memory modules is hindered by the large graphics card, which you'd have to temporarily remove if you wanted to upgrade the memory.

There's also no spare M.2 slot, so to add more SSD storage you'd need to use a 2.5in SSD drive, along with an adapter to fit it into the spare 3.5in bay that sits alongside the additional hard drive.

#### SPECIFICATIONS

Intel Core i7-10700 processor • 16GB memory • Nvidia GeForce RTX 3070 graphics • 512GB SSD • 1TB hard drive • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.1 • 3x DisplayPort • 1x HDMI port • 1x USB-C port • 5x USB 3.0 ports • 2x USB 2.0 ports • Gigabit Ethernet • Windows 10 Home • 386x175x392mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty [www.snipca.com/38977](http://www.snipca.com/38977)

#### 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](http://www.expertreviews.co.uk)) and IT Pro ([www.itpro.com](http://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 powerful PC but its focus on graphics performance over everyday Windows tasks makes it ideal for gamers only



**ALTERNATIVE** Chillblast Fusion Cruiser £1,500 This gaming PC has more upgrade potential and a faster AMD processor, but its graphics hardware can't match the Predator Orion's





# Reviews

PC MONITOR | £206 from Amazon [www.snipca.com/38992](http://www.snipca.com/38992)

## AOC Q27V4EA

### Star of the big screen

The Q27V4EA is a great example of AOC's uncanny ability to make high-quality monitors at fair prices. It packs a number of desirable characteristics into its slim design, and it's a solid choice if you want an increase in screen size and resolution – perhaps over and above your current laptop. It has fewer features than some 27in monitors we've tested, but it has the ones that matter most.

“You can't adjust it much, but it has a stylish design and high-quality screen”

The screen is mounted on a fairly basic stand with little scope for adjustment – just 21.5 degrees backwards tilt – and a relatively small selection of ports. On the rear, you'll find an HDMI 2.0 port, a DisplayPort 1.4 and a 3.5mm headphone jack. These all face directly outwards, which makes them much more accessible than many monitor connections that face downwards. AOC packs both HDMI and DisplayPort cables in the box, along with the power supply cable. You'll need room for a small power brick on or under your desk, but that's not a big problem.

This is a very attractive monitor, with three bezel-free edges and a slim profile (40mm at its thickest, less than 20mm at its thinnest, pictured right). This makes it look much more expensive than it is. The stand looks good too, and with a footprint of 210x185mm, the base won't eat into your desk space.

The screen itself is a 27in IPS panel with a resolution of 2560x1440 pixels. In our tests, the panel proved better than those on many comparable budget monitors. In its dedicated sRGB mode, the monitor

accurately reproduced 88.7 per cent coverage of colours. That's very respectable for an affordable monitor. This means what you see on screen will be close to what the original source intended, whether this is a photo or a website.

We measured peak brightness at just below the 250cd/m<sup>2</sup> quoted by AOC, while contrast reached highs of 850:1 in the monitor's default mode. These figures are, once again, impressive for a monitor at this price, although it's worth noting that brightness is locked to around 170cd/m<sup>2</sup> in sRGB mode. This is on the dim side, but it's fine for use in all but the most brightly lit rooms and it proved to be a pleasure to work on.

With a 75Hz refresh rate, a low (4 milliseconds) response time and adaptive sync support that allows the screen to adapt its frame rate to suit the output of your graphics hardware, it can even manage a bit of gaming too.

There are a couple of caveats, however. One is that it suffers from an unusual amount of 'IPS glow', which is a common problem with IPS monitors and makes it look like there's a bright light shining off it at certain viewing angles. Here it happens only if you move away from the point directly in front, so isn't a



problem unless you have to move to one side for any reason, such as when taking part in a video chat with someone sat next to you.

The other small gripe is that the on-screen controls are just a cluster of buttons in the bottom-right corner. It's hard to tell what each one does and takes a little getting used to.

#### SPECIFICATIONS

27in IPS screen • 2560x1440 pixels resolution • 75Hz refresh rate • 4ms response time • Adaptive sync • 1x HDMI port • 1x DisplayPort • 462x614x187mm (HxWxD) • 4.65kg • Three-year warranty [www.snipca.com/38992](http://www.snipca.com/38992)

**VERDICT** A stylish 27in IPS monitor that provides good colour accuracy and decent brightness levels

★★★★★

#### ALTERNATIVE

Iiyama ProLite XUB2792QSU-B1 £260

Spend a little extra for a more adjustable stand, with screen rotation and height adjustment





**PRINTER** | £212 from Printerland [www.snipca.com/39030](http://www.snipca.com/39030)

## Canon Pixma GM2050

### Back to black

Not everyone wants a printer that can perfectly reproduce copies of their holiday snaps. If you print only letters and documents, it's a bit of a waste to buy all that coloured ink and never use it. The Canon Pixma GM2050 is perfect for this requirement. It's an inkjet printer that only takes black ink, but it uses Canon's excellent MegaTank system, which means you refill the printer using bottles of ink instead of cartridges. This is better value for money and better for the environment.



“Mono printer for documents and letters that prints flawlessly, and runs economically and ecologically”

With only one ink, Canon has been able to reduce the size of the printer compared with its four- and six-colour stablemates. It measures a modest 166x403x369mm (HxWxD), slicing nearly 50mm off the width of the six-colour Canon Pixma G650 (see our review, Issue 610), though it is a little deeper.

It comes with three bottles of ink, which Canon claims can print an impressive 18,000 pages. Replacement bottles cost £12.99 and print 6,000 pages, which works out at 0.2p per print. The paper tray holds 250 sheets, with the option for a further 100 sheets via the rear input, and it can be set to print on both sides of a sheet automatically.

Setting up the GM2050 is incredibly easy, whether you're using a PC, phone or

tablet. The printer can be connected to Wi-Fi or Ethernet, or connected directly to a PC via USB. There are physical buttons on the device but they're mostly used for setting up – once it was up and running on our Wi-Fi network, we controlled it entirely with the device we were printing from.

The printer uses Canon's standard software and apps on Windows, macOS and mobile devices, which means you may come across options that the printer is unable to use, because the software is the same whether the printer it's controlling is mono like this one, or colour like most other models.

Print quality is excellent. We tested it by printing 200 copies of a pamphlet for a local charity and it produced every page effortlessly and without flaws.

**VERDICT** A high-quality mono printer with enough ink to print 18,000 pages and uses affordable refills that work out at 0.2p per page

★★★★★

#### ALTERNATIVE

Epson ET-M1100 **£100** A cheaper, more basic mono printer that's also refilled from bottles



#### SPECIFICATIONS

600x1200-dpi maximum print resolution • 13ppm quoted print speed • Wi-Fi 4 • Ethernet port • USB 2.0 port • 166x403x369mm (HxWxD) • 6kg • One-year warranty [www.snipca.com/39030](http://www.snipca.com/39030)

### CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

#### Aspect ratio



##### What is it?

Aspect ratio is a physical characteristic of a screen, whether it's on a PC monitor, a laptop or a TV. It refers to the relationship between the width and the height of the screen, usually stated as two numbers, separated by a colon. The first number refers to the width of the screen, the second to the height.

##### How does it work?

The numbers aren't actual measurements in millimetres or inches, but refer to their respective lengths relative to each other. For example, TV screens used to have an aspect ratio of 4:3 (pronounced "four by three"), which is a squarish rectangle that's 33 per cent wider than it is tall. Modern TVs are usually 16:9 ("sixteen by nine"), which has been popular since the introduction of widescreen TVs.

##### What are the specs?

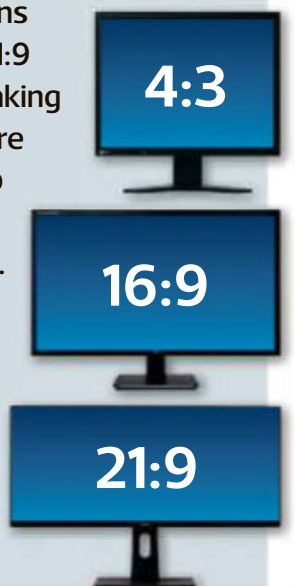
16:9 is the most common aspect ratio you'll come across, though some monitors and laptops still have the older, squarer 4:3 screens. There are also 'ultra-wide' screens with aspect ratios of 21:9 (these are strictly speaking 64:27 but the values are rounded down to keep them more easily comparable with 16:9).

There are other aspect ratios, but they're relatively rare, but comparing them to these three will give you an idea of how wide they are.

Although the resolution of a screen is dependent on its aspect ratio, you can still get different resolutions within each ratio. For example, 1920x1080 pixels (1080p) and 3840x2160 pixels (4K) both have an aspect ratio of 16:9.

##### Can I change it later?

No, the aspect ratio is a physical characteristic of the screen, so can't be changed or upgraded.





**MESH WI-FI** | £279 from Amazon [www.snipca.com/39025](http://www.snipca.com/39025)

## Amazon Eero 6

Takes things slowly

Amazon's Eero is a **mesh Wi-Fi** system, consisting of one router and two extenders, to spread your Wi-Fi signal further through your home. This latest version works with **Wi-Fi 6**, which increases the speed of the network for any devices that support it, but is otherwise identical to the previous model and still works with older devices.

The Eero 6 is designed to connect directly to a broadband modem, replacing your existing router. If you're currently using a combined modem/router, you can turn your old Wi-Fi off and hook the Eero router up to a spare Ethernet socket on your existing device.

“Unobtrusive and easy to set up, but slower than rivals”

Both router and extenders have shiny white plastic cases, with an unobtrusive footprint of 99x97mm, each powered by a **USB-C** socket at the rear. The only other connectors are a pair of **Gigabit Ethernet** sockets on the back of the router unit. One of these connects to your modem or existing router, while the other lets you



connect a single wired device. The extenders don't have Ethernet ports, so the Eero 6 can't support wired devices in other rooms. Amazon recommends that Eero 6 units should be placed no more than 15 metres apart.

To set up and manage your new mesh network you have to use the mobile app on Android or iOS. This has some great features, including the option to receive a notification whenever a new device connects for the first time. This makes it all but impossible for an intruder to sneak on to your network without your knowledge. It also supports parental controls.

The Eero 6 is a **dual-band** mesh system with a single **5GHz** radio, used for both exchanging data with connected units and for forwarding traffic to and from other devices. In our data-transfer speed tests it fell behind more expensive mesh

### SPECIFICATIONS

Dual-band Wi-Fi 6 mesh • AX1800 speed rating  
• 2x Gigabit Ethernet ports (including 1x WAN) •  
61x97x99mm (HxDxW) • One-year warranty  
[www.snipca.com/39025](http://www.snipca.com/39025)

systems that use **tri-band**, such as Netgear's Orbi. However, it was *also* slower than the cheaper TP-Link Deco X20 system (£230 from [www.snipca.com/39027](http://www.snipca.com/39027)). If you live in a small home, it's worth considering similarly priced Wi-Fi 6 standalone routers, such as the Asus RT-AX88U (£280 from [www.snipca.com/39028](http://www.snipca.com/39028)). In our tests, this was faster than Eero, even to distant parts of the house.

**VERDICT** Has Wi-Fi 6 and is easy to set up and use, but it's much slower than other Wi-Fi 6 systems at similar prices

★★★★★

### ALTERNATIVE

TP-Link Deco X20 **£230**  
This alternative three-node Wi-Fi 6 mesh system is cheaper and performed better in our tests



### WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

We solve your buying dilemmas

## How do I transmit from my Virgin cable box to TV?

**Q** Can you recommend a gadget to wirelessly transmit audio and video from my Virgin cable box to a remote TV, **HDMI to HDMI**? The range I need is about 30 metres and includes three walls. There's a bewildering array of gadgets available and I'd appreciate some guidance.

Derek Hawketts

**A** The big problem here is that 30 metres is right on the cusp of what basic wireless HDMI

extenders can manage. Because of that, and because you're throwing three walls into the mix, we'd advise opting for a model with a higher than average range.

The Shu One Wireless HDMI Extender (£169 from [www.snipca.com/39026](http://www.snipca.com/39026), pictured) is pricey, but promises ranges of up to 200 metres, which should be enough. The device supports Full HD (**1080p**) and has an infrared pass-through option, so you can control the device you're streaming from while sitting in front of the device you're watching.



Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)





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[WWW.CYBERPOWERSYSTEM.CO.UK](http://WWW.CYBERPOWERSYSTEM.CO.UK)



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All information correct at the time of printing. Subject to change.





# Reviews

**EARBUDS** | £244 from Amazon [www.snipca.com/39008](http://www.snipca.com/39008)

## Sony WF-1000XM4

Midget gems

Sony's latest **active noise-cancelling** earbuds don't come cheap, but they have a new design that's more compact and better looking than previous models. And the sleeker appearance is just the start of the improvements.

The noise-cancelling hardware inside does a great job of dampening the background noise around you. Also, the 6mm **speaker drivers** have been tweaked to improve low-end frequencies, so there's significantly better bass tones than we've heard from Sony earbuds in the past. They also now work over Bluetooth 5.2.

The charging case can now be topped up wirelessly; Sony's Digital Sound

### SPECIFICATIONS

6mm dynamic drivers • Bluetooth 5.2 • USB-C cable  
• Wireless charging case • 40x67x30mm (HxDxW) •  
41g • One-year warranty [www.snipca.com/39008](http://www.snipca.com/39008)

Enhancement Engine (DSEE), which enhances **lossy** audio formats such as MP3 and **AAC**, has been upgraded; and the buds have an **IPX4** rating for water resistance.

The Speak-to-Chat feature is another great addition. This detects your voice and automatically pauses the music and noise cancelling, so you can have a conversation with someone without having to remove the buds. It also learns about the environments you tend to find yourself in and automatically switches noise-cancelling profiles to suit each one.

Sound quality is excellent, with crystal-clear vocals and powerful, full-bodied bass. We listened to a broad range of musical styles through these buds and no matter what type of music you like, they will play it superbly well.

The noise-cancelling feature isn't

quite as effective as on our favourite earbuds, the Bose QuietComfort (£250 from [www.snipca.com/39010](http://www.snipca.com/39010)), but it's not far off, and these Sony buds are smaller and more discreet, if that's important to you.

**VERDICT** Excellent noise-cancelling earbuds in a small, discreet and comfortable design

★★★★★

**ALTERNATIVE** Bose QuietComfort £250 Even better noise-cancellation, but the buds are larger and protrude further out of your ears



**FITNESS WATCH** | £129 from Amazon [www.snipca.com/39009](http://www.snipca.com/39009)

## Fitbit Luxe

Only skin deep

This is the first Fitbit that's not primarily being marketed as a fitness watch, but instead as a fashion item that also happens to tell you how close you are to your daily target of 10,000 steps a day.

We tested the plain black version (pictured), but it also comes in more eye-catching colours with typically pretentious names: 'Lunar White/Soft Gold' and 'Orchid/Platinum'. If you want something that *really* stands out, you could opt for the 'Peony/Soft Gold Stainless Steel' model, though it's a more

### SPECIFICATIONS

0.76in 124x206-pixel touchscreen • 3-axis accelerometer • Optical heart-rate monitor • Red and infrared sensors for oxygen saturation (SpO2) monitoring • Bluetooth • Compatible with Android and iOS devices • 10x36x18mm (HxDxW)  
• One-year warranty [www.snipca.com/39009](http://www.snipca.com/39009)

expensive at £179. You can also buy a range of optional straps, costing £50 for leather or from £80 for metallic.

The Luxe is a slender fitness tracker with a small 0.76in, 124x206-pixel resolution **AMOLED** touchscreen, and a steel casing that feels solid and well made. Beyond that, its core tracking features are basic: it has an optical heart-rate tracker but no **GPS**.

The heart-rate tracker is there to keep tabs on your ticker and it also measures blood-oxygen levels (SpO2), heart-rate variability and stress levels. Despite not having GPS, it lets you track speed, pace and location, and have your walks and runs shown on a map, as long as you take your phone out with you.

Our biggest gripe was with the accuracy of the heart-rate monitor, particularly at

the beginning of each workout. It measured our heart rate much higher than our control monitor, until it eventually settled down after around 15 minutes.

**VERDICT** An attractive range of fitness-tracking watches, but more attention has been given to the design than the heart-monitoring

★★★★★

**ALTERNATIVE** Fitbit Charge 4 £99 It may not be as attractive but it is cheaper, has GPS features and the heart-rate monitor is more accurate





**SMARTPHONE** | £279 from Amazon [www.snipca.com/39037](http://www.snipca.com/39037)

## Motorola Defy

### Tough calls

Motorola's original Defy phone was launched in 2010. It was designed to be water- and dust-resistant, and able to withstand being dropped without breaking. This new model keeps the name and the tough build quality – keeping it aimed at people who need a rugged device when braving the elements outdoors. However, Motorola has updated it to bring it in line with modern models, though it won't rival the best smartphones in terms of performance.

The Defy is chunkier than most of today's smartphones, weighing 232g and measuring 10.9mm thick. It's tested to IP68 standard (meaning it's protected from harmful dust and can be submerged in water deeper than 1.5 metres for 35 minutes). It can also survive a drop of 1.8 metres on to a steel surface without suffering damage.

“Not a bad choice for using outdoors, but the screen is disappointing”

The case is made of plastic, but the criss-cross textured rear makes it easy to grip, so it's less likely to slip out of your hand. There's a lanyard loop at the bottom-left corner for attaching to your wrist for extra security. There's also an extra, programmable button on the right edge that can be assigned to launch a specific app, which is very useful for opening a map or similar while you're out and about.

With so much focus on protecting the phone, its specifications are unsurprisingly modest. It comes with a so-so Qualcomm Snapdragon 662 processor, and an unremarkable 4GB of RAM. There's also 64GB of expandable storage, a 6.5in 1600x720-pixel IPS screen and four cameras. In our tests, the Defy's performance lagged behind similarly priced standard phones. However, the



battery life is good, lasting for 20 hours 54 minutes in our video-playback test.

The IPS screen is similar to those we've seen on previous budget Motorola models. Although its colours are accurate, the brightness and contrast levels aren't so high, which is a shame on a phone that's intended for use outdoors.

#### SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 662 processor • 4GB of RAM • 64GB of storage • 6.5in 1600x720-pixel 60Hz IPS screen • 48-megapixel main rear camera • 2-megapixel macro camera • 8-megapixel front camera • Android 10 • 170x10.9x78mm (HxDxW) • 232g • Two-year warranty [www.snipca.com/39037](http://www.snipca.com/39037)

**VERDICT** Not bad for using outdoors when camping or hiking, with a good battery life and rugged design. But screen is disappointing, and it's slower than most other phones at this price

★★★★★

#### ALTERNATIVE Cat S42

£189 A more affordable rugged smartphone, but its specification is dated – with a smaller screen, older processor, 3GB of RAM, 32GB storage and a stylus



### DO I REALLY NEED...

## A 20TB hard drive?

#### What is it?

A 20TB Seagate hard drive (pictured), aimed at consumers. One of these should ensure you don't run out of storage space for years to come – 20TB is enough to hold 10,000 hours of HD video or five million 12-megapixel digital photos.



#### What does it do?

Seagate already makes 20GB hard drives for businesses that will always need more storage space, but these use heat-assisted magnetic recording (HAMR) technology, which cost more than £500. However, the company has made breakthroughs in producing larger-capacity drives using the cheaper perpendicular magnetic recording (PMR) technology, which should the price.

#### What's the catch?

While they will be cheaper than HAMR drives, we still expect these 20TB PMR drives to start at around £400.

#### So can I do without it?

For now, yes. But in a few years we expect 20TB drives to become as commonplace as 1TB drives are today.

### NEXT ISSUE

On Sale **Weds 25 Aug**

**Samsung Galaxy Book Go**  
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## Our pick of products that have won the **Buy It** award

### LAPTOP

**PRICE DROP**

**Lenovo Yoga Slim 7 (256GB)**  
**£649** from [www.snipca.com/38429](http://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](http://www.snipca.com/36642)

### DESKTOP PC

**Palicomp Intel Mercury**  
**£600** from [www.snipca.com/34223](http://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](http://www.snipca.com/35840)

### APPLE IPAD

**Apple iPad 10.2in**  
**£329** from [www.snipca.com/36178](http://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](http://www.snipca.com/33050)

### ANDROID TABLET

**PRICE DROP**

**Lenovo Tab P11 Pro**  
**£562** from [www.snipca.com/38585](http://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. £295 from [www.snipca.com/38606](http://www.snipca.com/38606)

### APPLE IPHONE

**Apple iPhone 12**  
**£799** from [www.snipca.com/36582](http://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](http://www.snipca.com/34773)

### ANDROID PHONE

**PRICE DROP**

**Xiaomi Poco F3**  
**£299** from [www.snipca.com/38395](http://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](http://www.snipca.com/36586)



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

**T**ablets – 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.

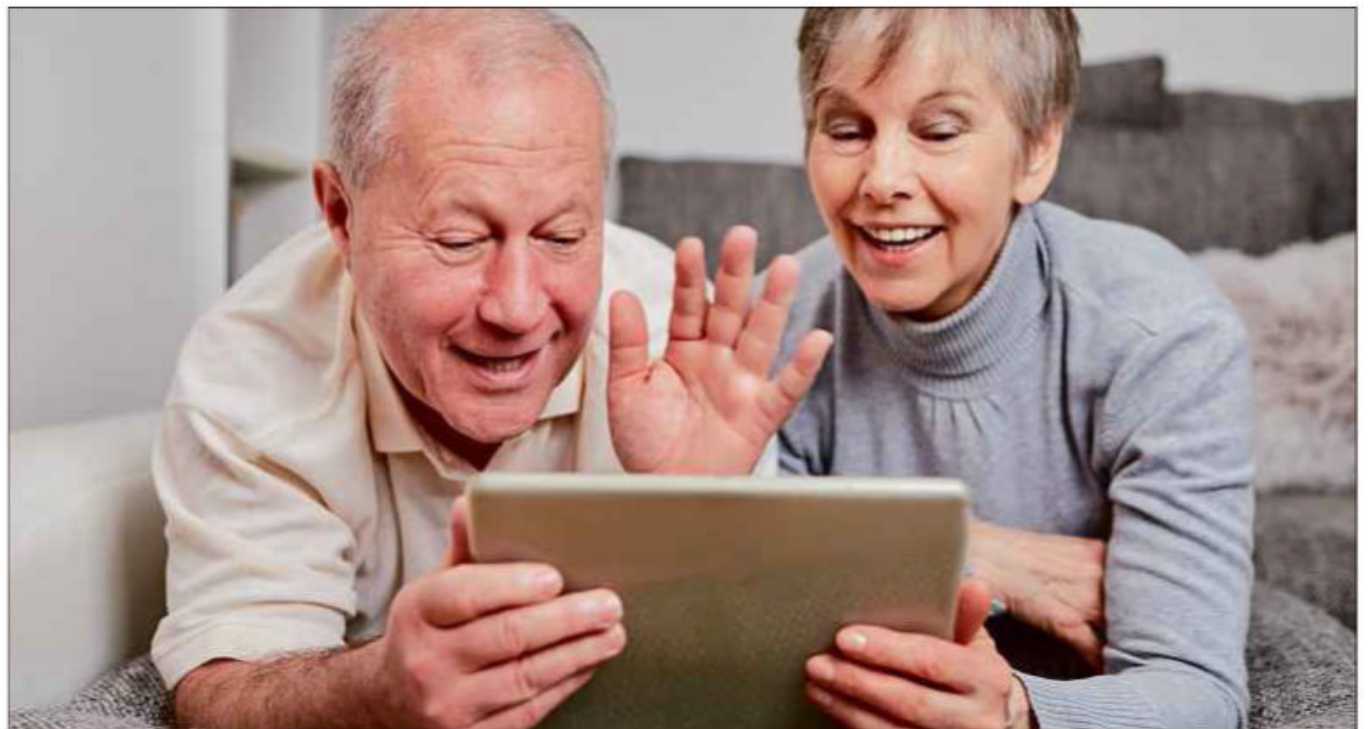
Well, it can be. In parts. But there are other things you simply need to know how to do. It's not obvious that you have to swipe from the top of the screen, pull up from the bottom or tap with two fingers instead of one.

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](mailto:PC0721@helpfulbooks.co.uk)**

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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](http://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](http://www.snipca.com/32586)

## SECURITY SOFTWARE

**Kaspersky Internet Security 2021**  
**£14.99** from [www.snipca.com/21532](http://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](http://www.snipca.com/32069)

## WEBCAM

**Logitech C925e Business Webcam**  
**£72** from [www.snipca.com/38385](http://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](http://www.snipca.com/38752)

## PC MONITOR

**BenQ GL2780**  
**£160** from [www.snipca.com/34834](http://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. £300 from [www.snipca.com/37096](http://www.snipca.com/37096)

## ROUTER

**Netgear Nighthawk RAX80**  
**£300** from [www.snipca.com/39013](http://www.snipca.com/39013)  
**Tested** Issue 603



This is the fastest Wi-Fi 6 router we've ever tested, transferring data at speeds of 520Mbps in the same and adjacent rooms of our test house. Also works with Wi-Fi 5, and comes with four spare Ethernet ports and two USB ports.

### ALTERNATIVE Asus RT-AX82U

Slower than the Nighthawk on Wi-Fi 6, but faster on Wi-Fi 5, so a better choice for older devices. Has four Gigabit Ethernet ports. £173 from [www.snipca.com/37675](http://www.snipca.com/37675)

## PRINTER

**Canon Pixma TS8350**  
**£176** from [www.snipca.com/38079](http://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](http://www.snipca.com/37995)



## COMPETITION

# Win 1 of 3 CHERRY STREAM DESKTOP RECHARGE wireless sets



CHERRY has released a new premium version of its popular Stream Desktop, called the STREAM DESKTOP RECHARGE keyboard and mouse set.

New features include rechargeable and replaceable batteries, while the mouse now also has AES encryption, not just the keyboard. Both mouse and keyboard are also rechargeable through a USB-C cable.



The keyboard has CHERRY's own SX scissor technology, making the keys crisp and clean to press. They're also extremely quiet, similar to the flatter design found in laptop keyboards. The mouse buttons are almost inaudible.

The keyboard has 10 additional keys: Windows Lock, Browser, Mail, Calculator and six keys to control volume and multimedia programs. The DPI switch on the top of the mouse lets you switch between three resolution levels (1,000 dpi/1,600 dpi/2,400 dpi).

You can configure the keyboard and mouse according to individual wishes

– just download the CHERRY KEYS tool from [www.cherry.co.uk/keys](http://www.cherry.co.uk/keys).

To enter this competition, answer the question at [www.snipca.com/38880](http://www.snipca.com/38880) and enter your details. It runs until midnight Tuesday 24 August. Good luck!

You can buy **CHERRY's STREAM DESKTOP RECHARGE** set for £98 from [www.cherry.co.uk](http://www.cherry.co.uk). For updates on CHERRY products, follow [@org\\_cherry](https://twitter.com/org_cherry) on Twitter and 'like' [www.facebook.com/ORG.CHERRY](https://www.facebook.com/ORG.CHERRY).

## MESH ROUTER

**BT** Whole Home Wi-Fi  
£200 from [www.snipca.com/26990](http://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](http://www.snipca.com/27309)

## SOLID-STATE DRIVE

**Samsung** 970 Evo Plus  
500GB  
£75 from [www.snipca.com/31265](http://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](http://www.snipca.com/37304)

## SMART SPEAKER

**Google** Nest Audio  
£90 from [www.snipca.com/36475](http://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](http://www.snipca.com/36602)



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# Workshops & Tips

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**44** Phone & Tablet Tips

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**47** Make Office Better

**48** In The Club: Raise funds in a PayPal Money Pool

## HOW TO...

# Recover icons and position them where you want

by Nik Rawlinson

**What you need:** Windows 10 **Time required:** 30 minutes

Icons serve two purposes – both make your life easier. First, they are shortcuts to the locations, files and programs you want to use. Second, they can be vital sources of information, particularly when overlaid by graphic indicators. For example, an orange spot on the Windows Update icon in the

notification area (next to the clock) tells you that your computer needs to restart.

It's annoying, therefore, when an icon you've come to rely on disappears from your desktop. Finding what it refers to can then take several clicks. If it was showing vital information, you might miss something important.



Here, we'll explain how you can bring back icons that vanish without a trace, whether they appear on the taskbar, Start menu or desktop.

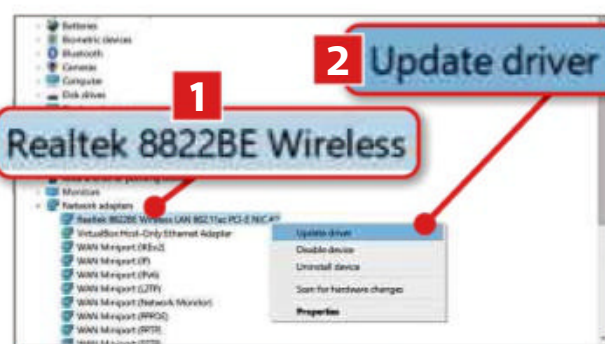
**1**

### Bring icons back to the taskbar

The most important icons appear on the far right of the taskbar, close to the clock and date. Click the speech bubble here to open the action centre, where you can also find sliders to turn on and off common functions, like the mobile **hotspot**, or to open Windows' full range of settings.

That's all useful, but turning these options on and off can result in icons disappearing or changing their appearance. For example, switching off Wi-Fi by clicking Network, then WiFi will replace the Wi-Fi icon with a globe icon (pictured above right). To get your network connection back, click the globe, then WiFi.

Sometimes, icons disappear because the components in your computer that they relate to have been disabled,



**If a missing icon is related to a specific component, ensure it's enabled and its driver is up to date**

either because you changed a setting or because a file has become corrupted. Sticking with your wireless connection for a moment, if your Wi-Fi icon has disappeared and the step above doesn't reveal it, type **device** into the Start menu, click 'Device Manager' in the results, then click the arrow beside 'Network adapters' to reveal that section's hidden entries.

You'll probably have several network adapters installed, but their names will help you tell them apart. Right-click any that show Wireless or similar (1 in our screenshot left), then in the menu that appears click any options that say Enable Device (this will appear only if the device has been disabled). Should this cause any problems, you'll find an option to disable the component again in the same menu. There's also an option to 'Update driver' 2. Click this, then click 'Search automatically for drivers'. Windows will search its catalogue for any updates and install them if it finds any. If it doesn't, it will tell you that you're already running the latest driver.

If any other icons are absent, check that they haven't been disabled. Right-click an empty space on the taskbar, followed by 'Taskbar settings'. Scroll down to 'Notification area' and click 'Select which





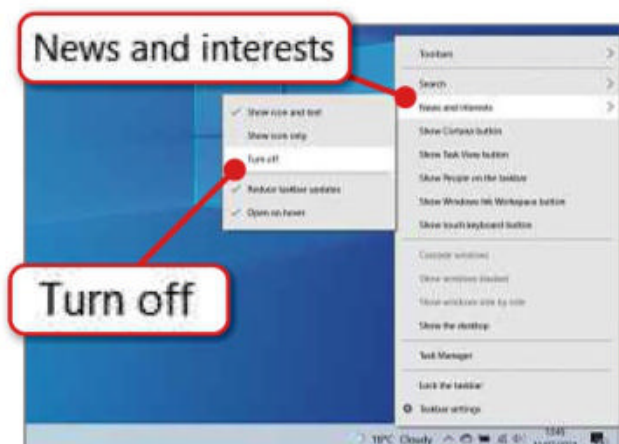
Turn the sliders on or off to decide which icons appear on your taskbar

icons appear on the taskbar', then use the sliders beside each option to enable or disable them (see screenshot above).

If you don't want to set each option individually, click the slider beside 'Always show all icons in the notification area'. When you enable this option, all of the icons that are hidden and would usually only appear when you click the up-pointing icon on the taskbar will be displayed alongside the clock. This is very useful if you frequently need to access icon-based settings, like those for Windows Security, that have a tendency to tuck themselves out of sight.

You'll notice a vertical line on the taskbar, just a few pixels in from the far right of the screen. It looks like Windows hasn't quite drawn the taskbar long enough, but this isn't an error: it's separating a very narrow icon with no discernible features from the rest of the taskbar. Click to the right of the line to hide all your windows and jump to the desktop. It's a handy trick to know, should you be surprised by someone you're shopping for online coming into the room. Clicking again reinstates all your original windows.

In its default state, hovering over the icon doesn't do anything, but you can set it to preview the desktop should there be something you need to refer to there. To do so, open Settings (press Windows key+I) then click Personalisation followed by Taskbar. Click the fifth slider, below 'Use Peek to preview the desktop'.



Hide Microsoft's recently added 'News and interests' icon if you find it annoying

## How I manage my icons

I like to keep my desktop tidy, so I hide all my icons from there. I also keep a minimum of icons pinned to the taskbar. Although having a lot of icons on display means programs are never more than a single click away, I prefer to keep in view only items that I use every day. For anything else, I press the Windows key and type the first few letters of the program name, so I can quickly locate it on the Windows menu.



Nik Rawlinson



Want to share icon tips with readers?  
Please let us know: [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)

Finally, if you've updated Windows 10 since 9 June, you may have noticed the icon for Microsoft's 'News and interests' **widget** appear appear on your taskbar. If you don't want it, right-click the icon or an empty part of the taskbar, hover over 'News and interests', then select 'Turn off' from the menu (see screenshot below left).

### 2 Show and hide desktop icons

The desktop is a useful place to store files that you're temporarily working on, and some programs add shortcuts there so you can launch them more quickly. However, this isn't a great way to work because your desktop can quickly become cluttered. It can also slow down your computer because every time you go back to the desktop – even if you're just in transit between programs – your computer needs to make sure everything is updated. If you instead store those files in a folder that's not opened frequently, it will only need to do this from time to time.

There is a workaround, however. As you'll know from navigating through File Explorer, the desktop has its own folder, and it's this that is displayed every time you switch back to the desktop. By setting Windows not to show icons on the desktop, you can still drag and drop files there so they're easy to find via Explorer.

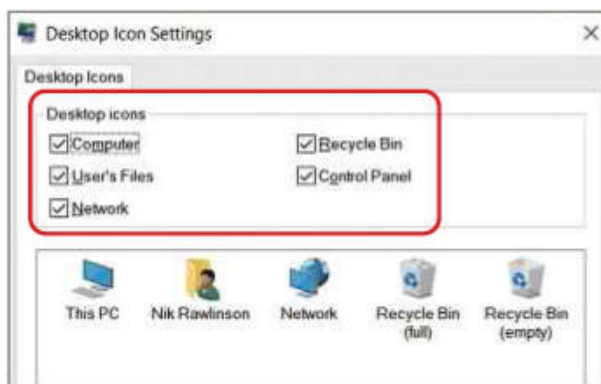
To hide your desktop icons, right-click an empty space on the desktop, hover over View and uncheck the option to 'Show desktop icons' on the menu. The icons will disappear, leaving a much more focused working environment. To find the files they relate to, open an Explorer window then click Desktop in the sidebar. If you can't see this option, it's probably hidden, so click the chevron (>) to the left of 'This PC' to reveal it.

For the best of both worlds – hiding your icons from the desktop but not having to navigate to them through Explorer – right-click the taskbar and hover over Toolbars, then click Desktop on the menu. You'll see a new Desktop button appear on the taskbar, with a



Add a toolbar to the taskbar so you can quickly see your desktop's files and shortcuts





Tick these boxes to switch on and off different types of icon on your desktop.

double-arrow (>>) icon to the right (1 in our screenshot below left). Click this to reveal a scrollable menu of all the files and shortcuts saved on your desktop 2.

For deeper control over which icons are shown on the desktop, rather than hiding the icons altogether, open Settings (press Windows key+I) and click Personalisation followed by Themes. Scroll down and click 'Desktop icon settings', then tick the boxes next to the options you want, including 'User's files', 'Computer' and Recycle Bin (see screenshot above).

## 3 Add icons to the Start menu

The Start menu is another location where programs frequently add their own shortcuts, in the shape of tiles. You can easily remove them by right-clicking, then clicking 'Unpin from Start'. Equally, you can add your own tiles by dragging a program from the list on the left of the menu to the empty panel on the right.

To save space, you can group related icons in a folder. Simply click and drag one, then briefly hold it over another. They'll shrink into a grey square, to which you can add further programs by repeating this process. To give the group a name, click it once to open it (its contents will pop out and be displayed below it), then click 'Name folder' and type the name you want to use.

## 4 Pin icons to the taskbar and restore Quick Launch

For the programs you use most often, it makes sense to pin them to the taskbar. To do this, launch them, then right-click their icons on the taskbar and select 'Pin to taskbar' (see screenshot above right). When you next close them, their icons will remain in view so you can quickly start them again.

Each icon you add to the taskbar will link only to a single location. If you want quick access to multiple icons for



Pin an icon to the taskbar so you can quickly open it by clicking

your most important files or shortcuts, you can instead add a toolbar, as we demonstrated above using the desktop folder. If you're a Windows veteran, you may remember something similar called Quick Launch, where you could store links to programs or locations you use frequently. It appeared beside the Windows menu in Windows XP and Vista, but disappeared in Windows 7. This was technically just sleight of hand on Microsoft's part, however, because Quick Launch still exists – as long as you know where to find it.

As you would when creating a regular toolbar, start by right-clicking the taskbar, then hover over Toolbars and click 'New toolbar...'. This opens a File Explorer window. Type the following into the Folder box and press Return, then click Select Folder:

`%UserProfile%\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Internet Explorer\Quick Launch`  
If that's too tricky to type, cut and paste it from our Pastebin account instead: [www.snipca.com/38988](http://www.snipca.com/38988).

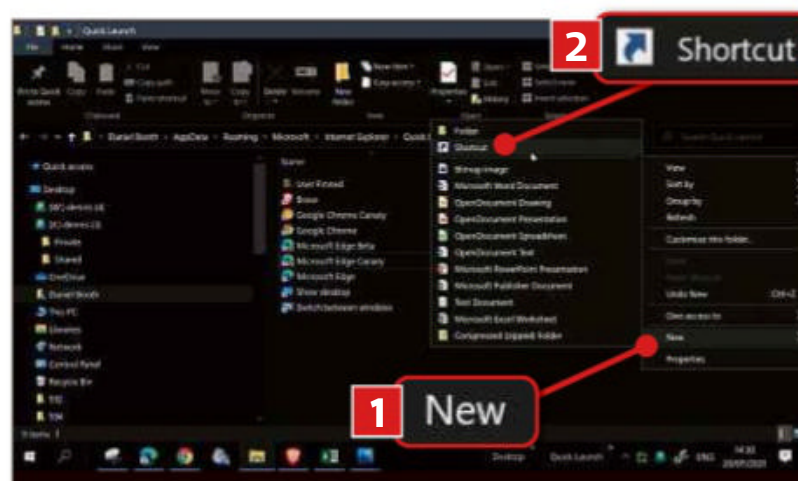
This immediately adds Quick Launch to the right of your taskbar. Click the >> icon to the right of it to view its default contents. These might not be

the programs you want to link to, so to make it *really* useful you'll need to tweak whatever appears.

Open a new Explorer window, then click in the 'Quick access' address bar at the top and enter the address you typed above to open the Quick Launch folder. When the window refreshes, you'll see that the folder contains a number of shortcut icons. To get rid of any, right-click them then press Delete. Next, right-click in a blank area, hover over New in the menu that appears (1 in our screenshot below left), then click Shortcut 2 in the next menu that appears. Next, click the Browse button and select the program you want to add to the Quick Launch toolbar, then click OK. Optionally change the shortcut name (for example, if you're adding Opera you may want to name the shortcut Web Browser for anyone who doesn't know what Opera is), then click OK.

You can add folders to the Quick Launch toolbar in just the same way, by selecting them rather than a program. You might expect the result to be similar to what you achieved when you created a toolbar from the desktop folder, earlier, which presented all of its icons in a

scrollable list. This may be an overwhelming result in the Quick Launch area, so instead of displaying the contents, clicking the link opens the folder in its own Explorer window. This is a quick, neat solution that gives you direct access to several of the files you use most often without navigating Windows' file system folder by folder through Explorer.



You can change which icons appear in your Quick Launch toolbar



# Workshop1

## Terminate processes to stop your PC overheating

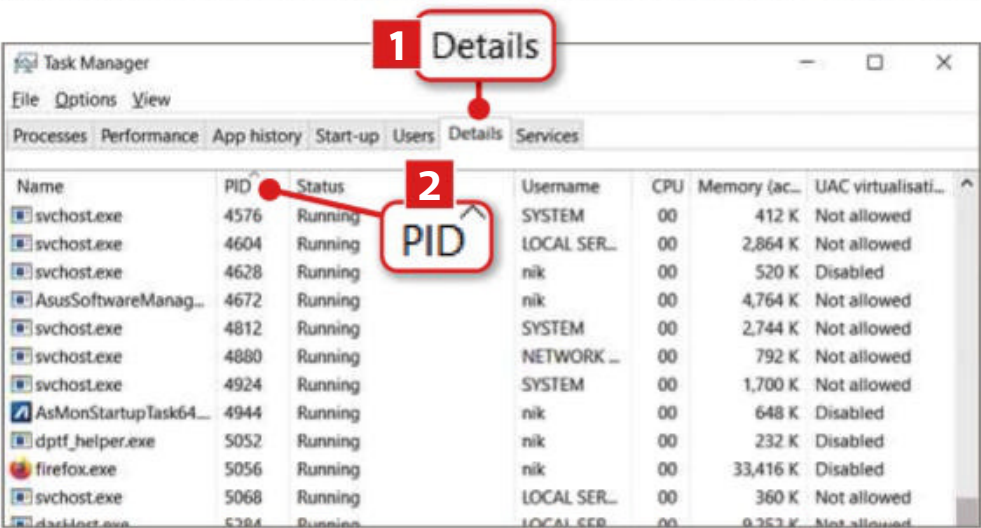
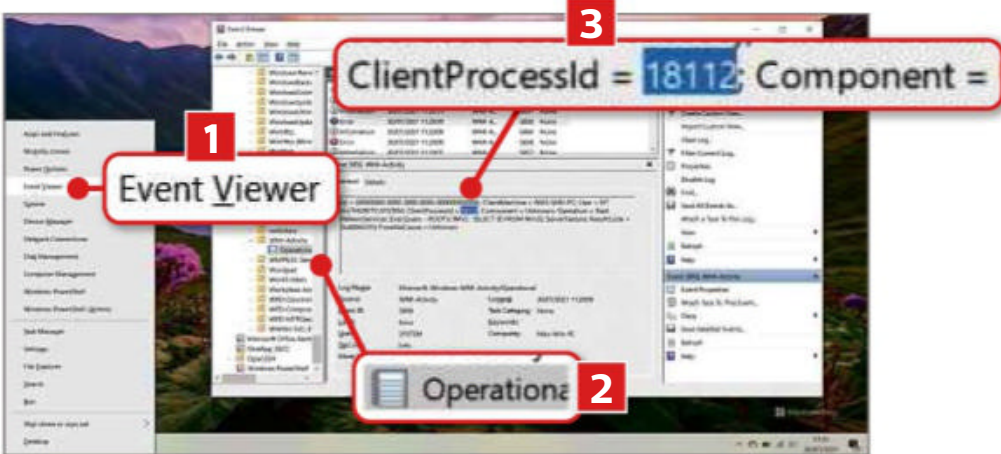
**What you need:** Windows 10  
**Time required:** 30 minutes

If your PC's fans start speeding up, your processor might be overheating. You should perform a full backup, then press Ctrl+Shift+Escape to open Task Manager (click 'More details' at the bottom if you see it). Click the top of the CPU column

so the processes using the most resources appear at the top. If one stays there over time, and uses close to 100 per cent, it could indicate a problem. Here, we look at some of the most common problematic processes.

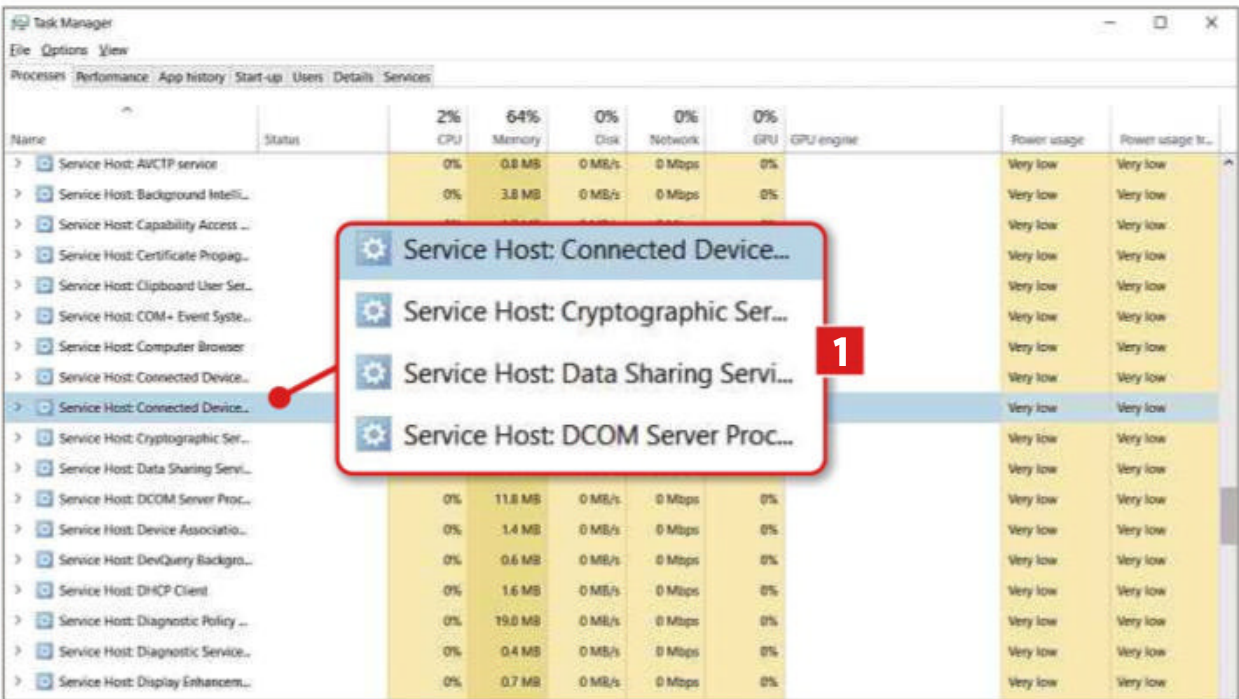


**STEP 1** WMI (Windows Management Instrumentation) Provider Host is a tool programs use to find out about resources built into your computer and the settings of the operating system. If it's overworking your processor, that suggests something else is constantly kicking it into action. To find out what, open the Power User menu by either right-clicking the Windows menu, or pressing the Windows key+X, then clicking Event Viewer **1**. Click the arrows beside 'Applications and Service Logs', followed by Microsoft, Windows, WMI-Activity, then Operational **2**. Look for any instance of 'Error' in the left-most column (under the Level heading), then check in the panel below for 'ClientProcessID =' **3**.

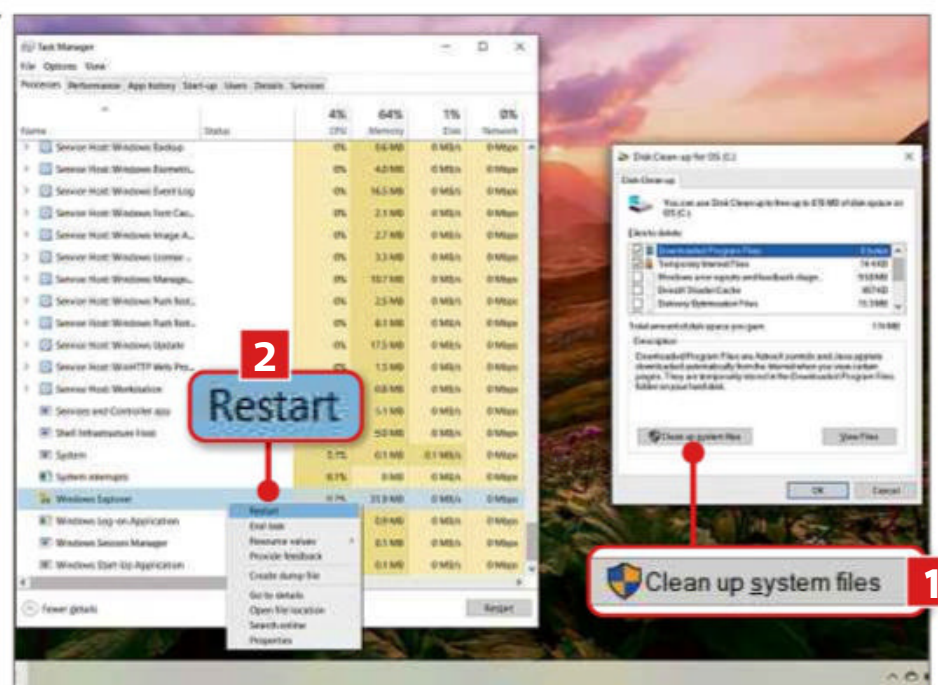
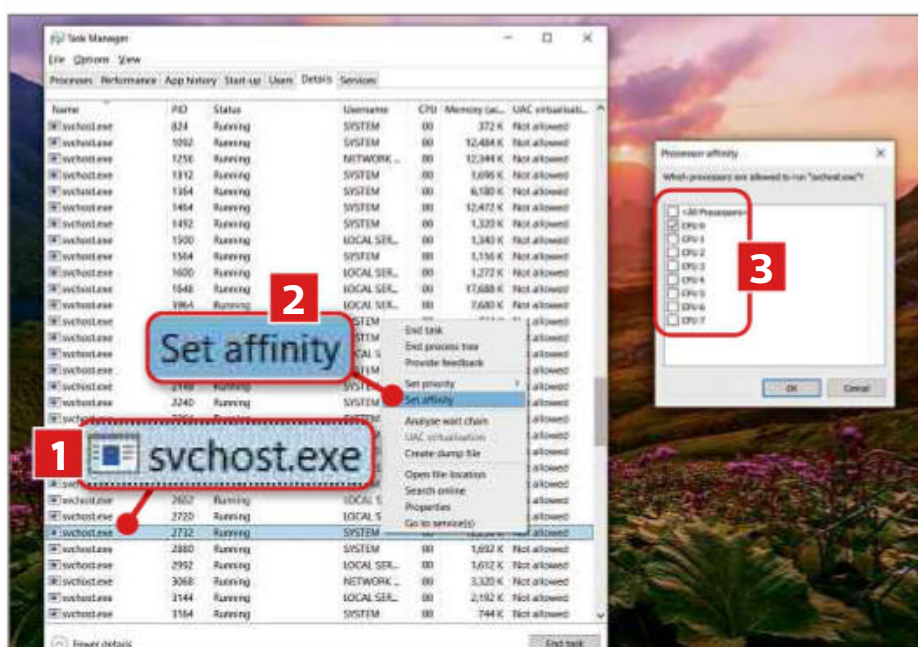


**STEP 2** Note the number (called the Event ID) next to ClientProcessID, because this identifies the process that prompted WMI Provider Host into action and is likely to be the cause of the problem. Next, switch to Task Manager and click the Details tab **1**. Click the PID column header **2** to sort the events into numerical order, then scroll until you find the matching number. The name of the problematic process or program will be shown to the left. This could be harming your computer in several ways – it's hard to know precisely why. You should search online for any plausible explanations and solutions.

**STEP 3** The software you run in Windows, as well as the many tools in Windows itself, rely on small external pieces of code. Windows uses **Service Host** (svchost.exe) to manage each bit of code, and may combine several chunks of code into one process. This prevents them from bombarding the processor with resource demands individually. However, if one of these stops working, it impacts all others in the same group, and their Service Host entry (several can run simultaneously **1**) ends up consuming excessive processor resources.







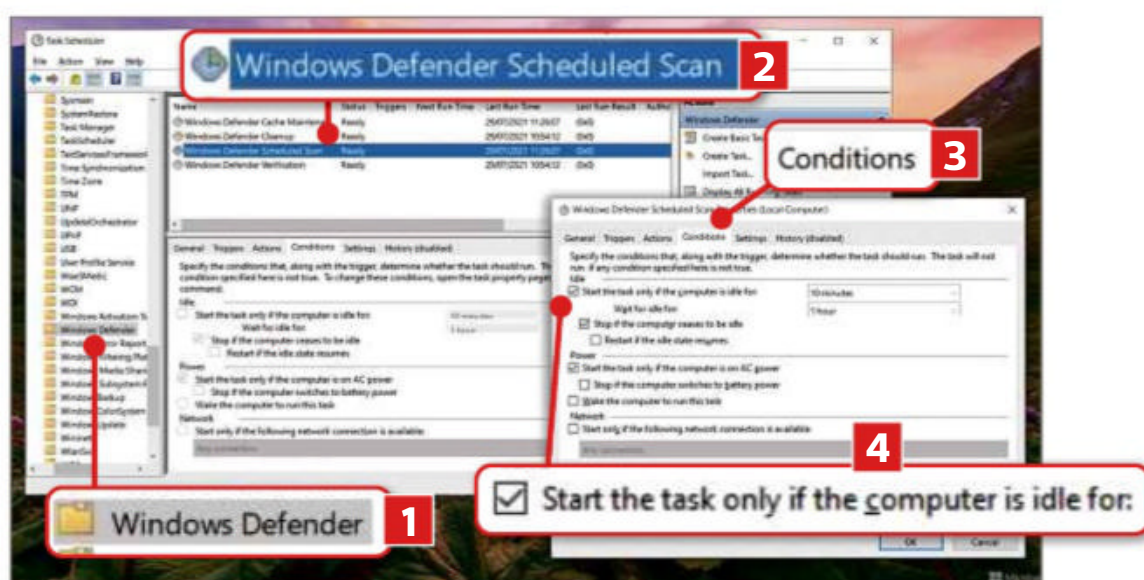
**STEP 4** The most effective solution is to increase your memory and make sure you're running the most recent edition of Windows. If you have 3.5GB of internal memory, and are running Windows 10 (version 1703 or later), each process runs individually, so a single resource having trouble shouldn't slow the others. Alternatively, if one instance of 'svchost' is still hogging your processor, you can try reducing the amount of resources it can access by right-clicking it in Task Manager then selecting 'Go to details'. This takes you to the Details tab, where the relevant process **1** will be selected. Right-click it, choose 'Set affinity' **2**, then untick each processor core individually **3** to see whether that improves performance. If it makes no difference, or causes problems, return to its original configuration.

**STEP 5** There are many reasons why File Explorer might be consuming excessive resources – and several possible solutions. Try moving files stored on the desktop elsewhere, such as to your Pictures, Downloads or Documents folders, then disable any online-storage synchronisation tools, like Dropbox or OneDrive, that you don't use. Next, press the Windows key, type **Disk** then click Disk Clean-up. Click 'Clean up system files' **1** to more thoroughly search your drive for unwanted leftovers, then click OK. Right-click Windows Explorer in Task Manager, then click Restart **2** in the menu that appears to reboot your PC.



**STEP 6** If **Windows Update Service** (wuaserv) is hogging your resources, press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click 'Update & Security' followed by Troubleshoot. Click 'Additional troubleshooters', followed by Windows Update, then 'Run the troubleshooter' **1** to run diagnostic tests and find a fix. If it doesn't reveal any problems, work through the steps that Microsoft lists at [www.snipca.com/39052](http://www.snipca.com/39052), which include freeing up drive space and disconnecting external hardware. If that doesn't work, try resetting the Windows Update Agent using the three commands (in Command Prompt) that Microsoft provides under the 'How do I reset Windows Update components?' heading at [www.snipca.com/39053](http://www.snipca.com/39053).

**STEP 7** If **Windows Defender** (MsMpEng.exe) is consuming too much of your resources, it may be encountering problems when scanning files. Temporarily disable any other antivirus software and, if this solves the problem, consider using one or the other, not both simultaneously. Otherwise, set Defender to scan only when your PC is idle to reduce the amount of work done by your processor. Press the Windows key, type **Scheduler** and click Task Scheduler. Click the arrows next to Task Scheduler Library, then click Microsoft, Windows, followed by Windows Defender **1**. Double-click Windows Defender Scheduled Scan **2**, followed by the Conditions tab **3**, then tick the box next to 'Start the task only if the computer is idle for' **4** and choose a time.





# Workshop 2

## Make voice recordings then edit them on your PC

**What you need:** iOS or Android phone or tablet; Audacity

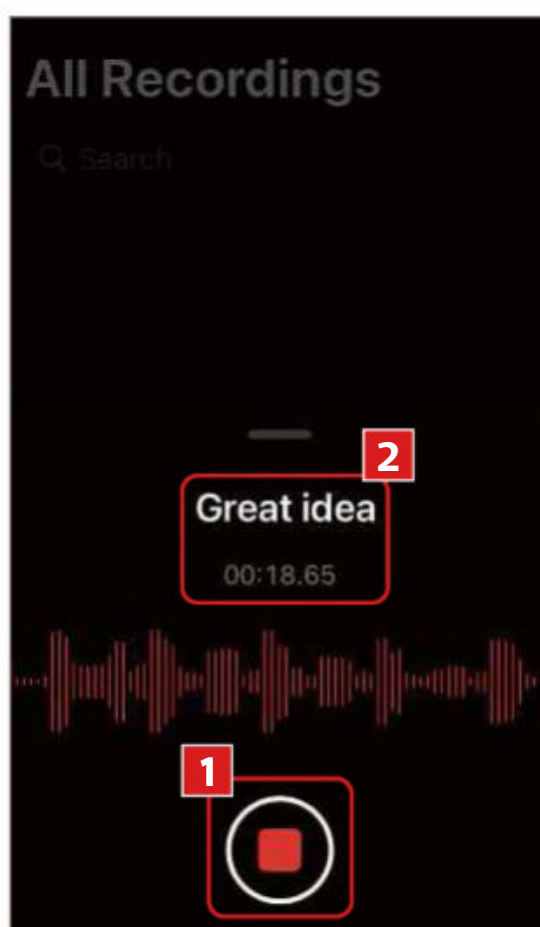
**Time required:** 30 minutes

Today's phones and tablets come with high-quality microphones, making them perfect for use as dictaphones. Here, we'll show you how to record your voice (or someone else's) on iOS

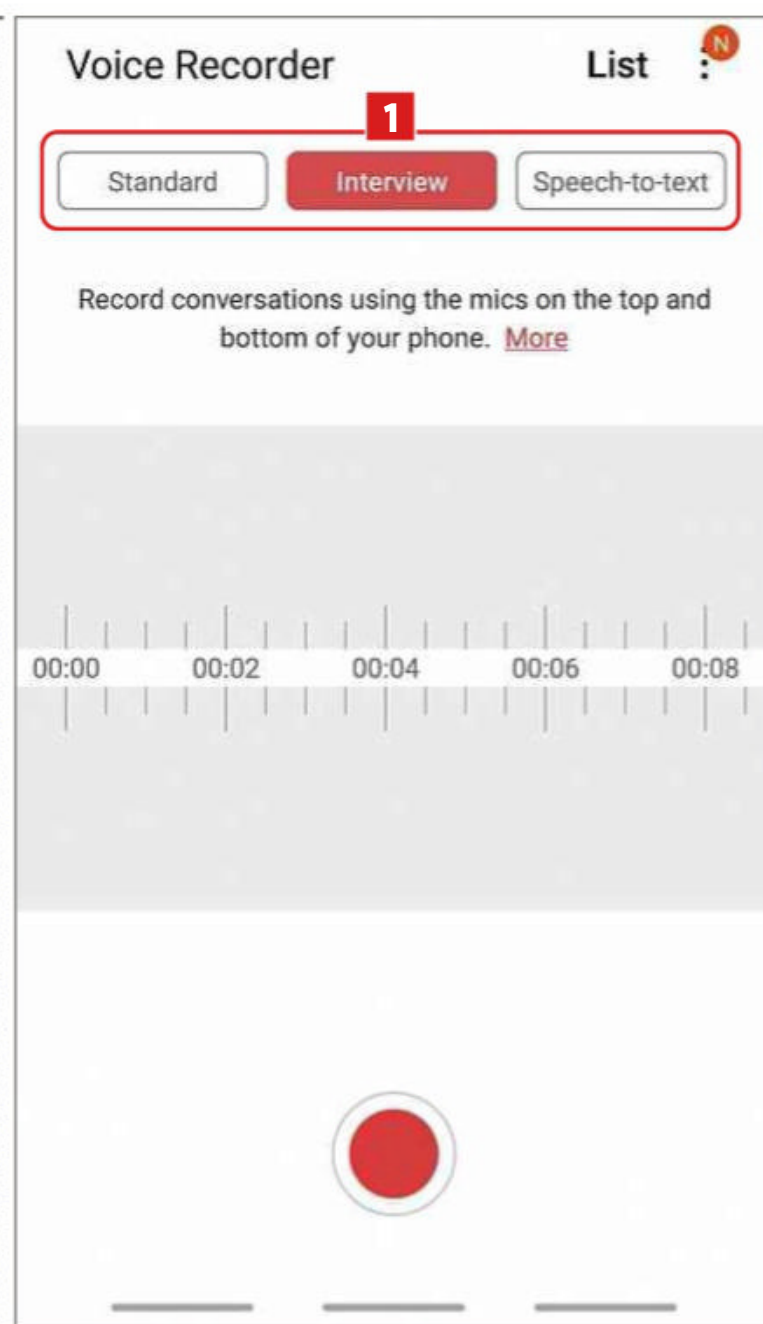
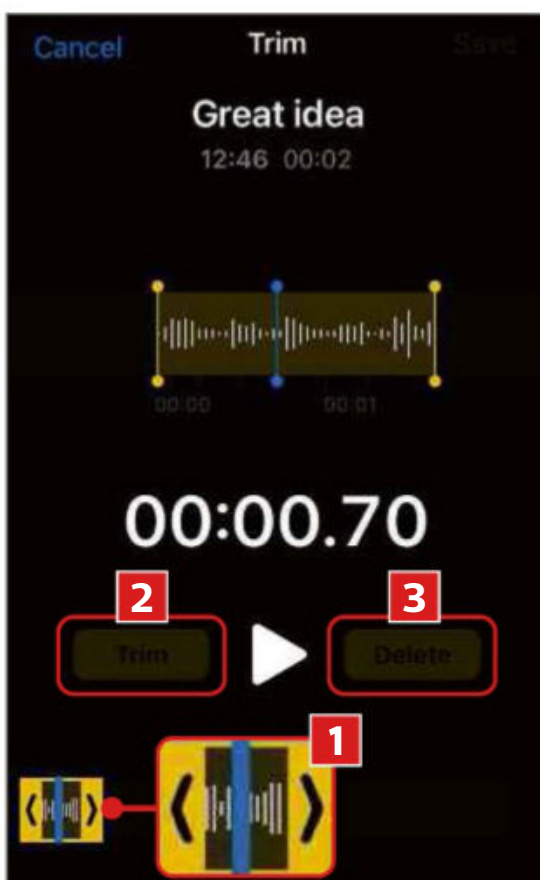
and Android mobile devices, then export them to your computer to remove any irritating pauses that can creep in when you're recording your thoughts.



**STEP 1** On an **iPhone** or **iPad** (skip to Step 3 if you're using an Android device), it's best to use Apple's Voice Memos app, which comes installed. To launch it, open the Extras folder on the home screen, then tap Voice Memos. When you first use the app, it will prompt you to enable location details – this means your voice recordings will be named using the location where they were made. Tap the Record button **1** to start your recording, then tap it a second time to stop and save it. If you chose to use location-based naming but want to change a recording's name, you can do so by long-pressing the name, then renaming it to whatever you like **2**.



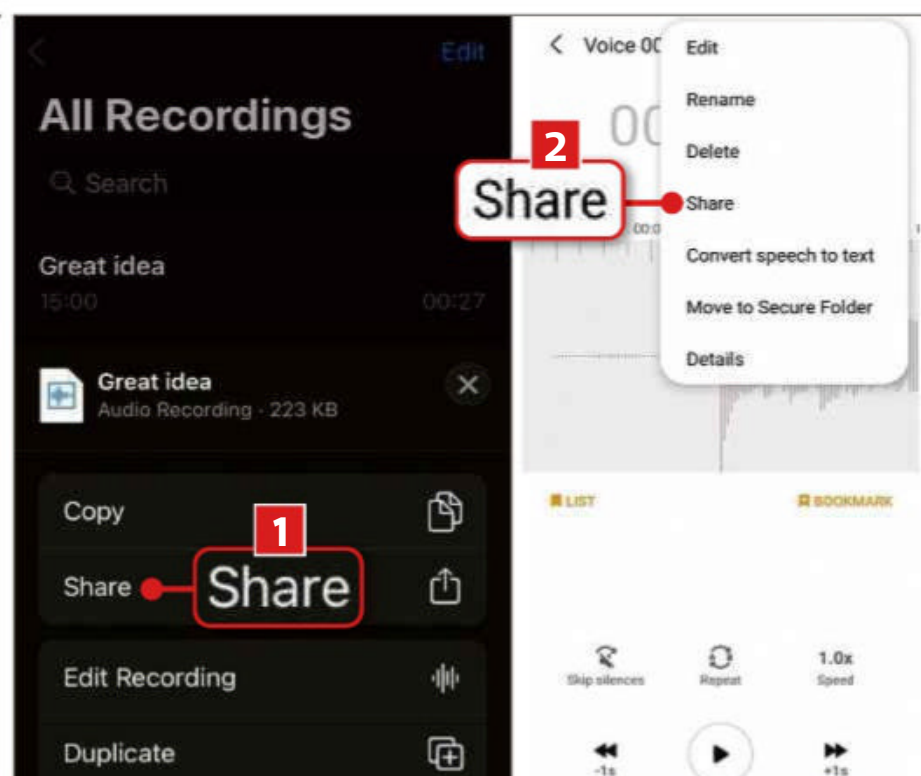
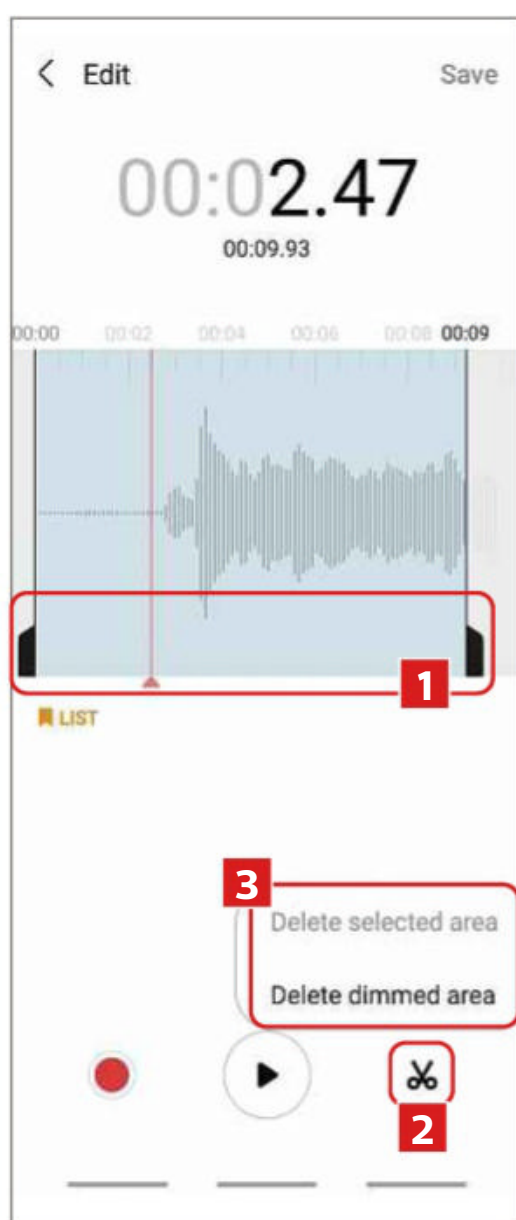
**STEP 2** You'll now see a list of all your recordings. To edit one, select it, then tap Edit Recording. In the next screen, tap the trim button (square icon, top right). Carefully drag the two yellow bars at the bottom of the screen **1** to select the relevant section of audio (this can be audio you want to keep or delete, as we'll explain in a moment). Press the Play button to make sure you've selected the correct part. To keep the selection and delete everything else, tap Trim **2**; alternatively, tap Delete **3** to remove your selection. Next, tap 'Save', then Done. You can now skip to Step 5.



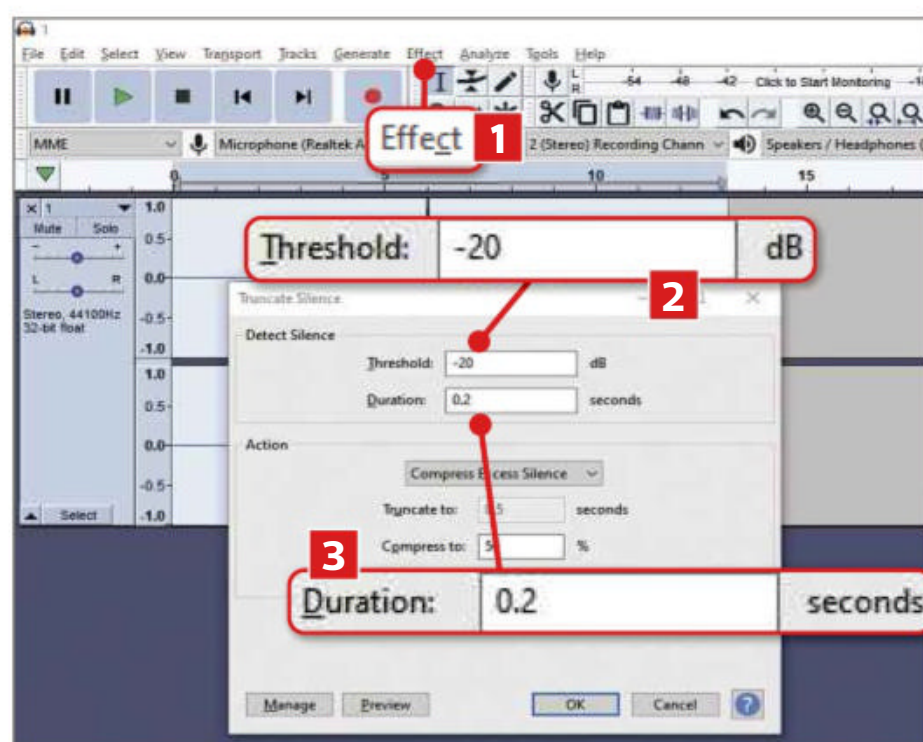
**STEP 3** On **Android** devices, your built-in voice-recording app will vary depending on the manufacturer. Here, we're using a Samsung Galaxy S20 phone which, like all Samsung devices, comes with the Samsung Voice Recorder app installed. This app has three recording modes **1**. 'Standard' is the most basic – simply press Record, then the Stop button. The 'Interview' mode uses both microphones on your device (one at the top, the other at the bottom) to record audio in stereo. The third option, 'Speech-to-text', means the app will not only record what you say, but also transcribe it in real time.



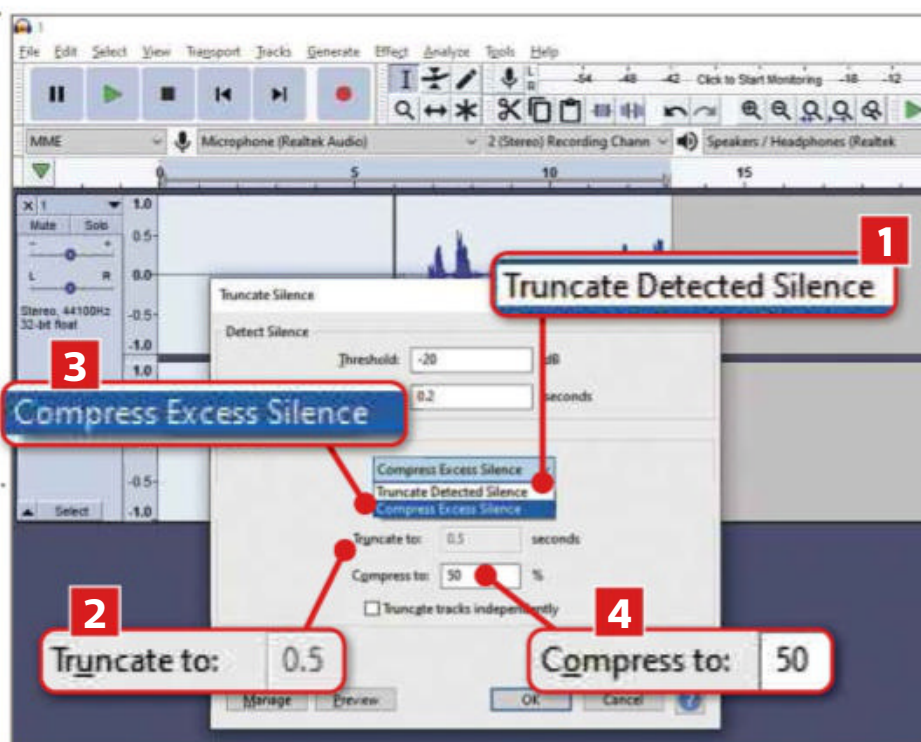
**STEP 4** Once you've chosen your recording mode, start the recording by pressing the Record button (the large red circle at the bottom). You can then press the Pause button if you want to take a short break, or Stop to end and save the recording. To trim unwanted sections, select your voice recording, tap the three vertical dots (top right), then Edit. You can now drag the bars at either end of the recording **1** to select the relevant section, then tap the Trim button (scissors icon **2**) and choose whether to keep the selected section ('Delete dimmed area') or the sections either side of it ('Delete selected area') **3**. Click 'Save when you've finished.



**STEP 5** Whether you're using an Android or iOS device, the easiest way to get your voice recording on to your computer is to email it to yourself (even a 15-minute recording will be less than 20MB, which is well within the attachment limit set by most email services). On an iPhone or iPad, select your voice recording, tap the three horizontal dots, Share **1**, then select Mail. On Android, it once again depends on which model/app you're using – with Samsung Voice Recorder, tap the three vertical dots on the voice recording, Share **2**, then Gmail (or whichever email app you use).



**STEP 6** Now that you have your voice recordings on your computer, you can use Audacity ([www.audacityteam.org](http://www.audacityteam.org)) to remove those annoying silences. Drag your voice-recording file from File Explorer into the Audacity window, then select the entire recording by pressing Ctrl+A. Next, open the Effect **1** menu and select 'Truncate Silence...'. The Threshold field **2** lets you choose what Audacity should treat as a period of silence – the higher the decibel (dB) value here, the more silences Audacity will detect (note that the dB values are minus numbers, so -10dB will pick up more silences than -20dB). The Duration field **3** lets you set how long the period of silence needs to be before Audacity removes it.



**STEP 7** To set Audacity to delete every period of silence it detects, set the dropdown menu to Truncate Detected Silence **1**. To leave a short period of silence, set the 'Truncate to' value **2** accordingly. Alternatively, you can tell Audacity to reduce the period of silence based on its duration. To do this, select Compress Excess Silence **3**, then use the 'Compress to' field **4** to set by how much the silence should be reduced (setting it to 50 per cent means a 10-second period of silence is reduced to five seconds, a five-second silence to 2.5 seconds, and so on). Click OK, and the periods of silence will be managed according to your settings. You can then save your recording by clicking File, Export, then 'Export as MP3'.



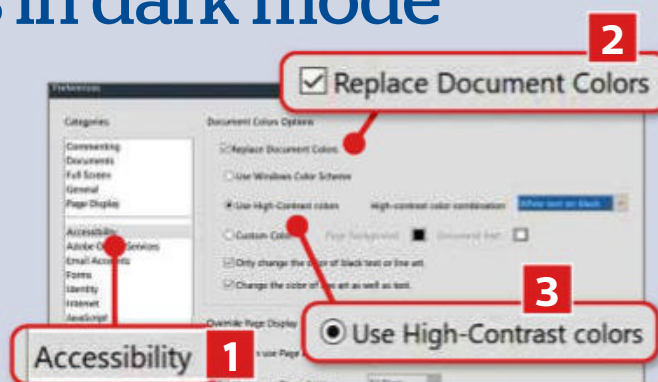
# Readers' Tips

## TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

### Read Adobe PDFs in dark mode

I'm a big fan of dark modes in software – they're less of a strain on my eyes. I'm delighted then that I've found how to change PDFs in Adobe Acrobat Reader (<https://get.adobe.com/uk/reader>) so that white text appears on a black background.

With Adobe Reader open, press Ctrl+K and you'll see the Preferences section. Now click Accessibility in the menu on the left (1 in our screenshot above right), and in the middle tick the 'Replace Document Colors' box (2). Next, select the 'Use High-Contrast



colors' option (3) and choose a colour combination in the dropdown menu on the right. I use white text on black (see screenshot above right) because it produces great contrast – and is the closest approximation to dark mode – but



yellow on black is strong too. Green on black is hideous! Finally, don't forget to click OK at the bottom.

From now on, every PDF you open in Adobe should show in your new colours.

Carl Wainwright

Carl wins a copy of our 2020 Back Issue CD

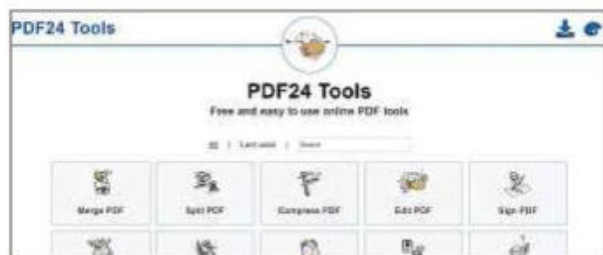
Buy it on Amazon [www.snipca.com/38164](http://www.snipca.com/38164)



## INTERNET

### Use online PDF tools, not downloadable program

After re-reading Michael Clary's problem ('Why won't PDF24 Creator work for me', Issue 608, page 71), I noticed he said he installed the program on his computer. Like Michael I also run Windows 10 Pro (version 20H2), but instead chose to use PDF24 Creator's online tools (available from [www.snipca.com](http://www.snipca.com)).



com/38900, pictured below left), rather than install the program. These online tools work well for me. Maybe Michael could see whether they'd let him do what he needs to. If the online version lets him choose a file and convert it, then that may confirm the problem lies within his PC.

Paul Croft

## PAYMENTS

### Use travel money card for safe shopping

In Issue 610's Letters (page 13) Joyce Walmsley asks for a bank payment card with a limited value. She could use a travel money card which, although originally intended for holidays, works just as well for purchases in this country.

You load money on to them, and can then use them in the same way as a debit card. No bank- or credit-card details are stored on them. They do have a minimum amount you can load at any one time, which in my experience varies

between £25 and £50. There is a small charge for reloading money, but this is how the cards can pay for themselves.

We currently use Post Office cards (pictured above), which you can buy and reload from any Post Office or online



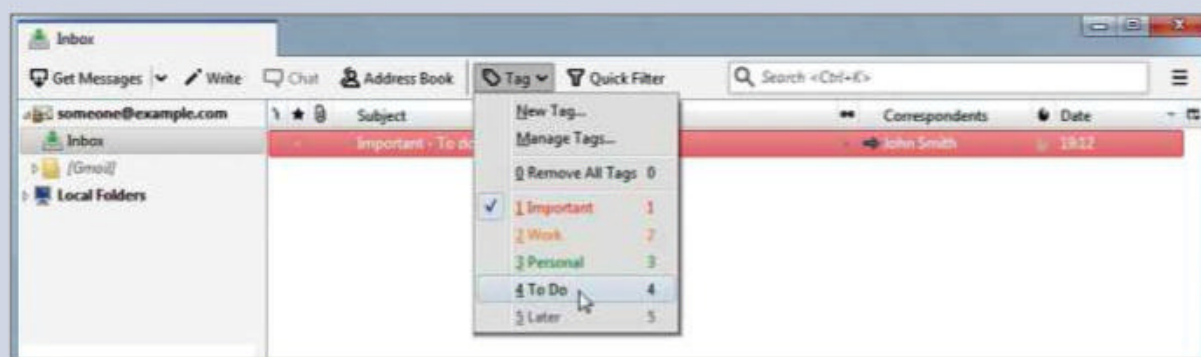
## Why I stopped using...

### eM Client

I started using eM Client ([www.emclient.com](http://www.emclient.com)) for my club's email traffic, as my version of Thunderbird had become too full for additional folders. However, it's slower both to load and to download new emails, though my biggest gripe is the absence of the coloured tags which I use to identify required actions in many of the folders.

### And what I use instead...

I returned to **Thunderbird** ([www.thunderbird.net](http://www.thunderbird.net)) because it gives



instant access to the Address Book and to group headers. It also offers four colour tags (plus black, see screenshot), with the option to add more – you can use these to colour the Subject and Correspondent columns. Makes it so much clearer when scrolling through messages. Also, one right-click opens a Template to find 'Start

a new message', without affecting the master email. In eM Client one has to copy the master to another folder to use it, otherwise the master is changed.

Ben Sladen

Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)



## Handy hints and tips from your fellow readers

✉ Email us your tips: [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)

([www.snipca.com/38907](http://www.snipca.com/38907)). We originally bought the cards to use on holiday, but since the pandemic struck we have used our cards in place of cash on many occasions here in the UK.

David Carpenter

✓ Joyce (see above) could try using Starling Bank, which offers exactly what she wants with its 'Connected card' ([www.snipca.com/38906](http://www.snipca.com/38906)). You simply add money online from your current account. If you maintain a low maximum value, you can limit any misuse.

Tim Boddington

### ACCESSORIES

#### Buy IKEA's monitor stand for just £10

✓ In Issue 609 (page 42) Paul Barraclough recommended a metal desk monitor stand with a drawer. I was surprised that it cost £36.48 on Amazon ([www.snipca.com/38479](http://www.snipca.com/38479)). I bought an almost identical one from IKEA, called the Brytet (pictured below) for a tenner ([www.snipca.com/38879](http://www.snipca.com/38879)). I removed the drawer and placed it over my small-form PC, which is on its side on my desk. The stand keeps my monitor away from the computer vents.

Ian Fisher



### STORAGE

#### Save portable software to microSD cards

✓ Regarding Tony Watson's request that you give more advice on using SD cards (Letters, Issue 609), I use microSD cards for many purposes. The most useful is for my Asus Transformer Book T100 (available 'used' priced £183 from Amazon, [www.snipca.com/38936](http://www.snipca.com/38936), pictured above right) which I use as a mini-laptop. It's small and light enough to fit into my hand luggage to take on holiday.

It does have limitations though, mainly having only a 32GB SSD. This is OK for hosting Windows 10 and Office, and maybe one or two other frequently used programs such as Firefox. It has only one microSD and one USB 3.0 slot. I use the microSD card to hold other programs as portable apps. I can open these easily

## Reader recommends...

### Lenovo Tab P11 Pro

£562 from Amazon [www.snipca.com/38585](http://www.snipca.com/38585)

✓ I've recently retired, and plan to go travelling just as soon as the world opens up again. I want to capture my thoughts as I travel, and so I bought this tablet following your five-star review in Issue 609 (page 24).

Its detachable keyboard looked perfect, and so it has proved in the few weeks I've had it. I was worried that typing on the keyboard would be awkward, but it feels great. It's a bit narrow, as you point out in your review, but you get used to it quite quickly. Battery life is amazing too. I can't confirm whether it lasts 17 hours, as your tests claim, but it has never run out of power.

I don't use it at home much – I prefer



my chunky desktop PC. But I didn't buy it for the kitchen table, or my lap while on the sofa. Instead I'm hoping it'll be the ideal companion on my globe-trotting adventures next year (fingers crossed). It weighs next to nothing, so won't burden me.

Philip Calder

✉ Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?

Email [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)



using shortcuts on my desktop. The card is permanently slotted into the laptop.

The USB 3.0 slot is connected to a compact USB hub, from which I run a miniature mouse and a USB stick holding my data. Various USB cables and adapters are used to connect the hub to other external devices if needed. The laptop and all its accessories, including the charger, fit in a small 'man-bag'. I wouldn't be without it.

John Bailey

### DIGITISATION

#### Scan negatives using an app

✓ In answer to Mike Capper's 'What Should I Buy?' question in Issue 609 (page 26) about a scanner for 2.5in negatives, I'm digitising the slide collection

for a society I belong to and have come across the same problem with different formats. I'd like to suggest a method that, with the quantity he mentions (around 100), will cost next to nothing.

He should use a tablet and select an app that gives him a blank white screen. Next, place the negative/slide on a small piece of glass (such as a cheap picture frame) and using two small blocks of wood suspend the slide over the tablet's white screen and take a photograph. Even a camera phone gives reasonable results. Use photo-editing software to crop and straighten the image. Make sure you don't place the slide directly on to the tablet screen as you will end up magnifying the individual red/blue/green pixels. I hope this helps.

Alan Hodson

✓ A x120 scanner from Reflecta ([www.reflecta.de](http://www.reflecta.de)) should do the job that Mike needs. It works with all sizes, and black and white, colour negatives and transparencies. It's a larger version of the standard 35mm film scanner. However, it's not easy to find online anymore, so he may need to buy one second-hand on eBay.

Dermot Lahiff





# Phone and Tablet Tips

## ANDROID

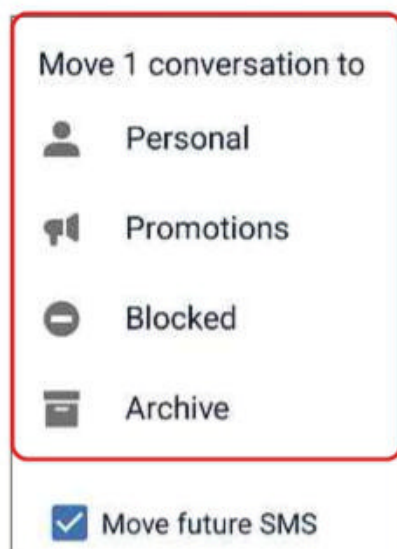
### Quickly organise and back up your text messages



Most texting apps offer very limited options for organising or doing much else with your messages. Install Microsoft's SMS Organizer, however, and it will organise your messages into categories – Personal, Transactions, Promotions and Starred. It also lets you quickly view unread messages, back up your messages to online storage and more.

SMS Organizer is still in **beta**, but we found it worked very well when we tested it. Install it from [www.snipca.com/38995](http://www.snipca.com/38995) and launch it. Tap the Continue button and you'll be prompted to provide the app permission to access your messages, phone and contacts. Tap 'Okay, give access' then tap Allow for all the categories requested.

Eventually, you'll reach a screen that says 'No backup found'. Tap 'Google Drive account', then select your Google account and tap OK. Tap Allow on the next screen, then tap Auto backup and select how often you want the app to back up your messages. Tap 'Skip', then Get Started and you'll be prompted to set SMS



Organizer as your default texting app – you may not want to do this until you've decided you're happy with it, so tap Cancel here for now.

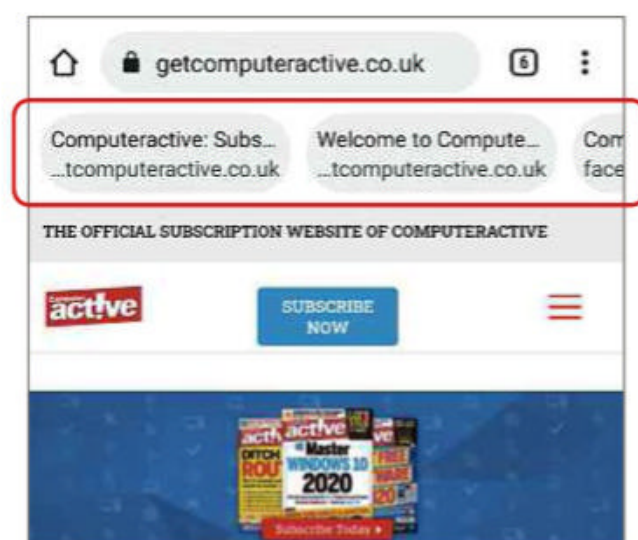
You'll see that the app has already organised your existing messages into categories. Tap a tab at the bottom of the screen to browse each one. If a message has been incorrectly categorised, long-press it, then tap the Move button (a folder with an arrow in it) and select the correct category (see screenshot below left). You can quickly filter your messages to those you haven't read yet by tapping the 'Unread only' switch, top right.

## ANDROID

### See Google search results in the top bar of Chrome



For years, Google searches have essentially worked the same way – presenting you with a vertically scrollable list of results that you can click or tap your way through. But the company is looking to shake things up a bit, if the latest version of Chrome for Android is anything to go by. By tweaking a hidden setting, you can enable a new feature called Continuous Search Navigation, which shows your search results in a horizontal bar above the main part of your screen. This lets you quickly navigate between your results without ever having to tap Back to return to the search page.



At the time of writing, Continuous Search Navigation is in a beta version that's only available by turning on a Chrome **flag**. As such, the feature is subject to change, but we think it's destined to appear as a standard option in Chrome sometime soon.

To enable it, launch Chrome, then type **chrome://flags** into the address bar and press Enter. Now type **continuous** into the 'Search flags' box until Continuous Search Navigation appears – select Enabled from the dropdown menus below it, then tap Relaunch.

Once Chrome has restarted, carry out a Google search as normal and tap the first result in the list. When the page opens, you should now see a bar at the top of the screen with further results from your search (see screenshot above). Swiping left will reveal more results. Tap one to go straight to the relevant page.

If you find you don't like this feature

## BEST NEW APPS

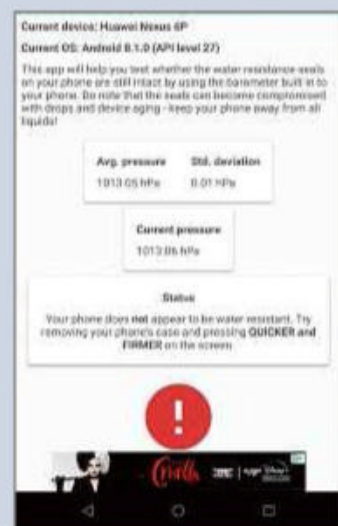
## What you should install this fortnight

### Water Resistance Tester

Free

Android [www.snipca.com/38998](http://www.snipca.com/38998)

This app can reveal your device's waterproof status by testing its **barometric sensor**,



though we wouldn't advise plunging your phone into water, based on its results. But in our tests, it was able to identify when a device *wasn't* water resistant.

### S2 Music Player

Free\*

Android [www.snipca.com/39000](http://www.snipca.com/39000)

With Google killing off its own Music app last year, this could be the replacement



you're looking for. It's a completely revamped successor to the once-popular Shuttle Music Player and its focus is music files stored on your device, rather than streaming services. It supports playlists, album art, Chromecast and has a built-in equalizer.

### Liquify

Free\*

iOS [www.snipca.com/38999](http://www.snipca.com/38999)

As we write this review, it's July and currently 30 degrees. Inevitably,



temperatures will plummet as the Great British summer progresses, but this app acts as a good reminder that it's important to stay hydrated, whatever the weather. Log your liquid intake, set yourself goals and motivate yourself with rewards.

\*Contains in-app purchases



## Brilliant things to do on your device

you can switch it off again by repeating the process above and selecting Default from the dropdown menus.

### ANDROID & iOS

#### Take a scrolling screenshot on your phone or tablet

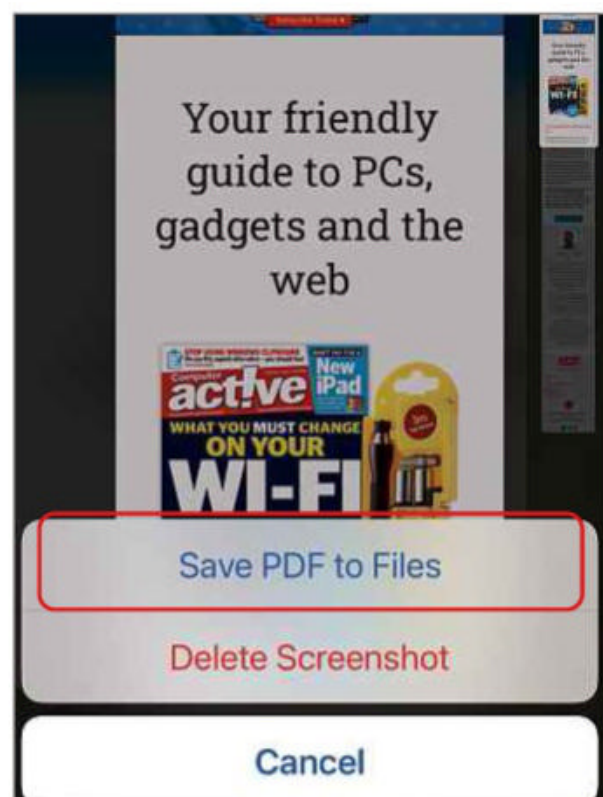


One of the new features in the upcoming Android 12 is scrolling screenshots, which lets you capture more than just whatever's visible on your screen at the time – for example, an entire web page. However, you can also capture scrolling screenshots on older Android versions and iOS devices.

On Android 11 or older, install LongShot (free from [www.snipca.com/38996](http://www.snipca.com/38996)), then launch it and tap Allow to grant it permission to access photos and files on your device. In the options that appear, tap 'Auto scroll' then OK and Enable the LongShot service when prompted, before tapping Allow.

Next, tap Capture Web Page, enter a keyword or URL in the address bar and tap Enter to navigate to the web page you want. Tap 'Set start position', top right, then scroll to where you want the capture to end. Tap 'End here and capture'. The screenshot will be saved to Photos.

On an iPhone, you can take scrolling screenshots in most of Apple's own apps. Open a web page in Safari, for example, and press the side or top button and volume up button at the same time to take a standard screenshot. Tap the small preview window that appears when the screenshot is taken, then tap the Full Page option in the top-right corner. Tap 'Done', then tap 'Save PDF to Files' (see screenshot below).

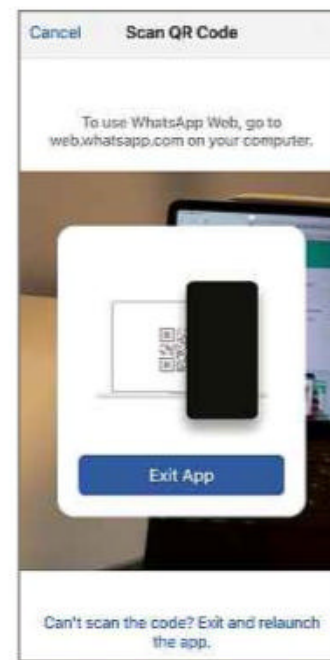


### iOS

#### Use WhatsApp on your iPad



Last month, WhatsApp announced it has begun testing a feature that lets people send messages on up to four devices ([www.snipca.com/38997](http://www.snipca.com/38997)). However, it's not clear when this update will become available to the public. As things stand, there isn't even an official WhatsApp app for iPad users. But there is a quick and easy way to use WhatsApp on your iPad now.



On your iPad, open Safari and type [web.whatsapp.com](http://web.whatsapp.com) into the address bar. Now grab your phone, launch the WhatsApp app and tap Settings, followed by Linked Devices. Tap 'Link a Device' and point your phone's camera at the QR code on your iPad's screen (see screenshot left). And that's it! You'll need to keep your phone nearby to send and receive messages via your iPad.

### BEST APPS FOR...

### Measuring land area

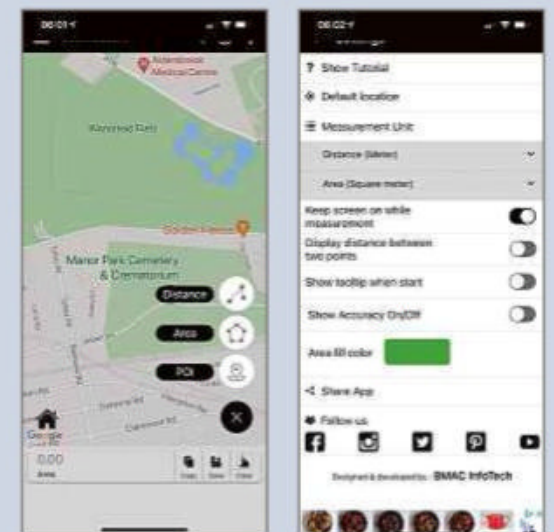
#### Geo Measure Area Calculator

Free\*

iOS [www.snipca.com/39007](http://www.snipca.com/39007)

This app lets you measure area and distance, either on a map or by recording yourself as you walk. There's a wide range of measurement units to choose from and you can customise the colours used or import your own map files in KML format. You can pay £2.99 to remove adverts, but all features are included for free.

**Best For** Less common units of measurement



#### GPS Fields Area Measure

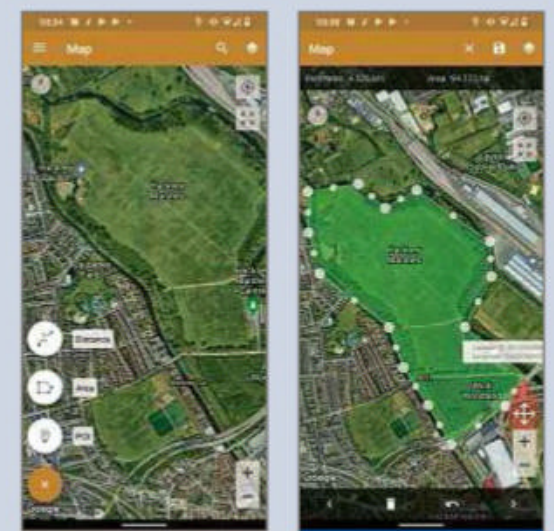
Free\*

Android [www.snipca.com/39004](http://www.snipca.com/39004)

iOS [www.snipca.com/39005](http://www.snipca.com/39005)

Quickly measure area, distance or perimeter from a Google Maps satellite view. You can plot area manually or by using GPS to locate your position. Results can be saved and shared, and you can choose imperial or metric measurements. Opting for premium (£4.50 per month) removes ads and unlocks features such as PDF exporting.

**Best For** Those restricted to desk-bound research



#### GPS Area Measure

Free

Android [www.snipca.com/39006](http://www.snipca.com/39006)

Use this app to plot the area or distance you want to measure not by marking points on a map but by physically walking it yourself. Tap GPS Point Here at various points as you walk, then tap Calculate to obtain the area and perimeter. Results can be shared via email.

**Best For** Walkers and hikers



\*Contains in-app purchases

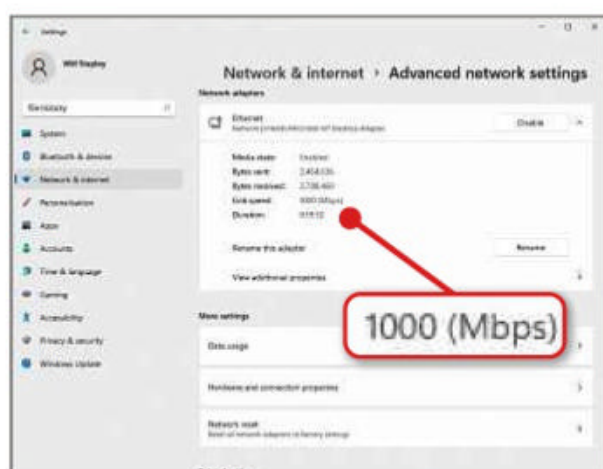


### WINDOWS 11

#### Find out more about your home-network settings

Microsoft has updated the design of the Settings app in Windows 11 Insider Preview, with the most notable change being that many settings are hidden by default – to reveal them, you have to click the appropriate section (a second click hides the section).

Microsoft has also added some new settings, including one called ‘Advanced network settings’ (you’ll find this by opening the Settings app, then going to ‘Network & Internet’). In the ‘Network adapters’ section at the top, you’ll see all your network adapters (wired and wireless) – click one and you’ll see detailed information about it, including its speed (see screenshot below) and how much data Windows has transferred using it. Click ‘View additional properties’ and you’ll see the IP address the adapter is using and its driver version.



### WINDOWS 7, 8.1 & 10

#### Identify notification sounds

From new email alerts to error warnings, Windows produces many different notification sounds. Sometimes you may hear one you don’t recognise, leaving you confused as to what it means. Sadly, Windows doesn’t have an online database of sounds that you can play, but there is another way to identify a sound. First, right-click the speaker icon in the system tray and select Sounds (click the small up arrow if you can’t see this icon); in Windows 7, open Control Panel, select ‘Large icons’ at the top-right, then click Sounds.

In the window that opens, select the Sounds tab. The ‘Program Events’ section at the bottom lists all Windows events (reminders, errors, warnings and so on). Scroll through this list, clicking the Test button (see screenshot above) for each one to hear what sound each entry is

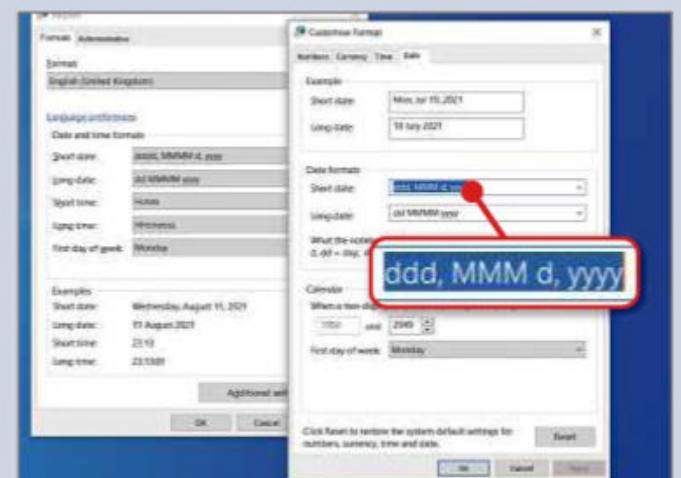
### WINDOWS 7, 8.1 & 10

## Change your Windows clock’s format



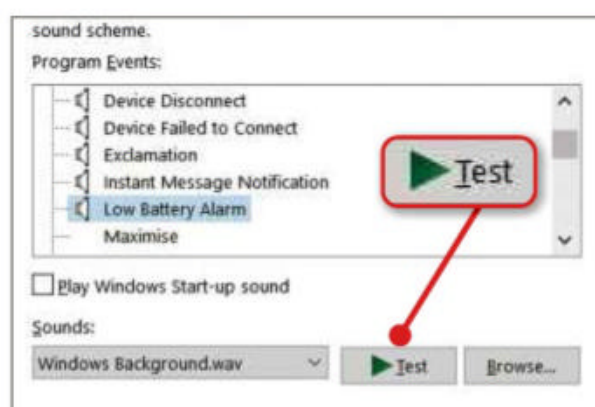
There are several registry hacks that let you change the format of the Windows clock (including one that shows seconds along with hours and minutes), but you don’t need to carry out hacks to do this. Instead, use the Region settings in Control Panel (open it by typing **control panel** in the Start menu). Click the ‘View by’ option in the top-right corner of the Control Panel window so it reads ‘Large icons’, then click Region. In the window that opens, locate the ‘Date and time formats’ section, then click the dropdown menu next to ‘Short time’. You now have four options: 12-hour and 24-hour, along with versions of both with a ‘tt’ at the end, which means the clock will display seconds.

Click the ‘Short date’ dropdown menu and you can change how the date is formatted using similar options. When you make changes, the box at the bottom of the window updates so you can see exactly how the clock will



look before clicking Apply.

You don’t have to limit yourself to the formatting options offered by Windows. To create your own, click the ‘Additional settings...’ button at the bottom. In the window that opens, select the Time or Date tab, then type your new format in the ‘Short time’ or ‘Short date’ box – the ‘What the notations mean’ section at the bottom explains what the various formatting codes mean. In our example, we’ve changed the ‘Short date’ to **ddd, MMM d, yyyy** (see screenshot), which means the date under the Windows clock uses the format ‘Wed, Aug 11, 2021’.



associated with. Note that some sounds are assigned to multiple events, so we recommend going through all of them and making a list of the ones that match the notification you want to identify.

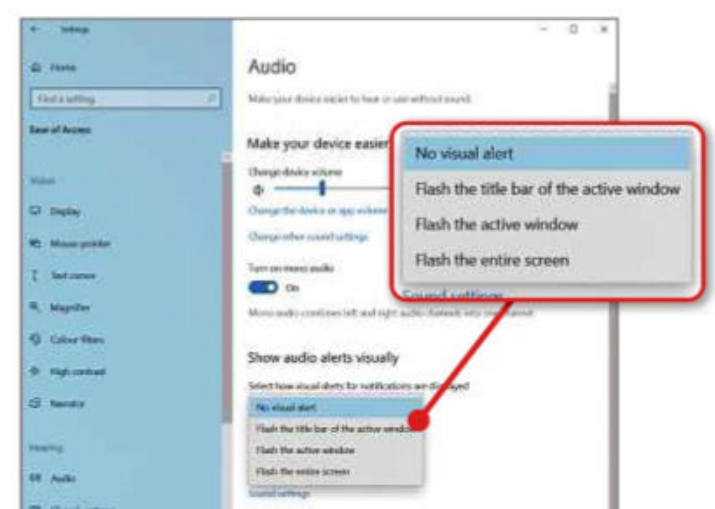
### WINDOWS 10

#### See audio alerts

If you’re hard of hearing or simply have your computer’s speakers turned down low, you may not hear audio alerts, such as when you receive a new email. Windows 10 has a hidden setting that lets you show a visual alert alongside the audio, meaning you’ll

never miss another notification.

To use it, open the Settings app (press the Windows key+I), then select ‘Ease of Access’, followed by Audio. On the right-hand side of the window, scroll to the ‘Show audio alerts visually’ section, then click the box under ‘Select how visual alerts for notifications...’. Here, you can choose whether to have the title bar of the relevant window flash, the whole window, or the entire screen (see screenshot below). To turn the visual notification off, select ‘No visual alert’.





### MICROSOFT EXCEL

## Use people icons in your spreadsheets

When you want to illustrate data in your spreadsheet relating to the number of people (such as members in a local club), ditch Excel's standard bar charts and instead try People Graph, which is available in Excel 2013 and later.

Open your spreadsheet, then click the Insert tab. Next, locate the 'Add-ins' section in the toolbar and click the green People Graph button (see 1 in our screenshot – if you can't see this button, try making the Excel window larger). The first time you do this, you'll need to click the 'Trust this add-in' button in the window that opens – this downloads the People Graph add-in from Microsoft's website. A dummy

graph will now appear.

To change this so it shows your data, click the graph window once, then the Data button (spreadsheet icon 2) in the top-right corner. From here, click the green 'Select your data' button, select the cells that contain the data you want to include in the graph, then click Create. The graph will now update to show your data. To change the title of the chart, double-click the existing one, enter your new title, then click the green arrow button. You can also change the style of the graph by clicking Settings (cog icon 3). Next,

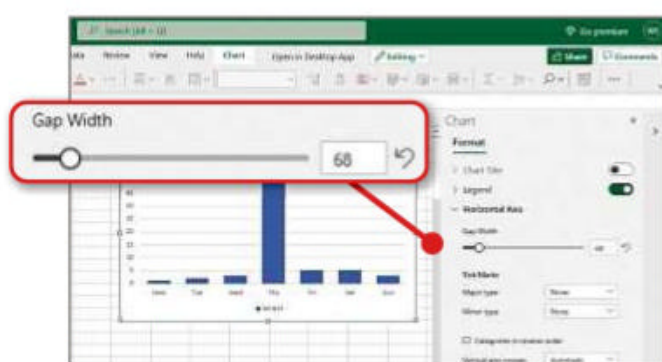


open the 'shape' tab, where you can change the graph to show icons of pets, computers and more.

### MICROSOFT EXCEL

## Format charts in Excel online

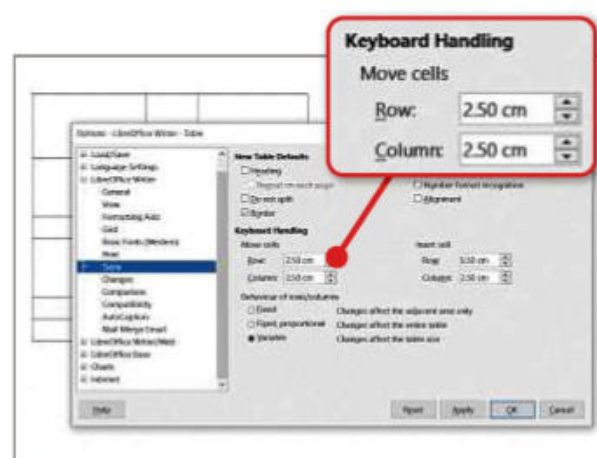
Microsoft recently added new tools to the free online version of Excel (known as 'Excel for the web', which you can use at [www.office.com](http://www.office.com)), including one that lets you format your charts. To use it, double-click a chart in your spreadsheet. A pane will appear on the right-hand side with sliders to switch the visibility of labels on and off, including the chart's title and legend. You can also tweak other aspects of your chart. To increase the thickness of its bars, open the Vertical Axis or Horizontal Axis section (depending on the type of chart you're using), then reduce the size of the gaps between each bar by moving the Gap Width slider to the left (see screenshot below).



### LIBREOFFICE WRITER

## Resize tables more easily

Using the mouse to resize tables in your Writer documents can be fiddly. For greater control, try using your keyboard. To change the width of a



column, place your cursor within the column, then hold down the Alt key and tap the left or right arrow key. Similarly, to change the height of a row, select it then hold down Alt and tap the up and down arrow keys. You can also adjust the width of a single cell in your table by holding down Ctrl+Alt, then tapping the left or right arrow key.

To change the amount by which your rows and columns are resized with each arrow key press, open the Tools menu, click Options, then select Table within the LibreOffice Writer section. In the Move Cells section, change the Row and Column sizes accordingly (see screenshot above).

### MICROSOFT WORD & LIBREOFFICE WRITER

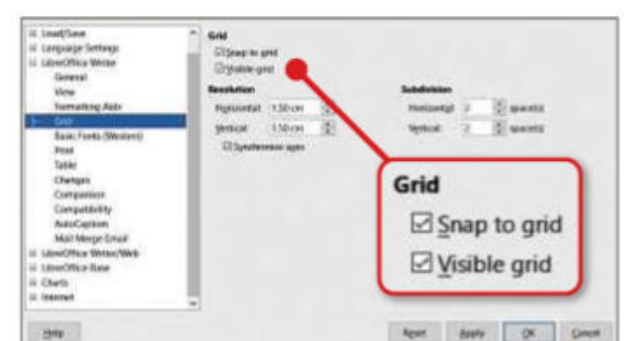
## Use gridlines to improve formatting

When you're adding images, shapes and other elements to your document, making sure they are aligned

with each other can be tricky. Using gridlines can make this task much easier.

In LibreOffice Writer, open the Tools menu, select Options, then expand the LibreOffice Writer section in the left-hand menu. On the right, click the 'Snap to grid' and 'Visible grid' boxes (see screenshot below). If necessary, you can also change the grid size using the Resolution boxes. Click OK to return to your document. When you next add an object to your document, it will snap to your grid as you move it around.

In Microsoft Word, click the View tab, then tick the Gridlines box (in the Show section of the toolbar). Gridlines will now appear in your document and, as with Writer, objects will snap to the grid as you move them. To change the size of the grid, select the Layout tab (or the Page Layout tab in Word 2013 and earlier), then click the Align button (far right of the toolbar), followed by 'Grid settings...'. You can then change the grid size using the Horizontal and Vertical spacing boxes.





# In The Club



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

## Raise funds in a PayPal Money Pool

**P**ayPal is closing one of its best hidden features. Called Money Pool, it lets you set up a fundraising page and share it with supporters via email, WhatsApp or social media.

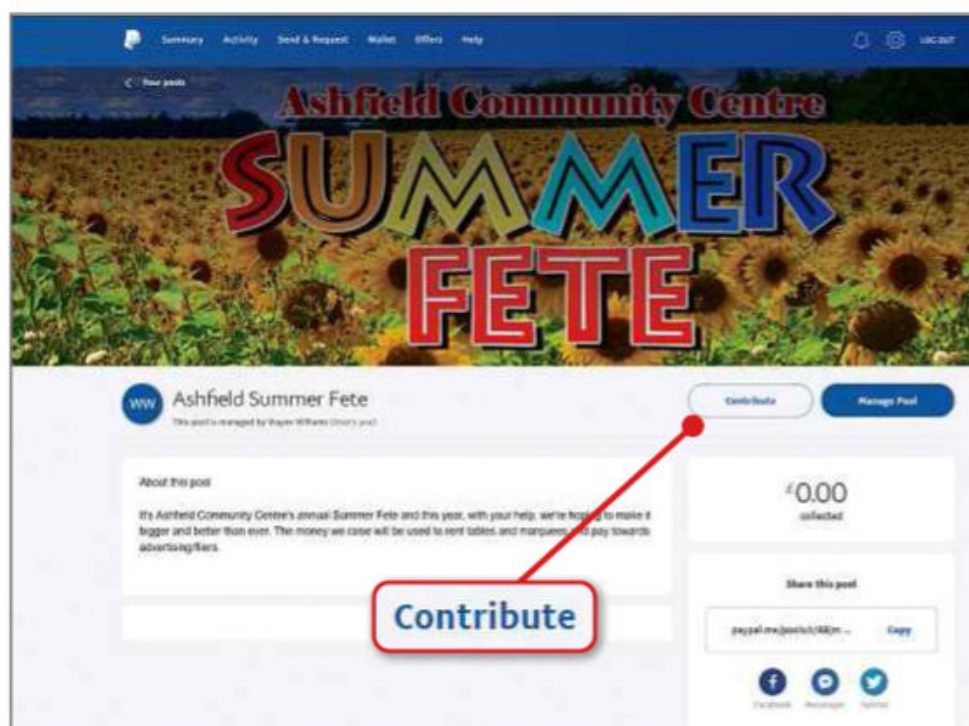
It's free when transferring money between UK accounts, though PayPal charges for international payments, and its exchange rates may be applied to currency conversions. You've got until 30 September to set up a new money-raising page, before the service closes for good on 8 November. If you don't transfer the money you've raised by then, PayPal will do it on 15 November (read more at [www.snipca.com/39059](http://www.snipca.com/39059)).

### Set up your pool

You'll need a PayPal account, as will the people who donate to your cause – sign up for one at [www.snipca.com/38985](http://www.snipca.com/38985) (it's not available for business accounts, only personal ones). Click 'Next' and finish the setup process, which includes entering your mobile-phone number (you can't avoid this).

Log into your PayPal account, then visit [www.snipca.com/38986](http://www.snipca.com/38986) and click the 'Start a Pool' button at the top. On the page that opens, click the blue 'Start a new fundraiser' button at the top right.

Decide how much contributors can pay and whether they remain anonymous



Once your page has gone live, members can donate money by clicking 'Contribute'

You'll now be directed to the 'goal' page. Give your pool a name so donors know what it's for. If you have a specific amount you're looking to raise, enter it in the box – or leave this blank if you want to raise as much as possible. You can also add a date by which the pool will close.

In the interests of transparency, you can let visitors to your page see how much you've raised to date, though you can hide this by unticking the box next to 'Show the amount you've collected'. Click the blue Next button.

You can now set the amount donors can pay – this can be any amount, a minimum, or exact (1 in our screenshot below left) – and whether their details should be shown (2). By default, the pool will show a person's name and the amount paid, but you can turn one or both off. Even if you opt to display the details, contributors will be given the opportunity to chip in anonymously should they prefer. Click Next.

### Design your pool page

Now it's time to design your fundraising page. Click the 'Add a cover photo' link at the top if you want to upload an image or logo (we've chosen a design for a summer fete – see screenshot above). Alternatively, select a different background colour. If you're including text, make it large so it can be read clearly on phones and tablets.

Next, enter a description of what you're collecting money for and how it will be used. Click the Preview button below to make sure you're happy with your description and how it looks.

The preview page shows your image/background colour, title, and who is managing it (the person who set it up), as well as the all-important description of the fundraiser. If you're happy with it, click the blue Publish button at the top. On the next page, click 'Agree and Publish' to create your pool.

Click the blue Share Pool button and you'll be provided a link to it. You can copy this and share it by any means – including WhatsApp, your club's website or social-media pages. There are also icons for sharing it on Facebook, Facebook Messenger and Twitter.

Once the pool has been created you'll be able to view it at any time by clicking its link or via your own PayPal page. To donate money, members need to click the Contribute button (see screenshot above). If you want to make changes or add extra information, click the Manage Pool button on your page and then click Edit Pool. You can change the page cover image and description, add a goal amount, set a closing date, and manage contributions. You can also delete the pool here when you no longer need it.



# What's All the Fuss About...



## Stinky Bay

Coastguards will no longer be confused by strange (and rude) place names

### What is it?

There are actually two of them - one in Polzeath, Cornwall (pictured right) and another 800 miles away in Craigie Brae, in Scotland's Western Isles. They've been cited by Ordnance Survey (OS) as examples of coastal areas with nicknames used by local people that emergency services don't recognise. Ideally, people would quote map coordinates when they phone for help, but these can be hard to find without internet access. Instead, they typically say what comes first into their heads, which is often the name used colloquially by locals.

### So Stinky Bay isn't an official name?

No, which is why historically it's never been written on the maps used by rescue teams. Other places they've struggled to find include Black Knob Point (Salcombe, Devon), Crazy Mary's Hole, (Gisleham, Suffolk), Nuncle Dicks (Portland, Dorset) and Slippery Bottom (Ludham, Norfolk).

### Wait – aren't these just names from an old Benny Hill sketch? Or on a saucy postcard from the 1950s?

We're sure they've raised many titters over the years, but they all exist – at least in the bawdy vernacular used by those who live and work nearby. The OS has now given these locations the recognition they deserve by adding them to Fintan, which is the digital mapping tool used by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).



### How does that work?

It's very simple. Rescuers just type the name of a location – whether official or a nickname – into a website and they'll see where it is. This can save vital seconds when responding to an emergency. In 2020, the MCA dealt with 33,000 incidents – a number that's expected to rise this year as record numbers of people choose to stay in the UK for their summer holidays.

### Can the public use the site?

No, it's just for the MCA. It started as a trial on the south coast of England, with staff entering nicknames for offshore rocks and islands. Long term, the OS wants Fintan to help other emergency services, not just the coastguard. Chris Chambers, head of OS National Mapping Services, said that “across the country

people refer to many other locations with nicknames – from buildings to parks and roundabouts to road junctions”.

In many cases the nickname is much better known than the real name, such as Spaghetti Junction in Birmingham, (officially called Gravelly Hill Interchange), or London's Gherkin (30 St Mary Axe). And if you live in Swindon you might report an accident at The Magic Roundabout, which is a notorious ring junction comprising five mini-roundabouts arranged in a circle.

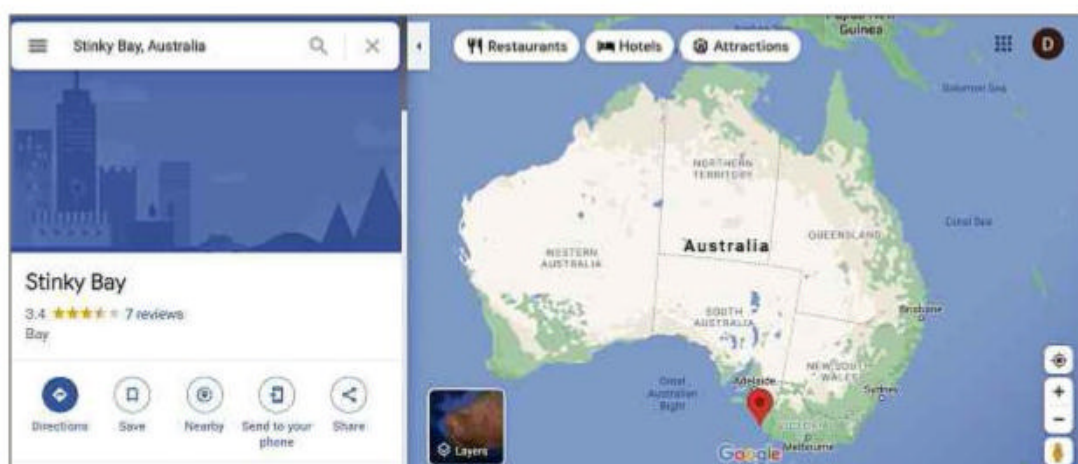
### How many nicknames does Fintan already have?

Around 7,500, making up a fraction of the database's 500,000 locations overall. The OS has created an animation showing how these unofficial names have been added to the database over the past nine years: [www.snipca.com/39024](http://www.snipca.com/39024). It says these rarely appear on mapping tools available to the public, such as Apple Maps or Google Maps.

### So what happens if you search for 'Stinky Bay' on Google Maps?

It takes you to a beach in South Australia (see screenshot left), about 230 miles south of Adelaide, and near the country's only beach nudist resort. We're sure the proximity of the two is just a coincidence.

Google's Stinky Bay is in neither Cornwall nor Scotland, but South Australia







# Make WINDOWS 10

## LAST LONGER

As Microsoft's focus switches to Windows 11, it will start to neglect Windows 10. The onus will fall on *you* to keep it safe and running smoothly. **Will Stapley** explains the changes you should make and the tools you should add

**W**hether your computer fails to meet Windows 11's minimum system requirements or you have no interest in upgrading to yet another operating system, we have bad news for you: Microsoft no longer sees your computer as a priority.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Find out if your hard drive is about to die
- Boost Windows 10's performance by identifying your 'hot files'
- Run Microsoft Defender alongside your existing security software
- Create a shared folder to roll out your own Feature update

To be fair, the company has committed to providing updates for Windows 10 until 2025, by when it will have supported the operating system for over 10 years – impressive next to Google's fleeting support for its Chromebooks.

However, Microsoft will be focusing its efforts on its new operating system while trying to get as many Windows 10 users as possible to upgrade. It has little incentive to release any significant new features for Windows 10, and its twice-yearly Feature updates for the system are likely to contain little more than bug and security fixes.

If this leaves you feeling abandoned by Microsoft, don't worry. In this feature, we'll explain how to make sure Windows 10 continues to run fast and securely, as Microsoft slowly winds down support

over the next few years.

Along with quick fixes that will guarantee your computer has all the resources it needs, we'll explain how to use Windows 10's hidden monitoring tools to run regular diagnostic reports, which will help you identify and fix problems with your PC's memory, hard drive, storage space, battery and more.

Besides keeping Windows running smoothly, you'll also want to improve how it works. So we'll also show you how you can create and release your very own Feature updates, breathing new life into all your Windows 10 machines with fresh features and tools.

We'd love to hear what tools you plan to include in your Feature updates – email yours to [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk).



## FIVE THINGS YOU NEED TO CHECK NOW

### ✓ Your version of Windows

Microsoft plans to continue rolling out two Feature updates every year for Windows 10. However, if recent updates are anything to go by, these will become increasingly smaller as the company prioritises Windows 11. These are still worth installing, however, because they will improve existing security features and fix bugs. The latest Windows Feature update, for example, strengthened Microsoft Defender Application Guard, which runs software safely in a quarantined environment (like a **sandbox**).

To check which version of Windows your computer is running, open the Settings app (press the Windows key+I), select System, then About (bottom of the menu on the left). In the 'Windows specifications' section, look under Version. On our computer, this says 21H1 (see screenshot above right), which means we're running the latest Feature update released in May this year.

If yours is still running an older version (such as 20H2, released in October last year), there might be a problem that's preventing Windows Update from downloading the latest 21H1 version. To fix this, bypass Windows Update and instead download the Windows Update Assistant tool ([www.snipca.com/39001](http://www.snipca.com/39001)) and click Update Now.

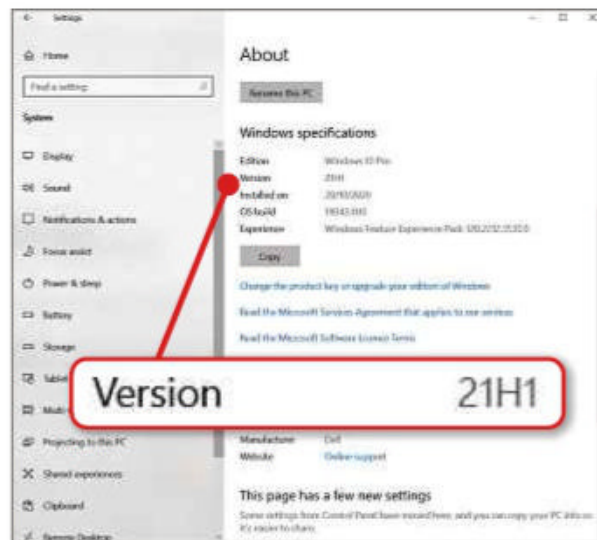
### ✓ Potential memory damage

If Windows 10 occasionally crashes, your computer's memory modules could be faulty. There are plenty of memory-checking tools you can download, but we recommend sticking with the one built into Windows.

To run it, click Start, type **memory diagnostic**, then press Enter and select 'Restart now...'. The tool will then run a series of tests. If it shows a warning message such as 'Hardware problems were detected', your computer's memory is probably damaged. The good news is that replacement memory is relatively cheap (£29 for 8GB from [www.snipca.com/39003](http://www.snipca.com/39003)), but you must ensure you buy memory that's compatible with your computer. Download Crucial's Memory Advisor tool ([www.snipca.com/39002](http://www.snipca.com/39002)) to find out what you need.

### ✓ Storage space

Two years ago, Microsoft added a feature to Windows called Reserved Storage, which kept around 10GB of hard-drive



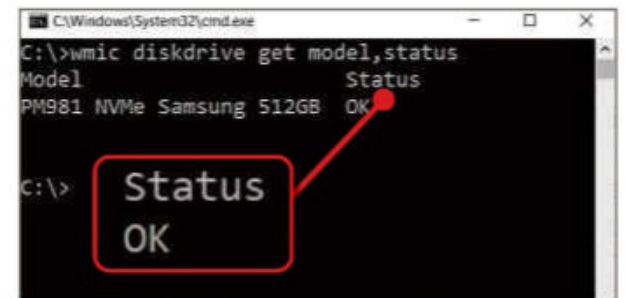
**Make sure your computer is running the latest version of Windows 10 (21H1)**

space free to ensure smoother Windows updates. However, this feature is only on computers that have had a **clean install** of Windows. On older computers, you need to manage the free space yourself, and we recommend a minimum of 15GB. This not only ensures updates run more smoothly, but will make use of this free space to store data when your computer's memory is full.

To check how much free space your hard drive has, open Settings, select System, then Storage – your free space will be listed at the end of the blue bar. If you're running low, click 'Configure Storage Sense or run it now' at the top, make sure you're happy with the settings for deleting items in your recycle bin and Downloads folder, then click 'Clean now'.

### ✓ Hard-drive health

It's also worth checking your hard drive – or more specifically, its SMART status (a diagnostic tool built into all hard drives that can tell you whether your drive is about to die). The quickest way to do this is via Command Prompt. Click Start, type **cmd**, then press Enter. Next type **wmic**



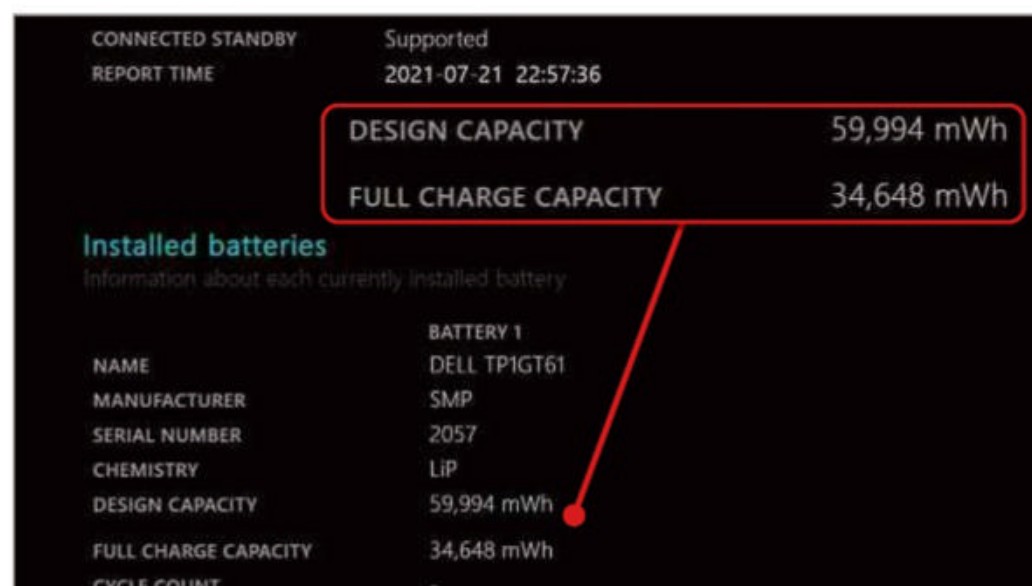
**You can quickly check your hard drive's health in Command Prompt**

**diskdrive get model,status**, press Enter and you'll see all your hard drives listed along with their SMART status. A status of OK (see screenshot above) means your drive is performing normally. If its status is Bad or Caution, you should replace the drive immediately.

### ✓ Battery capacity

Microsoft says Windows 11 will include "performance optimisation features" to boost battery life on laptops. Sadly, it's unlikely Windows 10 will receive the same treatment. However, if you're experiencing poor battery life it might not be Windows at fault, but rather the battery itself. The charge capacity of a battery deteriorates from the day it's manufactured. After around four years' use you can expect its capacity to have more than halved.

To find out whether your battery is the problem, open Command Prompt again and type **powercfg /batteryreport**, then copy the **file path** that's displayed into your browser's address bar. In the battery report that appears, scroll down to its Design Capacity (your battery's original capacity) and Full Charge Capacity (its capacity now – see screenshot below). The difference between the two will tell you by how much your battery has deteriorated – when your battery can hold only 30 per cent of its original capacity, it's time to look for a replacement.



**The battery in our 2017 Dell laptop is approaching half its original capacity**



# THREE MONITORING TOOLS YOU MUST START USING

## PERFORMANCE MONITOR

Now that you've given your computer a quick health check, it's time to dig a little deeper and make sure there's nothing causing Windows 10 to slow down.

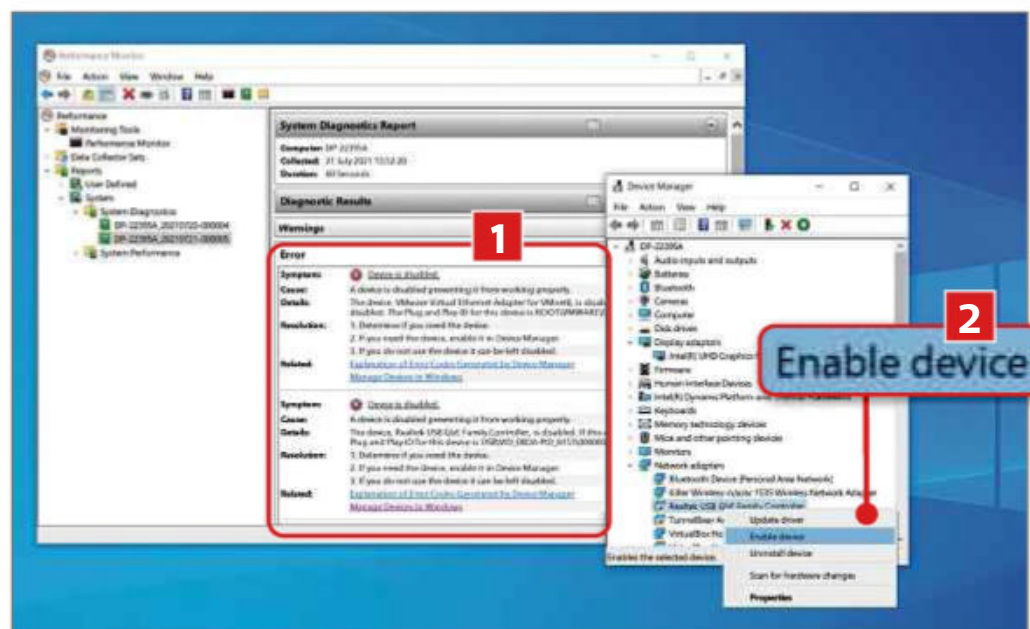
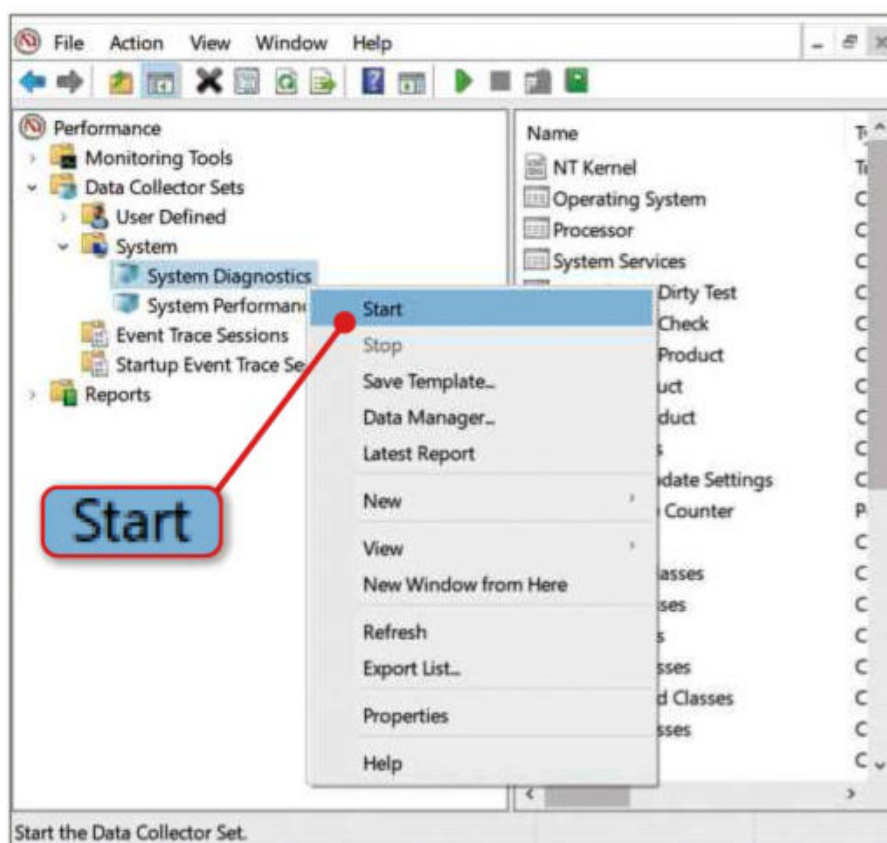
To do this, we're going to use three monitoring tools, starting with Performance Monitor. This scans your computer for one minute, then reports back with details about everything from how much your computer's processor and memory are being used, to specific files that are causing your hard drive to work harder. As we explain below, you can then use this information to identify programs that are putting unnecessary strain on your computer, then take action to speed things up and keep Windows 10 running smoothly.

### Run a diagnostics report

First, make sure you're logged into Windows with an **administrator** account (if you have only one Windows user account on your computer, it will be an administrator account by default). Next, click start, type **perfmon**, then select Performance Monitor in the results (take care to not select Resource Monitor here – we'll be using that tool later).

The 'Performance' screen, which is displayed when you open Performance Monitor, shows a real-time view of what your computer is doing. This includes how its memory is being used and details of your hard drive's 'idle' time (more of this is better because it indicates your drive isn't being put under too much stress). This provides a snapshot of how

**Performance Monitor lets you run diagnostic reports and save them for future reference**



If your report finds problems with hardware, you can usually fix them in Device Manager

your computer performed during the scan, though for real-time analysis you'll need a different tool, as we'll explain later on.

Instead, it's best to use Performance Monitor only to run a diagnostic report. To do this, double-click the Data Collector Sets option in the left-hand menu, then double-click System. From here, right-click System Diagnostics and select Start (see screenshot below). Performance Monitor will now monitor your computer for one minute.

### Interpret the results

To view your report, go to the left-hand menu then click Reports, followed by System. You'll see a list of all the diagnostic reports that you've run – each entry starts with the name of your computer. They're listed in date order from oldest to newest, so to view your most recent click the entry at the bottom (if you've only just

run a report, you may have to wait a few seconds for it to complete). At the top of the report, you'll see the name of your computer, the time and date you ran it, and how long it ran for.

The 'Diagnostic Results' section gives a brief overview of the performance test. Pay particular attention to the Error section at the top, which will warn you about any faulty hardware. Errors in this section usually relate to hardware that doesn't have a **driver** or is using one that's stopped working. In either case you can usually fix this by opening Device Manager (search for it in the Start menu), right-clicking the appropriate hardware, then selecting 'Update driver'.

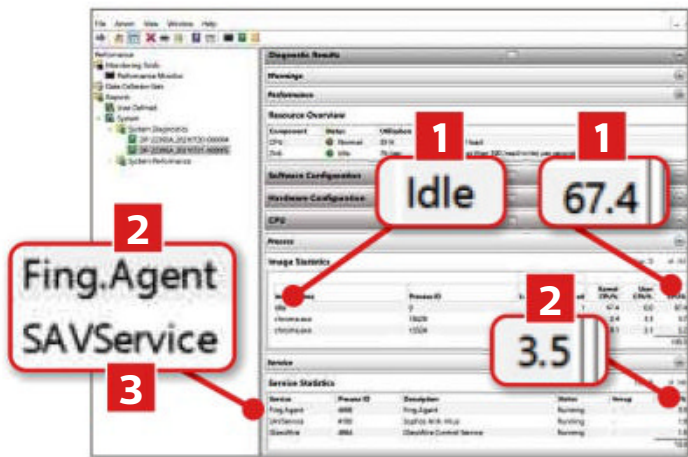
Our report revealed that two network adapters were disabled – one relating to our **virtual PC**, the other our laptop's Ethernet port (see **1** in our screenshot above). We left the former disabled because we're not currently using the virtual PC, but decided to enable the latter by selecting it in Device Manager (as explained above), then selecting 'Enable device' **2**.

### Identify hidden resource hogs

Further down the report, the 'Performance section' indicates the extent to which your processor (or CPU) and hard drive (Disk) were in use during the diagnostics scan. If either are marked as High, it could be because your antivirus program was performing a routine scan during the report or that Windows was checking for new updates, but you may also find a program you no longer need is hogging your processor.

By expanding the CPU section in our report, we can see the processor is listed as being Idle (in other words, not being used by any program) for 67.4 per cent of





Use Performance Monitor to identify programs putting a strain on your processor

the test (see 1 in our screenshot above). However, in the Service section (this shows programs running in the background) the report revealed a service called ‘Fing.Agent’ (part of the networking tool Fing, which we installed a few months previously) used 3.5 per cent 2 of our processor. It’s not a huge amount, but enough for us to consider uninstalling Fing (as we’ll explain in a moment, a separate monitoring tool reveals a more pressing reason for us to uninstall Fing).

The SAVService entry 3 relates to our antivirus tool (Sophos), which was performing a background scan at the time. The report also shows that GlassWire (another networking program) is using a small amount of processor power. Like Fing, we no longer use it, so we’ve earmarked it for uninstallation.

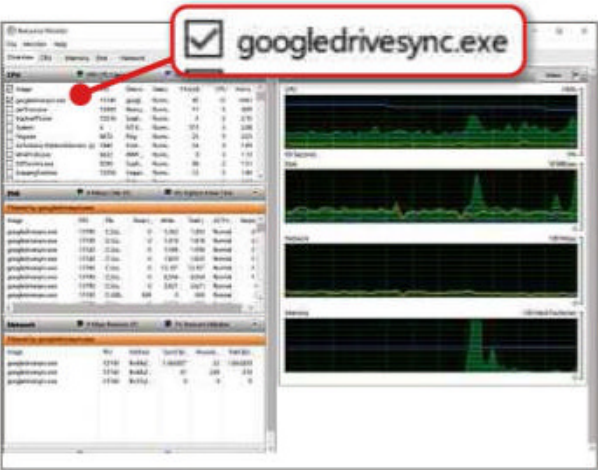
The diagnostic report also reveals what your hard drive is doing. Expand the Disk section, then double-click the Hot Files heading and you’ll see which files your hard drive was writing to (saving data) and reading from (accessing saved data) the most.

As with the other sections, you can re-order your list by clicking any of the column headers. When sorting by ‘Kb/Write’ (how many kilobytes the hard drive wrote to each file), a file relating to Windows’ backup – File History – topped the list. We don’t use File History for our backups, but had inadvertently left the tool switched on – something we rectified by going to the ‘Update & Security’ section of the Settings app, then Backup.

RESOURCE MONITOR  
Monitor Windows 10 in real time

While the diagnostic report in Performance Monitor is useful, you should use Resource Monitor to see in real time how your computer is performing. Launch it by searching for it in the Start menu.

The tool’s ‘Overview’ tab displays four



Resource Monitor reveals in real time what Windows and your installed programs are doing

charts that continuously update, showing how Windows 10 has been using your processor, hard drive, Wi-Fi and memory over the past 60 seconds (click the Views button then select Large to make the charts bigger).

Monitor a specific program

If you want to keep an eye on a particular program – such as one that your Performance Monitor report flagged as a potential problem – select it in the CPU section on the left. An orange line will now appear on each chart, indicating what proportion of the activity was caused by your selected program.

When we selected ‘googledrivesync.exe’ (see screenshot above), the charts indicated that this is a big drain on our processor, hard drive and network connection. Because this process is associated with Google’s ‘Backup and Sync’ tool (our chosen online backup service), we were happy to leave it running, though we’re hoping Google’s new backup service (due to launch in the next few months) will use less system resources.

If you spot a program that you don’t recognise (particularly if it’s making regular use of your internet connection),

we recommend searching for it online to find out what it relates to and make sure your Windows security settings are strengthened (as we explain on page 55).

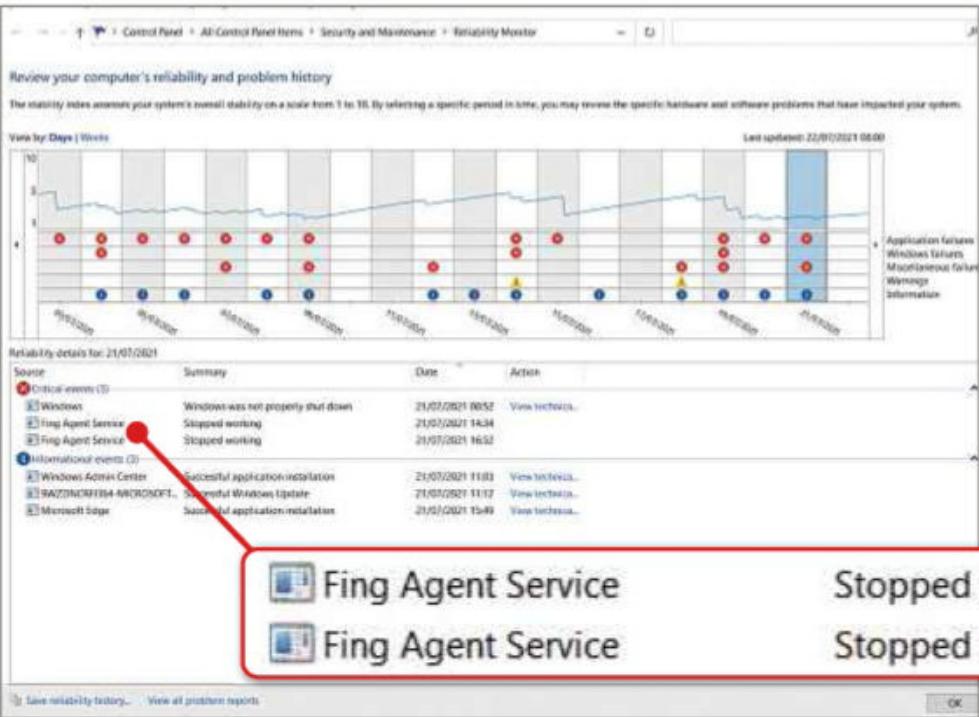
RELIABILITY MONITOR

Performance Monitor and Resource Monitor are great for checking how smoothly Windows is running now, but they’re not as good at weeding out problems that are intermittent. For this, you need to look back in time using Reliability Monitor (open it by clicking Start, typing **reliability**, then clicking ‘View reliability history’ in the results). Even if Windows 10 seems to be running smoothly, we recommend running this tool every month or so to identify programs that may cause problems in future.

Check Windows’ reliability

You’ll see a chart at the top of the Reliability Monitor window – this indicates your computer’s reliability over the past few weeks (10 indicates it’s completely reliable, 1 the opposite). The symbols below the chart indicate what happened on each given date. Keep an eye on the red crosses here because they show your computer suffered a failure. These can represent anything from your computer not being shut down properly to Windows crashing completely.

Click these icons and more details will appear in the bottom half of the window. As you can see in our example, Fing is yet again causing trouble – crashing twice on 21 July (see screenshot below). We don’t want to be too harsh on Fing (the problems it’s having on our computer could be due to a conflict with one of the many other programs we have installed). However, because we very rarely use it we’ve since decided to uninstall Fing.



Reliability Monitor lets you look back in time and identify the causes of Windows crashes



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IMPROVE WINDOWS 10's SECURITY

Microsoft has said it will continue to provide regular security updates for Windows 10 until the operating system's end of life (EOL) in 2025. We suspect it will provide updates beyond that – only last month it released a security update for Windows 7, which reached its *official* EOL in January 2020 (read more at [www.snipca.com/39011](http://www.snipca.com/39011)). However, to keep your Windows 10 computer as safe as possible, it's important to regularly check your security settings.

First, open Settings, select 'Update & Security', then click 'Virus & threat protection'. Precisely what you see here will depend on whether you're using Microsoft Defender (Windows' built-in security tool) or a third-party security program.

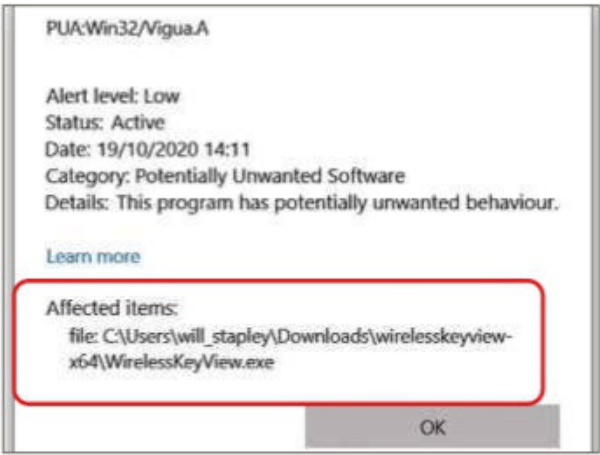
MICROSOFT DEFENDER

Microsoft Defender has improved so much in recent years that it now rivals paid-for security suites when it comes to blocking malware. As well as protecting you from real-time threats (such as when you download files containing malware), Defender regularly performs 'quick scans' of the folders that are most likely to contain infected files (such as your Downloads folder).

Run a full scan

Besides these quick scans, we recommend carrying out a *full* scan every six months or so. This will scan every file on your hard drive and can take a while to complete (just over 95 minutes for our hard drive containing 156GB of data). This is, however, a sensible precaution if – like us – you download a lot of files. To run a full scan, click 'Scan options', select 'Full scan', then click 'Scan now'.

It's also a good idea to review those



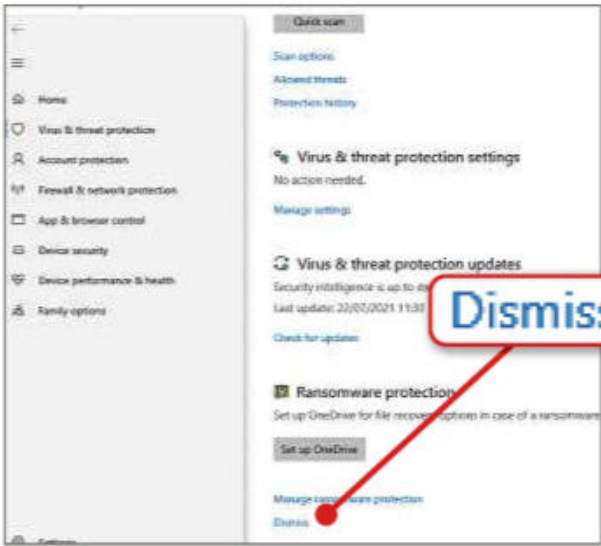
Review any threats you've told Defender to ignore and quarantine any you don't recognise

potential threats that you may have told Defender to ignore. Go back to the 'Virus & threat protection' window, click the 'Allowed threats' link and you'll see every file that you've marked as being safe. To find out more about a potential threat, click Details. The program it relates to will be listed under 'Affected items' (see screenshot above). If you don't recognise a program, click OK, then Quarantine.

There are some warnings you can safely ignore, though. Somewhat brazenly, Microsoft promotes its OneDrive online storage service as 'Ransomware protection' within this window, and prompts you to set up an account in which to back up your files. Although it's a good idea to regularly back up your files to the 'cloud' in this way, there's no reason why you should use OneDrive. If you are already using a different service, such as Google Drive, click Dismiss (see screenshot above right) to hide this warning.

THIRD-PARTY SECURITY SOFTWARE

If you're using third-party security software, such as Kaspersky or Norton, you'll see it listed at the top of the 'Virus

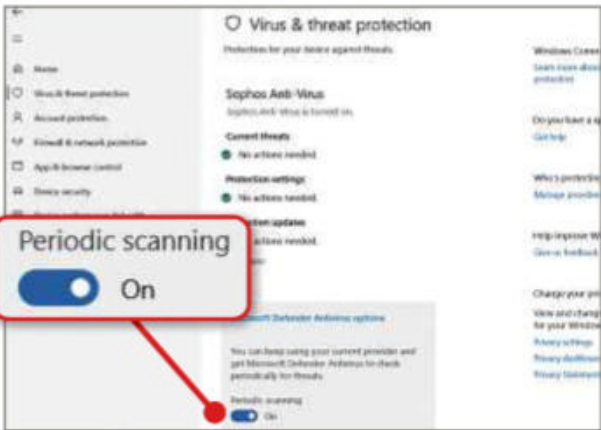


Click this option to stop Windows 10 nagging you to set up a OneDrive account

& threat protection' window. Based on the information provided to it by your security software, Windows will display any relevant warnings under these headings: 'Current threats' (files flagged as potential malware by your security software); 'Protection settings' (important settings that you should turn on); and 'Protection updates' (security software updates that you should install). If you spot any warnings, click the 'Open app' link at the bottom of the list – this opens your security software, where you'll be able to find out more about the warnings and take any necessary action.

Add a second layer of security

Windows has a hidden 'Periodic scanning' feature that lets you use Microsoft Defender *alongside* your main security software. To use it, click 'Microsoft Defender Antivirus options', then set the slider to On (see screenshot below). Running two antivirus tools side-by-side can cause conflicts (including one misdiagnosing the other as malware), so this feature won't perform real-time scans. Instead, Defender will periodically scan your hard drive for potential threats. You can also run a quick or full scan yourself by clicking 'Scan options'.

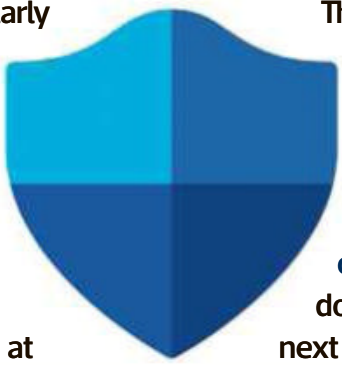


If you're using third-party security software, run occasional scans with Microsoft Defender

Which version of Defender do you have?

Knowing which version of Defender you're running can help you fix a problem, so it's a shame (but not particularly surprising) that Microsoft buries this information.

To find it, open Settings (press Windows key+I), then click 'Update & Security' followed by Windows Security. Next, click Open Windows Security, then click the cog icon at



the bottom left. Finally, click About under the Notifications heading.

The important number is next to Antimalware Client Version. You can compare this with the latest version of Defender by visiting Microsoft's site ([www.snipca.com/39051](http://www.snipca.com/39051)), then scrolling down and checking the number next to Platform Version.



# CREATE YOUR OWN WINDOWS 10 FEATURE UPDATES

As we suggested earlier, we don't expect Microsoft to add many new tools to Windows 10 via its twice-yearly Feature updates, but that doesn't mean you have to let the operating system stagnate. Here, we reveal the best software you should include in your very own Feature update, and how to roll out the update across all computers on your home network.

## Use tabs in File Explorer

For years, Microsoft has been talking about adding tabs to File Explorer, but it's still not managed it (and there's no sign of tabs in Windows 11). Take matters into your own hands with **QTTabBar** ([www.snipca.com/39016](http://www.snipca.com/39016)).

To use it, open File Explorer and select the View tab. Next, click the small down arrow under the Options button and select QTTabBar (see **1** in our screenshot above right). Within a couple of seconds, a new browser-style tab bar **2** will appear just below the address bar.

If you fancy a complete change, try **Q-Dir** ([www.snipca.com/39017](http://www.snipca.com/39017) – select 'Q-Dir\_Installer.zip'). This File Explorer alternative not only offers tabs, but also lets you browse four panes simultaneously, letting you move and copy files across multiple folders.

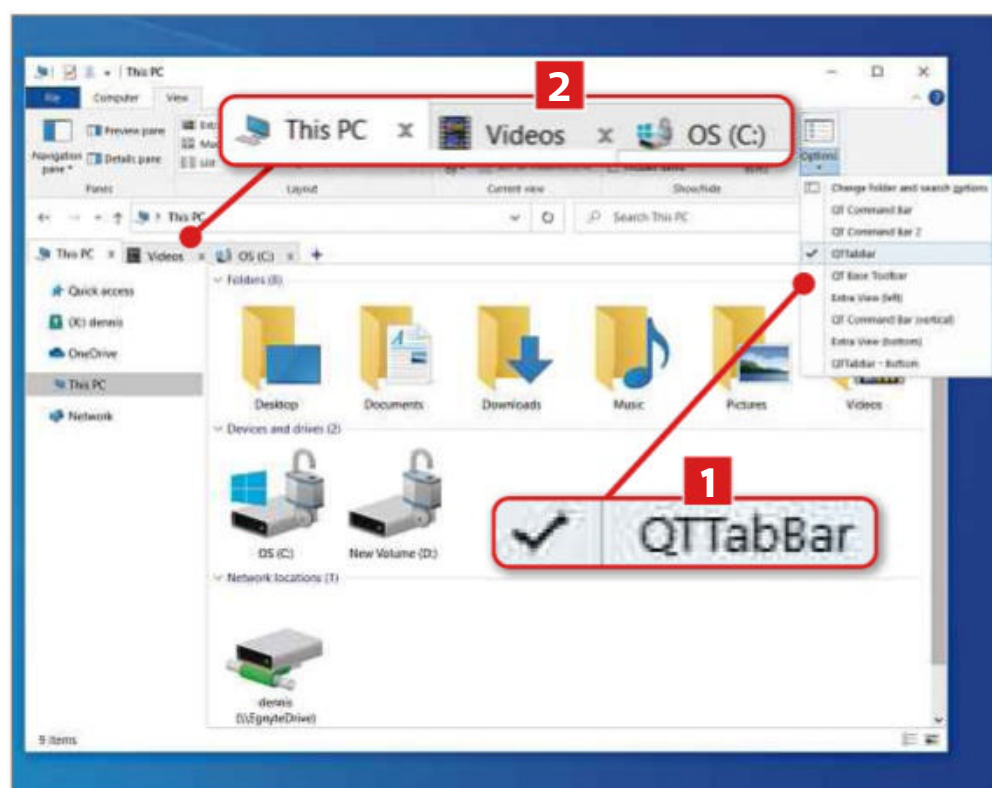
## Simplify the Start menu

The Start menu has ballooned since its first appearance in Windows 95. In Windows 11, Microsoft has ditched the annoying live tiles that take up so much room, but it looks like they're here to stay in Windows 10. Unless you do something about it, of course.

**Open-Shell** ([www.snipca.com/39018](http://www.snipca.com/39018)) is a free tool that lets you revert to the



Give your Start menu a Windows 7 look and feel with Start10



Add tabs to File Explorer using QTTabBar

simpler Start menu design of Windows 7. However, we had mixed results when trying it (it failed to install on one of our four computers). For a more stable alternative, consider **Start10** ([www.snipca.com/39019](http://www.snipca.com/39019), see screenshot below left). The only drawback is that it costs £4.99 per computer, so can get expensive if you want to roll out your Feature update across multiple PCs and laptops.

## Search faster

The search tool in Windows (accessed via the Start menu) isn't particularly reliable. Even when you type a program's name in full, it can often return incorrect results. **Everything** ([www.snipca.com/39020](http://www.snipca.com/39020) – click the Download Installer button) is so much better. It takes seconds to index all the files on your hard drive, then provides fast and accurate results to your search queries.

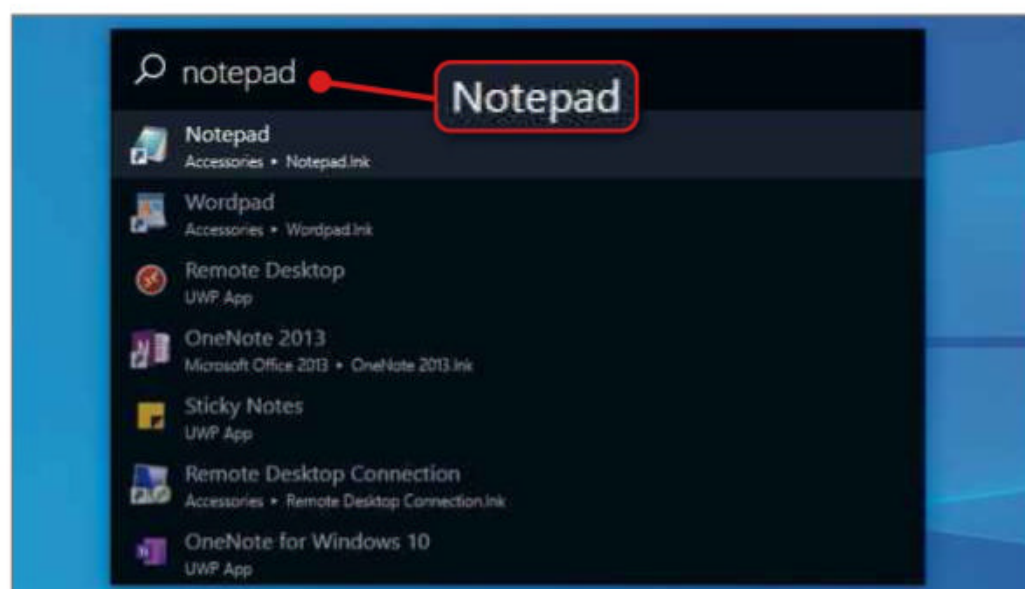
Download **Everything Toolbar** ([www.snipca.com/39021](http://www.snipca.com/39021) – select the MSI file at the bottom of the page) alongside the

main Everything program and you'll be able to run searches directly from a search box on your taskbar. Thanks to a recent update, Everything Toolbar lets you browse your search history by holding down the Ctrl key then pressing the up and down arrow keys.

Alternatively, try **Ueli** ([www.snipca.com/39022](http://www.snipca.com/39022)). To run a search, press Alt+Space (you can choose a different shortcut in settings), then start typing in the floating box that appears (see screenshot below). As with Everything, it's lightning fast, with search results appearing as you type. Thanks to a recent update, you can now search your browser bookmarks (it supports Firefox along with all Chromium-based browsers, such as Edge, Chrome, Brave and Vivaldi).

## Manage your Wi-Fi better

The Wi-Fi tool in the Windows 10 system tray is easy to use, but it's missing crucial features, such as the ability to rename your networks and select which ones



Hunt for files and programs in Ueli by pressing Alt+Space, then typing your search query

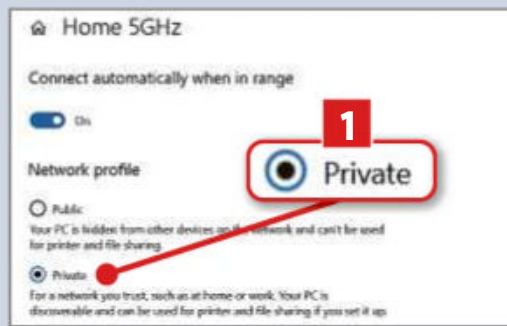


## WORKSHOP Share your 'Feature update' across your computers

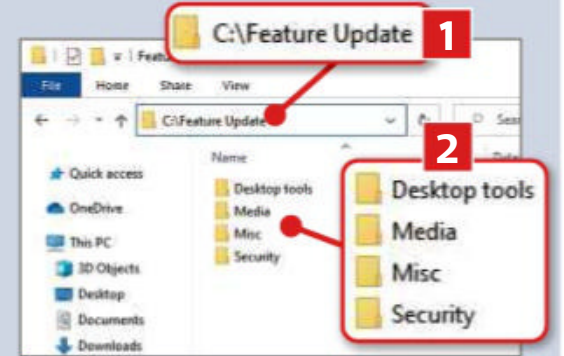
Once you've decided which programs you want to include in your Feature update, don't waste time downloading them to each of your computers. Instead, create a shared folder on

your main PC in which to store all the downloads and settings files. You'll then be able to access them from any computer on your network.

**1** Make sure all your computers are connected to the same network. On each, make sure the network is set to Private, which means they can share files and folders. To do this, click the Wi-Fi icon in your system tray, then click Properties next to your network followed by Private **1**.



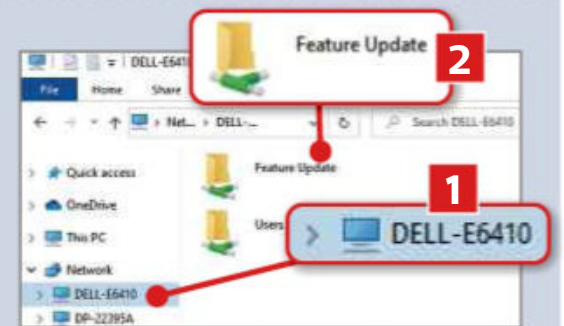
**2** On your main computer, open File Explorer (press the Windows key+E) then create a folder in which to store your Feature update's programs. We've created a 'Feature Update' folder in the root directory of our C: drive **1**, along with a few sub-folders to help organise the files **2**.



**3** Right-click your folder, select 'Give access to', then 'Specific people...'. In the window that opens, click the down arrow, select Everyone **1**, then click Add **2**, followed by Share. You can now copy all your files to this folder.



**4** To access this folder from another computer, open File Explorer, then click your main computer in the Network section **1**. You should now see your shared folder in the right-pane **2**. Double-click this to open the folder and run the installation files.

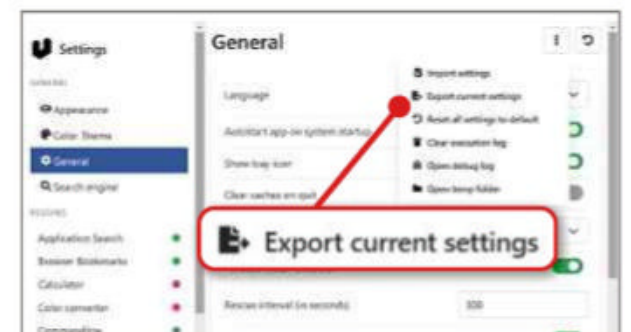


your computer should connect to first. The excellent **Wifinian** (download it from the Microsoft Store at [www.snipca.com/39023](http://www.snipca.com/39023)) does this and more. It runs directly from the system tray (look for the icon with three Wi-Fi symbols – see **1** in our screenshot right). It also lets you prioritise your various networks – click Organise, then move the networks up and down the list using the arrow buttons. To rename a network, click and hold its current name **2**, then type the new name (this doesn't change the SSID of your network, just how it's displayed on the computer you're currently using).



**Wifinian lets you quickly rename all your Wi-Fi networks**

Start, type **sync your settings**, then press Enter). However, it won't sync settings for your other programs. Once you've decided which programs you want to include in your Feature update, install them on your main computer, then configure each program's settings so



**Sync program settings – like those in Ueli – across your computers by first exporting**

they're running as you want them to. Next, in each program, look for an Export Settings (or similar) options – in Ueli, for example, you'll find this by clicking the three vertical dots (see screenshot above).

Not all programs let you do this, but for those that do you'll be able to import the settings on your other computers, saving you from having to configure them on each one. **ca**

## Sync settings across your computers

Windows 10 lets you sync settings, such as your desktop background and system sounds, across all your computers (click

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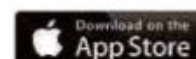
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**W**i-Fi-enabled plugs are one of the most convenient devices you can buy. They connect to the wireless network in your home, and can be controlled remotely using a smartphone app and a voice assistant like Alexa (on Amazon Echo devices) and Google Assistant on its Home devices.

This means you can plug them into the wall in awkward positions, such as behind your sofa, at the back of your TV or on the top of kitchen cupboards. You won't need to bend down or stand on tiptoes to turn them on and off because it's all done through the app.

It's as easy as if the plugs were positioned in full view at a convenient height. We're big fans of them (this writer has eight, alongside various Wi-Fi light bulbs), and would never go back to manual plugs.

But, they have two downsides. First, they're too big to be plugged in side by side, and don't leave space for conventional plugs in the space between (as pictured below). Second, they're not cheap. Although prices are falling as they become more common, you'll need to budget around £10 per socket ([www.snipca.com/39038](http://www.snipca.com/39038)) – although we've seen some selling for far more.



**Wi-Fi plugs are so bulky they don't leave space for conventional plugs in between**

A Wi-Fi power strip can overcome both problems. Several sockets are placed in one unit, so there's no extra space taken up by the 'body' that a single plug has. Also, as several components can be shared, like the controller, wireless circuitry and three-pin plug, they're often cheaper than the equivalent number of standalone plugs.

### Choose and set up your Wi-Fi power strip

First, you should think about how many plugs you need to control. If your budget allows, consider buying a power strip with more sockets than you currently require, so your system has room to grow.

# Buy a Wi-Fi power strip

Can't reach your TV's awkward plug socket? No matter – just use a Wi-Fi power strip to switch it on and off remotely. **Nik Rawlinson** explains how they work, and recommends the best one to buy

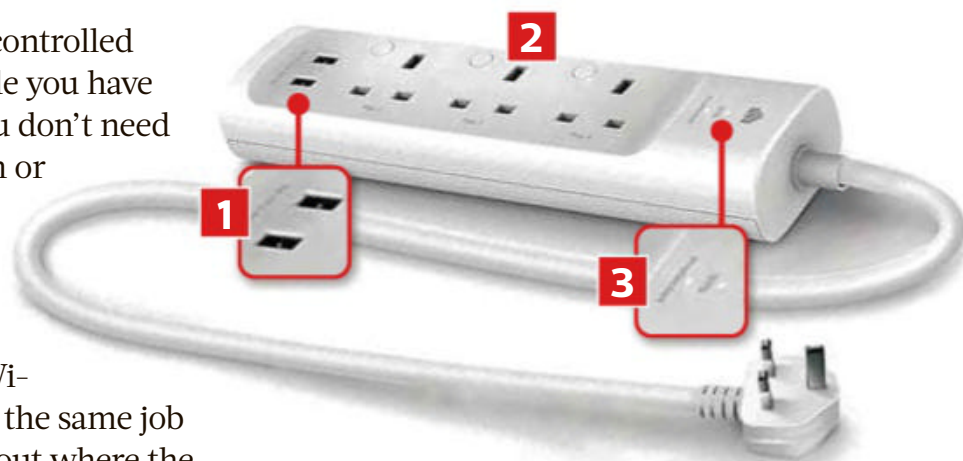


Make sure each one can be controlled individually, so if for example you have several lights plugged in, you don't need to have them all switched on or off at the same time.

Mind you, if that's all it can do, you may as well buy a single Wi-Fi plug and connect a regular (ie, non-Wi-Fi) extension, which will do the same job more cheaply. Also think about where the devices you need to power are situated, and make sure the lead, plus their own cables, are long enough to reach.

If you can't find a suitable model in online stores while searching for a **wi-fi power strip**, try a **smart extension lead** instead. This brings up more relevant results than either 'wireless extension' or 'wi-fi extension', which are more likely to find extenders for your wireless signal.

**TP-Link's Kasa Smart app is excellent, prompting us to buy the company's power strip**



**The Kasa Smart Wi-Fi Power Strip has two USB ports and three conventional sockets**

The final consideration, which isn't as easy to gauge when searching online, is the quality of the app that controls the strip. Comments from users are typically a good guide, despite the proliferation of fake reviews. In our experience, TP-Link's Kasa Smart app for both iOS ([www.snipca.com/39040](http://www.snipca.com/39040), pictured left) and Android ([www.snipca.com/39041](http://www.snipca.com/39041)) is excellent.

It gave us the confidence to buy the company's Kasa Smart Wi-Fi Power Strip (£24.99 from Amazon: [www.snipca.com/39042](http://www.snipca.com/39042)). This has two USB sockets (1 in photo above) that we're using to charge phones and ebook readers without having to use the adapter plugs that came with them.

It also has three conventional three-pin sockets (2 for full-size plugs, each of



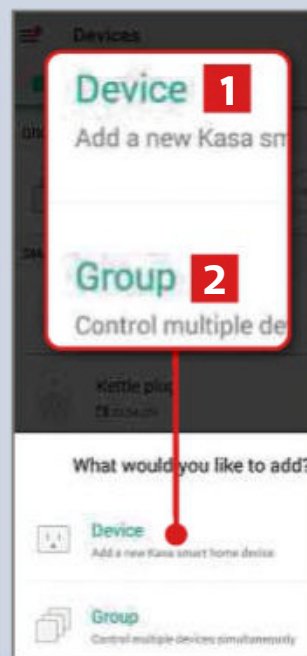
# MINI WORKSHOP

## Set up your Wi-Fi power strip

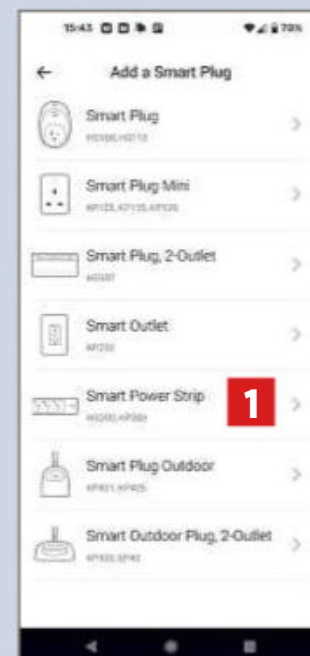
**1** Download the associated app from your phone or tablet's app store. If you need to set up an account, as you do with Kasa, tap the link **1** to create a new ID for yourself. If you need to set up your device on another phone in the future, you should be able to use the same login details.



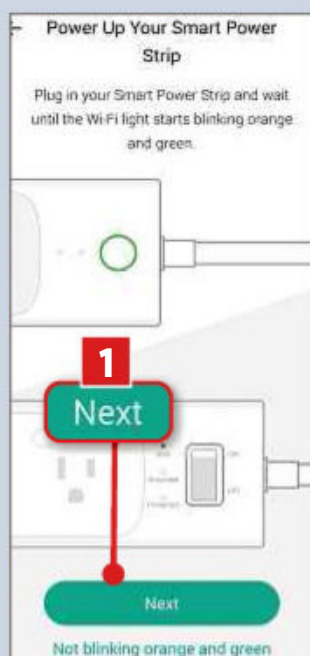
**2** Tap the '+' button on the Kasa Smart toolbar, followed by Device **1**. The other option – Group **2** – lets you add several devices so that sending a single command affects them all.



**3** Many manufacturers make Wi-Fi-enabled devices, including plugs, bulbs, switches and more. Select yours. If you're using Kasa Smart, tap Smart Plugs, then Smart Power Strip **1**. Two strips are listed: the HS300 and KP303. We're using the latter.



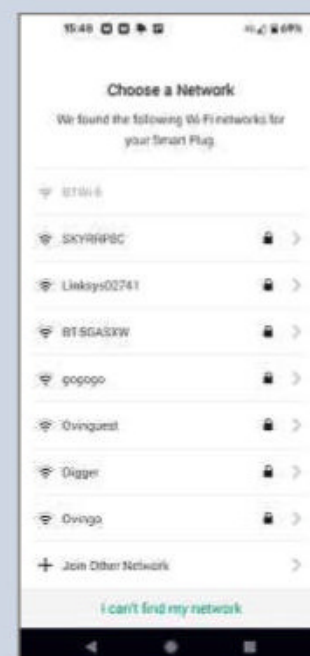
**4** Connect your power strip to the mains. Try to do this somewhere accessible so you can watch for a blinking light, labelled 'SYS', turning from orange to green, which may be hidden eventually behind a piece of furniture. Once the light flashes, tap Next **1**.



**5** Enable location access. Tap 'Allow' on the next screen so Kasa Smart can find your location, and know what time zone you're in. It will then scan for any compatible power strips nearby. If it doesn't find yours, try moving closer. When found, tap Connect **1**.



**6** Select your Wi-Fi network on the next screen, then enter your network password. This will be sent to the power strip so it can connect to your router. Once it's connected, tap each of the plugs in turn (on the screen) and give them a meaningful name.



which can be controlled directly using the three buttons on the extension itself, or the app (and, in turn, Amazon and Google voice assistants). The 'Status Light' **3** shows whether it's switched on and working, while the built-in **surge protection** helps to protect any sensitive electronic devices, like laptops or PCs, if there's a spike in the power supply.

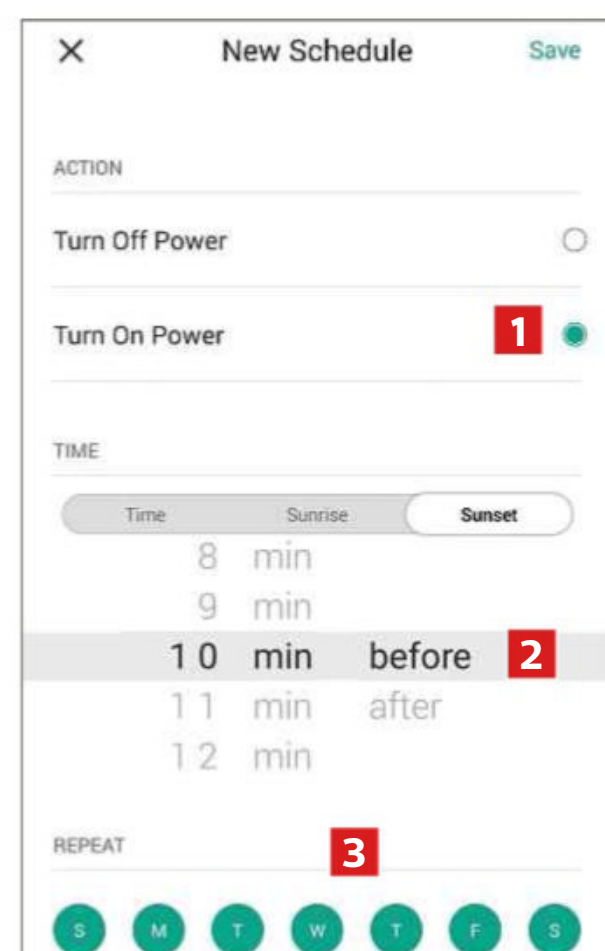
How you set up your power strip will depend on the model and manufacturer you've chosen, but it should be roughly similar to the Mini Workshop above, which explains how to set up the Kasa strip.

### Set times for your power strip

Your sockets will now appear in the Kasa Smart app. Tap the app buttons beside them to turn them on and off. If everything is working as it should, move the extension to its long-term location and connect your devices as appropriate.

You'll remember that the app asked for access to your location. This was so it could turn your devices on and off automatically at sunset and sunrise, compensating as these shift through the year. To set up this feature, tap the plug name (rather than the button) for which you want to enable it, then tap Schedule, followed by '+'. Tap 'Turn On Power' (**1** in our screenshot right), then tap Sunset. Optionally, use the controls below to select a number of minutes, between one and 59, that you want to adjust – for example, coming on 10 minutes before sunset, as we've set **2**. Use the buttons under Repeat **3** to select the days on which it should apply, then tap Save.

Now repeat the process, this time selecting Turn Off Power, and choosing a specific hour and minute – your bedtime, perhaps – to determine when the light is put out. **ca**





# WIPE YOUR WEB HISTORY

There are several ways to erase a record of the sites you've visited and searches you've made, but the most effective settings are buried deep within browsers.

**Wayne Williams** reveals how to find them and which ones you need to change



**A**lmost everywhere you go on the web and everything you search for gets logged and remembered in your browser. This history can be handy because it lets you revisit sites and searches, but sometimes you don't want your online activity being recorded. If you're looking for a birthday present for your partner while using a shared computer, for example, you don't want the fruits of your searches appearing when they next log on. In this feature we'll explain the best and newest ways to erase your browser tracks.

## PCs and laptops

Every browser provides ways to clear your history, but how you access this setting varies. We'll show you how to find it in all the major browsers, but there is a quicker way – press Ctrl+Shift+Delete – which works in any browser, and will take you directly to the relevant settings for managing your browser history.

### Clear your Chrome and Edge history

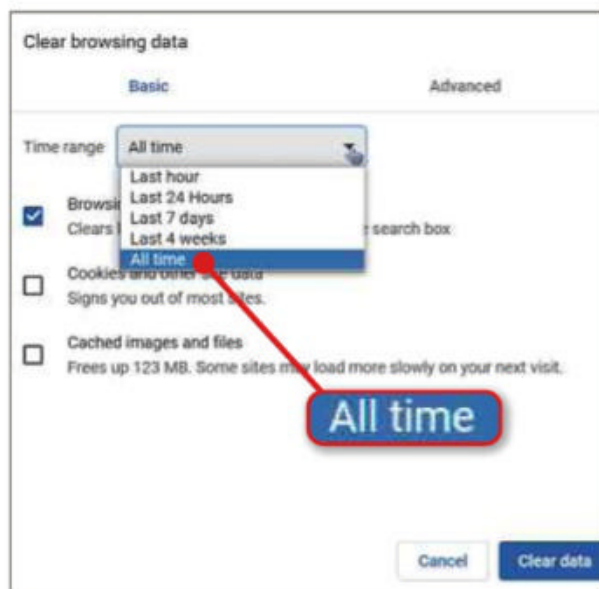
Click the three dots at the top right of Chrome, then Settings at the bottom. Next, on the left, click 'Privacy and security', followed by 'Clear browsing data' on the right. In the box that appears you'll see a dropdown menu that lets you specify when you want to remove the data from – 'Last hour', 'Last 24 Hours', 'Last 7 days', 'Last 4 weeks', or 'All time'

(see screenshot below).

Once you've chosen what you want to remove, tick the 'Browsing history' box, then click the blue 'Clear data' button at the bottom. You'll notice at the top that this is in the 'Basic' tab. Clicking the 'Advanced' tab shows you how many 'items' (ie, website URLs) you can delete, and also lets you wipe your download history, so nobody will see what you've downloaded from the web.

Deleting your entire history wipes the your personal slate clean, but if you feel this is too drastic you can choose to erase specific URLs while leaving others in place. Press Ctrl+H to bring up your history, then find the URL you want to remove, click the three dots at the far right, and select 'Remove from history'.

Clearing your history in Edge requires a



**Select how far back you want Chrome to wipe your history – from just the last hour to all time**

similar method. Click the three horizontal dots at the top right, then History. Next, click the three dots at the top of the History box (to the right of the magnifying-glass icon), followed by 'Clear browsing data'. This gives you similar options to Chrome, but there are no advanced settings. However, you can use the Ctrl+H keyboard shortcut to view and remove individual URLs.

### Clear your Firefox history

Click the top-right menu button (three horizontal lines), followed by History. Click 'Clear Recent History' in the sidebar that opens. A dropdown menu at the top lets you choose the time range to clear – last hour, last two hours, last four hours, today, or everything. Once selected, click OK to remove all items for that time period.

Another quick way to clear your history is to right-click the search box at the top of the browser and select 'Clear search history'. First, though, you'll need to add this search box, so click the menu again, followed by Settings, then click Search on the left and select 'Add search bar in toolbar'.

To avoid all this box ticking, you can command Firefox to automatically wipe your history from a browsing session every time you close it. Click the menu button again, then Settings, and 'Privacy & Security' on the left. Scroll down to History. Click the 'Firefox will: Remember History' dropdown menu and change this





Select these options to set Firefox to remember your history while you browse, but wipe it when you close the browser

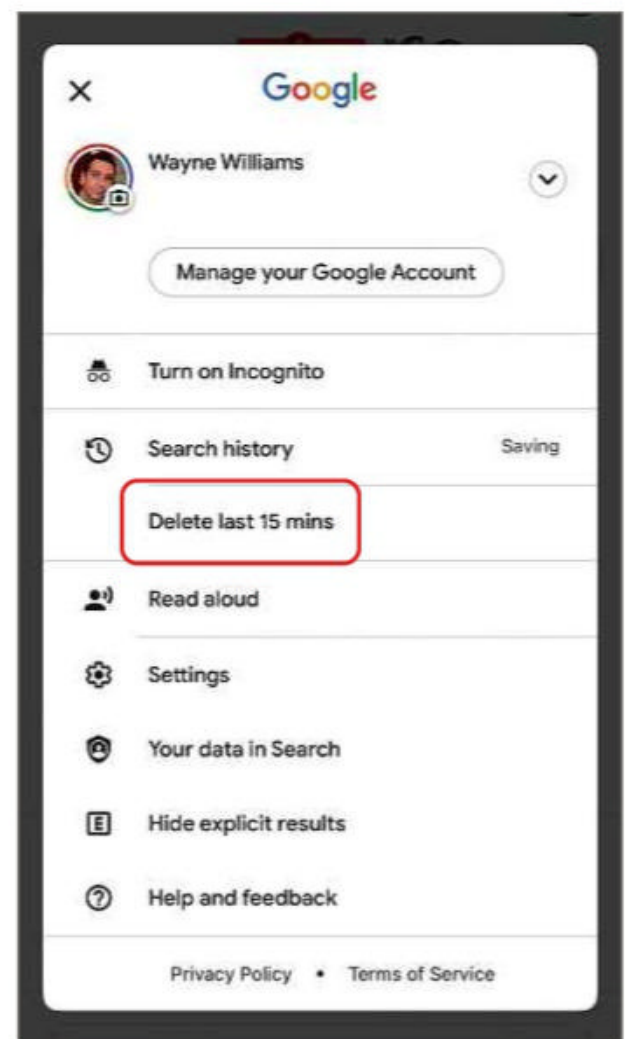
to 'Use custom settings for history' (1 in our screenshot above). You'll now see the option to 'Clear history when Firefox closes'. Tick this 2, ignoring for now the other two ticked boxes above it, and the Settings button will appear 3. Click it and you can choose what Firefox should wipe. Click OK when you've finished.

This setting deletes your history when you close the browser, but there's a more effective option. Go back to the 'Firefox will:' dropdown menu and untick the 'Remember browsing and download history' and 'Remember search and form history' boxes. From this point on, Firefox will stop recording the sites you visit, even as you browse.

To explain this, let's say you've visited

## Wipe what Google knows about you

Every search you make on Google is logged, stored, and linked to your Google account. The search giant uses this data to build up a profile of you to tailor future search results and advertising to your interests. You can see what search information Google has on you, by going to <https://myactivity.google.com>. Browse the list and select and delete any items you want removing.



Google now lets you wipe all searches in the past 15 minutes on Apple devices

from those other devices, and also from your Google accounts.

If that seems like the equivalent of using a machete to slash your history, Google's new 15-minute tool is more like a scalpel. To use it, you have to be searching through the Google app on an iPhone or iPad (Android users will have to wait). Once in the app, tap your account button at the top right, followed by 'Delete last 15 mins' (see screenshot above). If you don't see it, try updating the Google app to the latest version.

In addition, you can wipe individual (or all) sites from Chrome on an iPhone or iPad. Open Chrome, tap the three dots at the bottom right, followed by History, then Clear Browsing Data at the bottom (this deletes everything). For more precise controls, tap the blue Edit link next to this and choose the URLs you want to remove.

## Clear your Safari history

To wipe history in Safari, the default browser on your iPhone or iPad, you have to go into the device's operating system (iOS or iPadOS). Open Settings on your device, then scroll down to Safari and tap its entry. Next, find and tap 'Clear History and Website Data'. In the box that pops up, tap 'Clear History and Data'. Everything you've stored will now be wiped. **ca**

## Phones and tablets

### Clear your Chrome and Google app history

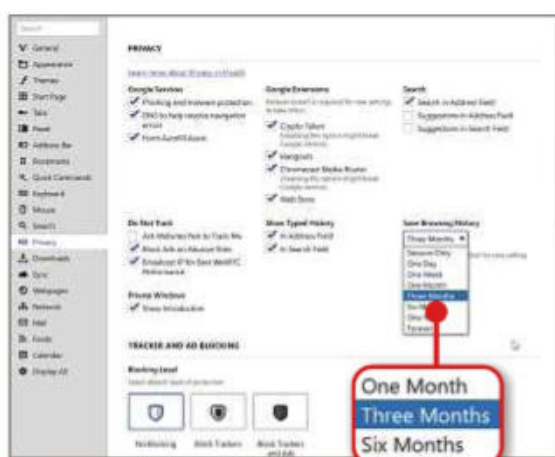
You have the same time-range options in Chrome on Android as you do on your computer – and the instructions are more or less the same. If you sync Chrome data across other devices, clearing it on your Android phone or tablet will remove it

## Clear your history on Brave & Vivaldi

Alternative browsers like Brave (<https://brave.com>) and Vivaldi (<https://vivaldi.com>), which we recommended in Issue 611's Cover Feature, are growing in popularity. They have similar history-wiping tools to their bigger rivals.

In Brave, tap the menu button (three horizontal lines) at the top right and open Settings. Click the History icon (a clock and arrow) in the bar at the top of the Settings page, then click 'Clear browsing data' on the left. From here you can choose what to remove and a time range. To make Brave wipe your history every time you close it, click the 'On exit' tab at the right, then tick 'Browsing history'. You may want to tick 'Download history' as well. Once that's done, click Save at the bottom right.

In Vivaldi, click the V button at the top left and in the menu that opens select Tools, followed by Delete Browsing Data. You'll now see the usual time-range options.



Vivaldi lets you choose how long it should remember your browser history for

For more advanced options, click the Settings cog at the bottom left of Vivaldi then select Privacy. On the next page, at the bottom right, select how long you want Vivaldi to save your history – from Session Only (it will be wiped when you close the browser) to Forever. The default is three months (as shown in our screenshot).



# Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

## PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

### What's this Dropbox exclamation mark?

**Q** I've used Dropbox for several years, mostly without bother. Recently, though, the little Dropbox icon in my Notification Area has developed a red exclamation mark. Obviously, this suggests a problem but, weirdly, I don't seem to be experiencing any hiccups. All my files are synced as expected and if I hover my mouse pointer over the icon it even shows the message 'Up to date' – which indeed everything seems to be. I've looked through the settings but can't find anything about this. The red mark has been there for a few weeks now. Any ideas?

Mark Wyatt

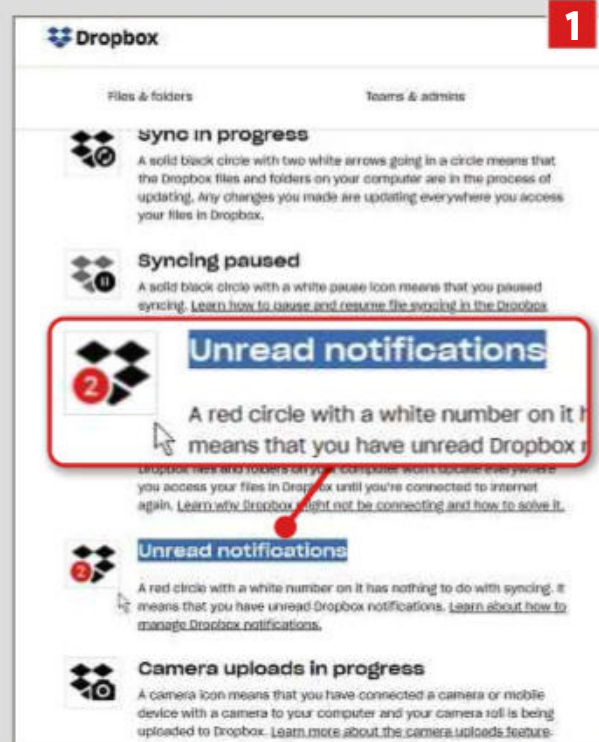
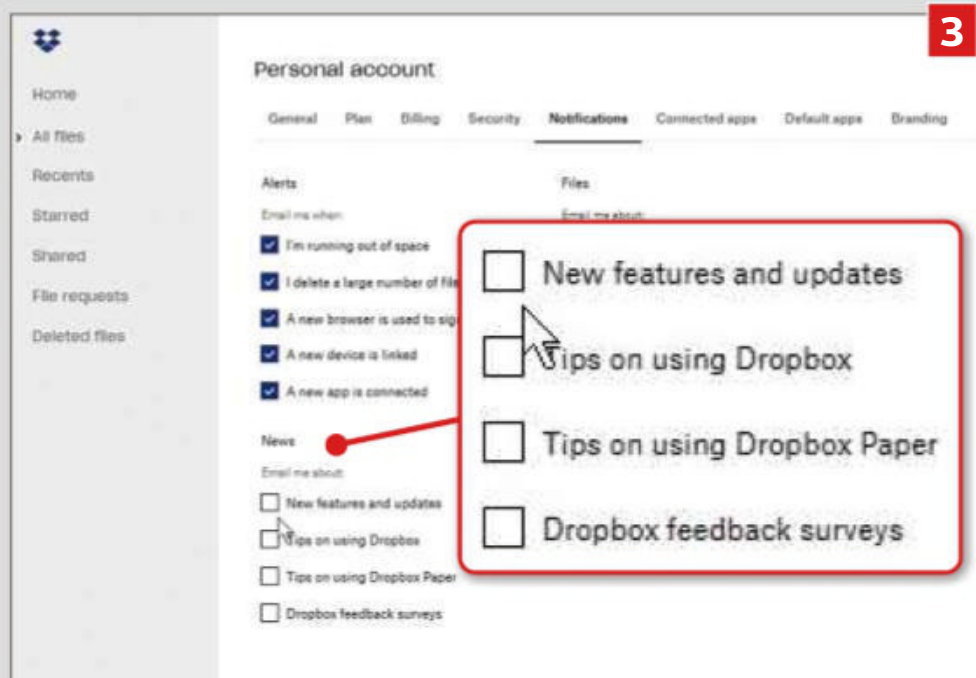
**A** What you're seeing is almost certainly not a red exclamation mark, but the number one in a red circle – but the Dropbox icon in the notification area is so small it can be hard to see this detail. We say this because Dropbox doesn't use red exclamation marks at all, as detailed on the company's page about its sync icons ([www.snipca.com/38910](http://www.snipca.com/38910), see screenshot **1**).

However, what you will see on this icon from time to time are little badges to indicate notifications. If you use Dropbox only in a personal capacity,

rarely if ever sharing files, then the quantity of these will be essentially zero. However, Dropbox itself does occasionally send alerts about new features and so forth. These badges are coloured red and a red badge with the number '1', when it appears as a small notification area icon, looks very much like an exclamation mark.

If you click this icon and then choose the Notifications tab, you'll probably see an 'unread' notification. Read it, and then click the Close link. That will make the red badge disappear.

To reduce the number of alerts you receive from Dropbox, untick some or all of the options under 'News'



Dropbox explains what its sync icons mean (**1**). A link on the Dropbox app will take you to further settings online (**2**)

That's your immediate confusion and problem fixed, but if you want to prevent or at least manage future notifications, read on.

First, right-click the Dropbox icon and then, in the pop-up pane, click the down arrow next to your initials and then choose Preferences. Next, on the Preferences menu, click to select the Notifications tab. Here, you'll find a bunch of tick boxes relating to a variety of different notification types. You can clear or leave these ticked as desired, but they're unlikely to be the ones responsible for causing your concern.

For those, you'll need to visit the relevant settings page on the Dropbox website. You can do this directly from the Preferences menu by clicking the 'View more settings on Dropbox.com' link **2**, or by visiting [www.snipca.com/38911](http://www.snipca.com/38911). Again, there are a whole bunch of pre-ticked boxes to manage here. It's up to you which you keep or deny but, to prevent red badges that are likely to be unwanted, we'd advise clearing some or all of those listed until the News heading **3**. These are likely to be relevant to anything you're doing with or need to know about your Dropbox account.



## What do different USB colours mean?

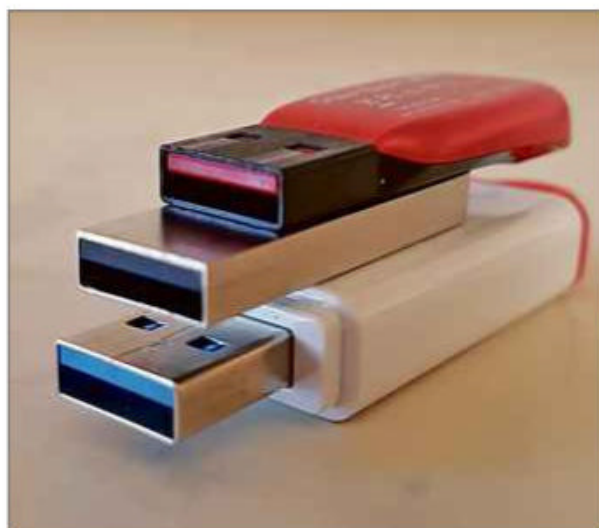
**Q** I've been told that USB ports are colour coded, with **USB 3.0** being blue, and **USB 2.0** black. I have USB sticks coloured blue, black and red. On my laptop computer I have three USB ports – two coloured black and one coloured blue. Is what I've been told correct? All of my USB sticks work in all of the ports on my laptop.

Ronnie Williams

**A** What you've been told has some truth to it, but it's not necessarily true!

To explain, we must first say that the branding of the endless USB versions, sub-versions and speed protocols is almost impossible for mere mortals to unravel. Fortunately, the interface itself is blissfully simple to use, so most of the time this naming mess doesn't matter: if you can plug a USB device into a USB socket, it'll often work.

As a rule of thumb, a higher USB number generally means a faster interface. So, while it's an oversimplification, a USB 3.0 socket should transfer stuff quicker than



**Hue do you think you are? USB sticks often don't stick to official colour standards**

the USB 2 equivalent, while a USB 3.1 or 3.2 port will generally outperform a corresponding USB 3.0 socket. Note that we haven't even mentioned the different socket shapes, such as the traditional, rectangular Type-A or the modern, smaller and reversible Type-C (**USB-C**). There's also USB 4.0 on the way – but let's not further muddy these murky waters!

So, what of the colours? Well, the current formal specifications, maintained

by the USB Implementers Forum ([www.usb.org](http://www.usb.org)), don't mention colour. This means any socket (or plug) can be any colour – because officially the colour denotes nothing. However, confusingly, the original USB 3.0 specification did recommend blue plastic inserts, so many PC manufacturers followed and still follow this. This original recommendation also applied to the plugs of faster USB 3.0 devices, incidentally. Older, slower USB 2.0 Type-A sockets were traditionally black, so blue was a useful distinguishing characteristic.

The upshot is that the blue USB 3.0 socket is no longer an official standard, though it is often the colour used. So, the colour of your USB sticks could mean something or nothing. The blue one probably does mean a faster USB 3.0 device, but that's not a certainty. The black one might mean slower USB 2.0 speeds, but it's just as likely a USB 3.0 device made by a manufacturer that didn't bother with a blue insert. And the red one? That's just a style choice, to match the outer casing.

## How do I copy Google searches on my iPhone?

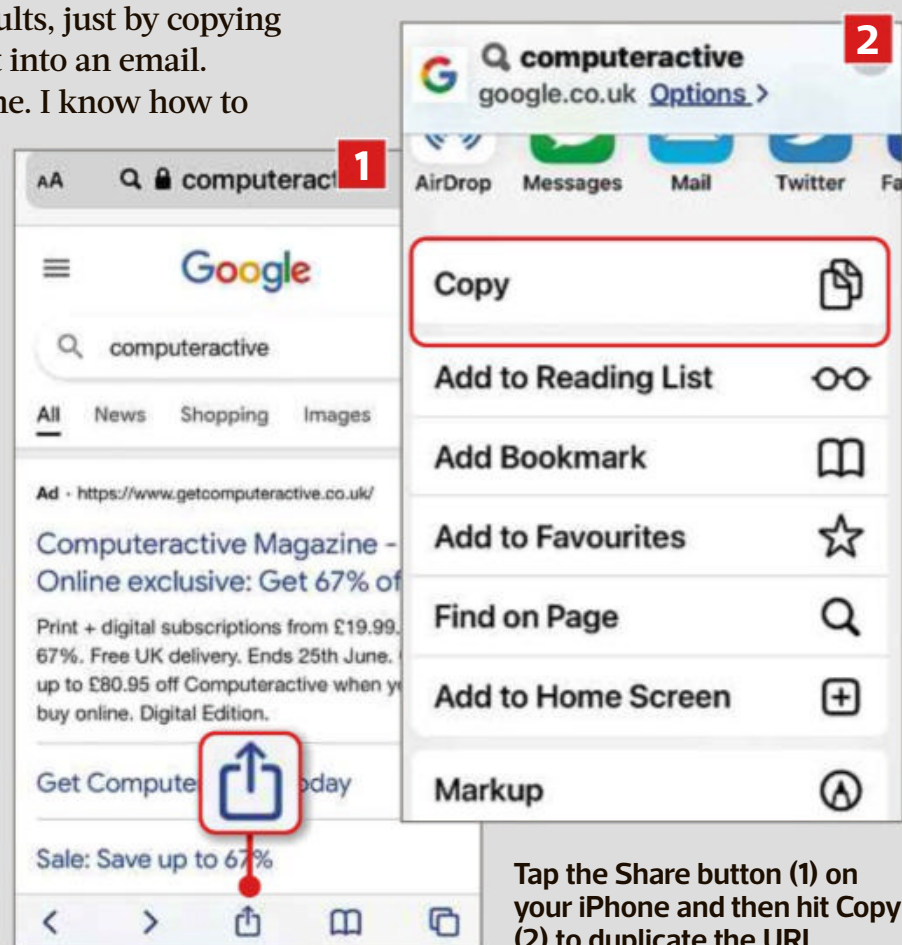
**Q** On my PC I can send people links to Google search results, just by copying the long string in the address bar and then pasting that into an email. However, I don't seem to be able to do this on my iPhone. I know how to tap and hold to copy, but that just copies the search term, not what I actually want to copy. Is this a quirk of the iPhone? Is there any way around it?

James Frazier

**A** Yes, this is down to the iPhone – or, specifically, the way the Safari web browser works. This retains your original search term in the address bar, in case you want to edit the word or phrase for a subsequent search. However, it means you can't directly copy the URL of the search results from this place.

Instead, at the bottom of Safari, you must first hit the Share button (a little square with an up arrow) to view the sharing options. Depending on your screen and font size, the Copy option might be immediately visible on the pane that sweeps into view. However, it's just as likely that you'll need to swipe up to find it. So, do that, then tap Copy and you're done.

To paste it into an email, or elsewhere, just tap and hold where you want it, and then tap Paste – but we think you already know that.



**Tap the Share button (1) on your iPhone and then hit Copy (2) to duplicate the URL**

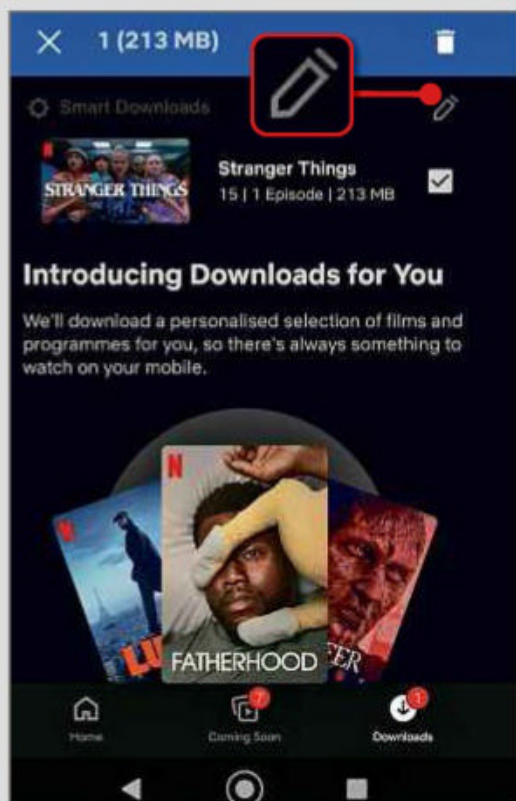


## Why won't Netflix play downloads?

**Q** I have no problems watching Netflix programmes at home on our Samsung smart TV. Recently, I purchased a new Samsung A7 tablet, and installed the Netflix app. I then downloaded some movies and TV series to watch when we are away from home. Initially all was fine. However, now when I try to watch the downloads I get a message saying there was a problem playing this video, with a code of 2.119. It says to try again but it does not work. Any ideas?

Billy Sawczyn

**A** Yes, for whatever reason one or more of your downloads has become corrupted – perhaps because it didn't complete downloading. Netflix is aware that this is a problem. Its suggested fix is to delete the affected downloads and start afresh. To do this, first tap the Downloads icon. If you don't see this, tap the More button (three horizontal lines) followed by My Downloads. Now tap the Edit icon (a pencil, see screenshot below) and then, next to each troublesome movie or show, tap the Delete icon (a dustbin).



Tap the Edit icon (a pencil) to then remove any corrupted downloads

## Is this Office 2010 update a fake?

**Q** I thought Office 2010 stopped being supported some time ago, but I noticed I've received notification of an update. What's going on? Am I somehow getting bogus updates? I'm using Windows 7, so I have stopped them being installed until I know they're safe. Office now displays a red banner encouraging me to upgrade.

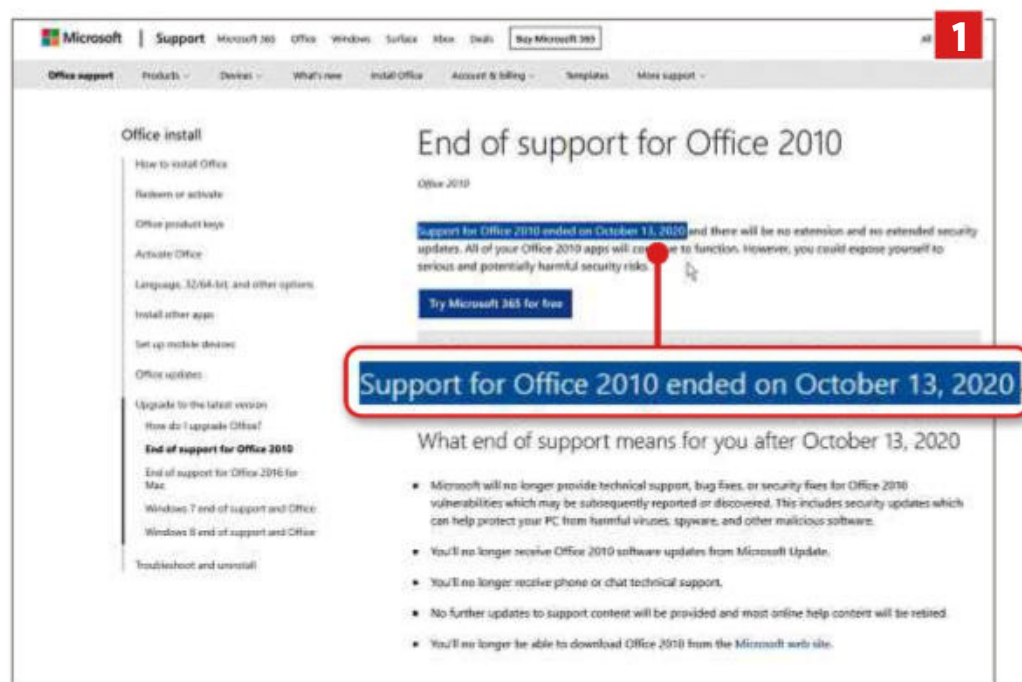
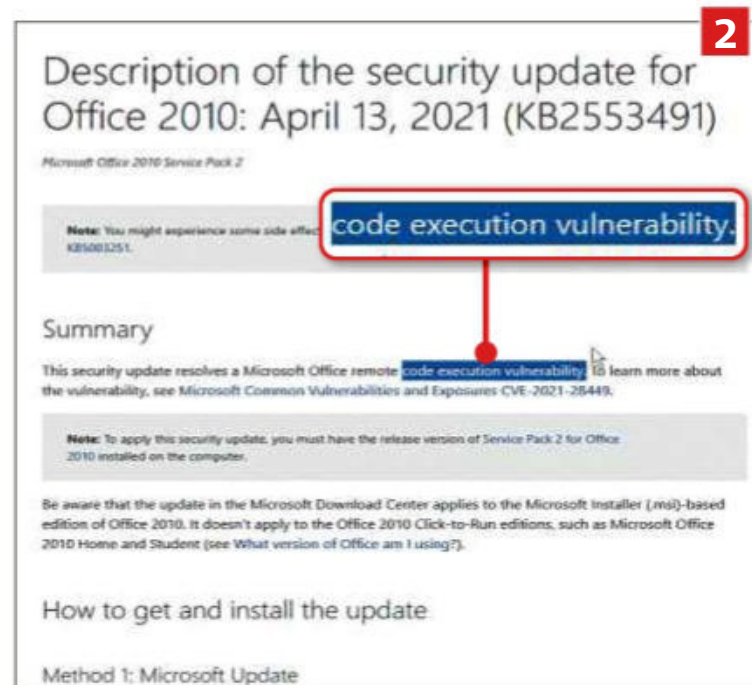
Roy Sainsbury

**A** What's going on here is Microsoft's time-honoured habit of publishing an end-of-support date, reaching it – and then continuing to release updates after all. It does this for a variety of reasons but, in the main, it's just good business sense. Fixing 'out-of-support' apps or services will cost Microsoft some money, but often not as much as the company calculates would be the cost of bad publicity from *not* remedying that problem.

Office 2010 is indeed now out of support, since 13 October last year – as explained by Microsoft at [www.snipca.com/38901](http://www.snipca.com/38901) (see

screenshot 1).

However, the company has discovered what it calls a 'code-execution flaw' that affects Office 2010 and later editions of the suite, as outlined at [www.snipca.com/38903](http://www.snipca.com/38903) 2. Some of these later versions of Office are still within the support window, so Microsoft has had to release an update to fix it regardless. As that fix is presumably suitable for the same flaw in Office 2010, Microsoft has made it available to users of that suite also. So, no – there's nothing to worry about here.



Even though Microsoft has stated its end of support for Office 2010 (1), it still issues updates that resolve flaws in that version of the suite (2)

**Q:** Will an old printer work with Windows 7?

**A:** Issue 576, page 64 – find it on our 2020 Back Issue CD

Buy it from  
[www.snipca.com/38164](http://www.snipca.com/38164)



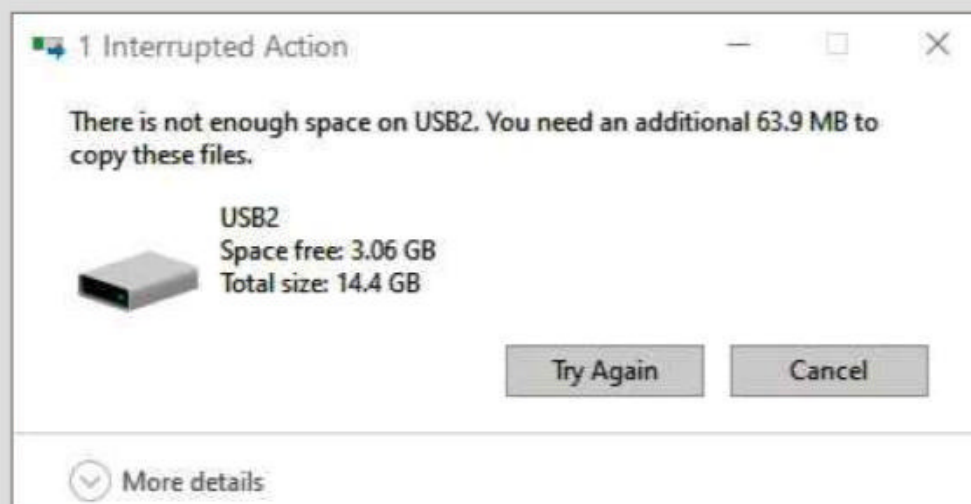


## Why can't I copy a small file on to my USB stick?

**Q** I need your help with a small problem. I have a 16GB USB stick that my computer says has a total size of 14.4GB with space free of 3.06GB. However, it won't accept another a file that's just 63.9MB (see screenshot). Do you know why?

Murray Sinclair

**A** Have you ever successfully used this card to store its full capacity, or close to it? If so, then we're not entirely sure what's causing this. It could be a bit of corruption caused by the failure to completely write a previous file, perhaps because the stick was removed too soon. To begin with, we'd copy the contents on to your PC's hard drive and then perform a full format to see if this restores the full capacity. To do this, first right-click the stick in File Explorer and then choose Format. Next, in the 'Format options' section,



If the USB stick really has 3.06GB of space, it should be able to accept a 63.9MB file

click to clear the tick from the Quick Format box and then click Start.

If this doesn't work – and particularly if this stick is new to you – then we're afraid you've probably got a fake. These abound online, and if buying from the likes of eBay there's often no easy way of telling good from bad. To check, you can use a tool called H2testw, which is a free download from [www.snipca.com/35365](http://www.snipca.com/35365).

First, extract the H2testw.exe program

file from the downloaded ZIP file. Next, double-click H2testw.exe and then click English. Now click 'Select target' and choose your USB stick. Finally, choose the 'all available space' option. Check your selections and then click the 'Write + Verify' button. H2testw will now attempt to write data to all 16GB of the stick.

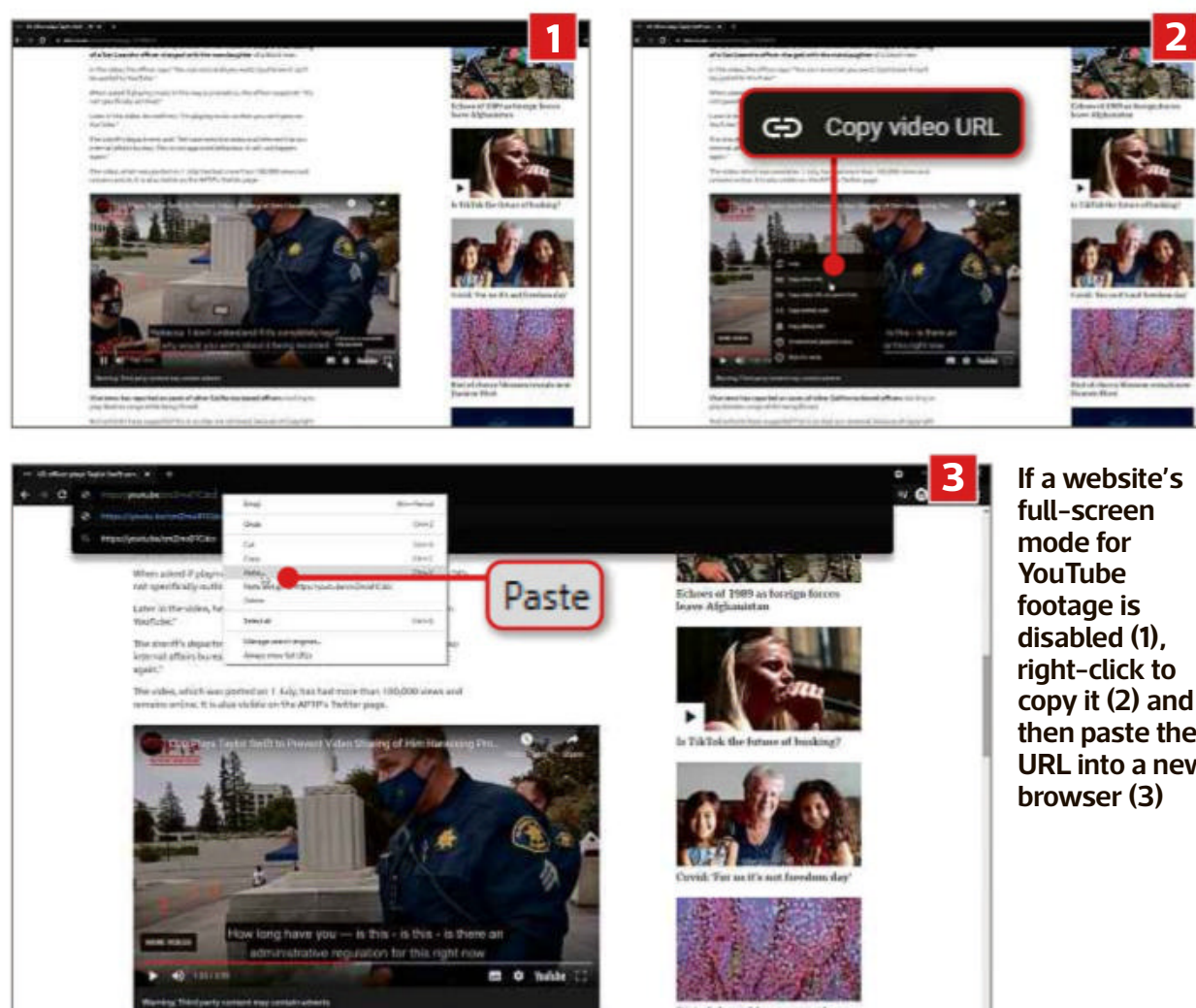
If it reports your stick is a fake, we're afraid there is no fix.

## Why are full-screen videos disabled?

**Q** Sometimes, when I tap the little expand icon at the bottom right of videos on websites, I'm told that full-screen mode is disabled. This happens on some pages of the BBC News website, for example – though not all. The other day I was looking at a page about the singer Taylor Swift, which had two videos. I could watch the news report video in full screen but the music video, which had been posted to YouTube, said full screen was disabled. Do you know why this is? Is there any way to watch these videos in full screen?

Melissa Herne

**A** This is usually down to whichever website is hosting the video. With footage hosted on YouTube, web developers have the option to disable full-screen mode for embedded clips (see screenshot **1**). You'd have to ask the individual developers why they choose to do this, but sometimes it's nothing more mysterious than thoughtless programming, as a particular piece of



If a website's full-screen mode for YouTube footage is disabled (1), right-click to copy it (2) and then paste the URL into a new browser (3)

coding has to be included to allow YouTube clips to be viewed in full screen.

There's no fix as such, but with YouTube clips there is a workaround. First, right-click in the video window and then choose 'Copy video URL' **2**. Next,

open a new browser tab and then press Control (Ctrl+V) to paste the video's address **3**, and then press Enter. You're now watching the clip on the YouTube website itself, so you'll be able to click the full-screen icon to view it.



# Problems Solved

## Am I stuck on W10 1909 forever?

**Q** I have an Asus ZenBook UX310UA laptop that's stuck on version 1909 of Windows 10. This is apparently because of a 'compatibility hold' related to the Conexant audio driver. This problem has been outstanding since May 2020, and support for version 1909 has now ended. Is there any solution in sight or is my three-year-old laptop now unsafe to use? I'd appreciate any advice, as I believe it affects many laptops.

Nigel Marchant

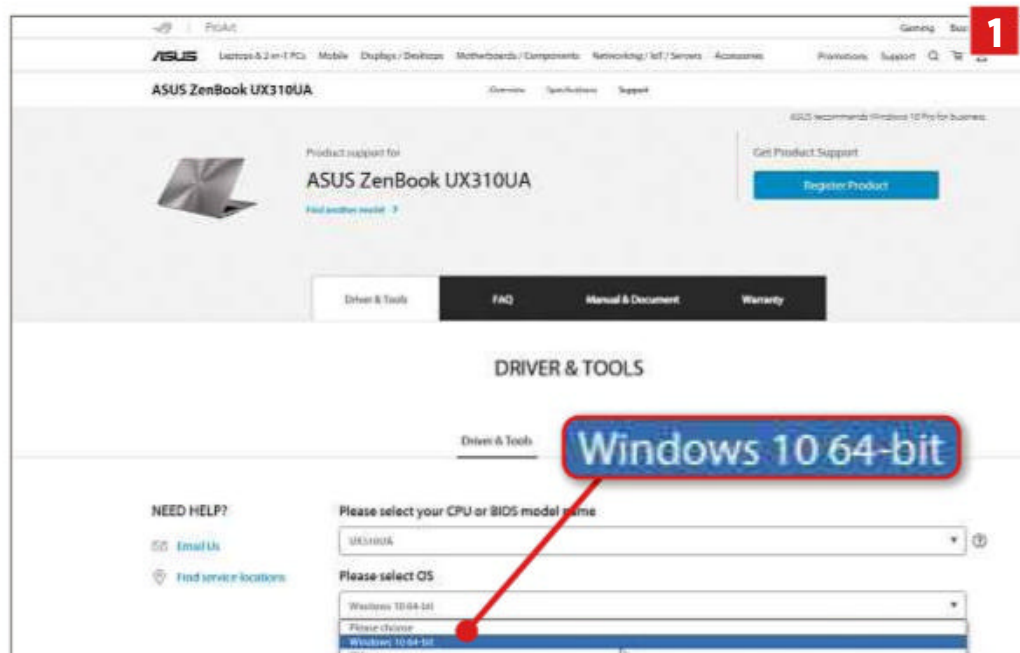
**A** Yes, this has been a problem for a lot of laptops running Windows 10, and a long-running concern for users. We have mentioned these compatibility holds before, and we don't imagine this will be the last time.

While we can't say the same for every laptop make and model, Asus has now released the driver you need. By the time

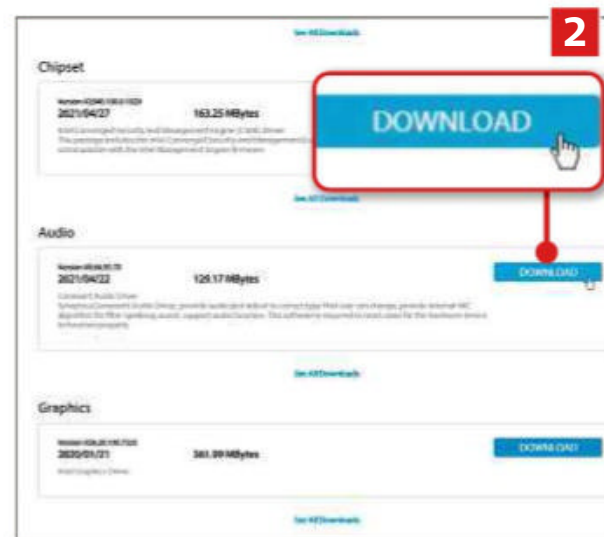
you read this, it might have downloaded and installed automatically. If not, you can download it directly from the Asus support website, at [www.snipca.com/38913](http://www.snipca.com/38913) (see screenshot 1).

Just use the dropdown menus to select your model and Windows 10 version and then scroll down to find the Audio section before clicking the Download button 2.

Once you've installed this, you should be able to proceed through the various Windows 10 version updates to reach 21H1, as the latest version is named.



On the Asus support website, select your model, Windows 10 version and Audio (1) and then click 'Download' (2) to get the recently issued driver

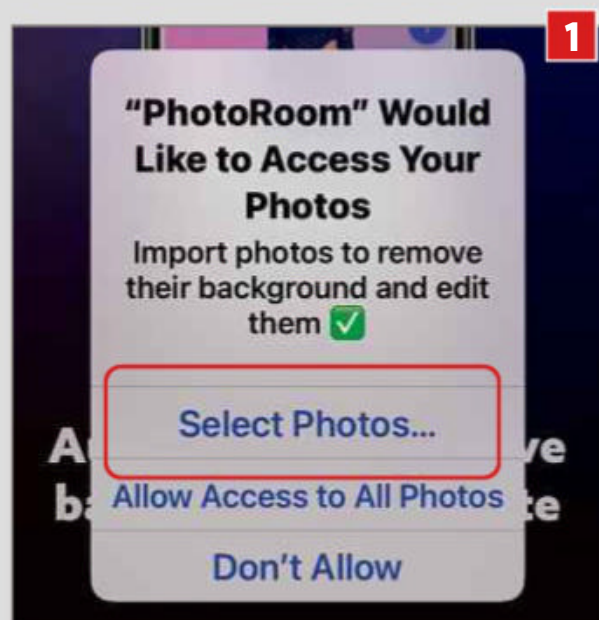


## Can I limit photo access on my iPad?

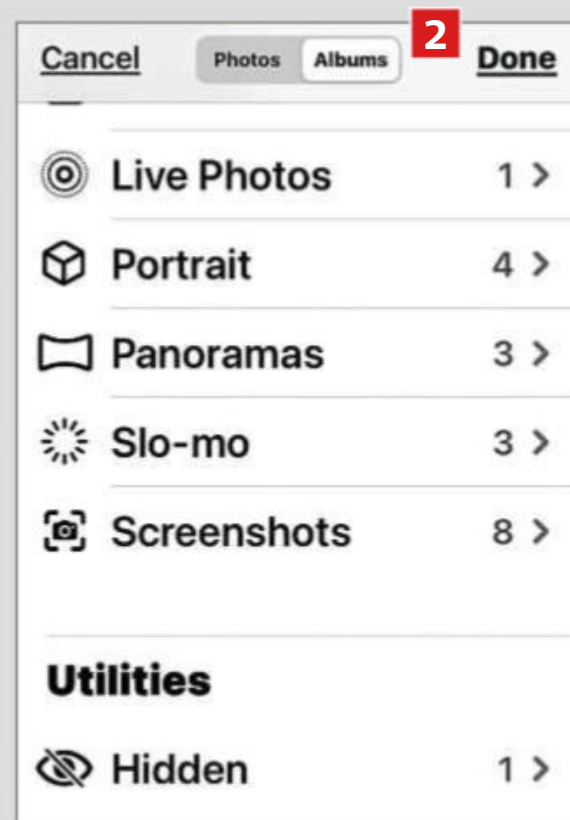
**Q** I use my iPad to store personal information, including invoices and correspondence. As such there are images that I do not wish to share with apps. Consequently, I find myself unable to try photo-manipulation apps, as they all seem to request access to my photos – including the PhotoRoom app you recommended a while back. I'd be grateful for your advice as to whether there is a simple and practical way to restrict these apps to specific photos or folders? I'm aware Apple allows photos to be put into a 'private' folder, but I'm unable to establish if images in this are restricted to viewing by all?

Michael Duffy

**A** The 'private' folder to which you refer is called Hidden. However, while it does prevent selected photos from being seen from within Apple's own Photos app, access to the folder itself can be granted to third-party apps. But that 'can be' is



Tap 'Select Photos' (1) and pick which Albums and Photos to give the app access to (2)



key here: iOS gives you control over which photos and folders PhotoRoom (and other apps) are able to access.

This isn't obvious from PhotoRoom's opening screen, as all it has is a button labelled 'Allow Access to All Photos'. However, tap this and iOS steps in to ask what level of access you want to give. If

you tap 'Allow Access to All Photos', then PhotoRoom will get that, including any in the Hidden folder. However, if instead you tap Select Photos (see screenshot 1), then on the next screen 2 you'll be able to tap to select individual photos or, more sensibly, the folders that PhotoRoom can access.





## WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

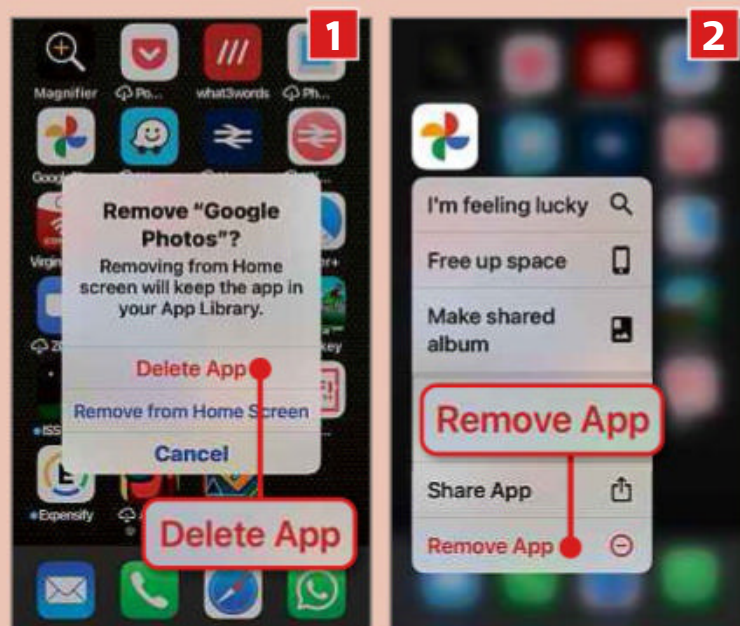
### Photos and Google Photos on my iPhone?

**Q** On my iPhone I have an app called Photos and another called Google Photos. I think both were pre-loaded. I wonder if you could tell me the difference? I don't know what images Google Photos stores. I'd like to know if I need Google Photos and, if not, how to delete it and everything it contains?

Gerry Jones

**A** New iPhones include only apps that Apple allows. The particular line-up of apps occasionally changes, as Apple invents new ones or drops old ones. Once upon a time Apple did include YouTube – an app by Google – on new iPhones, but that cooperative spirit ended nearly a decade ago.

We say all this to explain why there is no possible way that Google Photos came pre-installed on your iPhone. It simply never has. So, either you installed it yourself and have forgotten, or someone did so without your knowledge. If you purchased the phone from somewhere other than Apple and had help setting it up, then we suppose



To delete the Google Photos app from your iPhone, first tap 'Delete App' (1) and then 'Remove App' (2) to confirm

a shop assistant might have installed it with the good intention of being helpful.

All that aside, Google Photos will by default back up whatever photos you shoot with your iPhone, storing them to the account associated with the Google Photos app, on Google's servers. Hopefully, that's your own Google account. To check, launch the app and then tap the avatar icon at the top right. If

it's not your account, then whatever name you do find here should offer a clue as to why the app is on your iPhone and will inform what you do next.

You might now decide to keep the app, though there's little benefit because they both offer similar photo-management tools. Deleting it is as straightforward and safe as with any other non-Apple iPhone app – meaning it's *very* easy and safe. First, just tap and hold the app's icon and wait for a couple of seconds. Then tap Delete App

(see screenshot 1) and then confirm by tapping Remove App 2. Note, though, deleting the Google Photos app will not remove the photos the app has already backed up to the associated Google account. To manage those, you'll need to visit <https://photos.google.com>.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email [noproblem@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:noproblem@computeractive.co.uk)

## How do I access Usenet now?

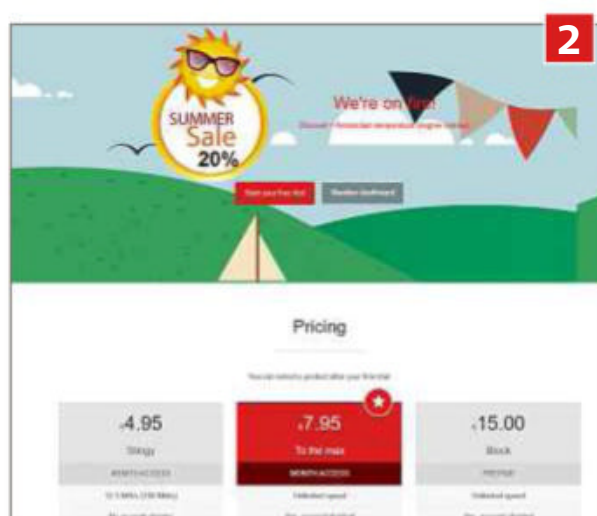
**Q** Thank you for an entertaining and informative magazine. My provider, Virgin, emailed to say that its Usenet service has been withdrawn. Since this was my main reason for joining Virgin many years ago, it makes me think why it has made this decision. What are the alternatives?

Martin Carpenter

**A** Virgin has presumably made a commercial decision that it wasn't worth maintaining its Usenet servers. The system is now dated, and generally used for piracy – though thousands of legitimate, text-based chat groups do still exist, of course.

If you just want to engage in these, then the Eternal September Usenet server is a

popular free option. You'll find the server details at [www.snipca.com/38904](http://www.snipca.com/38904) (see screenshot 1). However, if you're after access to binary groups – where all the files live, legal and otherwise – then you'll need to sign up to a paid service, like Usenet.Farm (<https://usenet.farm> 2). It offers a free trial, with up to 10GB of data transfers, but after that you'll be billed, starting at €4.95 (about £4.25) per month.



Alternatives to Virgin's service include Eternal September Usenet (1) and Usenet.Farm (2)

## Next Issue

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Weds  
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- What's up with my VLC playlist?
- Can I save emails as Word documents?
- How do I update my TV apps? ...And many more

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### Where's my iPad Mini update?

**Q** I saw in Issue 609's News section that Apple has released updates for the iPad Mini. I followed the [www.snipca.com/38648](http://www.snipca.com/38648) link and looked at the information there but really don't know what to do next. I didn't find a list of models affected, nor how to download and install the software. I looked in the Software Updates page in my iPad Mini's Settings, but it reports that there are no updates available. It currently runs iOS 9.3.5. I don't want to throw a perfectly good device in the bin, as it'd be such a waste.

Mike Hearn

**A** The flaw for which Apple released a fix relates to specific versions of iOS running on older iPads and iPhones. The affected models are listed on the Apple support page to which we linked, under the Security heading. Your device isn't listed because the earliest eligible model is iPad Mini 2, released in 2013. Your model is an original iPad Mini from 2012 (pictured below) – and iOS 9.3.5 is the latest available version for it, so it is no longer supported.

However, Apple has released updates for the original iPad Mini as recently as 2019, with 9.3.6 for the iPad Mini with cellular capability (a sibling model to



Apple no longer supports original iPad Minis, but may release emergency updates for them

your Wi-Fi-only device).

So, we imagine that were any serious flaws found in 9.3.5 for the original iPad Mini with Wi-Fi, Apple might still release a patch. In short, then, there's no need to throw your iPad in the bin.

### Should I worry about this TPM warning?

**Q** I read Issue 610's Windows 11 Cover Feature and followed the Mini Workshop on page 53 to check the TPM (Trusted Platform Module) on my computer. I needed to enable it in the BIOS, so I followed your steps. However, a warning message popped up that was about the **firmware TPM** key being stored in the code data region – whatever that means! There's no urgency, so I didn't proceed. However, what does it mean?

Tim Kingscote-Davies

**A** Well, for one it means that some computer manufacturers need a good talking to, because messages like this are both baffling and needlessly concerning to everyday users.

That aside, there's nothing to worry about: the message is an impenetrable way of telling you that, by enabling TPM, there is a risk that you could be permanently locked out of your data. However, this would be the case only if you go on to use the BitLocker encryption feature of Windows 10/11 Pro, and then forgot your password – and had also lost the recovery key for this (which could be in your Microsoft account, or perhaps you've printed it or written it down). It could also happen if the BIOS ROM chip on your computer needed replacing, and you (or the repairer) hadn't first disabled BitLocker encryption.

So, you can see this is really just a pile of hypothetical ifs and maybes. However, before making any change to the BIOS – and in particular with anything related to TPM – we'd always advise backing up important data first, just in case!

### Should I run multiple ad-blockers?

**Q** The uBlock Origin browser extension, (<https://ublockorigin.com>) as recommended in Issue 609's Workshops section, may be one of the most useful pieces of software ever! However, I have two questions. First, the article didn't say if one should disable any existing similar tools, like Adblock Plus? After searching online, I think I have convinced myself that it's sensible to do so. Second, how can I be sure it does not block something useful or important? I use Firefox, incidentally.

Dave Duncan

**A** There's no specific need to disable Adblock Plus, or any similar tools. Equally, running multiple blocking tools risks both diminishing returns and performance. There's also the possibility that the operations of competing tools will sometimes create conflicts, so we'd recommend sticking with one or the other. But you can run both and if that seems to work well for you, then we wouldn't give it any more thought.

As for your second question, there's no simple answer. Blocking tools, including uBlock Origin, tend to focus on the bad stuff, so it is unlikely that anything truly important would be blocked. However, if there's a particular website where you feel nothing should be blocked, then it's easy to switch it off. In Firefox, just click the uBlock Origin icon at the top right of the toolbar and then click the large power button icon (see screenshot below).



Click the power button icon to unblock anything on a website



# Jargon Buster

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

**32bit/64bit** A measure of how much data a PC can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

**3G/4G** A set of technologies that delivers faster mobile broadband, so called because they are the third and fourth generations of mobile data networking standards.

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

**AAC** Advanced Audio Coding. A type of music file.

**Administrator** Someone who can make changes to a computer that will affect others who also use it.

**Active noise cancelling** Method for reducing unwanted sound by adding a second sound specifically designed to cancel the first.

**Adaptive sync** Changing your monitor's refresh rate to the frame rate of the graphics card.

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

**Adware** Unwanted adverts that come with software.

**AMOLED** Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel displays. Most commonly used in smartphones, tablets and smartwatches.

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

**Barometric sensor** Chip inside a phone that measures air pressure.

**Benchmarking** Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

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

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

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

**Calibration** The process of checking that colours are accurate on a monitor.

**cd/m<sup>2</sup>** Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

**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.

**Code** Used to summarise the various programming languages used to create programs.

**Core** Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

**Cryptocurrency** A digital currency not backed by any country. The most popular is Bitcoin.

**Dark web** Websites that can only be accessed using specialised privacy software like Tor.

**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.

**File path** Shows the location of a file within Windows.

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

**Flag** Experimental features in Chrome that you have to turn on by typing in the address bar.

**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.

**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.

**HAMR** Heat-assisted magnetic recording. Increases the amount of data that can be stored on a drive by temporarily heating it as it saves files.

**Hardware acceleration** Using a graphics card to radically improve video and games performance.

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

**HDR** High-dynamic range. A camera that takes more than one photo with different levels of colour and contrast. These images are then combined to create a better-quality image.

**Hotspot** A public area covered by a Wi-Fi network that allows you to access the internet, either free or for a fee.

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

**IP address** Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

**IPS** A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better, more accurate-looking colours compared with monitors that do not use this technology.

**IPX4** A rating indicating that a device can withstand a splash of water from any direction for up to five minutes.

**JPEG** Joint Photograph Experts Group. A common type of image file created by most digital cameras. Some image quality is lost with each save.

**KML** Keyhole Markup Language. File format to show and share data in Google Earth.

**LED** Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light. Used on almost all electronic devices, and to provide the backlight for some LCDs.

**Lossy** A way of compressing image or audio files by deleting data. Shrinking them means they're easier to send over the internet, though some quality is lost.

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

**MicroSD card** A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

**mSATA** A smaller version of the SATA interface (see right), used for connecting SSDs in laptops and some PCs.

**PMR** Perpendicular Magnetic Recording. Used by most hard drives, this writes data to and reads it from circular tracks on a spinning platter.

**PNG** Portable Network Graphics. A format for images that shrinks file sizes using compression but without discarding any data.

**QR code** Quick Response code. A barcode that can be read using smartphones and dedicated QR-reading devices.

**RAM** Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on. Its capacity is measured in megabytes (MB): the more memory your PC has, the more things it can process simultaneously and the faster it will seem. Any data in RAM will be lost when the power is switched off.



**Refresh rate** Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn. Slight changes in the image each time it is updated combine to give the illusion of movement.

**Response time** How fast a coloured pixel turns to white and back again.

**ROM chip** Read-only memory chip, containing permanent data. Unlike RAM, it remains even after you turn off your computer.

**RSS** Really Simple Syndication. A simple format for automatically distributing news headlines and other content from the web.

**Sandbox** A virtual container that you can run programs in safely.

**SATA** Serial ATA. An interface for connecting hard drives and optical discs to a computer.

**SD card** Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

**Sideload** To install apps without using the official Android or iOS stores.

**SIM** Subscriber Identity Module. The smart card used by all digital mobile phones. The SIM card carries the user's identity and phone number for accessing the network.

**Simulator** A video game that simulates real-world activities.

**SMTP** Simple Mail Transfer Protocol. A standard for sending email messages. It is now largely reserved for sending messages rather than receiving them.

**Speaker driver** Cone-shaped part of the speaker that converts audio signals into sound waves.

**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.

**SSID** Service Set Identifier. A name used to identify a wireless network.

**Surge protection** A method of protecting devices from sudden spikes in voltage.

**TPM** Trusted Platform Module. A computer chip that allows your hardware to perform security-related tasks.

**Tri-band** A router that broadcasts on three radio bands – one on 2.4GHz, two on 5.0GHz.

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

**USB 2.0/3.0/3.1** Faster successors to USB.

**USB-C** A new connector that's reversible, letting you plug it in upside down.

**VESA** Video Electronics Standards Association. A standard mount for attaching monitors to stands, walls and PCs.

**VGA** Video Graphics Array. An older standard socket for connecting a monitor to a computer.

**Virtual PC** A Windows tool that enables you to run a second 'virtual' operating system on a PC, such as running a version of Windows 7 in a Windows 10 computer to use older programs.

**Volume** An alternative term for a drive or disk.

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





**Wi-Fi card** Adds Wi-Fi connectivity to a computer.

**Widget** A small program that runs on the Windows desktop.

**ZIP file** A file that contains compressed documents or files.

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# Easy when you **Know How**

Annoyed by the adverts and other clutter on its home screen, **Robert Irvine** attempts to...



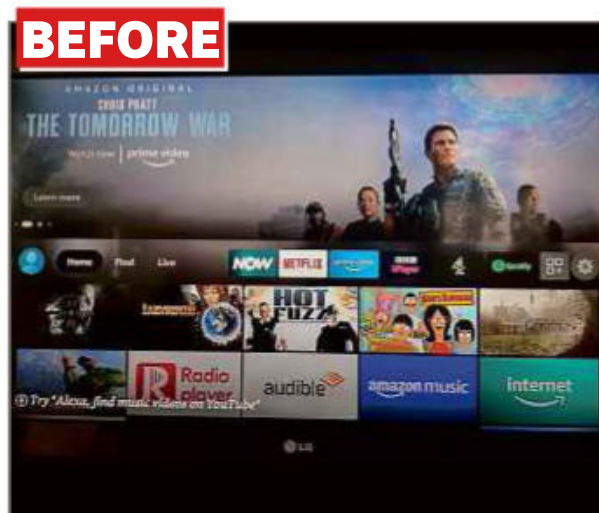
## Hack his Amazon Fire Stick

One of my worst domestic habits, along with eating crisps in bed, is continuing to use things that badly need upgrading. My favourite mug is chipped around the rim, my bathroom scales only work when heavily jumped on and – until recently – I was streaming my entertainment using the original Google Chromecast.

Back in 2013, this **HDMI** dongle was undoubtedly groundbreaking, but eight years later, it was starting to feel cumbersome and slow. Rather than splash out on a smart TV, I treated myself to an Amazon Fire TV Stick, for the princely sum of £30, having been impressed with the device when writing Issue 605's 'Master Your TV Sticks' Cover Feature.

“  
Navigating to Netflix is  
like walking through  
a pre-Covid Piccadilly  
Circus  
”

This lightweight streaming device has proved perfect for my needs: easy to set up, quick to operate and with more TV, film and music apps than you could (literally) shake a stick at. There's only one problem, which is that the Fire TV home screen is needlessly cluttered. Rather than offer big tiles for the services you use every day, six apps are squeezed into a narrow strip across the middle of the interface, with an ellipsis button you need to select to view the rest. Worst of all, the screen is dominated by adverts, 'featured content' and recommended apps that make navigating to Netflix like



**Robert wants his Fire TV Stick's home screen to look less like this...**

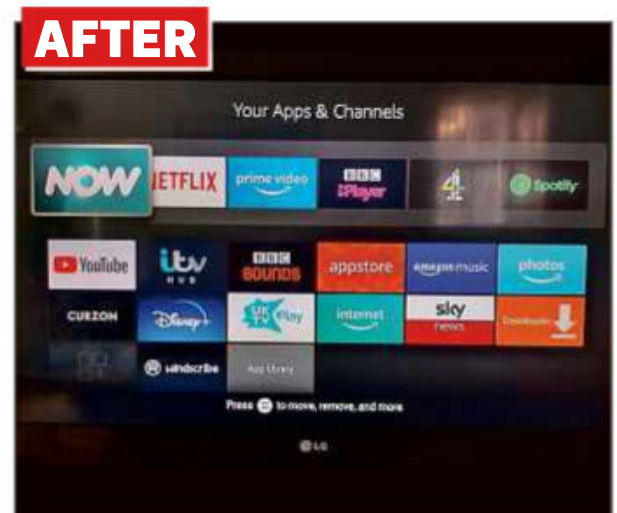
walking through a pre-Covid Piccadilly Circus.

Looking online for a way to hack the screen, I discovered that I wasn't the only Fire TV user who dislikes its appearance. The simplest suggested workaround was to hold down the Home button on the remote control to bring up the shortcuts screen, then select Apps to open the Apps Library. This displays your apps unencumbered by other junk, and would be ideal if it could be set as your default startup screen.

Sadly, it can't, so my next step was to try and turn off the ads and trailers, or at least make them less irritating. After digging around in Settings, I eventually found options under Preferences, then Featured Content that let me disable autoplaying audio and video.

Tweaking these settings made the home screen less frenetic, but it still looked crowded. The only solution, apparently, was to install an alternative **app launcher**, which required **sideloading** an app from outside the Amazon Appstore. This isn't as dodgy as it sounds, because Fire TV lets you install 'unknown apps', but it is a bit tricky.

I first installed a free app called Downloader from the Appstore ([www.snipca.com/37870](http://www.snipca.com/37870)) – the easiest way to find this was to ask Alexa: "find Downloader app". I then used the app's browser to access the download link of a




**...and more like this – but it's trickier to achieve than he'd hoped**

much recommended app launcher called Wolf Launcher ([www.snipca.com/37868](http://www.snipca.com/37868)). I was warned that my TV didn't allow apps from unknown sources, so I opened Settings when prompted to enable this permission for the Downloader app. I was then able to install and open Wolf Launcher, which presented my apps in a clean, colourful grid.

This looked great, but it didn't replace the default Fire TV home screen. To achieve that, I was advised to go to Settings, My Fire TV, then Developer Options and turn on ADB Debugging, then use Downloader to install an app called Launcher Manager ([www.snipca.com/37867](http://www.snipca.com/37867)). This let me disable the standard Amazon launcher on my device, which was supposed to make Wolf Launcher open when I pressed the Home button on my remote. Instead, it only displayed a worrying black screen. Fortunately, I managed to get back into Launcher Manager to re-enable the stock launcher, and decided that perhaps it wasn't so bad after all.

Further investigation revealed that Amazon is clamping down on third-party launchers, which may explain my failure, but at least I've removed the most annoying ads and haven't broken my Fire Stick.

 Need help with your streaming device? Let us know: [noproblem@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:noproblem@computeractive.co.uk)





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