Computer active

ISSUE 613 | 25 AUG – 7 SEPT 2021

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Hard-to-spot 'Microsoft' scam p11

Send 100% PRIVATE EMAILS
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Why you must upgrade to sticks that are BIGGER, FASTER, SAFER! p50

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WELCOME

From the Editor

I remember getting my first 2GB USB stick and wondering what I could possibly fill it with. This was in the days before smartphones that recorded everything you did, creating large files in the process. Yes, I had some photos and hundreds of documents, but they were measured in mere kilobytes. That left a lot of empty space.

As usual, I had underestimated the speed with which technology advances and prices fall. Within a month of getting my first smartphone I had recorded enough video to fill several 2GB sticks, and was already looking to buy 8GB replacements. These days, anything less than 64GB is widely seen as insufficient.

In our Cover Feature Nik Rawlinson explains how you can make the most of these mighty sticks (64GB and up). I suspect many people end up wasting all that storage by just shoving videos on to it – like moving into a mansion and filling the rooms with unopened Ikea flat packs. There's so much more you can do.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

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12.8 per cent
Fee eBay takes from sales under £2,500
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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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DENNIS PUBLICATION
Computeractive is published fortnightly by Dennis Publishing, 31-32 Alfred Place, London, WC1E 7DP.
Company registered in England. ISSN 1461-6211

Average sales, **Jan-Dec 2020 59,649** copies per issue.

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Distributed by Marketforce

Computeractive
Printed in the UK

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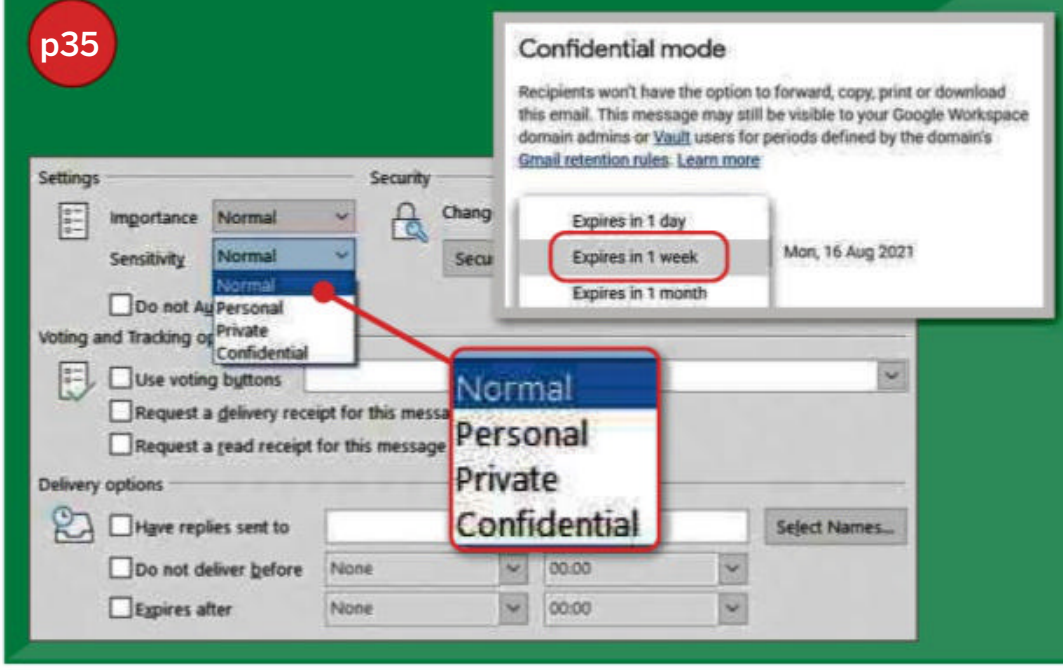


Ditch Your Old USB STICKS

COVER FEATURE P50

Why you must upgrade to sticks that are BIGGER, FASTER, SAFER!

Windows 11's new Snipping Tool & Mail revealed

Microsoft has unveiled how the Snipping Tool, Mail, Calendar and Calculator tools will look in Windows 11, and revealed new features you'll be able to use.

Writing on its blog (www.snipca.com/39176), Microsoft said the new Snipping Tool will be a revamp of the Windows 10 version, and is launched by pressing Windows key+Shift+S. This is the same shortcut that currently opens the 'Snip & Sketch' tool in Windows 10. Snip & Sketch will not be part of Windows 11.

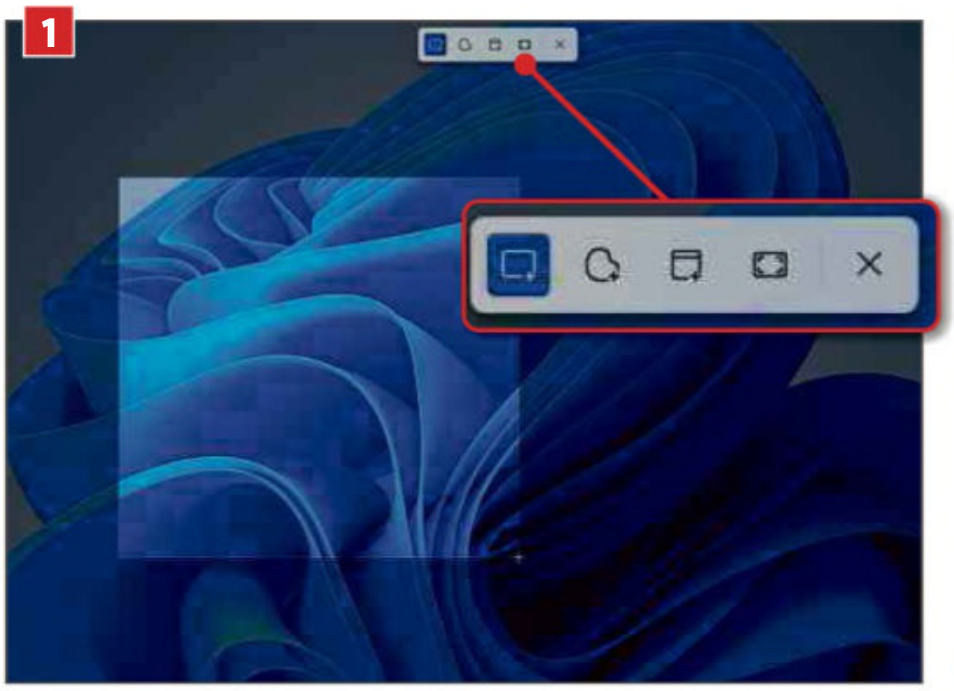
The shortcut brings up a menu with the options Rectangular Snip, Freeform Snip, Windows Snip and Fullscreen Snip (left to right in screenshot 1 above). Microsoft claims these options will make capturing screenshots "super easy". It also has tools for editing your screenshots, including annotations and cropping.

The main tweaks to the Mail and Calendar tools are rounded corners, to match the overall design of Windows 11, but there are bigger changes to Calculator, which Microsoft claims will make it the perfect way to "manage your finances, plot, and analyze equations on a graph, and evaluate algebra, trigonometry, and complex math expressions".

It will let you plot one or more equations on a graph mode and then analyze it to identify key features. You'll also be able to convert between more than 100 different units and currencies.

Finally, all four tools work in dark mode (see the Calculator tool in screenshot 2). This can be set to match your mode across the whole of Windows 11, or on a per-tool basis.

Meanwhile, Intel has released its first Bluetooth and Wi-Fi driver updates for Windows 11, available to download from its Driver & Support Assistant tool (www.snipca.com/39180). Both Intel and rival Nvidia have already released graphics driver updates for Windows 11.



WHAT WE THINK

You don't have to take as many screenshots as us (there were 118 in Issue 612) to appreciate that Windows badly needed a fresh tool for the job. The new-look Snipping Tool seems to be just that. Taking the keyboard shortcut from 'Snip & Sketch' is a great idea, while the four 'Snip' options keep things simple. It's also welcome that there'll be just one screenshot tool. Too often Microsoft has confused users by offering several tools that do similar things. We'll let you know what else is announced before launch.

WINDOWS 11 'TO DELAY CHROMEBOOKS'

Manufacturers are beginning to prioritise Windows 11 laptops above Chromebooks, industry analysts have said.

Market research firm IDC said production of Chromebooks will fall because manufacturers make higher profits on Windows machines, which tend to be much more expensive.

IDC claims the global shortage of processors will make the move away from Chromebooks faster than it otherwise would've been. With fewer chips available, manufacturers will have to be far choosier about the machines they make.

Some industry bosses now expect the shortage to continue until 2023, as supplies remain hit by fresh waves of Covid-19 in Taiwan and Malaysia, home to some of the world's biggest processor plants.

Lenovo, the world's biggest computer manufacturer, said last autumn that it could have increased production by 30 to 40 per cent had it not been for a lack of processors.

You'll like this...
Parents can now remove images of their kids from Google (www.snipca.com/39182)

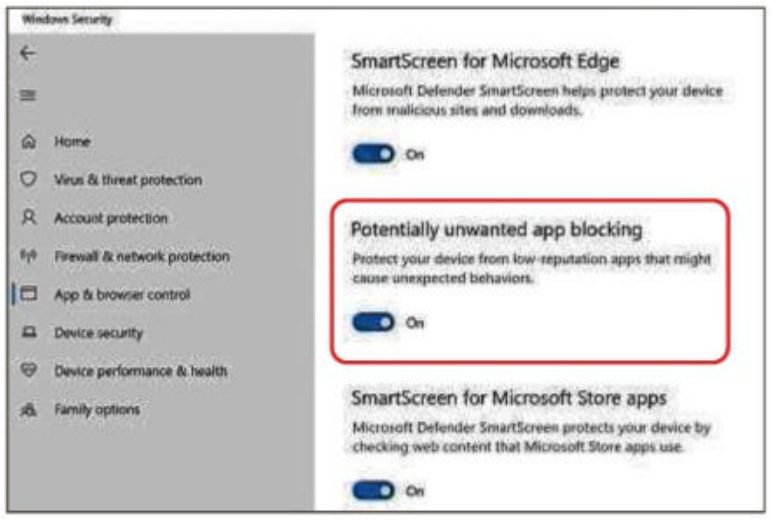
but not this...
PayPal "restricted account" scams are on the rise (www.snipca.com/39181)

Microsoft Defender now blocks unwanted software by default

Microsoft has updated Defender so it now blocks unwanted software by default. This option was introduced in the Windows 10 May 2020 Feature update (version 2004), but until now you've had to turn it on for it to work.

Once activated, it will prevent what Microsoft calls "potentially unwanted applications" (PUAs) from being installed on your computer. These aren't classified as malware, but as "software that can cause your device to run slowly, display unexpected ads, or at worst, install other software which may be more harmful or annoying".

The description covers many of the tools we expose in our 'Named & Shamed' section (page 21). They can include software that gathers your data without permission, antivirus programs that use false positives to exaggerate the risk you face, and tools that don't do what they claim to, or make key features available only when you pay.



Microsoft explains what it means by "unwanted software" at www.snipca.com/39079. It includes programs that make "misleading or inaccurate claims about files, registry entries, or other items on your device", and show "confusing or misleading prompts or pop-ups when you try to uninstall it".

To check the protection has been turned on, open Settings (press Windows key+I), then click 'Update & Security' followed by Windows Security on the left, then 'App & browser control' in the middle.

Next, click the 'Reputation-based protection settings' link then look at the slider below 'Potentially unwanted app blocking' (see screenshot). If it's blue, then the setting has been switched on (Microsoft gives these instructions at www.snipca.com/39078).

Send private items on WhatsApp that can be seen just once

WhatsApp now lets you send photos and videos that disappear from the chat after they've been opened by the recipient, making it safer to send sensitive information such as passwords.

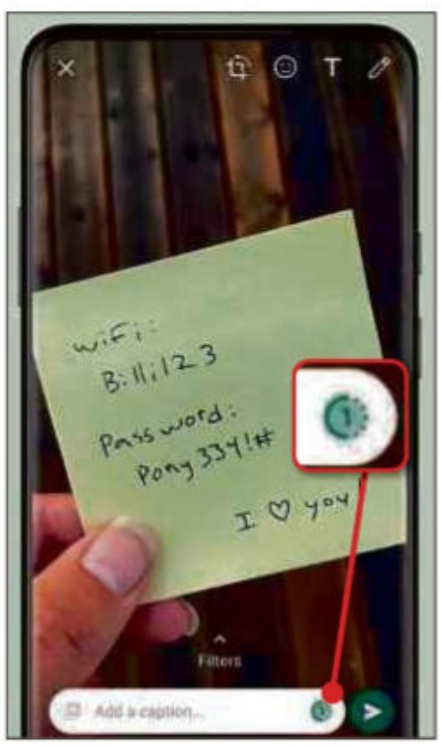
The new 'View Once' feature means sent items won't be saved to the recipient's Photos or Gallery folder, so can never be seen again, nor forwarded to anyone else. If not opened within 14 days, the sent items will be removed from the chat.

However, recipients are able to take a screenshot or screen recording of the content before it disappears, and you won't be notified if this happens. They're also able to take a photo or video of the information with a camera. As a result, WhatsApp warns users to send sensitive information only to "trusted individuals".

After the item has been opened, it will be marked with an 'Opened' label so you know it has been seen – though the recipient will need to have the 'Read receipts' option switched on.

In its blog (www.snipca.com/39102), WhatsApp uses the example of sending a Wi-Fi password. Once you're in a chat, take a photo or video then tap the 1 icon at the bottom (see screenshot).

'View Once' differs from WhatsApp's Disappearing Messages feature (www.snipca.com/39104), launched earlier this year, which makes messages vanish within seven days of being opened.



IN BRIEF

MORE ENGLISH COUNTIES GET GIGABIT

Kent, Lancashire and Wiltshire are among 26 English counties to be named by the Government in the next phase of its Project Gigabit plan to deliver 1Gbps to "hard-to-reach areas". Ministers say this latest stage will span 1.85m premises in locations that wouldn't otherwise be covered by broadband providers. More areas across all four nations will be announced later this year. Read more on GOV.UK: www.snipca.com/39101.

MoD PAYS 'ETHICAL HACKERS' TO FIND FLAWS

The Ministry of Defence has for the first time paid "ethical hackers" to find and fix security flaws in the UK's cyber-defence systems. It worked with the US company HackerOne in a 30-day 'Bug Bounty' programme, claiming such work will help to ensure "that lives and livelihoods are protected from those who may wish to do us harm". Read more at www.snipca.com/39105.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

Built by Oregon State University, Cassie has become the first robot to run five kilometres, having taught itself to stay upright using 'deep reinforcement learning'. Actually, make that *mostly* upright. Its run took 53 minutes, but that included six minutes of recovery after it had fallen over twice. Watch it at www.snipca.com/39066.

IN BRIEF

SONOS TO DEVELOP ITS OWN ASSISTANT

US audio firm Sonos seems to be developing its own voice assistant for the company's range of multi-room smart speakers. Sonos speakers already support voice commands via Alexa and Google Assistant, but according to an email sent to select customers (and posted by a Reddit contributor at www.snipca.com/39159), Sonos's version will be quicker, easier and more private.

GOVT SPENDS BILLIONS ON OLD IT SYSTEMS

A Cabinet Office report has found that the UK Government spends £2.3bn a year maintaining old computer systems, some of which date back 30 years. The amount accounts for just under half the Government's total IT spend. The report also revealed that the spending could spiral to £22bn over the next five years. Read the full report at www.snipca.com/39165.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

This is Amazon's new Smart Soap Dispenser (pictured), which, via Alexa, can "play songs, jokes, and more when you wash". It also counts to 20, because apparently we're incapable of doing this ourselves. For these 'benefits', you have to pay just $55 on Amazon US: www.snipca.com/39100.

Three random words safer than 'complex' passwords

When choosing a new password, it's best to avoid those comprising random characters and instead create one that's made up of three random words. That's according to the latest advice from experts at the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), part of the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ).

The NCSC says such three-word passwords not only contain a sufficiently unusual combination of letters, but are also much easier to remember compared to a random series of characters.

The government agency said that techniques people use to add special characters to passwords in an effort to increase their complexity (such as replacing the letter 'O' with zeros and adding exclamation marks) are often flawed. Attackers are aware of such techniques and use algorithms to spot them. The NCSC also criticised websites that enforce the use of special characters within passwords, highlighting that people simply fall back on variations of passwords they've previously used, making them less secure.

NCSC technical director Dr Ian Levy said: "Traditional password advice telling us to remember multiple complex passwords is simply daft. There are several good reasons why we decided on the three random words approach – not least because they create passwords which are both strong and easier to remember.

"By following this advice, people will be much less vulnerable to cyber criminals, and I'd encourage people to think about the passwords they use on their important accounts, and consider a password manager."

If you don't yet use a password manager for your online accounts, we recommend Bitwarden (www.bitwarden.com).

This free service lets you create and share unlimited passwords across all your devices.

How do you keep your passwords secure? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Edge to get 'Super Duper Security Mode'

Microsoft is working on a new feature for Edge that aims to make the browser more secure. Among other things, the Super Duper Security Mode disables the Just-In-Time Compilation (JIT) feature that currently exists in Edge.

JIT has been used by browsers since 2008 and speeds up websites that use JavaScript. However, Microsoft says the complexity and age of JIT means it contains a lot of bugs, which are often manipulated by hackers to snoop on what you're up to online. Microsoft says that although disabling JIT can slow down websites, most users won't see any noticeable drop in performance.

In a blog post (www.snipca.com/39178), Microsoft attempts to justify the feature's bizarre name, saying "...we think it is funny, and it is a bit too early for something official.

Super Duper Security Mode is currently available only in the Beta version of Edge and there's no word on when it will be released in the full version that comes with Windows 10 (we hope Microsoft manages to come up with a more suitable name by then).

TRY EDGE'S NEW SECURITY MODE

To test the new security mode, first install the beta version of Edge from www.snipca.com/39179. Launch the browser, then type edge:\\flags in the address bar. Type super duper in the search box, click the box next to the mode, then select Enabled and restart your browser.

Judge blocks anti-5G case against Government

A High Court judge has blocked a legal attempt to stop 5G masts being built across the UK.

The case, led by human-rights lawyer Michael Mansfield QC, was brought by Action Against 5G (https://actionagainst5g.org), which claims it's "supported by many people nationwide from all walks of life including doctors and scientists".

The site lists several "health risks" it claims are exacerbated by radiation from 5G, including damage to nervous systems, DNA mutation leading to cancer, and "increased levels of spontaneous abortion".

Its case accused the Government of pushing through 5G plans without an "adequate and proper consideration undertaken by the relevant safeguarding authorities of the creation of those man-made public health risks".

However, most scientists believe 5G poses no greater risk to health than other wireless technologies. In its defence the Government cited advice from the World Health Organization and Public Health England that 5G is safe.

Mrs Justice Foster dismissed the case, saying: "The real issue is that the claimants disagree with a large body of international opinion as to the safety of 5G [and the technical advice received] does not support the claimants' concerns".

She added that the Government's response set out a "rational, scientifically based view that there is nothing fundamentally different about the physical

characteristics of the radio signals produced by 5G compared to those produced by 3G and 4G".

The judge also agreed with the Government's view that the case was "out of time", which means it was brought too late because networks had started rolling out their 5G networks in 2019, two years after the Government published its strategy for the technology.

Action Against 5G responded by lodging a Renewal Notice seeking permission for a hearing, and hopes to raise more money online to fund the case. It had previously crowdfunded £162,000 to bring the legal action.

Apple pulls 'dating app for the unvaccinated'

Apple has removed a social and dating app for people who haven't had the Covid-19 vaccine for violating its policies on covering the pandemic.

Unjected, founded by two women from Hawaii, calls itself a community for "like-minded people that support medical autonomy and free speech". One of its features was a social feed where people gave reasons why they weren't getting the vaccine.

Apple told the app's owners that it "inappropriately refers to the Covid-19 pandemic in its concept or theme". The company says it will allow information on the disease to come only from "recognised sources, which includes governments, 'deeply credentialed' companies as well as non-government organisations focused on health".

Unjected's founders had asked members not to use words like 'jabbed' and 'vaccine' in order to avoid the app being detected and taken down by Apple. However, Apple warned the app not to "cheat the system" or it would be removed.

The app was launched in May with a slogan aiming it at people who'd "literally prefer to date a badger" than someone who has been vaccinated (www.snipca.com/39067, pictured). Its creators claim it had been downloaded 18,000 times before it was deleted.

Co-founder and photographer Shelby Thomson, 27, said her app was being "censored" unfairly by the major tech firms.

She told the *New York Post*: "We're being mislabelled as this anti-vax community, which is so not the case. We're just not pro-mandatory vaccination. It just should be a choice".

IN BRIEF

COPPER TURNED OFF IN 86 MORE AREAS

Openreach has named the next 86 areas to have their copper phone lines replaced by internet-based services such as VoIP. To see the new locations, plus all the previous 294 announced, click the green 'here' link at www.snipca.com/39071. In the spreadsheet that downloads, the new areas are numbered from 298 (Aberdare) on. Copper will only be turned off when 75 per cent of premises in an area can get full-fibre broadband.

RECYCLE YOUR OLD RASPBERRY PI

You can send your old Raspberry Pi computers to be refurbished and get a voucher in return. The scheme is being run by OKdo, a tech site that sells new mini computers such as the Pi. For each Pi 3B (pictured), Pi 3B+ or Pi 4 you return, you'll get £10 to spend on the store (www.okdo.com). For full details visit www.snipca.com/39065.

OLD ANDROID DEVICES LOSE GOOGLE TOOLS

Google will soon prevent users signing into its services on Android devices that run version 2.3.7 of the system, which was released 10 years ago. Trying to log into services like Gmail, Maps and YouTube after 27 September will produce "username or password errors", though you'll still be able to sign in online. Google advises users to update their device to Android 3.0. For more information visit www.snipca.com/39064.

Question of the Fortnight

Have Amazon's delivery drones been grounded?

It's neither a bird nor a plane, but a failed flight of fancy

Lockdown could've been the making of Amazon's drones. When company founder Jeff Bezos revealed in 2013 his vision of flying items to customers, some experts thought it could become reality by the end of the decade. Successful trials in 2016 in Cambridge suggested all was going well, and accompanying YouTube videos were watched millions of times.

But we've heard little since then. The videos were removed, the marketing hype stopped, and there haven't been any further public tests. Plans to build beehive-like headquarters for drones (pictured at www.snipca.com/39132) came to nothing. Instead of having vital items flown into their gardens during lockdown, customers relied on van deliveries. Nothing futuristic or revolutionary about them.

So what's gone wrong? Early critics of the idea said the UK's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) would never approve Amazon's drones, but they granted permission for trials. Instead, the problems seem to be chronic mismanagement of the company's Prime Air division, based in Cambridge. In August, speaking to *Wired* magazine, former employees spoke of "organised chaos" at the company, with managers lacking the technical knowledge to answer simple questions about the project.

Things deteriorated to the point where 100 Prime Air workers lost their jobs, while dozens of others were moved to roles abroad. Insiders say the main problem was a high turnover of staff, with some complaining they had three managers within one month. Those leaving were called "rats off a sinking ship".

Companies can survive such periods of upheaval, but not when they're trying to do something as challenging and radical as reinvent home deliveries. Rival drone companies were testing how to drop items by parachute, but Amazon wanted drones like the one pictured above to perform the more difficult task of landing outside homes and safely dropping items from just above the ground.

Prime Air struggled to get this to work without increasing the drone's weight above the threshold authorities use to classify a drone. This higher weight category meant engineers had to meet tougher regulations to avoid collisions with people on the ground.

None of this was possible when you had management giving staff conflicting tasks, and doubling their workload with little explanation. Perhaps ultimately the project was just too ambitious. One source described it as a "gigantic oversell – just so many promises that can't be kept".

Prime Air seemed to be on track as recently as last September, when the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) gave Amazon in the US permission to fly drones "beyond the line of sight" of the person operating them. A year earlier the company had unveiled a new design in Las Vegas in 2019 (pictured below left), which was expected to be tested also in the UK.

But that permission granted by the FAA had been given in the UK by the CAA back in 2016, and there's been no major breakthrough in the five years since. Experts doubt whether what's failed to take off in the UK will ever take flight in the US.

Prime Air's site is still live (www.snipca.com/39131), with videos and the promise that it "has great potential to enhance the services we already provide". Amazon responded to *Wired*'s story by insisting that it remains "committed" to the project, on which "hundreds of talented engineers, research scientists, and technology experts" still work.

Yet there's a sharp irony that while Jeff Bezos fulfills his childhood dream of flying to space, his drones remain earthbound. He's already boldly gone far beyond where they will.

THE FACTS

- Around 100 people have reportedly been made redundant from Amazon's Cambridge-based Prime Air
- The company has tested flying drones to deliver items to nearby homes
- Amazon says it's still "committed" to Prime Air, and will continue to develop drones in the UK

Amazon unveiled a new drone design in Las Vegas two years ago

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

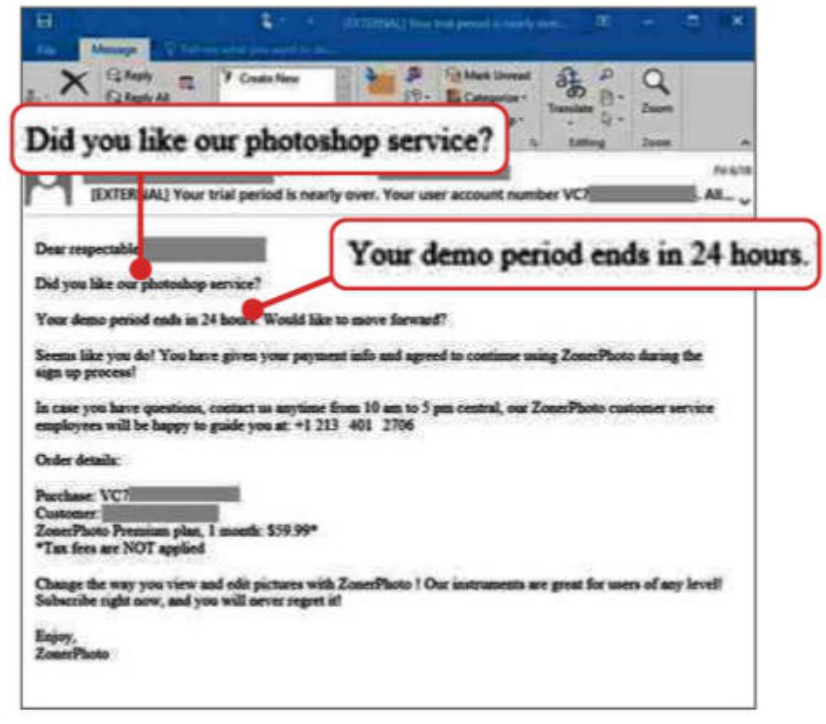
Ransomware from call centres

What is it?

Scammers are sending emails to Office 365 and Microsoft 365 users in an attempt to trick them into phoning a help centre, which is staffed by hackers who try to install ransomware on their computers.

Microsoft says the scam begins with an email that claims your free trial to a service is about to end, and your credit card will soon be charged for the full amount. Each "wave" of the scam mentions a different subscription in the email. Previous examples include a photo-editing service, or membership of a cooking and recipes website. A more recent version has a message confirming your receipt for a software purchase.

What makes this scam different to typical phishing attacks is that it tries to scare you into phoning a number, rather than click a link or download an attachment. Calling the number takes you to a scammer who says they can help you cancel the supposed subscription or transaction. They ask you to visit a website that looks like a genuine business and download an Excel file from the account page. Doing so infects your computer with the BazaLoader malware, allowing the scammer full control of your computer.



How can you stay safe?

First, read Microsoft's highly detailed blog post: www.snipca.com/39062. It contains examples of the emails sent – including one for 'photoshop' (see screenshot) – and the subject lines (for example, 'Your subscription will be changed to the gold membership, as the trial is ending').

For now this attack is aimed at Office 365 and Microsoft 365 users, but there's no reason why it won't spread beyond this. If you receive a suspicious email referring to a subscription ending, ring the company to check whether it's genuine. Don't call the number contained in the email though: instead, visit the company's site and look for the number in the 'Contact Us' pages.

New tools | Microsoft Edge's Password Health dashboard

When we poor humans need a quick health check, we have to drag our aching bones to the GP's surgery (Covid permitting). Happily, it's much easier to check the health of the passwords you use in Edge, thanks to a new tool Microsoft added in late July.

Click the top-right menu button (three dots), then Settings, followed by Profiles on the left. Next, in the middle, click Passwords and scroll down a little to see your 'Saved passwords' alphabetically listed by the site they sign you into. The passwords themselves appear as black dots until you reveal them by clicking the eye icon and typing your Windows password.

If the blue 'Show health' slider is switched on (1 in our screenshot), you'll see black dashes 2 next to every password (one dash is bad, two is OK, three is good). Hover over the dashes and you'll get a short report about the password's 'health', including whether it's being reused across other sites. There's one thing worse than a single dash, and that's an exclamation mark. This means the password has been leaked online. To change or delete any unsafe password, click the three horizontal dots at the far right.

ScamWatch
Readers warn readers

Tempted by China Bitcoin offer

I received an email about the Chinese government issuing its own version of Bitcoin, with a special opening offer (available only on that day) to subscribe at the opening rate which – it promised – would almost certainly show clear profit within a year. Like a fool I thought this too good to miss and felt I could afford to risk a small investment. However, I went to use my credit card and the transaction was declined by my bank, saving me some embarrassment. I can't believe I was taken in by this scam. I now learn that China wants to ban Bitcoin.

Charles Heyworth

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

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

I 'wait and see' with Windows upgrades

The advice in Issue 612's Cover Feature ('Make Windows 10 Last Longer', pictured) will help me keep the operating system running smoothly.

However, I'll still adopt the strategy I've used when previous versions have been released. This is to wait 12 to 18 months after a system has launched, read all the reviews, shake my head at the early problems, then choose whether upgrading is the right decision.

If it is, I'll know by then how to avoid most of the problems that always come with a new system.

This 'wait and see' approach has served me well in the past. It's meant I avoided the disasters of Windows Vista and Windows 8. I skipped both of these, stayed on XP and 7 (respectively), then several years later made a more informed choice to upgrade.

John Crossley

No more Windows 10 updates? Doesn't bother me!

Thanks for some interesting reading recently on the upcoming Windows 11.

For me, the most significant information was in Issue 611's 'Question of the Fortnight' ('Why is the next Windows 10 update so small?'), where you tell us that support for Windows 10 is expected to continue until October 2025. So that's my mind made up. I'm quite happy with Windows 10 and I don't care if there are no more feature updates because what I already have does everything I need.

I can see no possible advantage in upgrading, and several disadvantages, such as it causing problems, and it seems reasonable to expect it will have teething troubles. I'm still using some programs from previous operating systems (theoretically unsafe, I know, but they work fine).

I have quite a few peripherals (printer, scanner etc) that depend on drivers to function. These might work with Windows 11, but what if they don't?

Maurice Moriarty

I don't need facial or fingerprint logins

I would suggest that many users like myself are concerned about Microsoft's arrogance in trying to force its users to take actions that are both expensive and possibly not what they need. For instance, the insistence on Trusted Platform Module (TPM) for Windows 11 so it can push through facial or fingerprint recognition for logging in. This has no place for people like myself who are single users with no intention of sharing their computers with other people. I'd bet there are many people who just want to switch on and go with minimal or no login procedures forced upon them by Microsoft.

Why can't Microsoft ask some simple questions when you install Windows, giving users the opportunity to set their systems up how they want?

Brian Adams

Why are my fellow readers scared of change?

In every issue I read letters complaining about change – people don't like upgrades to Windows, smartphones, the latest gadgets and so on. What happened to the spirit with which readers took to computers in the first place? I grew up in the age of the ZX81 and the BBC Micro, which were revolutionary. They were the iPhone of their day. I loved trying out new things then, and still do now. I suspect the vast majority of your readers felt likewise when they were young, so what happened to their curiosity?

I read magazines precisely so I can keep up with developments in hardware and software, just as I did in the early 1980s when I used to type the code printed in magazines and order software cassette tapes from advertisers.

For better or worse, there are going to be massive changes in the next few years and I'm determined to be an early adopter of many new technologies, come what may. That's the spirit with which I took to computing back then and I don't see my advancing years as any reason to resist progress.

Rob Sedgwick

Give us codes by email – not phone!

Being forced to verify your identity via a code sent to your phone is getting excessive now. In recent weeks, PayPal, Amazon and even Tesco have forced me to verify a transaction using this method, so much so that I make sure my phone is charged as much as possible.

On one occasion, my phone was in another room and as flat as a pancake. I had to turn it on just to complete a Tesco shop.

What's the Issue...?

I believe you once explained how to take and edit screengrabs, such as by removing text and images. I think it was within the past two years.

Alan Smith

CA SAYS **Yes, at the end of 2020, in Issue 594 (pages 35-37). Your laptop must have 2GB memory.**

About two months ago you mentioned a Samsung phone that was £140, but I can't remember the model number. Can you help?

Graham Swain

CA SAYS **We think you mean the Samsung Galaxy A21s, which was our alternative to the Doro 8050 (Issue 609, page 26). When we last checked it was £147 on Amazon: www.snipca.com/39124.**

Am I right in thinking that you recently published an article on how to convert an old laptop into a Chromebook?

Norman Clark

Also, I'm fed up with some companies only allowing verification via mobile phone. I confess the following is partly my fault, but apparently my Twitter and PayPal accounts had an obsolete phone number attached to them. They decided I had to verify my identity one day, but as the code was sent to an old number, I obviously didn't receive it. This had me locked out of PayPal and Twitter for weeks, meaning I had to contact them to restore my accounts.

I'll refrain from letting my anger regress into insults, but isn't it about time that companies allowed verification via means other than codes? What would be wrong with verification via email?

Stephen Parry

Firefox's themes make it my favourite browser

I really enjoyed Issue 611's Cover Feature on browsers, and made some adjustments after reading it. I have Chrome, Brave, Edge and Firefox on my laptop and PC.

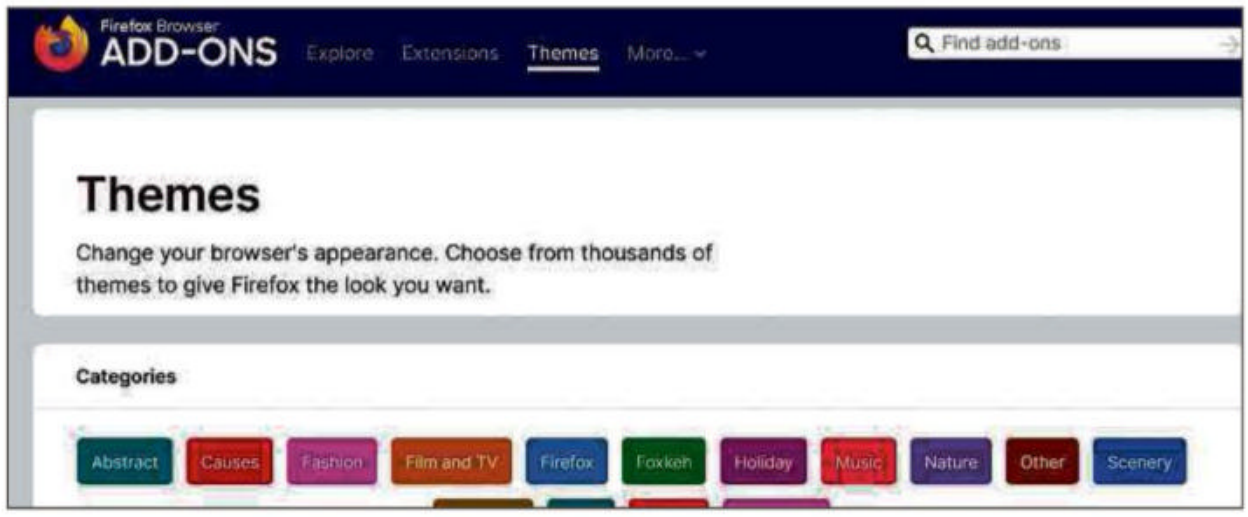
I have to say Firefox is my favourite, mainly because I can add a theme to it (see the collection at www.snipca.com/39125, pictured below). In spring I have a spring theme, at Christmas I have a Christmas theme, and so on. It's not essential I know, but pleasing anyway.

I can't be a minimalist because I like having the Menu Bar in Firefox. It enables me to see my Favourites easily – and believe me, I have a *lot* of Favourites, all neatly filed in folders.

I tend to use Brave when trying to avoid adverts on YouTube. It doesn't always work, though it still blocks more adverts than the other browsers.

As for Chrome, I tend to use that only when I'm casting to my TV. Edge I hardly use at all, though it is better than the first version of the browser, which was awful.

Lynn Sharpe



STAR LETTER

Yes, video chats during lockdown made me feel worse

Question of the Fortnight
Did video chats make people feel lonelier during lockdown?

I almost shed a tear reading your 'Question of the Fortnight' in Issue 612 ('Did video chats make people feel lonelier during lockdown?'). It rang true to my experience. I live alone, so was fearful when the first lockdown began. But my children reassured me that staying in touch on video chats would ease my loneliness.

The sad truth is that video chats just made me feel worse. I'm a 'hands-on' grandmother who used to look after the grandchildren three times a week. That life-affirming contact plummeted to zero, and no amount of video calls could compensate. Perhaps the most upsetting aspect is that I couldn't be honest with my family. I told them that video chats were keeping my spirits up, but those were white lies (I've used a false name to avoid hurting them). I wept after ending each chat.

The funny thing is, I don't think phoning (rather than video chats) would've had the same distressing impact. There's something more immediate about video chats that makes everything feel more emotional. But there was such pressure during lockdown to use video chats that I felt bad to raise objections. I'm glad the research you reported on has exposed some of the negative effects of relying on video.

I totally agree with its conclusion that during future lockdowns – and I fear we will have more – authorities *must* find a safe way for families to meet.

Audrey Johnson

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

I agree – Brave is brilliant

Back in Issue 599 you published my email accusing you of anti-Google bias following Issue 597's 'Stop Using Google' feature. Having seen Issue 611's 'Stop Using Chrome & Edge' cover, I thought I'd be writing to complain again, but I tried the Brave browser you recommend and, much to my surprise, was bowled over by its effectiveness.

It works absolutely superbly with YouTube. I'd almost succumbed to paying Google to remove the ads, and am so glad I didn't because Brave really cuts out all those annoying interruptions.

I also found that all of Google's apps work fine in Brave, so I'll probably switch – though I'll continue with both for a while just in case. So at long last I seem to agree with you!

Mervyn Thomas

I'd prefer to avoid 'pre'

I've no objection to Bob Nickson (Letters, Issue 611) making a distinction between software that has been installed by the computer's manufacturer and that installed by the user, but using 'pre' isn't the way to do it. This prefix is widely used to indicate a time before, as in pre-historic and pre-war, and is unsuited to indicate something that's already happened. Had computer software been available in my youth, the term 'ready-installed' would have been used, which is easy to understand and unambiguous. I recommend its adoption as standard.

Kenneth Vines

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights

Does PayPal's Buyer Protection still apply?

LEAD CASE

Q You often mention that eBay buyers can get refunds through PayPal's Buyer Protection, but has this been affected by eBay no longer giving sellers money through PayPal?

Stephen Baker

A The short answer is, no, it hasn't been affected – at least for now. Buyers will be able to use PayPal to pay for goods, and receive protection, until July 2023 (as Keith Seed does – see case opposite). What's changed is that eBay has stopped placing payments in sellers' PayPal accounts. Instead, they'll go straight into their bank accounts.

Selling fees are now automatically deducted from earnings at the time of sale, regardless of how the buyer pays. There are no PayPal fees now, only eBay's flat rate of 12.8 per cent of the total sale, plus a fixed fee of 30p, for all sales under £2,500. The old system was 10 per cent to eBay, plus PayPal's fees, plus 30p.

EBay claims these changes make transactions easier to carry out, and gives buyers more payment options, including Apple Pay and Google Pay, as well as credit and debit cards. However, neither Apple Pay nor Google Pay provide buyer protection, while protection offered by debit cards mostly covers fraud, not the kind of blanket protection offered by PayPal. You can of course use Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act for items over £100.

For sellers, the new system is like direct debit in that they'd have to talk to their bank to challenge any chargeback or unauthorised payment taken by eBay. But for both buyers and sellers there's the last resort: the Financial Ombudsman Services can overrule a bank's decision (www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk).

EBay's decision has angered many buyers and sellers, but it's too early to know whether substantial numbers will cancel their account and move to rival sites.

CASE CLOSED

Can I dump BT landline if I'm with TalkTalk?

Q I have my broadband with TalkTalk, which includes landline calls. Yet at the same time I'm paying BT £20.54 per month for a landline. Do I need to keep this BT service?

D Buckingham

A Mr Buckingham does need to keep a landline because TalkTalk uses Openreach's network to provide broadband – and this network also supplies the landline. However, he doesn't need to stick with BT's landline offer. Instead, we've suggested he save money by switching to a TalkTalk deal that includes line rental. He can compare deals at www.snipca.com/39056, though he'll probably get a better deal negotiating directly on 0345 172 0088.

He's had a landline agreement with BT for several years, so it's unlikely he'll have to pay an early-termination fee, and he'll probably be able to keep his current number. TalkTalk will do all the work to process the switch, so he shouldn't need to contact BT.

CASE CLOSED

CASE UPDATE

Virgin waives cancellation fee after reader moves house

Virgin Media has agreed to waive reader Donald MacLeod's early-termination fee after he explained to the company that health problems had forced him to move house and cancel his contract.

As we reported in Issue 611, Donald thought that because Virgin wasn't available at his new address he could cancel without a fee, but this isn't the case. There's no legal requirement for a company to offer your existing service at your new home. Donald sadly didn't have a valid reason to cancel without a fee, such as Virgin raising his monthly contract above the RPI rate of inflation.

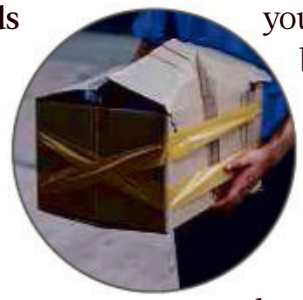
When he emailed us, the amount he owed Virgin had risen to £289.50, and he was being chased by a debt-collection agency. Virgin told us that it had added a month's usage (£49.50) on to his termination bill of £240.

We hoped Virgin would call off the debt-collection agency and work on a payment plan with Donald, but it went one better by ditching the £240 fee as a goodwill gesture, leaving him to pay the £49.50 for using the service until he cancelled, which he agrees is fair.

What does 'not as described' really mean?

Q **You often mention goods being inherently faulty and covered by the Consumer Rights Act (CRA). But sometimes you use phrases such as 'not fit for purpose', 'not as described' and 'not of satisfactory quality'. What do you mean by these and do they count as inherent faults?**

Jennifer Ward



A That's a good question, so we're happy to clarify. An inherent fault is one that existed before you bought it. This could be because of a fundamental design flaw, or a fault at the manufacturing stage – or even if it was damaged while being delivered to you.

However, the CRA also has a broader remit, covering goods that *do* work (and so can't be called faulty), but don't meet specific standards. Goods that aren't fit for purpose can't perform some tasks they're meant to, or *can* perform all tasks but only to a limited extent. They're typically slow, hard to use or simply ineffective.

Items that aren't as described don't have the features mentioned in the product description or advert, or aren't compatible with the devices and system they claim to be. Again, this doesn't mean the item is actually faulty.

The third term, 'not of satisfactory quality', generally refers to how durable an item is – ie, how well made it is and how long you'd expect it to last. Bargain-basement goods aren't expected to last as long as full-price items.

We consider all these when reviewing a reader's case to see which provides the best chance of success.

CASE CLOSED

Must I pay to return faulty goods?

Q **On eBay a couple of months ago I bought some hand secateurs for £7.50 through PayPal, with a three-year warranty. Soon after, one of the parts that adjusts the cutting width fell out and was lost. The seller has agreed to replace the secateurs, but asked me to pay to return them. Can they do that?**

Keith Seed

A Yes they can, but only with the condition that they promise to refund this delivery cost. Keith is entitled to this because the seller has accepted that the secateurs are faulty.

Had the seller not accepted this, it could have withheld this refund until it had examined the secateurs. If it had concluded that the secateurs *weren't* faulty, it wouldn't have had to refund Keith. Indeed, it could have asked him to pay to have the item returned to him.

We've advised Keith to email the seller with this information, just to remind them that they must add the refund for postage to the overall refund. If he has problems, he should raise a case through PayPal's Buyer Protection (www.snipca.com/39049). Alternatively, he could avoid the issue entirely by using PayPal's offer to cover up to £15 of return postage costs per year (www.snipca.com/39050).

On another note, we've found that the warranty is provided by the manufacturer, not the seller. He'll have to contact the former, therefore, if he wishes to cite the warranty when making a complaint.

CASE CLOSED

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Thanks Carphone Warehouse for our new phone

My wife and I each had a Doro 6520 phone on the EE network, with a signal booster so we could get a signal without having to go outside. When the booster died, I rang EE and was informed that I had two options: get a better phone or look on eBay for a booster.

Instead we went to Carphone Warehouse for advice and maybe buy some new phones. A woman there called Georgia explained our options, and we ended up with Oppo A53 phones on the iD network. She also showed how we could keep our existing numbers, explaining the techy bits in language we could understand. She has infinite patience!

We get a good signal in our house and are wondering why we didn't update years ago. To my mind Carphone Warehouse and Georgia in particular went above and beyond to make sure we were happy.

Terry Steels

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

Carphone Warehouse

Contact
Carphone Warehouse

- **Email and live chat**
  www.snipca.com/39057
- **Phone** 0370 111 6565

Grow Your Family Tree

If your great-uncle Matthew Davies became David Matthews, you'll struggle to track him down. Follow **Nick Peers**' advice to…

Find ancestors who changed their name

Did any of your ancestors change their name? It might explain why you can trace a person back only so far, or that they seem to disappear after a certain period. That's what Mike Stranks discovered when tracing his wife's father who married under the name Robert McMurray, but who doesn't appear in any records before 1935.

When Robert was alive, he spoke of his childhood at a house in Banff, Aberdeenshire, which Mike was able to find on the 1911 census. Here he found that Robert Maxtone was living at the property, and was the same age that Robert McMurray would have been. Further research revealed they shared the same birthday (15 September, 1895), as well as other common points of reference, including their father's first name. Mike wanted to know if he could obtain proof that Robert Maxtone and Robert McMurray were one and the same.

Check name changes recorded in *London Gazette*

We recommend that Mike reads the National Archives' excellent guide to the history of name changes in the UK (www.snipca.com/38937). This reveals that many people never officially registered their name change, and of those, fewer than one per cent paid to make a permanent record.

Download a copy of an ancestor's name change that was announced in *The London Gazette*

While these records held at the National Archives haven't been digitised or placed online, all registered name changes after 1914 have been reported in the *London Gazette*, and these *are* available to read and download for free. Mike believed Robert changed his surname in the mid-1930s, so if he had registered a change via deed poll, it would appear here.

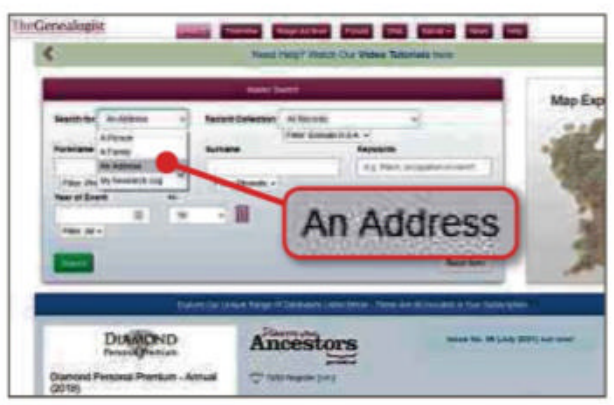
To check, visit the site's All Notices section (www.thegazette.co.uk/all-notices) and type your ancestor's old or new surname followed by change of name into the 'Text search' box on the left – for example, Maxtone change of name. Click 'Update results' above this to carry out the search. If too many results are returned, scroll down and expand the 'Publication date' section to reveal 'From' and 'To' boxes allowing you to narrow your search to a specific period.

If any results are found, click the result's title to view the original entry in the *Gazette*, which lists the full text of the deed poll including the date of the name change. If it's a match, click 'Download complete PDF' to the right of the image (see screenshot above left).

Search by address

A search of the *Gazette* for both 'Robert McMurray' and 'Robert Maxtone' revealed no results, but Mike's detective work is so thorough we're confident he has the right man.

If you know where someone lived at a certain time, try searching for records that may reveal their presence under an alias. You can track down records by street name on the 1841-1911 censuses and 1939 Register using The Genealogist's Master Search tool. Sign in at www.thegenealogist.co.uk/subscription, then at the top of the page select 'An address' under 'Search for' (see screenshot below). Ancestry users can enter a place name into the Keyword field at www.ancestry.co.uk/search.



Search for addresses at The Genealogist to find where your ancestors lived

Your **Genealogy** Problems Solved

Eleven years ago I bought Family Tree Maker (FTM) 2010, but I've only recently started using it. Long story short, I can't get it to run on my new Windows 10 PC, only on my old Windows 7 machine. Must I pay £80 to buy the 2019 version of FTM, or can I transfer the 85 people in my tree elsewhere?

John Leeson

If you export your FTM file in the GEDCOM format, you should be able to transfer it to any other family history program. FTM 2019 and RootsMagic (£19.95 from www.rootsmagic.co.uk) both work with Ancestry. Alternatively, try the downloadable program MyFamilyTree (free from www.snipca.com/38932) if you don't need an online tool.

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

Next issue: Create a visual timeline of your family history

AOC
GAMING

#1

GAMING MONITOR BRAND*
IN THE WORLD

Available at: amazon laptopsdirect BOX

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

Best Free Software

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

EMAIL CLIENT

Thunderbird 91

www.thunderbird.net

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1 or 10

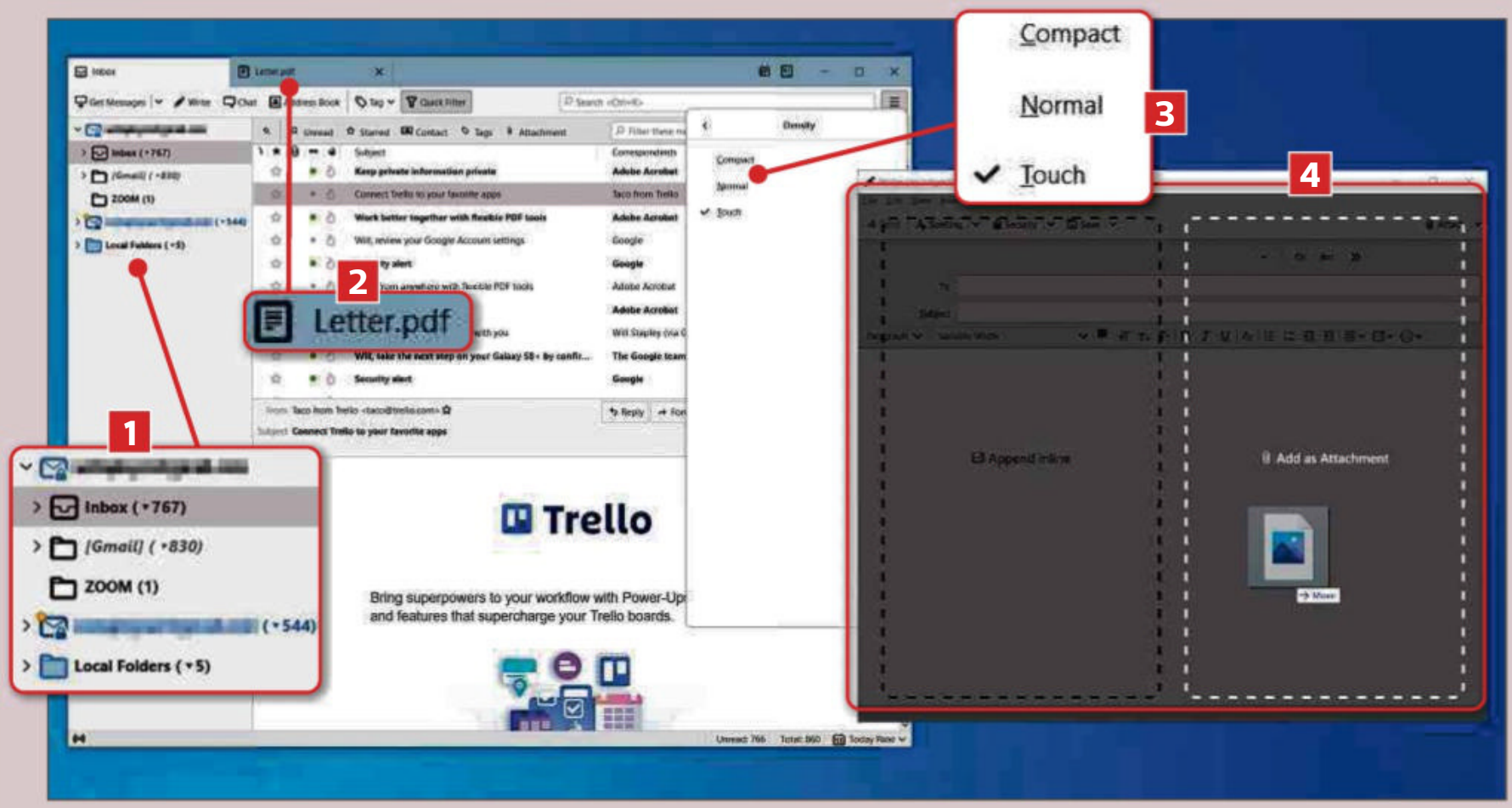
Unlike webmail services such as Gmail, Thunderbird is an email client that you install on your computer and has a reassuringly old-fashioned design. It's still getting regular updates, however, with version 91 adding a number of new features.

You can use Thunderbird with any email account – just click the menu button (three lines, top right), New, then 'Existing Mail Account...' and enter your login details. Version 91 now searches for calendars linked to any email accounts you import (for example, Google Calendar accounts associated with a Gmail account), letting you import them into Thunderbird's built-in calendar.

This version also lets you choose what happens when you drag an image into an email you're writing. Unlike Gmail, which assumes you want the image to appear 'inline' (in other words, alongside the body text of your email), Thunderbird gives you the option of adding it as an attachment (see 4 below) – choose the latter and the recipient will see the image listed as a file attached to the email, which they can then double-click to open or save.

We also like the new Density tool, which lets you adjust the spacing between Thunderbird's various buttons, your inbox items and more. We recommend setting this to Touch mode 3, which is primarily designed for touchscreen laptops and made for a less cluttered feel on our laptop's 13in screen. Another new feature is the ability to view PDFs directly within Thunderbird 2. It's a basic reader (you can't add annotations, for example), but it does mean you don't have to switch to another program simply to view a PDF.

Be aware, when we tried to upgrade from version 78 (despite its number, this is the version before 91) by clicking the menu button, Help, followed by About Thunderbird, the browser said it was already up to date. To force the update through, we downloaded it from the link above, then selected Upgrade during the installation process.



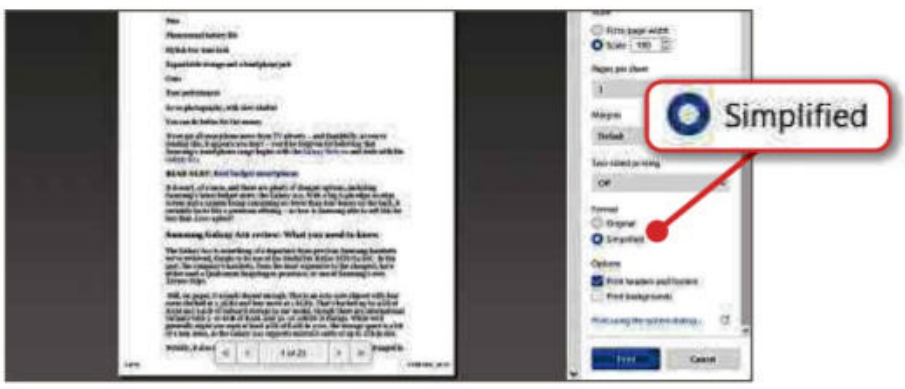
1 You can import as many email accounts as you like into Thunderbird, then switch between them in the left-hand pane.

2 When you double-click a PDF attached to an email, it will open within a new tab in the main Thunderbird window.

3 To add more space between Thunderbird's controls, open the main menu, select View, Density, then choose from the three options.

4 When dragging an image into a new email, you can now choose whether to add it to the body of your email or as an attachment.

BROWSER



Firefox 91

www.firefox.com

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1 or 10

As we revealed in Issue 611's Cover Feature, there are faster and more secure browsers than Chrome and Edge. Although it's been overshadowed by newer rivals such as Vivaldi (www.vivaldi.com) and Brave (www.brave.com), Mozilla's open-source Firefox remains a good option and continues to improve its privacy tools. Version 91 adds Enhanced Cookie Clearing (ECC), which lets you delete your web history more effectively. When you erase a specific site (click the menu button, select History, right-click the site, then click Forget About This Site), it wipes not only cookies from that site, but also any added via third-party code (such as from Facebook 'like' buttons). Firefox 91 also lets you remove distracting elements from pages before printing – press Ctrl+P, then select Simplified in the Format section (see screenshot).

VIDEO ENCODER

Shutter Encoder 15.3

www.snipca.com/39174

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1 or 10

Shutter Encoder (click the '64-bits install version...' button at the link above) is a powerful tool that lets you convert video files between a wide range of formats. Click 'Browse...', add the video files you want to convert, select an output format in the 'Choose function' boxes, then click 'Start function'. Shutter Encoder also lets you tweak and enhance your videos, including adjusting their length and adding text captions. Version 15.3 includes a new tool that lets you remove flicker from your videos - expand the Corrections menu, then select the Deflicker box (see screenshot). You can also now convert videos directly from a File Explorer window (right-click a video file, then select Shutter Encoder).

WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

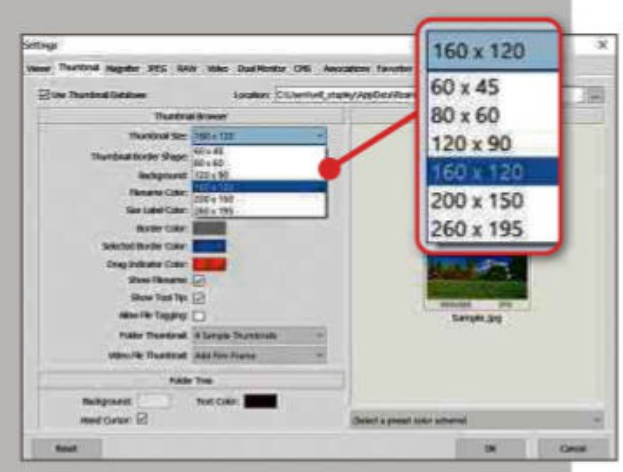
We tell you what software & apps to use

What can I use to copy my favourite photos?

Q Is there a program that not only lets me view all my photos in a slideshow, but also quickly copy any favourites to a specific folder as I go?

Keith Worsley

A Our favourite image viewer – FastStone Image Viewer (www.snipca.com/39175 – click the green Download button under 'exe') – is perfect for this. Once you've installed FastStone, run it then open the Settings menu and select the Settings option (or press F12). Next, select the Favorites tab, click Add, then select the folder you want to copy your favourite photos to. If you want to create a new folder for hosting your favourite shots, click the 'Create folder...' button. Click OK to close the Settings window.



In the left-hand pane, navigate to the folder containing your photo library. In the right-hand pane, you'll now see thumbnails of all photos within that folder. Double-click the first photo to view it in full screen. If this photo also happens to be one of your favourites, press the C key. In the Copy window that opens, click the Favorites tab, then select the folder you specified a moment ago. Click OK (or simply press Enter) and the photo will be copied to this folder. You can now move on to the next image by pressing the right arrow key. The next time you reach a photo you'd like to copy to your favourites folder, press C, followed by Enter (you don't need to select your favourites folder this time as FastStone defaults to the last folder you copied a photo to).

Alternatively, you can browse the thumbnails of your photos, using your keyboard's arrow keys to navigate, then pressing C to copy any favourites as before. To increase the size of these thumbnails, return to the Settings window (by pressing F12), select the Thumbnail tab, click the Thumbnail Size dropdown menu (see screenshot), choose a larger size, then click OK.

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

HOW I USE...

CursorFX

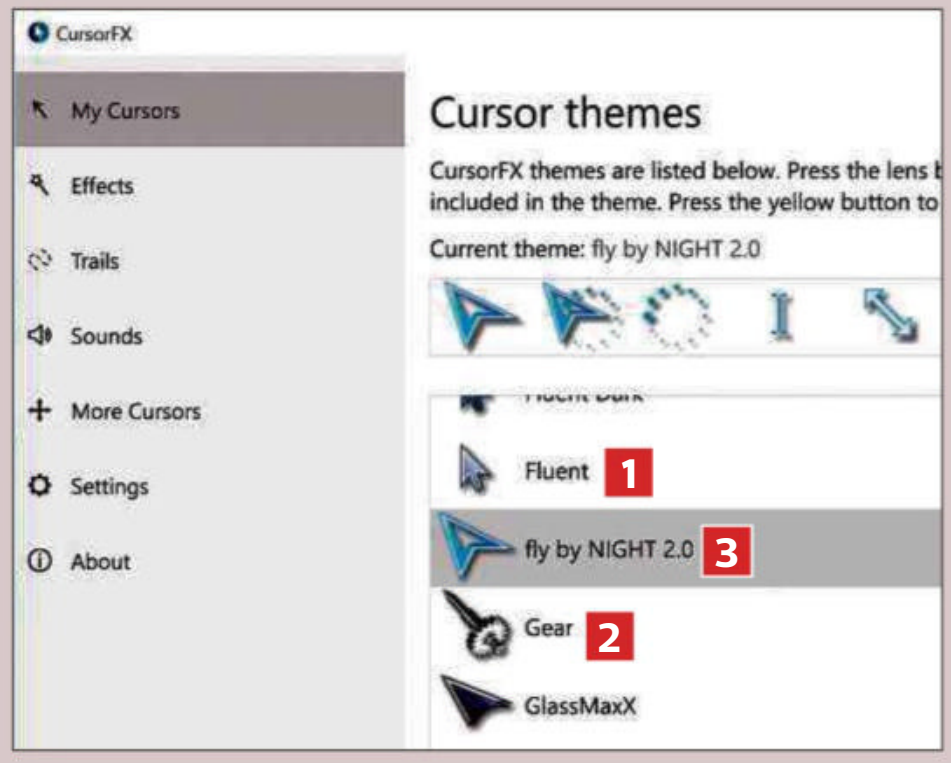
Wayne Williams may never get to fly with the Red Arrows, but at least this tool brings them to his desktop

Although modern computer screens are larger and sharper than ever, higher resolutions – typically 3840x2160 (4K) on PC monitors – makes things like text much harder to see, especially if your eyesight isn't what it once was (and mine isn't).

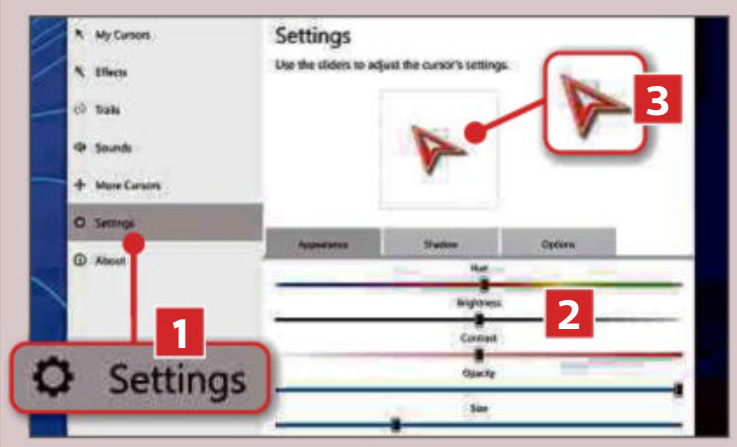
Increasing the scale and layout settings on my PC to 150 per cent helped, but the cursor remained tiny, and would often get lost on screen. I solved that problem with CursorFX (www.snipca.com/390899), which lets you change your pointer's style, colour and size. You can also add effects, trails and sounds.

CursorFX isn't free, but don't let that put you off. There's a free 30-day trial available, so you can see if it suits your needs before committing yourself, and the full version only costs a one-off payment of £4.99.

Once I've opened it, I click on My Cursors in the left-hand pane and then select a cursor theme on the right.



CursorFX's Fluent theme was too dull and Gear too quirky, so Wayne chose 'Fly by Night' instead



Wayne's Red Arrow cursor 3 is easy to see as it as it zooms across his desktop

There are simple designs like Fluent (1 in our screenshot above) and more quirky ones like Gear 2. I wanted something in the middle, so I visited www.snipca.com/39095 to see cursors created by other users and eventually chose 'Fly by Night' 3 (www.snipca.com/39098).

Once you've selected your cursor theme, you can – if you like – add animated and audio effects that will show your PC has registered your mouse click, though I personally find these annoying and distracting. You can also add trails like streams of bubbles or flashes shooting across your desktop. These follow the cursor around the screen, making it easier to track.

CursorFX has an editor that you launch by clicking the gold button next to a theme. Here you can adjust the speed of animations, and replace the graphics and sound effects with ones of your own. Making these changes requires you to type numbers to represent the degree of change (how fast the animations appear, for example).

I find it easier to use the sliders in Settings (1 in our screenshot left), though these change only the *style* of the cursor, not the effects. I played around with the sliders for hue, brightness, contrast, opacity and size 2 and transformed my 'Fly by Night' cursor into a bigger, more prominent red arrow 3.

If you're feeling really creative, you can use a separate design program to build your cursor from scratch, then import it into CursorFX and add edits to it. But I'm more than happy with my final 'Red Arrow' effort, tweaked entirely within the program.

WHAT I'D LIKE TO SEE IN CURSORFX

It's frustrating that editing animations and effects is so fiddly. CursorFX should introduce sliders for these options, because they work well in the Settings section. Also, I'd like to see more 'normal' and less wacky cursors included. Quirky cursors may seem like a bit of fun, but the novelty soon wears off.

Next issue: How I use... Notepad++

Named & Shamed

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

WARNING: JUNK AHEAD

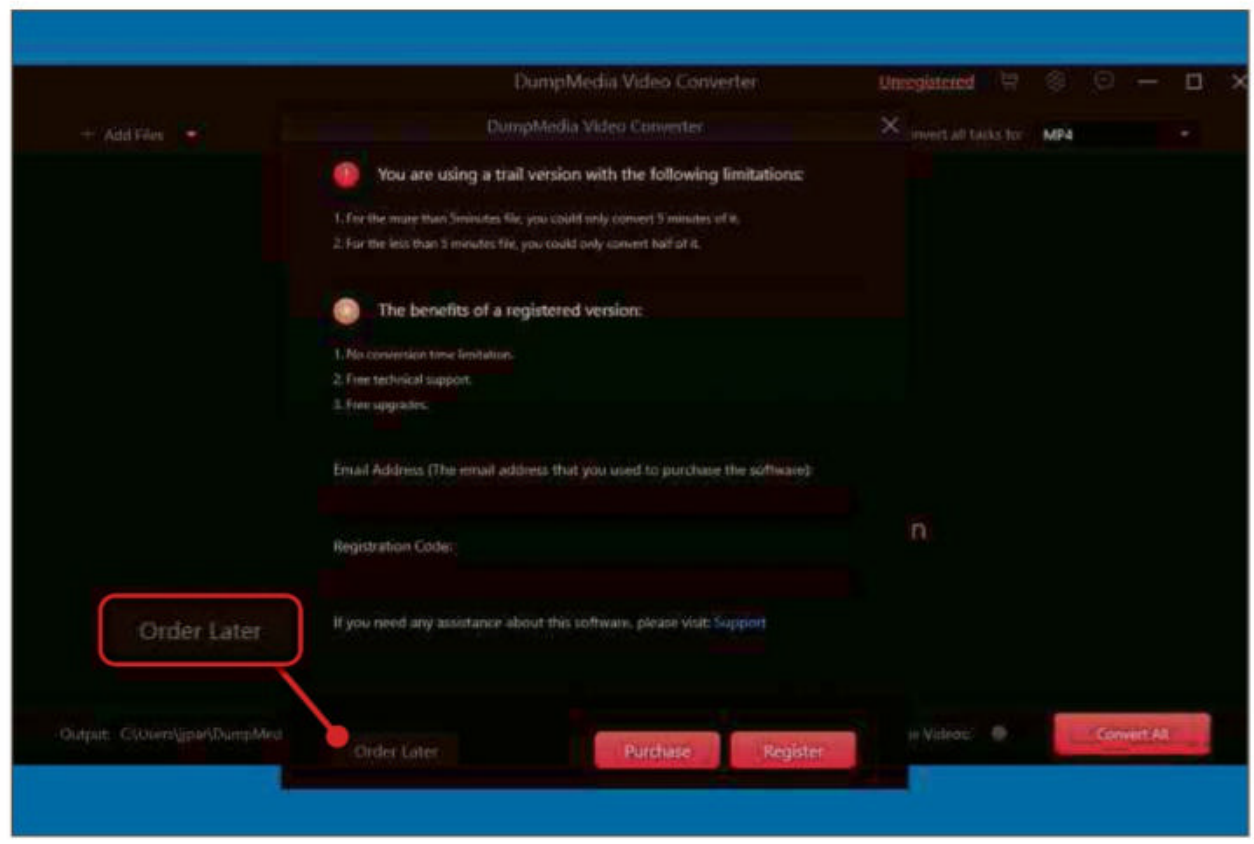
Junk offender: DumpMedia Video Converter

I've got a bunch of older video files: .3GP files recorded on an old phone that won't play on my current smartphone, plus some .swf files that Windows refuses point blank to open. So, I thought I'd give the curiously named DumpMedia Video Converter a try.

The program claims to be able to convert hundreds of different formats – including .3GP and .swf – and lets you rotate videos, which is useful for clips recorded on an old phone that come out sideways when you transfer them.

The first clue that this is not exactly top-drawer software is the horrendous English used on the website www.dumpmedia.com/video-converter: Video Converter is apparently "equipped with the full of feature, it is able to meet all your video needs".

Worse than this gibberish, it turns out that Video Converter is one of a growing number of tools that pretend to be a 'free download' on its web page, only revealing itself as a trial *after* you've installed it on your PC.



It looks like you can't click 'Order Later', but it's the only way you'll escape this page

Then, every time you launch the program, you're presented with a screen nagging you to 'Purchase' or 'Register'. These buttons look like the only routes forward, but to proceed you actually need to click the misleadingly worded, greyed-out 'Order Later' button.

If you ever make it to the program itself, the limitations of the trial render it effectively useless – you can convert only the first five minutes of any video file. Or, if your video is less than five minutes long, only half of it. Avoid this junk altogether and instead use an online file converter, such as www.zamzar.com.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Yuan Zhiwei, Senior Marketing Expert, Huawei

www.snipca.com/39110 "The value of home broadband services has shifted from large-scale connection-oriented operations to 'experience dividends', and this has been accompanied by the arrival of the blue ocean era of experience-based home broadband services."

WHAT THEY MEAN

Our 'experience' is that everyone pretends to understand this nonsense, but nobody actually does.

JONATHAN'S VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Philip Cooke

It's not unusual to find eBay used in villainous scams, though typically sellers or buyers are to blame. This time, though, I present to you former eBay security manager (and former police captain) Philip Cooke, one of several US employees who horrifically harassed a journalist couple who wrote newsletters criticising eBay.

Cooke and co terrorised the reporters by sending a number of threatening packages, including a funeral wreath, live cockroaches and – unbelievably – a pig foetus. They even went as far as carrying out surveillance on the couple's home.

Having pleaded guilty to his horrible crimes, Cooke was sentenced in a Massachusetts court to 18 months behind bars. He'll also face a further year of home detention, a $15,000 (£10,800) fine and 100 hours of community service.

LAPTOP | **£393** from Amazon www.snipca.com/39063

Samsung Galaxy Book Go

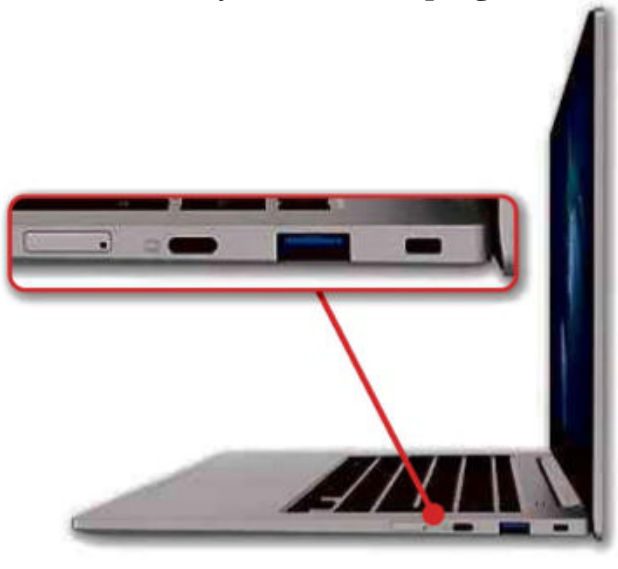
ARM yourself

Priced below £400, a reasonable initial reaction by anyone considering the Samsung Galaxy Book Go would be to wonder what sort of corners had been cut to achieve this. The big difference between this and more expensive models is that it replaces the standard laptop Intel or AMD processor with an eight-core Qualcomm 7C Gen 2, which is more like the kind of mobile chip you'd find in a smartphone or tablet.

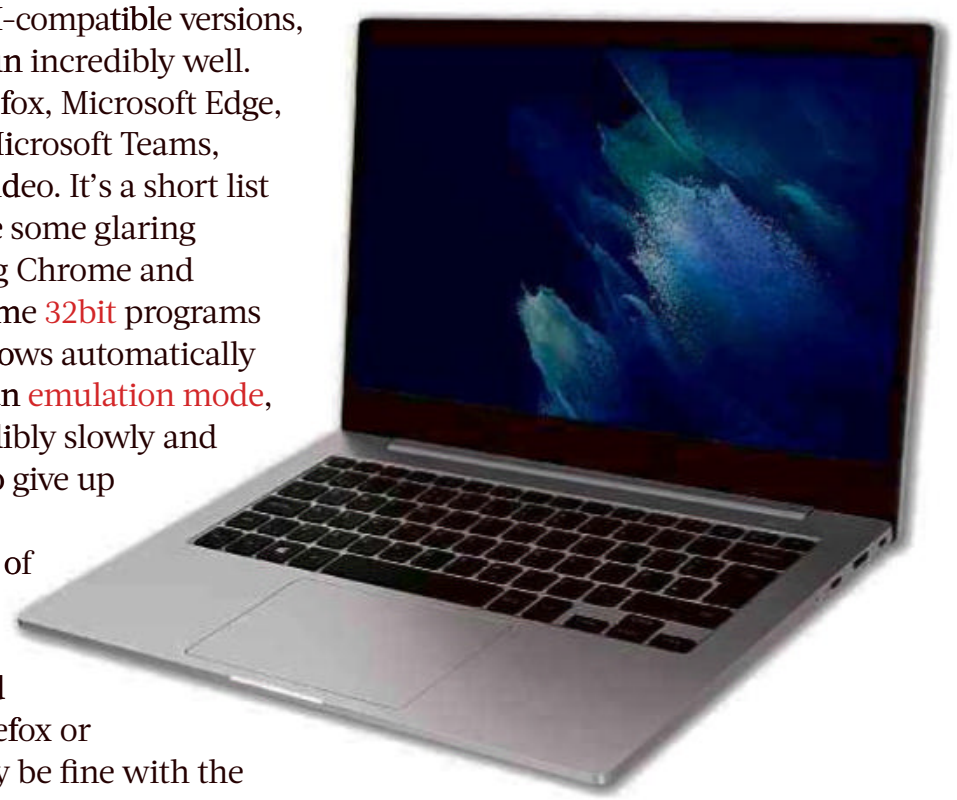
> "A budget laptop that prioritises cost and battery life over speed and screen quality"

Samsung's aim is to create an affordable lightweight laptop that combines long battery life with always-connected mobile data (it comes with a built-in 4G modem – you just need to add a SIM card). The Qualcomm processor requires less power than regular laptop processors, but it works in a very different way – using the stripped-back ARM architecture instead of the x86 technology that PC and laptop processors typically use.

This means it only supports the ARM-compatible version of Windows 10 Home. The good news is that this is slick and speedy on this laptop. The downside is there are only a handful of programs that come with ARM-compatible versions, though these also run incredibly well.



These include Firefox, Microsoft Edge, VLC, Zoom, 7-Zip, Microsoft Teams, Netflix and Prime Video. It's a short list overall and there are some glaring omissions, including Chrome and Microsoft Office. Some 32bit programs will run, with Windows automatically launching them in an emulation mode, but these run incredibly slowly and you're more likely to give up using them entirely.



If you spend most of your computer time online rather than on your desktop and are happy to use Firefox or Edge, you'll probably be fine with the Galaxy Book Go. Otherwise, it's worth checking to see if your favourite programs have ARM-compatible versions before committing to it (the vast majority won't).

Beyond the processor, its specifications are predictably modest. It has a 14in screen with a resolution of 1920x1080 pixels, and comes with 128GB of storage and 4GB of RAM (though there's an 8GB model that costs £100 more).

It's light, at 1.38kg, and relatively compact, at 14.9x 24x225mm. Both are welcome specs in a 14in laptop, but there are lighter and smaller models around if you're willing to spend a bit more. The case is made entirely of plastic, though the silver finish makes it look more expensive than it is. There are just enough ports, with a USB-C, headphone jack and microSD card slot on the left, and a USB-C, USB 2.0 and SIM card slot on the right (pictured below left). The lid opens up to 180 degrees, which is handy if you want to use it on your lap while slouched on the sofa, though it isn't touchscreen.

Beyond the software limitations, the other main disappointment is the screen. It proved to be bright enough in our tests, but the colour accuracy is way off. It also has narrow viewing angles, both vertically and horizontally, so you have to make sure the screen is positioned just right to see what's on it. Battery life is impressive, however, lasting 14 hours 17 minutes in our video-playback test.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Qualcomm 7C Gen 2 processor • 4GB memory • 14in 1920x1080-pixel TFT screen • 128GB SSD • 720p webcam • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 5.1 • 2x USB-C ports • MicroSD card slot • Windows 10 Home • 14.9x324x225mm (HxWxD) • 1.38kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/39063

VERDICT An affordable laptop that runs on a mobile processor, which guarantees a fast performance when using compatible programs – but these are few and far between

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Chuwi CoreBook X 14 inch £390 This affordable alternative uses an ageing 8th-generation Intel Core i5 processor to help keep its price down

PC | **£1,000** from Chillblast www.snipca.com/39075

Chillblast Fusion Frigate

A cool customer

This PC from Chillblast is fairly unique among models available for around the £1,000 mark, because it uses water instead of air to keep itself cool. Water-cooled systems are better than fans at keeping a PC's internal components cool and this also means it runs more quietly. The cooling system is intended to deal with the heat generated by the 11th-generation six-core Intel Core i5-11600K processor and does a good job. The PC barely makes a noise when idle, and while it does go up through the gears when the processor is pushed, it never becomes irritatingly loud.

> "A PC that stays cool and quiet when the heat is on"

It proved to be a great general-purpose PC, with excellent results in our Windows tests. As you might expect, it couldn't match more expensive models with eight-core chips when performing more complex tasks, such as video editing from multiple sources. However, for Windows jobs, when it isn't having to juggle several tasks at the same time, it performed as well as more expensive models.

This strong performance was not replicated in our gaming tests, however. With so much emphasis on its processor and cooling, Chillblast has had to reign in on the graphics hardware. The supplied

GeForce GTX 1650 is a fine mid-range graphics card, but it's more comfortable running games at 1080p (1920x1080 pixels) than at 1440p (2560x1440 pixels) or beyond. For example, it managed 38fps at 1080p when playing the game Metro Exodus at High settings, but this dropped to 28fps at 1440p and 16fps at 4K.

The rest of the PC is moderately well equipped, with 16GB of RAM (with two spare slots, so it's easy to expand if you need to) and a 500GB M.2 SSD. If you want more storage there's a second M.2 slot and two drive bays available for adding larger 3.5in hard drives.

The case includes a tempered glass side panel, but it isn't lit on the inside. Instead Chillblast adds a choice of colour through three front-mounted glowing fans. In the back of the case are all the ports you'll need, including a USB-C, three USB 3.0, two USB 2.0 and a Gigabit Ethernet. To connect a monitor, you can choose from DisplayPort, HDMI or DVI-D options.

SPECIFICATIONS

Intel Core i5-11600K processor • 16GB memory • Nvidia GeForce GTX 1650 graphics card • 500GB SSD • Wi-Fi 4 • 1x HDMI port • 1x DisplayPort • 1x DVI-D port • 4x USB 3.0 ports • 2x USB 2.0 ports • Gigabit Ethernet • Windows 10 Home • 400x210x426mm (HxWxD) • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/39075

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Dennis Publishing, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Dennis Publishing also owns the magazine *PC Pro* and the websites Expert Reviews (www.expertreviews.co.uk) and IT Pro (www.itpro.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

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

OUR AWARDS

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

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

PRICES

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

VERDICT This is a solid desktop PC that runs Windows 10 tasks extremely well, though you might expect more from its gaming performance

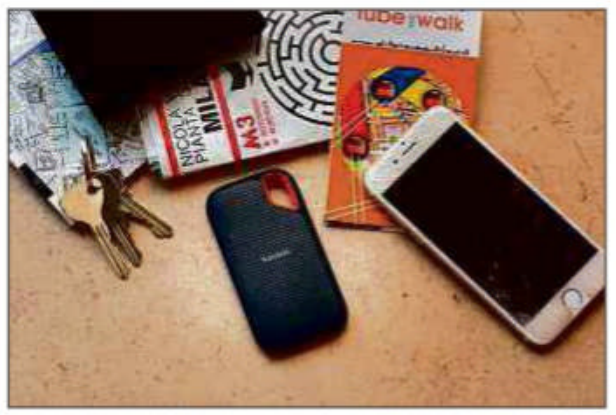
★★★★½

ALTERNATIVE

PC Specialist Fortnite Elite PC £971 This AMD-powered tower PC has a superior graphics card and promises faster gaming performance

Best external SSDs

Is your PC running out of storage? We've reviewed five of the best external SSDs to give you more space without compromising on speed



As manufacturers have moved to building laptops and desktop PCs with SSDs inside, loading and running Windows has become much faster. However, SSDs cost more per gigabyte, meaning storage capacity has generally been reduced, particularly on cheaper computers. As a result, we often hear from readers that they're running out of storage space and yearning for more.

One way to overcome the problem is to get yourself an external SSD. These convenient devices aren't as fast as their internal counterparts, because they connect to the PC via USB. This creates a bottleneck that doesn't exist with internal SSDs connected to a motherboard. They're still much faster than mechanical drives however, and now come in capacities of 500GB and more.

It's worth noting that all the drives we've reviewed here connect via USB-C ports. Nothing's ever that simple, though, and there are actually three standards that use a USB-C connector, which are called USB 3.2 Gen 1, USB 3.2 Gen 2 and USB 3.2 Gen 2x2. They're all backwards compatible, meaning a Gen 2x2 drive will happily operate on a Gen 1 USB-C port, but you'll only get maximum speed from it if you can connect it to the correct (or better) port. If you have an older port on your desktop PC (refer to your manual to find out), you can add a faster one using an expansion card, such as this Yottamaster model from Amazon (£60 from www.snipca.com/39109).

£117 from Amazon www.snipca.com/39115

SanDisk Extreme (1TB)

SanDisk's sturdy-looking Extreme has a loop built into the casing, so you can clip it on to a belt or bag.

It has an IP55 protection rating, which means you can get it wet, but it shouldn't be submerged in water and is fine for general outdoor use. The Extreme also has a decent three-year warranty.

It's fast, too, for a Gen 2 device, slightly outperforming the Seagate and the Samsung models that use the same technology.

Considering all this, the 12p-per-gigabyte price is reasonable, particularly if you tend to carry your drive around with you, because its solid exterior is perfectly capable of protecting it from knocks.

RATING
★★★★★

£72 from Amazon www.snipca.com/39112

Samsung T7 Touch (500GB)

With its smart metallic finish and rounded edges, the Samsung T7 Touch looks like a business-card holder. It's 8x85x57mm (HxDxW), and weighs 58g. Only the Seagate One Touch is smaller.

Its party trick is the little square on the front, which is a fingerprint reader you can use to keep the device locked with hardware-based 256bit AES encryption. If you want to share the drive with other people, you can register up to four prints or set a password instead.

It's a Gen 2 model, so tussled with the Seagate for slowest speed among the competition here, and it costs 14p per gigabyte, but the unique fingerprint lock makes it worth it.

RATING
★★★★½

£75 from Amazon www.snipca.com/39116

Adata SE900G (512GB)

This garish drive lights up when it's plugged in, showing a glowing rainbow mesh of colour. You can't switch it off or change it, so it's worth considering whether you can tolerate it before you buy.

It might be worth putting up with, though, because it's a fast performer.

It's the only Gen 2x2 drive we tested, so you need a compatible port to get the fastest speeds from it. If you have one, though, you can expect speeds that are twice as fast as the regular Gen 2 drives, making it a great all rounder for general use.

As you might expect, it is a little more expensive than most at 15p per gigabyte.

RATING ★★★★★

£170 from Amazon www.snipca.com/39106

Seagate One Touch SSD (1TB)

The Seagate One Touch SSD is arguably the best-looking external SSD in this test. With its grey finish, white trim and fabric side panels, it really looks quite stylish.

It's also tiny, measuring 11x50x70mm (HxDxW), and weighs a mere 74g, meaning it's incredibly portable if you need to use it in a number of locations.

It comes with Seagate's Rescue Data service. This means if your drive fails within its two-year warranty period, Seagate's technicians will do their best to recover your data.

However, it's more expensive than its rivals: at £170, it's roughly equivalent to 17p per gigabyte. The other downside is that it's one of the slowest models in our tests, though it's not that far behind other Gen 2 models.

RATING ★★★★★

£80 from Amazon www.snipca.com/39119

WD My Passport SSD (500GB)

This was the fastest of the Gen 2 drives, with only the Gen 2x2 Adata drive outperforming it. It also comes with an option to encrypt the drive using a password, and there's a suite of useful tools installed.

WD claims that it's strong enough to survive a drop from up to 2m, and it comes with an adapter for standard USB ports if you don't have a USB-C port available. It's not cheap, however, with the 500GB model working out at 16p per gigabyte, making it the second most expensive on test.

RATING ★★★★★

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

What's the best replacement for my Kindle DX?

Q **I hear my Kindle DX ebook reader will no longer work once 3G becomes obsolete. I use this 10in device because of my eyesight limitations. Amazon now only offers small-screen e-readers. What would be the best replacement for me?**

Stephen Lewis

A The first thing to note is that your Kindle DX *will* still work without 3G, it just won't be able to download books wirelessly. You should still be able to transfer books to the device by connecting it to a PC using a cable, so if you want to stick with it, you won't lose anything more than a little convenience.

However, if you're ready for a change, the other big name in ebook readers is Kobo, and it still has a 10.3in model in their line-up, called the Elipsa (pictured). It comes with more features, such as a stylus for making notes on screen and a flip-over cover.

This goes some way to justify its hefty price tag of £350 (www.snipca.com/39120).

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

PHONE | **£399** from OnePlus www.snipca.com/39146

OnePlus Nord 2 5G

Speeding fine

The numbering that OnePlus has applied to its Nord range is all over the place – this is actually the fifth phone to be launched in the range, not the second. However, we won't vent too much spleen on naming conventions because the phone itself is very impressive.

There are two variants available in the UK. The cheaper model (£399) comes with 8GB of RAM and 128GB of storage, and is available in grey. Spend £469 and you get 16GB of RAM, 256GB of storage and a choice of grey or blue. Otherwise, the two phones are identical.

> "For the price, it offers a vibrant screen, excellent camera and fast performance"

There are some nice design touches. The Gorilla Glass exterior is luxuriously curved in all the right places, making it a pleasure to hold. It has a three-position alert slider, which lets you quickly swap between 'silent', 'vibrate' and 'ring' modes, perfect for when you need to mute your phone quickly. However, there's no 3.5mm headphone jack and no microSD card slot.

The phone has a Mediatek Dimensity 1200-AI processor and performed faultlessly in our tests, though it still lagged behind similarly-priced rivals like the Xiaomi Poco F3. Battery life will take you just about through the day, lasting 22 hours 26 minutes in our video-playback test. With the included charger, the Nord 2 can be fully charged in 29 minutes, which is lightning fast.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Mediatek Dimensity 1200-AI processor • 8GB or 16GB of RAM • 128GB or 256GB of storage • 6.43in 2400x1080-pixel 90Hz AMOLED screen • 50-megapixel main rear camera • 8-megapixel wide camera • 32-megapixel front camera • OxygenOS 11.3 based on Android 11 • 8.3x159x73mm (HxDxW) • 189g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/39146

The screen is large at 6.43in across the diagonal. It uses AMOLED technology for superior contrast and colour vibrancy. It's also bright and has a 90Hz refresh rate, so scrolling and swiping around the OxygenOS 11.3 user interface (based on Android 11) feels very smooth.

The main rear camera is a 50-megapixel unit, and sits alongside an 8-megapixel ultrawide lens with a 120-degree field of view, and a 2-megapixel mono camera that's used solely for enhancing black-and-white shots. On the front, the selfie camera is 32 megapixels.

The main camera took excellent shots when we tested it, particularly landscapes and any scenes in low light. It isn't quite so impressive when capturing portraits, struggling to blur the background as much as we'd like, while video capture is fairly modest – with a maximum of 30fps at 1080p resolution.

As is now becoming standard on even mid-priced phones such as this, the Nord 2 has Wi-Fi 6 and 5G connectivity.

VERDICT Faster than most similarly-priced phones, with an excellent screen and impressive main camera, this is a great all-round phone for the price

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Xiaomi Poco F3 £349

The 256GB version has a 120Hz screen, 5G connectivity and even faster performance

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Near-Field Communication

What does it do?

Near-Field Communication (NFC) is a technology that allows two devices to exchange data. It's similar to Bluetooth, except that the communicating devices have to be much closer to one another – typically less than four inches. There's also no need to pair the devices beforehand. In smartphones, it's most often used in conjunction with payment apps, including Google Pay and Apple Pay. These let you touch your phone against contactless card readers to make payments from your debit or credit card.

How does it work?

NFC transmits information between devices using radio waves, just like Bluetooth or Wi-Fi. However, these signals aren't activated until an electromagnetic field is detected, which securely links the two devices that are trying to communicate (such as your phone and a shop's card reader). When paying for something via NFC on your phone, you'll sometimes need to confirm the purchase by unlocking your phone before or during the process.

What are the specs?

Fortunately, there's only one NFC specification, so you can simply check whether a device is NFC-enabled or not. If it is, it will work with any other NFC device. If you're using the system to make payments, which app you use will depend on the make of your phone. Apple, Samsung and Google all have their own payment apps, but they all work with the vast majority of UK banks and credit cards. It doesn't matter which one you choose, as long as your device is NFC enabled.

Can I change it later?

You can switch NFC off in your phone's settings if you don't want to use it any more, or you can simply avoid setting up a debit or credit card in your device's payment app. You can't add NFC to a phone that doesn't already have it, however.

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

intel CORE i7

PC MONITOR | **£281** from Ebuyer www.snipca.com/39134

Philips 243B9H

Screen star

The Philips 243B9H is a rare example of a fairly affordable monitor that refuses to make any significant compromises. It combines a decent panel with a wide selection of ports, a built-in webcam and a versatile stand.

It's a 1080p monitor with an IPS panel that measures 24in across the diagonal. It refreshes at a rate of 75Hz with a response time of 4 milliseconds, and it supports AMD FreeSync, meaning it's suitable for gaming as well as work. Viewing angles are very wide, as you'd expect of an IPS panel, and it performed admirably in all our tests, with decent colour accuracy, brightness levels and contrast.

It's attached to a stand that can pivot 90 degrees, slide up and down 150mm, tilt 30 degrees backwards and swivel 180 degrees. This level of adjustability goes well beyond what is typical for a monitor at this price.

Around the casing you'll find an HDMI, a DisplayPort and a VGA input, a USB hub (with one USB-C input that supports video-in, and three USB 3.0 ports), and audio jacks for connecting headphones and a microphone. Pressing down on the top edge reveals a built-in 1080p webcam. The webcam only works for video calls in well-lit rooms, but it's still better than most we've seen.

It has two built-in 2-Watt speakers which don't sound brilliant for music, but they're just about good enough for listening to dialogue in video and Windows' audio notifications.

SPECIFICATIONS

24in IPS screen • 1920x1080-pixel resolution • 75Hz refresh rate • 4ms response time • AMD FreeSync • 1x HDMI port • 1x DisplayPort • 1x VGA port • 1x USB-C port • 3x USB 3.0 ports • 541x522x216mm (HxWxD) • 5.44kg • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/39134

VERDICT A comprehensive set of features and a high-quality screen make this one of the best monitors you can buy for less than £300

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Asus BE24EQK £219 A slightly cheaper 24in monitor with a built-in webcam, but the quality of the screen isn't as good

WEBCAM | **£70** from Amazon www.snipca.com/39137

Trust Taxon QHD Webcam

Pixels, camera, action

If you want to look sharper on your video calls, one option is to upgrade your webcam. The Trust Taxon QHD can record video at 30fps with a 2560x1440-pixel resolution. Most standard webcams are 720p (1280x720 pixels) or 1080p (1920x1080 pixels), so this is a significant increase.

It has an 80-degree field of view, which is just wide enough to allow one or two others to join your video call. On the other hand, it isn't so wide that you'll look tiny in the frame when you're on your own. It also has stereo microphones, which ensures it picks up your voice superbly well. There's a privacy shield built into the camera, which slides across to cover the lens, but it doesn't switch off the camera or mic automatically. The small LED that glows green when the device is active acts as a reminder.

The camera is mounted on top of a standard hinged clip and comes with a 1.8m USB cable. The stand can be attached to the top of your PC monitor or laptop screen, placed flat on a desk or screwed to a tripod.

For the price (although Amazon has dropped this to just £45 recently) we'd expect additional software that offers some degree of customisation, such as altering the field of view, sharpness levels, contrast or colour. Unfortunately, you'll have to use whatever settings are available in the video-calling software you're using the webcam with.

SPECIFICATIONS

2K (2560x1440 pixels) video resolution • 30fps • Stereo microphones • USB 2.0 • Windows 10 and MacOS compatible • 50x90x65mm (HxWxD) • 85g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/39137

VERDICT A high-resolution webcam that can capture more detail, but it could really benefit from software that lets you tweak its settings

★★★★½

ALTERNATIVE Anker PowerConf C300 £80 Has a lower 1080p resolution, but it comes with software to help you get more from it

ROUTER | **£66** from Amazon www.snipca.com/39149

TP-Link Archer AX10

Six appeal

The TP-Link AX10 has a flat, elongated case that measures 260mm across but only 135mm from front to back. That makes it easy to accomodate anywhere in your home, and the four antennas project only 155mm upwards. As routers go, it's pretty inconspicuous and relatively cheap.

It offers full Wi-Fi 6 support with dual-band functionality from two independent (2.4GHz and 5GHz) radios – the devices that send the wireless signal. These performed reasonably well in our benchmark tests, but we found the Honour Router 3 (see Alternative, below) could reach slightly further, and more expensive routers significantly increased speeds by using more radios.

> "A cheap Wi-Fi 6 router with modest reach and speeds"

It offers decent wired connectivity, via five Gigabit Ethernet ports (pictured below) – one connects to your existing router or modem, while the others can be used to connect to compatible devices. It lacks any additional inputs, however, such as a USB port for file sharing or SIM card slot that could keep you connected via a mobile signal should your broadband go down.

We used TP-Link's Tether app on our Android phone to set up the AX10. This prompted us to scan a QR code on the back of the router to make the initial connection, after which we could choose new names and passphrases for the 2.4GHz and 5GHz networks. Once you've completed the initial setup you can choose to combine these under a single name if you prefer. You can also use the app to create and update parental control profiles. These are pretty basic – only supporting simple time limits and blocking specific URLs.

For most functions you'll need to open the browser-based interface, which is also easy to use, with a clear tabbed design. It takes just a few clicks to customise most of the settings you'll need regular access to.

We were pleasantly surprised to find that the AX10 includes an inbound VPN server, which you can use to access your home network from anywhere. However, it doesn't operate as an outbound VPN server, so can't disguise your location or IP address.

SPECIFICATIONS

Dual-band Wi-Fi 6 • AX1500 speed rating • 5x Gigabit Ethernet ports (including 1x WAN) • 39x135x260mm (HxDxW) • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/39149

VERDICT This router offers Wi-Fi 6 networking at a low price, but it's worth spending more on a better router, if you can afford it, to get faster speeds and greater reach

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Honor Router 3 £62 This inconspicuous router is a little cheaper and performed slightly better in our benchmark tests

DO I REALLY NEED...

Wi-Fi with Alexa?

What is it?

Vodafone's latest Pro Broadband package comes with a Super Wi-Fi Plus booster unit, which also works as an Alexa-powered smart speaker. You also get a Wi-Fi 6 router that comes with a 4G backup connection.

What does it do?

The booster can be set up in a different part of your house from your router to strengthen the Wi-Fi signal there. It can also do anything a regular Alexa smart speaker can, from playing music to controlling smart technology. Vodafone has added a "Dinnertime" skill, so you can say "Alexa, turn on dinnertime" and your internet connection will pause for 30 minutes while you and your family sit down to eat.

What's the catch?

You have to switch your broadband to the Vodafone Pro Broadand service, which costs from £38 per month.

So can I do without it?

Yes. If you want an Alexa device, it's better value to buy the latest Echo Dot (£50 from www.snipca.com/39151) for less than the price of two months of broadband. To temporarily switch off Wi-Fi, use your router's settings.

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale Weds 8 Sept

HP E27q G4
Broaden your outlook with an affordable 27in monitor

Huawei MateBook D 15 (2021)
All new update of the classic 15in laptop

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Buy It

Find out what other products we liked. Buy our new 2020 **Back Issue CD**: £15 from **www.snipca.com/38164**

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Lenovo Yoga Slim 7 (256GB)
£649 from www.snipca.com/38429
Tested Issue 601

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

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

DESKTOP PC

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

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

ALTERNATIVE Chillblast Photo Zen Fast Ryzen 7 CPU plus adequate GPU makes a superb work PC. £1,800 from www.snipca.com/35840

APPLE iPAD

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

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

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

ANDROID TABLET

PRICE DROP

Lenovo Tab P11 Pro
£499 from www.snipca.com/38585
Tested Issue 609

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

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S6 Lite Slower than the Lenovo Tab P11 Pro, but the 64GB storage and decent 10.2in screen make it good value. £323 from www.snipca.com/38606

APPLE iPHONE

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

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

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

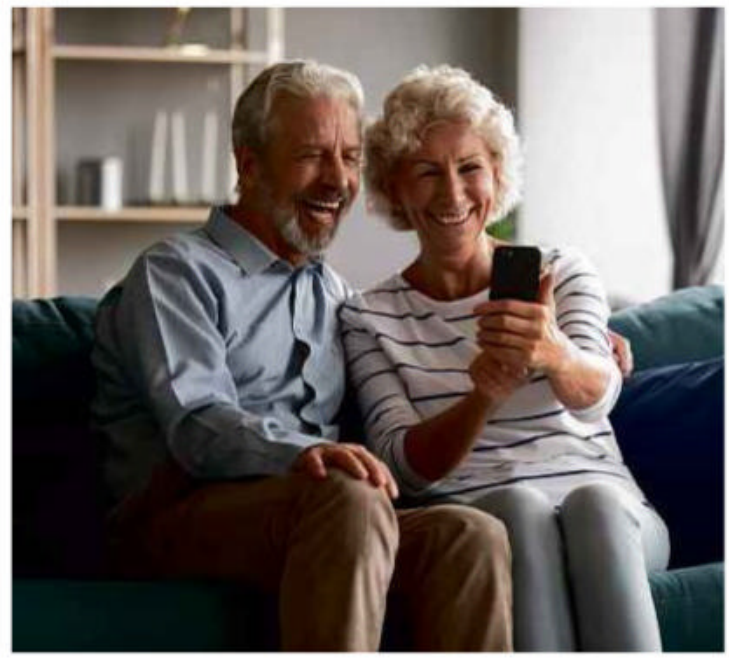
ANDROID PHONE

Xiaomi Poco F3
£299 from www.snipca.com/38395
Tested Issue 608

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

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

Now's the time to tackle your smartphone



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

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

Find out more...

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

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

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

Do the manufacturers do it on purpose?

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

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

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

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

Plain English... and that's not all

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

What's covered?

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

- The basics of controlling it – swiping, tapping, opening apps & so on.
- Send emails from your phone.
- Most phones have a good camera so you can take photos: here's how to use it properly (and for videos).
- Video phone calls – a great way to keep up with family who live a long way away
- Share photos with friends around the world – quickly and easily.
- See updates, photos and video clips from friends and family – as soon as they "post" them.
- Browse the web at home or out and about.
- Instant messaging and how to use it.
- Make it easier to read the screen.
- How to use it as a sat-nav... in the car or even on foot.
- Choosing and downloading apps.
- And obviously, you can make phone calls and send and receive text messages. ("Voicemail" is covered, too)

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

What one reader had to say:

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

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

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

Only half the story

That's only half the story but I don't have room to explain here. I've put together full information on the books – who they're for, what they cover and so on.

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

Don't buy now, do this instead

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

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Best order your Smartphone infopack now and soon you could be getting so much more from your phone – with much less hassle.

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Full privacy notice at www.helpfulbooks.co.uk/privacynotice

Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

EBOOK READER

Amazon Kindle (2019)
£70 from www.snipca.com/31621
Tested Issue 555

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

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Clara HD
Not waterproof, but has more lighting options to avoid blue light. £110 from www.snipca.com/32586

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Kaspersky Internet Security 2021
£14.99 from www.snipca.com/21532
Tested Issue 564

Kaspersky Internet Security has won our past nine antivirus tests and the 2020 version is now available at an exclusive reader discount on our Software Store. Go to the link above for a one-year, one-device licence or buy a two-year, two-device licence for just £32.99.

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

WEBCAM

PRICE DROP

Logitech C925e Business Webcam
£68 from www.snipca.com/38385
Tested: Issue 608

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

ALTERNATIVE Anker PowerConf C300
Good image quality, crisp audio and lots of features. £80 from www.snipca.com/38752

PC MONITOR

PRICE DROP

BenQ GL2780
£135 from www.snipca.com/34834
Tested Issue 581

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

ALTERNATIVE Philips Brilliance 241B7QPJEB With a great picture, stylish design and speakers, this 24in Full HD IPS is an excellent smaller screen. £300 from www.snipca.com/37096

ROUTER

Netgear Nighthawk RAX80
£300 from 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. £174 from www.snipca.com/37675

PRINTER

Canon Pixma TS8350
£205 from www.snipca.com/38079
Tested Issue 606

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

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

COMPETITION

Win a... Netgear Orbi LBR20 tri-band router

Netgear's Orbi LBR20 is a 4G LTE & Tri-Band Mesh WiFi router that works with any compatible network, including EE, O2, Three and Vodafone. Insert a nano-SIM card to get speeds up to 1.2Gbps. It connects with Orbi satellites to create a mesh Wi-Fi system throughout your home, covering up to 1,500 square feet.

It has two Gigabit Ethernet ports to keep your wired devices connected. You can control and set up guest networks using Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant, while parental controls let you pause or schedule device access, set online limits, view which sites have been visited online, and block sites from being visited.

It comes with advanced antivirus protection in the form of Netgear Armor, powered by Bitdefender. This blocks attacks across your network on an unlimited number of devices.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/39014 and enter your details. It runs until midnight Tuesday 7 September. Good luck!

You can buy the **Netgear Orbi LBR20** for £370 from https://store.netgear.co.uk. For Netgear product updates, follow @NETGEAR on Twitter.

MESH ROUTER

BT Whole Home Wi-Fi

£200 from www.snipca.com/26990
Tested Issue 496

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

ALTERNATIVE Zyxel Multy X
These two pillow-shaped boxes are powerful enough for most homes and provide four Ethernet ports apiece. £265 from www.snipca.com/27309

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Samsung 970 Evo Plus 500GB

£80 from www.snipca.com/31265
Tested Issue 552

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

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB
As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £60 from www.snipca.com/37304

SMART SPEAKER

Google Nest Audio

£90 from www.snipca.com/36475
Tested Issue 593

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

ALTERNATIVE Amazon Echo (4th generation) The latest version of the Echo changes the shape from a cylinder to a ball, which improves sound quality – though the Nest's is still superior. £90 from www.snipca.com/36602

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Workshops & Tips

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

35 Send and receive encrypted emails
38 Add map data to your spreadsheets
40 Capture sharp still images from your videos
42 Readers' Tips

PLUS

44 Phone & Tablet Tips
46 Make Windows Better
47 Make Office Better
48 In the Club: Set up mail merge

HOW TO...

Send and receive encrypted emails

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Email account; Microsoft Outlook **Time required:** 60 minutes

Only one person should be able to read the emails you send: the intended recipient. And only one person should be able to read the emails you receive: you.

If you're anything like us, your messages will rarely be sensitive or overly personal, but that's not to say they should be open to all and sundry. Whether you're applying for a job, confirming a holiday booking or sending your bank details to someone, there will always be times when you want to make sure your words don't go astray and leak what you'd rather keep private.

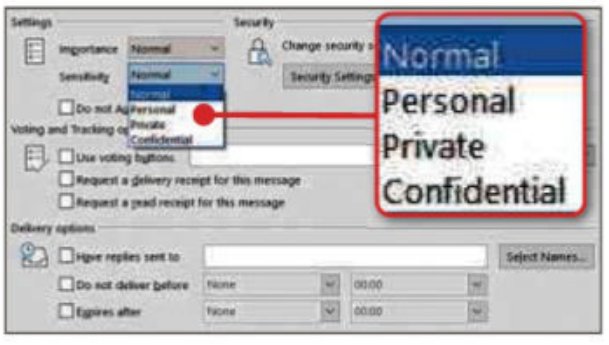
Here, we'll show you three different options for protecting your messages, starting with the most benign – simply marking them as sensitive – and working up to securing them with your own encryption keys. This latter option is the kind of measure routinely used by big business and law enforcement to scramble their messages at the point they leave a computer. That way, even if they're intercepted in transit their contents will remain hidden.

1 Mark your email as sensitive

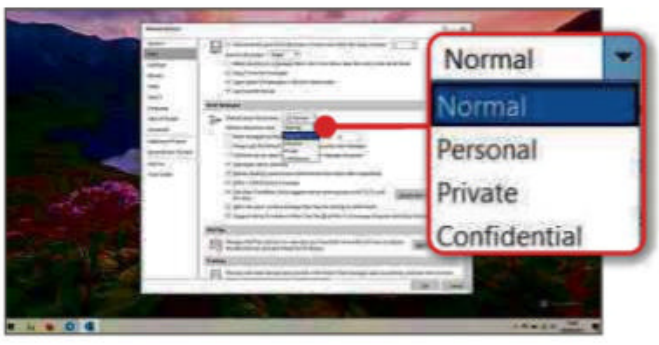
Microsoft Outlook (version 2010 onwards) lets you mark any email you send as normal, personal, private or confidential.

Whether the recipient takes any notice of the status you apply is up to them. They won't be prevented from taking whatever action they like with your message – copy, quote, print, forward it on and so on. However, they at least won't be able to claim that they didn't know its contents should have been handled with discretion.

Start by creating a new email. Add a recipient, subject and some body content, then click File followed by Properties. Within the Settings section, click the Sensitivity menu and select the level you want to use (see screenshot above).



Set a sensitivity level in Outlook to indicate how your emails should be handled



Change the default Sensitivity setting in Outlook's Mail options

By default, Sensitivity is set to Normal, which won't have any effect when the recipient receives your message. However, if you set this to Personal, Private or Confidential then – as long as your recipient is also using Outlook (either the Outlook program or Outlook.com) – they'll see a note below their name asking them to 'Please treat this as', followed by the Sensitivity level you selected.

You can also change the default level from Normal by clicking File, followed by Options, then Mail and, in the 'Send messages' section, choosing an option from the 'Default Sensitivity level' menu, as in our screenshot above.

2 Use Gmail's confidential mode

If your recipient has a habit of leaving their computer unattended and unlocked, there would be nothing to stop someone opening their email program and reading your messages, regardless of the level of sensitivity you've set.

For messages that you need to guard from all but a specific pair of eyes, go one step further and protect them with a passcode. For this, you'll need to switch to an alternative service provider. Gmail is free to sign up to and use, but still includes a nifty feature called 'confidential mode', which gives home users the kind of privacy tools that were once available only to users of expensive corporate email systems.

Log into your Gmail account (if you don't already have one, you can sign up at www.snipca.com/39096), click Compose to create a new email, then add a recipient, subject and message. Next, rather than clicking Send as you normally would, click the icon of a padlock overlaid by a clock (seventh icon to the right of the Send button).

With confidential mode enabled, Gmail immediately applies restrictions that prevent the recipient from forwarding, copying, printing or downloading the message. By default, the email will also be set to expire after a week, but you can change this to various intervals between one day and five years (see screenshot below).

Below this is the option to require a passcode to unlock the email (this passcode will be sent to your recipient via text message). Click the 'SMS passcode' option, followed by Save, then click Send and type the mobile-phone number to which Google should send the passcode when your recipient needs to open the message.

To send secure emails from your phone or tablet, you need the Gmail app – this is preinstalled on Android devices, and a free download for iOS at www.snipca.com/39097. Compose a new email in the usual way, then tap the three dots at the top of the composition screen and select 'Confidential mode'. Again, select an expiry date and choose whether a passcode is required, then tap Save. Tap the paper-aeroplane icon to send the message.

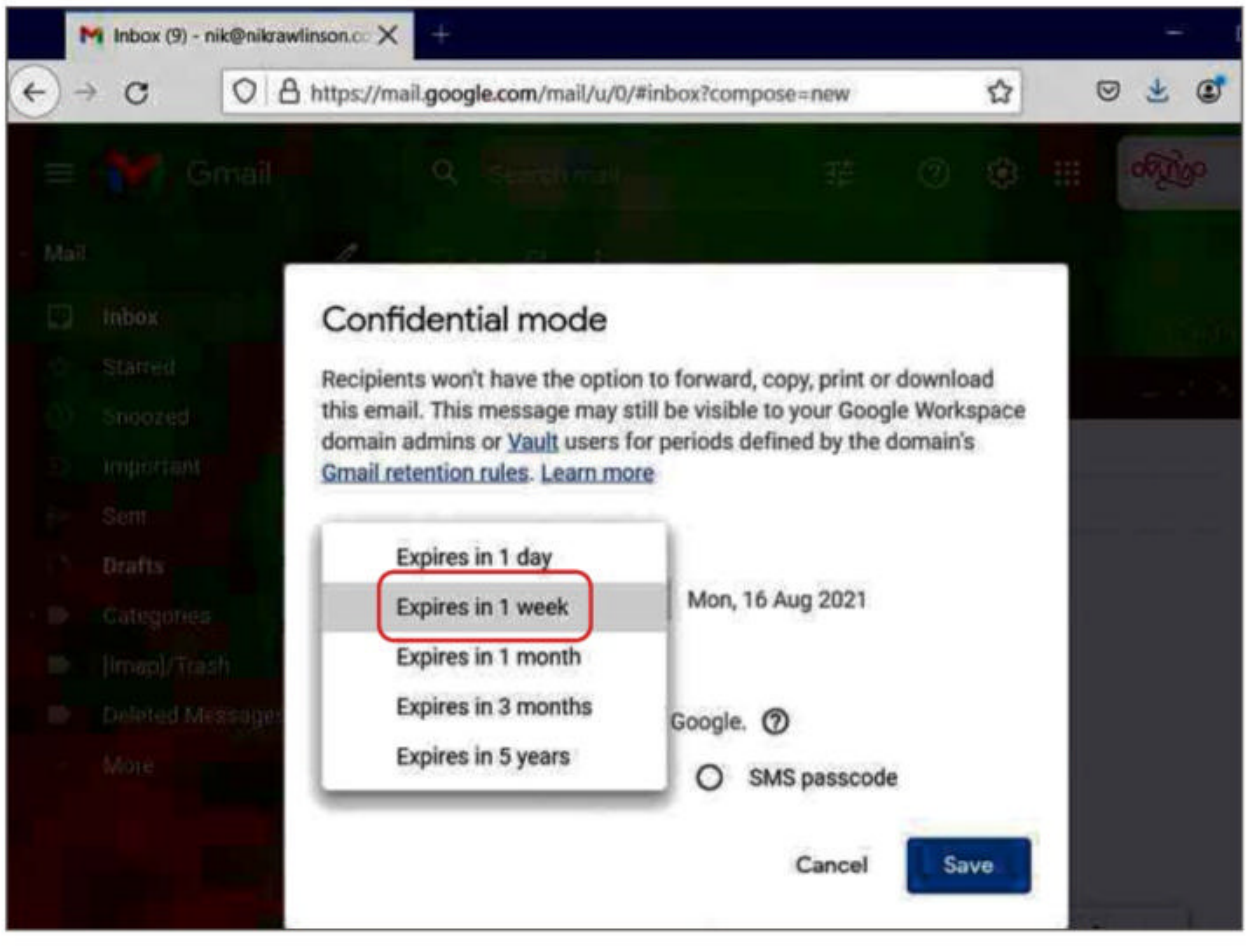
3 Read confidential mode emails

Whereas Microsoft's sensitivity setting (as explained earlier) relies on you and your recipient using Outlook, Google's confidential mode works outside of Gmail.

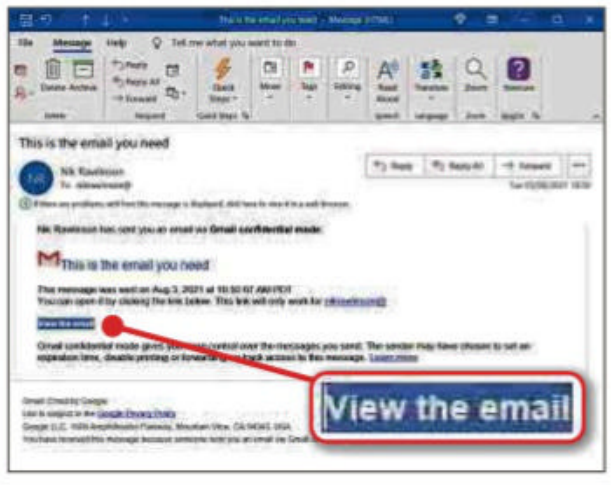
When you receive a protected email, you'll see only the subject line (so if you're *sending* an email, don't include sensitive information here) and who the message is from. If you're using Gmail to read the email, you'll see details of when the message expires along with a 'Send passcode' button. Clicking this sends a verification code to the mobile number specified by the person who sent the email (as explained in the previous step), which you can then use to unlock the email and display its contents.

If you're using an email program other than Gmail, such as Outlook, you'll see a 'View the email' button (see screenshot below). Clicking this opens your browser and displays a Send Passcode button, which you can then use to obtain the passcode and view the email.

Each of these confidential mode measures makes it more difficult for someone to share your email, but doesn't



Send emails using Gmail's confidential mode and set them to expire within a certain time frame



When you receive a confidential mode email, click this option to get your passcode

How I use email encryption

When you've gone to the effort of setting up email encryption with friends who have done the same, it's easy to get into the habit of using it every time. I like to think of it as similar to locking the door when I leave the house: if I didn't, there's a fair chance nobody would snoop around, but why take that risk? Encrypting emails is a sensible precaution when an increasing number of hackers are out to steal our personal information.

Nik Rawlinson

How do you use email encryption?
Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

stop them taking a screenshot of it in their browser, so it's not a foolproof way to have private conversations that can't ever be seen by anyone else.

4 Use your own encryption keys

You don't have to use Gmail to send secure emails. You can instead encrypt them yourself, then use any other email program to send them. However, this takes a little bit of effort to set up. You also need to coordinate with whoever you want to share encrypted emails with, because you'll both need to generate a pair of encryption keys – one public, one private. When you want to send someone an encrypted message, you'll need to use their public key to encrypt it. Once encrypted, the email can be decrypted and read only by using the associated private key. Don't worry if this sounds confusing – the process is fairly complicated, but we explain it step-by-step in Steps 5 and 6.

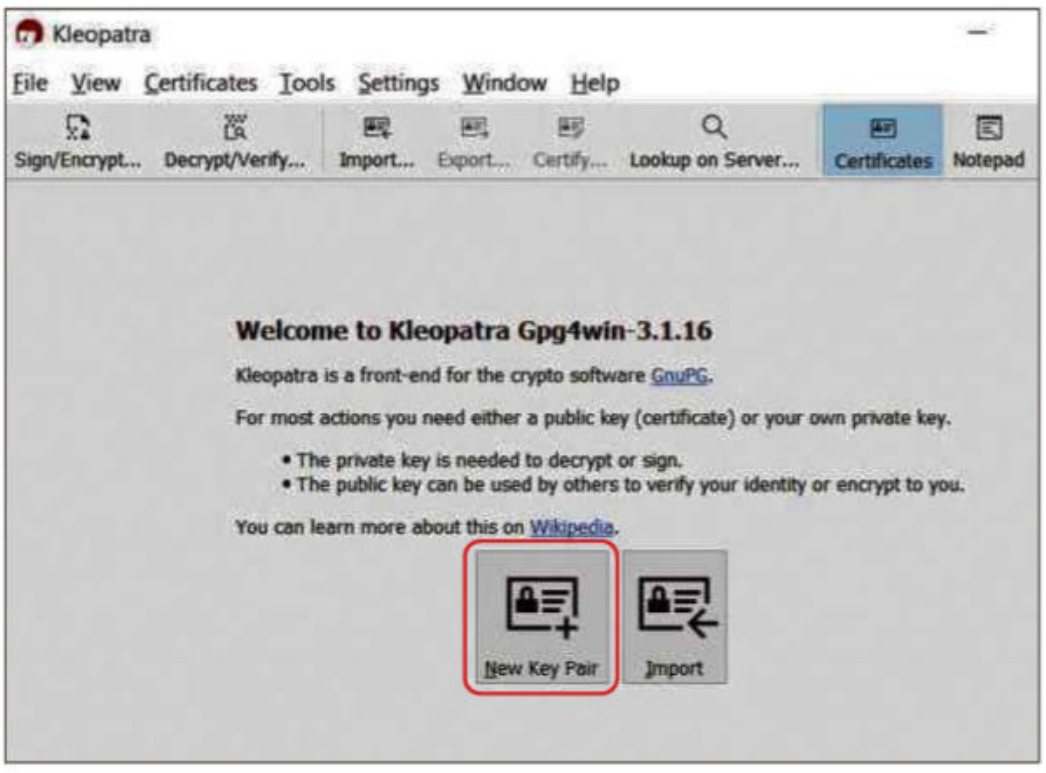
5 Generate your encryption key pair

Download Gpg4win from www.snipca.com/39099 (unless you want to make a donation, select $0 in the PayPal box, then click Download). Launch the downloaded file and, when asked which components you'd like to install, leave the default selection of checkboxes as they are. Click Next, followed by Install.

Once installation is complete, click Next and, on the following screen, leave the option to Run Kleopatra ticked. Click Finish. Kleopatra will now manage the creation of your public and private key, and store the public keys of anyone you want to send encrypted messages to.

With 'Certificates' selected on the toolbar, click New Key Pair (see screenshot above right), then provide your name and email address, and click Next. At this point, Kleopatra will appear to be idle for a while – in reality, a lot of work is going on in the background to generate a very long string of random numbers. When the process completes, click Finish.

You'll now be returned to the main window, in which a table will now contain your first key pair. You can use this pair of keys to handle encrypted emails at the address you specified at the start of the process. If you want to receive encrypted messages at a different email, you'll need to repeat the process for that address.



Kleopatra creates and manages your public and private encryption keys

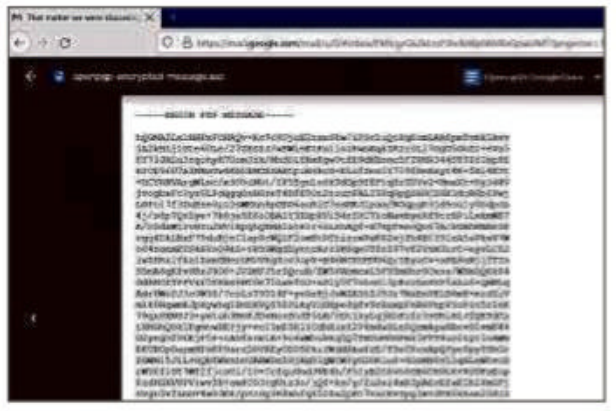
Right-click the only entry in the table and click 'Export...' Select a destination for the certificate it's going to export, then share the resulting file with anyone who will ever need to send you an encrypted message. You can do this by emailing it to them, or publishing it on your website, for example. They can then add it to their own copy of Kleopatra by clicking the toolbar's Import button.

You now need to export the private key that you'll use to unlock any encrypted emails you receive. Right-click the only entry in the table again, and this time select 'Backup secret keys'. Save the file on your computer, but this time don't share it with anyone. We recommend using a completely different folder to the one you used to store your public key so you never get them mixed up.

6 Send and read your encrypted messages

When someone sends you their public key, you first need to import it into Kleopatra – they'll need to do the same when you send them your public key. In Kleopatra, click the Import button on the main toolbar, then select the public key file that's been shared with you – if this arrived in an email from your correspondent, first save the key to your hard drive, then import it from there. Kleopatra will ask if you want to verify who it's from – as long as you trust the sender, click No.

Now start writing a new email in Outlook, providing a recipient address, subject line and message content as usual. When you've finished writing, click the Secure button in the toolbar. This checks the recipient's address against the list of public keys you've imported into the certificate manager and, if it finds a match, applies it to the email.



Without the private key to unscramble it, an encrypted email will be gibberish

When you click Send, your email will be scrambled before being sent. In much the same way that generating your key took a little while to complete, encrypting your message is a complicated process that requires a fair amount of calculation on your computer's part. It might briefly look like your email software has stalled, but leave it alone and it should complete the process in a few seconds.

When the recipient receives the message it will be scrambled, but, if they've imported the sender's public key, their email program will automatically decode it. If they're using Outlook, two information bars immediately below the recipient's email address will show that the message had previously been encrypted.

If you're wondering what an encrypted message would have looked like if it was intercepted, you just need to open it in an email program that doesn't have access to your store of public and private keys (see screenshot above). As you can see, it would be impossible to read.

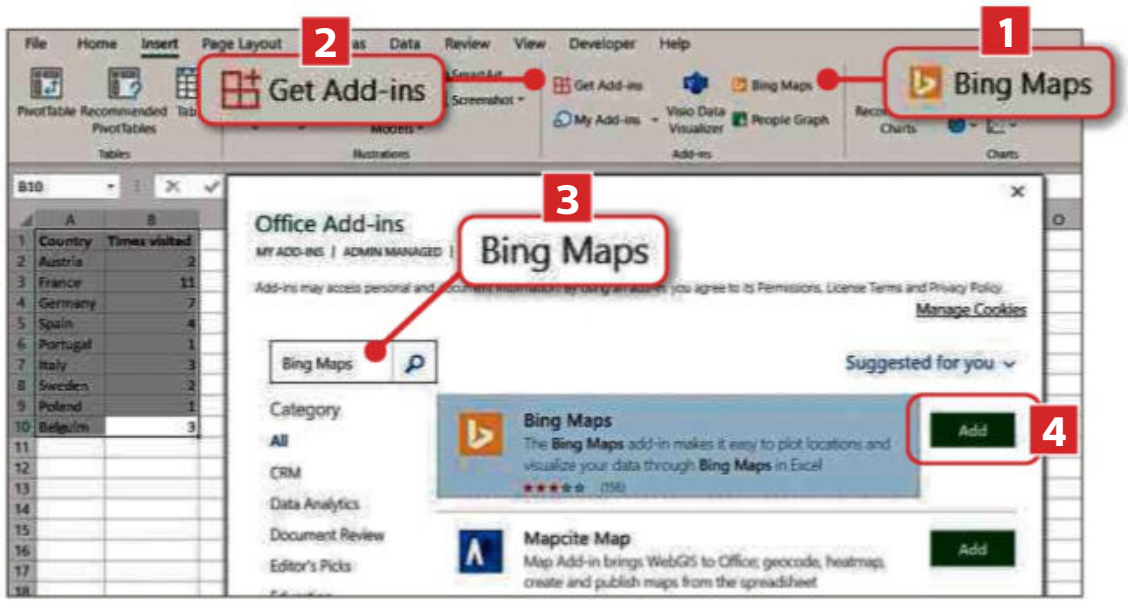
Add map data to your spreadsheets

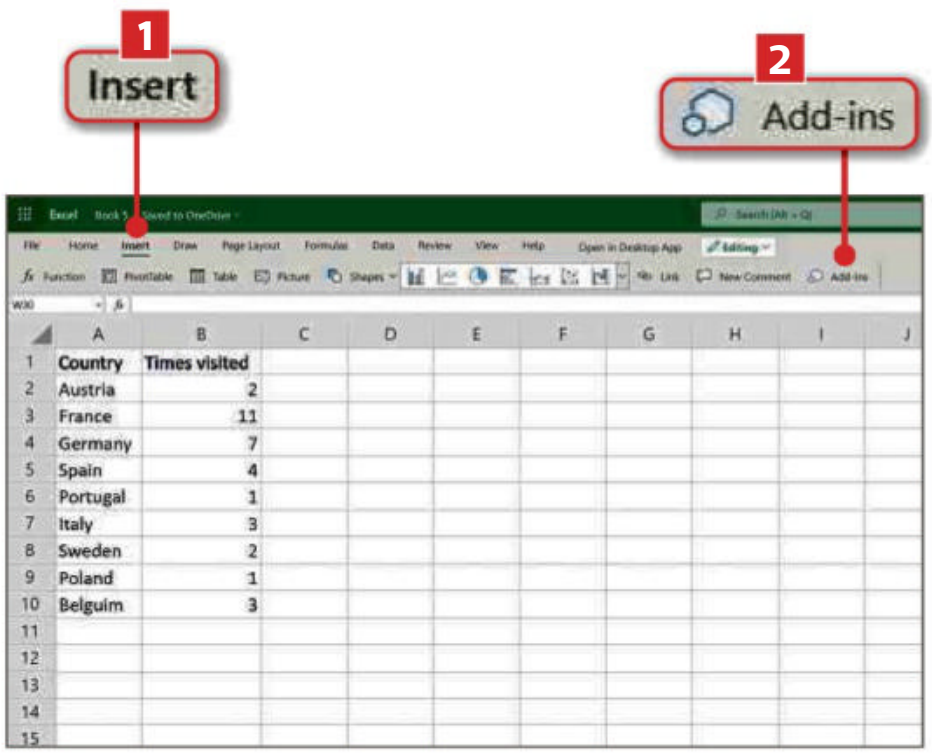
What you need: Microsoft Excel
Time required: 30 minutes

When you've lovingly put together a spreadsheet containing geographical data, what better way to visualise it than on a map? This might sound like hard work, but with a little help from the free Bing Maps add-in, Excel plots everything on a map for you. Don't worry if you don't have Excel installed on your computer – the add-in also works with the free version of 'Excel for the Web' (Microsoft's online version).

STEP 1

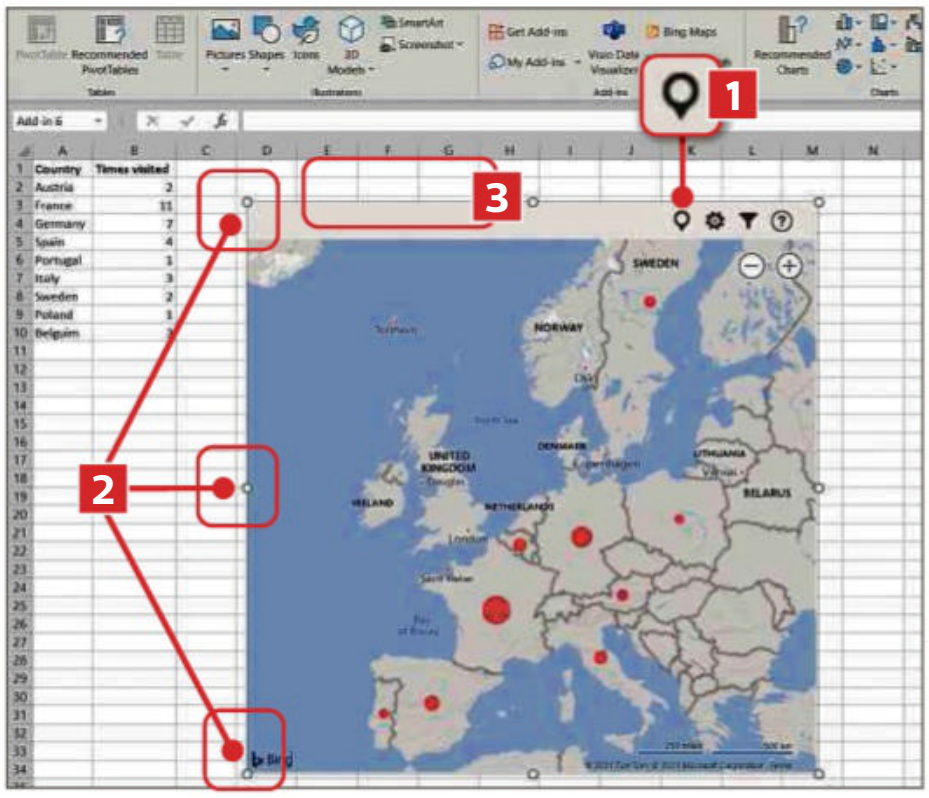
If you're using the offline version of Excel (2013 and later), open your spreadsheet as normal. The more specific the location data is in your spreadsheet, the more likely Excel will be able to pinpoint it on a map (for UK addresses, for example, it's best to include a postcode). In our example, we have a simple spreadsheet showing how many times we've visited a number of European countries. To load the map, click the Insert menu, then Bing Maps 1; if you can't see this option, click 'Get Add-ins' 2, search for Bing Maps 3, then select it, click Add 4 and, in the window that opens, click Continue.





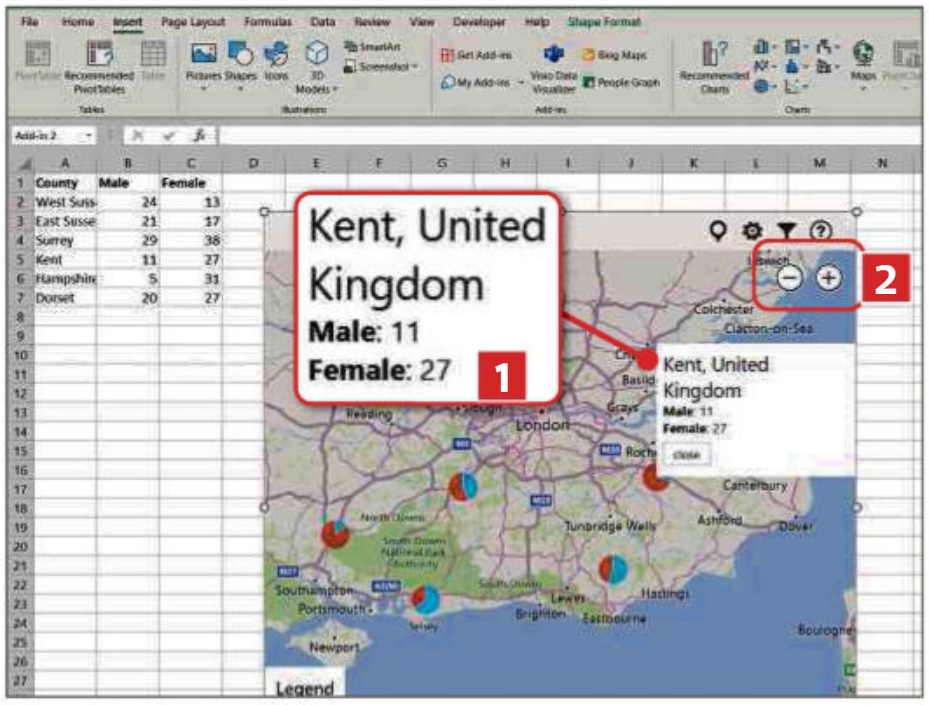
STEP 2

To install the add-in for 'Excel for the web', go to www.snipca.com/39157, click 'Sign in' and enter your Microsoft login details (if you don't have a Microsoft account, click 'Sign up for free' and follow the instructions). Once you've signed in, click the 'Upload and open...' link (top right), then upload your spreadsheet. Alternatively, you can create a new spreadsheet by clicking the Excel icon on the left, then 'New blank workbook'. Next, click Insert 1, 'Add-ins' 2, then install the Bing Maps add-in as described in Step 1.



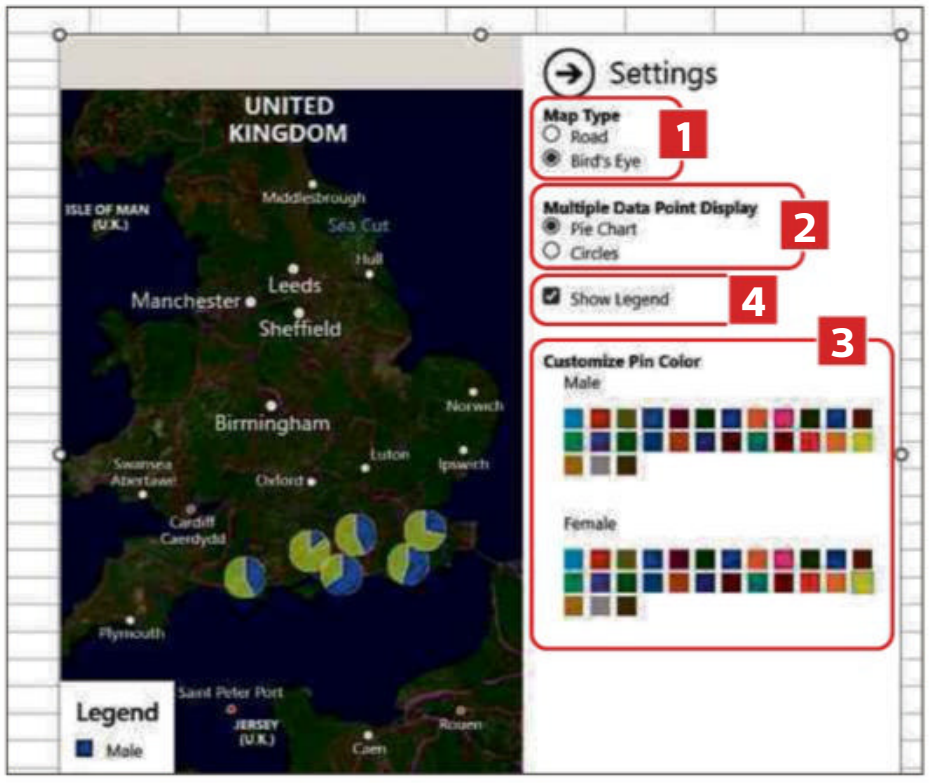
STEP 3

You can now add your data to the map. Select the cells you want to include (make sure your data has a header row as Excel will use this to create the legend for your map), then click the pin icon 1. As you can see in our example, Excel has used a red circle to mark each country on the map, sizing it according to the number of visits we've made. Resize the map by clicking and dragging the circles around its edges 2. To reposition the map in your spreadsheet, hover your mouse over the box that surrounds it 3, then click and drag.



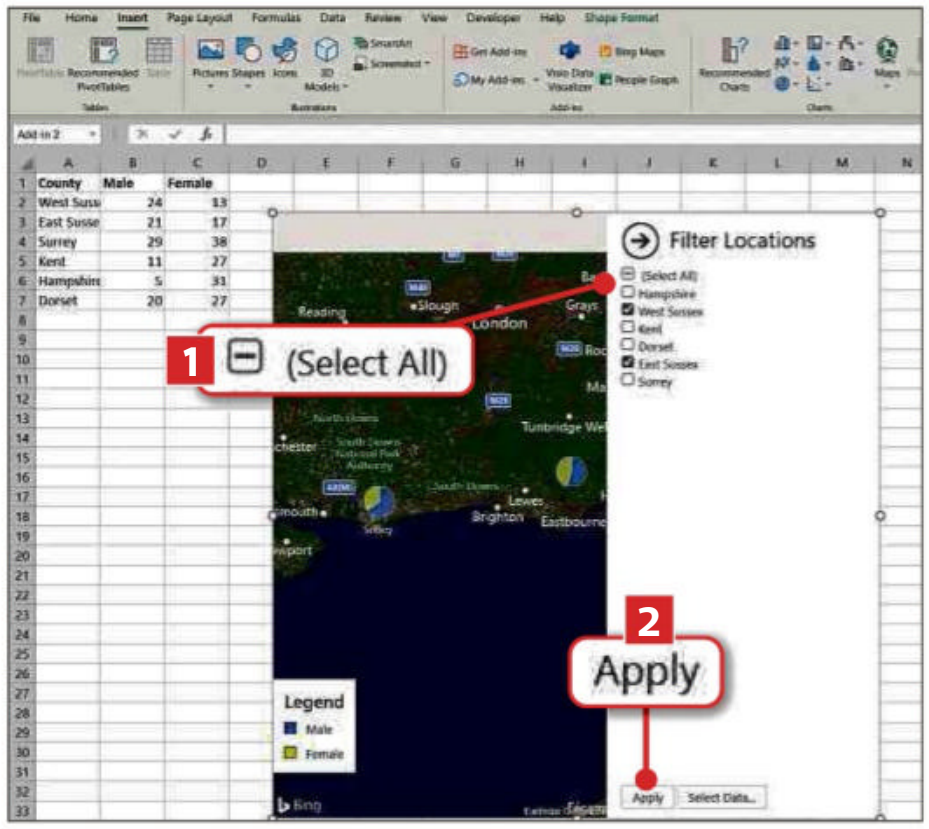
STEP 4

You can add as much data to the map as you like. In this example, we have a spreadsheet showing the counties in which members of a local club live, along with the split between male and female members for each. As before, we select the relevant cells, then click the pin icon above the map. This time, you'll see pie charts showing the male/female split for each county. Click a specific pie chart to see a breakdown of its figures **1**. You can also zoom in and out of the map by clicking the '+' and '–' buttons **2** or hovering your mouse over the map and moving the scroll wheel. To move around the map, click and drag with your mouse.



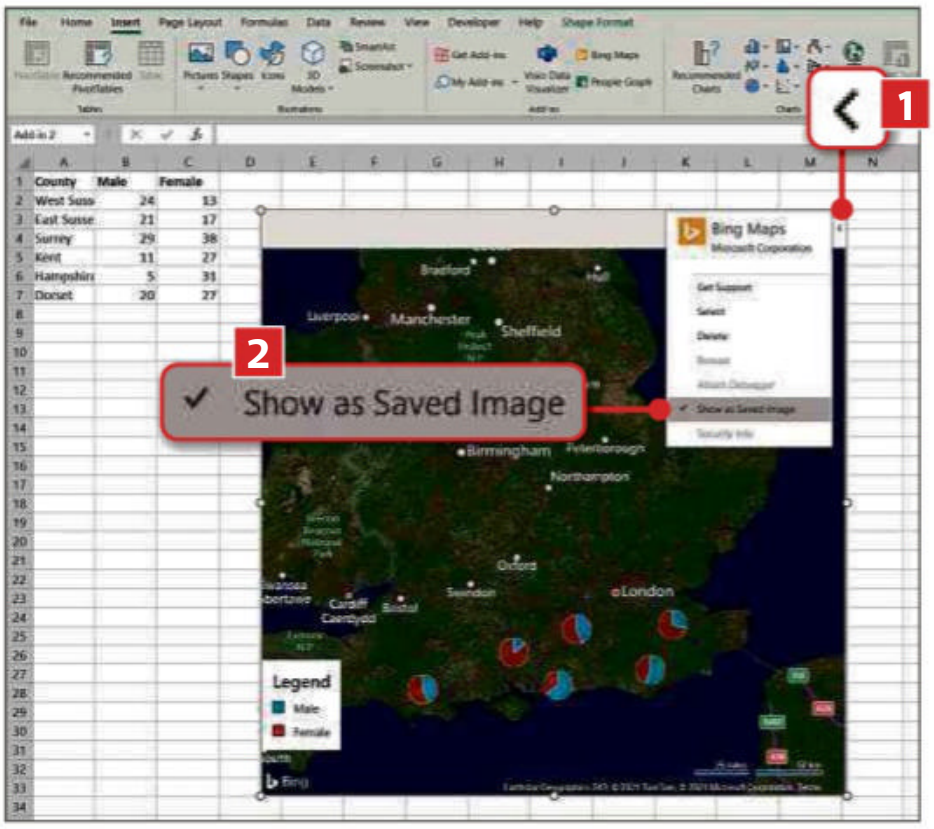
STEP 5

You can tweak the map's settings by clicking the cog icon in the top-right corner of the map window. The 'Map Type' options let you switch between Road (a standard road map view) and Bird's Eye (satellite images) **1**. As well as choosing whether to display the data for each entry as a pie chart or separate circles **2**, you can also select the colour for each **3** and choose whether to display the legend **4**. All changes you make here will be applied to the map instantly.



STEP 6

If you have a large spreadsheet, you may want to restrict what's displayed on the map. To do this, click the Filter button (funnel icon) at the top right of the map. You'll now see a list of all locations currently shown on the map. To remove specific entries, untick the relevant boxes. If you want to show only a small selection, it's quicker to untick the '(Select All)' box **1**, then tick those you want to see. Once you've made your changes, click Apply **2** to update the map. Note that this only alters what's displayed on the map – hiding an entry won't delete it from your spreadsheet.



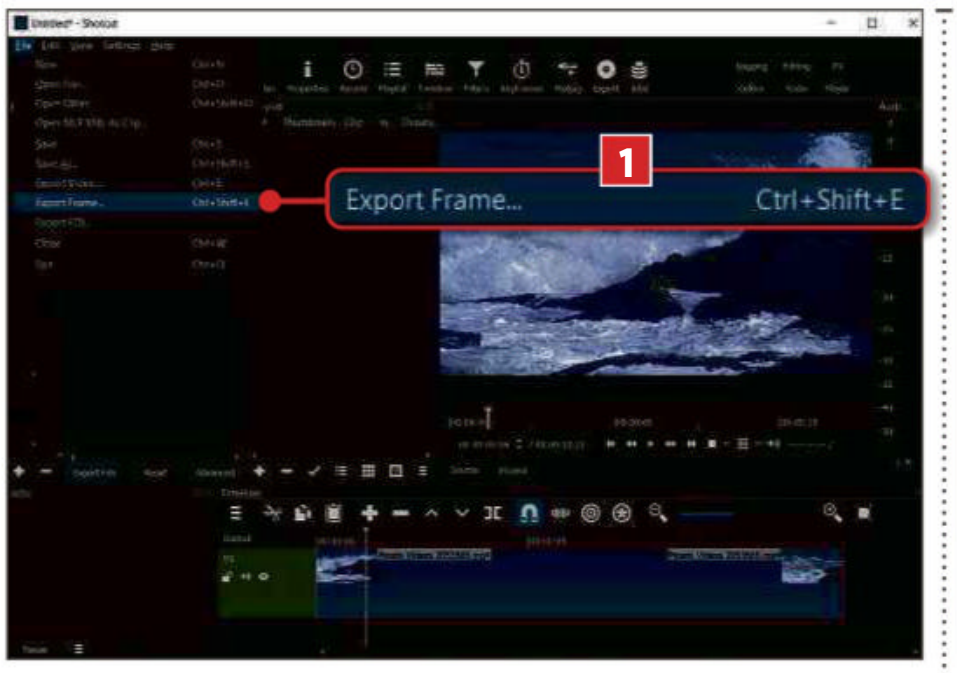
STEP 7

The Bing Maps add-in works only with Excel. If you share your spreadsheet with someone using another program, such as LibreOffice Calc, the map will appear as an empty white box. There is a way around this. In Excel, select the map, then click the small '<' button in the top-right corner **1** and select 'Show as Saved Image' **2** – this freezes the map, essentially turning it into an image. You can now save the spreadsheet, then open it in Calc and the map will be visible (however it won't update if you change data in your spreadsheet). Once you've done this, return to Excel and click 'Show as Saved Image' again to be able to update the map as before.

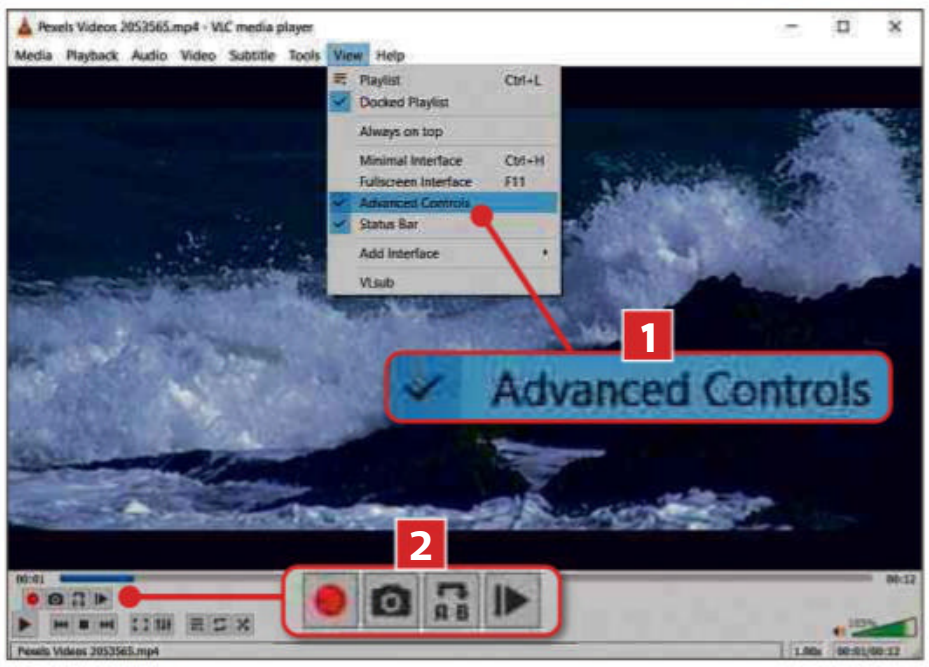
Capture sharp still images from your videos

What you need: VLC **Time required:** 20 minutes

Sometimes the best photos are actually contained within your videos. However, simply pausing the video at the right moment then taking a screenshot will result in a poor-quality image because its resolution will be dictated by the size of the window in which the video is playing. Here, we explain how to use VLC to export individual frames from your videos in a way that guarantees perfect, high-resolution still images every time.

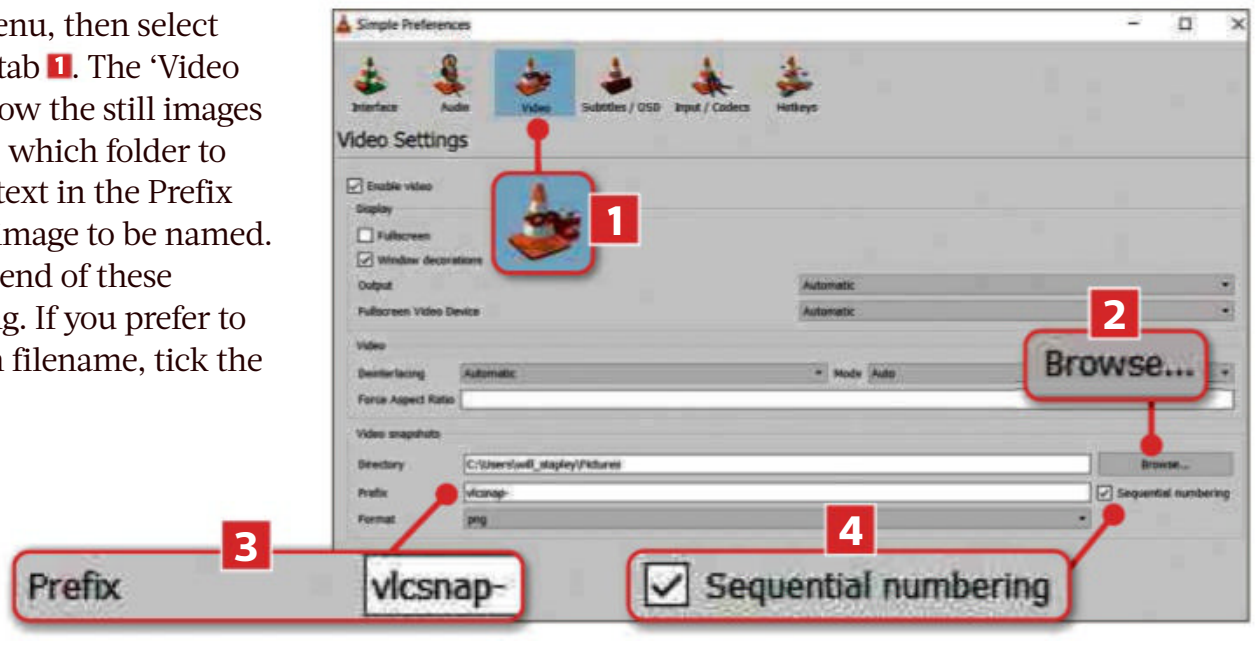


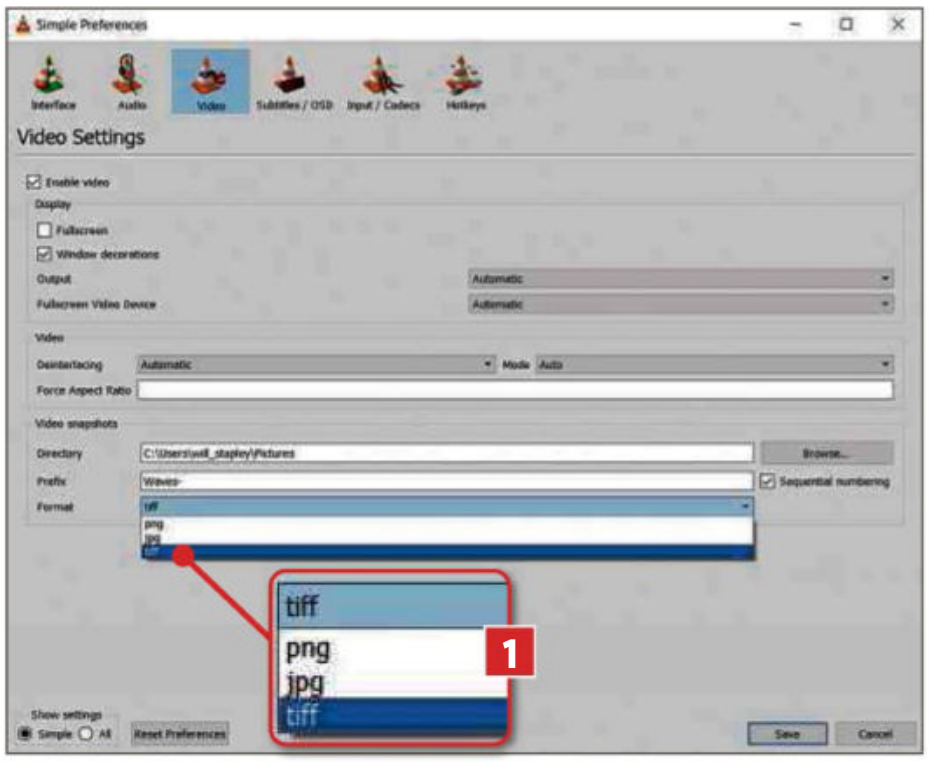
STEP 1 If you want to take a still image from a video that you created using video-editing software on your computer, it's best – if you still have it – to load the *original* video in that software. Any file you edited in and exported from that software will have had compression applied to it, so won't provide the best possible still image. Precisely how you do this depends on your video-editing software. In Shotcut (www.shotcut.com), open your video file, use the timeline at the bottom to navigate to the relevant section, then click File, followed by Export Frame 1. In Adobe Premiere (full version and Premiere Elements), simply press Shift key+E.



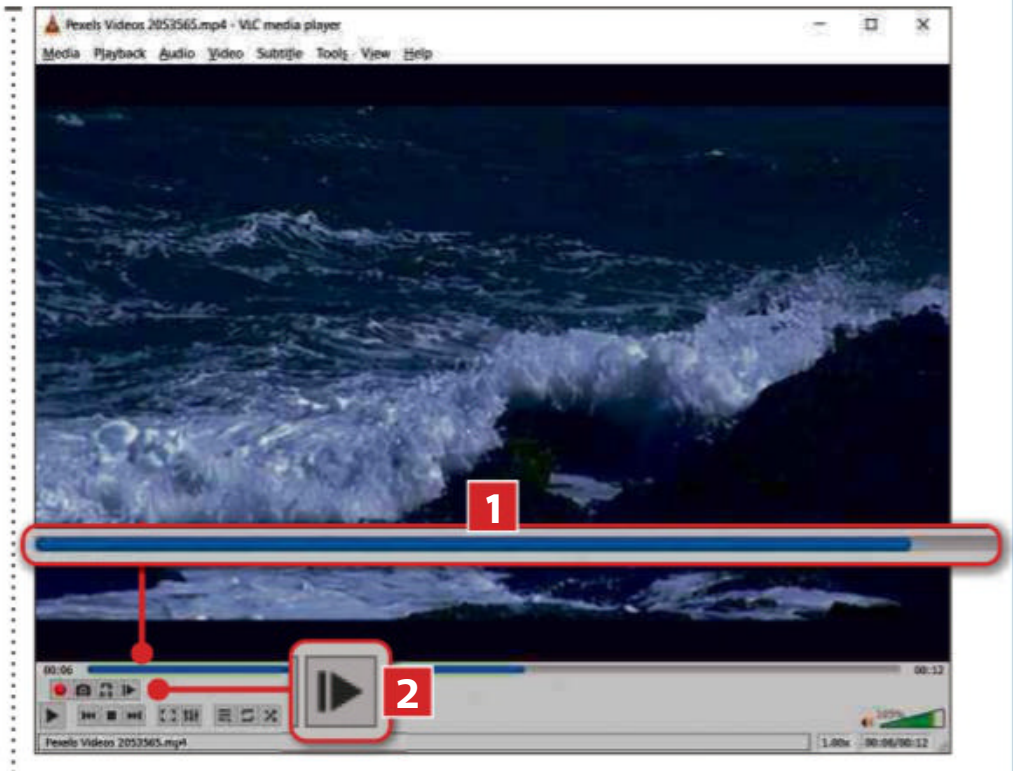
STEP 2 If you don't have the original video file, you can still produce high-quality still images. We recommend using VLC (www.videolan.org). Run VLC, then your video file (you can do this by dragging it from File Explorer directly into the VLC window). Next, click the View menu and select Advanced Controls 1 (if this option has a tick next to it, it's already enabled so you don't need to do anything). You should now see a new collection of buttons in the bottom corner of the screen 2 – we'll be using these to select and capture the still image later.

STEP 3 In the meantime, click the Tools menu, then select Preferences, followed by the Video tab 1. The 'Video snapshots' section lets you tweak how the still images are saved. First, click Browse 2, then choose which folder to save the images in. Next, edit the 'vlcsnap-' text in the Prefix box 3 according to how you want each still image to be named. By default, VLC will add a timestamp to the end of these filenames, but this can make them quite long. If you prefer to just add a unique number to the end of each filename, tick the 'Sequential numbering' box 4.

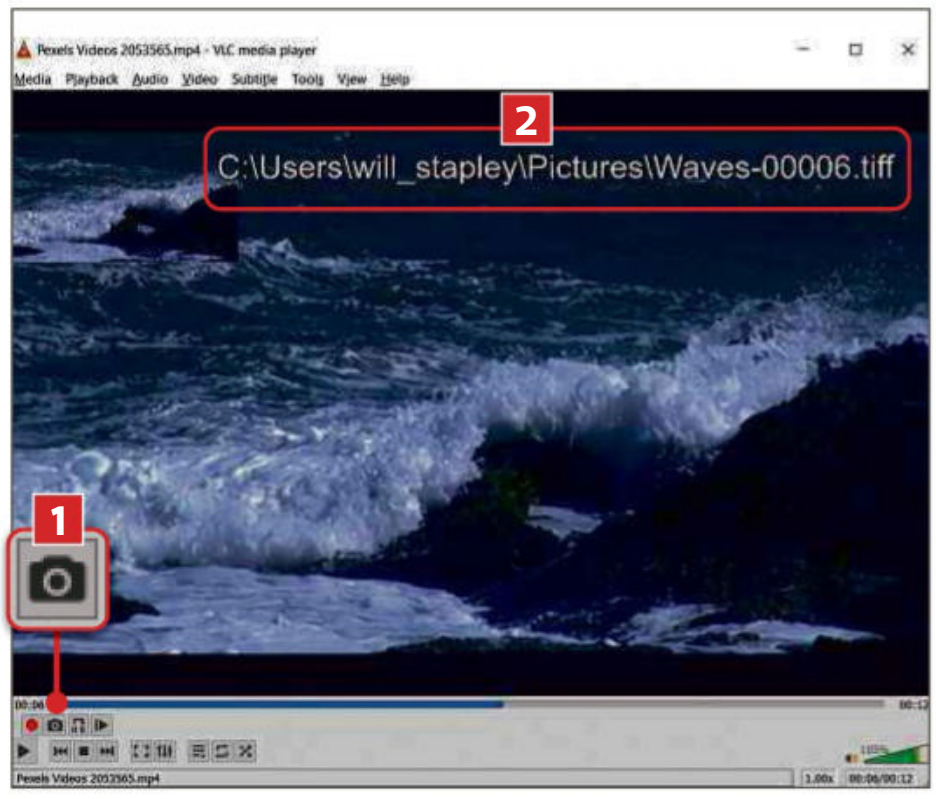




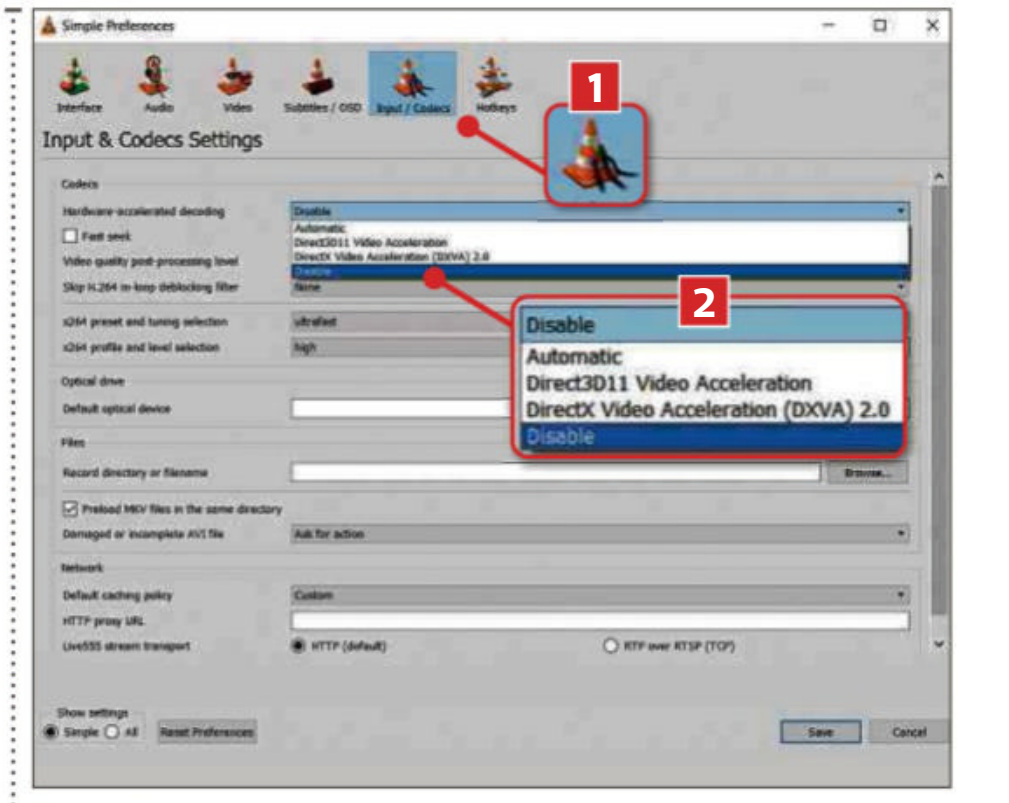
STEP 4 You now need to choose the file format for your still images. Click the Format dropdown menu and you'll see three format options 1. The default is PNG, which like JPEG helps keep file sizes down by compressing your images. However, this compression may result in slight reductions in quality (including areas that appear slightly smudged) – these will become more noticeable when printing the image or zooming in on detail. For the best results, we recommend selecting the TIFF format ('tiff'), which applies less compression. Click 'Save' when you've finished tweaking these settings.



STEP 5 You're now ready to capture your first still image. Navigate to the point in the video just before the section you want to take your still from - you can either use the bar along the bottom of the window 1 or the left and right arrow keys to move through the clip. Now click the 'Frame by frame' button 2 or press the E key to advance the video one frame at a time until you've reached the ideal point for the still image. VLC doesn't let you rewind frame-by-frame, so if you go too far you'll need to press the left arrow key to jump back, then advance through the frames again.



STEP 6 Once you have the frame you want as your still image, either click the 'Take a snapshot' button 1 or press Shift+S. VLC will briefly display a thumbnail of your image in the top-left corner of the window, along with a message showing the exported image's file path and name 2 (don't worry if this doesn't happen – we'll explain how to fix it in Step 7). Repeat this process to capture as many still images as you like. To view the images, open File Explorer (press the Windows key+E), then navigate to the folder you specified in Step 3.



STEP 7 If VLC fails to export your images, it's probably because you have hardware acceleration turned on. Due to a known bug in VLC, this can prevent images from being exported. To disable hardware acceleration, open the Tools menu, select Preferences, then the 'Inputs/Codecs' tab 1. Click the dropdown menu in the 'Hardware-accelerated encoding' section at the top, then select Disable 2. Click Save, then restart VLC and open your video file as before. You should now be able to export still images as described in Step 6.

Next issue: Lock your browser with a password

Readers' Tips

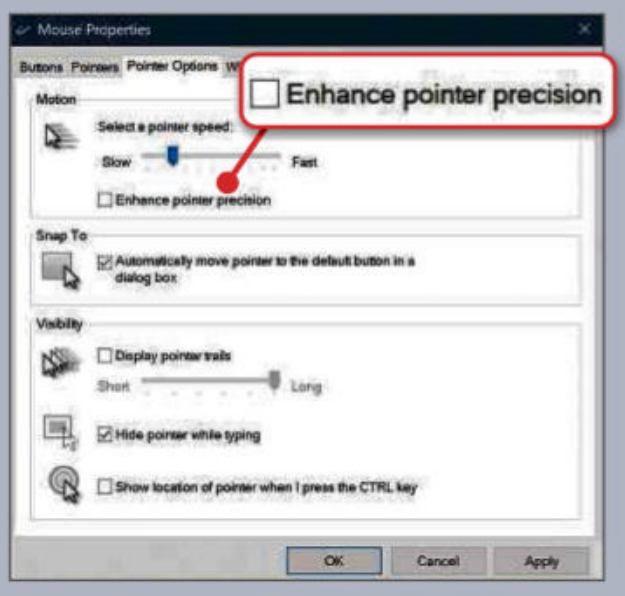
TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Get better cursor control in Windows

As I get older my mouse control is getting shakier, so I find it harder to place the cursor exactly where I want it.

Someone in my local computing club (meeting again in person – hooray!) suggested turning off a feature in Windows called 'mouse acceleration'. This option is meant to sharpen the precision of the cursor, but apparently for many people it has the opposite effect.

I thought it was worth trying, so I pressed Windows key+I to open Settings, then clicked Mouse on the left, and 'Additional mouse options' in the middle. I then unticked 'Enhance pointer precision' and clicked Apply at the bottom.



The effect was instant, as though the cursor went from wearing roller skates to boots weighed down with mud.

I'm sure it'll be too slow for many people, but it's just right for me. I no longer overshoot the place I want to click.

Ron Searle

Ron wins a copy of our 2020 Back Issue CD

Buy it on Amazon www.snipca.com/38164

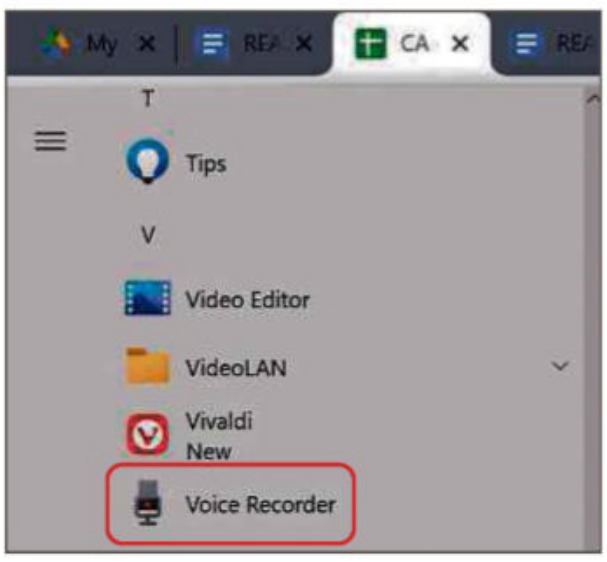
WINDOWS 10

Record sounds using Voice Recorder app

Your tips on improving Windows 10's accessibility tools (Issue 611, page 60) were useful. You explained how to record sound effects and add them to Windows, though you didn't mention using Windows 10's Voice Recorder app to record sounds. It works well, though it works only with sounds saved in the WAV format, so you may need to convert the files. Many of my sounds are MP3s, so I convert them using the online tool Zamzar (www.zamzar.com).

To open Voice Recorder, click the Start menu and scroll down to the tools listed under 'V' (see screenshot above right).

Roy Porter



SOFTWARE

Turn on subtitles in VLC

Another accessibility tool you could have mentioned is turning on subtitles in video programs. Here's what I do in VLC media player: click Tools, Preferences then select the Subtitles/OSD tab. From here you can choose the font, size, colour, outline and position of your subtitles.

Patricia Gill

SOFTWARE

Turn off 'Trimmed Mode' in Serif PagePlus

In Issue 611 (page 68) Roger Brown wrote about the problem he's having with a greyed-out 'Clean Design' button in Serif PagePlus. I recall suffering this problem myself, but I may have a solution. It's possible that Roger has activated 'Trimmed Mode' (Ctrl+Shift+G). My screenshots (above right) show this option switched on and off, side by side,

Why I stopped using...

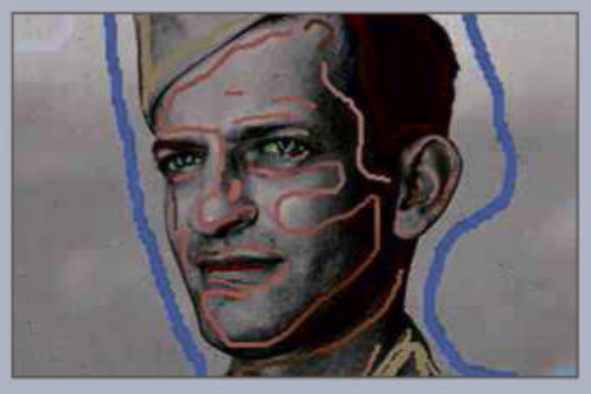
Colorize

Several readers and *Computeractive* writers have praised Colorize (www.snipca.com/38167), and for simple colouring of black-and-white photos it does a good job. But it does have restrictions (as you'd expect from a free tool), such as a 5MB limit on file sizes.

And what I use instead...

I've had several large jobs recently colourising hundreds of war and travel photos, so bought the program **Codijy Colorizer Pro** (www.codijy.com) for $67 (around £48). Yes, that's a bit pricey, but at least it's a one-off purchase, so you're not trapped into a subscription.

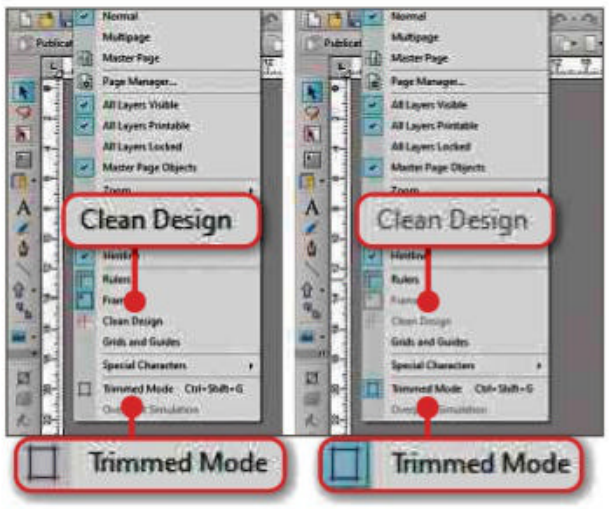
The difference between Codijy and Colorize is as pronounced as the difference between black and white and colour. Codijy's tools are more advanced, such as 'Auto-border detection' (see screenshot), which identifies the borders of adjoining areas in your photo, even if your mouse strokes aren't very precise.



I've never struggled to find a suitable colour, which is not surprising because there are 14,000 on offer!

Anthony Ferris

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



so you can see the difference.

By the way, I'm a keen supporter of Serif PagePlus, and have now published several books (one nearly 600 pages long, with thousands of images). In my view it's far superior to its replacement Affinity Publisher – a complex program lacking features essential to many publishers, seemingly aimed at magazine publishing rather than books.

Malcolm J Watkins

Reader recommends...

Samsung 860 QVO 1TB SSD

£96 from Amazon
www.snipca.com/39044

I have a Medion Akoya E7330 D PC, bought around 13 years ago. It's now as slow as a carthorse, and there's hardly any space left on the hard drive. I decided to take a chance on an SSD, and on Amazon Prime Day bought this Samsung model at £20 less than the usual price. I also bought a mounting bracket and SATA cable.

I used Samsung's Data Migration Tool to copy everything from my old drive to the SSD. I also changed the boot order in the BIOS, putting the SSD first.

The results were quite surprising. I could boot and get on to the internet in just a couple of minutes, and photos now load instantly rather than the 10 minutes (or not at all) previously.

Tom Ashmore

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

BROWSERS

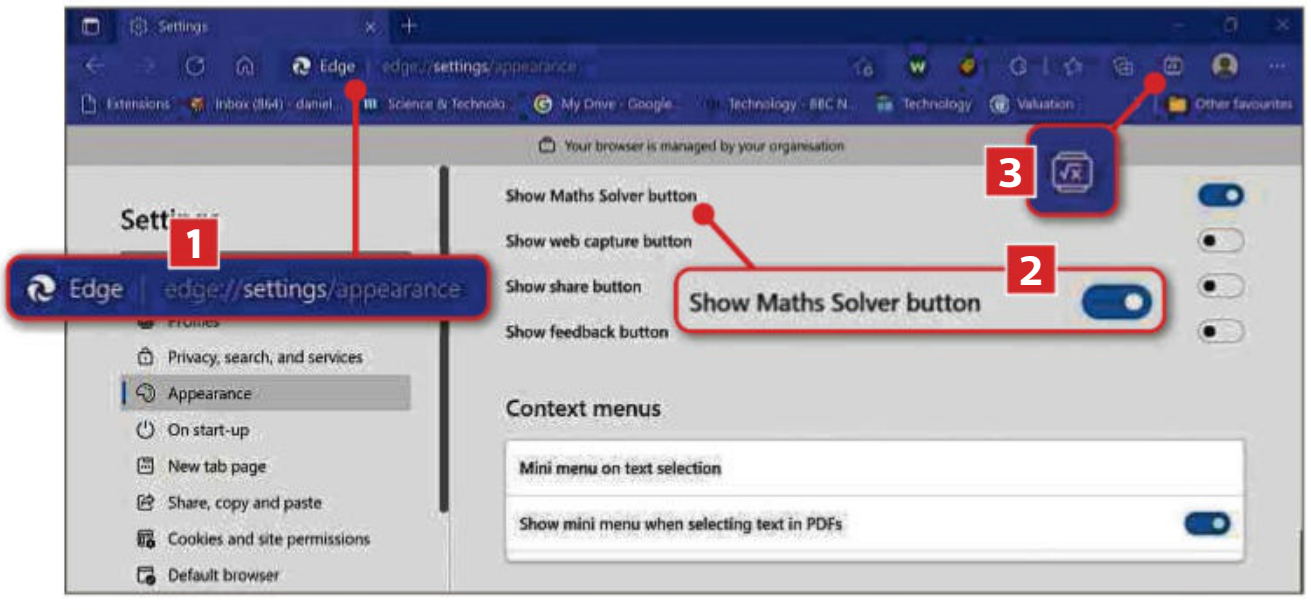
Add 'Maths Solver' to your Edge toolbar

I studied maths at university, but never needed to use my knowledge during my career as a civil servant. Now that I've retired, I've decided to rekindle my dormant maths skills. This has been helped greatly by discovering Maths Solver in Edge.

It's easy to find – just click the top-right menu icon, then 'More tools' at the bottom, followed by Maths Solver in the menu that appears. You're now given two choices: click 'Select maths problem' and you can draw a box around the problem you want to solve, or 'Type maths problem'.

A smart way to use Maths Solver is to add an icon for it to your Edge toolbar. Do this by choosing Appearance in Settings (or typing edge://settings/appearance in the browser bar – 1 in screenshot below left), then scrolling down and turning on the 'Show Maths Solver button' slider 2. Now click the icon 3 to launch the tool.

Adam Blanchford



DATA

Use 1pMobile to upload security videos from cameras

I'd like to echo Richard Martin and his praise for 1pMobile (www.1pmobile.com) in Issue 611 (page 42). I've set up an account to use with the Reolink security camera installed on our block of flats. I set it to capture activity between 8pm and 6am, with the clips stored on a 64GB SIM card.

I upload these to my Reolink account via my smartphone (on 1pMobile) when I need to. Average uploads are only in MBs, and so don't consume a great deal of bandwidth.

1pMobile charges just a penny for each call and text, so it's great value for money. Plus you can take advantage of longer-term usage by purchasing £15 credit for six months, carrying over any data you don't use. The data is always there should you need it or not. It was a no-brainer compared with Vodafone, which was costing me £17 per month for 2GB.

John Ryan

PHONES

Check whether your bank uses Google Pay

I'd like to add something to Helen Millward's persuasive review of the Nokia 3.4 phone (Issue 611, page 43, pictured). She rightly praises it for working with NFC, which allows her to use it for making contactless payments through Google Pay. But before buying this phone, or another that has NFC, readers should check whether their bank supports Google Pay. This is easily done – just visit Google's site: www.snipca.com/38674.

I'm proof that it's worth checking this. I was about to buy the Nokia 3.4 based on Helen's recommendation, but Google's site revealed that my bank, Barclays, doesn't work with Google Pay, though it does have its own contactless app for payments (www.snipca.com/38916).

Alan Iggleston

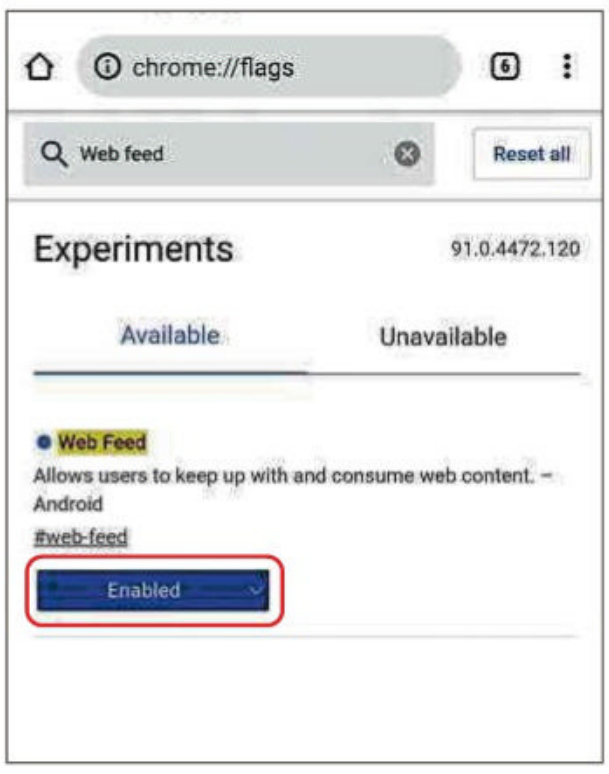
Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID

Follow a website's RSS feed in Google Chrome

Subscribing to RSS feeds used to be a great way to keep up to date with the latest updates to your favourite websites, though it's a bit of a dying platform now. But if you have an Android device running Chrome, there's a new way to subscribe to websites that let's you see the latest articles and posted updates. The 'Web Feed' option is an experimental feature that requires you to enable a Chrome flag, so it may not be compatible with *all* websites yet, but it worked well when we tested it.

Make sure you have the latest version of Chrome installed (check for updates via the Play app), then launch the browser, type chrome://flags into the address bar and tap Enter. Type web feed into the 'Search flags' box – the Web Feed flag will then appear below. In the dropdown menu below that, select Enabled (see screenshot below left), then tap Relaunch to restart your browser.



To subscribe to a website's feed, visit the site, then tap the menu button (three dots). At the bottom of the menu, you should see the name of the website, with a Follow button next to it. Tap this and you'll see a message confirming that you've followed the site. Remember that Google is still in the process of rolling this feature out, so if you don't see the Follow button in the menu yet, you may need to wait and try again at a later date.

Now you can access the latest updates from sites you've subscribed to by tapping the Home icon or by opening a fresh tab and tapping the Following button.

iOS

Add your NHS Covid pass to your Apple Wallet

Whatever your position on the controversial subject of vaccine passports, the chances are you're going to be asked to prove your Covid status at some point in the near future. Users of the NHS app – the one you can use to order repeat prescriptions and book GP appointments, not the separate NHS Covid-19 app – may have noticed that it now offers an option to get the NHS Covid Pass, which shows whether you're double-vaccinated or if you've recently tested negative following a PCR test. Usefully, iPhone owners can now add their NHS Covid Pass to their phone's Wallet, making it easy to access whenever it's needed.

You'll need the NHS app installed (free from www.snipca.com/39080). If you haven't already set up the NHS app you'll also need to do this. We don't have space here to explain how to set up the NHS app in full but, essentially, you need to set up an NHS login, then use a photo ID to prove who you are. You'll find more information on the process at www.snipca.com/39081.

Once you've done this, log into the NHS app and tap 'Get your NHS COVID Pass'. Tap 'I agree', then tap Continue. Now select Domestic, for use in the UK, or Travel, if you need to prove your Covid status for travelling abroad. You'll now see a QR code. Tap the 'Add to Apple Wallet' button just below it. On the next

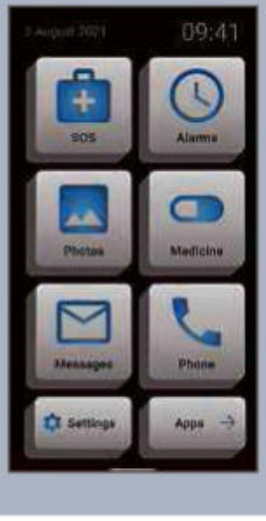
BEST NEW APPS What you should install this fortnight

Uncomplicated Launcher

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/39082

Smartphones are incredibly useful but they have become increasingly convoluted over the years. Uncomplicated Launcher takes your device right back to basics, with big, simple buttons for key functions, such as calls and alarms, and simple navigation. It's customisable too, though some options will require you to pay £2.09 for the full version.



Falou

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/39083

iOS www.snipca.com/39084

A new app in the Duolingo mould, Falou lets you learn 17 different languages through AI-powered conversations set in real-world scenarios. You get a few lessons for free, and there's a free three-day trial of Falou Premium (normally £30 per year) you can try to see if you want to subscribe.

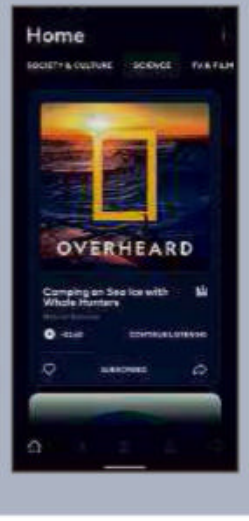
Moonbeam

Free

Android www.snipca.com/39085

iOS www.snipca.com/39086

Podcasts are great but there are so many these days, it's tricky to find shows worth listening to. Moonbeam makes this process easier. Choose categories you're interested in and the app will 'beam' you snippets of shows it thinks you'll like. You can either carry on listening and subscribe, or swipe up to hear another snippet.



*Contains in-app purchases

screen, tap Add to store the NHS Covid Pass in your Wallet.

Now, should you be asked for your Covid status to, say, access a venue, simply double-tap the power button (on iPhone X and later models) or the Home button (on older phones) to open Wallet, then tap the NHS Covid Pass to show the QR code. Your pass will expire after the date stated (see screenshot left), after which you'll need to repeat the process to get a new one.

iOS

Add annotations to PDFs

There are plenty of free PDF tools in the App Store, but many of these are packed with adverts or in-app purchases. In fact, your iPhone or iPad already has some great built-in PDF annotation tools – they're just hidden away.

The trick to using these tools is to save your PDF to the iOS Files app. For example, if someone has sent you a PDF via email, tap it, then tap the Share icon, then select 'Save to Files'.

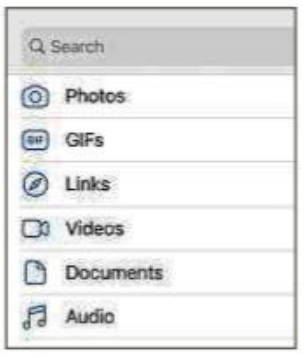
Now open the Files app, locate the PDF you saved and open it. Tap the pen icon in the top-right corner to launch the editing tools. A toolbar will open at the bottom, allowing you to select pens, rulers, colours and more (see screenshot below). Tap the plus sign icon on the right for more tools, including shapes, text boxes and arrows. You can also add a signature here or magnify a portion of the document to draw attention to it. If you make a mistake, tap the Undo button at the top. Tap 'Done' when you've finished.

ANDROID & iOS

Find messages, photos and more in your WhatsApp chats

Have you ever lost something that someone sent you in a WhatsApp chat – for example, a street address or a specific photo? WhatsApp offers a useful search tool that lets you find text within messages and specific file types that have been shared with you. It saves you from scrolling through your chats looking for something and works the same way on both Android and iOS.

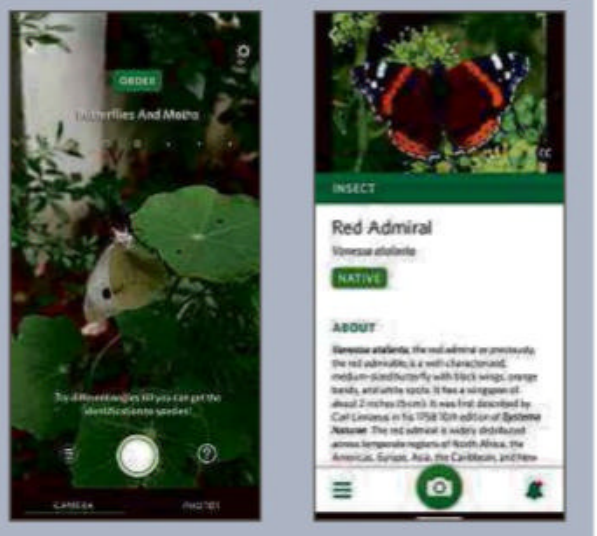
First, make sure you're viewing the Chats tab – tap the Back button to return to this if you're viewing a specific chat thread. At the top of the screen, tap the magnifying-glass icon, then start typing a keyword to search for a specific term among your messages – a partial street address, for example. Alternatively, if you're looking for a photo, GIF, link, video, audio file or document, tap one of the categories that appear (see screenshot above) when you tap the magnifying glass, to browse or search for these types of file specifically.



BEST APPS FOR... Identifying insects

Seek by iNaturalist

Free
Android www.snipca.com/39087
iOS www.snipca.com/39088
This app lets you identify insects – and other animal and plant life – just by pointing your device's camera at it and scanning it. Take a shot to add to your collection, read up about the species you've discovered, and upload any insect images from your photo library that you need to identify.
Best For Budding naturalists



Bugs Matter

Free
Android www.snipca.com/39092
iOS www.snipca.com/39093
Do your bit for biodiversity by using this app to record the number of bugs that hit your car's number plate over the course of a journey. You'll need to download and print your 'splat-o-meter' from www.snipca.com/39094. If you're quick you can submit your results to the current survey, which ends on 31 August.
Best For Helping research on insects

Google Search

Free
Android www.snipca.com/39090
iOS www.snipca.com/39091
Powered by Google's Lens technology, Google's Search app lets you search for pretty much anything via your phone or tablet's camera. Like Seek (above), point your camera at any insect to identify it, but you can also use it for translating foreign-language text, identifying products, scanning QR codes and more.
Best For Wider identification purposes

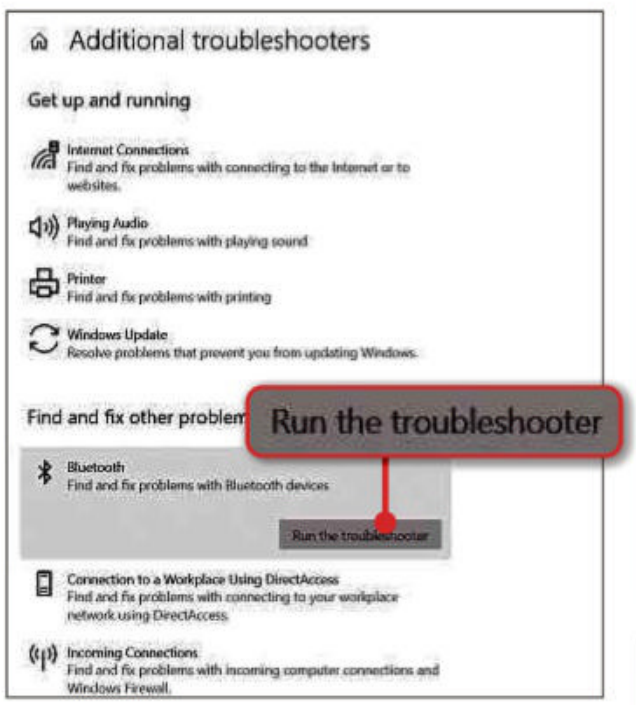
Make Windows Better

Expert tips for every version

WINDOWS 10

Troubleshoot Windows problems

When something goes wrong with your computer, Windows will usually run a troubleshooting wizard that attempts to identify and fix the problem. If you don't recall seeing one, it's worth checking your settings. Click start, type troubleshoot, then select the 'Troubleshoot settings' option from the results. In the window that opens, click the dropdown menu at the top and select 'Ask me before running troubleshooters' – you'll then get a message every time Windows needs to run a troubleshooter.



You can also run any of the troubleshooters yourself. Click the 'Additional options' link to see the complete list, which covers everything from Bluetooth to video-playback problems. Select the troubleshooter that relates to the problem you're experiencing, then click 'Run the troubleshooter' (see screenshot above).

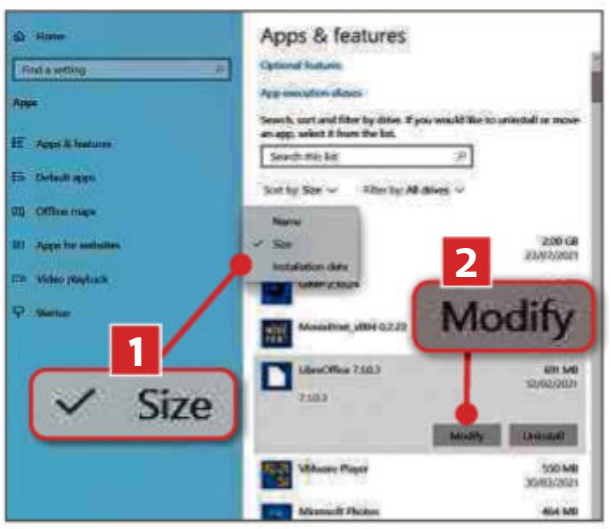
WINDOWS 10

Review and uninstall large programs

The uninstall tool in Windows 10 isn't as good as alternatives such as BC Uninstaller, which lets you remove multiple programs in one go (www.bcuninstaller.com – see Issue 611, page 20). It also has some hidden features that are worth using.

To find which of your installed programs are taking up the most space on your hard drive (useful if you're running out of space), open Settings (press the Windows key+I), select Apps, then 'Apps & features' in the left menu. Under the 'Search this list' box at the top, you'll notice a 'Sort by' dropdown box. Click this, then select Size (see 1 in our screenshot above). Windows will now order the list of programs from largest to smallest. If you spot one you no longer need, select it and then click Uninstall.

Some programs also let you modify them, such as to remove components you don't need. Select a program, click Modify 2 (if this is greyed out, it means that program can't be modified in this way) and the program's installation menu will appear, letting you choose which components to add or remove.



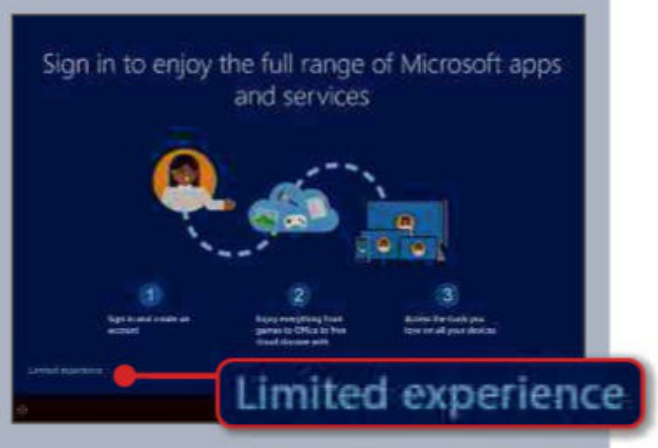
WINDOWS 10

Force Windows to use a local account

Every time Microsoft releases a Windows Feature update (the latest being the 21H1 update, released in May this year), it makes it harder for you to create a local account rather than a Microsoft account when performing a fresh install.

We actually prefer using a Microsoft account (you can sign into different computers and have your settings and personal files follow you), but we're not so keen on the way Microsoft makes it seem like it's your *only* option. If you prefer to use a local account (which isn't linked to Microsoft and keeps all your settings and other personal details stored solely on your computer's hard drive), here's how to do it.

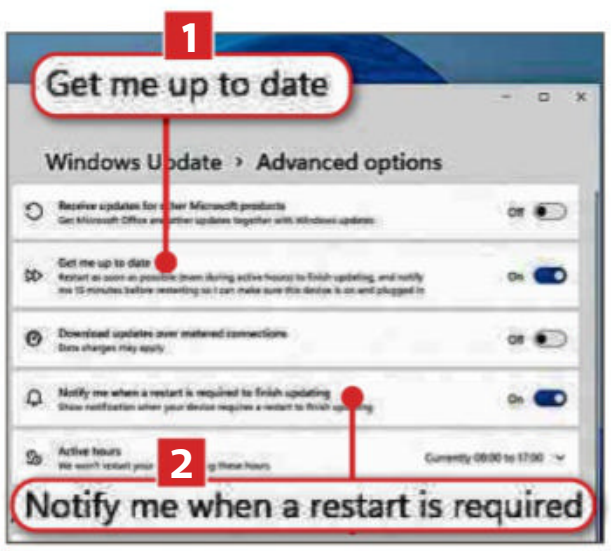
Follow the Windows 10 installation process through until you reach the point where it asks you to create a user account. Here, click the tiny 'Offline account' option in the bottom-left corner. In the screen that follows, Microsoft has another go at tricking you into using a Microsoft account



– instead of clicking the large Next button, click the 'Limited experience' link hidden in the bottom-left corner (see screenshot above).

Microsoft will then have a last-ditch attempt at changing your mind by displaying a 'Or even better, use an online account' message. Ignore this and enter your local account username in the box and click Next.

It's a shame Microsoft goes to such lengths to make it hard not to use a Microsoft account – we'd prefer the company to be more open about your options.



WINDOWS 11

Install updates immediately

Microsoft says updates for Windows 11 – due later this year – will be small and quick to install. It's added new options to the 'Windows update' of the Settings app. To ensure you've always got the latest updates installed, click 'Advanced options', then click the slider next to 'Get me up to date' to On (see 1 in our screenshot above). You can tell Windows 11 to remind you that you need to restart your computer to finish an update (turn on the 'Notify me when a restart...' slider 2).

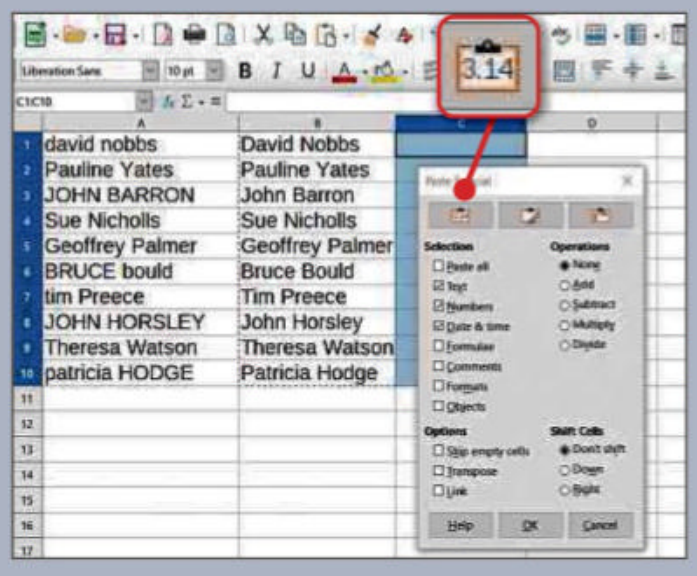
MICROSOFT EXCEL & LIBREOFFICE CALC

Apply title case to cells in spreadsheets

When you have a large number of cells containing people's names, you may find some are all lower case, others all upper case, and some are a mix of both. Using the PROPER formula in Excel and Calc you can quickly convert them all to title case (in other words, capitalising the first letter of each forename, surname and any middle names).

To use this formula, create a new column next to the one containing your case-mixed names. In this new column, click the cell next to your first name (B1 in our screenshot) then type =PROPER(A1) (change 'A1' to match the cell that contains the name in your spreadsheet) then press Enter. The cell should now display the same name, but in title case.

You can now copy this formula to the other cells in column B to convert all names into title case. However, because these cells are just displaying the result of a formula, if you delete the original names from column A the names in column B will also disappear. To fix this, create another new column, then select all the names in column B and press Ctrl+C to copy them. In Excel, right-click the first cell in the new empty column, select Paste Special, then Values and click OK; in Calc, use press Ctrl+Shift+V, then click the Values button (see screenshot). The names will now be pasted as text, not formulas, meaning you can now delete the other two columns containing names.



MICROSOFT WORD & EXCEL

Add Wikipedia to Office

Regular Wikipedia users should consider installing an Office add-in that adds content to your your documents and spreadsheets.

First, open Word or Excel, then click the Insert menu, followed by 'Get Add-ins'. In the screen that opens, click the search box, type wikipedia, then select the Wikipedia add-in from the results and click Add.

A Wikipedia sidebar will now open within your document or spreadsheet. When you highlight a term/cell, this sidebar will immediately show whatever information Wikipedia has on that term (if it can't find any relevant pages, you'll see a list of suggestions).

You can copy any text it finds from the Wikipedia sidebar into your document. Simply highlight the relevant copy, then click the '+' button that appears (see screenshot below). The selected text will now appear in your document.

If you close the Wikipedia sidebar, you can re-open it by returning to the Insert menu, then clicking 'My Add-ins' and double-clicking the Wikipedia entry.

MICROSOFT EXCEL & LIBREOFFICE CALC

Create summaries of cell data

As well as letting you combine the contents of two cells, the CONCATENATE formula lets you create full sentences to provide a summary of the data in a row of cells.

In our example, we have three columns for our local club, listing the names of members, the county they live in and the year they joined. Using the CONCATENATE formula, we can add text in quote marks alongside the cell references, creating a summary sentence.

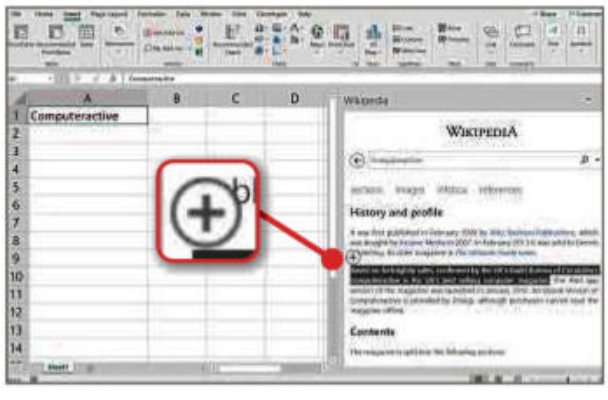
To do this, we type the following formula into cell D2: =CONCATENATE(A2, " lives in ", B2, " and joined the club in ", C2) (see screenshot below). Remember to include spacing before and after any text you add and to separate each cell reference with a comma. Once you've perfected the formula for the first cell, you can copy it to others in your spreadsheet.

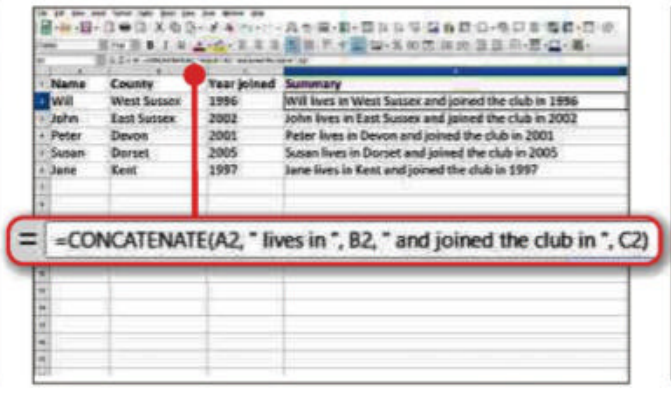
LIBREOFFICE WRITER

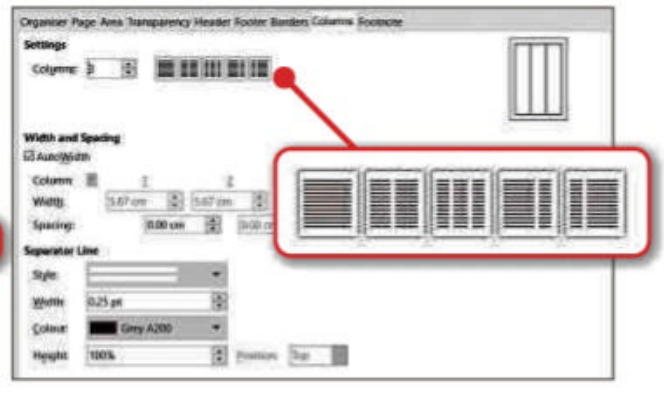
Split documents into columns

Using columns within a document can help you organise text into sections or articles, and are particularly useful when you're writing a newsletter. LibreOffice Writer makes it very easy to add columns to your documents. Simply open the Format menu at the top, then select Page Style. In the window that opens, select the Columns tab and, in the Settings section, choose how many columns you want (or select one of the preset options – see screenshot below).

In the 'Width and Spacing' section, you can adjust the size of each column, while the Separator Line section lets you apply borders. Once you've finished, click OK to return to your document. To move between the columns, press Ctrl+Shift+Enter.







In The Club

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

Set up mail merge in Excel and Word

If you want to post letters to members, you could spend ages addressing each letter and label or envelope by hand, but that would be a huge waste of time. The process of mail merging does all the hard work for you, creating a batch of letters personalised for each member, letting you choose who to include each time.

Add recipients in Excel

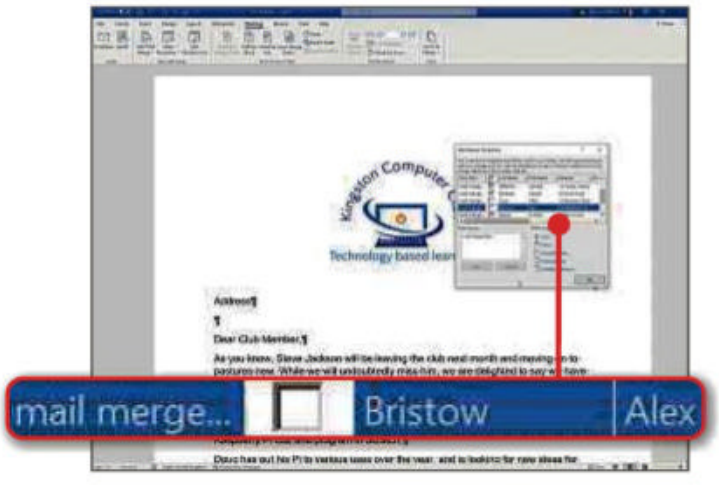
The first thing you need is a data source containing the details of everyone the mailing will be posted to. We'll use Excel for this, though you can perform a mail merge in both LibreOffice and Google Drive (using Sheets). Open a spreadsheet, and in a header row at the top add columns for Last Name, First Name, Address, Town/City, County, Postcode, Phone Number, and Email Address.

Underneath, fill in the details you have for each club member (this doesn't have to be in any particular order, such as alphabetical). Finally, save the spreadsheet, calling it something like 'Mail Merge Contacts'.

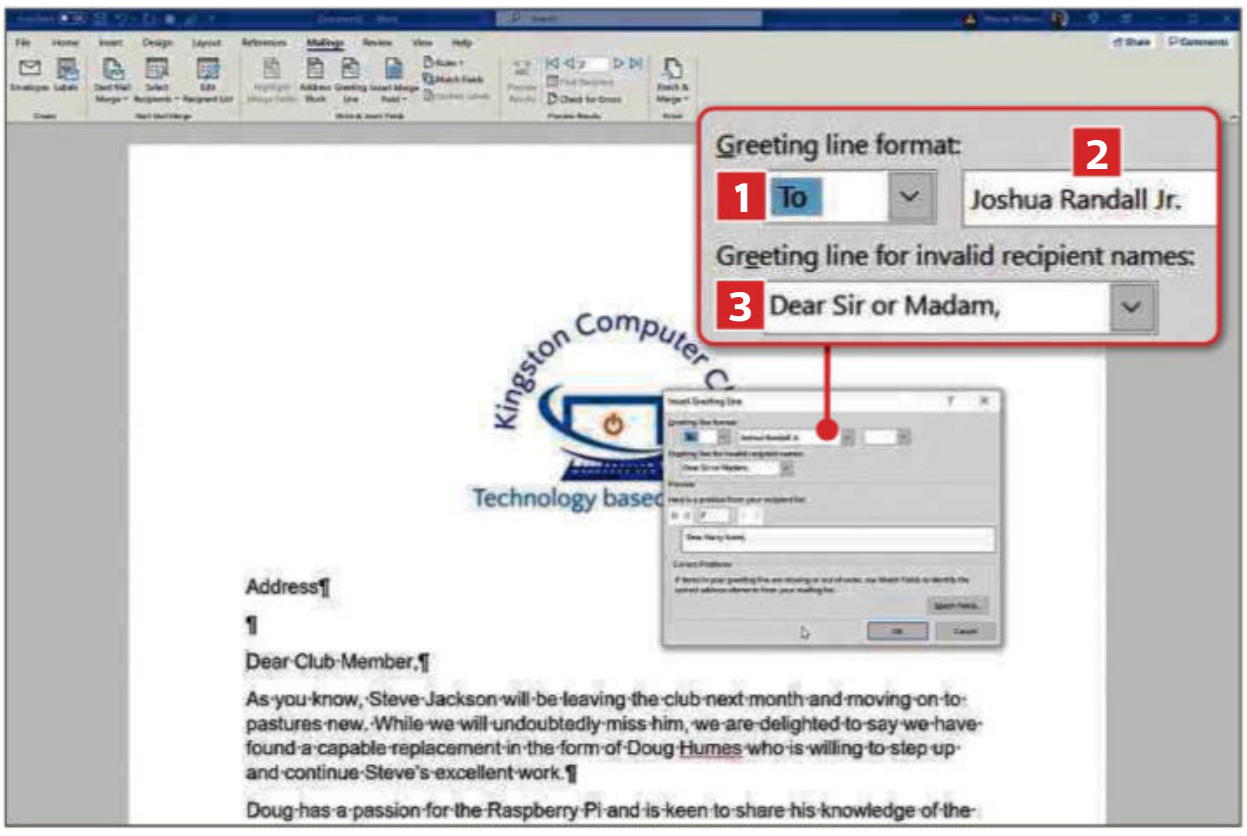
Import your list to Word

Now open the letter that you want to send in Word and click the Mailings tab at the top. Click the Start Mail Merge menu, then Select Recipients, followed by 'Use an Existing List'. Next, browse to where you saved your Excel spreadsheet, select it, and click Open. A 'Select Table' box will appear.

Make sure 'First row of data contains column headers' at the bottom is ticked,



Choose to exclude any members by unticking them in the recipients list



Click 'Greeting Line' then choose how to greet the recipients of your letter

and then click OK. Some of the previously greyed-out options in the Mailings menu will now be available, including Edit Recipient List. Clicking this shows the contact data that we entered into our spreadsheet.

All the recipients in the list are selected. To exclude anyone from the mailing, just untick them (such as 'Alex Bristow' in our screenshot below left). Clicking the Filter link below offers ways to exclude groups of people, such as those from outside a particular area. Click OK. Now you need to add mail merge fields to the letter you're sending.

Change your default greeting

To change your default greeting (ours is 'Dear Club Member'), highlight it and then click Greeting Line in the Mailings menu at the top of Word. In the box that appears, click the first dropdown menu to change 'Dear' to 'To' (1 in screenshot above) or none (which removes the greeting), and the second menu 2 to choose how the name should be presented – full name, just first name, and so on.

You can also add a default greeting line that'll be used if there's an error caused by invalid recipient names 3. A preview of how the greeting line will look will appear underneath, using an example pulled from the recipient list.

Step through the different entries to check it's all working fine. Click OK and 'Greeting line' will be added. You can now delete the original greeting ('Dear Club Member').

Now to add the address field. Click the place in the document where the address goes and click the Address Block button (in the Mailings tab). In the window that opens, choose the format for the recipient's name, and check the address preview on the right.

If any of the address is missing, click Match Fields and use the dropdown boxes to select the absent elements. Click OK, and 'Address Block' will be added to the document.

You can add other fields using the Insert Merge Field button. Clicking Preview Results shows how the letter will look with the fields filled in.

Finally, click 'Finish & Merge', select Print Documents, click OK, choose the correct printer, then click OK again. The customised letters will be printed for everyone selected.

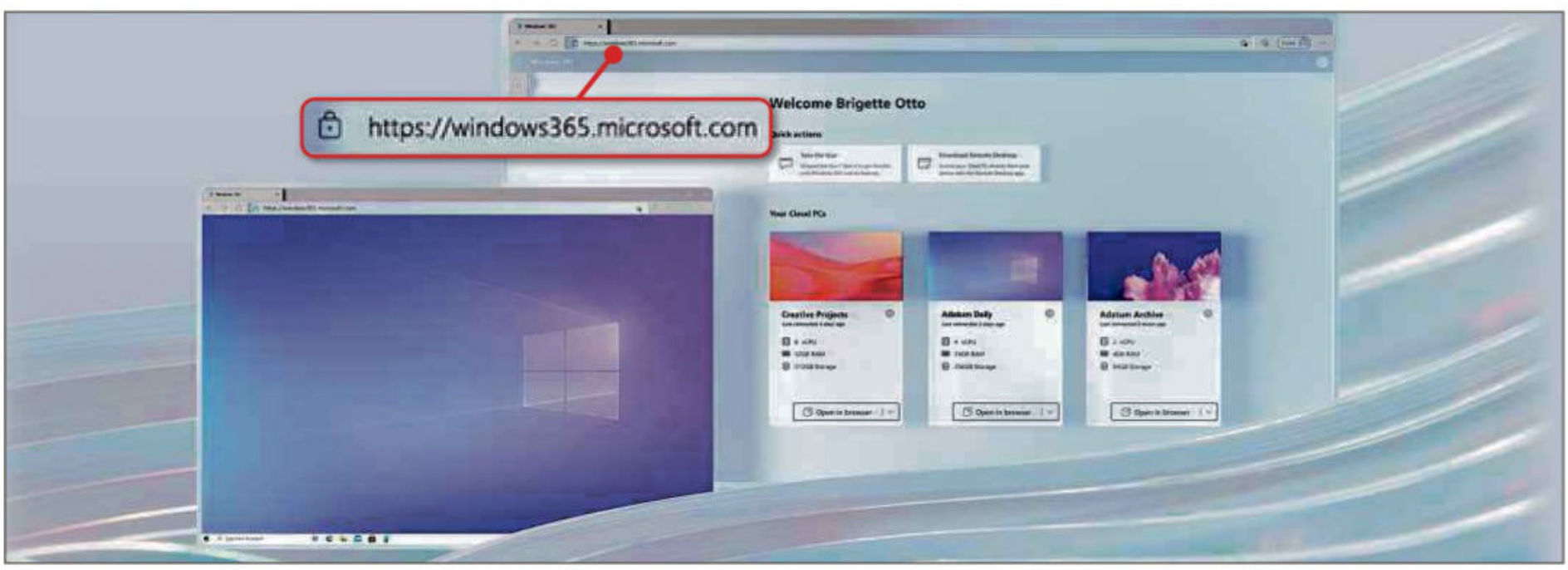
Next issue: Use multiple cameras in video calls

What's All the

Fuss About...

Windows 365

Microsoft has launched an operating system you can stream



What is it?

A new 'Cloud PC' service from Microsoft that lets businesses use Windows virtually, through the internet (by typing https://windows365.microsoft.com – see main image) or the company's Remote Desktop app. Users can access a Windows desktop from a device that itself *doesn't* run Windows, such as an Apple Mac, iPad, Chromebook, Android tablet or Linux machine. It's akin to streaming an operating system, rather than downloading it to your computer.

So it's a bit like streaming Netflix?

If you like, yes, and it's a loose comparison some people have made. Just as you stream Netflix to your TV, or other content like music and games, you can stream Windows to your machine. You never own that version of Windows because it's hosted on Microsoft's servers, but you can control it in the normal way, using your keyboard, mouse, webcam, microphone and more.

What about software and settings?

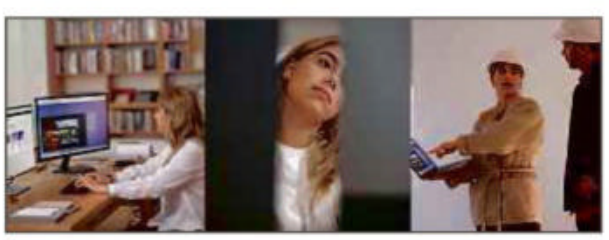
It works with those too. You can configure Windows just how you want it, and download the programs you want (including all Office tools). It remembers your data and preferences, so you won't have to start afresh every time you log in. You can hop between devices – tablet to computer, say – and pick up where you left off.

Will you need fast broadband to use it?

Yes, but not full-fibre. Microsoft claims that "if you can stream a movie, you have enough bandwidth for a great experience". That would suggest a speed of 24Mbps would be sufficient, though we'll have to wait and see.

But it's only for businesses?

Yes, and for customers signed up to the Enterprise package. Microsoft is appealing to businesses that are encouraging their staff to work remotely, rather than in the office. On the official site (www.snipca.com/39077) it's promoting the service as "hybrid Windows for a hybrid world", meaning Windows will work just as well wherever you are – at home, in the office, on the train, in a coffee shop, lounging on a sunbed in a green-list country. Microsoft illustrates the point with photos (below) of a woman using Windows 365 both on her desktop PC and on her laptop while chatting to a co-worker. What she's doing in the middle is anyone's guess.



Windows 365: convenient whether you're at home, at work, or just staring into the distance

Will there ever be a version for consumers?

Probably yes, but it may depend on how successful it proves for businesses. One of the reasons Microsoft has launched Windows 365 is that it can be provided on a subscription model, charging an ongoing fee (prices start from £17 per user per month – see www.snipca.com/39076). There's big bucks to be made from subscriptions. As an example, Microsoft now earns more from the subscription version of Office (now called Microsoft 365) than from the single-purchase edition. This lucrative strategy is known as 'Software as a Service' (Saas) – the 'service' description referring to the fact that in effect you rent the software rather than own it. Similarly, Windows 365 has been called 'Desktop as a Service' (DaaS).

So will Windows 11 be a subscription service?

It will be available through Windows 365 as soon as it launches, but will also be sold as a traditional downloadable version you pay once for – or get for free, if you can. But you don't have to be a business genius to realise that Microsoft's long-term plan is to ditch pay-once software and get everyone to subscribe. That's how it'll make those bucks grow even bigger.

Ditch Your Old USB STICKS

Nik Rawlinson reveals why there's never been a better time to upgrade to a new bigger, faster and safer USB stick and how it can offer more storage than all your old sticks combined

When did you last replace your USB sticks? If they're a few years old, we have some bad news for you: the chance of you losing your data is increasing by the day.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Use a USB stick to back up your entire computer
- Create shared storage for your home network
- Free up space on your hard drive by moving programs to your stick
- Get a USB stick that works with your phone and tablet

This is because the chips inside your sticks have a finite lifespan and, after a few thousand read, write and wipe operations, they'll start to lose their ability to hold on to your data. You won't notice this happening at first but, as the data becomes increasingly degraded, your files will start to corrupt, images will be lost, and documents and spreadsheets won't open. On page 57, we show you how you can check the health of the sticks you already own.

However, we're confident you'll see the benefits of replacing these after reading about the five best things you can do with large-capacity USB sticks. These include storing large photo collections, backing up your computer, running programs from a stick and sharing files across your home network.

The good news is that memory has never been cheaper. You can now buy a 64GB stick from SanDisk for less than a tenner (www.snipca.com/39113), which is a bargain considering it will perform faster than the sticks you're currently using and will help you securely store many more of your personal files.

SanDisk isn't your only option, and you can buy sticks that are larger than 64GB, so we'll also look at what else is available and provide the information you need to make the best choice for you (including the number of files each capacity will let you store). We'll also advise you on how you can safely dispose of your old sticks.

THE FIVE BEST THINGS YOU CAN DO WITH A BIG USB STICK

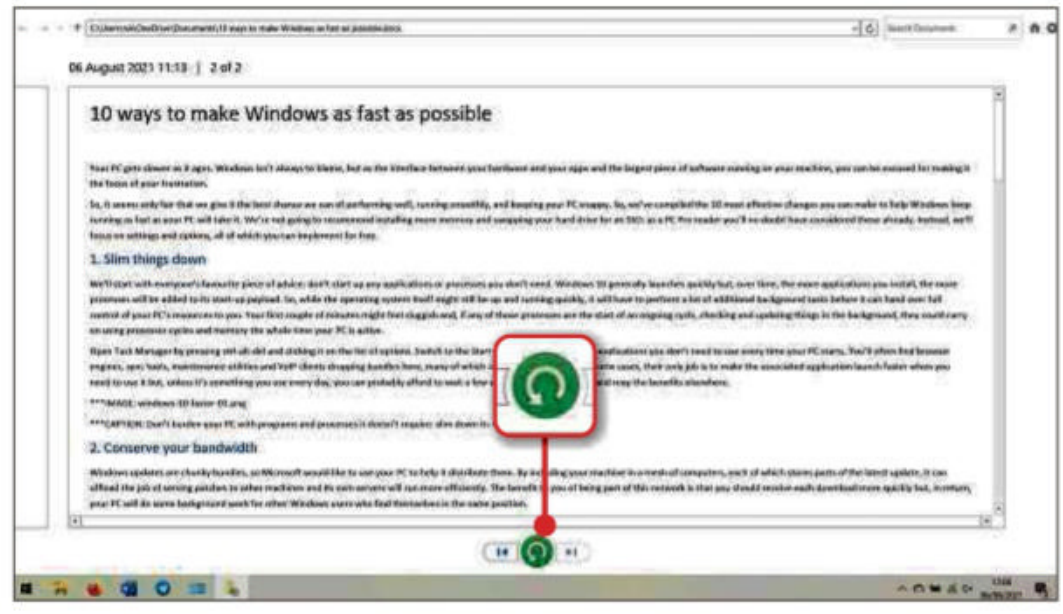
1 Keep your files and photos secure

File History, which is built into Windows 8 and later, lets you use USB storage to keep a running backup of your documents, photos, videos and more. Although it won't back up your Windows system files (see page 52 for that), File History is a great set-and-forget option for securing your most precious files, which are copied to a connected USB stick every time they change.

The clever thing about File History is that rather than just backing up your files once then overwriting them the next time they change, it also keeps historical versions. So if you've been working on several drafts of your memoirs and realise you've gone astray, you can revert not only to the previous version, but all versions before that. Depending on the capacity of your USB stick, that might mean you can go back to the very first version.

If you set up File History in the way we explain below, it will start deleting the oldest versions of your files only when your USB storage is full. So, this is one instance where buying the largest stick you can afford will pay dividends. You also need to keep your USB stick plugged in at all times to capture every version.

If you haven't yet bought a stick, consider something like the compact **SanDisk Ultra Fit**. The 256GB version costs around £25 (www.snipca.com/39128).



Click the green Restore button to browse through previous versions of your files

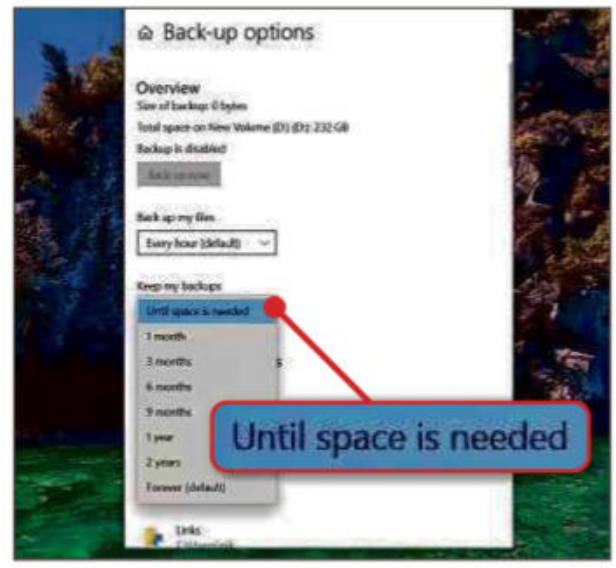
Create a USB backup

Get started by plugging in your USB stick and pressing the Windows key+I to open Settings. Click 'Update & Security', followed by Backup, then click the slider below 'Back up using File History', so it slides to the right. Windows will immediately start saving files to your USB stick.

By default, Windows saves incremental backups of your Documents, Music, Pictures, Videos and Desktop folders, plus any OneDrive files that have been synced to your computer. You can change this by clicking 'More options' followed by '+ Add folder'. To exclude a folder, select it in the list, then click Remove.

You can tweak how File History handles your backups by using the dropdown menus at the top of the window. Backups can run at various intervals from every 10 minutes to once a day, but we recommend changing this. Only backing up once a day means you risk losing several versions of a file you've been working on for hours; doing so every ten minutes is going to fill your stick quickly. We therefore suggest setting it to hourly backups.

We also recommend changing the 'Keep my backups' option from 'Forever' to 'Until space is needed' (see screenshot left). This means the oldest versions of your files will be deleted from File History to make space for more recent amendments, meaning you'll never miss a new backup just because your USB stick is full.



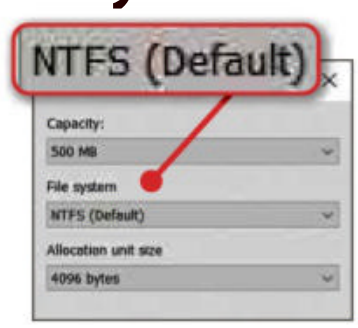
Set File History to delete previous versions of files only when your USB stick is full

Browse your backups

To recover an old version of a file, close the file if it's currently open, then launch a File Explorer window and navigate to the file you need to restore. If you want to keep both the new and the recovered file, make a copy of the new file. Next, click the Home tab at the top of the window (if it's not already active) followed by History.

Windows will switch to the File History view, where it displays the current version of the file in question. Use the backwards and forwards buttons at the bottom of the window to navigate through its history and, when you reach the one you want to recover, click the green Restore button (see screenshot above). It will now be extracted from the archive and saved in its original location, overwriting the current version. If you want to save it elsewhere, instead right-click the Restore button and select 'Restore to', then navigate to the desired location.

Store larger files on your USB stick



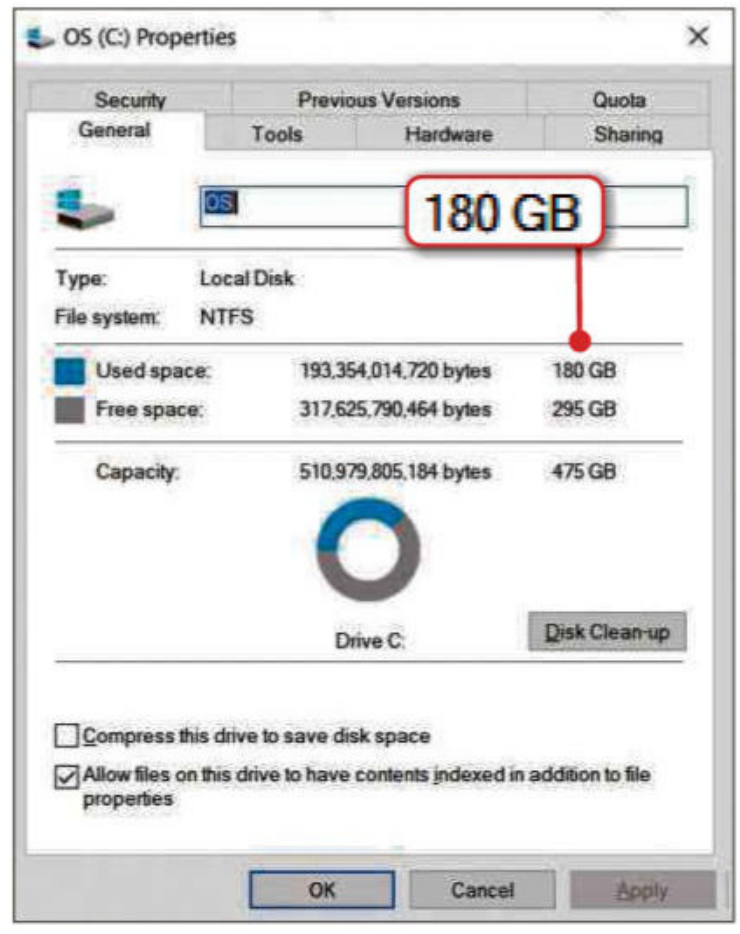
If your USB stick is formatted using the FAT32 file system, it will be compatible with the widest range of computers and devices. However, due to a limitation built into this file system, you won't be able to store files larger than 4GB (such as long 4K videos) on your stick. To overcome this, you'll need to reformat it using either exFAT or NTFS. The latter is compatible only with Windows computers, but also supports advanced features such as ReadyBoost (see page 55). Reformatting will wipe everything that's on the stick, so first move any important files from it.

Plug in your USB stick and right-click it in the File Explorer sidebar. Choose 'Format...' in the menu, then select NTFS in the 'File system' menu (see screenshot). Leave 'Quick Format' ticked and click Start.

2 Store a Windows system image

A system image is an exact copy of your computer's hard drive – including your personal files, those required to run Windows and more. You can't use a system image to browse and restore previous versions of your files (that's what File History is for – see page 51), but if your hard drive dies it lets you restore Windows and all your files on to a new drive.

You should never keep a system image on the drive it relates to (if that drive dies, so will the image), so a large USB stick is ideal. If possible, buy one that's the same size as your hard drive, but at the very least you'll need one that exceeds the amount of used space on your C: drive. To find out what this is, right click C: in the File Explorer sidebar and select Properties. As you can see from our screenshot right, our drive contains 180GB of data, so a 256GB USB stick will be sufficient.



Make sure your USB stick is at least as big as the used space on your hard drive

Create your system image

To create the image, we're going to use Paragon Backup & Recovery Community Edition (PBR – www.snipca.com/39139), which is free for personal use.

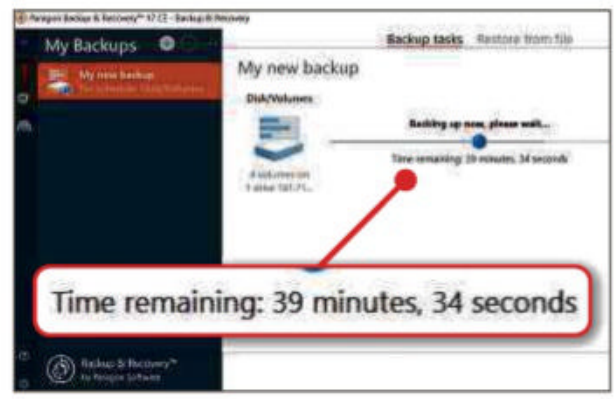
Once it's downlodeded, run the program, click 'Backup source', followed by 'Disks/Volumes'. Select your C: drive, which is the drive from which Windows boots, then click OK. Now click Destination, followed by 'External drives'. Select your USB stick in the main part of the window then click OK, followed by 'Back up now'.

You should create a new image every few weeks to minimise the amount of data you'll lose if your drive ever corrupts. A system image can take over an hour to create (you can keep an eye on progress – see screenshot right).

Create a recovery stick

Once the imaging process has finished, you need to use a second USB stick to create a 'recovery environment'. This lets you access your system image even if Windows won't load. You can use a smaller, existing stick for this step because it doesn't require as much room as your system image (we used a 1GB stick).

Click the cog at the bottom of the PBR sidebar, followed by Recovery Media Builder. Select 'Use this Windows image (ADK is not required)' from the 'Creation mode' menu, then click Next. Plug in your second USB stick and select this on the next screen where you're prompted to 'Choose a flash drive', then click Next. Confirm that you're happy for its contents to be overwritten and PBR will create a bootable recovery environment.



Creating a system image of a large hard drive can take over an hour

Label the large USB stick containing your image, and the smaller-capacity stick containing the recovery environment, then store them somewhere safe. If your hard drive ever suffers serious corruption and you need to restore your PC from your backup, connect both USB sticks before starting up your computer, then press whichever key lets you boot from an external device, or opens the BIOS or UEFI configuration menu. This is usually one of the function keys on the top row of your keyboard (look for a prompt shortly after you turn your computer on).

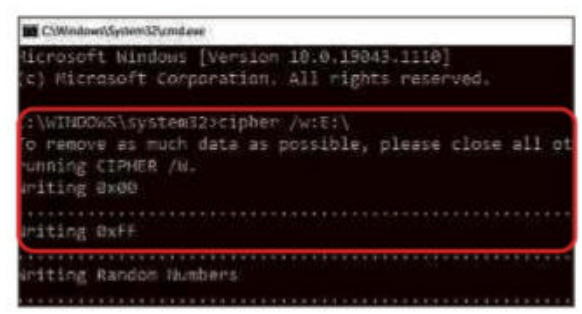
Select the recovery media (your smaller USB stick) as the boot drive and wait for it to start. This will load a stripped-down operating system that launches you straight into the 'Backup & Recovery' program. Click Restore at the bottom of the screen, with your 'restore source' at the top left and 'restore destination' at the top right. Make sure the source is your large USB stick containing the system image and the destination is your computer's hard drive, then click 'Restore now' to return your PC to the state it was in when you created the image.

Dispose of your old sticks safely

If you've decided to replace your old USB sticks, you may want to recycle them or give them to friends. Before doing either, make sure you've securely deleted all files from the sticks. Running a quick format on them isn't sufficient as this just marks the files as deleted (hiding them from view), meaning they're easily recoverable using tools such as Recuva (www.snipca.com/39148). Instead, you need to combine formatting with the powerful 'cipher' command in Command Prompt.

Plug in your stick and format it (right-click it in the File Explorer sidebar and select 'Format...'). Now check which letter Windows has assigned it by opening File Explorer and locating the stick in the sidebar. Next, press the Windows key, type `cmd`, then press Enter. Next, type `cipher /w:X:\`, replacing the 'X' with the drive letter of your USB stick. So, if you want to wipe the memory stick that appears as drive E:, you'd type `cipher /w:E:`, then press Enter.

Windows will immediately start overwriting any blank space on the stick with a series of characters, repeating the operation three times to entirely obscure what was originally stored there (see screenshot). When it's finished, the chances of anyone being able to recover your data will be very slim.

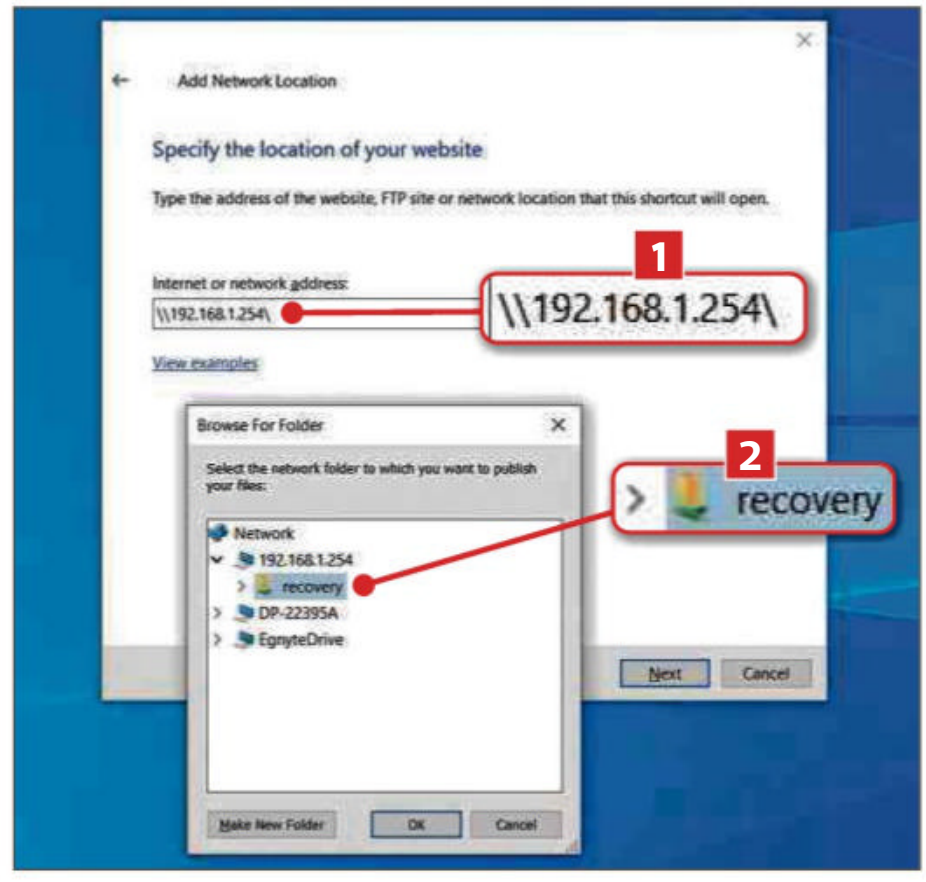


3 Share files on your network

If you have more than one computer, you can share files across them using online storage services such as Dropbox (www.dropbox.com) and OneDrive (www.onedrive.com). They're easy to set up and simple to use – but they're also limited. With OneDrive you only get 5GB of free storage. With Dropbox, your free storage is capped at 2GB, and even then you can only share it across three devices.

That's why we prefer using 'local' storage (in other words, storage that's physically connected to our home network) when sharing files across our computers, leaving online storage services only for when we need to make files accessible away from home.

A NAS lets you do this, but they are expensive. The good news is that you may be able to use a large USB stick and the USB socket on your router. Depending on how your router shares its USB port with other devices on your network, you may need to tweak Windows' settings, as we had to with our Plusnet Hub One router (a rebranded BT Home Hub 5).



Enter your router's default gateway to make sure Windows can locate your shared USB stick

Prepare your USB stick

First, format your USB stick by plugging it into your computer, right-clicking it in the File Explorer sidebar and selecting 'Format...'. Choose FAT from the 'File system' menu, leave Quick Format ticked, then click Start. Formatting should only take a few seconds and, because you're using the FAT file system (see box on page 51 for more on USB file systems), you have a greater chance of it working with a wider range of devices. When it's finished, remove the USB stick and plug it into your router.

Like many routers, ours uses a protocol called SMB 1.0 (Server Message Block 1) to manage transfers between the USB port and devices on the network. SMB 1.0 is enabled by default in Windows 10 Home, but Microsoft disables it on the Professional edition (newer versions such as SMB 2.0 and 3.0 are more secure for corporate networks). Because we're using Windows 10 Pro, we therefore needed to turn SMB 1.0 back on. If you're in the same situation, press the Windows key, type windows features, then select 'Turn Windows features on or off'.

In the window that opens, double-click the 'SMB 1.0/CIFS File Sharing Support' box, then tick the 'SMB 1.0/CIFS Automatic Removal' and 'SMB 1.0/CIFS Client' boxes (see screenshot below left). Click OK, then close the Windows Features box. You'll need to restart your computer for the changes to take effect.

Access your USB storage

To access your USB stick, you need your router's default gateway (the address computers and other devices use to connect to the router). To find this, press the Windows key, type cmd, then press Enter to open Command Prompt. Next, type ipconfig, press Enter, then look for the address to the right of Default Gateway – in our case, that's 192.168.1.254 (see screenshot below).

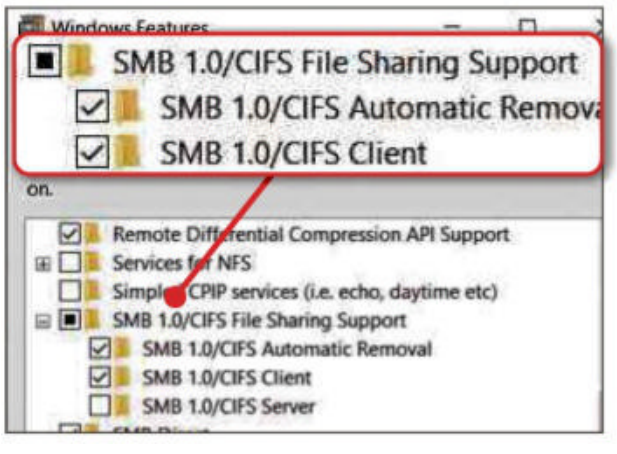
Close the Command Prompt window and return to File Explorer. Click 'This PC' in the sidebar, then right-click any empty space in the main section of the window and click 'Add a network location'. Click Next on the add network location box that opens, followed by 'Choose a custom network location', then Next again.

You could try clicking Browse on the next screen to see whether Windows is able to locate your USB stick on your network, but that didn't work for us. If you have no luck either, select the 'Internet or network address' box and type \\ followed by the default gateway address you copied down from the Command Prompt, then another \.

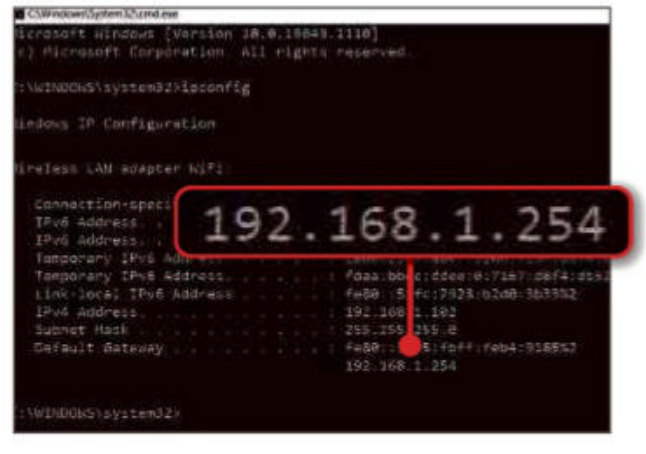
In our case, that's \\192.168.1.254\ (1 in our screenshot above). This time, having provided Windows with a starting point, it was able to see our USB stick, which was called 'recovery' 2. Select it, then click OK followed by Next. On the final screen, leave 'Open this network location when I click Finish' ticked, then click Finish.

Your USB stick will now appear in the This PC window in File Explorer, as well as in the sidebar. Clicking it reveals its contents, just as it would if it was directly connected to your PC. The benefit, however, is that because it's one step removed – ie, on your router – you can add it to any other computer on your network in the same way, so everyone will have access to its contents.

Don't forget that the files stored on any device attached to your router can easily be missed from backups you make on your computer – so always keep a second copy of anything important.



Enable SMB 1.0 in Windows 10 Pro to share a USB stick using your router



Find your router's default gateway address in Command Prompt

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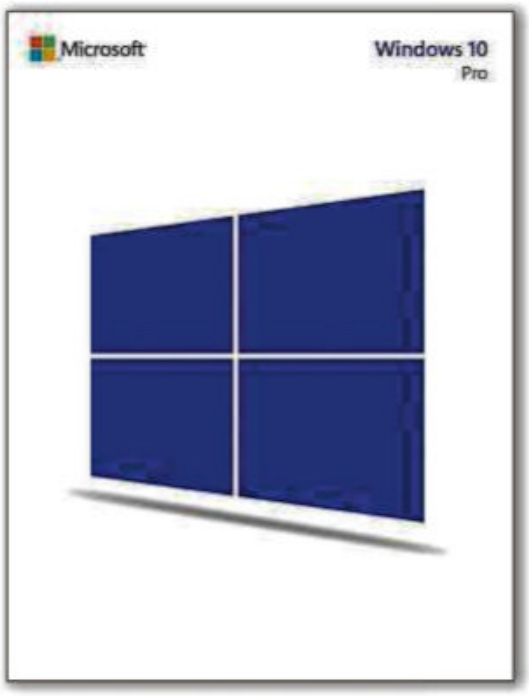

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4 Move programs from your hard drive to your USB stick

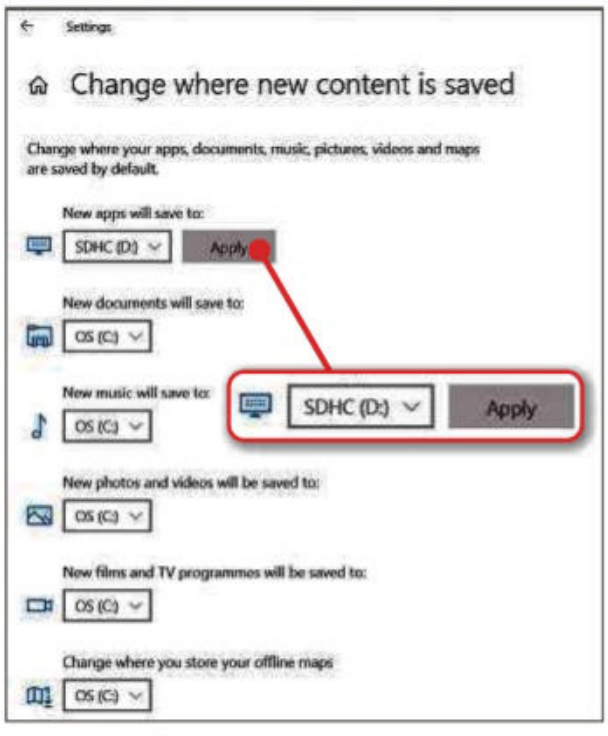
When your hard drive starts to run out of space, you have two options: replace it, or start moving things off it. Leaving it with barely any free space isn't an option because Windows needs drive space to store temporary files when your computer's memory is full.

Conventional wisdom used to be that you should keep 15 per cent of your hard drive free for this ongoing data shuffling. While that might be overkill on the the larger drives that come with today's computers, you should still avoid nearing full capacity so that memory-hungry programs like photo and video editors have the best chance of running smoothly.

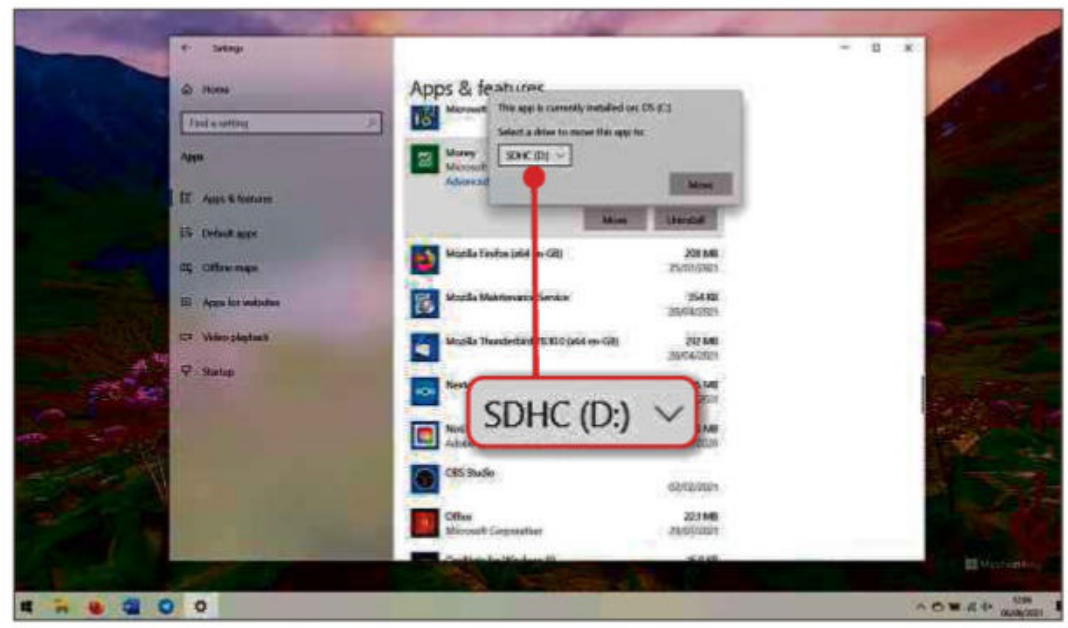
Fortunately, there's a quick fix: move any programs you installed from the Windows Store on to a large USB stick. They'll still be available whenever your USB stick is connected, but the space they occupied on your hard drive will be freed up.

Plug in your stick, then press Windows key+I to open Settings. Click Apps, followed by 'Apps & features', and scroll through the list of programs installed on your computer. When you find one you want to move to your USB stick, click it. If a Move button appears, click this, then select your USB stick in the menu below 'Choose a drive to move this app to' (see screenshot above right) and click Move.

If you don't see a Move button when you click the program name, this means it wasn't installed from the Windows Store, so can't be moved this way. However, if you still have the original installer, you can reinstall it on your USB storage instead. Open Settings and click



You can tell Windows to install all new programs to your USB stick



Free up space on your hard drive by moving programs to a USB stick

System followed by Storage. Click the 'Change where new content is saved' link and, under 'New apps will save to', select your USB drive (see screenshot below left). Click Apply, then close Settings and launch the installation program.

5 Increase your computer's memory

Increasing your computer's memory is one of the most cost-effective upgrades you can make. As we explained above, when the memory chips are full, Windows starts offloading temporary data on to the hard drive. However, your hard drive doesn't run as quickly as memory, so this can slow your computer.

The best way to fix this is to install more memory, but that's not always possible. For example, your computer may already have the maximum amount of memory installed or, as in the case of some laptops, the memory modules may not be accessible. However, since Vista, Windows has included a tool called ReadyBoost, which uses flash-based USB storage to supplement your computer's internal memory, making it easy to perform an upgrade without accessing the computer's interior.

Activate ReadyBoost

First, plug in your USB stick and format it as NTFS by right-clicking it in the File Explorer sidebar, clicking 'Format...', then selecting NTFS in the 'File system' dropdown menu. When the format process has completed, right-click your USB stick in the File Explorer sidebar again, but this time select Properties. From here, select the ReadyBoost tab to check that the tool is available for use on your computer. If it is, select the 'Use this device' option, then use the slider to allocate a set amount of storage for speeding up your system (see screenshot above). In Vista, the maximum amount you can allocate was 4GB, but Windows 7 and later versions let you allocate up to 32GB.

ReadyBoost uses a USB stick to improve the performance of some computers

ReadyBoost requires your USB stick to remain connected – as soon as you disconnect it, you'll lose the benefit. If you plan to use a large USB stick with File History (see page 51), it's worth allocating some of the stick's storage to ReadyBoost because you're likely to have the stick permanently attached to your computer.

Bear in mind that ReadyBoost won't deliver the same increase in performance as a memory upgrade of the same amount, but it's a good way to quickly give an old computer a much-needed boost.

Finally, if you don't see a slider on the ReadyBoost tab, but instead a warning that ReadyBoost won't make any difference to your PC, it's probably because your computer has an SSD instead of a traditional hard drive. Because SSDs are as fast as USB sticks (often *much* faster), Windows will simply use free space on your SSD for temporary storage when your memory is full.

FIND YOUR PERFECT USB STICK

Search Amazon for USB sticks and you'll find plenty to choose from. It's tempting to simply go for the largest stick you can afford, but that won't necessarily get you the stick you need. Many of the jobs we've covered so far involve backing up and securing your data, so you'll need a USB stick that's – above all else – reliable. We therefore recommend you avoid cheaper, unbranded sticks and instead opt for brands you know – we'll look at some of these later.

Capacity

USB stick capacities don't mean much on their own. A far more meaningful measurement is how many files you can store on them. To help you decide, we've compiled a table (see below) using the following file parameters:

Films: Video files encoded at Full HD settings (two-hour videos recorded in H.264 format)
Music: Audio files encoded at standard CD quality settings (four-minute files recorded at 44.1kHz, 16bit stereo)
Photos: 16-megapixel photos taken on a Google Pixel 5 smartphone
PDFs: PDFs of this Cover Feature (seven pages, including images)
Documents: Single-page Word documents (350 words in 11pt Calibri font)

The figures in our table act only as a guide because file sizes will always vary depending on factors such as compression ratios and how many times you've edited and saved it. Likewise, the stated size of any given memory stick is usually slightly larger than its usable capacity, as some space will be taken up by data written to the stick when it was formatted, as well as by sectors reserved for its file index.

To check how much free storage you have on a memory stick, right-click it in the File Explorer sidebar and select Properties in the menu. The pie chart under Capacity indicates used and available space.

The Samsung Duo has a USB-C connector and a USB-A adapter

Size

It's always worth checking a USB stick's *physical* size, particularly if your computer's USB ports are arranged close together. Buy a bulky stick and you may find it obstructs a neighbouring port, preventing you from using it. Most modern USB sticks have low-profile designs that avoid this problem, but it's still worth checking a stick's dimensions before you buy.

Connector

You should also check what type of connector a USB stick has. Most sticks have a USB-A connection, which slots into the familiar, rectangular ports that have been around since 1996. Like all USB-A devices, these can be plugged in only one way up, which can make them difficult to insert into the rear of a PC sitting under your desk.

Although they're still relatively rare, we're starting to see more sticks with the newer USB-C connector. You'll need a computer with a USB-C port to use these (most computers built in the last three years have at least one). Like all USB-C devices, these sticks can be plugged in either way up, so no more fumbling under the desk.

If you want to be able to use your stick with USB-C *and* USB-A ports, we recommend the **Samsung Duo Plus** (£28 for 128GB from www.snipca.com/39142, pictured above). This has a USB-C connector at one end (pictured above 1) and a removable adapter for USB-A ports at the other 2.

Large USB sticks are also handy for transferring batches of photos and videos to and from your phone and tablet. For iPhones or iPads, consider the **SanDisk 128GB iXpand** (£53 from www.snipca.com/39140), which has both a USB-A and Lightning connector (pictured below). This lets you plug the stick directly into your iOS device, then simply swivel the stick to switch between the two connectors. The stick also comes with a 'USB-A to USB-C' adapter.

For Android devices, you'll need the **Kingston DataTraveler 80** (£19 for 128GB from www.snipca.com/39141). Note that

SanDisk's iXpand has a Lightning connector to use with iOS devices, and a USB-C adapter (right)

How many files can you fit on your USB stick?

Stick size	Films	Music	Photos	PDFs	Documents
32GB	4.8	8,000	9,400	39,506	2,285,714
64GB	9.6	16,000	18,800	79,012	4,571,428
128GB	19.1	32,000	37,600	158,024	9,142,857
256GB	38.2	64,000	75,300	316,048	18,285,714
512GB	76.4	128,000	150,500	632,096	36,571,428

this stick has only a USB-C connector – to plug it into a USB-A socket, you'll need to buy a separate USB-C adapter (£6 from www.snipca.com/39150).

Speed

If you plan to use your new, high-capacity USB stick to transfer extra-large files (or multiple small files in one go), it pays to choose a stick that offers fast file transfers – but don't assume high prices are an indicator of high speeds.

Despite it being relatively cheap (£27 for 128GB from www.snipca.com/39152), the **Transcend JetFlash 920** (pictured below) is the fastest stick we've ever tested. In our read-speed tests, which determine how fast a computer can access files stored on the stick, it achieved an astonishingly quick 395MB/s, meaning it would take just 17 seconds to copy a two-hour video. This is more than twice the speed of the similarly priced Samsung Duo Plus (180MB/s) and more than four times as fast as the the SanDisk iXpand (85.9MB/s); the latter being nearly twice the price of the Transcend stick. It's not as versatile as the Samsung or SanDisk sticks, however, coming with only a USB-A connector.

Bear in mind you'll need a computer that supports the latest USB 3.2 Gen 2x2 specification to get the fastest speeds possible (newer sticks will still work on older computers, albeit slightly slower).

The Transcend JetFlash 920 is the fastest USB stick we've tested

Extra features

If you're buying a stick for your children or grandchildren that will spend much of its life at the bottom of a school bag, look for rugged and waterproof options.

The **Corsair Flash Survivor Stealth** (£35 for 128GB from www.snipca.com/39144, pictured below) looks great and is built using hard-anodized, aircraft-grade aluminium. The stick itself has a thread at one end that you use to secure it in a separate casing when not in use. The case is waterproof to a depth of 200 metres and has a shock-dampening collar to protect the stick from impact and vibration.

The Flash Survivor Stealth can withstand drops, even into water

Lexar's JumpDrive includes a fingerprint scanner to prevent unauthorised access to your files

If security is key, the **Lexar JumpDrive Fingerprint F35** (£42 for 128GB from www.snipca.com/39145, pictured above) encrypts any data you save to it, and only unlocks it when you press an enrolled fingerprint on the integrated sensor. You can register 10 fingerprints at a time, letting you grant access to several family members or work colleagues. ca

Check the health of your USB stick

If you're worried that your USB stick is coming to the end of its usable life, Windows' built-in CHKDSK (Check Disk) command can run tests and report back on any problems it finds. Open a new Command Prompt window and type chkdsk X:, replacing the 'X' with the drive letter of your stick.

Press Enter and the CHKDSK tool will examine each of the files and sectors on the stick and reveal how many bad sectors (damaged portions of the stick) it's found. Ideally, it shouldn't find any, and it should report "Windows has scanned the file system and found no problems...".

If it finds any bad sectors, repeat the process but this time adding a space, followed by /f to the end of the command – so, chkdsk X: /f, as before replacing the 'X' with your USB drive letter. When you press Enter, Windows will repeat the check and try to fix any problems it encounters. Even if it succeeds, it's a sign the stick is approaching the end of its life, so we recommend ditching it for a newer model.

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SCAN ME

Get ‘back in stock’ alerts

Product shortages are making it hard to find what you want when you shop online, but you can sign up to alerts that tell you when items are back in stock. **Daniel Booth** explains what you need to do

Anyone who’s spent much time shopping online in the past year will have been plagued by two words: ‘Currently unavailable’. When lockdown began, manufacturers around the world slashed production, prompting retailers to cut orders in return. The result has been an unprecedented shortage of items on the real and virtual shelves.

Technology has been particularly badly hit by a global processor shortage, restricting supplies not just of computers, phones and tablets, but also cars, microwave ovens and washing machines. It affects magazines as well as shoppers: several times this year we’ve refrained from recommending products because they’re no longer available.

There’s nothing you can do to end this crisis, which analysts expect to last until 2023. But you can set up alerts to tell you when your sought-after items are back in stock. We explain the best methods here.

Set up alerts on individual sites

It would be wrong not to start with Amazon. Yes, it’s widely criticised for dodging tax and harming the high street, but it’s by far the UK’s most popular online retailer, accounting for 30 per cent of sales in 2019 – a figure that’s bound to be higher now given that its sales rose by 51 per cent in 2020.

But it doesn’t make it easy to get ‘back in stock’ alerts. Instead, if an item is ‘temporarily’ out of stock, it gives you the option to buy it and you’ll be emailed an estimated delivery date.

For alerts that give you the chance to pause a moment before buying, you’ll need to set up ‘waitlist alerts’ (available both when browsing Amazon on a computer, and through the app: www.snipca.com/39126). These work only for Lightning Deals (available at www.snipca.com/39127), which have a limited number of discounts for a short period. If you see a Lightning Deal that’s valid but out of stock, you may see a yellow ‘Join Waitlist’ (see screenshot below).

This normally means the items have been claimed but have stayed in the shopper’s basket for longer than 15 minutes, and have therefore dropped out. The item therefore is technically back in stock, and you should see a notification offering you the chance to grab it (this works both on a computer and through the Amazon app: www.snipca.com/39126). Tap or click this, and you should be able to grab the item.

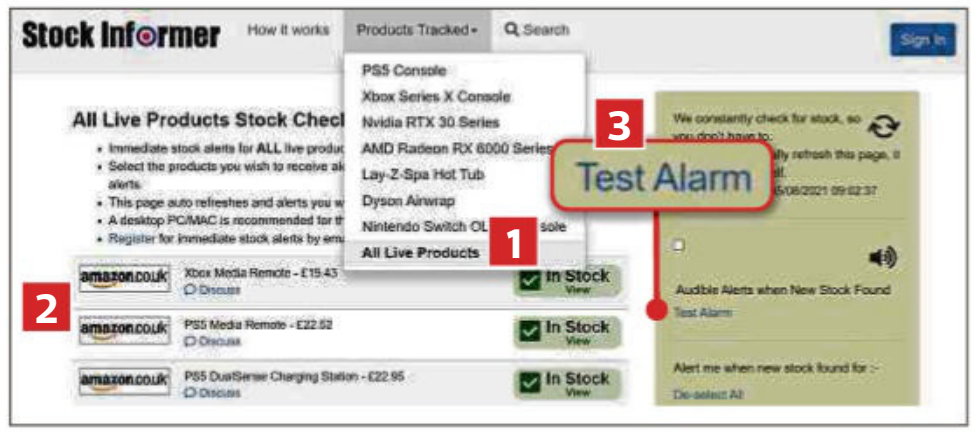
Other retailers make it much easier. On Currys PC World, for example, look for the link ‘Email me when back in stock’ under the price on the right. On Box (www.box.co.uk) it’s ‘Request Stock Alert’ – again on the right, under the price. On John Lewis, you’ll see ‘Email me when available’ under ‘Out of stock online’, as well as an option to check whether it’s available in a John Lewis high-street store.

Track multiple stores in real time

This approach may be sensible if you shop only at one store, but you’ll have greater success overall by signing up to third-party tools that provide alerts for a variety of retailers. One of the best is Stock Informer (www.stockinformer.co.uk), which tracks high-street shops as well as web stores (you’ll see them listed at www.snipca.com/39114 – scroll to the bottom).

It’s quite choosy about *which* items it tracks though, prioritising those in high demand. At the moment these are gaming products, graphics cards and hot tubs. So, before you create an account, visit the site, then click the Products Tracked menu at the top and select All

Select ‘Join Waitlist’ and Amazon will tell you if a Lightning Deal has become available again



Check which products are tracked by Stock Informer and where

Live Products at the bottom (1 in screenshot above).

You'll now see a list of items it's tracking, and at which store 2. If you're interested in one, create an account by clicking Sign In at the top right, then the blue 'Yes please, register now!' button. On the next page select the items you want to get alerts for – this can be by email (make sure you enter a genuine email address that you check regularly), or 'push notifications' that pop up on your computer when you have any browser open, or your phone or tablet (Android only for Stock Informer – no app needed). For the latter, select whether you want Moderated or Full alerts.

Once you tick the T&Cs box at the bottom then click Register, you'll receive an email from Stock Informer. Click the link it contains to go back to the site, then click Agree and log in on the left. You'll now see the products it's tracking for you. Scroll down and you've got the option to exclude stores from the alerts you receive.

There's one other option that you'll find useful or annoying (or possibly both): an audio alarm that tells you when an alert has been sent. To hear it, click the small blue 'Test Alarm' link on the right 3, which sounds like it's indicating the end of a factory shift (Apple blocks this on iPads and iPhones). If that's not too grating, tick the box to turn the alarm on.

Stock Informer is great, but its product range will be too narrow for many. You'll find more items on HotStock (www.hotstock.io/uk), including printers, tablets and speakers. Once you've signed up and clicked the confirmation link in the email it sends, you can search for an item at the top, or browse the 'Newly added' and Popular categories further down. When you've spotted an item you want, click the red Alert Me button, and then optionally click 'Set a maximum price for alerts'.

To choose how you're alerted, click your account icon top-right, followed by Settings, then pick an option: email, or push notifications on your browser (with accompanying sound) or on your phone and tablet (you'll need the app for this – Android www.snipca.com/39117, iOS www.snipca.com/39118). To get push notifications - which appear in green boxes at the top of the page (see screenshot below left) – HotStock will need to be running in your browser, but it doesn't need to be the tab you're currently in. These appear in Chrome, Edge and Firefox, but sadly not the fast-rising Brave or Vivaldi.

Track visual changes to a site

Another way to track items is to be alerted when words or images on a website change. The master of this is Visualping (https://visualping.io), which made headlines during lockdown for identifying free Tesco delivery slots (www.snipca.com/39121). Many people use it for tracking edits to Wikipedia articles, but it also works for 'back in stock' alerts.

First, find an item that's out of stock (on any retailer). Next, copy and paste the web page's URL into Visualping's search bar (1 in our screenshot below), then click Go 2. You'll see the web page with an editing grid. Move this grid towards where it says the item is unavailable (it's 'Temporarily out of stock' in our screenshot from Amazon 3). This will be the area it checks for changes - hopefully from 'out of stock' to 'in stock', or something similar.

Next, scroll down, enter your email address, and select how often you want it to check for changes (five minutes to once a week). Finally, click the green 'Start Monitoring' button, confirm you own the email address, then click the Activate button in the email it sends you. ca

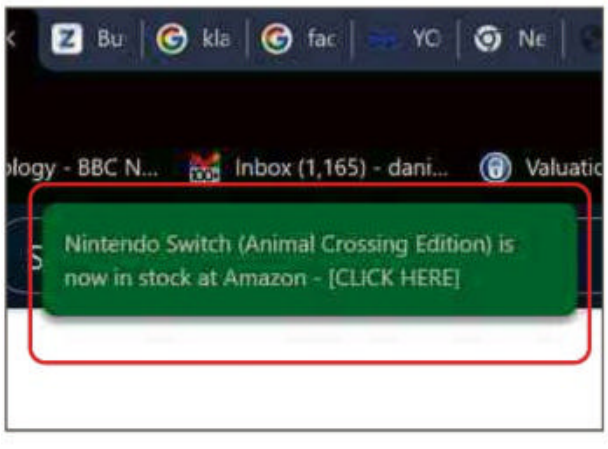
Don't keep refreshing pages

For Stock Informer it's a spinning arrow, while HotStock uses a spinning circle, but they both indicate the same thing: checking for products in 'real time'. This means they're continuously monitoring retailers' sites, rather than checking just once a day or week, say.

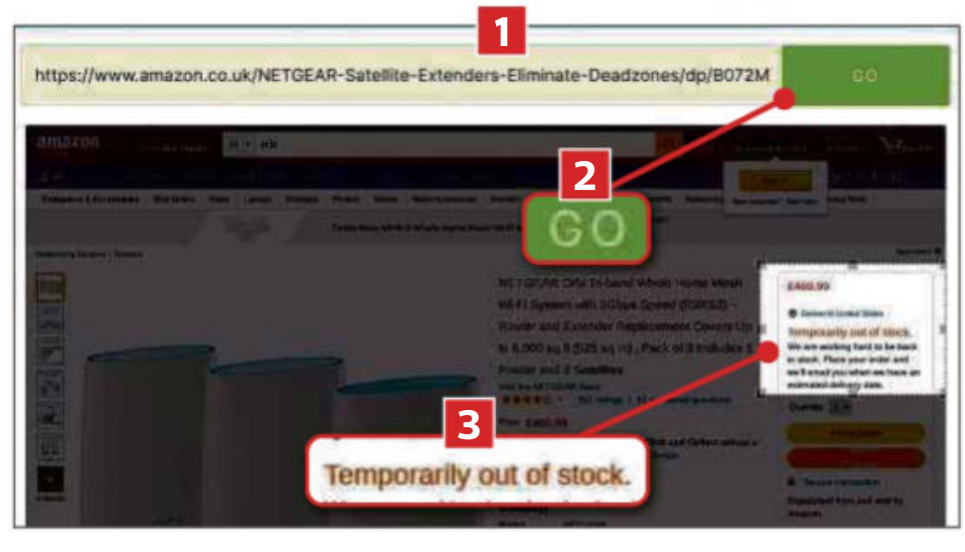
It's hard to verify these claims, but they both sent us alerts and emails within minutes of signing up, and have done so frequently since.

But it's no surprise that some shoppers try to cheat the system by constantly refreshing the webpage – both manually and using automated software. The sites say there's no need to do this because they update frequently enough already.

They remind users of this in the warning messages they send when they detect rapid refreshing, with HotStock dubiously claiming that it updates "automagically". Both sites say they ban anyone who ignores these warnings and continues to refresh too eagerly.



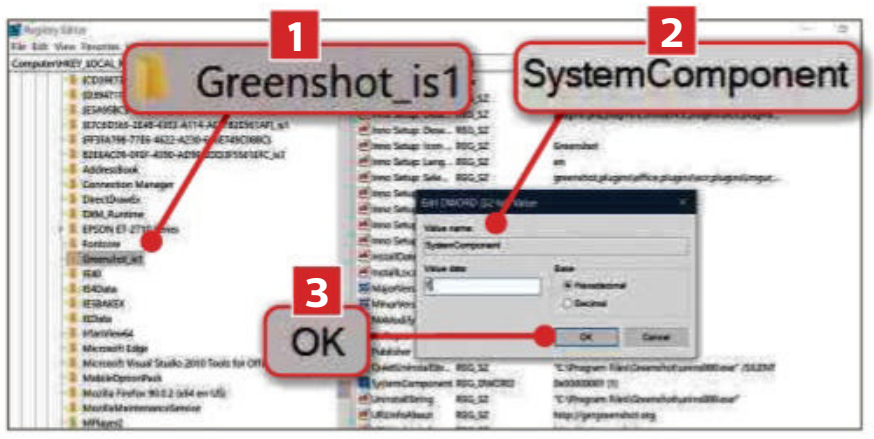
HotStock's alerts appear in green at the top of your browser



Select the 'Out of stock' part of a web page and Visualping will tell you when the words change

Keep your software secret

Hiding your programs and apps means only you will know which tools you've installed on your devices. **Daniel Booth** explains how to do this on computers, phones and tablets



Tweak the registry to stop programs appearing in Settings and Control Panel

There are three simple ways to see the software you've installed on your computer. One is to press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click Apps. Another is to type control panel into Windows search, then choose 'Programs and Features'. Even quicker is clicking the Start menu and scrolling down. All three methods are easy – perhaps *too* easy if you prefer to keep some or all of your programs secret.

It's even easier to see which apps you've installed on your phone and tablet: their icons are shown front and centre on the device's home screen.

Here we'll show you how to hide what you've installed, so nobody who shares (or steals) your device will know.

Hide software in Windows

How you hide your programs in Windows depends on whether you want to conceal certain tools or *all* of them, and also whether you want them to stop appearing everywhere, or just in specific places.

Hiding every program in the Start menu is easy, for example. Open Settings, then click Personalization followed by Start on the left, and turn off the 'Show app list in Start menu' slider. Now, when you open your Start menu, you'll just see live tiles and pinned folders. What's handy about this is that, once this is turned off, you'll be able to reveal and hide the programs without returning to Settings. Click 'All apps' at the top left of the menu to see your programs, then 'Pinned tiles' above to hide them again.

While this method is easy and effective, it doesn't hide programs elsewhere, so they'll still appear in the Apps section of Settings, and in the Control Panel. You can remove individual programs from both by editing the Windows registry, though only do so after you've created a system restore point.

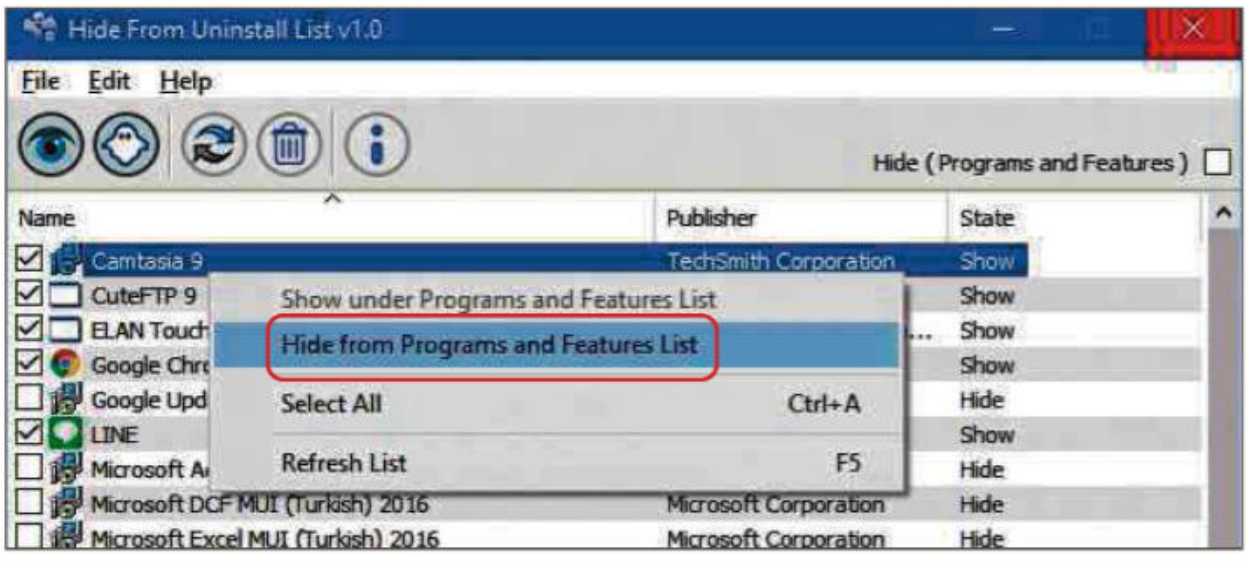
Open the registry by pressing Windows key+R, then typing regedit and clicking OK followed by Yes. Using the dropdown arrows, navigate to **HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Uninstall**. Tiptoeing through the registry is never easy, so if you'd prefer you can paste that address into the bar at the top of the registry (you may need to delete 'Computer' first). We've added it to our Pastebin account at www.snipca.com/39133 – just cut and paste it from there.

Note that for 32bit programs installed on a 64bit computer, navigate here instead: **HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Wow6432Node\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Uninstall**.

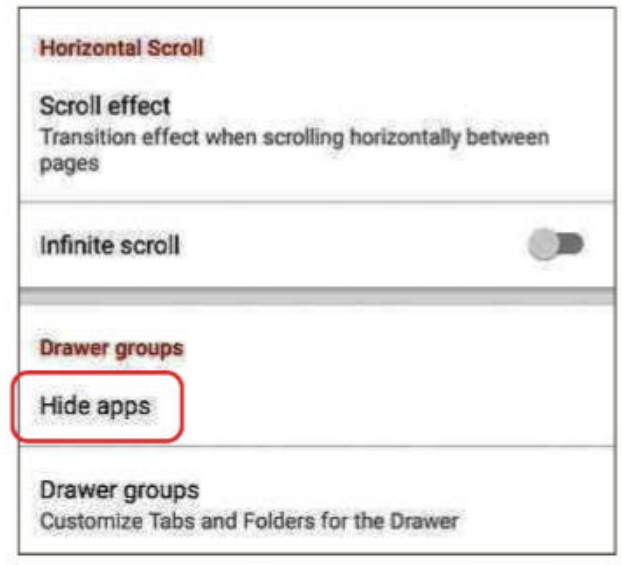
Next, find the program you want to hide within the registry's Uninstall folder ('Greenshot' 1 in our screenshot above), then right-click it and select New, DWORD (32-bit) Value. This will open a new value box in the central pane. Type SystemComponent into this box 2 to rename it. Double-click it, then type 1 into the 'Value data' field that appears. Finally, click OK 3.

If you regard this as rather long-winded, you're not alone. Developers at Sordum (www.sordum.org) think it's "tedious", and so built their own tool called Hide From Uninstall List (HideUL for short). To download it, visit www.snipca.com/39136 then scroll down about three-quarters of the page and click the grey Download button (avoiding all the nasty fake download adverts – not big or clever, Sordum).

It's a portable program, so you need only to run it, not install it. When it opens it'll show you all your programs, with



Right-click a program in HideUL then select 'Hide from Programs and Features list'



You can hide apps by using the Android app Nova Launcher Prime

those not currently hidden marked by a tick. To hide one, highlight it then click the ghost icon at the top, or right-click it then select 'Hide from Programs and Features list' (see screenshot above). You'll see the tick next to the program disappears, meaning it's no longer in the Apps section of Settings nor Control Panel (but it'll still be in the Start menu).

To hide all your programs, click Edit at the top followed by Select All (or press Ctrl+A). Next, right-click *any* app and choose 'Hide from Programs and Features list'. These changes are easily reversed by right-clicking and selecting 'Show under Programs and Features list'.

You can even remove the 'Programs and Features' list completely, so you'll see a blank page in Control Panel. Similarly, you can delete the 'Apps and features' option in Settings. Just tick 'Hide (Programs and Features)' at the top right and restart your computer.

Hide your Android and iOS apps

How Android and iOS hide apps perfectly captures the key pros and cons of both systems. On Android, you can install third-party apps to do the job, or choose the specific method added by the device's manufacturer. The results are more comprehensive than with iOS, but with Apple at least you don't have to worry about which particular iPhone or iPad (though the version of iOS will matter).

The process differs across Android manufacturers, but we'll use Samsung because it's fairly representative. Long-press an empty spot on the home screen, then tap the Settings cog, bottom right. Now swipe down to find and tap the Hidden Apps option. Select the apps you want to hide and they'll appear in a box at the top.

If you can't find a way to hide apps using your manufacturer's settings, try the outstanding Nova Launcher Prime instead. This third-party app is paid-for (£3.99 from www.snipca.com/39138), but it adds loads of tools, including the ability to create your own screen-tapping gestures for specific tasks.

Once you set it as your default app launcher (which means it'll change how Android looks on your device), open your app drawer then tap the Nova Settings app. Now go to 'App & widgets drawer' followed by 'Hide apps' (see screenshot above) and tap the apps you want to hide. To un-hide an app, search for it in the box at the top of your app drawer.

Apple hates you making changes to its devices, so it doesn't let you hide apps to the same extent, but there are still ways of making them harder to find.

On iPhones and iPads running iOS 14/iPadOS 14, long-press the app's icon on your home screen, then tap Remove App followed by 'Move to App Library'. You can also set all future apps you install to be stored in your App Library - tap Settings, then Home Screen, and tap App Library Only. Granted, this method wouldn't win gold at the hide and seek Olympics – anyone looking for them just needs to know where the App Library is – but it's a start.

You can also remove apps from search results, and from those that Siri suggests. Open Settings, tap 'Siri & Search', then tap the app you want to hide. On the next screen, turn off all the green sliders.

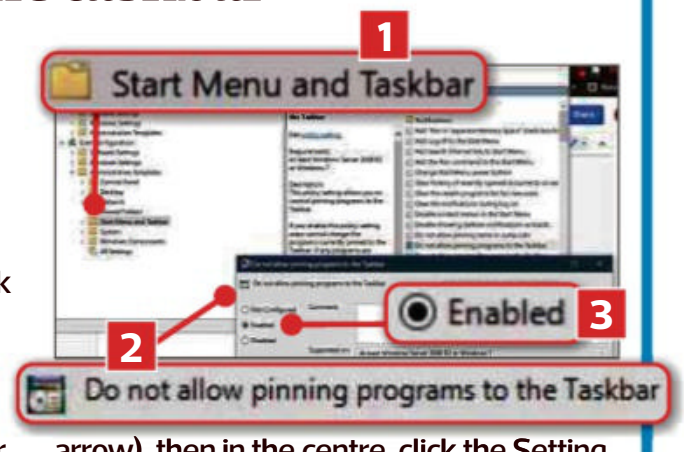
Another option is to hide apps from the list of what you've installed from the App Store. Open the App Store app, tap your account button at the top right, then Purchased (or My Purchases if you use Family Sharing). Find the app you want to conceal, then swipe left across it and tap Hide. This won't remove the app from anywhere else, though, and to 'unhide' it you'll need to download it again. ca

Don't forget to hide the taskbar

Even if you hide a program, its icon will still appear in the taskbar when you run it. You can prevent this by stopping the taskbar itself from appearing. Open Settings, then click Personalization followed by Taskbar on the left. Next, click the slider under 'Automatically hide the taskbar in desktop mode'.

Another solution is to keep the taskbar but stop icons being pinned to it. However, this works only for non-Microsoft programs you've installed, and you'll need to use Group Policy Editor, which is available only in Windows 10 Pro, not Home.

If you have Pro, press Windows key+R, type gpedit.msc, press Enter. Next, click the User Configuration dropdown arrow followed by the Administrative Templates arrow. Click the 'Start Menu and Taskbar' folder - 1 in our screenshot - (*not* the arrow), then in the centre, click the Setting heading to re-order the commands alphabetically.



Find and double-click 'Do not allow pinning programs to the Taskbar' 2, then select the Enabled button 3, followed by Apply and OK. You'll now see this 'Enabled' in the list of settings. Do the same for the option below to prevent Microsoft Store apps pinning themselves to the taskbar.

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

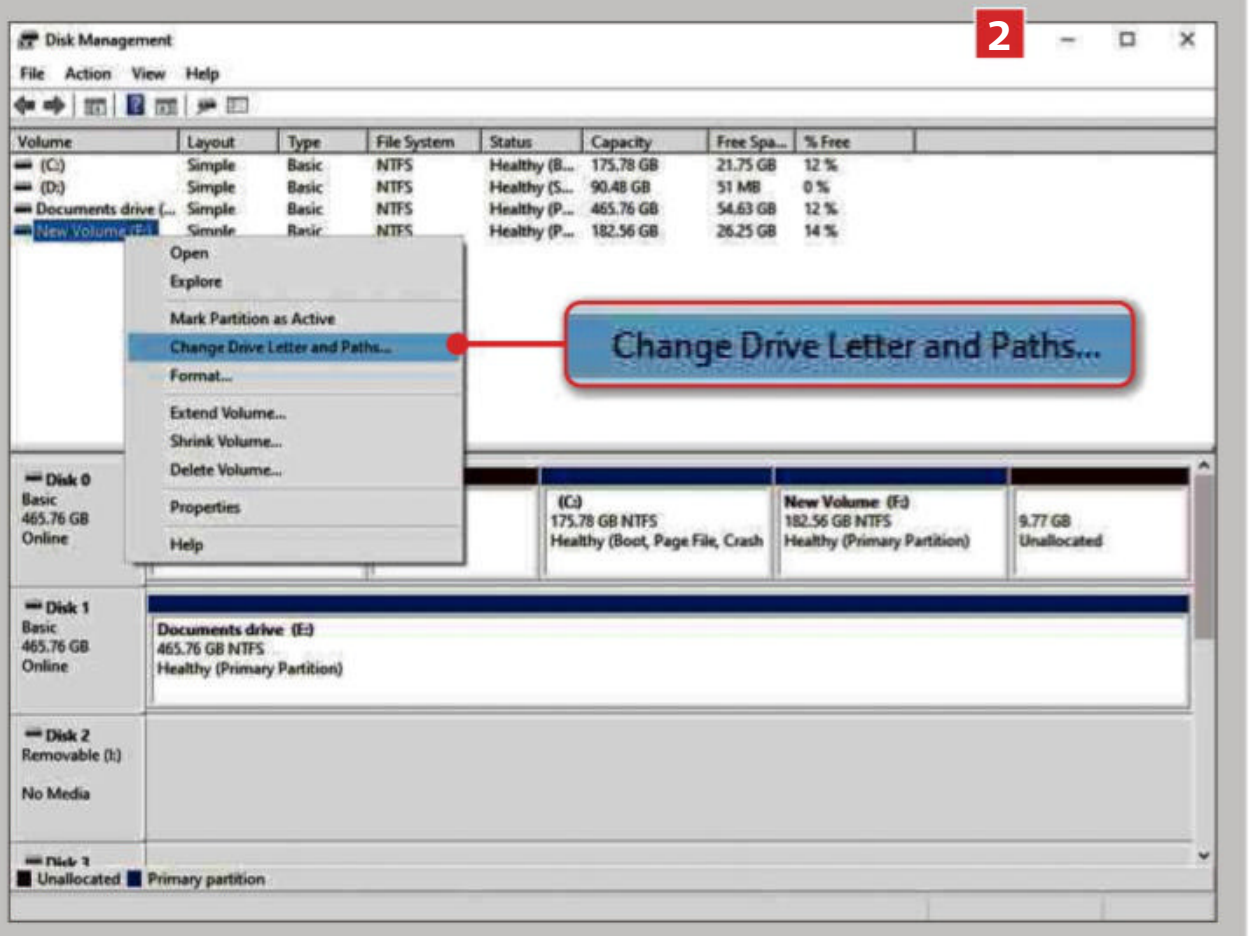
Why does VLC show errors?

Q I'm having problems with my music in VLC. Whenever I open and try to play a tune, error messages now pop up. Could you help me understand what's going on and let me know if there's any way of fixing this error using easy steps? I struggle understanding all of the terminology.

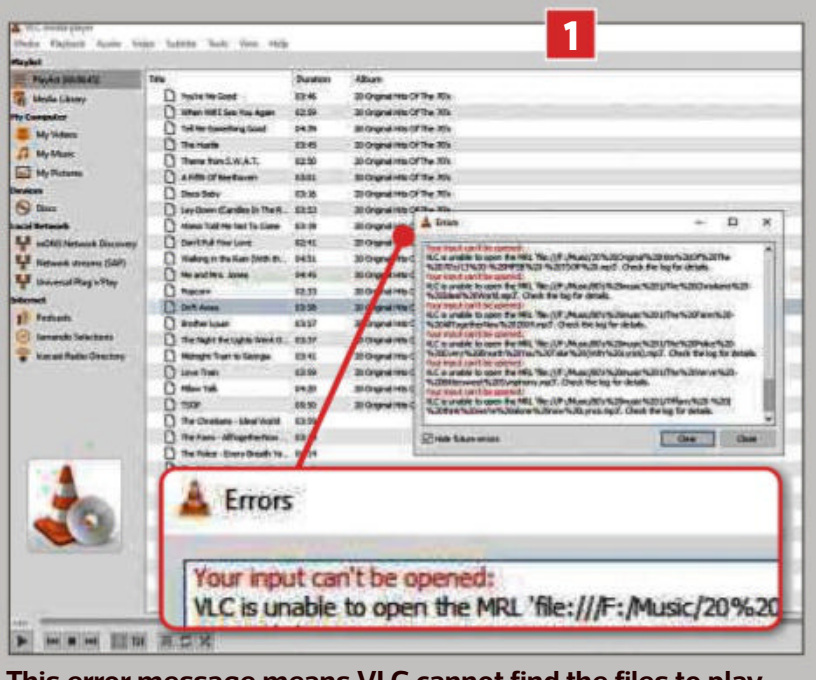
John Cranny

A You helpfully included a screenshot so that we could see the exact error message you're seeing (see screenshot 1). The terminology does look complex to untrained eyes, but it actually tells us a simple story – which is that VLC cannot find the files on the playlist that you're asking it to play.

Now, why that might be we do not know. However, we can interpret the jargon to tell you that specifically VLC is looking for files on drive F:, and within a folder called Music. The program is not finding the files in this location, so it displays an error message. The reason for this could be that the files have been moved or deleted, or that drive F: has been disconnected or otherwise disabled. Another possibility is that the drive that was at some pointed labelled F: has ended up with a different drive letter, perhaps because you've added another drive or USB stick.



To reassign drive letters, in Disk Management click 'Change Drive Letter and Paths'



This error message means VLC cannot find the files to play

Let's say, for example, that the drive that contains the Music folder (and thus the files VLC is seeking) is a traditional external hard drive that Windows 10 had labelled F:. If for whatever reason you disconnected that hard drive and inserted, say, a USB stick, then Windows 10 might have labelled that stick F:. If you then later reconnected the hard drive, it might end up as drive G: – because the F: label has in the meantime been allocated to the USB stick.

Does a scenario like this ring any bells? If so, then you can reassign the drive letters to fix things. To do this, first press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu and then choose Disk Management. Next, in the Disk Management window, right-click a drive, then choose 'Change Drive Letter and Paths' 2. Then, choose 'Assign the following drive letter' and pick the desired letter from the dropdown menu, then click OK. You might need to play around with the order of other drives, first changing the drive letter of a USB stick that might currently be labelled F:, for example – because your end game is to ensure the drive that contains your Music folder is the one assigned F.

If, on the other hand, you or someone else has intentionally moved the files, then a different fix will be required. It's possible to edit VLC's playlist code to change the location of files but, as you said you struggle with technology, we fear such a complex method might be too difficult. Instead, we think you'll find it easier to remake the playlist (or playlists) by dragging and dropping the files from wherever they now live into VLC's Playlist pane.

How do I update my TV apps?

Q I bought a new 48in Sony Bravia smart TV about six or seven years ago, spending quite a lot of money on it. One of the reasons I chose this set was because it had a number of streaming apps, including YouTube and BBC iPlayer. These all worked pretty well for a while. However, they've become increasingly unreliable and some, like the Channel 5 app, no longer want to work at all. I've looked at the Sony website to find ways to update these apps, but everything seems to be a dead end. Is there anything I can do, because the set itself is still great?

Scott Harris

A You didn't tell us your exact set model, but in the world of TVs it barely matters because 'smartness' dates very quickly indeed. We're sure that some of your fellow *Computeractive* readers would tell you that aspects of their own smart TV sets were rendered useless much sooner than seven years so, by that measure, you've done fairly well.

The trouble is that manufacturers – even one as big as Sony – have little commercial interest in providing meaningful support for ageing products. Of course, this is true for many products and industries, but in this particular example it means things like built-in apps are first left to go stale and then to rot and die.

Sony began releasing Android-based TVs in 2015, and apps for many of those will continue to be updated for a while yet. However, as your set pre-dates this, we're afraid its streaming apps are almost certainly on a downward slope – while some are plainly already dead.

There's nothing you can do about that. However, it is easy to update almost any reasonably modern TV so that it's able to access up-to-date versions of streaming apps. All the TV needs is a spare HDMI port, and then you can slot in a TV-streaming stick. This will put the 'smarts' back into your ageing set.

TV-streaming sticks like Amazon's Fire TV Stick Lite will update TV apps

There's no shortage of choice, which is why we published a comprehensive round-up back in Issue 593.

We'd recommend reading the whole feature, but our favourite, then and now, is Amazon's Fire TV Stick Lite (£29.99, www.snipca.com/38979, pictured).

Can I copy my Virgin Tivo programmes?

Q I'm an avid documentary watcher. I like to rewatch some of these programmes from time to time, but the problem is they are now starting to clog up my Virgin Tivo box. Is there any way I can put the programmes I have recorded on to a USB stick or even external hard drive to keep? Many years ago, when I lived with my parents, I used to record stuff from their Sky box using a DVD recorder. Would I need to do this again? I'm not very technical, by the way.

Peter Lang

An HDMI device like the eSync splitter might get around HDCP encryption

A The short answer is that there is no simple, non-technical way to do this. Older Tivo boxes did allow something similar to what you did with your parents' Sky box, but Virgin's Tivo boxes encrypt everything that comes out of them, making them hard to transfer and watch on other devices.

It might be possible to hook up your box to a DVD recorder that has an HDMI input via an HDMI splitter that strips the High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection (HDCP) encryption from the split output, such as the pictured eSynic unit (around £16, www.snipca.com/38980). However, the success of these devices is highly variable, not least because software updates to set-top boxes can break their ability to do the job. As such, there's no guarantee that attempts using this or any similar device would work – nor continue working even if they did.

Can I save emails as Word documents?

Q I need to save some emails from the Windows 10 Mail app for ongoing problems with fraud. I've found they can be saved as a file with a .eml file extension, but it's unreadable except in Mail. I came across a reference to transferring the EML file to another format that would be easier to read. Can you advise whether this is possible and, if so, how to change the format into HTML or as DOC?

Ian Egerton

A Some email programs, such as Outlook or Thunderbird, will let you save a message as pure text – though this option cuts out any formatting and graphics.

But it's academic, as Mail does not offer this facility. Fortunately, there are tools that will turn EML files into pretty much any format you choose. One of the best is Zamzar (www.zamzar.com), which we've recommended often over the years. Specifically, to convert EML to DOC, visit www.snipca.com/38981.

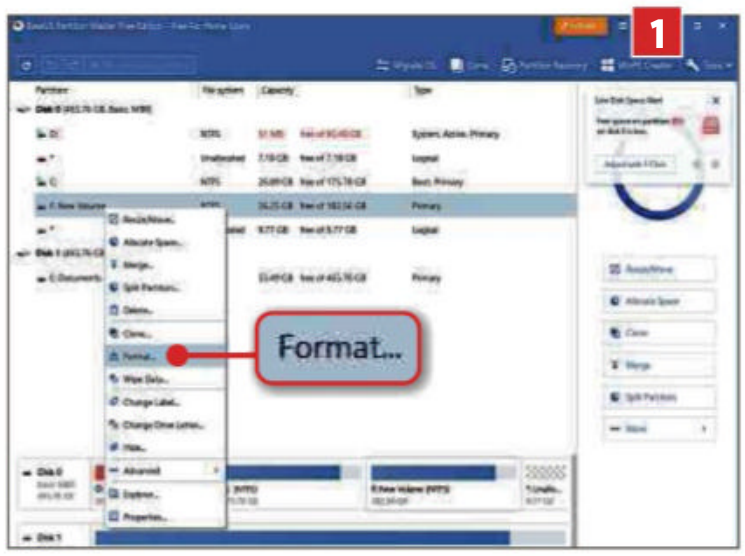
Then, just click Add Files, navigate to find and select an EML file, then click Open followed by Convert Now 1. Wait a few moments and then click the Download button 2 when it's ready.

In Zamzar you can convert EML files to DOC (1) and then download them (2)

How do I format my drive for Linux?

Q I have a Humax PVR, to which I can connect an external drive to copy content to save for later viewing. However, the drive needs to be formatted as EXT3 via a Linux operating system. Unfortunately, the friend who could do this for me is no longer available. How can I do this myself? I don't have a spare computer to reconfigure as a Linux machine, and my Dell laptop runs Windows 10. From my cursory research it seems I could create a Linux partition on my laptop and set up a dual-boot system, or I could run a Linux version in VirtualBox. I want a cheap, simple solution. What do you suggest?

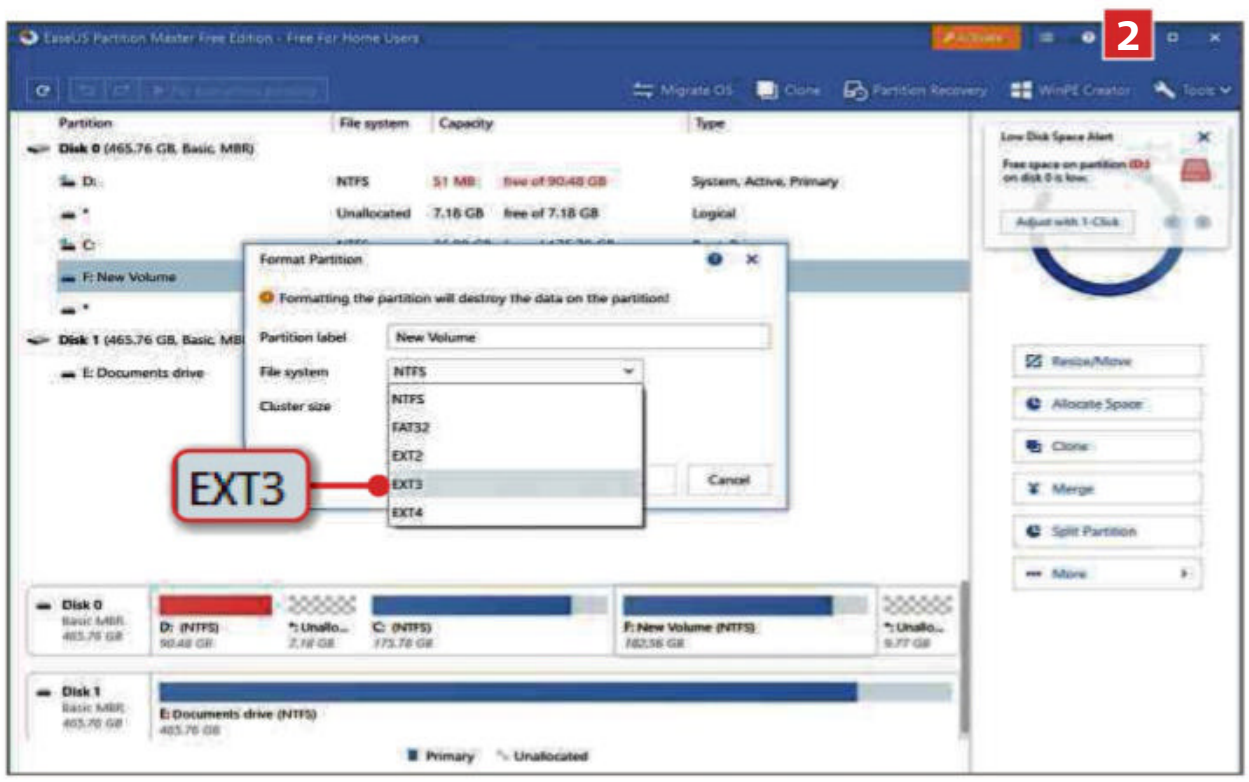
Tim Auburn



In EaseUS, right-click the relevant partition in the left-hand list and choose Format

A Both those options won't cost anything, but nor are they particularly simple. But what is both free *and* simple is EaseUS Partition Manager, a tool that will let you format a drive as EXT3 from your current Windows 10 setup – so no need to mess with dual-booting or virtualisation.

Download the program from www.snipca.com/38982 and launch it. Next, attach your external drive, then right-click the relevant partition in the left-hand list and choose Format (see screenshot 1). Then, in the Format Partition menu, click to open the 'File system' menu, choose EXT3 2 and then click OK. Now just follow the prompts.



In the Format Partition menu, click to open the 'File system' menu and choose EXT3

Q: Have my screenshots endangered my granddaughter?

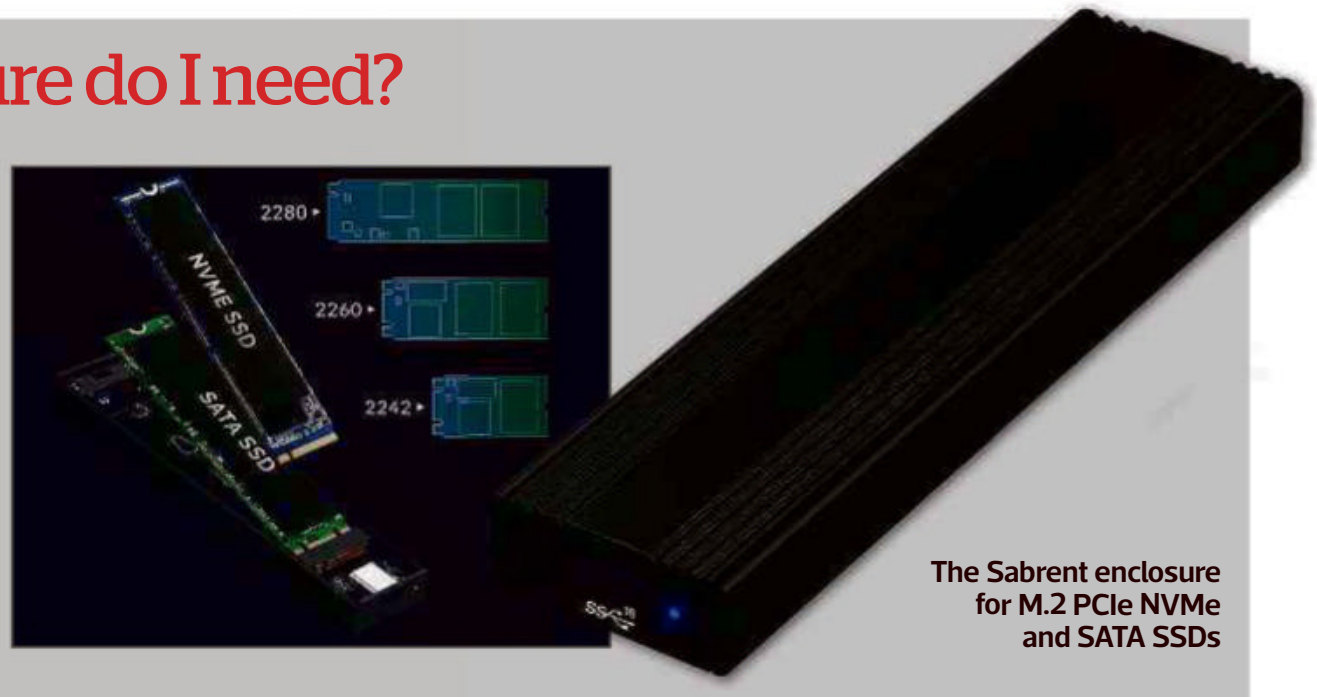
A: Issue 586, page 66 – find it on our 2020 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/38164

Which SSD enclosure do I need?

Q My computer runs Windows 10 Professional. I'd like to clone the current SATA 600 250GB M.2 SSD on to a larger-capacity M.2 drive – possibly a Samsung 970 Evo Plus. I'm looking at M.2 drive enclosures with a USB connection that are suitable to use. However, I'm confused by the specification of some of the enclosures available. Many state that they are NGFF enclosures with SATA M-key or B-key interfaces. Can you point me in the right direction, please?

John Miller



The Sabrent enclosure for M.2 PCIe NVMe and SATA SSDs

A The industry seems to have gone out of its way to create confusion in this area, so we understand your bafflement. Navigating this stuff can be a minefield! We could write pages explaining the intricacies of it all, but we'll need to stay focused to answer your particular question.

NGFF (or Next Generation Form Factor) is basically the old working name for what is now known as the M.2 connector. M.2 can be 'keyed' with one or more notches to indicate capability and/or prevent use of the incorrect SSD or slot. A B-key drive uses just two PCI Express (PCIe) data lanes, while an M-key drive uses four – allowing for data throughput operation.

Most new SATA M.2 SSDs are M-keyed. There are even faster M.2 SSDs that use a standard called NVMe (Non-Volatile Memory Express). NVMe M.2 drives require four PCIe data lanes, so these are also M-keyed. Incidentally, enjoying the full speed of NVMe SSDs depends on numerous factors, but connecting such a drive via USB means you probably wouldn't.

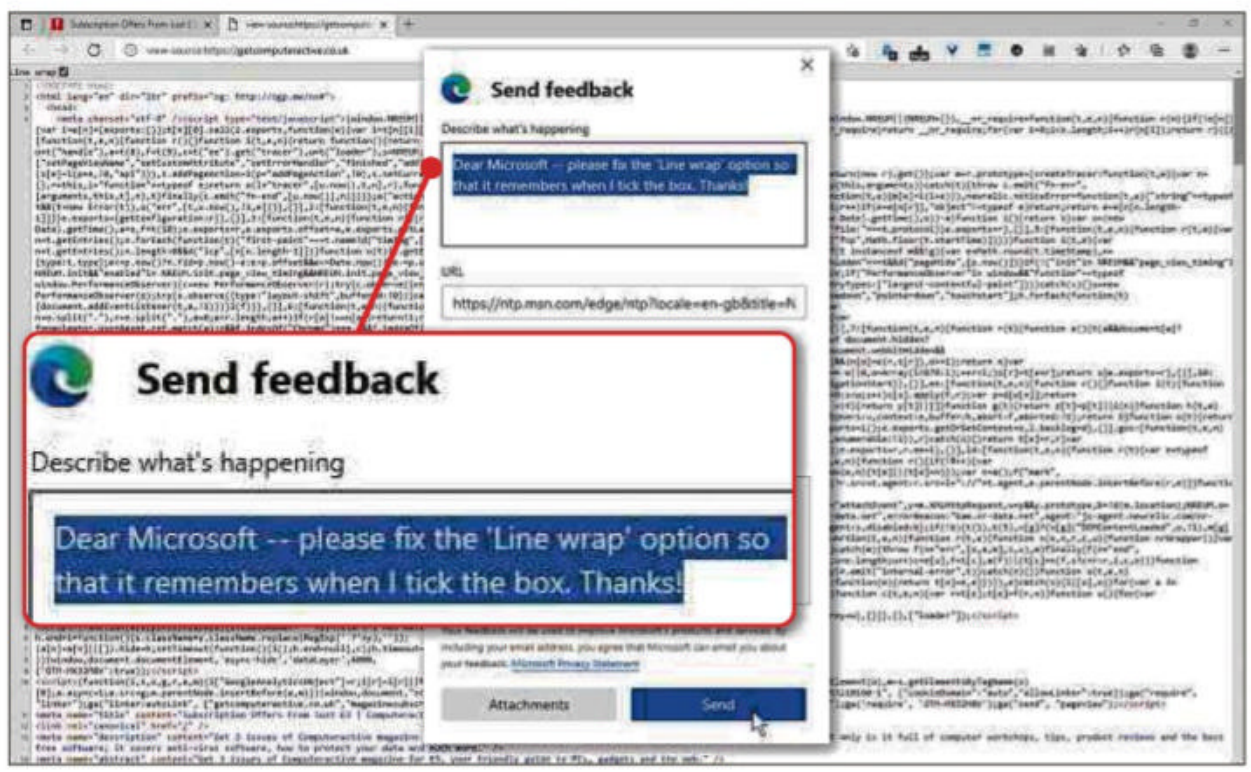
The Samsung 970 Evo Plus is an NVMe M-keyed device, so it needs an M-keyed enclosure.

Some enclosures, like the pictured Sabrent model (around £29, www.snipca.com/38983), will accommodate single-notch M-key SATA or NVMe drives, or dual-notch SATA M+B keys. It will not accept older, single-notch B-key devices.

How do I fix line wrapping in Edge?

Q As a website developer I use the Edge browser and frequently switch to view the source code, using the Control(Ctrl)+U keyboard shortcut. Line wrapping is pretty well essential, so that long lines of code wrap to the next line in the viewing window, but the default is disabled. I can tick the 'Line wrap' box to enable it, but it's cleared each new time I use it. I cannot find any way of changing this behaviour. Do you guys happen to know of a way, please?

Tim Boddington



You can send feedback to Edge's developers to point out the line-wrapping problem

A Sadly, we do not. This is a niche and relatively new feature of Edge (and Chrome) that doesn't seem to be have been implemented with much thought, because it suffers from precisely the problem you describe.

We imagine that at some point the underlying Chromium code, on which both Chrome and Edge are based, will be updated to ensure this option 'sticks' when ticked – but there's nothing you can do to change this behaviour in Edge.

If you want to feel like you're doing something proactive you could summon Edge's 'Send feedback' form, by pressing Alt+Shift+I (that's the letter I, not the number one), and writing a note for the attention of the browser's developers (see screenshot above).

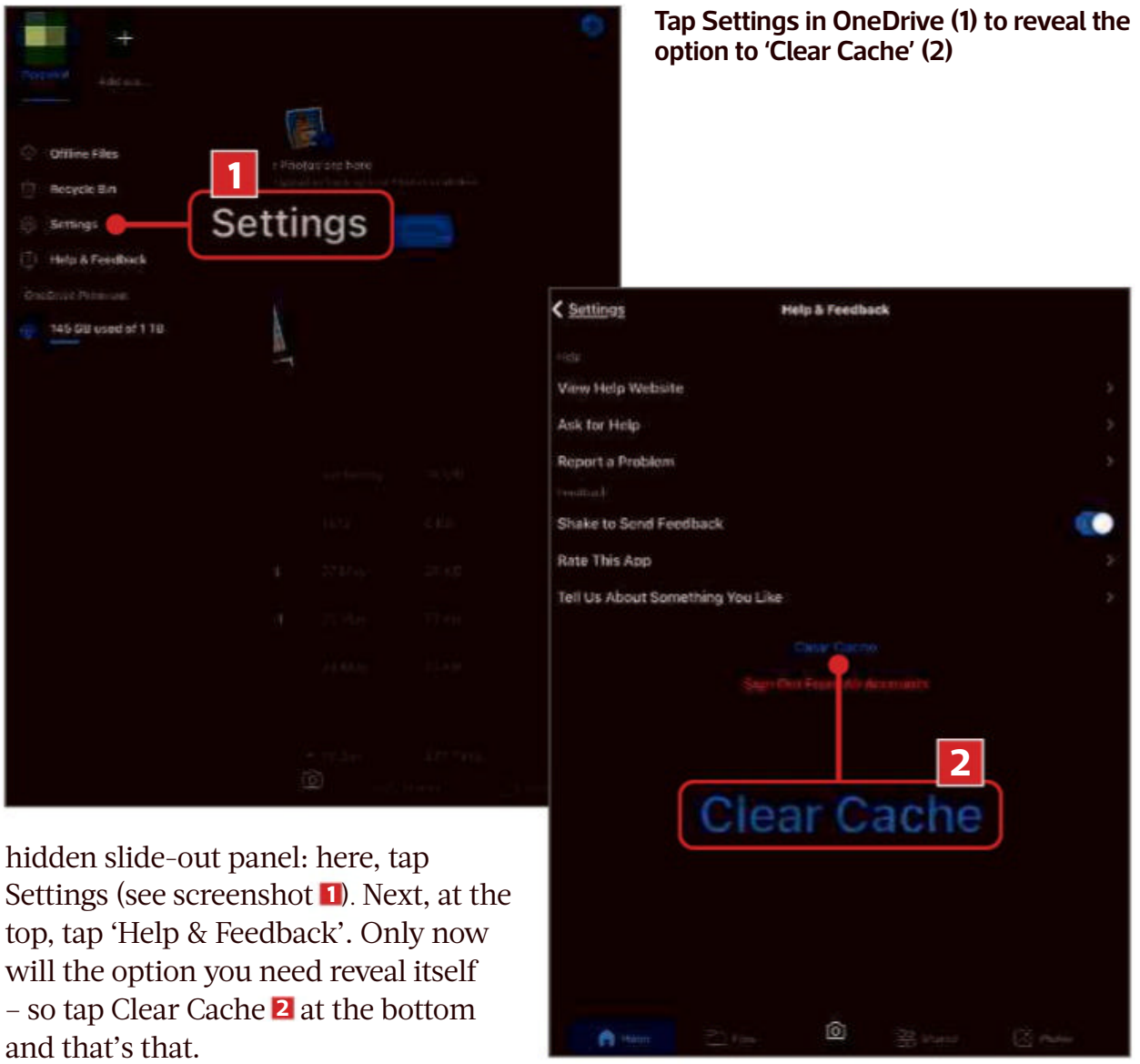
However, don't expect Microsoft to immediately scramble a crack coding squad to address this annoyance: the company is hardly known for issuing lightning-speed fixes for minor quirks.

Problems **Solved**

How do I erase my OneDrive cache?

Q I have an older iPad that has only 16GB of storage. It's fine for most things, but I recently wanted to free up some space, so I went into the Storage section of Settings to see what was taking up space. To my surprise, the OneDrive app was hogging about a gigabyte, despite me using it only occasionally. I tapped to see more, but the only options were to delete or 'offload' the app, neither of which I want to do (as I said, I do use it sometimes). I assume this is some form of cache that has built up through my years of using the app, but I can't find any way to clear it. Do you know if it's possible and, if so, how?

Nathan Stone



Tap Settings in OneDrive (1) to reveal the option to 'Clear Cache' (2)

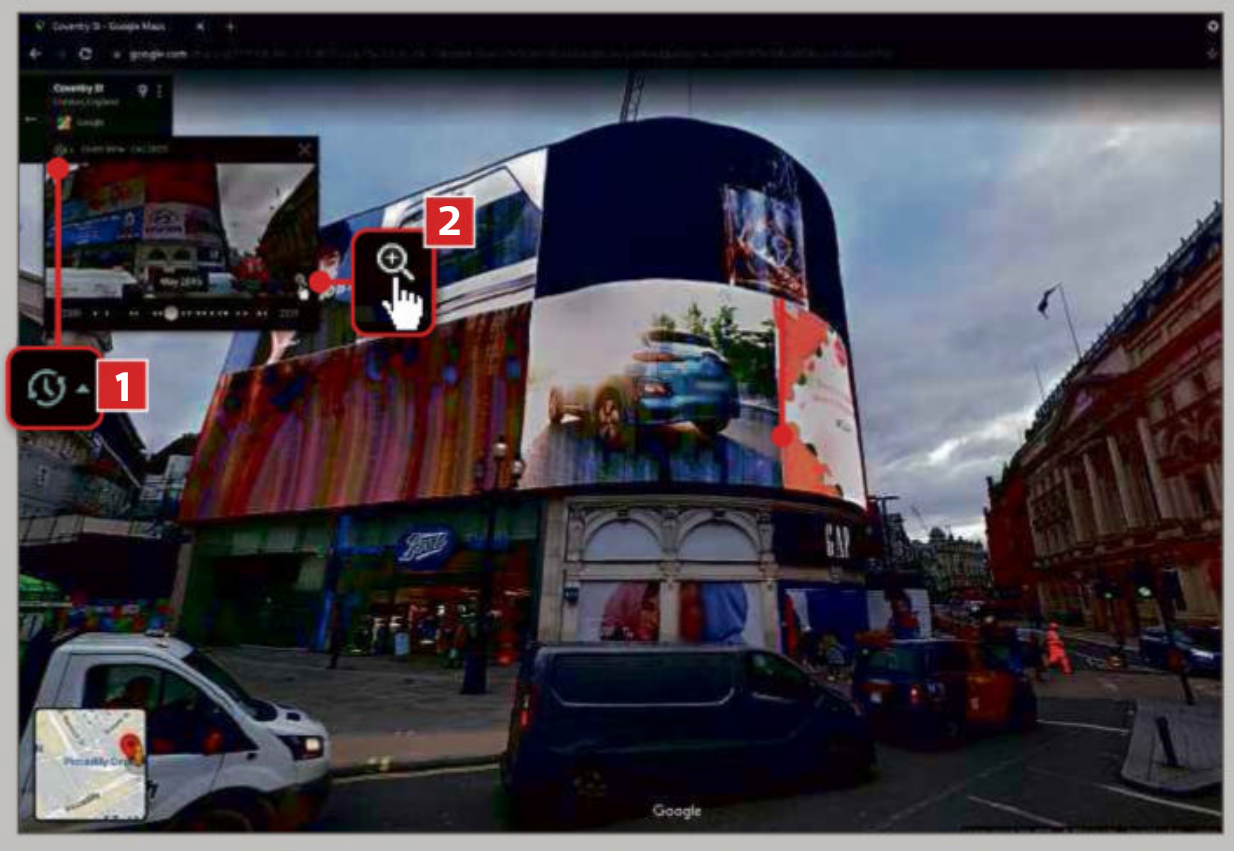
A It is possible but the option is so ludicrously and illogically hidden that you would be lucky to find it by accident – or even by actually looking!

Regardless, you need to do this from within the OneDrive app itself, so begin by launching that. Next, on the OneDrive Home tab, tap your avatar icon at the top left, next to Home. This will open a hidden slide-out panel: here, tap Settings (see screenshot 1). Next, at the top, tap 'Help & Feedback'. Only now will the option you need reveal itself – so tap Clear Cache 2 at the bottom and that's that.

Can I view old Street View photos?

Q The Google Street View car must have driven past my house again recently because the photo of our house has changed. Previously, it had captured our dog, Max, looking excitedly out the window. Max has unfortunately gone to doggie heaven and I wish I'd kept that old image of him for posterity. I emailed Google support, but have not had a response. Do you know if there's any way to get this old image back?

Derek Manfred



Click the clock icon (1), find the relevant year and then select the magnifying glass (2)

A Yes, this is easy – though perhaps not entirely obvious.

First, open Street View in the usual way, by dragging the little orange chap (officially called Pegman) on to your street, and use the arrows on the road to get the exact view you want.

Now look at the address area, at the top left of the Street View image. If you see a little clock icon here (see screenshot 1), then historical images are available: just click to open a dropdown pane, and then drag the slider control to find the year you want.

Finally, click the magnifying-glass icon 2 to view imagery from the chosen date in full screen.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

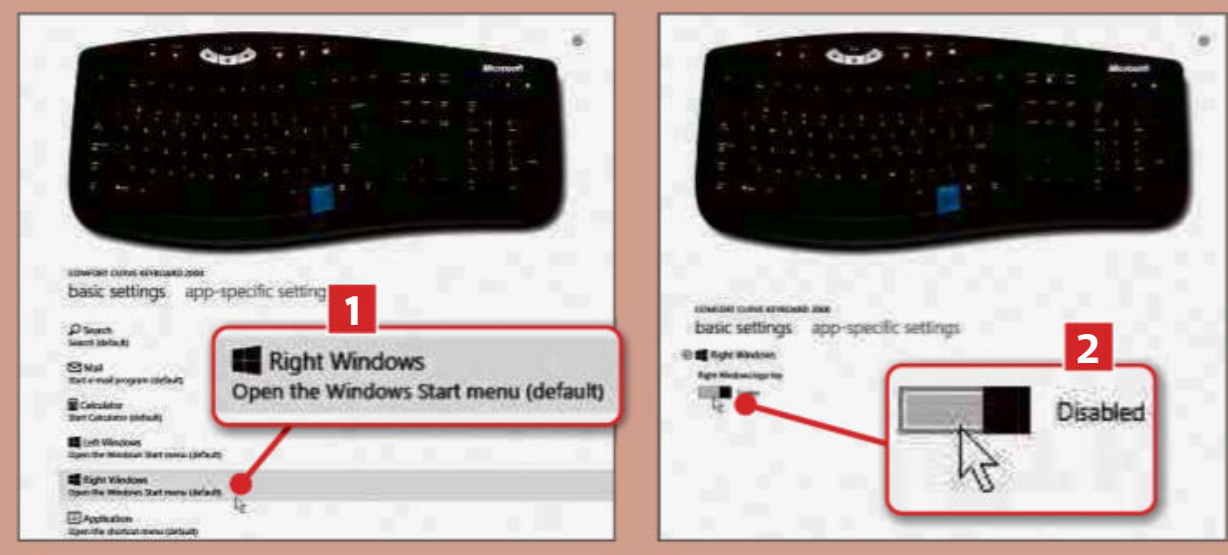
The two Windows keys on my keyboard?

Q A friend gave me his old Microsoft keyboard, to replace my even-older keyboard, which had stopped working. I attached this to my desktop PC and it works well. However, it has one annoyance and also a curiosity, which is that it has not one but two keys emblazoned with the Windows logo.

I never used this button on my old keyboard, so I certainly don't need two of them. However, both seem to do the same thing – namely opening the Start menu. Is this meant to be the case? Or should they do different things?

That aside, I find the right-hand one particularly annoying as it's near the right Control (Ctrl) key that I *do* use, and I regularly hit the wrong button – summoning the Start menu when I don't want it. Could you advise?

Gordon Ford



To disable the Right Windows key (1), move the slider for it to 'Disabled' (2)

A Some Microsoft keyboards do indeed have two Windows keys. Other than their physical positions, there's no difference between them or their operation. In other words, they both exist simply to provide quick access to the Start button.

However, it is possible to disable one or other (or both) of these keys, which sounds like something you'd like to do.

To do that, you'll need to download and install the free Microsoft Mouse and Keyboard Center app, from www.snipca.com/38984. Once that's on your system, you'll have control over a variety of keys on your keyboard – though exactly which keys and what control depends on the keyboard model.

To find out, launch the app and then click the 'basic controls' heading. Now scroll through the list to see the controllable keys. The 'Right Windows' key should be there so, if you wish to disable it, click its entry 1 and then click to slide the 'Right Windows logo key' switch to its Disabled position 2. Obviously, you can repeat this for the Left Windows key entry, if you wish.

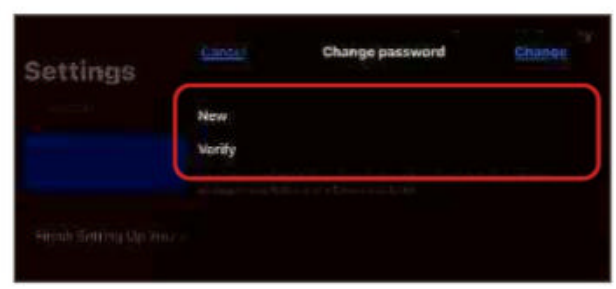
Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

How do I unlock my old iPad?

Q I have two iPads, one of which is old. Recently, when I switched it on, it asked for my four-digit passcode, which I tapped in. The next screen said Hello with 'Slide to set up' below this. Eventually, I was stumped by a screen asking for my Apple ID and original password. Trouble is, I have no idea what that is. Obviously, something has occurred while it was not used. How can I get it working again?

Norman Marrison

A It sounds like your iPad updated overnight, which can happen automatically in some circumstances. So, that's probably how you got here. That aside, the wording on the setup screen is confusing: it requires the Apple ID and current password – not necessarily the password originally used to set up the device. So, if you haven't tried your current password, do so.



Type a new password into the New and Verify boxes, then tap Change

If you've forgotten your current password, then your second iPad can probably help you here. First, launch the Settings app and then, on the left, at the top, tap your username. Then, on the right, tap 'Password & Security' and then 'Change password'. You'll be prompted to tap in your four-digit passcode, which you *do* remember. Finally, type a new password into the New and Verify boxes (see screenshot above), then tap Change.

If this fails, or for whatever reason you used a different Apple ID to set up the locked iPad, then only Apple can help. First, visit the 'Manage your Apple ID' webpage, at https://appleid.apple.com, then click the 'Forgotten your Apple ID or password?' link. Now tap the email address associated with your Apple account, followed by Continue and then just follow the prompts.

Next Issue

ON SALE Weds 8 Sept

- Why are Edge and Internet Explorer creating files?
- How do I make PDFs open automatically?
- How do I disable Ethernet?

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Do I have the Defender bug you warned about?

Q I read Issue 606's News section with interest, and in particular the 'Update Windows Defender to fix file-dumping bug' story on page 6. I'm an elderly computer user and I try to follow your instructions exactly, but I don't always understand how to interpret my results.

When I checked to see if I had been affected, I could not find a Store folder within the History folder. Does this mean that I do not have the bug and no files have been stored? Then, upon checking which version of Windows Defender I have, my Engine Version appeared as 0.0.0.0.

I have a Windows 10 desktop PC. I run AVG Internet Security, TuneUp and AntiTrack. Please could you explain my results – simply? Thank you. I would be lost without your magazine.

Pamela Brown

A There's nothing for you to worry about here. The third-party security software that you're using has disabled Windows Defender (now officially called Microsoft Defender), so it's not gathering any information, checking your files or updating itself. This is entirely normal.

Running Defender side by side with a third-party antivirus can cause conflicts and reduce your protection. However, you can activate Defender's 'Periodic scanning' to offer a second level of defence without clashing.

To use it, open Settings (Windows key+I), then click 'Update & Security' followed by Windows Security. Next, click 'Virus & threat protection', then 'Microsoft Defender Antivirus options', and set the slider to On (see screenshot below left).

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

Why can't I see EverythingToolbar?

Q I tried installing EverythingToolbar, as recommended in Issue 604's Best Free Software section (page 18). However, I cannot reveal the search box, or drag the horizontal bar to the left. In fact, there is no horizontal bar, nor anything that displays the three horizontal dots top right. In fact, nothing works as you said. Can you explain, please?

Christopher Clayton

A We've tried EverythingToolbar on several computers and it works perfectly on all of them. But we think the problem is a misunderstanding of what EverythingToolbar is and the order of our instructions.

If you install *only* EverythingToolbar, via the www.snipca.com/37884 link we published, then you'll experience exactly the problems you describe. That's because without something else installed, EverythingToolbar cannot be enabled – on its own it is useless.

That other element you need is Everything – which is the actual search tool that EverythingToolbar turns into a toolbar. We did state this in the second paragraph of our instructions, saying to download Everything itself from www.snipca.com/37885 (see screenshot above right), but as the link for EverythingToolbar was printed higher up the page, it'd be easy to make the mistake of installing that first, perhaps before reading our full instructions.

Still, no harm has been done here. You just need to install the latest version of Everything, then our EverythingToolbar instructions should work as expected.

You need to download the Everything search tool to make EverythingToolbar work

Do I need a Windows 11 product key?

Q I wanted to follow Issue 610's Cover Feature, to install a preview copy of Windows 11 on a virtual PC. However, when doing so I am asked for a valid Windows product key. Does that mean I have to buy another copy of Windows, or can I use the key from my existing PC?

Michael Chappell

A Longer-term, if you wanted to keep Windows 11 as a distinct virtual machine then, yes, you would need to buy a second copy of Windows. If or when you come to upgrade your actual PC from Windows 10 to 11, your licence for the older operating system will be incorporated into the new one – so there'd be no need to buy a new copy of Windows in that case.

However, if you only want to try Windows 11 in a virtual PC, you just need to click the 'I don't have a product key' link when prompted in the Activate Windows box.

The installation will then proceed uninterrupted. You'll also be able to use all of Windows 11's features for at least a month (although probably longer), until Microsoft forces you to activate it. At that point you can either buy a licence, or just start afresh with a new install on a new virtual PC.

Jargon **Buster**

256bit AES Military-grade level of encryption.

32bit/64bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

3GP A type of video file recorded by many mobile phones.

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

5G The latest generation of mobile networks.

Add-in Microsoft's name for tools that can be added to Office software.

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

AI Artificial Intelligence. A computer program designed to mimic the behaviour of humans or animals.

AMOLED Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. 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.

Architecture A set of rules and language that govern how hardware and software work.

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

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

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

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

Bitcoin A digital currency, not controlled by governments, that can be used to send money to individuals.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

Cast To send content from your PC to TV.

Client A program that acts as an interface between PC and server.

Code Shorthand term that describes the various programming languages used to create programs.

Compression ratio The ratio between the uncompressed size and compressed size of a file. A tool that compresses a file from 10MB to 2MB has a compression ratio of 5:1.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website.

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

Crowdfunding A process where a company gets the financing to launch a new product from prospective customers online.

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 – 2.4GHz and 5GHz.

Dual boot To set up a PC with two operating systems, so that one must be chosen each time it starts.

DVI-D Digital Visual Interface. A common type of display connector that can carry a digital signal.

EML Format used for saving emails as files.

Emulation mode When a device emulates how another type of device works, allowing it to run software it wouldn't otherwise be able to.

exFAT Extended File Allocation Table. Microsoft's file system for USB sticks and SD cards.

EXT3 The third file system built especially for the Linux OS.

False positive When an antivirus program wrongly detects malware.

FAT32 An old system used for formatting hard drives, and still used for some portable drives.

File path Shows the location of a file within Windows.

Flag An experimental feature in Chrome that you have to turn on by typing in the address bar.

Fps Frames per second. Used to indicate gaming performance.

FreeSync AMD's technology for varying the screen's refresh rate to avoid two frames being shown at the same time.

GEDCOM Short for Genealogical Data Communication. A file format used by genealogy programs.

GIF Graphics Interchange Format. A type of image file often used on the web.

Gigabit Ethernet A very fast networking standard that can transfer data at up to 1,000Mbps.

Gorilla glass Scratch-resistant glass that's used to protect the screens of tablets and phones.

H.264 A type of MPEG4 video that is used on Blu-ray discs and recorded by many cameras.

Hardware acceleration Using a graphics card to radically improve video and games performance.

HDCP Copy-protection technology for high-definition content built into Blu-ray players.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

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

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 more accurate colours.

JavaScript Programming language developers use to make web pages interactive.

JPEG Joint Photograph Experts Group. A common type of image file created by most digital cameras.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light. Used on almost all electronic devices.

M.2 A standard specification for PC expansion cards and connectors.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

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

NFC Near-field communication. A technology that allows two devices to communicate by being placed near to each other.

NGFF Next Generation Form Factor. A specification for computer expansion cards. The original name for M.2.

NTFS New Technology File System. A file system used by all recent versions of Windows.

NVMe Non-Volatile Memory Express. An interface that lets solid-state drives work faster.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives.

PCI Express Peripheral Component Interconnect Express. A faster version of PCI – a slot on the motherboard for expansion cards, such as for sound and memory.

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

PNG Portable Network Graphics. A format for images that shrinks file sizes using compression but without discarding any data.

Product key A unique serial number issued by software companies that must be typed in by the user before a program will launch for the first time.

PVR Personal video recorder. Set-top boxes that let you pause and record digital TV.

QR code Quick Response code. A square barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

Ransomware Malware run by hackers who lock files on your PC and demand a payment to release them.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

Response time How fast a coloured pixel turns to white and back again

RSS Really Simple Syndication. A simple format for automatically distributing news headlines and other content from the web.

SATA Serial ATA. An interface for connecting hard drives and optical discs to a computer.

SIM Subscriber Identity Module. The smart card used by all digital mobile phones.

Source code Program instructions that are readable by people but not computers.

Splitter Small electronic device used to duplicate a single HDMI signal and output it several times.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts. Faster but more expensive than conventional hard drives.

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

Temporary file A file created by a browser to store website data.

TIFF Tagged Image File Format. A standard file format used to store graphics images.

Timestamp The time which an event is recorded by a computer.

TPM Trusted Platform Module. A chip that allows your hardware to perform security-related tasks.

UEFI Unified Extensible Firmware Interface. A modern replacement for the BIOS.

Ultrawide Offering a field of view that's wider than traditional digital cameras.

SWF Small Web Format. A file format for Adobe Flash.

TPM Trusted Platform Module. A chip that allows your hardware to perform security-related tasks.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C A new connector that's reversible.

VGA Video Graphics Array. An older standard socket for connecting a monitor to a PC.

Virtual PC A Windows tool that enables you to run a second 'virtual' operating system on a PC.

Virtualisation Running a second 'virtual' operating system on a PC.

VoIP Voice over IP. The routing of voice conversations over the web.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

Water-cooling Lowering a PC's temperature using water rather than fans.

WAV file Audio file used for recording music and other sounds to disc.

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

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Know How

Before he moves on to his new job, **Robert Irvine** ties up the loose ends and tries to...

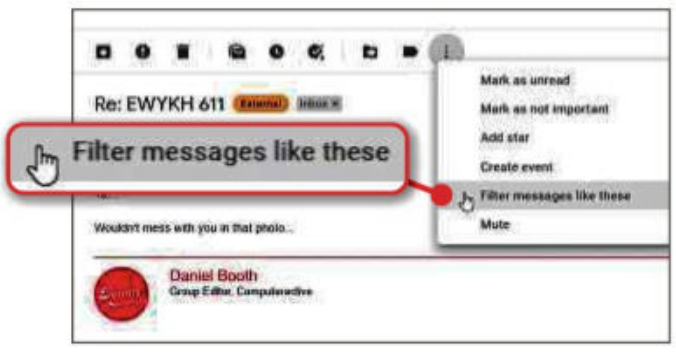
Replace his old email account

When my neighbours moved into the flat opposite mine last year, we struck up a happy and reciprocal relationship. They'd sign for my packages if I was out and I'd do the same for them. As the second lockdown was in full force, and nobody was going anywhere, this arrangement was never really a problem, because both parties were always at home to receive their own deliveries.

Robert set up an Out-of-Office Auto-Reply to tell people he's changed email address

> I need to tell important people how to contact me, and unimportant people not to bother me

Recently, however, I find myself constantly interrupted by couriers from Amazon, Hermes and DHL while I'm trying to work and my neighbours have gone AWOL, perhaps to the shops, or the park or just "out gallivanting", as my gran used to say. The sound of my door buzzer now fills me with dread. Why can't my neighbours have their post forwarded to wherever they happen to be, and stick a note on their door with directions to that location?



Robert finally worked out how to filter messages from a specific email address

I pondered this question while planning my migration from my old work email address to my new one (yes, I've finally found steady employment). I needed to tell important people where they could now contact me, inform unimportant people not to bother me any more, and have essential messages forwarded to me while leaving the junk behind.

Fortunately, both my old and new email accounts use Gmail, but with the company's custom domains in their addresses rather than "@gmail.com". This made switching from one to the other considerably easier.

First, to set up my auto-response message, I clicked the Settings cog in the top-right corner of my old inbox and chose "See all settings". This took me to the General tab, which Gmail packs most of its options on to. I scrolled past settings for spelling and grammar, smart features (which let Gmail predict what you're going to write, with alarming accuracy) and pointless 'stars' until I found the option I needed, right at the bottom of the page: 'Out-of-Office Auto-Reply'.

I turned this on (see screenshot above), chose today's date as the first day to send the auto-reply and left 'Last day' blank so it will keep responding to people until they (literally) get the message. I then typed my politely worded response, including the new email address I can be reached at. Usefully, Gmail lets you choose to send your auto-reply only to people in your Contacts, to prevent you from inadvertently telling spammers and scammers where to find you.

But what about valued acquaintances who weren't in my Contacts? There wasn't much point adding them now. To solve this problem, I clicked the 'Filters and blocked addresses' tab, which listed all the email addresses I'd filtered and blocked over the years, including – oddly – a newsletter I was responsible for sending.

However, I couldn't see a way to create a new filter. Gmail's own support page, 'Create rules to filter your emails' (www.snipca.com/39130), said to "click the Down arrow" in the search box, but there was no such arrow. Curse you, Google!

Eventually, I worked out that the arrow has been replaced by a three-line slider thing that's labelled 'Show all search options' when you hover your mouse over it. I clicked this and was able to set up a rule that forwarded all messages from a specific sender to my new email address, then clicked 'Create filter' to save it. I then found an even quicker method, which involves clicking the three-dot button in the top-right corner of an email and choosing 'Filter messages like these' (see screenshot left). I can now relax – I won't miss any meaningful communication in my new role.

But where is that new job, I hear you ask? Watch this space!

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The G-Master **Red Eagle™** monitors are real game changers. These high quality screens are packed with the latest technologies and will always support your performance perfectly. Choose between the Ultra Wide, Curved or Flat Design and join the professional gaming community!

Diagonal: 24" tot 34"
Panel: Fast IPS, IPS, VA
Design: Flat & Curved (1500R)
Resolution: Full HD, 2560x1440, 3440x1440

Refresh rate: 144Hz, 165Hz
Response time: 0.5ms, 0.8ms, 1ms
Extra: Black Tuner, FreeSync Premium, with/without height adjustment, speakers

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