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Computer active
Your friendly guide to technology
ISSUE 434 | 15 – 28 OCTOBER 2014

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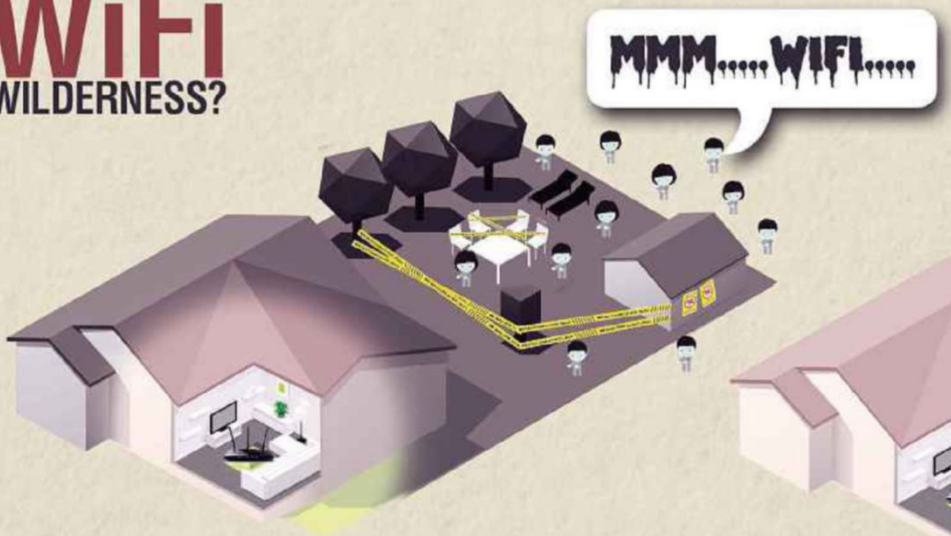

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From the Editor

For many people, the Windows Registry is a no-go area, like a forbidden zone surrounded by barbed wire, keep-out signs and rabid Rottweilers. But if you know what you're doing, you can profoundly improve the performance of your PC.

In this issue's cover feature we reveal the nine best Registry hacks, and explain how to perform them without damaging your system. You'll learn simple tweaks that will make your PC behave in clever new ways. I hope it gives you the confidence to dig deeper into this rarely explored part of your computer. It deserves to be treated with respect, certainly, but it's not as intimidating as you may think.

Also in this issue we reveal the top five in our list of the best free software ever (page 60). Do you agree with our number one? Please email me your thoughts.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

PS: Turn to page 34 for information on our new 164-page book: *The Definitve Guide to Google Hidden Tools*. You'll find it on Amazon at www.snipca.com/13911

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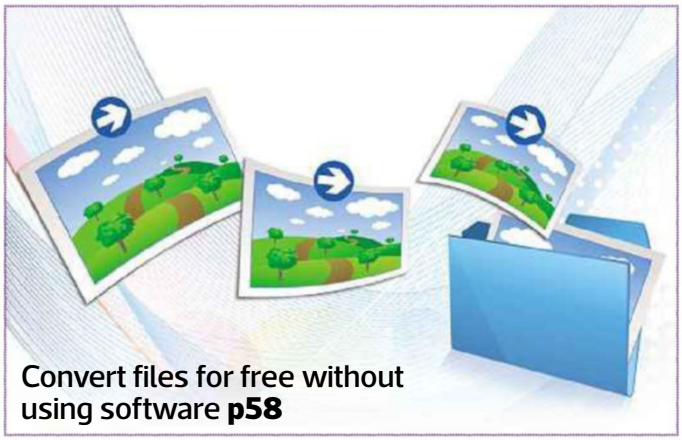
Hack THE WINDOWS REGISTRY

COVER FEATURE P50

The 9 most important changes you'll *ever* make to your PC



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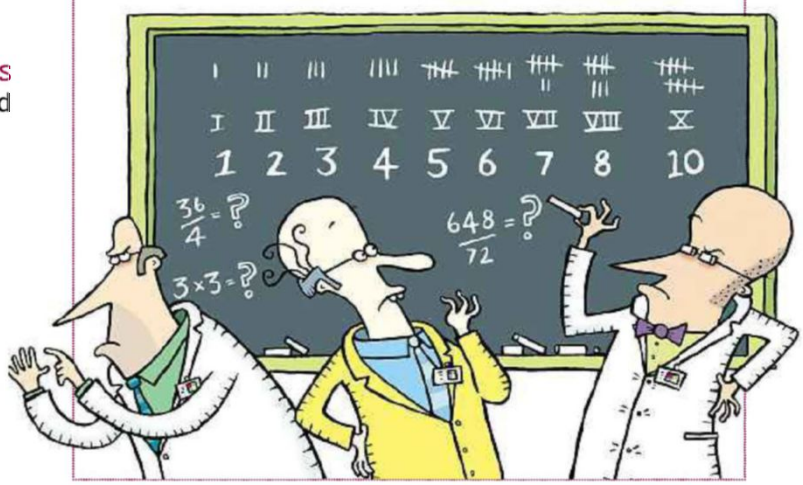

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Computeractive offer of the fortnight

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News

The top stories in the world of technology

Start menu returns in Windows 10 – but what happened to Windows 9?

As expected, on 30 September Microsoft unveiled its latest Windows operating system (OS), with many of the features that have been rumoured over the past few months. The Start menu returns – which will please many users – while multiple virtual desktops make their debut. Windows 10 will also adapt more smoothly to both touch and non-touch devices.

These features didn't surprise Windows experts, but the name did. Nobody had predicted that Microsoft would skip the number 9 and choose to call the new version Windows 10. At the launch event, Terry Myerson – executive vice-president of Microsoft's operating systems group – simply said that calling the new version Windows 9 "wouldn't be right" because of the company's 'One' strategy, which is focused on making the operating system work seamlessly on all Microsoft devices – phones, tablets, PCs and games consoles.

The new Start menu combines the traditional Windows column of your favourite programs and folders with a smaller Live Tile menu

Many experts were left unconvinced by this, with some suggesting that Microsoft chose 10 because it puts more distance between the new OS and Windows 8, which has been widely viewed as a commercial failure. Others mockingly asked whether Microsoft had lost count (including our own Stuart Andrews – see page 74). But Microsoft certainly wants Windows 10 to be seen as a radical leap. Myerson emphasised that "this isn't an incremental release. It's a new Windows".

MOST OF THE RUMOURS PROVED TRUE

For many people, the most important news is the return of the Start menu, which replaces the tile-based Start screen introduced in Windows 8.

Clicking the Start button in Windows 10 will bring up the column of programs, documents and system tools familiar to users of Windows 7 and older versions. Alongside this is the Live Tile menu, which is like a smaller, less imposing version of the Windows 8 Start screen. It comprises resizable live tiles that show snippets of emails, Facebook status updates, and news directly from the Start menu (see main screenshot, above left).

But for all the hype about the Start menu, virtual desktops could prove to be the most useful new feature. These let you switch between more than one Desktop – one for

WINDOWS 10 AT A GLANCE

- The Start menu returns, replacing the Start screen from Windows 8
- Windows 10 detects and adapts to touch and non-touch devices automatically
- Snapping and virtual desktops make managing a large number of open programs easier
- Cortana and Charms bar are unconfirmed, but are expected to feature in final version
- Microsoft says it will arrive in 2015, but Technical Preview is available now

COMMENT

There are plenty of changes and new features in Windows 10 but – unlike Windows 8 – none of them leave us scratching our heads and wondering what on earth Microsoft was thinking. The returning Start menu should win back older Windows users, while the inclusion of advanced snapping and virtual desktops will make it much easier for you to stay organised while having more programs open at once. Even leapfrogging number 9 makes a strange kind of sense because it generated publicity, which was one of Microsoft's main aims, and helps to disassociate Windows 10 from Windows 8.

It's often said that Microsoft releases good and bad operating systems alternately (XP good, Vista bad, 7 good, 8 bad). From what we've seen, Windows 10 keeps that series going. So far, so good.

WHAT THE WINDOWS EXPERTS SAY

Mary-Jo Foley, ZDNet Windows expert: "Windows 10 is the hybrid of Windows 7 and 8 that Microsoft should've done in the beginning".

Paul Thurrott, Windows blogger: "Microsoft seeks to please everyone with Windows 10, and it may just succeed".

Tom Warren, Editor, The Verge website: "Windows 10 might be fairly basic right now, but the signs are there that Microsoft understands its audience of Windows users".

Richard Taylor, BBC technology correspondent: "Windows 10 combines the familiarity of Windows 7 and sophistication of Windows 8".

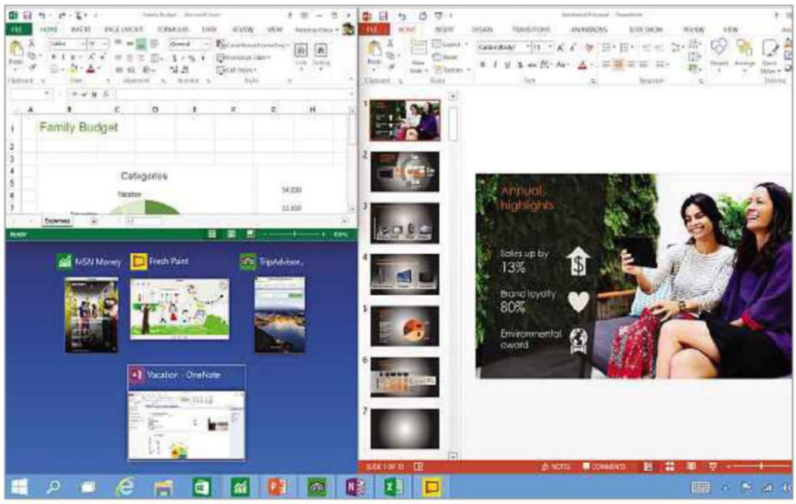
work, one for leisure, for example. It's a bit like having several monitors and extending your screen onto them, so you can have one Desktop filled with websites, another for documents you're working on, and so on. You'll be able to see a thumbnail overview of your virtual desktops by clicking Task View on the taskbar (or Start bar).

One of the few rumoured features that Microsoft didn't announce was Cortana - the virtual assistant tool which is capable of answering questions you ask (typed or spoken) with the help of the Bing search engine, and can also be used to set reminders and other organisational tasks. Despite its absence from the launch event – and the Technical Preview of Windows 10 now available (see page 35) – Cortana is expected to be included in the final version. Tom Warren – editor of The Verge website and founder of WinRumors (www.winrumors.com) – claims to have seen an early version of Cortana in Windows 10.

Interestingly, Warren also suggested that there are many more features coming to Windows 10 that Microsoft didn't reveal. He said: "Microsoft only shared a small number of Windows 10 features today [30 September], less than 10 per cent of the overall feature set, so expect to see Cortana and others arrive as the testing and preview builds roll out over the coming months".

BRINGING BACK 'SNAPPING' FROM WINDOWS 2.0

One thing we do know is that Windows 10 will bring back a feature that last appeared in Windows 2.0 - released in 1987. This lets you 'snap' programs to take up just a quarter of the screen (see screenshot, right). In Windows 7 you can drag open programs to the left or right edge of the screen, then let go to make them 'snap' to fill up exactly half the screen.



You can now 'snap' both Desktop and Modern apps to take up just quarter of the screen

> "For all the Start menu hype, virtual desktops may prove the most useful new feature"

In Windows 8, snapping 'Modern' apps to half a screen snaps the whole Desktop to the other half - a quirk that annoys many users. This won't happen in Windows 10, which will keep the Desktop behind any snapped apps. Microsoft is keen to make Modern apps behave more like traditional Desktop programs, so they're as easy to use with a keyboard and mouse as on a touchscreen.

Another new feature that better blends touch- and non-touch functionality is Continuum, which "dynamically adapts" your Desktop if you're using a hybrid device - ie, a laptop with a detachable screen that can be used as a tablet. This means that when you detach the screen, the logos get bigger and Desktop programs change into their Modern app counterparts. Re-attaching the screen will switch the OS back into Desktop mode. The Charms menu from Windows 8 wasn't shown during the launch, but Microsoft said it will appear for touchscreen users.

The Command Prompt has received some much-needed modernisation. It's now much easier to copy and paste text, and to wrap text when you resize the Command Prompt window (so you could neatly snap it to a quarter of the screen in one of your virtual desktops). You can also now use keyboard shortcuts as you would on other parts of your PC.

THE BIG QUESTION: WILL WINDOWS 10 BE FREE?

One thing that Microsoft remained tight-lipped about was the price and release date of Windows 10. When asked at the launch if there was any truth to the rumours that Windows 8 users would get a free upgrade, Myerson avoided a direct answer and said that he only wanted "to talk about the overall product family" at that time. There was also silence from Microsoft on the reported incentives to get Windows XP users to upgrade, or whether anything would be offered to tempt the millions of people still using Windows 7.

DOWNLOAD WINDOWS 10 NOW

Turn to page 35 for our Workshop explaining how to safely download, install and run the Windows 10 Technical Preview

New printers 'last two years' before they need refilling

Epson has released a new range of printers with ink tanks so large that they only need to be refilled every two years – according to claims by the company.

The company says you'll be able to print 4,000 A4 sheets of black text, or 6,500 of colour text on the EcoTank L355 (see image, right) and L555 printers (www.snipca.com/13942) before refilling.

Instead of cartridges, the EcoTank printers use four refillable 'reservoirs' (see image, below right), each with a 70ml capacity. By comparison, most print cartridges are 10 to 15ml.

With the EcoTank range, Epson is moving away from the standard business model of selling printers at low prices, but charging high prices for cartridges.

The L355 costs £249 (www.snipca.com/13939), while the more advanced L555 (www.snipca.com/13940) is priced £330 and comes with a fax, LCD screen and 30-page Automatic Document Feeder.

These are relatively expensive prices for printers, but customers will save money by having to refill less frequently, and because the cost of ink per sheet of paper is around 0.3p, much cheaper than the typical 3-5p per sheet for inkjet and laser-jet printers that cost under £100.

Epson has kept ink prices low by making the printers work only with dye ink (which is less vivid and fades faster) rather than the usual pigment ink. For this reason the printers are best used to print documents, rather than high-resolution photos.

The EcoTank range has come to the UK quite late, having already been released in Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2013. Simon Hanly, product manager at Epson UK – said it was the success of the printers in these four markets, where the company has sold more than 10 million units – and "customer needs" that led to Epson "launching the EcoTank range for Western Europe".

A refill bottle for each EcoTank cartridge costs £7.99. Both printers are available immediately from Dixons, Currys and PC World.

Tesco launches Hudl2 for £129, and price-cuts original to £99

Tesco has launched the Hudl2, the second edition of its budget Android tablet.

The high-definition screen has increased from 7in to 8.3in, and it runs the latest version of Google's Android mobile operating system, 4.4 KitKat. It features 2GB RAM, twice as much as before, and 16GB storage, which can be increased via a microSD slot. Tesco claims battery life is eight hours.

It comes in eight colours, including black, red and white, and has enhanced parental controls. When the device is first turned on, parents are prompted to set up features that restrict the amount of time their child can use it for. They can also filter inappropriate content and restrict access to the Google Play store.

At £129, the Hudl 2 is £10 more expensive than the original when it launched last year. But it's still much cheaper than many of its rivals, such as the Google Nexus 7, which costs from £199. Tesco has cut the price of the original Hudl to £99.

You can buy both tablets in Tesco stores and online at www.tesco.com/hudl. We will review the Hudl2 in our next issue, out 29 October.

☺ ***You'll like this***... You can now play TV and radio programmes on BBC iPlayer for 30 days after they air (www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer)

☹ ***... but not this*** Thousands of drivers couldn't renew their road tax in early October after the DVLA website crashed (www.snipca.com/13917)

Abusive 'rape' tweeter locked up for 18 weeks

A man who sent rape threats over Twitter to Labour MP Stella Creasy and feminist campaigner Caroline Criado-Perez has been sentenced to 18 weeks in jail.

Peter Nunn, 33 (pictured), was found guilty of sending "indecent, obscene or menacing messages" to the two women following a one-day trial at the City of London magistrates' court in late September.

His tweets included one about feeding Criado-Perez the date-rape drug Rohypnol, and said that she should treat the threats as a "compliment". In another tweet Nunn wrote: "If you can't threaten to rape a celebrity, what is the point in having them?"

Nunn's tweets were in response to Creasy and Criado-Perez's involvement in a successful campaign to put Jane Austen's face on the new £10 note, which will be issued in 2017. Nunn used several different Twitter accounts to make the threats, and also posted six videos in which he aggressively mocked the campaign.

In his defence, Nunn declared himself a "feminist" and said: "It is just a joke. It came into my mind at the time and I thought it was really, really funny." Nunn's defence lawyer, Helen Jones, told the court that he felt remorse for the stress and anxiety he caused.

Victim statements from Creasy and Criado-Perez spoke of the "terrifying" ordeal Nunn put them through. Criado-Perez said she experienced stress-related dizziness, while Creasy installed a panic button in her home.

Creasy called the sentence "a step forward in recognising the distress and fear online harassment can cause".

She added: "We need to send a clear message that it isn't for anyone to put up with being harassed via any medium – this is an old crime taking a new form online and should be treated as such."

BT tests 800Mbps broadband - fast enough to download HD films in seconds

BT has tested a technology called G.Fast that allows existing broadband lines – part fibre, part copper – to hit speeds up to 800Mbps.

This is almost as fast as existing fibre-broadband networks, which reach top speeds of 1Gbps in some areas, including parts of London, Cardiff and Bristol.

Currently, broadband in the UK is delivered using two methods: FTTP (fibre-to-the-premises) – fibre-broadband cables connecting directly to homes and businesses; and FTTC (fibre-to-the-cabinet) – fibre cables running to street cabinets, from where slower copper cables run to individual properties.

G.Fast uses FTTdp (fibre-to-the-distribution-point), where fibre cables go to telephone poles and junction boxes, before copper takes over. These are closer to homes than street cabinets letting them attain higher speeds.

Using FTTdp, BT achieved download speeds of 786Mbps and upload speeds of 231Mbps when the copper cables ran the final 19 metres to a property. When the copper cables started 66 metres away, BT hit 696Mbps for downloads and 200Mbps for uploads.

These speeds would be fast enough to download a high-definition movie in around 15 seconds.

A BT spokesperson said the company is yet to decide when or where G.Fast will be deployed.

When we asked BT whether FTTdp would lead to cheaper prices for customers, a spokesperson said: "FTTdp is a more cost-effective and simpler solution than FTTP because less fibre and civil engineering is required.

"It also has the potential to be less disruptive for the customer – but the trials will tell us more," he added.

IN BRIEF

FACEBOOK SAYS DRAG QUEENS CAN USE STAGE NAMES

Facebook has backtracked by telling a group of American drag queens that they don't have to use their real names on the site. The performers had been campaigning to use their stage names after Facebook sent them emails in September saying that the pseudonyms were against the website's policy. Drag artist Lil Miss Hot Mess told *The Guardian* that it was "a huge victory".

EU: SAFE TO USE PHONES ON PLANES

Passengers will now be able to make calls and use the internet on phones and tablets throughout entire EU flights after the European Aviation Safety Agency said using electronic devices on aeroplanes posed no safety threat. Previously, travellers were restricted to using devices – without internet – between take-off and landing. Airlines are expected to implement the new rules in the next eight months.

Tomorrow's world

Technology companies are battling to take ownership of your wrist. Smartwatches have made the headlines, but there's now a flying camera that straps to your wrist. Called the Nixie, it flies through the air filming you, before returning like a boomerang (watch it at www.flynixie.com). It's a finalist in Intel's Make It Wearable contest (https://makeit.intel.com), which backs innovation in wearable technology.

IN BRIEF

MICROSOFT LAUNCHES CHROMECAST RIVAL

Microsoft has released its answer to Google's Chromecast streaming dongle, the Microsoft Wireless Display Adapter (www.snipca.com/13897). It plugs into a user's HDTV, projector, or HD monitor and lets them 'mirror' the screen of their mobile device or PC to a second display within a seven-metre range. At $60, it costs double the price of Chromecast. Microsoft hasn't said when the device will arrive in the UK

CD RIPPING IS LEGAL IN THE UK – AT LAST

It's finally legal to make personal copies of CDs, MP3s, DVDs, Blu-rays and ebooks after the UK Intellectual Property Office approved legislation that had been delayed several months. However, it remains illegal to share copies. The new law also allows people to parody copyright works, such as spoof videos that piece together clips from TV shows.

Apple attacked over iOS bugs and bendy iPhones

Apple is enduring a barrage of criticism following a bug-filled launch of its latest mobile operating system, iOS 8, and reports that the new iPhone 6 Plus is prone to bending out of shape.

When Apple launched iOS 8 in mid-September, the company immediately received reports of short battery life, poor Wi-Fi connectivity, and problems with HealthKit – the feature which allows health and fitness apps to share data with each other and with Apple's Health app. People who downloaded iCloud Drive – Apple's first cloud-storage service to run in Windows (see page 38) – with iOS 8 also found themselves locked out of the new service on other devices.

Apple quickly fixed these problems in the 8.0.1 update, but it caused some users to be unable to connect to mobile networks or use the Touch ID fingerprint reader. The update was pulled immediately, and replaced with iOS 8.0.2 in late September. This, however, introduced a fresh set of bugs to iOS 8. One Twitter user, William Petty, said: "Top iOS 8.0.2 features so far: alarms that keep going after I turn them off, spotlight not returning any apps in results, crash-on-unlock".

There have also been reports that the iPhone 6 Plus – the larger of Apple's two new iPhones – has been bending out of shape in peoples' pockets. Apple dismissed suggestions that the phone's design is faulty, saying that only nine customers had contacted them to complain about it bending.

Computeractive found no undue 'bendiness' in our review of the iPhone (page 20), while tests run by ConsumerReports.org using a compression machine showed that the iPhone 6 Plus withstood more force than the HTC One M8 and smaller iPhone 6. Watch a video of the test at www.snipca.com/13867.

Met Police launches Europe's largest cybercrime unit to fight malware

The Metropolitan Police Service has revealed what it says is the largest cybercrime unit in Europe, dubbed Falcon.

Fraud and Linked Crime Online (Falcon, http://content.met.police.uk/Site/falcon) actually started work in August, but was officially launched in early October.

Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe – commissioner of the Met Police – said: "Falcon will see the Met have the best and, I believe, largest cybercrime and fraud team in Europe, with up to 500 specialist officers dedicated to tackling this crime."

Falcon will investigate the use of malware, phishing attacks, DDoS and network intrusion, especially among organised crime gangs, but reporting will still fall to the National Fraud Reporting Authority.

It won't look at cyberbullying or harassment, and won't cover online child abuse or other crimes that fall under the remit of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre.

The goal is to boost arrests and charges, but also to help improve victim care, including showing those hurt how to seek compensation.

Falcon will also work with businesses. Out of 17,000 reports of fraud in the past year, 54 per cent have been "cyber-enabled" and 30 per cent have been against businesses.

What's new from Google

Ancient Egypt has arrived on Street View, a mere 4,500 years after the Giza Pyramids were built. These awe-inspiring structures appear as part of Google's Egypt Collection (www.snipca.com/13912), along with other highlights including Saqqara, Cairo Citadel and the Hanging Church. There's no easy way to find the Sphinx from the page, so take this shortcut instead: www.snipca.com/13914.

Question of the Fortnight

Has Shellshock made the internet unsafe?

A new security vulnerability affecting more computers than the Heartbleed bug allows hackers to steal your information from banks, routers and security cameras

For the second time this year, security experts have discovered a widespread flaw that places the safety of the internet – and the personal information you store on it – in doubt.

The latest vulnerability is called Shellshock, and it affects more computers than Heartbleed – a flaw discovered in April that let hackers extract passwords from hundreds of thousands of the world's most popular websites.

Shellshock is so serious that the US National Cyber Security Division rated it 10 out of 10 for both 'exploitability' and 'potential impact'. The reason it's considered such a threat is that the flaw lets hackers take control of software that is used by millions of web servers and internet-connected devices – and it's much easier to exploit than the Heartbleed bug.

> "Hackers can exploit the Bash flaw to steal your bank details"

The threat goes beyond websites and home devices. The UK government said Shellshock could affect "critical national infrastructure", such as power plants and hospitals, if companies and organisations didn't respond quickly.

The software to blame is Bash, which is a Unix shell used by Linux, Apple's OS X and other less popular operating systems. Like Command Prompt in Windows, Bash lets you control your PC using text commands rather than the traditional Desktop. Windows doesn't use Bash, so hackers can't exploit Shellshock to take control of Windows PCs (unlike Ubuntu and OS X users, who could've been infiltrated until both operating systems were patched).

But that doesn't mean Windows users can breathe easily. If a hacker exploits the Bash flaw to infiltrate a web server, they can steal your personal information from a website running on it. If that site happens to be a bank, then the hacker could cause serious damage. The rewards for hackers are huge. Until companies fix the Bash flaw, you're at risk.

Many companies, including Apple, have now patched the flaw in their software, but there are still millions of routers, security cameras and other internet-connected devices that use the Bash code. Thankfully, Virgin, TalkTalk, BT and Sky routers are unaffected because their firmware uses BusyBox, an alternative interface to Bash. If you use another company's router, contact them to find out if they're affected by Shellshock (see contact details in Consumeractive, Issue 432).

So are you at risk every time you go online? The answer is yes, if you use a router made by a company that has an unpatched version of Bash. If your router is safe, then your safety depends on the security of the web server running the websites you're visiting, and that's something you really shouldn't have to worry about. Like so many security threats, this is unnerving because it makes you feel powerless. It's a reminder that using the internet will always be a question of placing your trust in the security of websites and tech companies.

But things can improve. Like OpenSSL – the code in which Heartbleed was found – Bash is maintained by a small team of people and isn't regularly updated. Major companies and governments need to show more support for these internet functions if we're to avoid further disastrous flaws that jeopardise our online security.

THE FACTS

- Shellshock is an easily exploitable security flaw that exists in Bash, a Unix shell used by Linux and Apple's OS X
- Hackers could use Bash to break into the servers of banks and hospitals to steal your personal information
- It's rated 10 out of 10 for both exploitability and impact by the US National Cyber Security Division

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind
Email: letters@computeractive.co.uk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/computeractive
Twitter: @ComputerActive
www.twitter.com/computeractive

Facing tech ageism at work

I totally agree with Stuart Andrews on the subject of tech ageism (The Final Straw, Issue 432), having been a victim of this at work. Ten years ago, when I was in my mid-fifties, I was the network manager of a small Local Area Network (LAN) which had around 30 users. My colleagues saw me as "Mr Computer" and would come to me with all sorts of problems, not always network related.

Four years ago, I was approaching 65 and retirement when a young consultant was appointed to our team. One day he was struggling with Word and could not work out how to insert a landscape page into a portrait document. Repeatedly my colleagues told him to "Ask David, he'll know", but he wouldn't. Eventually, with no-one else to turn to, he did ask me, and I quickly told him the answer. He then responded with: "I didn't think an old person would know anything about computers." I rest my case.

David Carpenter

For Ofcom to spread the idea that the over-50s are 'no hopers' when it comes to technology is inaccurate, insulting and way too simplistic. Ofcom asking questions in its How Tech Savvy Are You? quiz (www.snipca.com/13844) about whether I use Google Glass, 4G, smartwatches and 3D printers is short-sighted. I know about all these, but I choose to not use them for my own reasons.

A serious accident resulted in me having to find alternative employment quickly – which meant a change of direction aged 51. Among the many jobs I applied for was one as a computer technician at a large secondary school. It had a modest network of 120 PCs and two servers. My keen interest helped me beat five other candidates – all younger than me! I have overseen the growth of the network, which now has more than 600 PCs, laptops and mobile devices with more than 20 servers.

On the other side of the coin is my wife. She has often said that she hates computers, but will use one regularly to shop online and play Spider Solitaire. She decided a few months ago, at the age of 52, to buy a tablet, saying she needed to get more involved with technology. She uses it every day as well as the computer.

Technology is for any person of any age group who wants to use it. The findings of a shallow research questionnaire does nobody any favours and is not a true reflection of the reality.

Ray Humphrey

Don't talk down to young people over tech

What an incredible bore Derek Haines sounds in his Star Letter (Issue 433). He uses his ability to dual-boot a PC as some indication of his technical ability, and criticises young people for using Facebook and/or Instagram. Moreover, he seems proud to admit that he tries to catch out assistants in Currys and PC World when they don't instantly acknowledge his amazing ability.

It's sad indeed that Mr Haines can't remember back to his younger days when older people seemed on a different wavelength and yet, just sometimes, you would meet one who treated you with equal respect even though you had a different view on things.

I am of a similar age to Mr Haines. Like him, I don't use Facebook, but that doesn't mean I 'talk down' to younger people who do. Older people have a duty to motivate and encourage those of lesser years. It's amazing how rewarding that can be.

Peter Brown

My favourite maps in Google's Gallery

Thanks for introducing me to Google Maps Gallery (http://maps.google.com/gallery) in Issue 433. I've always been fascinated by maps, ever since receiving the *Times Atlas of the World* as a young boy (it's still one of my most cherished possessions). I'd like to recommend some of the best maps I found in the Gallery to my fellow readers.

The first – and most relevant to *Computeractive* readers – shows internet users per country as a percentage of the population (www.snipca.com/13826, see screenshot, below). It's interesting to see which countries love the internet more than the UK (mostly Scandinavia). In a similar vein is the 'Earth at night' map (www.snipca.com/13871), shot by Nasa in 2012, which shows the developed world lit up, and poorer

Goodbye eBay, hello Amazon Marketplace

I was interested in your Question of the Fortnight in Issue 433 on eBay's security flaws. This latest scandal is all the reason I need to close my account and move permanently to Amazon Marketplace. Over the past 15 years or so I've made quite a bit of money selling on eBay, and bought lots of bargains too. It used to be the first website I visited daily. But about a year ago, during a period when eBay was offline, I signed up for an Amazon Marketplace account, and was impressed how easy everything was. Since then, eBay has had lots of downtime, and several security hacks have been exposed,

shattering my confidence in the site. Over this time I've inched closer to buying and selling only on Amazon, thinking it would take just one more debacle to abandon eBay for good. That has now arrived, so off I go.

Luke Giggs

countries living in darkness.

My final recommendation is in the Historical section, which probably has the most interesting maps in the whole Gallery. It's a 1794 map of England (www.snipca.com/13829). Just zoom in to explore. Have a look at how tiny London was back then!

Dennis Ambrose

Cloud integration is a reason *not* to use Windows 10

In your round-up of Windows 10 rumours (News, Issue 432), you say that "the most useful new feature could be cloud integration – automatically backing up your files to the cloud no matter where you keep them". If this is correct and is not optional, it is a prime reason for *not* using the next version of Windows. It could be a security hazard as we have seen recently with celebrities getting their photos hacked. Worse still, for business use, it could be a location for industrial espionage by rival businesses.

I've never been a fan of cloud systems and prefer to keep everything under my own control on duplicate hard drives. Family photographs and important documents are on a separate offline machine. Certain corporations think they know best and push for these features to become the norm, or so they hope. The hidden agenda is that data is power, and by having an option to harvest all our cloud data they can build up a more comprehensive database far more cheaply than by any other means. This can then be used for their own ends or sold on in commercial deals. I'm quite happy to continue using Windows XP where things are under my control.

E Nott

Flummoxing phone scammers

This morning I received a call from a woman telling me that Microsoft had discovered a virus on my computer and she could clear it for me if I switched it on. Realising what this was all about, I asked her which of my five computers she wanted switching on. When she queried the number I explained that when I buy a new computer I never throw away the old one. This obviously flummoxed her, but I let her struggle for several minutes as she tried to get round the problem. I eventually pointed out that we both knew that her ploy was in fact a scam, at which point the line suddenly went dead. I do only have one PC, but at least I had the satisfaction of annoying her, rather than the other way round.

David Havenhand

STAR LETTER

Forget buying a Windows 7 PC – upgrade to Windows 8 instead

Your article on time running out to buy a Windows 7 PC was an interesting to read, and I'm sure lots of readers found it useful. My advice wouldn't be to panic-buy a Windows 7 PC, though. Sure, it was a great operating system (OS) in its day. I never had any problems with my Dell PC that ran Windows 7. But as a computing enthusiast (and big Microsoft fan – yes, we *do* exist!) I feel compelled to try each new version of Windows when it arrives. That meant switching to a Windows 8 PC last year. After using it for 18 months, I can passionately recommend it to anyone looking to buy a new computer.

I'll accept that Windows 8 takes some getting used to. It's a radical leap from Windows 7, and you'll need to persevere with it. But why is that a bad thing? I have grown far more familiar with Windows 8 than any previous version because it has challenged my skills as a computer user. A good OS should be advanced enough to force you to learn new things, not simply survive (and stagnate) on existing knowledge.

I always feel slightly exasperated when I hear about other Windows users dismissing new operating systems as unnecessary gimmicks. Surely anyone who is into computers sizzles with curiosity when a new version of Windows arrives? No? Is it just me, then? I find it odd. It's a bit like being a fan of a TV series, but giving up half way, and not bothering to find out how it ends. Or following a football team, but not wanting to know how well its new players are performing. I know money can be a factor for some people, but you just need to save the pennies for a couple of years and you'll have enough stashed away for the new OS when it arrives. As you may have guessed, I can't wait for Windows 10.

Larry Dickinson

The Star Letter writer wins a *Computeractive* mug!

Stop using Windows Update

Why all the fuss about Microsoft publishing an update that crashed a few PCs? This has been happening ever since Microsoft introduced Windows Update and is the reason I don't allow updates. With all the thousands of software-to-software and software-to-hardware interactions and configurations, I think it would be impossible to write software that works on every PC. I've tried lots of programs that don't work

with other software, so it's not Microsoft's fault.

I had a friend who – after being brainwashed into thinking his computer would be "unsafe" – insisted on using Windows Update. After the third time of installing Windows XP for him, I gave up and told him I wouldn't look after his machine unless he stopped using Update.

George Ayton

Consumeractive

I ordered an iPhone from Phones 4u before it went bust – what should I do?

Q **I've ordered an iPhone 6 from Phones 4u, and now they've gone bust I'm worried about getting it, and other things like who I go to for after-sales care, and what happens to the insurance I bought. Can you let me know what's going on?**

Jenny McDonald

A We get lots of emails from worried readers whenever a company goes bust. Every case is different, and it's too early to know all the details about the demise of Phones 4u, but the administrator Price Waterhouse Cooper (PwC) has clarified some of the most important points.

PHONE ORDERS

Those not yet despatched are being cancelled and customers such as Jenny will get a full refund.

FAULTY HANDSETS AND AFTERCARE

Any outstanding phone repairs should be completed, and the device returned to you. Phones 4u is currently telling people to call its customer services team (on 0844 871 2253) if they have a faulty phone not currently being repaired or need technical advice, but it's not clear how long this number will remain active.

If Phones 4u can't repair your phone, you should contact the phone manufacturer with proof of when you bought it to show it's still under warranty. EE – which plans to buy 58 Phones 4u stores and rebrand them EE – and Carphone Warehouse are offering to fix faulty phones for free under the manufacturer's warranty.

However, if your warranty has ended you can't sue Phones 4u under the Sale of Goods Act (SOGA). You could write to PwC and become an unsecured creditor (phone 020 7583 5000 for more details), but you'll join a long queue, and you may not get anything. If you paid by credit card you can claim against the bank for a repair, replacement or a refund under Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act.

PHONE INSURANCE

PwC said more than 800,000 people have bought insurance from Phones 4u and don't need to worry. This is because the insurance is underwritten by London General, so policies are separate from Phones 4u and will be honoured. However, if there are problems the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (www.fscs.org.uk) ensures you'll be protected either by moving your insurance to another company or getting a refund.

AIRTIME CONTRACTS

These aren't affected because airtime is a separate contract with your network, not the shop you bought the phone from. Every network has said that pricing and tariffs you signed up to when buying a phone will remain in place for the life of the contract. If your phone order from Phones 4u has been cancelled you won't be tied into an airtime contract. The only worry is for Life Mobile customers who use the Phones 4u network provided by EE. They're currently unaffected but it's not clear if this will change if that part of Phones 4u is sold.

CASHBACK AND PROMO DEALS

You may not get any outstanding cashback or promotional deals if you're still waiting for these. PwC will say soon if it can allow any of these to go through. As things develop we'll continue to bring you updates in Consumeractive or the News section.

CASE ONGOING

What are my rights after hedge trimmer stopped working?

Q **In January 2014, I bought an Eckman hedge trimmer from MySmartBuy (www.mysmartbuy.com). The trimmer worked fine for a while, but now the battery won't hold a charge. MySmartBuy has ceased trading, so I tried to use Eckman's warranty. But the company says that because I didn't buy the trimmer from it directly, it isn't responsible. What are my rights?**

John Brown

A John has the right to expect Eckman to honour its warranty because it's legally bound to do this. The company is correct in saying that because it didn't sell him the trimmer, it isn't responsible under the Sale of Goods Act (SOGA). However, the Sale and Supply of Goods to Consumers regulations, which are an amendment to SOGA, state that if a manufacturer or retailer offers a warranty, then they are legally bound by the terms and conditions that are set out.

So John now needs to find out whether Eckman's T&Cs cover the fault. John thinks the battery is the problem, so he wants Eckman to provide a new one, which costs £29.99. We've contacted Eckman to point out that it has to repair the trimmer if the fault's covered by the warranty. We'll let you know if this is the case in a later issue.

CASE ONGOING

We stand up for your legal rights

Contact us so we can investigate your case
Email: consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk
Write: Consumeractive, Computeractive, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD
Please include both your phone number and address.
Unfortunately, we can't reply to all your letters.

I wasn't told my camera is inherently faulty – what can I do?

Q **A Canon PowerShot A85 camera I bought in October 2005 now has a faulty CCD sensor. Canon knew about this inherent fault, posting a notice on its website that same year. I had registered the camera when I bought it, but was never informed of this fault. Canon says the free repair service it was offering ended in 2011. How can customers know about recalls if they aren't notified directly?**

Aidan Hart

A Aidan asks a good question. The simple answer is: you will struggle to learn about an inherent fault if the retailer or manufacturer doesn't inform you.

This leaves many people in the lurch. Aidan can't get a refund from the retailer because the camera is nine years old and the Sale of Goods Act only offers protection for up to six years (five in Scotland). He could argue that because Canon knew this fault existed it should still repair the camera or offer some pro rata refund, but it's unlikely he'll succeed because the notification was on the company's website for six years.

The lesson here is to be on the lookout for companies announcing inherent faults. You should bookmark the Trading Standards product-recall website (www.snipca.com/13786), which is updated regularly, and visit the manufacturer's website every so often.

CASE SOLVED

CASE UPDATES

A tale of two Virgin refunds

In Issue 431 we covered the case of John Deacon and whether he could get £45 back from Virgin Media because he hadn't received the up-to-100Mbps broadband speeds promised. We felt that, although he'd complained three times and received refunds each time, he should have escalated his complaint formally. Because John agreed to three refunds over a 10-month period, it could be seen that he'd legally 'accepted' the service he was receiving.

We spoke to leading consumer lawyer Gemma Bowen and she agreed with our conclusions, saying that John might find it difficult to explain why he'd let the matter go on for so long. We told John this, and mentioned that he could still take the case to arbitration, but he said he wasn't going to bother for only £45.

But there was some good news for John. He believed Virgin had wrongly charged him £240 when he switched to another ISP, saying he was still under contract. This amount was large enough for John to consider arbitration, so he wrote to Virgin asking for a deadlock letter. The company agreed that it was in the wrong and has sent him a cheque for £240.

THIS WILL COME IN USEFUL

Electrical retailers

Argos
0345 640 3030
Email: www.snipca.com/13787
Twitter: argos_online

Currys and PC World
0344 561 1234
Email: customer.services@currys.co.uk
Twitter: @curryspcworld

Dabs
01204 851825
Online help: www.snipca.com/13621
Twitter: @DabsDotCom

Ebuyer
0371 521 3300
Online help: www.ebuyer.com/help/enotes
Twitter: @Ebuyer

Empire Direct
0333 900 0064
Online help: www.snipca.com/13732
No Twitter account

LaptopsDirect
0871 971 0005
Online help: www.snipca.com/13789
Twitter: @laptopsdirectuk

Maplin
0333 400 9757
Email: technical@maplin.co.uk
Twitter: @maplintweet

Pixmania
0844 369 03 72
Email: www.snipca.com/13736
Twitter: Pixmania_uk

PowerDirect.co.uk
08444 818 820
Email: services@powerdirect.co.uk
No active Twitter account

Protect Your Tech

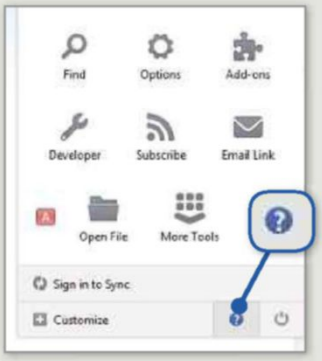
Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Firefox and Thunderbird flaws

What happened?

Mozilla urgently advised users to update its Firefox browser and Thunderbird email software after a "critical" flaw was found.



The flaw allows hackers to carry out a man-in-the-middle attack, in which criminals create fraudulent sites that masquerade as legitimate businesses and banks. Victims and antivirus programs are fooled because the website has an 'https://' prefix and a padlock, which are the normal signs that a site is protected by SSL encryption. You think you're dealing with a real organisation, but there's an imposter in the middle, eager to steal your passwords.

The vulnerability also affects Chrome, so Google have issued an update too.

What should you do?

Make sure Firefox and Thunderbird have been updated to 32.0.3 and 31.1.2 (or later) respectively. They are set by default to update automatically, but there's no harm in checking. In Firefox, click the top-right menu button, click the Help Menu question mark (see screenshot), then click About Firefox. The browser will look for updates and automatically download any it finds. If updates need to be installed, click 'Restart to Update'. You'll find these instructions at www.snipca.com/13845.

If updates are available in Thunderbird, you'll see a Software Update dialogue box with details. Click OK to download the update (you'll find instructions at www.snipca.com/13846). If the update fails, read Mozilla's advice on its support page: www.snipca.com/13847. Whenever you want to check your version of Thunderbird, use the keyboard shortcut Alt+H to open the Help menu.

Chrome also updates automatically, so check that you're using version 37.0.2062.124 or later. Click the top-right menu icon, then Settings. In the box that appears, click About under Chrome OS and you'll see the version number on the next page. For instructions on updating Chrome manually visit www.snipca.com/13848.

New tools

Adblock Plus' Facebook-blocking

www.adblockplus.org

The battle between advertisers and ad-blockers is like the evolutionary 'arms race' between predators and prey: when a company develops a new way to track your movements online, so the blockers respond by offering you a way to thwart it.

The predators in this case are Facebook. In late September it launched Atlas, which is an advertising platform that lets companies track your browsing across multiple devices. They would know that you saw an advert on your tablet, before buying it on your laptop.

We don't like the sound of that, and nor do Adblock Plus, who have updated their browser extension to block adverts that would be 'served' by Atlas (Adblock Plus explain more in their blog: www.snipca.com/13887).

We strongly recommend using an ad-blocker, if not Adblock Plus then the also-excellent AdBlock (https://getadblock.com).

ScamWatch

READERS WARN READERS

Scammers pretend to be BT

A friend was recently targeted by scammers who claimed to be from BT. They told him that he had downloaded some malicious files, and that he should log into his BT account so they could "help him" remove the files. He told the scammers that he had not long run his antivirus, malware and spyware programs and that it was impossible for anything malicious to be on his PC. They were persistent, but he continued to argue his point and they eventually hung up. This seems to be an updated version of the similar scam where people pretend to be from Microsoft.

Maurice Murphy

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

pcspecialist

PC Specialist recommends Windows 8.1

"A great little system for general duties, high definition media playback and casual gaming."
Zardon, KitGuru.net

INFINITY 7850K
from £499

- AMD A10-7850K Quad Core APU
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- 8GB Kingston HyperX FURY 1600MHz
- 2TB SATA III 6Gb/s HDD
- Corsair 450W VS Series PSU
- PCS Alpha Trion Case
- 3 Year Standard Warranty

"Vanquish 230X will give you a more than average level of gaming performance..."
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Ryan Martin, eTeknix.com

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JUNK REMOVER

Clean Master

www.snipca.com/13944
What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7 or 8

Clean Master may sound familiar if you have a tablet or phone. The highly rated Clean Master Android app (www.snipca.com/13935) has been downloaded more than 200 million times since its launch in 2012, and its users seem impressed: its Facebook page boasts almost six million 'likes'.

So we're surprised that Clean Master didn't launch on Windows before now. Perhaps its maker (Cheetah Mobile, which also makes the excellent Battery Doctor and CM Browser apps) thought that the PC-cleaning market was too crowded. Clean Master has managed to distinguish itself from its most obvious rival, CCleaner (www.piriform.com/ccleaner), by going for speed and simplicity over tools.

The program scans your PC automatically when you run it, and the results are quick and easy to follow. Junk is divided into familiar categories such as System and Web caches, plus more specific areas like 'Social software junk' and 'Video & audio junk'. You can clear categories of junk individually or remove it all at once, excluding certain categories if you want. And that's it. No fuss, no creative-but-useless extra tools – just fast and efficient PC cleaning.

Clean Master is also very easy to install. Click the blue Free Download button and run the installer, which opens with a very likeable animated junk-scrubbing brush. There's no adware to opt out of.

1 When you run Clean Master, it automatically scans your PC and reveals how much hard-drive space you can free up by removing all your junk files.

2 Most of your junk is likely to fall under the 'System cache' category, which includes temporary files (Temp Files). The figure in orange is that category's total size.

3 Click a category icon to open more buttons. Click 'Clean up' to remove those files from your PC now, or Ignore to exclude them from Clean Now.

4 Scroll down to see other categories, including 'Social software junk' (such as Skype files) and Registry junk. Click Clean Now to remove all junk from your PC.

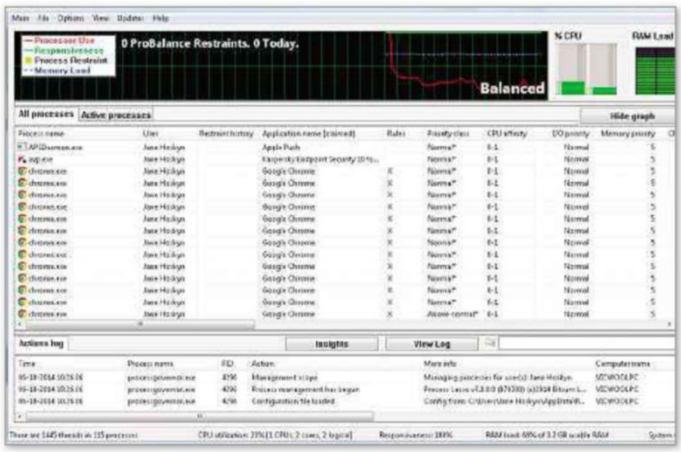
ANTIVIRUS

AVG AntiVirus Free 2015

www.snipca.com/13934

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7 or 8

AVG's latest security suite offers a few extra tools and an attractive new look (for "attractive" read "less like Windows 8"), and we hope that it provides better protection than its predecessor, which came eighth in our latest antivirus megatest (Issue 430). The new suite finally includes zero-day protection, and AVG pledges to update the program more frequently than the 2014 version. Annoyingly AVG's download button redirects you to the download mirror Cnet, but we had no trouble with the installer. Make sure to click 'Basic protection' and 'Custom install' when offered.



TASK MANAGER

Process Lasso Free 7

https://bitsum.com

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7 or 8

We're big fans of the free Task Manager-alternative Process Hacker (www.snipca.com/13937) and memory monitor Process Piglet (www.snipca.com/13938), so we're intrigued by Process Lasso, which sounds like a combination of the two. Like Process Hacker, its main window lists all your PC's running processes, and like Process Piglet it automatically stops memory hogs. There's also an 'Actions log', which records all your stopped and started processes, and a real-time graph that shows your system statistics.

Installation is a little confusing because a 64bit version is installed first, then a 32bit version. But setup is very quick and there's no adware to opt out of.

FILE SHARING

Jumpshare

https://jumpshare.com

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7 or 8

Drop a file or files onto the Jumpshare icon (a little kangaroo) at the bottom-right of your screen, and the program instantly and automatically copies a public-sharing link to your clipboard. Paste the link into an email to share it with friends and family straight away, even before your file has finished uploading. You can also share screenshots: right-click the kangaroo, click 'Take screenshot' and paste the share link into an email.

You need to sign up for a free account to use the service, which gives you 2GB cloud space for free. Click the kangaroo and click 'Sign up'.

WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

We tell you what software to use

What's the best scanning and photo-editing software for Windows 8.1?

Q **I used to use Ulead (later Corel) PhotoImpact on XP to scan paintings and drawings which my wife used for greeting cards. PhotoImpact doesn't seem to work on Windows 8.1, so I'm looking for a newer alternative. Can you help?**

Kevin Keeley

A PhotoImpact was indeed a great piece of software, but it's been surpassed by cheaper and simpler programs – some of which are exclusive to Windows 8.1. For example, Windows 8.1's built-in Scan app makes fast work of turning paintings and drawings into digital images. Type scan into your Start screen to find it. Also try the free tool Pixlr (https://pixlr.com), which is a great free image editor. You can either use it entirely online or download its new Windows version to your PC. For more creative projects, try the free PicsArt Photo Studio app for Windows 8.1 (www.snipca.com/13943). It includes a collage maker and drawing tool that's ideal for creating greetings cards.

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

Reviews

New products tested by our experts

SMARTPHONE | **£619 (16GB)** from www.snipca.com/13818

Apple iPhone 6 Plus

Computer active BUY IT! ★★★★★

Apple finally makes a big-screen phone and it's a corker

While other companies have been releasing bigger and bigger smartphones, Apple had steadfastly refused to follow suit, but the company has now given in – and in a very big way. The iPhone 6 Plus is easily one of the biggest phablets we've ever seen, with its screen measuring 5.5in. Although there are phablets with even bigger screens, the Plus is larger because it has to make room for its fingerprint reader and other sensors. It's so big, the iPhone 5s (see our review, Issue 408) can fit inside the boundaries of the screen with room to spare.

BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM

The Plus has a thin aluminium build with curved edges. Some users have reported that it can easily be bent out of shape, such as when sitting down with the phone in your pocket. We found that our review phone survived everyday use without so much as a scratch or dent, all without a case. When attempting to deliberately bend the phone, we only managed to cause it to creak audibly, but only by applying a lot of force.

The screen has a resolution of 1920x1080 pixels and it's easily one of the best smartphone screens we've seen. It's dazzlingly bright with exceptional colour accuracy, so photos and high-definition videos look great, while text is very sharp. You can adjust the resolution settings to show either as much text as possible, or to show less text but at a bigger size - useful if you have imperfect eyesight.

Some built-in apps have been updated to make use of the higher resolution. For example, when used in horizontal orientation Mail shows your inbox alongside your currently selected email, while Safari shows a Desktop-style tab bar and all your bookmarks alongside your current web page.

The screen's height and width makes one-handed use very difficult, but Apple has made some modifications to iOS 8 to make it a little less unwieldy. For example, double-tapping the Home button shifts the contents of the screen downwards, making controls at the top of the screen easier to reach, although controls on the far side of the screen still require stretching your thumb across, which is awkward. There's no getting around the fact that the Plus is much more uncomfortable to use single-handed – especially if you have small hands – than previous iPhones.

The increased dimensions necessitated by the big screen have been put to good use, though. There's now room for a massive battery which lasted an incredibly lengthy 40 hours when used for a mixture of web browsing on 3G and Wi-Fi, photography, GPS and making calls. When playing videos on a loop, it lasted just under 13 hours. This is one of the longest battery times we've seen.

There's also now room to include optical stabilisation in the camera which helps reduce blurriness in low-light photos. It also helps smooth out any juddering when filming, such as when you're walking or attempting to keep track of fast-moving subjects such as excitable children and pets.

The camera is better than ever in other ways too. Details were sharp, even in low light, and noise was kept to a minimum,

while colours were captured faithfully. It was surprisingly fast at focusing, so it took far fewer out-of-focus shots and videos than other smartphone cameras we've tested. The slow-motion video recording introduced in the 5s is now better, capturing smoother, more detailed results. It's a little gimmicky, but lots of fun. Obviously, the Plus's camera still can't match a good CSC or DSLR, but it's excellent for a smartphone.

Like the 5s, the 6 Plus has a dedicated chip, called the M8, for tracking motion data, so it can act as a basic fitness tracker. It has a built-in barometer, so it can keep track of how many flights of stairs you've climbed or how far up you've cycled or jogged. In our tests, it was generally accurate, although it sometimes missed a flight of stairs or two.

Like the iPhone 5s, the 6 Plus has a fingerprint scanner which you can use instead of a passcode to unlock your phone. Thanks to iOS 8, apps can now use the fingerprint scanner too. For example, you can set Evernote and 1Password to require your fingerprint before launching, which provides an extra layer of security.

Performance – whether in apps, 3D games or web apps – was very fast thanks to the 1.4GHz A8 dual-core processor – better than any other phone we've tested. Its table-topping performance is all the more impressive given that the Plus only has 1GB of memory - Android phones with similar performance tend to have two or three times as much. Call quality hasn't been forgotten. When connected to O2's network in central London, voices sounded very clear, while the background ruckus of a nearby building site was effectively filtered.

iOS 8

Last year's iOS 7 dramatically changed the way the iPhone's operating system looked, but it worked much as it did before. iOS 8 (also available free for older iPhones dating back to the 4s), on the other hand, introduces many new features that change the way the iPhone works. There's a lot more Android-style flexibility for starters. Apple's keyboard is better than before with more accurate autocorrect predictions, but you can replace it with a host of alternative keyboards from the App Store if you want (for the best available, see page 23). You can now also add widgets to the notifications drawer.

Apps can now have what Apple calls extensions, so the features of one app are now available within another. For example, you can now access your files stored on online storage services, such as Dropbox and OneDrive, directly from within other apps. You can also edit your photos in Apple's Photos app using the tools from third-party image editors. Apps have to explicitly support extensions, with some popular apps already updated.

Households with multiple iOS devices will appreciate the Family Sharing feature. This lets up to six people share an Apple account, in addition to their own, so they don't have to buy the same apps, music, videos and ebooks from Apple's stores more than once. There's no need to worry about the kids racking up huge bills downloading games and movies, though, as the 'Ask To Buy' setting means any attempted purchases have to be approved by you from your device first. Not all apps work with Family Sharing, though, as each app developer has to permit this.

Handoff is a clever feature that allows you to start a task on the 6 Plus and complete it on another iOS device (as long as it has Bluetooth LE). For example, you can start reading a really long web page or typing an email on the train, and then finish it on your iPad with its bigger screen when you get home. Handoff-capable apps appear as small icons on the lock screen and app switcher of the second iOS device - tapping them opens the app and lets you pick up immediately from where you left off on the 6 Plus. It's a surprisingly useful feature.

You can also act upon notifications, such as replying to a text message or ticking off a reminder on your to-do list, without leaving your current app. There are many more new features in iOS 8 which we don't have room to cover here (see Secret Tips for more – page 48).

The huge size and high cost of the iPhone 6 Plus won't suit everybody, but if you want a big-screened phone then it is the best available. Its high-quality screen, fast performance, lengthy battery life and refined operating system make it a joy to use.

SPECIFICATIONS

5.5in 1920x1080 pixel touchscreen • 1.4GHz Apple A8 dual-core processor • 1GB memory • 16GB storage • 4G • nano SIM • iOS 8 • 172g • 158x78x7mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/13819

HOW WE TEST

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PRICES

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

VERDICT: Expensive, but this is an exceptional phablet in almost every way

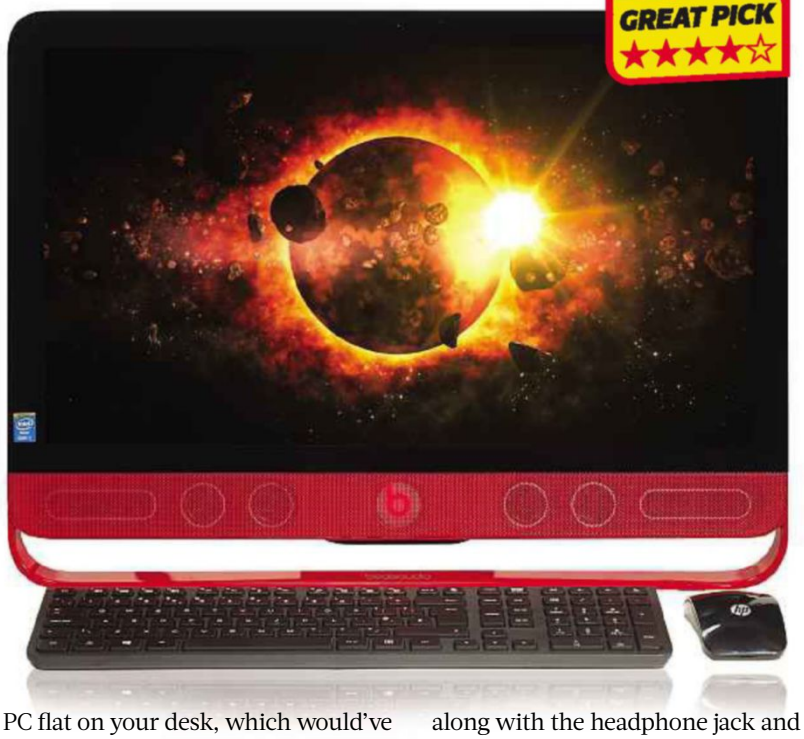
★★★★★

ALTERNATIVES: Apple iPhone 5s £459 If you'd rather have a smaller iOS smartphone, last year's 4in iPhone 5s is still available and is now cheaper

ALL-IN-ONE COMPUTER | **£799** from www.snipca.com/13811

HP Beats Special Edition 23

A striking all-in-one PC with style and substance



HP's latest all-in-one Windows 8.1 PC is nothing if not eye-catching. The black and red appearance of the Beats Special Edition 23 won't be to everyone's taste, but it's certainly distinctive. We thought its unconventional appearance might be something of a distraction, especially the glowing red 'B' symbol in the middle of the speakers, but we soon got used to it.

You won't be surprised to learn that this space-saving PC has Beats-branded speakers built in. Although they don't sound anywhere near as well balanced as a dedicated set of external speakers, they're far superior to the speakers of other all-in-ones we've seen at this price. The speakers were loud and sounded reasonably spacious with a moderate amount of bass, although the high end often sounded very harsh.

If you prefer your music through headphones, you can use a handy hook which slides out of the left-hand side of the PC on which you can hang your headphones and keep the cable from getting tangled. You won't need headphones or high volume to drown out the PC's cooling fan, however. It was very quiet, emitting a low whirring sound that was barely audible.

Disappointingly, the PC has a stiff stand that's hard to adjust. Nor can you lay the PC flat on your desk, which would've made the upright touchscreen far more comfortable to use for long periods of time. The screen itself is bright with wide viewing angles, but image quality is spoiled by a grainy sheen and washed-out colours. The screen resolution is high at 1920x1080 pixels, letting you work on two documents side-by-side or edit huge photos and spreadsheets without too much scrolling around.

The Intel integrated graphics chip is only powerful enough for playing older, less demanding 3D games. This PC is more than fast enough for most tasks though – its quad-core Intel Core i7 4785T processor and 8GB of memory sailed through our demanding benchmark tests. While it's possible to add another 8GB of memory, doing so is easier said than done as prising the case open is tricky and time-consuming.

A wireless keyboard and mouse are included. The mouse works well enough, but the keyboard is far too spongy, so typing can be uncomfortable and inaccurate. There are six USB ports, but only two of these are USB 3.0. The latter are located on the left-hand side along with the headphone jack and SD card slot. Unfortunately, they're recessed and are not as easy to reach as they should be. The rest of the USB ports are located at the rear along with the Gigabit Ethernet port and the HDMI port for connecting a second monitor. The latter can also be used to connect another computer, such as a laptop or tablet, which can then use the PC's monitor.

The HP Beats Special Edition 23 isn't perfect. It's let down by its mediocre-quality screen and hard-to-upgrade design, but it's still a good value all-in-one PC thanks to its fast performance, quiet operation and colourful looks.

VERDICT: Its looks won't suit everyone and it's not perfect, but this is a fast and quiet all-in-one PC with good speakers

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Dell Inspiron 17-7737 £799 A laptop powerful enough to replace a PC that's also blessed with a high-quality screen, plenty of memory and a fast dedicated graphics chip

SPECIFICATIONS

2.2GHz Intel Core i7-4785T quad-core processor • 8GB memory • 1TB hard drive • Intel HD 4600 integrated graphics chip • 23in 1920x1080-pixel touchscreen • Windows 8.1 • 413x563x14mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty • Part code: 23-n011na www.snipca.com/13811

PRINTER | **£136** from www.snipca.com/13813

Dell B2360dn

A blazingly fast laser printer

Dell's B2360dn black-and-white laser printer is bulky and plain-looking, but what it lacks in style it makes up for in its impressive specifications. It has a fast 38 pages-per-minute (ppm) maximum speed, automatic duplex (double-sided) printing and a Gigabit Ethernet port. It also has a 1,200-dpi maximum print resolution, although the default 600dpi is fine for most print projects. According to Dell, the B2360dn can print up to 80,000 pages per month, so it's prolific and durable enough for use in a small-business environment.

Both the main 250-page cassette tray and the 50-page multipurpose manual feed above it feel sturdy. For large print jobs you can add a second 550-sheet tray, but it's not cheap (£124 from www.snipca.com/13776). Unusually, you can't plug a USB stick directly into the printer and print documents stored on it.

When we started printing the first thing that struck us was how quiet it was for a quick mono laser, until it dawned on us that we weren't seeing the printer's top speeds. After much head-scratching we discovered that Quiet Mode is turned on by default. Disabling this increased the noise a little, but allowed the printer to demonstrate its impressive performance, delivering the first page of text in just eight seconds, and 25 pages in 45 seconds – a rate equivalent to 33.3ppm.

It was a similar result when printing graphics, though – oddly – it insisted on pausing before printing each of the four PowerPoint slides that make up part of our graphics-printing test, so it managed only 21.2ppm.

Print quality was exceptional, with crisp black text coupled with excellent photo prints and graphics. Our test images had accurate shading with virtually no banding or other flaws.

They may not look alike, but the Dell B2360dn seems to be based on the Lexmark MS415dn Pro, which has very similar specifications and performed almost identically in our tests. Our main reservation about the MS415dn is that its print costs are a little on the high side – and the same is true of the B2360dn. Using its 8,500-page capacity toner works out at just over 1.6p per page, although this is more forgivable in the case of the B2360dn as it costs £60 less than the MS415dn Pro to buy. The latter does come with a three-year warranty though, while the B2360dn only has a one-year warranty.

In an ideal world, the B2360dn's running costs would be lower, but no similarly priced mono laser printer can touch its combination of speed and quality. It's a worthy Buy It winner.

SPECIFICATIONS

1200dpi maximum print resolution • A4 and legal paper sizes • 263x399x382mm (HxWxD) • 14.1kg • One-year warranty • Part code 210-41173

www.snipca.com/13778

VERDICT: An almost flawless black-and-white laser printer

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: Samsung M2022W £67

A much cheaper and more compact mono laser printer with comparable image quality, but it costs almost three times as much to run

iOS 8 Keyboards

Swype

69p from www.snipca.com/13837

Instead of tapping each key individually, simply slide your finger from key to key instead. It's often much faster and well-suited for one-handed typing.

Fleksy

69p from www.snipca.com/13838

This keyboard supports some useful gestures, such as swiping left with one finger to delete a word or swiping down to replace a word you've typed with an autocorrect suggestion. Plus, if you prefer larger or smaller keys, it's resizable.

KuaiBoard

£1.49 from www.snipca.com/13851

An unusual keyboard that lets you quickly insert frequently used snippets of text, such as addresses or hard-to-spell names, as well as other information such as your current location.

Riffsy GIF Keyboard

Free from www.snipca.com/13840

Aimed at heavy users of instant-messaging apps such as WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger, this fun and quirky keyboard lets you easily insert animated GIFs into messages, tweets and more.

CAMERA | **£235** from www.snipca.com/13781

Canon PowerShot SX700 HS

A slim, stylish camera with a big zoom capabilities

The Canon PowerShot SX700 HS is a compact camera with a 30x zoom lens. This in itself is a remarkable technical achievement – it wasn't long ago that you'd only find such a powerful lens in far heavier, bulkier cameras.

The slim design broadens the camera's appeal to casual photographers who don't want something that'll weigh them down. It's not exactly a featherweight at 265g, but it's still small enough to slip into a jeans pocket, for example. The massive zoom manages to capture distant objects that would be barely noticable in photos taken with standard cameras. However, this benefit was slightly undermined by the quality of the SX700 HS's lens. Focus began to deteriorate at the extremes of its zoom range, particularly towards the edges of photos.

The SX700 HS isn't great for indoor photography, with image quality that's broadly in line with far cheaper compact cameras. Other cameras in this price range, such as the Panasonic LX7, have a shorter zoom but wider aperture, capturing more light for better image quality in dimly lit environments. Our video tests revealed similar results, with great results outdoors, but footage in darker interiors were blighted by noise.

SPECIFICATIONS

16-megapixel sensor • 30x zoom (25–750mm) • 3in screen • accepts SD, SDHC and SDXC storage cards • 265g • 66x113x35mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty

www.snipca.com/13782

The controls are generally good. A dial gives quick access to such options as determining the aperture size and setting manual mode. There's not much control over the focus, though – you can choose a fixed central area or leave it to the camera to select a focal point. There's a dedicated button for activating exposure compensation and a wheel at the rear of the camera for adjusting it, so it's quick to fine-tune the brightness of photos.

One problem with such a powerful zoom is that it can be hard to frame distant subjects, because even the slightest movement sends the camera's view veering way off target. The SX700 HS has a button that quickly zooms out to a wide-angle view, helping you relocate your chosen subject. Release the button and the camera zooms in again. Another button launches the Wi-Fi functions, which work in conjunction with apps for Android and iOS devices (free from www.snipca.com/13785) to provide wireless photo transfers and a remote-control function.

A big zoom is great for wildlife and sports photography, but fast-moving subjects require a quick response from the camera. The SX700 HS was very quick to focus in our tests, capturing an image every 0.8 seconds – a superb result. The dedicated burst mode was twice as fast, at 2.5 frames per second (fps). Various rival cameras offer speeds of up to 10fps, but they slow down or stop after a few frames. The SX700 HS's kept going at 2.5fps until the card was full.

A huge zoom lens in a small camera is such a great idea that we'd be willing to forgive the SX 700 HS's poor low-light performance for the sake of its huge zoom range. The lens' sharpness problems are disappointing though and prevent this camera from getting an unconditional recommendation.

VERDICT: A massive lens and fast performance, but image quality is good rather than great

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Panasonic Lumix DMC-TZ60 £318 More expensive, but its sharper lens and ability to shoot in RAW mode give it the edge for image quality

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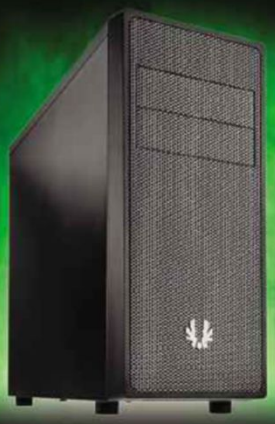

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Raspberry Pi Model B+

Learn to program, control robots or just stream music using this tiny computer

The Raspberry Pi Model B+ is, like previous models, a tiny computer built for hobbyists, students and anyone who wants to learn more about how computers and computer programs work.

Comparing to its predecessor – the model B (see our review, Issue 375), the B+ has a microSD slot (instead of a full-size SD version) and a combined audio/video port (instead of separate stereo sound and composite video connectors). These changes were necessary to make room for its 40-pin GPIO (General Purpose Input/Output) connector that's designed to connect and control other devices. You can still connect equipment designed for the B's 26-pin connector, but the extra pins let you hook up even more sensors, lights and motors. It also has four (up from two) USB ports.

To get up and running, you'll need a monitor connected via HDMI, a mouse and keyboard, a microUSB charger for power, and an 8GB microSD card for your operating system. It's also recommended, but not essential, that you connect the Pi to the internet using either its Ethernet port or a USB Wi-Fi adapter. If you want a shortcut, you can buy a starter kit that includes the NOOBS installer on a microSD card and a case (£40 from www.snipca.com/13742).

The NOOBS installer – which you should download free from www.snipca.com/13740 and copy to your microSD card before turning on your Pi for the first time – helps you choose and install your operating system. The recommended option is Raspbian Linux, a version of the popular Debian distribution, from which Ubuntu is also derived.

Raspbian includes the popular Python programming language and a development program called IDLE. There's a wealth of free information online to help you learn the language, but if you're not a would-be programmer you can still take advantage of software from other developers. Loads of programs, sensors and hardware kits are available for the Pi, so if you want a DIY weekend project then there are plenty to choose from. You can use your Pi as the basis for almost anything, from a smart watering system for your garden that uses soil-moisture sensors and an irrigation control kit to a time-lapse camera and a miniature robotic boat.

If you use NOOBS to install the XBMC media-centre operating system and connect the Pi to your TV, you can use it to stream video and music across your network. If you use the Raspbian operating system then you can install standard Linux programs and use your Pi to browse the web, run office programs and complete other basic tasks.

The Raspberry Pi B+ is a great little computer that's more flexible than ever. While its new features seem minor, it's now even better suited for lots of projects.

SPECIFICATIONS

700 MHz ARM1176JZ-F processor • 512MB memory • MicroSD slot • dual-core VideoCore IV integrated graphics chip • 1x 10/100Mbps Ethernet port • 56x85mm (WxD) www.snipca.com/13743

VERDICT: The Raspberry Pi B+ requires a few extras to get it going, but it's cheap, versatile and inspiring

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: Ubuntu Free It's not as good at controlling electronics projects, but if you want to learn to program then Linux turns an old PC into a software-creation sandpit

WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

What's the best scanner with ADF?

Q **Like David Robson (see What Should I Buy?, Issue 432), I would like to digitise hundreds of pictures (6x4in prints or of a similar size). To load them one at a time would be very time consuming. Is there a scanner with an automatic document feeder (ADF) you would recommend?**

Joe Selby

A Although scanners with automatic document feeders can scan multiple documents unattended, it is highly inadvisable to use them with photos. Every ADF we've seen has been designed for scanning documents on plain paper which is thinner than the paper typically used for photos. Attempting to scan multiple photos will therefore almost certainly cause repeated paper jams. Many ADFs won't scan 6x4in photos anyway as they often have a minimum paper size of A4. Additionally, many scanners will only scan at lower-quality settings using the ADF which is fine for documents, but not ideal for photos.

One way to avoid the time-consuming chore of scanning hundreds of photos is to pay a bulk-scanning service to do it for you. We've had good results from Metro Imaging in London, but their service isn't cheap starting at £3.50 per scan in quantities of 501 or more (www.snipca.com/13836).

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

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SMART TV | **£580** from www.snipca.com/13803

Toshiba 47L6453

An affordable 47in smart TV with loads of features

Toshiba smart TVs tend to have an incredible number of features, more than you might expect for the price, and the 47in 47L6453 is no exception. Beyond its unique family-centric interface, it has all the wired and wireless connectivity you could wish for yet it costs just £580, which is incredibly cheap for a 47in TV.

At first glance, the 47L6453 looks like a mix of black and silvery metal, but it's actually made from plastic. The screen's borders are impressively thin, but the stand feels cheap. It bends and flexes under the slightest pressure, but at least it doesn't wobble. The 47L6453 is quite bulky, projecting 8-10cm from a wall when using a mounting bracket.

There are plenty of inputs at the back. As well as four HDMI ports (which support MHL for connecting a compatible tablet or smartphone), you also get component, composite, VGA and SCART sockets. There are also phono and optical audio ports, an Ethernet socket and a CI card slot for pay TV services. The built-in Wi-Fi supports Intel's WiDi technology, letting you use the TV as a wireless monitor for your WiDi-compatible laptop.

> "Toshiba's interface lets everyone set up their own apps"

You'll also find two USB ports, so you can plug in an external drive and use the TV's basic PVR features, or play multimedia files from a USB stick, networked PC or NAS. We didn't have any trouble playing any of our test files.

Toshiba's smart TV interface is unique in that it has an accounts feature that lets everyone in your household set up their own range of apps and choose from personalised viewing recommendations. These aren't particularly inspired choices – viewers of *Top Gear*, for example, will get a list of other motoring programmes.

We're not great fans of Toshiba's baffling interface. Initially, you think there are loads of apps to choose from, but most are simply duplicates spread across multiple home screens. Finding a specific app can be tricky, because some only appear in the menus of a particular home screen. You do at least get big names like Netflix, BBC iPlayer, YouTube, KnowHow Movies and Blinkbox, but there's no Amazon Prime Instant Video, 4oD or ITV Player. The interface is also sluggish, often struggling to keep up with our remote-control button presses.

Picture quality is better than most TVs at this price – once you've adjusted the extensive image settings. Untweaked, illumination from the backlight seeps out into the edges of the image, particularly distracting in darker scenes. Switching off the Active Backlight feature and changing the picture mode to one of the three "Hollywood" presets improved things significantly, although it still isn't perfect.

SPECIFICATIONS

47in LED TV • 1920x1080-pixel resolution • 4x HDMI • 2x USB2 • 1x component • 1x composite • 1x SCART • 1x VGA • 1x Ethernet • Freeview HD • 657x1072x217mm • 13kg • One-year warranty

www.snipca.com/13804

Colour and sharpness are very good, but it's worth adjusting the white balance, especially if you watch a lot of sports. We made this adjustment during a football match, making skin tones, grass and sky immediately more natural-looking.

If you just want a large TV at a low price, then the Toshiba 47L6453 will do the job. You end up paying in other ways though – you'll need to tweak the settings for the best image quality, the smart TV interface is a mess and the selection of available apps and services pales in comparison with the competition. It's worth paying more for a rival model.

VERDICT: You'll struggle to find a TV with more features and connections for a lower price, but usability and picture quality are far from ideal

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Samsung UE48H6200 £600 Slightly more expensive, but with a slicker interface, better build quality, comparable image quality and a wider selection of online video content

PRINTER | **£46** from www.snipca.com/13815

Canon Pixma MG2950

A cheap multifunction printer with built-in Wi-Fi

These days it's common for even the cheapest printers to support wireless networks. Canon's Pixma MG2950 is a case in point – it's an inkjet multifunction printer (MFP) which scans, prints and makes copies. Connect it to your home network and the whole family can make use of it from PCs, Macs and even smartphones and tablets, yet it costs less than £50.

Although it offers all these functions, the MG2950 is still basic in many ways. Round the back you'll find a simple paper input tray with no manual feed option, while the output tray is a also a basic pull-out affair. With no raised edge or stopper, longer jobs can result in a disordered pile of printed pages. The scanner's lid is thin and flimsy, but its hinges allow it to close flat on thick documents, which should help guarantee decent scan quality.

As is typical with Canon's cheaper inkjets, the MG2950 produces a wheezy noise when printing, but this is not overly loud or irritating. It's not a quick printer, though, delivering five pages of text in 45 seconds, which works out at 6.7 pages per minute (ppm). It's even slower when printing colour graphics (five pages in three minutes). While this relaxed pace is to be expected at this price, we're less happy that the MG2950 doesn't support borderless photos on 6x4in paper and that it won't even print on A4 photo paper. At least plain-paper documents came out well, with crisp black text and punchy graphics.

Scanning over a Wi-Fi connection can be slow due to the large amount of data being sent, so we carried out our timed tests via USB. In this case, the MG2950 was remarkably quick: capturing an A4 document at 150 dots per inch (dpi) took just eight seconds. Scanning in more detail at 300dpi took only 14 seconds, while even capturing a photo at the maximum 1,200dpi setting took only 51 seconds. The scan results were impressive, with sharp focus and accurate colour reproduction. With high-quality scans and prints, it's not surprising that photocopies were also very good.

The MG2950's two black and colour ink tanks are available in two sizes (the XL version is better value for money). Using these, running costs work out at 8.4p per page of mixed text and graphics, which is reasonable, although the black portion of this is quite high at 3.4p.

This isn't a bad MFP for everyday jobs – with decent results and affordable costs, but we'd suggest spending a little more to get faster speeds and better photo printing.

SPECIFICATIONS

4800x600dpi maximum print resolution • 4ipm colour/8ipm mono quoted speeds • 600x1200dpi maximum scan resolution • USB2 • 802.11b/g/n • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/13816

VERDICT: An inexpensive MFP with reasonable running costs, but there are other, better-value models

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Canon Pixma MG4250 £49 Lower running costs and faster speeds make this similarly priced MFP a better choice

OUT SOON

AUTUMN 2014

The latest leaked information says that the Nexus 9 tablet – the HTC-made successor to the Nexus 7 – will have 5GB of memory and a 2560x1440 pixel 9in screen.

Android Police

AUTUMN 2014

Rumours say that the Nexus 6 Android phone will be based on Motorola's existing Moto X, but with a 6in 2560x1440 resolution screen, 3GB of memory, a 12-megapixel camera, a Snapdragon 805 processor and Android L too.

NOVEMBER 2014

Sony's Xperia Z3 Compact 8in Android tablet will be waterproof, like previous Xperia tablets. Prices start at £329 for the 16GB model, with pricing to be confirmed for the 4G version.

NOVEMBER 2014

The iPad Air 2 is rumoured to be thinner than the original version and will have a fingerprint sensor as well as the new, faster A8 processor, which first appeared in the iPhone 6.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 29 Oct

Hudl2
Tesco's latest Android tablet

Kobo Aura H2O
The first waterproof e-reader

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Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Apple MacBook Air 13in 128GB
£849 from www.snipca.com/10020
Tested: Issue 402

Apple's latest MacBook Air isn't cheap, but it's the best lightweight laptop available. It has excellent battery life, a comfortable keyboard, a sensibly sized screen, a sturdy and classy build and great bundled software.

ALTERNATIVE: Asus Chromebook C200 A cheap Chrome OS ultra-portable laptop with a bright screen, lengthy battery life and great keyboard. £200 from www.snipca.com/13460

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Kaveri Evolution
£500 from www.snipca.com/11804
Tested: Issue 422

A budget PC with a fast overclocked processor. It also has good upgrade potential and comes with a surprisingly good 24in monitor, as well as a quality USB keyboard and mouse.

ALTERNATIVE: Braebo Hemera A cheap, complete PC system that's powerful enough for basic tasks. £350 from www.snipca.com/12606

TABLET

Asus Nexus 7
£170 from www.snipca.com/13419
Tested: Issue 407

An excellent budget 7in Android tablet with a high-resolution screen and good battery life. It's not quite as cheap as the original Nexus 7 and Android still needs more high-quality tablet apps, but it's still a fantastic bargain.

ALTERNATIVE: Apple iPad Air A lightweight, 10in tablet with an excellent screen and peerless selection of apps. £399 from www.snipca.com/10545

PHONE

Motorola Moto G 4G
£149 without contract from www.snipca.com/13465
Tested: Issue 432

Motorola's budget Android smartphone is an absolute steal. It's very responsive, well made, fast and has a good screen. Plus, it's now been updated with 4G and a microSD card slot.

ALTERNATIVE: Apple iPhone 5s An excellent smartphone with a great camera and performance. £459 without a contract from www.snipca.com/10171

DIGITAL CAMERA

Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF6
£300 from www.snipca.com/12607
Tested: Issue 405

This compact interchangeable lens camera is small and reasonably priced, yet it has well-designed controls, a wide range of available lenses and shoots excellent quality photos. The GF6 really is unbeatable value.

ALTERNATIVE: Fujifilm XF1 If you don't need the flexibility of removable lenses, this slim compact is a great choice. £130 from www.snipca.com/13701

PHOTO EDITING

Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 5
£99 from www.snipca.com/13420
Tested: Issue 402

Lightroom is a consistently elegant, powerful and fast photo-management program packed with sophisticated features. If you want to keep on top of your photos and make them look their best, there's no better software to use.

ALTERNATIVE: Adobe Photoshop Elements 12 A fast and polished photo-editing program with excellent editing tools £46 from www.snipca.com/13861

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Kaspersky Internet Security 2014

£25 from www.snipca.com/12054
Tested: Issue 430

Kaspersky Internet Security 2014 has won our past three antivirus tests, making it the year's standout performer. As well as offering excellent protection – blocking 99 out of 100 threats in our last test – it has good parental controls and the ability to create a rescue disc for emergencies.

ALTERNATIVE: Norton Internet Security 2014 Great antivirus software, but sometimes blocks legitimate software. £34 from www.snipca.com/11279

HOMEPLUGS

Devolo dLAN 650 Triple+ Starter Kit

£100 from www.snipca.com/13655
Tested: Issue 433

Devolo's latest HomePlug adapters are not only very fast, but they're well designed too. They have a pass-through socket so you can still power another device and the design should avoid skirting boards and other obstacles.

ALTERNATIVE: TP-Link AV500 Nano Powerline Adapter Starter Kit (TL-PA4010KIT) These tiny HomePlug adapters are a great choice if socket space is at a premium. £25 from www.snipca.com/10742

COMPETITION

Nook GlowLight Win 1 of 4

Computer active WIN IT!

We awarded four stars to the brilliant new Nook GlowLight in Issue 431, saying that it's a "great e-reader with a lightweight build, impressive screen and customisable text". It's the lightest Nook ever, with a contemporary design, a soft-touch back, perfectly lit pages and sharper text. It holds up to 2,000 books, which is 80 per cent more than Kindle Paperwhite. To enter, email your address to cacomp@dennis.co.uk by midnight 28 October.

The Nook GlowLight is available now for £89. For more information visit www.nook.com/gb and follow Nook on Twitter @nook_uk.

SECURITY CAMERA

Y-cam HomeMonitor HD

£147 from www.snipca.com/11646
Tested: Issue 420

A home-security camera that's well priced and easy to set up. Plus, it has great picture quality, useful apps and there's no need to subscribe to any extra services. It's a worthy successor to the original HomeMonitor, our previous favourite security camera.

ALTERNATIVE: D-Link Wireless-N Day & Night Camera A good-value security camera with excellent night vision. £90 from www.snipca.com/12741

ROUTER

Trendnet TEW-812DRU

£90 from www.snipca.com/13854
Tested: Issue 427

An incredibly fast 802.11ac router that's also one of the cheapest we've seen. It's superb and the router to buy if you're ready to make the jump to 802.11ac. It's easy to set up, too.

ALTERNATIVE: Linksys WRT1900AC More expensive, but even faster and with loads of features, too. £220 from www.snipca.com/12928

MULTIFUNCTION PRINTER

Canon Pixma MG4250

£50 from www.snipca.com/12457
Tested: Issue 382

This budget multifunction printer (MFP) isn't the fastest available, but it's cheap to buy and inexpensive to run. Just as importantly, both prints and scans look great. Unless you need faster print speeds or separate ink tanks for each colour, this MFP is the one to buy.

ALTERNATIVE: Canon Pixma MX535 An MFP aimed at small offices with duplex, ADF and fax, but also good photo print quality. £71 from www.snipca.com/12909

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Scan V1 Value System

- Intel® Pentium® G3240 processor
- 4GB Corsair DDR3 1333MHz memory
- 500GB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Microsoft Windows 8.1

£299 Inc VAT

The V1 is a very capable entry-level system perfect from basic home/office tasks. It's based around the dual-core Intel® Pentium® G3240 processor, 4GB of RAM plus a 500GB hard disk.

Scan V15 Value System

- Intel® Core™ i5 4460 processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 1TB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Microsoft Windows 8.1

£475 Inc VAT

The V15 ups the ante by including a quad-core Intel® Core™ i5 4460 processor, so it makes light work of office and multimedia applications.

Scan G20 Value System

- Intel® Pentium® G3240 processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 750 Ti SSC
- 1TB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Microsoft Windows 8.1

£515 Inc VAT

Thanks to its dual-core Intel® Pentium® G3240 processor and NVIDIA GTX 750 Ti SSC graphics card the G20i is our most affordable gaming PC. It even includes surround sound!

Scan G30i Value System

- Intel® Core™ i5 4460 processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 760 SC ACX
- 1TB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Microsoft Windows 8.1

£678 Inc VAT

The combination of quad-core Intel® Core™ i5 4460 processor and NVIDIA GeForce GTX 760 graphics card ensures that the G30i can play any game you throw at it.

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A range of computers perfectly suited for the home/office. These affordable PCs are very flexible workhorses, capable of every task, from email/web surfing to high-end applications such as photo editing, video encoding and gaming. All of our Value Systems are pre-built and soak-tested so are ready to ship for next-day delivery.

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Fully 3XS compatible

Ready to ship

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The most awarded PCs and Laptops Period.

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- Intel Pentium G3258 overclocked to 4.5GHz
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 2133MHz memory
- 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 760
- 1TB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Microsoft Windows 8.1
- 3 Year Premium Warranty

£599 Inc VAT

The 3XS Performance GT is an affordably-priced gaming rig that includes a dual-core Intel Pentium G3258, which we overclock up to 4.5GHz for improved performance. Also included is a 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 760 graphics card, 8GB of 2133MHz Corsair DDR3, a Z97 motherboard and 1TB hard disk.

Scan 3XS Gamer 20i

- Intel® Core™ i7 4790 processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 2133MHz memory
- 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 970 SC ACX
- 1TB Seagate HDD
- Microsoft Windows 8.1
- 3 Year Premium Warranty

£1024 Inc VAT

The 3XS Gamer 20i is a super-fast gaming PC thanks to its combination of quad-core Intel Core i7 4790 CPU running at 3.6GHz with added Hyper-Threading plus a 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 970 graphics card. These components are installed in an Asus Z97-K motherboard along with a 1TB hard disk.

3XS Graphite LG156

- Intel® Core™ i5 4210M processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M
- 15.6in 1,920 x 1,080 screen
- 500GB WD 7200rpm hard drive
- Microsoft Windows 8.1

£799 Inc VAT

The LG156 is 15.6" mid-range gaming laptop that includes a NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M graphics card. The LG156 has won multiple awards in the press for its performance and value for money. The LG156 is ready for next-day delivery and has a 2 Year Warranty.

3XS Graphite LG1711

- Intel® Core™ i7 4710MQ processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 6GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 870M
- 17.3in 1,920 x 1,080 screen
- 500GB WD 7200rpm hard drive
- Microsoft Windows 8.1

£1065 Inc VAT

The LG1711 is a 17.3" high-end gaming laptop that includes a choice of powerful NVIDIA GeForce GTX 870M or 880M graphics card, ensuring silky smooth frame rates in all your games. The LG1711 is ready for next-day delivery and has a 2 Year Warranty.

3XS Custom Series

Our 3XS Custom Series is a range of computers designed to offer the best performance for a variety of applications, with a particular focus on games. We build Custom Series PCs to order, so we can configure and tailor make an individual PC just the way you want it. We can also overclock the processor, so you get a faster PC without a substantial increase in price. All 3XS Custom Series PCs are covered by a three year warranty as standard with the first year on-site.

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Built by award winning 3XS team

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3XS SYSTEMS

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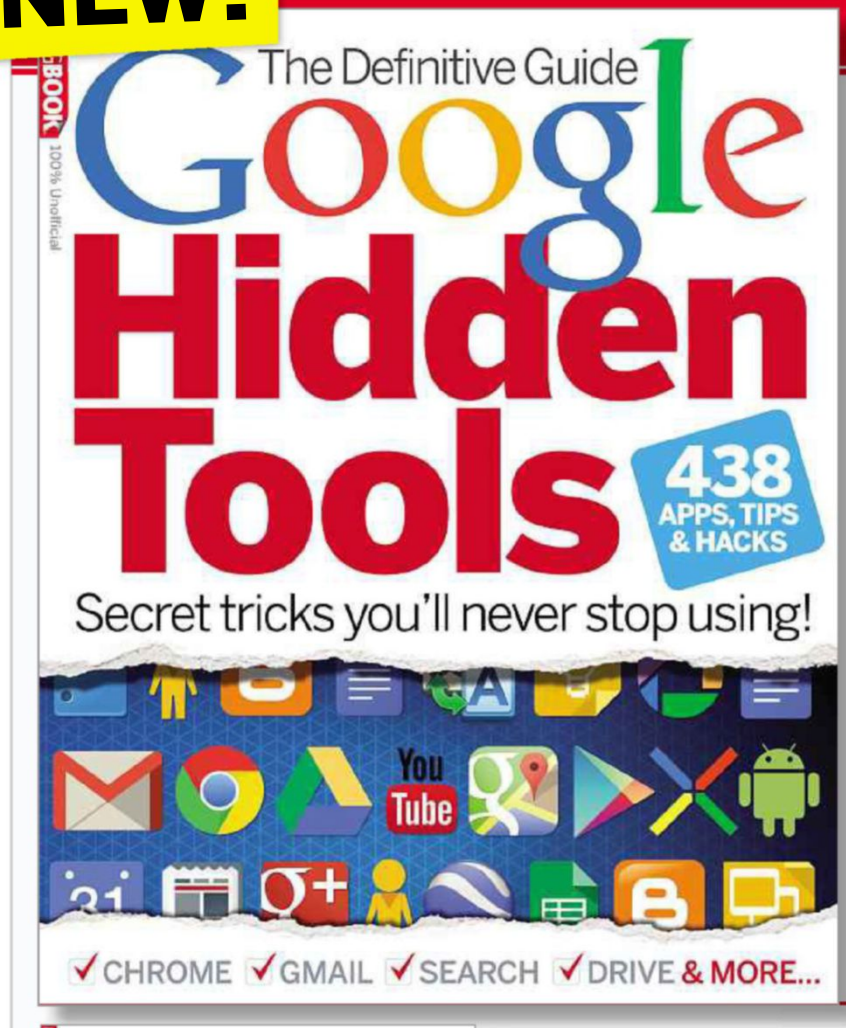

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Workshops & Tips

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

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PLUS
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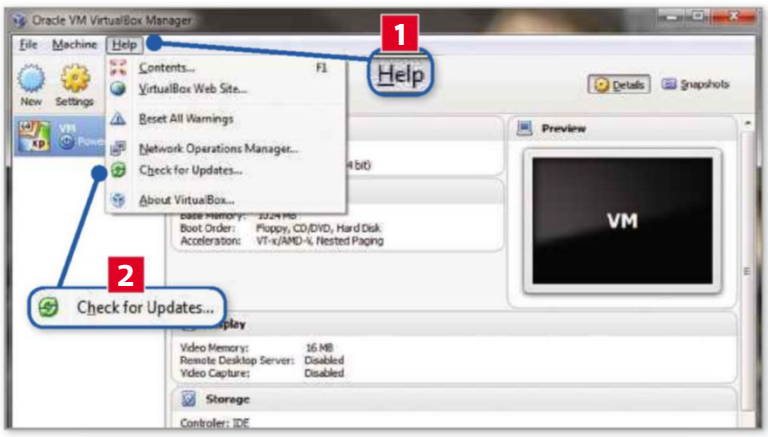
Download the Windows 10 Technical Preview

What you need: VirtualBox; Windows 7, 8 or 8.1 **Time required:** 2 hours

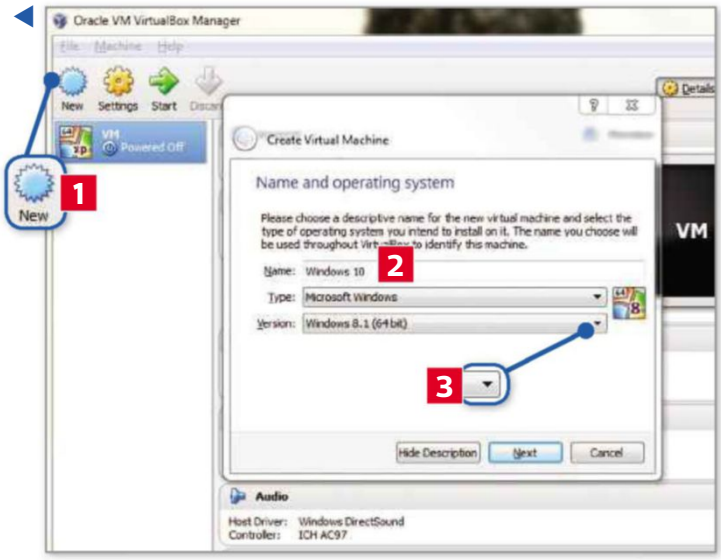
Microsoft has released the free Windows 10 Technical Preview for users to download and provide feedback. However, they don't recommend installing this on your PC as Windows 10 is likely to be unstable and will crash your system.

The safest alternative is to install and use Windows 10 from VirtualBox – a free virtual drive that lets you download and test programs without them affecting your PC. Here, we'll show you how to set up VirtualBox so you can try some of Windows 10's new features.

STEP 1 Go to www.snipca.com/13891 and click 'Join now' to join the Windows Insider Program. This gives you access to the Windows 10 Technical Preview in return for your feedback. Log in with your Microsoft account (Hotmail or Outlook) and then click I Accept (to accept the T&Cs). Next, click the 'install Technical Preview' link. Scroll down the next screen and click the 'Get the ISO files' link at the bottom left. Scroll down again and click the Download link beside 'English (United Kingdom) 64-bit (x64)' 1. It's a huge file (around 3.8GB) 2, so it'll take a while to download – anywhere from 30 minutes to a few hours (depending on your internet speed). Don't click the downloaded file as you won't need it until Step 5.

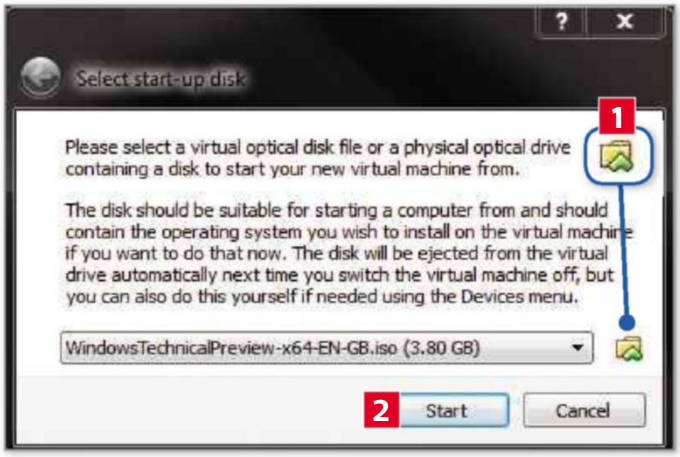


STEP 2 Because we're installing Windows 10 on a virtual drive, it shouldn't affect your PC, but Microsoft recommends backing up your data just in case. Do this while the ISO file is downloading. Use any cloud storage service (Dropbox, OneDrive, Google Drive) or copy your important data to an external hard drive. To download VirtualBox go to www.snipca.com/13892 and click Download Now. Click the setup file and keep clicking Next, followed by Yes and finally Install. If you already use VirtualBox, make sure you have the latest version, otherwise Windows 10 won't work. To do this, click Help 1 and then 'Check for Updates' 2. It'll update automatically if required.



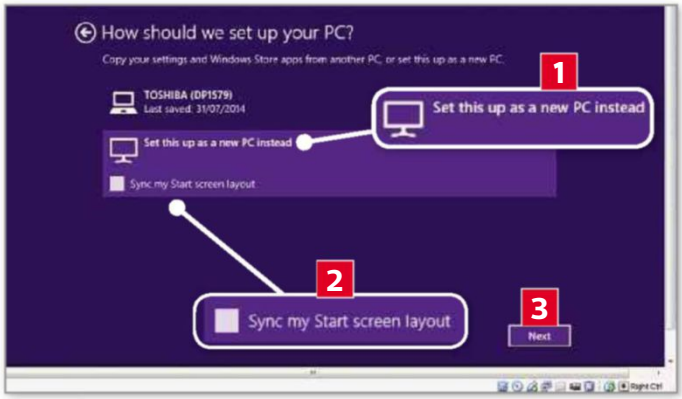
STEP 3 We'll now explain how to set up VirtualBox. Open it and click New 1. In the Create Virtual Machine dialogue box that appears, name it Windows 10 2, select Windows 8.1 (64bit) from the Version dropdown menu 3 (irrespective of whether you're doing this on a Windows 7, 8, or 8.1 PC) and then click Next. Click Next again as the suggested memory size should be fine. Now select 'Create a virtual hard drive now' and then click Create. Leave VDI (VirtualBox Disk Image) selected and click Next again.

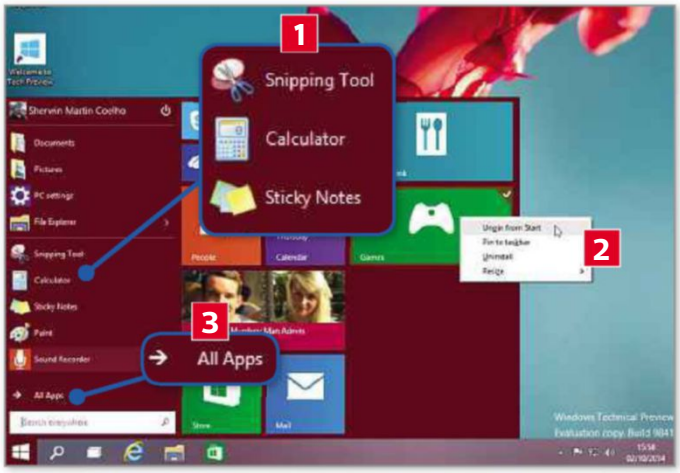
STEP 4 You now need to select whether you want a 'Dynamically allocated' or 'Fixed size' for your virtual hard drive. The former will expand the size of the virtual drive as files are added to it, but because we're only testing Windows 10, select 'Fixed size' 1. Click Next to see the specified amount of space allocated to the virtual drive (VirtualBox automatically determines the optimum amount required). Click Next and then Create to begin creating your virtual drive. You'll see a progress bar with an estimated time. It took about 10-15 minutes on our PC.



STEP 5 After that's done, you'll see your Windows 10 Technical Preview virtual drive in VirtualBox. You should now install Windows 10 on it. Click the Start button at the top. On the 'Select start-up disk' screen, click the small Folder icon 1 and navigate to the Windows Technical Preview ISO file you downloaded in Step 1. It should be in your Downloads folder. Click the file, click Open and then click Start 2. You should immediately see Windows 10 loading within VirtualBox. Select your language, click Next and then 'Install now'. Tick 'I accept the license terms' and then click Next. In the 'installation type' screen select Custom and then click Next. Windows 10 will begin installing and you'll see a progress bar below. Windows 10 will restart several times within VirtualBox, which is normal.

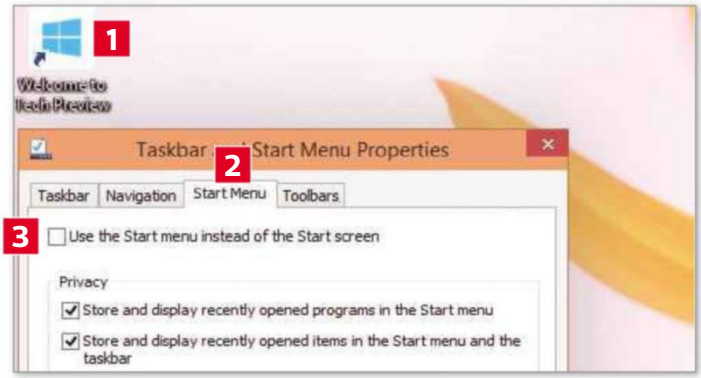
STEP 6 Once it boots, select 'Use express settings' on the Settings screen. Enter your Microsoft login details and click Next. If you've set up two-step verification on your Microsoft account, you'll need to enter your security code. Select how you would like to receive it (email address or mobile number) from the dropdown menu, type the security information required in the field below and then click Next. Type the code you receive and click Next again. If you have a Windows 8.1 device, you can choose to copy your settings and apps, but otherwise click 'Set this up as a new PC instead' 1, leaving 'Sync my Start screen layout' unticked 2. Click Next 3, and Next again to complete the setup. You'll now see your Windows 10 Start screen.





STEP 7 The first thing you'll notice is the return of the much-loved Start button. Click it to see a Start menu combining elements of the Start menu in Windows 7 (such as your most-used programs) 1 with the live tiles from Windows 8 (News, Mail and so on). Click a tile and drag it within the live-tile panel to reposition it. Right-click a tile and click one of the options 2 - (such as 'Unpin from Start' or 'Pin to taskbar') to do that. Click and drag a tile from the Start menu to your Desktop to create a shortcut. Click All Apps 3 to see all the programs and apps on your PC. Drag the edges of the Start menu to resize it.

STEP 8 The repositioned power button 1 gives you two options – 'Shut down' and Restart. If you want to lock your PC or sign out of your account, click your account name (beside the power button) and select what you want 2. Type what you want to search for in the search bar. Search results now include items on your PC as well as web results. Click one of the latter to go online in Internet Explorer. All the search terms you click can be accessed by clicking the Search icon 3.



STEP 9 Click the 'Welcome to Tech Preview' Desktop icon 1 to watch and read more about the new features in Windows 10. If you're familiar with Windows 8.1 and would prefer to use the Modern tile interface instead of the Start menu, there's an option to boot into it. Right-click anywhere on the taskbar, click Properties, then click the Start Menu tab 2 and untick 'Use the Start menu instead of the Start screen' 3. Click Apply and then OK. Your PC will restart, after which you'll see all your Windows 10 apps and programs on a Windows 8.1-like Modern tile interface.

STEP 10 After you've used Windows 10 for a while, you can submit feedback about issues you've faced (or possible suggestions). Click the Start button and then click Windows Feedback. Next, click a relevant section on the left (such as Internet Explorer) 1 to get further options about that section (like 'Media on the web') 2 on the right. Click the option that best describes your problem. Now either select one of the pre-written problems and click 'Me too!' or click 'New feedback', type your problem/suggestion and then click Send. Microsoft will use this feedback to enhance the final version. To close Windows 10 in VirtualBox, close the window, select 'Power off the machine' and then click OK. When you want to re-open it, simply open VirtualBox and click Start.

The 'Restore your PC from a virtual disk' Workshop will now appear in our next issue – out 29 Oct

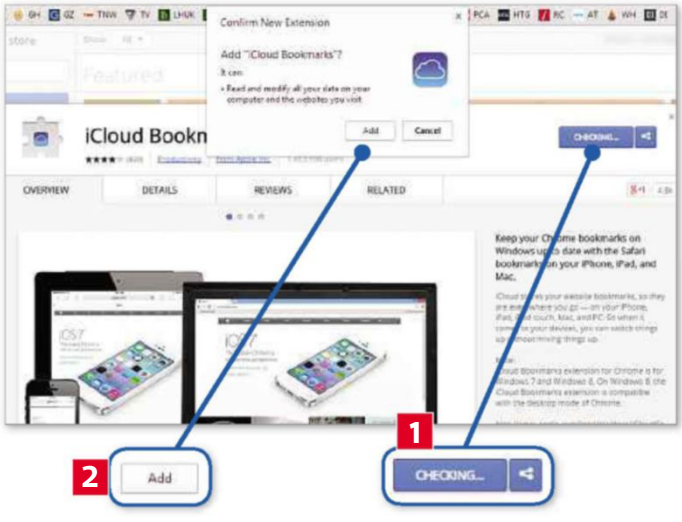
Sync your iPad with your PC

What you need: Windows 7, 8 or 8.1; iOS device (running iOS 8)
Time required: 30 minutes

Rather surprisingly, Apple has released iCloud for Windows before releasing a version for Mac. This lets you sync your iOS photos, bookmarks, email, contacts and documents with your device, PC and the web. We'll show you how to set it up and secure your account with two-step verification, so that it can never be accessed by hackers. After this is enabled, each time you want to access your Apple account you'll need to enter a new code, along with your login details.

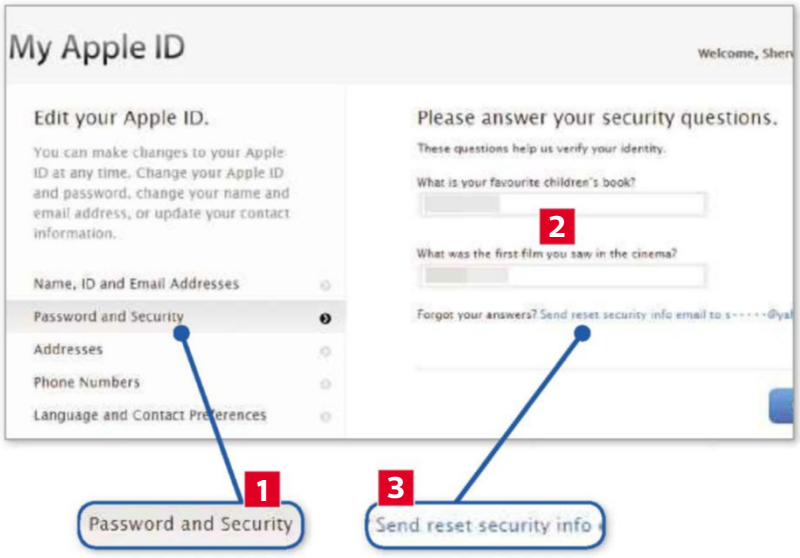
STEP 1 To download and install iCloud on your Windows PC, go to www.snipca.com/13855 and click the blue Download button. Click the setup file that downloads to your PC, Run, Next, accept the T&Cs 1, tick the box to enable automatic updates 2 and then click Install 3. Now click Yes (to confirm installation) and then Finish once that's done. Restart your PC to set up iCloud. Close any programs you're using and then click Yes to restart. You should see the iCloud window when your PC restarts. If you don't, click the Start button, All Programs and then iCloud. Enter your Apple ID and password and then click 'Sign in'. Click 'Automatically send' on the pop-up asking you to send Apple anonymous 'diagnostic' information about iCloud in case it crashes.

STEP 2 On the iCloud Control Panel tick all the items 1 to sync them with iCloud. This includes Apple's new storage service iCloud Drive. Next, tick all the browsers whose bookmarks you want to sync with Safari on your device 2, and then click OK. Finally, click Apply and then Merge (to merge your bookmarks). Unlike other cloud-storage services (such as Dropbox and Google Drive), iCloud Drive doesn't have a Desktop icon, but it's easy to create one. Click the Start button and type icloud drive. Now click iCloud Drive from the Start menu and drag it on to your Desktop. Files stored here will sync across all your devices and can also be accessed online



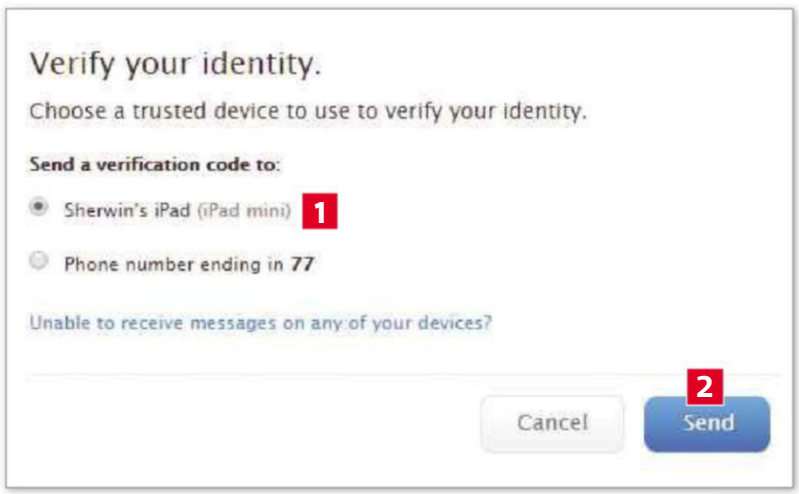
STEP 3 Next, click Download when prompted to download the iCloud Bookmarks extension for your default browser. Click the blue Free button (which then turns into Checking) 1 and then click Add 2. You'll see the iCloud extension at the top right of your browser, which lets you access the iCloud Control Panel. Close your browser. If you have Outlook set up on your PC, iCloud will automatically begin importing your contacts, calendar entries and tasks. Wait for this to finish and then click Done. Finally, click Close. To access your iCloud items, click the Start button, All Programs and then the iCloud folder.

STEP 4 Now move to your iPad. If you didn't set up iCloud after updating your device to iOS 8, there's an easy way to do it: open the Settings app on your device and then tap iCloud 1. Now tap your name 2, enter your login details and then tap Done to verify your account. To turn on iCloud Drive, tap it 3 and then tap the slider beside it. To access your synced bookmarks, open Safari on your device and then tap the '+' icon at the top right. Photos you take on your device will now automatically sync to your PC within seconds and your Mail app will now include your Outlook contacts, calendar and tasks.



STEP 5 We'll now show you how to enable two-step verification to secure your Apple and iCloud account. On your PC, go to www.snipca.com/13856 and click 'Manage your Apple ID'. Log into your account and then click Sign In. Click 'Password and Security' 1. You now need to correctly answer the security questions 2 you entered when you created your Apple ID. If you've forgotten them, click the blue link below 3 and follow the steps you receive via email. Type your answers and then click Continue. Click the 'Get started' link under Two-Step Verification and then click Continue (twice).

STEP 6 You'll see a message saying you need to wait for three days to enable two-step verification. After the date and time (which is also specified in an email you receive), repeat Step 5. After clicking Continue twice, click Get Started Now. Next, click 'Add a phone number', enter your mobile number and then click Next. You'll instantly receive a four-digit code as a text message. Type the code on your PC and then click Verify. You can add another mobile phone to receive a code if you want 1 or get it sent to an iPad that has Find My iPad enabled. To do the latter, click Verify 2. The code will appear on your iPad as a pop-up message (not email). Type it on your PC, click Verify Device and then click Continue 3.



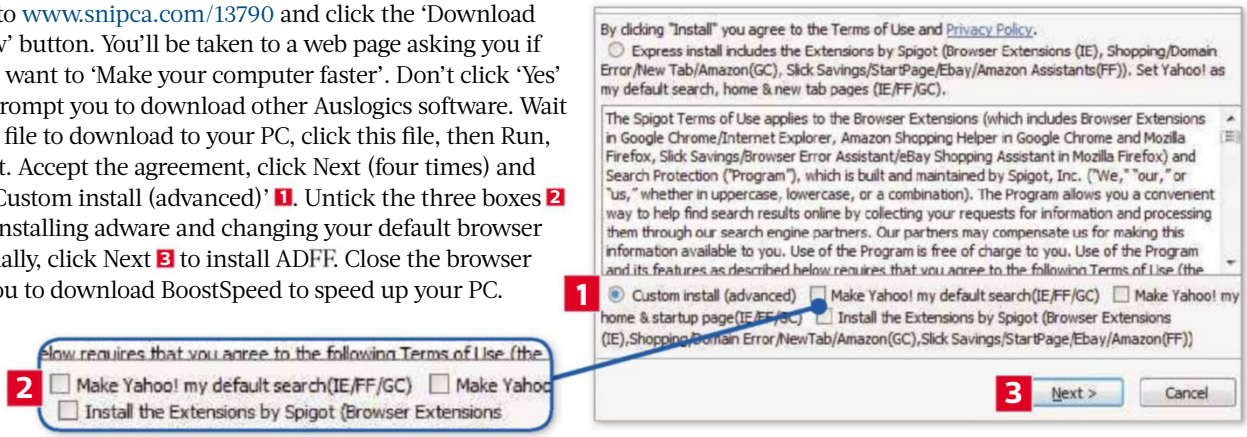
STEP 7 You'll now see a long alphanumeric recovery key, which can be used to access your account if you forget your password and lose any of your trusted devices. We recommend saving this key in a safe place on your PC. Next, click Continue, type your recovery key and then click Confirm. Tick 'I understand the conditions above', click 'Enable two-step verification' and then click Done. Now whenever you log into your Apple or iCloud account, you'll get an option asking you whether you want to receive your verification code on your phone or iPad. Select the option you want 1 and then click Send 2. Only after entering the correct verification code will you be able to access your account.

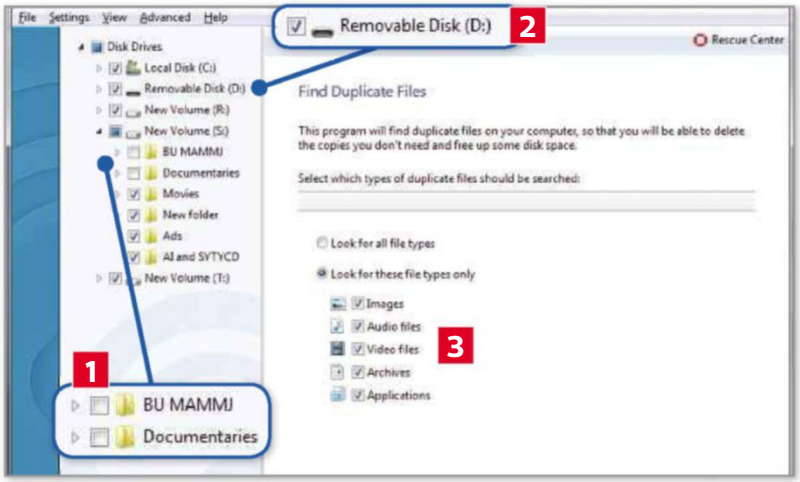
Remove duplicate files for free

What you need: Auslogics Duplicate File Finder; Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8, or 8.1
Time required: 20 minutes

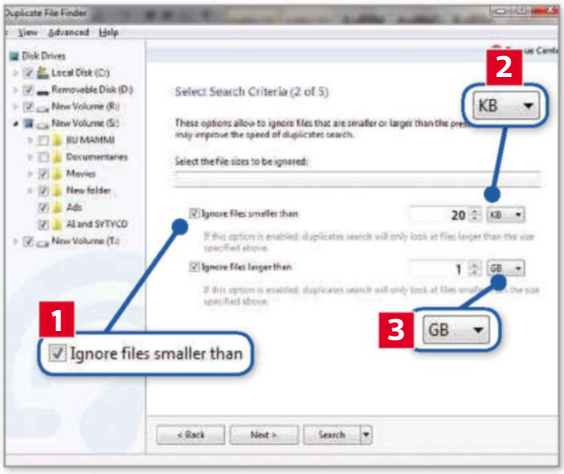
Over time you'll gather lots of photos, videos and other files on your PC. Many of these will be duplicates scattered across various locations and eating up storage space. Auslogics Duplicate File Finder (ADFF) is a free program that lets you find and delete these duplicates. You can specify which drives and folders to search, and look for duplicates of certain file types only. It also lets you preview files before deleting them and restore duplicates that you've deleted.

STEP 1 Go to www.snipca.com/13790 and click the 'Download now' button. You'll be taken to a web page asking you if you want to 'Make your computer faster'. Don't click 'Yes' as this will prompt you to download other Auslogics software. Wait for the setup file to download to your PC, click this file, then Run, Yes, and Next. Accept the agreement, click Next (four times) and then select 'Custom install (advanced)' 1. Untick the three boxes 2 (this avoids installing adware and changing your default browser settings). Finally, click Next 3 to install ADFF. Close the browser tab asking you to download BoostSpeed to speed up your PC.

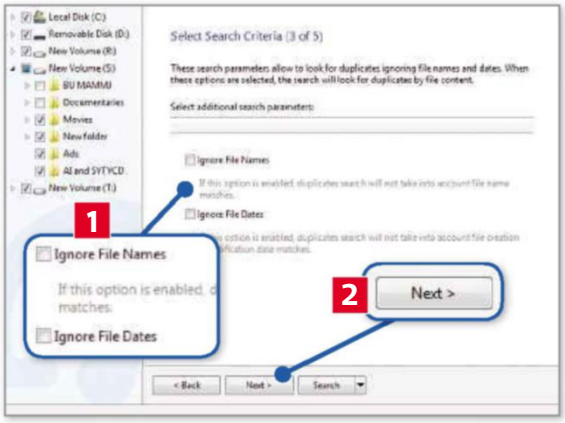




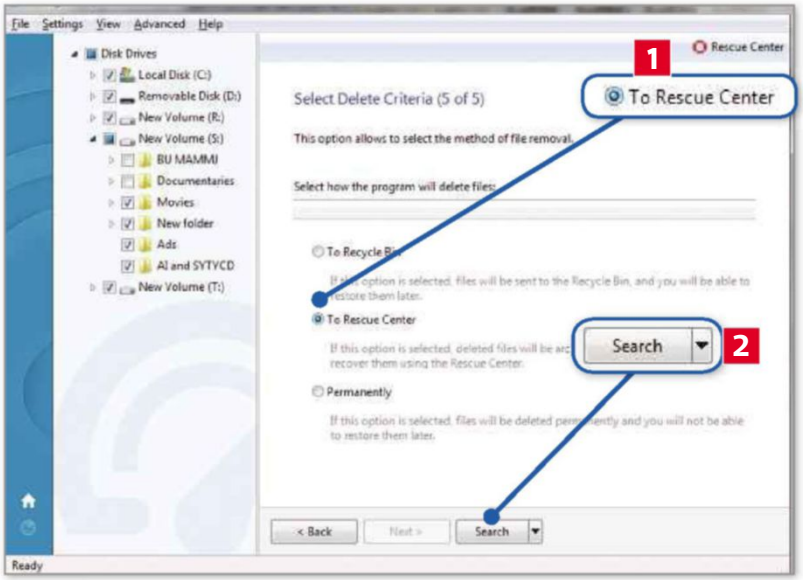
STEP 2 By default, ADFF searches for duplicates on your entire PC, but you can exclude certain folders from this search by clicking the dropdown menus beside the drives and unticking those folders 1. You can add any external drive (such as a USB stick or your tablet) to the search by connecting it to your PC. ADFF will detect the drive, though you'll need to tick it 2 to include it in the search. By default, ADFF will search for five file types 3. Untick any you want to exclude from the search, then click Next.



STEP 3 In the next step, you can narrow your search by file size. To search for all files (regardless of size) untick both boxes and click Next. Alternatively, to search for files between, say, 20KB and 1GB, tick 'Ignore files smaller than' 1, type 20 in the box, click the MB dropdown menu and change it to KB 2. Next, tick 'Ignore files larger than', type 1 in the box, click the dropdown menu and change it to GB 3. Click Next.

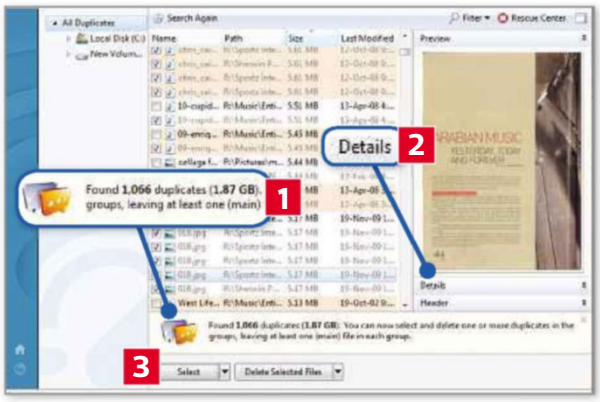


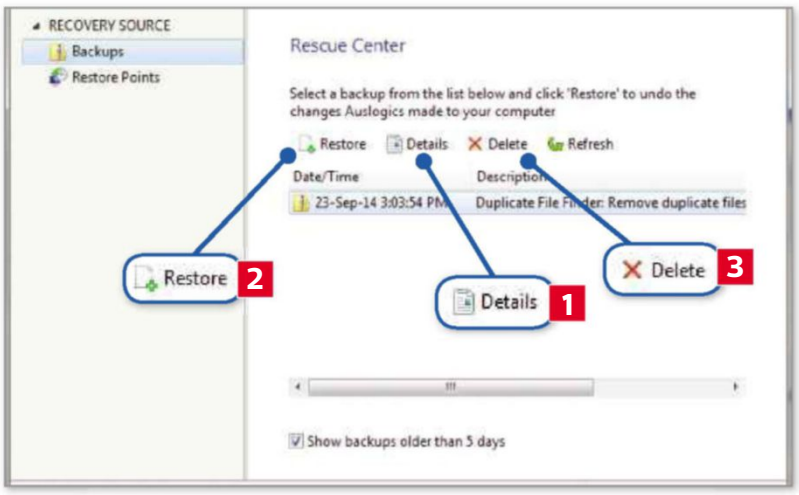
STEP 4 In the next step, untick both options 1 to find duplicates with the same name or created at the same time, then click Next 2. In the next step, select 'Search for all file names'. However, if you only want to search for duplicates of specific files, select 'File name contains the following:' and type their file names in quote marks in the box below, and add file extensions if you want. For example, to search for all photo files named England, type "england; england.jpg; england.jif" in the box. Click Next.



STEP 5 In the next step (5 of 5), tell ADFF what to do with duplicates that you delete (see Step 6). If you want the chance to restore some or all of your deleted duplicates later, select To Recycle Bin or 'To Rescue Center' 1. The Rescue Center option archives your deleted files in ADFF and lets you restore selected files to their original folders with one click. The Recycle Bin gives you far less control over restoring files. To delete duplicates from your PC for good, with no chance of restoring them, select Permanently. Once all your criteria have been set, click Search 2.

STEP 6 Once the search is complete, you'll see a list of all the original and duplicate files according to your criteria. We found over 1,000 duplicates that took up almost 2GB on our PC 1. Click any of the four columns (Name, Path, Size, Date Modified) to filter your search results. Click a file to see it in the Preview pane on the right. In the case of audio and video files, you'll see options to play them. Click Details 2 to see its file type, size and date you last opened it. To select all the duplicates without ticking them individually, click the dropdown menu beside Select 3 and click 'Select All Duplicates in Each Group'. To remove your selected duplicates, click Delete Selected Files, then OK.





STEP 7 Click OK when you see a notification confirming your files are deleted. If you selected Rescue Center in Step 5, you can recover all your deleted files. Click Rescue Center at the top right. Next, click Details 1 to see the files you've deleted. Click Restore 2 and then Yes to restore all your duplicates to their original folders. Once your files are restored, click OK. However, if you're sure you won't need these duplicates again, click Delete 3 and then OK.

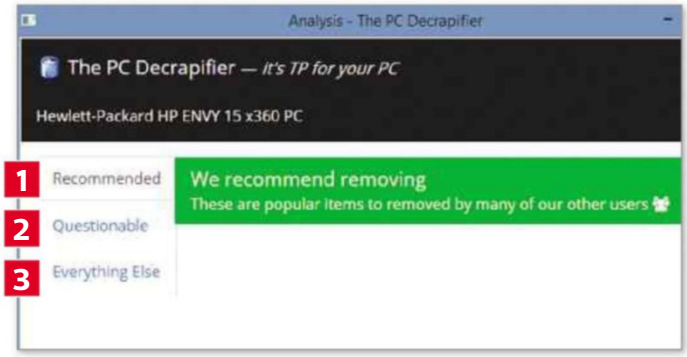
Wipe junk from a new PC

What you need: PC Decrapifier; Windows XP, 7, 8 or 8.1
Time required: 10 minutes

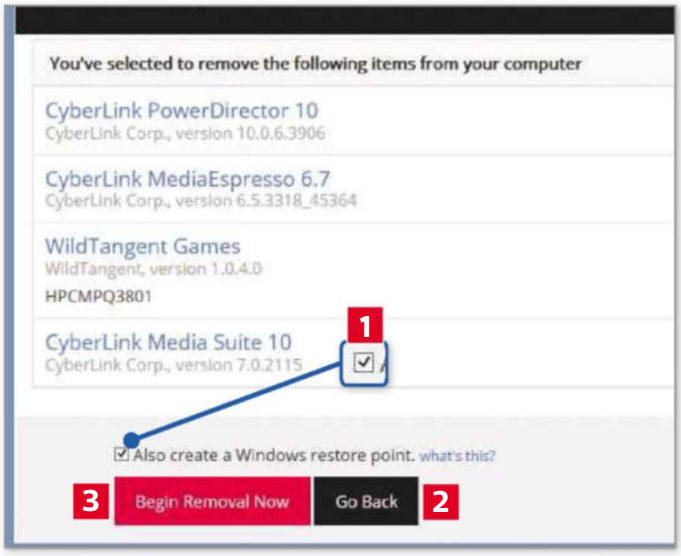
When you buy a new PC, it already has software on it. Manufacturers' pre-installed programs eat up space on your hard drive, slow down your computer and sometimes don't even appear in your list of installed programs.

PC Decrapifier is a free new tool that lets you batch-remove any software quickly and easily, including pre-installed junk that you can't remove via the Control Panel. It also lets you create a system restore point in case anything goes wrong. Run it on a brand new PC, and you could free up hundreds of MBs of space immediately. In this Workshop, we ran PC Decrapifier on a new Windows 8.1 HP Envy laptop that contained no software other than pre-installed programs.

STEP 1 Go to www.snipca.com/13825 and click the 'PC Decrapifier v3.0.0-BETA1' link to download a portable executable file. Click the file and click yes to run the program. In the program window, click Analyze to compile a list of all the software on the PC. When PC Decrapifier has received more feedback from users (it's currently in beta mode), your list will be divided into three sections: Recommended 1 (programs usually removed); Questionable 2 (programs often removed), and Everything Else 3. Currently, all programs are listed under Everything Else.



STEP 2 Click Everything Else to see your list. Because we ran PC Decrapifier on a brand new PC, all our programs were pre-installed, including space-hogging games and media suites. Click a program's name 1 to see more information about it on the PC Decrapifier website (www.pcdecrapifier.com), including the percentage of users who've uninstalled the program after it appeared in their PC Decrapifier list 2. If this figure is higher than 70 per cent, you're safe to remove the program. Don't uninstall anything required for your PC to function, such as system programs and drivers. Tick all the programs you want to uninstall and click Remove Selected 3 to start batch-uninstalling them.



STEP 3 In the window that opens, leave 'Also create a Windows restore point' ticked so that PC Decrapifier saves a full backup of your PC before it removes anything 1. To choose more programs to remove, click Go Back 2. Finally, click Begin Removal Now 3. By following these steps, we removed 600MB of pre-installed junk from a brand new PC in minutes. To see the 50 programs most frequently removed by PC Decrapifier users, go to www.snipca.com/13835.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 29 Oct

- Restore your PC from a virtual hard drive
- Add new pro effects to your video
- Sync email accounts on your tablet
- Remove junk before it crashes your PC

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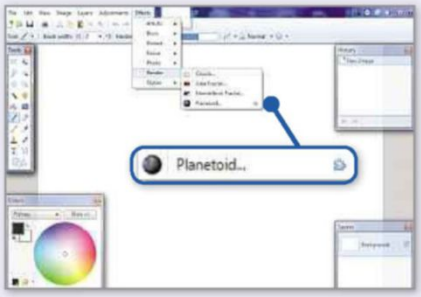
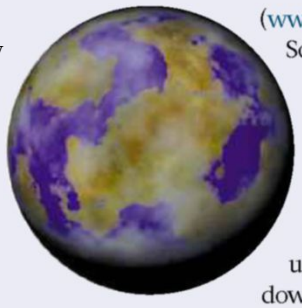
TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Make your own planets in Paint.NET

You were spot on to include Paint.NET in your list of the 20 Best Free Programs Ever (Issue 433), and I agree that the many plug-ins you can add make the software indispensable.

I'd like to recommend a new plug-in which has kept me entertained over the past month or so. It's called Planetoid, and it lets you quickly create planets, which is wonderful for an amateur astronomer like myself. In fact, it turns you into Slartibartfast, who – as Douglas Adams fans will know – was an award-winning planet-builder who helped to construct the Earth in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. You can customise planets just like he did, moving forests, mountains, clouds and more (though sadly, not Norwegian fjords).





You'll find the Planetoid plug-in on Paint.NET's forums (www.snipca.com/13896). Scroll down to the bottom of the first message, then click the 'Planetoid.zip' link to start downloading the plug-in. Once you've unzipped the download, copy the file 'Planetoid.dll' into your Paint.NET Effects folder and restart Paint.NET. Once that's done, click Effects, move your mouse over Render, then click Planetoid (see screenshot). It works on Paint.NET 3.5.11 and later.

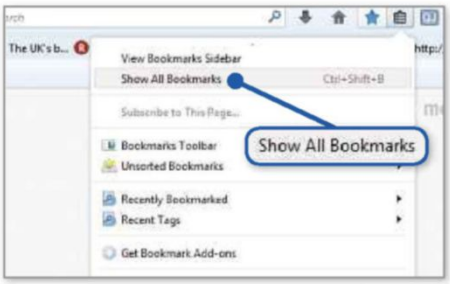
Martin Milne

The winner of every Tip of the Fortnight wins this exclusive Computeractive mug!

BROWSERS

Import bookmarks from Chrome to Firefox

After Chrome crashed on me for about the 10th time in a week, I made the decision to go back to using Firefox, which I last used about three years ago. This meant importing my bookmarks, which I thought would be a huge hassle. But not so. Mozilla gives you instructions on how to do it at www.snipca.com/13895, but I will summarise here.



First, in Firefox, click the Bookmarks button, then Show All Bookmarks (see screenshot, above) to open the Library windows. Next, click the 'Import and Backup' dropdown menu and select 'Import Data from Another Browser'. Select Chrome (or Internet Explorer, if that's what you want to do), then which information you want to import – cookies, browsing history and bookmarks. I think it's wise to import all three, even cookies. They get a bad press, but most cookies are perfectly safe, and make browsing the web much easier. Click Next.

To find your imported bookmarks in Firefox, click the Bookmarks button, hover your mouse over Bookmarks Toolbar, then click From Google Chrome.

Simon Evans

EMAIL

Turn on spellcheck in Outlook 2013

Thanks for that tip in Make Office Better (Issue 433) that explained how to get reminders in Outlook 2013 when it suspects you may have forgotten to attach a file to an email you're about to send. I do this a lot, much to my embarrassment (and my son's amusement!).

While I was setting this up in the Backstage view of Outlook 2013, I spotted another box I should tick: 'Always check spelling before sending'. My aforementioned son is an English teacher, so he often gives me detention for spelling errors in my email.

To get to the Backstage view in Outlook 2013, click File, Options, Mail. You'll see the spelling tickbox near the top.

Derek Reynolds

WEBSITE

Access Microsoft's services through new MSN portal

I bet lots of readers remember when companies tried to get us to access the web through the so-called 'walled gardens' of web portals. It was a time before Facebook, YouTube and Twitter (maybe a better age?). Anyway, I want to recommend Microsoft's revamped MSN portal (www.msn.com) because it has useful shortcuts to Outlook, Office and OneDrive, which work once you sign in with your Microsoft account. Because of this, I've changed it to the first page my browser (Chrome) loads.

I also use the portal as a quick 'at a glance' look at what's in the news. I would advise people to customise it to add subjects they're interested in. Do this by clicking My Topics next to News (see screenshot, below), then clicking Follow New Topics and typing a topic.

I think the portal is still in beta, so there may be a few glitches – though it's worked perfectly well for me over the past few weeks.

Colin Palmerston

Phone and Tablet Tips Brilliant things to do on your device

ANDROID

Use OneDrive's new photo-sharing options

Microsoft's OneDrive has changed how you access and share your photos. Open the app (www.snipca.com/13920), tap 'Sign in' and log into your account. Next, tap 'Turn on' to automatically back up the photos and videos on your device to OneDrive. Doing this adds 15GB of free space to your account. Tap the three lines at the top left to see your sections – Files contains every folder saved to your account, while Photos contains all your backed-up images. Tap 'Recent documents' or Shared to access these.

To share multiple photos, tap Photos, then tap and hold a photo you want to share until it's highlighted. Next, tap the other photos you want to share. Tap the Share icon at the bottom then tap 'Share a link' (see screenshot, right) to create a link to these photos. Select 'View' and then tap OK. Finally, tap the app you want to use to share these photos.

ANDROID

Create your own personal magazine

Last year Google merged Google Currents and Google Magazines into one app – Play Newsstand. The app features news, blogs and magazines you can subscribe to and save to read offline. It recently received a major redesign in keeping with Google's new 'Material Design', which is to be a feature of its next mobile operating system (called Android L).

Open the app (www.snipca.com/13921). to see the top news stories under Highlights. Swipe right to access your other topics (Sports, World, Technology and so on). To remove a topic from the app, navigate to it, then tap the three dots at the top right and tap 'Remove topic'.

To make an article available offline, tap it to open it and then tap the Bookmark icon in its top-right corner. You can access offline articles by tapping the three lines at the top left and then Bookmarks.

Tap the three lines, then tap My Library to see three specific categories: News is the news channels you've subscribed to, Magazines are digital magazines you've bought, and Topics are the news topics you've added to your app. To add more topics, swipe to Topics and then tap Add More.

If you've subscribed to magazines via Google Play, you'll see them in the My Magazines section (also accessed by tapping the three lines). These magazines are available offline by default.

ANDROID

Export Dropbox files to your SD card

The latest update to Dropbox (www.snipca.com/13923) lets you export files to your SD card. This is great if you have limited storage space on your Dropbox account. It's also a great way to transfer data from one device to another.

Open the app and long-press any file that you want to export. Next, tap Export

Best New Apps What you should install this fortnight

Sky Guide: View Stars Night or Day

£1.49

iOS: www.snipca.com/13924

Following a huge update, this is now the first app that notifies you when meteor showers and eclipses are due to take place. Swipe left across satellites (such as the ISS) to set reminders for when they are going to pass overhead. You can also view the sky up to 10,000 years in the future or past.

Viber

Free

Android: www.snipca.com/13925

iOS: www.snipca.com/13926

Viber now lets you make free video calls over cellular and Wi-Fi networks. Tap a contact to begin calling them and then tap Video to start a video call. It also has a new Desktop program, which you can download from www.viber.com. It's a great alternative to Skype.

Camera 51

Free

Android: www.snipca.com/13927

Camera 51 helps you take better photos by telling you where to point your device's camera. Open the app and focus on the object you want to capture. Next, move your camera until it overlaps with the phone icon at the centre of the screen and then take your photo.

to see the different options, then tap SD Card. Unfortunately, you can't batch-export multiple files.

IOS

Install and use SwiftKey on your iOS device

SwiftKey Keyboard (www.snipca.com/13922) - see Best New Apps, Issue 433 – is the best free third-party keyboard for iOS. However, unlike on Android devices where you just install the app and start using it, iOS 8 requires a few extra steps before you can use it.

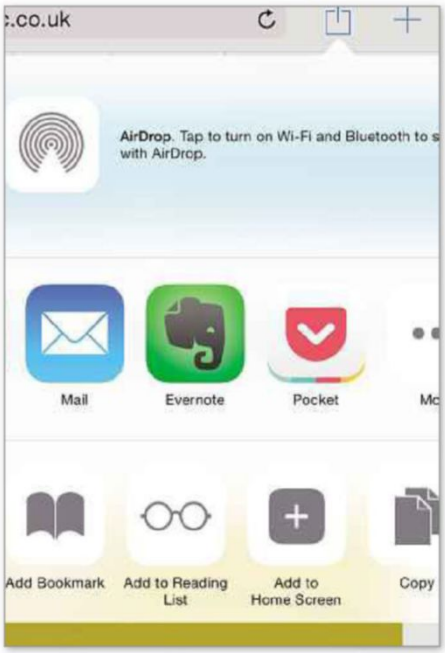
To activate SwiftKey Keyboard after you've installed it, tap Settings, General, Keyboard and then Keyboards. Next, tap Add New Keyboard, then SwiftKey. Tap 'SwiftKey - SwiftKey', then tap the slider beside Allow Full Access and then Allow to confirm this.

Next, open an app that requires the keyboard to type (such as Mail or Evernote). You'll still see your iOS 8 keyboard. Tap and hold the globe icon at the bottom left (see screenshot, above)and then tap SwiftKey Multiple Languages. You'll now be able to use SwiftKey. The only occasion your keyboard will revert to the default iOS 8 keyboard is when you enter passwords into websites, because Apple considers this is a safer option.

IOS

Save web articles to third-party apps

In iOS 8, you can save any article you read on Safari to any third-party apps that support this, so long as they're installed on your device. You can use this to read articles offline by saving them to apps like Evernote and Pocket. To do this, first open Safari, navigate to an article that you want to save and then tap the Share icon at the top. In the Share menu, you'll the Messages and Mail app, but you'll also see a new More option. Tap More, then tap the sliders beside all the third-party apps that you want to add to the Share menu and finally tap Done. You can now save your articles to those apps by tapping them after tapping the Share icon. For more iOS 8 tips see page 48.



Games With Kids

What to play together on your phone and tablet

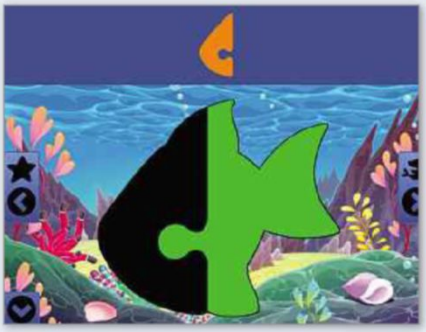
AGES 0-5

101 Animal Puzzles for Kids

£1.25 www.snipca.com/13928 (Android)

£1.49 www.snipca.com/13929 (iOS)

Choose from nine animal puzzle categories (including pets, riverside, dinosaurs) and seven difficulty levels. Upon successfully completing the puzzle, the animal makes a sound. You can modify the settings to automatically increase the difficulty level as your child improves.



AGES 6-10

Outworded (Word Search)

Free www.snipca.com/13930 (iOS)

This new word-search game will keep your child entertained for hours. Challenge them in multiplayer mode to see who can find the most words within a specific time or switch the timer off to see who can find all the words fastest. There are three difficulty levels and three timer settings.

AGES 11-16

Brain Wars

Free www.snipca.com/13931 (Android)

Free www.snipca.com/13932 (iOS)

This is a fun compendium of 10 games aimed at improving your teenager's maths skills, memory and concentration. We loved Operations in which you solve maths problems by tapping the right arithmetic symbol within a set time. You can also play these games in multiplayer mode.

Make Windows Better

Clever tips for every version

WINDOWS 7

Use checkboxes to batch-select multiple items

You can batch-select multiple items on your PC by pressing Ctrl and clicking the items you want. But if you'd rather have checkboxes on items to batch-select them (instead of pressing Ctrl), there's a nifty setting hidden within Windows Explorer to add them.

Click the Organize dropdown menu at the top left and then click 'Folder and search options'. Now click the View tab, scroll down and tick 'Use check boxes to select items'. Click Apply and then OK. Every item on your PC will get checkboxes at their top-right corner when you move your cursor to them. Tick the checkboxes of the items you want to batch-select, then right-click any of the selected items and choose what you want to do (Cut, Copy, Delete, etc).

WINDOWS XP

Customise your XP toolbar

There's an easy, little-known way to customise the Windows XP toolbar. The options on your toolbar (which are called 'buttons') are usually Back, Front, Up (to the previous folder), Search Folders and View, but you can add more buttons and even remove existing ones.

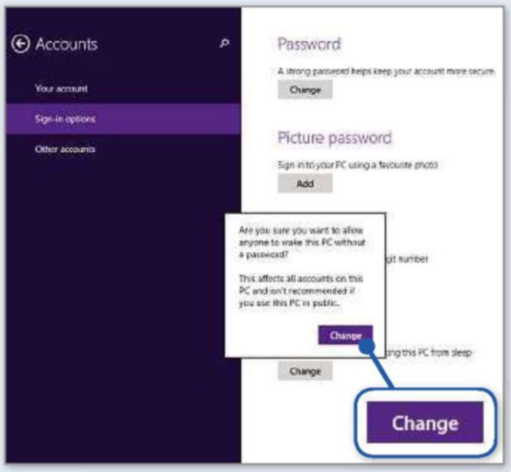
Right-click any empty area on the toolbar and then click Customize. You'll see a Customise Toolbar window listing all the available toolbar buttons on the left and your current toolbar buttons on the right, separated by Add and Remove options in the middle (see screenshot, below). To add buttons from the Available column to your toolbar, click the button you want from the left and then click Add. To remove buttons, click the button you want to remove on the right and then click Remove.

To change the order of a button on the toolbar, click that button on the right and then click Move Up or Move Down. To change where text appears on your toolbar (above, below or at the side of its icon) and your toolbar icon size, click the dropdown menus below.

WINDOWS XP, VISTA, 7, 8, 8.1

Avoid typing your password when your PC wakes up

We highly recommend setting a password for your Windows PC. But it's annoying having to type this whenever you need to wake it from Sleep mode. Thankfully, there's an easy way to avoid this, but the process to activate it is slightly different on each version of Windows.



In Windows 7, click the Start button, Control Panel, 'Hardware and Sound' and then click 'Require a password when the computer wakes' (below the Power Options). Now click the 'Change settings that are currently unavailable' link. Select 'Don't require a password' and finally click 'Save changes'.

In Windows 8.1, go to the Modern tile-interface, move your cursor to the bottom right of the screen to access your Charms bar and then click Settings. Now click 'Change PC settings' at the bottom. Click Account at the left, 'Sign-in options' (also on the left) and Change (below 'Password policy'). Finally, click Change again to confirm your decision – see screenshot.

In Windows Vista, the process is rather long-winded. Open Power Options in Control Panel. Now click the 'Change plan settings' link beside your selected power plan. Next, click the 'Change advanced power settings' link at the bottom and then click the 'Change settings that are currently unavailable' link. Finally, click both the dropdown menus below 'Require a password on wakeup' – 'On battery' and 'Plugged in' – changing them to No. Click Apply.

In Windows XP, it's much simpler. Open Power Options in Control Panel. Now click the Advanced tab and untick the 'Prompt for password when computer resumes from standby' box. Click Apply and then OK.

WINDOWS 8, 8.1

Add a customised section to the News app

In Issue 430 Make Windows Better, we showed you how to add different news sources to the News app in Windows 8.1.

However, there are several more ways you can customise the app, one of which is creating and adding your own customised news sections. In this example, we'll create and add a news section for UK politics.

Navigate to the Modern tile-interface and open the app. Now scroll to the extreme right and then click Customise MSN News. You'll see the different news sections (Top Stories, Our News Sources, UK, World, Sport etc.) in the order in which they appear in the app.

To create your news section, click Topics at the bottom left, type politics and click the correct autosuggest option. Scroll to the right to see it added as a section.

To reorder where this appears within your News app, click and drag it wherever you want. To delete a section from the app, click the X on it.

POWERPOINT

Create items that link to other slides when clicked

Every item that you add to PowerPoint (such as images, shapes, text, etc) can be hyperlinked to other parts of your presentation and even be used to play a sound. You can choose one of these 'actions' to take place when you click the item and the other when you move your cursor over it during your slideshow.

In this example, we'll show you how to make a shape play an applause sound when we move our cursor over it and link to the last slide in our presentation when we click it.

To insert a shape, click the Insert tab, the Shape dropdown menu (in the Illustrations section), and select a shape you want. Click your cursor at a point where you want to insert the shape into your slide and drag your cursor to extend your shape in that direction.

To add an action to the shape, click the shape and then click Actions (also in the Insert tab, in the Links section). It'll open in the Mouse Click tab. To hyperlink to the last slide, select 'Hyperlink to', click the dropdown menu and select 'Last slide' (see screenshot). Now click the Mouse Over tab, tick 'Play sound', click the dropdown menu below it and then click Applause. Click OK.

Start your slideshow and wait for the slide with the shape. Now move your cursor over the shape to hear the applause sound effect. Click it to jump to the last slide.

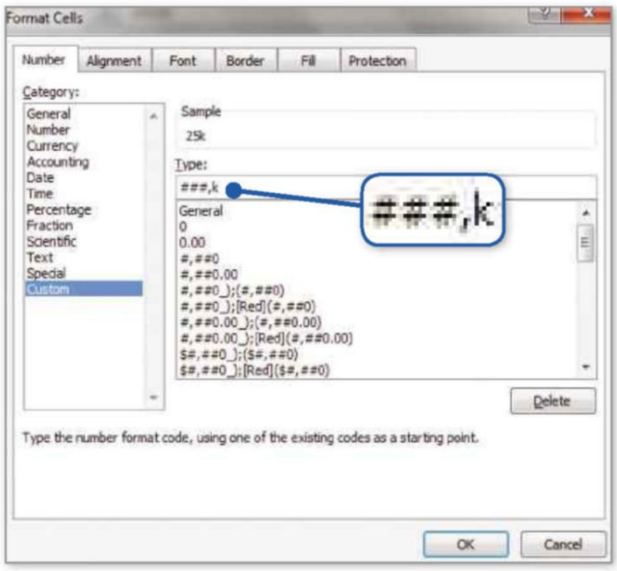
EXCEL

Round large values to the nearest thousand or million

If you have a spreadsheet with values in thousands (or millions), it's easy to round them up to the nearest thousand (or million) to make your numbers appear neater. The number 24,539 will appear as 25k and 2,357,890 as 3m.

To do this, highlight the column whose numbers you want to round up. Next, right-click the column and then click Format Cells. Now click Custom, which is the last option in the Category section at the left. Delete General from the Type box and type `###,k` (to round the entire section to the nearest thousand) or `###,m` (to round it to the nearest million) and then click OK.

The format only changes how the numbers appear in your spreadsheet. It doesn't change their value within the cell, so you can still use these rounded off numbers to make further calculations within Excel if you need to.



ONENOTE

Change your notebook colour

If you want to change your notebook colour in OneNote 2010 or 2013, click the File tab at the top left, then click the Settings dropdown menu and click Properties. In the Notebook Properties dialogue box, click the dropdown menu beside Color and choose one of the available options.

If you want to change the notebook display name, click that field and change it to whatever you want. This will only change the display name within OneNote. It won't change the OneNote folder name where your files are saved (if it's saved in OneDrive, for example).

OneNote 2013 files can be accessed on OneNote 2010, but not on OneNote 2007. You can convert files to be compatible with OneNote 2007, though this only works with offline files. Therefore, if you've synced your account to OneNote Online it won't work. To use offline OneNote 2013 files with OneNote 2007, click the 'Convert to 2007' button and then OK.

WORD

Expand and collapse sections of text

Using Word 2013, you can easily create sections of text that expand and collapse, which is handy when you want to break large chunks of text into smaller, digestible sections.

To do this you'll need to first break your text into sections and give each one a two-word title/intro. The trick is to convert these two-word titles into Headings. To do this, highlight a section title, click the Style dropdown menu at the right and select Heading 1. Do this for all the titles.

Now whenever you move your cursor over a Heading, you'll see a small dropdown arrow (collapsible menu) to its left. Click it and your text will collapse revealing the next heading below it. Click it again to see text within that Heading.

If this doesn't work, it's because you've changed your default viewing mode. Click the View tab and then click Print Layout (the second option from the left) because Headings only work in this mode.

iOS 8

Retrieve deleted photos, search in private, and add widgets to your iPad or iPhone

Switch to a more private search engine

iOS 8 lets you change your default search engine in Safari. One of the pre-installed search engines you can switch to is DuckDuckGo, which makes privacy its top priority. Unlike Google, it doesn't log your search history, target you with advertising or collect and share your personal information. All this, while providing accurate search results. To set it as your default search engine, tap Settings, scroll to Safari in the left-hand pane, tap it, tap Search Engine in the right pane and then select DuckDuckGo.

Send audio messages

The Messages app has had a big overhaul in iOS 8 and one of its more exciting additions is audio messages. Just tap and hold the microphone symbol at the bottom right and then speak your message. As you hold the microphone symbol, a radial menu appears. Swipe up to send the recording straight away, swipe left to delete it, or let go of the symbol to listen to the message you've just recorded.

Find lost photos and recover deleted ones

You can now recover photos you've accidentally deleted from your device. iOS 8 does this by retaining them in a Recently Deleted folder, which is similar to the Recycle Bin on your PC. Bear in mind that the new iOS 8 Photos app doesn't instantly show you all your photos as in previous versions, so don't think your old photos are gone if you don't see them. Tap Albums in the bottom-right corner of the Photos app to see all your photos, as well as your Recently Deleted folder. Tap this to see all the photos you've recently deleted. You'll see a notification with each photo telling you how many days are left before it's deleted permanently (a maximum of 30 days by default).

Add widgets for your favourite apps

One of iOS's most overdue features finally arrives: the option to use widgets. Unlike Android widgets, which are on the home screen, iOS 8 widgets are in the Notification Center. To access them, swipe down from the top of the screen. Tap the Today tab on the left to see Apple's default widget options, such as Calendar and Weather. Below that, you'll see all the apps on your device for which there are unused widgets. Tap the green '+' symbol next to the apps to add their widgets to your Notification Center. To remove widgets, tap the red '–' symbol.

Tap the green '+' symbols or red '–' symbols to add or remove widgets

Save battery power and reduce eye strain

iOS 8 offers a new Grayscale mode, which replaces colours from its display with various shades of grey. According to Apple, this extends your phone's battery life and also makes the screen less of a strain on your eyes. To activate this, tap Settings, General, Accessibility, then Grayscale.

Another way to save battery life is to use the new Battery Usage screen, which tells you the amount of power each app uses in percentage terms. Tap Settings, General, Usage, then Battery Usage to see how much each app has drained your device's battery in the last day and week.

The Battery Usage screen lets you identify the biggest battery hogs

Find your device after its battery is dead

Apple has improved the 'Find My iPhone/iPad' feature in iOS 8. This is used to track your device's location on a map using another Apple device or your PC. Previously, there wasn't much you could do to track your device if it's battery had run out. In iOS 8, however, you can set your device to send its last known location to your Apple account just before the battery dies. Tap Settings, iCloud, Find My iPhone/iPad, then tap Send Last Location.

To track your device, log into www.icloud.com/#find with your Apple ID from another Apple device or PC, click All Devices, then the device you've lost. Your device's location will be indicated by a circle on a map. A green circle indicates it's still on, while a grey circle indicates this was your device's last known location.

Switch on Send Last Location to locate your lost device after its battery has run out

Next issue Secret Tips For... Firefox

Kindle Unlimited

Amazon now wants to be the Netflix of books. We explain how its new ebook subscription service works

What is it?

Amazon's new digital library service is to ebooks what Netflix is to films and what Spotify is to music. For £7.99 a month, you can borrow up to 10 ebooks and audiobooks at a time from a huge selection of 650,000. The service works on any Kindle or any device with the Kindle app installed, including Android tablets and phones (www.snipca.com/13834), iPads, iPhones and Windows Phone devices.

Can I try it out for free?

Yes, Amazon offers a 30-day trial (www.snipca.com/13824). However, as with Amazon Prime, you'll need to enter your payment information before signing up, and you'll automatically be charged in the following month if you don't cancel your subscription.

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That still leaves plenty to choose from though. Some of the best-known books on Kindle Unlimited include *The Life of Pi*, the *Harry Potter* series and *Slaughterhouse Five*. At the moment, most Kindle Unlimited books are by self-published authors, which doesn't mean you won't have heard of them. Many self-published authors have reached the bestsellers lists, including Hugh Howey, JA Konrath and Barry Eisler, all of whom publish their books exclusively on Amazon.

Is this the first ever ebook library?

There are similar services out there. Scribd (www.scribd.com) is available in the UK for $8.99 (£5.50) a month, boasts around 500,000 ebooks and isn't being boycotted by major publishers.

What's more, you may not realise that you can borrow ebooks from your local library, without even having to leave your house. Most of the UK's public libraries now let you borrow ebooks for free from the comfort of your home PC. The most common platform that libraries use is OverDrive (http://app.overdrive.com), a program or app that you can download to your PC, Android tablet or phone, iPad or iPhone. Sign up using your local library membership details to gain access to its ebook collection, completely free. So it might be worth seeing what your library has to offer before you commit to Kindle Unlimited.

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Hack THE WINDOWS REGISTRY

STEP BY STEP

Your PC's Registry may be intimidating, but you're in control. **Jane Hoskyn** explains how to speed up and transform your computer by editing the Registry - quickly and safely

You know the Registry – it's that thing you're not supposed to touch. This mysterious nerve centre is where all your PC settings live, apparently on a knife-edge. So the received wisdom goes, tinkering with the Registry is about as wise as doing your own brain surgery.

We trot out this message regularly, and for good reason. If you edit or delete Registry files without knowing what they do (or indeed what you're doing), elements of Windows may simply stop working. You could even render your computer unusable.

KEY POINTS

- Back up your Registry by creating a system restore point
- Know your way around Registry Editor
- Edit the Registry safely and quickly
- Speed up your PC
- Transform your Desktop
- Make Windows work your way

Why risk it?

Tweaking the wrong Registry files can be cataclysmic, but tweaking the right ones in the right way could be the best thing that ever happened to your PC. We think editing the Registry is more like riding a motorbike than DIY surgery: potentially hazardous, but do it carefully and you'll love the freedom and speed it delivers.

You've already had plenty of practice in the Control Panel. In fact, the Control Panel is a component of the Registry – the friendly tip of the iceberg. Every time you change your Desktop settings, uninstall a program or change a file association, you're indirectly editing the Registry.

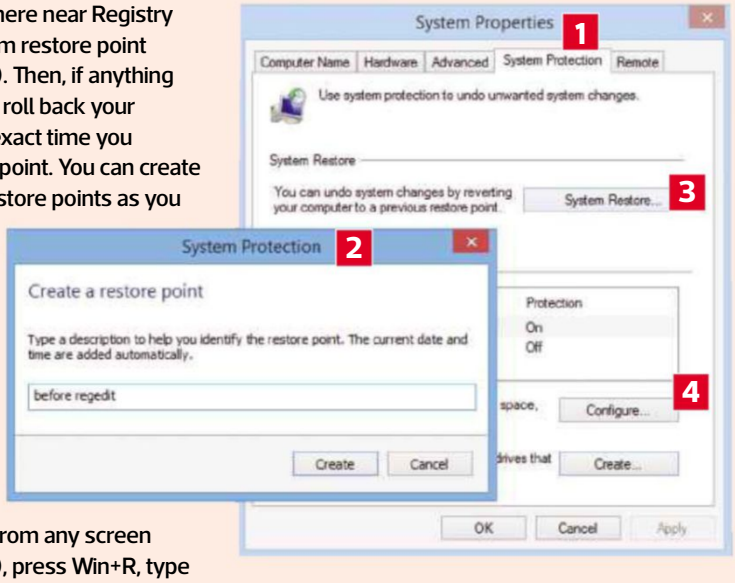
But there are many settings you can't change in the Control Panel, and for these you'll have to dig deeper into the iceberg. Here you'll find the really powerful settings that speed up your computer, transform your Desktop and make Windows do your bidding. The Registry is the Control Panel for adults.

Over the next few pages we'll show you how to edit the Registry safely and quickly using Windows' built-in Registry Editor. Then we'll reveal the nine most useful Registry edits we think you can make.

First, we'll show you how to insure your PC against Registry accidents by creating a system restore point. This is something we mention a lot in *Computeractive*, but rarely go into much detail about, so here we'll outline the process step by step.

BEFORE YOU START: BACK UP THE REGISTRY FIRST

Before you go anywhere near Registry Editor, create a system restore point (full Registry backup). Then, if anything goes wrong, you can roll back your PC's settings to the exact time you created your restore point. You can create and save as many restore points as you want (hard-drive space permitting), and roll back to whichever one you choose.



1 To create a new restore point, go to the System Protection tab in System Properties. To get there quickly from any screen (Windows 7 or 8/8.1), press Win+R, type sysdm.cpl and click OK.

2 Click Create at the bottom right to open the System Protection box. Type a name for your restore point (the date will be added for you) and click Create. Wait a minute or two while your restore point is created.

3 To roll back your PC's settings to a restore point, click System Restore, click Next, then click a restore point. All your saved restore points are listed here, along with those created automatically by Windows.

4 System Restore is allocated limited hard-drive space. Once that space is full, your oldest restore points are deleted. Click Configure to delete other points or increase the allocated space.

KNOW YOUR WAY AROUND REGISTRY EDITOR

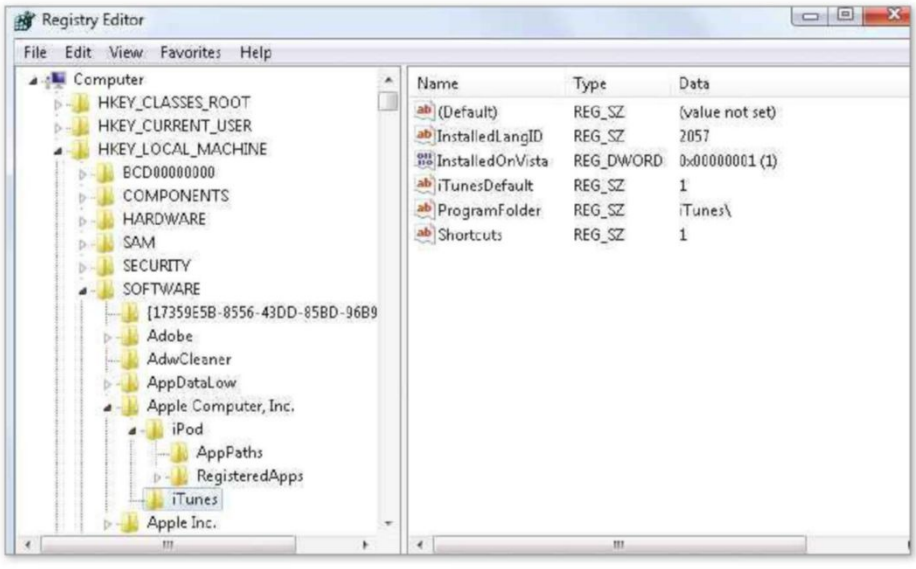
Find and open Regedit

You won't find Windows' built-in Registry editor – imaginatively called Registry Editor (Regedit for short) – in your Start menu or All Programs list. It's hidden away, quite sensibly, so that users don't stumble across it and start tinkering with its contents out of curiosity.

To open it, type regedit in the Start box or on your Start screen, click 'regedit.exe' in the list of results, then click Yes. You can also launch it from the Run dialogue box by pressing Win+R and typing regedit. This works in both Windows 7 and Windows 8/8.1.

The program window initially looks similar to Windows Explorer, with a tree of folders that you can click to open sub-folders, and files inside the folders. In Registry jargon these folders are called keys, and they contain data files and values. The top level of keys (the five that start 'HKEY') are root keys (also known as hives), and the keys inside them are sub-keys. Click any key, and the values and other data it contains will appear in the pane on the right.

Values are the Registry's brain cells. They dictate everything that your PC does. If you change one of these values, you change something (potentially anything) on your PC.



The Registry is arranged into keys and values, which are essentially folders and files

Back up, and back up again

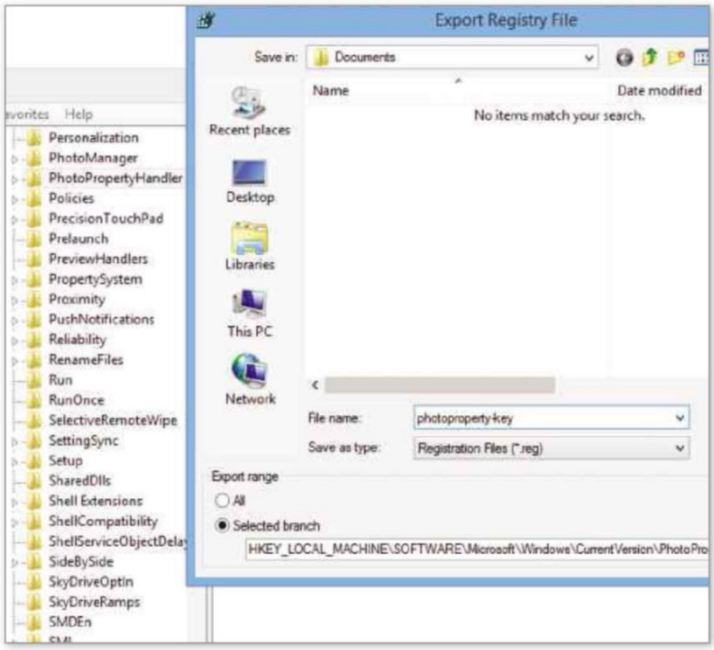
Most Registry edits take effect on your PC instantly. There's no Undo option and certainly no Ctrl+Z to save you if you accidentally click the wrong thing. In many cases you can't simply re-create an item you've deleted, either.

If things go wrong you can roll back to the restore point that you made (if you haven't made one, go back and do it now – it takes seconds), but restoring the Registry is an intensive process, and it isn't something you should inflict on your PC every day.

Before you change any value in the Registry, you can create a mini-backup by exporting a copy of the key that contains it. This saves a Registration file (REG, with the file extension '.reg') that you can import back into Regedit later to restore the key's original values. To back up any key, right-click it, click Export, type a name into the 'File name' box and click Save. Save a second copy of all your exported REG files to the cloud or an external hard drive for safekeeping.

Only ever use key exports as a secondary backup. They're no substitute for restore points. It's quicker to import a saved REG file into your Registry than to roll back to a restore point, but it's fiddly and doesn't always work. Here's a brief guide to importing and exporting REG files: www.snipca.com/13945.

Prevention is better than cure when it comes to tinkering with your PC. Create ▶



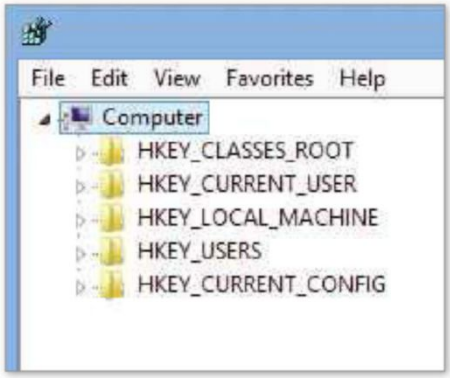
Export a Registry key as an extra backup before changing any values

backups and back up your backups, but do not edit or delete any key or value in Regedit until you're absolutely sure what it is and what will happen as a result.

Follow the key path

All the Registry hacks we describe over the next few pages start in the same way, so we won't repeat ourselves. In each case, open Regedit and click one of the root keys ('HKEY...'). To avoid spelling out the entire root key name each time, we'll refer to them by the last word in their name: ROOT, USER, MACHINE, USERS and CONFIG. We'll give you a path of sub-keys to click in turn, then show you which values to edit, add or delete.

We tested all our hacks on Windows 7 and Windows 8.1, and many will also work in Vista and even XP. But different PCs have different configurations, and keys that appear on some computers may not appear on others. So occasionally you may find yourself at a dead end, unable to find the key or value we're talking about. This happened to us when trying out a couple of well-established Registry hacks, and it was maddening – but there is a simple fix that works in most cases, as we'll reveal on page 53.



Every Registry edit starts from a root key ('HKEY')

3 REGISTRY CHANGES THAT SPEED UP YOUR PC

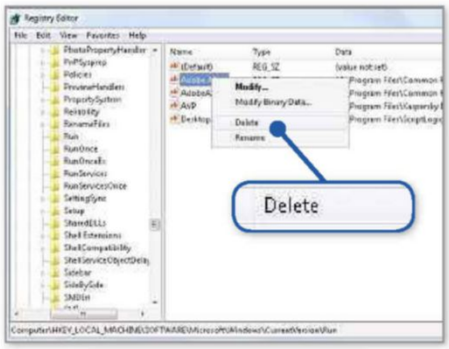
Make Windows start up faster

If you have time to make a cup of tea and read the newspaper between switching on your PC and being able to use it, your Windows startup is too slow.

A likely reason, especially if you've had your computer for a while, is that there are too many programs and processes clogging up your list of startup items. All these items start automatically with Windows, so your processor is working too hard from the moment you switch your computer on.

The only program that needs to start with Windows is your antivirus. You can clear all the others with a startup-manager like Autoruns (www.snipca.com/13894), but there's a simple Registry tweak that does the same job instantly, and without clogging up your PC with yet more software.

After creating a system restore point, open Regedit and go to the root key that ends with MACHINE. Click the little arrow to its left to open it and see its sub-keys. Click the arrow next to the sub-key Software, then the arrow next to its sub-key Microsoft, and so on with the sub-keys Windows and CurrentVersion. Finally, click the sub-key Run. (In future we'll write this as: Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run.)



Delete a program's value in the Run key to stop it running automatically at startup

Export a backup of the Run key by clicking File, Export and saving the REG file. Now look at the list of items in the right-hand pane. These should include startup items such as your antivirus (look for AVP in the Name column, and the program's maker in the folder string under Data) along with update installers and drivers that you can't find easily in the Control Panel.

Leave your antivirus and drivers alone, along with anything you can't identify. Update installers can safely be excluded from startup, but you should enable them once your system is up and running. If in doubt about any item, search for it on Google and in your Start menu.

To remove a program from the list, right-click its value file and click Delete. This doesn't uninstall the program from your PC, just prevents it running at startup.

Make Windows shut down faster

Windows Update may be important, but it tends to get in the way when you least want it to – such as when you're switching off your computer before bed.

To switch off immediately rather than wait for interminable updates to install,

A quick Registry hack can give you an alternative to 'Install updates and shut down'

add a new value to the Registry. This new value won't kill Windows Update, but it will give you the option to just 'Shut down' in addition to 'Install updates and shut down' (or 'Update and shut down' in Windows 8/8.1, where software updates seem to be a daily occurrence).

Go to the root key that ends in USER (not USERS), then follow the path: Software\Policies\Microsoft\Windows\WindowsUpdate and click the AU key. If you can't find the WindowsUpdate or AU keys, see 'What If You Can't Find a Key?' (right) for a solution.

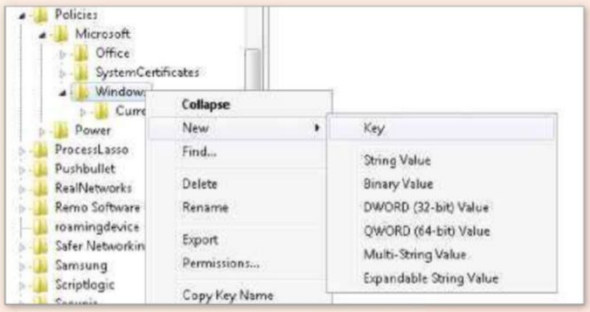
Once you've got to AU (which stands for Automatic Update), click it and create a new value. Right-click in the blank area of the right-hand pane, click New and click 'DWORD (32-bit) Value'. Unfortunately, you can't give your brand new value a simple, easily memorable name. Instead, you have to name it 'NoAUAsDefaultShutdownOption'. Type this in the filename field, capitals and lower-case letters intact (but no quote marks), and press Enter. Now, double-click your new value so that the 'Edit DWORD' window opens, and change the

WHAT IF YOU CAN'T FIND A KEY?

When we tried changing the Registry to make Windows shut down faster, we hit a dead end after following the path Software\Policies\Microsoft\Windows. Neither our Windows 7 nor our Windows 8.1 computer had a Windows Update sub-key, let alone an AU key.

First we tried searching for the errant keys by pressing Ctrl+F (Find) in Regedit, unticking Values and Data (just leaving Keys ticked) and running a search for WindowsUpdate and AU. You can use the Find box to search for any Registry item, or for an entire key path.

Sadly our search was fruitless. After headbutting



our desk a few times in frustration, we realised that we could simply create the key. First we exported a backup of the Windows key (using the path above). Then we right-clicked it, clicked New, then Key (see screenshot) and typed WindowsUpdate in the folder name field. Next, we right-clicked the new WindowsUpdate key and used the same process to create an AU key.

This key-creating fix doesn't work for all Registry dead ends. For example, if a key or value relates to an installed program that you don't have, or a feature your PC doesn't support, your new key won't do a thing. If you go creating keys and values willy-nilly you may do serious damage to your operating system.

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'Value data' from '0' to '1'. Click OK.

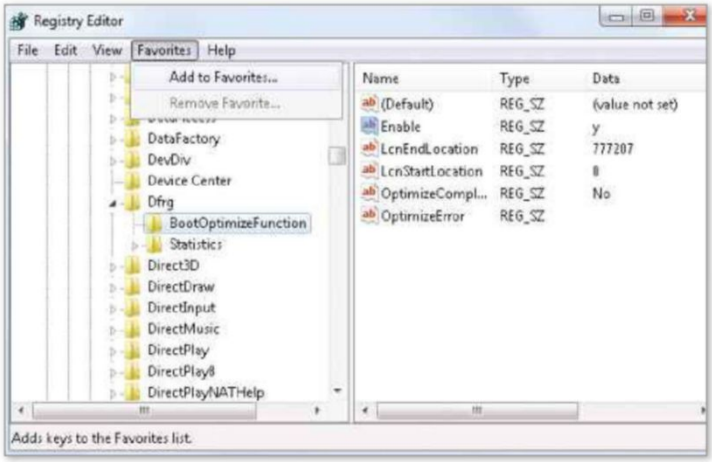
Next time you go to shut down your PC and you see 'Install updates and shut down', you should also see a plain old 'Shut down' option.

Proviso: you don't need us to tell you that system and software updates are vital for your PC's safety (very few updates are about new features – they usually patch new security flaws), so don't put off installing updates every time you shut down. As soon as you have time (or battery power, if you're using a laptop) to let Windows install its updates, select 'Install updates and shut down'.

Clean your PC with a boot defrag

Defragging (defragmenting) tidies up the space on your computer's hard drive so that Windows can find data on it more quickly, so it's one of the best ways to speed up your PC. A boot defrag is a super-charged defrag, doing its work before any other processes (including Windows) start running, so it's able to include files that Windows normally locks.

Some free defragging tools, such as the open-source program UltraDefrag (www.snipca.com/13902), have boot defrag options. This is a great choice if you want lots of features or you're not comfortable with Registry editing. But let's assume that you are comfortable with it (given that you've read this far), so here's how to set a boot defrag from Regedit, without installing any software at all.



Save your frequently used keys in your Regedit Favorites to save lots of scrolling

From the MACHINE root key, go to Software\Microsoft\Dfrg\ Boot OptimizeFunction. If your PC supports defrag, you'll see Enable in the list on the right. If it's set to 'y', your PC is already set to defrag when it boots. If it's set to 'n', double-click Enable and change the 'Value data' to 'y'. Restart your PC to run the boot defrag.

If you haven't defragged your PC for quite a while, the boot defrag can take a few hours, so make this Registry edit and restart your PC last thing at night.

Having your PC set to run automatic boot defrags improves its performance, but comes at the cost of your startup time, so you probably won't want this option enabled all the time. You can enable and disable it by changing the BootOptimizeFunction Enable value. To save you the hassle of ploughing through the same key path every time, save BootOptimizeFunction to your Regedit Favorites. Click the key, click Favorites and click 'Add to Favorites'. You can edit its name in the box before clicking OK, just as when you're saving a browser bookmark – particularly useful when you're saving this and other keys that have 20-character tongue-twisters for names. To access it later, click Favorites in the Regedit menu bar.

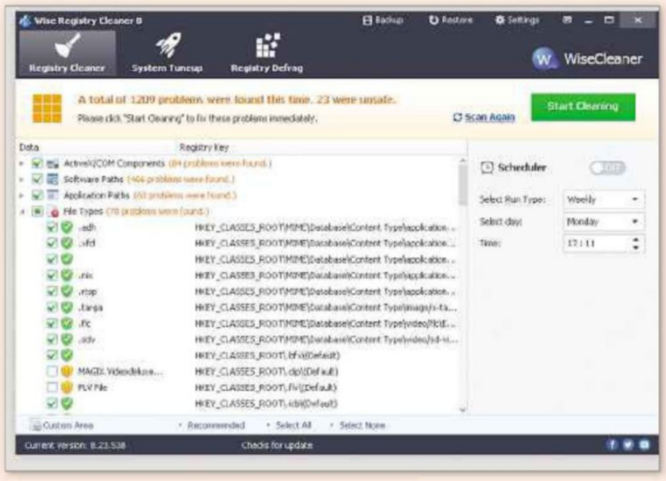
CLEAN THE REGISTRY TO SPEED UP YOUR PC

One of the great advantages of the Registry is that it doesn't involve downloading any software (see page 58 for more alternatives to software). This means that you can change your PC's features quickly and simply, without creating any hard-drive clutter. Or can you?

Actually, the Registry is one of your PC's prime clutter culprits. Every time you uninstall a program or change something in Windows, redundant Registry settings get left behind. Over time, these leftovers build up and slow down your PC, and removing them can do wonders for its performance and reliability.

To give your Registry a thorough clean, you need – yes – software. We don't recommend picking off any useless-sounding Registry files by yourself, not even after you've created all the restore points any PC could ever want.

Free program Wise Registry Cleaner (www.snipca.com/13905) is specially designed to remove junk files from your Registry without doing any damage. It quickly scans your Registry for obsolete, invalid or temporary items, offers advice about what's safe to remove and lets you remove selected keys, values and other files with one click. It also saves an automatic backup of your Registry, but we'd still recommend creating a restore point first.



Give your PC a boost by removing redundant Registry files with Wise Registry Cleaner

Like some other system-optimising brand names (including Auslogics and IObit), WiseCleaner, which makes Wise Registry Cleaner, sometimes tries to bundle unwanted extras with its programs. Thankfully we didn't find this to be the case with Wise Registry Cleaner. It's very quick and easy to install, and there are no annoying opt-outs to look out for. Just make sure to install an advert-blocking browser extension like AdBlock Plus (https://adblockplus.org) so that you don't get caught out by any fake Download buttons.

3 REGISTRY CHANGES THAT TRANSFORM YOUR DESKTOP

Block pop-up notifications

The notification 'balloons' that leap from the bottom-right of your Desktop are rarely helpful. If you wanted to know that you've got 'new unopened items' in Outlook, you'd check Outlook. You don't need an annoying balloon to tell you.

The official way to get rid of them is to click 'Customize...' in your system tray and work your way through the dropdown menus, selecting 'Hide icons and notifications' every time. Note that this won't let you hide the notifications alone – just notifications *and* icons. What's more, this process is cumbersome, especially if you've got a lot of software on your PC.

Head for Regedit to switch off all the notifications in one go, with or without removing the icons as well. From the USER root key, follow the path Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\Advanced. If you reach a dead end at CurrentVersion because there's no Explorer key, right-click CurrentVersion and create a new key called Explorer, then right-click that and create a new key called Advanced.

Click the Advanced key and right-click in the blank area of the right pane. Click New, select DWORD, type EnableBalloonTips in the filename field and press Enter. Double-click it, and you should see 0 under 'Value data'. This means that balloon tips are disabled. To enable them, change the value to 1. You'll need to restart Windows for this hack to take effect.

Switching notifications off via the Control Panel is time-consuming and doesn't let you keep the icons

Hack the Windows 8 Start screen

Windows 8's charmless Charms bar is the ultimate unwanted pop-up. Hover anywhere near the top-right corner of your screen in Windows 8 or 8.1, and out

Get rid of the Windows 8 Charms bar by creating a new Registry value

jumps this unwanted column of icons.

If you've upgraded to Windows 8.1, you can disable the Charms bar by right-clicking the Taskbar then selecting Properties, Navigation and unticking 'When I point to the upper right-hand corner...'. If you're on Windows 8, there's no disable option.

To remove the Charms bar completely in both Windows 8 and 8.1, you'll need to go via the Registry. From the root key USER, follow the path Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\ImmersiveShell\EdgeUi. If you hit a dead end, create the missing keys as before.

Then create a new DWORD in EdgeUi using the steps outlined above, name it DisableTRCorner and set its value to 0. As with the notifications hack, you can switch the Charms bar back on at any time by changing the value to 1.

Similarly, you can prevent the Windows 8 App Switcher bar appearing when you hover near the top-left corner by creating a DWORD under EdgeUi called DisableTLCorner and setting its value to 0.

To boot straight to the Desktop in Windows 8 or 8.1, go to the USER root key, follow the path Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\StartPage, create a DWORD called OpenAtLogon and set its value to 0.

Add Desktop shortcuts to the right-click menu

There's no need to have program shortcuts littered all over your Desktop and cluttering your Taskbar. With a reasonably quick Registry hack, you can open any installed program with a single right-click.

Go to ROOT and follow the path Directory\Background\shell. Right-click 'shell' and create a new key, giving it the name you want to appear in the right-click menu (for example, Skype). Right-click it and create a new key called 'command' (no capital letters).

We said "reasonably quick" because you now have to find the full file path to Skype, or whichever program you want to include in the right-click menu, and copy it to your Clipboard. Here's a trick for doing this: find the program in your Start menu or list of programs, and press Shift while right-clicking it. Then click 'Copy as path' to copy the file path to your Clipboard.

Most of this Desktop and Taskbar clutter can be moved to the right-click menu

Back in Regedit, click your new 'command' key, then double-click '(Default)' in the right-hand pane. Right-click and click Paste to copy the file path.

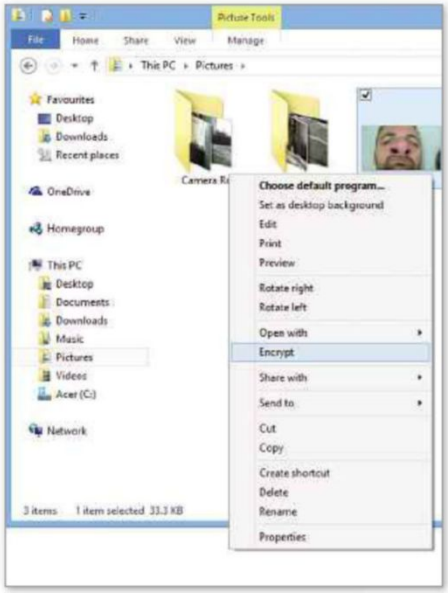
Right-click anywhere on the Desktop and you'll see your chosen program in the menu. You can add as many programs to the right-click menu as you want – just repeat the steps with a new menu item name each time.

3 CHANGES THAT MAKE WINDOWS WORK YOUR WAY

Encrypt any file with one click

Most Windows 7 and 8/8.1 PCs have built-in encryption for protecting selected files or folders from unauthorised eyes. If your computer supports it, you can encrypt a file by right-clicking it and clicking Properties, then clicking Advanced on the General tab, and ticking 'Encrypt contents to secure data' (see Microsoft's website for full instructions: www.snipca.com/13933).

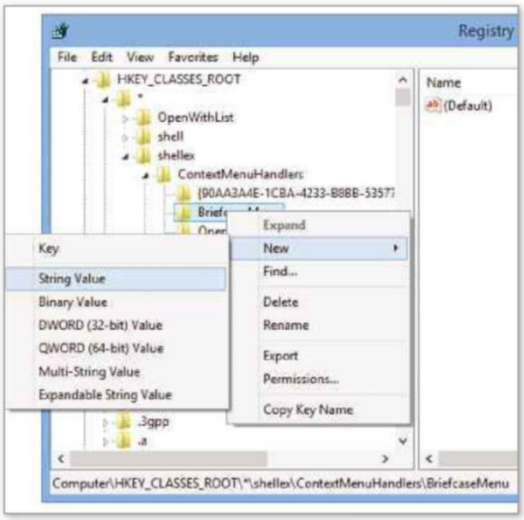
You can save yourself all these clicks and ticks by adding an encrypt option to the right-click menu in Windows Explorer. Go to USER and follow the path Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\Advanced. Create a new DWORD called EncryptionContextMenu and give it a value of 1. Now, when you right-click a file or folder, you'll see a new option called Encrypt. If you right-click a file that you've already encrypted, you'll see a Decrypt option instead.



Add the Encrypt option to the right-click menu in Windows Explorer

Remove junk from your right-click menu

Windows crams all sorts of items into the right-click menu, and you probably don't use half of them. You'll find the menu far more useful if you prune the default Windows items and leave more space for program shortcuts and useful tools like encryption, as explained above.



Hide an item from the right-click menu by giving it a new String Value

Right-click items are hidden in various Registry locations, but you'll find most in ROOT*\shellex\ContextMenuHandlers and ROOT*\shell. On some computers, 'shellex' is called 'shellexe'. Find the item you want to remove, right-click it and click Delete.

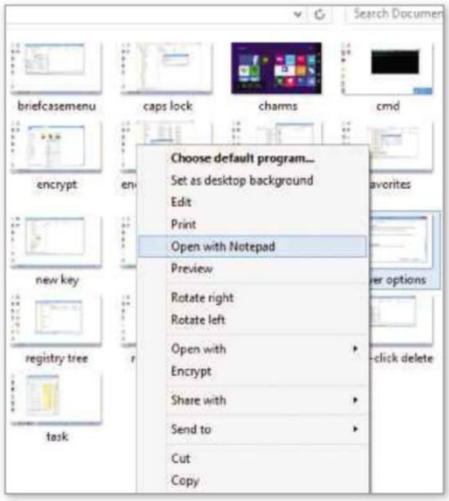
If there's an item that you think you might use occasionally, you can hide it rather than delete it. Right-click it, click New, then String Value and type Extended under Name. Now, the item will only appear if you press Shift while right-clicking the Desktop.

If, like us, you love being able to open programs and control your PC from the right-click menu, explore some of the other items under ROOT*, such as OpenWithList – but only after you've created a new restore point.

Open any document in Notepad with one right-click

Finally, our favourite hack: add an 'Open with Notepad' option to your right-click menu, so that you can check the contents of any document or spreadsheet very quickly from your Desktop or Windows Explorer, with no need to open Word or Excel.

Go to ROOT*\shell, then right-click 'shell' and create a new key called 'Open with Notepad'. Now create a new key inside that one, called 'command'. Double-click the (Default) value in the right-hand pane and type notepad.exe %1 (make sure to include the space before '%1'). Then, when you right-click any document or spreadsheet (or indeed any file), you'll see 'Open with Notepad' in the right-click menu. ca



Add 'Open with Notepad' to the right-click menu to check any document in an instant

NEXT ISSUE On sale Wednesday 29 October

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Spot any **scam** email

Is that email **really** from your bank? Here's what to do if you get an email claiming to be from one of these big companies

Apple
www.apple.com

Phishing advice:
www.snipca.com/13799
Forward suspicious emails to:
reportphishing@apple.com
Apple says that it never sends its users attachments in emails, so don't download files from emails that claim to be from Apple. If you get an Apple email containing an embedded link, hover over the link for a few seconds until the web address pops up, to check that it points to a legitimate Apple site.

Barclays
www.barclays.co.uk

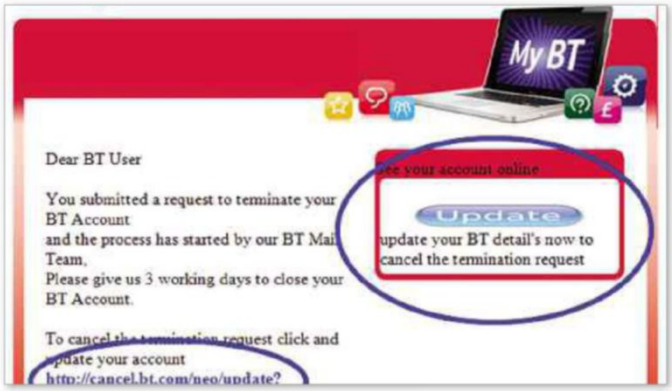
Phishing advice:
www.snipca.com/13801
Forward scams to:
internetsecurity@barclays.co.uk
The Barclays website has several pages of phishing advice, but the most useful is the Financial Scams page (link above). Click the blue '+' symbols to see information about 'Email scams', Vishing ('video phishing') and more. Barclays says it never sends emails that ask you to enter your account information. If you receive an email requesting it, forward it to the address above.

BT
www.bt.com

Phishing advice:
www.snipca.com/13783
Forward to:
abuse@bt.com
In September the telecoms giant issued a phishing warning to its customers after a spate of fake emails. The 'Be aware of phishing emails' warning (link above) offers plenty of advice, including all the real web addresses that BT sends emails from and some examples of scam emails.

Halifax
www.halifax.co.uk

Phishing advice:
www.snipca.com/13800
Forward to:
security@halifax.co.uk
Halifax says it'll never email you with a direct link to your Halifax 'Sign in' page. It also says it will never ask for your security details in a email. However, it does sometimes include links to external sites, such as financial advice sites, in legitimate marketing emails.



BT's phishing advice page includes examples of scam emails received by its customers

HSBC
www.hsbc.co.uk

Phishing advice:
www.snipca.com/13795
Forward to:
phishing@hsbc.com
To help you identify the emails you receive as legitimate, HSBC – like most companies – will always address you 'personally by name'. So if you receive an email purporting to come from HSBC and it starts with a salutation like: 'Dear customer' or 'Dear user', forward it to the email address above.

Microsoft
www.microsoft.com

Phishing advice:
www.snipca.com/13802
Forward to:
reportphishing@antiphishing.org
Microsoft's advice is confusing. Its phishing advice page warns against emails that ask you to 'Verify your account', yet the company sends legitimate emails containing a 'Recover account' button. If in doubt, forward any confusing emails to the 'reportphishing' address, and hover over embedded links to check the address before clicking.

NatWest and RBS
www.rbs.co.uk

Phishing advice:
www.snipca.com/13798
Forward to:
phishing@rbs.co.uk;
phishing@natwest.com
Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS, which owns NatWest) has its own browser security tool, Rapport (www.snipca.com/13857). Rapport has been reported to conflict with other security software, so we'd recommend using your browser's built-in phishing protection instead. Check that it's switched on in your browser settings.

Santander
www.santander.co.uk

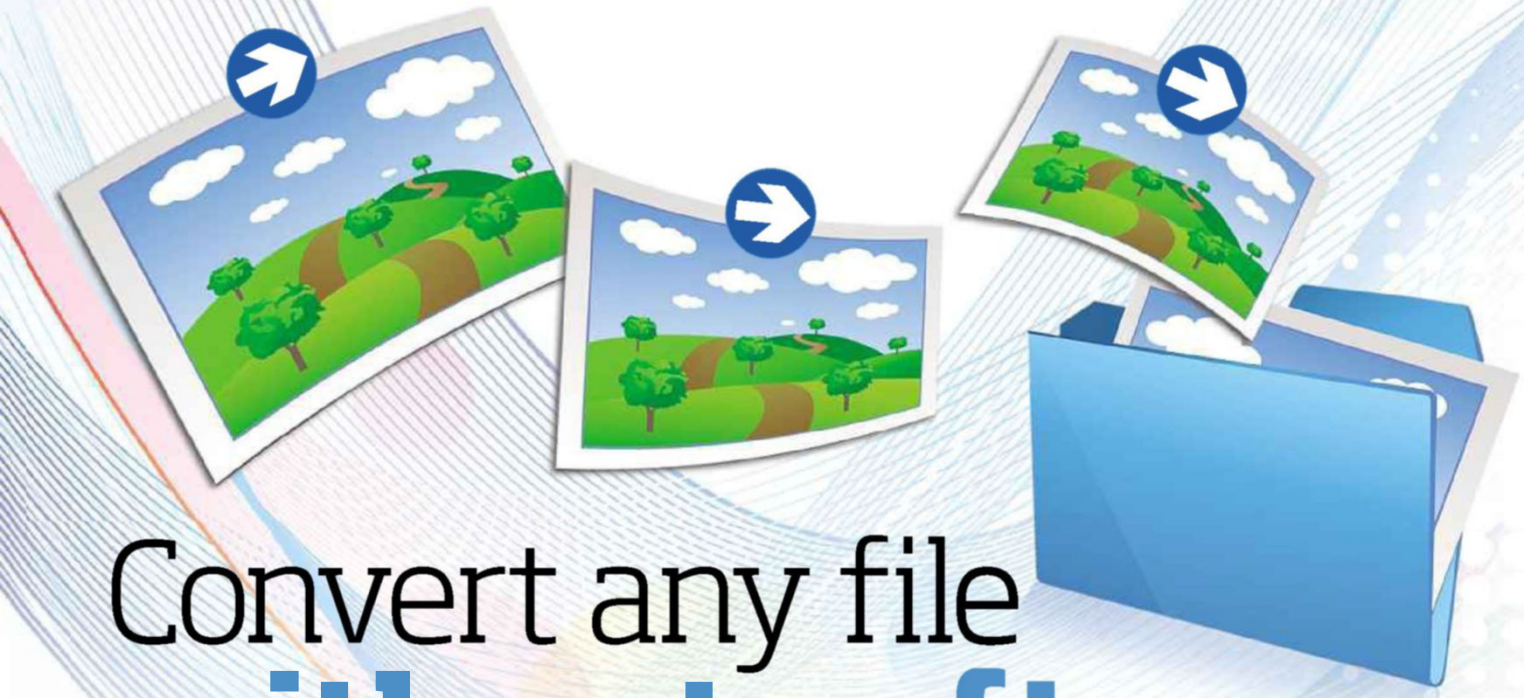
Phishing advice:
www.snipca.com/13796
Forward to:
phishing@santander.co.uk
Santander's phishing advice comprises a five-page PDF packed with advice about how to spot a scam email. The document even contains a quiz, which shows several screenshots of scam emails, then asks you to spot the tell-tale signs.

Talk Talk
www.talktalk.co.uk

Phishing advice:
www.snipca.com/13805
Forward to:
phishing@talktalkplc.com
The phishing advice from TalkTalk is pretty standard, urging you to make sure that emails address you personally, are spelt correctly, are from a legitimate address and don't ask you to confirm account or billing information.

Virgin Media
www.virginmedia.com

Phishing advice:
www.snipca.com/13793
Virgin updates its bulletin board to show the latest phishing threats. There's no email for forwarding scams, but you can complain about scam emails using a form on its phishing advice page.

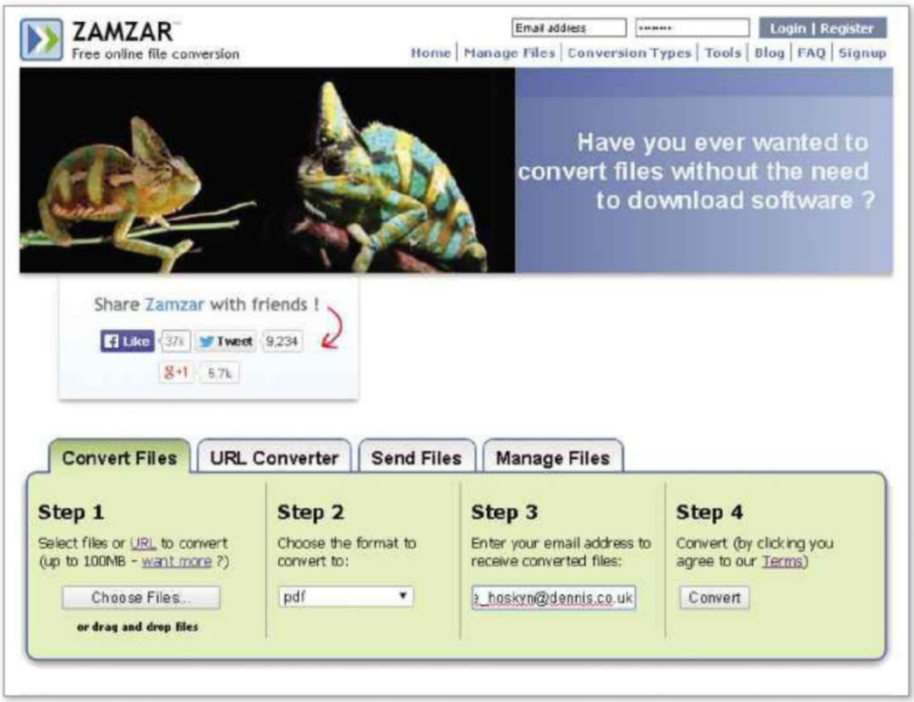


Convert any file without software

You no longer need software to convert files. **Jane Hoskyn** shows you how to turn photos, ebooks and other files into new formats for free online

Go to any software listings website and you'll find scores of file-conversion tools that offer to turn your JPEGs into PDFs, your HTMLs into EPUBs and your scanned letters into something digital. But all these tools come at a price – sometimes you pay for the program, and sometimes you pay in frustration while the so-called freeware litters your PC with unwanted adware.

Don't bother. File conversion is a task that you no longer need software to do, because all the best free tools are online. There's no program to install, no adware to fend off and, if you use the browser extension AdBlock (https://getadblock.com), you won't see any adverts at all (see our Cover Feature in Issue 433). Here we reveal the most useful online conversions and the best free tools for the job.



Upload a file to Zamzar, choose your export format and enter your email address to get a download link

Convert photos to PDF for emailing

JPEG has long been our favoured format for emailing photos to friends and family, but it turns out that we should have been using PDF instead. PDFs are about 10 times smaller than similar-quality JPEGs, and you can reduce or enlarge PDF files without degrading the image. Zoom into a 500KB JPEG and a 50KB PDF of the same photo and they'll look roughly the same.

What's more, most browsers now have PDF readers built in, so all your recipient has to do is click your email and your photo will open in their browser window, no software required.

Free online tool Zamzar (www.zamzar.com) lets you convert photos of any format to PDF (and many more formats besides). The process requires a few clicks, but it's a lot faster than downloading software. Drag one or more files (up to 100MB) on to the page, choose 'pdf' from the 'Convert files to:' dropdown menu, type your email address and click Convert. Click the link in the email that arrives a few seconds later (click under 'Alternatively click on the following link' – there's no need to sign up), then click the green Download Now button on the page that opens. Make sure that you've enabled AdBlock in your browser so that you don't see any fake Download buttons. You must download the file within 24 hours – after that, it's deleted from Zamzar's server.

If you need to shrink the PDF file, drag it on to the Compress PDF page at

SmallPDF.com (www.snipca.com/13860), where it will automatically be converted into a 144dpi file that's ideal for emailing.

Turn photos and documents into a multi-page PDF

Zamzar is extremely versatile and lets you convert between more than 1,200 formats (we didn't know there *were* that many formats). But there are some things it won't do – such as create a multi-page PDF. For this, you'll need the free site CloudConvert (http://cloudconvert.org), whose 'merge to pdf' feature (www.snipca.com/13850) lets you combine a batch of photos, documents and even ebooks into one multi-page PDF for emailing to friends. Make sure to select 'pdf' from the 'merge all into one' dropdown menu before you click Start Conversion (see screenshot, below). You can choose to have the download link emailed to you or save the file automatically to your Dropbox or Google Drive account.

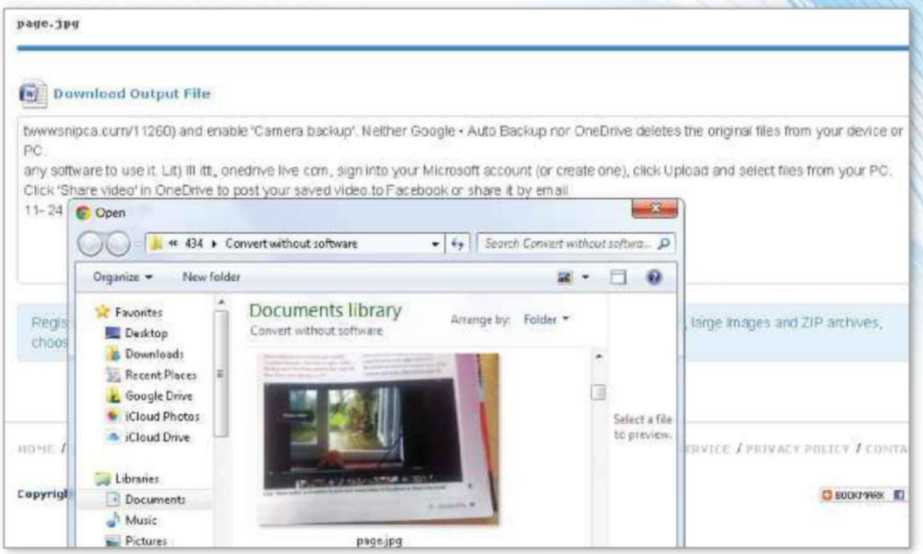
CloudConvert, like Zamzar, lets you convert between hundreds of formats, including video and audio formats, ZIP and RAR archive files, documents and spreadsheets. It's free for up to 25 'conversion minutes' per day. That doesn't include the time you take uploading files and exploring your conversion options, so it should be plenty. If you have a huge number of files to convert, an upgrade costs a reasonable €9 (£7) a month.

Click 'pdf' to convert a batch of files into one PDF using CloudConvert

Convert PDFs and photos into text or Word files

PDF may be the king of convenience when sharing photos and documents, but it's not exactly interactive. If you want to copy text or edit photos that are "locked" into a PDF, you'll need to extract them. Free website ExtractPDF (www.extractpdf.com) is the simplest option. Upload the PDF (up to 10MB), click 'Send file' and wait a few seconds while all the photos, texts, fonts and even metadata are extracted and sorted into different tabs, from where you can download or copy them.

To extract these elements from any web page, type the URL into the box on ExtractPDF and click 'Send file' as before.



Use OnlineOCR to convert a scanned letter or magazine page into text that you can edit

OnlineOCR (www.onlineocr.net) goes a step further by using optical character recognition (OCR) to "see" the text in JPEGs and other image formats, as well as PDF, and convert it into Word (DOCX), Excel or plain text documents that you can copy and edit. It's particularly useful for turning scanned official letters into editable templates. On the downside, you have to type in a captcha before clicking Convert, but the numbers are relatively easy to read. The conversion into text is very quick and surprisingly accurate.

Convert web pages into ebooks

Browser extensions are even quicker than any of the online tools we've mentioned so far, because they sit on your browser bar and let you convert web content with one click.

One of our favourites is dotEPUB for Chrome and Firefox (http://dotepub.com; scroll down to the Extension box on the right and click Install), which converts any web page into an ebook for reading in comfort on your PC, tablet or Kindle. Find an online article and click the round green dotEPUB bookmarklet to convert and save the file. The default format is EPUB, but you can change this to MOBI (Kindle): right-click the bookmarklet, click Options and click MOBI.

To convert ebooks between MOBI and EPUB and numerous other formats, use CloudConvert. Click 'Select files', upload your ebook file, click 'select format', then click ebook and choose your output format and location. There is an 'Add from URL' option for converting web pages, but CloudConvert only lets you output them as documents, including Word documents, or image files. CloudConvert has its own Chrome tool (www.snipca.com/13863), but it's a web app, not an extension, and we found it easier to use the website. ca

Convert web pages into ebooks with one click of your dotEPUB bookmarklet

WHAT FORMAT IS THAT?

If you find a file on your PC and you can't open it with any of your installed programs, find out what the file format is before you do anything else with it. Type the file's extension (the three letters after the last dot) into the File Extension Search box at FileInfo (www.fileinfo.com) to discover what it is, what it does and which programs or apps can open it. To check that a file is safe to open, run a quick check with the free online scanner VirusTotal (www.virustotal.com).

20 BEST FREE PROGRAMS EVER

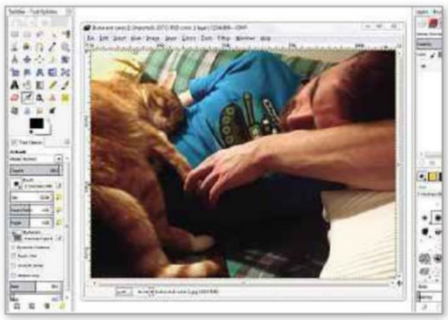
Final Countdown

5 GIMP
www.gimp.org

Launched: January 1996

Adobe Photoshop costs hundreds of pounds a year to use, but you can get very similar features in the free alternative GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program), including layers, transform tools, perspective distortion and a channel mixer. It does take a while to learn, but if you know your way around Photoshop or Photoshop Elements you'll feel very much at home.

GIMP is becoming increasingly user-friendly, and you can customise the layout using features like Single-Window Mode that keeps all its tools neatly docked. The installer on its website is a torrent file, but you can find a traditional executable installation file (EXE) on the open-source software site Sourceforge (www.snipca.com/13764).



Free photo editor GIMP looks and behaves like Photoshop, but without the price tag

HIDDEN FEATURE: Eradicate blemishes from people's portraits with the new Healing Tool (the little plaster-like icon on the left-hand toolbar). Hold down the Ctrl key and click an area of skin close to the spot or freckle, then click the blemish to remove it.

4 VLC
www.videolan.org/vlc

Launched: February 2001

This brilliant video and music player comprises many of our favourite things: it's portable, open source, cross-platform (Linux included) and it doesn't cost a penny. It plays most digital-video or audio formats you care to throw at it, including – unlike iTunes – DVDs for all regions. Its iOS version liberates you from iTunes by letting you transfer songs, videos and other media files to your iPad or iPhone manually.

VLC also has loads of playback features. It lets you slow down or speed up video and audio, move one frame at a time through video footage, take a screenshot from a DVD, and convert videos to black and white. At 22MB, it's a non-space-hogging download, too.

HIDDEN FEATURE: Turn a video into an interactive jigsaw puzzle that you can drag and drop into place as the video plays. To switch on the effect, click Tools, 'Effects and Filters', Video Effects, Geometry and click the box next to Puzzle Game.

VLC lets you turn a family video into a digital jigsaw puzzle

3 Google Earth
www.earth.google.co.uk

Launched: June 2005

Almost a decade after its launch, the sheer scope of Google Earth continues to amaze. From checking out prospective homes and paying a virtual visit to landmarks in distant continents, to a narrated tour of the volcanoes on Mars and flying an F-16 fighter jet over your house, Google Earth has it all covered. But Google isn't complacent about Earth, and new features are added all the time – for example, you can now see 3D trees in locations all over the planet. Apart from its world-changing search engine, Earth is Google's greatest achievement.

OUR TOP 20 IN FULL

1 SKYPE
www.skype.com

2 NINITE
https://ninite.com

3 GOOGLE EARTH
www.earth.google.co.uk

4 VLC
www.videolan.org/vlc

5 GIMP
www.gimp.org

6 DROPBOX
www.dropbox.com

7 HANDBRAKE
www.handbrake.fr

8 AVAST FREE ANTIVIRUS
www.avast.com

9 LIBREOFFICE
www.libreoffice.org

10 PAINT.NET
www.getpaint.net

11 CALIBRE
www.calibre-ebook.com

12 FIREFOX
www.mozilla.org/firefox

13 MUSICBEE
www.getmusicbee.com

14 GLARY UTILITIES
www.glarysoft.com

15 WINDOWS MOVIE MAKER
www.snipca.com/13441

16 TEAMVIEWER
www.teamviewer.com

17 SPOTIFY
www.spotify.com

18 RECUVA
www.piriform.com/recuva

19 LASTPASS
www.lastpass.com

20 IRFANVIEW
www.irfanview.com

SKYPE IN NUMBERS

214 billion
Minutes spent making Skype-to-Skype calls in 2013

$8.5 billion
What Microsoft paid for Skype in May 2011 (that's £5.19 billion in real money)

50 million
Skype users online at the same time on 21 January 2013*

34 per cent
The share of international calls made using Skype in 2012

31,156,382
People who've 'liked' Skype on Facebook (www.facebook.com/Skype) at time of writing

Tour the globe (and beyond) in astonishing detail with Google Earth

HIDDEN FEATURE: Turn Google Earth into a live weather station by ticking Weather in the bottom left-hand corner of the program window. Click the little plus symbol next to Weather to select elements including clouds and radar views. The area you're viewing will now be overlaid with your chosen elements, plus an information box containing temperature, forecast and other info.

2 Ninite
https://ninite.com

Launched: October 2009

Ninite solves two of the most annoying things about free software: installers full of adware and time-consuming software updates. It lets you download or update a batch of programs or apps at the same time, using an all-in-one executable file that contains no adware or PUPs (potentially unwanted programs). It's also very easy to use. Go to the website, tick your chosen programs and click Get Installer to download the EXE.

Send a collection of programs to family and friends in a Ninite installer file

The only downside is that Ninite doesn't list every program out there. It doesn't, for example, include all of our top 20 best-ever programs (see full list, right). However, you can ask Ninite to add a program to its list by scrolling down and clicking 'Show request form'.

HIDDEN FEATURE: Not so much a hidden feature as a trick: use Ninite to create a bespoke executable file for friends to use. When they run the installer, they can choose from your recommended selection of free programs. For example, this link (www.snipca.com/13767) automatically downloads an EXE containing a selection of our top 20.

1 Skype
www.skype.com

Computer active BEST FREE PROGRAMS WINNER

Launched: August 2003

It's almost impossible to overstate the importance of Skype. The free internet- calls tool is now used by everyone from far-flung families to astronauts on the International Space Station (www.snipca.com/13779) to keep in face-to-face contact.

Google Earth may have mapped the world, but Skype has changed it. More than a third of all international calls are now made using Skype, so it's ripped apart the market for expensive overseas telephone calls. Why pay ridiculous prices when you can just fire up Skype on your PC or laptop, tablet, smartphone, home phone, TV set or even games console (www.snipca.com/13775) and phone across the continents for free?

Even Skype isn't perfect, though. Its owner Microsoft cheekily bundles Bing and MSN with Skype's PC program unless you untick them during setup. But once it's installed, it's a program that'll make you wonder how you ever lived without it. And Microsoft, like Google, doesn't rest on its laurels – later in 2014

Call anywhere in the world for free with Skype

Even astronauts on the International Space Station use Skype to phone home

it's due to launch Skype Translator, offering real-time translation for Skype callers speaking in different languages.

HIDDEN FEATURE: Have you ever said to someone during a Skype call, "I'll email you the photo" or put it in Dropbox (or whichever cloud-storage service you happen to use)? No need. You can share photos, documents and other files in the Skype chat window. Just drag the file into the window and your recipient can download it. ca

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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Problems Solved

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

How do I rescue footage from my old home movie?

Q **I have a homemade DVD of a cruise I went on. The DVD was created in Windows XP, using Windows Movie Maker 2.6. My XP laptop is now useless, with an unknown fault. My original footage contained a clip of another couple we met on the cruise and I created for them their own DVD, including this clip. However, the lady's husband has since passed away and she has played her disc so much that she has cracked it. Is there any way to extract the clip of them from my DVD? My disc still plays just fine, but there's other footage on it not relevant to this lady. Or is it possible somehow to get the original footage off my faulty XP computer?**

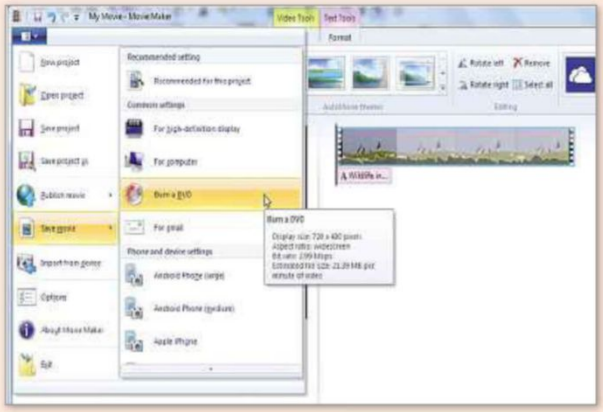
Mike Piper

A Given that you're in possession of a working DVD then the simplest solution would seem to be to rip that disc to turn the footage back into digital video files that you can save to your computer. Then, you could copy the relevant clip to a USB stick, for example, to give to the lady to view on her computer. Alternatively, you could use Windows Movie Maker 2012 in Windows 7 to create a new DVD for her.

Because your DVD is homemade it won't be copy-protected, so the ripping process is straightforward. A free tool such as DVD Decrypter will extract the video and audio files automatically (download it from www.dvddecrypter.org.uk). Once it's installed, insert your DVD and wait a moment for DVD Decrypter to detect it. Next, choose IFO from the Mode menu, note the drive and folder number under the Destination heading, then click the Decrypt button. Your video and audio files will be extracted and saved to the folder you noted down.

Next, you need to change the DVD video-object (VOB) files into a format that your friend will be able to play easily on her computer, such as MP4. HandBrake (https://handbrake.fr) is a free tool that will do this. Click Source, then Open File, navigate to the folder noted earlier, select a VOB file and click Open. In the Output Settings section, set Container to MP4, note the Destination and then click Start. Repeat this process for other files until you find the part you want.

Your MP4 files will be saved in HandBrake's Destination folder. Copy the relevant file to a USB stick or, to turn it into a DVD, open Windows Movie Maker (not 2.6, but the 2012 edition that comes with Windows 7), click 'Add videos and photos', navigate to HandBrake's Destination folder, select the relevant file and then click Open. Now open the Windows Movie Maker menu (click the down arrow at the top left), choose 'Save movie' followed by 'Burn a DVD', type a name and click Save. Now use the Windows DVD Maker wizard that appears to add a DVD menu, click Next followed by Burn, insert a blank DVD and you'll have one happy friend.



Use Windows Movie Maker to extract and burn DVD footage

Can I connect my Nexus 7 to a projector?

Q **I'm a member of my local U3A (University of the Third Age - www.u3a.org.uk) and help out at our technology group. I would like to demonstrate a Nexus 7 in action but I'm unsure how to connect it to a PC projector. Can you help please?**

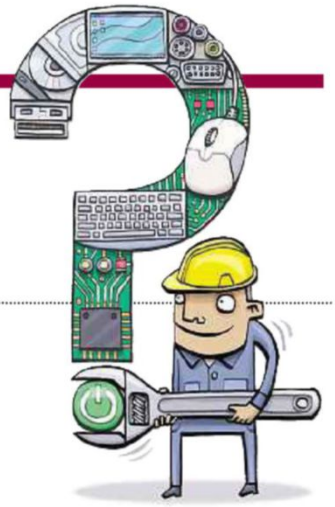
Adrian Barrett

A Unfortunately, this might not be possible, unless your group has access to a modern high-definition projector and the Nexus 7 in question is the 2013 model. We're not sure about the latter but, because you said 'PC projector', we suspect your device will only have a VGA input – and there's no way currently to get a Nexus 7 to interface with this socket.

Use a Slimport-to-HDMI adapter to connect a Nexus 7 to a projector

If the projector is a recent model then it might have an HDMI input and be able to accept and output the Nexus 7's 1280x800-pixel resolution. Even if it accepts the resolution, this does not guarantee it will be able to output it, so you'll need to check the projector's instruction manual: it will need to be able to output in full high definition or 'downscale' an HD input to its own output resolution.

If it can, and your Nexus 7 is the 2013 model, then a Slimport-to-HDMI adapter cable (£13 from www.snipca.com/13552) will let you connect the tablet to the projector via a standard HDMI cable (around £2, www.snipca.com/13553). Hook the Nexus 7 to the Slimport adapter then the HDMI cable from this to the projector, switch the two devices on, select the HDMI input on the projector and cross your fingers.



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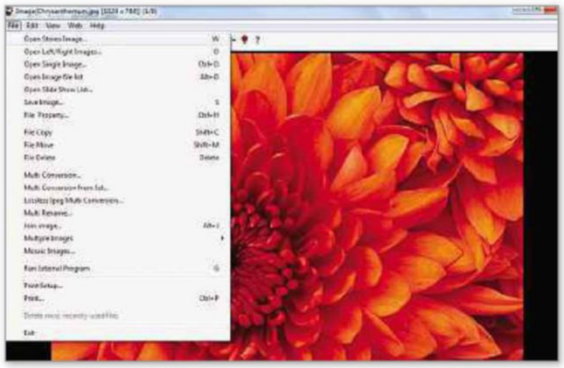
How do I open unknown files?

Q I have been a subscriber to your magazine for many years. One thing I find very annoying is when I see the 'Unknown File' message whenever I try to open certain files on my computer. The latest one is a file with a .mpo file extension. If I go online to look for a program that will open these files, I find lots of 'free download' links, but when I click these I usually find I have to pay. I never know how to open these files. Any ideas?

Colin Wadley



Open .mpo files with the free tool StereoPhoto Maker

A Generally, it's unwise to try opening files unless you know what they are and how they got on your computer. It's also dangerous to click on random 'free download' links in an effort to find a program that will do the job.

For starters, file names and file extensions do not offer certainty about a file's origins, content or safety record: it would be very easy, for example, for a hacker to hide a virus by naming a file 'BrilliantGame.exe'. Equally, a .doc file might well be a Word document but one that contains code to exploit flaws in older versions of the program.

Moreover, many scammers also build rogue programs that masquerade as 'free downloads' that will open this, that or another file – so by clicking such links you're potentially walking into an unpleasant trap.

The answer to your question is: do your research. In the first instance, use Google or a site like WhatIs.com's list of file formats (www.snipca.com/13392). Then, when you have an idea what the file type might be, research again to find a safe program with which to open it.

In this case we think you have a Multi Picture Object file, probably created by a 3D camera or program that creates anaglyphic (3D) images – do you have such a thing? If so, open the file using the software that came with your camera. Otherwise, a free tool such as StereoPhoto Maker (www.snipca.com/13393) should be able to open it.

If it won't, treat the file with suspicion – but don't just delete it, as it might be a file that's vital to another program. Back up your PC, then press F2 to rename the file (something like 'MyMPOfile.old') to see if everything still works okay.

What are these phishing alerts from Gmail?

Q I've been using Gmail without any problems for quite a while, but recently I've begun to receive this warning: "This message may not have been sent by: xxxxxxx@gmail.com", where the email address is often that of trusted friends. There are two options listed alongside, labelled 'Learn more' and 'Report phishing'. I clicked 'Learn more' but to be honest I'm still none the wiser. Why is Gmail flagging some of my friends' messages as phishing emails? I've opened some of them and they're definitely from people I know. What should I do?

Alison Herring

If emails from trusted contacts are marked as suspicious in Gmail, adjust your filters for the sender's address

A There's no simple answer to your first question, as Google uses many techniques to categorise incoming emails. Most likely is that the affected contacts have themselves been victims of spoofing, where some online scammer has borrowed their email address for spamming purposes.

There's nothing you can do about that and, while you should remain vigilant, if you trust these senders then you can continue to open and read their emails. Gmail will eventually figure out your preference but, if the problem persists, you can create filters to stop these messages being marked as spam (if that's what's happening).

To do this, click the down arrow in the Gmail search box. Now type the sender's email address into the From field and click the 'Create filter with this search' link. Tick the 'Never send it to Spam' followed by 'Create filter'.

How do I add items to Windows 7's 'Send To' menu?

Q On my old Windows XP computer I was able to add items to the right-click 'Send to' menu without difficulty. However, I cannot figure out how to do this in Windows 7. If it's possible, I'd really appreciate it if you could walk me through the process.

Joe Wayne

A Yes, this is possible but in Windows 7 the SendTo folder (where you need to drop your shortcuts) is more deeply hidden than in XP.

To start, press the Windows key+E to launch Windows Explorer, then navigate to **C:\Users\[username]\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows\SendTo**, where [username] is a folder named after your Windows username. Note that if you can't see this folder, in Windows Explorer, open the Tools menu and choose 'Folder options'. Next, select the View tab and scroll down the list under Advanced settings and clear the tick from the 'Hide protected operating system files (Recommended)' option.

With the SendTo folder now open in Windows Explorer, all you need to do is create shortcuts to the desired folders or tools. You can do this simply by dragging and dropping from the Windows Desktop, the Start menu or from another location via Windows Explorer.

Put shortcuts in your SendTo folder to add them to your 'Send to' menu

Is Process Hacker a virus?

Q I followed your brilliant Cover Feature 'Stop junk killing your PC' in Issue 430. I visited the www.snipca.com/13090 link to download Process Hacker 2, but this caused Kaspersky's System Watcher on my PC to identify it as malicious software. Following Kaspersky's recommendation I uninstalled the application. Did I download an infected copy of the application or is Kaspersky being over-cautious?

James Woods

A Process Hacker is not a virus but some of the program's capabilities may be identified as malicious by some security programs. So, Process Hacker is safe to download, install and use – with care.

However, we should point out that it's possible you actually downloaded some other malicious program. While Process Hacker itself is safe, the download page – like so many these days – is littered with fake Download buttons that are essentially just adverts. If you clicked one of these and then downloaded and installed the wrong program (perhaps one going by a similar or even identical name) then Kaspersky's alert would be correct.

It's really not easy to always know the difference. For the avoidance of doubt, we've created a new download link at www.snipca.com/13565. You'll notice from our screenshot that even this page is blighted by an advert masquerading as a Download Now button, so be sure to click the green button labelled 'Installer', which is the top of three buttons under the Download heading.

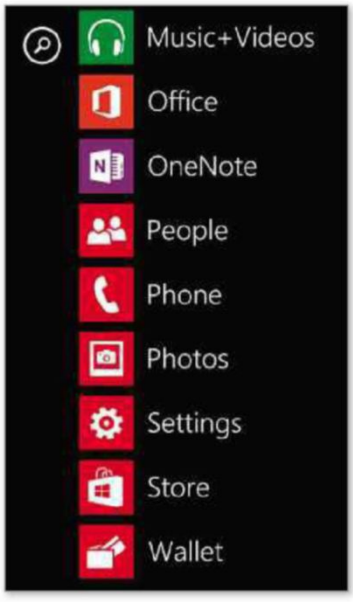
To avoid fake programs and adverts, click the Installer button on the Process Hacker download page

How do I access the Google Play store?

Q I want to download some apps from Google Play store. I have opened a new Gmail account but cannot see how to make it recognise my device. I have a Nokia 720 Lumia Black, running Windows Phone 8. I have also set up a Microsoft account, but with no success. Can you help?

Tom Thorpe

A We can help only by telling you that what you want to do is not possible. You have a smartphone running Microsoft's mobile operating system, Windows Phone 8. Google Play store, and the apps that it hosts, is designed for smartphones and tablets that run Android. Google Play store will therefore not work on your Nokia 720 – it's really that simple.



To download apps to your phone you need to visit the Windows Store, which you can launch by tapping the Store icon (if you can't see this on the home screen, swipe from right to left and then scroll through the list). You'll need to sign in with your Microsoft account.

Can I control my PC remotely?

Q I have a Dell Inspiron 545 desktop PC and Packard Bell EasyNote TE laptop, both running Windows 7 Home Premium. The desktop PC is connected to my BT Home Hub by Ethernet cable and the laptop by wireless. Is there any way to operate the desktop PC from another room, using the Home Hub and the laptop?

Eric Coulter

A Yes, this is possible using free software. Indeed, once you've got a remote-access program installed on both computers you'll be able to control your desktop PC from anywhere you can get a web connection – even if you're on the other side of the world.

There are numerous options available, one of the simplest being RemotePC (www.remotepc.net). The free version lets you set up and control only one computer, but that's not a problem for your needs.

Download the RemotePC Remote Access Host program to your desktop PC and then download and install the Remote Access Viewer program onto your laptop. On one of your computers, click the New User Sign Up button and then fill in the registration form. Once you've done this, log in on both computers.

On the host PC (your desktop), type and confirm a private key of between four and 15 characters and then click Yes to enable remote access. On the laptop, click to select your desktop PC in the 'Available Host computers' list and then click Connect. When prompted, enter the private key then click LogOn – and you're now in control of your desktop computer, via a window on your laptop showing the host PC's Windows Desktop.

Use the free version of the RemotePC tool to control your desktop PC from your laptop

How do I reposition my Start button?

Q I've been using computers since the BBC Model B and have muddled through most problems – but this one has me beaten. A few days ago I managed inadvertently to alter the position of the Start button and bottom bar, so they're now on the left-hand side of the screen rather than at the bottom. I eventually managed to rectify this but then both disappeared entirely. How do I fix this?

Douglas Fry

A It's possible to 'anchor' the Taskbar (the 'bottom bar', which contains the Start menu) to any screen extremity – bottom, top, left or right. To do this, you must click and hold down the mouse button on any blank part of the Taskbar and then drag and drop it into the desired position.

This is what you did inadvertently at the start of your woes. You then managed to do it again to move the Taskbar back to its traditional (and your preferred) position, at the foot of the screen.

It's also possible to resize the Taskbar to make it larger or smaller by clicking, holding and then dragging and dropping the top (or side or bottom) edge of the Taskbar. In Windows XP, it was possible to reduce the size to nothing but 7 prevents this, so you might instead have somehow enabled the auto-hide option that slides the Taskbar out of view after a few moments.

If your Taskbar keeps disappearing from view, untick 'Auto-hide the taskbar' in Properties

You can make it reappear by moving the mouse pointer to the bottom (or side or top) of the screen, or by using the keyboard shortcut Control (Ctrl)+Escape (Esc). Alternatively, to disable the option, right-click a blank part of the Taskbar, choose Properties then untick 'Auto-hide the taskbar'.

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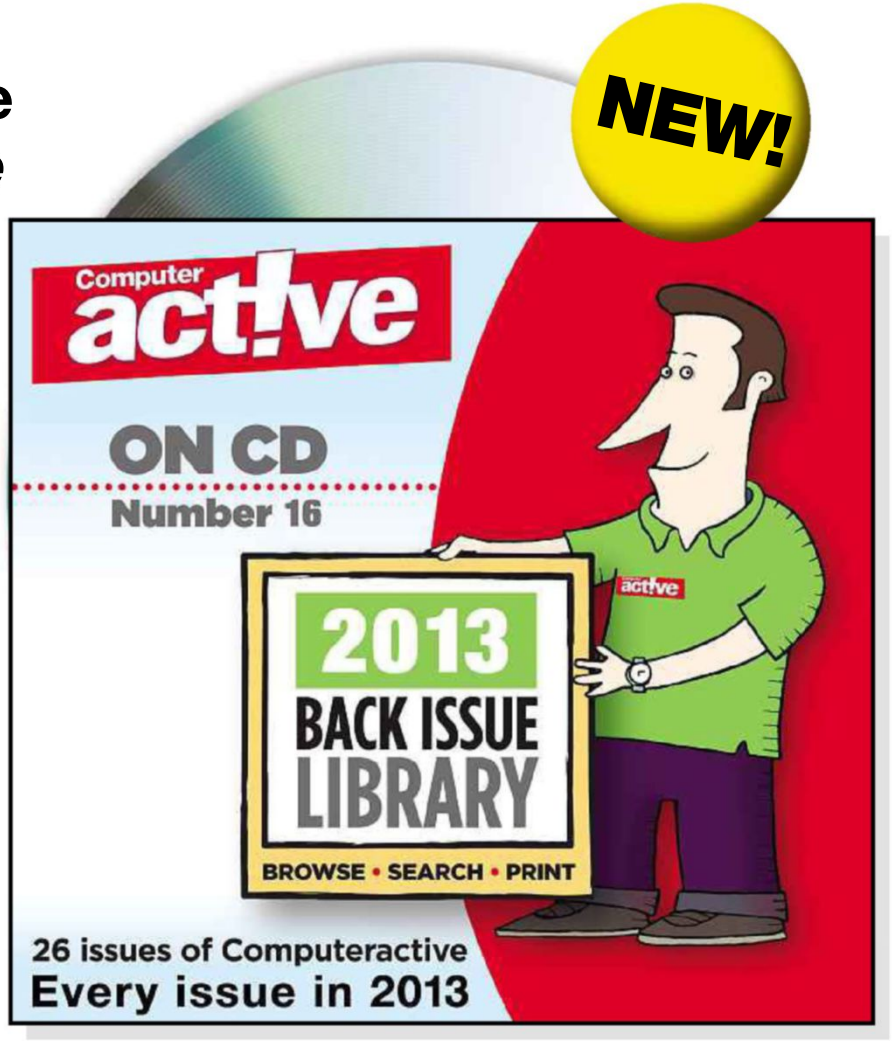


What is Unity Web Player and should I delete it?

Q I was checking through my download list when I found something called 'Unity Web Player', which I don't remember downloading. What is this? And is it something I should delete? If so, how? Also, it seems every time time I switch on my PC an Adobe notification on the Taskbar advises me that there's an update available. I've installed numerous such updates before so why does this keep happening? Some of us senior citizens have problems spotting scams!

Keith Ludlam

A Unity Web Player is a tool for displaying content designed for the Unity game 'engine', which basically gives developers a standard platform for which to write their code. If they write a game for Unity then they more or less don't need to worry whether someone runs their code on a tablet, games console or Windows PC, as in your case.

It's possible that you downloaded this a while ago, perhaps while exploring a website with a Unity-based game built into the page – you'd need to install Unity Web Player to play such a game. However, you say it's in your 'download list', so we're not sure if you've actually installed it or just found it in your browser's list of downloads. If the latter, just delete it. Using Windows Explorer, navigate to the Downloads folder, click the file then press Delete (Del) on your keyboard. If you found it in Control Panel's 'Uninstall a program' list then you can remove it by clicking the Uninstall button, though any website you use that relies on it will cease working properly.

Safely remove Unity Web Player if you don't need it via your Control Panel's 'Programs and Features' section

As for the Adobe updates this is entirely normal, if deeply frustrating. Adobe has a penchant for issuing updates all the time. Adobe Air, which like Unity enables various online tools to work, is one of the firm's worst offenders, often with several 'point' releases each month. You can remove it as above, with the same caveats.

Where have my drives gone?

Q I have a desktop computer running Windows 7 Home Premium. Usually when clicking the Libraries button at the bottom left of the screen it displays a pane showing folders for Documents, Pictures, Music and Videos, plus my internal and external drives. But suddenly, it's only displaying libraries for documents, pictures, music and videos – no hard drives are shown. How can I access my hard drives?

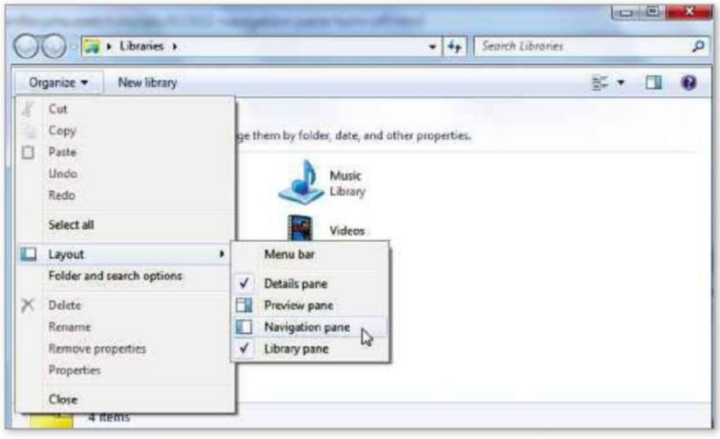
Terry Walders

A The button you refer to actually launches a tool called Windows Explorer, which by default displays Windows 7's libraries (called Documents, Pictures, Music and Video). These libraries are in turn just themed gatherings of files and folders stored on your hard drives, be they internal or external. So, by accessing a library you are in fact accessing your hard drives, albeit in a roundabout fashion.

So, libraries themselves would never show drives or drive labels. It's possible that some friend or technician has in the past set up a library called 'Drives' to direct you to your drives, and that this has since been accidentally deleted – but that seems like a bit of a stretch.

In fact, you can use Windows Explorer to find and explore your drives, by clicking Computer in the left-hand navigation pane. We think this is what you've been doing, but you've somehow managed to disable the navigation pane that makes this possible. To re-enable it, click the Organize button then hover your cursor over Layout and tick the 'Navigation pane' option.

If it's already ticked then one other possibility is that the Windows Explorer window has been resized, in such a way that the Computer listing is no longer visible. Either use the scroll bar (or your mouse's scroll button) to see more, or drag and drop the bottom right of the window to enlarge it.



Re-enable a missing Navigation pane in Windows Explorer via the Organize dropdown menu

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE 29 Oct

- Can I block emails from certain countries?
- How do I view backed-up photos with Picasa?
- Can I use USB for Samsung Galaxy S4 file transfers?

...And many more

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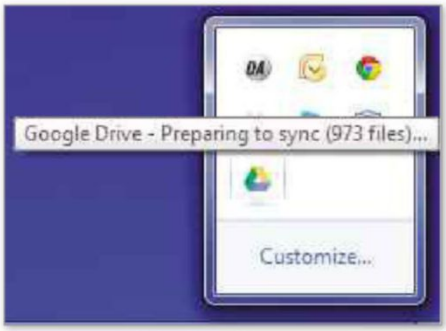
Google Drive

Overcome syncing problems, delete duplicate documents, and undelete files

Google Drive won't sync

It's all too easy to build up a huge collection of files in Google Drive (https://drive.google.com) – to the extent that it stops the cloud service working properly. Some users find that the Google Drive folder on their PC fails to sync with the cloud when they have lots of files in the folder, even if they're nowhere near their storage limits (see Google Groups, www.snipca.com/13828). The message 'Preparing to sync' appears whenever they hover over the Drive icon in their system tray, but Drive never actually syncs.

You can try to fix this by moving some files out of your Drive folder, but that rather defeats the point of having a Drive folder. So here's a better solution: create a new version of the Google Drive log file, which Drive has to read every time you sync. Close Google Drive, open Windows Explorer and navigate to **C:\Users\MYFOLDER\AppData\Local\Google\Drive'**. Right-click the file 'sync_log.log' and rename it to 'sync_log.old'. This creates a new, empty log file next time you start Drive. Drive will now be able to read the file more easily, and your folder should sync without any problems.



If your Google Drive icon always says 'Preparing to sync', you may need to create a new log file

Your Drive folder is full of duplicates

Google Drive doesn't have a built-in duplicate files finder, but you can clear duplicates by scanning the Drive folder on your Desktop with a free program such as Auslogics Duplicate File Finder (ADFF, www.snipca.com/13790) – see our Workshop on page 40. You can set Auslogics to find duplicates based on date or file size, or simply by using specific file names. When configuring your search in ADFF, set it to look for duplicates in your Google Drive folder only.

You accidentally deleted a file from Google Drive

Auslogics Duplicate File Finder has a built-in tool for restoring duplicates you deleted by accident (see Workshop, page 41). But if you accidentally delete some important files manually, what then? And what if you've emptied your Recycle Bin since deleting the files?

Luckily, there's a Trash folder (called Bin in some versions) in your online Drive account, and you can recover deleted files from here. Any files you delete from the Drive folder on your PC are sent to Trash online, and stay there until you explicitly delete them. Trash also contains older versions ('revisions') of files that you've edited in Drive.

Open Google Drive in your browser and click Trash (or Bin) in the left-hand pane. Right-click any file you want to retrieve and click Restore. You can also click 'Delete forever' to remove it permanently and free up storage space in your account. If you clicked 'Delete forever' and wish you hadn't, use this form (www.snipca.com/13665) to ask Google whether they can recover it for you (you may need to log in first if you aren't already).

Google Drive won't install on your PC

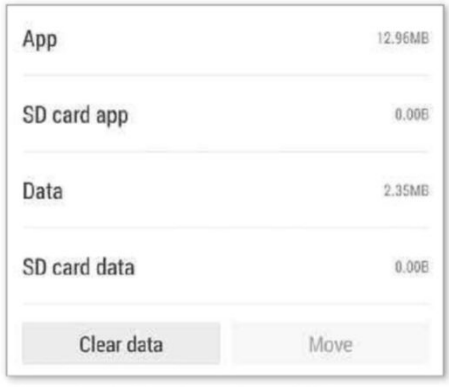
If you're trying to install Google Drive (www.snipca.com/13830) on your PC but see a message in the 'Sign in' window telling you there's a 'problem with this website's security certificate', it means Internet Explorer cannot recognise that Google Drive is a secure program. Even if IE isn't your browser, the Google Drive installer uses it to connect to the internet, so you need to change your settings in IE.

Untick the 'Check for...' boxes in IE if Windows prevents you from installing Google Drive

To fix this, open IE, click the cog at the top right, then click 'Internet options'. Click Advanced, then under Security, untick all three 'Check for...' boxes. This disables IE's security certificate and signature checks, and stops it blocking Google Drive. Click Apply and close IE. Once you've installed Google Drive, return to IE's settings and turn the checks back on.

Google Drive won't sync to your Android device

If you have Google Drive on your PC and also on your Android tablet or phone, but they fail to sync, there may be an error in the Android version's data or cache. First, clear the Google Drive cache on your Android device. In the Google Drive app, tap the three lines to show the sidebar, tap Settings, then 'Clear cache'. Next, go to your Android device's settings (this varies between devices), tap Apps and tap Google Drive (or Drive) in the list. Scroll down and tap 'Clear data', then tap OK.



Clear Google Drive's cache and data on your Android to get it syncing again

Next issue Fast Fixes for... Kindle

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PHOTOGRAPHIC

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No.336 Black 5ml	£12.99
No.337 Black 11ml	£18.99
No.338 Black 11ml	£18.99
No.339 Black 21ml	£25.99
No.342 Colour 5ml	£14.99
No.343 Colour 7ml	£20.99
No.344 Colour 14ml	£28.99
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T1291 Black	£10.99 11ml	£5.49 11ml	SX525WD/535WD/620FW, B42WD,
T1292-4 each	£10.99 7ml	£4.49 7ml	BX305F/320FW/525WD/625FWD
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Jargon Buster

Aperture An opening that controls the amount of light entering a camera lens.

Beta A version of software that's being tested. Beta versions are often released so problems can be ironed out.

Bluetooth LE Bluetooth low energy/Bluetooth Smart. A type of Bluetooth technology designed to consume less power while not sacrificing signal strength.

Botnet A group of infected computers connected together via the internet, and used to infect other PCs, send junk email and perform other criminal tasks.

Brute-force attack An automatic method of breaking encryption by trying all possible passwords until the right one is found.

Burst-shooting mode A camera mode for taking several pictures very quickly.

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

Component A cable, usually with three to five connectors, which is used to display video. Slightly higher quality than composite cables.

Composite A cable with three connectors which is used to display standard-definition video (up to 576i resolution).

Composite video A low-quality type of video connection that uses one cable for video. Normally colour-coded yellow.

CSC Compact system cameras. A camera that uses interchangeable lenses, but doesn't have a viewfinder that uses a mirror.

DDoS Direct Denial of Service. A targeted cyber-attack which brings down a web server and the websites running on it.

Download mirror A website that contains the same downloadable software as others, bundled in an installer.

Dpi Dots per inch. A measure of printed image quality, or the size an object will be shown on screen.

Dual core When two processors are combined into a single chip.

Exposure compensation Cameras automatically try to pick the correct exposure, but sometimes you will need to override it with this control.

Extension A program that adds extra features to your browser.

Firmware Basic software stored on a device, such as a music player, to control its operation. Can sometimes be upgraded in a process often called flashing.

Gigabit Ethernet A very fast networking standard that can transfer data at up to 1,000Mbps.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals. It is found on many new TVs and media PCs.

Integrated graphics chip A device that has a chip for processing graphics data built on to its motherboard, rather than having a separate graphics card.

Log files An electronic file that records data over time on a digital processor.

Man-in-the-middle attack When a hacker or malware intercepts communications between two computers to steal sensitive information.

Metadata A set of data that gives information about a file.

Memory See RAM.

MHL Mobile high-definition link. A technology that lets you connect a smartphone or tablet to a TV for showing content, as well as charge its battery, using a cable.

MicroSD A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

MicroUSB A miniature version of USB, often found on smartphones, tablets and portable hard drives.

.mpo An image format which combines two or more JPG images in a single file, and displays them in sequence.

NAS Network-attached storage. A hard drive attached to a network that can be shared by other PCs.

Noise Visible dust-like speckles that appear in some camera and TV images. In photos, they are caused by the camera's own sensor. In TV images, they can be caused by the TV's processor or by a flaw in the broadcast signal itself.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone, rather than just by the employees of the company that created it.

Optical audio A socket that provides a high-quality sound signal between PCs, amplifiers, CD and DVD players and more.

Optical stabilisation A mechanism built into digital cameras that compensates for any shaking or vibrations that occur during shooting.

Phono A term often used to describe standard stereo (red and white) audio connections.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to your web browser or to other applications, and is loaded only when it's needed.

Processor The processor – or central processing unit – is the brain of a computer. Processors now are tiny and capable of millions of calculations a second.

Programming language The computer instructions that are used to build computer programs.

PVR Personal video recorder. Also known as DVR (digital video recorder). These set-top boxes let you pause and record digital TV.

Quad core A PC that has four processors on a single chip, which allows it to operate faster than standard (single-core) PCs.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the computer is switched on.

Resolution The amount of detail shown in an image, whether on screen or printed.

Scart A standard connector for video and audio signals.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

Shell A program that lets you control your operating system using text commands.

Spoofing A technique whereby hackers pose as legitimate websites, emails or IP addresses to gain access to sensitive data.

SSL encryption Secure Sockets Layer. A technology for keeping information secure and secret when sent over the internet.

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.

Two-step verification A system that uses two different means to identify the user. For example, a PIN in addition to a password.

USB 3.0 A faster version of the USB standard used to connect devices to a computer.

VGA Video Graphics Array. A standard socket for connecting a monitor to a computer.

Virtual drive A set of files seen by Windows as a separate hard disk.

VOB Video Object. A file format that is used on DVDs.

Web apps Programs that aren't stored on your computer, but on a web server instead and run through your web browser.

White balance Adjusts the balance of colours in the image to produce natural-looking images.

Widget A small program such as a calendar that runs on the Windows Desktop.

Zero-day protection Safeguards that protect software against having its vulnerabilities exploited by hackers.

The Final Straw

STUART ANDREWS is *Computeractive*'s Mr Angry
@SATAndrews

Stuart Andrews wonders why Microsoft skipped 'nine' to release...

Windows 10

So, the next version of Windows will be called Windows 10, not Windows 9. In the last few days I've heard all kinds of excuses and explanations. Microsoft's executives have told us that "it wouldn't be right to call it Windows 9", and that Microsoft's "most comprehensive platform ever" needed a more appropriate name. Maybe it's just me, but calling the Windows after Windows 8 'Windows 9' would have made perfect sense, much as *Rocky IV* followed *Rocky III*, night follows day – and, er, the number nine follows eight.

> We all know that this is a desperate attempt to put some clear blue water between the new Windows and the old

Still, what do I know? It's this kind of visionary, blue-sky thinking that has put Microsoft where it is today.

Some have looked for linguistic and cultural reasons for this sequential leap, suggesting the number nine is unlucky in Japan or that Windows Nine sounds too much like what the Germans have already said to Windows 8. Others have looked for technical reasons. Apparently thousands of ancient applications already reference Windows 9 as an easy way to cover Windows 95 and 98. Calling Windows 8's successor 'Windows 10' is an easy way to avoid the potential bugs, though it sounds like overkill to me.

Microsoft isn't alone in this weird numbers business. Apple followed OS 8 with OS 9, but lost the plot with OS X and has stuck to the same version number ever since, like some fading beauty who is 29 every birthday. Apple now seems happy to creep forward with 10.9, 10.10, 10.11 releases, or maybe it's just forgotten what the X ever stood for.

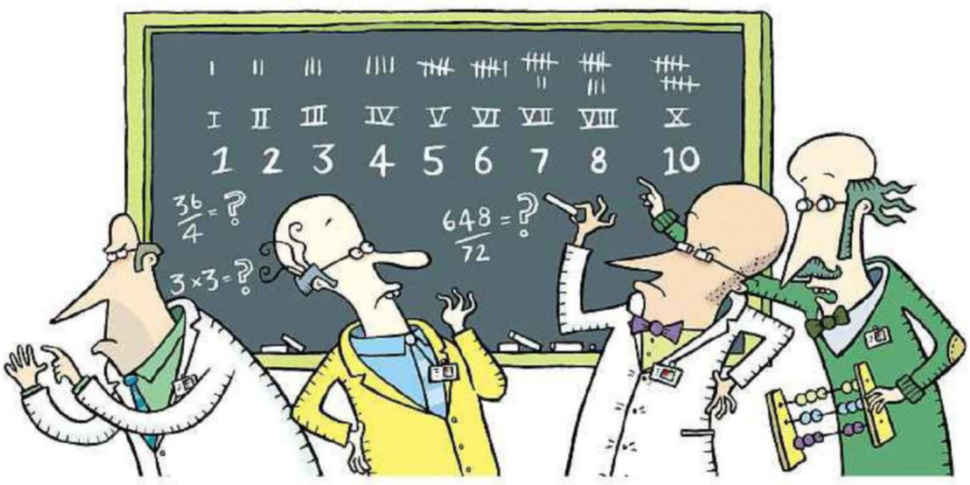
Google, meanwhile, lacks any logic. We went from Android 2.3 Froyo to 3.0 Gingerbread and 4.0 Ice Cream Sandwich, but then 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 were all Jelly Bean, 4.4 is KitKat and at the time of writing we still don't know whether Android L will be Android 5.0 or 4.5.

Still, Microsoft, who are you kidding? We all know that this is a desperate attempt to put some clear blue water between the new Windows and the old. It's a move you've tried before when you ditched the previous worst ever Windows – Vista – for Windows 7. There you needed to draw a line between a slow-moving, bug-ridden trainwreck and what was a cleaned-up, more efficient variant. Going back to numbers after XP and Vista was like going back to your roots.

Now you're trying the same trick, and we should be happy. Where Windows 8.1 gave us a Start button that simply took us straight to the Start screen, like a tap marked 'Free Beer' that dispensed cat wee, Windows 10 gives us a button that actually does what we expect. Putting search on that menu isn't a brilliant innovation – it's something that Windows 7 did already – and being able to run Metro, sorry, 'Modern' apps would be a fine idea, were there any that we wanted to run. Still, you've realised that mouse and keyboard users need an interface to fit their needs. Congratulations, Microsoft – you've incorporated many of the features third-party developers have used to fix Windows 8 already.

Microsoft even seems to be writing Windows 8 out of the Windows story, talking about how those stalwarts who have stuck to Windows 7 will feel like they're moving from a Toyota Prius to a Tesla sports car. If this means Windows 10 will feel like a supercharged Windows 7, then I'm all for it. After all, moving from Windows 7 to Windows 8 was like moving from a Prius to a golf buggy steered with experimental mind-controls.

I like the look of Windows 10, but I just wish Microsoft would be honest about the whole business, not indulge in this naming sleight of hand. Why can't they just admit that they got it wrong, call it Windows 9, and we'll all move on?



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Next issue Stuart despairs at the length of iPhone queues

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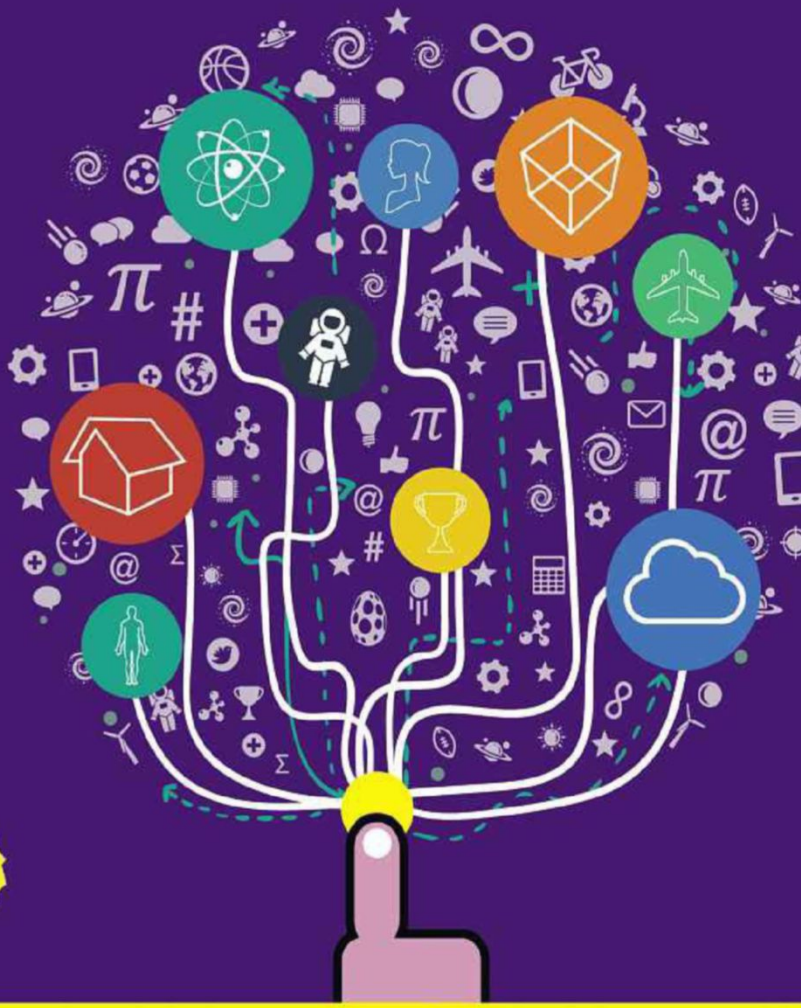

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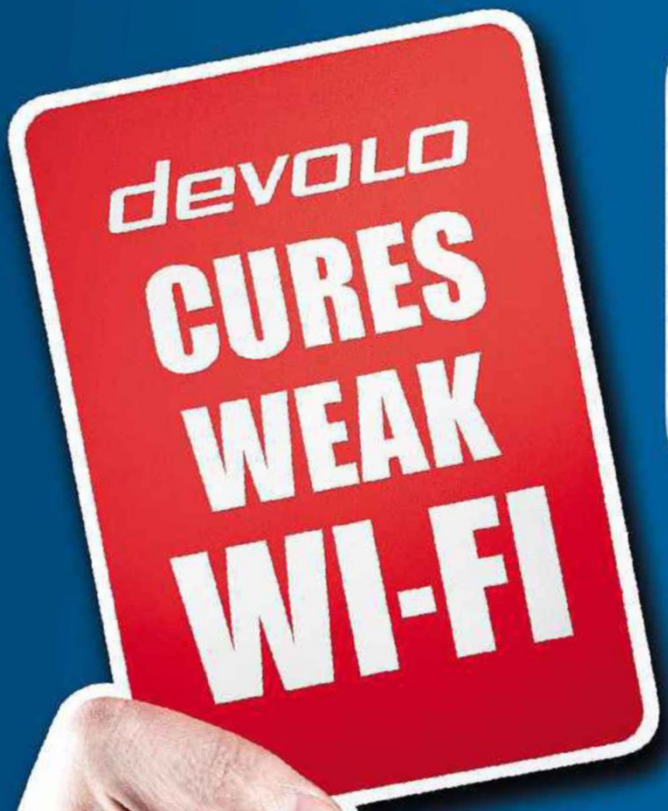

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