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Your friendly guide to technology
ISSUE 431 | 3 – 16 SEPTEMBER 2014

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Microsoft's shock warning – what you must do page 6

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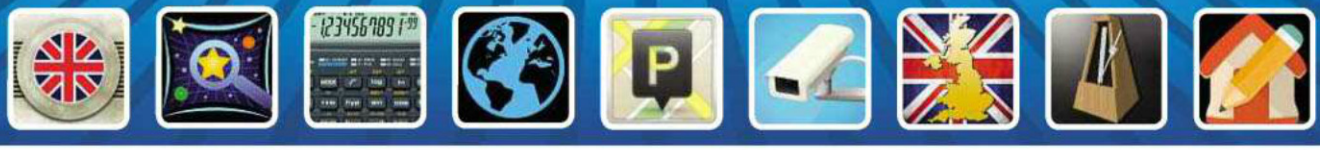

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New tactic from Indian fraudsters p9

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# From the Editor

Staring despondently at my overgrown lawn a few weeks ago, I briefly wondered if there was a tablet app that could magically do the work for me, before coming to my senses and dragging the mower from the garage. But though tablets can't yet cut the grass, they can help lessen the pain of several household chores, such as organising your bills, reading your electricity meter and lots of DIY tasks.

You'll learn how to do these in our Cover Feature (page 50), as well as more exciting things that unlock the full potential of your tablet. With the right apps you can transform it into a global tour guide, weather station, security camera, flight simulator, GPS and much more. You can explore Saturn, climb Mount Everest and sneak into the Bank of England, all without leaving your sofa. Less exciting, but definitely more useful, your tablet can help you find your car if you've forgotten where you parked. Please let me know which app you like best.

**Daniel Booth**
**editor@computeractive.co.uk**

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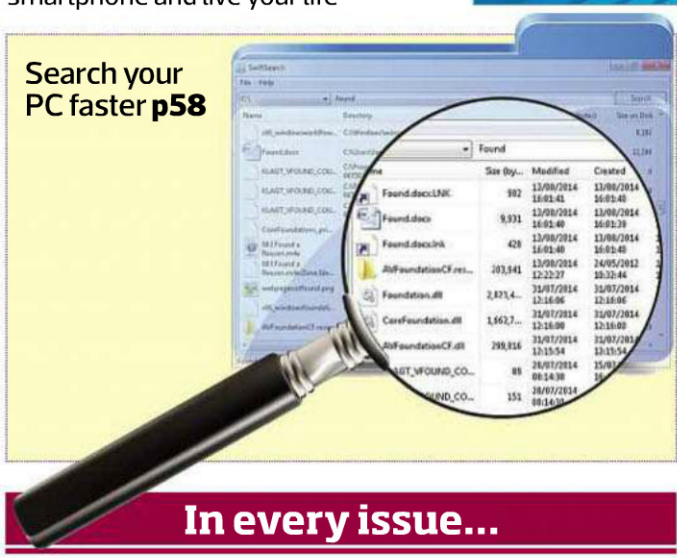


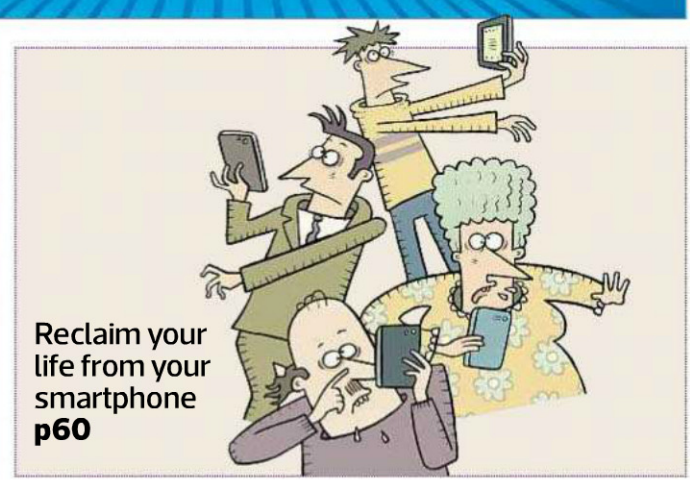


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# News

The top stories in the world of technology

# Microsoft: uninstall latest Windows 7 and 8.1 updates

Microsoft has advised Windows users to uninstall some of the latest updates for Windows 7 and 8.1, following hundreds of complaints from users that their computers have repeatedly crashed.

The updates – issued on 12 August – have caused some PCs to show the '0x50 Stop' error message, commonly known as the 'Blue Screen of Death'. There have also been problems with fonts not being displayed properly, and being saved in the wrong location.

The main cause of the errors is an update called MS14-045, which was supposed to be a routine security fix. Microsoft has removed the update from its website and advised Windows users to uninstall it, whether or not they've been experiencing problems. Microsoft also pulled a further three updates from the Downloads section of its site.

Microsoft posted instructions for uninstalling the updates on its Support website (www.snipca.com/13341), but they aren't easy to follow (see box, below). The company has been criticised for not doing enough to highlight the problems. Instead of making an announcement, Microsoft merely updated the FAQ section of its Security Bulletin to say it recommends uninstalling MS14-045 (www.snipca.com/13343).

Security analyst Graham Cluley praised Microsoft for offering advice, but said that users would've been happier if the bug "had been intercepted during Microsoft's testing process rather than only discovered once rolled out to users' computers".

It's not the first time Microsoft has advised users to uninstall misbehaving updates. In April 2013, Microsoft told Windows 7 users to uninstall an update that crashed some PCs, while in October 2013 the company had to remove a Windows 8.1 RT update that crashed tablets.

## COMMENT

Microsoft has given us problematic updates before. We spend a lot of time and money protecting Windows against threats from the internet, so the least we should expect is that Microsoft doesn't harm our computers from the inside. Microsoft dealt with this latest disaster poorly, and the fact that it didn't publicly announce how to fix the bug suggests that the company was more concerned about its own image than its customers' security.

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO...

**...if your PC has been crashing since the update?**
Follow Microsoft's instructions, but they're not easy to find. Go to www.snipca.com/13341 then click the 'More information' heading. Scroll down to Mitigations (Microsoft's word for 'instructions') under 'Known issue 3', then follow them. The instructions are fairly simple, but be extra careful between steps 2 and 9, which require deleting some Registry entries. Deleting the wrong ones could cause more harm to your PC.

**...if your PC seems fine since the update?**
While Microsoft has advised everyone to uninstall the patch, most Windows users aren't having problems with it. If your PC seems to be fine, take a look at Microsoft's instructions and decide if you're comfortable going through them. If you are, create a system restore point in case something goes wrong. If you're really worried about uninstalling the updates, then don't. We think your PC will most likely be OK.

**...if you haven't installed the update yet?**
Don't install it, and wait until Microsoft releases a fix. You might have to keep a close eye on the Support page for information, though, as Microsoft hasn't been very public about this debacle.

***You'll like this...***
Lenovo has launched its first budget laptop, costing just £229 (www.snipca.com/13395)

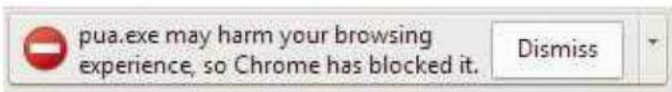
***...but not this***
Virgin Media broadband-only prices will rise in October (www.snipca.com/13421)

# Chrome boosts your anti-junk defences

Google has updated its built-in Safe Browsing tool on Chrome and Firefox browsers to help protect you from software that makes unwanted changes to your PC. These include Potentially Unwanted Programs (PUPs) such as browser-hijacking search engines, toolbars and dubious PC cleaners that request payments. They can be very hard to remove.

If you download something that Safe Browsing suspects is a PUP, you'll now see a message at the bottom of your screen telling you that it has been blocked (see screenshot below). If you think the download is safe and still want to go ahead, you can go to Chrome or Firefox's Downloads list and install it from there.

Previously Safe Browsing only warned you about websites and downloads that were known to install malware on your PC. By extending the tool to cover PUPs, Google is reacting to the growing problem of programs such as Registry cleaners and video players that – while not explicitly malicious – are in fact virtually useless and very irritating. When installed, they change the settings on your PC or browser in ways that can slow it down and make using it very annoying (see our Workshop on page 35).




Many PUPs are hidden away in the installers of legitimate software, usually in the 'Advanced' options or as opt-outs. Google didn't elaborate when asked whether Safe Browsing will tell people that they're downloading programs which contain PUPs in this way.

Currently, Google says Safe Browsing flags up three million malware threats every week.

Internet Explorer has a similar tool called SmartScreen Filter but it doesn't block PUPs (www.snipca.com/13362).

# Police officers punished for racism on Facebook and Twitter

Hundreds of police officers have been investigated for inappropriate behaviour on social-network sites, including making racist, homophobic and "religiously aggressive" comments, as well as adding the victims of crime as friends on Facebook.

A Freedom of Information request by the Press Association revealed that since 2009 there have been 828 investigations into the activities of police staff and officers' behaviour on sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Of those cases, nine per cent resulted in dismissals, 14 per cent yielded no further action, while the remainder were dealt with internally.

According to the police's Code of Ethics (www.snipca.com/13355), anything published online that is "discriminatory, abusive, oppressive, harassing, bullying, victimising, offensive or otherwise incompatible with policing principles" won't be tolerated.

One case involved an officer posting information about an upcoming police operation on his Facebook wall. Two constables in Northampton resigned after photos showing them in a "compromising situation" appeared online. In Devon a community support officer was reprimanded for posing on Facebook with weapons, while another staff member was investigated for falling asleep in the control room after a colleague posted their photo on Facebook.

These revelations will embarrass the police forces that have been encouraging officers to document their working lives with photos and comments on social media.

## IN BRIEF

### TWITTER TO REMOVE PHOTOS OF DEAD PEOPLE

Twitter will consider requests from family members to remove photos taken of people in the period "from when critical injury occurs to the moments before or after death". The move follows a request by the White House to remove images of the beheading of US journalist James Foley by ISIS jihadists, and the posting of fake photoshopped images of Robin Williams' body to the Twitter account of his daughter Zelda Williams.

### YOUTUBE MUSIC-STREAMING SERVICE LEAKED

YouTube's long-awaited music-streaming service will be called YouTube Music Key and will feature over 20 million tracks and videos, according to reports leaked online. It will feature concert footage, and recommendations based on your YouTube-viewing habits. Reportedly, subscribers will pay $9.99 a month and it will launch in the US before the end of 2014. If successful, a UK launch in 2015 is likely.

## Tomorrow's world

Dell Research is working on software that monitors a person's emotional state using brain-activity headsets. Jai Menon, who is leading the research, says the software could be used, for example, to detect how busy a person is, and then direct phone calls to voicemail if necessary. Currently, brain-monitoring hardware is primarily used to help people with severe disabilities interact with PCs or wheelchairs.

## IN BRIEF

### MAN UNITED BANS TABLETS AND LAPTOPS

Manchester United has banned fans taking tablets and laptops to matches at Old Trafford, the club's home stadium, because of "security" reasons. However, the fact that smartphones are still allowed has led some to speculate that the club's real motive is to prevent tablet owners obscuring other fans' views of the pitch when they take photos and videos.

### WINDOWS 9 'TO ARRIVE' ON 30 SEPTEMBER

Microsoft will host a preview event to announce Windows 9 on 30 September, according to technology site The Verge, which cites "sources familiar with Microsoft's plans". Other rumours suggest Microsoft will replace Windows 8's Start screen with a more traditional Start bar, while the voice-activated 'personal assistant' Cortana will be available as an app. Windows 9 is expected to launch in Spring 2015.

# Anger over EE's 50p queue-jumping phone fee

EE customers have been left fuming after the network set up a service that lets people pay 50p to jump the queue when phoning its customer service.

The automated service, called Priority Answer (www.snipca.com/13314), asks customers whether they want to pay the queue-jump fee. If you accept, you jump ahead of customers who haven't paid, but join a new queue of people who have.

It has been criticised by industry experts and members of the public. Rob Kerr, mobiles expert at uSwitch.com, said: "Priority queuing will create a two-tier system, and this isn't going to earn EE any points for popularity."

What makes things worse, Kerr says, is that the service exploits customers at a time when they require assistance: "Paying extra to get bumped up the queue for customer support is slightly adding insult to injury, as most people are calling when they need help the most."

Several people on *Computeractive*'s Facebook page slammed the service. One reader urged EE customers to "vote with their feet and move on", while another called it "profiteering" and wondered whether legal action could be taken against the company.

There were similar views on EE's website where customers responded angrily to a blog post (www.snipca.com/13317) trying to "clear up any misunderstandings" about the service. One customer said it shows "an unquestionable complete disregard and lack of respect".

In better news for EE, Ofcom said it has the best mobile phone reception in the UK. The company came top of Ofcom's latest 'Consumer experiences of mobile phone calls' report (www.snipca.com/13318).

# Michael J Fox and Intel team up to fight Parkinson's disease

The Michael J Fox Foundation and Intel are collaborating on a project that will use smartwatches to help doctors gain a better understanding of Parkinson's disease.

The idea for the project came to former Intel CEO and Parkinson's sufferer Andy Grove in June 2013. It will use Intel's Basis smartwatch (www.mybasis.com) to track physical indicators in people with the disease, including tremors, gait and sleep patterns. Intel's scientists will gather 1GB of data from patients every day, and look for patterns.

Parkinson's is difficult to monitor because the symptoms might not be visible when a sufferer visits the doctor. Doctors recommend that sufferers keep diaries, but this takes up a large amount of the patient's time. Bret Parker, who took part in the early stages of the study, praised it for addressing these problems: "I pay attention to my Parkinson's, but it's not everything I am all the time. The wearables [smartwatches] did that monitoring for me in a way I didn't even notice," he said.

The Michael J Fox Foundation was founded in 2000 by the Hollywood actor (pictured above left), who was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 1991. He's best known for his roles in the *Back to the Future* films.

## What's new from Google

As well as seeing the world on Google's Street View, you can now *hear* it. The fantastic Sounds of Street View project (www.snipca.com/13201) has added noise recorded in three locations. You'll hear an accordion and birdsong in Place du Palais, Avignon; waves and camera clicks in Hapuna Beach, Hawaii; and a band playing in Balboa Park, San Diego. Move around to hear different sounds nearby.

Question of the Fortnight

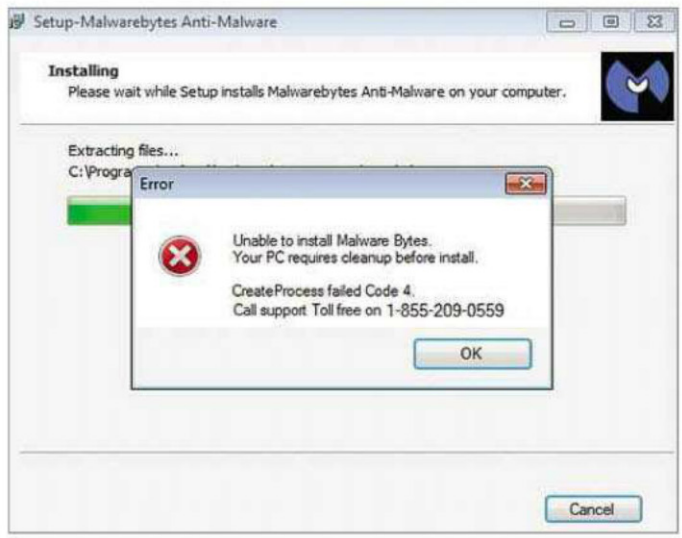
# Are scam downloads now impossible to spot?

Malwarebytes has revealed the latest strategy used by phone scammers, which worryingly shows that scams are getting harder to spot

You decide you need a new antivirus program from a trustworthy company such as AVG, Malwarebytes, Norton or McAfee. It downloads without any problem, you accept the terms and conditions, the familiar installer starts, and all seems to be going fine. But then halfway through the installation you get an error message that advises you to ring a phone number (see image, right). You could easily think this is the antivirus helpline.

But you'd be wrong. In fact it's the latest trick used by scammers to steal your money. The software is fake, and if you call the number in the error message, you reach an Indian call centre where they tell you that your computer is crawling with viruses and that they'll clean it for a fee. Of course, this is a lie.

This scam is easy to fall for, but worse is that fraudsters are hacking genuine security programs so that you pay them rather than the software company. Malwarebytes have detected criminals doing this. Jerome Segura, a senior security researcher at the company said: "A few weeks ago we documented a US-based company using our software against our Terms and Conditions. They were charging four times the price and worst of all the licence key had been pirated."




> "Call the error message number and you get an Indian call centre"

Online security companies report these to malicious downloads, but it's only a matter of time before they reappear elsewhere. And it's not difficult for criminals to build fake programs that mimic legitimate ones. Egemen Tas, Comodo's Vice President of Engineering, told *Computeractive* that scammers don't need to create a fake antivirus from scratch. Instead they can "simply take a genuine AV product, modify it and distribute it".

So how can you protect yourself? You should only download programs from the developers' official site, or from reputable sites such as Softpedia, CNet, TechSpot, The Windows Club and FileHippo. Be cautious when using the Windows Store on Windows 8, though, which was recently reported by technology site How to Geek as being filled with fake software.

Malwarebytes, which highlighted these scams on its blog (www.snipca.com/13428), says that a fake version of genuine software will be flagged by Windows before you download it with the message: 'The publisher could not be verified' (see image, left) or 'driver has been altered'. These warnings mean that the download hasn't been digitally signed by the program's developer, which most reputable software should be. You should click Cancel, not Run, and leave the box 'Always ask before opening this file' ticked.

So despite the increasing deviousness of scammers, you can shield yourself from their attacks. Thankfully, it's not impossible to spot them, but it is definitely getting harder.

## THE FACTS

- A new scam looks like genuine antivirus software, but interrupts your installation with a message telling you to call a phone number
- Legitimate antivirus software is digitally signed, and Windows notifies you if something you're about to download has a problem with this signature
- A recent report found that the Windows 8 Store is filled with fake software

# Letters

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## Switch from IE? Been there, done that

In Issue 430 you ask whether it's time to switch from Internet Explorer. I must confess that I assumed most people already had. I left the browser years ago when it became obvious that Firefox was faster, and had more features. I still use Firefox occasionally – it's like an old friend I want to stay in touch with – but Chrome is the best browser there has ever been. I've been using it for about 18 months, and it's simple, speedy and very stable. And I love playing around with the extensions. Internet Explorer seems one-dimensional by comparison.

**Dennis Hutton**

## Government's emergency data law will help them 'control the internet'

With reference to the Star Letter in Issue 429: "Emergency data law is 'necessary' to keep us safe from terrorists".

Whatever Ms Southall taught when she was a teacher it clearly wasn't history. If it was then maybe she would realise that even "1970s East Germany" wasn't always like that. All totalitarian governments start out by allowing or creating fear and paranoia to spread among the population, and then introduce "essential" legislation which is needed to counter the threat.

Each law passed erodes our civil liberties until we have none left. Despotic regimes in other countries have been overthrown by its populace, who have used the internet to communicate and organise themselves. This kind of power is feared by all governments – even ours – and measures like this are the thin end of the wedge. They seem reasonable now but ultimately they are putting into place the infrastructure for control of the internet.

Just take a look at how local authorities already use laws that have been passed for anti-terrorism purposes to spy on people they believe are sending their kids to a school outside the correct catchment area or not recycling their waste properly.

The terrorists that Ms Southall fears want to take away all our freedoms and live in a society that dictates to us how we think, act and behave. They needn't bother when her and her so-called "silent majority" are willing to give them all away.

**Malcolm Laycock**

In the Star Letter in Issue 429, Beatrice Southall castigates "privacy campaigners" who criticise the Government's new data law, which she says is intended to keep us safe. The problem with this and previous laws is that they are drafted far too loosely. If they were expressly aimed at combating terrorism then few people would argue against them. As Beatrice says, most people would sacrifice some privacy if it meant they could take a flight somewhere without being blown up.

However, the current law allows the Government and other authorities to snoop on us on the grounds of national security and for the purposes of detecting crime, preventing disorder, public safety, protecting public health or in the interests of the economic wellbeing of the UK. None of these are clearly defined terms and they can mean almost whatever the Government wants them to mean. If Beatrice became involved in, say, a campaign to save her local hospital, would she mind if her emails were monitored to help the authorities prevent what they may see as the potential for public disorder?

**Jim Pragnell**

I sincerely hope that our current teachers do not think like Beatrice Southall . She completely misses the point of the protests against this law. It is the random intrusion into our private lives that we object to. If the police or the security services believe there is something to check then they should have to apply for a warrant. It was my experience years ago that such warrants can be issued in minutes. If we allow "the authorities" freedom to poke around in our lives George Orwell's "1984" will become a reality.

**Roger Sargent**

## Linux is too much hassle for former XP users

Several times I've noted your excellent magazine suggest that Linux is a possible answer to those who are ready to abandon Windows XP. As an experienced user of Linux (specifically

## Winding up the phone scammers

I'm getting on but am of sane mind. In the past two weeks I've received over 20 phone calls, allegedly from Microsoft (based in India). At first, I just hung up on them, but today I thought – right! The Indian lady asked me to turn on my computer saying I had infected files. I told her to wait while I do this. After about five minutes I could hear her saying, "Hello? Hello?". Eventually she hung up, but 10 seconds later she was back. "Did you start your computer?" she asked me. To which I replied: "I *thought* I had a computer, but it's actually a microwave oven!". She hung up.

Hopefully, they will get the message, but I doubt it. I might be old but I ain't stupid.

**Richard Shevill**

Ubuntu), I don't think it is yet the complete answer. Downloading and installing it on the ISO image system actually seems to have become less reliable than it used to be. Indeed, my last two attempts haven't worked (apparently a vital file was missing, preventing installation). This is really not good enough and until Linux can be downloaded and used without that hassle I don't think it's the solution. Another problem is that almost whatever printer one may be using, Linux won't be able to 'find' it.

**Robin Brace**

## Smartwatches will give 'health warning signs'

I like Stuart Andrews's curmudgeonly take on the hype that surrounds new technology. I turn to his Final Straw column first in every issue. But I think he missed the point in Issue 430 when dismissing wearable technology, and smartwatches in particular. Yes, no doubt lots of people will use them in annoying ways, staring at their wrists as they walk zombie-like along the pavement, but I think smartwatches will turn into essential health devices to help people check their wellbeing through their heart rate. Watches already exist that do this, and I predict that others will soon be made that will give warning signs to people with conditions that need regular monitoring, such as diabetes and epilepsy. That's why I would buy one, not because it will let me check Twitter.

**Alexander Stimson**

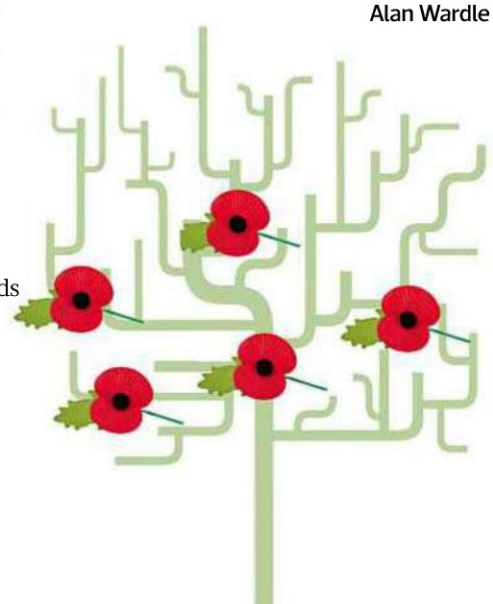
## Tips for finding WW1 ancestors

I have just finished reading your interesting article about researching one's World War I family tree (Issue 429). As I've been building my family tree for over a decade I can add a few more tips.

Do not assume your ancestor was in the army. Many men joined the navy or, like my grandfather, the Royal Naval Division. This was a body of up to eight battalions set up by Winston Churchill to help the Royal Marines defend the Belgian ports.

If you do have difficulty finding records for an ancestor, this may be because they are among what are known as the Burnt Records. Bombing during World War II damaged or destroyed many attestation records from WW1, so sadly you may only get a few snippets. Don't give up though, because it's amazing where some information can be gleaned.

**Alan Wardle**



# STAR LETTER

## Teens 'most tech-savvy'? Ofcom's research just seeks 'cheap headlines'

Surely Ofcom has better things to do than seek cheap headlines with flawed research into how teenagers are, apparently, better at using tech than us oldies ('Teenagers more tech-savvy than over-60s', News, Issue 430)?

It seems to me that Ofcom has made a basic error in assuming that regularity of use equates to technical understanding. I don't dispute the claim that teens use technology more often than people of a greyer vintage, but does that mean their use is more productive? For example, I could spend the next eight hours texting my friends about a party tonight, or uploading photos from last night's party to Facebook, but would that require as much technical know-how as 30 minutes of coding? Of course not. One hour with the Raspberry Pi is worth 100 hours taking stupid selfies.

At best, Ofcom's research is patronising drivel. But at worst, it perpetuates the myth that our technical 'best before' date expires when we hit 40 (a milestone I passed the same year the ZX Spectrum came out!). Ofcom should know that research like this, however well intentioned, gets spat out by the media in soundbite-friendly chunks. Most people will skim-read the findings and come to the simplified conclusion that the latest teenagers are a generation of tech geniuses, the like of which we've never seen before, while anyone over 60 thinks tablets are still what you take when you have a bit of indigestion.

More than anything, I don't get why Ofcom is conducting this sort of research. Its website describes Ofcom as: "Independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries". After this research, I think it should change to "Independent distributor of cheap, misleading headlines for the UK media". Ofcom should stick to policies that stand up for the consumer. These may get less news coverage, and Ofcom's PR department might become redundant, but the public will benefit more.

**Andrew Punt**

The Star Letter writer wins a *Computeractive* mug!

## Public won't be 'bullied' into buying Windows 8

I allowed myself a little smug chuckle when I read in Issue 430 that people leaving XP are moving to Windows 7 not 8. That's exactly what I did a few months back, and I'm not regretting it – Windows 7 is superb (in fact, I really should have switched much earlier). It just goes to show that the public won't be bullied by mega-rich corporations, and will stubbornly, even contrarily sometimes, do their own thing. Sorry Microsoft, you can't simply treat PC users like obedient dogs. Tell us to sit, and we'll stand. Ask us to beg, and we'll roll over.

**Josh Ferguson**

# Consumeractive

## Why can't I get return postage for faulty goods?

**Q** I bought a Lenovo G700 laptop from Love Lenovo (www.lovelenovo.co.uk), but it turned out to be faulty. They first promised to give me a full refund including the return postage of £23.12. But now the company says the laptop isn't faulty and it's not obliged to repay the return postage. Is this right?

Anantray Karia

**A** Yes it is right - if (and it's a big if) the laptop isn't faulty, then Love Lenovo doesn't have to refund Anantray the return postage costs. This refund right only exists in two instances. The most common is under the Sale of Goods Act for products that are faulty, not as described, or not fit for purpose. The other is when the retailer doesn't make it clear before you buy a product that you'll be the one paying the postage to return goods for any other reason bar a fault.

It's not going to be easy for Anantray to prove the laptop is faulty because Love Lenovo now have it. We've put his complaint to Love Lenovo, but he would have had a stronger case if before returning the laptop he had gathered supporting evidence, such as photos and error messages. It also helps to pay an expert to check the product, to confirm that it's faulty.

## Can I get a refund from Virgin for slow broadband?

**Q** I upgraded my Virgin broadband to the company's "up-to" 100Mbps service for an extra £5 per month, but it never got above 26Mbps. I called Virgin on three occasions, each time receiving a credit of £5, but the speed never improved. Over 12 months this means I've paid an extra £45 for a service I never got but Virgin won't refund this. Can I get this money back?

John Deacon

**A** There's nothing to stop John trying, but he may have a battle on his hands.

Initially we thought this was a simple breach of contract because Virgin hasn't delivered anywhere near the promised speed. John should've been able to cancel the upgrade and be reimbursed for the extra monthly charge.

But we think John has scuppered his chances of getting the £45 back because he failed to follow up on his initial complaints and so legally may have "accepted" the service.

We'll explain the legal definition of acceptance. It's true that John notified Virgin about the problem over the phone, each time being given a refund for that month's additional cost. Virgin told us that each time John called he was asked to connect his laptop to an Ethernet cable so it could check if the problem was with John's Wi-Fi router.

However, John never did this. Nor did he escalate the complaint formally. Instead he continued to use the service knowing there was a problem. All this could be considered "acceptance".

But this doesn't take away the fact Virgin was in breach of contract, so John should consider taking his case to arbitration. He needs to get a "deadlock letter" from Virgin, stating what it's done to help John and why it won't refund the £45. He can then file his claim with CISAS (www.cisas.org.uk). It may rule in his favour, it may not, but it won't cost him anything to try.

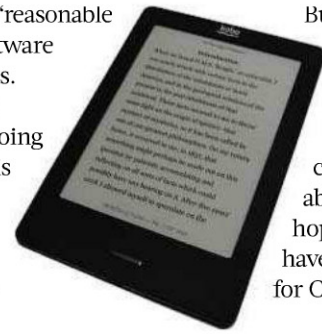
## Software has ruined my e-reader, but who's to blame?

**Q** The Kobo e-reader I bought from John Lewis in April 2012 was working fine until the latest firmware update (3.3.0). Now the device freezes after I've read about four pages. Kobo told me that its warranty has ended, so it won't do anything to help. But surely it's Kobo's responsibility?

Chris Worthington

**A** Chris is right - the manufacturer, not the retailer, is responsible if it releases software updates that render a device useless. It doesn't matter that Chris' warranty is no longer valid. Legally, software is seen as a service so Kobo has to abide by the Supply of Goods and Services to Consumers act. Services must be carried out with "reasonable skill and care", so the software mustn't damage the goods.

Of course, proving the update is to blame isn't going to be easy. Kobo told Chris it hadn't received any other complaints so we tried to narrow the field down. We asked Chris to reset the e-reader to the factory settings to remove the update. He told us that once he'd done this the device worked perfectly.



But the problem for Chris is that the firmware automatically reinstalls once he links the e-reader to his Kobo account to download a book. We've contacted Kobo and John Lewis about this situation and hopefully will have a solution for Chris soon.

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.

# Who's responsible for defective pre-installed software?

**Q** I bought a £799 Samsung Model UE48H6670ST Smart TV from Currys at the end of May. I've had nothing but problems trying to sync the TV. Samsung said it was aware of this problem with the TV, but wants to charge me for an engineer's visit. Currys said it was a software issue and not its problem so won't give me a refund. What do I do now?

David Adcock

**A** What David does now is let us handle this because the Currys staff he contacted are under the illusion that software-related issues are "not their problem".

Well, they are. But since David has hit a brick wall, we'll explain to Currys that when a retailer sells a product it's responsible for the whole item, including pre-installed software that's vital to the functioning of the device. If there's an inherent problem with this when a device is sold, then it was never "fit for purpose" in the first place.

A software problem only becomes another company's responsibility when it's a firmware upgrade made after the product was sold, which is outside the control of the retailer (see opposite: a firmware upgrade is causing faults with a Kobo). We've contacted Currys and it's investigating. We'll update you in a later issue.

CASE ONGOING

## CASE UPDATES

### Royal Mail offer compensation for lost packages sent by Freepost

In Issue 430 we looked at Richard Maxwell's compensation claim against Royal Mail for losing a mobile phone. He had sent it to MobileCashMate (www.mobilecashmate.co.uk), who had offered him £180 for it. We didn't think he had a claim because he'd used a Freepost service paid for by MobileCashMate, which meant he didn't have a contract with Royal Mail. Despite this, Royal Mail still offered the top-rate compensation for this Freepost service which is £50.

We asked Royal Mail for clarification. It told us that we were correct to say that Richard didn't have a contract with it, but it allows some claims that aren't bound by a legal contract, and considers each Freepost case on its individual merit.

Richard fulfilled some of the criteria Royal Mail considers when assessing a claim, the most important being that he had proof of postage and had agreed a price for the phone in advance. This is crucial if you want to claim any money back using Freepost. However, Richard is still £130 out of pocket, so the moral of this tale is when posting expensive items, pay for a service such as Special Delivery (www.snipca.com/13170), rather than rely on a company's offer of Freepost.

## THIS WILL COME IN USEFUL

### Contact info for PC/laptop manufacturers

**Apple 0800 107 6285**
Online help: www.snipca.com/13108 Twitter: None

**Acer 0371 760 1000**
Live chat: www.snipca.com/13175 Twitter: @AcerUK_Official

**Asus 0870 1208 340**
Email: www.snipca.com/13014 Twitter: @ASUSUK

**Dell 0800 028 2660**
Email: www.snipca.com/13016 Twitter: @DellCares

**HP 0207 660 0596**
Online help: www.snipca.com/13109 Twitter: @HPSupport

**Lenovo 0203 014 0095**
Contact form: www.snipca.com/13008 Twitter: @lenovo_UKI

**Samsung 0330 726 7864**
Email: www.snipca.com/13031 Twitter: @SamsungUK

**Sony 0207 365 2810**
Email: www.snipca.com/13018 Twitter: @SonyUK

**Toshiba 0333 222 7444**
Live chat: www.snipca.com/13176 Twitter: @ToshibaUK

# Protect Your Tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

## WATCH OUT FOR...

# New flaws in Adobe products

### What happened?

Adobe told users to urgently update Reader and Acrobat after hackers were discovered exploiting a zero-day vulnerability in Adobe Reader. The flaw, which was detected by security researchers at Kaspersky (www.snipca.com/13230), allows hackers to run malicious code on a targeted PC. It's been reported that the Mac versions of Acrobat and Reader are not at risk.

In a separate announcement, Adobe released yet more security updates for vulnerabilities that exist in the Windows, Mac and Linux version of its Flash plug-in. Although it has given some of these fixes the maximum priority rating, Adobe said it wasn't aware of hackers using the flaws to attack computers.

### What should you do?

Adobe Reader and Acrobat should update automatically, but often users have had to wait a worrying length of time before receiving confirmation that this has happened. You should check in the Help menu to see if there's a newer version available.

Which particular version of Reader and Acrobat you should be updated to depends on what you currently use – read Adobe's Security Bulletin for more info (see under 'Summary' at www.snipca.com/13229). If you think it hasn't been updated, follow the instructions in the bulletin and click the correct link.

The same applies for Flash updates. The version of Flash that comes with Chrome, Internet Explorer 10 for Windows 8 and Internet Explorer 11 for Windows 8.1 will update automatically. If you use Flash in Firefox or earlier Internet Explorer versions, or on a Linux PC or a Mac, read Adobe's latest Security Bulletin for Flash (www.snipca.com/13232) to find out which version you should update to (you'll download it from Adobe's Flash Player Support Center at www.snipca.com/13233).

You can find out which version of Flash you currently have installed at www.adobe.com/software/flash/about.

# New tools

## LastPass updates

https://lastpass.com

LastPass, our favourite password manager (see our Cover Feature, Issue 421), has had some impressive updates in the past few months, adding extra layers of security. The most important (via update 3.1.50), is that any URLs you save will be automatically prefixed with 'https'. This prefix is much safer than 'http' because it encrypts any data being transferred (never enter your credit-card details on a site that doesn't use 'https' – the extra 's' stands for 'Secure').

It's also easier to organise your passwords thanks to a new feature that suggests a folder name for new websites you save. And if you've yet to create a LastPass account, and use Chrome or Safari, now's the best time to do so because there's an "improved" wizard for those browsers. You can read all the recent changes in LastPass's Release Notes (www.snipca.com/13370).

# ScamWatch

READERS WARN READERS

### Suspicious of 'Skype PayPal transaction'

I recently received an email supposedly from PayPal Security, informing me that Skype had taken £58.96 from my PayPal account. The email asked me to click a link in order to retrieve this money. I sensed a scam, so checked my account and found no trace of this transaction. I asked PayPal if it had sent the email, and they confirmed my suspicions that it was a scam. The email was from paypal7@outlook.com, and the link had the word "scenter", obviously spelled incorrectly. According to PayPal's forums, it seems many others have been targeted by this scam (www.snipca.com/13171).

**Len Whitehead**

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

# pcspecialist

PC Specialist recommends Windows 8.1

## Infinity 7850K

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

- AMD A10-7850K Quad Core APU
- **Windows 8.1**
- 8GB Kingston Hyper-X FURY 1600MHz
- 2TB SATA III 6Gb/s HDD
- Corsir 450W VS Series PSU
- PCS Alpha Trion Case
- 3 Year Standard Warranty

**from £499***

## Vortex 750 Gaming PC

Game at the next level with the Vortex 750 Gaming PC. With 4th Gen Intel Core technology and AMD R9 Graphics, the Vortex 750will breeze through any game.

- 4th Gen Intel® Core™ i5-4570 Processor
- **Windows 8.1**
- 8GB Kingston DDR3 1600MHz RAM
- 1TB SATA III Hard Drive
- 2GB AMD Radeon R9 270X
- Corsair 450W VW Series PSU
- 3 Year Standard Warranty

**from £749***

## Vanquish DS Red

"If you want a quiet gaming system, look no further than the PC Specialist Vanquish DS Red".
*Custom PC Magazine*

- 4th Gen Intel® Core™ i5-4670K Processor
- **Windows 8.1**
- 8GB Kingston Hyper-X 1600MHz RAM
- 120GB Kingston SSD
- 1TB Caviar Black Hard Drive
- 3GB AMD Radeon R9 280X
- 3 Year Standard Warranty

**from £999***

## 10.1"Voyager 2-in-1

The 10.1" Voyager features the best of both worlds! Choose whether to dock the tablet into the Bluetooth keyboard, or take the Voyager away with you and use as a tablet!

- 10.1" LED Display (1920 x 1080)
- Intel® Dual Core™ N2806 Processor
- **Windows 8.1**
- 2GB DDR3L 1333MHz
- 32/64GB MSATA
- 10 Point Multi-touch
- Gyro Sensor
- 3 Year Standard Warranty

**from £269***

## 15.6" Optimus V

Breeze through your daily work, enjoy playing the latest games, or watch the latest blu-ray movies on this dazzling 15.6 inch full HD screen.

- 15.6" LED Display (1920 x 1080)
- 4th Gen Intel® Core™ i5-4210MQ Processor
- **Windows 8.1**
- 8GB Kingston SODIMM 1600MHz RAM
- 120GB Kingston V300 SSD
- 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M
- 3 Year Standard Warranty

**from £779***

## Vortex 870

Designed for high end gaming, the 15.6" Vortex IV is an extremely powerful Haswell ready Intel™ Core™ based notebook PC.
***FREE WATCH_DOGS GAME****

- 15.6" LED Display (1920x1080)
- 4th Gen Intel® Core™ i7-4710MQ Processor
- **Windows 8.1**
- 8GB Kingston SODIMM
- 120GB Kingston Hyper-X 3K SSD
- 6GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M
- 3 Year Standard Warranty

**from £1139***

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**code:CA297**

# Unleash the gamer within you...

# Best Free Software

Brilliant new programs that won't cost you anything

OFFICE SUITE

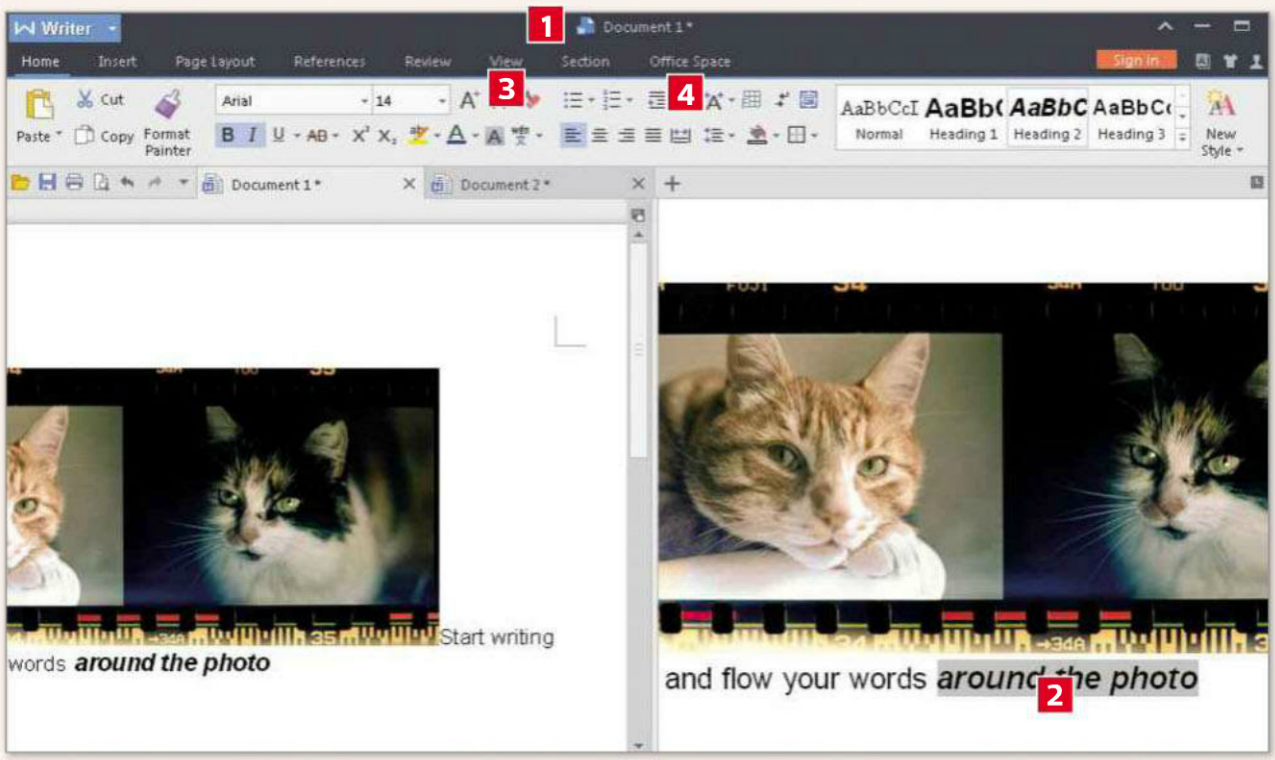
## WPS Office

**www.wps.com/office-for-windows**
**What you need:** Windows XP, Vista, 7 or 8

We use Microsoft Office because it's there, but it's not a very good habit. There are some excellent free alternatives, and WPS Office ('Writer, Presentation, Spreadsheets'), formerly called Kingsoft Office, is the smallest and freshest. It supports more formats and looks less old-fashioned than OpenOffice, it's easier to use than LibreOffice (though if you disagree turn to page 48) and, at just 61MB, it takes up less hard-drive space than either of them.

The most noticeable change, apart from the name, is a stunning new look that gives you one-click access to scores of tools. The suite opens by default on Writer, and you can open Presentation and Spreadsheets from your Start menu or screen. New features include File Roaming, which automatically and securely saves your open document to the cloud, and a split window that lets you see different parts of a document at once.

WPS is in beta and some features need to be ironed out – for example, it's not clear how to link from your cloud accounts to File Roaming. But the suite is so good that we're happy to recommend it now. We found the installer quick and easy to use, but you'll need to click 'No, thanks' in the final window to avoid downloading three extra tools (YAC, PC Faster and Utilities – these aren't malicious, but you should choose when you want them). WPS is also now available for Android (www.wps.com/android), iOS (www.wps.com/ios) and Linux (www.wps.com/linux).




1 Click the 'Document 1' tab to start creating a new document. Click the '+' symbol next to it to create a 'Document 2' tab, and so on. Click 'x' on a tab to close it.

2 Highlight some text and click the relevant toolbar button to change the font, size and style. To insert a photo, click Insert, Picture, then From File or From Scanner.

3 To split the window, click View, Split Window, then Split Horizontally or Split Vertically. Any edits you make in one window are copied into the second window.

4 To save documents automatically to the cloud, click Office Space, File Roaming, 'Sign in'. You can sign in using your Google, Twitter or Facebook account.

BACKUP TOOL

## AOMEI Backupper Standard

**www.snipca.com/13432**

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

Backing up your system is the first step in staying safe – whether it's from hackers locking down your computer or from someone spilling tea on your PC tower. This easy-to-use program will back up your files, software and settings while you carry on doing other work on your PC. Its new version lets you back up or restore data from one networked PC to another, which is useful if you're moving to a new machine or system. Click the small Local Download link under the left-hand blue button to get the installer, which doesn't try to add any unwanted extras.

PC TUNE-UP TOOL

## Baidu PC Faster 5

**www.pcfaster.com**

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

The faster, smaller, redesigned new version of this PC-boosting tool has a similar look and feel to Wise Care 365 (www.wisecleaner.com). Like Wise Care, PC Faster has a tidy blue program window with one-click tools for clearing junk, freeing up your PC's memory and removing items from your startup menu. The missing "s" in 'We make PC faster' at the top-left (see image, above) doesn't instil confidence (it should be 'makers'), and we weren't happy to see PC Faster appear in the installer for WPS Office (see opposite), but it's safe, useful and, indeed, fast. There is a 'Custom installation' link in the installer, but it doesn't include any crapware opt-outs and you don't have to click it unless you want to change the program file location.

FILE MANAGEMENT

## Data Crow 4

**www.datacrow.net**

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

Catalogue your videos, photos, ebooks and other files with this excellent open-source tool. It doesn't reorganise your files like Windows Explorer, but it helps you sort and find them more easily by letting you list them in different categories, add notes and links, such as links to Amazon or IMDb.com (www.imdb.com). The new version streamlines its cataloguing categories and lets you create your own (say, 'travel ebooks'). The installer doesn't contain any extras, but you will need to have Java installed (www.java.com).

## WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

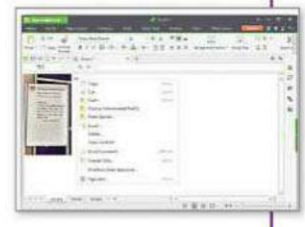
We tell you what software to use

### How can I index my whisky miniatures collection?

**Q** I collect whisky miniatures, and I take photos of the labels to help me keep track of them all. The trouble is that I'm colourblind, so I sometimes struggle to tell the labels apart. Is there a photo-organising tool that can help me?

Iain Johnston

**A** Because you're colour blind, you might be better off using a cataloguing program like Data Crow (see above), or WPS Spreadsheets (www.snipca.com/13435), which comes with WPS Office (see opposite). You can insert photos into rows and even take pictures using your webcam and add them directly to the spreadsheet to create an illustrated searchable database. If you do decide to go for a photo organiser, the best is Adobe Lightroom (www.snipca.com/13436). It lets you overlay photos and thumbnails with tags and other sorting data, as well as edit and export them – but it's expensive, at £57.64 (there are subscription options too). Picasa (http://picasa.google.com) is a great free alternative.



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

**TABLET** | **£1,109** from www.snipca.com/13194

## **Microsoft** Surface Pro 3

Third time lucky for Microsoft's flagship tablet

Microsoft is nothing if not persistent. Its Surface range of Windows 8 tablets has been far from popular, but that hasn't stopped the company from releasing the Surface Pro 3. This latest outing retains the distinctive features of its predecessors – a magnetically attached keyboard cover, a stylus and a built-in stand – but they've all been heavily refined.

The Surface Pro 3 comes with a choice of specifications, starting from a reasonable £639 all the way up to an eye-watering £1,649 (see table). Spending more gets you a faster processor, more memory and a greater amount of storage.

The two cheapest models come with only 4GB of memory and 64GB or 128GB respectively of storage, which is pretty miserly. 4GB of memory is fine for now, but will quickly become limiting as new programs needing more memory become available. While 64GB and 128GB sounds plenty, don't forget Windows 8.1 uses up around 30GB, leaving little for your own apps and files. We, therefore, reviewed the next model up (price £1,109), which comes with 8GB of memory, 256GB of storage and an Intel Core i5 4300U 1.9GHz dual-core processor. These are the minimum specifications we'd recommend.

### Keyboard cover and stand

At 800g, the Surface Pro 3 is 100g lighter than its predecessors. As laptops go, 800g is light, but it's heavy for a tablet, so when we used it for long periods using it for long periods our arm ached, unless we positioned it on our lap or stomach. Its hefty weight is no doubt down to its sturdy metal construction. It's noticeably thinner than most laptops though, but it still offers a full-size USB3.0 port, so you can easily plug in external storage, printers and other peripherals. It also comes with a built-in fold-out stand. Unlike stands on previous Surface Pros, this one can be positioned at any angle you like, making it easier to get a comfortable viewing angle when used with the optional keyboard cover.

The magnetic keyboard cover is one of the Surface Pro 3's most distinctive features, but it isn't included with the tablet (costing an extra £110). Usefully, the cover can now be attached at an angle. This raises the keyboard up slightly from the flat surface beneath and makes typing more comfortable for some. A cover with touch-sensitive, non-moving keys is available for older Surface Pros, but the Pro 3 is only compatible with a slightly bulkier cover that has physical keys that move. This is no bad thing, though, because we find typing with physical keys far faster and more accurate. Although the keys could do with more travel, it beats typing with the onscreen keyboard.

One of the biggest drawbacks of previous Surface Pros was that they were difficult to use on your lap. This was because the thin, flexible keyboard cover

| PROCESSOR | MEMORY | STORAGE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.5GHz Core i3 4020Y | 4GB | 64GB | £639 |
| 1.9GHz Core i5 4300U | 4GB | 128GB | £849 |
| 1.9GHz Core i5 4300U | 8GB | 256GB | £1,109 |
| 1.7GHz Core i7 4650U | 8GB | 256GB | £1,339 |
| 1.7GHz Core i7 4650U | 8GB | 512GB | £1,649 |

> The magnetic keyboard cover is one of its most distinctive features and can now be attached at an angle

and hard-to-adjust stand often made them feel precariously perched. Thanks to the new, stiffer keyboard cover and the more flexible stand, this is far less of a problem now. It's still not perfect though – perched on crossed legs it still felt unstable so it's still more at home on a desk than on a lap.

## Pen and screen

The Surface Pro 3 comes with a stylus that connects via Bluetooth. Pressing the button at the cap end of the stylus opens the OneNote app, even when the tablet is asleep, so you can quickly scribble notes. Windows' handwriting recognition is accurate, although it's not quite fast enough to be a full-time replacement for typing, unless you're a very slow typist.

Although the 12in touchscreen is pressure-sensitive (meaning pressing down harder with the stylus creates a thicker, darker mark), it only supports 256 levels of pressure instead of the 1,000 levels supported by the Surface Pro 2 (see our review, Issue 410). It's therefore not suited for creating finely detailed artworks, but it's more than good enough for sketching first drafts. Impressively, the palm of your hand is ignored when it's resting on the screen while you're drawing or writing.

The screens of previous Surfaces had a 16:9 aspect ratio, which made them noticeably more wide than tall. Although this was great for watching widescreen movies, it made them a little too high (in portrait orientation) for a comfortable reading experience. The Surface Pro 3 screen has a 3:2 aspect ratio instead, which is closer in proportions to an A4 page and makes reading much easier.

This aspect ratio is rare and allows for the super-high resolution of 2160x1440 pixels, which is also uncommon. Programs that support super-high resolutions have detailed graphics and incredibly crisp, print-like text, but there aren't many available. Most software you'll use on the Surface Pro will have jagged or unreadably small text. The colour accuracy is a little off, too, but it is at least very bright and the touch-sensitivity is flawless.

## Performance

Battery life was good, although it lagged behind its competitors somewhat. In our tablet-battery test – which plays a video on a loop until the battery is exhausted – the Surface Pro 3 lasted just over nine hours. In our laptop-battery test, which scrolls through a text document continuously until the battery dies, the Surface Pro 3 lasted just over 13 hours which isn't the best result we've seen, but is still very respectable.

The Surface Pro 3 performed well in our demanding benchmark speed tests, although its metal casing did become uncomfortably hot and its fan emitted a high-pitched whirring sound, which was distracting in a quiet room.

## Conclusion

The Surface Pro 3 is a vast improvement over its predecessors but it's very heavy for a tablet and still a little fiddly as a laptop, while the most sensible configuration costs as much as buying a separate tablet and budget laptop. It's a good choice if you like to use a stylus, if you work primarily at a desk or if you must have a USB port and be able to run Windows programs in a tablet. If you fall into one or more of these niches, then it's a good choice.

## SPECIFICATIONS

12in 2160x1440-pixel touchscreen • 1.9GHz Intel Core i5 4300U dual-core processor • 8GB memory • 256GB storage • Intel HD 4400 integrated graphics chip • Windows 8.1 Pro • 800g • 292x201x9mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/13195

## HOW WE TEST

*Computeractive* is owned by Dennis Publishing, which owns a hi-tech facility for testing the latest technology. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

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

## PRICES

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

**VERDICT:** Still not perfect, but the best Windows 8.1 tablet-laptop hybrid yet

★★★★☆

**ALTERNATIVE:** Apple MacBook Pro 13in Retina £1,199 A lightweight laptop with a great-quality super-high-resolution screen, comfortable keyboard and incredible battery life

**TABLET | £399 (16GB, Wi-Fi only)** from www.snipca.com/13360

# Samsung Galaxy Tab S 10.5

A quality 10in Android tablet let down by some niggling flaws

Back in Issue 429 we reviewed the Galaxy Tab S 8.4, a superb Android tablet with a screen so good that it even surpassed the outstanding screen of the iPad Mini 2 – which is already great – in quality. The 10in counterpart of the Tab S has now arrived and while it's obviously similar to the smaller Tab S, it has a few unique flaws of its own that prevent it from beating the 10in iPad Air.

The Tab S 10.5 looks almost identical to its smaller relative. It has a soft-touch surface on its rear and what appears to be a metal rim, but is actually plastic. The white version looks a little tacky, but the 'bronze titanium' variant, which is really just grey with a gold trim, looks surprisingly stylish.

The Tab S 10.5 may not be all-metal like the iPad Air (see our review, Issue 411), but it feels almost as sturdy and it's just as light at 465g. Despite its exceptionally slender build, it still has room for a microSD card slot. Disappointingly, though, it doesn't have a micro USB 3.0 port like the Galaxy Note 3 phablet. This would greatly reduce the amount of time needed for copying lots of files from your computer.

> "The 10.5in screen has a huge resolution of 2560x1440 pixels"

The Tab S 10.5 does have a few design flaws, though. The two unsightly holes on the back of the tablet are used for attaching Samsung's optional cases, which double as screen covers, but these can easily come off when jostled in a bag. The tablet has very thin borders on the left- and right-hand sides when held horizontally, which makes it tricky to get a firm, comfortable grip. This isn't a problem if you hold the tablet in portrait orientation where the borders are thicker, but here it's far too easy to accidentally press the touch-sensitive back and 'recent apps' buttons on one side, or the power button on the other, which is very annoying.

The 10.5in screen has a huge resolution of 2560x1440 pixels so text is very sharp. The screen uses AMOLED technology so it's dazzlingly bright, but thankfully doesn't have any of the sharpness or colour-accuracy problems of older AMOLED screens.

Like the Tab S 8.4, the 10.5 excelled in our app tests, but sometimes struggled when it came to responsiveness. The touchscreen occasionally lagged behind our finger movements when we scrolled through multimedia websites and web apps. We had no complaints about battery life – it lasted an impressive 14 hours and 20 minutes when playing videos on a loop.

Samsung has added its own TouchWiz interface on top of Android 4.4 KitKat. Although it's less cluttered than previous versions, we still don't like it. There are calendar and news widgets that you can't remove, but you can of course ignore them. The bar running along the bottom of the homescreen for holding your most frequently used apps has been removed, as has the option to have multiple user accounts. There is at least a substitute for the latter in the form of Kid's Mode – a child-oriented alternative interface that also prevents little ones from tampering with your apps and data.

TouchWiz isn't all bad. You can adjust a wide variety of settings such as screen rotation from the Notifications drawer with just a few taps. You can also run a small selection of apps simultaneously side by side and there's a handy file-manager app for copying files back and forth between the tablet and online storage services such as Dropbox. More unusual is SideSync, a pair of apps that let you control your tablet using your computer's keyboard and mouse.

The Galaxy Tab S 10.5 is one of the best 10in Android tablets. This only makes its flaws – from its ungainly physical design, to its questionable software – all the more irritating. Still, if you can live with these drawbacks it's a good-value tablet.

**SPECIFICATIONS**

10.5in 2560x1600 pixel touchscreen • 1.9GHz + 1.3GHz Samsung Exynos Octa 5420 processor • 3GB memory • 16GB storage • micro SD slot • Mali T628 graphics chip • Android 4.4 KitKat • 465g • 247x177x7mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty

www.snipca.com/13361

**VERDICT:** Lightweight with excellent battery life, but let down by some design flaws

★★★★☆

**ALTERNATIVE:** Apple iPad Air £399

The screen and battery life aren't quite as good, but a more sensible design and better apps give it the edge

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- 250GB Samsung 840 EVO series SSD
- 1000GB Seagate 7200rpm Hybrid SSHD
- 750W FSP Power Supply
- Windows 8.1 64bit OEM

**£1199** Inc VAT

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** World's fastest PC as tested by PC Pro Magazine - http://www.pcpro.co.uk/reviews/desktops/371152/chillblast-fusion-photo-oc-iv

**TV SPEAKERS** | **£230** from www.snipca.com/12995

# LG NB3540

## A sleek and slender soundbar with useful wireless features

The LG NB3540 soundbar might be aimed at owners of the company's own range of TVs, but it works equally well with other brands. The main speaker bar is slim and compact, so it's unlikely to obstruct the remote control's signal, while the subwoofer connects to the bar wirelessly, reducing cable clutter.

There are no HDMI ports at the rear of the bar, so you'll need an optical audio cable to get sound from your TV. There's also a standard audio jack and Bluetooth option, letting you connect your tablet or smartphone for music playback. You can easily switch between the various audio sources using the remote control.

We were impressed by the NB3540's audio quality. Films, games and broadcast TV all sounded clear and detailed, while the subwoofer added a rumbling bass that wasn't too overwhelming. The side-facing speakers at either end of the main speaker bar add extra depth and richness to the sound, but we weren't convinced by the optional 3D Surround mode. It's supposed to mimic a 5.1 surround-sound speaker system and while it did make movies and music sound a little roomier, we certainly weren't fooled into thinking we had an extra pair of speakers behind our heads.

The other sound modes are less gimmicky and more useful. Standard mode works well for TV, while the Music mode works well when listening to music from a tablet – it toned down the bass and brought out details in our test tracks.

Although we'd like the NB3540 to have HDMI ports, it's still a good-value soundbar due to the flexibility offered by its wireless subwoofer and its superb sound quality.

**SPECIFICATIONS**
320W • Optical and analogue audio ports • Bluetooth 3.0 • Soundbar 35x770x75mm (HxWxD) • Subwoofer 390x196x297mm (HxWxD)
www.snipca.com/12999

**VERDICT:** Excellent sound quality for the price and a wireless subwoofer make this a great soundbar

★★★★☆

**ALTERNATIVE:**
Humax STA-1200BSW £162 Even slimmer and cheaper, but has a wired subwoofer and inferior sound quality

**TV SPEAKERS** | **£162** from www.snipca.com/13006

# Humax STA-1200BSW

## An incredibly thin soundbar, but don't expect fantastic sound

Soundbars have only been around for a few years, but companies are already pushing the boundaries in terms of how thin they can make them. According to Humax, its STA-1200BSW is the world's thinnest, and we don't doubt it – it's amazingly slender at just 37mm high, but these tiny dimensions make managing the cables a nightmare.

The accompanying subwoofer doesn't use a power socket; it has to be wired directly into the main speaker bar instead. The power and optical audio cables also plug into the bar and are almost impossible to hide away. It would have been far tidier to put the connections on the subwoofer and only have one cable going to the bar itself. The bar's stand is flimsy, making it easy to accidentally knock the bar off the stand when walking past.

The quality of sound from the main speaker bar was a welcome improvement over our TV's internal speakers. Although the sound isn't as rich or deep as the LG NB3540 (see below right), it's still clear and precise enough to hear breaking glass in a fast-paced action scene. We were also able to turn up the volume very high without it distorting.

Unfortunately, sound quality is undermined by the subwoofer, which produced an overpowering bass with no real separation between different bass notes. Subwoofer controls could have saved it, but Humax didn't add any.

If you want superior sound from your TV, but have limited space and budget then the Humax STA-1200BSW is a good choice. But for everyone else there are better soundbars available for just a little more cash.

**SPECIFICATIONS**
180W • Optical and analogue audio ports • Bluetooth 3.0 • Soundbar 37x1200x20mm (HxWxD) • Subwoofer 265x195x266mm (HxWxD)
www.snipca.com/13007

**VERDICT:** You'll have your work cut out hiding the wires and the bass is overbearing, but the incredibly thin STA-1200 is still better than most TV speakers

★★★☆☆

**ALTERNATIVE:** LG NB3540 £230
Superior sound quality and a wireless subwoofer for only a little more money

**E-READER** | **£89** from www.snipca.com/13177

# **Barnes & Noble** Nook GlowLight

An e-reader that's more flexible than the Kindle

Sony may have stopped making e-readers, but there are still other dedicated devices for reading ebooks besides Amazon's ubiquitous Kindle. The Nook GlowLight is the latest e-reader from US bookshop chain Barnes & Noble and shouldn't be confused with the older Nook Simple Touch GlowLight.

The GlowLight's white rubber/plastic casing may not look very exciting, but when you pick it up you'll be struck by how light it is. At just 175g it's 31g lighter than the Kindle Paperwhite (see our review, Issue 411). The screen itself has a 1024x758-pixel resolution (which is the same as the Paperwhite), so text is sharp.

To turn a page, simply tap the right-hand edge of the screen. Using the sensibly laid-out and extremely responsive touchscreen interface, you can jump to specific parts of the book or search for specific words. You can also bring up the contents page, which includes tabs for your own annotations and bookmarks, as well as words you've looked up in the device's built-in dictionary.

Tapping the middle of the screen brings up the options menu. From here you can change the font, line spacing and the width of the margins – giving you plenty of control over the appearance of each ebook. Alternatively, you can opt to use the book publisher's recommended font settings, which is handy when reading books that use multiple fonts. It's a setting that you won't find on a Kindle.

Computer active GREAT PICK ★★★★☆

> "The GlowLight feature illuminates the e-ink screen so you can read in the dark"

The brightness setting controls the GlowLight feature, which illuminates the e-ink screen so you can read in the dark. You can turn it on and off simply by holding down the n-shaped button for a couple of seconds. The LEDs themselves are housed at the top of the screen, but manage to create a surprisingly even light across the whole display.

The GlowLight feature isn't perfect, though. There's a small shadow at the top of the screen (just below the LEDs) that runs across the edge of the display. It didn't prevent us from seeing the screen clearly, though. A more annoying flaw is that black text becomes tinged with blue on the GlowLight's maximum brightness setting.

The GlowLight has 4GB of built-in storage. This might seem generous, especially compared to the Paperwhite's 2GB, but only 2.05GB is actually available for personal use. The rest is eaten up by the GlowLight's Android 2.1 operating system. Nook claims this is still enough to store 2,000 ebooks.

On the whole, ebooks from the Barnes & Noble store tend to be slightly more expensive than those from Amazon, but you can always buy ePub and PDF ebooks from elsewhere and copy them from your computer to the GlowLight via USB.

You can lend ebooks you've bought from the Nook store for up to two weeks using Barnes & Noble's LendMe scheme, but the selection of available titles is limited. Plus, you won't be able to read the book until it's returned from your friend and you can only lend a book once.

The Nook GlowLight is a great e-reader with a lightweight build, impressive screen and customisable text. While its GlowLight illumination feature isn't perfect, it's still a good-value alternative to the Amazon Paperwhite – especially if you want to buy books from stores other than Amazon.

**SPECIFICATIONS**

6in touchscreen • 1024x758-pixel resolution • 4GB storage • 802.11b/g/n Wi-Fi • 166x127x11mm (HxWxD) • 175g • Supports ePub and PDF ebooks

www.snipca.com/13178

**VERDICT:** A super-light e-reader that's a great alternative to Amazon's Kindle Paperwhite

★★★★☆

**ALTERNATIVE:** Amazon Kindle Paperwhite £109 A little more expensive and a bit heavier, but with a better screen

**BLOOD-PRESSURE MONITOR** | **£60** from www.snipca.com/13191

# Salter MiBody Wrist Blood Pressure Monitor

Track your blood pressure at home with this Bluetooth wrist cuff monitor for iOS

The Salter MiBody Wrist Blood Pressure Monitor BPW-9154 connects to your iOS device via Bluetooth so you can record and track your blood pressure in the accompanying app (free from www.snipca.com/13187).

The MiBody app is currently only available for iOS. This is because the BPW-9154 requires Bluetooth 4.0, which is more common in Apple's mobile devices (it's actually been built in to iOS devices since the iPad 3 and the iPhone 4s). Annoyingly, each person in your household must have their own iOS device to use the BPW-9154 because the app can only cope with one user profile at a time. But there is a guest option that allows anyone to check their blood pressure in a one-off situation.

Using the app with the monitor is very simple. As long as you have Bluetooth enabled on your mobile device, the app automatically establishes a connection in a few quick steps. Annoyingly, the Blood Pressure Monitor's uses a US-style date format, but it's otherwise pretty easy to use.

**SPECIFICATIONS**

Bluetooth 4.0 • Requires iPhone 4s or later, iPad 3 or later, iPod Touch 5th generation or later • Uses two AAA batteries • Two-year warranty
www.snipca.com/13191

Just select your user profile on the Monitor and make sure your iOS device is to hand. The BPW-9154 gives you your systolic (blood pressure when your heart beats) and diastolic (blood pressure between heart beats) readings, takes your pulse and then displays all this on its screen. This data is sent to the app over Bluetooth, which records it and shows it on graphs. You can see averages of your readings over time and make notes about each reading, which is handy if you're monitoring for a specific condition.

We found it trickier to get accurate results from the BPW-9154 than with a traditional upper-arm monitor. Both monitor and wrist must be in exactly the right position (the monitor on your inner wrist and your wrist raised to the same height as your heart). This feels a little odd if you're used to upper-arm monitors, but once we'd got the hang of it, our results were consistent with readings from other blood-pressure monitors.

Although it worked well and the graphs are helpful, this monitor has not been clinically validated by the British Hypertension Society. If you want to be absolutely certain you're getting accurate results, we'd suggest buying a validated upper-arm monitor instead. The Omron

M3 doesn't have any smart features, but it's validated and inexpensive (£40 from www.snipca.com/13190).

**VERDICT:** Although it's cheap for a smart blood-pressure monitor, we'd rather use a clinically validated device

★★★☆☆

**ALTERNATIVE:** Withings Wireless Blood Pressure Monitor £110 A smart upper-arm monitor that also works with Android and is clinically validated, albeit only by US authorities

**SOLID-STATE DRIVE** | **£247** from www.snipca.com/13199

# Toshiba THNSNJ512GCSU

An unimpressive 512GB SSD

Toshiba used to be a leader in SSDs, but now their devices tend to be more expensive and slower than the competition. The catchily named THNSNJ512GCSU 512GB SSD is a perfect example.

In our test, large files were copied at an overall speed of 294MB/s, while small files were copied at an overall speed of 110MB/s. The latter isn't too far behind rival SSDs, but for large files it's almost 200MB/s slower.

Although still far faster than any laptop hard drive, this inconsistent performance makes the THNSNJ512GCSU one of the slowest SSDs we've seen recently. This might have been acceptable at a low price, but it costs £253 (or a hefty 49p per GB). The 512GB version of the Crucial MX100 (see our review, Issue 427) is far better value. It costs just £154 (or 30p per GB), yet leaves the THNSNJ512GCSU in the dust speed-wise and even comes with useful data-transfer software. Unless Toshiba's SSD drops dramatically in price, there's no reason to buy it.

**SPECIFICATIONS**

512GB (476GB formatted) capacity • SATA 3 interface • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/13200

**VERDICT:** Slower and more expensive than its rivals ★★☆☆☆

**LAPTOP** | **£750** from www.snipca.com/13196

# Toshiba Satellite S50t-B-10H

## Toshiba's latest laptop has some real image problems

Toshiba may have released the first laptop with a 4K screen – the £1,200 Satellite P50t (see our review, Issue 429) – but the vast majority of its laptops make do with far lower-resolution screens. The latest lower-res model is the Satellite S50t, which otherwise resembles its 4K counterpart but comes at a fraction of the price.

Like the P50t, the S50t has a plastic casing with metallic elements, such as the lid and wrist rest. Although the lid flexes under pressure more than we'd like, on the whole it's a well made and stylish laptop. While not necessarily designed for regular use while out and about, it's reasonably light at 2.2kg, rising to 2.5kg with charger, and its battery lasted just under nine hours in our test, which is a very respectable score.

Although we weren't expecting the S50t's screen to come anywhere close to matching the P50t's 4K resolution, we were still disappointed by its lowly 1366x768 pixels. So few pixels in a 15in screen makes text look very fuzzy, and working on large spreadsheets and photos feels cramped and requires lots of scrolling. Image quality isn't great either – colours look washed-out.

The screen is touch-sensitive, but we weren't too fond of it. Besides the usual problem of an upright touchscreen being uncomfortable to use for long periods of time, the screen's hinge isn't particularly stiff, so the screen wobbled noticeably every time we pressed it, which became an unwanted distraction. There's little need to use the touchscreen, though, because the keyboard and touchpad are both very good. Toshiba has squeezed in a number pad alongside the keyboard, so its keys are a tad narrower than we'd like, but they are still very comfortable to use, with plenty of travel and enough feedback for fast, accurate typing. The touchpad is large and accurate, while the buttons give plenty of feedback when pressed.

The S50t's dual-core Intel Core i7 4500U 1.8GHz processor isn't quite as powerful as the 2GHz quad-core processor in the P50t, but it wasn't far off in most of our benchmark tests. Its 3D performance is noticeably slower, however, due to its less powerful AMD Radeon R7 M260 dedicated graphics chip. Although this isn't ideal for gaming, the R7 M260 is still far faster than an integrated graphics chip so it is useful for boosting the performance of non-gaming programs, such as Photoshop.

The Toshiba Satellite S50t would be a very good laptop, if it wasn't for its low-resolution, poor-quality screen. We would have forgiven such a flaw in a cheaper computer, but not in one at this price. Yet if you're not overly concerned about image quality, then it's still a good buy because it's fast, comfortable to use and has a long battery life.

**SPECIFICATIONS**

1.8GHz Intel Core i7 4500U dual-core processor • 8GB memory • 1TB hard drive • AMD Radeon R9 M260 dedicated graphics chip • 15.6in 1366x768-pixel screen • 802.11ac/a/b/g/n • Windows 8.1 • 2.2kg (2.5kg with charger) • 20x380x262mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/13197

**VERDICT:** A stylish and powerful laptop let down by its poor screen

★★★☆☆

**ALTERNATIVE:** Dell Inspiron 17 7737 £849 A slightly more expensive desktop-replacement laptop with shorter battery life, but with a better screen too

## WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

# What's the best lightweight laptop for £300?

**Q** I'm looking for a lightweight 11.6in laptop that runs Windows 7 – I'm not keen on Chromebooks because I deal with lots of sensitive documents and photos I don't want to store online. Ideally it would cost around £300. Any ideas?

Faith Perkins

**A** Lightweight Windows 7 laptops at around £300 are difficult to find. You'll therefore have to settle for a Windows 8 version. Our choice would be the Asus VivoBook S200E which costs just £280 from www.snipca.com/13381. It weighs just 1.4kg, has 4GB of memory and a 500GB hard drive. Its battery life is relatively short at five hours, its 1.5GHz Intel Pentium 987 processor isn't especially fast and its keyboard is a little stiff, but it's the best laptop we've seen that most closely matches your criteria (see our review, Issue 387). It's now been officially discontinued, but stock is still available so you should pick one up now while you still can.

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

**SMARTPHONE** | **£427 without contract** from www.snipca.com/13368

# **Nokia** Lumia 930

## A chunky colourful beast of a smartphone

Nokia's mobile-phone business is now owned by Microsoft, but all Lumia Windows Phone 8 phones will remain Nokia-branded. The new Lumia 930, like previous Nokia smartphones running Microsoft's mobile operating system, comes in a variety of colours – orange, green, black or white.

Like its predecessor the 925 (see our review, Issue 402), the 930 is edged with a metal band instead of the all-plastic design common to most other Lumias. It's very robust, but isn't particularly comfortable to hold due to its thick dimensions and boxy shape, and the large 5in screen makes it tricky to use with one hand. Reaching across the width of the screen with your finger can be a real stretch.

The screen itself, though, is pretty good. Although colour accuracy is merely average, text is very sharp thanks to the screen's high resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The adjustable touch-sensitivity lets you use the screen even when you're wearing gloves – very handy in cold

> "It's uncomfortable to hold because it's thick and boxy"

weather. It worked better with woollen or polyester gloves than with leather gloves.

Unlike some of Nokia's cheaper Lumias, such as the 630, the 930 lacks a microSD card slot so you're stuck with the 32GB of built-in storage. We have no complaints about speed and performance though – the quad-core 2.2GHz Qualcomm Snapdragon 800 processor and 2GB of memory raced through our benchmark tests. Battery life was respectable. When used for making calls, GPS, web-browsing and taking photos, the battery lasted 22 and a half hours on 4G and 24 hours 40 minutes on 3G.

The camera coped well in bright daylight, taking sharp, detailed photos –although colours were a tad oversaturated. It fared less well in dimly lit conditions, where images were marred by a lot of noise, but shots were still usable.

The 930 comes with Windows Phone 8.1 (the latest version) pre-installed. We covered 8.1's major new features in our review of the Lumia 630 in Issue 426. These features include Cortana, the voice-activated personal assistant that's similar to Siri in iOS and Google Now in Android. It uses information on your phone and the internet to make your life easier. At the time of writing, Cortana is still in beta and not officially available for UK users yet, but it's simple to activate by simply changing your language and region settings from UK to US.

This is well worth doing because Cortana can be very useful. We asked Cortana to remind us to buy flowers when a good friend phoned, which worked perfectly. Cortana can determine your location, so you can even ask it to remind you to buy those flowers when you're near any florist. This didn't quite work out, and Cortana only prompted us when we were near one specific florist.

Windows Phone 8.1 is an impressive mobile-operating system, but the Lumia 930 is merely an average phone, let down by its uncomfortable design and so-so camera. The Lumia 1020 (see our review, Issue 408) is a superior Windows Phone smartphone, but if you have this much money to spend then the Android Sony Xperia Z2 (see our review, Issue 426) is a better buy due to its waterproof design and wider selection of apps.

**SPECIFICATIONS**

- 5in 1920x1080 pixel touchscreen
- 2.2GHz Qualcomm Snapdragon 800 quad-core processor
- 2GB memory
- 32GB storage
- 4G
- nano SIM
- Windows Phone 8.1
- 167g
- 137x71x10mm (HxWxD)
- One-year warranty www.snipca.com/13369

**VERDICT:** Not a bad smartphone, but its awkward shape and average camera are disappointing

★★★☆☆

**ALTERNATIVE:** Sony Xperia Z2 £450 A large 5in Android phone with a superior camera and waterproof casing

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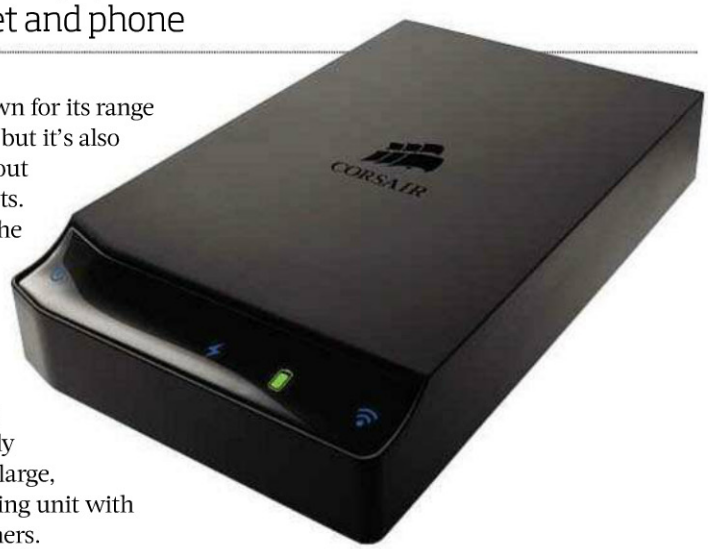
**NETWORK-ATTACHED STORAGE** | **£128** from www.snipca.com/13202

# Corsair Voyager Air 2

## A portable battery-powered NAS for your tablet and phone




Corsair is best known for its range of PC components, but it's also recently branched out into storage products. One of its latest is the 1TB Voyager Air 2, a battery-powered NAS for tablets and smartphones. The Voyager Air 2's appearance is hardly eye-catching. It's a large, chunky, plain-looking unit with sharp, angular corners.

As with any mobile NAS device, files are copied onto the Voyager 2 via USB 3.0 from your computer, and then accessed from your mobile device over a Wi-Fi network. The Voyager 2's fast USB3 performance was pretty much what we'd expect. We had no trouble wirelessly streaming three HD video files simultaneously. Impressively, we were able to wander 20 feet from the Voyager 2's built-in 802.11n hotspot and up a flight of stairs before we lost the wireless signal.

The Voyager Air 2's accompanying app is available for Android and iOS. While

> "The app interface has annoying quirks that had us baffled"

both apps coped well with H264 and MPEG 4 videos in our tests, neither were able to play our MKV videos. And though they could play most of our DivX videos, they mostly did so without any sound. Both apps have a near-identical user interface, which make use of cryptic icons that aren't easily deciphered. While we could simultaneously connect to our existing wireless network and the Voyager 2's hotspot, we could only do so as long as our router wasn't password protected, which is a bizarre condition on the part of the app. We'd never recommend using your router without password-protection enabled.

On Android, you can upload any file you want. On iOS, as expected, you can only upload photos from your camera roll due to Apple's current app restrictions. In both versions of the app, you have to tap the Folder tab in the app's sidebar before you can upload files – an annoying quirk of the interface that had us baffled initially. You can rename files, organise them into folders, download them from the Voyager to your device, cancel downloads if you change your mind and sort the file view.

The Corsair Voyager Air 2 is a good mobile NAS. Its cost per gigabyte of 13p is reasonably low and a USB wall charger is a useful extra. But it's not as good as it could be because of its slipshod apps. It could be great with some bug fixes and improvements, but for now it's merely fair value.

**SPECIFICATIONS**
1TB (939GB formatted) capacity • USB3 • 802.11b/g/n • 82x29x140mm (HxWxD) • 300g • One-year warranty • Part code CMFAIR-VA2-1000-NA www.snipca.com/13203

**VERDICT:** A quality mobile NAS let down by half-finished apps

★★★☆☆

**ALTERNATIVE:** LaCie Fuel 1TB £129 A less bulky mobile NAS that has better apps

# Weird... but useful

### Twelve South BassJump USB Subwoofer for MacBook

**£70 from** www.snipca.com/13387

A compact subwoofer that connects to your Mac via USB. It dramatically improves sound quality without the need for a full-size set of speakers.

### Pure PowerPort Reading Light and Fan

**£15 from** www.snipca.com/13388

A USB-powered reading light and mini cooling fan – ideal for bookworms who suffer from hot flushes. Designed for use with Pure's digital radios, but works with any USB port or charger.

### Twelve South PlugBug Charger

**£40 from** www.snipca.com/13389

An adapter that connects to your MacBook's charger, so you can use it to charge smartphones and tablets. Useful when travelling or simply for freeing up a USB port or power socket.

### PNY Robot Micro Adapter

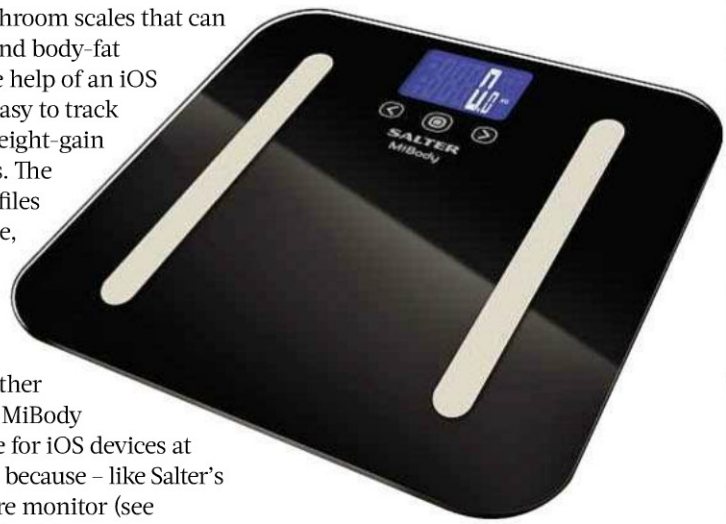
**£5 from** www.snipca.com/13390

A tiny USB On-The-Go adapter in the shape of the Android mascot. It lets you easily connect USB sticks to your Android device and is more convenient to carry around than cheaper but chunkier adapters.

**SMART SCALES** | **£70** from www.snipca.com/13206

# **Salter MiBody** Bluetooth Analyser Scale 9154

Keep the pounds off with scales that track your weight and body fat via an iOS app




These are smart bathroom scales that can track your weight and body-fat percentage with the help of an iOS app. This makes it easy to track progress towards weight-gain or weight-loss goals. The scales can store profiles for up to four people, so your entire household can use it.

Unlike many smart scales from other manufacturers, the MiBody app is only available for iOS devices at the moment. This is because – like Salter's smart blood-pressure monitor (see our review, page 24) – it depends on Bluetooth 4.0, a technology that's much more common in iOS devices right now.

> "It displays data quickly on the screen and in the app"

If you just stand on the scales, they give you a simple weight reading. You have to press the middle touch-sensitive button and then select your profile if you want it to carry out a full analysis and transfer your measurements to the app. The manual provides sensible information about what the data from the scales means and how best to use it. We were impressed by the accuracy of the scales and the speed with which they displayed our information on both the built-in screen and in the app. It gives you lots of useful information, showing lean muscle mass and water percentages as well as weight and body fat.

The app is easy to set up and charts progress towards your goals very clearly. Unfortunately, you can have only one user account on the app, and one copy of the app per device. In a household of four, that means you'll need four separate iOS devices if everyone wants to get full use from the scales. This helps keep your information confidential, but ensuring everyone has Apple tablets and phones won't be cheap. You can still have a profile on the scales for users without the app, but they won't be able to automatically record and track their data over time.

Although the 9154 is one of the best budget smart scales around, the limitations of its app mean many households won't be able to make the most of its features.

**SPECIFICATIONS**

Bluetooth 4.0 • Requires iPhone 4s or later, iPad 3 or later, iPod Touch 5th generation or later • Uses four AAA batteries • 15-year warranty

www.snipca.com/13205

**VERDICT:** Only buy this if everyone who will use it has their own iPhone, iPod Touch or iPad

★★★☆☆

**ALTERNATIVE:** Withings Smart Body Analyzer WS-50 £130 More expensive, but works with Android, iOS and PCs

## COMING SOON

**SEPTEMBER 2014**

Rumours suggest the iPhone 6 will come in two sizes – 4.7in and 5.5in, with the smaller model released first. The screens will reportedly have a resolution of 1704x960 pixels and a scratch-proof sapphire coating.

Martin Hayek

**AUTUMN 2014**

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

Android Police

**AUTUMN 2014**

Asus is rumoured to be planning an Android Wear smartwatch, featuring a rectangular watch face, but more specific details are as yet unavailable.

**AUTUMN 2014**

Conflicting rumours say that the Nexus 6 Android phone will be based either on LG's existing G3 phone or an entirely new phablet design from Motorola.

## NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 17 Sept

Dell Venue 8
Dell's budget Android tablet

Asus ZenFone 4
The £99 Android phone

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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: Dell Chromebook 11** A Chrome OS ultra-portable laptop with good battery life and a great keyboard. £179 from www.snipca.com/12413

## 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
**£150** without contract from www.snipca.com/13076
**Tested:** Issue 413

Motorola's budget Android smartphone is a steal. It's responsive, well made, fast and has a good screen. It's better than many phones at twice the price.

**ALTERNATIVE: Apple iPhone 5s** An excellent smartphone with a fingerprint scanner, a great-quality camera and very fast performance. £549 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/11115

## E-READER

**Kobo** Aura
**£98** from www.snipca.com/12147
**Tested:** Issue 410

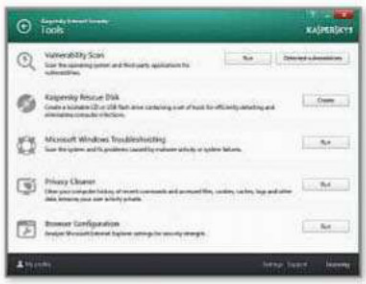
A great e-reader with an easy-to-read lit touchscreen that can be tweaked extensively through its settings. There's no 3G version for downloading books on the go, but, unlike the Amazon Kindle, you can buy ebooks from independent retailers that use the ePub format.

**ALTERNATIVE: Amazon Kindle Paperwhite (2013)** An e-reader with a brilliant screen and some useful features. £109 from www.snipca.com/10532

## SECURITY SOFTWARE

### Kaspersky Internet Security 2014

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



The best malware protection suite for the second year running also has good parental controls and the ability to create a rescue disc for emergencies. Click the link above for a 3-device licence, or buy a 1-device licence on our Software Store for just £17.99 (www.snipca.com/11134).

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

## 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 great, there's no better software to do it with.

**ALTERNATIVE: Adobe Photoshop Elements 12** A fast and polished photo-editing program with excellent advanced editing tools. £57 from www.snipca.com/12739

## PC MONITOR

### Dell UltraSharp U2412M

**£204** from www.snipca.com/12740
**Tested:** Issue 378

An exquisite monitor with superb image quality, an adjustable stand, a high resolution and even a built-in USB hub. It costs a little more than other monitors, but it's money well spent. It's easily the best value monitor we've seen and is the one by which all others are judged.

**ALTERNATIVE: AOC i2360PHU** A good-quality budget 23in monitor that's easily adjustable and has a built-in USB2 hub, too. £155 from www.snipca.com/12927

## SECURITY CAMERA

### Y-cam HomeMonitor HD

**£140** 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

PRICE DROP

### Trendnet TEW-812DRU

**£75** from www.snipca.com/12609
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

## NAS

### Synology DiskStation DS213j

**£160** from www.snipca.com/10575
**Tested:** Issue 404

This NAS enclosure has it all – fast performance, easy configuration and plenty of extra features. It's not perfect – disk installation is a little fiddly and it's a little pricey – but there are few other NAS devices we would rather buy.

**ALTERNATIVE: Synology DS414j** A four-drive NAS that's generally fast and easy to set up and use too. £258 from www.snipca.com/12545

# Buy It

## WEB DESIGN

PRICE DROP

### **Serif** WebPlus X7

**£76** from www.snipca.com/12338
**Tested:** Issue 414

WebPlus X7 is one of the best programs available for designing a website without having to write a line of code. It comes with lots of templates, with more available for purchase if you need them. It also has lots of specialist tools for building a small business website.

**ALTERNATIVE: Jimdo Pro** This browser-based program for creating websites is slick and feature packed, but lacking in high-quality templates. £60 a year from www.jimdo.com/pricing

## SMART TV

PRICE DROP

### **Samsung** UE32H6200

**£380** from www.snipca.com/13101
**Tested:** Issue 427

A stylish 32in smart TV with great picture quality and apps for all the terrestrial TV catch-up services. It has plenty of extras, too, such as recording-to-USB storage, 3D, playing media files stored on a NAS or USB stick, and plenty of HDMI ports.

**ALTERNATIVE: Sony KDL-42W705B** Excellent image quality, stylish looks and a 42in screen. £500 from www.snipca.com/12931

## 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** A MFP aimed at small offices with duplex, ADF and fax, but also good photo print quality. £74 from www.snipca.com/12909

## SOLID-STATE DRIVE

### **Crucial** MX100 512GB

**£150** from www.snipca.com/12743
**Tested:** Issue 427

A blindingly fast, high-capacity SSD at a remarkably low price. If you've been put off buying a SSD because of the cost, then now is finally the time to take the plunge. It's far faster than any hard drive and is one of the best upgrades you can fit to your computer.

**ALTERNATIVE: Crucial M550 SSD 1TB** If you need a bigger SSD, this fast 1TB model is great value. £330 from www.snipca.com/12932

## EXTERNAL HARD DRIVE

PRICE DROP

### **Western Digital** My Passport Ultra 1TB

**£49** from www.snipca.com/11908
**Tested:** Issue 307, Computer Shopper

The My Passport Ultra 1TB is a very fast USB3 portable hard drive that's very keenly priced. It comes bundled with backup software, although it can be clunky to use.

**ALTERNATIVE: Toshiba StorE Canvio 500GB** Not as good value or as fast, but it does come with better bundled software. £40 from www.snipca.com/12459

## HOMEPLUGS

### **TP-Link** AV500 Nano Powerline Adapter Starter Kit (TL-PA4010KIT)

**£25** from www.snipca.com/10742
**Tested:** Issue 395

TP-Link's tiny Homeplug adapters are a great choice, especially if socket space is at a premium or you don't want to block an adjacent socket. Despite their low price, they're also very fast making them great value.

**ALTERNATIVE: Devolo dLAN 500 AVPlus Starter Kit** These fast Homeplug adapters can block adjacent sockets, but they do have a passthrough socket. £75 from www.snipca.com/12933

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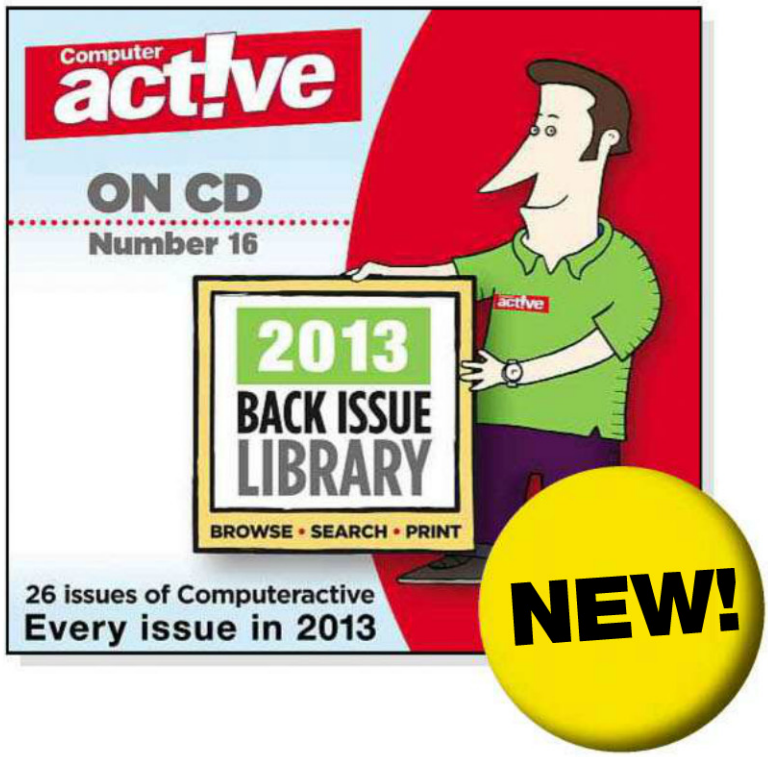


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**35** Stop adware changing your settings
**38** Download YouTube videos faster
**40** Uninstall multiple programs in one go
**42** Zip every file format for free

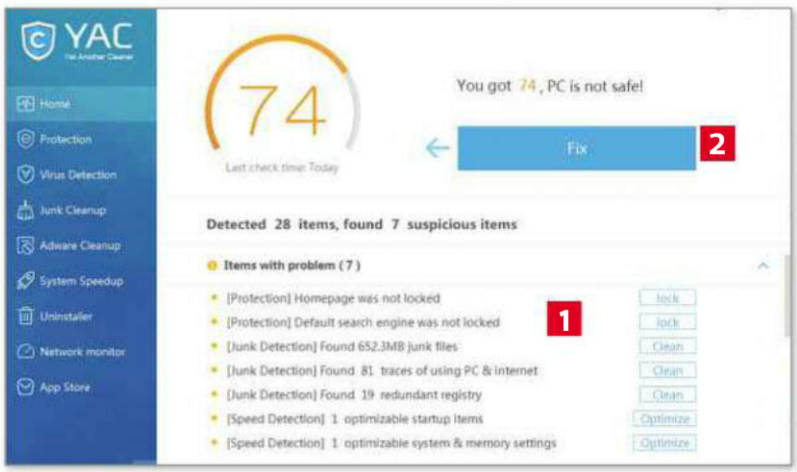
**PLUS**
**43** Readers' Tips
**44** Phone & Tablet Tips
**46** Make Windows Better
**47** Make Office Better
**48** Secret Tips For... LibreOffice

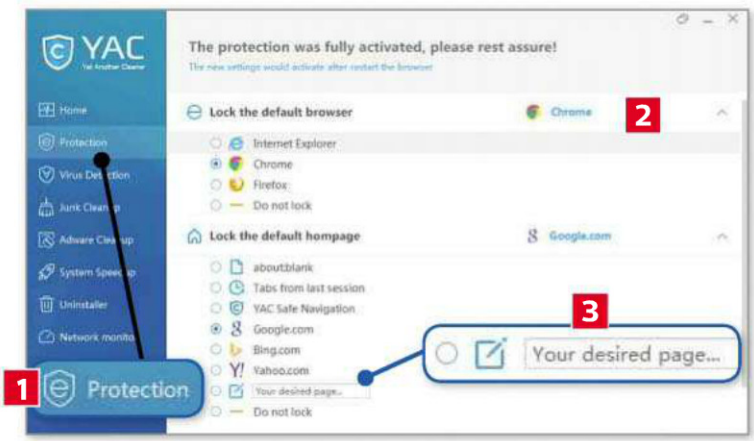

# Stop adware changing your PC settings

**What you need:** YAC; Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8 or 8.1 **Time required:** 30 minutes

The latest version of YAC (Yet Another Cleaner) claims to be the world's fastest and lightest PC cleaner and is very easy to use. YAC lets you lock your browser, homepage and search engine – stopping adware from changing these settings without your permission. It also reduces your PC's boot time by accessing and disabling unwanted startup items, and removes unnecessary items from your right-click and 'Send to' menus.

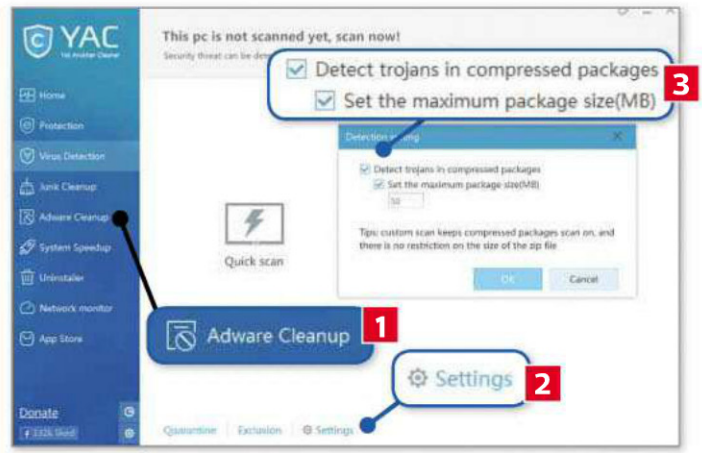
**STEP 1** Go to www.yac.mx and click the Get Free YAC button. Follow the onscreen instructions to download and install it on your PC. Once it's installed, click Examine Now to begin scanning your PC. When the scan is finished, scroll down to see a list of your PC's problems 1 and then click Fix 2 to fix them all at once. You'll see several entries such as 'Browser plugin protection' and 'Browser shortcut protection' activated. This will prevent any changes from being made to your browser without your knowledge.



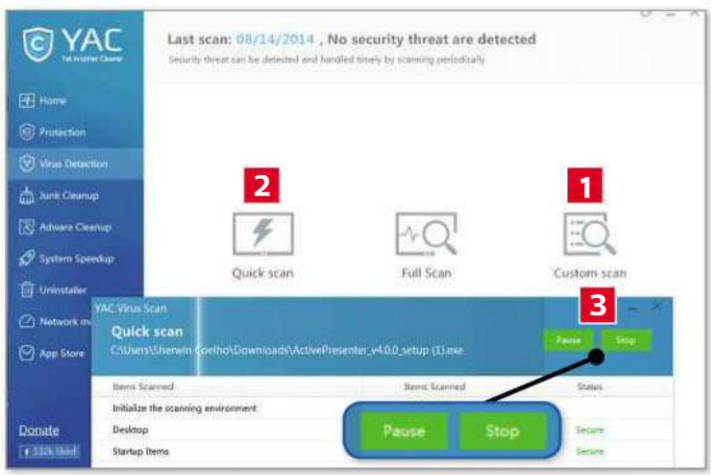




**STEP 2** Next, click Protection 1, then the dropdown menu beside 'Lock the default browser' 2 and select the browser you want. Click the dropdown menu beside 'Lock the default homepage' and select a homepage or type a web address in the 'Your desired page' field 3. Click the dropdown menu beside 'Lock the default search engine' and select your search engine. Click the dropdown menus beside 'Protect browser shortcut' and 'Protect online-shopping' and ensure 'Turn on' is selected in both instances. Restart your browser to activate these changes.

**STEP 3** YAC also lets you delete junk PC files, your online privacy records (so that hackers can't trace you) and any malicious plug-ins. Click Junk Cleanup 1 and then the dropdown menu beside it. Move your cursor over 'Deep cleaning items' and click the dropdown menu 2. Tick the box next to the 'Deep cleaning items' header to select all the items below it. Click the dropdown menu beside 'Privacy cleanup' and repeat the process. Click Scan 3 to begin scanning these items and then Clean to delete them. Restart your browser to activate these changes.

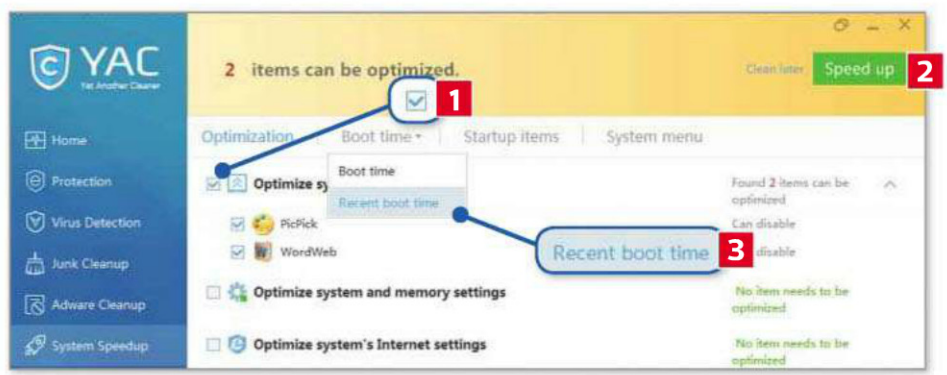


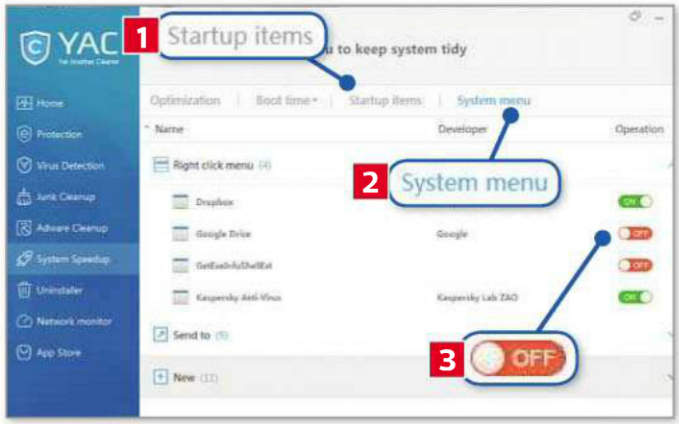

**STEP 4** To scan and eliminate concealed adware on your PC, click Adware Cleanup 1 and then click Scan. Click Clean and follow the steps. By default, YAC won't scan large zipped files and won't detect if they're infected by trojans. To change this, click Virus Detection and then click the Settings icon 2. Tick both the boxes 3 and then click OK. If you want to exclude any file or folder from this scan, click Exclusion at the bottom, click Add Directories (or Add Files), navigate to them and then click Open.



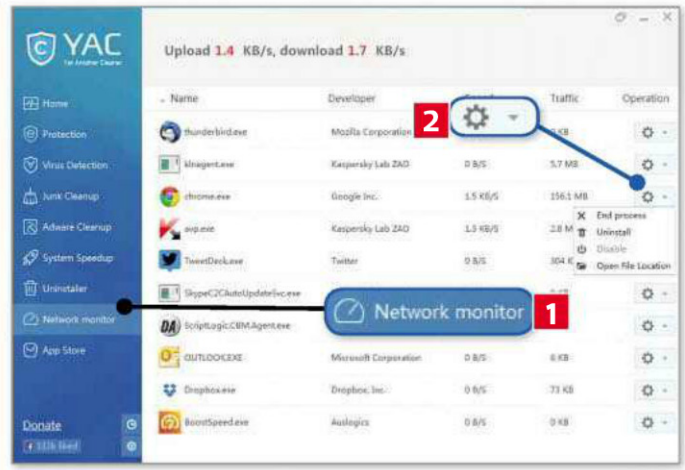

**STEP 5** Click Custom Scan 1 if you want to scan a specific location on your PC (handy for scanning individual folders, external hard drives and USB sticks). Click Quick Scan 2 to only scan your PC's memory, Desktop, startup items and browser download list. This scan takes around a minute. If you want to run a more comprehensive scan of every file on your PC, click Full Scan (it took 10 minutes on our PC, which runs lots of programs). Click Pause or Stop 3 at any time to do that during the scan. Click Detail Report to see a summary of your scan. If your YAC antivirus database (the list of all the viruses that YAC can identify) needs to be updated, click Update Now.

**STEP 6** YAC makes your PC start faster by disabling items it thinks you won't need. Click System Speedup and tick the box beside 'Optimize system startups' 1 to select a list of startup items slowing your PC's boot time. Next, click 'Speed up' 2 to disable them. After a few days, click the 'Boot time' dropdown menu and then click 'Recent boot time' 3 to see a graph of your PC's boot time in seconds.



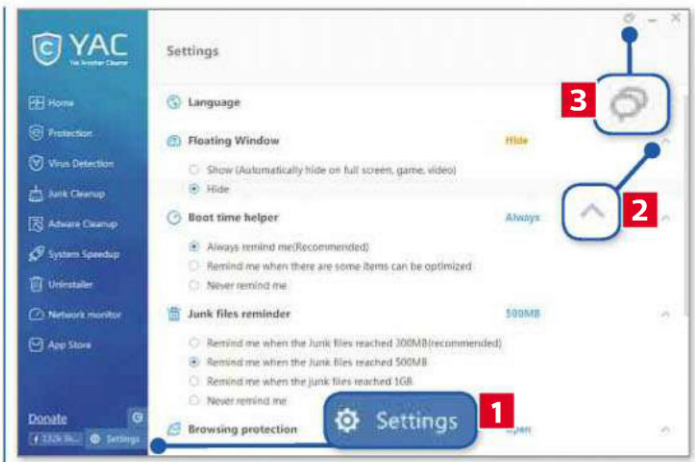



**STEP 7** The speed-up process will only disable startup items YAC deems unnecessary. To disable more startup items, click 'Startup items' 1 and click the slider beside the items you don't want. If you're unsure whether a program needs to start with your PC, leave it on. Browsers, email programs and cloud-storage services can safely be turned off. Scheduled tasks are automatic tasks set by certain programs that you install. Click the dropdown menu beside 'Scheduled task' and disable the tasks you don't want by clicking the sliders beside them. To remove items from your right-click and 'Send to' menus, click 'System menu' 2, the relevant dropdown menu and then click the items you want to turn off 3.




**STEP 8** YAC's network monitor performs a similar duty to Windows Task Manager. Click 'Network monitor' 1 to see a list of all the programs running on your PC. To close an unresponsive program, click the Settings icon beside it 2 and select 'End process', Uninstall or Open File Location (to access it in Windows Explorer).

**STEP 9** When you install YAC, a small floating window will appear on your Desktop. Click it and then click the dropdown menu 1 to see all your open programs. To close a program, click the small red 'No entry' sign 2 beside it and then click Yes. Click the Speed tab 3 to open that section and then click Test to see how fast your internet connection is. Click the dropdown menu again and close any programs that are taking up a lot of your bandwidth.



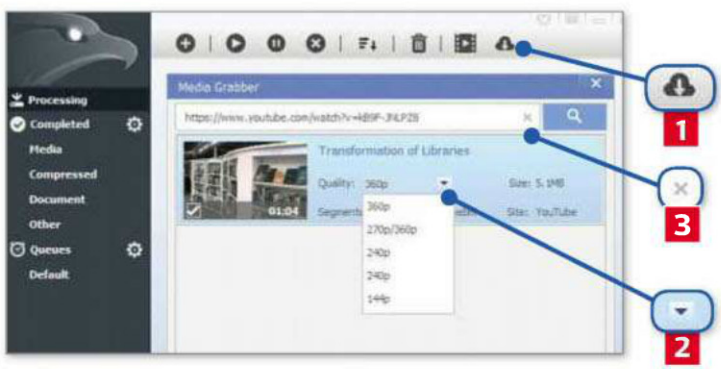

**STEP 10** To hide the floating YAC window, click the YAC icon on your Desktop and then click Settings 1. Click the dropdown menu beside Floating Window 2 and then select Hide. From time to time you'll get YAC pop-up notifications telling you to speed up your PC and remove your junk files. To change when these notifications appear, click the dropdown menus beside 'Boot time helper' and 'Junk files reminder' then click to select another option. If you have any problems with YAC, click the Feedback icon 3, type your query, your email address below and then click Submit. YAC claims to answer your query within a day. ●

# Download YouTube videos faster

**What you need:** EagleGet; Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8 or 8.1
**Time required:** 30 minutes

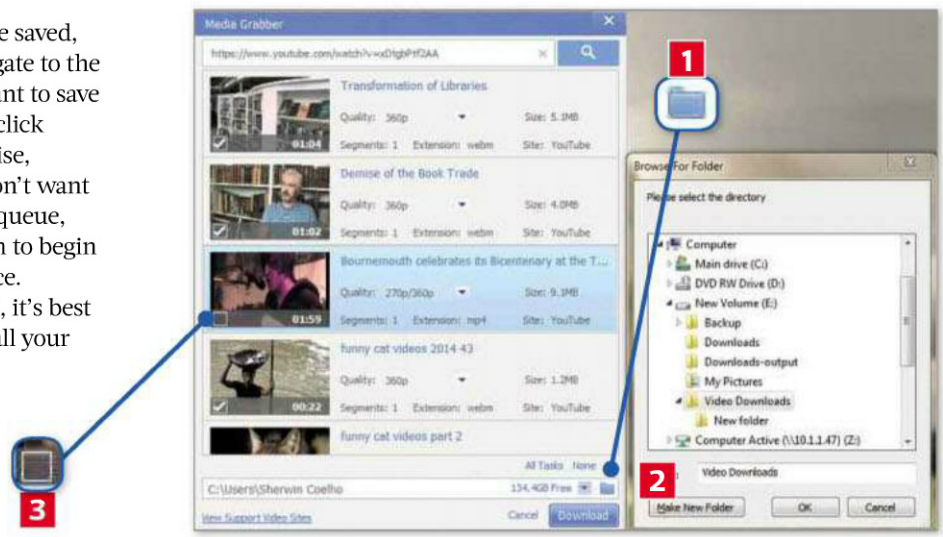
EagleGet is a free program that lets you download YouTube videos and manage them all from one place. Its download speeds are faster than similar programs and you can pause and restart your downloads whenever you want. Each of these video files can then be saved to specific locations on your PC. We'll show you how to download and manage multiple videos simultaneously.

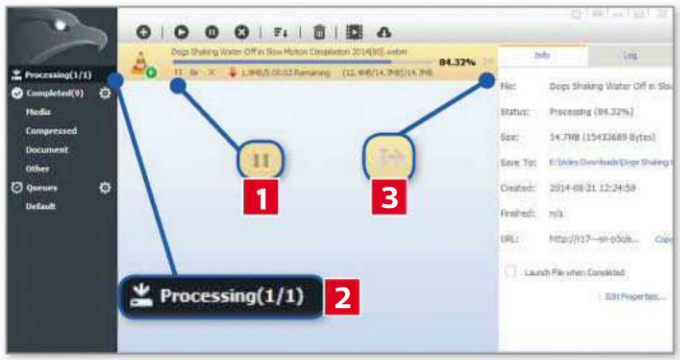
**STEP 1** Go to www.eagleget.com and click the Free Download button. Click the setup file that downloads to your PC, then Run, Yes, Next and accept the T&Cs. Click Next again (four times), Yes (to close your browsers), Install and then Finish. When you open your browser, you'll see a notification to add the EagleGet add-on to it. Annoyingly, this appears every time you open a new web page. Therefore, in Firefox, untick 'Allow this installation' 1 and then click Continue 2. In Chrome, click Not Now, and in Internet Explorer, click No.



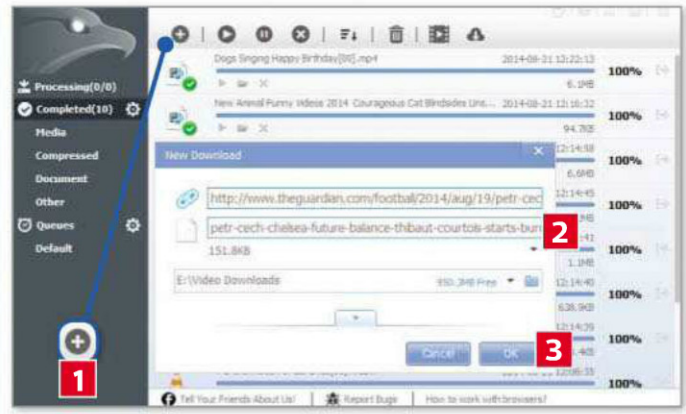

**STEP 2** Open any YouTube video that your family or friends have uploaded and copy its URL from your browser. Next, click the EagleGet Media Grabber icon 1, paste the YouTube URL in the Search field at the top and then click the Search icon. In a few seconds your video will appear here. By default your video will be downloaded in the same video quality that it was uploaded to YouTube. Higher quality will result in a larger file. If you want to decrease the video quality (and therefore the file size), click the Quality dropdown menu 2 and select a lower resolution. To add another video to this download queue, click 'X' 3, paste another YouTube URL and then click the Search icon. Repeat this to add more videos.

**STEP 3** To change where your videos are saved, click the folder icon 1 and navigate to the folder on your PC where you want to save them. If you want to create a new folder, click Make New Folder 2 and name it. Otherwise, simply click OK. If you decide that you don't want to download a video you've added to the queue, untick it 3. Click Download at the bottom to begin downloading all your ticked videos at once. Because EagleGet uses a lot of bandwidth, it's best to refrain from using your internet until all your videos are downloaded.

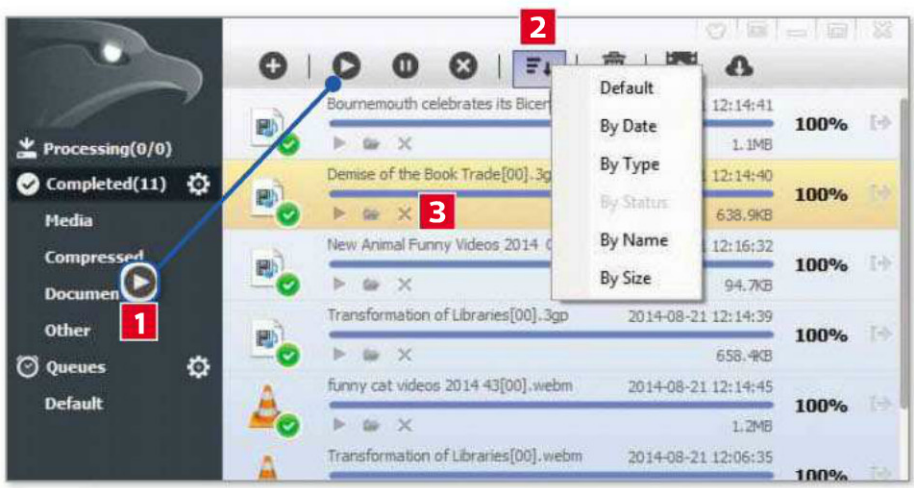





**STEP 4** To pause a download, click the Pause icon 1. Downloads will automatically pause if your internet connection is disconnected while the download is in progress. Unlike your browser's default Download Manager, EagleGet lets you continue your download from where you left off. Click Processing 2 to see your list of downloads in progress and then click the Play icon to resume downloading it. Click the small arrow icon 3 to reveal a side panel with details of your download. Tick the 'Launch File when Completed' box at the bottom right if you want to play the video as soon as it finishes downloading. To see a list of your completed downloads, click Completed on the left. The video quality of downloaded files is much better than YouTube.

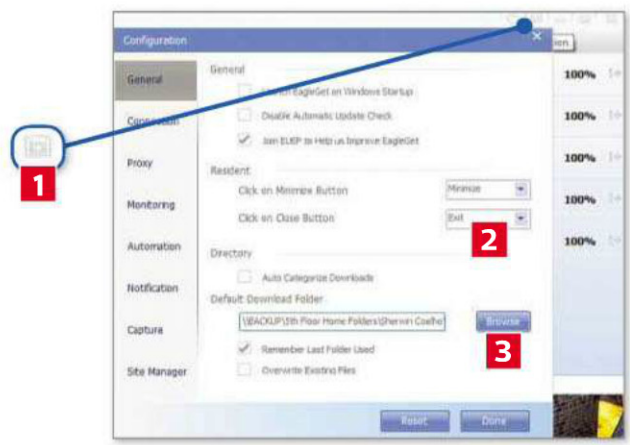



**STEP 5** You can also save website URLs using EagleGet. To do this, copy the website URL from your browser and then click the Add New Task icon 1. The URL automatically appears in a shortened version 2. Click the Folder icon and change where you want to save this link (see process in Step 3). The link will be saved as an HTML file in this folder. Click OK 3 when you've finished. Clicking Play under the link will open the web page in your default browser.




**STEP 6** To play a file directly from EagleGet, click the small Play icon beneath it or click the file and then click the Play icon 1. To sort all your downloaded files, click the Sort icon 2 and select one of the options (By Date, Type, Name or Size). To delete a file from this list, click it, click the Remove ('X') icon 3 and then click OK. If you want to delete the file in EagleGet and the one downloaded to your PC, tick the box after clicking the Remove icon and then click OK.

**STEP 7** To change your default EagleGet settings, click the Options icon 1 and then click Configurations. Untick 'Launch EagleGet on Windows Startup' (first box) to reduce your PC's boot time. Click the 'Click on Close Button' dropdown menu and select Exit 2 – otherwise EagleGet will run in the background even if you close it. To change your default Downloads folder, click the Browse button 3, navigate to a folder you want, click OK and then click Done. ●

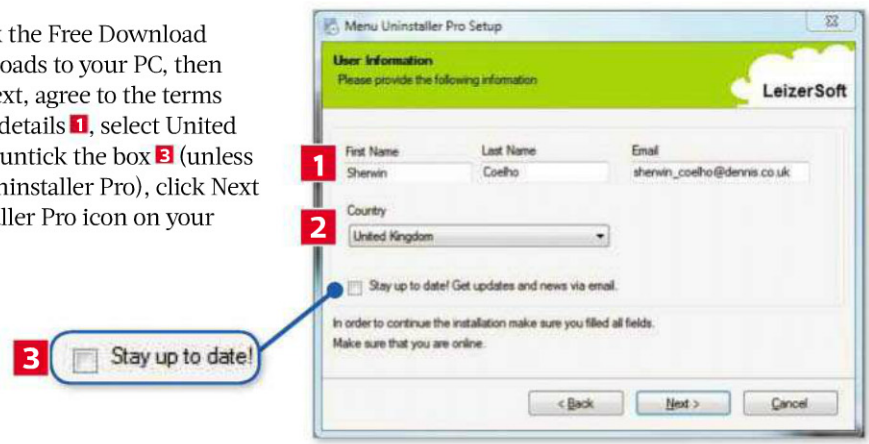


# Uninstall multiple programs in one go

**What you need:** Menu Uninstaller Pro; Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8 or 8.1
**Time required:** 30 minutes

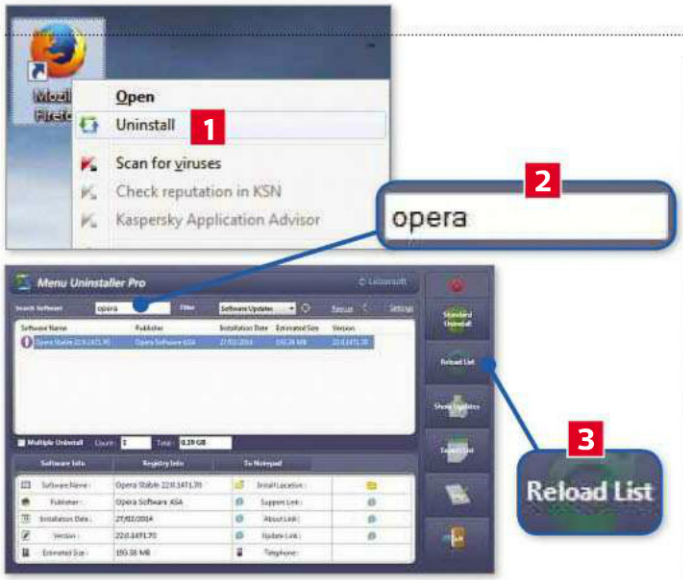
While you can remove unwanted programs from your PC one by one using the Control Panel in Windows, Menu Uninstaller Pro lets you uninstall several at once. You can filter the list of programs and services according to size, date installed and so on, and you can password-protect it so no one else can uninstall programs without your permission. It's a great alternative to the uninstallers we mentioned in Issue 427's Cover Feature.

**STEP 1** Go to www.snipca.com/13238 and click the Free Download button. Click the zipped file that downloads to your PC, then double-click the setup file, click Yes, Next, agree to the terms and conditions and click Next again. Enter your details 1, select United Kingdom from the Country dropdown menu 2, untick the box 3 (unless you want to receive email updates from Menu Uninstaller Pro), click Next and then Finish. Double-click the Menu Uninstaller Pro icon on your Desktop to launch it.



**STEP 2** Before uninstalling anything, create a restore point for your PC, in case you mistakenly uninstall software or a service that's vital to your PC. To do this, click Rescue 1, Next (three times) 2, Finish and then Yes. Once this is done, click Yes to restart your PC.

**STEP 3** Menu Uninstaller Pro lists all the programs and services on your PC. To filter this list then uninstall multiple programs simultaneously, click the dropdown menu at the top and select Last Installed 1. Next, tick Multiple Uninstall 2, tick all the programs you want to remove and then click Standard Uninstall 3. You'll still need to click responses to prompts as certain programs are uninstalled.




**STEP 4** To uninstall a program directly from your Desktop, right-click the program's icon, click Uninstall 1, then click Yes. Next, click Standard Uninstall and follow the steps. You can also find a program you want to uninstall by typing in Menu Uninstaller Pro's search field 2, clicking the program's name in the list below and then clicking Standard Uninstall. Click Reload List 3 to see your current list of programs. Click any program to see details (in a table below) including what version of it is on your PC, its size and installation folder, and links to its official website.

**STEP 5** To update programs, click the dropdown menu and then click Software Updates 1. Click a program 2, then the icon beside Update Link 3. Follow the steps to download and update the software from its official website. To uninstall browser toolbars, click the dropdown menu and then click Toolbars. Click any toolbar you don't want, then Standard Uninstall and follow the instructions.

**STEP 6** Click Show Updates on the right to see all items that have recently been updated. Use the dropdown menu at the top to filter these items. Click Hide Updates 1 to return to the standard view. Clicking Export List 2 will open an Excel spreadsheet of all the data displayed in Menu Uninstaller Pro (based on the currently selected filter) – handy if you want to quickly compile a list. Click Log 3 to see a summary in Notepad of all the tasks you've carried out using Menu Uninstaller Pro.

**STEP 7** Password-protect Menu Uninstall Pro to prevent others uninstalling programs without your permission. Click Settings 1, move your cursor to Password Protection 2 and then click Set Password 3. Type a password-reminder question and answer, enter and confirm your password and then click Save. Next, click Settings again, move your cursor over Password Protection and then click ON. Click Exit at the bottom right to close Menu Uninstaller Pro. The next time you open it, you'll need to enter your password and click OK.

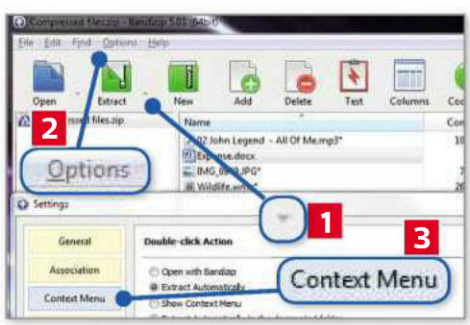
# Zip any file format for free

**What you need:** Bandizip; Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8 or 8.1 **Time required:** 10 minutes

Bandizip lets you zip and access any file, regardless of its format. Unlike WinRar and WinZip, Bandizip is free, and it supports many more file formats than 7-Zip. We'll show you how to create archives of zipped files, password-protect them and extract them to any folder using Bandizip's many options. Go to www.snipca.com/13288 and click the grey Download Now button. To download a portable version that you can use on any PC, click Bandizip Portable.

**STEP 1** Click the setup file that downloads to your PC, then click Yes, OK and Install to launch the program. To create a new zipped file archive, click New 1, Add 2, navigate to the folder you want on the left, click the file you want on the right and then click Open 3. To add multiple files, press Ctrl and select them before clicking Open. Click Add to add more files. You can also add files by dragging and dropping them into the New Archive window. Bandizip supports every file format, so you can drag and drop Office files, PDFs, images and audio and video files.

**STEP 3** Click the Bandizip icon in the folder you specified to see your zipped archive. To access these files you'll need to enter your password. To extract them, click the Extract dropdown menu 1 and select how you want them to be extracted (to the Desktop, to the current folder, etc). If you'd rather the files were extracted automatically whenever you click the Bandizip icon, click Options 2 then Settings. Now click Context Menu 3 and select Extract Automatically. If you want to extract these files to a particular folder, select 'Extract Automatically to the designated folder', click Browse, navigate to that folder and then click OK. Click OK at the bottom left to confirm your changes.




**STEP 2** If you want to change where your zipped files are saved, click Browse 1, navigate to a new folder on your PC, name your file archive and then click Save. To reveal the option to password-protect your zipped file archive, tick More Options 2. Click the Compression Level dropdown menu and change it to 2-Normal Compression, which is ideal if you're zipping files to email them. If you're zipping files to save space on your PC, then select 3-Maximum Compression. Tick Enter Password 3 then enter and re-enter your password in the fields provided. If you want to delete the original files after you've zipped them and batch-rename all the zipped files as the archive name, tick the relevant boxes below the password field. Click Start below to create your zipped archive.

**NEXT ISSUE**

ON SALE 17 Sept

- Save word docs online automatically
- Convert all videos, photos and audio
- Retrieve data from a lost phone
- Stop hackers stealing your credit card

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# Readers' Tips

Handy hints and tips from your fellow readers

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

## TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

## Change default update settings for specific programs

I live somewhere that doesn't enjoy great broadband speeds. Every time a big Windows update comes through, it takes an age to install on my computer, and while this is happening, I can't use any other web-based programs. The same thing happens when a large Adobe or Java update is taking place in the background. And, of course, some security updates – such as the latest one for Windows (see page 6) – prove to do more harm than good.

My son told me about a free program called Update Freezer, which lets me disable all default automatic updates and set them to Notify Only. I can manually update them when I visit his house, where he has a faster broadband connection.

Go to www.snipca.com/13385 and click 'Update Freezer 1.8 (self-installing exe)' below the Latest Version heading. Click the setup file that downloads to your PC, then click Yes and OK (twice).

You'll see your update status for all the main programs on your computer (see screenshot left). Tick the Disabled or Enabled buttons for each, depending on what you want to do.

I leave Google, Firefox and Opera enabled as their updates are not time-consuming. However, I think it's best to disable Adobe and Java updates and set Windows to Notify Only.

**Jeff Heap**

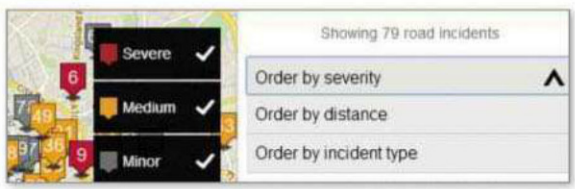
**The winner of every Tip of the Fortnight wins this exclusive Computeractive mug!**

TRAVEL WEBSITE

### Plan your journey using BBC's new travel site

My parents live in Yorkshire, my son's studying in Exeter University and my daughter works in London. I live in Brighton but visit them often. Planning my journey takes time but new features in the relaunched BBC Travel website have helped me.

Go to www.bbc.co.uk/travel, enter your postcode in the search bar and then click the search icon. Click Yes to set this as your main home location for all the BBC websites and then click the search icon again. You'll see a map of your area with red, yellow and grey markers, which represent Severe, Medium and Minor traffic incidents respectively. Toggle these on or off by clicking the options on the top right (see screenshot, below). Move your cursor over any marker to read more about the incident. Using the dropdown menu at the top right, you can filter these by distance, severity or incident type. I like the option to zoom in and out of the map (using the icons at the top left) to get a better view of the surrounding area. The Traffic Camera toggle highlights all the traffic cameras on the map.




**Ellie Faswell**

OPERA BROWSER

### Customise news categories

I like to read the news as soon as I open my browser and Opera lets me do that with just a few tweaks of my browser settings. Open the browser, click the Opera icon at the top and then click About Opera to update it.

Next, click the Discover tab at the top, then the Settings icon at the top right. Select United Kingdom (or any other country if you want updates from there), then click the Customize Top Stories tab and tick the news sections that interest you. There are 13 categories, including Business, Entertainment, Sports and Health. The best stories are automatically compiled from the most reputable news sources (such as the BBC, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph* and Sky News). Click any story to read the news on that website.

**Len Freeman**

WEBSITE

### Make Wikipedia better to read

I love using Wikipedia, but I find the site's interface quite dull and difficult to navigate. So when I heard about a new extension that makes it easier to read and more interesting to look at, I was eager to give it a try.

Go to www.wikiwand.com. In Chrome, click Install WikiWand and then click Add. In Firefox, click Get WikiWand, click Allow and then Install Now. Next, click any of the links on the webpage to see how it looks in WikiWand. There's no equivalent for Internet Explorer or Opera, but you can use the site in those browsers by entering search terms in WikiWand's search bar at the top right.

In WikiWand, you'll see the same Wikipedia article but with bigger fonts, more prominent pictures and sections that are easier to navigate. Click any section in the left-hand contents panel to jump to that category in the article. To hide the contents panel, click the three lines at the top left (move your cursor to the top to reveal it again). To email articles using Gmail, click the Share Article icon and then click Gmail. To read the latest news, click the dropdown menu beside WikiWand and then click News.

**Jim Daniels**

# Phone and Tablet Tips Brilliant things to do on your device

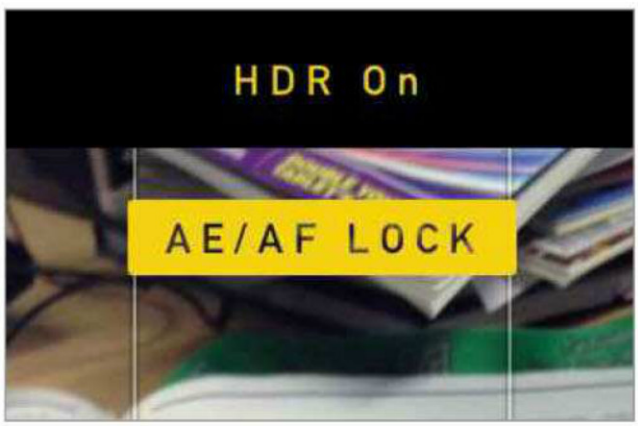
IOS

## Take better photos on your device

To get better photos on your iOS device, try locking your camera's auto exposure (AE) and autofocus (AF) and using HDR (High Dynamic Range). AE and AF let you focus on one area of your image, giving it sharper detail than the rest. Open the Camera app, then tap a particular area on your screen that you want as the focal point of your image. You'll see a yellow border appear briefly that defines the area of focus, but disappears when you take a photo or move your device.

To lock your AE and AF settings, tap and hold the area you want to focus on until you get a yellow AE/AF Lock bar at the top of your screen (see screenshot, below). Now, regardless of where you point your camera, the defined area on your screen will appear in finer detail than the rest of your image.

In HDR mode, your device captures multiple images and blends them to produce the best possible image. To activate HDR, use the HDR On/Off toggle at the top of your Camera. Use it when taking photos of landscapes, portraits and low-lit scenes. Make sure you turn it off when taking photos of moving objects and in very dark conditions because it won't produce good results.




ANDROID & iOS

## Create reminders that sync across every device

Todoist (Android www.snipca.com/13423; iOS www.snipca.com/13424) is a free task-list app that lets you create reminders that synchronise across all your devices. You can set these reminders to appear at a particular time and date. Here, we explain how to use it on an iOS device, but it works in a similar way on Android.

Open the app, tap 'Enter with Google Account', enter your Gmail login details, tap 'Sign in' and then tap Accept. To create a new reminder, tap the '+' at the top right. Tap Content and give your reminder a title, then tap Project and select one of the various pre-set labels (such as Personal, Work, etc).

Tap the small calendar icon and scroll up to set a reminder date (see screenshot above). Tap the 'Set a due time' slider to set one or more times for your reminders. Tap Done at the top right to add your reminder. To see all your reminders, tap the three lines at the top left.

ANDROID

## Share Dropbox files that expire after a certain time

A new free app caked Digify (www.snipca.com/13426) lets you send Dropbox files that expire after a period of time set by you. Open the app, swipe across the introductory

# Best New Apps What you should install this fortnight

**Hanx Writer**
**Free**
**iPad only:** www.snipca.com/13409
Hanx Writer, co-developed by actor Tom Hanks, recreates the feel of using a typewriter on your iPad. The tab moves as you type and even makes the 'ching' noise when it reaches the end of a line. You can lighten or darken the font, print your text and email it as a PDF.

**Touch Van Gogh**
**Free**
**Android:** www.snipca.com/13410
**iOS:** www.snipca.com/13411
Reveal hidden details within three of Vincent van Gogh's most iconic paintings simply by tapping the different areas. Use the sliders to see how each painting has changed over time and how it compares to the actual object. You can also read about the artist, his letters, sketches and techniques.

**Afterlight**
**Android 59p; iOS 69p**
**Android:** www.snipca.com/13412
**iOS:** www.snipca.com/13413
New to Android, Afterlight is a great app that lets you add filters to your images with one tap. You can also crop and rotate your image, add various borders, and adjust brightness, contrast and sharpness. Finally, select a custom image size and save or email it.

screens and tap Start. Next, tap 'Create an account', enter your details and then tap Submit. You'll receive an email in which you need to click the Activate Account link. Next, enter your login details within the app and tap Submit again. Now tap Dropbox, then Allow to give the app permission to access your Dropbox files.

Navigate through your Dropbox account to the file you want to share. Tap the To field and enter the recipient's email address. Next, tap the 'Self-destruct in' dropdown menu and select after how long you want this file to self destruct (from one minute to one month). Tap the Message field and type a message (optional), then tap Send. Tap OK when you see a message saying 'Your file has been shared'. The recipient will need to follow the steps in the email to install Digify, after which they can view your file for the period of time you've set.

ANDROID

## Automatically shorten URLs

A new app called ShortPaste automatically shortens every URL you copy, which makes life easier if you want to share them. Install the app from www.snipca.com/13425. Next, open Chrome and navigate to a webpage you'd like to share with someone. Tap and hold the URL bar at the top to reveal the Text Selection panel and then Tap the Copy icon.

Now open any other app, long-press the place where you want to paste the link and tap the Paste option when it appears. Your URL link will be changed to a shorter version that's easier to type.

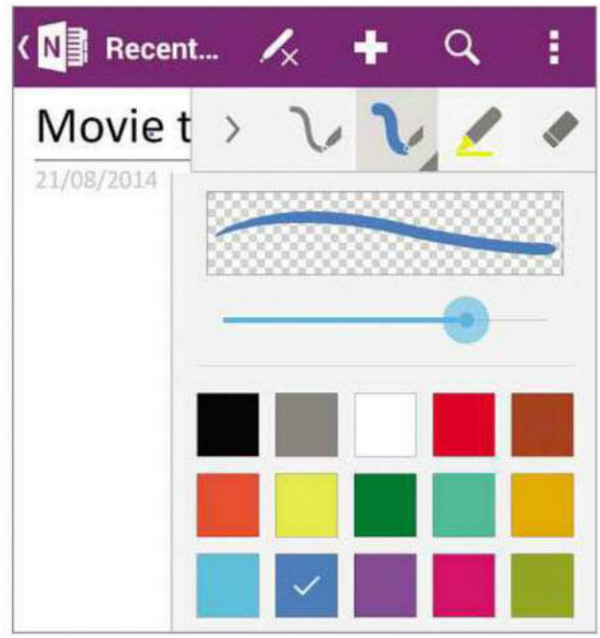
ANDROID

## Format text and scribble with your finger in OneNote

We always liked the fact that Evernote had options to format text, and write words or draw sketches in notes using a finger or stylus. A recent update to OneNote lets you do the same thing.

Open OneNote (www.snipca.com/13427), tap 'Sign in' and log in with your Microsoft details. Tap '+Page' to create a new note. Tap the bar at the top and give your note a title. To draw over it with your finger or stylus, tap the three dots at the top right, then tap Ink. Select one of the three pens by tapping one. Tap it again for tip options, including tip width (using the slider) and colours (see screenshot right). Write or draw whatever you want using your finger or stylus. Tap the Eraser (at the top right) to erase any mistakes. To revert to typing with your keyboard, tap the Pen icon with an 'X' at the top.

To format text, double-tap a word you've typed and use the sliders to highlight it. Next, tap the three dots, then tap Format. Tap the Bold, Italic, Underline, Strikethrough or Highlight icons to apply these formats. Your notes are automatically saved in your online notebook.




# Games With Kids

What to play together on your phone and tablet

**AGES 0-5**

**Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom**

**£1.99 www.snipca.com/13414 (iOS)**

This app offers four games your kids will love. Our favourite involved collecting stars, while avoiding obstacles. Another requires you to tap leaves to collect them before the timer counts down. After completing each game, you're rewarded with a sticker.

**AGES 6-10**

**Word Monsters**

**Free www.snipca.com/13415 (Android)**

**Free www.snipca.com/13416 (iOS)**

Choose from different topics – such as Fruits, 'Back in School' or Countries – then you'll see a grid of letters (shaped like cookies). Swipe across adjacent letters to form words and win points and cookies. The more you collect, the more options you'll have to create your own monster.

**AGES 11-16**

**Free www.snipca.com/13417 (Android)**

**Free www.snipca.com/13418 (iOS)**

Using the Multiplayer mode, challenge your kids to this addictive ten-pin bowling game from the PBA (Professional Bowlers Association). Change the bowling lanes and venues to personalise it. Tap and hold your bowl to position it and swipe forward to release it.

WINDOWS 7, 8, 8.1

## Download free Desktop themes

To make your Desktop more interesting, try downloading different themes to use as wallpaper. Each theme contains a series of images that refresh automatically to create an ever-changing backdrop for your Desktop. While there are themes that come with your PC, you can find, download and add many more for free. Right-click your Desktop, click Personalize, then 'Get more themes online' at the bottom right of the My Themes section. This takes you to a webpage where you'll see various themes with categories listed on the left (see screenshot below). Click a category to see the themes within it. Each theme lists how many images it contains. To preview the individual images within a theme, click Details, then the right arrow. Click 'Download theme' if you like it. Click the theme pack that downloads to your PC to set it as your Desktop theme.

WINDOWS 8, 8.1

## Customise the Bing Weather app

The Bing Weather app on the Modern tile interface gives you detailed weather information for your current location and lets you add other locations.

Open the app and click Allow so that Bing can locate your current position and display local weather information. Scroll to the right to see an hourly weather forecast, and further to the right to see temperatures across the whole country on a weather map.

Click the map to see a video using graphics to outline the forecast for the next 24 hours. Click Precipitation, Satellite and Cloud (at the top) to see video forecasts based on those parameters. If you want to see data for another part of the world, click Change Region at the top right and select an area (South America, Europe, Asia/Middle East, etc). Click the '+' and '-' icons to zoom in or out of your chosen location.

To add other locations to the app, right-click within it, click Places at the top, click '+' below Favourites, type a location and click the correct autosuggest option. Add as many as you want, then click the Back button when you've finished.

To check the weather in one of these locations, right-click within the app, click the dropdown menu beside Places and click that location.

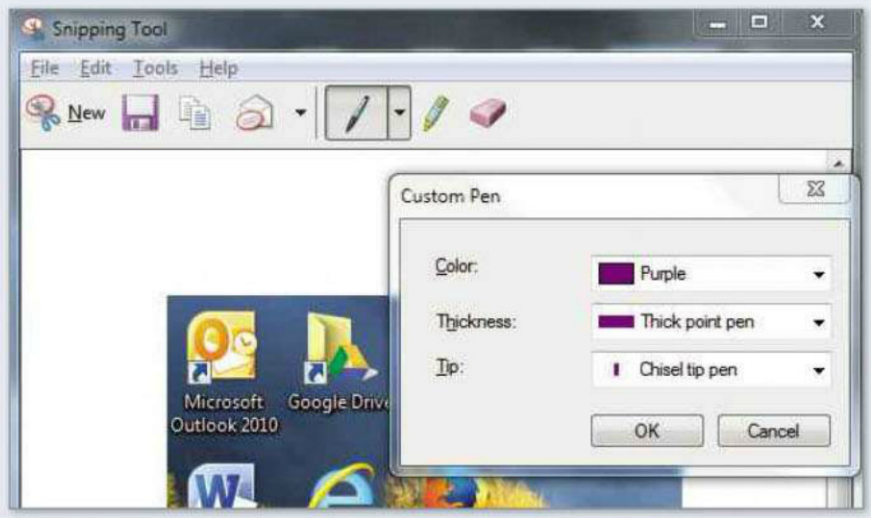
WINDOWS 7, 8, 8.1

## Scribble across your screenshots

There are a number of ways you can capture screenshots on your PC without downloading third-party programs, but the simplest way is to use the Snipping Tool. This is a handy, hidden Windows tool that lets you select the area of your Desktop you want to capture and – if you want – scribble or sketch something onto it.

The fastest way to access the Snipping Tool is to click the Start button, type snipping tool and then press Enter. Your Desktop will now be greyed out. Click the New dropdown menu to see four options. 'Free-form Snip' lets you move your cursor to draw around any part of your Desktop that you want to capture. Rectangular Snip lets you take a rectangular screenshot of any part of your Desktop. Windows Snip takes a screenshot of any open Desktop window you select, and Full-screen Snip captures your entire Desktop.

Once you've captured your screenshot, click the Pen dropdown menu (third option from the right), then Customize. Select the pen's colour, thickness and tip type by clicking the dropdown menus (see screenshot below), then click OK. Draw or scribble whatever you want across your screenshot using your mouse or your finger (if you have a touchscreen). You can also use the yellow Highlighter option (second from the right) to flag up something on your screenshot. If you make a mistake, click the Eraser (last option on the right) to undo it. To save your screenshot, click the Save Snip (floppy disc) icon. To mail it as an attachment, click the Send Snip (envelope) icon.




WINDOWS 7, 8, 8.1

## Create a new Library folder in Windows Explorer

Open Windows Explorer (or File Explorer if you're using Windows 8) and you'll see a list of libraries in the left-hand pane. The default Libraries are Documents, Music, Pictures and Videos, but you can designate any folder as a Library so that you have easy access to it.

Click the Libraries folder, right-click anywhere inside this folder, move your cursor to New, then click Library and give your new library a name. Double-click this Library, click 'Include a folder', navigate to the folder you want to assign to this Library and then click 'Include folder'. You'll now see the folder listed under Libraries along with Documents, Music and the rest.

# Create your own animation paths

The Animations tab in PowerPoint 2010 and 2013 lets you add effects to text or graphics. These include fades and shapes, but you can also make a selected item move in pre-determined straight-line paths or create a more complex path using your mouse. You can either do this with text or graphics.

To use text, highlight the text you want to animate, click the Animation tab, then the small dropdown menu (to the left of Effect Options) and click one of the options under Motion Paths (such as Lines) to see your highlighted text move in a downward path. After the motion is completed, you'll see a line in with a green triangle representing the starting point of the animated path and a red triangle where the path ends (see screenshot). To change this path, click the line, move your cursor to the green triangle until your cursor changes shape. Next, click and drag it to change its starting point. Do the same thing for the red triangle to change its end point.

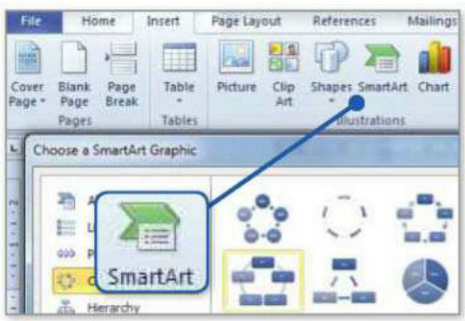
To create a more complex animated path, select the text you want to add an effect to, click the small dropdown arrow beside Effect Options and then click Custom Path. Your cursor will turn into a '+' sign. Move it anywhere across the screen to create the path you want your selected text to follow. Press Enter to see this in motion.

WORD

## Customise your SmartArt templates

SmartArt gives you a graphic representation of data, ideal for family trees, pyramid charts, lists and so on. These items can be added with just a few clicks, are very easy to customise and are available in all versions of Word. To add them to your document, click the Insert tab, SmartArt (see screenshot below), select one of the graphic images (we selected Cycle on the left, then chose Continous Cycle mode) and then click OK.

New Design and Format tabs will appear on your Ribbon so you can customise your graphic. Click the Change Colors dropdown menu and select a different colour theme for your graphic. Now click the Format tab, click one of the text boxes in your graphic and click a Shape Style from the top left. To revert to the original graphic, click the Design tab and then click Reset Graphic at the top right. To add more boxes to your graphic, click it, click the small arrow on its left edge, click inside any of the text fields and press Enter. You can type text from this box or from within the graphic.




OUTLOOK

## Add hyperlinks to your email signature

There's an easy way to add hyperlinks (blue underlined text that links to a website when clicked) to your signature in Outlook.

Click 'New E-mail' at the top left, then the Signature dropdown menu at the top, then click Signatures. If you've already created a signature, you'll see it here. If not, you can add one by following the steps in Make Office Better in Issue 420.

To demonstrate, we'll create a hyperlink using the word 'Computeractive', so that anyone who clicks it in an email will be taken straight to the *Computeractive* website. First, go to the *Computeractive* website and copy its URL. Now highlight the word 'Computeractive' in your signature, click the Hyperlink icon, paste the URL in the hyperlink's address bar and then click OK (twice).

EXCEL

## Automatically fill data in cells

Excel 2013 has a great Flash Fill option that lets you automatically fill in an entire column by providing one common value from the adjacent row. This is useful, for example, if you have two distinct pieces of data in the adjacent column – such as a first name followed by a surname – and want to create a separate column containing only first names.

For example, we've created a column (A) with first names and surnames. In the second column (B), we only want first names. So in cell B2, we'll type the first name from cell A2 (see screenshot below). This tells Flash Fill what values we want. Next, click the Fill dropdown menu at the top right (in the Editing section) and then click Flash Fill. The remaining first names will appear automatically in all the other cells in the second column.

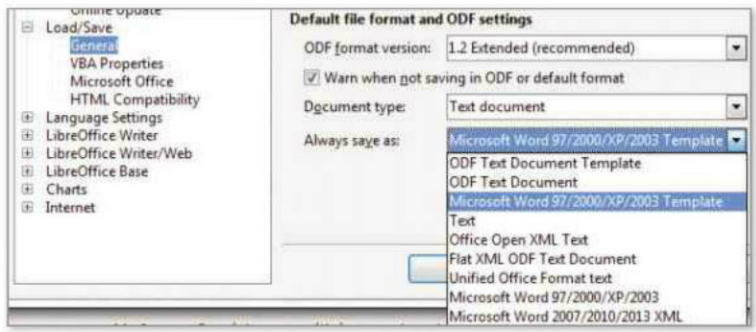
| | A | B |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Name | First Name |
| 2 | Ian Alexander | Ian |
| 3 | George Allinson | |
| 4 | Trevor Timms | |
| 5 | Chloe McGregor | |

# LibreOffice

Colour-code your spreadsheets, customise your comments and make LibreOffice files work in Microsoft Office

## Make LibreOffice files compatible with Microsoft Office

By default, LibreOffice (www.snipca.com/13010) saves files in formats that are not compatible with Microsoft Office. To change this, open any LibreOffice program (such as Writer Document), click Tools, Options, then click the '+' beside Load/Save in the left-hand pane. Click General, and in the 'Document type' dropdown menu, choose the document type you want to change the default format to (for example, Text document for Writer Document, Spreadsheet for Calc Spreadsheet and so on). Next, click the 'Always save as' dropdown menu, select 'Microsoft Word template' and then click OK. Repeat this process in any other LibreOffice programs that you use to create files that you might want to open in Microsoft Office.




**Change the default save options to make your LibreOffice files work in Microsoft Office**

## Customise your comments

The latest version of LibreOffice (4.3) adds a few extra options to the Comments feature in Writer. You can now change the formatting style of your comments to make them stand out and print comments in the document margin. Click the arrow at the bottom right of any comment box, then click Format All Comments. Here, you can format your comment text – changing the font style, font size and adding font effects. Once you've made the changes, click OK.

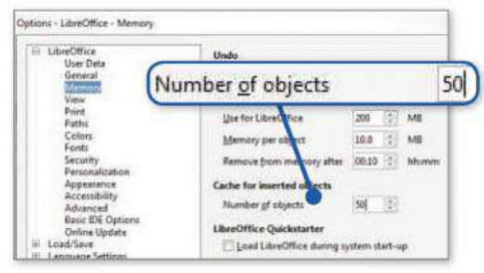
To print comments in the margin – rather than at the end of the document or page, click File, then Print. Under the General tab, click the dropdown menu next to Comments, select 'Place in margins' and click OK.

## Create bullet points automatically

LibreOffice doesn't let you create bulleted or numbered lists automatically, but you can easily do it yourself. Go to Tools, then click AutoCorrect Options, click the Options tab, tick the 'Apply numbering – symbol' box. Click Edit to choose the default symbol for a bullet point and then click OK. Next, click Format, AutoCorrect, and click While Typing (if there isn't a tick beside it already).

## Speed up LibreOffice

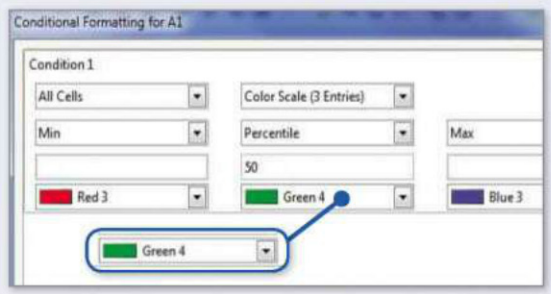
Sometimes your PC can struggle to keep LibreOffice running smoothly, particularly if you work with large files. If you find LibreOffice is slowing down, you'll need to allocate more PC memory to it. Click Tools, Options, then under the LibreOffice option in the left-hand pane, click Memory. If you have a fairly powerful or new PC (up to 18 months old), tick 'Load LibreOffice during system start-up'. Increase the first two options under 'Graphics cache' to 200 and 10 respectively. Increase 'Number of objects' to 50 (see screenshot below). You can tweak these values until you hit on the ideal setting for your PC.




**Increase the 'Number of objects' value to allocate more memory to LibreOffice**

## Colour-code your spreadsheet data

If you have a spreadsheet with loads of numerical data, colour-coding can give you an at-a-glance view of the contents. In LibreOffice Calc, highlight the data you want to apply the colour coding to, press Ctrl+A to select everything, click Format, Conditional Formatting, then click Colour Scale. Next, click the middle-bottom dropdown menu to select a colour that the scale should pass through to go from low to high – so if you choose Green, the colour scale will go from Red (low value) through Green (half-way value) to Blue (max value). Click OK to apply these changes to your cells.




**Choose the colours you want to represent the values of your spreadsheet data**

The latest version of LibreOffice lets you quickly copy the formula of the cell above the one you're in. To do this, press Ctrl+' (single quote).



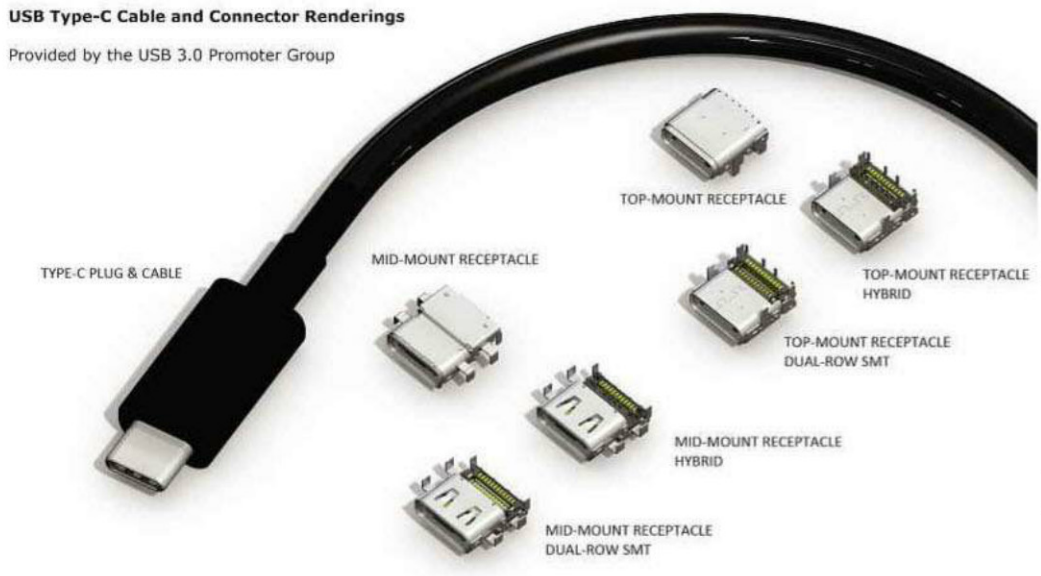
*Next issue Secret Tips for... Gmail*

# USB Type-C

A new USB cable will solve one of your most recurring and irritating tech headaches. We explain how

## What is it?

The first reversible USB 3.0 cable, which can be plugged in upside down. It means you won't have to worry about which way round a USB is when you insert it into a device, making your life just that little bit easier.

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## Wasn't this announced a while back?

Yes, last December, but the specifications have now been finalised, which means it's ready to be put into mass production. Its designers say that it's small enough to be used on mobile devices, but also "robust enough for laptops and tablets". It has been developed by the USB 3.0 Promoter Group, which comprises Hewlett-Packard, Intel, Microsoft, Renesas, STMicroelectronics and Texas Instruments.

## It all sounds great, but what's the catch?

Well, you won't be able to use USB Type-C with any of your current devices because it requires a new port design, although adapters will be available that make them compatible.

> "You can plug it in whichever way you're holding it"

In April, a spokeswoman for the USB 3.0 Promoter Group said that compatible devices would be on the market by the end of 2014, but there was no mention of that target in the group's latest announcement in August (www.snipca.com/13228). Instead, we reckon you'll have to wait until well into 2015 before there's any chance of seeing devices with Type-C ports. When they do arrive, we hope they also include old port designs. We want all devices to be as versatile as possible.

## How big are the USB Type-C connectors?

Roughly similar in size to the microUSB 2.0 Type-B connector, used to charge digital cameras and mobile phones. It has a port size of 8.4x2.6mm and its speed will match USB 3.1 (www.snipca.com/13209), also called SuperSpeed+, allowing data transfers of 10 gigabits per second (fast enough, in theory, to transfer a movie in one second).

## Remind me, what's USB 3.0 again?

The third generation of USB connectors, finalised in November 2008. It replaced USB 2.0 (completed in April 2000), which had succeeded USB 1.0 (April 1996). Its most important new feature was the SuperSpeed mode, which allowed data-transfer speeds of five gigabits per second.

## Will Type-C bring any other benefits?

Yes, loads more. Because USB Type-C can deliver power at up to 100 watts at 20 volts, it will charge phones, tablets and laptops faster. It'll also transfer data at the same time, which was not always possible in previous USB standards.

The smaller connectors will almost certainly lead to smaller devices. Alex Peleg, vice president of the Platform Engineering Group at Intel, said that USB Type-C "opens the door for the invention of an entirely new, super-thin class of devices that consumers haven't even seen yet" Microsoft is excited too, saying that Type-C "will offer a more intuitive consumer experience by means of reversible plug orientation and cable direction designs". Translated into normal English, this is Microsoft's clunky way of saying that the new USB will be very easy to use because you can plug it in whichever way up you're holding it.

It also means that Android and PC users will catch up with iPad and iPhone fans, who have been using Apple's range of reversible cables, called Lightning, (www.snipca.com/13208) since 2012.

# Best Free Apps TO Transform Your Tablet

Your tablet is far more than just an oversized phone. **Jane Hoskyn** reveals the best free apps for using your tablet in ways you never knew you could

Do you remember how long ago the first iPad was launched? Seven years? Ten years? Actually it was just four years ago. We'd already entered the second decade of the 21st Century when, in April 2010, Apple unveiled what looked like a pointlessly oversized iPhone. It didn't get a warm welcome (some reviewers even thought its name sounded like underwear) and looked doomed to fail in a world in love with dinky smartphones.

The iPad defied its critics to sell millions and become the mobile device of choice for grown-ups. Its success spawned an army of rival tablets whose lightweight design, laptop-beating battery life and just-big-enough screens make them ideal for browsing the web, watching video and reading articles in comfort – and their on-screen keyboards don't require that you file down your fingertips first. Tablets fit perfectly into our hands and our lives, and they're now part of the tech landscape.

But there's much more to tablets than convenient contours. iPads and their many Android counterparts are often regarded as little more than big smartphones, or laptops minus a keyboard (even by their dedicated users and fans), but they're uniquely versatile. The combination of portability, screen, battery, sensors, camera (or cameras), Wi-Fi, mobile internet (pause for breath), processor, ports, GPS, Bluetooth, storage space and support for apps means that they can be almost anything you want them to be. You just have to choose the right apps.

In the last couple of issues of *Computeractive* we've shown you how to use your tablet to gaze at the galaxy, scan your old photos and measure the height of your shed or the distance to Australia, and here we pick up the baton. Read on to discover scores of brilliant free apps that can help turn your tablet into the only device you'll ever need.

## KEY POINTS

- Use augmented-reality apps to explore the world from your armchair
- Turn your tablet into the only sat-nav, TV or e-reader you need
- Use your tablet to forecast the weather and collect climate data for scientists
- Use free apps to do household chores and even catch burglars
- Discover all the devices your tablet can replace

# TRAVEL THE WORLD AND BEYOND FROM HOME

## Use your tablet to tour the world

If you like Google Earth on your PC, just wait until you try it on your tablet. The free app (www.snipca.com/13251 Android; www.snipca.com/13286 iOS) lets you fly around the planet with a swipe of your finger, zoom in and out with a quick double-tap and tilt or rotate your view with a two-fingered pinch or swipe. It's like travelling the world with a jetpack and an invisibility cloak.

Glorious 3D images and built-in Street View let you explore the world at street level, with optional overlaid information such as footpaths and historical landmarks. The app is regularly updated with new features, such as the recently added 'tour guide' that recommends places to visit and takes you there in stunning detail from the comfort of your armchair.

Google Earth is incredible, but sometimes you need a specific tool to give you an even closer look at somewhere special. Mount Everest 3D (www.snipca.com/13215 Android; www.snipca.com/13217 iOS) lets you hike, scale and descend the world's tallest mountain and the surrounding Himalayan landscape using touch gestures. Closer to home, Bank of England Virtual Tour (www.snipca.com/13225 Android; www.snipca.com/13287 iOS) is a stunning free app that gives you an inside view of the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street, including a 360-degree panorama of the vault holding the UK's gold reserves. To put all that gold in context, explore the world economy with the new tablet-only statistics app Urban World (www.snipca.com/13252 Android; www.snipca.com/13290 iOS).

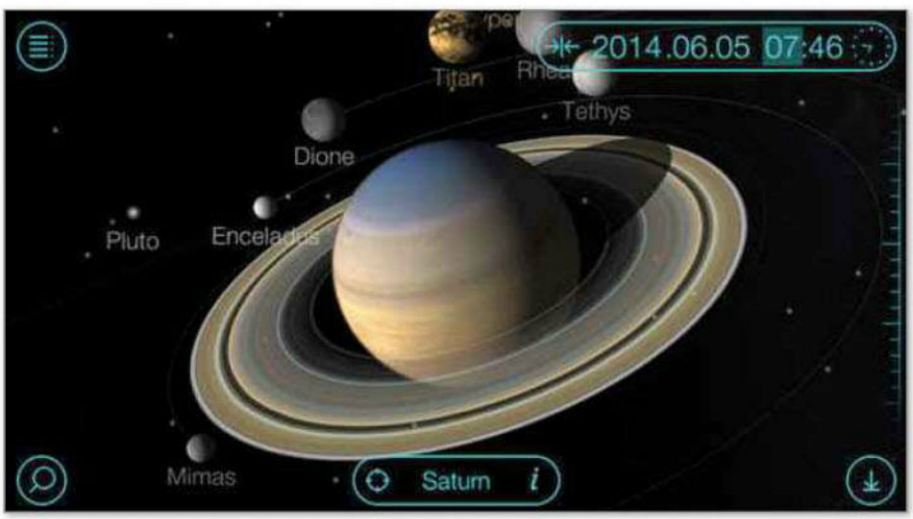
**Climb the world's highest mountain with Mount Everest 3D on your tablet**

Spin the globe with your finger, then pinch to zoom in on a location to explore its population and economy.

## Travel into outer space

Earth is merely the first frontier for tablet travellers. Touch down on Saturn with the superb free version of Solar Walk, which is now available for Android (www.snipca.com/13222) after three years as an iOS-only offering (www.snipca.com/13221). It uses a 3D solar-system model to help you navigate Saturn and its moons. You can zoom into their surfaces, see their positions on any given date and explore their geography and history. If you get bored of Saturn, you can unlock the entire Milky Way for just 69p.

In Issue 430 (page 40), we showed you how to use the brilliant stargazing app Star Chart (www.snipca.com/13219 Android; www.snipca.com/13220 iOS) to turn your tablet into a window on the universe. Point your tablet's camera at the sky and the app reveals which planets, stars and constellations you're looking at – even in broad daylight. Sky Map for iOS (www.snipca.com/13224) does a similar job and does it very well, but Sky Map for Android (www.snipca.com/13223) is a different app from another developer entirely. It actually seems to be a prototype version of the one-time Google app Droid Sky View, which allowed you to explore the night sky like a celestial version of the photo-identifying app Google Goggles (www.snipca.com/13320 Android only; see page 54).




**Explore Saturn and its moons in detailed 3D with Solar Walk**

## Fly around the globe

Flight-simulator apps never really work on tiny phone screens, but high-resolution tablet screens bring them alive. Free new app Infinity Flight Simulator 2014 (www.snipca.com/13373) turns your Android tablet into a cockpit and challenges you to fly and land your virtual plane safely, using on-screen controls like Autopilot, Gear and Brakes. iPad flight simulators are even better, but they'll cost you – for example, the brilliant Infinite Flight (£2.99, www.snipca.com/13429). You can also track real flights from your sofa with the popular Airport All (www.snipca.com/13374 Android only), which shows you real-time flight data on detailed maps and may come in handy next time you're off on holiday and need to know if your flight is delayed. The best-known flight-tracker, Flightradar24 (www.snipca.com/13401), has apps for many platforms and is often mentioned on TV news. ▶

# TURN YOUR TABLET INTO A NAVIGATION TOOL

## See through walls with augmented reality

Augmented reality is a sophisticated name for a simple idea – overlaying a real image with virtual information – and your tablet screen is its natural home. Augmented-reality apps like World Around Me (www.snipca.com/13210 Android; www.snipca.com/13211 iOS) use your tablet's camera, screen, GPS and internet connection to reveal hidden objects in the world around you. Just hold up your tablet as though you're taking a picture, and World Around Me overlays the view with information in whichever category you choose, from Art Galleries to Taxi Stands. It can see through walls, beyond hills and round corners, and it can see as far as you tell it to. For example, if you ask it to find all cafés within 100 metres of where you're standing, the view on your screen will fill up with markers revealing where the cafés are, how far away they are and even how they're rated by other World Around Me users. You can tap a marker for more details or directions, or switch to a map view if you find the annotated camera view too overcrowded to navigate.

Find Near Me (www.snipca.com/13214 Android only) lets you save favourite searches and locations, which can save time if you're in town again and can't remember where you found that cash machine last time.

Hold up your tablet's camera to see what's around the corner

## Find bargains in shops

The Co-operative chain of supermarkets is currently trialling trolley-mounted tablets so that customers can "tell us about their shopping experience" as they're chugging up and down the aisles. Maybe we're just jaded old cynics, but this sounds like another attempt to track our every move and make more money from us. We'd much rather take our own tablets to the shops and use them to save money.

We were excited to hear about new iOS app TrackIF (www.snipca.com/13292), which promises to find a product cheaper elsewhere if you scan its barcode while shopping, but it only lets you buy products from the US. If you shop online a lot and don't mind paying import duties, you may find it useful. Hopefully, there'll be a UK version soon. There are some good UK-centric alternatives include RedLaser (www.snipca.com/13296 Android; www.snipca.com/13294 iOS), which lets you scan and store your loyalty cards and set up wish lists, and the brilliantly fast Android app Barcode Scanner (www.snipca.com/13293). The app starts looking for barcodes as soon as you tap the app icon. When it sees one it offers a one-tap 'Product search' and 'Web search' to help you find it cheaper elsewhere. These searches appear to be very similar, except that 'Web search' includes links to maps and images, presumably to help you find the item in stock somewhere nearby. We didn't have much luck with the maps links, but we loved the app's speed and simplicity – and were especially impressed by how far away it could accurately read a barcode.

Before you head out to the shops next time, set up a list in Rethink (www.snipca.com/13295 Android only). This good-looking app uses location-based reminders to help you remember what to buy when you get to a particular shop. For example, if you need to buy some milk, you'll get a reminder when you pass your local cornershop or you're near a supermarket.

Point your tablet at a barcode, and Barcode Scanner will tell you where to buy the product cheaper

## Use your tablet to park the car – and find it again later

If you own a BMW Mini with an internet-connected dashboard and happen to be passing London's Westfield Stratford City shopping centre in a couple of months' time, the new JustPark 'smart parking' app can help you find a free parking space (www.snipca.com/13297). The rest of us still have to do it the hard way

Android app Park Me Right (www.snipca.com/13298) uses your tablet's GPS to seek out parking spaces and help you find your car again later. Open the app and tap the 'P' icon to find places to park nearby (including metered parking). Park Me Right automatically remembers where you are when you get out of your car and tags the exact location on a map so that you can find your way back, using an augmented-reality view for extra guidance if you wish. Annoyingly, you'll need to accept the app's terms and conditions when you first run it (common on iPad but not on Android), but it doesn't demand any dubious permissions.

Your tablet can help you on the road, too. CamSam (www.camsam.com, Android and Windows Phone only) alerts you in real time when you're approaching a speed camera, traffic blackspot or change in the speed limit, and tells you how far you are from these potential road problems. You can set it so it alerts you by sound only, so that you don't have to look at your tablet while driving.

Fuel Monitor (www.snipca.com/13299 iOS only) helps you keep journey costs down by monitoring your fuel usage. After you enter your vehicle details the first time you use it, the app automatically monitors your journeys whenever you start driving – recording petrol consumption, journey time and even the "character" of your driving, so you can manage your budget and improve your fuel efficiency.

You can even use your iPad to report potholes. UK-based Potholer (www.potholer.info) logs potholes automatically as you drive and sends the data to your local authority. It doesn't record any personal information. The app works best if your car runs quite smoothly, because it needs to be able to distinguish potholes from bumps in the road. To check how fast you're moving, use the GPS speedometer SpeedView (www.snipca.com/13325).

Find parking spaces on a map and locate your parked car with Park Me Right

## WHY WE'RE STILL USING GOOGLE MAPS

Tablets and maps should be a match made in heaven. Maps that struggle to breathe on tiny smartphone screens come alive on your tablet. Add mobile data, GPS and great battery life, and you've got the perfect opportunity for technologically minded cartographers to change the world (or at least map it). Maybe they're still working on it.

Apps that claim to offer interactive versions of Ordnance Survey maps either cost money (as with the excellent OS MapFinder app from www.snipca.com/13302) or disappoint. Walking Companion for Android (www.snipca.com/13304) looks promising but we couldn't get it to work – and its stated file size of 28KB seems oddly small. OutDoors Great Britain (www.snipca.com/13305 Android; www.snipca.com/13303 iOS) is free to download but you have to buy the maps as an in-app purchase. At £4.99 or £9.99 per map, it's no cheaper than buying a road atlas.

Eventually we stopped looking. We've already got an excellent maps app – Google Maps (www.snipca.com/13313 Android; www.snipca.com/13315 iOS) – and it's regularly updated with new features. It's just added new elevation profiles for cyclists and walkers, while the new Explore feature shows you local activities based on time and GPS location. You can also download apps that help you get more from Google Maps, such as Maps Measure (www.snipca.com/13250), which gauges distance and area, and Google Maps Engine (www.snipca.com/13316), which lets you view customised maps without an internet connection – very handy when you're planning a country walk far away from mobile masts.

Turn Google Maps into a distance and area calculator with Maps Measure

Beyond Google, the best map apps have more specialist aims. Waze (www.snipca.com/13308 Android; www.snipca.com/13310 iOS) is a community-based driving app that gathers information about routes and roadworks from its users. Colourblind Tube Map (www.snipca.com/13245 Android; www.snipca.com/13309), which is designed to help you navigate the London Underground if you're visually impaired, has deservedly been garlanded with awards for its ingenuity and ease of use.

# PROTECT YOUR HOME AND DO YOUR CHORES

### Use your tablet to trap thieves and burglars

If your tablet is stolen, your life is in a stranger's hands. Your contacts, photos, passwords and private messages are gone – with potentially devastating consequences. Apple addressed this risk last year by building a 'kill switch' into iOS 7 to let you lock and wipe your tablet or phone remotely, effectively rendering it useless to any thief. Samsung followed, and Google and Microsoft have pledged to add the technology to all Android and Windows tablets.

But kill switches won't bring back lost tablets. Even if you can lock your stolen data, you've still lost a very useful device that cost hundreds of pounds and contains priceless photos, videos and messages. Security company Prey (https://preyproject.com) has come up with an enhanced kill switch app that helps you catch the thief as well as locking your tablet. Its free app (www.snipca.com/13311 Android; www.snipca.com/13312 iOS) lets you operate your tablet's front camera remotely from a secure website and take a picture of whoever's using it. You can even take a screenshot of his or her online activity, which could prove decisive in identifying them – especially if they use your tablet to log into their email or Facebook account. Prey also lets you scare your thief with a pop-up message warning that you're watching them, but we'd advise sticking to the more stealthy approach and taking their photo and login screenshot to the police.

Lockwatch (www.snipca.com/13253 Android only) automatically takes a photo with your tablet's front camera

Lockwatch turns your tablet into a crimebuster by taking a photo of unauthorised users (we've pixellated this face)

whenever someone enters the wrong lock screen code, and emails you the picture along with your tablet's GPS location. The photo is shot without the thief's knowledge (they won't see or hear it happening), and the app starts automatically when required.

The benefits of an app like this go way beyond catching an opportunistic thief. If your tablet can identify someone who's burgling your home, it could be worth its weight in gold.

### Use your tablet to do the chores

Your tablet isn't just ideal for exploring space or fighting crime. It can also make your everyday chores slightly less, well, of a chore. It can read the gas or electricity meter by letting you take and upload a photo of your meter to EDF's app (www.snipca.com/13354); pay the bills by creating a calendar of payment dates with Smart Bills (www.snipca.com/13321); and file your shopping receipts by scanning them with the Digital Receipts app (www.snipca.com/13322).

Your tablet can also help you with the DIY. Measure&Align Plumb-bob (www.snipca.com/13323 Android) lets you measure various dimensions, check angles and draw blueprint-style plans onto photos, while Floor Plan Creator (www.snipca.com/13248 Android) and MagicPlan (www.snipca.com/13324 iOS) use augmented reality to overlay your room with your choice of virtual furniture and any renovations you have in mind. There's even an app, Handicare Vision, that uses augmented reality to show stairlift-fitters how a lift will look in people's homes (www.snipca.com/13353 Android only).

After all those chores, let your tablet relax with a takeaway and Sudoku. Using JustEat (www.just-eat.co.uk/apps, Android and iOS) you can browse local takeaway menus and place your order securely, while Google Goggles (www.snipca.com/13320 Android only) can solve a Sudoku puzzle for you if you take a photo of it. Goggles can also recognise famous landmarks and book covers, and even translate foreign text that you photograph using your tablet's camera.

## TURN YOUR TABLET INTO THE ONLY SCREEN YOU NEED

### Watch TV on your tablet

Why would you want to watch TV on your tablet when you've got a bigger, better screen in the corner of your living room? Your TV's set-top box may be connected to your router, but its interface is frustratingly fiddly and slow – and watching TV on your PC never feels quite right, especially if you have to sit at your desk. Your tablet offers the right combination of speed and comfort. BBC iPlayer, Channel 4's 4oD and ITV Player are all available as Android and iOS apps, but none are as good as their web-based counterparts. TVPlayer (www.snipca.com/13396 Android; www.snipca.com/13397 iOS) lets you watch live TV from scores of UK channels for free, and works on 3G/4G as well as Wi-Fi.

The best TV apps are from satellite, cable and online broadcasters. If you have a Sky TV subscription, Sky Go Tablet (www.snipca.com/13262 Android only) lets you stream programmes from 54 channels, including all Sky Movies and Sky Sports channels, plus a huge on-demand catalogue of films and shows. There's also a Sky Go iOS app (www.snipca.com/13398) and it works on iPad, but is optimised for iPhones. If you're on Virgin and you have a Tivo, Virgin TV Anywhere (www.snipca.com/13342 Android; www.snipca.com/13344 iOS) lets you watch live TV, view listings, set your Tivo to record and access catch-up services from the last seven days.

Netflix didn't get off to a good start on Android (www.snipca.com/13345) or iPad (www.snipca.com/13346), but both apps

## BECOME A WEATHER FORECASTER

Free new app YoWindow (www.snipca.com/13334 Android; www.snipca.com/13335 iOS) is a super-charged virtual equivalent of looking out the window to see what the weather's doing. It uses your tablet's environmental sensors, GPS and internet connection to tell you what's going on outside right now, including the temperature, wind speed, air pressure and even the sun's position. Swipe the screen to go back and forward in time and see the sun set, the moon rise and your screen fill with stars.

If you're really interested in weather, don't just sit and watch stars on your screen – get involved. Wezzoo (www.snipca.com/13337 Android; www.snipca.com/13338 iOS) crowdsources the weather by combining photos and live observations from users around the world. If you add enough useful pictures and comments, you could end up on the global leaderboard of Wezzoo contributors (tap the trophy icon to see the current leaders). Tap the 'oo' then tap an icon to contribute your observations (for example, the orange icon represents 'Hot'), and add additional photos and comments. If you just want to see what the weather's like around the world, pinch and swipe to navigate the map and tap a place to see what its locals are saying about the weather right now.

Crowdsourced Weather Map (www.snipca.com/13275 Android only) uses more scientific methods. It records air pressure, humidity, light and even magnetic flux, depending on your tablet's hardware. There are home-screen widgets for taking different readings, graphs for plotting different types of data and a map view that lets you compare your readings with others in your area.

'Loss of the Night' (www.snipca.com/13277 Android only) is a "citizen science project" to monitor light pollution and its effect on health and the environment. Join in by uploading photos of your night sky to this app and recording which stars you can see.

Contribute your own weather reports and photos to Wezzoo

# 6 GADGETS YOUR TABLET CAN REPLACE

### GPS/SAT-NAV

MapFactor: GPS Navigation for Android (www.snipca.com/13348) and Navfree for iPad (www.snipca.com/13352) guide you to your destination using OpenStreetMap (www.openstreetmap.org). Both apps store maps on your tablet for offline use – but only Navfree lets you download Stephen Fry's voice for an in-app purchase of £2.99.

### SECURITY CAMERA

Turn an old or spare Android tablet into a webcam by installing IP Webcam (www.snipca.com/13254), setting it up at home and tuning in via a secure web link. You can adjust the app to broadcast a low-resolution stream to help save the tablet's battery, or switch to higher resolution if its charger is plugged in.

Turn a spare Android tablet into a network security camera with IP Webcam

### SCIENTIFIC CALCULATOR

Classic Calculator (www.snipca.com/13268 Android only) was called Casio Scientific Calculator when it launched a few months ago, so its developers may have been asked to stop using the name. It still brings the classic Casio FX-82 calculator back to life in tablet form and meets all your mathematical needs.

### GAMES CONSOLE

Augmented-reality Android games like SpecTrek (www.snipca.com/13349) and Zombie Run (www.snipca.com/13350) challenge you to kill virtual ghosts and zombies in the real world (or a map of it).

### METRONOME

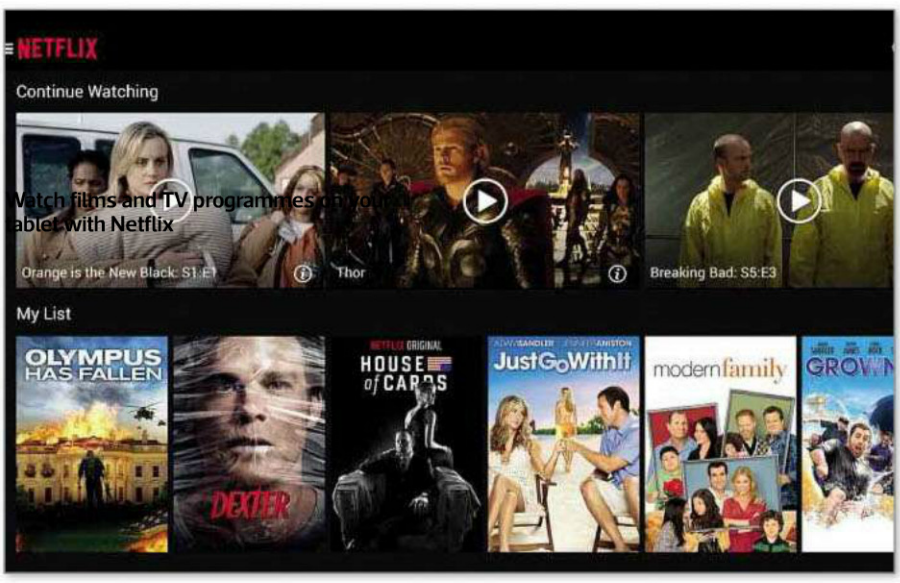
TrueMetronome Lite (www.snipca.com/13272 iOS only) counts out perfect beats up to 160 per minute, using the hypnotic sound of a traditional metronome.

### PEDOMETER

Noom Walk: Pedometer (www.snipca.com/13271 Android only) uses your tablet's built-in motion sensors to count your steps as you walk, and runs in the background all the time without draining your battery.

Pining for your old Casio FX-82? Install Classic Calculator on your Android tablet

You can set daily targets, get notifications when you reach your goals and share your achievements online.




Watch films and TV programmes on your tablet with Netflix

were updated in August to fix bugs and stability problems. It works with your existing Netflix subscription to give you instant access to programmes and films, and it syncs automatically so that if you stop watching a film on your tablet, you can pick up where you left off on your PC or laptop (or vice versa).

## Use your tablet as an e-reader

Amazon's free Kindle app can turn almost any tablet into an ebook reader, even if you don't own a Kindle device. Download the Kindle app for Android (www.snipca.com/13356) or iOS (www.snipca.com/13357) and sign into your Amazon account to automatically download any books you've bought from the Kindle store. You can also use the app to download books. The main drawback is that all your Kindle ebooks are in Amazon's format – you can't import your own PDF files, or even files in the popular ePUB ebook format. That aside, the Kindle app is excellent. The store's selection is huge, and the app makes reading a pleasure – just tap the left or right edge of a page to turn to the previous or next page, and tap the centre of the page to open settings and adjust your display.

Google Play Books is a must-have on Android (www.snipca.com/13358) and almost as good on iOS (www.snipca.com/13359), and supports ePUB, PDF, text search, automatic sync and unlimited cloud storage. It lets you read books offline, look up definitions, make notes and have some books read out loud. We had a few syncing problems with the iOS app, but it's still a wonderful tool and a great source of free reading material.

If you have time to read 40 million free ebooks, you can find them all on Wattpad (www.snipca.com/13364), which is free for the Kindle Fire tablet as well as ▶

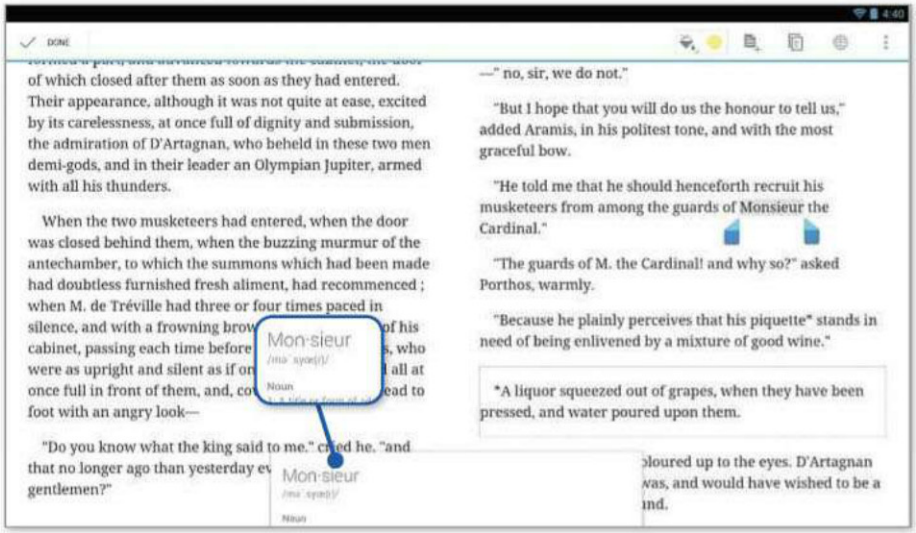
Android and iOS. The free Speed Reading Trainer (www.snipca.com/13365 Android only) might help you get through them.

## Turn your tablet into a remote screen for your PC

If you're upstairs with your tablet and your PC is downstairs full of files and programs that you need, PocketCloud lets you access them securely. It's very easy to use but needs a bit of setting up first. Install the free app on your tablet (www.snipca.com/13375 Android; www.snipca.com/13376 iOS) and the free software on your PC (www.snipca.com/13379).

On the program's download page, close the pop-up box, click the first 'PocketCloud for Windows' link and run the installer. It doesn't contain any unwanted extras, but you may be prompted to install Microsoft Visual C++ (which is safe) and you'll need to sign into your Google account. Open the tablet app, tap Auto Discovery and, as with the PC installer, sign in using your Google account. Once that's done, you'll be able to access your PC from your tablet, just as if it were a remote screen. There's a Quick Start Guide for Windows users at www.snipca.com/13380.

Access your Desktop PC files from your tablet with PocketCloud




Look up definitions and search for text with Google Play Books

You can also use your tablet to fix any computer problem. Record a video of the problem using your tablet, upload it using Fixya (www.snipca.com/13267 Android; www.snipca.com/13407 iOS) and let the Fixya community offer their solutions. It's not just for tech troubles – you can find and offer advice here on any household problem, from leaky washing machines to squeaky bike chains.

If you don't get the solution you're after, take it to the professionals with TeamViewer QuickSupport (www.snipca.com/13266 Android only). The app is a mobile version of TeamViewer's online service (www.teamviewer.com), which lets you connect securely online to a PC expert – and is one of our 20 best free programs of all time (see page 57).

## Transform your tablet with added accessories

Some of the best free tablet-transforming apps need paid accessories to make them work. You may have heard about Amazon's Local Register accessory (http://local register.amazon.com) that effectively turns tablets into cash registers. Currently, it's only available in the US, but it's another sign that tablets are becoming increasingly important in our everyday lives.

The new app Nest Mobile is free for Android (www.snipca.com/13366) and iOS (www.snipca.com/13367) but won't do much unless you've spent £179 to buy the Nest thermostat that we reviewed in Issue 430 (page 26). The app is the key to making the whole thing work – it turns your tablet into a remote control for your thermostat, and can set up a schedule for you automatically. Nest also gives you smoke and carbon-monoxide readings remotely and records your energy history so that you can see how your fuel usage changes throughout the year.

Other accessories don't even need an app to make them work with your tablet. The most eye-catching new arrival is Kensington's KeyFolio Thin X3 (www.snipca.com/13399), which effectively turns your iPad into a laptop and doubles as an iPad case and charger, but you'd have to buy it from the US for $89.99 (£54). Anker makes some brilliant budget alternatives that connect with most tablets, and they don't need any apps to power them – just Bluetooth. Their products include a mini keyboard, solar charger, multi-USB port and multi-angle portable stand, each for under £20 from Amazon (www.snipca.com/13371). ca

**NEXT ISSUE** On sale Wednesday 17 September

ON SALE 17 Sept

**REMOVE ALL YOUR OUT-OF-DATE SOFTWARE**

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# 20 BEST FREE PROGRAMS EVER Part 1

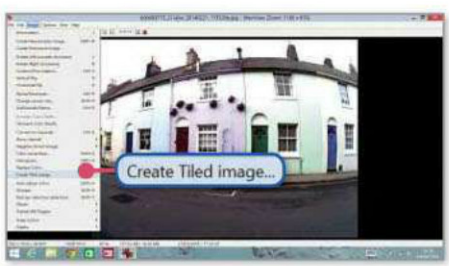
We've written about thousands of great free programs over the years, but now it's time to pick our 20 all-time favourites. Over the next four issues we'll count down to number one, picking out exceptional software that every PC user should try.

## 20 IrfanView
www.irfanview.com

**Launched:** June 1996

This photo viewer/editor looks a little dated, but offers many key features for amateurs and experts alike in an exceptionally lightweight package – the main program weighs in at only 1.8MB! Some features are only accessible when you download the separate plug-ins package, which you'll also find on the site's homepage ('plugins/Addons').

**HIDDEN FEATURE:** In the latest version (4.38) you can quickly create an artistic tiled image – set to your desired number of tiles or image size – by clicking Image, 'Create Tiled image' and filling in the relevant boxes.




Click 'Create Tiled image' in IrfanView to turn your photos into tiles

## 19 LastPass
https://lastpass.com

**Launched:** Aug 2008

A memorable password is an unsafe one. LastPass takes the hassle out of remembering different website logins by automatically creating strong passwords at the point of registration and then storing them securely for you, ready to pop into the login fields when you next visit. The universal Windows installer integrates LastPass into your web browsers.

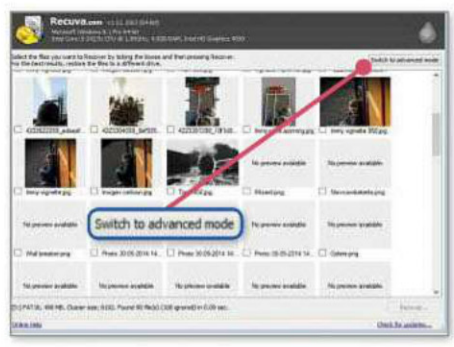
**HIDDEN FEATURE:** Click Settings and tick the box that says 'Only allow login from selected countries' and make sure UK is ticked. This helps to prevent overseas thieves from stealing your passwords.

## 18 Recuva
www.piriform.com/recuva

**Launched:** Aug 2007

Recuva is essential for those horrifying moments when you discover you've accidentally deleted a crucial document or wiped precious photos. This lightweight recovery utility quickly gets to work, scouring your hard drive for files that have been cleared out of the Recycle Bin or written off as lost on a formatted memory card, magically putting the fragments of data back together. Have it installed in case of emergencies.

**HIDDEN FEATURE:** To aid recovery from damaged or reformatted disks, run a scan, click 'Switch to advanced mode', click Options, pick the Actions tab and tick 'Scan for non-deleted files'.




In Recuva, switch to 'advanced mode' to recover files from damaged disks

## 17 Spotify
www.spotify.com

**Launched:** Oct 2008

The enormous online jukebox that has the back catalogues of everyone from Andy Williams to the New York Philharmonic to Paul Weller, just keeps giving more away for free. Spotify has now removed time limits for PC users, meaning you can listen to as many tracks, albums or playlists as you choose, with only the occasional advert interrupting.

**HIDDEN FEATURE:** Discover lots of rare live performances by typing "BBC" into the search engine. You'll find brilliant sessions from Dire Straits, The Kinks and The Who, among many others.

## 16 TeamViewer
www.teamviewer.com

**Launched:** July 2005

The versatile TeamViewer allows you to give someone access to your PC – or vice versa – simply by entering a couple of secure on-screen codes. For example, you could let a trusted computer expert access your PC to help you fix a technical problem. You could also let friends and family take part in a private photo presentation. Alternatively, keep your codes to yourself and use them to connect to your PC from your laptop or tablet when you're out and about.

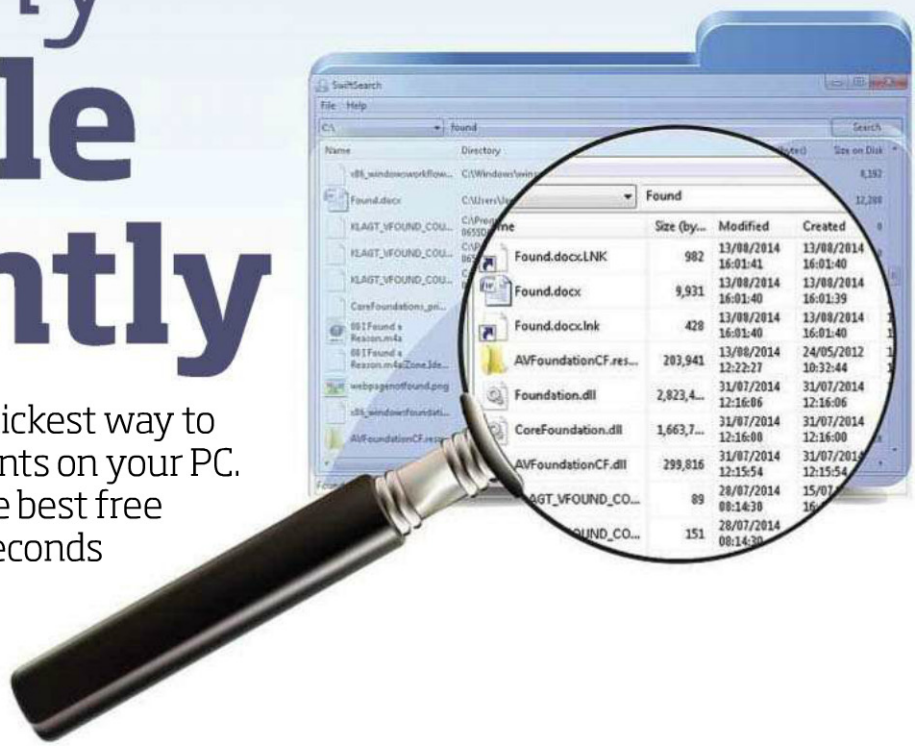
**HIDDEN FEATURE:** Show friends the parts of a new website you really like in virtual meetings by switching on Whiteboard mode and drawing on screen. Click Start Instant Meeting, invite your pals, and then click the Whiteboard tab and switch it on. Use the pen icon to draw on screen. ca

## NEXT ISSUE

The countdown continues with a music player, a system-cleaning tool and more...

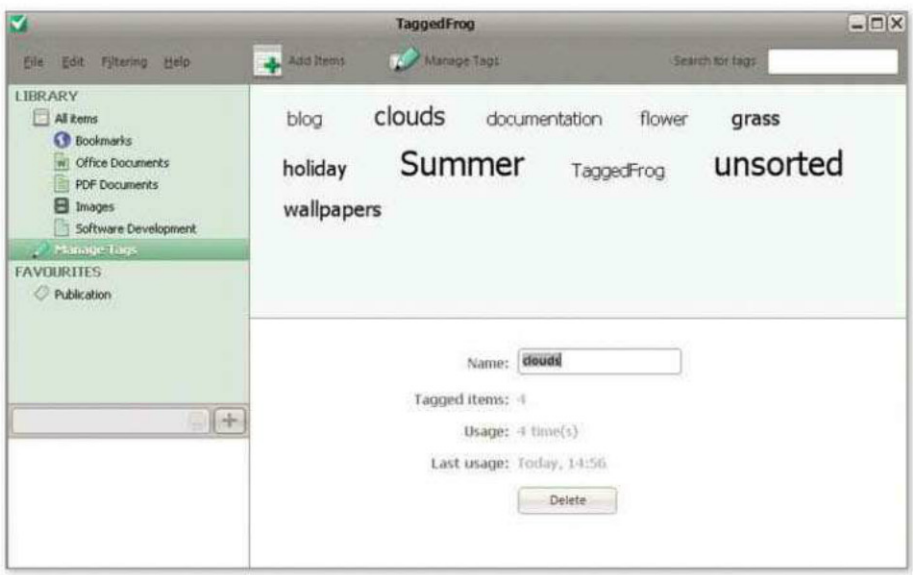
# Find any **lost file instantly**

Windows Search isn't the quickest way to find lost photos and documents on your PC. Here, **Robert Zak** reveals the best free tools for finding any file in seconds




Most of us have a pretty good idea of where items are on our computers. We organise our documents, photos and videos into a few folders (not to mention numerous subfolders) that we can access easily from the Desktop. But it doesn't take long before we start to forget where we've put things and our carefully constructed filing system falls apart.

The first port of call when seeking out lost files amid this confusion is Windows' own search tool, which is integrated into Windows Explorer and the Start menu (or Start screen). However, despite incremental improvements in Windows Search down the years (particularly in Windows 8), it won't always find what you're looking for. Luckily, there are lots of free tools that search your PC quickly and efficiently – and some that even help you organise your files, so you'll never lose track of them again.




**Use TaggedFrog's word cloud to quickly search for photos, documents and bookmarks**

## Search for the contents of files

Agent Ransack (www.snipca.com/13028) lets you search for text within documents and highlights your search terms in the results so you can see them in context. You can use Boolean expressions (AND, OR, NOT and so on) to add more flexibility to your search. Ransack is the free version of FileLocator Pro (www.snipca.com/13189; $49.95, about £30) – and it has so many handy features that you won't need to buy the full version

If you can't quite remember what you wrote in your document, free tool DocFetcher (www.snipca.com/13030) may help you with its 'fuzzy search' feature. This allows you to set such terms as 'Find words that are similar to...' or 'these two words should be at most 10 words away from each other'. Fuzzy search can also be applied to filenames.

MasterSeeker (www.master-seeker.com) is a free, simple tool that searches file contents and shows results as you're typing your search term. This helps if you're not quite sure about the filename. For example, if you type an extra letter in your search term that you thought was in your original filename and the results suddenly disappear, all you have to do is press your Backspace key to backtrack and see more results.

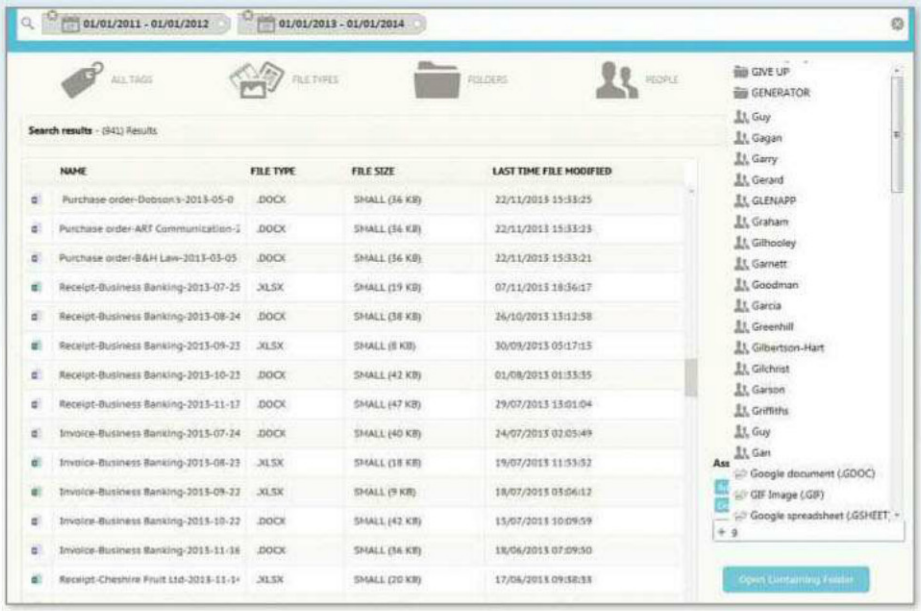
## Tag your files to help you find them

Windows Vista will forever be regarded as a flawed operating system, but one of its redeeming features is the option to tag files and folders, which in turn makes organising and finding them easier. If you're running Vista, just click a file in Windows Explorer and type tags in the Details pane at the bottom.

If you want to add more than one tag, separate each one with a semi-colon. For example, 'family; work; holidays').

Non-Vista users have a couple of great free tagging tools they can download. Users of Windows XP and 7 can try TaggedFrog (www.snipca.com/13198), which lets you tag all your photos, documents and browser bookmarks. As with Vista's built-in tool, you can add more than one tag to an item. This is useful if you forget the name of a file you're looking for. You can then search using the tag as a search term or click a tag in TaggedFrog's tag cloud. TaggedFrog integrates with Windows Explorer so you can search by tag from your Explorer window, and drag and drop files from Explorer into your tag library. You can also set up auto-tagging for certain file types or files that you save in specific folders.

Rummage (www.getrummage.com), a free new tool for Windows 7 and 8/8.1, also lets you tag your files for faster searching and can sync with your email and online contacts. This means you can then look for your contacts' names within documents as you search.




**Find files containing tags, and tag your online contacts using Rummage**

## Use search profiles to find files automatically

If you find yourself regularly losing the same kinds of files, or you keep misplacing them only to find them again in their original locations, use FileSeek (www.fileseek.ca) to create a few automatic search profiles. This fast, free tool lets you create search profiles with specific terms, and it's a quick and easy way to round up lots of lost files at once. For example, if you have a tendency to scatter uploaded photos across various folders, then you can set up a search profile that only looks for JPGs containing the word 'image' (or whatever default prefix your camera uses) in their filenames.

## Open files instantly

Launchy (www.launchy.net) is a no-nonsense free tool that instantly launches files and programs that you search for. It doesn't mess around with complex search terms, profiles and long lists of results. If it finds what you're looking for, just press Enter to launch the found item. This is particularly useful when you're not sure whether you have a certain program, file or photo on your computer and want to check it quickly without waiting for it to open in Windows or its default program. To make it even quicker, you can open Launchy with a keyboard shortcut (the default is Alt+space, but you can change this) and just start typing. You can also customise its interface to match your Windows Desktop.

SwiftSearch (www.snipca.com/13036) is another tool that gives you results with minimum fuss. It skips the indexing process that most other search tools use, and goes straight to reading the file tables. This means it produces results exceptionally fast, but means you can't launch programs or open files directly from your results. Instead, click a search result to open it in Windows Explorer, and click again to open or launch it. ca

**Launchy lets you find lost programs and files quickly and launch them instantly**

# MAKE WINDOWS SEARCH FASTER AND BETTER

Windows Search isn't as specialised or as fast as most of the tools in this feature, but there are a few adjustments you can make that will vastly improve its performance. First, you may be surprised to learn that Windows Search can find files according to their content (much like Agent Ransack), but you'll need to tweak its settings. Open Windows Explorer, click Organize, 'Folder and Search Options', then click the Search tab. Select 'Always search file names and contents'.

You can make Windows Search faster by reducing the number of file extensions that it searches. If you only ever use certain types of files, removing uncommon file types could greatly speed up your search times. Click Start, Indexing Options, Advanced, then click the File Types tab. You can add file types from the list as well as remove them. To add a file type, enter it in the 'Add new extension' box.

If you tend to keep folders outside Windows' default Documents folders, then you should make sure they're in the list of folders that Windows indexes (searches).

**You can tell Windows to search file contents as well as filenames**

Click Indexing Options, Modify, then add the folder you want Windows to include in its searches. Don't just add the whole hard drive, as this will slow down your searches.

# How to never be a smartphone zombie

Does your smartphone demand attention when you're trying to live your life? **Jane Hoskyn** reveals how to make your phone more useful and less annoying

Tablets are fast becoming the only devices we need (see our Cover Feature), but smartphones are increasingly the preserve of zombies who text and chat while dawdling down the street – usually, it seems, in front of us. Judging by your response to Stuart Andrews' The Final Straw column in Issue 426 ('Smartphone zombies'), you've noticed it too.

Let's get one thing straight: we don't hate smartphones. They're handy, free us from the landline in the living room, help us stay in touch with family and friends and can be life-savers in an emergency. But they can also be terrible nags, beeping and vibrating while you're trying to get on with your day, and luring you into being a smartphone zombie yourself.

Smartphones are smart enough to look after themselves. Here we reveal the best apps that liberate you from this tyranny and let you get back to living your life. Due to the protected nature of iOS, most are Android only.

## Make your phone reply to calls and texts automatically

You already know to put your phone in silent mode to avoid the nagging sound of incoming calls and texts, and your callers can always leave a voicemail. But many people never leave voicemails – and many of us never get round to checking them. To avoid the bother, install Auto SMS Lite (www.snipca.com/13383 Android only) and set up an automatic response to let people know you're not ignoring them. Its new version lets you respond automatically to photo or video messages (MMS) as well as plain text messages (SMS) and create different responses to calls and texts from different people.

The app is easy to use and extremely useful, but the free version has some annoying pop-ups adverts. Tap the little 'x' in the top-left corner of any advert to get rid of it. To start setting up automatic replies, tap AutoReply, tap 'Profile 1' and decide whether to create a text or phone message or both. Tap 'I'm driving now' to replace it with your own message, up to 160 characters long. Once that's done, the app runs constantly in the background using very little battery and watching out for calls and texts that you've asked it to respond to. It'll only send an auto-response once every few minutes, so that it can't be abused by spammers. The ad-free version costs £1.42 (www.snipca.com/13384).

**Create your own automatic response to texts and calls with Auto SMS Lite**

## Make your phone read texts out loud

Alexander Graham Bell would be baffled to learn that his invention has turned into a device for writing rather than talking. Most of the smartphone zombies we see don't stand there chatting, they stand there texting and reading. If you want to avoid becoming just like them, get free new app DriveSafe.ly (www.snipca.com/13386 Android only; iOS coming soon) to announce arriving texts and their senders' names out loud from your pocket. It can even read out their texts for you, using iSpeech Text to Speech technology (www.ispeech.org). You can tell it to read out a certain number of words only, which is useful if you regularly receive chatty texts and don't want DriveSafe.ly to read out the entire thing while you're in the supermarket queue. The first 10 words are usually enough. DriveSafe.ly's free version can also read out your incoming emails, app notifications and callers' names, and the paid version (£6.38, www.snipca.com/13408) lets you control your phone with voice commands. The paid app also lets you choose which voice the messages are read in, while the free version forces you to hear your texts being read out by a young American woman (apparently holding her nose) or by an unconvincing fake Barack Obama or George W Bush. The voice is no worse than most in-car sat-nav systems, but that doesn't make it OK. In the paid version, you can change it by tapping Settings, Preferences, Voice and choosing 'UK English Female' or 'UK English Male'.

DriveSafe.ly will read out your texts and tell you who sent them

## Create a secret vibration language

If you're putting your phone on silent, you can set it to vibrate when a text or call comes in. This vibrate mode isn't very sophisticated or informative – it just tells you that something's happened. Free Android app Vybe (www.snipca.com/13391) lets you create a secret vibration sign language with your phone, so that you know exactly what each vibration pattern means. When a text arrives, the vibration pattern will tell you who texted so that you don't have to look at your phone. It's a bit like Morse code on your phone.

To create a code, tap the red record button and tap a pattern in the big circle, as if you were using a drum. Tap the Contacts icon to assign the pattern to a person, then tap the floppy disc icon to save it. Next time that person contacts you, your phone will vibrate in his or her personal pattern. Tap the bottom-left icon to see and edit your saved vibrations.

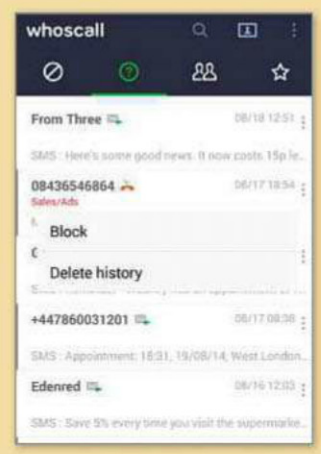
Create vibration patterns in Vybe so you know who's calling

Like Auto SMS Lite, Vybe includes some annoying full-screen and banner adverts (such as 'Beautiful Farming Sim' above) unless you upgrade to the pro version (£1.18, www.snipca.com/13402). While we'd love all apps to be free, we think Vybe Pro is a good investment. Its new version lets you create custom vibrations for all app notifications and set a 'Quiet time' where all vibrations are stopped – a good idea if you fancy a nap. ca

## BLOCK SPECIFIC PEOPLE CALLING YOU

Number-blocking apps can bring some relief if you regularly get annoying calls from the same source. Block'em (www.snipca.com/13403 Android only) was created in the UK to fight text bullying, but it also lets you block calls from specified numbers and contacts, without the caller knowing that they're being blocked. Line WhosCall (www.snipca.com/13404 Android only) reveals what type of company is calling you and lets you block them. The app was updated in August with a new URL scanner to help you avoid malicious websites on your phone or tablet. WhosCall is no longer available on iOS, and we're not sure whether this decision was made by the developer or Apple. We do know that iOS 7 has call-blocking built in, and third-party iPhone call-blockers tend to cost money. If you have iOS 6 or above and £6.99 to spare, Call Bliss (www.snipca.com/13405) lets you block calls from certain locations and set up a whitelist of allowed callers.

If you get a lot of automated messages that ask if you've had an accident or once took out PPI, they're almost certainly sent by spambot computers that use different numbers every time. This makes them difficult, if not impossible, to block. Whenever you get a call such as this and the number is visible, forward it to your network's customer services and report it to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) on 7726 (www.snipca.com/13406).

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Computer active

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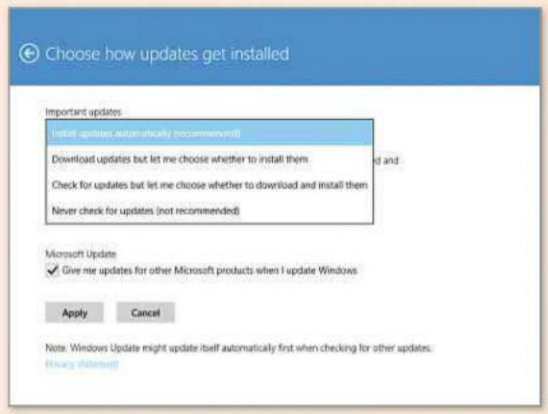
# Problems Solved

## PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

### Is my Windows 8 computer useless because I missed the upgrade?

**Q** I was flicking through Issue 424 when I spotted the small news story about Windows 8.1, saying there was a deadline to install Windows 8.1 by June 10. Clearly I have missed this date and I'm now worried. I thought I'd updated to Windows 8.1 ages ago, so what's this one all about? Is there any way to check? And given that I've missed this deadline, does it mean my Windows 8 is now useless? Everything still seems to work okay. Plain English advice would be appreciated.

Kevin Crawford




**Make sure Windows updates are installed automatically via Settings in the Charms bar**

**A** First, let's be clear about what Microsoft is talking about here: Windows 8.1 is not the same thing as Windows 8.1 Update. Put simply, Windows 8.1 Update is an update for Windows 8.1, not Windows 8. If you have Windows 8 you can still update to Windows 8.1 – but more about that later.

Windows 8.1 without Windows 8.1 Update applied is unsafe to use now because, without it, your computer will no longer receive updates and fixes from Microsoft – that's what the deadline really means. You can still download and apply Windows 8.1 Update, but if you didn't do so by June 10 then your PC has been vulnerable in the meantime.

To begin, check what version of Windows you're actually running. A quick and easy way to do this is to hold down the Windows key then press the Pause/Break key. In the System dialogue box that appears look under the 'Windows edition' heading.

You said you thought you'd already upgraded to Windows 8.1 and we suspect you're right, so it should read 'Windows 8.1 Pro' (or 'Windows 8.1' if you didn't originally buy Windows 8 Pro). If so, you can skip the next paragraph.

However, if it reads 'Windows 8.0 Pro' (or 'Windows 8.0') you haven't yet updated to Windows 8.1, so you'll need to do this via the Windows Store. Tap your Windows key to view the Modern tile interface, then click the Store app. Click the Windows 8.1 entry followed by Download and then follow the prompts. Now you have to wait for it to download and install.

If you have Windows Update set to download and apply updates automatically then your PC has already downloaded and applied Windows 8.1 Update. The simple way to check is to return to the tile interface and look at your user name and icon at the top right: if there's a search button alongside, then Windows 8.1 Update has been applied and you have nothing more to worry about.

Otherwise, open the Charms bar (Windows key+C) and click Settings followed by 'Change PC settings'. Now click 'Update and recovery' followed by Windows Update. Click the 'Check now' button followed by 'View details' then Install.

### Is my copy of Windows genuine?

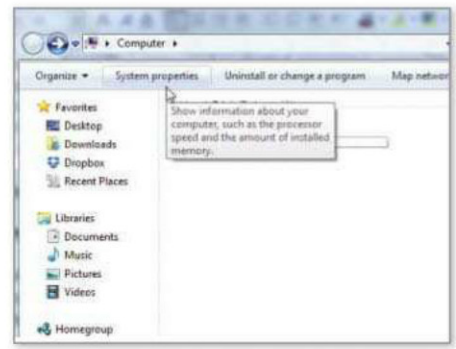
**Q** I've been running Windows 7 on a legitimately bought netbook for about three years. Recently, a message has started appearing stating "This copy of Windows is not genuine" and, instead of my usual wallpaper, my Desktop background is black. I know that the software is legal and am tempted to carry on using it. What's going on here? I've already bought Windows so don't expect to have to pay for it again.

Matthew Hill

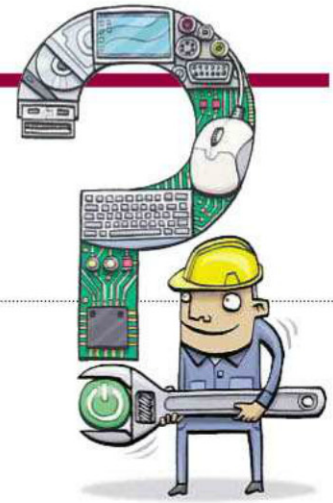
**A** It's possible that Windows has become corrupted or that you are the innocent victim of counterfeiting by the company or person who sold you the netbook. Microsoft periodically pushes out Windows updates that scan for counterfeit installations, resulting in a message like this. Resetting your PC will make all well for an hour but then the screen will once again turn black.

Try reactivating Windows to see if this fixes the problem. First, find the Certificate of Authenticity (CoA) sticker supplied with your netbook – it might be stuck to the netbook's underside or on a separate card. Next, click Start, Computer and then 'System properties' at the top. Now scroll down to the bottom to the 'Windows activation' section, click 'Change product key' and type the key that's on your CoA.

If you weren't supplied with a CoA, then it's likely you are indeed running a counterfeit version of Windows, albeit unwittingly – so you'll need to contact the vendor to put things right.




**Check the authenticity of your Windows version in 'System properties'**



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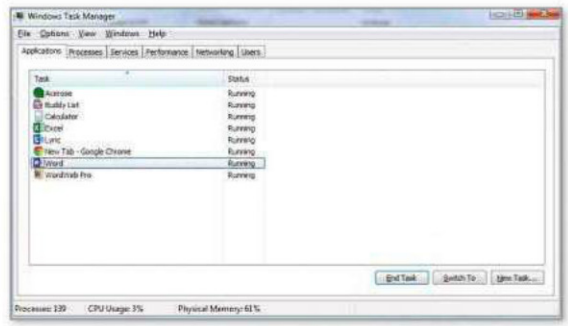
# How do I reopen Word's Document Recovery pane?

**Q** Recently, my PC froze and I had to restart Windows. At the time I'd been working on a couple of documents in Word. When I launched Word it opened with a Document Recovery pane on the left-hand side that listed both these documents as being recoverable. So I clicked the first one and sure enough – there was my document. However, I then accidentally closed the Document Recovery pane and I can't work out how to make it reappear. I've tried restarting Word but to no avail. How do I get the pane back?

**Tim Tucker**



**To retrieve the Document Recovery pane in Word, force the program to close using Windows Task Manager**

**A** Word's Document Recovery pane opens automatically after Word has closed unexpectedly, as happened with your crash. Infuriatingly, there's no way to open the pane manually, though you can trick it into opening by effectively causing Word to crash.

Launch Word, then right-click an empty section of the Taskbar and choose Task Manager. In Task Manager, select the Applications tab then click Word's entry in the Task list. Click the End Task button followed by End Now. Restart Word and the Document Recovery pane will appear.

If you use Word 2013, there's another way to locate recoverable documents. Click File, then Open. Now scroll to the bottom of the Recent Documents list and click the Recover Unsaved Documents button.

If all else fails, you can search for recoverable documents manually. Press Windows key+E to open Windows Explorer (or File Explorer in Windows 8/8.1), then click your documents drive in the left-hand pane. Now click in the search box at the top right of the window and type *.asd. Press Enter.

The '.asd' bit stands for 'autosave document' and it's the file extension that Word uses for autosaved and recoverable documents. The search will take a while because .asd is not a file type that Windows indexes by default. When the list appears, right-click the relevant file and choose Open. Select the 'Select a program from a list of installed programs' button then choose Word followed by OK.

# Why are there strange images on my tablet that aren't mine?

**Q** I recently bought a Samsung Galaxy Tab 3. Whenever I connect it to my computer, I find many images that I haven't taken, some blank, some pictures of adverts and a screenshot of the game Temple Run 2, which I didn't take. I also found a file named 'setup.exe' on my tablet.

What is all this?

**Alex Kensit**

**A** You didn't tell us where you're finding these images but we're guessing they're just temporary files created by web surfing and other everyday use. The adverts, for example, could simply be images cached from a website that you've visited. Alternatively, they could have been deposited on your tablet by any of the apps you've installed and may be required by those apps.

This is also true of Temple Run 2, though we suppose it's possible that you – or perhaps someone else who has access to your tablet – has inadvertently captured the screenshot. However, on the Galaxy Tab this requires holding down the home button and then the power button, which is really difficult to do accidentally.

It's also not easy for us to guess how the 'setup.exe' file made its way onto your device. Perhaps you (or another user) tapped some random download link, which prompted Android to save the file. Regardless, be assured that such files can't do any harm – Android cannot run executable files designed for Windows – so just delete it.

**If you see images on your device that you don't recognise, they may be temporary files created by your web-surfing activity**

# Problems Solved

## Why do my GIMP tool panels keep disappearing?

**Q** I installed the GIMP image-editing program for Windows. I find it quite difficult to use, but I'm slowly learning and I do like it. I've noticed that the two tool panels (Toolbox and Layers) that sit either side of the canvas have developed a tendency to disappear when I switch from GIMP to another program and then back. By hunting through the menus I've worked out how to switch them back on (via the Windows menu, in fact), but they soon enough disappear again.

What's going on? Is this some kind of bug?

Mark Farmer

**A** No, it isn't a bug. GIMP lets the user hide these – and other – 'Dockable Dialogs' with a tap of the Tab key (the one usually just to the left of the Q on your keyboard).

Windows has a number of keyboard shortcuts for switching between programs, including Alt+Tab and Windows key+Tab. It's our guess you've been using one of these shortcuts to switch between programs and have been getting your timing just a little out, perhaps releasing the Alt or Windows key before hitting the Tab key.

So, while practising your keyboard-shortcut skills will fix this problem, the next time GIMP's docked panels disappear, just tap Tab to bring them back.

**In GIMP, avoid pressing the Tab key if you don't want to hide your tool panels**

## What does this boot message mean?

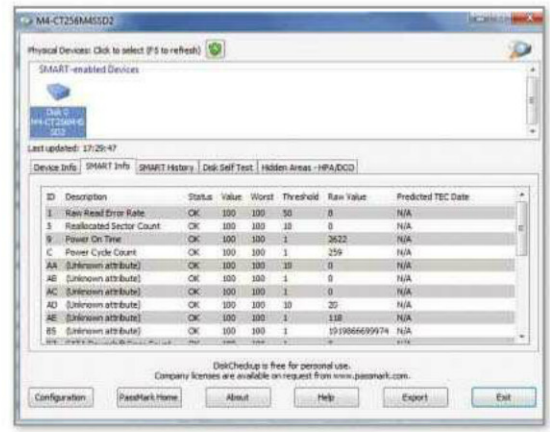
**Q** Recently, whenever I boot up my Sony desktop PC I'm presented with this message: "Pri Master Hard Drive Disk SMART Status BAD. Backup and Replace. Press F1 to Resume". I press F1 and Windows launches as normal. What's this all about?

Fred Roxborough

**A** We're afraid it's unlikely to be good news. The 'SMART' part of the message stands for 'Self-Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Technology' and 'Pri Master Hard Drive' means your computer's primary (main) hard drive. In other words, your PC's hard drive checks itself for errors and, sadly, it's found something wrong.

In your case the drive is still working, but it means SMART believes it will fail soon, so it's advising you to back up the drive and replace it. You should back up this drive immediately or risk losing data, but if you want to investigate the specifics of the problem, use a free SMART-monitoring tool, such as DiskCheckup from www.snipca.com/12889.

Once installed, launch DiskCheckup and then select your PC's main drive from the icon carousel. The SMART Info and SMART History tabs might show useful information, but for the full summary, select the Disk Self Test tab, choose Extended Test from the dropdown menu, then click the Start Test button.




**If your hard drive is having problems, use the free monitoring tool DiskCheckup to find out what's wrong**

## How do I get Kindle working again?

**Q** A little while ago I followed some instructions in your magazine that allowed me to read my Kindle ebooks on my laptop. But today I was unable to do this and this message came up on the screen: "This version of Kindle application has expired and can no longer be used. Please update to a newer version".

I'm not great on computers, so could you help me with this?

Cathie Archer

**A** The message is telling you what the problem is and what you need to do to fix it, but not how or where to find the solution. First, launch your browser and visit www.snipca.com/12885. Click the 'Download now' button (see screenshot, below) and, once the download has completed, double-click the file to begin the installation. Click Run and then follow the prompts.

When it's finished, the new version of the Kindle program will launch. You may need re-enter your login details, but otherwise that's it.

**Download the latest version of the Kindle for PC program to continue reading Kindle ebooks on your PC or tablet**

# Is this message a scam and how do I stop it?

**Q** I run Windows 7 on my desktop PC. Recently, a warning box has begun popping up, telling me I need to update my drivers. The only button option is OK. I haven't clicked this for fear that it's a scam, so instead I used the proper Windows Update tool to update everything – but the message keeps popping up. Is it a scam? If so, is it serious? And how do I get rid of it?

Jack Leonard

**Turn on Pop-up Blocker in your browser's Tools menu to prevent irritating pop-up scams**

**A** Yes, it's a scam – a pop-up advert displayed by some website or other that you're visiting. As scam dialogue boxes go, it's a pretty poor one, as it doesn't much resemble any real Windows alert, but it's probably good enough to catch out a few less-savvy PC users.

Fortunately, you've recognised it for what it is and not been tempted to click. It isn't serious, but the pop-up will continue to appear until you stop visiting the website responsible or you enable your web browser's pop-up blocker.

The screenshot you sent us shows you're using Internet Explorer. Tap the Alt key to bring up the menu bar, then open the Tools menu, hover your cursor over Pop-up Blocker and then click 'Turn on Pop-up Blocker'. Click Yes to confirm.

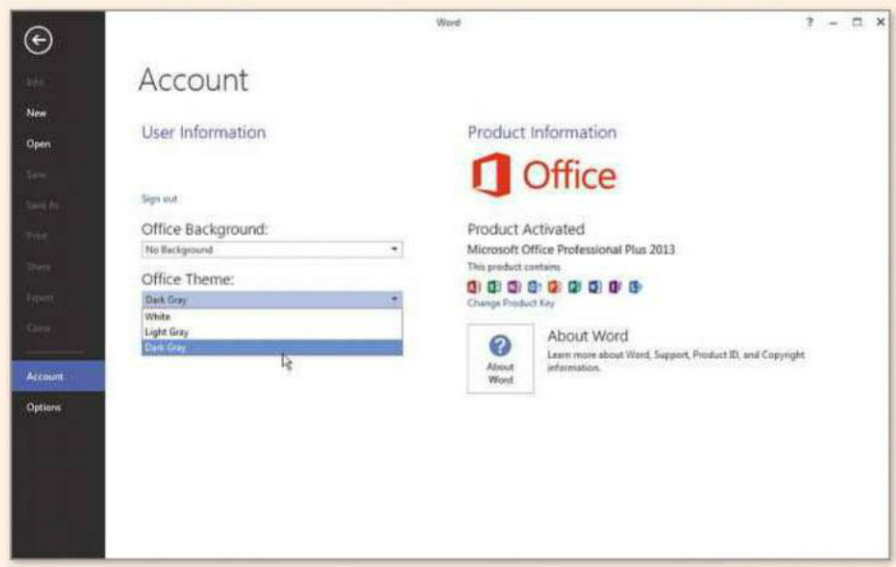
If you want to add exceptions to allow certain sites to display pop-ups, repeat this process but choose 'Pop-up Blocker settings', type a web address in the box and click Add.

# Can I darken the Ribbon in Word?

**Q** I've just started using Word 2013 and I have a query that you may be able to answer. I'm visually impaired and I find the pale-blue background colour used on the Ribbon strains my eyes.

Is there any way that the ribbon colour can be changed to a darker tint? My PC runs Windows 7.

Ian Watkins




**Use Word's theme-changing tool to change the colour of the Ribbon**

**A** There are a couple of things you can try. First, use Word's own theme-changing tool to pick a darker shade to see if that helps. In Word, click File, then Account and then open the Office Theme dropdown menu and choose Dark Gray.

We suspect, however, this may not solve your problem because Microsoft's definition of 'dark gray' is somewhat half-hearted, so the Ribbon (and any other affected areas) appear only very slightly darker than before.

One alternative is to use the accessibility features built into Windows. These include a high-contrast mode, which can easily be toggled on and off using a keyboard shortcut. So if you find the high-contrast colour scheme too much for anything other than Word, it's easy enough to disable.

Click Start followed by Control Panel, and then click 'Optimize visual display' under the 'Ease of Access' heading. Next, place a tick in the 'Turn on or off High Contrast when left ALT+left SHIFT+PRINT SCREEN is pressed' box.

We'd also suggest ticking the 'Display a warning message when turning a setting on' and 'Make a sound when turning a setting on or off' boxes, because then you'll receive audible alerts when changing modes. Click OK and then use the keyboard shortcut to try it out – that's left Alt+left Shift+Print Screen (PrtScn).

# Problems Solved

## Why can't I download the Windows 8.1 upgrade?

**Q** I have a Dell Inspiron 1525 laptop which is about six years old and came with Windows Vista. I recently took up a Microsoft offer to upgrade to Windows 8 Pro and found that it considerably helped to reduce the start-up time. I've spotted a free upgrade to 8.1 in the Windows Store, but I'm unable to complete the download. It reaches about 84 per cent and then fails. I've read that some antivirus software can cause problems so I disabled my AVG program and tried again, but the download still failed at the same point. I've removed other programs that Windows Upgrade Assistant said were incompatible and I've updated all my drivers. I'm at my wits' end with this. Any ideas?

Paul Seabridge

Check your hard drive for errors via File Explorer

**A** This kind of problem is often caused by previous failed attempts at installation, which may leave digital junk on your hard drive that prevents any future attempts to upgrade Windows. There's also the outside possibility that your PC's hard drive has a fault that is somehow stopping installation.

Start by checking the health of your drive. Press the Windows key+E to launch File Explorer, then right-click your Windows 8 drive – which will almost certainly be 'Local Drive (C:)' – and choose Properties. Now select the Tools tab and, in the 'Error checking' section, click the Check button (see screenshot). We're pretty sure your drive will be given a clean bill of health but, if not, follow Windows' recommendations.

Next, return to the Local Drive (C:) Properties dialogue box, select the General tab and click the Disk Cleanup button followed by 'Clean up system files'. Now make sure that the 'Previous Windows installation(s)' box is ticked and then click OK.

Finally, make sure Windows 8 itself is up to date. Read the final paragraph of our answer to the Problem of the Fortnight (on page 64) to find out how to do this – before you try to download and install Windows 8.1 from the Windows Store.

## How do I delete my old blog?

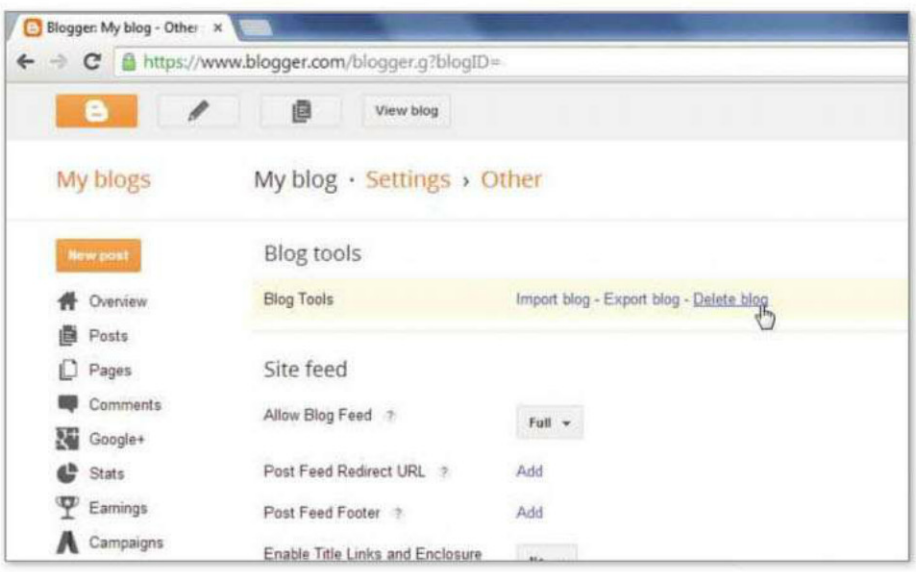
**Q** When I was younger I created a silly blog with Blogger (www.blogger.com) about which I'm now a bit embarrassed, because when you search for my name it comes up in the first few Google search results. I've managed to log into Blogger but I can't find any obvious way to delete my blog or my Blogger account, which is also no longer required because I don't want people viewing my profile either. Can you help?

Gary Clark

**A** Blogger is owned by Google and yet, incredibly, there's no way to delete a Blogger account – (we've changed your name, by the way, to spare your blushes). It is possible to delete individual Blogger blogs and wipe your Blogger profile's contents, which achieves the same effect – though it will take a few weeks before the information disappears from Google's search index.

Log in, click the down arrow next to the offending blog and choose Settings. Next, click Other below the Settings heading in the left-hand pane. Finally, click the 'Delete blog' link near the top then click the Delete This Blog button.

Next, click the Blogger logo at the top left to return to the dashboard then click your username at the top right, followed by 'Blogger profile'. Click the Edit Profile button, delete everything you want to disappear from the web then click Save Profile.




Remove your old Blogger blogs and account details via Settings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- Can I put an SSD into my all-in-one PC
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- Why are my Windows colours off?

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# Windows startup

Speed up your boot time, get rid of the blue screen and stop the infinite startup

## Windows starts on an infinite loop

One of Windows' most notorious startup problems is the infinite loop. This process involves Windows trying to repair itself at startup, failing, restarting your computer then trying again – ad infinitum. To stop this, press F8 repeatedly when switching on your PC (and before the Windows logo appears), use your cursor keys to highlight Repair Your Computer on the Advanced Boot Options screen, then hit Enter. Choose your keyboard and language preferences, type your user name and password, then click OK. Click Startup Repair. Windows will then attempt to fix whatever is preventing it from starting.

**Click Automatic Repair in Windows 8's 'Advanced options' to fix the infinite startup loop.**

In Windows 8, hold the Shift key down when pressing F8 (this varies according to your PC, and could be F5 or F11) until a menu appears. Click Troubleshoot, 'Advanced options', Automatic Repair ('Startup Repair' on some PCs), then follow the instructions. If this fails, go through the steps to get to 'Advanced options', click System Restore and follow the instructions.

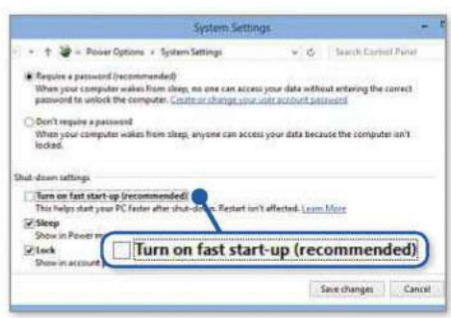
## Black or blue screen on startup

If you switch on your PC and see a black screen containing just a mouse cursor, or the so-called 'blue screen of death' with a load of technical-sounding words on it, then a crucial startup process could be corrupted and Windows Automatic Repair or Startup Repair has failed to detect it. Go to Advanced Boot Options (see previous tip), use your cursor keys to navigate to Safe Mode and press Enter. Once Windows Safe Mode has loaded, click Start, type cmd, hit Enter, then in the Command Prompt type sfc /scannow and press Enter. Once the scan is 100 per cent complete, restart your computer and Windows should boot as normal.

## Computer restarts on startup in Windows 8

If your computer sometimes switches itself off and on again when Windows 8 or 8.1 is starting up, your PC may be struggling with the demands of Fast Startup, which is enabled by default. Fast Startup is a unique feature to Windows 8/8.1 that creates a special file to make Windows boot faster (up to 70 per cent faster, according to Microsoft). This feature is genuinely helpful on more powerful computers, but on older and slower PCs it can be more of a hindrance than a help.

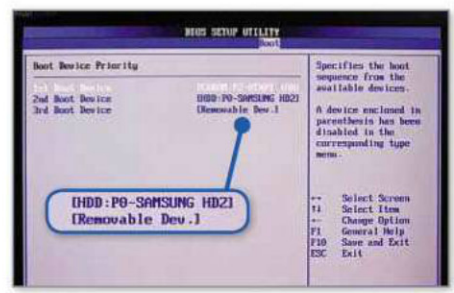
To disable it, go to the Start screen and type power options. Click or tap Power Options, 'Choose what the power buttons do', then click 'Change settings that are currently unavailable'. Scroll down to 'Shutdown settings' and untick 'Turn on fast start-up'. If you don't see the box, it means Fast Startup is already disabled, in which case the previous tip may solve the problem.




**Switch off Fast Startup in Windows 8 if your PC restarts when you boot**

## Missing DLL file error message

Windows presents thousands of error messages for startup problems, and many of these can be resolved by our first two tips. But a slightly trickier one is the 'hal.dll is missing or corrupt' error message, which you may see at startup in any version of Windows since XP. The message usually appears when you've plugged in an external hard drive or USB stick, and your PC thinks it should be booting Windows from it. To fix the problem, restart your PC and press F2 to open the Boot Menu (on some computers you press Delete). Click Boot Options (sometimes called 'Advanced BIOS features' or similar) and find the Boot Priority menu. Make sure your hard drive (or HDD) appears above 'Removable Device' in the list. You can move it up the list by using your '+' and '-' keys. Choose your BIOS option for 'Save and Exit' (F10, In our case), then exit the BIOS menu.




**Make sure your hard drive is listed above your removable device to avoid missing file errors**

## Windows starts up very slowly

Programs and processes that run automatically at startup slow your boot time down, as we revealed in our Cover Feature in Issue 430. To speed up your boot time, use a startup manager to disable startup items that you don't need. Autoruns (www.snipca.com/13183) is a small free tool that lists all your startup items and lets you find out more about them with a simple right-click, and WhatInStartup (www.snipca.com/13182) lets you disable any startup process quickly and easily. But you may already have a startup manager installed if you use a system cleaner program. For example Glary Utilities (www.glarysoft.com) includes a tool that lets you check and manage the programs that run automatically at Windows startup – and it even offers advice on how useful they are.

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| | |
|---|---|
| 2GB | £3.99 |
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| 8GB | £4.99 |
| 16GB | £7.99 |
| 32GB | £14.99 |

## MEMORY

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|---|---|---|
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|---|---|---|
| 4GB | 30MB/s | ~~£15.66~~ £5.99 |
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### Sandisk Extreme

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4GB | 30MB/s | ~~£21.33~~ £7.99 |
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| 16GB | 45MB/s | ~~£52.02~~ £14.99 |
| 12GB | 45MB/s | ~~£84.56~~ £26.99 |

### Sandisk Ultra

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4GB | 30MB/s | ~~£21.76~~ £13.99 |
| 8GB | 30MB/s | ~~£36.12~~ £19.99 |
| 16GB | 30MB/s | ~~£70.06~~ £34.99 |

### Sandisk Extreme

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 8GB | 60MB/s | ~~£67.07~~ £25.99 |
| 16GB | 60MB/s | ~~£118.19~~ £43.99 |
| 32GB | 60MB/s | ~~£208.89~~ £72.99 |

## PAPER

### Ilford Papers

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Buy One Get One Free:*** | |
| 6x4 Glossy 200g (50) | £4.99 |
| ***Buy One Get One Free:*** | |
| A4 Glossy 200g (20) | £7.99 |
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| A4 Glossy 270g (25) | £11.99 |
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| A4 Lustre 270g (25) | £11.99 |
| 6x4 Galerie Pearl 310g (100) | £12.99 |
| 7x5 Galerie Pearl 310g (100) | £12.99 |
| A4 Galerie Pearl 310g (25) | £12.99 |
| A3 Galerie Pearl 310g (25) | £28.99 |
| A3+ Galerie Pearl 310g (25) | £34.99 |
| A4 Galerie Gloss 310g (25) | £12.99 |
| A4 Matt D/Sided 200g (50) | £14.99 |

### Epson Papers

| | |
|---|---|
| 6x4 Photo 190g (70) | £7.99 |
| A4 Photo 190g (25) | £7.99 |
| ***Buy One Get One Free:*** | |
| 6x4 Prem Gloss 255g (40) | £9.99 |
| 7x5 Prem Gloss 255g (30) | £9.99 |
| ***Buy One Get One Free:*** | |
| A4 Prem Gloss 255g (15) | £9.99 |
| A3 Prem Gloss 255g (20) | £34.99 |
| A3+ Prem Gloss 255g (20) | £29.99 |
| 6x4 Semi-Gloss 251g (50) | £8.99 |
| A4 Semi-Gloss 251g (20) | £15.99 |
| A3 Semi-Gloss 251g (20) | £34.99 |
| A3+ Semi-Gloss 251g (20) | £29.99 |

*We stock papers from Ilford, Epson, Canon, HP, Kodak, Fotospeed & PermaJet*

## PHOTOGRAPHIC

### Camera Tripods

Full range of tripods in stock from Benro, Manfrotto & Vanguard.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Manfrotto** | 190XProB | £109.99 |
| **Vanguard** | AltaPro263 | £89.99 |

### Camera Bags

Huge range of bags in stock - over 50 bags on display in our showroom.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Vanguard** range from | £29.99 |
| **Tamrac** range from | £29.99 |
| **Billingham** range from | £99.99 |

### Camera Batteries

Replacement li-ion batteries for digital cameras, made by Energizer and Blumax

| | |
|---|---|
| **Canon** NB-2L | £9.99 |
| **Canon** LP-E5 | £9.99 |
| **Canon** LP-E6 | £19.99 |
| **Canon** LP-E8 | £15.99 |
| **Canon** BP-511 | £12.99 |
| **Nikon** EN-EL3e | £15.99 |
| **Nikon** EN-EL14 | £19.99 |
| **Nikon** EN-EL15 | £24.99 |
| **AA** Rechargeables x4 | £4.99 |

### Flash Guns & Meters

| | |
|---|---|
| **Nissin** Di466 GN:33 | £79.99 |
| **Nissin** Di622 GN:44 | £114.99 |
| **Nissin** Di866 GN:60 | £199.99 |
| **Metz** 36AF-5 GN:36 | £69.99 |
| **Sekonic** L308S | £139.99 |

### Screw-type Filters

Slim frame to reduce vignetting, and matt frame to reduce lens flare and reflections

| | |
|---|---|
| 46mm UV / Haze | £4.99 |
| 49mm UV / Haze | £4.99 |
| 52mm UV / Haze | £4.99 |
| 55mm UV / Haze | £5.99 |
| 58mm UV / Haze | £6.99 |
| 62mm UV / Haze | £7.99 |
| 67mm UV / Haze | £8.99 |
| 72mm UV / Haze | £8.99 |
| 77mm UV / Haze | £11.99 |
| Skylight filters from: | £6.99 |
| Circular Polarising filters from: | £18.99 |
| ND4 and ND8 filters from: | £11.99 |
| Starburst filters from: | £11.99 |

### P-Type Square Filter System

The P-Type square / rectangular filter system comprises three parts:
1) An adapter ring that screws onto the front of your DSLR lens
2) A filter holder clips onto the ring
3) One or more P-Type filters

| | |
|---|---|
| 49-82mm Adapter Rings | £4.99 |
| **Filter Holder** | £5.99 |
| **ND2** Filter | £9.99 |
| **ND2 Grad** Filter | £11.99 |
| **ND4** Filter | £9.99 |
| **ND4 Grad** Filter | £11.99 |
| **Circ Polarizing** Filter | £29.99 |

## PRINTER INK CARTRIDGES

### Canon Compatibles

| | |
|---|---|
| **BCI3e** Black 26ml | £2.99 |
| **BCi6** B/C/M/Y 15ml | £2.99 |
| **BCi6** PC/PM/R/G 15ml | £2.99 |
| **PGi5** Black 29ml | £4.99 |
| **CLi8** B/C/M/Y/PC/PM 15ml | £3.99 |
| **PGi520** Black 19ml | £4.99 |
| **CLI521** B/C/M/Y/GY 9ml | £3.99 |
| **PGi525** Black 19ml | £4.99 |
| **CLi526** B/C/M/Y/GY 9ml | £3.99 |
| **PGi550XL** Black 25ml | £4.99 |
| **CLi551XL** B/C/M/Y/GY 12ml | £3.99 |
| **PG37** Black 12ml | £9.99 |
| **PG40** Black 26ml | £13.99 |
| **PG50** Black 28ml | £12.99 |
| **PG510** Black 11ml | £13.99 |
| **PG512** Black 18ml | £14.99 |
| **PG540XL** Black 21ml | £13.99 |
| **CL38** Colour 12ml | £12.99 |
| **CL41** Colour 24ml | £16.99 |
| **CL51** Colour 24ml | £14.99 |
| **CL511** Colour 11ml | £15.99 |
| **CL513** Colour 15ml | £16.99 |
| **CL541XL** Colour 15ml | £15.99 |

### Canon Originals

| | |
|---|---|
| **BCi6** B/C/M/Y 13ml | £8.99 |
| **BCi6** PC/PM/R/G 13ml | £8.99 |
| **PGi5** Black 26ml | £12.99 |
| **CLi8** B/C/M/Y 13ml | £10.99 |
| **CLi8** PC/PM/R/G 13ml | £10.99 |
| **PGi9** All colours, each | £9.99 |
| **PGi29** All colours, each | £22.99 |
| **PGi520** Black 19ml | £10.99 |
| **CLI521** B/C/M/Y/GY 9ml | £9.99 |
| **PGi520/CLi521** set of 5 | £46.99 |
| **PGi525** Black 19ml | £10.99 |
| **CLi526** B/C/M/Y/GY 9ml | £9.99 |
| **PGi525/CLi526** set of 5 | £46.99 |
| **PGi550** Black 15ml | £10.99 |
| **CLi551** B/C/M/Y/GY 7ml | £8.99 |
| **PGi550/CLi551** set of 5 | £42.99 |
| **PG40** Black 16ml | £14.99 |
| **CL41** Colour 12ml | £18.99 |
| **PG50** Black 22ml | £21.99 |
| **CL51** Colour 21ml | £25.99 |
| **PG510** Black 9ml | £11.99 |
| **CL511** Colour 9ml | £15.99 |
| **PG510/CL511** Combo | £24.99 |
| **PG512** Black 15ml | £16.99 |
| **CL513** Colour 13ml | £20.99 |
| **PG540** Black 8ml | £11.99 |
| **CL541** Colour 8ml | £15.99 |
| **PG545** Black 8ml | £11.99 |
| **CL546** Colour 8ml | £13.99 |
| **KP-108IP** Ink & Paper | £29.99 |

*Many more in stock!*

### Brother Compatibles

| | |
|---|---|
| **LC970 / 1000** Black | £3.99 |
| **LC970 / 1000** C/M/Y | £2.99 |
| **LC970 / 1000** Set of 4 | £11.99 |
| **LC980 / 1100** Black | £3.99 |
| **LC980 / 1100** C/M/Y | £2.99 |
| **LC980 / 1100** Set of 4 | £11.99 |
| **LC985** Black | £3.99 |
| **LC985** C/M/Y | £2.99 |
| **LC985** Set of 4 | £11.99 |
| **LC1240** Black | £3.99 |
| **LC1240** C/M/Y | £2.99 |
| **LC1240** Set of 4 | £11.99 |

*Full range of Brother Original cartridges in stock!*

### Kodak Originals

| | |
|---|---|
| **ESP** Black Series 10 Ink | £6.99 |
| **ESP** Colour Series 10 Ink | £12.99 |
| **ESP** Black & Colour Ink | £18.99 |
| **ESP** Black Series 30 Ink | £6.99 |
| **ESP** Colour Series 30 Ink | £12.99 |
| **ESP** Black & Colour Ink | £18.99 |

*Kodak Papers also in stock!*

### Dell Cartridges

*Comprehensive range of Dell Original and Dell Compatible cartridges in stock - call or check website for details!*

### HP Compatibles

| | |
|---|---|
| **No.15** Black 46ml | £4.99 |
| **No.21** Black 10ml | £7.99 |
| **No.22** Colour 21ml | £11.99 |
| **No.45** Black 45ml | £4.99 |
| **No.56** Black 24ml | £9.99 |
| **No.57** Colour 24ml | £12.99 |
| **No.58** Photo 24ml | £12.99 |
| **No.78** Colour 36ml | £9.99 |
| **No.88XL** Black 58ml | £9.99 |
| **No.88XL** C/M/Y 17ml | £8.99 |
| **No.110** Colour 12ml | £10.99 |
| **No.300XL** Black 18ml | £14.99 |
| **No.300XL** Colour 18ml | £16.99 |
| **No.336** Black 10ml | £7.99 |
| **No.337** Black 24ml | £10.99 |
| **No.338** Black 24ml | £10.99 |
| **No.339** Black 34ml | £12.99 |
| **No.342** Colour 12ml | £10.99 |
| **No.343** Colour 21ml | £12.99 |
| **No.344** Colour 21ml | £14.99 |
| **No.348** Photo 21ml | £12.99 |
| **No.350XL** Black 34ml | £14.99 |
| **No.351XL** Colour 21ml | £16.99 |
| **No.363** Black 20ml | £6.99 |
| **No.363** C/M/Y/PC/PM 6ml | £4.99 |
| **No.364** Black 10ml | £6.99 |
| **No.364** PB/C/M/Y 5ml | £5.99 |

### HP Originals

| | |
|---|---|
| **No.21** Black 5ml | £11.99 |
| **No.22** Colour 5ml | £14.99 |
| **No.38** Colours, each | £26.99 |
| **No.56** Black 19ml | £19.99 |
| **No.57** Colour 17ml | £28.99 |
| **No.110** Colour 5ml | £19.99 |
| **No.300** Black 4ml | £10.99 |
| **No.300** Colour 4ml | £12.99 |
| **No.301** Black 3ml | £9.99 |
| **No.301** Colour 3ml | £11.99 |
| **No.301B/C** Combo | £17.99 |
| **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 |
| **No.348** Photo 13ml | £23.99 |
| **No.350** Black 4.5ml | £11.99 |
| **No.351** Colour 3.5ml | £14.99 |
| **No.363** Black 6ml | £13.99 |
| **No.363** C/M/Y/PC/PM ea. | £9.99 |
| **No.363** Set of 6 | £39.99 |
| **No.364** Black 8ml | £7.99 |
| **No.364** PB/C/M/Y 3ml ea. | £6.99 |
| **No.364** Set of 4 | £22.99 |
| **No.364XL** Black 14ml | £14.99 |
| **No.364XL** PB/C/M/Y 6ml | £13.99 |
| **No.901** Black 4ml | £11.99 |
| **No.901** Colour 9ml | £14.99 |
| **No.920XL** Black 49ml | £22.99 |
| **No.920XL** Colours 6ml | £9.99 |
| **No.940XL** Black 49ml | £26.99 |
| **No.940XL** Colours 16ml | £16.99 |

*Many more in stock!*

### Lexmark Compatibles

| | |
|---|---|
| **No.1** Cartridge | £10.99 |
| **No.2** Cartridge | £11.99 |
| **No.3** Cartridge | £14.99 |
| **No.16** Black | £10.99 |
| **No.17** Black | £9.99 |
| **No.23** Black | £11.99 |
| **No.24** Colour | £12.99 |
| **No.26** Colour | £12.99 |
| **No.27** Colour | £11.99 |
| **No.28** Black | £11.99 |
| **No.29** Colour | £12.99 |
| **No.31** Photo | £11.99 |
| **No.32** Black | £9.99 |
| **No.33** Colour | £11.99 |
| **No.34** Black | £11.99 |
| **No.35** Colour | £12.99 |

### Lexmark Originals

| | |
|---|---|
| **No.14** Black | £18.99 |
| **No.15** Colour | £20.99 |
| **No.32** Black | £22.99 |
| **No.33** Colour | £24.99 |
| **No.36** Black | £19.99 |
| **No.37** Colour | £20.99 |
| **No.100** Black | £15.99 |
| **No.100** Colours | £9.99 |

*Many more in stock!*

## EPSON
### COMPATIBLE & ORIGINAL INK

At Premier Ink, we stock two types of cartridges for Epson printers - **Originals**, which are made by Epson, and **Compatibles**, which are made by a UK company called **Jet Tec**. Using **Jet Tec Compatibles** is a way of saving money, without compromising on the quality of your prints. Here're the results from two **independent** ink tests that agree...

**"Jet Tec's colours were superb, with single greys and blacks very close to Epson ...so Jet Tec wins!"**
*- Total Digital Photography Magazine*

**"What we're looking at here is not only the best choice of ink for the R300 printer, but also the best ink in this group test, period. There's just no getting away from the superb combination of performance and pricing"**
*- Computer Upgrade Magazine*

Digital Photography ★★★★★

**Ink Test Winner!**

| Code: | Originals: | JetTec: | Suitable Printers: |
|---|---|---|---|
| **T007** Black | £29.99 16ml | £3.99 20ml, 3 for £10.99 | Photo 790, 890, 900, 915, 1290 |
| **T008** Colour | £23.99 46ml | £4.99 50ml, 3 for £13.99 | Photo 790, 870, 890, 895, 915 |
| **T009** Colour | £29.99 66ml | £4.99 70ml, 3 for £13.99 | Photo 900, 1270, 1290 |
| **T026** Black | £39.99 16ml | £3.99 20ml, 3 for £10.99 | Photo 810, 830 ,830u, 925, 935 |
| **T027** Colour | £29.99 46ml | £4.99 50ml, 3 for £13.99 | |
| **T040** Black | £44.99 17ml | £3.99 20ml, 3 for £10.99 | C62, CX3200 |
| **T041** Colour | £39.99 37ml | £4.99 46ml, 3 for £13.99 | |
| **T050** Black | £32.99 15ml | £2.99 16ml, 3 for £7.99 | 440, 640, 660 Photo 700, 1200 |
| **T051** Black | £36.99 24ml | £2.99 26ml, 3 for £7.99 | 740, 760, 800, 850, 860, 1160 |
| **T052** Colour | £36.99 35ml | £3.99 39ml, 3 for £10.99 | 440, 640, 660, 740, 760, 1160 |
| **T053** Colour | £26.99 43ml | £3.99 48ml, 3 for £10.99 | Photo 700, 750 |
| **T0441-4** Set of 4 | £44.99 | £14.99, 3 sets for £42.99 | C64, C66, C84, C86, |
| **T0441** Black | £19.99 13ml | £4.99 13ml, 3 for £13.99 | CX3600/3650, CX6400, 6600 |
| **T0452-4** each | £9.99 8ml | £3.99 13ml, 3 for £10.99 | |
| **T0481-6** Set of 6 | £69.99 | £19.99, 3 sets for £57.99 | R200, R220, R300, R320, R340 |
| **T0481-6** each | £15.99 13ml | £3.99 13ml, 3 for £10.99 | RX500, RX600, RX620, RX840 |
| **T0540-9** Set of 8 | £109.99 | £35.99, 3 sets for £99.99 | Photo R800, R1800 |
| **T0540** Gloss | £8.99 13ml | £3.99 21ml, 3 for £13.99 | |
| **T0541-9** each | £14.99 13ml | £4.99 21ml, 3 for £13.99 | |
| **T0551-4** Set of 4 | £34.99 | £14.99, 3 sets for £42.99 | Photo R240, R245 |
| **T0551** Black | £8.99 8ml | £4.99 8ml, 3 for £10.99 | RX420, RX425, RX520, RX525 |
| **T0552-4** each | £8.99 8ml | £3.99 8ml, 3 for £10.99 | |
| **T0591-9** Set of 8 | £99.99 | Check Website. | Photo R2400 |
| **T0591-9** each | £12.99 13ml | Check Website. | |
| **T0611-4** Set of 4 | £34.99 | £14.99, 3 sets for £42.99 | D68, D88 |
| **T0611** Black | £8.99 8ml | £4.99 8ml, 3 for £13.99 | DX3800/3850, DX4200/4250 |
| **T0612-4** each | £8.99 8ml | £3.99 8ml, 3 for £10.99 | DX4800/4850 |
| **T0711-4** Set of 4 | £34.99 | £14.99, 3 sets for £42.99 | S20Z1, SX100/105/115/200/205/215 |
| **T0711** Black | £8.99 7.4ml | £4.99 7.4ml, 3 for £13.99 | SX400/405/415/515, D78/92/120 |
| **T0711-4** each | £8.99 5.5ml | £3.99 7.4ml, 3 for £10.99 | DX4000/4400/5000/6000/7400/8400 |
| **T0791-6** Set of 6 | £74.99 | Check Website. | Photo 1400 |
| **T0791-6** each | £12.99 10ml | Check Website. | |
| **T0801-6** Set of 6 | £51.99 | £19.99, 3 sets for £57.99 | P50, R265/285/360, RX560/585 |
| **T0801-6** each | £8.99 7.4ml | £3.99 7.4ml, 3 for £10.99 | /685/650, PX700/710/800/810 |
| **T0870-9** Set of 8 | £74.99 | Check Website. | Photo R1900 |
| **T0870** Gloss | £7.99 11.4ml | Check Website. | |
| **T0871-9** each | £9.99 11.4ml | Check Website. | |
| **T0961-9** Set of 8 | £74.99 | Check Website. | Photo R2880 |
| **T0961-9** each | £9.99 11.4ml | Check Website. | |
| **T1281-4** Set of 4 | £29.99 | £14.99 | S22, SX125, SX130, SX235W, |
| **T1281** Black | £7.99 5.9ml | £4.99 5.9ml | SX420W/425W/435W/445W, |
| **T1282-4** each | £7.99 3.5ml | £3.99 3.5ml | BX305F |
| **T1291-4** Set of 4 | £42.99 | £16.99 | SX235W/420W/425W/435W/445W, |
| **T1291** Black | £10.99 11ml | £5.49 11ml | SX525WD/535WD/620FW, B42WD, |
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| **T1571-9** each | £20.99 25ml | Check Website. | R3000 |
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| **No.16** Set of 4 | £24.99 | £14.99 | Workforce WF-2010W, 2510WF, |
| **No.16** Black | £6.99 5.4ml | £4.99 5.4ml | 2520NF, 2530WF, 2540WF |
| **No.16** C/M/Y, each | £5.99 3.1ml | £3.99 3.1ml | |
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| **No.18** Black | £6.99 5.2ml | £4.99 5.2ml | XP102, 202, 205 |
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| **No.24** Set of 6 | £44.99 | **No.24XL** Set of 6 £69.99 | Expression Photo XP750, 850 |
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| 3 | plusnet | Plusnet: Broadband & Calls | £9.99 (£2.50 for 12 months) | 12 months | 17Mbps max speed | ∞ unlimited | £30.00 |
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# Jargon Buster

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

**Accelerometer** A sensor that detects movement. Used in smartphones to decide whether or not to display a portrait or landscape screen, control games or even work as a spirit level.

**Adware** Unwanted adverts that come with software.

**AMOLED** Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat panel displays. Most commonly used in smartphones, tablets and smartwatches.

**Aspect ratio** A measurement of the shape of a display. Traditional computer screens are 4:3. Widescreen displays are 16:9 or 16:10.

**Beta** A version of software that's being tested. Beta versions often include features that are at testing stage.

**Boolean** Logical statements such as AND, IF and OR used in programming. Named after the mathematician George Boole.

**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.

**Charms bar** A new tool in Windows 8, used to access common tools such as search and print.

**Contrast ratio** A measure of the difference between the darkest and lightest possible shades shown by a screen. Screens with higher contrast ratios are good for watching films or playing games.

**Crowdsource** To obtain ideas, information or money from a large group of people, usually online, rather than from more traditional sources.

**Dedicated graphics chip** A graphics card or chip that has its own dedicated memory, rather than using system memory like integrated graphics.

**Driver** A file that tells Windows how to work with a peripheral device.

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

**E-ink** Electrophoretic ink. A special type of ink used to display content in electronic devices.

**ePub** A file format used by many popular ebook readers.

**Executable file** A program file designed to run in Windows.

**Factory settings** The settings and appearance a device had when it was first purchased.

**Feedback** The tactile response that the keys on a keyboard give when they've been pressed.

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

**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.

**HDMI** High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals. It is found on many new TVs, media PCs and high-definition products such as Blu-ray disc players and the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 games consoles.

**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.

**LED** Light-Emitting Diode. An electronic device that emits light. Used on almost all electronic devices, and to provide the backlight for some LCDs.

**MB/s** Megabytes per second.

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

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

**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.

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

**Overclocking** Making a CPU work faster to improve performance at the cost of it running hotter and requiring more power.

**PDF ebooks** An ebook saved in PDF format. You'll need a PDF viewer to navigate and read it.

**Phablet** A smartphone with a screen size that is midway between that of a typical smartphone and a tablet.

**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 are capable of carrying out millions of calculations every second.

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

**Registry** The part of Windows that stores information on all hardware and software installed on your PC. The Registry can be edited to tweak settings but incorrect changes can damage the PC.

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

**Restore Point** A Windows backup of system files and settings.

**SSD** Solid-state drive. Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts. Faster but more expensive than conventional hard drives.

**System Restore Point** A Windows backup of system files and settings from a given date.

**Subwoofer** A special type of speaker designed to reproduce deep bass sounds only. Even on a stereo system, only one subwoofer is required because human ears cannot detect the direction of bass frequencies.

**Travel** The distance the keys of a keyboard have to be pressed before the keystroke is recognised.

**Trojan** A malicious computer program that's disguised as a different, harmless program. For example, a Trojan may be disguised as a game but it's actually a program that steals your internet username and password.

**Two-step verification** A system that uses two different means to identify the user. For example, a device that generates random unique numbers coupled with passwords.

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

**Virtual desktop** A Desktop environment which you can expand beyond the physical confines of your PC's screen.

**Virtual PC** A Windows tool that enables you to run a second 'virtual' operating system on a PC, such as running a version of XP in a Windows 7 computer to use older programs.

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

**Whitelist** A list of allowed websites, email addresses or applications used by security software to ensure you only visit safe websites and download safe programs.

**Zero-day vulnerability** A previously unknown software flaw that developers had not had time to fix. It may not have been exploited by hackers.

# The Final Straw

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

This issue Stuart Andrews despairs at the success of...

# BuzzFeed

In a whole bunch of ways, the internet has been good for journalism, broadening the range of media and allowing more voices to be heard. Yet I'm not sure that it's all good news. What bothers me most isn't falling newspaper sales or a collapse in standards, but the rise of a particular style. You know the sort. Look below many articles on a lot of major websites and you'll see the attention-grabbing photos and the hyperbolic headlines, tempting you to click. Open up your Facebook or Twitter feeds and you'll find the links. Some call

> You're probably not the target demographic for BuzzFeed because you have an IQ in three figures

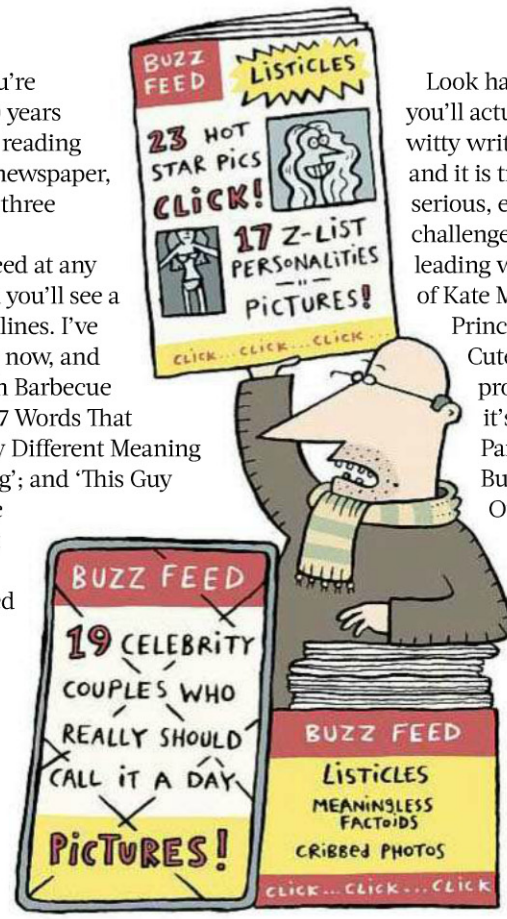
it 'social content', others 'social news and entertainment'. I won't say what I'd call it – it's more accurate but less polite.

The site to blame is BuzzFeed. It churns out endless, picture-heavy, list articles with breathless headlines, covering everything from the white lies people tell while dating, to celebrity couples who should think about splitting up. Of course, in social 'newspeak', this comes out as 'Sixteen Lies You Won't Believe That People Say on a First Date' and 'Nineteen Celebrity Couples Who Really Should Call It a Day'. Don't worry if these headlines mean nothing to you. That's because you're not the target demographic – you're probably about 40 years too old, still enjoy reading proper news in a newspaper, and have an IQ in three figures.

Go on to BuzzFeed at any time, any day, and you'll see a glut of inane headlines. I've just been on there now, and seen these: 'Which Barbecue Food Are You?'; '17 Words That Have a Completely Different Meaning When You're a Dog'; and 'This Guy Will Show You the Fastest Way to Cut a Watermelon'. Somehow I resisted the temptation to read more.

These feeble 'stories', punctuated by short animated video clips or movie images, are called listicles – a term that almost describes where those involved deserve a kick. They are bad enough, but then we come to all the other guff: the obsession with Z-list personalities, the 'hotness' or possible unattractiveness of Hollywood stars, and the best bits, worst bits, wisdom and history of the cast of US sitcom *Friends*. I thought everyone was over *Friends* by now. Apparently not.

I also hate the endless regurgitation. Some of the writers are less journalists than media Wombles, making good use of the stuff that other websites leave behind. It's no coincidence that BuzzFeed has been accused of lifting pictures and stories without due credit to downright plagiarism, last month sacking its 'viral politics editor' Benny Johnson because he'd taken words for more than 41 articles almost direct from other sources.




Look hard enough and you'll actually find some witty writers on BuzzFeed, and it is trying to get more serious, even if that's a challenge when you're leading with 'These Photos of Kate Middleton and Prince William are the Cutest Yet'. The problem is that it's opened up a Pandora's Box. BuzzFeed gets clicks. Other sites want clicks. Therefore, other sites ape BuzzFeed.

This worries me, partly because too many sites rely on lazily assembling news from other places, and partly because what proper news they dish out is often painfully superficial. This stuff is bad for us. The internet can be an incredible source of wisdom and knowledge, but this trivia gets us hooked and rots our brains. We're digesting meaningless factoids when we should be engaged with the deeper story.

BuzzFeed knows this. Its executives talk openly about how stories need to appeal to their readers on an emotional level, and how sharing stories takes priority over reading them. These sites create news we want to share because the act of sharing says something about us. But isn't the point of news not to engage our emotions and reflect who we are, but to inform us, educate us, and maybe change the way we think?

Do you agree with Stuart?
Let us know at letters@computeractive.co.uk



*Next week Stuart feels old in the face of Tech ageism*

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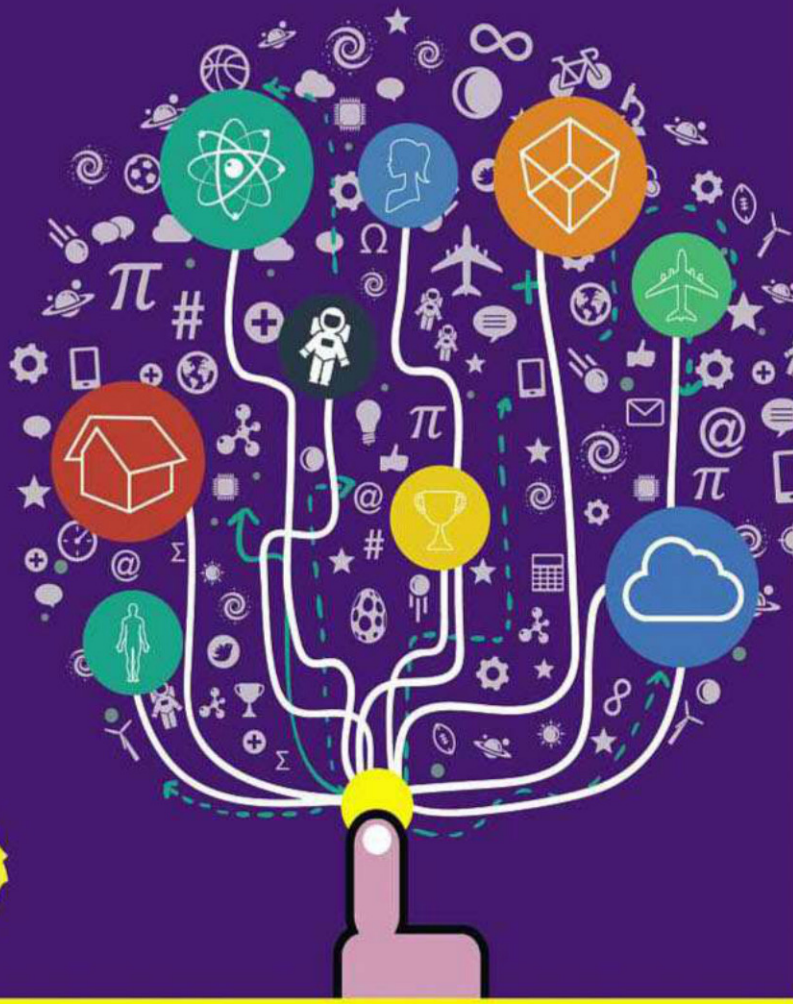

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