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From the Editor

I've got an idea for a reality TV show. Called 'Keep or Ditch?', it would follow the 'personal journey' of Windows 10 users as they decide which apps to uninstall. At the end they would gush about how removing the Groove Music app has made them a better person.

OK, it's the worst ever idea for a TV show. Not even Channel 5 would broadcast it. But it makes a great Cover Feature. We've given our 'keep or ditch' verdict on 30 Windows 10 apps, plus pointless tools in Windows 7.

Stuart Andrews would approve. He was always criticising Microsoft for stuffing Windows with junk. As he grumbles into the sunset, let me introduce our new Mr Angry - Ken Rigsby. Turn to page 74 for his first Final Straw column.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

PS: I'm delighted to say that our 2015 Back Issue CD, containing all 26 issues from last year, is now on sale - just visit www.snipca.com/19124.

THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

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HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

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

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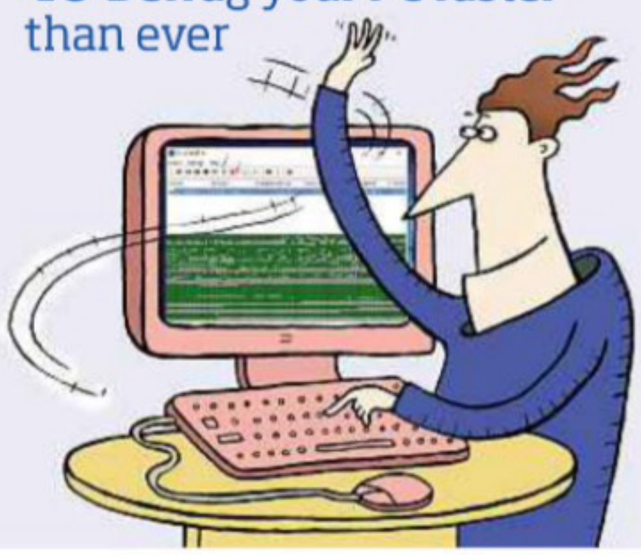

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New PCs must upgrade to Windows 10, says Microsoft

Microsoft has announced an unexpected new deadline to the life of Windows 7 and 8.1 that will leave millions of PCs at risk of being hacked. The company said that on 17 July 2017 it will stop releasing security updates for computers that are powered by Intel's Skylake processor and run Windows 7 or 8.1.

After that time only the "most critical" security fixes will be released for 7 and 8.1 PCs, Microsoft said.

That gives people running 7 or 8.1 on a Skylake PC less than 18 months to upgrade. But some users will have to upgrade sooner. That's because the company has said it will only support Microsoft-approved Skylake computers. You can see a list of these at www.snipca.com/19448 (see screenshot). It includes many bestselling models from Dell, Lenovo and HP.

The company hopes its dramatic warning will urge more Windows 7 and 8.1 users to upgrade to Windows 10. However, it will be seen by Microsoft's critics as the latest in a series of aggressive moves to 'force' people on to the new operating system.

Intel launched Skylake in August 2015. Some Windows 8.1 PCs are powered by Skylake, but the processor can mostly be found in Windows 10 PCs. Microsoft's decision will deter people who intend to buy a Skylake PC running Windows 10 so they can downgrade it to Windows 7 or 8.1.

If your PC runs an older processor, such as Intel's Broadwell or Haswell, you'll receive security updates until 2020 (Windows 7) and 2023 (Windows 8.1). There's no indication that Microsoft will end support early for PCs running these processors.

No support for future processors

Microsoft also said that computers containing the next generation of processors, such as Intel's 'Kaby Lake' and AMD's 'Bristol Ridge', will be restricted to running Windows 10. In effect Microsoft and the processor companies have agreed to stop making hardware that works with Windows 7 or 8.1.

Microsoft remains keen to highlight the limitations of Windows 7. In a blog post widely mocked for its use of jargon (www.snipca.com/19336), Terry Myerson, Microsoft's Executive Vice President of the Windows and Devices Group, said that it is "challenging" for modern hardware to work efficiently on computers that run Windows 7.

He stressed the benefits of running Windows 10 on a Skylake PC, saying "compared to Windows 7 PCs, Skylake when combined with Windows 10, enables up to 30x better graphics and 3x the battery life". But his words aren't likely to convince millions of people who love Windows 7.

COMMENT

Microsoft has opened a new front on the war against Windows 7 and 8.1 users. We already know it pesters people into upgrading, and has exaggerated the security risks of using old operating systems. Now it plans to withdraw hardware support for some PCs. It's clear that Microsoft wants to make life so hard for 7 and 8.1 users that Windows 10 feels like the only escape route.

WHAT PROCESSOR DO YOU HAVE?

To find out what processor you have on a Windows 7 PC, open the Start menu, click Computer then 'System properties' at the top. You'll see the information under the 'System' heading. See this info in Windows 8.1 by clicking System in the Control Panel.

However, you won't see 'Skylake' or any other processor codename listed, only its name. Search for the name of your processor on Google alongside the word 'codename' and hopefully you'll see the codename it was given.

Alternatively, try using the excellent free program CPU-Z (www.cpuid.com). It reveals information about your processor, such as its official name and codename, as well as its clock speed.

Want to buy a new Windows 7 PC that's safe to use? Read our guide on page 58

☺ ***You'll like this***... The world's largest miniature railway is now on Street View (www.snipca.com/19446)

☹ ***... but not this*** Asda's website had a security flaw for almost two years (www.snipca.com/19445)

eBay waited 30 days to fix password-stealing flaw

EBay has been criticised for taking a month to fix a security flaw that left their users' passwords at risk of theft.

The vulnerability was discovered on 11 December by a security researcher known only as MLT. He contacted eBay the same day, but revealed a month later that the website had only just fixed the problem.

MLT said that eBay "only rushed to patch the vulnerability after the media contacted them about it".

In a blog post (www.snipca.com/19432) MLT described the flaw as "fairly basic". He demonstrated how hackers could have set up fake login web pages with 'ebay.com' in the URL, using them to trick people into revealing their username and password.

They could have lured victims to these pages by sending them phishing emails containing links. Having stolen users' passwords, the attackers could have then hacked their accounts in order to send scam emails to millions of other people.

EBay blamed a "miscommunication" with MLT for the delay in fixing the flaw.

An eBay spokesman told our sister website IT Pro: "We're aware of this particular issue, which involves fraudsters attempting to phish customers using malicious code in very limited use cases. This type of scheme is extremely rare on our platform".

There's no sign that hackers exploited the flaw to steal passwords, but it's another indication of how many vulnerabilities lie undiscovered within websites.

It's not the first time eBay has been accused of reacting slowly to a reported flaw. In 2015, Estonian researcher Jaanus Kääp said the site hadn't fixed a vulnerability even though he had emailed them about it four times in 12 months (www.snipca.com/19434).

• Antivirus password-manager that kept your passwords unsafe - see page 14

Your country needs YOU! Govt wants civilian army to fight cybercrime

The Government is drawing up proposals to allow civilians to fight cybercime alongside the police.

Home Secretary Theresa May wants police forces to be able to ask IT experts for help in specialised areas, such as online accountancy fraud.

She said the plans - which would apply only in England and Wales - were part of a long-term aim to create a "more flexible workforce", and would "free up officers' time to focus on the jobs only they can carry out".

However the scheme was criticised by Labour and trade unions.

Shadow home secretary Andy Burnham warned that the proposals "could lead to policing on the cheap".

Unison, which represents public-sector workers, accused May of trying to recruit citizens to fill gaps in police forces affected by cuts.

A spokeswoman said: "The Government is clearly pinning its hopes on a volunteer army to plug the huge gap left by the loss of so many dedicated and skilled police staff".

She claimed that volunteers were "totally unsuitable" to crime-fighting duties because they couldn't work in the middle of the night, and weren't free to "absent themselves from the workplace at any time".

May's plans were also slated by security company Digital Guardian, which said that a "recruitment drought" means there's not enough trained IT experts to help.

Thomas Fischer, principal threat researcher at the company, said that "individuals who do meet the required training standards are highly sought after assets, likely to be in well-paid positions, with very little time to do volunteer work on the side".

IN BRIEF

'123456' WORLD'S FAVOURITE PASSWORD

The most commonly used password in 2015 was '123456', topping the chart for the third year running. 'Password' was second, and '12345678' third. Every year password-management company SplashData ranks the popularity of passwords leaked online, and every year it shows that millions of people use passwords that are notoriously easy to guess. See the 2015 list at www.snipca.com/19421.

MICROSOFT RECALLS FAULTY POWER CORDS

Microsoft is recalling many power cords for its Surface Pro tablet after it said they were in danger of overheating. The company said that "a very small proportion of Surface Pro customers" have reported problems with power cords that have been twisted or wound too tightly. The recall applies to Surface Pro, Pro 2 and Pro 3 models sold before July last year. Visit Microsoft's website for more details: www.snipca.com/19426.

Tomorrow's world

Robots in sci fi usually perform astonishing feats humans can't. But it's looking more likely we'll actually use them to do the chores we hate. Proof comes from Google in a video showing its Atlas robot doing the hoovering (www.snipca.com/19424). We can imagine the reaction of Marvin from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*: "Brain the size of a planet, and they ask me to clean the living room...."

IN BRIEF

FRIENDS REUNITED TO CLOSE AFTER 15 YEARS

Friends Reunited, one of the first social-networking websites, is to close. British couple Julie and Steve Pankhurst launched it in 2000 as a way for people to get in touch with old school friends and work colleagues. They sold it to ITV for £120m in 2005, by which time it had around 15 million members. But its popularity rapidly declined in the face of competition from sites such as MySpace and Facebook.

AMOUNT OF EMAIL SCAMS ROCKET IN 2015

The number of people who reported being targeted by phishing scams rose by 21 per cent in 2015 to 96,000. The figure comes from the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau, run by the City of London Police. It also found that at 80 per cent the vast majority of phishing attacks were emails, followed by landline calls (12 per cent), and text messages and mobile calls (eight per cent).

Tougher rules for misleading broadband ads – but will they work?

Doubts have already been cast on whether proposed rules to ban misleading broadband adverts will be implemented. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is considering plans to introduce tougher regulations that force companies to be clearer about the overall cost of contracts.

It will call on internet service providers (ISPs) to follow three new guidelines:

- They should include the cost of line rentals
- They should be clearer about when the cheaper, introductory deal ends, and what the cost will be after
- They should more clearly display additional upfront costs

The ASA says changes are needed because customers are confused about the true cost of broadband. A survey it ran last year with communications regulator Ofcom found that 81 per cent of people shown broadband adverts couldn't work out how much they would actually pay.

It hopes to reach a decision by June as to whether or not it will tighten the rules, but they are likely to face resistance from ISPs. A lobby group for the industry disputed the survey's relevance, claiming that "more detailed research is needed to corroborate the survey findings".

Nicholas Lansman from the Internet Services Providers' Association said: "Beyond adverts, ISPs provide clear information if consumers engage more closely with them, for example by going to their website, visiting a shop, working with comparison and consumer websites or by calling the providers".

However one ISP has welcomed the guidelines. A spokesman for TalkTalk said: "It's obvious that a single headline price is much clearer and better for customers, and we're actually already doing it on a pilot project up in York".

He added: "But until the whole market moves to single prices, any company that advertises its products like this will struggle to compete with what look like better deals from other providers".

Do you find broadband adverts confusing? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

BT to move call centre from India to UK

BT will end the misery of thousands of customers who currently have to speak to its call centre based in India whenever they have a query.

The company is creating 1,000 jobs in UK call centres as part of its pledge that by the end of 2016 80 per cent of its customer calls will be answered by British-based employees. At the moment half of such calls are answered by staff in Delhi and Bangalore.

The news will come as a relief to *Computeractive* readers, many of whom have emailed us to complain about foreign-based call centres, where most of the staff don't speak English as their first language (see Letters, page 11).

BT will hope that the move will salvage its reputation after communications regulator Ofcom said in December that BT was one of the most complained-about broadband companies. It was also given the *Daily Mail*'s Wooden Spoon award for 2015 for having the worst customer service in Britain (www.snipca.com/19414).

It's an embarrassing U-turn for the company, which moved its call centre to India in 2003 in order to cut costs. Two thousand British jobs were lost at the time.

The world's gone mad!

The latest 'condition' supposedly caused by modern technology is 'phantom vibration syndrome'. According to scientists at the Georgia Institute of Technology, 90 per cent of people hallucinate that their phone is buzzing when it's silent in their pocket. Apparently, we're so obsessed about being contactable 24 hours a day that our brain tricks us into thinking we've received messages. Read a summary at www.snipca.com/19410.

Question of the Fortnight

Why are PC sales plummeting?

Tablets, smartphones and Windows 10 are all being blamed for the current demise of computers

The final three months of 2015 were terrible for the PC industry. According to industry analysts IDC, PC sales fell by 10.6 per cent compared with the same period in 2014. A similar decline was reported by Gartner, a rival market research company, although it said that sales weren't quite so bad, falling by 8.3 per cent.

Whichever result you focus on, these are huge drops. IDC's figure was the biggest quarterly fall the company has ever recorded (read its analysis at www.snipca.com/19332). And it wasn't a blip: the fall was the fifth consecutive quarterly drop, and occurred in every region of the world. As a result PC sales in 2015 were just 288 million, the lowest annual figure since 2008. In 2011, 360 million PCs were sold worldwide.

No PC manufacturer bucked the trend. Acer in particular had an *annus horribilis*, with sales falling by 18.1 per cent. HP and Dell performed better, seeing sales drop by 5.9 per cent. But Chinese company Lenovo had the most to cheer – its sales fell by only 3.6 per cent. It remains the biggest PC manufacturer in the world, accounting for 20.7 per cent of sales, ahead of HP on 19.4 per cent.

> "For some experts, the explanation is simple: phones and tablets are taking over"

So why have we stopped buying computers? For some experts, the explanation is simple: phones and tablets are taking over. As these mobile devices become more powerful, consumers are finding that they don't need computers to browse the web. In fact, they don't need computers at all.

This is rarely an unbiased opinion. Those giving it usually stand to benefit from the growth of phones and tablets. And it overlooks the crucial point that users prefer to perform many tasks – such as writing a document and editing a video – on a PC keyboard rather than on a tablet's touchscreen equivalent.

Furthermore, anyone brave (and foolish) enough to forecast the demise of computers has to face the inconvenient truth that one company saw sales increase last year: Apple. Its success in 2015 – sales of Macs rose by 6 per cent – shows that users still want advanced machines capable of running sophisticated software.

There's also the Windows 10 factor. Most previous releases of Windows have led to an increase in PC sales, because many users felt the need to buy a machine running the new OS. But because Windows 10 is a free upgrade, users have been happy to stick with their current PC. IDC and Gartner think this will change in 2016, as customers begin to be tempted by "new products and attractive pricing".

Loren Loverde, IDC vice president, said: "Most PC users have delayed an upgrade, but can only maintain this for so long before facing security and performance issues". He believes that "a majority of these users" will eventually buy another PC, one that will almost certainly be running Windows 10.

Long term, Loverde's prediction should be proved correct. While most Windows 7 PCs can be upgraded to Windows 10, many aren't built to take full advantage of the new OS, forcing users to buy new machines. Also, IDC's figures show that sales of "detachable" tablets – hybrid devices that work as both a laptop and tablet – are growing. So while nobody can deny that fewer people are buying PCs, perhaps reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated.

THE FACTS

- PC sales fell by a record 10.6 per cent in the last three months of 2015
- In total 288 million PCs were sold in 2015, down from 360 million in 2011
- Lenovo remains the biggest PC manufacturer, making 20 per cent of computers sold worldwide

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

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Windows 10 update? We don't need it

My heart sank when I read the 'Question of the Fortnight' in Issue 467 ('What will be in the next big Windows 10 update?' – see image right). I'd like to answer it with a question of my own: why does there need to be another update at all? I know Microsoft loves tinkering with Windows, but there really is no need with Windows 10. I've been using it for a few months, and it's great. From reading your piece, it seems that Microsoft won't be fixing anything in the update. Instead it will be forcing Cortana on to people who don't want to use it, which I'm guessing is 90 per cent of people. At no point since upgrading to Windows 10 have I thought that it would be better if Cortana floated around following me. I'll finish with another question, aimed at *Computeractive*: will there be a way to avoid this update? Please say yes.

John Bullard

Question of the Fortnight

What will be in the next big Windows 10 update?

Expect changes to the Action Centre and Cortana when Redstone hits your PC

THE FACTS

"The leading rumours that Windows 10 requires an update as substantial as 8.1"

CA says We share some of John's concern about the next Windows 10 update (codenamed Redstone), especially the emphasis Microsoft is placing on Cortana. The company has said that the new version of this tool will follow you around the operating system offering tips. If so, it needs to be easy to turn off. Avoiding the update completely will probably be impossible, but when it arrives we will warn you of any problems it causes, and explain how to use its best tools.

Windows 10 isn't compatible with my hardware

I am constantly being nagged by Microsoft to upgrade my four-year-old Dell desktop PC from Windows 7 to 10. I have no objection in principle to upgrading, although articles in *Computeractive* have convinced me to let the new system get over its teething problems.

There is another reason to wait, and that's the question of compatibility. There is no Windows 10 driver for my Canon Pixma printer, which I have used daily for the past five years and still prints perfectly. Similarly there is no Windows 10 driver for my Epson Perfection scanner. I know we live in a disposable age, but why should I be under pressure to replace equipment that is still working perfectly? One more example: I keep track of my income and expenditure using Microsoft Money Plus, but that doesn't work in Windows 10. For all I know there are problems of software compatibility that I have yet to discover, but you can understand my reluctance to leap to respond to Microsoft's rather dodgy pressure to upgrade.

Geoff Griffiths

Why upgrade from XP when it's the 'best OS ever'?

I was amazed at the comments by Norman Broome regarding XP (Issue 466). I have just upgraded to Windows 7 from XP, because it was clear that support from third-party software (antivirus, firewalls, etc) would not be everlasting. It wasn't easy to change, and I also found that the format of Windows Explorer did not fit my way of working. I've been using computers for 25 years (yes, since MS-DOS times) and XP is the best OS I've ever used. It fulfilled all I needed from a PC. Windows 7 has added little to that. So I feel it somewhat arrogant to suggest that users of older systems are losing something by not upgrading.

Maurice Cooper

I read the letter by Mr Broome about people using XP being dinosaurs, and would like to bring him up to date. I use Windows 7, having thrown away a desktop PC with XP on it, as well as Office 97, Acrobat 7, an image-processing program and a computer-aided design (CAD) program. The total cost to replace them all is close to £1,000. It is not a case of me being a Luddite. I am not the stubborn sort, sticking two fingers at the modern world, but trying to get MS-DOS-type software to work on Windows 10 is all-but impossible.

The software I had worked fine, the PC was fine, XP was fine, but I was forced to update just to suit Microsoft's business plan. Now we have software that you can use only by subscribing to it. I can see the day when I will go back to pen and paper because everything else is unaffordable.

Jimmy 'counting the pennies' Faulkner

You can't enter the UK – Windows XP has crashed

Recently, on returning from Germany, I was passing through the automated electronic immigration system at Manchester Airport. Halfway through processing, the system crashed and I was in limbo. I couldn't go forward or back, and was told to stay where I was.

I was then informed that the system was rebooting and all would be OK in a minute or two. I was told to keep looking at the screen. I obeyed and saw the usual data passing as the reboot took place. Ultimately the Windows XP logo appeared and the system started operating again and I could leave.

I was reassured to know that the immigration system of the UK and its associated security is securely handled by Windows XP!

Paul Horbury

Microsoft et al: stop telling our Government how to run the country

I thought the Conservatives won the election last year, but reading Issue 467's News section it would appear that we are being run by a coalition made up of Google, Microsoft, Facebook, Twitter and Yahoo. Or at least that's what they would like to believe. I can't believe their combined arrogance in trying to influence our Government. If Theresa May wants to increase the powers of our secret services to spy on people, then what moral right have these tech companies got to prevent her? I want laws to be made by people who have been elected to Parliament, not self-interested groups worried that MI5 will be able to hack into their precious messaging services.

We need our Government to stay firm and ignore pressure from these companies. Without new powers we're never going to defeat groups such as ISIS. It's obvious tech companies think differently. In fact, I get the impression that they are more upset by the prospect of greater 'snooping' powers than by the prospect of more terrorist attacks.

David Campbell

Forget BT's foreign call centres - write instead

I fully sympathise with Roger Thompson and his "outer Mongolia" experience phoning BT (Letters, Issue 466). After patiently trying to make sense of conversations with BT call centres, usually located on the subcontinent, I found that I had unknowingly agreed to a new contract the facts of which were only revealed when I checked BT's account against my bank balance. My monthly payments have increased from £43 to £80!

BT told me that the decision could not be reversed because during such telephone conversations an automated program recalculates a new contract and call-centre operators have no authority to override "the machine". To overcome this I now correspond with BT directly using old-fashioned 'snail mail' (BT Correspondence Centre, Providence Row, Durham, DH98 1BT). When they contact you by telephone, you at least get an operator that speaks good English. That doesn't meant they can resolve the problem, but at least you can understand when they are insulting your intelligence.

Michael Mullaney

STAR LETTER

Windows 7 not safe to use? What a 'shameless scare story'

Microsoft has used some downright dastardly tricks to force people on to Windows 10, but they have hit new lows. I refer to your news story in Issue 467 about the company warning us that we use Windows 7 "at our own risk". Maybe the person who said it was going "off message", but I suspect that it was a deliberate exaggeration. Don't they realise how desperate this sounds? We're not stupid, Microsoft. We know that you're going to support Windows 7 until 2020 – you've made that perfectly clear. Insinuating that Windows 7 may become unsafe during the next four years is just a cynical, disingenuous ploy to plant seeds of doubt into our minds.

It's the trick clever politicians play when they hint at a problem to get the public worried, even when there's no evidence that the problem really exists (every political party does this, whether on the left or right). As you rightly said, Microsoft's warning is a shameless scare story. It doesn't even affect me, because I've already upgraded from Windows 7 to 10 (and I'm glad I did). I just feel sorry for all those still on Windows 7 who may now feel unfairly pressured into upgrading.

The most annoying thing is that Microsoft doesn't need to use such negative tactics. Windows 10 is the best operating system since XP - better even than the overrated Windows 7. To quote a song that's even older than me, Microsoft should "ac-cent-tchu-ate the positive", and try to persuade people to upgrade by talking about how good Windows 10 is.

Joe Hassall

The Star Letter writer wins a *Computeractive* mug!

Stuart's farewell brought tears to my eyes... almost

I can't believe that in the week we lose one hero, another one goes ('oh no, don't say it's true'). David Bowie's farewell is sadly more permanent, but I'll still miss Stuart Andrews. I would say his final column (Issue 467) brought a tear to my eye, but he would hate that kind of sentimentality. I hope the new Mr Angry is just as unforgiving, and doesn't make too many ch-ch-ch-ch-changes.

Pauline Egan

In Issue 467 you asked for our favourite Stuart Andrews column. That's easy for me - it's the time he mocked all the political correctness we see online (Issue 448), especially when expressed by self-righteous types on Twitter and Facebook. I agreed so much with everything Stuart said that I cut out the column and stuck it on the corkboard in my kitchen. A year later, it's still there.

Jeff Nicholas

As Stuart Andrews departs, I hope his successor follows three rules. First, don't fall for the absurd hype from tech companies about their new gadgets. Two, don't be afraid to swim against the tide of popular opinion. And three, remember that 99.99 per cent of what's said on social media is rubbish, and deserves to be mocked. Stick to those and you'll be as loved as your predecessor.

Doug Stelling

Consumeractive

Can eBay close a case with money still owed?

Q I bought a £10.49 TV remote control from a company on eBay. It didn't work, so I sent it back and received a refund. But the company ignored my requests to refund the £2.80 postage it cost me to return the item. Also, my negative feedback has been removed, and eBay has closed my dispute. Is all this fair?

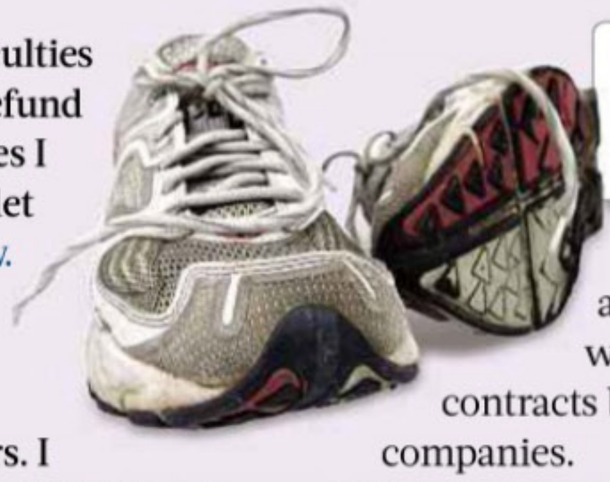
Brian Map

A No, it's not. Because the remote control was faulty Brian is entitled to a refund of the delivery postage, and what it cost him to return it. But eBay won't help him now because it closed his dispute after he was refunded for the cost of the item. We'll ask eBay what buyers can do in these situations, pointing out that in its Money Back Guarantee it says they are entitled to refunds for postage costs (www.snipca.com/19315).

It's the seller's right to ask customers to return damaged or faulty items, but they must pay for this postage. You should ask them to send pre-paid postage labels. Removing negative feedback maddens people, but sellers can request this. EBay will comply if the comments breach its guidelines. It's a common complaint on eBay's forum (www.snipca.com/19316).

CASE CLOSED

Who should refund me - Amazon or the company selling on Amazon?



Q I'm having difficulties trying to get a refund for a pair of shoes I bought for £119 from Millet Sports via Amazon (www.snipca.com/19299) last June. In November the heels on both shoes separated from the uppers. I know my contract is with Millet Sports, but the company has refused to offer a refund, claiming that I must go through Amazon first because it sent the shoes to me. But Amazon won't reply to my emails. Where do I go from here?

Eugene Coyle

A Eugene is right to say that his contract is with Millet Sports, not Amazon, but it's a bit more complicated than that. Millet Sports has a fulfilment contract with Amazon, which means the website deals with Millet's customer service. This includes delivery, returns and refunds. In this case Eugene does need to request a refund through Amazon, but because he was having no luck we contacted Millet Sports to see if it could help. The company told us that it will ask Amazon to issue a refund. Success!

His case highlights how difficult it can be for customers to know who to approach for a refund when there are contracts between two companies.

Millet Sports was correct to tell him to contact Amazon, but it should have made it clear why. It should also have offered Eugene advice on how to use Amazon's returns procedure (www.amazon.co.uk/returns).

However, Amazon appears to be unaware of how consumer law works. It told us that it handles other companies' customer services for only 12 months after purchase. Beyond that it advises customers to contact the manufacturer. It shouldn't be saying this to customers because a buyer's contract is *always* with the retailer, no matter how much time has passed since purchase.

We are concerned that the Amazon returns procedure makes it difficult to get a refund for items like Eugene's shoes that are 'fulfilled by Amazon'. If you've had similar problems please get in touch and we'll tackle Amazon.

CASE CLOSED

Is Amazon to blame for an error in item's description?

Q I bought a bass guitar from Dawsons Music via Amazon Marketplace. The description said it would come with a bag for the guitar - a "gig bag" - but this never arrived. I can't get through to Amazon, but Dawsons Music has apologised, saying that listing the gig bag was a mistake. It has offered me my money back, but I believe I've been misled by Amazon. Can you help?

Ray Hurst

A Sadly, there's not much we can do. Ray's contract isn't with Amazon, but with Dawsons Music. Also, we don't think Amazon tried to mislead Ray and the item's description has been corrected. Ray would find it very hard to prove that he was misled because he would have to show that the mistake in the wording was Amazon's fault. Dawsons has apologised to Ray, and said he can return the guitar at its expense for a full refund.

Sellers on Amazon and eBay who deliberately set out to mislead customers are in breach of the Unfair Trading Regulations. Readers who think they've been deceived should contact the site involved, and report the case to Citizens Advice Bureau (www.citizensadvice.org.uk), who will pass on the information to Trading Standards.

CASE CLOSED

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.

Android Lollipop has ruined my phone – what can I do?

Q **Having bought a Motorola Moto E phone from Tesco, I had to delete many apps in order to upgrade to Google's Android 5.0 (Lollipop). There isn't sufficient space to install any further apps, so I think the phone is now not fit for purpose. Tesco won't help, even though they say that lots of customers have had the same problem. Can I take legal action against anyone?**

Geoff Long

A Geoff's question is typical of many we've been asked over the past couple of years. When a software update causes a problem with hardware, who's to blame? Who should the customer contact for help – the retailer? The software developer? The hardware manufacturer? Should Geoff seek a refund from Tesco, Google or Motorola (owned by Lenovo)?

So many questions, so few answers. We may get clarification soon because the Consumer Rights Act (CRA), introduced last October, acknowledges this problem for the first time in law. It says that the 'retailer' must compensate you if a device you own is damaged as a result of a software update. By that definition Tesco – as the retailer – should have to refund Geoff, but it would argue that it wasn't responsible for Google's Android update.

It's been suggested that the word 'retailer' is misleading in this instance. Some lawyers say that 'provider' would have been more accurate because it would include companies that release software, as well as retailers that sell goods. This confusion will be cleared up only through legal precedent being set – ie, only when customers bring cases to court.

As a result Geoff should think pragmatically: from whom is he most likely to get a refund? We think it's Tesco. He should email the company (www.tesco.com/help/contact) to explain what's happened, pointing out that he is entitled to a refund under the CRA (read more info on Which?'s website www.snipca.com/19319).

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE

Claim partial refunds for slightly damaged goods

Several readers have contacted us to ask whether the Consumer Rights Act (CRA) has strengthened their rights for items bought in a sale. The new law doesn't make any specific changes to the rules on sale items, but there is a new regulation that increases your options when you return goods – whether they were bought at full price or at a discount.

Under the CRA you can now ask for a partial refund if you discover that an item is faulty, but not so badly damaged that you want to return it. For example, if a jumper has small stain that you can live with, or if a book has a slightly ripped page that doesn't affect your reading, you can go back to the retailer and ask for some money back.

While there was nothing stopping you doing this previously, but it was more like bartering, and wasn't supported by law. Now your claim for a partial refund has legal legitimacy. It's worth pointing this out to retailers when returning goods so they take you seriously. The CRA says that the amount you are refunded must be "appropriate" which, like so many aspects of consumer law, is open to interpretation. Of course, retailers don't have to refund you anything if they think the fault isn't bad enough, but the legal balance has definitely tipped in favour of the customer.

It's worth remembering that if a retailer points out a defect when you buy an item, you can't seek a refund based on that particular fault. However you can pursue a refund, full or partial, if you spot a different fault.

THIS WILL COME IN USEFUL

Keyboard shortcuts

Adobe Photoshop
www.snipca.com/19365

Chrome
www.snipca.com/19302

Dropbox
www.snipca.com/19363

Excel
www.snipca.com/19305

Facebook
www.snipca.com/19314

Firefox
www.snipca.com/19306

Gmail
www.snipca.com/19301

Google Drive
www.snipca.com/19310

Internet Explorer
www.snipca.com/19307

Opera
www.snipca.com/19308

Outlook
www.snipca.com/19309

Powerpoint
www.snipca.com/19361

Skype
www.snipca.com/19313

VLC media player
www.snipca.com/19312

Windows
www.snipca.com/19303

Word
www.snipca.com/19304

Yahoo Mail
www.snipca.com/19311

YAHOO! MAIL

Protect Your Tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Trend Micro's Password Manager

What happened?

Antivirus company Trend Micro was criticised by Google for including an unsafe password-management tool in its software. It was spotted by Google security researcher Tavis Ormandy, who is earning a reputation for identifying flaws buried deep in software. In December, he called AVG's WebTuneUp browser extension "trash" for "force installing" an unsafe plug-in into Chrome (see Protect Your Tech, Issue 467).

He followed this in early January by accusing Trend Micro of sneaking on to PCs a tool called Password Manager that, far from keeping your details safe, actually contained a flaw hackers could have exploited to steal your passwords. The tool is automatically added to your system when you download Trend Micro Antivirus. See Trend Micro's instructions at www.snipca.com/19326.

Ormandy was not impressed, telling Trend Micro that the vulnerability was "the most ridiculous thing" he had ever seen. He insisted that Trend Micro "come up with a plan for fixing this right now". You can read his exchange with the company on the Google Security Research blog: www.snipca.com/19325.

What should you do?

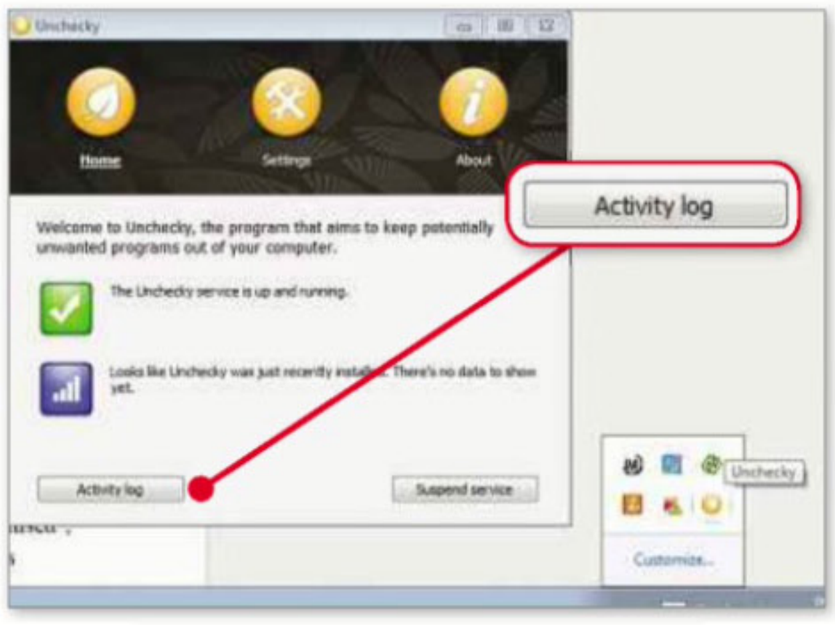
Don't panic because Trend Micro fixed the flaw in an update on 11 January, though this was six days after Ormandy told the company about it. In a blog post (www.snipca.com/19327) Trend Micro thanked Ormandy for discovering the flaw, and said it worked with him to resolve the problem. However many Trend Micro customers expressed shock at the flaw, and dismay that it took so long to fix.

This year has started badly for Trend Micro. As well as being forced to fix this flaw, it performed relatively poorly in our latest Antivirus Test (www.snipca.com/19328). If you want to switch antivirus, we recommend Kaspersky (see reader offer on page 68).

New tools

Unchecky 0.4.2
http://unchecky.com

When installing software, you have to stay as alert as you would crossing a busy road. You may not get flattened by a juggernaut, but leave certain boxes ticked and you could unwittingly install ghastly adware on your PC. Acting like a lollipop lady is Unchecky. It's a clever Windows program (XP to 10) that works silently in the background when you install software by automatically unticking boxes that contain unwanted extras.



It has been recently updated to work better with several popular programs, including audio player AIMP4, Adobe Digital Editions, ESET NOD32 antivirus and Java. But what we're most pleased about is that Unchecky now works with more Auslogics programs. These have previously been plagued by some of the most persistent adware, such as the horrid Ask Toolbar. To check which boxes it has unticked, click its icon in your Taskbar (a white leaf in a yellow circle), then click the 'Activity log' button (see screenshot above).

ScamWatch
READERS WARN READERS

'Security upgrades' banking scam

In January, I received a scam that appears to be a new twist on the bank-phishing emails. Rather than saying: "Your account has been compromised", it said that my account had had security upgrades applied. It came from 'NatWest', though the address was 'weekly@sendgrid.net'. It said that the updates meant I now had "even better control and greater peace of mind". It urged me to "try these new features" and there was a link at the bottom stating 'Get started', but hovering my mouse over it showed that it didn't go to a NatWest site.

Mark Kitchen

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

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PASSWORD MANAGER

LastPass 4.0

www.snipca.com/19295

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10

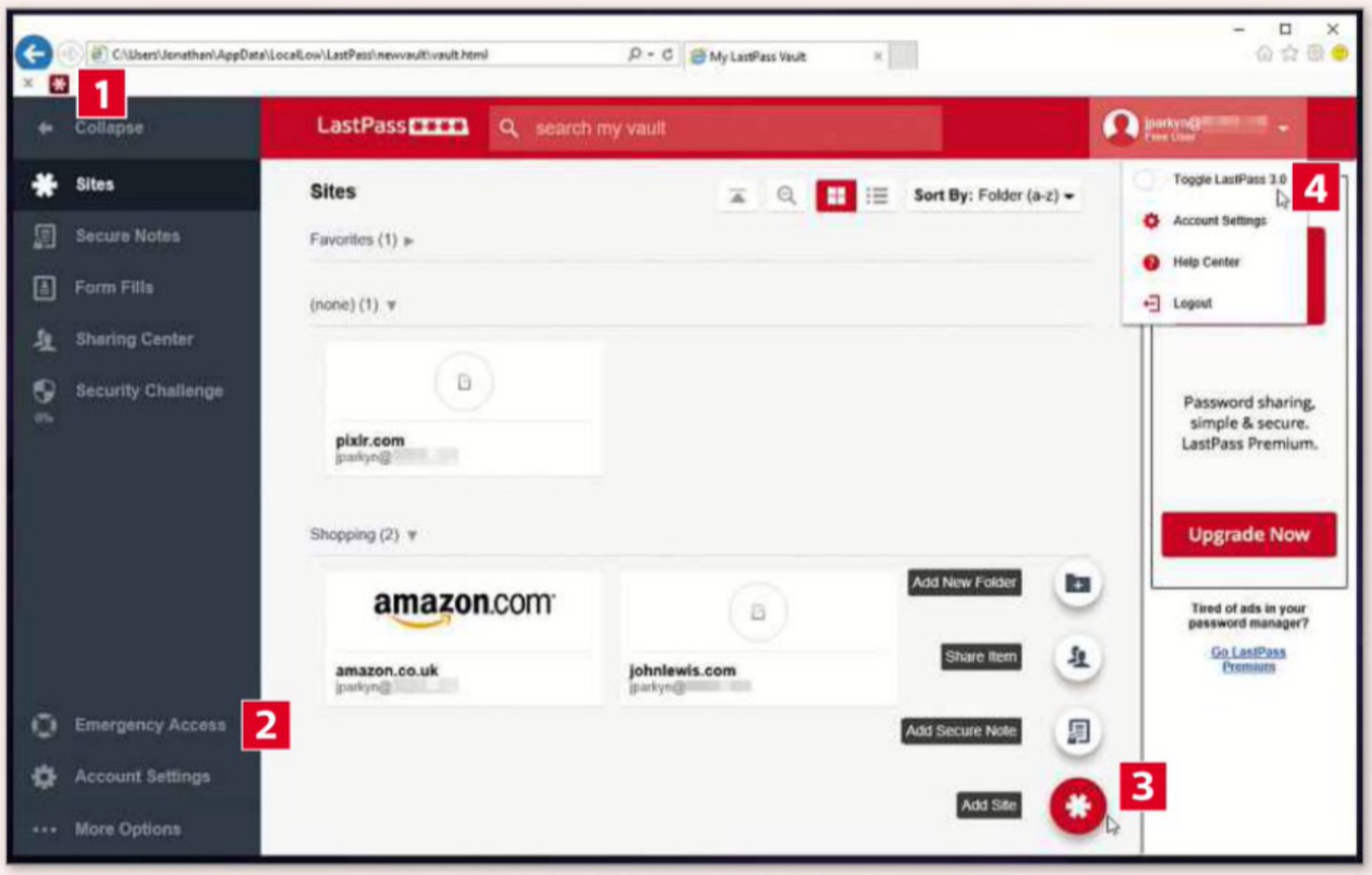
Ever since LastPass was bought last October by US cloud-software firm LogMeIn, users having been fearing that its new owners would mess around with how it worked. But the latest version of the password manager suggests that LogMeIn understands exactly why millions of people love LastPass. This version has a revamped interface and several outstanding new features, but you can still download and use it for free.

There's a Premium edition available for £8 per year, but all the program's core features are present in the free edition. The main limitation with the free version is that you can only sync passwords between the same type of device. For example, if you're using LastPass on your PC, you can sync it with LastPass on other PCs, but not on your phone or tablet.

Once you've installed LastPass, set up your account and master password when prompted. You'll then be asked to import any passwords stored in your browser. When you open your browser, enable the LastPass add-on (if prompted), then click the LastPass toolbar icon (an asterisk) and sign in. Once you do this, any time you sign into a site LastPass will ask you whether you'd like it to remember the password.

The new Vault is clean and easy to navigate (though it's possible to switch back to the old interface, should you prefer – see below). The new Emergency Access feature lets you nominate a trusted friend or family member to access your account if you can't for any reason. Your emergency contact just needs their own LastPass account.

So far the only drawback we've encountered with LastPass 4.0 is that it doesn't support Edge, Microsoft's new browser. This is because Microsoft hasn't yet updated Edge to support extensions (though the company says they will arrive in a "future update": www.snipca.com/19318). You'll need to use Internet Explorer, Chrome, Opera or Firefox in the meantime.

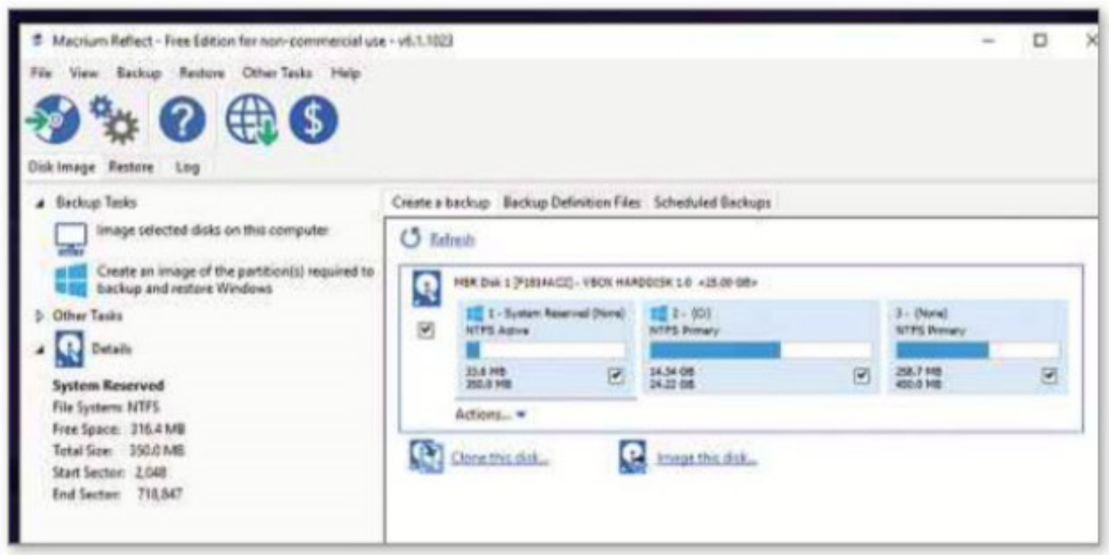


1 Click the asterisk icon to sign in (you can set your PC to sign into LastPass automatically). Click the asterisk again, then click My LastPass Vault to access the tool's main interface.

2 Most of the main options are listed in the left-hand pane, including the new Emergency Access feature. Click this, then click Give Emergency Access and type your trusted contact's email address.

3 The main area of your LastPass Vault displays all the sites you've saved passwords for. Click the round red button to add sites, organise sites into folders add notes and more.

4 Don't like LastPass 4.0's flashy new interface? No problem. Click your account in the top right, then click Toggle LastPass 3.0 to revert to the old-style layout.



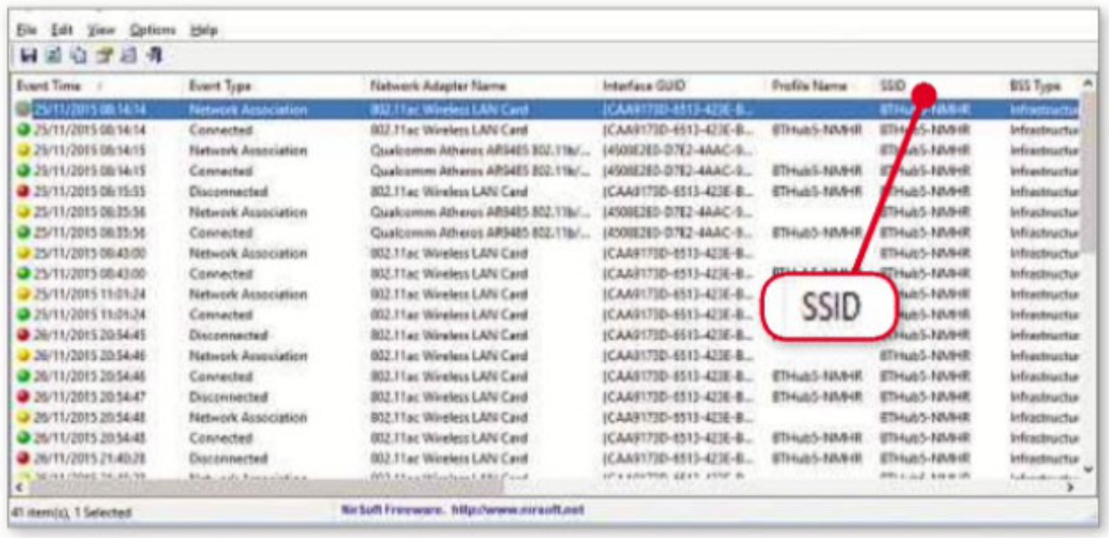
WINDOWS BACKUP

Macrium Reflect Free Edition 6.1.1

www.snipca.com/19298

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10

Windows comes with its own built-in backup tools, but they're fairly limited. If you want to clone your current hard drive to a new SSD, for example, you'll need to look elsewhere. Macrium Reflect Free can do this, as well as create regular system image backups and more. The latest version includes improved rescue tools for Windows 8 and 10, and better support for splitting files. Click the Download Now button at the link above, then click 'Softpedia Secure Download - x86' if your PC is 32bit, or 'Softpedia Secure Download - x64' if it's 64bit. Install the program, then launch it, insert a blank CD/DVD or spare USB stick and follow the on-screen instructions to create the Rescue Media – you'll need this to restore your data in the event that your PC won't start.



WI-FI TOOL

WifiHistoryView 1.0

www.snipca.com/19293

What you need: Windows Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10

Whether you're having problems connecting to wireless networks or you're looking for suspicious activity on your PC, you'll want WifiHistoryView in your toolkit. It's a very simple utility that lists all the connections to Wi-Fi networks your PC has made, and provides a wealth of information about each one – including its SSID (see screenshot), the date and time you connected to it, whether or not the connection was encrypted, the MAC address of the router or access point and more. It's a portable program, so simply download, unzip and run the tool – no installation required.

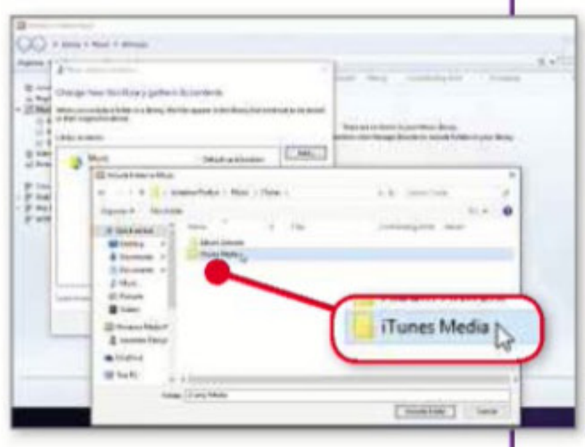
WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

We tell you what software to use

What can I use instead of iTunes?

Q I've had enough of iTunes! It's horribly slow and loses album artwork all the time. Would the Groove Music app that comes with Windows 10 be a good replacement? One thing concerns me though – I use iTunes to sync my contacts and calendar on my iPhone. Is there another program I can use for this?

Richard Haynes



A We agree that iTunes isn't great on Windows PCs, but we don't rate Groove Music much either (see our Cover Feature, page 50). Instead, try Windows Media Player (WMP), which is great for playing music files, and is available in all recent versions of Windows, including Windows 10 (look under W in 'All apps'). To import your iTunes library into WMP, click Organise, 'Manage libraries', Music, then click Add and browse to wherever iTunes stores all your files – usually **C:\Users\username\My Music\iTunes\iTunes Media** (see screenshot).

MediaMonkey (www.mediamonkey.com) is another great free iTunes replacement. It's fast, easy to use and, unlike WMP, you can even use it to sync tracks with your iPhone (or iPod) – see www.snipca.com/19300 for full instructions.

But neither let you sync your data (contacts, calendar etc) with an iPhone. Instead, in Windows 10, you can just sign into the Mail, Calendar and People apps with your iCloud account, effectively eliminating the need to sync. Set your iPhone to back up to iCloud (under iCloud in Settings). Photos can be synced using a USB stick.

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

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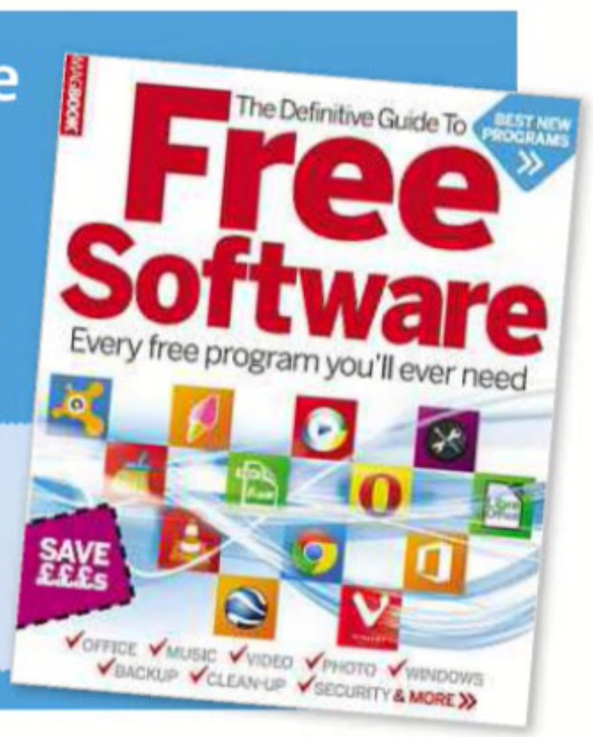
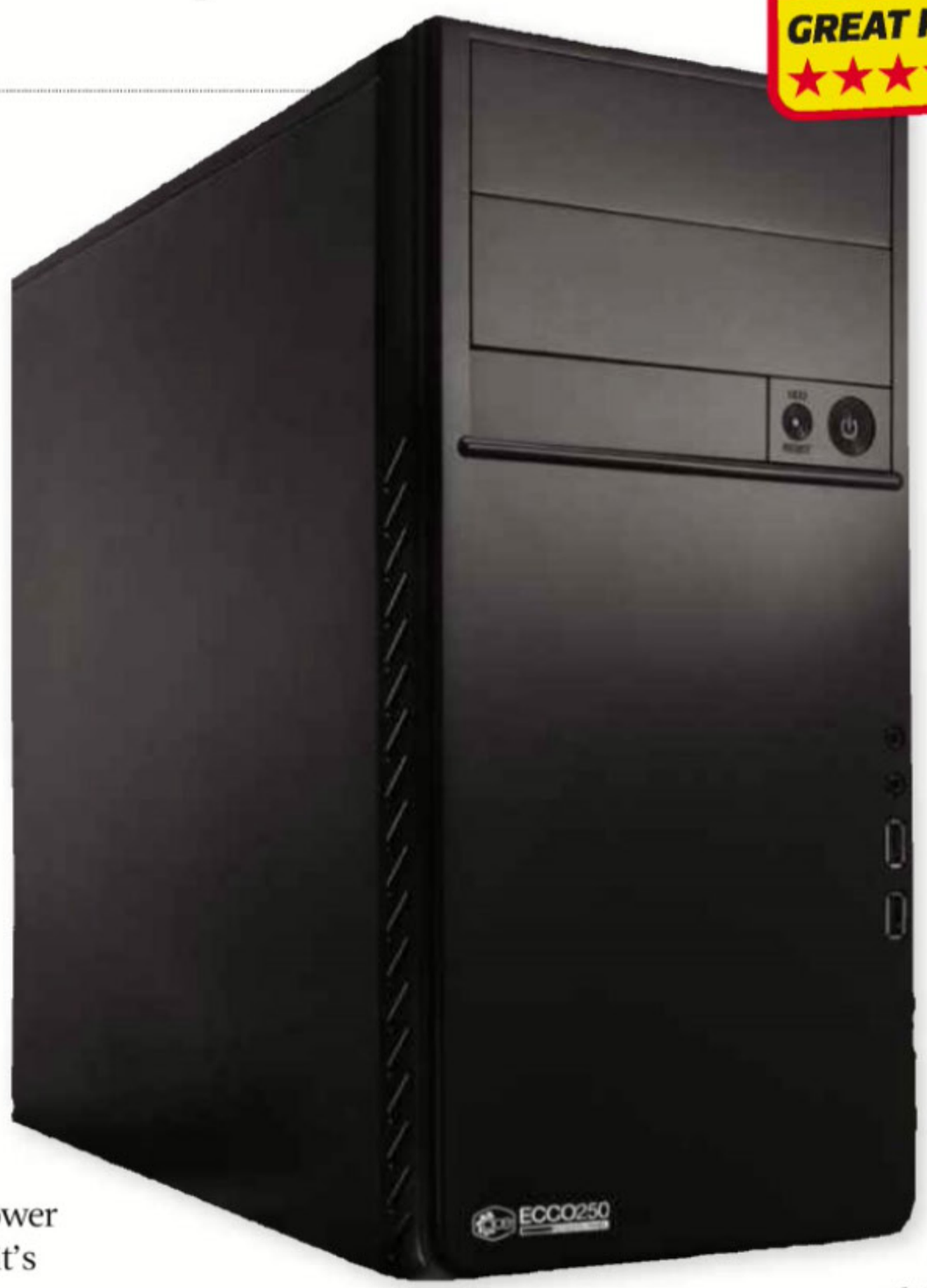


PC | **£380** from Chillblast www.snipca.com/19427

Chillblast Fusion Orion i3

A cheap and cheerful PC that's so quiet you'll forget it's there



Computer active GREAT PICK ★★★★☆

Desktop computers used to be plain black boxes. Now they come with UFO landing lights, rocket exhaust vents and Formula 1 spoilers. But what if you just want something that gets on with the job, neither seen nor heard? PC builder Chillblast – which isn't usually averse to an LED-backlit grille or dual-radiator water-cooler – has pushed all the stops back in for this exercise in understatement. The Fusion Orion i3 takes a selection of the latest affordable components and hides them inside a box so black, it'll attract nobody's attention but Stephen Hawking.

The case is actually Ace's Ecco 250. Not only is it devoid of shape or colour, it has an internal layer of noise-absorbing material that, just like a real black hole, allows nothing to escape. Switch on the PC, and – apart from a baleful red power light – the only clue you'll have that it's started doing anything is when the Windows 10 desktop appears.

It may be one of the smallest, plainest PC cases you can buy – in fact, one of the most perfectly featureless objects in the known universe – but we like to think it has a hint of style. On closer inspection, a series of diagonal vents runs down the left side of the matt front panel. And one of the two cutouts at the top conceals, in this configuration, a DVD writer drive.

> "There's barely any delay when opening programs or loading web pages"

Minimal it may be, but the Fusion Orion i3 isn't lacking in power on the inside. Although the Intel Core i3-6100 processor is the least powerful of Intel's latest Skylake chips, it packs a serious punch for everyday Windows tasks, partly thanks to its 3.7GHz clock speed. There's barely any delay when opening programs, loading web pages or applying filters to photos. The processor only has two cores, while many have four, but Intel's hyper-threading technology puts them to exceptionally good use in more strenuous tasks, such as video rendering. With 8GB of fast memory, this system is ready for most things you'll throw at it.

Even when you do, the processor's cooling fan remains practically inaudible. There's little else to heat up, since there's no separate graphics card, but the integrated Intel HD graphics 530 will cope with older 3D games and the likes of Minecraft. VGA, DVI and HDMI ports give you plenty of ways to attach a monitor, and alongside them on the back panel are four USB 2.0 ports and two of the faster USB 3.0, as well as 3.5mm jacks for a microphone and speakers. On the front, where they're easier to reach, are two extra USB 2.0 ports and 3.5mm headphone and mic jacks.

Many desktop PCs come without Wi-Fi, but an 802.11n adapter is included here in case your router isn't nearby. If you're likely to be using a wireless connection full-time, it's worth paying an extra tenner to upgrade this to 802.11ac, and this gets you Bluetooth too, letting you use accessories such as a wireless keyboard without extra USB dongles.

The 1TB hard drive is a hybrid type, with 8GB of flash memory to speed it up. There's a bit of room left for future expansion, with a PCI-Express port free for a graphics card; the power supply provides 500 watts, enough for any of today's mid-range cards.

The subtle styling, quiet running and competent performance make the Fusion Orion i3 a dependable budget computer, and with Chillblast's five-year warranty (free collect and return for the first two years, labour-only for the last three) it's a wise buy.

SPECIFICATIONS

3.7GHz dual-core Intel Core i3-6100 processor • 8GB memory • 1TB hybrid drive • 2x USB 3.0 ports • 6x USB 2.0 ports • Gigabit Ethernet • HDMI port • DVI port • VGA port • Windows 10 • 395x187x367mm (HxWxD) • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/19427

VERDICT: Everything you want in a basic PC, plus room for expansion later – it's a sensible system and a great deal

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Palicomp AMD Shockwave £500
If you're into games, pay a little more for something like this, with its Radeon R7 370 graphics card

LAPTOP-TABLET | **£500** from Lenovo www.snipca.com/19321

Lenovo Yoga 700 (11 inch)

A small laptop that's also a big tablet

We've mentioned before that Lenovo makes rather a lot of different laptop-tablet hybrids with bemusingly similar names. This year it seems to have called them all the 700. This particular one is the Yoga 700 – not to be confused with the Yoga 700. That's the one with a 14.1in screen. This one is 11.6in. Still following?

As befits a convertible, the Lenovo Yoga 700 (11 inch) has a special hinge that bends all the way round so you can fold the keyboard back and ignore it. Well, you can't literally ignore it, unless you undergo some sort of hypnosis, because you're still carrying it around. But the whole thing weighs a modest 1.1kg, so you can just about pretend. At 15.8mm, though, the folded-up Yoga 700 (11 inch) is a pretty chunky kind of iPad.

> "The Full HD display looks quite sharp, but is let down by dull colours and poor contrast"

Unlike an iPad, it runs Windows 10. Thanks to an efficient Intel Core M processor, it doesn't need an untablet-like fan inside, and with 8GB of memory it copes well with everyday tasks such as word processing and web browsing. It's not ideal for more ambitious purposes.

The Full HD (1920x1080-pixel) display looks quite sharp, but is let down by dull colours and poor contrast. And the lid section in which it resides flexes a bit too much for our liking. Apart from that the machine feels well built, with a soft finish that's easy to grip and a hinge stiff enough to stay in position while you prod the touchscreen.

The keyboard's tile-style keys have very little travel, so we didn't get distinct enough feedback to type as quickly and accurately as usual. The half-height Enter key and narrow left Shift key don't help. Such compromises are inevitable in devices with smaller screens, because the keyboards get shrunk to fit.

The touchpad – which still feels more natural to use than the touchscreen in office apps – is quite small and not the most responsive. In our test it handled most of Windows' multi-touch gestures, but would occasionally miss an input or two, which was frustrating.

Storage comes in the form of a 128GB SSD, which doesn't give you a lot of space after what's already used up by Windows 10. More impressive was the battery life, which lasted us around seven hours of light use.

The Yoga 700 (11 inch) is officially priced £560, but at the time of writing Lenovo was knocking £60 off. That's not bad value, but considering the poor screen and average build quality, we'll have to keep looking for the ideal mid-priced hybrid.

SPECIFICATIONS

Intel Core M3-6Y30 processor • 8GB memory • 128GB SSD • 11.6in 1920x1080-pixel screen • 1x USB 3.0 • 2x USB 2.0 • Micro HDMI • SD card reader • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Windows 10 Home • 15.8x290x197mm (HxWxD) • 1.1kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/19329

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

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

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PRICES

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

VERDICT: Touchscreen operation is a bonus, but it doesn't turn this so-so laptop into a must buy

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: ASUS Transformer Book T300 Chi £500 This one isn't perfect either and has similar specifications, but a detachable keyboard makes it more versatile

LAPTOP | **£1,149** from Dell www.snipca.com/19345

Dell XPS 13 (9305)

If only everything in life had this many pixels

The Dell XPS 13 is the Volkswagen Golf of ultrabooks. It may not look exciting, and the badge on the back won't set any hearts a-flutter, but it justifies a fairly high price with the promise of dependable performance.

There's a Dell XPS 13 in our office that was delivered, fittingly enough for an all-American computer maker, on the 4th of July 2008. In historical terms, that was before Obama's first inauguration. In dog years, half a lifetime ago. For a PC, practically the Jurassic era. It still works fine. That's why you buy an XPS.

> "The XPS 13's 3200x1800 pixels make the screen even sharper than the latest MacBooks"

This latest model, however, does look exciting. A Golf GTI, if you will. The case's slim wedge shape isn't quite the slimmest you'll see these days, and although it's built as an Apple-style aluminium 'unibody' – one single structure – it's not quite uni enough to banish Dell's beloved black plastic, even if it's now posher-sounding carbon fibre.

But the unique borderless display is something special. With only 5mm between the screen and the edge of the lid, the new XPS 13 is much neater than other 13in portables. If you do choose to spend this much, you'll get admiring glances from envious onlookers. Press the power button and you'll be impressed again, because Dell has squeezed more pixels into the screen.

Apple calls its high-resolution displays 'Retina', while the PC world refers to them as 'HiDPI', but the principle is similar: use a finer grid of dots, and adjust the software so that everything looks roughly the same size but sharper. Previously, Windows was pretty bad at this scaling, but Windows 10 is much better, even if some programs are still catching up. The XPS 13's 3200x1800 pixels make the screen even sharper than the latest MacBooks – you really can't see the dots at all.

And with high contrast and 95 per cent of the sRGB colour range, it looks gorgeous. The uneven backlighting in the previous model has been fixed. Our only complaint is that the 'dynamic contrast' feature is still obligatory. This tries to make bright areas brighter and dark areas darker, but it's distracting and prevents you using the full brightness when you need it. All Dell needs to add is an option to turn it off.

The Core i7 processor in the configuration we tested is one of the fastest in Intel's newest range, and the SSD inside is much faster than a mechanical hard drive, even if space is a little tight at 256GB. Starting up Windows is almost instant, and running demanding professional software such as Adobe Photoshop CC is no problem at all. Push the PC hard and its fans start to whir audibly, but without the whine of the previous model. Intel's built-in graphics card will cope with most 3D games at lower resolutions.

Although it's hard to see where there's room inside for much battery, the XPS 13 lasted an extraordinary 11-and-a-half hours in our light-use test. The backlit keyboard felt great to type on, and the touchpad worked smoothly. Besides two USB 3.0 ports, there's a tiny USB Type-C connector that supports the Thunderbolt 3 standard for ultra-fast peripherals. You can also use this for USB 3.1 devices or a monitor.

If your budget won't stretch to more than £1,000, the XPS 13 starts at a less eye-watering £849 with a slower 2.3GHz i5 processor and a Full HD (1920x1080-pixel) screen. Performance is still more than adequate for most purposes, but the lower resolution comes with less accurate colour reproduction.

SPECIFICATIONS

2.5GHz Intel Core i7-6500U dual-core processor • 8GB memory • 256GB SSD • 13.3in 3200x1800-pixel screen • Webcam • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.1 • 2x USB 3.0 ports • USB Type-C Thunderbolt 3 port • Windows 10 Home • 15x304x200mm (HxWxD) • 1.2kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/19345

VERDICT: You probably don't need to spend this much on a laptop, but if you can afford to, the XPS 13 feels both solid and special

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: Asus ZenBook UX303UA £885 With an i7 processor, this all-metal laptop is a better buy than the cheapest XPS

PC STICK | **£89** from Amazon
www.snipca.com/19330

Asus Chromebit CS10

A PC without the PC

Buying a very cheap computer, as we periodically point out, is often a false economy. Its limited performance will make some tasks impossible and others so frustrating that you avoid doing them – the opposite of how technology should improve your life. But there's a case to be made for a really, really cheap computer – one that's not so much an alternative to a proper computer, as an alternative to not having a computer.

Last year we tested a couple of 'PC sticks', tiny computers that plug straight into the HDMI port of a digital TV or PC monitor. The Chromebit is like that, but instead of Linux or Windows, it runs Google's Chrome OS, like the Chromebox and Chromebook PCs that we've tested before. Cleverly, the plug part can be folded into a right angle so the stick doesn't actually stick out. You'll need to add a Bluetooth wireless keyboard and mouse.

Unlike Windows, Chrome OS provides little except a web browser and file manager, and you can't install and run software. It's designed purely for working online, using web apps and storing documents 'in the cloud'. Just 16GB of physical storage is built in, but you get 100GB of space on Google's servers free for two years.

Forget most of what you know about using a PC: you'll need to get used to doing everything in the web browser, including word processing (via Google Docs) and photo editing (using free web apps such as Polarr). This is not a powerful computer, and even scrolling down a web page can keep it thinking for several seconds before it judders into action. If you're patient, it works, but it would make more sense for casual use than, say, something to carry around for work.

It's nice, though, that you can move it around the house or take it on holiday and plug it into any modern TV – keeping in mind that you'll need access to Wi-Fi. But its uses are limited. If you're thinking about converting your TV for home entertainment, Google's Chromecast video streamer is probably the stick you're looking for.

SPECIFICATIONS

Rockchip RK3288C quad-core processor • 2GB memory • 16GB flash storage • HDMI plug • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.0 • Chrome OS • 123x31x17mm (HxWxD) • 75g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/19331

VERDICT: It feels mean not to recommend the Chromebit, because it's the best (and only) Chromebit there is. But it's just not very inspiring

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Intel Compute Stick £80 This is slow too, but buy the version with Windows 10 and it's at least very good value

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PHONE | **£380** from Samsung www.snipca.com/19352

Samsung Galaxy S6

Superb smartphone with a classy camera

It may not be as striking as the Edge, Samsung's curvier version of this phone, but don't underestimate the S6. Yes, in appearance it's a bit reminiscent of the iPhone, thanks to its minimalist shape and bulbous metal frame. But that's no bad thing. What's more interesting is that, having been around for a good few months, it's now been heavily discounted (down from £499 at the time of writing). Could this be the top-of-the-range phone you wanted at a mid-range price?

> "While storage is limited, it's an otherwise fabulous phone for the price"

First impressions are good. With toughened glass from Gorilla Glass front and back, and a single button incorporating a fingerprint sensor, the beautifully made S6 looks like a cross between Apple's iPhone 5 and 6. As with the iPhone 6, the way the glass is rounded off to meet the edges of the case makes it feel quite vulnerable to chips and cracks, but the tough glass is designed to withstand drops on to rough surfaces. One side issue, however, is that the glass does tend to pick up a lot of fingerprints.

Available in white, silver, blue or black, the S6 has a slightly bigger screen than the iPhone 6, and weighs 9g more, but it's a fraction thinner, and overall it feels a comfortable size. Like the iPhone, it has no microSD slot for extra storage and you can't get at the battery to swap it, but despite the relative lack of openings in the case, it's not rated as water-resistant.

Ordinarily, it's reassuring to know you can add more storage when your phone fills up with photos, videos and music, so the microSD card slot is a big miss. You do get a reasonable 32GB built in, though, of which the Android operating system takes up 7GB. As if to make a point, Samsung has used an extra-fast kind of flash storage. This complements the Exynos 7420 processor to make the S6 feel very speedy. Nothing we tried could slow it down, from Google Maps to complicated web pages and 3D games.

Unlike some phones, it didn't become hot when working hard, and that indicates good energy efficiency. Unfortunately, that's offset by a small battery. Like the iPhone 6, the S6 will get you through a full day without recharging – but only just. Playing games will drain it much faster.

Perhaps the S6's best feature is the screen. Cramming 2560x1440 pixels into a 5.1in panel, it's even sharper than Apple's, and Samsung's AMOLED technology gives it superb colour reproduction, covering 98.5 per cent of the sRGB range with very high accuracy. AMOLED screens aren't quite as bright as other screen types, but as long as you turn on auto-brightness to give it an extra boost on sunny days, the S6 is as bright as they get. It also goes dimmer than the iPhone when you want to be discreet.

On the back is an impressive 16-megapixel camera, with a fast lens and optical image stabilisation to help you get great stills and video even in fairly low light. The S6 is also a decent telephone, with a clear microphone and speaker. Samsung's version of Android 5 Lollipop is a bit unusual, but some of the previous clutter has been cleared out, and an upgrade to Android 6 Marshmallow is being tested for release in the near future.

If you're not put off by the limited storage, it's hard to fault the S6, especially at this price. It's no iPhone killer – Apple's software is still much better – but it's one of the best Android deals around.

SPECIFICATIONS

5.1in 2560x1440-pixel screen • 16-megapixel rear camera • 5-megapixel front camera • 32GB flash storage • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.1 • 3G/4G • Android 5.1 • 143x71x6.8mm (HxWxD) • 138g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/19351

VERDICT: Great looks, quality screen, impressive camera, fast performance – and now much cheaper. There's little to dislike about this phone

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: iPhone 6 £459 Last year's iPhone is excellent, but it's currently more expensive and its 16GB of storage isn't really adequate

SMARTPHONE | **£280** from eBay www.snipca.com/19404

ZTE Axon Elite

The cheapest phone you've never heard of

ZTE? No, it didn't ring many bells with us, either. It turns out to be quite a big Chinese electronics manufacturer, and the Axon Elite is its challenge to the more familiar names in smartphones.

At first glance, the Axon Elite looks like something you'd find in a Middle-Eastern bazaar. It's the right sort of shape for a phablet, with the same screen size and resolution as the iPhone 6s Plus. But what ZTE calls its 'signature pattern grill' – a weird criss-cross at the top and bottom – is just a tacky way to trap fluff, and the faux-leather back is all too clearly aiming to mimic the LG G4.

ZTE's indefatigable marketing department reckons the Axon Elite has a 'visual depth' of 5.1mm, which would be impressive except for the inconvenient truth that it's 9.8mm thick.

> "The screen is bright, but colours aren't very accurate"

Turn the power on, and it doesn't get much better. ZTE's software, MiFavor, not only sounds like an ice-cream you'd buy on holiday, but looks like somebody tried to gold-plate an iPhone's home screen. It's actually Android, but not as you know it, after ZTE has fiddled about with it to within an inch of its life. However once you open an app it works normally. The screen still isn't great, though: it's bright, but colours aren't very accurate, with whites looking pinkish.

Inside the Axon Elite is another story. The eight-core Snapdragon 810 processor is what we'd expect to find in a phone costing twice as much, ensuring web browsing and apps run as smoothly as on any Android device. And the rest of the space inside must be full of battery, because it lasted us 11 hours and 45 minutes of video playback – enough for the whole *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

The rear 13-megapixel camera has twin lenses, enabling shallow depth-of-field effects that make photos look more like they were taken with a full-size camera. Our outdoor pictures looked good, but fine detail was fuzzy, as were our indoor shots. Below the lenses is a fingerprint sensor.

With 32GB of storage and a microSD slot for more, the Axon Elite is a complete package at a very reasonable price. It's just not as desirable as it could have been.

SPECIFICATIONS

5.5in 1920x1080-pixel screen • 13-megapixel rear camera • 8-megapixel front camera • 32GB flash storage • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.0 • 3G/4G • Android 5 MiFavor • 54x77x9.8mm (HxWxD) • 170g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/19405

VERDICT: There's no denying the inside is excellent value. The outside, however, is rather an acquired taste

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Motorola Moto X Play £260 This one's chunky too, and not quite as fast, but with an even longer battery life it's a better phone

The best... Photo scanners

Canon CanoScan LiDE 220

£55 from Amazon
www.snipca.com/18200

Scanners built into multi-function printers are fine for photocopying and digitising documents, but they don't always give great results with photos. A dedicated flatbed scanner like the LiDE 200 is a step up. At just over a minute to scan a 6x4in photo at 1200dpi, it's quick and has decent colour accuracy.

Canon CanoScan 9000F MkII

£156 from PC World Business
www.snipca.com/19398

One thing the LiDE 200 can't do is scan transparent slides and negatives. This model can – working at up to 9600dpi and with 48bit colour to capture more tonal range. It's faster than the LiDE 200, but not ideal for high volumes of scanning. Sadly it no longer comes with the excellent SilverFast software.

Epson Perfection V600 Photo

£230 from Argos
www.snipca.com/19399

This older model is still a great choice for photo scanning, using Epson's Digital ICE technology to remove dust and scratches. It has 48bit colour, 6400dpi and is faster than the Canon models above. Epson's software isn't great for colour negatives; for this add VueScan Professional: $80 (£56) from www.snipca.com/19400.

Plustek OpticFilm 8100

£170 from PC World Business
www.snipca.com/19402

A compact slide scanner like this makes more sense if you're specifically interested in 35mm slides and negatives. There are cheaper models, but this one provides reasonable quality, with 7200dpi in 48bit and SilverFast SE Plus 8 software.

TABLET | **£139** from Medion www.snipca.com/19412

Medion Lifetab 10345

Could this be the next Tesco Hudl?

You may come across this Android tablet in Aldi, which is selling them as a 'Special Buy'. It's certainly special all right – especially bad. It has a 1920x1200-pixel screen, giving you Full HD plus a bit extra for a more iPad-like shape. Costing just £139, it was shaping up to be a potential successor to Tesco's Hudl 2, which was an excellent bargain at a tenner less (until it was discontinued last autumn).

You wouldn't immediately guess that this was a budget product. It doesn't have the solid metal construction of an iPad, but then nor do many other devices. The back has a sparkly silver finish that Medion presumably hopes people might mistake for aluminium, and the white plastic edges are crisply styled, with a bit of a *Star Wars* feel to their diagonal grooves and insets. The 2-megapixel webcam and 5-megapixel rear camera won't win any awards, but that's tablet cameras for you.

> "Tap, swipe, pinch or scroll then wait to see if anything's going to happen"

Unlike the almost featureless iPad Air, the Lifetab has a relative glut of ports: besides micro-USB for charging and file transfer, there's mini HDMI to connect an HDTV or monitor and a microSD slot for extra storage. With a reasonably practical 32GB built in, you might not need it for a while. Stereo speakers are where they should be, on opposite sides of the screen, and there's even an infra-red transmitter hidden among the volume buttons, so you can control your TV from the tablet. You might never need to get off the sofa again.

When it comes to cheap tablets, the screen is usually the big disappointment, but this one looks fine. Although it's nowhere near as sharp as Apple's Retina displays and their closest rivals, it's not particularly coarse either. It doesn't go very bright, but contrast is quite good and colours look OK.

Here, though, the good news grinds to a halt, because a tablet's touchscreen isn't just there to show you things; it's also your means of input. Tap an app icon on the Lifetab, and it opens as expected. So far, so good. Now try tapping a link on a web page, or scrolling, or pinching something to zoom in, or swiping... oh dear. Instead of that lovely iPad feel of everything responding instantly to your touch, it's more a matter of waiting to see if anything is going to happen, realising it isn't, then trying again until it does. Attempting to use the on-screen keyboard pushes this beyond a joke: its cmpltly impsibl to typ acurtely.

This is a terrible shame, because everything else about the Lifetab is so much better. It comes with Android 4.4 (KitKat), which is pretty old but works fine, and beyond adding some pointless utility apps, which you can delete, Medion hasn't messed about with it unduly. The quad-core Intel Atom processor is one we've seen in many other tablets and laptop-tablet hybrids, and with 2GB of memory installed it can keep up with most tasks and all but the most advanced games. The battery claims to last 13 hours, although when we worked it hard this fell to just over four.

It's possible that a software update could improve the Lifetab's responsiveness, but it seems more likely that the screen itself is the problem. Either way, as it stands we can't recommend it, because it's no use having all the right features if the basic process of interacting with apps just doesn't work properly. This might have seemed a remarkable device before the iPad was invented, especially for so little money, but in 2016 it's just not good enough.

SPECIFICATIONS

10.1in 1920x1200-pixel screen • 5-megapixel rear camera • 2-megapixel front camera • 802.11n Wi-Fi • 174x263x8.5mm (HxWxD • 580g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/19413

VERDICT: It was so nearly a great budget device, but the Lifetab's unresponsiveness makes it downright unpleasant to use

★☆☆☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Amazon Fire HD 10 £170
Good for videos if you're an Amazon Prime subscriber, but Amazon's own software isn't as flexible as Android

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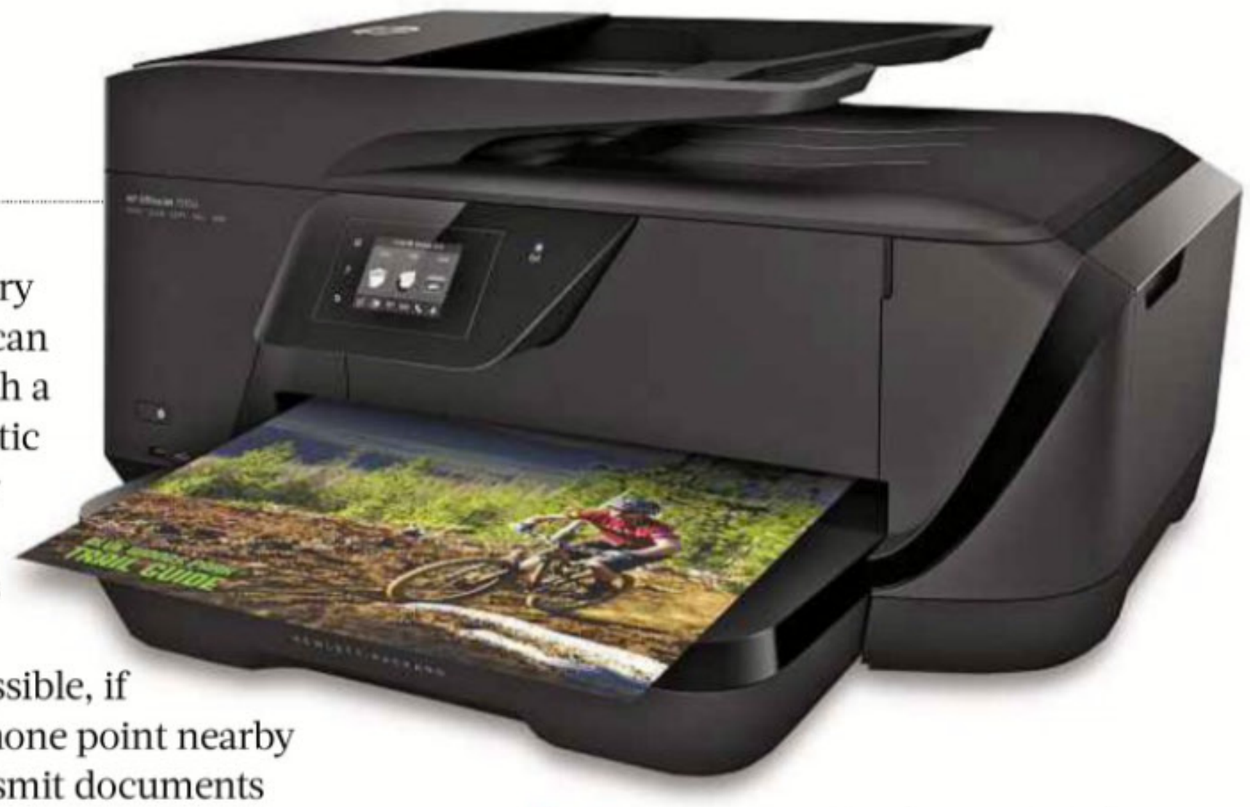
PRINTER | **£100** from John Lewis www.snipca.com/19393

HP Officejet 7510

An A4 printer that's A3 on the inside



Like Brother, HP has worked out that if you design an A4 printer so that the print head travels along the long side of the paper, you can also feed A3 into it. This is because the short side of A3 matches the long side of A4. It's not a great set-up for printing A3 all the time, but handy for producing the occasional poster, say.

> "A versatile printer that can manage A3, but it's noisy and only prints one side"

HP refers to this as 'wide format', which is a tad misleading, as this is the industry term for printers that are at least twice as big. Still, this Wi-Fi model does seem pretty versatile. It can actually take paper up to 322x475mm (larger than A3) and still print all the way to the edge. There's a scanner built into the top, although geometry dicates that this can only take A4, with a 30-sheet automatic document feeder (ADF) for quick multi-page scans or photocopies. Faxing is also possible, if you have a telephone point nearby and need to transmit documents to the 1990s.

At the bottom is a 250-sheet paper tray for the printer with a lid that will catch up to 75 sheets coming out. Copies came out well in black and white or colour, black text printed crisply and colour documents looked good, although there are better photo printers.

Using HP's XL cartridges, it'll cost you less than 4.5p to print a page of text and colour graphics, which is very reasonable. The Officejet 7510 is generally quick compared with other inkjet printers in this price bracket, nearing 15 pages per minute for text, but the noisy ADF took over three minutes to copy 10 colour pages.

As ever, HP's scanning software let us down, offering too few options and delivering a plain black page when we tried to use the maximum 1200dpi resolution. We were also disappointed that double-sided (duplex) printing isn't supported: without this, it's hard work to print A4 pages side by side to fold into a booklet, which would have been a good use of the A3 option.

SPECIFICATIONS

4800x1200dpi maximum print resolution • 8ppm colour and 15ppm mono quoted speeds • 1200x1200dpi maximum scan resolution • USB • 802.11n Wi-Fi • 366x613x483cm (HxWxD) • 13kg • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/19394

VERDICT: This chunky printer is very capable in many ways, but Brother beats it with duplex output and less clunky paper feeding

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Brother MFC-J5320DW £100 With duplex, this is a better buy if you can get it for the same price, though discounts vary widely

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

What's the best mouse for unsteady hands?

Q **A tremor in my hands is making it increasingly difficult to control my mouse. Can you recommend any software for Windows 10, or a special mouse, which might help me?**

Sheelagh Wurr

A Slowing down the mouse may help. Press the Windows key, type pointer speed and press Return to select the option that appears. Under Motion, set the slider to Slow.

You can also avoid the mouse and use the keyboard to skip between options. You can do this on any keyboard, and tips for both Windows and Mac users can be found at www.snipca.com/19389.

Taking this a step further, you can use your keyboard's number pad to move the cursor. Press the Windows key, type ease mouse and select 'Ease of Access mouse settings'. Click the switch to turn on Mouse buttons. You can then use the number keys around the 5 to move the cursor up, down, left, right and diagonally.

The Contour RollerMouse (see www.snipca.com/19391, pictured), available in several versions, lets you rest your hands while moving a sliding roller with your fingertips. Some users with tremors find it easier than a normal mouse. It's pricey – the cheapest we found was £137 on Amazon www.snipca.com/19390. But dealers offer a free trial: see www.snipca.com/19392.

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

PC MONITOR | **£215** from www.snipca.com/19416

AOC Q2778VQE

A decent PC monitor, plain and simple

If you look up 'monitor' in the dictionary, and skip past the bits about medical recording devices, giant lizards and school prefects, you'll discover it means 'a screen that displays an image generated by a computer'. But that doesn't really do justice to today's PC screens.

At the very least, any self-respecting LCD panel will tend to lay on a multi-port USB 3.0 hub; built-in stereo speakers are *de rigueur*; and how about an SD card slot to view photos from your camera? And finally, MHL support, so you can connect your Android device to charge up and mirror videos to the screen.

On top of that, cramming in all these goodies should in no way prevent the manufacturer reducing the bezel to the width of a gnat's kneecap and mounting it on an aluminium spike with tilt, height adjustment and 180-degree rotation. Naturally, all this will cost you a small fortune.

> "It may not have everything, but as a monitor for your PC, it's hard to beat"

Alternatively, you could buy the reasonably priced AOC Q2778VQE. This 27in monitor doesn't turn, twist or connect your accessories. It doesn't graph your heartbeat, hunt small mammals or stop first-years running in the corridors. It has no speaker at all, and its bezel is as chunky as its plastic stand is basic. But when it comes to displaying an image generated by a computer, you'd struggle to fault it.

Full-size monitors are only just beginning to move to the ultra-high resolutions now common on mobile devices. There are some 4K models (3840x2160 pixels or thereabouts), but many budget units still show only 1920x1080 pixels. This one, at 2560x1440, is sharper.

That's the same as Apple's £899 Thunderbolt Display, which likewise has no adjustment except tilt. Comparing the two, the Q2778VQE's colour accuracy came surprisingly close. Although it's aimed at creative users, the Thunderbolt Display is based on the standard sRGB colour space rather than a larger professional space like Adobe RGB.

The Q2778VQE covered 98.9 per cent of sRGB, and its Delta E (a measurement of how much colours vary from what they ought to be) was 1.9, which is almost as low as Apple's 1.8. The Q2778VQE was only about 80 per cent as bright as the Thunderbolt Display at its maximum, but that was too bright for us anyway, so we turned it down. Contrast was actually 30 per cent better.

While the Thunderbolt Display, like most current mid-range monitors, uses an IPS panel, the Q2778VQE is of the TN variety. That's usually associated with poor image quality at wider angles, but here we found no such problems, and the pixels update quickly, so there's no ghosting as objects move around the screen. The only catch is a fairly high input lag of 38 milliseconds. Keen gamers may notice the delay, which is similar to that of a living room HDTV.

Our Apple comparison may not be the most appropriate: the Thunderbolt Display is overpriced and due for replacement, so it's not the be-all and end-all. But compared to newer and cheaper rivals, the Q2778VQE still excels. It may be made of black plastic, but it has a pleasantly uncluttered design, with square corners at the top and neat curves below.

The disc-shaped stand looks like it might rotate, but doesn't. There's enough tilt to get a comfortable angle, although you might want to raise the screen on a couple of books. And no, it can't rotate into portrait mode, but how many of us use a monitor like that anyway?

Finally, the Q2778VQE not only has a full complement of VGA, DVI and DisplayPort connections on the back, but comes with cables for them all (although you'll need your own for HDMI). It really is excellent value.

SPECIFICATIONS

25in TN LCD • 2560x1440-pixel resolution • 1x HDMI port • 1x DVI port • 1x DisplayPort • 1x VGA port • 471x640x300mm (HxWxD) • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/19415

VERDICT: If you like do-it-all products, this isn't one, but it's a very good monitor at a very fair price

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: BenQ GW2765HT £275
Another good 2560x1440 screen for under £300, this has small speakers but looks uglier

WEB-DESIGN SOFTWARE | **£38** from Incomedia www.snipca.com/19411

Incomedia WebSite X5 v12 Evolution

A good way to dip a toe in the web-design pond

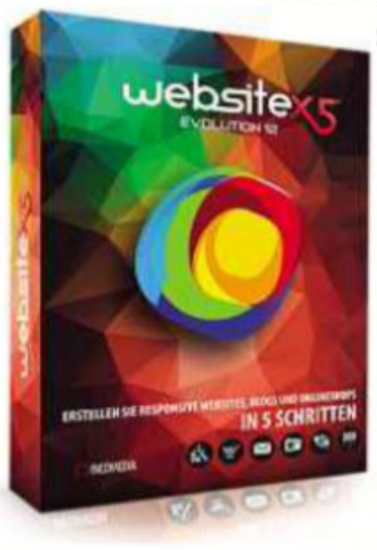
When Tim Berners-Lee invented the world wide web, it was all about simple HTML code and the occasional picture. In just a few minutes, anyone could make a website that worked as well as anyone else's. Thanks to progress, web design is now more complicated and requires considerable skill and knowledge – unless you use tools that can provide most of that for you.

Incomedia's WebSite X5 has been around for ages, but the Evolution edition is fairly new, providing more features than the basic £15 Home option without the cost of the £139 Professional version. One licence lets you install the software on two PCs, and there are no restrictions on how many sites you can create. A year's web hosting and the registration of a domain name – 'jeffbloggs.com' or whatever – is included in the price.

> "The process of creating a website is menu-driven, and you follow a series of logical steps"

A lot of rival products try to turn web design into desktop publishing (DTP), letting you freely place text and pictures on a page. The trouble is, web pages don't work like that, especially now that people use screens of all shapes and sizes. So the end result may be very inefficient as well as not coming out quite right.

WebSite X5 v12 takes a slightly more rigid approach, offering various types of frame to contain different elements. It's not really more restrictive; you can use as many frames as you like on a page. You just can't do unweb-like things such as rotating a block of text to a jaunty angle. Importantly, this method of construction allows WebSite X5 v12 to generate 'cleaner' HTML code, which means your pages will be displayed faster on the user's screen, and Google is less likely to bump your site down the search rankings for wasting everyone's time.



The process of creating a website is menu-driven, and you follow a series of logical steps, starting by choosing an appropriate template. There are over 1,000 to choose from, covering all sorts of reasons for having a website, but some of the more commercial types require extra fees. You could always start from scratch with a blank template, but without previous design experience you would be giving yourself an unnecessary challenge.

As you work through the menus, there are plenty of opportunities to change the template to make it unique, starting with picking a colour scheme and fonts. You can also make the whole site responsive, which means it'll rearrange itself to fit the screen it's viewed on, showing less information on a phone than on a desktop PC's monitor. This is the way all sites should now be designed, and although the Evolution edition doesn't let you customise the adaptations as much as the Professional version, it works reasonably well.

Other extra features in the Professional edition include advanced analytics to help maximise traffic. But Evolution has plenty of options, including the ability to make some pages available to registered users only, and to set up a catalogue and shopping cart for users to buy things from your site. Unfortunately, you can't legally sell digital products, such as PDFs, because the payment system doesn't comply with the horribly complicated new VAT scheme that came into effect last year. This applies to everyone, not just VAT-registered businesses.

As the web adapts to a touchscreen world with more sophisticated designs that feel slick and fluid, WebSite X5 v12's method does feel a little old fashioned. But it beats some flashy visual editors that output terrible code, and at a 25 per cent discount on the regular price from the link above, it's good value.

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Windows Vista, 7, 8 or 10 • 1GB of memory • Minimum 1024x600-pixel screen • Internet connection and email for activation www.snipca.com/19409

VERDICT: This isn't the most visual of web-design programs, but there's a lot to be said for its straightforward approach

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Xara Web Designer 11 £35 This visual editor is easy to use, has extra creative tools and lets you create separate mobile versions

SOUNDBAR | **£180** from Currys www.snipca.com/19419

Bose Solo 5

Boost your TV's audio quality

Computer active GREAT PICK ★★★★☆

Soundbars have become a popular TV accessory, sitting below the front edge of your screen and blurting out more better-quality audio than the built-in speakers. This one is particularly compact, and doesn't come with a separate subwoofer or any other complications. That makes it convenient for a PC as well as a TV. It can be wall mounted, if you prefer, using Bose's £25 WB-120 kit (www.snipca.com/19435).

What's unusual about the Solo 5 is that it isn't really designed for the kind of thumping bass and screaming stereo that put you in the middle of the movies. Instead, it's accent is on clarity. Film directors these days seem to positively encourage actors to mumble, presumably because it feels more natural. In the same quest for realism, they also tend to let their sound designers emphasise every conceivable background noise.

> "Speech was instantly more crisp and comprehensible"

The result is that you're not sure if DCI Luther has just said the victim was named Keaton, had been beaten or was in fact eaten – especially if you're busy hiding behind your fingers. And boomy sound quality doesn't help. That's the problem Bose wants to solve. With the Solo 5, we found speech instantly more crisp and comprehensible. The effect can be increased with a special Dialogue mode, which boosts vocal frequencies.

The Solo 5 connects to your sound source via 3.5mm stereo jack, SPDIF digital coaxial (the kind that looks like a phono plug) or optical Toslink (the fancy little square one). Alternatively, you can use Bluetooth, which is also handy if you want to play music from your phone or tablet. The sound quality won't be quite as good, because it doesn't support the higher-quality aptX system, but then nor do any of Apple's devices.

You also get a remote control with a surprisingly large number of buttons. This can also operate your TV, cable box and other gadgets, but if you're already used to your existing remote controls you might have preferred a simple clicker with only the Solo 5's own options.

The Solo 5 is powerful enough to fill a medium-sized room, but doesn't give you as much sense of stereo or surround as a beefier soundbar such as the Q Acoustics M4 (£299 from www.snipca.com/19425). But it's a more practical size for a desk.

VERDICT: The Bose Solo 5 is reasonably priced for a quality soundbar and a good choice if crystal-clear dialogue is your priority

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Maxell MXSP-SB3000 £190 Slide this 'soundbase' under your monitor for ergonomic height as well as crisp, listenable sound with a Speech mode

SPECIFICATIONS

Stereo soundbar • 3.5mm stereo input • Coaxial digital input (cable included) • Optical digital input (cable included) • Bluetooth • Universal remote control • 70x548x86mm (HxWxD) • 6.35kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/19420

COMING SOON

SPRING 2016

Others are calling Samsung's Galaxy TabPro S the "tablet nobody expected", which is funny because we told you about it months ago (see Issue 463). The 12in-screen Windows 10 device will compete with Apple's iPad Pro.

SPRING 2016

Due in March, HP's EliteBook Folio G1 could be the first ultra-slim laptop to go one better than Apple's 12in MacBook. Comes with an even sharper screen and a 180-degree hinge for more flexibility, but will be too expensive for many people.

SPRING 2016

Lenovo's Link is a USB stick that connects an Android device to a PC, letting you operate mobile apps from your keyboard or display the device's screen in a window. Expected to cost £40, it contrasts with Microsoft's Display Dock, which lets you use a Windows 10 phone as a PC.

SUMMER 2016

We're going to see a lot of new all-in-one PCs in 2016. One to look out for in June is Lenovo's IdeaCentre AIO 510S. Behind an ultra-slim bezel you get a choice of processors, storage and graphics cards from $699, which should mean £699.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 17 Feb

Huawei Mate 8
A different kind of phablet – with a battery that lasts days

Acer Aspire U5-710
The £999 all-in-one touchscreen PC with everything

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

NEW ENTRY

Asus UX305
£570 from www.snipca.com/19439
Tested: Issue 447

13.3in is a practical size for a laptop, and this light but sturdy 'ultrabook' has a smart and slim design that does justice to its capable performance. Upgradeable to Windows 10, it's limited mainly by its 128GB SSD, which makes it work fast but might leave you needing more space.

ALTERNATIVE Toshiba Satellite C40-C This 14in Windows 10 laptop looks like it cost a lot more. It's not the most amazing PC, but it's fantastic for the price. £200 from www.snipca.com/19436

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Shockwave
£500 from www.snipca.com/18748
Tested: Issue 464

Proving that you don't need an Intel processor, Palicomp has built an excellent PC around AMD's Athlon X4 860K and Radeon R7 370 graphics card. Runs Windows 7, 8.1 or 10.

ALTERNATIVE: Chillblast Fusion Orion i3 As long as games aren't a priority, this almost invisibly plain black box has all you need in an all-round budget system. £380 from www.snipca.com/19427

TABLET

Apple iPad Mini 4
£319 from www.snipca.com/18100
Tested: Issue 460

The 2015 update to Apple's 7.9in tablet greatly improves the screen and camera, boosts performance, and makes it worth the £100 extra over the iPad mini 2 (still a good budget buy). Go for the £399 64GB version if you can, though.

ALTERNATIVE: Apple iPad Air 2 The 9.7in option is still slim and light, also has Touch ID and Apple Pay, and the range of apps beats Android. £399 from www.snipca.com/18139

PHONE

Apple iPhone 6s
£539 from www.snipca.com/18240
Tested: Issue 461

It may look like the 2014 model, but this update is stronger and faster, with a higher-resolution camera, time-saving 3D Touch features and an excellent screen. The bigger 6s Plus has better battery life.

ALTERNATIVE: Moto X Play Motorola's fun phone may be plasticky, but it runs Android 5 smoothly. The screen, camera and battery life are all big pluses. £280 from www.snipca.com/17934

DIGITAL CAMERA

NEW ENTRY

Panasonic Lumix FZ330
£449 from www.snipca.com/19441
Tested: Issue 462

A wide-angle lens to capture scenes, a longer fast lens for flattering portraits and a telephoto for distant subjects – the 12-megapixel FZ330 gives you them all in one unit, with a fixed high-quality zoom lens.

ALTERNATIVE: Sony A5000 This neat compact system camera (CSC) lets you choose different lenses from Sony's range for more creative possibilities. £249 from www.snipca.com/15854

E-READER

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£110 from www.snipca.com/17776
Tested: Issue 458

With a new high-resolution screen, the affordable Kindle lacks only automatic brightness adjustment and page-turn buttons (you have to swipe the screen). It's great value as long as you're happy to buy your books from Amazon.

ALTERNATIVE: Kobo Glo HD As good as the Paperwhite, but with more storage, and slightly more compact, this is the independent e-reader to pick. £110 from www.snipca.com/19158

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SECURITY SOFTWARE

Kaspersky Internet Security 2016

£19.99 from www.snipca.com/17874

Tested: Issue 437

Kaspersky Internet Security 2016 has won our past seven antivirus tests. Compatible with Windows 10, the 2016 edition is available at an exclusive reader discount on our Software Store. Go to the link above for a one-device licence, or buy a three-device licence for just £39.99 at www.snipca.com/17903.

ALTERNATIVE: Avast Free Antivirus Almost as good as Kaspersky, but sometimes blocked legitimate software. Free from www.snipca.com/16493

PHOTO EDITING

Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 6

£104 from www.snipca.com/16952

Tested: Issue 453

Lightroom is the professional's choice for managing and tweaking photos, including raw files from DSLR cameras. If you need Photoshop for more advanced editing, get both on the Adobe CC Photography Plan for £8.57 a month (www.snipca.com/19283)

ALTERNATIVE: Xara Photo & Graphic Designer 11 For all-round design and drawing plus photo filters, this affordable app has a lot to offer. £50 from www.snipca.com/19280

SMART TV

Samsung UE40H5500

£398 from www.snipca.com/19160

Tested: Issue 446

A 40in 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, playing media files stored on a NAS or USB stick and plenty of HDMI ports.

ALTERNATIVE: Sony KDL-43W755C Excellent image quality, stylish looks and a 43in screen. £429 from www.snipca.com/18153

PC MONITOR

NEW ENTRY

AOC Q2778VQE

£215 from www.snipca.com/19416

Tested: Issue 468

It comes with no extras, such as built-in speakers or a USB hub, but this 2560x1440 panel gives you a full 27in screen with excellent contrast and colour accuracy at a very reasonable price. It's a little laggy for gamers, but there's no ghosting on motion.

ALTERNATIVE: Dell UltraSharp U2414H This 1920x1080, 24in screen has a stand that can switch to portrait mode. Colour accuracy is excellent. £188 from www.snipca.com/18207

ROUTER

Trendnet TEW-812DRU

£122 from www.snipca.com/19437

Tested: Issue 427

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

ALTERNATIVE: Linksys WRT1900AC More expensive, but even faster and with loads of features too. £180 from www.snipca.com/14950

NAS

Synology DiskStation DS215j

£135 from www.snipca.com/16187

Tested: Issue 449

This two-drive NAS enclosure has it all – fast performance, easy configuration and plenty of extra features. Its only flaw is that installation is a little fiddly – but if you want quality network storage, then this is the obvious choice.

ALTERNATIVE: Synology DS414j A four-drive NAS that's generally fast, easy to set up and use. £242 from www.snipca.com/16707

HOMEPLUGS

Devolo dLAN 1200 Triple+ Starter Kit

£119 from www.snipca.com/15369
Tested: Issue 444

Devolo's latest HomePlug adapters are the fastest we've ever seen. They're well designed too, with a passthrough socket so you can still power another device and the design should avoid skirting boards and other obstacles.

ALTERNATIVE: D-Link PowerLine AV2 1000HD Gigabit Starter Kit Fast (speeds of up to 1000Mbps), much cheaper and very easy to set up, but the lack of a passthrough socket is frustrating. £43 from www.snipca.com/17836

WEB-DESIGN

Xara Web Designer Premium 11

£70 from www.snipca.com/16955
Tested: Issue 453

This visual web-design program makes creating sites more like laying out a document than writing HTML code, and sites can be responsive, meaning they look right on both big and small screens without extra work. A basic version is also available for half the price.

ALTERNATIVE: Incomedia WebSite X5 v12 Evolution It may feel a little basic, but this straightforward program outputs efficient HTML code and responsive pages £38 from www.snipca.com/19440

COMPETITION

Win a **Wacom Bamboo Sparksmartpen**

Winner of a 4-star 'Great Pick' award in Issue 467, the new Wacom Bamboo Spark converts your handwriting into editable text on your PC or tablet. You simply press a button in the middle of the case to send each finished page to your device. Once that's done, you can access what you've written using online services such as Dropbox or Evernote, or Wacom's own service. To enter, email your address to cacomp@dennis.co.uk with 'spark' in the subject line by midnight 16 February.

The Wacom Bamboo Spark is on sale now for £119 from www.wacom.com. For more information on Wacom's products visit www.wacom.co.uk, and follow @wacomeurope on Twitter.

MULTIFUNCTION PRINTER

Canon Pixma MG6650

£88 from www.snipca.com/17334
Tested: Issue 455

It may look like something that James Bond would have to defuse, but this low-cost, all-in-one printer is an excellent choice. Running costs are reasonable too – buy the XL cartridges and running costs work out at 7.7p per colour page or 2.4p for black and white. This makes it very affordable to run.

ALTERNATIVE: Canon Pixma MX495 It's slow, and black ink is pricey, but this cheaper MFP has a paper feeder and fax too. £41 from www.snipca.com/17174

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Crucial BX100 1TB

£342 from www.snipca.com/19159
Tested: Issue 445

A blindingly fast, high-capacity SSD at a lower price than ever before. If you've been put off buying a SSD because of the cost, then now is finally the time to take the plunge.

ALTERNATIVE: Samsung 850 Pro 256GB An even faster SSD, but it's much more expensive per gigabyte. £110 from www.snipca.com/16498

SECURITY CAMERA

Y-cam HomeMonitor HD

£135 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. £88 from www.snipca.com/15275

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Workshops & Tips

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

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38 Compress over 180 file types
40 Defrag your PC faster than ever
42 Add new tools to Windows Clipboard

PLUS

43 Readers' Tips
44 Phone & Tablet Tips
46 Make Windows Better
47 Make Office Better
48 Secret Tips For... Activity Indicator

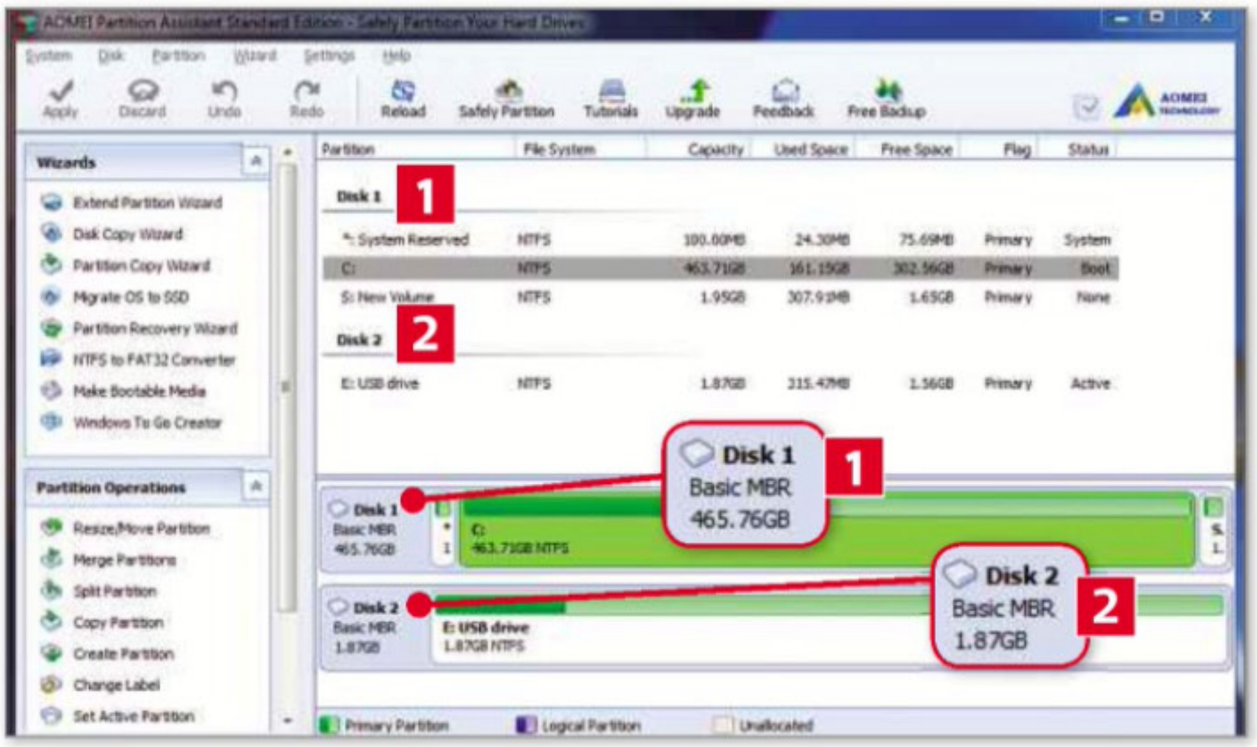
Clone a hard drive in Windows 10

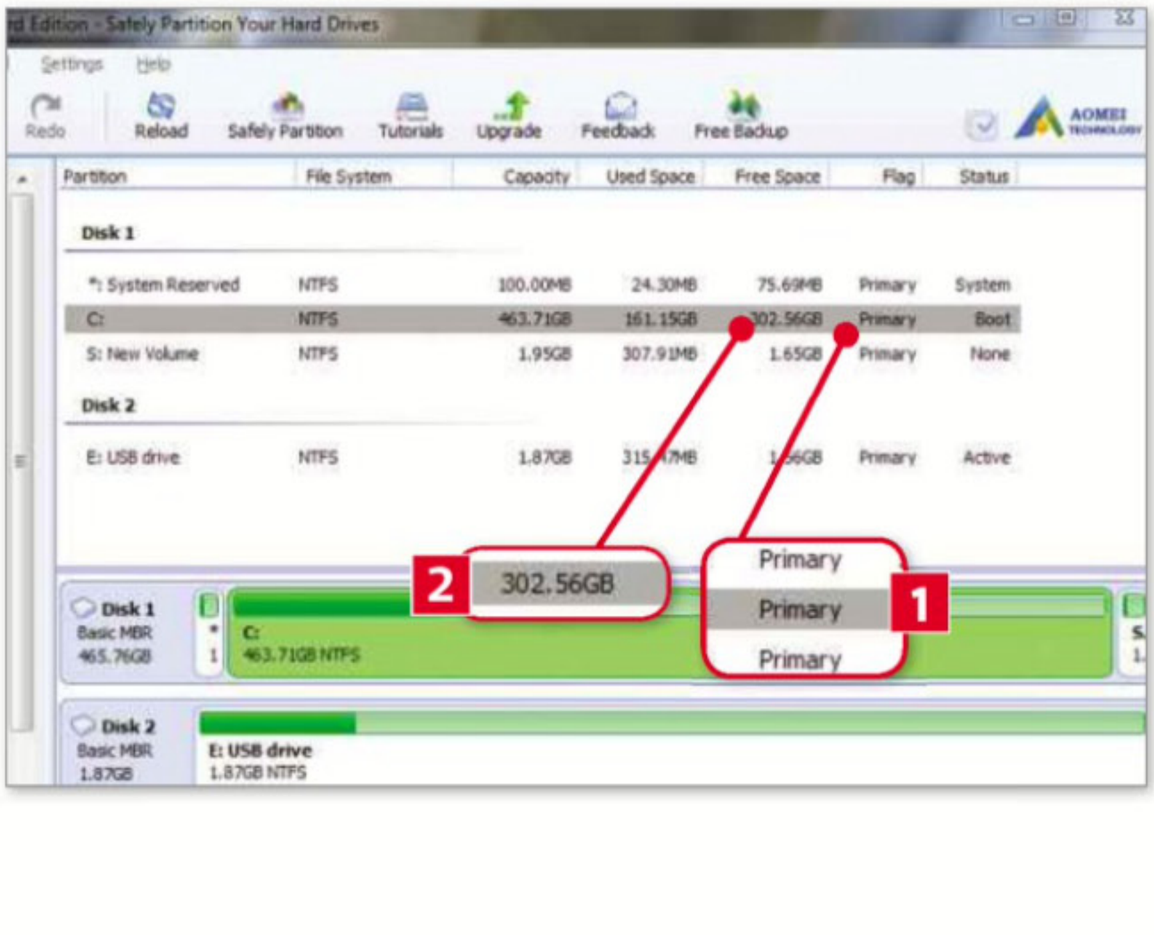
What you need: AOEMI Partition Assistant Standard Edition; Any version of Windows (XP to 10) **Time required:** 1 hour

Looking for a great way to back up your data? Then you should try AOMEI Partition Assistant – a fantastic free program that lets you clone all the partitions on your PC's hard drive. You can then copy this to another partition on your PC or to an external drive.

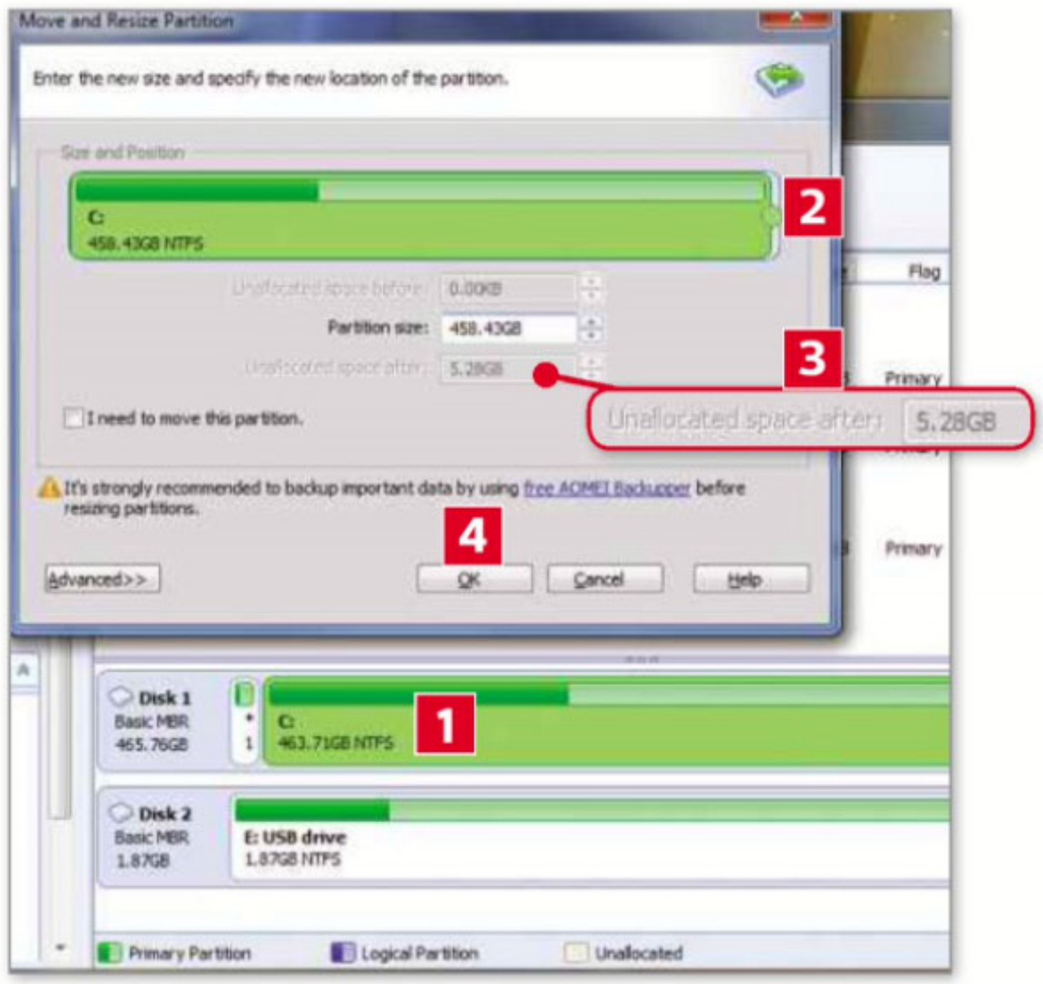
The program also makes it easy to move data to a new PC and lets you create a bootable drive. It offers another great feature that's only otherwise available to users of the Enterprise version of Windows 10 (see Step 8).

STEP 1 To install AOMEI Partition Assistant Standard Edition (APASE), go to www.snipca.com/19442 and click the green Download Freeware button. Click the downloaded setup file, Run, Yes, then OK. Now click Next, accept the agreement, then keep clicking Next until you see an option to click Install. Click Install, then Finish to run the program. You'll see a breakdown of all your PC's hard drives (including any external ones you've connected) and their partitions. Disk 1 **1** represents partitions on your PC and Disk 2 **2** represents external ones.

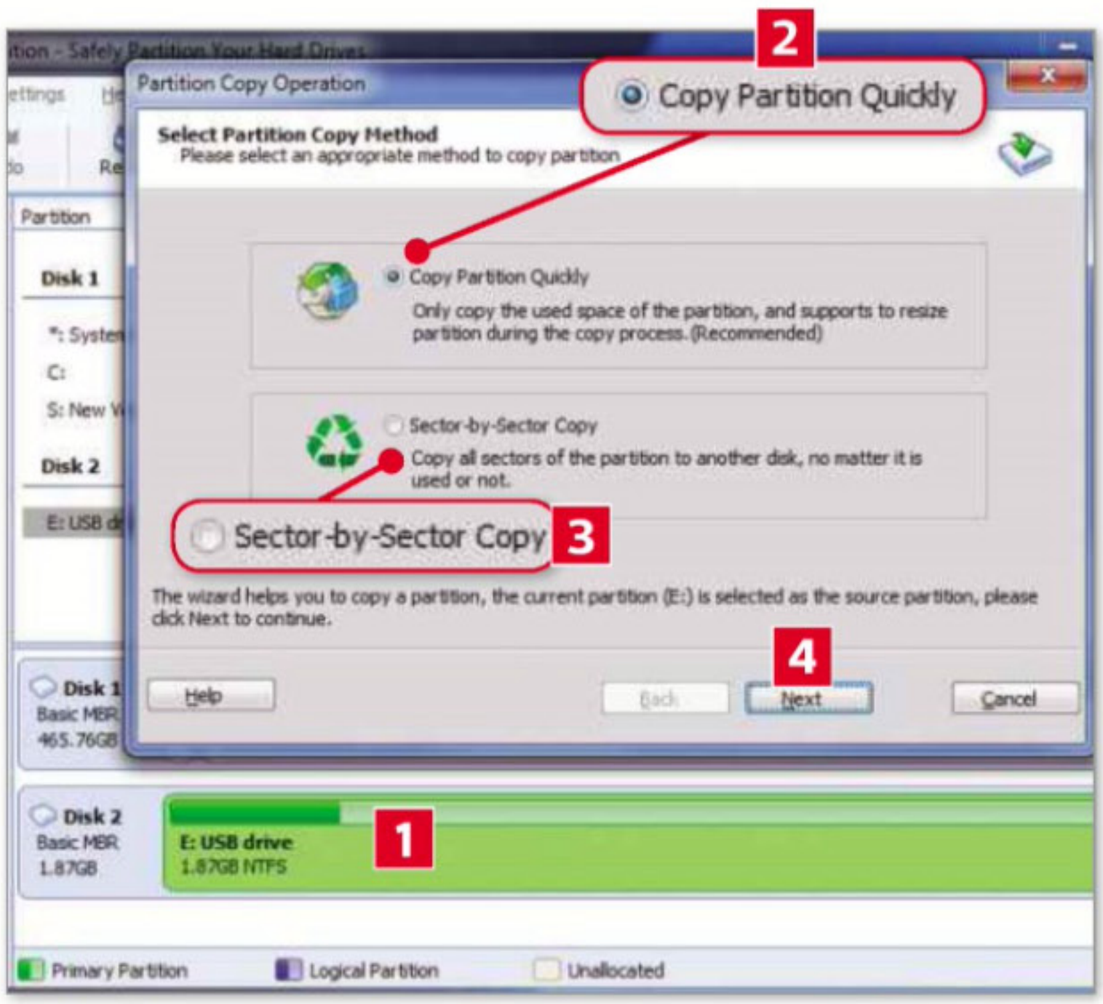




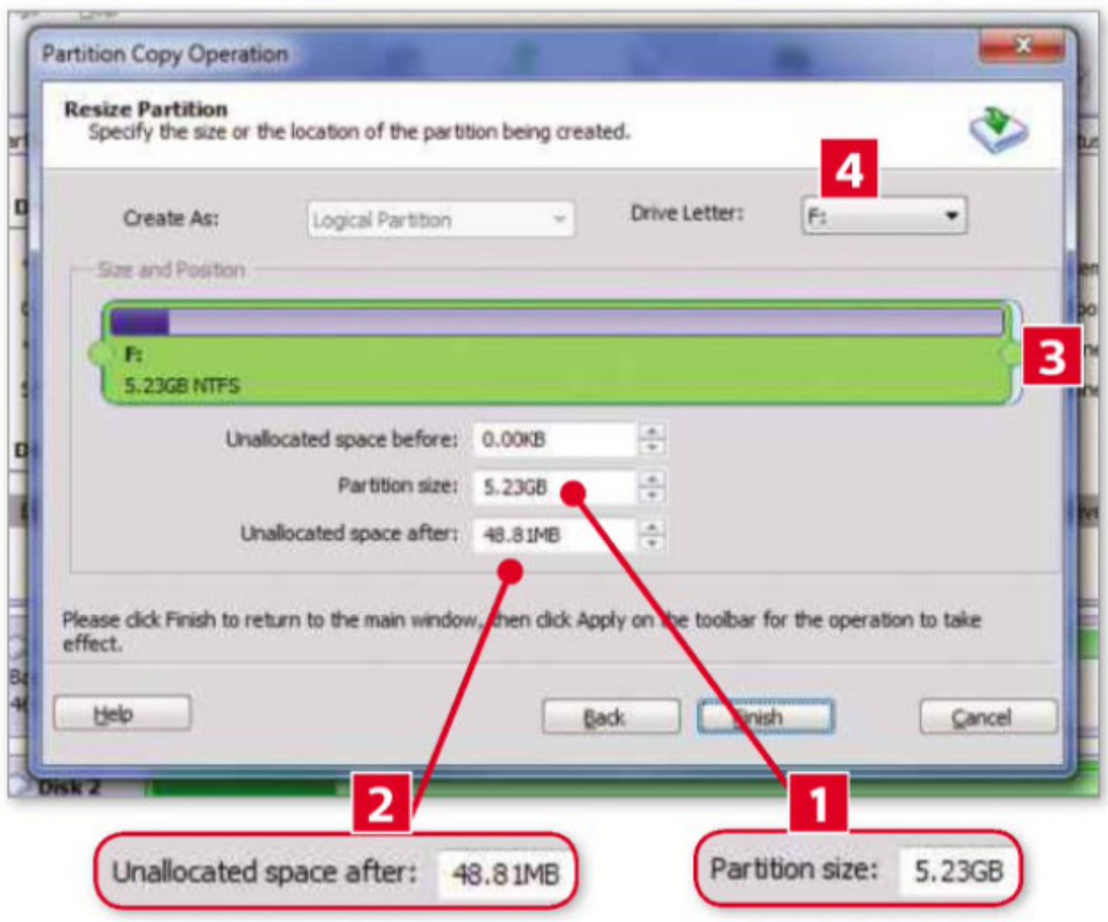
STEP 2 Any partitions listed as Primary **1** contain data. Before cloning any of these, you need to create a new empty partition by borrowing unallocated (free) space from one of your Primary partitions. You can then clone all the data from whichever partition you want to this new one. Before creating this new partition, check in the Free Space column to see which partition has the most unallocated space. For this example, we'll create a new partition using 5GB of the 302.55GB of free space on our C: partition **2**.



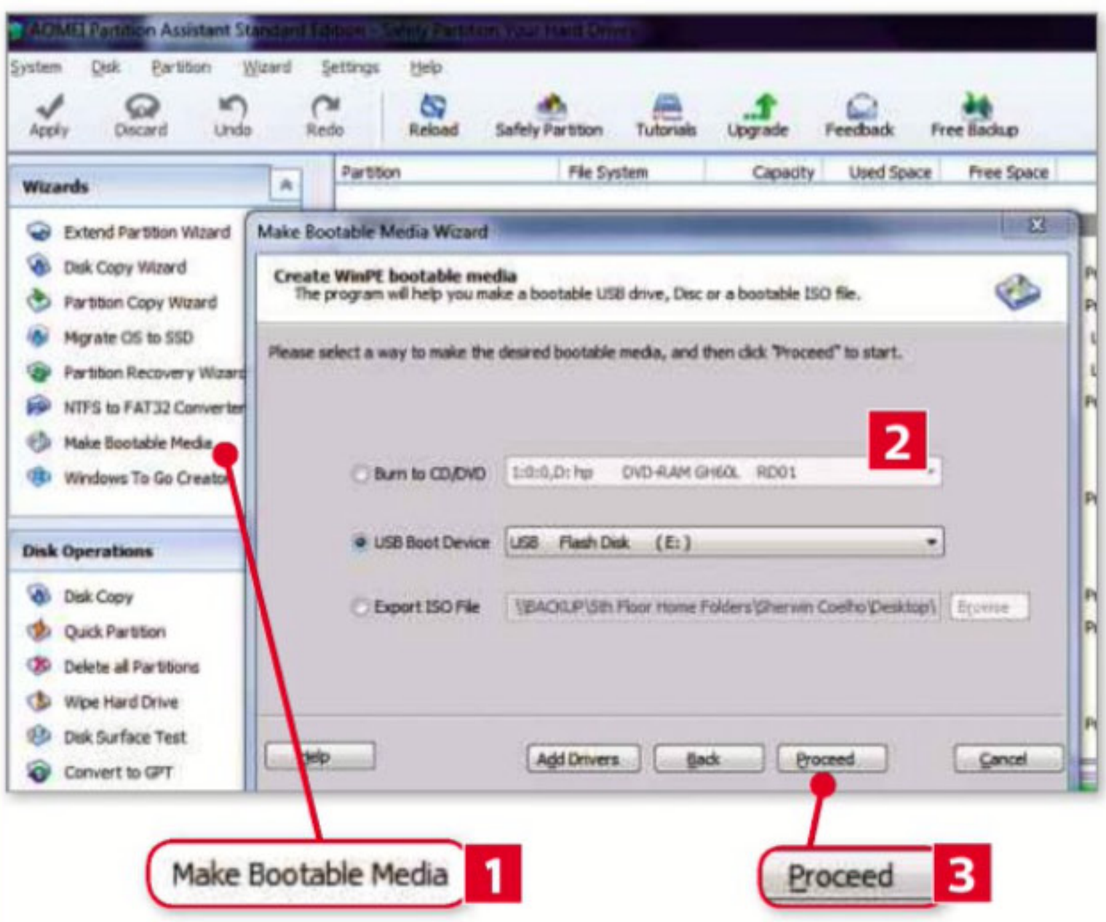
STEP 3 Right-click the C: partition 1, then click Resize Partition. Now click and drag the slider to the left 2 until you see the amount of space you want 3, then click OK 4. After doing this, you'll see a new Unallocated partition added to your hard drive within APASE. This partition will be represented by an asterisk (*), not a letter. You won't be able to access it at this point because it hasn't been created yet.



STEP 4 Now right-click the partition on your PC that you want to clone 1, then click Copy Partition. You'll see two options. Copy Partition Quickly 2 is faster because it only copies data to the new partition. 'Sector-by-Sector Copy' 3 copies the entire partition (including any unused space) and therefore takes longer. Select the method you want, then click Next 4. Now select your new, unallocated partition (with an asterisk), then click Next.

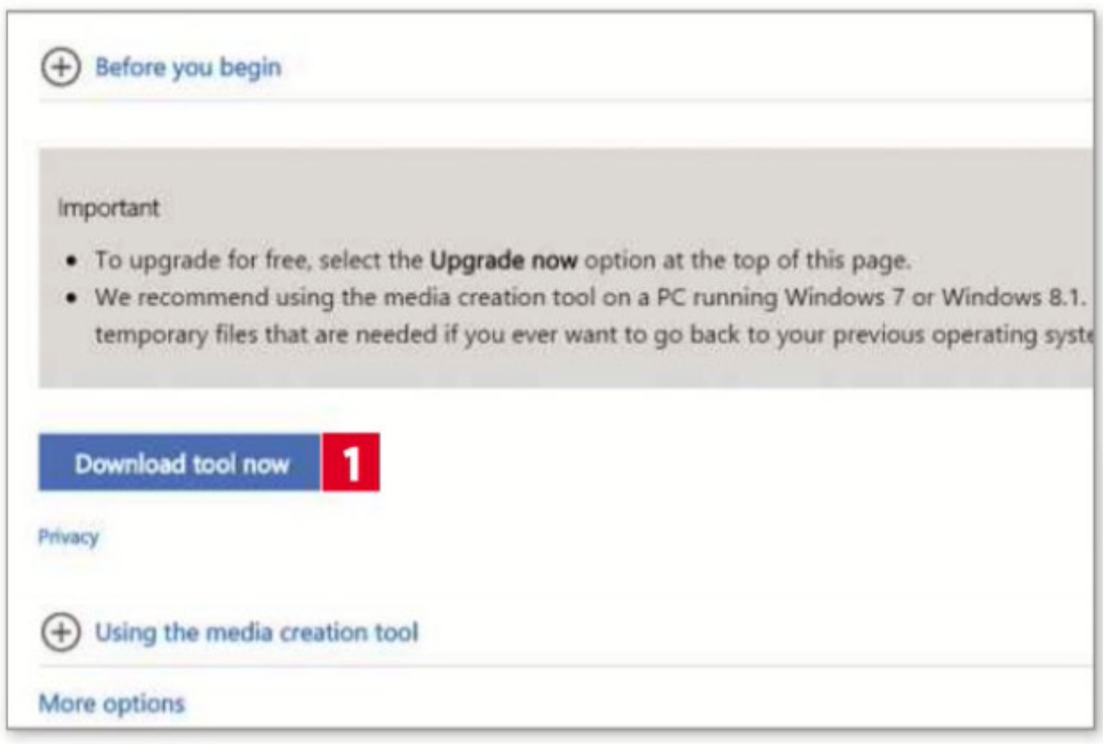


STEP 5 You'll see a breakdown of your new partition size 1 and how much unallocated space you'll have after cloning your selected partition to it 2. Drag the partition size slider to the extreme right 3. Use the Drive Letter dropdown menu to assign a letter to your new partition 4, then click Finish. You'll be taken to the main screen of APASE. Click Apply at the top left, then Proceed, and Yes to begin cloning. Click OK when that's done.



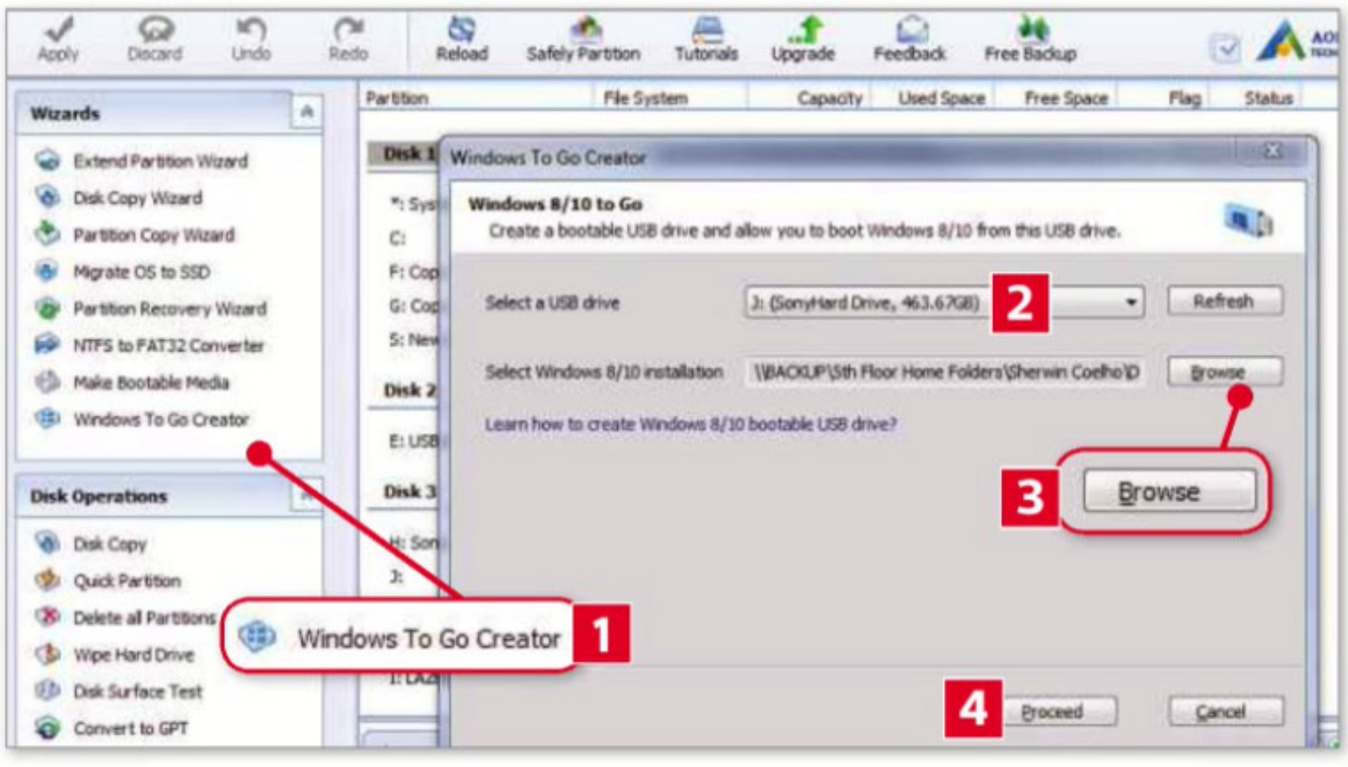
STEP 6 Another useful APASE feature is the ability to create a bootable rescue disc. This can be a life-saver if your PC crashes or gets corrupted and you can't boot it. If this happens, you can then boot your PC using the rescue disc, retrieve any precious data and reformat your PC. To create a bootable disc, you'll need an blank CD, DVD or USB stick. Insert your chosen media into your PC, click Make Bootable Media 1, then click Next. Now select the device you inserted 2, then click Proceed 3. After that's done, click Finish. Now whenever your PC fails to boot, insert your bootable disc/USB stick.

STEP 7 Switch on your PC, then look for the screen that tells you which key to repeatedly press to enter your PC's BIOS (it's F2 or F11 on most PCs) and press that key as your PC launches. Once in the BIOS, navigate to the 'Boot menu' 1 using the arrow keys. It's set to Hard Drive by default. Using the arrow and Enter keys, set it to CD-Rom Drive or Removable Devices (depending on what device you used) 2. Now exit the Boot menu and restart your PC. You'll now be able to boot into your PC and access your files.



STEP 8 The Enterprise version of Windows 10 has a feature called Windows To Go, which lets you create a Window 10 USB drive you can use to boot into Window 10 on any Windows PC. APASE has a brilliant tool that lets anyone create a bootable Windows 10 USB drive (you won't need the Enterprise version of Windows 10). You *will* need a Windows 10 ISO file and an empty USB drive (at least 12GB). Download the ISO file from www.snipca.com/19447 (scroll to the bottom of the page, then click 'Download tool now' 1).

STEP 9 Click the downloaded Media Creation Tool, Yes, then Accept. In the 'What do you want to do?' section, select 'Create installation for another PC', then click Next. On the next screen, untick 'Use the recommended options for this PC' 1. Now set the Language to 'English (United Kingdom)' 2, set the Edition to Windows 10 3 and Architecture to '64-bit' 4. Finally, click Next, then OK. Now select 'ISO file', click Next again, select where you want to save the file on your PC, then click Save. It's a huge file (around 3GB), so it can take a while to download.



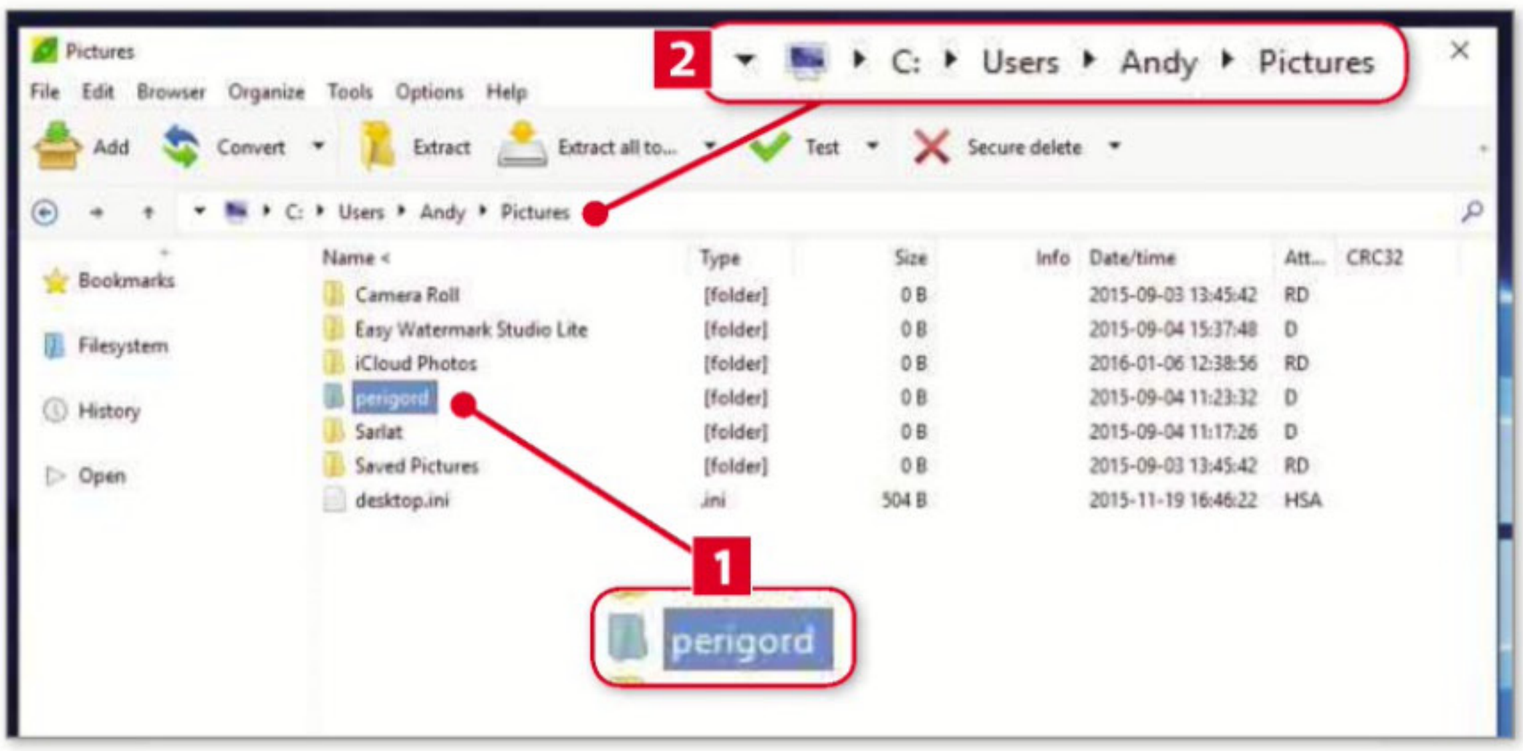
STEP 10 In APASE, click Windows To Go Creator 1. Now set 'Select a USB drive' to the USB drive you want to use 2. Next, click Browse 3, navigate to your downloaded Windows 10 ISO file, click Open, then OK. When you're done, click Proceed 4, then Yes to begin creating your bootable drive. Click OK after that's done. Now whenever you want to use Windows 10 on another Windows PC, simply restart that PC, insert this USB drive into it, enter the PC's Boot menu and change your boot order from Hard Drive to Removable Devices (see Step 7). ●

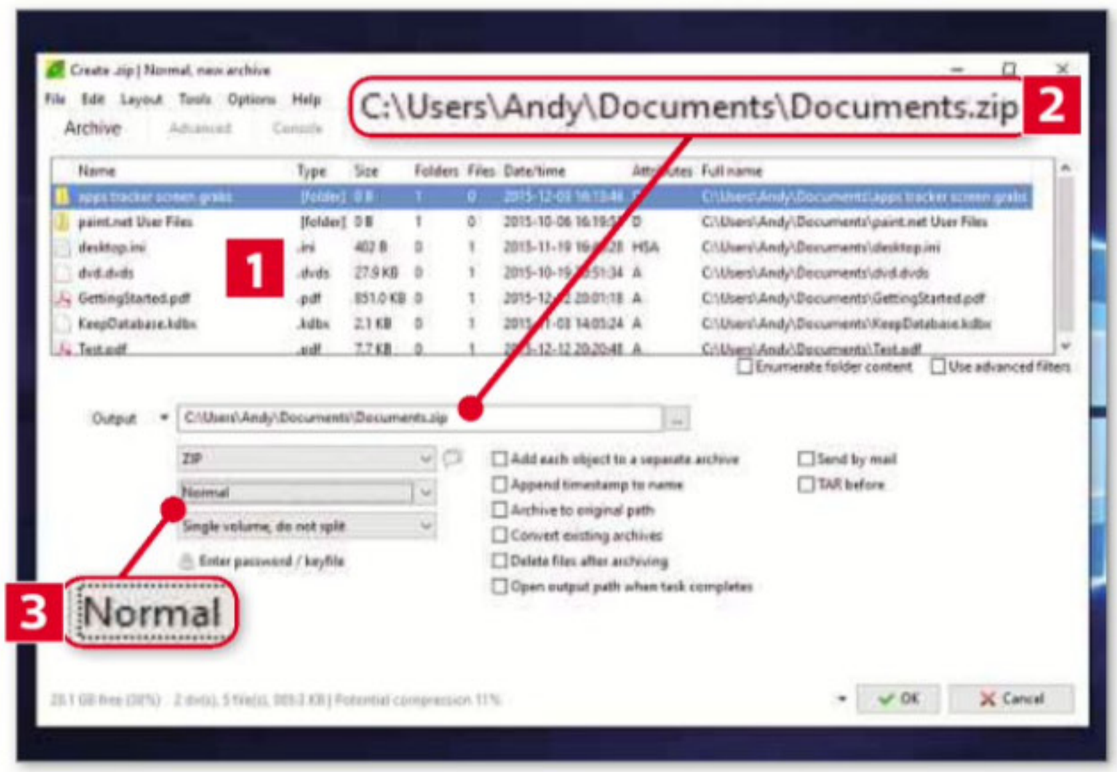
Compress over 180 file types for free

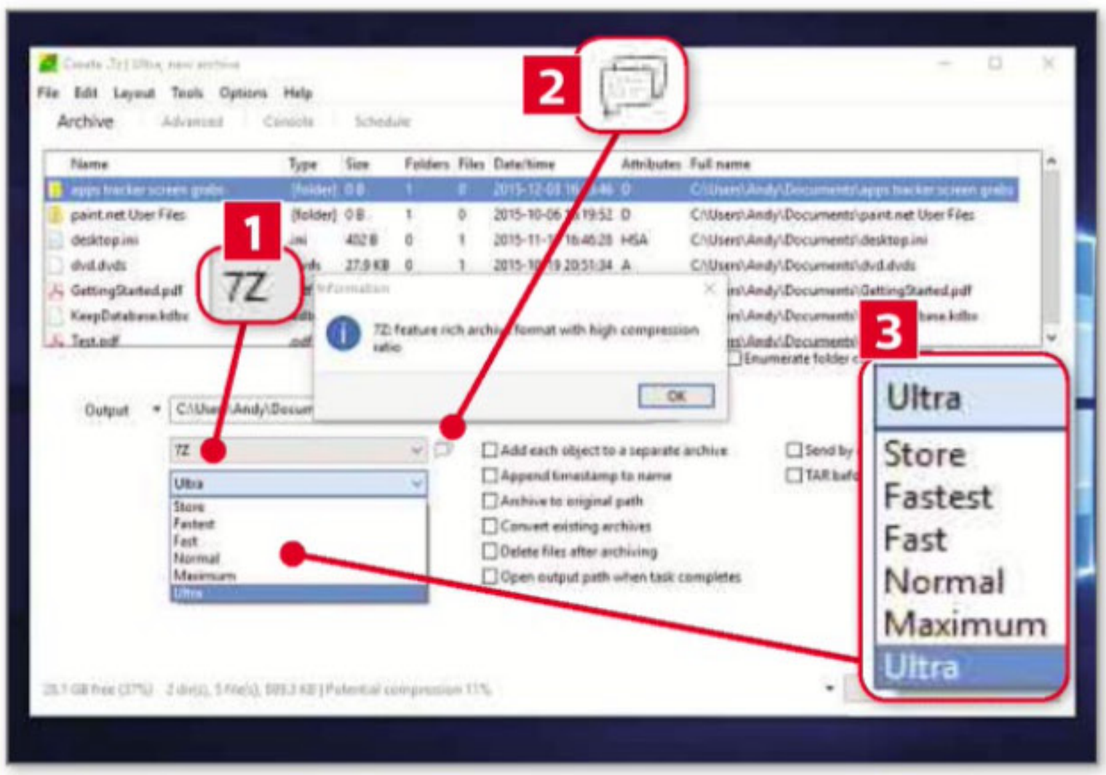
What you need: PeaZip; Any version of Windows (Vista to 10) **Time required:** 15 mins

The new version of PeaZip (5.9.1) can now compress 180 types of file (previously 150), making it significantly more versatile. This means you'll always get the appropriate compression for the particular activity you're doing. For example, if you want someone to open a file, but you don't know which operating system they run, use a standard ZIP file. However, if you want the minimum file size possible, try the superior 7z format, while the RAR format adds powerful encryption to keep your files secure. There's more information on some of the available formats and what they're good for on PeaZip's site: www.snipca.com/19322.

STEP 1 Download and install the software from www.peazip.org. Here, we're running Portable PeaZip, which is very similar to the installable version. The main difference being that it doesn't add an option to your right-click menu to add files to archive folders, which would be handy if you do a lot of compressing. PeaZip's main window is like an Explorer window, so you can double-click folders 1 to open them and use the trail 2 to help you navigate. Find the folder containing the files you want to compress.

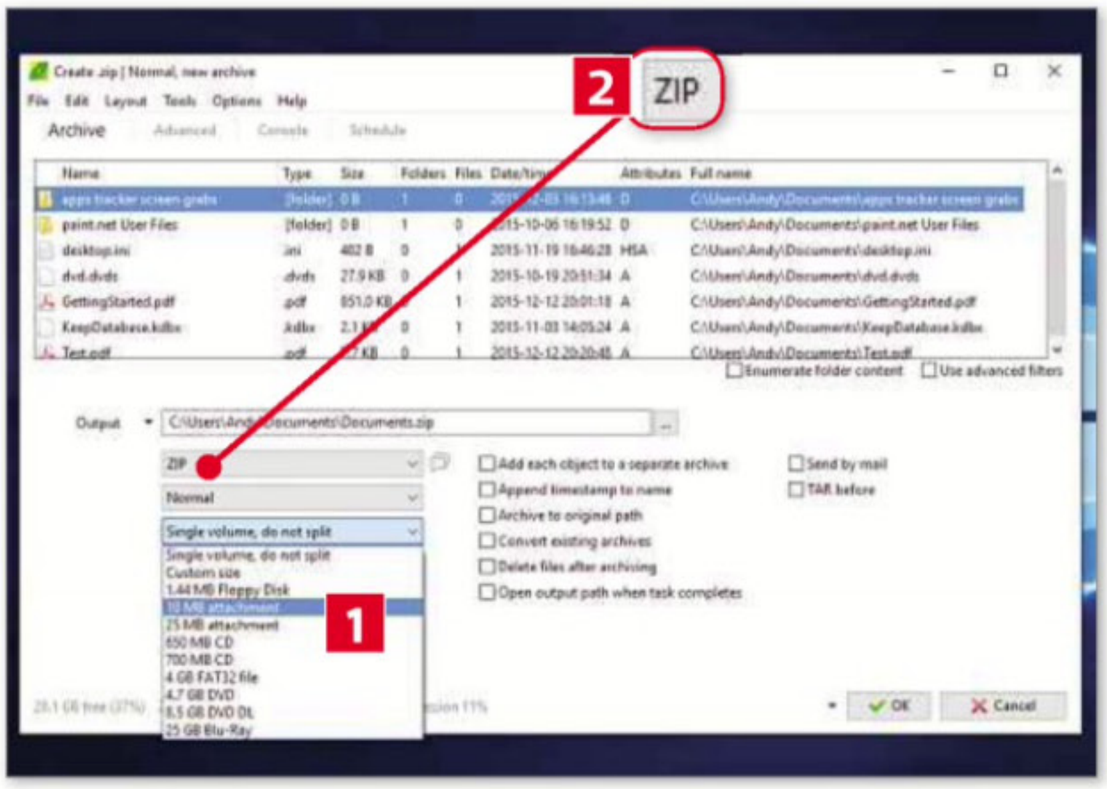




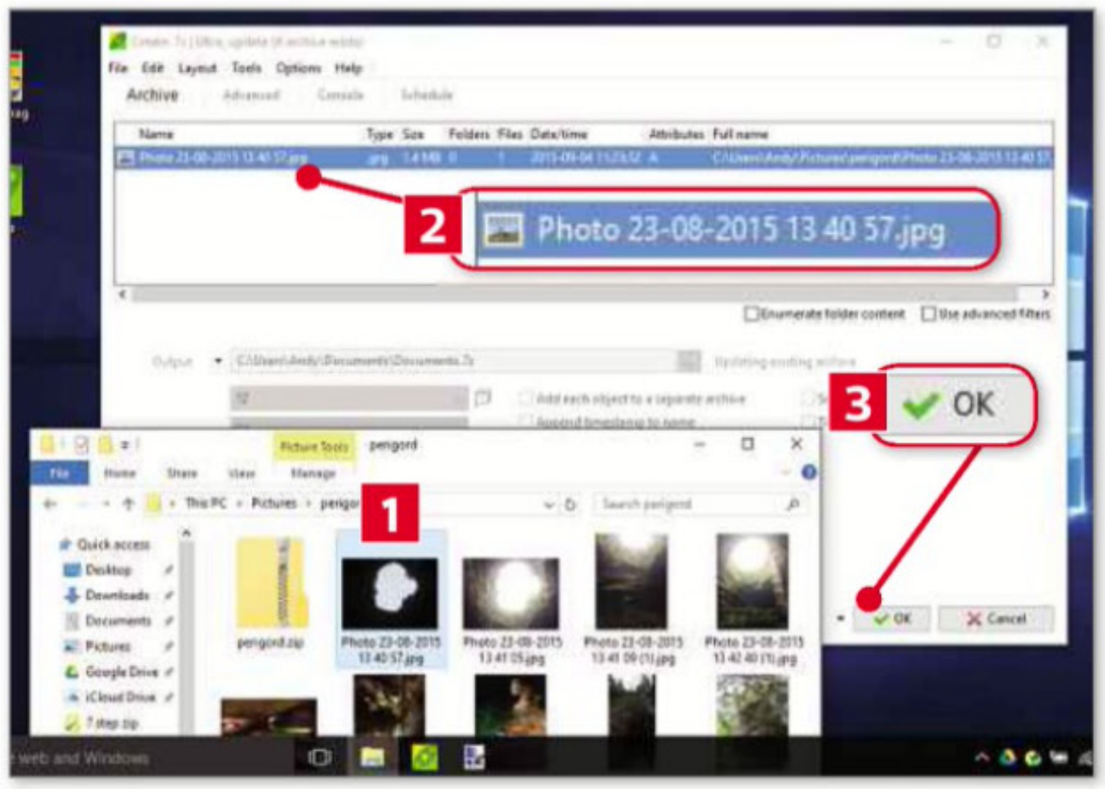


STEP 2 In the Archive tab select all the files you want to compress. Press Ctrl+A to select all, or left-click each with the Shift or Ctrl button held down to select multiple files. Once you've selected the files, click the Add button. A new window will open, letting you configure the type of file you want to make. The files to be included are listed 1. By default, the archive will be created in the same folder 2. Select the type of file you want to create and the compression level - ZIP and Normal 3 will create the most compatible file type. Click OK to create it.

STEP 3 Choosing a different compression format can improve the process. Reducing the amount of compression, for example, reduces the time it takes to create the file. Select a format from the list 1, then click the speech bubble 2 to see a window explaining the benefits of your chosen compression format. The dropdown menu below that lets you choose the level of compression. The menu differs slightly for each format, though maximum speed is usually at the top and maximum compression at the bottom 3.

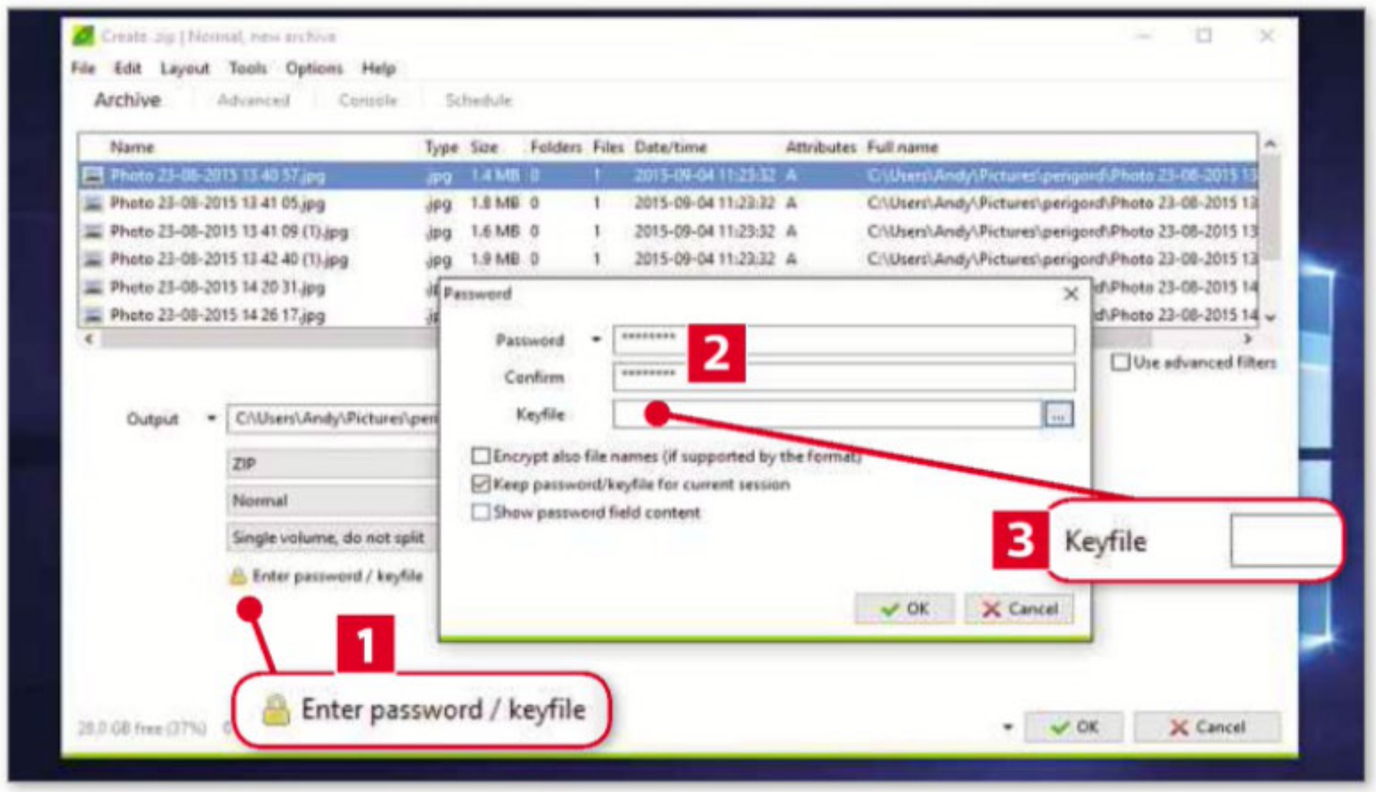


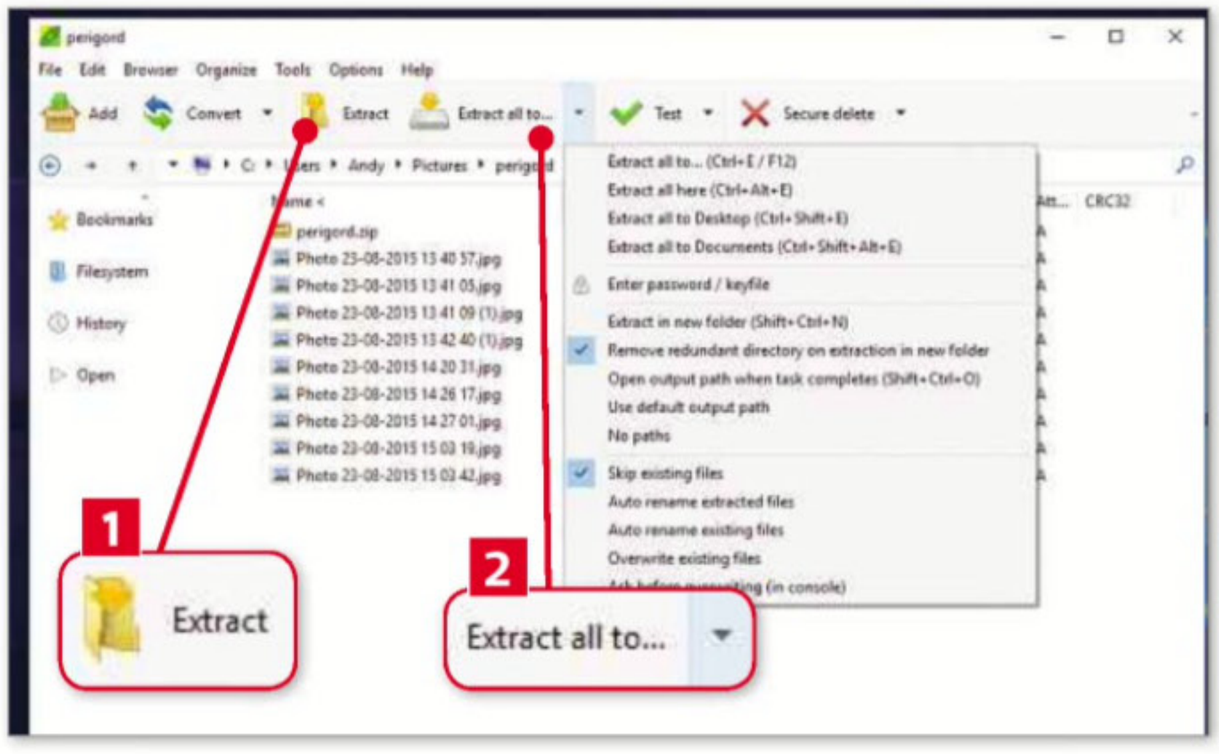
STEP 4 There are other sections of the Archive window worth exploring. The 'Single volume, do not split' dropdown menu can store compressed files across multiple storage media, which can be used to put a huge file on multiple CDs or DVDs, or to spread a file across a number of email attachments 1. Also look in the compression type menu 2 for 'Self-extracting' options. These create a compressed file with an EXE extension, so anyone you send it to can simply double-click it to extract the files, even if they don't have the compatible software normally required to open that type of file.



STEP 5 You don't have to create a new zip file if all you want to do is add a file to an existing archive. Find the archive in the main PeaZip explorer window and double-click it to see the files within. Click the Add button, then navigate to the file(s) you'd like to add to the archive 1. Drag it (them) to the PeaZip window 2. Click OK 3 and the files will be compressed into the existing archive.

STEP 6 To create a password-protected or encrypted archive, select the files you want to protect then click the Add button. Click the 'Enter password/ keyfile' link 1. Type and confirm a password 2. Depending on the file format you've chosen, other people may still be able to see the files within the archive. However, they won't be able to open them unless they have compression software, such as PeaZip, that lets them enter your password. To make your files even more secure you can also use a keyfile 3. You'll need this to re-open the files in the zip file.





STEP 7 PeaZip is also useful for opening compressed files that other people have sent to you. If you install the software you can simply right-click a file and choose from a range of options. If you're using the portable version, browse to the file you want to open and highlight it. To copy its contents into the current folder, simply press the Extract button 1. For more control, so you can choose where to put the files, enter any passwords or rename files as they're extracted, then click the arrow next to 'Extract all to' 2.

Defrag your PC faster than ever

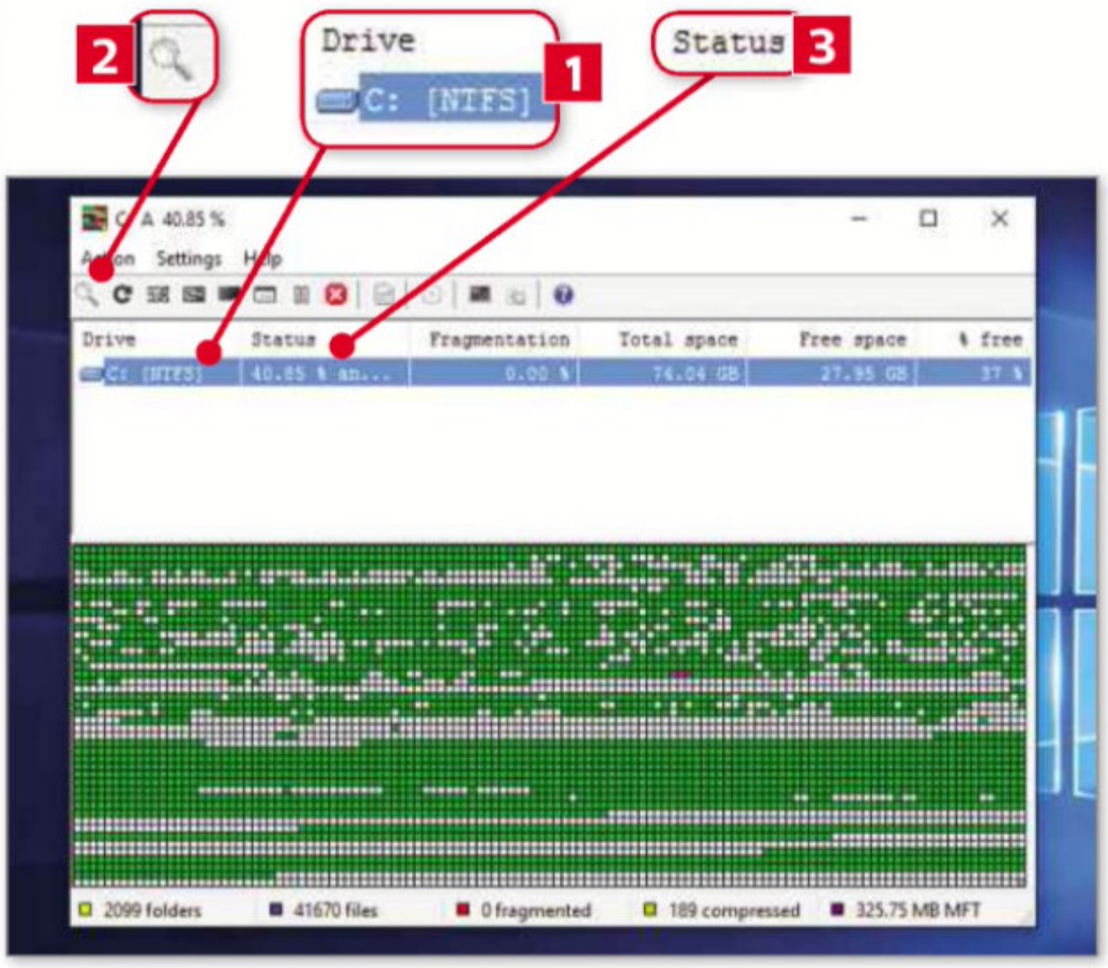
What you need: PC with standard hard drive; Any version of Windows (XP to 10)
Time required: 30 mins

Hard drives store vast amounts of information across a number of thin platters. Over time this data gets spread across the platters as it is written, deleted and rewritten – this process of fragmentation slows down your PC.

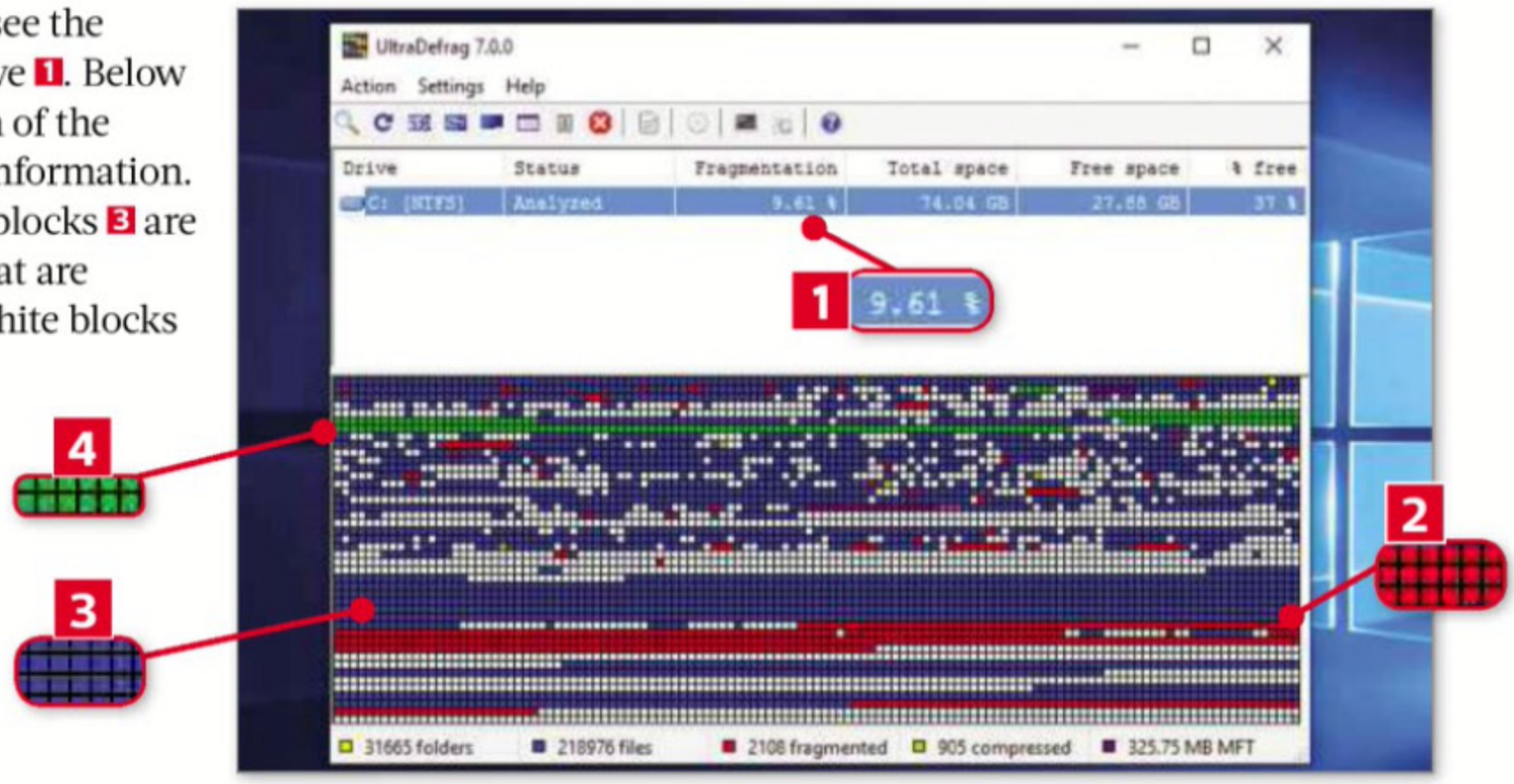
Defragmenting (or defragging) rearranges your data in a more logical way, so your PC can find content quicker. The biggest problem with defragging is that it can take a while time to perform. However, the latest version of free software UltraDefrag (7.0) does this faster than any program we've used before. A word of warning: use it only on hard drives, not on SSDs.

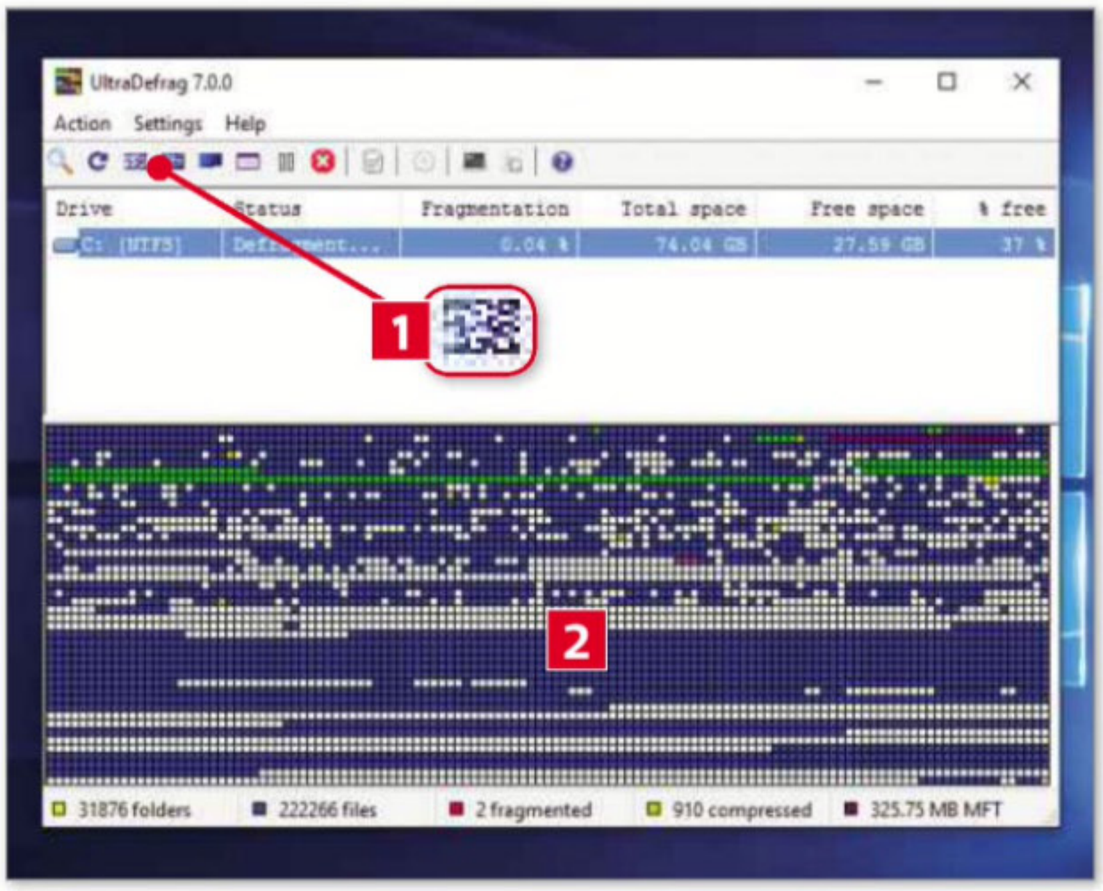
STEP 1 Go to www.snipca.com/19324 and download the correct version (32bit or 64bit 1) of UltraDefrag for your PC. The installable version is free of adware and unwanted extras, but take care during the Choose Components section of the installation. There are no nasty surprises here, but for privacy reasons you may want to turn off 'usage tracking', which shows UltraDefrag how you use your PC. During installation you can also choose to install icons to your Start menu and Desktop. If you'd prefer a portable version, they are available too 2.

STEP 2 First check whether your drive needs defragging. If you have more than one drive or partition installed, make sure you've selected the correct one 1. Choose Analyze from the Action menu, then click the magnifying glass icon 2 (or press F5). You can check the progress of your scan in the Status column 3. It will take a few minutes to complete.

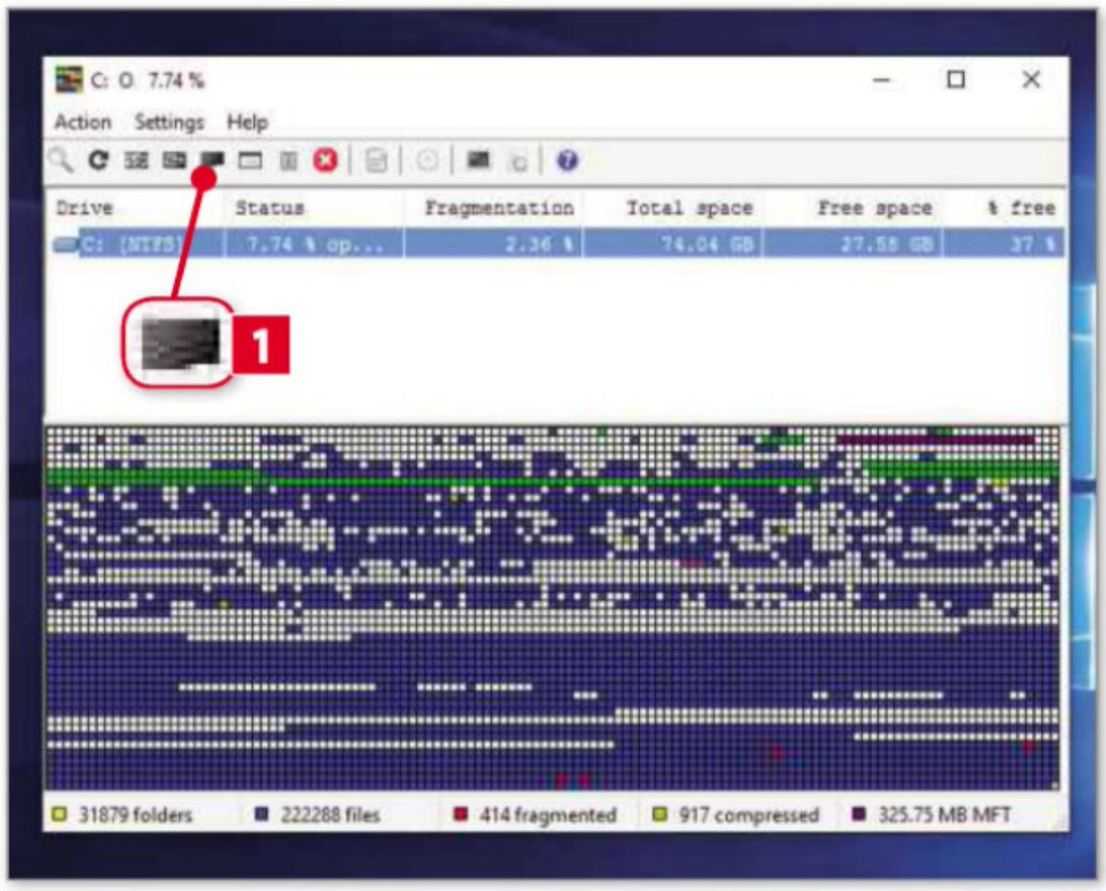


STEP 3 Once the analysis has finished you'll see the amount of fragmentation on your drive 1. Below there's also a graphical representation of the drive, colour-coded to provide more detailed information. Red blocks 2 represent fragmented files, blue blocks 3 are not fragmented and green blocks 4 are files that are locked by the operating system (see Step 7). White blocks represent free space.

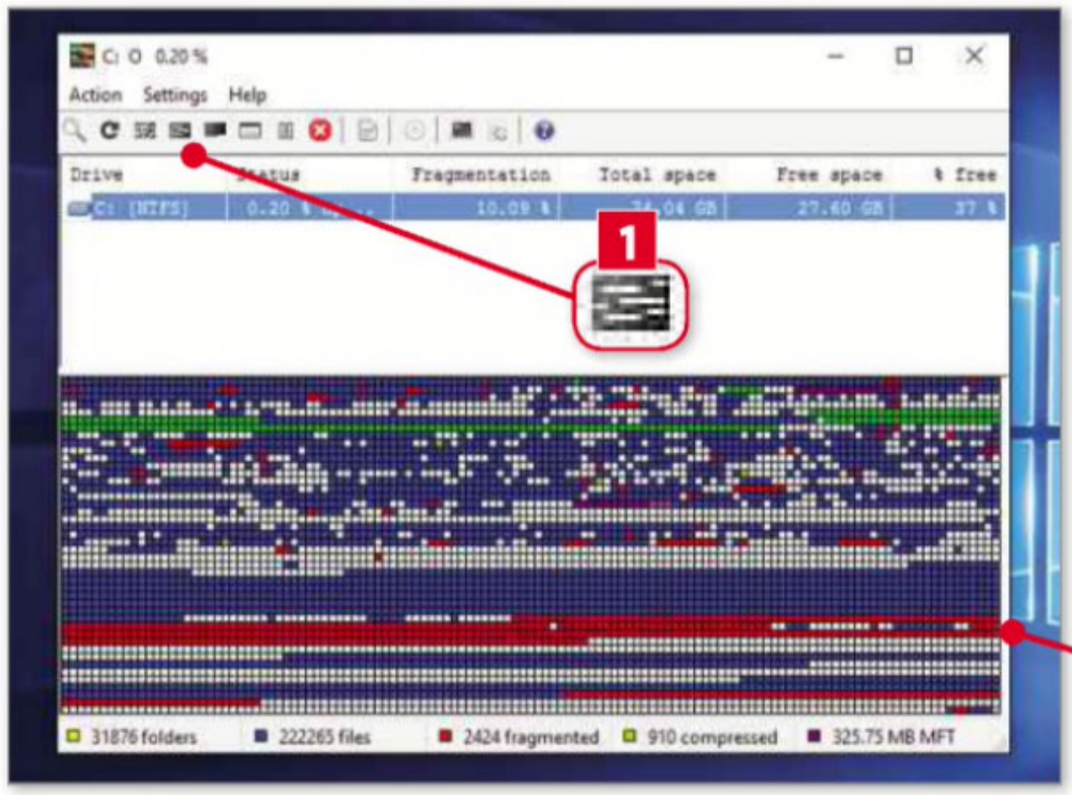




STEP 4 A standard defrag is very quick (about five minutes on our PC). Click the Defragment button 1 (or press F6) and you'll see the fragmented files being rearranged. When it's finished, most of the coloured blocks should have turned blue 2 (signifying that they're no longer fragmented), though you might find there's still a lot of empty (white) space between them.

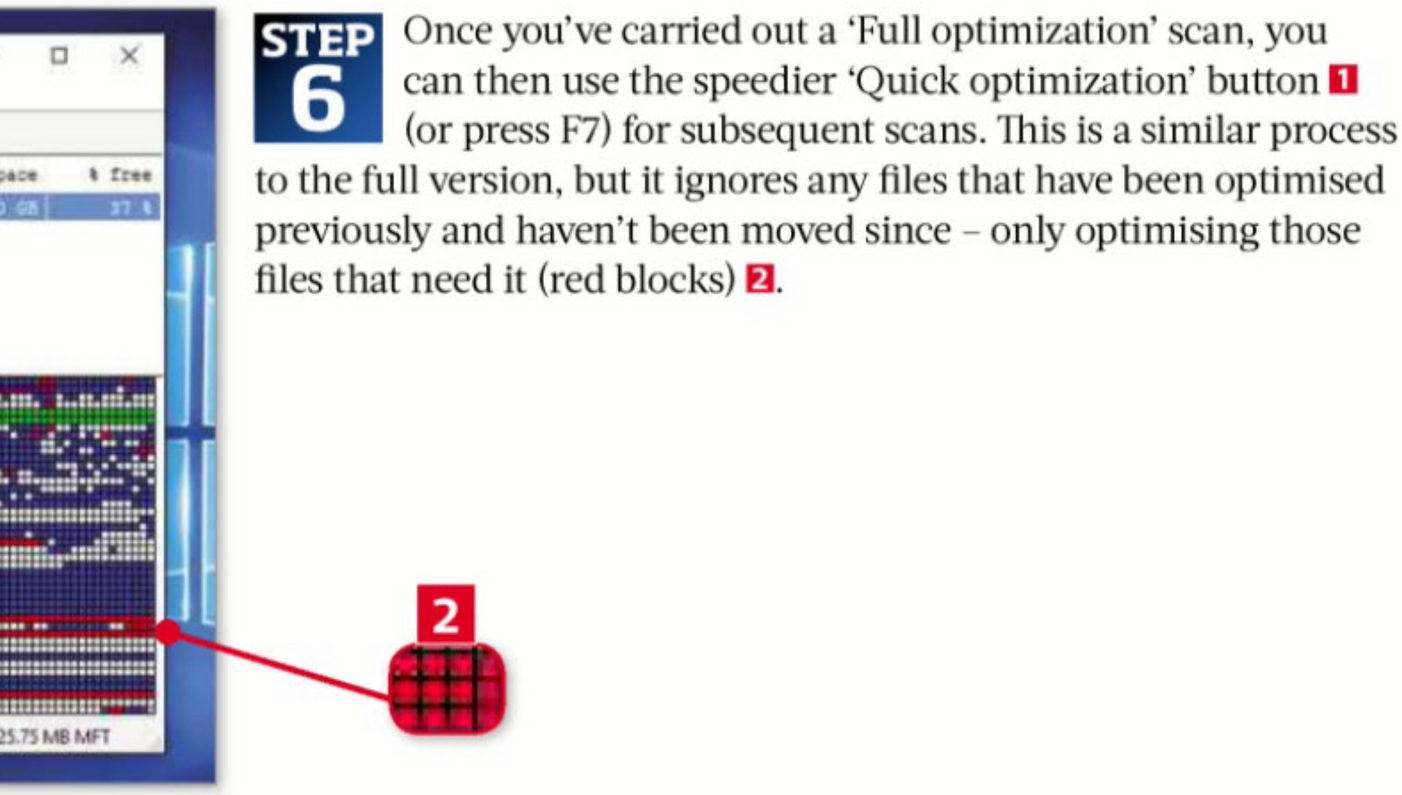


STEP 5 For a more thorough defrag click the 'Full optimization' button 1 or press Ctrl+F7. This rearranges files on the drive by moving those at the beginning of the drive to the end. It then moves the files back to the beginning in a more logical arrangement, letting Windows find files more quickly.



STEP 6 Once you've carried out a 'Full optimization' scan, you can then use the speedier 'Quick optimization' button 1 (or press F7) for subsequent scans. This is a similar process to the full version, but it ignores any files that have been optimised previously and haven't been moved since – only optimising those files that need it (red blocks) 2.

STEP 7 A full defrag can take a long time if your drive is severely fragmented. It's a good idea, therefore, to defrag overnight, telling your PC to shut down when it's finished. To do this, click the Action menu, 'When done' 1, then select an option from the sub-menu. Choose Shutdown 2, for example, to close your PC when the optimisation has completed. If you have a lot of green (locked) blocks and they look like they might be fragmented, consider running a boot-time scan, which can defrag locked files. From the Settings menu, choose 'Boot time scan', Enable, then restart your PC. When it's finished, disable it again or it will launch the next time you restart your PC.

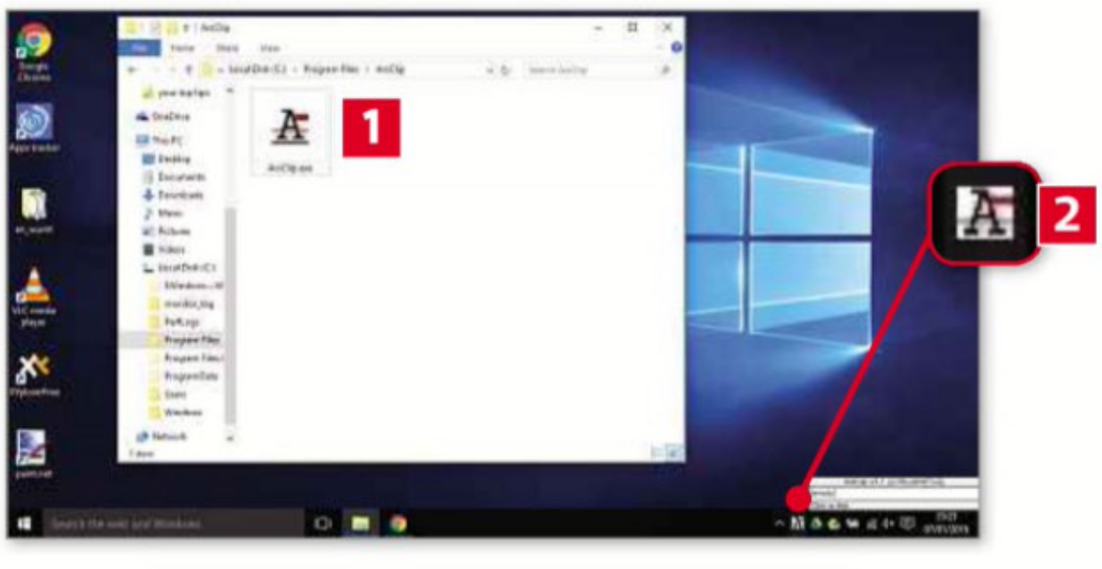


Add new tools to Windows Clipboard

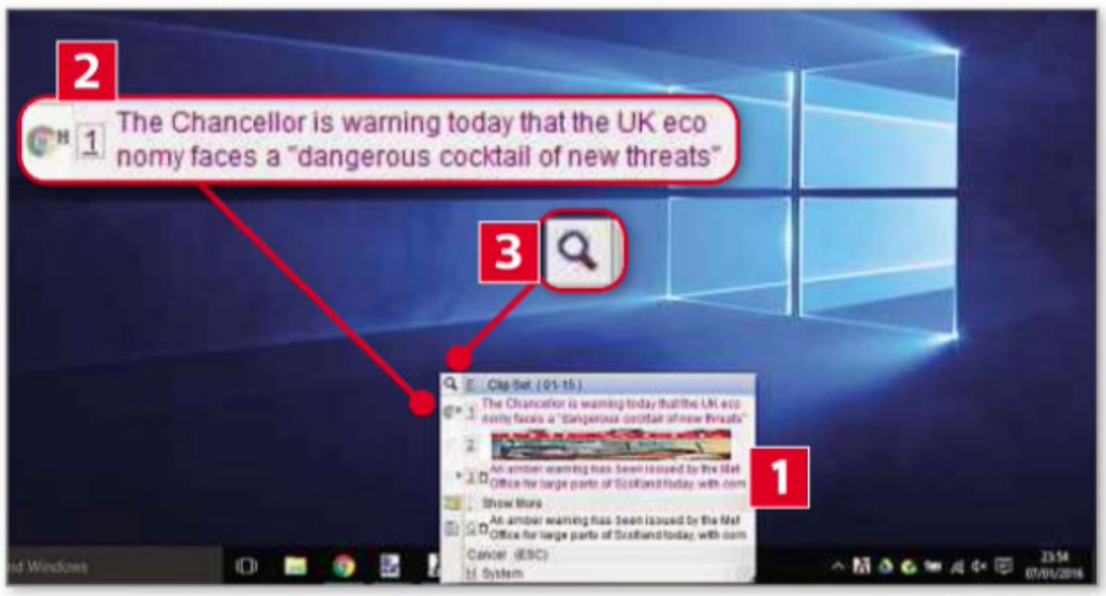
What you need: Any version of Windows (XP to 10) **Time required:** 10 minutes

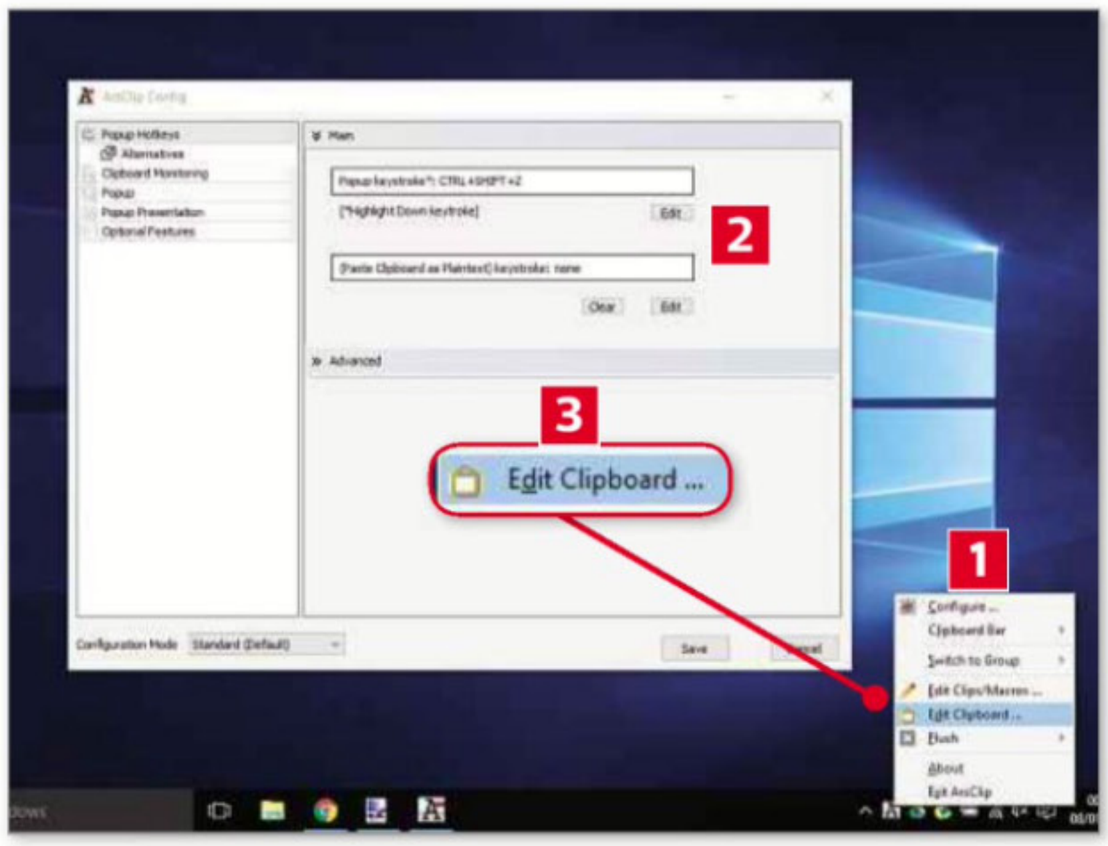
ArsClip is a handy little program that makes the Windows Clipboard more powerful. It lets you go back through your clipboard's history and find previous copied items (clips), even if you've copied other items in the meantime. You can then use quick and simple keyboard shortcuts to paste these into your documents or other programs. There are lots of ways you can customise the program to make it easier to use. We'll explain how to add extra tools and create keyboard shortcuts.

STEP 1 Download the portable version of ArsClip from www.snipca.com/19297 (double-click the green download zip link). Ignoring the setup program in the zip folder, extract the .exe file and put it somewhere safe, from where you can run the program. We found it wouldn't run from the Desktop so we made an ArsClip folder within the Program Files folder and ran it from there 1. An icon 2 is added to your Taskbar's notification area. Hover over it and you'll see the contents of the clipboard in a pop-out box.



STEP 2 Press Shift+Ctrl+Z to bring up a window listing previous clips 1. Click a clip to select it, then paste it into any program using the standard Ctrl+V shortcut. Alternatively, if you press the number or letter next to a clip 2, it will automatically paste into the program you were using before you pressed Shift+Ctrl+Z. Click the magnifying-glass icon 3 to search the clips for specific words or letters. You can also rearrange the order of the clips by clicking and dragging the icons in the left-hand column of the window.





STEP 3 Right-click the icon in the notification area to bring up its menu 1. The Configure option launches the program's settings window 2, where you can select and change a range of options, such as the keyboard shortcut used to open its pop-up window. The right-click menu also has a selection of other tools you can choose from, such as Edit Clipboard 3. This opens a text editor that lets you make changes to copied text before pasting it elsewhere.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 17 Feb

- Edit your Registry without errors
- Change your passwords on hacked sites
- Improve your Windows 10 System Tray
- Stop webcam hackers watching you

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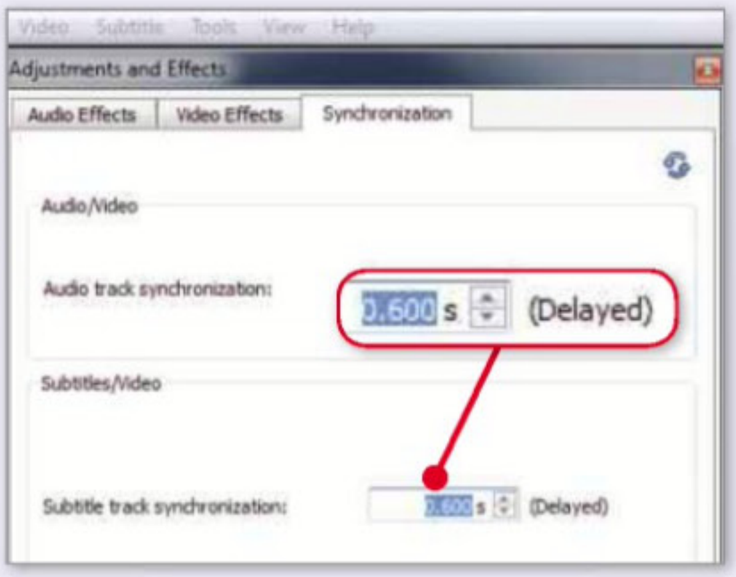
TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Fix out-of-sync subtitles in VLC media player

I am quite hard of hearing, a condition that has become more severe of late. I use a hearing aid but tend to rely on subtitles when watching videos on my computer. Thankfully, it's easy to download free subtitle files (which come in the standard .SRT format) for any movie or TV show using a simple Google search.

To load these subtitles into VLC (www.snipca.com/19204), which is my favourite media player, first play your video file, click Subtitle at the top of the VLC window, then click Add Subtitle File. Next, navigate to and select the downloaded subtitle file on your PC, then click Open. Once the file has loaded, your video will play with subtitles.



Sometimes, however, the subtitles are slightly out of sync with the video. Thankfully, there's an easy way to fix this. Simply click Tools at the top of VLC, then click Track Synchronization. Now look under the Subtitles/Video section in the window that opens. You'll see a small timer beside the 'Subtitle track synchronization' option.

Use the up or down arrows (see screenshot) to tweak when your subtitle appears on screen, then click Close. You may need to do this a few times to sync it precisely, but it's better than having premature or delayed subtitles ruin your experience.

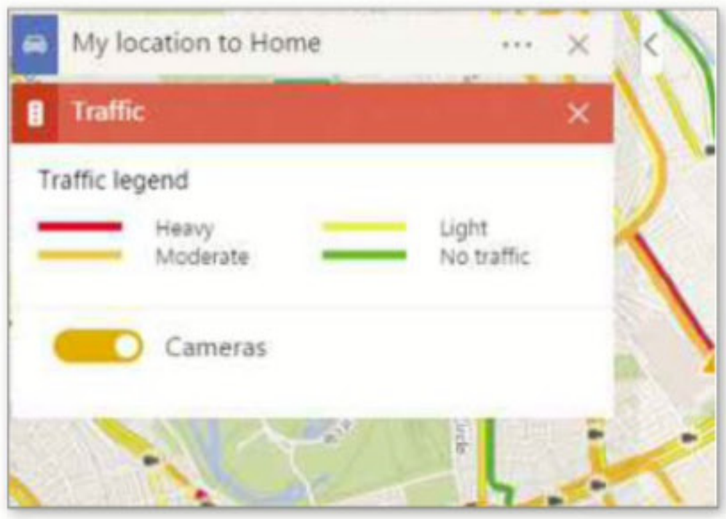
Ben Foreman

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

ONLINE NAVIGATION

Find out where traffic cameras are located on your route

I usually use Google Maps on my PC for directions, but I recently read about the new Bing Maps Preview (www.snipca.com/19362) and decided to give it a go. The directions icon (right-pointing arrow in a square to the right of the search field) lets you specify your location and destination.



One thing that impressed me is that it indicates where traffic cameras are located along your route – a feature you won't find in Google Maps. To see these, click the Traffic icon at the top (a box with three dots). You'll see colour-coded routes on your map that represent different levels of traffic build-up (see the 'Traffic legend' in the screenshot above). Click the Cameras slider to turn it on and you'll see exactly where traffic cameras are located along your route.

Frank Hunnicliffe

PC AUDIO CONNECTION

Fix sound problems when you connect your PC to your TV

On this page in Issue 462, reader Carl Foster explained how to fix audio problems when you connect your PC to your TV via an HDMI cable. Like Carl, I struggled to get any audio output from my TV after connecting the two, but I came across a very different solution to the problem.

So, you've connected your PC to your TV via an HDMI cable, and you can see your PC's screen on your TV but can't hear anything. Well, there are two ways to resolve this. Both methods require you to access the Sound section in your PC's Control Panel. To access this, open the Start menu, type sound, then click that option under Control Panel.

Carl suggested clicking the Digital Audio (HDMI) option in the list of Playback options, then clicking the Set Default button at the bottom. However, I couldn't see any Digital Audio (HDMI) option in my list. If you are having the same problem, simply right-click Speakers (which is the default option) and click Show Disabled Devices. You'll now see the Digital Audio (HDMI) option. Select it, then click Set Default. Sound will immediately transfer from your PC to your TV.

David Buxton

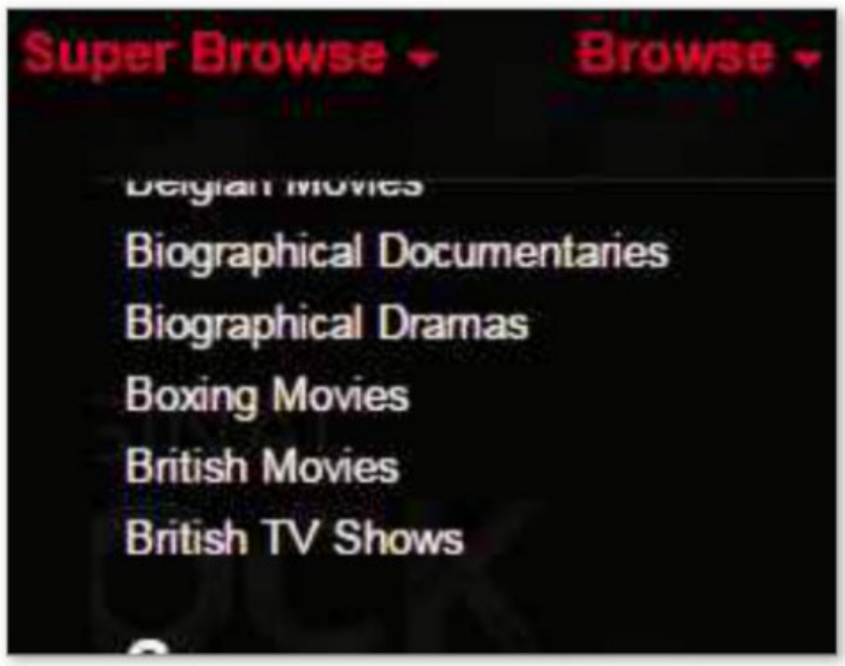
BROWSER EXTENSION

Access hidden Netflix film genres

Knowing what a self-confessed Netflix addict I am, a friend of mine told me about a new browser extension called Super Browse that lets you access hidden Netflix film genres within Chrome or Firefox. If you use Chrome, go to www.snipca.com/19359, click the blue 'Add to Chrome' button, then click 'Add extension'. In Firefox, go to www.snipca.com/19360, click 'Add to Firefox', then click Install.

Now go to Netflix (www.netflix.com) and log into your account. You'll now see a new Super Browse dropdown menu at the top left. Click to see to see a list of genres, arranged alphabetically (see screenshot below). Most letter sections contain at least 10 genres.

Russell Chance



Phone and Tablet Tips

Brilliant things to do on your device

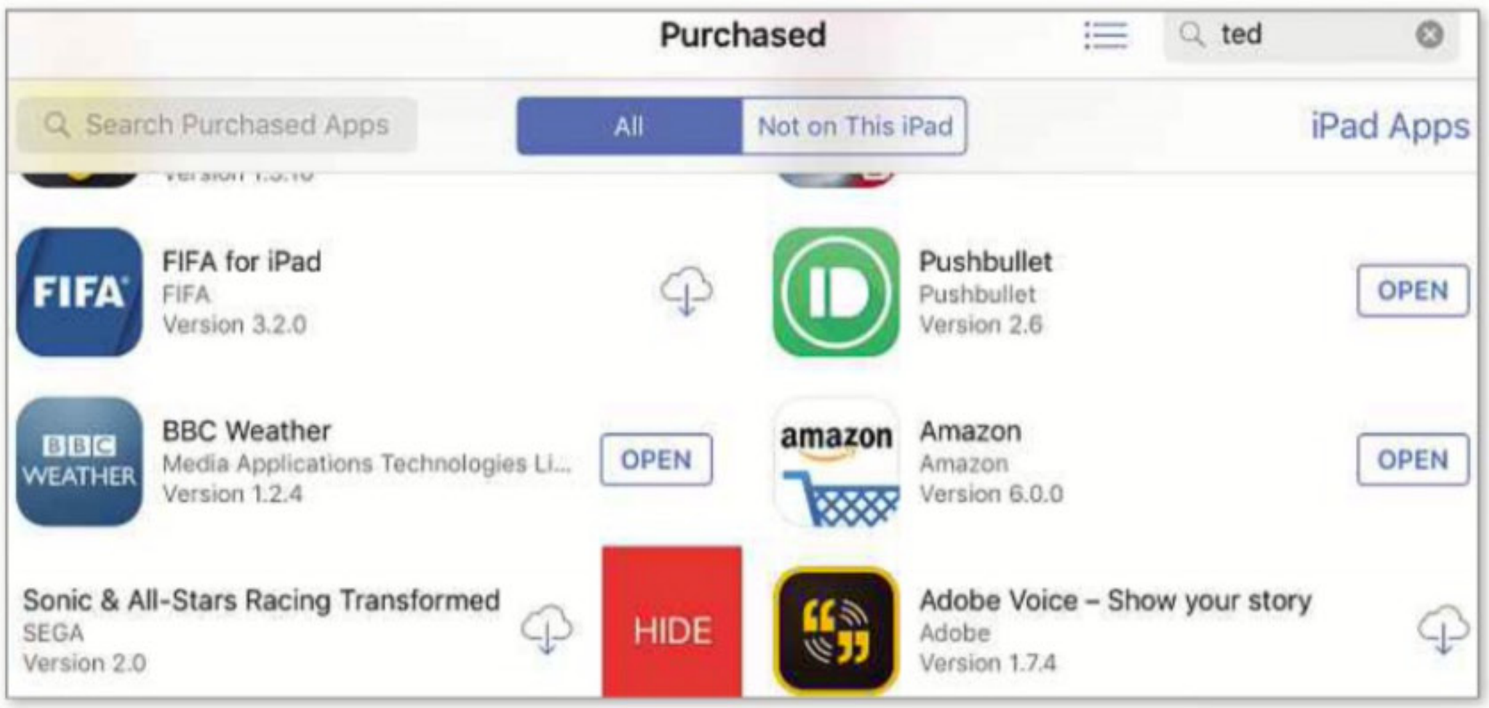
ANDROID & iOS

See all the apps you've ever installed on your device

If you've recently bought a new device (or reformatted an old one), then you probably went through the rigmarole of re-installing all your favourite apps. In the process, you may have forgotten some of the apps you had on your previous device. Thankfully, Android and iOS let you see every single app you've ever installed. If you've ever bought paid-for apps, you'll be able to install them on your new device for free.

If you use an Android device, open any browser on your PC, go to play.google.com/apps and log in using your Google account. You'll see all the apps you've ever installed. Scroll to the bottom and click Show More to see the full list. Any favourite app you come across, you can install via the Play Store on your device.

To see a list of all the apps you've ever installed on your iPhone or iPad, open the App Store on your device, then tap the Purchased option at the bottom. Apps installed on your device will have an Open option beside them, whereas older apps will have a Download icon (see screenshot above right). Tap the icon to install those apps. If you want to remove any apps from this list, simply swipe left across the app, then tap the Hide option that appears. Tap 'Not on This iPhone/iPad' at the top to only see the apps that are not on your current device.



iOS

View only emails that contain attachments

It's easy to add an Attachments section to your default Mail app. As its name implies, the section will only display emails with attached files. To do this, open your Mail app, then tap Mailboxes at the top left until you see all your sections (Inbox, Flagged and so on). Next, tap Edit, the box beside Attachments, then tap Done. In the Mailboxes section, you'll now see a new section called Attachments, where you'll find only emails with attached files.

ANDROID

Schedule a call within Skype

Microsoft recently updated its Skype Android app with a new feature that lets you schedule a Skype call with whomever you want. Apart from Skype (www.snipca.com/19422), you'll need to have the Outlook app (www.snipca.com/19431) installed because your call is saved as an event within Outlook and the recipient is alerted of your call via email.

To schedule a Skype call, open Skype, select the person with whom you want to schedule a call, tap the three dots at the top right, and tap 'Schedule a call'. You'll then be taken to the Events section within Outlook. Tap 'Starts at' to specify the date you want to schedule the call, select a date on the calendar, then tap OK. Next, tap the time option to specify the time, select the hour and minute, then tap OK again.

To set a notification reminder for the call, tap Notification at the bottom, then set how long before the call you want to be reminded about it. Next, tap the Skype slider to turn it on. When you're done, tap the tick icon at the top right.

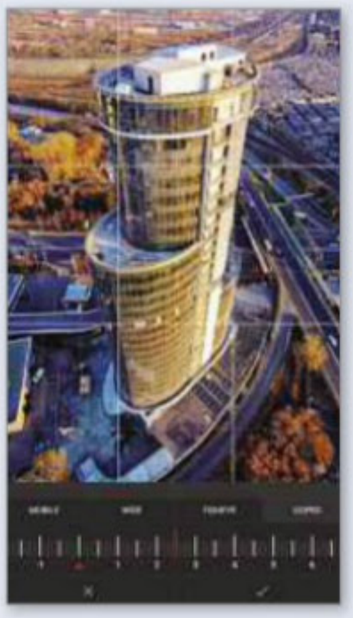
Best New Apps

What you should install this fortnight

SKRWT

Android: www.snipca.com/19377 **(67p)**
iOS: www.snipca.com/19378 **(79p)**

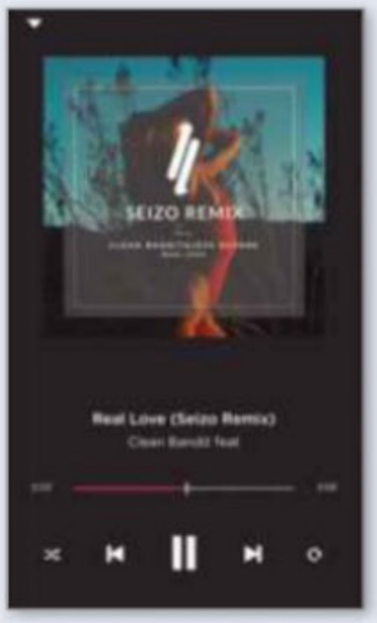
Almost all photo-editing apps let you crop, rotate, edit and add filters to your photos, but SKRWT has tools that make it stand out from the competition. It can easily fix blurry or distorted photos and its perspective-correction tool lets you alter photos that you've taken from the wrong angle.



Jukebox

Free
iOS: www.snipca.com/19379

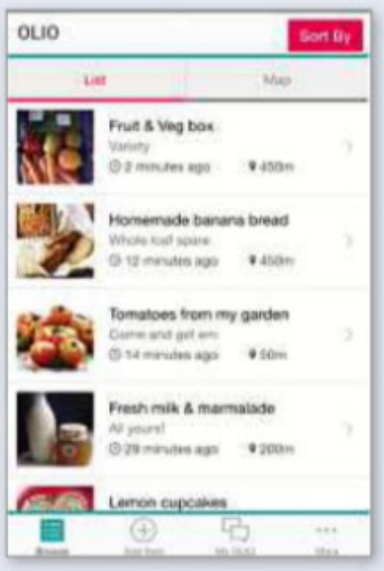
This app will appeal to people who prefer listening to their own music collection rather than to streaming services such as Spotify. Store your music in your Dropbox account, then grant Jukebox access to it and choose which tracks to download to your device. You can sort your music by album or artist and create playlists.



OLIO

Free
Android: www.snipca.com/19381
iOS: www.snipca.com/19382

OLIO's aim is to decrease food wastage in the UK. You upload a photo of food or drink items you don't want and provide your address. You can choose to sell it or give it away for free. The app only works within London, but it's quickly expanding to more areas.



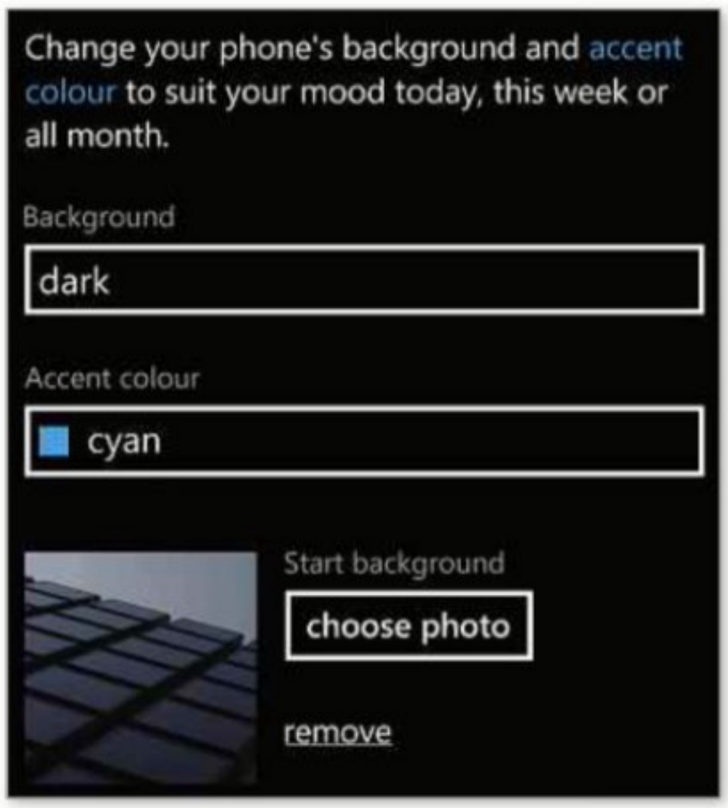
At the scheduled time both you and the recipient will see an option to join the Skype call.

Another new addition to the Skype app is the ability to open Office files you receive directly from within it. Simply tap a file you receive to open it. If you don't have its corresponding Office app, you'll be taken to the Google Play Store from where you can install it.

WINDOWS PHONE

Customise your phone's Start screen

By default, Windows Phone uses a dark green Start screen. However, you can switch between light and dark themes, choose from a selection of colours and use a photo on your device as a background image. To do this, delve into your phone's settings, navigate to the 'personalisation' section, then tap 'start+theme'. You'll see options for light and dark themes, as well as several colours. To add a photo as a background image, tap 'choose photo' (see screenshot below), select the one you want, then tap the tick icon.



ANDROID & iOS

Save articles you find on Facebook to Pocket

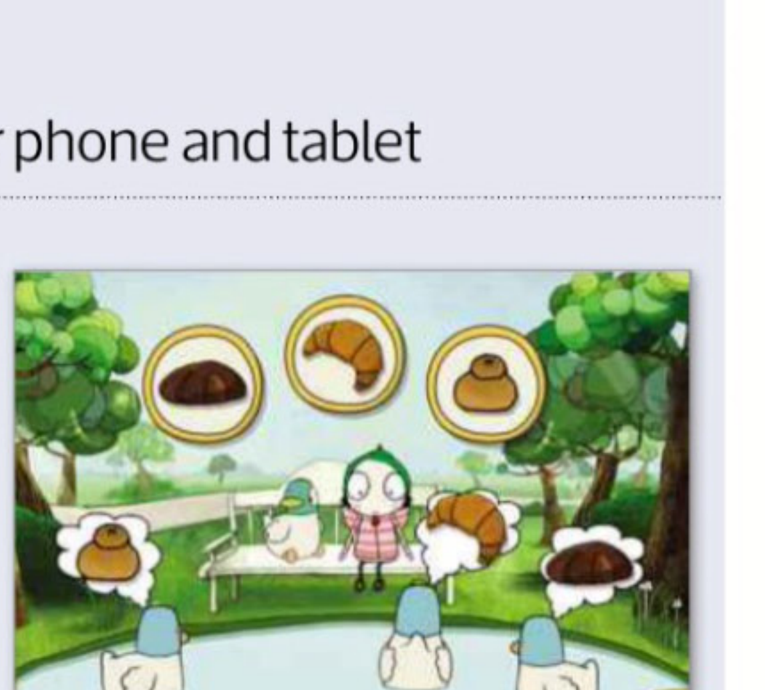
Facebook recently introduced its own mobile browser. Now, whenever you tap an article in Facebook's app, it opens in Facebook's browser rather than in your default one (such as Chrome or Safari).

You may find this annoying, not to mention a little presumptuous, but at least you can use Pocket in the browser. Using Pocket (Android www.snipca.com/19375; iOS www.snipca.com/19376) you can save articles when you're on a broadband connection, then read them later at your convenience when you're offline.

Tap an article to open it in Facebook's browser, tap the three dots at the top right, then tap Copy Link (see screenshot below). Now open Pocket and you'll see your copied link at the bottom. Tap the Add button beside the link to save that article to your Pocket reading list.

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO ANDROID

Our new 148-page book tells you everything you need to know about Android, including the best apps and tips for the Lollipop and Marshmallow updates.



NEW!

BUY IT NOW FROM AMAZON
at www.snipca.com/18829

Games With Kids

What to play together on your phone and tablet

AGES 0-5

Sarah & Duck – Day at the Park

£2.99 www.snipca.com/19383 (Android)
£2.99 www.snipca.com/19384 (iOS)

The six games in this CBBC app will keep your toddler entertained for hours. Our favourites are Kite Maker and Feeding the Ducks. In the former, your child can design their own kite using different shapes and colours. In the latter, they must match a duck with the correct type of bread.

AGES 6-10

Alto's Adventure

£2.29 www.snipca.com/19385 (iOS)

In this enjoyable game, your child plays as the snowboarder Alto navigating along a series of serene villages, woodlands and ruins. You need to rescue stray llamas by skiing into them. Tap the screen to jump over obstacles, and tap and hold it to perform somersaults for additional points.

AGES 11-16

Cryptica

Free www.snipca.com/19386 (Android)
Free www.snipca.com/19388 (iOS)

Cryptica is a puzzle game that will test your teenager's patience. Initially they match tiles to their correct outline. But things quickly get challenging when they realise the tiles are interconnected. Move one and the others move with it.

Make Windows Better

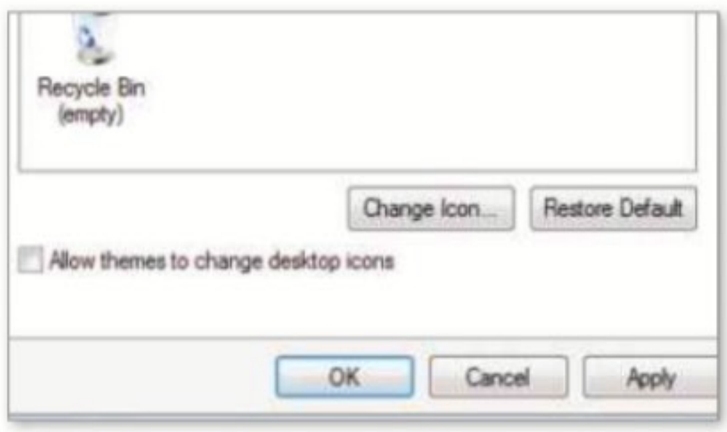
Clever tips for every version

WINDOWS 7, 8

Stop Windows themes changing your Desktop icons

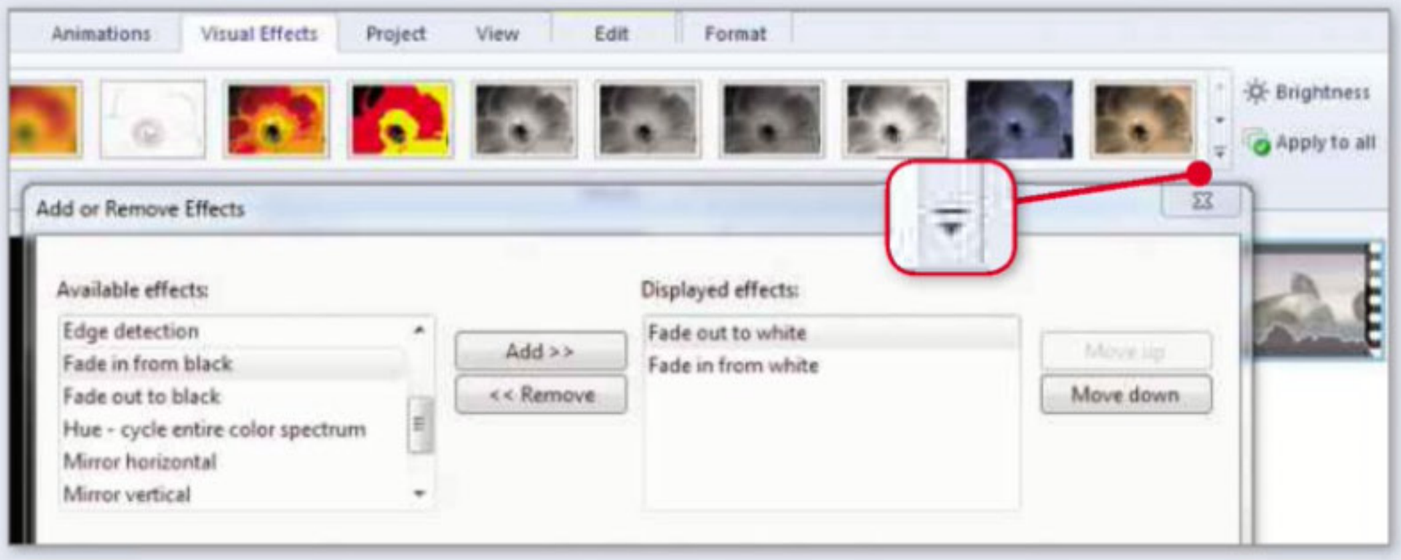
Windows 7 and 8 have lots of themes you can use to enhance the look and feel of your PC. Simply right-click your Desktop, click Personalize, then select the one you want. Bear in mind that some themes will automatically change the appearance of your Desktop icons, but thankfully there's an easy way to stop this happening.

Right-click anywhere on your Desktop, click Personalize, then click 'Change desktop icons' at the top left. You'll see a small 'Allow themes to change desktop icons' box at the bottom, which is ticked by default. Untick the box, click Apply, then OK (see screenshot below). In future, whenever you apply a new theme it won't affect your Desktop icons.



WINDOWS 7, 8

Add fade-in and fade-out effects to your videos



Windows Movie Maker is one of the best free video-editing programs. It comes with Windows Essentials, so check your PC to see if you have it. If not, you can install it for free from www.snipca.com/19417.

We'll show you how to add a fade-in and fade-out effect to the start and end of your video, which is a great way to make it look more stylish. First, open Movie Maker, click 'Add videos and photos' at the top, navigate to and select your video, then click Open.

To add the effect, click the Visual Effects tab. You'll see a list of buttons representing various effects. By default, you can apply only one effect to your video at a time. To add multiple effects, click the small down arrow at the top right (see screenshot), then click 'Multiple effects'. In the 'Available effects' section on the left, scroll to the Fade option. You'll see options to fade in/out from/to black or white. Choose a fade-in option, click Add, then choose a fade-out option and click Add again. Finally, click Apply and play your video to see it with your added effect.

To save your edited video, click the dropdown menu at the top left, click 'Save movie', 'For computer', rename your video, choose where you want to save it on your PC, then click Save.

WINDOWS 10

Restore Windows Photo Viewer in Windows 10

If you've updated your Windows 7 or 8 PC to Windows 10, you'll notice you have retained Windows Photo Viewer. But if you've carried out a clean install of Windows 10 or bought a new Windows PC, you won't have Windows Photo Viewer anymore (Microsoft would rather people use its Photo app instead). If you want to get it back use the popular free program Ultimate Windows Tweaker.

To install it, go to www.snipca.com/19418, scroll to the bottom of the screen, then click the dark blue Download Ultimate Windows Tweaker button. Open the downloaded zipped file, then extract its contents to your PC (to your Desktop, for example). Next, open the extracted folder, then click the setup file to launch the program.

Click the Additional section at the bottom left, then click Enable Windows Photo Viewer (see screenshot left). Now go to any image file on your PC, right-click it, move your cursor to 'Open with', then click Windows Photo Viewer to see the file there.

WINDOWS 10

See which apps have used the most data in the past month

In previous Workshops, we've shown you how to monitor your network usage over a period of time using Windows 7 and 8. But you could only do this using third-party programs. Windows 10 has this function built in, letting you monitor your network activity over the past 30 days?

To access this, you'll need to open your Task Manager (press Ctrl+Shift+Esc). Next, click 'More details' at the bottom left, then click the 'App history' tab. You'll see a list of all the apps installed on your PC (in alphabetical order) next to columns called 'CPU time', 'Tile updates', Downloads and Uploads. To see your programs' activity over the past month, click Options at the top left, then click 'Show history for all processes'.

Make Office Better

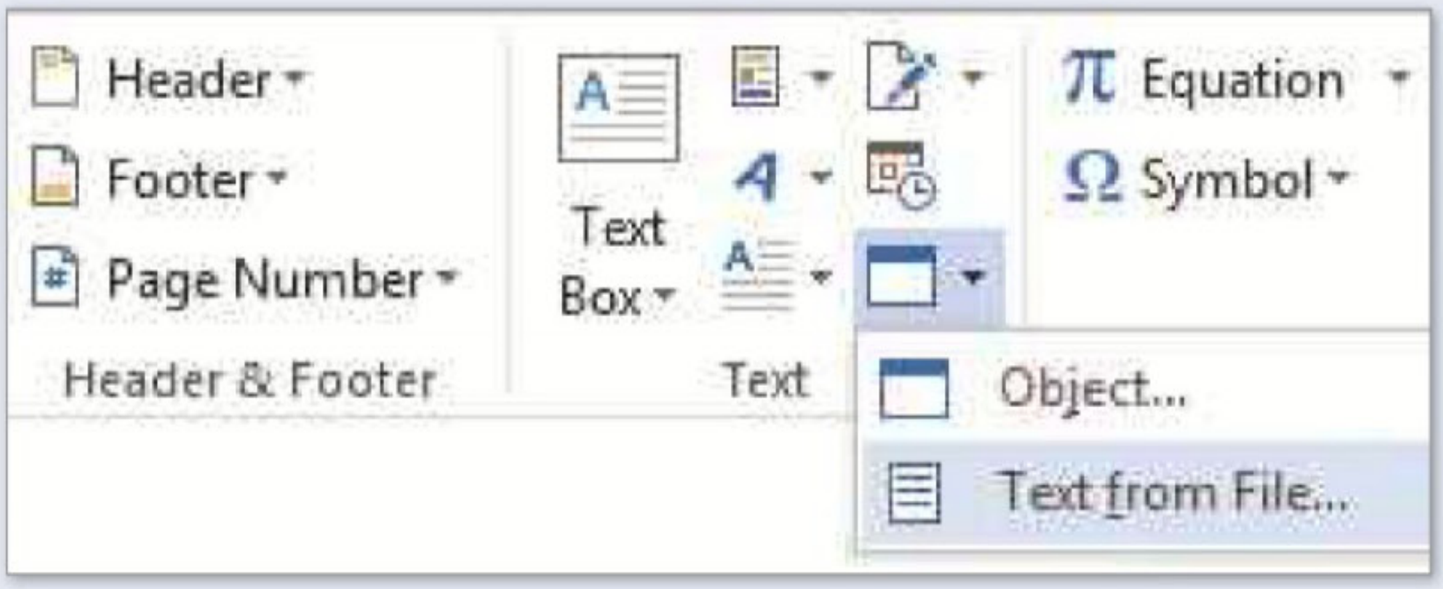
Expert tips for every program

WORD

Copy text from a password-protected document

While you can download many types of documents (ebooks, journals, etc) from the internet, many of these files will have been protected by whoever created the file, so you can access it but can't make any changes. On rare occasions, the page hosting the document will contain the password to unlock it, but don't count on it. While you can't copy images or charts from a password-protected document, there's an easy way to copy all the text within it. You can then modify this in whatever way you choose, such as increasing the font size.

To do this, open a new Word document, click the Insert tab, click the small white icon at the bottom-right of the Text section, then click 'Text from File' (see screenshot). If you use Office 2010 or earlier, click the Object dropdown menu (in the Text section) and then 'Text from File'.



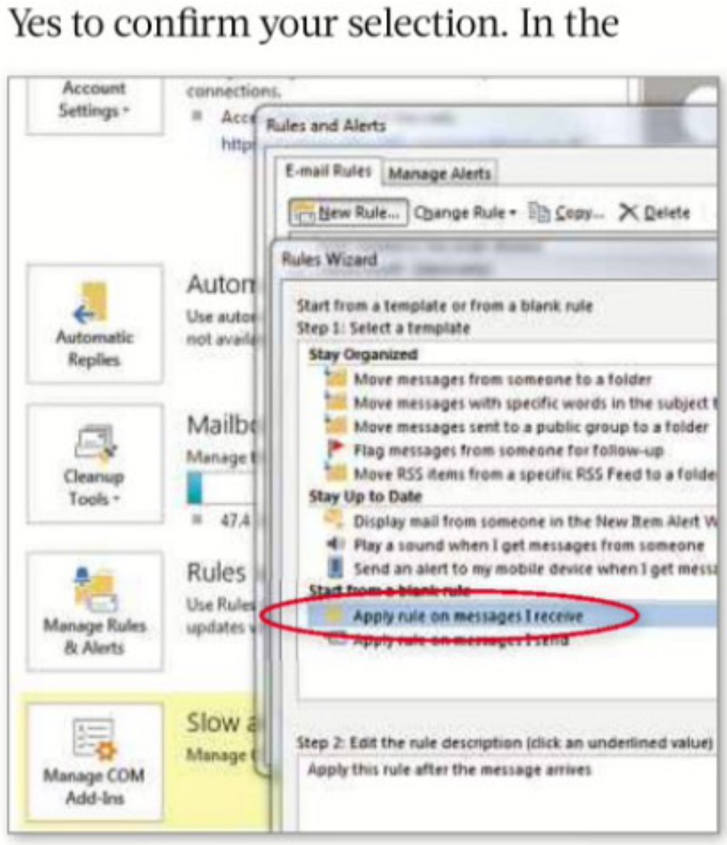
Now select the protected file, then click Insert. All text from that file will be copied to your new document in its original format. Save this document to your PC. You can now edit the file as you normally would.

OUTLOOK

Create Desktop alerts for email subfolders

By default, whenever you receive a new email, you'll see a small Desktop alert at the bottom right of your screen. However, if you've created subfolders within your inbox (for emails containing attachments or from certain individuals, for example), these will not generate notifications. We'll show you a simple way to set Desktop alerts for every email you receive.

Click File at the top left, then click the 'Manage Rules & Alerts' option at the bottom. Next, click New Rule at the top left, click 'Apply rule on messages I receive' at the bottom (see screenshot below), then click Next twice. Now click Yes to confirm your selection. In the Rules Wizard window that opens, scroll to the bottom, tick 'display a Desktop Alert', Finish, then click OK. Finally, click Apply, then OK. From now on, you'll see Desktop alerts for every email you receive.



EXCEL

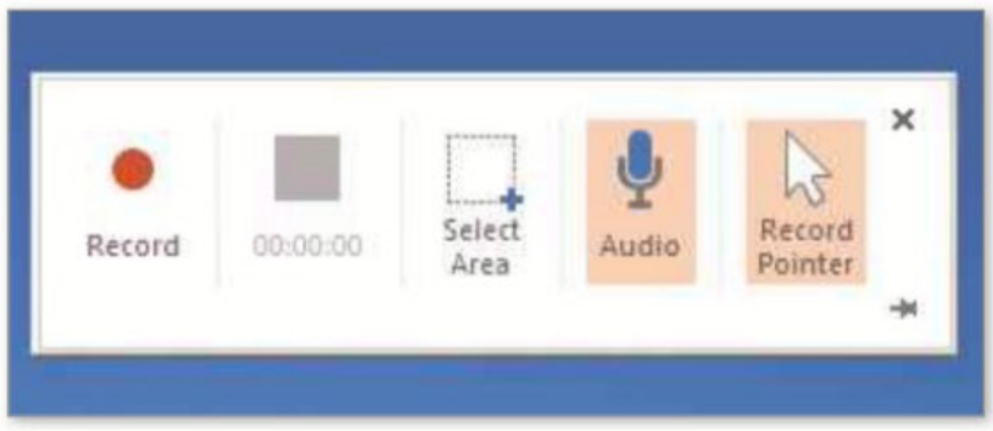
Show a column of figures in descending order of value

If you have a column containing numbers in ascending order but would like to flip the cells round so they are in descending order, there's an easy way to do this. First, select the cells you want to reverse. Next, click the Data tab, then the Sort button (in the Sort & Filter section). You'll see a window with three dropdown menus. Click the Order dropdown menu (which is set to 'Smallest to Largest' by default), click 'Largest to Smallest', then click OK.

POWERPOINT

Add a screen recording to your presentation

If you carry out presentations on a regular basis, it might be useful being able to show activity you carry out on your computer screen as part of a presentation – perhaps if you want to demonstrate a website or display files stored on your PC. Well, there's a simple, little-known way to insert whatever you do on your PC screen as a video in your presentation.



Open your presentation and navigate to the slide where you want to add your screen recording. Next, click the Insert tab, then Screen Recording at the top right. Your screen will become brighter and you'll see a menu at the top (see screenshot above). Click Select Area, then click and drag your cursor to select the area of the screen you want to record as a video. By default, your cursor will be included in the recording. To avoid this, click Record Pointer in the menu. To record a voiceover for your screen recording, ensure Audio is selected.

Click Record to begin your screen recording. You'll see a three-second countdown timer, after which whatever you do within your selected area will be recorded as a video. To stop the recording, move your cursor to the top of the screen to reveal your menu, then click Stop. The video will automatically be added to your slide, with playback controls at the bottom.

Activity Indicator

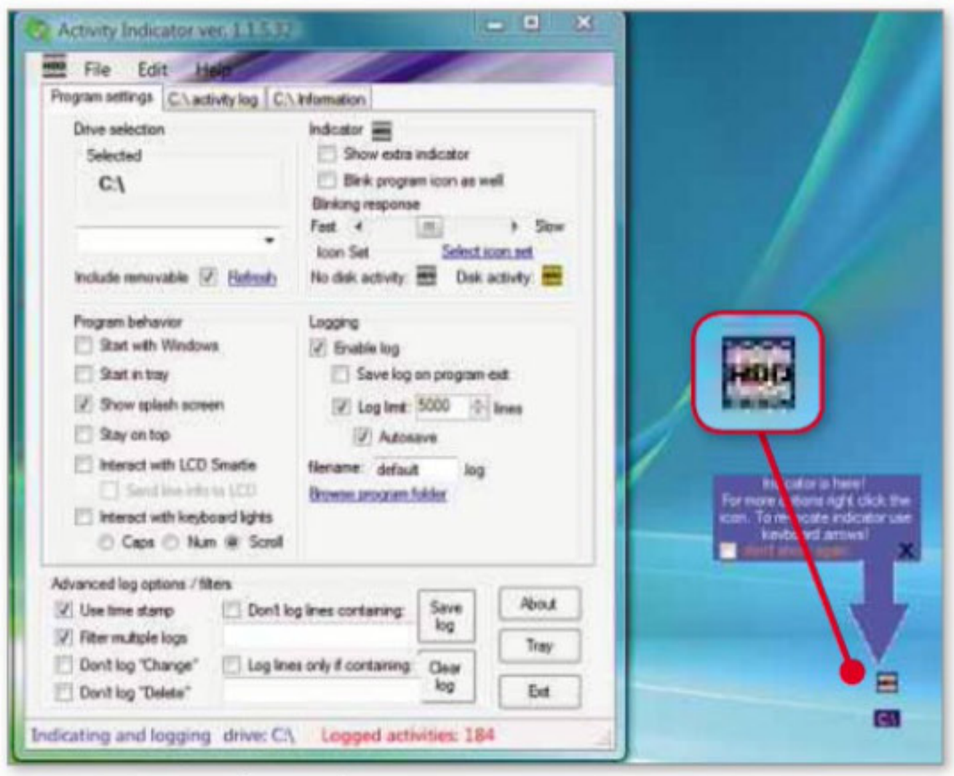
Customise activity logs, create more icons and speed up launch

Speed up launch time

Activity Indicator (www.snipca.com/19084) doesn't launch with Windows, but that's easily fixed, and while you're at it you can disable the program's splash screen to make it just a tad quicker to load. Every little helps, as they say. First, right-click the Activity Indicator icon in the notification area of the Taskbar and choose Show Window. In the 'Program behavior' section, tick 'Start with Windows' and clear the tick from 'Show splash screen'. Click the red X to close the window (don't click the Exit button because that closes the program entirely).

Put an icon on your Desktop

By default, Activity Indicator puts its little flashing icon in the Taskbar's notification area. But there's a hidden trick that'll put it on your Desktop instead. Open the Activity Indicator window (see previous tip). Next, click the indicator icon at the top left of the window – this puts a floating icon on your Desktop at the bottom right. Before you click anything else, you can use the cursor (arrow) keys to position this icon (see screenshot), then click the small cross to close the annotated arrow that signals the position of the icon.



Use the cursor (arrow) keys to position the Activity Indicator icon to any position on your Desktop

View every action

If you want to know exactly what your hard drive is up to, then all you need to do is click the 'X:\ activity log' tab (where 'X:' is the letter of the relevant drive). Unfortunately, the information tends to whip by at great speed, because hard drives don't tend to hang around when they're reading and writing data. There is a scroll bar that lets you move back up but the moment the hard drive carries out another task, the display once more whizzes to the most recent item. To stop the list in its tracks, tick the tiny Hold box at the bottom right of the window. Clear it again when you've finished reading.

Customise your logs

When you click the 'Save log' button, Activity Indicator stores the activity it's recorded as a text (.txt) file in the same folder as the program itself. If you're trying to troubleshoot unusual hard-drive activity then use the two fields at the bottom of the Activity Indicator window.

If, for example, you suspect that your antivirus software is making your hard drive – and consequently your PC – run slowly, tick the 'Log lines only if containing' box and then type the name of your antivirus software in the box. Similarly, exclude items by ticking the 'Don't log lines containing' box and then typing the relevant terms.

Create indicators for each drive

You can set Activity Indicator to show activity for just one drive, but what if you want to see what's going on with multiple drives simultaneously? Well, you can do that – and apply and save different settings (such as icon style) for each indicator.

First, press Windows key+E to launch Windows/File Explorer, navigate to the ActivityIndicator.exe program file, right-click it and choose Create Shortcut. Now right-click the shortcut and choose Properties. In the Target field, place double quotes around the current string (so **C:\Location\ ActivityIndicator.exe** becomes **"C:\Location\ ActivityIndicator.exe"**). Directly after the closing quotes type a space and then settings2 (so the whole now looks like this – **"C:\Location\ Activity Indicator.exe" settings2** – see screenshot). Click OK, then double-click the new shortcut to launch it.

Make the adjustments you want to the settings (for example, selecting the relevant drive), and then click Exit to save the changes. Repeat this process for further drives (adding 'settings3', then 'settings4' and so on). Each new shortcut will now relate to a specific drive.

Customise shortcuts representing each drive

This tip is particularly handy if you've set up separate Activity Indicator icons for all your drives (see box left). Open the Activity Indicator window, then – in the Indicator section of the 'Program settings' tab – click the 'Select icon set' link. Now just click to choose a new icon style. Repeat this process for all other Activity Indicator icons so you have a different icon for each drive.

Next issue Secret Tips For... Action Centre

Google Brotli

Browsing the web using Chrome is about to get much faster

What is it?

Google's latest algorithm for compressing data in its Chrome browser. The company says this "whole new data format" will make browsing the internet in Chrome much faster because web pages will load more quickly. Google announced its development last September, saying it was exciting news "because fast is better than slow". Can't argue with that.

Has it been speeding up Chrome since then?

Only in Chrome Canary (www.snipca.com/19396), where Google tests new tools. Canary's experimental nature means that you should use it only to try Chrome's new features, not as your main browser. Google admits that it can "sometimes break down completely", and is therefore designed for "developers and early adopters", not for the "faint hearted".

When will it arrive in the Chrome I use?

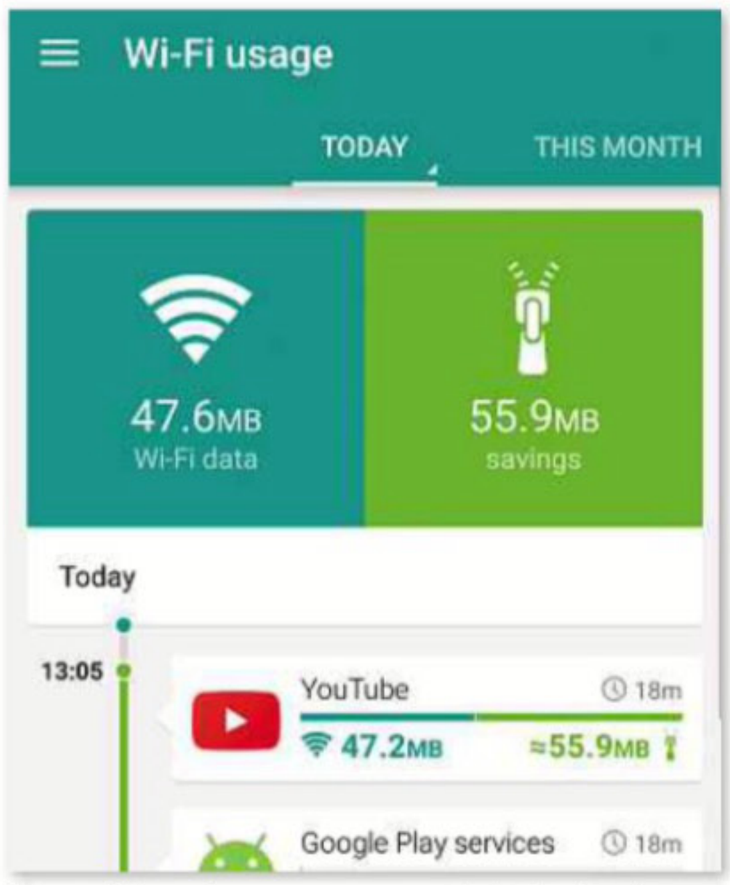
Within the next month, hopefully. In January, Google engineer Ilya Grigorik said that there was "intent to ship" Brotli, which means they are working on adding it to the official version of Chrome. It will probably be built into the next release of the browser, which should arrive by the end of March. At the moment Chrome is on version 47 (see the release history on Wikipedia: www.snipca.com/19397). Faster browsing would be a great way for Chrome to celebrate its 50th incarnation.

How fast is it?

Google claims that it reduces file sizes by up to 26 per cent more than its predecessor Zopfli, which arrived in 2013. This is important because as the amount of multimedia content on web pages continues to grow, browsers will struggle to load them quickly.

Will I really notice the difference?

Yes, particularly when browsing in Chrome on a phone or tablet. Because Brotli uses less data, you're much less likely to go over your data-usage limit on a mobile device. Google says this will mean "reduced battery use" too, hopefully leading to devices lasting longer between charges.



Opera Max also compresses data, but only when you browse on your phone or tablet

What if I don't use Chrome?

For mobile browsing you could try Opera Max instead. It's a free Android app (www.opera.com/max) that compresses the amount of data apps use on your phone and tablet. Opera claims it can compress data on streaming sites such as YouTube and Netflix by up to 50 per cent. It's been a huge hit, earning 74,000 five-star ratings on the Google Play store.

Does Firefox offer something similar?

No. Mozilla said in August 2014 that it was working on data-compression technology codenamed Janus, but its wiki site says that the project has now ended (www.snipca.com/19403). Mozilla has since said that it will adapt Firefox so it can use Brotli.

Where does the name come from?

It continues Google's obsession with quirkily naming its products after food. Just as each new version of Android is named after confectionary (the latest being Marshmallow), so Google's web-compression tools pay tribute to pastries from northern Switzerland.

Why?

No idea, but they sound quite tasty. Zopfli was named after Zopf, which is bread baked in the shape of a plait. As for brotli (main picture), Wikipedia tells us that the Swiss had largely forgotten about it until 10 years ago, when small bakeries started to revive old recipes (www.snipca.com/19406). Expect to see them on sale in Greggs by the end of the year, by which time Chrome should be faster than ever.

Uninstall Windows 10 Apps NOW!

Microsoft clutters your PC with many apps and features you don't need. Jonathan Parkyn explains which you should remove – and shows you how to do so safely

Windows has always come with a selection of pre-installed programs and tools, but some are more welcome than others. It can be useful to have built-in media players and so on, but there are often better alternatives available – sometimes for free. Many of Windows 7 and 8's built-in offerings are limited in their capabilities; others are completely unnecessary – they just get in the way, hogging resources and consuming valuable hard-drive space.

Windows 10 goes one step further - not only pre-loading your hard drive with dozens of Windows Store apps, but also making it extremely hard to remove them. Windows 10 also goes out of its way to try to get you to use these apps, setting them as the defaults for many common tasks, such as listening to music or viewing photos, often because they act as a gateway to Microsoft's paid-for services.

It's true that you can change your default programs to ones you want (see the box on page 52). But Windows has a nasty habit of switching back to its own apps without any warning. For example, many people discovered that Windows 10's November update sneakily removed non-Microsoft software from their PCs, and reset Microsoft's apps as their default programs.

You don't have to put up with this. As we're about to reveal, there are ways to rid yourself of all the junk Microsoft doesn't want you to uninstall. We'll show you which Windows apps you need to keep, and explain how to forever banish the ones you don't.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Get rid of useless apps and features you don't need
- Set the programs you want as your PC's defaults
- Safely uninstall (and reinstall) Windows 10's built-in apps
- Remove pointless tools from Windows 7 and 8

WINDOWS 10 APPS: WHAT TO KEEP, WHAT TO DITCH

1 3D Builder

What is it? It lets you create, view and print 3D models.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** Those who have an interest in 3D modelling may want to give this app a spin, but it's frustratingly low on features and, unless you have a compatible 3D printer (http://microsoft.com/3d), it's pretty useless.

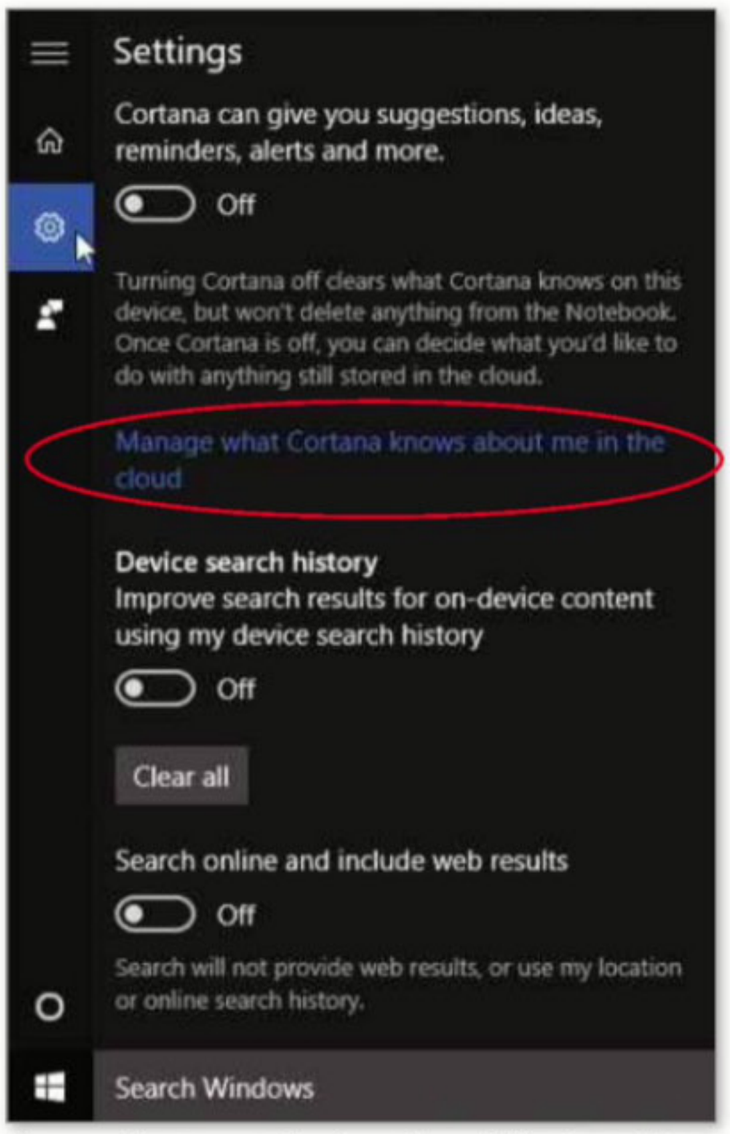
Don't want to build a 3D windmill? Uninstall this app

2 Cortana

What is it? Using spoken commands you can search your PC and the web and set reminders.

Keep or ditch? **Disable.** Some may find Cortana useful, but it gathers lots of information about you and your activity, and stores this online, which not everyone will be comfortable with. Annoyingly, although Cortana is technically an app, it's hardwired into Windows 10, so you can't uninstall it – not even with the tips we've outlined on page 53.

However, you can disable it by clicking the taskbar Search box, the Notebook icon (square with a circle in it), then Settings. Here, switch off all the options and click 'Manage what Cortana knows about me in the cloud' to remove your personal information from Microsoft's servers.



You can't remove Cortana from Windows 10, but you can stop it collecting your data

3 Films & TV

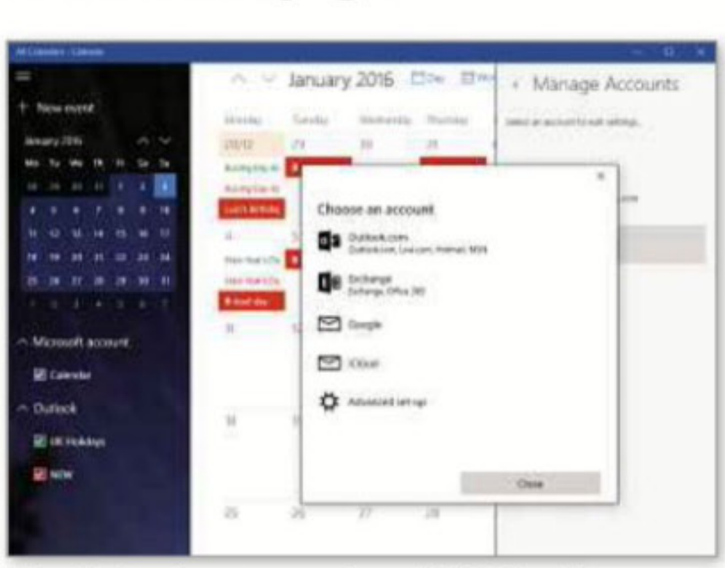
What is it? It lets you watch films and TV shows stored on your PC, as well as those bought or rented from Microsoft's online store.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** Windows Media Player (which is still included in Windows 10) or VLC (free from www.snipca.com/19249) are much better video players, and there are other ways to get on-demand films and TV shows, either free from catch-up services such as iPlayer, or paid-for from Netflix, Amazon Prime, Google Play, iTunes and others. Unless you're particularly fond of the Windows Store, this is an easy one to ditch.

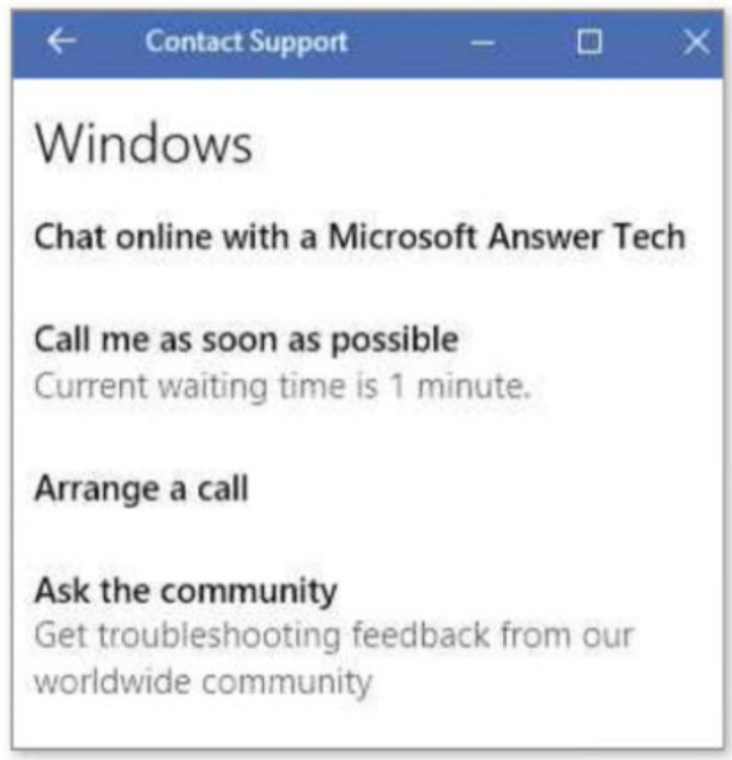
4 Calendar

What is it? A multi-purpose tool that helps you organise your schedule.

Keep or ditch? **Keep.** The Calendar app is actually pretty useful. It works with Outlook.com, Google Calendar and iCloud, so if you already use one of these services, all you need to do is sign in with the relevant account to view and synchronise appointments. Removing the app will affect Mail too, so we recommend keeping it.



The Calendar app works with Outlook.com, Google Calendar and iCloud



Chat to a Microsoft technical advisor using the Contact Support app

5 Contact Support

What is it? An easy way for you to get help with your PC.

Keep or ditch? **Keep.** It doesn't offer a great deal more than Microsoft's own support website does (www.snipca.com/19248), but it's easy to navigate and lets you chat online with Microsoft support staff. This is one you'll want to keep – which is just as well, as you can't uninstall it anyway!

6 Alarms & Clock

What is it? It's an alarm clock, world clock, timer and stopwatch all in one.

Keep or ditch? **Keep.** These are all useful functions to have on your PC. That said, Microsoft's app isn't the most reliable – we've heard of cases where alarms have failed to sound when they were supposed to. If this happens to you, dump it in favour of a free alternative, such as Free Alarm Clock (http://freealarmclocksoftware.com).

7 Get Started

What is it? A guide to using Windows 10.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** There are some helpful videos and nuggets of information here about everything from searching and syncing to using Windows 10's new features. But you'll also find the entire contents of this guide on Microsoft's site (www.snipca.com/19251), so you can get rid of the app.

8 Get Skype

What is it? This is simply a link to download the Desktop version of Skype.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** This app can be safely uninstalled. If you need to install the Desktop version at any point, get it from www.snipca.com/19250. ▶

9 Get Office

What is it? It's basically just a link to a free one-month trial of Microsoft Office 365.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** If you already have Office or have no intention of using it, there's no reason to keep this app. You can get the free one-month trial at any time from www.snipca.com/19264.

10 Camera

What is it? Takes photos and records video clips.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** If you don't have a camera built into your PC, there's little point in having this app. And even if you do, there are plenty of better camera tools available; your webcam may have come with its own software, or you could try a free tool, such as ManyCam (https://manycam.com).

11 Calculator

What is it? It's a calculator with standard, scientific and programmer modes, as well as conversion tools.

Keep or ditch? **Keep.** It may not look much like the Windows calculator of yore, but there's nothing particularly wrong with it, so we recommend leaving it where it is. If you don't like it, though, there's no shortage of free and paid-for alternatives in the Windows Store you can try.

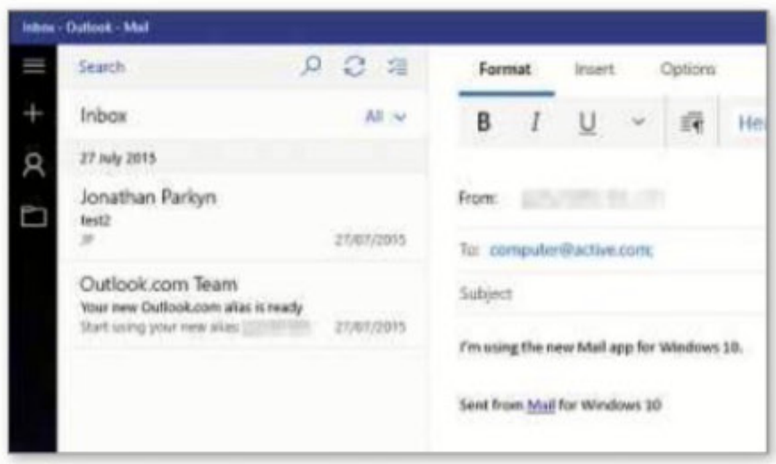
Its design has changed over the years, but the Windows Calculator is still worth using

MediaMonkey is a better music player than the Groove Music app

12 Groove Music

What is it? Microsoft's equivalent of music-streaming service Spotify, letting you stream tracks or play your own music collection.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** Groove Music is far from the best music player. In our opinion, Windows Media Player (also pre-installed) is the better program, while MediaMonkey (www.mediamonkey.com) is an easy-to-use, non-Mixcrosoft alternative. If you already subscribe to Spotify, Google Play Music or Apple Music, or you're not interested in music-streaming services, you won't want to pay £8.99 a month for a Groove Music pass, either.



It's sensible to keep the Mail app, even if you don't plan to use it

13 Mail

What is it? It's Windows 10's built-in email service.

Keep or ditch? **Keep.** Mail isn't perfect, but it's very easy to use and works with most types of accounts. If it's not to your taste, there are loads of alternatives. You could try Thunderbird (www.snipca.com/19252, though Mozilla has stopped work on improving it), or just log into your webmail via your browser. Even if you're not going to use it, though, we recommend leaving Mail installed, because removing it can affect other apps, such as Calendar.

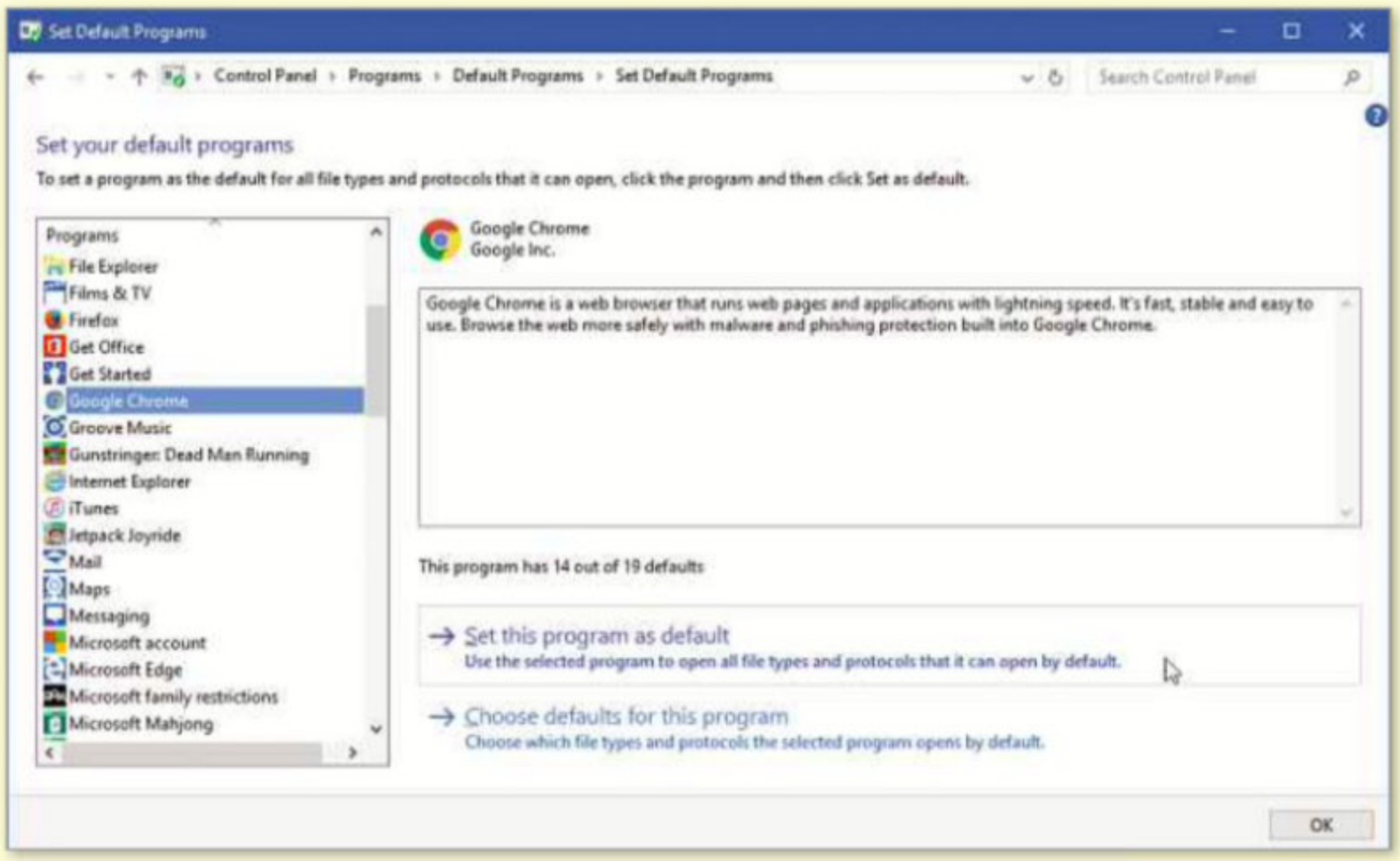
14 Maps

What is it? Maps is Microsoft's equivalent to Google Maps and Apple Maps.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** Having a map app is useful, even on a non-mobile device such as a desktop PC, where you can plan routes and journeys. However, it's probably easier to lose the Maps app and instead use the map service of your choice – Google Maps for example – in your browser as and when you need it.

CHANGE YOUR WINDOWS 10 DEFAULT APPS

If you want to change your default apps and programs in Windows 10, click Start, type default, then click Default Programs. In the window that opens, click 'Set your default programs' then scroll through the list of available programs and apps and click the one you want (Google Chrome if you want to set it as your default web browser, for example), then click 'Set this program as default'. To refine your selections further, click 'Choose defaults for this program' to specify each individual file type you want to associate with that specific software.



15 Microsoft Solitaire Collection

What is it? A free version of Microsoft's paid-for Solitaire game.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** Windows has always come with a smattering of built-in games, but Windows 10 includes only one – Microsoft Solitaire Collection – and asks you to pay (£7.69 per year) to remove adverts and unlock other features. Ditch it and instead play a truly free Solitaire game (http://solitaireforfree.com) online.

16 Messaging, Phone and Skype Video

What are they? These apps let you send and receive text messages and make voice and video calls.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** Windows 10's November update took Skype's core functions and split them over three new apps: Messaging, Phone and Skype Video. This probably makes sense for people who regularly use Skype on their phone or tablet, but those who prefer it on a PC should ditch all three apps and use the all-in-one desktop PC version instead (www.snipca.com/19250).

17 Microsoft Edge

What is it? It's the default web browser in Windows 10, and Microsoft's long-term replacement for Internet Explorer.

Keep or ditch? **Disable.** As with Cortana, it's not possible to uninstall Edge. If you don't want to use it, install your preferred browser and make sure it's set as the default, using our instructions on page 52.

18 Microsoft WiFi

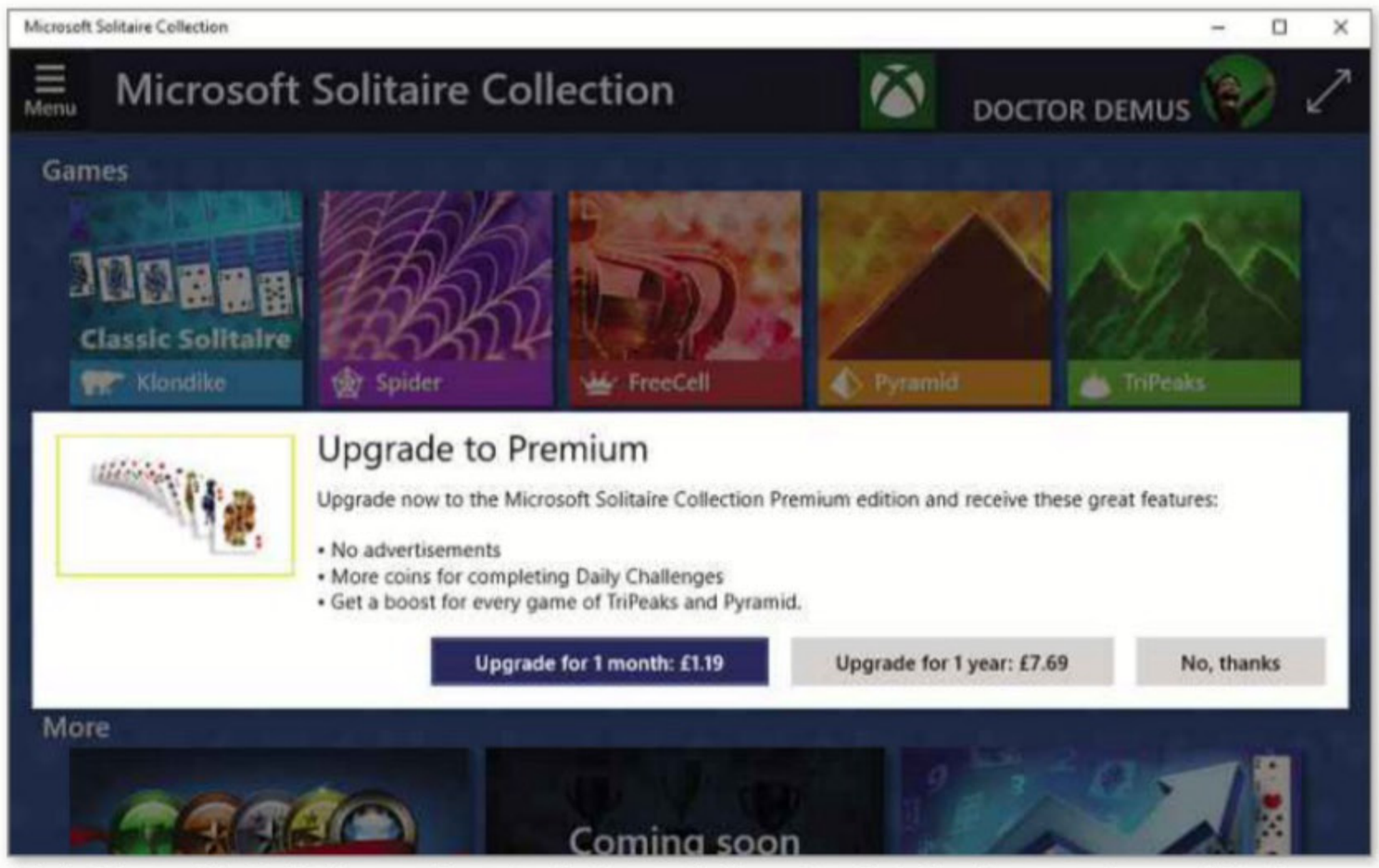
What is it? This app lets you buy wireless internet access at hotels, airports and other public places, via hotspots that support Microsoft's Wi-Fi partnership scheme.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** If you mostly use a PC, you should dump this because you'll almost certainly never need it. And you don't even need it if you mostly use a laptop, phone or tablet, because most Wi-Fi hotspots provide alternative methods of getting online.

19 Money

What is it? A financial app that shows market news, converts currencies and tracks stock prices.

Keep or ditch? **Depends.** Not everyone has a portfolio of investments they need to keep an eye on, so this app won't be relevant to every user. For those who follow the markets, however, it's actually a pretty handy tool.



Ditch Microsoft's Solitaire app if you're fed up with the adverts in the free version and don't want to upgrade

If you follow the stock market, you'll like the Money app

20 News

What is it? Presents you with regularly updated news stories from around the world.

Keep or ditch? **Keep.** While it's not strictly necessary – you can get your fix of current affairs from any number of online sources – it's actually quite handy to catch a glimpse of the latest headlines whenever you click Start, courtesy of this app's Live Tile. ▶

REMOVE WINDOWS 10'S DEFAULT APPS

There are three ways to uninstall Windows 10's built-in apps. Bear in mind that it can be hard to get them back once they've been removed. See page xx for more details.

1 Right-click

In some cases, you can remove built-in apps by right-clicking them and selecting Uninstall. This doesn't work for all, but this method will get rid of 3D Builder, Get Office, Get Skype, Get Started, Microsoft Solitaire Collection, Microsoft WiFi, Money, News, Phone Companion, Skype Video, Sport and Sway.

2 Use an uninstaller

Stubborn apps, including Alarms & Clock, Calculator, Films & TV and Groove Music, can be removed using the free program 10AppsManager (www.snipca.com/19259). Unzip the tool and run it, then click the icon for the app you want to remove and click Yes. The program maker recommends creating a System Restore point before using it so you can easily roll back any changes you make. In total it can uninstall 23 of Windows 10's built-in apps.

3 Manually remove them

It's possible to use Windows PowerShell commands to manually remove apps. However, we don't recommend using this method, but you may need to use PowerShell to *reinstall* your apps – see the box on page 56.

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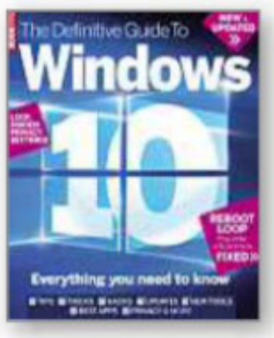

This 148-page book is the only guide you need on Microsoft's fantastic new operating system. You'll learn how to master all the new tools and software, and how to upgrade without losing anything. It's been updated to include fixes for problems that have appeared since Windows 10 launched.

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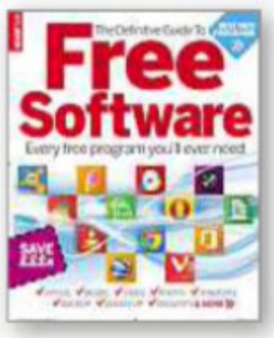

In our new 148-page book, we recommend only the very best free programs that deliver high-quality features and no nasty surprises (no junk - guaranteed!). It's packed with step-by-step tutorials and how-to guides for safe downloads – plus you'll learn which free antivirus you should use.

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21 People

What is it? It's where Windows stores your contacts.

Keep or ditch? **Keep.** Having your contacts on your PC is very useful, and People synchronises with not only Microsoft's Outlook.com, but also with Gmail and iCloud, amwong others. Even if you decide not to use it, it's sensible to leave it in place because it's linked to the Mail and Calendar apps.

22 Phone Companion

What is it? It's a pretty much surplus tool that aims to maintain the connection between your PC and your smartphone.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** In practice, Phone Companion doesn't offer an awful lot to Android or iOS users. It recognises your device and displays storage information but, aside from that, it just recommends Microsoft apps (OneNote, Outlook, Skype and so on). Syncing isn't supported and importing photos is handled separately (via AutoPlay).

Phone Companion doesn't do enough to deserve a place on your Desktop

23 Photos

What is it? A tool for importing, viewing and organising your photos.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** It's far from the best photo-organiser out there, offering strictly limited editing tools. You could download Google's Picasa (picasa.google.co.uk) instead, but that's starting to show its age a bit – and doesn't officially support Windows 10 (though it worked fine on our PC). We recommend giving Google Photos (https://photos.google.com) a go – the online service Google launched last year.

24 Sport

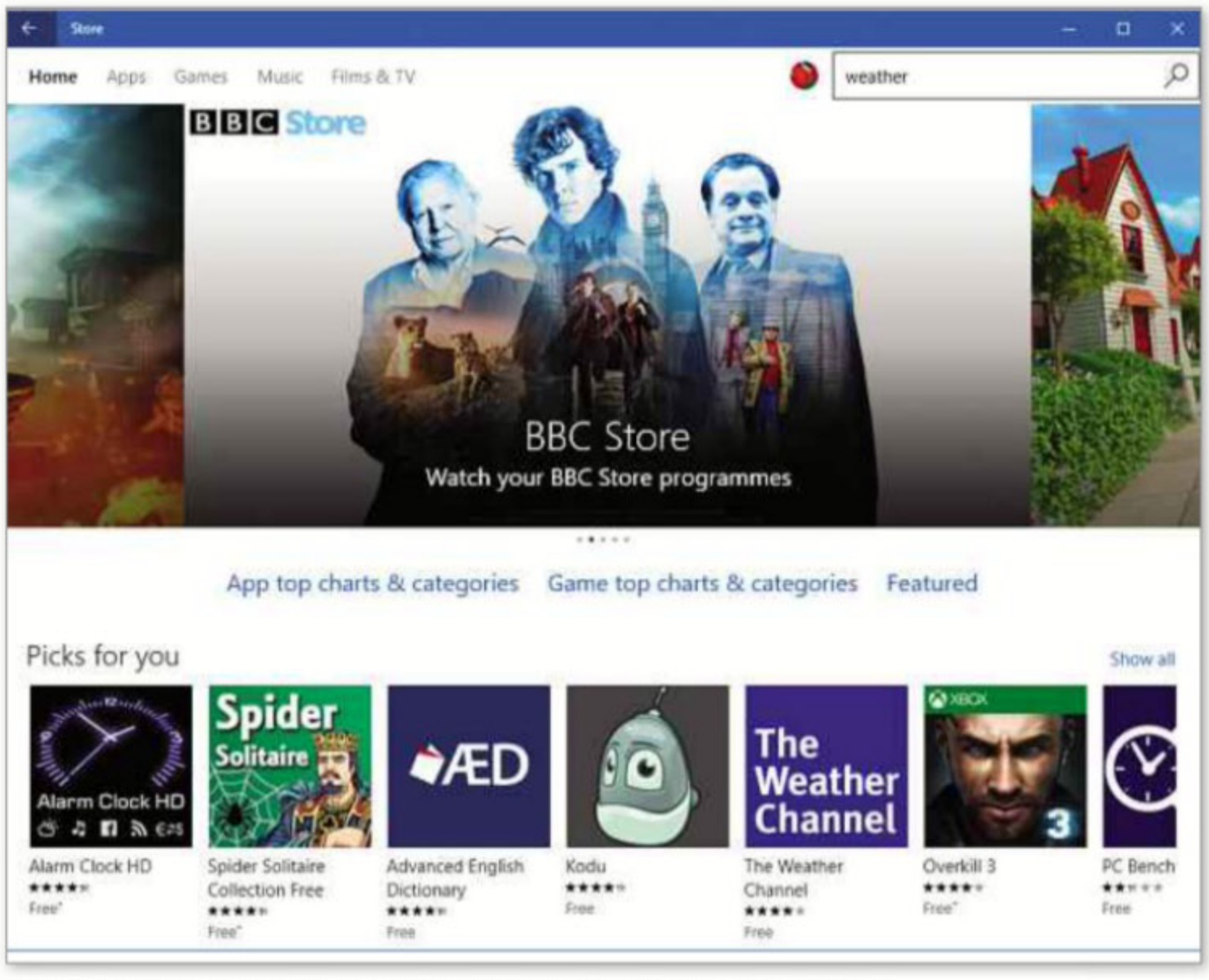
What is it? A source of sports-related news and scores.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** If you're not into sport, this app can be dumped without a second thought. Those who follow specific teams or individuals can personalise the app, but we doubt you'll find it better than what you currently use to keep up to date.

25 Store

What is it? Microsoft's marketplace for apps, games, music, films and TV.

Keep or ditch? **Keep.** While it's possible to uninstall the Windows Store using our hacks on page 54, we strongly advise against it. Removing the Store app not only cuts you off from an invaluable source of free tools and games, but it can also cause problems further down the line, should you ever wish to reinstall it.



Even if you never use it, you should keep the Store app installed

26 Sway

What is it? A presentation tool that lets you share 'stories' made from photos, videos, text and web content. It's like an online, lightweight version of PowerPoint. See more information at www.sway.com.

Keep or ditch? **Keep.** Automatically installed as part of Windows 10's November update, Sway is a useful tool that's also available for iOS (an Android version is on the way). It's easy to learn and definitely worth having a dabble with before deciding whether it's the sort of tool you'll regularly use.

27 Voice Recorder

What is it? An app that lets you record audio notes and other sounds.

Keep or ditch? **Ditch.** PCs without microphones won't be able to make use of this app at all. Even if you have a mic, Voice Recorder is low on features – it's better suited to phones and tablets. Instead record audio notes in a note-taking tool, such as Evernote Touch (www.snipca.com/19317). And for longer recordings with better quality and control, use a free sound-editing tool such as Audacity (http://audacityteam.org).

28 Weather

What is it? A source of up-to-date weather summaries and forecasts.

Keep or ditch? **Keep.** This decision is mostly down to personal taste, because there are dozens of alternative weather apps available in the Windows Store, some of which offer more detailed information. But we give it the benefit ▶

of the doubt, chiefly because it is well designed, easy to use and, most importantly, provides very accurate forecasts.

29 Windows Feedback

What is it? A method of reporting faults to Microsoft for analysis and to suggest improvements.

Keep or ditch? **Ignore.** Using this app means adjusting your PC's privacy settings to allow information about your PC usage to be sent to Microsoft, which you may be uncomfortable with. Annoyingly, Microsoft won't let you uninstall this app completely, but that doesn't mean you have to use it. If you're worried about Microsoft tracking your PC use, you should tweak your settings.

Select 'Never' and 'Basic' in 'Feedback & diagnostics' to stop Microsoft asking for feedback on how you use your PC

Click Start, Settings, Privacy, 'Feedback & diagnostics' and make sure 'Feedback frequency' is set to Never, and 'Diagnostic and usage data' is set to Basic (see screenshot above left).

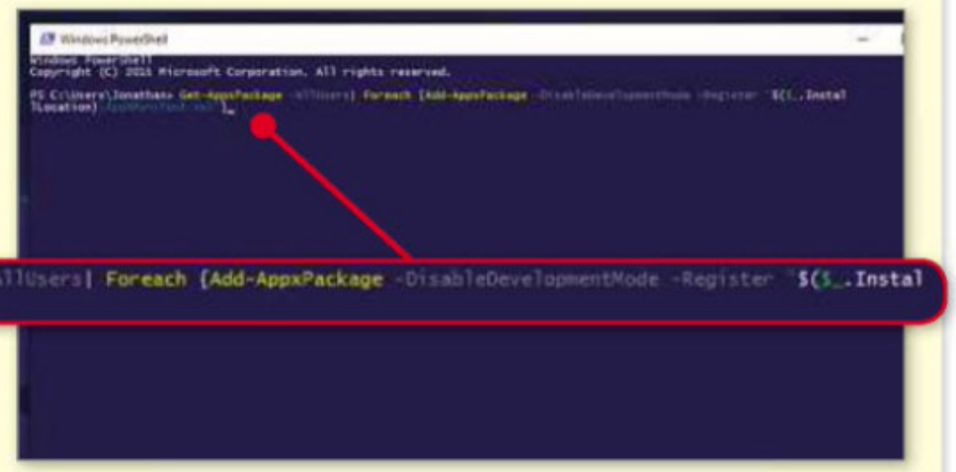
30 Xbox

What is it? Lets you view your gaming achievements, chat with fellow gamers and connect to an Xbox One console.

Keep or ditch? **Depends.** It will hold no interest for non-gamers, so they can safely dump it. For those interested in games, though, there are plenty features on offer that aren't available anywhere else, such as the ability to stream games and capture footage from an Xbox One console.

HOW TO REINSTALL WINDOWS 10 APPS

What if you uninstall an app only to find that you'd quite like to have it back? Luckily, in most cases you can simply re-download apps you want to restore from the Windows Store. However, this isn't always possible.



If you're having problems, this trick will reinstall all the apps you've removed. Click Start, type powershell, then right-click the Windows PowerShell option and select 'Run as administrator'. At the prompt, type the following command exactly (or cut and paste it from www.snipca.com/19323) then press Enter on your keyboard:

```
Get-AppxPackage -AllUsers| Foreach {Add-AppxPackage -DisableDevelopmentMode -Register "$($_.InstallLocation)\AppXManifest.xml"}
```

Let the process run until you see the prompt again. Don't be alarmed if you see lots of red warning messages. When it's finished, restart your PC and check your Start menu to see if the apps are back. If not, try running the PowerShell command and restarting again. It took us a couple of tries before we got our apps back.

WINDOWS 8 APPS: WHAT TO REMOVE

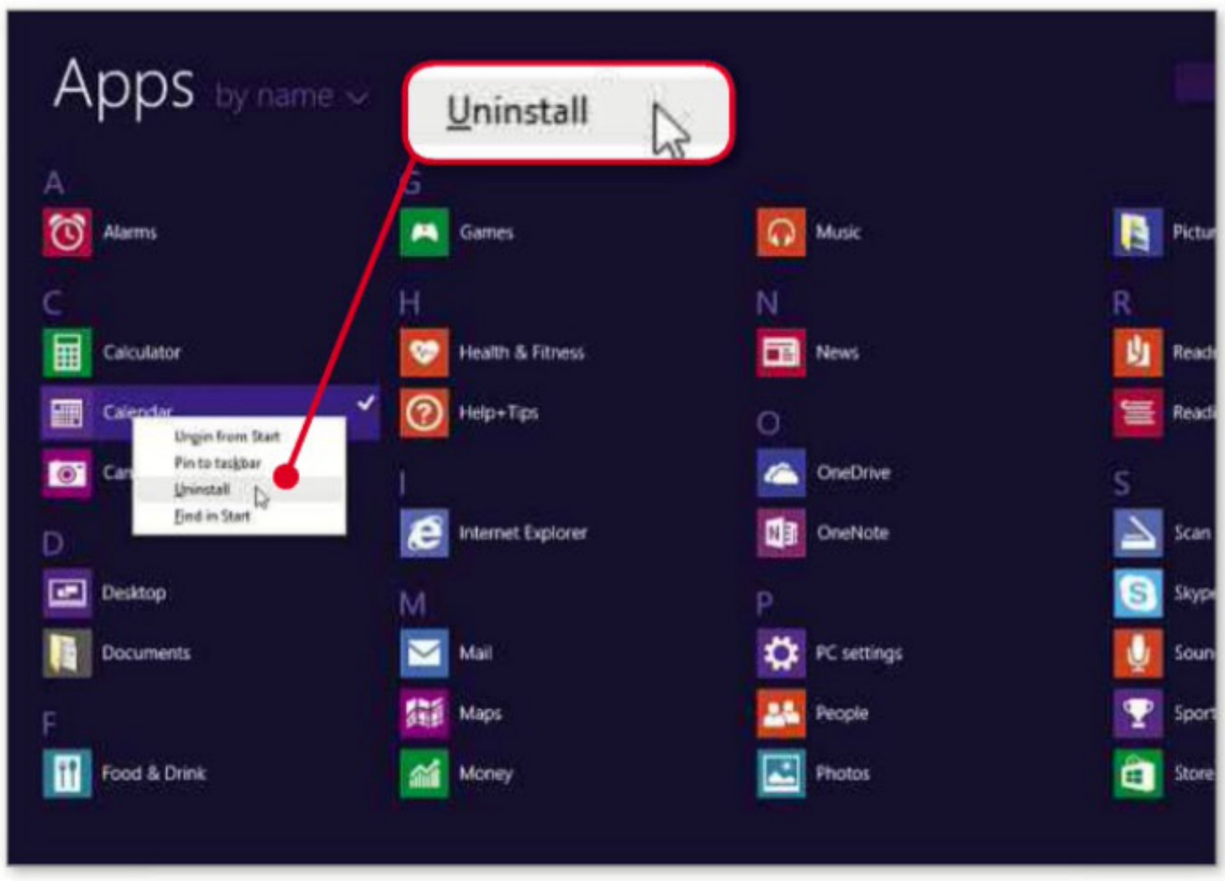
Windows 8 introduced the concept of Windows Store apps and every installation of the OS comes with a generous selection. But many of them carry out the same functions as existing Windows features – only not as well. However, it's easier to remove these in 8/8.1 than it is in 10. Everything but the Camera, OneDrive, Photos, Settings and Store apps can be removed with a simple right-click. Bear in mind that uninstalling one of Calendar, Mail or People apps will result in all three being removed.

How to uninstall individual apps

The easiest way to remove an app in Windows 8 is via the Start screen. The methods differ slightly in Windows 8 and 8.1, so we'll explain both.

In Windows 8, press the Windows key to open the Start screen. Right-click any blank space, then select 'All apps' from the lower right-hand corner to see a list of all your installed apps. Right-click the one you want to remove, then click Uninstall from the bar that appears at the bottom of the screen. Click Uninstall in the window that opens to confirm.

In Windows 8.1, click Start to open the Start screen, then click the icon with a down arrow in a circle that appears in the bottom left of the screen. Right-click the app you want to remove and select Uninstall. Click Uninstall in the window that opens to confirm. To reinstall apps, simply reverse this process.

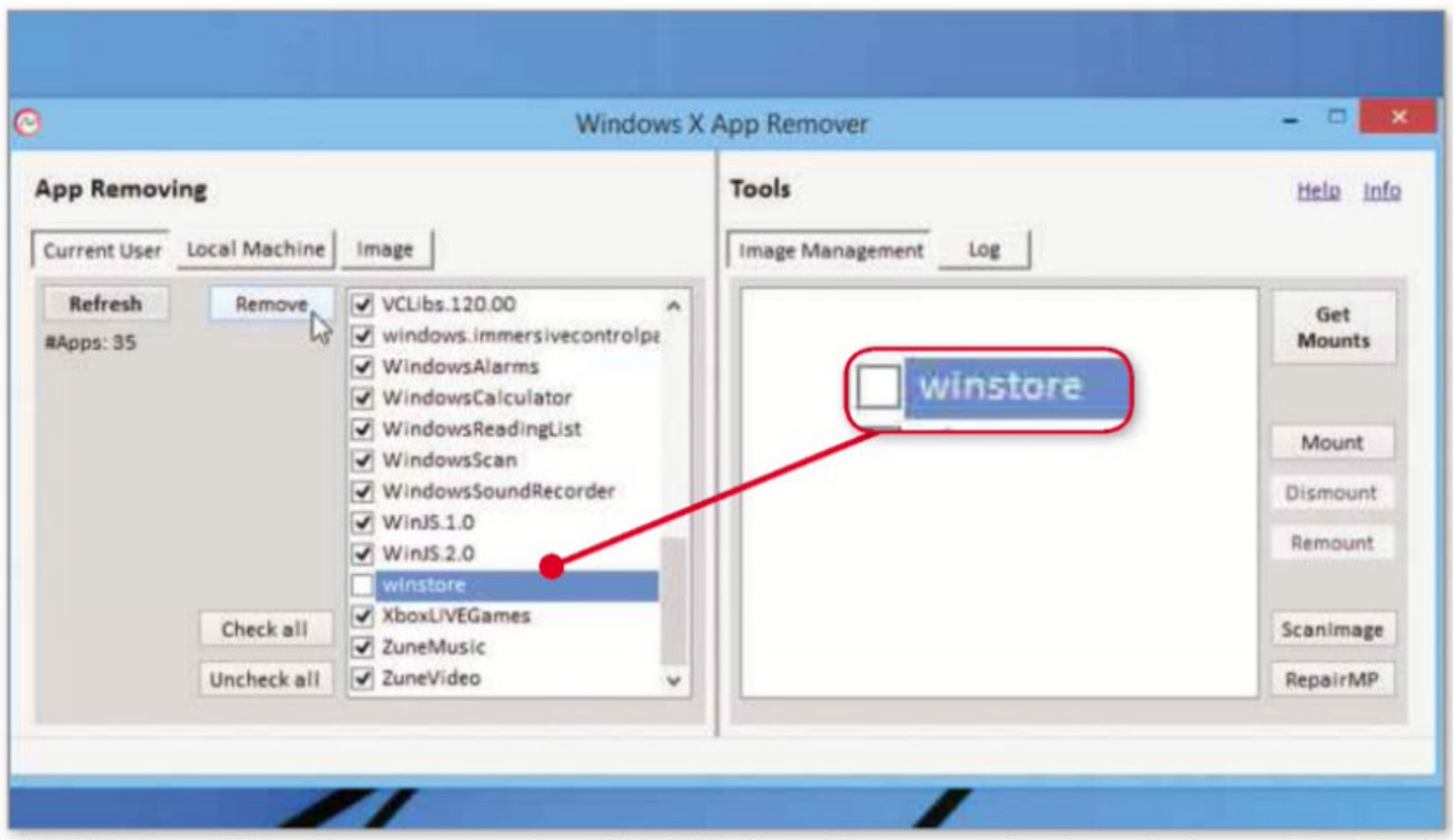


To remove an app in Windows 8/8.1, right-click it then click 'Uninstall'

Another way to remove apps is via Settings, which lists apps by size – letting you see which are taking up most space. Start by pressing Windows+C on your keyboard to open the Charms menu. Next, click Settings, 'Change PC settings', 'Search and apps', then 'App sizes'. Click any app, then click Uninstall and Uninstall again.

How to uninstall all apps

As with Windows 10, it's possible to remove all apps at once (except those that are built into the OS) using a single PowerShell command. But if you're not familiar with Windows PowerShell, you might be better off using a free tool called Windows X App Remover. Download the winxar_102.zip file from www.snipca.com/19269, unzip it, then run the tool. Click the Get Apps button, then tick the apps you want to remove.



Use Windows X App Remover to uninstall all Windows Store apps, but leave 'winstore' unticked in case you change your mind

We strongly recommend leaving Windows Store (listed as 'winstore') unticked because it represents the easiest way of getting your apps back again should you want to. Once you've made your selections, click Remove, then click Yes.

WINDOWS 7 TOOLS: WHAT TO REMOVE

Windows 7 may not come with apps, but it's bursting with tools and programs you don't really need. To remove them click Start, Control Panel, then 'Uninstall a program'. This opens the 'Programs and Features' tool. Its main function is to remove third-party software from your PC, but on the left you'll see an option to 'Turn Windows features on or off'. Click this to open a window listing the features you can enable or disable. Click the plus symbols to reveal individual components. To remove an item, untick it, then click OK. If you see a warning, click Yes.

What can you safely uninstall?

You need to be careful when removing features from Windows. Some – like Windows Search – make your PC work better, so it's best to disable only items you're sure you don't need. Here's what you *can* safely remove.

Games These are fun, but not essential. Untick individual games, or untick the Games box to remove them all.

Internet Explorer Use Chrome, Firefox or Opera instead of Microsoft's veteran browser? If so, you can safely uninstall it.

Windows Media Center Windows 7 Home Premium comes with Microsoft's home-entertainment suite, but many people just don't use it. Remove it by clicking the plus symbol next to Media Features, then unticking Windows Media Center. You should also untick Windows DVD Maker if you use other disc-burning tools, such as Nero Burning ROM (www.snipca.com/19288).

Internet Printing Client Not many of us will ever need to print over the internet, so this one can go. Click the plus symbol next to 'Print and Document Services', then untick it.

Tablet PC Components For reasons that are hard to fathom, Windows 7 runs touchscreen features, even if you don't have a suitable device. It makes no sense to leave these switched on.

Windows Gadget Platform Microsoft itself has condemned Desktop gadgets as unsafe because they can allow hackers to access your system.

XPS Services and XPS Viewer These provide support for XPS, Microsoft's PDF-like document format. Disable them if you don't use it. ca

TURN OFF FEATURES IN WINDOWS 8 AND 10

Turning off features in Windows 8 and 10 works in a similar way: right-click Start, then click Control Panel, 'Uninstall a program', and 'Turn Windows features on or off'. However, the available components differ in each OS, and there are fewer features we'd recommend removing. Internet Explorer, Internet Printing Client, XPS Services and XPS Viewer can all be safely removed if not needed. Users of Windows 8 Pro can remove Windows Media Center, too.

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You can **STILL BUY** a **Windows 7 PC** Here's how...

Don't buy a Windows 10 PC just because Microsoft wants you to. You can still get a new Windows 7 computer if you prefer that operating system. **Jonathan Parkyn** explains how

Microsoft hasn't exactly been coy about its desire to shift PC users on to Windows 10, tempting them with free upgrades, pre-loading installation files on to people's PCs and endlessly nagging them. With all this hype, we wouldn't blame you for abandoning Windows 7. But *Computeractive* readers aren't won over so easily. Annoyed by Microsoft's constant pestering, many of you have told us that you'll continue to use Windows 7. The most common question you've asked us is whether you can still buy a new Windows 7 PC. You want to stick with a familiar operating system (OS), but would still like a faster computer on which to run it. We're happy to say that yes, this is still possible. Here are your options.

Buy a new PC direct from a manufacturer

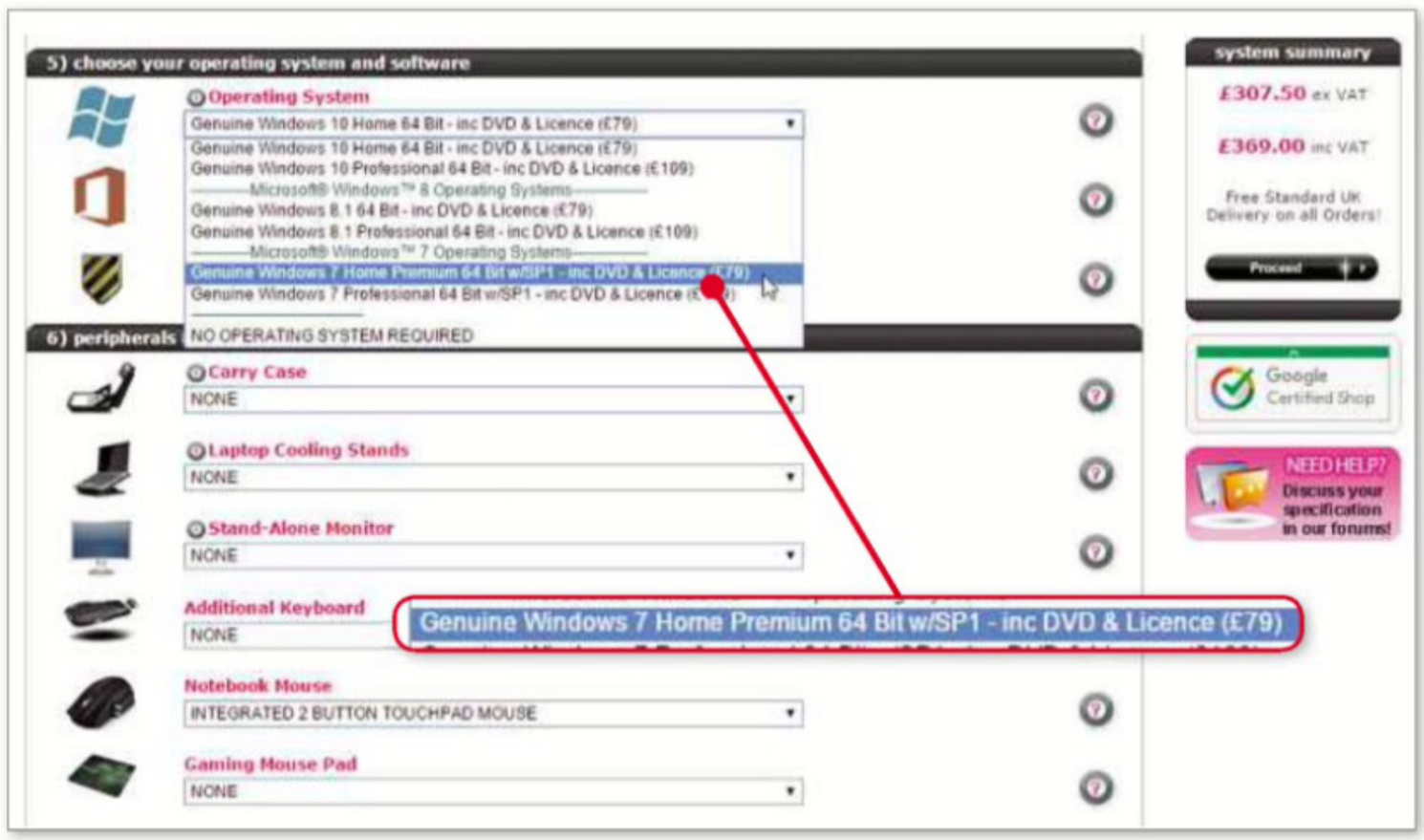
It's a little-known fact that you can still buy a brand new computer with Windows 7 pre-installed. UK manufacturer PC Specialist (www.pcspecialist.co.uk), for example, simply lets you select Windows 7 Home Premium or Professional as an alternative to Windows 10 when you're configuring your system. Windows 7 isn't available for all PC Specialist's models, but when it's offered, it costs exactly the same as Windows 10.

Similarly, Dell will provide you with Windows 7, though on certain business models only. Head to www.dell.co.uk and click 'For Work' in the top menu bar, then select a sub-category to see which models can be configured to come with Windows 7. Currently, Dell's Vostro 15 3000 series laptops (from £249) and OptiPlex 3020 desktop PCs (from £269) are among the cheaper models available with Windows 7 Professional Edition.

Buy a new PC from a retailer

A number of retailers also offer Windows 7 PCs. Head to Laptops Direct, for example, and you'll find an entire section of the online store still devoted to selling Windows 7 products (www.snipca.com/19334). Many of the laptops here are modern PCs with fast processors, lots of memory and, in some cases, SSDs.

Conversely, an Amazon search for 'Windows 7 PCs' turns up a lot of older products, many of which are built with outdated hardware, so take care when choosing your PC. Annoyingly, you'll also have to avoid hardware that's too new – specifically the latest Intel processors (read more about this news on page 6).

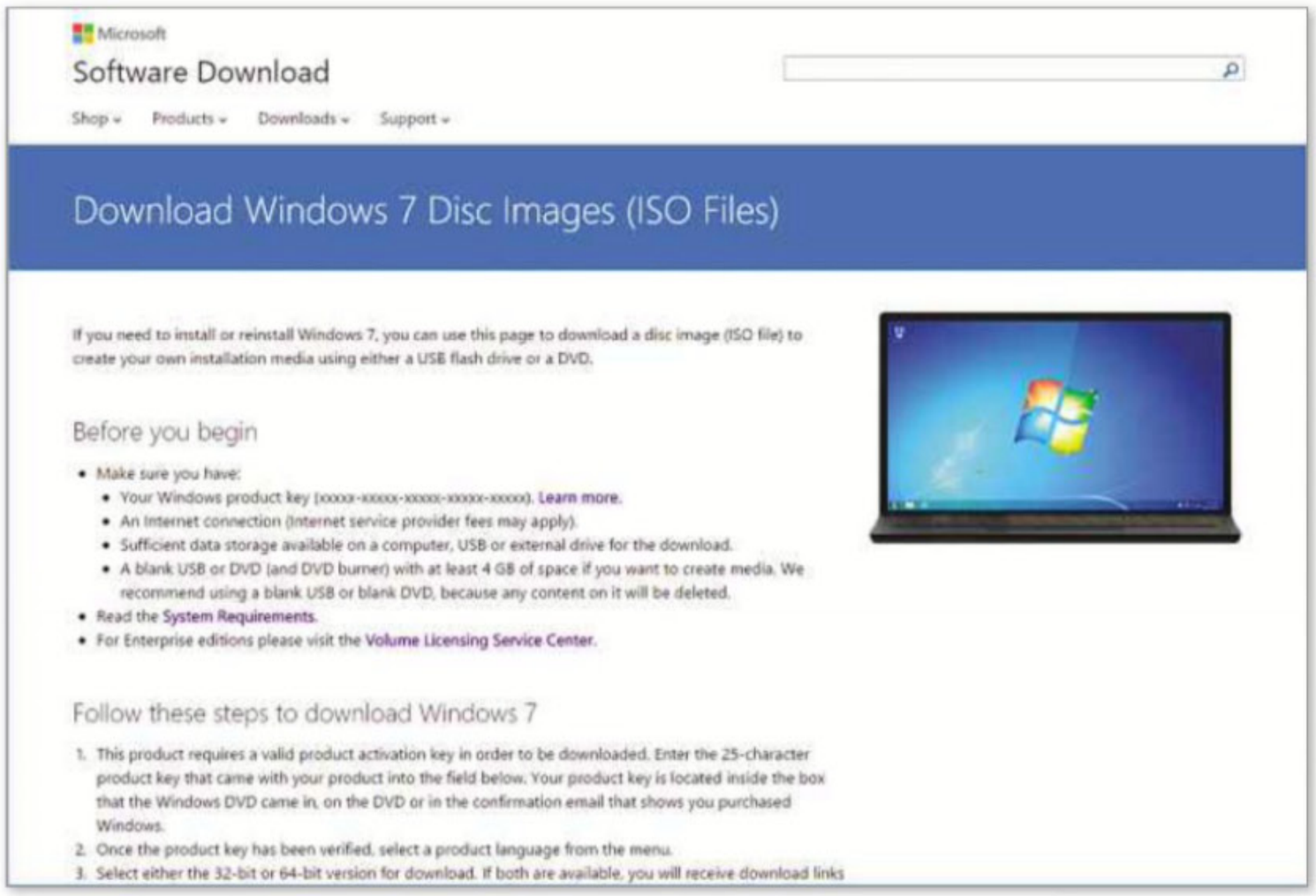


Some manufacturers, including PC Specialist, let you select Windows 7 as an option when you configure a PC to buy

Buy a second-hand or refurbished PC

Buying a pre-owned or refurbished PC can be a cheap way to get hold of a Windows 7 system. All the usual caveats apply here, though. Prices start at around £40 for refurbished Windows 7 PCs on eBay (for an example, see www.snipca.com/19337), but this may not always be the most reliable or trustworthy method of obtaining a new computer.

Dell (www.snipca.com/19338), Laptops Direct (www.snipca.com/19339) and other sellers often have special offers on refurbished units. Buying from a recognised name offers some reassurance regarding the legitimacy of the Windows 7 licence you're buying, plus peace of mind should things go wrong.



You can download a copy of Windows 7 from Microsoft, but only if you already have a product code

Exercise your downgrade rights

Microsoft provides 'downgrade rights' with certain editions of Windows. In theory, this lets you buy a new Windows 10 PC, then downgrade it to Windows 7 for free, using the licence that came with the new computer. Unfortunately, only PCs running the Professional editions of Windows 10 or Windows 8.1 are eligible – not the Home editions. And even then, the downgrade procedure itself can be difficult to pull off.

For a start, you'll need a full physical copy of Windows 7 Professional edition. If you don't have one, you can download it from Microsoft (www.snipca.com/19343) and burn it to a disc. But Microsoft's download site requires you to enter a valid Windows 7 Professional product code before you can download the OS. The code from your Windows 10 Pro PC won't work.

Frustratingly, Microsoft offers no obvious solution for this. One answer might be to search for the Windows 7 Professional edition product code online. This may not sound entirely legal, but, in fact, you won't actually be using the code to activate your copy of Windows; it's just to provide you with access to the download site. If you'd rather not do this, you could try to borrow a Windows 7 Professional disc from someone instead.

Next, use Belarc Advisor (www.snipca.com/19344) or a similar tool to uncover your Windows 10 product code – make a note of this, as you'll need it later. You'll then need to carry out a clean installation of Windows 7, which will wipe everything from your PC (follow Microsoft's 'To install Windows 7 using the Custom option and formatting the

You can buy legitimate copies of Windows 7 from Dabs.com for £114

hard disk' instructions at www.snipca.com/19341). During the installation process you'll be prompted again for the activation code – skip this by leaving the product key box empty and clicking Next.

Once Windows 7 is installed, you'll need to activate it manually over the phone, explaining that you're using your downgrade rights and quoting your Windows 10 product code. See www.snipca.com/19342 for more on Windows' downgrade rights.

Install Windows 7 yourself

If you don't qualify for downgrade rights, you could simply buy a boxed copy of Windows 7 and install it on a new PC. Prices vary from £40 to £150 on sites such as Amazon, though with Amazon's third-party traders you'll need to be careful that you're getting a genuine copy of Windows 7. To be safe, you may want to stick with reliable sources, such as Dabs.com, which is selling genuine copies of Windows 7 Professional Edition for £114 (www.snipca.com/19340).

Obviously, this isn't necessarily the cheapest way to get a new Windows 7 computer. But if you have an old Windows 7 PC you don't use any more, then you may be able save money by transferring the operating system's licence to a new computer for free. Predictably, there's another catch; you can only transfer a Windows 7 retail licence, not an OEM one. Loosely translated, this means that if your old PC came with Windows 7 pre-installed when you bought it, you almost certainly won't be able to transfer its licence to a new computer.

But if you bought a copy of Windows 7 yourself – a shop-bought DVD, for example – then you can transfer this. The process is similar to the downgrade rights method described above; use Belarc Advisor to make a note of your Windows 10 product code, then insert your Windows 7 disc and carry out a clean installation on the new PC, activating the licence over the phone once you're done. ca

IS WINDOWS 7 STILL SAFE?

Microsoft's Extended support for Windows 7 is due to end on 14 January 2020, after which the operating system (OS) will stop receiving security updates.

However, Microsoft has hinted that it may become unsafe earlier than that. As we reported in Issue 467 (see News, page 6), in December the company's chief marketing officer Chris Capossela said that people using Windows 7 do so "at their own risk". He warned users that the OS may be incompatible with new hardware, such as printers, and alluded to dangers posed by "viruses and security problems".

This feels like scare tactics to us (and to some of you, too – see Star Letter, page 11). It's true that Windows 7 will become increasingly incompatible with new hardware, but Microsoft has promised to release security fixes until 2020. If we take the company at its word, then anyone with a Windows 7 PC will be able to use it safely for the next four years.

It would be a scandal if Microsoft backtracked on this pledge. For more information on how long Microsoft will support different versions of Windows, see its 'Lifecycle fact sheet': www.snipca.com/19356. You'll see that Mainstream support for Windows 7 ended in 2015. This means no new features will be added to the OS, and doesn't pose a security risk.

Check your home **broadband and Wi-Fi**

Is your internet too slow? **Nicole Kobie** invites us into her home to reveal the best tests to find out where the problem lies

It's an all too common problem: your broadband just isn't as fast as you think it should be. Perhaps your Internet Service Provider (ISP) promised you 20Mbps, but you are barely managing half of that? Or maybe your speed fluctuates throughout the day, and stutters if you move to a different room.

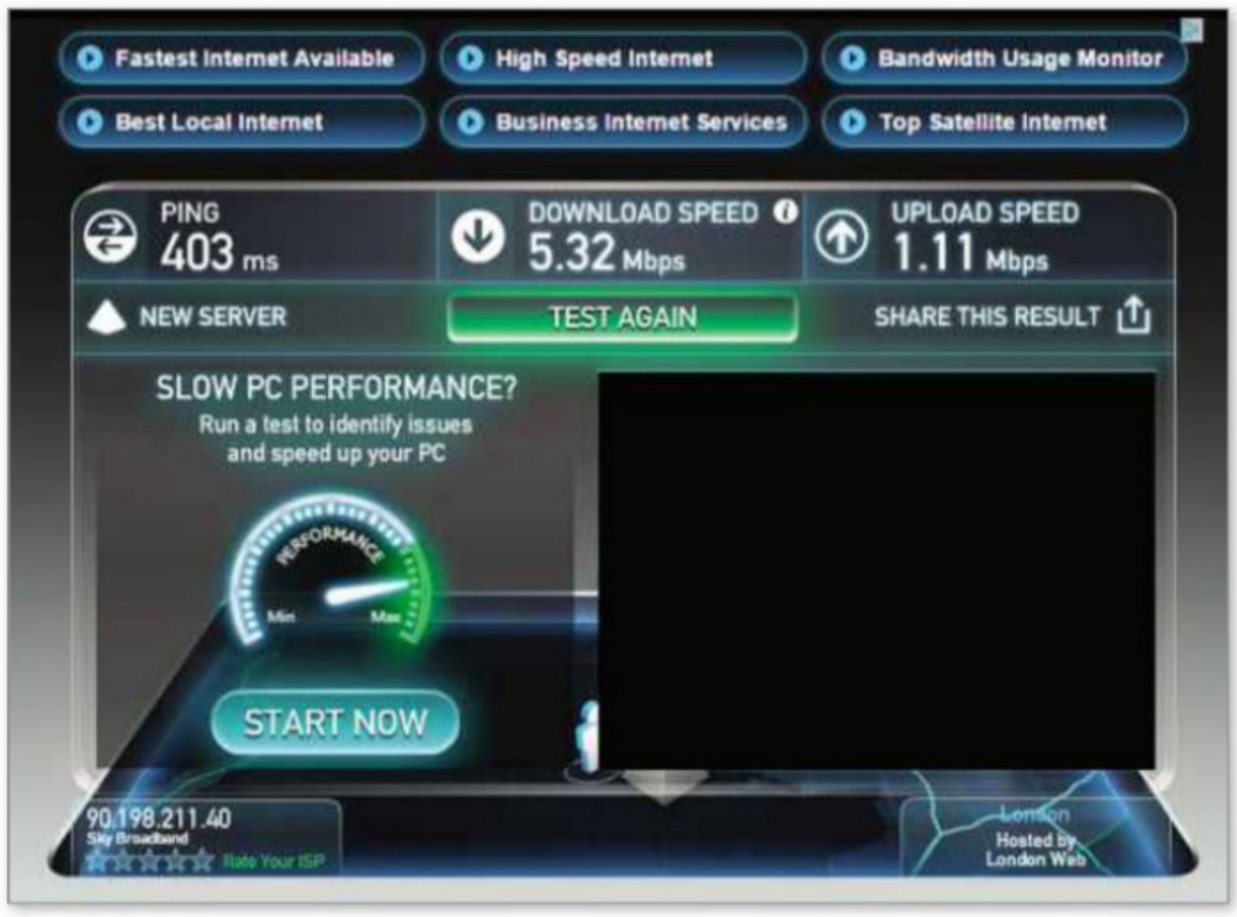
Thankfully, there are several excellent tests and apps that will tell you what speeds you're getting, and why these might be slower than you'd hoped. These are even worth trying even if you're happy with your broadband speed and Wi-Fi – you never know when you might need this kind of information.

Run a broadband speed test

Before you do anything else, find out how fast your connection really is via a broadband test. It's best to first do this using a cable connected directly to your router, rather than by Wi-Fi.

Numerous online services claim to test your speed, but their accuracy varies. One site whose results we trust is Speedtest.net (www.speedtest.net), which is run by the Seattle-based company Ookla. In its tests (see box on page 61 for more details) it automatically chooses its nearest server to you. Because this is likely to be a similar distance to your ISP's server, it should provide the most accurate result. To double-check the result choose a different server (one that is further away) by clicking the 'New Server' button.

Ookla runs the same speed tests offered by many other sites, including USwitch (www.snipca.com/19372), so look out for the Ookla logo before running multiple tests to make sure you're not wasting time comparing results using the same tool.



Click 'New Server' in Speedtest.net to switch servers

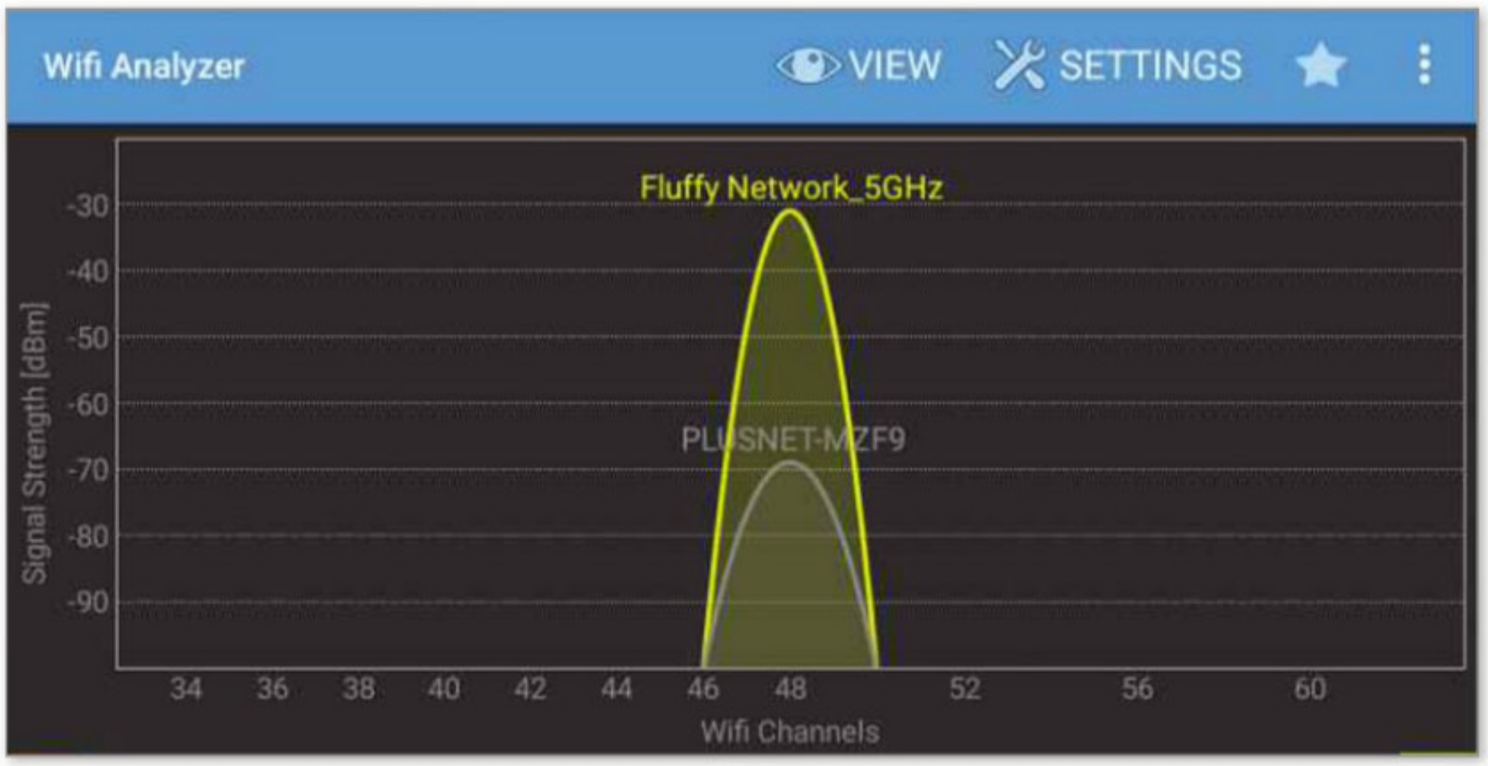
Another test you should try comes from Thinkbroadband (www.thinkbroadband.com/speedtest.html), a broadband news and information site. Unlike Speedtest.net it also shows your average speed over time, and your 'burst' speed, which is the very fastest you could have received at that particular time.

Testing Speedtest.com and Thinkbroadband back at my flat on a weekday afternoon produced similar results of around 14.5Mbps. My ISP claims I should be hitting 17Mbps, but I've never achieved this despite living near an exchange in central London, where speeds are typically very good.

Speeds will change throughout the day, and in the evening mine often falls to around 11Mbps as more people log on to use the network after returning home from work.

Check what's blocking your Wi-Fi

Your ISP may not be responsible for slow speeds; the blame could lie with your Wi-Fi. Perhaps you're getting interference from your neighbour's router, or the walls in your house are blocking the signal. If your desktop PC reaches the speed you expect, but your laptop, phone or tablet fall short, it's a safe bet your Wi-Fi is at fault. If you can, check this using Android apps, which are better than their basic iOS equivalents because Apple doesn't allow these to access data stored on



Wi-Fi Analyzer reveals how many people in the neighbourhood are on 2.4GHz and 5GHz

iPhones and iPads.

My own flat is the ground floor of an old two-up, two-down cottage that's been doubled in size with an extension at the back. As cosy as it is, it means that a one-time exterior wall runs through the middle of my flat, blocking my signal. I certainly don't need a Wi-Fi-checking app to confirm the problem, because the connection stops dead as I step from the hallway into the kitchen. I fixed this some months ago with a Wi-Fi extender (Netgear's EX6100 - £40 from Amazon: www.snipca.com/19373), meaning I can now happily stream and browse while sitting at the kitchen table.

I thought it would be interesting to see what the Wi-Fi-checking apps would make of my setup. Ofcom's new Wi-Fi Checker for Android (free from www.snipca.com/19368) is easy to use, but we didn't find it particularly helpful. It quickly reveals whether your Wi-Fi is hampering your internet connection, but if there is a problem it says that it doesn't have enough of a signal to give you the full details. It was sensitive enough to pick up interference from an operating microwave (scrambled eggs on toast, in case you're interested), but couldn't display the full report identifying the problem.

There are better options, one of which is Ookla's free Speedtest.net app for Android (www.snipca.com/19374). Usefully, it shows how your speeds vary during the day. Ours ranged from 6.1Mbps to 14.48Mbps, depending on where we stood, and whether the electric heater – which tends to chew up the signal – was switched on or off. Yes, I'm willing to risk chillblains to bring you these results.

OpenSignal for Android (free from www.snipca.com/19369) tests download and upload speeds as well as mobile broadband connections, and gives your Wi-Fi a rating out of five for different tasks. This helps you find out whether you need to switch to a fixed connection when you stream video or use Skype. However, it gave us different speeds for tests taken just minutes apart, which undermined our faith in it somewhat.

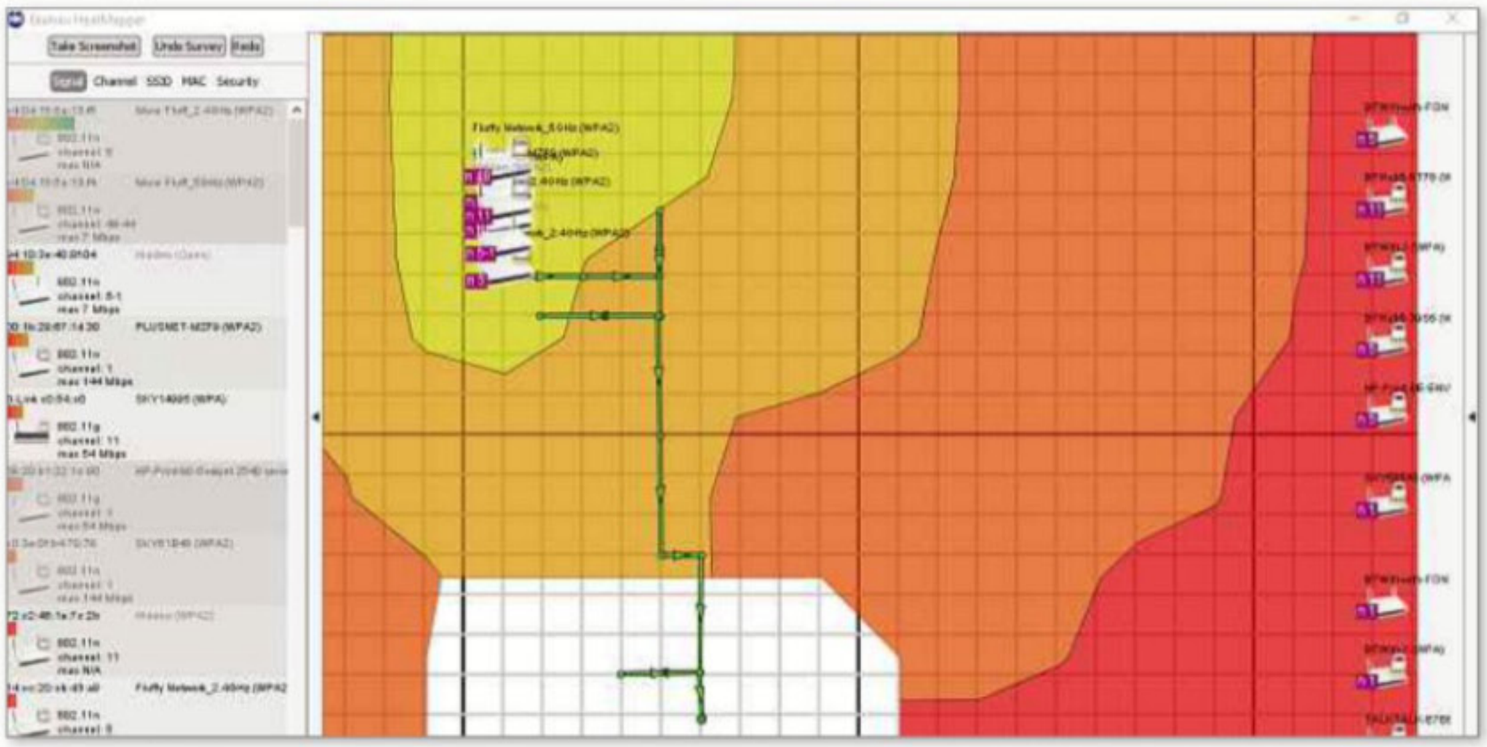
Are your neighbours to blame?

You should test your Wi-Fi in different rooms, and with electrical appliances turned on and off, to see if it fluctuates. If it doesn't alter much, your problem may be caused instead by interference from your neighbours' signals.

One way to overcome this is to use a dual-band router, which offers you 2.4GHz or 5GHz on the Wi-Fi spectrum. If everyone else in your street is on 2.4GHz, you can avoid interference by switching to 5GHz – and vice versa. You can also avoid interference by switching to a different channel on that spectrum range. Some routers now do this automatically.

Use the free Android app Wi-Fi Analyzer (www.snipca.com/19380, see screenshot above) to check whether your neighbours are using the same spectrum or channel. On my street, it revealed a dozen other wireless connections using 2.4GHz, but only one on 5GHz. It also shows which channel each connection is using, so if you're stuck with a single-band router, you can still find a less busy spot for your own Wi-Fi.

You can use a heatmap tool to find out where the signal is strongest in your home. We recommend Ekahau's Heatmapper (free from www.snipca.com/19387), which lets you build a heatmap on your laptop as you walk from room to room. Click the grid every step or two you take to map out the shape of your home, and then hover over your router to see the coverage map – green is where your signal is strongest, red is weakest. ca


Ekahau's Heatmapper builds a colour-coded heatmap of your Wi-Fi: red is bad, green is good

PING! HOW A BROADBAND SPEED TEST WORKS

Most speed tests generally work the same way: they download a small file, then use it to overload your network connection to see how fast the data travels.

Ookla's Speedtest.net performs three tests. The most important, which calculates broadband speed, is a 'ping' test (also called a latency test), which sends a piece of data to the server. It measures in milliseconds the time it takes to get a response.

The other two tests assess your download and upload speeds. For the former, Speedtest.net connects to the server and requests a small amount of data, timing how long it takes to arrive, before requesting more data "chunks" to fill the maximum amount allowed by the connection. The upload tests work in reverse, with Speedtest.net sending data from your PC to the server.

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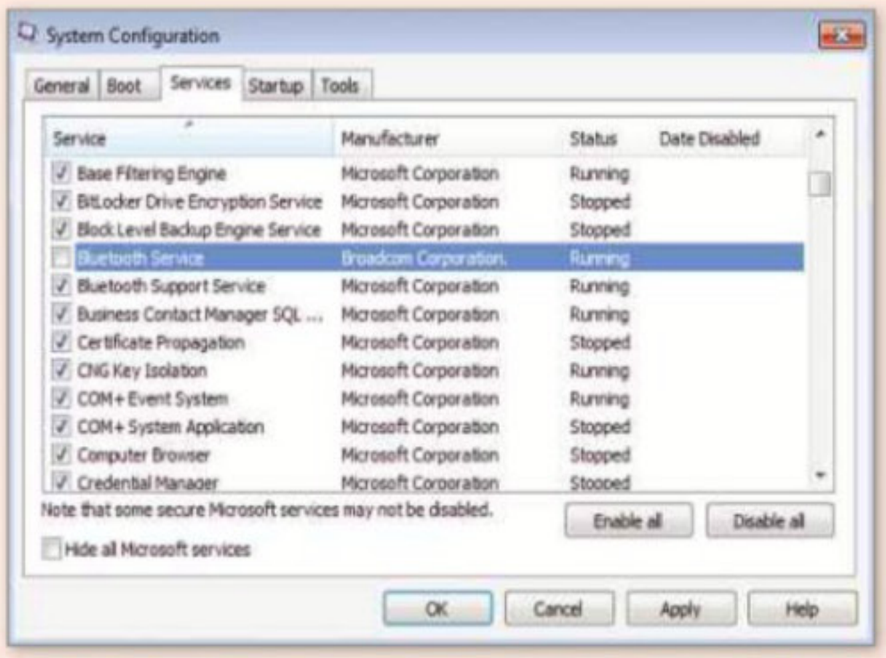
Problems Solved

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Why is Bluetooth slow to connect?

Q I have a Logitech MX Anywhere 2 mouse, which connects to a PC via either Bluetooth or Logitech's own USB receiver. When using the USB receiver, the mouse works as soon as Windows starts. But if I switch to Bluetooth then it takes several seconds before I can move the pointer. My laptop is a Sony Vaio running Windows 10. Is this behaviour normal? How can I fix it?

Boutros Chalouhy



Go to System Configuration and uninstall or disable tools and drivers to speed up Bluetooth connectivity

A Yes this is normal, up to a point. Basic USB connectivity is hardwired into modern computers, at the BIOS level. This means that support for USB keyboard-and-mouse input is available from the moment the computer is fired up. When Windows launches, additional drivers might be loaded to enable device-specific features – such as extra mouse buttons – but essential pointer-moving and typing actions will be recognised right away.

The same is not true of Bluetooth. The Bluetooth hardware might be enabled in the BIOS, but Bluetooth services rely on drivers loaded with the operating system – Windows 10 in your case. So, in Bluetooth mode your mouse won't respond until Windows has loaded the relevant drivers.

Windows decides the order in which drivers are loaded, and it doesn't take more than a moment for the individual drivers to launch. However, if you have a lot of stuff loading at startup those moments add up – and your Bluetooth drivers might be near the end of the queue.

In the first instance we recommend ensuring you have the latest versions of the Logitech mouse and Sony Bluetooth drivers installed: manufacturers regularly update drivers and the simple act of reinstalling them might bump them up Windows' priority list.

If that doesn't help, then we'd recommend using the System Configuration tool built in to Windows to take a peek at what's happening during startup: this won't solve the problem, but it will let you investigate what's being loaded, and when. You can then use this knowledge to uninstall unnecessary tools or drivers, or hit Google to do some more research.

Click Start, type msconfig.exe and press Enter. Select the Boot tab, then tick 'Boot log', followed by OK and then Restart. When Windows has launched, press Windows key+E to summon File Explorer, then navigate to C:\Windows (assuming that's where Windows is installed on your PC), right-click the file called 'ntbtlog.txt' and choose 'Open with' followed by Notepad.

At this point you must turn detective. Scroll through the log to look for your Bluetooth drivers. The related file won't necessarily include the word 'Bluetooth' – so look for abbreviations like 'BT' or 'Bth'. Then use the knowledge of your own PC's setup to investigate what loads prior to the Bluetooth drivers or , if you're not sure, use Google to figure out what each one is – and then uninstall or disable as appropriate. You can disable items via the Services and Startup tabs in the System Configuration tool.

Can I make the screensaver show the filename?

Q In the old days of Windows XP, I was able to set the screensaver to display the filename and location of the picture. The new screensavers don't seem to offer this same option. Is there any way to bring this facility back?

Allan Smith

A We don't know which later version of Windows you're using, but the answer is yes – if you have access to a Windows XP PC. Even if you don't, you'll still be able to do it, but you'll have to take the risk of downloading the necessary file from a non-Microsoft source.

In Windows XP, press Windows key+E, navigate to **C:\Windows\System32**, then copy the 'ssmypics.scr' file to a USB stick (or email it to your new PC). Now move to the new computer and launch Windows Explorer (or File Explorer in Windows 8.1/10), then navigate to **C:\Windows\System32** (or **C:\Windows\SysWOW64**, if your PC runs a 64bit edition). Copy the 'ssmypics.scr' to this folder.

Next, right-click the Windows Desktop and choose Personalize, then click Screen Saver. Now open the dropdown menu under 'Screen saver' and choose 'My Pictures Slideshow'. Click the Settings button, then tick 'Show file names'. Click OK twice.

To display the file name in screensaver mode, tick 'Show file names' in screen saver settings

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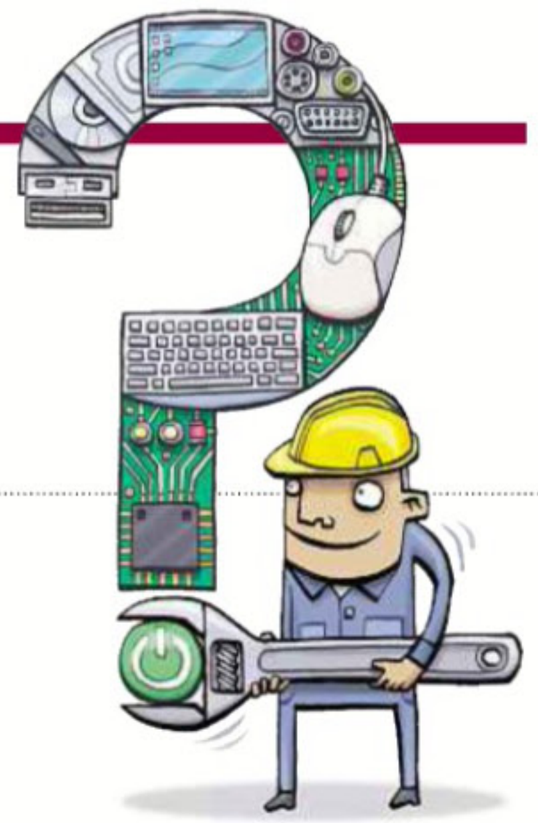
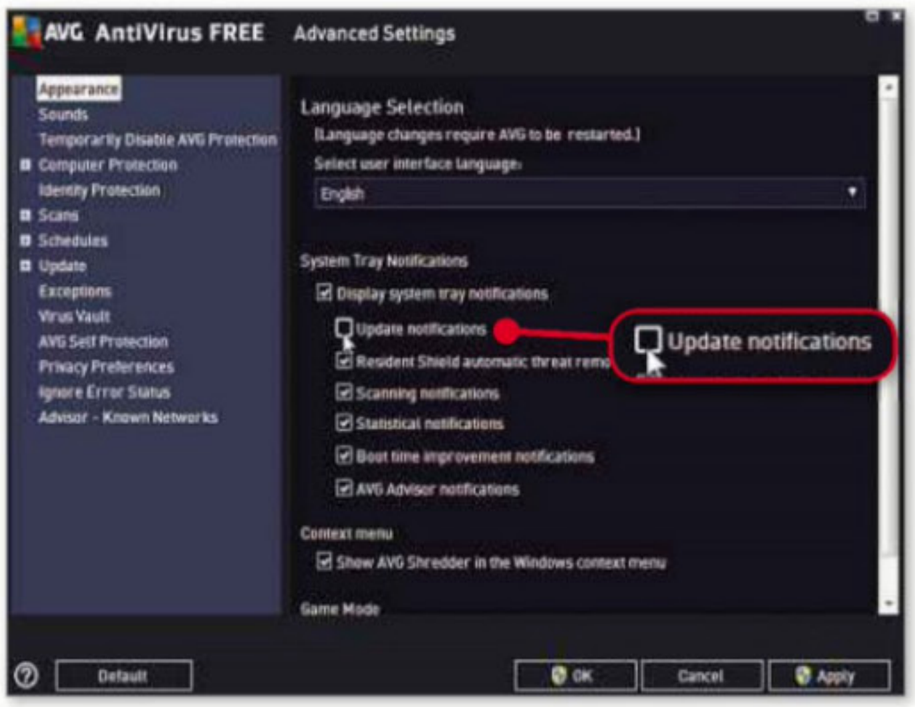


Is this pop-up a scam?

Q A box has popped up on my Windows Desktop on the bottom right of the screen. It reads: 'Fix common PC problems' and has a 'Free Scan' link. I imagine this is one of those scams where if I clicked, it would find about 10,000 problems that needed to be fixed and only their app could do it, at some considerable expense of course, so I haven't clicked. The annoying thing is it's blocking a clock icon I normally have in that corner and nothing I do either moves or eliminates it. Any ideas?

Walter Blanchard



Untick the 'Update notifications' box to stop pop-up adverts from AVG appearing

A Yes. This is the dubious work of the AVG AntiVirus Free security program, which you have installed on your PC.

AVG seems to have taken leave of its senses, and has begun taking advantage of its trusting users by displaying adverts in an effort to sell some of its paid-for tools. That in itself is not the worst thing to do, but the fact that it decided to do this via a suspicious-looking pop-up that carried no company branding whatsoever – and no obvious way to close it – shocks and disappoints us.

Fortunately, it's not actually harmful and is easy to close (when you know how). There's also a way to stop AVG making similar incursions on your Windows Desktop, if you're not tempted to remove the program, that is.

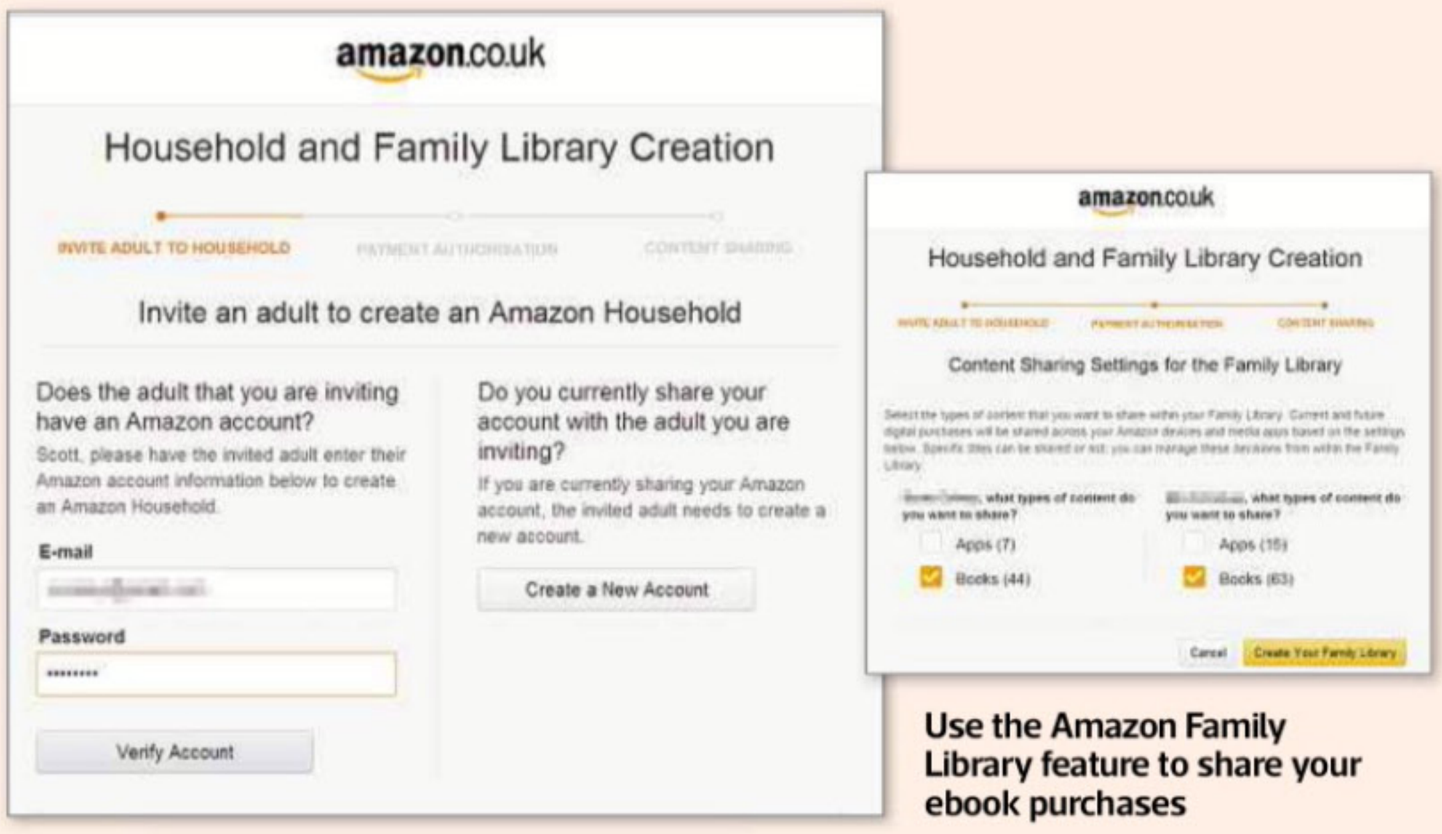
Look at the Windows Taskbar and you'll see the AVG icon (it's present in the screenshot you sent us). Just right-click this and choose 'Close window' – the advert will disappear.

To stop future adverts, you'll need to disable AVG's update notifications. This obviously isn't ideal, as you won't know when updates are available – but it's this channel that AVG uses to punt its paid-for programs. So, right-click the AVG icon in the Notification Area, then choose Open AVG. Now click Options, followed by 'Advanced settings', then click Appearance in the left-hand pane. Clear the tick from 'Update notifications' under 'Display system tray notifications', then click OK.

Can I lend my Kindle ebooks?

Q I have a Kindle Paperwhite. My wife recently bought a Kindle Fire in the sales and she now sometimes uses this as an e-reader. Our tastes in books aren't exactly the same, but there are a few ebooks of mine she'd like to read. We have American friends that tell me they're able to 'lend' ebooks to each other, but I can't figure out how to do that. My friend even tried to talk me through it on the phone, but the options he talked about don't seem to exist on my account. How do I lend ebooks to my wife?

Joe Hatfield



Use the Amazon Family Library feature to share your ebook purchases

A We're afraid that you can't, because the lending feature enjoyed by your American pals isn't yet available to UK Kindle owners. However, you can make use of a feature called Family Library that will enable you to share digital content bought from Amazon with your wife. Assuming you both agree, this will allow your wife to access your ebook purchases – and vice versa. You can even extend this sharing to your childrens, if you have any.

Visit the 'Manage Your Content and Devices' page at www.amazon.co.uk/mycd, then select the Settings tab. Now click the 'Invite an Adult' button – in the 'Households and Family Library' section – and ask your wife to fill out her Amazon credentials. Choose the 'Yes, we agree...' button, then click Create Household. Tick what content you wish to share, then click Create Your Family Library.

Problems Solved

Do pinned programs slow down my PC?

Q Can you explain whether apps and programs pinned on the Taskbar or as tiles on the new Windows 10 Start menu place a significant performance load on my computer? Is it detrimental to have lots pinned in this way, or is it insignificant?

John Lindley

A The performance effects of pinning stuff is largely insignificant. Pinning an item will make Windows fractionally slower to load, but we're talking milliseconds. Over time a lot of pinned items might add a couple of seconds to the overall launch time. However, once up and running their presence will have little or no impact on the performance of your PC.

So-called 'live' tiles could be considered the exception, because they actively update to display new or interesting stuff – such as weather reports or your favourite photos. By their very nature live tiles will take up a little bit of your computer's processing time but, again, the effect of a couple running in the background will be all but negligible.

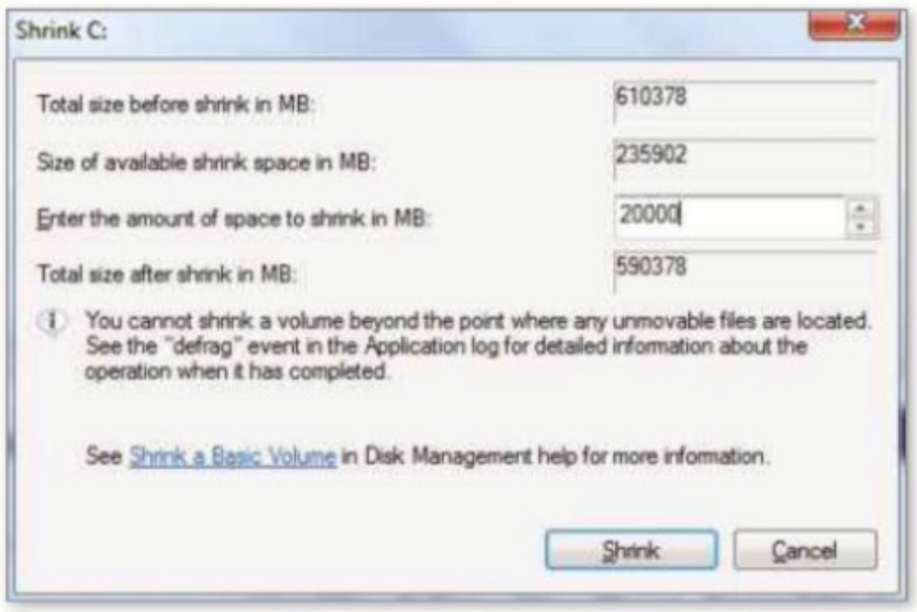
However, if you don't want the information that these live tiles serve up, they're easy enough to disable. Just right-click a live tile and choose 'Turn live tile off'.

Right-click a live tile and choose 'Turn live tile off' to stop their constant rotation

How do I make space on my C drive?

Q I have a desktop PC with two hard drives – C and D. My C has a 55GB limit, with only 1.62GB left. But my D drive has a 465GB limit with 308GB spare. Despite searching, I cannot work out how to free up space on my C drive by transferring stuff on to D. Can you give me a simple explanation?

Ian Mullin



Amend the storage space in the two partitions of a hard drive by entering the desired reduction and expansion

A Are you sure these are two separate physical drives, rather than one physical drive divided into two partitions? To check, press Windows key+R, then type diskmgmt.msc and press Enter. If the bottom pane displays both 'Disk 0' and 'Disk 1', then you have two physical drives. But our guess is that it'll just be 'Disk 0', with two partitions (C and D) represented by the rectangles to the right.

If so, right-click D and choose Shrink Volume. Type the desired reduction into the 'Enter the amount of space to shrink in MB' box, where 1,024MB equates to one gigabyte. Click Shrink. Now right-click the C rectangle and choose Extend Volume. Click Next, leave 'Select the amount of space in MB' value at the maximum, then click Next, followed by Finish.

If you do have two physical drives, you'll need to use Windows Explorer (or File Explorer) to drag and drop stuff between the two. Press Windows key+E twice to launch two Explorer windows. Only move stuff that you know is safe to move – and that won't include anything in the Windows or Program Files folders.

How do I go about making my keyboard's '@' symbol work?

Q When I try to type the email '@' symbol, it comes out as speech marks. Conversely, if I press Shift and 2 for speech marks, my computer types the @ symbol. I thought the keyboard was faulty so I bought a new one, but it's just the same. How do I resolve this?

Tony Whitelocke

Select 'English (United Kingdom) – United Kingdom' to change the region setting on your PC from American

A This is occurring because your computer has the wrong region settings: it's set up for keyboards with an American layout.

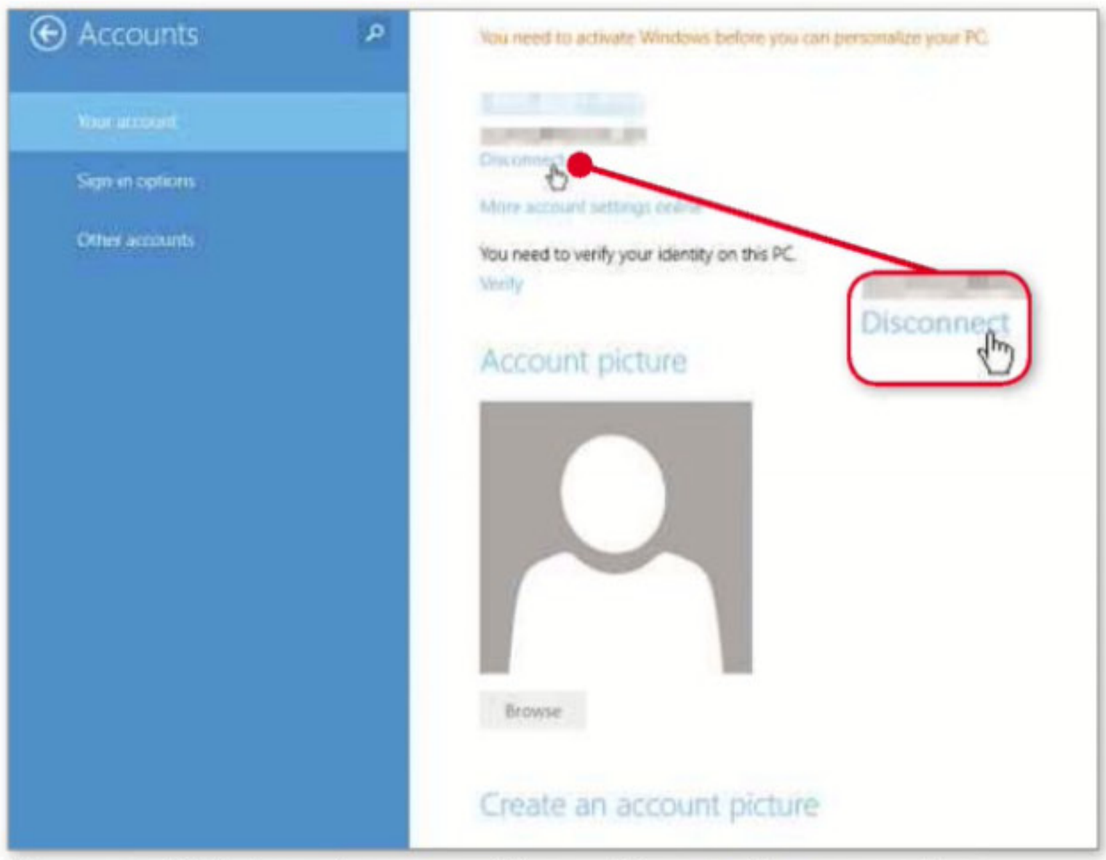
To fix it, launch the 'Region and Language' Control Panel by pressing Windows key+R, typing intl.cpl and pressing Enter. Now select the 'Keyboards and Languages' tab, and click the 'Change keyboards' button. Choose the General tab and, from the dropdown menu, select 'English (United Kingdom) – United Kingdom'.

If that option isn't listed, click Add, select it from the list and then click OK. Now repeat the above.

How do I stop Windows 10 syncing bookmarks?

Q I use a Windows 10 PC with Internet Explorer. I recently gave my spare computer to my daughter but, when either of us adds a bookmark to Favourites, it appears on the other's Favourites list. We use different email addresses, and live 40 miles apart. How do we stop this?

Bob Lees



Disconnect Windows from your Microsoft account on your old computer to stop bookmarks being synced on both PCs

A We don't have any information about the other computer, but we'll assume it's running either Windows 8, 8.1 or Windows 10. All these versions of the operating system are able to – and by default, will – sync all sorts of data and settings via Microsoft's OneDrive (previously called SkyDrive) cloud-storage system. If you sign into Windows with a Microsoft account, this is automatically enabled, but it's still possible to have it running in the background when using a local account.

So, we think this is the cause of your problem. Your old PC is running OneDrive (or SkyDrive) using a Microsoft account in your name and it's therefore busily syncing your Internet Explorer Favourites, and quite possibly your personal files, folders and various other settings as well.

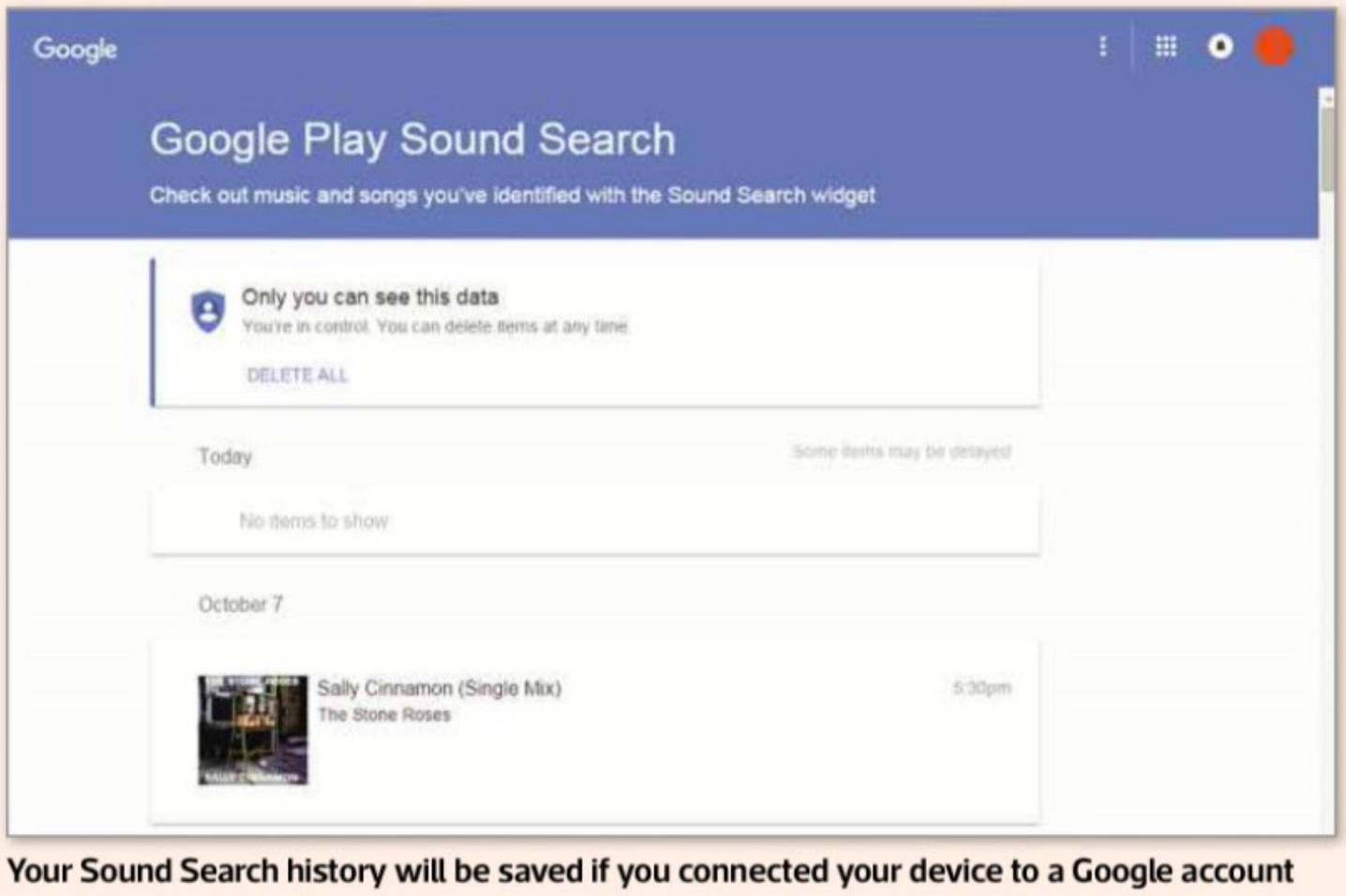
At your daughter's end you'll need either to disconnect Windows from your Microsoft account, or sign out of OneDrive/SkyDrive. Press Windows key+C to open the Charms bar, then click 'Change PC settings', followed by Accounts, 'Your account' and then Disconnect (or 'Switch to a local account'.

If you want to keep the Windows user account as it is, then instead launch SkyDrive or OneDrive from the Start screen, press Windows key+C, then click Settings, followed by Options and 'Sign out'.

Where's my Android song history?

Q I upgraded my smartphone to Android 6.0 (Marshmallow) and all went well. I previously had Google's 'What's this song?' widget installed on my home screen, and I'd use this often to identify and store the names of tunes I heard on my office radio. I could then tap a little clock icon to see a list of all the songs I'd identified, so that I could add them to Spotify at a later time. This widget is still there in Marshmallow, though it has a totally different look – and I can't find out how to bring up the history. This is really annoying, not least because I can't find the dozens of songs I must've identified before I upgraded. So, my simple question is – how do I view the history in this new version?

Martin Turner



Your Sound Search history will be saved if you connected your device to a Google account

A You don't, is the unfortunate answer. Google removed the history feature from its widget for reasons no one seems able to fathom. So, as it stands, Sound Search (as the widget's actually called) is useful only for identifying one song.

We do have a bit of good news, though: you'll probably be able to access the list of songs you'd saved before upgrading to Marshmallow. Assuming you've connected your Android device to a Google account, then your previous Sound Search history will be stored in your Google account. To view it, just visit www.snipca.com/19126 and log in with your Google credentials.

As for the hobbled Sound Search widget, we guess that Google might one day decide that it's made a mistake and restore the missing history feature. Until then, you're better off using a free alternative such as Shazam (www.snipca.com/19125), as this records and lets you access your history.

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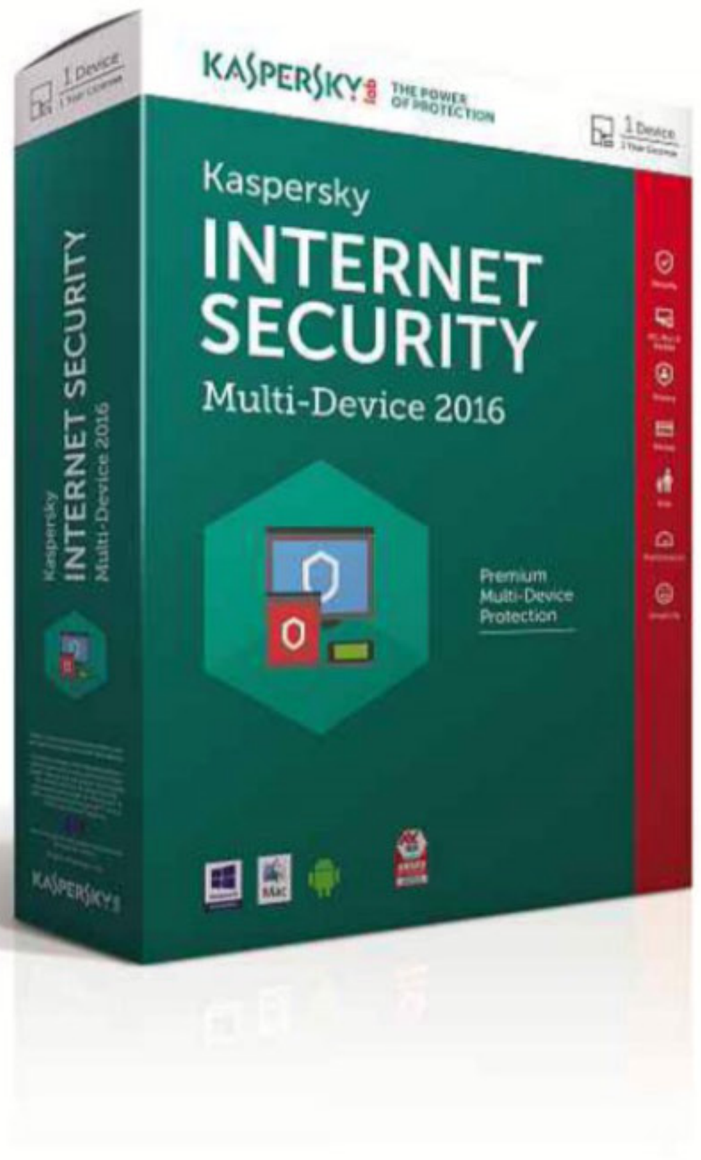

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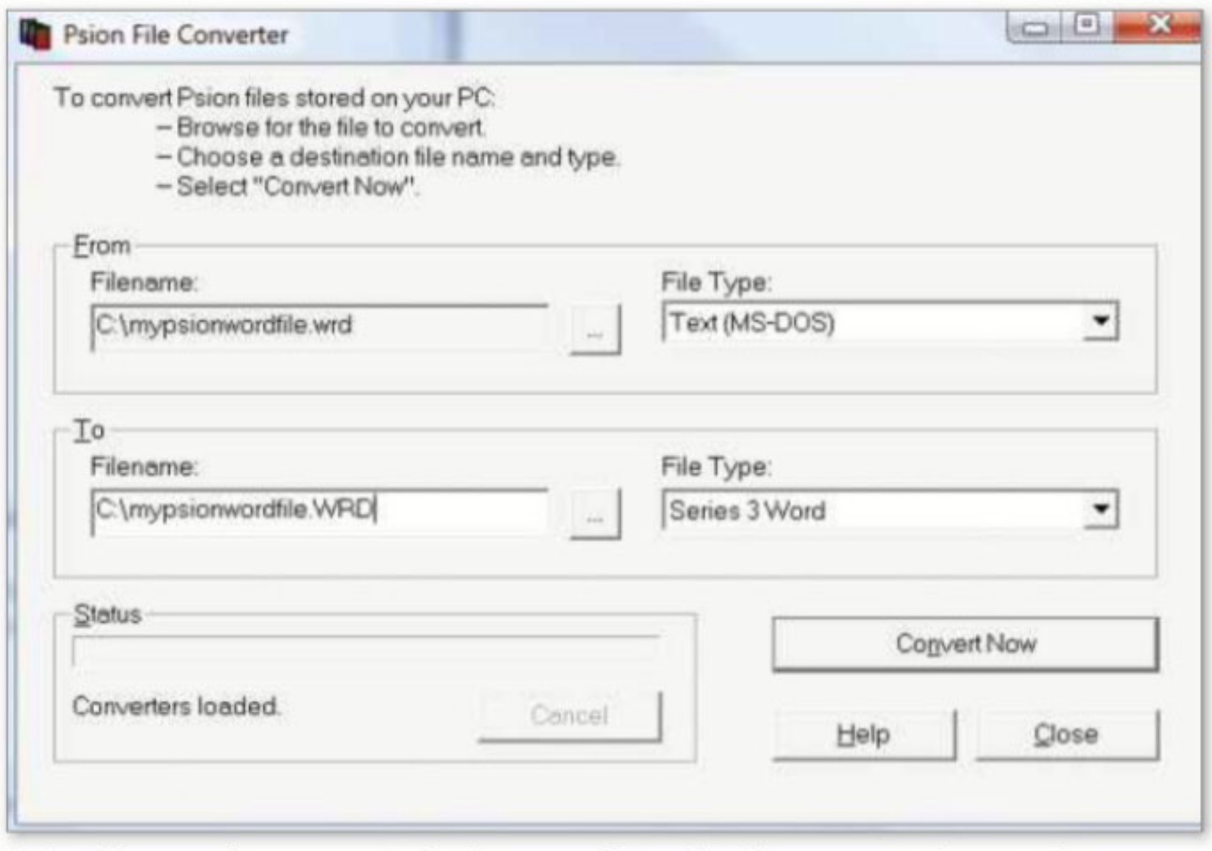
How do I open my old Psion files?

Q Prior to the advent of smartphones I had a Psion device. Before it died I downloaded some word-processing files, which were saved with a .psw suffix. I still have these on my PC, so I wonder if you could suggest a way to open these? Is there a program that will let me convert them to a format that would be readable in Microsoft Word?

Brian Cole-Hamilton



Psion files can be converted using a variety of online conversion services

A This is possible, but we're thrown a little by the file extension you cited. The word processor on Psion devices saved its documents with a .wrd extension. The .psw file extension was used by a 'pocket' version of Microsoft Word developed for early personal digital assistants (PDAs), dubbed Pocket PCs. We're wondering if you switched from a Psion to a Pocket PC, and forgot that you converted your Psion files from .wrd to .psw?

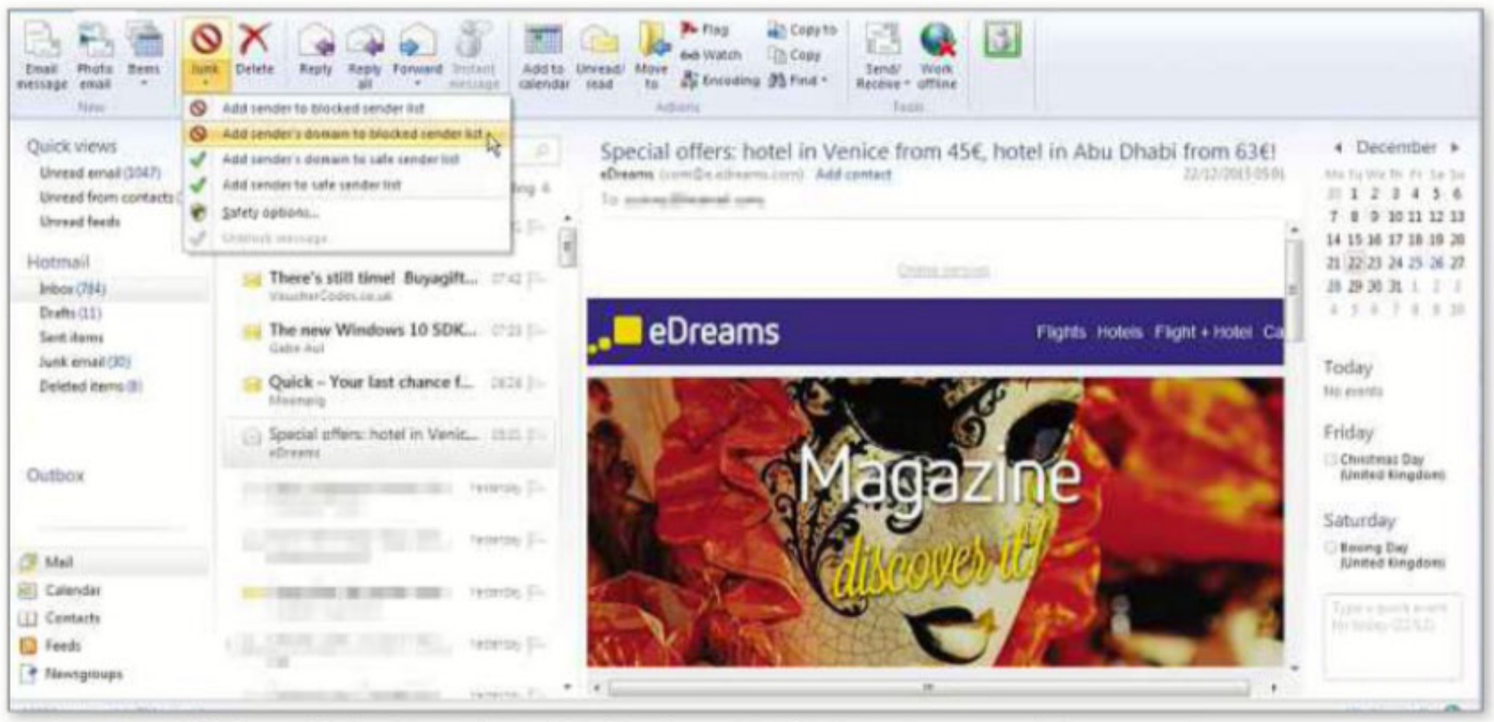
If so, there are loads of online file-conversion services that'll do the job, such as Docx2doc.com: you'll find its .psw converter at www.snipca.com/19242. Just click Choose File, select one of your files and then click the 'Convert file to DOC' button. Click the link to download a .doc version of the file, which will open in Microsoft Word.

Alternatively, if you really have .wrd files – or for some reason saved .wrd files with a .psw extension – then Psion's PsiWin tool will do the job. It's no longer officially available, but we grabbed it from www.snipca.com/19243, and found it worked fine in both Windows 7 and 10. Just click the ellipses ('...') buttons next to 'From and To' to select the files, use the File Type dropdowns to select what you want and then click Convert Now.

Why is Cisco spamming me?

Q For the past few months, I have been receiving hordes of emails from addresses ending in @cisco.com, which is, apparently, a company in the USA. But it seems to be sending them on behalf of other companies, as the full addresses are things like betfred@cisco.com, casino@cisco.com, PPI.alert@cisco.com and so on. Who is sending these? How is Cisco involved? How do I stop them? I add them to my junk email list, but that makes no difference.

Norman Coltham



Select the 'Add sender's domain to blocked sender list' to stop receiving spam

A These emails are not sent by Cisco, and have absolutely nothing to do with that company or any of the other companies mentioned in the email addresses. All these messages are spam – it's really that straightforward.

The spammer is spoofing Cisco's domain name in an effort to circumvent spam filters: if an email looks like it comes from a legitimate source, a filter is more likely to allow it through. And since spoofing is relatively easy for a spammer to achieve, lots of them do it.

You didn't tell us which email software you use, but we're surprised that the spam filter hasn't picked up on this already. Regardless, you should be able to set it up manually to catch all emails ending in '@cisco.com' and send them straight to the junk folder. In Windows Live Mail (WLM), for example, first click in your inbox to highlight one of the offending messages. Now, on the Home tab of the options at the top, click the down arrow below the Junk button and choose 'Add sender's domain to blocked sender list'.

If you make a mistake, or later change your mind, click WLM's menu button at the top left, then point your mouse cursor to Options and click 'Safety options'. Now select the Blocked Senders tab, find the erroneous addition, click to select it and then click Remove.

ON SALE 17 Feb

NEXT ISSUE

- Why can't I enable ReadyBoost?
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- Why won't my PC find Windows first time?

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Windows sound

Get PC sound on your HDMI TV, equalise unpredictable volume levels and fix choppy audio

No sound when playing media from your laptop through TV

Connected your laptop to your TV via an HDMI cable and getting pictures but no sound? It's a common problem that's easily fixed. Press Windows key+R to open the Run box, type mmsys.cpl and press Enter. Select the Playback tab to view a list of available devices, which should include an entry for your TV (if you don't see this entry, see one of our Readers' Tips on page 43 for a solution). Right-click this entry and choose 'Set as Default Device'. Click OK to close the box and then, if necessary, close and restart whatever media application you're using to output audio/video to your TV.

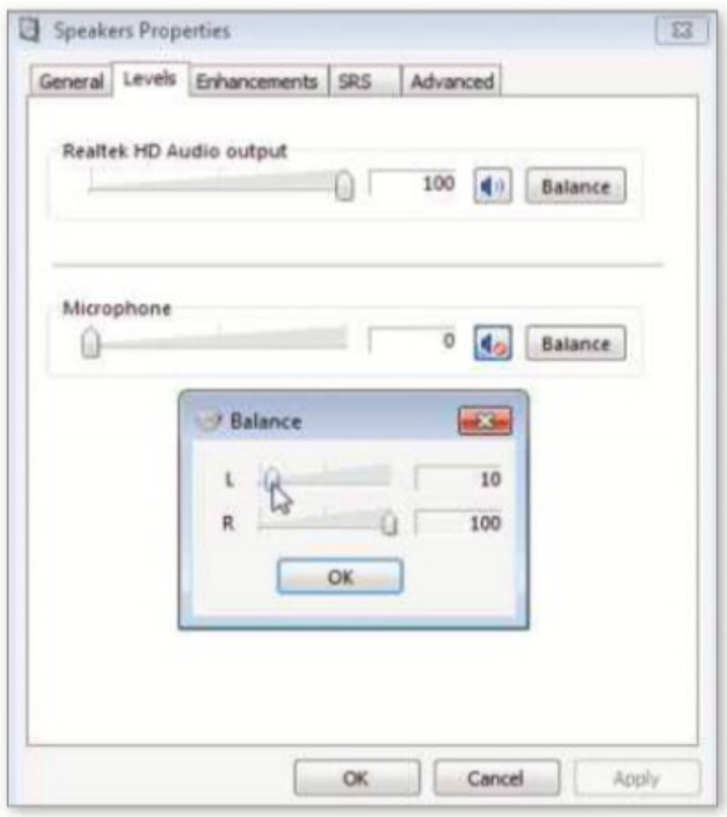
Volume levels are inconsistent

If you find that some sounds are louder than others, it's likely that Windows' volume levels are unequal. To equalise them, launch the master Volume Mixer window by pressing Windows key+R, typing sndvol.exe -f and pressing Enter. Now click and drag to move the various sliders up (see screenshot below). You can use this method to reduce volume levels in any program where the output is louder than it is in others.

If Windows' sound levels vary from one program to another, equalise them using Volume Mixer

Sound from only one speaker

Lop-sided sound is usually a symptom of a poor connection, meaning either the speaker or headphone plug is not fully inserted, or the cable or socket is



Only one speaker working? Push the jack plug in firmly, then check the Balance levels

faulty. Make sure the jack plug is pushed all the way in. If that doesn't work, check Windows' volume balance. Press Windows key+R, type mmsys.cpl then press Enter. Select the Levels tab, click Balance, then check that the numbers for both L(eft) and R(right) are the same (see screenshot above). If they are, then try your speakers with a different source – by connecting them to the 3.5mm headphones socket on your TV, for example. If both channels work – and the sound doesn't break up when you twiddle the cable – then there's a fault with your PC's jack socket.

On a desktop PC you might be able to get the connection repaired or replaced, or you may have to fit a new sound card. Laptop repairs are generally trickier or even impossible, but you could try an external sound card that connects via USB.

Front-panel audio socket doesn't work

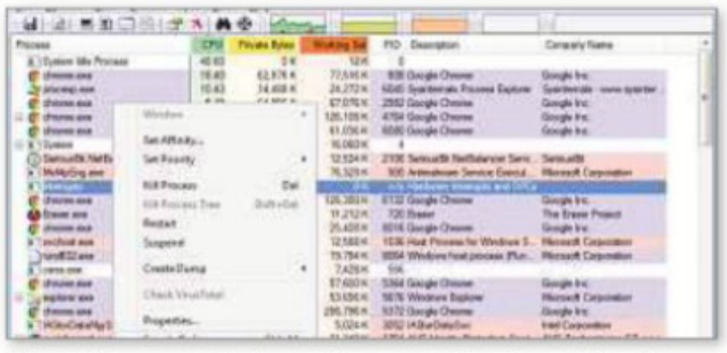
When sound works from your PC's rear socket but not from the connector at the front the cause is usually incorrect drivers or a disconnected (or absent) cable. If you're using the motherboard's integrated audio jack then check the motherboard manufacturer's website for the latest drivers. If you're using a slot-in sound card, then get the drivers from the sound card's manufacturer.

If this doesn't work, open up your PC and check to see if there's a cable between the front-panel socket and the motherboard. Note that front sockets are often part of a DVD drive, so check the connections here also. It's possible that your PC's manufacturer cut costs by not including the requisite cable. These can be bought cheaply online – but check the connections on both your motherboard and front panel so you know what to buy.

Audio stutters during playback

When music or video audio breaks up, it typically means that Windows is struggling to process things. Closing unused programs usually helps but for a permanent fix you'll need to dig deeper. First, turn off all audio enhancements. Press Windows key+R, type mmsys.cpl and press Enter. On the Playback tab, click to select your output device and then click Properties. Now choose the Enhancements tab, tick 'Disable all sound effects' and then click OK twice.

If this doesn't help, use Microsoft's free Process Explorer (www.snipca.com/19261) to figure out what processes might be contributing to the audio stutter. Click the CPU heading to sort the column, putting the biggest resource hogs at the top. Now play your audio while watching the topmost Description columns. Select a suspect process then press Control (Ctrl)+M to search the web for more information.



Use Microsoft's free Process Explorer tool to work out what's causing audio to stutter

Next issue Fast Fixes for... Shutting down

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Jargon Buster

32bit A measure of how much information a computer can process at once. More modern ones are 64bit.

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

64bit A technology that processes information in larger chunks. Most modern computers are 64bit.

802.11ac A standard for wireless networks. Faster than 802.11n.

802.11n A standard for wireless networks.

Add-on See Extensions.

AMOLED Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. A technology for creating flat-panel displays.

BIOS Basic Input-Output System. PC software that connects the vital components.

Clean install An operating system installation that overwrites all other content on the hard drive.

Clock speed The speed at which a PC processor can perform. Measured in Gigahertz (GHz).

CPU Central Processing Unit. Another term for a processor.

Defragment To reorganise the data stored on a hard drive so files can be accessed quickly.

Digital ICE Digital Image Correction and Enhancement. Scanner technology that removes dust and scratches.

DisplayPort A new socket for connecting monitors that's still relatively rare.

Domain name Used to identify one or more IP addresses. For example, microsoft.com represents a dozen IP addresses.

dpi Dots per inch. A measure of printed image quality.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with another device.

Dual-band router A Wi-Fi router that operates on two bands: 2.4 and 5GHz.

DVI Digital Visual Interface. A common type of display connector that can carry a digital signal.

Eight-core A standard processor has one core, but most modern, faster processors are dual-, quad- or even eight-core.

Extension A program that adds extra features to your browser.

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

Flash memory A type of memory that can retain information without a power source.

Flash storage A data-storage device that includes flash memory with an integrated USB interface.

File extension The part of a file name after the full stop.

Ghosting The appearance on a screen of a second image that's a ghost-like facsimile of the first.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

HiDPI High Dots Per Inch. Screens with a high resolution in a relatively small format.

Hotspot A public area covered by a Wi-Fi network.

HTML Hypertext Markup Language. The language used to write most web pages.

Hyperthreading A technology used by some Intel processors that allows them to multitask.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better colours.

LCD Liquid-Crystal Display. The technology used to create almost all flat displays (watches, TVs, etc).

MAC address Media Access Control. A unique code that identifies any router.

Megapixel A measure of the detail in a digital image, made up of a million dots (pixels).

MHL Mobile high-definition link. A technology that lets you connect a smartphone or tablet to a TV.

MicroSD Type of memory card.

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

Mini HDMI Downsized version of the HDMI cable and connector to accommodate smaller devices.

Mirror To display on your TV what's on your PC or tablet screen.

Motherboard The main circuit board inside every PC into which all other parts connect.

MS-DOS Microsoft Disk Operating System. The standard PC operating system before Windows.

Notification area An area on the bottom-right of the screen that shows running programs.

Optical image stabilisation A mechanism built into digital cameras that compensates for shaking and vibrations.

Partition (Partition disk) A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives.

PCI Express A faster version of PCI.

Phablet A smartphone with a screen size that's midway between a phone and a tablet.

Phishing A form of internet fraud.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to your web browser.

Processor The processor – or central processing unit – is the brain of a computer.

Quad core A PC that has four processors on a single chip.

Resolution The amount of detail shown in an image.

Responsive A website that automatically adjusts its content to suit the screen it's displayed on.

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

Server A computer on a network, that distributes info to other PCs.

Sound card An expansion card that lets a PC create game sound effects, music, and so on.

Splash screen Conveys an impression of what a document will look like.

Spoof When hackers pose as legitimate websites, emails or IP addresses to gain personal data.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors, printers and the internet.

.SRT A file format for video subtitles.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

System restore point The collection of system files at a given time to which Windows can revert if a problem occurs.

Taskbar The bar that runs along the bottom of the Windows screen.

Thunderbolt 3 Hardware interface that connects peripherals to a PC.

TN Twisted nematic. A common, cheap type of LCD.

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

USB 2.0 Faster successor to USB.

USB 3.0 An even faster version of the USB standard.

USB 3.1 The latest version of the USB hardware interface.

USB Type-C A new connector that's reversible, letting you plug it in upside down.

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

Web apps Programs that run through your web browser.

Wiki site A collaborative website that users can easily edit.

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The Final Straw

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Microsoft's endless nagging

Are you ready for something new? Are you? Come on, I know you are! You're not? Oh. Well, here it is anyway. If you don't want it – tough. I'll simply keep badgering until you agree. You'll then feel like a harried husband who wants to go fishing on a Saturday morning, but is being pestered into trudging around John Lewis to buy some overpriced cushion covers, before rushing home to fix the dripping tap and wonky shelf.

> The option I'm waiting for is, 'Thanks Microsoft, but I'm happy with Windows 7, so take your new OS and shove it where your forced updates don't shine'

That's pretty much how I feel every time my beloved Windows 7 laptop pops up with that "Get Windows 10 – it's free, and it's totally brilliant!" message. I wish Microsoft would understand that *I don't want Windows 10*. I want Windows 7, because everything works just fine.

And yet I know, sooner or later, that I'll cave in to Microsoft's hectoring. The company's endless nagging to 'upgrade' to Windows 10 will become too much. Soon, it'll seem easier simply to click the 'Yes' button (not least because there isn't a 'No' button).

Recently, the only options Microsoft offered me were 'Upgrade now' or 'Start download, upgrade later'. Yesterday, I had a new one – 'Schedule your upgrade now!'. But the option I'm really waiting for is the one that reads 'Thanks Microsoft, but I'm happy with Windows 7, so take your new operating system and shove it where your forced updates don't shine'. A bit long to fit on a button, admittedly. Maybe they could fit it on one of Windows 10's infernal rotating tiles.

Then there's Office – Microsoft's latest excuse to nag you. I launched Word to write this column and saw "Get the new Office! It's totally brilliant!". Well, no thanks. But, no, there's no 'No' button. All I can do, it seems, is see what's new or update Office, doubtless because Microsoft thinks it's for my own good.

I'm not afraid of change, but I want to choose when it happens, not because the time is right for someone else. Especially when that someone else wants to wrest away what little control I have left in my life in order that it can mess around with my computer whenever it chooses, not to mention track pretty much everything I do before reporting back to Microsoft HQ.

It took me a while to make the switch from Windows XP to 7. Microsoft didn't use my Windows Desktop as a place to strong-arm me. It didn't try to trick me into clicking an 'Upgrade' button. Its software engineers just made Windows 7 better and better until I felt that it was a worthwhile upgrade. But now the company wants to snatch that away and replace it with something unwanted, unfamiliar and full of funny new quirks.

Imagine that! You've spent several years getting used to something – perhaps even growing to love it – and then overnight it disappears, to be replaced by something new. Something you didn't ask for, and don't want. You know, a bit like me – your new Mr Angry.

Well, I'm sorry about that. I know that a lot of you had got used to Stuart Andrews. Some of you perhaps even loved him. And he's been replaced without so much as a please or thank you. Did he ask you? No. Did you want me? No. But at least, unlike Microsoft, I didn't badger you until you gave in.

So there you have it. You didn't ask for me. You didn't want me. But here I am, delivered straight to your favourite magazine, so get used to it. I'll be forcing my updates upon you each and every fortnight. It's for your own good.

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

Next issue Ken gets stuck into Raspberry Pi

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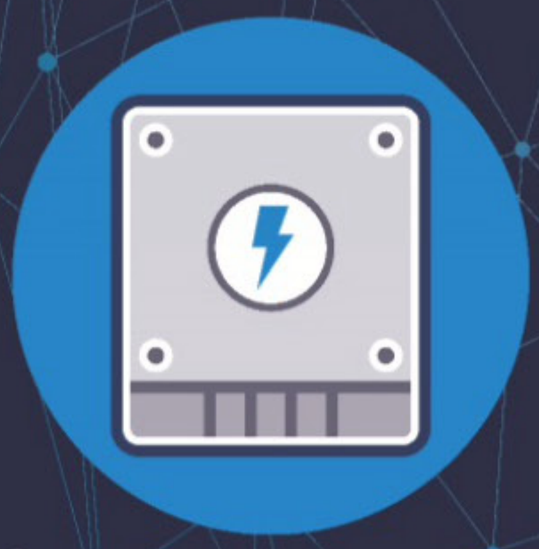

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