WebUser

13 - 26 July 2016 Issue 401

Best software / New apps / No Brains required

WHO'S LOGGING INTO YOUR GOOGLE ACCOUNT?
Find out and kick them out p46

GREAT £2 VALUE

BEAT WINDOWS 10 RESTRICTIONS

Have it your way or not at all p38

- Use it for free for longer
- Stop Microsoft sharing your data
- Only install the updates you need
- Remove built-in tools you hate
- Block awful ads & 'suggestions'

Or Make it leave you alone forever!

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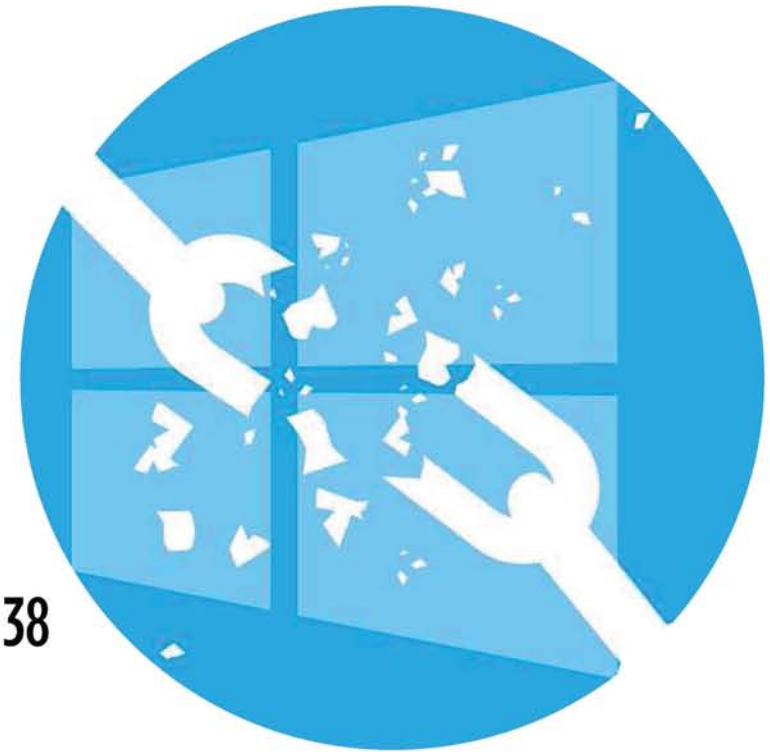

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Windows 10 ate my hamster

I was interested to read about the Californian woman who won $10,000 (£7,500) in compensation from Microsoft after Windows 10 tried and failed to install itself on her PC. "I had never heard of Windows 10," she said. "Nobody ever asked me if I wanted to update."

Whatever your views on Windows 10 – whether you think it's a brilliant operating system or you couldn't give two figs about it because there are more important things to worry about – you have to admit that Microsoft could have handled things better. From forcing upgrades on users to sneakily sharing their data and targeting them with ads, it's been acting like an arrogant bully.

Well, no more! In this issue's cover feature (page 38), we explain how to fight back against Windows 10's more tyrannical tendencies. By regaining control of the way it looks and how it works, you can enjoy the operating system on your own terms or get it to leave you alone altogether. And, of course, stop it eating your pets.

Robert Irvine
robert_irvine@dennis.co.uk
#webuser

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abc Average sales, Jan-Dec 2015, 29,463 copies per issue

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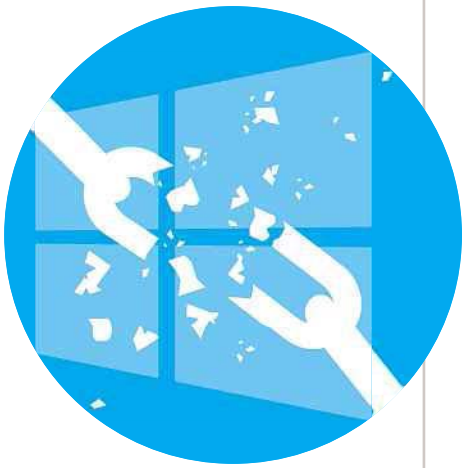

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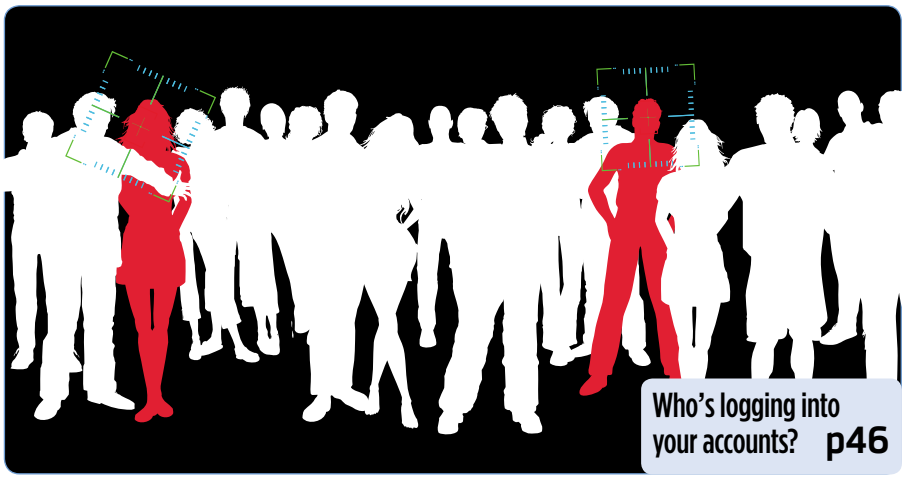

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What's New Online

See the planet with Google Maps

Earth looks better than ever – or at least it does if you peer at its surface using the Satellite view in Google Maps. The service has undergone a sharp improvement, upgrading its birds-eye imagery so that the landscape pops with truer colours and finer detail.

The photos were taken from the Landsat 8 satellite, which NASA, in collaboration with the US Geological Survey, launched into orbit three years ago. Google says the satellite has captured twice as many images as its predecessor, Landsat 7, enabling the company to stitch together a stunning mosaic made up of more than 700 trillion individual pixels.

Google's Earth Engine APIs have also been able to select the clearest pixels, which means the skies are cloudless and you can see far more of the globe's surface.

Some areas, including Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean, are visible in Google for the first time. The maps – which are also available to view in Google Earth – are as up-to-date as possible.

These are not the only changes to Maps, though. Android users can now set multiple destinations on a single trip using a button marked 'Add Stop'. We expect the feature will travel to iOS at some point in the near future.

maps.google.co.uk

Learn the basics of encryption using emoji

bit.ly/emoji401

Are you wondering why we've printed a string of emoji? Well, you may be surprised to learn that it's an encrypted message that says "Do you understand encryption?", which we put together using Mozilla's new Codemoji site. Created to teach the basics and importance of encryption, the site lets you write a message in English and scramble it using an emoji cipher. You can then share the result and challenge the recipient to work out what it says.

So what's the point? Well, Mozilla believes encryption is under threat from governments across the world. By showing how encryption works (how plain text is encoded and then decrypted using an encryption key), it hopes more people will oppose efforts to weaken it.

Find out what Google knows about you

myactivity.google.com

You have probably suspected for a while that Google has been building up a picture of your personality, but now you can find out exactly what the company has on file. The new My Activity hub lets you view everything Google's ad-tracking service has learned about you across all its tools, from Search to YouTube, and delete any entries you're not happy with. More importantly, you can tap the Menu button and select Activity Controls to give or deny permission for Google to monitor your web and app activity, and create a private map of where you go.

What's more, if you visit bit.ly/google401, you can choose to allow or prevent personalised ads based not only on the Google services you use but also more than two million sites in the Google Display Network. Yes, Google is looking to expand its ad-tracking facilities but, thankfully, it's on an opt-in rather than opt-out basis.

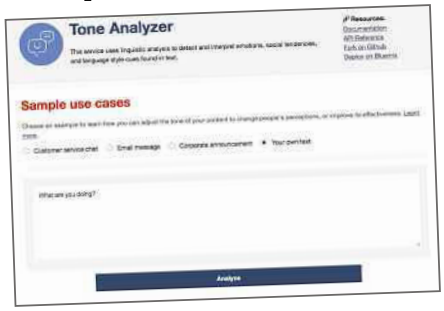
We highlight 10 of the most amazing and amusing things you can do on the web this fortnight

Get a Queen's-eye view of Trooping the Colour

bit.ly/trooping401

Produced by the BBC as an experiment in virtual reality for the Taster section of its website, this Trooping the Colour 360° video lets you see the ceremony from the Queen's perspective. Although you can view it in your browser, using your mouse to look around, it's best seen in all its glory using Google Cardboard.

Analyse the tone of your texts



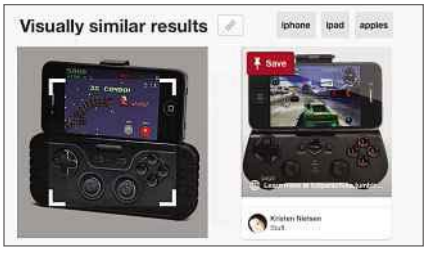
bit.ly/tone401

Do people often ignore your text messages? It could be because you're using the wrong tone. Write your intended message in Tone Analyzer and your words are linguistically analysed to determine whether you appear angry, sad, fearful, happy or any number of other emotions. It even goes as far as identifying the worst parts of your message so you can change the words before pressing Send. And if you're wondering how it works, there's lots of explanatory documentation, too.

Search for images visually on Pinterest

uk.pinterest.com

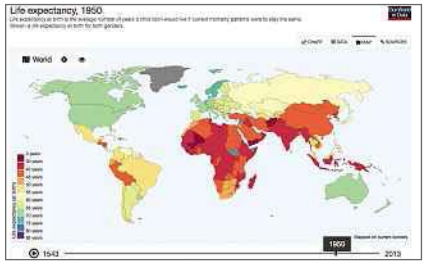
Pinterest is improving its search efficiency, starting with automatic object detection for the site's most popular categories. You can now find products within a 'pin' by tapping the visual search icon to see information about the various objects in the picture. Pinterest says it will expand this feature so that eventually you'll be able to take a photo of an object on your smartphone to receive recommendations and shop for items online.



Examine changes in life expectancy

bit.ly/life401

People in the UK are living longer, but that's not the case everywhere. The Our World in Data site lets you browse the figures on a map, using a slider to cycle through periods of history. A colour chart identifies the best and worst countries for life expectancy, and you can download spreadsheets for different territories.



5 TO FOLLOW ON TWITTER

@smilevector
This strange bot puts a big smile on the face of any celebrity it chooses

@AntAndDuck
You'll find it easier to tell Ant and Dec apart now that one's been replaced by a duck

@sonic_hedgehog
The official Sonic the Hedgehog account is packed with memes and fun

@TheresaMay2016
She may be Britain's next PM, so find out what makes her tick

@StanleyKubrick
Here's Stanley! The late film director and screenwriter has just joined Twitter

View lyrics in Google

www.google.co.uk

You can now search Google for song lyrics and view them directly in your search results. Not only will this save you having to visit a lyrics website, it should make sing-a-long sessions that bit more accurate.

Compare the heights of English buildings

bit.ly/height401

If you want to know how tall your house is or the height of any skyscrapers that have popped up in your city, zoom into this map. It will tell you all you need to know about every building in England, using data from the Environment Agency.

Take a geography quiz

d2dev.io/geoquiz

This Chrome-only quiz zooms around the world, pinpointing countries on a map and asking you to identify them. You can type your answer or speak it into a microphone if you have one.

Need to Know

Microsoft takes over your PC with huge Windows 10 ad

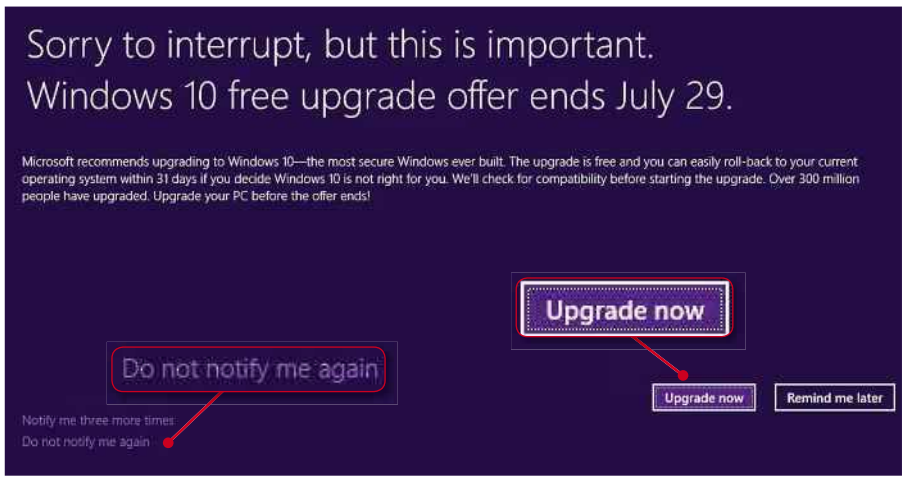
What happened?

Microsoft has stepped up its attempts to "persuade" PC users to update to Windows 10 by showing full-screen reminders that the free upgrade offer ends on 29 July.

Ever since Windows 10 arrived last summer, Microsoft has offered the operating system as a free upgrade to Windows 7 and 8. The offer expires at the end of July and to make sure customers don't miss out, Microsoft has been using the Windows notification system to inundate us with a barrage of pop-ups and warnings.

The original notification box was particularly troublesome because clicking the 'X' in the top corner – which would normally close a pop-up – was seen by Microsoft as a signal that you were agreeing to the upgrade. This was later remedied, but not before clever coders created a tool called Never10 (bit.ly/never401) that could be installed to stop the notifications and avoid an accidental upgrade. One woman even sued Microsoft for $10,000 after the company automatically downloaded a copy of Windows 10 to her PC. She said she hadn't agreed to the update.

Now the nagging has increased, and users of older operating systems are having their computer activities interrupted by a full-screen ad. "Microsoft recommends that you upgrade to Windows 10 before the offer expires," the company said in a statement. "You can choose to upgrade directly from the notification, dismiss the notification permanently, or choose to be reminded later."



Time is running out if you want to upgrade to Windows 10 for free before the deadline

How will it affect you?

Anyone running Windows 7 or 8 is likely to see this message at some point. You may have good reason not to upgrade – if you're concerned about privacy, for example, or don't want to learn a new operating system. It's worth giving Windows 10 a try while it's still free, however, as the price will soon jump to £99. You can roll back to a previous version within 31 days if you decide you prefer your old OS.

If you haven't upgraded but have used the "do not notify me again," option, or you have previously installed and uninstalled Windows 10, the message shouldn't appear. You won't see it if your PC doesn't support the new operating system, either.

Of course, if you want to upgrade but haven't got around to it yet, the message will be a welcome reminder. If that's the case, you should start the download now, because Microsoft's servers are likely to slow to a crawl as the deadline date approaches. Once downloaded, you can install Windows 10 whenever it's convenient. Just make sure you back up your files first.

What do we think?

Microsoft should learn to treat its customers as adults. There's nothing wrong with offering a few reminders, but taking over the entire screen after months of sending notifications is a step too far. Perhaps the company needs to accept that some people simply don't want Windows 10.

Rather than nagging Windows 7 and 8 users that the upgrade is available, it would be wiser to tell them about some of its useful features – and to let people know they can reinstate their current operating system if they want to. That's more likely to encourage people to upgrade than warnings about deadlines.

Indeed, rather than have a deadline, why not simply make Windows 10 free for all Windows users permanently? Many people who haven't upgraded yet will never do so, and having a deadline will only anger those who miss it.

Microsoft should also remember that some people don't feel confident performing the upgrade themselves. They may be waiting until a tech-savvy friend or family member has time to do it for them. An arbitrary deadline does nothing but cause unnecessary stress for those people who act as *de facto* tech support for their family and friends.

See our cover feature on page 38 for more about taking back control of Windows 10 from Microsoft.

What we think of this fortnight's top tech news stories and rumours, and how they affect you

Amazon offers phone discounts for ads

What happened?

Amazon has started to offer special discounts on Android phones for customers who are willing to put up with pre-installed apps and advertising. Amazon will slash $50 (£38) off the retail price of unlocked handsets, starting with the Moto G and the Blu R1 HD, but you'll need to be an Amazon Prime member. The ads will appear on the phone's lock screen, as they do on the Special Offers versions of its Kindle ebook readers and Fire tablets. The Blu is available for $50, which is half the retail price, while the Moto G will cost $150 rather than $200.

How will it affect you?

The subsidised smartphone offer is currently limited to these two handsets, and is available only in the US, but Amazon often tests ideas in its home nation before rolling them out worldwide.

As well as appearing in your lock screen, adverts will show up as notifications at the top of your screen. What's more, Amazon will install its own apps on the phone, and you won't be able to remove them.

Of course, the ad-supported deal is optional. Amazon offers a similar deal with its Kindle ebook readers and tablets, charging £10 less for a version of the device with advertising.

What do we think?

If you're short of cash, this offer might appeal to you, but subjecting yourself to an irritating lock screen and apps that can't be removed probably won't be worth the discount for most people. The fact that Amazon is extending this scheme from ebook readers and tablets to other companies' phones suggests it believes the subsidised handsets will appeal its customers and that the advertising will prove effective. Given the low cost of smartphones these days, we'd rather find a handset we could afford without signing up for enforced advertising, but full credit to Amazon for trying new ways to make money online.

First person killed in self-driving car

What happened?

The occupant of a Tesla self-driving car was killed in a collision in the US after the vehicle's Autopilot feature failed to recognise a white lorry against a bright sky. The lorry driver was unharmed.

Tesla electric cars are not marketed as driverless vehicles, but they have a feature called Autopilot, which is supposed to help drivers – not replace them. Although Autopilot can change lanes, adjust speed and brake without human intervention, drivers are supposed to keep their hands on the wheel and remain attentive. Reports suggest the driver in this case was watching a Harry Potter film while on the road, but the investigation continues, with US authorities looking into whether the car was at fault.

How will it affect you?

Fans of self-driving cars will be quick to point out that they've traversed 130 million miles of roads in trials over the past few years without any deaths or serious injuries. This case may set a precedent for how such accidents are investigated, though, and who is to blame – the driver, the car or the manufacturer.

Tests of driverless cars in the UK are continuing in Bristol, Greenwich and Milton Keynes, although these are smaller 'pod' vehicles that are slower than regular cars. Both Google and Volvo want to start testing their cars here soon, so we're likely to be interacting with self-driving cars on the road whether we want to or not.

What do we think?

It's not exactly clear what happened in the Tesla incident, but it's hard to imagine drivers paying close attention to the road when they think the software can handle it. Tesla's system slows the car to a halt if the driver removes their hands from the wheel, but the company may need to do more to prevent crashes. However, this single accident seems unlikely to affect the development or regulation of self-driving cars.

DoNotPay helps 160,000 beat traffic fines

What happened?

The 'robot lawyer' DoNotPay (www.donotpay.co.uk) has proved tremendously successful in helping British citizens appeal unfair parking tickets. The site was used 250,000 times in the UK last year, winning an impressive 160,000 of its claims. The story is the same across the Atlantic: DoNotPay launched in the US in March this year and has already been used more than 90,000 times.

DoNotPay is essentially an artificial-intelligence bot that acts as your lawyer for free. Once you log into the website, you're presented with two options: 'Appeal a Ticket (UK and NY)' or 'Compensation for a delayed flight'. From here, you're asked a series of multiple-choice questions to determine the type of fine you've received and generate your appeal.

The site was created by Joshua Browder after he received a number of parking tickets in and around London. He says "I realised there is a formulated process for appealing tickets, so I wrote a script that does the same thing and I started winning. I feel that parking tickets are already hurting the elderly and disabled, the most vulnerable in society. From my experience, parking lawyers are making millions appealing tickets from these groups, a task that can be easily automated for free."

How will it affect you?

To use DoNotPay, just go to the site, sign up and choose either the multiple-choice or the chatbot option. The site gives you 12 reasons to object to your fine, such as 'The parking bay was too small', 'I was travelling to the hospital urgently' and 'Problems with the signage' (which cleverly attaches a Street View image to back you up). Enter the details of the 'offence', and the site generates an appeal letter, which you can print and send to the council. The process takes just two minutes from start to finish and is certainly worth a try rather than paying the fine.

What do we think?

When we reviewed DoNotPay in Best New Websites in Issue 380 (bit.ly/webuser380), we were somewhat sceptical that it would live up to its promise, but evidently we were wrong! If you regularly drive in a busy town or city, getting a parking ticket has become almost inevitable, regardless of how law-abiding you are, with local governments turning minor road violations and simple driving errors into lucrative sources of revenue.

We're delighted that DoNotPay is leading the fight against unfair practices. Long may it continue.

FIRST LOOK

Now TV Combo

bit.ly/nowtv401

For the last few years, Now TV has offered stripped-back Sky TV with extra on-demand features for those who don't want to fork out for a full-blown Sky package. However, with the soon-to-be-launched Now TV Combo, the on-demand service is branching out into broadband, calls and live TV.

For a one-off setup fee (from £40), you can pick up the new Now TV Smart Box and a Now TV Hub for connecting your home to broadband, before choosing a Now TV pass to suit your needs. There's no monthly contract and prices start from £28 a month (including line rental) for 17Mbps broadband and Sky's Entertainment package. No matter which pass you opt for, the new Smart Box also offers more than 60 Freeview channels plus catch-up services including iPlayer, ITV Hub, All 4 and Demand 5.

The Smart Box is still manufactured by streaming-hardware specialist Roku but it represents a complete departure from previous Now TV boxes. It's larger than most of its rivals but stylish and easy to use, and offers live-broadcast Freeview TV with the added benefit of a pause-and-rewind facility.

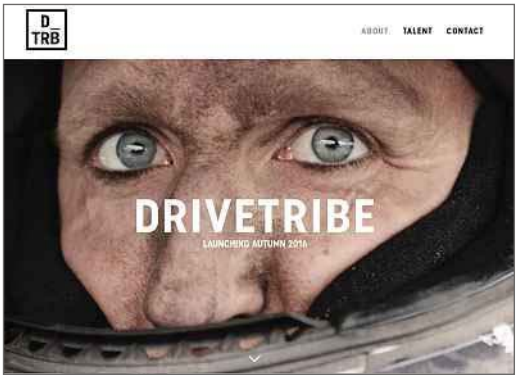
In terms of connectivity, you get 802.11n Wi-Fi and Ethernet, a microSD slot and USB port, plus HDMI for your video output.

The Now TV Hub, on the other hand, is essentially a bog-standard wireless router. It's compact – just 141 x 53 x 140mm – and has four 100Mbps Ethernet ports, WPS Wi-Fi setup, and compatibility for ADSL and fibre connections. Unfortunately, its Wi-Fi is only single-band 2.4GHz, 802.11n, which is as basic as wireless gets.

Now TV Combo is a welcome concept but whether or not anyone will actually want it remains to be seen. It looks as though Sky has found a smart way to take its streaming service to the next step, though.

WHAT'S THE RUMOUR

Is Clarkson launching his own social network?



Former *Top Gear* presenters Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond and James May have announced they'll be launching a new "social network" for car fans around the same time as their new Amazon Prime Video series *The Grand Tour* airs.

Called Drivetribe (drivetribe.com), the site is intended to give petrolheads a place to talk cars, car tech and all things machine-related. As Hammond says on the homepage: "Gamers have got Twitch, travellers have got TripAdvisor and fashion fans have got, oh, something or other, too. But people who are into cars have got nowhere."

From Hammond's description, it sounds as though Drivetribe will be a place "where people can meet and share video, comments, information and opinion". Other than that, details around this new online hangout for car fans are scant. Clarkson describes Drivetribe as "like YouPorn, only with cars," and May sees this as a refuge for "the world's most endangered tribes – Volvo enthusiasts, for example". With the clout of Clarkson, Hammond and May behind it, Drivetribe should become popular very quickly – especially if it's promoted on *The Grand Tour*.

You can request early access to Drivetribe by entering your email address in the sign-up box on the homepage. It's not known when this access will begin, but as the site is set to launch in autumn 2016, it's likely to be within the next month or so.

LIKELIHOOD RATING

✓✓✓✓✓

Drivetribe will definitely launch later this year, but it's not really Jeremy Clarkson's social network – he admits that he "didn't understand" the idea initially. It seems to be headed by former *Top Gear* producer Andy Wilman and entrepreneur Ernesto Schmitt. Also, it's not true that there aren't already online communities for car lovers: Car Throttle (www.carthrottle.com) and PistonHeads (www.pistonheads.com) both have thriving forums.

What's new on Kickstarter

Our favourite new project on the crowdfunding site

EasiSpread Heated Butter Knife

bit.ly/easispread401 | From £15

Spreading butter straight from the fridge onto bread or toast can be a frustrating and messy experience, so hurrah for the EasiSpread Heated Butter Knife. At the touch of a button, this electric knife heats up to 35°C within five seconds, so you can spread cold butter perfectly and evenly without tearing the bread. It only maintains its heat for 80 seconds, so nobody gets burnt, and the blade can be detached from the rechargeable handle for easy washing. The EasiSpread team hopes to raise £25,000 by 1 August.

WEBOMETER

WE LIKE...

New Android version named

Google has confirmed that Android 7.0 will be called Nougat. The new mobile operating system will be available to compatible Nexus devices within the next couple of months, and other Android devices later this year.

Facebook gives priority to friends and family

Facebook announced that it will start giving more prominence to posts by friends and family in news feeds, instead of content posted by media companies.

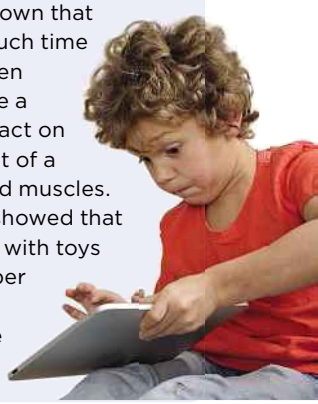
WE DON'T LIKE...

Spotify accuses Apple of killing competition

The music-streaming service accused Apple of "causing grave harm to Spotify and its users" after it rejected an update to the iOS Spotify app. Apple defended its position, accusing Spotify of "publicly resorting to rumors and half-truths about our service".

iPads stop children developing properly

Research has shown that spending too much time using touchscreen devices can have a detrimental impact on the development of a child's bones and muscles. A recent study showed that children playing with toys moved their upper limbs six times more than those using iPads.



Stay Safe Online

News about the latest threats and advice from security experts

SECURITY ALERT! | What's been bothering us this fortnight

Hackers turn Internet of Things devices into botnets

Hackers are turning Internet of Things (IoT) devices into Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) 'botnets' that take down banks, gaming firms and government agencies.

Cybercriminals are adapting the open-source code LizardStresser, written by hacking group Lizard Squad, to enlist connected devices that can carry out their attacks, security researchers believe. Lizard Squad was effectively disbanded in 2015 following the conviction of several members for attacks on popular networks and sites including PlayStation Network, Xbox Live and the servers for massively multiplayer online (MMO) game Destiny in 2014.

The number of botnets based on LizardStresser has been steadily growing recently, hitting the milestone of 100 unique command-and-control (C2) servers in June 2016, with a number of them specifically targeting IoT devices, according to research by Arbor Networks, the security division of Netscout.

bit.ly/iot401

Mobile ransomware increases fourfold in last year

Kaspersky Lab has revealed that mobile ransomware attacks quadrupled in 2015-2016 compared to the previous 12 months, with more than 136,000 users affected globally. Ransomware has become the fastest growing form of Android-based attack, increasing to 4.63% of the total number of threats in the last 12 months, compared to just 2.4% in 2014-15. Although the number of computers targeted in crypto-ransomware attacks – where files on the infected machine are encrypted by the malware – has increased substantially, Android has attracted more criminals using the screen-blocker technique, because this type of malware cannot be removed using external hardware (such as on a PC).

Kaspersky Lab is now predicting that other devices will be affected by such attacks, especially those that operate on Android-based systems. "The extortion model is here to stay. Mobile ransomware emerged as a follow-up to PC ransomware and it is likely that it will be followed-up with malware targeting devices that are very different to a PC or a smartphone," Roman Unuchek, mobile security expert at Kaspersky Lab, said. "These could be connected devices like smart watches, smart TVs and other smart products including home and in-car entertainment systems."

bit.ly/ransom401

Security Helpdesk | Your questions answered by security specialists

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT: Simon Crosby, chief technology officer and co-founder at Bromium (www.bromium.com)

Q Should Norton users be worried about the "high severity" vulnerabilities that have been reported in Symantec products (bit.ly/symantec401)?

Stephanie Coates, via Facebook

A The fact that antivirus isn't enough to protect PCs from modern threats has been accepted in the industry for a long time – even by the antivirus companies themselves. However, the realisation that security software itself can introduce new vulnerabilities will be a shock to many. There is a simple rule: the more code used by software, the more vulnerabilities. This means that merely installing software on a PC increases the chances of an attack.

Antivirus is no exception. Add to this that malware-detection rates are terrible, and that the very concept of detection is largely useless for polymorphic, targeted, zero-day malware, and it calls into question the use of antivirus at all.

> "The realisation that security software can introduce new vulnerabilities will be a shock to many"

Antivirus is used as a trusted means for browsing the internet and opening emails, so its security has to be taken very seriously. The only way to solve the inherent problem is to reduce the opportunities for malware attacks on a system and isolate dangerous activity from important processes.

It makes sense to use a layered approach to provide security, but it's not enough to simply rely on malware detection and each layer should be separate and isolated.

Tools such as micro-virtualisation, which separate computing tasks from each other, can provide a protective barrier because they prevent malware from spreading from one task to another.

+ Email us your security questions at webuser@dennis.co.uk

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Best New Websites

Site of the Fortnight

TELEVISION

RELAUNCH

Thunderbirds are go

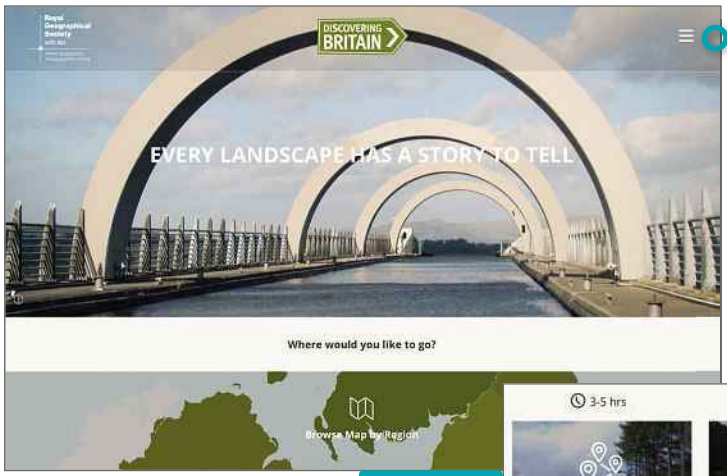
www.thunderbirds.com

It's 50 years since sci-fi puppet series *Thunderbirds* ended its first run, but it has been kept alive with remakes and CGI updates. This site encapsulates the magic of the latest incarnation perfectly. Each section takes a while to load, but you won't need any help from Brains to navigate the site. You'll soon be enjoying short bios of the 14 listed characters and looking at the various flying and ground-based vehicles. There are lots of photos and videos on offer and fun games to play. Older viewers may bemoan the absence of the old puppets, but it still brims with nostalgia while offering plenty for new *Thunderbirds* fans.

Our rating ★★★★★

CHARACTERS
As well as reading about the characters, you can spin them around in 3D

GAMES
There are three fun Thunderbirds games to play, and more will be added soon

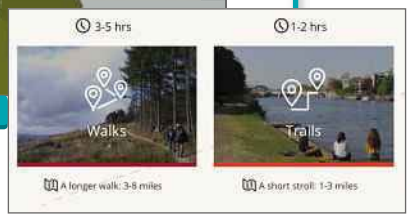


RELAUNCH

NEWS

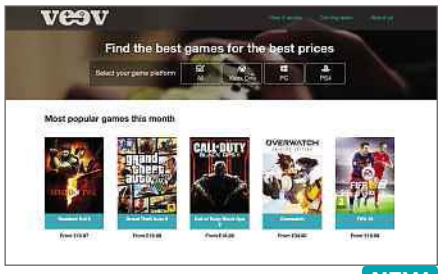
Discovering Britain

www.discoveringbritain.org



Whether you fancy a quick stroll or a long walk, this fascinating website from the Royal Geographical Society will take you on a voyage of discovery. The site seeks to teach you about the geographical stories that lie behind our country's rich and varied landscapes. We love the exhaustive detail, from overviews of the walks to downloadable audio guides and booklets. There's plenty for armchair explorers, too, including aerial photos and location guides, all presented in an attractive, accessible manner that's a joy to navigate. Indeed, you'll learn so much, whether your interest is rural, urban or coastal, that you'll never see the UK in the same way again.

Our rating ★★★★★



NEW

GAMES

Veev

www.veev.co.uk

Veev is the latest player in the field of price-comparison for video games. It makes a great first impression, with game suggestions for Xbox One, PS4 and PC on its homepage, including cover artwork and the cheapest price for each title. Delve deeper, however, and it begins to come unstuck. Although you can sign up for new-game and price-drop alerts, Veev focuses only on recent games and there's no search facility. The results are less than exhaustive, too, often missing out cheaper retailers such as Amazon. It's not game over, by any means, but Veev certainly needs to level up.

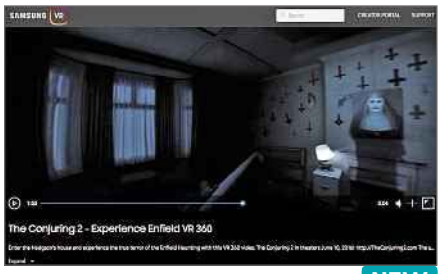
Our rating ★★★☆☆

Reviews by David Crookes

We review this fortnight's best new and relaunched websites and rate them for content, design and features

BOOT CAMP
Children will love the 13 printable downloads in the Boot Camp section

MEDIA
Get a taste of the action in high-quality pictures from the latest CITV series



NEW

VIDEO

Samsung VR

samsungvr.com

Virtual reality is gaining ground this year, thanks to headsets from HTC and Oculus Rift, and Facebook and YouTube offering 360° videos. Now Samsung has joined the fray with this collection of videos that work in your browser but are optimised for use with a Gear VR headset. The videos vary in quality but the best allow you to explore the haunted house used in recent horror film *The Conjuring 2* and view the story of the Mars Exploration Rover, Spirit. It's still a bit of a gimmick, and some of the videos may make you feel queasy, but it's a good pointer towards the future.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

CONSUMER

UK Recall

ukrecall.org.uk

Manufacturers recall products from time to time when they prove to be faulty or potentially dangerous, but you may not realise that something you've bought is affected. This site from the Retail Ombudsman is a central point for registering appliances. Enter an item's model and serial numbers, along with the date of purchase and warranty period, to register it on the manufacturers' database. Then, if there's a problem, you'll be emailed details of what to do next. The site also lists product recalls and alerts going back to 2002, which you can search by category and brand.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

TRAVEL

UK Nature Breaks

www.uknaturebreaks.co.uk

Aimed at holidaymakers who love the great outdoors, this site from the RSPB finds you accommodation across the UK. It's more of a hub than a standalone resource, letting you book cottages via Cottages.com (for a steep fee of £37), and lodges and boats through Hoseasons. Once you've provided details of your intended stay, you're quickly shown the available accommodation and can filter the results further. You can also read the blog, view details of RSPB events and reserves, and see ideas for activities. Best of all, 10% of the money you pay goes to the RPSB.

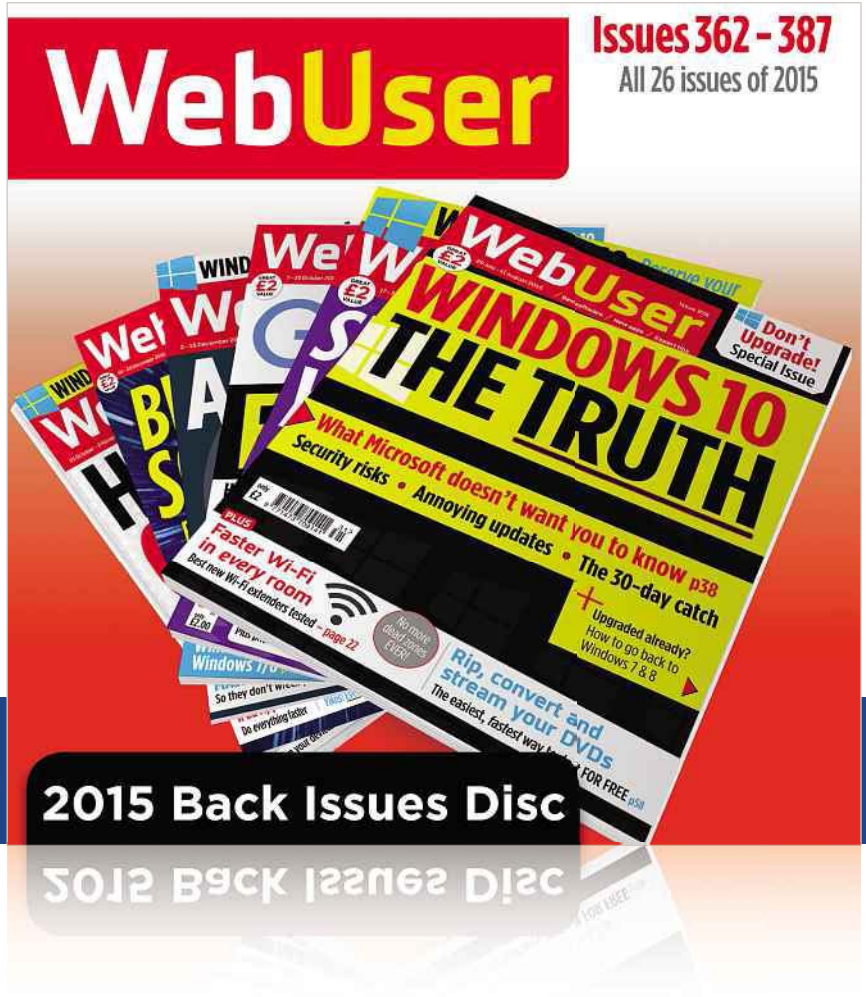
Our rating ★★★☆☆

Tell us about your website via webuser@dennis.co.uk

WebUser

Q How do I find the secret game that's supposedly hidden on my Android phone?

A Page 49, Issue 367



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or search for 'webuser disc' on Amazon

You can still buy our 2014 Back Issues Disc from bit.ly/webusercd

NEW

HEALTH

Move It Boom Rio

bit.ly/moveit401

This health-conscious site uses the Rio Olympics in Brazil to inspire children to keep fit and healthy. It revolves around a fun cartoon-like game that asks youngsters to complete physical tasks in real life, such as jumping, climbing and running, to prevent the evil Count Gusto from ruining a fictional Olympic event. It's an innovative idea that keeps kids motivated through unlockable achievements and lovely conversational asides. It's just a shame that it's only aimed at children in Leicester – hence the local park maps, club details and Leicester-focused leaderboard. Other NHS Trusts should take a look.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RELAUNCH

RETAIL

Moss Bros

www.moss.co.uk

This fresh look for the menswear retailer really measures up. The site presents its products in dashing style, using high-quality photos, and makes buying easy by providing drop-down menus for length and size of garments, and a speedy checkout. We like the comprehensive and prominent size guide on each product page, which gives advice on choosing trousers, shorts, casual wear, coats, shoes and hats. It also tells you how to measure and explains how clothes will fit, removing much of the guesswork. There are lots of great offers, too, with the latest deals prominent on the homepage.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RELAUNCH

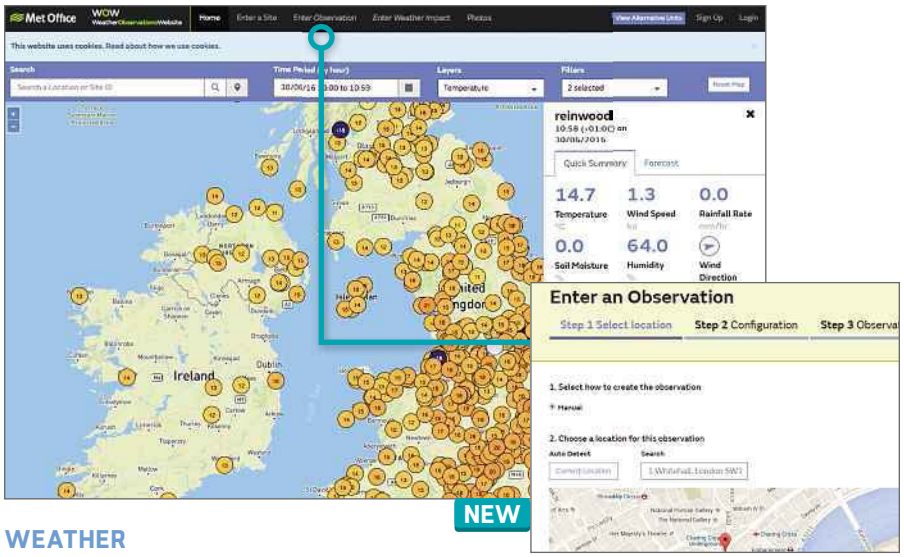
FILM

The Movie Database

www.themoviedb.org

Film and TV fans will love this movie database, which is jam-packed with information and images, and updated regularly by its users. A mobile-friendly redesign has made listings easier to read, and you can rate films and save them as favourites. As well as recommendations and highlighted discoveries, the site offers well-written plot summaries, cast lists and details of budgets, revenues, release dates and runtimes. Yet it's the media that most people will love about this blockbuster of a site, with loads of great videos, wallpapers and posters to download and use. It's a definite must-visit.

Our rating ★★★★☆



NEW

WEATHER

Weather Observation Website

wow.metoffice.gov.uk

Living in such a weather-obsessed nation, we expect this website will be snowed under with visitors. It invites people to submit their own weather observations and see them visualised on a world map (or locally, if you prefer). Produced by the Met Office, the site lets you search by location or time period and delve into the various layers, from temperature and wind direction to rainfall and soil moisture. You can filter the results according to official or submitted observations. Clicking a location gives you the lowdown on the present conditions, and adding your own observations is simple. We forecast that our weather obsession is about to get stronger.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

ART

Woof On The Wall

www.woofonthewall.co.uk

It sounds like a barking mad idea but the student behind this site hopes people will "paws" for reflection when they see his artwork. Ryan Harrison produces pictures based on the recordings of dog barks, having noted that different breeds and sizes produce different sound waves. The site lets you buy the results in frames or on canvas, mugs, bags and cushions. Sadly, the sprawling pages need to be far better organised, the product photos should showcase what's on offer more effectively and the checkout process needs to be simplified. It's an intriguing concept, but a little ruff!

Our rating ★★★☆☆

Build a Better Site

Specialist tips, top tools and practical help

Top Tips of the Fortnight

Chat to your site's visitors

Most websites offer links so that visitors can contact the site by email or social network, but wouldn't it be great if you could actually chat to your visitors while they're browsing? Wix (www.wix.com) has a new free chat tool you can add to a Wix website, which lets your visitors engage in a messenger-style conversation with you. To install it, click the Wix App Market and search for Formilla Live Chat.

Try different adverts

Google has added a new beta program to its AdSense advertising software (www.google.com/adsense), which you can use to earn money from your website. The options can be found in the new AdSense Lab (a sub-tab in the Optimization tab) which, like Labs in other Google services (such as Gmail), provides experimental tools for anyone willing to test them.

The first two Lab projects are 'Show fewer ads', which lets you reduce the number of adverts shown if they aren't likely to generate much revenue; and 'Inline ads', which automatically inserts sensibly sized ads into mobile versions of websites. Find out more at bit.ly/adsense401.

Deal of the Fortnight

Mitela (www.mitela.co.uk) is offering 50% off its completely unlimited Panther hosting if you pay for a year in advance. Use the code Spring2016.

Web-building Helpdesk

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT:
Chris Garner, Head of UX & Frontend Development, Tsohost (www.tsohost.com)

Q Will HTML5 ever be used on all websites?

Chris Cole, via Facebook

A The short answer is no. In an ideal world, all websites would be built and maintained using the latest technology, standards and frameworks. Unfortunately, keeping up with best practices is often impractical and costly, which means there will always be websites that fall behind the times and suffer the consequences.

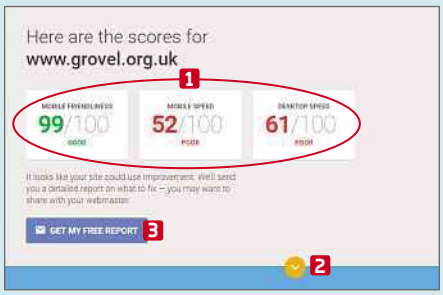
That said, now that HTML5 support is reliably integrated into all modern browsers, website developers should endeavour to adopt the standard because it will lead to better semantics, accessibility, optimisation and performance.

MINI WORKSHOP | Test your site with Google's latest tool

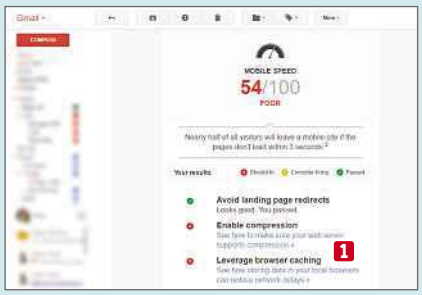
Think With Google: testmysite.thinkwithgoogle.com | 5 mins | Any browser

Google has launched a new tool that tests how mobile-friendly your site is, and how quickly it loads. If your site falls short of Google's standards, the service provides lots of information on how you can improve it

1 Go to testmysite.thinkwithgoogle.com, type your site's web address into the box 1 and press the blue Test Now button. 2 The site will run its tests, which could take a couple of minutes.



2 You are presented with three report cards showing ratings out of 100 for your site. 1 Click the down arrow 2 to get an explanation of how the ratings are calculated and find out what you failed on. If there are points you need to work on, click the Get My Free Report button 3 to have it emailed to you.



3 The email contains the same report but each negative comment is accompanied by a link. 1 Click one to visit Google's PageSpeed Tools website (bit.ly/speed401), which provides a handy reference guide to all the problems it flags up and explains how to fix them.

Email us your website building questions at webuser@dennis.co.uk

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Group Test

We test and compare the latest products

£500 Windows 10 PCs

Is it time to replace your creaky old desktop PC? **Andy Shaw** examines nine new models

Laptops are compact and convenient but if you want a powerful PC that's built to last, it's better to go for a desktop model. Standard PC components are cheaper than their smaller laptop equivalents, so you get significantly more power for your pennies, and what you lose in portability, you make up for in internal space for upgrading.

None of the PCs reviewed here come with screens, keyboards, mice or any other peripherals. If you're replacing an existing PC, simply swap out the box and use your current kit. If you want to buy a whole new set-up, the suppliers we've reviewed here will be more than happy to sell you any extras you may need, or you can shop around for the best deals.

HOW WE TESTED

We put all the PCs through their paces using our Windows benchmark suite, which gives an overall score based on a series of tests including office tasks, image editing and video encoding.

We also tested the computers' ability to run games and other graphically intensive tasks, pushing them to their limits with gaming benchmarks that run Dirt Showdown and Metro: Last Light Redux at their highest settings.

Palicomp AMD Avenger | £500 | www.palicomp.co.uk

FEATURES ★★★★☆ PERFORMANCE ★★★★★ EASE OF USE ★★★★★ VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★

The Palicomp AMD Avenger shuns the flashy case design of most desktop PCs and opts instead for a medium-sized plain black box that won't take up too much space on or below your desk. It only has two USB 3 ports on the front, though there are more (four USB 2 and four USB 3) on the back.

The PC comes crammed with great components. Palicomp has overclocked (made to run even faster) AMD's Athlon X4 880K processor to 4.5GHz and paired it with an excellent graphics card featuring AMD's GTX 960 chip. It's also equipped with a best-of-both-worlds dual hard-drive setup, with a 240GB SSD to get Windows and programs launched at top speed, alongside a 1TB hard drive to store your files on.

Despite the smaller-than-average case, there's still some room to upgrade, including spare memory slots for boosting the PC's 8GB of RAM. However, with two hard drives already installed, there's no space for any extra 2.5 or 3.5in drives, though there is a spare 5.25in bay below the built-in DVD-RW drive.

In our tests, the PC performed well. Its mid-table performance of 64 didn't set the Windows speed tests alight, but it was only four points behind the second-place Chillblast Fusion Nitro, which is impressive given the extremely tough competition in the top half of this group. The installed SSD makes the PC feel faster than its performance in these tests might imply.

The AMD Avenger put in an exceptional performance in our gaming tests, running our Dirt Showdown test at more frames per second than any other PC in this group. It was also joint first in the Metro: Last Light Redux test, alongside the Bronze Award-winning Box Cube Captain.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The Palicomp AMD Avenger is built into a relatively small case but it still has some room inside to upgrade, with space for extra memory and a 5.25in drive. However, you shouldn't need to upgrade any of its components any time soon, because they have been carefully chosen to provide a good level of performance. This was borne out by the PC's results in our tests – it dominated the games tests and performed well enough in the Windows test, too.

Cyberpower Infinity X33 SE | £499 | www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk

FEATURES ★★★★☆ PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
EASE OF USE ★★★★☆ VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★

WebUser SILVER AWARD

The Cyberpower Infinity X33 SE comes in a large case, so it's more amenable to upgrading than the Gold Award-winning Palicomp PC, although its motherboard is a bit on the small side. It has two 5.25in and seven 3.5in bays free, but there's no 2.5in tray ready and waiting for an SSD, and only a 1TB hard drive installed. It's a well-ventilated case and, although it doesn't come with its own fan, we didn't notice any overheating and there's space to add fans later if you need to.

Performance was excellent, coming second to the Palicomp in our Dirt Showdown test, and fourth in both the Metro: Last Light Redux and Windows performance tests, which kept it firmly in the top half of this group across the board. It doesn't have as many easily accessible USB ports as some of its rivals, with just one USB 3 and one USB 2 at the front, but it has six more on the back – two of which are USB 3.

VERDICT ★★★★★

This offers more future upgrading potential than the Gold Award-winning Palicomp PC and the performance was very similar in our tests. It doesn't have an SSD, though, and you'll need a 3.5in adapter if you want to install one.

Box Cube Captain | £500 | www.box.co.uk

FEATURES ★★★★★ PERFORMANCE ★★★★☆
EASE OF USE ★★★★★ VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★☆

WebUser BRONZE AWARD

The Box Cube Captain's case is more aesthetically pleasing than our other two award winners, and there's plenty of space inside for extra components, which means it has room for future upgrades. Box has already taken advantage of this by installing internal Wi-Fi hardware (the Cube Captain is the only PC in this group to have this), so if you are setting it up away from your router, you won't need a separate adapter to connect it to the internet. Although it doesn't come with an SSD, it's the only one of our award winners that has the correct attachments in place to add an extra 2.5in model without needing an adapter.

It performed well in the games tests, coming joint first in the Metro: Last Light Redux test and fourth in the Dirt Showdown test. It was third from bottom in the Windows benchmarks, though, which is a bit disappointing.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The Box Cube Captain is good at running games but fell behind our main award winners in our Windows performance tests. Its attractive case has plenty of room for upgrading and adding components further down the line.

BEST OF THE REST

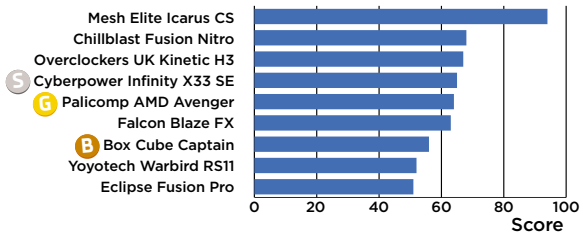
We reviewed six more PCs that didn't quite make it into our awards. The **Mesh Elite Icarus CS** (**£499** | **www.meshcomputers.com** | ★★★★☆) came top of our Windows benchmarks by some margin, but it didn't do so well in our gaming tests, so is less of an all-rounder. Meanwhile, the **Chillblast Fusion Nitro** (**£500** | **www.chillblast.com** | ★★★★☆) came second to the Mesh in our Windows tests but was short on upgrading potential.

If you want something more upgrade-friendly, the **Overclockers UK Kinetic H3** (**£497** | **www.overclockers.co.uk** | ★★★★☆) has a cracking case with stacks of room but its performance in our gaming tests was disappointing. Rounding off the four-star reviews is the **Yoyotech Warbird RS11** (**£500** | **www.yoyotech.co.uk** | ★★★★☆), which came third in both our gaming tests but put in a disappointing Windows performance, coming second from last.

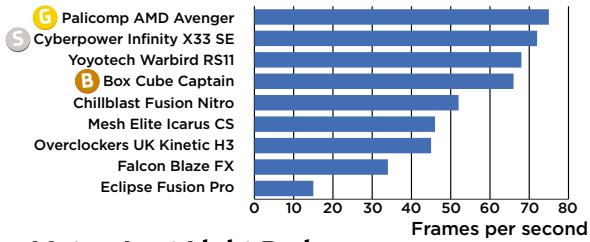
The **Falcon Blaze FX** (**£500** | **www.falconcomputers.co.uk** | ★★★☆☆) ended up in the bottom half in all our tests and its case hampers future upgrading. More disappointing was the **Eclipse Fusion Pro** (**£500** | **www.eclipsecomputers.com** | ★★☆☆☆), which came last in all the tests we ran.

TEST-RESULTS CHARTS

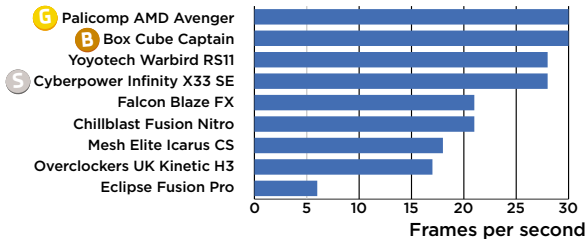
Overall 2D Performance



Dirt Showdown



Metro: Last Light Redux



	Palicomp AMD Avenger	Cyberpower Infinity X33 SE	Box Cube Captain	Mesh Elite Icarus CS	Chillblast Fusion Nitro
WEBSITE	www.palicomp.co.uk	www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk	www.box.co.uk	www.meshcomputers.com	www.chillblast.com
PRICE	£500	£499	£500	£499	£500
PROCESSOR	Quad-core 4.5GHz AMD Athlon X4 880K	Dual-core 3.7GHz Intel Core i3-6100	Quad-core 3.7GHz AMD Athlon X4 860K	Quad-core 3.3GHz Intel Core i5-6600	Dual-core 3.7GHz Intel Core i3-6100
MEMORY (TYPE)	8GB (1,600MHz DDR3)	8GB (2,133MHz DDR4)	8GB (1,866MHz DDR3)	8GB (2,400MHz DDR4)	8GB (2,133MHz DDR3)
MOTHERBOARD	Asus A88XM-Plus	MSI H110M PRO-VD	MSI A68HM Grenade	Asus B150M-C	Asus H110M-A
FRONT USB PORTS	2 x USB 3	1 x USB 2 , 1 x USB 3	2 x USB 2, 1 x USB 3	2 x USB 2, 1 x USB 3	2 x USB 2, 1 x USB 3
REAR USB PORTS	4 x USB 2, 2 x USB 3	4 x USB 2, 2 x USB 3	4 x USB 2, 2 x USB 3	2 x USB 2, 4 x USB 3	4 x USB 2, 2 x USB3
NETWORKING	Ethernet	Ethernet	Ethernet, 802.11n Wi-Fi	Ethernet	Ethernet
TOTAL STORAGE (TYPE)	240GB SSD, 1TB HDD	1TB HDD	1TB HDD	120GB SSD, 1TB HDD	1TB SSHD
MEMORY CARD READER	✗	✗	✗	SD, TF/microSD	SD, TF/microSD
OPTICAL DRIVE	DVD-RW	DVD-RW	DVD-RW	✗	✗
GRAPHICS CARD	4GB Palit GeForce GTX 960	2GB MSI GeForce GTX 960	2GB MSI Radeon R9 380	2GB Nvidia GeForce GTX 750Ti	4GB Sapphire Nitro Radeon R7 370
CASE SIZE	485 x 420 x 235mm	496 x 450 x 195mm	478 x 470 x 205mm	426 x 404 x 209mm	412 x 366 x 208mm
WARRANTY	Three-years return-to-base	Three-years labour, two-years parts	Two-years return-to-base	Two-years parts, lifetime labour, one-year collect-and-return	Five-years return-to-base including two-years collect-and-return

OUR VERDICT

We gave our Gold Award to the Palicomp AMD Avenger, which proved to be a good all-round performer. It could do with a little more internal space but you can't have everything in a £500 PC, and its excellent components mean you won't have to upgrade any time soon.

If future-proofing is important, our Silver Award-winner is a good alternative. The only downside is that it doesn't have an SSD, so it doesn't feel quite as nippy, even though its hardware performed similarly to our Gold Award-winner in tests.

The Box Cube Captain fell behind the other award winners in our Windows test but still performed well in our gaming tests, earning it our Bronze Award. It also has a roomy case, with lots of capacity to upgrade, and was the only PC to come equipped with Wi-Fi.

COOLER MASTER

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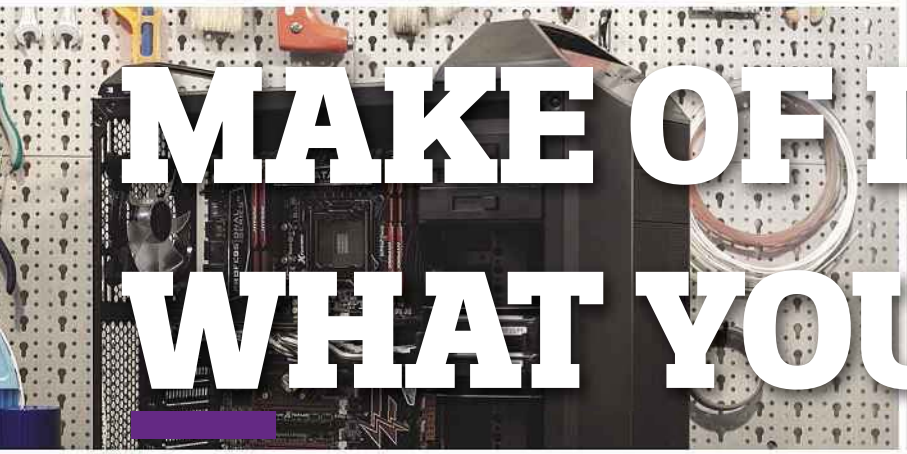
MAKE OF IT WHAT YOU WILL



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Web User's Best Buys

Web User and its sister titles test over 2,500 products every year

HARDWARE

WINDOWS 10 PC

Palicomp AMD Avenger

£500 from www.palicomp.co.uk
Date tested: June 2016

The Palicomp AMD Avenger's medium-sized case still provides plenty of room to upgrade. Its carefully chosen components provide good performance, especially when playing games.

KEY SPECS

Quad-core 4.5GHz AMD Athlon X4 880K processor ■ 8GB of memory ■ 1TB hard drive, 240GB SSD ■ 2 X USB 2 ports, 3 x USB 3 ports ■ Ethernet ■ 485 x 420 x 235mm ■ Three-years return-to-base warranty

BUDGET SMARTPHONE

Sony Xperia M4 Aqua

£149 from www.tesco.com/direct
Date tested: June 2016

A great budget smartphone with some high-end specs, including a powerful octa-core processor, a decent camera and a reasonable battery life. It's also dust- and water-resistant, with an impressively bright screen.

KEY SPECS

5in screen ■ Octa-core 1.5GHz processor ■ 2GB of memory ■ 8GB of storage ■ 13-megapixel rear camera ■ Android 5.0.2 Lollipop ■ 1,280 x 720 pixels resolution ■ 2,400mAh battery ■ Dust- and water-resistant ■ 146 x 73 x 7.3mm ■ 136g

MULTIFUNCTION PRINTER

Canon Pixma MG5750

£65.59 from www.photospecialist.co.uk
Date tested: June 2016

The MG5750 is an excellent all-rounder, producing top-quality prints at a great price and a reasonable speed. It uses multiple cartridges – including a special one for black text – to reduce waste and keep running costs low.

KEY SPECS

Thermal inkjet multifunction printer with scanner/copier ■ 4,800 x 1,200dpi maximum print ■ 1,200 x 2,400dpi (24-bit) optical scan resolution ■ 5 cartridges ■ USB and 802.11b/g/n Wi-Fi ■ 100-sheet tray ■ Duplex printing ■ 455 x 369 x 148mm

WINDOWS 10 LAPTOP

Acer Aspire One Cloudbook 14

£149.99 from www.currys.co.uk
Date tested: April 2016

The Cloudbook 14 is as good a laptop as you'll get for less than £200. It's not particularly fast and doesn't have a brilliant display, but it's fantastic value, especially because it includes a year's subscription to Office 365 Personal.

KEY SPECS

Dual-core 1.6GHz Intel Celeron N3050 processor ■ 2GB of memory ■ 32GB SSD ■ 14.1in non-touchscreen ■ 1,366 x 768 pixels resolution ■ 1 x USB 3, 1 x USB 2 port ■ 802.11n Wi-Fi ■ 339 x 235 x 17.9mm ■ 1.6kg ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

WIRELESS ROUTER

Netgear Nighthawk X4S

£259.99 from www.currys.co.uk
Date tested: December 2015

The Netgear Nighthawk X4S will boost your network, no matter what type of web connection you have. It's expensive but built to last, and should make further upgrades unnecessary until the next 802.11 standards are launched.

KEY SPECS

Dual-band 2.4GHz, 5GHz ■ 802.11ac ■ 2.53Gbps theoretical max speed ■ ADSL2+ and VDSL ■ 5 x 10/100/1,000Mbps Gigabit Ethernet ports ■ Dual-core 1.4GHz processor ■ 285 x 185 x 50mm ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

BUDGET TABLET

Apple iPad Mini 2

£219 from www.apple.com/uk
Date tested: November 2015

The iPad Mini 2 has a superb, slim-but-solid design and a good-quality screen. Its performance keeps up with the latest tablets, and the battery life is also impressive.

KEY SPECS

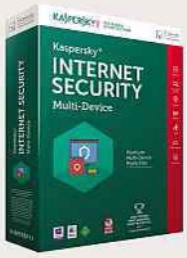
7.9in screen ■ 2,048 x 1,536 pixels resolution ■ 1.3GHz Apple A7 processor ■ 16GB storage ■ 5-megapixel rear camera, 1.2-megapixel front camera ■ 802.11n dual-band Wi-Fi ■ iOS 9 ■ 200 x 135 x 7.5mm ■ 331g

All prices correct at time of review

SOFTWARE & SERVICES

INTERNET SECURITY

Kaspersky Internet Security 2016



£19.95 from bit.ly/shop389
Date tested: January 2016

Kaspersky is rock solid at protecting your PC from the worst of the web, and has come top in seven of our most recent tests, blocking all viruses and malware with its robust defences. Click the link above to save £30 on the software (normal price £49.99).

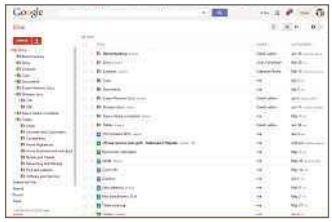
KEY FEATURES

Antivirus and firewall tools ■ Protects online shopping and banking ■ Identity and privacy tools ■ Dangerous-website alerts ■ Advanced parental control ■ Licences for one, three and five PCs; for one or two years, or pay monthly ■ Multi-device version ■ Compatible with Windows 10

ONLINE STORAGE

Google Drive

From free from drive.google.com
Date tested: January 2016



Google Drive is easy to use and has lots of free storage. The Windows software integrates with Explorer, so saving and syncing files is like keeping them in any other PC folder.

KEY FEATURES

16GB free storage ■ Web-based office software ■ Works with XP, Vista, 7, 8+ and 10 ■ Chrome browser add-on ■ Android and iOS apps ■ 100GB extra storage for £1.36 per month; 1TB for £6.01 per month; 10TB for £60.16 per month

WEB DESIGN

Xara Web Designer 11 Premium

£69.99 from www.xara.com
Date tested: November 2015

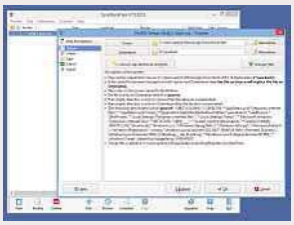
Xara Web Designer 11 is a great tool for anyone who wants a good-looking website without having to use HTML or CSS code. The interface is easy to use and the software includes all the tools you need to create flexible sites that change depending on the size of the screen.

KEY FEATURES

90+ templates ■ WYSIWYG design ■ Create responsive websites ■ Embed codes ■ Add HTML ■ Online editing ■ FTP uploader ■ Hosting (requires registration) ■ Browser preview (Chrome, Firefox, IE, Opera)

BACKUP AND SYNC

SyncBackFree



Free from bit.ly/syncback366
Date tested: March 2015

SyncBackFree is very capable software that gives you plenty of control over how it can be used. If you know what you need from your backups and you're prepared to spend some time configuring the options, SyncBackFree has everything you need.

KEY FEATURES

Synchronise: Copy files in both directions ■ Restore backup files easily ■ Email logs ■ Schedule backups ■ Simple and Advanced mode ■ Runs on Windows XP, Vista, 7. 8 and 10 ■ Extensive Help documentation and support

PHOTO EDITING

Adobe Photoshop Elements 13

£81.08 from www.adobe.com/uk
Date tested: December 2014

With its tidy interface and pop-out trays, Adobe Photoshop Elements provides everything an amateur photographer needs and helps you quickly find the right editing tools.

KEY FEATURES

Compatible with Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8+ and 10 (32- and 64-bit) ■ Bundled photo organiser ■ Content-aware edits ■ Guided edits ■ People-beautifier tools ■ RAW support

VIDEO EDITING

Adobe Premiere Elements 13

£81.08 from www.adobe.com/uk
Date tested: December 2014

Premiere Elements 13's superb interface makes its many features neat but accessible. You won't find better video-editing software for the price.

KEY FEATURES

Automatic editing ■ Export to multiple video formats ■ Burn to DVD and Blu-ray ■ Image stabiliser ■ Stop-motion capture ■ Motion tracking ■ Musical scores and sound effects ■ Upload to YouTube and Vimeo

Best Free Software

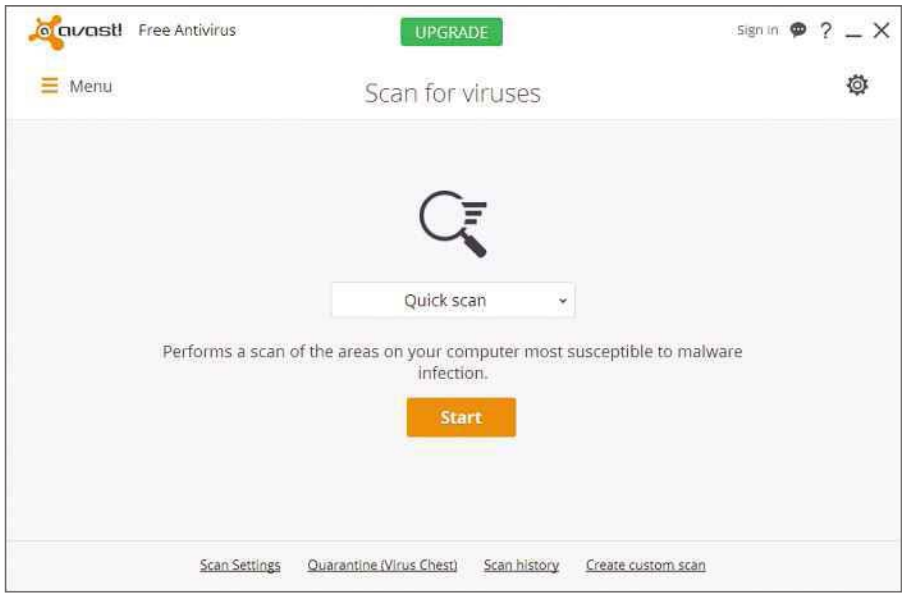
ANTIVIRUS

Avast Antivirus Nitro Update

www.avast.com

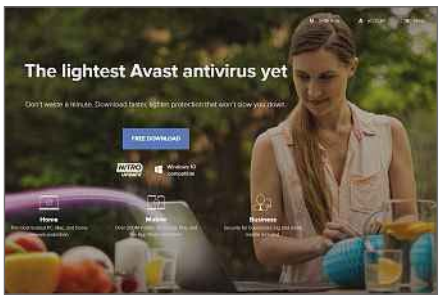
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

File size: 4.8MB



Avast released the 2016 edition of its free antivirus software back in November 2015 (see Issue 385, bit.ly/webuser385). That version introduced a simplified interface, a new password manager and an improved network scanner, among other features. Seven months later and the company has released a huge update for its software, with several major changes.

The Nitro Update, as Avast is calling it, is lightweight and significantly faster. The company has achieved this by harnessing the power of the cloud to identify and analyse threats. Because most of the work is now done online, the installed software takes up much less room (even the installer is smaller), so it loads approximately 11% more quickly, and downloads complete in much less time.



Avast even boasts that Windows 10 will run faster with its software than it will with Windows Defender, which is included as part of the operating system (Defender is enabled by default if you don't have another antivirus program installed). The Nitro Update also includes proprietary CyberCapture technology, which identifies and responds to unknown threats in real time.

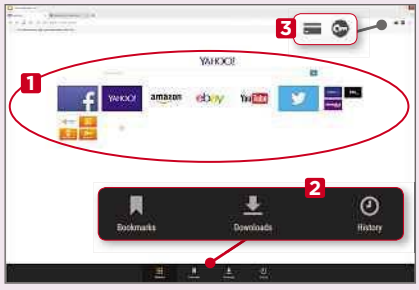
Those aren't the only changes to the free software. Some features, including Remote Assistance, have been dropped to help make the program lighter, and Avast has switched to a monthly release cycle so that new builds, with new features, will appear every 30 days.

The SafeZone secure web browser, which is now included in all versions of the software, gains a useful new banking mode in this release.

MINI WORKSHOP | Protect your PC using Avast Antivirus Nitro Update

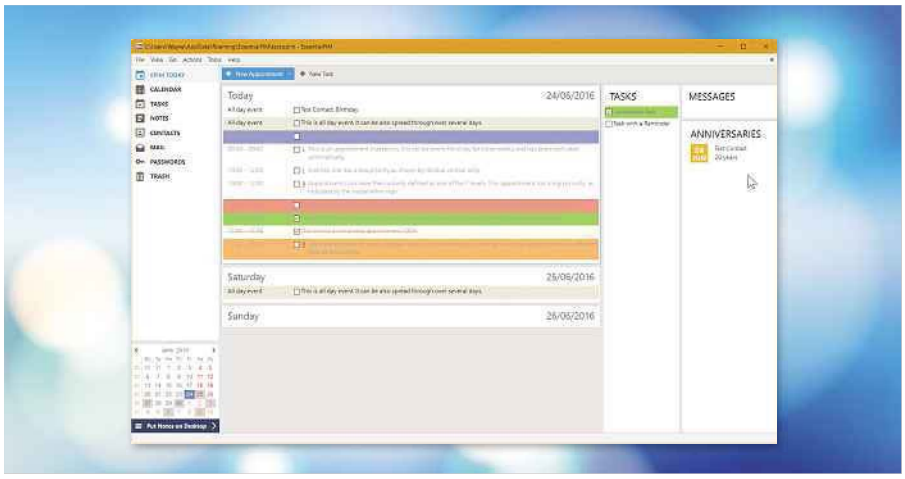
1 Avast's installer lets you choose the components you want; just untick any modules you don't require. Once the program has installed, scan for problems by clicking the Run Smart Scan button on the front screen. 1 The program runs through the available scans – including Compatibility Check, Viruses and Outdated Software – and reports its progress.

2 When it's finished, you can review the findings 1 and choose to resolve all the problems 2 or rescan your system. 3 Alternatively, you can click the menu button 4 and access the individual Scan, Tools and Passwords sections. The Scan button offers a choice of six scan types including viruses, browser add-ons, outdated software and network threats.



3 The Tools section gives you access to a VPN (Virtual Private Network), Rescue Disk and SafeZone Browser. The browser includes a Shortcuts page 1 with a bar for Bookmarks, Downloads and History. 2 The icons to the right of the address bar provide access to the Bank Mode and password manager. 3

This fortnight's top new software downloads to help you make the most of your PC, and they're all FREE



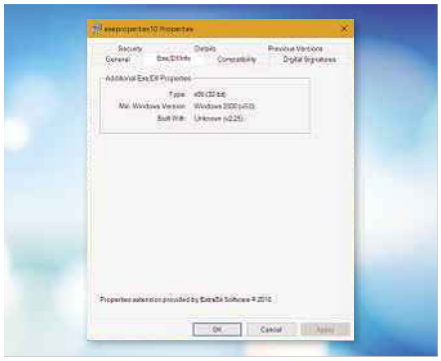
PERSONAL INFORMATION MANAGER

EssentialPIM Free 7

www.essentialpim.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 **File size:** 13.5MB

EssentialPIM is a powerful personal-information manager that helps you keep on top of everything from contacts and email to calendars, tasks, notes and passwords. It's fully portable, so you can carry it around on a USB flash drive. The free version has some limitations compared to the paid-for edition, but is enough for most users' needs. The latest release lets you tag items and password-protect any module. Birthdays in the calendar are now automatically linked to a contact.



SYSTEM TOOL

ExeProperties

bit.ly/exeprop401

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 **File size:** 611KB

If a program won't run on your PC, it may be because it needs a later version of Windows or you're trying to run a 64-bit program on a 32-bit system. ExeProperties can help you identify the problem. Just right-click the EXE or DLL file of the software you're having trouble running and select Properties, then open the new Exe/Dll Info tab to see the system type (32- or 64-bit) and the minimum Windows version required.

SYSTEM TOOL

8GadgetPack 19

8gadgetpack.net

Min requirements: Windows 8+/10

File size: 19.7MB

Windows 7 offers Desktop gadgets – small floating program widgets – but this feature was removed from Windows 8 and 10. 8GadgetPack brings it back, with more than 50 different gadgets to choose from, as well as a sidebar to store them in. The latest version improves compatibility with the forthcoming Windows 10 Anniversary Update and changes the default weather gadget to My Weather.

New Windows Apps

Cyclopsy

bit.ly/cyclopsy401

Min requirements: Windows 8+/10

File size: 138.7MB

The aim of this puzzle game is to help 'cyclopses' defeat an evil king and free their friends, which you can do by completing challenges such as occupying a certain amount of the game board.

Expedia Hotels, Flights, Cars & Activities

bit.ly/expedia401

Min requirements: Windows 10

File size: 33.5MB

The official app for Expedia lets you book hotels, flights and/or hire cars. It defaults to your current location and lets you sort results by price, deals or reviews.

Roku

bit.ly/roku401

Min requirements: Windows 10

File size: 4.7MB

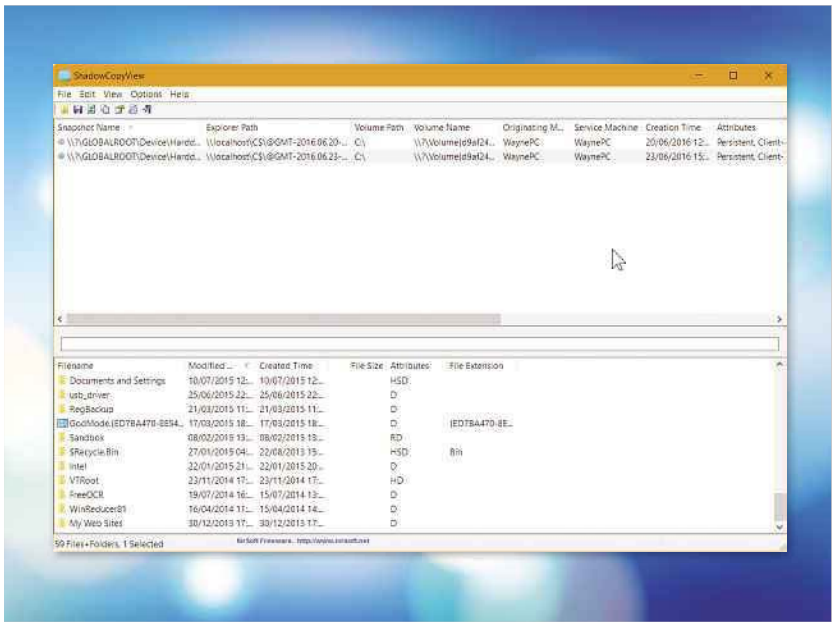
If you have a Roku device for streaming media, this app will give you quick access to your channels. It supports both touch and keyboard and mouse, and works with Cortana.

SYSTEM TOOL

ShadowCopyView

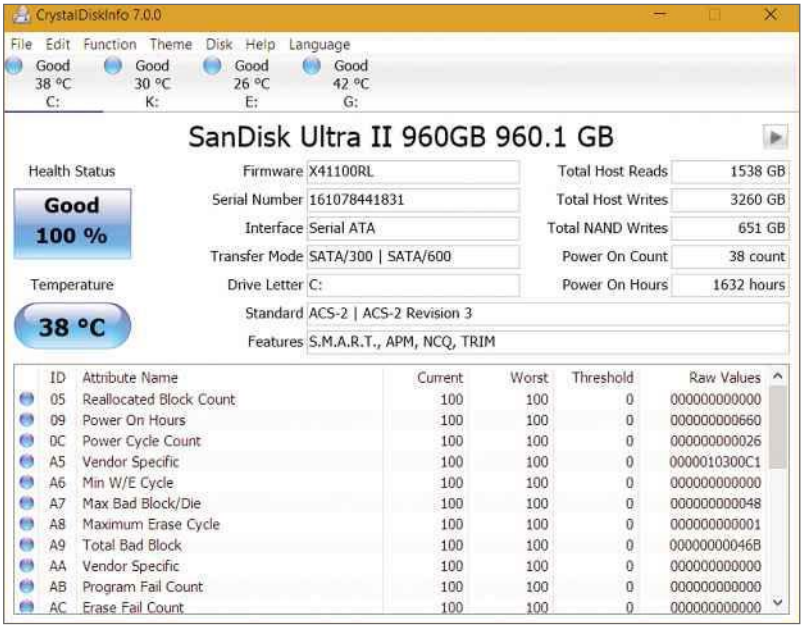
www.nirsoft.net

Min requirements: Windows Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 74KB



NirSoft produces a lot of handy apps, including ones designed to let you view your saved wireless keys, Bluetooth activity and hardware drivers. Volume Shadow Copy is a built-in Windows service that takes 'snapshots' of your system, and NirSoft's latest tool lets you browse through these moments in time. Snapshots contain older versions of your files and folders, and ShadowCopyView lets you view these, and optionally save a copy to your hard drive. If you've accidentally deleted a file, or overwritten it with a newer version, this free tool might just save the day.

There are 32 and 64-bit versions of ShadowCopyView available.



HARD-DRIVE CHECKER

CrystalDiskInfo 7

bit.ly/cdi401

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 3.7MB

It can be an absolute nightmare if your hard drive fails, especially if you haven't backed up your important personal data for a while. CrystalDiskInfo monitors your hard drive's health, and displays its S.M.A.R.T (Self-Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Technology) status, current temperature, details such as the number of hours the disk has been on for, and the read-error rate, alerting you of any potential problems before they affect the drive. The newest version improves support for Windows 10 and also adds support for additional drive interfaces.

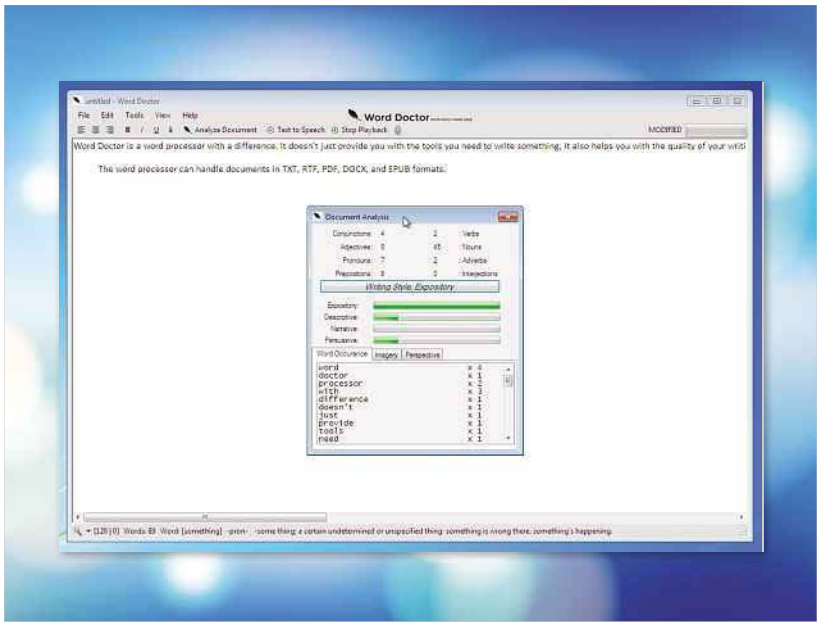
The program used to come bundled with the notorious OpenCandy adware, but thankfully that has now been removed.

WRITING TOOL

Word Doctor

www.the-word-doctor.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 14.3MB



Word Doctor is a word processor with a difference. It doesn't just provide you with the tools you need to write something, but also helps you improve the quality of your writing. Word Doctor offers easy access to a thesaurus, and its style editor can identify any weak phrases you may have used. Its Text/Document Analysis outlines Word Occurrence (frequency), and identifies Imagery and Writing Style elements. A Writing Wizard helps flesh out characters for fiction, while text-to-speech reads back to you what you've written.

The word processor is compatible with documents in various formats including TXT, RTF, PDF, DOCX and EPUB.

GAME

Prince of Thieves

bit.ly/prince401

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

File size: 9.2MB

In this fun platform game, Robin Hood, the "Prince of Thieves", has to collect bags of money from the rich to give to the poor. It looks and plays like a video game from 1985 and there's definitely a Mario vibe about all the jumping around. You can kill the guards by shooting them with arrows.

✗ Don't install...

IObit PCTransfer

www.iobit.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

File size: 4.5MB

IObit offers lots of useful free system tools, but PCTransfer isn't one of its better efforts. Designed to help you move data from an old PC to a new one, it's simple enough to use, but is flagged as containing malware by three scanners on VirusTotal (bit.ly/pctransfer401), including a possible Trojan. It's true that 51 scanners found the program to be safe, but you can't be too careful.

...Install this instead ✓

Laplink PCmover Express

bit.ly/mover380

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

File size: 34MB

If you're buying a new Windows 10 computer, you'll need a way to transfer important files and folders from your old PC to the new one. To make this easier, Microsoft has teamed up with Laplink to offer its PCmover Express software. This usually costs £19.95, but you can download it for free until 31 August.

Install PCmover Express on both your old PC (the one with the files you want to keep) and the new computer (the one that will receive the files), and connect both PCs to the same network, either using Wi-Fi or Ethernet.

UPDATED | New tweaks and fixes for your favourite free programs

SYSTEM TOOL

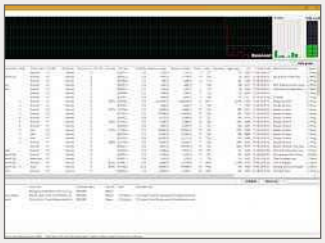
Windows Repair 3.9.3

bit.ly/winrepair375

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+

File size: 20.7MB

Windows Repair helps fix all manner of annoying problems with a misbehaving PC. The latest update to the program introduces massive code changes to the core of the program for the upcoming v4. These changes and improvements affect the repairs and user interface.



SYSTEM TOOL

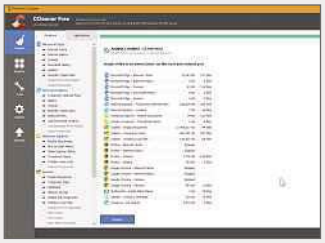
Process Lasso 8.9.8.12

bitsum.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

File size: 2.9MB

A more advanced alternative to the Windows Task Manager, Process Lasso automatically prevents programs from hogging system resources. This is a minor maintenance release that fixes some bugs and also improves performance in the server version of the software.



SYSTEM CLEANER

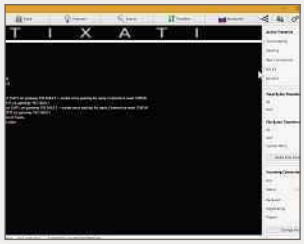
CCleaner 5.19

www.piriform.com/ccleaner

Min requirements: Windows 7/8+/10

File size: 6.7MB

The hugely popular system-cleaning tool gets updated on a monthly basis. This latest version is a faily minor release which improves Firefox and Chrome cleaning, optimises the detection routine for the Browser Plugin and fixes various bugs. It also improves the way windows resize.



BITTORRENT CLIENT

Tixati

www.tixati.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10, or Linux

File size: 14.8MB

This powerful BitTorrent tool offers support for magnet links and provides impressive control over download and upload speeds. The new version works faster, introduces several new functions and can handle 50% more simultaneous searches. ■

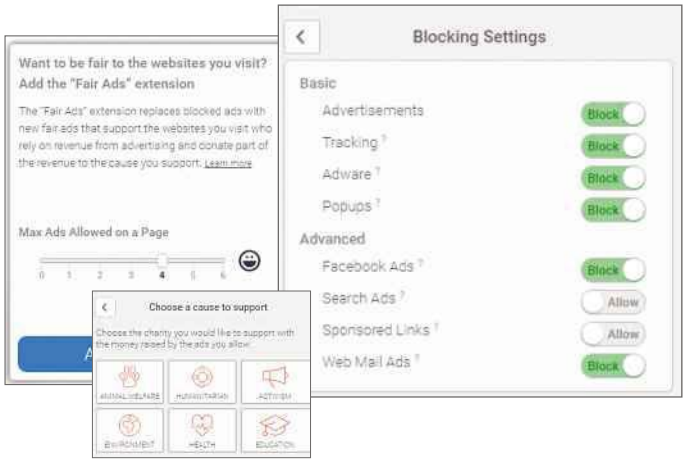
GET FREE SOFTWARE FIRST subscribe to Web User at subscribe.webuser.co.uk

Best New Browser Tools

CHROME

Block only the most annoying online ads

Most ad blockers work by using constantly updated filter lists to refuse all communication from advertising networks and servers. This means that inoffensive ads get filtered alongside annoying ones – unless the advertiser pays the blocker to be whitelisted – and many websites are deprived of essential revenue. Fair AdBlock (bit.ly/fair401) is a new type of blocker that lets you decide the types of advert you block and allow, from options including search ads, sponsored links and webmail ads. Best of all, you can help websites and good causes stay afloat by choosing to allow ads on certain sites from the charities of your choice. To do so, you need to install a separate add-on called Fair Ads, but neither tool uses much memory and you can limit the maximum number of ads on a page. It's an admirably altruistic approach to a controversial issue.



Make Facebook smarter and faster

Facebook might be the third most popular website in the world, but it's also cluttered, confusing and – dare we say it – rather dated in appearance. You can give the social network a much-needed makeover by installing the updated add-on Flatbook (bit.ly/flatbook401), which was previously called Facebook Flat. This applies a flatter, cleaner theme to the site that strips away surplus elements such as adverts and 'suggestions', replaces text links with tidy icons and displays profile photos in circles rather than squares. Not only do these changes make Facebook look smarter and load faster, but they also speed up navigation by providing instant access to your favourite features. Useful additions include an option to see which friends you interact with most often, and news feeds spanning categories such as Technology, Entertainment and Sport (sadly, these are rather US-biased).

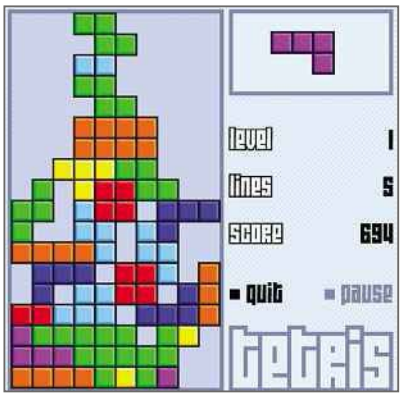
They say a change is as good as a holiday, so if you can't afford to go away this year, try Flatbook for a few days.

Count the days until important dates

Want to know how many days it is until Christmas? No, nor do we, but there are times when it's useful to know how much time remains before an important date – for example, a wedding or a knee operation. Calendar and Countdown (bit.ly/calendar401) is a handy Chrome extension for managing your life over the next few weeks, months or even years. Click its toolbar button to view a full annual calendar in a pop-up window, then click a significant date to open a set of options. You can now assign a colour to the date and attach a note to explain its importance. Choose Primary and an icon will appear on your toolbar counting down the days until that date so you don't forget it. What's more, if you hover over another date on the calendar, the add-on will tell you the number of days between them. You can add as many dates as you like and colour-code them accordingly. It certainly makes you realise how quickly time flies!

Play Tetris in your browser

In Issue 399, we featured a brilliant Chrome version of the Eighties Nintendo game Duck Hunt (bit.ly/duck399). If you enjoyed playing that, why not follow it up with a browser-based version of the Game Boy classic, Tetris (bit.ly/tetris401). Use the cursor keys to arrange the falling blocks into continuous lines. You can choose the difficulty level, although, sadly, the game doesn't retain the original music.



This fortnight's most useful tips and add-ons to help you get the most from Chrome, Firefox, Opera and more

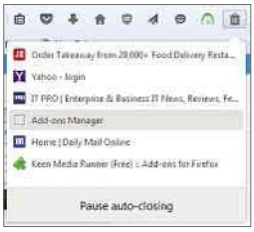
FIREFOX

Make Firefox change colour like Vivaldi

If you like the appearance of the trendy new browser Vivaldi but you're not ready to leave Firefox just yet, you can get the best of both worlds using VivaldiFox (bit.ly/vivaldifox401). This new add-on brings Vivaldi's clever colour-changing feature to Mozilla's browser, to make its interface match the website you're viewing. It works by applying the dominant colour from the current page to Firefox's tabs and toolbars. If, for example, you visit the Web User Forums, the browser will turn red (and not just in the Open Forum!); whereas on Mail Online it becomes true blue. You can perform further Vivaldi-style customisation in the add-on's Options, such as making your tabs rectangular, choosing a light or dark theme and adding a white background to tab icons.

Close unused tabs automatically

Leaving lots of browser tabs open wastes valuable memory, but help is at hand from the updated add-on Dustman (bit.ly/dustman401), which automatically closes tabs after they've been idle for 20 minutes. By default, it leaves at least five tabs open, which should be enough for anyone, and won't close any that you haven't yet viewed. You can increase or decrease the number of inactive minutes and open tabs in Dustman's Options, and restore the last 100 closed tabs by selecting them in its drop-down menu. Additionally, the auto-closing feature can be paused during times when you need to have lots of tabs open.

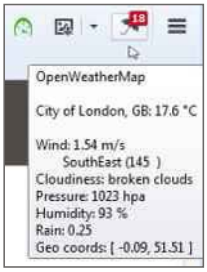


Download any image from any page

Grabbing photos from the web usually involves right-clicking them and choosing Save Image As. A much better option is to install Pick & Save Images (bit.ly/pick401), which makes downloading multiple pictures an absolute doddle. When you click the add-on's toolbar button, it opens a window showing every image hosted on the current page. Select the pictures you want to download, then click Save to grab them all in one fell swoop. You can use filters to show only images of a certain size and file type; remove duplicates from the results; sort pictures by resolution and dimensions; and create 'rules' for specific sites to speed up downloads in future.

Get an instant weather reading

OpenWeatherMap (bit.ly/open401) is one of the niftiest weather add-ons we've seen for a while. Hover your mouse over its icon and it will detect your location and display the current temperature, conditions, humidity, wind speed and pressure. Click the icon to view a forecast on the OpenWeatherMap website.



OTHER BROWSERS

Get personalised news in Opera

Following our two-page special about Opera in our last issue, version 39 of the browser gives you another reason to switch by improving its personal news service. Previously, this simply presented stories across categories including Technology, Entertainment and Sport, but it can now be tailored to deliver content that's more relevant for you. To use the feature, click the Menu button, choose News and select your favourite sources from the list. These include BBC News, Daily Mail and Sky News, and you can click 'Show me more' for hundreds of further options. When you're done, click 'Start reading' to view stories in an RSS-style feed.

Try new extensions for Edge

Microsoft's Windows 10 browser still has a long way to go to catch up with Chrome, Firefox and Opera, but its collection of extensions is slowly building. The latest additions include popular password manager LastPass, a New Tab page tweaker called Breeze and Microsoft's own Office Online tool. Currently, you need to be on the Windows 10 Insider Preview to use Edge extensions, but this should change with the release of the Anniversary Update. See our cover feature on page 38 for more info.

Best Free Apps

App of the Fortnight

PERSONAL FINANCE

UPDATED

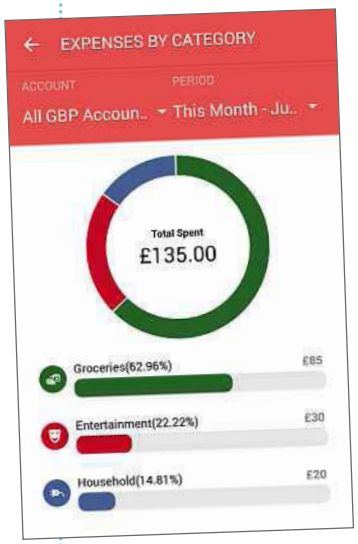
Expense IQ

bit.ly/expense401

Min requirements: Android (varies with device)
Size: Varies with device

Unlike some finance apps, Expense IQ (formerly known as EasyMoney) doesn't connect with your bank account to track your transactions automatically. We're happy about that, not just for security reasons, but because recording your income, spending, saving and other numbers manually is a key part of using the app. Entering income and expenses is very straightforward, with lots of preset categories to choose from, or you can create your own. Expense IQ then organises your data into reports, graphs and a Smart Overview that shows you at a glance where you're overspending.

The app's name change is just one of many improvements in version 2.0. New features include an option to photograph documents such as bills and receipts and add them to your records; offline access to your reports; and support for up to three accounts – personal, household and savings, for example.



The first time you open Expense IQ, it asks for permission to access 'photos, media and files on your device'. This allows it to save daily backups, import and export data and store attached images. Usefully, the default currency is pounds sterling, but you can change this if you want.

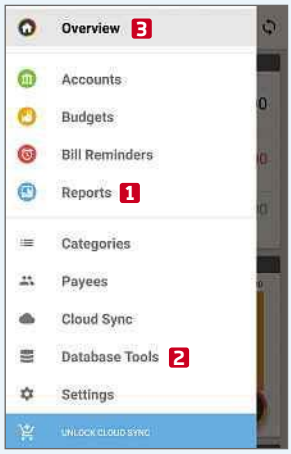
Now for the bad news. Some of the app's best features, including PIN lock, Dropbox sync and the option to export reports as CSV (spreadsheet) and QIF (Quicken) files, are limited to the paid-for version, which costs £1.68 per month or £41.06 per year. If that sounds too expensive, you'll have do without them and also put up with the ads in the free version.

Our rating ★★★★★

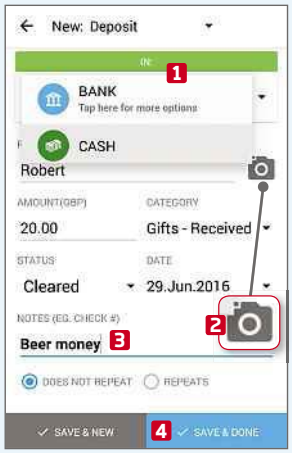
MINI WORKSHOP

Manage your money using Expense IQ

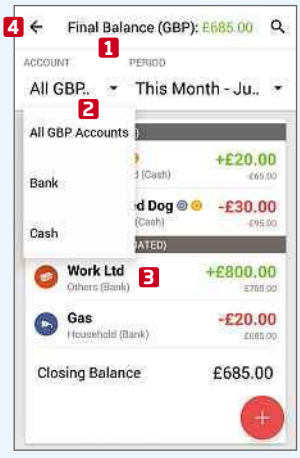
1 When you first launch Expense IQ, tap Allow to accept the permissions, then tap 'Start using Expense IQ'. The main menu provides access to Reports, 1 where you can see charts representing your spending habits, and Database Tools, 2 which include CSV and QIF file imports and local backups. To create a simple monthly budget, tap Overview, 3 then '+' and Add Income.



2 Tap Cash and select an income type from the drop-down menu. 1 Tap under 'Payee/Item' to enter the name of the person, company or other source. To take or attach a photo – such as a photo of the payee or a scan of the payment slip – tap the camera icon. 2 Use the other fields to add the date, category, cleared status and any notes. 3 Tap 'Save & Done' to exit and hear a ker-ching sound. 4



3 Your Final Balance screen opens automatically. Tap the '+' to enter more data. This time, Withdrawal is selected by default. Fill in a purchase or bill payment, then tap 'Save & Done' to see your updated Final Balance. 1 Tap under Account to select Bank, Cash or 'All GBP' transactions. 2 You can edit, delete or copy an entry by tapping it. 3 To return to the main menu, tap the arrow. 4



This fortnight's top free and paid-for apps for Android, iOS and Windows phones and tablets, and smart TVs

KEYBOARD

UPDATED

SwiftKey Beta

bit.ly/swift401

Min requirements: Android (varies with device)
Size: Varies with device

SwiftKey faces stiff competition these days. As if Google Keyboard weren't a big enough rival, there's now Chrooma (reviewed in Issue 397) and Microsoft Hub (Issue 396) to pile on the pressure. In a bid to stay ahead, SwiftKey has launched a beta app. Currently Android-only, it includes experimental features that may or may not make it to the main release (swiftkey.com), including double-word prediction and a fantastic clipboard that saves your most-used cuttings without overwriting.

Our rating ★★★★★

SECURITY

NEW

Hacked?

bit.ly/hacked401

Min requirements: Windows 10 Mobile
Size: 10.74MB

Many of us have more than one email account – and some of us have several. But we may not have the time or inclination to keep tabs on all of them, so they're easy prey for hackers. This new app for Windows 10 phones, tablets and PCs lets you monitor all your accounts from one hub. There's no need to share any passwords with the app; you simply enter your email addresses to see straight away if any of them has suffered a breach at any time, so you know whether you need to change your login details.

Our rating ★★★★☆

VIDEO

NEW

Mixatron

bit.ly/mixatron401

Min requirements: iOS 9
Size: 84.6MB

Add bold filters to your iPhone and iPad videos with this Instagram-style app. There are nine custom effects, with names like Comic, Pixel and Old Timey, and Mixatron welcomes your suggestions for more. The app can also automatically stitch several videos together and add music, and you can share the results immediately on Facebook, Instagram and other social sites. It's a quick and easy way to create and share a video of a special occasion or an interesting place you're visiting.

Our rating ★★★★☆

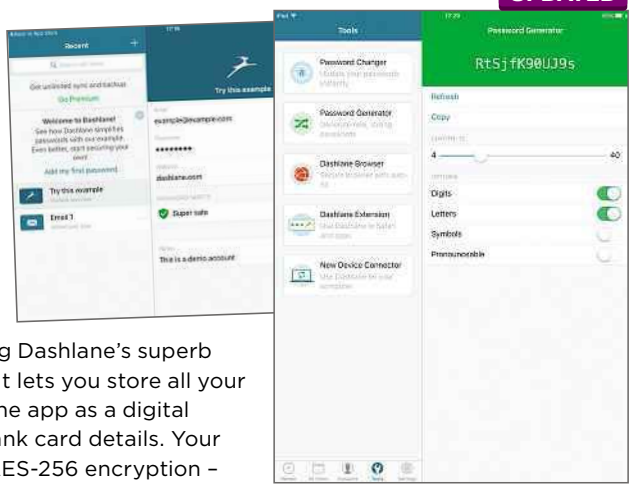
SECURITY

UPDATED

Dashlane

bit.ly/dashdroid401
bit.ly/dashios401

Min requirements: Android 4, iOS 9
Size: 37MB (Android), 54.1MB (iOS)



Stay safe when shopping, emailing and even banking on your phone and tablet by using Dashlane's superb password manager app. It lets you store all your logins securely and use the app as a digital wallet containing your bank card details. Your data is protected using AES-256 encryption – which no one in the world knows how to hack.

Dashlane's iOS app (see the screenshots, above) has a businesslike new look and is now much easier to nagivate. You can now search all the data in your account or use the Recent screen to find important items more quickly. The new Tools screen includes the secure Dashlane Browser, a Password Generator and the excellent Password Changer, which automatically changes multiple passwords securely.

The Android app has also been updated, but it doesn't include any new features, only bug fixes.

Our rating ★★★★★

GET THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO ANDROID

Our updated Android MagBook is packed with 148 pages of apps, workshops and advice to unlock the full potential of your tablet and phone.

Discover how to:

- Master new tools in Lollipop and Marshmallow
- Stop apps leaking your personal data
- Record anything on your phone and tablet
- Prevent updates from wrecking your device
- Remove hidden junk so it never comes back
- Switch from iOS without losing data

Order it now from Amazon at bit.ly/defguidetoandroid

PHOTOS

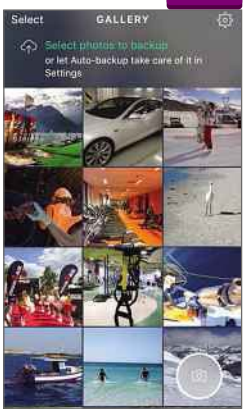
NEW

Avast Photo Space

bit.ly/avastphoto401

Min requirements: iOS 8

Size: 26.7MB



Another fortnight, another app for tidying up your overflowing photo library. This one comes courtesy of security company Avast and, like Google Photos, automatically backs up your pictures securely online, leaving only optimised thumbnails on your iPhone or iPad. You can download hi-res versions of any photo to your device whenever you want.

Avast Photo Space comes with its own camera app, which automatically transfers photos to your chosen cloud-storage service (Google Drive and Dropbox are supported). To save mobile data, set the app to sync photos via Wi-Fi only.

Our rating ★★★★★

FILES

UPDATED

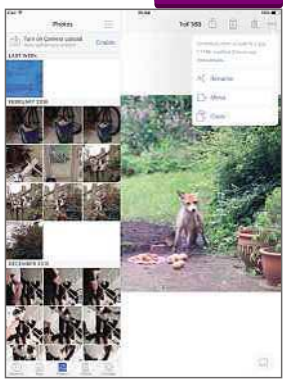
Dropbox

bit.ly/dropdroid401

bit.ly/dropios401

Min requirements: Android 4.1, iOS 8

Size: Varies by device (Android), 94.9MB (iOS)



Dropbox has given the Android and iOS versions of its app an impressive update. It looks fab – photos are displayed as thumbnails (at last!) and you can now make selected files available offline. The iPhone app boasts the most new functions at the time of writing, including the ability to create Microsoft Office documents and spreadsheets by tapping the '+' icon on the Recents screen. Both phone versions of the app now let you scan documents, such as receipts and official letters, using your camera.

Our rating ★★★★★

5 NEW APPS WORTH PAYING FOR

FILES

UniClip

bit.ly/uniclip401

Min requirements: iOS 8

Size: 4.6MB **Price:** £1.49

Access the same clipboard across all your Apple devices, including Mac computer as well as iPhone and iPad. You don't need to buy the UniClip program for Mac – just log into the same iCloud account.

FOOD

Foodster

bit.ly/foodster401

Min requirements: Android 4.1

Size: 7.4MB **Price:** 99p

Keep track of use-by dates for all the food in your fridge, and get automatic notifications when an item is about to go out of date.

CRAFT

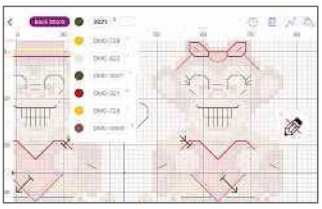
Cross Stitch Saga

bit.ly/stitch401

Min requirements: Android 4.0.3

Size: 9MB **Price:** £6.49

This powerful cross-stitching app has an interactive Assistant tool that supports professional pattern formats XSP and XSD, pre-installed patterns, a colours editor, a materials calculator and a diary.



TRAVEL

Yorkshire Three Peaks

bit.ly/yorks401

Min requirements: Android 4.0.3

Size: 2.6MB **Price:** £1.79

This is an interactive route guide for the Yorkshire Three Peak walk in the Pennines. Tap Location to check you're on the right track; tap and hold any two points to get a distance; and check sunset and sunrise times.

TRAVEL

MultiGo

bit.ly/multigo401

Min requirements: Android 4.4

Size: 5.1MB **Price:** £2.39

This app lets you create a multi-destination journey using an enhanced Google Maps tool. Choose several places you want to go to, either by driving or walking, and MultiGo will work out the best route for visiting them all.

UniClip | Foodster | Cross Stitch Saga | Yorkshire Three Peaks | MultiGo

Best New TV Apps

MUSIC & FILM

BitTorrent Now

bit.ly/bitnow401

Min requirements: Android 5

Size: 12MB

As we explained in our cover feature in Issue 399, BitTorrent has plenty of safe, legal uses and it's now launched a music- and video-streaming app that stays completely on the right side of the law. Rather than letting you download pirated content, BitTorrent Now introduces you to upcoming artists and filmmakers, providing "a rabbit hole of on-demand songs and stories". There are also a few names you may have heard of, such as Thom Yorke of Radiohead. With its slick, dark interface, BitTorrent Now bears a passing resemblance to Spotify, and offers a mix of ad-supported and paid-for content. It's currently available for Android, and is coming soon to iOS and Apple TV.

TV & FILM

Beam: Virgin Trains

bit.ly/beam401

Min requirements: Android 4.0.3, iOS 7, Virgin Trains Wi-Fi

Size: 38MB (Android), 28MB (iOS)

Virgin Trains is making long rail journeys more entertaining by letting passengers watch free films and TV shows on their phone or tablet. Just install the Beam app, connect to Virgin Trains Wi-Fi and you can choose from 200 hours of viewing from the comfort of your seat. Titles include recent blockbusters *The Wolf of Wall Street* and *War Horse*; classics such as *The Godfather* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*; and popular TV shows *House of Cards* and *Grantchester*. There are also movies and programmes for kids including *Frozen* and *Peppa Pig*, and games and magazines. Beam is presently available on every Virgin Trains Pendolino (First and Second Class), and will be coming to West Coast Voyagers and East Coast trains soon. Don't forget to plug in your headphones!

TV

ToView Live TV

bit.ly/tvdroid401

bit.ly/tvios401

Min requirements: Android 4.1, iOS

Size: 27MB

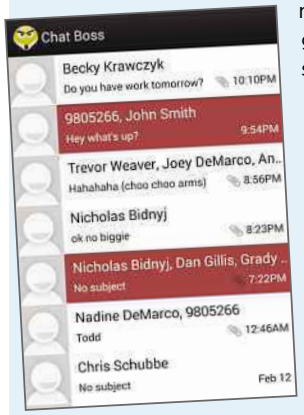
The TVCatchup app used to let you watch lots of live UK TV channels for free – until it got into legal trouble. There's now a suspiciously similar rival called ToView Live TV that works in exactly the same way: offering instant on-the-go access to your favourite BBC, ITV and other Freeview shows. The latest update to the Android version introduces a new Preview mode that lets you browse the channel list and 24-hour programme guide without interrupting your viewing. Sadly, we found the app crashed quite frequently and you need Wi-Fi to tune into most channels.

✗ Don't install...

Chat Boss

bit.ly/boss401

Free chat apps are a dime a dozen these days, so you can definitely afford to live without this one, which charges 59p for a cavalcade of crap. It's designed to mute annoying notifications from group conversations, so you don't keep getting interrupted, but it doesn't work properly and it looks awful. Besides, most phones now let you silence annoying notifications through their own settings, which renders Chat Boss redundant.



...Install this instead ✓

Google Hangouts

bit.ly/hangouts401

Min requirements: Android (varies with device), iOS 7

Size: Varies with device

Hangouts makes staying in touch with your friends easier than ever by letting you send messages, start video and voice calls, and join group chats from your phone, tablet or PC. This fantastic free service comes preinstalled on most Android devices, so setting it up is simply a matter of opening the app and signing in with your existing Google account. Once you've launched Hangouts, you can browse your contacts to see which of your friends already use it, and invite those who don't. Because chats are saved to Google's servers, you can easily resume conversations on another device or by visiting hangouts.google.com in your browser. ■

Our guide to iOS 10

Apple's latest mobile operating system has a few tricks up its sleeve. **David Crookes** explains all you need to know

So, it's time for another iOS update, then?

It sure is. While it's fair to say iOS 10 isn't quite as dramatic as the iOS 7 upgrade in 2013, which heralded a completely redesigned user interface, this new version is being dubbed by Apple as the biggest iOS release so far.

Will it feel different to iOS 9?

It will, provided you get to grips with its new touch-based features. Aside from being able to simply pick up your iPhone to wake it, there will be many more 3D Touch shortcuts. Force-touching will let you access advanced Control Centre settings, rename app folders and respond to notifications from the lock screen. In fact, 3D Touch is being expanded to all third-party app icons to make it the central method of control in iOS 10.

But does it look any different?

Apple has sought to tweak rather than overhaul the visuals of iOS 10 so the flat, minimalist design introduced in 2013 remains largely intact. One notable change is that notifications now float above the background in a bubble. The lock screen has also been freshened up – gone is the 'Slide to Unlock' function and in its place is 'Press Home to Open'. You'll also find other graphical changes within the Messages, Maps and Music apps, the latter being the most dramatic of all.

iOS 10 lets you respond to notifications directly from the lock screen

Why, what's happening to Apple Music?

Since it launched last June, Apple Music has been criticised for its clunky, unintuitive interface and numerous bugs. Sure, music lovers may have shaken their groovy thangs to the built-in radio station Beats 1 and playlists generated by humans rather than algorithms, but a rethink was sorely needed. Apple Music 2.0 has cleaned up the Now Playing Page and lets you enjoy daily curated playlists and sing along with lyrics in the For You feature. Disappointingly, Beats 1 won't gain any extra channels but the revamp should give market-leader Spotify a run for its money.

So is iOS finding its way again?

It seems that way. And while we're on the subject, we should point you in the direction of some changes to Maps. Aside from a cleaner design, Maps is becoming street smart in its ability to guess where you may be heading at any given time of the day. That may sound creepy but it works by keeping an eye on your calendar and your day-to-day movements to suggest destinations. But that's not all. You'll be able to search for key amenities such as fuel, food

iOS 10's improved Maps app predicts where you're going

and toilets along your route, and book a meal or a ride without leaving the app.

Is Apple still tightly controlling iOS apps?

Actually, no. The iOS 10 software-development kit has a range of new APIs that allow third-party developers to hook into Messages, Siri, Phone and Maps. This is making iOS 10 more open than ever before, although developers still need to go through an approval process before their apps see the light of day. This will be hugely beneficial for users. Siri will be able to access content and services created within non-Apple apps and there will be better support for VoIP services. Calls will be displayed on the lock screen and included in the Recents and Favourite tabs within the Phone app. You'll also be able to interact with apps within Messages.

Messages? Aren't texts old hat these days?

Hardly. Lots of services – from Facebook to WhatsApp – are vying for a slice of the messaging pie, and Apple knows it needs to keep Messages relevant. So although it has shied away from making Messages available on Android, it's trying to make it more appealing and fun. There's no single killer feature here – rather an accumulation of tiny ones – but they include different looks for your message bubbles, an animated handwriting option and hidden texts and photos that have to be swiped by the recipient to view. It's as if Apple has created a mammoth check list. Celebratory animations which fill the Messages screen? Check. Pre-written responses? Check. Sending heartbeats, sketches, fireballs, drawings and stickers? Multiple checks. The app can even automatically swap words for emoji and make payments to your favourite apps.

Irritate your friends and contacts by applying fancy effects to your messages

Will it be easier to type messages?

It should be. Apple is going to use 'Siri intelligence' to analyse your messages so that it can provide contextual suggestions. As an example, if someone asks where you are, Messages will instantly call up your location so you can share where you are. It will also scour your conversations for titbits of information that it can pull together. Suppose you're chatting about having a pizza at a set time on a Tuesday, Messages will spot the terms "pizza", "Tuesday", "8pm" and "Crust Avenue" – even if they are strewn across various messages – and not only collate them but make them available as a possible calendar entry.

The updated Messages app analyses the content of your conversations

Isn't this a bit intrusive?

Well, yes, but Apple insists that it will keep your privacy intact at all times, which is just as well because there are other ways it plans to 'manage' your data. The updated Photos app, for example, caregorises images automatically by place, people and time, and there's a new option called Moments that uses advanced recognition techniques to create a video montage of a particular event or day. A developer called Kay Yin found that Photos can recognise seven different facial expressions and detect 4,432 objects and scenes. It's impressive stuff.

Will iOS 10 integrate with our homes, too?

Apparently so. A new Home app will appear on iOS 10 devices, allowing you to control anything from lights and thermostats to door locks and alarms from your iPhone or iPad. You'll be able to create profiles for different rooms that include specific accessories.

When will iOS 10 be available?

Expect to see iOS 10 arrive in the autumn. It will be available for free and work on any iPhone from version 5 upwards, and any device later than (and including) the iPad Mini 2, fourth-generation iPad, iPad Air and iPad Pro, as well as the sixth-generation iPod Touch.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN MAC OS SIERRA

As well as releasing a new version of iOS, Apple has announced the next Mac operating system. Here's what you need to know

What's happened to OS X?

It's been rebranded as macOS, possibly so it fits in with Apple's naming conventions for tvOS and watchOS. Sierra will replace the current Mac operating system El Capitan later this year.

So what's the chatter?

The personal assistant Siri will be available on the Mac for the first time. You can ask it to search for images that you can drag into windows or find files using natural language. For example, you could say "Show me the documents I wrote last Tuesday" and the results will be displayed in the Notification Centre.

What else is coming?

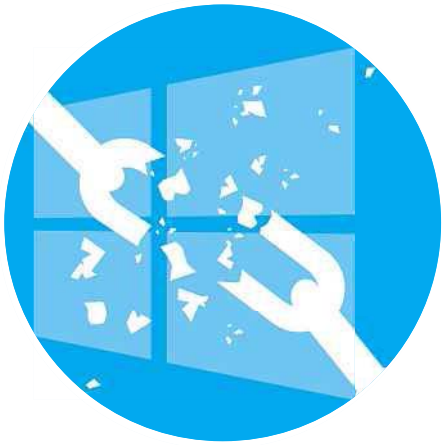
MacOS Sierra is introducting picture-in-picture functionality so you can pull a video from Safari or iTunes and have it play in the corner of the screen while you work. It's also integrating Apple Pay, although you will need to use iPhone's Touch ID or click Apple Watch's side button to complete a purchase. Apple Watch will also come in handy for automatically unlocking your Mac when you're within range.

Are Apple devices becoming more unified?

Yes. The same face-recognition technology that's being integrated into iOS 10 is coming to the Mac, and Apple Music will be given a Desktop revamp, too. You'll also be able to copy images, video and text on an iPhone and paste them to a Mac, while anything saved in iCloud Drive will be made available across devices.

BEAT WINDOWS 10

COVER FEATURE



Whether you love Windows 10 or are tired of hearing about it, don't let it push you around. **Wayne Williams** explains how to take control of the OS or make it leave you alone forever

IF YOU'RE PLANNING TO UPGRADE

If you've waited until now to make the move to Windows 10, follow our advice to ensure the transition is as smooth as possible and that *you* remain in control

Things to watch out for

The upgrade is performed by an app called Get Windows 10 (GWX). This will schedule your upgrade, so make sure it's set to happen at a time that suits you, and that you back up everything you need before you start.

If your PC has been running Windows 7 or 8.1 without problems (you can't upgrade for free from older versions, such as XP), it should be able to run Windows 10, but it's worth pointing out that the hardware requirements have changed for the Anniversary Update. Both the 32-bit and 64-bit versions of Windows 10 now require 2GB of RAM, whereas the previous 32-bit edition needed only 1GB. Storage requirements are still modest, though – 32-bit systems need 16GB of hard-drive space and 64-bit devices require 20GB.

During the update, make sure you select the Custom install option and choose which features to allow. If you simply select the Express Settings option, Windows 10 will automatically send speech, typing, contacts, calendar and location data, as well as advertising ID information, to Microsoft.

Make sure you choose the Custom install option when upgrading to Windows 10

Make sure you don't lose anything

The upgrade should run smoothly and when it's finished, your programs and personal files should all be right where you left them. That's unless, of course, something goes badly wrong during the upgrade. This is unlikely to happen, but to be on the safe side, it's important that you back up your personal data, either to another drive (probably the best bet), or to DVDs or the cloud. You should also back up your browser data, including bookmarks and login details. Both Chrome and Firefox let you sync your data over the web, which is definitely worth doing.

Change the way Windows 10 works

Windows 10 has more in common with Windows 7 than Windows 8, but there's still a lot to learn when switching to the new OS. Windows 10 provides many new ways to customise the OS, such as using the Settings app, but the old methods are still available. So, if you'd rather make your changes through the Control Panel, you can.

If you don't like the Windows 10 Start menu, change it by using Classic Shell

COVER FEATURE

RESTRICTIONS

Windows 10 celebrates its first birthday on 29 July, and Microsoft is getting ready to mark the occasion by releasing an Anniversary Update, a few days later, on 2 August. This update will offer lots of new features and improvements to the operating system. More importantly, 29 July is also the date when the OS will cease to be free for those who haven't upgraded – either because they've been biding their time till the deadline or because they have no intention of upgrading.

Thanks to Microsoft's annoyingly pushy approach over the past year, however, it has been very hard to avoid Windows 10, no matter what your intentions, and that's unlikely to change after 29 July. In this feature, we show you how to fight back against the more aggressive aspects of Windows 10, regain control of your PC and continue to use it the way you want.

Over the following six pages, we'll provide essential advice for those who intend to upgrade before the deadline, offer advanced tips for anyone who already uses Windows 10 and explain how you can block the upgrade for good if you're more than happy with your existing version of Windows.

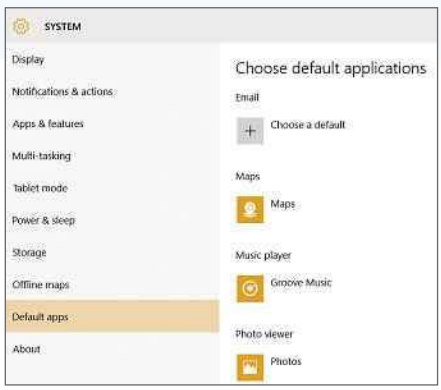
If you prefer the Windows 7 Start menu to Windows 10's tiled version, you can replace it by installing Classic Shell (www.classicshell.net). If Cortana is no use to you, remove it by right-clicking the search box and selecting Cortana, Hidden. Alternatively, you can disable the feature entirely by going to Start, Settings and searching for `Cortana`. Open 'Cortana & Search settings' and drag the slider to Off.

Microsoft wants you to use Windows 10 with a Microsoft account, but you can log in and use a local account instead. Go to Start, Settings, Accounts and click 'Sign in with a local account instead'.

Change the default apps

As you'd expect, Windows 10 uses Microsoft apps as its default options, but when you install a new program, such as Google Chrome, you can choose to set it as a new default. You can also change the defaults yourself. Go to Start, type `default app settings` and hit Enter. If you'd rather use the Control Panel to do this, open the Start menu, type `Default programs`, press Enter and click 'Set your default programs' in the window that opens.

Windows 10 occasionally resets your defaults in favour of its own apps (usually after a big update), so you may need to repeat the process occasionally.



You don't have to use Microsoft's apps if you prefer other programs

Turn off unwanted features

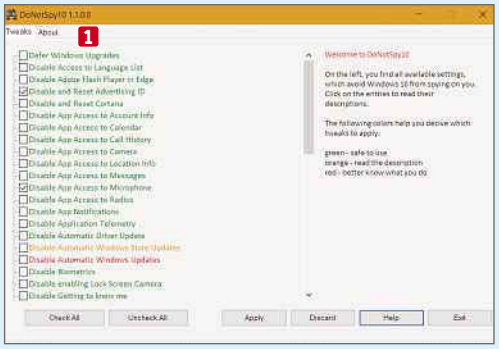
Once you've installed Windows 10, it's a good idea to remove anything you don't need, which will free up storage space and resources. Click Start and type `Programs and features`. Launch this and select 'Turn Windows features on or off'. It's up to you to decide exactly which features you remove (make sure you know what something does before uninstalling it) but we'd recommend removing the following:

- **Internet Explorer 11** – You don't need it. Windows 10 comes with Edge, and you're probably using Chrome or Firefox anyway.
- **Legacy Components: DirectPlay** – Unless you're playing games that are over 10 years old, you don't need this.
- **Media Features: Windows Media Player** – Swap this for VLC Media Player (www.videolan.org), or another media player.
- **Microsoft Print to PDF** – Unless you need to create PDF files from documents, remove this.
- **Print and Document Services** – Remove entries you don't need, such as 'Windows Fax and Scan'.
- **Remote Differential Compression API Support** – Few programs use this, so remove it.
- **Windows PowerShell 2.0** – The latest version of PowerShell (already installed in Windows 10) is 5.0, so you don't need this older one.
- **Windows Process Activation Service** – A feature aimed at developers.
- **Work Folders Client** – Only of use to businesses and enterprises.

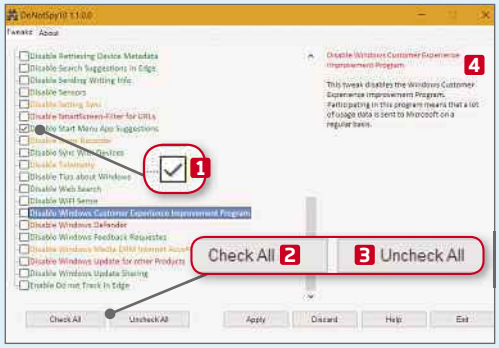
Switch off features you don't need for better performance

MINI WORKSHOP

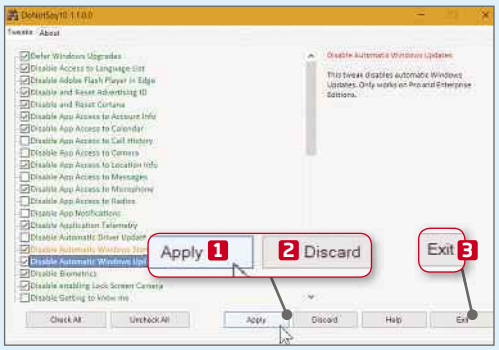
Manage Windows' privacy settings with DoNotSpy 10



1 Install DoNotSpy, taking care to decline the bundled junk. You're given the option to create an install point, which you should do to protect your system and data. When you've done that, the program presents a list of colour-coded, privacy-related tweaks that you can make. 1



2 Scroll down to view the full list. You can select a tweak individually by ticking its box, 1 or you can tick 2 or untick 3 all the boxes. Clicking an entry provides further information on what it does. 4 Most of the tweaks are self-explanatory, and the description simply expands on this.

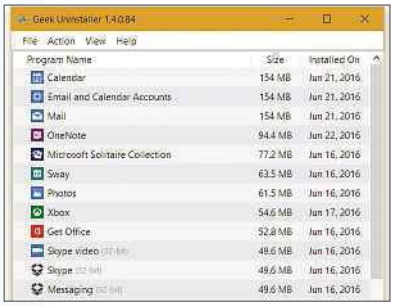


3 When you've finished choosing the options you want to enable or disable, click the Apply button. 1 If you change your mind about any of the items you've selected, click the Discard button 2 to revert to the default selection. Once you have made all the changes you want to make, click Exit 3 to quit the program.

- **XPS Services and XPS Viewer** – An alternative to PDF, which you're never likely to use.

Remove Windows 10 apps

Windows 10 comes with a selection of default apps that you probably don't need and will never use. You can uninstall these using a tool such as Geek Uninstaller (www.geekuninstaller.com). Just run the program and click View, Windows Store Apps. Right-click an unwanted app, such as 3D Builder, Get Office, Get Skype or Money, and select Uninstall. Sorting the list of apps by size will let you remove the largest first.

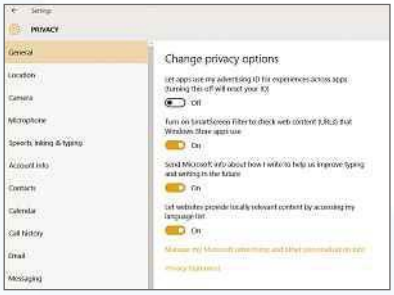


Uninstall unwanted Windows 10 apps completely so they never come back

Stop Microsoft sharing your data

Windows 10 famously 'spies' on users – something we covered in depth in Issue 380 (bit.ly/webuser380). Microsoft says it uses this data to tailor the operating system to give you a more personalised experience, but it also shares some of this information with installed third-party apps. You can stop this happening by going to Settings, Privacy, 'Account info' and flicking the 'Account info' switch to Off. You can also manage the sharing features under Settings, Privacy, General.

There are many programs that reduce Microsoft's spying. Our favourites are Windows 10 Privacy Fixer (bit.ly/privfix401) and DoNotSpy 10 (bit.ly/donotspy401).



Maintain your privacy by locking down Windows 10's settings

See our Mini Workshop (left) for instructions on using DoNotSpy.

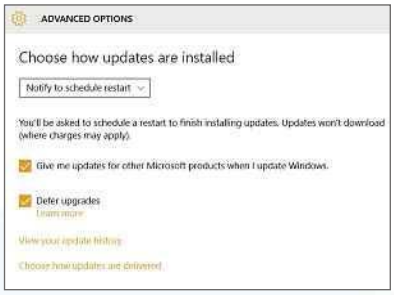
Block annoying ads and 'suggestions'

By making Windows 10 "free", Microsoft has had to find other ways to make money from its operating system – for example, by inserting 'suggestions' (we'd call them adverts) for other Windows Store apps in the Start menu. If you're not happy with this – and the Anniversary Update is set to double the number of 'promoted app' slots in the menu from five to 10 at the expense of your installed apps – you can switch off this feature. Go to Settings, Personalization, Start and use the toggle switch to turn off the option 'Occasionally show suggestions in Start'.

Choose when to install updates

Updates in Windows 10 are mandatory, which means you can't skip any you don't like the look of. You can decide when to install them, however, which should help you avoid any instances of bad timing, such as the case of the professional gamer who was interrupted by an unwanted update in the middle of a match (bit.ly/progame401). The Pro version of Windows 10 lets you defer updates. Click Start, Settings, 'Update and security' and click the 'Advanced options' link. Make sure 'Notify to schedule restart' is selected (as opposed to Automatic) and Tick 'Defer upgrades'.

In the Anniversary Update, you'll be able to tell Windows 10 when you definitely don't want updates to be installed. The new feature, called Active Hours, lets you specify a 12-hour period when your computer is in use, and Windows 10 will know not to install anything during that time. You can also pick the hour and day when it's safe for Windows to restart and finish installing updates.



The Windows 10 Anniversary Update gives you more control over updates

COVER FEATURE

MICROSOFT, STOP TRYING TO FORCE US TO UPGRADE!

Wayne Williams says:

"Windows 10 is a good operating system but in trying to force the upgrade, Microsoft has put off many would-be users. The company has employed all manner of sneaky tricks to con its paying customers into agreeing to the switch. For example, the red 'X' in the corner of the upgrade box didn't mean, "Go away and stop bothering me", as you would expect, but, "Yes, schedule an installation". In some cases, the 'X' in the pop-up message wasn't even there, which made cancelling even harder.

These tricks have led many to view the Get Windows 10 app as malware, and numerous tools, such as Never10 and GWX Stopper, have sprung up to defend PCs from this annoying threat.

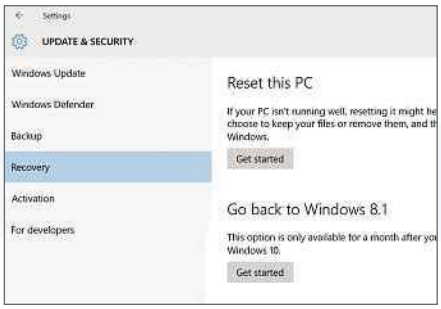
Naturally, users of earlier versions of Windows are angry about Microsoft's behaviour – and rightly so. There's even a Change.org petition

(bit.ly/win10petition401) that seeks to have the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) investigate Microsoft for 'malicious' Windows 10 upgrade practices.

At the time of writing, this has more than 5,800 signatures. Whether it leads to any action remains to be seen, but it's clear that many people are unhappy about Microsoft's approach to encouraging Windows 10 upgrades."

IF YOU'VE ALREADY UPGRADED

If you're already using Windows 10, there are lots of tricks you can use to beat Microsoft's restrictions and make it work the way you want. Here are our favourites



If you don't like Windows 10, you can go back – but you'll need to act quickly

Changed your mind?

If you've given Windows 10 a try and have decided you want to revert to Windows 7 or 8.1, it's easily done. Go to Start, Settings and click 'Update & security'. Click Recovery and you'll see a 'Go back to Windows 7' or 'Go back to Windows 8.1' entry (depending on which OS you were running before you installed Windows 10). Click 'Get started' and follow the steps to restore your previous OS.

The catch is that you have only 30 days after upgrading to roll back to a previous version of Windows. If you've been using Windows 10 for longer than that, your only option is to back up all your files and reinstall the older version of Windows, which will wipe everything from your PC.

Love Windows 10 and don't want to go back?

If you decide that Windows 10 is your operating system of choice from now on, you can wipe previous Windows installations from your PC and free up gigabytes of hard drive space. To do this, click Start and type `Disk Cleanup`. Launch the application and select your system drive (probably C:), then click OK. The tool will calculate the

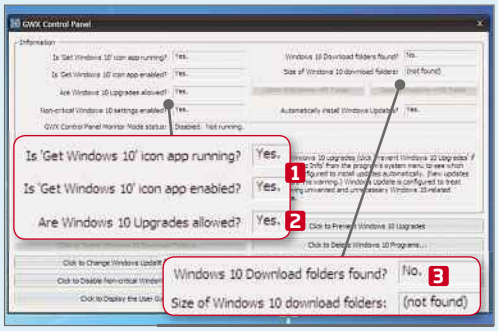
Delete old Windows 10 installation files to free up space on your hard drive

Try new features in the Anniversary Update

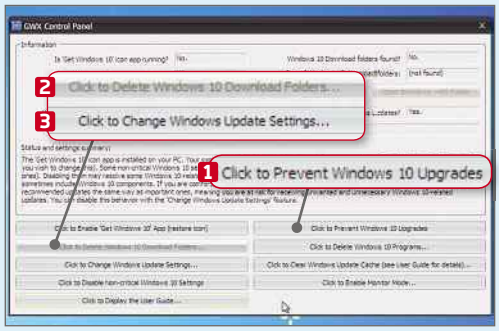
Microsoft plans to continue its development of Windows 10, rather than progressing to Windows 11 in a few years time. The forthcoming Anniversary Update introduces lots of improvements and fixes, as well as a host of new features. These include:

- **Revamped Start menu** – The All Apps list is now permanently on display, and a small sidebar shows links to Power, File Explorer and Settings.
- **Edge enhancements** – These include support for extensions (such as Adblock Plus and LastPass), a new history menu and the ability to clear browsing data automatically when you exit the browser.
- **Windows Ink** – Draw on your computer desktop and programs using a stylus or your finger.
- **Cortana improvements** – You'll be able to use the digital assistant before you log in, and searching for music and Office 365 documents will be easier. You'll also be able to make requests using natural language, such as "Email Dave the document I finished yesterday."
- **Updated apps** – Most of Microsoft's pre-installed apps have received improvements.
- **Action Centre additions** – You can prioritise alerts, so more important messages will appear at the top.
- **GNU Bash shell** – An Ubuntu command line inside Windows 10 is really only something developers will care about, but it's a big addition.
- **Limited Periodic Scanning mode** – This sets Windows Defender to scan your PC at intervals, even if you have another antivirus program installed, providing a useful second line of defence.

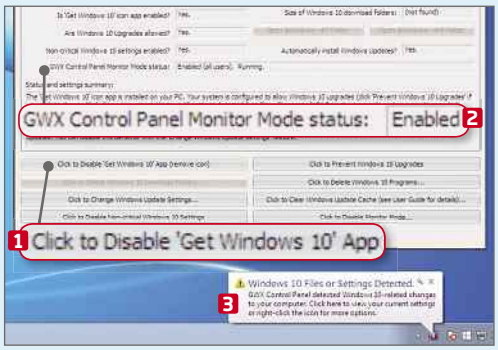
MINI WORKSHOP
Stop Windows 10 nagging you to upgrade



1 GWX Control Panel (bit.ly/gwxcontrol401) is available as an installer and a portable version. Either way, run the software and it will tell you whether the Get Windows 10 icon app is running and enabled, 1 and whether Windows 10 upgrades are allowed. 2 It will also show you any Windows 10 download folders it finds, and their size. 3



2 To block the Windows 10 upgrade, click the button to prevent it. 1 Then click the Delete Windows 10 Download Folders button. 2 This will remove all the downloaded installation files and free up lots of potentially wasted space. You can also choose how you want Windows to handle all updates in future. 3



3 In the past, Microsoft has made changes to the GWX app to sneak it past blocking programs such as GWX Control Panel. To stop the Get Windows 10 app reappearing, click the button to disable it. 1 In Monitor Mode, 2 the program keeps an eye on your PC and provides an alert 3 if it detects any Windows 10-related activity.

amount of space you can save and present you with a list of items that can safely be cleaned. Click the 'Clean up system files' button and select your system drive again. The tool will repeat the process, but this time it will also show Previous Windows installation(s). Tick the box for this option, as well as the box for 'Temporary Windows installation files', then click OK to remove those files and reclaim your missing hard-drive space.

Make Cortana respond instantly to your commands

To summon Cortana, you need to click a button, but if your PC or laptop has a microphone attached, you can dispense with this step and open the personal assistant simply by saying "Hey, Cortana". Before you can do this, however, you need to turn on this option. Open Cortana, click the three-line 'hamburger' button and select Settings. Enable the entry labelled 'Let Cortana respond to "Hey Cortana"'.

You can activate Cortana using your voice instead of a mouse click

Disable live tiles

Certain tiles in the Start menu – such as photos, news, weather and mail – update themselves continually. If you never look at these tiles, it makes sense to disable the feature. You can turn off tiles individually by right-clicking them and selecting More, 'Turn off live tile'. If you want to disable all your live tiles in one go, you can either use the Group Policy Editor (if you have any version of Windows 10 other than Home) or tweak the Registry.

To use the Group Policy Editor, click Start, type `gpedit.msc` and hit Enter. Navigate to:

Local Computer Policy/User Configuration/Administrative Templates/Start Menu/Taskbar/Notifications

Double-click the 'Turn off tile notifications' entry on the right and select 'enabled' in the window that opens. Click OK and close the editor.

If you'd rather tweak the Registry, open Start, type `regedit` and press Enter. Navigate to

HKEY_CURRENT_USER\SOFTWARE\Policies\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\PushNotifications

Right-click PushNotifications and select New, Dword (32-bit) Value. Give it the name: 'NoTileApplicationNotification', then double-click the entry and set its value to 1.

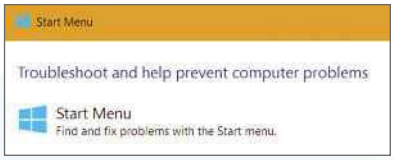
Say no to problem updates

Windows 10 makes all updates mandatory, but you can reject certain updates if they're likely to cause problems with your PC. Run the 'Show or hide updates' troubleshooter (bit.ly/hideupdates401) and click Next. You can now hide updates (which means Windows won't install them) or show hidden updates (enabling Windows to install them).

Stop Microsoft forcing updates on you that affect your PC's performance

Fix problems with your Start menu

If you are having problems with your Start menu – perhaps because applications haven't installed correctly or the tile database has been corrupted and tiles are failing to display as intended – try running Microsoft's new Start menu troubleshooter (bit.ly/startfix401). By default, the troubleshooter is set to fix any problems it finds automatically, but you can ask it not to if you simply want to find out what's causing the problems. Do this by following the Advanced link.



Solve any Start menu problems by running Microsoft's troubleshooter

Get faster access to common settings

If you find you're forever accessing the same settings – turning Bluetooth on and off, for example, or making changes to your display settings – you can place them within easier reach. Simply right-click the setting and select 'Pin to Start'. Confirm the action in the window that appears and when you next click the Start button, you'll see the selected setting in the menu.

Get speedier access to specific settings by pinning them to the Start menu

Reset everything and start afresh

If Windows starts misbehaving or becomes sluggish and unresponsive, a refresh may be the perfect solution. This process reinstalls the operating system and either keeps or removes your personal files, depending on the option you choose. You will need to reinstall all your software after the reset, because this will be wiped, along with your browser profile data, such as bookmarks and passwords. You can access Windows 10's Reset option in Update & Security, Recovery, or by holding down Shift when restarting your PC, which opens the Troubleshooting options.

If Windows 10 has become slow and unreliable, refresh it and start again

Microsoft is also releasing a new tool called Refresh Windows that works with the Anniversary Update. This will download and install the latest version of Windows 10 when you run a refresh.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO UPGRADE

If you're happy with Windows 7 or 8.1, you can stop Microsoft pestering you to upgrade – either temporarily or for good. Here's how to regain control

Don't upgrade if you don't want to

Despite Microsoft's persistence in coercing users to upgrade, you're under no obligation to switch to Windows 10 if you're happy with your current operating system. As long as you pay careful attention to the wording in the Get Windows 10 app, you can reject the upgrade. To be sure, it's worth using a program such as GWX Stopper (greatis.com) or GWX Control Panel (bit.ly/gwxcontrol401) which disables the Get Windows 10 app along with any associated pop-ups and alerts.

Stop Microsoft's nagging by installing Never10

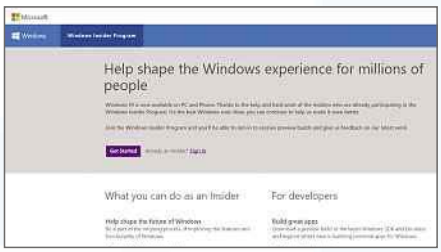
Alternatively, you can try Never10 (bit.ly/never401) which works in a similar way. Run the program to find out whether the Windows 10 OS upgrade is enabled on your PC. If it is, hit 'Disable Win10 Upgrade' to block the feature. You can reverse the setting later if you change your mind.

See our Mini Workshop on the opposite page to find out how to use GWX Control Panel.

Upgrade for free after 29 July

Although Microsoft says that its free Windows 10 upgrade offer will close at the end of July, there's a chance it may introduce other ways to get the OS for nothing, but we won't know until the deadline has passed. There will still be at least two ways to get your hands on Windows 10 for free, though.

If you have accessibility needs ("customers who use assistive technologies", as Microsoft puts it), you will be eligible for a free upgrade. We're not sure how you apply for this yet but, again, the details will be revealed after the deadline. The other way is to join the Insider Preview programme (insider.windows.com), which will let you use Windows 10 for free indefinitely.



Join the Windows 10 Insider Preview programme to continue using the OS free

The catch is that you can't personalise the operating system unless you pay for a valid licence. ■

NEXT ISSUE on sale Wednesday 27 July 2016

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Best free online office suites

You don't have to install or pay for a massive software suite to carry out office work on your PC. **Andy Shaw** tests the six best suites you can use for free, without leaving your browser

Google Docs | docs.google.com | ★★★★★

FEATURES ★★★★☆ PERFORMANCE ★★★★★ EASE OF USE ★★★★☆

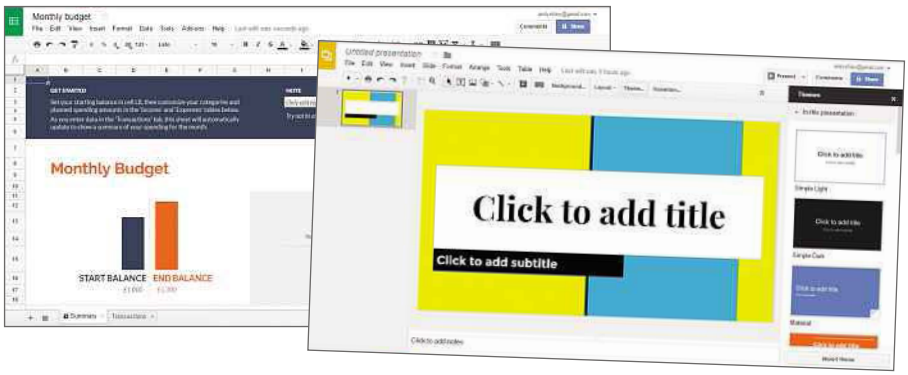
WebUser GOLD AWARD

What we liked:

Docs is Google's take on the online office suite. Its core components are a word processor, a spreadsheet and a presentation tool, but it also has the brilliant Forms, which gathers responses to questions in a spreadsheet, and a simple drawing tool. The entire suite is integrated with Google Drive, the company's online storage service, in which you can keep an unlimited number of Docs files.

There are lots of things that make Docs our favourite online office suite. We love that you can use it even when you're offline – provided you use the Chrome browser and are willing to install the Docs app (bit.ly/offline401). It's true that our other award-winning suites also provide offline versions, but they aren't as neat and compact as Google's.

The individual components have a familiar layout, with a single toolbar that provides quick access to common tools, and a row of menu options above containing more obscure features. This pared-back interface makes the software easy to get to grips with, and it's pleasingly consistent across all the applications. However, it means that some of the more sophisticated tools are hidden out of sight. Bringing up a word count in the word processor takes a number of clicks or a three-fingered keyboard shortcut (Ctrl+Shift+C), for example, whereas Microsoft's Office Online keeps this visible at all times.



If your needs from an office suite are particularly demanding, you may still need to resort to a full software suite to work on huge files or make the most of advanced tools and options. But for most users, Google Docs provides more than enough to carry out even sophisticated tasks.

How it can be improved:

The standard office-software menu and toolbar design will be familiar to anyone who has used office software before, but it's also dull. Office suites don't need to have pizzazz – and we'd be moaning if it was a case of form over function – but Docs is very ordinary. It also stores files in its own formats, so you have to convert them before you can share them – unless the recipients also use Google Docs.

OUR VERDICT

Google Docs isn't sophisticated enough to replace office software completely but the casual user will find its apps are up to most tasks. While its office tools aren't the most modern looking, Docs is great for working offline and its tight integration with Google Drive makes it incredibly convenient.

Microsoft Office Online | www.office.com | ★★★★☆

FEATURES ★★★★☆ PERFORMANCE ★★★★☆ EASE OF USE ★★★★☆

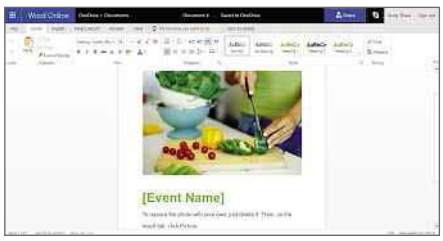
WebUser SILVER AWARD

What we liked:

Microsoft's online office tools have two significant advantages. The first is that the files they create are instantly compatible with its offline office software, so you don't have to perform file conversions or any other tricks if you want to share a file with the vast majority of PC users. The second is that the ubiquity of Microsoft's software makes its ribbon-toolbar interface immediately familiar to anyone who has used Microsoft Office on a computer in the past half-decade.

The suite includes Microsoft's trio of essential office tools: Word (word processor), Excel (spreadsheet) and PowerPoint (presentations). You also get access to OneNote, which is a handy place to keep and organise your notes and lists.

The tools integrate with OneDrive, which in turn integrates seamlessly with Windows 10, so your documents are always within easy reach if you buy into the whole system. New accounts are restricted to just 5GB of free storage,



though, which is less generous than Google's provision.

How it can be improved:

Microsoft's free tools have been stripped back to provide some incentive to upgrade to its paid-for Office 365 suite. Also, clicking a document sometimes opened a preview instead – which meant we had to click another button to work on the document.

OUR VERDICT

Microsoft's online tools offer wide compatibility and integration with OneDrive and Windows 10, but they aren't the full versions you get with the paid-for Office 365 suite.

Zoho Docs | www.zoho.com | ★★★★☆

FEATURES ★★★★☆ PERFORMANCE ★★★★☆ EASE OF USE ★★★☆☆

WebUser BRONZE AWARD

What we liked:

Like the other award winners, Zoho provides a word processor, spreadsheet and presentation tool, but while Google and Microsoft have made their suites look consistent, each tool in Zoho is completely different. The word processor, for example, has a modern, stripped-back interface, with buttons around the edge of the screen that open trays of extra tools. It also senses which tools you need in a given context – if you highlight some text, for example, a tray pops up, offering tools for styling and commenting. It would be great if the other components offered this, too, but the presentation and spreadsheet software use ribbon-style interfaces, with tabs to change the toolbars. Even these look different to each other rather than part of a suite.

The suite is linked to an online storage service so you can save your documents in the cloud. Like its rivals, Zoho provides software that helps you sync these files on your PC, if you wish.

How it could be improved:

Although the main office apps don't feel too stripped back, there are plenty of reminders that the free service is part of a larger suite that includes email services and task management tools. It also offers just 5GB of storage, which is a lot less than Google provides.

OUR VERDICT

While Zoho's word processor is slick and sophisticated, it doesn't gel well with the other elements, which use a different interface. This makes the suite feel more like a collection of programs than a single, coherent product.

BEST OF THE REST

Open365

open365.io

Open365 provides a way to use LibreOffice's Desktop software without having to install it. Unfortunately, it's still in beta and, as such, the interface feels unfinished. When using the word processor, for example, we couldn't hold down Shift and use the cursor keys to move around the copy to select it. It isn't ready for the limelight just yet, but we reckon it's one to keep an eye on in the future.

Apple iCloud

www.icloud.com

You don't need an Apple device to access its online office suite, which is built into its iCloud web service. The online tools are underpowered, however, and they use proprietary formats by default. The suite comes into its own if you have a Mac or iPad, with files syncing effortlessly between devices, but Google and Microsoft offer better tools.

ThinkFree Online

online.thinkfree.com

While other services pride themselves on working in your browser window, ThinkFree pops out a separate Window, then grinds to a halt if you don't have Java installed and is dangerously keen to run any program that asks for it. While it insists on sticking with this technology, ThinkFree Office is probably best avoided.

WHO'S LOGGING INTO YOUR ACCOUNTS?

It's not only hackers who try to access your accounts – people you know may be snooping, too. **Robert Irvine** explains how to detect and deal with intruders

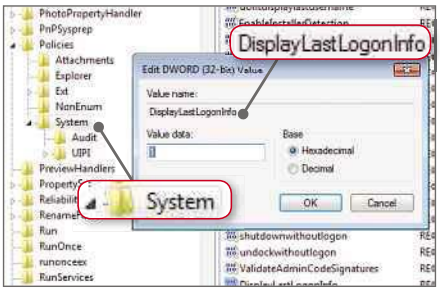
Discover who's been using your PC

Most of us don't mind someone using our PC if they ask nicely, but doing so without permission is another matter – what if they download malware, fiddle with your settings or nose through your private folders? If you suspect someone has logged into your PC behind your back, press the Windows key+R, type `eventvwr` and press Enter to launch Event Viewer.

Open the Windows Logs list on the left and click the Security log to see the times and dates of all logons and logoffs on your PC, along with the reboots and shutdowns, so you can spot any unauthorised activity. You should also check the Application tab to see when specific programs were run. Don't be alarmed by any errors or warnings you see in Event Viewer logs – these are common in Windows and don't mean there's anything wrong with your PC. Indeed, phone scammers are known to use scary-looking Event Viewer errors to fool their victims.

To ensure you don't miss any future intrusions, try the following Registry tweak. Press the Windows key+R, type `regedit` to open the Registry Editor and navigate to:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Policies\System

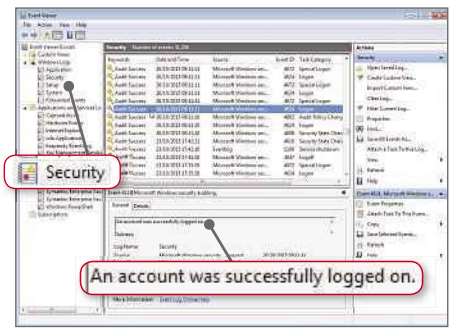


Create a new Registry value to view details of recent login attempts

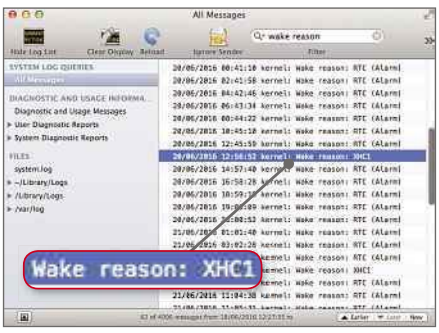
Right-click it, choose New, DWORD Value and name the value DisplayLastLogonInfo. Double-click it and change its value data to '1'. Now, when you log into Windows, you'll see details of the last time you signed into your account and any failed attempts to gain access to your PC.

Is someone using your Mac behind your back?

If you use Mac OS X (soon to be called macOS – see page 37), you can spot unauthorised users through the Console feature in Applications, Utilities. Open this and you'll see a stream of incomprehensible data, but you can drill down to the important info by typing `wake reason` into the search box. This will show all the times your Mac was 'woken up', whether by you or by someone else.



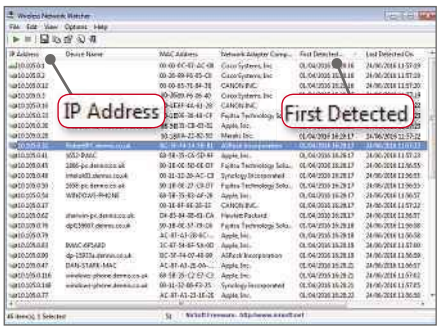
Check Event Viewer to see when users logged into and out of your PC



The Console in OS X reveals the times and dates your Mac was woken up

Unmask unwanted guests on your Wi-Fi

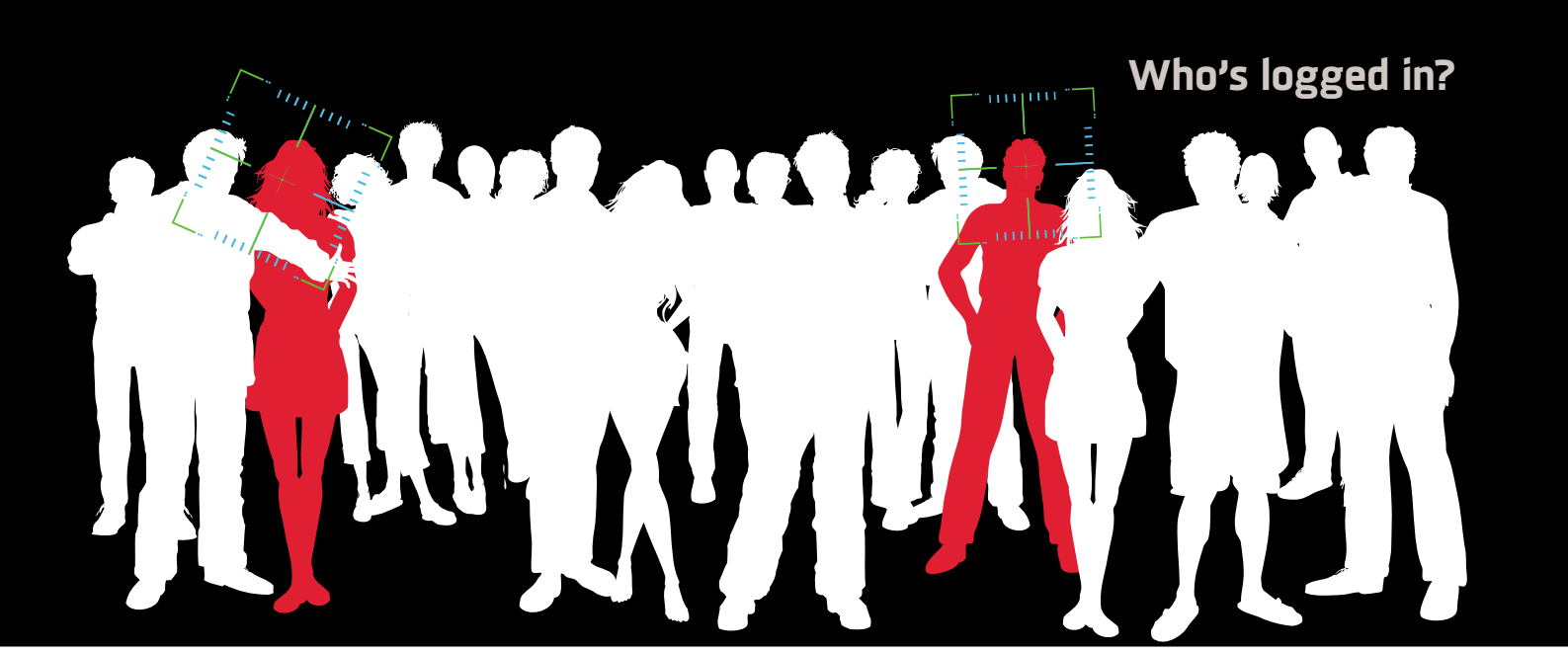
Even if your Wi-Fi network is properly encrypted and protected with an unguessable password, there's still a chance someone could be 'piggybacking' on your signal. Suppose an unscrupulous neighbour jotted down your login details while you were in the kitchen making tea, and is now enjoying high-speed wireless internet at your expense. To expose these freeloaders, install the brilliant free tool Wireless Network Watcher from Nirsoft (www.nirsoft.net – press Ctrl+F to find it on the page). This program displays a list of all devices connected to your network – including any from outside sources – and tells you their IP address, MAC address and network adapter manufacturer. Usefully, you can also see the times and dates they first and last accessed your Wi-Fi, and unmask persistent piggybackers – no more tea for them!



Wireless Network Watcher shows all the devices logged into your network

Log people out of your Google account

If you're worried that someone might be reading your email – be it your spouse, your boss or the government – Gmail can reassure you and let you log out remotely. In your browser, scroll to the bottom of the Gmail page and click the tiny Details link below 'Last account activity' in the bottom-right corner.



Stop people accessing your Google account by signing out on all devices

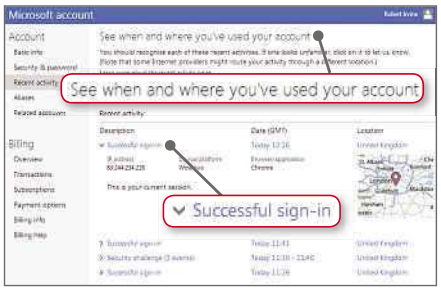
This tells you if your account is open in another location and displays a list of recent activity, including the access type (such as browser or mobile) and IP address. Click the 'Sign out of all other sessions' button to log out from all other locations apart from your current one. Because your Gmail address is now used across all Google services, clicking this button will also sign you out of Search, Drive and more.

On YouTube, click the cog icon in the top-right corner, select 'YouTube settings' and click the Advanced link below your name and email address. Click 'Sign out of all YouTube sessions' to stop anyone using your account.

Check activity on other webmail services

Although Outlook.com doesn't let you log out remotely, you can still check your account for unauthorised activity. Click your name in the top-right corner, choose 'Account settings' and then 'Recent activity'. Verify your details if prompted and Outlook.com will show you how, when and where your account was last accessed. If you see something suspicious, click 'This wasn't me' and follow the instructions to change your password.

To do the same in Yahoo Mail, click the cog icon in the top-right corner, choose 'Account info' and click 'View your recent sign-in activity'. Again, you should change your password if something seems amiss.



Outlook.com shows you when and where your account was logged into

Who's accessing your Facebook account?

Most Facebook users never bother to sign out, which means that anyone passing their PC or picking up their phone can access their accounts.

To make sure no-one invades your Facebook privacy and posts nonsense on your behalf, click the down arrow in the top-right corner of the Facebook website, choose Settings and select Security. Click the Where You're Logged In option to see a list of devices and locations, and the times and dates they were last accessed. Click 'End activity' next to an entry to sign out of that session, or choose End All Activity to sign out of all sessions, everywhere.

Facebook also offers a useful feature called 'Login notifications', which notifies you by email, text message or push notification if your account is accessed from an unfamiliar device. You can activate this on the Security page and check which devices Facebook regards as familiar by clicking 'Trusted browsers'. ■

Protect your privacy by making sure you are logged out of Facebook

CATCH PEOPLE TRYING TO USE YOUR PHONE

Apple and Google both offer free services for locating, locking and wiping a lost or stolen phone, called Find My Phone (bit.ly/findmyphone401) and Find Your Phone, respectively. As we explained in Issue 399, the latter has just been added to Google's My Account hub (myaccount.google.com) to make it easier to track down and sign out of a missing handset. Useful though these are, they don't tell you who snatched your phone, which is where Lockwatch (bit.ly/lockwatch401) comes in. This free Android app captures a photo when someone tries to unlock your phone using the wrong PIN, password or pattern. It then emails you the picture with a map of your device's location. Lockwatch works silently and invisibly with your phone's front camera, and starts automatically when needed, so you don't need to keep it running all the time.

Alternatively, Prey Anti Theft for iOS and Android (preyproject.com) lets you remotely control your phone's camera(s) to take photos of the snooper, pinpoint their location and delete all stored passwords from your device.

Lockwatch emails you a photo when some tries to unlock your phone

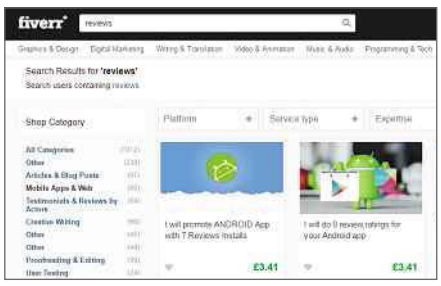
SPOT AND AVOID ONLINE FAKES

From paid-for reviews to dodgy downloads and phishing scams, not all is what it seems on the web. **Robert Irvine** reveals how to expose internet frauds

Identify fake customer reviews

Not all the reviews you read on websites such as Amazon, TripAdvisor and Google Play can be taken at face value. It's becoming increasingly common for companies and developers to buy fake reviews and ratings on these sites, in the same way that you can get thousands of Twitter followers overnight by paying for them. The fraudulent reviewers are usually real people (Amazon won't let you post a review unless you've bought at least one item from the store) who have signed up with services such as LaunchZon (launchzon.com) that bulk-sell bogus opinions. Alternatively, they advertise their writing skills through task marketplaces such as Fiverr (www.fiverr.com), which last year was at the centre of Amazon's clampdown on fake reviews that involved the store suing 1,114 alleged perpetrators. Current listings on Fiverr include 'I will post a positive review anywhere' and 'I will write perfect reviews for your Android apps' – clearly the community hasn't learned its lesson.

You can identify many of these paid-for reviews by using common sense – click the reviewer's name to see all the opinions they've posted; if the text is very similar, they're almost



People on task marketplaces such as Fiverr get paid to write fake reviews

Fakespot analyses product reviews for telltale signs that they can't be trusted

definitely a shill. Additionally, fake reviews are often vague, brief or over-enthusiastic, for example: "Best book/tablet/waffle maker I've ever bought, worth every penny!".

For a more scientific analysis, paste the URL of a product's Amazon page into Fakespot (fakespot.com) and click 'Analyse It!'. Fakespot uses its special algorithms to scan the reviews of the item for signs of fraudulence, looking at the language used, the reviewer's profile, correlation with other reviewers' data, the sentiments expressed and "prevailing patterns used by proven fake reviewers". Once finished, it gives an overall grade and summary to indicate whether reviews of the item are likely to be genuine or false. We were pleased (but not surprised!) that Fakespot gave our 2015 Back Issues Disc an 'A' grade and concluded that "you can trust reviews of this product"; whereas a pair of Techrise earphones received an 'F' and a warning for suspicious all-five-star reviews. See Fakespot's Worst Fake Reviews section for other examples.

Fakespot isn't always right, but the more reviews it analyses, the more accurate it becomes – it's already checked more than 390,000. There are also Fakespot extensions for Chrome (bit.ly/fakechrome401) and Firefox (bit.ly/fakefire401), so you can scan review pages on the fly.

Reject fake friends on social media

Connecting with strangers on Facebook and Twitter may gain you more friends and followers, but it also leaves you vulnerable to scammers and spammers. Be aware, if you're tempted to accept a friend request from a stranger or allow someone to follow you, that around 83 million Facebook accounts are thought to be fake and many of these are used for nefarious purposes.

First, check the person's Facebook profile (if you can) to verify they are who they say they are. Who are their friends? Where do they live? Have they shared any content aside from their profile photo? Best of all, try searching for their profile photo using an image-search engine to see if the picture has been stolen from elsewhere. To do this, save the photo to your Desktop, then go to TinEye (www.tineye.com) or Google Images (images.google.co.uk) and upload the picture to search for matches across the web. You can report

Look up an unknown profile photo to check a person is who they say they are

a fake account to Facebook by clicking the three-dot icon on its cover photo and choosing Report.

Fake accounts on Twitter can follow you without asking permission and may tweet links to malicious sites or pester you and your real followers with spam or porn. Many such accounts have eggs for profile pictures because they haven't changed Twitter's default settings, but others use photos of real people and not all egg accounts are fakes.

There are several tools that scan your list of followers to determine which profiles aren't genuine, but these often charge you to reveal the findings and let you block the offenders. Fortunately, a helpful chap called Clayton Lambert offers a couple of free scripts for weeding out fake Twitter followers, called Block & Remove Fake Twitter Egg Followers (bit.ly/blockegg401) and Fake Twitter Follower Removal Script (bit.ly/faketwitter401). Both need to be run using the Console function in Chrome – you'll find full instructions on their respective pages.

You can easily block and report fake accounts by clicking the cog icon in the top-right corner of their profile and choosing the appropriate option.

Twitter is full of fake 'egg accounts' but these are easy to block and report

Avoid dodgy download buttons

Many free software sites are plagued by adverts disguised as Download buttons, which trick you into downloading a program you didn't want that may prompt you to pay for it or install junk on your system. In some cases, these fake download links lead to malicious sites and could infect your computer.

The easiest way to avoid getting fooled by these fake buttons is to use an ad blocker such as Adblock Plus (adblockplus.org) or uBlock Origin (bit.ly/ublock401) to remove them from web pages. Alternatively, if you disagree with ad blocking, install the VirusTotal extension for Chrome (bit.ly/vtchrome401) or Firefox (bit.ly/vtfirefox401). When you suspect a download link may be fraudulent, either

Use VirusTotal's extension to avoid download links that aren't what they seem

right-click it and choose 'Scan with VirusTotal' or click the add-on's toolbar button and select 'Scan current site'. This will run the URL of the download or the page you're viewing through VirusTotal's 67 anti-malware engines and tell you if it contains anything dodgy.

Google has now started blocking sites that contain deceptive download buttons, but we've found that many are still slipping through the net.

Don't get fooled by phishing scams

Phishing scams have been around for so long that you might think you can see through their tricks, by looking for strange email addresses, spelling and grammar errors and suspicious requests ("please send your account details to receive your rebate"). Recently, however, cybercriminals have become more devious, especially when pretending their messages are from well-known companies such as banks, online stores and entertainment services. This lets them bypass spam filters and use increasingly convincing scare tactics to steal your data.

Last year, Google launched a Chrome extension called Password Alert (bit.ly/password401), which warns you when a phishing scam tricks you into using your Gmail username and password to sign into a site that isn't authorised to use Google logins. It works by scanning the HTML of pages to find out if they're impersonating Google sign-in pages. If you log into such a page, you'll be alerted to reset

Password Alert warns you about sites that trick you into using your Gmail login

Netcraft tells you whether the site you're viewing is likely to steal your data

your password immediately.

We'd also recommend the Netcraft Extension (toolbar.netcraft.com), which provides Risk Ratings and detailed site reports that are constantly updated to keep abreast of the latest phishing scams. It also checks if sites are using SSL encryption and valid security certificates, and – because Netcraft is based in Bath – it's very good at detecting deceptive pages from the UK. Our only grumble is that the Firefox version of the add-on (it's also available for Chrome and Opera) uses an old-fashioned toolbar rather than a tidy button. ■

SCAN ANDROID APPS FOR MALWARE

Installing apps from outside the Play store is always risky and sometimes even those inside are no safer, when Google fails to spot dodgy tools. For this reason, it's wise to have security software installed on your phone or tablet to automatically or manually scan apps for malware, suspicious permissions and other potential threats. There are loads of these to choose from, but we'd recommend Malwarebytes Anti-Malware Mobile (bit.ly/malware401), Trend Micro's Dr Safety – Free Mobile Security (bit.ly/safety401) and Avast Antivirus & Security (bit.ly/avast401). Don't install more than one though, or it will slow your device.

Use Dr Safety to stop fake apps infecting your phone with malware

Broadband Deals

Call FREE on 0800 083 2357 to switch your broadband

	Provider	Package name	Monthly price	Contract length	Broadband speed	Allowance	First-year cost*
1	TalkTalk	TalkTalk: Broadband	£7.50 (FREE for 12 months)	18 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	CHEAPEST £0.00
2	EE	EE: Broadband & Calls	£9.95 (£1 for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited **	£12.00
3	plusnet	Plusnet: Broadband	£9.99 (£1.99 for 12 months)	18 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£23.88
4	sky	Sky: Broadband	£10.00 (HALF PRICE for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£60.00

Terms & Conditions apply - see ISP sites for details
*First-year cost does not include line rental. Cost is calculated at monthly price x12 with all introductory offers subtracted. Additional charges incurred outside of free inclusive calls not included in first-year cost.
** Fair-usage or restriction policy applies.

Data supplied by www.broadbandgenie.co.uk. Correct as of 4 July 2016.

Ofcom
Broadband Genie's helpline is powered by Simplify Digital, the Ofcom-accredited switching service

In the next issue of our sister title Computeractive...

SNEAK PREVIEW!

Computer active

• **NEVER LOSE YOUR FILES**
What you must do to protect your photos and documents

PLUS
• Should you upgrade to Windows 10?

• Turn your PC into a planetarium

• Secret tips for using MediaMonkey

AND... The best alternative to Windows Live Mail

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On sale Weds 20 July

Take a Screen Break

Give your eyes a rest from your computer by taking our fiendish fortnightly challenges. Can you unravel our mobile-game word search and guess our film-title emoji?

WEB USER WORD SEARCH

Can you find the following mobile games in the grid on the right? Names may appear vertically, horizontally or diagonally, and forwards or backwards

ANGRY BIRDS
BEJEWELED
CANDY CRUSH
CLASH OF CLANS
CROSSY ROAD
CUT THE ROPE
FRUIT NINJA
HUNGRY SHARK
TAPPED OUT
TEMPLE RUN

S	L	K	D	H	Z	T	I	I	S	F	W
F	N	R	D	S	A	A	Y	J	D	R	L
R	U	A	E	U	S	P	N	P	R	U	E
Z	R	H	L	R	R	P	E	X	I	I	P
Q	E	S	E	C	G	E	R	H	B	T	O
E	L	Y	W	Y	F	D	E	Z	Y	N	R
C	P	R	E	D	Z	O	B	W	R	I	E
X	M	G	J	N	J	U	H	L	G	N	H
N	E	N	E	A	B	T	Z	S	N	J	T
X	T	U	B	C	K	R	L	S	A	A	T
T	T	H	F	L	M	X	V	R	P	L	U
D	X	D	A	O	R	Y	S	S	O	R	C

CAN YOU GUESS THESE FILM TITLES FROM THE EMOJI?

1

2

3

4

Get the answers online at bit.ly/quiz401

COMPETITIONS

WIN 1 OF 3

Creative T30 Wireless speakers

WORTH £74.99 EACH

Ideal for use with mobile devices, Macs and PCs, the Creative T30 Wireless speakers feature Bluetooth and NFC wireless connectivity using Creative's aptX® high-definition audio codecs, so they sound just as good whether you use the wire or not. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'creative' in the subject line. For more information, visit, uk.creative.com, follow @creativelabs on Twitter and 'like' www.facebook.com/CreativeStore.

WIN 1 OF 8

VQ Blighty portable radio

WORTH £49.99 EACH

Small enough to fit inside your pocket, the VQ Blighty portable radio is ideal for listening to sport and music when you're out and about this summer. It comes with headphones, boasts a 10-hour battery life and a vivid 1.6in LCD screen that you can view in sunshine. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'vq' in the subject line. For more info, visit www.myvq.co.uk, follow @MyVQUK on Twitter and 'like' www.facebook.com/MyVQUK.

Make slick video slideshows from your photos | bit.ly/scattershow401

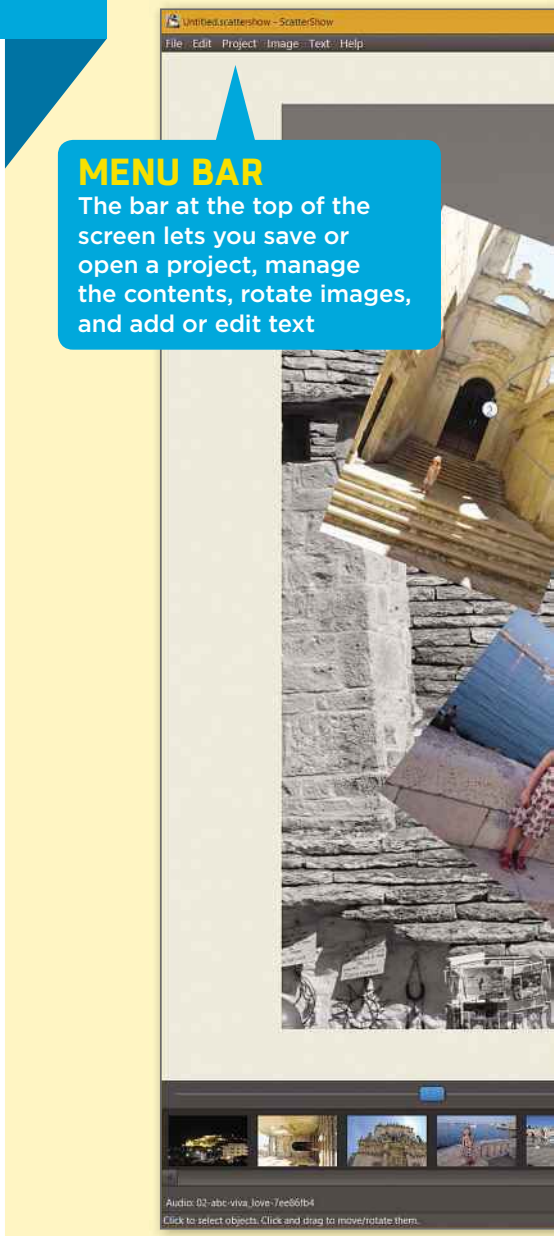
ScatterShow lets you transform boring, static holiday snaps into stylish videos you can share with friends and family. Here's how to use it

Now that summer is here, many of us are finalising our holiday plans and will no doubt return with lots of photographs. Instead of letting them lie forgotten on your computer or mobile phone – the fate of most digital photos – you can use ScatterShow to turn them into a video slideshow. This can then be saved to your computer, shared on Facebook or uploaded to YouTube.

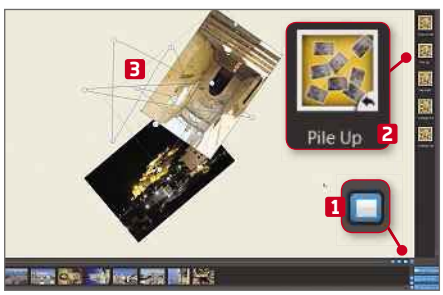
The program used to cost $30 (£21) but it's now free, and available for Windows (7 and up) and Mac OS X. You have to enter an email address to see the download links and get a serial number, which you enter during installation, but you're not asked to verify it, so you can always make up an address if you'd rather not give away your real one.

1 Click the Start Scattering Photos button on the splash screen and choose the pictures you want to include in your slideshow. They'll appear piled on top of each other in the centre 1 and laid out in a timeline underneath. 2 You can reorder the images by clicking and dragging them around the timeline.

2 Click one of the templates from the selection on the right. 1 There are eight to choose from, ranging from Basic Grid to Collage Scatter. Hit the Play/Pause button, 2 to start the slideshow. Photos will slide into view, stay in the centre for four seconds, then slide out again.



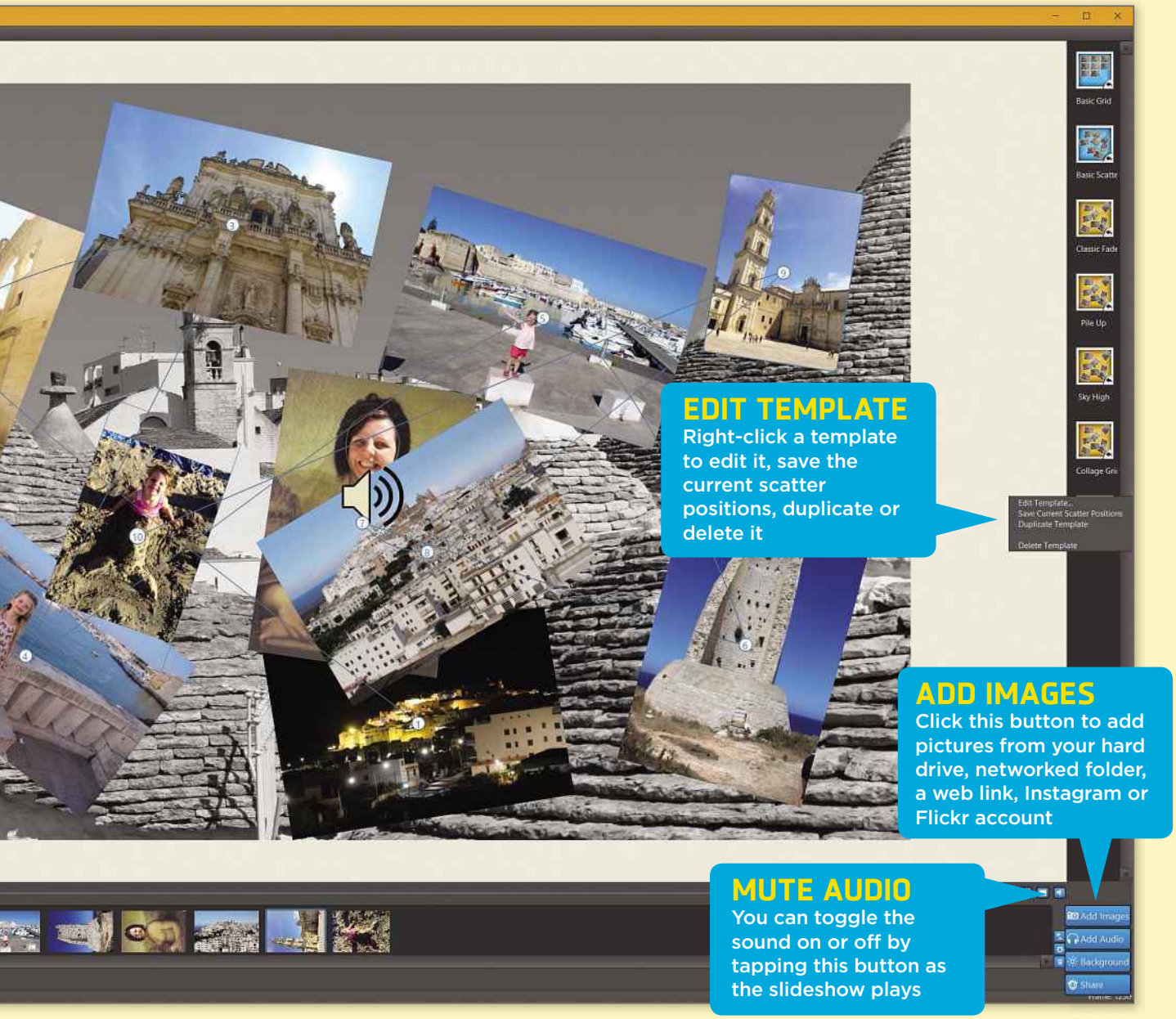
MENU BAR
The bar at the top of the screen lets you save or open a project, manage the contents, rotate images, and add or edit text



3 Clicking the Stop button 1 shows you the starting position for each of the images. You can also explore the different template layouts – Pile Up 2 is one of the better choices. Click the centre of the screen to display the paths that the images follow during the slideshow. 3

4 Click a photo and you'll be able to drag it to a different place 1 to change its path. You'll also be able to rotate images, which is handy if a portrait picture is being shown horizontally. Remember, you'll also be able to reorder images on the timeline. Press Play to preview your changes.

5 The default white backdrop is a little boring. To change it to something more interesting, click the Background button. 1 Find an image you want to use and click Open. Your new choice will be applied immediately. You can move and rotate the background just as you can the other images.



6 To add a soundtrack to your video slideshow, click the Add Audio button 1 and browse for a song to use. An audio icon 2 will appear in the centre of the screen showing that some music has been added. You can't move this icon because it's fixed into position.

7 The Edit Image button 1 lets you apply filters to some or all of your photos. 2 Choices include Toon, Auto Correct, Sepia and 'Black and White'. You can change the pause duration 3 and the image start and end opacity 4 (the fades between images). You can also override the template defaults. 5

8 When you're done, click the Share button. 1 You'll see a number of options. You can save the video as a movie 2 (there's a list of formats, quality and devices to pick from), or as an HTML5 file for posting on the web. 3 You can also share it on Facebook 4 or post it directly to YouTube. 5

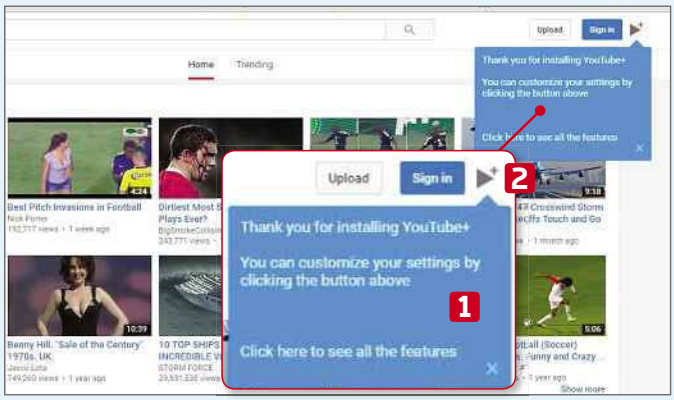
Fix YouTube's biggest problems

YouTube Plus: bit.ly/ytchrome401, bit.ly/ytfirefox401 | 10 mins |

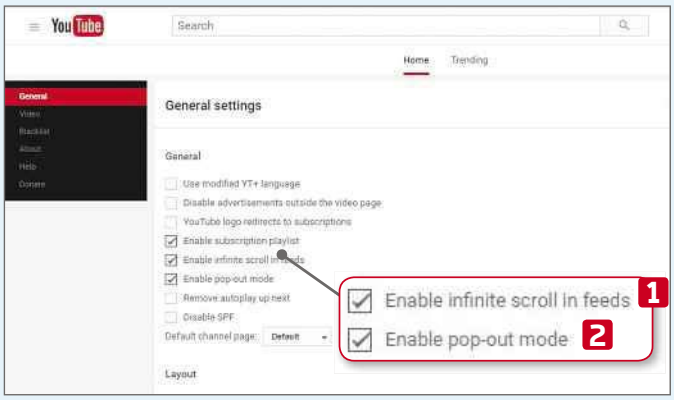
YouTube Plus is a browser add-on that provides a multitude of options to improve your YouTube experience. It not only lets you disable the video-streaming website's most annoying features, such as video annotations and advertisements, but also provides a range of handy tools, such as blacklisting users whose videos you don't want to see, choosing a default video resolution and automatically saving your last-used volume settings.

YouTube Plus also provides a pop-out view that loads your current video in a small, separate browser window, and lets you keep watching while you scroll down to read the comments. If you want to clear the clutter from a YouTube page, the add-on lets you remove the bits you don't like, including footers, sidebars and 'What to watch' suggestions.

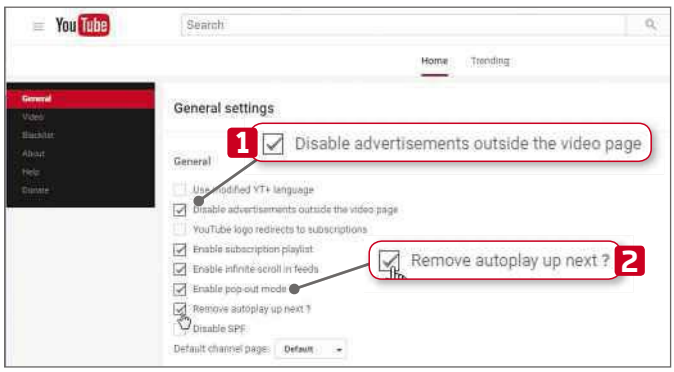
YouTube Plus is available for Firefox and Chrome – in this Workshop, we've used the latter to show you how to configure its best features.



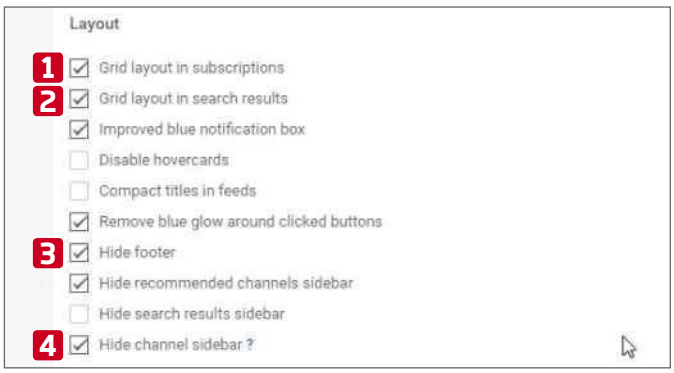
1 Install YouTube Plus for Chrome and click 'Add extension' when prompted. Next, visit www.youtube.com and a pop-up message appears. 1 Click the YouTube Plus button 2 to load the General settings page and start customising the extension's settings.



2 You'll notice some options are already ticked by default, such as 'Enable infinite scroll in feeds', 1 which lets you continuously scroll without having to click 'Load more'; and 'Enable pop-out mode', 2 which displays a 'pop-out' button when you hover your cursor over a video thumbnail.



3 To stop adverts appearing in 'What to watch', search results and channel pages, tick 'Disable advertisements outside the video page'. 1 You can also disable the 'Up next' Autoplay feature 2 and remove its switch altogether by ticking the appropriate box.

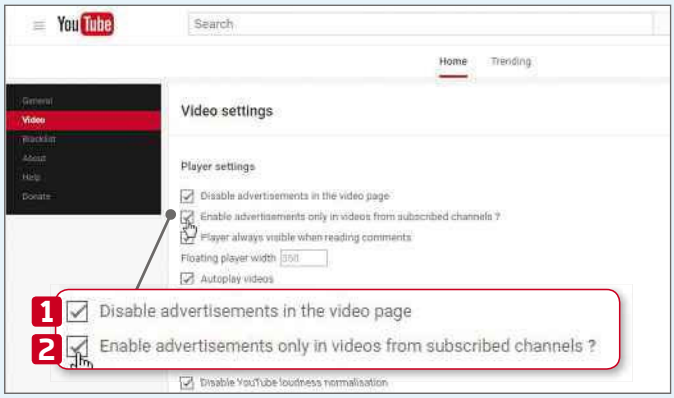


4 To view more items per page when browsing one of your subscription channels, tick 'Grid layout in subscriptions'. 1 You can do the same for search results. 2 The Layout section has options to hide all kinds of clutter, including the footer 3 and sidebars for subscriptions and channels. 4

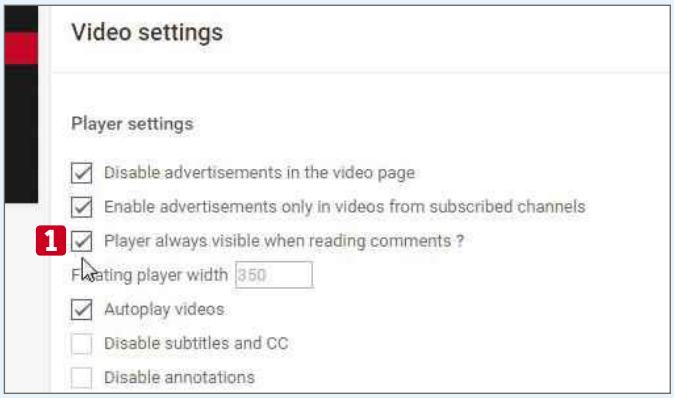
EXPERT TIP

Edward Munn says

YouTube Plus includes an Advanced options menu, which appears below the videos you watch to give you even more ways to enhance playback. This includes tools that let you take screenshots, play the video frame by frame and open it in a pop-out window. To hide these options, click the 'X' just above the icons.



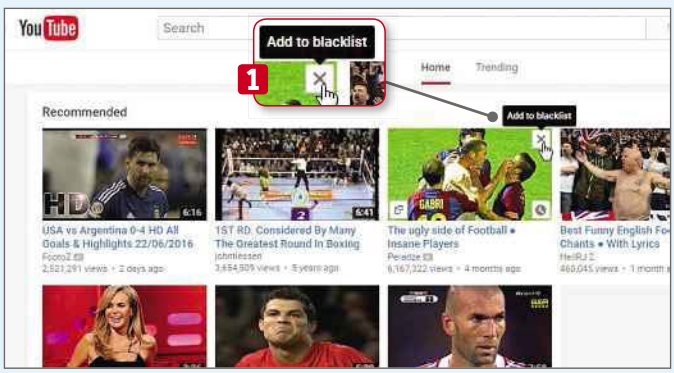
5 Click Save once you're happy with your changes, then select Video to open the YouTube Plus video settings page. Under 'Player settings', you can choose to disable video advertisements. 1 You can also allow video adverts for channels that you subscribe to 2 and want to support.



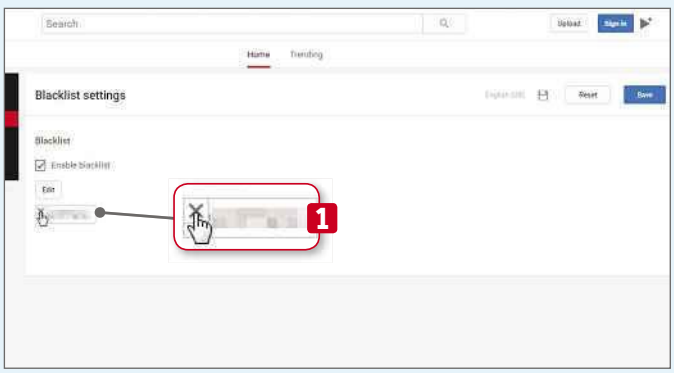
6 'Player always visible when reading comments' is ticked by default, 1 which means that videos automatically appear in a moveable, floating window when you scroll down to the comments. This window also contains an up-arrow that you can click to quickly return to the top of the page.

7 Annotations on videos can be annoying but thankfully there's an option to disable them. 1 In this section, you can also set YouTube to automatically memorise the volume level that you last used, 2 and there's a drop-down menu for choosing your preferred video quality setting. 3

8 If you like to save videos you've not finished watching, so you can view them later, tick 'Enable info bar with watch later button' 1 in the 'Player layout' section. You can also stop the video player from resizing according to the size of your browser window by ticking the appropriate box. 2



9 Click Save once you're happy with your changes, then click Blacklist. This handy tool is enabled by default and lets you block all videos from a particular user by hovering your cursor over a thumbnail of one of their videos and selecting the X. 1

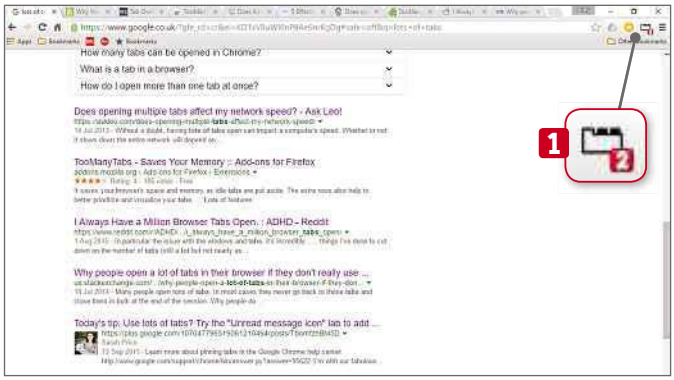


10 To unblock a blacklisted user, return to the Blacklist section of the settings and hover your cursor over the name of the user you want to unblock, then click the X. 1 Click Save to update your settings, then click the YouTube Plus button to close its configuration page.

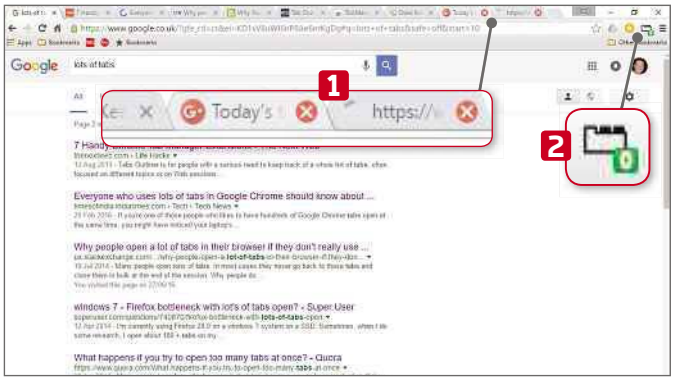
Stop Chrome tabs crashing your PC

It's easy to get tab-happy while using Google or any other site that offers lots of links, opening hordes of tabs so you can flick through them at your leisure. The problem with loading lots of tabs at once is that they can slow your PC to a crawl or even crash it completely. Tabs Limiter with Queue solves this problem by storing your tabs in a queue and opening only as many as your PC can handle.

Tabs Limiter with Queue: bit.ly/tabs401 | **10 mins** |

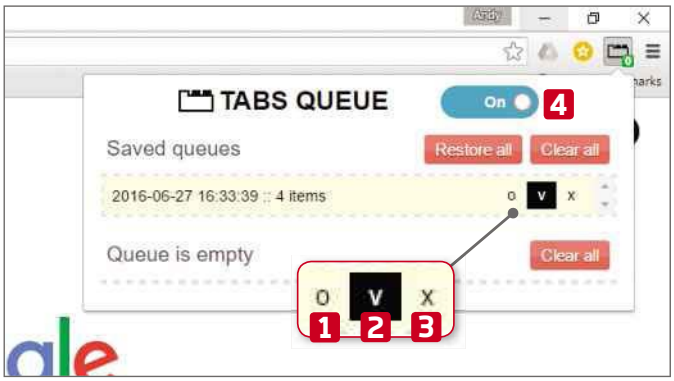


1 When you install the add-on, a new button is added to the toolbar. 1 If you don't have many tabs open, a green zero appears over the button. If you open more than 10 tabs, however, any new tabs are placed in a queue; the green zero then turns into a red number telling you how many there are.

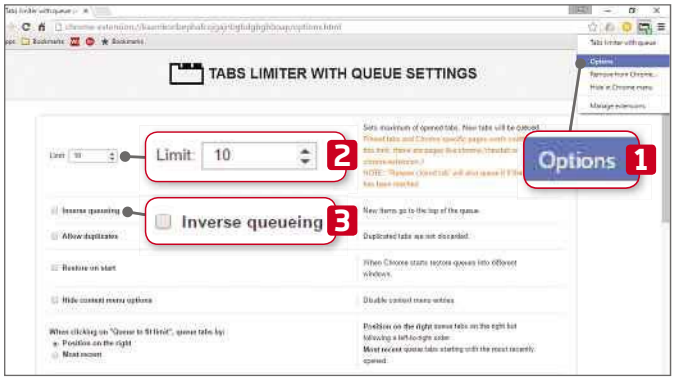


2 If you have tabs in your queue and you close an open tab, a new tab opens in the background on the right showing the next queued page. 1 The button indicates that there's one less tab in the queue, but the number of open tabs won't go down until your queue hits zero again. 2

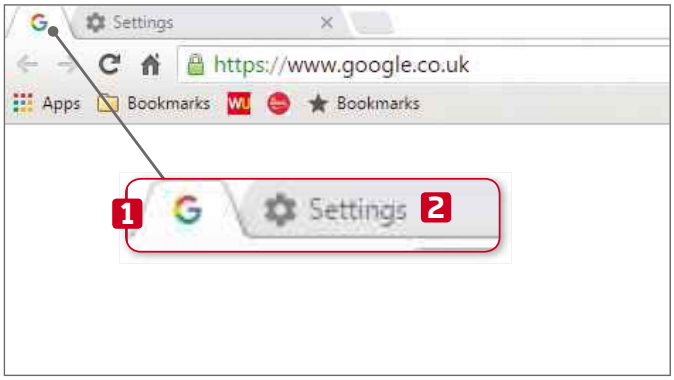
3 Click the button to see a list of the links in your queue. You can click and drag the menu button 1 to reorder them or click the cross (which appears when you hover over a link) to remove it. 2 Click the padlock 3 to lock a link – it won't open or disappear from the queue until you unlock it.



4 When you close Chrome, any items in your queue (but not open tabs) are saved until next time. Click the 'O' to open these saved tabs in a separate Window, 1 the 'V' to send them to the current queue 2 or the 'X' to remove them. 3 You can also switch off the add-on or reactivate it from here. 4



5 Right-click the button and choose Options 1 to open its settings. Here, you can tweak the number of tabs that can open before the queue starts, 2 and choose how to order the queue 3 and what to do with queues when you restart your browser. Scroll down and click Save to confirm your choices.

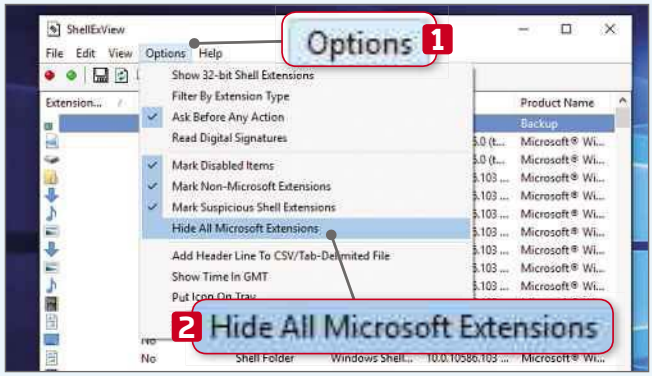


6 Pinned tabs 1 and special Chrome pages such as chrome://settings 2 aren't counted as normal tabs, so you can have as many of these open as you like. If you have a lot of pinned tabs, it's worth lowering the add-on's open tab limit (see Step 5) to avoid overloading the browser.

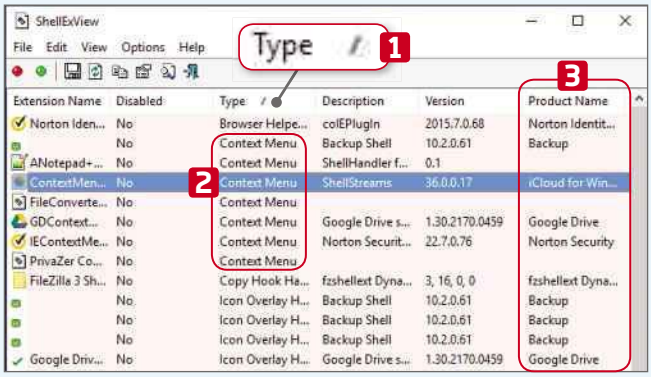
Speed up your right-click menu

Clicking the right-hand button on your mouse brings up the Windows context menu. This ought to appear instantly, but on some PCs it can take several seconds to display and, on occasions, even show a spinning disc while you wait for it. In this Workshop, we provide you with some tools to make your context menu as fast and responsive as ever, so you don't have to wait for it to appear.

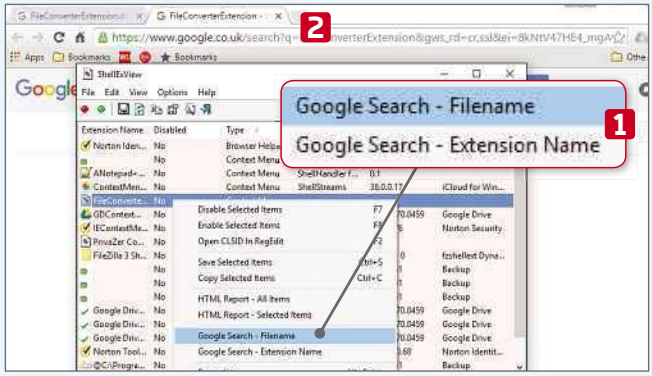
ShellExView: www.nirsoft.net | 10 mins | XP, Vista, 7, 8, 10



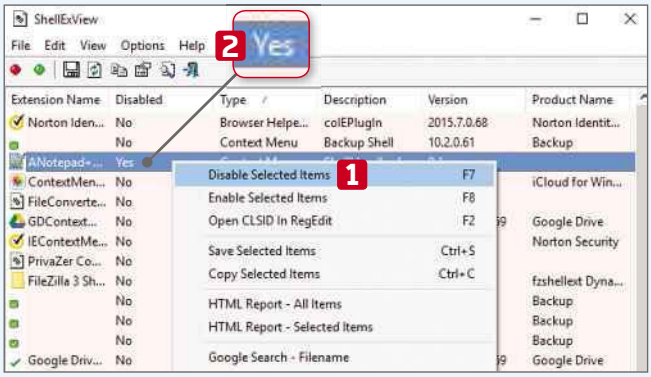
1 Most right-click problems crop up because the menu is overloaded with options installed by other programs. Click ShellExView's Options menu 1 and choose Hide All Microsoft Extensions. 2 This stops you accidentally removing default Windows settings that could stop your menu working.



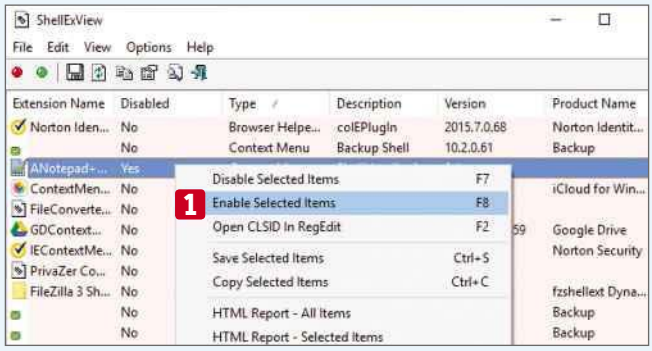
2 Click the Type heading 1 until the arrow points upwards. Removable options are listed as Context Menu types. 2 The Product Name column 3 shows which program they are associated with – you might not want to remove any tools that you use regularly.



3 If you're still not sure about an item, right-click it and choose 'Google Search – Filename' or 'Google Search – Extension Name'. 1 A browser opens 2 and jumps straight to a set of search results, with the file or extension name as a keyword.



4 When you find a process you want to remove, right-click it and choose Disable Selected Items. 1 You can select and disable several at the same time by holding the Ctrl key as you click to select them. The note in the Disabled column changes to Yes. 2



5 The program is stored by ShellExView, so you can reinstate it if you decide you want it back. In this case, right-click an item you've disabled and click Enable Selected Items. 1 There are shortcut keys for this if you have a lot – use F7 to disable and F8 to enable.

6 If your right-click menu only slows down when your PC has been idle for a few minutes, your hard drive is probably being put to sleep. To solve this, try installing KeepAliveHD (keepalivehd.codeplex.com), which regularly writes a tiny file to your drive to keep it awake.

Weekend Project

Get to grips with some serious PC DIY to boost your computer's performance

How to...

Find new uses for an old tablet

Wayne Williams has some great ideas for transforming an old tablet into a collection of useful gadgets you can use around your home

If you have an old tablet kicking around, don't be too quick to give or throw it away. Instead, you could use it for all sorts of different, dedicated purposes.

In this issue's Weekend Project, we look at various ways you can put an old tablet to good use by turning it into a media server, security camera, baby monitor, smart mirror or a second monitor for your PC or Mac. Each suggestion is easy to follow and won't take long to implement.

You could even use your tablet for more than one purpose – for example, by switching it from a media server to a security camera when you leave the house.

Media server

Tablets are great for watching video and playing music, but if you'd rather do this on a big screen or through better-quality speakers, you can turn your tablet into a media server, to send video and music to the other devices in your home.

As well as the tablet itself, you may need some additional storage to keep your video and music files on. This can be in the form of a microSD card (if your tablet accepts them) or you can use a USB OTG (On the Go) cable to add a USB drive to the device. Not all tablets support OTG, so you'll need to find this out first. The USB Host Diagnostics app (bit.ly/usbhd401) can tell you whether your device is compatible. The more storage you have, the more files you can load on to the tablet, but even the base version should have quite a lot of space, once you've removed any unwanted personal content and old apps. Ideally, you'll want your videos in MP4 format. You can convert

An OTG cable can connect standard USB storage devices to compatible phones

Google's TV dongle is one of the best devices for getting video onto a big screen

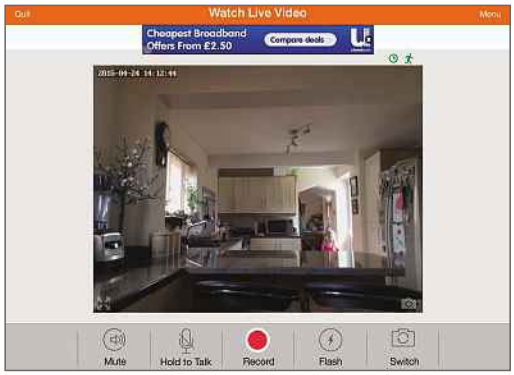
them using Freemake Video Converter (www.freemake.com).

Finally, you'll need a media server app. BubbleUPnP for DLNA/Chromecast (bit.ly/bubble401) is very good and works with all devices compatible with DLNA (Digital Living Network Alliance), including TVs, set-top boxes, laptops and games consoles. It also works with Google's Chromecast (£30 from www.google.com/chromecast). If you want to stream content from your tablet to your TV, adding a Chromecast is often the easiest option.

We show you how to set BubbleUPnP up in our Mini Workshop, below.

Security camera and baby monitor

Your old tablet can make an excellent monitoring device for keeping an eye on your home or your children. Manything for iOS and Android (manything.com) is a free app that lets you turn your tablet into a camera, and view its live video feed via the app on your phone or in your browser. It can send notifications when it detects motion and you can mark out detection zones to create areas where you don't want to trigger an alert. There are multiple recording modes and video can be stored in the cloud so you can review it from anywhere, and at any time. Although the app is free, you're limited to one camera and no cloud recording unless you upgrade to a subscription plan, which costs from £1.99 a month.



When a camera detects movement, it can alert you and can send recorded footage to the cloud

Alternatively, there's AtHome Camera (www.ichano.com) for iOS and Android, which works in the same way. Set up the tablet as your camera, then use your smartphone to view the live feed. You can switch between the front and rear cameras, turn on the tablet's flash (if it has one), mute the sound, talk to anyone in the same room as the tablet and record video on your phone. You can also turn on cloud storage if you sign up for an account.

A mobile device you no longer use can become a security camera

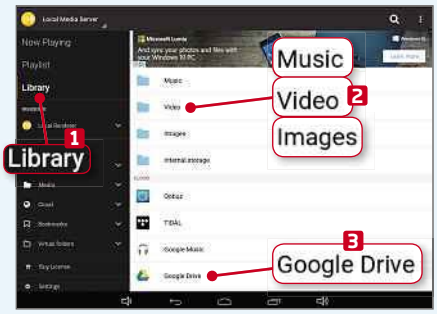
Occasionally, connections can be a little flaky over a wireless network, but keep trying and you should be able to link your devices eventually. If you prefer, you can use your phone as the camera and the tablet as the viewing device.

Magic mirror

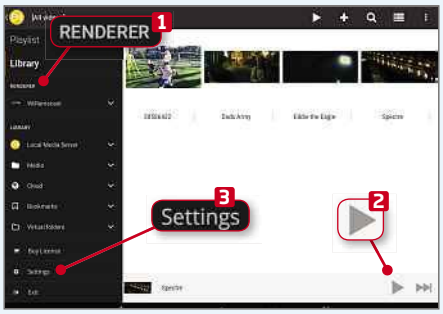
It might sound like a bit of a DIY project but creating a smart mirror from an old tablet is easier than you might expect. The idea is that the mirror itself looks no different from an ordinary one, but the tablet displays important information through it, such as the date, time, weather and anything planned for the day ahead.

You'll need to place a plastic two-way mirror in front of the tablet; these are

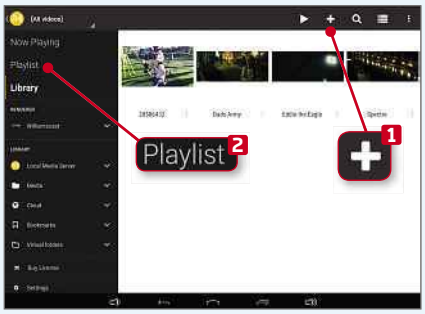
MINI WORKSHOP | Make a media server using BubbleUPnP for Android



1 Install the app on your tablet and open it. Tap Library 1 to view your files. You can find Music, Video and Images, 2 and access cloud services such as Google Drive, OneDrive and Dropbox. 3 Scrolling down provides access to bookmarked content and virtual folders (saved playlists, recently played and random tracks).



2 Under Renderer, 1 select the device you're going to be watching on or through, such as a Chromecast. Locate the first video you want to watch, select it and tap the Play button. 2 After a few seconds, the video should start to play on the connected device. If it doesn't, or there's no sound, go to Settings, 3 Chromecast and enable transcoding.



3 The Settings menu also lets you configure the look and behaviour of the app, as well as manage your server. You can create a playlist of movies or TV shows for binge watching by clicking the plus button 1 at the top of the videos screen. Go into the Playlist menu 2 to manage your items.

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If you use an Android tablet or phone, our new 148-page book will tell you how to get the most out of your device. It explains everything you need to know about the latest versions of Android (Lollipop and Marshmallow), so you'll feel confident that you won't get left behind. We also reveal the best apps for everything you'll ever want to do, and expose the dodgy apps that make your device slow and drain the battery. And as hackers continue to switch from PCs to phones and tablets, we'll show you how to stay safe.

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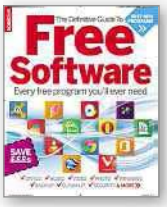
THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO FREE SOFTWARE



Free software can be a worry. Is it as good as a paid-for package? Will it sneak junk on to your PC? Does it nag you to update to a premium version? In our new 148-page book *The Definitive Guide to Free Software*, we recommend only the best free programs that deliver high-quality features and no nasty surprises.

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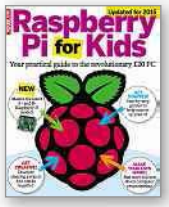
RASPBERRY PI FOR KIDS



The Raspberry Pi is the incredible £20 British computer that's taking the world by storm. It's ideal for children of all ages to experiment with, play games and learn valuable skills. We've updated this 148-page book to include instructions on mastering the new Pi models (A+ and B+).

BUY IT NOW FROM AMAZON
at bit.ly/raspbook

You can order any size of mirror from Cut Plastic Sheeting to create a smart mirror

widely available, but Cut Plastic Sheeting (bit.ly/plas401) is a good source that can provide the type of mirror you need in whatever size you require.

Use double-sided tape to attach the tablet to the back of the mirror, then cover the rest of the mirror's reverse side with black paper or card. You'll need to attach a power cord to the tablet, so the mirror will need to be positioned close enough to a power socket to plug in, which means it won't be suitable for a bathroom. You'll also need to make sure the tablet's screen is set to stay on when plugged in. Do this in Settings, Display.

Finally, you'll need an app to display the visible information. One of the best we've found is HannahMitt's Home Mirror (bit.ly/hmirror401). All the instructions you need are on the app's page.

Second screen for PC or Mac

Most of us like to multi-task when we work on our computers, and transforming your tablet into a second screen can make this a lot easier. You can keep your main screen focused on your work, while the second screen is used to display your email, Facebook account, news headlines or whatever else you want to keep half an eye on.

There are a couple of available options. If you have an iPad, use Air Display 2 (£7.99 from bit.ly/aird401) to connect it to Windows. For Mac owners, there's Air Display 3. There's also an Android version available for £7.66 (bit.ly/adand401) which connects to either Windows or a Mac. It's worth pointing out that Windows 10 is currently not supported, which is a bit annoying since the OS has been out for a year now.

Splashtop Wired XDisplay (bit.ly/xdis401) connects an Android tablet or iPad to a PC or Mac, and it also supports Windows 10. You'll need the XDisplay Agent for your computer, and the app for your tablet. The app is free, but comes with some serious limitations: iPad users can only use the free version for six minutes at a time, while Android users are limited to 10-minute sessions. Don't get too smug about the extra four minutes, though – if the app does what you need, the full no-limit version for the iPad costs £3.99, but Android users have to fork out £5.74.

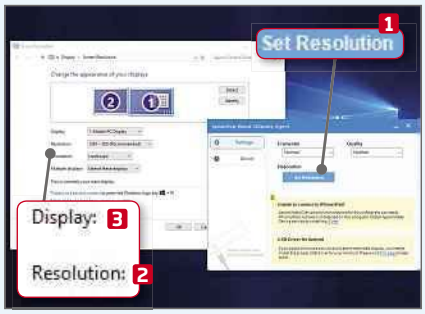
To find out how to set your device up with XDisplay, follow our Mini Workshop, below.

Turn your tablet into a second monitor

MINI WORKSHOP | Turn your tablet into a second screen with Splashtop Wired XDisplay

1 Install the XDisplay app on your tablet and accept the End User Licence Agreement (EULA). You'll need to enable USB debugging on your device (the app will take you there automatically). Tap the box to turn on debugging. 1 If this option is greyed out, make sure the switch at the top is set to On. 2

2 Hit the Back button to return to XDisplay. Install the XDisplay Agent for PC (or Mac), and restart your computer if prompted to do so. You can adjust the framerate 1 and quality 2 using the drop-down boxes. It's unlikely, but if you need to install a USB driver for Android, simply follow the instructions on the page. 3



3 Your tablet should now work as a second screen. You can move your mouse over to it, and drag content between your monitor and tablet display. Clicking the Set Resolution button 1 will open Windows' display configuration screen, where you can adjust the resolution 2 and display behaviour. 3

NEXT ISSUE **How To...** Scan and fix your PC even if Windows won't start

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Web User's Top Tips

Don't let notifications swamp your phone. Take control and manage them with tips from our experts

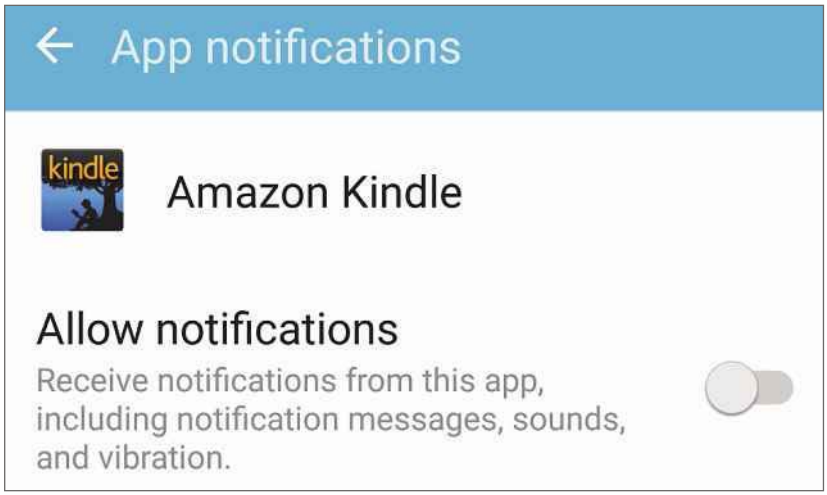
TOP TIPS FOR SMARTPHONE NOTIFICATIONS

Block unimportant app notifications

Some apps are more important than others, and you're more likely to want to see a notification for a text message, say, than for a game. So it's worth spending a little time and effort configuring important apps to show notifications, while blocking alerts that can wait, so you aren't constantly pestered with trivial messages.

On Android, go to Settings, then 'Application manager' or Apps to see a list of your apps. Tap an app, then press Notifications to see a simple on/off switch that lets you choose whether to allow or block it. Repeat this for every app installed.

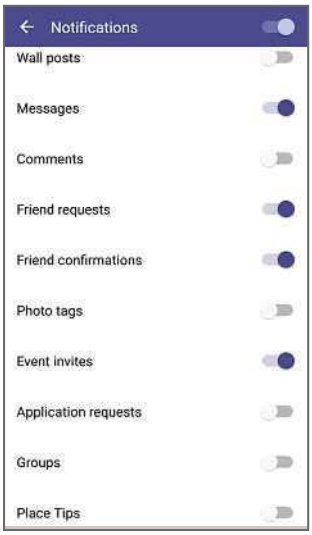
On iOS, go to Settings, Notifications. Select an app and, again, you'll see a switch that turns notifications on or off. You can now repeat the process for all your other installed apps.



This screen varies with Android versions, but the option to block notifications is the same

Manage Facebook notifications...

Some apps only provide a simple on/off switch to allow or block notifications, but others provide a finer degree of control. Facebook, for example, lets you choose the type of notifications you receive, so you can block certain events but still be notified of important ones. Open the Facebook app on Android, press the menu button, then tap App Settings and Notifications.



Facebook's app lets you fine-tune the notifications you receive

There are 10 types of notifications in Facebook for Android: Messages, Comments, Friend requests, Friend confirmations, Photo tags, Event invites, Application requests, Groups and Place Tips. Each category has an on/off switch that lets you choose which notifications to display and which to hide. Blocking some of them will reduce the number of distracting and unimportant notifications on your phone.

On iOS, open Facebook, press the More button, then tap Settings, Account Settings, Notifications, Mobile. Here, you'll find an astonishing 23 categories of notifications that can be turned on or off. Silence any you can live without.

If you see words that `look like they've been typed in a typewriter`, follow the instructions and type them exactly as they appear, paying close attention to spaces and punctuation.

...Twitter notifications...

Twitter can be worse than Facebook for the volume of notifications it generates. Open the Android Twitter app, press the menu button and select Settings. Press Notifications, then tap Mobile notifications and you'll see 13 categories of notifications. If all of them are turned on, your phone will drive you crazy with alert sounds, vibrations and messages, so turn off the ones you can live without and only leave the essential categories.

On the iPhone, open Twitter and press Me, then tap the settings gear icon, Notifications and Mobile Notifications. There are at least a dozen categories and you can choose which ones you want to enable or block.

... and LinkedIn notifications

It is a similar story with LinkedIn. On Android or Apple phones, open the app, press the Me button on the right-hand side of the navigation bar, then tap the

settings gear icon and select the Communications tab. Press notifications to see 15 categories of notifications. You can now use the on/off switch next to each category to block any you don't need.

Other apps, especially those with social features, may have similar notifications settings, although they often don't have as many categories. You should check each app and disable any unwanted notifications.

Do not disturb

We're all well trained enough to remember to put our phones on Silent when we're at the cinema or in a work meeting, but it's easy to forget to do this at night and be woken up by dings, whistles and vibrations as the phone signals alerts for something completely irrelevant at 3am. Both Android and iOS provide an option to silence these notifications.

You can schedule times for when you don't want to be pestered by notifications

On iOS, go to Settings, Do Not Disturb. The Manual switch lets you turn the setting on or off instantly, but there's also a Scheduled switch. Turn this on and press the From and To times to set them for when you go to bed and get up in the morning. During these hours, the notification sounds and vibrations will automatically be turned off and you can get some undisturbed sleep. There are also useful extra settings that silence all phone calls unless they are from certain people, such as Family or Favourites.

On Android 6, go to Settings, 'Do not disturb'. You'll see two options: 'Enable now' and 'Enable as scheduled'. Tap the scheduled option to select the days and set the start and end times accordingly. If you want to make sure that the alarm is still able to wake you in the morning, even when 'Do not disturb' is on, you can set this in Exceptions.

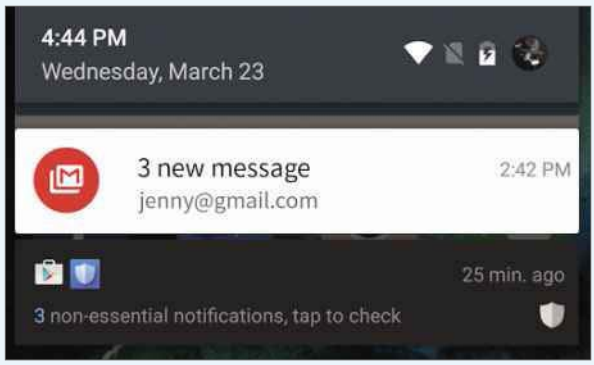
On Android 5, the Do Not Disturb feature is called Downtime and can be found in Settings, 'Sound & notification', Interruptions. Older versions of Android are different again and you may have to hunt around for the relevant settings.

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

More advanced tips for when you're feeling brave

Use a notification manager

There are apps for Android phones that let you customise and manage notifications. NotiBox (bit.ly/noti401) and Notification Manager (bit.ly/notman401) are two that give you greater control over the number and nature of the notifications you receive.



Notification Manager lets you distinguish between important and non-essential notifications

Install NotiBox and give it permission to access the notifications displayed on your phone. The app can back up any notifications it receives, but you won't want to do this for every app. Some, such as reminders from games, won't be relevant at a later time so aren't worth backing up. Choose the apps you want to enable notification backups for.

Notifications will appear on your phone in the usual way and can be swiped away and cleared, and copies will be stored in NotiBox, which you can view by opening the app. Choose the number of days you want to keep the notifications for and tap the star icon to mark important ones.

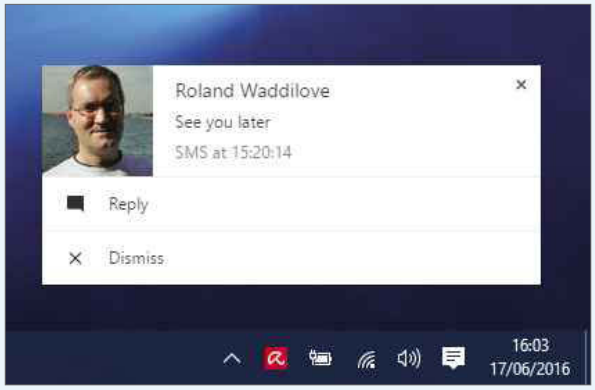
The display options let you apply a filter: you can view all notifications, just the ones marked as important, and so on. Pull down from the top and a permanent notifications bar from NotiBox shows icons for the four apps that have most recently displayed alerts.

Get notifications on your PC

If you're sitting at your computer and you can't see your phone's screen, you can use Pushbullet (www.pushbullet.com) or Pushline (www.getpushline.com) to send any notifications to your computer screen and save you hunting down your handset when it starts pinging and vibrating. Both forwarding services require you to install an app on your phone and an add-on in the Chrome browser on your computer. When a notification arrives on your phone, Chrome displays it in a pop-up box on your computer screen. Chrome apps can run in the background, so you don't even need to have the browser open.

Go to the Pushbullet website and click the Chrome icon to get the add-on, then click the button in Chrome and sign in with Google or Facebook. Install the Pushbullet app on your Android phone or iPhone and sign in. You are now ready to receive notifications. These will appear in the bottom-right corner of your computer screen. Some notifications let you perform actions: for example, you can reply to text messages on your PC by clicking the Reply button.

This is also available in the Cortana app for Android, but it's not compatible with all phones, so you may find it doesn't work on your handset. If it works on your phone, and you're running Windows 10 on your PC, it's definitely worth a look, although it has limited notification capabilities.



You can display phone notifications on your PC and perform actions, such as replying to a message

Ask the Expert

Roland Waddilove, computer programmer and PC journalist since 1981, answers all your technical questions. Email us for help at webuser@dennis.co.uk

WINDOWS 10

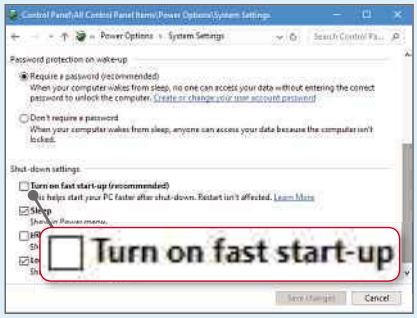
Solve Windows 10 problems

Q I recently purchased a Lenovo Yoga 3 Pro and installed Windows 10, but a month later, I couldn't open any applications except Explorer, which wasn't showing any of my files, documents, spreadsheets, photos and music files. I reinstalled Windows 10 and everything worked again. I was pleased to see that all my files were visible and hadn't been lost.

Everything was fine for a couple of months but then it started playing up again. Half the time, I have to immediately restart the computer, because I can't open any applications. It takes about five minutes for the laptop to restart, at which point I can open my programs. Occasionally, I also get an error message saying: 'Windows couldn't connect to the group policy client service.'

Terry Stringer, via email

A It's a good idea to check your hard drive for any problems before trying any fixes. Right-click the Start button and select Command Prompt (Admin). In the window, Type `chkdsk c: /f` then press Enter, and hit the Y key to schedule a check the next time Windows is started. Type `exit`, press Enter and restart the laptop. The drive is checked before Windows loads and any faults will be fixed.



Turn off fast start-up in Power Options if it's causing problems

When problems occur in Windows, System Restore can help. Right-click the Start button and select System. Click 'System protection' on the left and, in the next window, click System Restore. Select a restore point from a time before the problem began and follow the prompts to restore it. This often fixes a fault, at least temporarily.

Some people have found that the Fast Startup feature in Windows is the cause of this problem because updates or changes made during shutdown or startup are being corrupted. Right-click the battery/power icon in the notification area of the taskbar and select Power Options. Click 'Choose what the power buttons do', then scroll down to the bottom and clear the tick against 'Turn on fast start-up'.

SECURITY

Can partition encryption protect from ransomware?

Q I read with interest your cover feature on ransomware in Issue 398. I have used DataProtecto encryption on my hard drive because I was told that it would protect me from ransomware.

I have two hard drives divided into six partitions, some of which are encrypted. If I try to open one before I use the program to unlock it, I get a message that the location is not available and access is denied – I can't even scan it with my antivirus software. Does this mean the partition is protected from ransomware?

If it is protected, can I keep a document and photo on the Desktop as an early-warning system, so that if I ever found them locked by ransomware, I could simply keep the encrypted partitions locked until I remove the problem?

Your feature lists five programs to protect against different ransomware and says it's worth installing at least one. This sounds like I can use more than one, or have I misunderstood? I am now using Bitdefender Anti-ransomware (bit.ly/bdar401) and Malwarebytes Anti-ransomware (bit.ly/mbar401).

Gerald, via email

A If ransomware gets on your computer, it could do almost anything. It could encrypt only your personal files; it could encrypt all your files; or it could encrypt your entire hard drive and prevent you from starting your PC and getting into Windows.

Encrypted partitions are protected from any changes, but only if you never open them. As soon as you do, ransomware could encrypt these files, too. Also, if ransomware locks you out of Windows, you won't be able to access the protected partitions anyway.

There are two ways to protect against ransomware and one is to install and use security software. Running two or more security programs can sometimes, cause problems, but that's not always the case. However, each security program you install slows down the computer, so it's best to have as few as possible, even if they are compatible.

The other way to protect your computer is to use backups. Saving important files to a DVD-R prevents them from being encrypted, and backing them up to an external drive and then unplugging it also prevents encryption.

An online backup service can help, too. Files backed up online after a ransomware infection may be corrupted, but those backed up before should be OK. You should, therefore, be able to recover files from any of your old backups.

Malwarebytes Anti-Ransomware Beta is free and helps guard against ransomware

EMAIL

Reconnect to BT email

Q My sister has had a long period of illness, during which she wasn't able to use her email. Now her BT email no longer allows her access. She can log in but then gets stuck in an endless loop of demanding questions – something to do with 'going on a journey to a single BT ID' (whatever that means). All attempts to seek assistance from BT technical support have failed. Can you suggest anything?

Terry, via email

A BT ID is a single username and password that provides access to all BT services, from email to payment for phone and internet bills. Go to bit.ly/btid401 and find the links to create a BT ID and get a username and password. Once this is set up, try using it to log into your email account. Your email account can be accessed by logging in via the main bt.com website or through uk.yahoo.com, because Yahoo is BT's email provider. Try both websites.

GENERAL PC

Restart Windows 7 updates

Q I don't know that much about computers and I'm happy using Windows 7. When I'm told that I should 'back up before downloading Windows 10', I don't really know what they're talking about. It's the same for apps – I don't really understand what they are.

I got really worried when I realised I hadn't had a single Windows 7 update from Microsoft since 1 April. Can you tell me whether this is some kind of dirty trick by Microsoft to force people into upgrading? As I've said, I am quite content to continue with Windows 7.

Paul McAlroy, via email

A Microsoft has been pushing Windows 10 updates and it's been hard to avoid them. If you've blocked the Windows 10 upgrade, this may be stopping the Windows 7 updates, too.

Go to the Control Panel, select 'Small icons' from the 'View by' menu and click Windows Update to see its status. If it's turned off, you should turn it on. If Windows Update is already enabled, open a browser and go to bit.ly/reset401, then run the Windows Update Toubleshooter for Windows 7. This saves a file to the Downloads folder, so run Explorer, open Downloads and double-click the file to run it. Be aware, though, that fixing Windows Update may mean you will be pestered to upgrade to Windows 10.

You can repair Windows Update with tools available from the Microsoft website

Apps are programs downloaded from the Windows Store in Windows 10 and 8. There are technical differences between apps and ordinary programs, but they are not important and you can just think of them as any other type of software.

WINDOWS 10

Remove annoying Avast pop-up

Q I have installed Kaspersky Anti-Virus (www.kasperksy.co.uk) on my Lenovo desktop PC. Before upgrading it from Windows 7 to 10, I used Avast Antivirus, and I now keep getting a pop-up message saying: "To complete your Windows 10 upgrade install Avast Antivirus". I've tried selecting the "Remind me in... Never" option in the pop-up, but it's ignored. All attempts at hunting down the cause of the pop-up have failed. Where is it lurking and how can I banish it?

Colin Power, via email

A Upgrading from Windows 7 to 10 may have erased or disabled Avast, which could result in no virus protection. Avast runs automatically when Windows 10 starts but if your PC can't find it, you'll be prompted to reinstall it. You need to delete this program. Open Explorer, select This PC, and open the C:\Program Files (x86) folder. Open Common Files and look for an AV folder. This contains an Avast folder, which you can now delete.

HARDWARE

Find a hard-wearing keyboard

Q I like to type as I was trained to do in the army, and use illuminated keys, but I have rheumatoid arthritis and can't fully open my hands, so the figures and letters get scratched away. Do you know of any scratch-proof illuminated keyboards? This wear and tear means I often have to change my keyboard, and illuminated keyboards are expensive!

Leslie Simmons, via email

A *Bruce Whiting of The Keyboard Company says:* Keyboard backlighting is achieved with an LED fitted under each keytop, which lets the light shine through. The inexpensive method is to use a black coating that leaves the legend uncovered, but these coatings degrade with use. Higher quality keytops use two pieces of plastic in a 'double-shot' process, which means you have to wear through the top layer of plastic before there is visible damage. The Max Blackbird keyboard (bit.ly/kbco401) uses this method and should be much more robust.

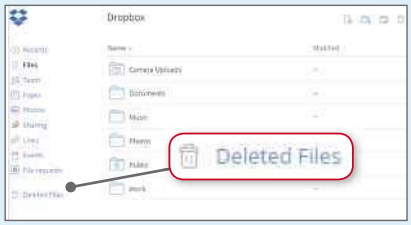
SECURITY

Will ransomware sync with Dropbox?

Q I'm worried about ransomware, so I have transferred my files to Dropbox to protect them. I've synced my PC to the cloud so if I change a file on my PC, it will be changed in the cloud. Will files on Dropbox be corrupted if I pick up file-scrambling ransomware? If so, what should I do to prevent this?

e-mail spectralx, via email

A As you've mentioned, if a file is changed on your PC, it will be changed in the cloud. So if your files are encrypted by ransomware, they will be uploaded and stored online, too, because Dropbox won't be able to tell whether you encrypted them on purpose for extra security or whether the action was carried out by ransomware. However, Dropbox stores previous versions of files for 30 days, so if ransomware strikes, you may be able to recover a version of a file that was saved before being infected.



Dropbox stores deleted files and previous versions of files for 30 days

This fortnight Roland has been diligently streaming Wimbledon for the purposes of 'research'

Your Top Tips

Our pick of the best advice from our readers. To get help or offer it to others, visit forum.webuser.co.uk

TOP TIP

Mug winner

GENERAL PC

Log into Windows more securely

You can make Windows 7 more secure by changing the way you log in. Press Windows+R and type `netplwiz`. When the User Accounts window opens, click the Advanced tab. In the lower part of the window, find 'Secure logon'. Tick the box next to 'Require users to press Ctrl+Alt+Delete', then click OK.

When Windows starts, or you log out or switch users, a message appears to press Ctrl+Alt+Delete. You can then select your account and start up in the usual way. According to the Microsoft article at bit.ly/ctrl401, this prevents malware and viruses from spying on you when you enter your username or password.

It seems like a good idea to me and it's not much hassle to press the keys before logging in. If you decide you don't like it, though, you can just run `netplwiz` again and clear the tick to put things back as they were.

Stop spyware by pressing Ctrl+Alt+Del before logging in to Windows

Sean Finn, via email

GENERAL PC

Shut down your PC from your keyboard

This morning, my mouse and the touchpad on my Windows 10 laptop both stopped working. I was unable to close anything until I remembered a handy keyboard shortcut I had recently read about. Repeatedly pressing Alt+F4 closed all my programs, one by one, and then gave me the option to shut down my computer. After doing this, my PC was working fine and, because I had shut it down properly, I avoided corrupting any files in the process.

Pressing Alt+F4 closes running programs and opens a shutdown menu

FratPark, Web User Forums

***Web User* says:** You can also close programs and shut down your PC by pressing Ctrl+Alt+Delete, then using the Tab and Enter keys to navigate menus.

BROWSERS

Switch tabs without using mouse clicks

Tab Focus (bit.ly/tabfocus401) is a handy Firefox add-on that lets you switch to another tab by hovering your mouse pointer over the relevant tab on the tab bar rather than clicking it. You can sometimes inadevertently find yourself on the wrong tab, but it's very quick and convenient once you get used to it.

The current version is 2.0.2, which is fine for Firefox, but you'll need to use an earlier version with Pale Moon – the latest version that works is 1.0.8.1 (bit.ly/backversions401).

Madeline, Web User Forums

SOFTWARE

Highlight selected areas in IrfanView

Last week, I wanted to highlight something in a picture to share on Twitter, but I didn't know if it was possible using IrfanView (www.irfanview.com). I quickly learned that there is no highlighter, but I found an easy way to achieve the same thing using the program's 'Colour corrections' tool. First, select the area you want to highlight. Next, click Image and 'Color corrections' (or press Shift+G). In the pop-up box that appears, move the 'Color balance' for B (blue) as far left as you can, and your selection should be highlighted in yellow in the 'New image' preview. Click OK when you're happy and save the file to update it with your changes.

Alan, via email

You can highlight a selection in Irfanview using its Colour Correction tool

GENERAL PC

Choose a better colour

If you change the background image for the Desktop in Windows 10, the colour of the Start menu and taskbar changes, too. If you set the Desktop background to

show your photos as a slideshow, the Start, taskbar and window title bars change colour with every image swap. It's very distracting and you may not like the colour that it's changed to.

You can stop the colour changes by opening Settings in Windows 10. Click Personalisation, then select Colours on the left. Turn off the switch under 'Choose a colour' and click a coloured tile to apply it to the Start menu, taskbar and window titles. This will no longer change with the Desktop image. I think it's much better to choose your own rather than leave it to Windows.

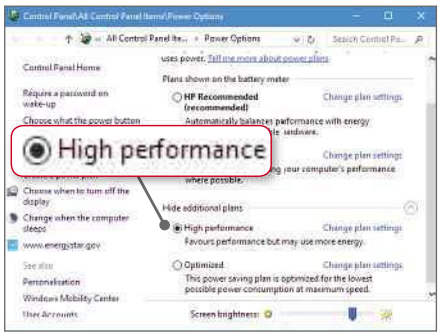
Tim O'Connor, via email

GENERAL PC

Increase your PC's power

Why not give your PC a power boost the next time it really needs it, such as when you're playing games or editing videos? Right-click the battery or power icon in the notification area of the taskbar and select Power Options; or select it from the Control Panel. Select 'High performance' in the list of power plans to remove all processing limits. If you can't see the option, click 'Show additional plans'.

Alan Lee, via email



Select the 'High performance' power plan to get the most from your PC

WINDOWS 10

Change Edge's downloads folder

Unlike Chrome and Firefox, Windows 10's Edge browser doesn't let you change the default Downloads folder. However, this can still be achieved if you're prepared to make a few tweaks to the Registry. Press Windows+R, type `regedit` and press Enter. Navigate to the following key:

HKEY_CURRENT_USER\SOFTWARE\Classes\Local Settings\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\AppContainer\Storage\microsoft.microsoftedge_8wekyb3d8bbwe\MicrosoftEdge\Main

Once the Main sub-key has been selected, choose New and 'String Value' and name the new value `Default Download Directory`. Double-click it and, in the 'Value data' box, enter the filepath of the folder that you'd like your downloads saved to, then click OK.

It's always important to back up the Registry before making any changes to it, and you can do this by simply clicking File and Export in the Registry Editor, then choosing the location you'd like to save the file to. If you change your mind about using a custom download folder, you can return to the default setting by simply deleting the Default Download Directory value you created.

Ed Wright, via email

GENERAL PC

Create a just-in-case account

It's worth setting up a second user account on your PC, even if you're the only person that uses it, because if your computer develops a fault or files become corrupt, you may find that you can't use it for certain tasks. The fault could even prevent you from logging in at all.

If you have a second administrator account, you can use this instead. Once you're logged in, you can access your files, use repair tools and carry out other rescue operations. If your old account can't be fixed, you can copy your files over and make the second account your main one.

In Windows 7, new accounts are created using the Control Panel's User Accounts tool; in Windows 10, just open Settings and click Accounts. It's very easy to create a new account, and it's well worth making a backup in case your computer develops any problems.

Barry Daley, via email

HARDWARE

Maintain a pristine printer

Every printer I have bought comes wrapped in a plastic bag. I recommend keeping this plastic bag to use as a cover for your new printer. It saves you from buying expensive purpose-made covers and prevents dust and grime getting in, which will save on cleaning and help your printer last longer, especially if you live with pets or smokers.

samsmoot, Web User Forums

GENERAL PC

Stop Windows Updates failing

I have suffered a problem very similar to that described by Joe Pester (Ask the Expert, Issue 399), in that Windows Updates keeps failing on my Windows 7 PC. Luckily, I was able to overcome the problem by installing Microsoft's new convenience rollup (bit.ly/convenience401).

It seems that the problem is with a new version of the update software that has since been fixed and included in the rollup. If you need help installing the rollup, there are some helpful instructions from MakeUseOf at bit.ly/update401

Microsoft's Windows 7 rollup can fix problems with Windows Update

Jonathan N Palmer, via email

WEB BUILDING

Get free SSL certificates

I just got a couple of free SSL certificates issued by ZeroSSL (zerossl.com). Unlike free certificates from Comodo and RapidSSL, which are just trials, these are genuinely free and issued by Let's Encrypt. You just need to renew them periodically. The whole process took me five mouse-clicks, so if you want to make your website more secure, I'd recommend trying it yourself.

free, Web User Forums

EMAIL

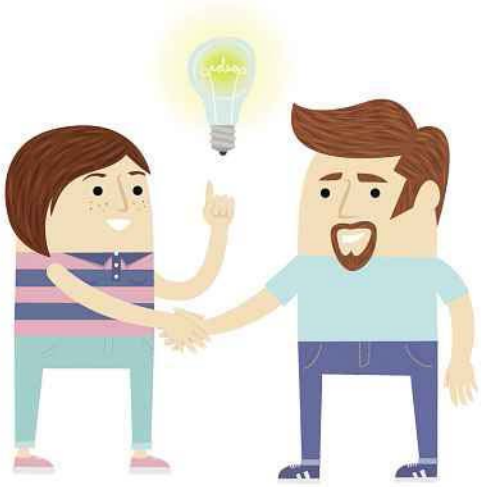
Block junk emails in Gmail

My Gmail account receives junk emails from senders, even after I've marked their emails as spam, which can be incredibly frustrating. However, I've recently discovered there's a simple way to block senders completely. After opening a message, you can click the drop-down menu and then click 'Block "name"' to block the sender in question. You'll receive a notification warning you that all messages from this person will be marked as spam, at which point you need to click Block again.

If you change your mind about something being categorised as spam, you can easily reverse the process by repeating the same steps and selecting 'Unblock "name"'.

James W, via email

Gmail lets you manually block senders who persistently evade the junk filter



Readers' Helpdesk

Our pick of the best solutions posted on our reader forums. Visit forum.webuser.co.uk – it's friendly and free!

GENERAL PC

Should I update Windows 8.1 to 10?

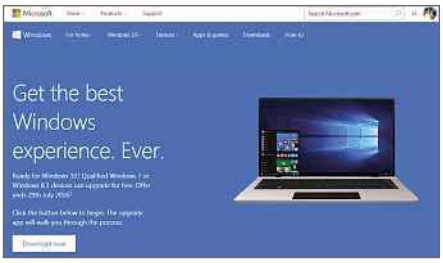
Q My brother-in-law hasn't decided whether to upgrade to Windows 10 because he is quite happy with Windows 8.1. Does anyone know the year Windows 8.1 will cease to be supported, because I imagine there could well be a Windows 11 or 12 out by that time time?

Dagwood00, Web User Forums

A Windows 8.1 falls under the same lifecycle policy as Windows 8. It will reach the end of mainstream support on 9 January 2018 and the end of Extended Support on 10 January 2023. Microsoft has said that there won't be any Windows versions after Window 10, which would appear to mean that it will be continue to be developed without users having to pay for a new version every other year.

If your brother-in-law is a typical home user, he will see little difference when using Windows 10, so I would suggest he upgrades before 29 July while it's still free. He can roll back to 8.1 within 30 days of upgrading and, after that, just restore a backup image of his hard drive if he makes one before he upgrades.

Stewart40 and ricky101, Web User Forums



Windows 10 is available as a free upgrade for Windows 7 and 8 users until 29 July

SOFTWARE

What's the best free spreadsheet program?

Q I have been using MS Works for years and have no problem with it at all, but if and when I buy a Windows 10 PC, what would be the best free office suite for me to use that includes a spreadsheet? It might be that Works will still be fine but I doubt it, because it's very old.

nutchoc, Web User Forums

A I've always used Kingsoft spreadsheets (bit.ly/spread401), which you can download on its own or as part of WPS Office 2016 Free (bit.ly/kwps401). However, my spreadsheets are very basic so I can't comment on how it compares to other programs. There is some more information about it, including some screen grabs, at bit.ly/kingsoft401.

Alternatively, you could install LibreOffice (www.libreoffice.org) or OpenOffice (www.openoffice.org), both of which offer spreadsheet programs. I've not used either of them but I've heard they're good. With LibreOffice, you can also sign up to its Open365 cloud service (open365.io) to store your files online and take advantage of its web-based apps.

Madeline, Web User Forums

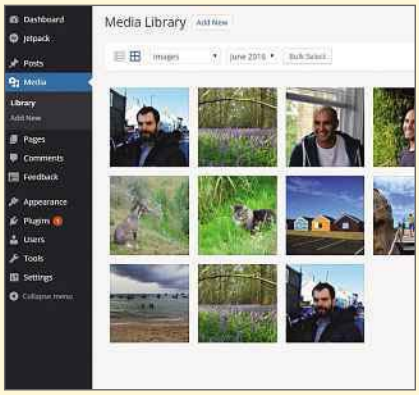
Kingsoft offers a free, standalone spreadsheet program

WORDPRESS

Why are files appearing in my media library?

Q All of a sudden, media items have started to appear and fill up my WordPress media library. I suspect a plugin could be to blame, but I only want media in my library that I've upload myself. How do I stop all these unwanted pictures being added?

TheClash, Web User Forums



Your WordPress media library should only contain files that you've uploaded

A What makes you think this is a plugin problem? Did you install some new ones shortly before you started seeing this behaviour? If so, delete them one by one and see if the problem stops. Also, try Googling any suspected plugins to see if other people have reported the problem. If it's not a plugin, then there's a chance that you've been hacked and someone may be hosting pictures from your site and displaying them on their own site.

You don't mention whether your site is self-hosted or hosted by WordPress. If it's the latter, then change your password to a really secure one and contact WordPress tech support if the problem persists. If you're self-hosted, I would suggest strengthening and changing the password for absolutely everything, including your WordPress login, hosting control panel and FTP access. Again, if the problem persists, then your hosting company's tech support may be able to help.

TheTechGuy, Web User Forums

Inbox

Star Email

Mug winner

It's too soon to give Flash the boot

As soon as I saw the cover of your 400th issue (congratulations, by the way) about "toxic tools you must remove", I had a gut feeling that one of them would be Adobe Flash. And you're quite correct that, in the past few years, Flash has become an annoyance as well as a security hazard.

Sadly, I think it is still too early to tell people to get rid of Flash from their browsers and PCs. Only the other day, I was trying to access an online store and it wouldn't let me see anything because I had disabled Flash in my browser (Firefox) and the whole site had been designed using Flash. It wasn't even a particularly old website, which suggests that Flash is far from dead as far as some developers are concerned.

Likewise, even though YouTube has switched to HTML5 for new uploads, there are still loads of videos on the site that use Flash, and you won't be able to watch them unless you have it installed. It's the same with some music-streaming sites – the songs may be in MP3 format, but the actual player uses Flash. Then, of course, there are the thousands of online games that can only be played if you have Flash.

The point I'm making is that although it's easy to dismiss Flash as outdated and unsafe technology, and tell people to disable or remove it, it's currently a necessary evil if you want to enjoy all the web has to offer. The important thing to remember is to keep it up to date, which should help you avoid at least some of the common problems with the plugin. Hopefully, within a few years, website developers will have moved on enough for all of us to give Flash the boot.

Jeremy Buckley, via email

Why I say no to Now TV

Browsing through *Web User*, I noticed you mention Now TV. I don't need Now TV because I subscribe to Sky's Variety pack, but there is nothing on there that's worth having anyway. If you only have Freeview, you might find the odd programme of interest.

If it was worthwhile, I'd give up Sky and go back to Freesat and Now TV, but Sky doesn't put its best shows on the service. I mostly only watch five of Sky's major channels, but only one of them is available on Now TV. Amazon Video is no better unless you want to watch stuff that isn't shown anywhere else – the reason being that it ain't that good. Some BBC shows eventually turn up, but most are cut-price garbage apart from odd good one, such as *Ripper Street*, which was on the BBC first, anyway. But I'm aware that other people have different tastes and may not agree.

Unless you watch a lot of football and old films, Sky isn't particularly good value. I only watch about six hours of BBC a week and three of those are because *Masterchef* is back. Freesat offers more choice than Freeview, but if you take out the 'plus ones', shopping channels and God channels, there's not much left. Virgin Media is just a more expensive cable version of Sky.

I also don't understand why anyone would pay BT and TalkTalk for what is essentially Freeview plus a couple of extra channels and the option to pay through the nose for football and films.

Martin Fletcher, Thorpe Hesley

Freemake needs to cater for audiophiles

I almost agree with John Lockett's comments about Freemake in Issue 399, and he has a point that the unwanted software that's bundled with its programs is damaging the company's reputation. However, Freemake is also damaging its reputation with the quality of its archiving from YouTube. For example, you can download audio from YouTube to MP3, which is fine,

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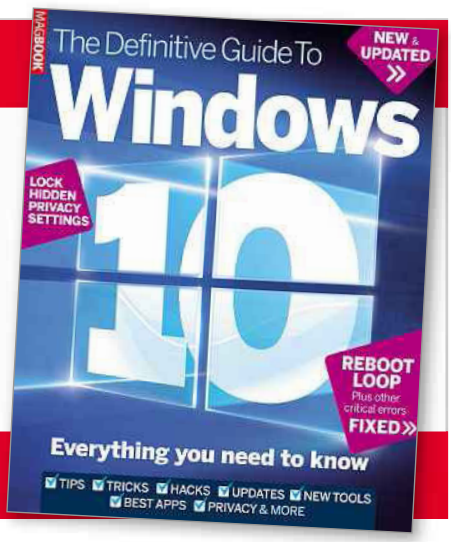

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but getting the full uncompressed quality is very difficult. Freemake states that you can convert MP3 to FLAC or WAV, but that won't improve the quality because MP3 is compressed with audio loss. Why can't more downloading tools cater for audiophiles like me?

Another thing that damages Freemake's reputation is that it has a separate video converter and downloader. Why? Separating these features may help some people, but it will confuse many others. The final straw is that Freemake Video Downloader now asks people to make a donation if they want their download speed to be unlimited. In the past, it always offered unlimited speed for free, so why change?

If you are reading this, Freemake, take note: clean up your act and start catering for audiophiles.

Gold Master, via email

Barry's Safe Mode simply won't work

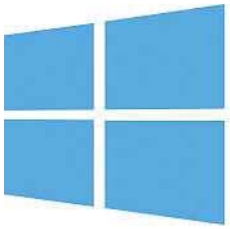
In his column in Issue 400, 'For Pete's sake, stop these PC conmen', Barry Collins made a plea for Microsoft to insist that all software be installed through a special Safe Mode. I doubt it would work. The conmen will simply tell their targets how to get round it.

I can't imagine that software developers would like Barry's Safe Mode, either. No doubt Microsoft would charge to allow new software to be included in the Windows Store.

John Chapman, Web User Forums

Why does Windows 10 need so much memory?

Barry's column in Issue 399 draws attention to the fact that Microsoft has quietly doubled the amount of RAM required to run Windows 10. I find this confusing. As I understand it, improvements in software development to streamline code and remove excess 'bloat' should mean that modern operating systems require less memory and hard-drive space. Also, isn't everything supposed to be in the cloud these days? This means you shouldn't need a high-spec PC to run Windows.



I'm no expert on these matters, so please correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems to me that this increase in system requirements is a way to get us to splash out on new hardware. That's something I certainly wouldn't put past Microsoft!

Josh Kirby, via email

Congratulations, and a correction

First, congratulations for reaching 400 issues! Regarding the Readers Tips section in Issue 400, I have a minor comment about the tip regarding turning off search indexing to make Windows faster. It's worth mentioning that if you do this, it takes quite a while to process the change.

It was nice to see that two of my tips were published. However, once again the magazine did not do me the courtesy of correctly using my username from the Web User Forums, which was irritating. Please note that it's FratPark, not Fratpark or Frat Park.

FratPark, Web User Forums

***Web User* says:** Thanks for the congratulations, FratPark, and apologies for printing your username incorrectly! We'll be more careful in future.

It's a worldwide web, not a British one

Regarding the 'Keep the web British' article in Issue 399 (bit.ly/webuser399), in which you advise us to "make sure the web keeps speaking your language". Firstly, when did the web become British? It's a worldwide web, not a British web. So it should be '*Make* the web British' rather than 'Keep'.

Secondly, this article only mentions English, but there are other languages spoken in Britain aside from English, including Welsh and Gaelic.

Thirdly, one of the advantages of the web is that you can find information in many languages from all over the world. An article that explained how to change language or geographic settings so you could find even more on the web would have been good, rather than just concentrating on changing things to UK English.

betty, Web User Forums

***Web User* says:** We're sorry that you didn't enjoy the feature, betty. The idea was to combat the increasing Americanisation of English on the web – such as changing 'favourite' to 'favorite' and 'organise' to 'organize' – by explaining how to switch default language settings from US English to UK English in browsers, search engines and voice assistants. We called the feature 'Keep the web British' as a playful reference to the fact that the web was

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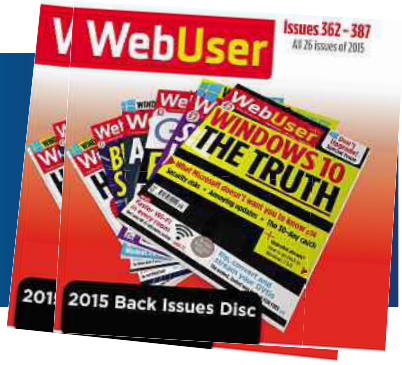

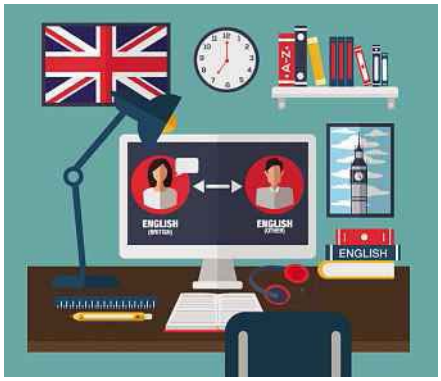

invented by a Brit, Sir Tim Berners-Lee. We agree that there's scope for a further article looking at changing other geographical settings, for example switching the date from MM/DD/YY to DD/MM/YY.

Well done for reaching 400 issues

I am delighted to see that *Web User* has reached its 400th issue and is still going strong. Although I can't claim to have bought every single issue, I did buy the very first one and have been a subscriber since 2011.

Who can forget 'Where's Netty?', the little penguin that was always tucked away on one of the pages so that readers could look for it. You should bring that back – it was good fun.

I'm also pleased that you've kept my favourite sections over the years, such as Best New Websites, Best Free Software and the Workshops, and got rid of some of the less interesting ones, such as the gadget pages and Sudoku!

I've certainly learned a lot from reading *Web User* and have generally followed your recommendations, including switching from Internet Explorer to Firefox and then Chrome, and using software such as CCleaner and Avast Free Antivirus.

Here's to another 400 issues. Keep up the good work!

Colin Wood, Nottingham

What you say...

WILL YOU PAY £50 FOR BT'S SPEEDY NEW SMART HUB (bit.ly/smarthub401)?

I might do, or I might complain about my current router's performance so BT sends me a new one.

Ian Phipps

I really regret joining BT. It's fine one minute and then the next you completely lose connection.

Paul Emsley

If people are dumb enough to be with BT, they'll pay for the new hub.

Meh *@pplwhocantpark*

I switched to BT after the TalkTalk hacking scandal, and it has been okay. BT recently upgraded my speed 'up to' 54Mbps (the top speed is 42Mbps) but my router gets quite hot, so I may ask if I need the new Smart Hub!

Jason 'Boz' Bowyer

Why should existing customers have to pay for the hub, while new ones get it for free? Typical BT!

The Tickler

WHEN DID YOU LAST SWITCH YOUR DEFAULT WEB BROWSER?

I switched from IE6 to Firefox in about 2002. I like the way you can drag tabs to the bookmark bar in Firefox.

Chris Armstrong

I used IE from 2000 when I got my first PC, but in 2014 I tried Firefox and I've never looked back!

Colin Wallace

I switched from Chrome to Opera last week. I might be switching back, though. I just love trying out browsers.

Jenny Jacks *@JenJacks3*

I switched from Chrome to Firefox on Android because I use a VPN. It also lets me disable adverts and WebRTC.

Paul *@abertawejack*

Ironically, I switched from Torch Browser to Chrome because Torch became too slow. I also like the New Tab Reloaded extension in Chrome.

Jack *@imthegoldmaster*

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE NEW-LOOK FACEBOOK MESSENGER (bit.ly/messenger401)?

I've deliberately avoided updating. I know for a fact that if I hate it, I won't be able to go back – as with the new Outlook mail, which I loathe.

Steve Hamilton

As long as it does what it's designed to do, who cares what it looks like?

Gary Olsen *@Gary_Olsen*

Does it still eavesdrop on phone calls?

Ted Taylor

DID YOU ENJOY THE 400th ISSUE OF *WEB USER* (bit.ly/issue400)?

I, for one, would like to thank the whole team who put together a great magazine every fortnight. Here's to the next 400 issues!

Jedi

Can't say I was around for Issue 1, but I look forward to every issue. So, who is the lucky staff member who qualifies for the *Web User* mug, having been at Web User Towers from day one?

George

Congratulations. I was reading the magazine in 2003 – and still do!

Madeline

Happy 400th *Web User*! Very well done indeed to your past and present team members. As always, keep up the good work chaps. More of the same please!

Stu Young

Page 404

Three's decision to block mobile ads could set a dangerous precedent, says **Barry Collins**

Three's ad blocker could damage the web

On the face of it, Three's offer to block mobile ads on behalf of its customers is hard to criticise. Similar to councils clearing dog mess and puddles of vomit off the pavements, it's dealing with a problem that nobody wants to see.

Yet, before I get around to explaining why it is actually a terrible idea, let me first have 10 minutes in a locked room with the web-advertising agencies and the idiot publishers who display their wares. Their shouty, impossible-to-close, auto-running 'nuisanceware' is why people are drawn to offers like Three's in the first place. Irritating people is a terrible business model, and if the only way they can get people to click their ads is by making it impossible for them not to, they're doing it wrong.

Now I've got that off my chest, let me explain why Three shouldn't actually be blocking this garbage. Firstly, Three has no right to deliver the content of web pages but not the adverts that pay for it. Like them or loathe them, those ads are part of an unwritten contract the reader has with the publisher: in exchange for viewing this content for free, you must also put up with the ads. It's the equivalent of Freeview blocking Three's ads on ITV because they find Will.i.am irritating (which he is).

> "It's like Freeview blocking Three's ads on ITV because they find Will.i.am irritating – which he is"

Advertising is the only revenue stream the vast majority of web publishers have. Nobody's yet invented a decent way to make micropayments for web content (pay 5p to read an article, say) and there's no evidence that it would be the least bit popular if they did. Right now, the fractions of pennies per view afforded by web advertising is all we've got. If Three's idea catches on and all internet providers start blocking ads, there's going to be a lot less content to read online in the not-too-distant future.

The other reason why Three should be prevented from blocking these ads is to protect net neutrality – a concept that allows internet service providers to be mere conduits who shuttle data from A to B and treat all packets of data equally. ISPs are quick to hide behind this "mere conduit" status when someone tries to sue them for serving up something libellous: "It wasn't our fault, guv. Don't shoot the messenger." Yet, at the same time, it appears they want to pick and choose which bits of data they *do* deliver.

Let's also examine the commercial motives here. Three's press release self-righteously insists that "customers should not pay data charges to receive adverts" and "these should be costs borne by the advertiser". In other words, Three wants advertisers to pay twice: once to the content owners to place their ads on their website and again to Three to deliver them. It's a win-win situation for Three: if advertisers cough up, Three gets paid for delivering something it should be doing as a matter of course; if they don't, Three cuts a lot of expensive traffic from its network.

And who is Three working with to implement this ad-blocking scheme? Shine Technologies, an Israeli start-up that has secured several million pounds' worth of funding from a company owned by Hutchison Whampoa's chairman – Hutchison being the parent company of Three. The prosecution rests. Your witness.

Illustration: Andrew Torrens

+ Do you agree? Let us know at webuser@dennis.co.uk

WebUser

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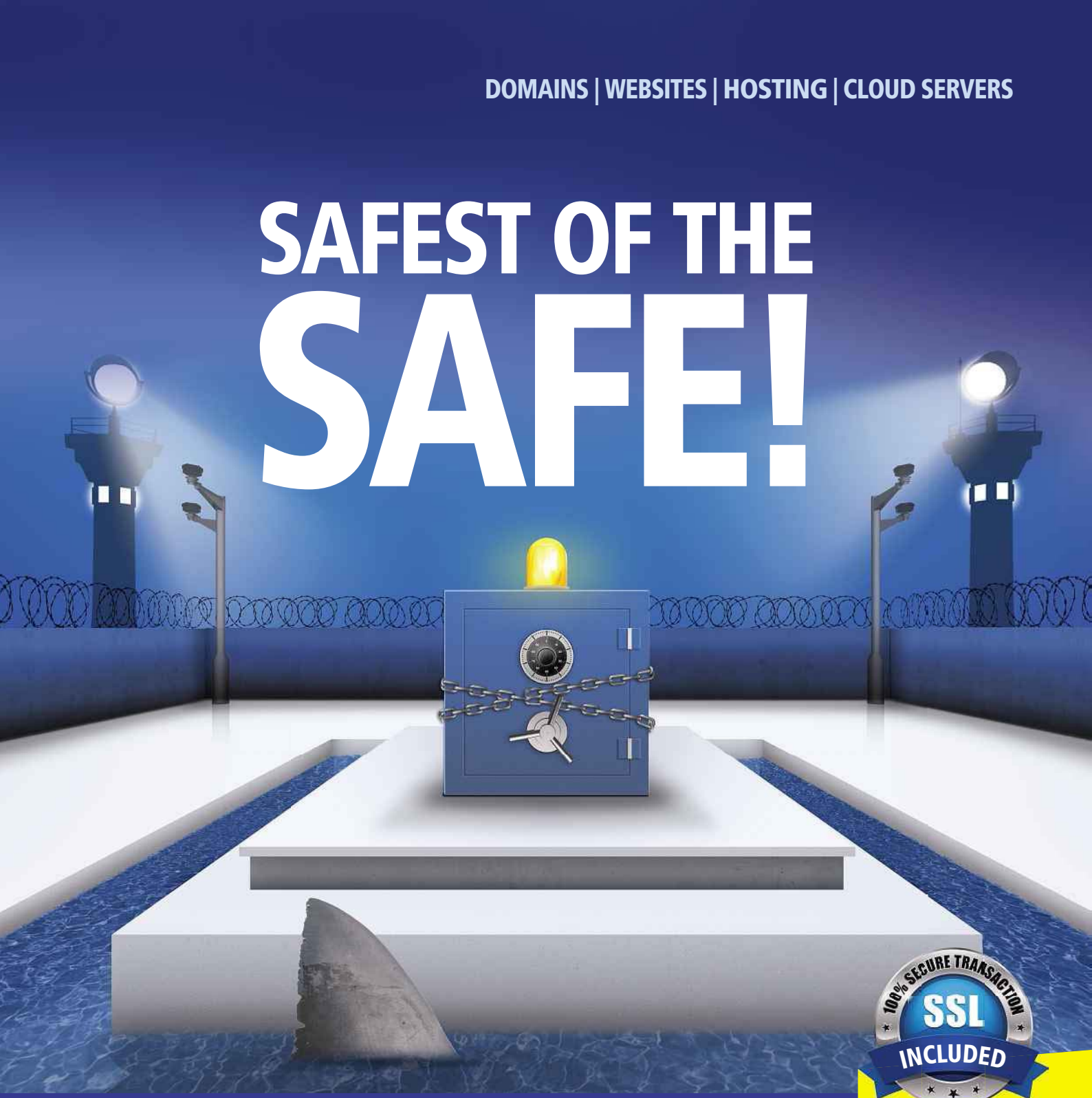

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