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Issue 402

27 July - 9 August 2016

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HACK ANYTHING ON ANY SITE

The 31 best changes you can make to....

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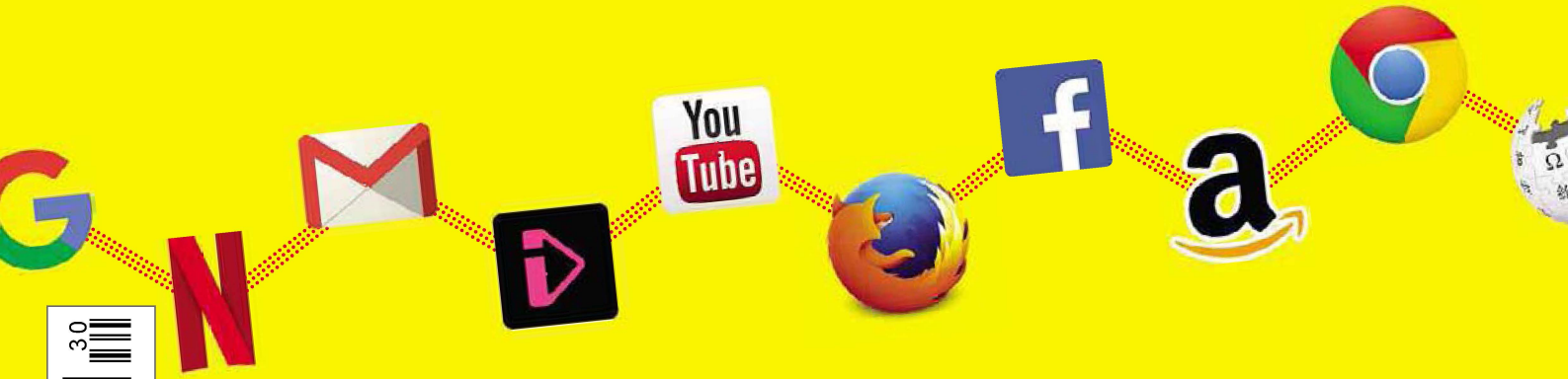

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THE 'SAFE' SITES YOU MUST NEVER DOWNLOAD FROM

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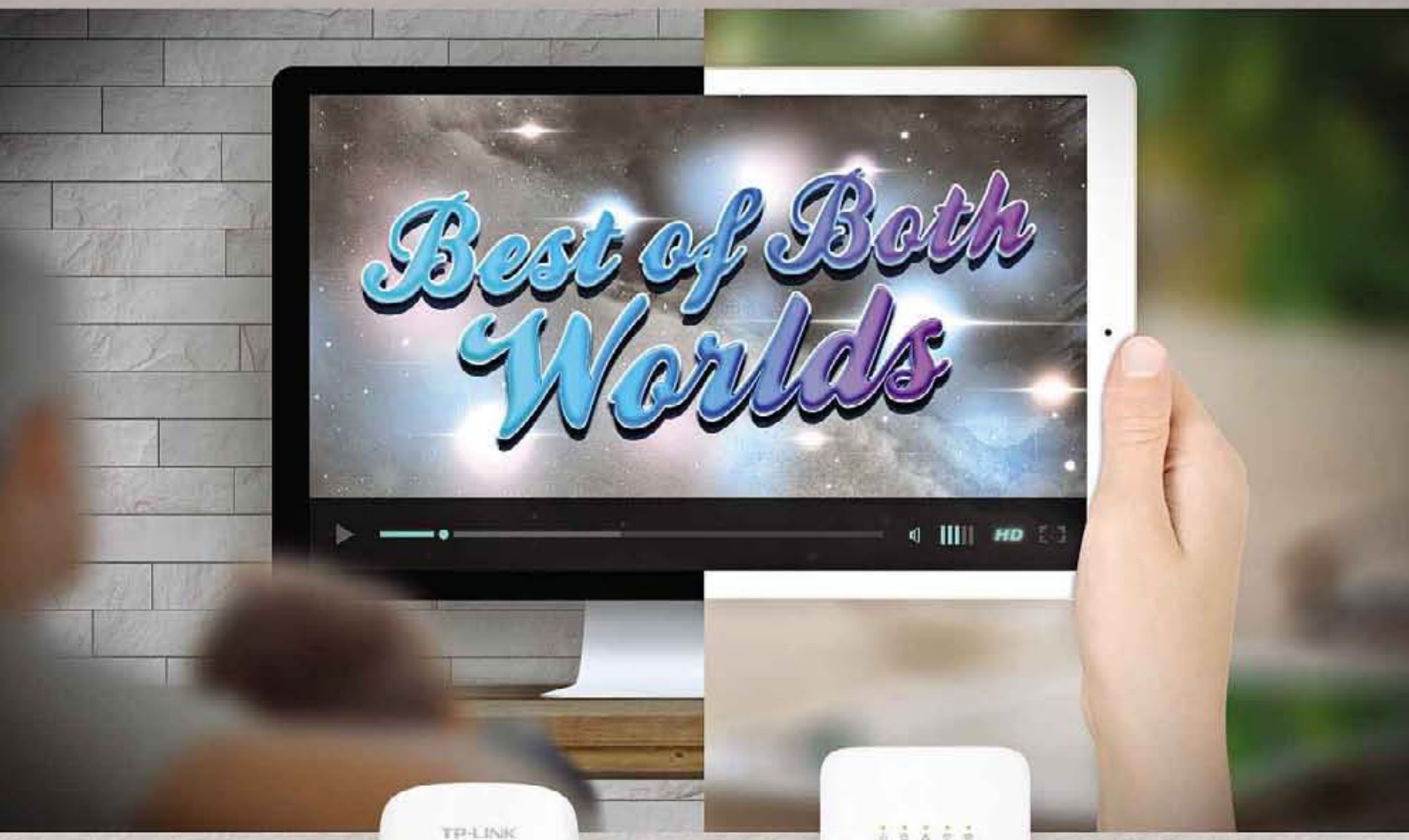

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Hack your way to happiness

Not all hackers are evil cybercriminals or bored teenagers – some have a sense of humour. For example, MI6's Operation Cupcake in 2011 replaced bomb-making instructions in an online al-Qaeda magazine with a recipe for cupcakes; and a hack from a year earlier on an EU presidency site swapped a profile photo of the Spanish prime minister with one of Mr Bean.

You won't find any advice in this issue's cover feature (page 38) about causing internet mischief, but you will discover 31 ways to 'hack' and improve your favourite sites. These include adding new features to YouTube, deleting things that annoy you and making pages easier to browse. Only you will be able to see the changes you apply, so you won't get in trouble!

We look at a nastier breed of hackers on page 36, where we examine the growing threat of RATs – Remote-access Trojans that use your PC's webcam and microphone to spy on you. They've even got Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg running scared!

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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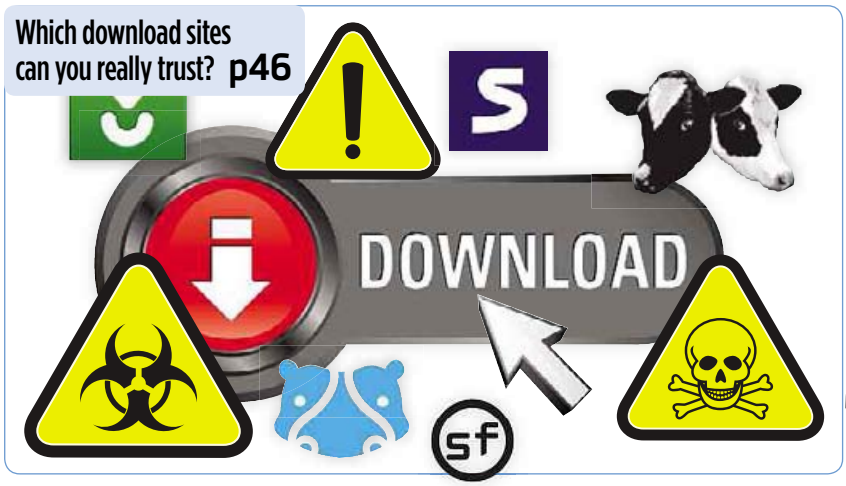

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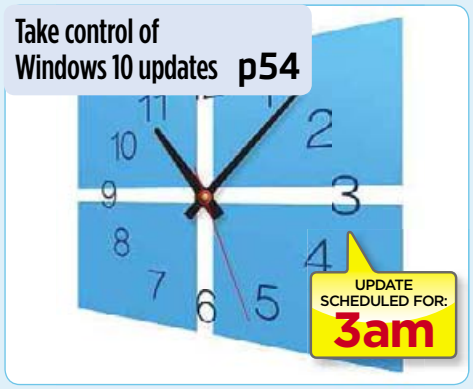

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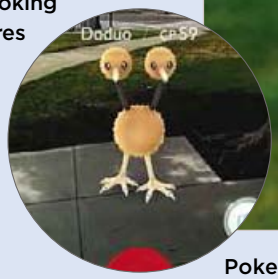
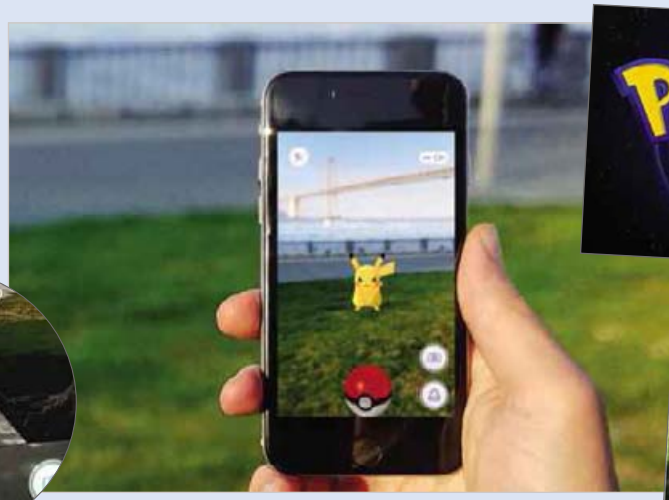
What's New Online

Scour the streets to catch Pokémon

You'd have to go back to 1989 to see a handheld gaming craze as popular as the one we're witnessing right now. But Nintendo, which shifted millions of Game Boys on the back of Tetris, has pulled off a masterstroke yet again with Pokémon Go, which involves players scouring the streets looking to catch quirky creatures running around in the real world.

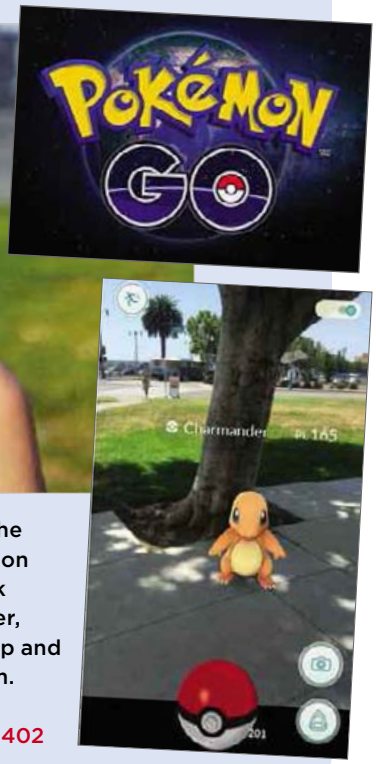


The free augmented-reality game swept across the US, Australia and Germany when it launched in early July and it's now arrived on our shores, allowing you to use your phone's GPS signal to find as many wild Pokémon as you can. By training your creatures and putting them into battle against other users, you can gain control over the numerous PokeGyms in your area.



Pokémon Go has turned social gaming on its head by getting players out and about, and encouraging visits to landmarks – or Pokestops – to collect free in-game items. Indeed, Pokémon Go has already become so popular that players are reportedly spending more time on the app than on Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram.

bit.ly/pokemon402



Master OK Google's commands

ok-google.io

If you can't see the point of Google's voice assistant OK Google, then take a look at the list of commands at the new OK Google website. It gives you an exhaustive set of examples that range from the time, weather and alarms to messaging, social apps and sports. By familiarising yourself with each one, you'll not only come to appreciate the impressive extent of OK Google's capabilities, but gain better control of your device. You can search the list for specific commands and hover over the words in grey boxes to see even more possibilities.

Use even larger GIFs on Twitter

www.twitter.com

Twitter is now letting users upload GIFs up to 15MB in size – three times the previous 5MB limit – which is sure to please fans of the animated images. It quietly announced the news in an FAQ that makes clear the feature is only available to users accessing Twitter via a browser – the 5MB limit remains in place if you are using the social network on your phone or tablet.

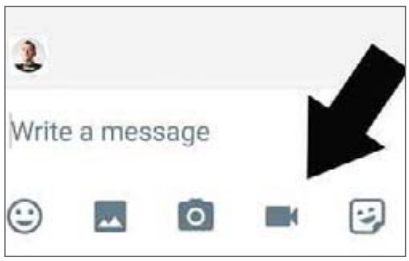
Even so, the expansion suggests that other barriers may also be lifted and it's possible that the 5MB limit for photos could removed at some point soon, too. Certainly, Twitter has made several significant changes recently, most notably in removing photos from its 140-character limit. The service has also just become the first social platform to support all 72 of Unicode's newest batch of emoji.

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

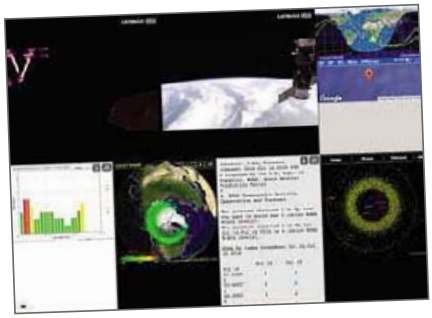
Send video messages in Hangouts

hangouts.google.com

Two years after the iOS app got the feature, Google Hangouts is finally letting you send video messages from your Android device. Provided you have version 11 of the app installed, you can now tap the video camera icon to record a short clip and send it to a friend. Oddly, the recipient needs to use a separate app to play the video.



Explore the fine details of space



spacedashboard.com

Want to replicate the dizzying feel of being right there in NASA's mission control room? Launch this dashboard and a host of live feeds will fill your browser with an array of space-related goodies. As well as being able to discover the current whereabouts of the International Space Station and seeing views of space and Earth via its cameras, you can check out the latest space weather, monitor where you can enjoy the Northern Lights and scroll down to absorb the current data from the Deep Space Network.

Relive the days of the typewriter

uniqcode.com/typewriter

There was a time when any professional-looking document had to be composed on a clunky manual typewriter. Although computers now rule the roost, there is still much nostalgia for those retro machines. This browser-based simulation lets you relive the 'joys' of hammering those keys, not only replicating the look and feel of a typewriter but the sound, too. The instructions alone show how much we take for granted today (such as a Delete key) but it's a lot of fun, especially since you can set the levels of brokenness and ribbon ink for that authentically wonky look.

Map the rise and fall of empires

www.runningreality.org

Empires grow, flourish, fail and fall, and if you want to see just how imperialism has changed the world, it's worth taking a look at this interactive map. Select dates using the slider or buttons to instantly see the political landscape of years gone by; or click a country, region or town to discover some stats. It's very much a work in progress, but visitors are invited to help improve the map.

5 TO FOLLOW ON TWITTER

@skyUK
Sky Q will start broadcasting 4K sports and movies from August

@facespics
This account is obsessed with finding faces in everyday objects

@Brilliant_Ads
Unearthing some of the strangest and funniest adverts around

@avast_antivirus
Follow the new owner of AVG for security news and advice

@Olympics
Count down to Rio with this official Olympic Games feed

Test the size of your vocabulary

bit.ly/vocab402

Said to be based on academic research, this quiz tests the breadth of your vocabulary by asking 50 increasingly difficult multiple-choice questions based on synonyms and antonyms, giving you a score you can share – and brag about – at the end.

Make Skype web calls using Linux

web.skype.com

Skype is introducing a new Linux Skype client for the open-source operating system, as well as an entirely web-based, Chrome-only offering. Skype is also releasing a version for Chromebooks.

Learn to speak Manx online

www.saysomethingin.com/manx

Only a small proportion of the 84,500 people who live on the Isle of Man actually converse in Manx but the language is being revived. You can learn to speak it online, through this series of free lessons and word games.

Need to Know

Researchers discover possible cure for ransomware

What happened?

Ransomware is one of the nastiest security threats on the web, but researchers in Florida believe they have devised a way to stop such attacks.

When ransomware infects a PC, it encrypts the user's personal files, making them inaccessible. Hackers then demand money – often hundreds of pounds in Bitcoin – to unlock the files, sometimes threatening to delete them if the user doesn't comply quickly. Ransomware attacks have doubled over the past year, according to the FBI, and security firm ESET has confirmed that this type of attack makes up a third of all hacks in the UK, with criminals targeting individuals as well as businesses, hospitals and universities.

Now researchers at the University of Florida believe they have found a solution: an "early-warning system" that alerts people when it detects that their PC is infected, and halts the encryption process. The software, called CryptoDrop, spots the malware soon after it activates, so the victim shouldn't lose more than a handful of files and won't be forced to pay the ransom.

During the research (which you can read at bit.ly/cure402), CryptoDrop caught all 492 ransomware samples it encountered, including notorious strains such as CryptoLocker, CTB-Locker and TeslaCrypt, losing just 10 files on average each time. The software is still being tested, and the researchers are looking for a commercial partner to help them bring it to market. They stressed that it's no replacement for antivirus software, but rather a safety net in case your security suite fails to block ransomware.

TeslaCrypt is one of the most prevalent types of ransomware, but it's no match for CryptoDrop

As the research was published, yet another ransomware strain was hitting PCs. The Stampado malware gives victims 96 hours to pay a ransom before it starts deleting random files every six hours. This ransomware is particularly alarming because it doesn't need administrator rights to do its dirty work, and hackers can buy it online for only $50 (£38), leading to fears that it could become widely used.

How will it affect you?

Don't hold your breath waiting for CryptoDrop to become available to the public. Although any added protection is welcome, it could be a while coming, and hackers will always find a way around any tool.

The best way to battle ransomware is to follow the same advice you've been hearing for years. Keep your PC and software up to date to ensure hackers can't take advantage of old flaws. Run antivirus software to prevent malware infection, and be wary of what you click and download. If you don't trust it, don't do it.

That's the best way to avoid malware of any sort, including ransomware. But sometimes hackers trick us, or we make mistakes, and malicious software is able to slip through our defences. To protect yourself against this happening, keep your PC backed up. If you have a copy of your most important files saved elsewhere, you won't need to pay a ransom to regain access to them.

And, as always, share this advice with your friends and family. Not everyone is aware of such threats, and helping them avoid infection now is much easier than trying to deal with the problem later.

What do we think?

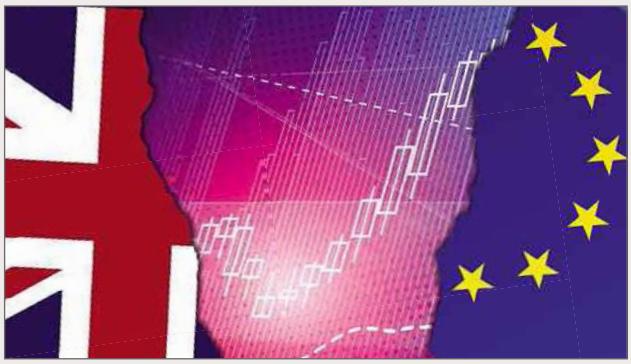
Bravo to the researchers for coming up with a creative solution. Rather than looking for malware, CryptoDrop looks for changes made to files and, if it recognises a pattern as the work of ransomware, halts it in its tracks.

Malware writers are inventive, though, which means security researchers need to be just as clever, if not more so. Here's hoping the Florida team finds a partner soon and that the software is affordable enough that we can all use it.

In the meantime, the tried and tested methods are the most effective at keeping us safe, provided we carry them out regularly. How many times have we been told to update our PCs, run antivirus software and back up our files? And how often have we put it off? Imagine the pain of losing all your family photos or business documents, and then take the time to protect them. It could save you a fortune, and the fewer of us pay the ransom, the less lucrative such attacks will become, hopefully discouraging them in the long term.

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

Brexit increases the price of computers



What happened?

The cost of computers, tablets and smartphones could be about to increase in the UK in the wake of the EU referendum result. Brexit has already led to a host of technology companies hiking their prices or warning that they may do so soon.

Dell confirmed that it would increase its prices, with reports suggesting that its products would cost 10% more. Lenovo and HP have also said they will raise prices by 10%, while smartphone maker OnePlus said its latest model would cost £20 more because of Brexit – a 6.5% rise.

The increases are largely due to the fact that technology manufacturers purchase components in US dollars – and the beating that the pound has taken after Brexit means they're paying relatively more to make hardware. These costs are being passed on to consumers.

How will it affect you?

If you need a new PC, Brexit may have taken money out of your wallet, because prices are set to rise by as much as 10%. It's not clear exactly when the rises will take place, because most hardware manufacturers will still have a stockpile of finished products and components, but if you're looking for a new laptop or other gadget, it may be worth buying now. Alternatively, if you're feeling optimistic, you can wait out the pound's nosedive to see if the situation improves.

What do we think?

Hardware manufacturers work to tight margins – as little as 5% – and don't make much profit from PCs. With that in mind, price rises are reasonable given the pound's fall. It's fair to assume, however, that the pound's weakness won't affect these companies until they have used up their existing stock – and yet they are already complaining about higher costs just weeks after the referendum. If prices don't come down when the pound recovers, it'll be clear that companies are using Brexit as an excuse to fleece consumers.

Windows 10 to offer monthly subscription

What happened?

Microsoft is preparing to offer a subscription version of Windows 10 to businesses, paving the way for users to pay for the operating system through rolling monthly or annual fees. The company has already been slowly shifting to the 'software-as-a-service' model with Office 365, which includes Word, Excel and other productivity tools. Rather than pay a one-off fee for the software, users pay a monthly fee, with new features arriving as and when they're ready.

Now Microsoft is offering the same scheme for Windows with Windows 10 Enterprise E3, a business-only product that costs $7 (£5.25) a month.

How will it affect you?

There's no change for home users yet. We'll continue to buy our Microsoft operating systems the old-fashioned way, getting a new edition when we buy a new PC, and upgrading as and when Microsoft rolls out a new version.

In general, if your PC is up to date, you'll get the next version free, just as Microsoft gave Windows 7 and 8 users a free upgrade to 10 for a year. It's not clear if Microsoft will eventually start charging for such upgrades, or asking for a few pounds a month to use Windows, but it's easy to see the financial benefits for the company.

What do we think?

Paying a subscription has its advantages, but not always for users. Many of us keep an old laptop after we've upgraded in case we need a spare, for example. This would be difficult if Windows simply stopped working on older devices.

The subscription model works well for businesses, although they can still buy Windows outright if they prefer. The fact that Microsoft offers other services as subscriptions, however, suggests that the company likes the boost its revenues get from regular fees, so we wouldn't be surprised if it starts offering Windows 10 to home users in this way.

Microsoft claims “major victory for privacy”

What happened?

An appeals court ruled that the US government can’t force Microsoft to hand over emails that are stored outside the country. The ruling relates to a specific drugs investigation, during which US authorities requested that the technology company surrender data stored in Ireland. In 2014, a judge ruled that Microsoft would have to grant access to the emails, prompting Microsoft to launch and win an appeal.

Microsoft had previously argued that forcing the company to hand over data stored overseas would lead to a “global free-for-all”, with countries outside the US applying their own search warrants to data centres inside the US. This raised concerns not only within Microsoft but also with privacy advocate groups.

Microsoft has held up the ruling as a “major victory for the protection of people’s privacy rights under their own laws rather than the reach of foreign governments”. According to the BBC (bit.ly/microsoft402), the US Department of Justice (DoJ) said it was disappointed by the ruling, arguing that international cloud storage provides a safe haven for criminals, and is considering its next move.

How will it affect you?

If you’re concerned about major technology companies such as Microsoft, Google and Facebook sharing your personal data with law-enforcement agencies, this court case does at least suggest that they are not doing so willingly. When we hand over so much of our digital information to these companies, it’s good to know they’re making an effort to protect it from third parties.

Having said that, the ruling applies only to data requests from within the US. Here in the UK we have the Investigatory Powers Bill, better known as the Snooper’s Charter, to worry about. This was passed by the House of Commons in March and is being debated in the House of Lords, which will continue into the autumn.

What do we think?

Privacy is a constant source of concern for internet users, and we’re sure this won’t be the last case of its kind, as government agencies across the world continue to demand access to our personal data. This ruling suggests that the US courts are on the side of individuals rather than governments, however, which is reassuring. In the words of Myles Jackman, the legal director of digital-rights organisation Open Rights Group (www.openrightsgroup.org): “US law enforcement agencies must respect European citizens’ digital privacy rights and the protection of their personal data.”

FIRST LOOK

Nest Cam Outdoor

nest.com/uk

External security cameras aren’t usually the prettiest objects around, and tend to look more suitable for protecting warehouse stock than your home. In fact, many are designed to look intimidating rather than blend in tastefully. While they may help keep your house safe, you could argue that they’re committing a crime against the appearance of your home.

Nest has bucked this trend with an exterior security camera you might actually like to have on your home. Its new Nest Cam Outdoor camera certainly looks like nothing else we’ve seen for external use. It’s an egg-like device with a magnetic fixing. Simply screw the base plate to the wall of your home, preferably somewhere out of reach. The camera then grips the base plate firmly, and is strong enough not to be dislodged by birds or bad weather. A built-in microphone and speaker allow you to talk to a delivery driver if you’re not at home, or simply shout at next door’s cat when it’s doing its business in your rhododendrons.

If you’re happy just to receive email alerts when the camera detects movement, along with live video streaming to your phone, buy the Nest Cam Outdoor and you’re good to go. If you also want a cloud-based archive of footage, you’ll have to sign up to the Nest Aware service for £80 a year, with another £40 for each additional camera. We think this is a little steep, but you can sign up month by month for £8, which means you can use it during your big annual holiday without having to pay all year.

The new Nest Cam Outdoor won’t be available until the end of the year, as the company needs to make the power cables comply with European regulations. It should cost around the same as the indoor version, which is £159, but that can’t be confirmed at present due to currency fluctuations.

WHAT'S THE RUMOUR

Is file-hosting service Megaupload returning?

Controversial tech entrepreneur Kim Dotcom intends to relaunch his content-sharing platform, Megaupload, next year, hinting that it will include elements of Bitcoin. The service, which launched in 2005, was closed by the US Department of Justice in 2012 amid copyright-infringement claims.

The new service will offer 100GB of free cloud storage, and no limits on data transfer, Dotcom said.

Megaupload 2 will also let users sync files across all devices and encrypt them in transit. Dotcom said: "Megaupload comes back on 20 January 2017, the fifth anniversary of the [Department of Justice] raid. It will be better than the original and it will feel like home.

"I can tell you that Megaupload and Bitcoin had sex. There is a pregnancy and I have a feeling that the baby will be such a joy."

Dotcom, who lives in New Zealand, is fighting a legal battle against extradition to the US, where he and colleagues face criminal charges including copyright infringement, money laundering and racketeering. Dotcom started a new service, Mega, in January 2013 but stepped down as director in September of that year, saying he no longer trusted the site after what he claimed was an investors' hostile takeover.

He expects the new site to launch with 100 million users, saying "most Megaupload accounts" will be reinstated with Premium-tier privileges at launch.

LIKELIHOOD RATING

✓✓✓✓✓

It could be third-time lucky for the tech maverick, following the closure of the original Megaupload and the 'hostile takeover' of Mega. By ensuring that none of the new site's servers are hosted in the US this time, it sounds as if Mr Dotcom is taking no chances.

What's new on Kickstarter

Our favourite new project on the crowdfunding site

Isolate

bit.ly/isolate402 | **From £23**

Don't let noisy neighbours, construction work or a snoring partner ruin your life – get a pair of Isolate ear plugs and enjoy some peace and quiet. These micro ear protectors differ from traditional plugs in that they block all sound, including the low, muffled bass frequencies that can leave you feeling disconnected, or as if you're underwater. Dense material suspended in soft memory foam blocks noise without any electronics. Isolate is designed to last forever, and has replaceable tips. The team hopes to raise £25,000 by 14 August.

WEBOMETER

WE LIKE...

Google reveals gender-equal emoji

Google has unveiled a series of new emoji that better embrace the diversity of its users. These span 11 new professions, including teacher, doctor and chef, and are available in both male and female versions, and across all skin colours.

Twitter removes extremist tweets

Twitter acted impressively quickly to remove tweets praising the Nice terrorist attack, which killed at least 80 people in July. Watchdog group the Counter Extremism Project said Twitter had "moved with swiftness we have not seen before".

WE DON'T LIKE...

Hackers bring down Pokémon Go

Pokémon Go suffered two major server crashes in the first few days of its UK release. Hackers took credit for the first, which left millions of players unable to access the hugely popular augmented-reality app.

Autopilot causes another Tesla car crash

A second self-driving Tesla car was involved in a crash, after it swerved and hit wooden rails next to a two-lane mountain road. Tesla admitted that the vehicle's Autopilot mode was active at the time of the accident.

Stay Safe Online

News about the latest threats and advice from security experts

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

Windows security flaw patched – after 20 years!

A security flaw in Windows has been discovered that dates back about 20 years. The source of the flaw originates in Windows Print Spooler – part of the operating system's software that deals with the printing process. The problem is that the spooler doesn't bother to verify whether a printer's drivers are legitimate when it's connected to a PC, which allows a hacker to install their own malicious drivers onto the computer without Windows noticing. Not only that, but malware can infect any computers on the network and keep infecting machines as they connect to the hacked printer.

Once the flaw was detected, by a security company called Vectra Networks, Microsoft was very quick to supply a patch, which you can download from bit.ly/patch402. This means that this ancient bug can finally be squashed – as long as you're using Windows Vista or later. The only likely weak spot is Windows XP, which around 10% of computers are still using, because it isn't covered by the patch. bit.ly/vectra402

Fake Pokémon app lets hackers access your phone

A malicious app masquerading as Pokémon Go could give hackers full access to victims' phones, security researchers have discovered. As we explain on page 6, Pokémon Go is a new augmented-reality game that lets players 'catch' Pokémon based on their physical location.

Experts from cybersecurity company Proofpoint discovered a Pokémon Go APK (Android installation file) that contained the DroidJack remote-access kit. The staggered release of Pokémon Go across the world (some countries got the game earlier than others) has led to many impatient users 'sideloading' unofficial versions of the app on their phones, putting them at risk of malware infection.

"Installing apps from third-party sources, other than officially vetted and sanctioned app stores, is never advisable," wrote Proofpoint in a blog post. "Cybercriminals take advantage of the popularity of applications such as Pokémon Go to trick users into installing malware. Just because you can get the latest software on your device does not mean that you should." bit.ly/proofpoint402

Security Helpdesk | Your questions answered by security specialists

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT: Richard Cassidy, cyber-security evangelist at Alert Logic (www.alertlogic.com)

ALERT LOGIC

Q Does the ransomware 'cure' developed by University of Florida researchers (see news story on page 8) mean we will soon be able to eliminate the threat?

Frank Boffin, Facebook

A That ransomware is a global problem, and has reached epidemic levels, is shown by the many high-profile cases where ransom payments have been made. The security industry is constantly striving to detect and prevent ransomware, and come up with new and effective ways to protect users.

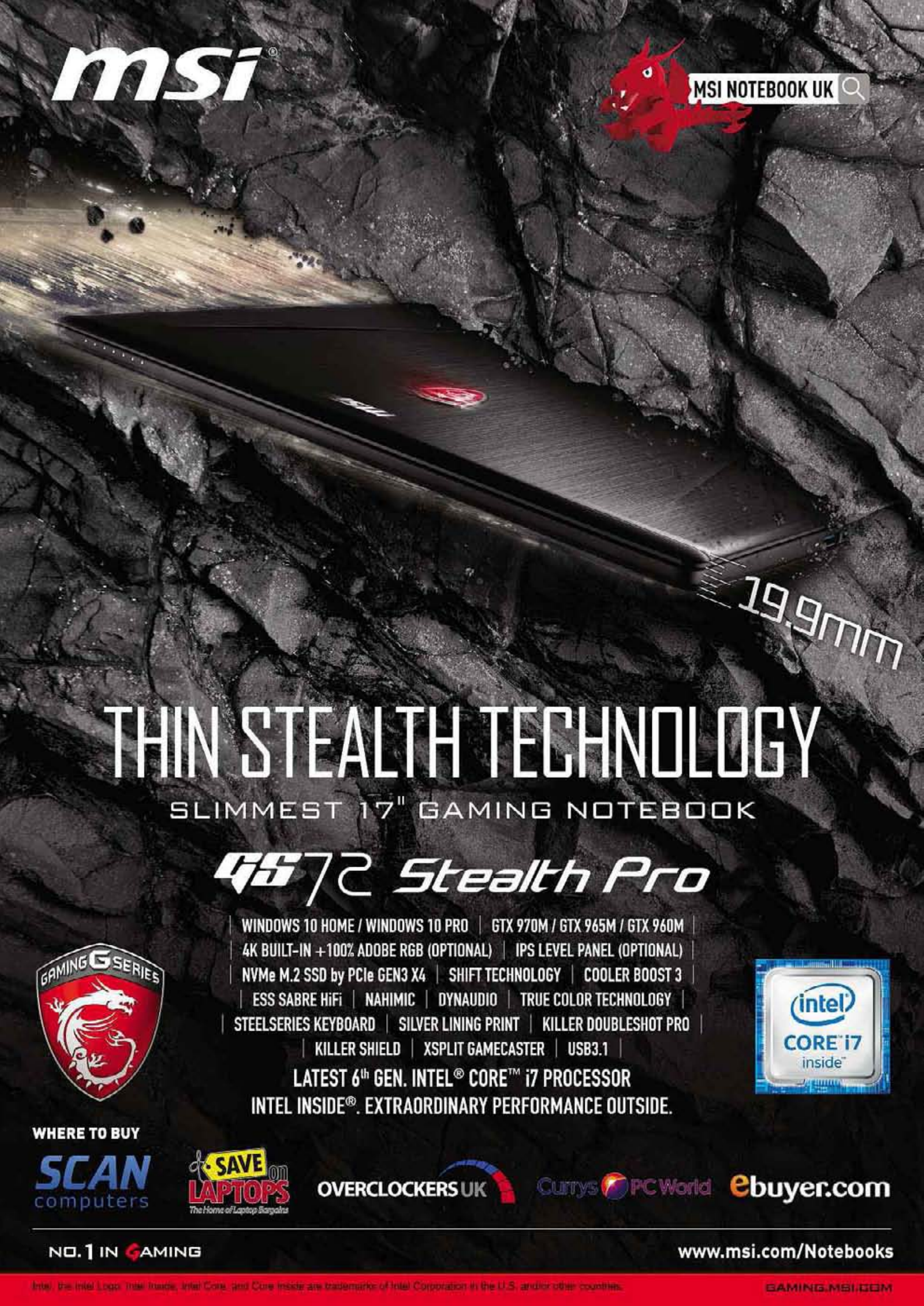
Although the method discovered by researchers at the University of Florida presents a novel way in which to detect and contain ransomware, it doesn't serve as the 'silver bullet' for ransomware in general. There are new variants of ransomware being written all the time and malware writers will do everything in their power to dissect and understand how this new anti-ransomware technology operates. They will create versions that attempt to either bypass detection or search more effectively for sensitive files to encrypt.

> "The ransomware 'cure' discovered by researchers doesn't serve as the 'silver bullet' for preventing the threat"

Even if the cybercriminals' efforts produce ransomware that can only encrypt a few files, those affected files may still be of critical importance. And the hackers could also develop ransomware that's more difficult to detect.

However, it should be remembered that ransomware is mostly spread through social-engineering, infecting our PCs and other devices via phishing emails and malicious links embedded in documents.

If users were better educated about attacks and were more vigilant with the communications they receive and the sites they visit, we'd get much further with preventing ransomware.


msi
MSI NOTEBOOK UK
19.9mm
THIN STEALTH TECHNOLOGY
SLIMMEST 17" GAMING NOTEBOOK
GS72 Stealth Pro
WINDOWS 10 HOME / WINDOWS 10 PRO | GTX 970M / GTX 965M / GTX 960M
4K BUILT-IN +100% ADOBE RGB (OPTIONAL) | IPS LEVEL PANEL (OPTIONAL)
NVMe M.2 SSD by PCIe GEN3 X4 | SHIFT TECHNOLOGY | COOLER BOOST 3
ESS SABRE HiFi | NAHIMIC | DYNAUDIO | TRUE COLOR TECHNOLOGY
STEELSERIES KEYBOARD | SILVER LINING PRINT | KILLER DOUBLESHOT PRO
KILLER SHIELD | XSPLIT GAMECASTER | USB3.1
GAMING G SERIES
intel CORE i7 inside
LATEST 6th GEN. INTEL® CORE™ i7 PROCESSOR
INTEL INSIDE®. EXTRAORDINARY PERFORMANCE OUTSIDE.
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GAMING.MSI.COM

Best New Websites

Site of the Fortnight

FAMILY

RELAUNCH

Families

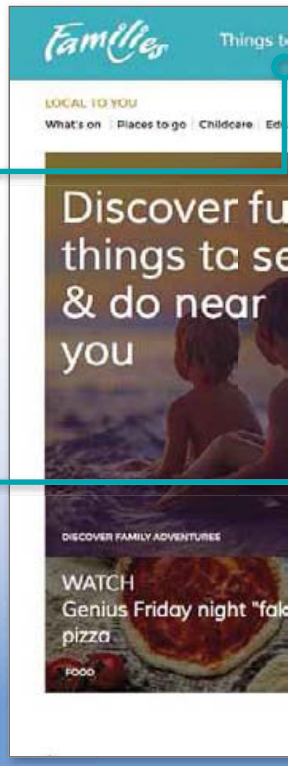
www.familiesonline.co.uk

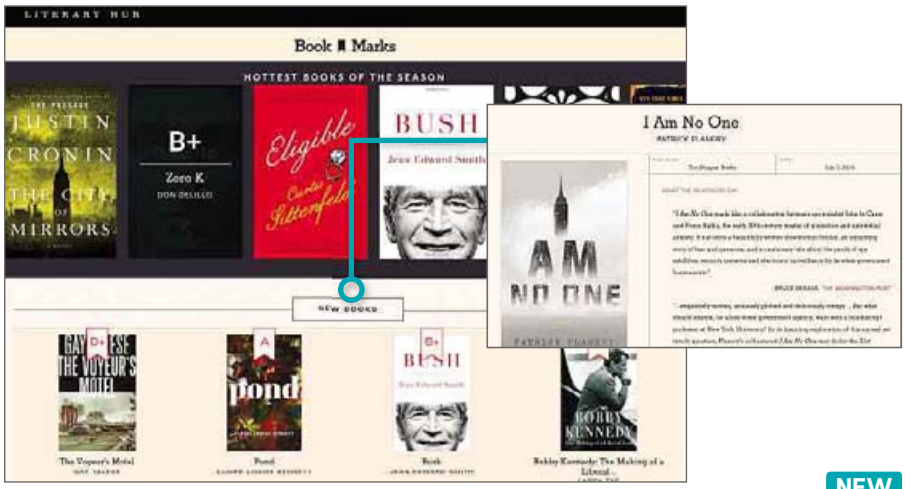
This fantastic website – previously called Mums in the Know – is an invaluable resource for entertaining bored children in the summer holidays. As well as browsing general-interest content including kid-friendly recipes, parenting hacks and reviews of clothes and apps, you can select your local area to discover great things to see and do nearby. The site is brimming with ideas and it's very easy to navigate, thanks to clear menus and signposting. And although Families doesn't offer much in the way of interaction – the chat areas aren't very busy – it does let you list your own events for free and enter regular competitions.

Our rating ★★★★★

THINGS TO DO
You can find oodles of inspiration for affordable, child-friendly days out

FOOD
Many of the recipes are accompanied by informative, easy-to-follow videos





NEW

BOOKS

Book Marks

lithub.com/bookmarks

Literary Hub has launched this book-review aggregator to help you decide what to read next. It collects the opinions of professional critics by including extracts from reviews accompanied by an overall grade. To be listed, a book must have attracted at least three reviews from sources including *The Guardian* and the *Washington Post*. This means many books – especially British ones – will inevitably be overlooked, but you can click to read the full reviews and, although you can't contribute to the score, you can add your own comments. With a speedy search engine, lots of genres and round-ups of most-reviewed and best-rated books, you're sure to discover some gems.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

ENVIRONMENT

Neat Streets

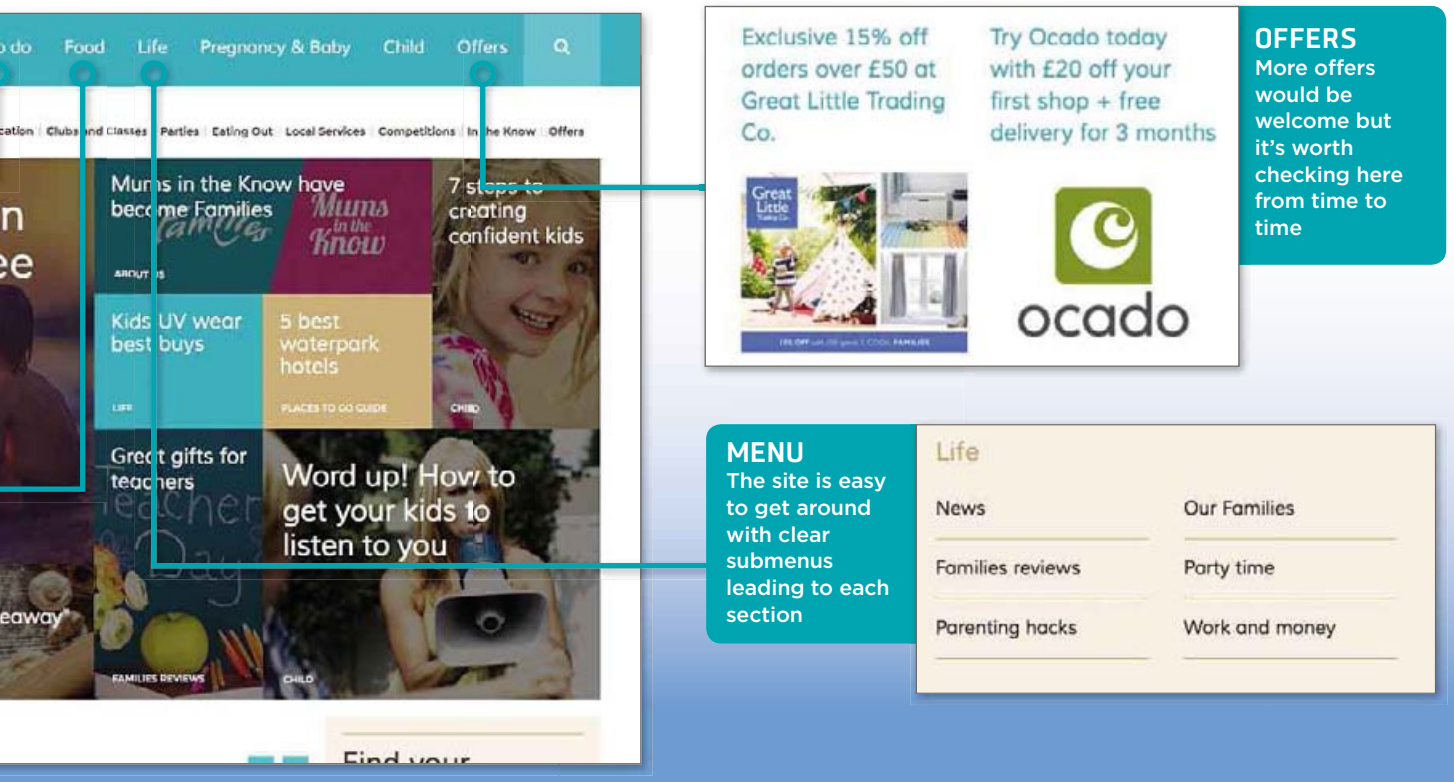
neatstreets.co

Litter costs local authorities £850m each year, but the amount being dropped hasn't fallen since 2004. To combat the problem, environmental charity Hubbub has created Neat Streets, which lists anti-litter campaigns around the world to inspire councils and businesses to share their expertise. The site currently has details of 26 projects and lets you see how much they cost, browse available resources and vote for your favourites. It's interesting to learn how other countries deal with their litter problems: check out the Hey Tosser campaign in New South Wales.

Our rating ★★★★☆

Reviews by David Crookes

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



NEW

MUSIC

Brain.fm

www.brain.fm

Brain.fm is a beautifully designed music website, backed by scientists, which aims to find you tunes to help you relax or concentrate. It asks a series of quick questions before using artificial intelligence to produce your perfect soundtrack. Using your feedback, it learns what does and doesn't work, tweaking its selection to become more effective. To find out more, it's worth reading the how-to guides and scientific explanations but you'll need a good pair of headphones to get the best results. The site hopes to entice you beyond its seven free sessions to a monthly subscription.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

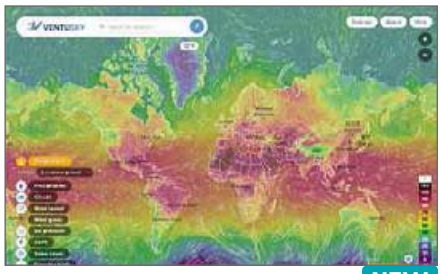
CRIME

iStreetWatch

www.istreetwatch.co.uk

In the wake of the Brexit result, there has been an alarming rise in the number of racially motivated hate crimes. This website lets people who have witnessed or experienced harassment on Britain's streets submit reports using a simple form. The incident is then plotted on a map for others to see, with the various accounts available to read on the timeline page. Although it's not intended to be a substitute for informing the police, it serves as a depressing reminder of the problems many people face. You can pledge to help end street harassment via the site, too.

Our rating ★★★★☆



NEW

WEATHER

VentuSky

www.ventusky.com

This impressive weather site from Czech meteorological company InMeteo blows away many of its rivals. It lets you view global weather conditions on a colourful, animated map, and see at a glance how the various elements depend on one another. By clicking the various layers, you can isolate the data, studying temperature forecasts, wind direction, precipitation levels, snow cover and more. You can also change the forecast time, and move back and forth to earlier or later days. There are lots of settings to play with, which can be adjusted to suit your computer's capabilities.

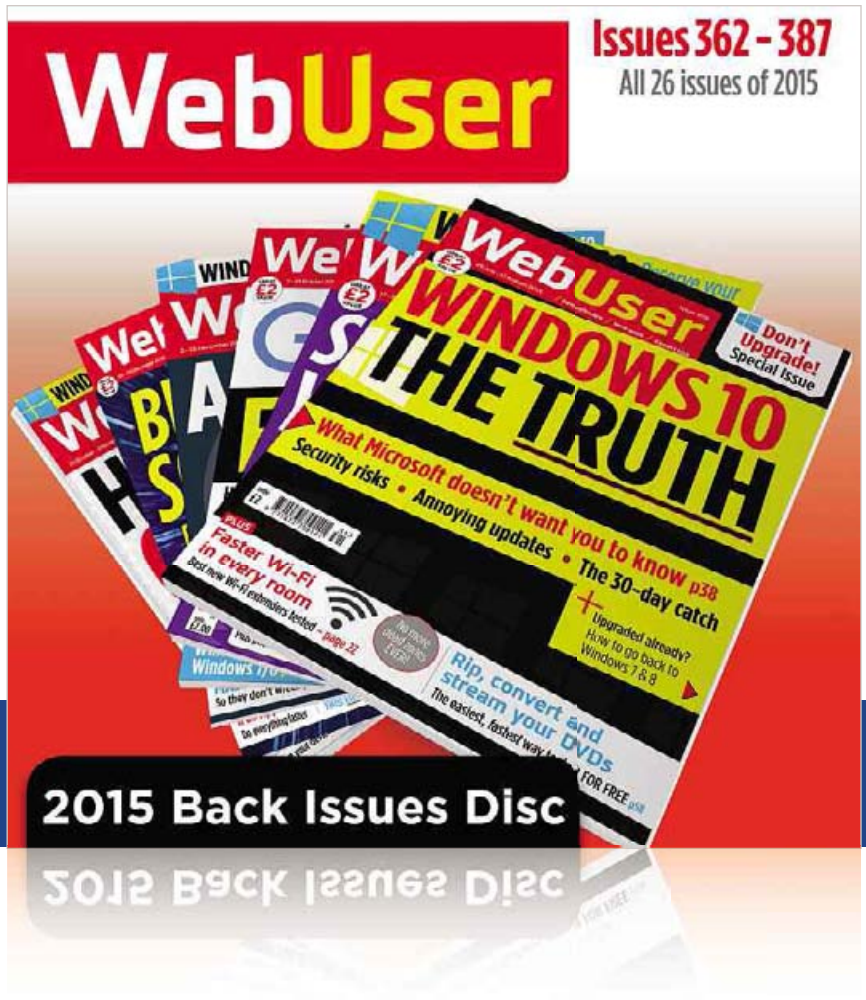
Our rating ★★★★☆

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

WebUser

Q How can I dual-boot Windows 10 with Windows 7 to get the best of both worlds?

A Page 48, Issue 381



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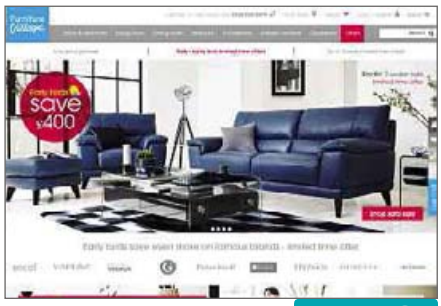
or search for 'webuser disc' on Amazon

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



RELAUNCH

SHOPPING

Furniture Village

www.furniturevillage.co.uk

The new site for Furniture Village packs away its tired old offering in favour of a clean, modern and mobile-friendly design. The first thing you see is a carousel which, despite moving at a dizzying pace, gives you a good flavour of what's on offer. But the main action is further down, with a selection of sofas to browse, well-shot images that lead to various departments and a section for recently viewed products. The company has used feedback from Feefo to filter and order product listings, and there's now a live chat facility. Its product pages clearly show delivery times and we like the 360-degree views and videos.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

PARKING

Driveway Calculator

calculator.spacehopper.com

If you've got some spare space outside your house, you could turn it into extra cash using this site from car-parking specialist Spacehopper. Just enter your postcode, the walking time to your nearest train station, whether your parking space is in a garage and (amusingly) if you're prepared to make the driver a cup of tea, to find out how much you could earn per day. You then sign up with Spacehopper to create a listing on its main site. Driveway Calculator is currently limited to London and its commuter belt (within 50 miles of the capital), but will be expanded nationwide soon.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

NEW

TRAVEL

Most New Zealand

www.mostnewzealand.com

Conservationist Shaun Lee has produced an honest homage to his New Zealand homeland that takes the concept of tourism sites to a fresh level. In looking at the good and bad of the country's environment, he presents facts such as "New Zealand has the most endangered birds" and uses stunning videos, audio, text descriptions, facts and context to back them up. You can jump from one item to the next via the striking, black-and-white thumbnails on the homepage or by using the back and forth buttons. You can also find links to various sanctuaries, maps, zoos and charities, and read top fives and random facts.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

FLIGHTS

Wingly

en.wingly.io

If you're looking forward to a holiday but dreading the prospect of commercial plane travel, this site lets you bypass the mob by sharing the cost of a scheduled private flight with a pilot. Not only is it easy to use – just enter your start and end points in its search function – but it's also surprisingly inexpensive. We found a 90-minute flight on a three-seater plane from Oxford to Chester for £64, and while UK choices are currently limited, it also lists trips across Europe. Each flight shows details of the pilot and you can pay via credit card or PayPal. We like that you can view all current routes on a map and create flight alerts to save repeatedly checking availability.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

LEISURE

The Brit Crowd

britcrowd.com

Created by former BBC journalist Emily Wren, this site is a tribute to British culture and things to see and do within these fair isles. Wren bristles with enthusiasm for life – her global experiences range from trekking into the Grand Canyon to skiing down the Alps – but The Brit Crowd could do with more of her personality. In its current form, it looks dull, the headlines are uninspiring and there are only two categories: Weekend Getaways and Events. Still, it's early days and the articles on the Chelsea Flower Show and Wimbledon are well-written and informative, with stunning Instagram photos.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

Build a Better Site

Specialist tips, top tools and practical help

Top Tips of the Fortnight

Jimdo is now fully compatible with mobile browsers

Online website builder Jimdo (www.jimdo.com) has finished a long-running conversion process to ensure that its templates work properly on mobile devices. This means pages adapt dynamically to smaller screens when visited on a phone or tablet. Statistics published by Jimdo show that more than 35% of visits to Jimdo sites are from mobile users. This update is likely to increase that number of mobile visitors because search engines such as Google prefer to send people who search from mobile devices to mobile-friendly websites.

Upgrade your WordPress PHP

PHP 7, the latest version of the programming language that WordPress websites are built in, could double the speed of your site, according to WP Engine

(wpengine.com). The new version was announced in December 2015, and webhosts are just beginning to support it. To see if your site is compatible with the latest version, you can use WP Engine's PHP Compatibility Checker plugin. Search for it from the Plugins menu of your site or download it from bit.ly/php402. This will tell you whether or not you will benefit from moving your site to a hosting package that supports the updated version.

Deal of the Fortnight

UK2 (www.uk2.net) is offering 95% off .site domains, which brings them down to £1.19 for the first year.

Web-building Helpdesk

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT:
Brian Sheldon, Hosting Technical Sales at Nublue (www.nublue.co.uk)

Q I'm planning to host a website. How can I tell how much traffic I'll get and how much bandwidth I'll need?

Philip Hughes, via email

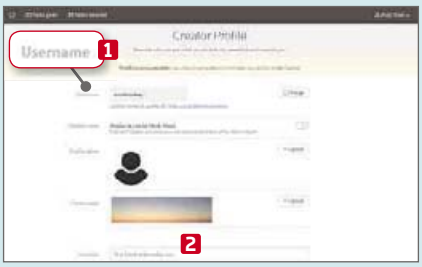
A Traffic depends on many factors, including your site's reputation, your marketing efforts and the time of year, but you can use this information to make a good estimate. It's worth checking how much traffic your competitors get, too, using sites such as www.easycounter.com.

Once you have an idea of visitor numbers, you can calculate how much bandwidth you need. First, find the average size of a page on your site. If it's 2MB, say, and you expect 3,000 people a month to view 10 pages, the calculation is 2MB x 3,000 visitors x 10 pages = 60,000MB or 60GB of bandwidth.

MINI WORKSHOP | Allow visitors to contribute financially to your website

Flattr: flattr.com | 10 mins | Any browser

Ad blockers can stop your site making money, but Flattr is developing new ways for visitors to contribute. Add a Flattr icon to your site and take a share of any money donated for your digital content



1 Sign up for the service and complete your user profile, including a username, 1 which Flattr will use to track your earnings. Visitors may want to click on your Flattr button to find out more about you and what you do, so scroll down your profile page and add some information about why visitors should support your site. 2

2 Scroll to the bottom of any page on the service's website and click the Embed link. Here you have a choice of three Flattr buttons. 1 Select the one you like best. Leave the URL option 2 at its default setting unless you need more than one button on a page, then select and copy the code 3 to the clipboard.

3 Paste the code into your site's HTML so the button appears where you want it, and upload the HTML file to your site. In WordPress, for example, you could add it to a sidebar. Scroll down to Text in the left column and drag the box into your sidebar on the right. Give it a title 1 and paste the code into the Content box. 2

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

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Product Test

We test and compare the latest products

EE Jay

Since Tesco discontinued the Hudl, we've missed the affordable Android tablet. **Nathan Spendelow** finds out whether the new EE Jay is the device to fill the gap

When Tesco launched its first Hudl in time for Christmas 2013 (reviewed in Issue 330 of *Web User* – bit.ly/wu330), it blew our minds. It was the first tablet for around £100 that was more than good enough for web browsing and other basic tablet tasks. Tesco bettered it the following year with the Hudl2 (reviewed in Issue 357 – bit.ly/webuser357) but it's no longer on sale and Tesco has yet to follow it with a third-generation model. That means Amazon is the obvious company to turn to for a budget tablet, but its £49.99 Fire tablet is disappointing, encumbered with a locked-down operating system and lacklustre performance.

This leaves the field wide open for the EE Jay. As you'd expect from a tablet from a mobile network, the Jay has 4G, so you don't have to be near a Wi-Fi network to connect it to the internet. This makes the pricing more complicated than the one-off Hudl – it's currently available for £119.99 on EE's Pay As You Go service, which includes 5GB of 4G data for 30 days, but you'll need to keep buying add-ons every month (or whenever you need them) to carry on using mobile data. If you don't, however, the Jay will still function like a regular Wi-Fi tablet.

> "At a glance, you could almost mistake the EE Jay for the iPad Mini 4, and at 322g, it's almost as light"

Alternatively, you can opt for a £18.50-per-month contract with an upfront cost of £29.99. That gets you 10GB of data each month and takes the total cost to £474 over two years. This may sound expensive, but compared to EE's contract on an iPad Mini 4 (which offers the same amount of data and starts at £31.50-per-month with an upfront cost of £150), it's more than £400 cheaper over the course of two years.

Build quality and hardware

Unlike the bulky plastic cases of the Hudl and Fire, the Jay's slimline design and metal chassis really impress, and its build quality is absolutely superb for such a cheap tablet. Its plastic cellular strips are admittedly a little lacking in style, but its gorgeous chamfered edges and aluminium case go a long way to make up for it. At a glance, you could almost mistake it for the iPad Mini 4, and at 322g, it's almost as light.

The battery life, however, was underwhelming. Its 3,600mAh battery managed just 6 hours and 8 minutes in our continuous video-playback test with the screen brightness set to our standard measurement of 170cd/m^2 (candles per square metre). This should be more than enough for a long car journey or flight but don't expect it to

last much longer once you get to the other end. The Hudl2 was able to squeeze nearly 7 hours out of its battery.

The stereo speakers aren't great, either, and it doesn't help that they're both located on one side of the tablet (or at the bottom if you're holding it in portrait orientation). They've got plenty of volume, but the sound they produce is tinny and lacking in significant bass and tended to distort at higher volumes, so we'd recommend plugging in a pair of headphones when listening to music or streaming Netflix.

On the back, you'll find a 5-megapixel rear camera, but the quality of our test photos was lacking: colours were muddy across the board and it really struggled in low-light conditions. Switching on HDR helped to brighten up our shots, but we wouldn't recommend using the camera for anything other than quick uploads to social media.

Operating system and performance

The Jay runs an unadulterated version of Android 5.1 Lollipop, and it's odd that EE hasn't given it a more up-to-date operating system, given that Marshmallow's been out for some time and the even newer Android Nougat is almost here. Still, at least it isn't bundled with unwanted extras, as Tesco's Hudl was, and doesn't follow Amazon's annoying habit of smothering Android with its own operating system.

Pre-installed apps are kept to a minimum on the Jay, with just the My EE app installed to help you manage your data and pay bills. Because it's installed with the older Lollipop OS, it's lacking some of Android's newer tools, such as 'Now on Tap' and the energy-saving Doze mode, but it's not a deal-breaker on such an affordable device.

With a quad-core 1.0GHz MediaTek 8735M processor and 1GB of RAM memory at its disposal, the Jay is a mediocre multi-tasker at best. Scoring 436 in Geekbench 3's single-core test and 1,349 in the multi-core test, it's faster than Amazon's Fire tablet but not as fast as the Hudl2 was nearly two years ago.

However, Android felt reasonably fast and responsive during everyday use, and it only tended to struggle slightly when switching between multiple apps at speed.

Its Peacekeeper score of 550 also wasn't hugely impressive on paper, but general web browsing was relatively stutter-free. It was jerky when browsing media-heavy web pages, such as the Guardian's homepage, but it's perfectly acceptable provided you're patient.

Its gaming performance was more disappointing. When we tried playing a round of Hearthstone, for example, the animations were juddery. Simpler, 2D games were absolutely fine, though, and we were able to play Angry Birds 2, Threes and Temple Run 2 without any problems.

OUR VERDICT

★★★★☆

The EE Jay isn't the innovation that the Hudl was and, although it's built better than the Hudl2, it compromises on performance. It's a faster option than the cheaper Amazon Fire, but if you want to play demanding games, you'll have to spend more on a better tablet.

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

Having said that, this device lets you surf the web when you're away from Wi-Fi, which is a valuable bonus.

PRODUCT INFO

EE Jay
bit.ly/ee402
Price: £119.99 (PAYG); £29.99 (with £18.50 per month contract)

SPECIFICATIONS

- Quad-core 1GHz processor
- 1GB of RAM memory
- 16GB of storage
- 7.85in 1,024 x 768 pixels screen
- 3,600mAh battery
- 2-megapixels front camera
- 5-megapixels rear camera
- MicroSD memory card slot
- 802.11b/g/n Wi-Fi
- Bluetooth 4.0
- 4G wireless data
- Android 5.1
- 200 x 135 x 7.8mm
- 322g

FOR

✓ Affordable 4G/Wi-Fi tablet
✓ Great build quality

AGAINST

✗ Lacks the performance of the Hudl2

MORE AFFORDABLE

Amazon Fire,
bit.ly/fire402

BEST AVAILABLE

iPad Mini 4, from £319
bit.ly/mini402

BT Smart Hub

Jonathan Bray tests BT's claim that its latest router is the fastest ISP-supplied model in the UK

ISPs don't tend to upgrade their routers that often and most don't supply cutting-edge technology, but BT is an exception because it designs its own routers rather than simply sticking its logo on someone else's models.

BT claims it latest router, the Smart Hub, is the fastest ISP-supplied router around. It has seven internal anntennae: four devoted to the 5GHz 802.11ac band and three to the 2.4GHz band. That means top theoretical speeds of 1,700Mbps and 450Mbps respectively, which is faster than the theoretical top speeds of any of its rivals, including the Sky Q Hub and the Virgin Media Hub 3.

It has four Gigabit Ethernet ports on the rear, where the Sky Hub has only two, and there's also a single USB port for sharing data on a USB device, which you don't get on either Virgin or Sky Q routers.

Setting it up is simple – you just swap the device and cables with your old router. If you have an Ethernet internet connection, you'll need to use Ethernet port 1 instead because, somewhat bafflingly, there's no dedicated WAN port. Pull out the plastic password tab from the side of the router and use the details printed on it to connect your Wi-Fi devices.

BT has spruced up the user interface, making it much easier to understand and explore if you want to configure it further. However, it merges the 5GHz and 2.4GHz network names by default, so you don't know which one you're connected to. You can separate them manually, though.

We tested the router in a narrow Victorian terraced property using iPerf (iperf.fr) to gauge maximum speed, and compared it to a Sky Q Hub, which was already installed and supplying the property with Wi-Fi. The signal had to pass through a wooden floor, brick wall, staircase and stud wall.

> "The BT Smart Hub's theoretical top speeds are faster than any of its rivals"

The BT Smart Hub was faster than Sky's hardware across the board. We measured a speed of 16.2MB/s at long range on the 5GHz network, which beat Sky's 14.8MB/s. On the 2.4GHz network at the same range, BT's speed was 9.1MB/s – again, faster than Sky, although the latter's network extenders helped it come close with speeds of 8.1MB/s.

We found the hardware extenders in Sky's Mesh system boosted the signal and made it stronger throughout the house, despite being slower. This means that the Smart Hub will be slightly more susceptible to interference, and that there might be less difference in speed in larger houses.

PRODUCT INFO

BT Smart Hub

www.bt.com

Price: from free for new customers

SPECIFICATIONS

- 7 antennae
- 802.11ac (2.4GHz and 5GHz)
- 4 x Gigabit Ethernet ports
- 1 x USB port
- Advanced filters
- Removable password card

FOR

✓ Really is the fastest ISP router currently available

✓ Easy setup (especially for existing BT customers)

AGAINST

✗ No WAN port

OUR VERDICT

★★★★★

Existing customers can buy the BT Smart Hub for £50, which is an absolute bargain considering the router's technical capabilities, and a saving of £70 over the Hub's normal price of £130. New customers and those renewing their contract will be offered the Smart Hub for free.

For most users already with BT, and anyone thinking of moving to BT, the BT Smart Hub is a winner. It's an excellent router and a huge upgrade over the last model.

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

WWW.ESET.CO.UK/HOME

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Now with Parental Control for Android

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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).

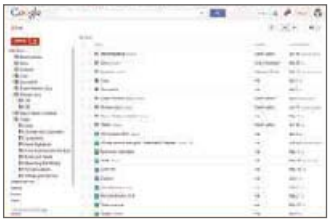
KEY FEATURES

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

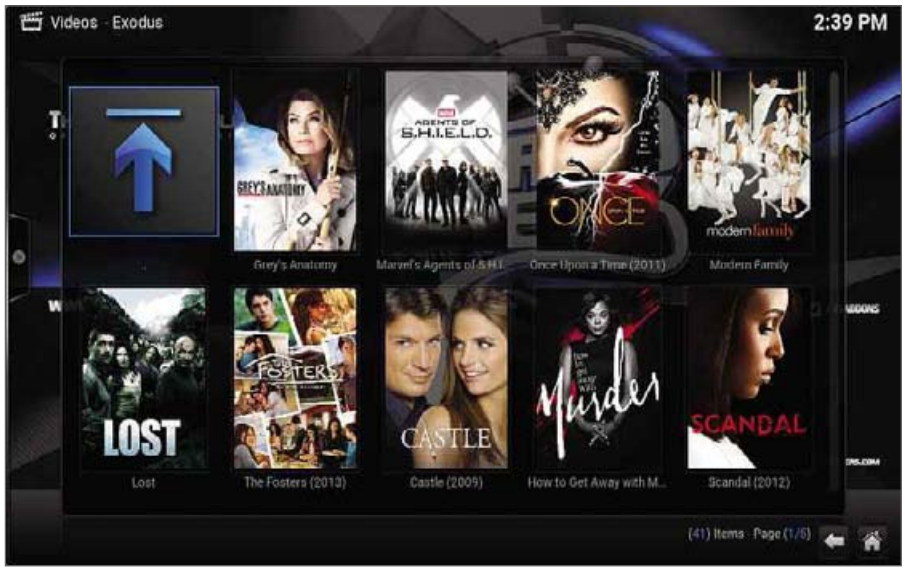
TV MEDIA CENTRE

FreeTelly

www.tvaddons.ag

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 or Mac OS X

File size: 68.4MB



The Popcorn Time streaming app has suffered lots of legal problems for breaching copyright, and has been banned in the UK. However, it does make it very easy for anyone to torrent movies and TV shows without knowing the first thing about peers, seeds and swarms. If you want to watch something, you simply click a thumbnail to make your choice and start watching.

FreeTelly is similar to Popcorn Time, but it does away with the torrenting aspect, which means that – legally – you should be on safer ground. It lets you find and watch TV shows and movies from around the world, tune into live broadcasts and sport, and more, but it only gives you access to content that's readily available online, and doesn't involve you in distributing copyrighted material.

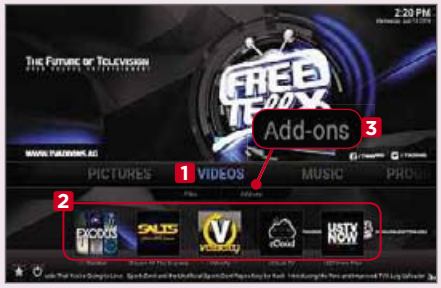
FreeTelly is based on the open-source Kodi media centre (formerly XBMC), but it's entirely standalone and you don't need Kodi to make it work. As with Kodi, you can expand FreeTelly's capabilities using plugins, and there are no adverts or pop-ups to interrupt your viewing pleasure.

The Exodus add-on is a great place to start if you want to watch popular US TV shows such as *Agents of SHIELD*, *Modern Family* and *Castle*. You may need to create an account with some of the services before you can view the content they offer.

A word of warning: FreeTelly's setup requires the program to download some add-ons when you install it, but you may find the process fails. At the time of writing, some UK users were having problems downloading these add-ons, but you should be able to get around this by adjusting your firewall's settings, or temporarily disabling it while you finalise the installation.

MINI WORKSHOP | Watch TV shows using FreeTelly

1 Install FreeTelly and launch it. Click the OK button in the interface, then 'Click Here to Finalize Installation'. 1 Click the Continue button and FreeTelly will try to download some additional items. 2 If that fails, follow the advice in the final paragraph above, or read the suggestions at bit.ly/freetellyhelp402.



2 Once FreeTelly has installed, you'll be taken to the main screen. Hover your mouse over the Videos section 1 to display shortcuts to some of the most popular add-ons. 2 There are plenty more to choose from. Click the Add-ons tab 3 to browse the selection, which includes FilmOnTV, UKTV Again and YouTube.

3 You can also listen to audio through FreeTelly. Select Music 1 and browse the add-ons for audio options. The centre strip also lets you view your photos, 2 play CDs and DVDs, and add new features via Programs. 3 You can quickly find content you've starred 4 and access FreeTelly's power settings. 5

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

SECURITY TOOL

VirusTotal Scanner 6

bit.ly/virus402

Min requirements: Windows Vista/7/8+/10 **File size:** 188KB

If you want to be completely certain that a file isn't malware, you can upload it to VirusTotal (www.virustotal.com), where it will be checked using more than 50 antivirus engines including Avast, Bitdefender and Sophos. VirusTotal Scanner makes checking suspicious items quicker and easier by uploading a digital fingerprint of the file (a hash) rather than the file itself. The latest version is the first new release in a while, and includes improved installer and uninstaller screens.

THUMBNAIL MAKER

Icaros 3

bit.ly/icaros402

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 **File size:** 7.7MB

Icaros can generate Windows Explorer thumbnails for most video types and produce cover-art thumbnails. It's easy to use, but there are plenty of advanced features available if you want more control over the finished result. The latest version gains a new, more intuitive interface, and an internal cache to help speed up the thumbnail-creation process. All settings are now fully editable, too.

VIDEO EDITOR

Vidiot

bit.ly/vidiot402

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 **File size:** 18.7MB

Vidiot is an excellent free video editor that anyone can master in minutes. It's a non-linear tool aimed at home users, and supports compositing (scaling/rotating/positioning), cropping, changing speed, adding transitions and titles, trimming, key frames and more. Start by choosing some videos, then make your required edits and render the finished movie via the option in the Sequence menu.

New Windows Apps

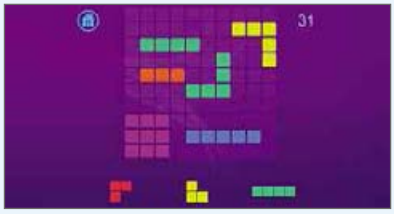
1010 Tetris

bit.ly/1010tetris402

Min requirements: Windows 10

File size: 19.5MB

1010 Tetris is a variation of the popular puzzle arcade game, but instead of rotating the shapes as they fall, you have place them as they arrive on the game board to fill in all the spaces.



AnTuTu Benchmark v6

bit.ly/bench402

Min requirements: Windows 10

File size: 84.5MB

This app lets you benchmark your PC or Windows mobile device so you can see how it rates. The app checks your processor, memory, video card and more.

Perfect Workout

bit.ly/workout402

Min requirements: Windows 10

File size: 15.1MB

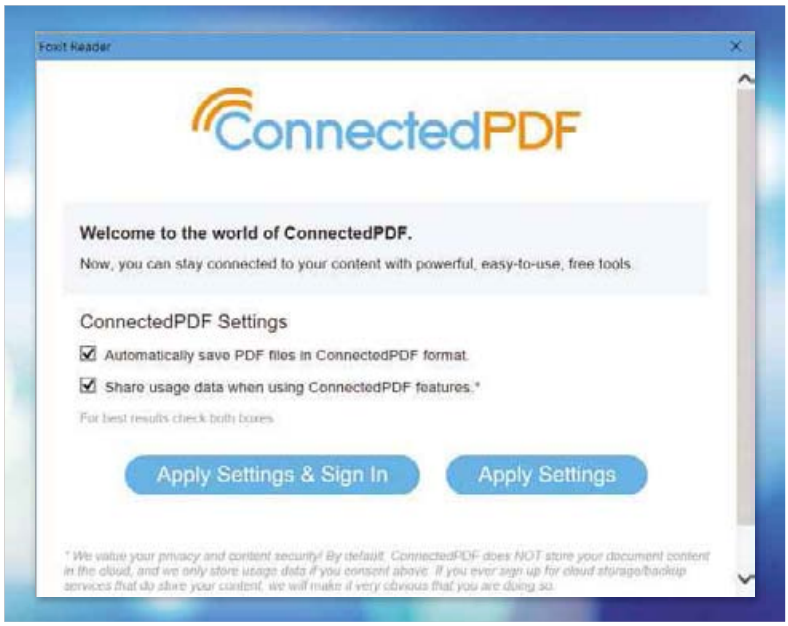
This fitness app lets you work out in front of your PC. There are more than 100 animated exercises to follow, and using the app regularly allows you to unlock bonus content.

PDF TOOL

Foxit Reader 8

www.foxitsoftware.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 45.9MB



Foxit Reader has long been one of our favourite free PDF tools. It's much more than a simple viewer because it also lets you edit and create PDFs, and comes with OneDrive and Google Drive integration. The latest version introduces an innovative feature called ConnectedPDF, which lets the PDF's creator identify who is opening and editing documents (with their knowledge), track new versions, announce updates, activate digital-rights management, collect data and much more. See our Workshop on page 56 for a guide to using ConnectedPDF.

This latest version of Foxit Reader also includes new Dropbox integration and the ability to convert emails in MSG format into PDFs.

DISC-AUTHORING TOOL

DVDStyler 3

www.dvdstyler.org

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10, Mac OS X or Linux
File size: 30.4MB

DVDStyler is a handy authoring tool that can create DVDs from videos in most formats, and also generates photo slideshows with or without audio. It offers a choice of templates, and you can create your own menus, changing the background, button appearance and position, and more. The latest version adds support for animation and introduces various additional options, including the ability to downmix audio to stereo. There are some new templates ('heart' and 'Mother's Day'), and the software has had various general improvements and additions made throughout.

DVDStyler is a very powerful program, and you can customise it to suit your 'burning' desires.

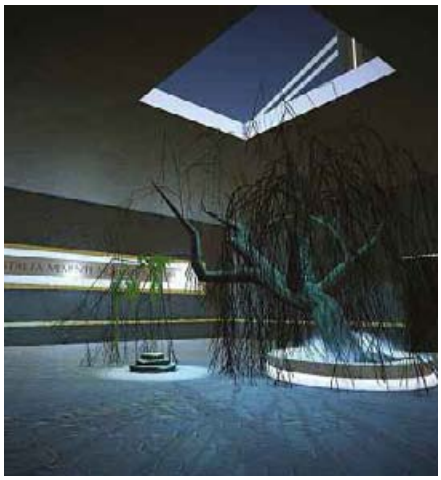
MEDIA PLAYER

GoPro VR Player 2

bit.ly/goprovr402

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10, Mac OS X, or Linux
File size: 68.6MB

There are lots of 360-degree videos you can watch on the web and if you're feeling creative, you can make your own by using a dedicated 360-degree camera or by strapping several cameras together. GoPro VR Player 2, formerly called Kolor Eyes Desktop, lets you download 360-degree content to enjoy offline. It's easy to use – just drag and drop an MP4 video to the interface, or click the button and browse for your file, and it will start playing. You can then click and drag on the playing clip to watch it from any angle. There are various playback settings to experiment with in the software's Preferences menu.



GAME

Mind Palace

bit.ly/mind402

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

File size: 299MB

In this game, the bad news is that you're dead, but the aim is to find out who you were and try to get a shot at a second life. As you wander around the 3D Mind Palace, a bodiless artificial intelligence talks to you, making various observations. The narration is in French, but it's fully subtitled in English.

✗ Don't install...

FastPictureViewer Pro

www.fastpictureviewer.com

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

Size: 35.5MB

FastPictureViewer Pro is super-speedy and comes packed with professional features, but we think $49.95 (£37) is way too much to pay for something that just lets you view your own photos. It's fully compatible with Adobe Lightroom (which isn't exactly cheap itself), but at that price, who cares?

...Install this instead ✓

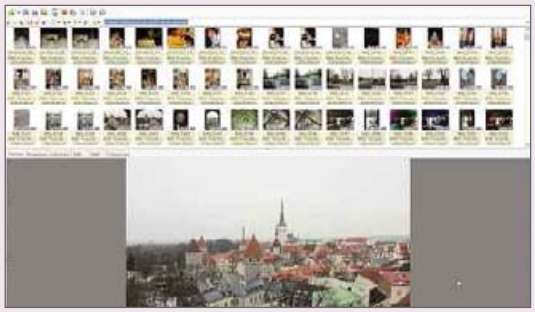
XnView

www.xnview.com

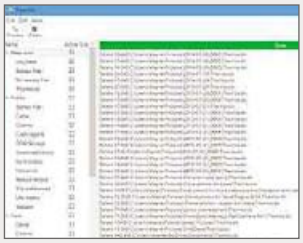
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

Size: 4.9MB

XnView is a feature-rich image viewer that makes it easy to move, rename and convert your photos; view image properties and EXIF information; and label and rate your images for tider organisation. Its simple interface is packed with advanced tools such as Batch Processing and Batch Rename, as well as essential options for resizing, cropping and red-eye removal. The program automatically optimises your images' colour and contrast; offers a range of attractive filters; and lets you view photos side by side for instant comparison. It's also available as a portable application.



UPDATED | New tweaks and fixes for your favourite free programs



SYSTEM CLEANER

BleachBit 1.12

www.bleachbit.org

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

File size: 6.2MB

This open-source program frees up space on your PC by removing junk files. The new version includes fixes for various bugs and errors, along with updates for cleaning Google Chrome and Firefox, and updated cleaners for the Linux version of BleachBit.

EBOOK MANAGER

Calibre 2.62

calibre-ebook.com

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

File size: 66MB

The latest release of the free ebook manager and viewer adds support for reading and writing metadata from EPUB 3 files, and can recognise the newest Kindle ebook readers from Amazon, such as the Kindle Voyage. Numerous bug fixes have been made to Calibre, too.

IMAGE EDITOR

Paint.net 4.0.10

www.getpaint.net

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

File size: 6.7MB

Paint.net is undoubtedly one of the best free photo-editing tools around. This updated version includes several improvements to the behaviour of the interface and you can now scroll around the screen by using the arrow keys. It also introduces a lot of general improvements and bug fixes.

SYSTEM TOOL

Glary Utilities 5.55

www.glarysoft.com

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

File size: 15.5MB

Glary Utilities is a collection of tools for fixing problems, optimising Windows and protecting your privacy. The new version improves the quick-search feature, and adds uTorrent and FrostWire support to the program's disk cleaner. The tool for erasing your tracks has also been improved. ■

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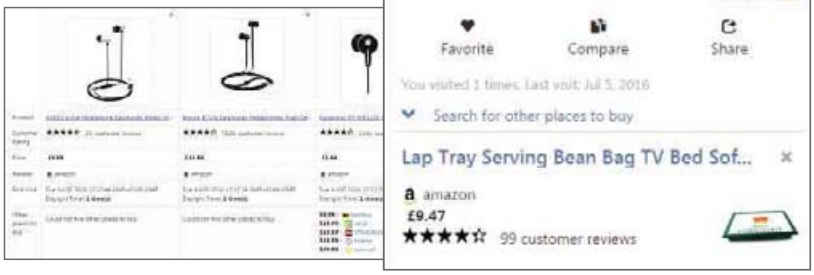
Best New Browser Tools

CHROME

Save money when shopping online

These days, most people don't bother to visit price-comparison sites, which means they miss out on great deals at online stores other than Amazon. To bag a bargain every time, install Microsoft's new Chrome extension Personal Shopping Assistant (bit.ly/shopping402). This automatically stores details of products you view online, and lets you save specific items as 'favorites' to receive alerts when their price drops. You can compare similar products side by side, and click 'Search for other places to buy' to see if an item is available for less elsewhere. There's also an option to 'pin' the add-on as a sidebar rather than viewing the info in a pop-up panel.

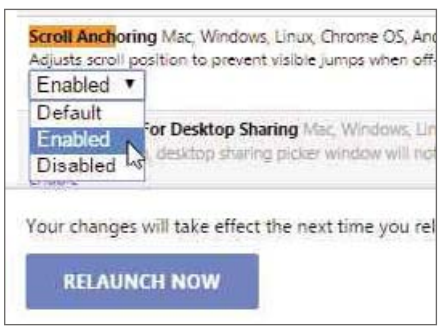
Personal Shopping Assistant is a Microsoft Garage project, which means it's still in development, and it currently works with more US stores than UK ones. But if you're an avid online shopper, it's a useful and unobtrusive tool.



Stop pages jumping when they load

Sometimes, when you open a site in your browser and start reading the text, the page jumps around while off-screen elements such as photos and adverts are loaded. This makes it impossible to keep your place and is extremely annoying, so we're delighted that Chrome 51 finally fixes the problem.

Unfortunately, it doesn't prevent the jumps automatically – perhaps some people like wasting time waiting for pages to settle – and you need to activate a tucked-away option called Scroll Anchoring. To turn it on, type `chrome:flags` into your address bar, press Enter and find the entry for Scroll Anchoring – you can use Ctrl+F to find it quickly. Choose Enabled from the drop-down menu and relaunch Chrome. You should now find that your reading is no longer interrupted by off-screen elements loading. This tweak works in both desktop and mobile versions of Chrome.



Save any web content to Facebook

If Facebook is the first and last site you visit every time you go online, you'll like the social network's new 'Save to Facebook' extension (bit.ly/save402), which lets you save any interesting web content you come across. Just click the toolbar button when viewing an article, video, product, recipe or other page to bookmark it for later. The content is stored at www.facebook.com/saved and can only be accessed by you, unless you choose to share it with your friends. Alternatively, you can click the extension's button to open the last few items you've bookmarked.

On the downside, 'Save to Facebook' is pretty basic compared to other web-clipping tools such as Pocket and Evernote, and it effectively tells the social network even more about where you go and what you like online, presumably so it can target you with relevant ads.

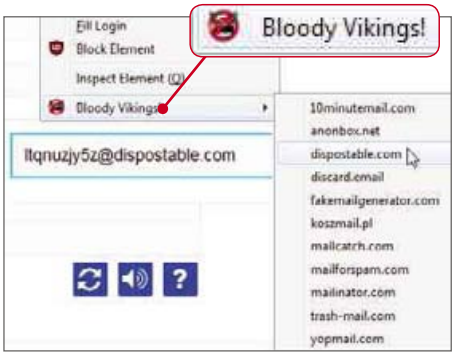
Cast from Chrome without an extension

Previously, if you wanted to 'cast' a browser tab to your Chromecast so you could view its content on your TV, you needed to install the Google Cast extension (bit.ly/cast402). But now, as of Chrome 51, you can cast tabs directly from the browser without the need for an add-on – either click the main menu button or right-click the page and choose Cast. If you can't see the Cast option, type `chrome:flags` into your address bar, press Enter and find the entry Media Router. Select Enabled, restart the browser and you should now be able to cast.

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

FIREFOX

Beat spam by creating fake email addresses



"Spam spam spam spam, spam spam spam spam," sang the Vikings in the famous Monty Python sketch that inspired the catch-all term for junk email. Now those "bloody Vikings!", as Terry Jones' waitress moans, have their own Firefox add-on, which helps prevent spam from flooding your inbox. Bloody Vikings (bit.ly/vikings402) generates fake email addresses on the fly, so you don't need to enter your real one when you register with a website. Simply right-click the email field, select 'Bloody Vikings!' and choose from one of 11 disposable email providers. The add-on opens your temporary inbox in the background, allowing you to confirm your registration while staying completely anonymous. Take that, you spam-loving Vikings!

Try new features before everyone else

It's always interesting to experiment with new browser tools, but it usually means installing a less stable beta or developer version of the browser. If you want to help Mozilla develop Firefox without risking stability, sign up for Firefox Test Pilot (testpilot.firefox.com). This revived add-on lets you try new features in your current version of the browser and provide your feedback to Mozilla. Test Pilot currently offers three experimental tools, the most notable of which is Activity Stream, which redesigns your homepage to provide a "visual timeline" of sites you've visited and bookmarked. The others are Tab Center, which moves your tabs from the top of the browser to the side; and Universal Search, which makes suggestions as you type into the address bar. You can choose which features to test or try them all, and click Give Feedback to tell Mozilla what you think. If you decide you don't like the new tools, click Test Pilot's toolbar button, choose – for example – Activity Stream, then click Disable Activity Stream.

Remove unwanted elements from Firefox

Mozilla has streamlined Firefox significantly over the years, but you may still find the browser cluttered with options that you never use and elements that you don't like. You can hack its interface to remove these unwanted items by installing Hide Preferences (bit.ly/hide402). This new add-on lets you hide dozens of Firefox features including options in the Preferences panel and Add-ons Manager; the 'favicons' that appear on tabs; and even the so-called 'hamburger menu' in the top-right corner. If nothing else, Hide Preferences lets you prevent anyone else who uses your computer from changing your browser settings without your permission.

OTHER BROWSERS

Search for and copy text instantly

In Issue 400 (bit.ly/issue400), we raved about Opera's brilliant, Chrome-beating new features and now it's added another one. The 'search popup' tool makes it quicker and easier to look up a word or phrase from a web page, or copy it to your clipboard. Rather than opening the right-click menu, simply highlight the text and select Search or Copy from the two options that appear. The feature is currently only available in the developer version of Opera (www.opera.com/developer). If you prefer to use the right-click menu, click the menu button, go to Settings, Browser, 'User interface' and deselect the option 'Enable the search popup on selecting text'.

Apply different themes to Vivaldi

Vivaldi (vivaldi.com) has added an array of new colours to its dark and light themes. To view them, click the main menu button and choose Tools, Settings, Themes. There are seven options to choose from, including Hot Pink, Blueprint and Human, and you can create a custom theme from scratch using the colours of your choice. Just click New Theme 1, then the Edit Theme button to select foreground, background, highlight and accent colours. You can also make your theme's corners more or less rounded, and increase or decrease the contrast.

Best Free Apps

App of the Fortnight

PHOTOS

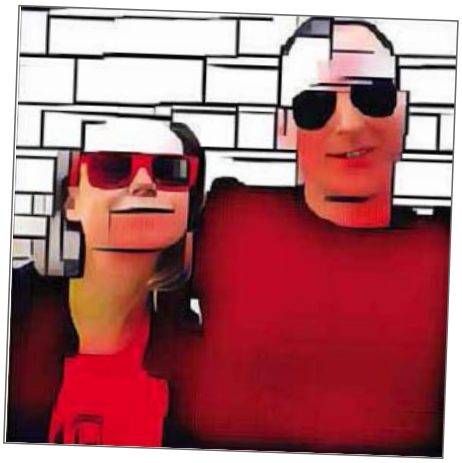
NEW

Prisma

bit.ly/prisma402

Min requirements: iOS 8

Size: 15.8MB

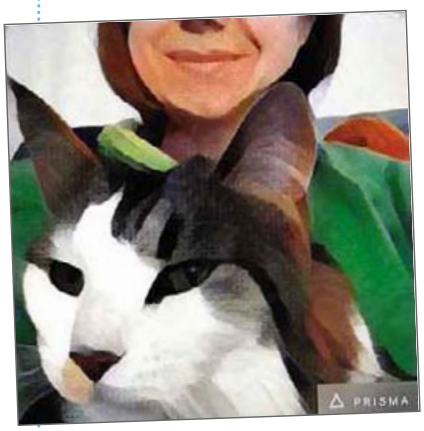


Prisma offers photo filters that will blow your mind. These are 'smart' filters, combining artificial intelligence (AI) and neural networks with famous artists and artistic styles. Options range from Roy Lichtenstein's dotted cartoons and Mondrian's primary blocks through Asian ink drawings to the flattering 'Udnie', which is based on this Francis Picabia painting: bit.ly/udnie402.

A huge amount of effort and panache has gone into making the filters work. Each one takes a few seconds to analyse your photo and apply its effect in the most appropriate way. It's impossible to describe the power of the results – you have to see them for yourself.

There's no social element to Prisma, unless you count the usual sharing options, so there's no need to register. Just fire up the app and shoot or select a photo, tap a filter to set it to work, and then save the result or tap another filter.

Filters aren't applied cumulatively, but of course you can save a photo, select it and then apply another filter on top (once you set off down this road you really will be up all night). Results aren't saved automatically unless you enable that option in Settings, where you can also switch off the watermark.



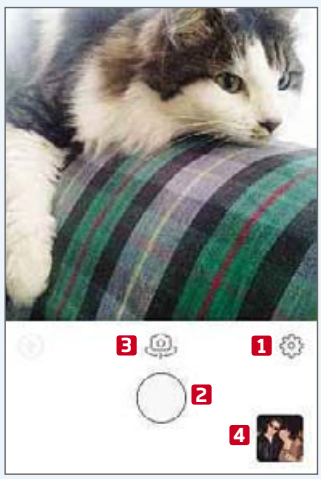
The five-star rating was a shoo-in, but there are downsides. We found we had to be online for the filters to work, and the app is a monstrous battery drain. Prisma is currently iOS-only but an Android version should be released very soon, along with Prisma for video.

Our rating ★★★★★

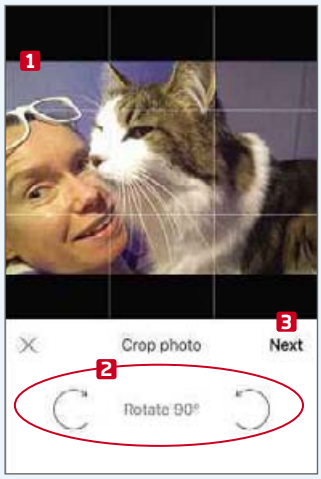
MINI WORKSHOP

Transform photos into art using Prisma

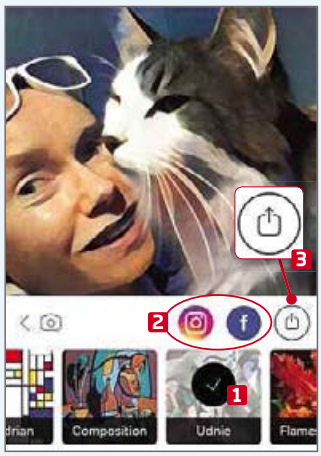
1 Launch Prisma and allow it to access your photos and camera. On the screen that opens, tap the Settings cog, 1 move the Enable Watermarks slider to off and then tap Done. Tap the round button to take a photo 2 or tap the camera icon to switch to selfie mode. 3 To select a photo from your device, tap the thumbnail. 4



2 Tap Camera Roll, then choose an album to select a photo from. Tap your chosen photo, then tap Use. On the screen that opens, pinch and drag the photo to align it in the square box. 1 You can also use the clockwise and anticlockwise arrows to rotate it. 2 Tap Next to start editing. 3



3 Swipe through the filters under the photo, tap one to apply it, 1 and then wait while the filter analyses the photo. Swipe your finger across the photo to adjust the filter's density. Tap the Instagram or Facebook icon to share your work, 2 or tap the share icon, 3 then Save Image, to save the edited photo to your device.



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

SOCIAL

NEW

Storm It

bit.ly/storm402

Min requirements: Android 4.1

Size: 4.2MB

Seasoned Twitter users know how to get around the 140-character limit by 'tweetstorming' – making their point over a series of numbered tweets, posted one after another. Storm It does the tweeting – and indeed the storming – for you. Simply link it to your Twitter account, type away to your heart's content and then, when you've finished, let Storm convert your entire message into numbered tweets. You can save and edit drafts, preview your tweets before posting, and even use the app to post individual tweets.

Our rating ★★★★☆

VIDEO

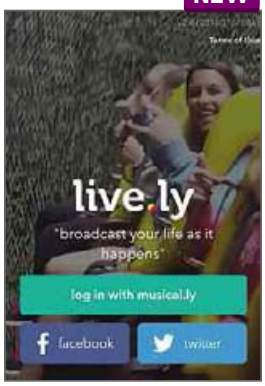
NEW

Live.ly

bit.ly/live402

Min requirements: iOS 8

Size: 42.4MB



Live.ly lets you broadcast live video clips of yourself and whatever is going on around you. Yes, that sounds a lot like Periscope – but we think this app, from the maker of the hugely popular music video app Musical.ly, takes less getting used to and has the same sort of community feel. You can log in via Facebook or Google, or create a free account. Despite being just one of many similar apps, Live.ly beat Facebook Messenger and Instagram to the top of the Free iPhone Apps chart in early July, and it's coming soon to Android.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RADIO

UPDATED

BBC iPlayer Radio

bit.ly/iplayerdroid402

bit.ly/iplayerios402

Min requirements: Android 4, iOS 7.1

Size: 19MB (Android), 20.9MB (iOS)

The UK got first dibs on this stunning app, but it's now available in the Republic of Ireland, too, and will soon be rolled out worldwide. All users can stream live BBC radio from UK stations and the World Service, as well as listening to catch-up shows on demand, downloading podcasts, exploring curated collections and browsing track lists. You can even wake up and doze off to BBC radio by using the app's built-in alarm clock and night mode.

Our rating ★★★★★

OFFICE

UPDATED

Arrow Launcher

bit.ly/launcher402

Min requirements: Android 4.0.3

Size: Varies with device

Swipe to create, edit and sync Office 365 documents on the new Documents screen of Microsoft's superb Android launcher. The app now integrates with your Office 365 account, so you no longer have to email documents to yourself to have the same versions on your phone, tablet and PC.

Office tricks aside, Arrow is also a brilliant customisation tool that far outclasses Google's default launcher. It automatically organises your apps and contacts based on how much you use them; includes built-in reminders courtesy of Wunderlist; and offers quick access to recent downloads, photos and installed apps. It's also extremely light on memory and battery.

The app is constantly being improved by the Microsoft Garage team, who run a beta version for testing tweaks and features. You can find out more at bit.ly/garage402.

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

MUSIC & HEARING

NEW

Mimi Music

bit.ly/mimi402

Min requirements: iOS 9

Size: 39.2MB

Hearing, like eyesight, differs from one person to the next, but volume controls tend to assume that everyone's hearing is the same. Step forward Mimi Music, the latest app from sound specialist Mimi Hearing Technologies, which includes a medically certified hearing test to measure your personal "earprint", then uses this data to optimise the volume and clarity of music on your iPhone and iPad so it's a perfect match for your ears. It integrates with Spotify, SoundCloud and iTunes on iOS, and is set to launch soon for Android. Find out more and sign up for news at mimi.io.

Our rating ★★★★★

TO-DO

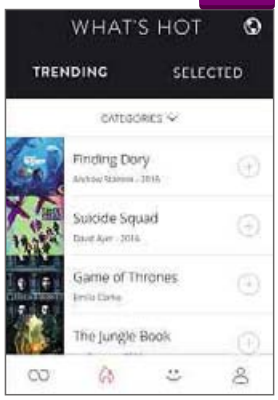
NEW

Soon

bit.ly/soon402

Min requirements: iOS 8

Size: 28.7MB



Do you keep forgetting which books you wanted to get from Amazon? Or the films you wanted to see at the cinema, or (more likely) on Netflix? And what *was* that museum you promised to visit before it closes? Keep a cultural to-do list with Soon, an app that's much easier to use than talk about ("download Soon" "download what soon?" "no, Soon"). Tap a category (Movies, TV Series, Restaurants, Places and so on) and search for items, find out what's happening near you or browse trending examples. You can show off your list on Facebook and tick off items when they're 'done'.

Our rating ★★★★☆

5 NEW APPS WORTH PAYING FOR

WI-FI

192.168.1.1 Admin Pro

bit.ly/admin402

Min requirements: Android 2.3

Size: 2MB **Price:** £1.89

Configuring your router generally involves fiddling with your browser or Command Prompt, but this app lets you do it all from your phone or tablet, using a stored Wi-Fi admin page for easy tweaks.

VIDEO

Face Swap Live

bit.ly/facedroid402

bit.ly/faceios402

Min requirements: Android 4.4, iOS 8

Size: 61MB (Android), 91.6MB (iOS)

Price: 79p

This fun app lets you record live video of friends with their faces swapped with each other, with celebrity mugs or even vegetables. It's new to Android, and has been updated for iOS.

GAME

Titan Quest

bit.ly/titan402

Min requirements: Android 5

Size: 1.3GB **Price:** £6.99

Titan by name, titan by size. The 1.3GB download is worth every byte for fans of this classic action role-playing game, which has moved from PC to Android almost wholly intact. There are no in-app purchases, either.

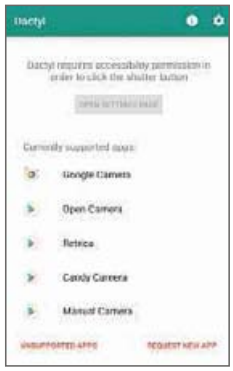
PHOTOGRAPHY

Dactyl

bit.ly/dactyl402

Min requirements: Android (varies with device)

Size: 3.8MB **Price:** £1.79



Use your fingerprint sensor as a shutter button in your chosen camera app. Support is being added for all major camera apps, including video and selfie modes, but only on devices with fingerprint sensors.

VIRTUAL REALITY

SolarVR

bit.ly/solar402

Min requirements: Android 4.4

Size: 61MB **Price:** 59p

Tour the Solar System in stunning virtual reality (VR), with detailed audio and text commentary on every planet and moon. You'll need the Google Cardboard app (bit.ly/card402) and viewer to use it.

192.168.1.1 Admin Pro | Face Swap Live | Titan Quest | Dactyl | SolarVR

Best New TV Apps

SPORT

BT Sport

bit.ly/btsport402

Min requirements: Android 4.3, iOS 8, Windows 10 **Size:** 42MB

Sport-loving EE users can now get BT Sport for free for six months, whether they're existing customers or new to the network. The offer provides access to all BT Sport channels, which you can stream to your Android, iOS or Windows phone or tablet via the mobile app. Coverage includes the Premier League, UEFA Champions League and Europa League Football; Aviva Premiership Rugby; and MotoGP. You can register your interest for the deal at bit.ly/eeoffer402. Once the six months are up, you can either cancel the BT Sport subscription or carry on paying for it at a cost of £5 a month.

GAME

Chuckle Brothers Chuckle World

bit.ly/chuckle402

Min requirements: Android 2.3.3, iOS 8

Size: 79MB

What could be more fun than a mobile app featuring the chucklesome Chuckle Brothers from the classic CBBC series *ChuckleVision*? Nothing, that's what – so why not bring some side-splitting hilarity to your phone or tablet with the gruesome twosome's new "endless" quiz game? This tests your general knowledge with thousands of trivia questions – you just select one of the two possible answers by swiping toward the correct Chuckle Brother ("to me, to you", and so on). Chuckle World also includes a "sound board" of silly noises and other audio effects that will make even the dullest journeys fly by. Honest.

MUSIC

Tidal

tidal.com/gb

Min requirements: Android 4.1, iOS 8.1

Size: 11MB (Android), 32.8MB (iOS)

This music-streaming service for discerning audiophiles with a few bob to spare could previously only be enjoyed on your phone, tablet or computer, but it has now added welcome support for Chromecast. This means you can stream songs and videos from Tidal to your TV or stereo at CD quality (if you subscribe to Tidal's HiFi option, for £19.99 per month). Tidal provides unlimited access to more than 40 million tracks and 130,000 music videos, as well as playlists by music journalists and tailor-made recommendations. It also has an offline mode that works on up to three devices.

✗ Don't install...

Alarm From Hell

bit.ly/hell402

As if getting up in the morning wasn't unpleasant enough, this app makes certain that you wake up in the worst possible mood by subjecting you to "crazy or annoying sounds" to keep you from slumber. Once the alarm has been set off, this sonic torture can only be deactivated by solving a maths puzzle or walking around the room. While we're sure Alarm From Hell is very effective, it's hardly going to make you greet the day with a smile on your face.

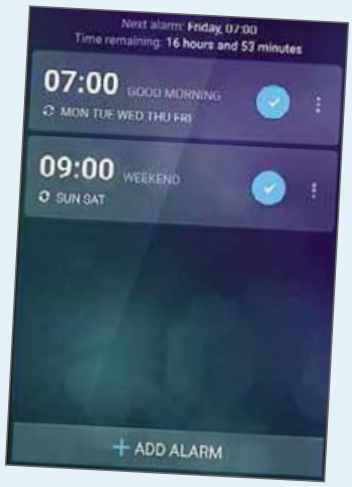
...Install this instead ✓

Alarm Clock Xtreme Free

bit.ly/alarm402

Min requirements: Android (varies with device)

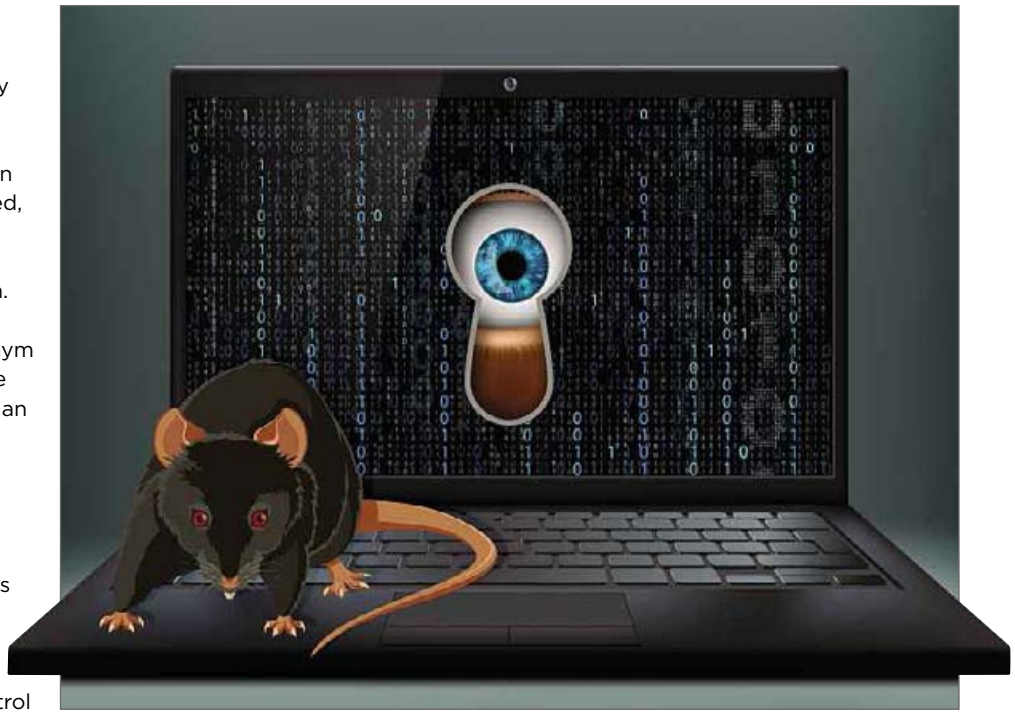
Size: Varies with device



Most phones have built-in alarm clocks, but they tend to be rather basic and not always conducive to a pleasant awakening. Alarm Clock Xtreme Free provides a customisable alternative that will get you up without driving you nuts. You can set your morning alarm to slowly increase in volume; choose your favourite music to wake you; use the large snooze button to prevent you from pressing 'dismiss' accidentally; and have the snooze duration decrease in time after every snooze. The app also includes a Sleep Tracker that helps improve your sleep quality so you have more energy during the day.

Remote-access Trojans

Why does Mark Zuckerberg tape up his laptop's webcam and mic? Because he's afraid of RATs. **David Crookes** explains why it's no joke



What are remote-access Trojans?

A remote-access Trojan is a particularly devious type of malware that allows attackers to infiltrate your computer and control it from wherever they are in the world. Once the software is installed, intruders can gain administrative privileges to your machine and effectively treat it as if it was their own. It's quite fitting that these Trojans are commonly known by the sinister acronym RAT because the consequences can be just as unpleasant and catastrophic as an infestation of vermin.

What sort of things can the attackers do?

Once an attacker has access to your computer, they can view your screen as if they were sat in front of it. This not only allows the 'ratters' to spy on what you're doing, but lets them use their own keyboard and mouse to control your machine. For example, they can open your email client to look for important information, install further malware, view your bank details and seize control of your accounts.

Are they after my money?

Many of them are. The theft of personal and banking information is high on the list of motivations for this type of hacker and companies are not immune either (a RAT recently stole the personal details of more than 7.93 million customers of Japanese travel agency JTB Corp). But another, more sinister reason for gaining access is to hijack your computer's camera and microphone. Acutely aware of this, Facebook CEO and co-founder Mark Zuckerberg puts tape over the webcam and microphone of his Apple laptop. This was visible in the background of a recent photo celebrating 500 million people using Instagram each month.

Check out the taped up mic and camera in this photo of Mark Zuckerberg

Why would a ratter want to control my webcam?

Some attackers are simply being voyeuristic. They're excited by the thrill of spying on their oblivious victims and they refer to those they watch and the computers they seize as "slaves".
This invasion of privacy becomes even nastier when the ratters engage in sexual exploitation. They collect images and videos of people in states of undress or even having sex in front of their computers, then use what they capture to blackmail victims. Unsuspecting children have also been filmed by ratted webcams and threatened. Former Miss Teen USA Cassidy Wolf was watched for a year in 2013 and received emails attempting to blackmail her. Wolf's jailed attacker in this case was an ex-classmate who was found guilty of hacking the machines of up to 150 women.

US model Cassidy Wolf was the victim of a RAT-enabled extortion attempt

©Glenn Francis, www.PacificProDigital.com

What about my microphone?

Again, ratters like to eavesdrop on conversations for voyeuristic reasons, but they also use microphones to gather information that they can use against their victims (such as personal secrets and travel plans). This leaves people vulnerable because their privacy has been violated and there's no telling what details have been picked up. But it's not just hackers that want to listen to our chatter. Documents leaked by whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed that the US National Security Agency (NSA) has an interest in controlling cameras and microphones: the government-designed plugins CaptiveAudience and Gumfish have been used to record conversations and take photos.

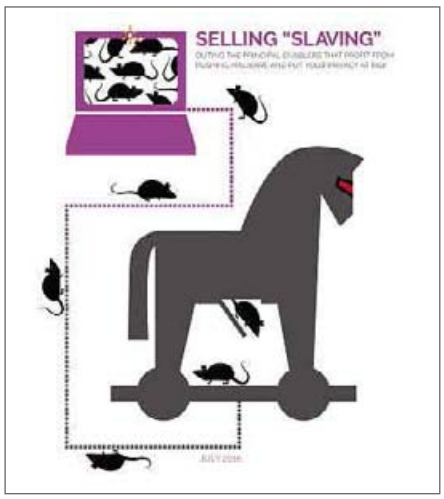
Are these hackers sophisticated criminals?

Not necessarily. Most of them buy ready-made RATs and one in particular, called BlackShades, is especially popular. Costing around £30, it's not illegal in and of itself, but installing it on a victim's computer is a crime. BlackShades affects Windows computers and it is well known to the authorities. In 2014, there were more than dozen raids across the world, with 17 people arrested in the UK. BlackShades' co-creator Michael Hodge was sentenced to five years probation in the US in January this year for distributing malware and conspiring to commit computer hacking.

So Mark Zuckerberg is right to be concerned?

Very much so. A report entitled *Selling "Slaving": Outlining the Principal Enablers that Profit from Pushing Malware and Put Your Privacy at Risk* (bit.ly/slaving402) was published last July by the Digital Citizens Alliance, which said that approximately 70% of all malware online today is a Trojan. It added that of all Trojans, RATs are the easiest to deploy and use: "It takes ratters little time to slave hundreds of devices", the report said. Ratters use HackForums to share tips and they have even suggested that YouTube is a good way to spread their captured videos. With online tutorials

The FBI has arrested perps around the world for using the BlackShades RAT



RATs were heavily featured in the Digital Citizens Alliance report into 'slaving'

describing how to seize control of computers, there is no doubt that RATs are a genuine threat.

What do the experts say?

RATs are a continuing concern for experts and the authorities. In April this year, FBI Director James Comey was speaking at a Q&A event about encryption and privacy when he let slip that he, too, uses tape to cover the webcam on his laptop. "I put a piece of tape over the camera," he said, "because I saw somebody smarter than I am had a piece of tape over their camera". Ironically, earlier in his speech, he had been bemoaning the increasing number of tech companies making so-called 'unhackable' devices.

So how do I know if I've been ratted?

There are several telltale signs. You may find that your webcam's light suddenly turns on without you activating it. You may also discover software appearing on your PC or laptop that you did not install. Sometimes your mouse cursor may move without you touching anything or your monitor may turn off. Anything untoward such as windows appearing or closing, files being encrypted or deleted, or attempts on your online bank accounts may indicate you have a RAT problem.

You can't tell from this photo, but James Comey likes to put tape over his camera

Is there anything I can do to prevent infection?

Thankfully, there is. The usual basic rules apply: make sure you have up-to-date antivirus software installed (even on an Apple Mac) and think carefully before you download anything from websites unless you truly trust the source (see our feature on page 46 for more on this topic). Never open an email attachment from an unknown sender, because many RATs are installed that way, and – if you're really paranoid – follow Zuckerberg's lead by covering your webcam with tape until you want to use it and inserting a dummy plug into the microphone jack of your computer to prevent the internal mic from picking up sound.

TAKE BACK CONTROL OF A RATTED COMPUTER

If you suspect that your computer has been compromised by a ratter, here's what you should do to cut off their access

Disconnect from the internet

A ratter can't remotely access your account if your computer is offline, so turn off the Wi-Fi and unplug the Ethernet cable if you're using one.

Run your antivirus software

If you already have up-to-date antivirus software installed, you should run a full a system scan. Otherwise, download a security tool to a USB drive and run it from there.

Consider a fresh install

If you're really concerned about a possible infestation, either roll your computer back to an earlier date using System Restore or the Recovery option in Windows 10 (go to Start, Settings, Update & Security and Recovery on Windows 10). If the worst comes to the worst, consider reinstalling Windows.

HACK ANYTHING ON ANY SITE

COVER FEATURE

If you don't like the way a website looks or works, then change it! **Wayne Williams** reveals 31 clever ways to improve the web and tailor it to your tastes and needs

Even the best websites can have annoying elements – pages that are slow to load, colours that make text hard to read, adverts that obstruct your view, hard-to-find options and so on. Fortunately, there are plenty of free tools and tricks you can use to fix these problems and make the web look and work the way you want it to. Often, this is as simple as installing a browser extension that will perform the desired 'hack' at the click of a button. In this feature, we round up our favourite new ways to change and improve the web.

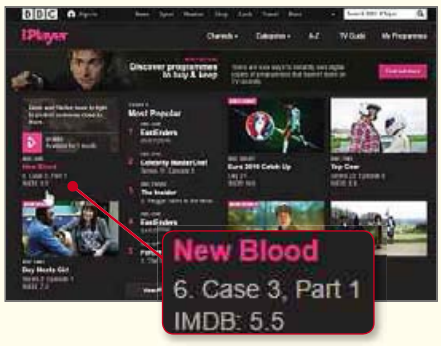
Over the following six pages, we show you how to add useful new features to popular sites including YouTube, BBC iPlayer and Gmail; explain how to remove unwanted elements such as adverts; and show you how to customise the design of pages. We also reveal how to make websites faster and safer.

ADD USEFUL NEW FEATURES

Add new options to YouTube

You can enhance your YouTube viewing experience by installing Magic Actions for YouTube (www.chromeactions.com), which introduces a bunch of additional options. Available for Chrome, Firefox and Opera, this amazing add-on lets you block ads and annotations; hide unwanted page elements including comments, related videos and descriptions; force YouTube to play videos at the resolution and size of your choice; control the volume using your mouse wheel; capture screenshots; and much more. There's also a handy Cinema mode that lets you flick a switch to darken everything on the page except the video player.

Be sure to decline the recommended extra tool during installation.



Add IMDB ratings to BBC iPlayer

If you're not sure whether a film or TV show on BBC iPlayer is worth watching,

you can always look it up on IMDb (Internet Movie Database). Instead of visiting the site, you can install the Chrome add-on IMDb Ratings for BBC iPlayer (bit.ly/imdb402). This shows the IMDB rating for every film and TV show on iPlayer (where available) and lets you click through to the IMDB page for further information.

Add features to Gmail

Gmail Labs lets you add some experimental features to Google's email service, although the selection hasn't been updated in quite some time.

To view the list and enable any options you like, open Gmail, go to Settings and click the Labs tab at the top. Highlights include Preview Pane, which displays the content of messages to the right of your inbox; and Canned Responses, which saves you typing by sending commonly used replies at the click of a button. Scroll down when you're done and click Save Changes.

One of the best third-party add-ons for Gmail is Boomerang (www.boomeranggmail.com), which is available for Firefox, Chrome and Safari. It lets you schedule messages to be sent or returned at a date of your choosing, and you can also track messages and schedule reminders.

Make Facebook more flexible

Facebook can be pretty irritating at times, but Social Fixer (socialfixer.com) lets you enhance the site with extra options while removing the bits that annoy you. It works with Firefox, Chrome, Opera and Safari, and gives you the options to filter your news feed, hide posts you've already read, show full images by hovering over them, hide parts of a page, change themes, and more. Unfortunately, the add-on hasn't been updated in quite a while, so you might find some features no longer work properly.

Get extra options in Wikipedia

You can add some welcome additional features to the online encyclopaedia by installing Wikipedia Plus on Chrome (bit.ly/wikiplus402). The extension shows short text snippets for other Wikipedia entries when you hover your mouse over a link; turns section titles into in-page links for easier bookmarking and sharing; and lets you hover over an image to see a larger version of it.

Another Chrome extension worth exploring is Black Menu for Wikipedia (bit.ly/blackmenu402). This adds a sidebar to the page that you can use to open other Wikimedia Foundation projects, including Wiktionary, Wikiquote and Wikibooks.

Buy Amazon books for less from local shops

It's no secret that competition from Amazon has put many independent bookshops out of business, but it's worth remembering that the online behemoth isn't always the cheapest option. The Chrome extension Bookindy (bit.ly/bookindy402) offers the best of both worlds by telling you when a book you're viewing on Amazon is available for a lower price from a local bookseller. It uses data from the independent-bookshop network Hive (www.hive.co.uk) to tell you how far away the store is, or you can order the book from that seller online for delivery or collection.

Discover places to visit via Airbnb

If you're planning to use Airbnb (www.airbnb.co.uk) to find affordable holiday accommodation, it's worth installing a Chrome extension from location-information service Yapq (yapq.com) called 'Explore nearby places for Airbnb' (bit.ly/airbnb402). This shows you interesting things to see and do for listings on Airbnb, so you can make sure the property you book isn't in the middle of nowhere. Each recommendation, which is embedded on the relevant Airbnb page, tells you how many minutes' walk it is from where you're staying, and you can click 'Read more' to see full details on Yapq. The extension's suggestions include an interesting array of places around the world, including tourist attractions, historic buildings and areas of natural beauty.

Add handy new options to Netflix

On a phone or tablet, the simplicity of the Netflix app is a definite boon; but in a Desktop browser, the Netflix website looks frustratingly basic. You can make its pages more interesting and useful by installing the excellent Chrome extension Flix Plus by Lifehacker (bit.ly/flixplus402). This offers lots of clever ways to customise Netflix and improve your viewing – just choose the ones you want to apply in its Options. For example, before you start watching a film, you can view a trailer on YouTube and show ratings from IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes; while for TV shows, you can hide potential spoilers for upcoming episodes and click the Random Episode button for a surprise choice. Flix Plus also lets you rearrange your watch list, so that titles set to be removed from the service soon are placed at the top.

REMOVE UNWANTED FEATURES

Remove specific elements from web pages

Ad blockers strip annoying advertising from web pages, but there may be other elements you want to remove, such as sidebars and promotional content. The excellent uBlock Origin (bit.ly/ublockorigin402) – not to be confused with uBlock, which it split from – lets you remove unwanted elements by right-clicking them and selecting Block Element. It works with Opera, Firefox and Chrome, and you can turn all blocked elements off or on by clicking the uBlock Origin button on your toolbar.

Remove results from Google

When you search for something on Google, certain websites almost always appear in the results – Wikipedia, for example. If you never visit these sites, use the Chrome add-on Personal Blocklist (bit.ly/pblock402) to remove specific URLs from your web searches. Simply click the Block link that appears next to the web address in your results.

Selectively block adverts

Adblock Plus (adblockplus.org) allows some advertising to appear through its 'acceptable' ads programme (including ads from companies who pay to be whitelisted), but it doesn't give you much control over what's permitted. If you want to choose which ads to allow, Stands' Fair Adblock (www.standsapp.org) for Chrome blocks ads as normal, but lets you choose to allow certain ones through. The money this generates gets split with the website and a charitable cause of your choice (with, as you might expect, a portion also going to the ad blocker's publisher).

Block all ads without exception

As mentioned above, most ad blockers give you the option to display some ads and whitelist sites you want to support. AdBlocker Ultimate (adblockultimate.net), which is available for all the major browsers, blocks *all* advertising, along with tracking and malware domains. There's no whitelisting or acceptable ads: once you've installed the add-on, that's it – all adverts will be removed. Just bear in mind that most websites depend on ad revenue to fund the free content they provide, and to pay for their running costs.

Stop sites blocking your ad blocker

A growing number of sites are fighting back against ad blockers: some may flash up a message asking you to disable your ad blocker or whitelist the site; others might stop you viewing content while your ad blocker is running. Anti-Adblock Killer (bit.ly/antiadblock402) helps to keep your ad blocker active by disguising its presence. It's compatible with Chrome Firefox, Opera and Safari; and Adblock Plus, Adblock and uBlock Origin.

For Anti-Adblock Killer to work effectively, you'll first need to install a userscript manager such as Greasemonkey for Firefox (www.greasespot.net) or Tampermonkey (tampermonkey.net) for other browsers. Once this is done, go to bit.ly/adblock402 and click the Subscribe button to add Anti-Adblock Killer to your ad blocker's filter list. If you're using uBlock Origin, you'll also need to go into that blocker's Options, click the '3rd-party filters' tab and tick the box next to Anti-Adblock Killer.

Websites detect ad blockers in a variety of ways, so this script won't necessarily work on all of them.

CUSTOMISE THE DESIGN

Make sites kinder on the eyes

If your eyesight isn't what it used to be, and you find some sites hard to read, the easiest solution is to zoom in to get a closer look. This is usually done using a slider, or by holding down Ctrl and spinning the mouse scroll wheel (or tapping the plus button).

There are other tweaks that make a website easier to view. In Firefox, you can set a website's font size and colours under Options, Content, Fonts & Colours. You'll find extra choices in the Advanced section. In Chrome, go to Settings, 'Show advanced settings' and make the required changes under 'Web content'. Clicking Chrome's Accessibility link displays a selection of add-ons that improve Chrome if your vision is suffering, including a Colour Enhancer and High Contrast mode.

Change the colour of websites

You can manually change the colour of a websites using your browser settings, but it's easier to use an add-on such as Color That Site (bit.ly/colorsite402) for Firefox. Once it's installed, restart your browser and click the button to open the sidebar. Click the Go button and you'll be able to change the foreground and background colours, and specify any colours you want left as they are.

See our Mini Workshop opposite for instructions on using Color That Site.

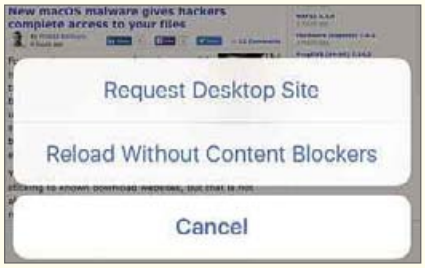
Add a custom look to any website

Stylish (bit.ly/stylish402) is an excellent Chrome extension that lets you install themes and skins for popular sites. You can remove unwanted content, change colours or fully redesign the look of

a site. To use it, browse to a site you want to change, click the Stylish button in your browser and select 'Find more styles for this site'. This will open a page on Userstyles.org showing a list of available choices. Select a look, then click 'Install with Stylish' to apply it.

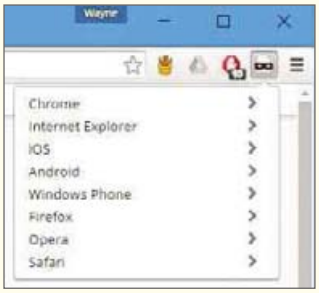
Use the Desktop version of a site on mobile

The Desktop version of a website often looks better and offers more features than its mobile counterpart, even if it doesn't always fit properly on your phone's screen. Many mobile sites offer an option to open the Desktop version: look in the menu section, usually accessed by tapping a button in the top-left corner, then find the option and tap it to switch. Alternatively, on iPhone, tap the Share button and select Request Desktop Site, or long-press the reload button and select the option when it appears. On Android, tap the three-dots button in the top-right corner and select 'Request desktop site'.



Use the mobile version of a site on Desktop

The Desktop version of a website should, in theory, be the best version for viewing on a PC or Mac, but sometimes the mobile version is the better choice because it's cleaner, faster to load and easier to navigate. You can persuade a website to display the mobile version by fooling it into thinking you're browsing from a mobile device. To do this, you need to change the User Agent String. This can be done manually, but the User-Agent Switcher for Chrome (bit.ly/useragent402) makes it even simpler. Install it, click the button in the browser and pick a device to spoof, such as an Android phone. You can quickly switch between views for the best results.

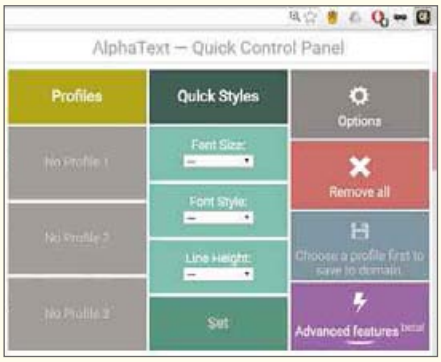


Apply a different theme to Facebook

Facebook is one of the most popular sites on the web, but its design is dated and rather basic. You can give the social network a facelift using the Flatbook Chrome extension (bit.ly/flatbook402). Not only does this give Facebook a smarter, more modern look but it also strips out the advertising, making the site much faster, and adds a handy sidebar on the left to provide easy access to all the main sections. The new design takes a little getting used to, but we really like it.

Make text more readable

Reading large swathes of text on websites can be uncomfortable on the eyes, especially if the web designer has chosen a nasty colour scheme or made poor formatting choices. AlphaText (bit.ly/alphatext402) is a Chrome add-on that can customise and change the appearance of text on web pages to make it easier to read. Click the button in the browser and you can change the font size, font style and line height. You can also optimise the colour and hide multimedia content. Create a profile for your preferred choices and you can apply this whenever you like. You can



MINI WORKSHOP | Change the colour of sites using Color That Site

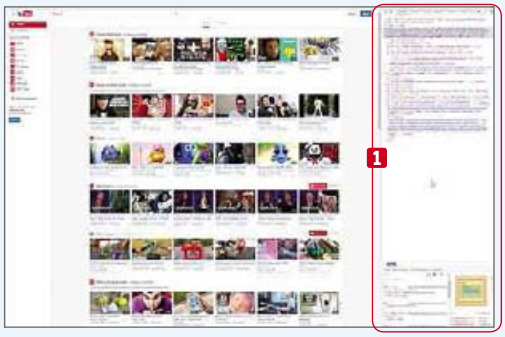
1 Install Color That Site in Firefox and restart your browser. Click the new button in the top-right corner 1 to open a sidebar for the extension. 2 A message tells you that the colours of the currently displayed website have not yet been edited. Click the Go button 3 to begin making changes.

2 The Colours tab 1 lets you change the foreground and background colours. Open a section you want to change (background colours, in this instance) and you'll see a palette of colours used on the site. 2 Use the sliders 3 to make changes to the hue, saturation and luminosity, then click Preview 4 to see the results.

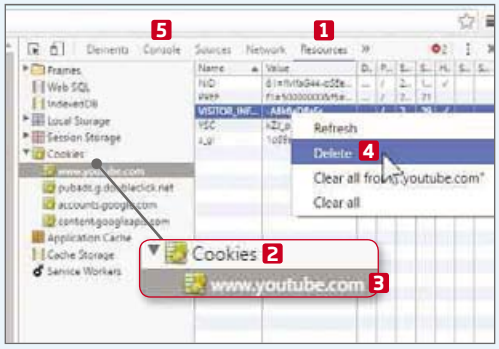
3 If you want to keep certain colours on a site as they are, open the 'Don't change these colours' menu 1 and drag the ones you want left alone into the foreground or background boxes. 2 There are other changes you can make in the Bitmaps and Settings tabs. 3 When you're happy with your tweaks, click Save. 4

MINI WORKSHOP

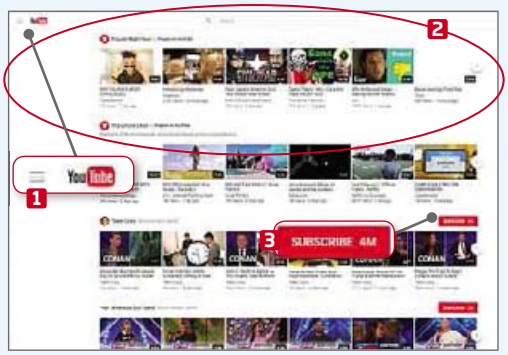
Unlock YouTube's Material Design layout



1 Google is testing a flatter and cleaner design for YouTube. It's not available yet, but you can unlock it if you know how. First, log out of YouTube or open an Incognito window (in Chrome, press Ctrl+Shift+N). Go to https:www.youtube.com/?gl=US and open the Developer Tools (Ctrl+Shift+i). 1



2 Go to the Resources tab, 1 expand Cookies 2 and click www.youtube.com. 3 Right-click the VISITOR_INFO1_LIVE cookie and Select Delete. 4 Click the Console tab, 5 then type: `document.cookie="VISITOR_INFO1_LIVE=Qa1hUZu3gtk;path=/;domain=.youtube.com";` and hit Enter to action the command and create a new cookie. Close the Developer Tools window.



3 Reload YouTube to see the new design. A three-line menu in the top-left corner 1 opens a sidebar containing Home, Trending and History entries, and a Best of YouTube selection. Popular and 'Shared and Liked' videos appear at the top. 2 Use the buttons 3 to subscribe to Recommended channels.

also have your favourite websites adopt your chosen text size and style every time you visit them.

Centralise Google search results

Google's search engine places the content of its results on the left-hand side of the page. If you have a large monitor, you'll be left with lots of white space on the right-hand side, which can look odd. Centered Google Results (bit.ly/centregoogle402) is a Chrome extension that does exactly what its name implies by placing the results in the centre of your screen. This not only looks nicer, but it's more comfortable to read, too.

Apply Material Design to Google sites

Material Design is a design language created by Google and used across the search giant's recent web and mobile products, with the aim of providing a clean, stylish and consistent look. Ink for Google (bit.ly/ink402) is a browser extension for Firefox and Chrome that improves the look of Google websites – including Search, Gmail, and Calendar – by introducing a colourful look that follows the Material Design guidelines.

See our Mini Workshop on the left for guidance on applying Material Design to websites.

Customise the Google homepage

Google's search page is as basic as they come – except for when it's running one of its famous themed doodles. The Chrome extension Custom Google Background (bit.ly/customgoogle402) lets you add some colourful wallpaper to the page. You can upload your own photos, apply images from the web or search photography site 500px, and either choose a particular photo to display or randomise images. In addition, you can customise the information on screen by hiding the footer, the search button, Google logo and more. You can also change the site's background colour.

View Bing's daily wallpaper on Google

Bing's daily background image is probably the main reason people visit Microsoft's search engine. If you like the look of Bing, but prefer Google's results, then Bing Wallpaper for Google Homepage (bit.ly/bingongoogle402) gives you the best of both worlds. Install the Chrome extension and you'll see that day's Bing image on Google.

Make Wikipedia look more modern

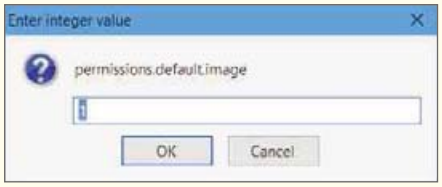
Wikipedia is a fantastic resource for looking up information on the web, but its design is horribly dated. Wikiwand (www.wikiwand.com) for Chrome, Firefox, Safari and iPhone gives the online encyclopedia a stylish, modern makeover. It transforms the appearance of articles, expanding images to create large cover photos, converting the Contents list into convenient menu options and providing page previews when you hover your mouse over links. The main content is made much easier to read and you're even alerted when someone edits the article you're viewing. WikiWand works automatically, with no need to adjust any settings, and you can easily switch back to the standard Wikipedia design when you want.

MAKE SITES FASTER TO USE

Remove images from web pages

When you browse the web, text loads immediately, but photos can take longer, especially if they haven't been optimised. To speed things up, you can stop images loading automatically.

In Chrome, go to Settings, 'Show advanced settings' and click the 'Content settings' button under Privacy. Tick 'Do not show any images'.



Alternatively, you can use the Images ON/OFF extension (bit.ly/imagesonoff402).

In Firefox, type: `about:config` into the address bar and press Enter. Search for 'permissions.default .image' and change the value: 0 is always load images, 1 is never load images, and 2 is don't load third-party images.

Speed up page-loading times

All sorts of things can slow down the speed at which a site loads. Google's Data Saver technology, for Chrome and Android (bit.ly/gdschrome402), and Firefox (bit.ly/gdsfirefox402), reduces the amount of data that's downloaded when you visit some websites, which makes pages load more quickly. There are some caveats, however: images may look a little fuzzy and the add-on doesn't work on secure (HTTPS) sites, or in Incognito mode.

BOOST WEBSITE SECURITY

Bypass EU cookie warnings

An EU law requires sites to warn visitors about the use of cookies – although this could potentially be repealed following Brexit. It's rather pointless, because most of us simply close the warning without reading it. If you'd rather not be bothered by these messages in your browser, you can remove the warnings by using the I Don't Care About Cookies (bit.ly/cookiescare402) add-on, which works with all the major browsers.

You can also remove them using Adblock Plus (adblockplus.org). Once it's installed, open the subscriptions page at adblockplus.org/en/subscriptions and find Prebake in the list. Click the link to subscribe to its filter list and click 'Add subscription' in the window that opens. If you use another ad blocker, follow the instructions on the Prebake site (prebake.eu).

Block cross-site request forgeries

Clickjacking and Cross-Site Request Forgery (CSRF) attacks redirect your browser to a different site without your knowledge. That can result in you being taken to a malicious site, which could infect your system with malware. RequestPolicy Continued (bit.ly/requestpolicy402) is an add-on for Firefox that stops this happening. You can block all such cross-site requests, or whitelist any you know are safe.

Always access secure versions of websites

While many websites now offer secure HTTPS versions, not all of them load it by default. HTTPS Everywhere (bit.ly/https402) is a browser add-on for Chrome, Firefox and Opera that automatically redirects your browser to the secure version of a site, so even if you only type in the basic address, you'll still end up on the secure version. ■

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Best free to-do list tools

Lots of to-do list services sync between your computer, your mobile devices and the web, so you can access them wherever and whenever you need. But which one should you use? **Edward Munn** rounds up six of the best

Google Keep | www.google.com/keep | ★★★★★

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

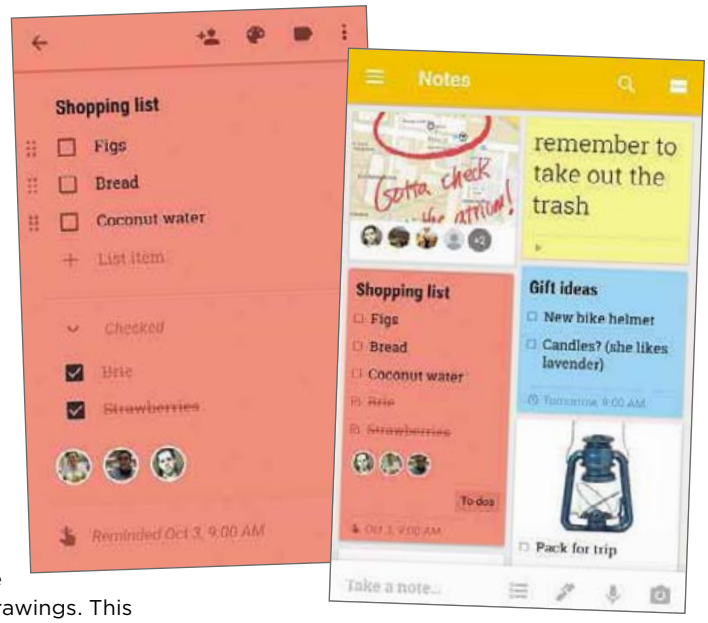
WebUser GOLD AWARD

What we liked:

Google Keep is the most versatile and easiest to use of all the to-do list apps we tested. Because it's also designed to take notes, it works a little differently to some of its competitors, but creating to-do lists is as simple as tapping the list icon on the home screen and then adding as many items to it as you want. Each note or list can then be named and you can also make lists easier to find by colour-coding them and adding labels. For example, you might create a Home label for personal lists and a Work label for work-related tasks.

When you complete a task, you can tick the appropriate box and it'll be crossed out and moved to the bottom of the list. To clear a finished list, you must archive it by tapping the appropriate button or simply swipe it from the homepage. Archiving your lists, rather than deleting them, is very useful if you need to find something again at a later date, and Google's predictably excellent search tools make this a straightforward task.

Keep lets you set reminders (including repeat reminders) for each of your lists or notes, and there's even the option to set location-based reminders, which is handy if you want to be prompted to send an email as soon as you arrive at work, for example. Collaborative lists are also supported – should you want to share a list with family, friends or colleagues – and you can add photos, voice recordings and drawings. This impressive catalogue of features might sound complicated, but Keep's intuitive, minimalist interface (which is identical across all devices) makes it an absolute pleasure to use.



How it can be improved:

Although the option to create notes or lists is one of the app's strengths, you can end up with an endless stream of muddled entries if you don't perform regular housekeeping.

OUR VERDICT

Google Keep's user-friendly interface and impressive range of features make it the most accessible and versatile of all the services we tested. If you want to make to-do lists quickly and easily without the rigid structures imposed by its rivals, Google Keep is perfect for the job.

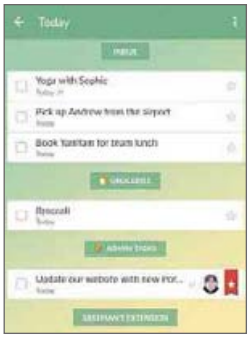
Wunderlist | www.wunderlist.com | ★★★★★

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

What we liked:

Unlike Google Keep, Wunderlist is entirely dedicated to creating to-do lists and helping you structure and manage your tasks and chores. After choosing from its default lists, which include groceries, movies to watch, travel, work, family and private (you can also create your own lists), you can start adding tasks directly from the app's home screen, setting a due date and reminder for each one. The app's Smart Due Dates feature makes this even easier by recognising words and phrases you type, such as 'tomorrow', 'next week' or 'August 5', and automatically adding the relevant due date and reminder.

As well as sending alerts, Wunderlist helps you keep on top of your most pressing chores with its Today and Starred smart lists; you can leave new entries in the Inbox if you're not sure where they belong yet.



Like Google Keep, Wunderlist lets you create collaborative lists but it goes a step further by letting you start conversations about lists and assign specific tasks to other users. For both private and collaborative lists, you can add notes, subtasks and files to each entry in the list view.

How it can be improved:

The option to add notes and files when you first create a task would be a welcome feature. Also, the free version of Wunderlist limits the size of your file attachments and the number of subtasks you can add.

OUR VERDICT

Wunderlist only just missed out on our Gold award. It's easy to use, has excellent organisational tools and several features you'd normally expect to find in paid-for apps.

Any.Do | www.any.do | ★★★★☆

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

What we liked:

Any.Do is another excellent free app offering to-do lists for managing your everyday chores. Like Wunderlist, it comes with a selection of presets including Personal, Work and Grocery List to help organise your tasks, and you can choose to delete these lists or add to them. As you type a new task, Any.Do's handy auto-suggestion tool helps to finish your sentence. It also has an excellent voice dictation option.

When you make an entry, the app lets you add a reminder, set it as a repeat task or simply leave it as it is. When reviewing your tasks, Any.Do lets you view them by date and priority order to help you find the most important entries and, like Wunderlist, you can select items from the list view to add notes (including attachments) and share the list with other users. Unlike the other apps we tested, Any.Do uses unique gesture-based actions to help you clear items quickly and easily – simply tap a task and swipe right over it to mark it as complete, then shake your device to clean up all your finished tasks.

How it can be improved:

Like ToDoist, you have to pay to unlock location-based reminders in Any.Do. Although we like the app's unique interface and gesture-based actions, it was a bit trickier to get to grips with than our other award winners.

OUR VERDICT

Any.Do offers an impressive range of features for free, but it's not as easy to use as Google Keep and Wunderlist. If, however you want to try a to-do list app that frees you up from typing and has some quirky features, it's well worth a try.

BEST OF THE REST

ToDoist

todoist.com

ToDoist is one of the biggest names in to-do list services and it offers an unrivalled number of features to help you manage your everyday tasks. However, many of these features, such as labels, reminders and file uploads, are reserved for Premium users, so unless you want to pay £21.99 a year to subscribe, we'd recommend Wunderlist, which looks and feels similar, but offers more on its free plan.

Remember the Milk

www.rememberthemilk.com

Remember the Milk was a strong contender for one of our awards because it offers an impressive set of organisational tools including lists, tags, priorities, due dates and repeats, as well as handy features such as reminders and shared lists. Unfortunately, we found its interface cluttered and confusing, and would recommend using something more intuitive.

Evernote

evernote.com

Like Google Keep, Evernote lets you create to-do lists within notes. However, adding tick boxes to a note is surprisingly clunky and if that's your main reason for using it, you'll find the impressive range of other features a massive distraction. You'll also need to subscribe to the premium plan if you want to access your notebooks offline and on more than two devices, so we'd recommend using one of the other apps unless you're already a fan.

HOW UNSAFE are these download sites?

Downloading software from the web can be a risky business. **Robert Irvine** reveals which sources can and can't be trusted

Downloading free software is as simple as clicking a button on a web page, but sometimes you get more than you bargained for: the program may come packaged with junk or a button may trick you into installing something completely different. Sadly, an increasing number of download sites employ these underhand tactics so, armed with the brilliant tools VirusTotal (virustotal.com) and Unchecky (unchecky.com), we downloaded software from seven of the most popular sources to test how honest they are with their users about unwanted extras.

Tucows

www.tucows.com/downloads

In May this year, Tucows announced that it was "cutting the crap" by ditching ad-supported downloads in favour of a new business model (bit.ly/tucows402). Rather than tricking you into clicking adverts disguised as Download buttons, and bundling toolbars and other unwanted junk, Tucows says it now merely promotes its domain-registration service Hover and phone network Ting (which are only available in the US).

To check that Tucows isn't pulling the udder one, we tried downloading several programs from the site, but we were blocked by Chrome every time. The browser warned that: "Attackers on www.tucows.com might attempt to trick you into installing programs that harm your browsing experience". Giving Tucows the benefit of the doubt, we tried again in Firefox and got a similar warning from the browser's 'Phishing and Malware Protection' feature.

✗ OUR VERDICT

If Tucows has cleaned up its act, Google and Mozilla clearly didn't get the memo. To be honest, its selection of free software is pretty poor these days, so you're better off elsewhere.

Chrome and Firefox both warned us that Tucows hosted harmful software

SnapFiles

www.snapfiles.com

SnapFiles states on its Our Adware/Spyware Policy page (bit.ly/snapfiles402) that it has a "zero tolerance policy when it comes to spyware and malware" and tests every program it lists. It admits to featuring "a very limited number of adware applications", but insists none of these contain malicious components and that they are clearly flagged on the download page.

To test this, we downloaded a program we know comes bundled with undesirable extras. Sure enough, SnapFiles displayed a warning: "This program offers to install promotional third-party software. Installation is optional but you should pay close attention to avoid installing unwanted software."

✓ OUR VERDICT

We admire SnapFiles' honesty in admitting that some of its software includes unwanted extras, and that it warns users to take care – it's a problem we regularly deal with ourselves in our Best Free Software section. Also, unlike other download sites, it's not plagued by deceptive ads.

Snapfiles warns you if the program you're about to download contains junk

Download.com

download.cnet.com

Such is Download.com's dire reputation that our ad blocker, uBlock Origin, wouldn't let us access it, citing "badware risks". Temporarily disabling the blocker didn't work because every link we clicked on the site re-triggered the warning so, reluctantly, we turned it off completely.

Once we made it into Download.com, we found it was as awful as we remembered: blighted by fake Download buttons, swamped with ads and ridiculously slow. On the plus side, we didn't come across any software that still used CNET's notorious installer, which bundles unwanted 'offers' with downloads and makes them difficult to decline. On the downside, several programs we downloaded failed to completely pass a VirusTotal scan, with four or five scanners detecting suspicious elements – ranging from adware to a possible Trojan.

✗ OUR VERDICT

Although Download.com appears to have stopped bundling junk with software, its surfeit of ads – especially those disguised as Download buttons – makes it impossible to recommend.

We were forced to disable our ad blocker to access Download.com

Dodgy download sites

FileHippo

filehippo.com

FileHippo proudly proclaims on its homepage that all its programs are tested for malware and adware, and include "no added bundles, installers or toolbars". It also offers a 'FileHippo Safety Guarantee' that ensures downloads are safe by scanning them with Avira antivirus technology. These are exactly the reassurances we want, and FileHippo stays true to its word: none of the software we downloaded came with nasty surprises.

Sadly, FileHippo muddies the water with adverts masquerading as Download buttons and an irritating habit of playing video ads while you're downloading, under the pretence of letting you "catch up on some of the latest tech news". You can combat both of these problems by installing an ad blocker and by disabling JavaScript in your browser using Toggle JavaScript for Chrome (bit.ly/jschrome402) or JavaScript Toggle On or Off for Firefox (bit.ly/jsfirefox402).

OUR VERDICT

FileHippo's large selection of software, including betas and previous versions of programs, is completely safe, but if you want to download software without putting up with irritating distractions, you'll need to use an ad-blocking tool.

We like FileHippo, but we could do without its annoying video adverts

Softpedia

www.softpedia.com

We have mixed feelings about Softpedia. On the one hand, it offers a bigger and more varied choice of software than any other download site; tests programs to ensure they don't contain any malware – look out for the 100% Clean rating; and encourages users to report anything dodgy. On the other hand, it's a mess and unless you know to ignore all Download buttons apart from the dark blues ones, you could end up with unwanted and possibly invasive software on your PC. We were also annoyed that Softpedia failed to warn us which programs were bundled with 'offers', which meant we almost installed a load of Yahoo crap.

OUR VERDICT

Sorry, Softpedia – although you've helped us many times by providing software that's unavailable elsewhere, you really need to improve your presentation and information. Until then, you get a red cross.

Softpedia didn't warn us that this program would try to install unwanted extras

SourceForge

sourceforge.net

The open-source software repository has been under new ownership since the beginning of 2016 and, like Tucows, it has promised to stop using deceptive ads and bundling junk with its downloads. A notorious adware program called DevShare has been "completely eliminated", and SourceForge says it now scans all programs for malware.

We tested this claim by downloading a random selection of software from the site, including KeePass, CamStudio and the dubious-sounding Torrent Episode Downloader (TED). Happily, every download was completely clean – even TED – with no browser warnings, unwelcome junk or malware.

SourceForge's programs contained no crapware

OUR VERDICT

Bravo to the new owners of SourceForge for tackling the dodgy downloads that were damaging the site's reputation. Hopefully, it will resist the temptation to resume dubious practices in future.

MajorGeeks

www.majorgeeks.com

MajorGeeks hasn't updated its design for 14 years, but it's still a great place to find all the latest downloads – and not just the most popular ones. It subjects all the software it lists to a rigorous testing process, scanning it for malware and running it in a secure environment to ensure it does what it claims to do.

Like other download sites, MajorGeeks still offers programs with unwanted extras, but it makes the effort to highlight these in its listings. Look between the file size and minimum requirements next to the program's name, or in the License field of its download page, to find out if it's freeware, shareware or ad-supported. Forewarned is forearmed, after all, as any major geek with tell you.

OUR VERDICT

We often turn to MajorGeeks when other download sites fail, and have never suffered any hidden malware. Still, it would be nice if the 'Ad-Supported' label was more prominent, because it's easy to miss.

MajorGeeks flags ad-supported downloads that may contain bundled junk

Remove built-in junk from any device

Many PCs, phones and tablets come loaded with bloatware that you'll never need or use. **Edward Munn** explains five ways to get rid of this unwanted clutter for good

Clear unwanted programs from your PC

Some PC manufacturers make money by swamping their computers with unnecessary extras, otherwise known as bloatware. Although not all of these applications are useless, most of us would rather make our own choices about which programs are installed on our computers. The charmingly named PC DeCrapifier (pcdecrapifier.com) is a handy tool that removes unwanted clutter from your PC, whether it's new or old, freeing up drive space and speeding up your system.

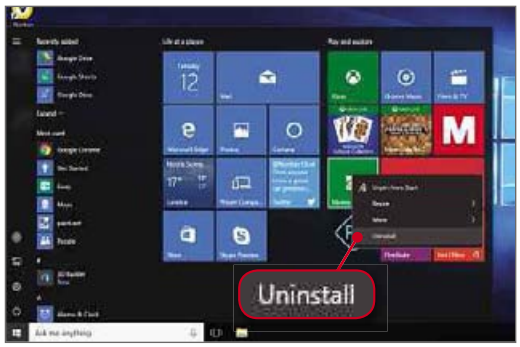
The free version of PC Decrapifier is a portable application, which means you can run it on any PC without installing it. It uses a simple wizard to present you with a list of items that it recommends you remove. Most of these programs should be safe to delete, but it's still important you review the list carefully in case there's anything you'll regret getting rid of.

Additionally, PC Decrapifier offers a 'Questionable' list, which includes programs many users choose to remove but that you should consider carefully before uninstalling. Lastly, the program lets you manually review and uninstall any other programs installed on your PC via its Everything Else section.

PC Decrapifier highlights programs that it recommends you uninstall

Remove preinstalled Windows 10 apps

In Windows 10, you can normally remove any bloatware installed by the manufacturer by right-clicking the appropriate apps in the Start menu and selecting Uninstall. The same is true for Microsoft apps such as Get Skype, Get Office, Money, News and Sports, but other default Windows 10 apps are more stubborn.



You can uninstall some built-in Windows apps by right-clicking them in the Start menu

For example, to get rid of Photos, Weather, Mail and Calendar, you need to use a command line in Windows PowerShell. First, type `powershell` into the Start menu, right-click it and select 'Run as administrator', then agree to the User Account Control prompt. Next, type the following command: `Get-AppxPackage *APP* | Remove-AppxPackage` (where APP is the name of the app you want to remove), and press Enter to execute the command. You can do this with as many Windows 10 apps as you like, pressing Enter after each one, but bear in mind that you cannot remove the likes of Cortana, Contact Support and Microsoft Edge. You won't necessarily benefit from extra hard-drive space by uninstalling these apps, but it'll certainly declutter your Start menu and prevent you from opening them accidentally.

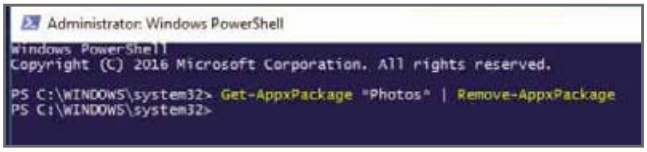
If you decide you want to get back a default Windows apps, you can reverse the process with a single PowerShell command line. Run PowerShell as an administrator again, then type:

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

and press Enter.

Alternatively, visit our page-by-page links for this issue at bit.ly/page402 to copy and paste this rather complex command into PowerShell. You might need to give the process a few moments to complete, and at first it may look like it's not doing anything.

Before you make any of these changes using PowerShell, we always recommend creating a System Restore point or a system image in case something goes wrong.



Use PowerShell to remove stubborn, built-in Windows 10 apps

Hide and remove Android bloatware

As with PCs, many Android phones and tablets come with their manufacturers' own apps installed. Unfortunately, you can't normally uninstall these apps unless you root your device, but you can at least disable them so they don't launch in the background and consume precious resources.

In newer versions of Android, you can do this directly from the operating system's Apps settings menu. Simply open the Settings app, then tap Apps and choose the app you want disable from the list. On the app's info page, you'll see a Disable button. Tap this and a warning appears saying that it could cause problems. Don't worry, because if it does, you can always re-enable it later. After disabling the app, you can also tap 'Clear data' (where applicable) to delete any cached files associated with it.

You can disable manufacturers' apps from the Apps settings menu

If you have an older Android device – or you're not happy just deactivating the preinstalled apps on your phone or tablet – you can remove them altogether by rooting your device and installing the premium app Titanium Backup (bit.ly/tbr402). However, you should think carefully before choosing this option, because rooting your smartphone will void the manufacturer's warranty and you also run the risk of 'bricking' your device, making it completely unusable.

If you still want to go ahead, there are instructions on freezing or uninstalling apps in a helpful How-To Geek article (bit.ly/howto402). Before attempting this, it's always best to create a backup in case something goes wrong.

Titanium Backup enables you to uninstall any apps on a rooted device

Hide Android apps using Apex Launcher

If you'd prefer to hide pre-installed apps from your device without interfering with the way they work, you can do so by installing Apex Launcher (bit.ly/apex402). This handy app replaces the default launcher on your device, giving you lots of customisation options for both the home screen and app drawer.

After installing Apex Launcher, open 'Apex settings', tap 'Backup and restore' and choose 'Import desktop data' to import your current home screen (shortcuts, folders and so on) or start a new configuration by dropping apps you want from the app drawer. To hide apps from this app drawer, open 'Drawer settings' from 'Apex settings', tap 'Hidden apps' and select the apps you want to hide. Removing apps you've never used will make the app drawer feel much less cluttered and you can easily reverse the process at any time by simply unticking the appropriate boxes.

Apex Launcher lets you hide Android apps from the app drawer

Another option is to install the free app Disable Bloatware – Hide Apps (bit.ly/disable402), which doesn't require root access but lets you remove unwanted apps from your app drawer and home screens by hiding them. Scroll through its list of 'hide-able' apps, then tap any you want to get rid of and choose Disable.

Remove preinstalled apps from iOS

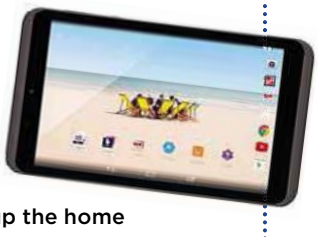
Once iOS 10 has been released, you'll be able to remove some of the apps that come preinstalled on Apple devices including Calculator, Calendar, iBooks, iTunes Store, Mail, Maps, Podcasts, Stocks, Tips, Voice Memos, Watch and Weather. To do this, you just long-press the app, then tap the X in its corner as you would to delete any other app. Unfortunately, this method only hides the app and deletes its cached data, so the storage savings will be marginal, but it'll be the first time you've officially been able to remove unwanted clutter from the home screens. To restore an app, you can simply find it in the App Store and install it again.

Hide unwanted apps by placing them all in one folder

In the meantime, our tidy-up tip is to add all the apps you don't use to a folder called 'Apple Apps' or something similar, then move it to the last of your home screens so that it's out of sight until iOS 10 is released in a couple of months. To create a folder, simply drag one app over another. ■

CAN I REMOVE APPS FROM MY HUDL?

One of the most frequently asked questions about moving preinstalled apps relates to Tesco's Hudl. Unfortunately, the same rules apply as any other Android phone or tablet in that you can't uninstall bloatware completely without rooting the device. However, you can easily clean up the home screen by long-pressing icons and tapping the X that appears to remove them. If you want to hide Tesco's apps from the app drawer, you can do so using a custom launcher such as Apex Launcher (as described above).



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	Provider	Package name	Monthly price	Contract length	Broadband speed	Allowance	First-year cost*
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2	EE	EE: Broadband	£9.95 (£1 for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited **	£12.00
3	sky	Sky: Broadband	£10.00 (HALF PRICE for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£60.00
4	Virgin media	Virgin: Broadband	£19.00 (£12 for 9 months)	12 months	50Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited **	£165.00

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 15 July 2016.

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

SNEAK PREVIEW!

Computer active

- **WINDOWS 10 ANNIVERSARY UPDATE** Your complete guide to every new tool
- Remove the junk that Windows always leaves behind
- Best software to find PC files
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Take a Screen Break

Give your eyes a rest from your computer by taking our fiendish fortnightly challenges. Can you unravel our cloud-storage word search and guess our band-name emoji?

WEB USER WORD SEARCH

Can you find the following cloud-storage services in the grid on the right? Names may appear vertically, horizontally or diagonally, and forwards or backwards

CLOUD DRIVE
DROPBOX
GOOGLE DRIVE
ICLOUD
LIVEDRIVE
MEDIAFIRE
MEGA
ONEDRIVE
SPIDEROAK
SUGARSYNC

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

CAN YOU GUESS THE BAND NAMES FROM THE EMOJI?

1

2

3

4

Get the answers online at bit.ly/quiz402

COMPETITIONS

WIN 1 OF 8 Rock Jaw Clarito headphones

WORTH £23.95 EACH

Rock Jaw's new Clarito headphones are compact, lightweight, and built to last. They have a powerful 8mm precision-tuned driver, delivering crisp and clear audio for music and movies. The headphones come with a range of ear tips to ensure you find your perfect fit. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'clarito' in the subject line. For more info visit https://rockjawaudio.com and follow @rockjawaudio1 on Twitter.

WIN! NETGEAR Nighthawk X6 AC3200 router

WORTH £229.99

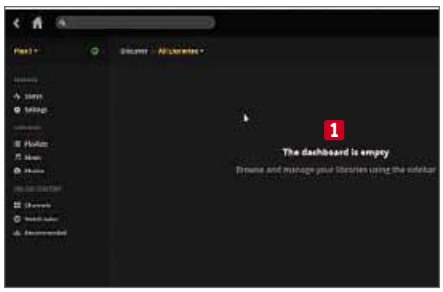
To celebrate the Nighthawk X6 winning Best Router at the European Hardware Awards (bit.ly/awards402), NETGEAR is giving one away to a lucky *Web User* reader. The router's Tri-Band Wi-Fi technology connects automatically and simultaneously to every WiFi-enabled device in your home. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'Nighthawk' in the subject line. For more info visit www.netgear.co.uk and follow @NETGEAR_UKI on Twitter.

Stream videos anywhere using Plex Media Server | www.plex.tv

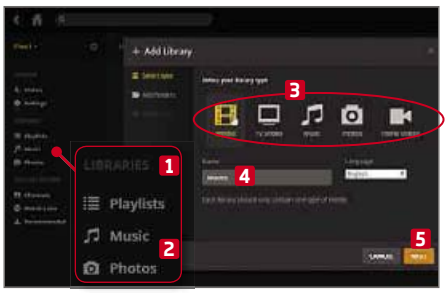
Plex is a powerful media server that streams videos stored in a central location to any device on your network or beyond. Here's how to use it

Plex Media Server first became available to the public in August 2010, but it's taken until now for it to hit version 1.0. The software is entirely free and available for Windows 7 onwards, Mac OS X and Linux, and there are apps available for streaming to iOS, Android, Roku, Apple TV, Android TV, Xbox One/360, PlayStation 3 and 4, Chromecast and more.

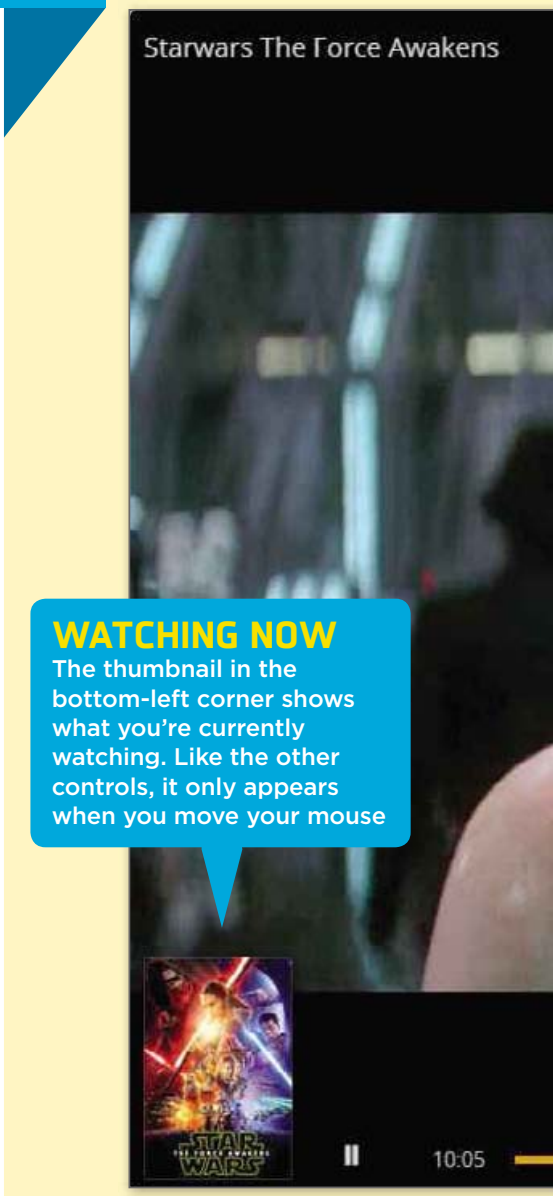
Your videos, photos and music are stored on your main computer (or a NAS – Network Attached Storage – if you prefer), then accessed via whatever viewing device you choose. By streaming your media, Plex lets you begin watching a movie on one device, then switch to viewing it on a different one and pick up from wherever you left off.



1 Download Plex Media Server and install it on the computer that hosts your media. Once it's installed, click Launch. Plex will run minimised in the notification area of your taskbar. Double-click the icon to open the media server's interface in your web browser. The dashboard is empty to begin with. 1

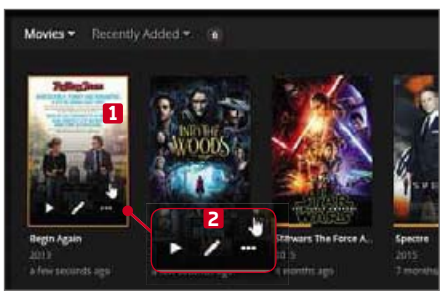


2 Under Libraries, 1 you can access Music and Photos. 2 To add a section for videos, hover your mouse over Libraries and click the plus sign that appears. You can choose from Movies, TV Shows and Home Videos. 3 Click the icon you want – you can change the name if you like 4 – and click Next. 5



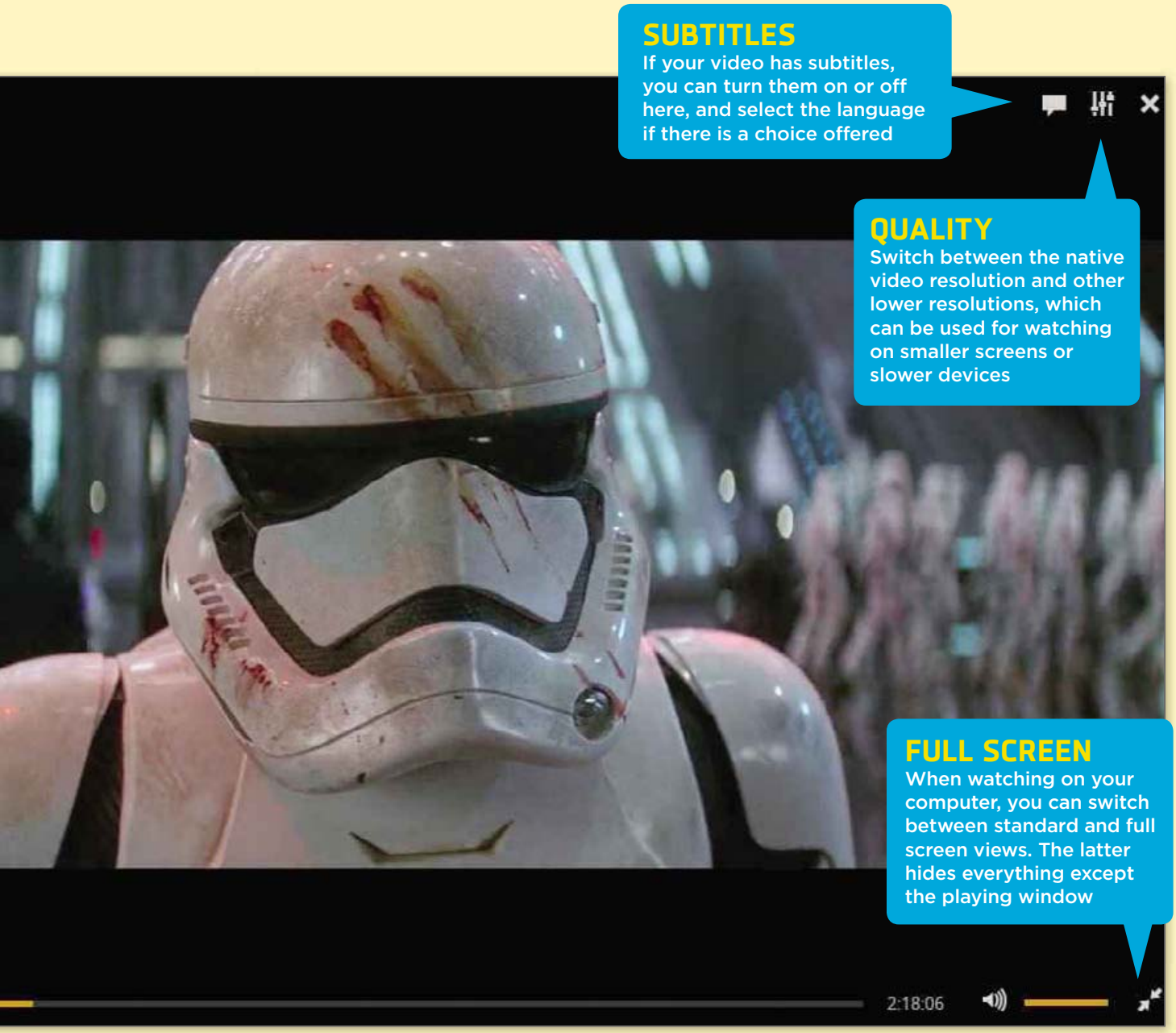
WATCHING NOW
The thumbnail in the bottom-left corner shows what you're currently watching. Like the other controls, it only appears when you move your mouse

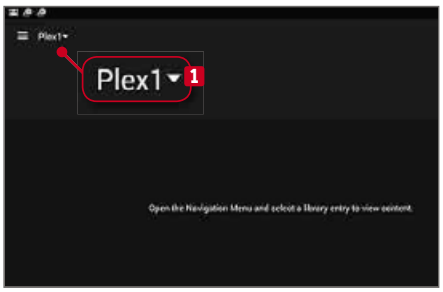
3 On the following screen, you're prompted to browse for the folder that contains the relevant type of file. 1 To get the most from Plex, you need to separate your movies, TV shows and home videos into distinct folders. Navigate to the folder you want to use and click Add Library. 2



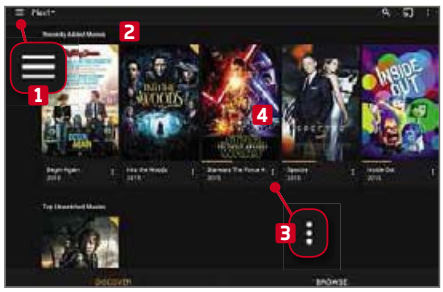
4 Plex searches for content and automatically matches a file's name in your folder with the data in its online database, then downloads the relevant artwork and information. 1 If it identifies something incorrectly, hover your mouse over the thumbnail, click the Edit button, 2 and change the name.

5 Click a thumbnail to view information about a movie or TV show, including its running time, 1 star rating, 2 age rating, 3 cast and overview. 4 The sidebar 5 contains tools to play it, edit the information, add it to a playlist, refresh the details and mark it as watched.

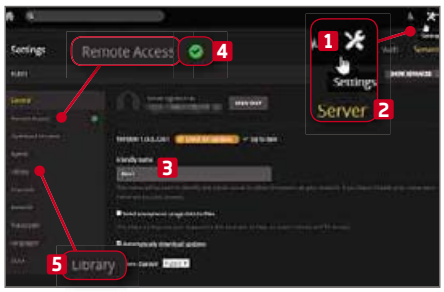




6 Plex is designed to stream content over your network, rather than just watch it on the device it's stored on, so you need to install the relevant app on the device you want to use – Android in this instance (bit.ly/plexandroid402) – and launch it. Use the drop-down arrow 1 to select your server.



7 Tap the menu button 1 and a sidebar opens. From here, you can access Playlists and Channels, as well as your Movies, Music, and Photos libraries. This is the Movies screen. 2 Tap the three dots button 3 to start a video playing or to add it to the playlist. Tap the thumbnail 4 to open up the info page for that film.



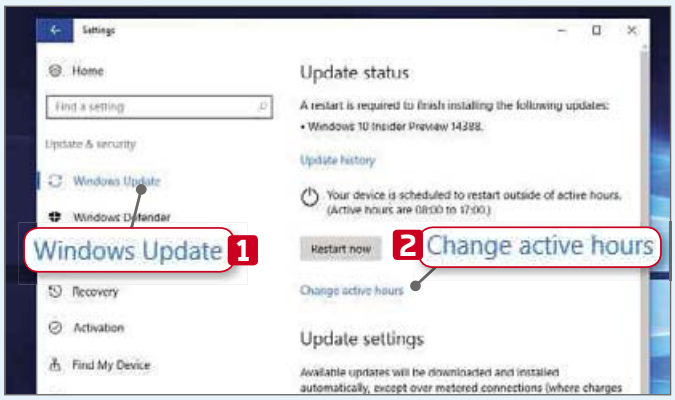
8 To configure your server, click the Settings button, 1 then click Server. 2 You can change the server name 3 and enable or disable remote access, 4 so your media can be viewed outside your network. Click Library 5 to change when and how often Plex checks for new files in your libraries.

Take control of Windows 10's automatic updates

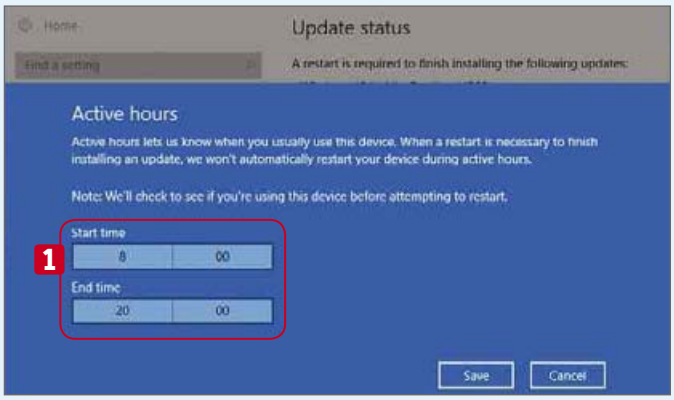
Windows 10: bit.ly/windows402 | 20 mins |

In previous versions of Windows, you could choose whether to sit back and let Windows update your computer automatically, or make your own choices about when and which updates were installed. With Windows 10, Microsoft took that choice away, arguing that some silly people never updated their PCs at all, which put them at risk of hacking and malware. Unfortunately, this means that those of us who want more control (and are capable of making sensible choices) have also had the option taken away.

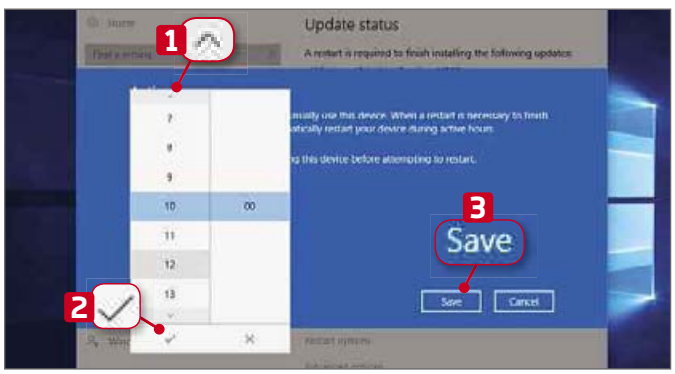
As a token offering, Microsoft has made a change to the Anniversary Update, which lets you choose a 12-hour period in the day when you don't want updates to install. We take a look at how to set it up, below. However, we still don't think this allows enough control, so we also walk you through some other tweaks and hacks that let you do more. Remember, though, why Microsoft took away this choice, and make sure you still regularly check for and install essential updates.



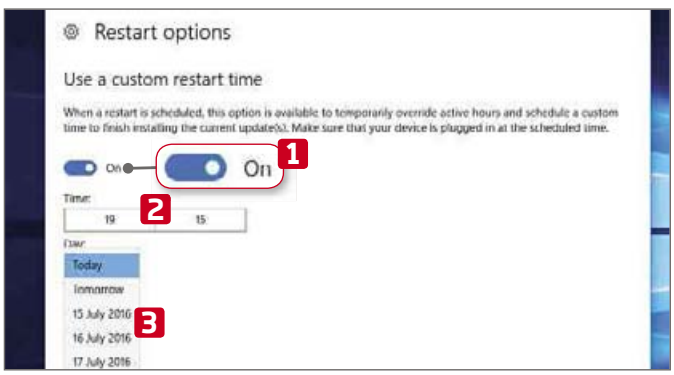
1 To explore the Anniversary Update's new settings, press Windows+i to open the Settings window and click 'Update & security'. Click Windows Update, 1 if it isn't already selected, then click the 'Change active hours' link. 2



2 You can set a period of up to 12 hours in which you never want updates to install. If you work on your computer for longer than 12 hours a day, you'll need to work out when the updates will be the least disruptive. Click the times below 'Start time' and 'End time' 1 to adjust them.



3 Scroll through the available hour slots using the up and down buttons. 1 You can only choose times on the hour – there are no half- or quarter-hour options. Choose your time and click the tick button 2 to confirm, then click Save 3 when you're happy with both start and end times.

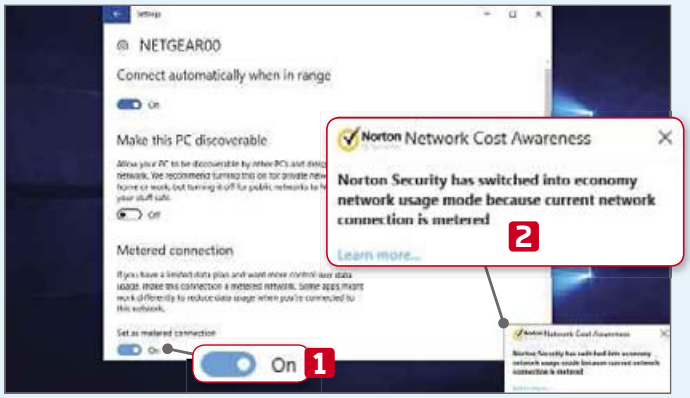


4 If you have an update pending that's waiting for a restart, you can reschedule when Windows does this. Click the 'Restart options' link and flick the switch to On. 1 Choose a time 2 and date 3 for the restart to take place.

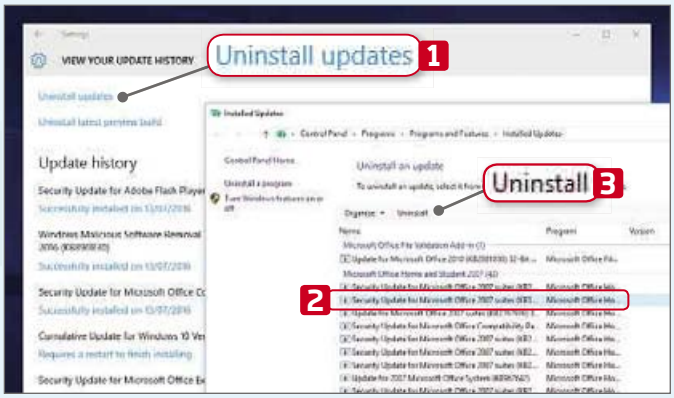
EXPERT TIP

Andy Shaw says

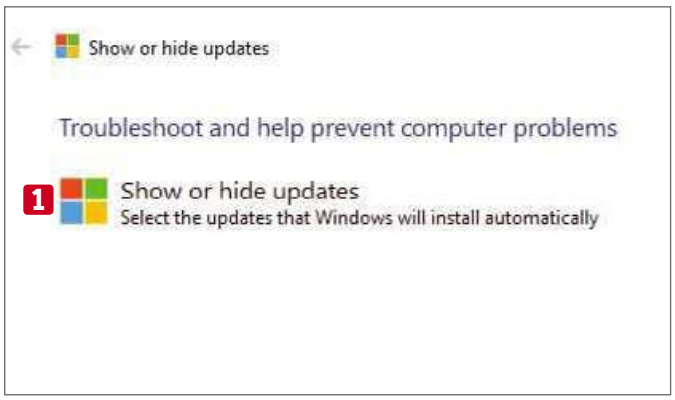
For a temporary fix in extreme cases, where a lengthy update and restart process could really ruin your day, you can switch off Windows Update to stop any updates downloading on your PC. Press Windows+R and type `services.msc`, then scroll down to find Windows Update. Right-click it, then choose Stop from the menu. Just remember to turn it back on to get updates working again.



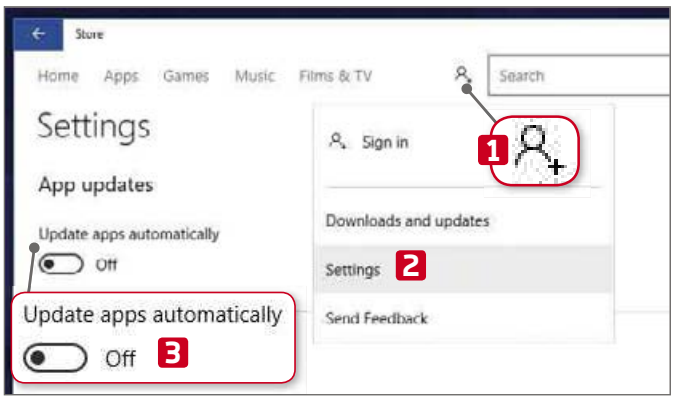
5 Set your network connection to 'metered' to stop updates downloading over Wi-Fi. From Settings, choose Network & Internet, WiFi and click the current connection. Turn on the 'Set as metered connection' switch. 1 This may affect other programs 2 but still lets essential security updates through.



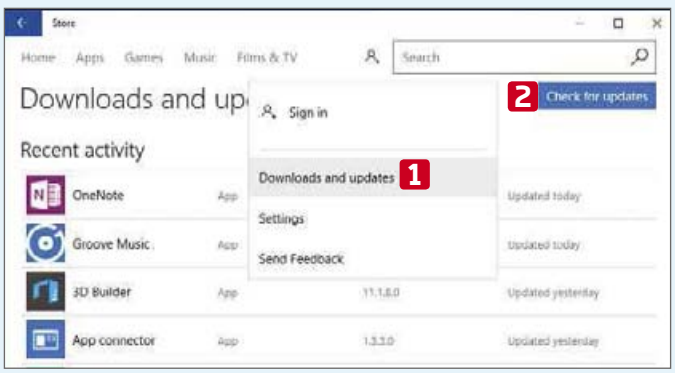
6 If you don't want to turn off updates altogether, but still want to remove one that causes problems, you can uninstall it. Go to Settings, 'Update & security', Windows Update, then 'Update history'. Click 'Uninstall updates', 1 then click the update you want to remove 2 and click Uninstall. 3



7 You can then use a Microsoft Troubleshooter to temporarily prevent the update from reinstalling. Work through the troubleshooter at bit.ly/show402. You'll need to download and run the 'Show or hide updates' tool. 1



8 Windows 10 has a lot of built-in apps but if you don't use them, there's no point automatically updating them. Open the Store and click the Account icon 1 next to the search box. Select Settings 2 and turn off the 'Update apps automatically' switch. 3



9 To update your apps manually, click the Account icon again and select 'Downloads and updates'. 1 Click the 'Check for updates' button. 2 It's worth doing this regularly if you use any of the built-in apps.

10 Most of us have Windows 10 Home installed on our PCs but if you have any other version, you can use the Group Policy Editor to make further tweaks to the update settings. Microsoft has a page about this tool (bit.ly/pro402), which explains how to use it.

Manage, share and track PDFs online

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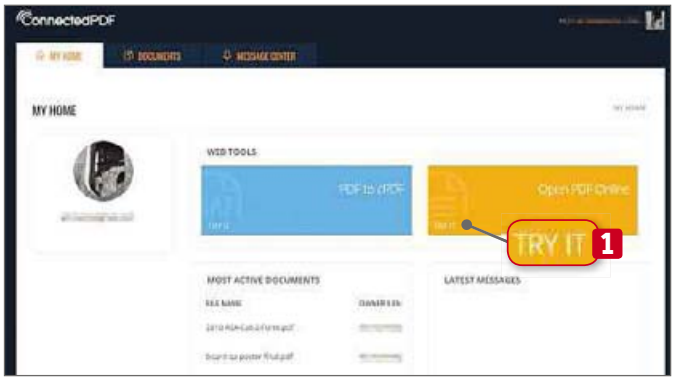
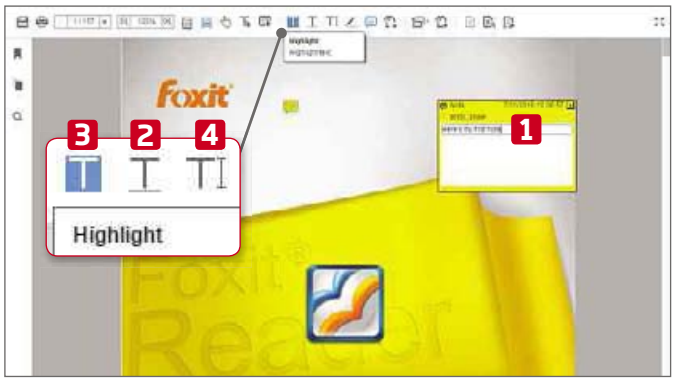
Connected PDF: www.connectedpdf.com | 10 mins | Any browser



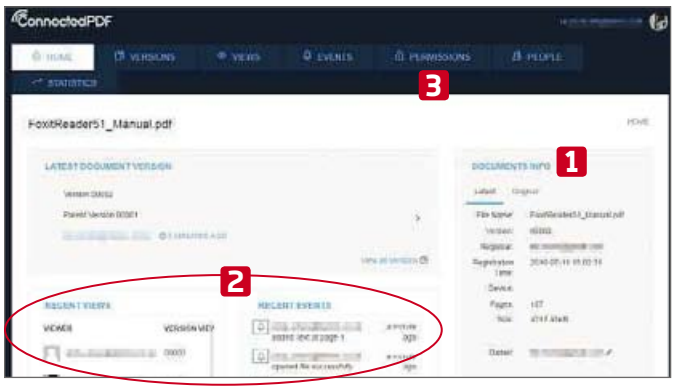
1 Visit www.connectedpdf.com, set up an account and log in. Next, click Try It in the Open PDF Online box. 1 Select Foxit WebPDF Reader's menu button and click Create, then Browse. Choose the PDF file you want to share, then click Open and 'View in new tab'.

2 Click 'Convert to cPDF' to make the PDF trackable. Next, click Register New Version, enter a tag 1 and description 2 and click 'Register and Upload' 3 to save the file to Foxit's servers. You can now share the link that appears with people who you want to access the file.

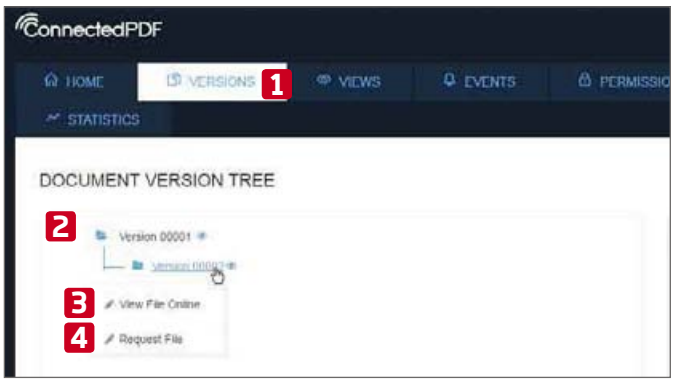


3 When recipients enter the URL into the address bar of their web browser, they're invited to log in or sign up to ConnectedPDF before they can download the file. By uploading it to Foxit WebPDF Reader, they can then add notes 1 as well as underlining, 2 highlighting 3 and adding text. 4

4 To update the document so it includes their annotations, they'll need to click Save. 1 They can then upload the new version by clicking Register New Version 2 and clicking 'Register and Upload' as described in Step 2.



5 From ConnectedPDF's My Documents page, click the appropriate document to see a summary of its Info, 1 Recent Views and Recent Events. 2 To give another user access to this tracking information, click Permissions, 3 then select Add New User and enter their email address.



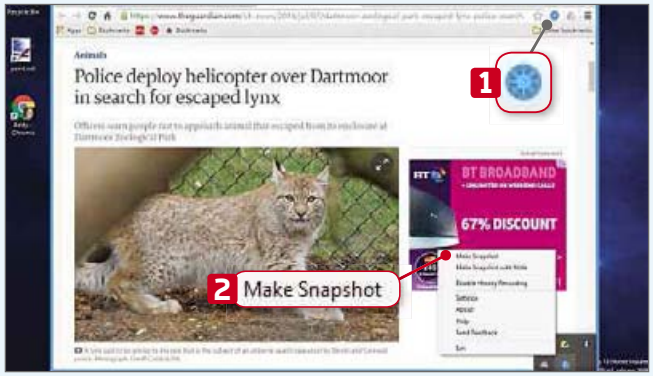
6 To manage and view previous versions of the file, click Versions. 1 Each version of the file is listed chronologically in the Version Tree 2 and you can hover your mouse over a version number to view the file online. 3 If a file has been registered but not uploaded, click Request File. 4

Make bookmarks and history more searchable

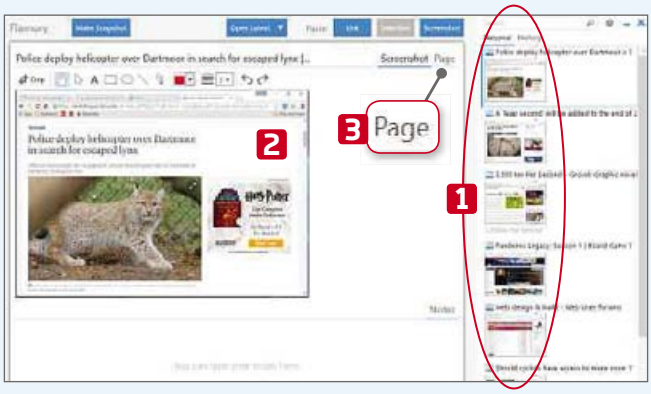
Flamory is an innovative bookmarking tool that takes searchable snapshots of web pages, so you can find the bookmark you want by searching for keywords, rather than having to know the name of the site. It's a separate program that you run alongside your browser.

During installation, let the software install the Chrome add-on and track your history (you can turn this off in Step 6).

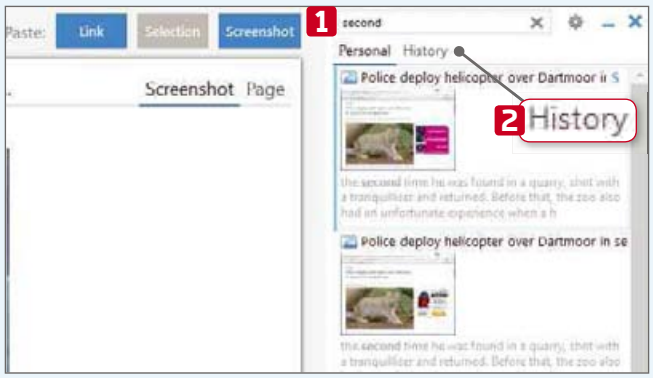
Flamory: flamory.com | 10 mins | Chrome



1 When you're on a page you want to bookmark, click the Flamory button 1 to capture a snapshot. You can also right-click the icon in the notification area and choose Make Snapshot, 2 or use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Alt+A.



2 Open the software to view snapshots you've taken. The column on the right shows thumbnails of the most recent 1 – hover your mouse over one to bring up a larger preview in the main window. 2 Click the Page tab 3 to see a preview of the site.



3 Search your snapshots by typing in the box. 1 Each snapshot saves the entire text of the page, not just what appears in the screenshot. Results are listed below. The History tab 2 can search all the sites you've visited previously, if you've enabled this option.

4 Add notes to your snapshots by choosing 'Make Snapshot with Note' from the notification icon or using the Windows+Shift+A keyboard shortcut (this can also be used to take snapshots of PDFs and text documents). Type the note in the box 1 and it pops up when you revisit a page.

5 You can easily share your snapshots. Use the tools above the snapshot to crop it 1 and add notes in the section below. 2 Open the program you're using to share the snapshot (such as your email) behind Flamory and click one of the Paste options 3 to automatically paste it in.

6 Right-click the notification icon and choose Settings. Here, you can stop Flamory launching with Windows, 1 hide the taskbar icon 2 and choose from additional snapshot shortcuts. 3 Click the tabs to change hotkey combinations and to switch off the history-recording tool.

Weekend Project

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

How to...

How to scan and fix your non-booting PC

Wayne Williams explains how to put together a toolkit that you can use to reboot and fix your PC when disaster strikes

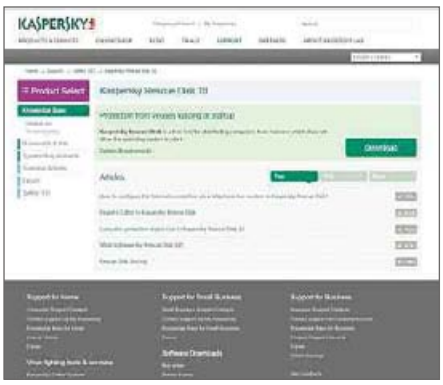
When your PC stops working properly, it can really ruin your day. And there are so many elements that can go spectacularly wrong: hardware can fail, Windows can become corrupted, malware can run amok and more. Trying to recover from a disaster can be challenging, especially if you're not sure exactly what the cause of the problem is. Thankfully, most security companies offer free bootable rescue discs, in ISO (disc image) format, that you can use to identify and fix most common problems. And if things are truly screwed up, they can be used to recover your important personal data.

Find the right rescue disc

There are lots of bootable rescue discs available and while a lot of them perform similar tasks (finding and removing viruses is by far the most common), you might want to download a selection of alternatives that will cover you for all eventualities. The LiveCD List (livecdlist.com) provides a comprehensive list of all of the live CDs available for download. It includes the name of the disc, its size, its purpose and the date of the most recent release. The list is sorted by date so if you start from the top, you shouldn't end up with anything too old. Clicking a link will take you to a page containing information about your choice, including its homepage, download page, Wikipedia page, size, last stable version number, last release, and more. You can also find out more about what it does.

With so many bootable discs to choose from – 319 at the time of writing – it's not easy to know which one to choose. We recommend that you focus on those marked for 'Rescue', 'Diagnostics' and 'Antivirus', and pick one that's recently been updated.

For general problem solving and data recovery, using a Linux-based operating



Many of the top names in antivirus software provide a boot disc that can remove virus infections from Windows

system such as Ubuntu (or Lubuntu if you want a lighter version) makes a lot of sense. You'll be able to use this to explore your hard drive and download any tools you require.

Boot from CD/DVD or USB flash drive

Burning the supplied ISO file to CD or DVD is the easiest way to get started. Writable discs are cheap and you can clearly label each one and keep it in a safe place until you need it. We show you how to create one and use it to start your PC in our Mini Workshop, below.

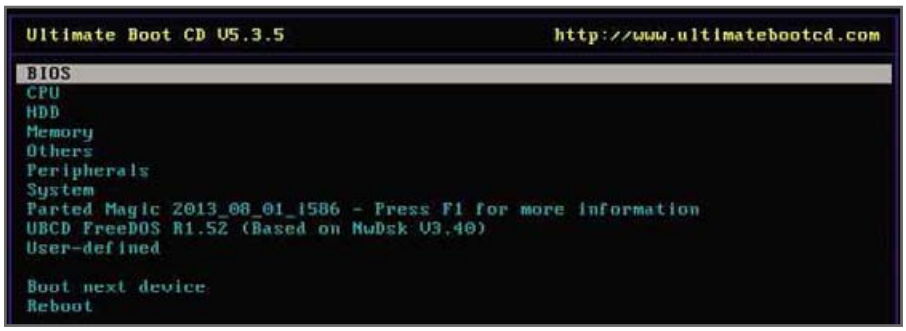
Not all computers come with an optical drive, so you might need to use a USB memory stick or SD card instead. For this, you'll need to use a program such as UNetbootin (bit.ly/unet402) which is available for Windows, Mac and Linux. It can write an existing ISO to a drive, or download and install one directly from its list of choices. The benefit of this method is that you can easily update a USB stick when a new version of your favourite rescue disc is released.

Recover from a virus

Malware can really mess up your PC, preventing you from running Windows, disabling your antivirus software and sometimes even blocking access to the internet. Booting from a live antivirus CD is the best solution, because a virus that runs in Windows can't interfere with software that's run before the OS is launched, and you can update the disc with the latest definitions before using it to tackle the malware on your PC.

There are several good options to choose from, including Bitdefender Rescue CD (bit.ly/bdcd402), Kaspersky Rescue Disk (bit.ly/kaspersky402), AVG Rescue CD (bit.ly/avgcd402) and Avira Rescue System (bit.ly/aviracd402). Emsisoft Emergency Kit (bit.ly/eekcd402) is also very good.

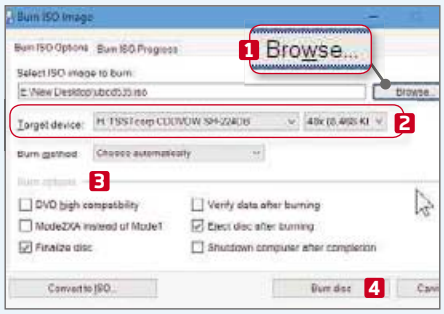
There's nothing to stop you creating multiple discs – one for each of your preferred antivirus scanners – and using more than one to make sure your PC is entirely clean before you go back into Windows. We show you how to use the Bitdefender Rescue CD in our Mini Workshop on page 61.



The text menu looks simple but Ultimate Boot CD contains loads of useful tools

MINI WORKSHOP | How to create a rescue CD and boot into it

1 Find a rescue CD that suits your needs. Here, we've chosen the Ultimate Boot CD. Download the file in ISO format. Next, you'll need a program that can write disc image files, such as CDBurnerXP (cdburnerxp.se). Select the option to 'Burn ISO image' 1 and click OK. 2 This opens a new window.



2 Insert a blank disc into your CD writer. Click the Browse button 1 and select the ISO file you downloaded earlier. Make sure the correct drive is selected under 'Target device' and adjust the writing speed if required. 2 There are other burn options, too. 3 Click 'Burn disc' 4 when you're ready.

3 When the disc has burned successfully, you can boot from it – provided your PC is set up to do this. If it isn't, go into setup (press Del or F12 at boot) and look for a boot order menu. Select CD as the first choice, 1 then press F10 to save the changes and exit. The exact details of this step may differ from one PC to another.

WebUser Bookstore

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO ANDROID

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.

BUY IT NOW FROM AMAZON
at bit.ly/defguidetoandroid

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO WINDOWS 10

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

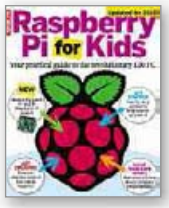
BUY IT NOW FROM AMAZON
at bit.ly/guidetowindows10

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.

BUY IT NOW FROM AMAZON
at bit.ly/guidetosoftware

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

Check for hardware errors

One of our favourite rescue discs is the Ultimate Boot CD (www.ultimatebootcd.com), which contains a wide range of useful tools, including partition tools, boot managers, hardware testers, antivirus scanners, disk managers, installation tools and diagnostic software. Its set of software is very comprehensive and although not all the programs are as useful as you might hope, it provides the tools you need to fix most types of problems.

Find and fix memory errors

Faulty memory can cause all manner of of problems on a PC and it isn't always obvious that it's the memory that's to blame. If you've tried other fixes, to no avail, you can test for memory problems by running a "memtest". You'll find most rescue discs – including Ultimate Boot CD – provide an option to scan your memory and identify any bad blocks. If this is the cause of your problems, you can simply replace the bad RAM module with a new one.

If you've scanned your hardware and your PC is still suffering, try running a 'memtest' memory scan

Find and fix hard-drive faults

Modern hard drives come with error-checking built in. You can use a program such as CrystalDiskInfo (bit.ly/crystal402) to periodically check the drive's SMART (Self-Monitoring, Analysis, and Reporting Technology) status from within Windows, which warns you of potential problems so you can rescue your data before disaster strikes. Many live CDs and Linux-based operating systems come with disk error-checking tools which can scan for problems and also let you check a drive's SMART status.

Manage partition problems

If you are having problems with missing or corrupt partitions, you can use a tool such as GParted to edit, resize, add or delete them. You'll find this tool on most Linux-based rescue discs (including Ubuntu) and there's also a dedicated GParted Live CD available (bit.ly/gparted402). Aomei Partition Assistant Standard (www.aomeitech.com) can also create a bootable rescue disc.

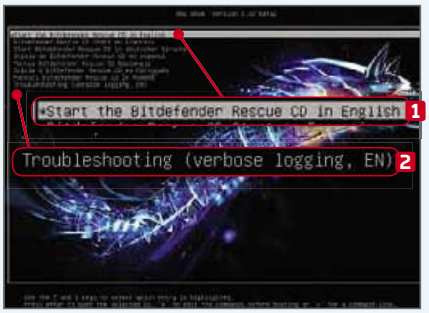
Recover data from a corrupt drive

If your choice of rescue disc includes a file manager (and most will), you may be able to access the drive or partition that's causing your problems and copy your personal files from it. Running a Linux OS, such as Ubuntu, is a particularly good choice in this instance because it comes with a built-in file manager, and you can download additional rescue tools should you need to.

You can get Windows to scan a problematic NTFS drive through Linux using 'ntfsprogs', which you can install via the Ubuntu Software Centre (or by opening a terminal window and typing `command: sudo apt-get install ntfsprogs`). Once it's installed, you can run it using the 'ntfsfix' command. You'll need to point the app in the direction of the problem drive. ■

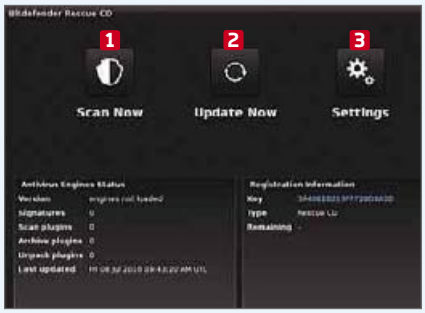
You can run the complete Ubuntu OS from a DVD and use its built-in rescue tools

MINI WORKSHOP | Check your PC for viruses using Bitdefender Rescue CD



1 Boot into the disc to see the main menu. The top entry lets you launch the software in English. 1 Press Enter and the Desktop should load. If it doesn't for some reason, use the Troubleshooting option. 2

2 Bitdefender Rescue CD has a familiar-looking Desktop. You can browse your hard drives for personal data under File System or Home; 1 seek remote help from someone you know using TeamViewer; 2 or check for malware using the Antivirus Scanner. 3 Clicking the B button 4 gives you access to other tools, including a web browser.



3 To look for malware on your PC, launch the scanner, agree to the terms and conditions, then click Continue. The software loads the latest definitions and you can then launch a malware scan. 1 The main screen also lets you update the definitions 2 and access the Settings. 3

NEXT ISSUE **How To...** Roll back unwanted Anniversary Update changes

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...on an iPad or iPhone

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STEP 2 Choose your subscription term and tap twice on the 'price' box

STEP 3 Choose whether to create an optional PixelMags account

STEP 4 Enter your Apple ID password to confirm

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...on a Kindle Fire

Kindle Fire subscriptions come with a FREE one month trial.

STEP 1 Tap 'Free Trial Subscription' in the *Web user* library

STEP 2 Chose your subscription term from the drop down menu on the popup that appears

STEP 3 Tap 'Subscribe'

available on kindle fire

...via the Zinio app

STEP 1 Search for *Web user* via the search box in the Shop tab

STEP 2 Tap the 'Subscribe' button

STEP 3 Choose whether to create an optional Zinio account

STEP 4 Enter your Apple ID password to confirm

Subscribe to *Web user* today and save on the single issue price

Web User's Top Tips

Our experts show you how to converse with bots and get the most from these virtual assistants

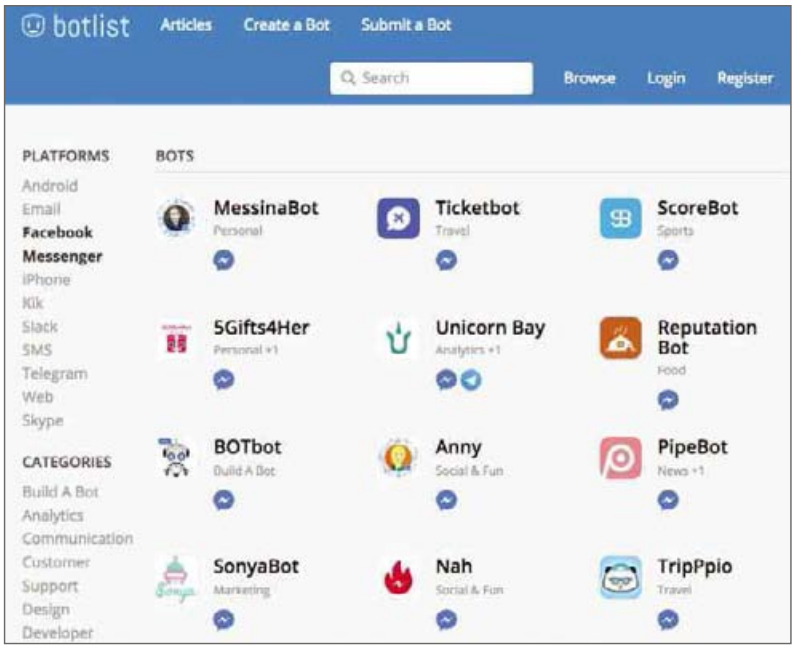
TOP TIPS FOR USING BOTS

Where to find bots to talk to

Bots are software robots, and you access their services and information by messaging them using natural language. The ideal conduit for using them is software that you already use to chat to people. Facebook is taking this very seriously and has opened its Messenger app to bots (via the website or on mobile: bit.ly/fband402 for Android or bit.ly/fbios402 for iOS). This is currently the best place to try them out and you'll need a Facebook account to log in.

To find a bot to talk to, open Messenger and type a company name into the search box. At the top of the search results is a section labelled 'Bots and Businesses'. Press the icon to start. You can also find bots on the Botlist website (botlist.co). Select Facebook Messenger on the left, then select a bot category, such as Food, Health or News. When you find an interesting bot, search for the name in Messenger and press the icon.

For more on bots, check out our FAQ in Issue 396 (bit.ly/webuser396).



Find bots at the Botlist website and then search for them in Messenger

Bot basics

Bots aren't allowed to contact you, send you a message or start a conversation, so you won't be pestered by companies you don't want to deal with. You have to initiate the conversation by sending a message to the bot by, for example, typing `Hi` and pressing Send.

Bots and businesses are displayed together in Messenger search results so you can't always tell if you are talking to a bot or a company. If it's a bot, you'll get an immediate reply and you can begin interacting with it. If it isn't, your message is sent as a standard Messenger message and may be replied to by a human.

Many bots have a Get Started screen. Search for the bot, click or tap it, then press Get Started.

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.

Read the manual

When you begin interacting with a bot, its opening message will provide tips and instructions. Messages are kept as part of a conversation, so you can scroll back to the start if you've forgotten how to do something, such as subscribing or unsubscribing to updates, or accessing certain features.

Play a quiz

If you've never used a bot before, Trivia Blast is a fun and simple introduction. Search Messenger for `trivia` and press the icon. A horizontal slider provides a range of topics including General Knowledge, Friends, Literature, Technology and Harry Potter. Swipe left and right to select one. You get seven questions, shown one at a time, displaying a photo and a question with multiple-choice answers. When the quiz is finished, just type `new topic` to start a new game.

Trivia Blast is a fun and easy introduction to using bots

Seek pet advice

Vet Triage helps you decide whether your poorly pet needs to see a vet. Search for `Vet Triage` and say `Hi`. You are asked to enter any symptoms, such as vomiting or lethargy, and the bot may ask additional questions before providing a diagnosis. Depending on how the conversation goes, you'll be told whether it's time to rush Cuddles to Casualty or just tuck him up in a blanket – unless Cuddles is a goldfish!

Request a weather forecast

Search for `poncho` and press the 'Hi Poncho' icon to use the chatty weather-forecasting service. Press Get Started and ask a question, such as 'Will it rain tomorrow?' to launch the conversation. Poncho asks where you live, then you type in your post code or the name of your nearest town or city to see the latest forecast.

Poncho can automatically send weather forecasts in the morning and the evening, and asks what time you want to receive them. Enter the times or opt out by pressing 'Skip for now'. Type `weather` to get a weather forecast or enter `hourly forecast` for a horizontal slider showing the forecast every hour for the next six hours. Each hour is represented by a tile, and swiping left and right lets you see whether rain, sunshine or clouds are on the way.

Book your next holiday

Search for `Kayak`, press it, then type `Hi` to activate the online travel website's bot. If you have a budget for a trip but don't mind where you go, ask 'Where can I go for £200?' to get several ideas for places and a link to search for flights. Ask 'Can you recommend a cheap hotel in Paris?' and Kayak will ask when you want to check in, how many nights you want to stay and your departure date. It then lists hotels with photos and prices, and a link for more details. Enter a new location, such as Spain, and you'll get a list of hotels for the same dates. If you select one of the offered items, such as a hotel or flight, a browser window opens on the Kayak website where you can continue your booking and make a payment.

The Kayak bot can find you flights and hotels

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

More advanced tips for when you're feeling brave

Get help and change settings

To get help, just type `help` (easy, right?). This usually displays a list of commands you can use with the bot, along with tips for using it and ways to access subscriptions.

Bots, like other apps and programs, have their own settings you can tinker with. To access them, simply type `settings`. Each bot provides its own customisation options and it's worth exploring these if you find a bot you like and want to use regularly.

Most bots provide usage tips in response to a Help command

Remember the commands

The various actions you can perform in a bot are displayed as a list of multiple-choice options. You simply tap one of the links and it automatically enters the relevant command in your conversation. It's worth making a note of this command so you can just type it in future because this is quicker than bringing up the list of actions.

Delete bots and conversations

Some bots can be overly chatty, constantly making your Facebook Messenger beep and buzz with new notifications. If you find that a bot is annoying you in this way, try reading the instructions at the start of the conversation – there may an option to unsubscribe from updates which will stop your phone alerting you with unnecessary interruptions.

The conversations you have with bots can be archived or deleted. Select the All tab and look down the list of conversations. Long pressing a conversation brings up a menu on the screen. You can mute notifications, archive the conversation or delete it completely.

Set up a news bot

Digg (digg.com) is a news website that features the latest stories from the web and presents the best ones on its homepage and Editions screen. To get its bot, search for `Digg` in Messenger and press the icon, then on the next screen, press Get Started. You can accept or decline the offer of a daily Digg Edition containing the most popular news stories.

Type `edition` in the bot whenever you want to see the latest news stories, or type `trending` to see the most-read items. Both commands display a horizontal slider of tiles consisting of an image, a headline and a description. Swipe left or right to browse the stories and tap one to read it in your browser.

The best way to use this news bot is to type in the name of a topic you're interested in, such as 'brexit', 'olympics', 'football' or 'science'. Digg will then bring up a slider showing the latest and most popular news stories related to that subject. It's a great bot and it even has a sense of humour, telling you to keep messages simple because 'I'm not Siri'.

The Digg bot sends you the latest news stories on any chosen subject

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

GENERAL PC

Eliminate a persistent pop-up

Q Every time I open Windows 10, I get a pop-up message saying "Skip Metro Suite 3.1.0.0 is available. Download it now?". How do I get rid of it? I have deleted it in 'Programs and Features' but can't find it elsewhere.

David Shields, via email

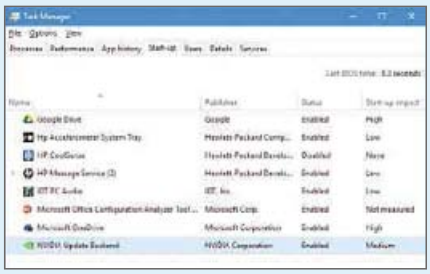
A This program from Winaero (winaero.com) probably didn't uninstall properly when you removed it. One solution is to download Skip Metro Suite (bit.ly/skip402) again, run it and untick the Enable Skip Metro Suite tick box in the top-left corner of the app. Then uninstall it in 'Programs and Features' in the Control Panel, or delete the folder it's installed in.

Another way to remove it is to press Windows+R and type `regedit`. In the Registry Editor, go to:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows NT\CurrentVersion\Winlogon

Double-click the value Userinit and remove the path to 'skipmetrosuite.exe'. Close the Registry Editor, restart Windows and delete the file 'C:\Windows\skipmetrosuite.exe'.

Finally, right-click the taskbar and select Task Manager. In the Start-up tab, disable any item that refers to Winaero or Skip Metro Suite.



Run Task Manager and use the Start-up tab to stop items starting with Windows

SOFTWARE

Reactivate Office after upgrading Windows

Q I have been using Microsoft Office Professional 2010 for a number of years. Recently, I upgraded my PC to Windows 10 and, to speed things up further, installed an SSD drive as my main hard drive. I wasn't worried about my software because I have all the original discs and product keys.

The installation went well but now I can't activate the office software. Even though it worked previously, the site says the software may be counterfeit. Neither of the solutions it suggests to activate it – by phone and online – has worked.

Having paid around £100 for the software, I feel aggrieved that it's no longer recognised because I changed my hard drive. Microsoft doesn't make it easy to speak to anyone for help, either, and doesn't list any numbers on its website.

Peter Holden, via email

Microsoft's Office Configuration Analyzer Tool helps solve problems with Office

A Upgrading Windows shouldn't affect any installed software, but you're not the first person to encounter this problem. The new SSD may be the cause; if you performed a clean installation of Windows 10, Office might regard it as a new installation. In an effort to prevent piracy, the licence limits the number of times you can install Office, but you're allowed to move the software from one PC to another. Microsoft says you can activate a moved copy of Office over the phone, so that method should have worked for you. You'll find detailed instructions at bit.ly/office402. The Microsoft Office Configuration Analyzer Tool (bit.ly/mocat402) may also help. Select 'OffCAT.msi' and double-click it after downloading. It analyses the Office installation for problems and fixes them. Then try telephone activation again.

GENERAL PC

Fix unresponsive downloads

Q I have a PC with 64-bit Windows 7 Home Premium, and I receive my broadband through BT. The blue light on my Home Hub is on and the icon in the notification area tells me that I have internet access. I can browse the web and access any websites I wish.

My problem is that I can't download anything. The relevant icon appears on the Desktop but when I double-click it, nothing happens. I am also getting messages of the type: "A problem has caused X program to stop working, please close the program."

I have tried to fix this with virus scans, a System Restore and so on, but nothing seems to work. I need to fix it fast, because I deleted my antivirus software and now I can't download a replacement.

Malcolm Pritchard, via email

A When you double-click a file, Windows looks at the extension (such as EXE, JPEG, MP3 and so on) and consults the Registry to see what to do with it. Somehow the information in the Registry concerning EXE files has been deleted or corrupted. You must restore the correct settings.

Press Windows+R, type `regedit` and press Enter. In the Registry Editor, find 'HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT\.exe' in the left-hand pane and double-click '(Default)' on the right. In the Value data box, type `exefile`.

Next, find 'HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT\exefile' in the left pane. Double-click '(Default)' on the right and set the Value data to `"%1" %*`. Finally, find 'KEY_CLASSES_ROOT\exefile\shell\open' and double-click '(Default)', then set the value to `"%1" %*`. Close the Registry Editor and restart Windows.

There's also a download available from bit.ly/exe402 that attempts to fix

the problem automatically. Double-click it and follow the instructions.

WINDOWS 10
Remove the Windows PIN

Q I followed advice about logging into Windows 10 without a PIN, but I'm having problems. I typed `netplwiz` into the Run box, as instructed, and unticked the box saying I needed a username and password. Then I typed in my PIN twice to confirm it and rebooted the PC. Sure enough, I was no longer asked for my PIN – I was denied access instead! Am I doing something wrong?

Carl Hughes, via email

A The default method of logging in is to enter your username and password, but you can set a PIN instead. If you wanted to skip the login screen completely, you should have gone to Settings, Accounts, Sign-in and removed the PIN first, then used `netplwiz` to skip the login screen.

For anyone who doesn't know this trick, press Windows+R and type `netplwiz`. Select your account and clear the tick next to 'Users must enter a username and password'. A window appears saying: 'Automatically sign in'. Enter your password twice. When that's done, open Settings and select Accounts, 'Sign-in options'. Under 'Require sign-in' select Never.

Select your account and clear the tick box to skip the usual login

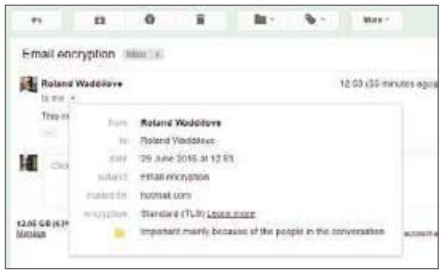
SECURITY
Ensure a secure connection

Q I want to set up an encrypted connection for confidential business information. I recently upgraded my PC to Windows 10 and installed Mozilla Firefox 47. In Options, Privacy, I came across some virtual private network (VPN) software called Disconnect (disconnect.me). I looked it up and it seems reasonably well respected, but when I tried to take up the free 30-day trial, Kaspersky Total Security (www.kaspersky.co.uk) blocked it.

I've read that Opera (www.opera.com) is launching a browser that includes a VPN, so I might try that, but I'm generally reluctant to use free products. I tried Hushmail (www.hushmail.com) a while ago but it took too long to set up, and I became wary when I discovered that an entire industry had sprung up around making it work. I also tried another service but couldn't get it to work and eventually got my money back.

Should I opt for Disconnect or go against my instinctive mistrust of free products and wait for Opera?

Woody Yafful, via email



To see if an email was encrypted, click the down arrow in the top-left corner

A Firefox uses a list of trackers provided by Disconnect. It's basically a list of things to block to increase privacy when using Firefox's Private Browsing feature. A Chrome extension in the Chrome Web Store provides a similar set of tools and has a high rating.

The Disconnect website doesn't provide any company information, however – no address, phone number or names. We'd be wary of buying products or services from companies that don't provide these basic channels of communication.

Opera added a VPN to the developer version of its browser (www.opera.com/developer) a few months ago but hasn't given a date for the mainstream release. You can activate the VPN by going to Settings, 'Privacy & Security' and ticking 'Enable VPN'.

Other VPNs worth considering include CyberGhost (www.cyberghostvpn.com), TunnelBear (www.tunnelbear.com), and PrivateTunnel (www.privatetunnel.com). Some well-known internet security companies also have VPNs, such as AVG Safe Surf (bit.ly/avgss402) and Avast SecureLine (bit.ly/avastsl402).

You may not realise it, but many email services use encryption these days. When two email providers support Transport Layer Security (TLS), messages sent and received are encrypted. Gmail and Outlook both support TLS encryption, for example. According to Google, 85% of all emails it sends and 75% of messages it receives are encrypted (bit.ly/encrypt402).

HARDWARE
Store a laptop battery safely

Q I'm going on holiday and plan to leave behind my HP Pavilion laptop. If I charge the battery fully before I go, will it be OK for the 10 days I'm away?

Darren, via email

A To avoid reducing the lifespan of your battery, it's best to charge it to 100% and then run it down to around 75% before powering off your laptop.

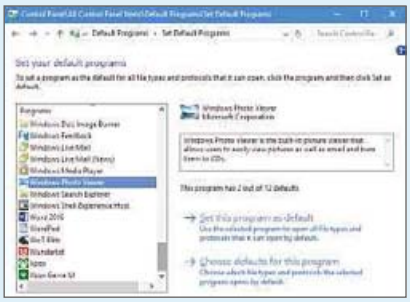
GENERAL PC
Fix file associations

Q I've set JPEG files to open with Windows Photo Viewer on my PC, but when I click on them, Lightroom opens instead. What can I do?

Adrian Bonnington, via email

A There are two possible fixes for this, and both involve changing file associations. When you double-click a file in Explorer, Windows runs the program associated with it. You can assign a new program by right-clicking a file, such as a JPEG image, and selecting 'Choose another app'. Tick the box 'Always use this app to open .jpg files' at the bottom, then find and click Windows Photo Viewer.

Another method is to open the Control Panel, select the small icons view and click Default Programs. Click 'Set your default programs'. Select Windows Photo Viewer in the left-hand list and, on the right, click 'Set this program as default' to use it for every file type it can open. Alternatively, click 'Choose defaults for this program' and tick the box next to each file type you want it to open.



Set the default programs for files using this facility in the Control Panel

This fortnight Roland has been getting to know the Anniversary Update edition of Windows 10

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

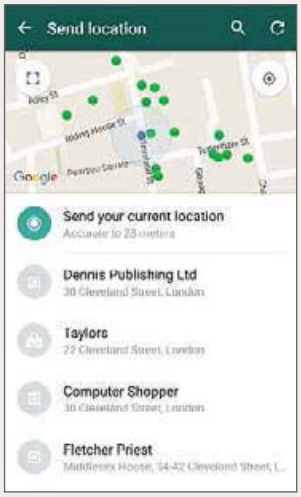
TOP TIP

Mug winner

APPS

Find your car with WhatsApp

I recently hired a car while on holiday in the south of France with my partner. If we couldn't park in the centre of the town where we were staying, we would leave the car in the outskirts and then walk the kilometre or so back to the apartment. Because we weren't familiar with the areas we parked in, I wanted to make sure we could find the car when we went back to it later. This reminded me of a tip I read in your WhatsApp feature in Issue 396 (bit.ly/webuser396).



Use WhatsApp's location sharing to remember where your car is parked

As soon as we parked the car, I used the messenger's location-sharing tool to share the GPS coordinates with my partner. When we needed to return to the vehicle, either of us could tap the location in our conversation history and Google Maps would offer us walking directions.

Because we both had WhatsApp (bit.ly/wapp402) installed on our phones, there was no need to download any new apps and only one of us had to share the location in order for us both to have a record of it. To share your current location, simply tap the paperclip attachment button in a conversation, select Location and then tap 'Send current location' (it says 'accurate to X meters' under this button). It could help avoid the frustration of forgetting where you've parked your car – but remember, you still have to share the location in WhatsApp before leaving the vehicle!

Joe Taylor, via email

GENERAL PC

Force shutdown shortcut

In Issue 401 (bit.ly/webuser401), FratPark provided a tip for shutting down your PC using a keyboard shortcut. Another way to quickly turn off your PC is to use a 'Force shutdown' shortcut on your Desktop. To create the shortcut, right-click the Desktop, select New and Shortcut, then enter the command `shutdown -f -t 00` in the location box. Click Next, then name the shortcut 'Force shutdown' or something similar. Once the shortcut is there, you can change its icon by right-clicking it and selecting Properties, then Shortcut and Change Icon. There's a power button icon in the list that's perfect for the job!

Create a 'Force shutdown' button on your Desktop

On another note, did you know that you can tweak the Control Panel's Power Options so that your laptop shuts down (rather than sleeping or hibernating) when you perform certain actions, such as closing the lid or pressing the 'power off' button? To find this menu in Windows 10, type `Power & sleep settings` in the Start menu, click the option when it appears, then click the 'Additional power settings' link.

Personally, I like to set the function for closing the lid and the sleep buttons as 'do nothing', especially when the laptop is running on mains power.

jason.smith.uk, Web User Forums

SOFTWARE

XP experience on Windows 7

One thing that always put me off Windows 7 was its Start menu, which is smaller and trickier to customise than XP's. However, if you install Classic Shell (www.classicshell.net), you can set up a Start menu that is very similar to XP's. It even lets you disable features such as 'recent programs' and Recent Items, which I find improves it no end.

Classic Shell is free and comes with no unwanted junk, so it's an excellent solution if you want to make your PC feel a bit more like XP, or you simply want more control over the Start menu. It works with Windows 8 and 10, too.

jason.smith.uk, Web User Forums

Classic Shell lets you customise the Windows Start Menu

SOFTWARE

Start a document anywhere in Word

I always assumed that you had to start a Microsoft Word document in the top-left corner of the page because

that's where the flashing cursor is. However, I've recently found out that you can actually start writing anywhere on the page, which is great if you want to use a more creative layout.

Start a new document and select Print Layout on the View tab. Double-click anywhere on the page and start typing. The words appear at the position where you double-clicked.

Kevin Burke, via email

SOFTWARE

Add photos to OneNote

I use OneNote (www.onenote.com) to store notes because it runs on both my phone and my laptop, and I can access my notes at home or when I am out. I'm collecting notes and photos for an ebook I'm writing and OneNote on my Android phone lets me write down an idea or take a photo and attach it to a note. Photos are stored in the Photos app, but saving them to OneNote lets me attach notes. I'd forget, otherwise.

When you create a new note in OneNote on your phone and add a photo, you'll see a photo toolbar. A new option I've noticed recently is Rotate. You can now use this to rotate images clockwise or anticlockwise if they've been taken upside down, which occasionally happens with photos taken on a phone.

B. Stott, via emai

Store photos and notes in OneNote on your PC and on your phone

NTERNET

Test whether your internet is down

If I had a pound for every time someone in my house said the internet wasn't working, I'd have enough to buy a *Web User* subscription! I hear, "Dad the internet's not working!" or "Paul, can you see what's up with the internet? I've not been able to get on all day!". What they usually mean is that they've been trying to access one particular site and can't get on. I tell them to go to www.google.co.uk or www.bing.com and see what happens. It's usually fine, so it's not the internet but the site that's unavailable, which I can't do anything about. My advice is to always test that it's not the your internet connection that's at fault by trying Google and Bing.

Paul Harris, via email

Down For Everyone Or Just Me tells you if a website has widely reported problems

Web User says: You can also try using 'Down For Everyone Or Just Me' (isup.me) to check if a site is not working properly. Type its URL into the box and press Enter. The site tells you of any reported problems.

EMAIL

Using Gmail on a touchscreen

If you have a PC with a touchscreen, try switching on Gmail's touch interface. Go to the gear icon in the top right-hand corner and select 'Touch-enabled'. This mode spaces everything out more, to make it easier for people with stubby fingers to accurately press elements such as messages, labels, Inbox, Sent Mail and so on. You can swipe up and down the screen when viewing your inbox to see more messages. Swiping left and right goes to the previous or next screen, so you can tap an email to view it and then swipe right to return to the inbox.

I like how it works, but there's still room for improvement. For example, the Windows 10 Mail app offers quick actions when you swipe left or right over a message in the inbox. It would be good if Gmail could do this, too.

Alan Morrison, via emaill

WINDOWS 10

Fix the Start menu

When I first tried Windows 10, there was an annoying problem with the Start menu that stopped all or part of it from displaying properly. Most of these problems will have been fixed with updates, but if you're still suffering, try using the Microsoft troubleshooter for the Start menu and Cortana at bit.ly/win402. It offers a range of fixes you can try, including a specific tool you can install if all else has failed.

Jack Gold, Web User Forums

SOFTWARE

Move from Evernote to OneNote

If you've been put off using Evernote (evernote.com), now that the free version limits you to just two devices, and are considering moving to OneNote (www.onenote.com), Microsoft has a tool that can help. To use it, you need to have the Desktop version of Evernote or export your notes as an ENEX file. Then, you need to have the Desktop version of OneNote or the OneNote Windows 10 app installed to use the OneNote importer tool. There are full instructions on how to perform the migration in a useful article on How To Geek (bit.ly/htgeek402)

FratPark, Web User Forums

WEBSITES

Share photo albums on Facebook

I recently discovered a handy feature on Facebook that lets you share your photo albums with anyone, even if they don't have a Facebook account. In the past, I had to upload my pictures to Dropbox or Google Drive as well as Facebook if I wanted to share photos with friends and family who didn't use the social network, so it saves me a lot of time now that I only have to upload them once.

To share an album, open it on Facebook, then click the Settings cog and click Get Link. Next, copy the link in the box to put it in an email or click 'Send in Message' to send it via Facebook Messenger. Although you can only create a link from a Desktop browser, the album is best viewed from a mobile browser. Indeed, if you access the link from your PC, Facebook only shows square thumbnails of all the pictures if you don't sign up or log in; but when you load it from your mobile, you can view all the images at full size.

Andy Brown, via email

'Get link' lets you share your photo albums with friends who don't use Facebook

Readers' Helpdesk

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

PRIVACY

Will CCleaner delete traces of my activity?

Q I have just run the latest version of CCleaner (bit.ly/cclean402) on Windows 10 and noticed several references to a document (and other files) that I had just opened. It got me thinking how vulnerable I would be if this kind of information fell into the wrong hands. What made matters worse was that I had permanently deleted the document just before running CCleaner. Where does Windows store this information and does CCleaner get rid of all such traces of activity?

Castman, Web User Forums

A When you delete a file in Windows, the file isn't actually deleted. Instead, Windows simply marks the space it occupies on the hard drive as 'empty' so it can be used to store something else. The data that makes up the file simply stays on the drive until it's overwritten. Until that happens, the files are recoverable.

To avoid this, the files must be overwritten several times. You can set CCleaner to do this by clicking Options then Settings, selecting Secure File Deletion and the number of overwrites you'd like to perform. Three is a good choice because any more than this can be very slow. For files not cleaned by CCleaner, I'd recommend Eraser (eraser.heidi.ie). PrivaZer (www.privazer.com) is another good tool for clearing traces of activity.

You can set CCleaner to securely delete files from your hard drive

calimanco and Bally1001, Web User Forums

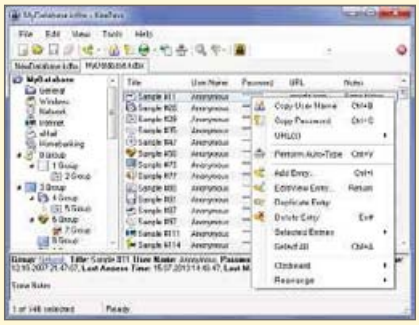
SECURITY

How do I move my KeePass database to a new PC?

Q I have an old laptop running Windows 7 that's on its last legs. All my passwords are saved on the computer using KeePass Password Safe (keepass.info) and I want to know if there is a way I can transfer them to my other PC? It won't let me copy them to Dropbox.

davidnhdg, Web User Forums

A To move the database of encrypted passwords to another PC, you simply need to copy the KDBX file. If you use a key file, you'll need to move this too. If, however, you use the Windows User Account method to open your database, you'll need to change the master key to something else, because it's specific to your PC and Windows installation.



KeePass lets you safely store passwords on your PC for free

Moving the file with Dropbox should work in just the same way as saving it to an external hard drive or USB stick. There is a tutorial video you can watch at bit.ly/dropbox402. I use Dropbox to share my KeePass file between my PC and Android tablet. Alternatively, you could use the portable version of KeePass, which lets you use the tool on any PC and take your passwords with you, wherever you go.

DavidNewton and TheTechGuy, Web User Forums

NETWORKING

Which Wi-Fi adapter should I buy?

Q I have just bought a second-hand Windows 7 PC. Everything works fine but I was told that I need a Wi-Fi adapter to get online. There seem to be some reasonably priced adapters out there, but I'm not quite sure what I should be looking for and would appreciate any help or advice.

humptan, Web User Forums

A I've used Netgear adapters for some years, on all sorts of devices including Linux, and they've never let me down. I currently still use an older N-150 model and setting it up is simple – you just install the correct drivers and plug it in. For a full list of current Netgear adapters, visit bit.ly/wifi402.

The model you choose will depend on the type of router you're using. To maximise performance, you should buy an adapter that uses the same Wi-Fi standard as your router: 802.11ac is the latest and before that came 802.11n and 802.11g. All Netgear's adapters indicate the Wi-Fi standard in their name, and the numbers refer to the maximum possible transfer speed. It's worth noting, however, that wireless adapters produce much lower speeds than these numbers and transfer speeds can also be limited by other factors including your USB version (2.0 or 3.0). To save some money, you might want to consider buying an 802.11n adapter, even if you have an 802.11ac router.

Netgear has a range of wireless adapters at different prices

Dave_1 and tornado, Web User Forums

Inbox

Star Email

Mug winner

Uncle Pete should ditch Windows altogether

Regarding Barry Collins' column in Issue 400 (bit.ly/issue400), 'For Pete's sake, stop these PC conmen': I'm curious as to why Barry finds it necessary to give Microsoft another chance, when he recognises that a Chromebook will suit Uncle Pete's needs just as well, and will save him from having to suffer the endless problems associated with running Windows.

Offering a 'safe' mode – presumably in place of the normal 'unsafe' mode – cannot guarantee that Uncle Pete's PC won't be attacked, because since Windows 2000 it hasn't been possible to uninstall Internet Explorer. The kindest thing I can say about this is that Microsoft can freely track what Uncle Pete is doing on his PC, but given its lamentable security record it

is almost inevitable that someone will exploit a vulnerability.

Connecting a Windows PC to the web is asking for trouble, in the same way that leaving your front door open when you go out is negligent. For some reason, on Windows XP, we just accepted that we had to slow down our PCs with firewalls, antivirus packages and malware scanners, but no-one cared that the same fundamental shortcomings were present in Windows Vista, 7, 8, 8.1 and 10.

Windows dominates the market because people are familiar with it, most hardware manufacturers release drivers for it and it has the widest choice of software. Nevertheless, sensible and superior alternatives to Windows exist and I can't help thinking that there's a gap in the market for readers who are curious about life outside the [Bill] Gates of Microsoft and Windows?

Alan Gregory, via email

Opera is out of tune with online banks

After you raved about Opera in Issue 400, I downloaded and installed the browser. It has a nice interface and it seemed like it would be easy to use. That is, until I tried to log in to my bank – Barclays – and found that Opera isn't supported. Since I do virtually all my business online, this would be a major problem, so Opera was on my computer for less than 10 minutes. I think that could be some kind of record!

David Eaglesham, via email

Appy days are *not* here again

I have 49 apps installed on my Samsung Galaxy Pro 10 tablet. "Is that all?", some of you might ask, but actually – even in business – how many do you really need?

Only seven of these apps were downloaded by me, including banking, food and music. The rest of the rubbish was built in and I cannot get rid of it. I do not do 'media', I do not need seven different rubbish Google items and I do not need the likes of Bloomberg plus stuff I've never heard of.

I also have a smartphone, which I only use while I'm out shopping, when I need to call my disabled wife at home and when we are away. I do not give the number out and I don't use text messages.

I had my first mobile phone around 1990. It was a big black Motorola brick on a now-defunct network. I prefer Nokia, because I like the software and the way it works, but my non-smart Nokia phone is now redundant.

I bought a 2nd-generation Motorola smartphone, as recommended by *Web User* for price and value, and I would advise your readers to do the same. If you do not need the latest over-the-top, overpriced phone, then the Motorola does the same things just or almost as well.

Martin Fletcher, Thorpe Hesley

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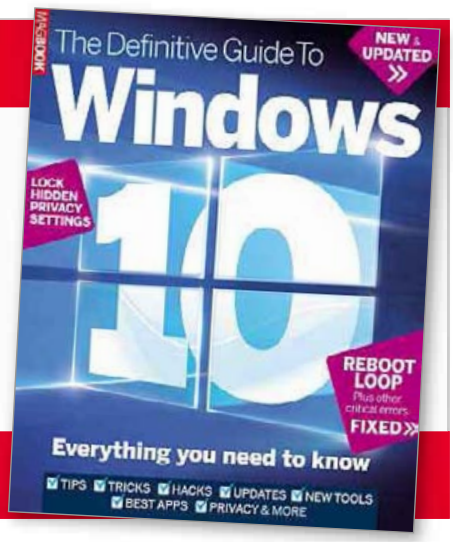


You can let us know your views and opinions via: webuser@dennis.co.uk, www.facebook.com/webusermagazine, www.twitter.com/webusermagazine and forum.webuser.co.uk

Is it safe to download this software?

In the 'Top Tips of the Fortnight' section of Build a Better Site in Issue 400, there's a tip called 'Free code editor with Firefox preview'. When I try to access this site to download the BlueGriffon tool, I get the message: "Your connection is not secure. The owner of www.bluegriffon.org has configured their site improperly. To protect your information from being stolen, Firefox has not connected to this website."

I am always reluctant to take it further after these warnings. I would like to use this code editor, but I just need reassurance that it is okay to proceed with downloading the program.

Simon Oliver, via email

***Web User* says:** We tried using Firefox to download the BlueGriffon code editor and we didn't encounter any problems, so it might be that an add-on you're using is blocking the software. There's some useful information about the error message you're getting at bit.ly/ffblock402, which might help. We've heard that add-ons called BrowserSafe or Browser Safeguard can unnecessarily block legitimate sites with this message, so consider turning these off while you download, if you have them installed.

To put your mind at ease, we also tried downloading the code editor in Chrome and that doesn't block the site, either. We ran both the site and the download through VirusTotal, and none of the 68 antivirus programs represented there flag it up as dangerous, so it looks like it's perfectly safe to use.

Uninstalling Flash simply isn't feasible

I thought your cover feature in Issue 400, 'Uninstall this Unsafe Software Now' was a very good article. However, I agree with what Jeremy Buckley said in his Star Letter in issue 401 – it really is too soon to dump Flash completely. Too much stuff online still uses Flash, so not having it available simply isn't feasible at present.

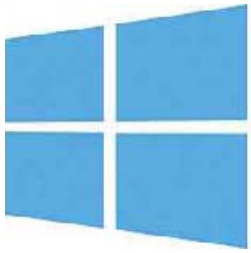
You didn't mention Opera in your feature, but you can make all its plugins 'Click to Play' by going to Settings, Websites to set your preference.

Madeline, Web User Forums

Windows 10 ate my hard drive

Although Windows 10 didn't eat my hamster, as you warned in Issue 401 (bit.ly/webuser401), it did eat a lot of my hard-drive space and memory, leaving me with a much slower PC than when I used Windows 7. Even after taking your advice and deleting previous Windows installations from my system, I found it rather sluggish, although at least I managed to free up several gigabytes of space. Of course, by clearing out those installation files, I also removed any chance of going to back to Windows 7. So I guess it's either put up or shut up!

I don't think Windows 10 is that bad, to be honest, and I'm sure I'll get used to the things that I don't like at the moment – such as Cortana – or at least get used to ignoring them. I quite like using apps rather than programs, and that it retains a lot of the same features as Windows 7. Plus, I managed to upgrade while it was still free, so I suppose I shouldn't really complain. I just wish I'd performed a clean install to avoid the speed problems I'm now having.



Les Kerr, via email

I'm steering clear of self-driving cars

Tragic though it is, I'm not surprised to hear about the first fatality in a self-driving car (Need to Know, Issue 401). These vehicles may be a wonderful idea in theory, eliminating the need to take driving lessons and meaning you don't need to worry about steering, braking or parking, but they will also lead to widespread complacency on our roads.

If drivers believe that the car will do all the work for them, then they won't bother paying attention to what's in front of and behind them, putting not just themselves but other drivers, their passengers and pedestrians in danger. I'm sure these cars have automatic safety controls and use advanced technology to prevent accidents and injuries, but that isn't the point. As with cars today, the problem doesn't lie with the vehicles themselves, but with the people supposedly in control of them.

If drivers are watching films, browsing the web or – God forbid – enjoying a drink, because they think the car is doing all the work for them, then who knows what carnage awaits us from these death traps on wheels? I, for one, will be steering clear!

Peter Clements, via email

Our 2015 Back Issues Disc is on sale now from Amazon, visit bit.ly/webusercd15

Blocking ads is unfair to the web

Barry Collins is right to question the use of ad blockers in his column in Issue 401, 'Three's ad blocker could damage the web'. Yes, adverts can be annoying, especially on your phone, but they're also there for a reason: to help keep the internet free.

Three has no right to appoint itself as the guardian of the internet and take money away from sites that depend on advertising to survive. As Barry points out, Three is asking companies to pay twice to advertise their products – once to the websites and then again to Three. This doesn't seem very fair to me, and it will surely be us consumers who ultimately pay because the companies will have to raise their prices.

I don't particularly like Three's own adverts with that annoying purple Muppet thing in them, but I understand why Three needs to promote its network on TV, in the press and on the web. Blocking all adverts by default will solve nothing, because less salubrious companies will simply find other ways to get our attention.

Nigel Glover, via email

Blocking ads is a brilliant idea

What is Barry Collins on about, complaining about the "danger" of ad blocking? There's nothing I hate more than having the screen of my phone filled by some massive ad that can't be closed. It gets in the way of what I'm trying to look at, it wastes my data and it tries to get me to buy something that I have zero interest in, most often a health drink or women's deodorant. Yet Barry thinks it's a *bad* thing that Three is going to block mobile ads, because of some moral problem he has with it. Me, I couldn't be happier – bring on the block!

Dylan Boyle, via email

What you say...

ARE YOU WORRIED THAT BREXIT WILL LEAD TO HIGHER PRICES FOR TECH?

We haven't even left yet. Greedy companies are just using it as an excuse to raise prices.

Claudia Ridley

I have to agree that this is a great excuse for companies to increase prices and lay the blame on Brexit. Unfortunately, those who created this mess have all decided to leave!

Christopher Arkle

Given that we should be able to open our own trade deals with countries that make electrical equipment, I would expect prices to be cheaper.

Dave Stockwell

If the pound drops, the price will go up on all imported goods. Simple maths.

John Laverock

WHEN YOU BUY A PHONE, DO YOU CARE WHETHER IT'S WATERPROOF?

I have a Samsung Galaxy S5 which is waterproof, but that's not why I chose it.

Ian Watts @retroman426

It's not high on the priority list, but the risk of dropping it down the toilet is a factor worth considering.

Derek @dlee1

Can't say I do. I've no idea whether my phone is waterproof.

Joanne Evans

Judging by the number of young people I know who regularly drop their phones down nightclub toilets, I'd say it's a number-one selling point.

Richard Morgan

HAVE YOU EVER HAD TO RETURN A FAULTY PC OR LAPTOP?

I returned one to PC World because it would not connect to Wi-Fi. The company made every excuse it could and, in the end, would only offer a credit note.

Paul Emsley

I bought one from TV-shopping channel Ideal World (www.idealworld.tv). It didn't work so I sent it back – they actually picked it up and I got a refund.

Ronda Newell

Yes, my HP laptop. The DVD drive kept ejecting automatically. It was only a day old. I got a new one.

Paul @abertawejack

My Fujitsu laptop (from Comet) was a right pain to get fixed. I had intermittent problems with it, and it took around three months to get a replacement.

Ryan Walmsley @ryanteck

DID YOU GRAB ANY BARGAINS ON AMAZON PRIME DAY (12 JULY)?

I got an air flosser (for removing plaque from your teeth) for £30 instead of £60, and an Amazon Fire stick for £19.

Tony Gomm

The item I was after was overpriced, so I won't bother signing up to Amazon Prime. I've had the same experience with HMV. I bought a CD on eBay for £5.95 which cost nearly £13 from HMV.

Gwyn Griffiths

There wasn't much stuff I was interested in. I'd rather spend the money on vinyl.

Jack @imthegoldmaster

It was overhyped as usual. The only bargains to be had were stuff I didn't want or need.

Gary Olsen @Gary_Olsen

Page 404

Barry Collins warns that strapping your phone to your dashboard will end in disaster

Sat-nav apps are an accident waiting to happen

How do you know when a technology is on its last legs? Because they start flogging it in Argos. It was while I was waiting at Collection Point B last week, gawping at the cabinets of cut-price TomToms and Garmins, that it dawned on me how long it had been since I'd actually seen a sat-nav suckered to someone's windscreen. Probably not since I'd seen a faded Garfield stuck to the back window.

Nowadays, most people have replaced a dedicated sat-nav with their smartphone, of course. With a decent-sized screen and apps such as TomTom Go, Google Maps and Waze, there's little point in paying for a standalone navigation system, not least because a phone does much more besides: music, audiobooks and even phone calls, to name but a few. Yet, as great and potentially lifesaving as these sat-nav apps are, they also frequently encourage dangerous driving.

I've been using the TomTom Go app on my Android handset for the past couple of years. It has genuinely saved me hours (perhaps days) of being stuck in logjams because of its brilliant live traffic detection, but by default, that very same feature also poses a safety risk. If TomTom spots a faster route, it will ask the driver to select OK on screen to accept the route change, which even on my handsomely sized Galaxy S6 Edge takes precision prodding. I've lost count of the number of times I've been hurtling down the motorway, only to be encouraged to take my eyes off the road as I make multiple attempts to tap that tiny icon.

It worried me so much that I tweaked the settings to force TomTom to just take the fastest route without seeking permission, which, when you think about it, should surely be the default option anyway – what kind of lunatic would knowingly take a slower route?

> "Google's app Waze should really be called Gaze, such is its constant desire to divert your attention"

Yet skipping around traffic jams isn't the only reason TomTom wants your attention. If someone's reported a set of temporary roadworks, for instance, you'll often get an onscreen prompt asking you to confirm whether they are still there, distracting your attention once more and potentially at the worst possible time – when you should be looking for those temporary traffic lights. TomTom's online manual of course warns that "Use of TomTom products while driving still means that you need to drive with due care and attention" but when you're constantly being urged to look away from the road, that warning rings hollow.

TomTom's not the worst offender, either. The Google-owned app Waze should really be called Gaze, such is its constant desire to divert your attention to the screen. By default, it parps out distracting fanfares when you achieve certain driving goals, encourages you to press a big orange button to report accidents/traffic/speed traps on your route, and shows others users driving around the map – even encouraging you to chat with them! Many of these features can be switched off or voice controlled, but its cheery "let's drive safely" message at the start of every drive is more than a tad ironic.

These sat-nav apps are, on their default settings, an accident waiting to happen. Someone needs to point their developers in the right direction.

Illustration: Andrew Torrens

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

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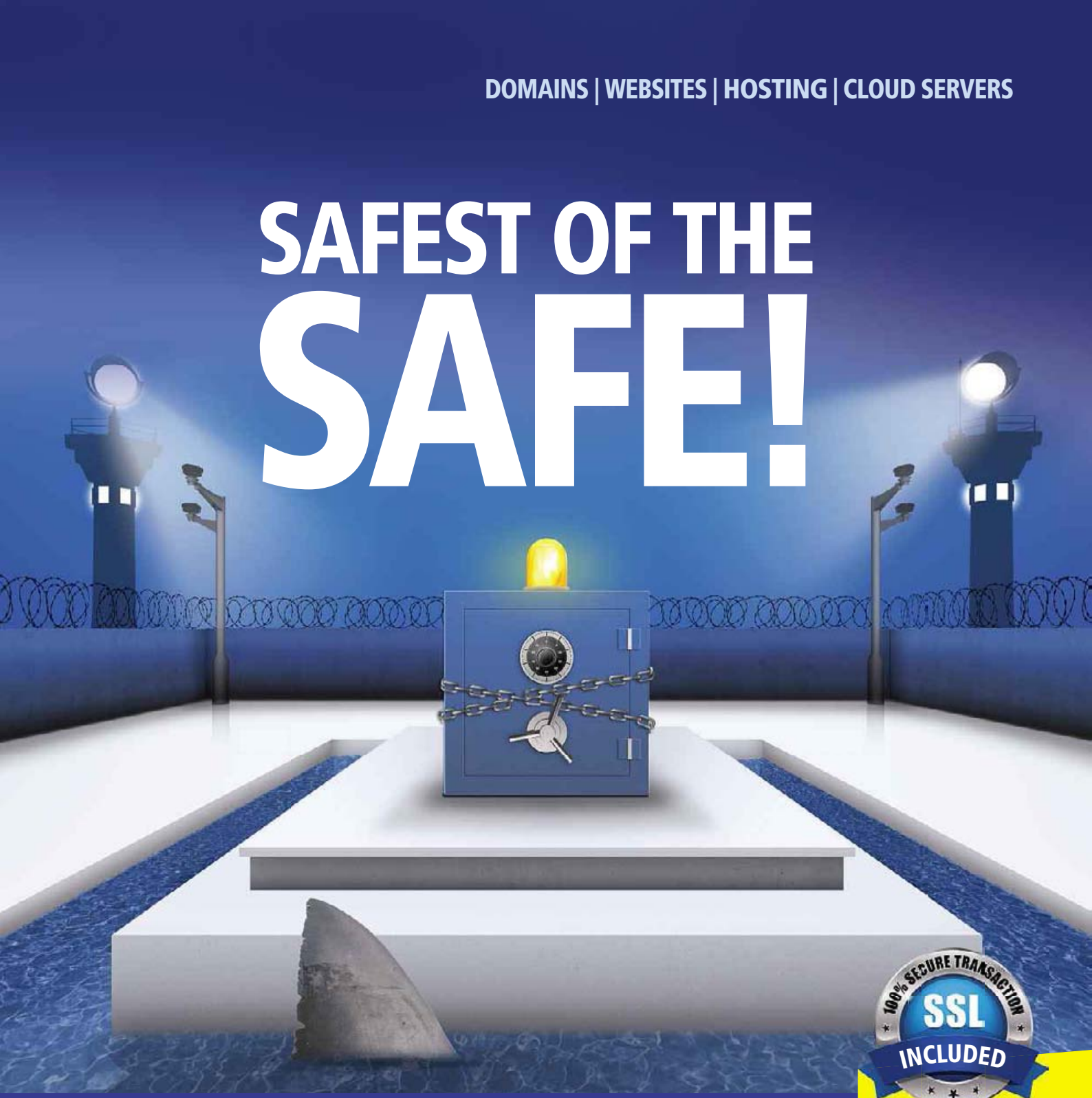

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