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£2.20

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DOWNLOAD THESE *NOW*

1. The Junk-blitzing PC Cleaner
2. The Secure Remote-access Tool
3. The Advanced Photo Editor
4. The Ultra-private Browser
5. The Windows Alternative
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7. The Powerful Photo Viewer
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9. The No-cost Antivirus
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Which To Buy For Christmas?

tp-link

deco™ | Paint Your Home in Wi-Fi™

"We can't fault the Deco's performance and ease of use." - **PC Advisor**

Deco M5 Whole Home Wi-Fi System

Connect to your Wi-Fi seamlessly throughout your home.

TP-Link HomeCare™

Protects devices from viruses and malware, with easy-to-use parental controls. Powered by Trend Micro®.

Easy Setup

The Deco app assists you with everything, from Wi-Fi settings to the placement of each Deco unit.

TP-Link ART™

Adaptive Routing Technology automatically assigns your devices to the best Deco unit and Wi-Fi band.

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Homepage

Prepare your machine for 2018

There's still a month to go until the end of 2017, but I think we can agree that it's not been a vintage year – crippling cyber-attacks, devastating hurricanes, global political tensions and a disappointing John Lewis Christmas ad – so let's look to the future instead! 2018 will bring the 21st Commonwealth games, the first 'space tourist' flight to the moon and more free software than you can shake a mouse at.

Although *Web User* won't be jumping any hurdles or piloting spacecraft, we will be downloading plenty of programs – and we've made a head start in this issue's cover feature. Our official software supremo, Wayne Williams, has handpicked 10 terrific tools to see you through the next 12 months, from a speedy system cleaner to a marvellous media player and a brilliant new browser. Wayne explains why you'll love these particular programs, reveals how to make the most of them and even suggests suitable alternatives. Turn to page 36 to be the first to discover these delightful downloads.

Robert Irvine, Editor
robert_irvine@dennis.co.uk
#webuser

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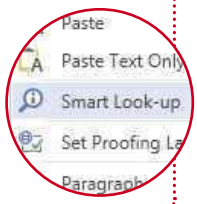

abc Average sales, Jan-Dec 2016, 28,298 copies per issue

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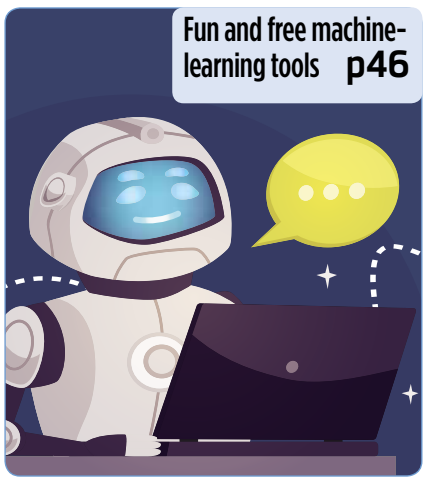

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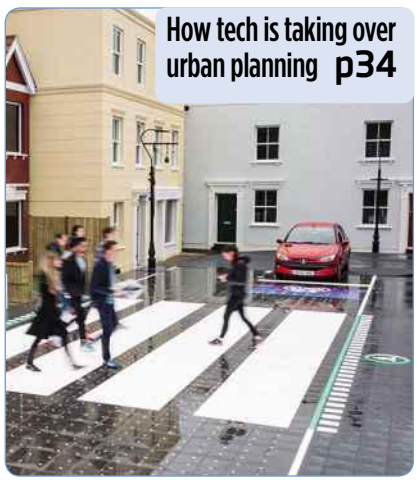

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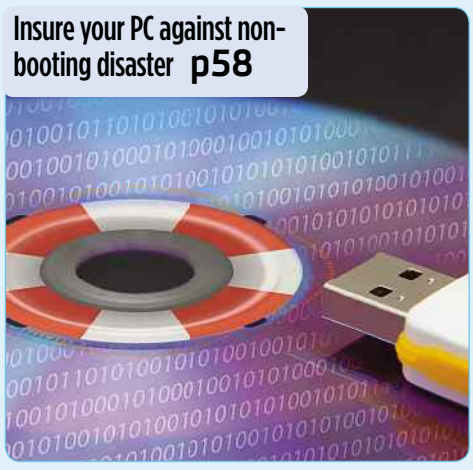

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What's New Online

Enhance lo-res photos for free

Rather than fiddle around with photo-editing software, try dropping your low-resolution images into Let's Enhance instead. This new online tool uses neural networks to upscale the resolution of your JPEGs by four times, producing images that should be noticeably sharper, crisper and more life-like. It does this by drawing on previous data, which means it should get better with age.

The artificial intelligence certainly takes the hard work out of fixing your images. Once they have been processed, it offers three filters. 'Anti-JPEG' doesn't seem to do much but 'Boring' upscales the image, ensuring that the details and edges of the original remain intact. 'Magic' fills in the missing details, drawing on the AI to make educated 'guesses' as to what should go where.

In practice, some of our images seemed to work better than others

but the overall results were impressive, and you can download the images when they're ready. However, you need to sign up for an account to see the results and when the tool is under a heavy load, it delays the processing time.

See our feature on page 46 for a look at more amazing machine-learning tools.

letsenhance.io

Send money to friends in Messenger

messenger.com

Keen to make Messenger more than just a medium for sharing photos and emoji, Facebook now lets you use it to send money to your friends and family. It promises to encrypt your details and protect payments with bank-level security as you send cash to any UK Messenger user (it stops short of letting you wire money abroad).

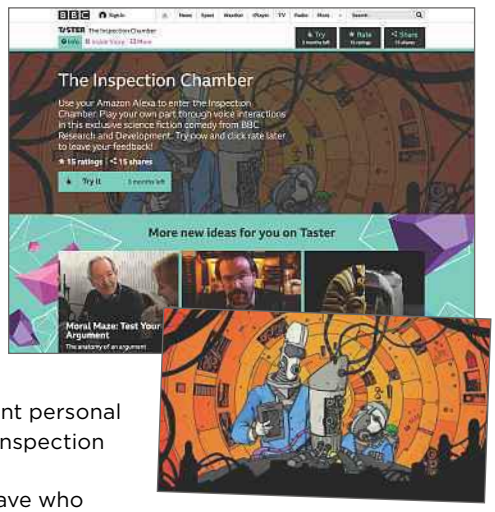
Sending cash is easy. Start a message, tap the blue '+' icon and press the green Payment button. Set up a payment account, add your debit card, enter an amount and tap Pay. Recipients need only tap Add Card and enter their own details to receive the cash. You'll see a fun animation as the money transfers.

Messenger has also launched M Suggestions, which uses AI to detect when you're discussing money. When it spots such a situation, you'll see an option to send or request cash.

Enjoy an interactive BBC drama

bit.ly/inspection437

The BBC has released an experimental new interactive audio drama that lets you use your voice to influence the outcome of the story. Created by the Beeb's R&D unit for Amazon's intelligent personal assistant, Alexa, The Inspection Chamber begins with a computer named Dave who explains that a pair of curious scientists are trying to understand what kind of creature you are. As you answer a series of questions, the plot moves in different directions, resulting in an amusing sci-fi adventure that adds a gaming element to traditional radio programming.



To begin, visit the website on your computer, click Try It and enable the Alexa skill. The drama starts the moment you utter "Alexa, launch The Inspection Chamber" within earshot of your Amazon Echo or other Alexa-enabled device.

We pick the 10 best things you must do on the web this fortnight

Raise cash for charity with Amazon

smile.amazon.co.uk

Fancy raising money for charity by simply buying items from Amazon? Then select one of 10 leading UK charities on this spin-off site, buy an item and the retailer will donate 0.5% of its purchase price. The Amazon Smile scheme has already raised $62m in the US, and Amazon plans to open it to all UK-registered charities in early 2018.

Create your own silhouette

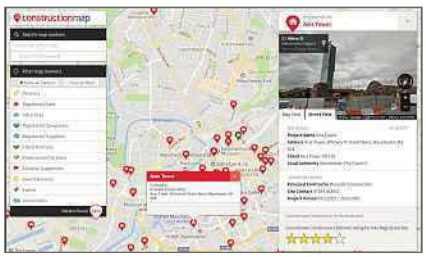
bit.ly/silh437

Launch this gorgeous visual experiment, position yourself in front of your webcam and your silhouette will burst into life in a vivid flurry of colour. Alternatively, select Pointer and move your mouse around to send light fizzing across the screen. In either case, you're sure to be impressed by what creator Yuichiroh Arai has achieved and, to spice things up, the control panel lets you play with the resolution, colour, radius and decay of the images that appear. Of course, there's no real point to the experiment but it's guaranteed to keep you entertained for a while.

Locate building sites on a map

www.constructionmap.info

Britain sometimes feels like one big construction site and while it's interesting to see new buildings spring up, it can also be a tad disruptive, so this map aims to plot the location of every major project. Enter your postcode or address to see a host of pins. The red ones are active while the others show where construction companies are based. Clicking a pin gives you details of what's taking place, along with contractor information, the local authority and expected timeframe. You can even see how considerate the companies are.



See if your ISP is throttling your speed

bit.ly/speed437

If you're suffering slow broadband speeds and can't figure out why, you may want to check whether your ISP is to blame. The Internet Health Test, which has been devised by Battle for the Net, an organisation campaigning for net neutrality, spends a couple of minutes examining whether or not your speed is being degraded or throttled and alerts you to any inconsistencies.

5 TO FOLLOW ON TWITTER

@colorisebot
Tweet a black-and-white image and this feed creates a colour version

@MozTheMonsterJL
The monster from the John Lewis ad has begun tweeting its thoughts

@Comey
The former FBI Director James Comey has switched to this handle

@kfc
This feed is worth checking out just to see the identities of the 11 people KFC follows

@NHS
Each week, a new person curates the NHS feed and shares their story

Create a longer Twitter name

www.twitter.com

As well as increasing tweets to 280 characters, Twitter now lets you select a longer display name of up to 50 characters and change it at any time by going to your profile and selecting Edit Profile, Name.

Upload old content to Instagram Stories

www.instagram.com

Instagram has relaxed its 24-hour limit on its Stories feature by allowing older images and videos to be uploaded from your camera roll. You can also use a new sticker to describe when content was captured and add context.

Name the song that's playing

assistant.google.com

Rather than launch Shazam, you can now ask Google Assistant to show you a card that not only reveals the name of a mystery song and artist, but the lyrics and links to YouTube, Spotify and Google Play Music.

Need to Know

Cybercriminals could kill millions by hacking cars

What happened?

An American academic has warned that any car built since 2005 is at risk of being hacked because the technology used by vehicles isn't being updated.

Justin Cappos, a computer scientist at New York University, told the *Times* that hackers may already be targeting cars without us knowing it. Cars are increasingly controlled by electronic components, and Cappos noted that hackers can easily stop brakes or turn power steering wheels with little effort.

Cappos' warning isn't the first. Security researchers Charlie Miller and Chris Valasek – both of whom now work for Uber – notoriously took over a Jeep Cherokee's brakes and accelerator while inside the vehicle and travelling at high speed. More than a million cars were recalled in the wake of the research.

However, while Miller and Valasek required access to the car to perform their hack, Cappos suggests that a specific vulnerability allows remote access and essentially affects all modern cars. Once on the network, hackers can easily manipulate these vehicles because their components aren't well protected. Despite their essential role in controlling the car, the components don't usually check where inputs are coming from, leaving them open to control by hackers.

Alarmingly, Cappos warned that a successful cyber-attack against connected cars could put millions of lives at risk, and said that deaths caused by hacked cars were likely occur within years.

Public Service Announcement

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

This PSA is a joint product by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Transportation and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

March 17, 2016

Alert Number
I-031716-PSA

Questions regarding this PSA should be directed to your local FBI Field Office.

Local Field Office Locations:
www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field

MOTOR VEHICLES INCREASINGLY VULNERABLE TO REMOTE EXPLOITS

As previously reported by the media in and after July 2015, security researchers evaluating automotive cybersecurity were able to demonstrate remote exploits of motor vehicles. The analysis demonstrated the researchers could gain significant control over vehicle functions remotely by exploiting wireless communications vulnerabilities. While the identified vulnerabilities have been addressed, it is important that consumers and manufacturers are aware of the possible threats and how an attacker may seek to remotely exploit vulnerabilities in the future. Third party aftermarket devices with Internet or cellular access plugged into diagnostics ports could also introduce wireless vulnerabilities.

Modern motor vehicles often include new connected vehicle technologies that aim to provide benefits such as added safety features, improved fuel economy, and greater overall convenience. Aftermarket devices are also providing consumers with new features to monitor the status of their vehicles. However, with this increased connectivity, it is important that consumers and manufacturers maintain awareness of potential cyber security threats.

The FBI has issued advice about the threat posed by the hacking of motor vehicles

Not everyone agrees with Cappos' prediction, however. The executive director of policing agency Europol said: "Cybersecurity is clearly a big issue but it's unlikely to be taken seriously [with] sensational comments like this."

Such challenges become more dangerous as we shift more of the responsibilities of driving to cars. Chancellor Philip Hammond believes driverless cars will be navigating British roads by 2021, without a backup driver behind the wheel. The Chancellor was speaking ahead of a budget that introduced measures to encourage self-driving cars in the UK, making it easier for developers to test them.

How will it affect you?

You could trade in your new car for an older model, but given that these vulnerabilities may stretch back decades, you could be no better off. So what can you do? The FBI and US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration advise that if your car receives software updates, make sure you download and install them, ensuring you get them from an authentic source, such as the car manufacturer.

They also advise that you be careful what you plug into your car. Most modern cars have a standard diagnostics port, which you can use for do-it-yourself telematics. Be wary of any device you plug in, and make sure it hasn't been compromised before you connect it to your car.

Also be wary of any apps on your mobile devices that connect to you car, because dodgy apps could leave your vehicle at risk. Keep an eye out for recalls, too. If a manufacturer is worried enough about a security flaw to recall millions of cars, you know it's serious.

Having said that, we're not aware of any hacks made against cars so far. The only people actively targeting cars are security researchers. While that's likely to change eventually, it's up the car industry to protect our vehicles. There's only so much drivers can do.

What do we think?

Justin Cappos is definitely trying to scare the car industry into action. This is a serious problem, but it's one that can be addressed before anyone gets hurt. Clearly, he doesn't believe manufacturers and their partners are doing enough, and his announcement is one way of pressuring the industry into fixing weaknesses before hackers can wreak havoc.

There's no reason for the rest of us to panic, but if you're in the market for a new car and it offers network features, ask the manufacturer what protections are in place and whether security patches will ever be issued. If you're not satisfied by the answer, consider taking your driving business elsewhere.

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

Dodgy Kodi set-top boxes could kill you

What happened?

Owning an illegal Kodi box can get you into trouble in more ways than one. Not only are the media-streaming devices attracting the attention of anti-piracy authorities, but now tests have revealed that many of them pose a fire risk, too.

Electrical Safety First (www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk), the campaign group from the Electrical Safety Council, teamed up with anti-piracy group Federation Against Copyright Theft (FACT, www.fact-uk.org.uk) to study the safety of the boxes, and found that none of the nine devices tested met UK safety regulations.

How will it affect you?

The Intellectual Property Office said that as many as a million Kodi boxes were sold in the UK over the past two years, and because they're sold through unofficial channels, they haven't been properly tested for safety. According to Electrical Safety First, this means that if you have a box, you should unplug it immediately.

Of course, your box may be perfectly safe, but unfortunately there's no way of knowing for sure – and the EU has recalled such devices in the past. The safety group has advised owners to look for a CE mark indicating that their IPTV box meets regulations, and to double check that the power supply's output voltage and current ratings match those of the device.

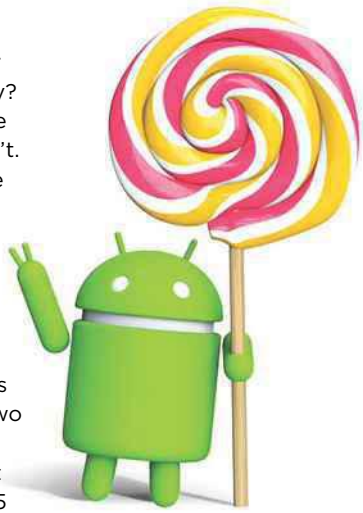
What do we think?

If piracy and the threats involved with copyright infringement weren't enough to put you off, this report adds weight to the argument that you should skip a Kodi box in favour of a properly tested web-TV system. That said, we'd give this research more weight if it wasn't backed by FACT, which certainly has a dog in the fight.

Either way, if you insist on using a dodgy TV box, check that it conforms to local power regulations. If the fear of a fire puts you off, you could buy a cheap, legal device such as a Roku, Chromecast or Amazon Fire TV Stick to stream your TV instead.

One billion Android devices out of date

What happened?



Have you updated your Android phone recently? If not, you're among the billion users who haven't. That's according to one hardware engineer, who used Google's own figures to work out how many active phones are running out-of-date software.

Engineer Dan Luu has estimated that of the two billion active devices running Android, about half are using Android 5 (Lollipop, which was released more than two years ago), or earlier. And this problem is likely to get worse because users are taking longer than ever to adopt new software.

One reason for this lag in updating Android could be that manufacturers and operators are slow to push updates through to older phones. Another could be down to many of us hanging on to our phones for as long as possible, which is actually good news for the environment.

Another theory is that the market for mid-range and budget phones is booming, and those devices tend to run older operating systems.

How will it affect you?

There are two ways this can have a negative impact. First, older operating systems that haven't been updated pose a security risk. If your phone hasn't been patched, you're vulnerable to all kinds of horrible bugs and although fixes for these are developed regularly, they have to be made available to users, who in turn need to install them.

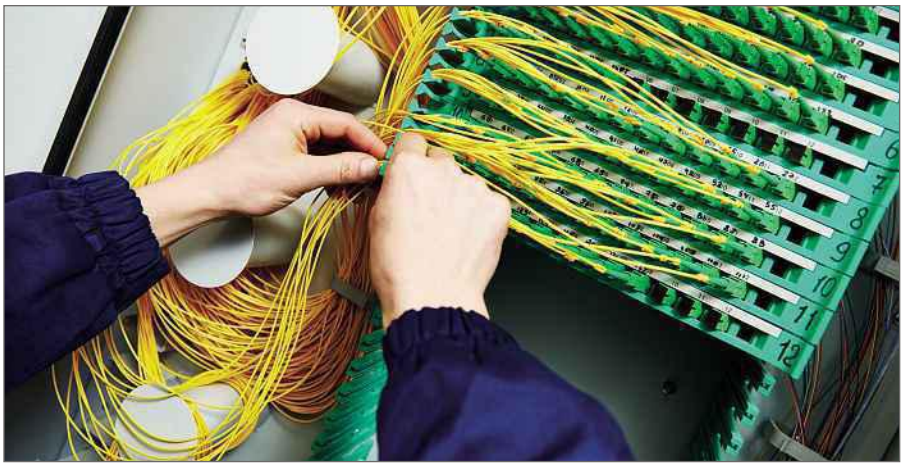
Second, using an older OS means your phone lacks the latest features. That can mean some Android apps stop working because they're no longer compatible.

What do we think?

Google has taken steps to make it easier to push updates out to our phones, but it's clear that many people still aren't receiving them. Manufacturers and operators need to do more to ensure their customers are receiving updates.

Once a phone has been sold and is in users' hands, these companies still have a responsibility to keep the software up to date. If you receive a notification for a software update on your phone, be sure to download and run it – it's a privilege many of us aren't getting.

ISPs to pay compensation for poor service



What happened?

Customers who feel they've been ripped off by their broadband or landline provider will now be able to get compensation automatically through Ofcom's new automatic payout scheme.

Ofcom has invited all the major ISPs to sign up for the initiative, which means customers receive credits on their bill when things don't go to plan, such as slow repairs to their service, missed appointments and delayed installations.

So far, BT, Sky, TalkTalk, Virgin Media and Zen Internet have all signed up to take part in the scheme, which means 90% of the population are covered by automatic compensation.

"Waiting too long for your landline or broadband to be fixed is frustrating enough, without having to fight for compensation," Lindsey Fussell, Ofcom's consumer group director, said. "Providers will have to pay money back automatically, whenever repairs or installations don't happen on time, or an engineer doesn't turn up. People will get the money they deserve, while providers will want to work harder to improve their service."

Ofcom said £142m will be paid out in its new automatic compensation initiative, which is nine times the amount already being paid out to customers. Consumer publication *Which* has voiced its support for the campaign, saying it's vital that providers sign up to the scheme to ensure their customers remain satisfied with their service.

How will it affect you?

The new scheme offers a set sum of money for each problem you experience. For example, if a repair is delayed after the service has stopped working, and it's not fixed within two days, you will be entitled to £8 for every day that the service is delayed. Similarly, if an engineer misses a prearranged appointment, you'll be entitled to a £25 payment, while if the start of your new service is delayed, you will receive £8 for each day your service isn't switched on.

What do we think?

It's about time that broadband companies started compensating us properly for poor service, rather than leaving us without internet for days on end. Monthly contracts are expensive enough without us having to pay for times when we can't actually get online, especially when the problem is due to delayed repairs or an engineer not turning up on time.

We're pleased that all the major ISPs have signed up for Ofcom's scheme and that compensation will be paid automatically to prevent providers from deliberately delaying or questioning payouts. Let's hope they don't offset the cost by increasing our bills.

FIRST LOOK

Sky Soundbox

bit.ly/soundbox437

As far as TV speakers go, the Sky Soundbox is a bit of an oddity. It's not slim or long enough to be a soundbar, yet it isn't wide enough to be a sound base, either. If your TV is stood on a surface and you want to place the Soundbox in front of it, this could be a problem. It was certainly a problem in our living room, where the speaker blocked a significant portion of the lower part of the screen, forcing us to move it down to a lower shelf. You can't wall-mount it either, so it's not designed for a 'floating' setup.

The rest of the Soundbox's features are a bit of a mixed bag. It has only one HDMI output, so connectivity is a bit limited, and you'll have to route any audio that doesn't come from your Sky box via the optical output on your TV. There's also no direct support for Dolby Atmos, which is odd given the technology's recent introduction to the screening of Premier League matches.

Bluetooth-pairing works beautifully and automatically, but we're not keen on the way the Soundbox interrupts playback from other sources to announce "Bluetooth device is connected/disconnected" whenever a previously paired device goes in and out of range.

Despite these niggles, the Sky Soundbox manages to deliver on sound quality, packing quite a punch for its size with surprisingly wide and deep sound. Despite the lack of a separate subwoofer, the bass offers plenty of impact – it's a world away from your regular TV speakers.

For Sky customers, the £299 price compares favourably with soundbars from companies such as Samsung. However, if you're not a subscriber, the Soundbox costs an eye-watering £799 which, despite its impressive sound, is way more than it's worth.

WHAT'S THE RUMOUR

Does Facebook want us to upload nude selfies?

Facebook is reportedly asking users in Australia to send it nude photos of themselves, as part of a new effort to combat 'revenge porn' – non-consensual sharing of intimate images, usually by a former partner.

If a user is worried that intimate photos may be shared online against their will, they can use Facebook Messenger to have the images turned into a "hash". This is a unique digital fingerprint that can be used to identify and therefore prevent any other attempts to upload the image on Facebook, Messenger and Instagram.

Up to now, Facebook users have been told to report images to the company's "specially trained representatives". The image is taken down if it violates Facebook's terms and conditions, and photo-matching techniques are used to prevent the image from being uploaded again.

This hashing technique aims to streamline that process considerably, stopping malicious parties from uploading the pictures in the first place. In a blog post, Facebook describes it as "an emergency option for people to provide a photo proactively to Facebook". Users will need to first complete an online form, then send the picture they are worried about to Facebook, where a community operations analyst will hash it. According to the company, after the image has been converted into a hash code, the social network will store the picture for a short amount of time before automatically deleting it.

LIKELIHOOD RATING
✓✓✓✓✓

Despite some reports, Facebook isn't asking its two billion users to flood it with naked selfies. Only individuals who feel they are at risk from being exposed (literally) by a former partner are being asked to take these precautions. Some users may feel wary that pictures are analysed by Facebook staff rather than AI, so we'll have to wait and see if the programme proves effective and expands beyond Australia.

What's new on Kickstarter

Our favourite new project on the crowdfunding site

Pholio

bit.ly/pholio437 | From £199

If you have thousands of photos and videos spread over different devices and services, Pholio can gather them together so you can manage them in one place. Connect the "intelligent box" to your wireless network and it gathers all your media files and indexes them using visual-recognition technology, which makes finding specific images a breeze. Pholio's 500GB of secure storage lets you save photos at their original resolution or smaller, and it can recognise and classify faces, objects and scenes. The Pholio team hopes to raise £95,653 by 9 December.

WEBOMETER

WE LIKE...

Facebook ditches app invites

Facebook has confirmed that it is killing off its annoying App Invites feature, which allowed friends to pester you with invites to join games such as Farmville. As of 5 February 2018, the option will no longer be available.

Xmas discounts on voice assistants

Black Friday and Cyber Monday may have been and gone, but we were pleased to see that many of the best deals were for voice-assisted smart speakers, including £20 off an Amazon Echo and £50 off a Google Home.

WE DON'T LIKE...

BT increases prices – again

BT has warned that it's hiking broadband prices by up to £30 a year, and the cost of its BT Sport service by up to £36 a year. The price increases come into effect on 7 January and are BT's fourth hike in three years.

Cash Converters hit by hack

Cash Converters has been threatened with a leak of customer data if it doesn't pay a ransom demand. The data is likely to include personal details, passwords and purchase history, and possibly card details.

Stay Safe Online

News about the latest threats and advice from security experts

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

Children's smart toys 'have security flaws'

Consumer group Which has called on retailers to stop selling certain internet-connected toys, which it says have "proven" security issues. The alleged vulnerabilities make it possible for strangers to connect to smart toys such as Furby Connect, the i-Que Intelligent Robot, CloudPets and Toy-fi Teddy, and talk to children without their parents' knowledge.

Which worked with the German consumer group Stiftung Warentest and other security experts to test popular Bluetooth and Wi-Fi toys, and found that the Bluetooth connection on four of them had not been secured. This meant that a hacker did not need a password, PIN code or any other authentication to access the devices.

Hasbro, which makes the Furby Connect, addressed the security fears by saying the results of the tests carried out for Which had been achieved in very specific conditions. "A tremendous amount of engineering would be required to reverse-engineer the product as well as to create new firmware," it said. "We feel confident in the way we have designed both the toy and the app to deliver a secure play experience."
bit.ly/furby437

Masked man tricks iPhone X's Face ID

Security researchers have managed to fool the iPhone X's Face ID lock screen by using a specially developed mask that bypasses the new device's advanced facial-recognition engine.

The outer 'skin' of the mask was handcrafted by researchers at Vietnamese security firm Bkav, before being laid on a 3D-printed frame. Other facial features, such as the mask's eyes, were merely printed images. In total, the mask cost around $150 (£115) to make and was created in just five days.

Bkav insists there wasn't any jiggery pokery involved in its test – the iPhone X used in the experiment was trained using a real person's face and was seemingly unlocked on the first try.

However, despite the experiment proving that Face ID isn't as secure as Apple would have us all believe, the vulnerability shouldn't prove a huge risk for regular iPhone owners. It's unlikely that many people would go to the lengths of these researchers to break into an iPhone.
bit.ly/mask437

Security Helpdesk | Your questions answered by security specialists

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT: Alexey Malanov, Malware Expert at Kaspersky Lab (www.kaspersky.co.uk)

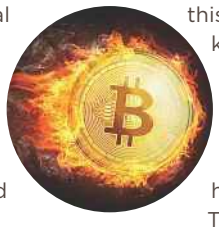
KASPERSKY lab

Q How safe is it to use cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin?
Ryan Bentley, Twitter

A Cryptocurrencies work in much the same way as e-payment systems such as PayPal, which means they are vulnerable to the same problems. However, the operating principles specific to cryptocurrencies can make these problems more likely to occur, and there are also risks unique to cryptocurrencies.

One common problem is plain, ordinary theft. Let's say you're transferring money to a friend. You copy his wallet address accurately, but malware replaces the address in the clipboard with another one, redirecting your payment. Not every user is vigilant enough to double-check an address after copying it, especially if the address is a long jumble of characters.

Or take phishing, for another example. As with ordinary e-money, users can be tricked into visiting a phishing website where they upload their cryptowallets and enter a password.



Of course, traditional bank or payment systems are also vulnerable to cybercriminals – but with a traditional system, there is a good chance that you can cancel the transfer. If you're the victim of cryptocurrency theft, you may as well complain to the United Nations. What happens in Bitcoin stays in Bitcoin.

Another problem is the loss or theft of a wallet. Most users store their cryptocurrency wallet files on their computers, which means they can be stolen using malware or lost if the hard drive crashes. For this reason, more knowledgeable users make hard copies of their secret key and buy a USB hardware wallet.

Traditional internet banking tends to impose greater security measures, such as two-factor authentication and confirmation of transactions using SMS with one-time-use passwords, to further protect customers.

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

BEND YOUR REALITY

AG352UCG AG352QCX

QHD | NVIDIA G-SYNC | 200HZ | Adaptive Sync | 35"

AOC GAMING

aocgaming.com @aoc_gaming @aocgaming @aocgaming

SCAN OVERCLOCKERS UK amazon.co.uk

Best New Websites

Site of the Fortnight

CULTURE

NEW

English Heritage

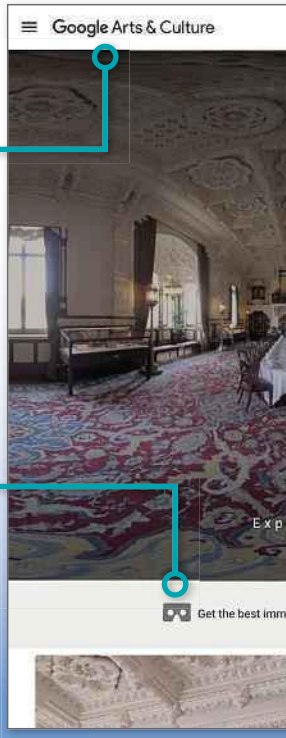
bit.ly/english437

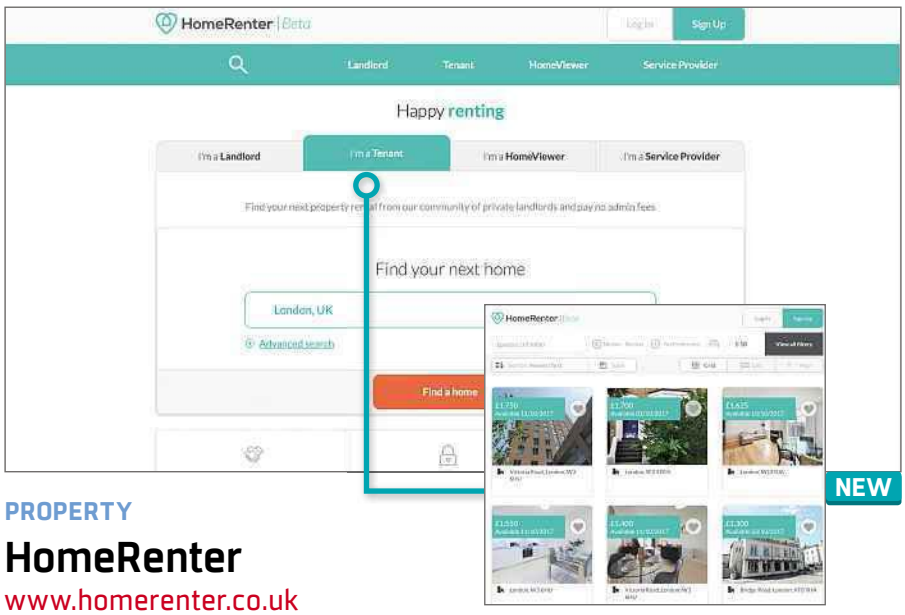
English Heritage has joined forces with Google Arts & Culture to let online visitors nose around thousands of interesting rooms, objects and artworks. It provides a dizzying amount of content, telling the stories of 29 historic locations across England. We couldn't fail to be impressed by the quality of the 360-degree tours, stunning images and beautifully shot videos. You'll find yourself scrolling up and down a fair bit to get a sense of its sheer scale, but with lots of articles to read, picks by the curators and a chance to explore English heritage via a detailed timeline, this fascinating site is sure to keep you busy.

Our rating ★★★★★

CURATED CONTENT
Experts pick their favourite objects and explain them in a series of videos

GOOGLE CARDBOARD
Immerse yourself in 360-degree videos using your phone and Google Cardboard





NEW

PROPERTY

HomeRenter

www.homerenter.co.uk

By removing the high fees levied on tenants by traditional lettings agents, this smart property site aims to cut the cost of renting a home. It charges landlords a small annual fee and lets them create a listing that also appears on property portals such as Rightmove. Would-be tenants can then search and filter to find a place they like, perusing the comprehensive listings, images, street views, maps and landlord profiles. Each listing can be saved or shared, landlords can be messaged directly and you can earn money by hosting viewings. With its clear explanations and pleasant layout, it's sure to be a winner once it increases its portfolio to beyond the current 50 properties.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

TECHNOLOGY

V by Vodafone

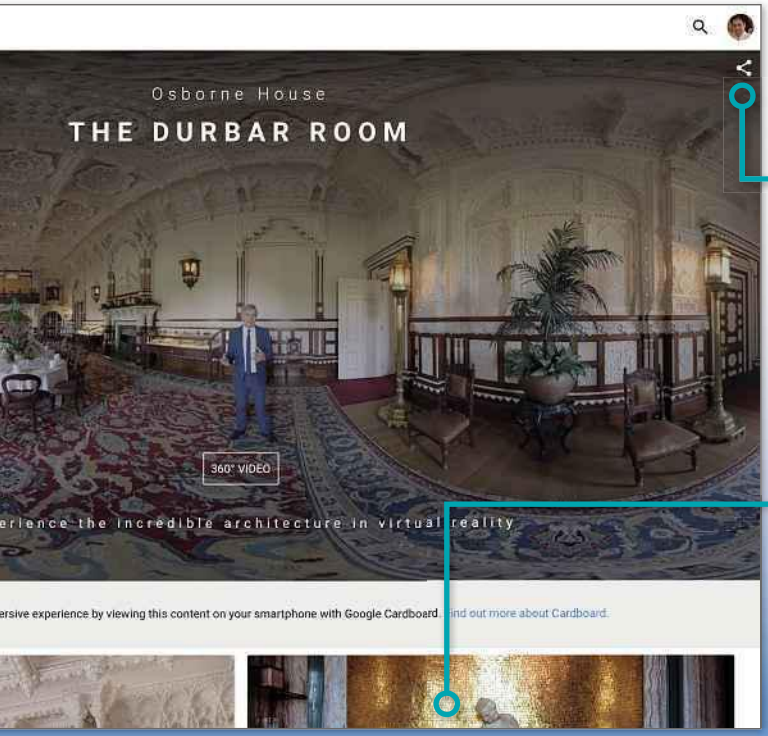
shop.v.vodafone.com

Vodafone is promoting a range of new Internet of Things devices that include a pet tracker, a bag tracker, a connected camera and a car telematics dongle. The site uses bold images, long lists of features and tech specs to help you get a better idea of what the items do and how they work. Yet it's frustrating at times: the top third of the homepage is full of promotional guff that forces you to scroll down, and the product pages have too many Show More buttons. Thankfully, prices and accompanying subscriptions are very clear, and the simple checkout process makes purchasing easy.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

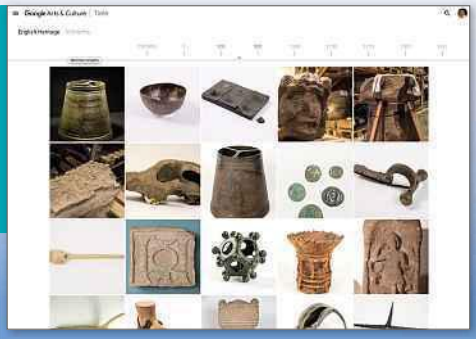
Reviews by David Crookes

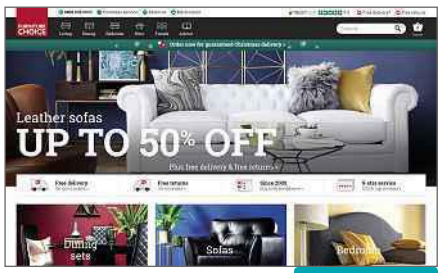
We review this fortnight's best new and relaunched websites and rate them for content, design and features



SHARE
All the content can be posted on social media by clicking the share icon

TIMELINE
Click the Explore button to see objects from England's past to the present day





RELAUNCH

FURNITURE

Furniture Choice

www.furniturechoice.co.uk

The revamped site for this online store offers much more than an easy way to furnish your home. There is help and advice in abundance along with better navigation, in-depth descriptions, lots of images and an improved search facility. We particularly loved the Trends section with its professional snaps of various themes; the Furniture Choice Blog with its inspiring posts; and the Advice page, which is packed with info about everything from caring for wooden furniture to creating a kid-friendly home. The search engine for local furniture-recycling centres is a great idea, too.

Our rating ★★★★★

RELAUNCH

TOYS

Build a Bear

www.buildabear.co.uk

Build-A-Bear is a hugely popular high-street chain that invites children to make their own cuddly toys. You can use its site to discover store locations, peruse the collections and buy online. Disappointingly, the product pages only contain one (albeit large) image, but the main draw anyway is The Bear Builder tool. This guides children through the step-by-step process of selecting a bear; picking clothes, shoes and accessories; and selecting the perfect sounds and scents. It's just a shame you don't see the bear being built before your eyes, which diminishes some of the enjoyment.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

RELAUNCH

PHOTOGRAPHY

Camera Centre

www.cameracentreuk.com

Start searching for a camera on this relaunched site and it not only suggests products as you type but shows you thumbnails of what they look like. Such snappy attention to detail helps to make this redesign an overall success. But while it's certainly a breeze to navigate, it feels a bit cluttered at times and zooming into product images is a tad clumsy. Still, there are some welcome additions, most notably the events page and the blog (which really needs to be regularly maintained to be useful). You can also message the support team during the day via the live-chat facility.

Our rating ★★★★☆

Build a Better Site

Specialist tips, top tools and practical help

Top Tips of the Fortnight

Fasthosts revamps its control panel

If you're a Fasthosts (www.fasthosts.co.uk) customer, you'll see its revamped control panel the next time you sign in. It's been completely redesigned to work well with whatever device you log in with, and brings all the information and controls you need for managing your domains and websites to your fingertips.

As before, you can access the control panel from admin.fasthosts.co.uk, and use your existing username and password to log in.

120 cheat sheets for designing your website

Web-design tools can be used more efficiently if you get to grips with the many tricks and shortcuts they offer. However, finding and learning all the shortcuts that are out there can take a lot of time-consuming research. Thankfully, Codeinwp (www.codeinwp.com) has done the hard work for you by scouring the web for these simple hacks, and has gathered lots of handy cheat sheets, both in PDF and web format, for you to explore from its site. To see them all, head to bit.ly/cheat437.

Deal of the Fortnight

CyberHostUK (www.cyberhostuk.net) has a great-value Simple hosting option, which supports a website up to 200MB in size for just £1.25 per month.

Web-building Helpdesk

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT:
Nick Akam, CTO, Easy Internet (www.easy-internet.co.uk)

Q I'd like to try my hand at making a website for free or minimal cost and, if it's successful, put it on better paid-for hosting later. How should I start?

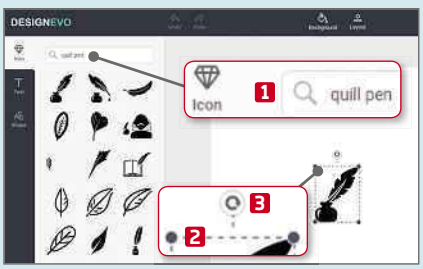
Francis Golding, via email

A Some domain registrars (including Easy Internet) give you a small free hosting account when you register a domain name, along with a site builder. These packages offer restricted space and bandwidth, but if your site takes off, you can upgrade to a paid-for package later with very little effort and no migration involved.

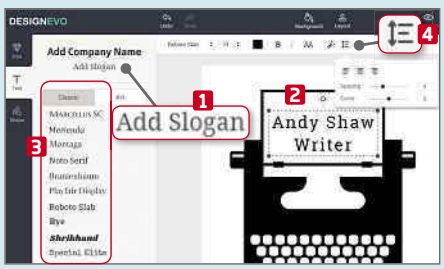
MINI WORKSHOP | Design your own website logo

DesignEvo: www.designevo.com | 10 mins | Any browser

Even the humblest of websites benefit from having a logo, but designing one requires skill and talent. DesignEvo can help anyone make an attractive, professional-looking logo in a few simple steps



1 On the main page, click 'Make a Logo for Free'. Most logos are built around a central image so with that in mind, type the name of something that sums up your website in the box on the Icon tab. 1 Click the image you want to use and adjust its size 2 and rotation 3 using the handles on the box that surrounds it.



2 Click the Text tab, then click Add Company Name or Add Slogan. 1 A text box appears on the page for you to enter your text. 2 Choose a font from the list 3 and resize it using the handles. Click Format 4 to change the alignment and spacing, and to make the text follow a curve, if required.

3 You can also add shapes from the Shape tab. 1 Use the Preview button 2 to see how your design will look if you use it on a business card or letterhead. To save your creation, click the download button 3 and click 'Download and Agree'.

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

Ultra Wide-Color

with 4K in an immersive design

Colours like you've never seen before. This brilliant 4K UHD resolution display with Ultra Wide-Color offers the richest and most vivid colours wrapped in an immersive curved design for a your best creations yet.

innovation you

40" 4K curved display
(BDM4037U)

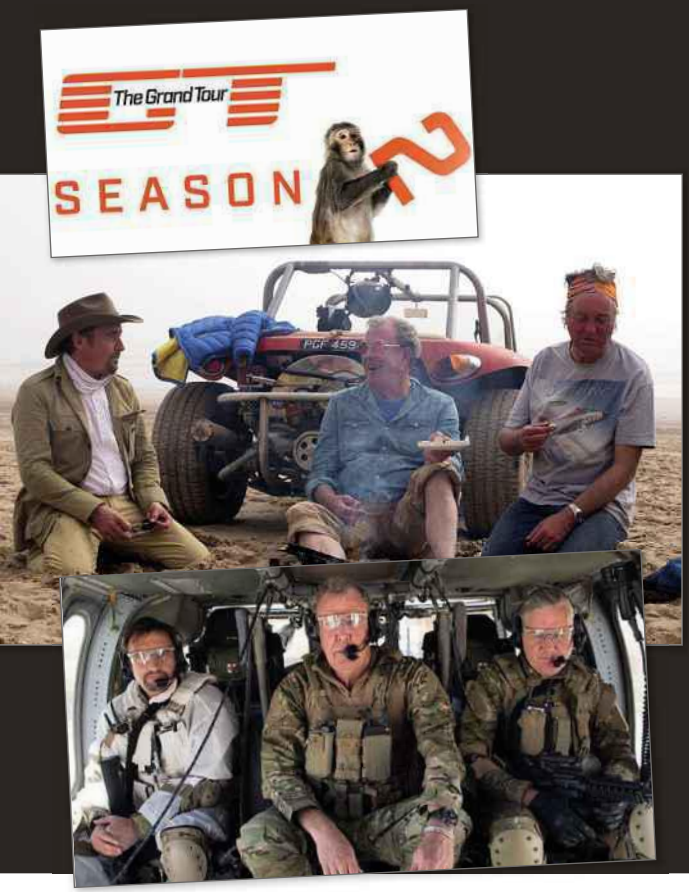
MISCO A Systemax Business
amazon.co.uk
ebuyer.com
BT Business Direct

PHILIPS

What To Watch Online

Pick of the fortnight

amazon prime video



Watch *The Grand Tour* Season 2

From 8 December

Considering the hype surrounding *The Grand Tour* last November when the ex-*Top Gear* team returned with a bigger budget, more glamorous locations and even more elaborate stunts, the second series has had comparatively little fanfare. As before, it will be shown exclusively on Amazon Prime Video, in the hope that Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond and James May will persuade you to part with £79 for an annual membership – or £5.99 per month for Prime Video only – if you're not already signed up.

The Grand Tour team has driven across five continents, visiting countries including Croatia, Mozambique, Dubai, Spain, Switzerland and the US. Footage released so far shows the 'boys' driving Jaguars down a snowy ski slope in Colorado; racing old bangers down muddy African tracks; and abandoning the road to take to the air and water. The studio tent has a new permanent home in the Cotswolds, which must have proved convenient for local resident Clarkson, who developed pneumonia during filming, and Hammond who suffered (another) horrific near-fatal crash.

As with the last series, new episodes of *The Grand Tour* will be shown weekly, streaming every Friday. The 12 instalments should keep your engine revving through the winter months, and you can watch the first trailer at bit.ly/grandtour437.

Watch *The Crown* Season 2

From 8 December

Netflix's critically acclaimed, multi-award-winning and lavishly expensive biographical drama about Queen Elizabeth II returns for a second series that promises to be just as sumptuous and successful as the first.

Claire Foy returns as the young monarch Liz Windsor, facing challenges such as the Suez Crisis of 1956, domestic strife with Prince Philip (played again by Matt Smith) and Princess Margaret being "naughty" (according to series creator Peter Morgan).

All 10 episodes of Season 2 of *The Crown* will be added to Netflix on 8 December, for your royal-bingeing pleasure.

Stream Sky's Christmas movie channels

There's nothing like a festive film to get you in the mood for Christmas, so Sky has launched no less than three new channels to ensure 'Yule' be entertained over the holiday season.

The first of these, Sky Cinema Christmas, runs from 8 November until 31 December on channel 303, screening more than 1,000 family favourites including *It's a Wonderful Life*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* and *A Muppet Christmas Carol*.

If Christmas flicks bring out your inner Scrooge, you can get some respite from Sky Cinema Classics, which will be showing such traditional, non-cheesy fare as *The Great Escape*, *The Italian Job* and *The Godfather*, between 18 and 26 December.

And finally, if you fancy a New Year singalong, there's Sky Cinema Musicals, trotting out the likes of *Grease*, *Frozen* and *The Phantom of the Opera* from 27 December to 7 January.

If you don't have a Sky subscription, you can get a free festive fix through Now TV with a 14-day Sky Cinema pass (bit.ly/nowtv437).

We reveal what's new on Netflix, BBC iPlayer, Amazon Prime Video and other streaming services

Chuckle at stand-up comedy on Amazon

NextUp, the video-on-demand service for comedy fans, is now available through Amazon Channels (bit.ly/channels437), which offers extra content to Prime members for an additional monthly subscription – in this case, £3.50 per month. NextUp features exclusive full-length stand-up shows from comedians including Ed Byrne, Richard Herring and the late Sean Hughes, with new sets added every week. If you're not a Prime member, NextUp is available separately through its website and mobile apps (landing.nextupcomedy.com), and offers a free 30-day trial.

Access saved All 4 shows more easily

All 4, Channel 4's live and on-demand service, has made a small but welcome improvement to its mobile app that makes it easier to access shows you've bookmarked to watch later or regularly. Previously, you had to tap the main menu, choose My4 and then select My List. Now, the programmes you added to My List are featured on the home screen for one-tap streaming or downloading.

Discover where to watch with *Which*

There are so many entertainment stores these days that much of your valuable viewing time can be wasted browsing them all to find a particular film or TV show. A new online tool from *Which* in conjunction with FindAnyFilm.com aims to make life easier by showing you in seconds which services are showing which titles. Just head to the Which Film Finder (bit.ly/filmfinder437), search for a movie or series and specify whether you want to stream online, rent a download or buy outright on good old-fashioned DVD or Blu-ray. Services offering that title are then listed below, including prices and different editions, so you can see the cheapest options. The tool covers Google Play, Amazon, iTunes, Sky Store, Rakuten TV and more, but not subscription services such as Netflix.

Keep your old LoveFilm discs

LOVEFILM BY POST

If you're a former LoveFilm By Post customer who has yet to send back any DVDs or Blu-rays, the good news is that they are yours to keep. Amazon closed the long-running disc-rental service on 31 October, after giving members their last month for free, and has now confirmed that it doesn't want the bother of dealing with returns.

An Amazon spokesperson told Digital Spy that customers can keep any DVDs or Blu-rays at no extra cost. "We do not require customers to return LoveFilm discs they still have at home, and they will not be charged for retaining them" (bit.ly/lovefilm437). Amazon bought Love Film in 2011, and merged its streaming arm with Prime Instant Video in February 2014.

Streaming across the pond

What's new in the US that we want over here

YouTube TV (tv.youtube.com), Google's new live TV-streaming service, was featured in this section in Issue 434. It's now available on even more devices but still, sadly, only in the US. Previously, the service let you watch YouTube TV channels including NBC, CBS, Fox, Disney and YouTube Red on your mobile device or computer, but it can now be streamed and recorded on Android TV devices including Nvidia Shield; smart TVs with Android TV built in, such as Sony's latest models; and Xbox One. There's now a Live guide that displays forthcoming programming, a new dark background and the ability to continue viewing on another device at any time. The app can be controlled using voice commands, too.

Will it come to the UK?

There's still no news about whether YouTube TV will make it over here, let alone how much it would cost (it's currently $35 – around £27 – per month in the US) or which channels it might offer. Watch this space!

Product Test

We test and compare the latest products

Amazon Echo 2 vs Google Home Mini

Andy Shaw checks out the latest additions to the growing range of voice-assistant devices

Amazon Echo 2

Price: £89.99
Buy from Amazon:
bit.ly/echo437

FOR

✓ Cheaper than the original
✓ Smaller, with new design options
✓ New Alexa features

AGAINST

✗ Much the same as the original

★★★★★

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

Google Home Mini

Price: £49
Buy from John Lewis:
bit.ly/gohm437

FOR

✓ Stylish design with touch controls
✓ Integrated Google Assistant and speaker

AGAINST

✗ No 3.5mm audio-jack output

★★★★★

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

Voice assistants haven't been around for very long but Amazon has already launched a second version of its popular Echo device, while Google is following up its Home unit in a smaller, cheaper package. We're comparing these two new devices even though, technically, the Google Home Mini (above left) is more of a rival to Amazon's Echo Dot. If you want to see a head-to-head featuring both companies' full-sized units, we compared the original Amazon Echo with the Google Home in Issue 422 (bit.ly/webuser422).

The original Amazon Echo launched in the US back in 2014, so it's not surprising that Amazon is retiring this grand-daddy of the smart speaker and replacing it with a new incarnation. It's calling it the All-New Amazon Echo (2nd Generation) – presumably to make it easy to find on the website if you're guessing its name – but for the purposes of this review, we're calling it the Echo 2.

> In a smart home, saying "Alexa, good night" will prompt Echo 2 to turn off the lights, lock the door and turn off the TV

Echo 2 design and features

In most respects, the Echo 2 is much the same device as its predecessor. You control it with your voice and it will play music, control smart-home devices and act as a computerised personal assistant. Ask it a question and Alexa – the name given to the artificial intelligence that communicates with you – will do her best to answer.

The design of the new Echo 2 has been softened, so it looks less like an early adopter's toy and more like something you might buy from Habitat or Ikea. It's also more compact than its predecessor – 89mm shorter, in fact – which means it fits more neatly on a shelf or kitchen counter.

The three fabric-clad models – Charcoal (black), Sandstone (white) and Heather Grey – are priced at £89 in the UK, while the Oak, Silver and Walnut finishes are more expensive at £99. Unlike Google Home, you can't change these fabrics at a later date, so make sure you're happy with your choice before handing over your cash. The overall effect is a device that blends into its surroundings much more successfully than before.

We mostly approve of the Echo 2's other design tweaks, though our one minor moan is that it's lost the twisty top from the original, which you could use to manually adjust the volume. You now have to make do with the '+' and '-' buttons for volume control, which are arranged in the same way as on the Echo Dot but have a less responsive feel to them.

On the positive side, the Echo 2 has added a 3.5mm headphone jack next to the power input, so you can plug in an external speaker if you want better sound quality – just as you can with the Dot.

Depending on which finish you get, the Echo 2 works out £50 or £60 cheaper than the original Echo when it was first launched. If you're lucky enough to own a big house and want to fill it with Amazon's digital butlers, the Echo 2 is also available in a two-pack for £155 (saving £23) and a three-pack for £220 (saving £47).

Google Home Mini design and features

Unlike its full-sized big brother, the pebble-shaped Google Home Mini doesn't let you swap its colours and is only available in three varieties – Chalk, Charcoal and Coral – but the textured fabric that wraps around the top of the speaker looks great and certainly makes it a much classier looking unit than the utilitarian Echo Dot.

The Google Home Mini is significantly smaller and cheaper than the Google Home, and is designed to broaden the product range rather than replace its predecessor model. The original Google Home costs £119 so, at £49, the Mini is a far more affordable way to introduce yourself to the world of Google Assistant-powered smart speakers, though if you'd prefer to go down the Amazon route, the Echo Dot is available for an only slightly more expensive £50.

Despite its smaller size, the Mini does almost everything its larger sibling can, hooking into your home network and drawing on Google's server-based AI to answer questions, play music and control other devices. It has touch controls to the right and left, which let you change the volume; and four pin-prick LEDs that light up to indicate the volume and activity.

Around the base, you'll find a single Micro USB port for powering the Home Mini and a switch to mute the microphone. That's it for external features. On the inside, there's a 360-degree speaker and a pair of far-field microphones to help it pick up your voice from across the room.

Just like the larger Home model, the Mini has dual-band Wi-Fi with MIMO (multiple-input, multiple-output) and Bluetooth, so you can connect your phone to it directly if you want to use it to play music. What it lacks – compared with the Echo 2 and Dot – is a 3.5mm output jack, so you can't hook it up to your hi-fi and use it as a voice-powered streamer. However, once again, this is somewhat compensated for by its compatibility with Google

Cast, which you can use to send audio both to the speaker itself and from the speaker to any Cast-compatible audio equipment.

Google Home Mini performance

The smaller size of the Google Home Mini means its doesn't sound as good as the full Home and Amazon Echo speakers. It's fine for listening to talk radio shows, podcasts and the like, but music sounds thin and lacks body. It's hardly surprising that there's no bass because it's so small, but it could still sound richer.

The sensitivity of its microphones is a little on the disappointing side, certainly compared with the Echo Dot. We found we were having to repeat ourselves more frequently than with Amazon's devices.

However, if you own and run other Google hardware, and you've ever used the speech recognition on your Android smartphone, you'll know exactly how impressive Google's technology is, once you've started communicating with it. The fact that it works beautifully with other Google products gives it an edge over Amazon's Alexa alternatives.

We particularly like the way you can command your Chromecast to play movies and control playback; find directions and have them sent directly to Google Maps on your phone; and even locate that phone if it's been mislaid. That's only a small sample of the Google Home Mini's capabilities and these, like Alexa's Skills, will continue to be added to in the future.

For example, there's already support for Spotify and a range of smart-home gear, including British Gas' Hive smart thermostat, Nest, Philips Hue, Samsung Smart Things and more.

Amazon Echo 2 performance

Despite the new features, there's little separating the new Echo 2 from its predecessor. However, Amazon has been carrying out some background work by introducing a new way of interacting with Alexa called "Alexa routines". This allows Alexa to perform a number of functions when you say a single command – a bit like running a batch file on your PC. For instance, in a home equipped with various web-connected devices, saying "Alexa, good night" will prompt Echo 2 to turn off the lights, lock the door and turn off the TV.

Another feature, which has been available in the US for some time but was only recently introduced in the UK, is Drop In, which lets you make calls between Echo devices and apps. An invaluable tool for rounding up the kids at dinner time or communicating your imminent arrival home while you're *en route*, its call quality, even over the internet, is superb.

Alexa is as good as ever at picking up voice commands and swiftly answering questions with mostly sensible responses. Amazon's assistant may not have the might of Google at her beck and call, but she's just as adept as Google Assistant at providing in-depth answers to even the most pointless questions.

> "Google Home Mini works beautifully with other Google products, giving it an edge over Amazon's Alexa alternatives"

WHAT'S AROUND THE CORNER?

Amazon and Google are storming ahead with their voice-assistant devices but the success of the products has caught the eye of other tech giants.

The Apple HomePod (bit.ly/homepod437) uses the company's existing Siri voice assistant, built into an attractive speaker that's almost certain to provide high-quality sound at a matching high price. It's configured for Apple Music, though, so if you use a different music streaming service, we don't know whether it will work. If you're already waist-deep in Apple products, it may make sense to add to your collection but we suspect most *Web User* readers will be better off with Amazon or Google.

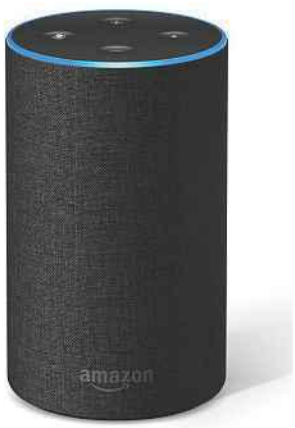
Microsoft is taking a different tack, developing its Windows 10-based voice assistant Cortana into an always-on interface you can use on your PC, called HomeHub. If you already talk to Cortana, you're probably part of the way there, but it sounds to us like Microsoft is taking a good idea and making it less convenient. Who wants to wait for Windows to load before getting a reply to your questions?

OUR VERDICT

The key to the Echo 2's appeal is that it offers much the same experience as the original, but at a better price. If you're heavily invested in Amazon's suite of services, the Echo 2 is a great choice, but if your Google account is filled to the brim with movies, TV shows and podcasts, Google's alternative will offer greater rewards.

On its own, though, we don't think the Google Mini is as good as Amazon's Echo 2 or the Echo Dot because Alexa's system is more mature and has more capabilities. It also offers wider support among third-party speaker manufacturers.

If you've been hesitant in the past about plonking an always-listening device in your home, the Echo 2 is proof that these devices do indeed have a future, and they keep getting better and better.



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PC Specialist recommends Windows Windows 10

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HARDWARE

VOICE ASSISTANT

Amazon Echo

NEW!

£89.99 from bit.ly/echo437
Tested: Issue 437

With its sophisticated speech recognition, Amazon's second-generation Echo proves that smart digital assistants have a bright future, and it keeps getting better and better.

KEY SPECS

Compatible with Fire OS, Android and iOS devices ■ 802.11a/b/g/n Wi-Fi ■ Line-out with 3.5mm cable or Bluetooth ■ 2.5in woofer, 0.6in tweeter ■ 148 x 88 x 88mm ■ 821g ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

HIGH-SPEED ROUTER

TP-Link Deco M5

£229.99 from bit.ly/tpl435
Tested: Issue 435

This is a finely balanced mesh system with good range, although it isn't the fastest router available. However, it's got great additional features including built-in antivirus and powerful parental controls.

KEY SPECS

Mesh-networking kit ■ 802.11ac Wi-Fi ■ Combined network of 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands ■ WPA2-AES security ■ 1 x WAN port ■ 2 x Gigabit Ethernet ports ■ 120 x 120 x 38mm ■ Three-years return-to-base warranty

BUDGET TABLET

Amazon Fire HD 8

£89.99 from bit.ly/fire433
Tested: Issue 433

Long battery life, superb build quality and decent performance make this an excellent 16GB tablet for the price. It's worth paying the extra £10 for this ad-free version, too.

KEY SPECS

Quad-core 1.3GHz MediaTek MT8135 processor ■ 1.5GB memory ■ 16GB storage (expandable to 256GB) ■ 8in 1,280 x 800 pixels screen ■ 2-megapixel rear camera ■ Fire OS ■ 214 x 128 x 9.7mm ■ 369g ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

BUDGET PHONE

Samsung Galaxy J5 (2017)

£219 from bit.ly/sams432
Tested: Issue 432

Samsung's updated Galaxy J5 does everything you could ask of a budget phone. Battery life is top-notch, the screen is rich and vivid, and its camera quality is excellent.

KEY SPECS

Octa-core 1.6GHz Exynos 7870 processor ■ 13-megapixel front and rear cameras ■ 2GB RAM ■ 16GB storage ■ 5.2in 1,280 x 720-pixel screen ■ Android 7 ■ 146.2 x 71.3 x 8mm ■ 160g ■ Two-years return-to-base warranty

HYBRID LAPTOP-TABLET

Lenovo Yoga Book

£548.97 from bit.ly/lenw431
Tested: Issue 431

The Yoga Book laptop-tablet hybrid genuinely feels like a step forward, with its virtual keyboard and fantastic writing surface that makes it an exceptional note-taking device.

KEY SPECS

Quad-core 2.4GHz Intel Atom x5-Z8550 processor ■ 4GB memory ■ 64GB storage ■ 10.1in 1,920 x 1,200-pixel screen ■ 1 x Micro USB port ■ 802.11ac Wi-Fi ■ Windows 10 ■ 256 x 170 x 9.6mm ■ 690g ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

NAS DRIVE

Synology DS216j

£161.13 from bit.ly/syn430
Tested: Issue 430

The DS216j is a great-value network storage device with lots of features that make it incredibly flexible. It's not the most powerful choice, but it can do most of the things other NAS drives can do, including pricier models.

KEY SPECS

Dual-core 1GHz Marvell Armada 385 32-bit processor ■ 512MB DDR3 memory ■ 2 x drive bays (drives not included) ■ 20TB (2 x 10TB drive) maximum capacity ■ 165 x 100 x 225.5mm ■ 880g ■ Two-years return-to-base warranty

All prices correct at time of review

SOFTWARE & SERVICES

INTERNET SECURITY

Kaspersky Internet Security 2018

£19.95 from bit.ly/kaspersky2018
Tested: *Computeractive* Issue 493

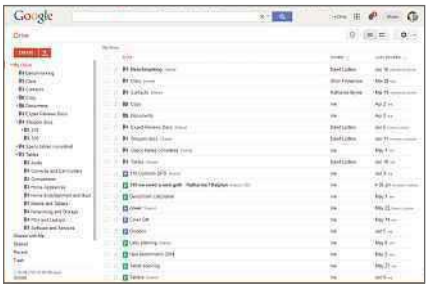
Kaspersky is rock solid at protecting your PC from the worst of the web, and has come top in nine of our most recent tests, blocking all malware with its robust defences. Use the URL above to save £15.04 on the software (normal price £34.99).

KEY FEATURES

Antivirus and firewall tools ■ Protects online shopping and banking ■ Identity and privacy tools ■ Dangerous-website alerts ■ New software updater ■ Secure-connection VPN ■ Advanced ad-blocking system ■ Multi-device version ■ Compatible with Windows 10

ONLINE STORAGE

Google Drive



From free from drive.google.com
Tested: Issue 389

Google Drive is easy to use and has lots of free storage with the option to buy more if you need it. The Windows software integrates seamlessly with Explorer, so saving and syncing files is like keeping them in any other PC folder.

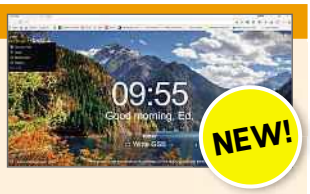
KEY FEATURES

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 User Gold Award winners

NEW TAB PAGE

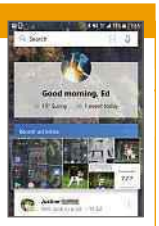
Momentum



Free from bit.ly/momentum436
Tested: Issue 436
Momentum fits an impressive number of useful tools into an attractive New Tab page for Chrome. It's a great way to make your day more productive.

ANDROID LAUNCHER

Microsoft Launcher



Free from bit.ly/microsoftl435
Tested: Issue 435
For all-round performance, usability and features, Microsoft Launcher is the best free launcher you can get. It's very fast and supports gestures.

VIDEO-EDITING TOOL

Microsoft Photos

Free from bit.ly/phot434
Tested: Issue 434
This tool is built into your Photos app and is very efficient at turning your home videos into professional-looking movies.

HOME-SURVEILLANCE SOFTWARE

Ivideon

Free from bit.ly/ivid433
Tested: Issue 433
Simple to set up and use, Ivideon is ideal for monitoring one or two cameras and lets you store footage for 24 hours.

PDF READER

Sumatra PDF

Free from sumatrapdfreader.org
Tested: Issue 432
Sumatra is simple and easy to use. It's also one of the fastest PDF readers available.

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PDF READER

Foxit Reader 9

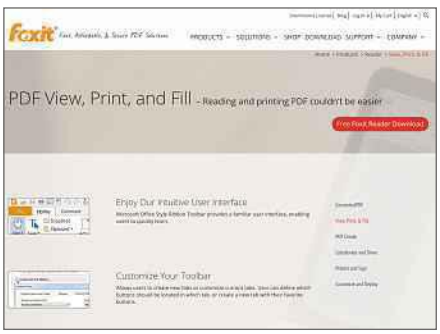
bit.ly/foxit437

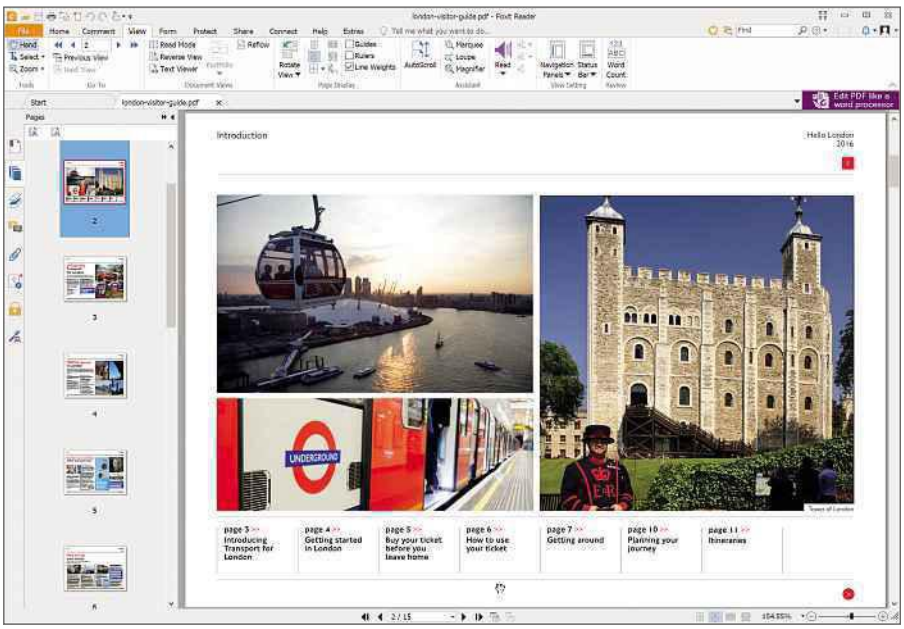
Min requirements: Windows XP/ Vista/7/8+/10 or Linux

File size: 51.3MB

Few people use Adobe's PDF reader these days, because there are better, more lightweight free alternatives available. Microsoft Edge, the default browser in Windows 10, doubles as a serviceable PDF viewer that you can use if you don't want to install a dedicated tool for the task, but Foxit Reader is an excellent third-party choice, regardless of which browser you use.

Foxit Software has introduced a lot of big changes to its free PDF reader in this version, making it easier to use and adding new features along with a good number of security and stability fixes.





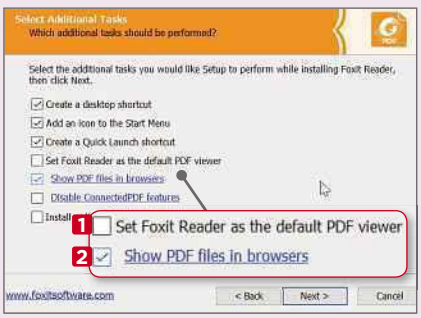
You can now access commands and perform certain actions using a single key press – V to select, H for hand, Z for marquee zoom and so on (the full list can be found in the updated manual). However, this function isn't enabled by default so if you want to use it, go to File, Preferences, General and tick the box for 'Use single-key accelerators to access tools' to turn it on.

Reflow is another new feature. It temporarily presents a PDF in a single column that matches the width of the document window, so you don't need to scroll horizontally to read any text.

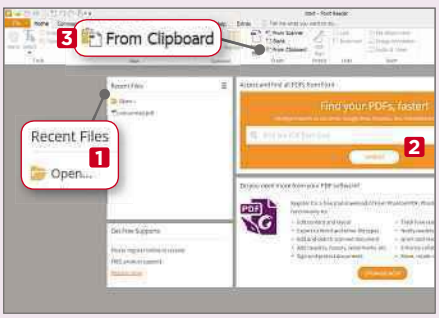
The Windows version of Foxit Reader also gains some advanced security features, using enterprise-grade tools such as Windows Information Protection (WIP) to guard against potential data leakage.

Other changes in the new release include the ability to add a bleed mark at each corner of a PDF to show the boundaries when printing, and more options for digital signatures.

MINI WORKSHOP | View PDFs more easily using Foxit Reader 9



1 During installation, you can set Foxit Reader as your default PDF viewer 1 and also have it display PDFs directly in your browser. 2 The next screen will let you enable or disable the Safe Reading Mode, which prevents files from executing malicious content. Be sure to reject the 14-day trial of PhantomPDF on the final screen.



2 You can open a new PDF or access previous ones. 1 Foxit also lets you search for documents across popular cloud-storage services 2 but you'll need to sign up to Foxit & Findo for this. The program lets you create your own PDFs from a file, via a scanner or using content stored on your clipboard. 3

3 Foxit Reader offers a choice of viewing modes that can be combined. Select the View tab 1 and you can switch to Read Mode, 2 which removes the side menus and distractions; or Text Viewer, 3 which hides images. Reflow 4 rearranges the content into a single column the width of the document pane.

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

AUDIO EDITOR

Audacity 2.2

www.audacityteam.org

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10, MacOS or Linux **File size:** 19.3MB

Audacity is a superb free multi-track audio editor packed with advanced features and effects. You can import, improve and mix music files; fix common problems such as background noise and low volume; and even record audio from scratch. This is the first major update in two years and comes with four new themes to choose from. Much of the program's code has been rewritten and the menus have been reorganised. Look out for a workshop about Audacity 2.2 in our next issue.

PASSWORD MANAGER

Dashlane 5

www.dashlane.com

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

File size: 667KB (installer only)

Dashlane can generate and remember unique passwords, and offers many other useful features, including emergency access and the ability to securely share passwords and notes with people you trust. The latest version adds support for Linux, Chrome OS and Microsoft Edge, and a self-correcting auto-fill feature. Our Workshop on page 57 tells you how to use Dashlane 5.

AUDIO PLAYER

AIMP

bit.ly/aimp437

Min requirements: Windows Vista/7/8+/10 **File size:** 10.1MB

AIMP is a powerful music player that can handle all the main audio formats and lets you listen to internet radio. It comes with a choice of skins, an 18-band equaliser and a selection of built-in sound effects and mixing options. In this new release, the music library's database has been overhauled so it's significantly faster, and AIMP's tag editor can now be used to download lyrics from the web.

New Windows Apps

GHub

bit.ly/ghub437

Min requirements: Windows 10

File size: 22.1MB

This unofficial ad-supported app provides quick access to many of Google's popular web services, including Gmail, Calendar, Google Maps and Google News. Select the service you require from the sidebar.

Audiocloud

bit.ly/audio437

Min requirements: Windows 10

File size: 22MB

This third-party SoundCloud client lets you find and listen to new music on the streaming service. Some features require you to sign in with a SoundCloud account.

Crypto Chart

bit.ly/crypto437

Min requirements: Windows 10

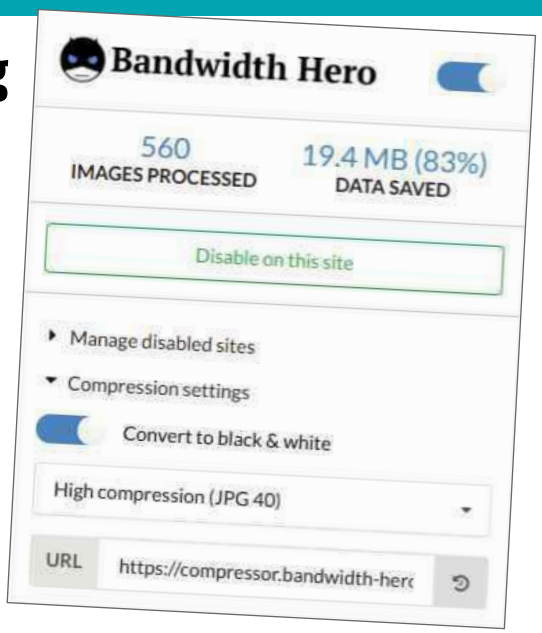
File size: 31.3MB

If you invest in cryptocurrency such as Bitcoin, or plan to do so in the future, Crypto Chart is a handy app that provides access to the latest prices, volumes and changes.

Best New Browser Tools

CHROME

Save data by compressing online images



If a web page is taking an age to load, it's almost certainly because it's stuffed with large, high-resolution images, which not only test your patience but guzzle your data. You can prevent this from happening by installing a new Chrome extension called Bandwidth Hero (bit.ly/bandwidth437), which compresses all pictures on web pages to save you both time and data. It works automatically, downloading images to a proxy server, converting them to smaller files and returning them to your browser (this happens much more quickly than it sounds).

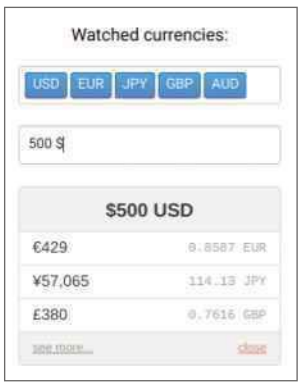
By default, the add-on reduces the file size by around 50%, but you can reduce the compression level in its settings and stop it making images black and white.

Bandwidth Hero can be disabled on specific sites to leave their pictures intact, and usefully keeps a record of all the images it's compressed and data it's saved. It's also available for Firefox (bit.ly/bandfire437).

View instant currency conversions

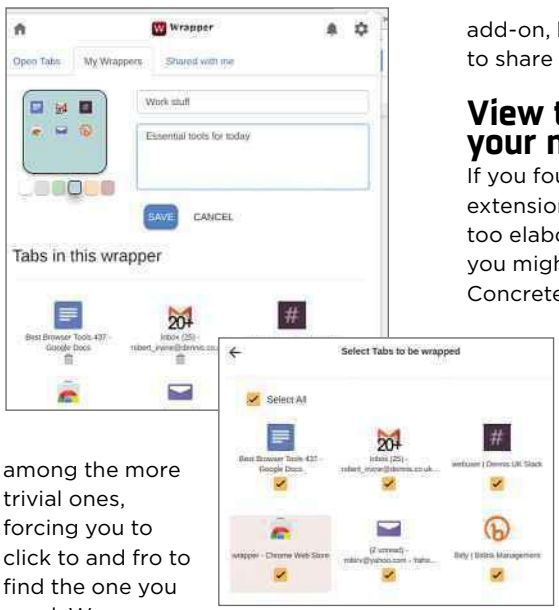
As we mentioned in this section in Issue 435, Opera recently added a handy feature that lets you convert currency online simply by highlighting an amount on a web page. A new extension called Conveuro (bit.ly/conveuro437) brings this functionality to Chrome and, if anything, it's even slicker than Opera's tool.

Select a price on a page to see an instant pop-up converting it into pounds sterling, euros, US and Australian dollars, and Japanese yen. Alternatively, click the toolbar button, type the value and enter the currency code, symbol or keyword, such as EUR, $ or pound. Conveuro recognises 32 currencies (not just the euro, as its name suggests) and written as well as numerical values.



Manage your tabs by wrapping them

When you have lots of tabs open in Chrome, important pages can get lost among the more trivial ones, forcing you to click to and fro to find the one you need. Wrapper (bit.ly/wrapper437) makes life easier by showing you at a glance the contents of all your tabs, and letting you organise them into tidy groups called 'wrappers'.



You can give each wrapper a title and description, colour-code it for easy reference and even share it with other people via email. Click a wrapper to view all the tabs within it and either open them individually or all at once.

Wrappers are saved when you close your browser, to give you instant access to the wrapped pages next time you need them. Annoyingly, you need to register with Wrapper to use the add-on, but this allows other people to share their wrappers with you.

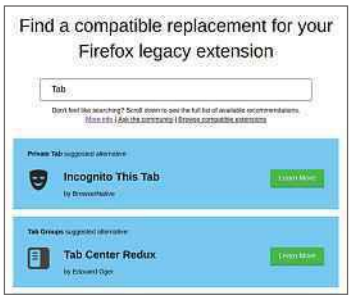
View the weather on your new tabs

If you found the New Tab page extensions we reviewed last issue too elaborate for your needs, you might prefer the simplicity of Concretely (bit.ly/concretely437). This attractive add-on focuses solely on displaying the time and the weather on your new tab, but lets you customise how this information appears. You can choose your preferred background colour (we've opted for a regal purple, below), show a five-day weather forecast for any location and play around with the big clock – switching between digital and analogue, and different styles of 'delimiter' (the character that separates the numbers).

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

FIREFOX

Find alternatives to defunct Firefox add-ons



Firefox 57 – also known as Quantum – is here, but you may find that your favourite add-ons no longer work in the new WebExtension-only browser. As we explained in Issue 434, you can view suggested alternatives by clicking the 'Find a Replacement' button next to a defunct entry in the Add-ons Manager, but a quicker method is to use the dedicated Extension Finder (bit.ly/extension437) created by the Mozilla user community. Enter the name of a 'legacy extension' (a beloved add-on consigned to oblivion) to see the closest alternative, as suggested by other Firefox users, then choose Learn More to open its page on the revamped Add-ons site (addons.mozilla.org – see our review on page 14) and install it. Because they are hand-picked, the suggestions are more relevant than those provided by Mozilla itself.

Download YouTube videos at full HD quality

If your favourite add-on for downloading videos from YouTube is incompatible with Firefox Quantum, there's a new tool you can try called YouTube Video Downloader (bit.ly/youtube437). This has the advantage over similar extensions of letting you download video at full-HD quality (1080p resolution) and audio at a bitrate of 256Kbps.

Just click the Download As button below a video and choose to save in MP4 or MP3 format, or 3GP for videos you want to play on your phone. Bear in mind, however, that Google isn't keen on YouTube downloaders, so anything you save must be kept for your own personal use.

Block cookie warnings

One add-on we're pleased to see has made the transition to WebExtension is I Don't Care About Cookies (bit.ly/cookies437). This invaluable tool automatically removes those annoying EU-regulation warnings that appear on websites, telling you they use cookies and asking you to agree to their terms.

If you spot a warning the extension has missed, right-click it and choose 'Report a cookie warning' to hide it for yourself and other users in future.

Apply a dark theme to Google sites

Google's 'all-white on all sites' approach is clean and minimalist, but it's also pretty boring and can strain your eyes when you're browsing at night. Dark Theme for Google (bit.ly/dark437) makes the white background black on services including Search, Images and Translate. By default, text is grey and links are blue, so they show up nicely against the dark background, but you can choose other colours in the add-on's Options. For YouTube, there's a separate add-on, Dark Theme for YouTube (bit.ly/youtubedark437).

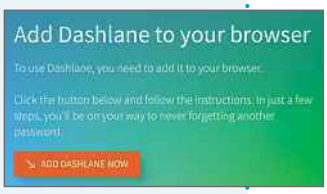
OTHER BROWSERS

Count the cost of idle browsing

Ever wondered how much money you could be making if you were working instead of mindlessly browsing the web? Find out by installing Sloth Worth (bit.ly/sloth437), which counts the time you waste on distracting sites and tells you the amount of cash you've sacrificed by doing so. You can specify an hourly rate, set the default currency and tell the sloth to stop counting when you've been inactive for a certain time. The add-on recognises more than 1,500 time-wasting sites and although it doesn't acknowledge those of us who work and browse simultaneously, it's still an interesting tool.

Get a password manager for Edge

Typical: you wait two years for a decent password manager for Microsoft Edge, and then two come along almost at once! In October, we got 1Password (bit.ly/1password437) and now there's an Edge extension for the popular service Dashlane (bit.ly/dash437). This provides secure storage for all your passwords and personal info, and lets you autofill forms on any site. You can import passwords saved in your browser, and generate new logins on the fly. Dashlane is free to use, but certain features are only available in its Premium version.



Best Free Apps

App of the Fortnight

PHOTO ORGANISER

Polarr Album+

bit.ly/album437

10.3

NEW

Apple and Google both offer great built-in photo apps to help organise and enhance the vast, sprawling image libraries most of us now carry around on our mobile devices. But the trouble with both of them is that they need to be connected to the internet to work. Polarr – the developers of the brilliant (and recently updated) Polarr Photo Editor – have created Album+ as an offline alternative.

The app automatically indexes your photos using metadata and AI recognition, grouping together similar shots and letting you search for specific people, objects and locations. It cleverly hides certain images such as screenshots and documents so that they don't get in the way of your gallery of photos. And instead of uploading your images to some corporate server where your most cherished private moments could easily fall into the wrong hands, all the images – and the means to categorise and organise them – remain firmly on your physical device, with local, on-board AI powering the app's abilities.

Additional features include the option to batch-apply filters to multiple photos at once, add automated enhancements (such as exposure and skin-tone correction), organise groups of photos into collages, remove duplicates and share snaps to social media, cloud storage and other apps. It's all easy to use, too.

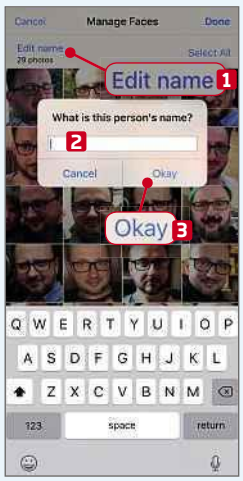
The one catch is that full, unfettered access to all the app's features requires a subscription fee of £1.79 per month or £11.99 per year. You do, however, get a month with all features unlocked to see whether they're worth paying for, and can extend the free period further by exchanging activation codes with other users. Currently only available for iOS, it's likely that an Android version will follow soon.

Our rating ★★★★☆

MINI WORKSHOP

Manage your photos using Polarr Album+

1 Album+ scans your photo library and automatically indexes the images it finds. You'll need to add names to the faces it recognises if you want to be able to search for specific people. Press the Search icon in the top-right corner, then tap 'Manage faces'. Tap 'Edit name' 1 at the top of a group of faces, type the name of the person in the box 2 and tap Okay. 3



2 The main library view shows your photos grouped together by date and location, with the newest photos at the top. To browse or search for someone or something specific, tap the Search icon in the top-right corner and select Discover People, Discover Things or Discover Locations from the drop-down menu at the top. 1 Alternatively, type a person's name or an object or place into the Search box. 2

3 To apply filters to more than one photo at a time, tap the filter (three interlocking circles) button in the bottom left of the main library view. A selection of favourite filters will be displayed at the bottom of the screen, 1 but you can select others by tapping the three vertical dots. 2 Now tap all the photos you want to apply the filter to and tap Done. 3

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

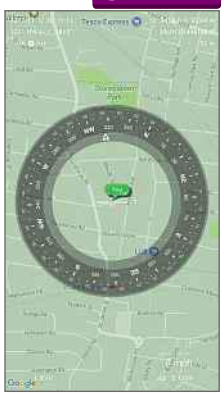
NAVIGATION

UPDATED

Spyglass

bit.ly/spyglass437

5



This excellent all-in-one off-road navigation tool has long been an essential purchase for ramblers with iPhones. Now, not only is Spyglass available for Android but it's also free, with an in-app purchase of £5.99 to unlock advanced features such as augmented-reality camera support and offline maps (iOS users have to pay the same amount upfront). There are tons of features and customisation options, even in the free version – you can choose your preferred map supplier and type, for example, and specify which measurement units are used.

Our rating ★★★★☆

GAME

NEW

Words With Friends 2

bit.ly/wordsdroid437

bit.ly/wordsios437

4.4 10

If you're not one of the 250 million people who installed the original Words With Friends app, we should explain that it's basically Scrabble with a social-networking twist. This is, in theory, a brand-new sequel rather than an update, but it's effectively the same game with a number of new features, including a Solo Challenge mode that lets you hone your skills against AI opponents, a quick-fire Lightning Round and a Social Dictionary that adds more than 50,000 new in-game words.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RECIPES

UPDATED

BBC Good Food 2.0

bit.ly/fooddroid437

bit.ly/foodios437

4.4 9

Apparently still trying to make up to foodies for threatening to remove its recipe archive from the internet last year, the BBC has released a new version of its Good Food app for iOS and Android. The main improvements are visual – it's much better looking than its predecessor and provides easy access to a searchable database of more than 10,000 recipes. You need to sign up for a (free) account to use the app – after that you can browse for recipes and save ones you like to your online collection.

Our rating ★★★★☆

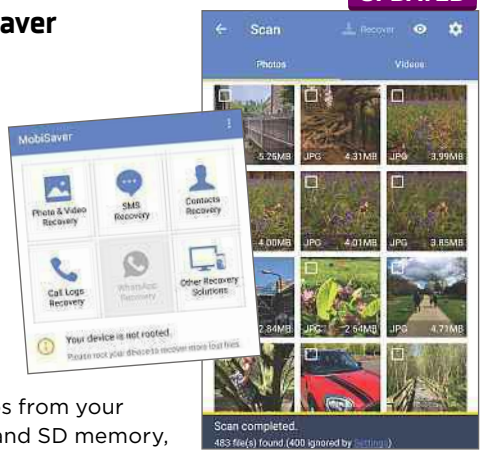
DATA RECOVERY

UPDATED

EaseUS MobiSaver

bit.ly/easeus437

4



Anyone who has ever deleted a photo and instantly regretted it will appreciate this app. EaseUS MobiSaver can recover deleted images and videos from your device's internal and SD memory, and the latest version adds the ability to retrieve deleted text messages and WhatsApp conversations, too. MobiSaver supports non-rooted phones and tablets, but it's much more effective if you have rooted your device. In non-rooted mode, it's only able to scan your cache and thumbnail folders for recoverable images and videos.

Additionally, the free version of the app is restricted to recovering JPEG and MP4 format files – for other formats, you need to pay £4.99.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

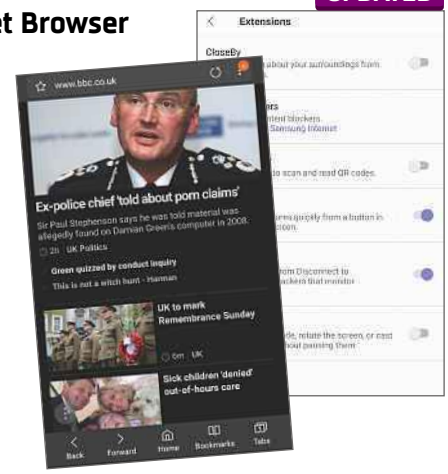
WEB BROWSER

UPDATED

Samsung Internet Browser

bit.ly/samsung437

5



Honorary award for most unexpectedly brilliant app of the fortnight goes to Samsung Internet, the electronics giant's rather good Android web browser. Previously only available for Samsung Galaxy (or Nexus/Pixel) devices, the latest version (6.2) can now be installed on any Android device running Lollipop and up, and includes some great new features, such as a built-in tracking blocker and the ability to relieve eye strain in low light by quickly switching to 'Night mode'. Support for ad blockers is also provided, and for anyone wanting to jump ship from Chrome, there's a handy extension that lets you sync your bookmarks (bit.ly/samsungex437).

Our rating ★★★★★

5 NEW APPS WORTH PAYING FOR

GAME

Monument Valley 2

bit.ly/monument437

Price: £4.99

4.4

Released for iOS earlier in the year, this gorgeous sequel is finally out for Android devices. The puzzles aren't quite as challenging as the original but it still oozes geometric beauty.

KIDS

We ARGH Pirates

bit.ly/piratedroid437

bit.ly/pirateios437

Price: £3.19 (Android) £3.99 (iOS)

4.0.3 8

You can't go far wrong with a pirate game aimed at six year olds and this cute, quirky treasure-hunting adventure is genuinely great, blending various styles of gameplay and puzzles.

GAME

Cronus

bit.ly/cronusdroid437

bit.ly/cronusios437

Price: £1.19 (Android) 99p (iOS)

5 9.2

Three words: golf in space. This intriguing little game, developed in the UK, involves saving the human race by playing more than 2,000 holes of golf on procedurally generated asteroids among Saturn's rings.

PHOTO EDITOR

LightX

bit.ly/lightxdroid437

bit.ly/lightxios437

Price: £1.79 (Android) £1.99 (iOS)

4.0.3 8.1

Swapping faces between images is always good for a laugh, but if you want a photo-editing tool that offers genuinely useful abilities, try LightX. The latest version lets you magically remove backgrounds from shots.

MUSIC

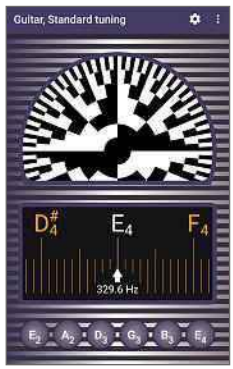
Strobe Tuner Pro

bit.ly/strobe437

Price: 89p

4.0.3

A great tuning app that includes a strobe tuner for extra precision. It's only designed to work with guitars and violins, but it's easy to use and much cheaper than the real thing.



Monument Valley 2

We ARGH Pirates

Cronus

LightX

Strobe Tuner Pro

✗ Don't install...

LumaFusion

bit.ly/lumafusion437

If you're looking to make quick cuts to videos you've shot on your iPhone, it's best to give LumaFusion a miss. Just to be clear, we've nothing against this iOS-only app – it's a powerful tool that puts the ability to carry out complex, multi-track video editing in your pocket. But unless you're a budding JJ Abrams, it's basically overkill. It also has a relatively steep learning curve and a hefty price tag (£20).

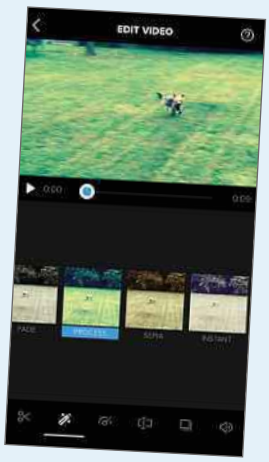
...Install this instead ✓

Splice

bit.ly/splice437

9

Apple lets iPhone and iPad users edit videos using its own iMovie app but even this might be overdoing it, depending on your needs. Our favourite video-editing app for iOS is Splice, a super-simple but impressively feature-filled tool from the people who make GoPro cameras. You don't need a GoPro to use Splice, though, and it's completely free to download, with no in-app purchases or watermarks. You can cut and add cool effects, crops and more to your clips. Music or sound effects can be added from the app's surprisingly large library, or you can record your own narration. ■

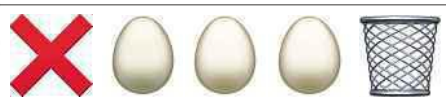


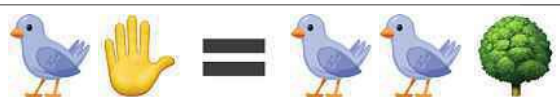
Take a Screen Break

Give your eyes a rest from your browser by taking our fiendish fortnightly challenges. Can you guess our proverb emoji and solve our word puzzle?

WIN A WEB USER MUG!
Email your answers to webuser@dennis.co.uk – one correct entry will win a *Web User* mug

CAN YOU GUESS THE PROVERBS FROM THE EMOJI?

1 

2 

3

4

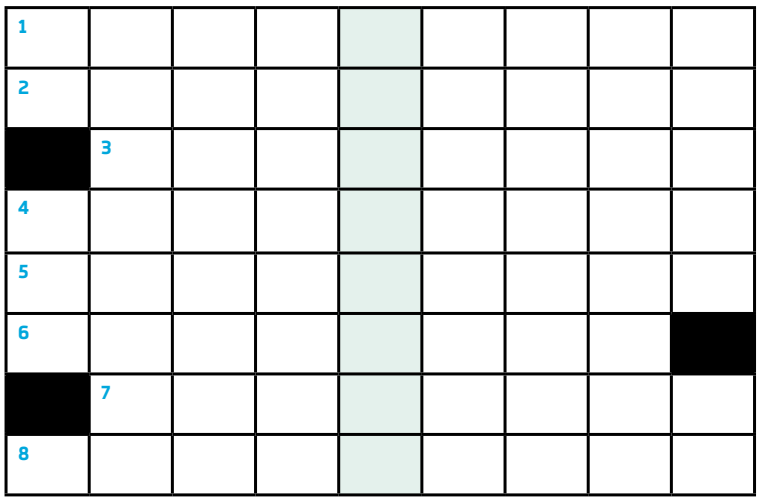
5

6

WEB USER WORD PUZZLE

Enter the answers in the grid to reveal a tech-related term in the highlighted column

1 UK professional golfer, three times Masters winner (4,5)
2 1971 Rod Stewart Number One hit (6,3)
3 Island country south of India, known as Ceylon under British rule (3,5)
4 1957 Jack Kerouac novel (2,3,4)
5 UK TV star – *Till Death Us Do Part*, *Worzel Gummidge* and *Sherlock* (3,6)
6 Galaxy containing our planet (5,3)
7 Type of rigid airship
8 Shakespearean heroine, married to *Othello*



COMPETITIONS

WORTH £129.99 EACH

WIN 1 OF 2
Sound BlasterX Kratos S5 speakers

Creative's Sound BlasterX Kratos S5 speaker system has been designed to elevate your listening pleasure when gaming. It delivers clear highs, detailed mid-range sound and deep bass. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'Kratos' in the subject line. For more information, visit uk.creative.com and follow @creativelabs on Twitter.

WORTH £47.99 EACH

WIN 1 OF 5
MAGIX Photostory Deluxe

The new version of MAGIX's Photostory Deluxe processes high-resolution images five times faster, making it the most powerful edition yet. Over 1,500 intros/outros, transitions, background noises and songs have been redesigned in a clear new layout. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'photostory' in the subject line. For more information, visit www.magix.com/gb and follow @MAGIX_INT on Twitter.

FAQ

Everything you need to know about the most interesting new technology trends and events

Smart cities

More than half of the world's population lives in urban areas. **David Crookes** looks at how technology is being used to make our towns and cities 'smart'

What are smart cities?

The use of the word 'smart' in this context is nothing to do with picturesque squares and immaculate parks but, rather, refers to cities collecting data and using it to manage resources and assets. The idea has become hugely popular among tech companies and urban planners over the past few years. The hope is that information and communications technology can lead to more efficiency within a city, improving the quality of life for anyone who lives, works or visits there.

How do they work?

In a nutshell, smart cities rely on information gathered from smart devices, whether it's your phone, water meter or thermostat, or sensors located in streets and vehicles. When those sensors have collected enough data, city officials can use it to identify the needs of residents and plan infrastructure. By monitoring the day-to-day happenings of a city, urban planners can manage congestion and energy usage more easily, spot potential water leaks and figure out where public Wi-Fi needs a boost.

Smart technology can pinpoint potential water leaks before they happen

Doesn't that cost a lot of money?

Actually, the technology is reasonably inexpensive. Thanks to mass production and the growth of cloud computing, the price of sensors and the cost of storing information are low. At the same time, data-analysis tools have become more advanced due to huge leaps in machine learning (see our feature on page 50), which means they're better equipped to use the massive quantities of data these sensors collect. Add to this the rise of the Internet of Things, reliable 4G mobile internet connections and free public Wi-Fi and you've got a solid communication structure to build on.

What kind of data is collected?

That depends on what the city is trying to achieve. For example, buildings could communicate their energy usage to the national grid so that energy providers can work out the most efficient way to keep them powered. Similarly, air-quality data could highlight signs of high pollution, potentially helping asthma sufferers. In Louisville, Kentucky, some inhalers have built-in sensors so that health authorities can map where and when their owners use them. Sensors can monitor traffic flow, counting how many vehicles pass specific spots, and use the data to manage traffic signals. They can also detect when a car park is full and use electronic street signs to direct drivers to those that are empty.

Sensors in inhalers help identify badly polluted areas

Could smart cities cut crime?

They certainly have the potential to do so. As far back as 2007, Boston started gathering acoustic data to pinpoint the location of gunshots. More recently, Huawei created a system that lets the police combine their video-surveillance networks with private and public security systems to keep an eye out for thefts and disturbances. Other ideas include connecting streetlights to a network so that the local council is alerted whenever a bulb breaks, keeping the streets brighter and safer. Amsterdam can dim its streetlights based on pedestrian traffic. In fact, one of the most appealing prospects for smart cities is the ability to use data to anticipate problems.

Amsterdam dims its lights depending on how many people are around

Bristol recently overtook London to be named the UK's smartest city

Bristol's Shadowing project won a Playable City award for being smart and fun

Will they also be able to keep people moving?

Yes. Millions of pounds are being spent developing technologies that help ease the flow of people. Columbus, Ohio, for example, is replacing radios on its buses with wireless communication technology to transmit bus data faster and make vehicle tracking more reliable. Meanwhile, work is going into collecting data about major incidents and events so that traffic systems can pass on information in real time. Commuters in Denver can access up-to-date travel information on their mobile devices to help them decide on the best mode of transport to use.

Do we have smart city projects in the UK?

Indeed we do. According to a survey by communications company Huawei, Bristol is leading the way, followed by London. Meanwhile, Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leeds, Nottingham, Newcastle, Oxford, Cambridge, Peterborough, Milton Keynes and Aberdeen are all making efforts to improve civic services with digital technology. According to Smart America Challenge, cities worldwide are set to invest $41 trillion in smart technology over the next 20 years.

What makes Bristol so smart?

An initiative called Bristol Is Open (www.bristolisopen.com) is harnessing fast telecoms networks to make the city programmable. Information from sensors – including the smartphones and GPS devices of participants – is anonymised and then made public through an 'open data' portal. The scheme is proving a boon to developers, and it's hoped that they can use the data – which includes details of traffic flow, energy and air quality – in their own applications.

Will smart cities be fun or merely functional?

Both, we hope. On the one hand, some cities in China use facial recognition on buses to check features against a centralised database of ID card photos. On the other, Bristol won the Playable City Award in 2014 (www.playablecity.com) for its eye-catching Shadowing project, where eight augmented street lights recorded the shadows of people as they passed, and replayed them to the next person to wander by. Those who took part were seen to dance, hop or make other exaggerated moves and complex gestures.

Are any really big names involved in such schemes?

Yes. Manchester's CityVerve (www.cityverve.org.uk) is a consortium of 21 partners including Cisco, Siemens, BT and Ordnance Survey, which is looking at using technology to reduce pressure on A&E admissions and enhance the energy management of buildings.

Meanwhile, Alphabet – Google's parent company – is set to turn an 800-acre area of Toronto, Canada, into a model smart city with climate-friendly energy systems and self-driving vehicles (sidewalktoronto.ca). It says its goal is "reimagining cities from the internet up".

Will these companies recoup their investment?

We assume so, otherwise most wouldn't get involved. In fact, Navigant Research claims that revenue from the smart city industry is set to reach $20.2bn by 2020, and that's without factoring in the potential boost to local economies as more people decide to live and work in cities that are 'user-friendly'. We shouldn't look purely at the financial benefits, though. Smart cities are capable of lowering our carbon footprint by monitoring and tackling pollution, and applying innovation to lighting and energy to improve urban life for all of us.

Toronto is being turned into a model smart city with a more eco-friendly energy provision

WHY DID THE SMARTPHONE ZOMBIES CROSS THE ROAD?

Because they were too busy staring at their phones to notice they'd stepped off the pavement! Thankfully, smart city technology may have an answer to the modern problem of people forgetting to look both ways before they cross the road: a smart crossing that alerts drivers to potential dangers.

The technology, created by UK software company Umbrellium and already on test in London, monitors an area of road using tracking cameras

linked to a neural network, so that it can tell when someone is wandering across a particular section of road or is in danger of stepping off the kerb.

It can distinguish between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, and works out the speed and trajectory of motorists before marking out a zebra-like 'Starling Crossing' using LEDs or creating a large, safer buffer zone. Warning pattern lights also alert the phone user of their predicament.

BEST FREE SOFTWARE 2018

COVER FEATURE

Wondering which tools will supercharge your PC for the new year? *Web User* software supremo **Wayne Williams** picks his favourite new and updated programs for 2018 and reveals what's so good about them

As you'll know if you read our Best Free Software section every issue, there's no shortage of great free and open-source programs available to download. Whatever you're looking for – be it a photo editor, antivirus program or system cleaner – you should be able to find something that perfectly suits your needs – hopefully based on our recommendations!

That said, free software isn't without its risks, because some of it comes bundled with 'crapware' or bombards you with nag screens and adverts, so it's important to know what you're getting before you click that Download button.

To celebrate the imminent New Year, I've chosen 10 of the most promising new programs (or new versions) for 2018. Each of these applications performs a different but equally useful task and, in this feature, I'll explain why I think you'll love them, how to use them and any pitfalls to be aware of. I'll also suggest some alternatives you might like to consider instead.

And if that's not enough free software for you, we've still got our regular section on page 26 – albeit slightly shorter this issue to make room for this feature!

SYSTEM CLEANER

1 Clean Master 6

www.cleanmasterofficial.com
Min requirements:
Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 20.7MB

Why I like it

Regularly running a system cleaner removes accumulated junk from your hard drive, freeing up space so it can run more efficiently. CCleaner is the most well-known free program for performing this task, but I find that Clean Master works just as well and its interface is more attractive and easier to use.

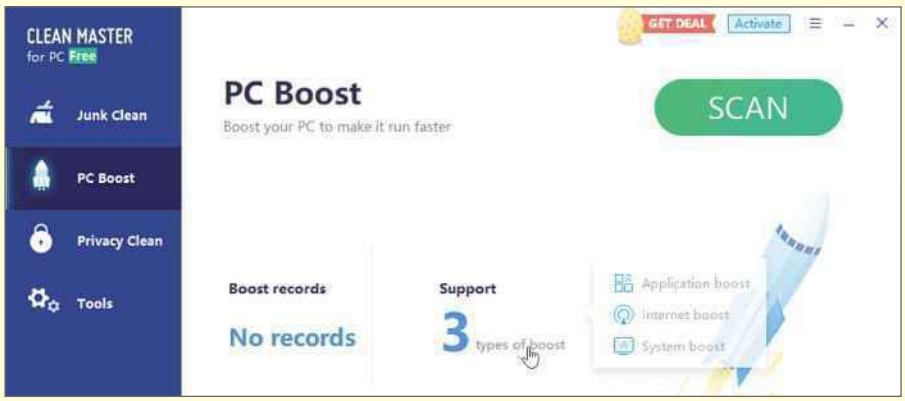
The Android version of Clean Master has been downloaded more than 900 million times but the PC edition is less well known. Its recent update means it now cleans up after more than a thousand programs, as well as Windows. Clean Master also stops unnecessary programs starting alongside your operating system, and intelligently

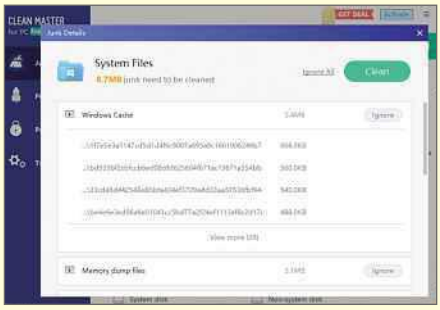
optimises your PC and network settings to improve overall performance.

I particularly like the Privacy Clean feature. With just one click, it locks out intruders, deletes personal records and stops your web browsing being tracked.

How I use it

You can run a junk clean at any time but Clean Master also offers handy real-time monitoring and auto-clean options,





which you can use to make sure your system is always free of junk. If your PC is struggling with a resource-heavy task – as mine sometimes does after installing so much free software – you can give it a quick performance boost. There are three options for this: Application, Internet and System. You'll find all of them under PC Boost.

What I don't like

The free version of Clean Master is very good but if you want the extra tools to scan, fix and update more than five million devices and drivers, and recover lost data, you'll need to pay $29.90 (about £22.75) to unlock the Premium edition. I understand that developers need to make money, but I do wish that at least some of this functionality was available in the free edition.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

CCleaner
www.piriform.com/ccleaner

We can't write about system-cleaning tools without recommending the excellent CCleaner, which can remove junk, clean the Registry and more.

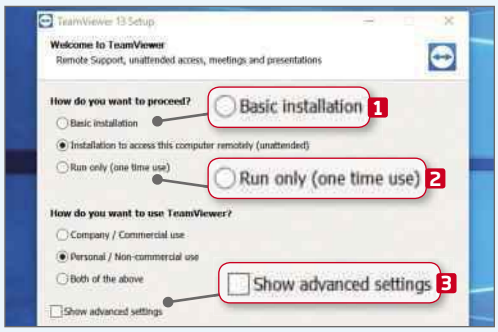
MINI WORKSHOP | Remove PC junk using Clean Master

1 Select the Junk Clean option 1 in the sidebar, then click the Scan button. 2 The software will go to work looking for content that can be removed. This should only take a matter of seconds. You can turn the 'Real-time monitor' (which automatically checks for junk) 3 and 'Auto clean' 4 features on or off.

2 Clean Master presents you with its findings, sorted into categories including Windows, 1 Software, Browser, Multimedia, Social Software, Malware, and Registry. Click an entry to see what was found. You can ignore anything you don't want to clean, ignore all or clean just that section. Click the Clean button to remove all junk. 2

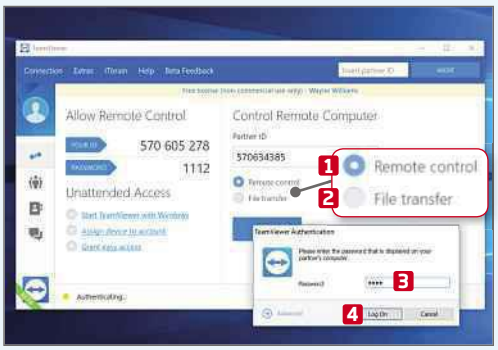
3 Clean Master's PC Boost section 1 improves your system's performance, while the Privacy Clean feature 2 wipes your history. Click the Scan button 3 to make it check specific areas including your internet browsing history, Windows history and application history, to clean them quickly and efficiently.

MINI WORKSHOP
Control a PC remotely using TeamViewer



1 You have the option of installing TeamViewer on your PC 1 or running it without installation. 2 If you want to be able to control other computers from your own PC, select the install option. Tick the Show Advanced Settings box 3 if you want greater control over the program's setup options.

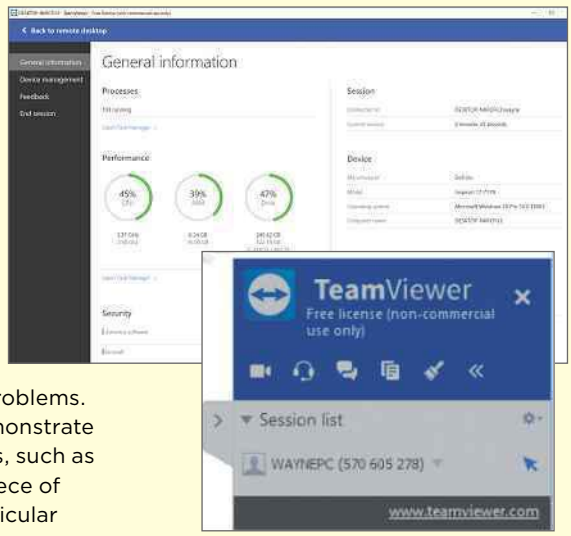
2 Run the program on your PC, then ask the person whose computer you want to take control of to install or run the TeamViewer software. Once this is done, ask them for their ID and password (preferably over the phone, rather than by email, for security reasons), then enter their nine-digit ID into the Partner ID box. 1



3 Choose a connection type. Remote Control 1 grants you complete control over the remote computer, while File Transfer 2 lets you send and receive files. Click Connect and enter the remote computer's password in the box, 3 then click Log On 4 to complete the connection. You can now control their system remotely.

2 REMOTE-ACCESS TOOL
TeamViewer 13

bit.ly/teamv437
Min requirements: Windows XP/ Vista/7/8+/10. MacOS or Linux
File size: 18.3MB



Why I like it
Because I write about technology for a living, I'm frequently the first port of call for friends and family members having PC problems. I also get asked to demonstrate certain computer tasks, such as how to install a new piece of hardware or use a particular program.

TeamViewer has proved an essential tool for this purpose because it lets me remotely take control of someone else's PC (with their permission, naturally) so I can assist with the problem without having to arrange a visit to their home. TeamViewer also lets you chat remotely with someone, share files and switch control, so they can take over your PC. It's very easy to use and the remote control is impressively speedy, especially in this new and improved version.

How I use it
The beta version of TeamViewer has a new user interface, which you can preview by clicking the 'Try it now' button. This has a menu bar at the top, as well as a quick-connection box. The sidebar on the left lets you start and join meetings, and more.

For speed reasons, TeamViewer doesn't show the remote system's Windows wallpaper but if you want to view it, you can. Go to View on your PC and untick Hide Wallpaper.

What I don't like
There are a lot of business-related features in TeamViewer that home users won't be interested in, and this creates unnecessary clutter, but it's a minor criticism for such a brilliant piece of free software.

TRY THIS INSTEAD
AnyDesk
bit.ly/adesk437

This remote-access software is also free for personal use and available for Windows, Mac, Linux, Android and iOS. It's super-fast, too.

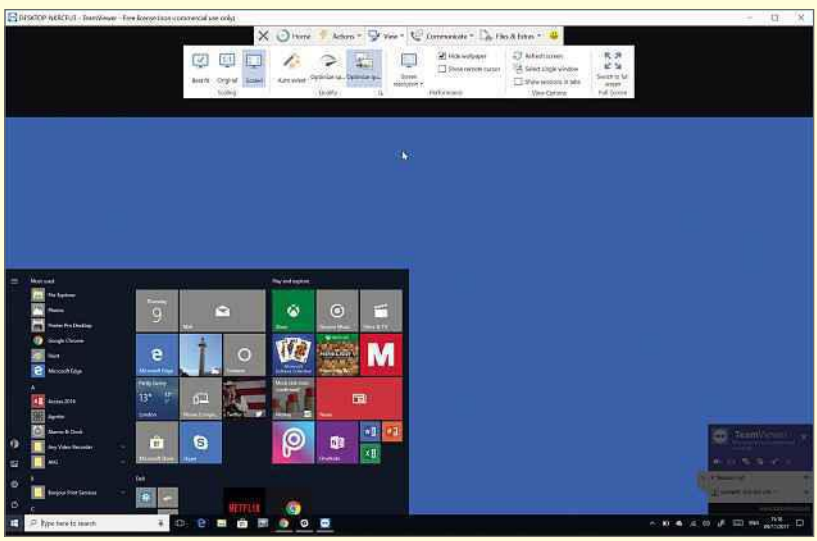


PHOTO FILTERS

3 DxO Nik Collection

nikcollection.dxo.com
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 or MacOS
File size: 429MB

Why I like it

The Nik Collection comprises a number of high-quality Photoshop plugins. It was originally priced at $500 (about £380) but Google, which acquired Nik in 2012, made it free last year, before ending support in May – much to the annoyance of loyal users such as myself.

Thankfully, ownership of the collection has since been transferred to photography firm DxO and, although there are plans to release a new 2018 edition in the middle of next year, the original plugin pack is still available to download for free.

There are seven impressive plugins on offer – Analog Efex Pro, Color Efex Pro, Silver Efex Pro, Viveza, HDR Efex Pro, Sharpener Pro and Dfine – all of which can be used to give your snaps a polished, professional look.

How I use it

Although the Nik plugins are designed to work with Photoshop, I use them in the popular free image editor Paint.NET (www.getpaint.net). Installing them requires the plugin PSFilterPDN (bit.ly/pdn437). Open Paint.NET's effects folder (C:\Program Files\Paint.NET\Effects) in Explorer, unzip the plugin, and copy the PSFilterShim.exe and PSFilterPdn.dll files to the Effects folder. Click OK at the permission prompt, then run the Nik Collection installer. It won't detect Paint.NET, but don't worry about that. Click the plus sign at the bottom of the installer, browse to C:\Program Files\Paint.NET\Effects, click OK and then Install.

What I don't like

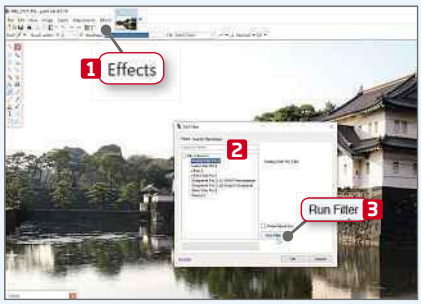
To access the download links, you need to enter your email address and sign up to DxO's mailing list, which I find rather unnecessary. You can unsubscribe afterwards, though, and there's nothing to stop you using a fake email address service such as temp-mail.org to avoid sharing your real address.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

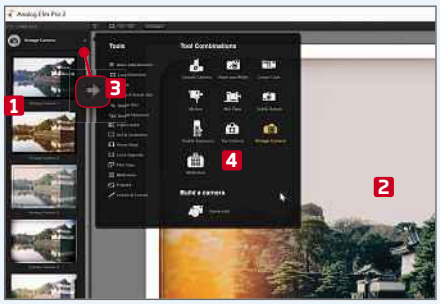
Paint.NET plugins
bit.ly/paintnet437

You can download lots of free user-created plugins direct from Paint.NET's forum. Some are quite old, but they should still work.

MINI WORKSHOP | Create photo effects using DxO Nik Collection



1 Once you've installed the Nik plugins, launch Paint.NET and open a photo. Click Effects 1 to open its menu and select 8bf Filter at the bottom of the list. Click the small plus sign next to Nik Collection to display all the effects it has to offer. 2 Select one to apply, then click Run Filter. 3



2 The first plugin in the list is Analog Efex Pro, which makes photos look like they were taken on classic cameras and film types. Select a filter on the left 1 to apply it to your photo in the preview window. 2 Click the arrow next to the camera type 3 to pick a different set of tools. 4

3 The Viveza effect gives you a lot of manual control over your image's brightness, contrast, saturation and structure. Use the sliders on the right 1 or the 'Levels and Curves' feature 2 to make the required adjustments. Adding control points to your image 3 allows for more precise edits.

WEB BROWSER

4 Brave

www.brave.com
Min requirements: Windows 7/8+/10, MacOS or Linux
File size: 115MB

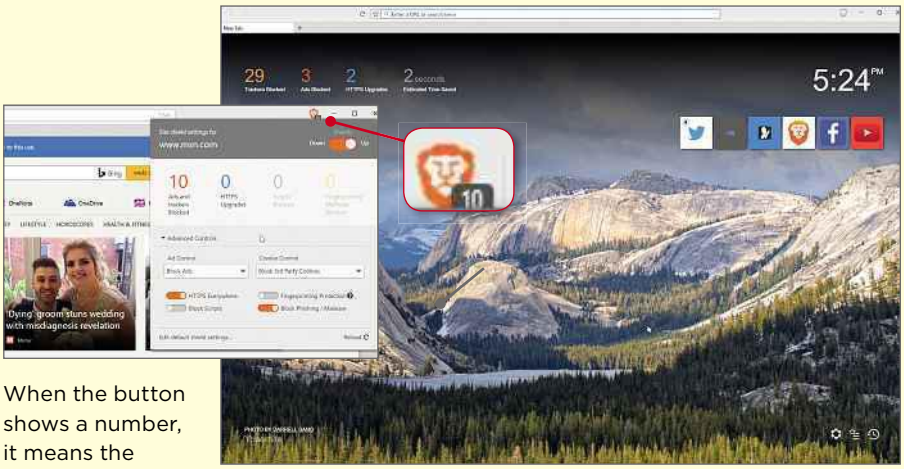
Why I like it

Created by the former CEO of Mozilla, the organisation behind Firefox, Brave is the most private browser I've tried in a long time. It comes with a built-in ad blocker that's enabled by default and automatically redirects you to the securest version of a site, so you don't put your personal data at risk. Whereas the private mode in Chrome and Firefox simply stops your browsing history being stored, Brave's private-tab mode actively stops hidden trackers following you around the web.

An intriguing 'Tor in the tab' feature is planned for the future, which will deliver even greater privacy.

How I use it

Browse the web and keep an eye on the Shields button in the top-right corner.



When the button shows a number, it means the browser has blocked something – just click the button to see exactly what. I like that you can choose what gets blocked, and toggle the shields on or off when you need to – for example, when web content won't display properly. Brave also blocks scripts, phishing sites and malware.

What I don't like

Brave's new-tab dashboard includes pretty images, details of any content it's blocked to date and shortcuts to your favourite sites. However, the browser itself isn't as attractive, and has a dull and dated interface.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

Vivaldi
vivaldi.com

This Chrome-based web browser from the former CEO of Opera is packed with excellent features, such as tab stacking and tiling.

WINDOWS ALTERNATIVE

5 ReactOS

www.reactos.org
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 70.5MB

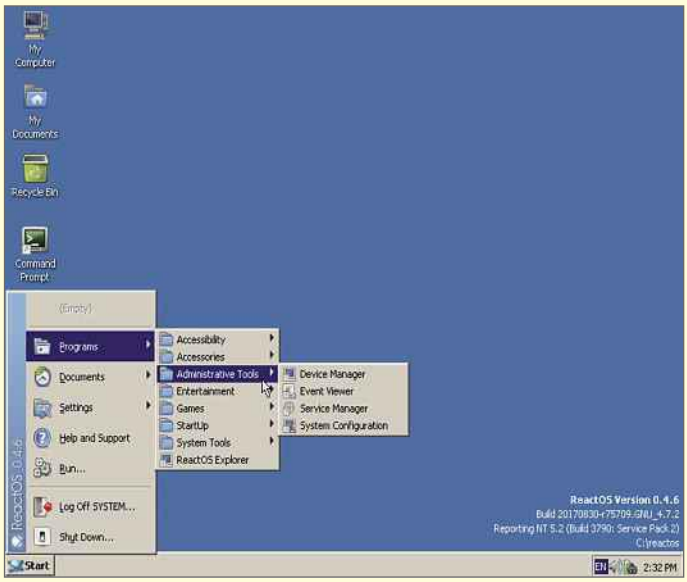
Why I like it

I'd be lost without Windows, but I also like to try alternative operating systems, especially ones that don't spy on you in the way Windows 10 does. ReactOS is a Windows-compatible operating system that can run most of your favourite programs, but it's entirely open-source and has been created from scratch without any input from Microsoft.

You can install ReactOS on your current PC or, if you want to try it in advance (which is the wisest option), run it from a LiveCD first.

How I use it

Thankfully, there's no great learning curve with ReactOS – if you've used Windows before, then you'll feel right at home here. It includes new (but very similar) versions of many of the applications usually bundled with Windows, including Calculator, NotePad, WordPad, Paint and Regedit. However, certain features, such as the Applications Manager that's used to download new programs, aren't available in the LiveCD version.



What I don't like

ReactOS is still in its very early stages – it's labelled an alpha – and this shows. The design is very similar to Windows 98, with a grey taskbar and bland Start button. Although the designers obviously couldn't rip off Microsoft's current, modern design, a bit more effort to make it look more appealing would not have gone amiss. I've found it slightly unstable at times, too.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

Linux Mint
linuxmint.com

Mint is arguably the best Linux distro (software package) for anyone looking to switch from Windows. Linux kindly lets you try all its operating systems before you commit to installing, so you know what to expect.

MEDIA CENTRE

6 Kodi 18 (Leia)

kodi.tv
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10, MacOS or Linux
File size: 82.7MB

Why I like it

Kodi is a fantastic media centre that can play and stream anything, and although it's recently gained a bad reputation for piracy, you would need to install unofficial third-party add-ons to unlock that side of things. Team Kodi doesn't support or condone this, and has been very vocal in condemning piracy.

There are plenty of excellent – and legal – add-ons you can install on Kodi, and we covered some of the best in Issue 435 (bit.ly/webuser435) along with details of version 18 (Leia), which is going to be the fastest and most versatile incarnation yet.

How I use it

I share Kodi with other members of my family, so I'm thankful that the software supports user accounts that you can set up by clicking the cog and going to Profiles. Installing add-ons is very simple – you just go to Add-ons and click 'Enter add-on browser' (if you haven't yet installed any add-ons) or the box icon (if you have), then locate the one you want in the list.

Note that, at the time of writing, Kodi 18 is only available as a nightly build, which means the software is likely to undergo more tweaks before it's ready for release.

What I don't like

Using Kodi is very easy, but configuring it isn't especially intuitive. Installing add-ons, especially those from other third-party repositories, can be a challenge if you don't know what you're doing, not to mention legally risky.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

MediaPortal
www.team-mediaportal.com

This software can play any media including movies, DVDs, music and radio, and stream content to other devices across your network.

IMAGE VIEWER

7 XnView MP

bit.ly/xn437
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10, MacOS or Linux
File size: 52.3MB

Why I like it

The popular image viewer XnView will be celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2018. It's changed a lot in two decades and now combines a media browser, viewer and converter, and supports more than 500 image formats. XnView MP works quickly and can batch-covert a group of files from one format to another; scan and print images; and even take screenshots.

How I use it

Open a folder in XnView MP to display thumbnails of all the images it contains, with useful information about each one. Select any of the thumbnails to see a larger preview with Properties, a Histogram and useful EXIF data on the left. You can tag images to view them via the Categories tab, which makes it much easier to find specific pictures in future. Double-clicking an image lets you apply adjustments, and add text and shapes to it.

What I don't like

There are a lot of features packed into XnView MP, but it's not always obvious where to find them. If you want to apply a filter, for example, you first need to open the photo, then go to Image, Filter and select the one you want from the list. The preview option isn't automatically selected, so you need to enable this to see what a filter does.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

IrfanView
www.irfanview.com

IrfanView is another hugely popular image viewer that comes packed with features including batch processing, support for Photoshop filters and a multimedia player.

MEDIA PLAYER

8 Zoom Player 14 Beta

bit.ly/zoom437
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 29.4MB

Why I like it

I've always found iTunes bloated and awkward, which is why I stopped using it years ago. Zoom Player is an excellent alternative which can handle all the popular audio and video formats, and play DVDs. Features on offer include a file browser, playlist editor, bookmarks manager, play history, audio equaliser and colour controls. The Install Centre lets you choose exactly which third-party media components you want to install for playback, and you can customise the player depending on the device you plan to run it on – PC (desktop and laptop), Home Theatre PC (HTPC) or Tablet (and touchscreens).

How I use it

I like that most of Zoom Player's settings can be easily accessed by right-clicking. There are menus for Controls, Navigation, Aspect Ratio and more, to give you total control over how you play music and videos. There are also some buttons in the bottom-right corner of the interface: the first one displays a handy menu at the top of the screen, with further options below; the second opens the equaliser; and the third button displays your playlist.

What I don't like

Zoom Player's interface isn't quite as polished as other media players, and there are a lot of settings to get to grips with. That said, the options are arranged well and most are self-explanatory.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

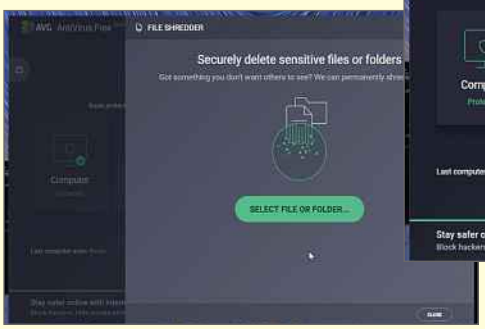
VLC Media Player
www.videolan.org

VLC can handle most media files with ease, and is packed with useful features, as well as offering optional add-ons. It's no wonder it's so popular.

ANTIVIRUS TOOL

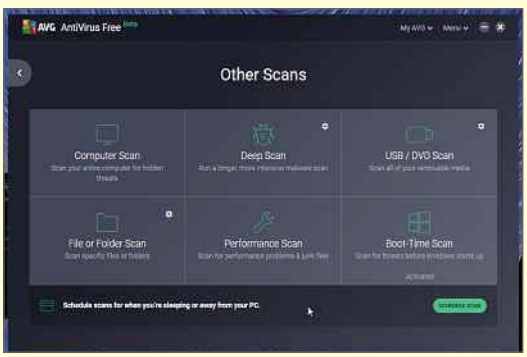
9 AVG Free Beta

bit.ly/avgbeta437
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 3.5MB



Why I like it

It's important to run security software on your PC to protect it from threats such as ransomware that lurk online. AVG is both reliable and easy to use, and this beta version has undergone several tweaks to make it less resource-intensive. It can protect you from all major threats, and block unsafe links, downloads and email attachments.



How I use it

I like that you can run a scan at any time from the home screen. If you click the cog icon on the Scan Computer button, you can choose from one of six scan types – Computer (a full scan), Deep (more intensive), USB/DVD (to scan removable media), File or Folder (to scan specific locations), Performance (to look for potential issues and junk files) and Boot-Time Scan. This last option isn't available by default but can be added (for free) with a single click. It then checks your PC when you reboot.

The program also has a File Shredder for deleting personal files for good.

What I don't like

Beta software can be buggy but I found the current AVG beta to be very stable. Still, it's important to remember that it's a test version, which means you could encounter problems with the software. If you're not willing to take that risk, stick to the stable edition.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

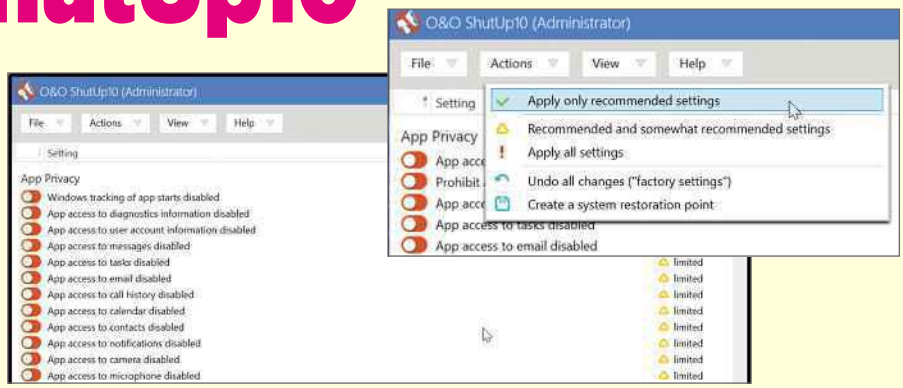
Avast Free Antivirus
www.avast.com

Avast now owns AVG but, despite this, its antivirus program is very different and offers additional features, such as home network and router security.

PRIVACY TOOL

10 O&O ShutUp10

bit.ly/ooshut437
Min requirements: Windows 10
File size: 786KB



Why I like it

Since Windows 10 first launched, Microsoft has reined in many of its spying features and made it easier to manage your privacy, but I'm still uncomfortable with some of the settings that are turned on by default. O&O ShutUp10 gives you greater control over these elements, and the program doesn't even need to be installed – just run it and you'll be presented with a long list of options that you can enable or disable. These are grouped by category (App Privacy, Cortana, Location Services, Lock Screen, Miscellaneous, Privacy, Security, User Behaviour and more) and can be sorted by name, activation status and recommendation.

A recent update means that O&O ShutUp10 is now fully compatible with the Fall Creators Update, so your privacy remains fully covered.

How I use it

Although O&O ShutUp10's categories are useful, I prefer to toggle them off so I just have a long list of available settings to scan through. To do this, click the View button and untick 'Group by Categories'. While a lot of the settings are self-explanatory – and clicking any of them will present you with an explanation of what it does – it's not always obvious whether or not you should disable something. Click the Actions button and you can choose to 'Apply only recommended settings' (the safest choice), apply 'Recommended and somewhat recommended settings' (I love that "somewhat" qualifier!) or 'Apply all settings' (the riskiest option). You can also undo all changes and create a System Restore point here.

What I don't like

O&O ShutUp10 works as intended but its interface is a bit bland. Also, having to click each entry to find out what it does – when there are so many settings on offer – is a bit of a pain.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

DoNotSpy10 3

bit.ly/nospy437

DoNotSpy10 is a privacy tool that provides a simple front end where you can quickly turn off any privacy features you're unhappy about. Be sure to decline the junk that's offered during installation.

TOP 5 PROGRAMS OF 2017

As determined by the number of your clicks on our Bitly links

1 AllDup
bit.ly/alldup418
An essential free tool for finding and removing duplicate files.

2 DNS Benchmark
bit.ly/grc429
Speed up your internet by switching to a faster DNS server.

3 Tor Browser
bit.ly/torbrowser432
Protect your privacy by staying totally anonymous online.

4 ActivePresenter
bit.ly/active435
Record and edit anything that happens on your screen.

5 Ultimate Settings Panel
bit.ly/usp416
Access hundreds of hidden Windows options in one place.

NEXT ISSUE on sale Wednesday 13 December 2017

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REMOVE WI-FI JUNK
Clear unwanted entries from your network list

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Best free Windows 10 file-manager apps

File Explorer isn't the only way to manage your files. **Jonathan Parkyn** compares six free Windows 10 apps you can use instead

Metro Commander | bit.ly/metr437 | ★★★★★

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

WebUser GOLD AWARD

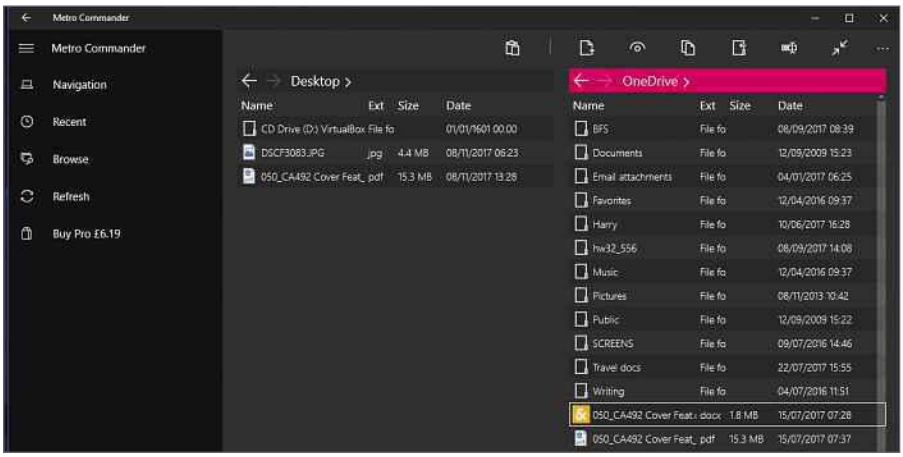
What we liked:

Metro Commander stands out from the crowd by offering a very useful dual-pane interface, even in its free version. It's a Universal Windows Platform app (UWP), so it works on Xbox One and Windows Mobile, too.

The dual-pane view takes a bit of getting used to at first, but it's essentially just two columns of files, each representing their own directory. To choose which directories are shown, click the heading at the top of a column to highlight it, then click one of the icons on the left – Navigation, Recent or Browse – to select the location you want to display.

'Recent' lists recently visited locations and 'Browse' opens a standard File Explorer window for you to find the directory you want. 'Navigation', which lets you choose one of your favourite directories, initially only displays a handful of default locations – including your Music, Pictures and Videos folders – but it's easy to add more by clicking the '+' button and choosing a folder.

You can drag and drop between panes, and a strip of icons along the top of the window lets you access further tools for copying, pasting, renaming and so on.



Metro Commander also supports OneDrive (without you having to pay extra), offers a wide range of keyboard shortcuts (click the '?' icon for a handy list) and has its own built-in file viewer that supports useful features, such as Rotate, and Slideshow and 'Cast to Device' for photo files.

How it can be improved:

Some of the adverts displayed in the bottom-right corner of the window can be intrusive. Getting rid of them permanently costs £3.09, while various other similarly priced in-app purchases unlock other features, such as alternate themes, MKV support and built-in file compression tools. Sadly, Dropbox support is one of the paid-for extras. Alternatively, you could consider opting for the Pro version (£6.19 from within the free version), which unlocks all the app's advanced features.

OUR VERDICT

Unwanted advertising intrusions aside, Metro Commander is a smart-looking file-management tool that offers a good, workable range of features in its free incarnation, including a very useful dual-pane view.

File Browser | bit.ly/fileb437 | ★★★★☆

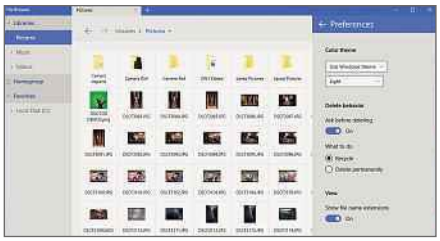
FEATURES ★★★☆☆ PERFORMANCE ★★★★☆ EASE OF USE ★★★★☆

What we liked:

Unlike some of the other free Explorer replacements in the Windows Store, File Browser doesn't hassle you relentlessly with adverts. By default, it provides shortcuts to your Windows Libraries and Homegroup locations, and you can also add a shortcut to any folder or drive by clicking Favorites, then Add and selecting the location required.

Single-clicking a file reveals a wealth of options along the bottom of the window, including sharing, copying, pasting, renaming and pinning items to Start. Further options – including the 'Copy to' and 'Move to' commands – can be found by right-clicking an item.

A modest yet useful selection of customisation options is provided in the Preferences menu: you can choose to show or hide file extensions; recycle or delete files permanently; and opt to have a confirmation message appear before you can delete anything. A handful of colour themes is also available.



How it can be improved:

Frustratingly, the app's support for tabbed browsing is locked to an in-app purchase. Tabs appear at the top, but clicking the '+' sign to open a new one prompts you to cough up £1.19 for the Pro version of File Browser. Admittedly, this is a relatively small price to pay, but the Pro version doesn't unlock any other notable extras beyond a Dark theme option in Preferences.

OUR VERDICT

File Browser isn't exactly overburdened with features, but it looks good and does its job well. The lack of adverts in the free version is refreshing, too.

Files&Folders Lite | bit.ly/filef437 | ★★★☆☆

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

What we liked:

Files&Folders Lite is made by Finebits, the same developer as our Gold Award winner, and shares a number of Metro Commander's useful tools, including a built-in file viewer and OneDrive support. The key difference is that Files&Folders Lite sticks to a traditional single-pane view.

Click Navigation (your favourite directories), Recent (recently visited directories) or Browse (which opens a standard File Explorer window) on the left, then select the location you want to display in the main area of the app window. Back, forward and up arrows let you navigate, while right-clicking files and folders provides access to commands – Copy, Cut, Rename, Delete, and so on – as well as a handy 'Share to' option. Further tools, including a 'Pin to Start' option, are in the top toolbar.

Files&Folders Lite also lets you customise its appearance. Click Personalization, then scroll to select one of the predefined backgrounds or click the '+' sign to browse for an image of your own choosing.

How it can be improved:

Files&Folders Lite also shares some of Metro Commander's flaws, including its distracting ads and expensive advanced features (the Pro version costs £6.19). And, without its stablemate's dual-pane view, navigation is more awkward.

OUR VERDICT

It's not as intuitive as other file-manager apps and some of its features are hidden behind a paywall, but Files&Folders Lite's customisability and built-in file viewer is a useful bonus.

BEST OF THE REST

My Explorer

bit.ly/myexp437

My Explorer feels like an old-school Windows 8 app and could do with a bit of a refresh, but it does a basic job reasonably well. You can add your own favourite locations (up to 999 of them) and right-clicking files reveals management options along the bottom of the screen. Customisation options are limited to choosing Light or Dark themes and the type of folder icon used, but at least there are no annoying adverts to contend with.

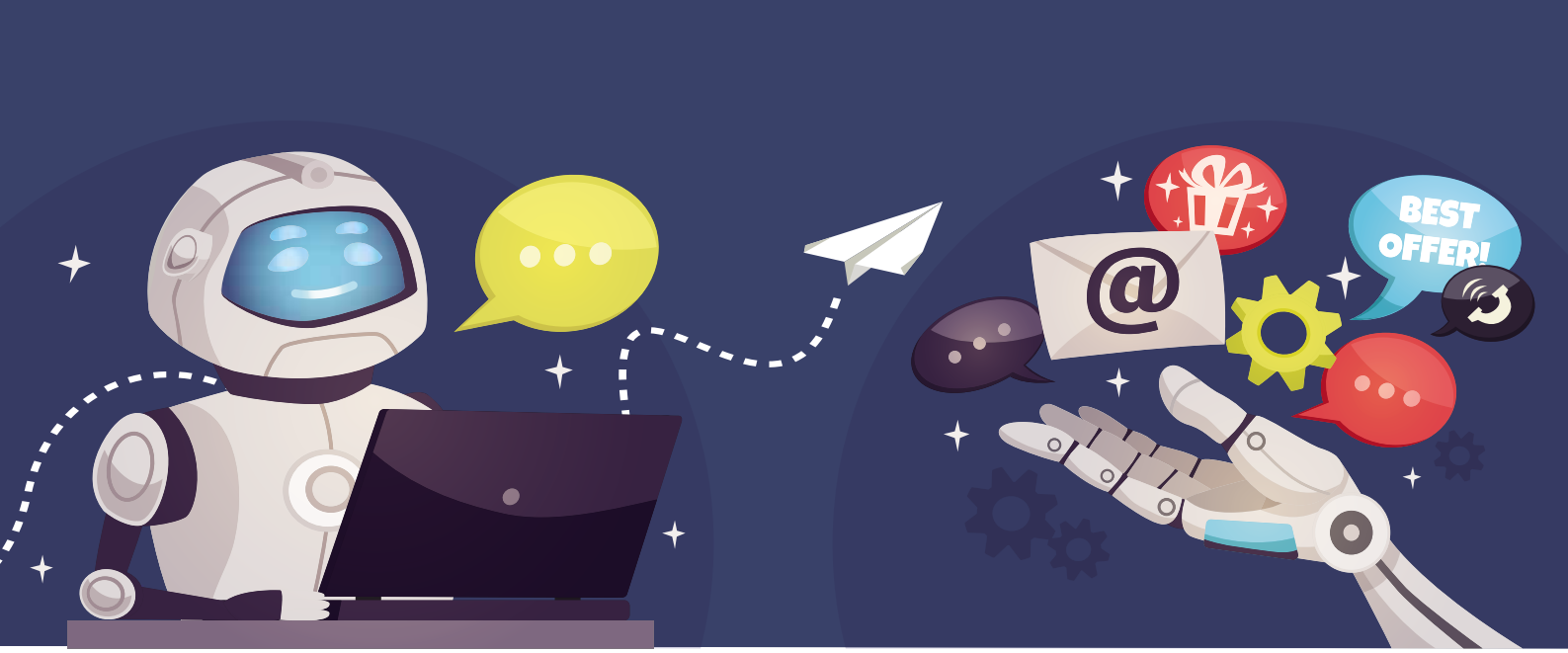
Aerize Explorer

bit.ly/aer437

Hamstrung by an unattractive interface and navigation that's clearly been designed for touch controls (single-clicking opens files by default), Aerize Explorer does have a few benefits, including badges showing the number of items contained in each folder. Sadly, many tools and options, such as file compression, require £1.89 for the Pro version. Also, you need to pay a further £3.89 to permanently disable the ads.

Windows 10's secret File Explorer app

Since the Creators Update, Windows 10 has included a hidden app version of File Explorer. You can unlock it by right-clicking your Desktop and selecting New, then Shortcut. In the Create Shortcut window, type: `explorer shell:AppsFolder\c5e2524a-ea46-4f67-841f-6a9465d9d515_cw5n1h2txyewy!App` and press Enter. Name your shortcut, click Finish, then double-click it to open the File Explorer app. It's a bit bare but is ad-free and will match Windows 10's dark or light theme.



Machine-learning tools you can try online

Artificial intelligence – or machine learning – is everywhere these days and getting smarter all the time. **Edward Munn** shows you fun and futuristic ways to use AI

Help a Google machine to learn

To see first hand how machine learning works, try Google's fun app at bit.ly/machine437. You don't need to understand coding, just click Let's Go and the tutorial shows you step by step how to make the machine produce specific outputs such as GIFs, sounds and speech based on actions you've captured with your own webcam. You can record yourself making beak gestures to teach the machine how to make bird sounds, for example, or play air guitar to make it play a guitar sound.

When you perform an action after teaching the machine, it'll automatically play the appropriate output and also show how confident it is that it's picked the right one. If the confidence figure is low, try recording more examples of your action from different angles.

Teach Google's machine to display a cat GIF

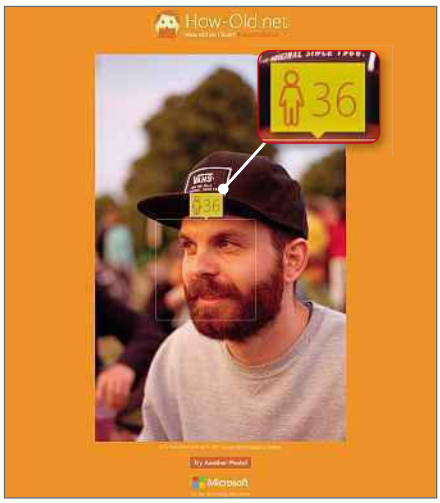
You can reset a class and start again from scratch at any time by clicking the Reset button.

Get Microsoft to guess your age

If you're not easily offended, why not ask Microsoft's How-Old.net robot to guess your age? Visit how-old.net and click 'Use your own photo', then upload a photo in which your face is clearly visible (you can use an image with several people in it, too). The app highlights each face it recognises with a square and shows an estimated age and gender for each one.

At the bottom of the page, Microsoft says "Sorry if we didn't get it quite right – we are still improving this feature", and there's definitely some truth in this. We noticed significant age variations even when analysing photos of the same person taken a couple of years apart, and some predictions were out by as much as 30 years!

To understand in more detail how Microsoft's Face API works, visit bit.ly/faceapi436 and upload an image to the Face Detection section. As well as age and gender, you'll see how the tool uses machine learning to identify your emotion, pose, smile and 27 different facial 'landmarks'. The app at the top of the page can use this information to analyse two photos and tells you how likely it is that the faces belong to the same person. Simply click Browse below each window or copy an image URL to the appropriate boxes to test it.



Microsoft's How-Old.net app was some way off when guessing our age

Similar technology is used by Apple's Photos app to automatically group photos of the same person (see the next tip for more info).

Find every photo of your dog or car

One of the easiest ways to take advantage of machine learning is in Google Photos, both online and on your mobile device. Search for a term such as 'dog', 'cat' or 'beach', and the AI displays remarkably accurate results within seconds, which in turn saves you having to manually tag any of your photos ever again. We tried more specific terms such as 'Jack Russell' and were amazed at how it managed to pick out photos of a specific breed.

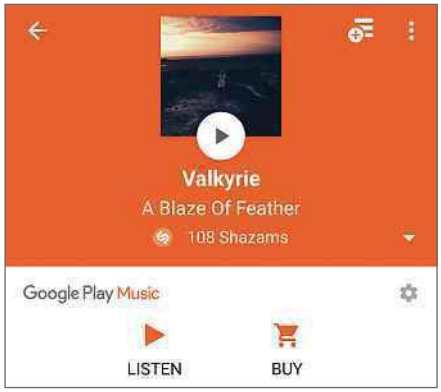
Search for an object in Google Photos

If you have an iPhone or iPad, you can use Apple's Photos app to search your images in the same way (find out how this feature recently landed Apple in hot water in the box, right). You can try terms including 'dog', 'car', 'trees' and 'snow', and the app also uses facial recognition to group your photos by those who appear in them.

Discover the name and performer of any song

Shazam (www.shazam.com) has been around for nearly as long as smartphones, but it's still one of our favourite examples of machine learning. Install the app, tap the main button when any song is playing near you and Shazam will listen for as long as it needs to identify the track. Remarkably, the app works even when there's a lot of background noise, but it's much less likely to successfully identify a song from a live performance. Once the app has identified a song, you can usually preview it. Shazam can also be linked with Spotify and Deezer to automatically save all your identified tracks for listening to later.

SoundHound (soundhound.com) is another excellent song-recognition app that goes one step further by using AI to identify tracks from you singing or humming the tune. It's perfect for those moments when you can't get a melody out of your head but can't remember what song it's from!

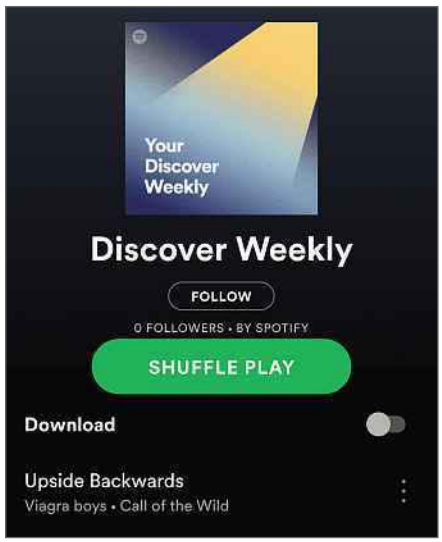


Shazam can identify even the most obscure tracks

Get personalised music recommendations

Spotify uses machine learning to generate a weekly playlist of song recommendations for you, based on music you've already listened to. Visit bit.ly/discover437 and click Get Playlist to find yours, or simply search 'Discover Weekly' in the app. If you tap Follow on the playlist, you'll be able to find it more easily from the Playlists menu.

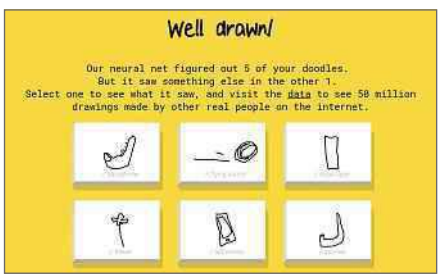
Check back every Monday and you'll find that your playlist has been updated with a completely new selection of songs. Just remember to save any tracks you like to Your Library before the end of the week, or you might not be able to find them again.



Check the Discover Weekly playlist for new music recommendations

Show Google how to doodle anything

Quick, Draw (bit.ly/doodle437) is another fun game created by Google that uses machine learning to guess what you've doodled online. Although the tool doesn't always guess correctly, it's strangely satisfying when it identifies, for example, a skyscraper when you draw an upright rectangle! It's only been taught a few hundred concepts, but every doodle is added to a database of more than 50 million drawings and these have been made open-source so that any developer can use them to train new neural networks.



Quick, Draw recognised some of our sloppiest doodles

CAN HUMANS SEE MY PRIVATE DATA?

There was uproar a few weeks ago when a number of iPhone users discovered that entering the search term 'brassiere' in the iOS Photos app returned photos of people in their underwear (provided they already had such photos on the device). So what are the privacy implications of apps being able to analyse the contents of your photos, and is there any chance your private snaps could end up in the wrong hands? Fortunately, the machine learning that's in action on iPhones and iPads takes place entirely on the device, using artificial intelligence that's been trained using a library of thousands of labelled images.

Google Photos' object recognition works slightly differently. Because all your images are already uploaded to the cloud, the analysis can take place there. The results are generally a little more accurate than Apple's, but this is because Google anonymously uses your images to improve its machine learning. Again, this is done without human input, so you don't need to worry that your bikini snaps are being passed around Silicon Valley!

Apple's Photos app analyses your images on the device

Best new Christmas gadgets

Stuck for Christmas present ideas, or don't know what to ask for yourself? Then feast your eyes on these innovative gift ideas...

Chillblast Fusion Toro PC

www.chillblast.com/toro

£1149.00

Chillblast is renowned for producing high-spec gaming PCs and its new ultra-powerful Fusion Toro comes equipped with the latest top-notch components, including an Intel quad-core processor and GeForce GTX 1060 graphics card. The bundled ASUS 24in 144Hz monitor will make your games dazzle, while Chillblast's five-year warranty and award-winning customer service provide reliable backup and assistance. Get £150 off at www.chillblast.com/toro, or use the checkout code **GIFTGUIDE17.**

Gamebuino META

http://gamebuino.com/

€ 79.00 (£70.00)

Retro gaming is all the rage – with even Nintendo reproducing its classic consoles in affordable new formats. The Gamebuino META is based on the incredibly popular Arduino board, the starting point for many a DIY computing project, and lets you play games programmed by other enthusiasts, as well as creating your own. Back the Kickstarter fundraising project before 23 December to be one of the first to own this fantastic new handheld unit.

DJI SPARK

www.dji.com

£519 from DJI

Get yourself a DJI Spark drone and you'll never again need to press a button to take a photo. Once it's in the air, simply form a rectangle shape with your fingers and it'll recognise the gesture as its cue to take a snap, giving you a bird's-eye selfie. It can take 12-megapixel photos and record Full HD video, providing editing templates via its accompanying app.

CHERRY

DW 5100 Keyboard

www.scan.co.uk

£27.00

Why put up with a bog-standard keyboard and mouse when you can get quality and style for a bargain price? This wireless keyboard has a comfortable typing action and laser-etched labels that won't wear off, plus 10 multimedia keys that you can reprogram with Cherry's free KeyM@n software. Its ergonomically shaped mouse has a soft surface, rubber grip panels and five programmable buttons. Both mouse and keyboard connect to one tiny radio receiver that plugs into a USB port.

CHERRY Strait 3.0 Black Keyboard

www.cpc.farnell.com

£30.00

Cherry's reputation for precision engineering and high-quality workmanship is showcased in this eye-catching keyboard. The laser-etched black keys and blue inlaid background sit within an elegant ultra-flat chassis, and include five programmable hotkeys to control media-player functions. The comfortable typing action and whisper-quiet keystrokes make it ideal for everyday use.

iPhone 6s

https://softoption.buytech.store

£364.00 from SoftOption

The innovations of the iPhone 6s include 3D Touch, which lets you access extra features with a firmer press of the screen, and Live Photos, which capture a moving picture from just before to just after you hit the shutter. Its 12-megapixel rear camera takes brilliant 4K video, and the rounded metal-backed case feels great in your hand. SoftOption is now selling this fantastic phone, compatible with Apple's latest iOS 11 operating system, in four colours, with a huge 64GB of storage, unlocked for use on any mobile network, at 44% less than its original price.

GT Omega Pro Racing Office Chair

www.gtomegaracing.com

£180.00

It's time to bring some flair to the humble office chair. The GT Omega Pro Racing's sports-car styling reflects the attention to ergonomics you'd expect from a classic motor marque. The body-hugging design provides solid back support, while the headrest and lumbar-support cushions, height-control mechanism and adjustable armrests allow you to set up your perfect working (and gaming) position. It even reclines so you can enjoy a quick power nap!

Creative Sound BlasterX Katana

uk.creative.com

£279.00

Soundbars designed to sit under your TV also make sense under your monitor, especially when they're as compact and powerful as the Katana. Music, movies and games all sound awesome thanks to the 24-bit DAC (digital to analogue converter) and five speakers driven individually by amplifiers using DSP (digital sound processing). The unique Aurora Reactive lighting system lets you create stunning colour effects with 49 programmable LEDs controlled from your PC.

Best new Christmas gadgets

iStorage diskAshur² USB 3.1

https://istorage-uk.com

£141.78

The diskAshur² is the ultimate encrypted hard drive for storing precious data, such as family photos and videos. Once you set your unique PIN code, everything it contains will be safe from prying eyes. The drive is available in four striking colours (Ocean Blue, Fiery Red, Phantom Black and Racing Green) and in capacity options from 128GB to 5TB. Use the code FGG15 to buy it at a 15% discount – £141.78 (including VAT).*

*Terms and conditions apply to the entire iStorage range. Promotion ends 31st January 2018.

ROCCAT Kone AIMO and Khan Pro

www.currys.co.uk

£159.98

Looking for that perfect Christmas gift for your favourite gamer? ROCCAT has you covered. The Kone AIMO offers a new immersive lighting system to brighten your gaming experience. The highly precise Owl-Eye Optical sensor, ergonomically placed buttons, and benchmarking shape make the Kone AIMO the perfect mouse for any gamer. And because it's Christmas why not add the unique Hi-Res Audio gaming headset, the Khan Pro. Both products are available in black, grey and white.

Google Daydream View

https://store.google.com

£69.00

Google's Daydream View lets you join the virtual-reality revolution without spending a fortune – just slide a compatible phone into the fabric-clad case and you'll be immersed in another world. By sensing your every move, it makes games feel brilliantly realistic. Daydream's standout feature is its wireless controller – just make sure you hold on tight to the handy wrist strap to stop it flying out of your hand in the excitement!

CHERRY MX Board 3.0

www.scan.co.uk

£60.00

Cherry has been manufacturing some of the best keyboards in the world for over 40 years, and the exclusive Gold Crosspoint contacts in its MX key switches ensure perfect keystrokes every time. This professional wired USB model with laser-etched key caps is sturdier than ever, and comes with a choice of red or brown switches: both provide a fast, lightweight linear action with no annoying click sound, with brown providing an extra bump of tactile feedback.

Apple iPad with Retina Display 64GB Wi-Fi + cellular

https://softoption.buytech.store

£303.06 from SoftOption

Seven years on from its arrival, the iPad continues to push at the boundaries of tablet innovation. This 'Good as New' edition includes 4G connectivity, an ultra-sharp Retina-display screen and an iSight camera that records videos in 1080p resolution. At £303, it costs around half of the original price and comes with 64GB storage – an option that's no longer available from Apple's store.

Oakley Radar Pace

www.wiggle.co.uk

£320.00

Imagine having the benefit of a professional coach, urging you to train faster and for longer. Pair Oakley's Radar Pace glasses with your phone and they'll use sensors to analyse your running, giving you audio feedback to improve your technique and a well-balanced training program that gradually increases the intensity of your speed training.

Beats SOLO3 Wireless On-Ear Headphones

https://softoption.buytech.store

£214.19

With a battery life of up to 40 hours, the Solo3 headphones ensure you'll never be marooned without your favourite tunes. Charge them up for just five minutes and the Fast Fuel feature guarantees three hours of playback. Hold them near your iPhone and they'll connect simultaneously to your Apple Watch, iPad and Mac. For the best audio experience, customise the ear cups for optimum comfort.

Affinity Photo & Affinity Designer

https://affinity.serif.com

From £19.99

The Affinity Photo and Designer programs enable you to work faster than ever on image-based projects, whether you're carrying out a quick photo edit or putting together a complex document involving hundreds of layers or stacked images. Version 1.6 of the programs contains new tools that raise the bar for creative software, including an impressive 'Light' user interface, which provides a vibrant alternative to the 'Dark' mode. Available on Mac, Windows and iOS.

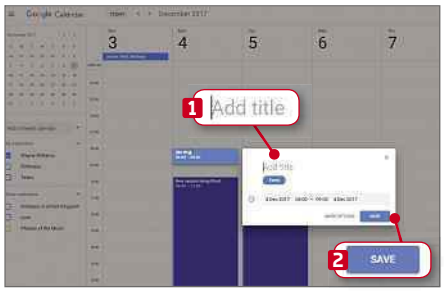
Use Google Calendar's new tools

Google's web-based calendar has been given a stylish new look and a number of useful new features. Here's what you need to know

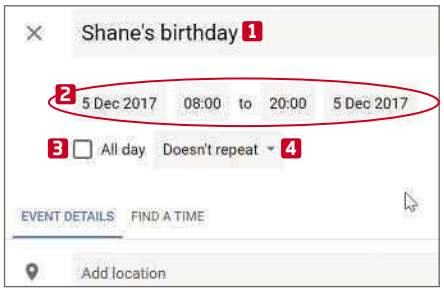
Google Calendar: calendar.google.com | 10 mins | Any browser

Google Calendar is a powerful and flexible tool that helps you keep track of your upcoming plans, and those of your contacts. You can have multiple calendars and search across any of them, as well as across calendars belonging to your friends, and those which have been made publicly available. And you can add a surprising amount of information to an event, and share some or all of it with others.

Google has revamped the web version of Calendar, giving it a fresh new look and a responsive layout, which automatically adjusts to your screen size. You can now add rich formatting and hyperlinks to invites, and view two calendars side by side in the Day View.



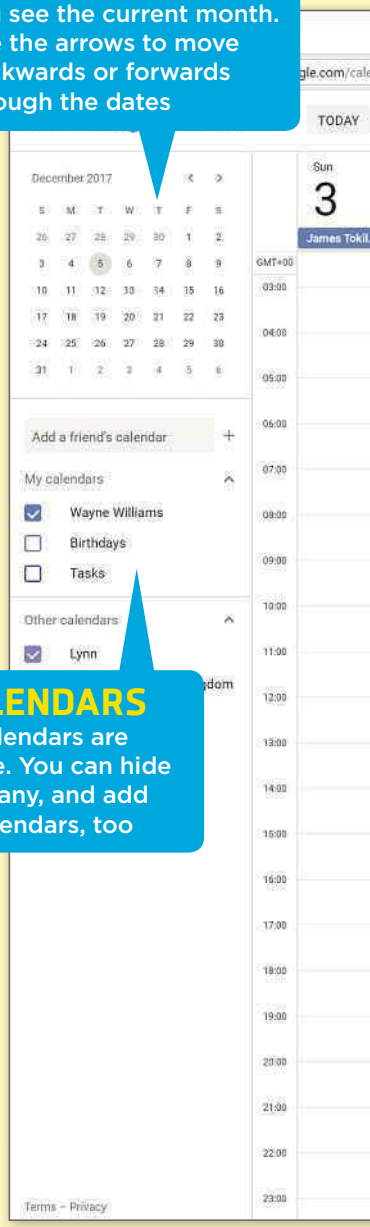
1 To get started with the updated version, click 'Use new Calendar' in the top-right corner of the main view. There are a couple of ways to add a new event. If you just want to create an event with a title, click the start date/time on the calendar, add a title in the box 1 and click Save. 2

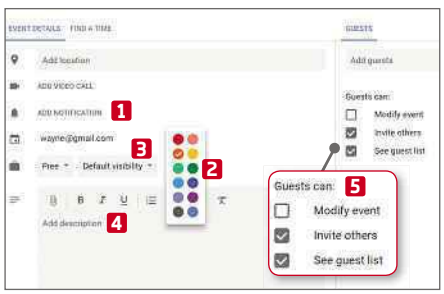


2 For a more complex event, with more detail, click the red plus sign. This will open a new window. From here, you can add a title, 1 change the event date, and set the start and end times. 2 You can tick the box to make the event occupy the whole day, 3 and set it to repeat if it's a recurring event. 4

CURRENT MONTH
The small calendar lets you see the current month. Use the arrows to move backwards or forwards through the dates

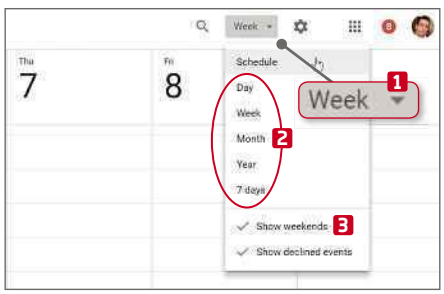
MY CALENDARS
All your calendars are shown here. You can hide or remove any, and add friends' calendars, too



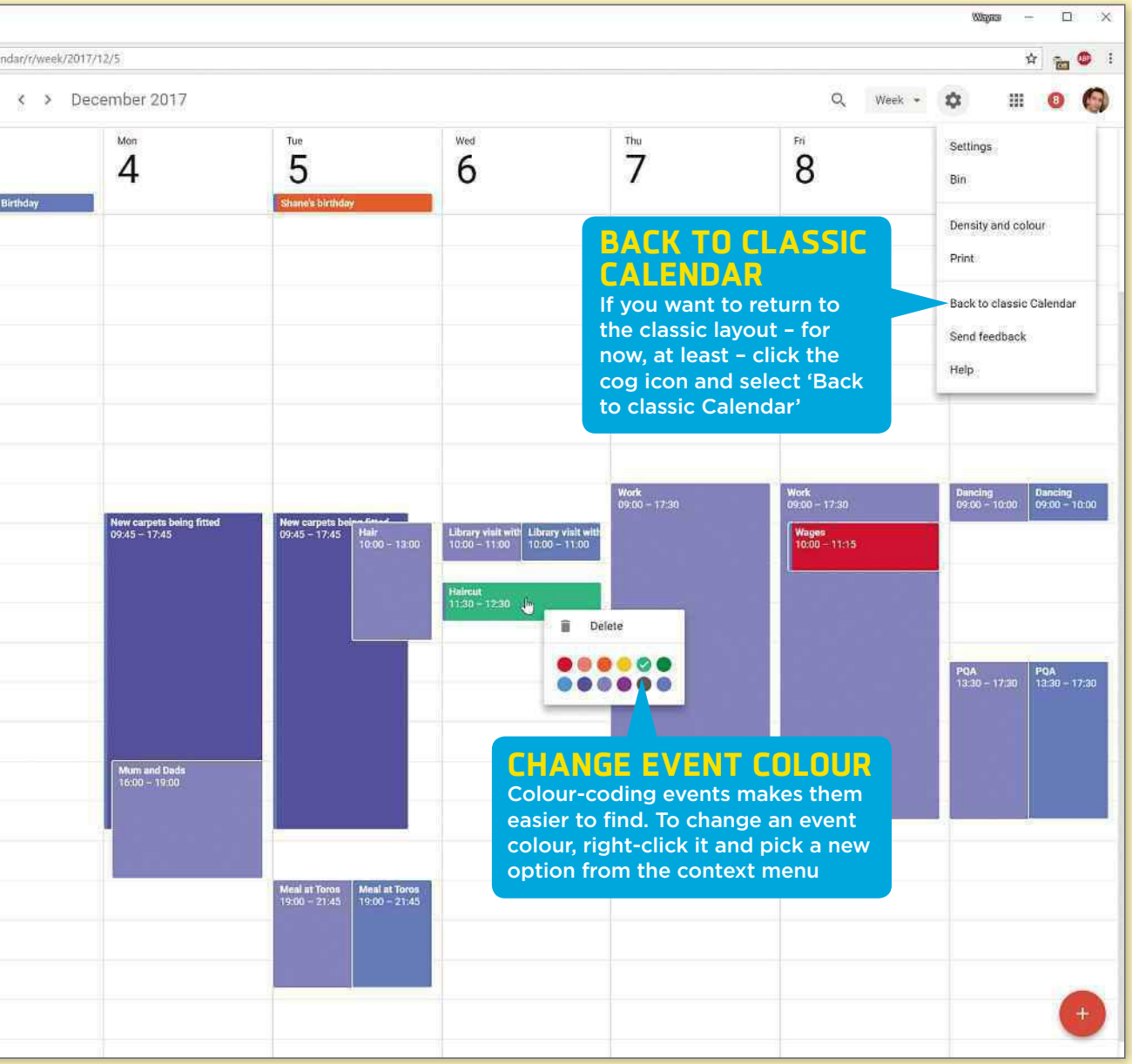


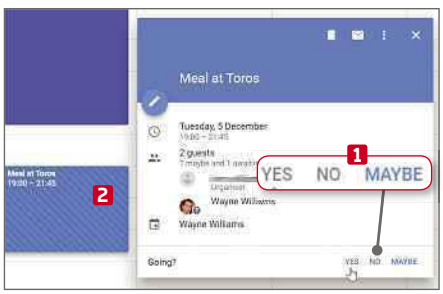
3 You can add a location, request a notification before the event starts 1 and change the entry's colour. 2 Use the Default visibility drop-down menu to set whether the event is public or private. 3 You can also add a description, 4 invite guests to the event and grant them certain privileges. 5

4 Clicking a created event brings up an overview showing the date, and start and end times. 1 Click the Edit pencil 2 to make any changes. The three-dot Options button 3 lets you print or duplicate that item, publish the event or change the owner (by switching it to someone else's calendar).

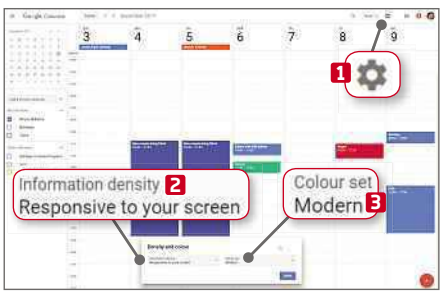


5 By default, Google Calendar shows Week view, but there are others available. Click the arrow 1 to open a drop-down menu and select a new time period. 2 You can toggle weekends and declined events on or off. 3 Schedule view helps you keep on top of events so you don't miss upcoming appointments.

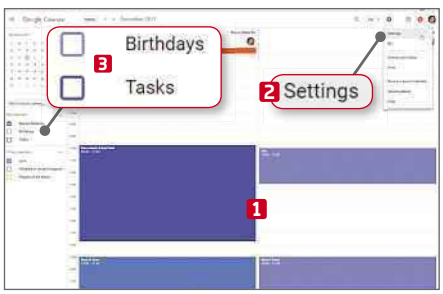




6 If you get invited to an event by someone else, you can respond to the invitation by clicking the event and choosing an option next to 'Going?'. Choose from Yes, No or Maybe. 1 If you say Yes, the event will be marked with a solid colour. A Maybe has a stripy background 2 and a No is crossed out.



7 The default layout will be fine for most users, but you can change the style and colours if you wish. Click the cog button 1 and select 'Density and colour'. You can switch the density from 'Responsive to your screen' 2 to Compact, and choose between Modern or Classic colours. 3



8 The Day View lets you see two calendars side by side. 1 If you don't want to use this, you can disable it by clicking the cog button and going to Settings. 2 Scroll down and untick 'View calendars side by side in Day View'. You can also untick one of the calendars in the sidebar. 3

Save space with OneDrive Files On-Demand

Files On-Demand | 20 mins | Windows 10 Fall Creators Update

The Windows 10 Fall Creators Update introduced a number of new features to Microsoft's operating system. One of the most welcome is a new Files On-Demand option for OneDrive. This lets you access your files in Microsoft's cloud service from your PC without having to download them first. You can view any file from OneDrive in File Explorer and interact with it as if it were stored locally.

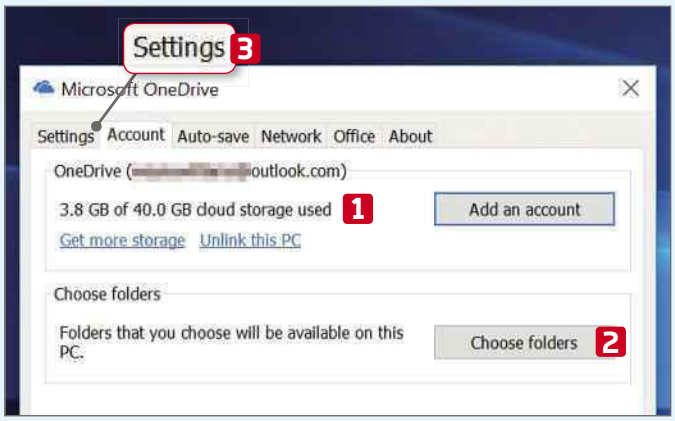
If you ever used OneDrive in Windows 8.1, you may be familiar with this idea, because OneDrive Files On-Demand is essentially an improved version of the old placeholders tool. In this Workshop, we explain how to set up and use the new feature.

EXPERT TIP

Wayne Williams says

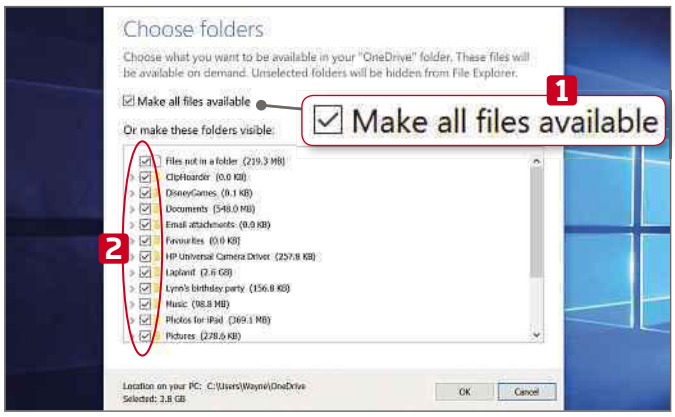
If you can't see the option to enable OneDrive Files On-Demand, make sure you're running the Fall Creators Update by typing `winver` into the Windows 10 search box and pressing Enter. You should have Windows version 1709. If you have it but still can't see the feature, download and install the latest version of OneDrive direct from Microsoft (bit.ly/onedrive437 – note that this is a direct link to the file). This should fix the issue.

1 If you're running the latest version of Windows 10 – the Fall Creators Update – the new tool should be enabled automatically. You need to sign into a Microsoft account to use it. If you're not already signed in, double-click the cloud icon in the notification area **1** to enter your login details. **2**

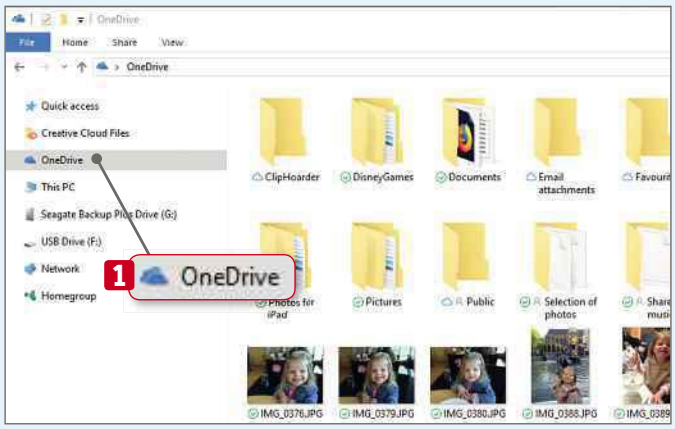


2 The next step is to check that the OneDrive Files On-Demand tool has been enabled. Right-click the cloud icon and select Settings. This shows your account details, including how much storage you have and how much is in use, **1** and lets you choose which folders will be available on your PC. **2** Click the Settings tab. **3**

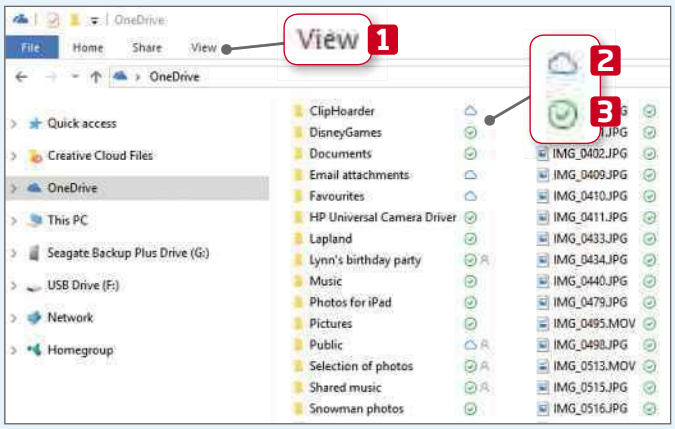
3 Make sure 'Start OneDrive automatically when I sign in to Windows' **1** is ticked so that the storage service is always available. You should see a new 'Files on Demand' section at the bottom. **2** Tick 'Save space and download files as you use them' to enable the tool, then click OK.



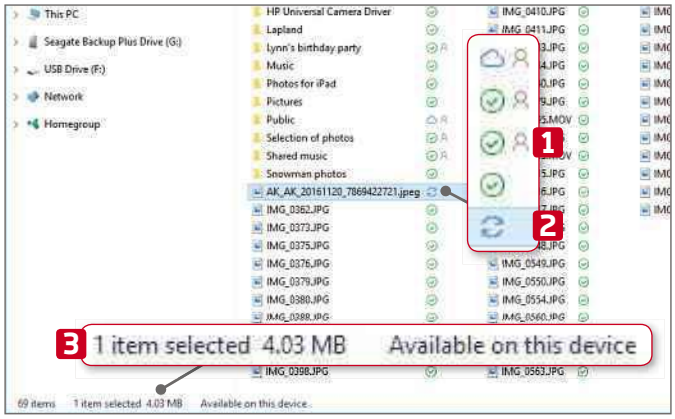
4 Return to the Account tab and click the 'Choose folders' button. You'll be presented with a list of items that will be available in the OneDrive folder on your PC and on demand. You can choose to make them all available **1** or untick some to hide them from File Explorer. **2**



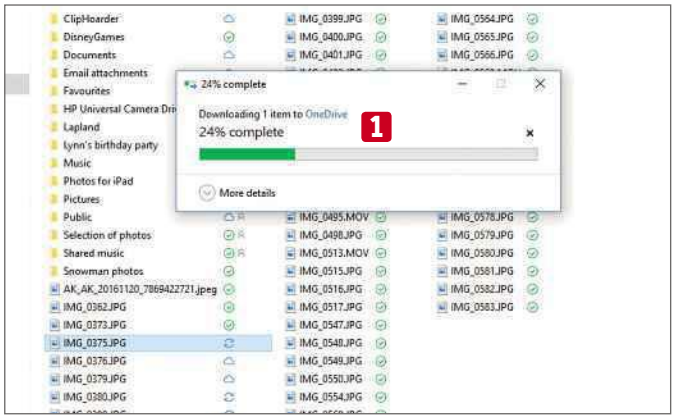
5 Everything you selected should now be available to view on your PC. Open File Explorer and select OneDrive in the list on the left. 1 You'll see all the files and folders stored in Microsoft's cloud service. From here, you can manage them and delete any you don't want.



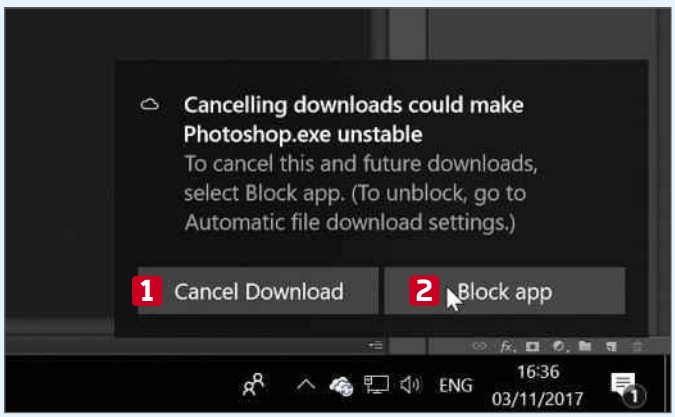
6 File Explorer now has a Status column showing icons to indicate the status of your files and folders. To see it a little more clearly, go to View, 1 List. The cloud icon 2 indicates that an item is available online. A green tick 3 means it's available on your PC.



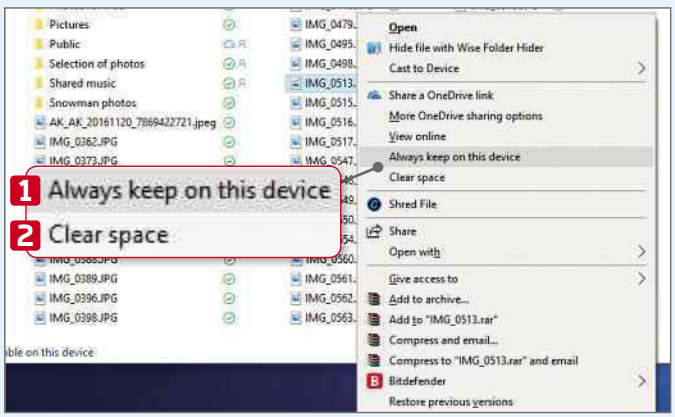
7 A person icon 1 next to an item means it's shared. If you see a blue refresh icon, 2 the item is currently syncing (either uploading or downloading). Click any item, and you'll see its status in the bar at the bottom of the window. 3



8 To open a file, double-click it as usual. Any files on your device will open immediately, while files that are stored on OneDrive will download 1 and then open. Windows treats OneDrive files like any other, so you can open them in an appropriate application or drag them out of the OneDrive folder and drop them into another one.



9 Windows notifies you when an application other than File Explorer tries to fetch a file from OneDrive. If you don't want it to download the file, click 'Cancel download'. 1 To stop that program downloading files in future, click 'Block app'. 2 You can manage your blocked applications by going to Settings, Privacy, then 'Automatic file downloads'.



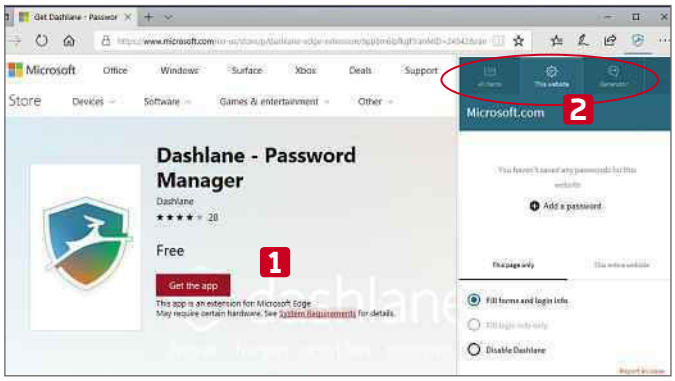
10 You may not want a local copy of every file and folder you've stored in OneDrive, so File Explorer provides a way to manage this duplication directly. Right-click an item and select 'Always keep on this device' 1 to make sure it's always available, or choose 'Clear space' 2 to store it online only.

Try Dashlane's advanced new tools

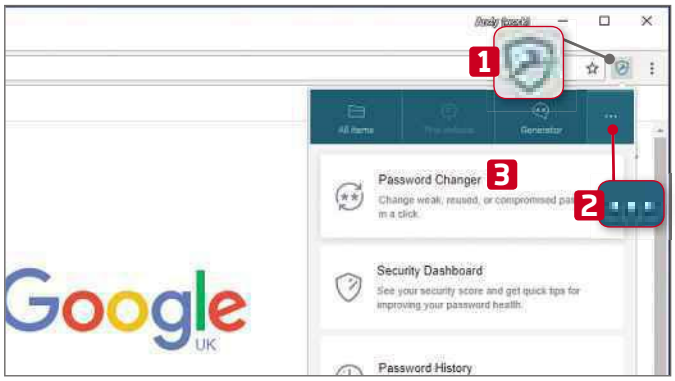
Password manager Dashlane has just been updated to version 5 and now comes with a host of new tools designed to make your passwords even easier to set up, manage and use.

With integrated support for Microsoft Edge and an expanded tool to change your passwords automatically, Dashlane 5 is well worth exploring.

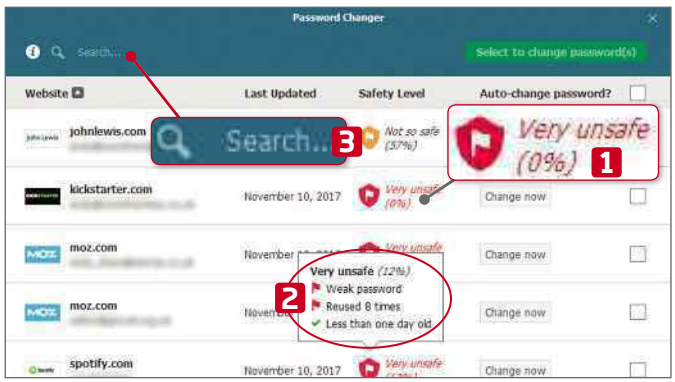
Dashlane 5: www.dashlane.com | 10 mins | Windows 7, 8, 10 Mac 10.11, 10.12



1 Dashlane has joined the increasing number of add-ons now available for Microsoft's Edge browser, so if you prefer using Edge to Chrome or Firefox, download the add-on from bit.ly/das437. 1 It looks just like the add-ons for the other browsers, with tabs at the top 2 for exploring its interface.



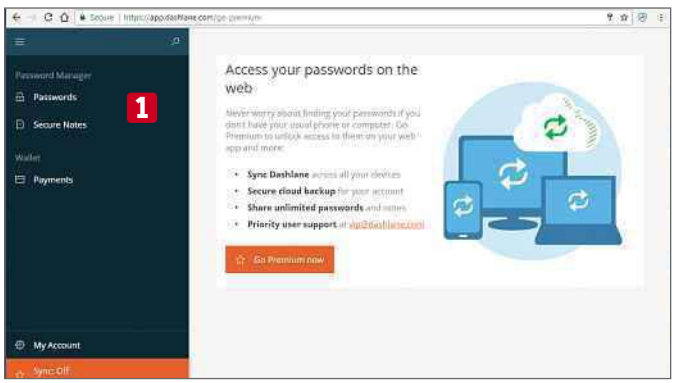
2 The Password Changer lets you change your password on 500 sites without searching for your account settings. Launch it from the add-on by clicking the icon, 1 then the menu, 2 then Password Changer. 3 Alternatively, from the software itself, choose Password Changer from the Tools menu.



3 The software highlights any passwords you're using that aren't deemed safe enough. 1 If you want to know why, hover your mouse over the information to see a pop-up that explains the problem. 2 If your list is very long, click in the search box 3 to enter the name of the site you're looking for.

4 To change a password, click a site's 'Change now' button. 1 Dashlane automatically creates a safe new password for you and registers it with the website. If you want to change the passwords for all your sites at once, tick the box for 'Auto-change password?' 2

5 Dashlane has improved its self-learning autofill tools, so if you come across a form that isn't auto-filling properly, you can teach Dashlane to fill the box correctly the next time you visit. This makes it worth filling in all your info, including credit card details, 1 PayPal account and other ID data. 2



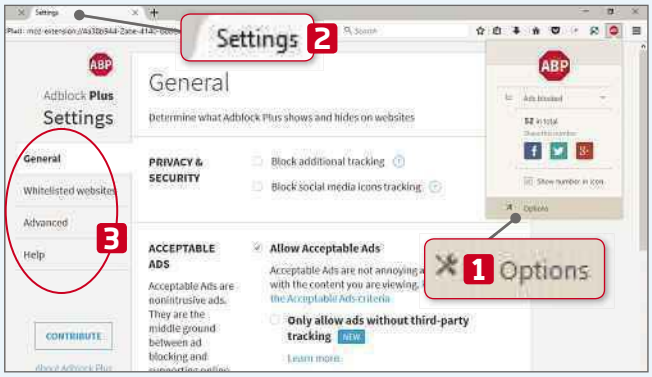
6 The Premium version ($40 – around £30 per year) lets you sync your passwords across devices and access the new web version at app.dashlane.com, 1 which can be used from any device with a browser. If you don't need syncing, you could create a different account for each device for free.

Restore lost Adblock Plus tools in Firefox 57

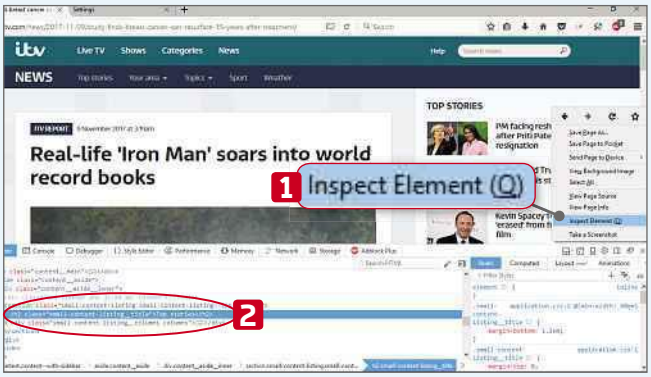
With Mozilla switching exclusively to WebExtensions in Firefox 57, Adblock Plus has undergone an enforced update that you have to install to keep the ad blocker working. Unfortunately, version 3 has brought some less welcome changes and a few problems. We show you the main differences and offer a workaround for the broken 'Block element' tool.

Adblock Plus 3: adblockplus.org | **10 mins** | **Firefox**

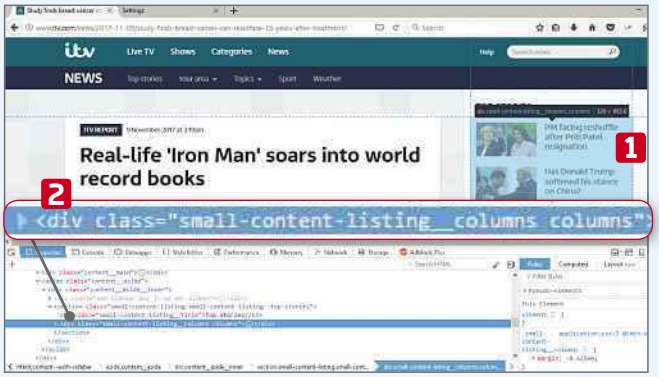
1 Adblock Plus now shows the number of ads that have been blocked as an overlay on its icon. 1 This used to be displayed as a tool tip that only appeared if you hovered your mouse pointer over the icon. If you find it distracting, left-click it and untick 'Show number in icon'. 2



2 The Settings page is now hosted on a web page rather than in a Firefox dialogue box. To open it, click the icon and choose Options. 1 The Settings page will open in a new tab. 2 Use the tabs on the left 3 to switch between the different options pages.

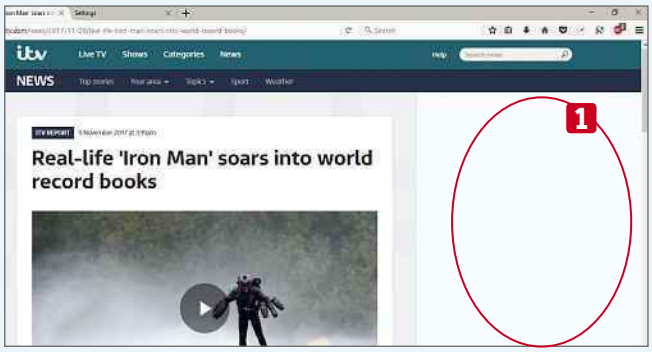


3 The 'Block element' button on the main menu doesn't work yet but you can still block elements manually. Right-click the section of a web page that you want to block and choose Inspect Element. 1 This opens the Inspector, highlighting the element in the site's HTML code. 2



4 Hover over the lines of code to make sure you have the correct element covered. When the section you want to block is highlighted, 1 click the line of code to keep that highlighted, too. 2 Look for the name of the element within the quote marks that follow 'class='.

5 Go to the Settings, click Advanced 1 and scroll down to 'My filter list'. Click the Start Writing button (or Edit Filters if you already have filters set up). Enter the web address, followed by ##. then the name of the class. 2 Don't add any spaces. Click Save. 3



6 When you reload the page, the unwanted element disappears and will never appear on that website again. 1 If you make a mistake or want to reverse the block, go back to the Advanced page in Settings and delete the line from the filters.

Weekend Project

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

How to...

Build a Windows 10 emergency recovery tool

Wayne Williams explains how to create a Windows 10 rescue disk that could save your PC and data if something goes horribly wrong

Your PC can go wrong in many different ways, and for a host of reasons, ranging from a massive malware infection to catastrophic hardware failure. One of the most frustrating problems a PC user can face is a system that won't boot, but identifying why Windows isn't loading – so you can fix it – can be tricky. Windows 10 comes with several handy troubleshooting tools, but they won't work if you can't access Windows in the first place. The best solution is to prepare an emergency recovery disk in advance, which you can then use to boot your PC if things turn bad. In this issue's Weekend Project we show you how to do exactly that.

What you need

There are plenty of tools you can use to create an emergency boot DVD or USB flash drive, but for this project we'll use AOMEI PE Builder 2 (bit.ly/apeb437). This tool lets you create a recovery disk based on Windows PE (or Windows Pre-installation Environment, to give its full name). For those who aren't familiar with it, Windows PE is a cut-down version of Microsoft's operating system that looks and works very much like Windows 10.

When you boot into Windows PE, it provides a Desktop, web browser, command prompt and other Windows features that you can use to (hopefully) overcome your PC woes, along with access to a wealth of third-party programs including 7-Zip, Recuva, CPU-Z and SumatraPDF. We show you how to create your recovery disk in our Mini Workshop, opposite.

Two editions of the tool are available to download, both of which are free. The smaller option (72.3MB) contains all the basic features you're likely to need, while the larger version (146MB) comes with two additional AOMEI tools – Partition Assistant and Backupper. For peace of mind, we recommend you go for the larger download because in an emergency, it makes sense to have immediate access to all the tools you

may need to identify and overcome the problem.

The previous version of AOMEI PE Builder only worked in Windows 7 and 8, but the latest edition supports every version of Windows from XP to Windows 10. It also runs on newer computers with a UEFI and older hardware that still uses the BIOS.

Creating the environment

By default, AOMEI PE Builder downloads the WinPE environment from the internet during the process of building your rescue disk. However, if you have a slow or unreliable internet connection, the download may fail during the disk-creation process. If this happens, just try again.

If it still doesn't work, download the environment from bit.ly/wpebe437. You can download the software via Microsoft OneDrive or Google Drive, and 32- and 64-bit versions are available. Once the file has downloaded (it's about 340MB), unzip it and copy its contents into the AOMEI PE Builder folder, which you'll probably find at C:\Program Files (x86)\AOMEI PE Builder 2.0. Restart the media creation process from scratch and it should complete this time.

Boot into your recovery media

Once you've created your rescue tool, you can boot into it when a major problem arises. In most cases, this is simply a matter of inserting the disc into your DVD drive or plugging the memory stick into a spare USB slot and switching on your PC. The computer should recognise the presence of a boot disk and launch into it.

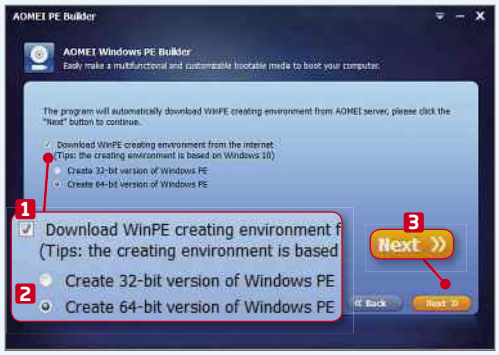
However, this will only work if your PC is set to check for the relevant drive during boot up. If it fails to recognise it, you'll need to make a simple change. Switch on your PC and watch the screen. Press the key it tells you to use to enter settings. This is usually F12 or Delete. Once in the BIOS/UEFI screen, look for a boot order menu and edit it so that the DVD or USB flash drive is the first entry. Save the changes and exit (press F10), and it should find and boot from your recovery disk this time.

We show you how to use Windows PE in our Mini Workshop on page 61.

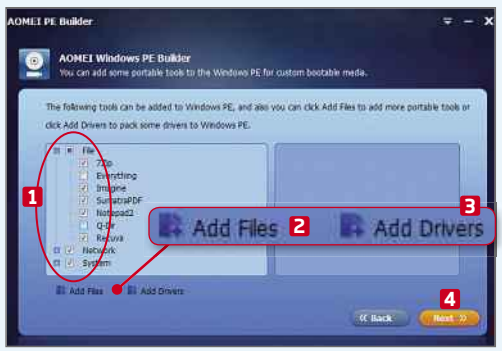
RECOVERY TOOLS

Your recovery media comes with a selection of tools to help you troubleshoot and fix your computer. You'll find shortcuts to these on the Desktop. Click This PC to browse every drive in or connected to your computer. If you can't boot into a drive, you may still be able to view and copy content from it. Imagine is an image and animation viewer, Notepad2 lets you jot down any useful information you need, and 7-Zip is an archiving tool. PassMark OSF Mount lets you mount and manage virtual disks, and AOMEI Backupper can

MINI WORKSHOP
Create a free recovery disk



1 Install and launch the program. When the message appears telling you which tools are included in AOMEI PE Builder, click Next. Make sure 'Download WinPE creating environment from the internet' 1 is ticked, then decide whether you want to create a 32-bit or 64-bit rescue disk. 2 Click Next. 3



2 Choose which tools you want to include or exclude from the bootable media. Click the plus signs next to the File, Network and System sections, then tick or untick the various options. 1 You can also add your own files 2 and drivers 3 if required. When you've finished, click Next. 4

3 You now have the option to write your rescue media to CD/DVD 1 or a USB memory stick. 2 Use the drop-down box to select your preferred destination. Alternatively, you can save the media in ISO format and write it to disc or flash drive manually later. 3 Choose the option you require and click Next. 4

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Data supplied by www.broadbandgenie.co.uk. Correct as of 17 November 2017.

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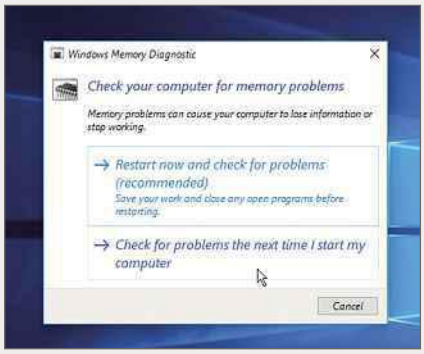
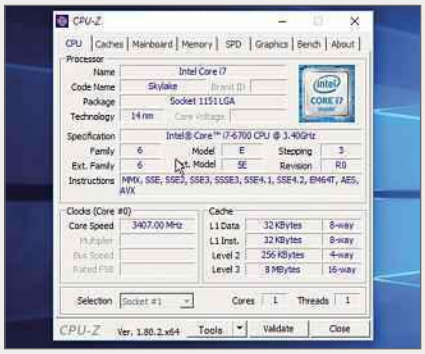


The Memory Diagnostics Tool checks your PC for RAM problems

Recuva is a simple data-recovery tool that restores missing and deleted files



CPU-Z reveals the state of your hardware. Use the tabs to select different items

back up your system drive, disks, partitions, files and folders, and even clone entire drives and partitions.

If you're having disk-related problems, including a failing hard drive, this tool may prove invaluable for salvaging your data. PE Network helps you get your PC back online and access other PCs on your local network. AOMEI's Partition Assistant lets you create, copy, merge, resize and split partitions, and even recover damaged ones. This is the tool you'll need to solve most disk problems.

QtWeb is a browser, which you can use to seek help online. BOOTICE is a powerful application that lets you install, back up and restore your Master Boot Record (MBR) or Partition Boot Record (PBR), and manage and edit disk partitions and sectors.

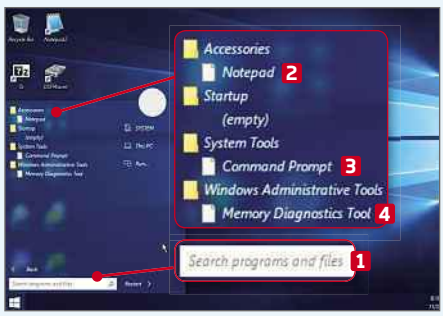
BOOTICE offers a selection of tools for fixing a drive that won't boot

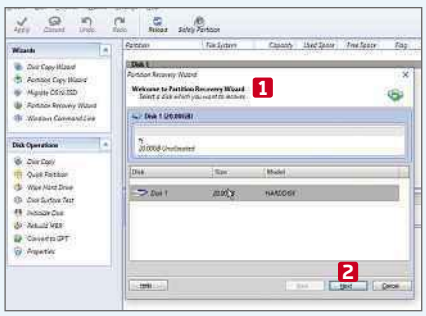
AOMEI Backupper lets you back up and restore data between your drives

Recuva is an excellent tool for recovering deleted or inaccessible content from a drive, while CPU-Z gathers information on your PC, which may help you troubleshoot hardware. Finally, there's SumatraPDF, which you can use to open (or create) documents in PDF format.

The first time you run one or more of these tools, you'll probably find that it prompts you to update to the latest version.

MINI WORKSHOP | Use your recovery media





1 Windows PE looks similar to Windows 10 – even down to the wallpaper. 1 It comes with Desktop shortcuts to its various programs and services. 2 Click the Start button 3 to run AOMEI's own tools, Backupper and Partition Assistant. 4 You can also access the System, This PC and Run options from the menu. 5

2 Use the search box to search for any programs and files, 1 or click the All Programs button above it to browse the Accessories, Startup, System Tools and Windows Administrative Tools folders. These folders are mostly empty but you can run Notepad, 2 open a Command Prompt 3 and launch the Memory Diagnostics tool. 4

3 The particular tools you need will depend on the nature of your problem. For example, if you can't access your system partition, try running AOMEI Partition Standard and launching the Partition Recovery Wizard. 1 Select the drive you want to recover, click Next 2 and choose to run a Fast or a Full search.

NEXT ISSUE **How To...** Build your own PC

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Web User Masterclass

Our experts share their favourite secret **startup commands** for popular programs

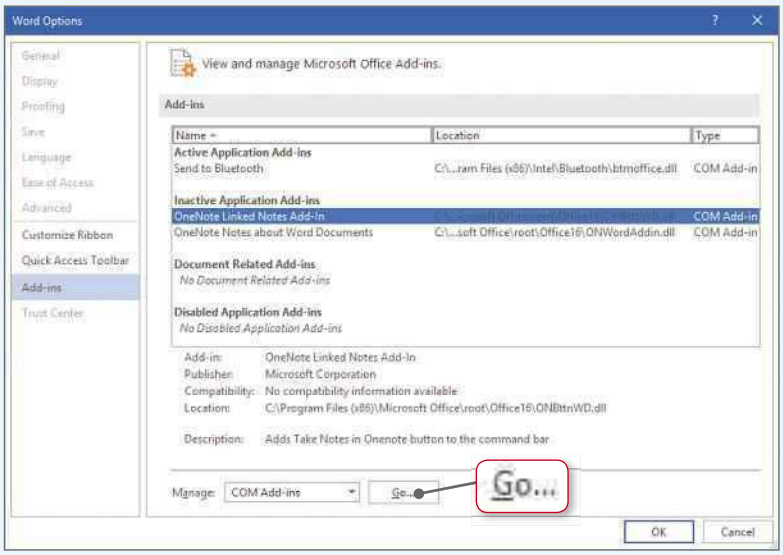
Start Microsoft Office apps in Safe Mode

If you find that Microsoft Office applications such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint are crashing when you open them or try to load a document, try starting them in Safe mode. This disables any extras that may be installed, such as add-ins and extensions.

Press Windows+R to open the Run box, type one of the following and press the Enter key:

```
winword /safe
excel /safe
powerpnt /safe
outlook /safe
mspub /safe
```

If the Office application now starts normally, it means that there may be a bad add-in or extension. Go to the File menu and select Options, then Add-ins. This lists all the add-ins you have installed. It doesn't tell you which one is faulty, though, so try uninstalling the most recently added one and run the software again.



Click the Go button to disable or remove Word add-ins

Open websites like apps

Chrome lets you launch your favourite web apps straight from the Desktop, without any of the browser's usual tabs, address box, toolbar icons or bookmarks bar – so all you see is the site running in a window. It works best with websites that behave like apps, so it's perfect for Google tools such as Gmail, Keep, YouTube, Drive and Photos. It also works well with other app-like sites, such as Microsoft To-Do and Outlook.com.

To open a website in this way, press Windows+R and type `Chrome --app=` followed by the URL. Here are some examples:

```
chrome --app=https://mail
.google.com
chrome --app=https://keep
.google.com
chrome --app=https://youtube
.com
chrome --app=https://drive
.google.com
chrome --app=https://photos
.google.com
chrome --app=https://to-do
.microsoft.com
chrome --app=https://outlook
.com
```

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.

Create shortcuts to run websites

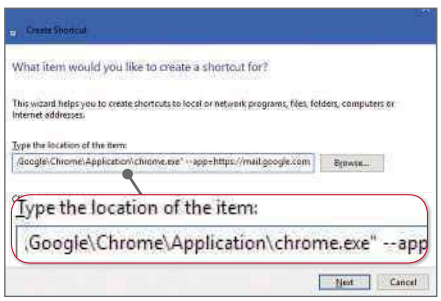
Typing commands into the Run box is tedious, so you could instead create Desktop icons that you click to open sites as if they were apps. Right-click an empty part of the Desktop and select New, Shortcut. You'll need to enter the full path to Chrome for a shortcut, so click Browse, find Chrome and select it. The following should work:

```
C:\Program Files (x86)\Google\
Chrome\Application\chrome.exe
```

Place the cursor at the end, press the spacebar and type:

```
--app=https://photos.google.com
```

Click Next and give the shortcut a name. You now have a Desktop icon that opens Google Photos like a Desktop app. Try it with other URLs such as Gmail, Drive and Outlook.



Create Desktop shortcuts to make websites open like Desktop apps

Safe browsing and email

One of best things about Mozilla's Firefox browser and Thunderbird email software is the large number of available add-ons. However, you may occasionally find one that causes problems you can't fix.

As with the Office tip above, running Firefox in Safe mode disables add-ons, hardware acceleration, third-party toolbar items, themes and other

extras, which may stop the problem occurring. Once in Safe mode, you can fix the source of the problem, such as by removing a bad plugin. Press Windows+R and type one of the following, then press Enter:

```
firefox -safe-mode
thunderbird -safe-mode
```

Open tab sets in Firefox

Most Firefox command-line options are aimed at developers but there are a few simple ones, such as the command to open the browser with several open tabs. Press Windows+R and type `firefox url url` (where each 'url' is a website address), then press Enter. For example, to open Firefox with Bing, Yahoo and Google on tabs, press Windows+R and type:

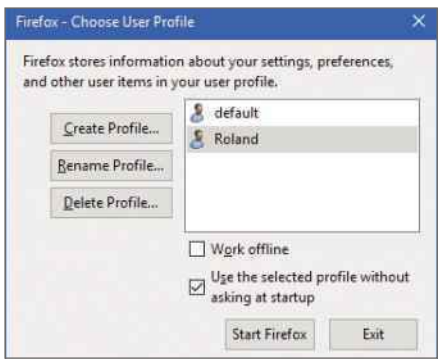
```
firefox www.bing.com www
.yahoo.com www.google.com
```

This makes it possible to create Desktop shortcuts that open your favourite sets of tabs. Right-click the Desktop and select New, Shortcut. Click Browse and find Firefox – try C:\Program Files (x86)\Mozilla Firefox\firefox.exe. Place the cursor at the end and add the URLs with a space between each one. Click Next, enter the shortcut name and click Finish. You can create other shortcuts for different tab sets.

Use profiles in Firefox

Your Firefox profile is a bit like a user account and stores your bookmarks, startup page, settings and more. You can have more than one, so one profile could be for work and another for personal web browsing, each with different bookmarks and settings.

Close Firefox and open the Profile Manager by pressing Windows+R and typing `firefox -p` then pressing Enter. Rename the default and call it Personal. Then click Create Profile and name it Work. To start Firefox with a profile, press Windows+R and enter `firefox -p ProfileName`. As with our other tips, you could create a Desktop shortcut for each profile.



Create Firefox profiles for different uses, such as work and personal

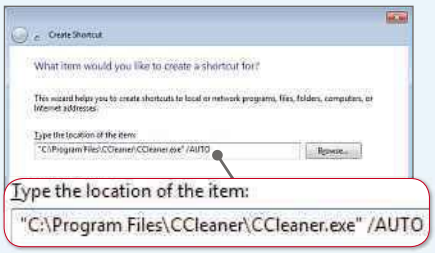
TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

More advanced tips for when you're feeling brave

Clean Windows with a click

You can set CCleaner (www.piriform.com/ccleaner) to remove junk files and various program and browsing histories automatically, with a single command. Auto mode uses the current default settings, so just use CCleaner normally at least once and configure the cleaning options.

The best way to use the command-line options is to create a Desktop shortcut. Right-click the Desktop and select New, Shortcut. Click Browse and find CCleaner in C:\Program Files or C:\Program Files (x86). Add a space to the end of the line and type `/AUTO` to run it silently and quit afterwards. To shut down Windows afterwards, add `/AUTO /SHUTDOWN`. Click Next, then name the shortcut and click Finish.



Create a shortcut with a command to run CCleaner in the background

Defragment your hard drive

Defraggler is a disk defragmenter from the developer of CCleaner (www.piriform.com). You can control it via the point-and-click interface or from the command line. Create a Desktop shortcut and add the drive or folder to defrag, plus options such as:

```
"C:\Program Files\Defraggler\
Df.exe" C:\Windows
"C:\Program Files\Defraggler\
Df.exe" C:\  /shutdown
"C:\Program Files\Defraggler\
Df.exe" C:\  /large
"C:\Program Files\Defraggler\
Df.exe" C:\  /fs
```

Adding `/shutdown` shuts down the PC afterwards; `/large` moves large files to the end of its hard drive for extra speed; and `/fs` reduces the free space fragments.

Use Windows Defender commands

When Windows Defender is run from the command prompt, it provides access to various extra functions. To see them, right-click the Start button in Windows 10 and select Command Prompt (Admin). Type:

```
cd "C:\Program Files\Windows
Defender"
MpCmdRun -h
```

This changes to the Windows Defender folder and then displays Help information using `-h`. It looks intimidating at first but it's actually quite simple. To perform a quick scan of the PC for viruses, type `MpCmdRun -Scan ScanType 1`. Replace the 1 with a 2 for a full scan. To check for new virus definition updates, enter `MpCmdRun -SignatureUpdate`.

Try advanced Chrome commands

Dozens of commands can be used when starting Chrome. Most are aimed at developers, but some are useful for all users. For example, if Chrome blocks old plugins, press Windows+R and type `chrome --allow-outdated-plugins`. If a web page won't display because it has mixed secure and insecure content, use `chrome --allow-running-insecure-content`. To run a series of diagnostic tests to see if Chrome is okay, type `chrome --diagnostics`.

Type `chrome://flags` in the address box to see hidden settings, some of which are experimental. If any you've changed are causing problems, press Windows+R and type `chrome --no-experiments` to disable them. Return to Chrome Flags and use the button at the top to reset everything back to the default.

To start Chrome full screen, type `chrome --start-maximized`. To make the window a specific size, use `chrome --window-size=800,600` where the numbers show the width and height in pixels. To position the Chrome window, type `chrome --window-position=50,0` where the numbers are the x,y coordinates.

To finish, try combining everything we've learned about Chrome. For example, to start Gmail as its own app, in an 800 x 600 window, 50 pixels in and 50 down, type:

```
chrome --app=https://mail
.google.com --window-
size=800,600 --window-
position=50,50
```

That's too long to type every time so you should create a shortcut by replacing 'chrome' with the full path.

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

HARDWARE

Find a driver for an old printer

Q I'd like to use my Epson AcuLaser C1100 printer with my Windows 10 computer, but I can't find a suitable printer driver. The Epson site says it's an old printer, so there's no driver for Windows 10. It suggests using an alternate driver but doesn't say which one. Windows Update couldn't help me either. Where can I get a suitable printer driver?

Peter Scandle, via email

A Plug the printer into the PC using a USB cable, then open Settings (Windows+i) and click Devices. Select 'Printers & scanners' and click 'Add a printer or scanner' to see if Windows can find a driver. Sometimes a driver

Plug in a printer and Windows will often find a compatible driver automatically

for a similar printer will work when the exact model isn't available, or the driver will offer only basic printing without any extra features.

If Windows can't find a suitable driver, try visiting Epson's software page for the AcuLaser C1100, which you'll find at bit.ly/epso437. It was last updated in 2004, however, so it may not be much help.

GENERAL PC

Go back to Windows XP

Q I've been trying to buy a new PC with Windows XP installed, or to downgrade one of my existing PCs to XP, but with no luck. I always liked Windows XP because I understood it and found it easy to use. The systems I have now are alien to me. I don't want to have to go on a course to learn how to use a new operating system when there's a perfectly good one I'd rather stick with.

William Henderson, via email

A New PCs running Windows XP are rare, but there are still second-hand and refurbished PCs available that have XP installed. An obvious place to look is eBay. When we searched for `Windows XP PC`, we found dozens of models, some selling for as little as £50.

Amazon offers a good selection of XP computers, too. Go to either the desktop or laptop PC section and search for `Windows XP`. Most are second-hand, but some have been refurbished and a few are new. Most of them are very cheap, too, because they use old hardware.

However, you may have trouble finding software that runs on XP, because many programs now require at least Windows 7. Windows 10 is quite different to XP but it's not difficult to use. It's worth getting a modern PC or laptop and spending some time getting to know the new operating system, because Microsoft no longer supports XP and sooner or later it will stop working completely.

BROWSERS

Allow Flash to run if necessary

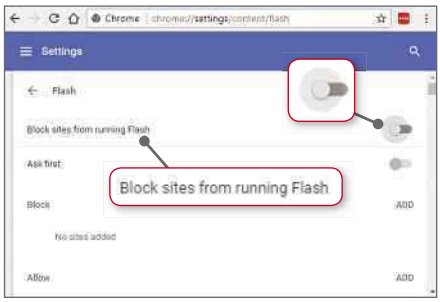
Q My Windows 10 laptop sometimes shows the following message: "Something missing on the page. To help you stay safe, we've blocked Adobe Flash. Click here to turn it on." There's a 'Got it' button I can press. What do I do?

Darren, via email

A Flash used to be a very popular technology for adding videos, games and other multimedia elements to web pages. Today its use has declined dramatically, and web browsers disable it by default because of security issues.

You can safely ignore messages about Flash because most of the web works perfectly well without it. If you really need it, go to the menu in Chrome, choose Settings and click Advanced. Under 'Privacy and security' click 'Content Settings', then click Flash. The 'Allow sites to run Flash' switch at the top lets you choose whether to block Flash or allow it to run. If you allow it, enable the option to 'Ask first'.

We generally suggest blocking Flash, but if a website you frequently visit needs it, click the Add button to the right of Allow and add the URL.



Use this switch in Chrome's settings to choose whether or not to let Flash run

SOFTWARE

Access WinUtilities' free tools

Q I've tried using the 'free' WinUtilities 15 program mentioned in Best Free Software, Issue 428 (bit.ly/webuser428) a number of times. On each occasion, a box has appeared at the bottom of every page asking for a licence number and code.

When I click Maintenance, for example, I see a list of things the program can do, but with crosses beside each one. I assume that if I were to enter a valid licence number and code, the crosses would disappear and the program would run. It's very frustrating.

Derek Wellings, via email

A There are two versions of the program, so make sure you have the free one. Go to 'Programs and Features' in the Control Panel and uninstall WinUtilities. Then go to hi.ylcomputing.com, click Products, WinUtilities Free and Download.

Close this confusing nag window by clicking the X in the top-right corner to continue to WinUtilities Free Edition

When you run WinUtilities Free Edition, it tries to get you to buy or register the full program. This nag screen is confusing, but to continue to the free program, all you have to do is click the Close button in the top-right corner. You can only access the basic maintenance modules and AutoCare settings for free, but it's still useful.

SECURITY

Fix the Store app after CCleaner malware

Q I have an HP Stream laptop. When I tried to use CCleaner, I got an error message, which I suspect was due to the recent hack. I updated CCleaner as suggested, then ran a full scan using Windows Defender. It found Win32/Floxif, which I deleted. I then installed Malwarebytes (www.malwarebytes.com) but that only found a Potentially Unwanted Program (PUP), which I got rid of. I also ran `sfc` but found nothing.

However, ever since the problem appeared, I've been unable to access any of my installed apps, including Store. I've tried various solutions suggested online but without success. I tried 10AppsManager (bit.ly/apps437), which helped me delete and reinstall several apps, but I still can't get the Store to open. What should I do?

M Farnsworth, via email

Run the troubleshooters in the Settings app to solve problems

A Win32/Floxif is indeed the malware that found its way into CCleaner, so your PC was definitely infected. Windows Defender detects and removes it, but running Malwarebytes as a precaution was a good idea. Microsoft Safety Scanner (bit.ly/msss437) is another tool you could have used, but your PC should be clean by now.

Your problem with the Windows Store and apps may or may not be related. People were having trouble with the Store long before the CCleaner incident. There isn't a single fix – it's one of those problems where you just have to try a few different things and see if they work.

Press Windows+R, type `wsreset.exe` (a Windows Store Reset tool) and press Enter. Click the clock on the right of the taskbar and make sure it's set to the correct time and date. Click Start, Administrative Tools, then Disk Clean-up. Click 'Clean up system files'. After the scan, tick every option and clean the hard drive.

Press Windows+i to open Settings, then click 'Update & security', followed by Troubleshoot on the left. Finally, click the following items to run their troubleshooters: Internet Connections, Windows Update, Incoming Connections and Windows Store Apps.

GENERAL PC

Force Windows 10 to install Fall Creators Update

Q I haven't got the Windows 10 Fall Creators Update on either of my computers. How long do I have to wait? Can I speed up the process?

Darren, via email

A Microsoft sends updates to the most compatible computers first, leaving the most difficult PCs until last. An incompatibility may be preventing the installation of the Creator's Update, but you can download and install it manually.

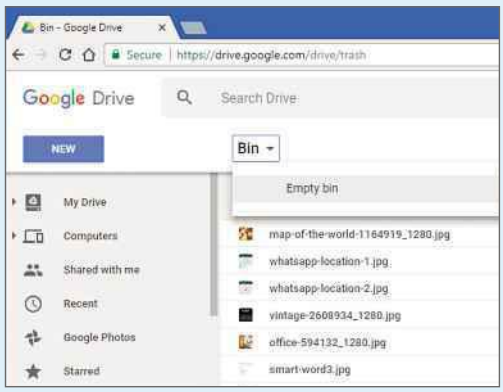
Go to the Microsoft Windows 10 Download page at bit.ly/fcu437 and you'll see two options. Click 'Update now' and see what happens. If it can't upgrade the PC, click the 'Download tool now' button to download a utility that creates an installation DVD or USB flash drive. You can then use this to upgrade the PC. There are comprehensive instructions on the download page.

EMAIL

Recover space on Google Drive

Q I use all Google's services, including Drive, Gmail and Photos, but I'm nearing the limit of my free storage allowance. Is there anything I can do, other than paying for extra storage?

S Browne, via email



Empty the bin on Google Drive to free up space

A Yes, there are several things you can do to recover storage space. The first is to go to drive.google.com and click Bin on the left. Click Bin at the top, then select 'Empty bin'. Deleted files remain in the bin forever, using up valuable storage, so emptying it can free up a lot of space, especially if you've never done this before.

Go to Gmail and, in the search box at the top, type `has:attachment` and press Enter. This lists all emails that have file attachments. These can take up a lot of space, so go to the last page with the oldest emails and start deleting. Afterwards, click More on the left, then Bin. Select all the deleted emails and empty the Bin.

This fortnight Roland bought a new USB hard drive and has been testing different backup programs

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

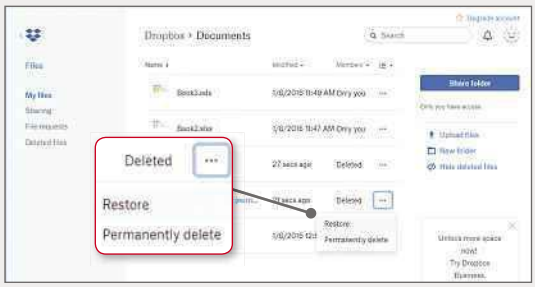
Mug winner

ONLINE STORAGE

Recover deleted Dropbox files

Dropbox is my favourite online service. I've put a folder on my PC Desktop that syncs with my online storage, and I use this folder to store files I'm working on. If a file is deleted in Dropbox, it's moved to the Recycle Bin on my PC. If I need to recover a file I've previously deleted, this is always a good place to look.

If it's not there, it may be online. Log into www.dropbox.com in a browser, click Files on the left, then click 'Deleted files'. This lists all the files that have been deleted in the past 30 days. Even if a file was deleted on your PC and emptied from the Recycle Bin, it can be recovered on Dropbox.



Nothing is irretrievably deleted from Dropbox – at least not for 30 days

When viewing your files on the Dropbox site, there is another link on the right to 'Show deleted files'. It shows only the deleted files in the current folder. Click the three-dot menu button for options to restore or permanently delete a file.

Gary Lee, via email

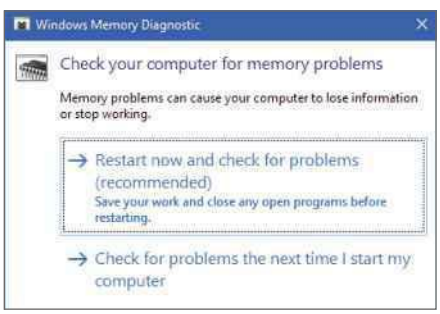
GENERAL PC

Check your memory

While exploring the Start menu in Windows 10, I found an item called Windows Memory Diagnostic. If you expand Windows Administrative Tools, it's the last item in that section. It checks the PC's memory for problems and when it is run, you are given two options: 'Restart now and check for problems' and 'Check for problems the next time I start my computer'.

If you are having problems with your PC, it might be useful to try this tool and see if it reports anything.

Lisa Dowling, via email



Use this Windows tool to check the memory in your PC

MOBILE

Remove breaking news from Samsung

My Samsung phone was constantly sending me notifications of 'Breaking news' from an app called UpDay that I couldn't even find on my phone. There's an option to switch off these updates in the settings but it doesn't stay switched off for very long. Eventually, I found the way to switch it off. Go to Settings, Notification, Advanced, then select 'Show system apps'. Look for the UpDay app in the long list, tap it, then disable the notification and in the new screen, disable the notification again.

Paul Raymon, via email

E-READERS

Manage Kindle loans

I currently have a three-month free Kindle Unlimited trial, which lets me borrow 10 books at a time. I have to return any I've read if I want more, but it's not easy to tell which ebooks are the borrowed ones and which are my other Kindle books. The best way to sort them is to go to 'Manage Content and Devices' and sort by 'Borrows'. Then only Kindle Unlimited and Prime loans are displayed.

Amazon lets you borrow books on your Kindle

FratPark, via Web User Forums

GENERAL PC

More thorough cleaning

You can use Disk Cleanup to remove junk, caches, logs and other files that you no longer need, but there's a Registry tweak that makes it even more efficient. Usually, the tool deletes temporary files more than seven days old, but you can reduce this to clean more often. Press Windows+R, type `regedit` to open the Registry Editor, then press Enter. Go to:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\VolumeCaches\Temporary Files

Find and double-click LastAccess and change the 7 to 6, 5 or 4 (days).

To launch Disk Cleanup in Windows 10, click Start and find the Windows Administrative Tools menu. In Windows 7 it's on Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools.

Paul Hart, via email

SOFTWARE

Trim back the Ditto clipboard

I use Ditto (bit.ly/ditt437) to save multiple clipboard items at a time. You can set Ditto to clear items after a certain time, but I often have so many saved that I prefer to clear them earlier.

Keep your Ditto Clipboard tidy by removing non-essential clippings

An individual item can be deleted by clicking the text, right-clicking the mouse and selecting Delete. For multiple items, use Shift+click to highlight the items, then right-click and select Delete.

Joel Lynch, via email

GENERAL PC

Speed up boot time

A relative recently asked me why it was taking longer and longer to start her Windows 10 computer. In trying to get to the bottom of the problem, I began with her Startup items, which I explored by right-clicking the taskbar and selecting Task Manager. On an older PC, you have to press Windows+R, type `msconfig` and press Enter.

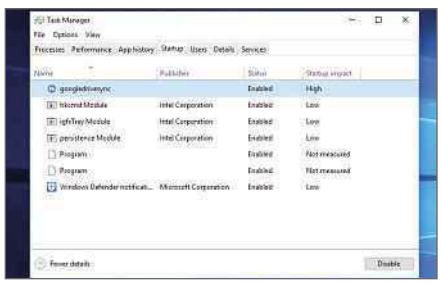
I explained that a lot of software likes to launch as soon as the PC has started and that it generally does this unless you explicitly stop it from happening, though some programs give you the option to choose when you install them.

She also had some programs that didn't need to launch on startup at all, including printers, cameras and scanners.

We unticked most of them and this alone greatly reduced her startup time. For a few items that I was unsure about, a quick Google search provided advice on whether they were needed.

Be careful, though, because security tools and software related to networking should remain enabled.

tornado, via Web User Forums



Stop programs starting with Windows by using the Task Manager's Startup tab

GENERAL PC

Get a Cortana switch

I suspect I'm in a minority but I quite like donning my headset and barking orders at Cortana. If I'm just surfing the web or mucking about on my PC, I find it can save me typing, which is great because I'm not particularly good at it. However, I also value my privacy and know that having Cortana listening out for me all the time isn't generally considered a good idea.

Having spent some time researching this, I've found a useful program called Cortana Switch, which lets you switch Cortana on or off at the press of a button. Turning it off disables it right down into the Registry, so you know it's been done properly.

You can download Cortana Switcher from the author's GitHub page at bit.ly/cosw437.

Bobby Lyons, via email

SOFTWARE

Time for a timer

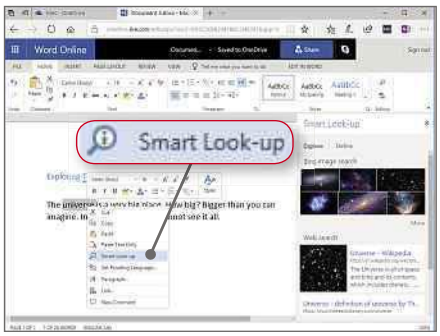
I've got a timer on my phone but for those occasions when I don't have my phone to hand, I use my PC. I've found a great portable timer that's free to download called Hourglass (bit.ly/hg437). It looks basic but it actually has a lot of great options. You can use it to count down to a specific time, enter a duration in words rather than punching in numbers, and pause and resume the timer any time you like.

Ben Grayson, via email

OFFICE

Look up words in Word

I ditched my PC's installed version of Microsoft Office and now use Word Online (onedrive.live.com). I like the useful feature for looking up words while you are writing. Select a word in the document, right-click it and choose 'Smart Look-up' in the menu that



Use the Smart Look-up feature for research and definitions in Word Online

appears. It opens a panel on the right with two tabs: Explore and Define. The Define tab shows the dictionary definition, while the Explore tab shows a variety of content and often includes Wikipedia entries, web and image search results, and more.

There are lots of links that open pages in new tabs. Smart Look-up is great for researching topics I'm writing about or for checking words I'm not sure about.

Neil Greenall, via email

SOFTWARE

Try this Visio alternative

I was looking for an alternative to Microsoft's flowchart software Visio (bit.ly/vis437), so I could make an attractive map of my home network. In the process, I came across a website that suggested using PowerPoint with clipart, and linked to a wonderful selection of computing-related clipart at bit.ly/nca437.

I accept that it is not as clean and crisp as Visio but for the home user who just wants to have a diagram that helps to keep track of their network, it's a good alternative.

Barry Singleton, via email

BLUNDER OF THE FORTNIGHT

CHROME OS

Switching between Chrome accounts

I have a Chromebook that I like to use while I'm sitting in front of the TV because it's light, quick to start and the battery lasts ages between charges. However, I have different Google accounts for home and work and I was having to sign out of Chromebook, then back in as my other identity, if I wanted to switch between them. This isn't a problem in Windows because you can have different Chrome windows signed into different accounts.

I mentioned how convoluted this was to a colleague and they pointed out that if I launched an incognito window, I could log into another Google account and it wouldn't affect the other window!

This was a total revelation. I now regularly have both accounts open at once and save bags of time going back and forth between them.

David Norton, via email

Have you managed to fix a PC-related disaster?
If so, please send your story to webuser@dennis.co.uk

WebUser Reader Offer

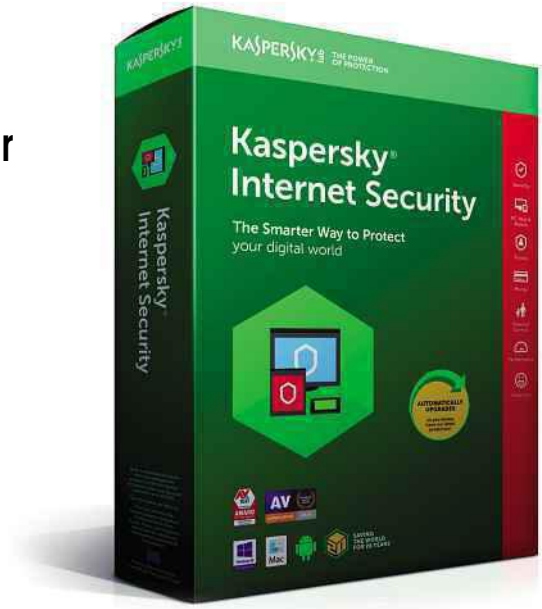
OFFER OF THE FORTNIGHT

Kaspersky Internet Security 2018 - on sale now

Our sister title *Computeractive* is now selling the 2018 edition of the award-winning antivirus Kaspersky Internet Security at a special discount for readers

WHAT'S NEW IN KASPERSKY 2018:

- ✓ Blocks infections that strike as your PC boots
- ✓ Improved notifications for hacked websites
- ✓ Faster startup and update times
- ✓ Stops viruses modifying files on your computer



SINCE WINDOWS 10 LAUNCHED 15,870 READERS HAVE BOUGHT KASPERSKY SOFTWARE FROM THE SOFTWARE STORE

One PC for one year **NOW ONLY £19.99***

Normally £34.99

Buy it on our Software Store at bit.ly/kaspersky1pc

Three PCs for two years **NOW ONLY £39.99**

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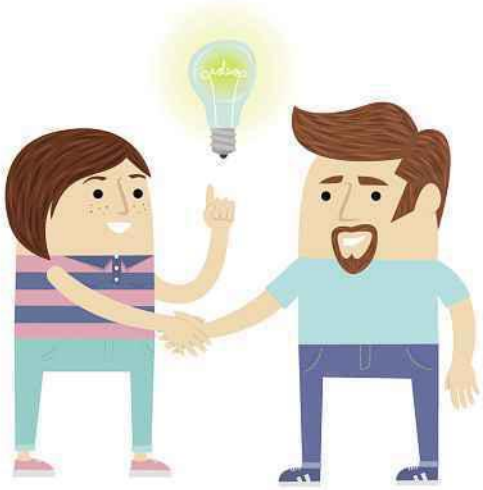
WINNER OF THE PAST EIGHT COMPUTERACTIVE ANTIVIRUS TESTS



Readers' Helpdesk

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

SECURITY

Has CCleaner Trojan removed restore points?

Q I unknowingly downloaded the infected CCleaner (www.piriform.com) update, back when it was in circulation, and then didn't use my computer for several weeks. When I switched it back on again, I still didn't know about Floxif (the Trojan that snuck into a version of CCleaner but has since been patched) and updated my security software as part of my regular routine

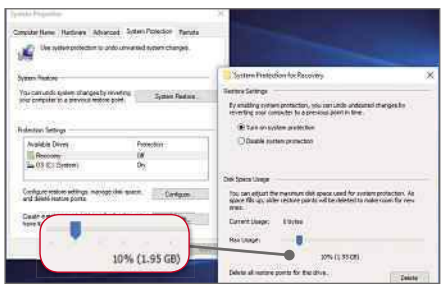
The new update for CCleaner is supposed to fix the problem but when I scanned with Malwarebytes, it found Floxif. I quarantined it and removed it with Malwarebytes, and uninstalled CCleaner. Malwarebytes also created a new restore point.

My computer is relatively new, so I thought it would be a good idea to go back to the system restore point I created when I first got it. However, that's now missing and the only restore point present is the one created by Malwarebytes after removing Floxif.

Flower, Web User Forums

A I honestly don't think you need to reset Windows. Even if your PC picked up Floxif via the rogue copy of CCleaner, the server that it connected with was quickly disabled, so it doesn't pose a threat. Installing the latest copy of CCleaner will correct any problem and in most cases, Malwarebytes will remove it.

As for the restore points, it may be that you have insufficient space to store them.



Give your restore points enough space so older ones don't have to be deleted

Type `system restore` into the search box and select 'Create a restore point'. In System Properties under the System Protection tab, click Configure. Make sure that Disk Space Usage is set to a suitable size. I set it at 10% to allow plenty of room for multiple restore points.

Scrimper, Web User Forums

SECURITY

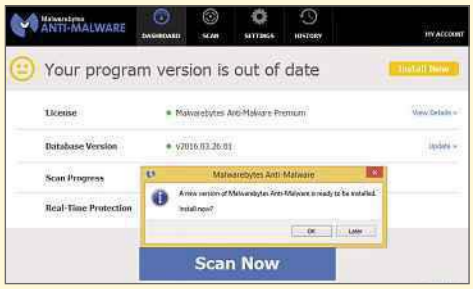
Should I update Malwarebytes?

Q I have Malwarebytes version 2.2.1.1043 (www.malwarebytes.com) installed as an 'on-demand' scanner. I use it every two weeks as part of my housekeeping regime.

Pop-up windows have started to appear, recommending that I install a newer version, but I am loath to click the button in case I lose this version, which I know works and doesn't clash with my other security programs.

The strange thing is that I have the paid-for version of v.2.2.1.1043 installed on a laptop, which shows the message 'Your computer is fully protected' with no prompts to update anything.

Roy, Web User Forums



Try the new version of Malwarebytes. If you don't like it, you can revert to an older one

A To be on the safe side, you should ignore the pop-up message and download the free version directly from Malwarebytes at bit.ly/mwb437. If you don't like it, you can go back to the version you currently have by uninstalling version 3, rebooting your PC, and downloading and installing the older version from bit.ly/dlmb437.

Note that this is a direct link to the installable file of version 2.2.1.1043, which will immediately prompt you to choose a location to save the installation file to.

Cantrel and Madeline, Web User Forums

NETWORKING

Why does my Wi-Fi keep disconnecting?

Q My laptop's Wi-Fi keeps disconnecting, despite having the 'Connect automatically' box ticked. Each time I have to reconnect from the settings. Why is this happening?

Grumpy Old Man, Web User Forums

A The next time your web connection fails, take a look at the router. Does it still have its lights on? Connect to the router using an Ethernet cable and see if the problem continues. Make a note of whether your connection drops at a particular time of day, or after a set period of time using it. This might help you figure out what the problem is.

It may be that your Wi-Fi channel is just too busy. Download the free version of inSSIDer3 (bit.ly/ins437) and, when the right pane populates, click Networks. Use the Link Score to find the least busy channel and switch to that instead. Your router's channel setting may be set to Auto, which can also cause problems.

Wireless disconnects can also be due to interference from another device, such as an electrical appliance or cordless-phone base. Cordless phones usually operate around channel 1, so use inSSIDer3 to find a better channel.

Cantrel, Web User Forums

See if your router could be better set to a different channel using InSSIDer

Inbox

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

Star Email

Mug winner

Can we trust Amazon couriers with our keys?

Having experienced many problems with courier deliveries, I have mixed feelings about Amazon's new Amazon Key idea (Need to Know, Issue 436), which allows couriers into your home to drop off packages. On the one hand, it would mean less chance of the parcel being stolen from outside your front door, chucked carelessly over your garden fence or left exposed to the elements. On the other hand, it means allowing a complete stranger into your home, either when you're not there or – perhaps even worse – when you *are* there, but don't hear the doorbell because you're in the bathroom or asleep.

I'm sure couriers must be required to pass stringent security checks before they're recruited but there is still the risk that they could steal something, intrude on your privacy or fail to shut your front door securely when they leave.

Amazon says it will prevent such problems by letting you monitor the delivery remotely using a camera, but no such technology is completely reliable – internet connections drop, notifications fail to appear and streaming video buffers – so you may miss the moment when the misdemeanour occurs. I also wonder if the camera evidence would be admissible in a criminal investigation if one were to occur, because surely there are laws about recording people without their prior permission?

I'm not saying that couriers can't be trusted, merely that I would personally need more reassurance before handing over my door keys to Amazon.

Elizabeth Kent, via email

Manners should come before phones

In reply to your Star Email in Issue 434 from Humbert in San Antonio, as a grandad who has embraced the 21st Century and has two grandchildren of seven and nine, Humbert's comments seem to me very old fashioned. They seem to imply that most grandparents cannot or will not grasp technology for the sake of conversation with their grandchildren.

However, I also feel that children should be taught in the first place that it's rude to ignore people and that texting at the table is bad manners. Children are in danger of losing the art of conversation and the ability to interact with their fellow humans, as well as how to spell.

If a grandparent is in the company of a grandchild, it would be nice if they could converse with that child and not have to compete to get their attention. Of course, children and their parents should embrace new technology but please let's leave some space for all ages to relate to one another.

Humbert, if you wish to go down this road, by all means go there but at the end of the day, the children will not respect you unless you stand some ground and show them that it takes more than texting to make a good world.

Terry Bradley, Milton Keynes

My favourite Android launcher

Interesting article on launchers in Issue 435. The best launcher I've found for Android TV is Launcher+ (bit.ly/launcherplus437). It's faster and more

Quiz Answers: Issue 436

1. *Treasure Island*
2. *Watership Down*
3. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*
4. *The Cat in the Hat*
5. *The Water Babies*
6. *The Jungle Book*

WINNER!
Well done to **Michael Boardman** who wins a Web User mug

WORD PUZZLE
Document

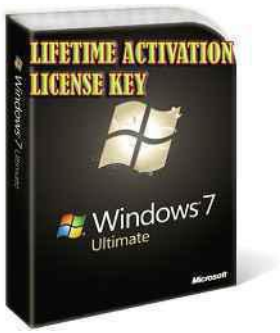
flexible than the others I've tried. Hola and Nova are also good. I'm not as keen on Microsoft Launcher because you can't get many icons on the screen.

betty, Web User Forums

Don't buy software licence keys on eBay

In 2016, I bought a Windows 7 licence key on eBay. It worked perfectly so I gave the seller top rating. This year, my computer suddenly started saying that the key was invalid. Surprised, I contacted Microsoft, who confirmed that this was the case.

I emailed the seller (three times) and they eventually informed me that the licence key expired after one year. I replied that nowhere in their eBay listing did it indicate that the key would expire. Why would I buy one that expires? They have not responded.



I tried to raise the issue online with eBay, but because it was a "digital download", there is no capability to do so. I rang eBay and they said I should have raised the matter within 30 days. But how could I when I only realised after a year that the item was not as advertised? They suggested that I contact my bank and get a refund.

I find eBay's attitude highly disappointing and, meanwhile, this seller has a top rating (which cannot be changed), enticing more buyers. You may trot out the old cliché: "If a bargain seems too good to be true, it probably is". But the whole point of eBay is that you can get great bargains. Over the years, I've found many bargains and had no problems, until now.

So if anyone is thinking of buying a software key, I would advise them not to – at least until eBay and the dodgy sellers get their act together. You probably won't have any recourse when things go horribly wrong.

Richard Bale, via email

What you say...

APPLE'S IPHONE X IS NOW ON SALE – FOR £999! ARE YOU SAVING UP FOR IT?

I would buy it if the iPhone came out every two or three years, but *yearly*? £1,000 for a phone is crazy.

Cunningham Hutchison *@MrChutchy*

Just no. Current phone cost £130 and it (just about) does the job.

Nat Grove

I didn't spend much more than that on my last computer, which is considerably more powerful, although not quite so portable.

Lee Dodgson

I wouldn't spent £2.50 on an iPhone.

Gary McPherson *@gsmcpherson682*

THE NHS HAS LAUNCHED VIDEO CONSULTATIONS WITH GPs ON PHONES (bit.ly/nhs437). A GOOD IDEA?

Not sure about that. They could miss something vitally important if they couldn't see the patient properly.

Iori *@gadgetgal16*

If ever anything is going to be abused then this must be a prime candidate. The usual suspects will complain about headaches.

Geoffrey Boow

Great idea. It will mean not going out of the house when feeling ill and a better chance of talking to a GP who specialises in mental health.

Lewis Karl Flood *@LewisKFlood*

I don't think I would be comfortable doing this. I usually only go to the doctor for something that would require an examination or test.

Val Young

THE BBC NEWS SITE RECENTLY CELEBRATED ITS 20TH BIRTHDAY (bit.ly/bbc437). HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT IT?

On a daily basis. I prefer to look at it on a mobile browser rather than on the app.

Martin Phillp

It's great, but I miss the days when they had a dedicated Desktop page. The responsive site isn't great on a big screen.

Chris Armstrong

Never. The Licence Fee is the biggest rip-off going and is forced on mugs in the UK by bullies.

Paul Adrian

Every day. Been there since the start. When I was first on the net, there were no pictures or videos, just text and the occasional MIDI file.

Gavin Green

SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT DO MORE TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO TAKE COMPUTING GCSE (bit.ly/gcse437)?

No. Those who can will be way ahead anyway. To those who can't (like me), it's like trying to understand ancient Greek. Better to put the resources into ensuring every 16-year-old can read, write and count.

Iain Kenworthy-Neale

Define 'computing'. It's so nebulous and woolly as to be useless, just like ICT before it.

Mike Hudson

There should be four core subjects – maths, English, science and IT. But subjects should be taught with relevance to the real world, such as taxes and budgeting.

GoCrazyRobin *@David13Robinson*

It's possible as it stands to receive a respectable GCSE without understanding a thing about the "mechanics" of computing.

Richard Morgan

Page 404

Barry Collins says we must stop companies such as Google tracking our every move

Stop encouraging the digital stalkers

If I knocked on your door, told you that I'd followed you to Tesco that morning, knew that you'd been on holiday in the Algarve the week before and proceeded to list every place you'd visited for the past month, you'd call the police. You might punch me in the face first, but you'd definitely call the police.

Google does precisely this to hundreds of millions of people every month, and yet nobody bats an eyelid. I got an email from Google just yesterday entitled 'Your October in Review', which spelled out exactly which cities I've visited, the hotels I stayed in, the pubs I've had a pint in and the stores I've shopped in. If I click a link in the email, I can literally trace my steps to every single place I've been, on any day for the past five years. Go to www.google.com/maps/timeline and you'll probably find your own. Your phone is the best, most dedicated stalker there has ever been.

The weird thing is that, like hundreds of millions of other Android users, I know Google collects all this stuff and I get absolutely nothing back in return. Nothing other than a slightly sinister email showing pictures of all the places I've been to, anyway. How have we been brainwashed into thinking this kind of behaviour is acceptable?

> "Google and the like have convinced us they need this data to keep giving away all this stuff for free, but it's not true"

This is an issue that's been bothering Jon von Tetzchner, the man who developed the Opera web browser many years ago and has now moved on to a new browser called Vivaldi (vivaldi.com). He's spent the past few months trying to get us to wake up to the level of surveillance that we're blithely putting up with.

"I don't think people actually realise the level of scrutiny that we go through, the level of data that's being collected," he told me on a recent visit to London. "Sometimes I become a little bit creepy and ask people: what if I could follow you all the time? Would you mind me standing two feet behind you wherever you go and watch everything that you do on your computer? Do you mind? And obviously everyone says no! That's the level of scrutiny we're under. That information is being used to provide tailored advertisements."

As von Tetzchner pointed out, we've just accepted that this kind of intrusion is necessary – the 'quid pro quo' for getting a free email service such as Gmail, or for Google Maps knowing where you parked your car. Google and the like have convinced us they need this data to keep giving away all this stuff for free, but it's not true. "Our lack of privacy is now a security problem," he said. "If that's the case, shouldn't we get our privacy back? Shouldn't we stop doing this? The internet was working just fine without this level of data collection and without this level of targeting opportunity."

You know what's even more disturbing? When von Tetzchner raised these issues in an interview with *Wired* magazine, Google coincidentally suspended Vivaldi's AdWords account within days and without explanation, essentially cutting off the company's oxygen supply. Google insists the suspension was unrelated and eventually restored Vivaldi's account.

Google seemingly doesn't want people discussing its stalker-like behaviour. You have to wonder why.

Illustration: Andrew Torrens

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

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FOR MORE INFO SEE PAGE 62

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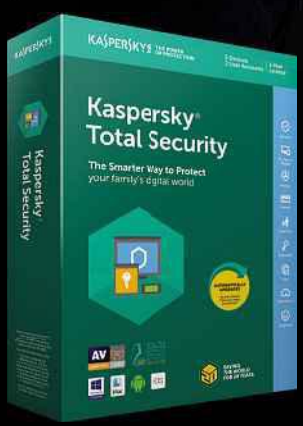

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