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Better than bootlegging!

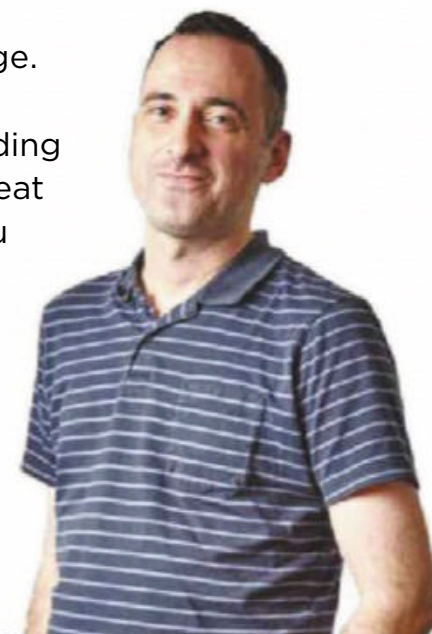
Not so long ago, crafty bootleggers would sneak camcorders into cinemas to covertly capture the films streamed – sorry, projected – in front of them. All very dubious, of course, and usually resulting in shaky, poorly framed recordings, with the on-screen action accompanied by audience coughing, sweet-wrapper rustling and angry ushers bawling out the cameraman.

Fortunately, it's now much easier – and completely legal – to save films and TV shows to watch at your leisure. As we explain in this issue's cover feature, lots of streaming services now let you download their video content to

play offline, so you don't even need an internet connection to sit back and binge.

We reveal how to get the best quality downloads from popular services including BBC iPlayer, Netflix and Now TV, and beat restrictions on how you watch what you save. We also pick the best tools for grabbing videos from sites that don't offer a download option – with not a cough or a rustle to be heard!

Robert Irvine, Editor
editor@webuser.co.uk
[#webuser](https://twitter.com/webuser)



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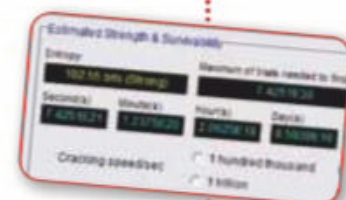
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you want,
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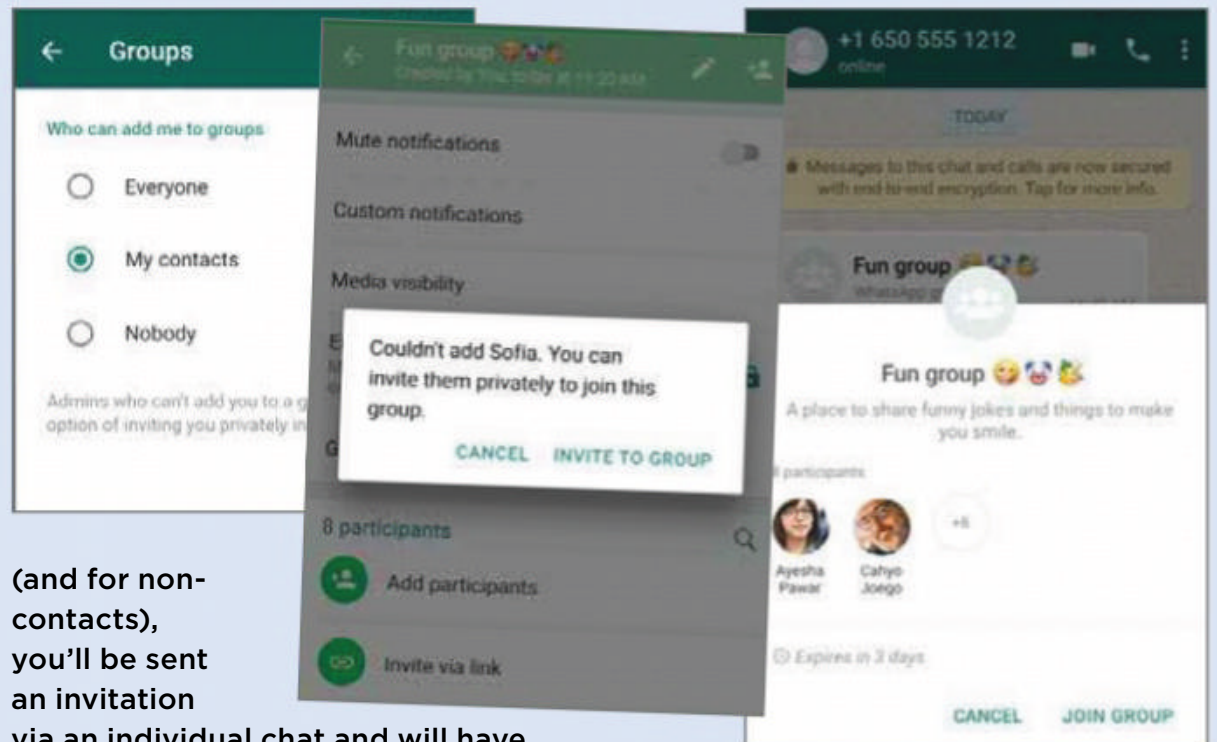


What's New Online

Stop people adding you to WhatsApp groups

Fed up of being added to WhatsApp groups without being asked first? With a new privacy feature, the messaging service is now letting you take back control, giving you the option to receive invites that can be accepted or turned down, rather than allowing anybody to automatically include you.

To activate this feature, open the three-dot menu in the WhatsApp app and tap Settings, Account, Privacy, then the new Groups option. Here you can make your choice between Everyone, My Contacts and Nobody. By default, every WhatsApp user is set to the first option, which means anyone can add you to a group. Select My Contacts if you only want people in your address book to do this, or choose Nobody to insist on giving your consent. In this case



(and for non-contacts), you'll be sent an invitation via an individual chat and will have three days to respond. Naturally, this means you could still be pestered by requests but at least you'll no longer have to actively leave groups you don't want to be part of.

Meanwhile, keep your eyes peeled

for a new dark mode in WhatsApp for Android, which should help soothe your eyes by turning the app dark grey.

www.whatsapp.com

Get insights into pet behaviour

whydocatsanddogs.com

We seem to have an insatiable curiosity for information about our pets. Google is certainly bombarded with questions about cats and dogs and, in its quest to give the purr-fect answers (sorry), the search giant has collaborated with pet

lover Nadieh Bremer on a visual exploration of the most popular queries.

Using Google Trends data to collate the 4,400 most-asked questions about pets that start with the word "why", it lets you indicate whether you're a cat or dog lover (you can select both)

before presenting you with animal likes and dislikes, patterns of behaviour and the different sounds they make. Hovering over any bold text or circles highlights the many questions, while clicking sends you to a Google results page.

Each circle is sized according to the popularity of the question and there are nice tidbits of information along with summaries of the data. It should give you a fascinating insight into your pet's behaviour.



Create your own surround-sound drama

bit.ly/sound474

Realising that many of us have mobile phones, tablets and laptops knocking around, each of which is equipped with its own speakers, the BBC (along with the Universities of Salford, Surrey and Southampton) is encouraging you to build your own surround-sound system.

It has created a 13-minute sci-fi audio drama called The Vostok-K Incident and, while you start the programme on a single

device, you can subsequently load the website on other devices to allow them to act as extra speakers.

This unlocks hidden audio content as well as immersive spatial aspects of the drama and, by indicating where you're placing the extra devices in the room, the sounds will adapt to give you a 360-degree experience. It's all very easy: you'll see a link that lets you click 'Join as additional device' and you pair devices by entering the code you see on screen.



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

View live global flights

bit.ly/flights474

There are many online flight trackers, but few of them use an interactive globe and fewer still are as simple as this new Live Flights tool. It depicts planes as red and blue shapes – the former denoting aircraft flying into one of 10 airports around the world and blue showing those flying away. You can also zoom in and hover over the planes to see more information about them.



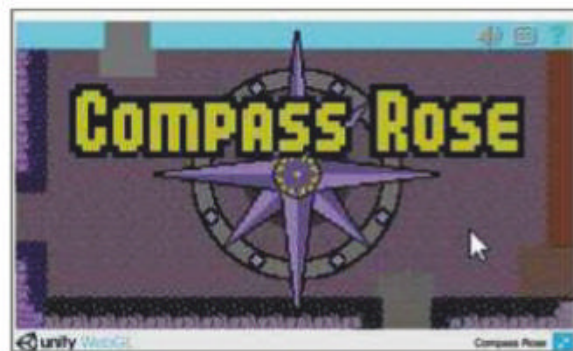
Explore the world of *Game of Thrones*

www.vizofthrones.com

With the eighth and final season of HBO's blockbuster TV hit now airing on Sky Atlantic, you may want to see how the *Game of Thrones* story and characters have fared so far. This map lets you select an episode to explore where the scenes took place. It also lets you see who was involved and whether anyone died or had sex (the likelihood of both being high). Selecting a character in a scene tells you how long they appeared for, and you may be surprised by who has had the most screen time.



Play an online puzzle game



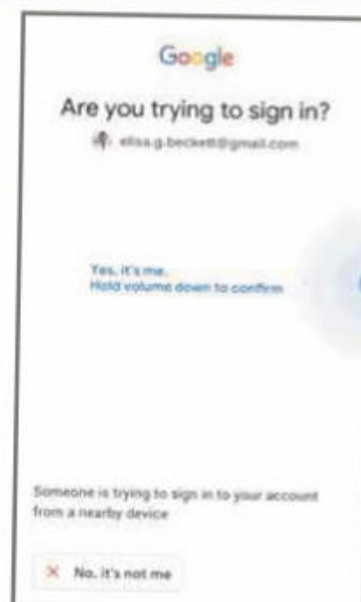
bit.ly/puzzle474

Rather than providing you with a set of rules from the outset like most puzzle games, Compass Rose challenges you to work them out for yourself. As such, the game can be difficult and frustrating, but with lateral thinking and timely use of the built-in hint system, you should find yourself making progress. Playable for free in your browser, the game is based on a set of riddles, the solutions for which let you move from room to room. You can also download all of the game's assets for free and use them in any way you like.

Use your Android phone as a security key

bit.ly/security474

Android smartphones running version 7 (Nougat) or higher now have a built-in security key. This can be used to verify any attempts you make to log into your Google account on a Bluetooth-enabled Chrome OS, macOS or Windows 10 computer. All you have to do to get set up is click Add Security Key in your 2-Step Verification settings and select your phone.



NEW VOICE COMMANDS



Keep up with football

Google Assistant's new Sports Facts skill keeps you up to date with the latest football info. Simply say, for example, "When are [a team] playing," or "what are the Premier League standings".



Use Siri with AirPods

Double-tap one of your Apple AirPods (or say "Hey Siri" on second-gen devices) to adjust the volume, play, pause and skip your music, and check the battery.



Play Apple Music

Open the main menu in the Alexa app, select Skills & Games and search for the new Apple Music skill. Tap Enable, use your Apple ID to sign into your account and you can play your tunes via Alexa.



Share your phone screen on Skype

bit.ly/skype474

If you're signed up to the Skype Insider beta programme, try this new feature for sharing what's on your iOS and Android screen. Just tap the "..." icon, select Share Screen and start your broadcast.

Change your PS4 online ID

bit.ly/ps474

Do you fancy changing your PlayStation Network ID to something snappier? Sign in with your existing ID and select PSN Profile in the menu, then click Edit next to your Online ID and it'll now prompt you for a new one.

See the UK's top takeaways

bit.ly/justeat474

Whether you love Chinese, Indian or pizza, you can now compare your favourite takeaway tuck with others across the UK. Just Eat shows each region's four most popular dishes, linking to its ordering system.

Internet Explorer security flaw puts all Windows users at risk

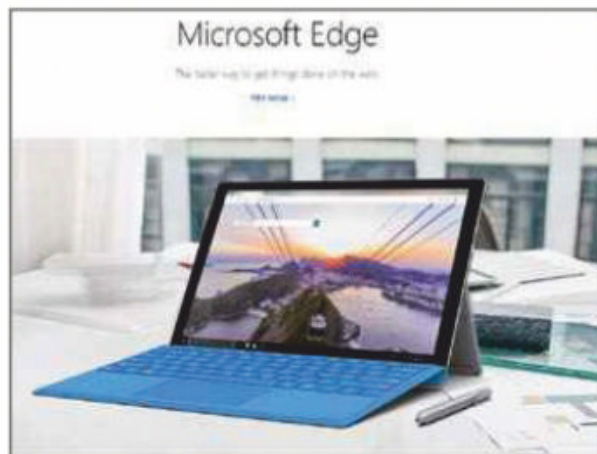
What happened?

A security researcher has released details of a serious flaw in Internet Explorer that could let files be snatched from computers running Windows, even if users never open Microsoft's old browser. The longstanding vulnerability takes advantage of the file format IE uses to store web pages you download: whereas modern browsers save web pages in HTML format, IE uses MHT.

Independent security researcher John Page found a flaw in IE that can be triggered if an MHT file is opened (bit.ly/ieflaw474). This is especially problematic because MHT files open by default in Windows: if one is downloaded or a user clicks a link that directs to one, it will be opened automatically by the operating system, triggering an attack.

Although Internet Explorer is now used by fewer than one in 10 web users, and Microsoft itself now favours its Edge browser, all Windows users could still be vulnerable. If you use Chrome, Firefox or any other browser to click a malicious link and accidentally download a dodgy MHT file, it will still automatically open in IE, unless you've uninstalled Microsoft's old browser from your system.

Microsoft has been told of the flaw, but has opted not to issue an immediate patch, which prompted the researcher to publicly release the details of the vulnerability, to spur the tech giant into action.



Microsoft has encouraged Windows 10 users to ditch Internet Explorer for Edge

How will it affect you?

If a hacker successfully uses this flaw, they could use it to snoop around your system and potentially steal locally stored files. According to John Page, the flaw impacts anyone running Windows 7, Windows 10 or Windows Server 2012 R2, whether or not they use IE as their browser.

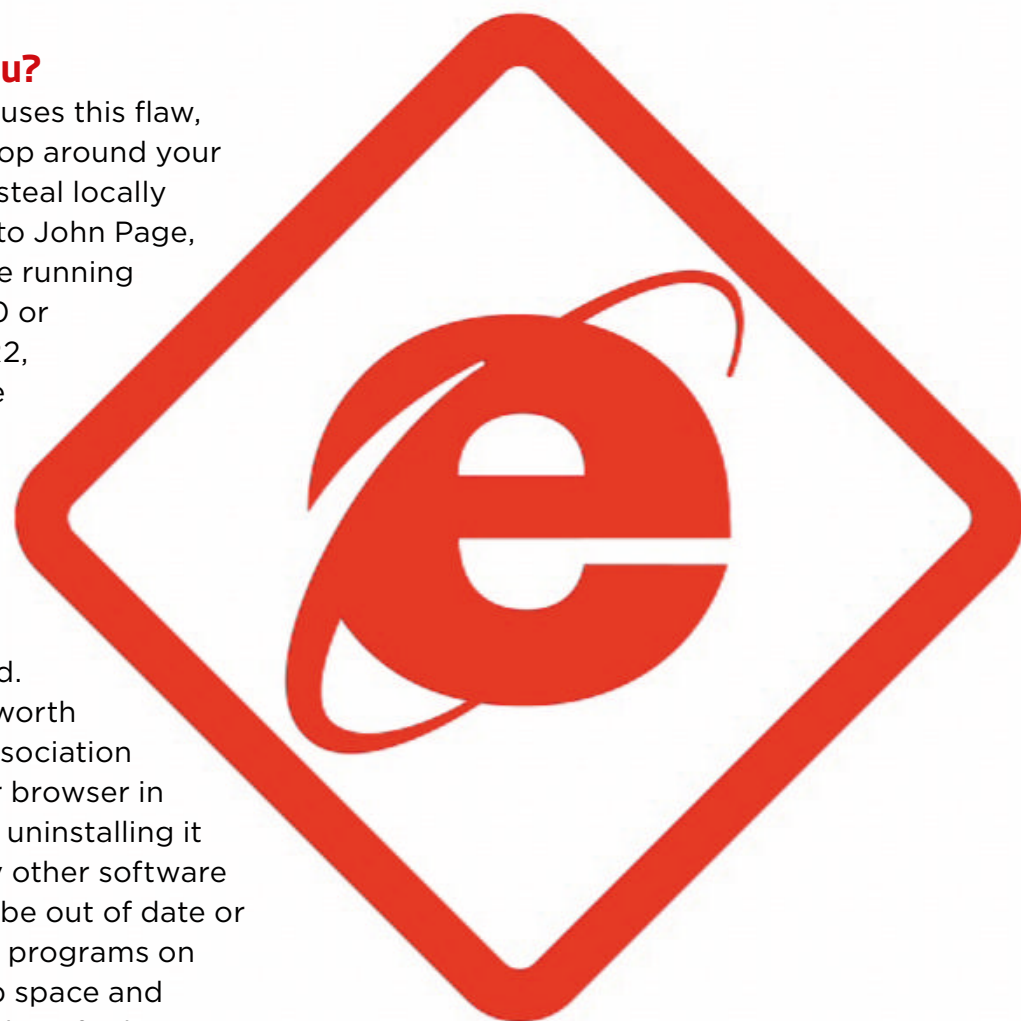
However, for a dodgy MHT file to automatically open on your version of Windows, you would need to have IE installed. If you never use IE, it's worth changing the default association for MHT files to another browser in your settings, or simply uninstalling it – and that's true for any other software you don't use that may be out of date or unpatched. Leaving old programs on your computer takes up space and leaves you at risk of hackers finding a flaw they can exploit.

However, it's worth noting that this flaw was spotted by a security researcher and there's no evidence of it being used by hackers – yet. Also, Microsoft apparently isn't convinced of the threat. It didn't rush out a patch as the researcher hoped when he notified the company, and hasn't said if it will patch the flaw in the future. It might, but there are no plans in the pipeline as yet.

That suggests there's little immediate concern about this bug, though hackers will have read the same reports about this flaw as you now have, and may feel inspired to use it to target Windows computers.

To stay safe, uninstall IE from any PCs that still have it, ensure you're running antivirus or other security software that scans any files downloaded from the internet, and be cautious of email attachments or links that you aren't completely certain are safe.

Such advice is worth following regardless of whether Microsoft ever patches this flaw.



What do we think?

If you are still using Internet Explorer as your main browser, it's now time to find an alternative. There's no reason to have this out-of-date browser on your system, let alone as your main gateway to accessing the web. If you want to stick with Microsoft, use Edge. If you want to avoid Chrome, consider Firefox. There are plenty of options out there that are up to date, modern and secure.

It's easy to criticise Microsoft for not being more attentive and fixing this bug, but the company's response suggests the flaw isn't serious enough to nab the top spot on its to-do list. Microsoft has a good record for issuing patches for major bugs – even for software that no longer receives updates, as was the case when Windows XP was given a security patch after the WannaCry attack.

That said, we hope this flaw gets fixed sooner rather than later, given how many people are still likely to have IE lurking on their computers, even if they've upgraded to a more modern browser.

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

Amazon Prime Video comes to Chromecast

What happened?

For years, Amazon and Google have battled for supremacy in the streaming arena, refusing to work with each other's services. This is why the YouTube app isn't available on the Fire TV platform, and you can't stream Prime Video to Google's Chromecast TV dongle.

However, this impasse is about to end. Within the next few months, Amazon's Fire TV devices will get the official YouTube app, while the Prime Video app for Android will finally add Chromecast support.

How will it affect you?

If you have a Chromecast and a Prime Video account

– which is included with an Amazon Prime subscription – you'll have so far been unable to watch movies and TV shows from the latter via Google's dongle. That meant either shelling out for a Fire TV stick or another smart-TV device supported by Amazon.

Amazon and Google have yet to reveal a specific date for the launch of the apps on their respective platforms, but once released, you'll finally be able to watch YouTube videos on your Fire TV device, or Prime Video on your Chromecast. Later in the year, the YouTube TV and



TV dongles, but to faff about switching between platforms to play the content they'd already paid for. It's ridiculous for companies that make billions in revenue to force this upon TV streaming fans, and both Amazon

and Google are lucky to have avoided the wrath of consumers and regulators for as long as they have.

What do we think?

Perhaps this development could lead to Amazon lifting its ban on other competing Google products, such as the Home smart speakers. It's clear that both Amazon and Google were angling to widen their respective shares of the TV-streaming market. Frustratingly, they did so by forcing customers to not only shell out for multiple smart

YouTube Kids apps will also land on the Fire TV platform.

Google forced to offer Android users a choice of browsers

What happened?

Google revealed the browser ballot screen it will show European users as part of an antitrust ruling where it was fined \$5bn (£3.85bn) by EU regulators for using Android to promote Chrome. The proposed design of the screen has been disputed by rival browser developers who brought the case to the EU, including lobby group FairSearch, so it could be subject to change. Indeed, Google said the ballot was likely to be updated over time, based on user feedback.

How will it affect you?

The browser ballot will not

only be shown on new Android phones, it will also be displayed on all other Android devices used in Europe. The ballot screen will pop up after an update installs the system and Google Play is opened, showing four randomly chosen alternatives to Google's own browser and search bar. The screen allows you to immediately install a new browser and change your default search engine.

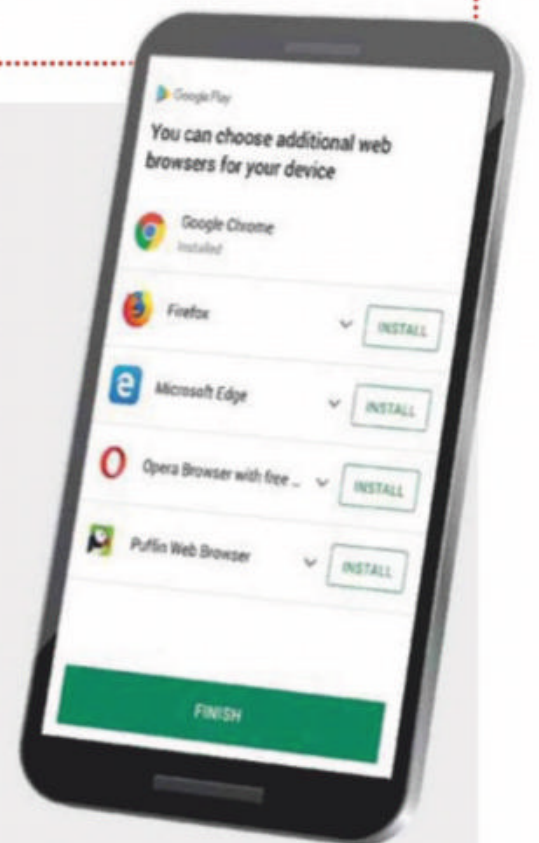
If you're happy using Chrome as a browser and Google for search, you don't need to make any changes because these will remain the default options. If you opt for a different browser, you'll still have Chrome on your device

unless you actively remove it.

What do we think?

It's ironic that Chrome is facing such a browser ballot, when the original idea came from a similar ruling against Microsoft and Internet Explorer. It's unclear how successful that original ballot was; the desktop browser market is no longer dominated by Microsoft, but that's more to do with the popularity of Chrome than any efforts from the EU.

Google's ballot is a bit different to Microsoft's, though similar in that IE was still the default browser for Windows computers, and wasn't automatically deleted when a new one was



installed. While this new ballot isn't likely to budge Chrome from Android dominance, it is a reminder to mobile users that there are plenty of excellent alternatives to Google's browser out there, including Firefox, Brave and Opera.

Charity calls for social-media seizure warnings

What happened?

A growing number of social-media users are suffering epileptic seizures, the Epilepsy Society has claimed (bit.ly/epilepsy474), when flashing images are shared across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

According to Clare Pelham, Chief Executive of the society, while many users share these images without understanding the risks, others are more malicious. She said, “When it comes to deliberately targeting people with epilepsy with the intention of causing a seizure, we need to call that behaviour what it is – a pre-meditated and pre-planned intention to assault.”

These images often feature hashtags related to the neurological disorder, tricking epilepsy sufferers into clicking on videos and images that trigger the condition. Pelham’s charity is demanding that “the government must bring this behaviour within the reach of the criminal law”.

The charity hopes that by writing to Digital Secretary Jeremy Wright now, the government will implement a warning scheme into its ongoing attempt to crackdown on nebulous and ill-defined ‘online harms’.

“We are currently consulting on this,” a government spokesperson said, “and want to hear from the Epilepsy Society, and others, about what steps they

would like to see platforms take to make the internet a safer place.”

While it’s unlikely to offer any comfort to those already targeted, Facebook says it’s looking at new ways to offer a more inclusive online space because “everyone deserves to enjoy the benefits of the internet safely”.



How will it affect you?

The Epilepsy Society reckons that the UK has around 20,000 people suffering from photosensitive epilepsy of the sort triggered by flashing lights and fast-paced imagery, with kids and younger people most affected. If you’re one of them, or know someone who is, it means being extra careful when visiting social-media sites – possibly avoiding them altogether. However, outside of website warnings, the charity’s thinking relies on protection after the event – and that’s no good for those already triggered.

What do we think?

Social-media sites such as Facebook already have policies in place to protect users from abuse (however ineffective they may be). The law, too, prevents this sort of online assault. So, while stronger action may be necessary, we’d rather not resort to the usual bans and arrests that are the hallmark of online regulation these days. A far better alternative would be to do what Facebook does with potentially upsetting images: blur the image, add a warning and let the user decide if they want to click to view.



FIRST LOOK

Amazon Kindle (2019) bit.ly/kindle474

For the purest ebook experience, Amazon’s Kindle has always been the best e-reader. The only real complaint about the entry-level version of the device was that it was too simple compared to the more sophisticated – and more expensive – Paperwhite. Amazon, it seems, has heard those cries and updated its classic e-reader accordingly.

The all-new Kindle (as Amazon is calling it) finally adds a built-in front light for reading day and night. And that’s not all, with the device receiving a Bluetooth upgrade and support for audiobooks from the Amazon-owned Audible. A word of warning, though: with no audio jack, you’ll need to hook up Bluetooth headphones to listen to

them. The updated device feels lighter and, with its smoothed-out edges and bezels, even more comfortable to hold. But despite fancy new internal tools, the core Kindle experience remains unchanged.

The 6in screen with its 256ppi E ink display will be familiar to existing Kindle owners – and while it’s admittedly easier on the eyes than the bright lights of a standard tablet, it lacks the general crisp imagery of its older, pricier counterpart. Old-school fans may be disappointed to see this is yet another touchscreen e-reader, with no satisfying ‘click’ of physical buttons when you ‘turn the page’.

Another drawback is that the all-new



Kindle isn’t as feature-rich as the Paperwhite, which is equipped with five (rather than four) LED front lights, a cellular connection, and IPX8 waterproofing.

For audiophiles, the

real difference comes down to storage, with the Paperwhite loaded with 8GB, compared to the latest Kindle’s 4GB. Likewise, if you’re not fussed about the all-new Kindle’s upgrades, the old eighth-generation Kindle is still £20 cheaper.

Amazon is selling the device for £70 – although that model comes with on-screen ‘special offers’ (better known as adverts); you can avoid these by spending an extra tenner.



WHAT'S THE RUMOUR

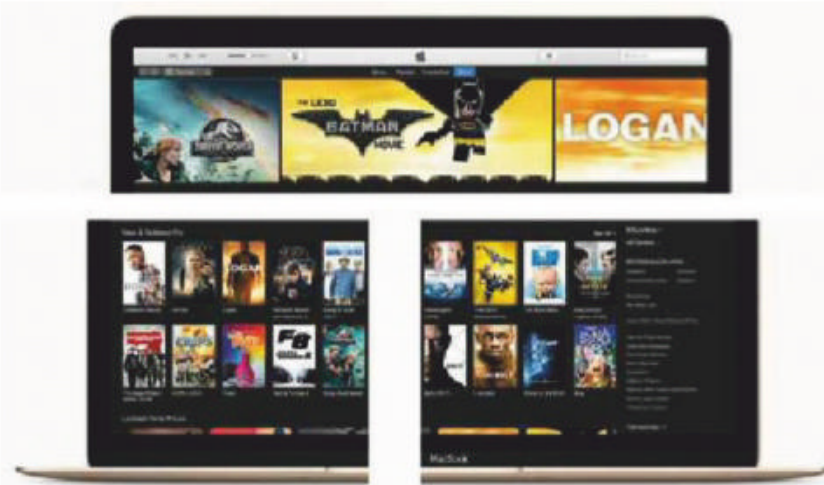
Is Apple going to carve up iTunes?

Since its release in 2001, iTunes has been the place to go for music, movies and other entertainment such as ebooks. Now there are rumours that Apple plans to split the one-stop service into separate platforms. Steve Troughton-Smith, a developer, took to Twitter to claim that he'd found undisclosed evidence that Apple is "planning new Music, Podcasts, perhaps even Books apps for macOS".

It's thought the move will coincide with the launch of the tech firm's recently unveiled Apple TV+ platform. However, the company has already started creating multiple media apps – Spotify rival Apple Music, a service that would've been quite at home in the iTunes ecosystem, is completely free from the shackles of the software.

Apple TV+ will also become the place to rent and buy films and TV shows. It's a decision designed to push iOS and macOS users into the arms of the new service, and away from the comfort zone of iTunes – which will itself will then be carved up.

Insiders agree, speculating that Apple could unveil the new apps at its annual Worldwide Developers Conference in June.



LIKELIHOOD RATING



It makes sense for Apple to direct users to its new services – and if that involves multiple apps, so be it. But it may feel counterintuitive for customers to use separate tools when iTunes does such a good job of storing all your multimedia in one place.

The instantly recognisable iTunes may be one of the strongest tech brands in the world, yet with Apple banking on its TV platform to bring in the mega-bucks, we wouldn't be surprised to see it rebrand the rest of its services. However, without seeing Troughton-Smith's evidence, it's hard to confirm this as anything more than a rumour.

WEBOMETER

WE LIKE...

Smart speakers provide government advice

The government has added 12,000 pieces of information to Alexa and Google Assistant, giving smart-speaker users approved answers to questions such as 'How do I apply for a passport?' and 'When is the next bank holiday?'.



Facebook bans groups that spread hate

Facebook has permanently banned a dozen far-right groups that it says "spread hate or attack or call for the exclusion of others on the basis of who they are," under a new category defined as 'dangerous individuals and organisations'.



WE DON'T LIKE...

Web users still choosing weak passwords

Millions of people are still using easy-to-guess passwords for their online accounts, according to new research by the National Crime Security Centre. '123456' was the most used, ahead of 'qwerty', 'password' and '111111'.



Foldable phones suffer broken screens

Samsung has delayed the launch of its folding smartphone, the Galaxy Fold, after reviewers said the screens on their devices broke easily. The company said it needed to "fully evaluate the feedback and run further internal tests".



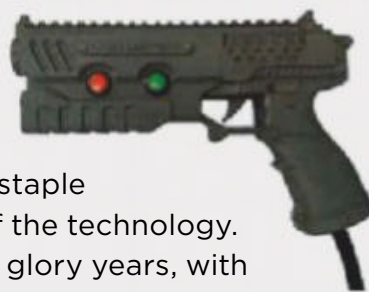
What's new on Kickstarter

Our favourite new project on the crowdfunding site

Sinden Lightgun

bit.ly/lightgun474 | From £80

From Duck Hunt to Time Crisis, the lightgun was once a staple accessory for any gamer – until LCD televisions killed off the technology. Now, the Sinden Lightgun hopes to bring back gaming's glory years, with an absurdly oversized pistol that "uses smart image recognition with some clever maths and clever software" to work on new TV screens. Inside the 3D-printed model is a high-speed camera that captures what's on-screen to determine where the player is aiming. The hand-cannon is compatible with Windows and Linux, and even works using Raspberry Pi. Pledges start at £10.



Stay Safe Online

News about the latest threats and advice from security experts

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

Outlook.com hack is worse than Microsoft claimed

A hack that Microsoft said affected "some" of its users' email accounts has been revealed to be much worse than initially thought, with hackers able to access messages from a large number of Outlook.com, MSN and Hotmail addresses.



According to Microsoft, the hackers could have viewed account email addresses, folder names and the subject lines of emails – but not the content of the messages or any attachments. It's not clear how many webmail users have been affected by the breach, which took place during the first three months of this year, or who the hackers are, but they weren't able to steal login details or other personal information. As a cautionary measure, Microsoft is recommending

that affected users reset their passwords.

"Microsoft regrets any inconvenience caused by this issue," said the company. "Please be assured that Microsoft takes data protection very seriously and has engaged its internal security and privacy teams in the investigation and resolution of the issue, as well as additional hardening of systems and processes to prevent such recurrence."

bit.ly/outlook474

Hotel websites are failing to secure customer data

Two-thirds of hotel websites inadvertently leak personal data to third-party companies and leave their customers vulnerable to hackers, according to research by Symantec. The cybersecurity firm found that the majority of booking systems used by hotels could allow scammers to access personal information such as mobile-phone and passport numbers.

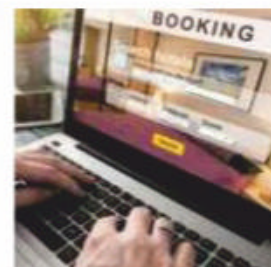
The leaks come from the confirmation

emails sent to customers, which often contain an unsecured direct link to their online booking. The report suggests that anyone on the same network could intercept the email and modify or cancel their reservation.

The researchers tested the websites of 1,500 hotels from 54 countries and found that two in three of them – 67%, – had the problem. These security lapses are in breach of the EU's GDPR laws, which state that firms must protect the personal data of customers.

"The fact that this issue exists, despite the GDPR coming into effect in Europe almost one year ago, suggests that the GDPR's implementation has not completely addressed how organisations respond to data leakage," said Symantec.

bit.ly/hotel474



Security Helpdesk | Your questions answered by security specialists

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT:
David Emm, Principal Security Researcher at Kaspersky Lab
(www.kaspersky.co.uk)



Q How worried should we be about Amazon staff listening to Alexa recordings (bit.ly/alexa474)?

Jason Goulding, Facebook

A It's uncomfortable enough to know that Alexa has all this information and that humans have been

listening in, but what's especially alarming is the suggestion that Amazon allowed customers an opt-out for Alexa sharing their voice commands, yet the company still went ahead and analysed their recordings. An opt-out should cover all data; and even if people opt in, that data should be anonymised.

If there's a connection established between the Alexa recordings and Amazon account details, this news is even more concerning because it gives Amazon the ability to pin specific recordings to identifiable individuals. It's important that companies



who capture data obtain informed consent – and if Amazon is doing this without people realising, it is potentially breaching GDPR.

Computers contain huge amounts of private data and the companies providing us with services have massive amounts of power at their

disposal. We know that our data is valuable, and we've now reached a point where the minutiae of our everyday lives is being captured in one form or another. We, as consumers, have a right to know when this is happening – and be given the ability to opt out.

Anyone worried about this development should check the default settings of their Alexa device, opt out of human verification where applicable and disable any other functionality that concerns them. If you're in doubt about something, seek advice from the relevant company's support team.

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KOLINK Observatory

MICROSOFT Windows 10 or 10 Pro

CREATE YOUR OWN CPU-MOTHERBOARD UPGRADE BUNDLE

★ Best New Websites

Site of the Fortnight

AUDIOBOOKS

RELAUNCH

Big Finish

www.bigfinish.com

When Big Finish relaunched its website, it took a few days to iron out problems with logins, downloads and free extracts. Now these are sorted, this producer of downloadable sci-fi audio drama – best known for its line-up of official licensed Doctor Who plays – has returned to its original script: a cleanly revamped and intuitive site that, thanks to improved navigation and a fast search engine, makes it easy to find and buy its excellent products. Shows are listed with full descriptions, background info, cast details and production credits, and can be added to a wishlist or sampled online. There are also loads of freebies to delve into.

Our rating



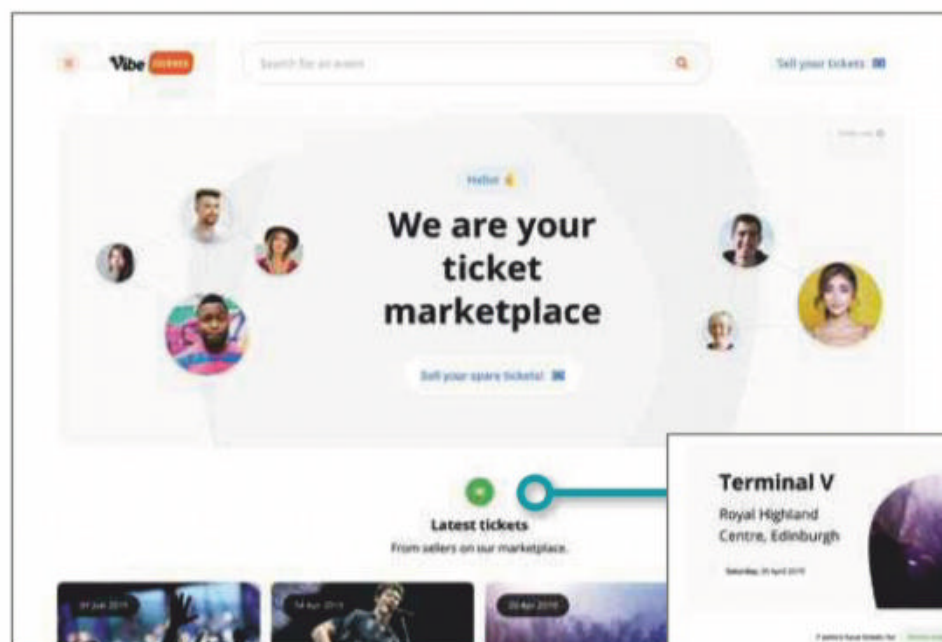
BOOK CLUB

The Big Finish Book Club picks a release and encourages readers to discuss it on Facebook



WHAT'S NEW

As well as offering freebies, Big Finish keeps you updated about forthcoming releases



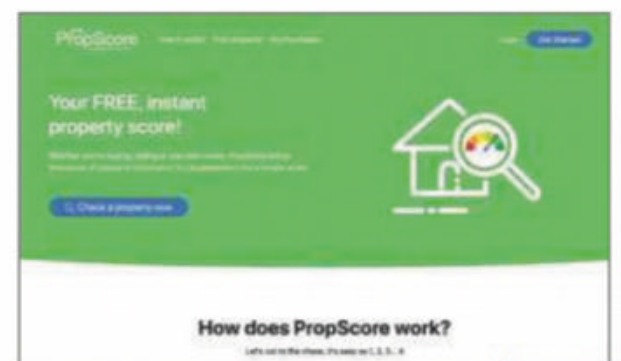
EVENTS

Vibe Tickets

www.vibetickets.co.uk

Vibe Tickets aims to be an ethical ticket marketplace and was originally set up to put fans in touch with one another and allow tickets to be sold at face value. It's now gone further by inviting vetted sellers on board – a much needed attempt to boost the supply of tickets since searching for events online often draws a blank. These sellers are clearly identified to separate them from fan sellers, and the site also asks for sign-ins via Google or Facebook to reassure users that a basic validation process is in place. Vibe Tickets is sticking to its remit of never charging fees to buy or sell, which is certainly commendable.

Our rating



PROPERTY

PropScore

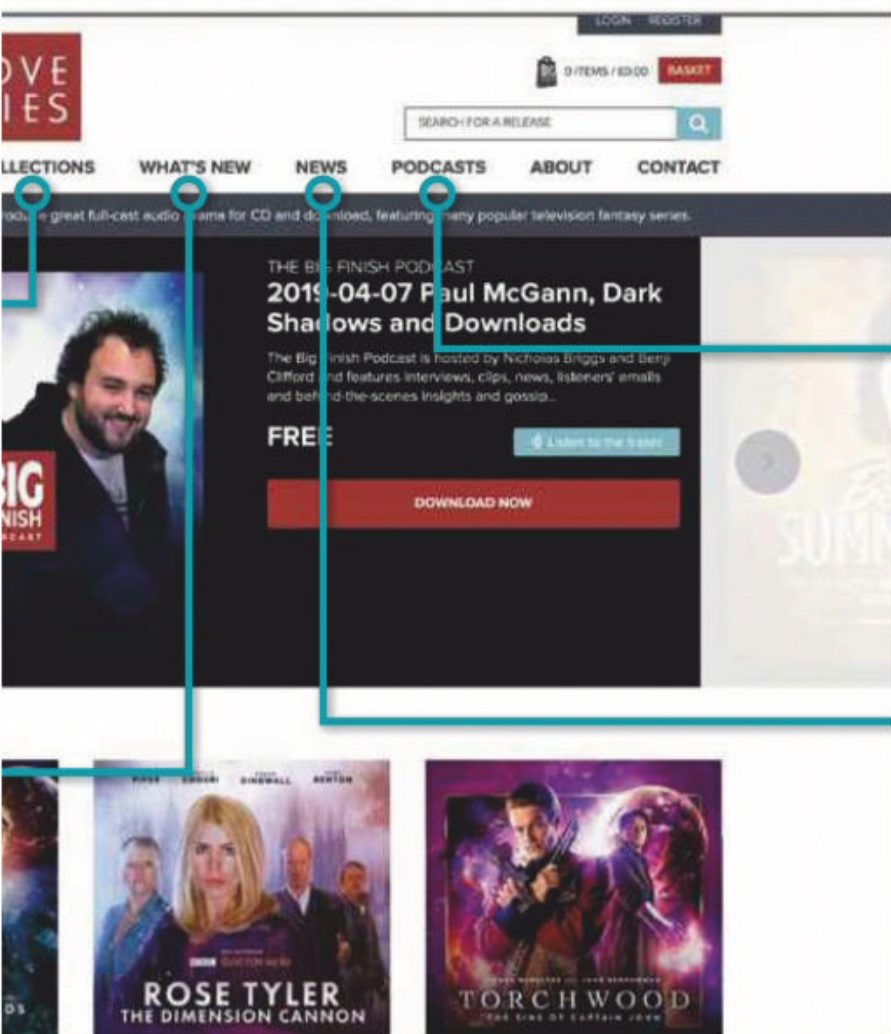
propscore.co.uk

Rather than jump straight in with an offer and a survey to buy a house, enter the postcode into this website for a basic analysis. The online service checks the property's area and looks at data including crime rates, nearby amenities and insurance risks to give you a score out of 100 – the higher the number, the better. The catch is that although PropScore gives a brief explanation of how it reached that score, you need to pay for more info. A comprehensive PropScore Home Report costs £59.99 but the site also offers cheaper checks such as title deeds and flood risks.

Our rating



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



PODCASTS
Hear about Doctor Who's rich history and either play podcasts instantly or download them

FREE MAGAZINE
Big Finish's well-written 24-page PDF magazine Vortex is a must-read for sci-fi fans

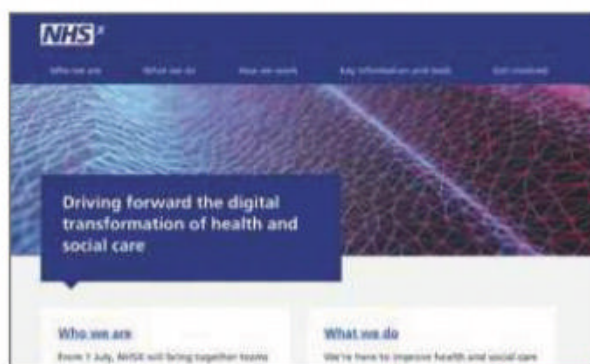


TRAVEL

Escape greatestescape.co

Want to go on holiday but not sure where to go? Just enter a departure airport and select some dates and this website will show you the cheapest flights across the world. The service highlights the least expensive tickets per continent and lets you view flight options and prices via Skyscanner before booking. It also lets you widen your search by zooming in and hovering over airports for instant prices. Since you can quickly change the criteria – to see popular destinations, the hottest weather or the need for a visa – Escape will have you in the air on a cheap flight in no time.

Our rating

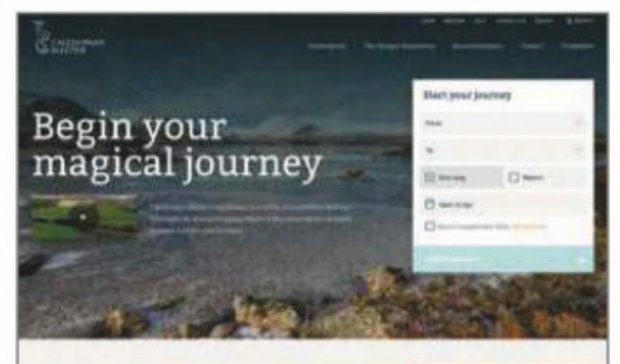


HEALTH

NHSX www.nhsx.nhs.uk

The NHS is (finally) being digitally transformed, giving patients access to data and more online services. This is all under the banner of NHSX – 'X' standing for user experience – and this site explains the thinking. So far, it's rather "governmental" and, in places, a bit cringey. The video by Secretary of State for Health Matt Hancock is delivered over a driving beat, yet the site itself blandly draws attention to the plan, culture and values while sending you elsewhere for blogs and updates. That said, there's a good overview of the apps and tools, and a regularly updated Twitter account.

Our rating



TRANSPORT

Caledonian Sleeper www.sleeper.scot

Not only does the Caledonian Sleeper have a swish new fleet of overnight trains operating between London and Scotland, it's also on the right tracks with its revamped booking website. Starting with a prominent search engine on the homepage, it's five-step journey clearly displays the departure, arrival and duration times, along with various fare options, optional extras and a plan of the carriage. You can also peek at the Sleeper experience, check out destination guides and sign up for the latest offers. The only derailment is the baffling decision to hide the fab range of retro-style posters.

Our rating



NOW AVAILABLE!



For more information, visit **bit.ly/wudisc18**
or search for 'webuser disc' on Amazon



NEW

PETS

Purrfect Landlords

bit.ly/purr474

Many landlords refuse to allow pets but Cats Protection reckons people with feline friends are more likely to treat a property as their home and stick around. As such, the charity is laying out its arguments for landlords while dishing out advice to potential cat-owning tenants through a mix of downloadable guides, an animated video, useful bullet points and case studies. The site is a bit untidy, requiring some effort on the part of the visitor, and finding useful info can be tricky. But there are lots of helpful links, an example tenancy agreement and even a suggested Pet CV, as well as some nice cat pics, too.

Our rating



NEW

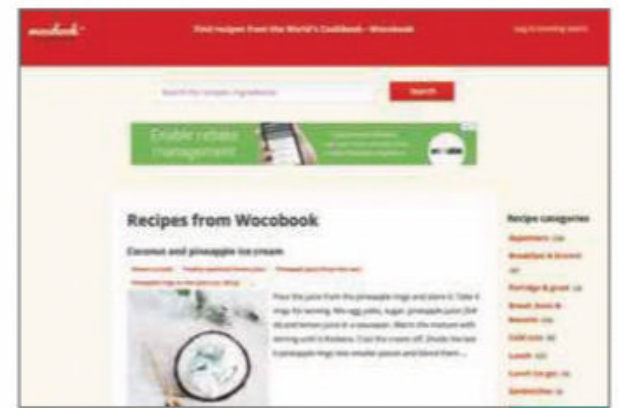
TOURISM

Visit North East England

www.visitnortheastengland.com

England's North East has heritage dating back to the Bronze Age, but the main focus of this site is on the here and now. It encourages you to visit Newcastle, Durham, Gateshead, Sunderland and beyond, giving a solid flavour of each area. Sadly, when we looked, the same events were being promoted regardless of a specific location and, worse, many had already happened. But there's still plenty to see, with lots of vivid images, great videos and articles and an abundance of links to sights and cities. We'd like to see less reliance on the pull-down menu for navigation, though.

Our rating



NEW

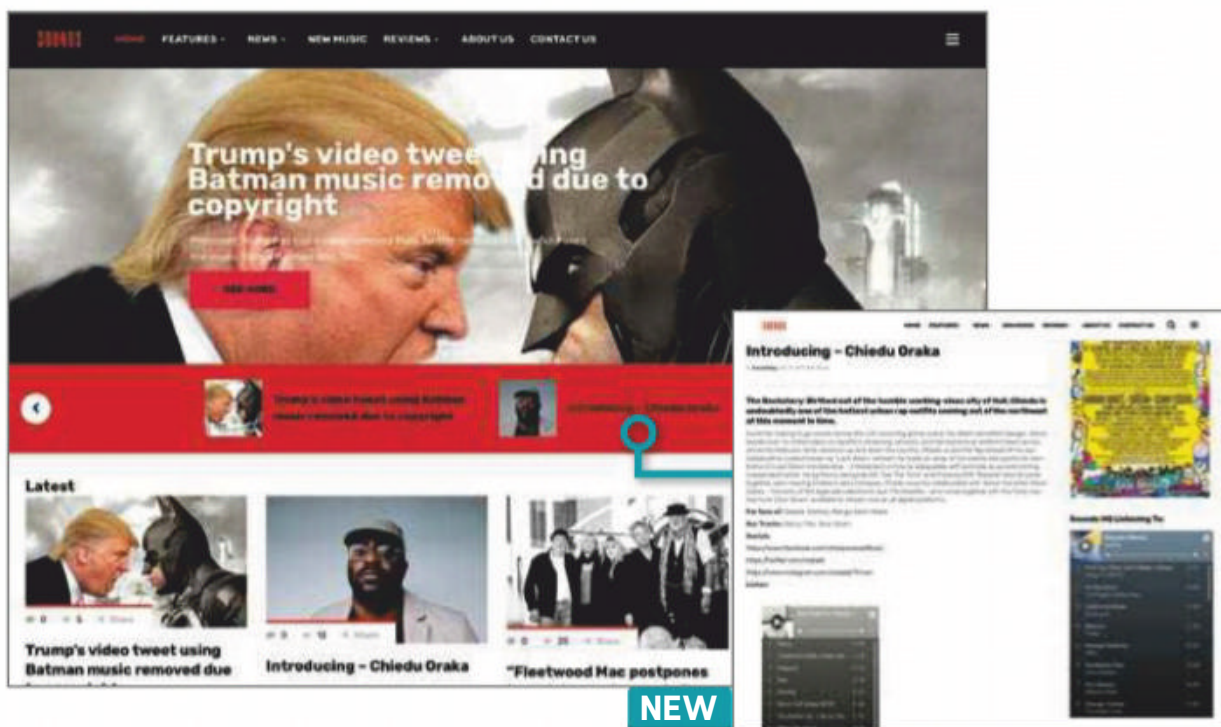
COOKING

Wocobook

www.wocobook.com

Chefs often tell you that people eat with their eyes, in which case Wocobook is going to leave you seriously hungry. Despite having thousands of recipes, there's a distinct lack of photos so you're never quite sure how something should turn out, although the site encourages anyone who rustles up a meal to take a snap and upload it. But while the presentation could be improved, there's a feast of categories, from appetisers to sandwiches. The search facility is also fast and lets you look for recipes by name or ingredients. Make sure you have a converter handy, though, because the recipes use American standards.

Our rating



NEW

MUSIC

Sounds

soundsmag.co.uk

Published weekly in the UK from 1970 to 1991, *Sounds* was a rival to *NME* and *Melody Maker*, breaking new acts and movements from Nirvana to punk, its pages rocking with respected voices, from John Peel to Jon Ronson. This site heralds its rebirth as a limited print-run magazine and lets you read offbeat features and interviews, catch up with the latest news and reviews, and discover new music (some articles feature playable tracks and social-media links). We love that it's regularly updated and that clicking the menu shows you the latest posts. You can also keep popping back to read comments or share articles, and the site looks particularly good on mobile devices.

Our rating



NEW

ARCHITECTURE

Explore Churches

bit.ly/churches474

Many English churches have a fascinating story to tell: Gloucester Cathedral, for example, provided the backdrop for scenes in three Harry Potter films while Hull Minster is linked with slave-trade abolitionist William Wilberforce. The new Experiences section of Explore Churches provides content to better explore this heritage, with guided tours, panoramic views and visits to iconic eateries. However, clicking Book Now simply led us back to the homepage and we had problems signing up for an account, which you need for favourites and wishlists.

Our rating



Build a Better Site

Specialist tips, top tools and practical help

Top Tips of the Fortnight

Try building a Voog website

There are plenty of online web-building tools that let you create a web page without having to code, but one we haven't covered before is Voog (www.voog.com). This tool can be used to create attractive sites that adapt well to visitors on mobile devices, and has a Standard plan that compares well with the likes of Wix (www.wix.com) and other similar rivals. For €6 (around £5) per month, you get a custom domain, 2GB of storage and 30 pages. There's no free option but you can sign up for a 30-day trial before committing.

Find out more about your visitors

Have you ever wondered who the visitors to your site are? You can find out all about them using Google Analytics (analytics.google.com). Go to your site in



Analytics and click Audience. The Overview section breaks down which languages they speak, but it's worth exploring the submenus below for loads more interesting information. The Demographics option breaks down their age and gender, while Interests tells you what other things they're into. You can also find out which browsers and devices they're using to access your site.

Deal of the Fortnight

UK2 (www.uk2.net) is offering 'co.uk' domains for 1p for the first year. Subsequent years will cost £11.39 per year.

Web-building Helpdesk

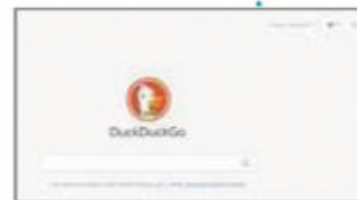
Q I spend a lot of time worrying about my Google rank. Am I wasting my time or is it important?

Charles Branson, via email

A Most people arrive at websites from search engines, so a good ranking on Google is still really important. You can see how many of your visitors come from Google if you use a tool like Analytics (analytics.google.com). If it's not a large proportion, then you either need to worry that you're missing them or decide that you don't need them.

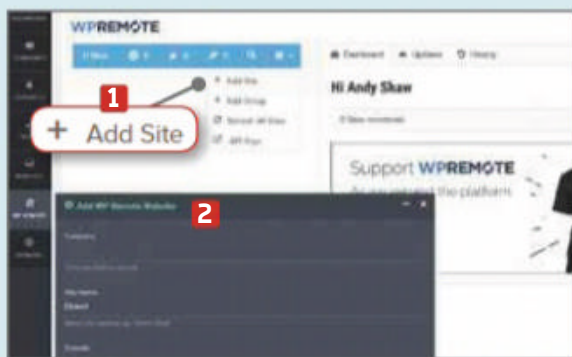
Google is still the king of search but it might not last forever. Rival search engines such as DuckDuckGo (duckduckgo.com) are continuing to gain popularity. Getting in early on the next big thing could prove advantageous in the future.

Andy Shaw, Technical & Reviews Editor,
Web User

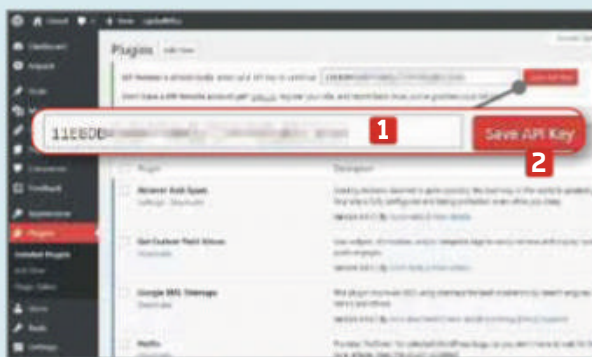


MINI WORKSHOP | Monitor all your WordPress websites from one place WP Remote: wpremote.com | 10 mins | Any self-hosted WordPress website

If you have more than one WordPress website, it can be annoying to have to visit each one to manage backups and pending plugin and theme updates. WP Remote's website-and-plugin combo solves the problem for you



1 Go to wpremote.com and click the 'Add your first site' button. You have to register for an account, then the WP Remote dashboard opens. Click Add Site. **1** Fill in the form **2** (leave the company section blank if you aren't one), copy the API key and click the Install Plugin button.



2 From your WordPress dashboard, click the Install Now button, then click Activate when it appears. On the Plugins page, paste the API key into the box **1** and click Save API Key. **2** Click the WP Remote Refresh button to get the WP Remote dashboard. Add new sites by clicking the cog button.



3 WP Remote shows whether any of your sites need attention. Green sites are fine, **1** while yellow sites have updates pending. **2** Control updates from the Updates tab, or select the Plugins and Themes tabs **3** to view them independently. You can also use it as a backup tool, if you haven't already got one.

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What To Watch Online

Pick of the fortnight

NOW TV



Discover the truth about the Chernobyl nuclear disaster

From 7 May

The human stories behind the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster are explored in a new five-part dramatisation from Sky and HBO. *Chernobyl* premieres on Sky Atlantic at the same time as HBO in the US, and you can stream it live and on-demand via Now TV.

Chernobyl lays bare the “lies and conspiracy” that led to the catastrophe, which devastated Ukraine shortly before the break-up of the Soviet Union. *The Walking Dead*’s Johan Renck directs a largely British cast including Jared Harris (*The Crown*, *Mad Men*), Emily Watson (*Apple Tree Yard*) and Stellan Skarsgård (*River*). Harris plays Soviet nuclear physicist Valery Legasov, who was among the first to understand the scope of the disaster that ended up killing many of the men and women who worked to contain it.

Episodes air weekly on Sky Atlantic from 7 May – download and stream them via Now TV with an Entertainment Pass (bit.ly/nowent474 – £7.99 per month after a 14-day trial) or a Sky Cinema Pass (£11.99 per month). Sky subscribers can also watch online via Sky Go (bit.ly/chernobylsky474) and you can check out HBO’s official trailer on YouTube (bit.ly/chernobyl474) – but don’t have nightmares!



Watch Tudor drama *The Spanish Princess*

From 5 May

Charlotte Hope (Myranda in *Game of Thrones*) plays Henry VIII’s first wife Catherine of Aragon in the latest Starz-produced mini-series based on Philippa Gregory’s Tudor novels.

The Spanish Princess picks up the



story following *The White Princess*, which was in turn a sequel to 2013’s Golden Globe-winning *The White Queen*. Stream those shows on-demand via Amazon’s StarzPlay channel at bit.ly/whiteprincess474 and bit.ly/whitequeen474. *The Spanish Princess*’s eight episodes will arrive weekly on StarzPlay after they’ve aired on Starz in the US. Watch the official trailer at bit.ly/spanishprincess474.

To get StarzPlay, you’ll need to pay an extra £4.99 per month on top of your Amazon Prime Video subscription, after a seven-day free trial. Find out more at bit.ly/channels474.

See *Lucifer*’s new Netflix home

From 8 May

Life is a rollercoaster for this devilish comic adaptation, which stars Welsh actor Tom Ellis (Gary from *Miranda*)



as Satan in the guise of an LAPD cop. Originally made by Fox and shown on Amazon Prime Video, *Lucifer* was cancelled after Season 3, leaving bereft fans to launch a #SaveLucifer campaign. Netflix stepped in with a rescue bid, and here we are with Season 4.

The new season’s first five episodes land everywhere on 8 May,

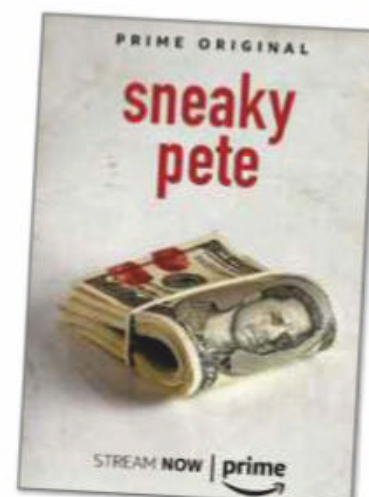
so UK viewers won’t be left lagging behind as with previous seasons. Watch Netflix’s latest teaser at bit.ly/lucifer474, and stream all three previous seasons on-demand via Amazon at bit.ly/luciferam474.



Meet Amazon’s *Sneaky Pete*

From 10 May

Giovanni Ribisi has found time amid filming no fewer than four sequels to *Avatar*



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

to make a third season of this smart, twisted mob thriller co-created by Bryan Cranston (*Breaking Bad*). 10 episodes of Season 3, which sees con man Marius (Ribisi) on the run from gangsters, land on Amazon Prime Video on 10 May at bit.ly/sneakypete474. Watch the new season's official trailer at bit.ly/petetrail474.



N Raise spirits with US sitcom *Dead to Me*

From 3 May

Christina Applegate's post-*Married with Children* career continues apace with this Netflix Original comedy, executive-produced by her *Anchorman* co-star Will Ferrell. Applegate plays a wound-up widow who befriends an eccentric optimist with a shocking – nay, supernatural – secret. Watch the trailer for free on Netflix at bit.ly/deadtome474, where all 10 episodes arrive on Friday 3 May.

In case you missed it...

The BBC has nabbed Hulu's big-budget 9/11 drama *The Looming Tower*, which stars Jeff Daniels as an FBI chief in the run-up to the Twin

Towers tragedy. The 10-part mini-series airs weekly on BBC Two and the iPlayer – watch the trailer at bit.ly/tower474.

The iPlayer also has a fresh batch of BBC Three box sets. Dark comedy *Back to Life* is now available at bit.ly/back474, while relationships advice show *Sex on the Couch* is at bit.ly/couch474. *Line of*



Duty fans mustn't miss *Bodies*, Jed Mercurio's 2004 hospital drama with Max Beesley and a scene-stealing Keith Allen. Stream

or download all 17 episodes at bit.ly/bodies474.

Now TV has all eight episodes of HBO's Golden Globe-winning thriller *Sharp Objects*, which stars Amy Adams as a reporter with a dark past. Stream or download the box set at bit.ly/sharp474, and watch the trailer at bit.ly/sharptrail474.

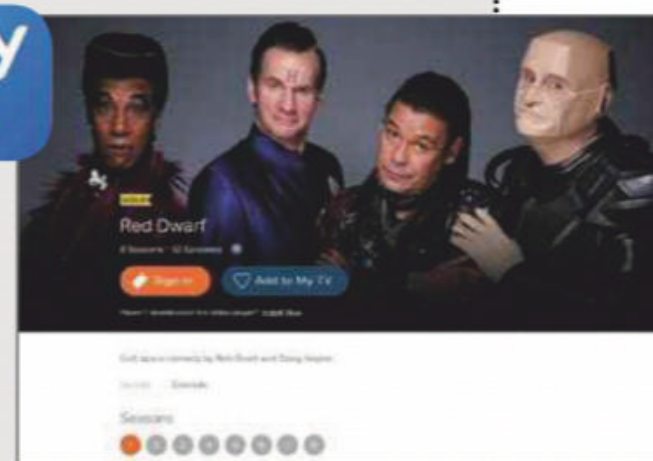
BBC box sets come to Now TV and Sky Go

Classic BBC box sets including *Red Dwarf*, *The Royle Family* and *Little Britain* are now available to watch in full via Sky's online platforms, following a deal between Sky and BBC Studios.

The deal brings hundreds of hours of BBC shows to Now TV and Sky Go, courtesy of BBC Studios' UKTV brands Gold and Alibi, with more to come later this year.

Inside Number 9, *Green Wing* and *The League of Gentleman* are also among the box sets available to stream and download now. Many more, including *Top Gear*, *Spooks* and Brian Cox's *Wonder* series, are set to follow later in 2019.

Read more about downloading shows from streaming services, including Now TV and Sky Go, in our cover feature on page 40.



Now TV Stream live football and cricket on mobile

From 3 May

Say hello to international cricket and wave goodbye to the football Premier League and Championship seasons – all live on Now TV, courtesy of Sky Sports.

A fortnight of cricket One Day Internationals begins on Friday 3 May with England facing Ireland, followed by England v Pakistan six times between now and 19 May, all shown live on Sky Sports (fixtures: bit.ly/skycricket474). Meanwhile the football Championship season ends on 5 May, followed a week later by the Premier League (bit.ly/skyfooty474).

You can stream all the action live and



on-demand via Now TV with a Sky Sports Pass, which is cheaper to watch on your phone or tablet for just £5.99 per month for a Sky Sports Mobile Pass. Find out more at bit.ly/nowsport474.

Product Test

We test and compare the latest products

Vodafone Smart X9

The Vodafone Smart X9 isn't a perfect smartphone, but for less than £100, what's not to like?

When you think of Vodafone, you probably think of a mobile network rather than a smartphone manufacturer, but Vodafone also produces unique phones under its own brand. This cuts out the hardware middleman and allows Vodafone to supply surprisingly good phones (locked to its own network, of course) at remarkably low prices. The latest model is the Smart X9. It's not blisteringly fast, but it's better than anyone would expect for a phone that costs just £99 (not including a compulsory £10 top-up to get you started).

At first glance, you'd be forgiven for mistaking the X9 for a more expensive model, thanks to its slim, curved design, fingerprint reader and dual cameras. It comes with a Qualcomm Snapdragon 450 processor, backed with 3GB of RAM and 32GB of internal storage. This specification is identical to that of last year's Moto G6, which

was great at the time but has since been superseded by the newer Moto G7 (reviewed in Issue 472, bit.ly/webuser472). However, the G6 is still available to buy for around £200, while the Moto E5 costs £120.

The X9's 5.7in 18:9 display is surrounded by thin bezels to the left and right and slightly thicker bezels at the top and bottom, although thankfully there's no unsightly notch. Flip it over and its design is pleasingly minimalist. The dual-camera array is neatly contained in the top-left corner, and the circular fingerprint reader sits near the top in the middle. A Vodafone logo is barely visible near the bottom.

The back of the device is the most obvious indication that this isn't an expensive model, however. Not only is it a magnet for fingerprints, but it's quite clearly made of plastic rather than a more



premium-looking glass coating. We have no problem with plastic because it reduces the overall weight, but there's not much you can do about the smudges.

Memory and screen

The Smart X9 provides a microSD card slot to help beef up the rather limited 32GB of internal storage, and there's a 3.5mm headphone jack on the top edge, which is always welcome but by no means guaranteed these days.

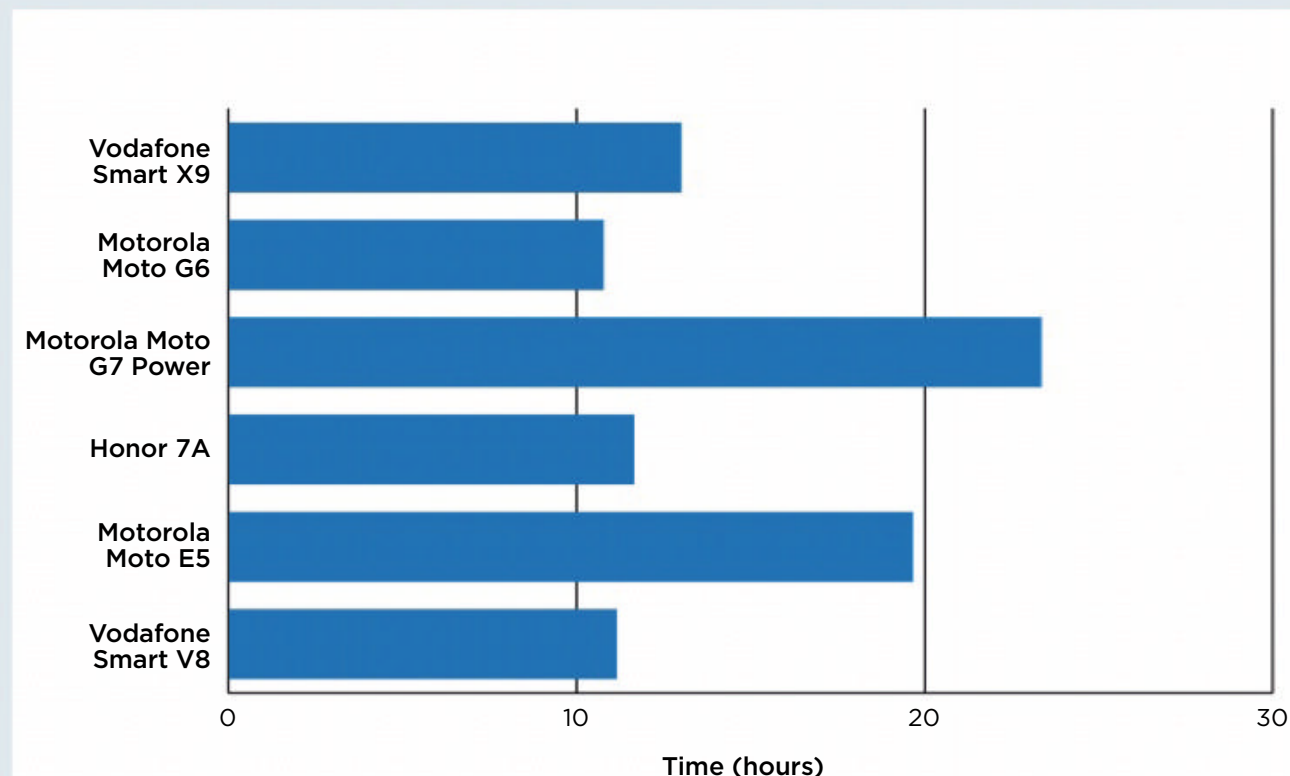
The front of the phone is dominated by its 1080p touchscreen. It's an IPS display, which is inferior technology to the AMOLED screens you find on more expensive models, but it's good for the price. Viewing angles are decent, and its maximum brightness of 455cd/m² (candles per square metre) should make it easy to see in bright sunshine, while its contrast level of 1,436:1 makes everything look clear and sharp. Its colour accuracy isn't the best we've seen, but we can forgive it a few foibles for the price.

In our benchmark tests, the Smart X9's performance matched that of the Moto G6, which is what we'd expect given that their internal specifications are identical.



“ You'd be forgiven for mistaking the X9 for a more expensive model, thanks to its slim, curved design ”

Comparison of battery life in budget smartphones



This puts it behind the Moto G7 Power (also reviewed in Issue 472) but again, you'd expect that from a pricier phone. Compared with other phones in its price bracket – last year's Vodafone Smart V8, the Moto E5 and the Honor 7A – the X9 is faster.

The result was the same in our intense graphical tests, although there are no real winners here because all the budget phones struggled to reach frame rates of above 20fps, which doesn't make for a wonderful experience when playing the latest games. That said, these benchmarks are deliberately tough, so you'll find that simple games should run without too much difficulty.

We were pleased to see that the X9 is practically free from junk software, with just three bundled Vodafone apps when you first switch on the

phone: Start, Tips and My Vodafone. Navigation feels snappy enough, but we noticed that it felt slower than more expensive handsets.

Battery and camera

Battery life isn't bad, either. The X9 has a 3,100mAh battery, which lasted for 13 hours in our looped video test. That puts it ahead of the V8, G6 and 7A, but some way behind the Moto G7 Power and the Moto E5, both of which have incredible stamina (see table above).

A £100 smartphone with a dual-camera array is something of a rarity, so Vodafone deserves particular credit for achieving such a feat with the X9. Its 16-megapixel primary camera is supported by a 5-megapixel secondary camera for adding depth to shots. The photos we took were a lot better than

we'd expect from a £100 smartphone, presenting plenty of detail even in relatively low light. We don't want to overstate the quality of its shots – it's no match for the Huawei Mate 20 Pro or even the OnePlus 6T, for example – but the photos are remarkably good for a budget phone and are certainly enough to satisfy most people's needs if money is tight.

You can't have everything, of course, and the X9's 8-megapixel front-facing camera is nothing to write home about. Shots taken with it lacked depth and were thoroughly over-processed.

Captured video could also be better. The Vodafone Smart X9 records at a maximum resolution of just 1080p at 30fps and offers little in the way of image stabilisation.

PRODUCT INFO

Vodafone Smart X9

Price: £99

Buy from:

www.vodafone.co.uk

SPECIFICATIONS

- Qualcomm Snapdragon SDM450 octa-core processor
- 3GB RAM
- 32GB storage space
- 5.7in 18:9 Full HD+ IPS screen
- 16 megapixels + 5 megapixels autofocus dual rear camera with LED flash; 8 megapixels fixed focus front camera
- microSD card slot (supports up to 256GB)
- Android 8.1
- 153g
- 148 x 71 x 7.95mm

FOR

- ✓ Looks good
- ✓ Decent performance
- ✓ Great camera for the price

AGAINST

- ✗ Locked to Vodafone

BETTER BATTERY

Motorola Moto G7 Power, £179

bit.ly/motg474



FASTER GRAPHICS

Honor 7A, £129.99

bit.ly/hon474



OUR VERDICT

The Vodafone Smart X9 punches well above its weight for such an inexpensive phone, giving you a lot more than you'd expect for a measly £100.

That's not to say you can't do better if you have a little more cash to spend. For

£80 more, you can buy the Moto G7 Power, which looks smarter and packs in a little more grunt. It also lasts considerably longer on a single charge, thanks to its huge 4,000mAh battery.

If £100 really is your limit, though, and you're happy to

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

use Vodafone as your mobile network provider, the X9 is superb value.

HP Tango X

HP's new multifunction printer is a refreshing change from the usual ink-guzzling desktop behemoths

The HP Tango X is not your typical home printer. There are no cables (other than the power lead) for connecting it to other devices, and you set it up using your smartphone rather than your PC. It's quiet and compact, with a textured wraparound cover that converts into an output tray, so you can camouflage it when it's not in use. If that sounds like a gimmick, it's surprisingly effective in practice: during testing, we kept the HP Tango X in our living room and, when it was folded up and put away, it looked more like a thick hardback book than a printer.

The main drawback comes when someone wants to print something, because the cover has to be unfolded and paper inserted before it's ready to

go. Meanwhile, because the printer only operates wirelessly, we found it tricky to position: it still needs a power supply, so you can't just put it anywhere, and perhaps because it uses 802.11n Wi-Fi rather than 802.11ac, we found the Tango fussy about where it was located. You need a solid Wi-Fi connection because there's no USB port to connect to if it stops working.

Nor should you expect fast print speeds. HP claims the Tango X produces 20ppm (pages per minute) mono printing and 11ppm in colour, but those figures are for draft mode. In reality, you'll have to wait around 30 seconds for the first page to print and can expect, at most, three or four pages per minute. But that's not a problem for a printer that you only use occasionally.

Print quality and ink

The good news is that the print quality is excellent. Text is solid with no feathering, while the three-colour ink cartridge produces strong graphics and excellent photos. Print on HP photo paper and the company promises the results will last you a lifetime, and to the naked eye they look as good as professional prints. The only slight flaw is a 1mm-thick white border on one edge.

That brings us to one of the Tango's big innovations: an ink subscription service that promises free photo prints for the printer's lifetime. From £1.99 for 50 pages per month,



“The ink subscription service promises free photo prints for the printer's lifetime”

HP will automatically send you replacement cartridges when your printer needs them. There are a few rules and regulations, though, so check the details at bit.ly/hpink474 before you commit.

The Tango also supports copying and scanning, which is done via your smartphone. When you open the HP Smart app and press the Copy button, you're prompted to take a photo of your target document, which is

sharpened and straightened before being sent to the printer. You can “scan to email” in a similar way.

While the app integrates with both Dropbox and Google Drive, you can only print PDFs and JPEG photos from within it. This is a frustrating restriction, which means you have to start your PC to print other types of document from there or, slightly bizarrely, email a file to the printer instead.

PRODUCT INFO

HP Tango X

Price: £179.99

Buy from HP:

bit.ly/hptx474

SPECIFICATIONS

- 4,800 x 1,200dpi print resolution
- 802.11n Wi-Fi
- Bluetooth LE
- A4 maximum paper size
- 377 x 206 x 91mm
- 3kg
- 1 year warranty

FOR

- ✓ Quiet and compact
- ✓ High-quality prints
- ✓ Subscription photo prints

AGAINST

- ✗ No USB connection
- ✗ Slow performance

OUR VERDICT



The HP Tango X offers you two buying choices: the straight-up Tango for £129, which is the same printer but doesn't include the wraparound cover; or the full discreetly camouflaged Tango X, which costs an extra £51. That may seem a lot for a piece of fabric, but it really does look a lot better than the standard

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

hulk of conventional all-in-one machines. HP's latest innovation doesn't come cheap, but it delivers on its promise of rethinking home printing.

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Outside.





Web User's Best Buys

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

HARDWARE

SMARTPHONE

Moto G7 Power

£179.99 from bit.ly/pow472

Tested: Issue 472

Battery life is at the heart of what we love and hate about our phones, and the Moto G7 Power lasted an incredible 26 hours and 22 minutes in our tests. Its specs and price are also great.

KEY SPECS

Octa-core 1.8GHz processor ■ 64GB storage ■ 4GB RAM ■ 6.2in, 720 x 1,570-pixel screen ■ 12-megapixel rear camera, 8-megapixel front camera ■ 5,000mAh battery ■ 159.4 x 76 x 9.3mm ■ 193g ■ One-year return-to-base warranty



WI-FI EXTENDER

Netgear Nighthawk X6S

£145.99 from bit.ly/ngx6s471

Tested: Issue 471

The Nighthawk X6S's unbeatable combination of high speed and top-end features makes it the best Wi-Fi extender available. It's big and boxy, but its performance gives mesh-router systems a run for their money.

KEY SPECS

Works with 2.4GHz and 5GHz networks ■ 4 x Gigabit Ethernet ports ■ Access control ■ Wi-Fi schedule ■ WPS button ■ 277 x 170 x 93mm ■ Two-year warranty



SECURITY CAMERA

Blink XT

£149.99 from bit.ly/blink470

Tested: Issue 470

The Blink XT can be positioned anywhere in your home, indoors or out, and includes a lifetime subscription to its cloud-storage service. You get a couple of years' use out of the camera before you need to replace the batteries.

KEY SPECS

HD Video ■ Motion and temperature sensors ■ Built-in microphone ■ Camera mount included ■ Weatherproof ■ Infrared night vision ■ Wi-Fi connectivity ■ Instant alerts to your phone ■ Two years of battery life



LAPTOP SSD

Samsung 970 Evo

£75.51 from bit.ly/sevo469

Tested: Issue 469

The Samsung 970 Evo is a smart, affordable choice for anyone looking to get better performance from their laptop. It's very fast, with excellent file-transfer speeds, and there are higher capacity versions with up to 2TB of storage.

KEY SPECS

256GB capacity ■ 3,600MB/s maximum speed ■ M.2 PCIe Gen 3 x 4 interface ■ Samsung Phoenix 5-core processor ■ Samsung V-NAND 3-bit MLC flash memory ■ 22 x 80 x 2.38mm ■ Five-year warranty



MINI PC

Lenovo IdeaCentre 620s

£479 from bit.ly/lenovo467

Tested: Issue 467

This compact PC crams in more power for entertainment, work and gaming than you might think, and includes decent graphics performance at an affordable price.

KEY SPECS

Quad-core 2.4GHz Intel Core i5-7400T processor ■ 1TB hard drive ■ 8GB memory ■ 4 x USB 2 ports ■ 802.11ac Wi-Fi ■ 4GB Nvidia GeForce graphics adapter ■ Windows 10 Home ■ 224 x 212 x 102mm ■ One-year return-to-base warranty



SMART SPEAKER

Google Home Hub

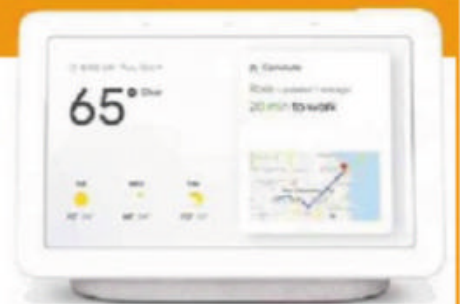
£139 from bit.ly/homehub463

Tested: Issue 463

Its low price, seamless integration with Google services and ability to double as a digital photo frame make the Google Home Hub the best smart screen we've seen.

KEY SPECS

7in LCD touch screen ■ 1,024 x 600-pixels resolution ■ Dual-band 802.11b/g/n/ac ■ Bluetooth 5.0 ■ 178 x 118 x 67mm ■ 480g ■ Choice of Aqua, Chalk, Charcoal or Sand ■ One-year return-to-base warranty



SOFTWARE & SERVICES

BACKUP SOFTWARE

Acronis True Image 2019

£35 from

bit.ly/acro473

Tested: Issue 473

Acronis True Image is a versatile backup tool that can do everything from cloud storage to disaster recovery. It isn't cheap compared with rival software, but it's flexible and simple to control, reasonably fast and should cover all your backing-up needs.

KEY FEATURES

Windows, macOS, Android, iOS ■ Local backup ■ Disc-image backup ■ Restore from the web ■ Create disaster recovery ■ AES-256 encryption ■ Continuous, daily, weekly or monthly backups ■ Multiple backup sets

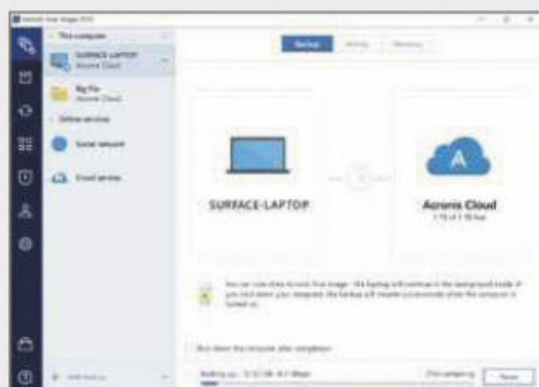


PHOTO-EDITING SOFTWARE

DxO PhotoLab

£99 from

bit.ly/dxo455

Tested: Issue 455

If you're put off by Adobe's subscription costs, DxO PhotoLab is the best alternative for managing and editing your photos. Its interface is streamlined and elegant, and the editing and image quality are exceptional. It's also very simple to use and comes with lots of sophisticated tools.

KEY FEATURES

RAW conversion ■ High quality noise reduction ■ Optical corrections ■ Red-eye correction ■ Advanced light and colour ■ Batch processing ■ Selective tone ■ Full-screen mode ■ Spot-weighted mode



Web User Gold Award winners

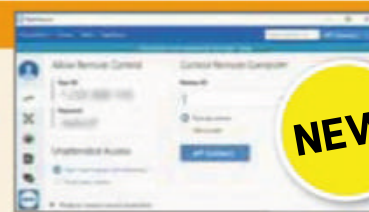
SCREEN-SHARING TOOL

TeamViewer

Free from www.teamviewer.com

Tested: Issue 473

TeamViewer surpasses its rivals with a range of powerful options. It's robust and reliable, and offers the same tools to personal users – for free – that businesses have to pay for.



NEW!

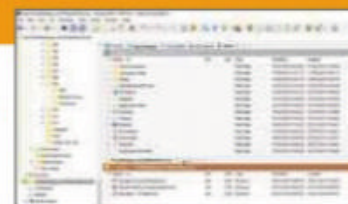
FILE-EXPLORER ALTERNATIVE

XYplorer Free

Free from bit.ly/xypl472

Tested: Issue 472

Fast and effective, XYplorer Free does everything we wish Windows' built-in File Explorer could do. Its excellent tabbed interface makes managing your files impressively easy.



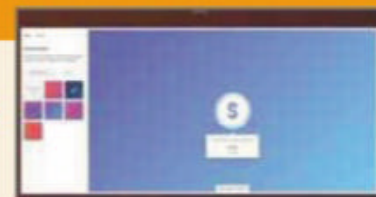
FILE-TRANSFER SERVICE

Smash

Free from fromsmash.com

Tested: Issue 471

Unlike other services for sharing large files, Smash places no limit on the size of files you can send. Its free version has a few restrictions, but we love its speedy simplicity.



PRIVATE-MESSAGING APP

Signal

Free from signal.org

Tested: Issue 470

Signal does everything WhatsApp can do, and offers some useful and unique extras.



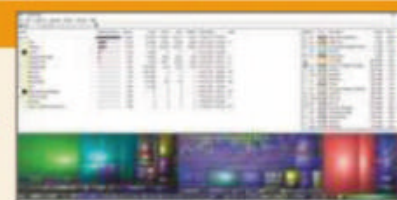
DRIVE-SPACE ANALYSER

WinDirStat

Free from windirstat.net

Tested: Issue 469

WinDirStat delivers comprehensive analysis of your hard drive and makes it easy to take action against space-hogging files.



WEB USER

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BROWSER

Opera 60 – Reborn 3

www.opera.com

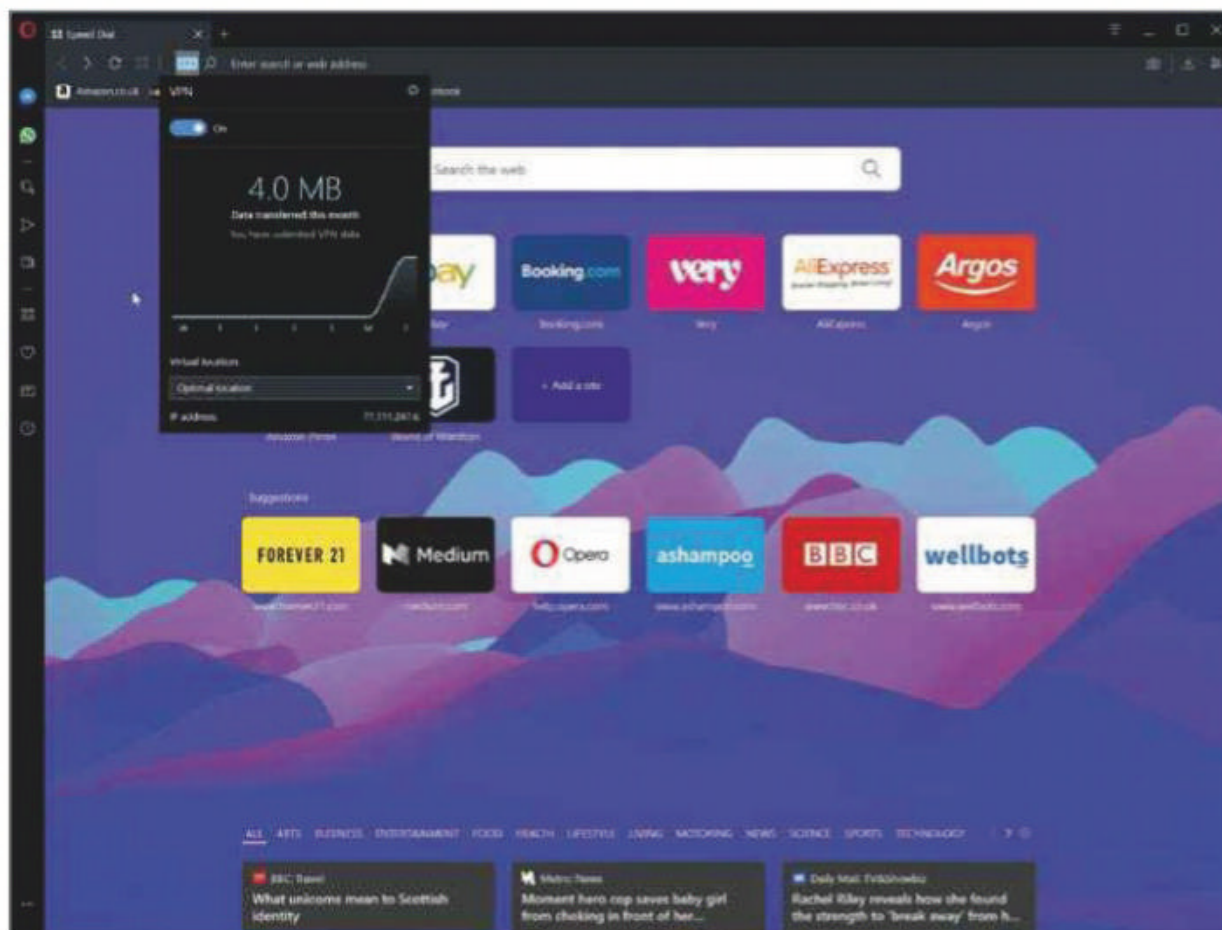
Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10, macOS or Linux

File size: 2.12MB

Opera doesn't get the same level of attention as rival browsers Chrome and Firefox, but it's actually very good and brings a lot of innovation to the table. Each year, the browser gets a major makeover, with new features and a new look. Reborn 3, the codename for Opera 60, comes with Web 3 support, a crypto wallet, an updated and unlimited VPN (virtual private network) and a much more attractive interface.

The biggest addition in this version of Opera is support for Web 3 (aka the Decentralised Web), which lets you make online transactions and interact with the blockchain-based "internet of the future". Opera is the first browser to embrace Web 3, but we suspect it won't be the last.

Support for Web 3 comes with a new integrated crypto wallet for storing cryptocurrency. It syncs with the crypto wallet in Opera for Android, which means that the wallet keys never leave your phone. If you need to identify yourself to a Web 3 site or sign



a transaction on the blockchain, you'll get a notification on your smartphone and can confirm it there. The crypto wallet will also be available in the iOS version of its mobile browser Opera Touch very soon.

Opera's free and unlimited VPN provides an encrypted tunnel that protects your data from third parties and hides your geographic location

from websites. It gets a welcome performance boost in this update, following complaints from users that it was slowing down browsing.

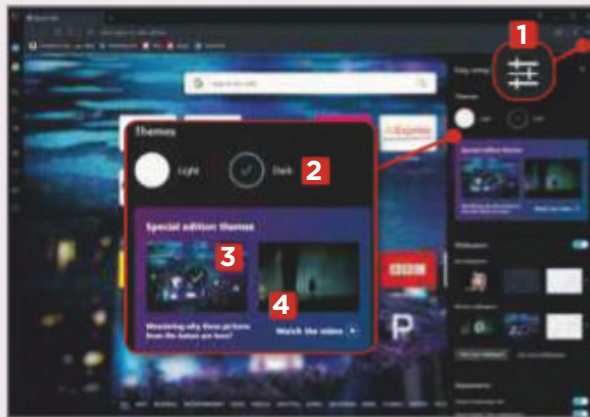
Finally, Opera gains a new borderless design that removes the dividing lines between the sections of its interface. There are two themes available – Light and Dark – and it's now easier to see the currently selected tab.



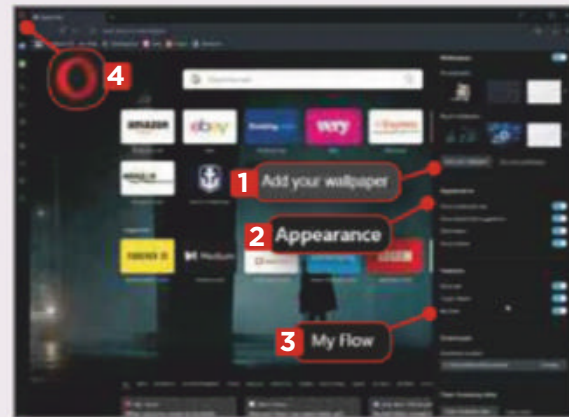
MINI WORKSHOP | Explore the new tools in Opera 60



1 When you launch Opera 60, you're greeted with the Speed Dial page, which provides quick access to your favourite sites. It comes preloaded with a selection of shortcuts **1** but you can customise this and add your own. **2** The sidebar **3** includes Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and Instant Search. News headlines are displayed below. **4**

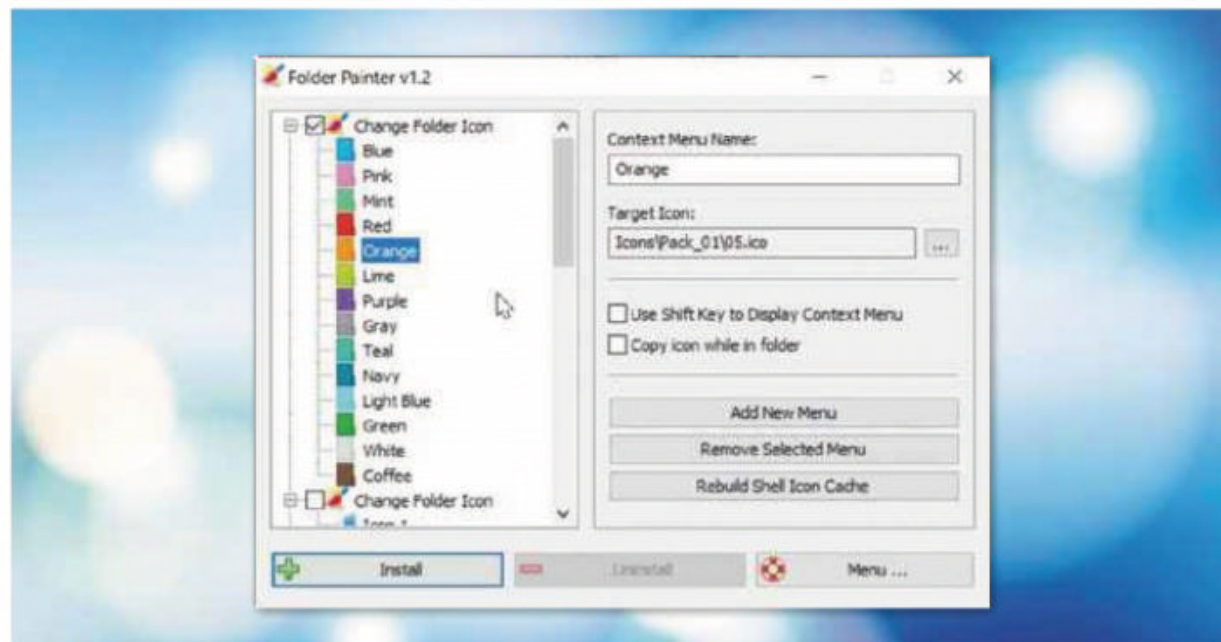


2 The browser has an Easy Setup option that you can access by clicking the button in the top-right corner. **1** A bar slides into view and from here, you can switch between the Light and Dark modes, **2** and enable special 'futuristic' themes **3** from a video that Opera has created **4** to tie in with the browser launch.



3 You can apply new wallpapers, **1** change the browser's appearance, **2** and enable the ad-blocker, crypto wallet and My Flow **3** (web content you save for later viewing). To use the built-in VPN, click the Opera button, **4** open Settings, scroll down, click Advanced and slide the Enable VPN toggle to On.

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



SYSTEM TOOL

Folder Painter

bit.ly/fpaint474

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10 **File size:** 2.3MB

Finding one specific folder in a group isn't easy because they all look the same. This free tool lets you assign different colours to individual folders, so they stand out. To use Folder Painter, run the software and choose an icon pack. Next, install the tool to add it to your context menu, right-click a folder to change, then select the Change Folder Icon entry and pick a colour. There are additional icon packs available to install, so you can customise your folders whenever you feel the need.

New Windows 10 App

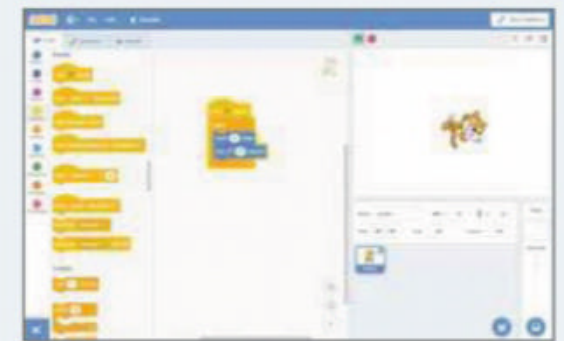
Scratch Desktop

bit.ly/scratch474

Min requirements: Windows 10

File size: 153.3MB

Scratch is included with the Raspberry Pi OS, so you may already be familiar with the visual programming application (created by the Lifelong Kindergarten Group at the MIT Media Lab) that lets you build interactive stories, games and animations using a simple drag-and-drop interface. It's aimed at children, but adults can use it, too. This app is a Windows 10 port of the official release.



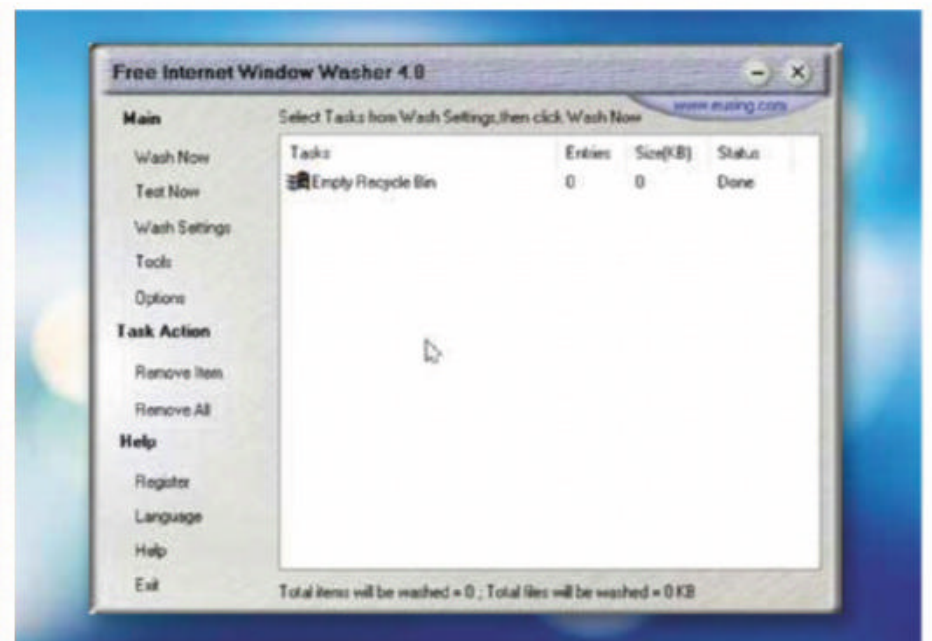
PDF TOOL

JSoft PDF Reducer 2

bit.ly/pdf474

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10 **File size:** 24.2MB

JSoft PDF Reducer can compress, merge and split PDF files, as well as rearrange or delete pages, add or remove text, and include passwords, watermarks and signatures in your PDFs. To use it, just drag and drop a PDF or folder to the program window, then click your way through the wizard, choosing the options you require. The software's website is in French (click the Télécharger button to start the download), but PDF Reducer is in English.



SYSTEM CLEANER

Eusing Free Internet Window Washer 4

eusing.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10 **File size:** 1.4MB

Don't be put off by the dated interface of Eusing's free system cleaner – it does a great job of removing all traces of your computer activity and internet usage, 'washing' your system by deleting cookies, temp folders, run and search histories, recent documents, your browser's cache, visited URLs and more. You can choose what to remove, schedule cleans and overwrite deleted files numerous times for extra security. This release adds support for the latest version of Firefox.

PASSWORD TOOL

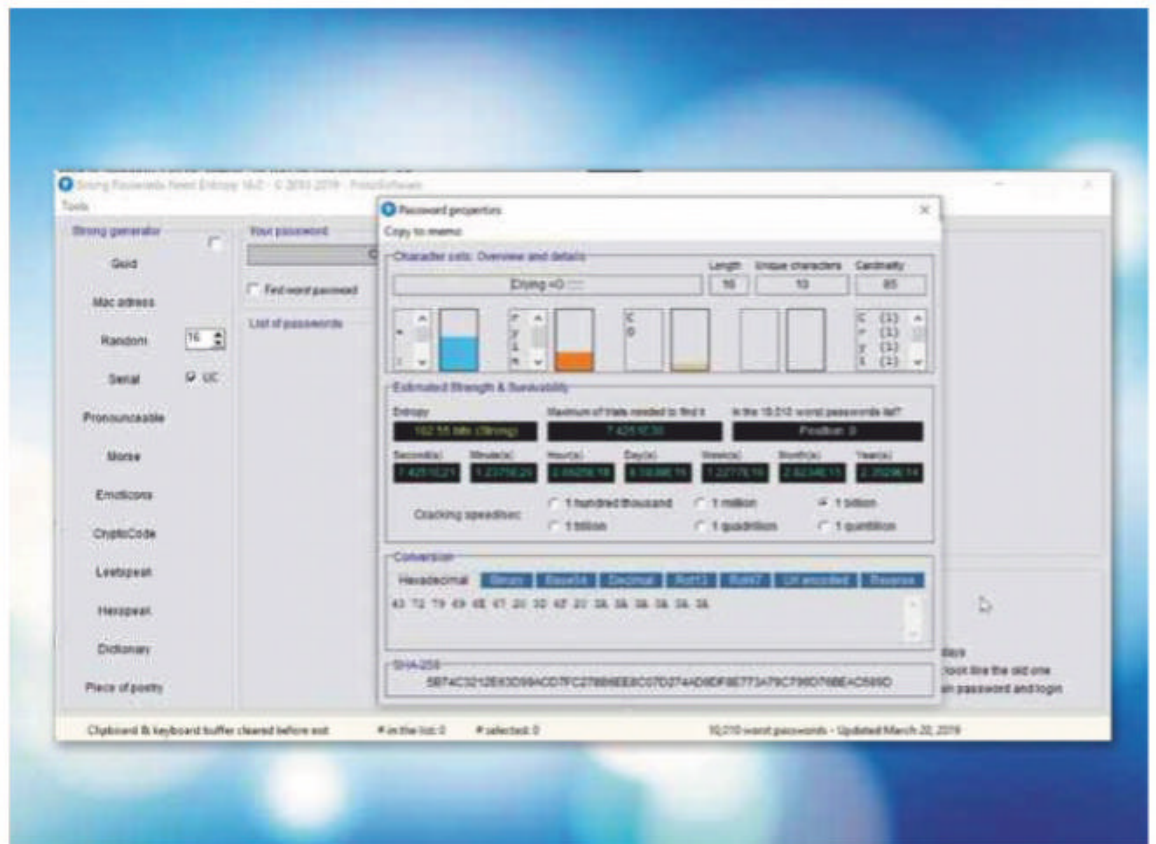
Strong Passwords Need Entropy 16

bit.ly/spne474

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10

File size: 367KB

Strong Passwords Need Entropy (SPNE for short) checks the strength and “survivability” of a password, so you can see how long it would take for a hacker to crack it. It also shows you where in the list of the world’s worst passwords a login ranks. The program can generate secure passwords in a number of ways, including Random, Morse Code, Emoticons, CryptoCode, Leetspeak and Piece of Poetry. The latest version adds a new status bar, updates the worst passwords list and automatically removes duplicate passwords and those with low entropy (predictability). It also improves SPNE’s code and interface.



DISK TOOL

OSFMount 3

bit.ly/osfm474

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10

File size: 7.6MB

OSFMount lets you ‘mount’ local disk-image files, making them accessible, so you can read and write data. Each mounted image is assigned a drive letter so you can use it just as you would any regular drive. The program can handle all the major image file formats – including IMG, ISO and BIN – and this new version can mount a virtual drive using Physical Disk emulation, so the disk can be recognised by Windows Disk Management. OSFMount can also mount a virtual drive as read/write while preserving the data of the original image file. There’s a new step-by-step wizard for easier mounting of virtual drives, too.

VPN TOOL

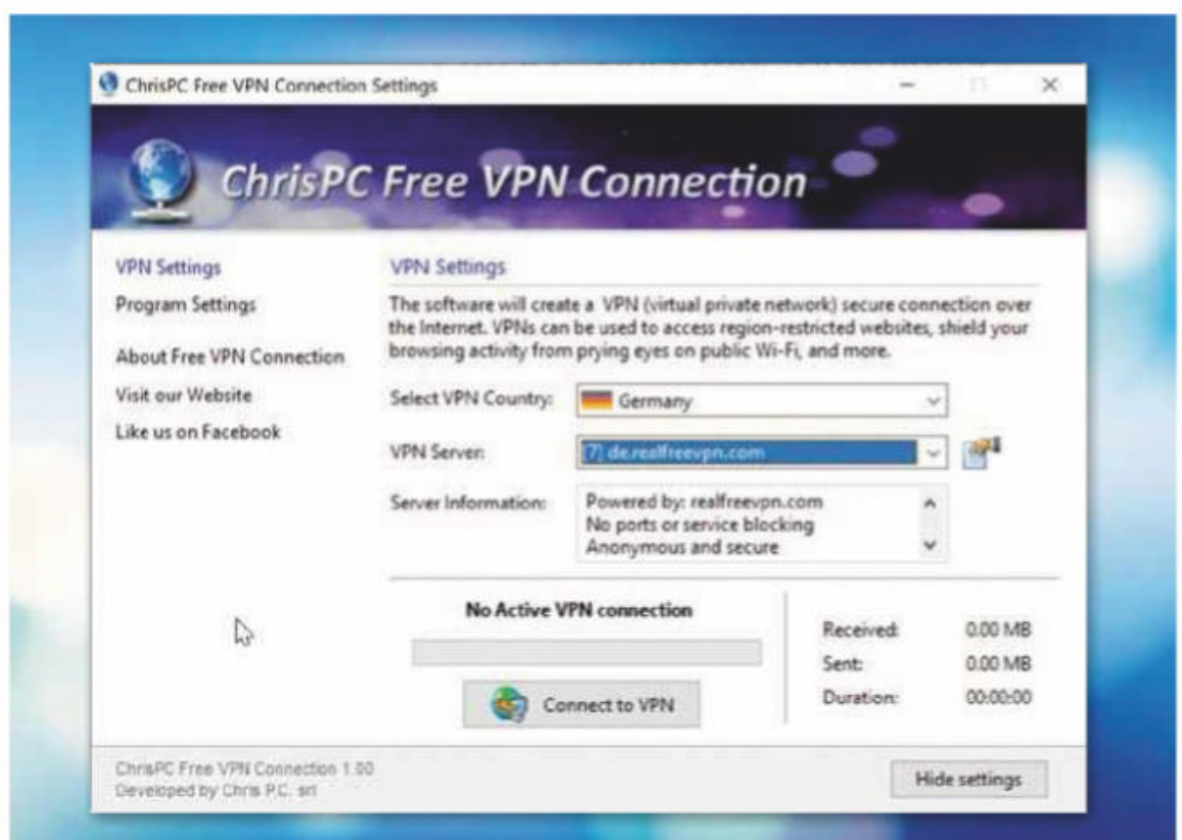
ChrisPC Free VPN Connection

bit.ly/chrisvpn474

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10

File size: 1.7MB

If you want to avoid people spying on your internet activity, or access sites which have been geographically blocked, then running a VPN is the obvious solution. This new tool from ChrisPC gives you access to more than 90 free VPN servers in the UK, US, Germany, Canada, France, Russia, Singapore and the Netherlands. Just select a country and pick a VPN server from the drop-down menu. The server-information box tells you which company the VPN server is powered by, and lists the benefits and any restrictions to be aware of – such as the automatic blocking of potentially illegal activity.





GAME

By The Lake

bit.ly/bylake474

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10, macOS or Linux

File size: 519MB

This creepy and atmospheric game takes place in a snowbound Russian village, near a lake which has somehow caused the local children to vanish. The aim is to find your way through the village, avoiding the dark forces. By The Lake was developed over an eight-week period and is a fun game to play, if a little rough in places.

Don't install...

Anti-Twin

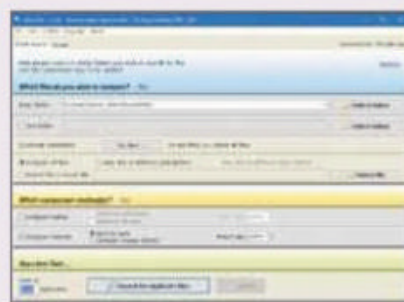
bit.ly/anti474

Min requirements:

Windows XP/
Vista/7/8.1/10

File size: 0.9MB

Anti-Twin is a nifty little duplicate cleaner, and we especially like its built-in pop-up preview pane – although it can get in the way when you're trying to mark the files you want to remove. The main drawback is that the software hasn't been updated since 2010, and it failed to catch many of our known duplicates.



...Install this instead

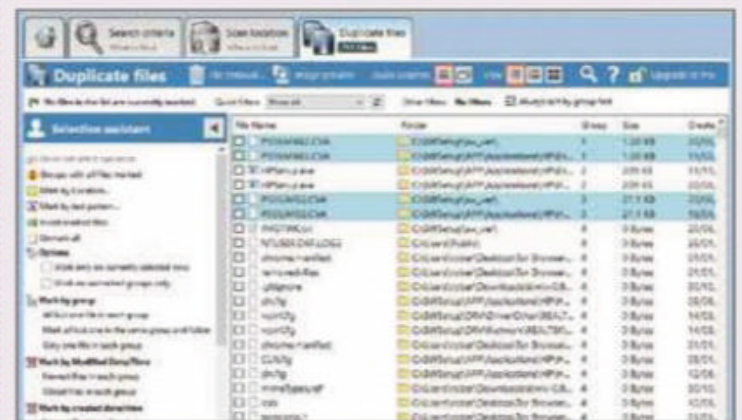
Duplicate Cleaner Free

bit.ly/dc474

Min requirements: Windows Vista/7/8.1/10

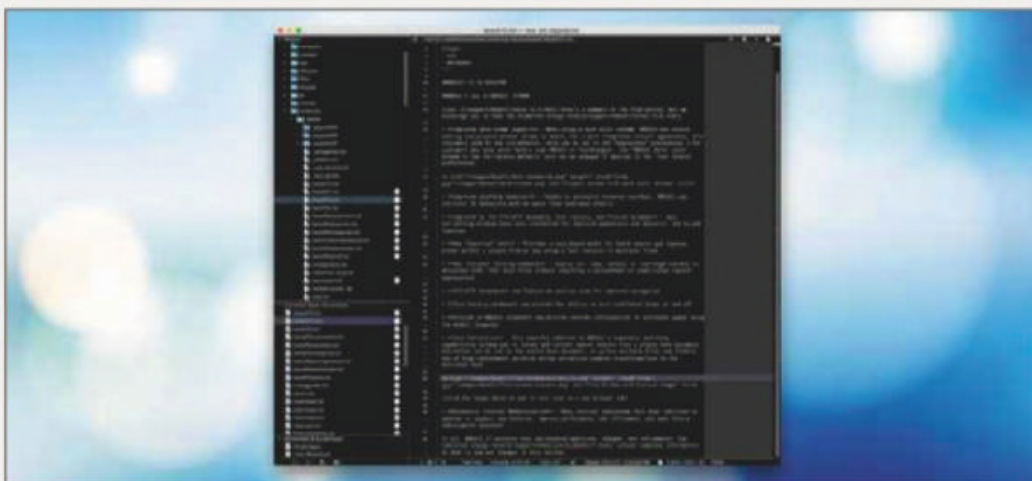
File size: 5.6MB

Duplicate Cleaner Free is a fantastic, incredibly fast tool for detecting unnecessary copies of files on your PC. In our tests, it took just 18 seconds to scan our entire C drive and find 6,999 duplicate files, while individual folders were scanned in less than a second. You can search by filename or extension, and select a file-type filter, so the tool only displays audio or image files in the results. Double-clicking any listed item displays a preview, too, so you can be sure you're removing the correct files. A Pro version, with even more features, is available for £23.95.



OTHER OPERATING SYSTEMS

What's new for Linux and Mac OS



TEXT EDITOR

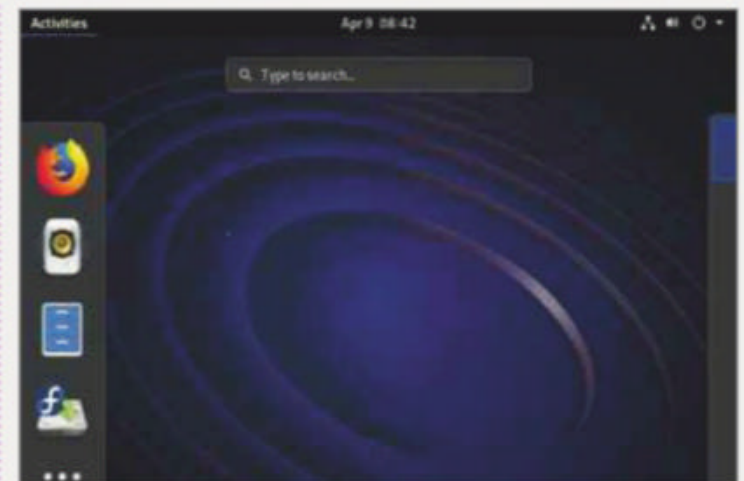
BBEdit 12

bit.ly/bbedit474

Min requirements: macOS 10.14.1 or later, 64-bit processor

File size: 14.3MB

After nearly five years, BBEdit, the professional text, code and markup editor for macOS, returns to the Mac App Store as a 64-bit application with more than 300 new features and refinements, Dark Mode support, Git integration and more. The app offers a 30-day evaluation period with all the features – once the trial ends, the software reverts to free mode and loses certain functionality such as web-authoring tools. If you want the advanced features, you can buy a subscription for \$3.99 (£3.05) per month or \$39.99 (£30.50) per year via an in-app purchase.



LINUX DISTRO

Fedora 30 Beta

fedoraproject.org

Min requirements: 64-bit processor

File size: 1.8GB

Arguably the best Linux distribution available for advanced users, Fedora 30 has just hit beta at the time of writing and the final release should be available around the time you read this. DeepinDE and Pantheon Desktop join KDE Plasma and Xfce as DE (desktop environment) options, and GNOME, the most popular DE, gets updated to 3.32, with a more modern visual style.

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Best New Browser Tools



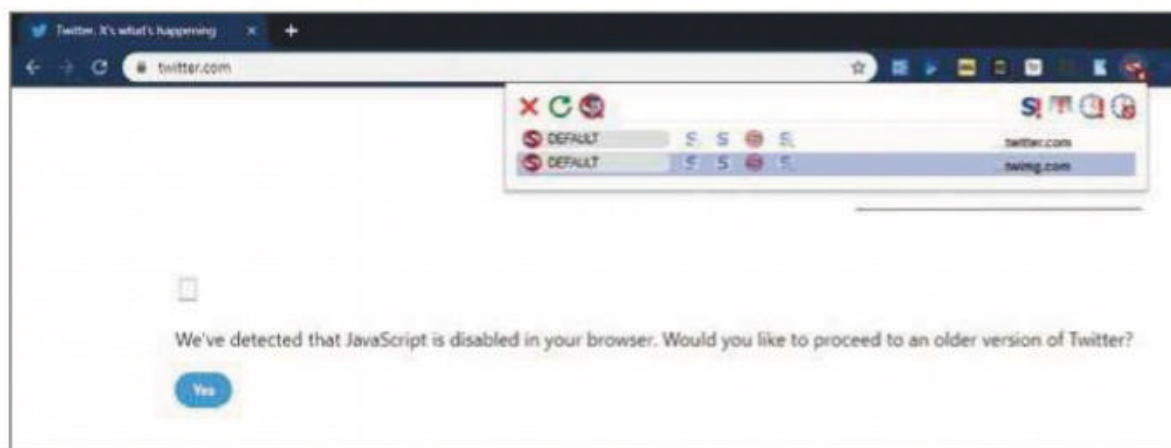
CHROME

Block unsafe scripts using NoScript for Chrome

The best and most popular extension for protecting your browser against malicious JavaScript exploits hidden in web pages has finally arrived on Chrome (bit.ly/noscript474).

NoScript has been available for Firefox for 14 years (bit.ly/noff474), blocking so-called 'active content' that can be used by hackers to steal your data, or worse. The tool operates a blanket ban on Java, Flash, JavaScript and other executables unless you whitelist the specific domain – a pre-emptive measure that offers “maximum security for your browser”.

Once you've installed NoScript, click its toolbar button to see all the current



permissions for active content on the page you're on. The add-on's default for most scripts, such as Google Analytics, is to block them – but you can click each icon to grant temporary permission and

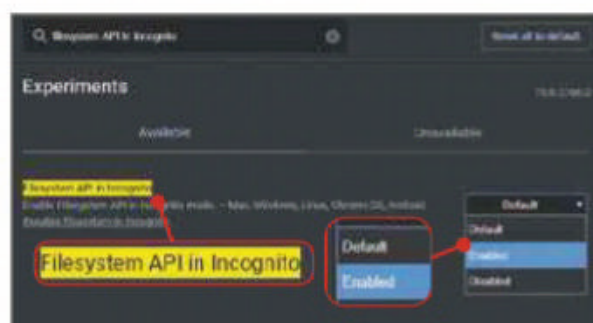
let NoScript know whether that site's content can be trusted. Alternatively, set up your own custom permissions to keep you safe without causing some websites to not function.

Preview results on any search engine

Last issue, we looked at the excellent Google Results Previewer (bit.ly/goog474), which lets you preview search results by hovering over them (and saving you a wasted click).

URL Render (bit.ly/render474) does the same across a wider range of search engines, including Google, Bing, Yahoo, DuckDuckGo and Qwant, although in our tests, it struggled with the latter two. Run a search, then hover your mouse over any of the results – this creates a scrollable pop-up so you can continue browsing without navigating away from your search provider.

The extension is still in beta, so expect a few hiccups. But even in its current state, URL Render is a joy to use and the developer promises that it won't compromise your privacy.



Prevent websites seeing you in incognito mode

Chrome's incognito mode is an excellent way to keep your browsing history secret (see our feature on page 50 for other uses), but you can still be 'watched' by websites that track you. However, a fix is on its way to prevent sites from detecting when you're using incognito mode.

Last month, Google introduced the 'Filesystem API in Incognito' flag in its developer-focused Chrome Canary

browser (bit.ly/canary474) – a setting designed to ensure that files won't remain after you've exited the Incognito tab. However, it didn't work – until now.

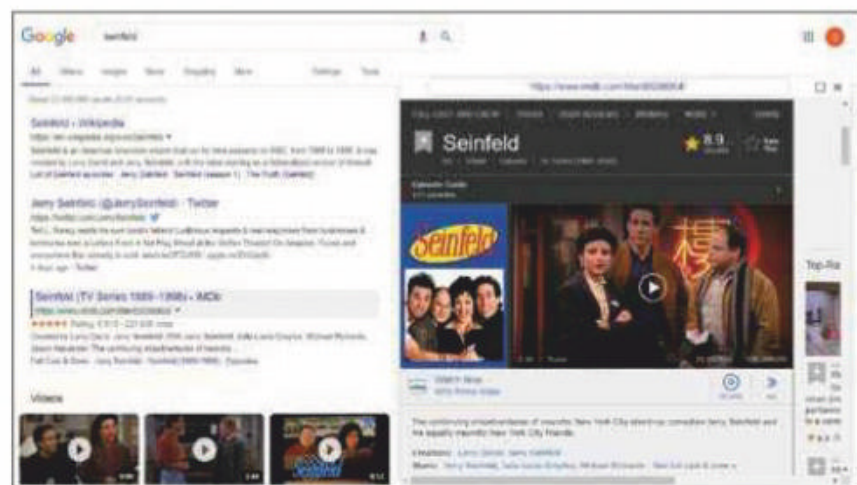
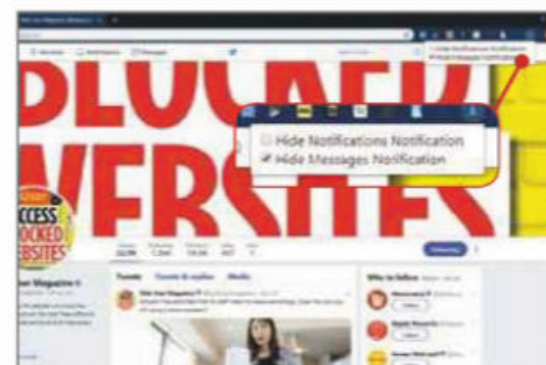
In Canary's address bar, type `chrome://flags/#enable-filesystem-in-incognito` and flick

the switch to Enabled, then open an incognito window and visit bit.ly/incogtest474 to check it's working. The feature should be available in the forthcoming Chrome 75 update.

Browse Twitter in peace

Twitter is probably the loudest website on the planet – a million conflicting opinions whizzing past and arguments brewing in every second tweet. The Mindful Twitter browser extension (bit.ly/twit474) won't block out all that noise, but it will hide all those annoying notifications that bombard you while you're browsing the social network. That's especially useful if you get a lot of direct messages or you're set up to receive notifications whenever your favourite celebrities tweet.

Click the toolbar icon, tick the boxes for both general and message notifications and you can now browse the Twittersphere in peace.



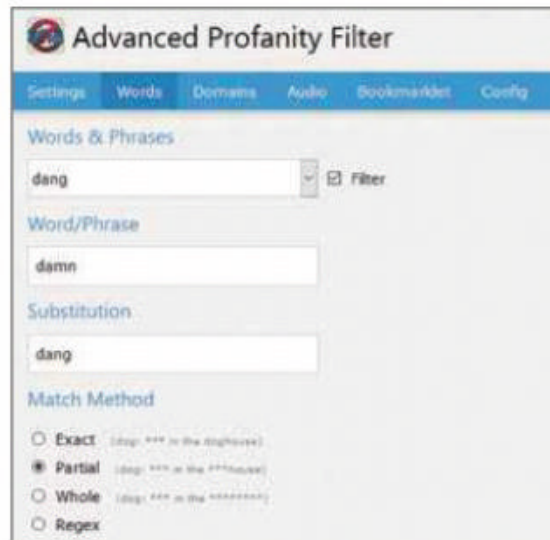
This fortnight's most useful tips and add-ons to help you get the most from Chrome, Firefox, Opera and more



FIREFOX

Block offensive words on websites automatically

In the darkest recesses of the internet, the air threatens to turn so blue, it'd make a hardened docker blush. The Advanced Profanity Filter (bit.ly/profanity474) makes the web more pleasant for you and your family. After installation, click the add-on's toolbar button to take control of what you see online – start by toggling the tool to On, then click Options to censor, substitute or remove swear words, and blacklist and whitelist specific domains. The extension even works on video subtitles – albeit experimentally.

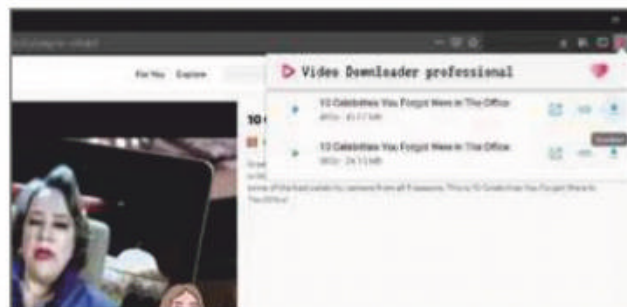


Under Words, you can add words to the ban list – use the drop-down menu to automatically add them, but make sure you tick Filter if you want to avoid the really nasty stuff (strong stomach advised). Once you've selected a word, you can decide which word will replace it, as well as how the tool matches curse words.

Apply a dark mode to Facebook Messenger

Messenger is the best place to go for Facebook messages – it's a lot easier to focus on your chats without the background chatter of the social network's news feed, sponsored adverts and marketplace notifications. But you know what else makes it even easier to concentrate? Dark mode. Enabling it in the smartphone app is now simple, but not so easy when using messenger.com, which dazzles your retinas with its bleached-out appearance.

Messenger Dark Theme (bit.ly/dark474) solves the problem by applying the universally popular dark mode to your browser experience and making messaging far easier on the eyes, especially at night. To switch back to classic mode, go to Firefox's Add-ons section and click Disable next to the extension.

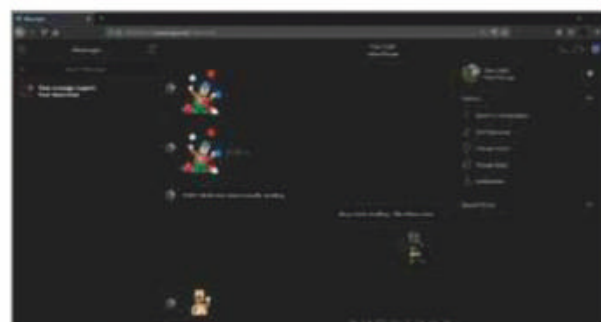


Download videos from almost any site

Unlike many extensions for downloading videos from the web, Video Downloader Professional (bit.ly/vid474) isn't restricted to YouTube. You can also use it on Facebook, Instagram, Daily Motion, Vimeo and, so the developer says, "many more".

Rather than adding a new button on a website, downloads are handled within the add-on itself: find a video you want to download, then give the icon a click. You'll likely see a list of available resolutions of varying video quality, while other options include copying the video link or opening it in separate window. If you're on a page with multiple videos, the add-on helpfully displays them in a list, making it ideal for sites like Facebook.

See our cover feature on page 40 for more advice about downloading web videos.



OTHER BROWSERS

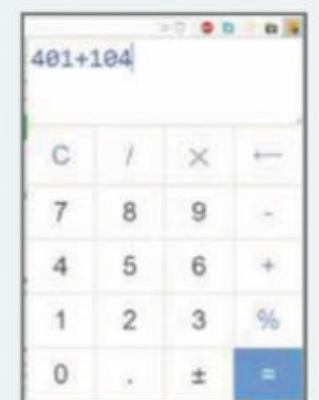
Keep your tabs private

Hide Tabs (Panic Button) (bit.ly/hide474) is one of our favourite new add-ons for Opera – and not just because it does exactly what you think it does. It also gets the thumbs-up from us for its sheer speed. Whether you've got one open tab or many on-screen, hit the Hide Tabs icon and in a blink of an eye, they'll vanish from view, replaced with your usual homepage. Another tap of the icon magically brings them back as if nothing happened. This is useful when you're browsing for secrets such as gifts, or you don't want everyone around you to know what you're looking at.



Install the add-on that adds up

Windows has offered a calculator since time immemorial, but getting to it involves going through the Start menu. Simple Calculator (bit.ly/calc474), on the other hand, is only ever a single click away. It's another 'does what it says on the tin' extension for Opera – super-lightweight and cleanly designed, it works instantly. Another highlight is that clicking the icon again, which makes the add-on disappear, won't immediately clear your current workings out; your sums stay saved in the calculator until you press C for clear.





Best Free Apps



App of the Fortnight

PRIVACY

Jumbo

bit.ly/jumbo474



Social networks provide an excellent platform for self-expression, but have you ever considered that some of your old tweets, posts and status updates might give away more private information than you're comfortable with?

Professing to 'clean your digital life', Jumbo is a new app (currently iOS-only) that serves as an all-in-one social-media privacy assistant, clearing up your personal data across multiple social networks and online services from within a single handy

app. If, for example, you've ever worried that one of your old tweets might one day come back to haunt you, you can use Jumbo to quickly tidy up your previous Twitter activity and archive any older tweets to your mobile device.

As well as Twitter, the app lets you clean up your Google Search history and Alexa voice recordings, all in just a few quick taps. The developer says that support for cleaning many more services, including Instagram and Tinder,

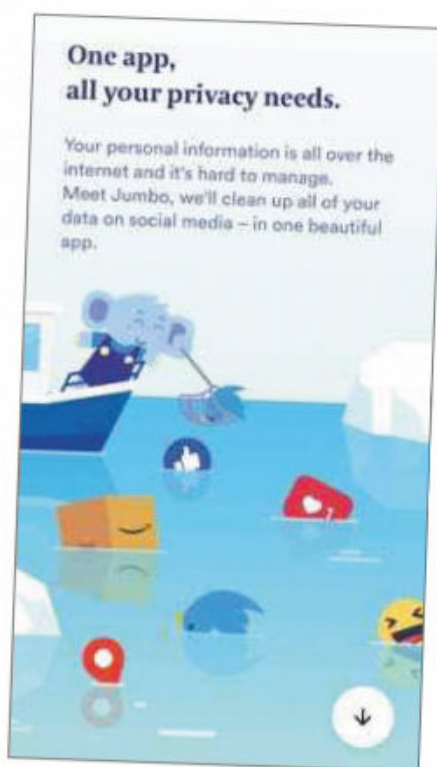
is on its way.

Not only that, but if you've ever tried to make sense of Facebook's labyrinthine privacy settings, then you'll be pleased to hear that Jumbo also offers a very handy Smart Facebook Privacy Settings feature. Jumbo can't clean your Facebook history for you (yet), but it can help you take control of your privacy settings on the social network.

Crucially, Jumbo allows you to clean up your social data without ever compromising your privacy. In fact, Jumbo itself never even gets access to your personal information. The entire app has been designed to work without storing or processing

any of your data on its own servers – all your data remains on your iPhone or iPad.

NEW



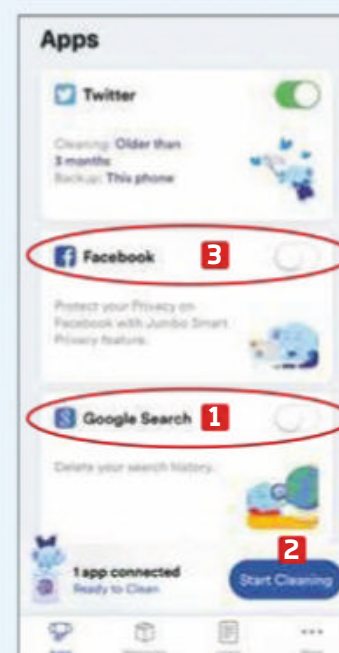
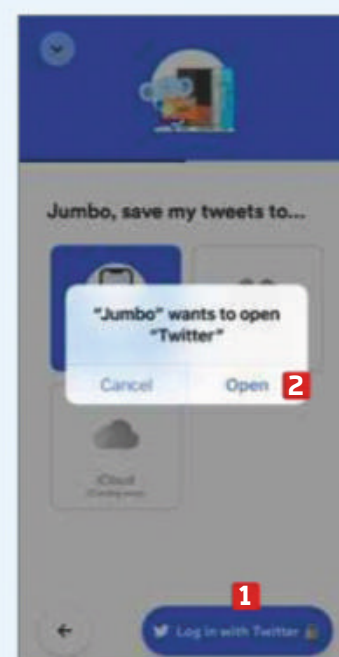
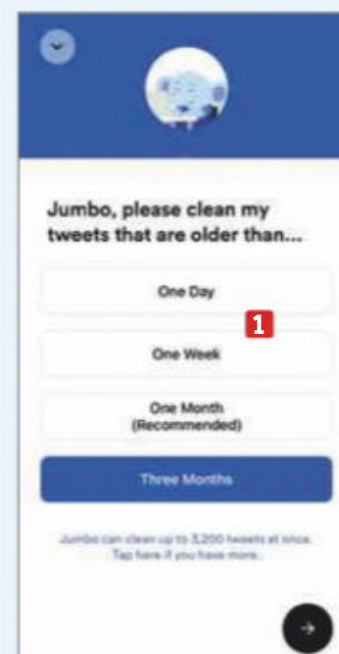
MINI WORKSHOP

Connect and clean your social media accounts with Jumbo

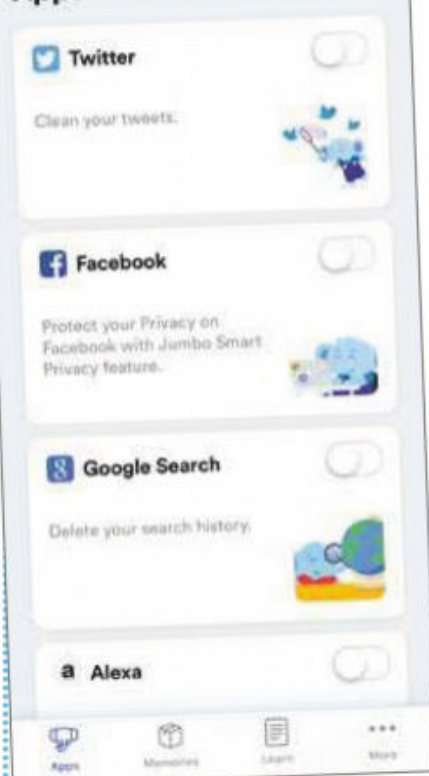
1 Download the Jumbo app, then launch it and tap your way through the various welcome screens. Once you're done, you'll see a screen with separate 'cards' representing each social-media account the service supports. To clean your tweets, for example, press the switch on the Twitter card. On the next screen, you'll need to choose a time range – you can choose to clean all tweets older than a day, week, month or three months. **1**

2 Select one of these options, then tap the arrow button that appears in the bottom-right corner. On the next screen, you'll be asked where you want to save your old tweets. Currently, you can only choose to save to your iPhone, but options to save to Dropbox and iCloud are coming soon. Make your selection, press 'Log in with Twitter', **1** then tap Open. **2** When the Twitter app opens, choose Connect.

3 Tap 'Set up a new app', which will return you to the main Jumbo screen. You can now add another account – Google Search **1** or Alexa, for example – by pressing the relevant card and repeating steps 1 and 2. When you're done adding accounts, tap the Start Cleaning button. **2** If you want Jumbo's help with your Facebook privacy settings, tap the Facebook card, **3** then choose 'Log in with Facebook' and follow the steps.



Apps





Our rating



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

PODCASTS

Laughable

bit.ly/laughdroid474
bit.ly/laughios474
 5  11.4

There are dozens of podcast apps around but Laughable's different in that (as the name suggests) it's skewed towards comedy. You can subscribe to your favourite comedians and get curated recommendations for other artists, making it easy to discover more of what you like. Useful profile pages provide links to other podcasts, tour dates and social-media accounts. Updated for iOS with performance and navigational improvements, and completely new to Android, Laughable is an essential download for comedy fans and podcast lovers in general.



Our rating

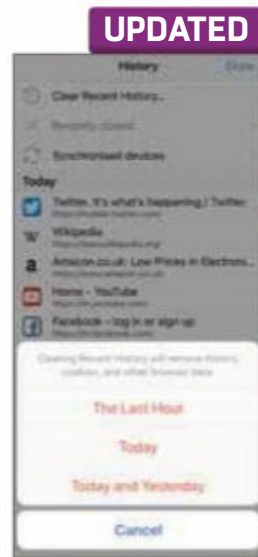


BROWSER

Firefox

bit.ly/ffoxdroid474
bit.ly/ffoxios474
 (varies)  11.4

Mozilla has updated its Firefox app for iPhone and iPad users with a number of significant improvements. For example, controlling your browsing history is now much easier. You can clear recent history in a couple of taps, and are now given the option to delete your history for the last hour, the last day or the day before. Handy new shortcuts let you get to your bookmarks, history, reading list and downloads direct from the Firefox Home screen, and the browser's built-in password manager has been improved with the option to enable Face ID to keep your logins even more secure.





Our rating



SOCIAL

Snapchat

bit.ly/snapdroid474
bit.ly/snapios474
 4.4  10

Snapchat users on Android have always had a bit of a rough deal. Until recently, the Android version of the popular messaging app performed sluggishly when compared to its iOS cousin. For a long time, the developers attempted to improve its performance via patches and updates but eventually gave up the ghost (no pun on Snapchat's logo intended) and went back to the drawing board, rebuilding the Android app from the ground up. You won't notice any changes to the way the app works, but it should feel a lot snappier (no pun intended, again).




Our rating

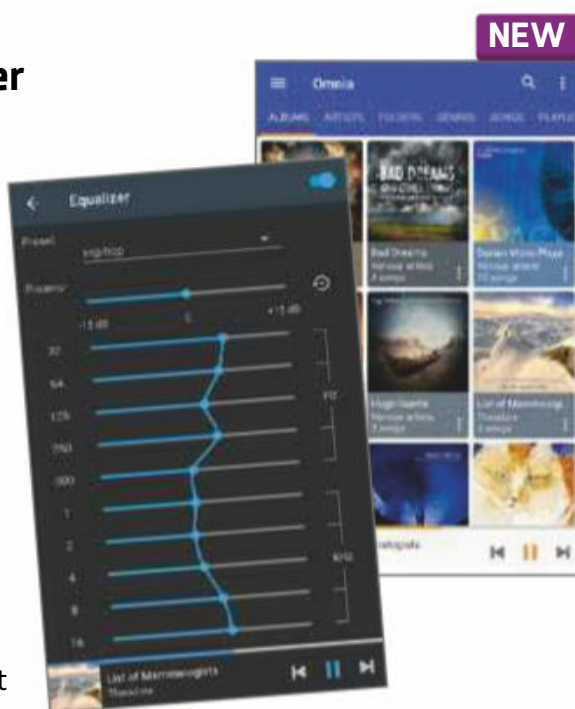


MUSIC

Omnia Music Player

bit.ly/omnia474
 5

If you've stuck with the same music player app for years, despite the wide range of alternatives available, Omnia could be the one to change your mind. It's only in beta at the moment, but the signs are very positive. Despite a tiny footprint (5MB), Omnia offers tons of advanced features, including playback for practically any audio format, a built-in 10-band graphic equaliser and support for Chromecast and Android Auto. Sound quality is excellent, due to the fact that Omnia uses its own high-res audio engine, decoder and library, rather than Android's built-in decoders. And, thanks to its smart Material Design interface, Omnia looks great, too.



Our rating

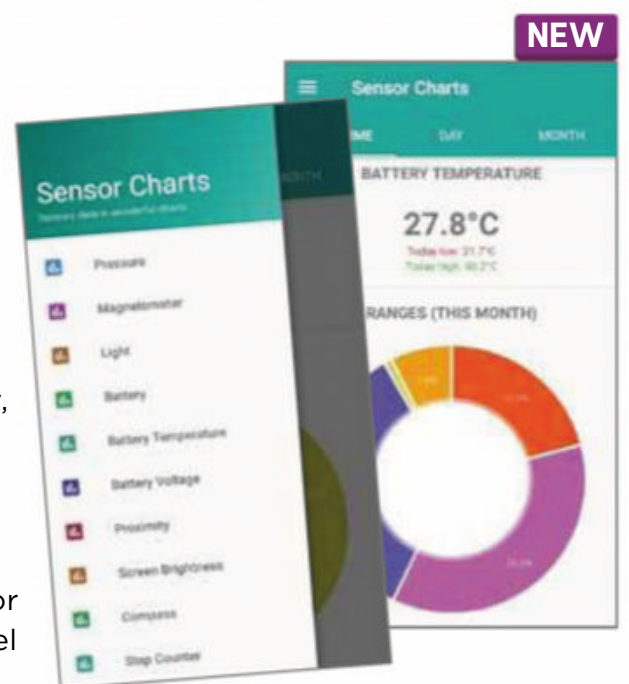


TOOLS

Sensor Charts

bit.ly/sensor474
 4.4

For many people, there's something quite beautiful about seeing data represented visually, whether it's a weather map or a steadily rising sales chart. The developers of Sensor Charts obviously feel this way, too, since their app ingeniously takes the data gathered by all the various sensors built into your mobile device – the pressure sensor, proximity sensor, compass, step counter, battery meter, memory usage and more – and turns it into stunning, colourful graphs and charts. Data is recorded in the background and you can opt to view live readings or historic data over a specific time range. Less beautiful are the large and sadly omnipresent ads.



Our rating



5 NEW APPS WORTH PAYING FOR

FOOD

Lunchbox Recipes

bit.ly/lunchdroid474

bit.ly/lunchios474

Price: £3.99

 5  8

Bored of the same homemade sandwiches but don't want to pay for supermarket meal deals? This app, with 90 (and growing) easy lunch recipes, could be just what you need.



PUZZLE

Photographs

bit.ly/photodroid474

bit.ly/photoios474

Price: £3.99

 4.1  8

Short but sweet, this unassuming pixel-art game mixes puzzles with narrative, over a series of relatable, sometimes heart-breaking stories. Music and visuals are beautiful, and the puzzles are varied.



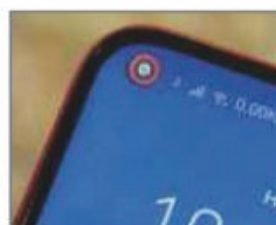
TOOLS

Battery Ring

bit.ly/batterydroid474

Price: 59p

 4.0.3



Battery Ring shows your device's remaining battery charge via a ring symbol at the top of the screen. It's customisable and works particularly well on devices with a hole-punch camera lens, such as the Samsung Galaxy S10.

GAME

Construction Simulator 3

bit.ly/consimdroid474

bit.ly/consimios474

Price: £4.59 (Android), £3.99 (iOS)

 5  9

Jump into the cockpit view of excavators, cranes and over 50 other construction vehicles, to build towering structures, bridges and more in this sequel to the popular simulation game.



REFERENCE

Indoor Plant Guide Pocket Edition

bit.ly/plantdroid474

Price: £2.49

 4

This portable A-Z of indoor houseplants, each with its own image and data, has been updated with new plant profiles and the ability for users to submit suggestions for inclusion.



Lunchbox Recipes



Photographs



Battery Ring



Construction Simulator 3



Indoor Plant Guide Pocket Edition

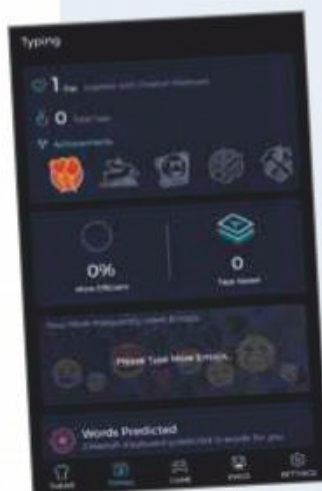


Don't install...

Cheetah Keyboard

bit.ly/cheetah474



Not all 'Don't Installs' start out as bad apps, and Cheetah Keyboard is a prime example. This alternative Android keyboard launched for free back in 2017 and gained a reasonable following. But recent updates appear to have ruined this once-great app, with many users complaining of increased, intrusive advertising, as well as broken functionality (such as glitchy auto-complete), rip-off in-app personalisation options and high subscription costs (£22.49 per year) to banish ads.



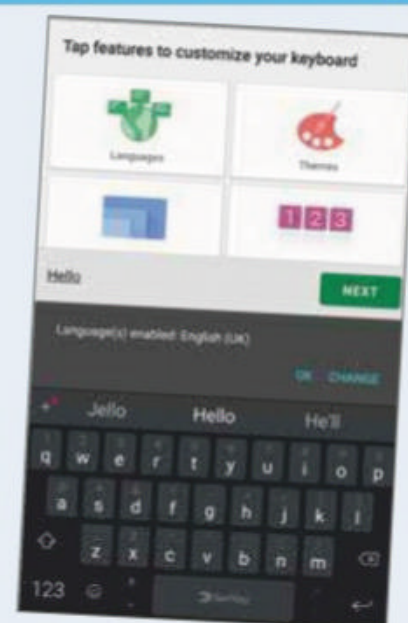
...Install this instead

SwiftKey Keyboard

bit.ly/swift474

 5  9.3

SwiftKey has been one of the best alternative keyboards ever since its launch, nine years ago, and – happily – it remains unspoiled by the ravages of time. Even being bought out by Microsoft in 2016 doesn't seem to have adversely affected this powerful tool, which offers all the emoji, GIFs and stickers that users now expect, as well as the option to type by swiping instead of tapping. It may lack Cheetah's vast range of glitzy themes, but it's still heavily customisable and works like a dream. Cleverly, Swiftkey learns to adapt to your personal typing style and, best of all, it's still completely free. ■





Take a Screen Break

Give your eyes a rest from your browser by taking our fiendish fortnightly challenges. Can you guess our British sitcom emoji and our Wikipedia article?

**WIN A
WEB USER
2018 BACK
ISSUES DISC!**

Email your answers to
editor@webuser.co.uk
- one correct entry
will win a disc



CAN YOU GUESS THE BRITISH SITCOMS FROM THE EMOJI?

1

2

3

4

5

6

GUESS THE WIKIPEDIA ARTICLE

Can you work out which technology-related Wikipedia entry the following clues refer to?



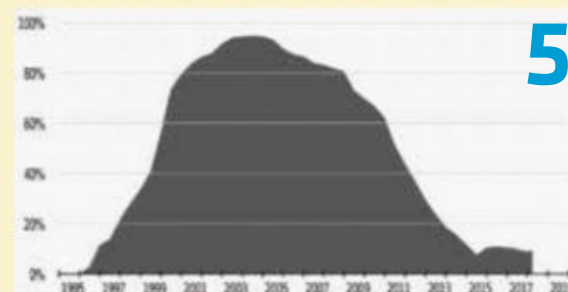
1 "The project was started in the summer of 1994 by computer programmer and developer Thomas Reardon, who used source code from Spyglass, Inc."

2 "It has been subjected to many security vulnerabilities and concerns: much of the spyware, adware and computer viruses across the internet are made possible by exploitable bugs in its architecture."

3 "While a major upgrade can be uninstalled in a traditional way, the matter of uninstalling a version that

has shipped with an operating system remains a controversial one."

4 "It is still installed in Windows 10 to maintain compatibility with older websites and intranet sites that require ActiveX and other legacy web technologies."



COMPETITIONS

WIN 1 OF 5 YubiKey 5 NFC

Own the world's first multi-protocol security key, YubiKey 5 NFC. The key lets you protect your devices without passwords, providing strong authentication via Near Field Communication (NFC) and USB-A ports. Plus, it's water- and crush-resistant. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'YubiKey' in the subject line. For more information, visit www.yubico.com and follow [@yubico](https://twitter.com/yubico) on Twitter.



**WORTH
£42
EACH**

WIN 1 OF 5 iPad Air Metropolis cases

Rugged and resistant to impact, Urban Armor Gear's new iPad Air cases will keep your device safe in all conditions. Its tactile grip makes it comfortable to hold, and it provides easy access to the touchscreen and ports. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'metropolis' in the subject line. For more information, visit urbanarmorgear.com and follow [@UrbanArmorGear](https://twitter.com/UrbanArmorGear) on Twitter.



**WORTH
£59.95
EACH**

Formjacking

Cybercriminals are trying to skim your data from online forms and you won't suspect a thing. **David Crookes** reveals all about this scary new security threat



What is it?

Formjacking is a new form of cybercrime that grabs victims' personal details from the payment forms of online stores and services. It manages to remain virtually undetectable, using the information from the forms to extract money, commit bank fraud or engage in identity theft, and victims don't know they've been affected until it's too late. Formjacking has been compared to card skimming at cash machines.

How does it work?

Cybercriminals have figured out that they can inject malicious JavaScript code into a genuine website's payment form. Victims visit the site, unaware that it has been affected, and fill in the form with their name, email address, phone number and – crucially – their card details. When they submit the form, a copy is sent to the hackers who are then able to access their data. Since the form is also sent to the merchant and the transaction is

verified, the victim has no idea that their data has been leaked.

Surely there are telltale signs?

Not at the victim's end, no, and this is why the technique is so frightening. You enter your details on the website based on trust, believing that your information is being encrypted and sent only to the server of the company you're dealing with. In return, you'll see that the transaction has been successful: after all, you'll receive the intended goods or services. Formjacking should make us all much more wary about completing online transactions.

So what happens next?

Once the hackers have your information, they can do whatever they want with it. Maybe they'll use it themselves or perhaps they'll sell it on. The point is that they'll have gained possession of it without any fault on your part: you'll have acted in good faith by filling in your details on a website that you may well have used many times in the past or is a well-known, respected name. You may only discover there's a problem when you check your credit card bill or bank statement or if you receive odd letters or emails.

But how do hackers inject code undetected?

There are numerous ways. Some criminals may gain access to a website's login page, while others may have spotted a vulnerability on the

server. But they generally use a supply chain attack – one that seeks to gain entry by earmarking the least secure parts of a network. So, for example, if a major business uses a smaller firm to provide a particular service such as a chatbot, there may be a greater likelihood that the third-party company will have an exploitable weakness, making it a target. By compromising that company's technology, hackers gain access to the host website and make their changes. The potential for damage is huge.

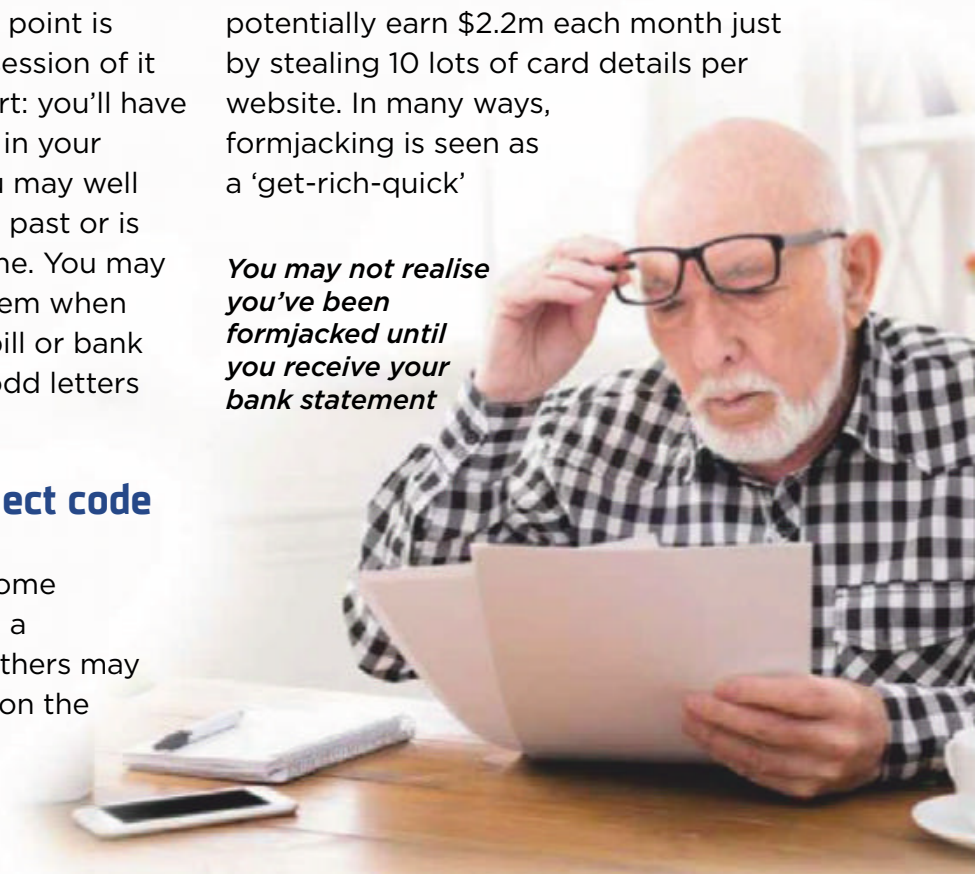
How big a problem is this?

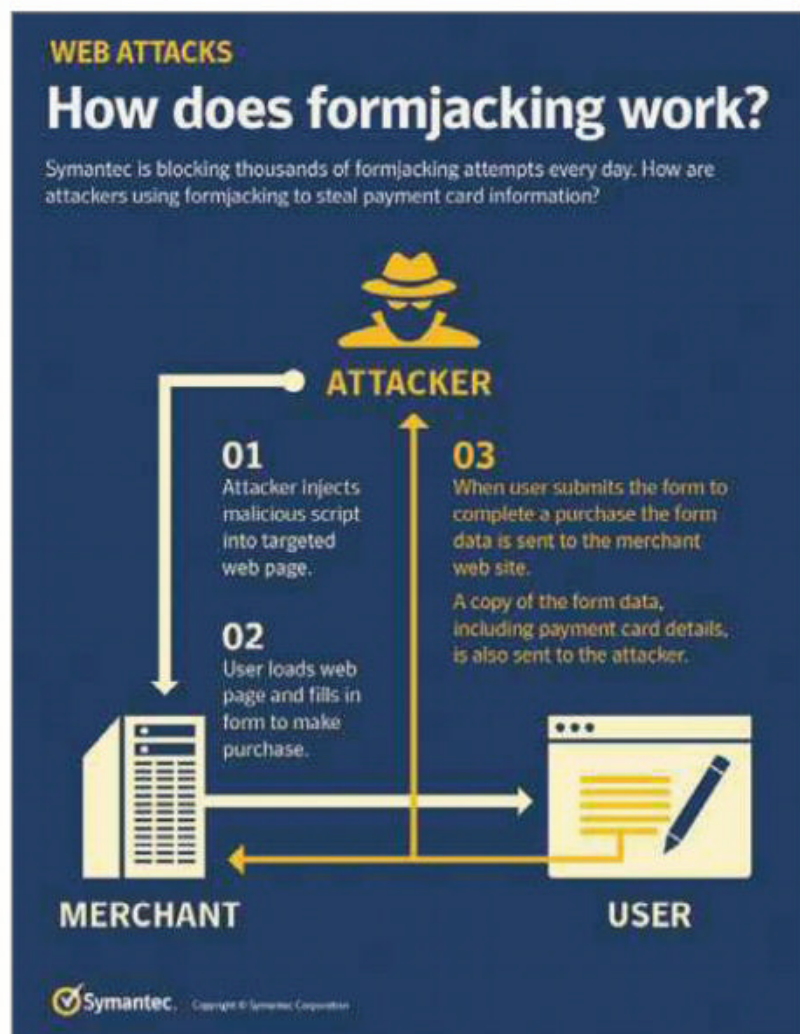
Very big. According to the online security company Symantec, 4,800 websites are compromised with formjacking code every month. It claims to have blocked 3.7 million formjacking attempts in 2018 and says that cybercriminals can potentially earn \$2.2m each month just by stealing 10 lots of card details per website. In many ways, formjacking is seen as a 'get-rich-quick'

You may not realise you've been formjacked until you receive your bank statement



Formjacking is like an online method of skimming your bank card at cash machines





Symantec has created this infographic to explain how formjacking works

scheme for hackers and, with clever ways of disguising damaging code as harmless, they can siphon huge amounts of data before anyone gets wind of it.

Have I already been affected?

Possibly. The trouble is that cybercriminals have grown in confidence

and they've moved from targeting the websites of small and medium businesses to much larger ones. So in recent months we've seen some massive names affected, including British Airways, Ticketmaster and Feedify. More than 383,000 transactions, credit card data and personal details were stolen by

British Airways is one of the biggest names to have suffered a formjacking attack

cyberhackers in the British Airways attack alone, so the chance of falling victim is high.

Are companies letting people know?

Yes – it would be a poor company that buried such a major security breach. Ticketmaster, for instance, set up a support page (security.ticketmaster.ie), having spotted the problem on 23 June 2018 (it said UK customers from February

last year may have been affected – a sign of how well the code is hidden). In this case, cybercriminals got in via a live-chat support tool built by Inbenta, targeting its front-end servers where the code libraries used by Ticketmaster were stored. They then exploited the 'file upload' capability of the web server.

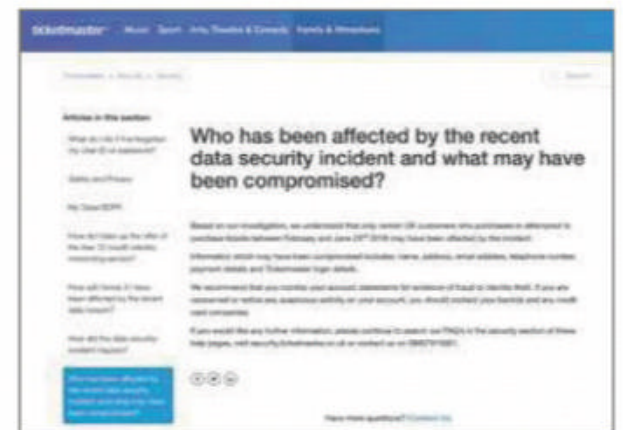
Are they well-organised attacks?

The attacks on British Airways, Ticketmaster and Feedify are believed to have been carried out by a hacking group called Magecart, which had already proven adept at skimming card details from unsecured payment forms on websites. It appears that

Magecart went as far as paying for an SSL certificate for its server to give it an air of legitimacy, while also setting up spoof web domains. But other websites are being compromised, including small ones, so we assume other groups and individuals are involved.

Why have they turned to formjacking?

Other forms of hacking – such as ransomware – are apparently becoming less lucrative and widespread thanks to fluctuating cryptocurrency values. Sophisticated ways to block other problems such as cryptojacking (in which a hacker seizes control of a victim's computer to mine cryptocurrency) have also caused a decline. Formjacking is a way for criminals to stay ahead of the



Ticketmaster admitted that formjacking may have compromised customers' data

curve, but be aware that those other risks to your security are still a threat and it's essential to remain vigilant.

How can I protect myself?

The best defence is security software with intrusion prevention system (IPS) technology, which most antivirus programs provide, to protect you from formjacking attacks on infiltrated websites. IPS checks whether data is being sent to a location different to the one it should be going to and issues a warning or blocks the transaction. But don't rely on antivirus protection alone: follow standard security advice such as ensuring websites are secure, not using an open network and watching out for phishing attempts.

What can I do as a website owner?

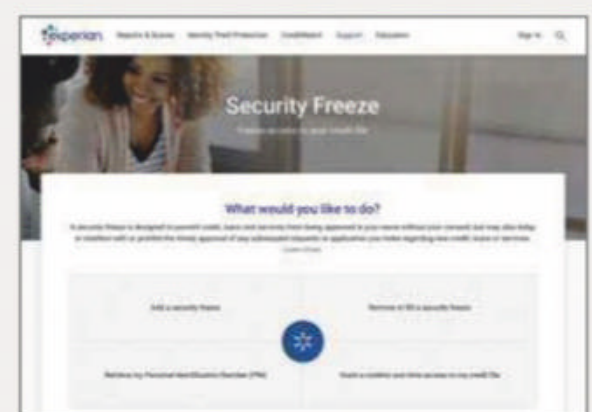
Website owners with payment forms are advised to look out for suspicious behaviour and check their code for potential changes while monitoring for unwanted patterns. They should also patch their servers, enforce privileged access management and ensure that third-party suppliers are doing the same. One particular danger is that a breach of a single tool used across many websites can cause widespread issues.

HOW DO I KNOW I'VE BEEN FORMJACKED?

There is every chance that you'll only discover you've fallen prey to a formjacking attack when details of the breach are disclosed by the victim company. However, according to Experian, it pays to keep your eyes peeled for other telltale signs that you've been affected directly.

It is important, says Experian, to examine credit card statements, flagging up anything suspicious. You should also use a service that lets you check your credit score – many are free and can alert you to unexplained drops which suggests your data is being used by someone else. Experian,

Equifax and TransUnion all let you freeze access to your credit files (bit.ly/freeze474) to prevent credit, loans or services from being approved in your name without your consent.



DOWNLOAD STREAMING VIDEO

**COVER
FEATURE**

Enjoy online TV shows, films and videos offline, as **Wayne Williams** reveals the best ways to download streaming content to watch whenever and wherever you want

sky
NETFLIX

BT
iPlayer

amazon

Virgin media

YouTube

NOWTV

Streaming services such as YouTube, BBC iPlayer, Netflix, Now TV and Amazon Prime Video have revolutionised the way we experience our entertainment, providing us with instant access to films, TV shows, music videos, live events, viral clips and much more, directly in our browsers and on our mobile devices.

But for many of us, the ephemeral nature of streaming is no substitute for having a locally stored copy of video content to watch whenever you

want – even when you don't have an internet connection – which is why downloading remains so popular. Indeed, many streaming services now offer their own download options for offline playback, although usually there are some restrictions.

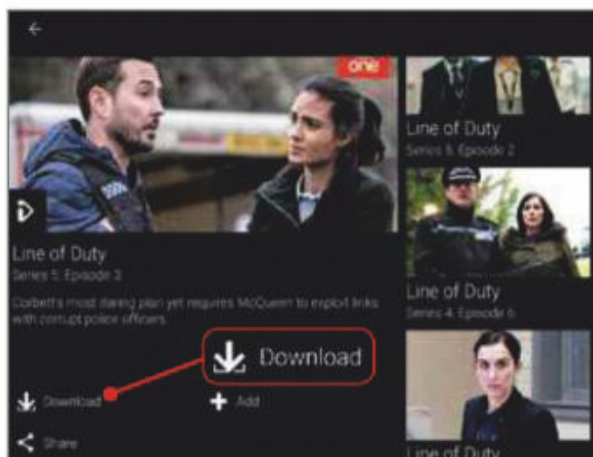
In this feature, we explain how to download any video you stream, so you can enjoy the best of both worlds. We also reveal some tricks to circumvent annoying download limitations, opening up your viewing options even further.

DOWNLOAD STREAMING TV SHOWS & FILMS

Most streaming services now let you download their content but don't clearly explain the limits on what you can and can't do. Here's what you need to know for all the big names

BBC iPlayer

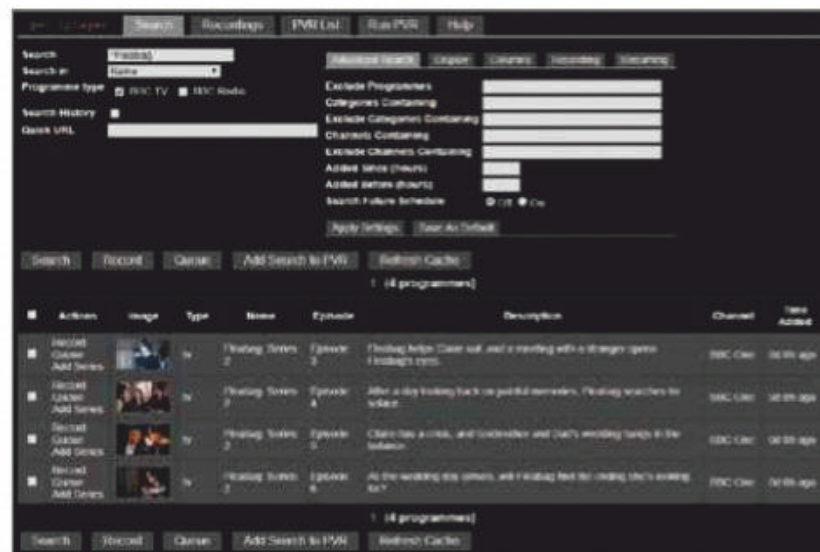
The ever-improving BBC iPlayer (www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer) lets you watch the Beeb's channels live, catch up with past programming and even enjoy original content that has yet to be broadcast. You can access it through the web or download it for your PC or Mac (www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/install), and there are also mobile apps available for all the major platforms. Usefully, the iPlayer lets you save programmes directly to your device, choosing between standard (800kbps) and high (1,500kbps) quality. It even offers a series link, for downloading new episodes as they become available.



You can download most streaming TV shows from BBC iPlayer for 30 days

However, there are some restrictions to be aware of. Downloaded programmes are only available to watch for the length of time they are on iPlayer, so if something is available for 30 days, you'll only have until the end of that same 30-day period to watch what you download. You can't transfer saved programmes between devices, nor download content from outside the UK; and on mobile devices, shows can only be downloaded via Wi-Fi, not 3G or 4G. Also, not all programmes are available to download. Live streams, new shows, sports broadcasts and films (where the BBC has limited rights) may not be available. In such instances, the Download option will be greyed out.

Some of the iPlayer's restrictions can be circumvented by using



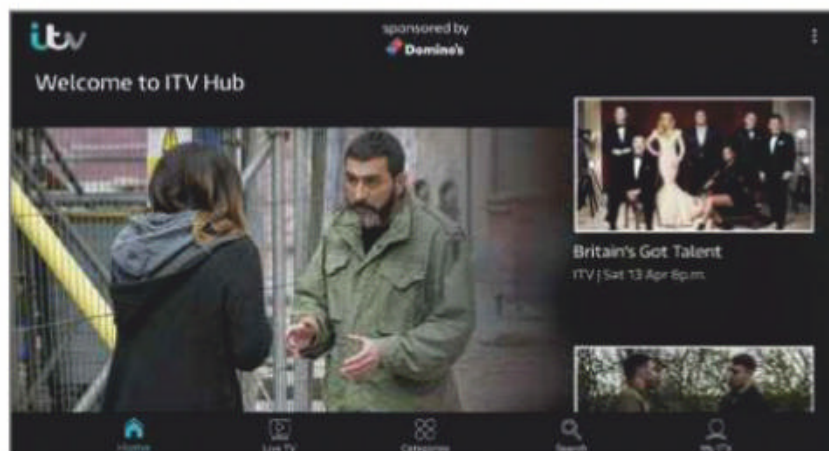
Download BBC shows to watch for as long as you want using Get iPlayer

Get iPlayer (bit.ly/getiplay474). This free software for Windows, macOS and Linux lets you download individual programmes or entire series, and the videos will never expire and can be watched on any device. Get iPlayer does have some restrictions of its own: it can only search for shows that were broadcast in the past 30 days, and doesn't allow downloading for certain content, such as news and sports videos. Also, Get iPlayer's command-line interface can seem very intimidating.

For a friendlier view, launch the Web PRV Manager from the Start menu, then either search for a programme to download or paste its web address from the iPlayer website. Click Record and the show will be saved in DRM-free MP4 format that you can watch in any media player.

ITV Hub+

ITV Hub (www.itv.com/hub/itv) is ITV's free, ad-supported streaming service, which gives you access to six live channels, full series box sets and unlimited on-demand viewing. ITV Hub+ is the paid-for version of the service: by paying £3.99 a month, you get (mostly) ad-free viewing, the ability to watch shows abroad and the option to download content for offline viewing.



You can download your favourite ITV shows but only on iOS – and it'll cost you

Annoyingly, there is a huge catch with the download feature, which is that it's currently only available on iOS, so you'll need to own an iPhone or iPad, and be connected to Wi-Fi. You can download up to three shows simultaneously, and store as many as you have space for. Not all shows are available to download (due to licensing issues, or because they are set to expire in under a week)

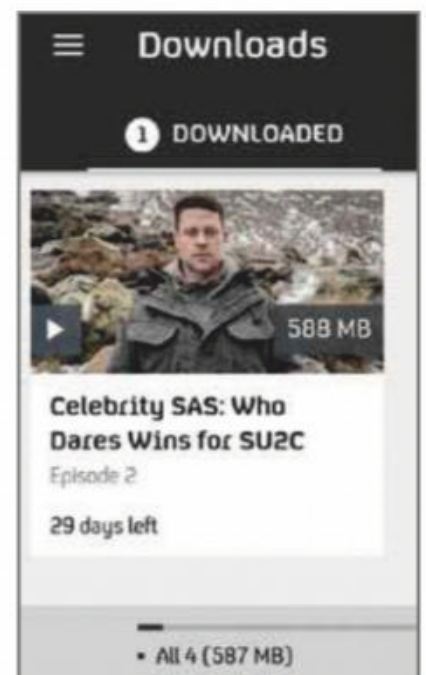
and you only have seven days to watch them. If you haven't got around to viewing the programmes in that time, you can re-download them (which will reset the clock) – provided they are still available.

All 4

Channel 4's catch-up service (www.channel4.com) lets you watch live channels and shows on demand, including box sets and exclusive content. Create an account and you can stream *and* download available shows through the All 4 app on iOS or Android, either over Wi-Fi, 3G or 4G (just be aware of doing so if you have a restrictive mobile data cap).

Most available programmes can be downloaded for 30 days after broadcast. If a download expires but

the show is still available, you might be able to get it again. You can download as many titles as you have space for on your device (one download at a time), and All 4 lets you save shows to an SD card, if your phone or tablet has one, so you don't have to worry about filling up your device's internal storage. The trade-off for this flexibility is that All 4 videos contain unskippable ads, and this also applies to downloaded content.



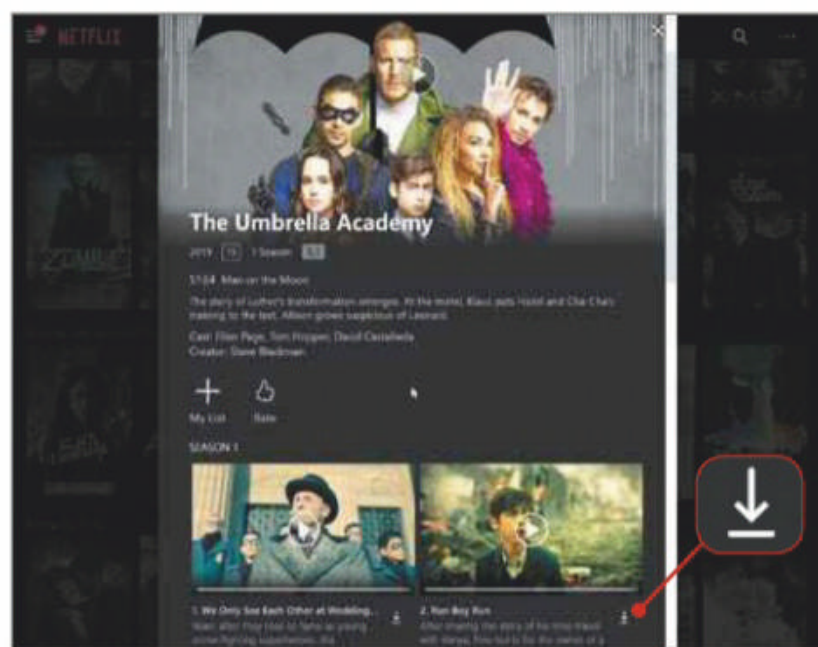
All 4 offers more flexible downloading than ITV but you'll need to sit through ads

N Netflix

Netflix (www.netflix.com) offers an unrivalled selection of movies and TV shows, including plenty of original content, such as *Stranger Things*, *The Umbrella Academy* and *The Crown*. There are Basic (£5.99 a month), Standard HD (£7.99 a month) and Premium Ultra HD (£9.99 a month) plans available, and you can download many (but by no means all) shows and movies to watch later using the Netflix app.

The Android and iOS app lets you store up to 100 titles on a device (if you have the space), with downloads expiring after a set time – this will vary depending on the movie or show. You can download content to one phone or tablet on the Basic plan, two devices on Standard and four on Premium.

The Netflix app is also available for Windows 10 (bit.ly/nflix474), which means you can download movies and programmes to watch directly on your PC – handy for taking your laptop on trips with you. The Windows 10 app also lets you stream content in 4K (provided you're on the Premium Ultra HD plan), so you don't need to use Microsoft's Edge browser for this purpose (Edge is currently the only Windows browser that supports that resolution on Netflix).

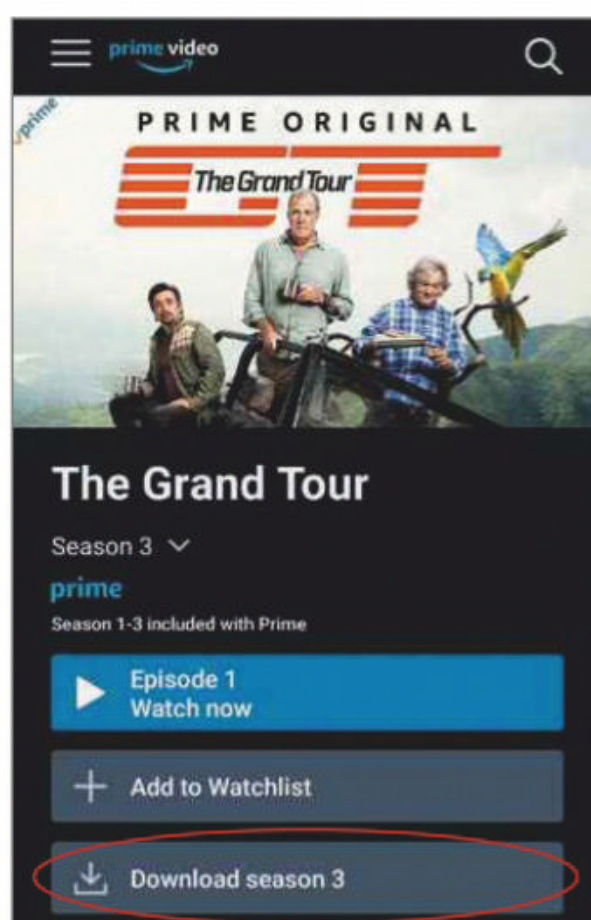


Your Netflix subscription includes the option to download films and TV shows to watch offline



Amazon Prime Video

Amazon Prime (bit.ly/prime474) costs £79 a year and has plenty of benefits, including free access to Prime Video, the retail giant's streaming service. You can, if you prefer, just pay £5.99 a month for access to the streaming element. There's a decent selection of movies and TV shows on offer, including some very good originals such as *The Grand Tour*, *The Marvellous Mrs Maisel* and *The Man in the High Castle*. There's a *Lord of the Rings* series in development, too.



Prime Video lets you download entire TV series, individual episodes and films

Amazon lets you download selected movies and TV included with Prime to compatible mobile devices, including Android, iOS and of course its own Fire devices. Make sure you're connected via Wi-Fi, open the details for the film, TV series or episode you want, and tap

Download. Not everything is available to save (usually as a result of rights issues), and you may have a limited amount of time to watch something.

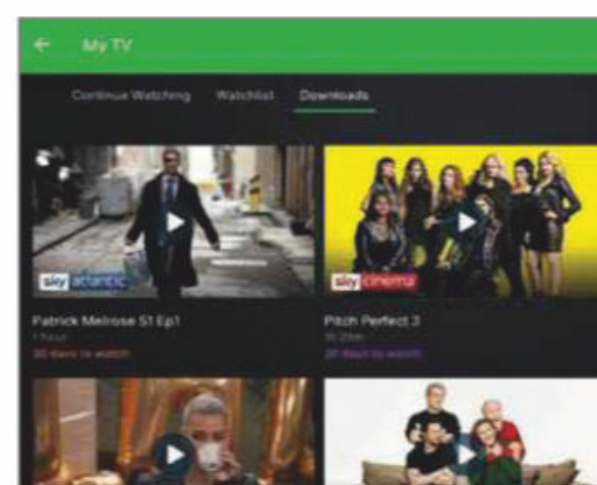
NOW TV

The Sky-owned Now TV (www.nowtv.com) is available on Windows, macOS, Android, iOS, games consoles and various streaming devices, as well as Sky's own Now TV Smart Box (£45.99) and Smart Stick (£14.99).

To get the most from the service, you'll need to buy

one or more Now TV passes. There are passes available for Entertainment (£7.99 a month), Sky Cinema (£11.99 a month), Kids (£3.99 a month), Sky Sports (from £5.99) and reality-show bundle Hayu (£3.99 a month).

With the exception of the Sky Sports pass, you can download most on-demand shows and movies via the Now TV app on iOS and Android, including *Game of Thrones*, which is currently showing on Sky Atlantic. Once downloaded, you have 30 days to start watching. Don't sign out of the Now TV



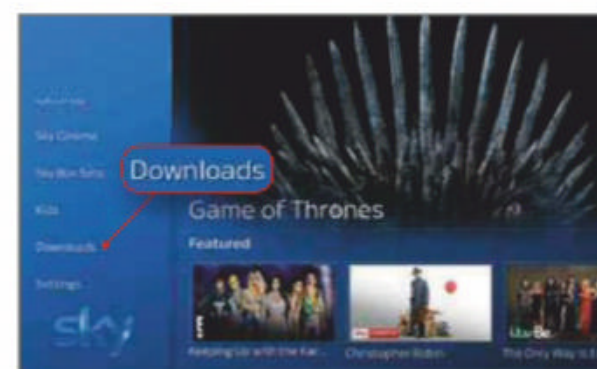
Now TV now lets you download Sky TV shows to watch offline for 30 days

account on your device, though, because doing so will cause your downloaded content to be deleted.



Sky Go Extra

Sky TV customers can use the free Sky Go app – available for iOS, Android, Windows and macOS – to watch live television and catch up on TV programmes and movies. If you want to download shows for offline viewing, you'll need to subscribe to Sky Go Extra. This costs £5 a month on top of your subscription but gives users additional features beyond downloads, including the ability to stream on two devices concurrently instead of just one. As is standard, downloads last for a maximum of 30 days and you have 48 hours to finish watching something once you've started.



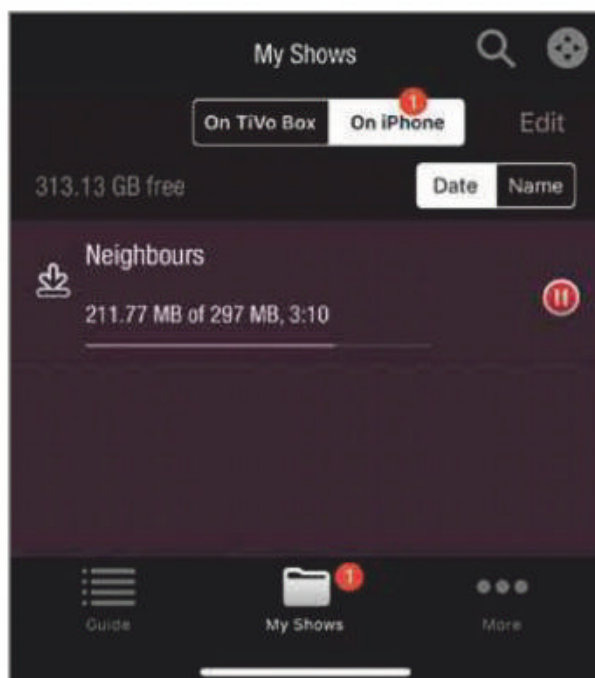
Sky customers can download TV shows and films for an extra £5 per month



Virgin TV

There are two ways that Virgin TV customers can download content for offline viewing. The first is through the Virgin TV Control app, and requires you to have a V6 box. Go to My Shows in the app and select the show you wish to download. Tap 'Get this Show', then Download. Select the downloading settings and tap 'Download with these options'. The download will show in the On Phone tab and can be watched offline. You have a maximum of 30 days to watch a saved show, and 48 hours to finish a recording once you've started watching it.

Alternatively, you can use the Virgin TV Go app (virgintvgo.virginmedia.com)



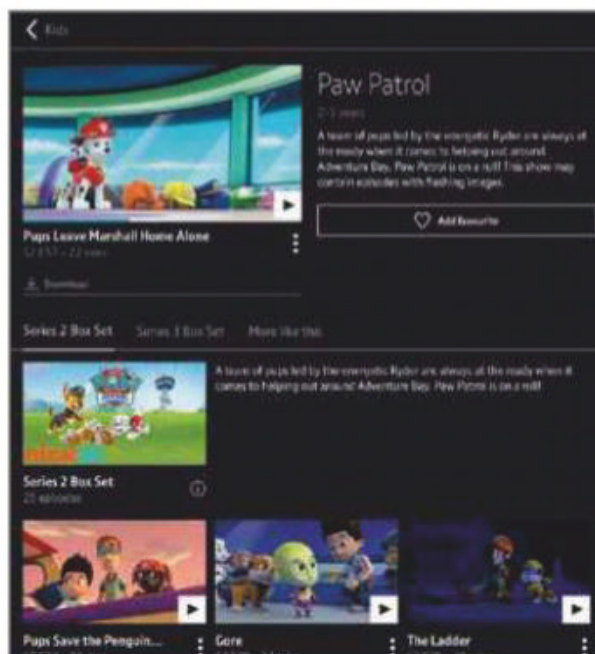
Virgin Media gives customers two ways to download streaming TV content

which lets you watch live TV and on-demand content – it's available for iOS, Android and Windows 10. The channels and box sets available to you will depend on your subscription, and you can use the service on two devices, or up to four if you're a Full House TV customer. The app also lets you download selected on-demand content for watching offline. Just choose a show, then tap Download. If this option is greyed out, you might need to upgrade your subscription.



BT TV App Extra

The BT TV App lets you stream BT television channels on your computer, tablet or smartphone. It's available for all the major platforms including iOS and Android. For downloads, you'll need the BT TV App Extra (www.bt.com/tv/appextra), which also lets you enjoy catchup and on-demand content, and watch programmes and movies via Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV and Samsung Smart TV. It costs £5 extra a month, and the usual restrictions for downloads apply.



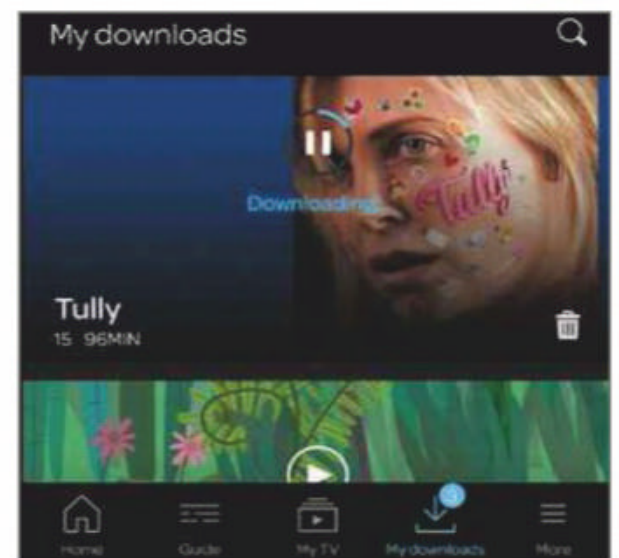
Pay BT TV an extra fiver a month to download video content to watch offline



TalkTalk TV

TalkTalk's TV service gives you access to more than 80 free channels (including 15 in HD) and lets you add extra channels and on-demand content – including Sky Cinema and Sky Sports – for a monthly fee. You can download shows to watch at your convenience by installing the TalkTalk TV app on Android or iOS (bit.ly/talk474).

Unfortunately, as the numerous one-star app reviews (on both platforms) point out, many of the channels aren't available to watch (including boosts), let alone record, so be prepared for disappointment!



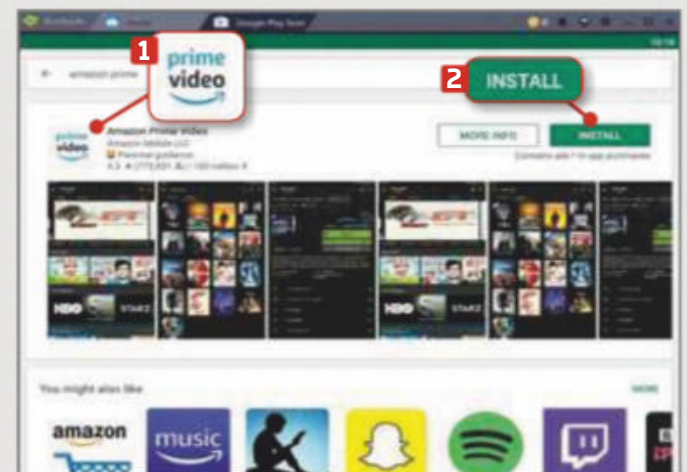
You can download streaming video from TalkTalk TV, but it's pretty limited

BEAT MOBILE-ONLY DOWNLOAD RESTRICTIONS

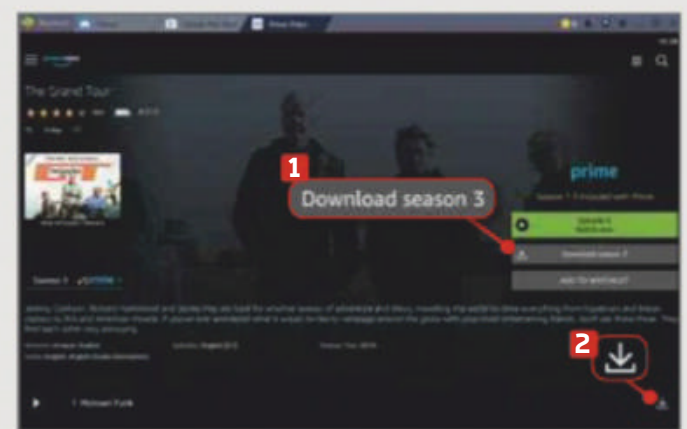
Most services that let you download TV shows and movies limit you to doing so on a mobile device, such as a phone or tablet. That's not great if you want to watch something on a bigger screen. You may be able to get around this and download content to your PC by using the free Android emulator BlueStacks (www.bluestacks.com).

While this might sound like the perfect solution, you'll only be able to download and watch the saved content within the emulated app – you won't be able to move it and view it using a different media player on the desktop (such as VLC, for example). You can change the video resolution and DPI in Settings, though. Follow our Mini Workshop to find out how this trick works.

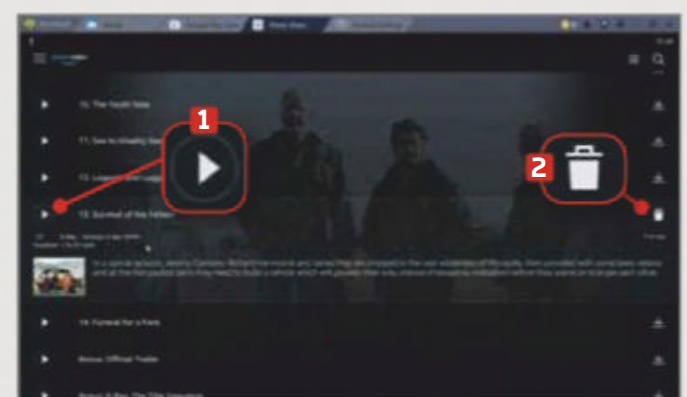
1 Download and run BlueStacks, and sign into your Google account. You can create a new account just for the purpose of downloading apps from Google Play if required. You'll receive an email saying you've signed in on a new phone. Google Play will load. Search for an app, such as Amazon Prime Video, **1** and install it. **2**



2 Once installed, we just need to sign in with our Amazon account details and can browse the list of shows and movies on offer. We'll choose *The Grand Tour* motoring show. Click its thumbnail to open the show's page. From here, we can download an entire series, **1** or scroll down and save individual episodes. **2**



3 The app now lets us choose a quality setting – Best, Better, Good or Data Saver. You can make any of those options your default setting if you want. The show will start to download. When it completes, you'll be able to watch the TV show or film offline. **1** You can delete it from here, too. **2**

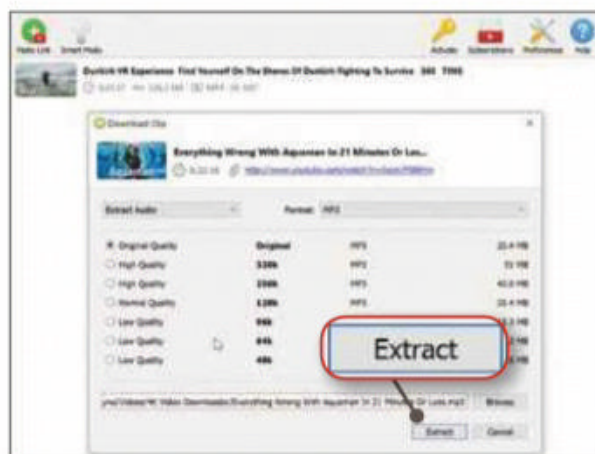


DOWNLOAD ANY STREAMING VIDEO

Not all video services provide download options, but there are still ways to get the content you want, for your own personal use. Here are the best free tools for downloading videos

Download and convert YouTube videos

There are plenty of websites and programs you can use to download and convert YouTube videos for watching offline on any device, but many are stuffed with ads, bundled with junk or just plain useless. Our favourite free tool is undoubtedly 4K Video Downloader (www.4kdownload.com). To use it, you just need to copy the video URL from YouTube and paste it into the program. You can select the quality and format (MP4 or MKV) and whether or not to include subtitles, or just extract the audio in MP3, M4A or OGG format. 4K Video Downloader includes a Smart Mode that lets you download videos from YouTube with a single click, using the settings you've specified previously.



4K Video Downloader offers the best means of downloading YouTube videos



Download videos from your friends' Facebook feeds to keep and watch forever

Grab Facebook videos in your browser

If you see a video on Facebook that you want to download, give the Facebook Video Downloader (fbdown.net) a try. Right-click the video and copy the URL, then open the downloader, paste in the address and click the Download button. You'll have the option of saving the clip in normal or HD quality. There's also a Chrome extension available (bit.ly/fbdown474) and a Firefox version in the works. You can download videos on Android using Chrome, but iOS users will need a file manager. Additionally, the service can download Live Facebook videos, but only once they've finished streaming.

Watch TED talks offline

TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) is a non-profit organisation devoted to "Ideas Worth Spreading". Its fascinating lessons are delivered by experts in a wide range of fields, and in many different languages. You can download most talks through

your desktop browser by going to ted.com, finding a talk page of interest and clicking the Share button. In the box that opens, you can choose to download the talk as an MP4 video or an MP3 audio track (if available) and even add subtitles to a video. Another way to download a talk is by

visiting bit.ly/ted474 and clicking the Download option. You can choose from Low, Medium or High quality.

The TED app for Android and iOS also lets you download video and audio talks to enlighten you offline.



You can download every TED talk ever published without paying a penny

Save videos directly from Twitter

Video plays a major role in most social networks these days, including Twitter. Although you can't download clips directly from the service, there is a simple way to get around this restriction. Open a tweet containing a video and click the down arrow on the top right-hand side. In the menu that opens, click 'Copy link to Tweet'. Open a new browser tab and go to Download Twitter Videos (www.downloadtwittervideo.com) and paste in the URL you copied. You can choose



Twitter doesn't let you download videos but there is a simple workaround

DO I NEED A TV LICENCE TO WATCH OFFLINE?

It used to be the case that a TV licence was only required for watching live broadcasts. Catch-up, on-demand and recorded TV in iPlayer were all exempt, so if you

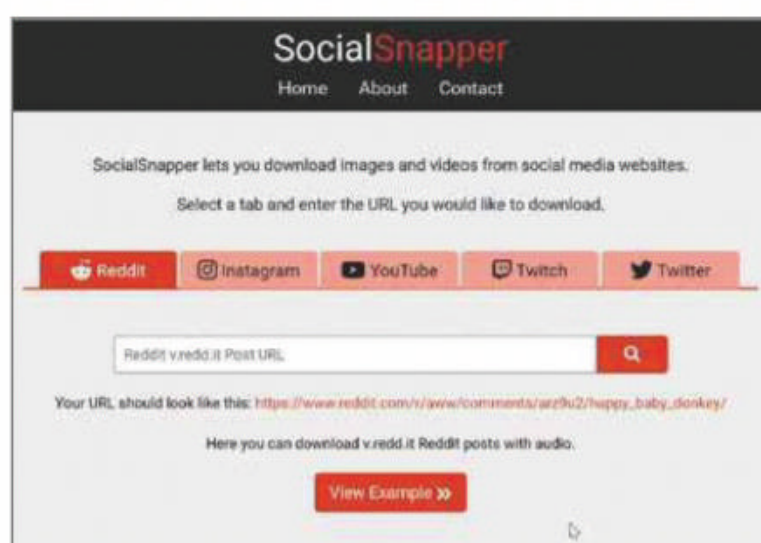
never watched live programmes, then you didn't need a licence. However, that changed in 2016 and you now need a licence to watch or record live TV programmes on any channel, and also to download or watch BBC programmes on iPlayer. This rule covers all devices - TVs, tablets and mobile phones. You don't need a licence if you only watch non-live streaming content from broadcasters other than the BBC, or movies and TV shows you've paid for. See the TV Licensing website (bit.ly/tvlicence474) for more information.



to download the file in MP4 format or MP4 HD. There's a mobile version of the site available, too.

Download videos from social sites

SocialSnapper (socialsnapper.net) makes it possible to download videos from Reddit, Twitch and YouTube, as well as stories, albums and more from Instagram. Just open the service in your browser and click the tab you require – Reddit, Instagram, YouTube or Twitch. Paste in the URL of the video you want to download into the box and press Enter. The video will open in a new window where you can click the Download button. Each social service has different options available. For

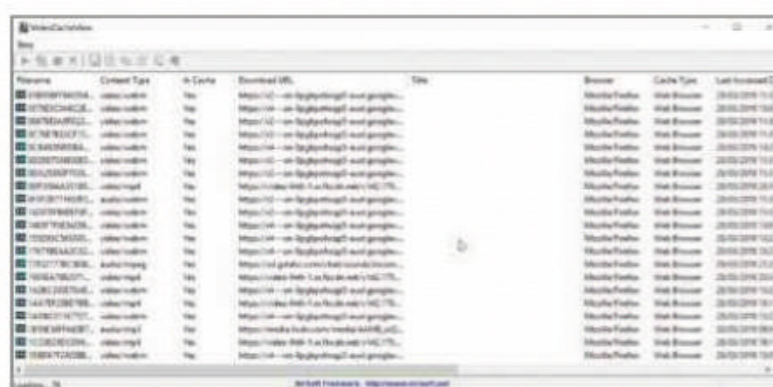


Use SocialSnapper to download video content from social-media sites

example, you might be able to download the video with sound, without sound or just the audio, and also pick the quality of the download.

Play videos you downloaded without realising

When you watch web videos, they get cached by your browser to ensure smooth playback. VideoCacheView is a free tool from NirSoft (nirsoft.net) that scans your browser cache looking for videos that have been saved in this manner. You can watch the



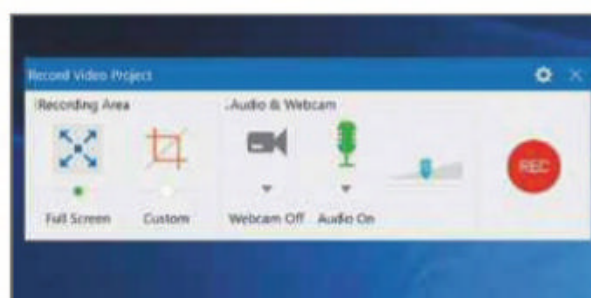
VideoCacheView automatically saves videos you play in your browser

inadvertently downloaded clips by selecting one and clicking the Play button. Not all cached content will play, but you can save the clips that do and even manually merge multiple separate pieces into a single video.

The software works with all the main browsers.

Record any video playing on screen

You can use a screen- and video-capture tool such as ActivePresenter (atomisystems.com) to record any playing video. The software is free for personal use and, as well as recording video, lets you edit the captured content afterwards, trimming the start and end points, and cutting out unwanted parts (including adverts). You can also copy and paste clips, reorder captured videos, blur out part of the video, split and join audio and video, change the playback speed



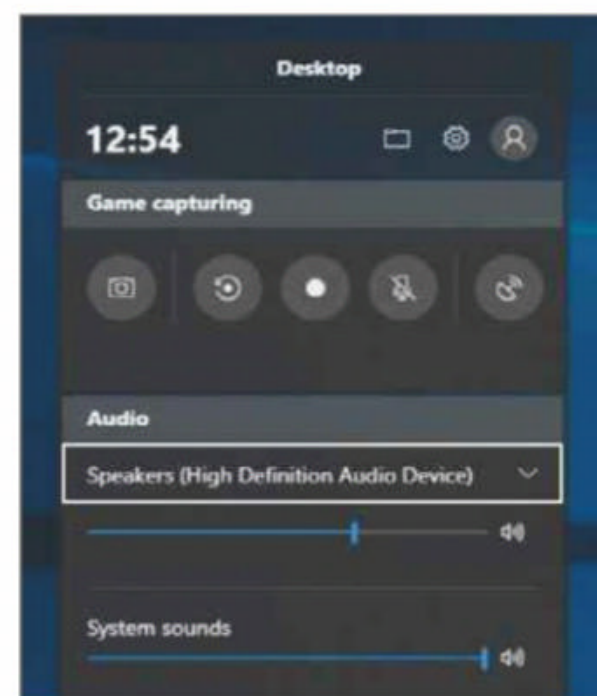
Record streaming video by capturing what's playing on your screen

and volume, add captions and drop in transitions between parts.

Other options let you change the size of the video, its frame rate and quality, and the sample rate and bitrate of the audio. Captured videos can be saved in a range of popular formats, including MP4, FLV, AVI, WMV, WebM and MKV.

Capture videos using Windows 10's Game Bar

Windows 10 has a special built-in screen recorder called Game Bar, which was originally designed to let gamers take screenshots and record gameplay footage – it also has a number of game-related features. However, it can be used to record anything on screen, including streaming video. To use it, press the Windows key+G, and click the Record button to start and stop recording. You can configure various settings including the video and audio quality, and specify a maximum recording length. ■



Windows 10 offers a built-in tool you can use to record streaming video

NEXT ISSUE

on sale Wednesday 15 May 2019

50 BEST FREE APPS

YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF

Top-quality tools for Android and iOS that are too good to miss



PLUS...

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It's not just ads that can drive you to distraction online

TASK-MANAGER TRICKS

Get the most from Windows' most useful built-in tool

**SUBSCRIBE TO WEB USER AT
SUBSCRIBE.WEBUSER.CO.UK**

Best free tools for shortening URLs

A good link shortener should do two things: make long URLs short and provide statistics on every click you get. This was the secret behind Goo.gl's success, but Google recently shut down that service. **Steve Clark** clicks through the best alternatives



Kutt.it | kutt.it | ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★ PERFORMANCE ★★★★★ EASE OF USE ★★★★★

**WebUser
GOLD
AWARD**

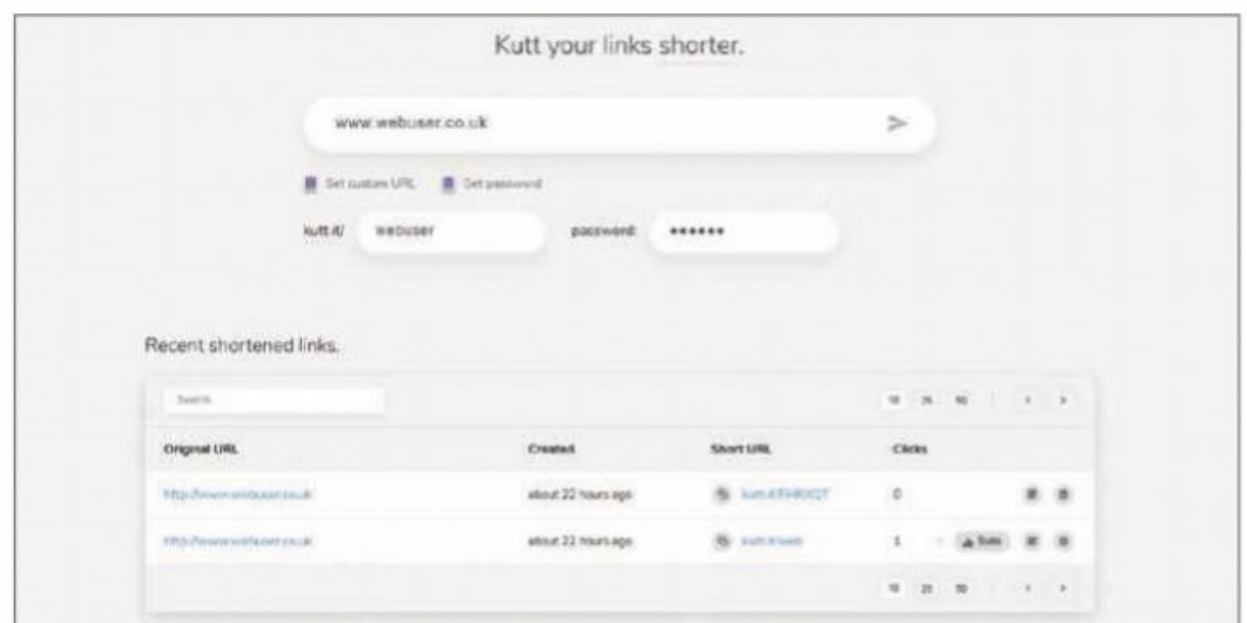
What we liked:

Kutt.it is simple to use, with an interface so clean, you'd be able to figure out how to use it even if you'd never seen a computer before. When it comes to using this free, open-source tool, it's arguably better than its more popular rival, Bit.ly, which suffers from severe dashboard clutter.

At the top of the page is a text box for your link, below which are options to add a custom suffix and, impressively, password protection. Scroll down and you'll find basic stats for each URL, such as how many clicks a link gets and the browser and operating system used by people clicking it.

If you're not too fussed about custom links, paste the URL into the box and you're good to go, creating a shortened link with a few random characters. But it's easier for users if you add a short word into the custom URL field – just like the *Web User* team does with Bit.ly. Once it's been created, copy the shortened link or grab the QR code Kutt.it generates for you.

If you own your own website, with a custom domain name, fiddle around in the settings and you'll be able to create branded shortened links that replace



the 'kutt.it' section with your own domain URL.

Kutt.it's Chrome and Firefox extensions make creating links even faster: in the settings, generate an API key on the Kutt.it website and add it to the extension. That way, the next time you're on a web page you want to share, you can just click the icon to make Kutt.it automatically create a shortened – but non-customisable – URL.

How it can be improved:

There's not much to change with Kutt.it because it's such a focused tool. However, one area that could do with work is the statistics. These are basic,

and the layout's not quite as professional as its top-dollar rival. Mind you, unlike Bit.ly, which artificially caps stats to 30 days for free users, at least Kutt.it lets you see your all-time click-through rate.

OUR VERDICT

Kutt.it feels like a streamlined Bit.ly. It delivers most of the services offered by its rival, without any of the clutter that can make using Bit.ly frustrating. It's also entirely free and open-source, which gets a thumbs-up from us.

Cutt.ly | cutt.ly | ★★★★★

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

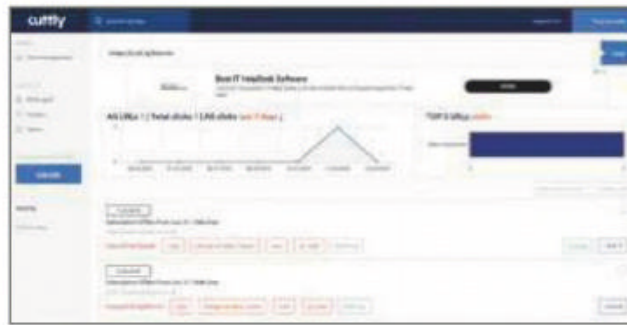
WebUser
SILVER
AWARD

What we liked:

Cutt.ly's URL shortener is packed with features, but it can occasionally feel like a faff. Pasting your link into the field and clicking Shorten is easy enough, but you then need to head back to the dashboard, locate the link and choose to 'change alias/url' – a fancy way of saying, 'customise link'. Once that's done, you'll have a memorable link ready to share (or, if you'd rather, create a QR code).

If you're into digital marketing, you'll know that UTM (Urchin Tracking Module) is invaluable for finding out if your social-media campaigns are working. In this respect, Cutt.ly is outstanding. Once you've created a short URL, you're just a click away from inputting all the details required to track any digital campaign.

Dealing with lots of shortened links can often be a headache. For instance, Bit.ly links can only be sorted by chronology or number of clicks. Cutt.ly, on the other hand, lets you add tags to links, and each link can be dragged and



dropped into a specific order. It's a small feature but a welcome one.

How it can be improved:

The problem we had with Cutt.ly is that adverts along the top half of the screen end up pushing vital data down the page. That may be a fair trade-off for a free tool but it doesn't make it any less annoying.

OUR VERDICT

If ever the phrase 'don't judge a book by its cover' applied to a website, it's this one. Very little love has gone into the site's design, but there's plenty in its invaluable functions to inspire devotion.

Let's Shorten That URL | lstu.fr | ★★★★★

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

WebUser
BRONZE
AWARD

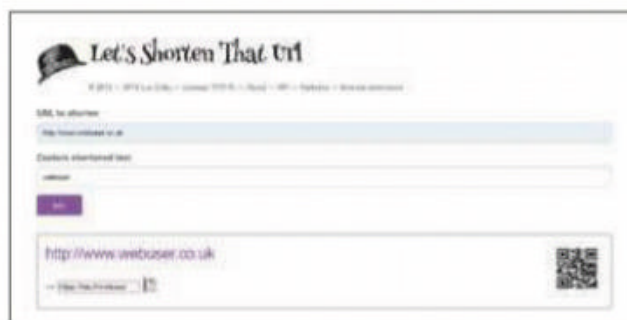
What we liked:

There's a delightful efficiency to Let's Shorten That URL (LSTU), and at first glance you'd be forgiven for thinking that it's about as basic as a URL shortener can be – which it is, if you want it to be.

Visit the site and you're greeted with two text boxes: one for the URL and one for the custom text that follows the 'lstu.fr' prefix. Pop in the details, click Go and let the tool do its work. If you're only interested in quickly creating short links, there's nothing else for you to worry about.

However, if you want to delve a little deeper into URL performance, click the Statistics link at the top of the screen. Here, you can check how many clicks a link is getting, grab its self-generated QR code, set an admin password or – in a move we've not seen elsewhere – import and export other URLs.

Browser extensions are also available for Chrome and Firefox, which work in the same way as Kutt.it's.



How it can be improved:

The statistics info is limited to the number of clicks. However, it's arguable that by adding more functions, LSTU would lose the foolproof simplicity that makes it unique. We'd also like to see some sort of login screen. As it stands, LSTU appears to save data using your browser's cookies.

OUR VERDICT

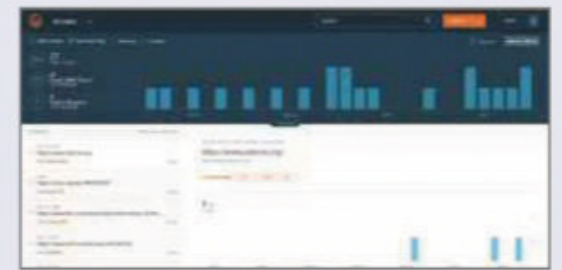
LSTU is the no-nonsense answer to the question 'how can I shorten this URL?'. But it doesn't offer much usable data if you want to seriously track click-through rates (or anything else, for that matter).

BEST OF THE REST

Bit.ly

bit.ly

The king of URL shorteners, Bit.ly makes it super easy to trim links, and editing custom URLs is just as effortless. Even on the free plan, the tool's statistics are concise and in-depth, which is why we still use it for *Web User* links. However, at the time of testing, Bit.ly suffered lamentable reliability, thanks to repeated DDoS attacks, which forced it out of our awards. But when it works, it's pure gold.



Rebrandly

rebrandly.com

Rebrandly's smart, slick look – from its swish logo to its Google-esque white space – may help justify its premium pricing plans, but even without the upgrade, the site works just fine for quickly creating links and checking basic stats. It also has a one-click bookmarklet: a bookmarking tool that acts like a browser extension, which is useful if you use Safari or Edge.



Bit.do

bit.do

Like LSTU, Bit.do can be loosely categorised as a basic URL shortener for trimming links. You may need to get creative with your custom URLs, but it offers more detailed data on how many clicks a link gets, including which sites and pages are driving traffic your way. We especially like its ability to download and export that data into a CSV or Excel file.



What's eating your bandwidth?

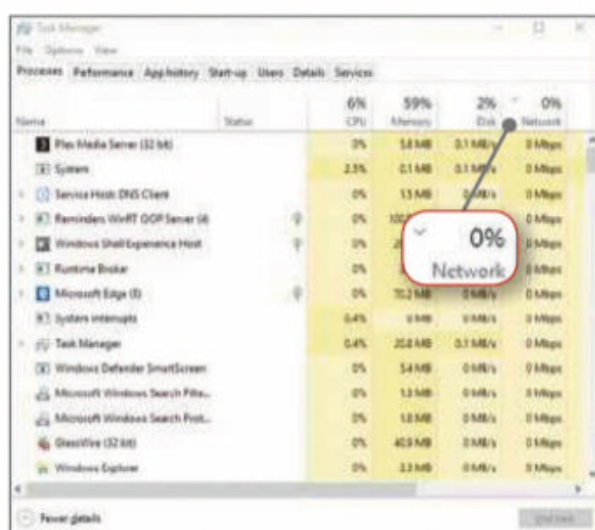


We place more demand than ever on our home networks, without realising what's slowing them down. **Nik Rawlinson** explains how to identify and stop the biggest hogs

Check active processes in Windows Task Manager

To find out what's hampering your broadband speed, start close to home. As soon as you notice a slowdown while using your PC, open Task Manager and click the Network column heading twice to reorder your active processes from most to least demanding. If your PC is idle, you should see very little activity here but, if a browser window or program is hogging more than 10% of the network connection, save your work and shut it down to see what difference it makes to your broadband speed.

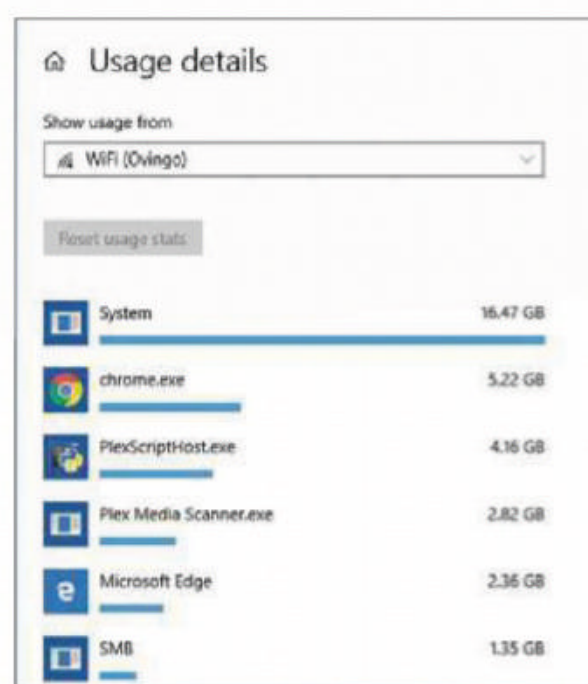
Your available bandwidth is shared across all devices attached to your network, so repeat this process on any other PCs and, if you have a Mac, use Activity Monitor to do the same thing there. Again, click the Network tab at the top of the interface.



Check Task Manager to see if any program is overloading your network connection

Monitor your data usage

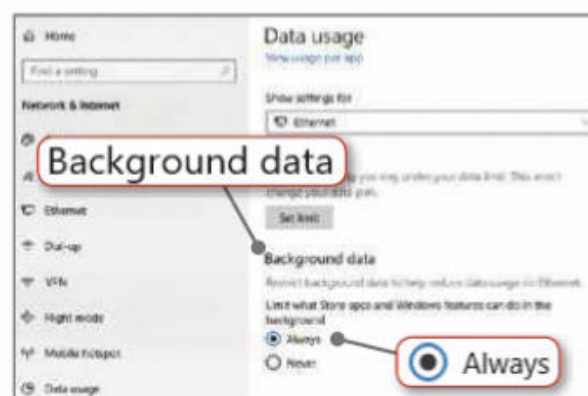
Click the cog in the Windows Start menu to open Settings, then click 'Network & Internet' followed by 'Data usage' (in the sidebar). At the top of the main pane, you'll see how much data has passed



Windows' data-usage graphs show specific programs' bandwidth use

through your Wi-Fi connection over the last 30 days. Click it for a breakdown by application.

In our case, the System itself – that is, Windows – is by far the hungriest process. Unsurprisingly, Chrome comes second. To curb Windows' usage, it might be worth minimising what it does while unsupervised. Click the arrow in the top-left corner of the window to step back to the 'Data usage' page, then scroll down to 'Background data'. Click



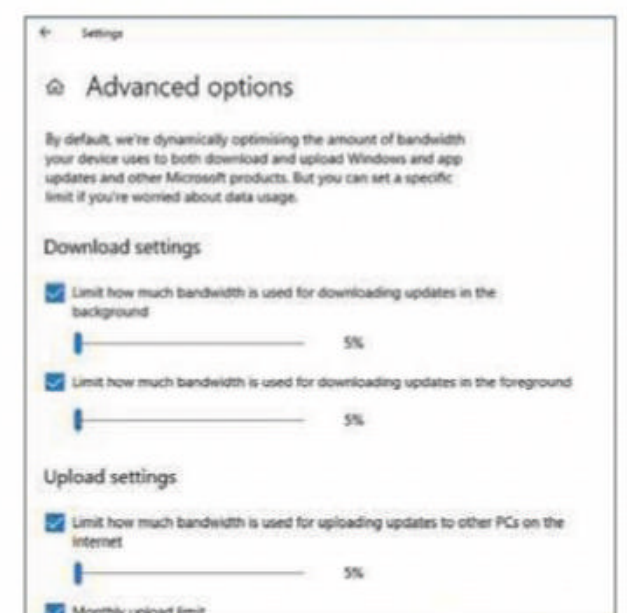
Stop the Windows Store and other features wasting data in the background

the radio button beside Always to limit what Store apps and Windows features can do online when you're not actively using them. This shouldn't limit any application you're actively using from accessing the internet because it will be an unrestricted foreground process.

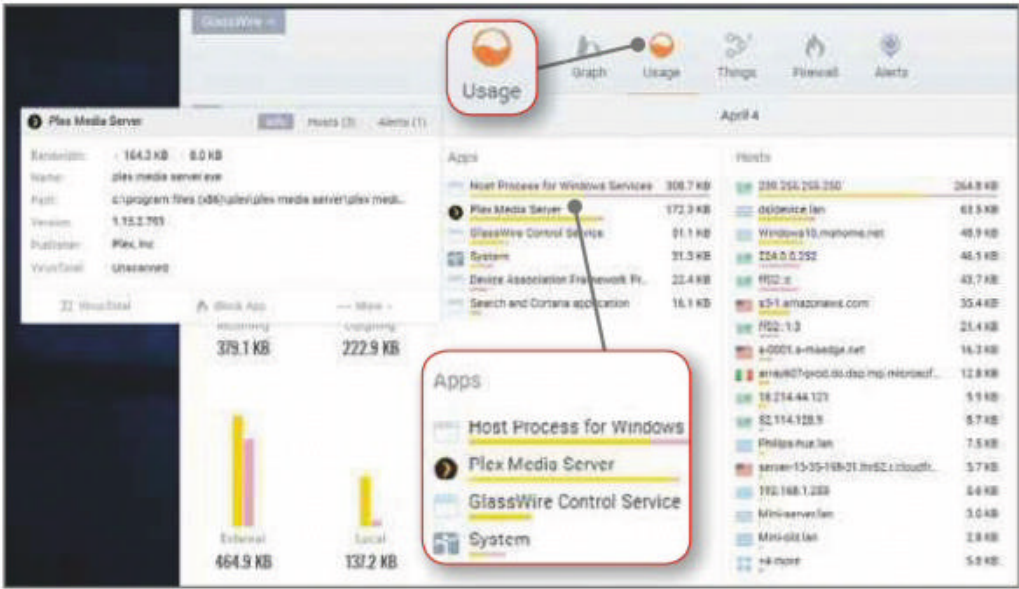
Keep Windows updates in check

The hungriest data-muncher of all is Windows Update, because although Windows is great at keeping itself patched so you don't have to, it does so on its own terms. It's not currently possible to schedule the often very large downloads, only when they're applied – open the Windows menu, type windows update and select 'Windows Update settings' from the results, then click 'Change active hours' to specify the hours when you don't want it to reboot and install.

However, you can limit the rate at which Windows downloads its updates. They'll still arrive, but more slowly. Open the Windows Update settings by



Reduce how much bandwidth Windows uses when it downloads updates

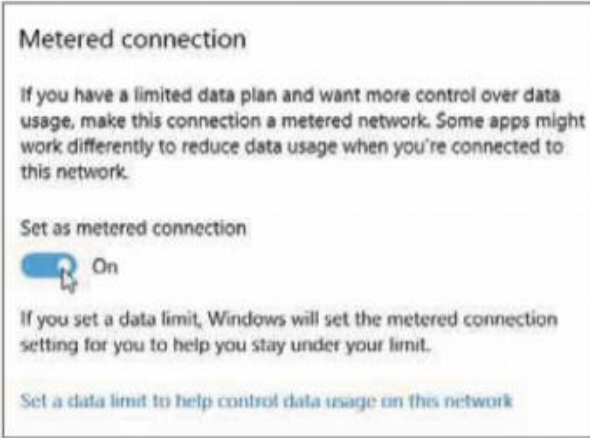


GlassWire shows you which applications are connecting to remote servers from your PC

| Network | Device | MAC Address | IP Address |
|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 2.4 GHz Wireless: | EX2700 | 02:0f:b5:24:77:83 | 192.168.1.77 |
| | udhcp-0-9-9-pre-5... | 50:c7:bf:4e:14:e1 | 192.168.1.66 |
| | amazon-2ad05e4d | fc:a1:83:3a:10:2c | 192.168.1.70 |
| | amazon-aa3610f74 | f0:81:73:7e:1c:0c | 192.168.1.92 |
| | udhcp-0-9-9-pre-5... | 50:c7:bf:4e:17:08 | 192.168.1.65 |
| | udhcp-0-9-9-pre-5... | 50:c7:bf:bd:45:ed | 192.168.1.65 |
| | amazon-c1ac732a5 | 50:dc:e7:ef:30:3b | 192.168.1.71 |
| | udhcp-0-9-9-pre-5... | 50:c7:bf:4e:14:85 | 192.168.1.120 |
| | Richs-Mac-mini | 02:0f:b5:a6:e0:e5 | 192.168.1.75 |
| | Mini-old | 02:0f:b5:29:7a:91 | 192.168.1.75 |
| 5 GHz Wireless: | No devices detected | | |
| | | | |
| Ethernet: | myHivehub | 00:1c:2b:15:8f:0a | 192.168.1.80 |
| | EX2700 | 02:0f:b5:b2:61:7f | 192.168.1.114 |
| | GW-B8D7AF2B3AB1 | b8:d7:af:2b:3a:b1 | 192.168.1.91 |
| | Ntki-Mac-mini | f0:18:98:b2:40:b7 | 192.168.1.202 |
| | HS100 | 02:0f:b5:d9:ed:50 | 192.168.1.78 |
| | | | |

If you can't find anything wrong with your PC, the problem may lie at the router level

following the steps above, but rather than tweaking the active hours, click 'Advanced options' followed by Delivery Optimisation and, once again, 'Advanced options'. Check each of the boxes on this page, then drag the sliders to the far left to minimise the amount of bandwidth used for any update activity. You'll notice that there's an 'Upload settings' section. This controls how much data your PC streams back to the web to help update other users' PCs around the world. While reducing the load on Microsoft's servers, this impacts your own bandwidth use, so you might want to disable it. You can't shut it off entirely using the sliders, but telling Windows you're on a metered connection (even if you're not) will put it out of action.



Set your Wi-Fi connection as metered to control data usage on your home network

To do this, step back to the Settings homepage and click Network & Internet followed by Wi-Fi. Click 'Manage known networks', then select your active network connection and click Properties. Scroll down to 'Metered connection' and move the switch below 'Set as metered connection' to On. Note that doing this will also pause OneDrive syncing, so you'll need to be careful that any file you access from the cloud is the most up to date version.

Check for suspicious activity
Still having problems? Don't panic, but a common culprit when you can't work

out why your PC is consuming a large amount of bandwidth is malware, which may be calling back to a remote server and sending it your data. GlassWire (www.glasswire.com) is a beautiful, intuitive application that gives you a graphical representation of your PC's online interactions – and highlights every program that's accessing the net. Click Usage on the toolbar at the top of the interface to see applications, devices and the kind of traffic passing over your network. The Apps column is of greatest interest, because it shows you what your PC is up to. Right-click any entry in the list, and you can block its internet access with a single click, or dig deeper to see exactly what it's connecting to. If GlassWire doesn't turn up any suspicious activity, the problem may lie beyond your PC, and the bandwidth leak could be happening through your router. If so, this is most likely because an unauthorised user or device has connected to it.

Find and block intruders

Click the Windows menu and type command, then select 'Command Prompt' in the list of results, type ipconfig and press Return. Copy the four sets of numbers beside Default

Gateway in the 'Wireless LAN adapter WiFi' section of the answer this returns: this is your router's address on your network. Type it into your browser and press Enter. If you're using a BT Home Hub or Plusnet Hub One, the first page you encounter will show a list of devices connected to your network. Other routers may require you to navigate the menus, in which case look for 'connected clients', 'DHCP client list' or a similar option. Check through the list for anything unfamiliar, bearing in mind that not everything will be logically named. You can often find out more about unknown devices by typing their address (shown in the IP Address column) into a browser. In our case, 192.168.1.114 brings up a Netgear login page, revealing the EX2700 to be a Wi-Fi extender. This is safe to leave on the network. Temporarily block anything you can't identify. On the Plusnet Hub One, click Settings followed by Plusnet Access Control and select the device you want to block from the drop-down menu. Use the time menus to cut off its internet access around the clock. If you later find you've blocked something you use, you'll know that the device is not an interloper, and can reinstate its access. ■

MONITOR YOUR WI-FI WITH FING

To save you visiting your router's configuration pages regularly, download Fing for iOS (bit.ly/fingios474) and Android (bit.ly/fingdroid474). Although this free app can't block devices, it usefully lists everything connected to your local Wi-Fi network (complete with IP and MAC addresses), so you can watch for intruders on the fly and see what might secretly be slowing your connection. Fing also lets you run Wi-Fi and internet speed tests from anywhere, detect open ports and troubleshoot network and device issues. It's an essential tool for your phone or tablet, and has a clean, easy-to-use interface.

Ingenious uses for INCOGNITO MODE

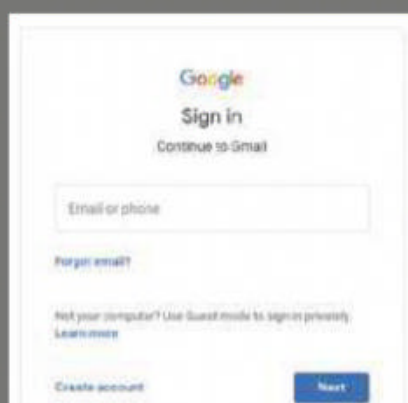
Your browser's private-browsing mode can do much more than conceal details of the sites you visit. **Robert Irvine** reveals eight of the most useful incognito tricks

HOW TO GO INCOGNITO

To switch to private mode in your browser, either open the main menu in the top-right corner and choose 'New incognito window' (Chrome), 'New Private Window' (Firefox) or 'New InPrivate window' (Edge); or press Ctrl+Shift+N (Chrome) or Ctrl+Shift+P (non-Chromium browsers). You can also right-click a link to open that page in private mode.

Log into two accounts with the same site

It's not unusual to have more than one account with a particular online service: for example, you may have different Gmail addresses for work and personal use, run a Facebook group in addition to your individual profile or have separate eBay accounts for buying and selling. Rather than signing out of one account and into the other every time you want to switch between them, you can use your browser's incognito mode to log into both simultaneously. Because private-browsing mode doesn't store sign-in cookies or access those saved in standard browsing mode, the accounts won't interfere with one another and you won't be automatically signed in when you go incognito.

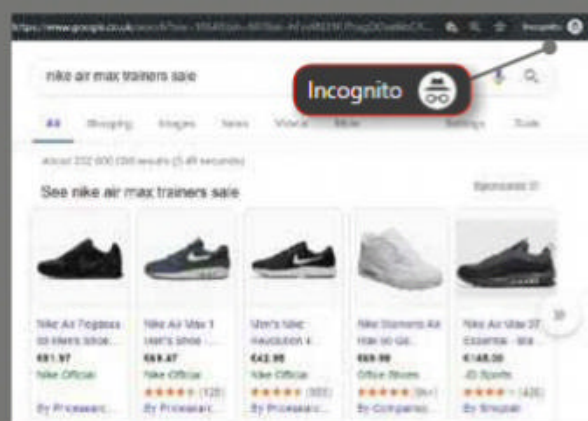


Sign into a second email account while staying logged into the first

you can use your browser's incognito mode to log into both simultaneously. Because private-browsing mode doesn't store sign-in cookies or access those saved in standard browsing mode, the accounts won't interfere with one another and you won't be automatically signed in when you go incognito.

Get unbiased search results from Google

As we explained in last issue's DuckDuckGo feature, Google tailors your search results based on your previous searches, the links you clicked, other Google tools you use and what it perceives your interests to be. This can be time-saving and useful, but it means you may not always get the best results – at least not in the right order. Rather

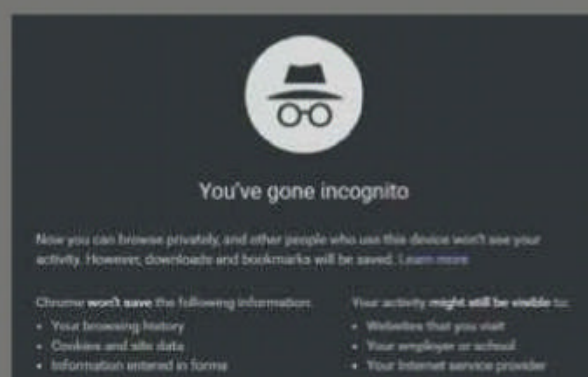


Search in incognito mode to get unfiltered results - albeit it with adverts

than log out of Google or switch to a different search engine when you want to view unbiased and unfiltered results, try searching in private-browsing mode. This trick also works on other sites that shape your search results, such as YouTube and Twitter. The downside is that your ad blocker (if you use one) is disabled when you go incognito, so you'll either need to ignore the adverts and 'sponsored' results, or allow it to run in private mode – see box, right.

Browse anonymously away from home

Incognito mode isn't only useful for covering your tracks on your own PC,



Incognito mode protects your data when using someone else's computer

it's also sensible precaution when you hop on a computer away from home, such as to check your emails at a friend's house or print your travel arrangements in a hotel lobby. By using private-browsing mode, you can ensure that your browsing history, login details and any information you've entered into forms won't be stored on that machine and made easily accessible to anyone who hops on after you!

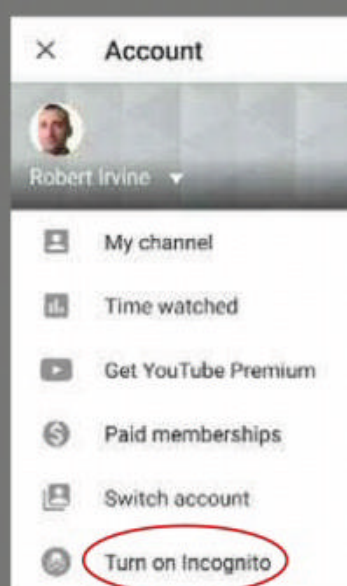
View content as it appears to others

Private-browsing mode provides a quick and easy way for web developers to see how their sites look from the 'other side', so they can identify any problems that prospective visitors might encounter. However, it's equally useful for previewing how your social-media content appears to other people, without needing to log out of your account. Just open your Facebook profile, Twitter feed, Instagram page, WordPress blog or other social site to check which of your posts, photos and personal details are public and therefore visible to anyone.



See what you're sharing publicly on social media using incognito mode

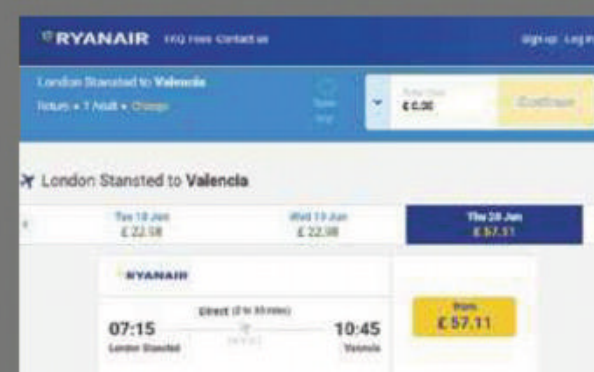
The YouTube app has a handy Incognito option – but the website doesn't



distracting to embarrassing. The YouTube mobile app now offers an invaluable incognito mode that lets you watch videos privately – just tap your profile photo and choose ‘Turn on Incognito’, and nothing you view will be stored until you turn the option off again. On the YouTube website, the process is fiddlier and involves clearing then pausing your Watch and Search histories. A much easier solution is to switch to private-browsing mode for a video session, where your viewing activity won't be stored by YouTube or used as the basis for recommendations.

Save money on flight and hotel prices

When you're planning a holiday, it's frustrating to see that the cost of a specific flight or a hotel's room rate has risen when you revisit a travel-booking website. This sneaky price hike may be caused by cookies that the site has implanted in your browser, so it knows who and where you are, and that you're very keen to finalise your travel arrangements. By searching for flights and accommodation in private-browsing mode, you'll be working from a clean slate and may find you're offered lower rates.

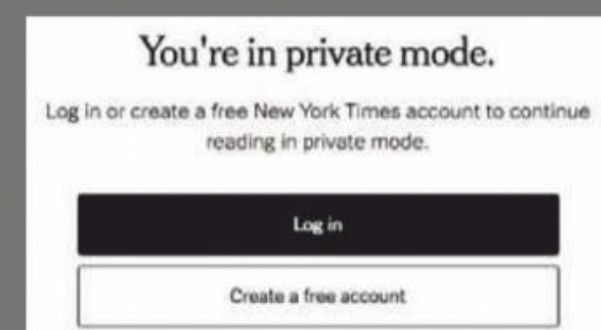


Revisit flight-booking sites in incognito mode and you may get lower fares

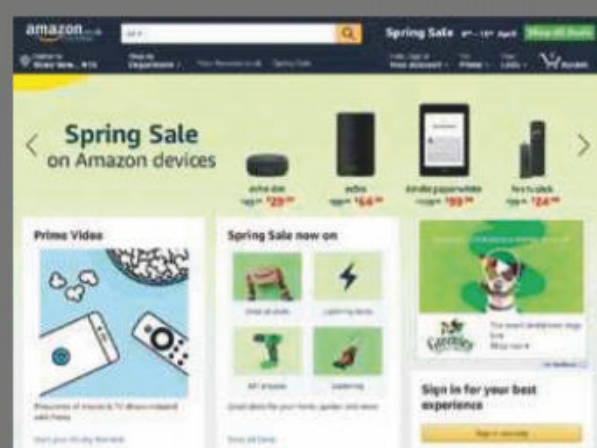
We should point out that travel-industry representatives deny this trick works and say that prices fluctuate regardless of cookies, but plenty of travellers have found otherwise, so it's certainly worth a try.

Read more articles on paywalled sites

Many newspaper websites now lock their content behind subscription paywalls as an alternative source of revenue to advertising. However, some titles – for example, the Washington Post (www.washingtonpost.com) – let you read a limited number of articles for free each month before the paywall kicks in. Once you reach that limit, it's often possible to reset the meter and read more articles by viewing the site in incognito mode. Not the New York Times, though, which is now wise to this trick and detects when you try to bypass its paywall in private mode. ■



Private mode can trick some paywalled sites but not the New York Times!



Browse Amazon freely without it storing and revealing your viewing history

Keep surprises secret from loved ones

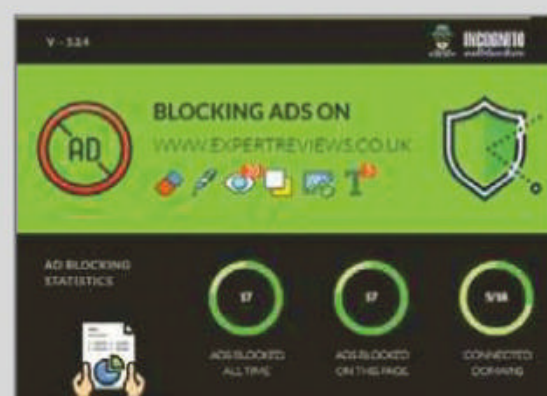
If you've been shopping for a gift for someone on Amazon, the surprise is likely to be spoiled the second they visit the online store and see your 'recently viewed items' and 'recommended for you' suggestions on the homepage. Thanks a lot, Amazon! Fortunately, you can prevent your secret purchase from being revealed by using private-browsing mode – not just on Amazon but other sites, too. Because the mode stops your browser saving details of the items you've searched for and viewed, the recipient of your gift will be none the wiser. True, you'll need to sign into your account when you proceed to the checkout, but you'll be signed out automatically as you soon as you exit incognito.

Stop YouTube recommending videos

YouTube knows your viewing tastes better than you do yourself, but its endless recommendations for what you should watch next can veer from

BLOCK ADS IN PRIVATE-BROWSING MODE

When you switch to private-browsing mode, all your extensions – including your ad blocker – are automatically disabled. This prevents data from being saved to your computer, but it



also leaves you exposed to annoying and intrusive adverts. A Firefox add-on called Incognito Adblocker (bit.ly/incognito474) solves this problem by overriding your browser's settings to continue working when you open a new private window, blocking all ads on pages, as well as unwanted trackers.

In Chrome, you can set your preferred ad blocker to run in incognito mode by going to <chrome://extensions>, clicking Details next to the add-on and choosing 'Allow in incognito'.



Practical WebUser

16 pages of workshops, tips, projects and problem solving

Explore Vivaldi's best new tools

Vivaldi, the web browser created by the former CEO of Opera, has been updated with lots of new features. Here's what you need to know

Vivaldi: vivaldi.com | 15 mins | Windows 7, 8, 10 | macOS 10.10+

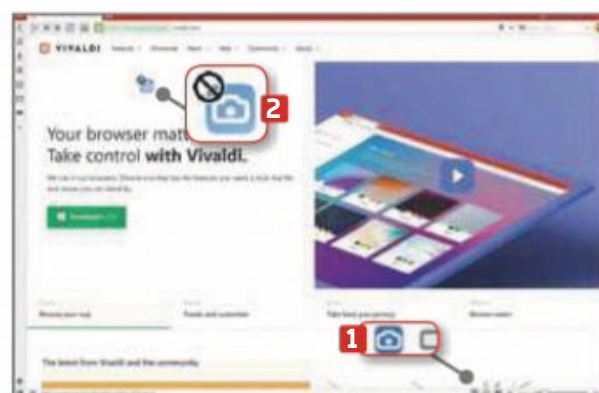
It's not easy to compete with the big four browsers – Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Microsoft Edge and Opera – but Vivaldi is doing a good job of getting noticed. Created by Opera co-founder Jon von Tetzchner, Vivaldi launched in 2016. Since then it has added innovation after innovation with each update. The latest version (at the

time of writing) is Vivaldi 2.4, which adds customisation options, multi-user support, extra bookmarking tools and a calculator in the Quick Command tool.

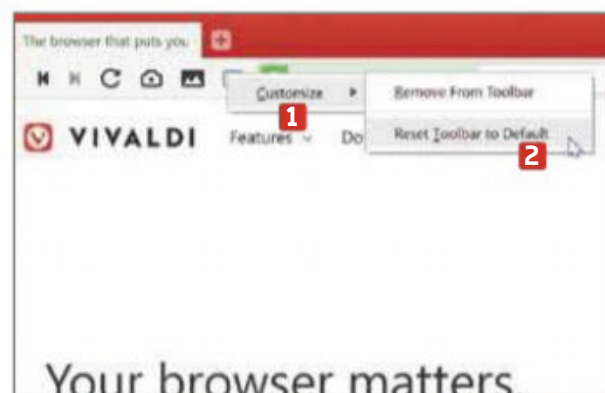
Vivaldi is available for Windows, macOS and Linux, and is based on Chromium, which means it can run add-ons developed for Chrome and Opera. Here's what's new in the browser.



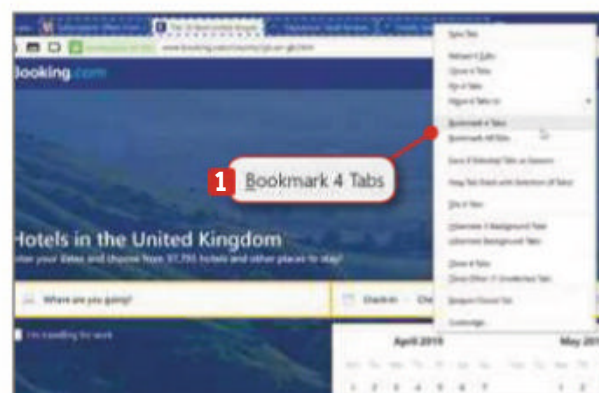
1 Vivaldi lets you customise your browser so that it looks and behaves exactly how you want it to. You can now rearrange the position of the navigation buttons **1** and status buttons, **2** and move them between locations.



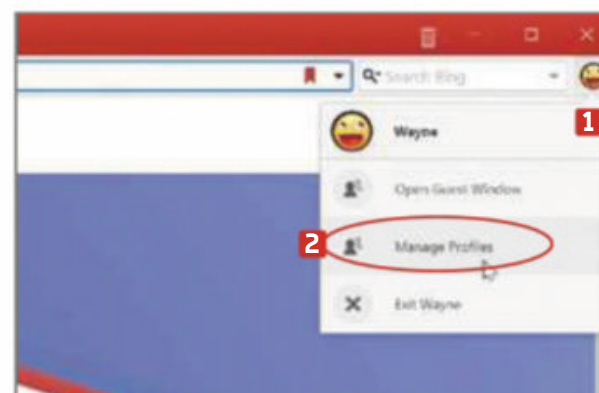
2 To move a button from one place to another, hold down the Shift key, then click and drag the item to its new home. For example, if you want to move the capture button from the bottom right **1** to the top left, hold Shift, then click and drag it to its new position. The button turns blue **2** as you drag it.



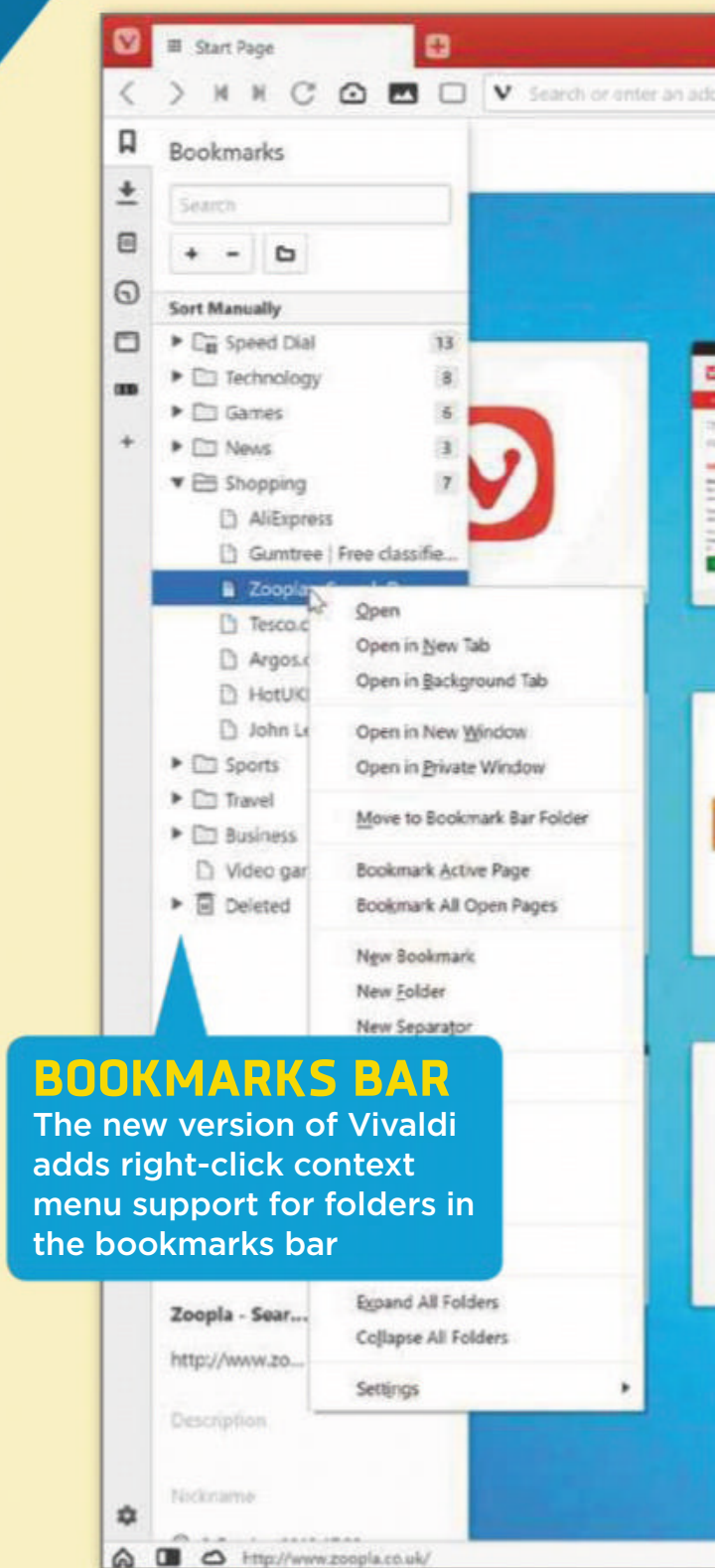
3 If you change your mind about the changes you've made, you can reset the browser to its default layout. Right-click a toolbar and select Customize, **1** 'Reset Toolbar to Default'. **2** You'll need to do this with each toolbar to make sure every button is returned to its original place.



4 You can now bookmark several websites at once and store them in a date-stamped folder. Select the tabs you want by holding down Ctrl or Shift and clicking each in turn. Then right-click and choose 'Bookmark x Tabs'. **1** You can access your new folder in the bookmark manager.



5 Vivaldi supports multiple users, which is ideal if you share your browser with other family members because each person can have their own speed dials, bookmarks, extensions, browsing history and so on. Click the person button in the top-right corner, **1** then click the option to Manage Profiles. **2**





SPEED DIAL

Open a new tab to see the Speed Dial page, which displays thumbnails of your favourite sites for easy access

GUEST VIEW

In this view, Vivaldi doesn't record activity such as browsing and searching. Guests can't change any of your browser settings or access your data

ADAPTIVE INTERFACE

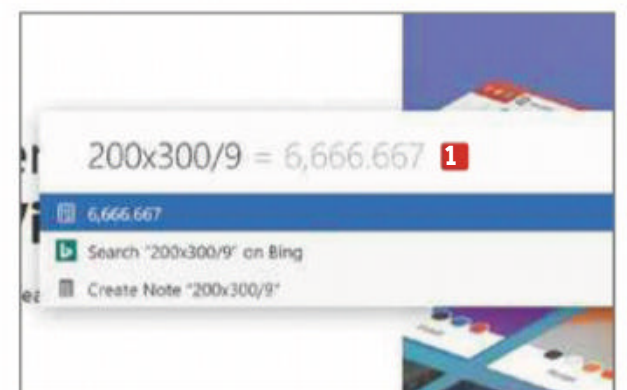
Vivaldi changes its colour scheme to match the site you're viewing. Visit Groupon, for example, and the browser turns green when you open that site in a new tab



6 In the new window that opens, click the three-dot icon **1** to select or remove an account. From here, you can also choose to browse the web as a guest **2** or add accounts for one or more people. **3** You can select an avatar and create a desktop shortcut for each profile.



7 If you don't need profiles, you can remove the tool. Click the Settings cog, **1** then choose Address Bar **2** and untick Show Profile Button. **3** For additional profile customisation options, type `chrome://settings` into the address bar and press Enter.



8 Vivaldi now has a calculator, which you can access from the Quick Commands tool. Press F2 in Windows or Cmd+E in macOS. From here, you can enter the calculation you want to perform and press Enter. **1** Click the result to copy it to your clipboard.



Wirelessly share files between all your devices



Feem: feem.io | ⌚ 20 mins | 🖥️ Windows 🤖 Android 🍏 macOS 🐧 Linux 🍏 iOS

EXPERT TIP

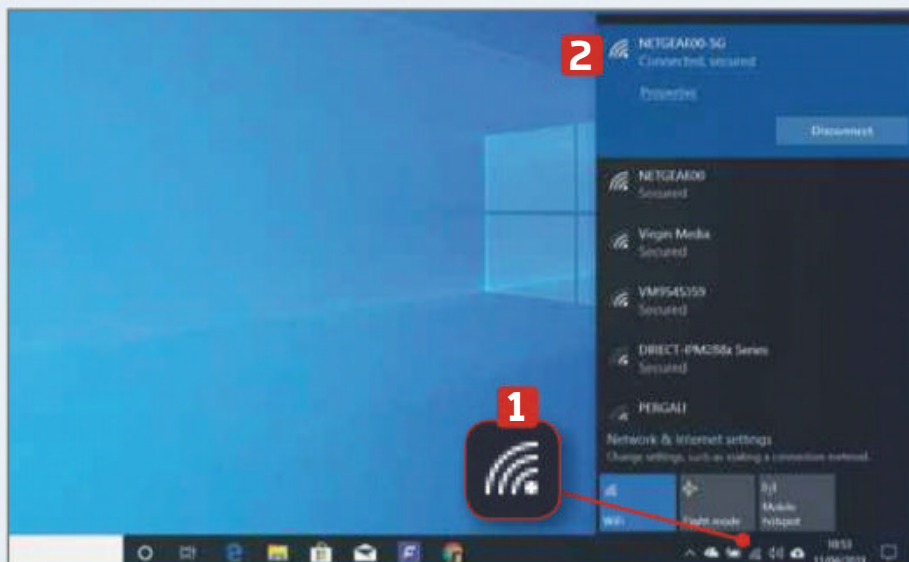
Andy Shaw says

The free version of Feem is surprisingly powerful but there are a few advantages to upgrading to a paid-for plan, such as sharing files between a lot of devices at once, changing the slightly daft device names or changing the default download folder. You can do this through the Device Settings option once you've upgraded. Moving to Pro costs \$4.99 (around £3.81) for 1-4 devices, and \$9.99 (around £7.63) for 5-19 devices.

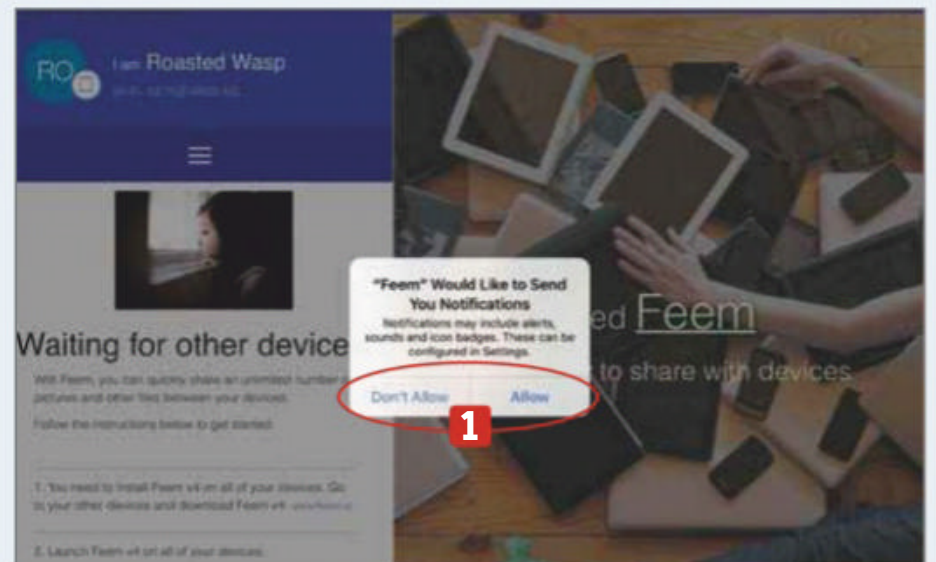


Why is it that the file you want to use is never on the right device? Whether it's a photo on your Android phone that you want to edit on your PC, or a document on your PC that you want to read on your iPad, you need to jump through hoops to email it to yourself or sync it through the cloud. Either of these options means uploading, downloading and switching between devices and apps, leaving a trail of files behind you.

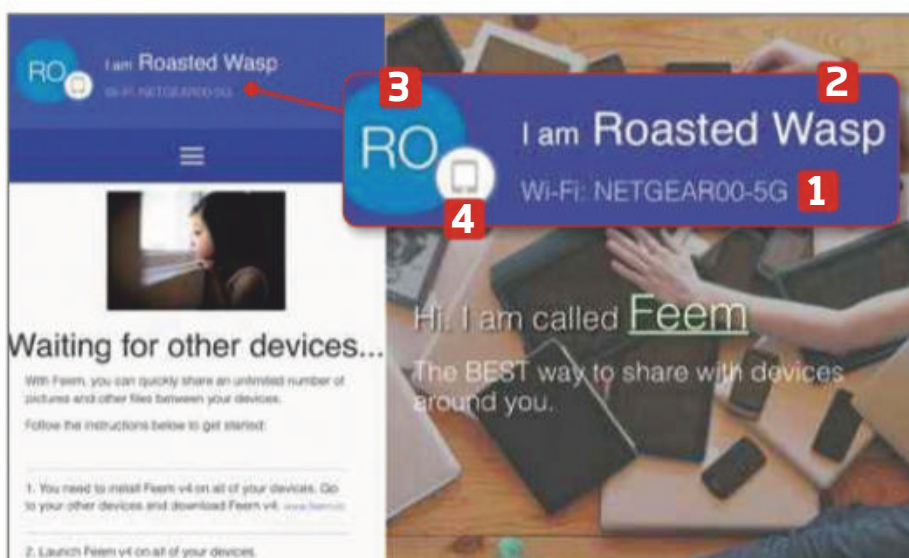
Feem cuts all this nonsense to its simplest level, letting you share files between any combination of your devices, whether they run Windows, Android, iOS, macOS or Linux, as long as they're all connected to the same wireless network. You don't even need to be connected to the internet.



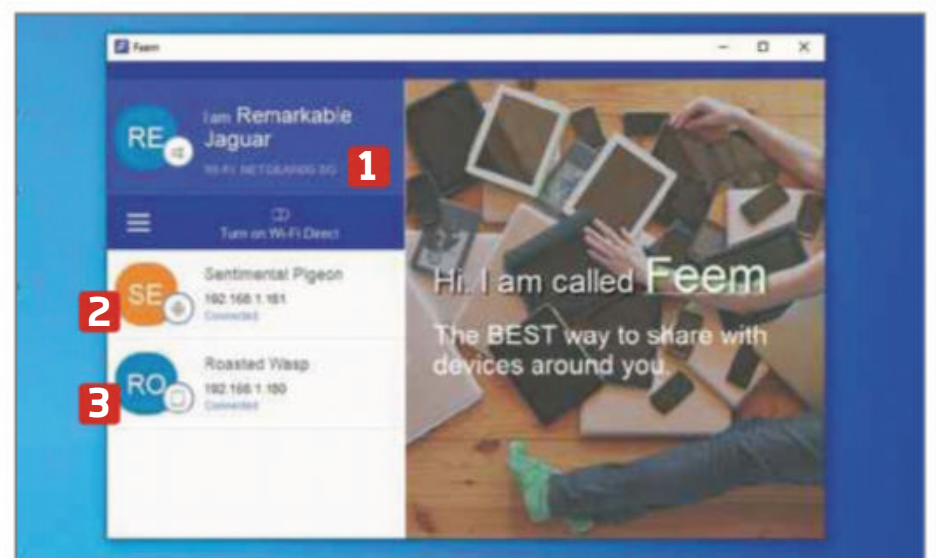
1 The most likely reason why Feem might not work is because your devices aren't all on the same network. If you have more than one network (such as 2.4GHz and 5GHz), make sure everything's on the same one. In Windows, click the 'Internet access' symbol in the notification area. **1** Compare networks with your mobile devices. **2**



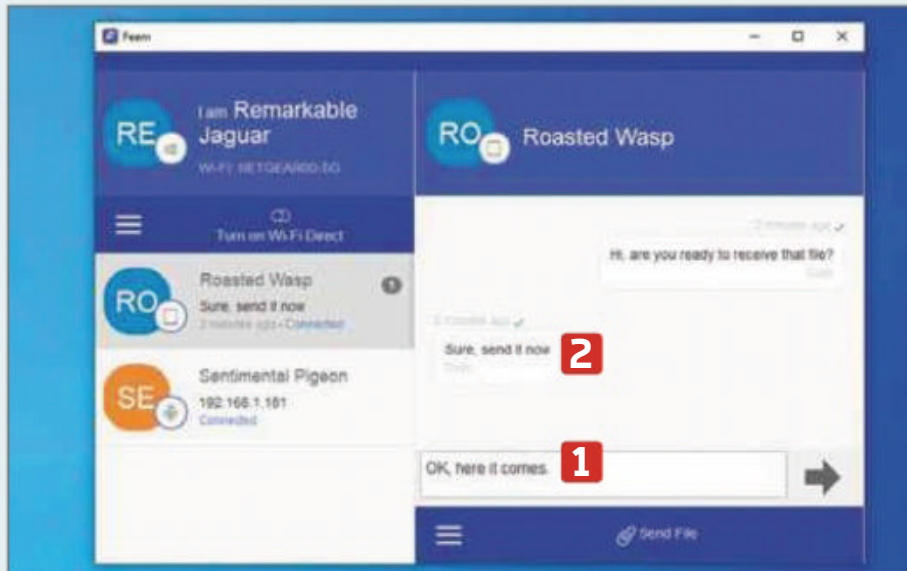
2 Choose a device and install Feem v4 on it (we've installed it on an iPad). Links to the mobile apps can be found at feem.io. You don't have to give Feem permission to send you notifications **1** but you do have to allow access to photos, files and folders. The Windows version triggers the 'Windows protected your PC' screen - click 'More info' to bypass it.



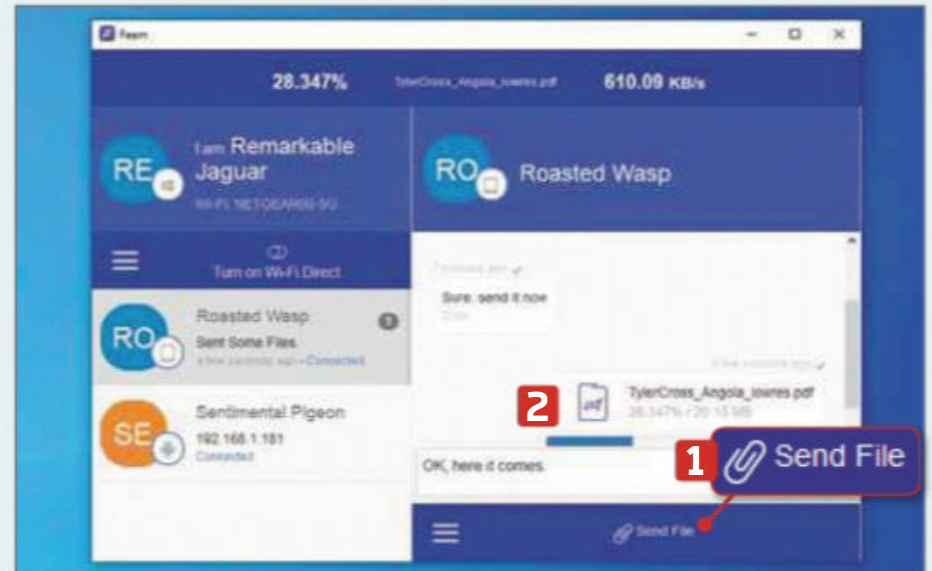
3 You're shown what network you're on **1** and the device is given a name. **2** The initials in the icon reflect the name of the device, **3** with another icon that shows what kind of device it's installed on. **4** This helps you distinguish your devices when you add more. Install the software or app on any other devices you want to share files between.



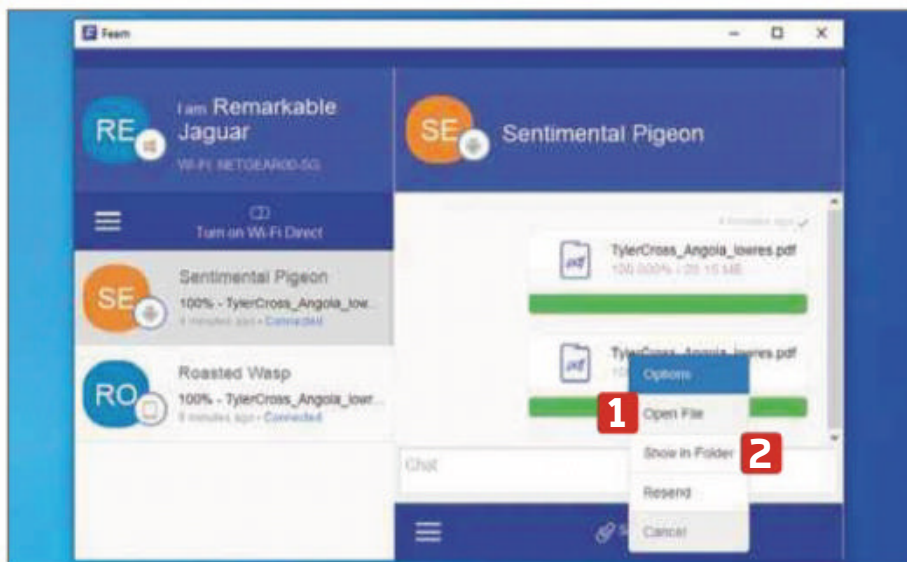
4 As you install Feem on each device, you should see them appear on each others' screens. If one device doesn't appear on the others, check it's on the correct network, **1** then close the app and restart it. Here, on the Windows app, you can see it's connected to an Android **2** and an Apple **3** device.



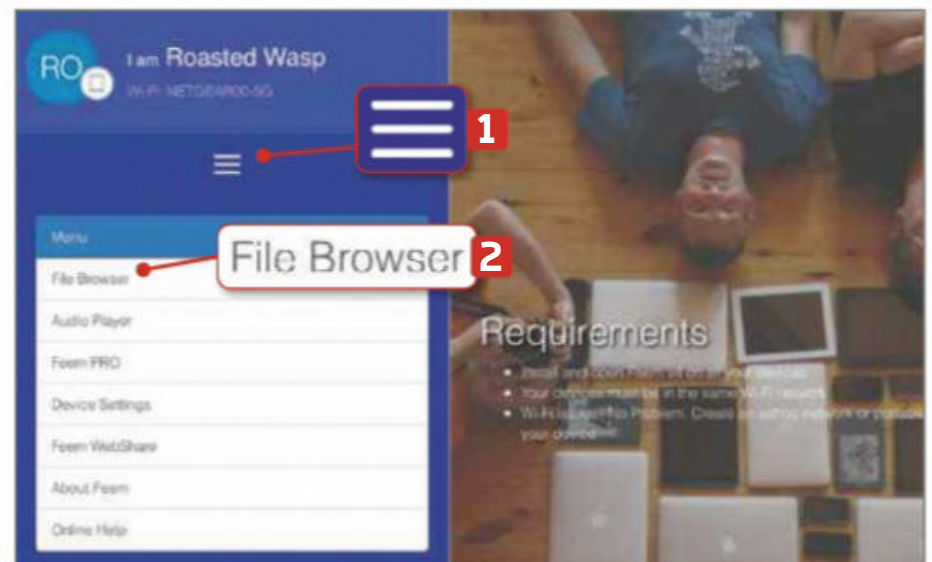
5 Click or tap the device you want to send a file to. If the device is in the hands of another person, you can chat to them by typing a message into the Chat box. **1** Press Enter or the arrow key to send the message. Responses appear on your screen. **2**



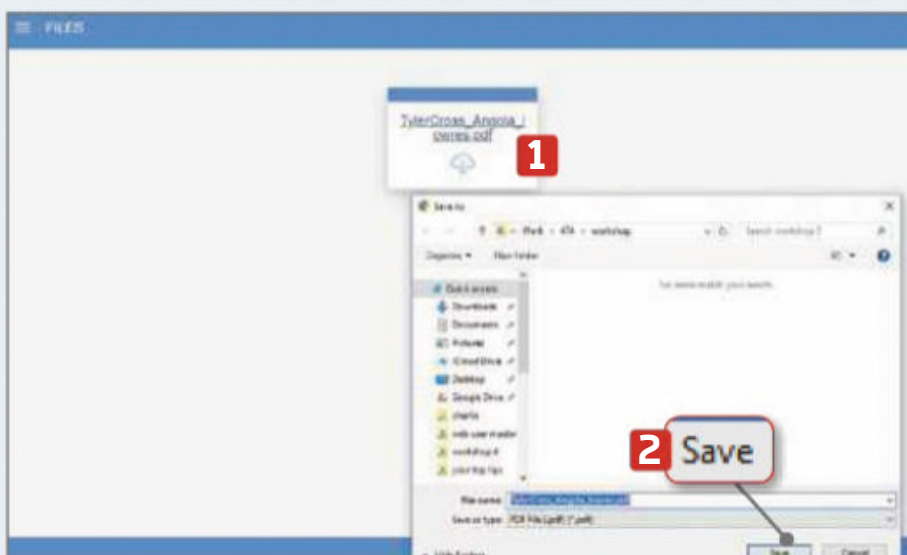
6 Click or tap Send File **1** and your device's usual file selection tool appears. On Windows, it's a File Explorer window. Select the file and click OK. The file appears in the transfer section **2** and reports on its progress across the network.



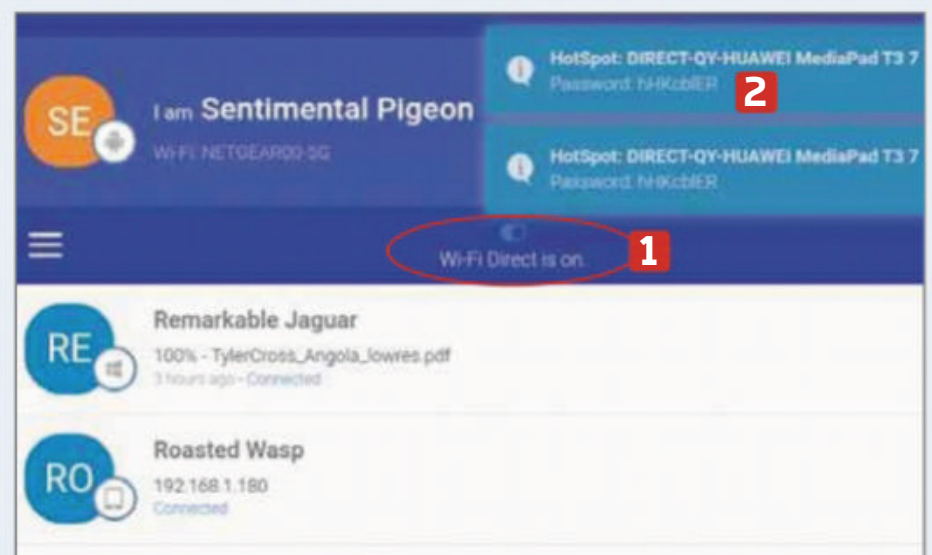
7 Click or tap the file to see the options available, which may vary slightly depending on the device. On Windows, you can open the file **1** or show the folder it's in. **2** Android and iOS have the same options, but iOS offers to let you open the file in another app straight away – however, it doesn't show you where the file is.



8 To find files later on iOS, click the menu button **1** and choose File Browser, **2** then tap Others. Your files are listed. Tap a file and you can open it in the software or choose to open it in another app using iOS's standard export tool.



9 If you need to send a file to a device that doesn't have Feem installed, use the WebShare option. Choose it from the menu, then click the 'Turn on Feem WebShare' switch. On the remote PC, type the URL into a browser, click Login and enter the password listed on the host device. Click a file **1** to download it. **2**



10 If you have two devices and no Wi-Fi network, you may be able to use one of the devices to create a hotspot, connect the other device and share files. On a compatible device, such as this Android tablet, tap the Wi-Fi Direct switch. **1** The network name and password **2** is shown. Connect another device to it and share files as normal.



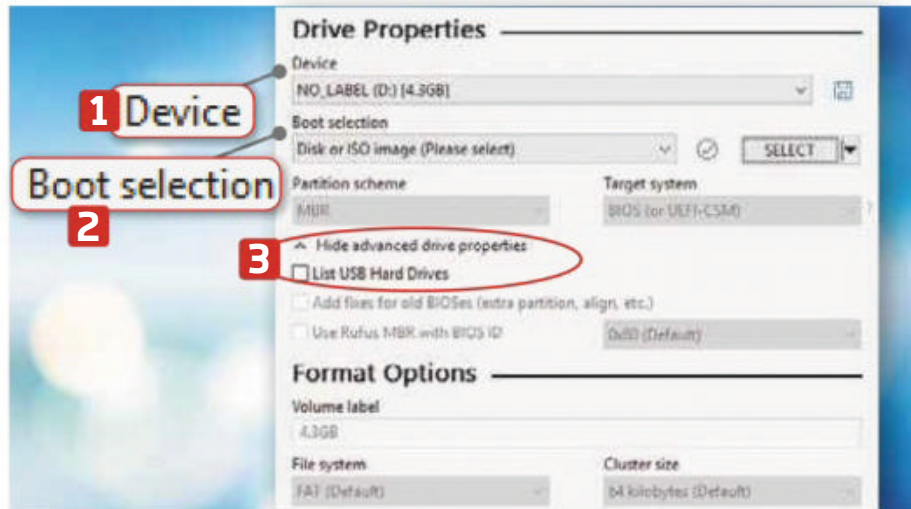
Download and write a Windows ISO

Rufus lets you create bootable USB flash drives, so you can install a Windows or Linux operating system on multiple computers. We last looked at this speedy tool in issue 454 (bit.ly/webuser454), but the latest update adds the ability

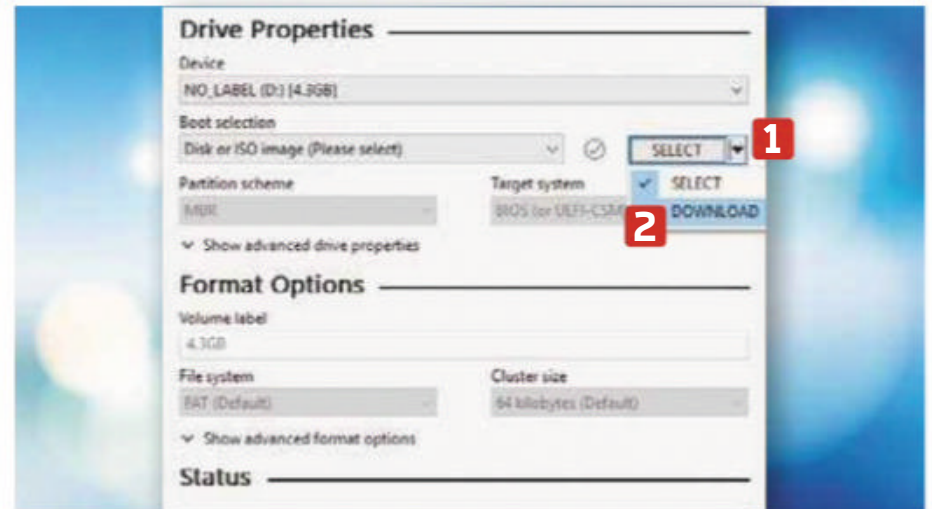
to download a Windows ISO direct, so you don't have to rummage through the Microsoft website or use tricky workarounds to get a copy of the OS.



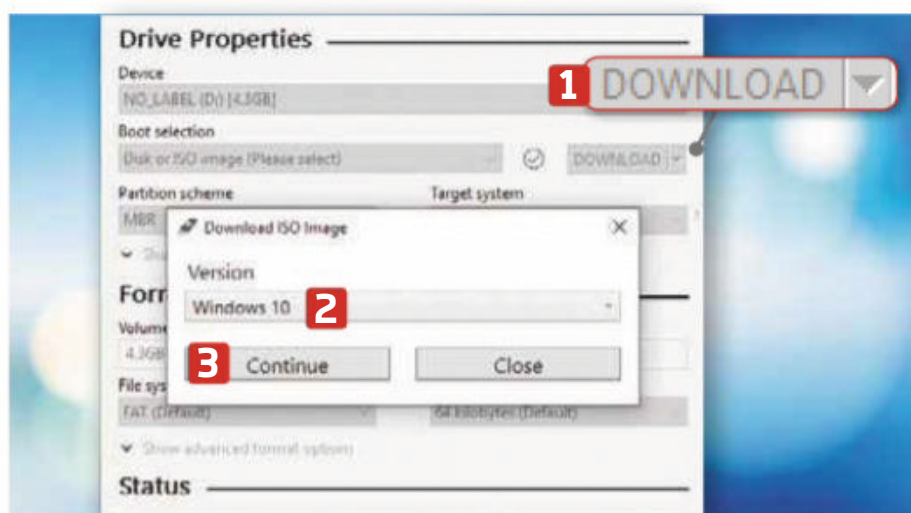
Rufus: rufus.ie | 10 mins | Windows 8.1, 10



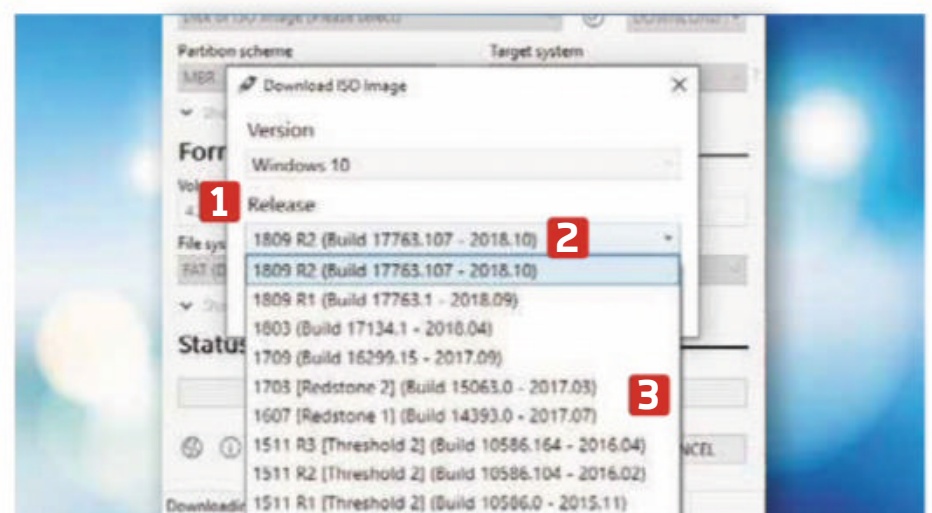
1 To run Rufus 3.5, search in the Start bar for the desktop app. Device **1** lists all inserted USB drives and 'Boot selection' **2** contains your Operating System choices. Choose 'Show advanced drive properties' to force Rufus to display USB hard drives, **3** if that's your target save destination.



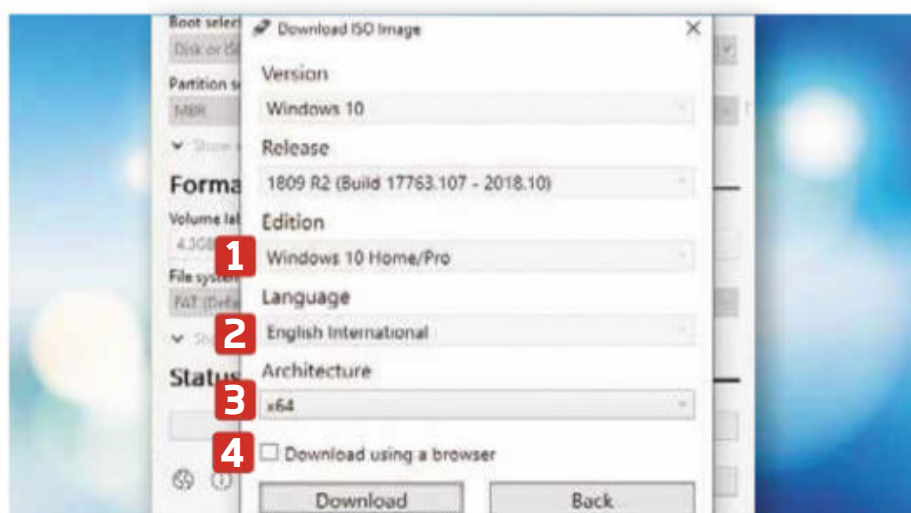
2 Previously, Rufus asked you to download the Windows ISO from Microsoft in advance (available from bit.ly/windows474), then run the tool. Now, you can just click the drop-down menu to the right of 'Boot selection'. **1** By default, this reads Select; you should change it to Download. **2**



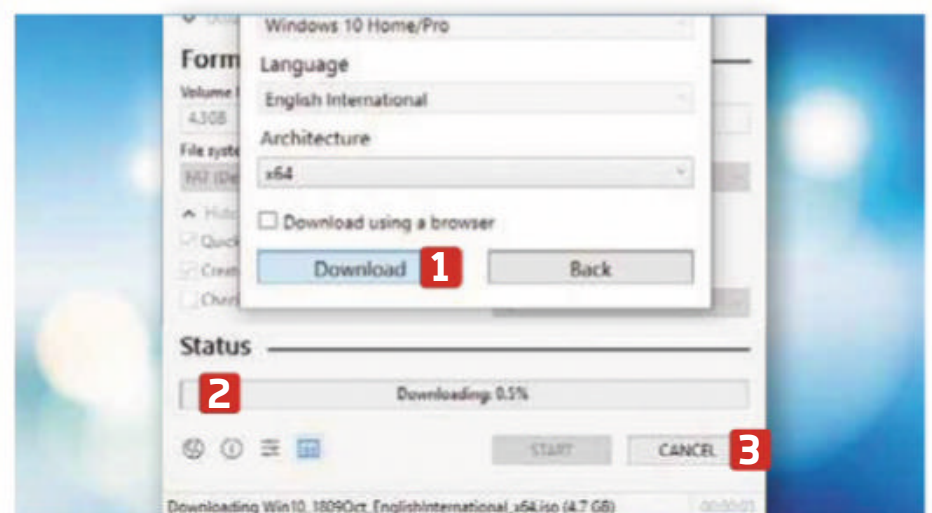
3 Click Download again – the word, **1** not the downward-facing arrow. A pop-up opens asking which ISO image you want to download. **2** In this latest version of Rufus, clicking the drop-down arrow offers two options: Windows 10 and Windows 8.1. Make your choice and click Continue. **3**



4 A fresh drop-down menu is added, which lets you decide which release build or version of Windows you need **1** – useful if a Microsoft update bricks your computer. The latest version sits at the top **2** with older releases below. **3** Select the one you want, then click Continue.



5 The next drop-down menu lets you specify the Windows edition you want – for example, Home, Pro or Education. **1** Click Continue and select your preferred language for the OS **2** and the system's architecture (x86 for 32-bit or x64 for 64-bit). **3** Tick 'Download using a browser', if you wish. **4**



6 Finally, click Download. **1** File Explorer appears, so point the tool at the target destination and press Save. Rufus is best used with a USB drive, but the ISO can also be downloaded to your hard drive – the status bar shows its progress. **2** Click Cancel **3** to halt the process if you want.

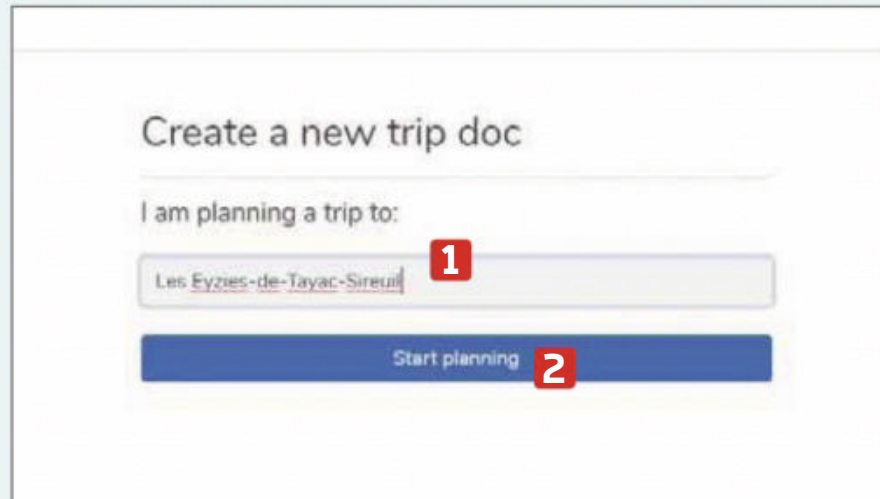


Group plan your next holiday online

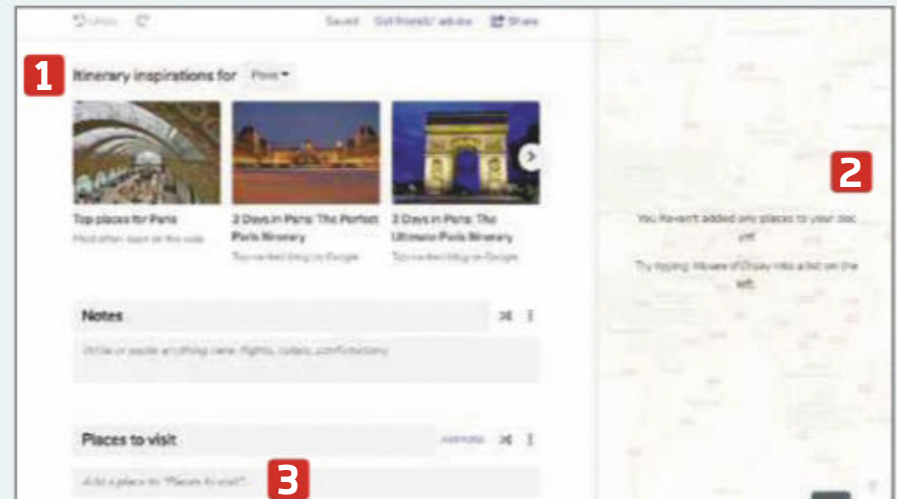
Don't get lumbered with all the work of planning your next holiday when you can share the load with your travel companions. Travelchime is a brilliant tool that uses Google Maps to compile a list of places you'd like to visit

while you're away, so you can share your ideas, get contributions from others and plan your time for maximum enjoyment when you get there.

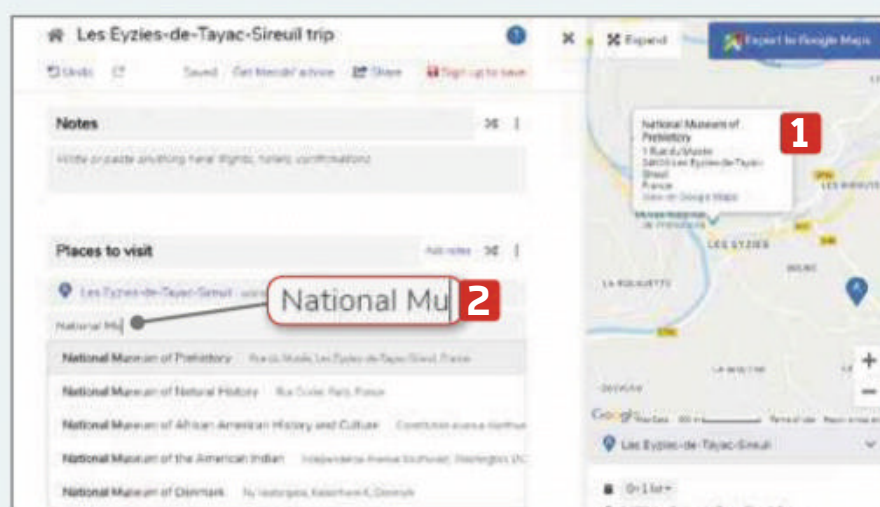
Travelchime: travelchime.com | 10 mins | **Any browser**



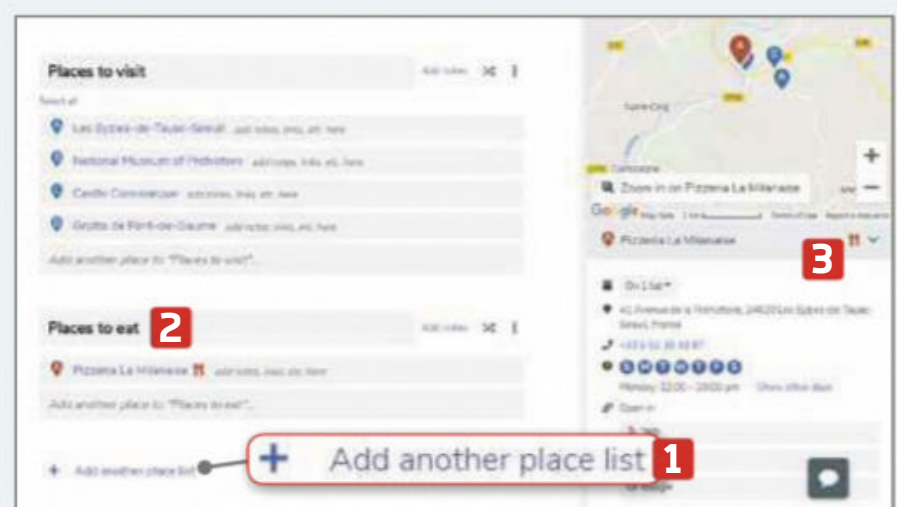
1 Click the 'Start planning a trip' button and type in your holiday destination. **1** If the place is recognised, it appears in the list of options that pop up. If it doesn't, try casting your net a bit further by entering the nearest town or region. Click the 'Start planning' button. **2**



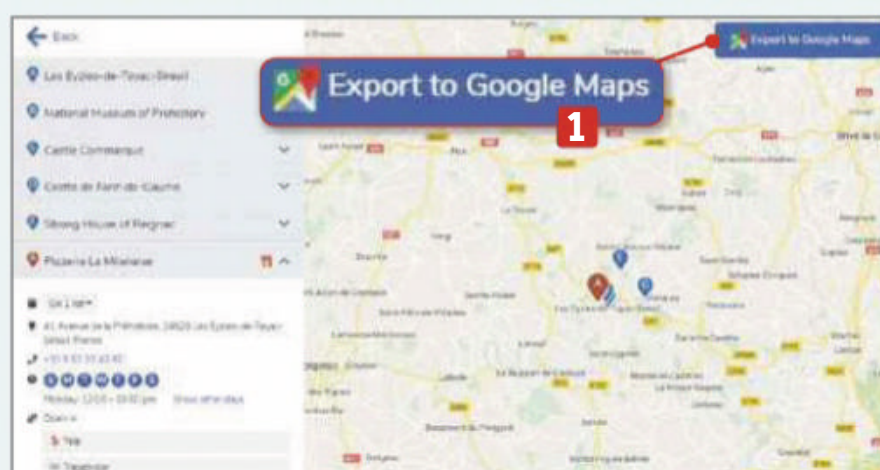
2 If it's a popular destination, you may see suggested itineraries you can use to inspire your own schedule. **1** If not, you get a blank map. **2** Type the name of the area you're going to under the 'Places to visit' box, **3** and a map will open for you to explore.



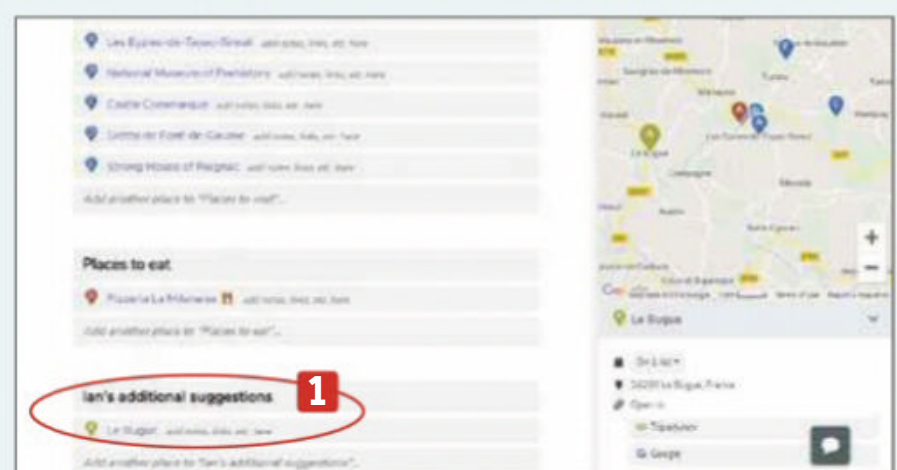
3 If you don't yet have a list of sights to see, scan around the map for places of interest. **1** When you find something appealing, start typing its name in the box under 'Places to visit'. **2** The details from the map should be picked up and a marker dropped for future reference.



4 To create a new list, type a name in the box below or click 'Add another place list': **1** for example, a list of restaurants. **2** As long as you have an internet connection on a mobile device, you can come back and find phone numbers and opening hours of places you've saved. **3**



5 To explore more of the map, click the Expand button. You can also export your list to Google Maps by clicking 'Export to Google Maps'. **1** Click 'Open in Google Maps', then click the Following link and a version of the list will be saved to your Google Maps so it's easy to return to.



6 Once you're ready to share, click 'Get friends' advice'. You need to sign in, either with Facebook, Google or an email and password, so that any additions they make are saved back into your account. **1** Sharers won't see the Notes section, so you can add any private information there.

Weekend Project

Get to grips with some serious tech tinkering to boost your computer and other devices



How to...

Add Wi-Fi connectivity to your vehicle

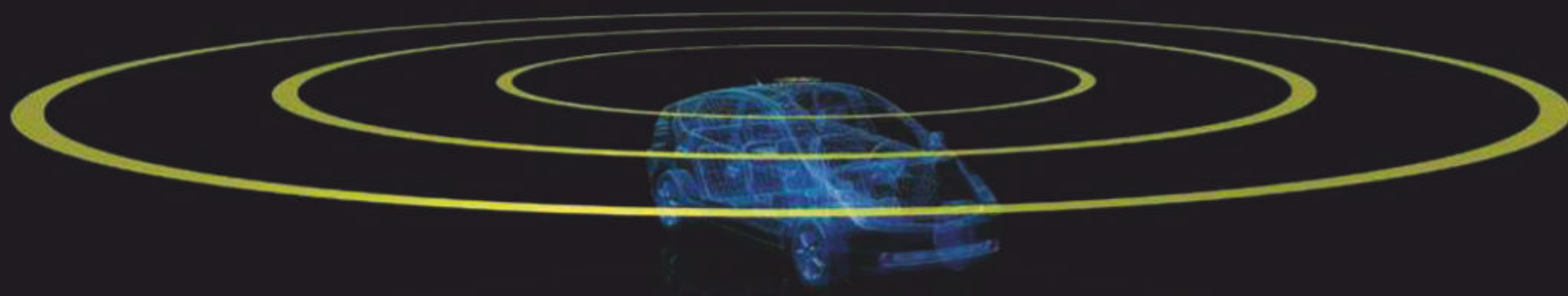
Wayne Williams shows you how to keep your passengers happy on long journeys by kitting out your car with a reliable Wi-Fi connection

Getting online when you were away from home used to be a challenge because free Wi-Fi in hotels, airports and coffee shops was often slow and unreliable. Thankfully, these days that's (mostly) no longer the case. Unless you find

yourself in the total back of beyond, there's a good chance you'll be able to access the internet wherever you are, including while you're on the move.

In this issue's Weekend Project, we look at a number of ways you can

add Wi-Fi to your car. Doing so has lots of benefits, especially for your passengers, because they'll be able to connect wireless-only devices such as tablets to your network, and stream videos and music, as well as play online-only games.



Share your smartphone's connection

Thanks to the widespread availability of 4G, the easiest way to get a decent connection in your car is by turning your smartphone into a hotspot that other devices can connect to. The process is very straightforward and we show you how to do this on both iOS and Android in our Mini Workshop on page 61.

The downside to this method (and,

indeed, the other methods discussed here) is that if you're on a limited mobile data plan, other devices using your connection may eat through your allowance, especially if they are streaming media. It might seem like a good idea to let your children or grandchildren watch YouTube videos on a long car journey, but you may regret the decision later if you don't have enough of your allowance left over to check your emails.

For that reason, if you intend to regularly share your connection in your car, you might want to upgrade to a larger or unlimited plan. You could also consider buying a spare phone to leave in your car, and use this as the device for the hotspot. Remember to keep it charged or plugged in all the time.

It's also worth pointing out that the quality of the connection you share will be reliant on where you are. If you find



The 4GEE WiFi Mini lets you connect up to 20 devices



The Pocket Hotspot Pro Netgear M1 delivers download speeds of up to 1Gbps

yourself in a part of the country with only 3G coverage (or worse), you can expect to hear complaints from your passengers when videos freeze or pages fail to load.

Use a dedicated mobile hotspot

If you don't want to use your smartphone to create a hotspot in the car, consider buying and using a dedicated mobile hotspot (sometimes referred to as MiFi or Mobile Wi-Fi). This is essentially a small portable router that turns a 3G/4G mobile data connection into a wireless signal. You can connect multiple devices to the network (the number varies, but 20 is typical) and because it's portable, you can use it at home, in the car, on a train and at your destination – just take it wherever you want to go.

A mobile hotspot provides a more reliable connection than what you get from simply tethering a smartphone

(especially when connecting multiple devices), as well as better battery life. It also has the benefit of freeing up your phone for whatever tasks you might need it for, such as taking and making calls.

All the major mobile network providers offer devices that you can either buy outright, along with a data-only SIM card, or pick up for free (or for a small upfront cost) as part of a contract. You don't need to stick with the same provider you use for your phone, so feel free to shop around.

For an idea of the sort of price you can expect to pay, EE's 4GEE WiFi Mini (bit.ly/eewm474) is available for no upfront cost, but you pay £13 a month (on a 24-month contract) to get 5GB of data per month, or £22 a month for 15GB of data. Another option is the Huawei E5573 4G Mobile Wi-Fi Router, which costs £25 a month (on an 18-month

contract) for 10GB of data. O2 offers the Huawei Pocket Hotspot 4G 2017 for £20.38 a month (on a 24-month contract) for 15GB per month of data. If you want an even better router, O2 also offers the Pocket Hotspot Pro Netgear M1 for £24.84 a month (on a 36-month contract). You get 15GB of data with download speeds of up to one Gigabit-per-second.

Plans from the different mobile providers all tend to be customisable, so if you want a shorter contract or more data, it's easily arranged. The price will change accordingly, of course.

There are also dongles available specifically for use in a vehicle, which plug into the 12V power socket. This means you don't need to worry about charging before your journey and can use it to power your mobile phone at the same time. Although these are rarely







EE no longer sells the Buzzard 2 directly, but it's still available to buy online



Connect your devices to the GX450 as soon as the ignition is turned on

Broadband Deals

Call FREE on 0800 083 2357 to switch your broadband

| | Provider | Package name | Monthly price | Contract length | Broadband speed | Allowance | First-year cost* |
|---|---|---|---------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 |  | TalkTalk: Fast Broadband | £17.00 (£27 after 12 months) | 12 months | 11Mbps avg. speed | ∞ unlimited | CHEAPEST £204.00 |
| 2 |  | Shell Energy: Fast Broadband | £17.99 | 18 months | 11Mbps avg. speed | ∞ unlimited | £215.88 |
| 3 |  | Sky: Broadband Unlimited | £18.00 (£31 after 18 months) | 18 months | 11Mbps avg. speed | ∞ unlimited * | £216.00 |
| 4 |  | Virgin Media: Player Bundle + Fibre Broadband + Weekend Calls | £33.00 (£51 after 12 months) | 12 months | 54Mbps avg. speed | ∞ unlimited | £396.00 |

Terms & Conditions apply - see ISP sites for details

* Fair-usage or restriction policy applies.

Data supplied by www.broadbandgenie.co.uk. Correct as of 16 April 2019.

Ofcom

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

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The Ford Focus's optional FordPass Connect modem lets you create a Wi-Fi Hotspot. You'll need a Vodafone subscription

offered by mobile network providers, you can still find various models to buy on Amazon, including the Buzzard 2 from EE, which was an excellent device when it launched back in 2014.

Install a router

If you want permanent and ultra-reliable Wi-Fi in your car and you don't care how much it costs, then installing a wireless modem and router is an option you may want to consider. The cellular radio and Wi-Fi signals are much stronger, and some devices come with USB and Ethernet ports, which is handy if you want to wirelessly connect a laptop or storage drive and do some work or give your passengers some big-screen entertainment.

In-Car PC (www.in-carpc.co.uk) sells three in-vehicle routers. The GX450 4G Router has an internal LTE 4G module and supports two external 4G antennas. You can connect up to eight Wi-Fi devices to it, and it powers on and off with the vehicle ignition. However, it will set you back around £630.

The LX40 4G is cheaper, at £408, and allows up to 10 devices to connect to it. Like the GX450, it has an LTE 4G module and support for two

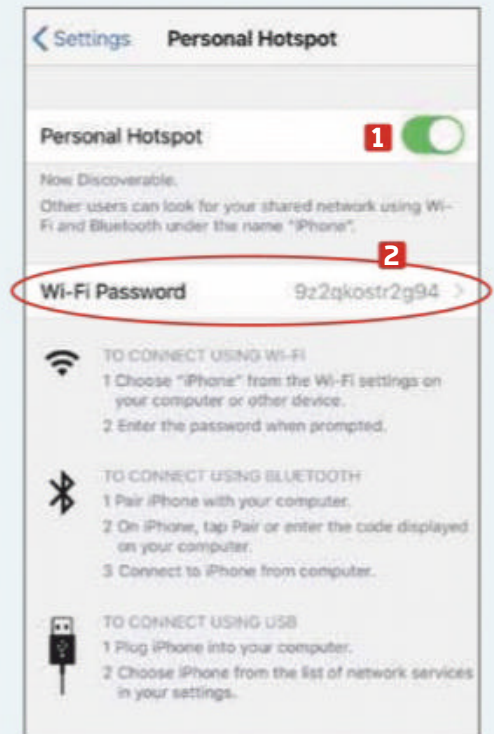
external 4G antennas. For the gold standard, there's the IBR900 4G Wi-Fi Vehicle Router, which offers dual SIM and dual-band (2.4/5 GHz 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac Wave 2) functionality and allows up to 128 devices to connect to the network. Expect to pay an eye-watering £930.

Buy a new car

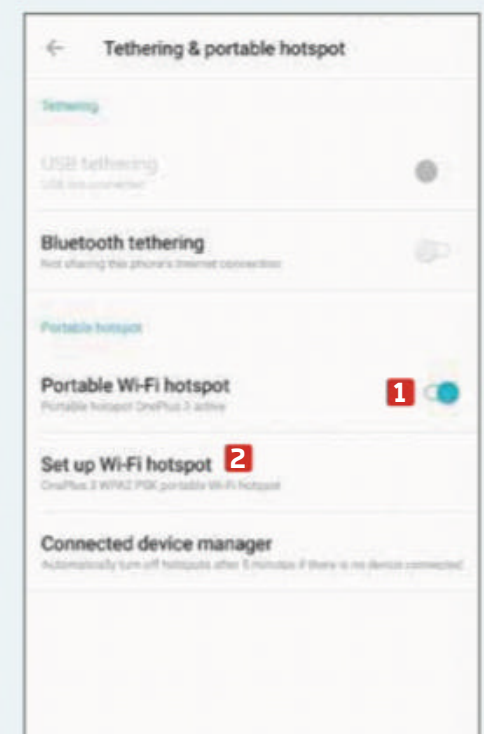
Okay, so this is an extreme option, but if you're thinking of buying a new car, you might want to consider a model that comes with a built-in cellular data connection that you can use to create a local Wi-Fi network. Tesla, Audi, BMW and Lexus all offer cars with Wi-Fi (it's an optional extra in some cases), but if your budget won't stretch to one of those, you'll find the feature is also available in the new Ford Focus. The way the Wi-Fi works depends on the make of car: some require you to add a SIM card with data, while others use your phone (and therefore your phone's data plan). The number of devices you can connect wirelessly depends on the car, but it's usually between 5 and 10. Because the Wi-Fi feature is built-in, you should enjoy better connectivity than you'd get from separate devices. ■

MINI WORKSHOP Turn your smartphone into a wireless hotspot

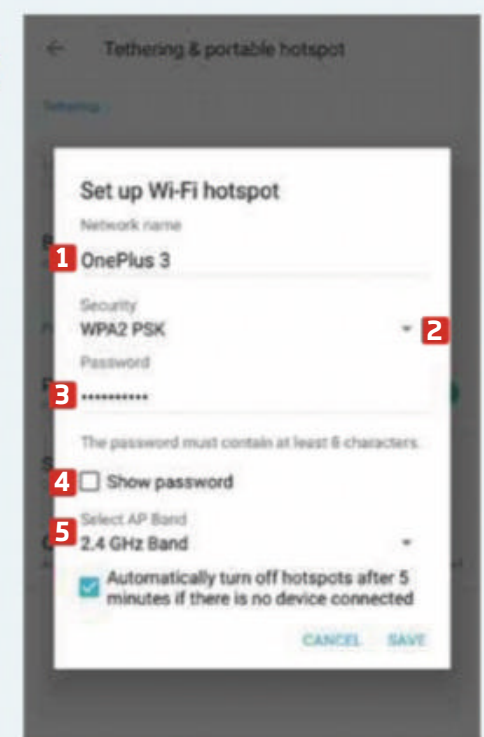
1 In iOS, open Settings, tap Personal Hotspot and flick Personal Hotspot to On. **1** The Wi-Fi password needed to connect is shown below. **2** Tap it and you'll be able to copy the password or change it to something different. It needs to be at least 8 characters long.



2 The process for sharing your Android's cellular connection may vary slightly depending on your device. Open Settings and in the Wireless & Networks section, tap More. Open 'Tethering & portable hotspot' and enable 'Portable Wi-Fi hotspot'. **1** Tap 'Set up Wi-Fi hotspot' **2** to configure the details.



3 You can change the network name **1** and also enable or disable the security. **2** Enter a password for the connection. **3** As in iOS, it needs to be at least 8 characters. Tick 'Show password' **4** to see what it is. Choose which band to use. **5** The hotspot will turn off after five minutes if a connection isn't made.



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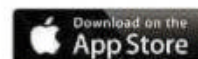
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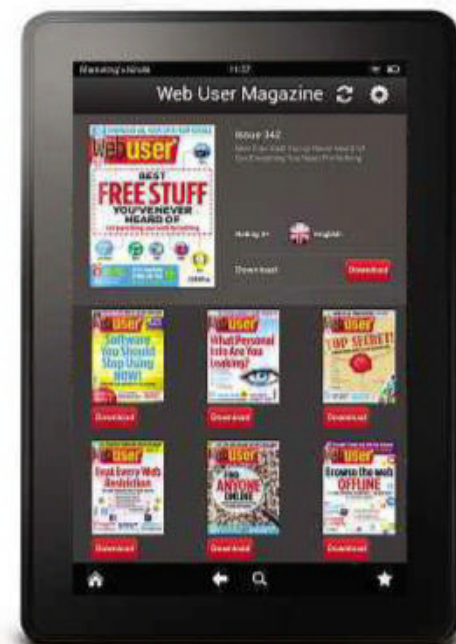
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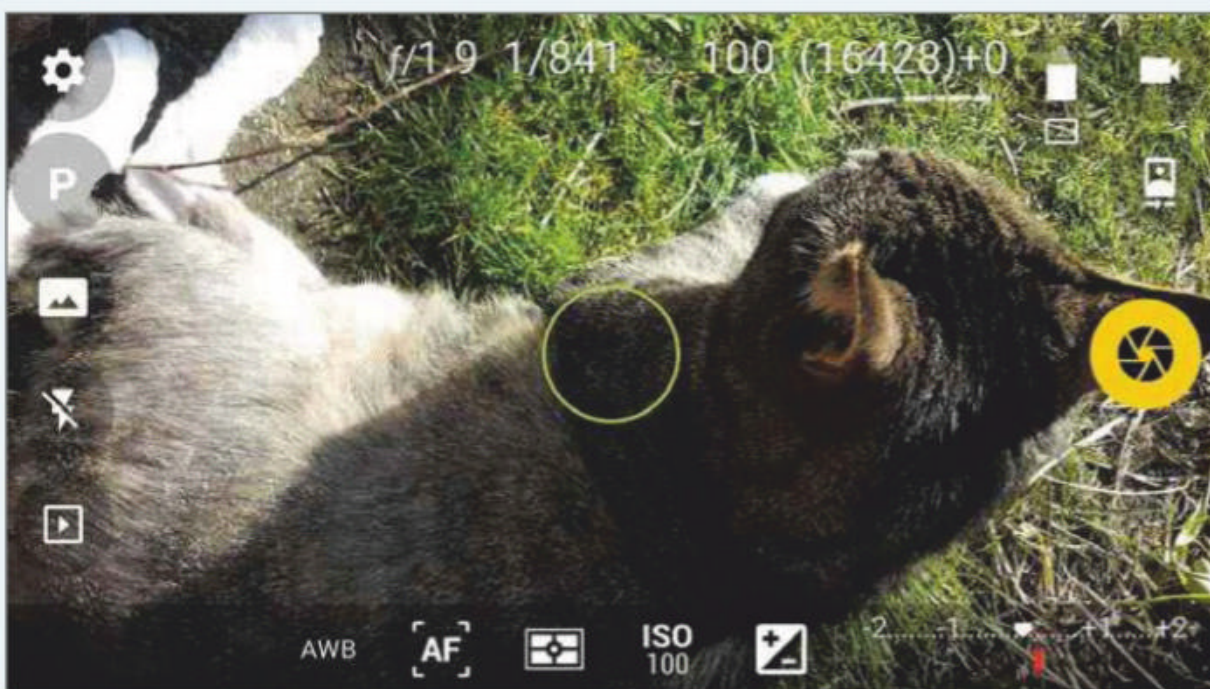
Web User Masterclass

Take better phone photos with hidden tools and manual apps

Improve your mobile snaps using manual settings

A phone camera's default mode is point-and-shoot, which is quick and easy for taking photographs. But you can go beyond these basic settings to access manual camera features if you want more control over your images.

The process varies depending on your phone and camera app, but if you want to adjust the ISO (light sensitivity), shutter speed, light balance and any other attributes in your quest for the perfect shot, look for a cog icon, a menu button or try swiping left or right. If the camera app doesn't have these features or you find them tricky to use, install Camera FV-5 (bit.ly/cafv474) or Manual Camera (bit.ly/mancam474) on Android; or MuseCam (bit.ly/muse474) or VSCO (bit.ly/vcs474) on iOS. There are free versions of these apps and they make accessing manual settings much easier.



Find your camera's manual settings or use an app, such as Camera FV-5

Use High Dynamic Range

The scene you want to shoot might include both light and dark areas, and regular camera settings may set the exposure for one area leaving other parts dark or washed out. HDR (High Dynamic Range) combines the best bits from multiple exposures to create photos that have better exposure and colour saturation. Turn it on either with an HDR option on the screen or in the camera settings. It almost always improves how a photo looks.

On an iPhone, go to Settings, Camera and turn off Smart HDR if it is available. You can then manually turn it on or off in the Camera app when taking a photo. There is also an option to keep or

discard the normal photo in addition to the HDR photo.

Force a sharper focus

The iPhone and some other phones have a focus and exposure lock, which can prove very useful. Point the camera at the subject, then tap and hold your finger on it until an AE/AF Lock message appears on the screen. Now, when you compose the scene, the focus and exposure remain locked on the subject, even if it is off-centre. Tap and hold again to cancel it.



Tweak the exposure to lighten or darken a photo that has awkward lighting

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.



the screen to change the exposure. Increase or decrease the exposure until the image on the screen looks right. For example, you can increase exposure to whiten snow in winter, but decrease it on a sunny beach in summer. Decreasing the exposure when shooting sunsets will bring out the sky's colours and produce silhouettes.

Blur the background

Phone cameras maximise the depth of field so that everything in the frame is in focus. However, a busy background can distract from the subject of your image. In photos that centre on a head-and-shoulders portrait, your pet, a flower or any other foreground objects, it's best to have the subject sharply focused and the background blurred.

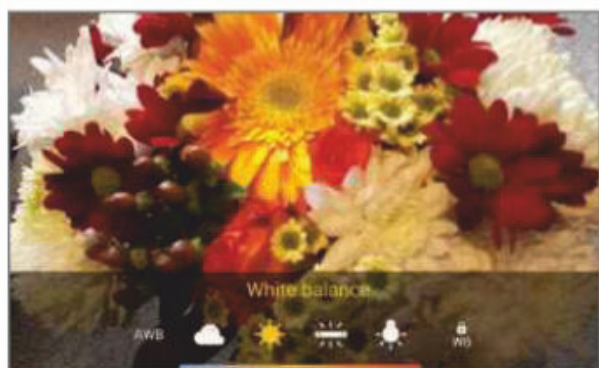
There are several ways to achieve this and some phones have a simple option you can select in the camera's menu or settings called Portrait, Selective Focus or an icon of a silhouette of a person. Select the option, point the phone at the subject, tap the subject to focus and then capture the shot.

If your phone doesn't have a portrait mode, get close and tap the subject on your screen to set the focus. If the phone has an option to increase the aperture, use that to blur the background by reducing the depth of field.

Adjust the white balance

Different light sources – the sun, clouds, lamps, strip lights, LED lights, street lights – all produce a slightly different colour cast. While our eyes automatically compensate for this, cameras don't, and this can affect how colours appear in your image. Photos taken indoors at night, for example, often look like they are tinted orange.

You can compensate for this using white balance controls. Press the WB (White Balance) or AWB (Automatic White Balance) button in the camera's settings or a camera app. Use the control, a slider or preset icons to reduce the blue (cloudy day) or orange (indoor) colour casts in photos. The iPhone doesn't have adjustable white balance, but MuseCam adds it.



Fix a light source's colour cast by selecting the appropriate symbol

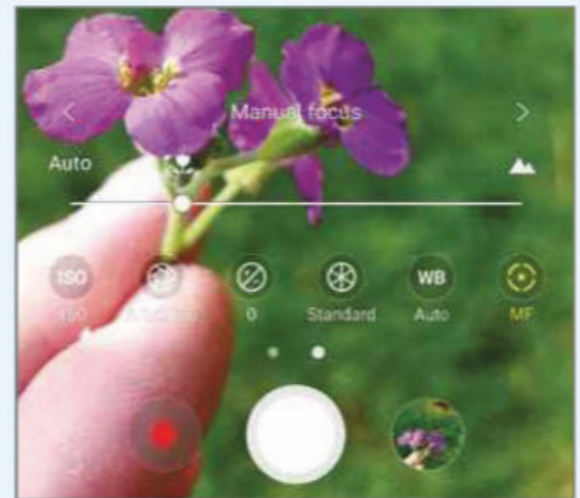
TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

More advanced tips for when you're feeling brave

Focus manually

You can simply point and tap to take a photo, which automatically tries to get everything in the frame in focus, but setting the focus manually can produce some interesting effects. With close-up portraits, distant landscapes and anything between, try manual mode if you have time to set up a shot.

Select the focus mode in the manual features. It may look like an [AF] icon and tapping it lets you select from several focus modes or use a slider that ranges from close up to infinity. Select the mode or drag the slider while watching the screen to see the effect. In manual mode, tap the part of the image to focus on.



Choose manual focus for special effects such as blurring backgrounds

and reduced photo quality, so don't use it unless you have to. However, some photographers deliberately use ISO for artistic effects, so it's worth experimenting with.

Lower ISO for better photos

ISO refers to the sensitivity of traditional film to light. A low ISO such as 50 means low sensitivity to light and is useful on a bright sunny day, because it produces photos with more saturated colours and less film grain.

You can select the ISO rating on many phone cameras to produce this same effect, even though there is no actual film. Go to the camera app settings or manual features menu and select ISO. Set a low number for the best quality image with the least digital noise (like old film grain). Low ISO requires more light, so only use it when there is plenty of bright light.



Select a low ISO setting in bright sunshine to minimise noise

Shoot in low light

The ISO setting represents the camera's sensitivity to light, and a high number increases sensitivity, which enables photos to be taken in low light without the flash, even at night. Open the camera's manual settings and drag the ISO slider to the maximum or tap the highest value.

A side effect of a high ISO is that it produces image noise (random pixels)

Capture fast action

If you're trying to capture a rapidly moving subject – such as a sports race or people on a fairground ride – you need a fast shutter speed to freeze the action, otherwise the image may blur. Look in the manual tools for shutter speed: there may be an option to set it from 10 seconds to 1/10,000th of a second. Choose short times for action shots.

If there is no shutter speed control, force it by selecting a large aperture (a small number) to let in more light, or increase the ISO number to make the camera more sensitive to light.

Larger apertures and higher ISO settings require shorter shutter times, which is what you want for freezing and capturing fast actions.

Get a pan and blur effect

To achieve the effect where a moving object – such as a car, horse or bike – stays in

focus while the background is blurred, use the manual settings. If possible, choose a slow shutter speed. If not, set a low ISO speed to force a reduction in shutter speed. Then, as the subject speeds past you, track it with your camera by swivelling from your hips.

It can help to set manual focus and then focus on the ground over which the moving object will pass, so you don't need to focus on it during the brief time it flashes by.

Ask the Expert

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



EMAIL

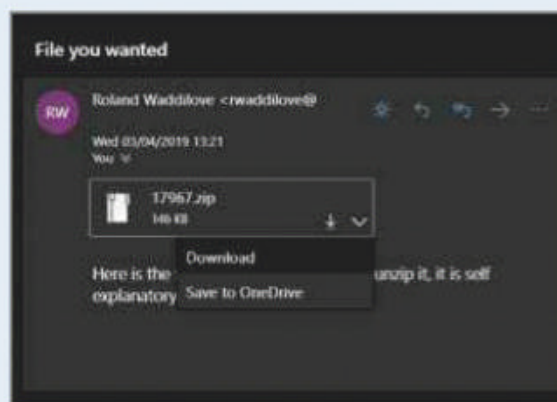
Download a difficult attachment

Q Someone has sent me an email with a file attached, but I can't download it. When I click the file, Outlook asks where to save it, then it fails. I access my email using Outlook webmail (outlook.live.com) in a web browser. Is there anything I can do?

Richard Crosse, via email

A There are several things to try. First, switch to another browser. If you use Edge, try Chrome. It shouldn't make any difference but it eliminates the possibility of a browser problem.

Instead of clicking the attachment, click the down arrow in the corner of the attachment box and select the option to save it to OneDrive. Give it a minute, then open OneDrive



Outlook can save email attachments directly to OneDrive

(onedrive.live.com) in Explorer on your PC and check the 'Email attachments' folder.

If you still can't download the file, ask whoever sent it to upload it to OneDrive, Google Drive (drive.google.com), Dropbox (www.dropbox.com) or another online storage service, then share it and send the link in an email. Click the link to download the file.

a USB cable and give the computer a minute to detect the phone and set up any device drivers it needs. Then, when you open Smart Switch, it should automatically detect and connect to the phone.

If a software update is available, Smart Switch will detect it automatically and you can then download and install it. If it doesn't detect any updates for the phone, there are none available.

GENERAL PC

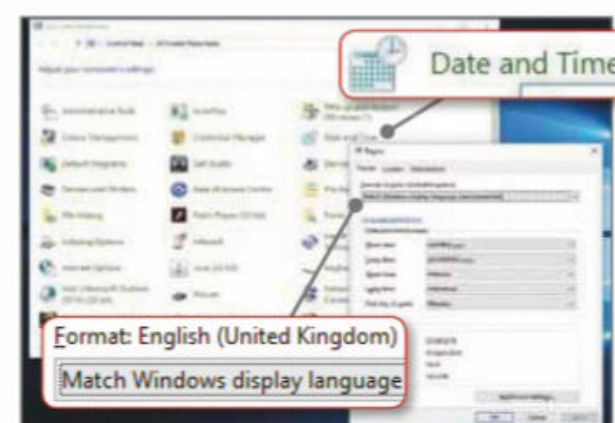
Fix date format in Windows

Q I have a second-hand Windows 10 laptop from eBay. I've noticed that sometimes it displays the date as month/day/year instead of day/month/year. This is easy to spot when it's something like 4/17/19 because there isn't a 17th month, but it's harder with a date like 4/5/19 – is that the 4th of May or the 5th of April? What's happening, and how do I change it?

Harry Cobden, via email

A Here in the UK we write dates with the day before the month, but in other parts of the world they put the month first. Windows can use either date format, and it sounds as if your PC is using the wrong one. You may find that other settings are wrong, too, such as the default money symbol and units of measurement, so it's worth checking them all.

Click Start, then type **control panel** and click it when it appears. Click Region, select the Formats tab and you'll see several options. Choose 'English (United Kingdom)' from the



If dates are formatted wrong in Windows, adjust the settings from the Control Panel

MOBILE

Force Samsung phone update

Q My wife and I both have Samsung S8 smartphones. This week, my phone updated itself to Android 9, but for some reason my wife's phone won't update. She bought it from Amazon and has only had it for three months or so. Under Updates, it says that the latest updates have been installed, but in fact the most recent update was a security patch dated May 2018.



Samsung Smart Switch backs up, restores and updates your phone

The phone has Android 8 and Samsung Experience 9.0 installed. I've tried all the usual methods of updating but nothing works.

Gordon Cook, via email

A Although you both have the same phone, some minor differences may mean one receives updates before the other. Updates are often made available to people over a period of time and not everyone will receive them on the same day. It's possible that the updates may arrive in a week or two. If not, there are ways to force the phone to update.

Open Settings and tap Software Update. Turn off the option to 'Download updates automatically', then tap 'Download updates manually'. This triggers the phone to check for updates. If any are available, tap OK, then Start.

You can also install updates from your PC. Open your desktop browser and go to bit.ly/sss474, where you'll find Samsung Smart Switch for PC and Mac. Download and install it. Next, connect the phone to your computer using



Format menu, then check that all the date and time options below are set correctly. Each one has several options.

Click the 'Additional settings' button and go through the options on the Numbers, Currency, Time and Date tabs, selecting those you want, then close the window. Back in Region, select the Administrative tab. Click 'Change system locale' and choose 'English (United Kingdom)'. Close the windows and restart your PC. Now everything should be in the correct format.

EMAIL

Register IncrediMail licences

Q I've been using IncrediMail (www.incredimail.com) for a long time, but when I renewed some licences recently, I couldn't install them and the program said there was an error. IncrediMail's helpline was no help and I still can't load the licences. Is another service blocking IncrediMail or is there a simple solution I'm missing?

Jeremy Adams, via email

A It's possible for security software such as a firewall to block communications between IncrediMail and the licensing server, which may produce "Error 5" or "Error 1232". Disable any security software before you add the new licence. For example, go to the Control Panel and click Windows Defender Firewall, then 'Turn Windows Defender Firewall on or off'. Switch everything back on once you've set up the IncrediMail licence.

Also check that IncrediMail isn't in offline mode by going to the File menu and making sure Work Offline isn't enabled. Cookie cleaner utilities and cookie blockers can interfere with the licence registration process, so switch off any of those, too.

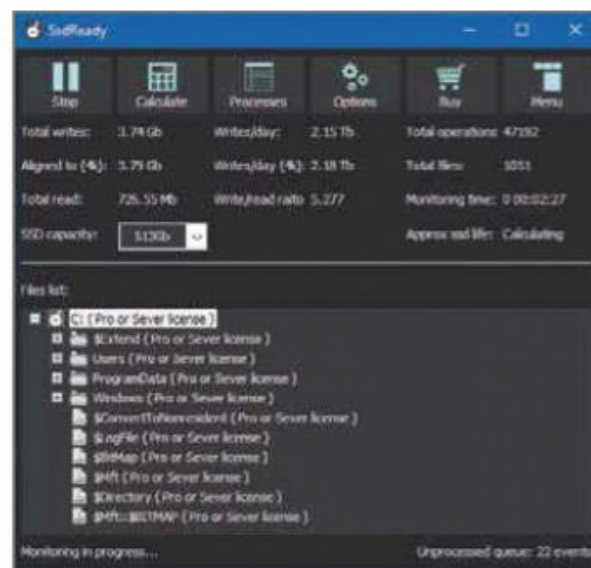
Go to Help, Licenses and see which licences it lists. Select and remove any that have expired, then use Enter Code to add your current licence code. Take care to enter it exactly as it appears, with capitals, spaces, punctuation and any other characters.

If nothing works, email purchase@incredimail.com, including the code you're struggling with and the name and email address you used when buying it.

HARDWARE

Predict the lifespan of an SSD

Q I have an ageing laptop that seems to slow down considerably when accessing the hard drive. I'm thinking of replacing it with a self-encrypting drive



SsdReady estimates how long your SSD will last, but let it run for a few days first

(SED), but I've read that such devices have limited lifespans, so before I buy one I'd be interested to know what my total read/write access numbers are like with typical usage over a period of one month, say. Is there a tool I can use to log this information? When an SED fails from overuse, how does this usually manifest itself?

Phil James, via email

A A self-encrypting drive (SED) is basically a hard drive with encryption built into the drive controller, which makes it extremely secure. We're assuming you want a solid-state drive (SSD) rather than a mechanical hard drive, because an SSD is much faster

and would speed up your slow PC.

It's true that SSDs have a limited lifespan and can only be written a certain number of times. However, plenty of hard drives fail and lose data, even those that aren't SSDs.

The estimated lifespan of an SSD varies depending on its construction, model and manufacturer. Samsung, for example, says its SSD 850 Pro SATA is designed to cope with having 150TB of data written to it. This is the equivalent of 41GB every day for 10 years, which far more than most home users would ever manage.

SSDs use various techniques to spread the wear and tear across the entire drive. If you were to update a file on a mechanical hard drive, for example, it would rewrite it to the same spot, whereas an SSD writes it to a new memory location to spread the burden. This helps the SSD lasts longer.

There's nothing to worry about when using a solid-state drive. Bear in mind that the lifetimes quoted for SSDs and mechanical hard drives are averages: some will fail sooner, while others will go on forever. That's why it's important to keep backups of all your data, no matter which type of drive you use, just in case it fails.

A free tool called SsdReady (bit.ly/ssdr474) can monitor how much data your PC reads and writes every day.

GENERAL PC

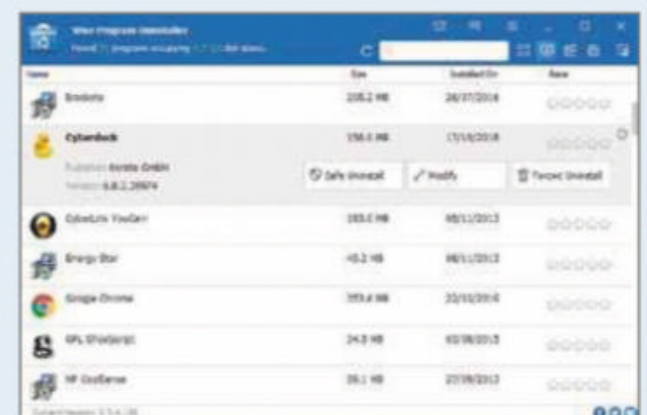
Uninstall stubborn software

Q There's a program on my PC that I can't uninstall. It was a free trial but I don't want to pay for the full software, so I want to remove it. If I choose to uninstall it in 'Programs and Features' in the Control Panel, nothing happens. How do I get rid of it?

Steve Thomas, via email

A There's more than one way to uninstall a program, so it's worth trying them all because one may succeed where others fail. In Windows 10, you can uninstall programs from the Settings app. Press Windows+i to open it, then click Apps. Find the app in the list, click it, then click Uninstall.

If the program appears on the Start menu, you may see a menu entry to run the uninstaller. If not, right-click



Wise Program Uninstaller's Forced Uninstall is useful for software that won't budge

the program on the Start menu and select Uninstall. These options might not work if the uninstaller is broken, so open Explorer and find the program folder in C:\Program files or C:\Program files (x86). If there is a file called Uninstall or Uninstaller, double-click to run it.

Tools such as IObit Uninstaller (bit.ly/ioun474) and Wise Program Uninstaller (bit.ly/wpun474) may be able to remove it. As a last resort, just delete the folder in C:\Program files.



This fortnight Roland has been using his smartphone to map the strength of the Wi-Fi signal around his home

Your Top Tips

Our pick of the best advice from our readers. Please send questions and answers to webuser@webuser.co.uk



TOP TIP

GENERAL PC

Force the Start menu to stay open

Here's a time-saving tip: when you click Windows 10's Start menu to open a program, it normally closes as soon as you make your selection. If you want to launch multiple programs, you have to click Start every time you want to open another one. Instead, open the Start menu, then press and hold the Windows key. As you open each program, never letting go of the Windows key, the Start menu remains open as the programs launch behind it.

Gavin Cooper, via email



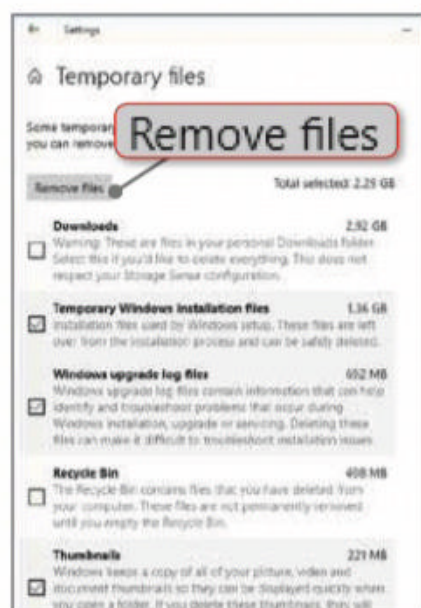
Keep the Start menu open after you launch an app, so you can open another

Back Issues disc winner



GENERAL PC

Replace Disk Cleanup



Go to Storage in the Settings app to clear junk files

For years, I used the Disk Cleanup tool to clear out junk and recover disk space in Windows, but Microsoft no longer supports it. Instead you have to go to the Settings app (Windows+i) and click System, followed by Storage. In the list of items in drive C:, click 'Temporary files' to see all sorts

of temporary files that can be cleared, with options similar to those in the old Disk Cleanup tool. Items can be selected with tick boxes and clicking 'Remove files' declutters the drive.

Peter Davis, via email

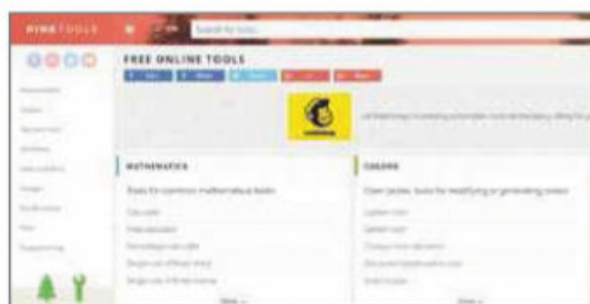
Web User says: If you preferred the Windows tool, there's a free program called Cleanmgr+ (bit.ly/clnm474) that recreates what it did. We had a workshop on this tool last issue (bit.ly/webuser473).

INTERNET

The website that does everything

Pine Tools (pinetools.com) is an incredible website with just about every web tool you've ever needed, including a timer, image editor, file splitter, list sorter and more calculators than you can shake a stick at. Have a look around. Whenever I need to do something on my computer, I always check it out – it's saved me using Google more than once.

Dan Halliday, via email



Discover the ultimate web toolbox

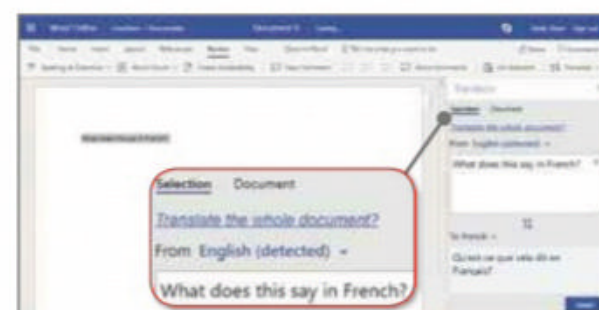
OFFICE

Translate documents with Word Online

Many of us expect people to understand English but it's bound to impress someone if you try to speak their language. Use the free Word Online web app (bit.ly/word474): select the Review tab and click Translate on the right to open a panel where you can select text

and translate it into a number of other languages. The Translator panel is live: click the Selection tab and select some text in your letter or document to see the translated text on the right. It works the other way round, too, so if you get a document or email in a foreign language you can select text to instantly see it in English. Double-click a word in a document to see the foreign language version and a dictionary definition.

Brian Bishop, via email

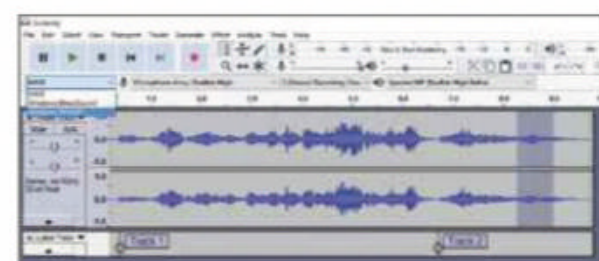


Use the Word app to translate text to and from English

SOFTWARE

Record calls with Audacity

If your messaging app doesn't let you record calls, use audio editor Audacity (www.audacityteam.org). Right-click the speaker icon in the notification area, select Sounds and go to the Recording tab. Enable Stereo Mix – if you don't see it, you may need to install additional drivers or right-click the box to Show Disabled Devices. Open Audacity and, in the drop-down menu under the microphone's recording-level slider, change the default MME to Windows WASAPI. You're all set! Press the Record button, then make a call using your chosen app and, once it's over, select File,



Audacity is able to record calls on any messenger app



Export to save a copy of the call. Don't forget to tell the person you're speaking to that you're recording the conversation.

Winston Murray, via email

INTERNET

Change how Wikipedia looks

I find reading articles in Wikipedia an absolute nightmare, so I'm jolly glad to recommend free wiki reader Wikiwand (www.wikiwand.com). It's a browser extension for Chrome, Firefox and iPhone that magically makes the online encyclopedia much more modern, by reformatting the page to look like a magazine with a sidebar you can use to navigate. Now I can enjoy hours of discovery on the site without the frustration of using its horrific interface.

Martin Jones, via email



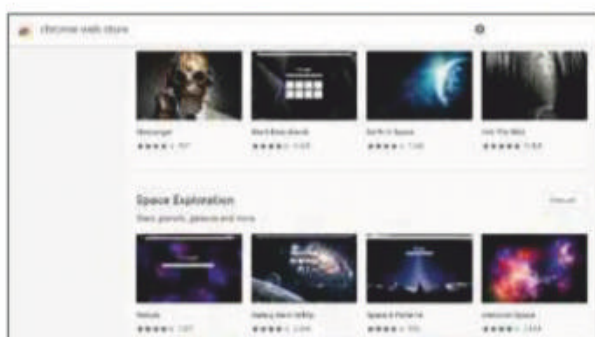
Wikiwand makes Wikipedia more readable

BROWSERS

Transform Chrome's look with themes

Not long ago, Google unveiled a new set of themes for the Chrome browser, and they're much more interesting than dark mode. You can add them at bit.ly/theme474 and apply a fresh lick of paint to Chrome, whether it's a bold block colour or a high-res image. It's well worth exploring what's on offer if you're bored with your browser.

John Bones, via email



If you don't like dark mode, try Chrome's colourful new themes

BROWSERS

Get rid of unwanted Chrome themes

In issue 470's Best New Browser Tools (bit.ly/webuser470), the tip on installing a new theme in Chrome says if you don't like a theme you can select 'undo'. This doesn't always work, so click Customise Chrome (top right) and untick 'Themes' under settings to clear all themes.

FratPark, via email

GAMING

Back up your game saves

With all your recent coverage on internet gaming, I thought you might be interested in Game Backup Monitor (bit.ly/gbmon474), a Windows app that automatically detects when you're gaming and creates backup saves when you stop playing the game. All you need to do during setup is let Game Backup Monitor configure your games, so it can save them. I find it useful to save these to my computer, which is handy when I lose my internet connection, but you can also pop them on the cloud.

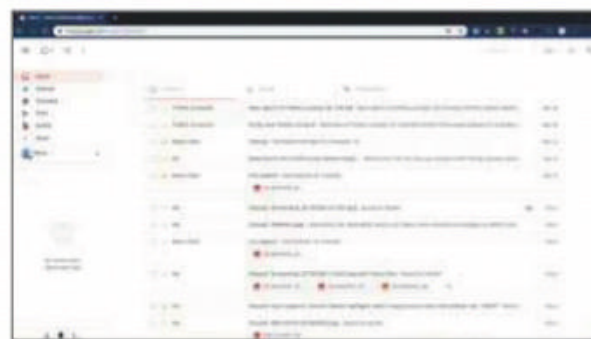
Stephan Callow, via email

EMAIL

Declutter Gmail with Simplify

If you hate Gmail's clutter, download the Simplify Gmail extension for Chrome (bit.ly/simplify474). It hides all those awful distractions embedded into Gmail, and removes a few icons so you can focus on your emails. You don't have to 'activate' it or anything, just install it and the extension does the rest whenever you visit Gmail.

Freddie Thompson, via email



Finally, a Chrome extension that tidies up Gmail's clutter

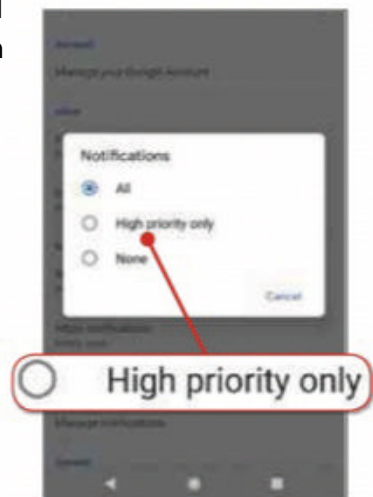
EMAIL

Switch off unnecessary Google notifications

I'm forever being bombarded by unimportant emails and today I decided enough was enough – I only want to be notified about important messages. I went into my phone's Settings menu, then to Account, Notifications, where I was able to change notifications to 'High priority only'. On a computer, open the settings in Gmail and find the category 'Desktop notifications'.

You can choose what sort of notifications you want popping up onscreen, or disable them entirely.

Joseph Conway, via email



Put an end to distracting email notifications

SECURITY

Decrypt files locked by ransomware

I thought I'd draw your attention to a piece of software that can help retrieve files sabotaged by the BigBobRoss ransomware. 'Emsoft Decrypter for BigBobRoss' (bit.ly/bigbob474) decrypts files using the ransomware's read.txt document. Upload that and point it in the direction of the encrypted files to run the removal. It's a much better solution than handing over hard-earned bitcoins for files you might never get back.

Justin Golding, via email

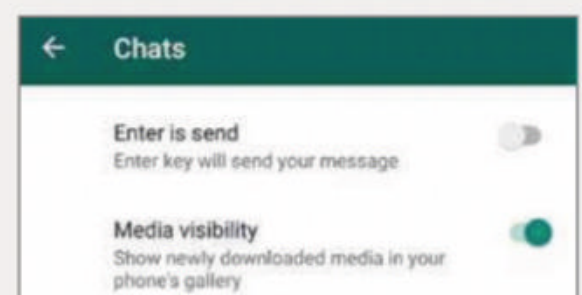
BLUNDER OF THE FORTNIGHT

MOBILE

Stop WhatsApp photos appearing in your gallery

I was showing my grandson photos of a recent trip to Malta, scrolling through the photos on my phone, when all of a sudden, the screen was filled pictures of my eldest daughter's ultrasound! My grandson doesn't yet know he's soon to get a baby brother so I hurriedly swiped past the sonogram and batted away his questions of "is that a baby, Nanny?" while trying to find out why the photo was in my phone gallery. Turns out, it was added to my phone from WhatsApp.

To stop this happening, open the



WhatsApp can save unwanted photos to your gallery – if you let it

Settings menu, tap Chats and toggle off the option 'Media visibility'. Now I've turned it off, I feel much safer showing my grandson my photos!

Mary May, via email

Have you managed to fix a PC-related disaster?

If so, please send your story to webuser@webuser.co.uk



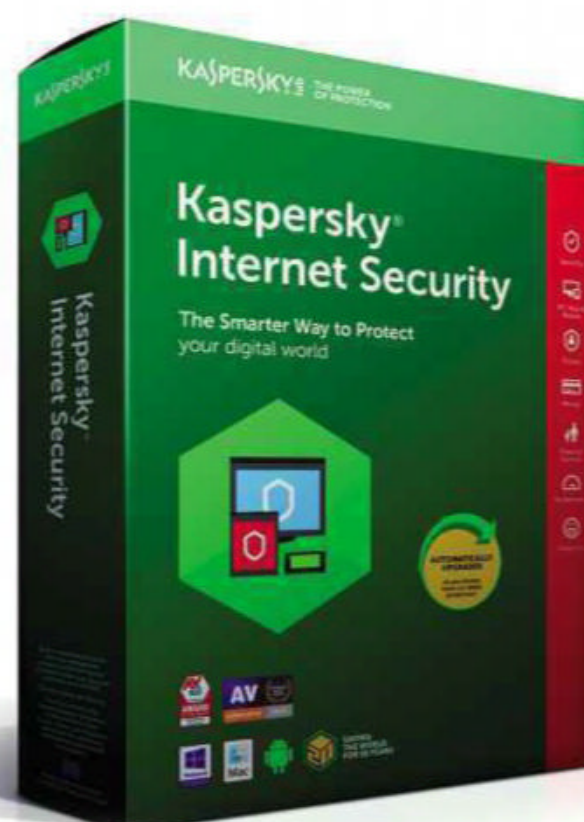
OFFER OF THE FORTNIGHT

Kaspersky Internet Security 2019 - on sale now

Our sister title *Computeractive* is now selling the new and improved 2019 edition of the multi-award-winning antivirus Kaspersky Internet Security at a special discount for readers

WHAT'S NEW IN KASPERSKY 2019:

- ✓ Finds and removes dodgy browser extensions
- ✓ Identifies software that needs to be updated
- ✓ Gives you more control over which adverts are blocked
- ✓ More advanced options to keep malware off your PC



**SINCE WINDOWS 10 LAUNCHED 19,844 READERS
HAVE BOUGHT KASPERSKY SOFTWARE
FROM THE SOFTWARE STORE**

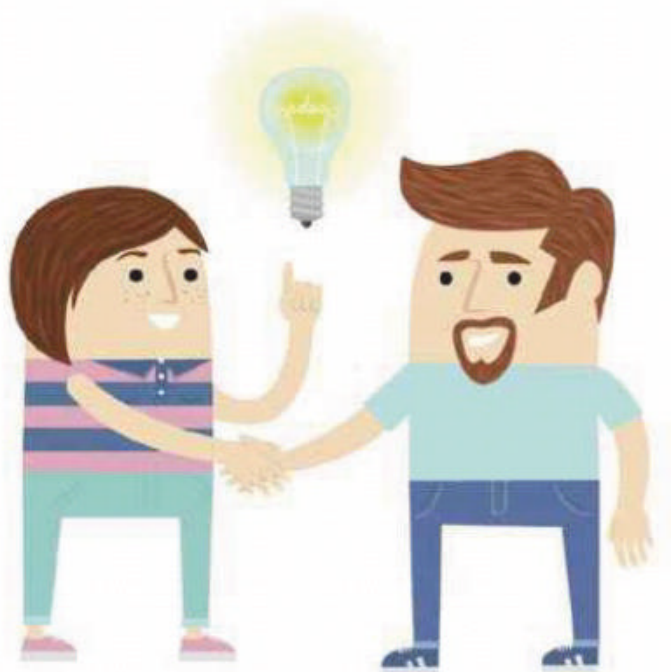
One PC for one year NOW ONLY £17.99*
Normally £34.99

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

Three PCs for two years NOW ONLY £39.99
Normally £79.99

Buy it from our Software Store at bit.ly/kaspersky2019
* while stocks last

**WINNER OF THE PAST NINE COMPUTERACTIVE
ANTIVIRUS TESTS**



Readers' Helpdesk

Can you help your fellow readers with their computer problems? Send your questions and answers to webuser@webuser.co.uk

SOFTWARE

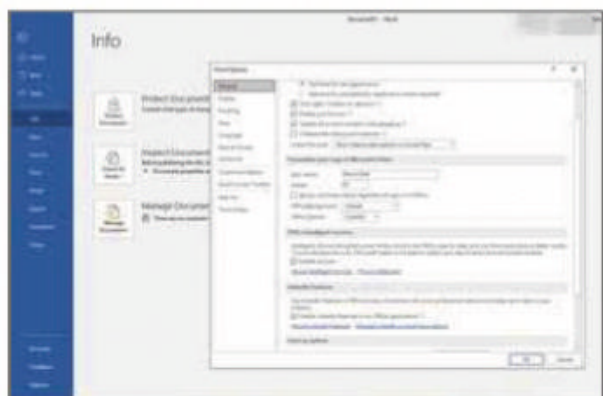
Create automatic backups in Microsoft Office

Q How do I change the way that Excel and Word save files, so that a backup is created in a predefined location, such as an external hard drive, whenever I save my work? I would prefer this method to using a backup app, because it would ensure that new files are backed up, even if they are in folders that I have not configured for automatic backup, and the backups would still be made even if I move the master files around or keep them on a USB memory stick. I'm using Windows 7 on my vintage 2012 PC, with Microsoft Office Home and Student 2010.

Steve Cox, via email

A There are a couple of methods for automatically creating backups in older versions of Microsoft Office – however, you can't change their location because they are saved in the same place as the original file. One way to create an automatic backup is to open your document, click File and select Options. In the pop-up, click Save and you'll see there's an option to 'Always create backup copy'. Tick this box, then click OK. Alternatively, when you choose to save a document for the first time, File Explorer shows an option called Tools next to the Save button. Clicking this reveals a drop-down menu, so choose General Options and tick the 'Always create backup' box.

Steve Clark, Features Writer, Web User



Word lets you set automatic backups in its Save Options

READERS RESPOND

Identify strange Registry files

A I read Ask the Expert in Issue 472 (bit.ly/webuser472) with great interest, especially the bit about strange files in the Registry. I had the same problem and tracked it down to the software Clover, which adds tabs to File Explorer and originates in China. In this case, at least, it was innocuous.

Peter Anderson, via email

Create your own website

A In response to Keith Hodgson's email about website editors in Issue 472, I personally use the free editor for Wix (wix.com). I love Wix for the simplicity of creating a site. There are premium plans for custom domain names and options to set up an online shop, too.

Flynn Farrow, via email

CAN YOU HELP?

webuser@webuser.co.uk

You can seek help or suggest solutions to other readers' problems by emailing webuser@webuser.co.uk or via www.facebook.com/webusermagazine or twitter.com/webusermagazine.

iOS

Q The other day, I was trying to highlight text using my iPad. My word – what a nightmare! It was completely inaccurate and I could barely select what I needed. Surely there must be an app for this, as I imagine it's a common complaint. Can anyone point me in the right direction?

Adam Moretz, via email

INTERNET

Q Quick question for you all: I really hate navigating websites now you have to constantly accept cookies. In particular, I find web pages cluttered, with annoying, immovable things that block out half the page or just won't go away. What's a good fix for this?

Keep up the excellent work!

Kirk Marney, via email

ONLINE OFFICE

Share Google Docs as PDFs

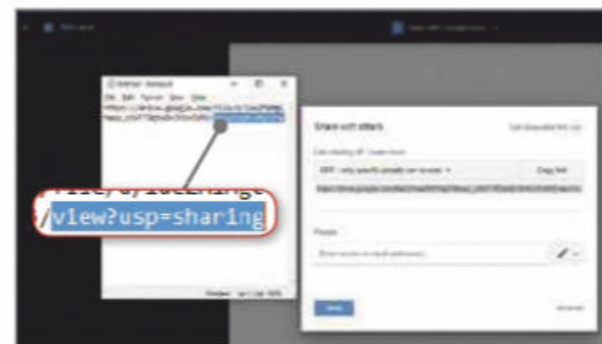
Q I share a lot of Google Docs with other people and I'd like to be able to share them as PDFs – in part, so they can't be unnecessarily changed. The only way I've found of doing this is to open the file, then re-save it as a PDF before sharing, or else my recipient has to download and convert it to PDF after I send it. Does anyone know if there's a quicker way of achieving all this?

Norm Paul, via email

A There is a slightly easier way – or, at least, a different way to share Google Docs as PDFs. Choose to share the document, then click 'Get shareable link'. Once you've got the link, paste it into Notepad (or any other text editor, for

that matter). At the end of the link, there's a line that reads `view?usp=sharing` or `edit?usp=sharing`, depending on the permissions granted. Delete this and in its place, type `export?format=pdf`. Share that link and your recipients will be able to see the file as a PDF.

Steve Clark, Features Writer, Web User



Override Google Docs' default sharing settings

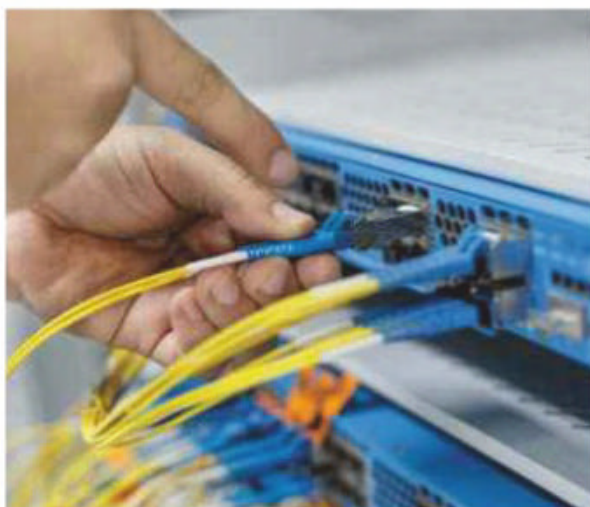
Star Email

Why should we pay for ISP outages?

After reading your news story about ISPs offering their customers automatic compensation for poor service ('Broadband users to get automatic payouts', Need to Know, Issue 473), I have to say that it's about time!

We seem to suffer at least one outage with Virgin Media every month, which leaves us without internet and often without TV channels, too, for several hours. In some cases the 'fault' has lasted for a day or two, with no explanation for its cause or apology for the inconvenience incurred.

Now that so many devices in our homes rely on the internet – not just computers, but tablets, Amazon Echos and so on – being unable to get online is a massive pain, so it's only right that



the companies responsible should compensate us. Broadband isn't cheap, after all, so why should we have to pay for a whole day when we were unable to use it?

If my train is delayed, I always claim compensation, not only because train

tickets are ridiculously expensive and arriving an hour late at your destination is enormously inconvenient, but because if you don't claim, then the railway operators will think they can keep on getting away with poor service. The same applies to internet providers but until now, few have offered a simple way to claim your money back.

Automatic compensation is therefore both logical and welcome, although I note that it was only after pressure from Ofcom that ISPs decided it was a good idea. Obviously, there are some internet faults that can't be helped and take time to fix, but why should customers have to effectively foot the bill?

Anna Houghton, via email

Back Issues disc winner



Using an ad blocker is *not* stealing!

The letter from Keith Amersham in Issue 472, 'Using an ad blocker is like stealing', had me shaking my head in disbelief.

Mr Amersham seems to think that because web designers have published their sites to the web and placed some adverts on them, then they are due some recompense. This is tosh.

Publishing a website to an open area of the internet is like a loss-leader in the vast majority of business cases. Websites are simply a channel to sell something, whether that something is physical items, software or information. Nobody has to read adverts if they don't want to. If your website content is valuable enough to visitors, then you could look into alternative ways to fund it, such as a membership area or a paywall.

Personally, I've developed a skill where I barely notice adverts anymore. If I visit a site and my consciousness filters out the advert, am I stealing the content? Of course not. Although adverts can be annoying – some more than others –



accusing people who use ad blockers of "stealing" is ridiculous.

Martin Dimmock, via email

Barry Collins doth protest too much about payments

I have just read Barry's diatribe against both his utility company and his bank in Issue 463, 'You can bank on unfair loyalty penalties', and could barely believe it.

Firstly, if his original direct debit for his utility bill was only £65 per month,

he must have had the bargain of the century, unless he lives in a one-room hovel, since I believe the average cost is almost twice this figure for gas and electricity combined.

Barry is a freelance journalist, so he presumably works from home, which means having the heating on all day in winter; and as he is a techie, he must have lots of gadgets consuming loads of juice, so the figure doesn't seem to ring true.

Barry freely admits he failed to

Quiz Answers: Issue 473

1 **Surfin' Bird**



2 **Kung Fu Fighting**



3 **Disco Duck**



4 **The Birdie Song**



5 **Turtle Power**



6 **Barbie Girl**



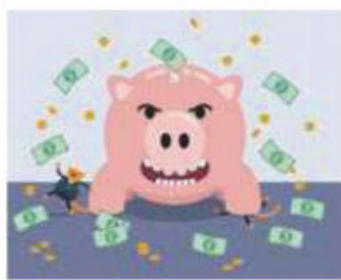
WINNER!

Well done to **Eric Walden** who wins a Web User Back Issues Disc



WIKIPEDIA ARTICLE

Facebook



properly read an important email from his supplier warning him of a higher direct debit, but then goes on to suggest that his bank should have warned him as well.

That's unbelievable, and not in any way their responsibility – and would he have read their email anyway, I ask myself!

Lastly, Barry complains that he gets little for the monthly fee he pays to his bank. Then why pay it? There are plenty of banks that don't charge any fees and even some that pay you interest.

I have no connection to any utility company or bank, but I do hope I know how to look after my own finances.

John Perkins, via email

Stop telling us about Windows 10 updates

I'm becoming increasingly annoyed that *Web User* continues to publish articles about the wonderful new features in last October's Windows 10 update and now the Spring 2019 Update (Workshop 2, Issue 472).

As someone with a new HP laptop that has *still* not been offered update 1809, I'm finding that the advice in the magazine is becoming somewhat redundant. How about an article which would be of some use setting out why users have not received the 1809 update from Microsoft? It is not very helpful to tell us about updates that most of your readers will not get.

Jim Darroch, via email

Cloud-security cameras need fast broadband

Your product test in Issue 470 of the Blink XT and the BT Smart Home Cam left out one very important point with regard to using 'cloud' storage with security cameras, which is that they all recommend a minimum upload speed of 2Mbps.

Many people don't have access to 'superfast' fibre broadband and have to make do with a standard 'copper line'. My upload speed struggles to reach 1.5Mbps at the best of times, so the use of cloud storage with these devices is not possible.

Steve Jeffery, via email



What you say...

HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST CUSTOMER REVIEWS AND RATINGS ON AMAZON?

I don't trust them at all. Half the time, the reviews are for completely different models of a purchase. Until they properly align the reviews with the correct product, reading them is an exercise in futility.

Rich Grove

I include them in my product research, but always take them with a pinch of salt. 'Verified purchase' doesn't seem to mean much any more.

Caroline Chapman @cornfedmind

I don't shop with Amazon. I don't trust their delivery drivers – throwing your parcels everywhere or leaving them in stupid places – let alone the reviews. I had a parcel left under my doormat (hardly a safe place) by a driver.

Kevin Gadget Man Benton

Reviews are not important. If you don't like it, just return it.

Stan @Stan72699007

GOOGLE HAS CLOSED ITS GOOGLE+ SOCIAL NETWORK. WILL YOU MISS IT?

Good riddance to bad rubbish. It was too difficult to use. You had to join circles – what on Earth?

Lance Parkington

I set up an account but never used it – it wasn't as user-friendly as Facebook. So no, I won't miss it!

Lynn Sharpe

I hated it when Google tried to integrate Google+ with YouTube. After that, the saying of 'don't put all your eggs in one basket' came true.

Goldmaster @imthegoldmaster

It came far too late to the game. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were already well established. Google+ offered nothing new and therefore had no appeal.

John Scott

DOES THE NEWS THAT AMAZON LISTENS TO ALEXA RECORDINGS (bit.ly/alexa474) PUT YOU OFF SMART SPEAKERS?

Doesn't surprise me. All the things you say to smart speakers have to be sent somewhere for the data to be processed, so it's only natural for nosy Amazon staff to listen in.

Paul Guest

I have an Echo Spot for the kitchen and two Echoes in the bedroom and living room. I sometimes have to shout at them to turn a light on or off!

Dean Stockton

I don't need Alexa. I search the web manually using Google via its website.

Brian Brown

Considering how boring the things people ask Alexa are, like "tell me the weather forecast" or "play a song by Ed Sheeran", I doubt the recordings are particularly interesting.

Jane Groves

WILL FLICKR'S NEW PHOTO-THEFT DETECTION TOOLS (bit.ly/flickr474) WIN YOU BACK TO THE SERVICE?

What about the free storage Flickr stole from its users, will it detect that? No chance of me going back if there are better free alternatives.

Russell Cox @RussWWFC

No, I don't trust Flickr any more, after the way it's treated its community. 500px (500px.com) is much better.

Sarah Markham

Most people steal photos from Google Images not Flickr, so I doubt it'll help.

Andrew Batts

! Page 404



Expensive games are every bit as addictive as gambling machines, says **Barry Collins**

We need to stop feeding greedy games

The most I've ever lost at cards is £20. I'm a coward, an invertebrate. I know how to play Texas Hold 'em, and have spent countless hours doing so, but I shy away from cash games because I haven't got the bottle, and in poker you definitely need the bottle. I've probably saved myself a small fortune.

Instead, I've become horribly addicted to another card game: Hearthstone. This was big about five years ago, but I'm unfashionably late. It's part poker, part Dungeons & Dragons. Your cards represent characters with different abilities, and you have to create the right hand and play your cards in the right order to succeed. It's brilliant, it's addictive and it's free to play – but it could also be ruinously expensive.

As is the trend in modern gaming, it all boils down to in-app purchases. Every few months, Hearthstone releases

a new set of cards with new powers. Then it does its best to sell them to you. Almost every time I open the app, I'm offered the new "Mega Bundle" – 80 packs of virtual cards, all mine for the bargain price of £69.99, or a 50-pack set for a mere £45.

You don't have to buy the cards – you can always keep playing with the old sets, but that puts you at a serious disadvantage. While all the other players are loading up with powerful new cards, you're lumbered with an old set that slowly dwindles in power as the game maker removes old cards from your deck.

If I weren't so cautious, I'd have slapped down my £70 by now. I can see how others – especially children – are

tempted into paying for them. Who wouldn't want to buy success? Most of our ruling class have done so.

It's not only Hearthstone that tempts young players into paying for expensive add-ons. Fortnite has become the biggest money-spinning game on the planet, even though it's free to play. It

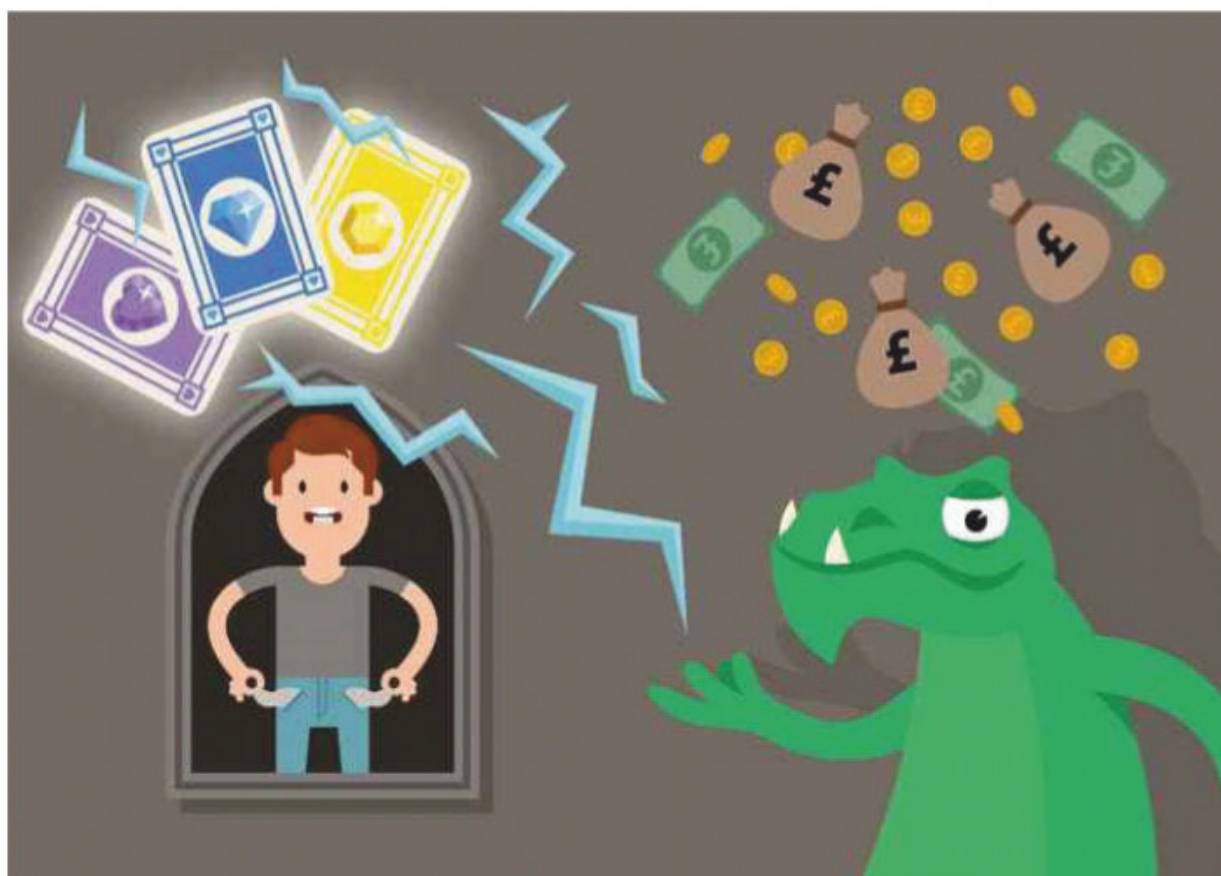
makes its gazillions by selling kids cosmetic add-ons that – unlike Hearthstone – don't even give you a better chance of winning. Yet kids are spending a fortune

on new outfits. And when the Fortnite Store marks its £79.99 bundle of virtual coins as "Best Value", well, you'd be an idiot to choose a cheaper pack, wouldn't you?

And let's not forget FIFA, one of the world's longest running and richest game franchises. Not only does publisher Electronic Arts get away with charging upwards of £50 for the game itself, but its Ultimate Team add-on also tempts you to splash out on the best footballers with real money. You want Messi or Ronaldo in your team? You'll probably end up paying hundreds of pounds before either of them turns up in one of the randomly selected packs of player cards. Don't want to pay any extra? You get Andy Carroll.

New laws recently stopped gamblers being able to shove £100 a go into fixed-odds betting terminals. Yet we're still allowing children (including us bigger kids) to slap down sixty, seventy or eighty quid a go on virtual trinkets with a guaranteed return of zero. Something's gone wrong here. Very wrong.

“Who wouldn't want to buy success? Most of our ruling class have done so”



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