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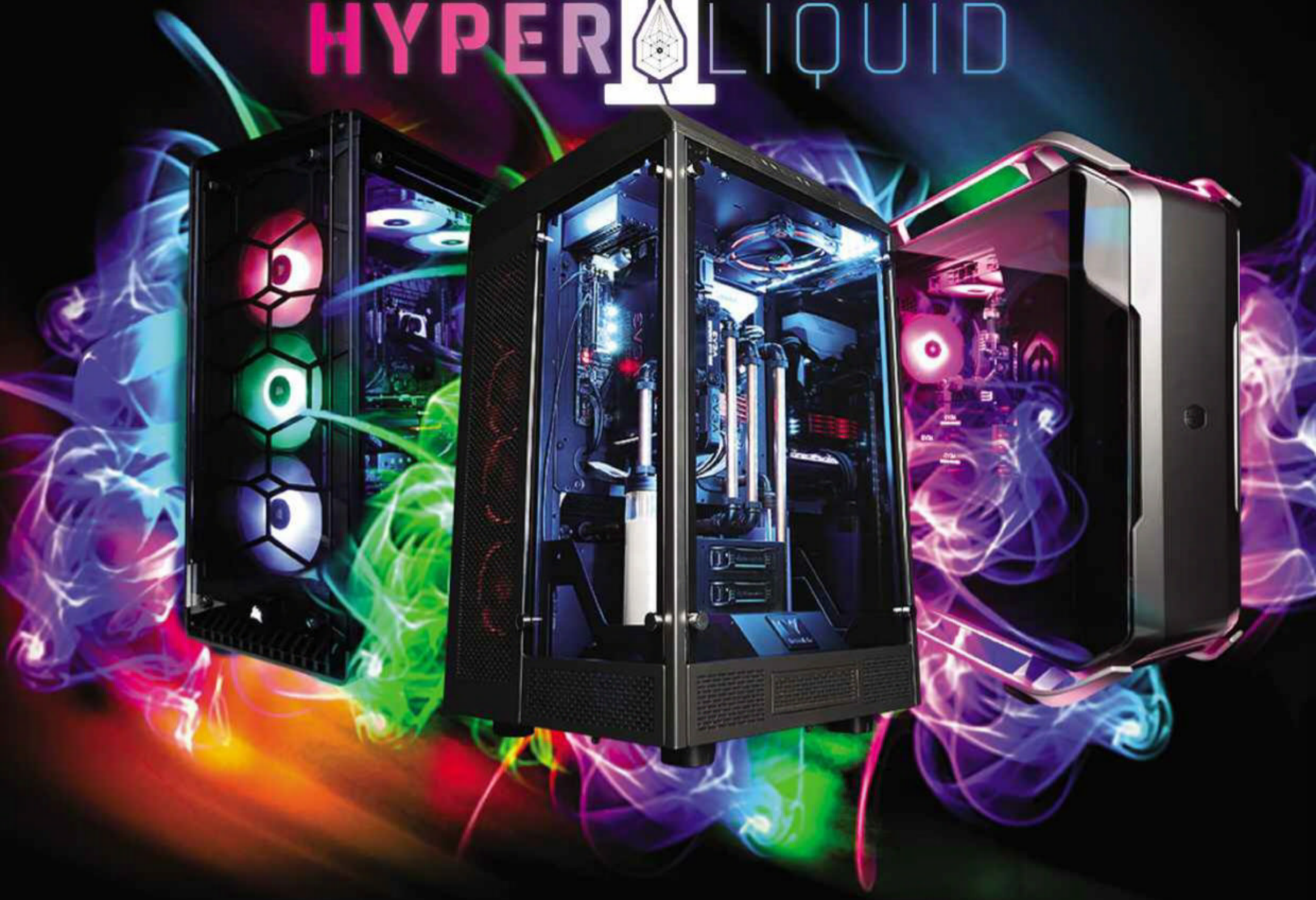

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WebUser

Best software / New apps / Three-word gesture

PATCH YOUR OWN PC

Don't wait for essential updates – install them yourself NOW!

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Don't Pay For STREAMING

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PLUS

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Start afresh in one click p56

MAKE DELETED PHOTOS 100% UNRECOVERABLE

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Homepage

Issue 482

Stranger things have happened

I stopped watching TV in 1986, appalled by the audience on *Blockbusters* doing that embarrassing hand-jive thing. I didn't really, of course, but declaring "I never watch TV any more, I don't even know why I have one!" has become the hipster equivalent of saying "I never touch sugar". Streaming services such as Netflix have changed our viewing habits forever, consigning our DVD box sets to the cupboard and TV downloads to forgotten hard drives, while we happily pay a monthly subscription to watch some of the same shows and films on a smaller screen.

In this issue's cover feature, we explain how you can rescue your old video and music content, and stream it around your home, by setting up your own free media server. Not only will this save you money on streaming subscriptions, but it means you can rediscover great series and movies, rather than struggling with the plot machinations of *Stranger Things*. And that is worth hand-jiving about!

Robert Irvine, Editor
editor@webuser.co.uk
#webuser

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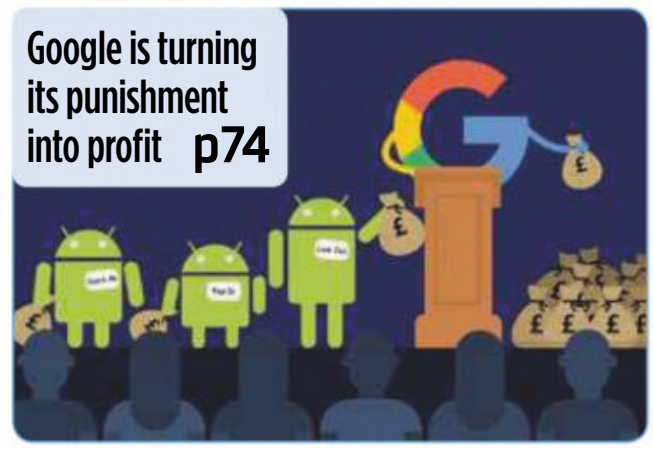

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PRINTING
Printed by Wyndeham Bicester, Oxon
Distributors Seymour 020 7396 4000

Web User is produced by Robirv Limited and published fortnightly by Dennis Publishing Ltd, a company registered in England 1138891.

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Web User is published fortnightly by Dennis Publishing Ltd, 31-32 Alfred Place, WC1E 7DP. Company registered in England.
ISSN 1473-7094

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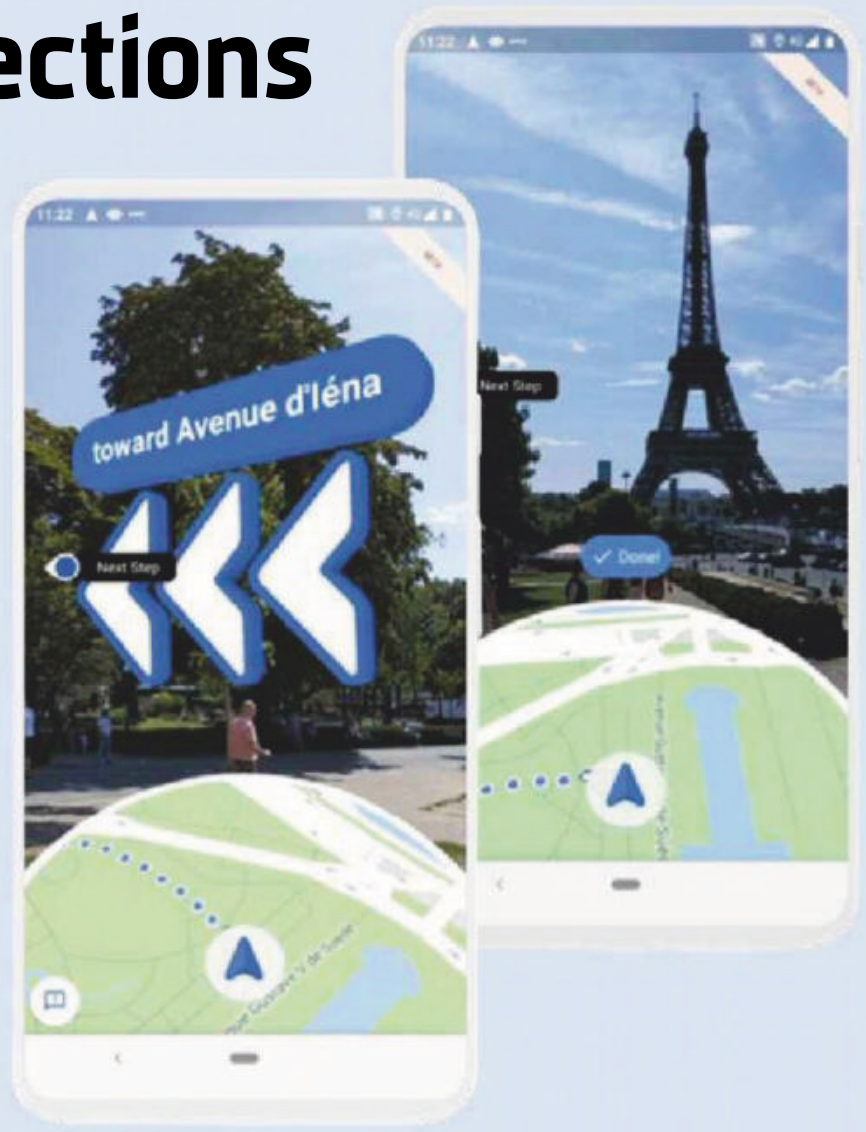
What's New Online

Get AR walking directions in Google Maps



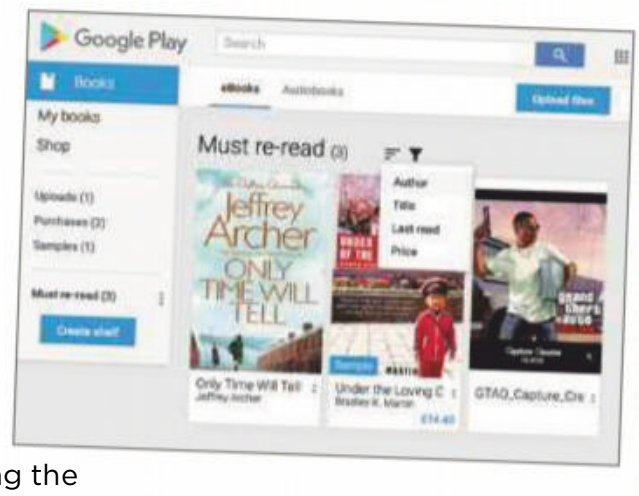
Have you ever opened a map app, sought directions and got flustered because you couldn't figure out which way you were supposed to be facing? Rather than walk around in circles trying to get your bearings, Google Maps has created a new augmented-reality feature called Live View, which lets you point your camera at the real world to see arrows and directions superimposed on what you see.

The feature is currently in beta, so it's only available on Google's Pixel phones and other Android and iOS devices that support ARCore and ARKit. With the app open, simply type your destination into the search bar, tap Directions and select the walking option (it currently only works when you're on foot). A Live View option will appear next to Start and, once it's worked out your starting point by scanning your surroundings, it'll begin to display the on-screen prompts.

As you walk and move your phone down, Google Maps reverts to a full map view and will buzz to alert you to further directions. Of course, the extra power needed for Live View could also affect your battery, so don't use it if you're utterly lost and running out of juice.

maps.google.co.uk

Organise your ebooks on shelves



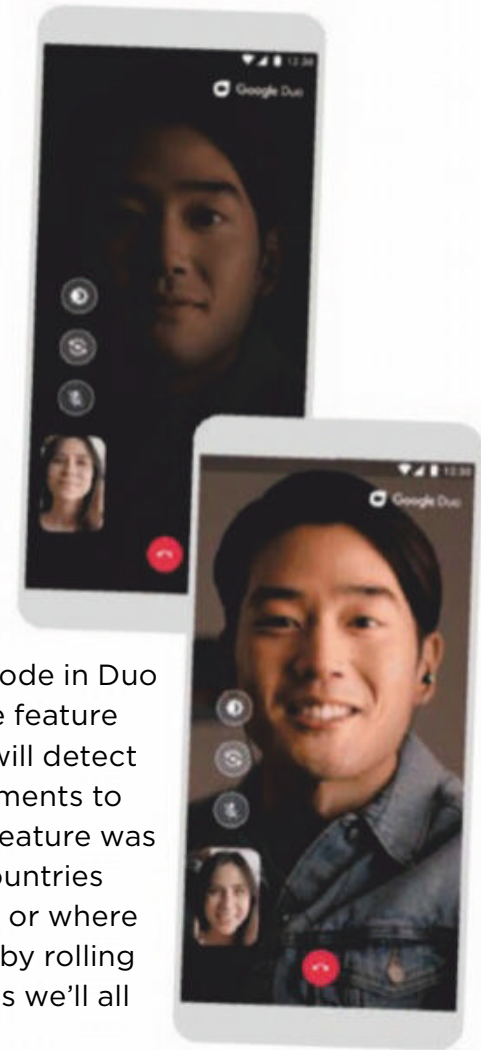
play.google.com/books

Google has come up with some novel ways of organising ebooks you buy from Play Books. By going to the website and clicking the Settings cog, you can now select Beta Features and choose from three useful new options.

The first lets you activate custom shelves, so you can click Create Shelf in the left-hand menu and produce sections that best meet your needs. For example, you might like to create a shelf for books you fancy rereading or build one around a particular theme. In any case, books can be added by selecting the dots on a cover and selecting the name of your new shelf.

Another Beta option lets you use a Ready to Read shelf that will automatically fill with books that you're yet to complete. There's also a new search/sort option that lets you filter your books by author, title, last read and price, or find them by keyword.

Video chat with friends in the dark



duo.google.com

There are tips online about looking good in a video chat, but none of them suggest making a call in a dimly lit environment. Sometimes, however, you don't have much choice, perhaps because you're out in the street at night, tucked up in bed or illuminated by the light of a flickering TV.

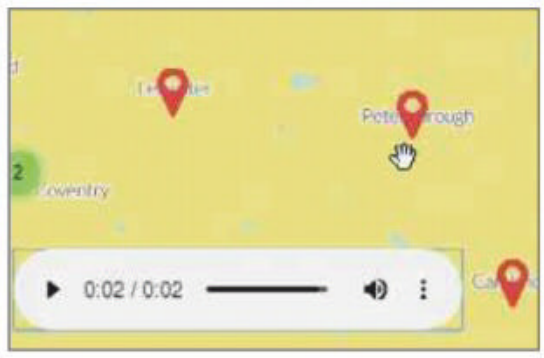
To get around this problem, Google has introduced a new low-light mode in Duo for iOS and Android. With the feature turned on during a call, Duo will detect dim lighting and make adjustments to brighten you on screen. The feature was designed to help people in countries where electricity is expensive or where power cuts are common but, by rolling it out globally, Google reckons we'll all find a good use for it.

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

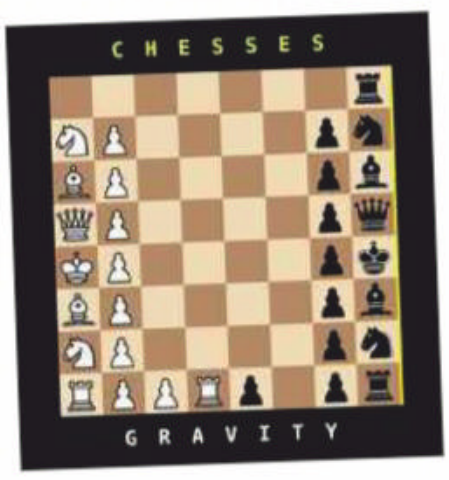
Learn how to pronounce place names

bit.ly/spoken483

Pyeongchang, Poughkeepsie, Peterborough – it's often tricky to know how a place name is pronounced. The Spoken World global map uses recordings from pronunciation-reference website Forvo to provide clips of native speakers saying place names. Just select a place, then click the audio player in the bottom-left corner to hear it spoken.



Play around with the rules of chess



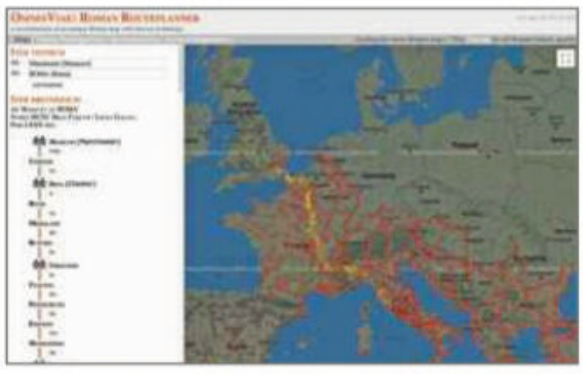
bit.ly/chess483

The rules of chess date back to the sixth century, but that doesn't mean they can't be played around with. Game designer and Concordia University professor Pippin Barr has done just that, coming up with eight variations on the age-old theme in an intriguing set of browser-based games. One of them packs the whole board with pieces and another has them fall to the bottom of the board when you make your move. It certainly turns perceptions of chess on their head and the resulting innovations make for some difficult games, but it also reinforces just how robust the rules were in the first place.

Navigate the Roman Empire

omnesviae.org

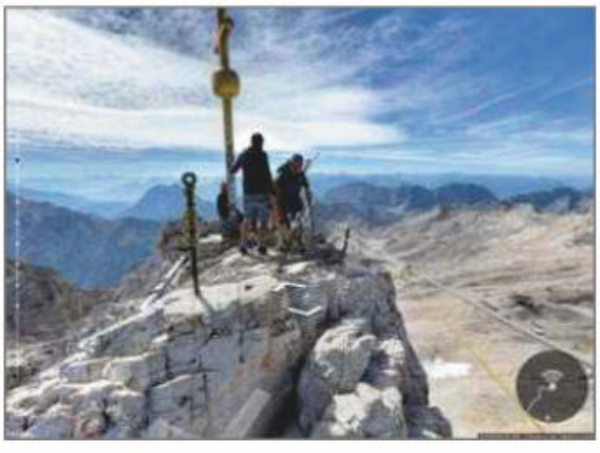
The Romans didn't invent roads but they certainly improved them by making them straight, well-drained and built on solid foundations. Now, you can follow their routes on OmnesViae, based on the ancient Roman road map, *Tabula Peutingeriana* (a 13th-century parchment copy of a potential original). Enter your trip details in the *Ab* (to) and *Ad* (from) boxes, and the site will then plot a route in yellow while indicating all the stops along the way and the length of time it would take in *dies* (days).



Climb Germany's highest mountain

zugspitze360.com

At 2,962 metres above sea level, Zugspitze in Germany is Europe's ninth-highest mountain but you don't need to pull on any boots to enjoy scaling it. Using 360-degree panoramic photography and having taken more than 25,000 images, the climb has been captured in three stages. Follow it up to the summit for stunning views and read in-depth details of the ascent.



NEW VOICE COMMANDS

Listen to your messages

Add people to your Families group (families.google.com) and you can ask Google Assistant to send reminders to their phones, either at particular times or when the person reaches a certain place.

Stop Siri swearing

Siri now lets you block explicit language. Launch the Settings app, select Screen Time and tap Content & Privacy Restrictions. Choose Content Restriction and tap Explicit Language, Don't Allow.

Check racing results

The Racing Post now shares betting tips and race results via Alexa – say "Ask Racing Post for a tip for the next race" or "Ask Racing Post for result of [specific race]".

Report fake news on Instagram

www.instagram.com

False content can be flagged for attention on Instagram by launching the app, tapping the three-dot menu and selecting Report and It's Inappropriate. Tap False Information and the report will train AI to watch out for similar content in future.

Calculate the chance of rain

bit.ly/rain483

This weather calculator warns if rain will ruin a wedding day, but its Met Office data can also be used to predict the dampness of future events. Enter a date and region to see a percentage chance of rainfall.

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podcasters.spotify.com

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Need to Know

Amazon accused of selling banned and dangerous products

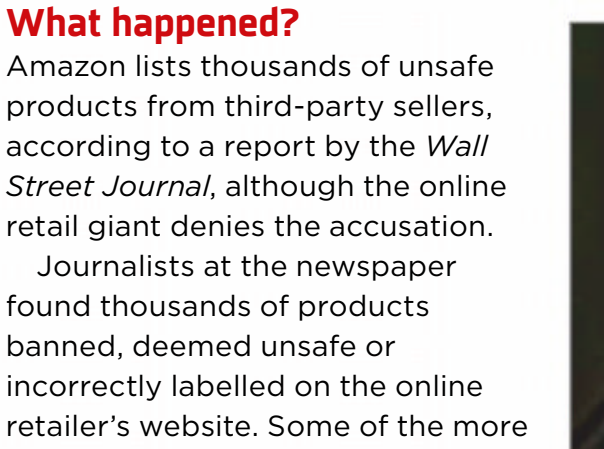
What happened?

Amazon lists thousands of unsafe products from third-party sellers, according to a report by the *Wall Street Journal*, although the online retail giant denies the accusation.

Journalists at the newspaper found thousands of products banned, deemed unsafe or incorrectly labelled on the online retailer's website. Some of the more than 4,000 potentially dangerous products included medication and toys, the report said (bit.ly/wall483).

In response, Amazon issued a statement via its own blog saying the company invests "significant resources" to protect customers – some $400m last year – with tools that review millions of products every few minutes using artificial intelligence to scan product listings. The company also has human reviewers, and products can be reported by customers, regulators and more. "In 2018, our teams and technologies proactively blocked more than three billion suspect listings for various forms of abuse, including non-compliance, before they were published to our store," the company said in a statement.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, however, thousands of problematic listings are still slipping through and half the products identified by its reporters were being delivered directly from Amazon's warehouse, with some bearing the 'Amazon's Choice' recommendation badge on the listing.


THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Amazon Has Ceded Control of Its Site. The Result: Thousands of Banned, Unsafe or Mislabeled Products

The* Wall Street Journal *claims Amazon is facilitating the sale of dodgy goods

Credit: Sasima / Shutterstock.com

More than 50% of Amazon's sales are through third-party sellers, via its Marketplace rather than its main store. Many of these sellers are based overseas, in particular in Asia. The report follows other investigations into the ongoing issue of fake or suspect reviews on the site.

How will it affect you?

Shopping on Amazon is increasingly like shopping on the wider web: there are legitimate products for great prices, but also scammers to watch out for. Our advice is to view product reviews with a critical eye – read several before buying and make sure the review text refers to the correct product because they can sometimes be copied from one product to another, similar one. Look out for reviews that admit they were given a free sample to write about, though Amazon is supposed to have cracked down on that practice. For a wider look at reviews, ReviewMeta (reviewmeta.com) is a website and Chrome extension that evaluates all the reviews on a page and assesses how likely they are to be legitimate.

Next, check who is selling the product. On the desktop site, this information is shown on the right-hand side of the page, under the 'Add to Basket' and Buy Now buttons. The safest option is to choose items stocked, sold by and delivered by Amazon itself. Products sold by a third-party seller – which could be a known brand or a name you've never heard of – and fulfilled by Amazon are stored in and dispatched from Amazon's warehouse, but Amazon is acting as a marketplace, like eBay, for another seller. In other cases, the third-party seller is both selling and shipping. With some products, you can use the filters on the left-hand side of the results page to remove third-party sellers and only see products sold by Amazon itself.

Remember – just because a product is listed on Amazon, doesn't mean it's legitimate. The vast majority of items are safe, but if a deal seems too good to be true, it pays to be wary.

What do we think?

By allowing third-party sellers, Amazon offers the widest selection possible for shoppers, but this also introduces risks. The *Wall Street Journal* reporters found thousands of dodgy products, but Amazon lists millions of items, so it's no wonder a few sneak through. For the most part, Amazon remains a relatively safe place to find what you're looking to buy, but if you have any problems, contact Amazon's customer service team, which – once you can get hold of someone – is usually helpful.

All that said, this issue raises the question often faced by tech companies: is Amazon merely a platform for others to sell on or is it a store itself? Given it sells its own products, it's clear most of us see Amazon as a store and expect it to be responsible for what's stocked on its virtual shelves.

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

Chromebooks revealed to have expiry dates

What happened?

Chromebooks – laptops that run Google's Chrome OS – are always up-to-date, with the software automatically refreshing, so long as you have an internet connection. However, those automatic updates have been revealed to have secret expiration dates, after which the device will no longer receive any more software updates or support from Google.

Each Chromebook should receive 6.5 years of auto-update support, according to a Google Support page, but that countdown starts when the hardware is released, not when the device is first used, making it difficult to know when the actual expiration date falls. It also makes buying a second-hand device or an older Chomebook model less attractive.

How will it affect you?

Google has a list of expiration dates available at bit.ly/expire483. However, to use that list, you'll need to know the full model number of your device. Some Chromebooks have this written somewhere on the device itself. If not, there's a fiddly way to find out. First, get the platform number. Either open your Chromebook and press Alt+V at the login screen or type `chrome://version` into the browser address bar, then head to cros-updates-serving.appspot.com where you'll be able to see which model numbers use that platform number, to find out when your device expires.

What do we think?

It's never a good idea to use a laptop with software that isn't up to date – it's a security risk we warn about frequently. This expiration policy means software on a Chromebook will eventually no longer be updated, leaving its user unprotected and unsupported. It also forces us to replace outdated Chromebooks, which is wasteful for our budgets and the environment.

Google should only stop supporting devices when the hardware is truly out of date, not based on predefined expiry dates set years before – and it should give users plenty of warning first.

Google's Privacy Sandbox will protect users

What happened?

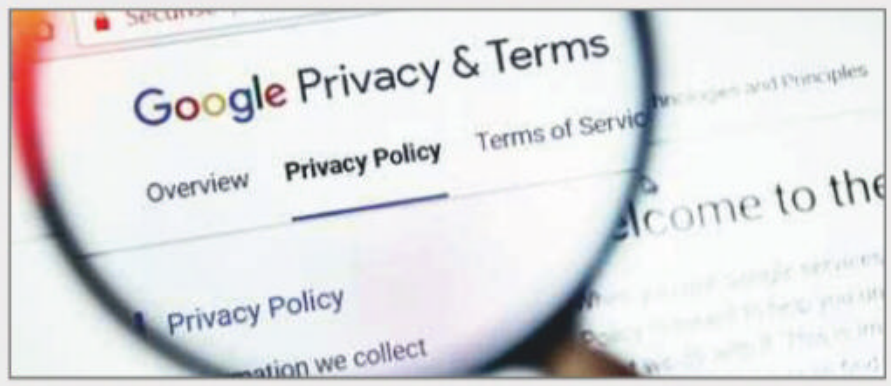
Google has unveiled a host of tools to boost online privacy, dubbing the system its Privacy Sandbox, which it's describing as a secure environment for personalisation that maintains protection of user privacy. The aim is for Google to give advertisers enough information to show relevant ads but without giving away personally identifying data (bit.ly/sandbox483).

Google said the move was necessary because existing privacy protections aren't holding up – blocking cookies, for example, just leads to more invasive techniques such as browser fingerprinting. Google, of course, makes most of its money via online advertising, which often uses cookies, and the company notes that blocking tracking cookies "significantly reduces publishers' primary means of funding".

How will it affect you?

Google said this experiment could take years to fully develop – web standards are a slow business – but the idea is that your personal information will only be viewable in aggregate, so an advertiser may know that you like travelling, for example, but nothing more.

The project is in its early days, but Google suggested it could be used for ad selection, by letting a publisher see whether an ad is relevant to you while withholding access to the bulk of your browsing history.



Credit: pixinoo / Shutterstock.com

Such ideas will take time to develop. In the meantime, you can protect your privacy by installing an ad blocker or tracker blocker, such as uBlock Origin or Ghostery.

What do we think?

Google has a problem. People don't like the search giant tracking them online, but are also annoyed by the many repetitive, irrelevant ads they get shown. Google makes the bulk of its revenue from advertising, giving away access to tools such as Gmail and Chrome for free, and this Privacy Sandbox may help rebalance the situation, allowing the current model to continue. However, it may be time for a new business model for the internet – one that's not based on collecting and selling our private data.

Microsoft and Facebook listen to private chats

What happened?

Microsoft and Facebook have joined Google, Amazon and Apple in admitting that they use third-party contractors to listen in on private conversations – all in the name of "improving services".

Contractors hired by Microsoft told technology site Motherboard that they often listened to conversations. Most of the voice clips, dating from 2014 and 2015, were of children launching games and issuing console commands using Microsoft's Kinect gaming sensor and Cortana voice assistant.

Microsoft responded to the news by saying: "We stopped reviewing any voice content taken through Xbox for product improvement purposes a number of months ago, as we no longer felt it was necessary, and have no plans to restart those reviews."

The news came a week after Facebook confirmed it, too, had employed contractors able to access voice recordings. Selected users had opted to allow Facebook's AI to transcribe their voices when using the Messenger app, but did not realise that humans would also be able to listen in.

The social-media giant is sticking to the same defence: reviewers were used to improve voice-enabled services. In response, a Facebook representative said, "much like Apple and Google, we paused human review of audio more than a week ago". They added that the practice was "very common in tech."

How will it affect you?

If you don't use your voice to control your Xbox, you're in the clear. Similarly, unless you specifically let Facebook access your Messenger audio, your conversations should remain private, unless you chatted aloud to someone who *had* enabled the feature. However, it's a timely reminder that hidden in the depths of those unreadable terms of service agreements are rules that allow companies to eavesdrop on you.

None of the companies involved are currently engaging in the practice of using humans to review users' voice chats, but that doesn't mean they won't resume the practice in future.

What do we think?

This is yet another case of 'tech firm betrays users' data' – and we're concerned that even basic principles of privacy are being ignored. When a company tells us these circumstances arise because it wants to improve its services, we're not convinced it's simply a case of making voice recognition better or understanding how people use a certain platform – there's every chance that audio data will be used to 'improve' other services, such as targeted ads.

See our feature on page 51 to find out how to wipe recordings of your voice from the web.

FIRST LOOK

Motorola One Action

bit.ly/motorola483

Motorola has been on a 'One' spree of late, releasing the well-received Motorola One and the Motorola One Vision. The two phones come in at a budget-ish price, while offering some of the more advanced features found in Moto's flagship models. And now we have the Motorola One Action.

Like its namesakes, the phone runs Android One, the purest Android experience yet. It's a clean operating system loaded with only the most basic Android apps and none of the manufacturer's proprietary bloatware that wastes precious storage space (and, in most cases, can't be uninstalled). The result is a phone that can be properly personalised and, theoretically at least, runs smoother and faster.

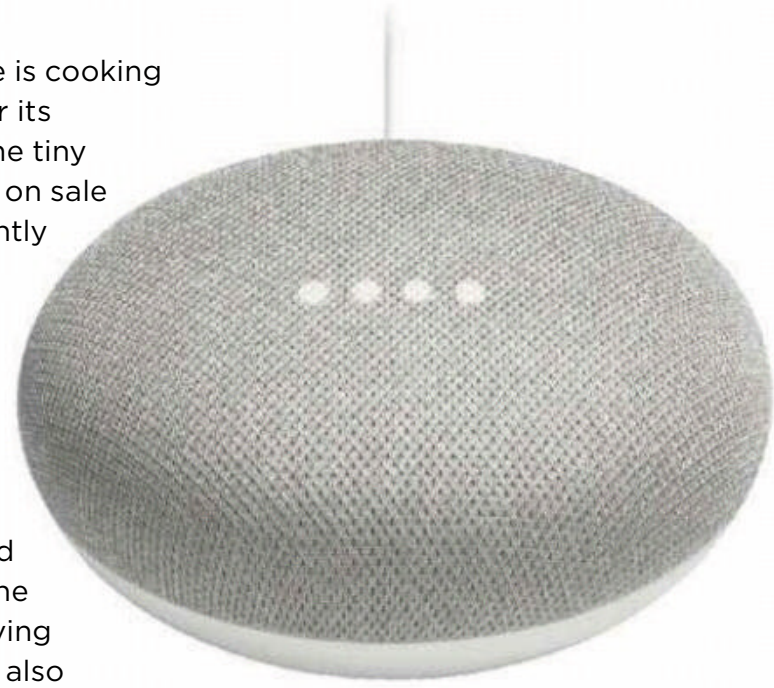
But that's not the only thing to attract users to the Motorola One Action. This is an excellent phone for shutterbugs and the GoPro crowd. Billed as "the world's first ultra-wide action cam" and featuring a 6.3in 21:9 full high-definition screen, it allows you to take wide landscape videos without rotating your phone. After using the 12-megapixel selfie and triple rear cameras with its 5-megapixel depth-sensing lens, you can take advantage of an impressive AI camera that helps you take better shots (and improve the ones you've already taken).

It's a beautiful-looking phone: slim, with rounded curves and an eye-catching contoured-glass design. Buried inside, the Action runs a 2.2GHz Octa-core Samsung Exynos 9609 processor on 4GB of RAM. It's all powered by a 3500mAH battery that should easily see you through the day on standard use. Internal storage is a generous 128GB, which you can expand further with a microSD card.

The Motorola One Action is available in 'denim blue' and 'pearl white', at a very reasonable £219. It's not 5G-compatible, but no phones at this price point are – at least, for the moment.

WHAT'S THE RUMOUR

Is Google launching a new Home Mini?



Rumours abound that Google is cooking up a much-needed refresh for its popular Home Mini device. The tiny smart speaker, which is often on sale for less than £30, will apparently receive a major overhaul that adds new features.

Unlike the original Home, the Home Mini's audio capabilities were best described as 'fine' – perfect for basic use, but not ideal for audiophiles. The rumoured device rectifies this, upping the maximum volume and improving the bass. It's been said that it also features a 3.5mm headphone jack and a proper wall mount.

The new Mini will also include a motion sensor, so it'll know when you're in the room and may require its services. Essentially, it's a sort of halfway house between the original Home Mini and its more powerful counterpart, Google Home.

According to the whispers, that's not all that's changing. Google is considering renaming the device the Nest Mini. That may not roll off the tongue quite so easily, but it's in keeping with the Google-owned Nest brand, which focuses on smart home devices such as thermostats and home security gadgets.

There's no word yet on price, but expect it to cost about the same as the existing Mini.

LIKELIHOOD RATING

✓✓✓✓✓

The original Google Home Mini deserves an upgrade – although, we're not sold on the new Nest name. It's been a while since the company made any real effort with its smart speaker suite. The disc-like Home Mini hit the shelves in 2017, and outside of the Google Home Hub, with its tablet-like screen, the line-up hasn't evolved in any meaningful way. In other words, it's time for a refresh – especially if Google hopes to overtake Amazon's popular Echo range.

What's new on Kickstarter

Our favourite new project on the crowdfunding site

Anti-Snatch

bit.ly/snatch483 | From £30

Many of us keep our entire lives on our phones, so having your handset snatched could be a disaster. That's the point of the anti-snatch case, with its clever two-piece design that snaps around most phone types. Activate the GPS app, then place your phone inside the case. Now, should a thief grab it, the upper casing slides away in their hands, leaving the phone in your possession. Meanwhile, the app alerts you and other users of an attempted theft. Pledges start at £30 for the case and app combo, while £50 gets you two Anti-Snatches.

WEBOMETER

WE LIKE...

Google Photos adds text-search option

The Google Photos app now lets you search for text in photos you've taken, such as snaps of receipts, street signs and documents. Google says the new Lens feature could be used for capturing and finding tricky-to-remember Wi-Fi passwords.

Netflix stops hiding new streaming content

Netflix is making it easier for viewers to find new TV shows and films by adding a Latest tab to its app for smart TVs, set-top boxes and games consoles. The feature also alerts you to upcoming content and lets you set reminders.

WE DON'T LIKE...

Google drops its Android dessert names

Google has confirmed that the next version of its mobile operating system will simply be called Android 10. This ends the convention of naming editions after desserts and sweet treats, which Google says users found confusing.

Instagram doubles its number of ads

Instagram is testing an increase in the number of adverts that users see in its Stories feature to "roughly double" the amount. The Facebook-owned social-media app will show selected users back-to-back ads from different companies.

Stay Safe Online

News about the latest threats and advice from security experts

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

Bluetooth devices at risk of KNOB attacks

Security researchers have discovered a flaw in Bluetooth, which allows hackers to listen in on conversations conducted via Bluetooth devices and change the contents of file transfers.

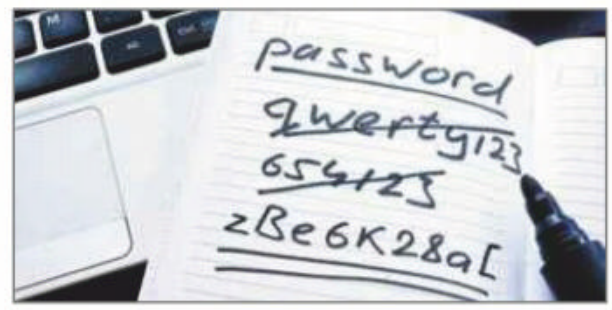
The vulnerability is codenamed KNOB, which stands for 'Key Negotiation of Bluetooth', and works by forcing the participants in a Bluetooth communication to use a weak encryption key. This allows attackers to eavesdrop on data – including the audio of phone calls – being passed between devices, without the victims knowing.

The researchers tested the KNOB exploit on 17 different Bluetooth chips across 24 different devices, and all were found to be at the mercy of KNOB. "After we disclosed our attack to [the Bluetooth] industry in late 2018, some vendors might have implemented workarounds for the vulnerability on their devices," the researchers said. "So the short answer is: if your device was not updated after late 2018, it is likely vulnerable. Devices updated afterwards might be fixed." bit.ly/knob483

Web users failing to change stolen passwords

Google has revealed that 1.5% of web users log into online accounts using details that have been compromised in data breaches.

Despite being notified by Google's Password Checkup extension (bit.ly/checkup483) that their details have been leaked to hackers, a large proportion of users fail to change their passwords or deactivate accounts, according to the report. Only 26% of users with compromised details changed their passwords after being warned by the extension.



The extension monitors a user's login attempts and scans them against a database of four billion usernames and passwords known to have been involved in data breaches. Of the 21 million login attempts scanned and analysed by Password Checkup, Google said 316,000 used unsafe credentials, equating to roughly 1.5% of all attempts.

"Hijackers routinely attempt to sign into sites across the web with every credential exposed by a third-party breach," said Google. "If you use strong, unique passwords for all your accounts, this risk disappears." bit.ly/login483

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 Following the news about smart speakers sharing our voice data with humans, is it safe to use them to check our bank balances (bit.ly/bank483)?

Simon Waite, Facebook

A All Amazon Alexa owners will likely be stunned by the news that Amazon employees can listen to their intimate moments. With increasing regularity, these devices have hit the headlines for intruding on people's privacy, so the question is: where does this end? These devices are meant to enhance our lives, not spy on us.

If people are able to carry out banking transactions using a smart speaker, it not only raises the issue of someone recording your voice and spoofing a transaction, but also highlights the risk that recordings stored by the vendor of the device could be stolen by cybercriminals.

Additionally, if every transaction requires a PIN from the customer to verify their identity, it rather negates the convenience of banking in this way.

Q How worried should be about security breaches in which fingerprint data is stolen?

Terry Verey, Twitter

A Biometric data is just as valuable a target for cybercriminals as usernames and passwords. The theft of biometric data, and the fact that it could be used to spoof your identity, highlights how important it is for companies to secure their customers' data.

In the event of a data breach, a compromised password can be changed, but this is not true for a fingerprint or other biometric data. This raises the question of whether biometrics are a safe alternative to passwords? It's my view that biometrics should be used as an alternative to usernames, not passwords. Whether it's passwords or biometrics, providers should take steps to secure authentication data and other personal information. If data is stored in the clear, it provides a treasure trove for cybercriminals.

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

Make It Yours.

COOLER MASTER

RGB
16.7 Million Colors

KEEP A LOW PROFILE.

SK630, SK650

The **SK630** and **SK650** Mechanical Keyboards are slim keyboards with all of the signature **Cooler Master** features like on-the-fly controls and RGB backlighting – also adding new Cherry MX Low Profile Switches.

A reduced travel and actuation distance with extra-flat keycaps means that you get all of the precision and durability of a mechanical keyboard. All of this within a minimalistic slim stylish keyboard.

Add in a refined brushed aluminium housing and understated LED ring, and you have a keyboard that looks as good as it performs.

Best New Websites

Site of the Fortnight

TOYS

RELAUNCH

Lego

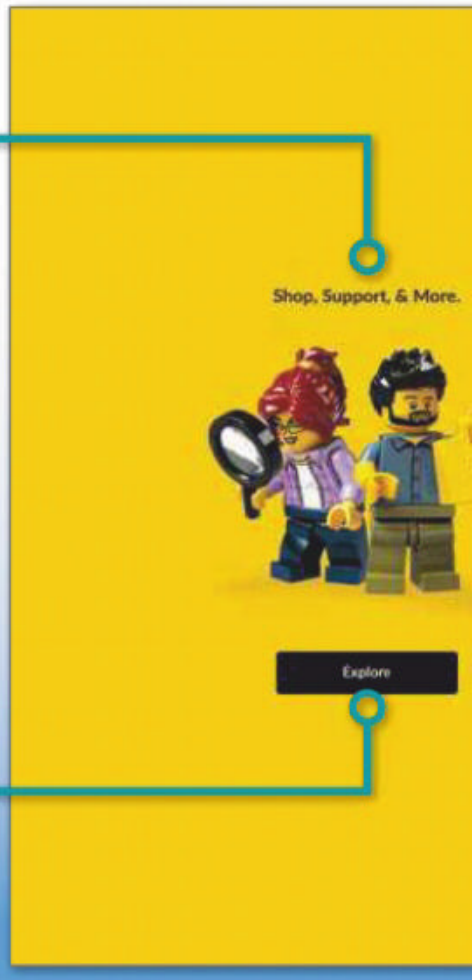
www.lego.com

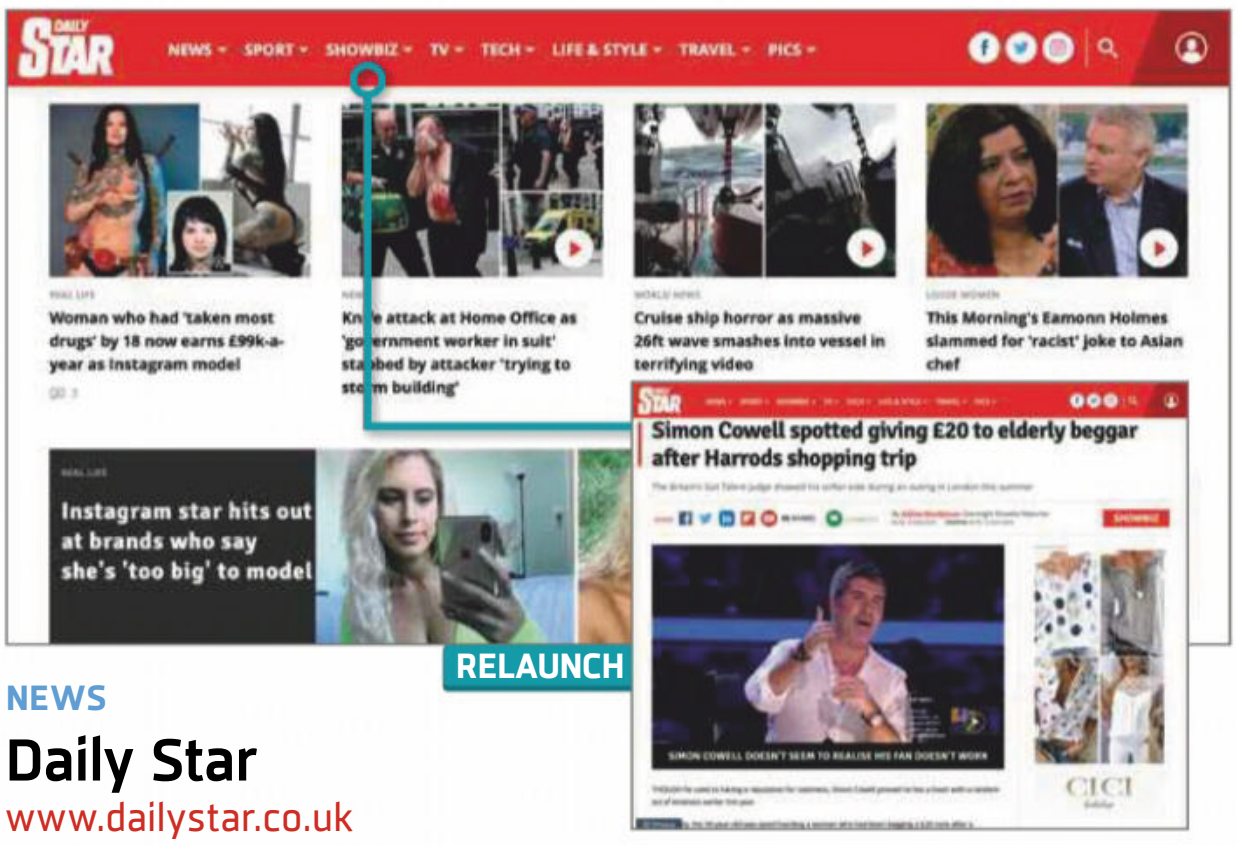
Lego's two distinct websites – for retail and for content – have been combined into one. The landing page now offers shopping and support on the left-hand side, and fun brick-related content on the right. Browsing products lets you check out the many Lego themes, the newest ones clearly highlighted, and jump to a specific interest – such as coding, robots or STEM – along with promotions and exclusives. The content side is, as before, brimming with info about the sets, and lets you enjoy videos, games and characters. It's also easier to find a physical store, join the points-earning VIP scheme and find spare Lego parts.

Our rating ★★★★★

SHOPPING
New products, promotions and exclusives are clearly highlighted alongside any special offers

FILTERS
Find the items you're after by narrowing them down according to age, popularity, price and more





RELAUNCH

NEWS

Daily Star

www.dailystar.co.uk

Put the Daily Star's new-look website next to that of The Mirror and you'd think one is a reflection of the other – both use the exact same template and, if it wasn't for the variation in news agenda (the Star's menu swaps politics for showbiz), you'd be hard pressed to tell the difference. In many ways, the revamp has reined in the Star's in-your-face personality and it's now easier to find stories, thanks to a cleaner, responsive design and tags that let you jump straight to specific categories. The article pages, however, feel cluttered with images, ads and suggested stories that get in the way of the words. Also, videos auto-play and not all stories allow comments.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

NEW

SPORT

The Athletic

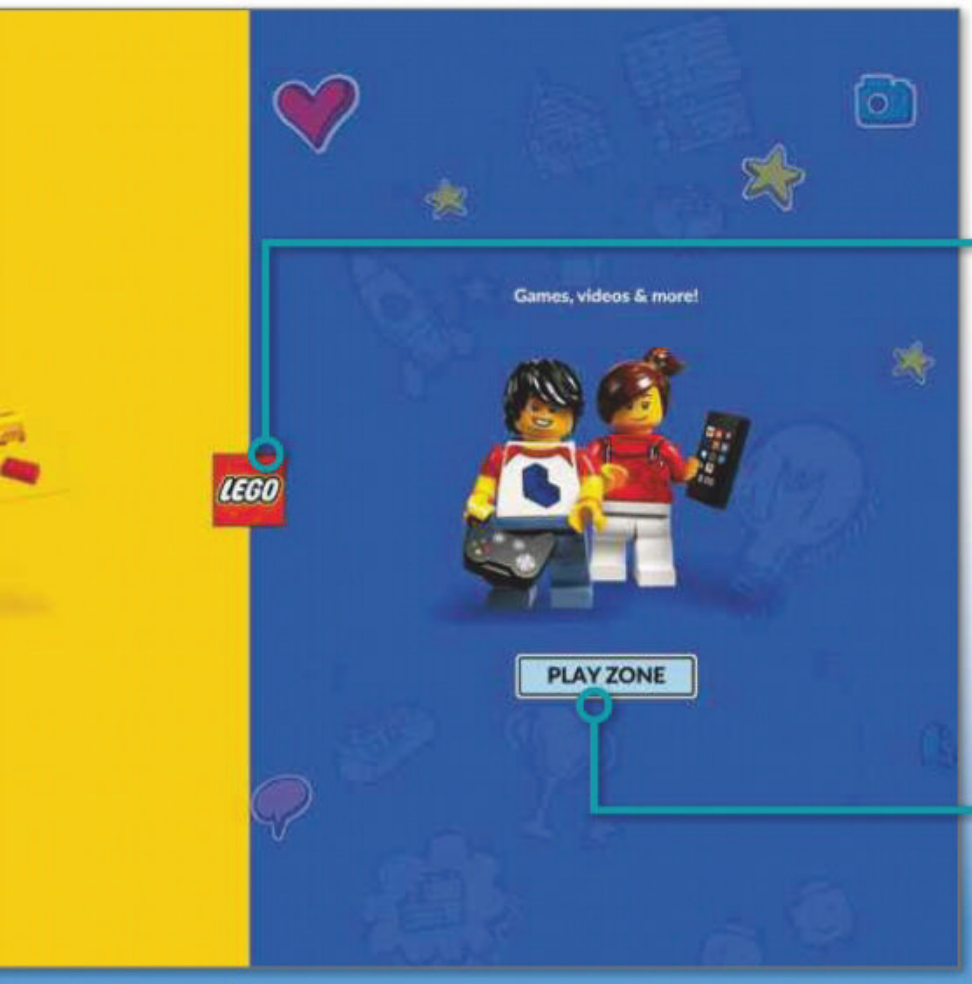
theathletic.co.uk

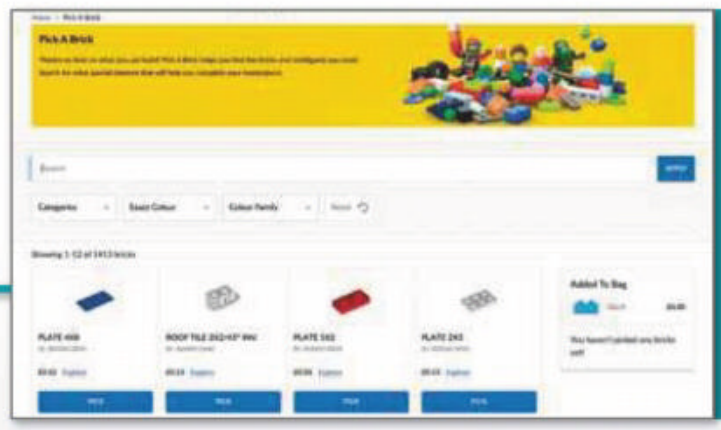
The Athletic has been covering sport in the US for three years and its goal is to crack the UK, too. It has been snapping up some of the best journalistic talent from the national and regional press but while you can read the first few paragraphs of an article, you must pay yearly or monthly to enjoy the work in full (or try the free trial). We pleased about the lack of ads and sensational football tittle-tattle, and love the mix of news, features, interviews and long reads. There's no doubting the quality but it'll be interesting to see if this subscription approach scores a positive result.

Our rating ★★★★★

Reviews by David Crookes

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





PICK A BRICK
If you need a specific brick or minifigure, you can buy individual bricks from a choice of 1,413

KIDS ZONE
There are lots of activities for children and a free *Lego Life* magazine for five- to nine-year olds

NEW

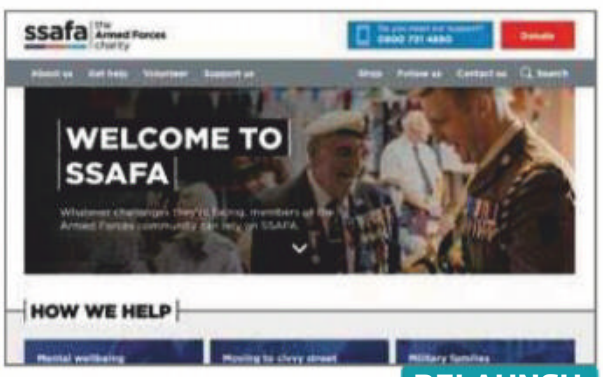
PETS

Pets Are Welcome

www.webboxpaw.co.uk

Enter a town, city or postcode into this website and it shows a list of pet-friendly places to visit – or at least it will if you search for the handful of locations it currently covers. Created by a pet-food brand, the site points you toward pubs, restaurants, shops, accommodation, parks and walks by pinning locations on a map. But since it relies on visitors to suggest suitable hotspots, it will take time to build. As it stands, it's easy to use and offers useful information, including adresses and website details. The site encourages people to post a photo of their pets, too, which is rather endearing.

Our rating ★★★☆☆



RELAUNCH

CHARITY

SSAFA

www.ssafa.org.uk

SSAFA supports the UK's armed forces and its relaunched website does a fine job of explaining its work. By breaking the homepage into digestible chunks, it allows visitors to explore the charity's important issues and the people it has assisted, while encouraging visitors to get involved and asking for donations without being too pushy. We like how the charity lets volunteers make and update their own pages, which should give the site a more localised feel over time, but we'd like to see greater prominence given to its fascinating history section and the latest news stories.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RELAUNCH

OUTDOOR

Freshwalks

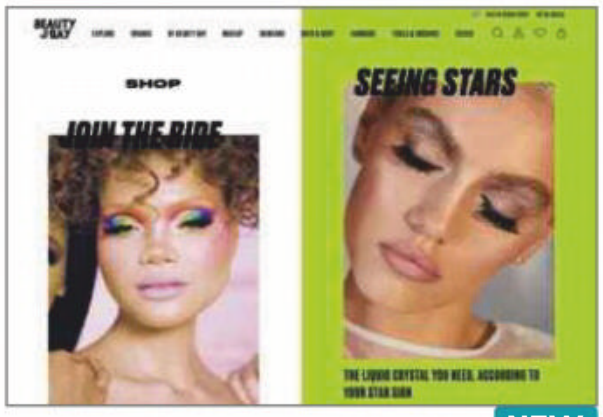
www.freshwalks.co.uk

Business folk stuck in stuffy offices and boardrooms should welcome any encouragement to enjoy a country ramble or a city walk. Freshwalks has organised such networking jaunts for five years in the North West and it's roaming further afield with this revamped site that integrates Eventbrite and Mailchimp for ticket sales and marketing. Navigation is a bit clumsy, but we like the list of forthcoming events showing bullet points for distance, time and difficulty, with advice, tips and a full rundown of what to expect. The profiles of the team and regular walkers adds a personal touch.

Our rating ★★★★☆

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

Best New Websites



NEW

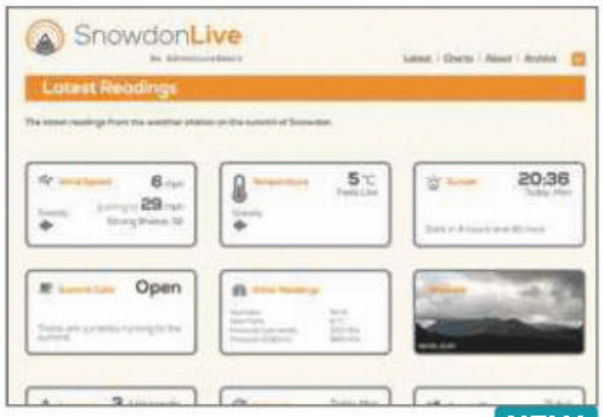
HEALTH & BEAUTY

Beauty Bay

www.beautybay.com

They say beauty is in the eye of the beholder but there's no denying this site is a stunner. The split homepage with the shop to the left and articles to the right allows each to be scrolled independently and offers lots of cross-referencing. While the images rolling down each side are beautifully shot, they're also very large which makes discovering items and content a slow process. Thankfully, the menu lets you filter content by product and brand, while displaying a tips section called Wanna Learn More. Content is also being posted to the social-media channels of 'influencers', which we imagine is very 'on trend'.

Our rating ★★★★★



NEW

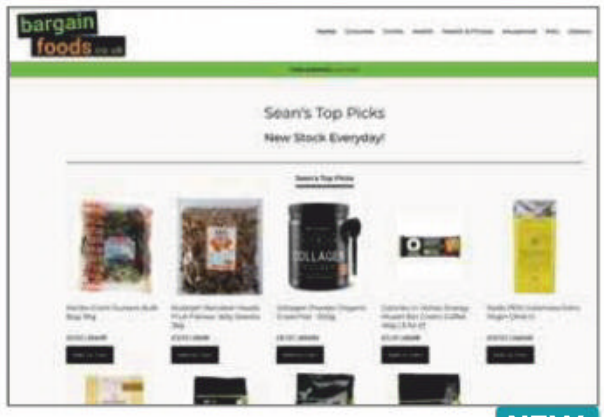
OUTDOOR

Snowdon Live

www.snowdon.live

Wales' highest mountain, Snowdon, offers stunning views – so long as the weather is on your side. Conditions up high can be treacherous, putting pressure on Llanberis Mountain Rescue Team, which is why this new weather-checking website has been created. It serves the latest readings from the weather station at the summit, clearly displaying the info to show wind speed, temperature, sunset and forecast. There's also a box that lets you know if the trains are running and whether the café is open. The readings can be embedded in your own website and there's a handy link to walking advice from AdventureSmart Wales.

Our rating ★★★★★



NEW

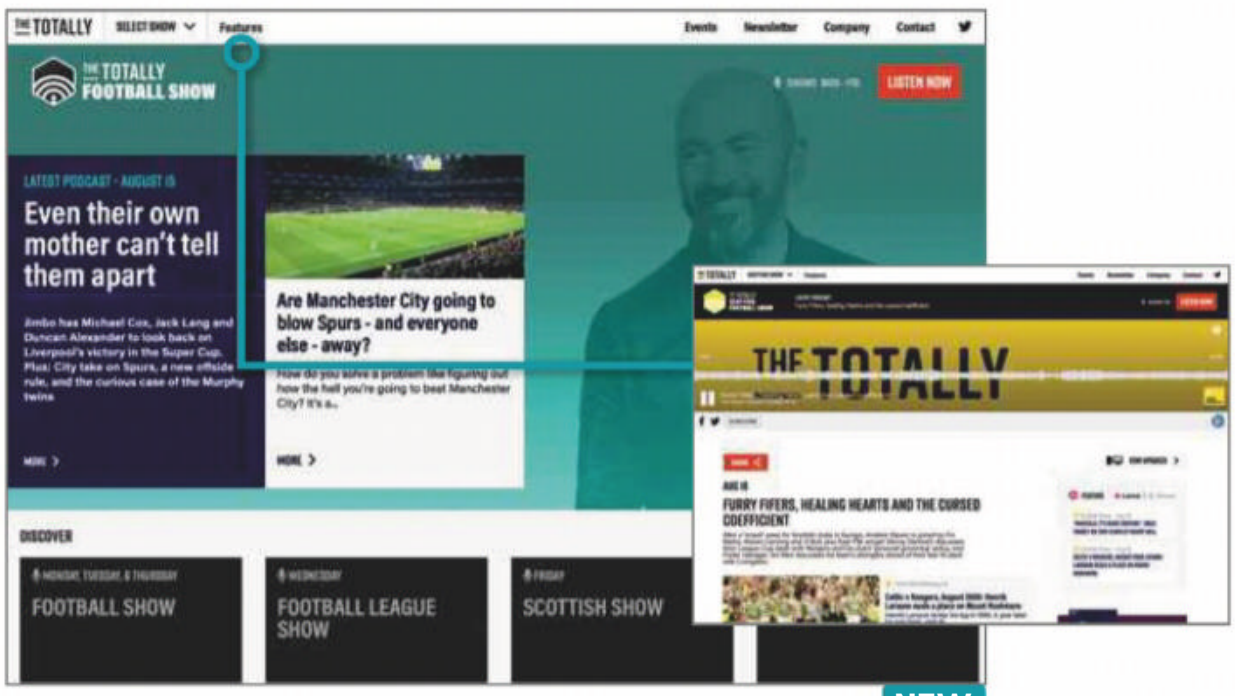
SHOPPING

Bargain Foods

www.bargainfoods.co.uk

Set up by two former market traders, Bargain Foods has only been online for a few weeks but discount-hungry customers are already devouring its wares in droves. The site offers sizeable savings on a range of groceries, drinks, health items, pet food and household goods. But while its physical shops in the West Midlands are basic, the web store includes recommendations and promotions to whet the appetite. Some of the food items are past or near their best-by date – some are dated 2018! – yet adding them to the cart and checking out is easy, although free shipping is only for baskets over £100.

Our rating ★★★☆☆



NEW

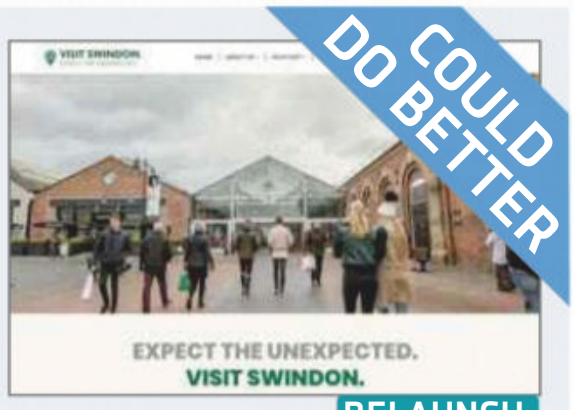
FOOTBALL

The Totally Football Show

www.thetotallyfootballshow.com

Presented by journalist James Richardson (the chap who used to front Channel 4's *Football Italia* in the 1990s), The Totally Football Show is a popular podcast that has spawned several spin-offs. This new site lets you listen to each instalment via stream or download, and packs in scores of in-depth features, most of which are related to the podcasts in some way. Like the podcasts themselves, the website has a professional sheen, highlighting the weekly show schedule and letting you stay updated by signing up to the newsletter. Simply click Select Show to see what's on offer. There's even a show called Golazzo that should bring back some memories.

Our rating ★★★★☆



RELAUNCH

TOURISM

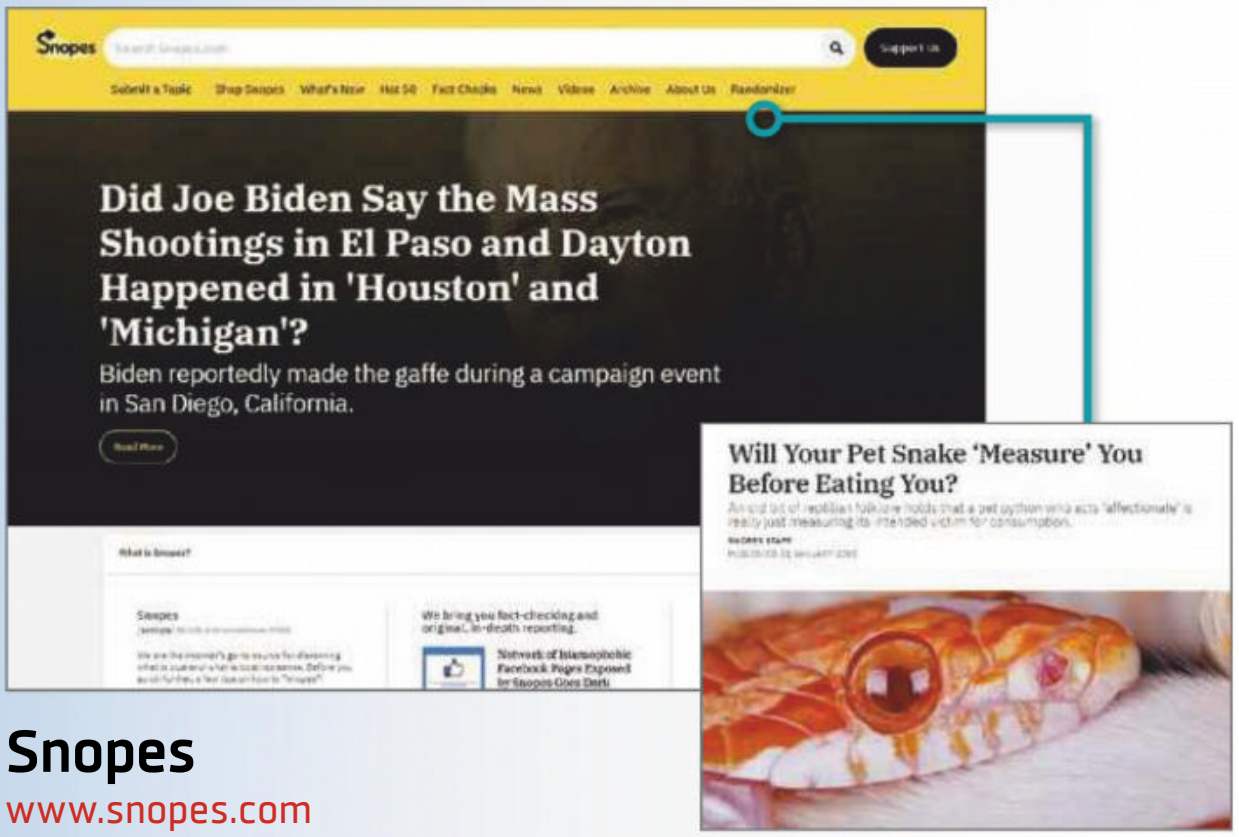
Visit Swindon

www.visitswindon.org.uk

Promoting Swindon as one of the South West's best kept secrets – "expect the unexpected" – this site hopes to boost visitor numbers by showcasing key hotspots. It does so by creating itineraries aimed at specific interests – shopping, leisure, heritage, a night out and more. These, however, are merely lists of attractions with a brief description, image and links to other websites: it doesn't suggest an ideal hour-by-hour day out or let you build a bespoke itinerary of your own. More helpfully, the revamped site adds accommodation and events.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

ESSENTIAL BOOKMARKS THIS ISSUE: Recommended reference sites



Snopes

www.snopes.com

Still going strong after 26 years, the internet's definitive fact-checking source is the place to come when you read something online and think: "That can't be true, can it?". Does chewing gum take seven years to digest? Are tennis balls toxic to dogs? Is Facebook going to start charging? These questions (to which the answers are all 'no') and virtually any urban legend, rumour or hoax you can think are explored and often exposed on Snopes by its dedicated team of investigators. You can search for a specific topic, browse the archive, read a random article or view the truth behind the current Hot 50 rumours (invariably dominated by Donald Trump's alleged *faux pas*). In this era of 'fake news', Snopes is more important than ever.

Google Ngram Viewer

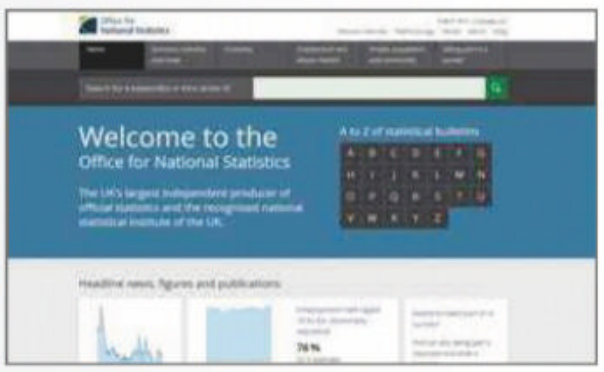
bit.ly/ngrams483

Ever wondered when a particular word or phrase was first used, became common parlance or dropped out of fashion? Then head to Google's fascinating Ngram Viewer, which lets you search for terms in printed sources dating back to 1500, and plots the rise and fall of their usage on a line graph. The site's database draws on more than five million books published up to 2008, and lets you view the matches it finds by clicking through to Google Books. You can also use Ngram Viewer to compare the popularity of several words or phrases over the centuries by typing them into its search box, separated by commas. It even lets you embed its charts on other sites.

Everipedia

everipedia.org

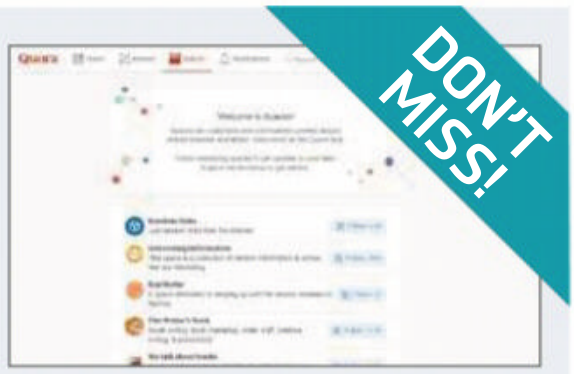
Wikipedia is one of the wonders of the web, but it's not without its flaws, not least its boring design, officious moderators and narrow definitions of credible sources. Everipedia is an alternative online encyclopedia that builds on Wikipedia's content to allow anyone to add articles on any topic they wish (provided they have at least one citation), which makes its content much more varied. Whereas Wikipedia is controlled by a relatively small team, Everipedia uses blockchain technology to foster a more democratic community and rewards its contributors with 'IQ tokens' which they can use to vote on new articles and edits. It also looks more modern than Wikipedia, with a slicker design and layout.



Office of National Statistics

www.ons.gov.uk

It might not sound particularly thrilling, but as a hard factual summary of the state of the nation, the Office of National Statistics website is an invaluable and illuminating resource. Its figures are frequently quoted in news stories, but by browsing the detailed reports and graphs you can get to grips with the bigger picture, and you don't need to register or pay to access any of the content. Discover the likelihood of being a victim of crime in England and Wales, the average weekly wage, the number of people who use streaming services and much, much more, with all the statistics presented in a clear, easy to understand manner. Scottish statistic seekers should check out statistics.gov.scot.



Quora Spaces

www.quora.com/spaces

The sprawling question-and-answer site Quora is now easier to browse following the introduction last year of Spaces. This new feature consists of curated collections and communities based around shared interests and tastes, which makes discussions a lot more focused and posted content more relevant. Popular Spaces cover topics including space exploration, The Beatles, cybersecurity, Tolkien and "mortality moments – reflecting and reminiscing about experiences all of us face growing older". You can follow a Space to have new posts appear in your Quora feed, and apply to create your own (bit.ly/applyspace483).

Tell us about your favourite reference sites via webuser@webuser.co.uk

Build a Better Site

Specialist tips, top tools and practical help

Top Tips of the Fortnight

Make dynamic PDFs to share online

PDFs are a great way to share documents but thumbnails are less than ideal for showing them off. Flipbook (www.flipbookpdf.net) converts your PDFs into dynamic web-based documents, which you can either link to or host on your own website. It's free for unlimited documents, as long as they're 20 pages or less.

Check your PHP version

Are you keeping up with the latest version of PHP (www.php.net), the programming language that powers WordPress websites?

According to PHP's developer, websites that upgraded from 7.2 to 7.3 last year saw performance increases of 10%, with further benefits expected when 7.4 is launched later this year.

Many WordPress users don't upgrade the version of PHP they're using unless their web host demands it, but there's nothing to stop you – most hosts let you upgrade your PHP version via the dashboard for free. Check which version you're using and upgrade it if you're running behind. Ensure your site still works afterwards – you can always downgrade it again if something goes wrong.

Deal of the Fortnight

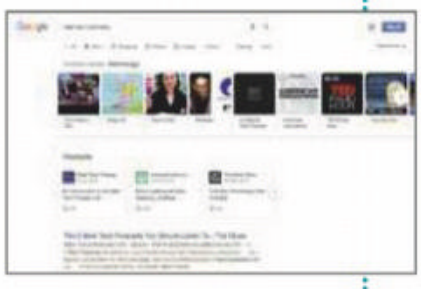
A2 Hosting (www.a2hosting.co.uk) has a sale on its shared hosting, which it's discounting by 63% to £2.93 per month. At the checkout, use the code SU63MM.

Web-building Helpdesk

Q I'm more of a talker than a writer, but I still want to share my knowledge and opinions on the web. How can I ensure people find my podcasts so I'm not just shouting into the void?

Gary Farmer, via email

A Google now puts individual podcasts and series in its search results, particularly if people specifically search for the term 'podcast' along with their search term. Make sure you have a website with links to your episodes listed and accessible, so Google knows they exist, and ensure they're available in the popular podcast places, such as iTunes. This is usually done by submitting an RSS feed that links to the location where the podcast files are stored.

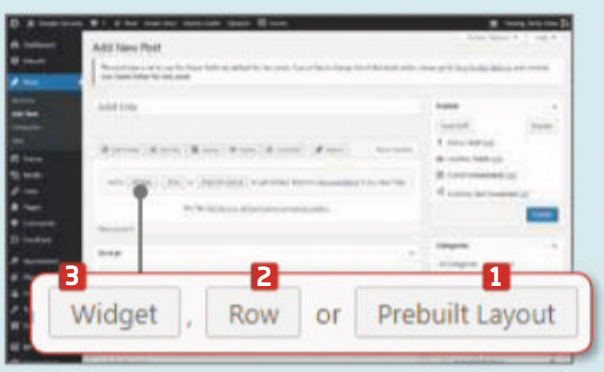


Andy Shaw, Technical & Reviews Editor

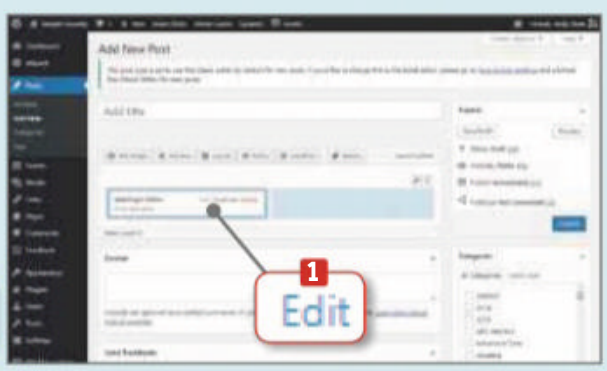
MINI WORKSHOP | Use a block-based page-building tool in WordPress

Page Builder: bit.ly/sopb483 | 10 mins | Self-hosted WordPress website

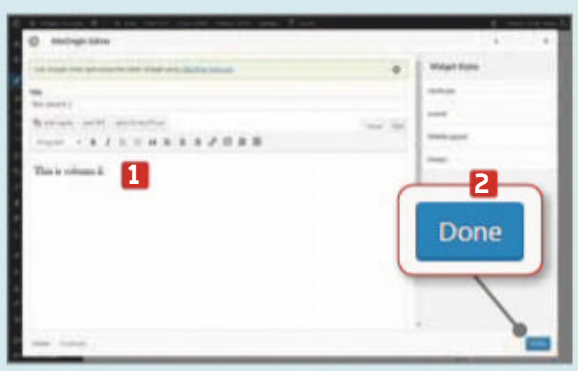
WordPress posts have a habit of looking identical across your website. For more control over the look and layout, without the need to delve into code, try this free Page Builder plugin from SiteOrigin



1 Download the plugin as normal. Create a new post or page, then click the Page Builder tab (next to the regular Visual and Text tabs). You can view a range of templates by clicking the Prebuilt Layout button, 1 create your own column-based layout from the Row button 2 or insert a regular WordPress Widget. 3



2 Once you've created the layout, click the element you want to edit and click the Edit option that appears when you hover your mouse over it. 1 You may be asked to install the SiteOrigin Widgets Bundle if you haven't yet done so. Click the link and it will install automatically.



3 A window pops up and you can edit the block using the standard WordPress editor, 1 adding text and images as normal. When you've finished, click Done. 2 You need to save your post for changes to take effect, then you can preview and publish your site as normal.

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

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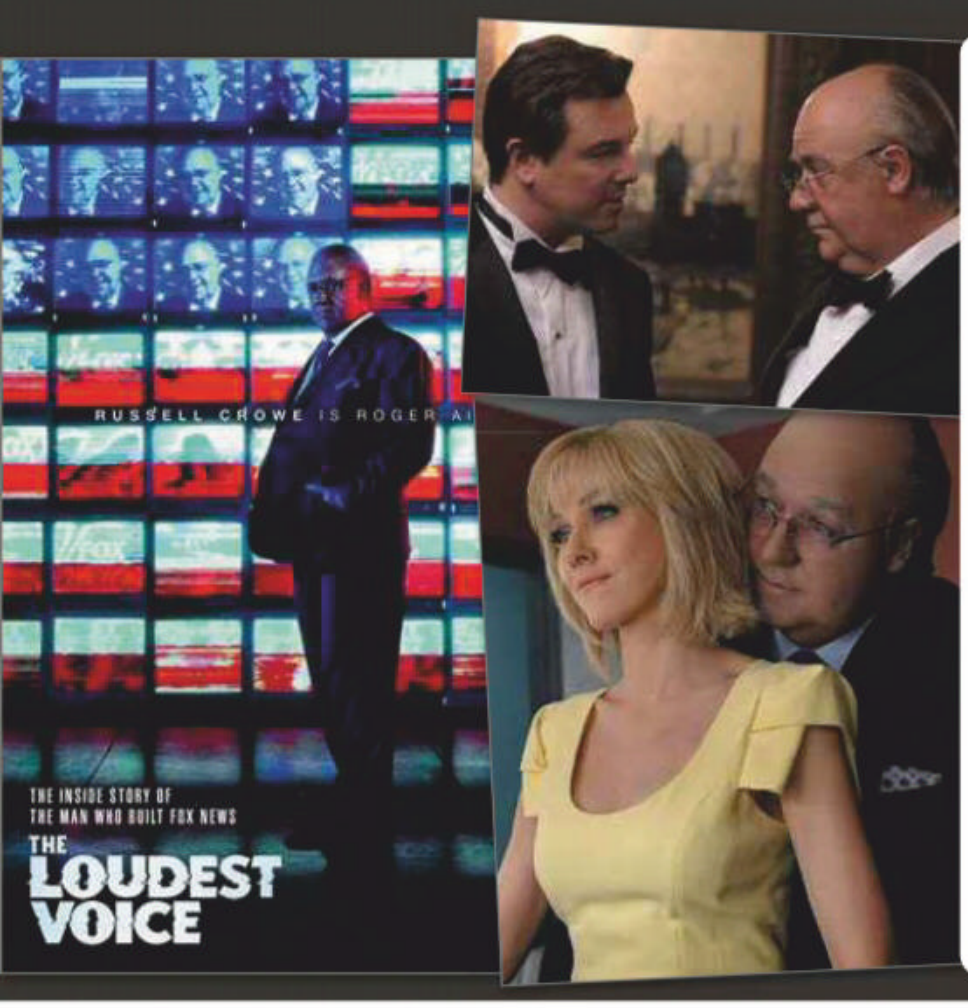
What To Watch Online

Pick of the fortnight



Watch the news with Russell Crowe in *The Loudest Voice*

From 5 September

"People don't want to be informed. They wanna *feel* informed," declares Russell Crowe as Fox News founder Roger Ailes, in the official trailer for *The Loudest Voice* (bit.ly/voice483) - the story of how fake news took over the world.

The seven-part miniseries, based on the bestselling book by Gabriel Sherman (bit.ly/voicebook483), sees Oscar-winner Crowe transform his accent and appearance (and how!) to play Ailes, who was dubbed the "real leader" of America's Republican Party during the Bush years of the 2000s. The cast also includes Naomi Watts and Seth MacFarlane, while Ailes' real-life chums Rupert Murdoch and Vice President Dick Cheney are played by less starry actors. Episode directors include Stephen Frears (*A Very English Scandal*, *The Queen*), and the show was created by Tom McCarthy (director of fab indie film *The Station Agent*).

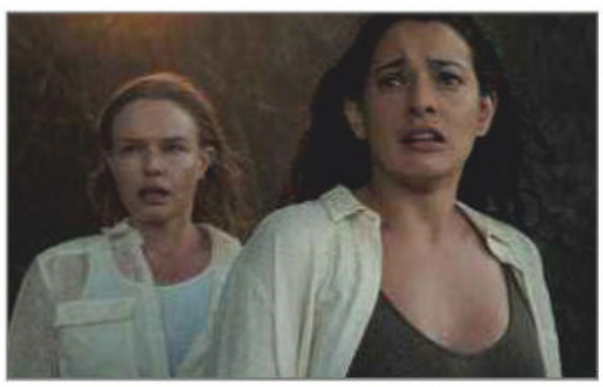
You can watch all seven episodes of *The Loudest Voice* from 5 September with a Now TV Entertainment Pass (£7.99 per month, bit.ly/nowent483).

Escape Netflix's mysterious *I-Land*

From 12 September

Lost meets *The Hunger Games* in Netflix's seven-part sci-fi yarn. Kate Bosworth (*Superman Returns*) heads an ensemble cast of 10 strangers who wake up on a desert island – sorry, I-Land – with no memory of who they are or how they got there. Wait for it: "this world is not as it seems" (but of course!), and the 10 face an extreme battle for survival.

I-Land may not be original but it sounds unmissable, especially once you hear it's written by award-winning playwright Neil LaBute. The show arrives on 12 September at bit.ly/iland483, where you can watch the trailer for free.



Stream the Euro 2020 qualifiers live

5-10 September

England and Scotland continue their battle to reach the Euro 2020 footy finals, with each team facing two opponents in September. Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland play one game each.

Both England matches – against Bulgaria on Saturday 7 and Kosovo on Tuesday 10 – are free to stream via ITV Hub (www.itv.com). You can stream all the other qualifiers live via Now TV with a Sky Sports Pass, which costs £14.99 per week and lets you watch all 11 Sky Sports channels online (bit.ly/nowsport483).

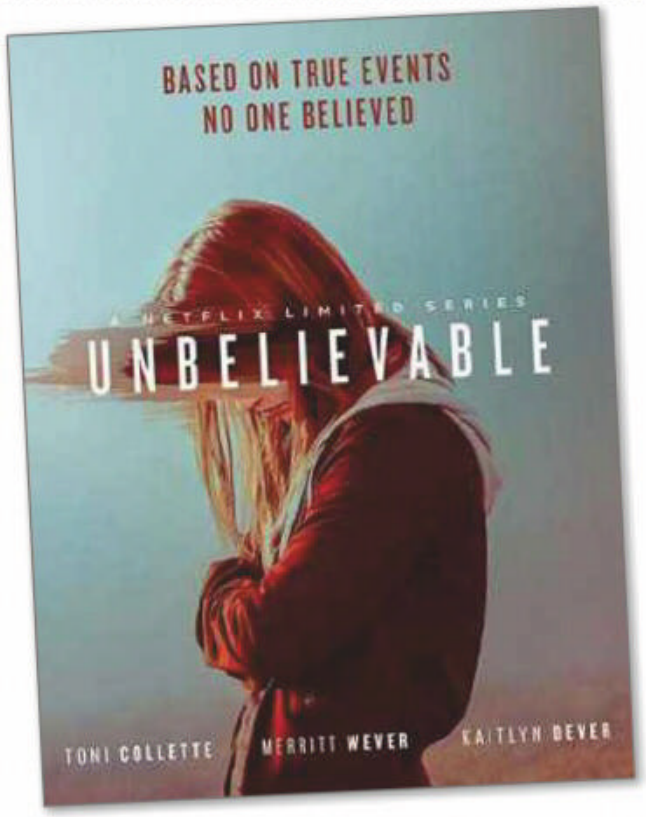
Plan your viewing with Sky's fixture list (bit.ly/euro483), and catch up with the qualifiers so far with Sky's Euro 2020 YouTube playlist (bit.ly/qualifiers483).

Get a second round of *The Reluctant Landlord*

From 4 September

Sky ordered a second series of Romesh Ranganathan's autobiographical pub-based comedy nearly a year ago, before Series 1 even aired – and it's finally time for Romesh's return (now there's a good name for a pub). Six new episodes arrive weekly at 10pm on Sky One, and you can stream them live and on-demand via Now TV at bit.ly/landlord483.

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



Watch your Sky recordings on the Go

Sky has updated its free Sky Go app to let Sky Q subscribers watch their recorded TV programmes on a phone or tablet anywhere, online or offline. Access to recordings used to be the only major difference between the Sky Go and Sky Q apps. Once the Sky Go update has finished rolling out in the next few weeks, the Sky Q app will be discontinued.

As well as letting subscribers watch and schedule upcoming recordings, the revamped Sky Go app will offer personalised Sky Cinema recommendations and include access to live and on-demand Freeview and Sky channels.

The update is rolling out now for Android (bit.ly/skygodroid483), iOS (bit.ly/skygoios483), Amazon Fire and Windows.

Watch Netflix's new true-crime drama *Unbelievable*

From 13 September

Netflix is back in 'inspired by a true crime' territory with this dark eight-part drama. Toni Collette and Merritt Wever play detectives trying to discover the truth about a horrifying rape, after the 18-year-old victim is accused of lying. Watch the official trailer at bit.ly/unbelievable483.

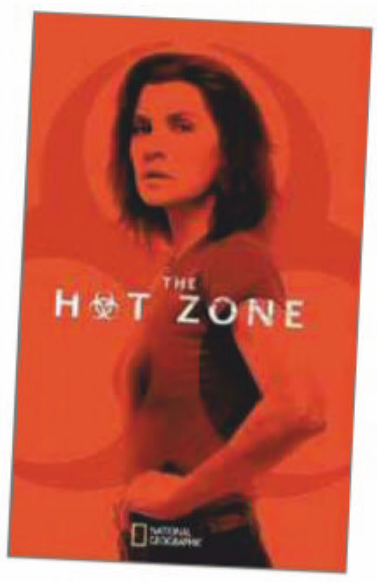
The miniseries is based on a Pulitzer Prize-winning 2015 article, 'An Unbelievable Story of Rape', which you can read online at bit.ly/unarticle483.

Watch National Geographic's Ebola drama *The Hot Zone*

From 10 September

Julianna Margulies and Noah Emmerich star in this chilling fact-based miniseries about a US outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus in 1989.

The Hot Zone got great reviews in the US and feels like classic Netflix or iPlayer fodder, as you can see from the trailer (bit.ly/hotzone483). But it's made by the National Geographic channel – and that's the only place you can watch it. Unlike its sister channel Nat Geo Wild, National Geographic isn't on Now TV.



To stream National Geographic legally in the UK, head to TVPlayer (bit.ly/tvplayer483). Subscriptions cost £6.99 per month (after one month free) and include dozens more channels that aren't yet on Now TV, such as History, Eurosport and Universal TV.

Watch Netflix's Spanish thriller *Elite*

From 6 September

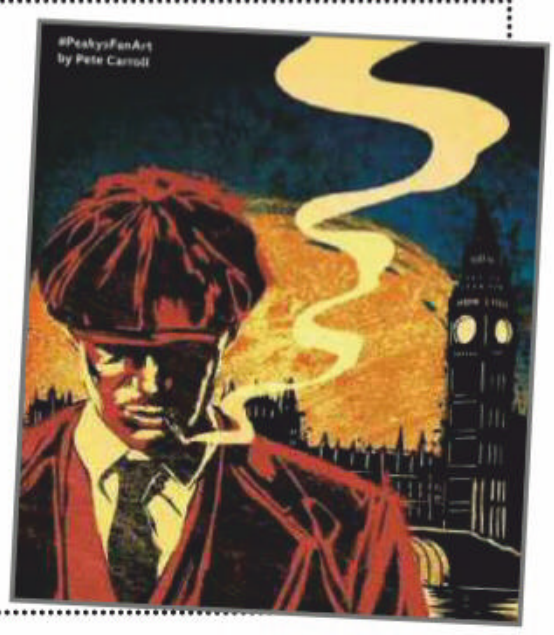
Need an adrenaline-TV fix while Netflix takes a break from comic book adaptations? This Spanish teen thriller is just the ticket. It follows three working-class kids sent to a posh private school after their own school is destroyed in an earthquake. Class war leads to murder – but who is the killer? Treat yourself to both seasons of this binge-worthy gem at bit.ly/elite483, where you can watch the latest trailer for free.

In case you missed it...

The latest book adaptation by Andrew Davies (*Pride and Prejudice*, *House of Cards*, *Les Misérables*, *Bridget Jones* and lots more) is ITV's eight-part drama *Sanditon*, from Jane Austen's unfinished final novel. Episodes arrive weekly at ITV Hub (www.itv.com) and the official trailer is at bit.ly/sanditon483.

***Peaky Blinders* is back for a fifth series, as you'll know from the brilliant fan-art billboards (see right), all winners of a BBC competition (bit.ly/peakyart483). Stream the four previous series –plus online exclusives – on the iPlayer at bit.ly/peaky483.**

***The Great British Bake Off* has returned, too, of course, and is streaming weekly via All 4. You can watch all the BBC-era shows (series 1-7) on Netflix at bit.ly/bbcbake483, and revisit the last two series on All 4 at bit.ly/gbbo483.**



Group Test

We test and compare the latest products

Chromebooks under £400

These budget Chromebooks are perfectly configured for web browsing with none of the hassle that comes with Windows

Chromebooks are quick to boot, easy to use and fast to fix if anything goes wrong. Although the original concept was a cheap laptop you could use to browse websites and check your email, there are now models that cost nearer to £2,000 than £200.

For the purpose of this Group Test, we've stuck to the Chromebook basics, exploring four models that cost less than £400. These laptops are intended for web-savvy people like you, who are happy to carry out the vast majority of their computing online, without downloading software.

HOW WE TESTED

Chromebooks can't run our standard suite of performance tests so, instead, we ran a combination of web-based tests all at the same time – a multi-tasking megatest that pushed the processing power of these Chromebooks to their limits.

We also ran our standard battery test, where we play a looping video from a full charge and record how long it takes for the Chromebook to shut down; and tested the screens with our colorimeter.

Lenovo Chromebook 500e (1st Gen) | £349.98 | Buy from Amazon: bit.ly/leno483

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

VERDICT ★★★★★

This is a lovable and rugged convertible Chromebook that's been designed for the classroom but would be just as useful in your home and on the move. It's neither the fastest or the longest lasting in our tests, but we love the fact that it's tough enough to survive a few knocks. It's versatile, too – you can use a stylus on its touchscreen and it can contort into whatever shape you need at the time, from a tablet to a laptop.

Rugged, convertible Chromebooks are already a popular option for many schools, but Lenovo's 11.6in Chromebook 500e takes the design a step further, offering a near-perfect balance between versatility, durability and all-round practicality. With a desktop footprint of 290 x 240mm and thickness of just over 20mm, it fits easily into a small bag and skips effortlessly between clamshell, tablet and tent configurations.

It's about as rugged as they come. From the rubber bumpers and spill-proof keyboard to the Gorilla Glass 3 screen, this machine feels like it's built for the battlefield. It's versatile, too, with a responsive touchscreen that also works with a supplied stylus, complete with pressure sensitivity, for taking notes and sketching ideas. The keyboard is great to type on and the trackpad works well, and – the icing on the cake – it's affordable, too.

The cost-cutting has affected the screen because although a low resolution of 1,366 x 768 pixels is standard for screens this small, we measured only 64% of the SRGB standard on our colorimeter. It's also disappointingly dull, peaking at just 200cd/m² (candles per square metre). There's a new version coming out with a 250cd/m² screen but we couldn't get a test sample in time.

The performance of the e500 doesn't feel slow in general use and it came second of the four Chromebooks in this group for our multitasking test. This does, however, impact the battery life, which ranked third, lasting just under eight hours – but that's still enough for a day's work when you don't have access to a plug socket.

WebUser GOLD AWARD

HP Chromebook 15 | £399.99 |

Buy from Amazon: bit.ly/hp483

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

WebUser SILVER AWARD

HP's latest Chromebook is both affordable and stylish. Our review unit came in a fetching two-tone ink-blue and white finish, with a tough anodised aluminium chassis and what HP calls a "ceramic-feel" plastic lid. It's just 18mm thick when closed and weighs 1.8kg.

Its standout feature is the (non-touch) 15.6in IPS screen. The tiny side bezels make it look huge, and the 1,920 x 1,080 pixels resolution is satisfyingly sharp. While it only recreates 63.3% of the SRGB colour standard, that's only just behind the Gold Award-winning Lenovo, with a top brightness of 237cd/m².

Its full-sized keyboard, complete with numeric pad, and large 12cm-wide touchpad both perform well, and there are two USB Type-C and two standard USB 3 ports. It was the best performer in our multi-tasking tests but this took its toll on the battery, which lasted only 6 hours and 21 minutes.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The raw speed of this larger laptop makes it the Group Test's top performer but its superior components impact the battery life. All cheaper Chromebooks suffer from sub-par screens, but this model's is the best of this bunch.

Acer Chromebook 11 C732 | £250.98 |

Buy from eBuyer: bit.ly/acer11483

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

WebUser BRONZE AWARD

Like the Lenovo Gold Award-winner, this Acer model has a rugged design – a matt-black chassis with rubber edging that should help it survive a short drop.

Internally, it's less impressive, with a Celeron N3350 processor (first seen in 2016) and a Wi-Fi adapter that lost signal sooner than the other Chromebooks tested here. The weak TN (Twisted nematic) screen is pleasantly bright, managing 293cd/m² in our tests, but only recreated a feeble 32.4% of SRGB colours. However, you get a respectable 4GB of memory, a keyboard and touchpad that are better than they look, two USB Type-C ports you can use for charging or sending the display to a better monitor, and two standard USB 3 ports. Its performance managed to pip the other Acer model in this group, and it demonstrated a great battery life of 11 hours and 38 minutes in our run-down test.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

This is the cheapest Chromebook in this Group Test, and its screen and performance reflect this. As such, it's best reserved for browsing and email, but its battery will last all day, thanks to the minimal demands of its internal hardware.

Acer Chromebook 14 CB514-1HT | £369.99 |

Buy from Acer: bit.ly/acer14483

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

The aluminium keyboard surround and lid of this stylish-looking Chromebook gave a favourable first impression, but closer inspection revealed some flimsiness and rough edges. It's not terrible – just don't expect it to feel like a Macbook Air as much as it looks like one.

The 14in IPS screen has a credible brightness of 280cd/m², but only produces 61% of the SRGB colour palette. However, the keyboard and touchpad are responsive, and it has two USB Type-C ports alongside two standard USB 3 ports.

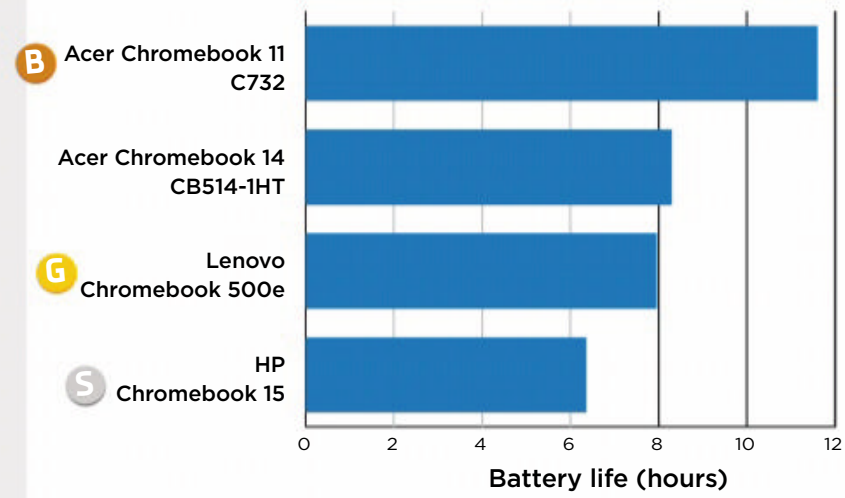
Performance was this model's greatest disappointment. It has 4GB of memory but felt slow even as we were using it. Our benchmark results bore this out, where it languished even below the other, cheaper Acer Chromebook we tested. The battery life makes up for this a little, but it still only came second in our tests behind our Bronze Award-winner.

VERDICT ★★★☆☆

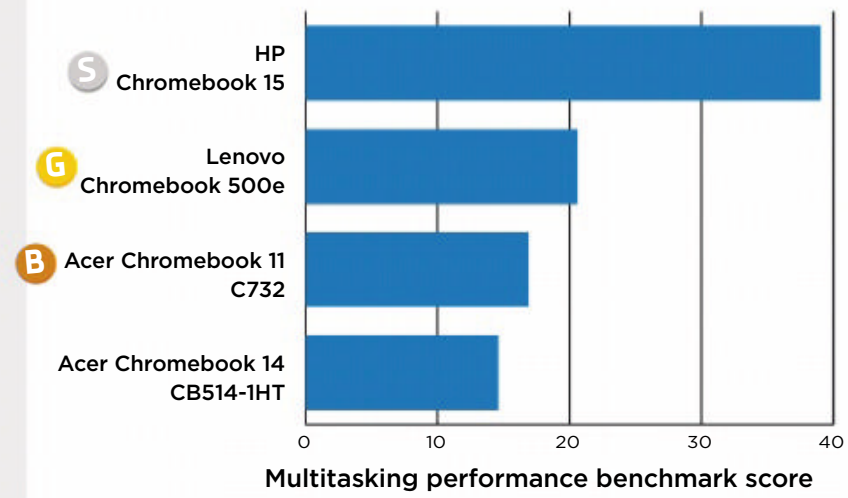
This Chromebook may look expensive but its flash exterior has led to compromises on internal components. The screen is better than the smaller Acer's – and it's a touchscreen – but the extra £100 you pay isn't worth the money.

TEST-RESULTS CHARTS

Battery life



Multitasking performance



Group Test Chromebooks under £400

	Lenovo Chromebook 500e	HP Chromebook 15	Acer Chromebook 11 C732	Acer Chromebook 14 CB514-1H
WEBSITE	www.lenovo.com	www.hp.com	www.acer.com	www.acer.com
PRICE	£349.98	£399.99	£250.98	£369.99
BUY FROM	Amazon: bit.ly/leno483	Amazon: bit.ly/hp483	eBuyer: bit.ly/acer11483	Acer: bit.ly/acer14483
PROCESSOR	Intel Celeron N3450	Intel Pentium 4415U	Intel Celeron N3350	Intel Celeron N3350
MEMORY	4GB	4GB	4GB	4GB
DISPLAY SIZE	11.6in (gloss finish)	15in (gloss finish)	11.6in (matte finish)	14in (gloss finish)
RESOLUTION	1,366 x 768 pixels	1,920 x 1,080 pixels	1,366 x 768 pixels	1,920 x 1,080 pixels
TOUCHSCREEN	Capacitive	✗	✗	Capacitive
GRAPHICS	Intel UHD Graphics 500	Intel UHD Graphics 610	Intel UHD Graphics 500	Intel UHD Graphics 500
VIDEO OUT	USB-C	USB-C	USB-C	USB-C
STORAGE	32GB eMMC	32GB eMMC	32GB eMMC	32GB eMMC
MEMORY-CARD READER	microSD	microSD	microSD	microSD
WIRELESS NETWORK	802.11ac	802.11ac	802.11ac	802.11ac
PORTS	2 x USB Type-C, 2 x USB 3, 3.5mm audio	2 x USB Type-C, 2 x USB 3, 3.5mm audio	2 x USB Type-C, 2 x USB 3, 3.5mm audio	2 x USB Type-C, 2 x USB 3, 3.5mm audio
WEBCAM	✓	✓	✓	✓
STYLUS	✓	✗	✗	✗
DIMENSIONS	290 x 204 x 20.4mm	359 x 246 x 18mm	302 x 209 x 21.3mm	323 x 232 x 17mm
WEIGHT	1.31kg	1.81kg	1.35kg	1.5kg
WARRANTY	1-year collect-and-return	1-year return-to-base	1-year collect-and-return	1-year return-to-base

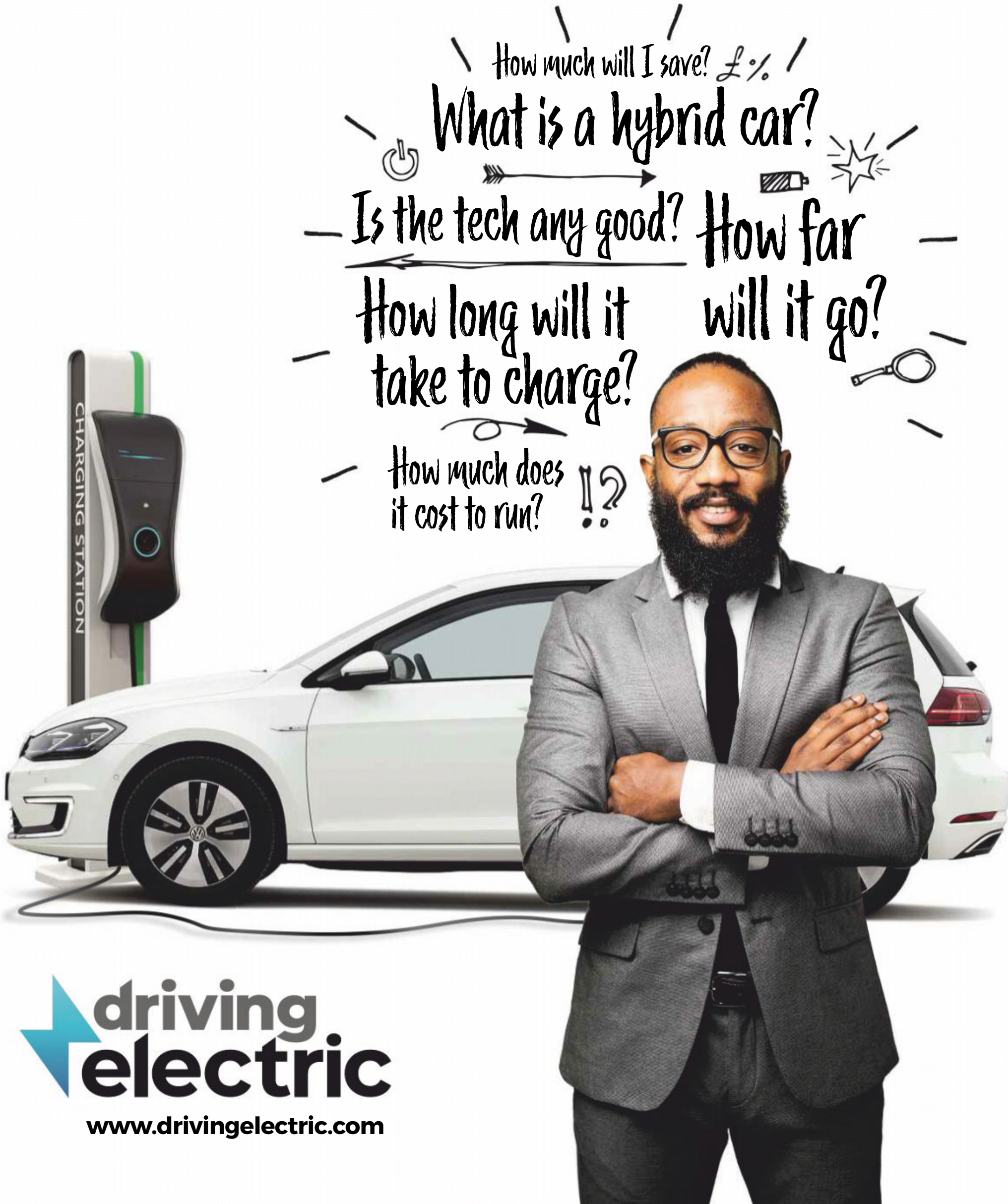
OUR VERDICT

We gave our Gold Award to the Lenovo Chromebook 500e. This multifunction device can be used as a laptop, a tablet or a tent-shaped touchscreen, and also comes with a stylus, all the while being robust enough to stand-up to a classroom environment, which makes it more than sturdy enough for most homes.

For something more sophisticated, the HP Chromebook 15 is just the ticket. Its superior hardware and design make it feel more akin to a fully fledged laptop, and while compromises have been made to keep the costs down, it's the closest you'll get to a flagship Chromebook in the under-£400 price bracket.

Our Bronze Award goes to the most affordable Chromebook in this test, the £250 Acer Chromebook 11 C732. It's a bit on the slow side and the screen isn't great, but it's a bargain for the price, especially considering its rivals cost at least £100 more.

All you need to know about electric cars...



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HARDWARE, SOFTWARE & SERVICES

CHROMEBOOK

Lenovo Chromebook 500e

£349.98 from bit.ly/leno483
Tested: Issue 483

This versatile and rugged convertible Chromebook has been designed for the classroom but would be just as useful at home and on the move. It's tough enough to survive a few knocks and you can use a stylus on its touchscreen.

KEY SPECS

Intel Celeron N3450 processor ■ 32GB storage ■ 4GB memory ■ 11.6in touchscreen ■ 1,366 x 768 pixels resolution ■ Intel UHD Graphics 500 card ■ 2 x USB-C, 2 x USB 3 ports ■ 290 x 204 x 20.4mm ■ 1.31kg ■ 1-year collect-and-return

SECURITY CAMERA

Google Nest Cam IQ Outdoor

£279 from bit.ly/nest481
Tested: Issue 481

This is the best-quality external security camera we've tested, capable of capturing clear, sharp video footage. It takes a bit of setting up and is expensive, but it's worth paying for if you're serious about your home security.

KEY SPECS

Outdoor camera ■ 1080p video resolution ■ 130-degree lens ■ Motion and audio detection ■ Night vision ■ 802.11ac Wi-Fi ■ 128 x 93 x 93mm ■ Three hours of free cloud storage ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

INKJET PRINTER

Canon Pixma TS6250

£114.36 from bit.ly/cango479
Tested: Issue 479

This multifunction printer looks smart and is easy to use, whether you're printing from a PC, mobile device or its own touchscreen. With great results and acceptable running costs, it's easy to recommend.

KEY SPECS

4,800 x 1,200dpi print resolution ■ 2,400 x 1,200dpi scan resolution ■ 200-sheet A4 paper capacity ■ Double-sided printing ■ 7.5in colour touchscreen ■ 802.11n Wi-Fi ■ 372 x 315 x 139mm ■ 6.2kg ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

MINI PC

ASRock DeskMini 310

£668.70 from bit.ly/asro477
Tested: Issue 477

The performance of this diminutive PC comes remarkably close to a full-size system, once you've paid for and installed its components. It's compact, quiet and runs Windows well.

KEY SPECS

Intel Core i5-8400 processor ■ 250GB SSD ■ 16GB memory ■ Intel UHD Graphics 630 card ■ 1 x USB Type-C, 2 x USB 3.1, 1 x USB 2 ports ■ 802.11ac Wi-Fi, Gigabit Ethernet ■ 158 x 155 x 80mm ■ 1.87kg ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

GRAPHICS CARD

Asus ROG Strix RX 570 OC

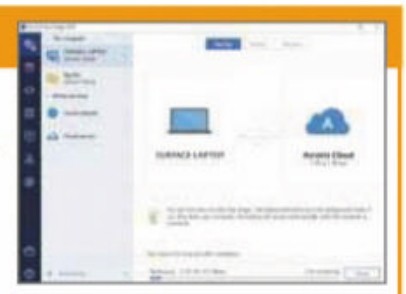
£189.99 from bit.ly/asusbox475
Tested: Issue 475

Asus's twin-fan graphics card gets the balance perfectly right. It comfortably plays games that are designed to push a graphics-processing unit to the limit, and for the price it kicks cards with similar specifications right out of the game.

KEY SPECS

AMD Radeon RX 570 graphics processor ■ 2,048 GPU cores ■ 1,300MHz clock speed ■ 4GB memory ■ 1 x DisplayPort, 2 x DVI, 1 x HDMI outputs ■ 200W power ■ 240mm ■ Two-year repair-and-replace warranty

BACKUP SOFTWARE



Acronis True Image 2019

£35 from bit.ly/acro473
Tested: Issue 473

Acronis True Image is a versatile backup tool that does everything from cloud storage to disaster recovery. It's not cheap compared with rival software, but it's flexible and simple to control, and should cover all your backup 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

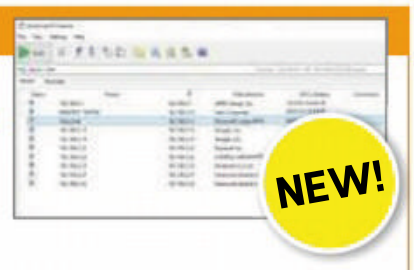
All prices correct at time of review

Gold Award winners

The best from our software tests

WI-FI MONITOR

Advanced IP Scanner



Free from
www.advanced-ip-scanner.com
Tested: Issue 482
This easy-to-use tool identifies all the devices connected to your Wi-Fi network. Its remote access is exceptional and there's a portable version available, too.

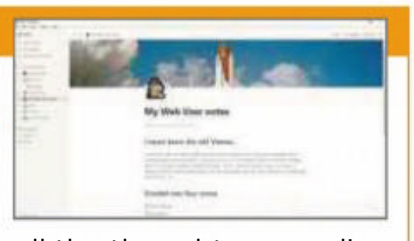
BACKUP SOFTWARE

EaseUS Todo Backup Free

Free from bit.ly/ease481
Tested: Issue 481
The free version of EaseUS Todo Backup is more than enough to keep your PC backed up for years to come. It's missing a few tools by nothing that hampers its usefulness.

NOTE-TAKING TOOL

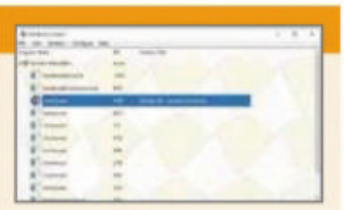
Notion



Free from www.notion.so
Tested: Issue 480
Notion lets you keep and organise all the thoughts cascading through your mind, no matter what device you're using. It has every feature you'll ever need, and it's free for personal use.

SANDBOX SOFTWARE

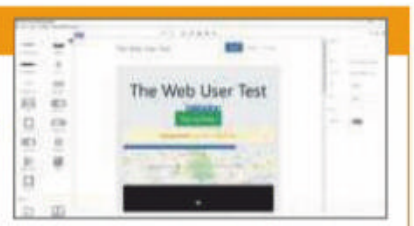
Sandboxie



Free from www.sandboxie.com
Tested: Issue 479
If you can get past the dated interface and upgrade nags, Sandboxie is the most thorough sandboxing tool we've seen for running programs in a fenced-off environment.

WEB-DESIGN TOOL

Basic WebPage Builder



Free from bit.ly/bwpb478
Tested: Issue 478
Basic WebPage Builder is ideal for budding but inexperienced web designers. Its impressive range of elements will fulfil most basic needs, with no HTML knowledge required.

PDF EDITOR

Apowersoft Online PDF Editor

Free from bit.ly/apow477
Tested: Issue 477
We were gobsmacked by how much PDF content we were able to edit using this excellent free full-featured tool.

WebUser

BACK ISSUES DISC 2018

Our **2018 Back Issues Disc** containing all 26 issues from last year is now on sale from Amazon

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

You can still buy our 2014-2017 Back Issues Discs, search for 'webuser disc' on Amazon

Best Free Software

PHOTO VIEWER

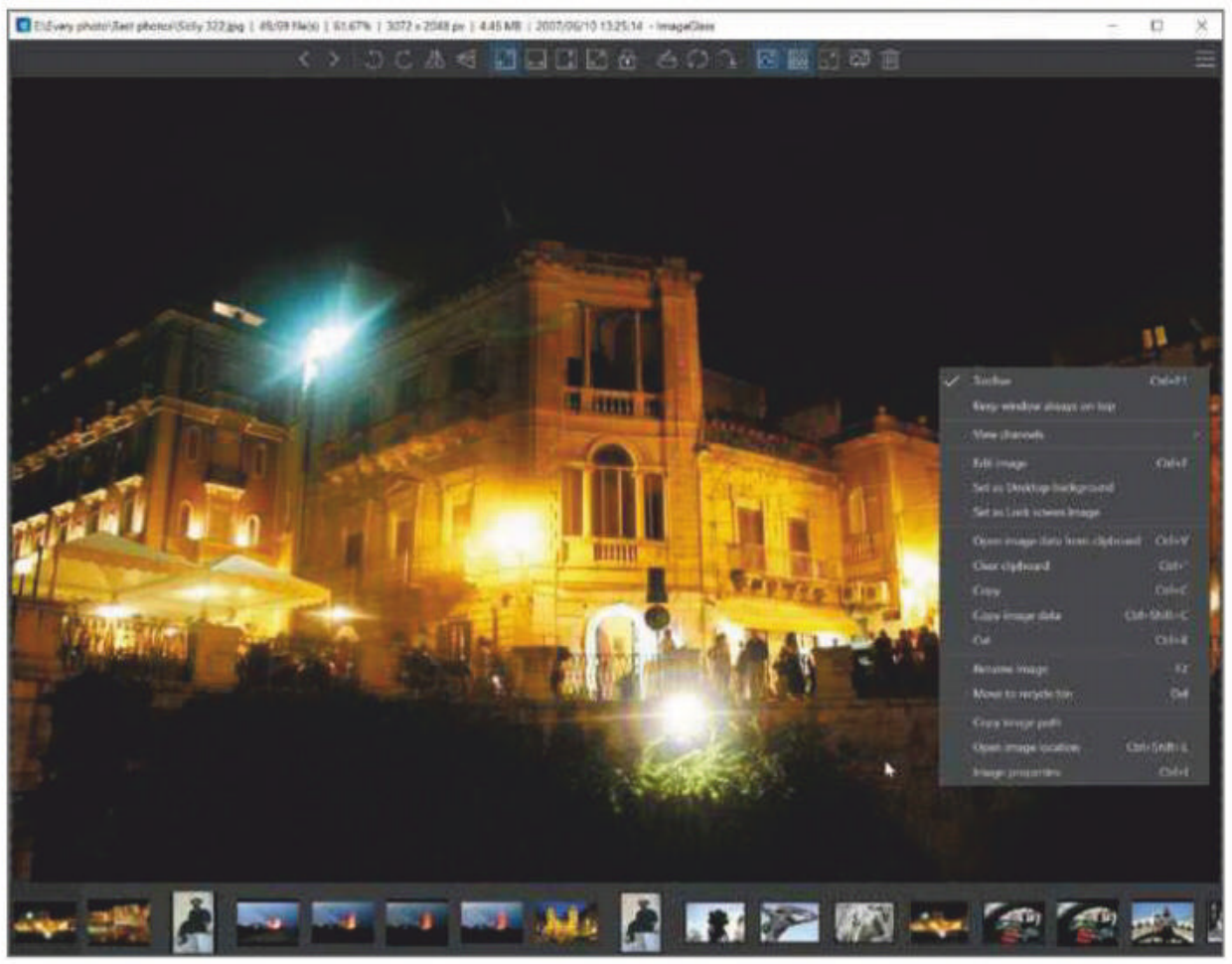
ImageGlass 7

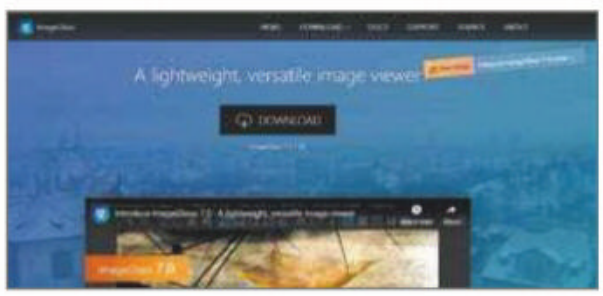
imageglass.org

Min requirements: Windows 7/8+/10
File size: 13.8MB

In Windows 10, Microsoft replaced its popular Photo Viewer with a better-looking Photos app, but we've found that this is slower and doesn't handle single images as well. There are plenty of third-party viewers you can use instead, such as IrfanView, Faststone Image Viewer and the just-updated ImageGlass. This open-source program supports 72 different image formats, including RAW, PSD (Photoshop's native format), JFIF and HEIC.

While the focus of ImageGlass is on presenting images, a toolbar at the top of the screen gives you access to a number of useful tools that you can use to quickly move through different images in the same folder, rotate pictures, flip them (horizontally or vertically), zoom to a preset, show a slideshow or delete the image.





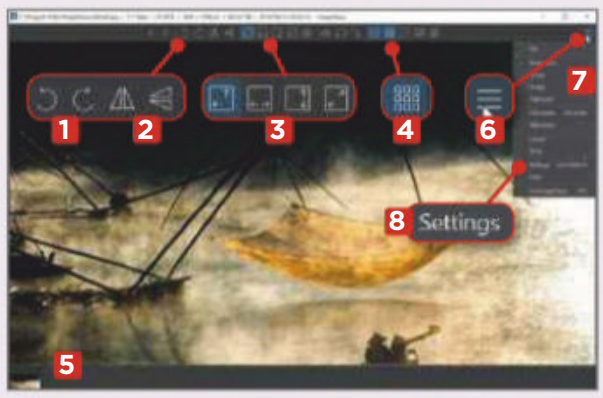
The three-line 'hamburger' button in the top-right corner opens the program menu where you can access additional tools – including the colour picker (eye-dropper) and clipboard – and configure the software to suit your needs. ImageGlass doesn't offer any tools for editing your photos, but you can link your favourite image editor to it in the software's settings, so it opens automatically whenever you need to make any tweaks to a picture.

The latest version of ImageGlass introduces a wealth of new features including the ability to view image files from a website, load photos in a new window or in the top-left or centre positions, and customise zoom levels. It can also reload the image list and display colour channels (Red, Green, Blue, Black and Alpha) separately.

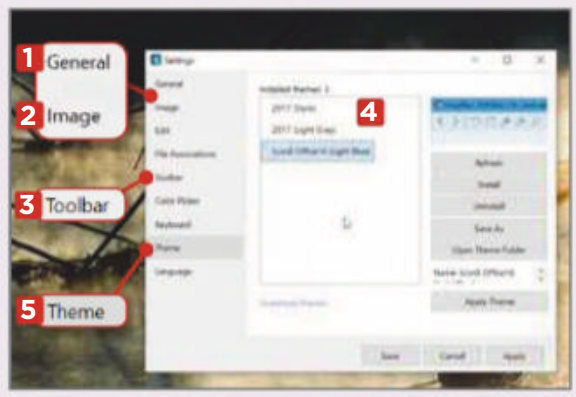
There are installer and portable versions of ImageGlass available.

MINI WORKSHOP | View your photos in ImageGlass 7

1 When you first launch ImageGlass, it lets you choose between Dark and Light Grey themes (you can download and install additional themes later), and Standard and Designer layouts. You can also opt to make ImageGlass your default viewer. When done, it will open with a supplied image 1 and the toolbar at the top. 2



2 The toolbar is where you can rotate the image, 1 flip it, 2 pick a zoom, 3 and show thumbnails, 4 which appear at the bottom. 5 The three-line 'hamburger' button 6 opens the menu, 7 and you can also right-click the main image to access another menu with different options. Select Settings 8 to configure the software.



3 You can manage startup behaviour under General, 1 and adjust loading under Image. 2 The Toolbar option 3 lets you choose which buttons appear in the toolbar, and where it sits in the interface. You can download new themes from the website, and install them 4 in the Theme section. 5

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

PAINTING TOOL

Artweaver Free 7

www.artweaver.de/en

Min requirements: Windows 7/8+/10 **File size:** 14.6MB

Artweaver Free can be used to create works of art from scratch, or for editing and improving photos.The latest version offers the usual tools, including magic wand and clone stamp, with improved brush handling and adjustments. Preset handling has been simplified by combining the options in one media palette, and the program now supports Windows Ink Pen and faster updating. Be sure to decline the bundled junk during installation, and look out for a workshop on Artweaver in our next issue.

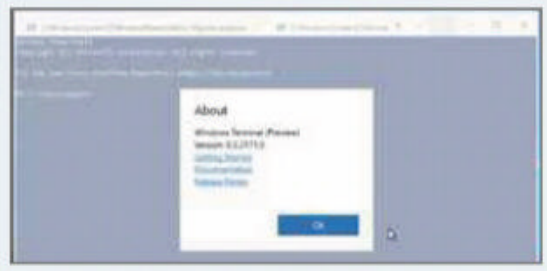
New Windows 10 App

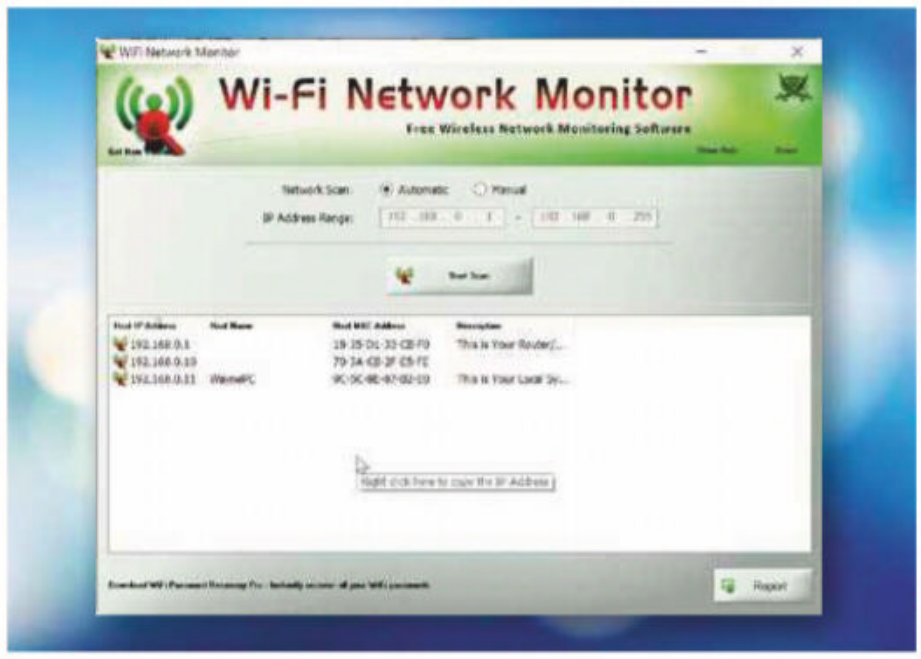
Windows Terminal (Preview)

bit.ly/term483

File size: 17.56MB

Windows Terminal is used with command-line tools and shells such as Command Prompt, PowerShell and WSL (Windows Subsystem for Linux). It's currently a preview build, but v0.3 gains an updated interface with a draggable title bar, improved drop-down button layout, custom tab title, and additional background options. If you can't get it from the Microsoft Store, try the GitHub page at bit.ly/termgh483. You need to be running the May 2019 Update.





NETWORK MONITOR

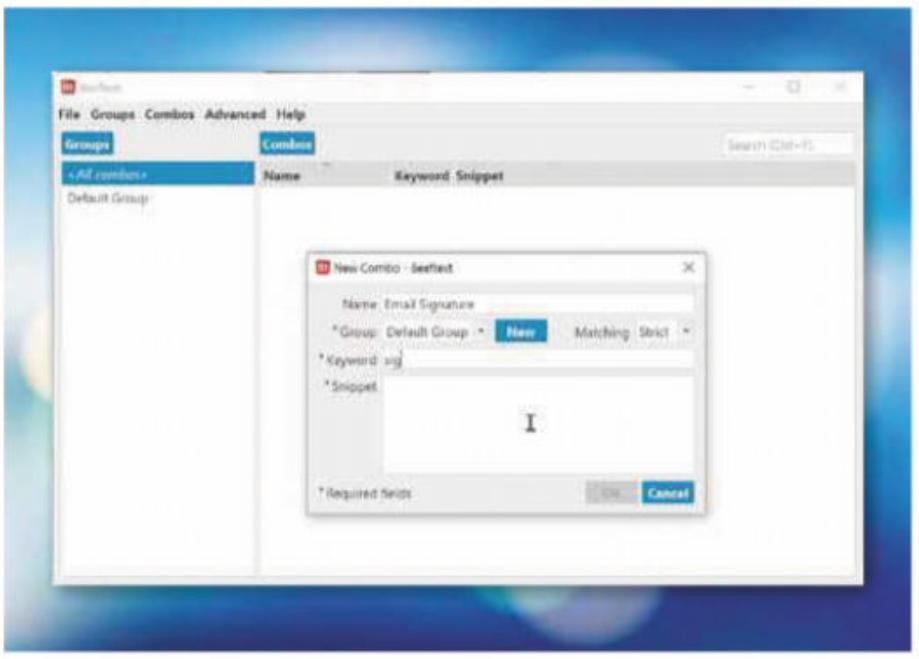
Wi-Fi Network Monitor 7

bit.ly/wifinm483

Min requirements: Windows 7/8+/10 **File size:** 3.5MB

Wi-Fi Network Monitor remotely scans your wireless network to reveal all the devices connected to it – useful for identifying neighbours who might be piggybacking on your connection, for example. It's very easy to use, and will automatically scan your system, although there's a handy manual mode you can use if you prefer.

This is a big update that improves the interface to make it easier to use and adds an HTML report.



TEXT TOOL

BeefText 4

beeftext.org

Min requirements: Windows 7/8+/10 **File size:** 7.5MB

This open-source text-substitution tool is particularly useful if you regularly find yourself having to type the same long piece of text, such as a custom email signature. BeefText can save you time and effort – just type your text into the program, then assign a 'combo' (a text shortcut) to it.

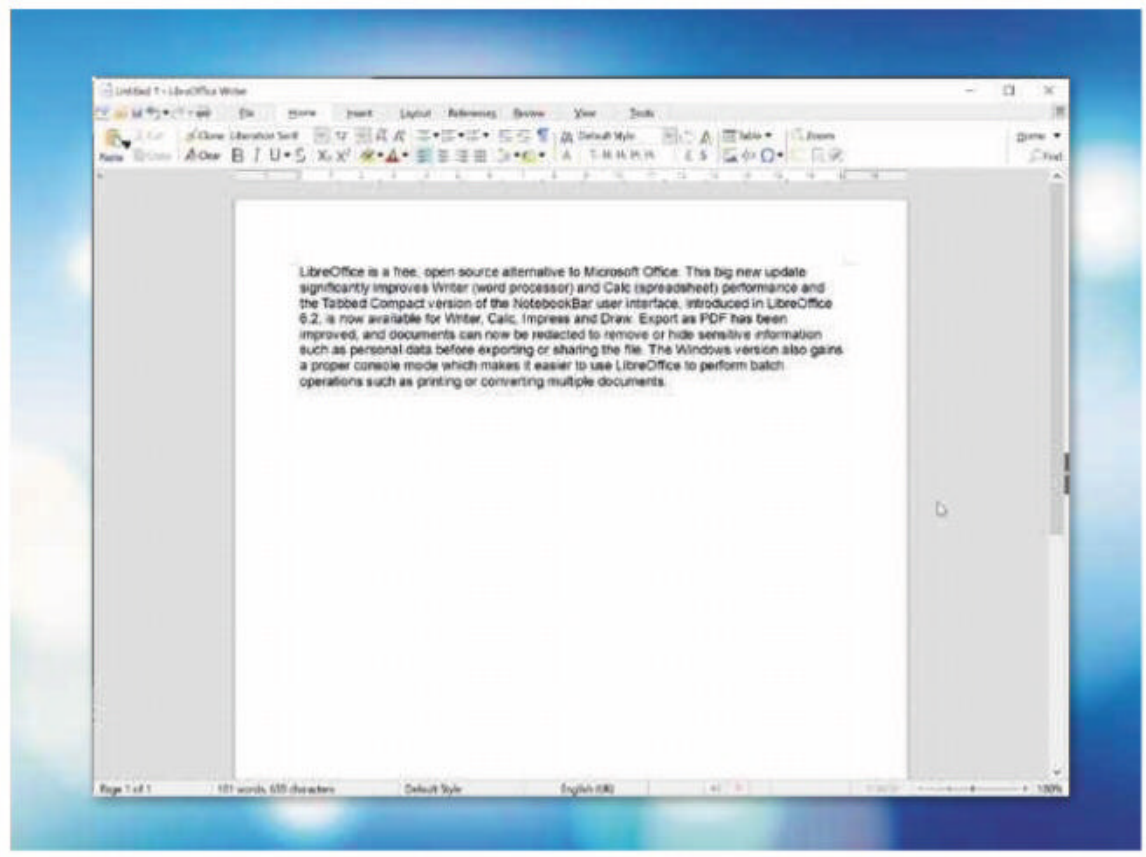
This updated version of BeefText lets you manually back up and restore the combo list and fixes a bug where the list could potentially be erased on reboot.

OFFICE SUITE

LibreOffice 6.3

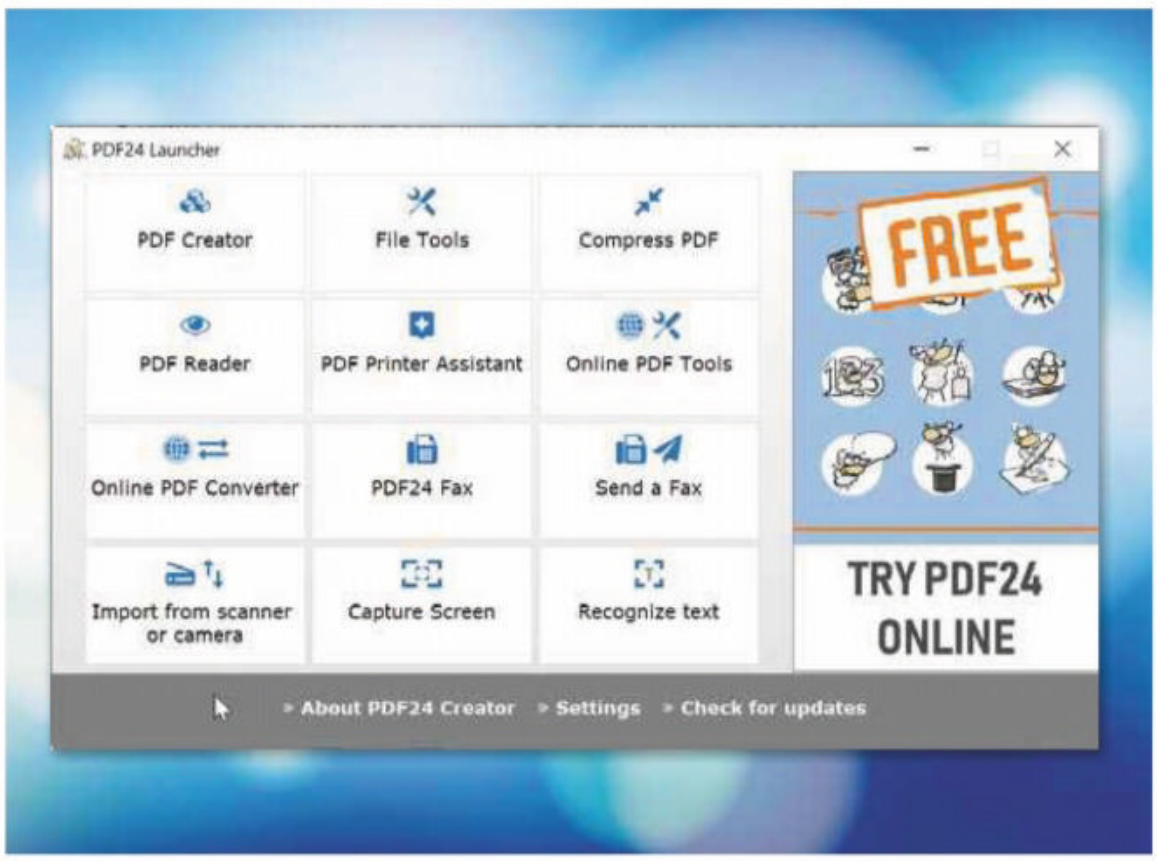
www.libreoffice.org

Min requirements: Windows 7/8+/10, macOS or Linux **File size:** 286MB



This major update to the open-source office suite significantly improves Writer (word processor) and Calc (spreadsheet) performance. Moreover, the Tabbed Compact version of the NotebookBar user interface, introduced in LibreOffice 6.2, is now available for Writer, Calc, Impress and Draw. The 'Export as PDF' option has been improved, and documents can now be redacted to remove or hide sensitive information – such as personal data – before exporting or sharing the file.

The Windows version of LibreOffice also gains a proper console mode, which makes it easier to perform batch operations such as printing or converting multiple documents.



PDF TOOLKIT

PDF24 Creator 9

en.pdf24.org

Min requirements: Windows 7/8+/10

File size: 24.7MB

PDF24 Creator is a suite of free tools that provides everything you need to easily create, split and merge PDFs, as well as rotate and reorder pages, and add identifying watermarks and stamps. This new release adds a number of new features, such as a rotation setting for paper and overlay, and a 'merge with zipper' option that can merge documents together page by page (all the page 1s of each document, followed by all the page 2s and so on).

The updated program can also reverse the page order of a PDF document, and prompts you for a save name and location during automatic saves.

PHOTO VIEWER

Photo Viewer for Win 10

photoviewerforwin10.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8+/10

File size: 1.3MB

ImageGlass (see page 28) is an excellent image viewer, but Photo Viewer for Win 10 is a stylish alternative that puts the focus squarely on displaying your images with no menus or toolbars to get in the way. Right-clicking an open image will display a context menu from which you can toggle the full-screen mode on or off, rotate the image left or right, open the next or previous image, zoom in or out, start a slideshow and change the background colour. Each command has a keyboard shortcut assigned to it.

Despite its name, Photo Viewer for Win 10 also runs on Windows 7 and up.

GAME

Chronodog – Earth Defender

bit.ly/cdog483

Min requirements: Windows 7/8+/10 or macOS **File size:** 35.9MB

Poor Chronodog! It's his first day on the job and he has just one second to prevent a huge meteor from crashing into Earth. Pressing the big red button will slow down time and give you just long enough to work out which other controls you need to use to prevent the catastrophe. More of the console is revealed as you progress.

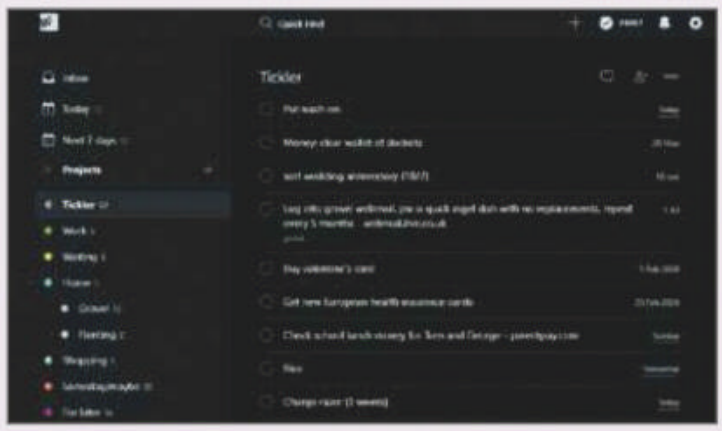
✓ Install this program...

Todoist

todoist.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10 or macOS
File size: 26.4MB

Whether you currently make lists on scraps of paper or have an organised system, Todoist can almost certainly improve on what you've got. This sophisticated tool can be used for creating simple lists with tick boxes, but it can also turn you into a super-human task manager if you unleash its full capabilities. Adding new tasks is very straightforward, and doesn't get in the way of actually getting the tasks done. Todoist's interface is web-based so you can access it on any computer, and there are also apps for your mobile devices, which sync immediately.



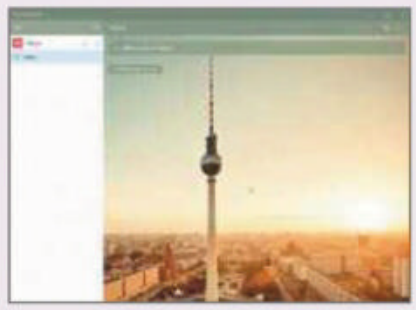
...Not this one ✗

Wunderlist

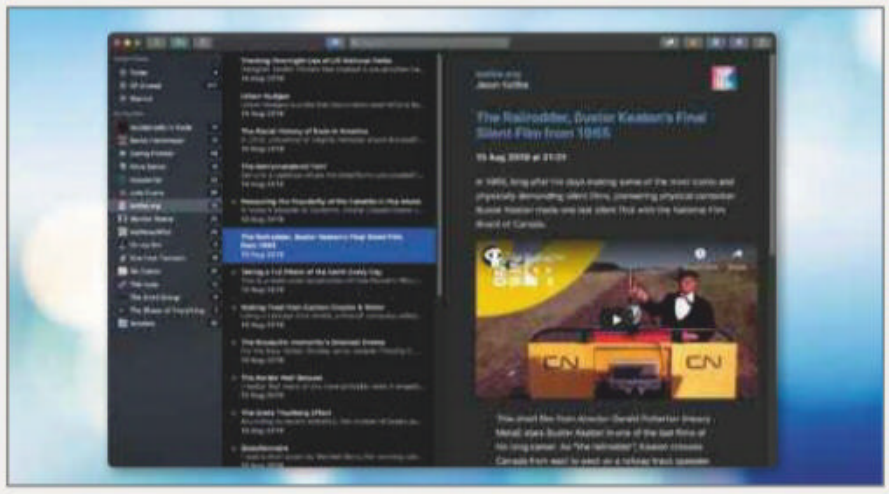
www.wunderlist.com

Min requirements: Windows 10
File size: 53MB

We loved Wunderlist, but it's now been superseded by Microsoft To-Do (bit.ly/mstd424), and is no longer being developed. You can still download the Wunderlist app from the Microsoft Store, but no new features are being added and you may have trouble syncing it with your mobile devices, which makes installing it a purely nostalgic exercise.



OTHER OPERATING SYSTEMS What's new for Linux and macOS



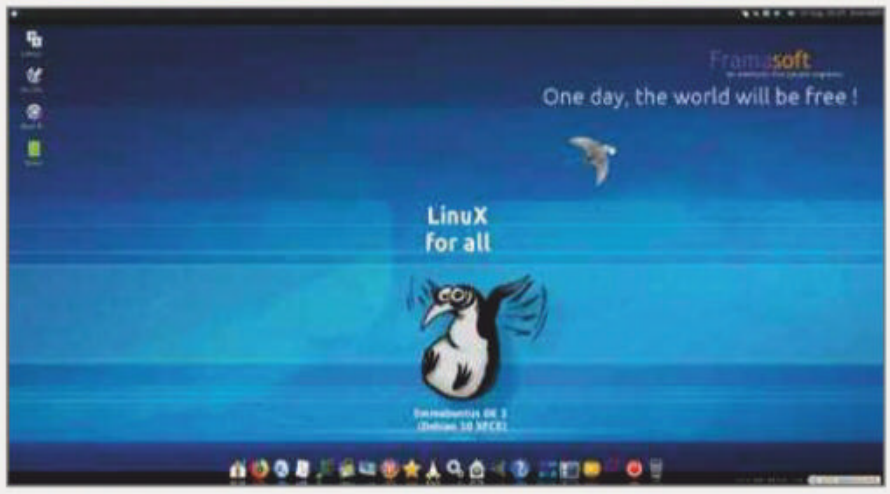
NEWS READER

NetNewsWire 5 Beta

bit.ly/nnw483

Min requirements: macOS 10.14.4 or newer
File size: 4.9MB

NetNewsWire is a free, open-source RSS reader for macOS. It's currently in public beta, but it's stable and comes with lots of powerful features, such as direct feed downloading, syncing via Feedbin, AppleScript support and keyboard shortcuts. There's a Dark Mode that makes using the program less tiring for your eyes, and a Safari extension to make it easier to add feeds. An iOS version is also being developed but it's not currently available to the public.



LINUX DISTRO

Emmabuntüs

emmabuntus.org

Min requirements: 1GB RAM, 40GB hard drive
File size: 3GB

Despite having a name that instantly triggers an association with Baby Spice Emma Bunton, Emmabuntüs is a great, albeit little-known Linux distro now based on Debian 10 Buster. The operating system is designed to run on older PCs, and the current version (at the time of writing) is Release Candidate 3 (RC3), although the full, finished version is imminent. Emmabuntüs is beginner friendly with an Xfce desktop and a macOS-style dock at the bottom.

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Best New Browser Tools

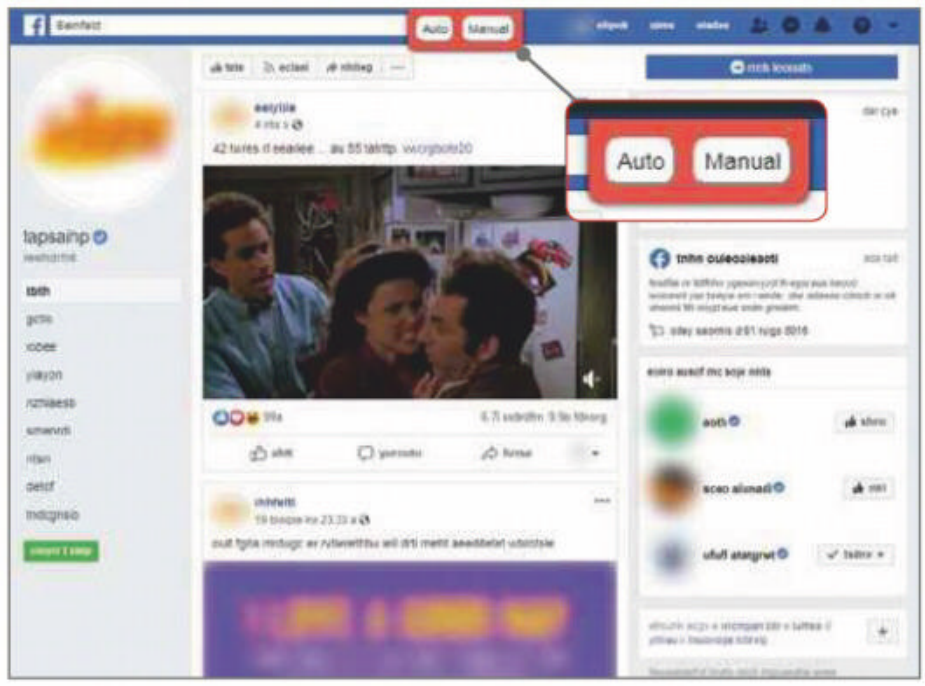
CHROME

Protect your personal data in screenshots

If you regularly take and share screenshots, you're no doubt familiar with the follow-up action: scrupulously studying every inch of your image to ensure it contains no private data before you send it on. Thankfully, that could become a thing of the past with the release of DataMask (bit.ly/mask483), a browser tool that helps you protect and hide your personal information.

Before you take your screenshot, click the extension's toolbar icon. You're offered two choices: Auto and Manual. Auto should be fine for most users, but be warned that it can be overzealous, masking even the most harmless details. Manual gives you more precision, letting you weave across the screen selecting specific images and areas of text.

The end result of using either mode is that text is scrambled into nonsense and images are blurred. Now you can share the screenshot without revealing sensitive data.



Reply to Gmail messages much faster

Reply Ninja (reply.ninja) is all about making email replies quicker than before – but probably not in the way you think. Essentially, it's a copy-and-paste tool.

Click to reply to any text-based email, making sure you click the three-dot icon to reveal the original email. As you hover your cursor over that original email, you'll notice that Reply Ninja automatically highlights lines or blocks of text. Click your mouse, and the selected text is added to your email. Do this as many times as you like.

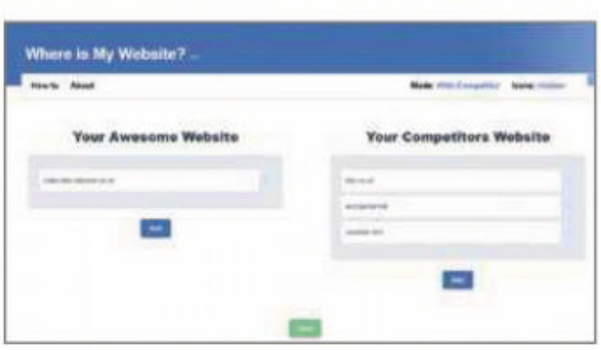
Once that's done, revisit your reply. Now, type your responses beneath the text pulled by Reply Ninja from the original email. This makes replying quick, but also clear, which means both everyday users and professionals will get a lot of use from the browser tool.

Keep an eye on your website rivals

If you run a blog or own your own website, 'Where is My Website' (bit.ly/website483) is an indispensable browser tool. No more scrolling through Google, counting the position of your site compared to your rivals – WIMW will highlight these for you as soon as you hit the Google search results.

Setup is very simple. Click the add-on's toolbar button and you're taken to a page with two boxes: in the first, add the URL of your own website or blog (and don't bother with 'https'); in the other, include all the sites that you're up against, pressing Add after each one. Click Save.

Now, when you run a search, WIMW adds an unmissable green highlight to the URL for your website, and red ones along those of your rivals, letting you see at a glance how you rank alongside competitors.



Save time reading online articles

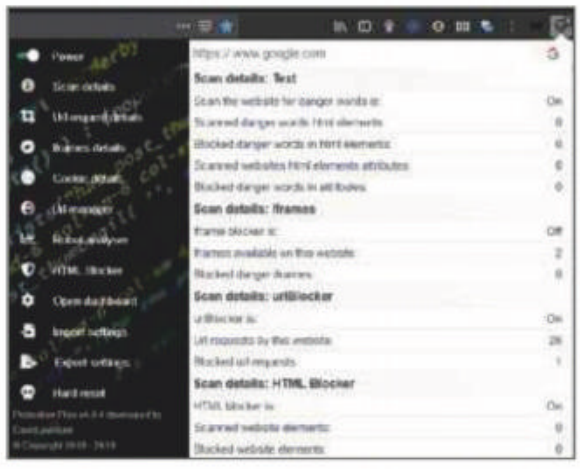
In Issue 482 (bit.ly/webuser482), we covered a clever browser tool called TLDR (bit.ly/tldr483), which neatly summarises all the relevant information on a web page. New extension Crammer (bit.ly/crammer483) is TLDR's natural partner – using AI, it cuts out even more, creating a movable analysis panel that highlights common words and keywords.

This is helpful for keeping up to date with current affairs or if you've been suckered in by a clickbait title – with one click of the Analyse button, you're free to find out if the web page in question can live up to its wild promises. Key phrases also feature badges that you can click to jump to that passage in the article.

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

FIREFOX

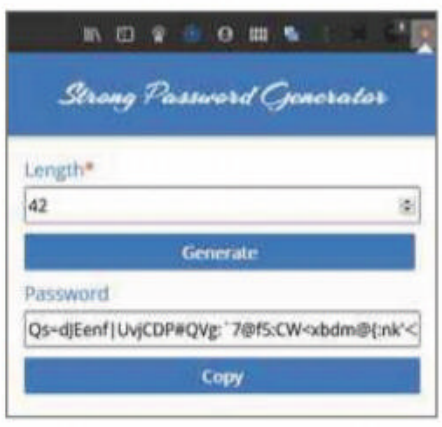
Protect Firefox from hidden online threats



Without the correct tools, even browsing apparently harmless websites can be risky. *Web User* has covered many protective web extensions, but few cover all the bases. The updated extension Protection (bit.ly/protect483) does just that. Described as a "powerful, fast and light website securer", it's packed with handy settings that let you block all sorts of internet nasties, such as URL requests and malicious scripts, and delete cookies in one click. Open the extension to get a detailed analysis of the site you're visiting.

Protection offers a smart way to manage your URL white- and blacklists, too: you can choose to add a standard address, and opt to block or allow sites that include any other part of the web address string, such as 'UTM_source' and other tracking information.

Create the strongest passwords possible



It's getting to the point where websites demand that your password be at least 50 characters long, and feature a combination of upper- and lower-case letters, numbers, symbols, and your mother's second pet's last name translated into Chinese. It's a security measure that stops hackers brute-forcing their way into your accounts, but it's a massive headache for you.

Strong Password Generator (bit.ly/password483) saves you time and frustration by creating near-uncrackable passwords in seconds. First select your preferred character length, up to 100. Next, click Generate. A new password, conforming to the requirements, appears in the text box, for you to copy to the website (and your own records). It looks like pure gibberish: no known words, just a collection of upper- and lower-case letters, punctuation marks, marks and random symbols.

Good luck guessing that, hackers!

Watch what you want on YouTube

Whether you're PewDiePie or Joe Schmo nobody, if you're a YouTuber, you rely on advertising bucks to make ends meet. Unfortunately, ad blockers such as uBlock Origin stop every ad in their path, and this indiscriminate blocking hurts the smallest channels most of all.

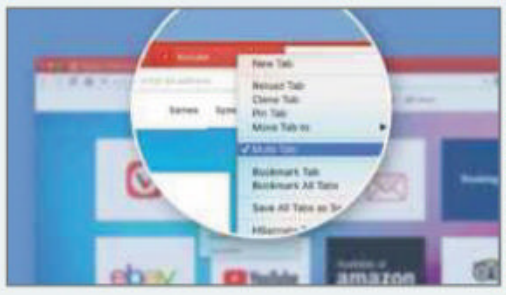
YouTube Channel Whitelist (bit.ly/whitelist483) has the power to override uBlock Origin's default mode, letting your add specific channels to a whitelist that allows adverts to play. Open the extension's main menu and grant the tool its required permission. Now, import and protect your YouTube subscription list. You can also search for your favourite channels and add them manually.

Even if you don't use uBlock Origin, the add-on offers the handy ability to automatically mute adverts and force-skip unskippable ads.

OTHER BROWSERS

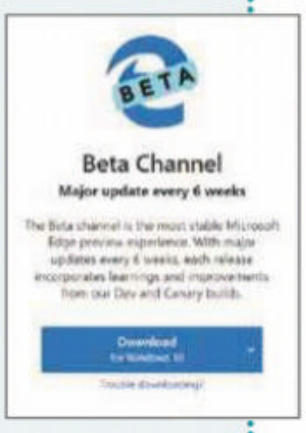
Try Vivaldi's latest tools

The biggest change in Vivaldi's latest update sees a much-needed and long-awaited addition – finally, you can right-click a tab and choose to mute it, even if it's currently silent. The status bar has also been upgraded. It now keeps you informed about the browser's processes on web pages with long load times. And while every other browser wants to kill off Flash Player, Vivaldi continues to offer updates to its plugin. Less exciting are the tweaks to accessing user profiles, while macOS users are promised "improved stability for a smoother ride".



Test the beta version of Edge

Hooray - Edge Chromium Beta is now available to test. For several months, Microsoft has teased the release of the new Edge with its Dev and Canary channels. However, these test beds are typically too unstable for the average user – with nightly and weekly updates, there's always that risk that it'll crash during use, or worse. The Edge Beta version, out for Windows 7, 8, 8.1 and 10, as well as macOS, receives updates every six weeks. This means it should suffer fewer bugs, and offers the most stable version of the Chromium-based browser yet.



Best Free Apps

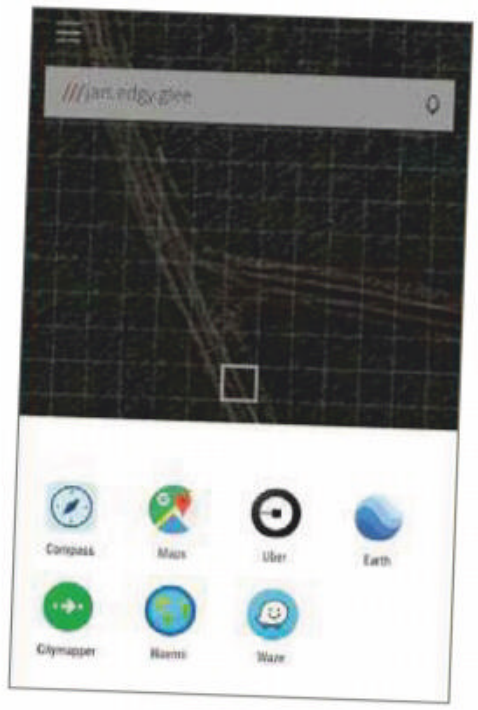
App of the Fortnight

NAVIGATION

What3words

UPDATED

bit.ly/what3droid483
bit.ly/what3ios483
4.0.3 10



This issue's App of the Fortnight is one to file directly under "why hasn't anyone thought of this before?". If you've ever struggled to explain exactly where to meet someone, ended up being taken to the wrong location by a taxi driver or had problems finding where you parked your car, you'll know that the standard address system leaves a lot to be desired. Tents at festivals don't have postcodes, for example, and it's hard to be precise when describing a specific point on a hiking route or when directing someone to the correct entrance of a large building.

Now, though, thanks to What3words, you'll be able to pinpoint anything, anywhere on the planet, accurately to within a couple of metres. Devised by British developer Chris Sheddick, What3words essentially divides the globe into a colossal grid of 57 trillion 3x3m squares, each of which can be identified by a unique address. Unlike longitude and latitude, however, What3words addresses are easy to remember, since they're all made up by random combinations of three different words separated by full stops – 'humid.foam.stray', for example – all of which have been translated across 35-plus different languages.

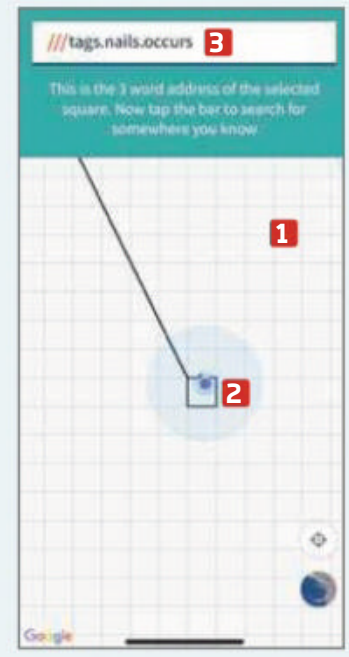
The app lets you save and share favourite locations, or search for addresses using your voice. What makes What3words even more essential is that it comes with its own built-in compass tool that works offline, plus it's compatible with many existing navigation tools, such as Google Maps.

What3words is being pitched in the media as "the app that could save your life" – and, given its ability to provide emergency services with your precise location in the event of an accident, it could very well end up fulfilling that prophecy.

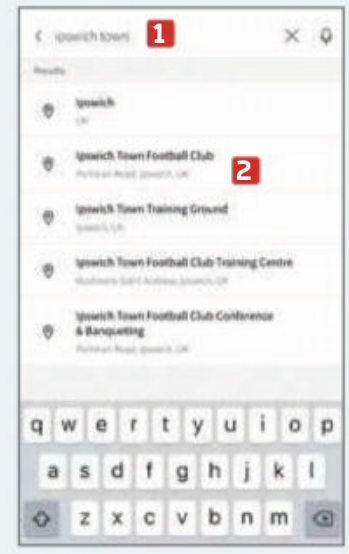
MINI WORKSHOP

Share your location using What3words

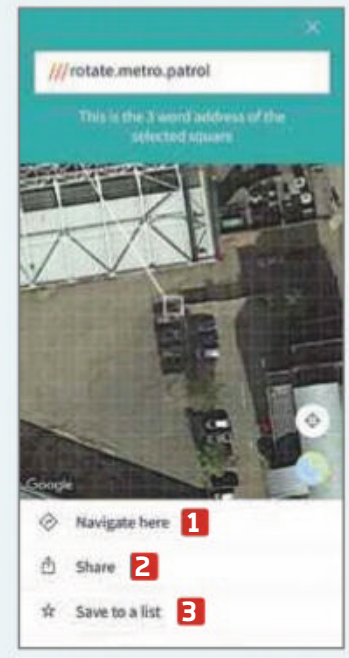
1 To get started with What3words, launch the app and select your language from the list, then allow it permission to use your location. You'll see a map overlaid by a grid, 1 with your current location denoted by a blue dot. 2 Press the blue dot and the What3words address for your current location will be shown in the Search box at the top of the screen 3.



2 To find the precise What3words address for a specific location, tap in the Search box 1 and start typing an address, town or place name. Select the location you're looking for in the results underneath. 2 You'll be taken to a map of the location – pinch to zoom in until you see the grid. Now, tap the square nearest the precise location you want and the What3words address will be displayed.



3 A panel will slide up from the bottom of the screen with some options. Press 'Navigate here', 1 then select a navigation app to get directions. Tap Share, 2 then select a messaging or email app to send the location to someone else. Choosing Save 3 allows you to save locations for quick access, though you'll be prompted to sign up for a What3words account before you can do so.



Our rating ★★★★★

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

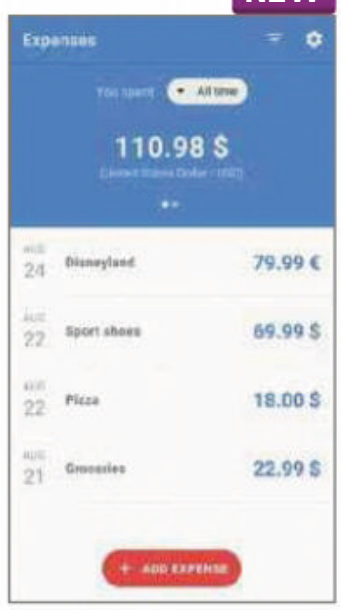
MONEY

Expenses: Simple Tracker

bit.ly/expenses483

5

NEW



The clue is in the name – this app is an easy-to-use expenses tracker that's designed to help you keep an eye on your budget with as little distraction as possible. Behind the minimalist interface is a powerful tool that lets you manage your expenditure using tags, customise the app to suit your budgeting methods, work offline and even export your budget in the widely accepted XLS spreadsheet format.

Even better, Expenses: Simple Tracker is open-source and completely free of adverts.

Our rating ★★★★★

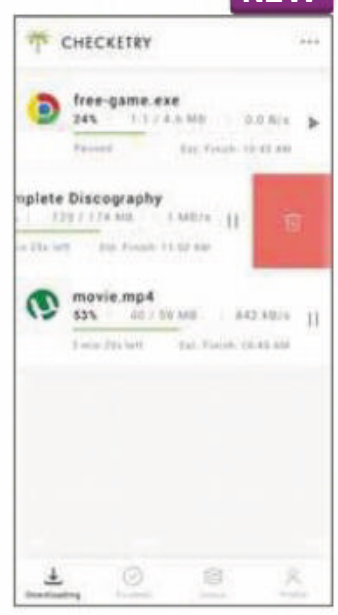
FILES

Checketry

bit.ly/checketry483

4.4

NEW



If you frequently download large files on your computer, Checketry could be the ideal app for you. It's an Android file manager at heart, but it also happens to work as a download manager, allowing you to track the progress of and manage your PC downloads remotely from your mobile device. For this to work, you'll need to install the desktop client for your PC (head to www.checketry.com for this) and connect it to your mobile app. Checketry supports Chrome, Firefox, Steam, uTorrent and others.

Our rating ★★★★☆

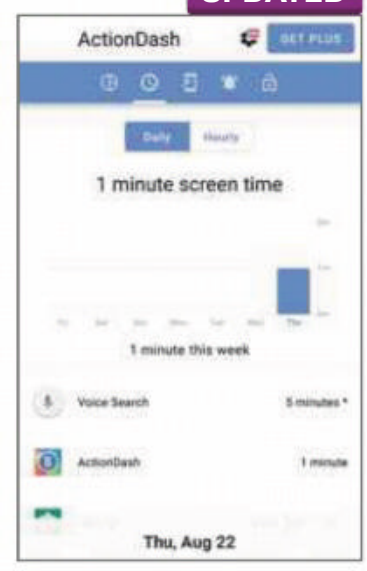
TOOLS

ActionDash

bit.ly/action483

5

UPDATED



It's an undeniable truth that most of us use our mobile devices too much, which is why Apple and Google both introduced tools to help track our screen time. But what if your Android device pre-dates Google's Digital Wellbeing feature, or you want more control than Android's default tools provide? Step up ActionDash. The latest version lets you visualise your screen time, uncover notification-spamming apps and more.

Some features, such as setting app usage limits, require a £4.49 payment for ActionDash Plus.

Our rating ★★★½☆

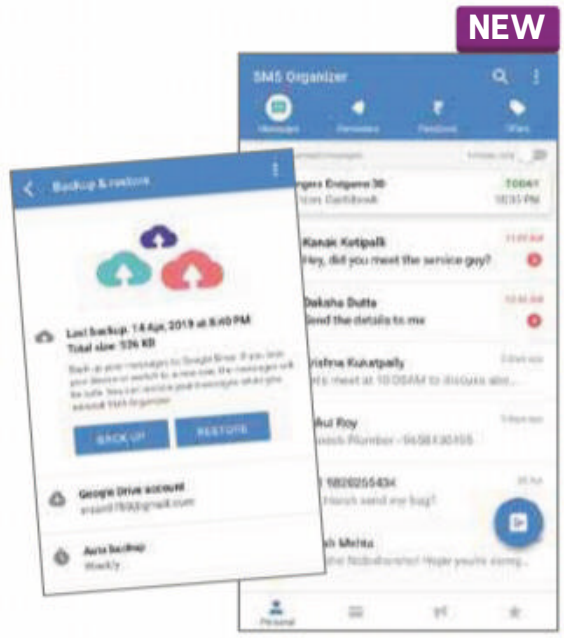
MESSAGING

SMS Organizer

bit.ly/smsdroid483

4.4

NEW



Users of Microsoft's Outlook.com webmail tool will already know that the company has achieved a level of success with automatic junk-mail filtering. Now, the software giant has brought these skills to text messaging, too. Originally launched in India this year (and technically still in beta), Microsoft's new SMS Organizer app uses machine learning to manage your message feed automatically, filtering junk messages into a separate folder, letting you block spam senders and sending you contextually generated reminders for important items, such as bill payments, hotel reservations and doctor's appointments.

The app's settings can be personalised, and messages are backed up automatically, with the option to read them offline.

Our rating ★★★★★

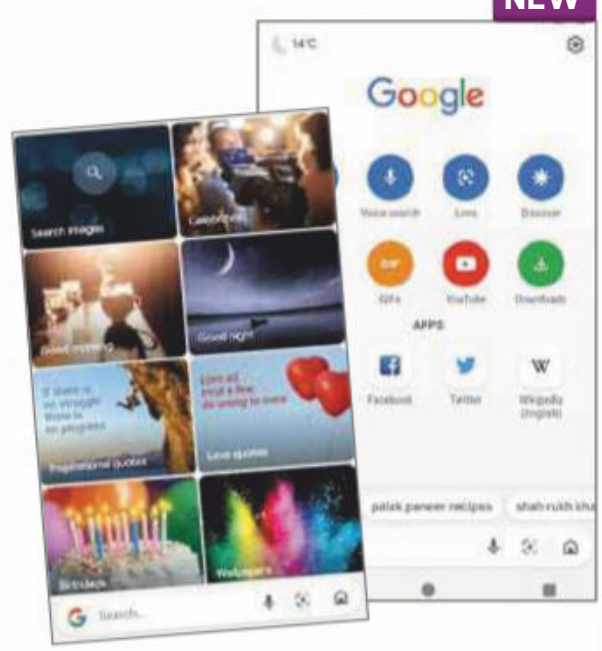
SEARCH

Google Go

bit.ly/googlego483

(varies)

NEW



Google's lightweight search tool was initially intended for users in countries with unreliable internet coverage and less sophisticated mobile devices. Two years on, Google has decided to give Go a wider release, and it's now available for everyone to download. The app itself is tiny, taking up just 7MB of your phone or tablet's storage. Search results are optimised, meaning they use less bandwidth, which should make searching faster, even in areas with patchy 3G, 4G or Wi-Fi. The tool also provides links to useful sites and incorporates several other Google features, including Google Lens, Voice Search, Text-to-Speech and translation.

Our rating ★★★★★

5 NEW APPS WORTH PAYING FOR

MUSIC

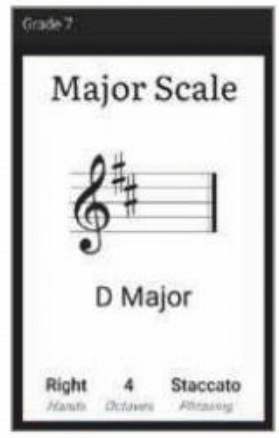
Piano PA

bit.ly/piano483

Price: 99p

7

Learning to play the piano? This app helps you hone your scales and arpeggios. Just choose the grade you want to practise for, select an exercise and start tickling the ivories.



WELLBEING

Environments

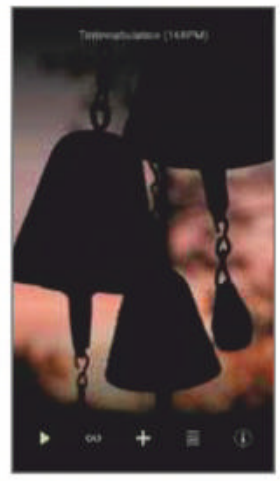
bit.ly/envirodroid483

bit.ly/enviroios483

Price: £2.79 (Android) £2.99 (iOS)

4.4 10.2

Launched on iOS last year, this collection of 23 natural soundscapes is now available on Android. Relax to the tune of a calming seashore or a forest at dusk.



GAME

Gris

bit.ly/gris483

Price: £4.99

10

It might seem like a Monument Valley clone, but Gris is possibly the most beautiful platform puzzle game about coping with sorrow and loss that you're likely to play all year.

GAME

Witcheye

bit.ly/witchdroid483

bit.ly/witchios483

Price: £2.99

4.1 9

This game about a witch who can transform into a flying eyeball successfully blends the look of old-school platform adventures with clever, modern touchscreen controls over more than 50 levels.

HOME

The TeamTOMM App

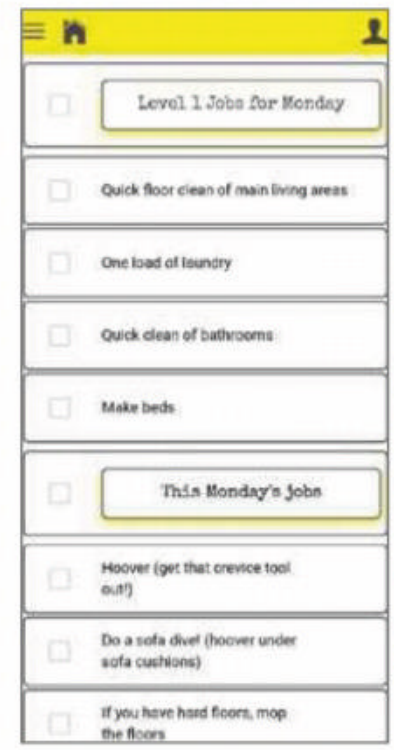
bit.ly/mumdroid483

bit.ly/mumios483

Price: £4.99

7 9

Based on the popular blog and book The Organised Mum Method, this app aims to help you organise your home more efficiently. Apparently, it works for dads, too!



Piano PA

Environments

Gris

Witcheye

The TeamTOMM App

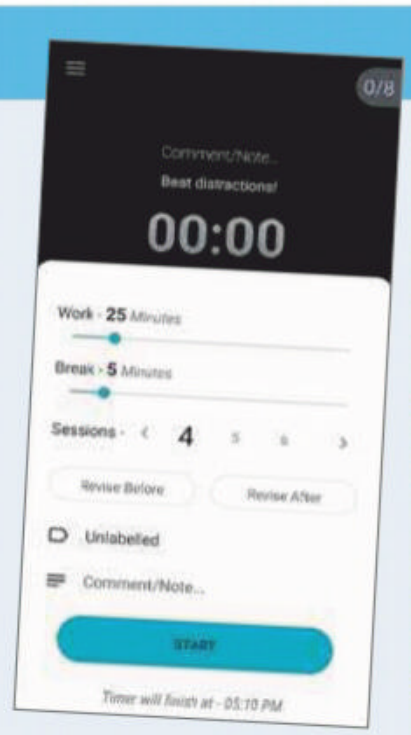
✓ Install this app...

Engross

bit.ly/engross483

4.4

There's much more to Engross than just a basic timer app. Inspired by the Pomodoro Technique (a time-management theory, developed by Francesco Cirillo in the late 1980s), it aims to improve your focus while you're working or studying by breaking down time into sessions and measuring how frequently you get distracted. You can also opt to turn off Wi-Fi during sessions and, if you upgrade to Premium (for £3.75), block distracting apps while you work. Engross also offers statistics and analysis, as well as a to-do list and a day planner. Or you could just use it to help you cook the perfect soft-boiled egg.



✗ ...Not this one

Simple Countdown Timer

bit.ly/simple483

Timing, as they say, is everything – which is why this amateurish app should be avoided. It's certainly not the prettiest timer app we've ever encountered and hasn't been updated since 2012, which should set a few alarm bells ringing (pun intended). If that's not enough to put you off, many users have found that it's not always possible to rely on the timer working correctly, effectively rendering the app all but useless.

Take a Screen Break

Give your eyes a rest from your browser by taking our fiendish fortnightly challenges. Can you guess our rock-band 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 CLASSIC ROCK BANDS FROM THE EMOJI?

1

2

3

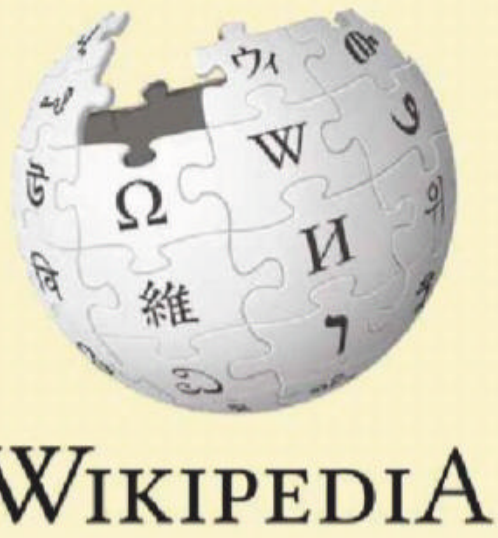
4

5

6

GUESS THE WIKIPEDIA ARTICLE

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



1 "It displays text, vector graphics and raster graphics to provide animations, video games and applications. It allows streaming of audio and video, and can capture mouse, microphone and camera input."

2 "Although it was previously a dominant platform for online multimedia content, it is slowly being abandoned due to inherent security flaws and has an official end-of-life of 2020."

3 "Starting from Chrome 76 and Firefox 69, it is disabled by default and browsers do not even show a prompt to activate content that was created using it."

4

5 "For many years its security record has led security experts to recommend against using its player and content. Past vulnerabilities have enabled spying via web cameras."

COMPETITIONS

WIN 1 OF 2
BoomBar+ Bluetooth Speakers

WORTH £40 EACH

KitSound's new metallic-blue BoomBar+ is an ultraportable compact Bluetooth speaker that creates powerful audio to rival its bigger counterparts. It seamlessly connects to your phone, and gives you up to 20 hours listening time. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'Boombar+' in the subject line. For more information, visit www.kitsound.co.uk and follow KitSound on Instagram: www.instagram.com/kitsounduk.

WIN 1 OF 3
Evoluent4 Wireless vertical mice

WORTH £150 EACH

BakkerElkhuizen's new Evoluent4 Wireless is a vertical mouse you hold in a 'handshake' position. As you use it, your wrist and lower arm won't have to bend and rotate as much, reducing pain and discomfort. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'Evoluent4' in the subject line. For more information on BakkerElkhuizen's other products, visit www.bakkerelkhuizen.co.uk.

FAQ

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

HarmonyOS

Huawei has unveiled an alternative to Android, but why is it taking on Google's mobile operating system? **David Crookes** explains all

What is it?

HarmonyOS is a new operating system that is currently being developed by Huawei (www.huawei.com/uk). It was unveiled at the company's developer conference in China last month and is being touted as a potential long-term replacement for Android, should Huawei be permanently cut off from updates to Google's mobile OS. Much of HarmonyOS's future use therefore depends on the outcome of ongoing trade negotiations between the US and China.

What's the latest on that?

After President Donald Trump issued a national security order (which declared Huawei a threat to communication networks, technology and services), Google suspended Huawei's Android licence on 19 May, preventing the Chinese company from accessing future updates. Google revived the relationship the following day when the US granted a temporary, 90-day reprieve, but while it allowed Huawei to keep existing networks and issue updates to existing phones, tablets and other devices, there is still every chance that the ban could be issued again. This will also affect the UK, because it would mean Google services, including Android, are simply out of bounds for Huawei.

Huawei's been quick off the mark, then?

To some extent, yes. But the fact that HarmonyOS has been unveiled within three months of the initial ban is a good indication that Huawei has had plans for its own operating system for a few years now. In fact, the company said it began development in 2017 and has put more than 4,000 engineers on the job. That's some investment.

So what's HarmonyOS like?

Richard Yu, CEO of Huawei's consumer business group, says HarmonyOS is a lightweight microkernel-based operating system, which means it has the near-minimal amount of functions needed to manage system resources and none of the baggage of Android's Linux kernel. The idea is that HarmonyOS will eventually work across different devices such as smart speakers, watches, TVs and in-vehicle systems, while allowing developers to produce a single version of their apps. Huawei played down the availability of HarmonyOS on smartphones, but said that the OS will be ready for such devices if need be.

Mr Yu also said that Android has an outdated scheduling mechanism, redundant codes and general fragmentation problems – issues that are addressed by HarmonyOS.

Will it look different to Android?

According to Dr Wang Chenglu, president of software for Huawei's consumer devices, HarmonyOS will use the company's EMUI interface (bit.ly/emui483) which is already used to skin

Huawei unveiled HarmonyOS at its developer's conference in China last month

Huawei's CEO says that HarmonyOS will have none of the baggage of Android

Huawei is set to launch its latest Android phone, the Mate 30 Pro, this autumn

the company's Android phones. On the face of it, then, users may not see much of a visual difference should it be rolled out on smartphones at some point in the future.

Is there some doubt that it'll be used?

Well, Huawei insists that it's not ready to ditch Android just yet. The company says it is only earmarking HarmonyOS for devices other than mobile phones for the time being and intends to use Google's operating system for as long as it can – Huawei is set to launch the Mate 30 Pro running Android Q later this autumn. Huawei phones that are currently on sale will also continue to use Android, so the situation will only change if US laws (and consequently Google) stop its handsets receiving security updates or block its access to the Google Play store.

Does that mean it's not ready?

Huawei says it could make HarmonyOS available on its phones within a day or two if need be, but it's right to be cautious about ditching Android prematurely. Android is very attractive to buyers, who are more likely to want a phone running Google's operating system than one that is less familiar. For that reason, HarmonyOS is being lined up as a backup plan, and the Mate 30 Pro will only come with it installed if it's absolutely necessary.

That said, version 1.0 has been incorporated in Honor Vision smart TV in China, where the operating system is being called HongmengOS.

HarmonyOS Vs Google Fuchsia

Google is currently developing a new operating system called Fuchsia (fuchsia.dev), which it hopes will one day replace Android. The OS is based on a new microkernel called Zircon, which is capable of running on various different devices. The similarities with HarmonyOS are striking, and this is unlikely to be accidental. Huawei was actually found to be working with Fuchsia last year, so it must have drawn some inspiration from the project. That said, it's not thought that HarmonyOS is based on Fuchsia's microkernel, although it could easily become its strongest competitor in a short space of time.

Is the risk of losing Android not the same in China?

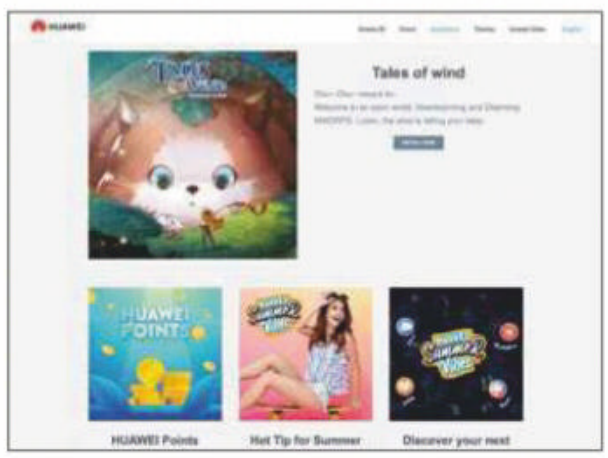
No. Google's services are not allowed in China, so the Android version used by Huawei in its home country is stripped of those apps. It's the international markets where an inability to use Android will be most felt, so the aim is to tread carefully so as not to damage global sales of its smartphones. Huawei is keeping users abreast of the situation with an FAQ at bit.ly/answers483.

Will there be lots of apps for HarmonyOS?

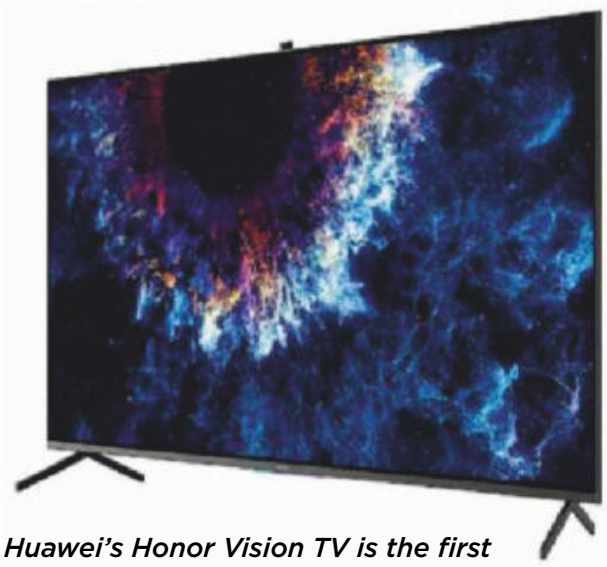
HarmonyOS is open-source, and the hope is that a supportive development community will quickly get behind it. Even so, it will have a job on its hands since Android and iOS are so popular. A mobile OS needs apps to encourage people to buy into its ecosystem – without a good selection of apps, customers are likely to steer clear. It's a problem that other OS rivals, such as Windows Phone and Firefox OS, have tried and failed to conquer.

But isn't Android open-source too?

Yes, and there's nothing to stop Huawei installing the open-source core of Android on its devices. The problem relates to the vital non-core components that we've come to expect from Android. The Google Play store and Google apps



Huawei wants developers to use its own AppGallery store rather than Google Play



Huawei's Honor Vision TV is the first device to run the new operating system

such as Maps, Gmail and YouTube must be licensed, and it is these that the US giant is barring Huawei from using. Huawei has asked app developers to publish on its own AppGallery store (bit.ly/gallery483) to get around some of the restrictions.

Will HarmonyOS be secure?

Security has been cited as the prime reason for the US decision against Huawei amid fears the company is linked to the ruling Chinese Communist Party. In that sense, it is right for us to raise questions about this issue, but Mr Yu says everything is above board: "HarmonyOS is the first OS to use formal verification in device TEE, significantly improving security. In addition, because the HarmonyOS microkernel has much less code, the probability of attack is greatly reduced". Certainly, there will be no available root access. We can only wait and see.

What if everything works out well?

If the US allows restrictions against Huawei to be permanently lifted, then the company is likely to continue with HarmonyOS regardless. Not only will this future-proof its mobile business, but it means Huawei can widen its ambition beyond smartphones to explore the Internet of Things.

Don't Pay For STREAMING

COVER FEATURE

Forget Netflix and Spotify – **Wayne Williams** reveals how to set up your own media-streaming service, so you can enjoy your music and videos on any device

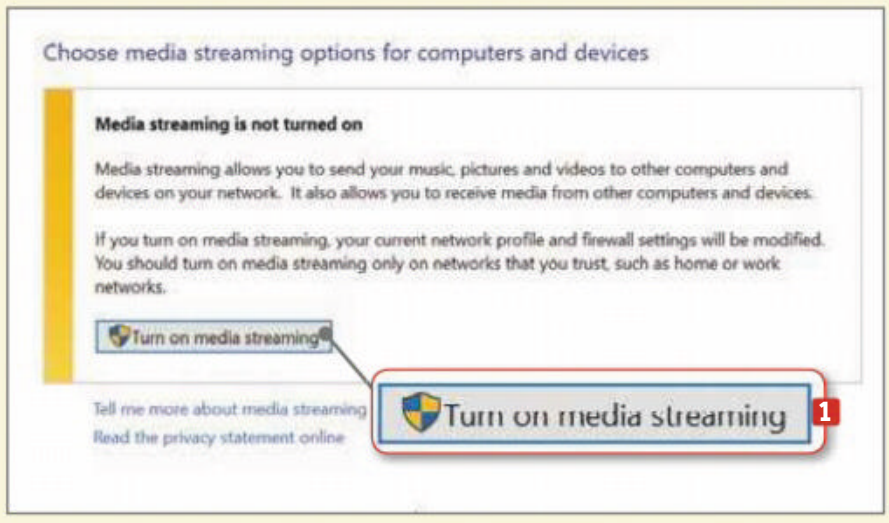
From Apple Music, Deezer and Spotify to Netflix, Now TV and Amazon Prime Video, there are so many streaming services competing for our attention and money these days that it is easy to neglect the entertainment we already own. DVDs gathering dust on shelves, MP3 collections stuck on old hard drives and forgotten torrent files downloaded long ago (legally, of course!). So much great content gone to waste.

Fortunately, there is a way you can rescue your old music and videos, while simultaneously saving money on streaming subscriptions, by turning your PC or laptop into a media server. It's not as complicated as it sounds, and you don't need to invest in expensive software and hardware to get started.

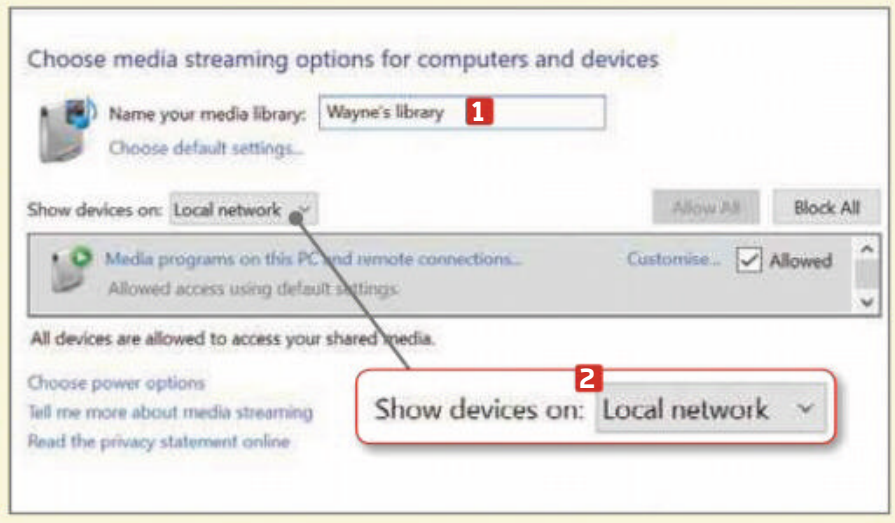
In this feature, we explain the quickest, easiest and cheapest options for setting up your own personal Netflix and Spotify, so you can stream all your old music and video content to new devices.

STREAM MEDIA FILES USING WINDOWS

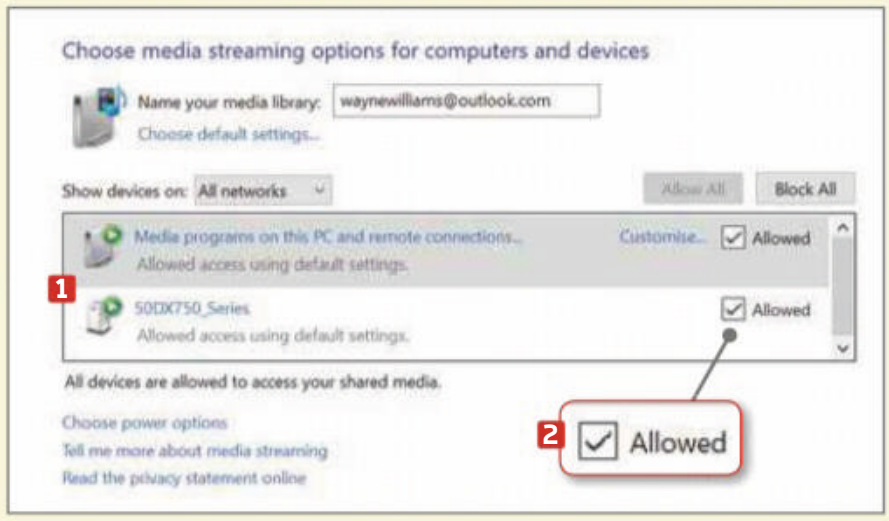
If you're using Windows 10, you don't need special third-party software to stream videos and photos to your TV and other devices on your network – you can simply use the built-in DLNA (Digital Living Network Alliance) media-streaming feature. Created by Sony in 2003, DLNA is available on a wide range of home-entertainment devices, though you may need to install additional software to connect certain hardware to your server. Not all devices can recognise all file formats and DRM (Digital Rights Management) may occasionally be an issue.



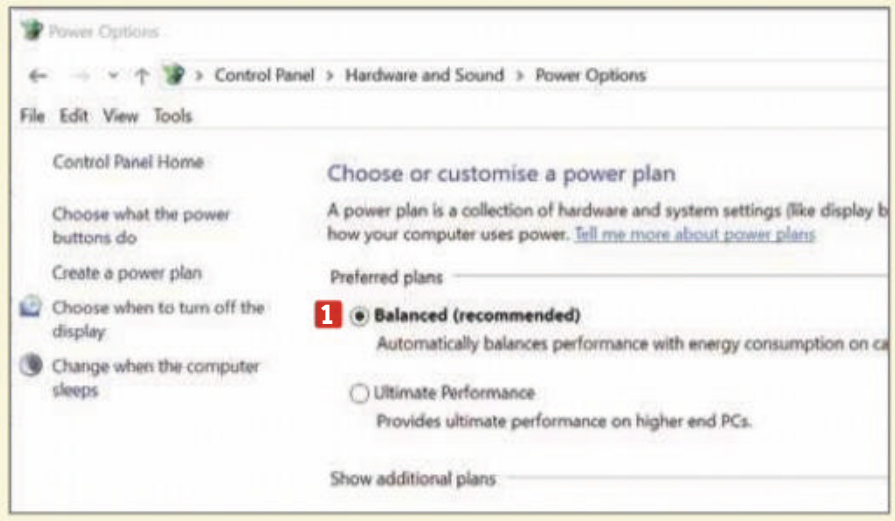
1 The DLNA feature isn't currently accessible in Windows 10's Settings, so you'll need to go through the old Control Panel instead. In the Windows search box, type `media streaming options` and press Enter to open the relevant section. Media streaming is disabled by default. Click the 'Turn on media streaming' button 1 to enable it.



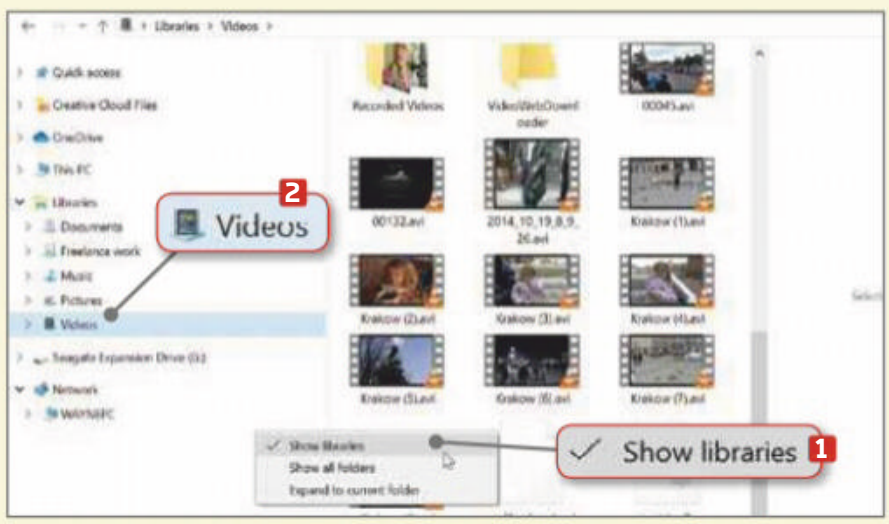
2 The options for Windows 10's DLNA media server will appear. In the top box, give your media library a name – something that will make it easy to identify. 1 The option 'Show devices on' will be set to 'Local network'. 2 You can change this to 'All networks' if you need to, but you probably won't.



3 You should now see a list of all compatible DLNA devices currently on your network 1 showing which ones can access your media. If nothing appears, make sure you're on the correct network. Untick Allowed 2 to block a device from being able to access your content.



4 Your PC will need to be on and awake to stream content to your TV or other DLNA devices. Click the 'Choose power options' link and pick a power plan that doesn't involve your system going to sleep when idle. 1 Click OK to apply all the changes.



5 Your media is accessed through the Videos, Music and Pictures libraries in Windows. To show these in Windows 10, open File Explorer, then right-click a blank area of the left-hand panel and select Show Libraries. 1 You can then drag your content to the relevant folder. 2

6 How you view media from your PC on a DLNA device will vary depending on the device itself. To play something on a PlayStation 4, you need to install the Media Player. Launch this app to see your PC listed along with other DLNA servers on the network. Select it, then choose a folder. 1

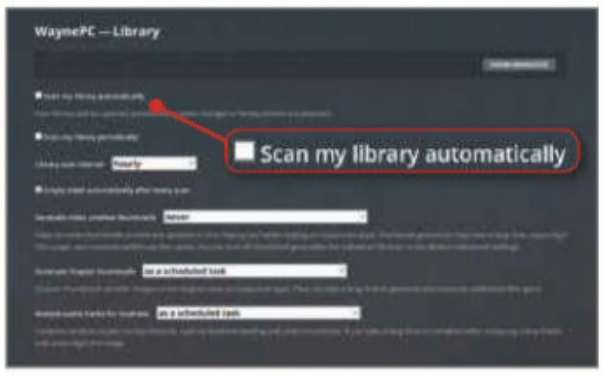
PLEX STREAM YOUR MEDIA FILES USING PLEX

Plex Media Server (www.plex.tv) had its first public release in August 2010, and it's got better and better over the years, adding lots of new, powerful features. It's mostly free to use (some features require a paid-for Pass) and is available for Windows 7 and later, macOS and Linux.

Your media files (videos, photos and music) are hosted on your main computer – or a NAS (Network Attached Storage) drive, if you prefer – then accessed via your choice of viewing device(s). The server needs to always be on – you can't watch or listen to your media from elsewhere if it's turned off.

Plex apps are available for streaming to iOS, Android, Roku, Apple TV, Android TV, Xbox One/360, PlayStation 3 and 4, Chromecast and more. Because Plex streams your media, you can start watching a movie on one device, then switch to another, picking up where you left off. So, for example, you could begin watching a movie on the living-room TV, then catch the end on a tablet in bed.

Plex can scan your libraries automatically, so content added to one of your media folders will be detected and its details updated. You can also set Plex to check your library as often as you like (hourly, by default). All this can be configured by going into the server settings and clicking Library. See our workshop, opposite, to find out how to get started with Plex Media Server.

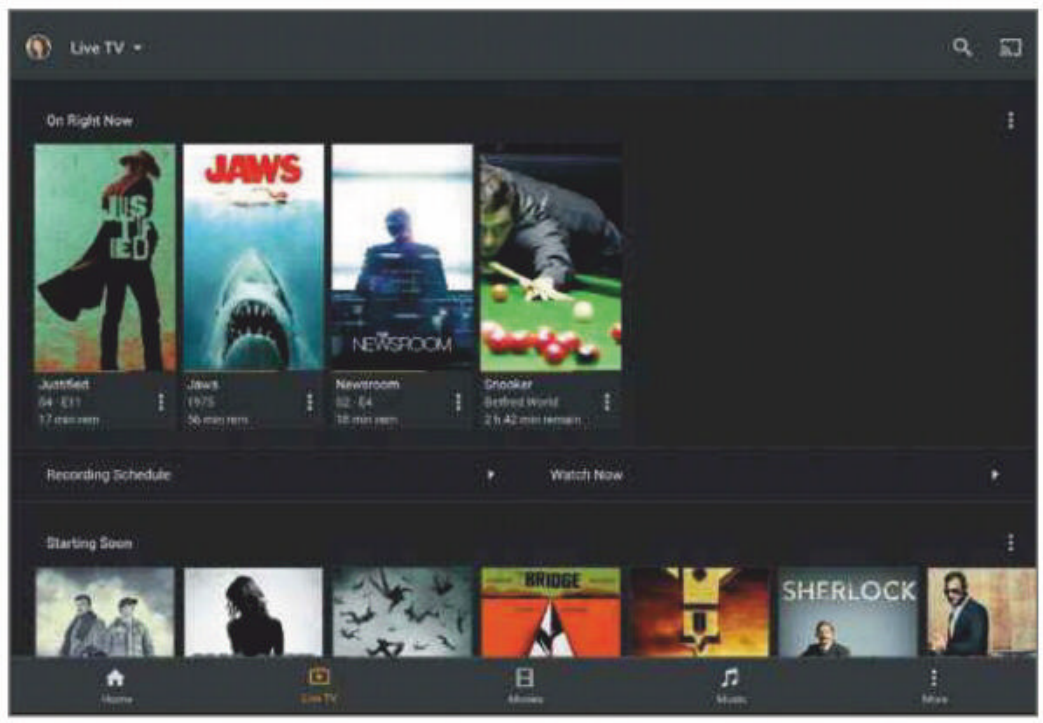


Plex automatically scans your media libraries to detect new content

To share your library with friends and family memebers, go to Settings in the Plex server, then select Sharing under Family & Friends. Click 'Invite a friend', then enter their Plex username or email address (they will also need Plex installed to access your content). They then receive an invitation that allows them to stream videos and music stored in your library. You can set restrictions to control what they can and can't view or listen to.

Free Plex restrictions to be aware of

As mentioned above, Plex is free to use, but there's also a subscription service called Plex Pass that offers a number of paid-for features, the most useful of which are the live TV and DVR elements. If you don't need these, you can stick with the free version.



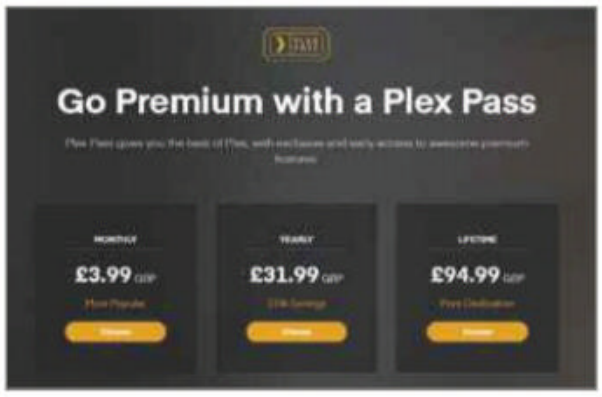
The Plex mobile app has some restrictions but these can be removed for a fee

If you want to enjoy Plex on an Android or iOS device, there's a free app available, but it has some restrictions – streaming media from your Plex library on mobile devices is limited to one minute for video and music, and a watermark gets added to your photos. You can overcome these annoyances either by buying a Plex Pass or by making a one-time $5 (£4.12) in-app purchase to unlock the app (this is a much cheaper option, but doesn't give you any Plex Pass features). The purchase is tied to your app store account, rather than a particular device, so if you have an Android phone and tablet, or iPhone and iPad, you can enjoy the full experience on both. If you want to avoid paying, you can simply stream the content from your server to your web browser for free. This method doesn't provide such a feature-rich experience but you get what you pay for.

There are a number of benefits to subscribing, and at £3.99 a month – or £31.99 a year – a Plex Pass isn't expensive. If you prefer a one-off payment, a lifetime licence costs £94.99.

Benefits of the paid-for service include movie and TV extras (cinema trailers can play before movies); auto tagging and places on photos; lyrics and automatically generated playlists for music; and the ability to watch and record free broadcast TV – provided you have an antenna and TV tuner.

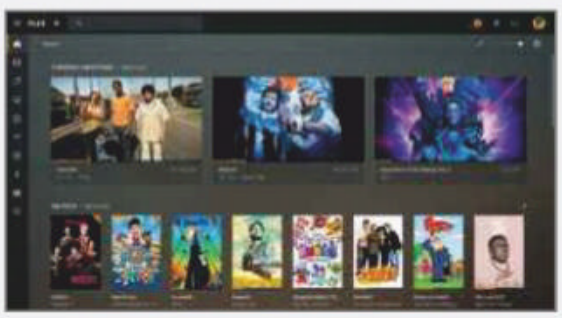
You can also sync movies, shows, music and photos to your mobile devices to enjoy offline. This also unlocks the Android app, saving you $5. Moreover, subscribing to a Plex Pass helps support the ongoing development of Plex, since the service isn't funded in any other way.



Buying a Plex Pass unlocks extra features and supports the software's development

DOWNLOAD THE NEW PLEX APP

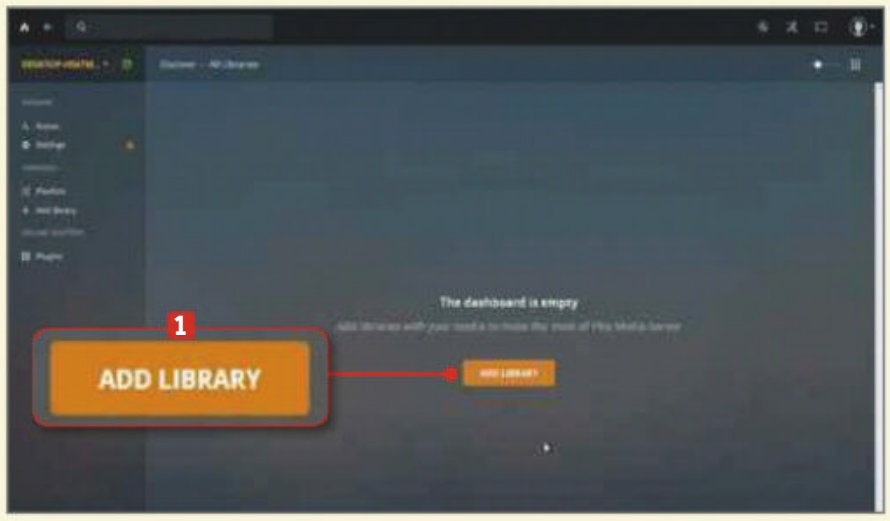
Plex has launched a new desktop app (bit.ly/plexapp483) retaining most of the features of its existing software, plus support for offline access to media files. The app makes it easy to stream content to other Windows and macOS computers, but drops Plex's home-theatre functionality for streaming to non-smart TVs and its current desktop media player, while retaining the central Plex Media Server described in our workshop.



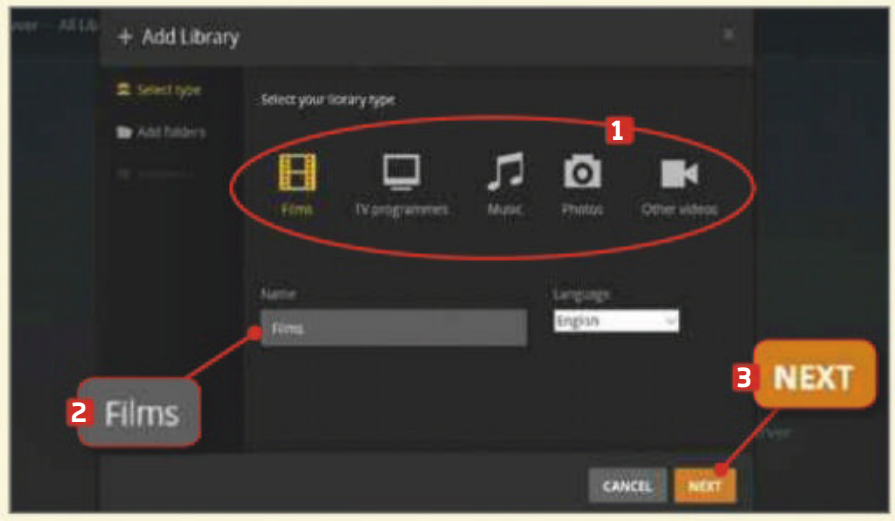
Plex intends for the app to permanently replace Plex Media Player, but will continue to update the latter until January 2020.

Set up and stream with Plex Media Server

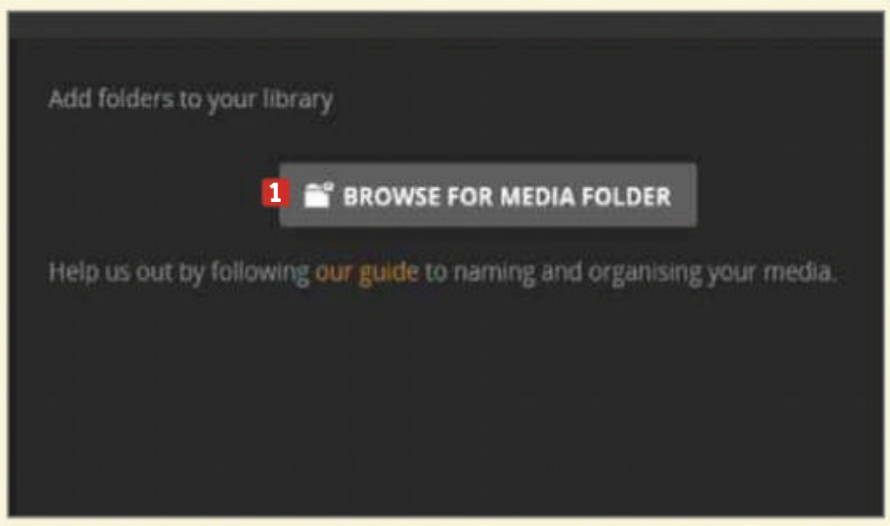
Plex Media Server: www.plex.tv | 10 mins | Windows 7/8/10, macOS or Linux



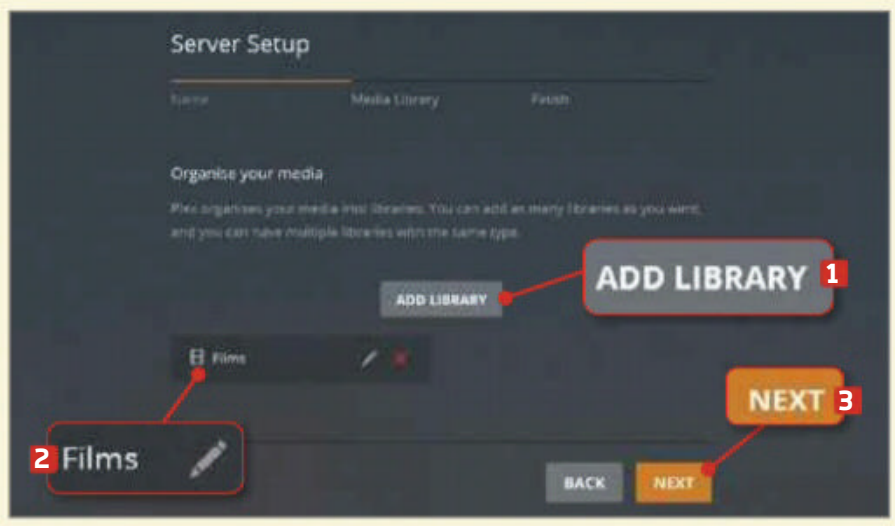
1 Create a Plex account, then download the Plex Media Server software (bit.ly/plex483) and install it on the computer that will host your library. Click Launch, then double-click the icon in the system tray to open the media server's interface in your web browser. The dashboard will be empty to begin with. Click Add Library. 1



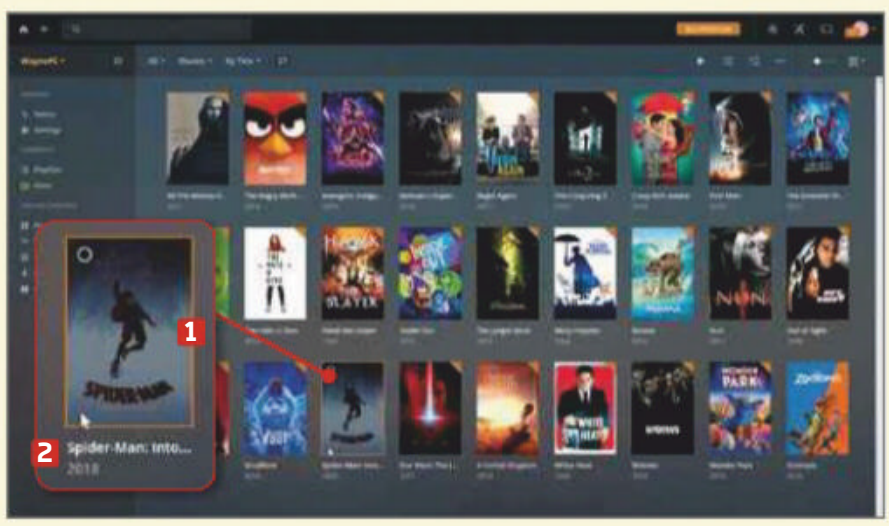
2 The Add Library window opens, and you can choose the type of library you want to create – Films, TV Programmes, Music, Photos or Other Videos. 1 We'll start by creating a library of movies. Click Films and give the library a name (or leave it as it is), 2 then click Next. 3



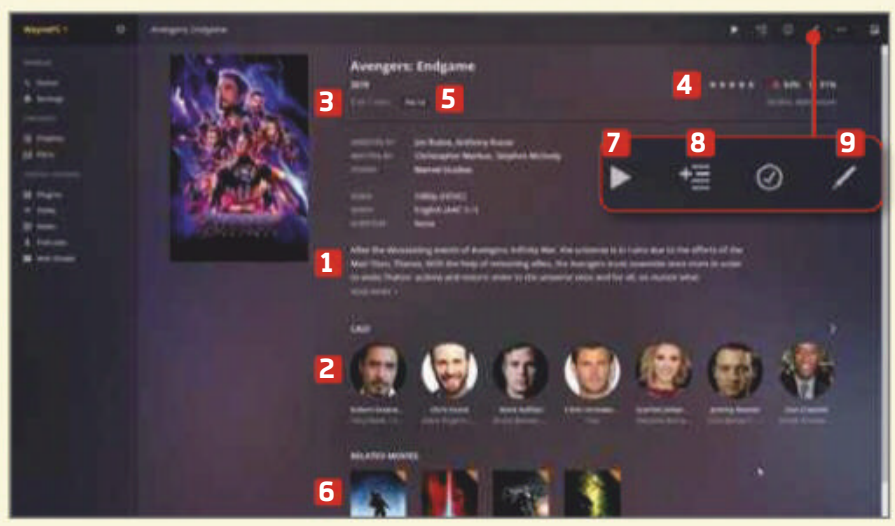
3 On the following screen, you'll be prompted to browse for the folder containing that specific type of media – films, in our case. 1 Plex requires you to have separate folders for each of the category types, so don't store movies, TV shows and home videos in the same place – put them in separate folders.



4 You'll now be prompted to add libraries for your other types of media. Click the Add Library button 1 to do this. You can rename any of the libraries on this screen. 2 Click Next 3 and you'll be given the opportunity to download Plex apps for your various devices. Click Done, then click OK to apply the changes.



5 Plex will scan for content in the libraries you added, then automatically compare a file's name with the data in its online database to download matching artwork and details. 1 If it incorrectly identifies something, hover your mouse over the thumbnail, click the Edit button and change the name. 2



6 Click a thumbnail to view information about that particular movie, including its plot, 1 cast, 2 run time, 3 star rating, 4 age rating 5 and any related items. 6 The bar at the top lets you start playing the film, 7 add it to a playlist 8 or edit the details. 9

GET THE MOST FROM YOUR MEDIA SERVER

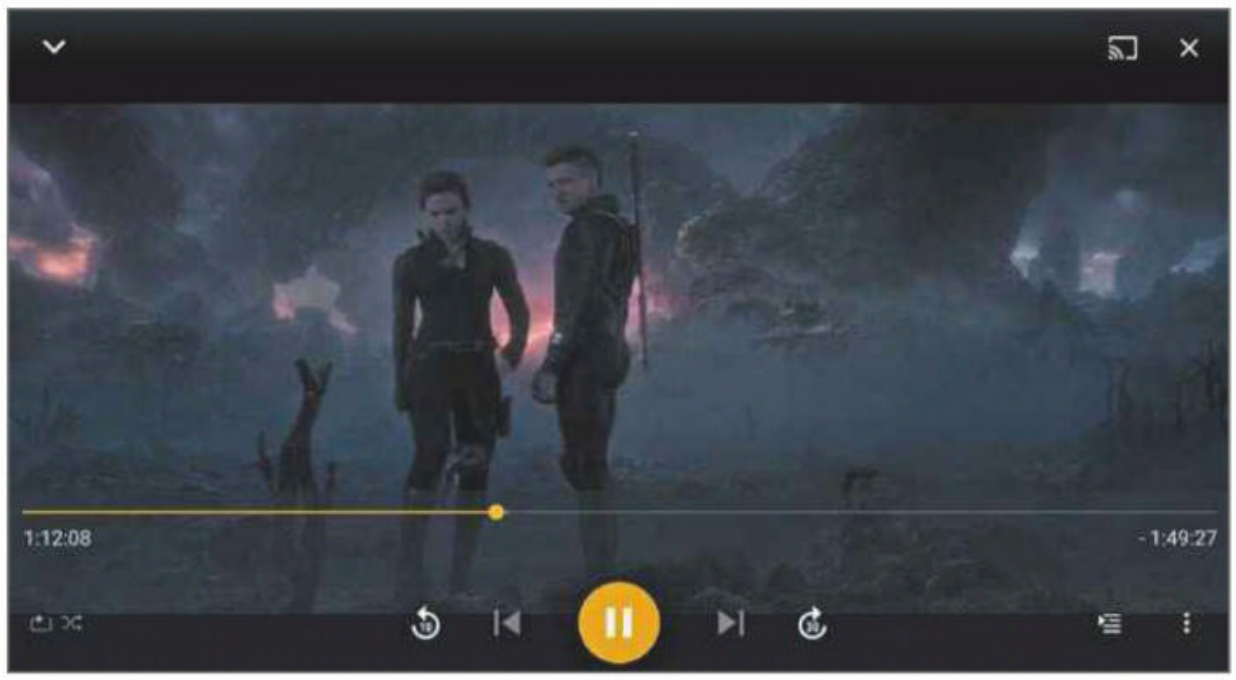
Stream Plex content to any device

While it's easy to use Plex to stream your content over a network, it's also possible to stream it over the internet, so you can continue to watch videos while away from home (provided you have Plex installed on a mobile device with Wi-Fi or cellular connectivity). To do this, you need to enable a setting in your Plex server: go to Settings, Remote Access and select Enable Remote Access. Once the feature is active, you can watch your content on a signed-in Plex app, including the desktop app or through a web browser at plex.tv/web.

Plex can handle most media formats, but the hardware you stream to may have some restrictions. Apple TV 4K, for example, can only handle videos in M4V, MP4 and MOV formats that are encoded in H.264 or MPEG-4. You can still try to view a file that's in a different format because the Plex server will transcode it into a format that the client can play. This requires a fair amount of processing power, though, so you need to make sure your server is set up on a relatively powerful device, such as a desktop PC or a modern laptop (a Raspberry Pi probably won't cut it).

If you intend to regularly view media on a particular device – such as the Apple TV 4K in our example – then it might be worth converting your files to a compatible format before adding them to your server. Handbrake (handbrake.fr) is ideal for the job.

See our Mini Workshop below to find out how to stream media files over your home network.

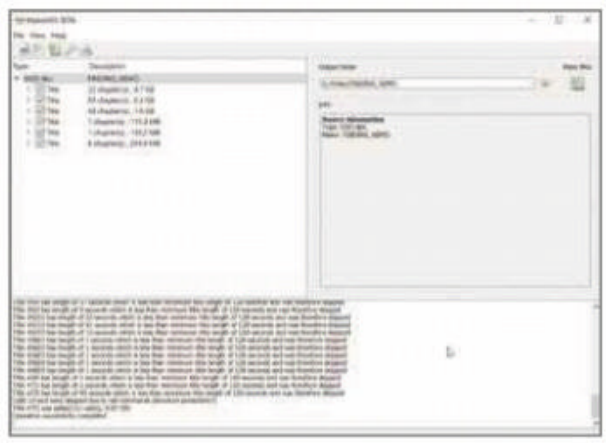


Plex lets you stream videos and music to mobile devices over the internet

Rip and add your CD and DVD collection

If you have a large collection of CDs and DVDs sitting around gathering dust, you can rip them to your hard drive for easy access and streaming. There are a number of tools you can use for the job, but for ripping DVDs or Blu-rays, we'd definitely recommend MakeMKV (makemkv.com), which will rip your videos to MKV (Matroska Video) format. This 'container format' is great for ripped movies and TV shows because it can store numerous video, audio and subtitle tracks.

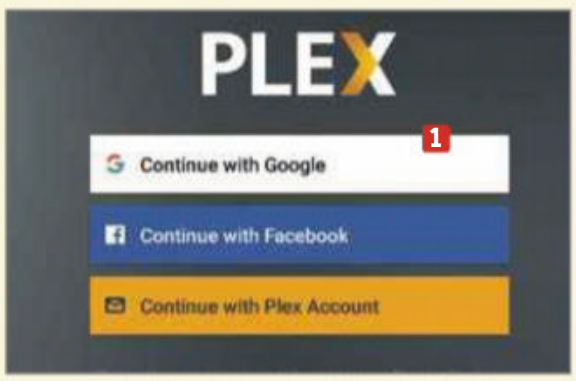
For Audio CDs, use Exact Audio Copy (EAC) (www.exactaudiocopy.de). This is a free ripper that supports the AccurateRip plugin, which uses a global database to ensure your rips are entirely free from errors.



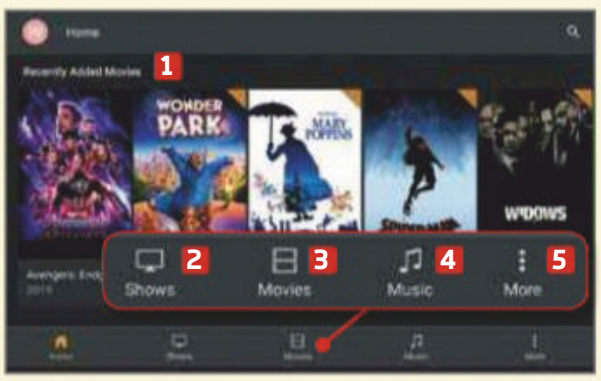
Use MakeMKV to rip your old DVDs and Blu-rays to stream with Plex

Ashampoo Music Studio 2019 (bit.ly/amstudio483) used to cost $29.99 but can now be downloaded for free. It lets you rip CDs, extract sound from videos and edit tracks. We featured a workshop on Ashampoo Music Studio 2019 in our last issue.

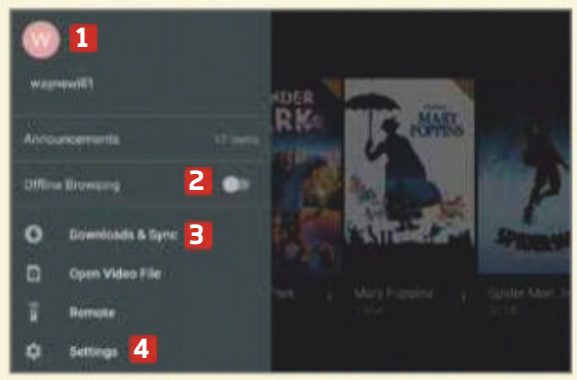
MINI WORKSHOP | Play Plex content on any device



1 Once you've set up your library, you can watch or listen to content directly on that PC. However, Plex is really designed to stream media over your network. Install the relevant app on the device(s) you want to use – we'll stream to an Android tablet (bit.ly/plexand483) – and launch it. Sign into your account. 1



2 All your recently added content will appear, ready for playing. 1 The bar at the bottom lets you access Shows, 2 Movies 3 and Music. 4 More 5 provides access to additional media options. Tap an item's thumbnail to view information about it or start it streaming on your device.



3 Tapping the account logo in the top-left corner 1 will open Settings. From here, you can toggle offline browsing on or off, 2 manage downloads and sync, 3 and open Settings. 4 Under Settings, you can configure notifications, sync, quality (for audio and video), sharing and more.

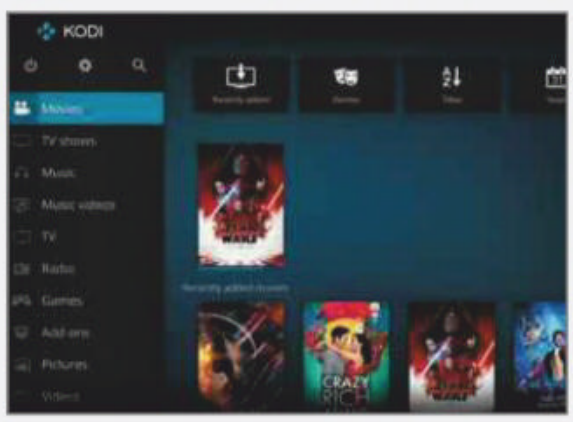
THE BEST ALTERNATIVES TO PLEX

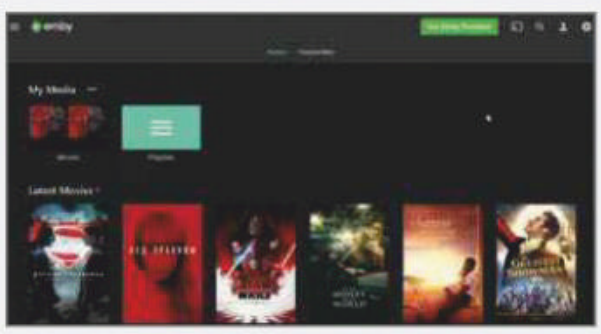
Plex is a great tool for managing media and streaming it over a network or the internet, but it's not the only option available. Here are four other excellent programs we recommend

Kodi

kodi.tv

There can't be many people who haven't at least heard of Kodi, because the home-theatre software is hardly ever out of the news. This is mainly due to its support for third-party plugins which allow users to stream pirated content, but Kodi itself is perfectly legal and runs on a wide range of devices and operating systems. You can use it to play music, movies and TV shows, display photos and the weather forecast, and even play retro games.





Emby

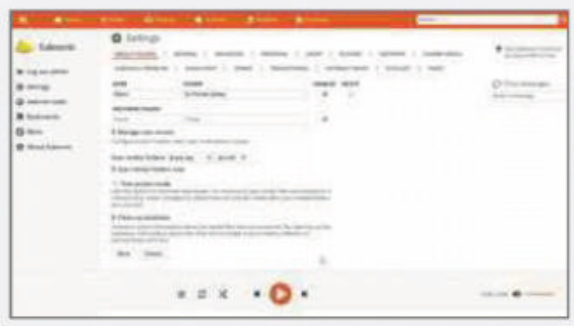
emby.media

Emby is free and open-source, and works in the same way as Plex. You store your media in a central location and stream it to other connected devices. You can stream live TV, sync personal media to mobile devices for offline access, schedule tasks, create user accounts for friends and family, and more. Emby Premiere ($54 – £44.50 – a year) users get a DVR, cinema mode, cloud and folder sync, and content conversion.

Subsonic

www.subsonic.org

Subsonic is a personal media-streaming server for Windows, macOS and Linux. You install the server on your main computer, then access the music or movies via a web browser or optional phone app. The application is free, but there is a paid-for version available for



$1 a month – or $99 (£81.60) for a lifetime subscription – that gives you access to the mobile apps, video streaming, a personal server address and the ability to stream to Chromecast, Sonos and compatible DLNA/UPnP devices. The free version comes with a 30-day trial of Premium, so you can take it for a test drive first.

Google Play Music Manager

bit.ly/gpmm483

If you only want to stream music, then Google Play Music Manager for Windows and macOS is a great solution. You can upload up to 100,000 songs to your Google Play library for free, importing music from iTunes, Windows Media Player or folders on your hard drive, then stream the songs to your mobile devices. Chrome users can install the Google Play Music app (bit.ly/playmusic483) to upload music.

Create your own Spotify streaming service

While most people will probably use Plex to stream video, it's also great for audio and you can use it as your own personal Spotify. Sure, it won't give you access to anywhere near as many songs, but you can guarantee it will only provide you with music you want to listen to because they will be tracks from your own collection. Just add your

music to a library, then stream it to your phone when out and about. Plex buffers content, so music should play pretty well, provided you're in an area with at least 3G coverage, However, as with all streaming services, it can eat into your mobile allowance so keep an eye on your usage. You can add songs to a queue or a playlist, or sync them to your phone if you're going somewhere without a mobile signal. You'll need a Plex Pass for this last option, though. There are some "playback modifiers" on offer, too, which let you repeat a track, shuffle tracks and add "sweet fades" and volume levelling. ■

NEXT ISSUE on sale Wednesday 18 September 2019

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Best free Android data shredders

Don’t let private documents, photos and videos stored on your phone fall into the wrong hands. **Steve Clark** tests six tools that delete files permanently

Shredder | bit.ly/shredder483 | **Android 4.1+** | ★★★★★

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

WebUser GOLD AWARD

What we liked:

You can’t mistake what Shredder does – from the moment you hit the home screen, it’s all laid out before you. Across the top half of the screen are quick options to view how much space is taken up by images, videos, music, files and WhatsApp Media (although you’ll need to sit through an ad to gain access to this one). You’re then free to select these files and add them to the shredding pile.

On the lower half of the screen are four essential options: Shred Files, Shred Free Space, and Shred Internal and External Storage. This is where you’re able to take a more measured approach, selecting multiple files with a classic press-and-hold action before moving them to the shredder.

As with most file shredders in the Google Play store, you’re free to choose how many times a file is ‘shredded’. The British government, for instance, recommends shredding files once, while the US Air Force shreds files three times, plus an additional shred-check. All these methods and more are available in Shredder.

What singles Shredder out from its rivals – and makes it a super-secure choice – is the option to shred a single file up to 35 times (known as the Gutmann method). In our tests, this took around 40 seconds, and removed all trace of the file in question. Post-shred, you can view a report detailing key stats about your purge.

As an additional security measure, Shredder also includes password protection, which should stop malicious ne’er-do-wells accessing important documents when your back is turned.

How it can be improved:

Despite the excellent home-screen design, navigating to files is clunky, and you often need to squint to figure out if you’re choosing the right files to delete. You’re only able to shred files displayed on a single screen, so it can be a tad time-consuming. We’re also not keen on having to sit through forced advertising to access useful features such as View Recoverable Files, which lets you check that no files can be restored later.

OUR VERDICT

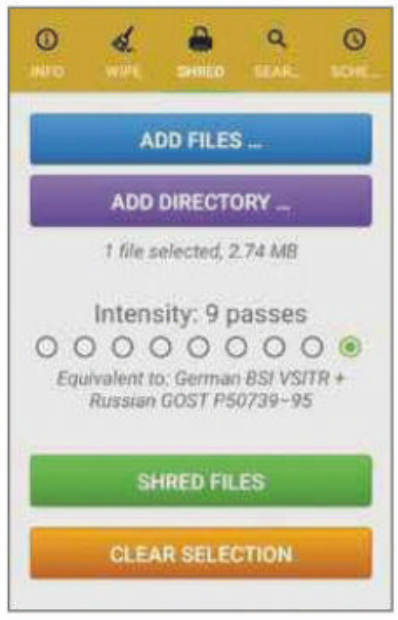
Shredder is an excellent tool for permanently junking all those unwanted files – especially when pairing file-format quick actions with the Gutmann method. It would benefit from some extra features and a design that matches its modern home screens.

Andro Shredder | bit.ly/andro483 | Android 5+ | ★★★★☆

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

What we liked:

From the off, Andro Shredder is clean and quick, presenting you with the option to add individual files or an entire directory. You're then instructed to select the intensity, which determines how many times the app shreds your file, ranging from one to nine, which is the same number used by the German Federal Office for Information Security. We shredded a selection of photos and Word documents, and even on the highest intensity, shredding only took around six seconds.



The app also lets you completely wipe previously used storage space – just select a location and an intensity, then let the app do the rest – which is useful if you're dumping or selling an old Android device and a factory reset won't suffice.

Andro Shredder also features a Scheduler that lets you automate weekly or monthly directory shreds and storage wipes, both for your phone and any attached SD cards.

How it can be improved:

Andro Shredder is very fast and has some useful features, but the app's design feels less than modern and its occasional colour clashes are downright hideous. Its big, mobile-friendly buttons are helpful but also made us wary of accidentally knocking them and wiping our entire phone by mistake.

OUR VERDICT

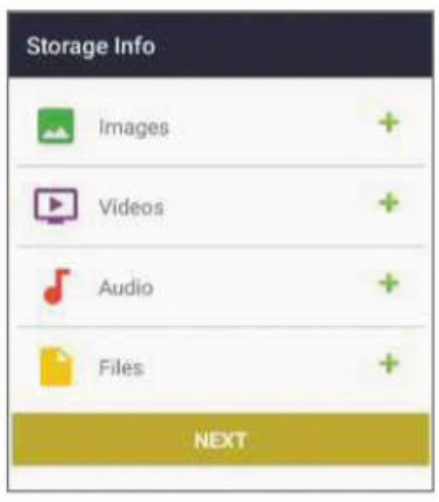
Andro Shredder is a powerful app that speeds through file shredding at a rapid rate. Its handy task scheduler tackles your unwanted files without the tedium of having to manually shred them.

True Shredder | bit.ly/true483 | Android 4.1+ | ★★★★☆

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

What we liked:

True Shredder is a great choice for those who are averse to bells and would rather steer clear of whistles – it does nothing but shred files with a laser-like focus.



What it lacks in features, it makes up for with ease of use – and not just because the tool presents you with a foolproof choice of Images, Videos, Audio and Files. Click the plus sign to go into any of these categories, choose the files you want to clear and confirm by pressing the tick.

At this point, where other file shredders ask you to move straight to the shredding process, True Shredder lets you go back and select more files in other categories. You can then bulk-delete them all at once.

The app also helps you prevent file restoration by prompting you to delete your cache, but that's the limit of its extras.

How it can be improved:

The main problem is that it's not apparent that you can switch between different storage locations, such as your phone's internal storage and your SD memory card. Shredding can take a while compared to other apps – and we're talking minutes here, not seconds – though we presume this is because it's shredding each file multiple times and wiping the phone's free space.

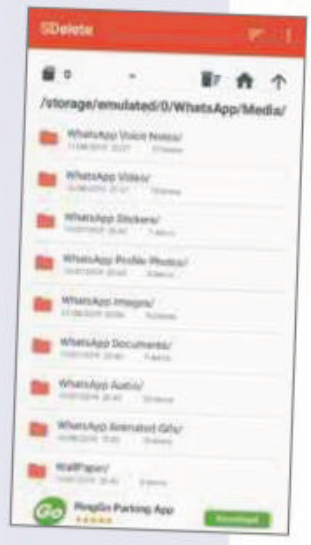
OUR VERDICT

True Shredder is an entry-level file shredder built for a single purpose, at which it excels. Features are few and shredding options limited, but it's an ideal choice for a quick and easy solution.

BEST OF THE REST

SDelete

bit.ly/sdelete483



Oh, how we wanted SDelete to make the top of the list. At first glance, it feels modern and powerful, with its File Explorer-like design and familiar method of pressing and holding to delete both single files or entire folders. Unfortunately, in our tests, it crashed more than once, and it was difficult to pinpoint files we wanted to delete without scrolling through everything else on the phone. Good and frustrating in equal measures.

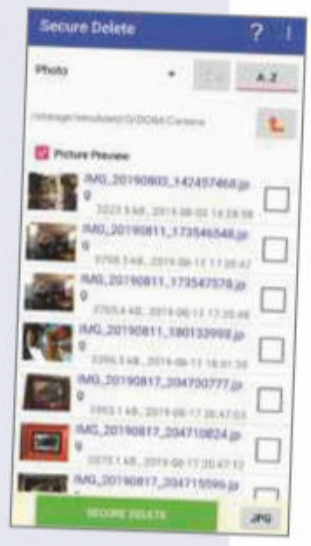
Shreddit

bit.ly/shreddit483

Shreddit may look like a knock-off SDelete, with its File Explorer navigation, but it's vastly superior. Tap the menu button to quickly switch between storage locations, downloads and even WhatsApp media. Delving into the Settings lets you choose how many times the app shreds a file and the default shredding method – ranging from British government protocols to the US Department of Defense. You can also secure the app with a passcode.

Secure Delete

bit.ly/secure483



Secure Delete feels like a hybrid of True Shredder and Shreddit. It's very simple to use, with no unnecessary features, and navigation follows the File Explorer format. You start by choosing between clearing files stored internally or on the SD card, then delve into folders within folders to locate your files. There's no fear of accidentally removing anything, because Secure Delete requests that you confirm every deletion by typing 'yes' before the shredding begins.

Patch your own PC

Don't wait for the latest fixes for your software and hardware – install them yourself. **Nik Rawlinson** explains how to get essential updates to keep your PC running smoothly and securely

Windows generally does an excellent job of keeping itself healthy. Yet, however useful Windows Update might be, there's still plenty it doesn't do. It's blind to many third-party programs and less-common drivers – and even conspires with Microsoft to 'throttle' big updates.

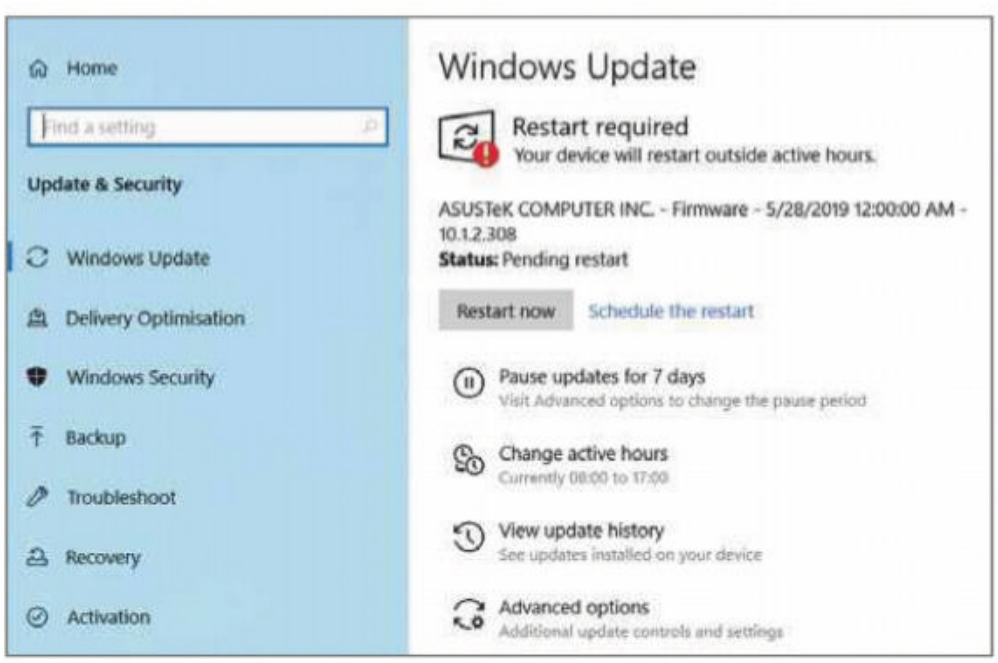
Although we trust Windows Update entirely, we also believe that responsible computer users – that's you and us – have a duty to be more proactive. Doing so protects our files and photos, makes sure our software runs smoothly and prevents any data that people share with us – via emails and files uploaded to the cloud – from being exploited by hackers once it's synced to our own PCs.

In this feature, we go beyond Windows Update to show you how easy it is to keep your operating system, third-party software, drivers and other tools fully patched and up to date.

Force Windows to check for updates

Windows updates aren't always delivered as soon as they're available. As we've already mentioned, large downloads, such as operating system updates, are often rolled out in stages, and there's no telling how far down the line your PC is set to receive them. Fortunately, you can jump the queue.

Open Settings by pressing Windows+i and click 'Update & security'. Click the 'Check for Updates' button and Windows will present you with a list of the latest available patches. Any that apply to your computer will be downloaded and installed – or queued for installation next time you reboot.

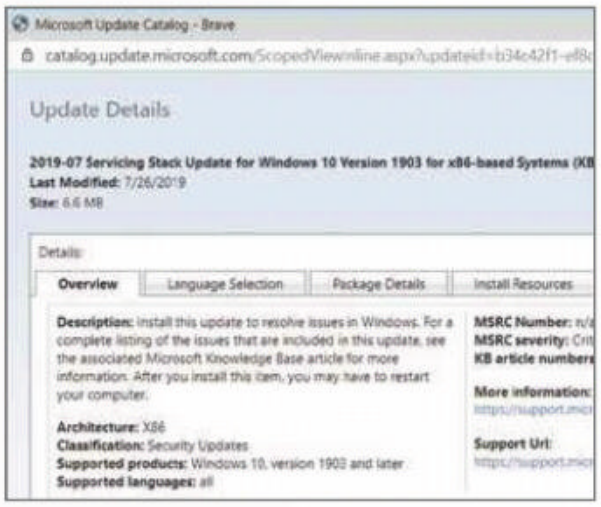


Windows Update downloads patches for the operating system, Microsoft programs and hardware components

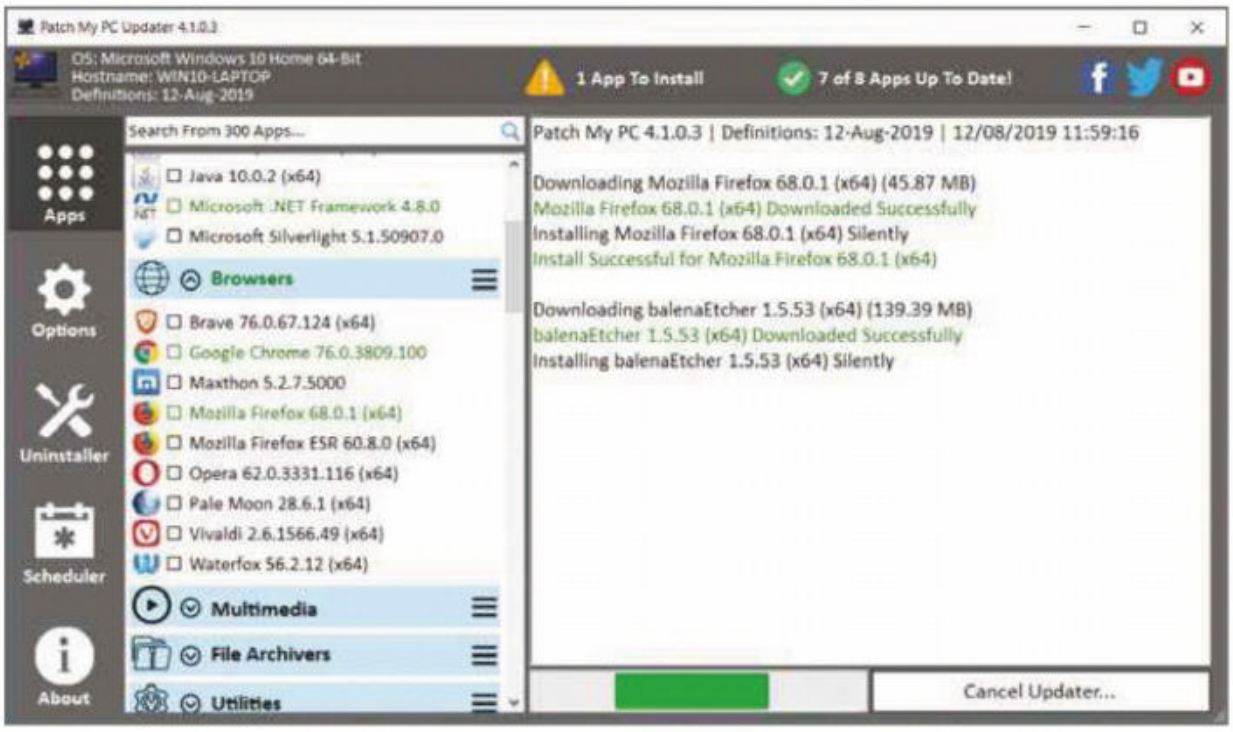
Click 'Advanced options' and make sure the slider below 'Receive updates for other Microsoft products when you update Windows' is on (to the right). You can optionally do the same to the slider two lines below this, for restarting as soon as possible, so that you're asked to reboot whenever a patch has been downloaded. Windows will always give you the chance to save and close your work before restarting.

If you still can't see an update that you know has been released, you can often download it manually from the Microsoft Update Catalog site (bit.ly/catalog483). Use the search box to hunt for the patch you need. If you had been chasing the May update to Windows because you needed to install it before going on holiday, for example, searching for 1903 would locate it.

Be careful what you download, though. Because you're not using Windows' built-in update tool, you won't benefit from the compatibility checks it performs. Rather than directly clicking the Download button for any entry, click the update's hyperlinked name in the left-hand column to display a summary of what it contains, then read through the pages linked beneath either 'More information' or 'Support Url' for the complete lowdown. If you're still in any doubt, close the browser window and wait for it to appear in the usual manner.



Make sure updates you download from Microsoft are relevant to your system



Patch My PC Updater identifies outdated programs installed on your PC and quickly downloads updates for them

Patch Windows apps and programs

Windows Update checks for Windows patches, core hardware updates and firmware patches and, optionally, updates to Microsoft applications such as Office and Skype.

Updates to non-Microsoft software downloaded from the Microsoft Store are delivered through the Store itself. To find them, open Microsoft Store from the Start menu and check for a down-pointing arrow to the right of the toolbar. A number beside it represents a count of available updates. If the arrow and number are missing, your Store applications are up to date.

If you're happy to cede control of Store updates to Windows, click the three-dot icon the end of the toolbar, followed by Settings, then make sure the switch below 'Update apps automatically' is on (to the right).

For third-party programs downloaded from the web or installed from CD or DVD, you'll need to use their integrated update features (explore the Help or Edit menu because these are common locations for update triggers), check the manufacturer's website or use an update tool such as Patch My PC Updater (bit.ly/patchmypc483).

This brilliant free tool doesn't need to be installed, so just launch it from your Downloads folder and it will scan your PC, comparing the software it finds against a database of updates. It's impressively fast. Outdated software will be coloured red in the list of results and ticked in the list of applications beside it. Uncheck any you prefer not to patch, then click the Update button at the foot of the window to bring them up to date.

You can also use Patch My PC's list to install applications from scratch, without having to visit each developer's site in turn. Everyday essentials such as Firefox, LibreOffice and Malwarebytes are included, along with more than 350 other popular programs.

Detect and update outdated drivers

Old drivers can conflict with more recent Windows releases to cause instability. Not all manufacturers distribute revised drivers through

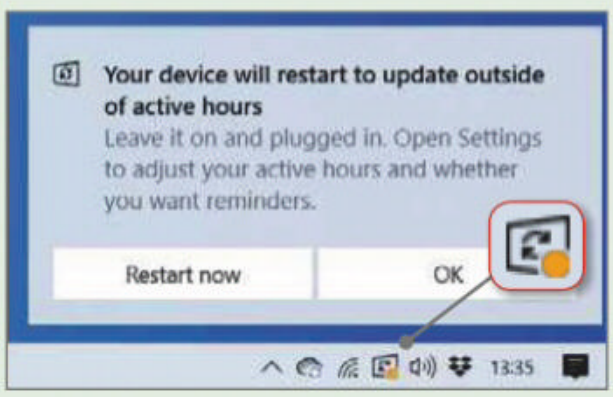
CONTROL WHEN UPDATES ARE APPLIED

Windows 10 won't ask to update during your 'active hours' – the time when you're most likely to be using your PC. You can set your active hours by opening Settings (Windows+i), typing `active` in the search box and clicking 'Change active hours'. Click 'Change active hours' for a second time (this time in the main part of the window), followed by the Change link beside 'Current active hours'.

If you've updated to the most recent version of Windows – the so-called 1903 build – which went live in May, you'll see an option to 'Automatically adjust active hours for this device based on activity'. Turn this on and Windows will monitor your working patterns, and adjust the active hours setting to fit. You'll know if you have an update waiting to be applied if you check your System Tray and spot an update logo with an orange dot on top.

You can opt out of updating for seven days by clicking 'Pause updates for 7 days' on the main System Update screen in Settings. To pause for any longer, you'll need to click through to 'Advanced options'. Scroll down to the 'Pause updates' section and use the drop-down menu to select a date up to 35 days into the future, when updating will resume.

We wouldn't advise putting off updates for so long, but if that's what you want, there is a workaround that lets you delay them for a potentially infinite period. Scroll back to the top of the 'Advanced options' page and make sure 'Download updates over metered connections' is switched off. Now, close Settings and open the Wi-Fi menu by clicking the Wi-Fi icon in the System Tray. Click the Properties link beneath the name of your active network and, in the dialogue box that appears, enable the option 'Set as metered connection'. As long as you're using that same Wi-Fi network, your PC won't download any updates using Windows' built-in tools.



The orange dot in our System Tray shows there are updates pending

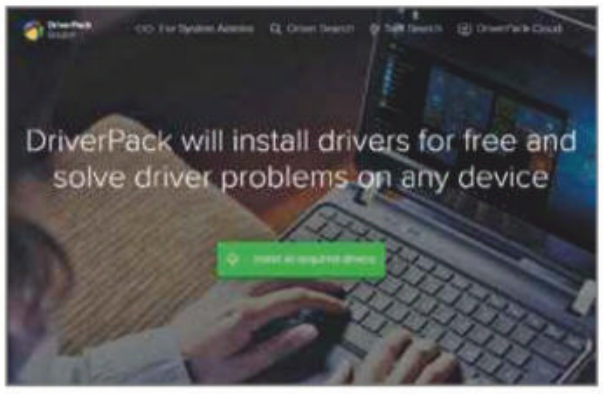
Patch your own PC

Windows Update, though, and you don't want to be manually trawling their websites one by one, so it pays to use a driver-update tool.

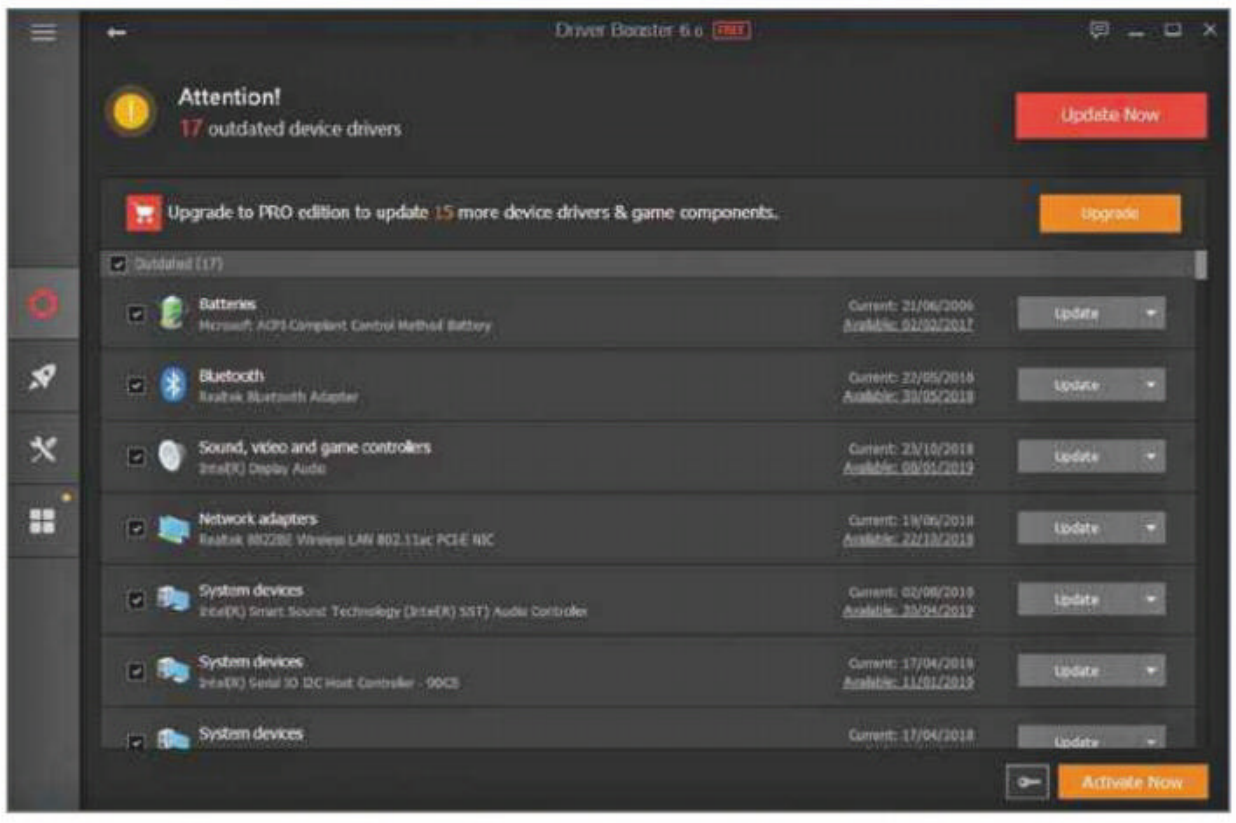
The free program Driver Booster 6 (bit.ly/driverbooster483) makes short work of finding outdated drivers by comparing what's installed on your system against a list of more than 2.5 million updates. You can apply fixes individually by clicking their Update buttons or accept them wholesale by clicking Update All at the top of the window.

You'll notice that the list of results is accompanied by an upgrade offer, promising to reveal several other outdated drivers. This upgrade, to Driver Booster Pro, which costs $22.95 (£19 at the time of writing), may be worth considering if you only want to install (and run) one driver-update tool, but if you'd rather not pay, you could instead install several and run them cyclically – perhaps a different one every Monday morning, for example, so that over time they spot and patch every outdated driver between them.

If you want to go down this road, check out DriverPack (bit.ly/driverpack483), DriverIdentifier (bit.ly/driveridentifier483) and Driver Easy (bit.ly/drivereasy483).



DriverPack scans and updates your drivers for free



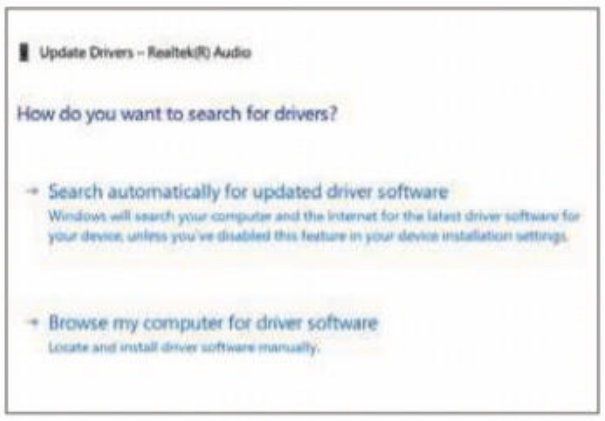
Driver Booster compares your installed drivers against a huge database to ensure you're running the most recent versions

Manually update your drivers

From time to time, you'll need to update a driver manually, perhaps because a manufacturer has sent an alert to registered users. If the driver isn't bundled with an installer, you'll need to apply it yourself.

Before you start, you should create a system restore point to which you can roll back in case anything goes wrong. Click Start and type `restore`, then click 'Create a restore point' at the top of the menu. Click Create in the dialogue box that pops up and, once the restore point has been set, close the System Properties window.

Click Start, type `device` and click Device Manager in the results. Browse the categories until you find the one into which the updated component fits. For example, in the screen grab on the right, we've expanded the 'Sound, video and game controllers' category, then right-clicked our sound device and picked Update Driver from the context menu. This gives us two options: 'Search automatically for updated driver software' or 'Browse my computer for driver software'. Click the second option, then navigate to the download and apply the update. ■



If you don't have an installer for a driver, apply it manually via Device Manager

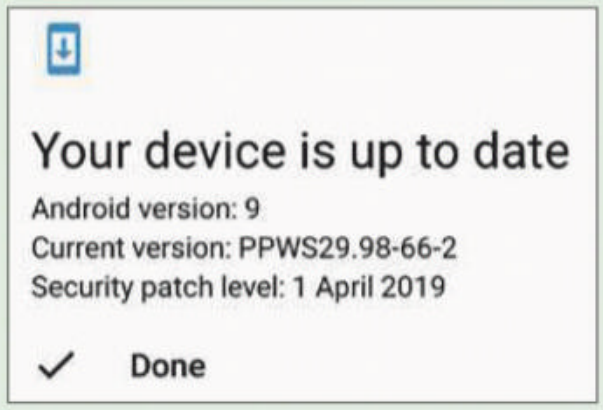
FORCE YOUR ANDROID PHONE TO UPDATE

Unlike iOS, which runs in a broadly similar fashion on any iPhone or iPad, Android can be implemented slightly differently by each manufacturer, so the precise instructions for updating it may differ between handsets.

Option 1: Open Settings, swipe to System and tap Advanced to open a hidden menu. Tap 'System updates' and your device will check Google's update servers for the latest patches. All being well, it will return a response that your device is up to date.

Option 2: Open Settings and tap About followed by 'System updates'. Tap 'Check for updates'.

Option 3: If neither of the above works, open Settings and type `update` in the search box at the top to find the system update options.



Good news – Android OS is updated to the latest version available for our phone

Some aspects of the Android OS may have been adapted by your device manufacturer. Examples include drivers for bespoke components, such as an uncommon fingerprint reader or an overlay on the Android interface to change the mechanics of the default launcher. These will often need to be updated separately, so check for any manufacturer-specific tools installed on your device, or delivered through the Google Play store.

Opening the Play store on our Motorola G6 reveals several examples of the latter, with updates for essential tools such as the Phone application, Carrier Services and Device Health Services all waiting to be downloaded.

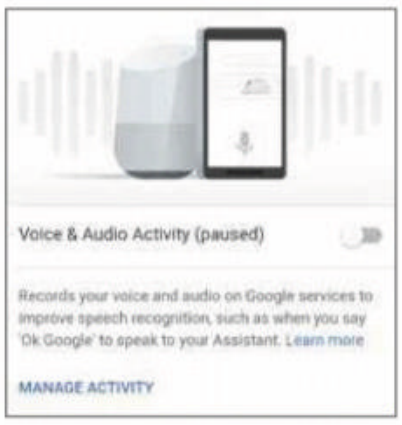
STOP the web eavesdropping

Smart assistants are sharing our private conversations with other people. **Robert Irvine** explains how to delete and disable voice recordings

GOOGLE ASSISTANT

As we reported in Issue 480, Google has admitted that its contractors listen to voice recordings made by Google Assistant and the Home speakers it powers. As of 1 August, Google says 'human review' has been suspended for three months, but you may still want to guard against it affecting you in the future.

Open the Google Home app on your phone or tablet, press the Account icon in the bottom-right corner and choose Settings. Select 'Your data in the Assistant' to open the 'Your Assistant activity' screen, then swipe down and tap Voice & Audio Activity. Here, you can tap the slider to 'pause' (turn off) voice recording, and press Manage Activity to review and delete recordings previously captured by Google.



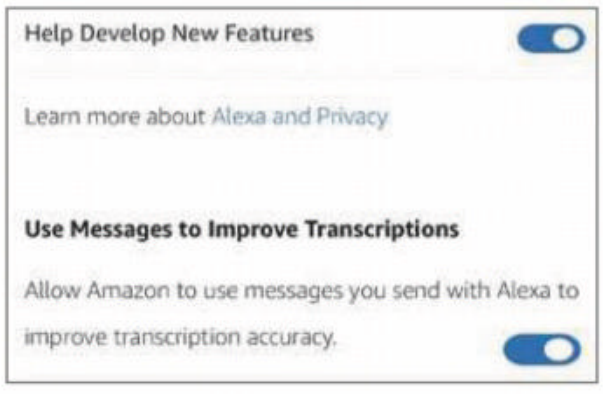
You can also access these settings in your browser by going to your Google account (myaccount.google.com) and clicking 'Data & personalisation', then Voice & Audio Activity.

ALEXA

Earlier this year, Amazon was the first tech giant to reveal that its voice assistant, Alexa, collects and shares audio snippets from users. Following a backlash, Amazon now lets you opt out of your voice being recorded.

Open the Alexa mobile app, then tap Menu, Settings, Alexa Privacy. Press the option Manage How Your Data Improves Alexa, then switch off the sliders for 'Help Improve Amazon Services and Develop New Features' and 'Use Messages to Improve Transcriptions'.

To review and remove voice data that Alexa has already recorded, go back to the Alexa Privacy screen and choose Review Voice History. Select All History from the drop-down menu then tap 'Delete All Recordings for All History'.



You can also disable voice recording and delete your history by visiting Amazon's Alexa Privacy page (bit.ly/alexa483) in your browser.

SIRI

Last month, Apple suspended its reviews of Siri voice recordings by human contractors and said users will be able to opt out of the feature in a future software update. In the meantime, you can stop the voice assistant listening on your iPhone or iPad by going to Settings, Siri & Search and turning off the options 'Listen for 'Hey Siri' and 'Press Side Button [or Home] for Siri'. You'll need to accept the warning that you want to fully disable Siri. Also go to Settings, General Keyboard and turn off Enable Dictation.

Unlike other voice assistants, you can't delete Siri's recordings manually, but Apple says it will wipe them after you stop using it.

CORTANA

Not to be left out, Microsoft has been exposed for listening to Cortana voice commands, as well as translated Skype calls. You can't do much about the latter (other than avoiding Skype's Translator service), but you can stop Cortana recording and sharing your voice data. Press the Windows key+i to open the Windows Settings panel, then choose Privacy, 'Speech, inking and typing' and click 'Turn off speech services and typing suggestions'. Next, go back to Settings and choose Accounts, 'Manage my Microsoft account'. When your account page loads, click 'Activity history' under Privacy, then click Voice in the 'Explore your data' column. Here you can review and delete stored Cortana data – click 'Clear activity' to wipe the whole lot. ■

WHY ARE THEY RECORDING YOU?

All four companies hire contractors to review recordings obtained through their voice assistants, to "improve their services" and develop new features. For example, if Alexa doesn't understand your question or answers incorrectly, the contractor will take note. The voice data is collected anonymously, so you can't be identified as the speaker, and Google says only 0.2% of Assistant commands are reviewed by humans. Privacy concerns arose because users weren't told that their recordings were being listened to, and because smart assistants were sharing audio outside of spoken commands, such as private conversations. Hopefully, the negative press will make all four more transparent in future.

Manage your photos in Gallery Go

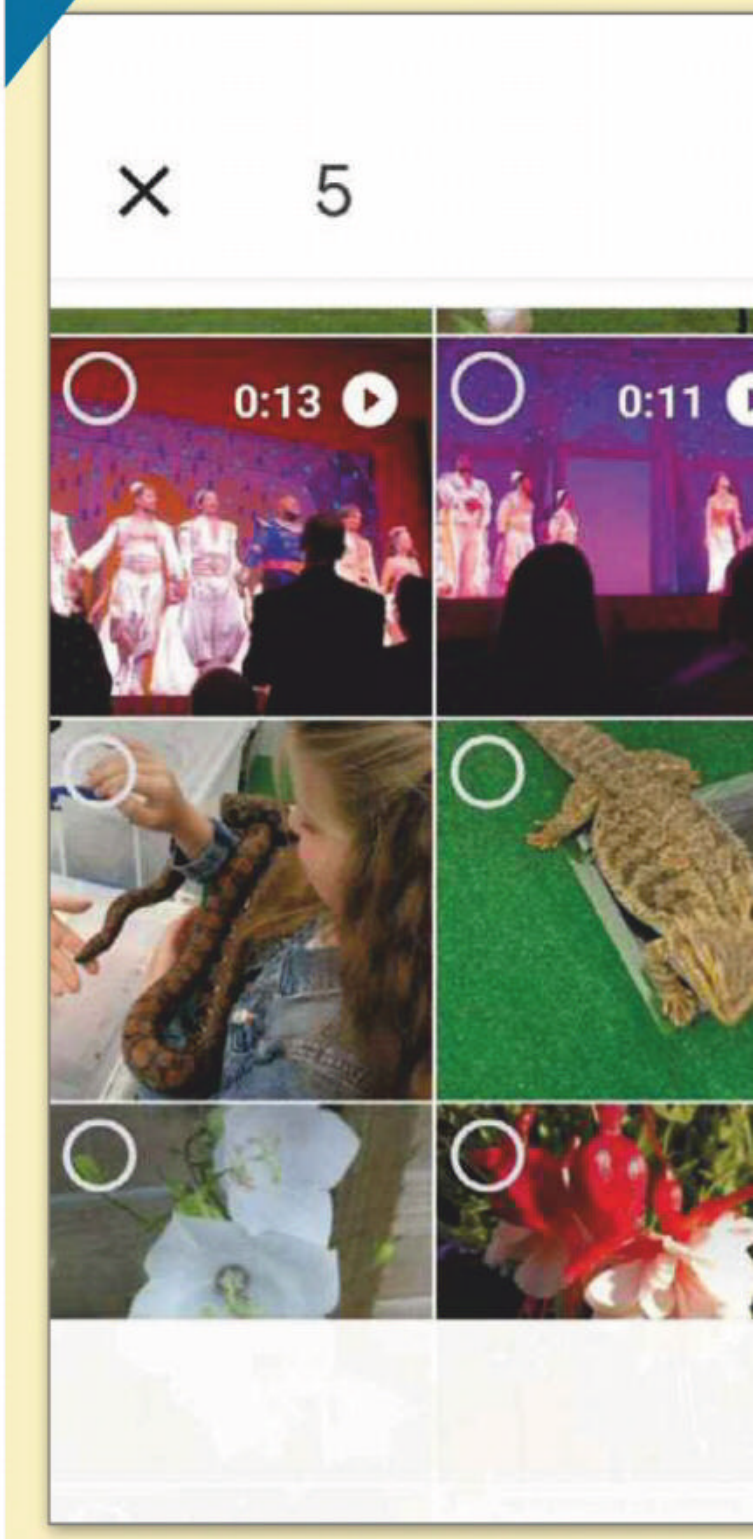
Google has created a smart, light and fast offline alternative to its Google Photos app for Android. Here's how to use Gallery Go

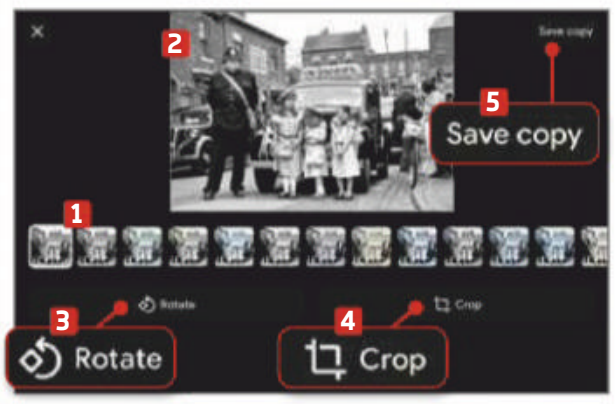
Gallery Go: bit.ly/gallerygo483 | 20 mins | Android 8.1

Gallery Go is a lightweight alternative to Google Photos. Introduced by Google for Nigeria, it was originally intended for use in developing nations where internet coverage might be patchy and low-cost smartphones dominate. Unlike Google Photos, Gallery Go works offline, but it uses machine learning to organise and manage your photos and comes with some simple but useful editing tools. Despite being aimed at low- and middle-income countries, Gallery Go is available all over the world, though your device needs to be running Android 8.1 (Oreo) or newer. Some features, such as organising photos by person, aren't available in the UK and Europe for (presumably) privacy reasons.

1 The first time you use Gallery Go, you need to grant it permission to access your photos and videos. Once you've done that, it will open and show a strip of images 1 for the current month, 2 with screenshots 3 and videos 4 accessible from above. There's also a Folders section at the bottom. 5

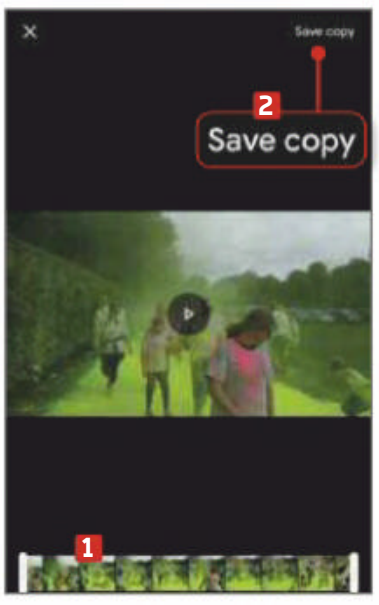
2 Tap any photo to view it. The image will open in a new window and, from here, you'll be able to share, 1 auto-enhance, 2 edit 3 or delete it. 4 You can move between the other photos by swiping left or right. Tapping the arrow 5 takes you back to the thumbnails screen.



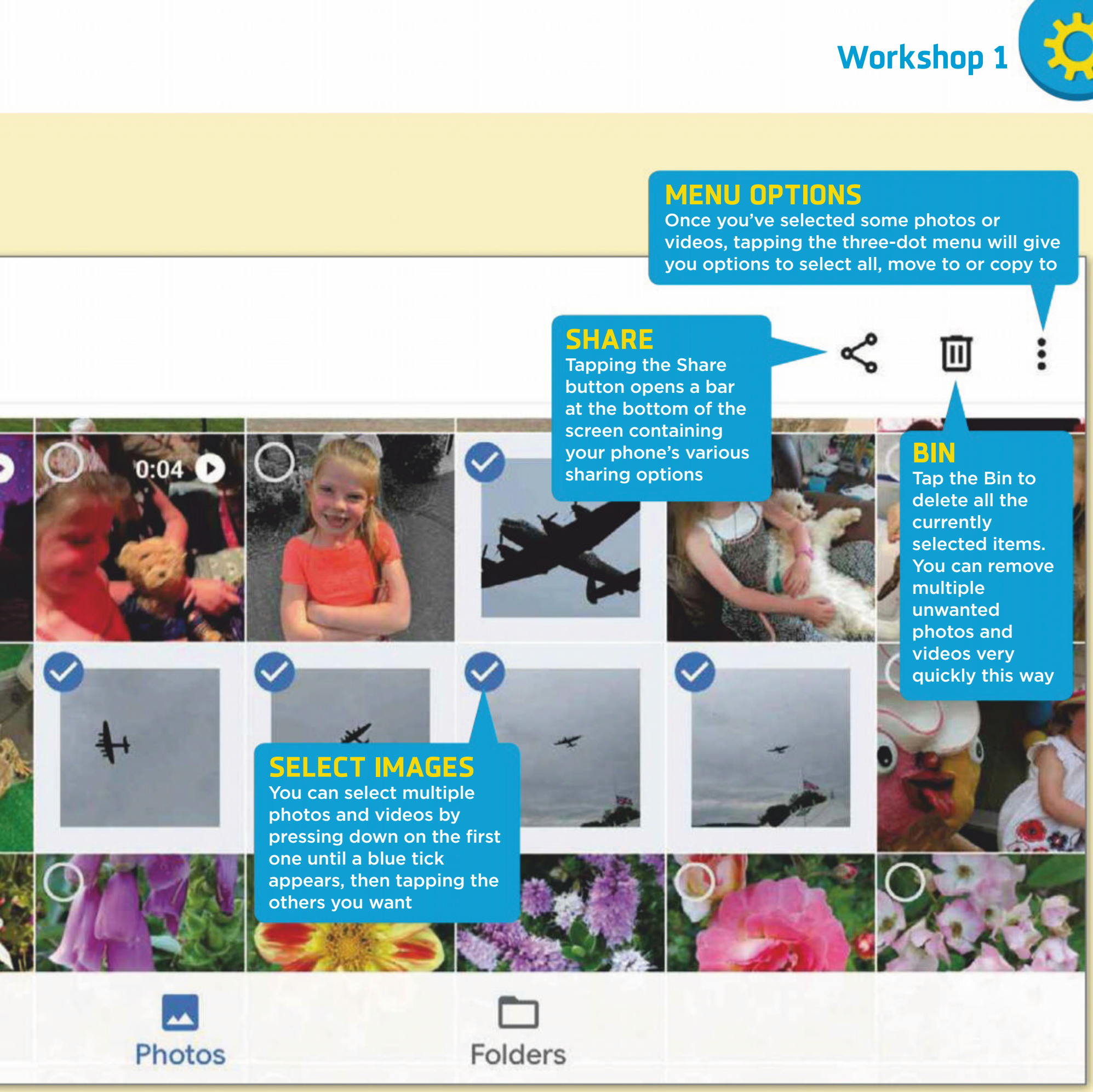


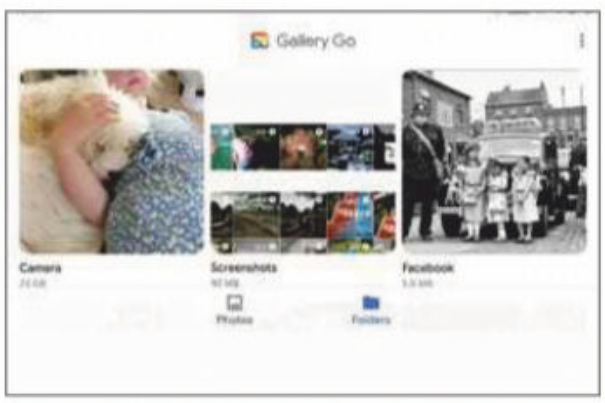
3 The Edit section displays a strip of filters that you can apply to your image. 1 Just tap one to see how it looks when applied to the photo above. 2 You can also rotate the photo 3 and crop it 4 using the buttons below. Tap 'Save copy' 5 when you've finished making changes.

4 When you tap a video, you'll be able to watch, share, edit or delete it. The editing section is slightly different because it only allows you to trim the clip using the sliders on the timeline at the bottom of the screen. 1 Click 'Save copy' 2 when you're finished.

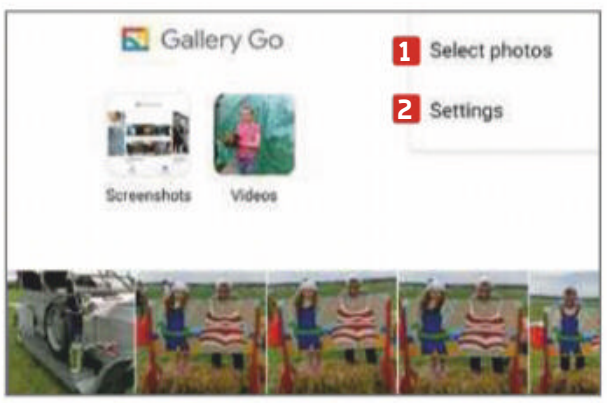


5 As you would expect, the Screenshots button on the main page presents you with a wall of screenshots, while the Video button shows all the videos stored on your phone. As with the photo thumbnails, you can simply scroll down to view all past videos. 1 More categories will be added in due course.

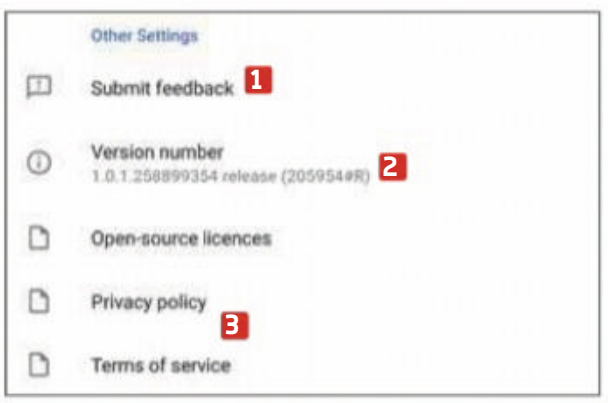




6 The Folders section lets you browse individual folders of photos and videos. Tap one to see its contents. Usefully, Gallery Go shows you the amount of storage that particular folder is taking up, which can come in handy if you're trying to reclaim some additional space.



7 There's not much else to Gallery Go besides the features we've covered – it's designed to be very simple to use. But if you tap the three-dot menu in the top-right corner, you'll have the option to select some photos 1 for sharing or deleting, and can also open the application settings. 2



8 The Settings screen is rather basic and merely lets you submit feedback on the app 1 (a form will open ready for you to enter some comments or view the system logs), view the version number 2 and read Google Go's open-source licences, privacy policy and terms of service. 3

Replace built-in Windows features with faster tools

Executor & SearchMyFiles: bit.ly/exec483 & nirsoft.net | 20 mins | Windows 7, 8, 10

The big spring and autumn Windows updates usually include a few bug fixes and updates for existing tools, but Microsoft's main focus seems to be on pushing out new tools rather than refining old software.

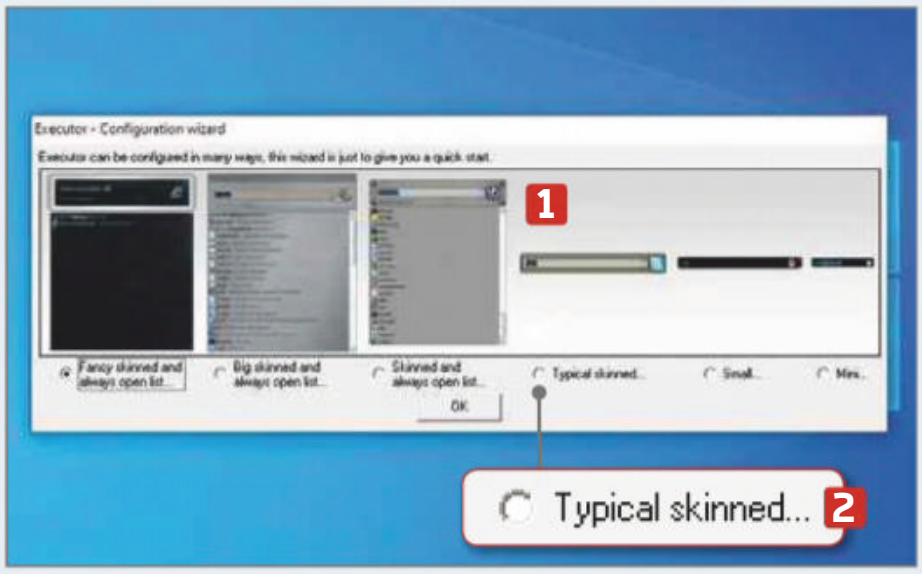
Thankfully, there are developers who are always looking for new ways to make Windows better, and Executor (bit.ly/exec483) and SearchMyFiles (go to nirsoft.net and search for `SearchMyFiles`) are two brilliant examples. The first is a launcher, a bit like the Windows search box, but fast and configurable; while SearchMyFiles is a vast improvement over Windows' search tools, allowing you to easily and quickly refine your results to find the exact file you're looking for.

Both programs are portable, so they don't have to be installed, and won't negatively impact your PC's performance.

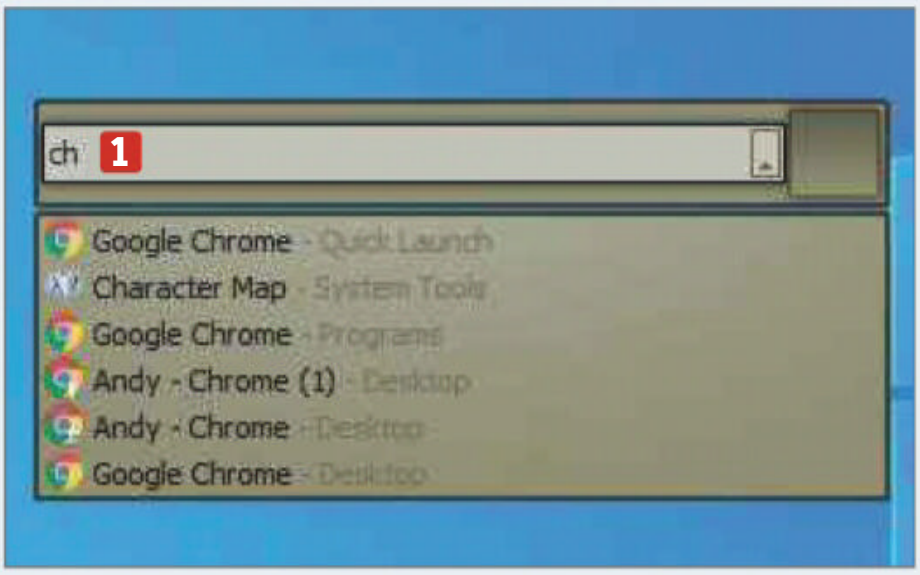
EXPERT TIP

Andy Shaw says

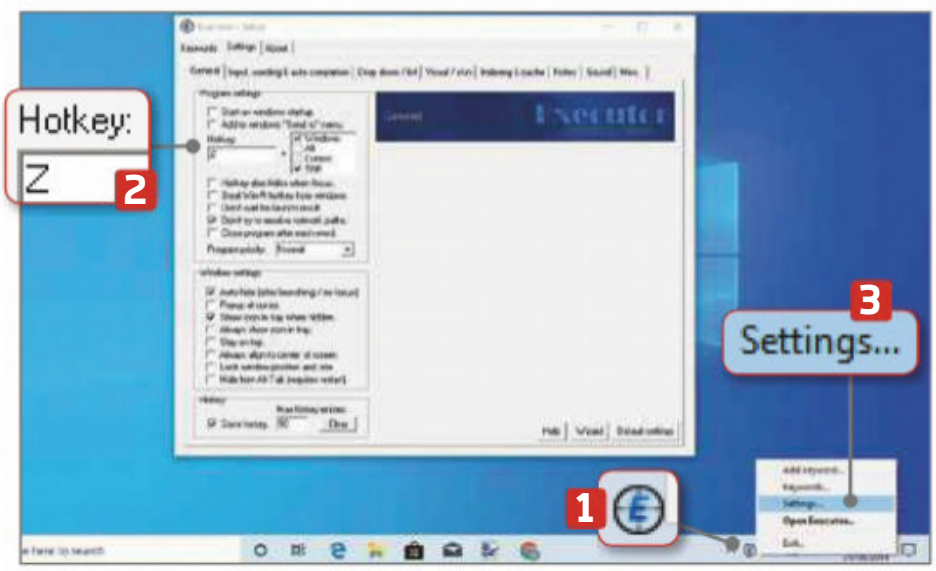
You can also use SearchMyFiles to find duplicate files. Open the Search Mode menu by clicking the arrow in the box and choosing Duplicates Search, then proceed with your search as before. You can also let the software search for and isolate files that aren't duplicates, or find any files that have a particular name.



1 Executor's opening screen is a configuration wizard. Choose the layout you prefer [1] but remember, you can always change it later. We went for the 'Typical skinned' option, [2] if you want your screen to look the same as ours. The next screen allows you to choose more settings, but stick with the default options for now.

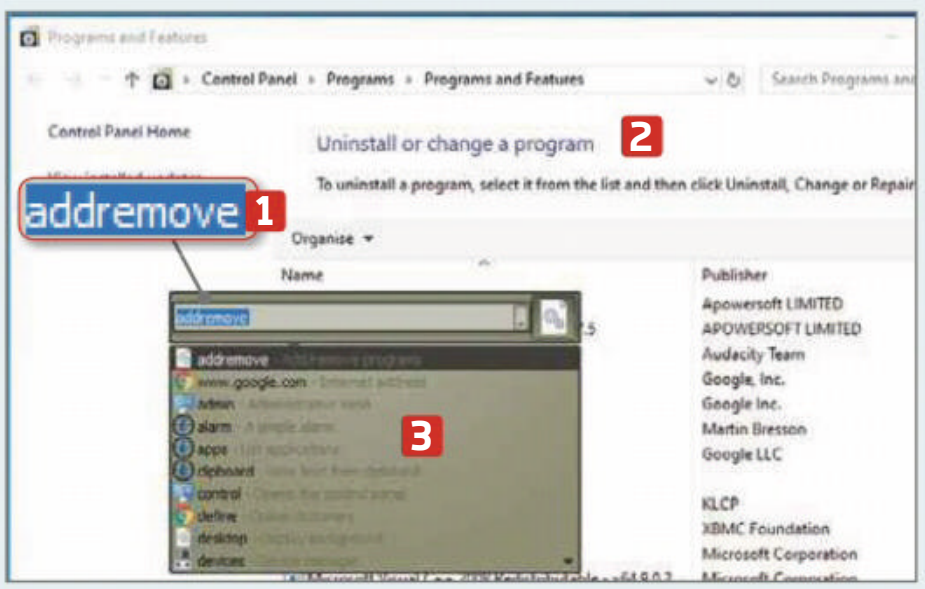


2 The launcher works in a similar way to the Windows search bar, loading suggestions for programs and apps to run as you type their names. However, it's much faster. For example, start typing `Chrome` [1] and a menu drops down below, refining the available options as you type.

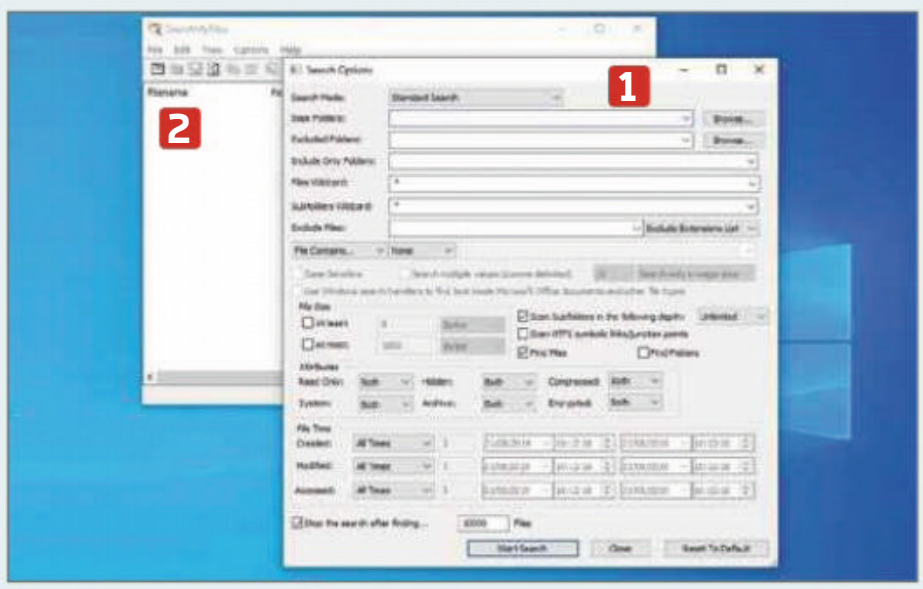


3 Executor tends to disappear to the notification area when it's not being used but you can bring it back by clicking its icon [1] or using the keyboard shortcut Shift+Win+Z. If you want to change this to a different keyboard combination, [2] right-click the notification area icon and choose Settings. [3]

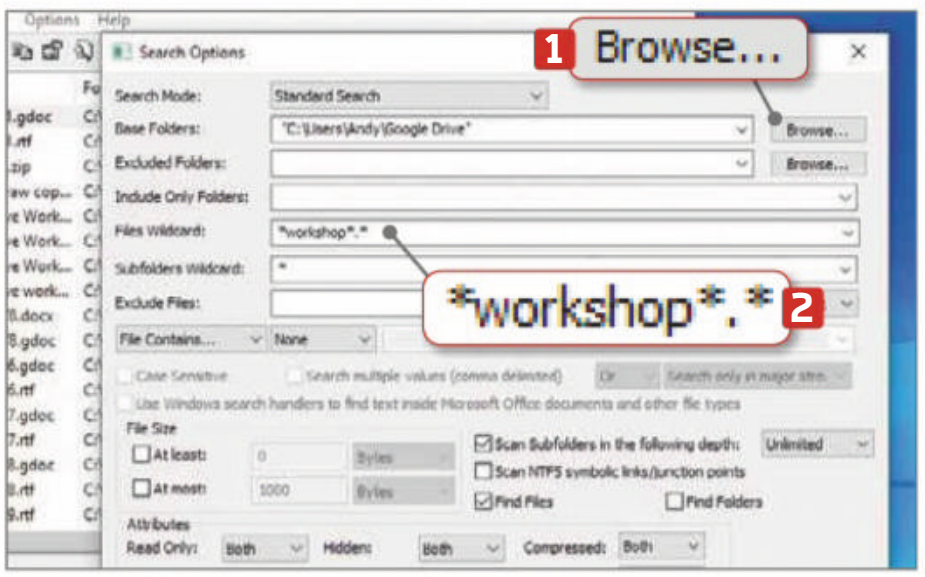
4 Type a URL in the box [1] and press Enter to launch your default browser and navigate to the page you requested. [2] This function alone makes it worth switching to Executor, because it takes at least one less click than the Windows search box and doesn't force you to use Edge.



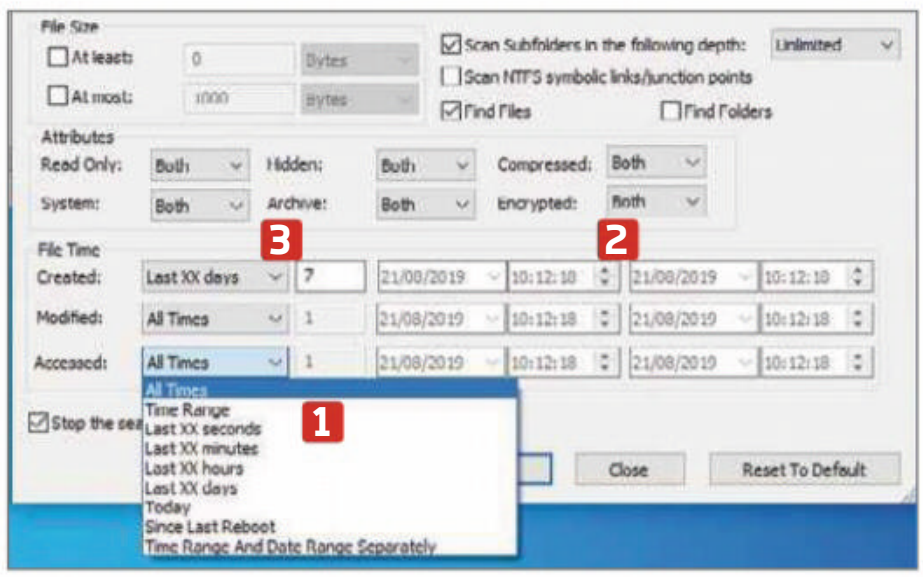
5 You can also use the software to launch settings. For example, start typing `addremove` 1 to open the Control Panel's 'Uninstall or change a program' window. 2 There are lots of built-in shortcuts – click the down arrow to display them in the menu below. 3



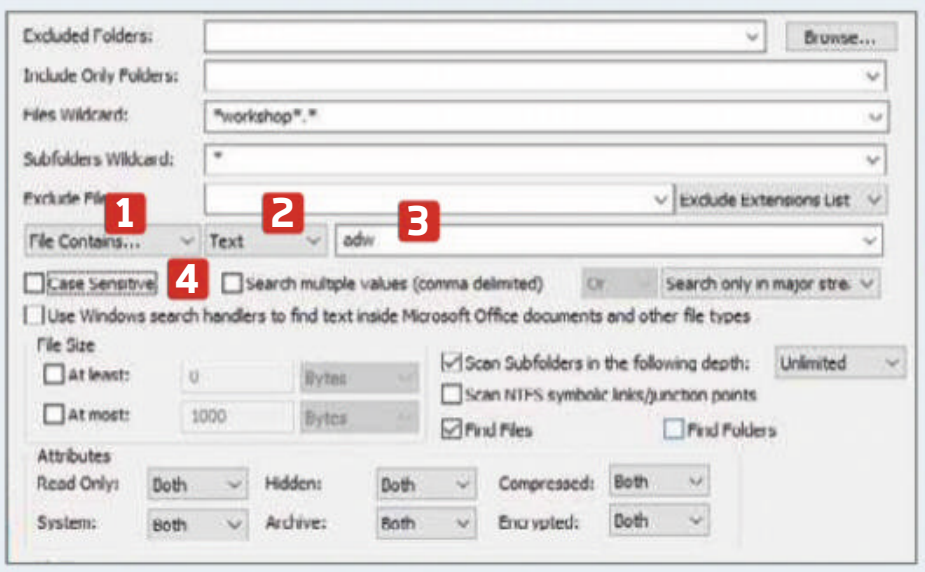
6 SearchMyFiles opens two windows: the first contains the form you need to fill out to perform your search 1 (don't worry, you don't have to fill in every box); and the second displays the results as they appear. 2



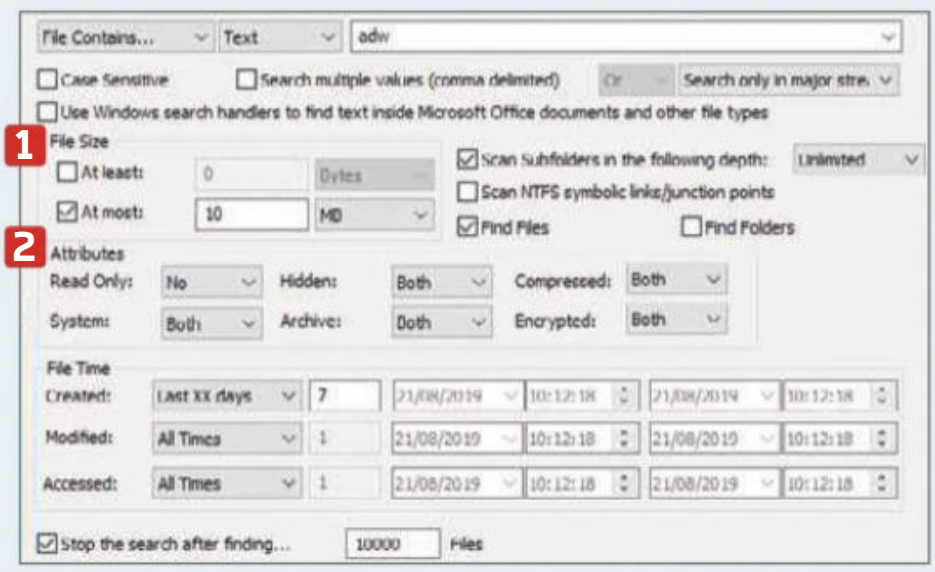
7 To perform a basic file search, click the top Browse button 1 and whittle down to the subfolders that you think the file might be contained in. In Files Wildcard, type anything that might appear in the filename, surrounded by wildcards (*). You can add a '.*' wildcard file extension if you don't know what type of file it is. 2



8 If you know when your file was created or modified, fill in the File Time section. You can use the Time Range setting 1 to select between two dates 2 or choose options such as 'Last XX days' and put a relevant number in the box next to it. 3



9 Some file types let you search the contents of a file. Choose whether you want it to contain the search term or not, 1 what category of item it is (probably Text) 2 and type it into the box. 3 You can refine other elements such as case sensitivity below. 4

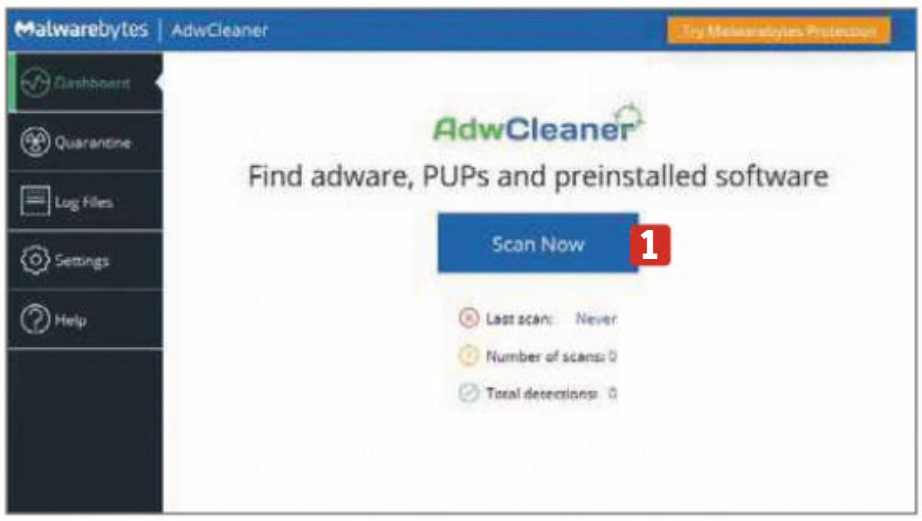


10 It's less likely that you're going to know a file's size 1 or attributes, 2 but the options are there in case this helps you narrow down a long list of results. The previous search settings stay in the boxes even if you close the software, so it's easy to adapt a search and run it again.

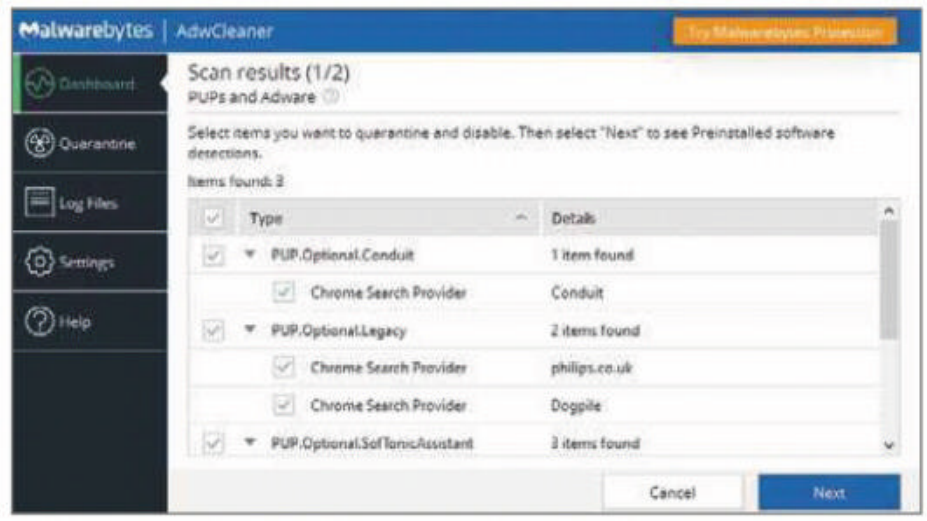
Remove preinstalled software with AdwCleaner

When you get a new computer or clean your PC by returning it to its factory settings, you may still find a collection of additional software that you don't need. AdwCleaner now detects these potentially unwanted programs (PUPs) and can remove them. When downloading AdwCleaner, click the green Free Download button, not the white and blue one on the toolbar. It's portable, so it doesn't need installing.

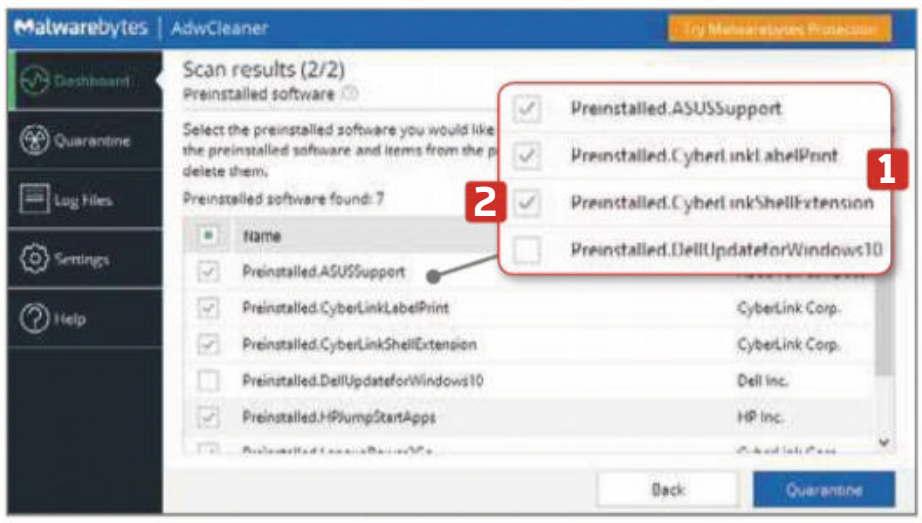
Malwarebytes AdwCleaner: bit.ly/adwcleaner483 | **10 mins** | **7, 8, 10**



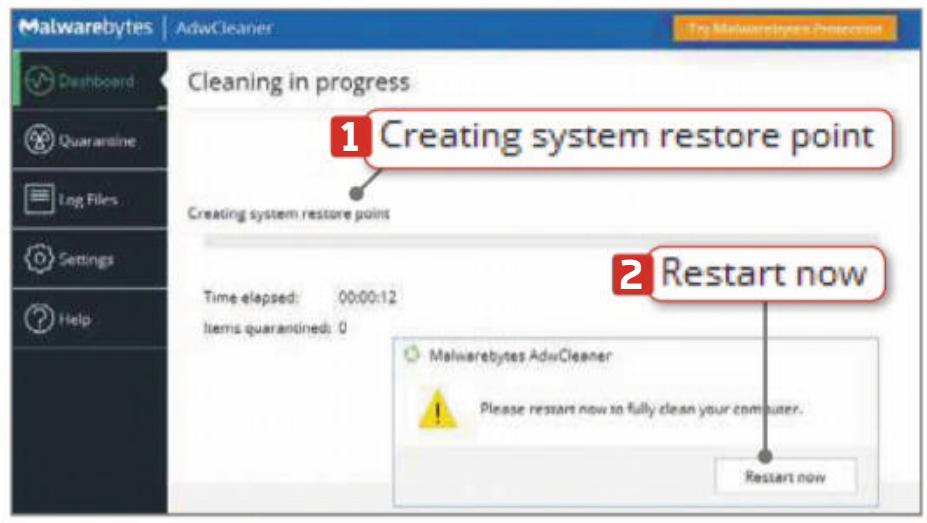
1 When you first run AdwCleaner, you're invited to initiate a preliminary scan. Click Scan Now 1 to get results in just a few minutes. If the software didn't find anything, you can check that it ran properly by clicking the View Scan Log File button to open a more detailed breakdown.



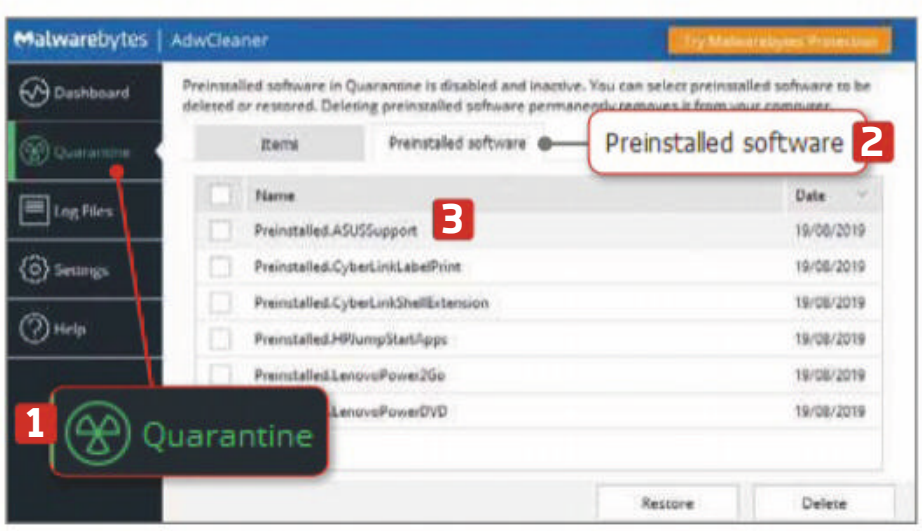
2 If potentially unwanted software is found, you're taken to the 'Scan results' area. The first page lists 'PUPs and Adware'. If you have any on your PC, it's usually best to tick everything and disable the lot, because it comes from a database of programs that most people don't want.



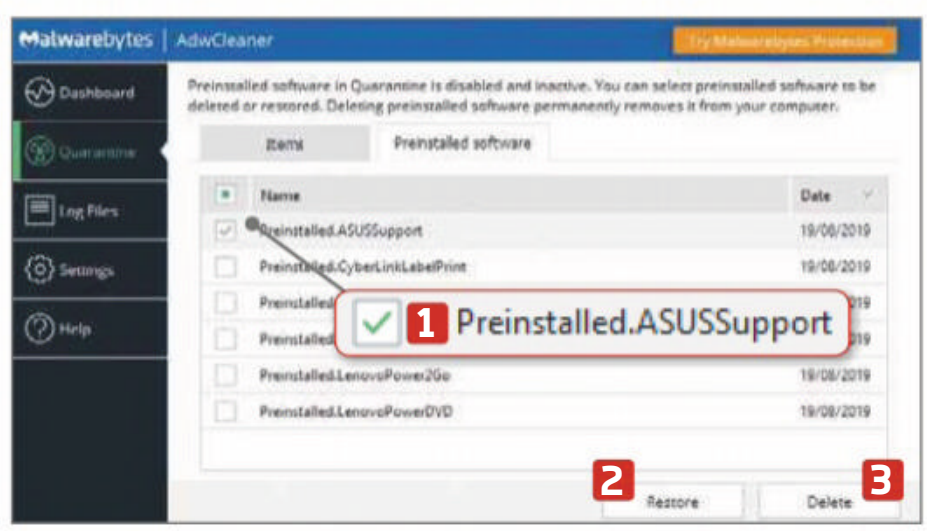
3 Click Next to see the 'Preinstalled software' section. This lists software that may appear on a new PC but doesn't come with Windows, 1 so is installed by manufacturers. Some of it may be useful, so check the list carefully for software you think you might need. Tick anything you want to remove. 2



4 Save your work in any other programs you have open, then click the Quarantine button and the Continue button in the window that pops up. The software creates a system restore point, 1 removes the unwanted software and reboots your PC. 2



5 Your PC should be performing better than it was before. However, if you've accidentally removed something that you suspect you need after all, click the Quarantine button. 1 It's likely to be a 'Preinstalled software' option, so click that tab 2 to see what you've removed. 3

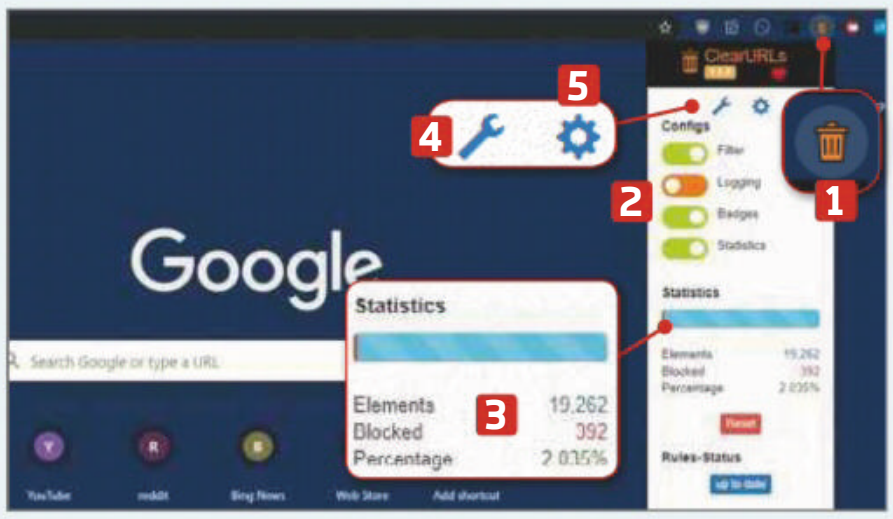


6 To reinstate something you've quarantined, tick its box 1 and click the Restore button. 2 If you're happy that everything is working as it should (we'd advise giving it a bit of time before making this decision), you can permanently remove items by clicking the Delete button. 3

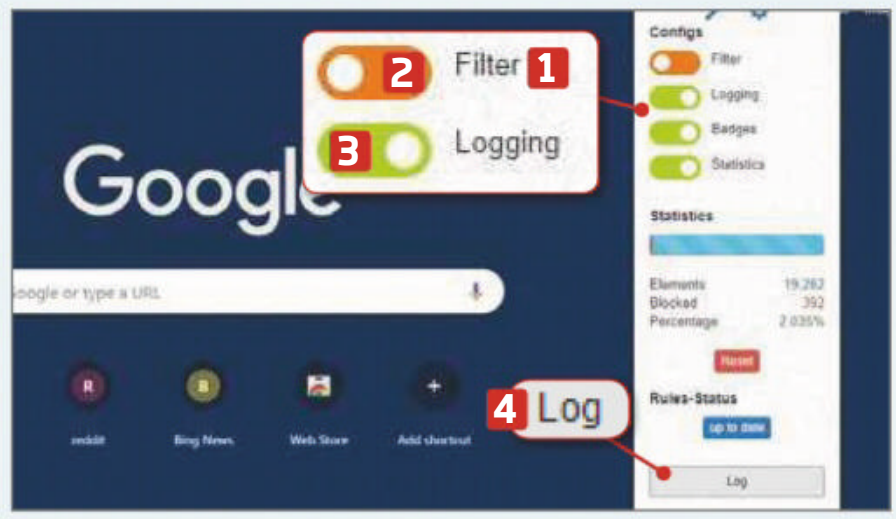
Delete tracking information from URLs

In last issue's Best New Browser Tools, we briefly looked at ClearURLs – a Chrome and Firefox extension that tidies up web address by removing hidden tracking information. Those long URL strings, usually containing the word 'source' or 'UTM', tell websites exactly how you found them and which link you clicked to get there. ClearURLs strips these links free of tracking info, so you can browse the web in privacy.

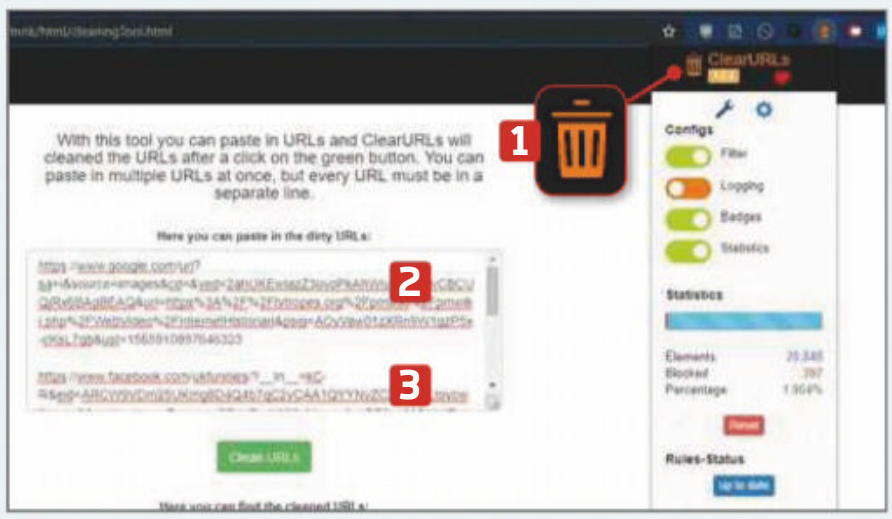
ClearURLS: bit.ly/clear483 | 10 mins | Chrome Firefox



1 Install ClearURLs and click its toolbar button. 1 A panel opens showing four toggle switches 2 – Filter, Logging, Badges and Statistics. Below these are your statistics, 3 showing the number of cleaned links. At the top of the screen are two other options: Cleaning Tool 4 and Settings. 5



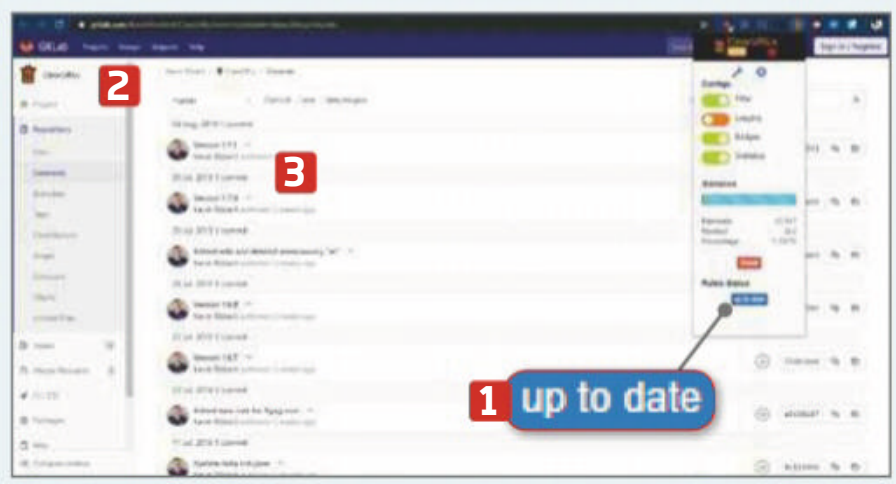
2 Filter 1 is essentially your On-Off switch, so toggling it off (orange) 2 means URLs retain their tracking information. Conversely, Logging is off by default and switching it on (green) 3 means the tool creates a log of all clean URLs, which can be accessed by clicking Log. 4



3 Click the Cleaning Tool icon. 1 While the extension automatically scrubs up links, it also lets you manually clean them. Paste a dirty link into the top field. 2 If you have more than one 'dirty' URL, press Enter and paste the next one on a separate line. 3

4 Click the ClearURLs button. 1 Instantly, the long, unwieldy URL is transformed into a direct link to the site you want to visit. 2 You can now copy and paste it into your address bar. Certain links won't clean up, but most – including those on Google and Facebook – will.

5 Click Settings. The top setting lets you alter the badge colour, 1 which displays on the extension how many URLs have been cleaned. Select a colour 2 or enter your own hex code. 3 After making any changes, press 'Save & reload action' 4 or Reset 5 to restore default settings.



6 According to the developer, ClearURLs has 130 rules working away in the background to keep links clear of trackers. To check you have the updated list, click the extension and select 'up to date'. 1 You're taken to the GitLab page 2 to view all the tool's latest updates. 3

Weekend Project

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

How to...

Create your own website from scratch Part 2: Domains & hosting

Last issue, **Wayne Williams** showed you how to build a website. In this second of a two-part series, you get to put that website online

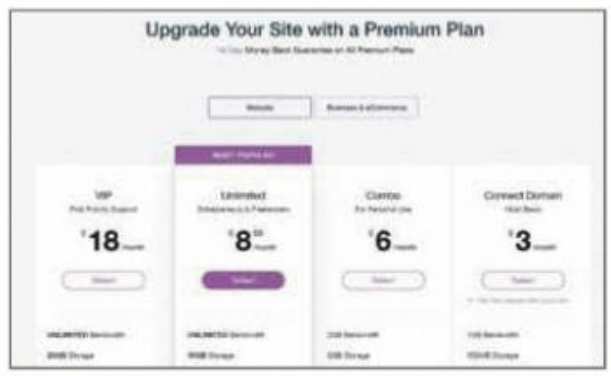
In last issue's Part One of our website-creation project, we looked at how to put together a site using the excellent BlueGriffon (bluegriffon.org). The software – built around Gecko, Firefox's rendering engine – offers a wizard-based template you can use to get started and also lets you import and customise free templates. Creating a site is the hard part, but once you've done that, the next step is to get it up on the web, ready for people to visit. That's what we'll be looking at in this second part of our Weekend Project.

Buying a domain and organising web hosting isn't difficult, but it can get pricey if you don't pay close attention to elements such as VAT and paid-for extras that may be added during the checkout process.

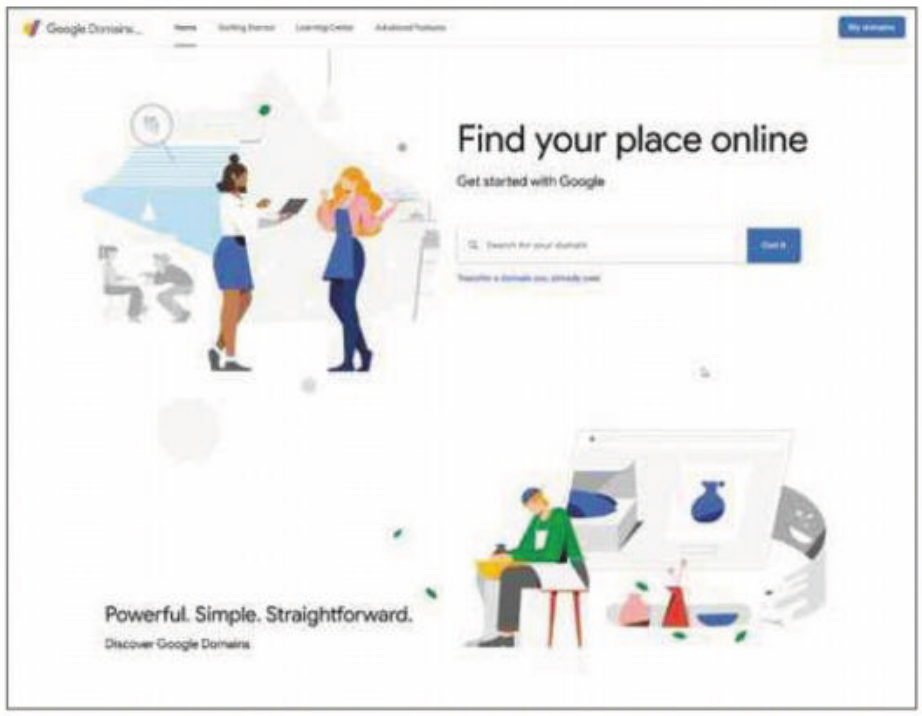
Website builders and hosts

As we mentioned in our last issue, the quickest way to build a website and get it online is to use a website builder such as Wix (www.wix.com), which offers free hosting. The downside of this is that your site will be stuck on Wix forever, and you're saddled with a web address along the lines of http://waynewillx.wixsite.com/website.

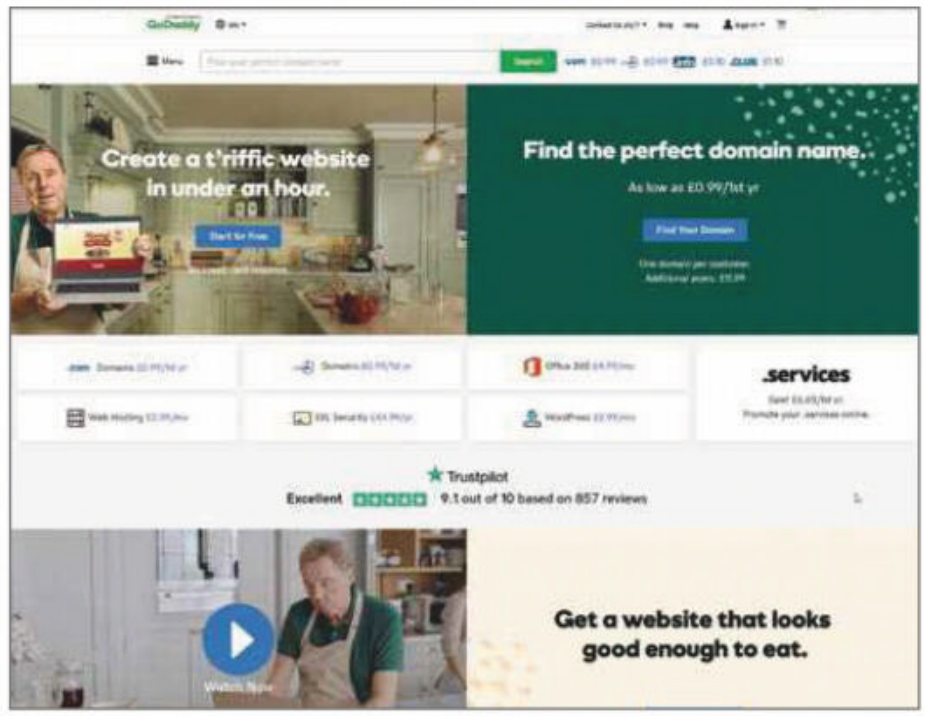
If you'd rather have a less cumbersome URL and connect your own custom domain, you'll have to upgrade to a premium plan. These cost from £3.60 a month (on the annual plan) for the most basic option – 1GB bandwidth and 500MB storage – but Wix offers a number of other choices. The best plan for most people will be Unlimited, which costs £5.10 a month – this gives you unlimited bandwidth, 10GB storage, no Wix ads and a free domain for a year.



Wix offers paid subscriptions that let you remove ads and use your own domain



Google lets you find and buy a domain for your website, but it's the not the cheapest option



GoDaddy is one of the largest domain-name registrars and offers hosting, too

However, if you think you might want to move your site away from Wix at some point in the future, then it's best to start with a site you've built yourself, as we looked at in our last Issue.

Web hosting and domain hosting

They may sound similar, but domain hosting and web hosting are two different things. A domain host provides you with a domain name, such as webuser.co.uk, which is typed into a browser to access your website. A web host, on the other hand, provides the space on the web where your website is located. Web hosts usually let you buy a domain, often as part of a package, and they may include a free or discounted domain when you sign up, which is definitely worth considering, though you need to make sure you're not paying over the odds later if the offer is time-limited.

Buying a domain

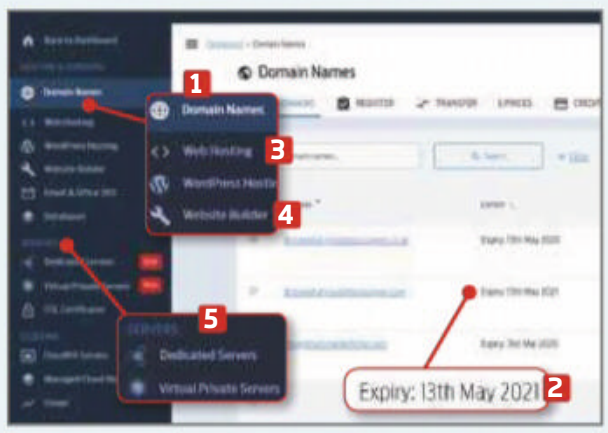
Choosing a domain used to be a simple matter of finding an available name with a '.com' or '.co.uk' extension (suffix). These days, there are many more extensions to choose from including '.org', '.net', '.co', '.online', '.uk', '.me', '.me.uk', '.info' and '.website'. The price you pay will vary wildly depending on the extension. At Fasthosts (fasthosts.co.uk), for example, you can shell out £12 for two years for a '.co.uk' domain, £24 for a '.com', or £29.98 for '.website'. The first year is sometimes heavily discounted – at GoDaddy (uk.godaddy.com), for example, buying a '.com' domain for two years costs £1.19 for the first year and £19.32 for the second.

The renewal price is typically much higher, too. Domain sellers figure that once you've bought your site name, you'll be prepared to pay twice the amount – or more – to keep it in the future. Other things to consider are whether you get extras for free, such as Whois privacy protection. Without this, anyone looking into your domain on the web can easily find out your home address, phone number and email address, so if a domain doesn't come with Whois, it's worth buying that protection separately. You should also check how easy it is to transfer your domain to another registrar, in case you decide to move in the future.

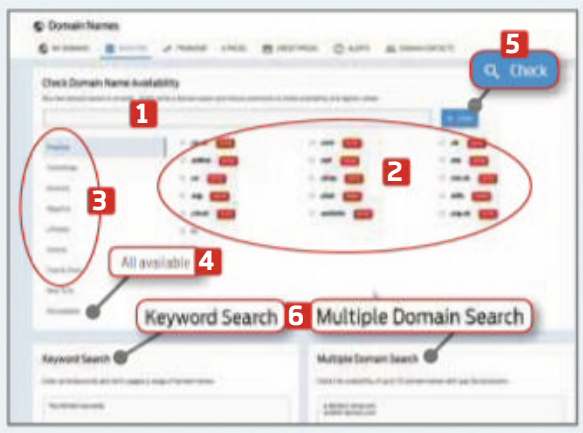
Some domain registrars we recommend include GoDaddy (uk.godaddy.com), Domain.com (www.domain.com), Google Domains (domains.google) and Namecheap (www.namecheap.com).

MINI WORKSHOP | Manage your site in Fasthosts

1 If you decide to go with Fasthosts for your domain or web hosting, you'll be able to manage and monitor your account through the dashboard. This shows your web hosting and lets you add a plan if you don't have one. 1 It also displays your hosted email, 2 and your current renewals, 3 and lets you search for a new domain. 4



2 The sidebar lets you view your current domain names, 1 and shows when they are set to expire. 2 You can also view your existing hosting package 3 and add and access a website builder (it costs from £5.99 a month). 4 Fasthosts now offers dedicated and virtual private servers for sale, too. 5



3 To find and buy a new domain name, first check for availability by typing the name of the site in the box, 1 then choosing which of the many extensions you're interested in. 2 You can browse by category 3 or see all available options. 4 Click Check. 5 You can also perform a keyword or multiple-domain search. 6

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	Provider	Package name	Monthly price	Contract length	Broadband speed	Allowance	First-year cost*
1	TalkTalk For Everyone	TalkTalk: Fast Broadband	£19.95 (£27 after 18 months)	18 months	11Mbps avg. speed	∞ unlimited	CHEAPEST £239.40
2	Shell Energy	Shell Energy: Fast Broadband	£19.99	18 months	11Mbps avg. speed	∞ unlimited	£239.88
3	sky	Sky: Broadband Essential	£20.00 (£25 after 18 months)	18 months	11Mbps avg. speed	∞ unlimited *	£240.00
4	Virgin media	Virgin Media: Big Bundle + Fibre Broadband + Weekend Calls	£33.00 (£54 after 12 months)	12 months	108Mbps avg. speed	∞ unlimited	£396.00

Terms & Conditions apply - see ISP sites for details
* Fair-usage or restriction policy applies.

Ofcom

Data supplied by www.broadbandgenie.co.uk. Correct as of 20 August 2019.

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

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- **BOOST YOUR LAPTOP BATTERY** Set the 'idle' options you've been ignoring

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On sale Weds 11 Sept

Choose the right web host

There are lots of web hosting services out there, but picking the right one requires some research. Consider what it is you need for your site, both now and in the future. If it's just a simple website with a couple of basic pages, then you don't need much web space, bandwidth or advanced features such as DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service) protection.

If you plan to expand the site, add features and maybe sell items, then you need to choose a package that offers these options. Be warned, some services will offer a decent introductory price but then increase the monthly fee significantly. The prices on display often don't include 20% VAT, so make sure you factor that in, too.

Things to consider when choosing a host – beyond price and what you'll get for your money – include server-response time (how long it takes to display your site, which is something Google takes into account for site ranking), uptime (reliability) and customer service.

There are a number of different types of web host including Shared (you share a server with other sites, which makes it the cheapest option), VPS (also shared, but faster because it's shared with fewer sites) and Dedicated (you have your own server, though this is expensive and really only for bigger sites).

Once you've got your host set up, make a note of its FTP details and follow our Mini Workshop, below, to transfer your Blue Griffon site to your hosting.

RECOMMENDED WEB HOSTS

Hostinger

www.hostinger.co.uk

Launched in 2004, Hostinger offers fast and secure web hosting from just £1.19 a month (provided you sign up for 48 months – for a single year's hosting, it's £2.81 a month). This buys hosting for a single website, along with an email account and 100GB of bandwidth. If that's not enough, premium web hosting (£3.11 a month on a 48-month contract) increases this to unlimited websites, email accounts and bandwidth, and includes weekly backups.

Bluehost

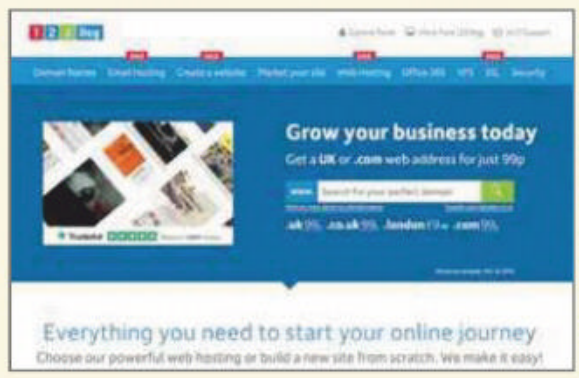
www.bluehost.com

Bluehost has been hosting sites created using WordPress since 2003. The Shared plan costs £3.91 a month (for an initial term of 36 months) and gives you one website, 50GB of SSD storage, unmetered bandwidth, one domain, five parked domains and 25 sub-domains.

123 Reg

www.123-reg.co.uk

Although it's probably best known for selling domains, 123 Reg also offers reliable UK web hosting, along with a web builder to help get you started. Its cheapest offering is the Essentials package, which costs £4.19 a month for the first year. This provides hosting for one website, with one free domain, 10GB of web space and unlimited bandwidth.



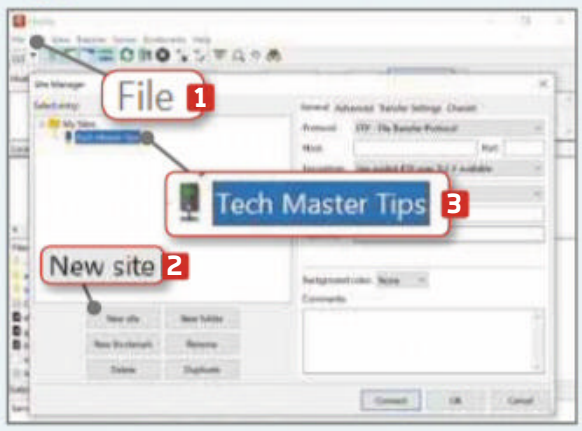
123reg includes everything you need to get your website online

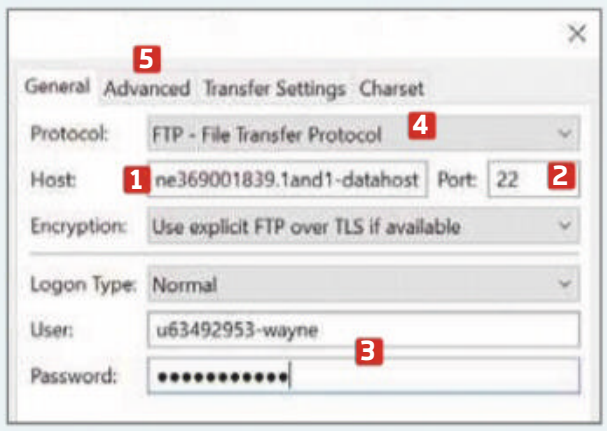
Fasthosts

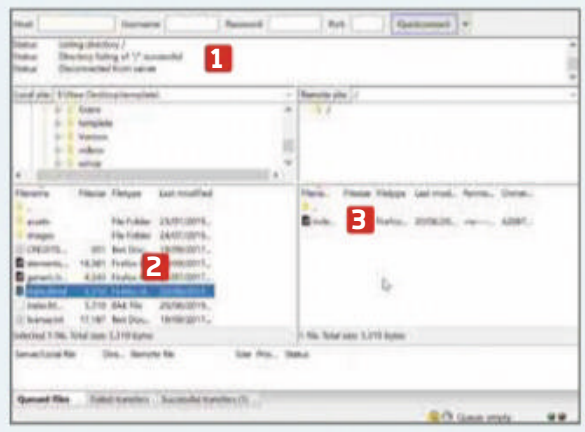
www.fasthosts.co.uk

Fasthosts offers two types of web hosting – regular and WordPress hosting. On the regular side, its Ignite package costs from £3 a month for one website, with 10GB of SSD storage and a free domain. The cost of the WordPress hosting varies depending on the number of websites you want to create. Prices start at £3.89 for one site per month, and drop to £2.99 per site per month (£5.98 in total) when you buy two sites, and so on. We show you around Fasthost's dashboard in our Mini Workshop on page 59.

MINI WORKSHOP | Upload your site to the web







1 Once you've created your website and bought web hosting and a domain, you're ready to get your site online. In this Workshop, we're using FileZilla (filezilla-project.org). Click File, 1 then Site Manager and, in the window that opens, click 'New site'. 2 Give the site a name (to differentiate it from any other sites you create). 3

2 On the right-hand side of the same window, click the Host field and enter the FTP server name supplied by your web host. 1 Next, enter the port number, 2 then your username and password. 3 Change the Protocol (from FTP to SFTP), if necessary. 4 Click the Advanced tab, 5 then click Browse and select the folder to contain your website.

3 Click OK. FileZilla offers to save your passwords. Reopen File, Site Manager, select your site on the left and click Connect. FileZilla connects to the web host – a bar displays its progress. 1 When connected, select the files on the left 2 that make up your website and drag them across to your website on the right. 3

NEXT ISSUE **How To...** Turn any printer into a wireless printer

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STEP 4 Enter your Apple ID password to confirm

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...on a Kindle Fire

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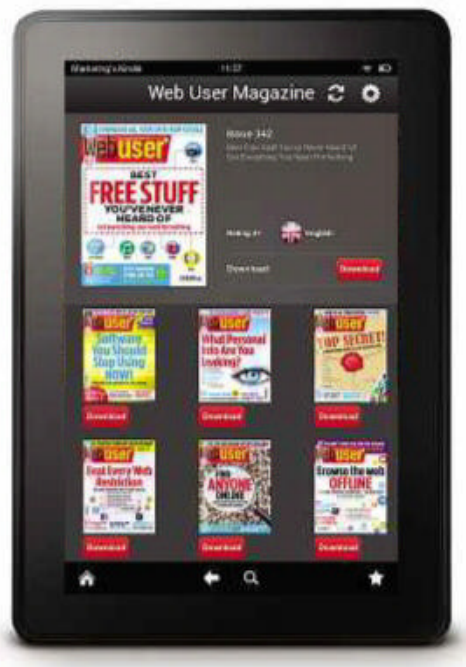
STEP 2 Chose your subscription term from the drop down menu on the popup that appears

STEP 3 Tap 'Subscribe'

available on kindle fire



...via the Zinio app

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

STEP 2 Tap the 'Subscribe' button

STEP 3 Choose whether to create an optional Zinio account

STEP 4 Enter your Apple ID password to confirm

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Web User Masterclass

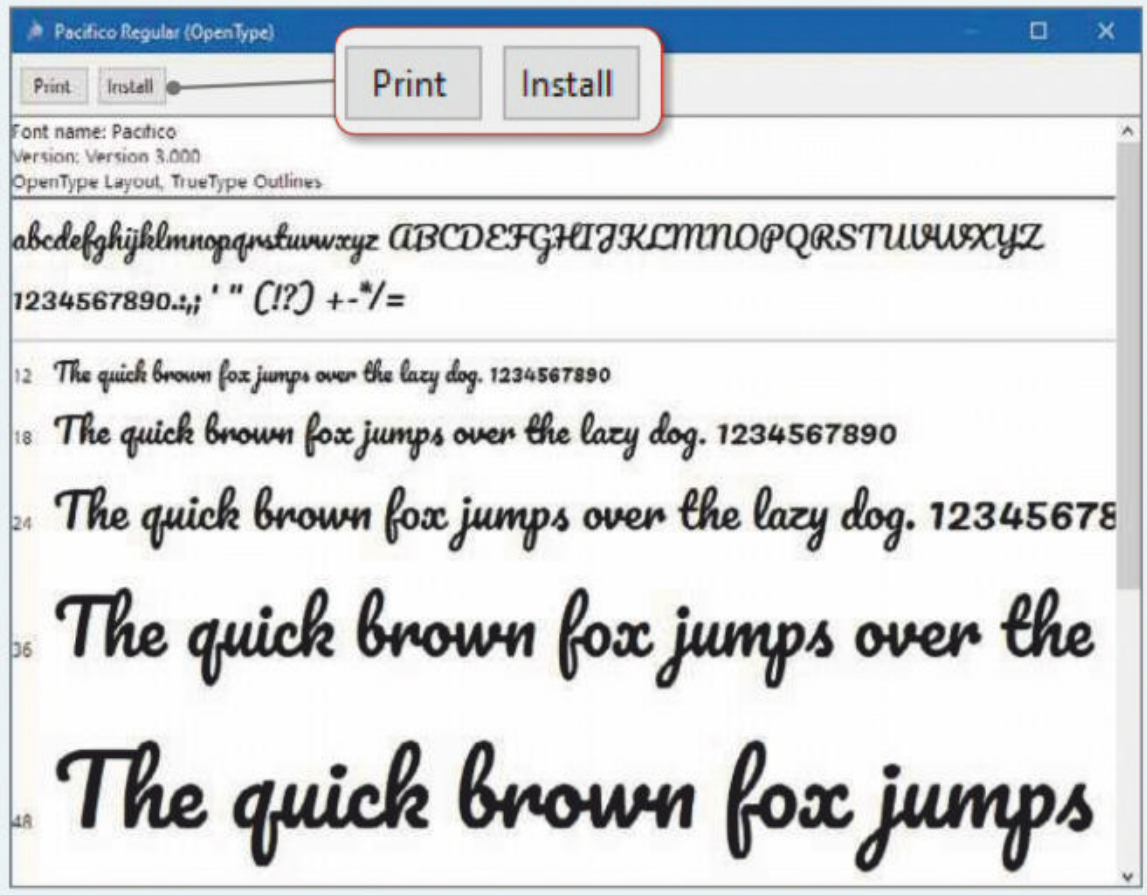
Enhance the text in Windows with free, top quality fonts

Install new fonts in Windows for fancy text

Fonts (or to be more accurate, typefaces – but let's not get into that) determine the way text looks. There are plain fonts, bold fonts, handwriting fonts, serif and sans serif fonts (which refers to the decorative elements that embellish the letters on fonts such as Times New Roman), scary fonts that look as if they're dripping blood and lots more.

You can download font files from the web. In all versions of Windows, double-clicking a TTF font file opens a window containing a preview of the font. At the top are two buttons: Print and Install. Clicking Print lets you see what the font looks like on paper, and clicking Install makes it available in all your applications, including Word, WordPad and even art or photo editors that have a text function.

In case you're wondering why the font preview window repeats the sentence "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog", it's because it contains every letter of the alphabet.



Double-click a font file to view it, print it and install it

Download free fonts

Do a quick Google search for 'free fonts' and you'll find hundreds of sites offering them, such as 1001 Free Fonts (www.1001freefonts.com), DaFont (www.dafont.com), Befonts (befonts.com) and many more. Download some fonts, scan the Zip file with your antivirus software, then unzip and install them.

Install fonts in batches

A font often includes lots of variations, such as bold and italic versions, and installing dozens of files individually is tedious. Thankfully, you can install multiple font files using drag and drop. Open the Windows 10 Settings app and click Personalisation, followed by Fonts on the left. On the right is a dotted box labelled 'Drag and drop to install'. Select some font files in Explorer, then click and drag them to the box.

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.

Hide fonts you don't use

Windows works in many languages and contains fonts for the special characters they use. However, most people use only one or two languages. You can tidy up Windows by hiding fonts for languages you don't use.

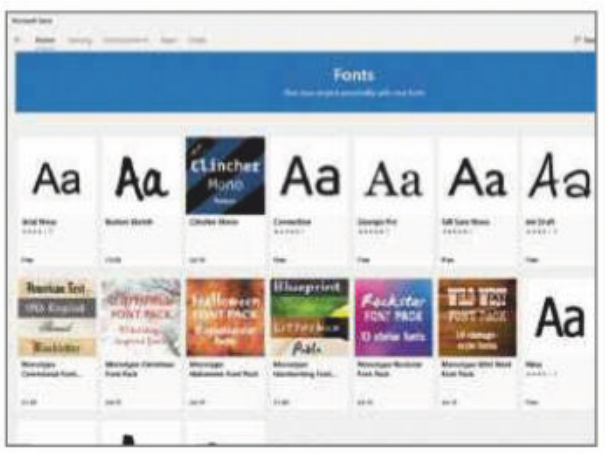
Type `control panel` in the taskbar search box and open the Control Panel. Click Fonts, then click 'Font settings' on the left and tick the box to 'Hide fonts based on language settings'.

Install lots of fonts at once

A quick way to install fonts is to select all the TTF files in Explorer, right-click and choose Install on the menu that appears. The menu actually has two relevant entries: Install makes the fonts available in your account on the PC, while 'Install for all users' makes them available to all user accounts.

Get fonts from the Store

The Windows 10 Store app offers a small but useful collection of fonts that you can add to your PC. Open the Store and search for Fonts, then



Search the Microsoft Store for fonts – there are several free options

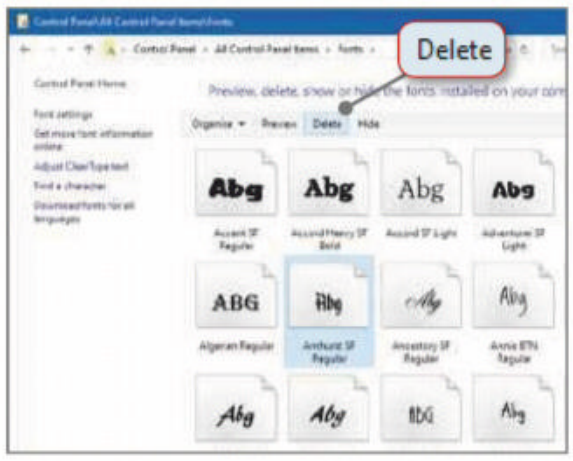
click ‘Explore new fonts’. Alternatively, go to Settings, Personalisation, Fonts, ‘Get more fonts in Microsoft Store’. Some are free, but there are a few that you have to pay for. Click a font to open the details page, then click the Get button to install it.

Uninstall an unwanted font

Having too many fonts can slow down a low-powered computer that has limited memory, so don’t install every font you find, only those you need. In particular, an excess of fonts makes font menus in applications sluggish, especially those that offer a preview of each font.

By the same logic, uninstalling fonts can speed up a slow PC. In Windows 10, open Settings, Personalisation, Fonts, then scroll down to find a font that isn’t required by Windows or other programs you use, and click it. Click Uninstall in the next window.

Every version of Windows has a Fonts section in the Control Panel. Browse the fonts, select one, then click Delete in the menu bar or right-click it and select Delete. If the font consists of multiple files, this removes them all.



Make sure your PC doesn’t need a particular font before you remove it

Make fonts clearer

ClearType is the method Windows uses to draw text on the screen, and you can optimise it for the specific screen you use with your PC. Slight variations between laptops and desktop screens can make text fuzzy, so sharpen it up.

Open Windows 10 Settings and type `cleartype` into the search box, then click ‘Adjust ClearType text’. In Windows 7, open Fonts in the Control Panel and click ‘Adjust ClearType text’. In both cases, Windows displays samples of text on the screen. Simply click the one that looks best.

Solve font problems

If you’ve been experimenting with fonts and settings, and you’ve started to experience problems, you can reset everything. Go to Fonts in the Control panel and click ‘Font settings’, then click ‘Restore default font settings’.

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

More advanced tips for when you’re feeling brave

Store fonts on an external drive

A single font file can occupy 2MB or more of hard-drive space, so having thousands of fonts on your computer can take up gigabytes of space. If your hard drive is nearly full, you can store them on an external drive instead of your PC’s internal Windows drive.

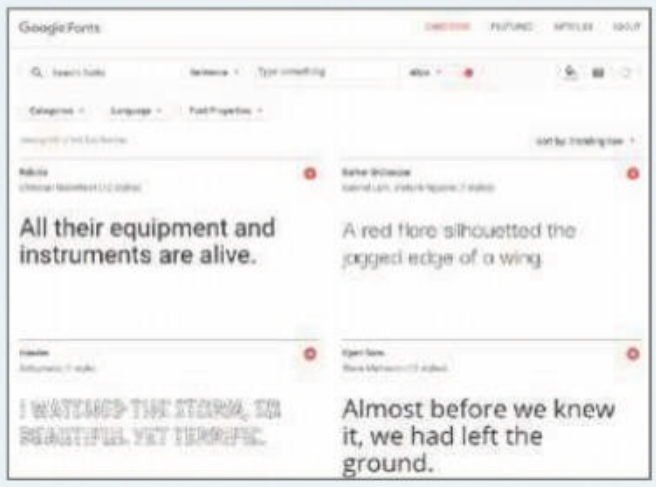
Open the Control Panel and click Fonts. Click ‘Font settings’, then tick the box labelled ‘Allow fonts to be installed using a shortcut’. Download any fonts you like, then transfer them to an external drive and install them from there. A shortcut to that font now appears in the Control Panel Fonts app. Fonts installed on an external drive work in the same way as fonts on your main drive, as long as the external drive is plugged in and switched on.

Install Google Fonts

Google provides an excellent collection of free fonts. You’ll find nearly 1,000 at the fonts.google.com website in every style you can imagine, ranging from the plain and simple to the weird and wonderful. They’re aimed at website developers, who use them to give their site’s headings and text a unique style, but you can download and use them on your PC, too.

Go to the website and browse the fonts. Click the plus button next to any you like, then click the black bar at the bottom of the browser window. Click the download button in the top-right corner. Unzip the download and install the fonts in the usual way.

You can use your Google web fonts in your own documents and programs on your computer.



Google Fonts provides a huge collection of fonts for your PC

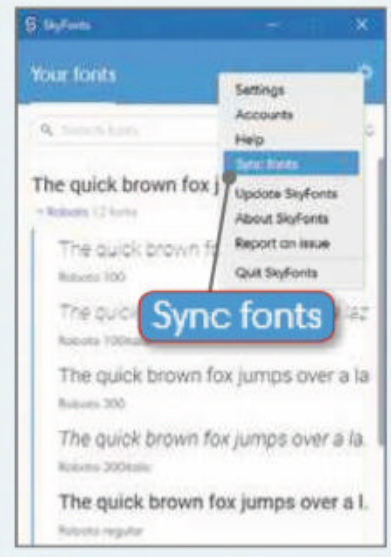
Auto-update Google Fonts

It’s possible to update a font and make changes to it. SkyFonts (bit.ly/skyf483) is a free tool that lets you manage and update Google fonts.

Run it and ignore the request to sign into a font provider. Click the link at the bottom to skip the step and view Google Fonts. Click View Google Fonts at the bottom of the next step.

A web browser opens with a custom view of Google Fonts. Browse or search for a font, then click the SkyFonts arrows. Tick the ‘Add entire family’ box to install every variation of a font (bold, italic and so on), then click Add. After a few seconds, the font appears in the SkyFonts window.

Click the name under a font to expand the preview, or right-click a font to view its files or uninstall it. Click the cog icon, then ‘Sync fonts’ to check for and install font updates. Updates are automatic if you allow SkyFonts to start when Windows boots (which you can enable or disable in the settings).



Use SkyFonts to add, update and manage Google fonts in Windows

Create your own fonts

There are plenty of handwriting fonts available, but wouldn’t it be great to have a font that exactly matched your own writing? Open the Store on Windows 10 and search for Microsoft Font Maker. You’ll need an input pen for this, which is available on Microsoft Surface and computers with graphics tablets.

Font Ark (fontark.net/farkwp) is a powerful online font creator with an online video tutorial showing how a designer created four weights of a font in just six hours. Yes, creating fonts really does take that long! Birdfont (birdfont.org) and FontForge (fontforge.github.io) are free font creators that run on Windows, if you want to have a go yourself.

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

GENERAL PC

Solve a Windows 10 update error

Q I'm having trouble trying to update Windows 10 with KB4057453. It refuses to install and shows the error number 0x80070453. I have tried updating it 23 times with no joy. I have automatic updates switched on.

Searching the internet for a solution, I've noticed that many other people have the same problem. My laptop is an Acer E-571 with 4GB of DDR3 memory and a 500GB SSD.

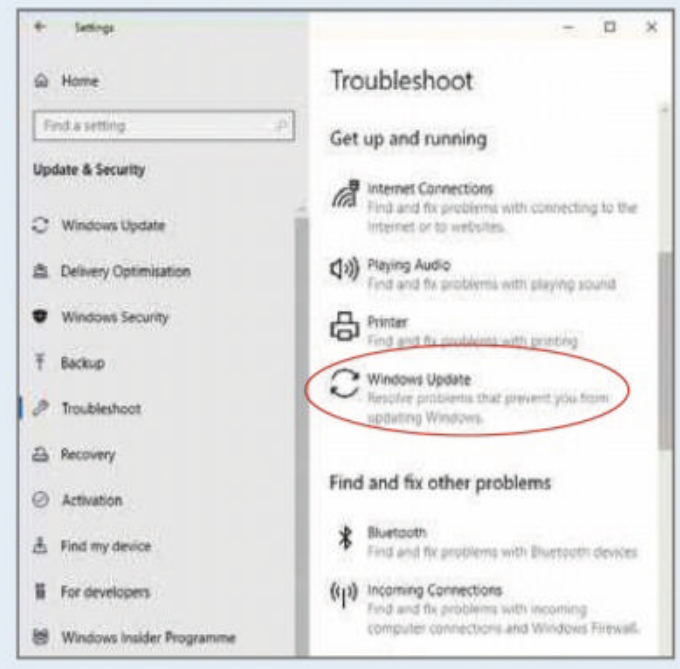
Alfred Donovan, via email

A Sometimes, minor updates refuse to install, even though Windows tries and fails many times. Wait long enough and the problem is likely to go away on its own, because the spring and autumn major updates contain all previous updates rolled up into one.

If you don't want to wait, or are fed up with repeatedly updating and failing, there are fixes that sometimes work. Open the Settings app, click 'Update & Security', then Windows Update. Click the 'Check for updates' button, because sometimes one update relies on another or a new update fixes one that previously failed.

Now choose the Troubleshoot option and run Windows Update, Internet Connections, Incoming Connections, Network Adapter, Program Compatibility Troubleshooter and Windows Store Apps.

Type `command prompt` into the taskbar search box, right-click it and choose 'Run as administrator'. Type `sfc /scannow` at the command prompt and press Enter to check Windows files. When it has finished, type `DISM /Online /Cleanup-Image /RestoreHealth` and press Enter, to check Windows Update files. Try Windows Update again and – fingers crossed – it will work this time. See our feature on page 48 for advice about installing updates manually.



Use the Troubleshoot tools to fix problems with Windows Update

GENERAL PC

Unlock a BitLocker drive

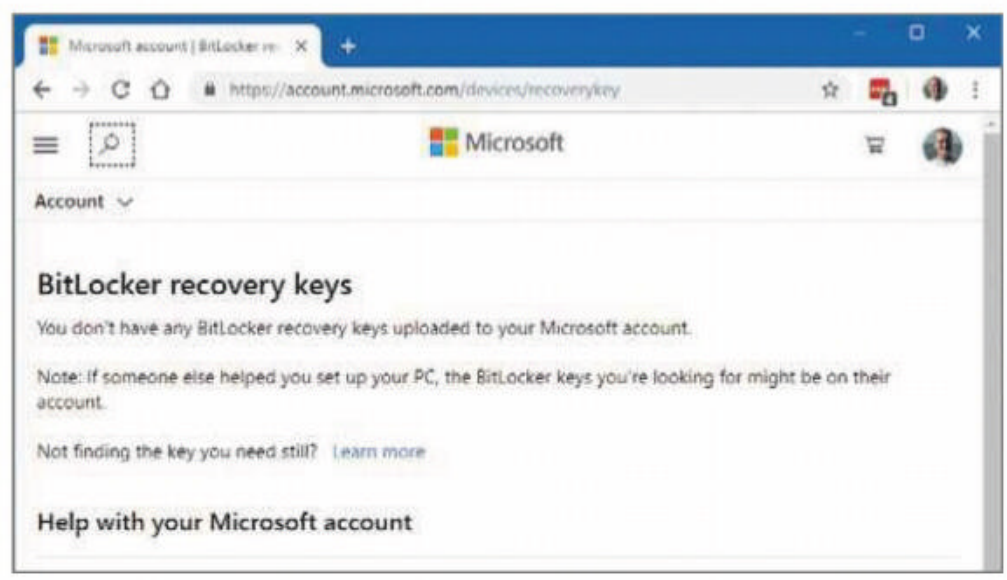
Q I have been given a computer by a relative who no longer needs it, but there is a snag: it has BitLocker installed and they can't access the hard drive. They said I can keep the computer if I can unlock the drive. Is there a way to do this or will I have to replace the drive with a new one?

Dave Hart, via email

A BitLocker is designed to guard against access to your computer, and it does a good job of keeping people out. There is no backdoor or secret way to access the drive and the only option is to use the BitLocker key.

BitLocker lets you create a backup of of the recovery key and the original owner may have one stored in their Microsoft account. Ask them to open a browser and go to onedrive.live.com/recoverykey and send you the recovery key. In addition to this, a copy may be stored elsewhere in the owner's Microsoft account, at account.microsoft.com/devices/recoverykey.

If no recovery keys can be found, replacing the drive is not necessary. It can be erased, formatted and re-used when Windows is installed. You need to download the Windows Media Creation Tool (bit.ly/wmct483) on another computer and write it to a DVD or USB memory stick, so it can be used to start your computer. You will need a Windows licence, though.

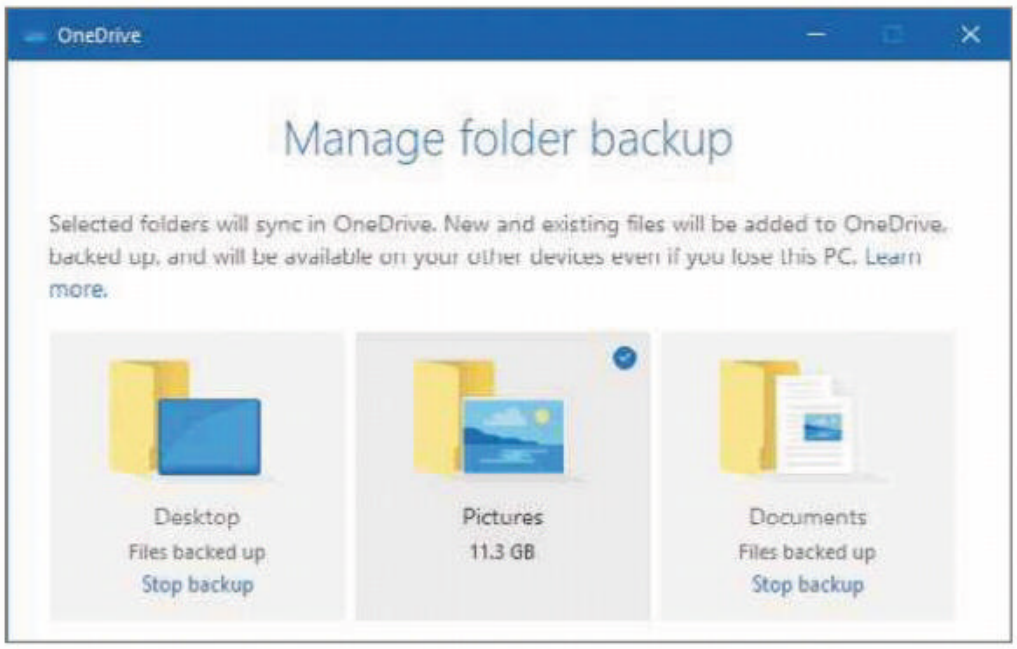


If you've used BitLocker to lock a drive, there may be a spare key in your Microsoft account

GENERAL PC

Set OneDrive to sync to a new PC

Q My computer failed and, although it could have been repaired, I decided it wasn't worth spending money on such



Don't lose your files – use OneDrive to sync and back them up

an old (2013) model, so I bought a new laptop. I plugged it in, went through the Windows setup, then took a break and watched TV.

When I returned, I found the desktop and files from my old computer were on it. How did that happen? Is this some new feature of Windows 10? I'm not complaining – in fact, I'm thankful for it – but I'm just wondering how it occured.

Robert Carr, via email

A There are several ways this could happen and there are settings in Windows 10 that can be synced across computers if they're enabled. Open the Settings app and go to Accounts, then 'Sync your settings'. There are several switches to enable or disable syncing of various elements, such as the desktop theme, passwords and other Windows settings. They are probably enabled, so that your new computer will look and work the same as your old one as soon as it's finished syncing.

OneDrive is probably responsible for syncing your files, although Google Drive and Dropbox also have sync capabilities, if you've already installed them. Right-click the OneDrive icon at the right of the taskbar and select Settings. Select the 'Back up' tab and then click the 'Manage backup' button.

This sets the Desktop, Pictures and Documents folders to back up to OneDrive, and since OneDrive is synced to every computer you use, all the files and folders contained in them will automatically appear on a new computer.

Syncing Windows settings and using OneDrive for Desktop, Documents and Pictures doesn't save everything in the event of a disaster, but it saves a lot. The Videos folder isn't included because video files are often too large. In fact, Desktop, Documents and Pictures may be too large for the free space on OneDrive, but another 100GB only costs £1.99 a month.

SOFTWARE

Fix a portable booting problem

Q Having read the 'Run Anything from a USB Stick' feature (Issue 477, bit.ly/webuser477), I got myself a DataTraveler 100 G3 64GB USB memory stick and invested in the full version of Hasleo WinToUSB in order to install Windows 10 Pro on the USB device. I have tried all the options, MBR and GPT for both BIOS and UEFI; and have also tried all the install options, VHD, VHDX and Legacy.

I have tried to run Windows off the device on five different PCs and laptops, mostly Windows 10 Pro, mixture of UEFI and BIOS, with and without Legacy support, with and without Safe Boot option. Not a single PC booted from the portable OS. I didn't get any errors – Windows is just loading endlessly while stuck on the manufacturer's screen. When I check the contents of the USB stick, all the Windows folders are there.

Mariusz, via email

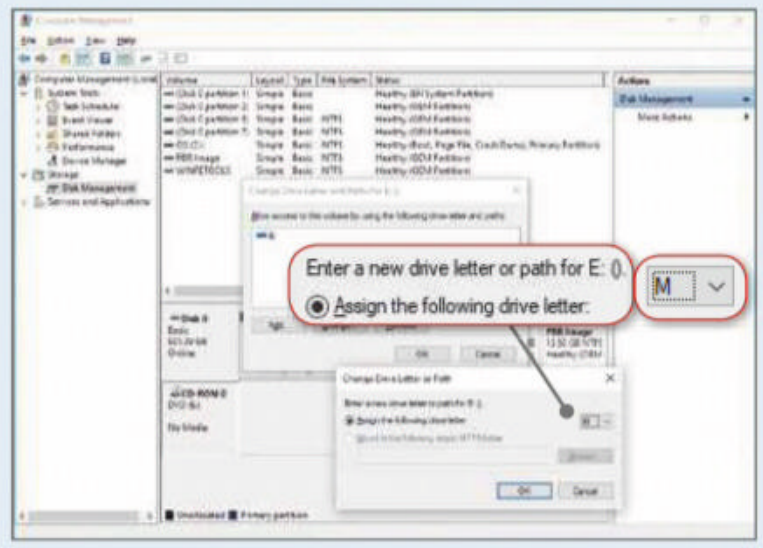
A Your email is so similar to Marc's from Issue 481 (bit.ly/webuser481) that we had to double-check it wasn't the same one. He even has the exact same make and model of USB memory stick as you, which is unlikely to be a coincidence. It's probably the cause of the problem.

It seems that some USB sticks are not bootable and it looks like the DataTraveler 100 G3 64GB is one of them. In all your tests with different PCs

HARDWARE

Restore a missing USB drive

Q I plugged my USB hard drive into my computer today but it's not showing up in Explorer. I've been using this drive on and off for a couple of years. I know the drive is powering up and can hear it and feel a vibration, so what could the problem be? Is there any way to get my files back? I vaguely remember reading about someone else with this problem, but can't remember the solution.



Change the permanent letter of a removable drive to one that's less likely to be pinched by another device

Karen Scott, via email

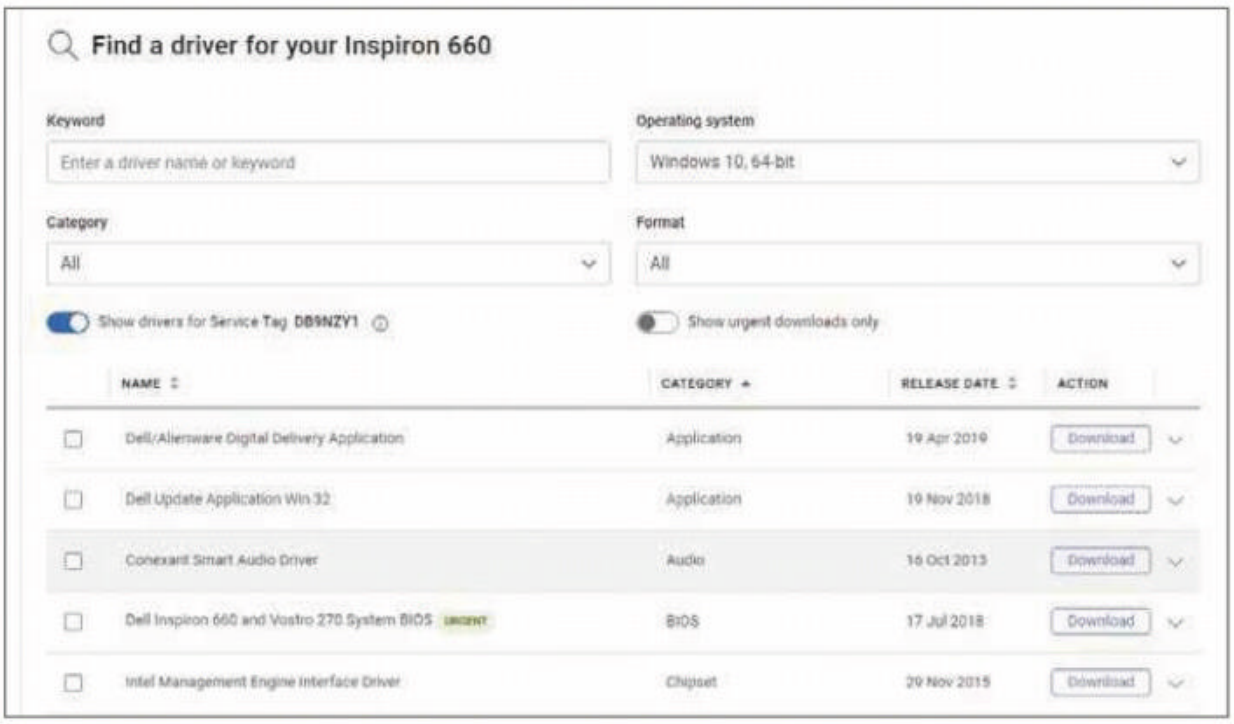
A It's possible that the drive has a serious hardware fault that's preventing it from working, but before you throw it away, it's worth seeing if there is a configuration problem in Windows.

When an external storage device such as a USB hard drive, memory stick or digital camera is plugged into Windows, it's automatically assigned the next available drive letter, such as 'D' or 'E'. Windows seems to get confused if a device is plugged in but can no longer access the usual drive letter assigned to it, perhaps because that drive letter has been passed on to another device in the meantime.

Plug in and power up the external USB drive, then right-click This PC in Explorer and select Manage. Expand Storage and select Disk Management. In the lower part of the window, right-click 'Disk 1', 'Disk 2' or whatever the drive is called, and select 'Change Drive Letter and Paths'. Choose a drive letter that's well away from anything else, such as 'M' or 'P'. The drive will then appear in Explorer and will always use this drive letter.

and install options, it is the one thing you didn't change. Try a different make and model of USB memory stick.

Some people have found that doing an initial format of the USB stick with the excellent free tool Rufus (rufus.ie) solves the problem. Download the portable version and click it to run it.



Update your PC's drivers by downloading new versions from the manufacturer's site

GENERAL PC

Update deleted sound drivers

Q After updating to the latest version of Windows 10 (1903), I have no sound on my computer. A friend helped me to restore the previous version of Windows, but does this mean I can never update it, at least not without losing the sound?

Richard Wood, via email

A Windows Update can remove hardware drivers if they have compatibility problems or newer ones are available. Sometimes the newer drivers are not as good or have compatibility problems themselves. Whenever there is a major update, there are always a few people with this problem.

Go to the computer manufacturer's website and search for your computer model in the software downloads or drivers section. Save the audio drivers or whatever package includes the audio drivers to the hard drive. Run it and install them whenever Windows Update causes problems, and they should restore the audio on the computer.

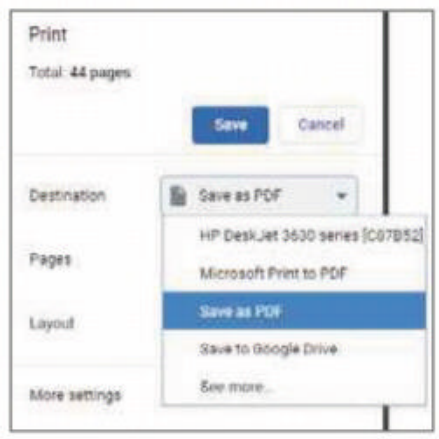
GENERAL PC

Stop Chrome saving instead of printing

Q Whenever I go to print something from Chrome, such as a web page or email, instead of a Print button I now get a Save button. How has Print become Save, and how do I get Print back?

Tony Crook, via email

A This has probably happened because at some point you created a PDF file in either Windows or Chrome. To do this, you would have selected 'Print to PDF' or 'Microsoft Print to PDF', and it's now become the default target device instead of your printer. It's easy to switch it back.



Switch between Save and Print on the Destination menu in Chrome

Open the Control Panel, then open 'Devices and Printers'. Right-click your printer and select 'Set as default printer'. In Windows 10, go to the Settings app, choose Devices, then 'Printers & scanners' and click the printer. Set it as the default by clicking the button.

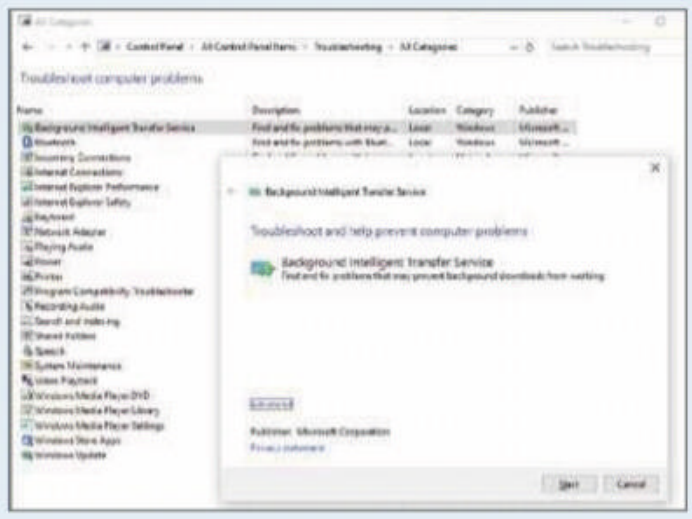
When printing from Chrome, click Destination in the print window. If the only options are to print to PDF, click More to see all devices that can be printed to and select the printer.

SECURITY

Fix Windows Defender not updating

Q Windows Defender is stuck with outdated virus definitions and won't update. When I try to update, it spins its wheels for a few minutes, gets nowhere, then shows a meaningless error code. Is this a common problem and, more importantly, is there a cure?

Sean Edmunds, via email



Running Windows' Troubleshooters can help fix all sorts of problems

A It isn't a common problem but there is a cure. If you have a firewall, turn it off while updating. If this works, check that Windows Defender is allowed through the firewall when it is on.

Open Control Panel and click Troubleshooting. Click 'View all' and run 'Background Intelligent Transfer service', Incoming Connections, Internet Connections, Network Adapter, Windows Store Apps and Windows Update. Basically, everything that uses the internet. Restart Windows and you should find that your Defender updates are restored.

SECURITY

Tell whether a Microsoft call is a hoax

Q Three times this month I've had a call from someone claiming to be from Microsoft asking about malware on my computer. I was immediately suspicious of a scam, but wondered if there was some way to tell if a call is genuinely from Microsoft.

G Baker, via email

A Microsoft never calls anyone about malware on their computer, so all such calls are scams.

This fortnight, Roland has been restoring an old PC. It ran well once the adware and junk were cleared

Readers' Helpdesk

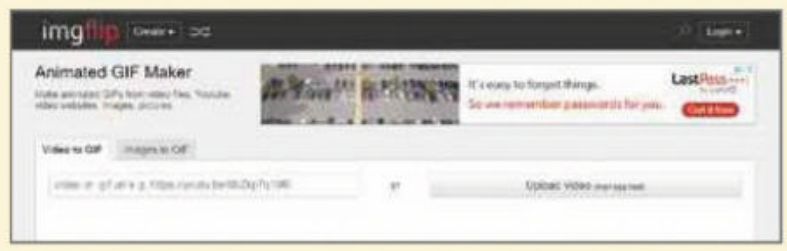
Can you help your fellow readers with their computer problems? Send your questions and answers to webuser@webuser.co.uk

READERS RESPOND

Back Issues disc winner

VIDEO

Create your own GIFs



You can make your own GIFs using any video or image

A Several issues ago, a reader asked how to create GIFs for sharing with friends and family.

One of the best and simplest tools I've found is Imgflip's GIF maker (bit.ly/gifmaker483), which lets you upload your own videos or images and convert them to GIF format.

Alternatively, there's Motion (bit.ly/gif483), which won't make traditional GIFs but adds a fancy overlay to still images, creating the illusion of movement. Lastly, I've found that Google Photos automatically creates GIFs using videos in your library, although you're beholden to its whims as to which videos it'll turn into GIFs and when. Hope that helps!

Richard Olver, 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

GENERAL PC

Q Is there a way to change the default download location in Windows 10? It would make my life a lot easier if documents were downloaded straight to my Documents folder, images to Pictures, and so on.

Nicholas Bledsoe, via email

HARDWARE

Q My wireless speed – like most of the country, it seems – is absolutely atrocious, but I don't fancy trailing Ethernet cables throughout my home. I've heard Powerline adapters may help, but are they just snake oil?

Angela Liddle, via email

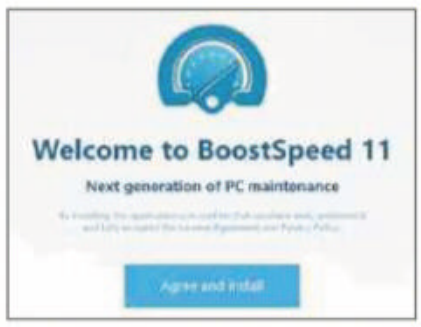
SOFTWARE

Boost your computer's speed

Q In your Best Free Software section in Issue 481 (bit.ly/webuser481), you recommend the program Auslogics BoostSpeed 11 Free (bit.ly/boost483). This sounds wonderful, but unfortunately, Malwarebytes quarantines it because of the three PUPS (potentially unwanted programs) it detects in the download. Who should I believe?

T Todd, via email

A Sorry you're having problems with getting BoostSpeed to run. These sort of warnings can be worrying, but in our experience, it's likely that Malwarebytes is flagging the program as a false positive. Auslogics is a respected developer, so if you've downloaded the software from the official site, you should be secure.



Who should you trust: Auslogics or Malwarebytes?

If you want a second opinion, and you're feeling adventurous, you can use a Registry hack to set up Windows Defender to check for PUPs. Open the Registry Editor and navigate to:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Policies\Microsoft\Windows Defender

Right-click this folder, and create a new key. Name it MpEngine. Inside this key, make a new DWORD (32-bit), and call it MpEnablePus. Set the value to 1, click OK and restart your computer. Now, whenever Windows Defender detects a PUP, it will automatically remove it.

Go to Defender's History to find out more about any detections.

Steve Clark, Features Writer, Web User

WINDOWS 10

Customise Windows 10 light and dark themes

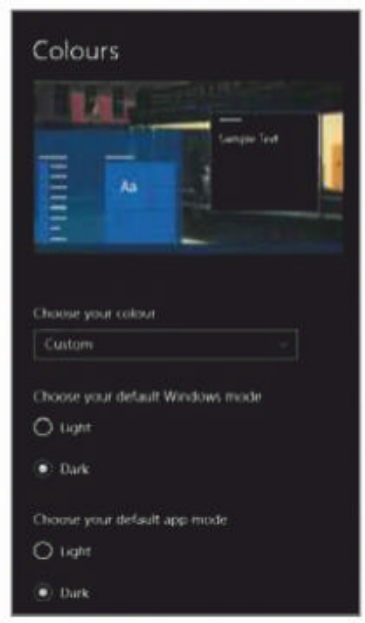
Q Can I use a combination of themes in Windows 10? I love dark mode, but I can't deal with it across the entire operating system. Can I change themes on a per-app basis? I'm wondering if I've overlooked a setting or if there's a program that lets me do this.

Geoff Northolt, via email

A It'll brighten your day to know you can have both light and dark mode themes running on Windows 10. But it may darken your mood to learn that, as it stands, it's slightly limited. Open Settings, Personalisation, and go to Colours. Under the option 'Choose your colour', use the drop-down menu and select Custom. You can now choose between light and dark for your default Windows mode. Beneath this is the option to choose your default app mode – again, select either light or dark. You'll now find that the core Windows 10 experience and the app modes are different.

For further customisation, check each app's settings to see if you can natively switch between the two themes.

Steve Clark, Features Writer, Web User



Split the difference – use light and dark modes in Windows 10

Your Top Tips

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

TOP TIP

Back Issues disc winner

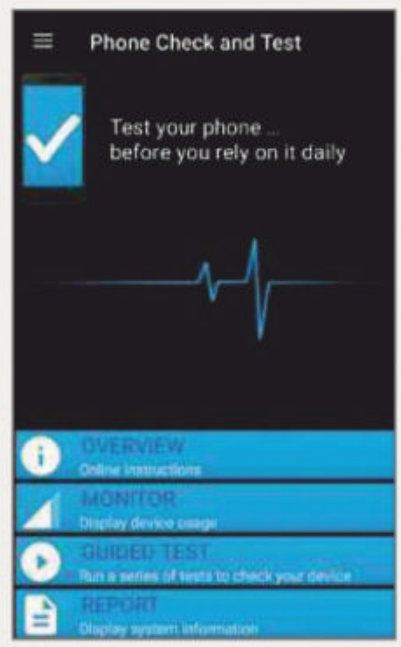
ANDROID

Give your phone a health checkup

Google, unfortunately, doesn't offer much in the way of built-in Android diagnostics, so if you're worried that your Android phone might be on the blink, try the 'Phone Check and Test' app from the Google Play Store (bit.ly/check483).

Run the tool to check the 'health' of all the most important parts of your phone. It covers basics such as your network, Wi-Fi, display settings and touchscreen, as well as your camera, sensors, GPS, processor and loads more to make sure everything's shipshape on your device. Best of all, for future reference, you can have the report emailed to you once complete.

George Calloway, via email



Keep your phone healthy using 'Phone Check and Test'

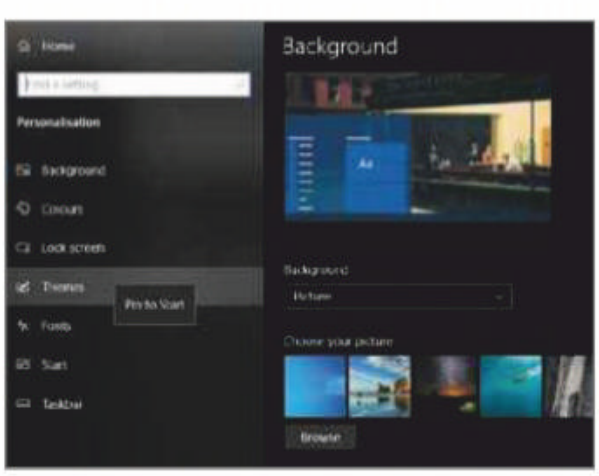
WINDOWS 10

Get faster access to Settings

It's not obvious, but you can pin items in the Settings app to the Start menu. Right-click an item such as System, Personalisation or Apps, and click 'Pin to Start' from the menu. You can go even deeper by opening an item and right-clicking any of the items on the left to pin them. For example, open Settings, Personalisation, then right-click Themes and pin it.

The same goes for the Control Panel. Open it, right-click any item – such as Power Options or 'Devices and Printers' – and select 'Pin to Start' to create a tile. There's also a 'Create shortcut' menu you can use to create a desktop shortcut for opening a Control Panel item.

Tom Morrison, via email



Create your own Start menu tiles from options in the Settings app

GENERAL PC

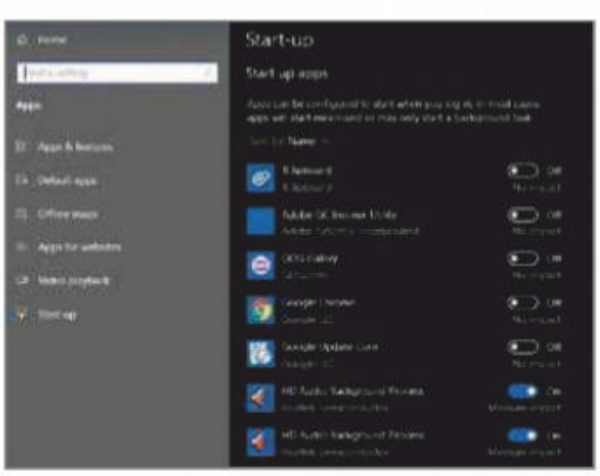
Disable startup programs

Programs that automatically start with Windows can be useful, but sometimes they just cause problems, such as slowing down your computer or worse. The usual procedure for checking startup items is to open Task Manager and click the 'Start up' tab, but Windows 10 provides another way.

Open the Settings app and click Apps, then Start-up. You'll see a list of programs that auto-start with Windows, along with information on the impact they have on the startup time. There are switches to enable and disable them.

I use the preview version of Windows which gives me early access to features, so if you don't see this, you soon will.

Martin Walford, via email



See and configure startup programs in the Windows 10 Settings app

ANDROID

Zoom using one hand

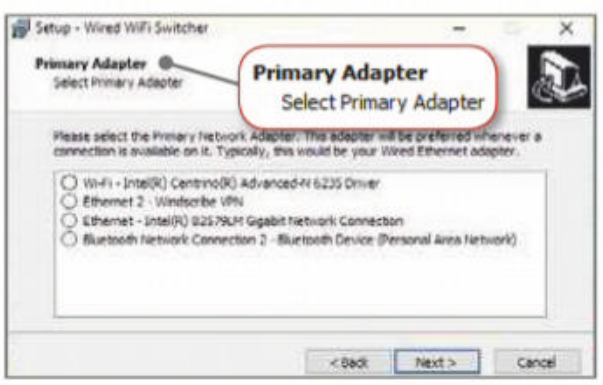
Do any other readers find zooming into images and websites a bit fiddly? I usually need two hands to pinch the screen and move in and out. However, quite by accident, I discovered that you can zoom with one hand. Double-tap the screen, as you normally would, but keep your finger pressed down after the second tap. Now, you can move your thumb over the screen to zoom in and out.

Ken Barnes, via email

NETWORKING

Choose to connect to Ethernet or Wi-Fi

Wired Wi-Fi Switcher (bit.ly/switcher483) is a great tool that lets you set your Network Adapter preference, so you can control how you connect to it. You can choose when your computer connects to the internet using Wi-Fi, and when it connects via your Ethernet cable. Before you start, make sure you know what your Wi-Fi and Ethernet adapters are called, then open the tool. During setup, you're prompted to select your primary network adapter, followed by your secondary



Choose which network you want to use with this tool

network adapter. Finish the setup and the tool will automatically connect you to your chosen network each time.

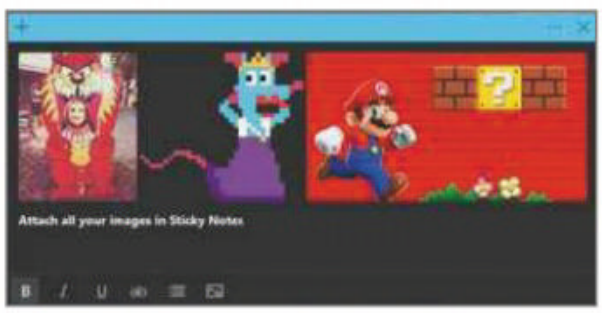
Nathan Schofield, via email

WINDOWS 10

Add images to Windows' Sticky Notes

Windows 10's Sticky Notes offers more than just to-do lists and notes, and appears to have had some sort of upgrade since I last used it. In addition to adding text formatting, such as bold and italic, and bullet points, you can now add images from elsewhere on your computer, or even online, by downloading them, then attaching them by clicking the Image button.

Mervyn Styles, via email



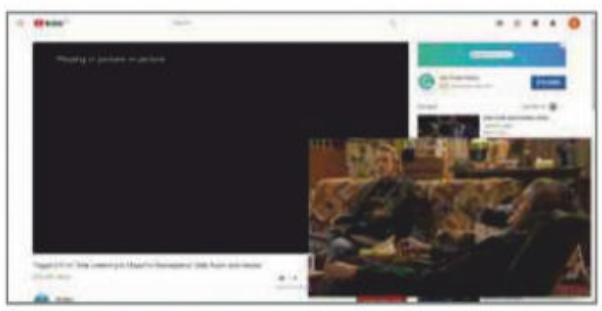
Don't forget, you can attach saved images to Sticky Notes

BROWSER TOOLS

Another way to enable PiP Mode

In the last issue of your magazine, RJ Leigh recommended Google's own picture-in-picture extension. Like many other readers, however, I try to avoid a lot of Google products – and, if you're anything like me, you may want to try an alternative. I heartily recommend the bluntly named Picture-in-Picture (bit.ly/pip483). You'll need to tweak a few flags, as detailed on the tool's Chrome Web Store page, but it's very easy to use once that's done.

Geraint Holder, via email



Watch while you work with this Picture-in-Picture extension

BROWSER TOOLS

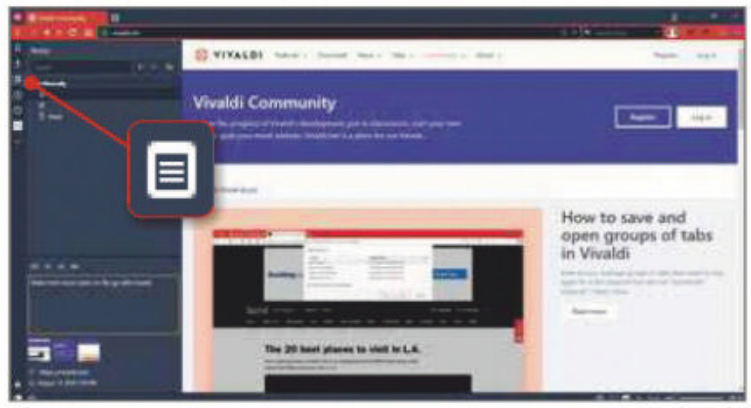
'Kill' sticky headers on websites

I hate the new-look internet, with its pop-ups and notifications and cookie notices and the like. In years to come, I imagine we'll look back on these so-called 'features' and laugh, in the same way we do when we come across old-fashioned 90s-style websites today. Your magazine has taught me how to block many of these nuisances, but I thought other readers may like to know about the bookmarklet 'Kill sticky headers' (bit.ly/sticky483). You'll no doubt be familiar with sticky headers, which remain fixed in the same position on a web page wherever you scroll and navigate. Companies often add them to a website to promote a sale or newsletter.

Drag and drop 'Kill sticky headers' to your bookmark bar and it will automatically scan pages and remove the offending clutter.

The developer mentions that the bookmarklet may interfere with certain navigation buttons so you may have to refresh the page to fix this.

Martha Kendrew, via email



Vivaldi lets you make notes, whatever you're doing

BROWSER TOOLS

Add notes in Vivaldi

I'm fairly new to Vivaldi, but even more experienced users may not know about the browser's Notes tool, which lets you make notes, take screenshots and attach files that sit neatly tucked away on the sidebar. It's become utterly indispensable to me, particularly the option of capturing selected areas of the screen, which is similar to using Windows' Snipping Tool app. Check you have it set up by right-clicking Vivaldi's side panel and ticking the Notes option. The icon looks like the page in a notebook.

Helen Guthrie, via email

SECURITY

Recover deleted passwords

It's useful to know that if you accidentally delete a password or a note in the password manager LastPass (www.lastpass.com), it can be recovered. This could save you from being locked out of an account or website.

Click the LastPass icon on your browser's toolbar, then click 'Open my Vault'. Click More Options at the bottom of the left-hand panel and expand Advanced. Click 'Deleted items' to see all deleted passwords and notes. There is a Restore button on the right of each item and a Delete button if you're certain you really want to delete it.

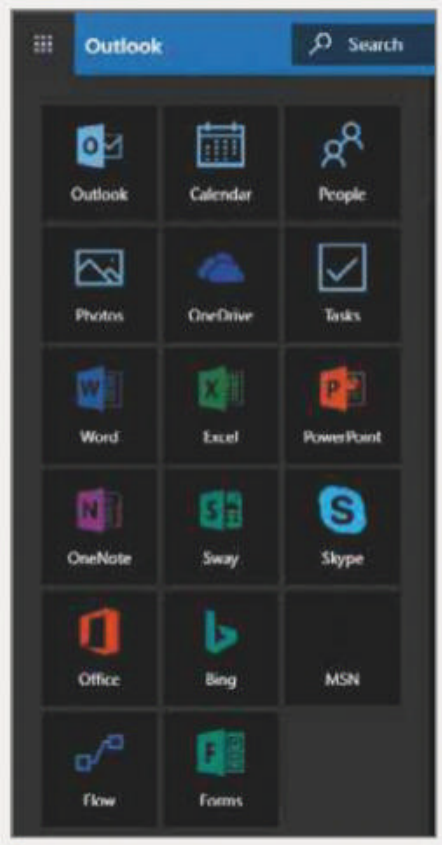
Stuart Woodruff, via email

BLUNDER OF THE FORTNIGHT

OUTLOOK

Use keyboard shortcuts to switch apps

I use Microsoft's Outlook.com for work and at home, which means I frequently have to switch between the different apps. This used to be fairly straightforward because I'd pin my most-used tools to the navigation bar, so they were just a click away. However, the updated Outlook web app no longer lets me do this, which is very frustrating! To change from my calendar to my email, I now have to manually click the 'waffle' icon and select the app I needed.



Use keyboard shortcuts to quickly switch between Outlook apps

What a fool I've been, though, because it turns out that you can use keyboard shortcuts – even in the browser – to move between apps. To switch to Mail, press Ctrl+Shift+1; Calendar is Ctrl+Shift+2; People is Ctrl+Shift+3; and Tasks is Ctrl+Shift+4. There may even be more.

Scott Torrance, via email

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

Inbox

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

Star Email

Back Issues disc winner

CCleaner is now a form of junk itself

I'm sure that you'll receive a few complaints about your cover feature in Issue 482 about ditching 'mainstream' programs for open-source alternatives, not least from devoted CCleaner users who won't hear a bad word said against it.

I, however, am no longer a CCleaner fan, so I agree with your assessment that the program is "way past its prime" and that its users have suffered greatly since it was bought by Avast. How can you trust a system cleaner to remove unwanted files from your PC when it comes bundled with unwanted junk itself, and tries to install other software from Avast, whether you like it or not?

Now that I am running Windows 10 on my PC, I find that I no longer need antivirus software because Windows Defender does a perfectly good job, so I certainly don't want Avast Free Antivirus on my system. I have used it before and found it slowed down my PC. Furthermore, according to recent reports I have read, Windows Defender actually does a better job of detecting and removing malware.

I also grew tired of CCleaner nagging me to use it to save drive space, nagging me to update to the latest version and nagging me to upgrade to its paid-for edition. These pop-ups are intrusive and annoying, and constitute a form of junk in themselves, so they have no place in a system cleaner.

It's sad that such a once reliable program has become so poor, and I certainly won't be downloading CCleaner again until it fixes these problems – preferably, by becoming open-source.

Brian Turnbull, via email

Why no mention of 5G in phone reviews?

I see from the product test of budget smartphones in Issue 482 that there is no mention of either phone being 5G-compatible. I am sure that at such low prices, these phones only have 4G, but surely it is worth mentioning.
5G will be available in most areas within the next 12 months and people will want to know if it's worth getting either the Realme 3 Pro or the Vodafone Smart V10, so they can use the new network.

Charlie Ade Amos, Stamford

Andy Shaw, Technical & Reviews Editor, says: At the time of writing, there are only 10 phones available in the UK that support 5G. You can see a list of them at 5g.co.uk/phones. The site also has a list of providers and the areas they cover (or are planning to cover) at bit.ly/fgro483. It's worth checking before you buy a new phone, but note that 5G-compatible models tend to be more expensive.

Neither of the budget models we reviewed in Issue 482 can connect to the 5G network.

Don't worry about overcharging your phone

In Issue 482's Inbox, Miriam Simmons warned of the dangers of leaving a phone charging overnight, saying that it could explode and cause an electrical fire. But most phones automatically stop charging once they reach 100% power, to prevent damage to their batteries.

As someone who uses their phone for most of the day, charging it at night is the only option I have, and I'm hardly going to set my alarm for 3am so I can unplug it as soon as it's charged. Taking a charger with me during the day is not an option, because it won't fit in my pocket

Quiz Answers: Issue 482

1. Kung Fu Panda
2. Chicken Run
3. Watership Down
4. All Dogs Go to Heaven
5. Ghost in the Shell
6. How to Train Your Dragon

WINNER!
Well done to **Mike Noon** who wins a Web User Back Issues Disc

WIKIPEDIA ARTICLE

Linux

and I am not about to start carrying a 'manbag' just for that reason!

I have never heard of anyone's phone exploding because of overcharging, although I do accept Miss Simmons' point about not using dodgy chargers because I know of people who have had electric shocks from them.

Michael Branning, via email

Pointless paying for shows you've already seen

It's a bit late for BritBox. Most old BBC shows are already on Amazon Prime or Netflix, both of which I have. At 73, I find the stuff on BritBox is either programmes my wife and I have never ever wanted to watch, or ones we have seen at least three times already, such as *Poirot*. *Vera* is excellent if you like that kind of thing, but we have seen every episode.

As for paying for BritBox – unless you are under 25, you will have seen all these shows for nothing, and still can unless the BBC and ITV withdraw them from the Drama and Alibi channels.

Enough is enough!

Martin Fletcher, Thorpe Hesley

Did Microsoft change my desktop theme?

I recently bought a replacement laptop as a backup for my desktop PC. The new laptop was set to a default theme that was quite different to the one on my desktop PC, but I decided to keep it and only changed the mouse pointer to one that was bolder and easier to see.

The next day, I started my desktop PC and noticed that its theme had changed to that of the new laptop – including my own change of mouse pointer! I wonder if Microsoft is monitoring us all and was responsible for making the change?

I strongly object to this – not just because I would rather select my own themes and settings, but also because it indicates that Microsoft is possibly spying on us more than we realise.
I cannot think of any other way my desktop theme could have changed with no input from me.

George C Griffiths, via email

What you say...

HOW WORRIED ARE YOU ABOUT TECH COMPANIES RECORDING YOUR VOICE (see page 51)?

I'm not worried at all, because I don't talk into gizmos such as Alexa, Cortana or Google Assistant.

Geoffrey Boow

Tools are being built to be used against us. Why are TVs and phones all now being manufactured to video us via the whole screen? Probably because people have cottoned on to the small cameras and are covering them up.

Liz F Lambeth

As Alexa still consistently fails to understand my instructions half the time, I am not too concerned yet.
If she can't understand the recordings then I doubt anyone else will be able to either!

Rich Grove

DO YOU AGREE THAT DRIVERS SHOULD BE BANNED FROM USING HANDS-FREE PHONES (bit.ly/handsfree483)?

Yes. People are on their phones too much of the time, clearly unaware of their surroundings, and don't care what is going on because they are concentrating on the call or app. This leads naturally to driving without due care and attention by one in three drivers. That's millions of people.

Lance Parkington

Before we go banning things, we need some good solid figures to base any decision on. I think banning hands-free calls is ridiculous myself – it is far more dangerous to be fiddling with the on-screen systems they now have in modern cars. Personally, I think it makes more sense to straight-jacket and gag all kids in the back seat.

Steve Si

It's something I don't do myself.
I would have to see the statistics on crashes involving people making hands-free phone calls at the moment of collision. In the future, as driving becomes more automated, hands-free calls will become less risky.

Chris Armstrong

So, what's the difference between talking to someone on the phone (hands-free) and talking to someone sitting next to you? Or is that going to be banned too?

Marie Davies

WINDOWS DEFENDER HAS BEEN NAMED THE BEST ANTIVIRUS SOFTWARE (bit.ly/defender483). WHAT DO YOU USE TO PROTECT YOUR PC?

I use Kaspersky Total Security and have done for many years. Prior to that I used Norton, which was blocking loads of websites saying they were not safe, even though I knew they were

Kevin Gadget Man Benton

Norton. It's never let me down and has saved me from a few dodgy files over the years. It costs less than £20 to protect five devices for 12 months.

Simon Mellor @4KBacon

I now use Defender on all my PCs after reading a test report in *Web User* that stated it was second only to Kaspersky.

John Hewett

After using Kaspersky for many years, I switched to Windows Defender and it's been brilliant. I won't waste drive space by installing a third-party antivirus again.

David P-Smith @david_p_s

I haven't got any antivirus on my computer.

Athol A Witter

Page 404

Barry Collins despairs of the EU's latest attempt to discipline Google

Google is profiting from its punishment

Do you want Qwant? Will you get to know DuckDuckGo? No, I've not turned into a third-rate poet. These are the genuine choices you'll soon be faced with when you fire up an Android phone for the first time.

This is the new search ballot, part of Google's so-called punishment from the EU for anti-competitive behaviour. Aside from a walloping great fine, Google is being told to offer Android owners a selection of alternative search engines when they first set up an Android phone. It'll be doing the same with web browsers, too.

That all sounds perfectly reasonable, you might think, until you start scratching away at the detail. "Google will use a first-price sealed-bid auction to select the other general search providers that appear in the choice screen," Google announced recently. "In each country auction, search providers will state the price that they are willing to pay each time a user selects them from the choice screen in the given country. The three highest bidders that meet or exceed the bid threshold for a given country will appear in the choice screen for that country."

Go back and read that last paragraph again – I'll wait for you. Yes, you did read that correctly. Google is proposing to profit from its own punishment by charging the alternative search engines who want to appear on the ballot. It even has the brass neck to set a minimum bid threshold, presumably to ensure that the search providers don't collude with one another and set the price at 2p per customer, or something similar. Because that would be (ahem) anti-competitive.

Whatever happens here, it's a win-win for Google. If Android users choose Google, it's as you were; if they choose another search provider, Google collects a fee that will help offset the fine it was hit with for being a monopolistic monster in the first place.

> "Faced with a list of unfamiliar names and the brand that is literally a byword for search, most people will play it safe"

Of course, the chances of phone owners picking anything other than Google in the search ballot are pretty slim. Faced with a list of unfamiliar names and the brand that was literally added to the dictionary over a decade ago as a byword for search, most people will play it safe.

We know that because we've been here before. Microsoft, you may remember, was forced to offer a similar browser ballot at the start of this decade. This resulted in a near-zero benefit for the alternative browsers. Opera dropped market share in the immediate aftermath, as did Firefox. Some of the lesser-known names, such as Flock, publicly complained that "the browser choice screen has only contributed marginally to growth in overall downloads".

After a series of rows about the not-so-random order alternative browsers were displayed in, it was eventually dropped – not because the browser ballot was a roaring success, but because a rival launched a great browser and smashed Microsoft's monopoly. That rival was, of course, Google Chrome.

People don't flock to Google because it's built into Android. They stick with it because it's the best search engine. The EU is obsessed with bundling, but the only bundle it's going to sort this time is a bundle of cash for a monopolist.

Illustration: Andrew Torrens

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

SUBSCRIPTION OFFER
FOR MORE INFO SEE PAGE 62

WebUser

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What's inside the next issue:

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PLUS:

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- Back up your Gmail to your PC
- Secret hacks to improve Reddit

AND...

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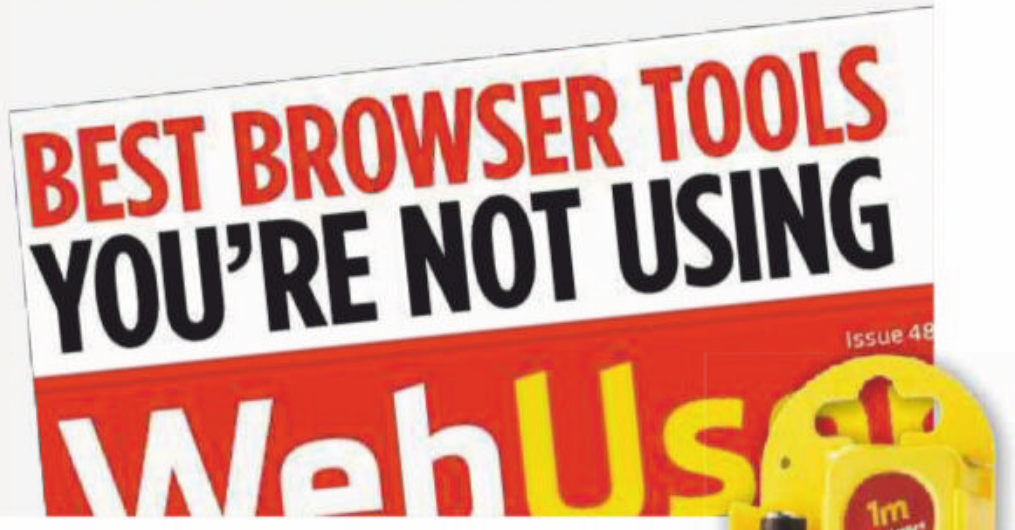

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