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Homepage

Issue 506

Show Sky and Virgin who's boss

"Fifty-seven channels and nothin' on," complained Bruce Springsteen in 1992, before shooting his TV screen, like Elvis was reportedly wont to do. I dread to think how 'The Boss' would react after signing up for Sky TV and having to flick through more than 300 channels, just to watch Primal Living or Discovery Shed.

I certainly don't miss paying £40 per month for Virgin Media TV to be bundled with my broadband, as a combination of Now TV, Prime Video and YouTube is more than enough for my entertainment needs – and much cheaper.

In this issue's cover feature, we explain the benefits of cutting the cable and satellite cord to stream all your TV, films and sport online – legally, of course, and direct to your television. We round up the best free and paid-for services and devices for enjoying content you can view on Sky and Virgin Media TV, but without being tied to a lengthy, expensive contract.

Glory days, as Bruce would say!

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

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2 How to find out where your ancestors are buried using Find A Grave **page 17**

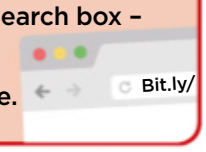
3 How to add a watermark to your PDF files to stop other people stealing them **page 29**

4 How to save money on Amazon by comparing prices across its global stores **page 32**

5 How to make Chrome show the full URLs of websites in its address bar **Page 70**

How to use Bitly links

We use Bitly links to shorten web addresses that would otherwise be too long to print in the magazine. Type these into the address bar of your browser – not the search box – and you'll be redirected to the relevant web page.



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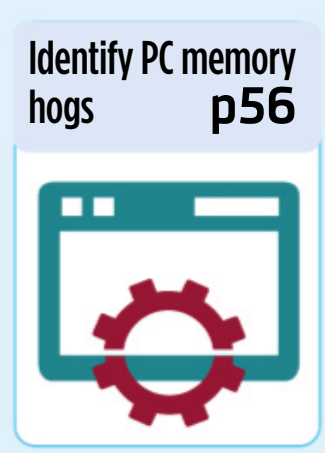

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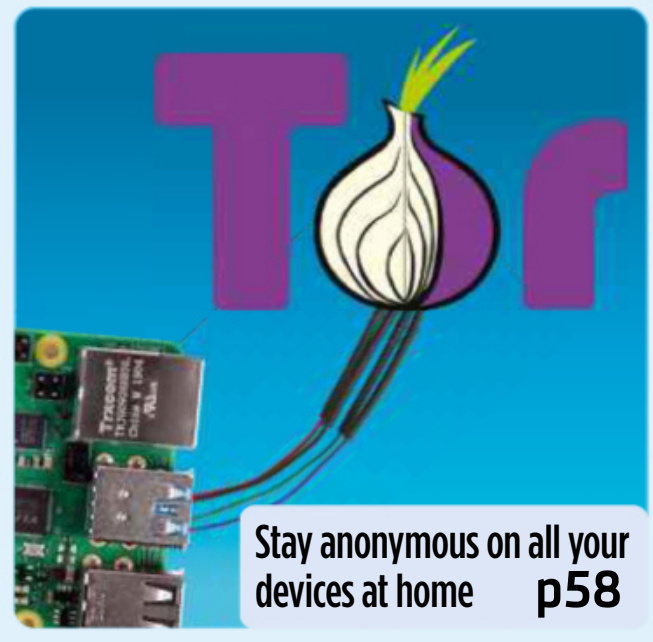

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PRINTING
Printed by Wyndeham Bicester, Oxon
Distributors Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 161 Marsh Wall, E14 9AP

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

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

WEB USER
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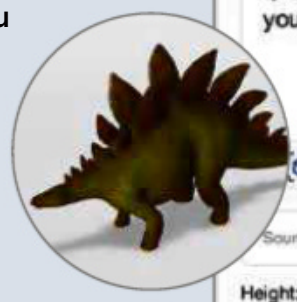
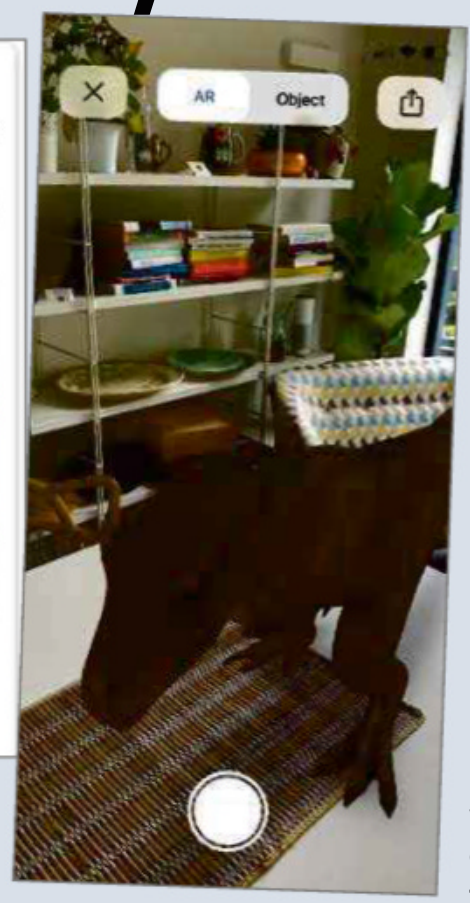
What's New Online

Invite 3D dinosaurs into your home

Fancy having a T-Rex running across your kitchen counter? Or a Stegosaurus getting comfy on your bed? With Google's new augmented-reality (AR) tool, you can choose from one of 10 different dinosaurs and place them anywhere you wish – and, if you use the feature on an Android device, you can even hear them roar.



There's no need to download an app: just grab a smartphone running at least Android 7 or iOS 11. Visit Google in your mobile browser or use the Google app to search for Tyrannosaurus Rex, Velociraptor, Triceratops, Spinosaurus, Stegosaurus, Brachiosaurus, Ankylosaurus, Dilophosaurus, Pteranodon or Parasaurolophus (you can also just type `dinosaur`). Look for the 'View in 3D' option towards the top of the search results and move your device around until the dinosaur appears, overlaid on your immediate environment.



You can rotate the reptiles and zoom in and out, or tap the camera button to take a photo or video – ideal for recreating a movie scene. Select View Actual Size on an Android device to use the auto-scale feature or tap Object to examine the dinosaurs without any background. Each creature looks impressively realistic (not that we've seen a real dinosaur!), thanks to developer Ludia using technology from its Jurassic World Alive game.

bit.ly/dino506

Play a Simpsons-inspired golfing game

bit.ly/putting506

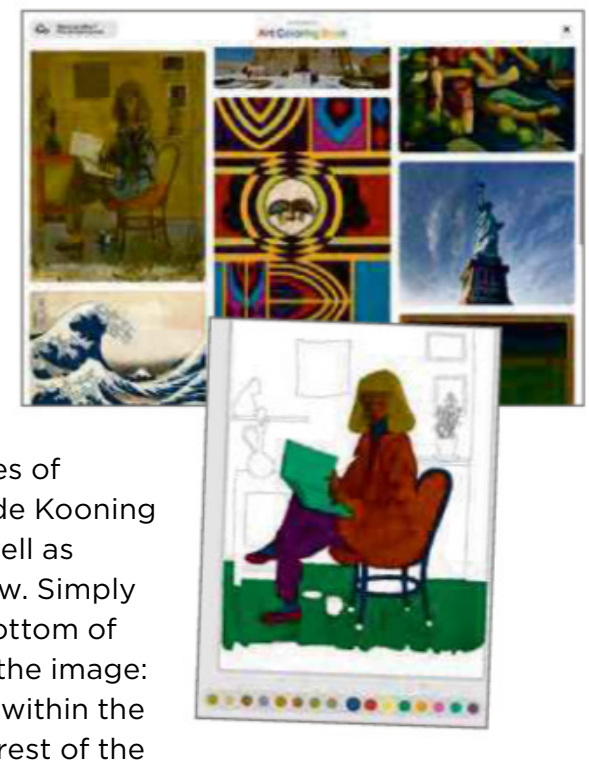
Avid fans of *The Simpsons* are sure to have heard of Lee Carvallo's Putting Challenge – the fictional video game that Marge bought Bart for Christmas in the 1995 episode 'Marge Be Not Proud'. As you may have seen when the game played out over the closing credits, it was comically under par. But here we are, 25 years on, playing a recreated online version, courtesy of developer Aaron Demester.

Endorsed by the show's executive producer Bill Oakley and created in Unity, the game replicates the naff nature of the televised original down to a tee. Choose between a putter or a 3-wood and decide whether to go for a feather touch or a power drive. Type in a three-digit code, press Enter and see where the ball lands. Will you fire it straight into the parking lot, as happened in the animated show, or neatly slot it away in the hole?

Colour some famous paintings

bit.ly/paintings506

Artists make painstaking decisions over the colours they use in their paintings, but you can have some fun giving famous artworks a makeover. The latest experiment from Google Arts & Culture lets you colour paintings by the likes of Vincent van Gogh, Elaine de Kooning and Hafidh al-Droubi, as well as landmarks from Street View. Simply select a colour from the bottom of the screen and apply it to the image: eight colours are featured within the original artwork while the rest of the palette is bolder for greater experimentation.



Textures are automatically added as you paint, and outlines and background can be removed, so you can colour only part of the image. You can download or share your finished masterpiece, and print a PDF colouring book that includes dot-to-dots and maze challenges.

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

Explore the deepest point on Earth

bit.ly/earth506

Located in the Western Pacific Ocean, Challenger Deep is the lowest point on the Earth's crust. This Esri story map lets you dive in and explore why it's so deep, how it was discovered and what it's like down there, thanks to a mix of mesmerising images, fascinating facts and riveting references that are sure to have you scrolling ever deeper.

Complete a cultural crossword

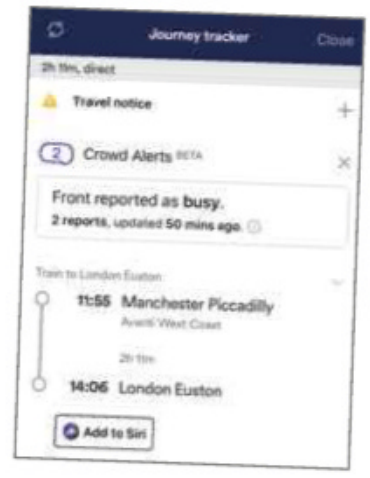
bit.ly/crossword506

Test your knowledge of the world, arts, fashion, natural history and science and technology with this set of five challenging crosswords. Clues are revealed by selecting a box in the grid and you can learn more about the topics covered (and get some hints) by clicking through for more information about each answer. Clues you solve are automatically saved as you progress, so you can dip in and out at leisure. The cultural crosswords are also available in the Google Arts & Culture app for iOS and Android, for when you want to test your knowledge on the go.

Check how busy your train is

www.thetrainline.com

Nobody likes a packed train at the best of times – and given these are the worst, it's reassuring to have a heads-up. The Trainline app has added a new feature called Crowd Alerts that uses anonymised data from passengers to show you how busy a train's carriages are. Tap the live tracker for a journey and look for the icon – an orange bubble means the whole train is busy, while blue indicates crowds in the front, middle or back. You can also see how many people have reported an issue and tap for further detail. See page 48 for more post-lockdown tools.



See lockdown's effect on the world

eodashboard.org

The coronavirus lockdown hasn't only affected our lives, it's also had an impact on the environment, which you could say is one of the few positives, as this map clearly shows. Check the effects on the planet's air, land and water as monitored by space agencies NASA, ESA and JAXA, using the indicators to view specific examples in countries around the world.

NEW VOICE COMMANDS

Use Assistant in Stadia

If you have a Stadia Controller, you can now use Google Assistant button to control games, provided Assistant is enabled in your Stadia account. The light will flash when the microphone is on.

Type with your voice

You can now launch Microsoft Word (version 2.38 upwards) on your iPhone or iPad, select Dictate and start "typing" using your voice.

Listen to background sounds

Say, "Alexa, play café sounds" to hear the hustle and bustle of a coffee shop without venturing into one. There are also stadium, office, seaside, farm and library noises.

Find pubs with beer gardens

bit.ly/beer506

If you feel safer sipping a drink outdoors rather than inside a pub, this pint-sized map plots beer gardens across the UK. You can add any pubs that are not included.

Download six game jams

bit.ly/jams506

Criterion Games holds internal 'jams', allowing developers to make games from scratch within a set period of time. It's now released six of the most recently produced games for free, and lets you read the story behind each one.

Hear your Summer Rewind

www.spotify.com/rewind

You can now listen to a personalised, automatically generated playlist of your favourite Spotify tracks from previous summers. Alternatively, relax with a curated Summer Throwbacks playlist. Both options are available for Free and Premium users.

Tell us your favourite new things at twitter.com/webusermagazine

Need to Know

TikTok faces ban over privacy and security fears

What happened?

TikTok is beloved by teenagers all over the world, but not by security services. The Chinese-owned social-media app is famous for letting users share video clips and lip-syncs to popular songs, but it's quickly becoming notorious for its security risks.

TikTok is owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, which bought the lip-syncing app Musical.ly and relaunched it under the new name. The app has more than 800 million active users, mostly under the age of 24.

India banned TikTok last month, as well as dozens of other apps made by Chinese developers, amid military action between the two countries. Officials warned the apps could be "hostile to national security" and risk sending private data to the Chinese government. The US is considering following suit, and has already banned its soldiers from installing TikTok.

Elsewhere, a leaked memo from Amazon suggested it was banning its employees from using the app, but that was quickly reversed following claims that the email to staff was sent erroneously. Wells Fargo, a US bank, has asked its workers to remove the app from their business phones, saying it was a security risk and that corporate devices should be for work, not play.

Part of the concern is that Chinese laws require the government to have access to all data, foreign or otherwise. TikTok says that data from its overseas users is stored in Singapore, not China – though that doesn't exempt the company from sending information to the Chinese government on request.

Credit: Ascannio / Shutterstock.com

TikTok has over 800 million users who may be sharing more data than they realise

Another issue concerns security flaws found in TikTok. Perhaps the most high profile was when TikTok was spotted snooping on clipboards on iPhones, but the company claimed this was actually an anti-spam filter that looked for people copying and pasting messages. And while there have been plenty of other vulnerabilities spotted, that's true of many apps and TikTok has at least released patches for the found flaws.

However, the core concern for US and Indian authorities, and large companies, is that Chinese authorities could get access to users' personal data. Leaked police reports from the US suggested that could go beyond the videos you post on the social network, and include your phone type, IP address and phone number, as well as Facebook details, if you used your account to register for TikTok. Such data could prove useful to policing authorities – be it in China, the US or closer to home.

How will it affect you?

It's impossible to say definitively whether TikTok is safe to use – but that's true of plenty of chat apps. If you have a sensitive job, you may want to remove the app from your work phone. In fact, you shouldn't have *any* unnecessary apps on your device, whether they originate from China or elsewhere.

The likelihood of you being a target for Chinese authorities is a security-risk assessment called a 'threat model'. Ignore the jargon, it's very simple: are you likely to be at risk from Chinese security or policing agencies? If not, and all you're doing is posting silly videos, then TikTok is probably no more of a security threat to you – or your children and grandchildren – than Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and the rest.

But that's an optimistic view, and it's worth keeping an eye on developments, because it's likely that TikTok isn't the only app on your phone made by Chinese developers.

What do we think?

Security is a complex enough issue without geopolitics, trade wars and spying added to the mix. The notion of China using an app like TikTok to gather sensitive information is alarming, be it specific data against individuals or mass data sets to use for disinformation campaigns – but it's worth noting that the latter already happens in the US and the UK, thanks to Cambridge Analytica and Facebook.

It seems unlikely that the Chinese government is any better behaved than our own politicians, and that suggests there may be real concern here. That doesn't mean it's imperative to delete the app from your kids' phones, but it's worth having a conversation with your teenagers about these issues.

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

Facebook merges Messenger with WhatsApp

What happened?

Facebook bought WhatsApp back in 2014 and, last year, revealed plans to move Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram to the same technology platform. This would allow someone on Messenger or Instagram to send a message to a friend on WhatsApp.

The move has been controversial – sparking privacy complaints from WhatsApp users who don't want their details shared to Facebook – and slow to arrive, as it's technically complicated. But reports suggest the capability could soon be up and running, after industry watchers on the WABetaInfo website (bit.ly/wabetainfo506) spotted code in Messenger that suggested the move was imminent.

It appears from the code that Facebook engineers are hard at work on the project, and founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg said last year that the merger may arrive this year, but it could take much longer.

How will it affect you?

If and when the merger happens, it will allow people on Messenger, WhatsApp or Instagram to chat with other people on any of those services without needing to sign up separately. The apps will continue to exist as standalone services, but will be able to communicate with each other.

It's not yet clear if you'll be able to opt out of such a system, to stop someone on Facebook messaging you on one of the other apps.

None of this means your messages in WhatsApp will be readable by Facebook, because they are end-to-end encrypted. Of course, Facebook now owns both Instagram and WhatsApp, so it can effectively do what it likes.

What do we think?

Before this merging feature is rolled out, Facebook needs to make sure it answers questions about how user data from the other two apps is collected and held by Messenger. That could prove a bigger hurdle than any of the technical challenges currently being tackled.

Huawei removal could cause UK blackouts

What happened?

BT has said that without Huawei, the UK could face mobile-signal blackouts. Currently, BT and other infrastructure companies use technology from the Chinese firm in their mobile networks. This has sparked security concerns – and a diplomatic debate.

Earlier this year, the UK government said Huawei equipment would be limited to providing 35% of a network, but it's widely expected that this will shift to a tougher stance, particularly regarding new 5G networks, but possibly involve removing Huawei equipment from older networks, too.

However, at a parliamentary committee meeting, BT's chief technology officer, Howard Watson, said that removing all Huawei equipment from BT networks within the next three years could cause "blackouts for customers on 4G and 2G, as well as 5G, throughout the country". That claim was echoed by Vodafone.

How will it affect you?

The impact on mobile users is largely down to what the government decides to do, but also how quickly it demands that operators make changes. If Boris Johnson orders operators such as BT and Vodafone to stop using Huawei equipment, it will take time for networks to be upgraded. The earlier the deadline, BT suggested, the bigger the disruption.

Credit: DANIEL CONSTANTE / Shutterstock.com

Watson told MPs that entirely removing all Huawei equipment by 2023 would lead to blackouts in some places lasting days, because the work would cause disruption to mobile masts, of which some 60% use Huawei technology. Given how many of us no longer have landlines, that kind of blackout could prove dangerous.

STOP PRESS

The Digital Secretary, Oliver Dowden, has now confirmed that UK mobile providers will be banned from buying new Huawei 5G equipment after 31 December, and must remove all Huawei 5G kit from their networks by 2027. We can only hope they do so without major disruption to the service.

Billions of stolen passwords on the dark web

What happened?

Usernames and passwords for billions of accounts are being sold on the dark web, according to a leading security software firm. During the 18-month-long study (bit.ly/digital506), researchers at Digital Shadows investigated how hackers steal and use private account details. Its in-depth report reveals that 5 billion 'unique' user credentials are in circulation, many of which have been shared multiple times and in multiple underground forums. Since 2018, there has been a 300% increase in leaked account details.

The average going rate for a single account? Yours for the bargain price of £12 each – although more valuable credentials, such as banking logins, cost around £56 each. To make matters worse, Digital Shadows reports that due to the sheer volume of stolen information, much of it is accessible to cybercriminals for free.

Brute-force cracks are among the main ways hackers gain access to accounts. These attacks use cheap software that, when armed with an email address or username, attempts thousands of password combinations every minute until it hits upon the one that works.

Researchers also found that while the stolen data predominantly affects individuals, financial and administrative credentials that give criminals access to

business networks are also available, which means they, too, are far from secure.

How will it affect you?

Web User readers are well versed in the procedures needed to keep vigilant and secure online, but it's worth sharing that knowledge with friends and family. It's easy to fall victim to a data breach, and hard to regain control before a hacker can do serious damage.

Researchers suggest that "multi-factor authentication is the best of a range of imperfect steps to mitigate" since "attackers are bypassing two-factor authentication (2FA) – and not just those [methods] that are SMS-based". However, one way to help avoid losing your data is to use different passwords for different services.

Check whether your account names and passwords have been involved in any data breach by visiting haveibeenpwned.com. Chrome users should also use Google's own Password Checkup tool (bit.ly/checkup506), which "helps you re-secure accounts that were affected by data breaches".

What do we think?

Security is the defining feature of today's modern internet. As horrifying as those numbers are, it's a good reminder to keep your accounts secure, whether it's your email address, social or streaming accounts, or banking logins. Perhaps most frustrating is the news that the now-omnipresent 2FA isn't as effective as many of us had hoped.

FIRST LOOK

Urbanista London

bit.ly/london506

Wireless earbuds are all the rage these days. Competing with the likes of Apple, Amazon and Microsoft is Urbanista, a small Swedish manufacturer devoted to creating audio gear inspired by and suitable for the urban environment. Or "designed for life in motion", as the website puts it. The company's latest earbuds, named London, cost a fraction of the price of more famous rivals.

But cutting costs doesn't mean compromising on quality. The Urbanista London earphones are bold and stylishly designed, with short stems and downward-angled buds that comfortably sit in the ear. They come with four different ear-tips, to ensure a snug fit for everyone, and include some clever tech – Urbanista's 'ear detection', which automatically pauses audio whenever the earbuds are removed, and restarts when you insert them again.

The IPx4-certified waterproof build features an ambient-sound mode and active noise cancellation – essential for city use – with a basic built-in microphone that blocks out background noise.

Touchpads on the side of the earbuds offer simple playback control – a series of taps and double-taps let you play, pause, adjust volumes, answer calls and activate your phone's smart assistant. One baffling oversight, however, is that you can't use the touch-sensitive pads to skip tracks.

Battery life is a reasonable five hours, while the included charging case offers a further four full charges before you need to plug it into a power source via a USB-C cable. The four LEDs on the front of the case mean you can keep an eye on charge levels, and there's an easy-reset button inside, which lets you rapidly pair and unpair the buds to Bluetooth devices.

Available in four elegant colours, the Urbanista London earbuds are priced at £129.

WHAT'S THE RUMOUR

Is Twitter launching a subscription service?

Credit: PiXXart / Shutterstock.com

A mysterious job listing has fuelled rumours that Twitter is working on a secret subscription platform. According to the ad, a new Twitter team, codenamed Gryphon, is "building a subscription platform, one that can be reused by other teams in the future". The listing goes on to announce that this is "a first for Twitter", which is seeking "a full-stack engineer to lead the Payment and Subscription client work".

There are few other clues as to what Twitter may be intending for its users, and how it will be implemented. Adding to the mystery, the job advert was later replaced with an appeal for a more generic 'Android engineer'.

Twitter has previous experience here. Several years ago, the social network began investigating possible subscription services, going as far as to survey existing users about their willingness to pay for breaking news content, in-depth analytics and detailed information on what users' followers were tweeting about. In other words, they were looking to attract business and power users. It's likely that this renewed interest will be similarly focused.

However, it's possible the rumoured Gryphon subscription plans could have a gaming focus. With the ninth generation of gaming consoles just around the corner, could Twitter be looking to create a rival to Twitch and YouTube Gaming?

LIKELIHOOD RATING

✓✓✓✓✓

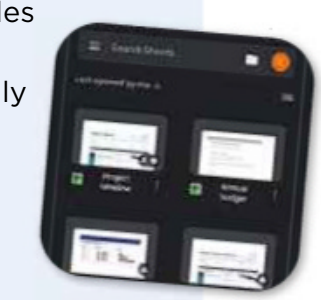
The job listing shows sure-fire intent from Twitter. But will its subscription plans fizzle out, as they did several years ago? Right now, Twitter's main source of income is advertising, but with the bottom falling out of the advertising industry – partly due to the coronavirus – it makes sense for Twitter to investigate additional revenue streams. It's hard to believe that Twitter's millions of users will pay for the privilege, so it will need to be strongly focused in at least one area, most likely subscription-based business tools.

WEBOMETER

WE LIKE...

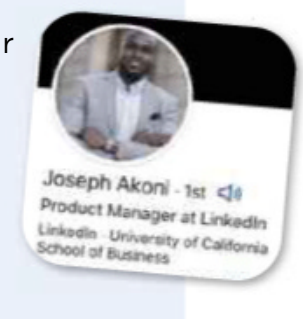
Google Docs app gets a dark mode

Google has added a much-requested dark mode to its Docs, Sheets and Slides apps for Android. The apps automatically use your system theme, so if your device already has dark mode enabled, you won't have to enable it manually for each one.



LinkedIn adds name pronunciation

If people often mispronounce your name, you'll appreciate a new feature from LinkedIn, which lets you add an audio recording to your profile of you saying your own name, to ensure that potential employers and connections get it right the first time.



WE DON'T LIKE...

Free TV licence scrapped for over-75s

From 1 August, the BBC will end free TV licences for the over-75s, following a two-month delay caused by the coronavirus. More than 3 million viewers will now have to pay the £157.50 fee, though anyone receiving the Pension Credit benefit will be exempt.

More dodgy Android apps discovered

Security researchers at Check Point have warned Android users to remove 11 dangerous apps including a memory game and a file-recovery tool (bit.ly/apps506). The apps contain the notorious malware Joker, which secretly subscribes users to premium services.

What's new on Kickstarter

Our favourite new project on the crowdfunding site

C-Tap

bit.ly/ctap506 | From £36

C-Tap is a chunky but lightweight aluminium fountain pen that doubles as a device controller. The tool's pentagonal case features a Bluetooth clicker at one end that links with the companion app to control whatever devices you set it up with. So, for example, one click for turning on your smart lights, two clicks could turn up your stereo's volume; a tap and a hold can turn on your smart TV; and so on. Both the ink cartridge and battery are replaceable. A £36 pledge gets you a single C-Tap pen, which will have a recommended retail price of £80.

Stay Safe Online

News about the latest threats and advice from security experts

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

Firefox Send suffers malware abuse

Mozilla temporarily suspended its file-sharing service Firefox Send (send.firefox.com) while it investigated reports of abuse by malware operators, and has added a "Report abuse" button to the service. While it was offline, anyone who tried to use Send was greeted with a message saying that it was "temporarily unavailable while we work on product improvements".

Mozilla launched the free, encrypted file-transfer service in March 2019, allowing users to share files from any browser, without having to install any software. Firefox Send lets you send files of up to 1GB without needing to sign up, or 2.5GB once you create a free Firefox account.

The recipient of a file doesn't need to be signed up with Send to download the item – they simply click a link to start the download, which will expire after a specific time. Hackers are believed to have exploited this simplicity by uploading malware to Send, where it was stored in an encrypted format. Links to the malicious files could then be easily shared by email.

bit.ly/send506

ThiefQuest 'ransomware' targets Mac users

Mac users have been warned about a new type of malware called ThiefQuest, which can encrypt an entire macOS system and steal the data stored on it.

The malware was originally believed to be ransomware because it demands that victims pay $50 to decrypt their locked files. However, security experts at Malwarebytes now believe ThiefQuest is actually a 'wiper', designed to wipe the contents of the drive it infects. The ransomware element is said to be a smokescreen for this purpose, because the malware doesn't provide contact details for paying the 'ransom'.

ThiefQuest has been spread via pirated Mac software shared on torrent sites, primarily an infected copy of a firewall called Little Snitch. It installs itself in several places in macOS, hidden behind names such as 'com.apple.questd' and 'CrashReporter'.

Malwarebytes said its anti-malware software for Macs can detect and remove ThiefQuest, while users whose files have been encrypted can unlock them using a free tool called EvilQuest Decryptor (bit.ly/decryptor506).

bit.ly/thief506

Security Helpdesk | Your questions answered by security specialists

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT: Tom Gaffney, principal security consultant at F-Secure (www.f-secure.com)

F-Secure.

Q Are web users doing enough to protect their identities online?

Paul Giddings, Facebook

A Identity theft can be distressing, time-consuming and costly, but despite increased awareness about the dangers, many of us still aren't putting enough measures in place to protect ourselves.

Now, more than ever, there is a huge reliance on online services for activities such as home schooling, shopping, communication and medical appointments, all of which require accounts with logins and passwords. With this comes the increased risk of data breaches and the potential for users' details to end up on the dark web to be exploited by criminals.

Recent F-Secure research found that 41% of people use the same password for multiple accounts, while 56% reuse their passwords with only slight variations. With the average person having 18 password-protected accounts, even one leaked credential could quickly lead to multiple risks for a user.

> "41% of people use the same password for multiple accounts"

Creating and remembering a strong, unique password for just one account is tough, let alone for 20 or more. And even if you do everything right, your online services can still be breached. There needs to be a new approach to securing personal data online, with tougher protections in place.

In response to these concerns, F-Secure has launched ID Protection (bit.ly/idprotection506), which continuously monitors and detects exposed personal information online and is able to respond quickly to threats to users' identity. It also doubles as a password manager to prevent account takeovers.

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

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Breakdown cover from £39: price is for Annual UK Roadside Vehicle Membership. Other levels of cover are also available. Offer is not available for existing Members or at renewal. Cover must be paid by continuous payment method. We'll use your payment details to renew your cover after 12 months. You'll receive a renewal invitation beforehand so you'll have plenty of time to change or cancel your cover. Offer not available in conjunction with any other offer online or in a breakdown situation. If you're buying online please use the website link specified, otherwise you will not receive the offer. **Gift card:** please allow 6 weeks from your policy start date for delivery and processing provided you haven't cancelled your policy. Card is redeemable online so you must have a valid e-mail address. Offer closing date: 31/08/20. **Unlimited call outs:** repeat call outs for the same fault within 28 days will not be covered. 30 minutes attendance: based on an average of all AA attended breakdowns 1 August 2018 – 31 July 2019. **Smart Breakdown and Tap and Track App:** subject to network coverage. **Member Benefits** saving value calculated based on the top 10% of Members by Member benefit redemptions between 01/03/2019 and 29/02/2020. For further information visit: theaa.com/member-benefits. All information correct at time of print June 2020.

Best New Websites

Site of the Fortnight

CARDS

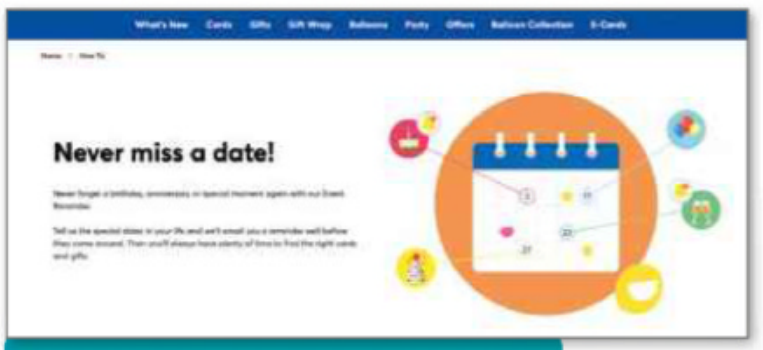
RELAUNCH

Card Factory

www.cardfactory.co.uk

Greetings to the new Card Factory website, which relaunched shortly after the chain's high-street stores reopened. It's now easier to find the right card for any occasion – and that's not just because live chat is a mere click away. Detailed drop-down menus offer ideas and inspiration, and there's now more focus on personalised items, including a range of editable e-cards. Gifts including mugs, cushions and wall art will soon let you add names and photos, too. And if you're at a loss for words, then call on the 'verse finder', which lets you select from a vast list of messages and customise them in whatever way you wish.

Our rating ★★★★★



EVENT REMINDERS
Enter important dates into this new tool to be notified when special moments are coming up

CHOOSE A CARD
There are cards to suit any occasion and they come with free first class delivery

NEW

HOBBIES

Nest Friends

www.nestfriends.co.uk

This bird-spotting website advocates less tweeting and more twitching. Aimed at keeping children occupied when they venture outdoors, it's packed with friendly illustrations of British birds as colourful characters. Kids are encouraged to mark how many feathered friends they see on printable Spotter Sheets, and can click to hear what each one sounds like and what it likes to eat, along with other fun facts. Designer Rick Oliver has also created downloadable colouring pages, and the Create Your Own section tool allows young minds to run wild. Add some wonderful projects, such as building a bird feeder or binoculars from toilet rolls, and this site really flies.

Our rating ★★★★★

NEW

TRAVEL

Visit Lake District

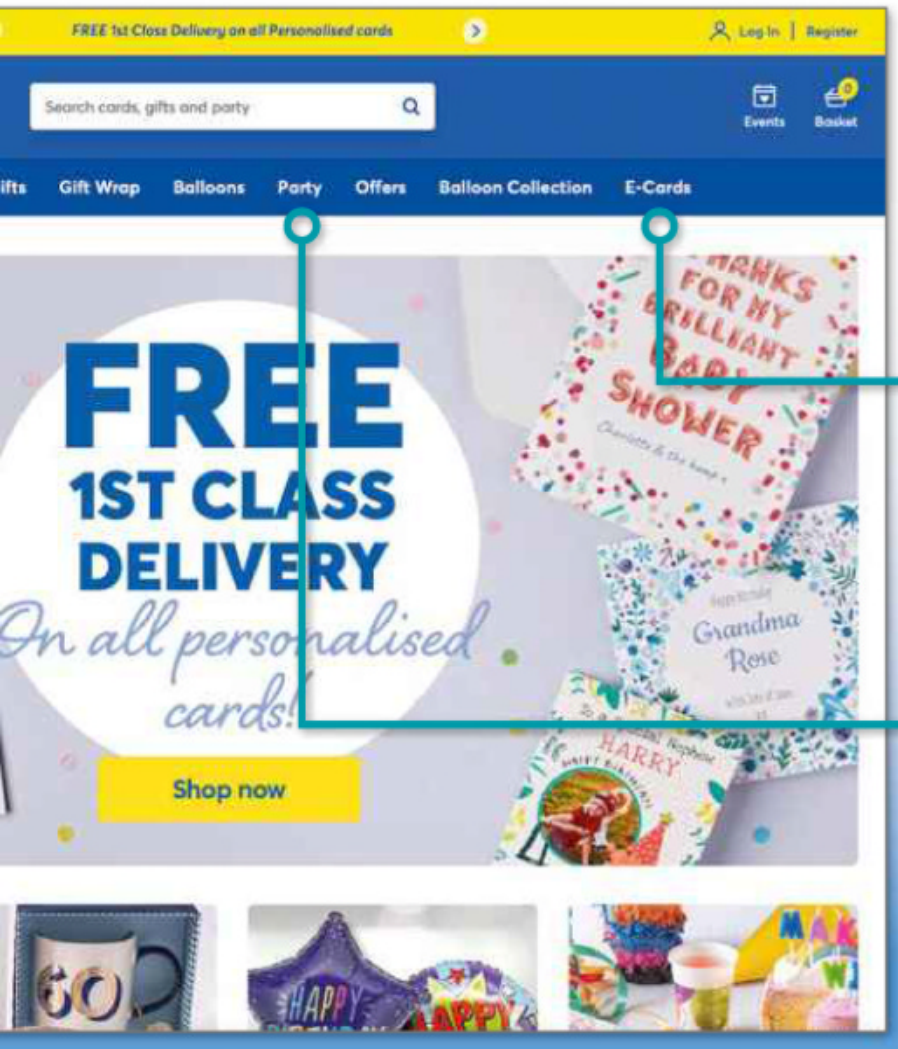
www.visitlakedistrict.com

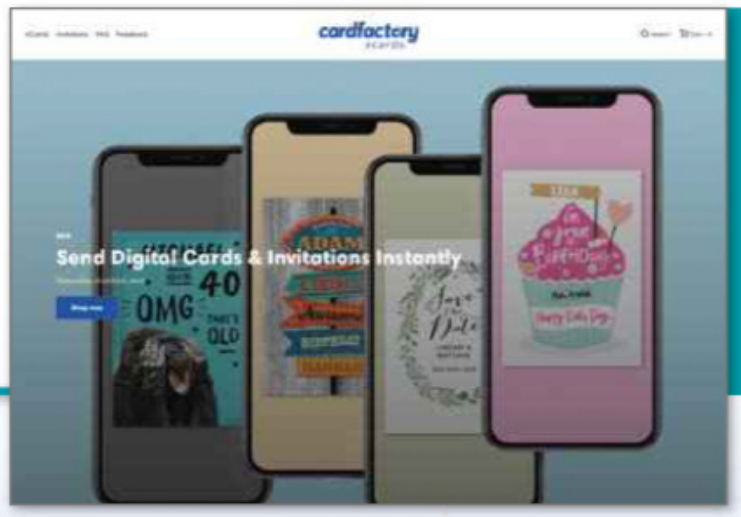
Having urged people to stay away for four months, the Cumbrian tourist board has moved away from its old Go Lakes website and unveiled a new hub to welcome people back. Offering hints and tips for planning a trip to the Lake District, it recommends places to stay and eat, and lots of things to do – select a category or use the search engine and filters. There's an abundance of suggestions as well as useful features, including an A-to-Z of the 16 lakes. Some items – such as a selfie guide, itineraries and blog – feel hidden, but the newsletter will keep you updated.

Our rating ★★★★☆

Reviews by David Crookes

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





ECARDS
Digital cards and invitations can be personalised, but you pay extra to remove the Card Factory logo

PLAN A PARTY
Organising a (socially distant) gathering? Download a to-do list and get some planning advice

NEW

TRAVEL

Travelbounce

www.travelbounce.co.uk

Stay safe at home! Go out! Visit any country! Not that one! If you're confused about how best to act during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, check out Travelbounce, which collates the latest travel news, looking at current restrictions by country, and explains how to make the most of a trip and what to expect when you arrive. Its series of articles is categorised to help you find the information you need, and a search tool checks for rising cases in a country so you can keep a tally of the number of deaths. Alternatively, stick to the UK and read the Staycation section instead.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

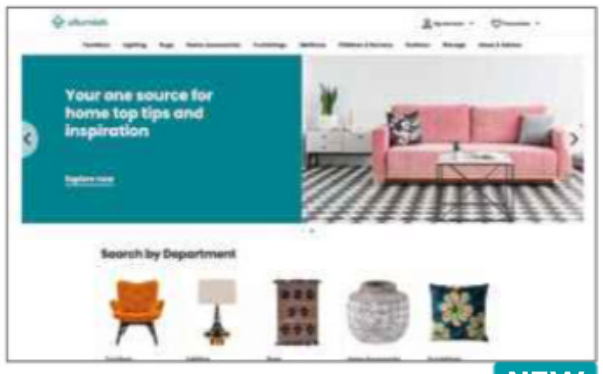
LOCAL NEWS

The Mill

manchestermill.co.uk

The Mill instantly asks you to subscribe to its email newsletter, and you can only view the site's content by clicking "Let me read it first". But what seems like an irritating obstacle is actually an integral point: The Mill is a digital publication delivering ad-free news and features about Manchester straight to your inbox, and there's a paid-for membership on the horizon. To that end, this site shows what you'll get: conversational stories alongside photos and personal takes. These are presented one after another – a menu is much-needed – but it's improving each week as it finds its feet.

Our rating ★★★☆☆



NEW

FURNITURE

Ufurnish

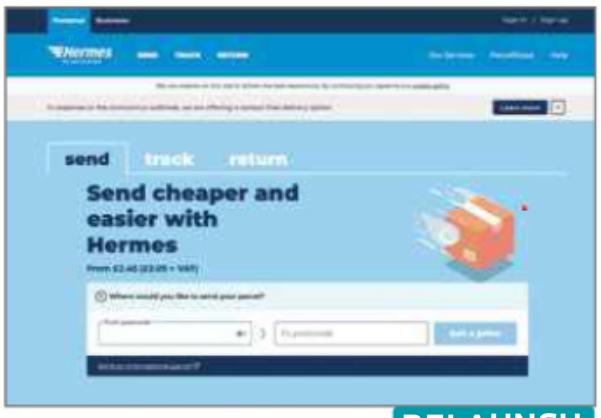
www.ufurnish.com

Rather than visit individual retailers in your hunt for home furniture, this site brings together products from more than 100 well-know homeware companies including John Lewis, Furniture Village and Dunelm. It creates a seamless experience by showcasing each product, both in the listings and on the item pages themselves. Filters can be used to narrow by category, colour, dimension, material and more, and items can be added to your favourites. Only when you decide to buy are you taken to a retailer's website and, if you're stuck for ideas, there's an inspiring blog, too.

Our rating ★★★★★

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

Best New Websites



RELAUNCH

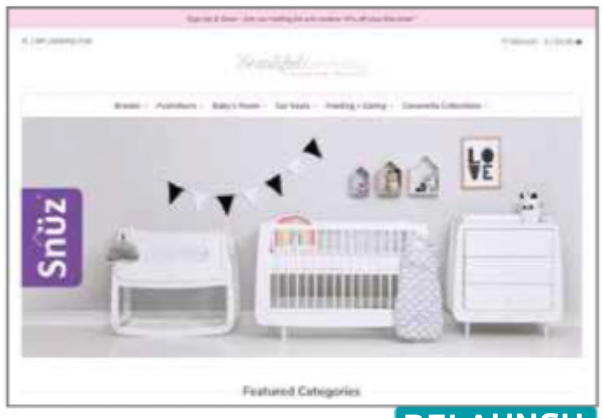
DELIVERY

Hermes

new.myhermes.co.uk

Hermes recently suffered delays affecting 30,000 parcels after a scanning machine misread postcodes. However, its new website looks more reliable and simplifies the process of sending items – specify where you're sending items from and to, and, after choosing a weight, move through the options to get a price. You no longer see your printable label being created at each step but the design feels more accessible. Useful touches include price comparisons with Royal Mail, instructions about wrapping your parcels, a returns page that lets you directly select a retailer and more detailed tracking information.

Our rating ★★★★☆



RELAUNCH

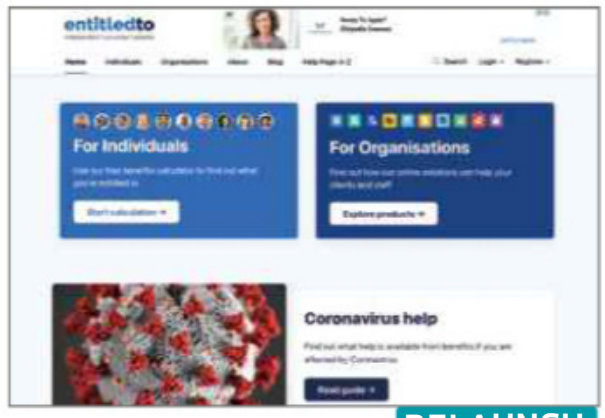
FAMILY

Beautiful Bambino

beautifulbambino.co.uk

This online baby shop has moved from the Woocommerce platform to Shopify, and it's used the opportunity to make a few subtle tweaks to how it looks and works. The new design has more featured categories and now does a better job of highlighting services such as free delivery and price matching. New products have also been included and we're pleased to see that the main blog hasn't been pushed aside, remaining integral to the homepage. A new section – Reuben's Blog, named after the owner's baby – has yet to be populated, but there are plenty of images to browse from Beautiful Bambino's Instagram feed.

Our rating ★★★★★



RELAUNCH

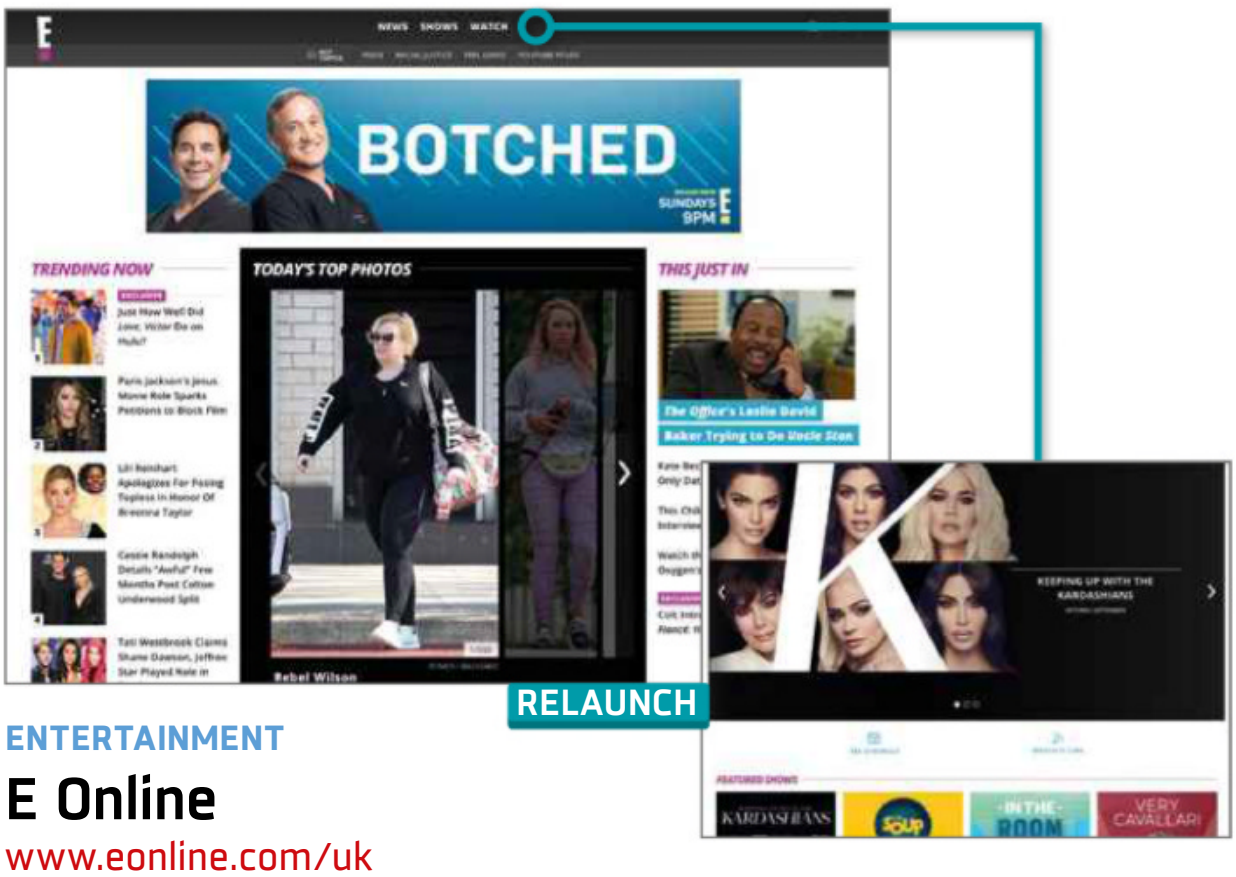
MONEY

Entitledto

www.entitledto.co.uk

As it celebrates its 20th birthday, Entitledto has relaunched just as people most need its financial advice. Its main attraction is a free benefits calculator that lets visitors describe their current housing and living situation to work out their entitlements. This involves filling out a comprehensive form, but it's largely a tick-box exercise. The estimates are clearly laid out, separated into boxes for Universal Credit, Council Tax support and more. Results can be emailed or downloaded as a PDF, and there's a budget tool you can sign up to. There's also a useful section looking at the financial issues surrounding COVID-19.

Our rating ★★★★☆



RELAUNCH

ENTERTAINMENT

E Online

www.eonline.com/uk

Want to keep up with the Kardashians or find out what Jennifer Aniston thinks about COVID-19? If you have even a passing interest in celebrity culture, E Online is sure to have you covered. The redesigned website simplifies navigation – you can check the latest news, view current TV shows and (US) schedules, or watch footage on YouTube. A new Hot Topics bar at the top of the screen directs you to the latest trending stories, while photo galleries let your eyes feast on images that now load faster. As you scroll, however, you start seeing large amounts of sponsored content mixed in between the articles, enticing you to click. And that's literally not cool!

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

GAMING

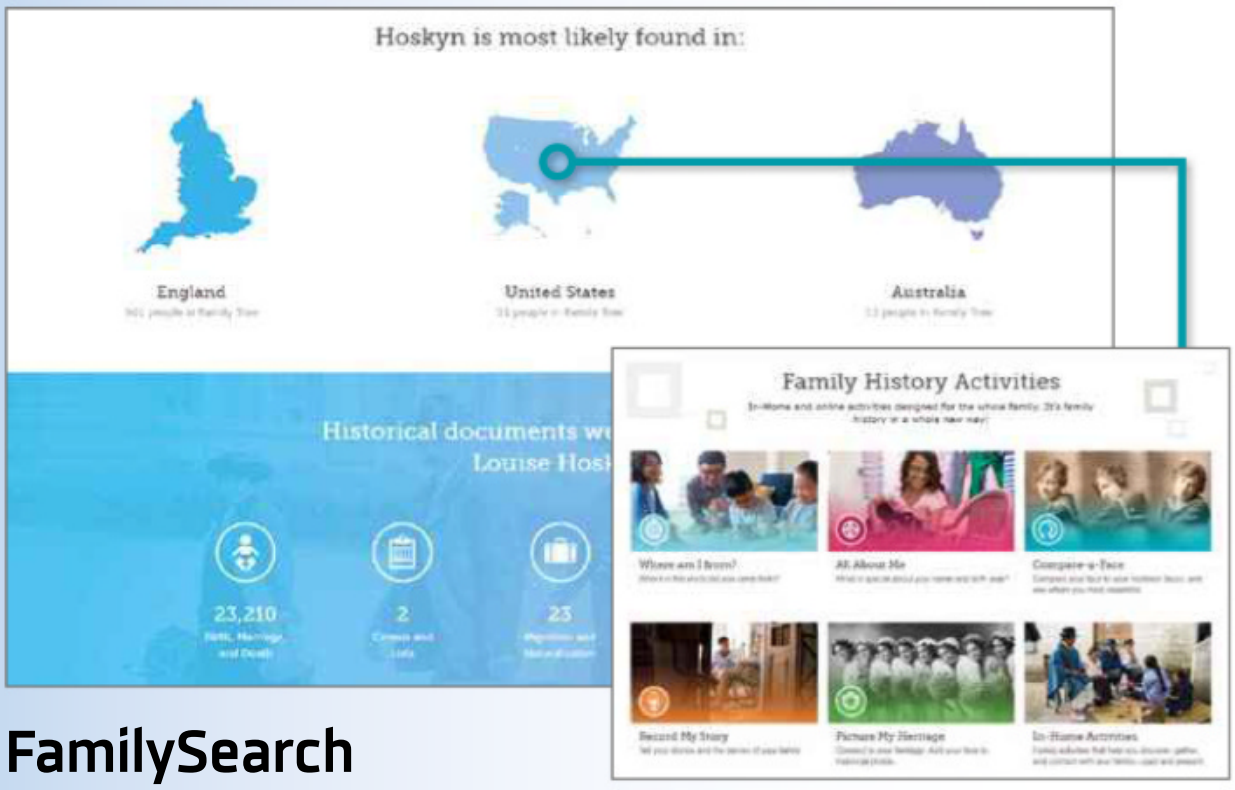
The Codemasters Archive

thecodemastersarchive.co.uk

This website acts as an archive for Codemasters, one of UK gaming's best-known names, founded by brothers Richard and David Darling in 1986. The site's "games vault" is an alphabetical list of titles – including Dizzy, Micro Machines and Colin McRae Rally – though, as it stands, it's a work in progress. Click a title to see cover images and screenshots, release formats and the programmers involved. Some have a Play Online function, which we hope will be widely rolled out soon.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

ESSENTIAL BOOKMARKS THIS ISSUE: Fascinating family research



FamilySearch

www.familysearch.org

This superb site offers free tools you'd pay through the nose for elsewhere, including a family-tree builder, audio-memoir maker, photo albums and a 'Compare-a-Face' tool that finds lookalike ancestors. Founded by the US Mormon church, FamilySearch is now a global project with a huge collection of records spanning nations and centuries. Enter a name to discover historical matches from Aberdeen to Arkansas, then explore document transcripts, scanned images and collections of employment, migration, military and other records (bit.ly/collections506). You need a free account to build your tree, and can start from scratch or import genealogy files such as GEDCOM. If you set your tree to 'public', it'll contribute to FamilySearch's vast collaborative tree.

Genuki

www.genuki.org.uk

Once you've discovered that your great-great-great-grandad was a missionary, a stonemason or perhaps a notorious local thief, then head to Genuki to discover the reality of life for such a person at that time. Genuki has been uploading and linking to UK and Irish genealogical records since the mid-1990s, and is still updated almost daily. The site map itself looks like a family tree (bit.ly/genuki506), but its best to navigate by selecting a home nation under 'UK and Ireland', clicking a county or category (such as Dwellings or Occupations), then exploring the wealth of links. The design could do with modernising but it's an excellent free resource.

Twile

www.twile.com

A timeline is an alternative way to display your family's history or tell the stories of ancestors you're researching, and Twile is the best free online tool for the job. Enter a few birth dates and key events to get started, or upload family-tree files to convert them automatically into an interactive timeline. It's all free to use, and you can add unlimited events, photos and PDF documents. Your Twile timeline is private by default, but you can invite family members to collaborate, and apply various privacy settings throughout your tree to ensure your more personal memories stay personal. Complemented by an attractive design that's easy to navigate, Twile puts a fresh, friendly face on what can often be a text-heavy hobby.

Free UK Genealogy

www.freeukgenealogy.org.uk

Download free certificates and documents charting the history of your house, street and family via this massive free UK database. Actually, it's three databases: FreeREG (parish records), FreeCEN (Census returns from 1841 to 1911, the last publicly available until 1921's return is released in January 2022); and, most fascinating of all, FreeBMD. BMD stands for births, marriages and deaths – the cornerstone of family-history research – and FreeBMD's records cover England and Wales since 1837. Indexing the records is still a work in progress, so it's not comprehensive, but the search tool (bit.ly/freebmd506) leads you down a fascinating rabbit hole of scanned and transcribed paperwork about anyone from the past you want to research.

Find A Grave

www.findagrave.com

Where is your grandmother buried? And which great-uncle donated his body to medical science? These questions may seem morbid, but Find A Grave treats its fascinating topic with respect. For 25 years, the site's users (and now users of the free app, bit.ly/findapp506) have contributed photos of famous graves, details of family graves and biographies of the people laid to rest there, to create a detailed global map of burial sites (bit.ly/cemetery506). A free account lets you create virtual memorials to lost loved ones and join the busy forums, where topics include surname research, war memories and coping with grief.

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

Computer active

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Build a Better Site

Specialist tips, top tools and practical help

Top Tips of the Fortnight

Create a simple site in seconds

Super-light web-hosting tool Publish This (publishthis.email) lets you create and publish a website by writing an email, complete with pictures and formatting, and sending it to page@publishthis.email. A few seconds later, you get a link to your website with the email's contents as the front page.

The link we received didn't initially work, but we got round this problem by adding the unique code from the end of the link to www.publishthis.email (for example, www.publishthis.email/rJlcKNynl).

Test your site's rich results

Leveraging Google's 'rich results' system, where elements such as star ratings are added if you search for reviews in Google, is managed via a system called 'structured data'. Previously, you would use Google's Structured Data Testing Tool to test whether your site was compatible, but it's been replaced by the new Rich Results Test tool (bit.ly/rich506). This is a better gauge of whether your site will be compatible with Google's latest results. To add structured data to your site, see Google's guide at bit.ly/struc506.

Deal of the Fortnight

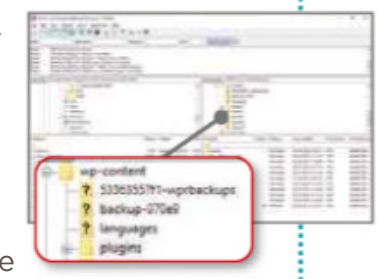
Namecheap (www.namecheap.com) is offering 50% off all hosting packages for the first year, bringing the great-value Stellar plan down to £1.38 per month.

Web-building Helpdesk

Q When I try to update a WordPress plugin, I get a 'Gateway' error and my whole site crashes. I then have to reset the site through Recovery mode.

Tony Hanson, via email

A You don't need to update WordPress plugins through the dashboard. All data from plugins is stored in the 'wp-content\plugins' directory of your website, where each plugin has its own folder. To uninstall a plugin, connect to your site via FTP and simply remove the plugin's folder and all its contents. Go back to the dashboard and the plugin no longer appears in the list. You can now go to Add Plugins and reinstall it. Note that this may remove some saved settings, but this is usually preferable to a broken site.



To manually remove a plugin, delete it's folder

Andy Shaw, Technical & Reviews Editor

MINI WORKSHOP | Edit images from the WordPress app

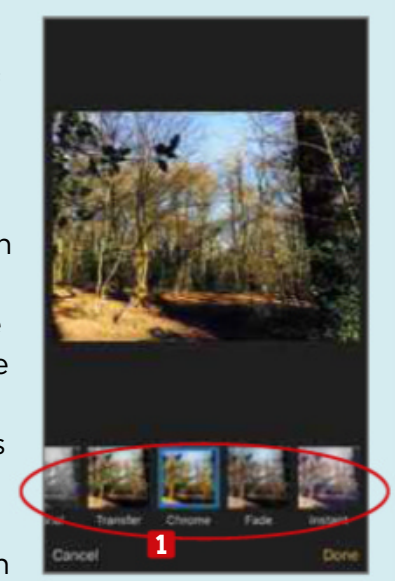
WordPress app: apps.wordpress.com/mobile | 5 mins | Android, iOS, iPadOS

WordPress is constantly updating its mobile apps to make it easier to post to your website when you're away from your PC. The latest addition is the option to edit images from within the app.

1 The simplest way to edit an image is to first add it to a post. Go to your post, then tap the plus button in the bottom corner and choose Image. Tap Add Image and choose where you want to get the image from. Once the image is there, tap it, then tap the tools icon. 1 Select Edit 2 from the menu.

2 To rotate or crop an image, tap the crop icon. Drag one of the handles in the corners 1 to resize the borders. You can rotate the picture by clicking the rotating arrow icon. 2 This icon next to it 3 lets you choose from pre-selected standard picture ratios. Undo 4 if you go wrong and tap Done 5 when you've finished.

3 The iOS version of the app has a couple of additional options, which are part of its built-in image editor. Tap the magic-wand icon to access the phone's filters, 1 which you can scroll through by swiping left at the bottom. Tap the pen icon to add hand-written marks and text.



What To Watch Online

Pick of the fortnight

Watch Caitlin Moran adaptation *How to Build a Girl*

From 24 July

The film adaptation of Caitlin Moran's autobiographical novel is the latest high-profile movie to forego cinemas and debut online instead. *How to Build a Girl* will be available exclusively on Amazon Prime Video, where it may well reach a bigger audience than a cinema release would have delivered.

Beanie Feldstein (*Lady Bird*, *What We Do in the Shadows*) stars as teenage rock critic Johanna Morrigan, a fictionalised version of Moran herself. So the actress - who grew up in Beverly Hills and is sister to Jonah Hill - will have had her work cut out mastering a working-class Wolverhampton accent. The official trailer (bit.ly/girl506) suggests she's done pretty well. Paddy Considine, Chris O'Dowd, Emma Thompson, Michael Sheen (him again) and TV's Mel and Sue also appear, while Mel's sister Coky Giedroyc (*Harlots*) directs.

Feldstein returns in late 2020 in another 1990s-set biographical role, playing Monica Lewinsky in FX's *American Crime Story: Impeachment* (bit.ly/impeach506).

Welcome back Kermit and friends in *Muppets Now*

From 31 July

Disney's new show is the closest yet to the wonderful chaos of Jim Henson's original *Muppet Show*. *Muppets Now* sees Kermit, Miss Piggy, Animal and the gang perform improvised sketches with celebrity guests including RuPaul and Seth Rogan, who also pop up in the trailer (bit.ly/muptrail506).

The six-episode series is the third Muppets production by Disney, after 2015 sitcom *The Muppets* (bit.ly/themuppets506) and *Muppet Babies* (bit.ly/babies506). Stream them and many others on-demand via muppets.disney.com. If you'd rather stick with Henson-era Muppets, head for good old YouTube: bit.ly/muppetshow506.

Romp through 1950s Morocco in *Little Birds*

From 4 August

Sheepish *Fleabag* boyfriend Hugh Skinner takes a somewhat wilder role in this new period drama based on the racy stories by Anaïs Nin (bit.ly/birdsbook506). In the six-part Sky Atlantic series, Skinner plays the fiancé of troubled American debutante Lucy Savage (Juno Temple from *Atonement*) as they enjoy the final years of colonial decadence in Tangier. Watch the 60-second teaser at bit.ly/birds506 (not for kids!) then stream episodes via Now TV with an Entertainment Pass.

Watch *Fear the Walking Dead* on Prime Video

From 29 July

Months after airing on AMC, which isn't available online in the UK, Season 5 of zombie prequel *Fear the Walking Dead* finally comes to Amazon Prime Video. Returning cast members include Lennie James, who discusses the new season's themes in a whole series of 'sneak peek' videos on AMC's UK website at bit.ly/fearpeek506. Watch Season 5 along with its predecessors at bit.ly/fear506, where Season 6 will arrive next year.

See Michael Sheen play a serial killer in *Prodigal Son*

From 28 July

After *Quiz* and *Staged* comes another intriguing TV role for Michael Sheen, who now gets to vamp it up as notorious US serial killer Dr Martin

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

Whitly, complete with Hannibal Lecter-style cage. Check him out in head-to-toe orange in the official trailer at bit.ly/son506.

Prodigal Son is really about Whitly's acclaimed psychologist son, who uses his family insights to solve crimes for the NYPD, but it's Sheen's menacing turn we'll be tuning in for. The 20-episode first season, which originally aired on US network Fox, comes to Now TV via Sky One.

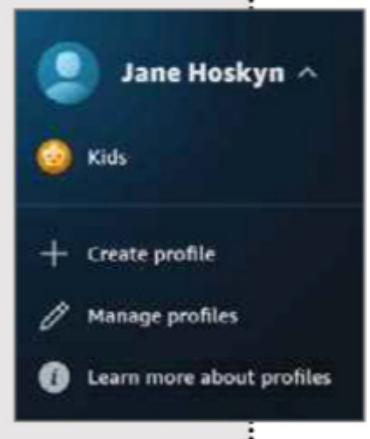
Amazon adds user profiles to Prime Video

At last, you and your family members can have separate Prime Video watchlists, recommendations, histories and viewing positions, thanks to the arrival of user profiles on Amazon's streaming service.

Netflix has long allowed its customers to split one account into multiple profiles. This lets different members of a household watch their personal selection of films and shows at their own pace, without interfering with each other's viewing.

Amazon lets you have up to six profiles on one account, including the account holder. Parents will be able to PIN-protect purchases and age-restricted content.

The feature is available now via Amazon's Prime Video app on mobile, Roku, Amazon Fire and other smart TV devices. We'll have more on the personalisation power of user profiles in our next issue.



Watch Season 3 of Idris Elba's *In the Long Run*

From 22 July

The third series of Idris Elba's sitcom, based on his own childhood in 1980s London, comes to Now TV as a six-episode box set. Series 3 finally introduces us to Walter's (Elba's) mum, who arrives from Sierra Leone to live with the family. Regular cast members Bill Bailey and Kellie Shirley return along with Elba. Catch up with all of Series 1 and 2 via Now TV at bit.ly/longrun506, where Series 3 will join them after the first episode airs on Sky One.

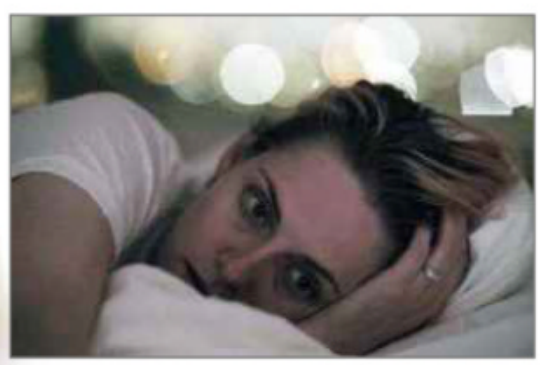
Watch new seasons of *Good Girls* and *The Umbrella Academy*

From 26/31 July

Two acclaimed US dramas launch new seasons on Netflix this fortnight. Back on 26 July for Season 3 is *Good Girls*, starring Christina Hendricks as one of three suburban housewives who turn to crime. Watch the latest trailer at bit.ly/girls506.

Back on 31 July, according to its decidedly stylish posters, is comic adaptation *The Umbrella Academy*, starring Ellen Page and Tom Hooper as adopted superhero siblings. Watch Netflix's Season 2 teaser, in which cast members shake a tail feather while apparently isolated in their homes, at bit.ly/umbrella506.

In case you missed it...



Gurinder Chadha, Maggie Gyllenhaal and Kristen Stewart (pictured) are among the filmmakers and actors contributing short films to Netflix's lockdown series, *Homemade*, available now at bit.ly/homemade506. Netflix also has a couple of new original films: Charlize Theron in action thriller *The Old Guard* (bit.ly/guard506) and Omar Epps in obsession drama *Fatal Affair* (bit.ly/affair506). Watch all the trailers for free on Netflix.

Meanwhile Tom Hanks' latest save-the-day blockbuster, *Greyhound*, has gone straight to Apple TV+. Watch the trailer at bit.ly/greyhound506.

David Tennant and Jessica Hynes are back for Series 2 of comedy-drama *There She Goes*, now on BBC iPlayer at bit.ly/there506. Other returning shows include Amazon's *Absentia*, back for a third season on Prime Video at bit.ly/absentia506, and Chris O'Dowd in *Get Shorty*, now onto Season 3 via Now TV at bit.ly/shorty506.

Product Test

We test and compare the latest products

Microsoft Surface Go 2

This device is a gorgeous hybrid of compact laptop and tablet, with a great screen and decent audio – just don't expect powerhouse performance

The Microsoft Surface Go 2 represents all the best and worst features of 2-in-1 hybrid devices. On the positive side, it's tiny, lightweight and works well both as a laptop and a tablet – you can use it to watch Netflix in bed or attach the keyboard for work on the move. On the downside, it's not as powerful as dedicated laptops of the same price and it's more expensive than an iPad or Android tablet.

The Surface Go 2 is available in three variants. The version tested for this review is the top of the range, costing £619 for the tablet alone. It comes with an Intel Core m3-8100Y processor, 8GB of memory and a 128GB SSD hard drive. The cheaper models are powered by a Pentium Gold 4425Y processor and come with either 4GB of memory and 64GB of eMMC storage for £399, or 8GB of memory and a 128GB SSD for £529.

For all three models, you need to factor in the cost of buying the Type Cover keyboard – either £100 for the standard black model or £125 for the suede-finished Signature version. If you want the Surface Pen as well, you need to add another £100 to the total price.

Screen and built-in hardware

At 10.5in across the diagonal, the display is half an inch larger than the original Surface Go. This has been accommmodated for by reducing the bezel width, rather than increasing the size of its casing. Despite the bigger screen, it's still best to run one app at a time.

> "The keyboard is excellent, the display is stunning and the entire package is about as portable as a laptop can get"

The screen itself is brilliant. Its resolution of 1,920 x 1,280 pixels is perfectly sharp at this size, and it can display 97.2% of the sRGB colour standard. It's bright, too, peaking at 391cd/m^2 (candles per square metre), which means you can see it outdoors in sunlight, and it has a contrast ratio of 1,411:1.

There's also a new webcam that's compatible with Windows Hello, so you can unlock the device with your face and don't have to faff about typing in PIN codes or passwords. It's one of the

best built-in webcams we've seen on any laptop, recording perfectly exposed video at 1080p and up to 30fps.

The new Studio microphone setup is equally good and captures your voice with impressive clarity. Even the speakers, which aren't normally great on such small laptops, are high quality. The bass output isn't brilliant, but the sound is clear and full-bodied, and perfectly good for conference calls and listening to podcasts.

Ports are limited to a single USB 3.0 Type-C port with a magnetised Surface Connect charging port next to it. There's a microSD card slot hidden under the kickstand for a cheap storage boost and, in a surprise move, it supports WiFi-6.

There's also a semi-decent 8-megapixel camera on the rear, although with such a comparatively low resolution it's not going to be useful for anything other than the odd document scan.

Keyboard and pen

At £100 plus, the optional Type Cover keyboard is far from cheap, but its tiny size belies how comfortable it is to use. Microsoft has made compromises in all the right places, maintaining large Enter, Backspace, right Shift and Tab keys, and the sturdy feel and slightly concave key surface make for a superlative compact keyboard.

Even the small touchpad below the keyboard works effectively. The sensitivity is good, the surface feels slick and smooth under your finger, and it's just wide enough to make three- and four-finger multitouch gestures. However, if you're planning to use the Surface Go 2 all day every day, it's best supplemented with a decent Bluetooth mouse.

Alternatively, you could part with another £100 and get the Surface Pen, which conveniently clips on the left edge of the tablet, where it charges.

This is the same Surface Pen as the Surface Pro 7's, with tilt-to-shade and 4,096 levels of pressure sensitivity. It feels as comfortable and accurate as any stylus we've tried, with well-judged friction between the nib of the pen and the screen. There's a right-click button on the barrel and another button on the top, which can be customised to perform various shortcuts. The top button also acts as an eraser, just like a regular pencil.

Performance and battery life

The Intel processor in the top-tier Surface Go 2 model we tested provides a significant step up in performance when compared to its predecessor. However, while it's perfectly adequate for office-based tasks such as word processing, emailing, browsing the web and streaming, there's a limit to its power, so more demanding tasks such as photo editing will slow things down dramatically.

Even having multiple tabs open in Chrome and working on large Google Sheets can affect its responsiveness, so you can forget about intensive tasks such as video editing or anything beyond basic games. We ran the ageing Dirt Showdown benchmark at 720p and it achieved an average frame rate of just 14fps (frames per second). The Surface Go 2 is clearly no speed demon and the cheaper versions in the range are likely to be even less so.

Battery life is a touch more impressive but still nothing to write home about. When we ran the the Surface Go 2 through our video-rundown test, with flight mode engaged and the screen set to a brightness of 170cd/m², it lasted a disappointing 7 hours and 17 minutes.

OUR VERDICT

★★★★☆

The design and usability of the Surface Go 2 make this a gorgeous little device. You can type for hours in comfort on the excellent Type Cover keyboard, the display is stunning and the entire package is about as portable as a laptop can get. However, factor in the extra money for the keyboard (and the pen, if you want that, too) and the cost starts to pile up.

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

We found the performance of the top-spec model we tested only passable, so the cheaper versions will be even less impressive and, possibly, too under-powered to run Windows properly.

PRODUCT INFO

Microsoft Surface Go 2

Price: £619 (Alternative specs available from £399)
Buy from Microsoft: bit.ly/surface506

SPECIFICATIONS

- Intel Core m3-8100Y processor
- Intel UHD Graphics 615
- 8GB of memory
- 128GB of storage
- 10.5in, 1,920 x 1,280 pixels IPS touchscreen
- microSD memory card slot
- 802.11ax Wi-Fi
- 245 x 175 x 8.3mm
- 540g

FOR

- ✓ Excellent screen
- ✓ Surprisingly usable keyboard
- ✓ High-quality webcam

AGAINST

- ✗ Not fast enough
- ✗ Expensive extras

BETTER VALUE TABLET

Apple iPad, £349
bit.ly/ipad506

EVEN BETTER SCREEN

Samsung Galaxy Tab S6, £619
bit.ly/samsung506

Samsung Galaxy A21s

Samsung's fantastic top-of-the-range Android phones are far from cheap, so how does this new, more affordable model compare?

It's not the flashiest phone you can buy, but the new Galaxy A21s comes at a fraction of the cost of the company's flagship devices, and is a reliable choice for anyone looking to upgrade without spending a fortune.

The design is as eye-catching as any of Samsung's recent phones, with minimal screen bezels and an unobtrusive camera hole in the top-left corner. The back of the device is gently curved, with four cameras and an LED flash arranged in a tidy rectangle. A rear-mounted fingerprint sensor sits in the centre.

On the bottom edge, there's a USB Type-C port for charging, flanked by a 3.5mm audio jack and solitary speaker grille. A volume rocker and power button sit on the right, with a shared nano-SIM and microSD tray on the left, which takes cards of up to 512GB.

PRODUCT INFO

Samsung Galaxy A21s

Price: £179.95
Buy from Amazon:
bit.ly/sams506

SPECIFICATIONS

- 2GHz octa-core Samsung Exynos 850 processor
- 3GB of memory
- 64GB of storage
- 6.5in 1,600 x 720 pixels PLS screen
- 802.11ac Wi-Fi
- 164 x 75 x 8.9mm
- 192g

FOR

✓ Excellent value for money
✓ Long-lasting battery life
✓ Impressive quadruple cameras

AGAINST

✗ Lower screen resolution than similarly priced rivals
✗ Basic video options

Screen, performance, battery and cameras

The biggest compromise made to curb the cost of the Galaxy A21s is its screen – a PLS display (effectively the same as a regular IPS panel) with a low resolution of 1,600 x 720 pixels. This isn't great by modern standards and can't match the pixel-packed Full HD screens of its rivals.

In our tests, it only reproduced 73% of the sRGB colour standard, which isn't a good result. However, its maximum brightness of 553cd/m² (candles per square metre) and contrast ratio of 1,267:1 are much better.

The phone is powered by Samsung's 2GHz Exynos 850 processor and 3GB of memory. There are faster phones available in the same price bracket, but the Galaxy A21s rarely felt unresponsive or sluggish, though it takes a while to boot up and sometimes lingers on the lock screen for too long. The lower-resolution screen helps boost graphical performance and it runs casual games well.

> "If you care about battery life, you're in for a treat"

If you care about battery life, you're in for a treat. In our standard rundown test, which plays a looped video with the screen set to 170cd/m², it lasted 22 hours and 48 minutes – an exceptional result that outstrips its similarly priced rivals.

The phone comes with a quadruple-camera array, consisting of a 48-megapixels main lens, supported by an 8-megapixels wide-angle unit, a 2-megapixels macro camera and a 2-megapixels depth sensor. A 13-megapixels selfie camera sits on the front.

The main camera takes 12-megapixels photos by default – the 48-megapixels option is located in Pro mode – but both settings produced rich, vibrant and detailed images. We particularly liked its Live Focus mode, which lets you adjust the level of background blur either before or after you press the shutter button. The macro mode is also a lot of fun.

OUR VERDICT

★★★★☆

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

Samsung has skilfully balanced the features and cost of the Galaxy A21s to produce an excellent budget phone. Despite the so-so screen and performance, the device exceeded our expectations and held its own against similarly priced models from Xiaomi and Motorola. The battery life and generous array of cameras are particularly impressive.

cyclingelectric

Win a Ridgeback Advance e-bike worth £3,499.99.

To celebrate the launch of Cycling Electric, the new magazine all about e-bikes, we are partnering with Freewheel to bring you the chance to win a Ridgeback Advance.* Just answer the following question:
What e-bike drive system does the Ridgeback Advance use?

Enter at cyclist.co.uk/e-bikes-competition

The competition prize is courtesy of Freewheel.co.uk

Freewheel, simply put is your local bike shop online. There's nothing quite like the knowledge, reliability and customer experience of a great local bike shop. In an age where it's getting harder to run a bricks and mortar store, Freewheel is the platform that lets shops thrive while giving you the benefits of online shopping. When you shop on Freewheel, you can order a product and have it delivered to an extensive network of authorised shops, where you can make the most of the expertise of the staff on collection. Each purchase benefits your local store via a commission programme. You can find your local Freewheel store at freewheel.co.uk/stores

*Visit the Cyclist website for the full list of terms and conditions.

RIDGEBACK

Web User's Best Buys

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

HARDWARE, SOFTWARE & SERVICES

INKJET PRINTER

Canon Pixma TS8350

£162 from bit.ly/canonts505
Tested: Issue 505

The Canon Pixma TS8350 is hard to beat for all-round print, scan and copy quality, producing rich, crisp text and precise photo prints. The generous touchscreen makes it easy to use and it performs well as a standalone device.

KEY SPECS

Thermal inkjet printer ■ 4,800 x 1,200dpi print resolution ■ 2,400 x 4,800dpi scan resolution ■ 10.8cm colour touchscreen ■ Double-sided printing ■ 200-sheet input ■ 373 x 319 x 141mm ■ 6.6kg ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

MESH WI-FI SYSTEM

Netgear Orbi RBK50

£299.99 from bit.ly/orbi503
Tested: Issue 503

The Orbi Is a brilliant mesh Wi-Fi package. It's powerful, the units look good and it has a well-designed interface. It's pricey, particularly with the add-ons, but we think it's worth it.

KEY SPECS

Two nodes ■ Tri-band 802.11ac Wi-Fi ■ 2 x 2 MIMO system ■ 4 Ethernet ports ■ Router mode ■ WPS ■ Guest network ■ Parental controls ■ Alexa and Google Assistant voice control ■ 203 x 162 x 79mm ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

EXTERNAL SSD

SanDisk Extreme Pro 500GB

£131.99 from bit.ly/sandisk501
Tested: Issue 501

Robust, fast and reliable, the SanDisk Extreme Pro 500GB outperformed every other SSD in our tests. You pay a bit more per GB but, if you can afford the best, then why settle for less?

KEY SPECS

465GB formatted capacity ■ 28p per usable gigabyte ■ Also available in 1TB and 2TB capacities ■ USB Type-C connection ■ 96 x 50 x 9mm ■ 78g ■ Three-years return-to-base warranty ■ Sturdy and attractive design

FITNESS WATCH

Xiaomi Mi Smart Band 4

£25.98 from bit.ly/xiaomi499
Tested: Issue 499

The Xiaomi Mi Smart Band 4's colourful screen and excellent battery life mean you won't need to charge it more than a couple of times a month. For the low price, it's extraordinarily good value for money.

KEY SPECS

Pedometer ■ Heart-rate monitor ■ Sleep tracking ■ GPS from phone (Android or iOS) ■ Waterproof to depth of 50m ■ 240 x 120 pixels resolution ■ 0.95in AMOLED display ■ 20-days battery life ■ 22.1g ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

INTERNET SECURITY SUITE

Bitdefender Internet Security 2020

£14.99 (1 year, 3 devices) from bit.ly/bitdef497
Tested: Issue 497

This superb security suite's one-stop all-round package can't be beaten. It's lightweight, easy to use, loaded with features and scored 100% for malware protection in our tests.

KEY SPECS

Malicious-website detection ■ Secure browser ■ Browser extension ■ Anti-ransomware ■ Parental controls ■ Firewall ■ Password manager ■ Home-network scanner ■ Secure file deletion ■ File encryption ■ VPN – 200MB of data per day

MONITOR

BenQ BL2780T

£209.97 from bit.ly/benq495
Tested: Issue 495

This BenQ monitor offers impressive screen quality, with excellent contrast and colours, for a reasonable price. It has a good selection of ports and is height adjustable. You can even rotate it by 90 degrees to use in portrait mode.

KEY SPECS

27in screen ■ 1,920 x 1,080 pixels resolution ■ 5 milliseconds response time ■ 1 x DisplayPort, 1 x HDMI, 1 x VGA ports ■ 2 x audio outputs ■ 2 x 2W speakers ■ 547 x 512 x 231mm ■ 7.2kg ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

All prices correct at time of review

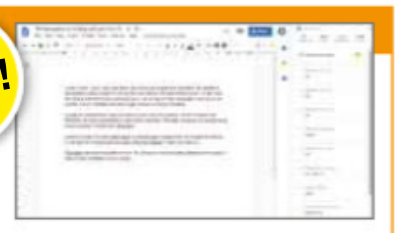
Gold Award winners

The best from our software tests

GRAMMAR CHECKER

Grammarly

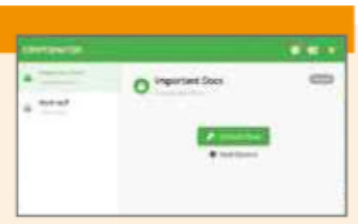
NEW!



Free from www.grammarly.com
Tested: Issue 505
Grammarly is a thorough, effective way to check and correct your writing for spelling and grammatical errors. It's a capable and sophisticated language-analysis tool.

ENCRYPTION TOOL

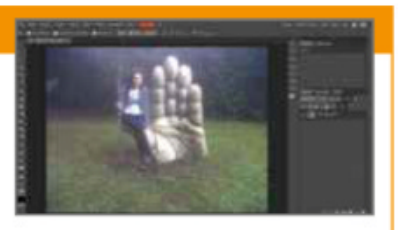
Cryptomator



Free from cryptomator.org
Tested: Issue 504
Cryptomator's clean, modern interface and cross-platform support makes file encryption incredibly easy. Its security extends to cloud services and it has no hidden costs.

ONLINE IMAGE EDITOR

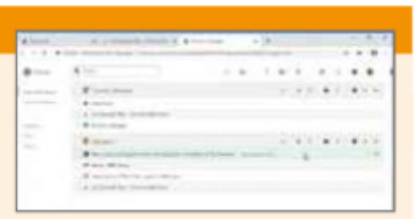
Photopea



Free from www.photopea.com
Tested: Issue 503
Photopea is a stunning photo-editing suite that has all the tools of Photoshop with none of the cost. It's worth taking the time to learn its ways to reap its many rewards.

CHROME TAB MANAGER

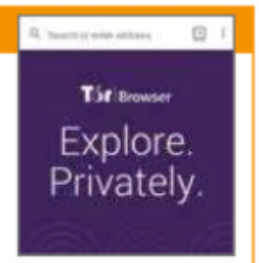
Cluster



Free from bit.ly/cluster502
Tested: Issue 502
Cluster pulls all your Chrome tabs together in one place and offers lots of useful features, such as saving your browsing sessions for later and pausing inactive tabs to save memory.

PRIVATE ANDROID BROWSER

Tor



Free from bit.ly/tor501
Tested: Issue 501
Browsers don't come more secure and private than Tor. It's loaded with useful features and works in the background, automatically encrypting your data.

EBOOK SOFTWARE

Calibre

Free from calibre-ebook.com
Tested: Issue 500
Calibre can import any ebook file, so whatever format your books are saved in, it can turn them into documents you can read on your PC screen.

WebUser

BACK ISSUES DISC 2019

Our **2019 Back Issues Disc** containing all 26 issues from last year is now on sale from Amazon

For more information, visit
bit.ly/webuser2019
or search for 'webuser disc'

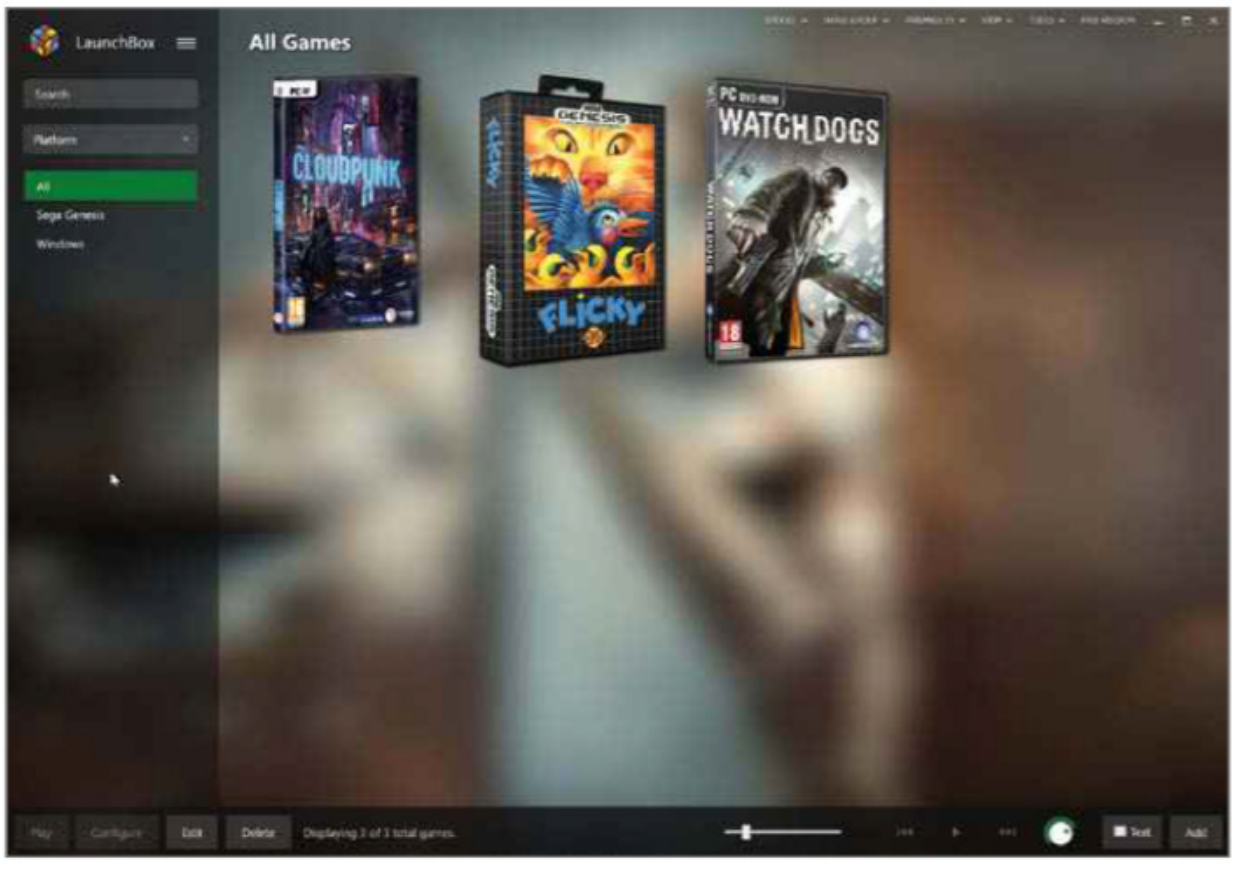
You can still buy our 2014-2018 Back Issues Discs Search for 'webuser disc' on Amazon

Best Free Software

GAMES LAUNCHER

LaunchBox 11

www.launchbox-app.com
Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10
File size: 235MB



LaunchBox was originally designed as a front end for DOSBox to make it easier to run older games in Windows. Since then, its abilities have expanded considerably and the portable database and launcher can now handle pretty much any game you want to play.

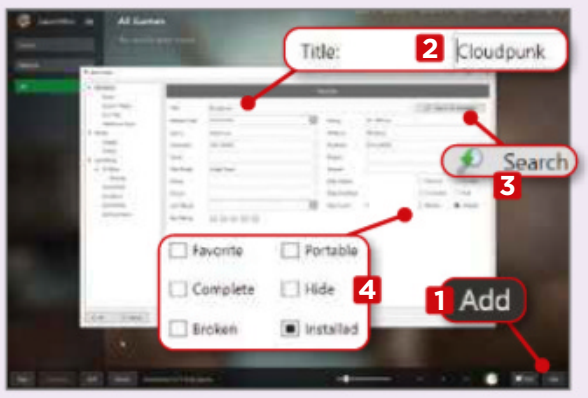
DOSBox is still included for anyone wanting to run old DOS games, but LaunchBox can also run modern releases and non-Windows games via emulators (you'll need to download these separately). You can use it to organise your games collection, adding as much information as required, and the crowdsourced database makes it very easy to add new titles.

If you buy games through Steam, LaunchBox can automatically import all your software from there, and you can customise your library. This new release can capture screenshots automatically, while integration with OBS Studio (obsproject.com) lets you quickly record videos of gameplay. You can associate multiple recordings and screenshots with your games.

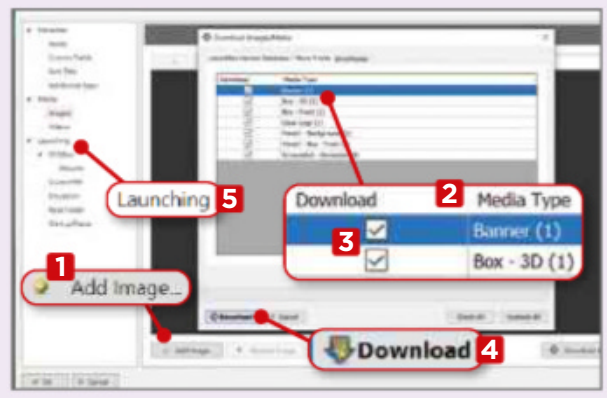
The media-cleanup feature now includes rough image matching to find and remove duplicate artwork with different sizes or other variations, saving space in your collection. The Add and Edit dialogue boxes have also been overhauled to fix past usability problems.

The free version of LaunchBox will be sufficient for most people but, if you need additional features – such as gamepad support, custom fields and filters, and an interface for use on your TV or an arcade cabinet – the cost to upgrade to LaunchBox Premium with Big Box starts at $30 (£24).

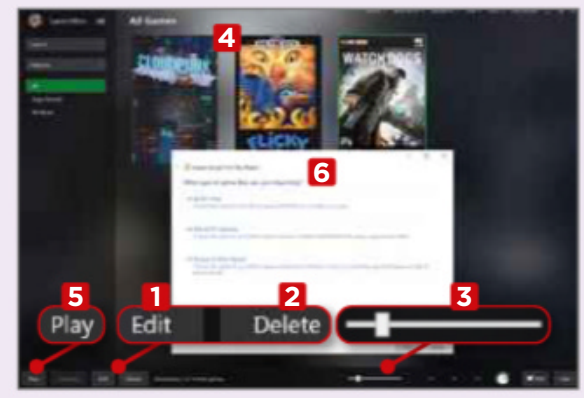
MINI WORKSHOP | Add, manage and run games in LaunchBox



1 To add some software to LaunchBox, just click the Add button, 1 then search for your game by title. 2 Click the search box to the right 3 and, if the game is found, select it. Use the tick boxes 4 to mark its status, including whether it's installed on your PC and if it's a favourite game.

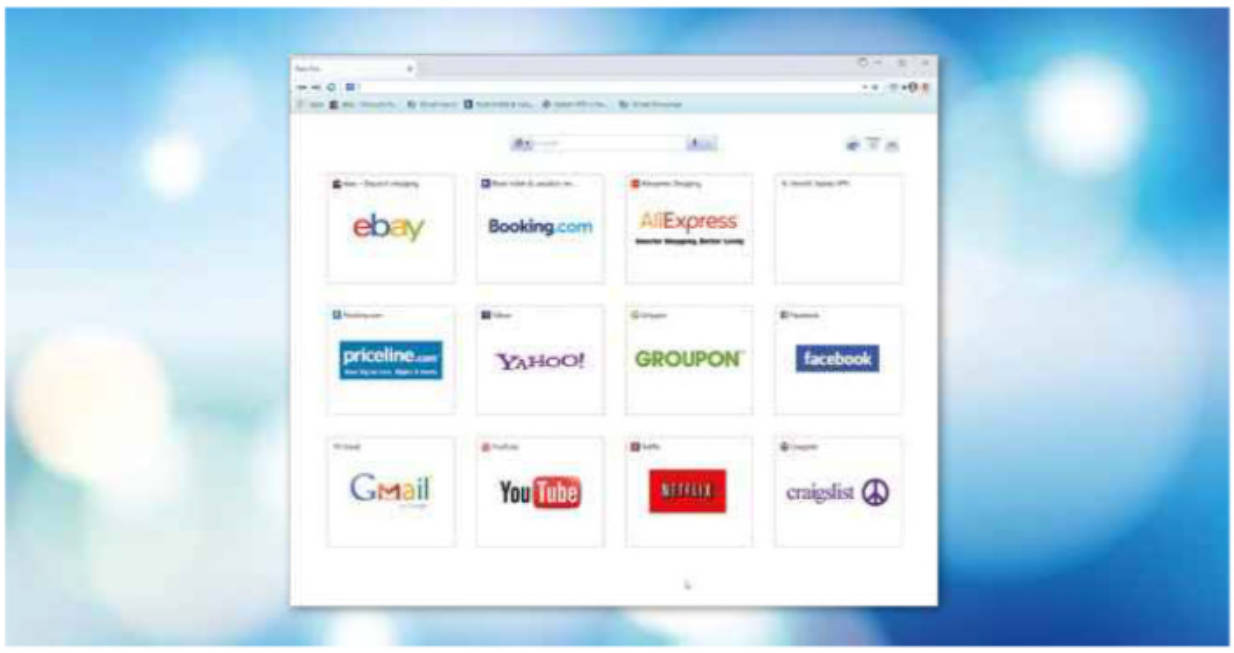


2 Click Images and you can add your own picture for that game, 1 or download some media from the LaunchBox Games Database. 2 Choose what you want to grab, 3 then click the Download button. 4 Under Launching, 5 select how the game should run – either through DOSBox or an emulator, or you can point it to the game's '.exe' file.



3 The game will appear on the main screen. You can configure its details by clicking the Edit button 1 or remove it with Delete. 2 Use the slider 3 to adjust the thumbnail size. 4 Click Play 5 to run the selected game. You can also add new games by dragging them to the interface and using the wizard. 6

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



WEB BROWSER

Slimjet 27

www.slimjet.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10 **File size:** 55.8MB

Slimjet is a speedy web browser built on the open-source Chromium engine used by Google Chrome. It loads pages quickly and has an impressive selection of built-in features, including one-click Facebook integration, photo enhancer, instant photo uploading, streaming video downloader and an intelligent form filler. This version adds support for tab groups and lets you manage cookies on a per-site basis and block third-party cookies. The browser engine has been updated to Chromium 83.

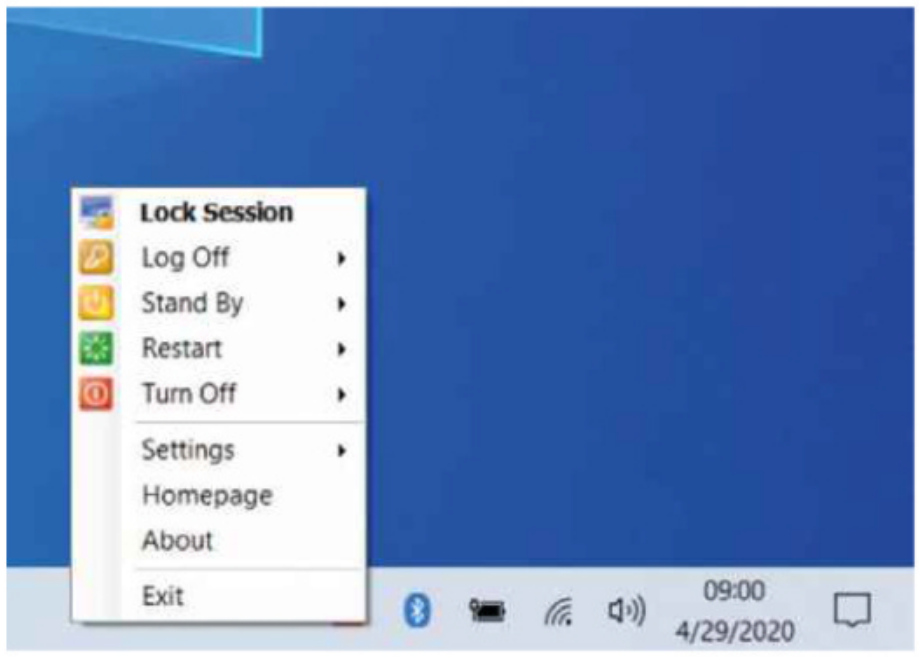
New Windows 10 App

Amazon Prime Video for Windows

bit.ly/primeapp506

File size: 39.37MB

The official Amazon Prime Video app for Windows 10 lets you access all the streaming service's shows and movies on your PC (you will need a Prime subscription). You can download them for offline viewing, and rent or buy titles that aren't available for free. The built-in X-ray feature provides useful details about the cast, music and other information as you watch.



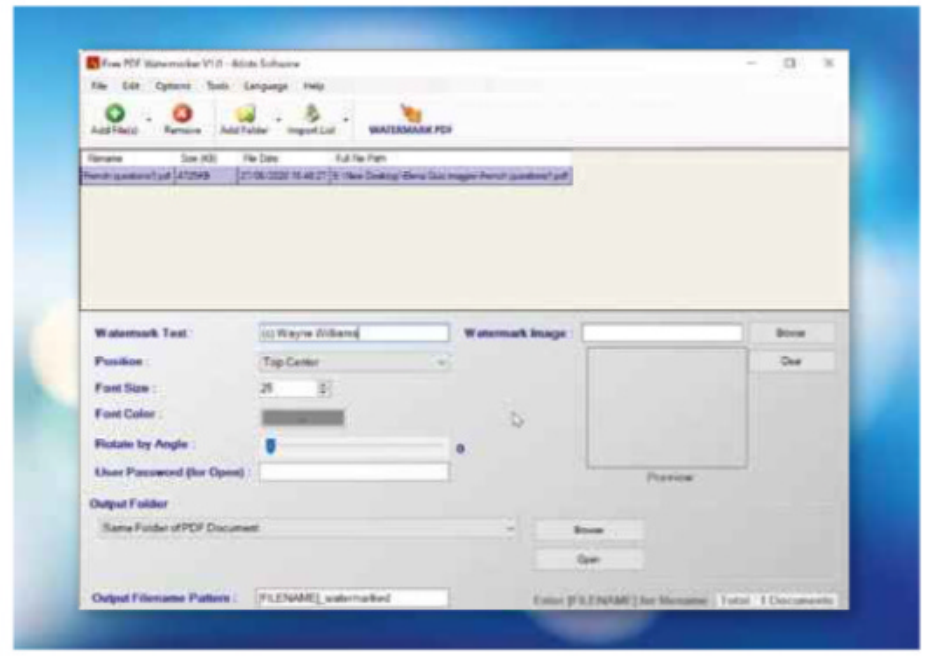
SYSTEM TOOL

OxyBits EasyShutdown 2

bit.ly/eshutd506

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10 **File size:** 1.8MB

EasyShutdown makes it simpler to quickly shut down, restart, lock or log off your PC. It's actually a rerelease of a program called FSEasyShutdown, and adds a button to the system tray, which you can right-click to choose the required action and either perform it immediately or with a delay. Left-clicking the icon brings up a box that lets you configure the optional postponement. The software can force non-responding programs to quit on shutdown.



PDF TOOL

Free PDF Watermarker

bit.ly/pdfwater506

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10 **File size:** 1.8MB

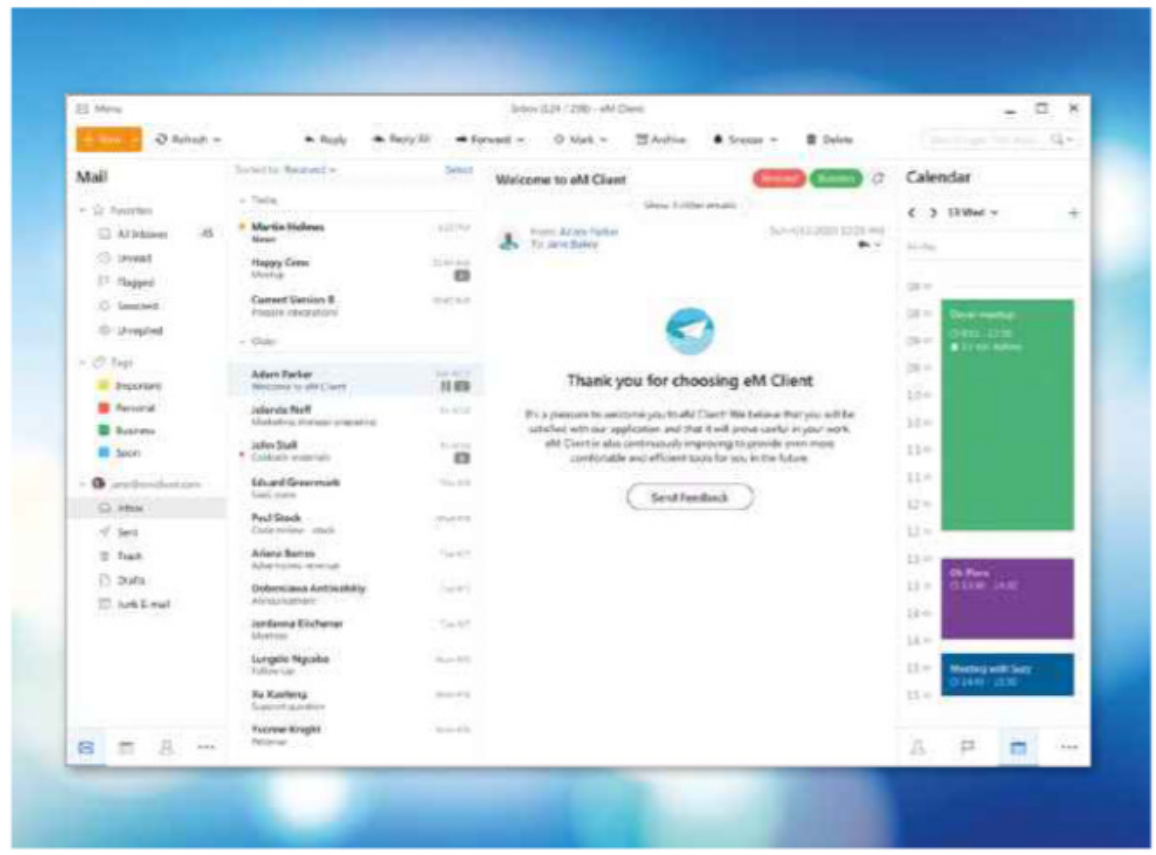
There are lots of free tools that let you edit PDF files, but if you just want to mark your documents with a watermark, to stop anyone stealing them or claiming ownership, you can use this simple program. Add your files, enter the text (or upload an image) to use for your watermark, then set a position along with font size and colour, and optionally rotate it. The software lets you add whole folders of PDF documents or import list files, and also supports command-line usage.

EMAIL CLIENT

eM Client 8

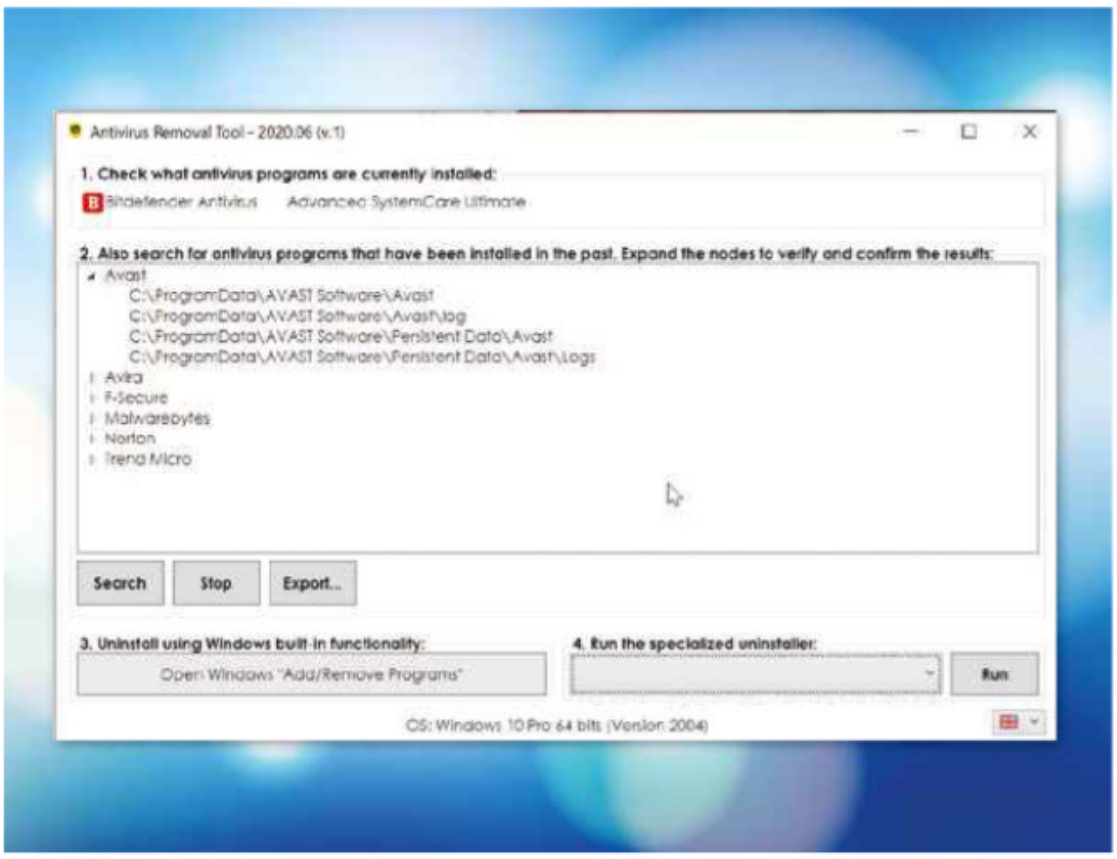
www.emclient.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10 or macOS **File size:** 105MB



An intuitive alternative to Microsoft Outlook, eM Client is a full-featured email application that comes with a handy built-in calendar and task and contact managers. It has a clean, easy-to-navigate interface and offers support for IMAP and POP protocols.

Version 8 introduces a totally new look for the software and adds support for multiple instances of eM Client, so you can have the calendar open in one window and email in another. There's a new 'All attachments' view, support for attaching files from cloud-storage services such as OneDrive and Google Drive, and a new sidebar view for summarising the day's events.



UNINSTALLER

Antivirus Removal Tool 2

antivirus-removal-tool.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10

File size: 162MB

When you install and then uninstall antivirus software, stray files and Registry entries often get left behind. These can potentially interfere with any new security software you install, causing problems. Antivirus Removal Tool can find and fully remove all anti-malware software on your system. When you run the tool, it displays any currently installed program(s). Click the Search button to scan for past applications, which you can then remove using Windows' built-in uninstaller, or click the down arrow and select a specialised uninstaller from the list. It offers removal tools for all the major antivirus names, including Avast, AVG, Bitdefender, Kaspersky and Malwarebytes.

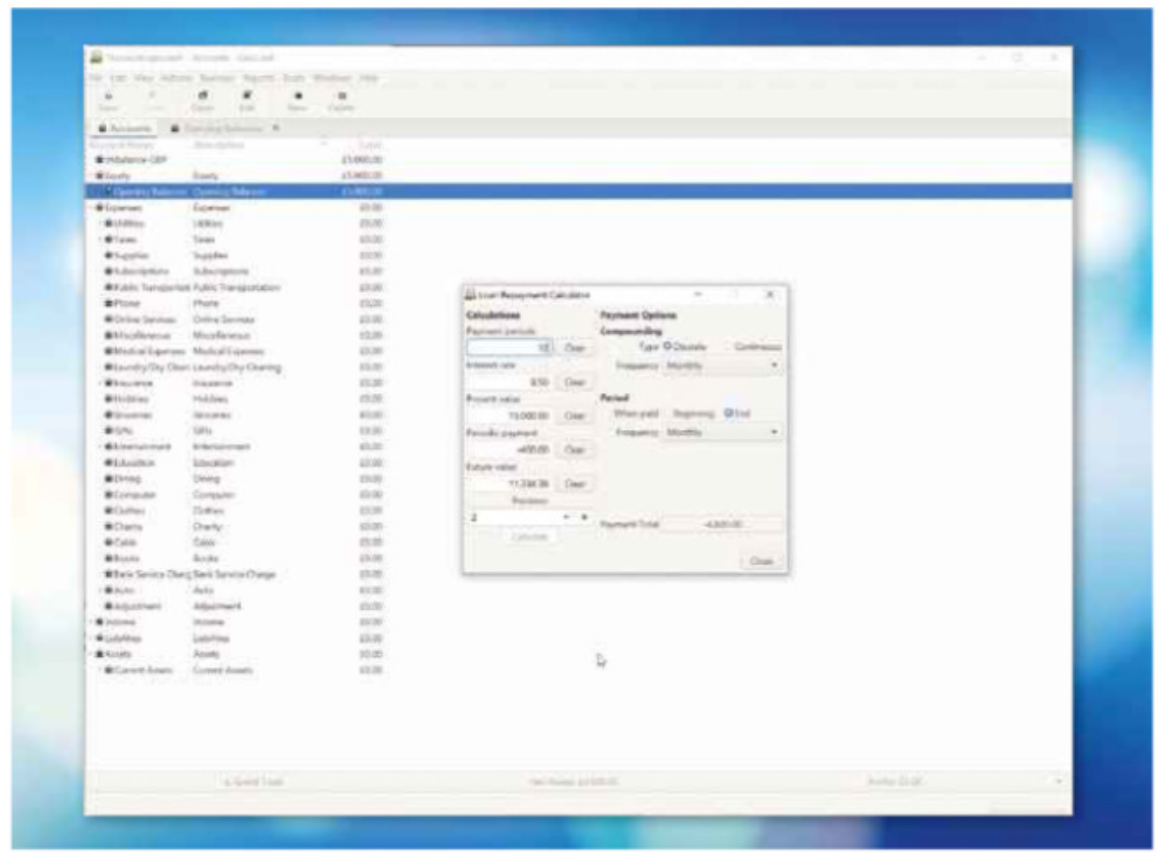
ACCOUNTING SOFTWARE

GnuCash 4

www.gnucash.org

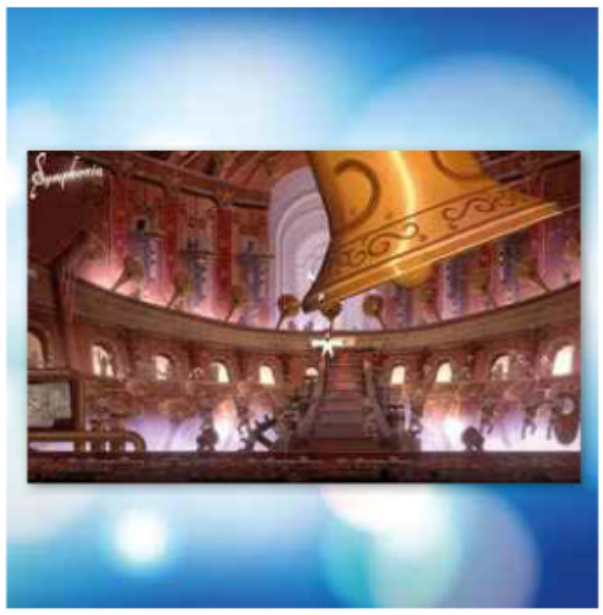
Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10, macOS or Linux

File size: 142MB



Keeping on top of your finances can often be a struggle, especially in the wake of the coronavirus lockdown, but GnuCash can help you get things organised. Designed for both business and individual use, the software can track your incomings and outgoings, and help you plan for the future. Handy pie and bar charts show you exactly where your money is going each month, and the software includes an in-depth guide to help get you started.

This new version improves the interface and adds a new Transaction Association dialogue, type-ahead search and a separate executable file for command-line activity.



GAME

Symphonia

bit.ly/symph506

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10, USB game controller
File size: 338MB

Symphonia is a musical platform game in which you play a violinist. Your instrument and bow are used to shape the world as you move through it, and the graphics and sounds are stunning. You need a gamepad (ideally an Xbox 360 or Xbox One controller) to play Symphonia properly, because it's too sophisticated for keyboard controls.

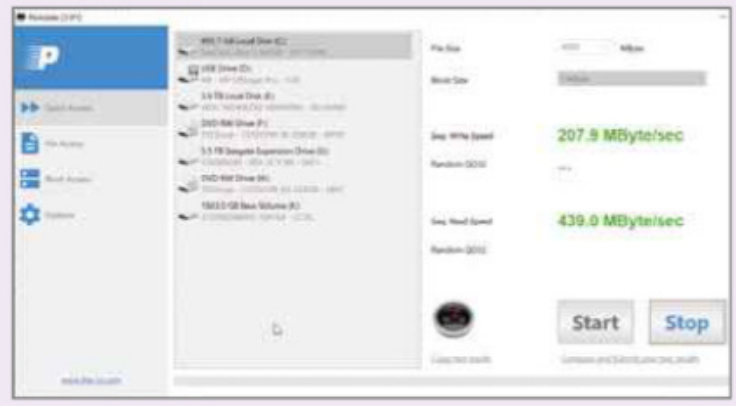
✓ Install this program...

Parkdale

bit.ly/park506

Min requirements: Windows 7/8/10 or macOS
File size: 743KB

If you're concerned that your hard drive is no longer running as fast as it should be, you can use a benchmarking tool such as Parkdale to check its performance. This free program can test the read and write speed of all of the drives in or connected to your PC, and offers three modes: QuickAccess, which tests sequential read/write speeds and random data access; FileAccess, which measures drive speeds with a file of your choice; and BlockAccess, which tests disk sectors. Once you've benchmarked a drive, you can compare your test results with other Parkdale users.



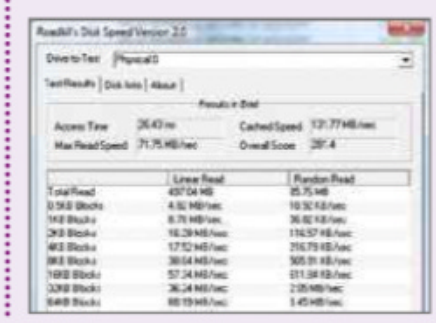
...Not this one ✗

Roadkil's Disk Speed

www.roadkil.net

Min requirements: Windows XP/7/8
File size: 47MB

If you stumble across this program while searching for a free benchmarking tool, we'd advise you to ignore it and use another one. Although its official website is still live, Roadkil's Disk Speed hasn't been updated since 2009. It's so old, in fact, that it quotes 56K modem speed in its 'download time' specifications!



OTHER OPERATING SYSTEMS What's new for Linux and macOS

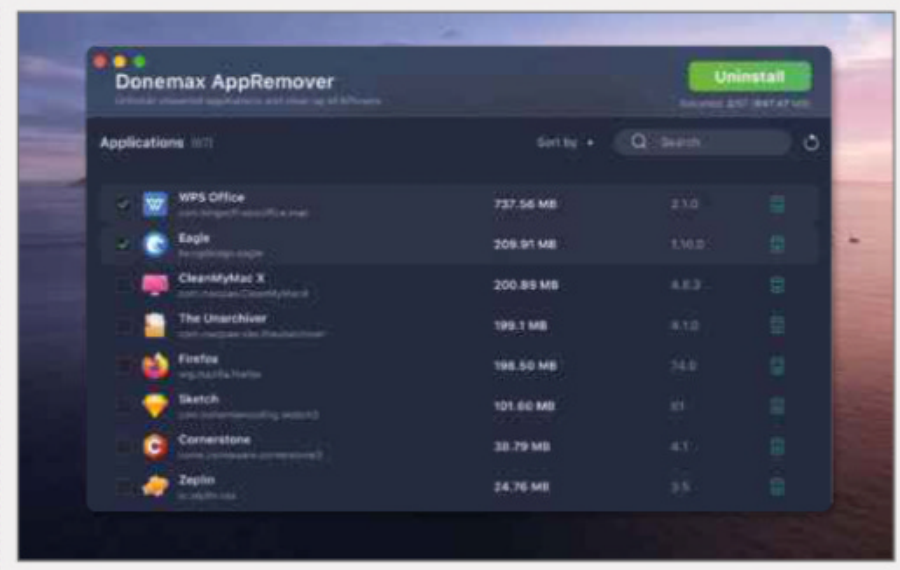
LINUX DISTRO

Linux Mint 20 'Ulyana'

www.linuxmint.com

Min requirements: 2GB RAM, 20GB disk space
File size: 1.8GB

Mint is one of the most popular Linux distributions. Based on Ubuntu, it's available in a choice of three desktop environments – Cinnamon (the most popular), MATE and Xfce. This release comes with Linux kernel 5.4 and a new program called Warpinator – a reimplementation of Giver – which allows for easy file sharing across a local network.



UNINSTALLER

Donemax AppRemover

bit.ly/appremove506

Min requirements: macOS 10.7 and newer
File size: 3.4MB

Donemax AppRemover can uninstall unwanted Mac applications individually or in batches, then remove any junk that would usually get left behind, including temp files, logs, cache, cookies and more. It offers a straightforward, intuitive interface, and lets you sort your apps by various criteria or search for them by name.

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

Best New Browser Tools

CHROME

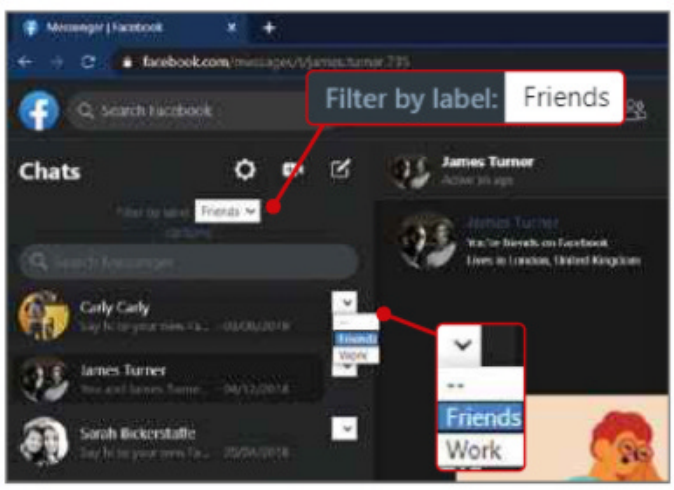
Share accounts without sharing passwords

Keyring (joinkeyring.com) is a new tool that lets you securely grant other people access to your online accounts without needing to hand over your password. Setup is very straightforward. Sign in with your Google account – you'll need to give the extension (encrypted, read-only) access to your contact list – then choose which services to share. These include Netflix, Spotify, Apple Music and Prime Video. You can then invite friends and family to join your Keyring via email - they'll also need to install the Keyring extension to access your services on their own computer. It's worth bearing in mind that most of these services have device limits, so not everyone will be able to use them at the same time.

The free version of Keyring lets you share six services with three people, which should be enough for most users. Unlimited monthly plans start at $5 (£4). We'll be looking at other ways to share your accounts in our next issue.

Organise Facebook Messenger using folders

Facebook Messenger Organiser (bit.ly/fborganise506) introduces a revolutionary concept to the browser-based version of the messaging service (messenger.com): folders. The extension lets you manage Messenger in the same way you'd organise your email inbox, by adding a drop-down menu and Options button to the top of your Messenger list. Beside each chat there is another drop-down menu.



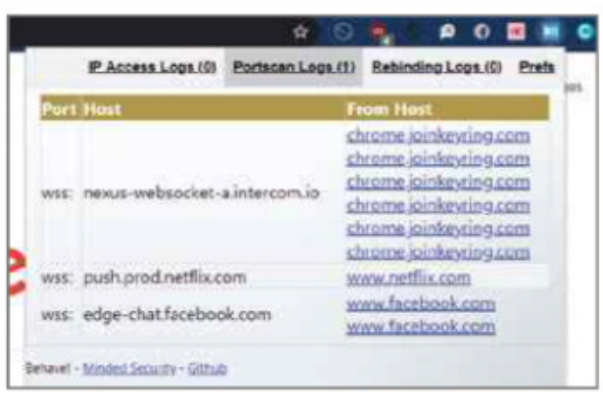
To start, click Options, then create folders for friends, family, work and so on. Next, add the relevant contacts to the folders using the drop-down menu next to their name. You can then use the 'Filter by label' drop-down menu to switch between folders.

To view all messages at once, switch the filter to '--'.

Get notified when websites misbehave

Certain websites have a nasty habit of performing dodgy actions, such as scanning ports or checking private IP addresses. Without an extension like Behave (bit.ly/behave506), it can be hard to know precisely what sites are up to – until it's too late. This open-source tool was developed by the chief technology officer of a business that helps app developers build secure software.

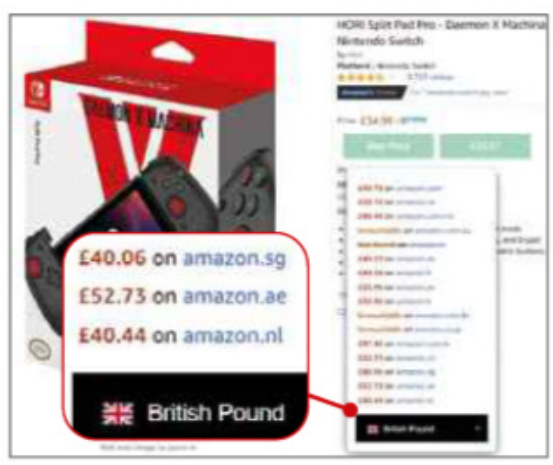
Unfortunately, there's no way for the browser tool to stop a website misbehaving, but Behave will send you an alert to keep you informed of any suspicious activity. You can view three different logs by opening the extension: sites accessing private IPs, port-scanning and DNS-rebinding attacks. Displayed alongside these notifications are pertinent details, including host URLs and target IPs, with additional options on the Prefs tab.



Compare prices across Amazon sites

It's now even easier to bag a bargain on Amazon – though not necessarily on the UK site. Cross (bit.ly/cross506) lets you compare prices across all 17 global Amazon stores. Visit any product page and Cross inserts a Best Price button beneath the current selling price. Hovering over this button lets you see how much the product is selling for on different Amazon sites, along with a link. Prices are displayed in your local currency, but this can be changed by clicking British Pound to open a menu of options.

Obviously, you need to take into account delivery times and international shipping costs (and whether the seller even offers that service), but it could still save you money overall.



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

FIREFOX

Explode memory-hogging tabs in one click

Having too many tabs open can have a negative impact on your browsing. If you need to free up memory, the lightweight tool Tab Grenade (bit.ly/grenade506) is a must for your arsenal of add-ons.

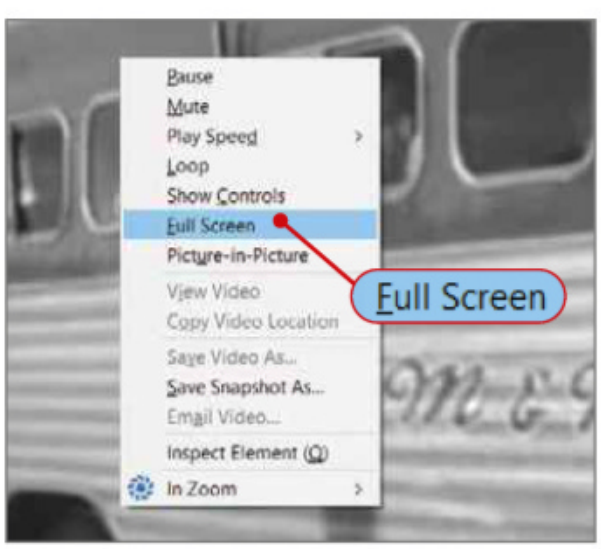
One click of Grenade's toolbar button sends all your open tabs to an easy-to-read list. You can then reopen each one without losing your place. It's a good way to keep your computer running smoothly, particularly if you're prone to overloading your browser with open tabs.

It's not a new concept, and we've covered similar tab managers and killers before, but we were impressed with Tab Grenade's speed and its clean list of closed tabs. The grouping of each set of 'detonated' tabs works well – should you pull the pin on further tabs, you can easily find each set again.

Quickly switch to full-screen view

Full Screen for Firefox (bit.ly/fullscreen506) is a one-click browser tool that lets you snap to full-screen in a flash. This means stripping out the taskbar and address bar, so you can focus on the page's content. Once you're done, move your cursor to the top of the screen to reveal the address bar, where another click of the add-on's toolbar button returns you to standard view. You can also press the Esc key to end full-screen mode.

Full Screen for Firefox can also instantly switch media files such as images and videos to full-screen. Right-click supported HTML5 videos to get the Full Screen option.



The developer of the add-on has plenty more tools at bit.ly/stefan506, including the excellent YouTube add-on Turn Off the Lights.

Refresh tabs with a single click

Sticking with the theme of utility browser tools, Reload (bit.ly/reload506) can speed up your browsing by letting you refresh your current tab by double-clicking the middle mouse button anywhere on the page.

As the developer states, there are "no options to configure". Simply install and double-click. The extension won't work on so-called 'special pages', such as the Firefox Add-ons site, but you won't have any problems with it elsewhere.

Reload is a modified version of – and companion to – the add-on Tab Page Double Click Reload and Close (bit.ly/doubleclick506), which lets you reload and close tabs using your mouse buttons. Just make sure you're using a mouse with a middle button.

OTHER BROWSERS

Hear web pages read aloud

Pericles (bit.ly/pericles506), named after the Greek orator, is a simple text-to-speech extension. Open a page, then click the Pericles toolbar button to hear it read aloud. Playback control buttons are big and bold, which makes it ideal for visually impaired people who most need this type of tool. Dipping into the Options reveals lots of additional settings, such as reading speed and auto-scroll. Mac users benefit from plenty of different voices, with a slightly more limited range on Windows. You can also use customisable keyboard shortcuts to manage playback.

Minimise your scroll bar

While it may not take up a huge amount of your screen, a browser's scroll bar can seem a little too wide – which is where Minimal Scrollbar (bit.ly/scroll506) comes in handy. It's a browser tool that squishes the scrollbar to the absolute minimum, making it barely visible on screen. It's possible to change this using a Registry hack – open up the Registry Editor and go to HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Control Panel\Desktop\WindowMetrics, where you can alter the ScrollWidth values. If you'd rather not tinker with these settings, Minimal Scrollbar is the next-best option.

Best Free Apps

App of the Fortnight

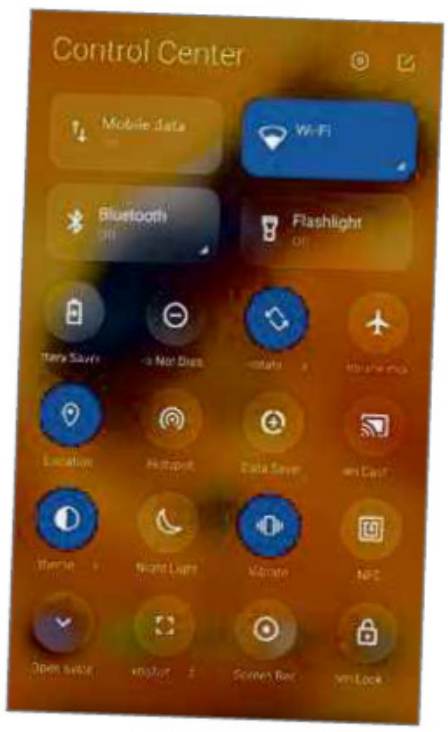
TOOLS

Mi Control Center

UPDATED

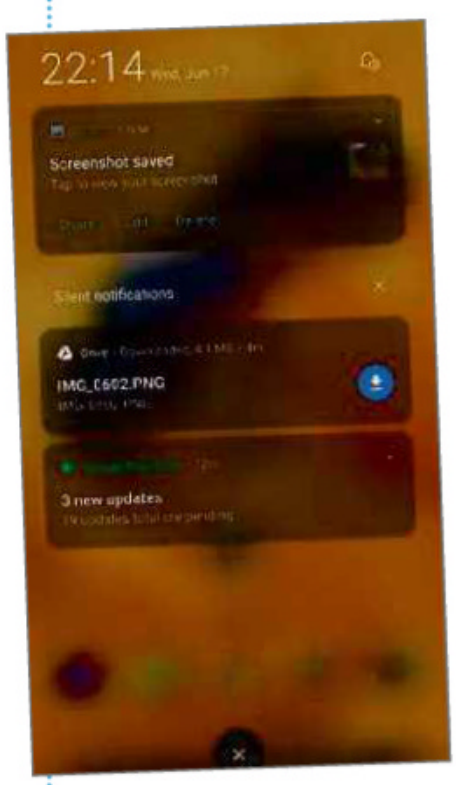
bit.ly/micontrol506

5



We could fill an entire issue of *Web User* on the subject of the relative pros and cons of iOS and Android – both mobile operating systems have their advantages and disadvantages, and we would never suggest that one is better than the other. Control Centre, however, is one of the things that Apple arguably nails. Swipe down from the top of your iPhone screen and you're greeted with a smart-looking screen of quick settings to toggle – volume, brightness, Wi-Fi, Airplane Mode and more – along with shortcuts to frequently used functions, including your device's torch and camera. Best of all, the Control Centre in iOS is customisable.

Android has an equivalent but, depending on the version of the operating system that your device is running, the Quick Settings panel may require two swipes to open fully and probably isn't as attractive or as flexible as Apple's offering. Which is where Mi Control Center comes in – essentially, it brings the look and feel of Apple's Control Centre to your Android device.



The app lets you separate your notifications from your quick settings, just like on recent iPhones. Swipe down from the top left to view notifications, swipe down from the top right to open a panel of quick settings. It looks great and offers lots of customisation options.

On the downside, the free version includes adverts and hobbles some of the app's advanced options, such as setting custom colours and images as the background, and customising the icon grid layout. You can banish the ads and unlock all the app's premium features by upgrading to the Pro versio, which currently costs £2.49 for new users.

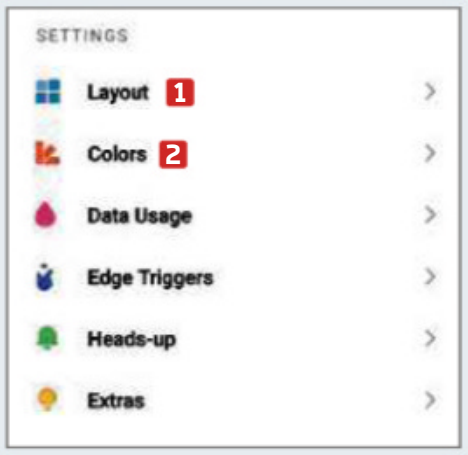
Our rating ★★★★★

MINI WORKSHOP

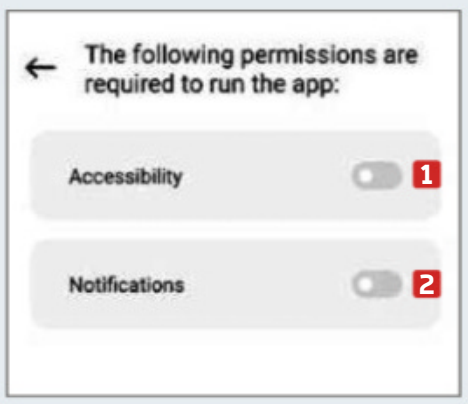
Access your Android settings using Mi Control Center

1 Launch Mi Control Center and you'll be presented with a configuration screen. Leave the switch at the top 1 turned off for now. You can choose between two layouts – Notification Shade and Control Center. 2 Select the latter and drag the slider below 3 left or right to set how much of the touch area at the top of the screen is dedicated to the Control Center and Notifications when you swipe down.

2 Scroll down to Settings. Tap Layout 1 to customise how the icons in the Control Center look – for example, you can make the quick tiles square, opt for a circular battery indicator, show a power menu button and so on. Colors 2 lets you adapt the Control Center's colour scheme, background and more. Work through these options and change them to your liking, then go back to the main screen.



3 Tap the switch next to 'Not running' at the top of the screen to enable Mi Control Center. You'll be asked to give the app Accessibility and Notification permissions. Tap the switch next to Accessibility, 1 select Mi Control Center, then switch it on and press OK. Tap the switch next to Notifications, 2 then toggle the Mi Control Center option on and choose Allow. Agree to the Data Protection screen to complete setup.



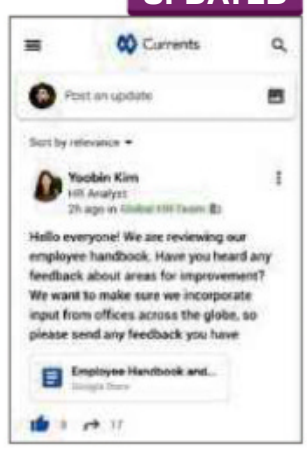
This fortnight's top free and paid-for apps for Android and iOS phones and tablets

SOCIAL

UPDATED

Google Currents

bit.ly/currentsdroid506
bit.ly/currentsios506
5 11



Not to be confused with the magazine app of the same name that Google shut down in 2013, Currents is basically the new name for the last remaining vestiges of Google's failed social network, Google+. The service and its accompanying apps have now been reimagined as a business-centric social channel, allowing users of Google's G Suite to connect with colleagues to exchange ideas, collaborate on projects and more. New features include additional formatting tools for posts and the ability to prioritise posts from important collaborators.

Our rating ★★★★☆

WEATHER

NEW

AniWeather

bit.ly/aniweather506
4.2

There are lots of weather apps available, but many of them are like the British weather itself – frustratingly unreliable and frequently disappointing. AniWeather aims to stand out from the crowd with a striking, animated look that takes its cues from Google's own material design. There's some neat support for gesture control – for example, swipe left for hour-by-hour forecasts for the next two days, swipe up for settings – but other than that, it's all fairly straightforward. Data is taken from OpenWeather and is location-based, though you can add other cities, too, for when you're feeling brave enough to travel.

Our rating ★★★★☆

MESSAGING

NEW

Slatch

bit.ly/slatchdroid506
bit.ly/slatchios506
6 11

Ever had one of those tortuous messaging exchanges with a non-English speaker, where you're both copying and pasting text between Google Translate to work out what the other person is saying? Slatch could put an end to that hassle by letting individuals and groups chat in their own languages, which are translated on the fly. Voice-message translation is also available. This French-developed app could revolutionise global communication, though Slatch's clunky claim of being "the first messaging app witch translate in groups" [sic] on its website (slatch.io) raises some doubt!

Our rating ★★★☆☆

VIDEO

NEW

Focos Live

bit.ly/focos506
12

Apple's Portrait mode gives anyone with a dual or triple-camera iPhone the ability to shoot professional-looking portraits that place their subjects in sharp focus. Currently, Portrait mode is only available for still photos, although it's thought that the forthcoming iPhone 12 will extend portrait mode to video, too. With Focos Live, however, you can get ahead of the game. The app uses the depth data from your iPhone's cameras to allow portrait video recording and the ability to alter aperture settings after the fact. The free version offers lots of other effects and editing tools, but leaves a watermark – if that's a deal breaker, you can pay from £1.99 per month for the Pro version.

Our rating ★★★★☆

MUSIC

UPDATED

Oto Music

bit.ly/oto506
5

Android users have no shortage of music players at their disposal, but if you're looking for something sleek and fast that still has lots of useful abilities, then Oto Music is a smart choice. The app's design looks great and puts a lot of big-name players to shame (we're looking at you, YouTube Music). Its minimalist approach lets the music do the talking but that's not to say it's lacking in features: Oto Music has a fully-functioning built-in equaliser, playlist support, a song tag editor, Chromecast support and – in the latest version – support for lyrics and more. All that in an app that's just 3.9MB in size.

Our rating ★★★★★

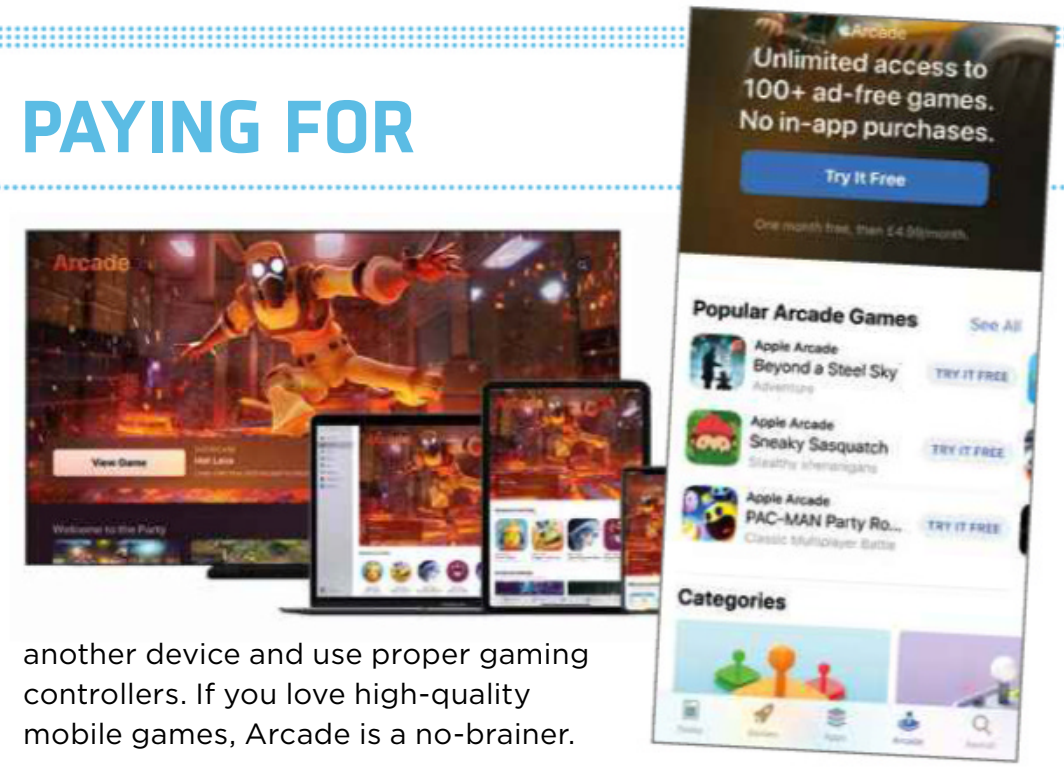
NEW GAMES WORTH PAYING FOR

Apple Arcade

bit.ly/arcade506

Price: £4.99 per month

13



Apple's gaming subscription service isn't new, but a steady stream of titles has been added to it since it launched, with the three latest releases highlighted below among its best yet.

Arcade offers access to more than 100 titles, including a number of big-name exclusives and indie gems. You can play offline with no ads or in-app purchases, pick up where you left off on another device and use proper gaming controllers. If you love high-quality mobile games, Arcade is a no-brainer.

Little Orpheus

bit.ly/orpheus506

In this game, you take on the role of Soviet cosmonaut Ivan Ivanovich, an unlikely hero who relives his epic journey to the centre of the Earth across eight different episodes. It's a colourful and witty side-scrolling adventure game.

Beyond a Steel Sky

bit.ly/beyond506

A long overdue sequel to 1994's cyberpunk classic Beneath a Steel Sky, this game picks up the story some time later as you point-and-click your way through puzzles, uncovering dystopian conspiracies as grizzled protagonist, Robert Foster.

Winding Worlds

bit.ly/winding506

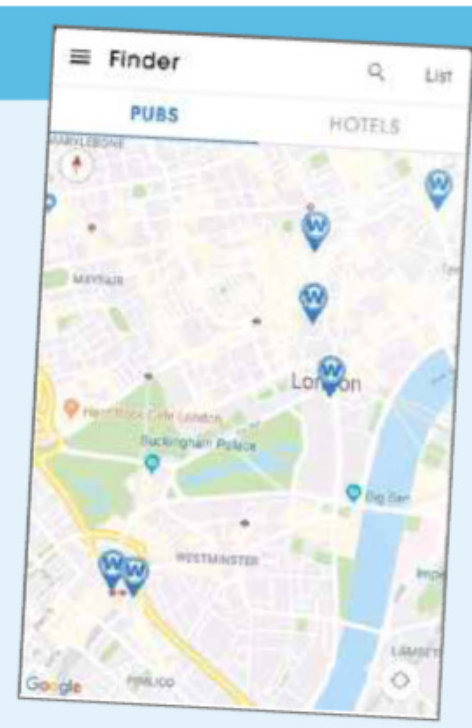
In this sweet-natured puzzle game, you're tasked with solving various character's problems in order to save their souls. Gameplay is intuitive and gesture-friendly, while the music and pastel-tinted visuals are soothing and dreamy.

✓ Install this app...

Wetherspoon

bit.ly/spoon506

6 11



With pubs now reopening, the official Wetherspoon app provides a brilliant way to enjoy an evening out at one of the company's many venues safely – by ordering your food and drinks from the app instead of going to the bar. The reorder function makes it easier to get the next round in, too. Additionally, the app lets you find your closest Wetherspoon pub easily by viewing nearby branches on a map.

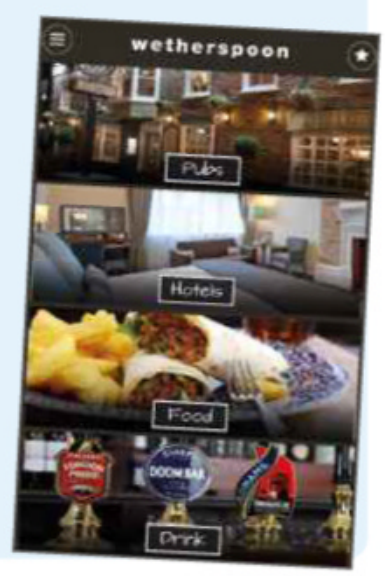
Alternatively, if you're not a Wetherspoon fan, you can install Neverspoons (neverspoons.app) – a new app that helps you find independent pubs in your area instead of big chains.

...Not this one ✗

Wetherspoon Pub-Finder

bit.ly/weth506

The 'out with the old and in with the new' adage apparently doesn't apply to Wetherspoon, which seems to have left its old app hanging around on Google Play long after the new one (left) was released, rather than removing it to avoid confusion. This one is effectively obsolete – it hasn't been updated since 2016, suffers broken functionality, occasionally crashes and should be avoided.



Take a Screen Break

Take a rest from your browser with our fiendish fortnightly challenges – solve our British comedy films emoji and guess our Wayback Machine year

WIN A WEB USER 2019 BACK ISSUES DISC!
Email your answers to editor@webuser.co.uk – one correct entry will win a disc

CAN YOU GUESS THE BRITISH COMEDY FILMS FROM THE EMOJI?

1

2

3

4

5

6

GUESS THE WAYBACK MACHINE YEAR

Can you work out which year the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine captured the following websites?

COMPETITIONS

WIN 1 OF 2

Toshiba P300 6TB hard drives

WORTH £109.99 EACH

Toshiba's 3.5in P300 is a versatile hard drive ideal for a range of computers – all-in-one and desktop PCs, gaming computers – as well as external enclosures. The dual-stage actuator makes for more precise and faster read and write speeds. To enter this competition, email your home address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'Toshiba' in the subject line. For more info on Toshiba's storage products, visit www.toshiba-storage.com.

WIN 1 OF 3

CHERRY DW 9000 SLIM keyboard and mouse

WORTH £90 EACH

Perfect for working from home, CHERRY's DW 9000 keyboard-and-mouse set uses rechargeable lithium batteries that let you work for a week without charging. The keyboard's metal plate prevents bending, while the mouse fits perfectly in your hand, thanks to its rubber-coated side parts and compact design. To enter, email webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'CHERRY' in the subject line. Visit CHERRY's site (bit.ly/cherry506) for more home-office products.

FAQ

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

Apple's new operating systems

The coronavirus lockdown hasn't prevented Apple from revamping its products. **David Crookes** looks at the best new features in Apple's next round of updates

So another set of updates then?

Absolutely. Adhering to its annual tradition, Apple has revised its operating systems for the iPhone, iPad, Mac, Apple TV and Apple Watch. It has tweaked their designs, borrowed from Android and unveiled a host of new features, some of which could significantly alter the way you use the tech giant's devices.

What's new with the iPhone?

Apple's flagship product is upgrading to iOS 14, with the most noticeable changes on the Home Screen. For starters, widgets are being redesigned and will now come in three sizes, allowing them to display more information. They'll be placeable anywhere – even on top of each other – thanks to a feature called Smart Stacks. This uses on-device intelligence to automatically switch between the widgets depending on your location, activity and the time of day.

The widgets on the iOS 14 Home Screen come in three different sizes

Won't that cause a lot of clutter?

A lot depends on the number of widgets you use and how you position them, but Apple is also introducing App Library – a feature that automatically organises apps into categories. By scrolling to the last Home Screen page, you'll see boxes containing suggested and recently added apps, as well as those labelled Social, Entertainment, Productivity and so on. You'll also be able to hide Home Screen pages or pull down to view a list of apps in alphabetical order.

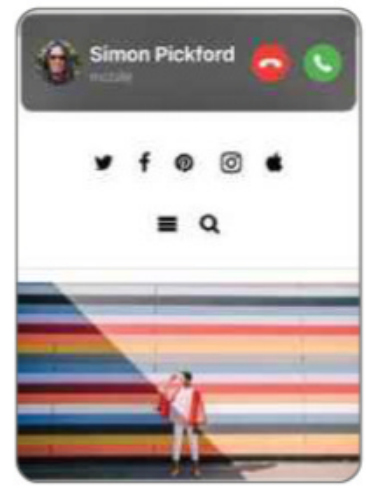
App Library automatically organises your iPhone apps into categories

Will I still need to install loads of apps?

Maybe not. Another new feature, App Clip, lets you use just a small part of an app whenever you require it. For example, you may find yourself in a car park needing to make a payment. Rather than installing an app for that sole purpose, you'll be able to scan a code, use NFC tags or tap a link. Almost immediately, part of an app will appear on-demand and let you complete the necessary process. Each App Clip is up to 10MB in size and it won't download to your iPhone, although some of the details you enter may be temporarily cached for future reference.

Does this make iOS 14 more seamless?

To some degree, yes. Apple has made certain processes in iOS 14 more unobtrusive. For example, you'll be notified of an incoming call by a floating banner at the top of the screen, rather than having your whole display taken over. Similarly, Siri's input will be confined to the bottom of the screen.

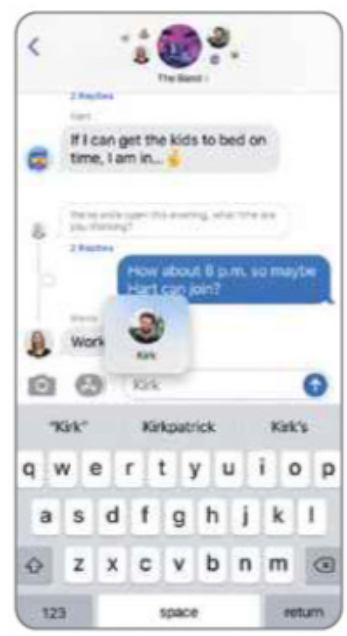


Incoming call notifications will no longer take up your whole screen

If you get a message or an email when watching a video, the new Picture-in-Picture feature lets you continue viewing while using another app. It'll be possible to view a FaceTime call while getting on with other tasks.

Does that mean communication is more slick?

Yes, and this extends to Messages, which is introducing inline replies within group threads. These let you



You'll now be able to reply to specific people within group messages

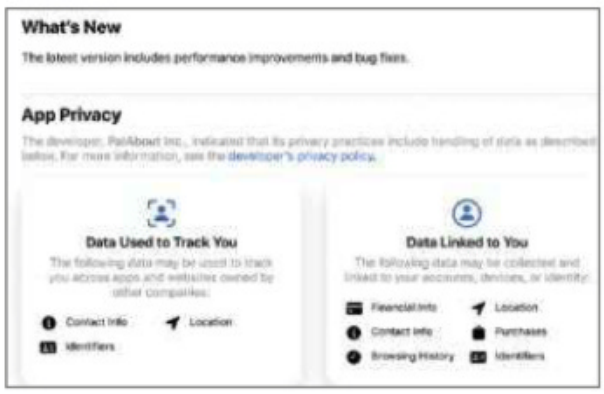
respond to specific messages or take part in a new conversation away from the main group. You'll also be able to opt out of group message notifications that don't mention your name and pin important conversations. As a bonus, groups will be customisable with an image or emoji, and Apple is expanding its Meemoji options to include more hairstyles, headwear and face masks.

Can I chat in different languages?

Apple plans to introduce a new Translate app that works offline with 11 languages, so you can speak and hear instant translations. Flip your iPhone into landscape mode and the app will keep listening for audio to translate as you chat. You can also input or paste text for written translations and use Safari to translate entire web pages.

Will my privacy be protected?

Apple says apps such as Maps (which is adding cycling directions, speed cameras and charging stops for electric vehicles) will ask your permission before they track you. App Store pages will also include third-party privacy summaries, while the enhanced, smart-home-focused Home app will ensure information about your accessories are end-to-end encrypted. Safari will let you see whether any of your passwords have been involved in a data breach, too.



iOS 14 gives you greater control over how apps access your data

Will the new features come to the iPad?

Many will, but iPadOS 14 widgets will be limited to the Today View sidebar. New iPad-only features include a retooled search facility that'll find pretty much anything on your tablet, and sidebars in preinstalled apps such as Photos, Files, Calendar and Apple Music to facilitate navigation. Keyboard and mouse support is being added for games.

The new sidebar in iPadOS 14 makes it easier to navigate the device

Lots to write home about, then?

Yes, and you'll be able to do so with the Apple Pencil, because iPadOS 14 is bringing over Scribble from the Apple Watch. Write in a text field and iPadOS 14 will convert the words into typed text. It also allows handwritten words in notes to be highlighted, cut and pasted as typed text. Cleverly, Scribble can detect handwritten phone numbers, addresses and dates, offering options to call, look up or add to Calendar.

iPadOS 14 can convert what you write on screen into typed text

Anything else to watch out for?

Sleep tracking is being introduced in watchOS 7, and your Apple Watch will now know when you're washing your hands, kickstarting a 20-second timer. Four new workouts and better monitoring for calorie-burning are coming to the Activity app, which is being renamed Fitness, and cycling directions will be viewable from your wrist. Additionally, notifications will be sent if any attached headphones are pumping out sounds too loudly for too long.

The Apple Watch is being updated with a sleep-tracking function

And what about Apple TV?

Apple TV may be Apple's most neglected platform, but the tvOS 14 upgrade is bringing some welcome additions. YouTube content will be viewable in 4K, and 4K videos will be shareable from an iPhone or iPad to the Apple TV in full resolution. Picture-in-Picture will allow you to view two things at once, and you'll be able to connect two pairs of AirPods to a single Apple TV for tuning in with a friend. Other updates include multi-user support for games, new controller support and the ability to display live camera feeds.

When will these updates be available?

You can expect iOS 14, iPadOS 14, tvOS 14 and watchOS 7 to be released in September, with public betas available from July.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN macOS BIG SUR

Apple also announced details of the next Mac operating system, Big Sur, which has a cleaner design and a translucent menu bar, bringing it more in line with iPadOS and iOS. There's a new Control Center that features key options such as Wi-Fi and AirDrop, as well as a revised Notification Center with different-sized widgets. The Messages and Maps apps also benefit from the changes being made to their iOS and iPadOS counterparts.

The biggest change (other than Macs transitioning from Intel chips to Apple's custom silicon) concerns Safari which, aside from speed improvements, will have a customisable Start page and enhanced support for extensions available from the Mac App Store. Since Safari will support the WebExtension API, you'll be able to use add-ons available for other web browsers. These will be time and site-restricted for greater privacy.

HDR videos will also be playable but Flash support has been ditched. By supporting Google's WebP image format, images can be transparent with the benefit of smaller file sizes while a built-in translation feature is set to make viewing foreign-language sites as easy as pressing a button. Big Sur is likely to be released in October.

Don't Pay For SKY & VIRGIN TV

COVER FEATURE

Got 300 channels and nothing to watch? **Wayne Williams** explains why and how you should switch from your expensive TV provider to better-value streaming services

Not so long ago, if you wanted to enjoy a decent choice of live and on-demand TV and films, you needed to pay cable and satellite companies such as Virgin Media and Sky hundreds of pounds a year. Now, thanks to the rise of streaming services such as Netflix, BBC iPlayer and Amazon Prime Video, you can watch hundreds of new and classic TV series and movies for much less, without being tied to a lengthy contract.

Despite this, many people still choose to pay their ISP a fortune to have TV bundled with their broadband and phone – whether for convenience, because the promise of hundreds of channels sounds appealing (even though most of them are rubbish) or because they haven't properly considered the cheaper alternatives.

In this feature, we explain the benefits of 'cutting the cord' (as they say in America), outline the best options available to you and reveal what you need to do to make significant savings on your home entertainment.

Your TV-switching questions answered

Ditching your TV package may seem like a drastic move, but there are many benefits. Here, we address the most commonly asked questions

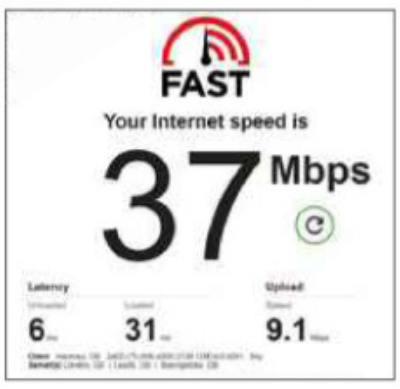
Why should I ditch Sky or Virgin Media?

The real question is not why should you leave, but why should you stay? If you regularly watch shows on the hundreds of different TV channels your ISP offers, that's great. But if you only watch programmes that are available on the main channels, which you can get through Freeview, Freesat or YouView, why spend money for the sake of it?

Yes, there are cut-price deals that bundle broadband, TV and phone, but the money you could save by ditching the TV element and paying for just broadband (and a landline, if necessary) would be better spent on upgrading to a faster connection.

Do I need fast broadband to stream?

No. The quality of the shows you watch – standard definition (SD), high definition (HD) or 4K – will determine what speed you need, and each of the different services, such as Netflix (www.netflix.com), Amazon Prime Video (bit.ly/primevid506), YouTube (www.youtube.com) and BBC iPlayer (www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer) have their own requirements. Netflix is the most demanding service, but it only requires 3Mbps for SD, 5Mbps for HD and 25Mbps for Ultra HD.



In truth, you'll need a faster connection than that, especially if you want to use your internet for anything else while you're watching TV, but Ofcom, the UK's communications regulator, says the average home broadband speed is now 64Mbps (up from 54.2Mbps last year), although many connections fall short of that figure. Netflix recommends using Fast.com to test your current broadband speed.

What hardware do I need?

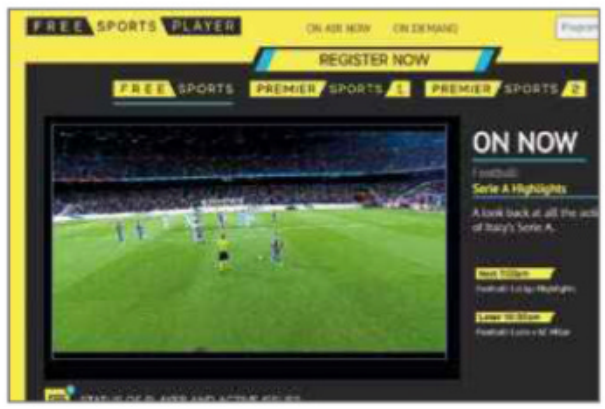
That depends on your requirements. Owning a smart TV may be enough, because you'll be able to install apps on it for services including Netflix, iPlayer, Disney Plus (www.disneyplus.com), YouTube and BritBox (www.britbox.co.uk) – if they're not already installed. Netflix is included as standard on most smart TVs, and there may even be a dedicated button for it on your remote control. Just press this and Netflix will open, ready for you to sign in (provided you're online).

Failing that, you could buy an Amazon Fire TV stick. As well as using it to watch Prime Video (if you have a subscription), you can install apps and watch content from all the other services.

> "The money saved by ditching the TV element of a bundled deal would be better spent on upgrading to a faster connection"

Can I still watch sport?

Compared to other forms of entertainment, your options with sport are more limited. Obviously, thanks to the coronavirus lockdown, there hasn't been as much (current) sport available to watch, but that's now changing and you have a number of options to consider. You can watch sporting events on the BBC via iPlayer, and Amazon Prime Video has been showing more live sport lately, including four live Premier League matches. Freeview (www.freeview.co.uk) has Freesports (www.freesports.tv) and BT Sports Showcase channels (64 and 115, respectively), with some free games now being shown on Sky Pick (channel 11), while Now TV (www.nowtv.com) lets you buy a one-month Sky Sports Pass (with 11 live Sky Sports channels) for £33.99.



Can I still record TV shows?

When you cancel your Sky or Virgin Media contract, you may be required to send back your TV box (it remains the service provider's property at all times). Even if you're allowed to keep it, you'll no longer be able to record anything with it.

If you prefer to record shows, rather than just watch them on-demand or on catch-up, you can buy a Freeview or Freesat recorder. Prices vary depending on features, but you can pick up a cheap one for around £30.

What if I'm still under contract?

Depending on the length of your contract – and how much time you have remaining – you may have to pay an early disconnection fee. This isn't a one-off figure – you'll have to pay it monthly, potentially up to the point when your contract ends – and it isn't likely to be much cheaper than what you're actually paying for your services under contract. That said, your provider won't simply keep taking money from you month after month – the fee will be capped. For Virgin Media, the maximum you will be expected to pay if you cancel early is £240.

Do I need a TV licence?

It depends what you intend to watch, but the short answer is probably yes. A TV licence is required to watch or stream all live content, regardless of whether it's a programme, film or sporting event, and which channel is broadcasting it. You also need a licence if you download or record a live broadcast for later viewing. It doesn't matter which device you watch or stream the content on, the rules remain the same. You don't need to pay £157.50 a year for a TV licence if you only watch on-demand or catch-up content on most services, but you will if using BBC iPlayer. See the TV Licensing website (tvlicensing.co.uk) for more information.

Best TV-streaming services

To get a comparable experience to Sky or Virgin Media's services, you'll need a combination of other – still much cheaper – sources. Here are our recommendations

Watch the latest blockbuster movies

With cinemas closing as a result of COVID-19, a number of big movies came to streaming services much earlier than planned. Some, like Disney's *Artemis Fowl*, bypassed theatres altogether.

You can watch some of these films through Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, both of which regularly snap up movies that would usually play in cinemas. Disney Plus streams movies from its own studio, including the previously mentioned *Artemis Fowl* and Pixar's *Onward*, while Apple TV Plus is now showing Tom Hanks' new film *Greyhound*, which was originally due for a cinema release.

If you want to watch a particular movie, and don't mind paying for the pleasure, Prime Video and Google Play Movies (bit.ly/gplay506) offer recent releases to rent or buy, while a Now TV Sky Cinema Pass lets you stream as many films as you want for £11.99 a month, with a seven-day free trial available.

Discover exciting new TV shows

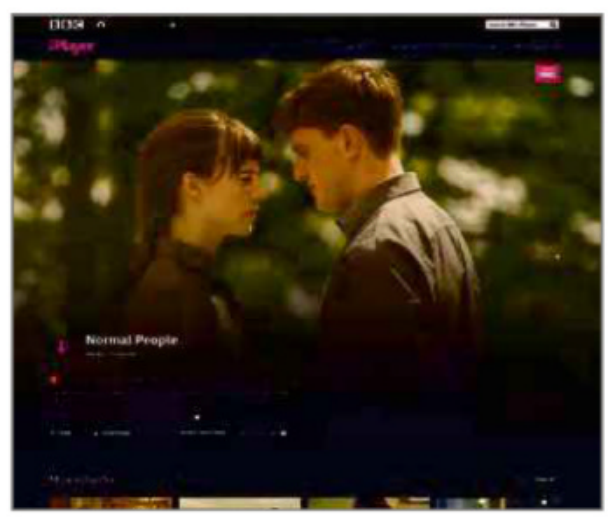
The pandemic has shut down a lot of TV production globally, but that hasn't stopped Netflix and Amazon Prime Video rolling out new series and new seasons of past favourites. Netflix's more recent offerings include *Snowpiercer*, *Tiger King*, *Space Force*, the Ibiza-set *White Lines*, and season two of *Dead to Me* and Ricky Gervais's *After Life*. Amazon has *Upload*, *Little Fires Everywhere* and *Alex Rider*, with season two of *The Boys* coming on 4 September. Both services offer plenty of shows that might be new to you, or

that you missed when they originally aired, which are well worth exploring.

A Now TV Entertainment Pass offers more than 300 on-demand boxsets, including Sky originals such as the stunning (but very violent) *Gangs of London*, shows from the Sky Atlantic channel including the critically acclaimed *Succession* and classic series such as *The Sopranos* and *The Office* (both UK and US versions).

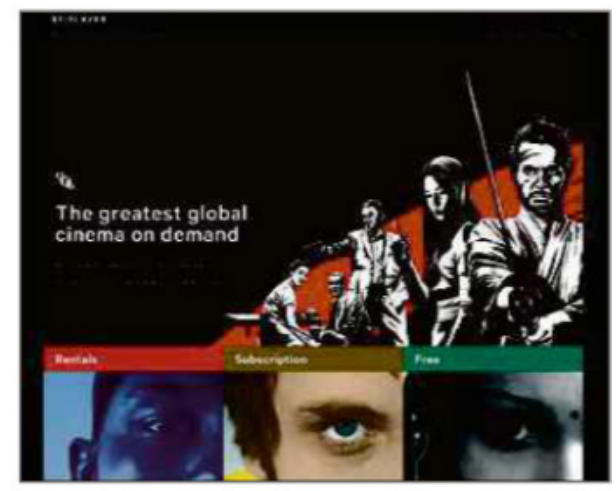
Catch up with terrestrial TV

The days of having to watch a show at a scheduled date and time are long gone. You can now watch whatever you like, whenever you like. If you miss an episode, or even an entire series, you can watch it on catch-up or on-demand through BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub (bit.ly/itvhub506), All 4 (www.channel4.com) and My5 (www.my5.tv). The latter three often entail sitting through lengthy ad breaks, but that's the price you pay for having so much free content at your fingertips! Paying £3.99 a month for ITV Hub+ or All 4+ will remove the ads.



Discover independent and world cinema

Lots of services offer blockbuster movies but, if you fancy something more highbrow, then it's worth looking elsewhere. Mubi (mubi.com) offers "cult classics and modern masterpieces" from around the world, with a new film added every day. Curzon Home Cinema (www.curzonhomecinema.com) lets you rent independent films on the same day they are released at the cinema, and BFI (player.bfi.org.uk) lets you rent more recent releases (priced from £2.50 each), access thousands of archive films for free, and subscribe to classic cinema.



Watch sport without a Sky contract

As mentioned on page 41, Freeview users can access Freesports and BT Sports Showcase channels. If you want access to Sky Sports, you can get Now TV with a Sky Sports Pass (with 11 live Sky Sports channels). You can choose between a day pass (£9.99) or a month pass (£33.99 with a seven-day free trial) and cancel at any time.

Stream live TV channels

You can watch live terrestrial TV through Freeview or Freesat (www.freesat.co.uk), and through BBC iPlayer and ITV Hub. TVPlayer (tvplayer.com) offers both free and paid-for options (for £6.99 per month), with the latter offering more than 45 free-to-air and premium channels, including Film4, Sky History and LifetimeHD, plus catch-up and on-demand content. It also works across multiple devices, including desktop, mobile and streaming sticks.

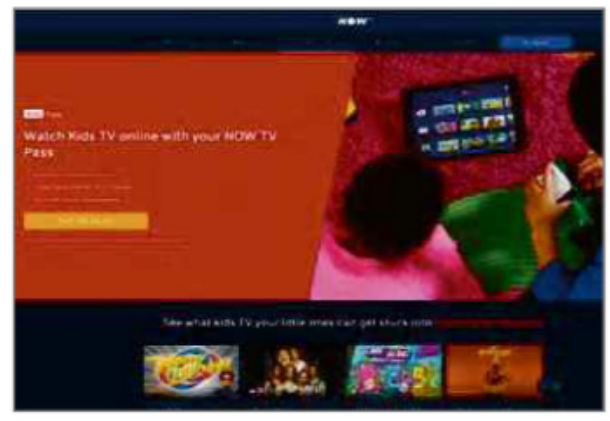
Get yourself a Now TV Entertainment Pass and you can watch Sky channels live without a Sky contract, including Sky One, Sky News, Sky Atlantic,

Comedy Central, Gold, Syfy and Discovery.

Enjoy family entertainment

If you're looking for TV shows or movies that the entire family can enjoy, including the youngest members of your household, then you're spoilt for choice. Disney Plus is home to vast amounts of family-friendly content from the media giant's archive, which includes movies from Disney itself, Pixar, Star Wars and Marvel. Not to be outdone, Netflix also has a huge number of kids shows and family films, including originals, and you can set up profiles for your children so they only have access to age-appropriate content.

Now TV Kids comes with thousands of ad-free kids shows, plus six channels that aren't available on Freeview,



including Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon and Nick Jr, for £3.99 a month.

Stream classic TV series and films

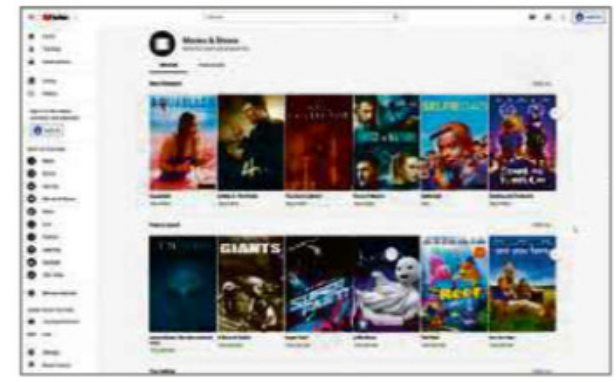
COVID-19 has forced the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 to dig into their respective archives and broadcast past series in prime-time slots. But if you are seeking specific classic shows, then you might well find them on iPlayer, All 4 or Netflix, including classic *Coronation Street* and *Brookside*, every episode of *Call the Midwife* and *French and Saunders*,

and several David Attenborough documentary series.

BritBox provides a home for British boxsets from all the terrestrial UK broadcasters, offering entire series of much-loved shows such as *Doc Martin*, *Doctor Who*, *Top Gear*, *Downton Abbey*, *Death in Paradise*, *Midsomer Murders*, and *Only Fools and Horses*. It also offers a free trial, which gives it an advantage over Netflix and Disney Plus, which have scrapped theirs.

Stream films for free online

You don't need to pay for a service like Netflix to watch movies because it's possible to enjoy some good free films through iPlayer, Rakuten TV (rakuten.tv), and even YouTube. With the latter, you will need to use a VPN – such as Windscribe (windscribe.com) – connected to a US server to access the official free titles at bit.ly/ytfilms506 (although there are lots of full-length films uploaded to YouTube unofficially). The movies on offer change regularly



HOW MUCH CAN YOU SAVE?

It's not easy to pin down the exact amount you'll save by switching from Sky or Virgin Media because their prices differ for new and existing customers, and vary depending on which bundles and add-ons you go for, and which deals are running. The prices included in the table below are for the base (cheapest) packages for each of the respective services. We haven't included free options such as All 4, ITV Hub and YouTube.

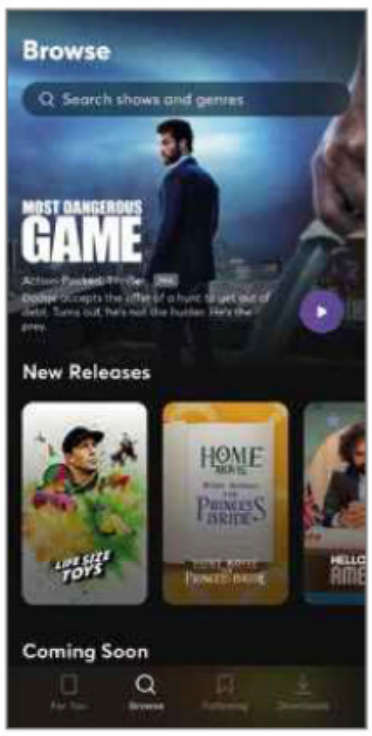
You often need to pay more for extras such as HD content, multiple-device support and movies and sport, but you may get discounts in other areas – for example, Sky's Ultimate TV upgrade chucks in a Netflix subscription for £4 a month. Bear in mind you need to factor in the cost of broadband, even if you ditch your current ISP's TV option.

SERVICE	MONTHLY COST	ANNUAL COST	MINIMUM CONTRACT	FREE TRIAL?
SKY SIGNATURE	£25 (£30 after 18 months) plus setup fee of £20	£300 (then £360)	18 months	No
VIRGIN MEDIA BIG BUNDLE	£33 (£59 after 18 months) plus setup fee of £35	£396 (then £708)	18 months	No
BBC iPLAYER	£13.13 (for TV licence)	£157.50 (for TV licence)	N/A	N/A
NETFLIX BASIC	£5.99	£71.88	Cancel any time	Not any more
NOW TV ENTERTAINMENT	£8.99	£107.88	Cancel any time	7 days
AMAZON PRIME VIDEO	£7.99	£79.99	Cancel any time	30 days
BRITBOX	£5.99	£71.88	Cancel any time	30 days
DISNEY PLUS	£5.99	£59.99	Cancel any time	Not any more
TV PLAYER PREMIUM	£6.99	£69.99	Cancel any time	30 days
MUBI	£9.99	£95.88	Cancel any time	7 days

but, at the time of writing, highlights include *A Street Cat Named Bob*, *Into the Blue*, *The November Man*, *Shaolin* and *Before We Go*.

Watch bite-size TV series

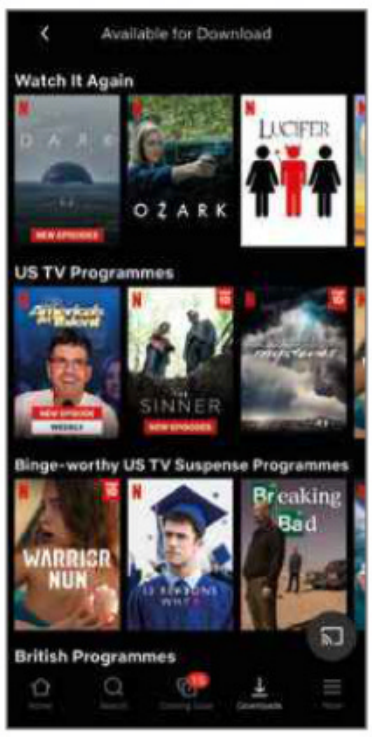
Quibi (quibi.com) is designed to be a short-form Netflix for your phone, with lots of specially created series starring the likes of Idris Elba, Anna Kendrick and Christoph Waltz. The episodes are all under 10 minutes long and can be viewed in landscape or portrait mode. It's quite an expensive service, at £7.99 a month for ad-free viewing, but there's a 14-day free trial available.



Another lesser known app is Whatifi for iOS (whatificom), which lets you decide how shows progress at key points (similar to a choose-your-own-adventure story). The idea is that you put together watch parties to view and vote on the action, although you can enjoy them on your own (with some limitations). It's free, but there are currently only two shows available.

Download shows to watch on the move

Unless you have an unlimited mobile-data allowance, streaming programmes on your phone when out and about isn't practical. Thankfully, all the major streaming services, including Netflix, Prime Video, iPlayer, All 4, Mubi and even Quibi, allow you to download shows and films to your device for offline viewing.



Connect to Wi-Fi, then open the Android or iOS app for the service you use, select the programme you want and either download individual episodes or (if offered) the entire series. Not all shows or films are available to download. In the Netflix app, tap Downloads at the bottom of the screen, then choose See What You Can Download.

Best TV-streaming devices

There are numerous hardware options for streaming TV and films, depending on your needs and budget. Here are some of the main choices, and our recommendations

Streaming sticks

Perhaps the easiest option for cord-cutters is to supplement your entertainment setup with a streaming stick, which turns any TV into a smart TV. The stick plugs into an HDMI port on your TV and gives you access to whatever streaming services are supported. The best known of these products is the Amazon Fire TV Stick (£49.99 from amazon.co.uk), which provides access to Prime Video (if you have a Prime account), and additional services including YouTube and Netflix.

Other products worth considering are the Roku Streaming Stick (£49.99 from www.roku.com) and Google's Chromecast Ultra (£69 from bit.ly/ccast506). All three of these devices can handle streaming at up to 4K quality.

Now TV users can pick up a Roku-powered Smart Stick for £24.99 (bit.ly/ntvstick506), which comes with one month of Entertainment and Sky Cinema pre-loaded, but is limited to HD quality.

Set-top boxes

A step up from streaming sticks, set-top boxes are typically faster and offer more features. Amazon's Fire TV Cube (£109.99 from amazon.co.uk), for example, includes a microphone for hands-free Amazon Alexa voice control and Dolby Vision. We're not convinced that it's worth the extra money, though.

Apple's own set-top box, Apple TV, comes in two versions – HD (£149) and 4K (from £179). The device includes one year of Apple TV Plus (worth £60 a year), which provides access to original programming including *The Morning Show*, *Mythic Quest*, *Central Park*, *Fraggle Rock: Rock On!* and *Foundation*.

Apple TV boxes also let you watch content from other streaming services including iPlayer, ITV Hub, Prime Video and Now TV, and you can control them using Apple's voice assistant Siri.

If you plan to use Freeview for your telly watching, then you might want to consider one of Humax's players/recorders (bit.ly/humaxview506). They are pricier than some other brands, but are built for quality and you can land some bargains if you shop around. Humax also offers Freesat receivers and recorders (bit.ly/humaxsat506) if you have a satellite dish and opt to use that free service.

HAGGLE A BETTER TV DEAL

The truth is that although companies like Sky and Virgin Media have a fixed pricing scheme, there is quite a lot of flexibility, and you can usually save money on your existing deal simply by asking. In the past, we've haggled our way to faster broadband (with a new free router) and an improved TV package (with the latest TV box), *and* saved money on monthly payments. If asking nicely doesn't do the trick, then consider threatening to cancel your subscription and go elsewhere – mentioning a rival ISP will help you here, or you could just say that Freeview is good enough for you.

This tactic might get you transferred to a different department – known as 'retentions' – where the customer-support staff have more power to offer you a better deal. While they may not rush to slash the cost of your subscription (it depends how much you pay), they may offer an upgraded TV package and/or faster broadband, for free. Before you go down the haggling route, decide what you hope to get out of your call and stick to your plan.

MoneySavingExpert.com provides some useful tips for haggling for a better deal with Sky (bit.ly/skyhaggle506) and Virgin Media (bit.ly/vmhaggle506).

Again, they are a little more expensive than rivals.

If you don't want to pay the premium for a Humax product, then Manhattan's range of Freeview and Freesat boxes (manhattan-tv.com) may suffice.

Smart TVs

These days, most modern TVs are "smart" and come with Freeview and catch-up services such as iPlayer and YouTube built in. They also let you install third-party apps, so you can add Disney Plus, BritBox and others to your viewing arsenal. Some sets now come with support for smart assistants such as Alexa, Google Assistant or Samsung's Bixby, so you can control everything you watch with your voice rather than having to hunt for your remote control.

The options available to you will depend on the TV operating system your device runs. There are a number of choices, including Android TV, Samsung Tizen, LG WebOS and Panasonic My Home Screen. Each has its own pros and cons so, if you're thinking of buying one, do some research beforehand.

Games consoles

If you have a modern games console such as an Xbox One or a PlayStation 4, you'll be able to enjoy Netflix, Prime Video, Now TV and more – directly from the device. Not every streaming service is available for every console: Mubi, for example, can be watched on PlayStation 3 and 4, but not on an Xbox; and although the Apple TV app is available for a number of devices, including smart TVs, computers, iPhones, iPads, and Roku and Fire TV players, it isn't (currently) console-friendly. ■

NEXT ISSUE on sale Wednesday 5 August 2020

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Best free OCR software

Optical character recognition software (or OCR for short) ‘reads’ and copies text from documents and images, so the content can be searched, copied and edited. **Steve Clark** tests the best free tools for the job

SimpleOCR | www.simpleocr.com | ★★★★★

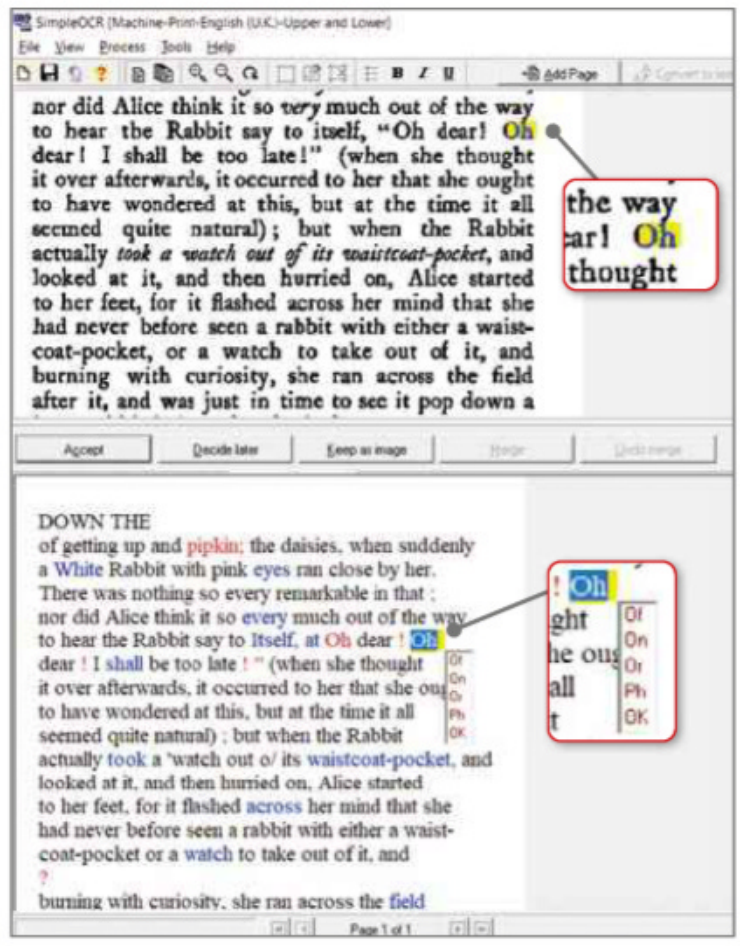
FEATURES ★★★★★ PERFORMANCE ★★★★★ EASE OF USE ★★★★★

WebUser GOLD AWARD

What we liked:

SimpleOCR’s design looks rather dated, but looks can be deceptive. Beneath those Windows 98 stylings lies a tool that makes converting images to text impressively quick and easy.

Files can be imported individually, in batches, in the ‘.ink’ format or straight from your scanner. Unfortunately, file types are limited to JPG, TIFF and BMP, which you may find restrictive, although a quick conversion to a supported format is easily done. Once you’ve added your pages, click ‘Convert to text’ and the words are displayed in a second pane, below the original image.



One of the main drawbacks to many OCR tools is the need to proofread the output (see Boxoft in our Best of the Rest, opposite). SimpleOCR neatly overcomes this problem by including a built-in spellchecker. After converting an image to text, the original document may be highlighted in places, where the software isn’t sure it’s ‘read’ the word correctly. On the editable document below, you can click the word and choose from a short list of suggestions. Failing that, you can re-type the word directly into the text pane, ready to be copied. Using the arrow keys, you can hop back and forth between words, too, which speeds up the whole process.

Head into Tools, and you’re able to exert more control over how your text converts and displays, including the spellchecker function. You also have the option to switch between saving your work as a text file or Word document.

How it can be improved:

As its name suggest, SimpleOCR is a pretty basic tool. That should be fine for everyday use, especially for converting multiple files. However, power users may want to explore the paid-for functions available, such as the ability to convert handwriting.

We’d also like to see support for a wider range of file types. If SimpleOCR included PDF conversions, then Windows users wouldn’t need any other tool.

OUR VERDICT

SimpleOCR converts almost anything you throw at it – as long as it’s in one of the few image formats supported. The spellcheck function is its stand-out feature, letting you ensure the accuracy of its output as you go. Unlike some of its rivals, it doesn’t have a mobile version, so you’ll have to look elsewhere for something more universal.

A9T9 OCR | bit.ly/anine506 | ★★★★☆

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

WebUser SILVER AWARD

What we liked:

A9T9 OCR is another blindingly simple tool. It was originally designed as a universal app to work across your PC and Windows phone.

The program has two panes – one for your file and one for the conversion. Below this are basic user commands for loading files. To upload a batch of files, select them in File Explorer and tick the Process All Documents box.

A9T9 lets you save conversions as either a Word document or a text file. For foreign-language text, there's a drop-down menu that lets you select from 20 different languages.

Perhaps A9T9's finest feature is PDF support. Many OCR readers simply can't convert text on a PDF into plaintext. Even taking a screenshot of a PDF confuses many tools, leaving swathes of unreadable text. A9T9 is not only capable with PDFs but accurate, too.

How it can be improved:

While OCR results are fantastic, there are a couple of limitations to A9T9's software. Firstly, certain file types – such as BMP and TIFF – can't be converted, which is baffling. Even more restrictive is the tool's Windows app heritage, which means, like SimpleOCR, it's not available on Apple or Android devices.

OUR VERDICT

A9T9 is a basic tool but it handles text well. The accuracy of its character recognition is outstanding, and is particularly useful for grabbing text from PDFs. Its only significant drawback is that it's Windows-only.

Easy Screen OCR | easyscreenocr.com | ★★★★☆

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

WebUser BRONZE AWARD

What we liked:

Easy Screen OCR is a lightweight tool that's ideal for on-the-fly use, whether you're on a PC or a mobile device. Opening the software doesn't display a main window and you won't find it sitting on the taskbar. Instead, the tool sits hidden in the overflow menu, activated with a right-click. There are only two main options: Capture and Image OCR. Both work splendidly.

Capture lets you drag a box around whatever's on your screen (or use a custom hotkey). This is sent directly to the Easy Screen window and pressing the OCR button 'translates' the digital image and moves over to the Text tab, where you'll find the plain-text version. Image OCR works in a similar fashion, by dragging and dropping downloaded files from File Explorer.

Extra credit is deserved for the software's accuracy. We found it capable of 'reading' images that others struggled to convert into text.

How it can be improved:

There's no scanner or batch upload – not even an upload button – so everything has to be dragged, dropped or captured, which can be laborious. Image file types are limited to JPG, BMP and PNG, with no support for TIFF or GIF. We'd love to see expanded support for more formats.

OUR VERDICT

A solid, entry-level OCR tool, Easy Screen OCR is as fast as it is simple to use. The tool's accuracy is commendable, but the lack of additional features makes it best-suited to casual use.

BEST OF THE REST

Office Lens

bit.ly/lens506

Microsoft's Office Lens, available for Windows and mobile devices, is billed as a "scanner in your pocket". To use it, you'll need the app and Microsoft Word. Take a photo of text, then save it as a Word (OCR) document. This file displays the converted text and the original image. Using two pieces of software for one job is fiddly, but it has all the usual Microsoft benefits, such as cloud saves and regular updates.

Boxoft Free OCR

www.boxoft.com/free-ocr

When Boxoft Free OCR works, it's very good, with support for a range of file types and scanner capabilities. Accuracy is strong but with a few misses – replacing "any" with "amy", for example. Some conversions also include strings of nonsense. Who can forget the classic line from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, "when the Rabbit actually took tz watch out g its #zczzzktc01zz'—p0cl·t·z?" It's a fair, free effort but demands too much post-conversion proofreading.

Google Docs

docs.google.com

No need to download additional software – Google's OCR tool is built into Docs. Right-click an image or PDF saved in your Google Drive and select 'Open with Google Docs' for a text-only version of the file. Depending on the original layout, you may need to tweak the formatting, but the conversions are impressively accurate. However, it's a shame the original image isn't also displayed for quick comparisons.

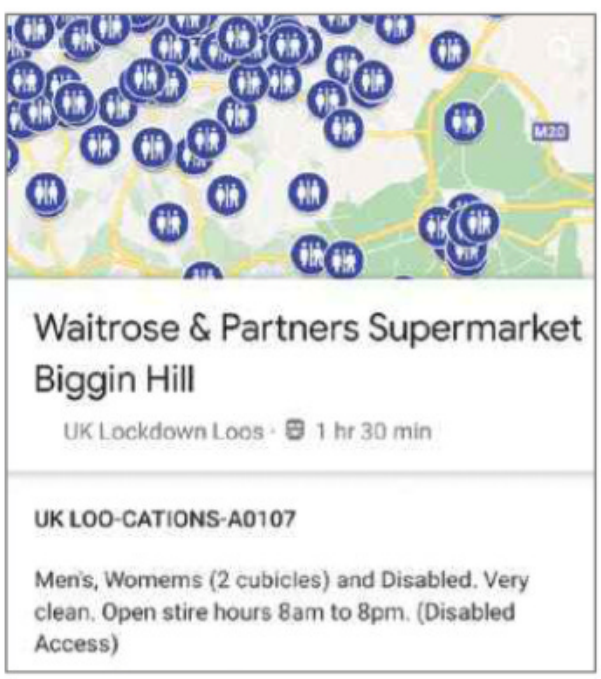
Survive life after lockdown

Restrictions may have lifted but the coronavirus is still affecting all our lives. **Robert Irvine** reveals the most useful web tools for adjusting to the 'new normal'

Find the nearest public toilet

Shops, pubs and restaurants may have reopened, but many public toilets haven't, either for safety reasons or because staff aren't available to clean and maintain them. This poses a problem with a capital pee for anyone caught short while out enjoying their post-lockdown freedom, but help is at hand from Lockdown Loo (lockdownloo.com). As featured in last issue's What's New Online – since when it's added thousands more 'loo-cations' – this lav-ly resource shows you where to find open toilets across the UK, including facilities in train stations, cafés, shopping centres, supermarkets and parks. For your convenience, many entries include details of opening times, cleanliness and disabled access, with options to submit your own loo-cations and correct inaccurate information (the site rejects duplicates and silly suggestions such as bushes).

With more than 5,000 toilets currently pinpointed, Lockdown Loo can be a bit fiddly to use on your phone,



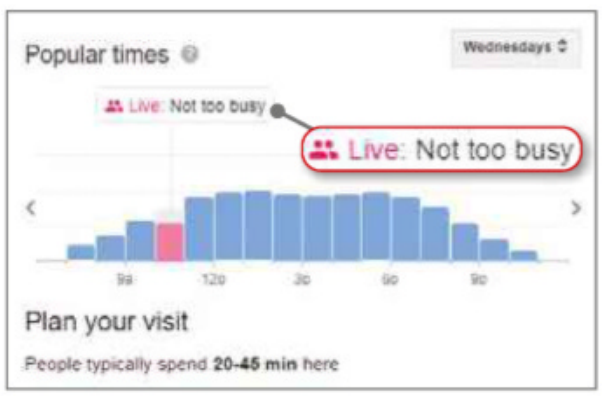
Lockdown Loo shows you the location of toilets open to the public around the UK

so its makers recommend opening its map in Google Maps for easier navigation, by tapping the square in the top-right corner. Alternatively, you could install the Toilet Finder app for Android (bit.ly/toilet506) or iOS (bit.ly/tfios506), although its results aren't guaranteed to be open.

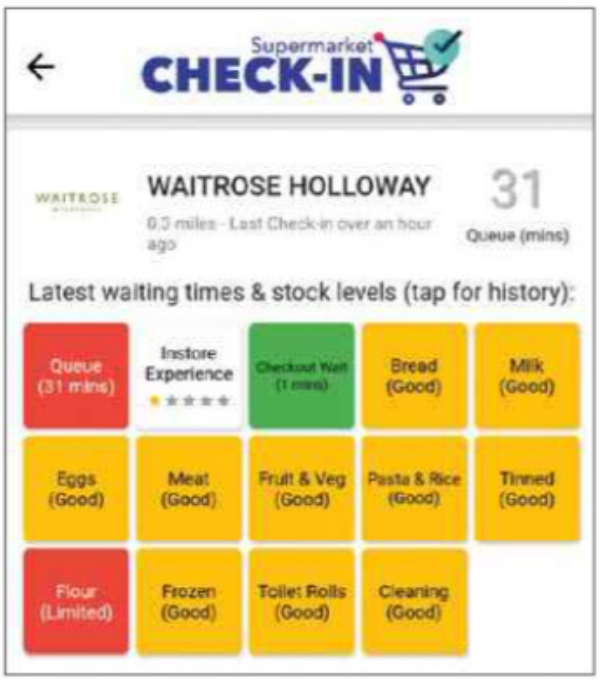
Avoid long queues at the shops

The hour-long wait to get into your local supermarket has thankfully gone, but with more shops now open you may find yourself queueing outside more often than you'd like. One way to avoid the socially distanced crowds is to use Google's 'Popular times' data. Search for the store you plan to visit, then scroll down the information panel on the right (at the top on mobile) to the 'Popular times' section. Here, you'll see a bar chart showing the busiest times to visit the shop throughout the day and week, accompanied by summaries such as 'Usually as busy as it gets', and details of how much time people typically spend there.

For bigger stores, you may also see live data sourced (anonymously) from Google users who are shopping there right now. Look for the pink bar and, if the status is 'Not too busy', then you probably won't have to queue. 'Popular times' data can also be viewed in Google



Google's 'Popular times' data helps you avoid having to queue outside shops



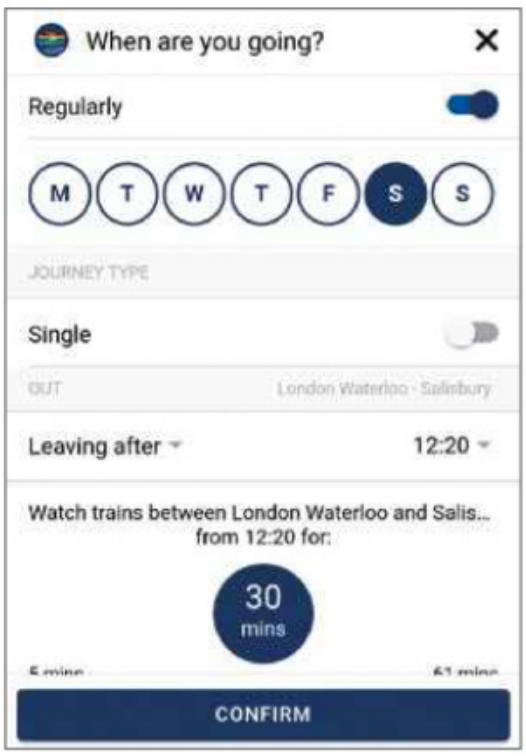
Check queue times and stock levels at local stores using Supermarket Check-in

Maps and, though it isn't available for all shops, it's certainly worth checking.

Additionally, there's a free app called Supermarket Check-in (Android, bit.ly/scdroid506; iOS, bit.ly/scios506), which predicts queue times and even stock levels for stores in your area. However, its information relies on other users 'checking in' to those places – so why not check in yourself to help improve the app?

Get a seat on public transport

During lockdown, buses and trains were virtually empty, but now that restrictions have been lifted, they're getting busy again. To ensure you remain safely social-distanced and preferably get a seat on your journey, you can check the 'crowdedness level' in the Google Maps app. Search for public-transport directions, select a bus or train route and look for predictions such as 'Usually standing room only'. This feature is only available in certain UK cities, and initially used data from



National Rail's Alert Me tool warns you about busy train services via Messenger

CHECK COVID-19 INFECTIONS IN YOUR AREA

The government is reportedly planning to launch a web dashboard that displays coronavirus test results by neighbourhood and possibly even by street and postcode, to help identify local outbreaks (bit.ly/dashboards506). In the meantime (and we won't hold our breath), you can get general figures for infections in your area via the BBC's Coronavirus UK page (bit.ly/covidbbc506). Search for a UK postcode, English, Welsh or Northern Irish council, or Scottish health board to view the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths, how the death rate is changing and how it compares to the rest of the country.

before the coronavirus struck, so you might not see updated info yet. However, you can still check station crowdedness using the 'Popular times' data mentioned in the previous tip.

To combat overcrowding, National Rail is now alerting passengers to busy train services to encourage travel at quieter times. Look for a red or yellow warning triangle when you check your journey on the National Rail website or app. You can also sign up for its Alert Me tool (bit.ly/alertme506) to receive information about crowded trains and stations, as well as delays and disruptions, via Facebook Messenger (WhatsApp alerts are coming soon).

Additionally, The Trainline has added a Crowd Alerts feature to its app that tells you how busy train carriages are - see page 7 for details.

Pick up a pint from the pub

If you're apprehensive about returning to your local pub, whether due to health concerns or because of the strict new rules, why not pick up a pint to drink outside or at home? Takeaway Pints (www.takeawaypints.co.uk) provides a map of hostelries offering a collection service for draught and bottled beer and cider, wine, cocktails, hot drinks and food. Although originally London-centric, it now covers counties across Britain, from Aberdeenshire to Yorkshire, and lets you submit details of pubs it's missed.

To find out which pubs are now open in your area, you can either check their websites and social-media pages or again turn to Google Maps. Search for 'pubs near me' and the map will pinpoint nearby venues and tell you whether they're serving again or are still 'temporarily closed'.

Similarly, you can find cafés in your area by tapping the Coffee option at the top of the Maps app, then choosing 'Open now', although Google does warn that "Hours or services may differ due to COVID-19".

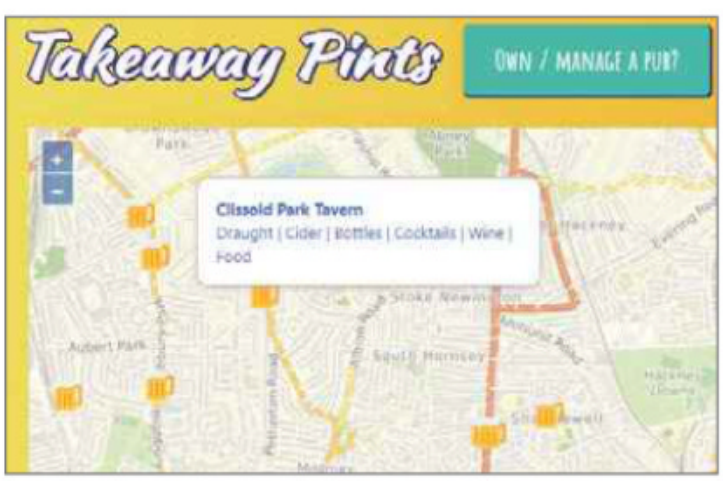
Plan your post-lockdown holiday

The coronavirus put paid to most of our holidays this year, but if you're desperate to get away now that restrictions have eased, you could consider a 'staycation'. 101 UK Holidays (www.101holidays.co.uk/uk) offers hand-picked suggestions for post-lockdown breaks in Blighty, such as exploring the Jurassic coast, hiking in the Lake District and renting a shepherd's hut in Devon, while Cool Camping provides a guide to COVID-19-secure camping (bit.ly/camping506).

If you'd prefer to holiday in Europe, Re-open EU (reopen.europa.eu/en) tells you the current situation in different countries, including travel regulations, healthy and safety rules, and whether shops, bars, restaurants, beaches and attractions are open.

Donate to local food banks

One upside to lockdown life was a reduction in food waste, as housebound Brits became more creative with their cooking and more casual about use-by dates. The downside was that food banks received less support, with many supermarkets removing their donation boxes. Now that shops and cupboards are fully stocked again, you may want to consider helping the needy by sharing your excess supplies. You can find food banks in your area via the Trussell Trust website (bit.ly/trussell506), which provides contact details for more than 1,200 centres across the UK. Tinned vegetables and toiletries, soup and fruit, pasta and rice, and tea and coffee are especially welcome, or you can make a financial donation online. ■



If you're unable or unwilling to sit in the pub, pick up a takeaway pint instead

Learn which lockdown restrictions are still in place in countries across Europe

Help the less fortunate by donating your excess supplies to a local food bank

Reclaim your photos & videos from the web

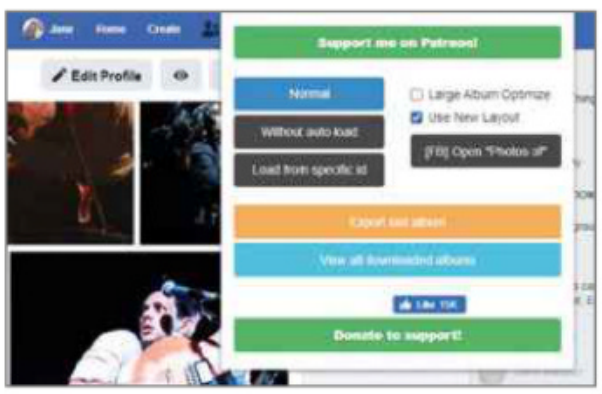
Have you lost track of all your photos and videos because they're scattered across Facebook, Snapfish, WhatsApp and myriad other online services? **Jane Hoskyn** reveals how to get them all back

Download all your Facebook photos and videos

Facebook compresses your photos and videos to save server space and speed up page loads, so you shouldn't rely on it as the sole custodian of your digital handiwork. On the plus side, it's relatively easy to reclaim any content you've posted.

To get a ZIP file containing every photo and video you've ever uploaded to Facebook, go to bit.ly/fbphotos506, click 'Deselect all', 'Photos and videos' then Create File. To save all files from a specific album, use the free extension DownAlbum (Chrome bit.ly/down506; Firefox script bit.ly/downfox506).

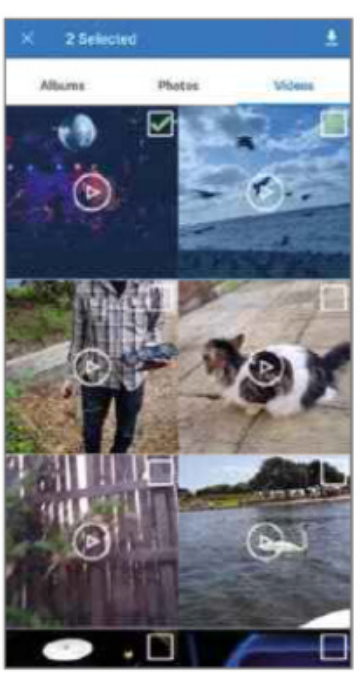
If you'd rather download a selection of individual photos, use Fatkun Batch Download (Chrome bit.ly/fatkun506). Enter the URL of the Facebook album or page, then filter items by size if you want, for example, to narrow your photo downloads to those that are big enough to print well.



DownAlbum lets you save photos and videos from a Facebook album to your PC

Save Facebook videos to your phone or tablet

Facebook's app doesn't let you download your videos to your own device, so install Download Videos and Photos (Android, bit.ly/downapp506) instead. It's free unless you want to download more than two videos at a time (there's no limit on photos): just pick an album, then tap Download All, or tick the items you want to save. You'll need a workaround for iPhone and iPad.

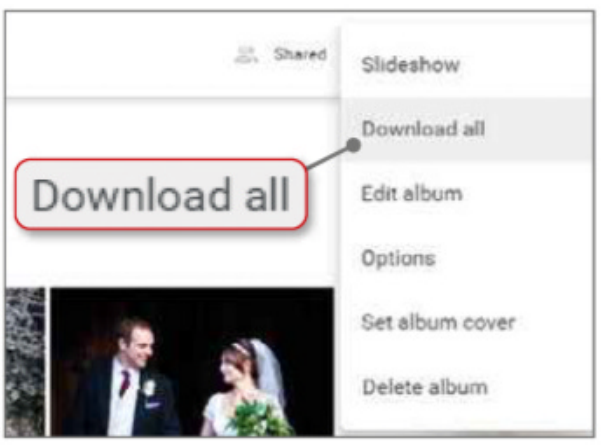


The Download Videos and Photos app lets you save your own Facebook videos

File-explorer apps such as 'Documents by Readdle' (iOS, bit.ly/documents506) let you copy Facebook links to your clipboard, then download the file. Alternatively, use Facebook's mobile website (m.facebook.com). This is clumsy compared with the app, but it does at least add a download option to your videos.

Get your Facebook uploads via Google Photos

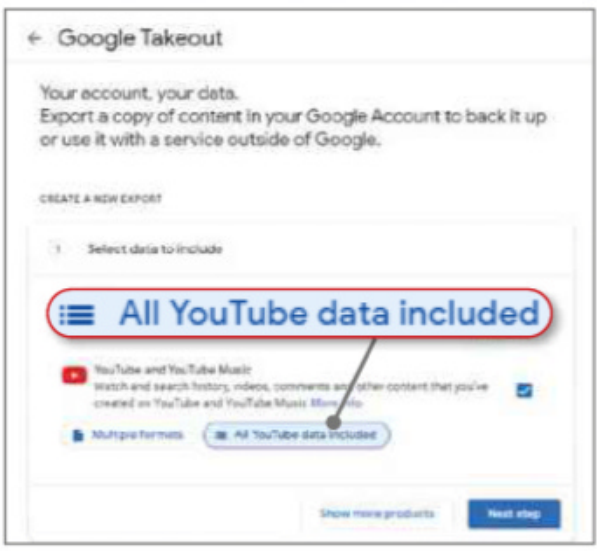
Facebook's new built-in tool-transfer tool (www.facebook.com/dtp) automatically copies all your photos and videos to Google Photos, from where you can view, edit and share them. Remember, though, that your photos are still on a server until you download them via Google Photos, whose app only lets you download images one at a time. To save multiple items, use the website (photos.google.com). You can click multiple items to select them, or use the 'Download all' option in albums.



Google Photos has a 'Download all' option on its web-based version only

Reclaim your videos from YouTube

YouTube's recently redesigned Studio (studio.youtube.com) lets you download your own videos – but only one by one, and in lower resolution than the originals – so use the YouTube section of Google Takeout (takeout.google.com) instead. The 'All YouTube data included' button lets you download just videos or expand the download to include spreadsheet-ready lists of your playlists, history and more. The 'Multiple formats' button lets you request videos in their original size and format.



Google Takeout is a quick way to reclaim all the videos you've uploaded to YouTube

Get your photos back from Instagram

There's no Download link on photos and videos you've uploaded to Instagram, but you can request a copy of all your data. Find the Request Download link near the bottom of the 'Privacy and Security' page (bit.ly/instapriv506).

For a more selective download, use a third-party tool such as Web tool DownloadGram (downloadgram.com), which lets you download any public Instagram photo or video, including long-form 'IGTV' videos, by entering the URL. To select multiple items for

Reclaim Instagram photos in one go or bit by bit, using Fatkun Batch Download

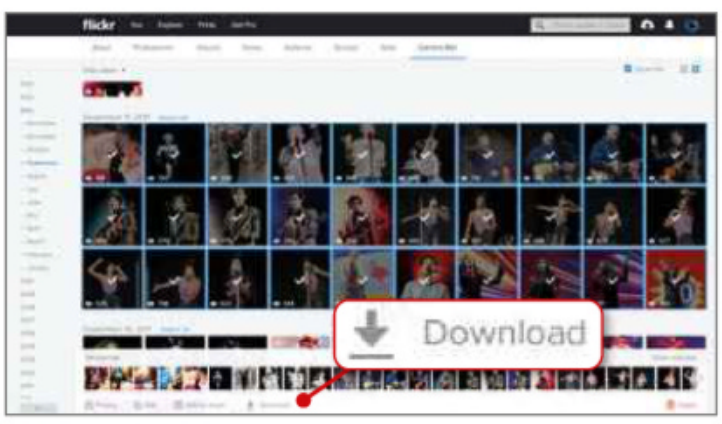
downloading at full size, use DownAlbum or Fatkun Batch Download (Chrome, bit.ly/fatkun506). The best app for saving your Instagram content to your Android device is 'Photo & Video Downloader for Instagram' (bit.ly/downinsta506).

Get your photos back from Flickr

Flickr servers aren't the safest place for your precious shots. Current owners SmugMug even threatened to delete all but the most recent 1,000 items uploaded by free account users (bit.ly/smugmug506). However, its options for getting your own photos and videos back are excellent.

Go to flickr.com/cameraroll and click 'Select all' next to the upload dates to download up to 500 items at once. To download an entire album, click Albums, then hover over a thumbnail and click the arrow. You can download up to 5,000 album contents in one go, but it's more likely to work if you stick to under 500.

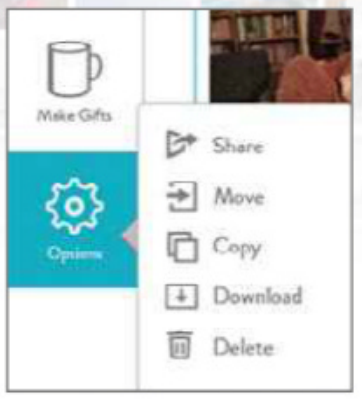
You can download your entire archive via Settings (click the big blue 'Request my Flickr data' button), but a couple of third-party programs make the process easier. New open-source tool Flickr Downloadr (flickrdownloadr.com) and long-time user favourite Bulkr (getbulkr.com) both let you download multiple items at original size, along with their descriptions, titles and tags.



Flickr's ownership is confusing but its built-in download options are very good

Get your photos back from Snapfish

Even if you've ordered prints, you should still keep a hold of your digital originals. Snapfish (www.snapfish.co.uk) makes it

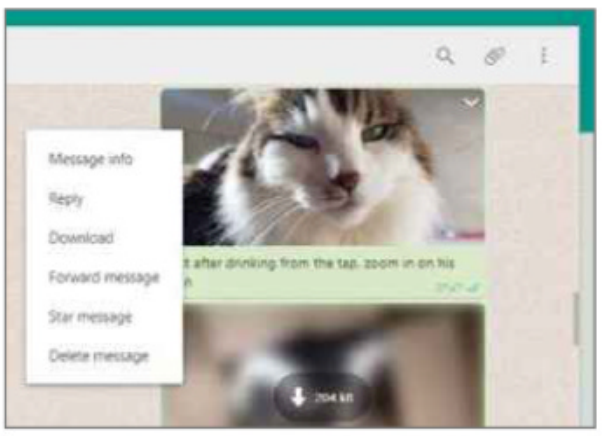


Download your photos in their original resolution after Snapfish has printed them

easier to get your files back than many photo-printing services. Log into the website (this doesn't work in the app), then select the albums you want to download. Click Options then Download to save them to your computer in their original resolution, in batches of 50. Find out more via Snapfish's Knowledge Base at bit.ly/snap506.

Reclaim photos and videos from WhatsApp

Photos and videos you're sent via WhatsApp are automatically saved to your gallery unless you switch this option off in Settings. To reclaim your own pictures and clips, you need to export the chat you sent them in. In the chat's three-dot menu, tap More, 'Export chat', Include Media. You can then select a destination such as Google Drive, Dropbox or via email.



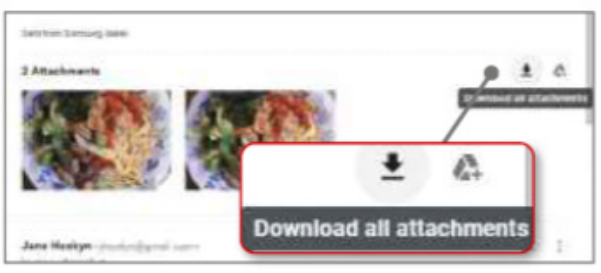
WhatsApp is made for phones, but its web version offers a handy Download option

To download selected photos and videos, use WhatsApp's web version. Go to web.whatsapp.com on your computer, then link it with the app on your phone via the WhatsApp Web option in the app's main menu. Load a chat, click any photo to load it, then choose Downloads from the menu that appears when you click the tiny arrow.

Get back photos and videos from emails

You can download your entire Gmail archive, including every photo and video you've ever sent and received, via your Google Dashboard (bit.ly/dash506). For a more selective approach, use Gmail's hidden 'Download all attachments' option (Outlook's Save All Attachments link is much easier to see). Open a Gmail conversation, then click the arrow on the right of a message that contains attachments (see screenshot, below).

The free Chrome extension 'Better download all attachments for Gmail' (bit.ly/attach506) adds an extra button that downloads every attachment in a message thread. To download from more than one thread at a time, use a program such as the free version of GearMage's Mail Attachment Downloader (bit.ly/maildown506), which works with Gmail, Outlook.com and Yahoo Mail.



Gmail has a 'Download all attachments' option, but it's well hidden

IF YOU CAN'T DOWNLOAD IT, CAPTURE IT!

Not all websites let you download your own stuff. For example, you can't download Pinterest boards you've created. And while Twitter (bit.ly/twitter506) and Telegram (bit.ly/telegram506) now let you request your data, as do Gmail and Outlook, the massive files involved make it hit and miss. It's easier to immortalise just the pages and chats you want, by taking a screenshot.

Free extension Full Page Screen Capture (Chrome bit.ly/fullpage506; similar for Firefox is bit.ly/fullweb506) is a great tool that can capture even huge message threads, provided you scroll to the top of the thread first (see screenshot). You can then download the capture as a PDF, for free.

Alternatively, Zapptales (www.zapptales.com/en) will turn your private messages into custom books for a fee. Certainly a novel way to save that lockdown WhatsApp chat!

Curate and share your interests using Google Keen

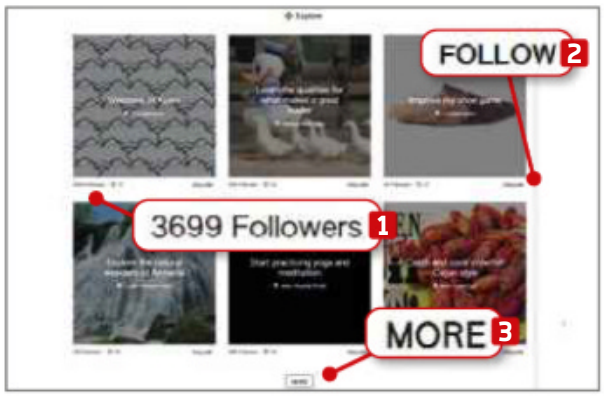
Keen lets you create, curate and collaborate on inspirational content. Here's how to use it

Keen: staykeen.com | 10 mins | Any browser

Keen, developed by Google's Area 120 (its workshop for experimental projects) and PAIR (People and AI Research), is designed to provide a home for things that interest you. It's similar to Pinterest (pinterest.com) but easier to use and with a cleaner design.

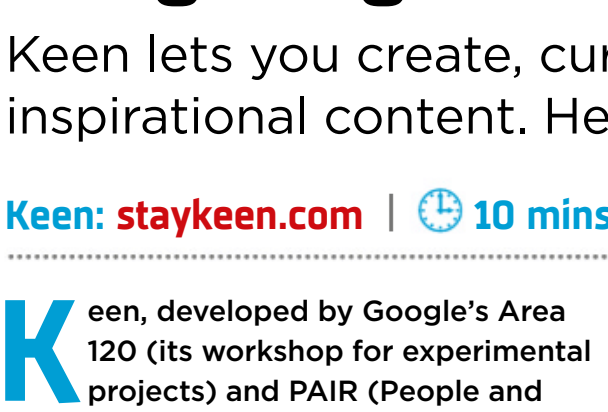
You can adapt ready-made categories or create your own, then curate content for yourself or for sharing with others. Keen uses Google Search and machine learning to find and add content related to your interests – the more you add, the better its recommendations become. If you find other users with the same interests, you can follow their Keens.

The free service is available on the web and as an Android app.

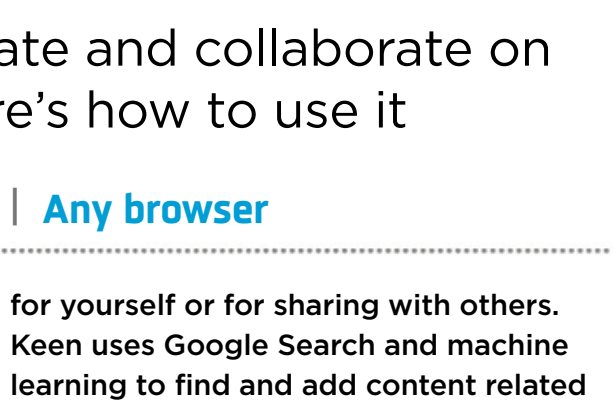


1 Open Keen in your browser and sign in using a Google account. The site displays some popular Keens, showing the number of followers each one has. 1 You can follow any that interest you. 2 Click the More button 3 to display additional collections.

2 To create your own Keen, click the plus sign at the top of the page. Give your collection a name. 1 Clicking the mushroom icon 2 provides tips, with mushroom-related examples to give you an idea of how to name your own Keen. You can get emails for new finds (up to twice a week). 3 Click Next. 4

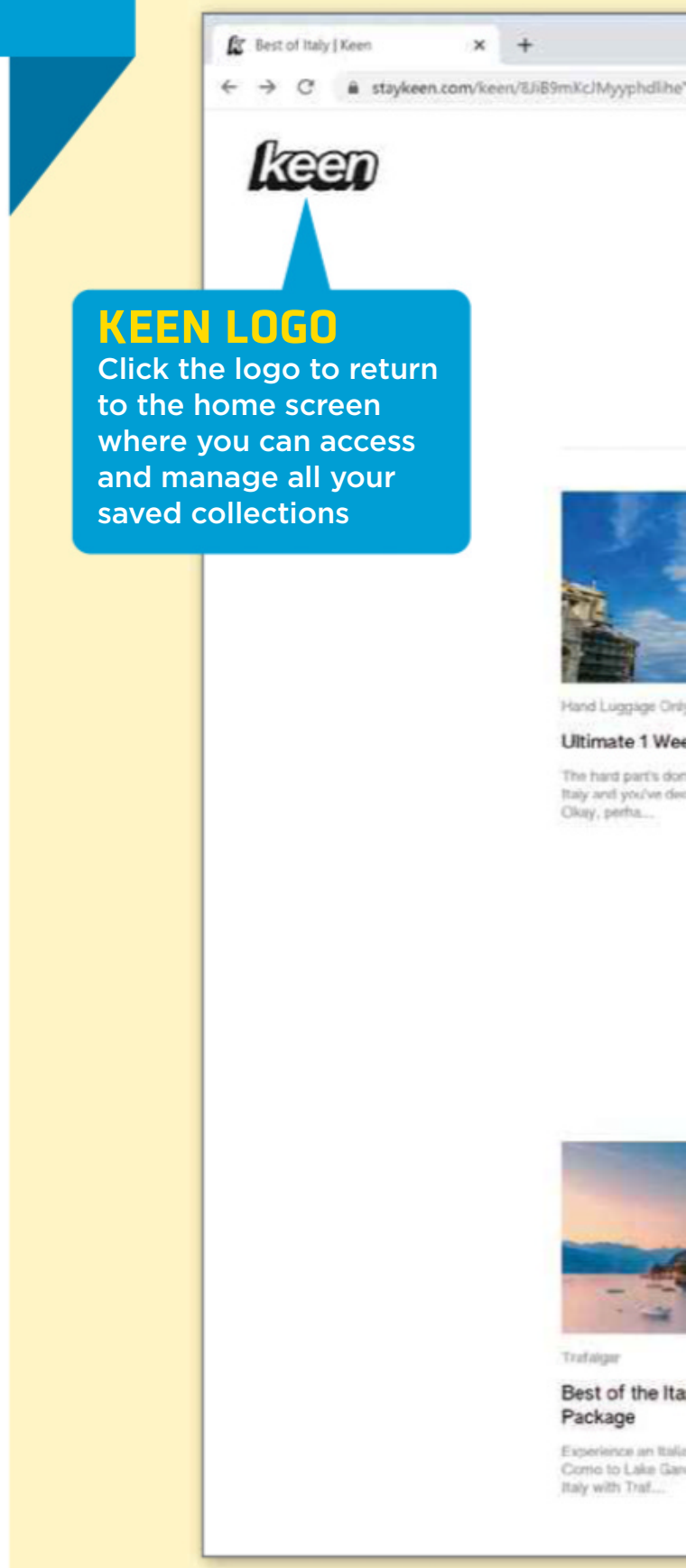


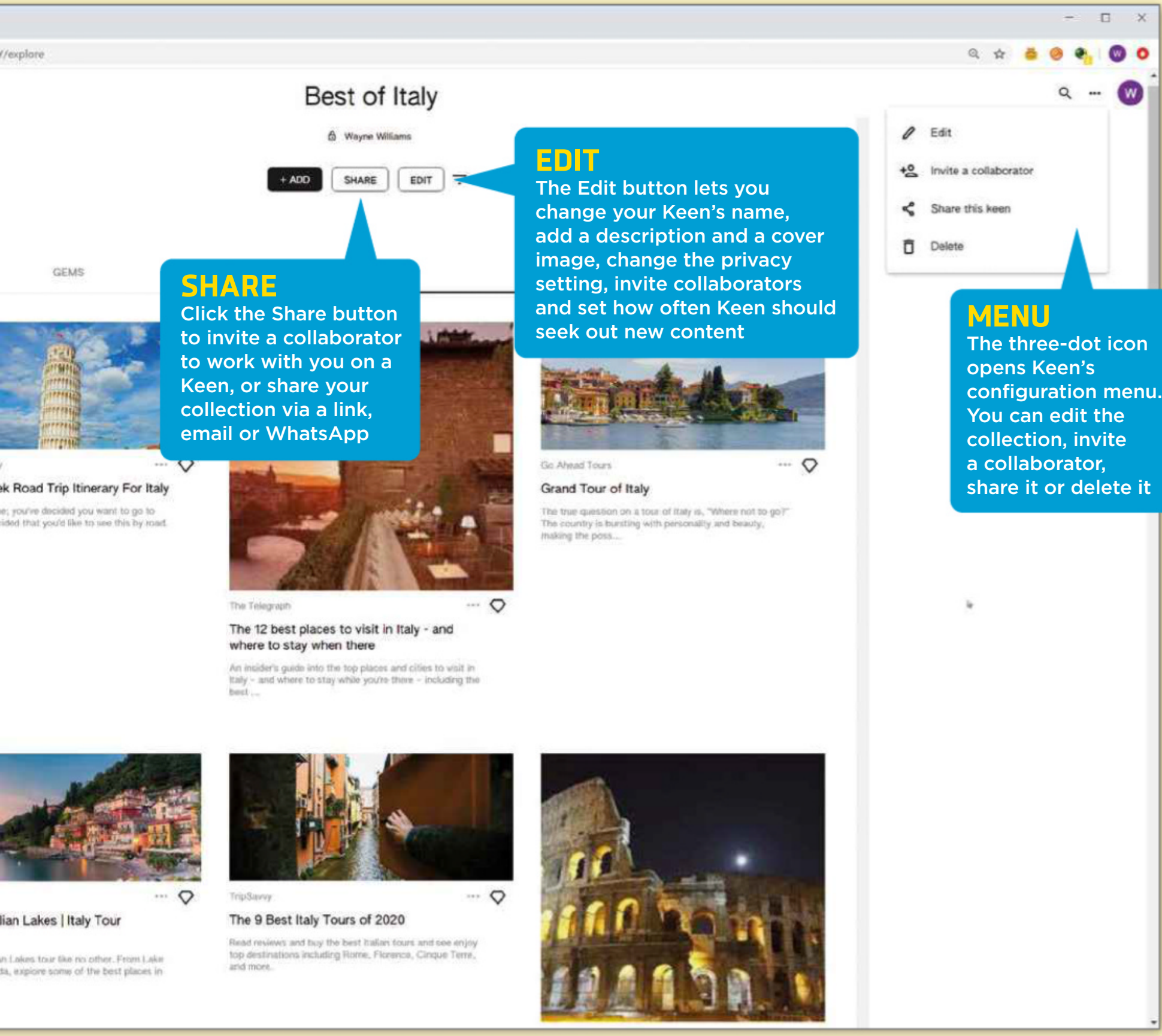
3 You're shown a list of search suggestions similar to your own heading that you may want to pick from. 1 Click More Settings 2 to add a description of your collection and choose who can view it – you can set this to Private, Shared (with a link) or Public. Click Create. 3



4 Your collection is created and appears at the top of the main page. Click its tile to open it and reveal any automatically added content. 1 Clicking an entry opens it in a new tab. If you like what you see, click the gem 2 to save it. Keen uses your preferences to find similar content.

5 Items you save are stored under Gems. 1 Find more things to add under Explore 2 or open Searches 3 and add search terms that relate to your collection by clicking the plus symbol. 4 Click Edit 5 to remove any saved terms. Go back to Explore to see any newly found content.

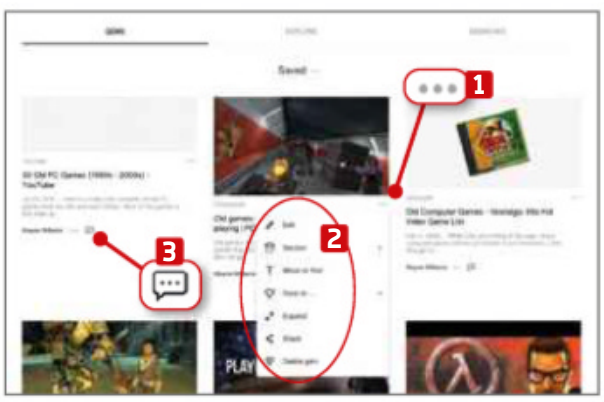




SHARE
Click the Share button to invite a collaborator to work with you on a Keen, or share your collection via a link, email or WhatsApp

EDIT
The Edit button lets you change your Keen's name, add a description and a cover image, change the privacy setting, invite collaborators and set how often Keen should seek out new content

MENU
The three-dot icon opens Keen's configuration menu. You can edit the collection, invite a collaborator, share it or delete it



6 Under each entry, click the three-dot icon 1 to open a menu of useful tools for arranging your collection. 2 From here, you can edit the item, place it in a section, reorder it, save it to a new collection, expand it, share it or delete it. Click the speech-bubble icon 3 to add a comment.

7 The expanded view lets you add a comment 1 or share an item. 2 Clicking the item itself opens the link in a new tab. People who have access to your Keen can reply to your comments. 3 Clicking the three-dot icon 4 opens the management menu. 5

8 To add your own items to a Keen, click the +Add button at the top of the page. 1 You can add your own links, insert some text 2 or find something via search. 3 If your Keen is getting crowded, you can add sections 4 with their own titles and descriptions to organise your items.

Control several PCs with a single keyboard and mouse

Mouse Without Borders: bit.ly/mwb506 | 20 mins | 7, 8, 10

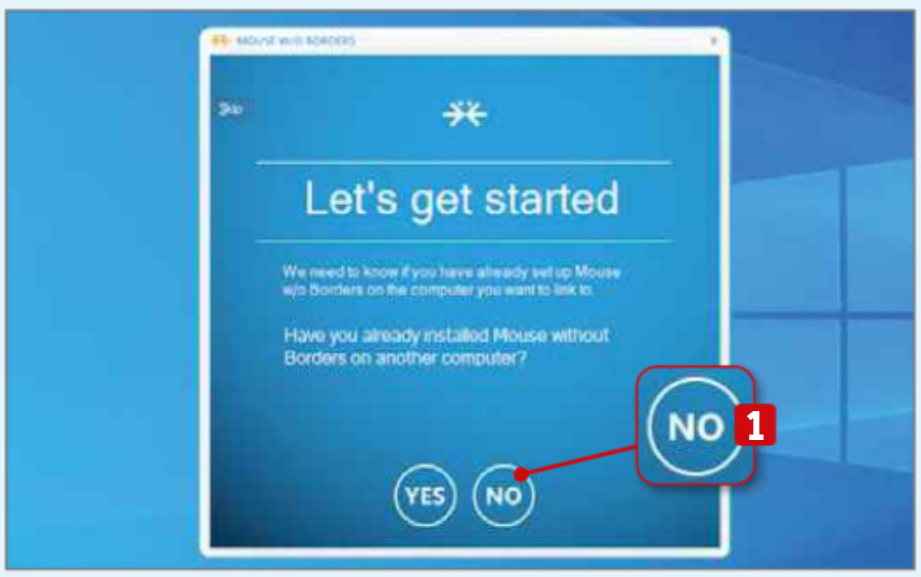
Mouse Without Borders is a Microsoft Garage program, which means it's software created by one of Microsoft's clever developers in their spare time and given to Microsoft to distribute for free. But there's nothing amateurish about this remarkable piece of software, which could revolutionise the working methods of anyone who needs to use more than one computer.

What the software does is let you control several PCs from a single keyboard and mouse, without the need for any additional hardware. Mouse Without Borders runs in the background and, as long your PCs are all connected to the same network, you simply push your mouse cursor to the edge of one PC's screen and it appears on the next.

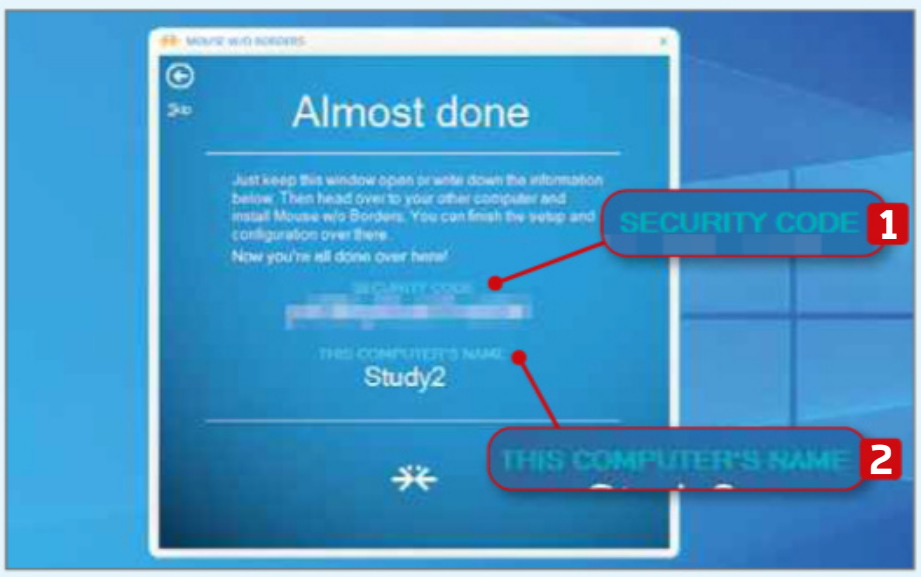
EXPERT TIP

Andy Shaw says

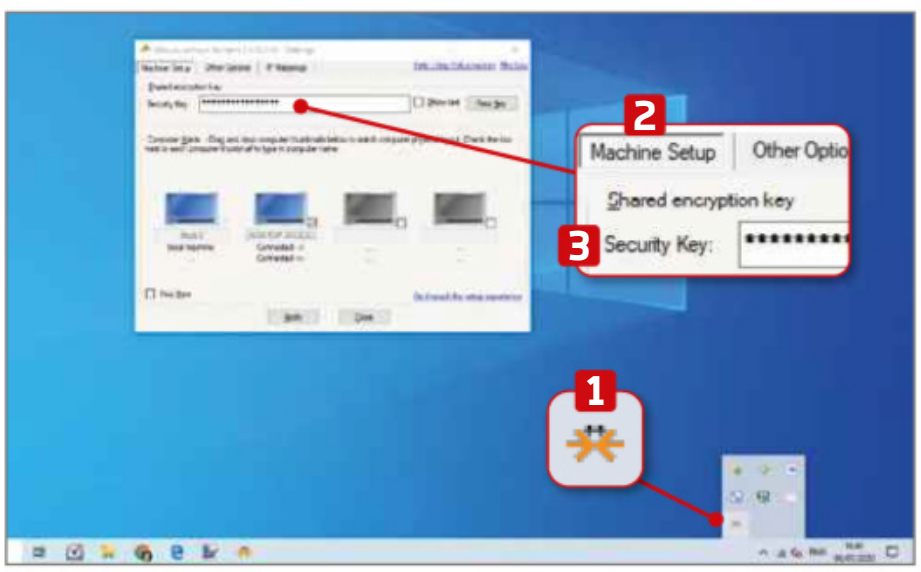
Mouse Without Borders works brilliantly if you're trying to connect Windows PCs, but it doesn't work if you're switching between macOS or Linux computers, such as a Raspberry Pi. In this situation, try Barrier (bit.ly/barrier506), with the caveat that the software is still in development. The link above takes you to the software's home on GitHub, or you can download it for free from bit.ly/barrel506.



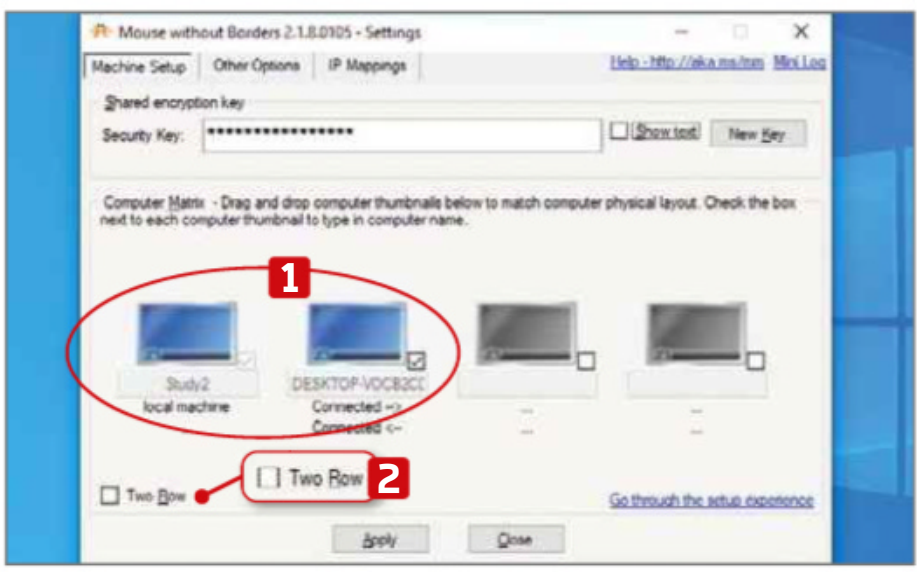
1 Before you unplug any keyboards, download and install the Mouse Without Borders software on every PC you want to use. Set the software running on one of the PCs you are going to use that won't have a keyboard and mouse plugged in. The software asks whether you have installed it on another PC. Click No. 1



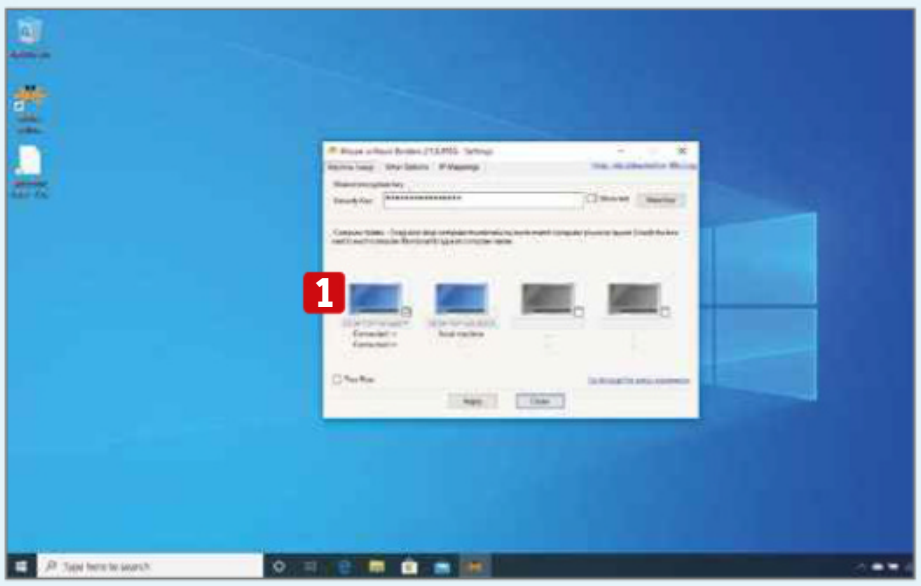
2 This displays a security code 1 and the computer's name. 2 Now run the software on the PC that will keep its keyboard and mouse attached, but this time answer 'Yes' to the 'Let's get started' question. Enter the code and the computer name in the boxes.



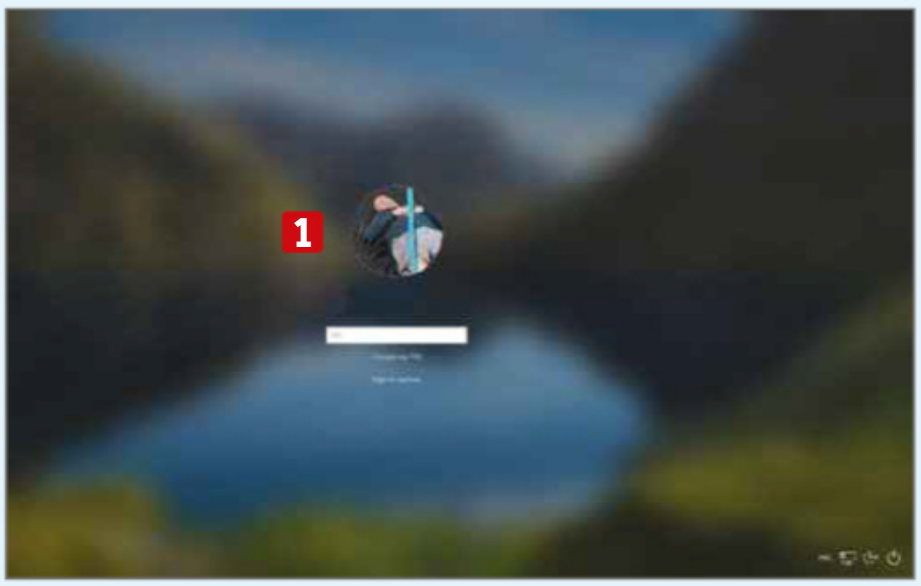
3 The Mouse Without Borders Settings window appears. If it doesn't, or you want to open it again at a later date, left-click the icon in the notification area of the taskbar. 1 This will open on the Machine Setup tab. 2 Here, you can find the Security Key, 3 should you need it again (for example, if you want to add another PC).



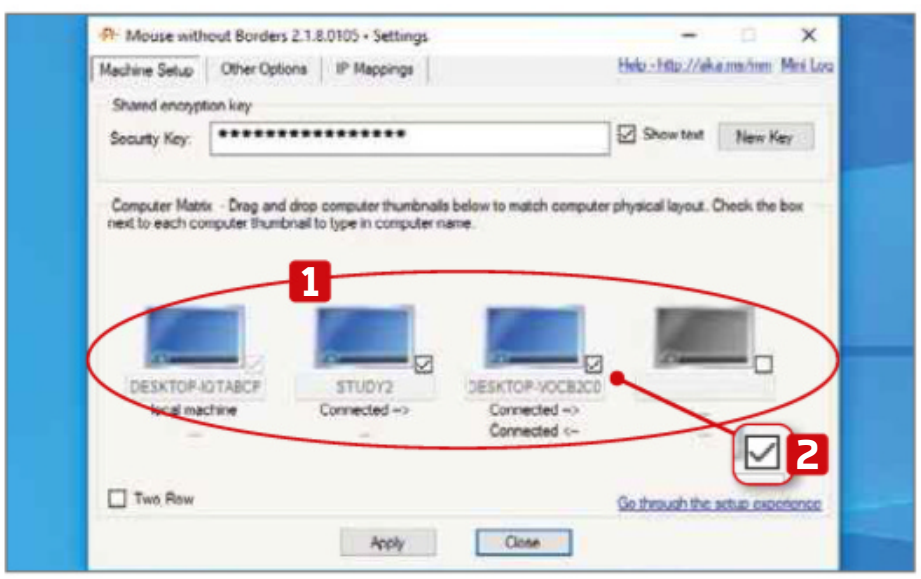
4 The Computer Matrix section should display your computers. 1 If they're arranged in the wrong order, then click, drag and drop them into the correct position. You can arrange them in a row or, if you have the appropriate shelves or monitor stands, align them vertically. 2



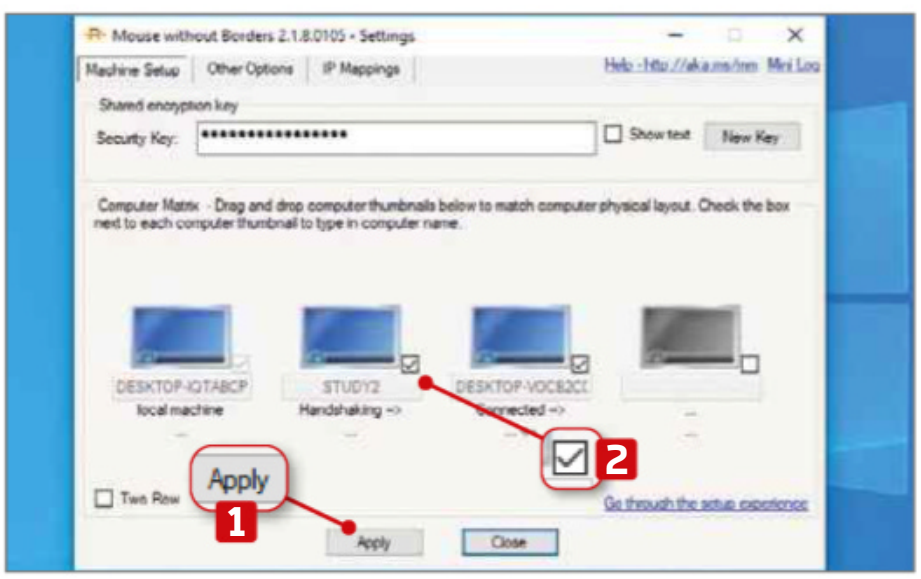
5 Now try moving your mouse from your main screen and off to the side where the second computer has been set up. 1 The cursor smoothly transitions to the next screen. The experience is exactly the same as if you had multiple monitors installed on a single PC.



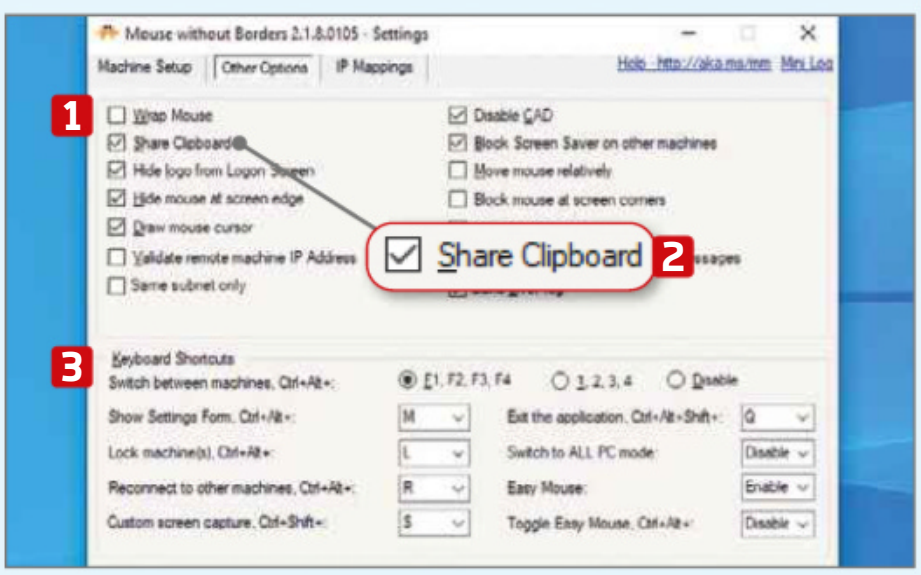
6 The software is very clever. The clipboard works across devices, so you can copy things from one PC and paste them onto another. It even works in the login screen of attached computers when you switch them on. 1 Make sure the computer with the keyboard boots first.



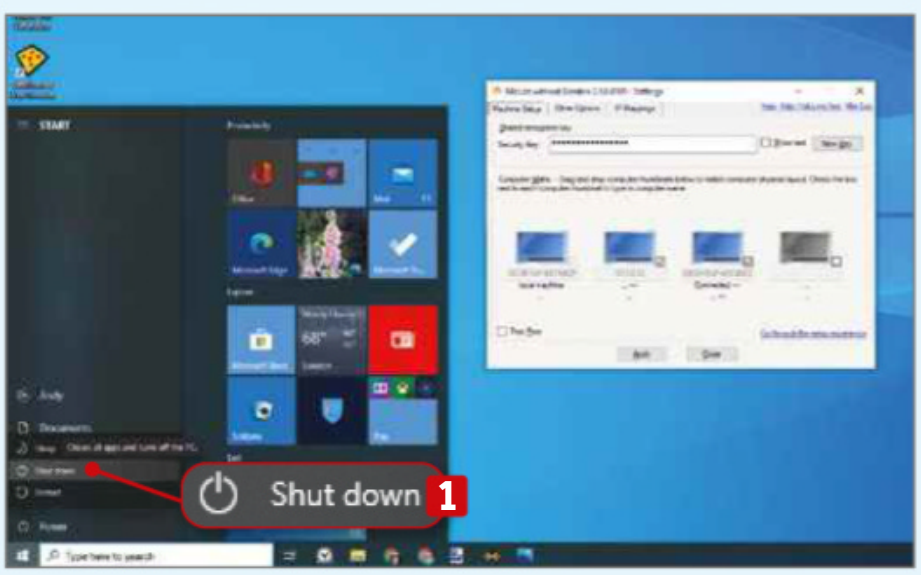
7 Things start to get a bit complicated when you try add a third and fourth PC to the mix. You can add the new PC by using the same key and computer name, but you may then need to go to each computer, adjust the arrangement 1 and tick the boxes next to the icons 2 to ensure they're all working together.



8 Inevitably, there are times when the software stops working, perhaps because you've had to restart one computer and it hasn't been picked up by the others. Clicking the Apply button 1 often gets your PCs communicating again. If that fails, untick 2 and retick the problem machine.



9 It's worth exploring the Other Options tab in Settings. At the top, there are two columns 1 for fine-tuning the software, such as whether you want to disable clipboard sharing (don't – it's brilliant). 2 Below, you'll find a list of the keyboard shortcuts, 3 which you can reconfigure if you wish.

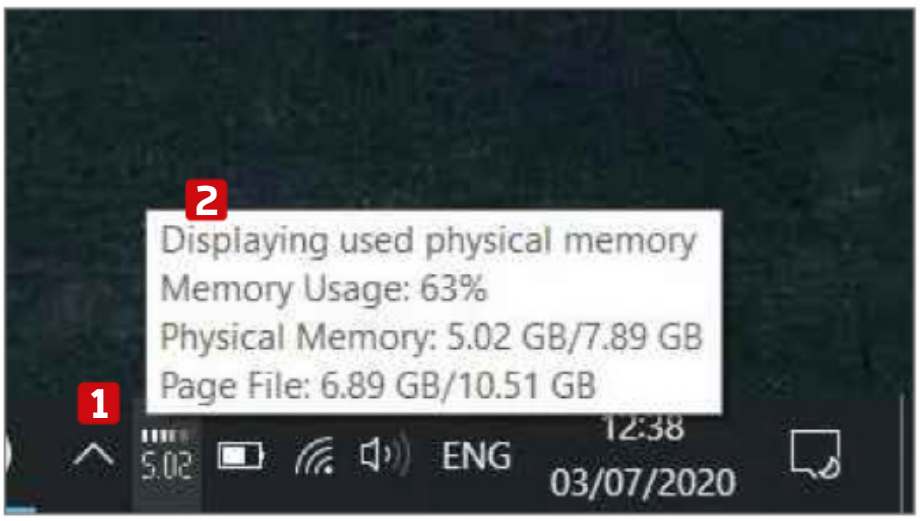


10 When shutting down, 1 it's worth waiting for the satellite PCs to finish the process while you're still logged into your main PC. Otherwise, if something goes wrong, you'll have to restart the PC with the keyboard before you can control the others.

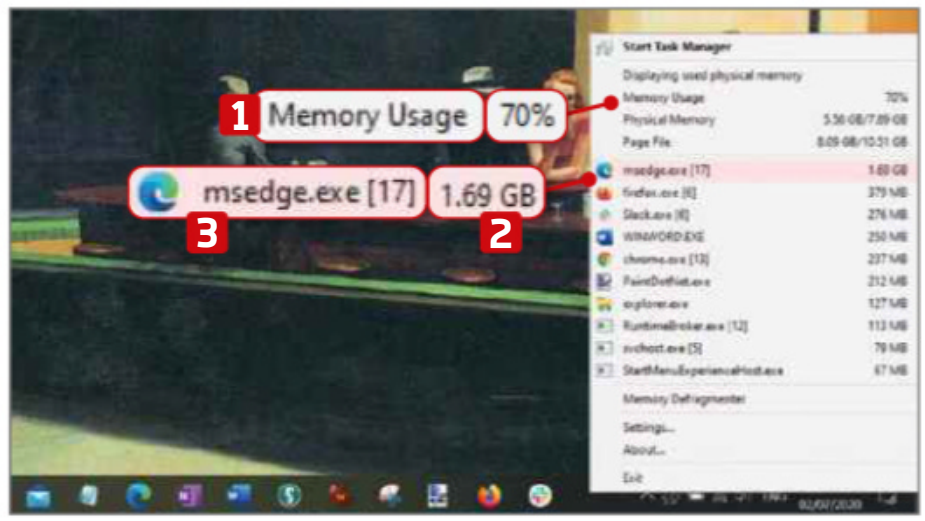
Stop programs hogging your PC's memory

MemInfo is a simple task manager that lets you keep watch on programs that hog your computer's memory. MemInfo monitors real-time memory use, so if something is using too much memory, it's easy to identify and shut down. Discreetly housed in the system tray, with no interface beyond a straightforward right-click menu, MemInfo is also available as a portable version.

MemInfo: bit.ly/meminfo506 | **10 mins** | **7, 8, 10**

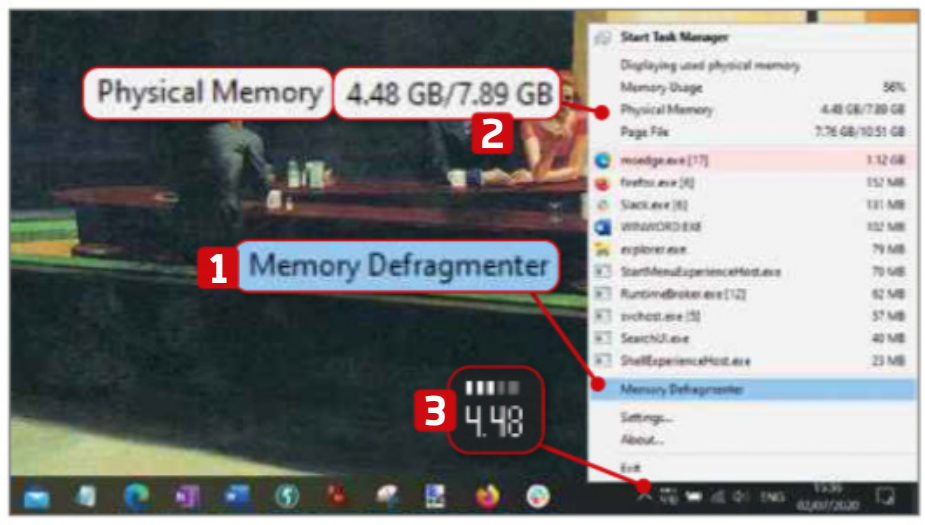


1 When launched, MemInfo lives in the system tray. 1 The numbers tell you how much physical memory is currently being used, so there's no need to open Task Manager, although you can do so by double-clicking MemInfo's taskbar icon. You can also hover over the icon for more information. 2

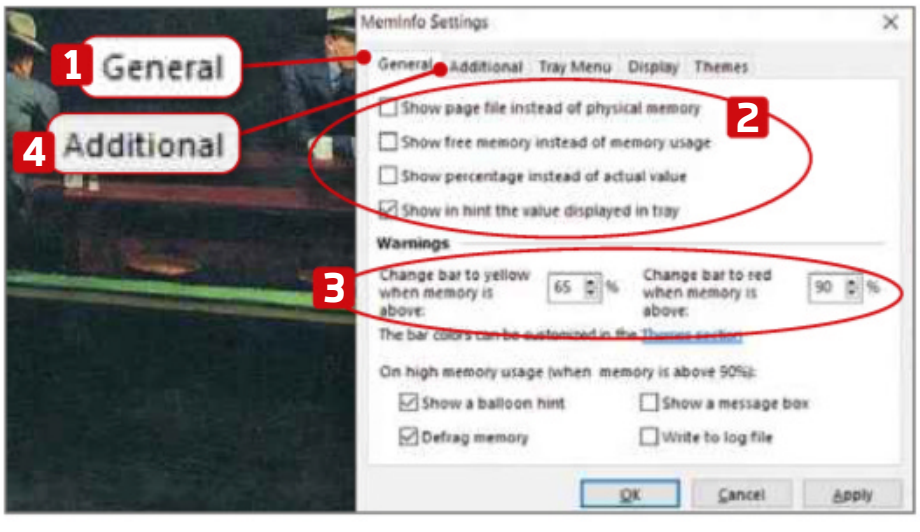


2 Right-click the icon for more detailed information. Total memory usage is displayed, 1 along with a list of all running processes below. Alongside each active program, you can see how much memory each one is using. 2 Memory hogs are highlighted in red. 3

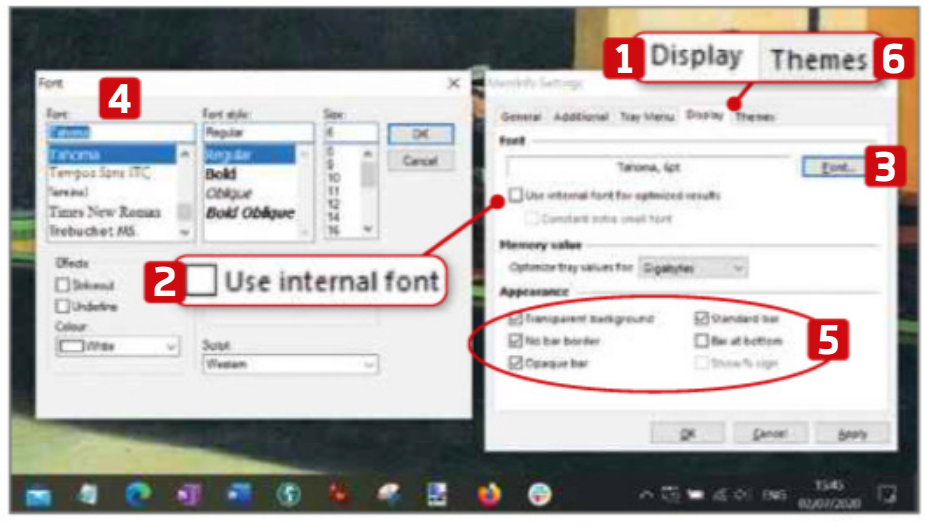
3 Let's say we want to stop a particularly memory-hungry web browser. Click the name of the process, for example chrome.exe. 1 A dialogue box provides options to 'Copy details', 2 Free Memory 3 and Kill Process. 4 Select Kill Process to instantly shut down the program.



4 Memory Defragmenter, 1 in the MemInfo right-click menu, automatically frees up memory wasted by all current processes (it's also available for individual programs – see Step 3). There are no additional pop-ups, but look for a drop in the Physical Memory used 2 and the number on the icon. 3



5 To customise MemInfo, select Settings from the right-click menu. In the General tab, 1 use the tick-boxes to change the information displayed at the top of the right-click menu. 2 Warnings for memory hogs can be raised or reduced. 3 Click the Additional tab 4 to set up automated defragging.

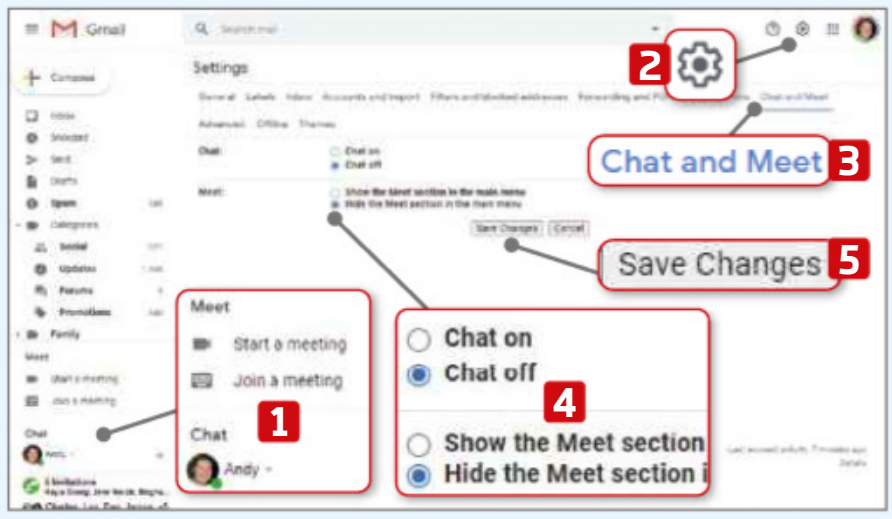


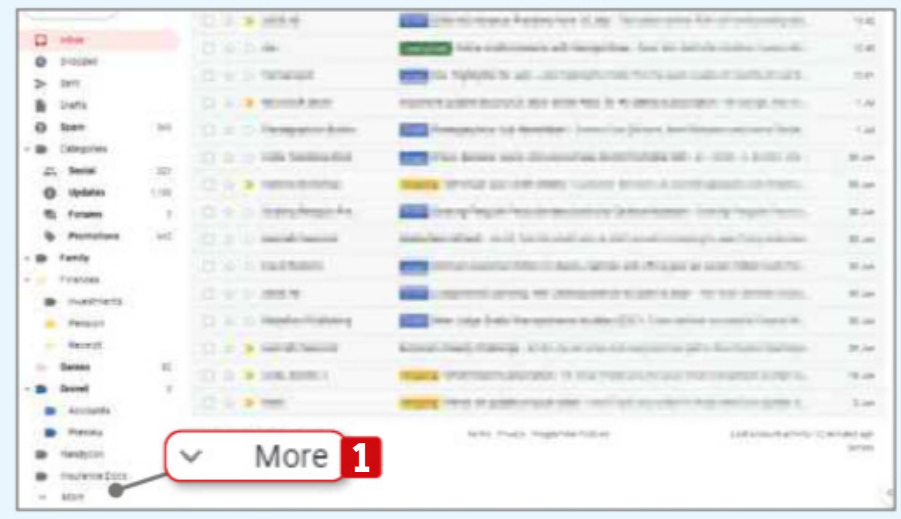
6 The Display tab 1 lets you use your preferred typeface by opting out of the internal font setting. 2 Click the Font button 3 to open a pop-up of font options. 4 You can also customise the tool's appearance. 5 The Themes 6 tab lets you tweak the colours for each component.

Declutter your Gmail sidebar

Launched in 2004, Gmail has been around for a phenomenal 16 years, and some of us have been using it since day one. Anything that old inevitably accumulates clutter, and while there's no need to worry about ancient emails, your sidebar could probably do with some serious pruning. Here, we show you the quickest and easiest way to perform a proper clear-out.

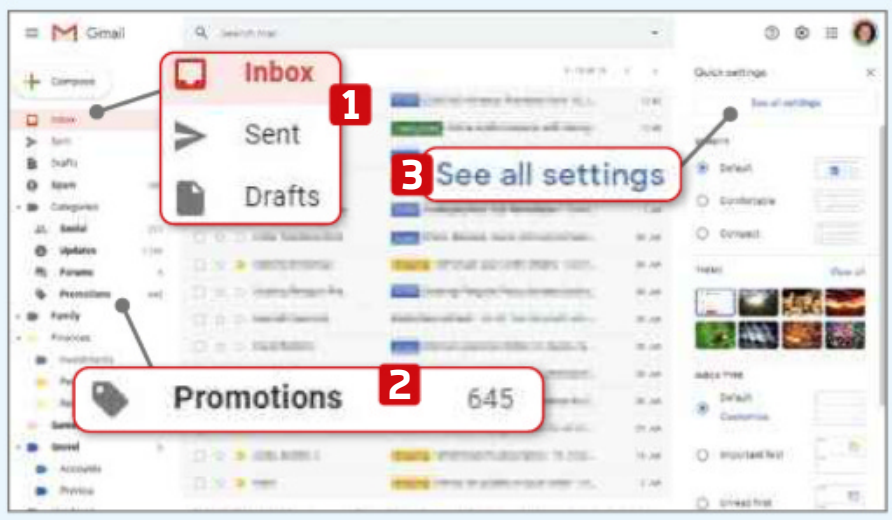
Gmail: mail.google.com | 10 mins | Any browser





1 Start by removing any Google Chat or Google Meet boxes, 1 particularly if you never use them. Click the Settings cog 2 then 'See all settings'. Select the 'Chat and Meet' tab, 3 then select 'Chat off' and 'Hide the Meet section'. 4 Click Save Changes. 5

2 This stretches the folder bar to the bottom of the screen and beyond. It can be hard to find anything with so many folders, so it's a good idea to hide lesser-used ones. Nothing is deleted, so if you can't find something after this process, scroll to the bottom and click More. 1



3 The top labels in the list are system labels, such as your Inbox, Sent and Drafts folder. 1 These provide quick one-click access and, usefully, display the numbers of unread emails contained within them. 2 Click Settings and choose 'See all settings'. 3

4 'System labels', in the Labels tab, 1 lists everything you can display in this section. Choose to permanently 'show' or 'hide' 2 any of the labels from the list. Scheduled, Drafts and Spam also have a 'show if unread' option, 3 so they only appear if they contain unread items.

5 Categories – below the System labels – is Google's own message-filtering system. Click to 'show' or 'hide' the Categories section, 1 or the individual folders. 2 Incidentally, the 'Show in IMAP' tick boxes 3 control which folders appear in email software, such as Windows 10 Mail.

6 The last section is for labels you've created yourself. 1 As with the previous steps, you can 'show', 'hide' and 'show if unread', but you can also 'remove' and 'edit' them. 2 Edit lets you rename and rearrange the labels, if necessary.

Weekend Project

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

How to...

Set up a Tor proxy to stay anonymous on all devices

Wayne Williams shows you how to set up a Tor proxy to keep all the devices on your home network completely private and secure

In the early days of the internet, your online privacy fears were probably limited to worrying about your boss being able to see every website you browsed. These days, most of us are all too aware that the sites we visit on any device are spying on us and sharing our online activity with advertisers, marketing companies and anyone else prepared to pay for the information. In a bid to thwart the snoopers, increasing numbers of web users are turning to VPNs – virtual private networks – but even those aren't always as private as you might think. Thankfully there's a free, trustworthy alternative: Tor.

We've looked at setting Tor up on individual devices before. In this Weekend Project, we show you how to create a cheap Tor proxy to protect all the devices on your network.

What is Tor?

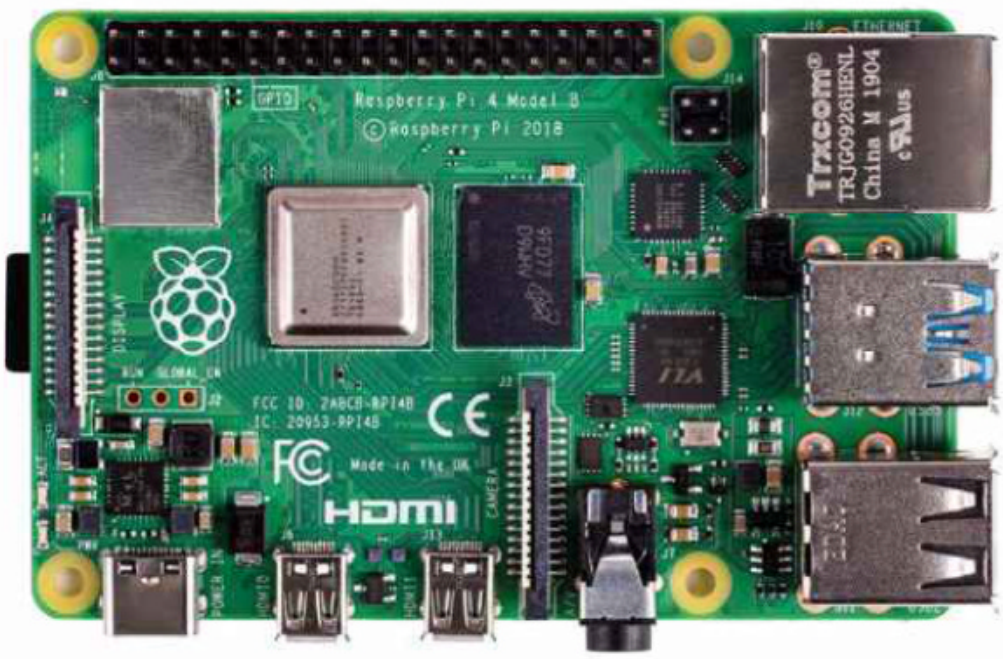
Similar to a VPN, the Tor network is designed to protect your browsing and disguise your location. However, where it differs from a VPN is that there's no single entity behind it that you need to trust – instead, the network is run by thousands of volunteers scattered far and wide. Tor works by transmitting and encrypting your web traffic across randomly selected relays around the world, and you can request a new 'circuit' for any site at any time.

The easiest way to access this network is via the Tor Browser (www.torproject.org). This is available for Windows, macOS, Linux and Android, and is based on Mozilla Firefox's browser. As well as letting you browse the regular web anonymously, it can also handle '.onion' addresses (so called because onions have multiple layers, as do onion services), which provide access to the dark web.

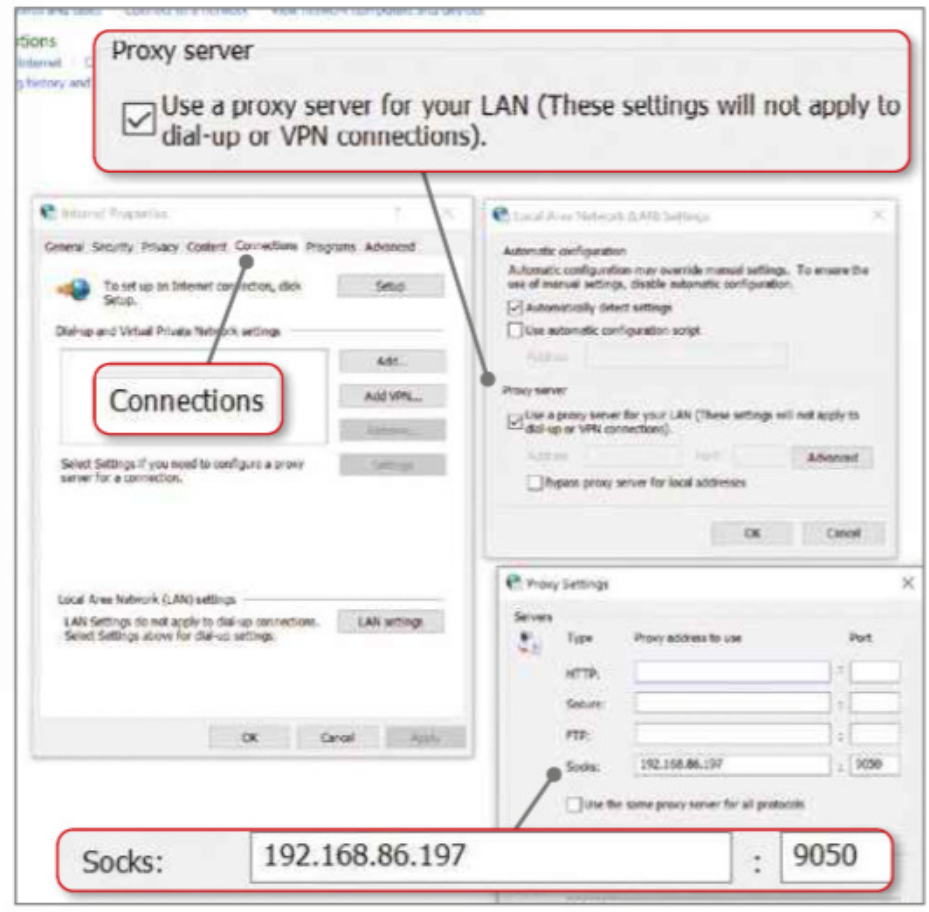
Set up a Tor proxy

To browse the web using Tor, you simply have to install the browser on your device. However, if you're using several different devices, you'll have to set up Tor on each and every one of them.

In Issue 498's Weekend Project (bit.ly/webuser498), we explained how you could avoid this repetive task by



You can use pretty much any Raspberry Pi for this project but the fourth-generation model is best



You can configure a Tor proxy through the Internet Options section of the Windows Control Panel

installing a VPN on your router to protect *all* your home network traffic. In this Weekend Project, we show you how to achieve a similar result by installing Tor on a Raspberry Pi.

What you'll need

Obviously, the first piece of equipment you'll need is a Raspberry Pi. You can pick up the latest model – the Raspberry Pi 4 – for as little as £34 from the likes of The Pi Hut (thepihut.com). You'll need a screen – either a TV or a computer monitor – so you can see what's going on, and a micro HDMI-to-HDMI cable (or a standard HDMI-to-HDMI cable plus a micro HDMI-to-HDMI adapter) to connect the Pi to the display. You'll also need a compatible power supply, a USB keyboard and mouse, and a microSD card for the operating system.

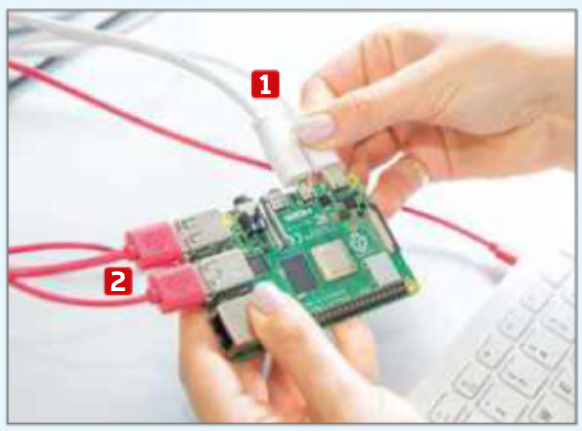
There's a good chance that you'll have at least some of the required cables and peripherals at home but, if not, you can pick up everything you need from The Pi Hut. The company offers a Starter Kit which bundles a Raspberry Pi 4 board (in your choice of memory size – 2GB, 4GB or 8GB) with a case, cables and microSD card from £59. If you need a keyboard and mouse as well, that will set you back just £7.

You need a dedicated microSD card for the operating system, but if you have a spare one at home you can use that. It needs to be at least 8GB, but 16GB is better. You'll probably need an adapter for the card to connect it to your PC so you can copy the operating system to it. For this project, we're using Raspberry Pi OS. We show you how to install it in our Mini Workshop, below.

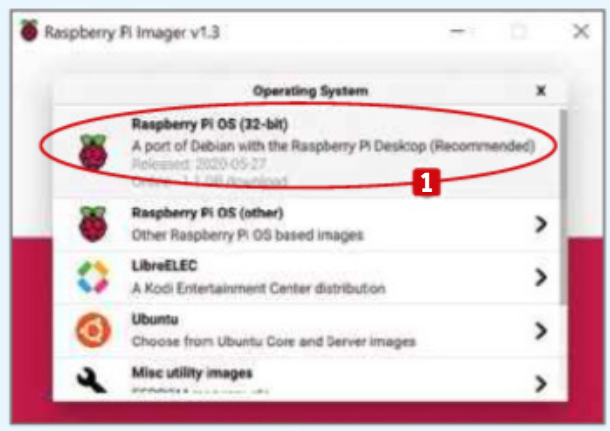
Connect to your Tor proxy from any browser

Once Tor is up and running on the Pi, the final step is to connect to it using your browser. In Chromium-based browsers, such as Google Chrome, Opera and the new Microsoft Edge, you can configure the proxy directly in Windows. The instructions should be to click the three-dot menu button at the top-right of your browser, open Settings, click Advanced, select System and click 'Open your computer's proxy settings'. However, we recommend going via the

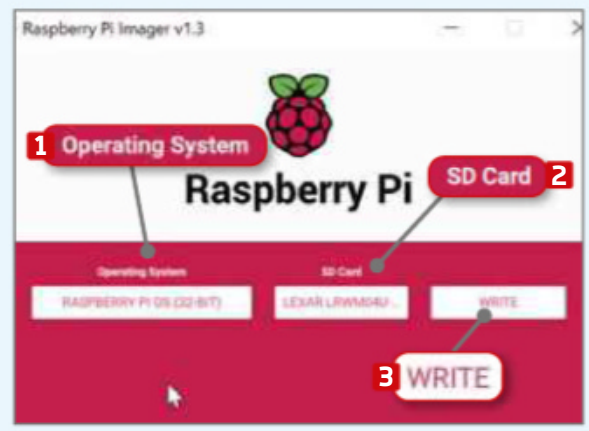
MINI WORKSHOP | Install Raspberry Pi OS on an SD memory card



1 Start by connecting all the required hardware to your Pi. This includes plugging the device into a screen 1 and connecting a keyboard and mouse. 2 Add an Ethernet cable if you want wired internet. If not, you can connect it to Wi-Fi when you power on the device. Now we need to add the operating system.



2 Download Raspberry Pi Imager for Windows, macOS or Linux (www.raspberrypi.org/downloads), then install it. Connect the microSD card to your PC (directly or via an adapter) and run Raspberry Pi Imager. Choose Raspberry Pi OS from the list of operating systems, 1 then select your SD card. Make sure you choose the correct option in the list.



3 Confirm that the correct operating system 1 and SD card 2 are selected, then click the Write button. 3 Once the operating system has been transferred, remove the SD card from your computer, plug it into your Pi and power up the device. Now we need to set up our Tor proxy - see our Mini Workshop on page 61.

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	Provider	Package name	Monthly price	Contract length	Broadband speed	Allowance	First-year cost*
1	Shell Energy	Shell Energy: Fast Broadband	£18.99 (£21.99 after 18 months)	18 months	11Mbps avg. speed	∞ unlimited	CHEAPEST £227.88
2	sse	SSE: Unlimited Fibre + Line Rental Only	£23.00	18 months	35Mbps avg. speed	∞ unlimited	£276.00
3	sky	Sky: Superfast Talk and Line Rental	£27.00	18 months	59Mbps avg. speed	∞ unlimited*	£324.00
4	Virgin media	Virgin Media: Big Bundle + Fibre Broadband + Weekend Calls	£29.99 (£59 after 12 months)	12 months	54Mbps avg. speed	∞ unlimited	£359.88

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

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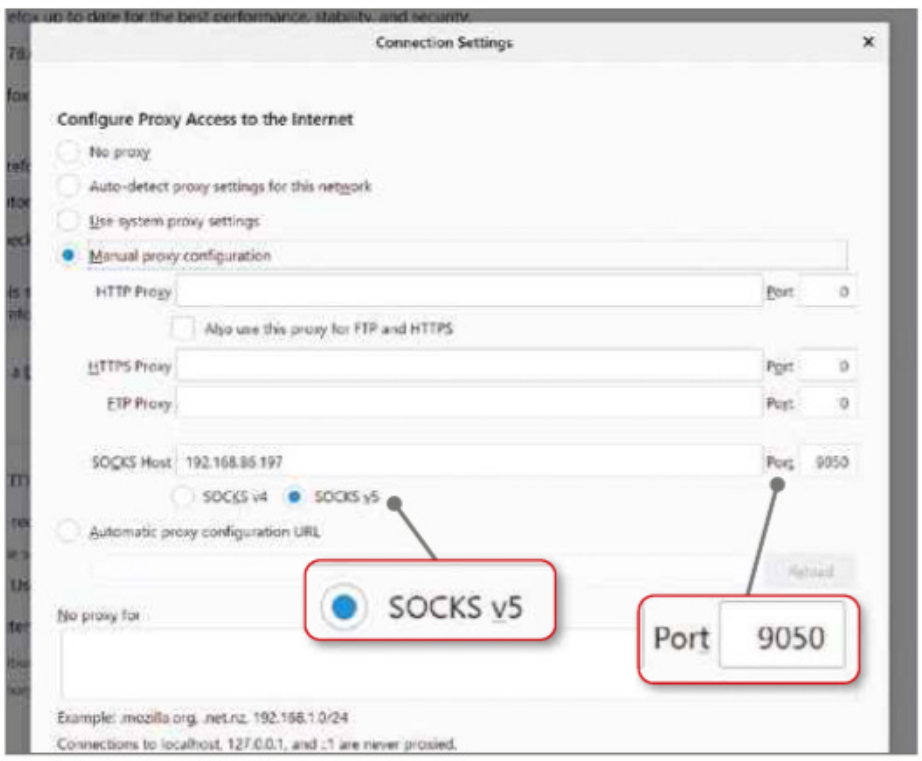


You can configure the Tor Proxy settings directly in Firefox

If everything is working as it should, the Tor Project check page should show this message

If the check page doesn't recognise that you're using the Tor Browser, you'll see this message, but you can still use Tor

old Windows Control Panel instead.

Type `control panel` in the Windows search box and press Enter to select it. In Category view, click 'Network and Internet', then Internet Options. This opens the Internet Properties box. Click the Connections tab, then the 'LAN settings' button. Tick the box next to 'Use a proxy server for your LAN' and click Advanced. Enter your Raspberry Pi's IP address in the Socks box (leave the other boxes above it blank).

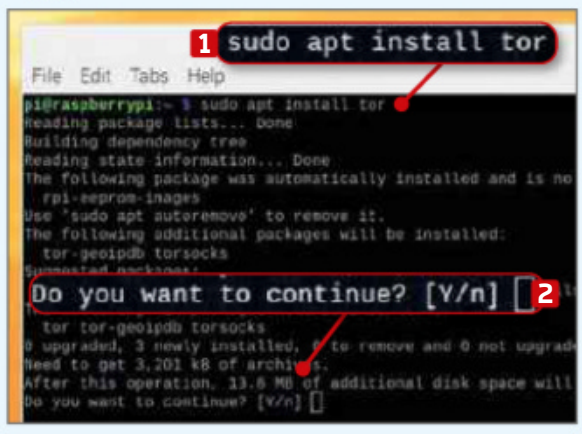
For the Port, enter `9050`. Click OK to close that window, then click OK on the other windows to close them. Try connecting to the internet with your Chromium browser to make sure you're online.

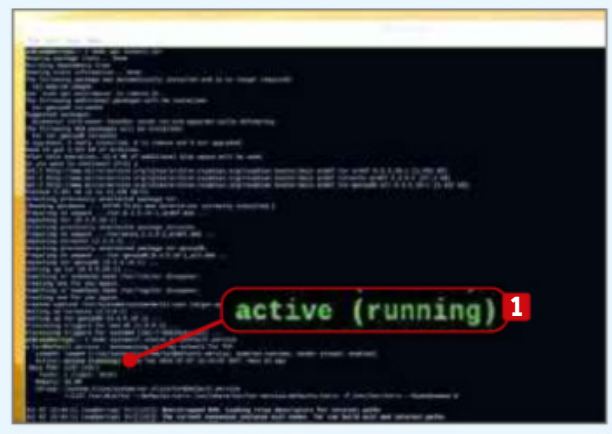
If you're using a Firefox-based browser, click the menu button in the top-right corner, then click Options. Select General and scroll down to Network Settings at the bottom of the page. Click the Settings button to configure how Firefox connects to the internet. The Connection Settings window opens. Click the 'Manual proxy configuration' option and, in the 'SOCKS Host' field, enter the IP address of your Pi and use the same port number as before – '9050'. Make sure SOCKS v5 is selected. Click OK and relaunch your browser.

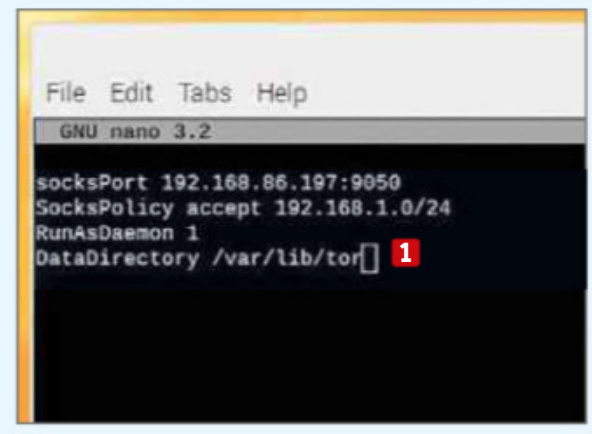
Assuming you've entered everything correctly, your browser should now be communicating with the Tor server. To make sure things are working as they should, go to check.torproject.org to confirm whether or not you are using Tor.

It's worth remembering that your Tor proxy will only work and protect your browsing when your Raspberry Pi is powered up and connected to the internet.

MINI WORKSHOP | Install Tor on your Raspberry Pi







1 Make sure your Pi is connected to the internet, then open Terminal and enter the following command:

`sudo apt update && sudo apt -y upgrade`

Once it has installed any updates, reboot your Pi by entering

`sudo reboot`

When it starts up, open Terminal again. Enter:

`sudo apt install tor` 1

Type Y when prompted. 2

2 After Tor has installed, check it's running by entering:

`sudo systemctl status tor@default.service`

You should see a message telling you Tor is active. 1 Find your Pi's IP address by entering hostname -I into Terminal and make a note of it. To back up the 'torrc' configuration file, enter:

`sudo cp /etc/tor/torrc /etc/tor/torrc.backup`

Then enter:

`sudo nano /etc/tor/torrc`

3 The config file opens in the Nano text editor. Delete its contents and Enter the following, replacing [IP Address] with the actual address:

```
SocksPort [IP Address]:9050
SocksPolicy accept 192.168.1.0/24
RunAsDaemon 1
DataDirectory /var/lib/tor 1
```

Press Ctrl+O, press Enter, then Ctrl+X. To restart Tor, open Terminal and enter: `sudo systemctl restart tor@default.service`

NEXT ISSUE **How To...** Run Android on an old PC

On sale Wednesday 5 August

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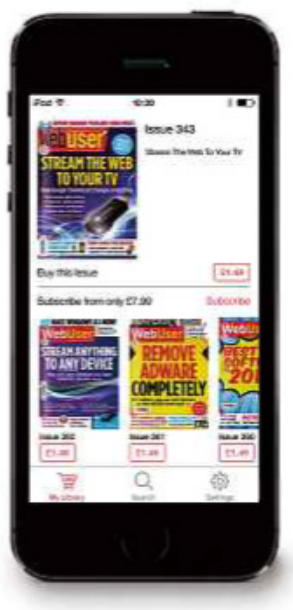

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Web User Masterclass

Use a second web browser for privacy, speed and keeping work and personal life separate

Try different browsers by installing portable apps

There are lots of different browsers to choose from, each with its own distinct features, interface and settings, so it's worth experimenting to find out which one suits you best. Many browsers are available as portable apps, which – unlike programs installed in Windows – won't clutter your operating system by leaving behind unnecessary files and are easily removed by deleting their folders. They often come as self-extracting archives that unzip to your selected location. You'll find more than a dozen at bit.ly/portable506.

Some portable browsers are available direct from the developer, including Maxthon (maxthon.com), Vivaldi (vivaldi.com – select Advanced when installing and choose the Standalone installation) and Avant Browser (avantbrowser.com – download the USB disk version). If a site you visit doesn't work properly in one browser, try another.

If you don't want to install a new browser, try a portable version instead

Shop and bank securely

Web browsers leak information in several ways and are far from secure or private. For example, extensions you install can access every page you visit and even see the content of forms you fill in. For the best security, install an alternative browser with no extensions, to use for online banking and shopping.

Iridium Browser (iridiumbrowser.de), based on Chrome, has added security and privacy, and comes in installed and portable versions. Companies such as Avast (bit.ly/avastbrow506), Comodo (bit.ly/comodo506) and AVG (bit.ly/avgbrowse506) know a lot about privacy and security, and their browsers are more secure than most.

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.

Speed up your computer

You may want a second browser for specialised purposes, such as Opera GX (opera.com/gx or portableapps.com), which is designed for gamers. This is actually one of the most interesting browsers we've seen in a long time, and its innovative features are useful even if you don't play games.

Clicking one of the icons down the left-hand side opens a panel. The Hot Tabs Killer lists all your open tabs in order of CPU or RAM usage, so you can immediately identify any that use too much processor power or memory and close them. Below this are speedometer-style CPU and RAM gauges, with sliders to limit how much the browser uses. The idea is that you can use the browser to chat with friends via Twitch, Discord, Facebook Messenger and other services without using the valuable CPU and RAM resources you need for games.

This feature benefits non-gaming activities, too, if your normal browser uses too much processing power and memory, leaving other apps short of resources. It can also be handy if you like to chat via WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Instagram, and have them running in the sidebar while you're browsing the web.

Opera GX has many excellent customisation features including ad and tracker blocking, wallpaper, colour schemes, animations, regular extensions and sidebar extensions.

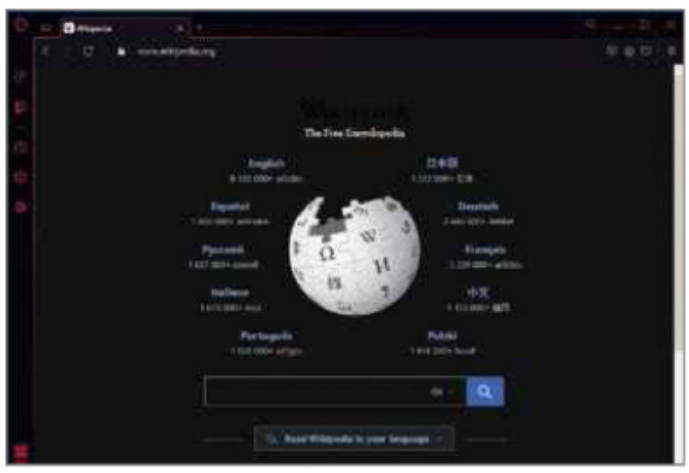
Use Opera GX when you need to minimise processor and memory usage

Browse the web in dark mode

Dark mode has become very popular but it can usually only be applied to system windows and a few apps that support it. It's rare to find a website that you can choose to display in dark mode.

Opera GX (opera.com/gx), however, can force websites to do just that. Click the menu icon in the top-right corner and turn on the switch to Force Dark Pages. The next website you visit will display in dark mode.

This functionality makes Opera GX great for browsing the web after sunset, because it's more restful on your eyes.



Use Opera GX to force websites to use dark mode in the evening

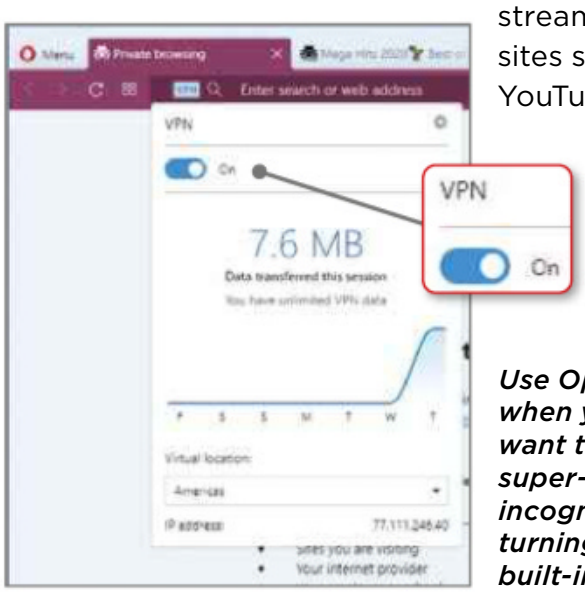
Use Opera's VPN for privacy

Sometimes you want to browse the web privately without being tracked or revealing your identity. Incognito mode goes some way to making this possible, but a VPN adds even more privacy.

There are many VPN services available, but free ones are often very busy, which slows them down, while costs can mount up with paid-for services, which makes them expensive.

The Opera browser (opera.com) has a VPN built in, so there's no software to install, no sign-up and no cost. Click Opera's VPN button at the left of the address bar and switch it on. There are three geographic areas to choose from: Americas, Europe and Asia.

Opera's VPN tends to slow down at peak times – such as in the evening – but even then, it's usually fast enough for web browsing and can handle video streaming at sites such as YouTube.



Use Opera when you want to go super-incognito by turning on its built-in VPN

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

More advanced tips for when you're feeling brave

Create a new identity

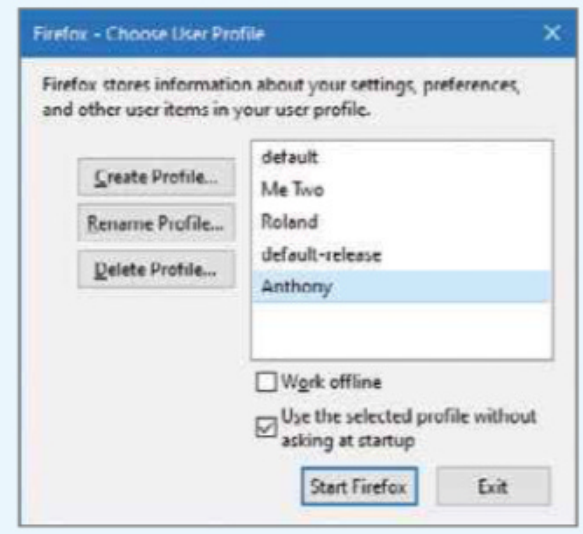
You can browse as two different people to keep your bookmarks, history, cookies and web data separate, without needing to use a second browser. For example, if you set up separate identities for work and personal, you can have different extensions installed and stay signed into different accounts for online services, such as Google, Microsoft and social-media platforms.

In Chrome, click your profile icon in the top-right corner and click Add at the bottom. In the window that opens, enter a name, such as Wally Work or Polly Personal, and select an icon. Tick the box at the bottom to create a desktop shortcut that will start Chrome as this person instead of your usual identity.

A new browser window opens and everything you do in it is stored separately to other user profiles. Close the browser and open Chrome as usual to go back to the original user, or click the profile icon and select the user on the menu. You can even keep a normal browser window open and an alternative user window at the same time.

In the new version of Edge, click the profile icon in the top right corner and click 'Add profile'. A new window opens with the default name Profile 1. Click the profile icon again and select 'Manage profile settings'. Click the three-dot menu button to the right of Profile 1 and select Edit. Change the name to whatever you want and select an icon for the profile picture.

For some odd reason, Firefox hides this feature and you have to type



Create user profiles for Firefox and browse the web as different users

`about:profiles` in the address box to access it. Click 'Create a New Profile' and it's added to the profiles list below. Under each profile is a button to launch a new window with the selected user profile.

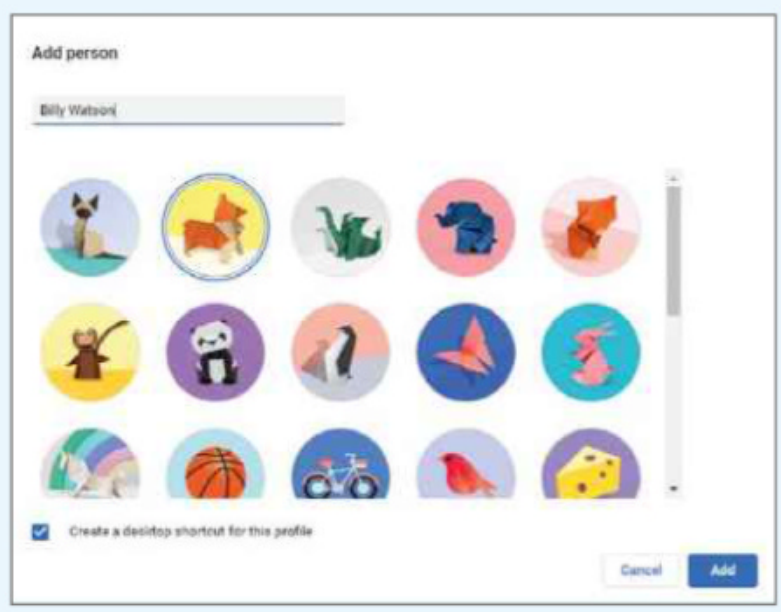
There is another way to create and select profiles in Firefox. Open File Explorer and right-click C:\Program Files\Mozilla Firefox. Right-click the Firefox.exe file and select 'Send to', then 'Desktop (create shortcut)'. Right-click the desktop shortcut and select Properties, then click the Target box and, at the end of what's already there, type a space, then `-p`. Click OK.

Click the desktop icon to start Firefox and it opens a window to select the user profile to start with. You can also create, rename and delete user profiles from here.

Try beta versions

The beta version of a browser installs separately to the standard version, rather than replacing it. This means you can have both Chrome and Chrome beta installed. There are in fact two further test versions – Dev and Canary. The last is the newest, but it's also the least stable and least tested. To get all the Chrome betas for PC, Mac, Android and iOS, visit bit.ly/chrome506.

Firefox beta, developer and nightly builds can be downloaded from bit.ly/ffbeta506. Opera beta and developer versions are at bit.ly/opbeta506.



Create a new user profile for work or personal browsing in Chrome or Edge

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

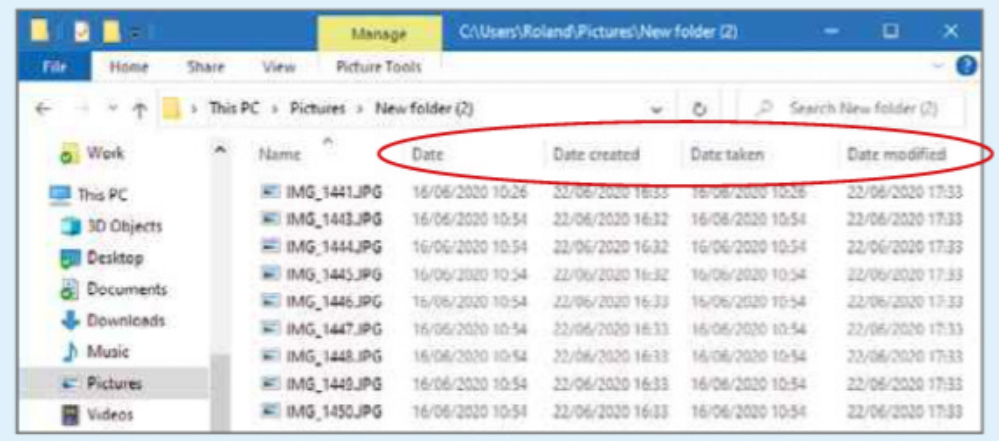
WINDOWS

Sort photos by date taken

Q In 'Ask the Expert' in Issue 489 (bit.ly/webuser489), you kindly gave me advice on recovering photos. I successfully downloaded them to my PC from iCloud, but now that I'm getting around to sorting them, I notice they've been given the date of the download and not the date when they were taken. Can I save them in a way that keeps the original date?

I've looked into using OneDrive but I'm not sure how to get the app on my iPhone. When I go to OneDrive on my PC running Windows 8.1, it shows a message stating that the administrator has blocked its use.

Alan Smith, via email



A photo may have up to four different dates associated with it

A A file can have several dates associated with it, such as the date it was originally created and the date it was last modified. A photo can hold additional information, called meta or EXIF data, which includes the date it was taken. To see a photo's EXIF data, right-click the file and select Properties. Select the Details tab and scroll through the information. The date the photo was taken should be listed.

Put the photos in the Pictures folder or a subfolder. In Explorer, click View, then Details. The files are listed in columns by Name, Type, Size and so on. Most likely, there is a 'Date created' column, which should be showing the date and time when the photos were downloaded and saved to disk.

Right-click any column heading to display a list of all available types, including Date, 'Date modified', 'Date created' and 'Date taken'. The best one to use for your purposes is Date, but 'Date taken' also works. Select one of them and clear the tick against the others. Now you can click the Date or 'Date taken' heading to sort photos by that information. Click the heading again to reverse the sort order.

To get the OneDrive app on your iPhone, install it from the App Store. The reason why OneDrive on your computer is blocked may be down to a Registry setting. Press Windows+R and enter `regedit`, then go to:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Policies\Microsoft\Windows\OneDrive

In some cases, OneDrive may be called SkyDrive instead. If there is a value on the right called DisableFileSync, double-click it and set the value to 0 (zero). If it doesn't exist, go to Edit, New, 'DWORD (32-bit) Value' and create it. Restart Windows afterwards.

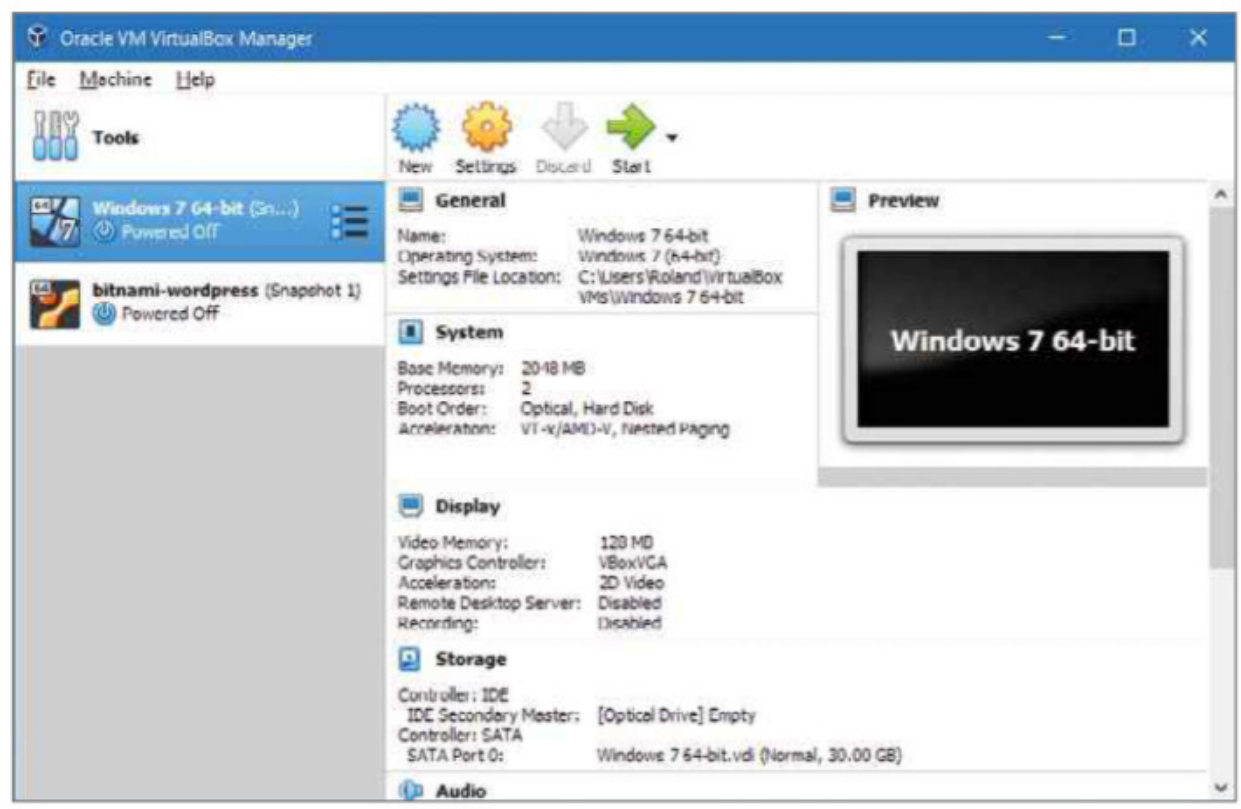
WINDOWS

Remove unwanted Windows watermark

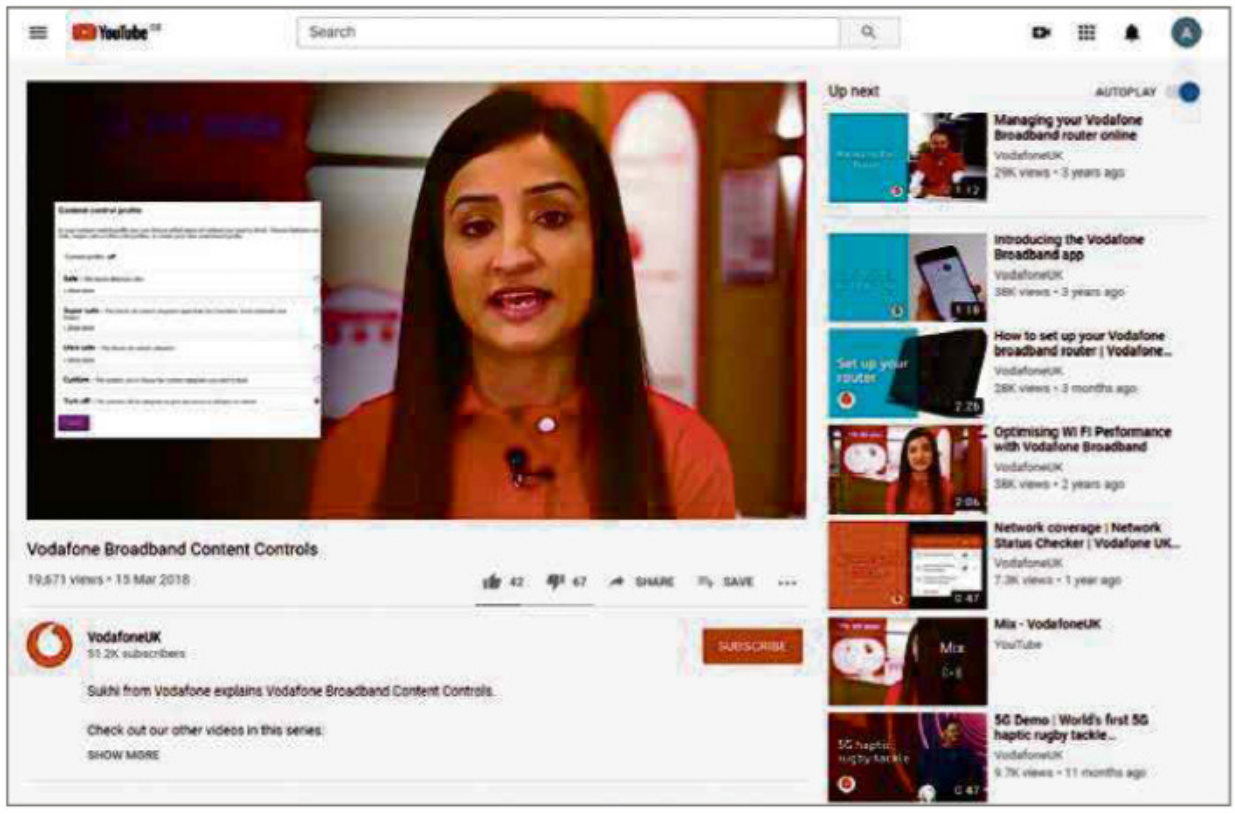
Q I have an HP Pavilion Desktop PC 570, now running Windows 10 Enterprise. Recently, I upgraded from Windows 10 Home to Enterprise, to enable Hyper-V for a project I was doing. However, when I finished upgrading, I realised there was a watermark on my screen.

It turns out my product key, bought from the Microsoft Store, didn't activate properly. I didn't mind the watermark much until I got into video editing, when it was hard to play back results without seeing it. Also, I wasn't able to enable dark mode.

Do you know a way to disable the watermark and enable dark mode? Even better, do you know how to make



Run Windows, Linux and other operating systems in a window using VirtualBox



Vodafone's YouTube channel provides advice on managing your parental controls

Windows 10 see my product key as genuine? If it helps, the error code I have in Settings is 0xC004C003 and I've tried Windows Troubleshooting – it just said "We can't find anything wrong. Are you connected to the internet?". I'm pretty sure I'm connected to the internet because I'm sending you this email!

Mr Anonymous, via email

A If the problem is with Windows installed on the computer, only Microsoft can fix the licence-key issue, so you'll have to contact them. However, here's what we think may be happening. Hyper-V enables you to create virtual machines to run other operating systems in a window on the desktop, such as Linux or another copy of Windows. Is your problem occuring in the Hyper-V version of Windows?

A Windows 10 Enterprise licence lets you run Hyper-V, but you need to buy a second licence to run Windows in the virtual machine. You can't use your Windows 10 Enterprise licence key again – error code 0xC004C003 means 'Product key blocked'.

It's too late in your case, but this may help other readers avoid the same problem: VirtualBox (virtualbox.org) lets you create virtual machines on Windows Home. You then only need one licence to run Windows in it, instead of two.

An unlicensed version of Windows doesn't let you change the Personalisation settings, which explains why dark mode is blocked.

SECURITY

Unblock access to TunnelBear VPN

Q For a couple of years, I have been happily using TunnelBear VPN (www.tunnelbear.com) with no problems. However, I recently changed my ISP from Sky to Vodafone, and now TunnelBear refuses to open from the Start menu. I have tried to open the TunnelBear website to search for information to help, but it just tells me "TunnelBear.com refused to connect".

Not only that, I get the same message from most other VPN sites. Either that or just a blank page. Any ideas? Is this my fault or something to do with Vodafone? The TunnelBear VPN works fine on my Android phone, though I still get the same message if I try to connect to TunnelBear.com.

Pete Hogg, via email

A If you were only having problems with TunnelBear, it would imply a TunnelBear problem, but being unable to connect to most VPN websites indicates that there is a general category block on VPNs. We have seen this at public Wi-Fi hotspots where there are restrictions on the type of sites people are allowed to access while sipping their coffee or shopping, but it doesn't usually happen at home.

One possibility is that parental controls have been set on the Vodafone router to prevent access to sites deemed unsuitable. Go into the router settings and turn off the controls. There's a video that might help at bit.ly/voda506.

Some people solved the problem by

WINDOWS

Get Bluetooth back after update

Q After the invitation to update my Acer Aspire V 15 to Windows 10 build 2004, I performed the update and all appeared to go well. However, when I went to use Bluetooth, it was gone. I looked in Device Manager but only the Bluetooth emblem was left, with no drivers or anything else. How do I get Bluetooth back?

Tony Leach, via email

A Occasionally, a Windows update will remove a hardware driver or replace it with a different version that isn't as good. However, there are ways to fix this.

Right-click the Start button and select Device Manager from the menu. Expand the Bluetooth section and, if there are any items, right-click them and select 'Update driver'. Click 'Search automatically for drivers'. If nothing is found, click 'Search for updated drivers on Windows Update'.

If there are no Bluetooth items, right-click the Bluetooth category or the computer name at the top, then select 'Scan for hardware changes'. If Bluetooth still isn't found, it means Microsoft has no drivers for it, so you will have visit your PC manufacturer's website to download them. You may need to search the site for the specific model of your computer.

Check whether you have any Bluetooth devices installed

replacing the Vodafone router with one of their own, but we wonder if the problem was simply due to the Vodafone router's parental controls being set too high and the replacement router not having these controls, which therefore fixed the issue.

Some tweaks to TunnelBear may also help. Open the app and go to the General tab in Preferences. If TCP Override is on, turn it off. Likewise, if it is off, turn it on. Find GhostBear on the Security tab in Preferences. TunnelBear recommends that it's turned off, but it can be enabled on restrictive networks to get around censorship problems.

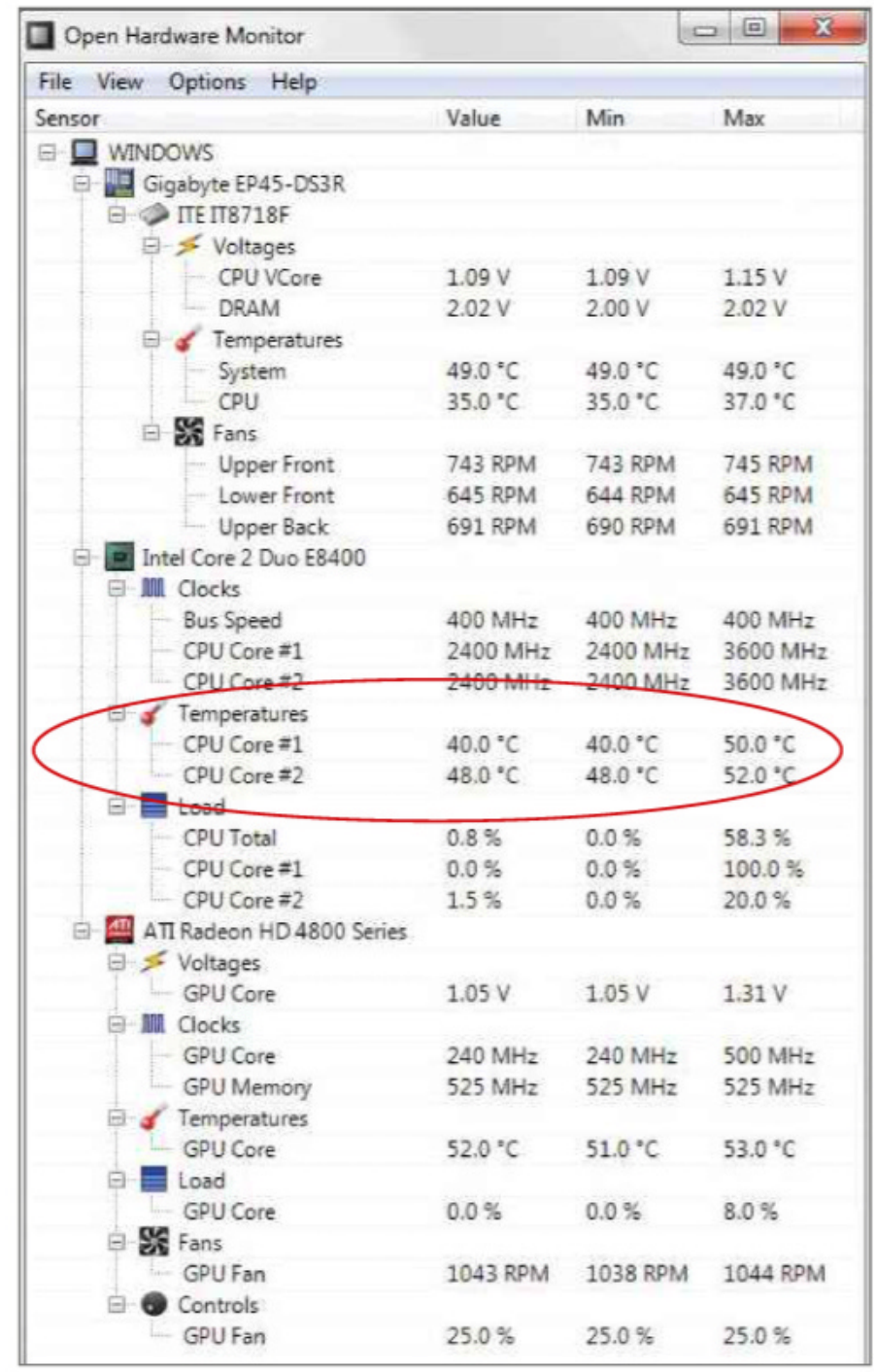
HARDWARE

Does a laptop need a fan?

Q For a few days, my laptop was producing a loud noise. It may have been the fan because I couldn't feel any air blowing out of it. The noise has now stopped but when I power on the laptop, I get a message saying something like "the computer cannot be started because the fan is not working," or words to that effect. However, there is an option to continue startup anyway.

I am using the computer right now to type this email, so the laptop is working, but the lack of fan has me worried. Is it safe to continue, especially as we are having such a hot summer? Mind you, knowing British weather, it won't last and it will be cold and raining by the time you answer this!

Rafael Thompson, via email



See how hot your processor is getting using the Open Hardware Monitor tool

A It's hard to say whether it's safe to use your laptop without a fan because it depends on how much heat the laptop produces, and how reliant it is on the fan to clear that heat. Some laptops run fairly cool most of the time, such as when you are browsing the web, checking email and so on, and they only need the fan for heavy-duty applications, such as gaming or video editing.

It would be best to repair the fan, but some laptops can be difficult to take apart so you may have to turn to a local computer repair shop for help.

In the meantime, a hardware-monitor tool, which monitors the temperature sensors inside the computer, will tell you how hot it is running. Open Hardware Monitor (openhardwaremonitor.org) is a free tool that shows system information such as CPU load, disk usage and temperature.

Intel says that it's very unlikely that you'll damage a processor by overheating it. A CPU will self-monitor the temperature and slow down the clock speed if it's too high. It may even stop completely or shut down the computer rather than exceed its temperature limits. Locking up and unexpected shutdowns are signs of a computer overheating.

We wouldn't advise using the computer if it's overheating but it might be fine for lightweight tasks until it can be repaired. We can't say what temperature is safe because every CPU is different. However, some will work at temperatures as high as 100˚C before shutting down.

WINDOWS

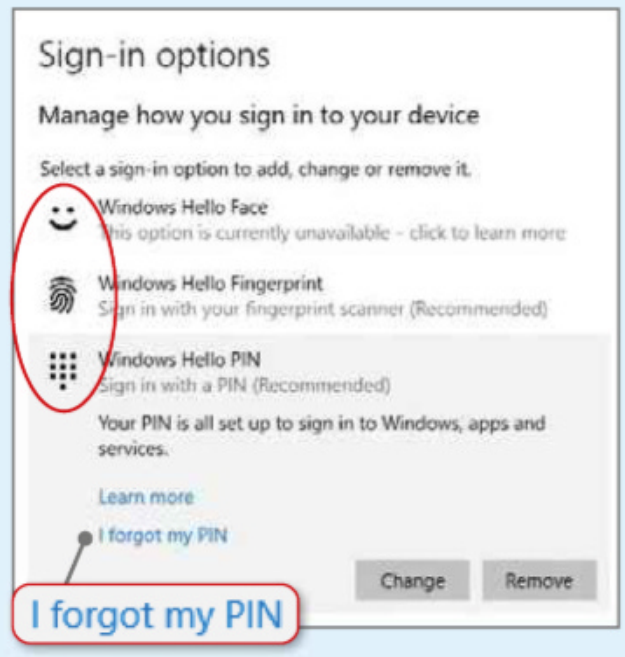
Reset a forgotten PIN

Q I am being asked for a PIN when downloading an app from the Microsoft Store in Windows 10. I don't recall setting a PIN. Is there a way to get rid of this request?

Len Watkins, via email

A The PIN is part of Windows Hello and it must have been set at some point – if not by you, then by someone else who uses your Microsoft account. This could be a partner or even a child, if you're signed into your account on another device, such as an Xbox.

To reset the Windows Hello PIN, open Windows settings and click Accounts, then 'Sign-in options'. Click Windows Hello PIN, then click the 'I forgot my PIN' link and follow the instructions to remove or reset it.



You can configure Windows Hello to sign in with a face, fingerprint or PIN

Open the Microsoft Store app on your computer and click the three-dot menu button in the top-right corner. Select Settings, then turn off 'Purchase sign-in' to avoid having to sign in when you want to download or buy anything.

This fortnight Roland has spent most evenings streaming TV to his PC and laptop, having ditched live TV entirely

Readers' Helpdesk

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

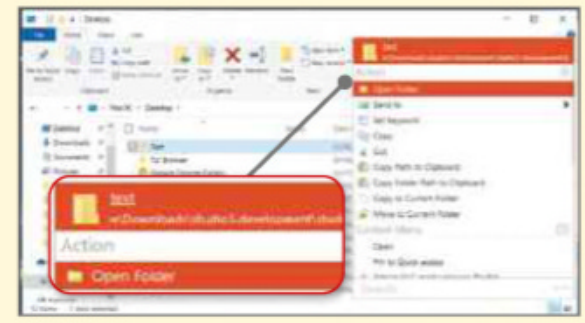
READERS RESPOND

Back Issues disc winner

GENERAL PC

Change File Explorer save locations

A I read Tommy Smith's question in Issue 501 (bit.ly/webuser501) describing a one-click method for changing the 'Save as' destination folder. This is not actually a part of Windows but comes from a small free tool called Listary (www.listary.com). I use it all the time and it's a must-have on my computer. It's primarily an instant-search tool that lets you open any Explorer window or click in a file dialogue box and start typing the name of a file to find it instantly.



Use Listary for faster File Explorer search

Nigel Head, 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.

SMARTPHONE

Q I know I can cast videos on my phone to my TV, but is there a way to beam programmes from my TV to my phone?

L Lyme, via email

EMAIL

Q I have thousands of unread emails in my secondary inbox. Is there any way to delete them all in one go? Gmail only lets me delete 30 at a time.

Pete Lambert, via email

WEBSITES

Stop Amazon's auto-renewal

Q I'm having difficulty cancelling an Amazon Prime subscription that I never requested. I tried to cancel Prime and even cancelled my Amazon account. I also called Amazon on two occasions regarding a possible Prime scam, but I have been ignored. Can you help?

John Thomas, via email

A While the Prime charge may seem like a scam, it's more likely to be the work of so-called 'dark patterns'. When you place an order as a non-Prime member, a splash screen pops up offering you the opportunity to take advantage of free delivery. Hidden in the small print, however, is evidence that delivery is far from free – you're signing up for a free trial for Prime, which automatically renews annually or monthly. Deep at the bottom of the page, typically in light grey that's easily missed, is the option to opt out, but Amazon banks on people ignoring it. We've lost count of the number of times this has happened to friends and family members.

If you still have access to your Amazon account, sign in and go to Accounts & Lists. In the drop-down menu, select Your Prime Membership, where you can view, manage and, most importantly, check details to see if they tally with your charge – such as the billing date. Also visit Memberships & Subscriptions and change the View menu to All Subscriptions, to clarify whether your account has ever had a legitimate Prime subscription. If you're certain this is a scam, contact your bank immediately.

Steve Clark, Features Writer

It's far too easy to unwittingly opt into an Amazon Prime subscription

WINDOWS

Fix PDF printing problems

Q I was pleased to see you mention PDF printing problems in the latest Windows 10 update (Need to Know, Issue 504, bit.ly/webuser504). I'd been having trouble saving a PDF of a newsletter to send to the printer. After trying several programs, I used Bullzip (www.bullzip.com), but still had problems with photos. Can you recommend a solution?

John Harris, via email

A Bullzip is an excellent tool to use as a workaround – although, thankfully, Microsoft seems to have fixed the issue with Update KB4567523. In the recent changelog, the company noted that the hotfix "addresses an issue that might prevent certain printers from printing. This issue might also affect software-based printers, such as when printing to PDF".

Check your computer is fully up to date, but also make sure to manually download this specific patch from the Microsoft Update Catalog at bit.ly/update506. Mind you, this exact issue reared its head on Windows 8.1, so this may not be the last we hear about it.

Steve Clark, Features Writer

Microsoft has fixed its print to PDF problems with an update

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

SMART HOME

Improve Google Assistant's sensitivity

Having recently bought the new Google Nest Mini smart speaker, I was interested to read the advice in Issue 503 (bit.ly/webuser503) regarding adjusting the Assistant's sensitivity. Looking at comments on the internet, it was clear that a lot of people were, like me, experiencing the same problem – frequently having to shout to get my voice commands recognised.

Many were having so many problems adjusting the sensitivity that they decided to go back to using the previous model. This seems a shame as the sound quality of the new Nest Mini is much improved.

Crank up the sensitivity of the Nest Mini if it's not hearing your commands

This is how I adjusted my unit. On the Google Home app, tap Home, then select the correct speaker from the list. From this screen, press the cog icon, then scroll almost to the bottom of the page to find '"Hey Google" sensitivity'. Drag the slider from the central Default position to 'Most sensitive' on the right.

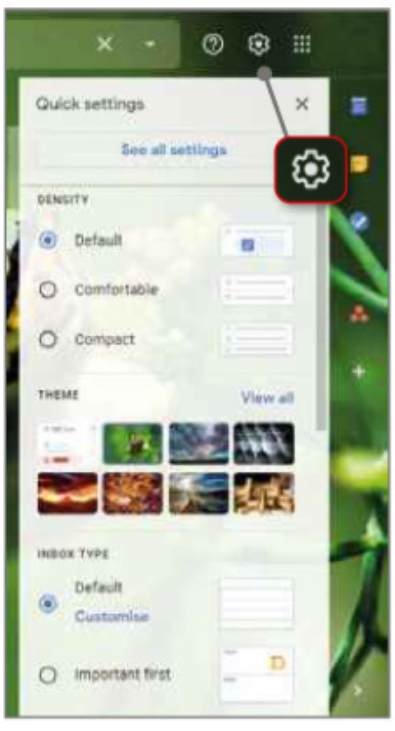
Trevor Bunce, via email

EMAIL

Use Gmail's quick settings

It's easy to miss new features in Gmail, because things change behind the scenes without you realising. I clicked the cog icon for the first time in ages and was surprised to see a completely new menu. When did that appear? If you've not seen it, click the cog icon and you'll find lots of interface settings right there in the menu, such as the inbox type, reading pane, theme and density.

Lee Allen, via email



Gmail's Quick Settings menu provides fast access to a range of handy options

BROWSERS

Find Edge extensions easily

Microsoft has finally updated its Edge Add-ons page (bit.ly/edge506). Perhaps *Web User* mentioning problems with the old layout has paid off, because rather than displaying every extension on a single page, it now features top picks across loads of different topics, such as productivity tools and ad blockers. It's yet to reach the dizzy heights of Firefox's excellent Add-ons page, which lets you search for recently updated and released tools, but it's a step in the right direction!

Sheila Barber, via email

It's now easier to access extensions for Microsoft Edge

BROWSERS

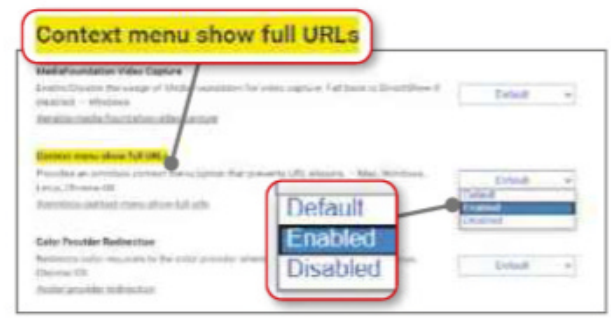
Show full URLs in Chrome

As your magazine has noted previously, Chrome's address bar no longer shows the full URL for websites, often stripping out 'https' and 'www'. However, if you need these, you can restore them using one of Google's experimental flags. Go to:

`chrome://flags/#omnibox-context-menu-show-full-urls`

Change the drop-down option to Enable, then restart the browser when prompted – you can now see the whole web address.

Jack Barnett, via email



Stop Chrome hiding full URLs by setting this flag

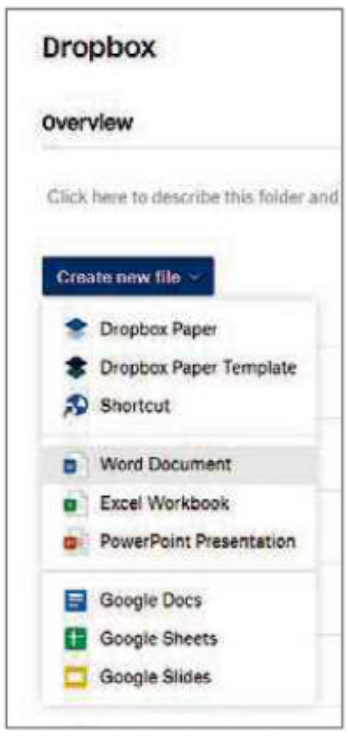
OFFICE

An office suite for Dropbox

I use Dropbox (www.dropbox.com) for online storage, rather than Google Drive (drive.google.com) or OneDrive (onedrive.com). However, OneDrive has Word, Excel and PowerPoint, and Drive has Docs, Sheets and Slides – applications that let you create and edit documents in the browser. But did you know that Dropbox can use these tools, too?

Assuming you have a Microsoft or Google account, and have previously visited and signed in, you can create and edit office documents from Dropbox without having to go to OneDrive or Google Drive. Visit Dropbox in a browser and, in the Files section, click 'Create new file'. Select Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Docs, Sheets or Slides as you prefer. If you have documents on your computer, drag them to Dropbox in a browser.

Move the mouse over a document,



Edit Word documents in Dropbox using the Word web app or Google Docs

such as a Word file, then click the down arrow next to Open and select either 'Word for the web' or Google Docs. I'm not sure if it's a bug but you only see this option if the browser window is wide enough. The document is opened and you can edit it as if you were on OneDrive or Google Drive. Any changes are saved back to Dropbox.

This is useful if Dropbox is your primary online storage service. I've been with Dropbox for years and have nearly 10GB of free space, which I've earned by taking up various offers over the years.

Pauline Adams, via email

VIDEO

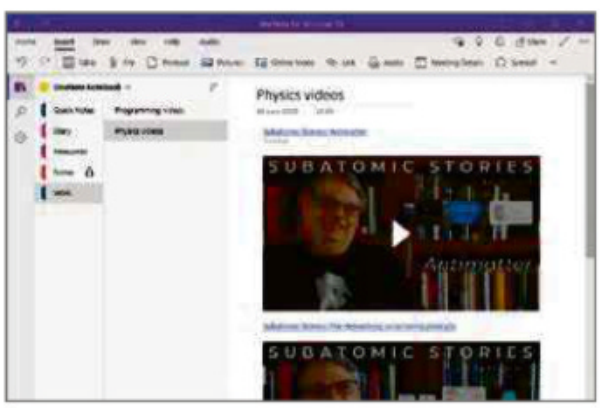
Store video collections in OneNote

It seems unnecessarily difficult to find YouTube videos I've previously watched. This is particularly annoying when I'm trying to follow a course or view a series of videos on a topic.

I know you can create playlists on YouTube but I prefer to store related videos in a OneNote note. When a video is playing on YouTube, right-click it and click 'Copy video URL'. You can then create a new note in the OneNote app (free from the Windows 10 Store) and paste it in. There's an Online Video button in the Insert toolbar, but pasting the link also seems to work. If you're watching a series, you can then go back to this video and find the next one in the sequence from the 'Up next' column.

You can create notes for different topics, create video collections and write your own notes underneath. It may be an odd thing to do, but it works for me!

Reggie Carter, via email



Paste the URLs of YouTube videos into a OneNote note to create a collection

WEBSITES

Soothe yourself with hundreds of ambient sounds

I often found household noise distracting when working from home, until I came across mynoise.net. This free website masks external sounds by generating ambient audio. Tracks are grouped together by use – for instance, for when you want to sleep, calm down or just block out background chatter. Since each track is pre-loaded, there's no audio streaming or data costs. As well as being browser-based, there are apps for Android, iOS and Amazon, and full albums on Spotify. There are plenty of customisation options for perfecting the balance, as the site is also intended to help those with hearing problems. I'm hooked on Pebble Beach and Primeval Forest right now.

Colin Leadbetter, via email

My Noise lets you block out background sounds

BROWSERS

Fine-tune text selection using the keyboard

Selecting text to copy from a web page can be fiddly but you can use your keyboard to make the process less hit and miss. Click and drag from the right to select the text on a web page, then hold down the Shift key and and use any of the arrow keys to grow or shrink the selection from the right. If you select the text by dragging across it backwards, from the left, you can then use the Shift and arrow keys to grow or shrink from that direction. It's handy for getting a selection just right before copying it.

M Cooper, via email

SOFTWARE

View your system info

Web User readers keen to find out more info about their PCs should download GFXplorer (bit.ly/gfxplorer506) – a free tool that displays system information. After deciding to upgrade parts of my PC, I thought it best to check my current build and what it could handle, and found GFXplorer to be essential. Cycling through the different tabs, I was able to see all the details about my computer, from processor to hard drives, all in one place, making my upgrade preparations a lot easier.

James Hannes, via email

This free tool lets you get to know your computer system better

BLUNDER OF THE FORTNIGHT

GENERAL PC

Fix audio problems with a USB adapter

I started my Windows 7 PC a few weeks ago but couldn't get any sound at all from either the front or back audio jack sockets. Then, yesterday, I dug out a USB headset that I haven't used for a while. It consists of a USB lead with a small control pad that has a jack socket for the headphone and mic unit. I plugged it all in and, to my joy, I had sound through the headset.

If your audio jacks aren't working, a USB audio adapter may be all you need

After dancing around for a few minutes, I had the brainwave to plug my sound system into the control pad instead of the headset. I'm delighted to report that I've now got my full sound system back.

Coops, 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

How I doubled my 4G broadband speed

I live in rural West Wales where BT is the sole provider of broadband, over copper wires (no fibre optic), at a very poor speed of 2Mbps and sometimes even less. The telephone and broadband stops working altogether when it rains, which BT has failed to repair. I was paying £45 a month for this.

I decided to try 4G. I bought an EE SIM and a Vodafone SIM, and tested the speeds around my property using my mobile phone and a speed-testing app. Vodafone was the fastest, so I purchased a 4G Vodafone GigaCube, which managed 25Mbps indoors. I pay £50 a month for this, which is only £5 more than BT but 12 times faster.

I was very happy with this speed, but then happened to read about the Poynting 4G-XPOL 0001 outdoor antenna (pictured, left) and decided to purchase one and try it. I mounted the outside antenna on my house's eaves, near the ridge tiles at the highest point, and connected it to the GigaCube hub via the supplied cables. I now get a broadband speed of 45Mbps broadband indoors. The Poynting 4G-XPOL 0001 has nearly doubled my 4G broadband speed, which is amazing.

These are both brilliant products that I would highly recommend to any of your readers who have slow broadband speeds over copper wires, but a good 4G signal. I am in no way affiliated with Vodafone or Poynting.

Legend Welsh, via email

Your ISP may be blocking the Internet Archive

I have been using the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine (web.archive.org) in a professional capacity for several years.

When I was forced to work from home, I discovered that the website was behaving oddly and searches for archived versions of web pages simply did not work in the expected way.

A search for information about the possible cause of this problem suggested that the site might be blocked by my ISP, which indeed turned out to be the case.

Vodafone (my ISP) allows me to block specific categories of web content and it turns out that it is blocking the Wayback Machine, and possibly other sections of the Internet Archive, because it's included in Vodafone's 'malicious content' category. I had to log into my Vodafone account and add an exception to be able to access the site.

This perhaps should be highlighted in your magazine.

Raymond Dalgleish, via email

Watch out for Facebook phishing scam

I have recently received phishing emails pretending to be Facebook. These say that my account had been accessed from a different device, often quoting a device I do not own.

The emails ask me to click a link to confirm to Facebook that it was or was not me who accessed my account. Naturally, I have not clicked anything. To use a Navy expression: "I did not come out on the last ration boat".

I have forwarded one of the emails to the Facebook phishing address (phish@fb.com), but thought you might like to know about this scam, so you can warn other readers.

Alan Gordon, via email

Windows users deserve better updates

I just wanted to thank you for bringing the fantastic program Wu10Man (bit.ly/wu10man504) to my attention in your Best Free Software section in Issue 504. It is probably the most useful tool I have ever downloaded, and works a treat! There is just one slight problem: it sometimes it needs to be disabled when downloading certain programs, especially

Quiz Answers: Issue 505

1 Bournemouth
2 Weymouth
3 Swansea
4 Cowes
5 Padstow
6 Penzance

WINNER!
Well done to **Steve Rigby** who wins a Web User Back Issues Disc

WAYBACK MACHINE
2011

from the Microsoft Store.

The frequency of (usually pointless) Windows 10 updates had always irked me. Without fail, they cause problems. Frankly, users deserve better and updates should be thoroughly tested prior to release. The worst was from version 1809 to 1909. It took me a couple of weeks to realise that it had stopped my backups working. Why did they tinker with it in the first place? I went back to version 1809 and everything was fine again. I'm now on version 2004 and have used Wu10Man to good effect since.

Bob Prichard, via email

Amazon's prices are like a rollercoaster

I'd like to warn other readers to be careful when buying items from Amazon at the price stated. I bought a BenQ monitor (as recommended by *Web User*, bit.ly/benq495) for £184.99 for one of my systems. I was very happy with both the price and the monitor and, after a few weeks, decided to purchase a second monitor for another system. The price had shot up to £213.97 – an increase of nearly £30.

Now, there is either a young apprentice picking out random numbers on millions of items or the software built into Amazon's system is varying the price of items automatically. I bookmarked the Amazon page and checked it regularly over the next few weeks. It was like watching a rollercoaster ride. The price changed at least 15 times with the highest reaching £242.61. I took screenshots to prove it (see left). I eventually bought the monitor when the price dropped to £184.97.

I cannot fault Amazon's service, which is exceptional, and if you are happy with the price stated for an item then buy it. But if you are not in a hurry, then wait. The price goes down as well as up, and you could save yourself nearly £60!

Stephen Preston, via email

What you say...

DO YOU SWITCH BETWEEN DIFFERENT WEB BROWSERS OR JUST STICK WITH ONE?

I'm a great browser switcher. I have tried them all, but now mainly use Edge and Vivaldi on my PC and Brave on my Android phone. I used Firefox for years, but went right off it when it became so resource-greedy.

Eff Clarke

I use a very old version of Firefox (47) as my everyday browser, because there's an extension called CoolPreviews that I cannot live without and have never found a replacement for. I also use Firefox's latest version for those sites that need a modern browser, and Chrome for all video requirements, because most video sites seem to work best in Chrome.

Rich Grove

I only use Brave. I did have Vivaldi installed but it kept blocking images from showing, so I deleted it.

Dean Stockton

My main browser is Chrome. I use Firefox for one site, just to keep the login details separate. I also use Pale Moon once in a while to test with if a site is playing up.

Paul Steel

Opera is my daily browser but, on very rare occasions, I fire up Internet Explorer for older websites that work better in IE.

Carl Briggs

My favourite browsers are Chrome and Yandex (browser.yandex.com). The latter is very fast, supports both Chrome and Opera extensions, and has DuckDuckGo as its default search engine.

Mike Lawler

DO YOU STILL TAKE PHOTOS WITH A 'PROPER' CAMERA AS WELL AS YOUR PHONE?

My 'proper' camera rarely sees the light of day since smartphone cameras have become so good. It's so much easier to use my phone, which is always nearby if not on my person.

Gary Olsen

As a wedding photographer, I use a proper camera and a small one when I'm out on trips. For a quick snap, I will use my phone. What I find funny is that, years ago, people complained that cameras were too big to carry around and now they carry mobile phones that are often even bigger!

John Young

I can't remember the last time I used a proper camera. I'm not a professional photographer so the 12-megapixel camera on my phone is all I need.

Brian Brown

99% of the pictures I take are with a proper camera. I only use my phone when I want a photo and don't have a camera around. I'm not one of those people who need to take pictures of anything and everything, though.

Caroline Monroe

I still use and prefer a 'proper' camera. My complaint against phone cameras is that I can't see what's on the screen on a sunny day, but I like that my pictures are uploaded to Google Photos automatically.

John Hewett

I don't use my digital camera any more. My Samsung Galaxy phone takes superb photos and videos.

Geoffrey Boow

My 15-year-old phone-obsessed son saved up and bought himself a Canon 750D on eBay last week. So I guess there is still a market for them!

Michelle Austin

Yes, I have an Olympus SZ-31MR. It has an amazing zoom and, quite frankly, my iPhone does not.

Barry Griggs

Page 404

Barry Collins despairs at the daft ways that politicians have tried to control social media

This lot will never bring Facebook to book

If there's one thing that's almost guaranteed to have me howling like a dog with its tail slammed in a car door, it's politicians trying to get a handle on technology. The House of Lords Select Committee on Democracy and Digital Technologies is a panel formed predominantly of peers with little or no expertise in technology, chaired by Lord Puttnam – the film producer best known for *Chariots of Fire*. A great man, doubtless, but about as qualified to head up a digital technology committee as I am to direct the next Bond film.

Puttnam and co have spent the past two years "considering democracy and digital technologies" and have reached a set of conclusions that anyone faintly qualified could have told them at the outset. "The digital and social media landscape is dominated by two behemoths – Facebook and Google". Well, hold the front page.

"They largely pass under the radar, operating outside the rules that govern electoral politics" – ah, you've noticed Mr Trump won the election, then? "Platforms like Facebook and Google seek to hide behind 'black box' algorithms which choose what content users are shown" – computers, innit?

> "Asking these organisations to regulate fast-moving social media is like asking Sir Bobby Charlton to man-mark Raheem Sterling"

However, if the committee's conclusions win it the Basil Fawlty Lifetime Achievement Award for the Bleeding Obvious, then the recommendations are something to behold. Take the first one off the rack, for example, in which their Lordships recommend that "the relevant experts in the ASA, the Electoral Commission, Ofcom and the UK Statistics Authority should cooperate through a regulatory committee on political advertising".

Wow. Talk about gathering the four paper tigers of the apocalypse. The ASA spends its entire, futile existence banning adverts that stopped running months ago, so slow is it to react to complaints. And long-term readers will know of my overwhelming scorn for Ofcom's painful inability to regulate the broadband market, to the extent that we're now almost rock bottom of the OECD league table for fibre-broadband adoption. The Electoral Commission, meanwhile, has achieved the rare feat of uniting both Leavers and Remainers in calls for it to be scrapped; at least the UK Statistics Authority could keep a detailed track of how ineffective the other three are. Asking these four to regulate something as fast-moving as social media is like asking Sir Bobby Charlton to man-mark Raheem Sterling.

Then there's the recommendation that "the Government should establish an independent ombudsman for content moderation decisions to whom the public can appeal should they feel they have been let down by a platform's decisions". Got the hump that Facebook has removed a post about how irredeemably inept your local MP is? Then write to the independent ombudsman and wait nine months while yet another overworked, understaffed quango manages to get your complaint to the top of the in-tray, by which time the whole thing will have blown over.

The problem with appointing a panel of clueless peers to oversee new technology is that they will come up with 20th-century solutions to 21st-century problems. They've wasted two years on this nonsense and achieved nothing. I'm angry and you should be too – it's your money they've wasted doing it.

Illustration: Andrew Torrens

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

WebUser

SUBSCRIPTION OFFER
FOR MORE INFO SEE PAGE 62

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