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How the three Rs can breathe new life into your phone, tablet & other devices

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Homepage

Issue 510

If it *is* broke, *do* fix it!

I've lost count of how many of my phones, tablets, iPods and other gadgets have died over the years. After going through the seven stages of grief, from shock and denial (furiously jabbing buttons to try and bring the device back to life) to resignation and hope (deciding to buy a new one), I invariably end up shoving the knackered item in a drawer and forgetting about it.

What a wasteful fool I've been, because there's gold in them thar drawers, once you apply the principle of the three Rs: repair, reuse and recycle. In this issue's cover feature, Jane Hoskyn explains why you should never discard your defective devices, but instead try performing your own DIY fixes – tackling everything from scratched screens to dead batteries and worn-out wires. She also reveals clever new uses for obsolete tech, turning old phones into dashcams, tablets into photo frames, routers into ham-radio networks and other apparent junk into money.

There's plenty to gain in the Rs!

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

abc Average sales, Jan-Dec 2019, 24,266 copies per issue

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4 How to make room for Microsoft's massive new Flight Simulator **page 67**

5 How to add a spellchecker and dictionary to your favourite Windows programs **page 71**

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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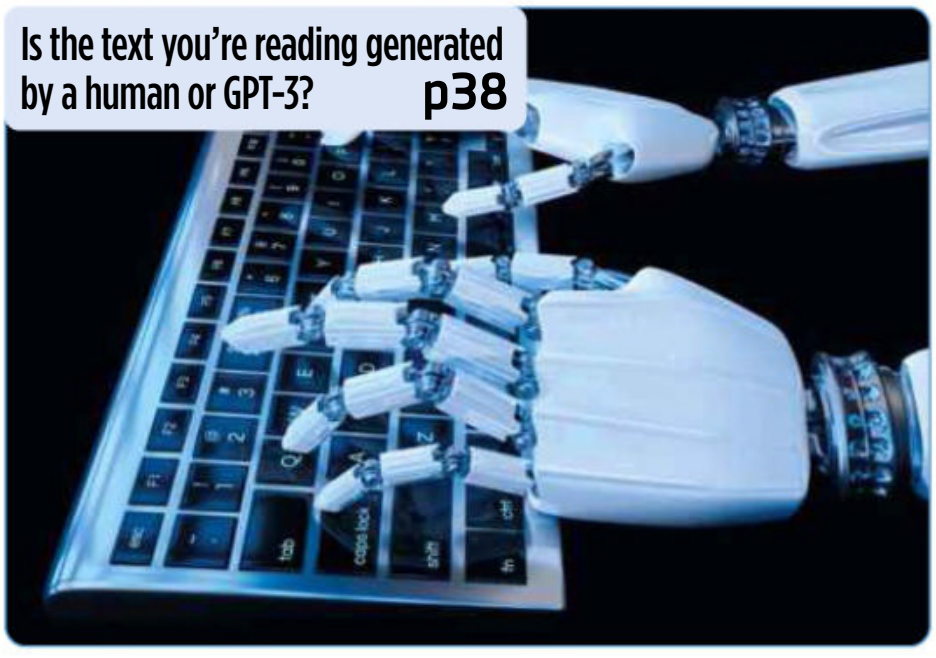

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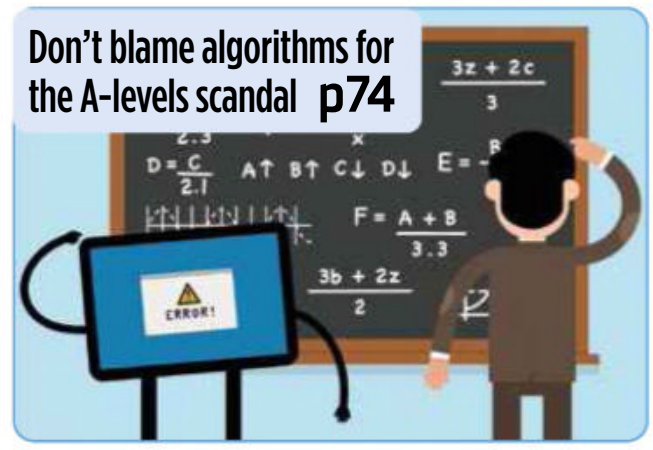

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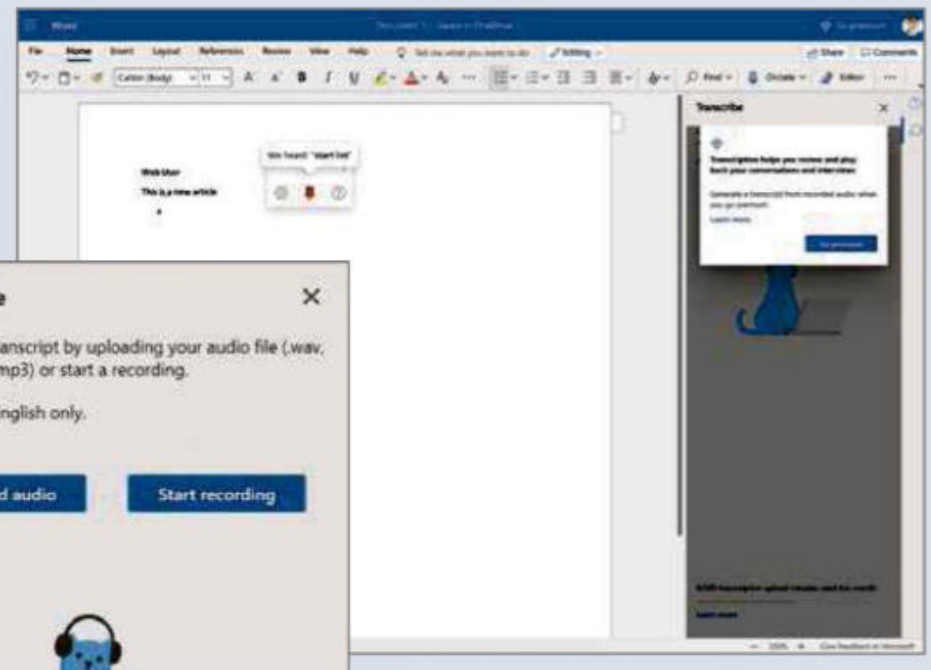
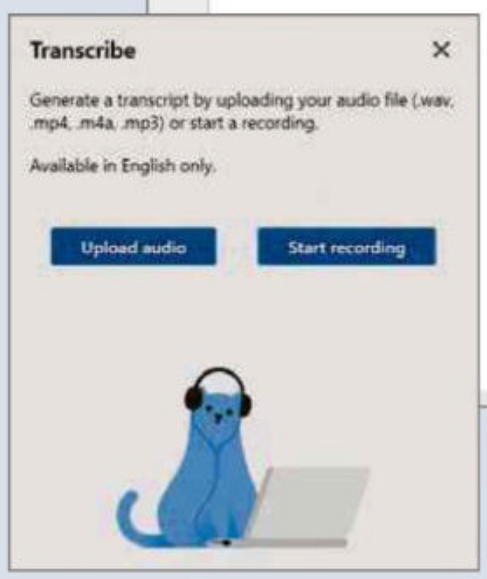
What's New Online

Dictate and transcribe in Word online

Microsoft Word on the web already allowed you to dictate the content of your documents, provided you've granted it access to your device's microphone. Now it's going further by letting you manipulate your text using voice commands that can organise, format, edit and add various elements.





You can add punctuation (such as "full stop", "comma" and "question mark") or include symbols (for example, "percent sign" and "pound sterling sign") by simply uttering a command. Phrases for formatting – such as "bold last sentence" and "start list" – will help you avoid having to reach for your keyboard. You can even add emoji, clear formatting and align text. A full list of commands can be viewed at bit.ly/commands510.

Dictate isn't the only addition – Word now has a Transcribe function for (paid-for) Microsoft 365 subscribers, which works with real-time recordings so you can start editing the text of a conversation right away. Similar to Otter.ai (otter.ai) and Trint (trint.com), it can detect different speakers, time-stamp the audio, allow editing and let you insert quotes in a document. You can also work with pre-recorded conversations saved as MP3, WAV, M4A or MP4 files, although you're limited to five hours each month and the files must be no greater than 200MB in size.

Both Dictate and Transcribe can be accessed from the main toolbar in Word online.
bit.ly/wordonline510

Hack and slash through Google's dinosaur game

dinoswords.gg

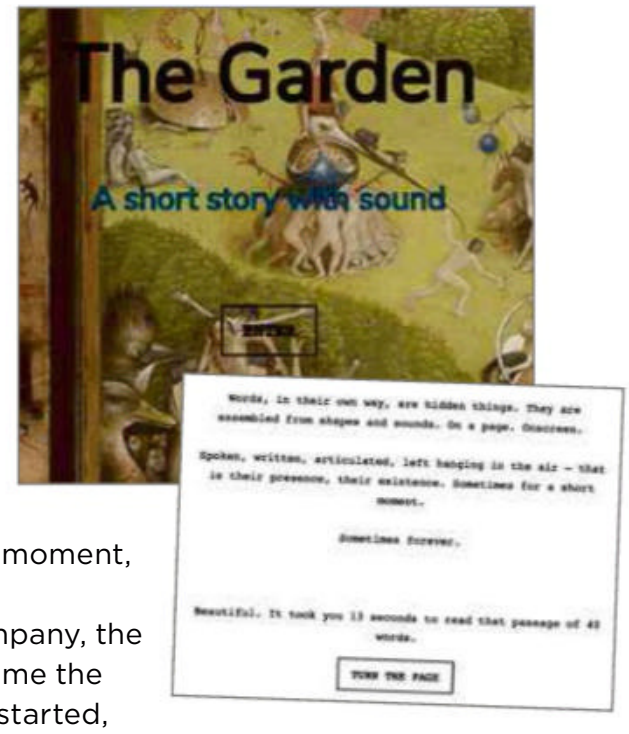
One of the best features in Chrome springs into life when the browser is in its least useful state: offline. The message indicating a lack of an internet connection shows a picture of a dinosaur which, when you press the Spacebar, turns into a fun running game that requires you to leap over cacti for as long as possible.

A group of developers has taken the concept a step further, equipping the dinosaur with 26 different items, weapons and actions in a new game called Dino Swords.

Accessed via a new website (you'll need to be online for this one), you amass your arsenal as you run, with each weapon assigned to a particular key shown at the bottom of the screen. These let you get past obstacles as you attempt to amass a high score. If you do particularly well, you may even end up on the leaderboard.

Explore a story through words and sound

bit.ly/garden510

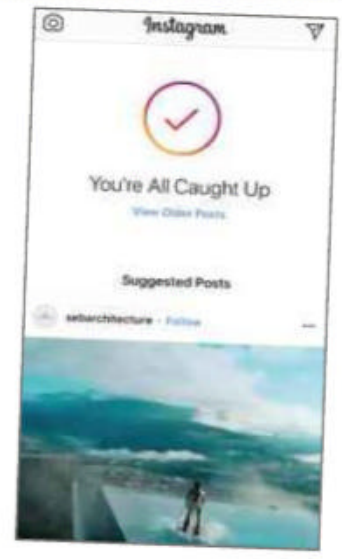


This immersive slice of fiction not only seeks to engage you with words but with audio, too. As such, The Garden suggests you grab a pair of headphones – claiming it helps lend a sense of imagined space – before playing out the narrative using words that appear and disappear at what's determined to be the right moment, often to dramatic effect.

Created by a theatre company, the idea is that the words become the actors but, before you get started, you're tested on how fast you can read. This determines the number of words that will appear every second and you're told how long the "performance" will take in total. As you read, sounds, music and images (from *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymous Bosch) tie in with the story, making for a compelling interactive experience.

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

View suggested Instagram posts



www.instagram.com

Keep scrolling on Instagram and, after seeing a message saying you're all caught up, you'll now be encouraged to keep swiping. A new Suggested Posts feature showcases accounts of potential interest (as well as ads). You can indicate your lack of interest in a particular post via the three-dot menu, and the option to view older posts remains.

Keep the Daleks at bay

bbc.in/2WghrhO

The free-to-play CBBC online game Nightfall has introduced Doctor Who to one of its five "REM" zones, inviting young players aged between eight and 13 to work with their friends to take on the dastardly Daleks. Available until 29 September, the game allows up to 20 players to style their Nightfaller characters as Jodie Whittaker's Doctor or one of the enemy Cybermen to do battle. The game explores a cartoon-like "dreamscape" and is controlled using your keyboard and mouse. It aims to teach youngsters that worries and fears can be conquered, particularly when they work with others.

View ancient creatures in AR

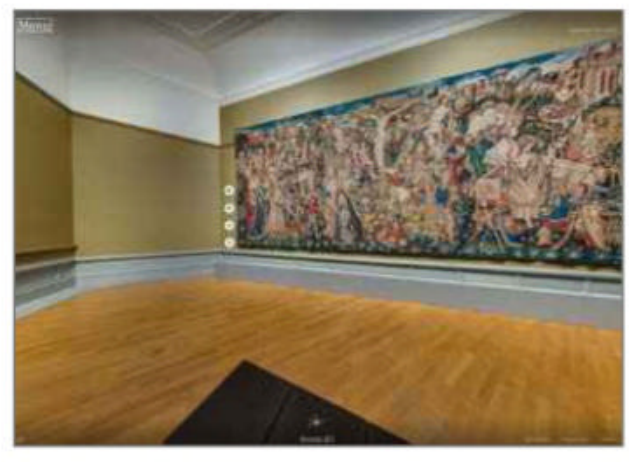
www.google.co.uk

Google Arts & Culture is going back in time, allowing you to take a look at ancient creatures via the power of augmented reality. Having teamed up with museums in London, Moscow and Washington, DC, you can view a tiny crustacean called a cambropachycope, whose head was full of compound eyes, or check out a 480 million-year-old marine animal. The app for iOS and Android also includes a look at the blue whale and a spotted trunkfish, which all loom into view when you move your device in a circular motion. You can capture photos and videos, and share your discoveries with others.

Explore Van Eyck's virtual exhibition

virtualtour.vaneyck2020.be

Take a look at the paintings of the 15th-century Flemish painter Jan van Eyck by embarking on a 360-degree tour around the Ghent Museum of Fine Arts. You can visit various gallery rooms and zoom into the paintings for a closer look, and be sure to click the audio and text guide icons dotted around to discover more information about the exhibits.



NEW VOICE COMMANDS

Get a snapshot of your day

Say "Hey Google, show me my day" on an Android device to get a time-adjustable Snapshot summary of your tasks, reminders, the weather, info about your commute and even recipe recommendations.

Check if it's raining

Siri can tell you the weather but you can now ask "Do I need an umbrella?" for a simple raincheck.

Use voice commands with TikTok

Launch the Alexa app and you can now say "Open TikTok", search for a specific type of video or say "Ask TikTok to start recording" for when you're filming hands-free.

Look for great eBay prices

www.ebay.co.uk

When searching for a product on eBay, look for a new Great Price badge that flags up competitively priced listings. This is based on a seller's status, newness of the product and comparison with similar listings, but sellers cannot actually request a badge.

Filter words in Steam chats

store.steampowered.com

Steam has rolled out a Labs experiment that lets you filter words in chats and supporting games. Go to your Account preferences and you can add words that you do and don't like. Profanities and slurs can be replaced with symbols.

Find places in Google Maps

www.google.co.uk/maps

Tap the Saved tab in the Google Maps app to see your most recently saved places at the top of the page. By turning on Location History, you can also check where you've been and see nearby saved places.

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Need to Know

Amazon deletes 20,000 reviews following fraudulent activity

What happened?

If you're shopping on Amazon and spot a product with a long list of five-star reviews, they may be fake, according to an investigation by the *Financial Times*, which has prompted the online store to delete 20,000 'customer' reviews.

The investigation revealed that the top-ranked reviewer on the Amazon .co.uk site was doling out a five-star score every few hours, covering £15,000 in products in August. His profile disappeared after the *FT* contacted him, while another two top-ranked reviewers also deleted their histories and profiles, with one changing their profile photo to the words "please go away".

Most of the products reviewed were from Chinese brands, some of whom offer free items in return for positive ratings via Facebook or messaging groups. The reviewer spotted by the *FT* said he wasn't paid for the reviews, but the products – ranging from laptops to gazebos – appeared to be listed for sale on eBay.

Amazon has since removed the questionable reviews and said it would investigate the report. The company says it analyses reviews before they go public, looking at 10 million each week. Amazon has previously said it uses AI for such moderation, and bans anyone who violates its terms.

Amazon's terms forbid users from posting reviews in exchange for free or discounted products, except via its own in-house Vine programme, which links product makers with reviewers. But those reviews need not be positive.

Credit: Elena Fragoso / Shutterstock.com

Fakespot analyses customer reviews on Amazon and identifies fake ones

Figures from the Fakespot website (www.fakespot.com), which analyses fraud on sites such as Amazon, found that the level of fake reviews was worse on Amazon.co.uk than elsewhere, with more than half of all products listed featuring false ratings.

The report comes as the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) is investigating fake or manipulated reviews on online stores. The watchdog said in May that it was looking into suspicious reviews where a single user looks at an "unlikely range" of products or services – which is what the *FT* report seems to reveal – as well as businesses that manipulate reviews to come off better than intended. It's also examining how websites manage paid-for and incentivised reviews.

How will it affect you?

Most of us consider the star rating and reviews when looking for a product to buy on Amazon or other retail platforms. This investigation – and others before it – suggests that those reviews aren't wholly trustworthy, so if you don't know the product or the manufacturer, be wary.

When shopping on Amazon, it's worth looking at the full range of reviews because whatever paid-for reviews a product may have, it won't stop unimpressed customers posting a negative one. Scroll down the listing page to the reviews and click to see four-star or three-star write-ups, which may give a more realistic insight. You can also click to see what other products a reviewer has written about – if the list seems too random or lengthy to be a real person, perhaps disregard their comment. If you do spot a dodgy review, you can click the "report abuse" button to notify Amazon.

If you're still unsure, try searching for reviews of the product on sites other than Amazon. Alternatively, install the Fakespot browser extension to analyse reviews and determine if they can be trusted. And if you do buy a product you're not satisfied with, get a refund from the seller or Amazon.

What do we think?

Sadly, this isn't a new problem. Amazon may be trying to stop dodgy reviews, but nine of its top 10 ranked reviewers were accepting free products for their posts, so it's clearly not doing enough.

Amazon uses AI and machine learning to watch for dodgy reviews, but it took a human reporter at the *FT* to spot that one reviewer was posting multiple times a day. It's clear that Amazon needs to do more to address these problems or the CMA may force its hand.

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

Virgin offers budget broadband for the needy

What happened?

Virgin Media has unveiled a new broadband package designed to help people facing financial uncertainty because of the coronavirus. The ISP's new Essential Broadband plan will cost just £15 a month, and have a speed limit of 15Mbps.

The package will only be available to web users who are claiming Universal Credit. As of July, there were 5.6 million people on the social security system, a figure that's significantly climbed throughout the pandemic.

How will it affect you?

The Essential Broadband plan will begin later this year and initially be available only to existing Virgin Media customers who are on Universal Credit. To sign up, customers fill in an online form proving their status.

Alongside the discount, the contract will have no price changes and no fixed term, so it can be cancelled at any time without penalty. If you stop receiving Universal Credit, you can switch to any other Virgin Media package or stay on the Essential Broadband plan at £23 a month. If you're over 25 and on Universal Credit, you'll receive about £410 a month, which means every few pounds you save can make a real difference.

If you do switch to this plan, note that it's for broadband only: your existing phone or TV contract won't be retained, and will be billed separately.

What do we think?

There are other broadband packages that cost less than £20 a month, but the consistency in pricing and no fixed-term contract are additional features that make this a particularly empathetic move from Virgin Media. Plenty of us are going through difficult times right now with a recession sparked by the pandemic, but broadband is an essential service for keeping in touch with friends and family, applying for jobs and keeping entertained when in quarantine. Making it a little easier for customers in tough times is a good idea that other broadband providers should offer, too.

Security flaw found in Windows Defender

What happened?

Security researchers have revealed that Defender, Microsoft's built-in security software, can be used to download malicious files. Researcher Mohammad Askar revealed on Twitter that he was able to use a command-line tool in Defender to download a threat-emulation program, while security site Bleeping Computer actually downloaded a ransomware sample (bit.ly/334PKwT).

This suggests that a piece of malware could use Defender to download files it needs to attack a PC, though that would require the malware getting past Defender or other antivirus software in the first place.

The report comes as Microsoft has explained why it no longer lets users remove Defender, because it would allow an attacker to abuse the Registry to disable the security software.

How will it affect you?

The Defender download attack is a clever workaround, but there's no evidence it's being used by hackers. If you're running Defender or another antivirus solution, it should stop malware being installed in the first place. Defender also scans downloaded files as a second layer of protection.

There's no reason to disable Defender. If you're using another piece of antivirus software, it will be automatically disabled; if you're not, Microsoft wants you to have at least Defender as protection to help keep your PC safe.

What do we think?

Keeping web-connected computers safe isn't easy. There's always a flaw that can be exploited or a bug someone hasn't yet spotted. So it's great that researchers are finding potential weak points in systems such as Defender, so Microsoft can build in protections – and even better to know there's already a level of protection in place. We're not keen on losing any aspect of control over our computers, but it's sensible for Microsoft to lock down its protection, even if that means we can't wholly disable Defender.

UK broadband speeds among slowest in Europe

What happened?

An annual study charting worldwide broadbands speeds has found the UK has the eighth slowest in Europe. To put it another way, out of 29 Western European states, the UK placed 22nd.

The report, from Cable.co.uk and M-Lab (bit.ly/2Z3p8LG), is based on 577 million global speed tests across 221 countries. It suggests the UK has dropped from having the 34th fastest broadband in the world last year to 47th fastest in 2020. Meanwhile, countries such as Monaco and Gibraltar have shot up the table.

One of the biggest issues, according to Cable.co.uk's Dan Howdle, is Britain's failure to deliver full fibre broadband. The consumer telecoms analyst said: "The UK is comparatively late in its rollout of pure fibre networks, which is causing it to stagnate while other nations gain ground. It is obviously easier to upgrade a country or territory to full fibre, the smaller it happens to be. However, the UK still finds itself a long way behind many nations of equal or greater size".

After conducting 44,416,381 tests in the UK, using 12,266,029 unique IP addresses, the study confirmed that the average download speed here clocks in at 37.82 Mbps. In a country where 95% of residents regularly use the internet, that's not to be sniffed at.

But it pales in comparison to European countries such as Denmark (85.03Mbps) and Switzerland (110.45Mbps), and even the British island Jersey (218.37Mbps).

How will it affect you?

Slower internet speeds means it takes slightly longer to reach websites, stream films and download videos. To put the report's findings into context, it takes an average of 18 minutes to download a 5GB file in the UK, whereas in Switzerland, it takes just six minutes. Until full fibre broadband reaches every corner of the country, those figures aren't likely to change any time soon.

If you're a reader in Lichtenstein, though, congratulations: you officially have the fastest broadband in the world. With lightning-fast average speeds of almost 230Mbps, you can download a 5GB file in just under three minutes.

What do we think?

This news will come as no surprise to many UK residents who have long complained about slow internet speeds. But it's not all doom and gloom. Average speeds may not be lightning fast but they're serviceable, especially when compared to places like Cambodia (5.2Mbps) or, at the bottom of the table, Southern Sudan (0.58Mbps).

Still, this poor ranking should serve as a prod to the UK government to make good on its promise of "gigabit broadband sprouting in every home" by the end of 2025.

FIRST LOOK

TCL 10 TabMax

www.tcl.com

You may not recognise the TCL brand, which manufactures TVs, mobile phones and audio gear, but you may have used it before – in the past, the company supplied the hardware for many Vodafone tablets and devices from Alcatel.

Now, TCL is launching two of its own branded tablets: the 10 TabMax and the 10 TabMid, both aimed at the affordable tablet market.

The 10 TabMax features a 10.3in IPS LCD screen that harnesses TCL's NxtVision. This system optimises the tablet's display, bringing crisper, more detailed images to the screen – a feature already used by some of TCL's smartphones. To protect users' eyes, the TabMax also features blue light reduction and alerts when you get too close to the screen.

Inside the chassis, you'll find an octa-core MediaTek MT8768T processor, 4GB of RAM and a standard 64GB of internal storage, all running on a respectable 8000mAH battery. The camera is equally impressive for the price, with a 13-megapixel rear camera and an 8-megapixel shooter on the front, so you won't have any difficulty capturing videos in 1080p.

Those specs drop when it comes to the 8in TabMid. Powered by a Snapdragon 665 processor on 4GB RAM, you get a barely passable 8-megapixel rear camera and a 5-megapixel front-facing one. On the plus side, it also features the company's NxtVision technology – although you'll need to see past the thick bezels surrounding the screen.

The TCL 10 TabMax is set to be priced at around £249, with an upgraded 4G edition for £299. You'll also be able to buy a handful of accessories, including a stylus and keyboard case, once the tablet launches in the UK by the end of this year.

WHAT'S THE RUMOUR

Is Windows 10 introducing a Wonder Bar?

Apple's Touch Bar is one of the highlights of the MacBook Pro. Situated just above the keyboard, it provides quick access to commands and contextual shortcuts for different apps.

Images leaked online show a Windows 10 keyboard coupled with a similar feature called the Wonder Bar, fuelling rumours that, as part of Microsoft's plan to bring key Windows 10X features to its traditional operating system, we're about to see the arrival of the Touch Bar-style tool.

In Windows 10X, the Wonder Bar provides access to emoji, your clipboard and specific commands in apps. It's believed that the Windows 10 version will get a makeover to include optimised typing on dual-screen devices, access to GIFs and an updated emoji picker and, like Apple's Touch Bar, allow you to control the cursor via the bar.

Alongside touchscreen support for dual-screen devices, the new and improved Wonder Bar is expected to be made available for single-screen devices via dedicated hardware.

LIKELIHOOD RATING

✓✓✓✓✓

There's good reason for Microsoft to make this move. The technology already exists, and the company is introducing other Windows 10X features such as an improved Start menu and Action Centre, and faster system updates, so introducing the Wonder Bar is a no-brainer.

With Microsoft's imminent Surface Duo launch, and the long-rumoured Surface Neo tablet, it's the perfect time to bring the Wonder Bar to a wider audience. As the Surface laptop range shows, Microsoft is keen to compete with Apple hardware, and the Wonder Bar is part of that premium experience.

Only two questions linger over its arrival on traditional Windows 10 computers: are there any potential technical issues and how much extra will the inclusion of a Wonder Bar – if that is indeed what it ends up being called – add to the cost?

What's new on Kickstarter

Our favourite new project on the crowdfunding site

ZEF

bit.ly/2QSirrf | From £26

One of the biggest complaints about face masks is that they are uncomfortable to wear. ZEF aims to solve this problem with a lightweight, ergonomically designed device that you slip inside your mask to sit under your mouth and help you breathe more easily. ZEF's developers claim it "helps reduce headaches, moisture, foggy glasses and itchy skin" and runs silently when turned on. It'll even make it easier to speak through your mask. On a full charge, which takes 30 minutes, battery life lasts around four hours. Back the project to get your own ZEF from £26, with double packs for £52.

WEBOMETER

WE LIKE...

App-free contact-tracing arrives on phones

Google and Apple have updated their contact-tracing capabilities so public health authorities can directly notify Android and iOS users if they've potentially been exposed to the coronavirus, without them needing to install a dedicated app.

Intel unveils new company logo

Intel has redesigned its logo for only the second time in its history, giving it a more modern appearance while retaining the square dot above the 'i'. The company also plans to "modernise" its iconic five-note "bong" jingle later this year.

WE DON'T LIKE...

Social networks fail to tackle misinformation

Social networks including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are failing to remove misleading and "harmful" posts about coronavirus vaccinations, according to campaign group CCDH, which flagged more than 900 examples of misinformation.

NetWalker ransomware targets businesses

A ransomware group known as 'NetWalker' has been linked with a spate of attacks on businesses. The group has amassed millions of dollars in ill-gotten gains in just over five months, according to McAfee Advanced Threat Research.

Stay Safe Online

News about the latest threats and advice from security experts

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

Android spyware disguised as COVID app

A new form of Android spyware has been discovered that uses explicit content and the COVID-19 pandemic to install remote-access malware on mobile devices. According to Kaspersky, two malicious apps are being distributed by a prolific hacking group based in India, called "Transparent Tribe".

Kaspersky said that the first app is a modified version of an open-source video player for Android. As it's installed, it uses an adult video to distract the user. The second app looks similar to the coronavirus tracking app developed by the Indian government's National Informatics Centre. Once downloaded, both apps attempt to install an Android-based Remote Access Tool (RAT), which has been customised by the attackers to extract users' private data.

The researchers spotted the connection between the group and the two apps because the hackers used related domains to host the malicious files.

"To stay protected from such threats, users need to be more careful than ever in assessing the sources they download content from and make sure that their devices are secure," said Kaspersky.
bit.ly/3lLGqGV

Joker malware continues to plague Play store

In other Android malware news, six apps have been removed from the Google Play store after it was discovered they were infected with Joker malware. Also known as "Bread", Joker is a form of 'fleeceware' that's designed to trick users into subscribing to unwanted premium services. This type of malware tends to use as little code as possible, which makes its fraudulent activity difficult to spot.

The six infected apps have been downloaded more than 200,000 times and, although they're no longer available in the Play store, security researchers at Pradeo believe they are still installed on users' devices. The apps are Convenient Scanner 2, Separate Doc Scanner, Safety AppLock, Push Message-Texting & SMS, Emoji Wallpaper and Fingertip GameBox.

"Once running on users' devices, these apps automatically download malicious code," said a Pradeo researcher. "Then, they leverage their numerous permissions to execute the malicious code."

In January, it was revealed that Google had removed 17,000 Joker-infected Android apps, with 11 more deleted in July.
bit.ly/2Z4fNDo

Security Helpdesk | Your questions answered by security specialists

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

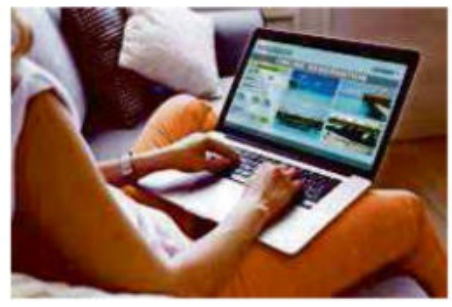
KASPERSKY lab

Q I am receiving a lot of scam emails about holiday bookings. Is this a growing trend?

Brian Goode, Facebook

A Yes, many Brits are at risk of falling for holiday scams as they prioritise cheap deals over security in the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown. It is understandable that price is a factor in choosing which holiday providers to place bookings with, but cheap deals must not come at the cost of security. Scammers are clever and opportunistic and, as bookings increase, they'll try to cash in on unsuspecting sunseekers.

In spite of the inevitable rush to book an escape following months of lockdown restrictions,



I would advise everyone to remember good cybersecurity practices and check website authenticity before clicking Buy.

It may still be the holiday season for many Brits, but it's always hunting season for scammers. If something seems too good to be true, there's a good chance it's exactly that.

Q Do I need to install an antivirus app on my Android phone?

James Penn, Twitter

A It's almost second nature for people to ensure they install antivirus software on the laptop or desktop PC that they use for online banking, but the same isn't true of smartphones or tablets.

With more than half of us choosing to use mobile banking, it's important to ask why we aren't protecting these devices in the same way. As mobile malware becomes more advanced, simply taking individual common-sense precautions to avoid being hacked is no longer enough.

When our mobile devices are protected by antivirus software, they are better able to defend against potential attacks.

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

£499.99

Impulse

AMD IMPULSE (RYZ7)

AMD Ryzen 5 2600 - 6 Cores (O.C 4Ghz)
ASUS PRIME B450M-A
CORSAIR 8GB DDR4 3000Mhz
INTEL 512GB M.2 nVME 660P
AMD RX 560 2GB
GAMEMAX Expedition
MICROSOFT Windows 10 or 10 Pro

£599.99

mercury

INTEL i5 MERCURY (COF9)

INTEL Core i5 9600K (O.C 5Ghz)
ASUS PRIME Z390-P
CORSAIR 16GB DDR4 3000Mhz
INTEL 1TB M.2 nVME 660P
INTEL UHD 630 Integrated Graphics
KOLINK Stronghold
MICROSOFT Windows 10 or 10 Pro

£1249.99

NAVIGATOR

AMD NAVIGATOR (RYZ8)

AMD Ryzen 5 3600X (O.C 4.3Ghz)
ASUS TUF X570-Plus Gaming
CORSAIR 16GB DDR4 3600Mhz - RGB
INTEL 512GB M.2 nVME 660P
SEAGATE 2TB Sata3 HDD
AMD 5700XT 8GB
CORSAIR iCUE 220T RGB White
MICROSOFT Windows 10 or 10 Pro

palicomp

01270 898 104
sales@palicomp.co.uk

*Sales subject to our terms of sale available online - www.palicomp.co.uk - Configuration issues will be advised by phone - any alternatives will also be advised by phone before proceeding with the order. Systems Custom built then are tested 100% prior to dispatch - dispatched via courier for next working day delivery - other delivery options available online. 0% Finance upto 12 months only - terms online - early settlement fee just £29.00 - apply online or phone. Prices inclusive of VAT and free UK mainland shipping. Q-jump cut-off time 15.00pm.

Best New Websites

Site of the Fortnight

TECHNOLOGY

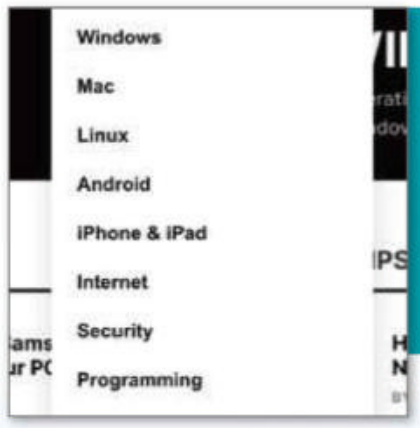
RELAUNCH

MakeUseOf

www.makeuseof.com

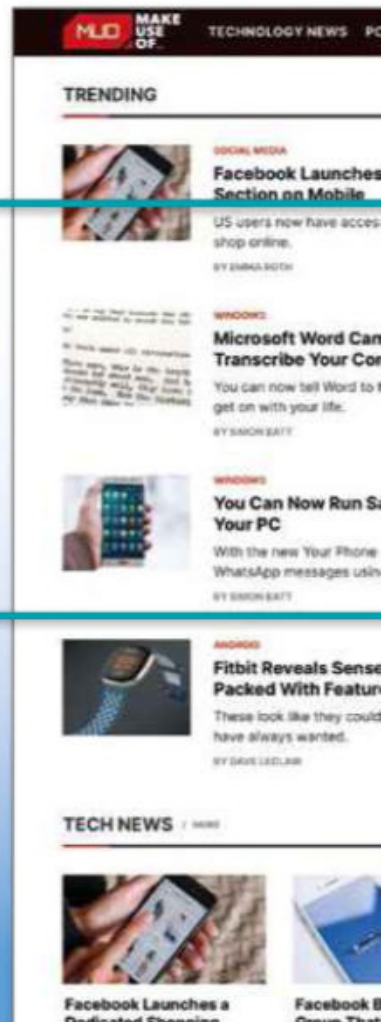
One of the leading tech news and advice wesbites, MakeUseOf delivers easy-to-follow tips, tricks and techniques to help you get the most from your devices. This smart-looking redesign gives the content more space to breathe – the Trending section contains fewer articles than before, but previews and tagging make it easier to identify their content. Tech news gains a welcome promotion to the navigation bar and, as before, the site benefits from a lack of clickbait headlines. It's a shame that the user comments on articles have been removed, but the overall design feels slick and professional, and as informative as ever.

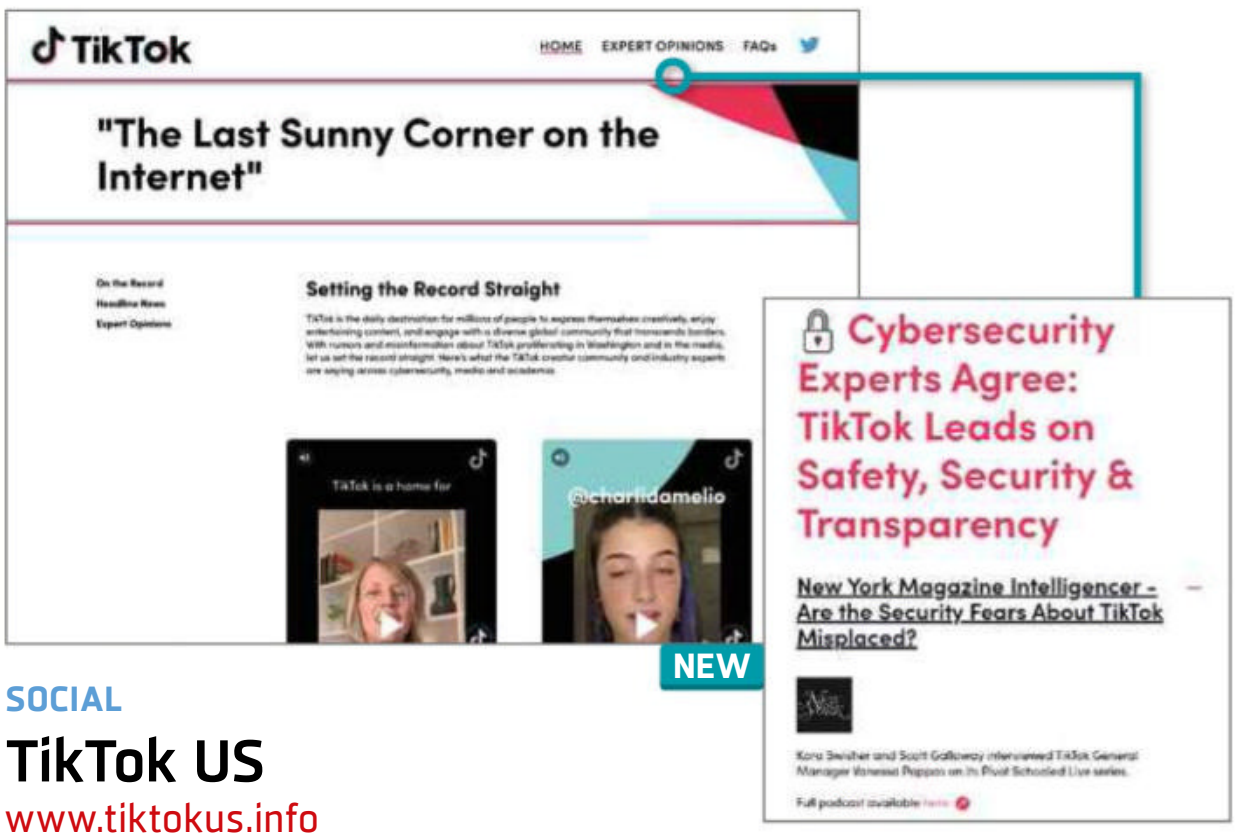
Our rating ★★★★★



PLATFORM NEWS
Posts cover multiple platforms from mobile, Windows, and Mac to Linux, including Raspberry Pi

LOTS OF ADVICE
Get expert computing advice, cut through the jargon and check out the buying guides





NEW

SOCIAL

TikTok US

www.tiktokus.info

Facing a potential ban in the United States following accusations by the Trump administration, TikTok is seeking to defend itself. It has created a website titled "The Last Sunny Corner on the Internet," to explain why it's filing a federal court complaint and outline its security roadmap. It also serves up a selection of company-related news published on high-profile tech websites and in newspapers – all of which back TikTok's argument, of course. In that sense, it's a firmly one-sided affair with plenty of supportive TikTok creators featured on the homepage. Even so, it's important to read what TikTok has to say so you can make up your own mind about the furore.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

PETS

PetsRadar

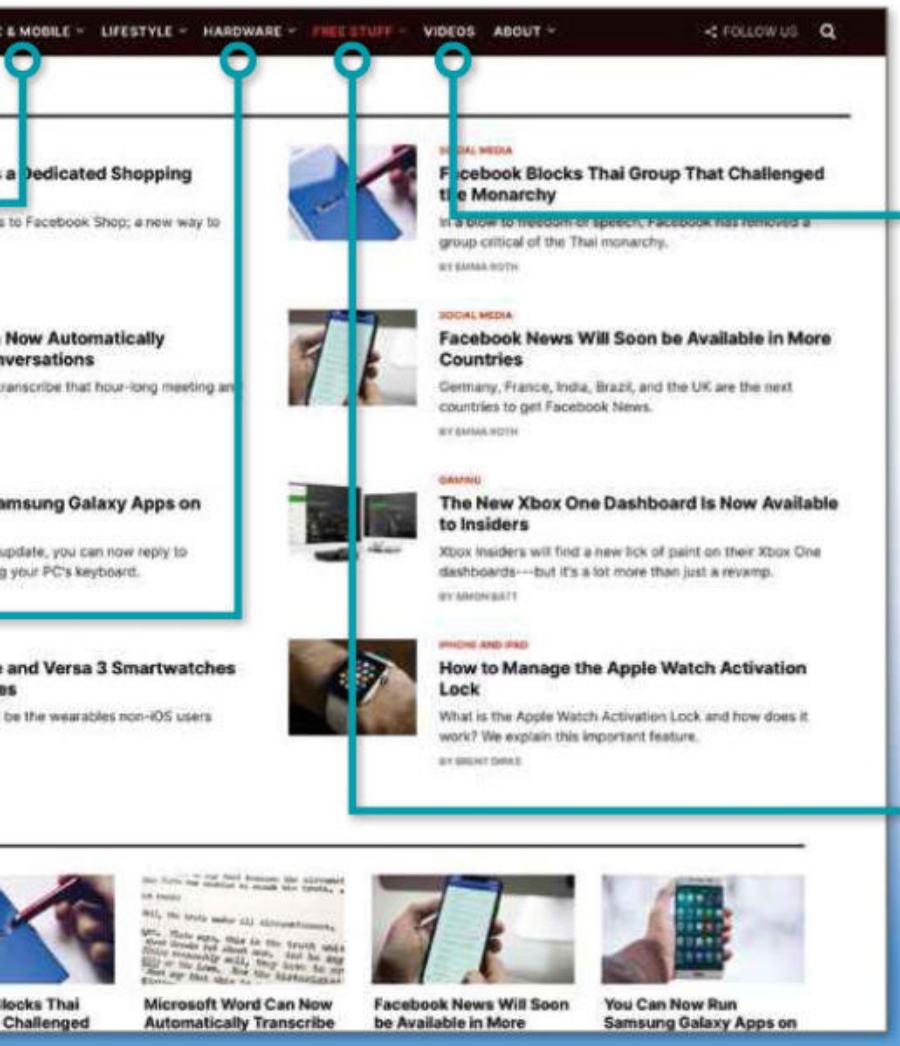
www.petsradar.com

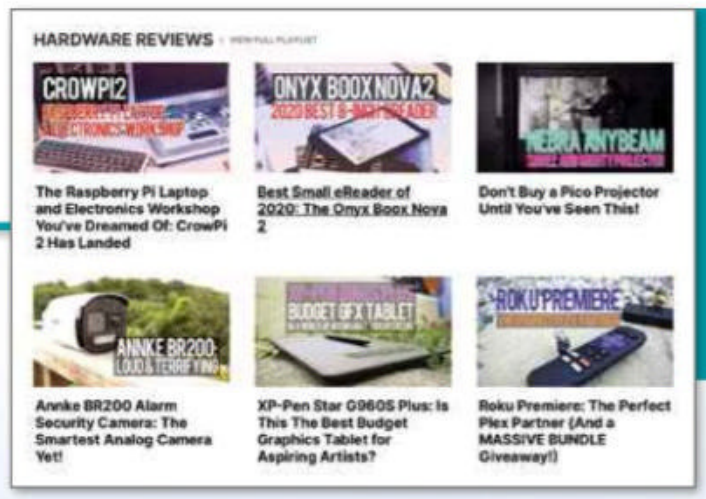
Owning a pet is a lot of work, so if you're after some guidance and products to make the job easier, this site has you barking up the right tree. PetsRadar includes advice from vets, veterinary professionals and pet owners, mainly – though not exclusively – covering cats and dogs. Mixed in are some fun articles, such as a round-up of Twitter accounts featuring cats, as well as how-tos that put an emphasis on care. The buyers guides point you to Amazon, which – along with ads – is how the site makes it money. Signing up for the newsletter gets you a free Perfect Pets ebook.

Our rating ★★★★☆

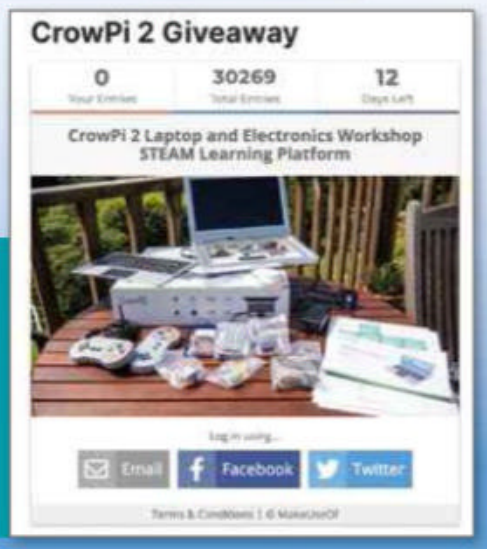
Reviews by David Crookes

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

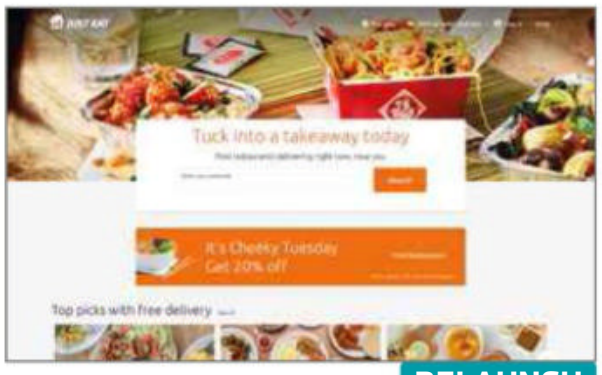




VIDEOS
Watch hardware reviews and view a playlist packed with tips on the site's YouTube channel



FREE STUFF
As before, there are lots of competitions, free ebooks and printable cheat sheets



RELAUNCH

FOOD

Just Eat

www.just-eat.co.uk

When your stomach is rumbling and you don't want to cook, head to Just Eat, which continues to make it easy to order food online. As well as a new orange logo and tidier design, its revamped site highlights eateries that offer free delivery, are suitable for single-person ordering and have just joined Just Eat. COVID-19 has meant more outlets have been added, which you can filter by cuisine, offers and even hygiene. Navigating the menus is effortless and there's 20% off food at many places every Tuesday. If you can buy cheaper direct, Just Eat will refund twice the difference.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RELAUNCH

COMICS

Comic Scene

comicscene.org

Having stripped away the clutter of its old site, Comic Scene aims to attract visitors by focusing on the latest news. In the process, links to its YouTube channel, free comics and ComicCon listings have been severed but more room is now given to the headlines, with stories covering anything from humorous titles (such as *The Beano*) to more serious superhero fare. Content is free but there's a paid-for comic club that gets you a regular printed publication. You'll also find a directory of comic creators and links to other comic sites – though, oddly, this buries some great podcasts.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

TRAVEL

Visit Sidmouth

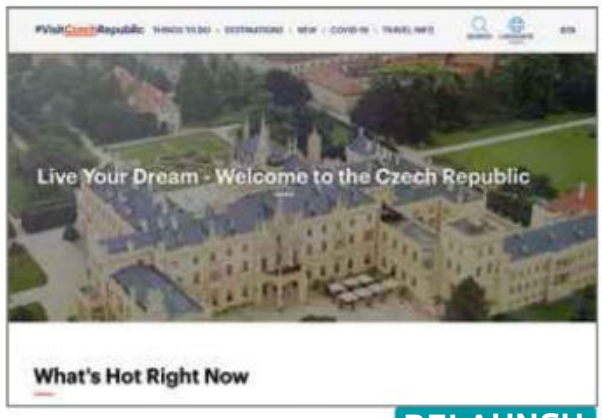
bit.ly/sidmouth510

Sidmouth has, like many seaside towns, suffered from the coronavirus pandemic – the latest blow being the cancellation of its crowd-pulling air show. By launching this new site, tourism bosses hope to entice visitors to return. Aside from the usual sections about what to do and the events taking place, there are three webcams showing live streams of Jacob's Ladder beach, the Esplanade and Port Royal. You can also take a virtual tour that's compatible with Google Cardboard. There's a blog, too, and an online accommodation booker – all the tools you need to plan a wonderful trip.

Our rating ★★★★☆

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

Best New Websites



RELAUNCH

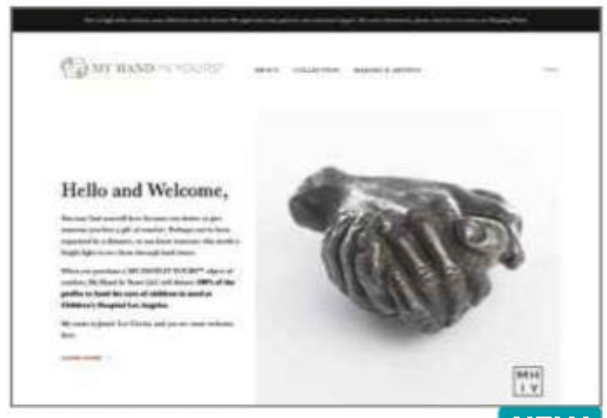
TRAVEL

Visit Czech Republic

www.visitczechrepublic.com

Having feasted your eyes on the splendid homepage video showcasing the best destinations and top things to see and do in the Czech Republic, your next step will be to check the COVID-19 section – only to discover the important risk map is nowhere to be found. In fairness, it's the only misstep in an otherwise excellent website that includes around 20,000 inspirational articles and stories. We particularly like the travel info section which gives key details about tipping, driving, communication, currency and more. There's a large selection of free PDF guides, too, covering everything from castles to music.

Our rating ★★★★☆



NEW

GIFTS

My Hand In Yours

myhandinyours.com

Actor Jamie Lee Curtis has commissioned this site offering "objects of comfort" aimed at helping others through tough times. These currently comprise a silver pendant by Cathy Waterman and a small sculpture of two clasped hands, the proceeds from which are being donated to the Children's Hospital Los Angeles. The classy, easily navigable site includes info about the artists and close-ups of the items, and while they're aimed at US buyers, you can ship them to the UK for around £30 postage. You can also donate directly, but we'd like to have seen some case study stories about the children the scheme will help.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

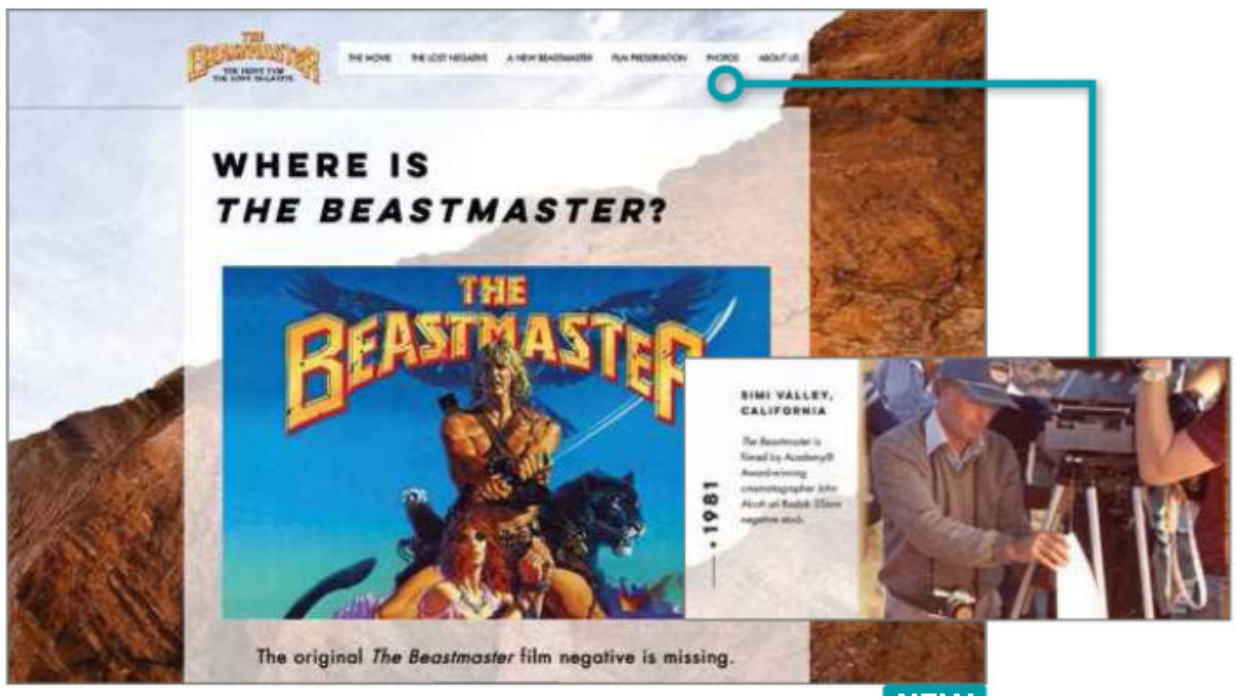
RELAUNCH

HEALTH

National Autistic Society www.autism.org.uk

It's always a delight to see website developers addressing the needs of their audience. Designed for autistic people, this site uses language that's easy to understand, cutting out unnecessary jargon, and images have been chosen for their relevance rather than to pad out the pages. The layouts also seek to avoid distraction but best of all is a "calm" button, which mutes colours and makes the content easier on the eye. Of course, there's also a ton of info and advice about autism with topics looking at bullying, mental health, behaviour and more, together with a choice of newsletters to keep you up to date.

Our rating ★★★★★



NEW

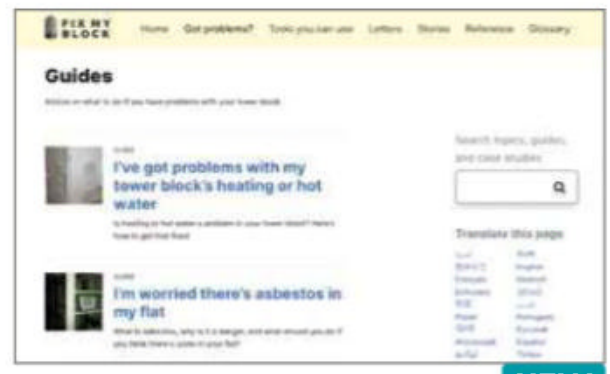
CAMPAIGN

Where Is The Beastmaster?

www.whereisthebeastmaster.com

Film director Don Coscarelli is a man on a mission: he helmed the sword and sorcery movie *The Beastmaster* in 1982 but the original camera negative is missing. In what could be a genius publicity stunt, he's now appealing for help after discovering it had been stored in a Californian garage owned by its rightsholder's attorney – who abandoned it when he moved. This website shows what Coscarelli is looking for and invites anyone with information to get in touch. Follow the negative's journey from inception to storage, and read about the movie itself. Then take a look at some photos and discover plans for a new big-screen reboot of the animal-loving hero.

Our rating ★★★★☆



NEW

HOUSING

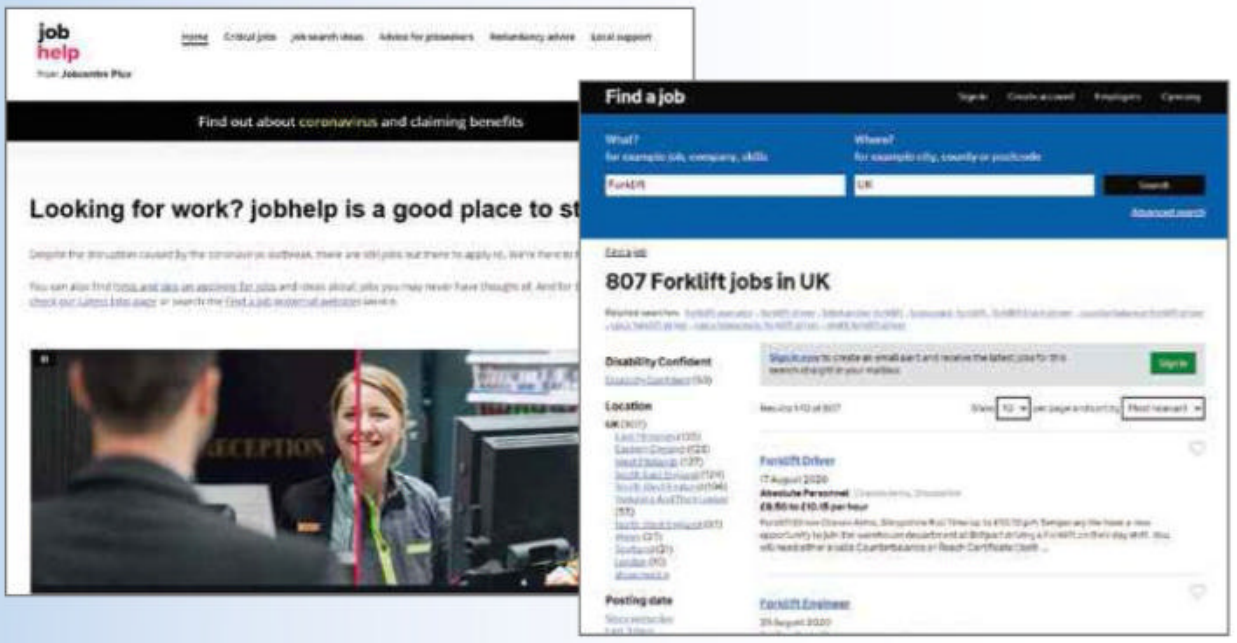
Fix My Block

fixmyblock.org

The Grenfell fire three years ago has cast a long shadow over anyone living in a tower block, so this excellent site has been set up by safety campaigners to empower residents and ensure that their problems are addressed. You can browse informative articles on topics including damp, mould and pests, and asbestos and ACM cladding, to find out what the law says about your landlord's responsibilities and the action you can take. There are also links to relevant online resources and template letters for contacting your councillor, MP or housing ombudsman. Impressively, the site is available in 20 languages.

Our rating ★★★★☆

ESSENTIAL BOOKMARKS THIS ISSUE: Excellent employment sites



Jobhelp

jobhelp.campaign.gov.uk

Find a Job

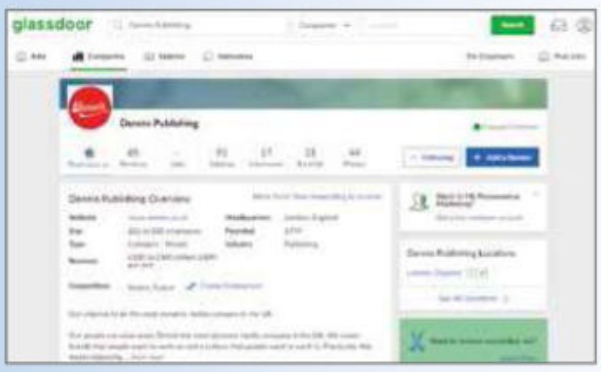
findajob.dwp.gov.uk

With unemployment rising in the wake of the coronavirus, it's not surprising that the government now has two official sites for job seekers. Jobhelp (from Jobcentre Plus) puts a positive spin on the current crisis, with its photos of cheerful faces, reassurance that "there are still jobs out there" and helpful (if concise) advice on employment-related topics, including coping with redundancy, perfecting your CV and preparing for virtual interviews. It also provides links to external resources and recruitment drives for 'critical jobs' in social care, food manufacturing and other essential areas. Find a Job takes a more practical approach, letting you search for vacancies across the UK, filtering results by category, salary, location, contract type and 'disability confident'. Between them, the two sites should help set you on the right career path.

Indeed

www.indeed.co.uk

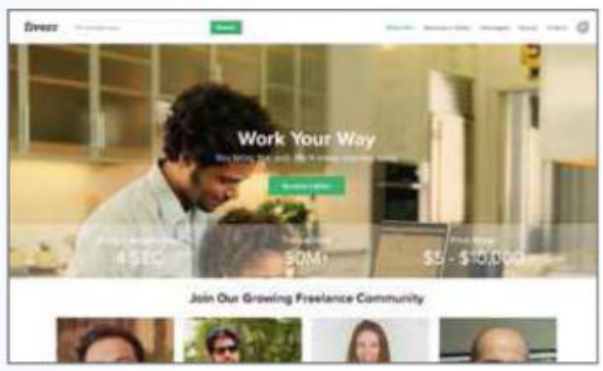
Chances are you've heard of the world's most popular job site, which claims to post 10 new vacancies every second. Indeed should be your first point of call when looking for employment – its fast and accurate search engine, minimalist design and useful filters make it the Google of job seeking (though you can also search for jobs directly through Google). The site highlights new matches for your previous searches every time you visit, and lets you sign up for job alerts, post your CV for recruiters to see and save job ads to apply for later. You can also read employee reviews of companies that are currently hiring, and view the average salary for specific roles.



Glassdoor

www.glassdoor.co.uk

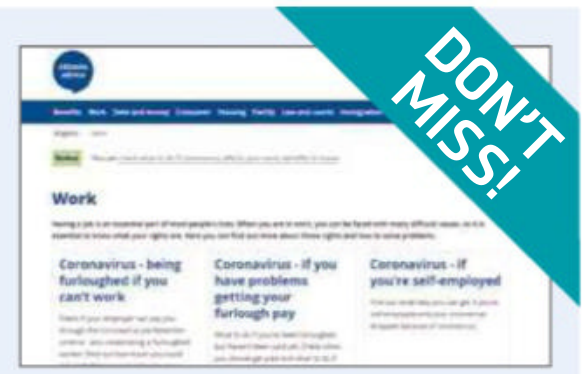
Applying for jobs involves putting yourself up for scrutiny by employers, so why not scrutinise them first by using Glassdoor? Search for a company to read reviews written (anonymously) by current and former employees, and interview candidates, listing their personal pros and cons for working there and their advice to management. You can also view average salaries for different positions within the company, see how these compare to competitors and learn about the benefits offered. Additionally, Glassdoor lets you search for jobs, upload your CV and discover typical interview questions for specific employers and roles. And, of course, you can share your own positive and negative company experiences.



Fiverr

www.fiverr.com

Rather than combing job sites for opportunities, you can advertise your services on Fiverr and have employers come to you. Sign up to become a seller, create a profile detailing your skills and experience, then set up your 'gig' – the service you are offering, such as writing, web design, photography, translation or anything else you're good at. Name your price and post your gig, then wait for 'buyers' to contact you. With so many people turning to freelance work to provide or supplement their income, there's a lot of competition for jobs on the site, but it's free to use (Fiverr takes a 20% cut of your earnings) and you can boost your profile using video and other elements, and increase trust as you accumulate customer reviews.



Work - Citizens Advice

bit.ly/citizens510

The job uncertainty caused by the coronavirus means it's important to know your employment rights, and this plain but functional site from Citizens Advice provides comprehensive and clearly explained content that should answer your work questions. Its COVID-related articles address issues such as late furlough payments, health concerns about returning to work and what to do if you need time off to look after someone who's ill. More broadly, it also advises on redundancy and dismissal, discrimination in the workplace and dealing with grievances, and lets you search for specific work information.

Tell us about your favourite job-seeking sites via webuser@webuser.co.uk

Computer active

READER OFFER!

ADD A DISC FOR £6.95!

Buy Windows 10 Home for just £29.99!

In this new Reader Offer, we're selling **Windows 10 Home** for just **£29.99** (1-PC, unlimited lifetime licence)! The normal price is a hefty £119.99, so our deal represents a whopping 75% discount.

To buy **Windows 10 Home**, visit **bit.ly/win10discount** and click the red Buy Now button on the right. If you have any questions about your purchase, please email **editor@computeractive.co.uk**.

Windows 10 Home NOW ONLY £29.99*

*Normally £119.99

Buy it on our Software Store at bit.ly/win10discount

Build a Better Site

Specialist tips, top tools and practical help

Top Tips of the Fortnight

Tell a Web Story

Web Stories are a new content format designed by Google to help users find short, "snackable" snippets of information that could help you get more visitors to your site. Similar to the social media 'stories' you may have seen on Facebook or Instagram, it uses a series of portrait-oriented videos or slideshows, overlaid with short captions, to get your information across in a fast, mobile-friendly way. Google is pushing Stories hard on mobile searches and has published guidelines on how to create them. Find out more at amp.dev/about/stories.

Update your Google Site

If you were building websites more than eight years ago, you may still have a 'classic' Google Site. Google Sites (sites.google.com) updated a few years ago, but it allowed you to continue running older sites through its previous interface. However, this option is scheduled to shut down in 2021, so you'll have to convert your classic sites, download them for posterity or let them disappear.

You can use the new Classic Sites Manager interface at sites.google.com/classicsitesmanager to download your site, or find out how to convert it to the newer system at bit.ly/2EYcCWX.

Deal of the Fortnight

UK2 (www.uk2.net) is offering a free '.online' domain if you buy any '.com' or '.uk' domain.

Web-building Helpdesk

Q **My website was set up by a professional but I'd like to edit myself. How do I access it?**

Shaun Ivory, via email

A We can tell from your site's footer that it was created using WordPress, so the only way to edit it is from the WordPress dashboard. To access this, go to www.shaunivory.co.uk/wp-admin and enter your username and password. If you don't have a username and password, you can't access the site. The dashboard is a behind-the-scenes website that controls what visitors see. Explore the Pages and Posts sections of the menu on the left to find the pages you want to edit.

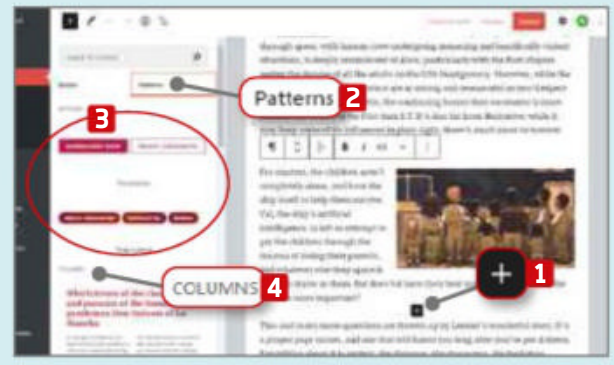
Andy Shaw, Technical & Reviews Editor

MINI WORKSHOP | Master the new Block tools in WordPress 5.5

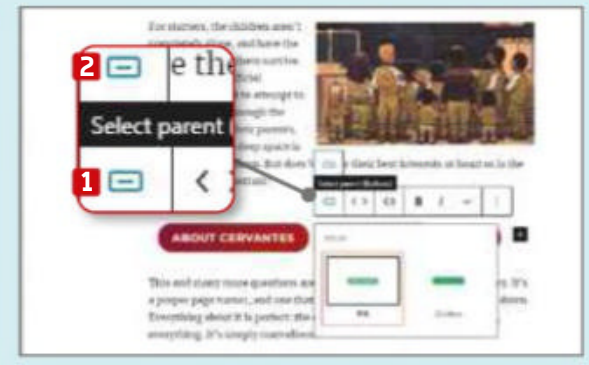
WordPress: wordpress.org | 10 mins | WordPress website

WordPress has been updated to version 5.5, which introduces some interesting new block tools for arranging the layout of your posts. In this workshop, we guide you through the highlights.

1 WordPress has added some simple image-editing tools you can access from within the image block. Click the Crop icon to display two options: Zoom 1 lets you adjust the size of the image – you can make it up to 300% larger; Aspect Ratio 2 lets you choose from a range of standard ratios to make your images more regular.



2 Click the 'Add block' button 1 and choose 'Browse all'. Select the Patterns tab 2 to see various groups of blocks you can choose to add to your layout. For example, you could create a suite of buttons 3 or columns of text. 4 Click one to insert it as a new block on your post.



3 These blocks within blocks can be tricky to navigate so new tools have been added to help make the process easier. If you're adjusting a block within a block (such as a single button in a group of buttons), hover over the block type button 1 and a 'Select parent' button appears above, 2 so you can switch to editing the block as a whole.

What To Watch Online

Pick of the fortnight

NETFLIX

Meet Millie Bobby Brown as Sherlock's sister *Enola Holmes*

From 23 September

Stranger Things' Millie Bobby Brown and *Man of Steel*'s Henry Cavill return to their British roots for this new Netflix film, which follows the adventures of Sherlock Holmes' 16-year-old little sister, a super-sleuth in her own right.

The film is based on the young adult mystery novels by US author Nancy Springer (bit.ly/2QN8NWX), inspired of course by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's legendary logician – who himself has spawned more than 25,000 adaptations.

Brown (Enola) and Cavill (Sherlock) are both English, which may surprise some viewers. Brown moved to the US from Bournemouth at age four, so perhaps her cut-glass *Enola Holmes* accent got some help from co-stars Helen Bonham Carter, Fiona Shaw and Frances de la Tour. Adeel Akhtar and Sam Clafli round out the fantastic British cast.

Netflix released the official trailer (bit.ly/3jGN4wq) via Twitter, wrapping its date announcement in the wily anagram: 'alone loshme reeebtpms wnettyrhitd' ('Enola Holmes September Twenty third').

See John Cusack fight a pandemic in *Utopia*

From 25 September

John Cusack stars in this Amazon remake of Channel 4's 2013 black comedy, *Utopia*. The new eight-episode series, created and scripted by *Gone Girl* writer Gillian Flynn, sticks to the original premise about a group of likeable geeks running a cult comic that correctly predicts – guess what? – a global pandemic. Check out the trailer on YouTube at bit.ly/31OykVU.

The original C4 *Utopia*, featuring Adeel Akhtar and a fair bit of ultra-violence, is also available on-demand via Amazon, but not with Prime Video. Buy each of its two seasons for £10.99 from amzn.to/2GdkZy3.

Watch *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* prequel *Ratched*

From 18 September

Sarah Paulson reunites with *American Horror Story* creator RyanMurphy for this eight-episode drama, a prequel to the classic 1975 film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Paulson plays a younger version of Nurse Ratched – made infamous by the Oscar-winning Louise Fletcher – amid a starry cast that includes Judy Davis, Don Cheadle, Sharon Stone, Rosanna Arquette and Sophie Okonedo. Netflix has already commissioned Season 2, even though Season 1 hasn't been released anywhere yet. Watch *Ratched* from 18 Sep at bit.ly/32Qsz9G, and catch the colourful trailer at bit.ly/2YWwErA.

Get on your bike with Ewan McGregor in *Long Way Up*

From 18 September

Over a decade since Ewan McGregor and his best friend Charley Boorman last biked across continents, they're back in the saddle for Apple TV+. Last time we saw them was in 2007, when they motored from John O' Groats to Cape Town for the BBC's *Long Way Down*. This time they travel through South America, covering 13,000 miles in 100 days.

Watch *Long Way Up* via Apple TV+, which costs £4.99 per month after a

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

seven-day trial (appletvplus.com). The official trailer is at bit.ly/334pcw3. You can find full episodes of its predecessor *Long Way Down* on YouTube: bit.ly/350k9PF.

Watch Rob Lowe in new cop show *9-1-1: Lone Star*

From 3 September

Rob Lowe and Liv Tyler swap silver screens for cop shops in this new spin-off from Fox's *9-1-1*. Lowe is a sophisticated New York cop who relocates to Texas in *9-1-1: Lone Star*, which received so-so reviews in the US but went down well with viewers, so it'll be back next year with Season 2.

You can watch *9-1-1: Lone Star* online via Now TV with an Entertainment Pass (£9.99 per month, bit.ly/2Lj0yiA). Watch the official trailer at bit.y/32Ohzts.

See Robert Pattinson in gothic thriller *The Devil All the Time*

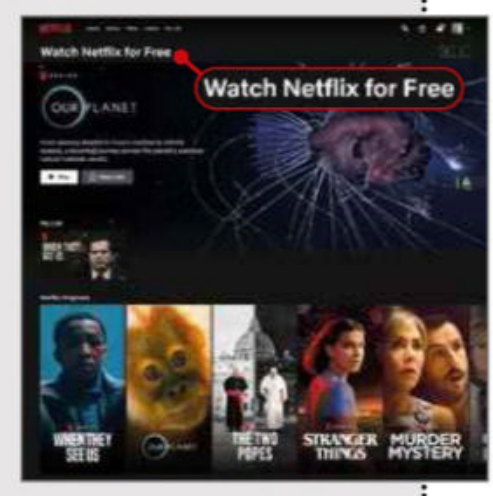
From 16 September

Robert Pattinson – currently helping cinemas back on their feet in *Tenet* – and *Spider-Man*'s Tom Holland star in this intriguing new film from writer Antonio Campos (*The Sinner*). Both British actors play Americans, struggling to put World War Two behind them in post-war Ohio: Pattinson is "unholy preacher" Preston Teagardin, and Holland is protective young family man Arvin Russell. Watch the official trailer at bit.ly/351wZx1.

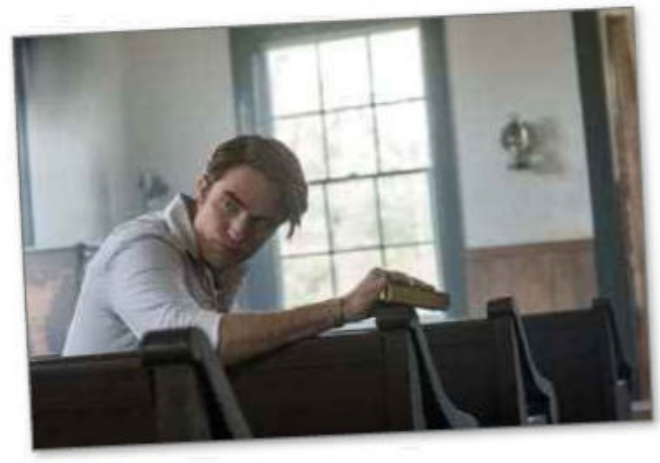
Netflix original content free to watch

Stranger Things, _The Two Popes_ and _Our Planet_ are among a selection of films and shows that Netflix now lets anyone watch for free, without having to subscribe.

The main catch is that the new 'Watch Netflix for Free' section only offers first episodes. The list also features _When They See Us_, _Grace and Frankie_ and _Elite_. Other films in the line-up include Sandra Bullock thriller _Bird Box_ and Jennifer Aniston and Adam Sandler comedy _Murder Mystery_. You can browse the full selection at bit.ly/2QTQcIA.



The same free content is available globally, so it doesn't matter where you're watching from. The selection will grow in the coming months, but licensing restrictions mean it's only ever likely to contain Netflix Originals.



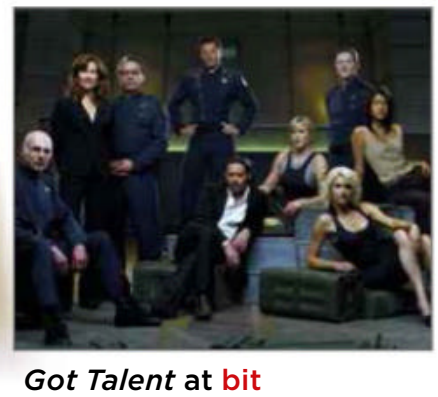
Watch Film4's best-ever films on BritBox

From 17 September

P'tang Yang Kipperbang, *Shallow Grave*, *Mona Lisa*, *The Long Good Friday*, *Trainspotting* and Clive Owen's gambling thriller *Croupier* (pictured, below) are among 25 classic British films coming to BritBox, some of them exclusive to the platform. Find the full list at bit.ly/3lOw5tF.

Also coming to BritBox on 17 September are both series of the BBC's *Happy Valley*, which is no longer streaming elsewhere. Following on 24 September is the PG Wodehouse adaptation *Blandings*, starring Timothy Spall and Jennifer Saunders.

In case you missed it...



Among all the returning light-entertainment heavyweights (*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* at bit.ly/3hVhxWZ, *Britain's Got Talent* at bit.ly/3hY6EU8 and *Strictly Come Dancing* at bbc.in/31RgUrl), autumn has also brought a few tasty box sets to our public broadcasters' streaming services.

BBC iPlayer has added all four series of *Battlestar Galactica*, originally broadcast between 2004 and 2009, at bbc.in/3hUTMhv. Over on Channel 4's All 4, you can now watch all six seasons of FX's Elmore Leonard adaptation *Justified*, previously shown on Channel 5 and Sky. Channel 5's My5, meanwhile, has a new remake of *All Creatures Great and Small*, at bit.ly/2ESTM3w.

BritBox has just added international crime drama *Cold Courage*, starring John Simm; both series of 2017's *Trust Me*, with Jody Whittaker; and both series of 2014's *Damned*, with Jo Brand and Alan Davies (www.britbox.co.uk).

Product Test

We test and compare the latest products

Apple 27in iMac (2020)

The latest iMac retains the superb design of previous models and includes some useful upgraded specifications

The design and exterior of the iMac haven't altered significantly for years – it's still the same elegant, slender, silver and black all-in-one it has been since the 2012 overhaul.

It says a lot about Apple's hardware design that iMacs remain among the most attractive and powerful all-in-ones on the market. The anodised silver finish, one-piece L-shaped stand and gently swelling rear tapering to ultra-thin 5mm edges cut a dash on any desk. You could make the argument that the rather broad 27mm bezels are beginning to look a little old hat and that Apple could do with adding height adjustability, but there's no denying that, despite its age, this is still an iconic piece of design.

New and upgraded features

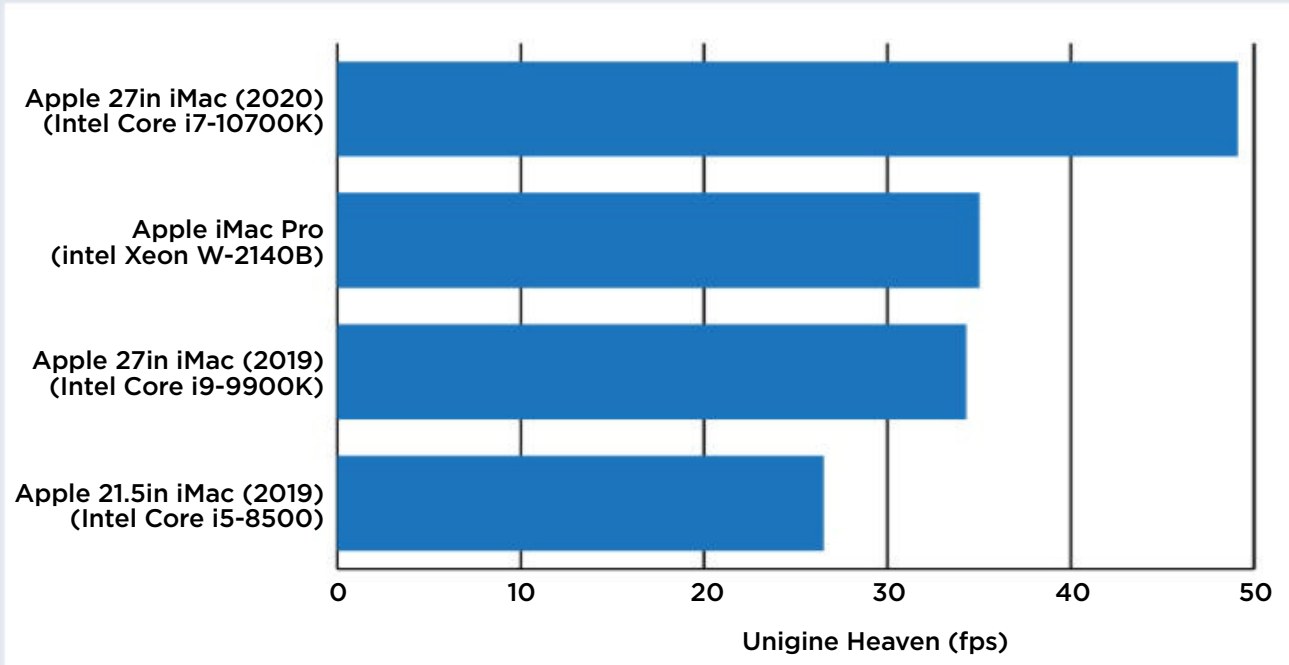
There are a few changes in this latest iMac update. A new "nano-texture" anti-reflective glass option helps reduce screen glare for those working in bright rooms or near windows, but it'll cost you an extra £500 to include it in your specs.

This is also the first iMac with Apple's 'True Tone' display tech, which adjusts the screen's brightness to your surroundings, so your eyes don't need to adjust if you look away. Elsewhere, the system's audio and webcam have also had an upgrade.

Otherwise, the new iMac is all about the performance increases brought about by the introduction of new high-performance 10th-generation Intel processors and AMD Radeon Pro 5000 series graphics, along with new options to upgrade the memory and storage to the giddy heights of 128GB and 8TB. It's the first generation of iMac not to offer a Fusion drive (mixing both a traditional mechanical drive for size with an SSD for speed). Whichever iMac model you choose to buy, the whole system now runs from an SSD.

> "Memory options run from 8GB all the way up to 128GB, while SSDs are available in sizes up to 8TB"

Graphics processing performance measured with the Unigine Heaven benchmark tool



Price

Let's not beat about the bush, iMacs are expensive. The base configuration for the 2020 iMac costs £1,799, which provides a 3.1GHz six-core Intel Core i5-10500 processor with 8GB of memory, an AMD Radeon Pro 5300 GPU with 4GB of dedicated graphics memory, and a 256GB SSD. Included by default is the glorious 27in 5K IPS display, but without the nano-texture, anti-glare glass option which, as mentioned before, costs an extra £500.

Prices rise steadily as you go up the range. Further processor options include the six-core 3.3GHz Core i5-10600, the octa-core 3.8GHz Core i7-10700K and the ten-core Intel Core i9. Memory options run from 8GB all the way up to 128GB, while SSDs are available in sizes up to 8TB. As for graphics, you can choose the AMD Radeon Pro 5300, the 5500XT (8GB of memory), the 5700 (8GB) or the 5700XT (16GB).

Pimp it out fully and the iMac 27in ends up costing a mammoth £8,799 – unsurprisingly, the biggest costs are the 128GB of memory and 8TB SSD upgrades. For this review, we were sent something slightly less expensive: the Core i7-10700K model with 8GB of memory, an AMD Radeon Pro 5500XT with 8GB of memory, and a 512GB SSD. This model costs £2,799.

Build, screen and performance

The 2020 iMac has two USB Type-C Thunderbolt 3 ports to replace the original's Thunderbolt ports. It also has a faster SD card reader, boosted from SDHC to SDHX, which enables support for faster memory cards. You can also upgrade from Gigabit Ethernet to 10 Gigabit Ethernet for another £100.

Appearance-wise, however, it all looks more or less the same as it ever has, down to the ports, which are still situated in a neat row on the back of the screen in the bottom-right corner.

The new iMac also has an improved 1080p FaceTime HD webcam and "studio quality" microphones, similar to the 16in MacBook Pro. Given the increased number of people working from home, both are welcome improvements.

The quality of the 27in 5K IPS display is as unimpeachable as ever. The resolution is a super sharp 5,120 x 2,880 pixels with a density of 218ppi, which is calibrated in the factory. Colour accuracy is fantastic with a measured average Delta E of 0.81 (the lower the better). The screen is also super bright, reaching a measured peak of 533cd/m², and has a decent contrast ratio of 1,046:1. It's a fabulous display that makes movies and games look beautifully vibrant.

We've come to expect the latest 10th generation Intel processors to deliver superlative overall performance, and the octa-core Intel Core i7-10700K in our review iMac was no disappointment. Although this is far from the fastest chip in the new series (and not the fastest you can specify in this year's 27in iMac), its performance matches 2019's top-end iMac CPU – the Intel Core i9-9900K.

The 2020 iMac performs at or above the level of last year's iMac in a variety of benchmarks, with overall better performance than the 2018 iMac Pro, especially in the graphics-heavy Unigine Valley and Heaven tests.

As for the performance of the SSD, that's a touch more consistent than in previous models, with the Blackmagic Disk Speed Test reporting an impressive 2,312MB/s and 2,342MB/s for sustained read and write speeds.

PRODUCT INFO

Apple 27in iMac (2020)

Price: From £1,799
Buy from Apple:
www.apple.com

SPECIFICATIONS

Base specifications for £1,799 model:

- 3.1GHz 6-core 10th-generation Intel Core i5 processor
- 8GB 2666MHz DDR4 memory
- Radeon Pro 5300 with 4GB of GDDR6 memory
- 256GB SSD storage
- Retina 5K Display
- 2 x Thunderbolt 3 ports

FOR

- ✓ Elegant design
- ✓ Fast performance
- ✓ Wonderful display

AGAINST

- ✗ Very expensive
- ✗ Thick bezels around screen

WINDOWS ALTERNATIVE

HP Envy 32-a0012na, £2,999
bit.ly/32QTEt7

MORE AFFORDABLE

Asus Zen 27in, £999.99
bit.ly/2EU2xtM

OUR VERDICT

★★★★☆

The latest 27in Apple iMac is as elegant and well made as an all-in-one PC can get. Performance is better than last year's models and it can be specified with huge amounts of memory and SSD storage. The display is wonderful and there's now a 1080p webcam and improved microphones to boot. But, as ever with Apple, this all comes with an eye-watering price tag.

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

Avita Pura 14

Avita packs decent specifications into an affordable, compact laptop – so what's the catch?

You may not be familiar with Avita but the laptop manufacturer is becoming more popular and undercutting established brands. Its latest offering, the Pura 14, is its cheapest model yet. For the very reasonable sum of £330, this laptop features an AMD Ryzen 5 3500U processor, 4GB of memory, 256GB of storage and runs Windows 10 Home.

Build, screen and audio

To achieve such a low price, we expect compromises, and the first signs are evident in the build – it's made from cheap plastic and feels a bit creaky when you rest your wrists on it. It's compact, though, measuring 322 x 221 x 15mm, and weighs around 1.3kg. Despite this, it manages to squeeze in a microSD slot (up to 256GB), a 3.5mm audio jack, two USB 3 ports, an HDMI output and a USB Type-C port.

The laptop's keyboard isn't bad. It has a compact layout and the keys don't move far, but the overall typing experience is fine. We weren't fond of the touchpad, though. It's overly sensitive and frequently executes unwanted three-finger gestures when there are only two fingers on the pad. We tried to adjust its settings but it didn't take well to our fine-tuning.

Avita's pricier Liber 14 has a good IPS display, so we had high expectations for the Pura's 14in 1,920 x 1,080 pixels IPS panel. Sadly, the screen is the dimmest and dullest of any laptop we've ever tested, with a maximum brightness of only 194cd/m². Colour performance is similarly poor, covering just 59.4% of the sRGB colour standard.

The audio quality is also disappointing. Located on the underside of the chassis, the laptop's stereo speakers sound muted and tinny, even at maximum volume, and bass is virtually non-existent. It'll suffice for Zoom or Skype calls but, if you're listening to music or watching YouTube, you'll need a good pair of headphones.

Performance and battery

Ordinarily, we wouldn't expect much from the processor

> "The speedy Ryzen 5 processor doesn't leave room in the budget for much else"

performance of a laptop this cheap but our test results were a pleasant surprise. In our 4K media benchmark, the Pura 14 reached an overall score of 80 – not far off recent laptops we've reviewed that cost £200 more. In standard daily use, it feels reasonably snappy – until we pushed our Chrome browser beyond 20 open tabs and it started to slow down.

The laptop has built-in graphics hardware, so don't expect great performance from the latest games, though it ran Minecraft well. The SSD was a bit slower than we'd hoped and the battery barely lasted five hours.

Overall, the Avita Pura 14 isn't good enough to topple our current favourite budget model, the £549 Honor MagicBook 14, which also runs on an AMD Ryzen 5 3500U processor but doubles the memory to 8GB, making it well worth the extra £200.

PRODUCT INFO

Avita Pura 14

Price: £329.99
Buy from JD Williams:
bit.ly/avita510

SPECIFICATIONS

- AMD Ryzen 5 3500U processor
- 4GB of memory
- AMD Radeon Vega 8 Graphics
- 256GB SSD storage
- 14in 1,920 x 1,080 resolution IPS screen
- microSD card slot
- HDMI port
- 2 x USB 3, 1 x USB Type-C ports
- 802.11ac Wi-Fi
- 322 x 221 x 15mm
- 1.34kg
- Windows 10 Home

FOR

- ✓ Affordable
- ✓ Slender and lightweight
- ✓ Decent CPU performance

AGAINST

- ✗ Slow SSD
- ✗ Flimsy build
- ✗ Dim, lifeless display

OUR VERDICT ★★★★☆

The Avita Pura 14 is far more powerful than any £330 laptop has a right to be but the inclusion of a Ryzen 5 processor doesn't leave much room in the budget for anything else. The build quality is flimsy, the display is disappointing, battery life is mediocre and the SSD speeds are anything but cutting edge. However, it's a great laptop for such a low price, particularly if you value core power.

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

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HARDWARE, SOFTWARE & SERVICES

MONITOR

AOC 24B2XH

£110.71 from bit.ly/aoc24b509
Tested: Issue 509

This monitor is the cheapest IPS screen we've ever seen, and it's phenomenal for the price, offering great contrast and colour accuracy. As long as your PC has VGA or HDMI connections, the AOC 24B2XH is a fabulous upgrade.

KEY SPECS

24in screen ■ 1,920 x 1,080 pixels resolution ■ IPS panel ■ 8ms response time ■ 75Hz refresh rate ■ 1 x HDMI, 1 x VGA ports (cables included) ■ Tilt stand ■ Three-years return-to-base warranty

TABLET

Apple iPad 10.2in

£349 from bit.ly/ipad507
Tested: Issue 507

The superb quality of the 10.2in iPad makes it easily the best tablet available for the price. It's wonderfully slim and light, has an excellent screen and easily connects to external drives and (for another £159) Apple's Smart Keyboard.

KEY SPECS

Quad-core 2.34GHz Apple A10 Fusion processor ■ 10.2in IPS screen, 2,160 x 1,620-pixels resolution ■ 1.2-megapixels front camera, 8-megapixels rear ■ 802.11ac Wi-Fi ■ 32GB storage ■ 3GB RAM ■ 251 x 174 x 7.5mm ■ 484g ■ 1-year return-to-base

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..

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

All prices correct at time of review

Gold Award winners

The best from our software tests

RADIO-STREAMING APP

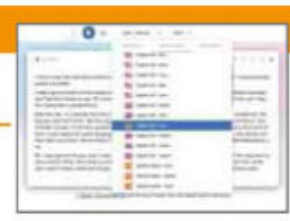
BBC Sounds

NEW!

Free from bit.ly/soundsand509
Tested: Issue 509
This marvellous app gives access to all national and local BBC radio stations, along with podcasts, catch-up content and special mixes.

TEXT-TO-SPEECH TOOL

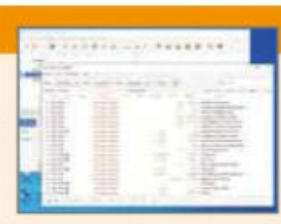
NaturalReader



Free from www.naturalreaders.com
Tested: Issue 508
This near-flawless text-to-speech tool is accurate and easy to use. Its clean design, cross-platform support and file-upload options make it ideal for hearing content read aloud.

BANKING SOFTWARE

HomeBank



Free from homebank.free.fr
Tested: Issue 507
Personal banking software HomeBank gets the balance just right, making it easy to import your account information, and offering clear, useful tools to help you manage your budgets.

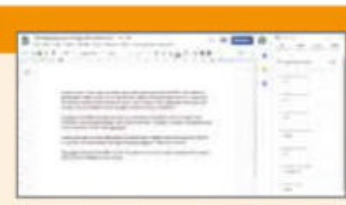
OCR SOFTWARE

SimpleOCR

Free from www.simpleocr.com
Tested: Issue 506
SimpleOCR does a brilliant job of extracting text from scanned documents and imported photos. Its spellcheck function is the stand-out feature.

GRAMMAR CHECKER

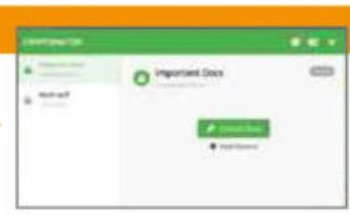
Grammarly



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.

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'

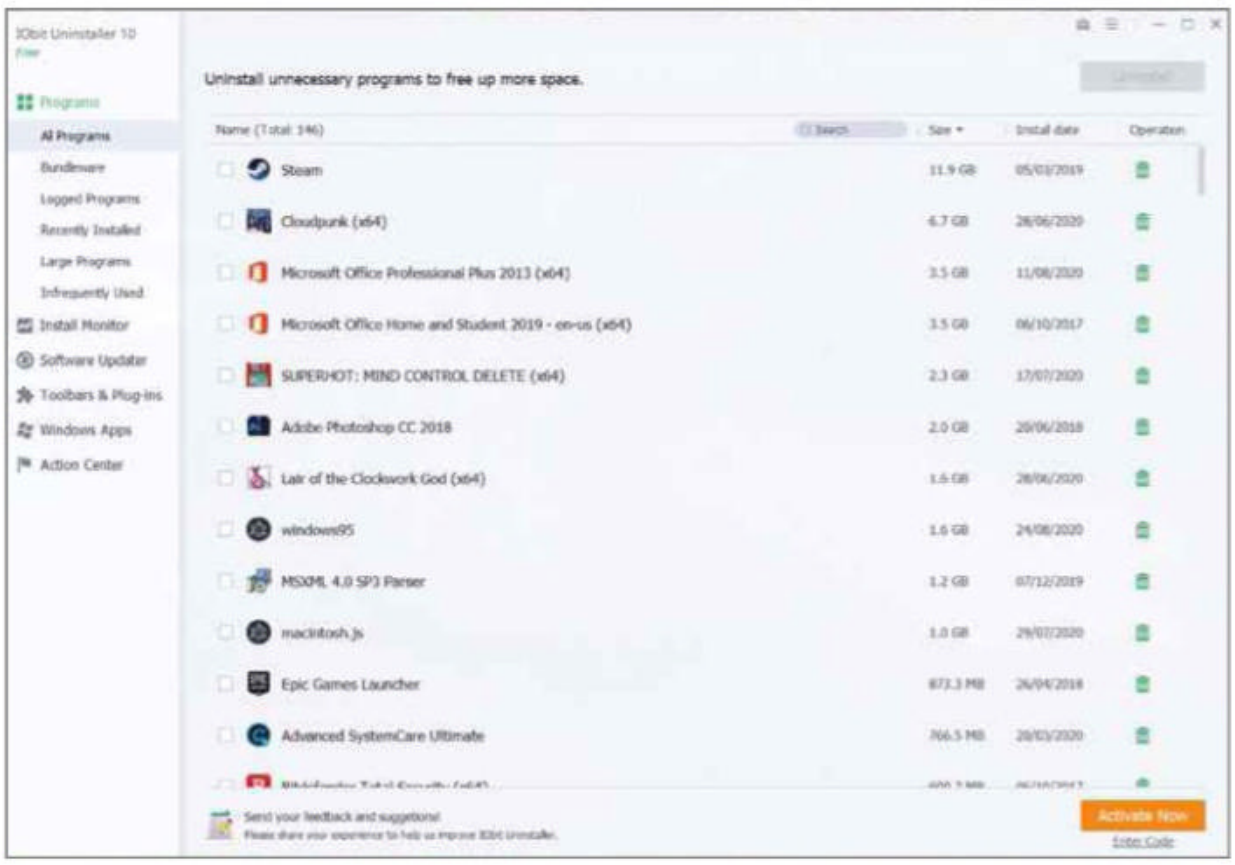
You can still buy our 2014-2018 Back Issues Discs Search for 'webuser disc' on Amazon

Best Free Software

UNINSTALLER

IObit Uninstaller 10

bit.ly/uninstaller510
Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10
File size: 22.9MB



Windows comes with its own built-in uninstaller, but IObit Uninstaller is a much more powerful tool for the job. It not only removes programs that you no longer want, but cleans up after them too, deleting leftover junk such as temporary and installer files, and Registry entries. It can quickly batch-uninstall software and force-remove broken files and applications.

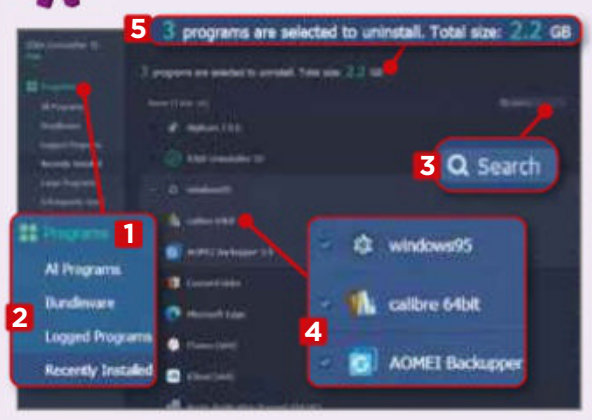
IObit Uninstaller's list of installed software can be filtered by All Programs, Bundleware, Logged Programs (software installations it's monitored), Recently Installed, Large Programs and Infrequently Used. You can also reorder the list by Name, Size or Install Date, or search for items you want to remove. There are additional sections for the Install Monitor, Software Updater, Toolbars & Plug-ins and Windows Apps.

Bonus tools include Software Health, which checks to make sure your programs are up to date and identifies any previous leftovers; and Easy Uninstall, which provides a target you can drag to programs to remove them. Other options include Force Uninstall, Uninstall History, File Shredder and Windows Updates, which shows recent system updates and lets you remove problematic ones.

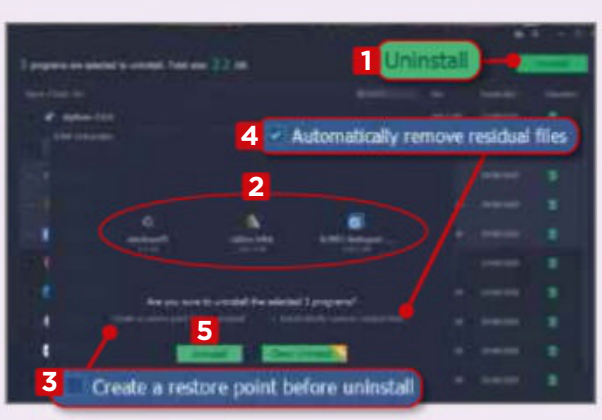
This new version of IObit Uninstaller has an optimised uninstall algorithm to remove unwanted programs more thoroughly; a new Browser Notification Block under Software Health, which prevents annoying browser alerts from popping up on screen in Chrome, Firefox, Opera and Edge; and a new Light mode in Settings.

A Pro edition of IObit Uninstaller with extra features, including a one-click software updater, is available for £15.22 a year.

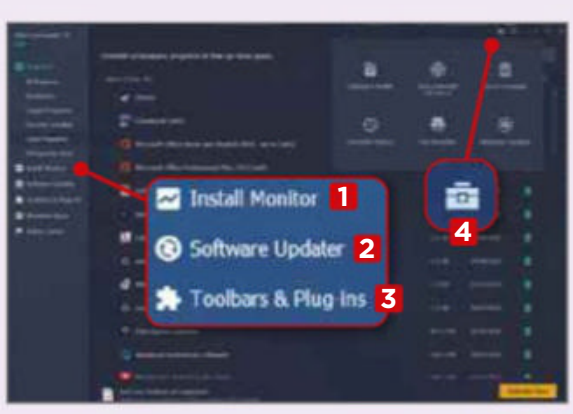
MINI WORKSHOP | Remove unwanted programs with IObit Uninstaller 10



1 To get started, browse IObit Uninstaller's All Programs list 1 or filter everything by category. 2 You can also search for applications by name. 3 Tick the box for anything you want to remove. 4 You can uninstall multiple programs at once. The number of items selected, and the total amount of space that will be freed up, is displayed. 5

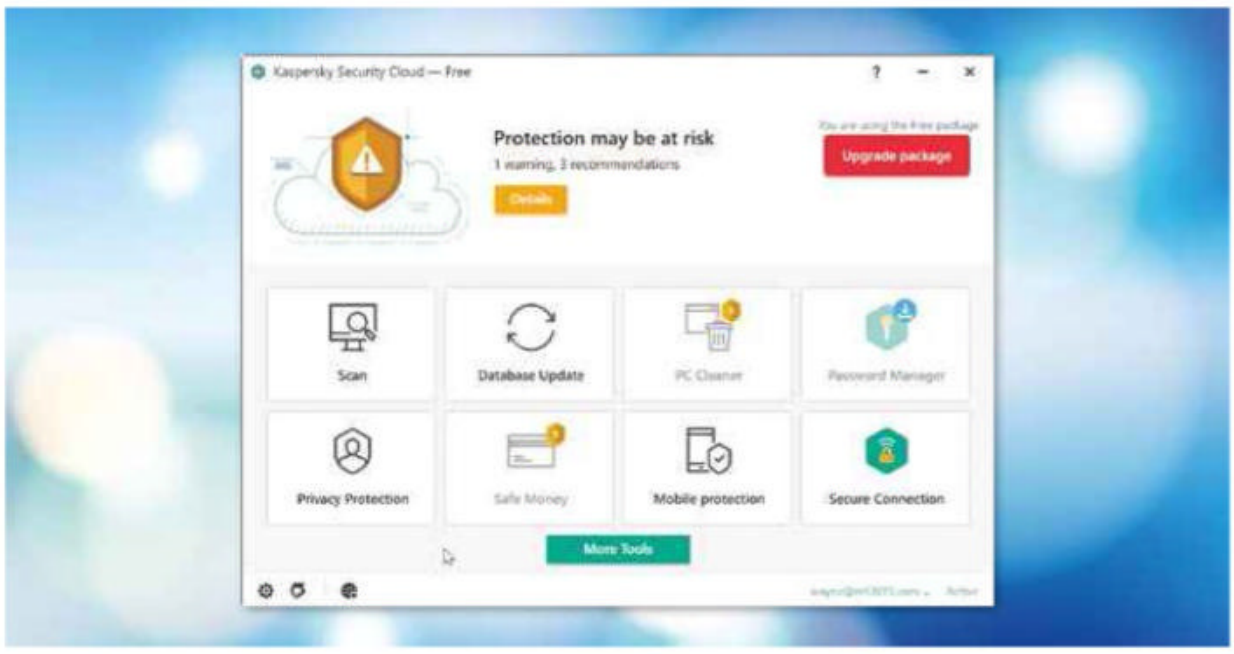


2 Click Uninstall. 1 A pop-up appears showing which programs will be removed. 2 IObit Uninstaller can create a restore point, 3 so you can roll things back should any problems occur. It will also automatically remove residual files afterwards, unless you untick this box. 4 Click the Uninstall button 5 to begin the removal process.



3 Install Monitor 1 is where you can view newly installed programs. The Software Updater lets you install the newest version of tools on your PC, 2 and you can remove unwanted browser extras under Toolbars & Plug-ins. 3 Opening the toolbox 4 in the top-right corner gives you access to other features, such as Software Health.

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



ANTIVIRUS TOOL

Kaspersky Security Cloud 2021 Free

bit.ly/ksky510

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

Kaspersky has released a free, cut-down version of its Security Cloud software, which provides basic antivirus protection for Windows, iOS and Android. You need to create a Kaspersky account to use it, after which you can run a quick, full or selective scan (which targets specific files or folders). You can also scan external devices, check for vulnerabilities on your PC and run a scan from the context menu.

Be sure to decline the option to install Kaspersky Password Manager.

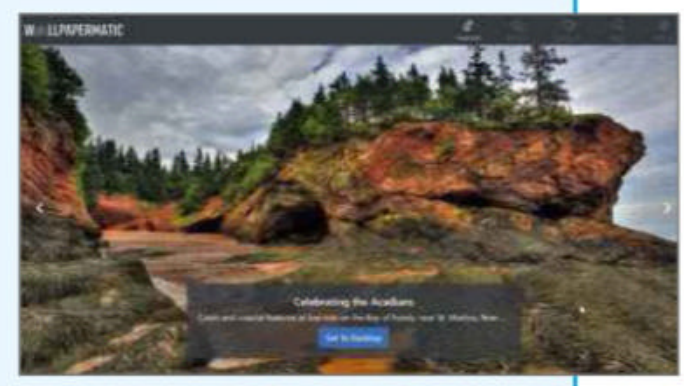
New Windows 10 App

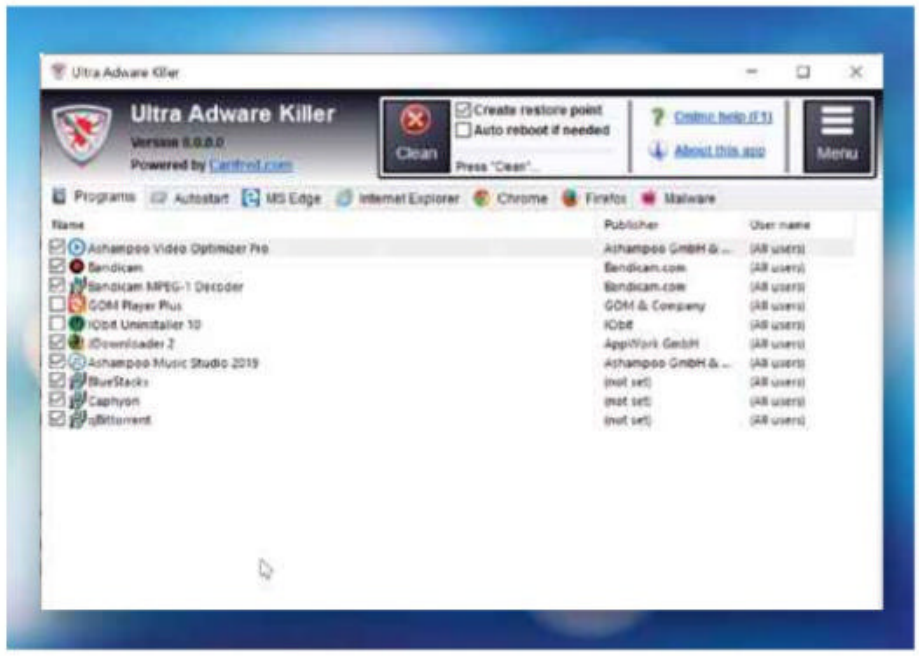
Wallpapermatic

bit.ly/wpm510

File size: 508MB

This app can automatically change your Windows wallpaper and offers a selection of featured images that can be applied with a click of a button. You can pick from random images, sort by category or search by name. It can change wallpaper based on a schedule of your choosing, and you can set the quality and where the images come from, and whether the Lock Screen should match the wallpaper.





MALWARE REMOVER

Ultra Adware Killer 8

bit.ly/uakill510

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10 **File size:** 9.8MB

Ultra Adware Killer can find and remove adware and malware, and works across all user accounts simultaneously. Just click the Scan button and it will identify software with ads, risky browser settings and malware. It can remove browser toolbars, add-ons, plugins, unwanted search providers, hijacked homepages, potentially unwanted applications and most forms of malware. This new version fixes some problems and detects more threats.

CLIPBOARD TOOL

MultiClipBoardSlots 2

www.softwareok.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10 **File size:** 178KB

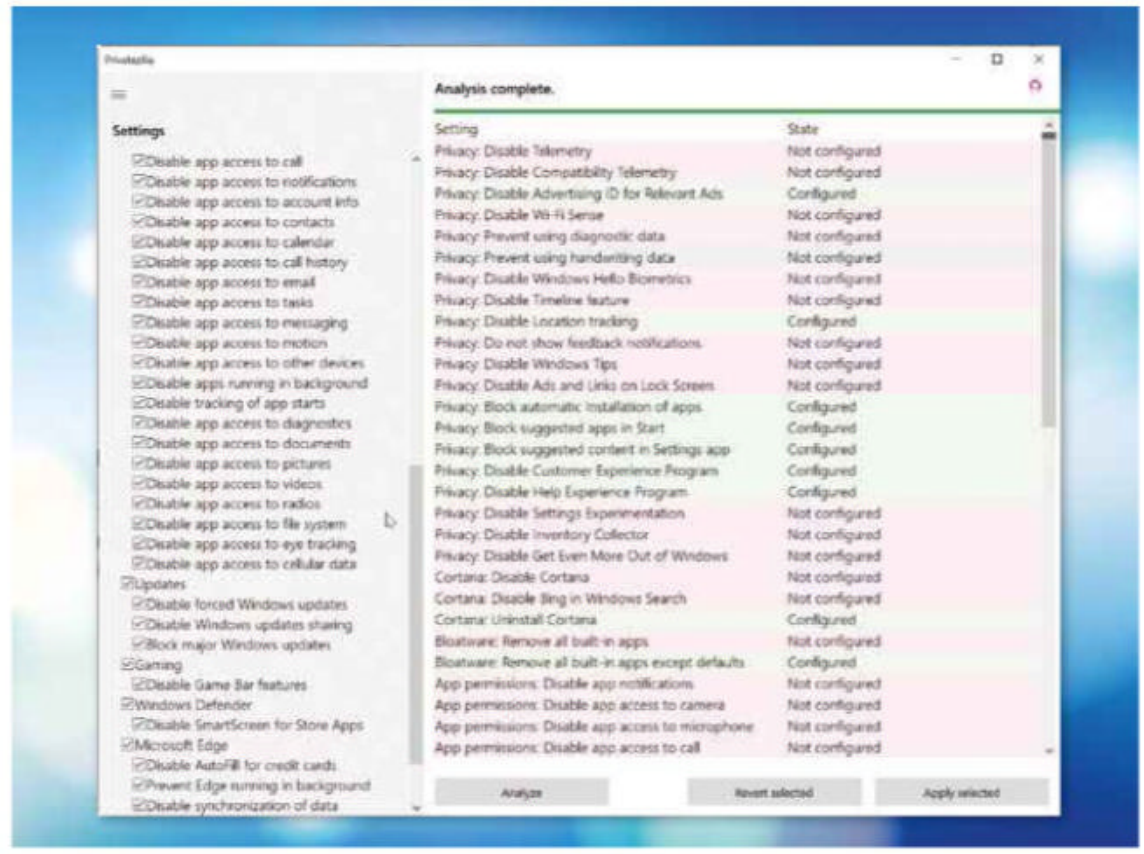
Windows 10 has an optional Clipboard History feature – found in Settings, System, Clipboard – which gives you access to multiple items stored in your clipboard. MultiClipBoardSlots provides an alternative solution and lets you extend the Clipboard so you can store and access up to 10 copied items – such as text and images – using a keyboard shortcut. This updated release fixes some bugs and improves performance. There are portable and installer versions available.

PRIVACY TOOL

Privatezilla

bit.ly/pzilla510

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10
File size: 83.6KB



This is a new open-source version of a program previously named Spydish. The tiny application is designed to check your privacy in Windows. It doesn't require installation – just run it and it will display a list of settings. Select the sections you're interested in – Privacy, Cortana, Bloatware, App Permissions, Updates and more – and click the Analyse button. It will check the status of all of the settings and show them as either Configured (your privacy is protected) or Not Configured (inactive). All settings can be enabled or disabled.

Some Spydish code was rewritten to allow the new version of Privatezilla to become open source.

CUSTOMISATION TOOL

CustomFolder

www.gdzsoft.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10
File size: 3.3MB

If you have lots of folders and shortcuts to folders on your PC, it can be tricky to tell one from another because they all look the same – rectangular and yellow.

CustomFolder is a free tool that lets you change the colour of any folder, choose a different icon and add 'emblems' to the icon. You can have up to nine emblems on a folder icon, in whatever position you like, with choices that include numbers, coloured circles and various emoji.

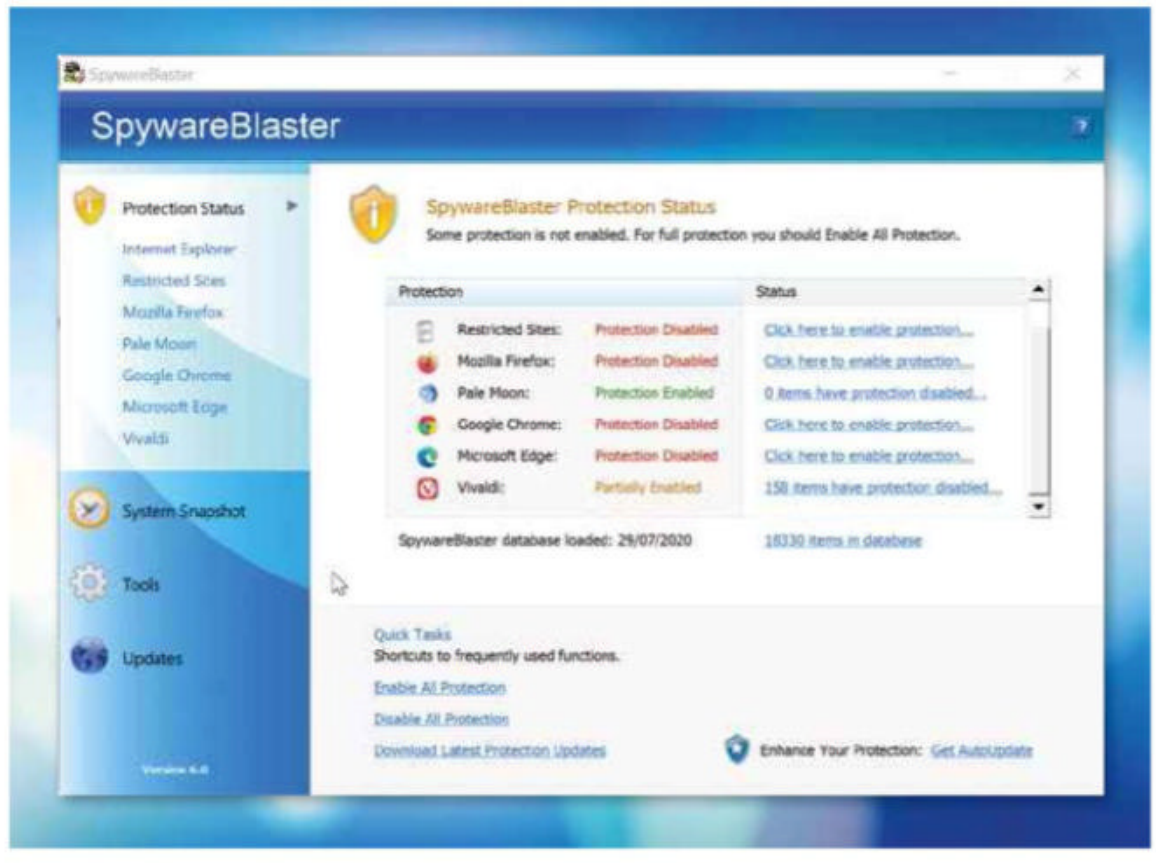
To use the program, hold down the Shift key, right-click a folder and select CustomFolder from the context menu.

ANTI-MALWARE TOOL

SpywareBlaster 6

www.brightfort.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10
File size: 4.2MB



SpywareBlaster protects your PC against spyware, adware, browser hijackers, trackers and malicious websites. It works with Chrome, Firefox, Microsoft Edge, Pale Moon, Vivaldi and Internet Explorer, and lets you protect against ad and tracking cookies and dangerous scripts, and restrict the actions of known bad sites. You can take a system snapshot to create an image of your settings, so you can restore them if disaster strikes, while other tools let you back up the Hosts file, disable Flash and more.

This new version protects more browsers, displays better on high-DPI screens and offers enhanced Windows 10 support.

GAME

Portal Go

bit.ly/portal510

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10
File size: 52.3MB

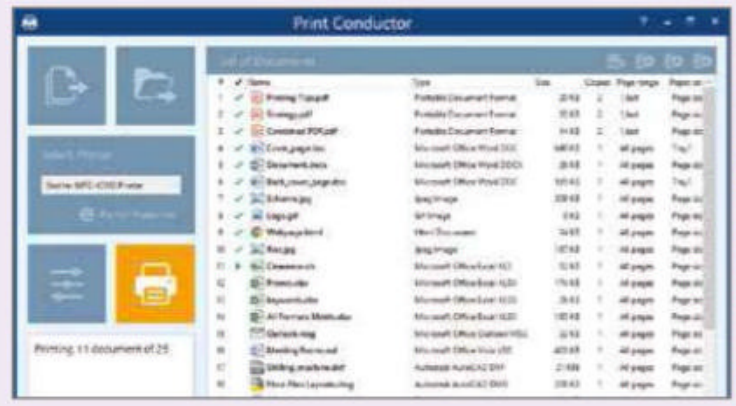
This is an entertaining isometric puzzle game that's heavily inspired by Valve's Portal (it even uses the same objects). The idea is to clear levels by using portals to move items, such as crates, from one place to another, while avoiding sentries and collecting slices of cake. Portal Go doesn't require installation – just unzip the download and run the program.

✓ Install this program...

Print Conductor 7

www.print-conductor.com
Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10
File size: 94.9MB

Print Conductor is an essential tool for anyone who regularly prints large numbers of documents. Simply drag and drop the files you need to print to the program window, then select your printer in the drop-down menu and click Start Printing. You can also export and import document lists. The latest version of Print Conductor has an improved interface, offers support for additional file types and processes Word and PDF files twice as fast. The program is free for personal and non-commercial use, but costs $149 (£111) for businesses. See page 64 for tips on boosting your printer's efficiency.



...Not this one ✗

SilentPrint3

silentprint.com/
Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10
File size: 24.4MB

SilentPrint3 is a powerful batch-printing program that allows documents to be automatically printed or converted to PDF, simply by placing them in a designated folder. On the plus side, you can try the software for free; on the downside, this places a watermark on your printouts. To remove this, you'll need to buy a licence for £118.80.

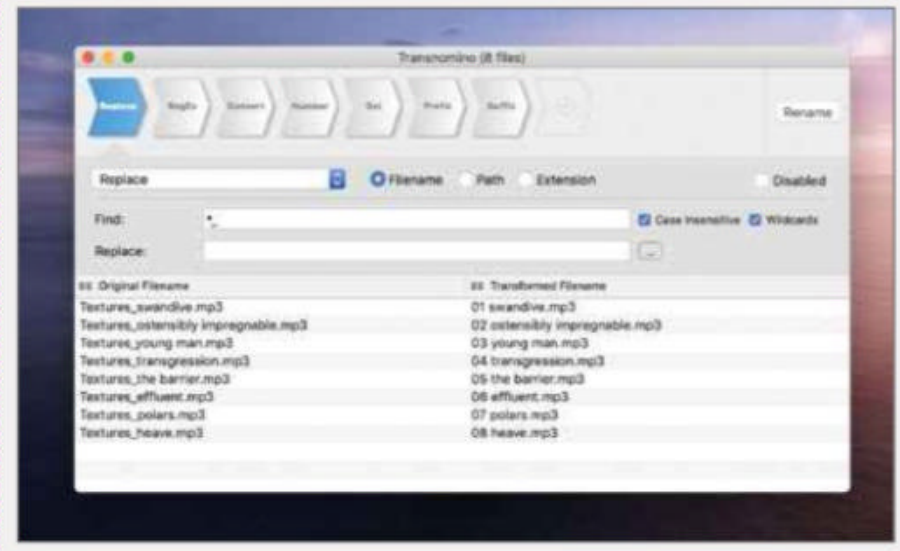
OTHER OPERATING SYSTEMS What's new for Linux and macOS

LINUX DISTRO

MX Linux 19.2 KDE Edition

mxlinux.org
Min requirements: 64-bit processor **File size:** 2GB

Based on Debian 10 (Buster), MX Linux is gaining in popularity and usually features an Xfce desktop environment. Xfce is really designed to run on low-spec systems, so it isn't especially attractive. Fortunately, if your PC is reasonably capable, you can now choose a 64-bit only KDE variant instead, which looks much better. MX Linux comes with some excellent software preinstalled, including Firefox, Thunderbird, LibreOffice and GIMP.



RENAME TOOL

Transnomino 5

bit.ly/transnom510
Min requirements: macOS **File size:** 8.7MB

Transnomino is an app for batch-renaming files. It offers a wide range of renaming actions, from simple text replacements to more advanced options. You can also save your preferred renaming style for reusing in the future. Version 5 adds some new renaming styles – Trim, which can remove characters from the start or end of a name, and Select, which can be used to make a sub-selection of loaded files) – as well as additional command-line actions.

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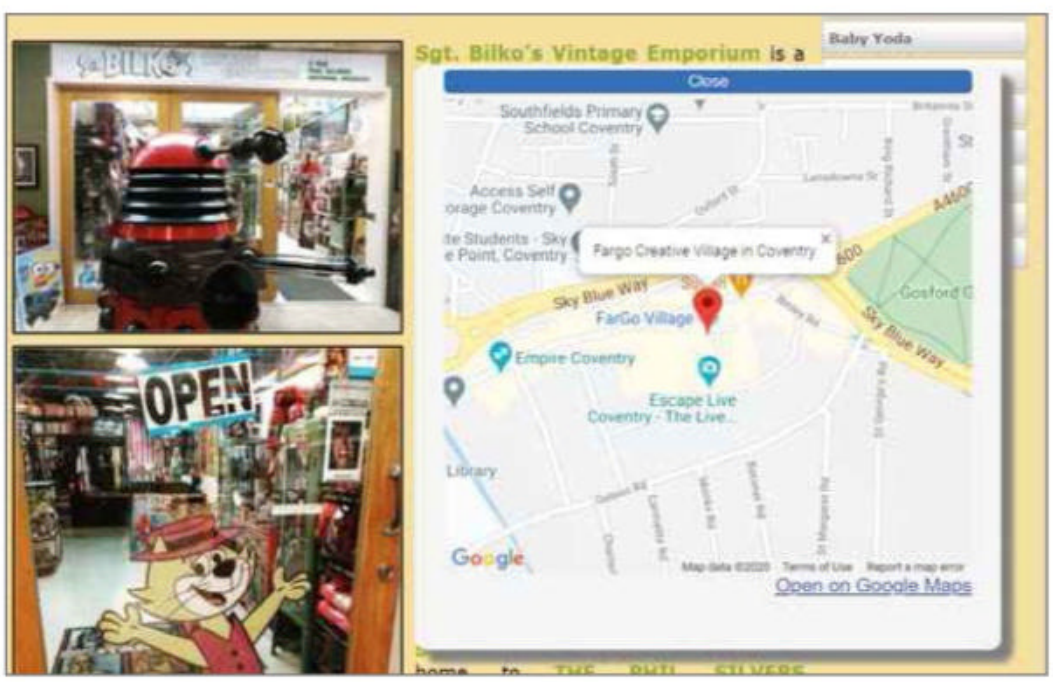
Best New Browser Tools

CHROME

Find addresses on Google Maps instantly

Imagine a world where you no longer have to copy an address from a company website, visit Google Maps, paste the address and then search for it. This is no wild fantasy, thanks to Easy Address Search (bit.ly/2GfltUm), which makes finding addresses on Google Maps a doddle. You don't even have to navigate away from the page you're viewing to search. When you stumble across an address, simply highlight it and right-click. Select 'Find with Easy Address Search' and a small pop-up appears showing you where it is on the map. You can then close this or open the address in Google Maps proper.

The browser tool works for full or partial addresses, such as street names or postcodes, as well as business names. This function really should be built into Chrome by default.

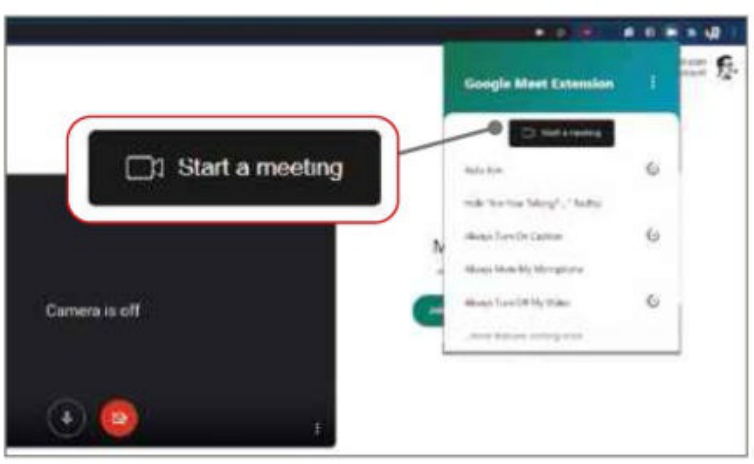


Improve your Google Meet video chats

The Google Meet Extension (bit.ly/meet510) – yes, boringly, that really is what it's called – promises to make your Google-based video calls slicker and more productive. It does so by eliminating many of the pre-call options you typically need to set, so you can dive straight into calls with minimal fuss.

Open the add-on for a brief list of options, with more to come in future updates. These include Auto Join, 'Start a meeting' and Always Turn Off My Video. Click any of these to activate them – a green tick will appear next to them to show they're active. You can even use the tool during the setup or call stage, with options taking immediate effect.

Once your arrangements are set (and remembered for future calls), you can seamlessly slip into that socially distanced family quiz night or engrossing Q4 financial presentation.



Bring back the old Facebook

Remember the good old days of Facebook, before the 2020 interface update? Thanks to 'Old Layout for Facebook' (bit.ly/3hTyh0O), you no longer have to accept Mark Zuckerberg's vision of progressive design, with its bubbly buttons and app-like appearance.

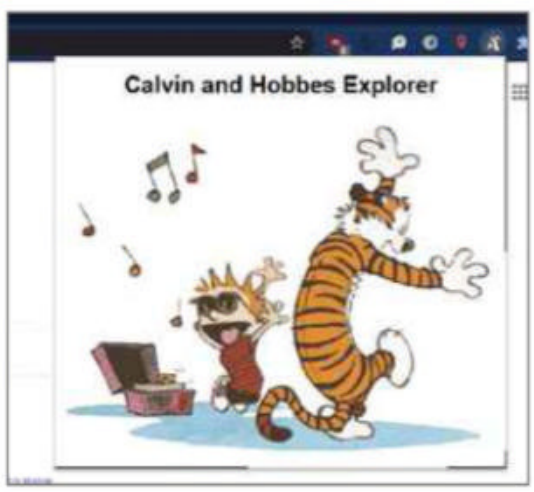
With the extension installed, the site is immediately transformed to the more traditional version. As far as we can tell, this hasn't impacted performance – it's the same Facebook but with a 'nostalgic' skin. The design can be switched back to the new version by disabling the add-on.

Read *Calvin and Hobbes* comics

Calvin and Hobbes is often called "the last great newspaper comic strip". Not bad for a strip that only ran for 10 years, between 1985 and 1995. But while artist Bill Waterson no longer draws his most famous creation, you can still get your fix of stories about a precocious little boy and his stuffed toy tiger.

The Calvin and Hobbes Explorer (bit.ly/3hTRkI6) brings the comic straight to your browser. Click the add-on's toolbar button and, after a brief loading screen (featuring our heroes, of course), a random four-panel strip is displayed. If you're looking to binge-read, just click the toolbar button again to view another. Image quality is crisp, although the need to scroll to view the final panel can be a pane (geddit?!).

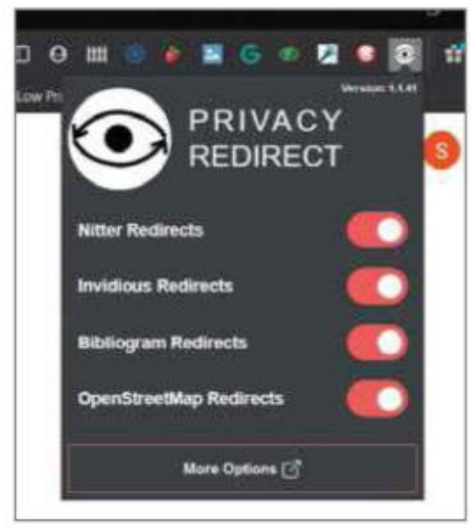
The comic strips are sourced from the long-running gocomics.com website. Now can we have a *Peanuts* version as well, please?



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

FIREFOX

Visit private versions of popular sites



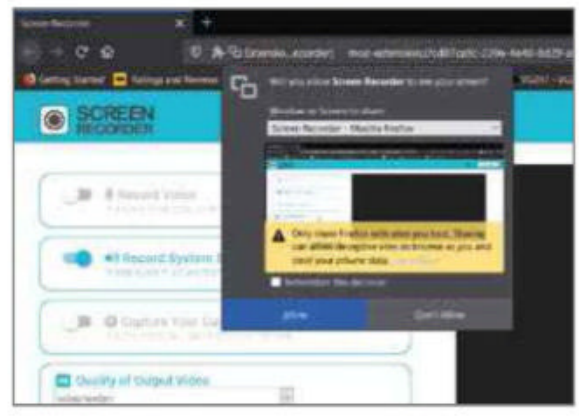
Web User readers know better than most just how much data sites such as YouTube and Google Maps collect about us, but force of habit and convenience keep bringing us back to them. The Privacy Redirect extension (mzl.la/34ZDWik) is built to automatically send you to websites that provide an alternative interface that won't mop up your personal data. So, head to Twitter and you'll find yourself on Nitter; search for Google Maps and you're taken to Open Street Map. The tool also offers redirects for YouTube (Invidious) and Instagram (Bibliogram) - see our feature on page 48 for more about these alternative front ends.

By opening the extension, any of these sites can be toggled on or off. You can also use advanced options to choose specific instances of each website, tweak video playback settings on Invidious and set website exceptions.

Block promoted tweets on Twitter

We're big fans of any extension that filters out nefarious and annoying elements on social media, and that's exactly what Block Twitter Promoted (mzl.la/34UtSqJ) does.

By default, any promoted tweet (or 'advert', as they were once known) is stripped out of your timeline. But the fun doesn't stop there. This browser tool also hides the Who To Follow module, removes cards from tweets and trends, as well as 'suggested' tweets, which insert a random tweet on your timeline and tell you someone who you follow liked it. Best of all is 'Always show Latest Tweets instead of top Tweets' – something fans of the site constantly request. You can switch any of these settings on or off by going to browser tool's Options in the Firefox Add-ons Manager.



Record what's on your screen

In Issue 509 (bit.ly/webuser509), we looked at the Microsoft Edge extension Screen Recorder, which we considered "ideal for those looking for a simple-to-use screen-capture tool". The Screen Recorder browser tool (mzl.la/2GgQpDK) is now also available for Firefox. As you'd expect, it's just as uncomplicated and easy to use – in fact, it works exactly the same way as its Edge-based counterpart.

Open the add-on for three options: Record Voice, Record System Sound and Capture Your Camera. Of course, you don't have to choose any of these. Click Start Recording, then select which window to capture. This also displays a preview of what will be recorded. After you finish, you can download the video to your computer or save it to Google Drive.

OTHER BROWSERS

Make Bing your default

Remember when a Home button was an indispensable part of web browsing, instantly whisking you back to where you started? That's more or less how Microsoft's new Bing Homepage and Search Engine (bit.ly/3jCJQd8) functions. With the extension installed, one click of the toolbar button transports you back to bing.com, ready for your next search. Doing so also means you get to view stunning photography, which changes daily, and catch up on the latest news. You can tweak your current search settings and customise your homepage appearance, too.

Get Xbox gaming themes

The Xbox New Tab (bit.ly/32SWyxs) brings new themes (not to mention a dash of colour) to your new tabs. Choose between 10 of the biggest games on Microsoft's gaming console, plus the generic Xbox Games Pass. Each of these adds backgrounds to your new tabs, which can be cycled by pressing the arrow buttons. You'll also find links for live streams of your chosen game. Click the three-line button next to your profile picture to turn off top links (located beneath the search bar) and live streams, if you don't want any clutter obscuring the hi-res background images.

Tell us your favourite add-ons at www.facebook.com/webusermagazine

Best Free Apps

App of the Fortnight

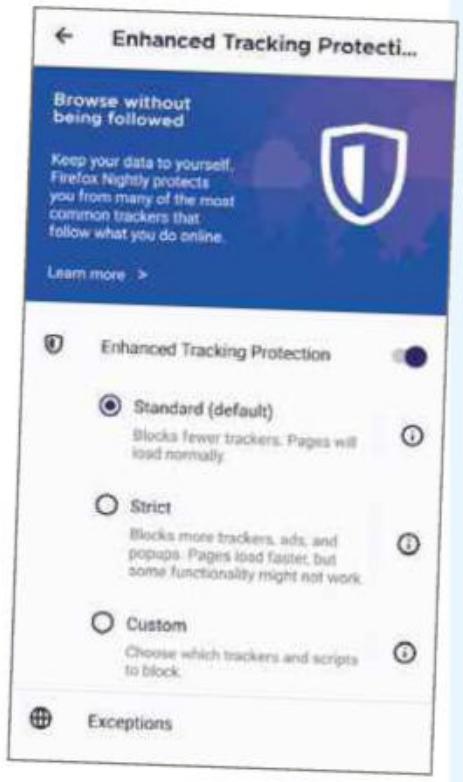
WEB BROWSER

Firefox for Android

bit.ly/JKVqlf

5

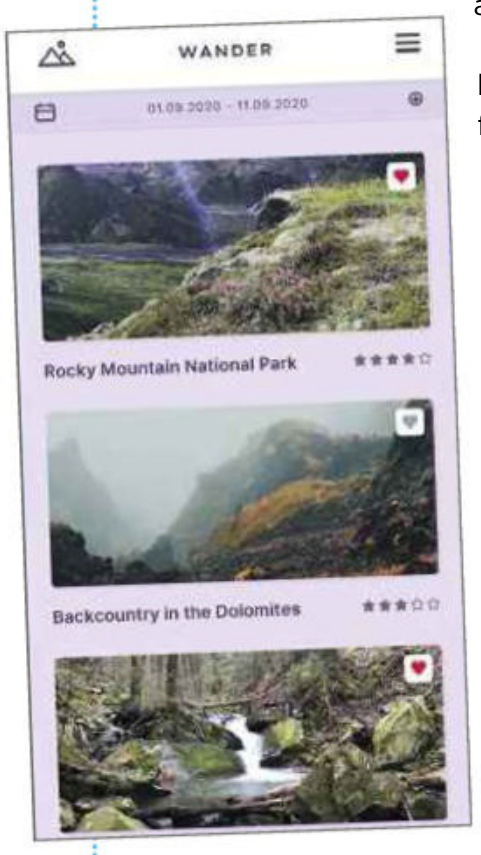
UPDATED



Nobody could accuse Mozilla of resting on its laurels. The developer recently released a number of new mobile apps, including its own VPN (bit.ly/330BLYW), and is continually updating its flagship product – Firefox – on both desktop and mobile.

The latest update to the Android version of the browser (version 79, now out of beta) is a little different. It's effectively a major reimagining of Firefox – dubbed Firefox Daylight – similar to how the company overhauled its desktop browser a couple of years ago with its Firefox Quantum update. The new release has three main aims – to make the browser faster, more customisable and more private.

Under the hood, Firefox for Android is now powered by Mozilla's own browser engine, GeckoView, which Mozilla claims will make browsing much speedier and allow the company to implement further speed improvements on a quicker cycle.

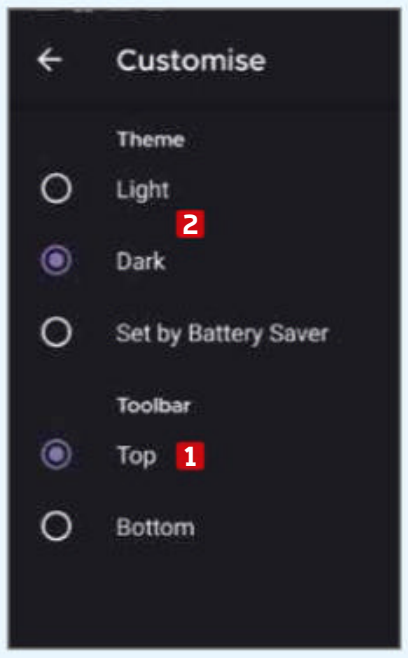


Changes have also been made to how Firefox for Android looks and feels. Overall, the interface is cleaner, less cluttered and offers more ways to personalise your browsing experience, such as placing the address bar at the top or bottom of the screen, according to your preference. The latest version also introduces Collections as a smart way to organise bookmarks, shared links, frequent tasks and more. Picture-in-picture video and quick toggling between light and dark mode are also new. The only downside is that add-on support is currently limited in this new version. In terms of privacy, Firefox for Android now has Enhanced Tracking Protection switched on by default. Mozilla has also incorporated the best bits of its dedicated privacy browser, Firefox Focus, into Firefox itself, including the ability to switch to Private Mode in a single tap.

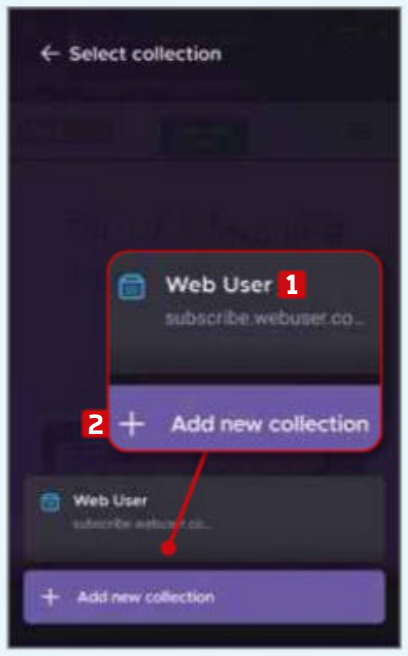
MINI WORKSHOP

Explore Firefox for Android's new features

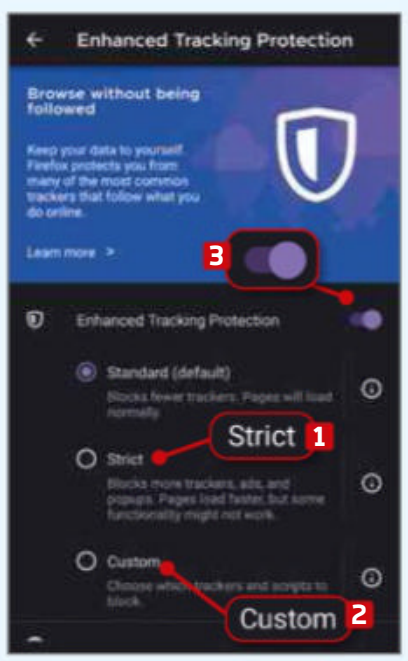
1 By default, Firefox for Android puts the address bar at the bottom of the screen. If you want to move it to the top, tap the three-dot menu button in the bottom right-hand corner and select Settings. On the Settings screen, select Customise under the General section heading, then tap to select the Top option under Toolbar. 1 You can also set your Light and Dark Theme preferences here. 2



2 Collections let you organise your saved tabs into groups. To add a tab to a Collection, visit the relevant page, tap the three-dot menu button next to the address bar and select 'Save to collection'. On the next screen, you can either choose an existing Collection 1 to save your tab to; or tap 'Add new collection,' 2 type a name for your new Collection and tap the tick button.



3 Enhanced Tracking Protection (ETP) is enabled by default. ETP's protection level is set to Standard by default, but you can change this if you want. Tap the shield icon to the left of the address bar, then select Protection Settings. Here, you can opt for Strict 1 to block more trackers, or Custom 2 to specify which trackers you want to block yourself. Or you can switch ETP off altogether. 3



Our rating ★★★★★

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

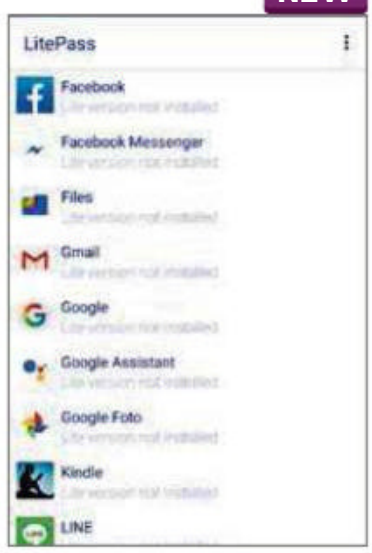
TOOLS

NEW

LitePass

bit.ly/2F6yajJ

6



LitePass has a simple mission in life; to keep you informed about all the apps that offer a 'lite' version. Lite apps are alternatives to full-fat apps, specially designed to have a lower impact on your device's resources and mobile data bandwidth. Initially developed for territories where low-end devices and slower networks are prevalent, lite apps are growing in popularity around the world, thanks to their smaller footprint and lower data costs.

LitePass lets you keep track of which apps have lite equivalents via a regularly updated list.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

PHOTOS

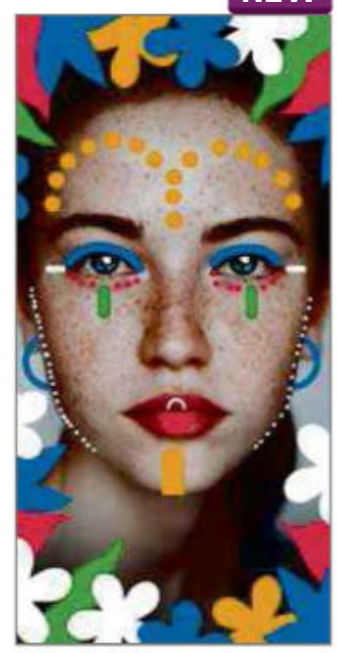
NEW

Bazaart

bit.ly/2QTIH5E

bit.ly/2QTevq9

8 12



Bazaart has been a firm favourite among iOS-owning photo editors for a while, and now its colourful collection of tweaking tools has been made available for Android users, too. The tools it offers have an artistic flavour, the most obviously useful option being the ability to remove and replace your photo's background with a few taps. You can use all Bazaart's features and content for free for seven days, after which some functions require a subscription (£3.59 per month) to unlock.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

GAME

NEW

Eve Echoes

bit.ly/31W9zXO

5.1

bit.ly/2Z0Lc9y

9

If you're a fan of immersive space simulations, you'll be glad that Eve Echoes is finally out of beta and waiting to consume hours of your life. Based on the successful sandbox formula established by Eve Online, the game effectively lets you play out your own epic space adventure across a vast universe, with its own player-driven economy, hundreds of unique vessels, thrilling PvP ship-to-ship combat and more. The action translates fairly well to mobile, though some text can be hard to read.

Our rating ★★★★☆

HEALTH

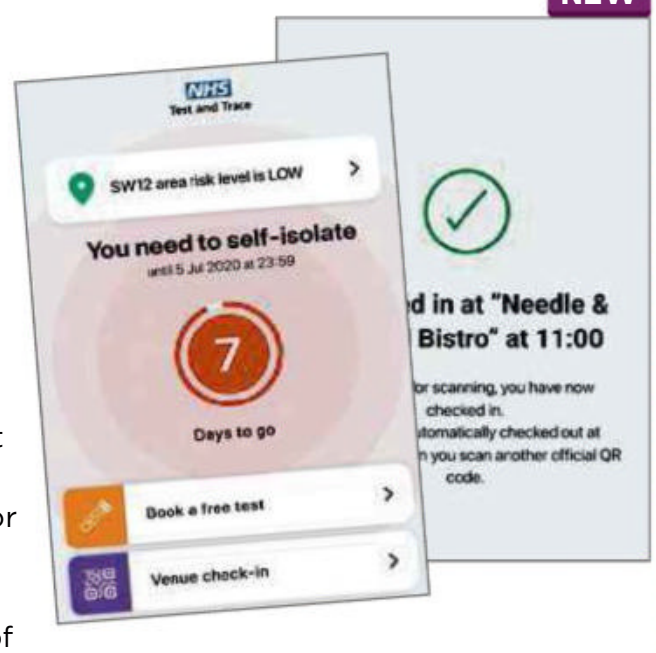
NEW

NHS COVID-19

bit.ly/2EKX0WT

bit.ly/2QS5iyo

6 13.5



The good news is that the government's much touted (by the government, at least) NHS Test and Trace app is finally available for Android and iOS. The bad news is that, at the time of writing, it's still very much stuck at the trial stage – usage is currently restricted to NHS responders and residents of the Isle of Wight and Newham. Hopefully, by the time you read this, it'll be enjoying a wider rollout to other areas of the UK. In the meantime, you can download the app in preparation for its arrival and read about its functions – including alerts to tell you that you've come into close contact with users who have tested positive – at covid19.nhs.uk.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

PHOTOS

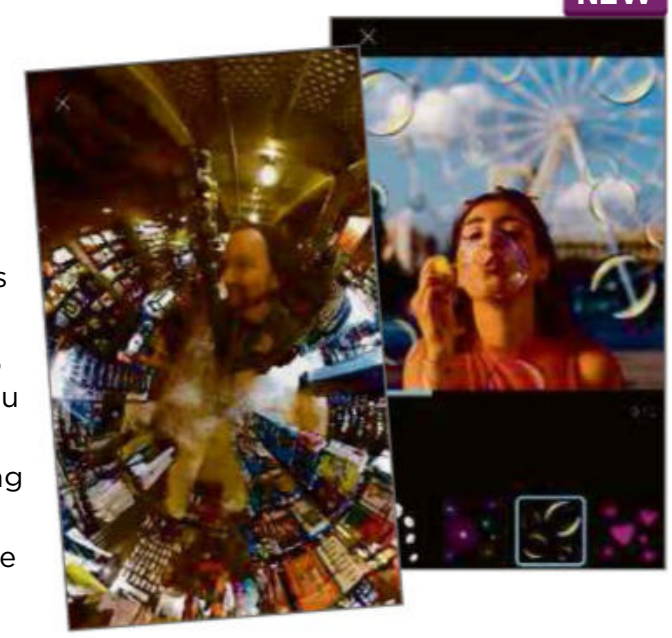
NEW

IQUISPIN

bit.ly/3jEPgEz

bit.ly/3jV6wFR

7 13



If your device's camera supports 360-degree panorama shots, IQUISPIN lets you add a little more sparkle by turning them into mini movies, complete with motion effects such as floating bubbles, twinkling stars and other fun embellishments. IQUISPIN can't be used to create 360-degree photos – you need to take these in a separate app first. Your own device's camera app may offer a 360-degree or spherical panorama option. Also, IQUISPIN only supports files created in the JPEG/Equirectangular Projection Format at an aspect ratio of 1:2. If an image is over 4,096 x 8,192 pixels in size, it will be scaled down automatically.

Our rating ★★★★☆

5 NEW APPS WORTH PAYING FOR

NOTES

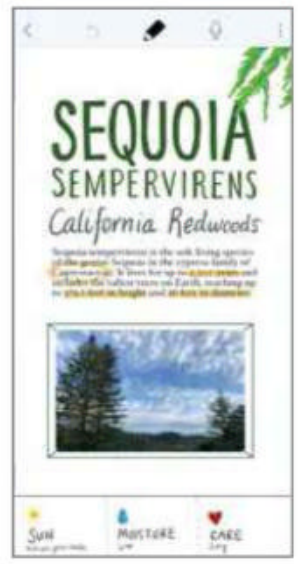
Notability

bit.ly/3hZlIB1

Price: £8.99

11

This popular note-taking app has a new Favorites toolbar and an improved Style menu. Several optional new features, such as handwriting recognition and stickers, are available via in-app purchases.



PRODUCTIVITY

Secure Clips

bit.ly/2F4UiLj

Price: £1.69

6

Android's default clipboard isn't very secure but this app fixes the problem by keeping all your clipboard content private from other apps. Once it's set up, you can copy and paste via the long-press menu.

GAME

Bright Paw

bit.ly/2Z2ANug

bit.ly/3hW0Had

Price: £4.99

7 12

Bright Paw is a quirky game in which you play a cute cat navigating your way through a series of escape room-style puzzles as you attempt to solve the mystery of your owners' murder.

PHOTOS

SlideScan

bit.ly/3gT7pwn

bit.ly/3gZ5HJY

Price: £5.49 per month (Android), £5.99 per month (iOS)

6 11.4

Got a collection of old slides gathering dust in a drawer somewhere? SlideScan lets you bring your memories back to life by scanning them in at high quality. You can try it for free for three days.

ART

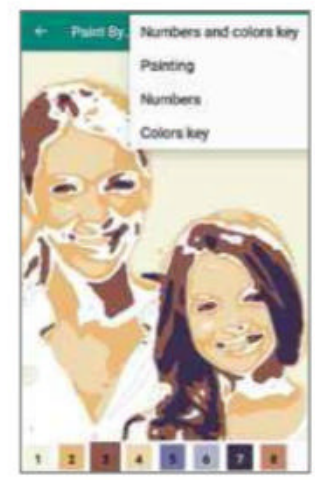
Paint By Numbers Creator Pro

bit.ly/32W3ytA

Price: £4.59

4.3

This app lets you have fun with your photos by converting them to paint-by-numbers images that you can colour in via the app or print out. This Pro version gives you access to the full colour palette.



Notability

Secure Clips

Bright Paw

SlideScan

Paint By Numbers Creator Pro

✓ Install this app...

GPS Speedometer

bit.ly/3jHWB67

4.1

Now that the UK has started opening up again, this app is ideal for keeping track of your movements. It's one of the more reliable speedometer apps on the Google Play store, with many positive reviews backing up its accuracy claims. It also functions as a full pedometer, odometer and mileage tracker, and shows a huge range of detailed data about your journey, whether you're travelling on foot or by car, bike, boat or plane. The displayed information includes current speed, average speed, maximum speed, distance, latitude, longitude, altitude and more. The app saves all your trips automatically so you can view your stats.

✗ ...Not this one

Speedometer 125

bit.ly/2QRnZSW

It might boast a fun, retro design but Speedometer 125 is a little more than a gimmick. Like GPS Speedometer, it uses GPS to measure the speed of the vehicle you're travelling in. But it has no practical application beyond displaying your current speed in the style of an old-fashioned thermometer. Not only that, but there's no option to stop the screen timing out and going blank, making it useless as an in-car speedometer.

Take a Screen Break

Take a rest from your browser with our fiendish fortnightly challenges. Can you solve our Elvis-song 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 ELVIS PRESLEY SONGS FROM THE EMOJI?

1 💔 🏨

2 😈 ➡️ 🧔

3 ↩️ 2️⃣ 💌

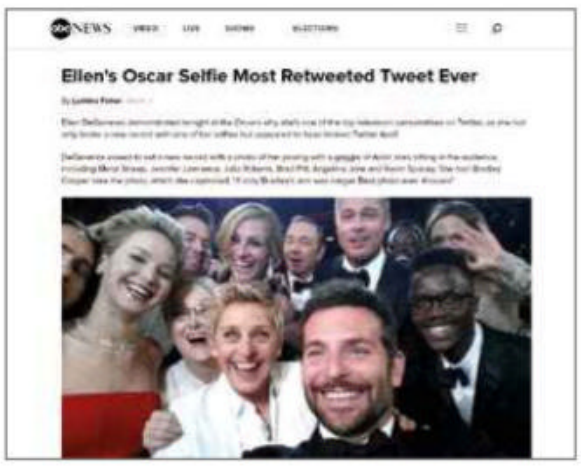
4 🏢 🏡 🪨

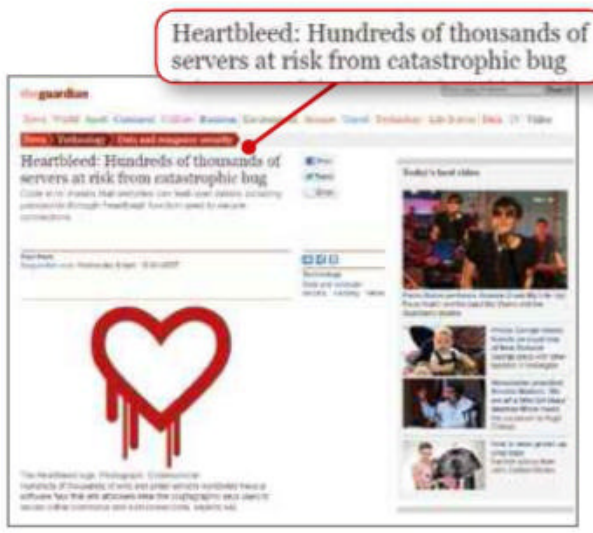
5 🔥 💑

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 4

Pinnacle Studio 24 Ultimate

WORTH £114.95 EACH

The new version of Pinnacle Studio Ultimate comes with a redesigned Title Editor, enhanced Video Masking and improvements that streamline your video-editing workflows. As always, it offers precision and power, inspiring limitless creative opportunities in moviemaking. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'Pinnacle' in the subject line. For more details, visit www.pinnaclesys.com and www.facebook.com/PinnacleSys.

WIN 1 OF 3

T5 Ultra Connect wireless earphones

WORTH £74.95 EACH

Rockjaw's T5 Ultra Connect has HD audio, an excellent range and provides more than 11 hours of battery life. Each earphone has a magnetic strip to connect them when they're not in use, so you don't lose them when they're hung around your neck. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'T5 Ultra Connect' in the subject line. For more info, visit rockjawaudio.com and follow @rockjawaudio on Twitter.

FAQ

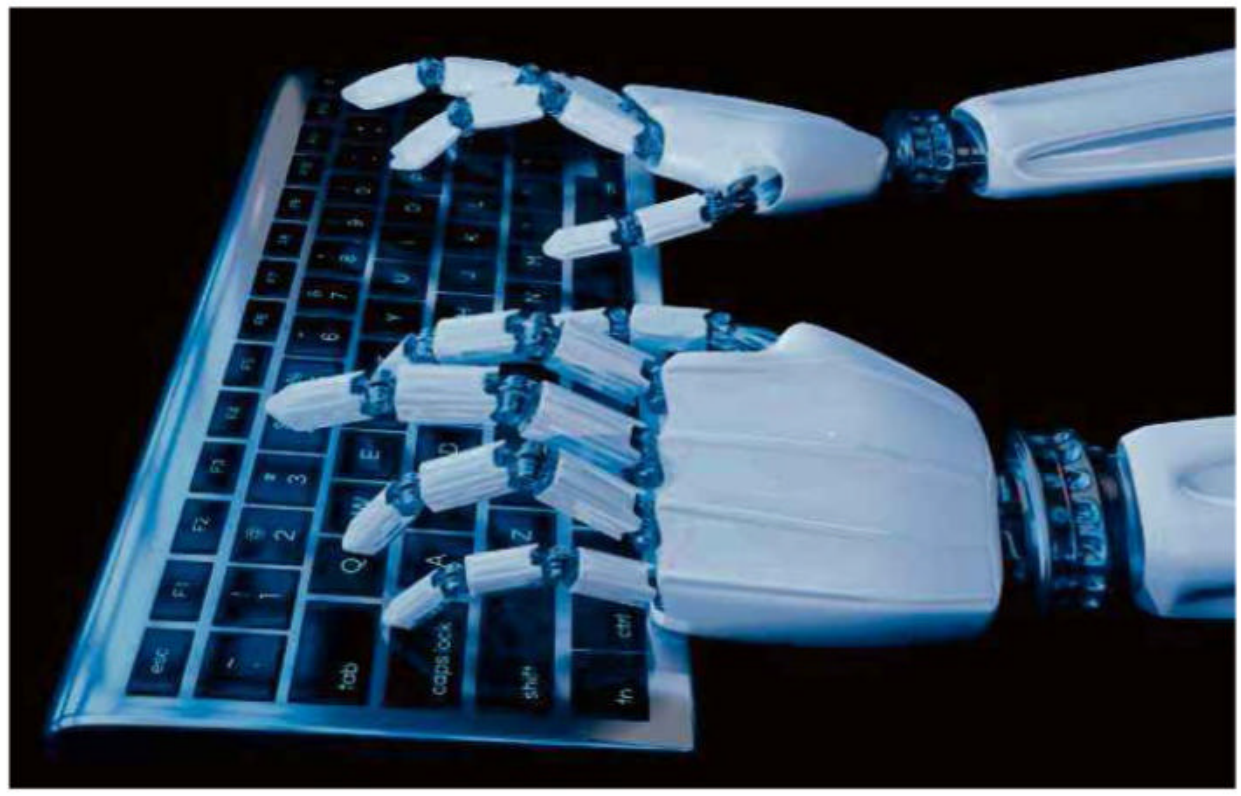
Everything you need to know about the most interesting new technology trends and events

Our guide to GPT-3

No AI was used in writing this article, but it could have been. **David Crookes** looks at the latest development in auto-generated text

What is it?

GPT-3 is an exciting but controversial machine-learning system that's capable of auto-generating text with a minimum of input. Standing for "generative pre-trained transformer" and now on its third version, GPT-3 has been dubbed the most powerful language model ever built – producing copious amounts of prose which, in many cases, reads as if it was written by a human.



Where has it come from?

The software is the brainchild of OpenAI (openai.com), an artificial-intelligence research and deployment company based in San Francisco. Founded as a non-profit organisation in 2015 with a $1bn investment from SpaceX founder Elon Musk, among others, it has since become a for-profit business, with Microsoft alone pumping in $1bn last year. The company created the basic premise of GPT in 2017 and announced GPT-2 last year. But it's the far more advanced GPT-3, unveiled in June this year, which has set the tech world ablaze.

How does it work?

GPT-3 is best explained as an autocomplete program, similar to the type used by search engines and phone keyboards, which suggests words and phrases to follow text that you type in. It looks for patterns and works out which word is most likely to come next, building blocks of text as it goes along. All it needs is an initial steer as to what it should be writing. From that point, it can crack on with the task at hand without further human intervention.

OpenAI develops artificial intelligence projects designed to benefit humanity

GPT-3 sources much of its information from the huge Common Crawl dataset

Why is this seen as groundbreaking?

The main difference between GPT-3 and previous programs is the sheer amount of data it draws on. This tool has been trained on a staggering 45TB of data, which includes every single article from the English version of Wikipedia – although that only comprises 0.6% of the entire dataset. The rest is made up of other text-based sources – from blogs, Reddit posts and newspaper articles to digitised books, manuals and religious texts – literally anything that's written online. 60% of the data has come from the Common Crawl (commoncrawl.org) dataset, which includes 60 million domains.

So what is it capable of writing?

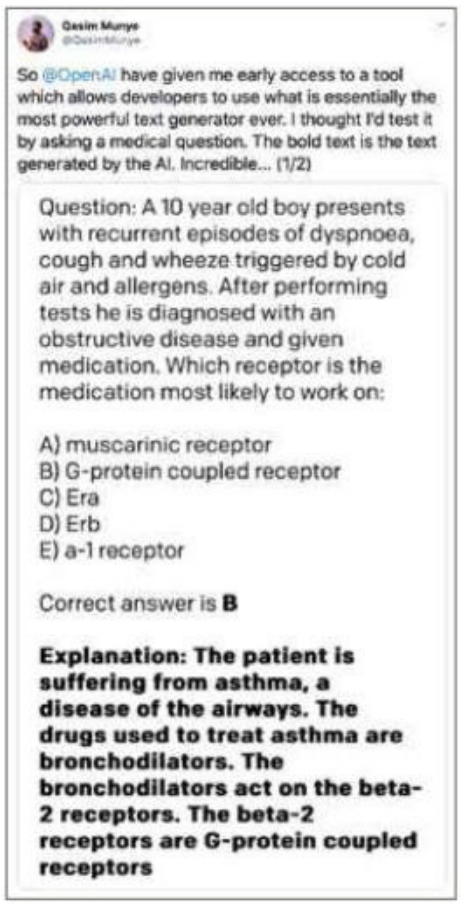
Pretty much anything that can be written. It can string together original, creative prose, for example, or churn out poetry, legal documents and even programming code. For the program to figure what it's supposed to be writing, a human needs only to input a few words or phrases, and it'll work out the style and produce content accordingly.

How is it currently being used?

OpenAI has released a paid-for API (beta.openai.com) that grants developers access to GPT-3's artificial intelligence models. This provides a "text in, text out" interface, allowing words to be inputted and completed text to be viewed, which suggests that GPT-3 could be used for semantic search, chatbots, creative writing and productivity.

Any examples?

Well, we've seen GPT-3 use a URL and a description to code a mock website (bit.ly/mock510). Medical student Qasim



A medical student asked GPT-3 a tricky question and was amazed by the accuracy of the answer

Munye (bit.ly/qasim510) asked the AI some health-related questions and received accurate answers with detailed explanations. You can see a guitar tab generated from a fictional song and artist (bit.ly/guitar510), and some legalese courtesy of Francis Jervis (bit.ly/jervis510).

Are there any apps that I can try myself?

Of course. A good place to start would be AI Dungeon (play.aidungeon.io) by Nick Walton, which we looked at in our AI experiments feature in Issue 507. This game now runs on a GPT-3 based model to interpret your commands and generate a narrative – you can try it for free for seven days. Likewise, in Issue 490, we looked at a chatbot that uses GPT-2 to create documents based on what it reads (talktotransformer.com). You can still use it, but you'll need to sign in and are now restricted to 20,000 characters in any given month on the free tier.

AI Dungeon generates unique text-based adventure games using GPT-3 technology

Why aren't GPT-3 apps more open?

Mainly because the technology is still new and there are concerns about moving too fast, too soon. For example, a chatbot called Learn From Anyone (learnfromanyone.com) was shared online in July, allowing you to type the name of a 'teacher', such as Elon Musk or William Shakespeare, and indicate what you wanted to learn. Its creator said a security review was needed, so it's currently not available to try unless you're part of the testing team. You'll find many examples of what it's up to on Twitter, though.

Learn from Anyone generates lessons in the style of your preferred teacher

Why is a security review needed for the apps?

Biases and negatives can creep in with GPT-3. On 18 July, for instance, Jerome Pesenti, the head of AI at Facebook, used GPT-3 to write tweets. He entered single words such as "Jews", "black", "women" and "holocaust", and was aghast at the resulting prejudice (bit.ly/pesenti510). Certain words tend to become connected to certain groups: for example, "naughty" often appears when discussing women. In response, OpenAI co-founder Sam Altman unveiled a 'toxicity filter' that is now enabled by default, which shows OpenAI is well aware of the issues.

So it shouldn't go unsupervised?

That's right, and Altman has said that the hype around GPT-3 is "way too much". He tweeted: "It's impressive but it still has serious weaknesses and sometimes makes very silly mistakes". He called GPT-3 a "very early glimpse", and it's important to bear in mind that any jaw-dropping examples of the AI doing great things get promoted over less impressive results.

However, while tests for factual accuracy sometimes result in failure ("How many eyes does my foot have?" asked one researcher of GPT-3. "Your foot has two eyes," came the answer), it is possible to tease the tool into giving the correct response by steering it in the right direction via the initial prompts. This, however, could become an issue in itself. OpenAI has warned that text generation could fall prey to "misinformation, spam, phishing, abuse of legal and governmental processes, fraudulent essay writing and social engineering pretexting".

GPT-3 said a researcher had two eyes in their foot, proving it's not infallible

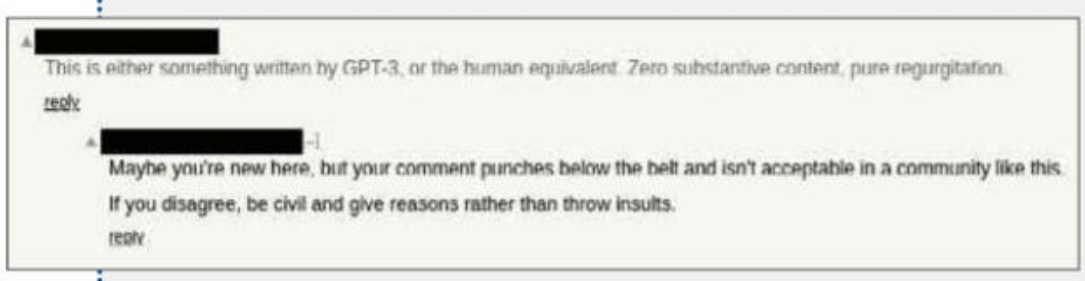
So we need to tread carefully?

Yes, but that may be easier said than done, now that GPT-3 is out there. Although the technology can be used with good intentions, such power is likely to be abused – if not now then at some point in the future. It could have a profound impact on employment – Microsoft has already laid off dozens of journalists working for Microsoft News and MSN in favour of using AI to curate content – and lead to more fake news and inaccurate research than ever before.

As it stands, GPT-3 is a huge leap forward and, if it ends up being able to reason abstractly and think for itself (achieving the goal of artificial general intelligence), then who knows which direction it will go in.

DOES GPT-3 PASS THE TURING TEST?

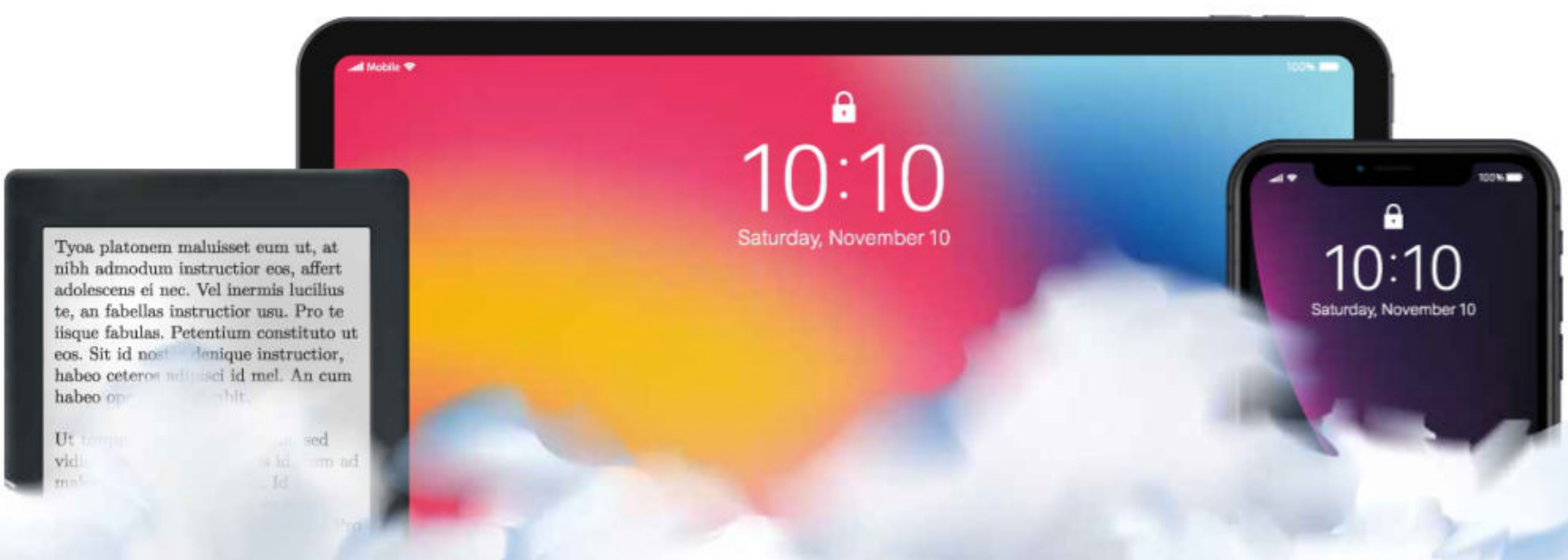
Experts say GPT-3 falls short of passing the Turing Test – its overall output would not fool a human into believing the AI was a real person. However, to test the power of GPT-3, Liam Porr created a fake blog (bit.ly/fakeblog510) and one of the posts not only reached the top slot on Hacker News, but attracted 26,000 visitors in two weeks. Only a handful of visitors commented that it was perhaps written by GPT-3 – a suggestion that ended up being downvoted by the community. "I felt a little bad considering that it really was written by GPT-3, but it's still pretty funny," Liam wrote (for real) in a subsequent blog post (bit.ly/liam510).



Repair, Reuse & Recycle

COVER FEATURE

Has your phone slowed to a crawl? Is your tablet on its last legs? Don't throw them away! **Jane Hoskyn** outlines three Rs that give your devices new life: Repair, Reuse and Recycle



The TVs, cameras and video recorders of the 1980s may feel clunky by today's streamlined standards, but they lasted years. Your latest phone, however, may be up the spout by spring. The result is that half a million tonnes of electrical waste goes into UK bins – and then into landfill – every year. Another million tonnes is stashed at home and dumped in our lofts and drawers in favour of shiny new replacements (bit.ly/waste510).

And that's exactly what the manufacturers want. Our obsession with new stuff means more profit for Apple, Samsung and co, so they encourage such profligate habits by making their devices ever more difficult for the average person to fix. But enough is enough. Following pressure from consumer groups, the EU recently adopted new requirements that enshrine your right to repair your gadgets yourself (repair.eu).

In this feature, we show you how to make your devices last longer – not only by carrying out DIY repairs, but also by recycling them safely, and reusing and repurposing them in ways you might never have imagined.

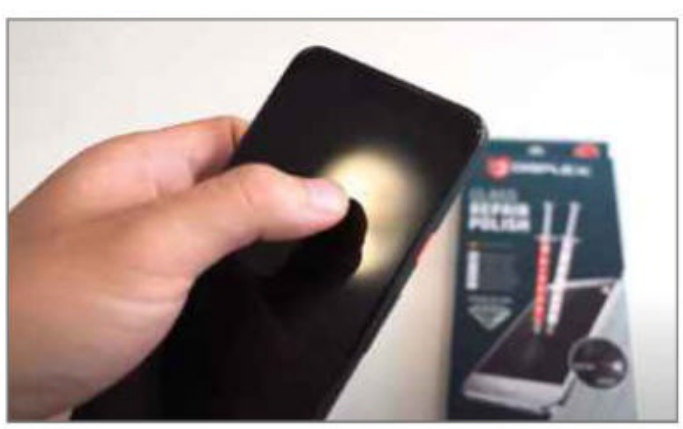
COVER FEATURE

REPAIR YOUR BROKEN DEVICES

Rub out touchscreen scratches

Toothpaste and vegetable oil are the two best-known home remedies for "rubbing out" superficial touchscreen scratches. Well, save that minty freshness for your teeth because not only does toothpaste not fix scratches, it may even damage your screen further. Here's a YouTube video debunking the myth: bit.ly/paste510.

You'll have more luck using a special solution such as G3 Pro (currently £7.55 from Amazon, amzn.to/3gHPYz5) or Glass Repair from UK site Scratch Doctor (£8.95, bit.ly/scratchdoc510). They won't magically remove the damage, but they can smooth scratches on screens and optical glass, as shown here: bit.ly/scratch510.



Use a dedicated screen-repair paste to smooth surface scratches on your screen

Use glue to make a screen last longer

A cracked display doesn't necessarily spell doom or a whopping bill to get your screen replaced (Samsung charges £229: bit.ly/samscreen510). If the damage is to the touchscreen layer ('digitiser'), rather than the LCD panel beneath it, then the device should still work. To prevent further damage, secure the crack with special screen glue (around £10, amzn.to/2YGgGlf).

Despite the YouTube videos extolling the screen-fixing virtues of superglue, epoxy resin and even nail varnish, please do not try this at home. Not unless you were planning to replace the screen anyway.

Use special screen glue to stop touchscreen cracks in their tracks

HOW FIXABLE IS YOUR SMARTPHONE?

Ease of repair may not be a top feature on your priority list when choosing which phone to buy, but there's a big gap between easiest and hardest. And with big companies cottoning on to the extra profits to be made from hard-to-fix devices, the gap is getting wider. See the full list at bit.ly/repairability510.

Easiest: Fairphone 3 (Android phone specially designed to be as easy as possible to take apart and fix using replaceable parts, shop.fairphone.com)

Easy: Shift 6m (modular Android phone built in Germany, www.shiftphones.com/en)

Moderately easy: iPhone (display is easy to replace, especially on old models); Huawei Mate (modular components, but front and back are glued down)

Hard: Google Pixel 3 and 4 (back panel glued on; display repair requires complete disassembly); Samsung Galaxy devices (parts all glued down)

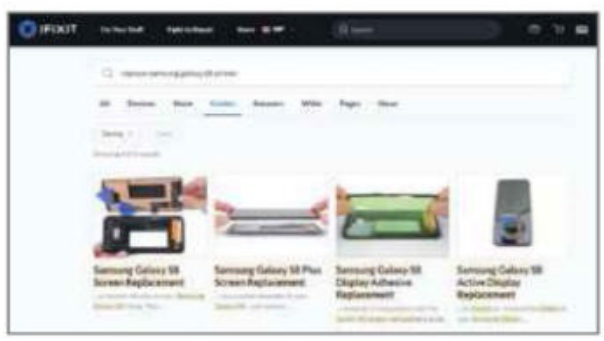
Hardest: Motorola Razr (parts glued and soldered together, making disassembly near impossible)

Replace a phone or tablet display

Even if your cracked screen does need replacing, you may still be able to do this at home, especially on an older device that doesn't have its components glued or soldered together. Visit the superb website iFixit (www.ifixit.com) and look for guides specific to your device. Our search for 'replace Samsung Galaxy S8 screen' turned up six illustrated guides to fitting a screen in Samsung's notoriously hard-to-fix devices: bit.ly/samfix510.

If you've read through the steps and think you can manage the task yourself, buy a replacement screen specific to your device's model. These cost as little as £10 and sometimes come with device-specific tools for prying off the broken display.

A smartphone screwdriver set may also come in handy (this one's just £5: amzn.to/32yrvHi). iFixit also sells components and tools, and displays prices in pounds when you switch to the Store section of the site.



iFixit is an essential bookmark for DIY repairs such as replacing phone screens

Rejuvenate your device with a new battery

Replacing a device's rechargeable battery can add years to its lifespan, and it's a simple task if we're talking about an early Kindle, a digital camera or an older mobile phone. Tech World (techworldonline.co.uk) lets you search by device or battery model to find new batteries and chargers. To recycle the old battery, order a free collection box from Recycle Now (bit.ly/battbox510).

Newer devices are trickier to tackle because companies have gradually made batteries harder to replace. For example, to replace the battery in an e-reader from around the Kindle 3 onwards, you'll need a mini screwdriver and a plastic 'pry tool' (bit.ly/kinfix510). Search iFixit for 'replace battery', plus your device, for illustrated steps.

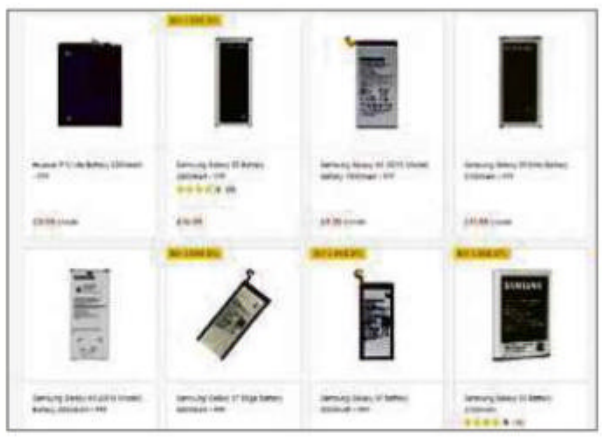
E-reader batteries are relatively easy to replace, but you may need special tools

Replace your smartphone's battery

Apple led the move away from removable batteries by sealing them inside iPhones and voiding your warranty if you tried replacing them (bit.ly/ibatt510). Samsung ditched removable batteries in 2014, and LG in 2015. Now, only sustainable Android devices such as a Shift (www.shiftphones.com/en) or Fairphone (shop.fairphone.com) make batteries and components easy to replace at home.

It's still possible to replace the battery in a big-brand device, though. First, check the battery's health using AccuBattery (Android, bit.ly/accubatt510), then go to iFixit for device-specific advice. Bear in mind that you'll need a fair bit of kit and plenty of patience. For example, to replace the battery in a hard-to-dismantle Google Pixel 3, you'll need an adhesive knife, suction cups, a heated 'iOpener' tool and device-specific adhesive strips (bit.ly/pixfix510). The same goes for recent iPhones, including the 11 Pro (bit.ly/ifix510) and Samsung Galaxy devices (this YouTube video illustrates the process well: bit.ly/samvid510).

To buy batteries, head to My Memory (bit.ly/mymem510), where a new Samsung Galaxy battery costs less than £10. Compare that with the £59 Samsung charges to replace it for you (bit.ly/sambatt510). Apple charges £49-£69 plus £7.44 delivery (apple.co/2YGIaXY).



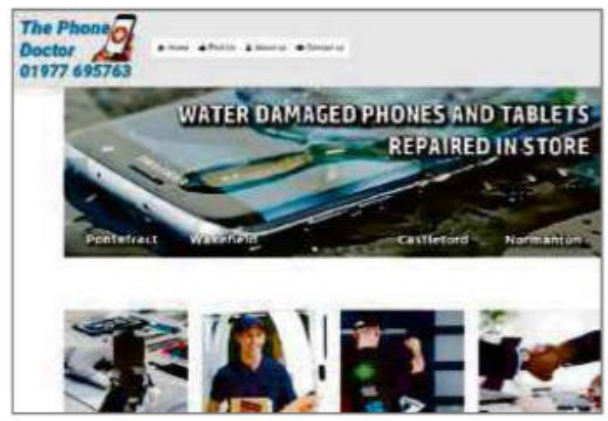
Even the newest smartphone batteries can be replaced at home and are cheap to buy

Fix a water-damaged device

'Waterproof' smartphones are increasingly common, partly because of the very same internal seals that make DIY repairs so tricky. But no mainstream smartphone is truly waterproof. A Samsung Galaxy S10 or Huawei P30 is rain-proof, but you wouldn't want to leave it in the bath!

Certain damage-limitation basics are essential if your device has been soaked. Switch it off if it's still on, and don't plug it in. Don't press any buttons, blow into ports or shake the phone, since this can push water further inside. Sit it on top of a disposable humidifier and let it dry out over a day or two. Water-damage rescue kits are inexpensive and worth a try (such as the AF Tech Rescue Kit, which costs £9 from amzn.to/3hKttKZ).

If none of that helps, you could risk taking the phone apart to let the insides dry out. Type `disassemble` into iFixit, along with the device's make and model, for guidance. If you'd rather let an expert handle the job, an independent UK repair shop such as The Phone Doctor (£36 to fix water damage, bit.ly/phonedoc510) or FixFactor (£59, bit.ly/fixfac510) will do their best for your sodden gadget. They can't guarantee to repair it, but they will offer to recycle what isn't fixable.



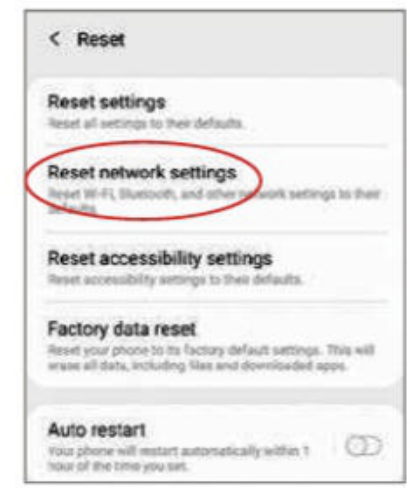
If your drowned device is past DIY repair, try a specialist such as The Phone Doctor

Fix your phone's audio problems

The most likely cause of audio problems in a mobile device is a worn-out wire connection in your headphones. If the rest of the components are high-quality enough to be worth keeping, solder a replacement plug to the wire using the steps outlined at bit.ly/fixplug510.

If you're sure the headphones are working, then clean the phone's socket to ensure the connection isn't hampered. As a last resort, you can replace the socket. iFixit runs through the process with a Samsung Galaxy S8 in this YouTube video: bit.ly/s8vid510.

If Bluetooth suddenly refuses to work, even though both devices are charged and in range, then delete old devices from the Bluetooth pairing list (tap 'Forget this Device' in iOS Settings, and Unpair in Android). Android also lets you restore Bluetooth and other connections to factory settings: go to Settings, 'General management', Reset, 'Reset network settings' (on some devices it's in Advanced, Reset Options).



To fix Bluetooth bugs, reset your device's network settings

BEST APPS TO TURN YOUR OLD DEVICE INTO A...

- **Timelapse camera:** Create a timelapse of your garden waking up and going to sleep each day. Leave your old device in your window and use Lapse It (Android and iOS, www.lapseit.com) to take photos at set intervals, then turn them into a video.
- **Wireless webcam:** DroidCam (Android bit.ly/droidcam510, iOS bit.ly/ioscam510) turns a spare smartphone into a webcam for your PC.
- **Dictaphone:** Easy Voice Recorder (Android bit.ly/easydroid510, iOS apple.co/31H3gHD) lets you record anything from shopping lists to birdsong.
- **Interactive photo album:** Erase your old tablet, load it with family photos and videos, then use F-Stop Gallery (Android, bit.ly/fstop510) to create albums and slideshows. It's a great idea for a family gift.
- **Digital photo frame:** Free app Scoompa (Android, bit.ly/scoompa510) lets you select hundreds of photos and videos on your device or cloud storage, then creates a customisable slideshow. LiveFrame (iOS, www.liveframeapp.com) lets you include photos from your social media contacts.
- **Make-up or shaving mirror:** Get a well-lit magnified close-up of your face with Mirror (Android, bit.ly/mirror510), which turns the tablet's front-facing camera into a powerfully configurable mirror.

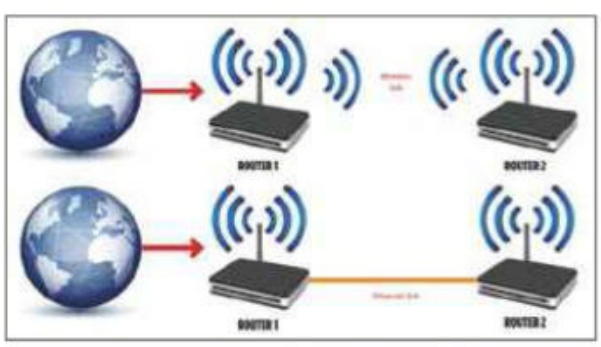
COVER FEATURE

REUSE AND REPURPOSE YOUR OLD TECH

Turn your old router into a Wi-Fi network extender

If you still have an old router from when you last changed internet providers, dig it out of the loft and put it back to work as a network extender, solving your home's Wi-Fi black spots.

The process of hooking up multiple routers via Ethernet, to create a wireless distribution system (WDS) and spread your home's Wi-Fi to the shed, loft, basement or wherever, is fairly easy to do at home. However, it does involve several steps and checks, and tinkering with your PC's Network settings. So rather than go into too much detail here, we'll direct you to this excellent YouTube video, which includes numerous useful screenshots: bit.ly/routvid510. Our sister website Expert Reviews explains more at bit.ly/wifiext510, and there's a detailed guide at bit.ly/router510.



Extend your Wi-Fi to your shed by turning your old router into a network extender

Turn old routers into a ham radio network

Ham-radio enthusiasts in the US have developed software that lets them use routers to create a 'mesh' radio network for broadcasting over long distances. If you fancy getting involved, read about the Broadband Hamnet project at bit.ly/hamnet510, and watch this excellent introductory video from YouTube channel HamRadioConcepts: bit.ly/hamvid510. Or get in touch with your local ham radio club and offer them your old (working) routers. Tony Hancock would be proud.

The Broadband Hamnet project turns Wi-Fi routers into a ham radio network

'Donate' your Android device to medical science

If your old Android phone or tablet still works but is gathering dust, then you can donate its unused power to medical (and other) science by installing the free app Boinc (bit.ly/boinc510). The app automatically harnesses the computing power of unused devices and your Wi-Fi to help power crowdsourced science projects, notably medical trials and astronomy research. When you install the app, you get to choose which projects you want your old phone to help with – for example, to protect the planet from getting hit by an asteroid. Find out more at boinc.berkeley.edu.

Boinc turns your old Android into fuel for scientific research

Create a combined GPS, dashcam and car radio

Even if your old phone or tablet has no SIM – and, therefore, no internet access – while you're out and about, it will still work as a GPS navigator. You'll need to download apps and maps on your home Wi-Fi but once that's done, you don't need a connection to use them. Waze (Android and iOS, www.waze.com/apps) gives you turn-by-turn directions, estimated time of arrival, petrol prices, accident warnings and more. Offline GPS (Android, bit.ly/offgps510) is particularly good for maps. To use the device's camera as a dashcam, get AutoGuard (Android, bit.ly/aguard510) or RoadAR (iOS, bit.ly/roadar510).

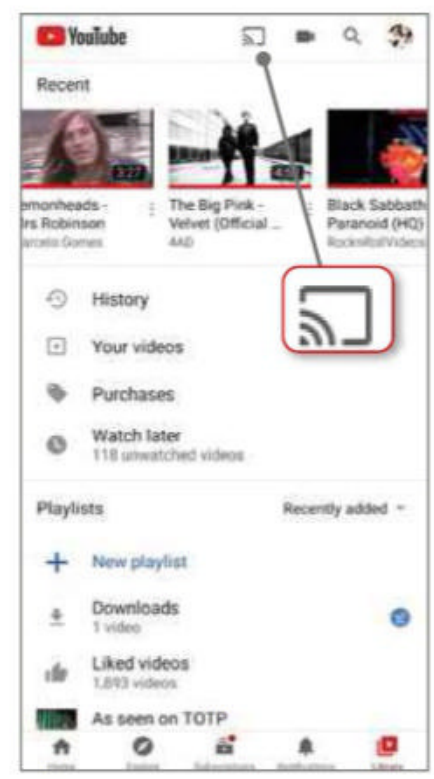
For in-car radio, pre-load music and radio via apps such as BBC Sounds (which lets you download entire radio shows for free, bit.ly/sounds510); Castbox (best for podcasts, bit.ly/castbox510); or Spotify (whose £9.99-per-month version lets you download unlimited music for offline listening, www.spotify.com).

Keep a second pair of eyes on the road: repurpose your old device as a dashcam

Turn a spare mobile device into a media hub

If your old or spare phone or tablet is new enough to support the latest app versions of your favourite streaming services, you can use it as a casting hub to stream films, TV shows and your own videos to your smart TV or TV stick.

For example, in YouTube's app (bit.ly/youtube510), open a playlist or video, tap the cast icon and select your TV or streaming device (which will need to be switched on) to beam the action to the bigger screen. The wonderfully versatile VLC Media Player app lets you cast your own video files and photos to your TV from your old or spare Windows and Mac laptops, as well as from Android and iOS devices (bit.ly/vlcapps510). You can also stream any web video via VLC, and use add-ons to integrate the player with other music and video services, including TuneIn Radio, YouTube and Dailymotion (addons.videolan.org), and Spotify (bit.ly/vlcspot510).



Cast YouTube videos and playlists from an old mobile device to your TV

The casting capabilities of your old device needn't stop at video. Spotify, Amazon Music (amzn.to/3gLs71h) and YouTube Music (Google's successor to Google Play Music, music.youtube.com) all let you stream your playlists via a Bluetooth speaker or smart speaker (such as Amazon Echo), creating a nifty stereo system that you can then control by voice via Alexa, Google Assistant or Siri.

Use an old phone or tablet as a universal remote

Numerous apps will turn your old mobile device into a touchscreen remote for your streaming services. Better still, they add keyboards and voice control to make searching infinitely easier than clicking with a standard remote.

The best smart TV remote is an app – it's even got a proper keyboard and voice control

There are official remote-control apps for Roku (Android and iOS, bit.ly/roku510) and Amazon Fire TV (Android bit.ly/firedroid510, iOS bit.ly/fireios510), and you can use the Google Home app (Android and iOS, bit.ly/home510) to control your Chromecast. Google Home, Alexa, Nest, Apple Home Kit (bit.ly/homekit510) and others can extend this remote-control power to all supported devices, including smart speakers and thermostats.

Use your old tablet as a second monitor for your computer

Use your old tablet as a second PC screen

Splashtop Personal (Android 4+ and iOS 11+, bit.ly/splash510) pairs your tablet (or phone, if you don't mind a second monitor being on the small side) with your Windows computer via Wi-Fi. You can then set the PC to treat the tablet as an extra monitor. The best of the company's setup videos on YouTube is seven years old, but the basics and links still apply: bit.ly/splashhow510.

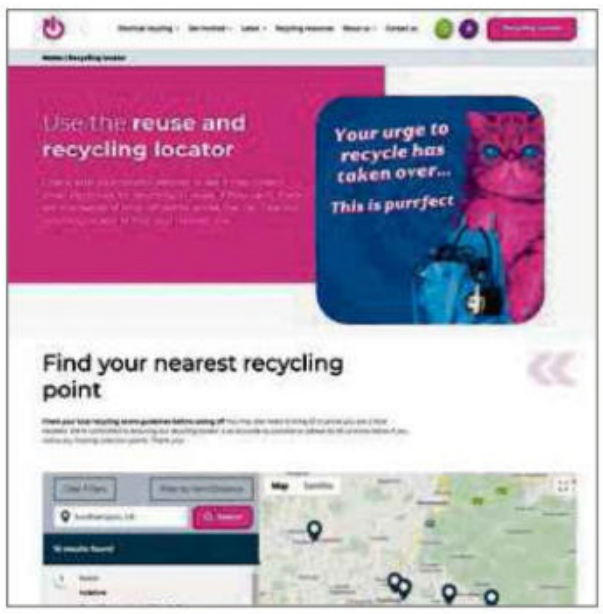
Alternatively, load up the old tablet with app versions of tools that you also use on your PC, such as Gmail, Facebook, Amazon and RSS feeds (for example, Feedly, feedly.com), then use them to get updates without having to switch on your PC.

RECYCLE AND SELL YOUR OLD TECH DEVICES

Find local shops to recycle your gadgets

According to the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive, unrecycled household electricals cost the UK over £370m per year in lost materials such as gold, copper, aluminium and steel. They also pollute our environment and harm wildlife.

Luckily, it's easy to get your gadgets recycled if they're beyond repair. Anything with a plug, battery or cable can be recycled, so your broken old chargers, gaming controllers and power tools can all find new life. Go to the Recycle Your Electricals Locator (bit.ly/locator510) to find local shops that accept various types of electrical rubbish. Click 'See more details' to check which type of item each shop will accept. For lithium-ion batteries and other small electricals, order a box from Recycle Now (bit.ly/battbox510).



Your nearest tech recycling point may be a local high-street shop

Sell your old tech – even if it's broken

Before sending old devices to the knacker's yard, find out if they're worth anything. The easiest way is to enter an item's details into Sell My Mobile (www.sellmymobile.com) to get a quote, then follow the steps to send them your devices. Also check Compare My Mobile (bit.ly/compare510), which lets you lock in a quote for up to 14 days; and look at second-hand entertainment retailers including CeX (uk.webuy.com) and Music Magpie (www.musicmagpie.co.uk), whose Sell Phones & Tech page (bit.ly/selltech510) delivers an instant quote.

Turn your old Moto X into £20 with Music Magpie, which also accepts CDs and DVDs

These middleman sellers will even give a quote for devices that don't work, although you're looking at about a tenth of the working price. However, phones that are water-damaged or have cracked screens aren't likely to net you any cash at all.

Trade in old tech for Apple or Samsung credit

Apple's Trade In scheme lets you barter a computer or device for Apple Store credit – and it doesn't even have to be an i-device. If your unwanted item isn't eligible for credit, they'll still recycle it for free. Head to apple.co/2GayFKj to enter a few details about the item you want to trade in and get a quote. You can then take the stuff to an Apple Store or order a pre-paid postage pack, then send it

Apple gives store credit on old iPads, iPhones, iPods – and some non-Apple devices, too

back within 14 days to get your credit.

Samsung now offers a similar trade-in service for phones, tablets and smart watches at bit.ly/samtrade510, but the device needs to be a Samsung product in working order.

Donate old devices to a good cause

Charity shops are far more welcoming of old electrical goods than they used to be, and their websites may even help you declutter by paying for postage.

Children's charity Little Lives UK has a free downloadable Royal Mail label for any weight of old phones and tablets (bit.ly/littlelives510). Their experts will then refurbish the devices, if possible, or send them for safe recycling.

To sell your phone and automatically split the proceeds with Oxfam, use the Fonebank website (bit.ly/fonebank510). You can also donate old phones, tablets, iPods and other small electricals to any Oxfam shop for refurbishment or recycling. WaterAid also works with Fonebank to sell your old phone, and will even take your old car (bit.ly/wateraid510), while the Institute of Cancer Research will accept your old printer ink cartridges as well as mobile phones (bit.ly/ink510).

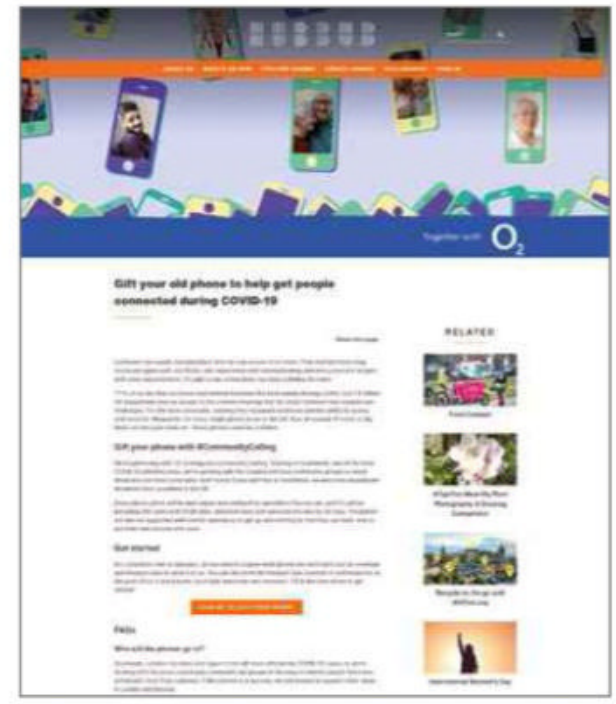
Your dusty old electricals can help change lives by raising money for charity

The Restart Project works with numerous UK charities to raise money from old gadgets, whether they are working or broken. Find out more at therestartproject.org/unwanted.

Help isolated people stay in touch

Community Calling (bit.ly/community510) was founded by O2 and local charities in London to help isolated people stay in touch with loved ones during lockdown. The project is now spreading across the country and will, the organisers hope, outlive COVID-19 to continue helping people feel less alone.

All donated phones must still be in working condition, and you're asked to perform a factory reset before donating yours. Chargers are also gratefully accepted. Click Sign Up To Gift Your Phone to order a free package for posting your unwanted devices. ■



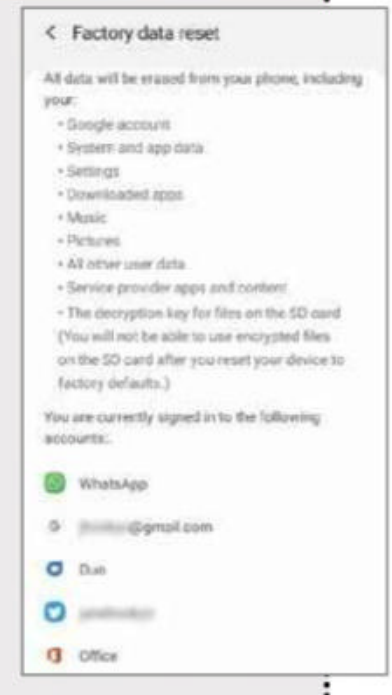
Your old phone can help people stay in touch during the pandemic and beyond

DELETE YOUR DATA BEFORE DITCHING DEVICES

Wiping data from your old devices is essential, like shredding important paperwork before binning it. Some recycling centres offer to do it for you but for peace of mind, we recommend wiping the data yourself.

To erase data from a PC or laptop, use the open-source tool Permadelete (bit.ly/permadel510). If your computer is on the vintage side, use SDelete, which works on versions of Windows going back to 2000 (bit.ly/sdelete510). For a Mac, use Permanent Eraser (bit.ly/permeraser510).

To wipe all data from your phone or tablet, go into Settings and perform a factory reset, which wipes data and removes any cloud-based protection such as iCloud and Google Find My Device. Also remember to remove any SIM and memory cards. Sell My Mobile outlines data-wiping steps for different devices in detail at bit.ly/wipedata510.



NEXT ISSUE on sale Wednesday 30 September 2020

Killed by Google

Discover the best free alternatives to tools that Google has abandoned

PLUS...

STOP USING EXTENSIONS
Ditch dodgy browser add-ons in favour of scripts

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Best free audio-editing tools

Whether you're trimming old music tracks or recording a podcast, you want an audio editor that keeps sound quality high. **Steve Clark** tests six of the best free audio-editing tools

Audacity | www.audacityteam.org | ★★★★★

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

What we liked: Audacity has long been considered the premier free audio-editing software, and that's unlikely to change any time soon. For zero cost, you get all the features of professional, paid-for alternatives, with no annoying limitations or paywalled extras.

Editing audio in Audacity is easy, particularly if you're already familiar with video-editing software. Import your files (almost every audio format is supported), then trim, clip and mix your masterpiece across multiple channels with pinpoint accuracy. As well as importing files, you can also record directly in the tool. This lets you use multiple inputs or sources – ideal for recording a podcast with a friend, for instance – with each input given a separate channel.

Most of the work is carried out via the central control panel – a collection of nine core commands in a ribbon across the top. Lots of other complex options nestle within the toolbar headings, so there's lots to explore for advanced users. Noise reduction, for example, is an absolute necessity. In just a few clicks, that low hiss of dead air that the microphone picks up is gone, giving a professional polish to productions.

If you enjoy toying with your audio, the extensive Effects section is a particular highlight, making it possible to create new, other-worldly sounds or mimic, say, a voice on an old-fashioned wireless.

To help you get the most out of your creations, Audacity has a wealth of plugins for adding extra abilities and features, such as adjusting tempos, detecting the pitch and creating new audio effects.

How it can be improved: Audacity is showing its age and its dated interface isn't just messy – it can be downright overwhelming if you're new to the game. There's also no context menu, for right-clicking a track to quickly splice, split or duplicate it. However, the program's biggest failing is destructive editing – when you import a track, any changes made by the software directly modify the original file. Thankfully, there's an Undo button for backtracking on any mistakes you might make.

OUR VERDICT

Audacity continues its reign as king of the free audio editors. It ably competes with expensive professional software and, although there are minor flaws, it delivers all the features you need, whatever your skill level.

Ocenaudio | www.ocenaudio.com | ★★★★★

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

What we liked:

Ocenaudio, a program that began life as an internal tool for a Brazilian university research group, is designed "for people who need to edit and analyse audio files without complications". On that promise, it delivers and, like Audacity, does so for free and without limits.

The software has an unfussy interface with modern trimmings that make it far more accessible than many in its field, including our Gold Award winner. And despite its apparent simplicity, Ocenaudio is almost as powerful as Audacity. Outside of basics such as noise reduction and audio analysis, you'll find bags of filters and effects – just not quite as many. Multi-track editing is also supported. Meanwhile, audiophiles will appreciate being able to switch between waveform and spectral views, or a combination of both.

The controls are a bit fiddly and small, situated beside a searchable file bar. But at least right-clicking offers easy access to core controls.

How it can be improved:

Ocenaudio doesn't have a long list of features: for some, that'll come as a relief; for others, it's going to send them straight into the arms of Audacity (or paid-for alternatives such as Sound Forge and Adobe Audition). That's not to say you can't create professional-sounding tracks, but your options for doing so are slightly more limited.

OUR VERDICT

Ocenaudio is an uncomplicated audio editor with a slick interface, whether you're trimming a clip for personal use or cutting your latest album. However, it's less packed with features than other programs.

WavePad | www.nch.com.au/wavepad | ★★★★☆

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

What we liked:

WavePad is arguably the easiest tool to use in this round-up. Its toolbar ribbon is brimming with actions that make editing quick and easy and, unlike certain competitors, it won't have you reaching for a YouTube tutorial every five seconds.

Trim a clip, batch-convert files, silence white noise in the background – it's all done with clearly labelled one-click options. One of these, Paste Mix, is a clever tool that looks for audio copied to your computer's clipboard. If none is found, it can take your text files and synthesise speech, which can then be pasted alongside your real audio tracks.

But don't let the simplicity of the interface detract from what is otherwise a very powerful tool. There are also plenty of tutorials to help you learn the intricacies of performing various tasks, including assistance with the basics, as well as instructions for niche projects such as how to create a ringtone for your Android phone.

How it can be improved:

WavePad's multi-toolbar layout may not suit everyone: the lower bar lets you select common tools, while the top one houses more in-depth options, for fine-tuning your work. It isn't particularly quick to finalise your audio, either. The free version of WavePad is missing a few features found in the paid-for edition, but most users won't notice.

OUR VERDICT

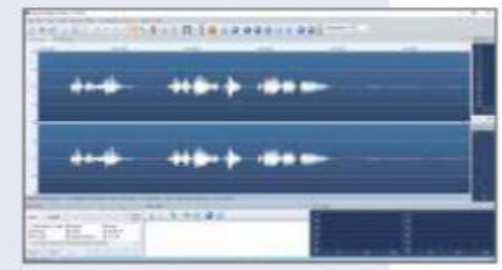
WavePad is ideal for novices with a basic understanding of editing sound. It's easy to use, with plenty of filters and effects, but there aren't enough bells and whistles here for higher-level power users.

BEST OF THE REST

Acoustica 6

acondigital.com/downloads

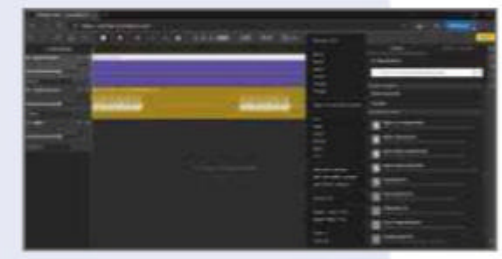
Acoustica 6 might not be the latest version of Acon Digital's sound editor, but it's free – for the basic version, at least. It's a professional product, with an interface that's chopped up into multiple panes, including the excellent Effects Chain for layering and managing multiple effects. Features are missing from the free version, though – for instance, you can open lots of audio files, navigable via a tab system, but there's no multi-track editing.



Soundation

soundation.com

Soundation is a simple browser-based audio editor that looks and performs as well as any paid-for alternative. However, features are sparse, as is its fun but not particularly well-stocked sounds library. As with any tiered subscription package, the free edition has restrictions: solo projects are limited to 10 and export quality is lo-fi. However, if you're not an audiophile and don't want to download programs, it's worth exploring.



HYA.WAVE

hya.io/wave

Open File Explorer, drag and drop a file on to the HYA.WAVE timeline and you're good to go. Yes, this browser-based tool is really that basic. You're lucky that you get a Record button. Editing is done via a draggable timeline and a right-click. That's the tool's true strength: it's built for quick and dirty edits. Its main flaw is that exported files are only available in the WAV format.

HACK YOUR favourite websites

Apply alternative front ends to the sites you visit every day to customise their appearance, add useful features and protect your privacy. **Robert Irvine** rounds up the best options

Wave a wand at Wikipedia

Wikipedia is an incredible free resource, but while its articles are interesting to read, the site's dated, monochrome, text-heavy layout can feel dull to browse. To make the encyclopedia more engaging, install the magical add-on Wikiwand (www.wikiwand.com) in Chrome or Firefox, or search for an article via its website in your desktop or mobile browser.

This alternative front end transforms Wikipedia's appearance with an attractive, modern look and fonts, and expands images to create large cover photos. It also converts each article's Contents list into a convenient side menu, and provides page previews when you hover your mouse over links and pop-up definitions when you Ctrl+click individual words. The main content is automatically made much easier to read, with further customisation options available, and you can switch back to standard Wikipedia at the click of a button.

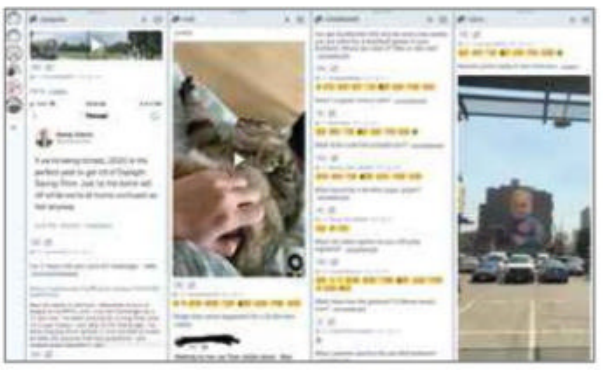
A Wikiwand app is coming to Android soon. You can sign up for an invite at invites.wikiwand.com.

Wikiwand makes Wikipedia articles easier to read and more visually engaging

Revolutionise your Reddit experience

Reddit redesigned its website in 2018 to such outcry from its users that it still offers the option to switch back to 'Old Reddit'. Fortunately, there are better ways to access the social network, via front ends created by third-party developers.

Deck for Reddit (rdddeck.com), for example, lets you browse multiple subreddits at once in resizable columns, similar to the Twitter app TweetDeck (see opposite). You can add as many subreddits as you like, and sign into your Reddit account for additional features such as dark mode and hiding NSFW (not safe for work) content.



Browse multiple subreddits side-by-side using the alternative front end Deck

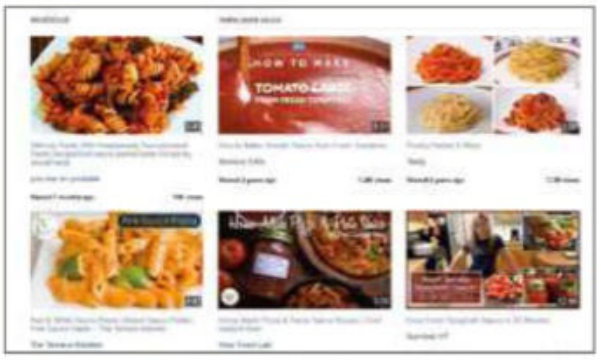
Lots more options are available through the brilliant browser add-on Reddit Enhancement Suite (redditenhancementsuite.com), including auto-scroll, keyboard shortcuts for upvoting and downvoting posts, an inline image viewer, clearer presentation of comments and an automatic night mode.

On Android and iOS devices, install Infinity (bit.ly/infinityreddit510) and Apollo (apolloapp.io), respectively, for a smoother and more elegant Reddit experience than its official app.

Watch YouTube without ads or tracking

Viewing videos on YouTube usually means being watched yourself, as Google tracks your interests and targets you with adverts. Until recently, you could protect your privacy while enjoying all the benefits of YouTube using an ad- and tracker-free front end called Invidious (invidio.us), but the developer shut the site down on 1 September – not because of threats from Google, but because he was "tired and ready to move on".

Happily, Invidious lives on through other 'instances' that use the same code (instances.invidio.us) to offer a clean, Google-free YouTube experience, complete with a large video player, one-click dark mode and the ability to download audio and video content. On the downside, you can't sort your search results by 'most recent' and only 20 videos are displayed per page.



Use an Invidious 'instance' to watch YouTube videos without Google knowing

Alternatively, you can download FreeTube (bit.ly/freetube510), an open-source YouTube player for Windows, macOS and Linux that lets you watch, search and download videos on your desktop, without ads or tracking. It also offers Chrome and

NewPipe lets you download videos from YouTube on your Android device

Firefox extensions that open YouTube videos directly in FreeTube.

The best ad-free YouTube front-end for Android is NewPipe, which – unsurprisingly – isn't available in the Google Play store, but is free to download from alternative app store F-Droid (bit.ly/newpipe510). It's lightweight, privacy-focused and lets you download videos and play them in the background, but you'll need to allow your device to install 'unknown apps'.

IMPROVE FACEBOOK'S NEW DESIGN

As we reported last issue, Facebook has disabled the option to revert to its 'classic' design. If you're not keen on the new layout, you can use FB Purity (www.fbpurity.com) to tweak it to your liking. Available for all the main browsers, this extension lets you remove unwanted elements such as posts about events, recommendation requests and sponsored content; hide photos, videos and chat features; reorder your news feed to display recent or close friends' posts first; customise the font size and background colour; and much more.

FB Purity's developer warns that some options may not work with the new Facebook design yet. Alternatively, you can install the new Chrome extension 'Old Layout for Facebook' (bit.ly/3hTyh0O) to revert to the classic design - see page 32.

Make Twitter look and work better

Twitter's website is basic in its features and design, and even last year's revamp did little more than move things around and add a dark mode. To keep 'power users' happy, Twitter provides its own alternative front end called TweetDeck (tweetdeck.twitter.com), for desktop and mobile devices. This lets you monitor your timeline, notifications, messages, trending topics and other activity side by side, manage multiple accounts and schedule tweets for later.

Twitter has clamped down on free third-party apps accessing its service, which is why tools such as HootSuite are now paid-for and business-orientated. Nitter (nitter.net), however, offers a streamlined way to browse tweets while maintaining your privacy. This site removes the JavaScript that Twitter uses to track you, as well as all ads, and makes the site much faster to load. You can't log into your Twitter account through Nitter – instead, you search for a username to view that feed anonymously. Install the browser add-on Nitter Redirect (bit.ly/nitter510) to open all Twitter links in Nitter.

For a better Twitter experience on your phone or tablet, we recommend Albatross for Android and iOS (bit.ly/albatross510), which is fully customisable, removes ads from Twitter and displays tweets in a genuinely chronological order.

Access Instagram in your browser

Although it's possible to view Instagram feeds in your browser rather than the mobile app – just type `instagram.com/` followed by the username – you can only scroll so far before being nagged to log in, and you can't view photos full size, or download them. Bibliogram (bibliogram.art) solves these problems by providing a simple, speedy front end for Instagram that removes ads and trackers. Just search for a username to access that person's timeline, with no obstructions, and see details of their posts and follower count. Click an image to open it and right-click to save it to your hard drive.

Note that Bibliogram doesn't let you post, comment or follow anonymously, or view private Instagram profiles.

Search Google without being spied on

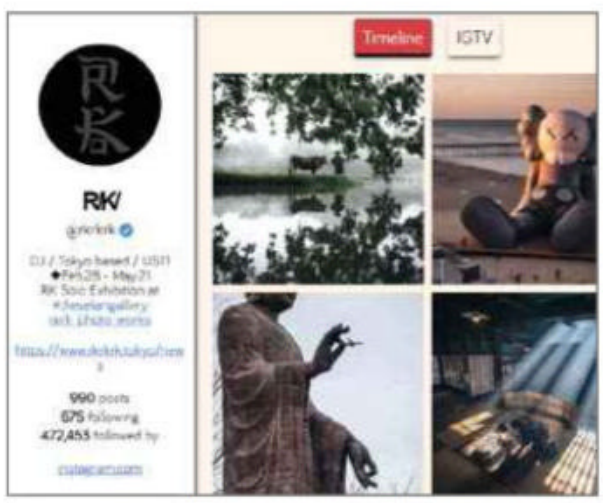
If you like the speed, accuracy and convenience of Google search, but don't like being spied on and having information about you collected, consider switching to Startpage.com (www.startpage.com). This privacy-focused search engine uses Google search results, but with none of the intrusive data tracking and logging, so you can quickly find online content without online trackers finding you.

Unlike Google, Startpage.com doesn't store your searches, record your IP address, implant tracking cookies or share your personal information with third parties. It also offers a useful Anonymous View, which lets you open Google results using a proxy server.

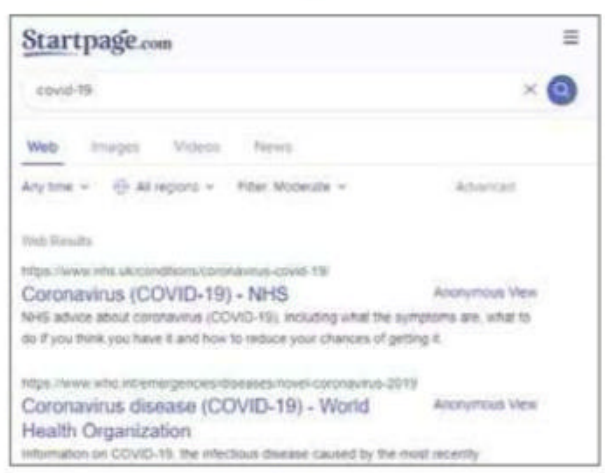
To support its upkeep (Startpage.com pays Google to use its results), the site displays sponsored links at the top of your search results, but these are clearly labelled 'Ad' and have no access to your personal information.

There are also Startpage apps for Android (bit.ly/startdroid510) and iOS (bit.ly/startios510), and add-ons for all the main browsers.

Nitter lets you browse tweets without Twitter tracking you or displaying ads



Bibliogram lets you browse Instagram feeds without being nagged to sign in



Startpage.com serves as a privacy-focused front end for Google searches

Why Chrome OS is better than Windows

Why not make your next laptop a Chromebook instead of a Windows machine? **Wayne Williams** reveals the things that Google's operating system can do that Microsoft's can't

It sets up in seconds

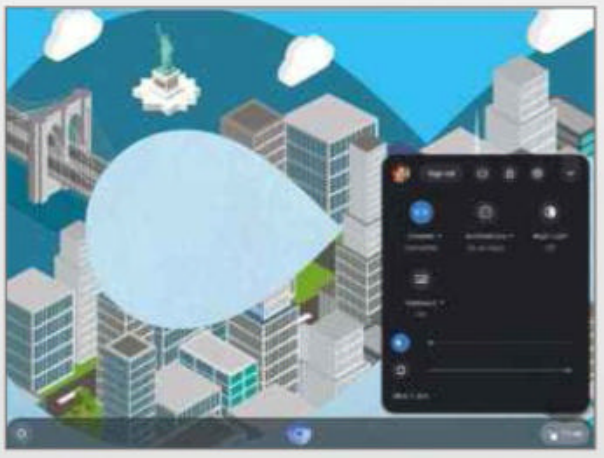
When you install a clean copy of Windows 10 or launch a new installation for the first time, you have to set up the operating system, choosing which features to allow and which to block. You only have to do this once (unless a new feature update requires you to do it again), but it's still time consuming. With Chrome OS, all you have to do is log into your Google account and you're ready to get going. You can start using apps such as Gmail, Drive and Docs instantly, with no need to sign in again or download anything.

Just sign into your Google account to set up your new Chromebook

It's lightweight and fast

Unlike Windows 10, which hogs resources and comes bundled with apps you will probably never use, Chrome OS is a lightweight operating system that can run on low-powered hardware. This in turn results in excellent battery life and a system that takes seconds to boot up, rather than several minutes – as is the case with most Windows computers.

If you want to get a taste of Chrome OS's speedy performance on your own PC, you can install CloudReady: Home Edition (www.neverware.com). This is a build of Chromium OS (the open-source development version of Chrome OS) that's designed to run on older PCs and Macs, and is free for personal use.

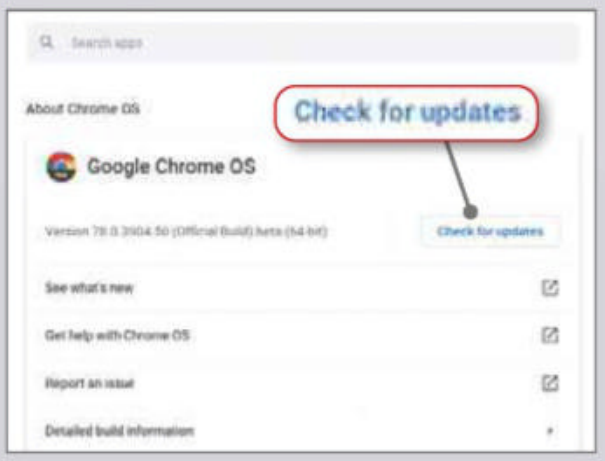


You can run Chrome OS on an old Windows laptop using CloudReady

It doesn't suffer update problems

It seems like every new Windows 10 update breaks something – Microsoft rolls out a fix for one problem and, in doing so, introduces a different issue elsewhere. A recent update that installed the new Chromium-based Edge was found to be causing system slowdowns for many people, while another update unexpectedly removed Notepad and Paint for some users, and yet another disabled printing.

Chrome OS updates, on the other hand, are rarely problematic and you probably won't even notice them – they're installed automatically, but you can also update manually. Because the operating system is so lightweight, updates are very quick to install, unlike their Windows counterparts which can take an age to finish and may require one or more restarts.



Chrome OS won't stop working properly after an update – unlike Windows

It's easy to move between Chromebooks

If you want to upgrade your Windows laptop to a new model running the latest operating system, you have three options: start from scratch; reinstall your programs and copy over your data; or use a third-party tool to clone and restore your drive.

With a Chromebook, all you need to do is log into your new device and you're ready to go, with all your apps and settings in place. It really couldn't be easier.

You can use Google to search more than just the web in Chrome OS

It uses Google for search

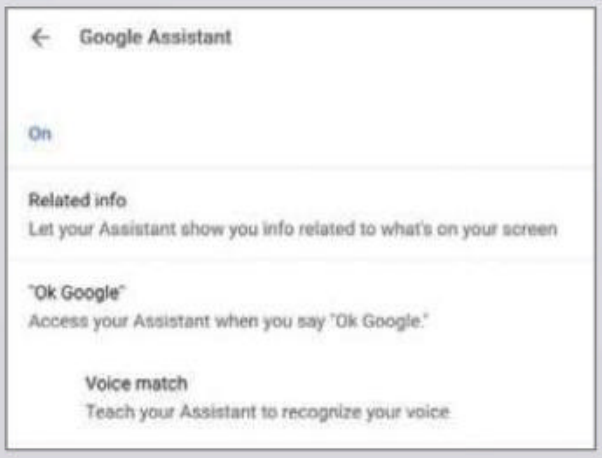
Microsoft has integrated its own search engine into Windows 10. If you use the Windows search box to look for something on the web – or ask Cortana to carry out the job – the results you get will come from Bing. And, despite what Microsoft says, Bing really isn't that good.

Chrome OS uses Google, which is much faster and more accurate, to search the web, as well as your files, apps and web history. Chromebooks include a useful Google Search button on their keyboards for instant access.

It offers smart voice control

Some Chromebooks come with Google Assistant built in, which you can use to get quick answers to questions, manage tasks, control compatible smart-home devices and more, using your voice rather than typing. Windows 10 has a rival smart assistant in the form of Cortana, but it's nowhere near as good and is hampered by being powered by Bing. Due to its data-harvesting abilities, Google already knows a huge amount about you, which – while not great news if you're worried about your privacy – gives its Assistant a major head start in knowing what you like.

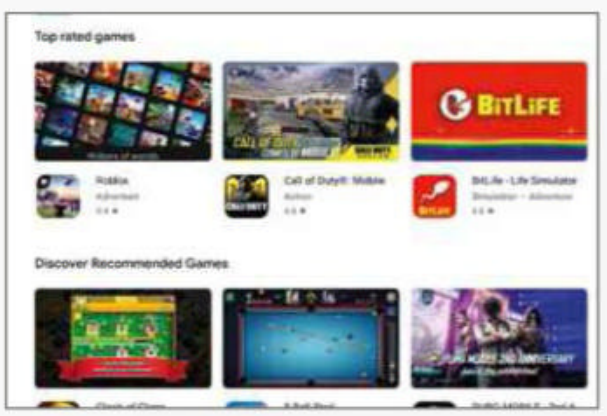
Assistant can also save you time by performing everyday tasks such as creating a new Google Docs document, searching for files, capturing screenshots and adjusting your screen's brightness.



Control your Chromebook using your voice with its built-in Google Assistant

It can run Android apps natively

Although you can use a third-party program such as BlueStacks (www.bluestacks.com) to run Android apps on your Windows PC, Chromebooks can install and run them natively, provided you have access to the Google Play Store, which the majority of Chromebooks released from 2019



Chromebooks let you use your favourite mobile apps on a large screen

onwards do (the feature has been available on some older models since 2016). Newer Chromebooks have touchscreens to help you get the most from Android apps without using your keyboard and mouse, so you can play your favourite mobile games on your desktop.

It can run Linux apps

Chrome OS – like Google's other operating system, Android – is built on the Linux kernel, so it makes sense that you'd be able to run Linux apps on it. That said, running Linux apps on a Chromebook is only possible thanks to Google's Crostini Project, which uses container technology combined with virtual machines.

To use the feature, you first need to enable it on your Chromebook by going to Settings, looking for the Linux (Beta) option and turning it on. The installation process will begin and, afterwards, you'll be faced with a blank Terminal screen to type commands into. From here, you can install Linux apps. To install LibreOffice, for example, type `sudo apt install libreoffice -y`.

You can run Linux apps in Chrome OS by enabling a hidden option

It can run (some) Windows apps

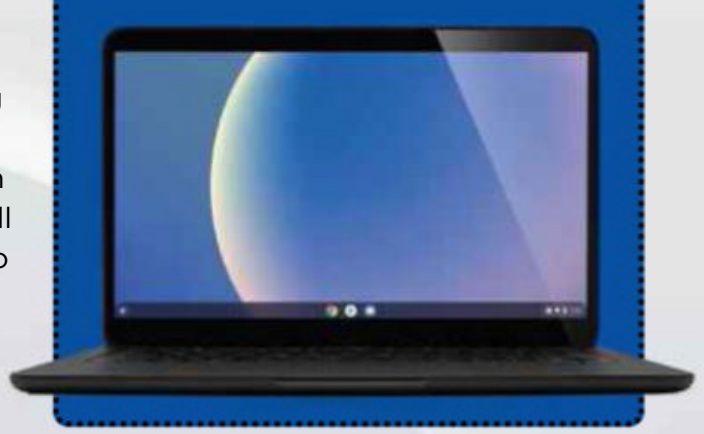
Yes, it's possible to run Windows programs on Chrome OS, but there is a catch, which is that you'll need to buy CrossOver Chrome OS (bit.ly/cochrome510) to do so, and – perhaps most importantly of all – your Chromebook will need to have an Intel processor (which not all do) and support Google Play. CrossOver Chrome OS costs from £32 and can run more than 16,000 Windows programs, including Microsoft Office, Adobe Photoshop and Steam. It's still in beta, so you may encounter a few bugs and not everything will run quite as intended. ■

ON THE OTHER HAND...

The main downside to Chrome OS is that you can't usually install third-party software on your Chromebook without going through the Google Play store (or using extensions from the Chrome Web Store). With Windows 10, you can install software from anywhere – and that includes superior paid-for tools such as Microsoft Office and the latest AAA games.

Although Chrome OS doesn't need an internet connection to work, the system and its apps are are built for online use, which is less true of Windows. Also, Microsoft's operating system can recognise and use all manner of hardware devices thanks to its massive driver database, while Chrome OS only supports the basics.

Finally, Chromebooks used to be very cheap, and while that's still true in a lot of cases, premium models such as Google's Pixelbook Go can set you back up to £1,329. For that price, you could pick up a more capable Windows laptop.



Chrome OS can even run Windows programs – but it'll cost you

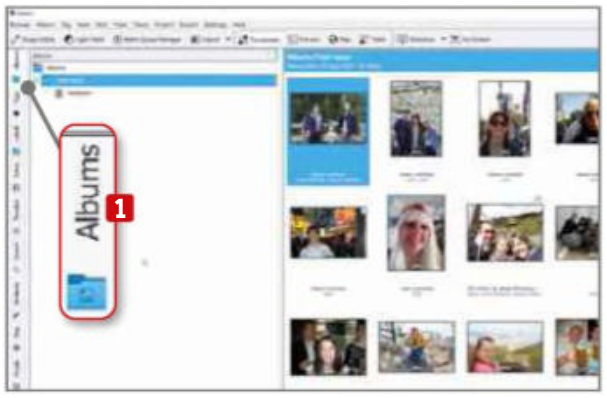
Use DigiKam 7's face-finding tools to catalogue your photos

Photo organiser DigiKam has had a major update that's made it brilliant at recognising people in photos, like Picasa did. Here's how to use it

DigiKam: www.digikam.org | 20 mins |

It's likely that you've accumulated a vast hoard of photos on your computer over the years, from various sources such as cameras, mobile phones and shared by other people. DigiKam is a powerful photo manager that can sort your collection into thumbnail albums, filter content by category, edit individual images and share items across numerous services. The latest version comes with a new facial-recognition tool that uses machine learning to quickly and accurately identify faces in photos. And not just human faces, either – the tool is clever enough to also be able to identify dogs and other creatures, too.

1 DigiKam is actually two separate tools: Showfoto is a standalone image editor; and DigiKam is a photo manager and editor. It's the latter you'll need. When you run it for the first time, you're asked where you keep your photos. 1 You can add more sources later.

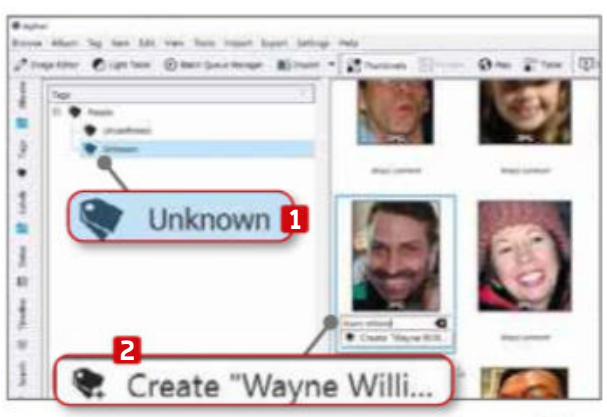


2 Click Next, then select the type of database you want – the default SQLite option is fine – and choose a location for it. Click through the rest of the questions and DigiKam loads and imports your images. This takes a while. When it's finished, access your photos through the Albums view. 1

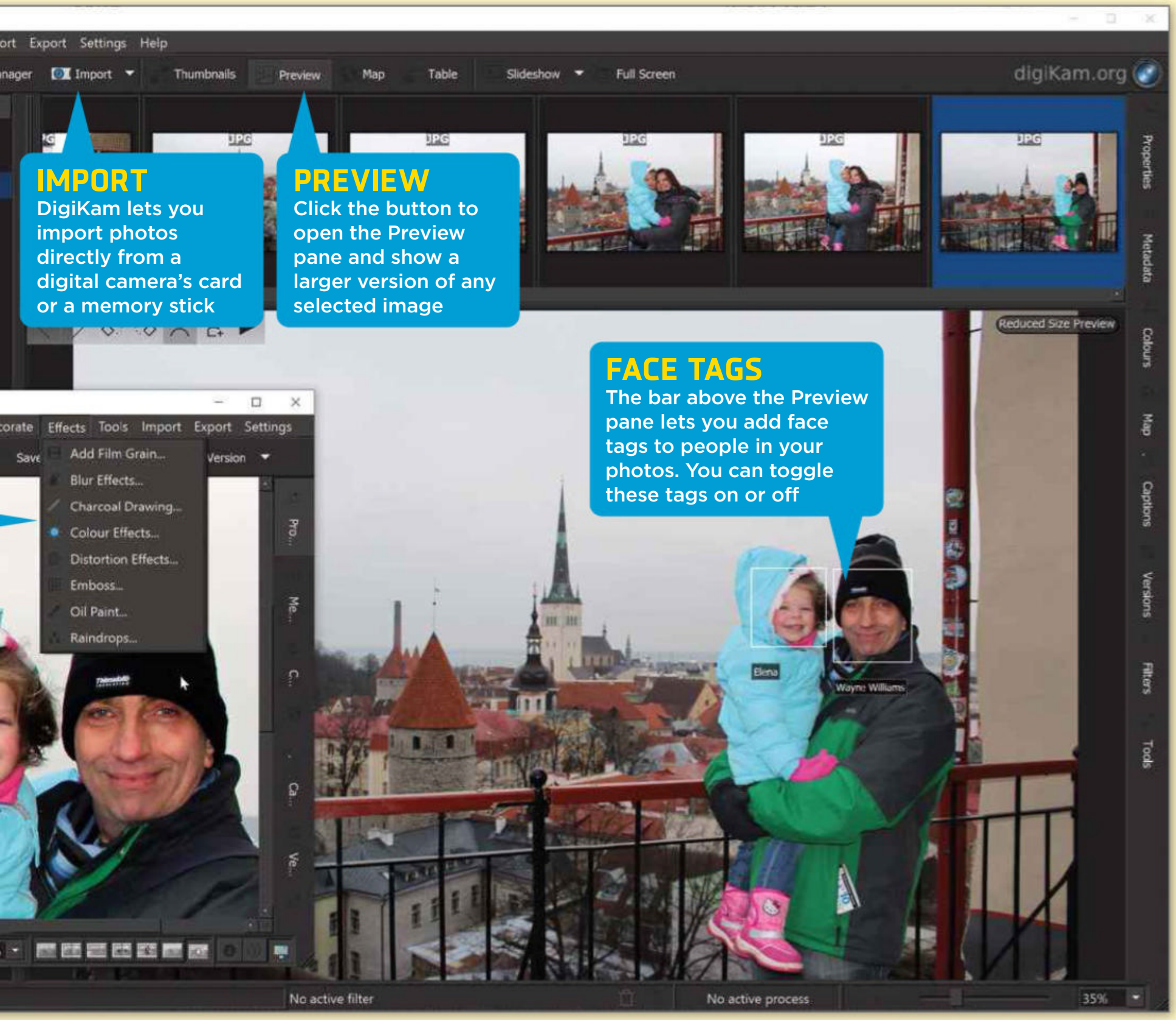
IMAGE EDITOR
Click the Image Editor button to fix and enhance your photos, and apply various effects

3 Select a photo and you can rate it out of five, 1 open it full screen 2 or rotate it left or right. 3 Right-clicking it brings up a context menu with more options, such as assigning a tag and a label.

4 To scan for faces, click the People tab. 1 Make sure 'Detect faces' 2 is selected and click the 'Scan collection for faces' button. 3 It goes to work, scouring all your photos for people. You can see how many photos have been processed in the status bar, below. 4



5 Click the Unknown tag at the top 1 and DigiKam displays thumbnails of all of the faces it's found. Hover over a face and a 'Who is this?' box opens. Enter that person's name and click the option to create a tag for them. 2 Find more photos of that person in your collection.



6 Their name will be shown below. Click the tick to add them to that tag. Next, find someone else to identify. Click the X 1 to clear the field (it will show the name you entered previously), then enter the new name and add them. Tags showing all the people you've added so far appear on the left. 2

7 DigiKam often identifies faces you may not recognise, such as people in the background or things that aren't real people. Remove any incorrect thumbnails by clicking the minus (-) button. 1 When you've added a few faces to each tag (it can work with just one, but more is better), click Recognise Faces. 2

8 Click 'Scan collection for faces' and DigiKam will tag your other photos with a name (or names, if it's unsure) from your list. Click a tag on the left to review all the faces. If you find any that are incorrectly identified, hover over them and change the tag 1 or reject the image. 2

Keep watch over all the PCs you look after

O&O Syspectr: www.syspectr.com | 20 mins | 8.1, 10

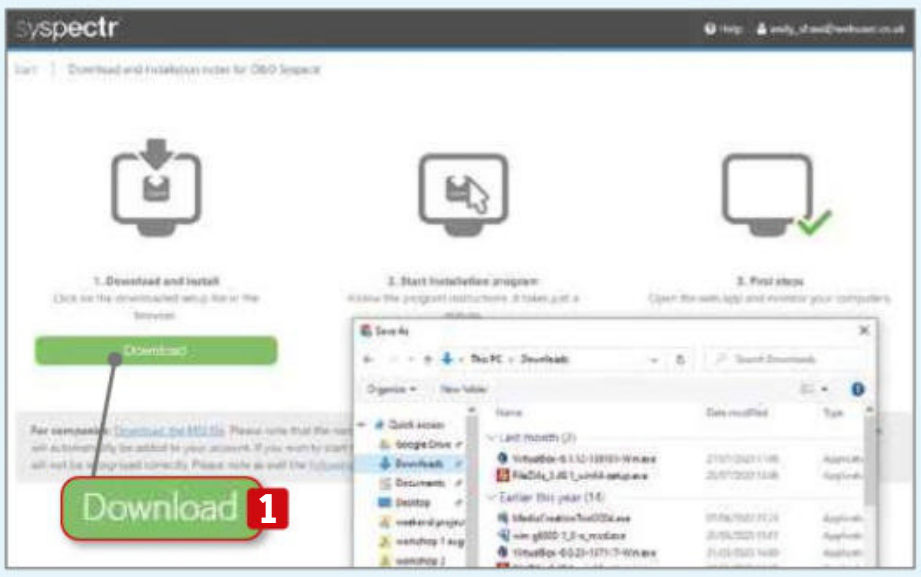
We know that *Web User* readers are often the most computer-savvy people among their families and friends, and get asked to fix problems when technology goes wrong. The trouble is that problems often get flagged long after action should have been taken.

To make your tech-support role easier, install O&O Syspectr on all the PCs you look after. This handy free tool displays key information about each computer on a single dashboard you can access anywhere. You can see at a glance if there are any serious problems appearing on the PCs, check that security tools are working, ensure that updates have been installed and even connect to a PC remotely, to solve simple problems without leaving your seat.

EXPERT TIP

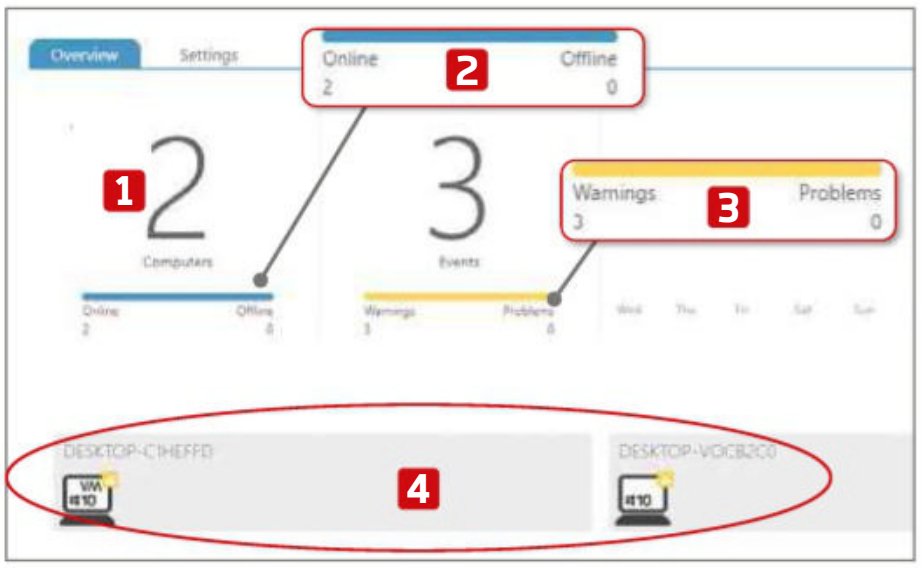
Andy Shaw says

If you're watching over other people's PCs as well as your own, organise them into separate groups. From the main Overview screen, click 'Create new group'. Name the group, give it a description if you wish, then click the 'Add computer' box. Enter the details of each computer you want to include in the group, then click Add. You can then view different groups to see at a glance whether the problems are with your own PCs or ones you're monitoring for other people.

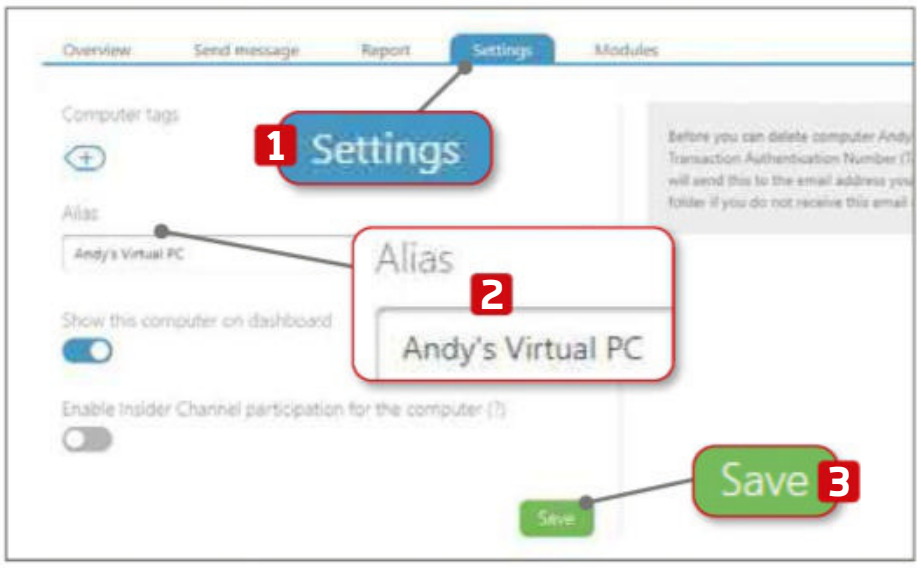


1 Start on the first PC that you want to look after. Create an account by going to www.syspectr.com in your browser, clicking the 'Sign up now' button and following the instructions. You're taken to a screen with a Download button. **1** Download the software to the PC and run it to install it.

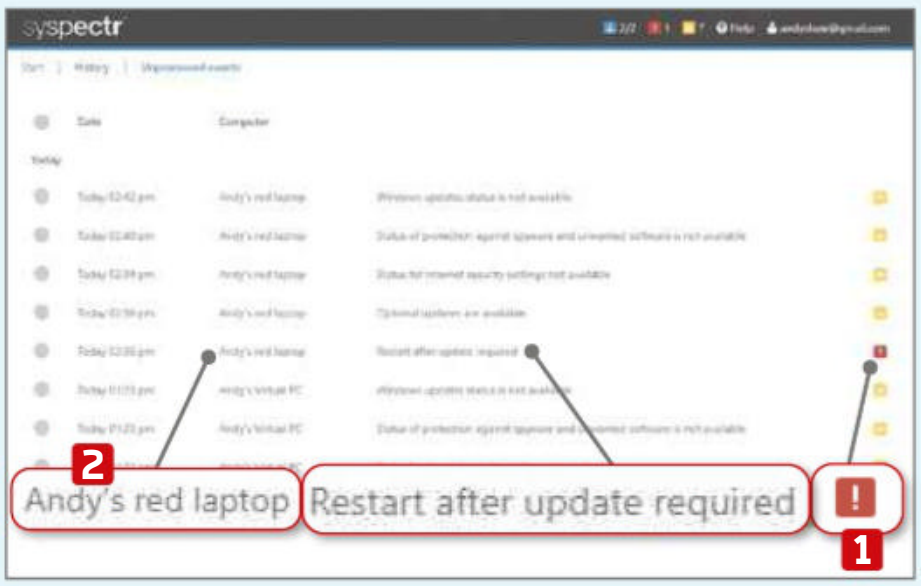
2 Repeat this process on all the PCs you want to monitor. Log into the dashboard on your own PC and a 'First steps' window appears. **1** Click the 'Add computer' button, **2** then the download button, to get the encrypted installation file that's associated with your account. If you've closed it, you can click the grey 'Add computer' button in the Overview screen.



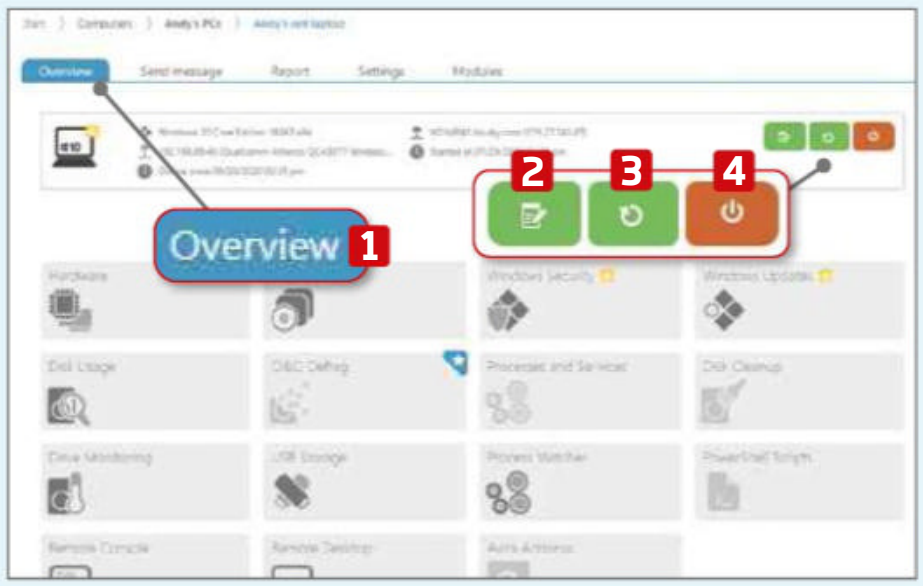
3 Scroll down or close the First Steps window to see the overview of your current setup. This displays the number of PCs you have connected, **1** along with their online/offline status, **2** and any events and warnings. **3** The icons for individual PCs **4** are displayed below.



4 Your computers are designated serial numbers, such as 'Desktop-C1HEFFD', which isn't very helpful for identifying which is which. Click the computer's icon and choose the Settings tab. **1** Under Alias, type in a more recognisable name for the computer. **2** Click Save. **3**

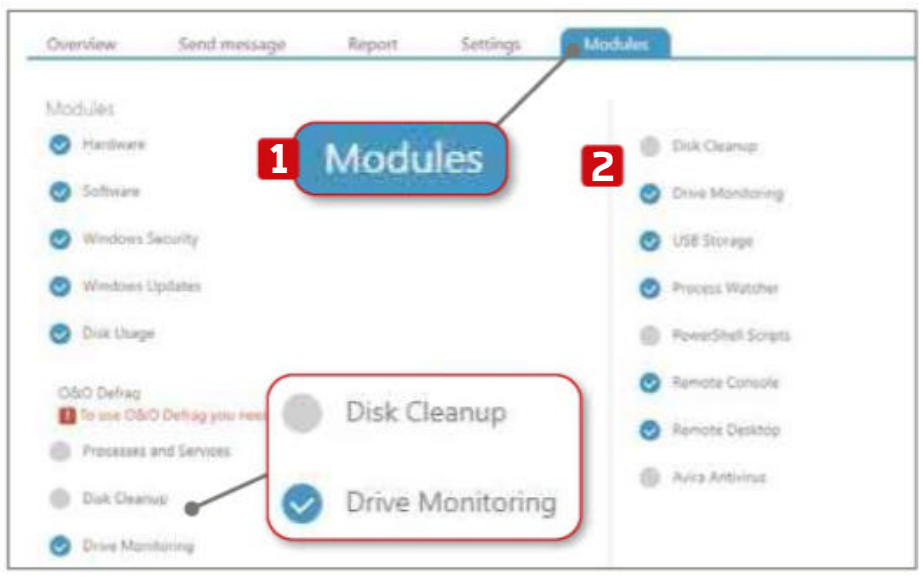


5 Red items displayed in the Events area are worth examining. Click the number to open 'Unprocessed events'. Any problem events are flagged with a red icon in the right-hand column. 1 In this example, we have a PC that has downloaded and installed its updates, but needs restarting to apply them. Click the computer's name. 2

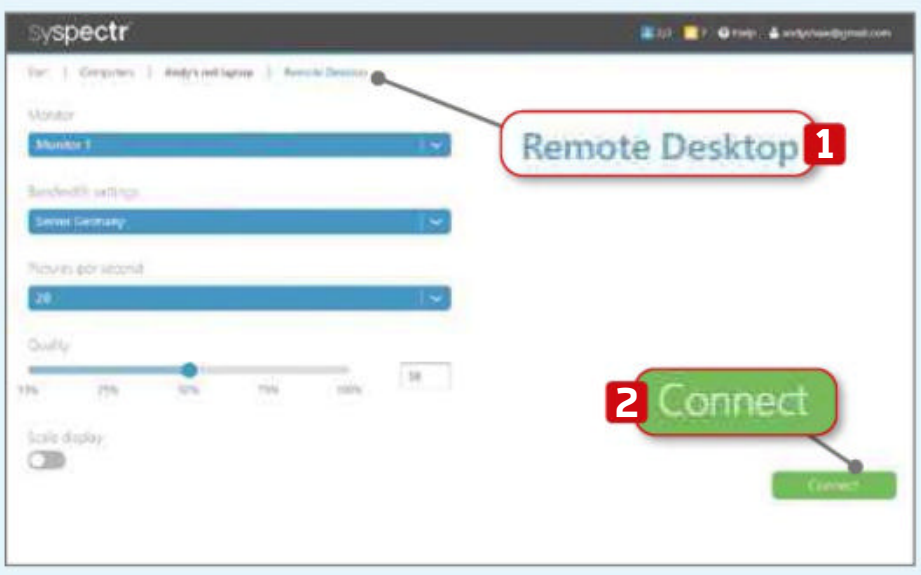


6 The PC's overview tab 1 displays a page with three buttons that let you make a note about a PC, 2 restart it 3 or switch it off. 4 Here, we're clicking the Restart button. You're asked to confirm the action on the PC you're sitting at, which sends a message to the remote PC, warning anyone using it that it's about to restart.

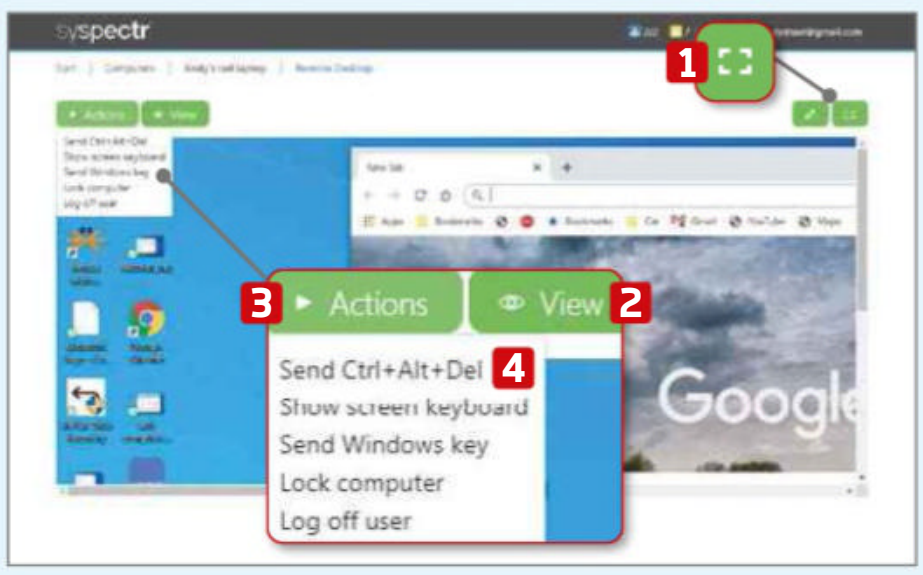
7 The computer's Overview screen displays a grid of tools. Use these to check the hardware 1 and software 2 installed on the PC, all the security 3 and update information, 4 and a range of other tools. Some of the greyed-out boxes need premium O&O tools, but others, such as Disk Cleanup, 5 just need activating.



8 To change which options are available for each computer, click one and choose the Modules tab. 1 Here, you can add any components that you think you might need (such as Disk Cleanup) by ticking the circles, 2 or remove any you don't need by clearing ticks that are already there.



9 One particularly useful tool in O&O Syspectr is Remote Desktop. 1 Click this, then choose how you want the connection to work. The default settings should be fine. Click the Connect button. 2 A message appears on the remote PC allowing its user to accept or deny you access.

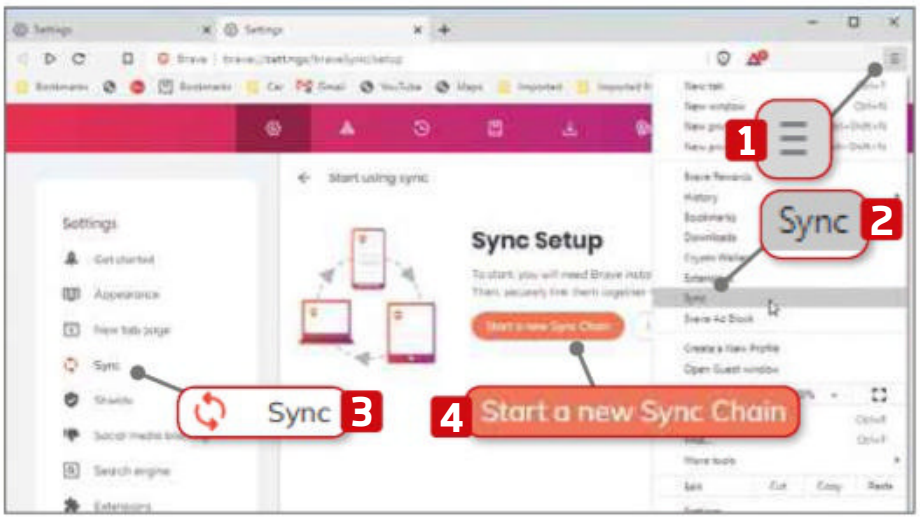


10 Once you've taken over the PC, its desktop appears in a window. You can scroll around it or, if you prefer, click the Fullscreen button 1 to let it take over your entire screen. The View button 2 can be used to configure the size and resolution. Click Actions 3 for access to commands, such as Ctrl+Alt+Delete. 4

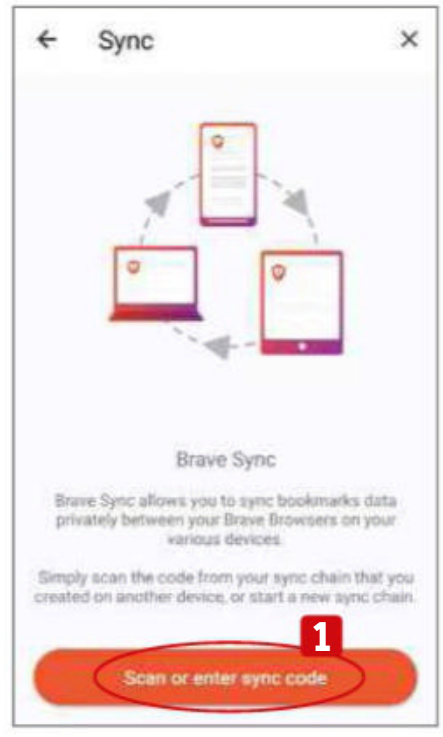
Sync your Brave data between devices

The latest version of the Chromium-based Brave browser has dramatically overhauled its Sync tool, making it much better at syncing bookmarks, history and tabs between all your Windows and Android devices. The system is encrypted within the browser and doesn't require you to sign up for an account. The iOS version is still under development but is expected soon.

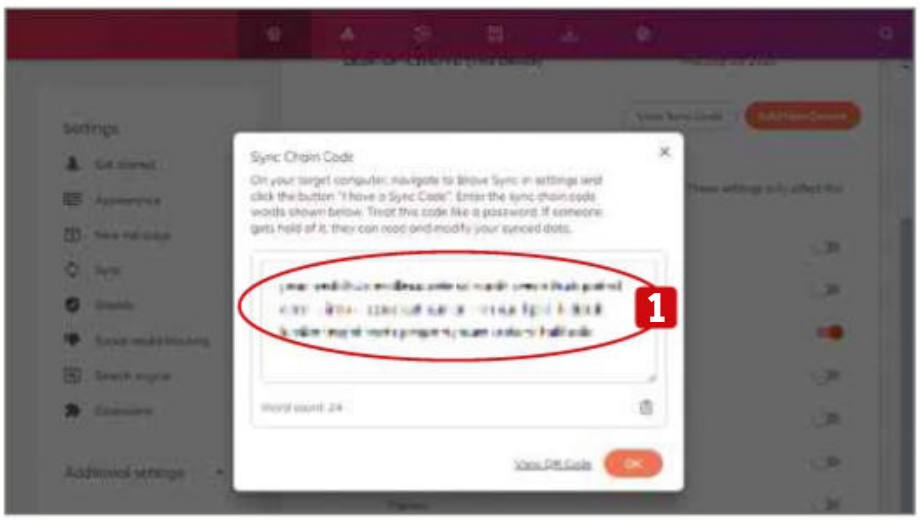
Brave: brave.com | 10 mins | 7, 8, 10



1 In your main Brave browser, click the menu button 1 and choose Sync. 2 The Settings page opens with the Sync option selected. 3 Click the 'Start a new Sync Chain' button, 4 even if you've used sync tools in a previous version of Brave. You're asked what type of device you'd like to sync to.

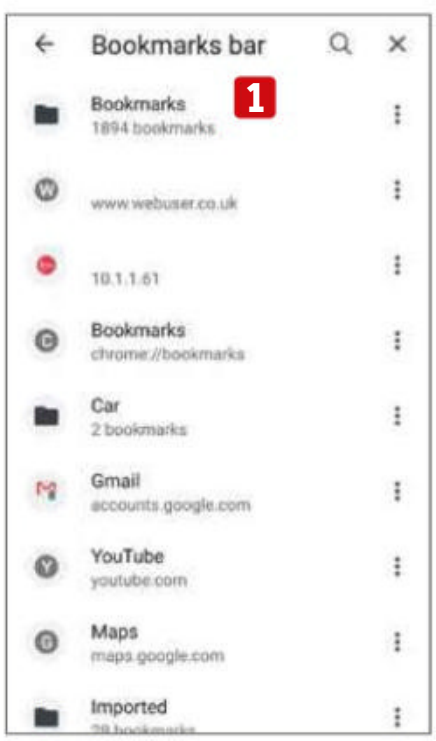


2 If your second Brave browser is installed on a mobile device, open the menu and choose Settings. Scroll down and open the Sync section. Choose to 'Scan or enter sync code' 1 and hold your device's camera up to the QR code that should be displayed on your PC's screen. The phone will start syncing, which can take a few minutes.

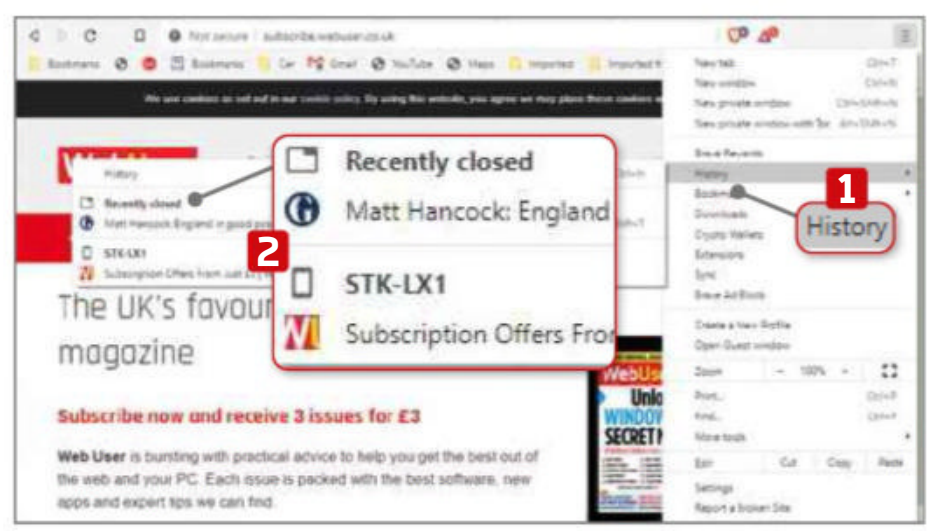


3 Alternatively, if you're syncing to another PC, you're given a Sync Chain Code. This is a series of 24 words 1 and is effectively a very long password. Keep it private because anyone with access to it can sync their browser with yours, which means they will be able to use any saved passwords.

4 On a mobile device, choose what to sync by tapping the Categories button. On a PC, choose 'Manage your synced devices' in the Sync settings. In both cases, you can turn on 'Sync everything' 1 or choose individual items in the list. 2 Some, such as Extensions, 3 are only available on desktop.



5 Most elements should sync automatically, though we found that some, such as bookmarks, took a while to appear and only started syncing when we attempted to access them on a second browser. Be patient – it only takes a few seconds and your bookmarks will soon appear. 1

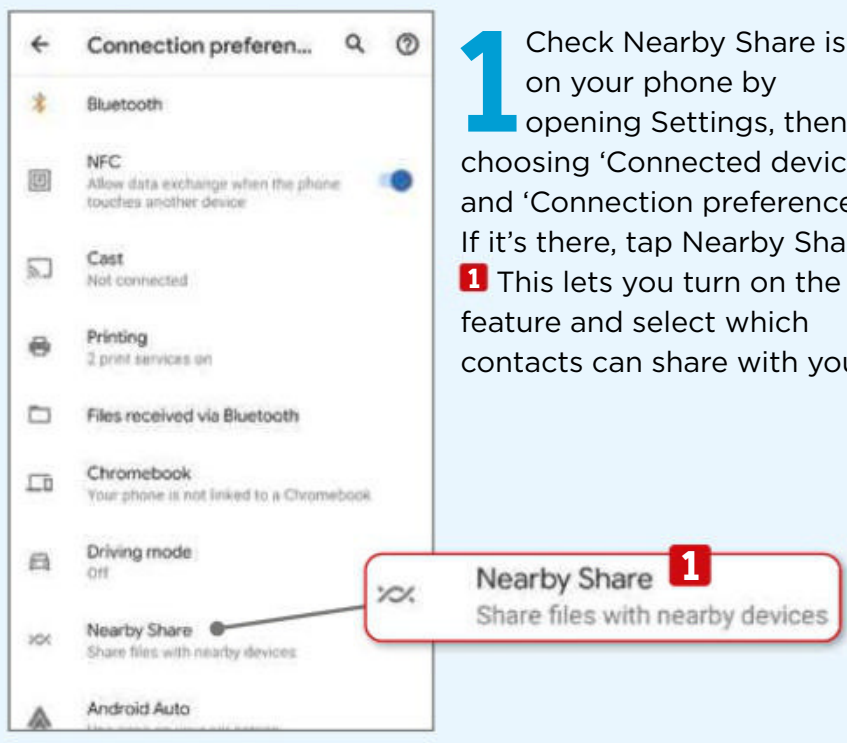


6 When syncing open tabs, you'll find your other browser's tabs in the menu. On mobile, Recent Tabs displays a list of the other browser's open tabs. In the desktop version, the list is accessed from the menu's History option. 1 In both cases, other browsers appear below the 'Recently closed' section. 2

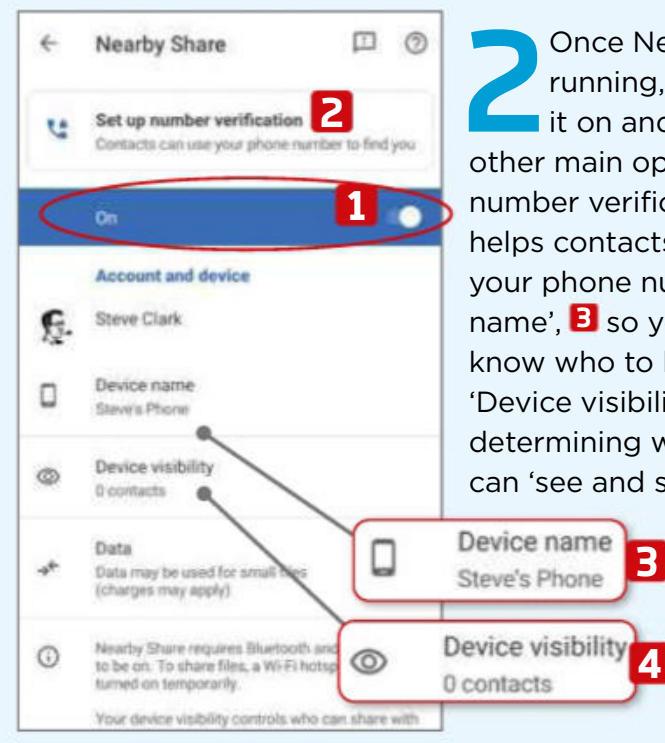
Share files with Google's Nearby Share

Nearby Share is Google's answer to Apple's AirDrop – it lets you share files with devices that are physically close by. It's rolling out to most Android phones but if you haven't received the update yet, there's a workaround: go to Settings, 'Apps and notifications', then select Google Play Services from the list. If that doesn't work, you could try signing up to become a beta tester.

Nearby Share: bit.ly/near510 | **10 mins** | **Android 6.0+**

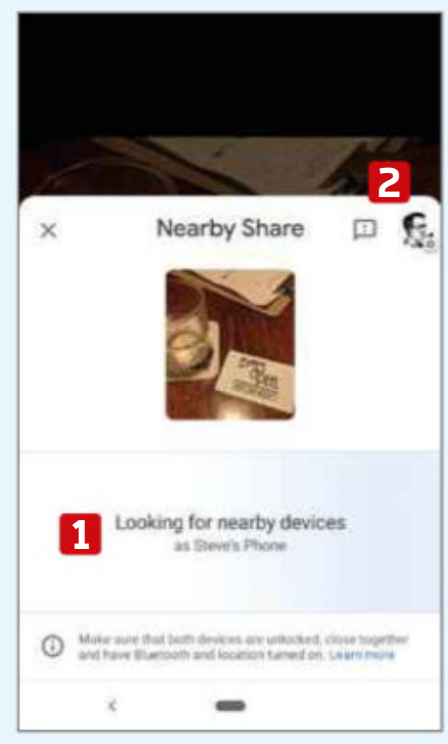


1 Check Nearby Share is on your phone by opening Settings, then choosing 'Connected devices' and 'Connection preferences'. If it's there, tap Nearby Share. 1 This lets you turn on the feature and select which contacts can share with you.

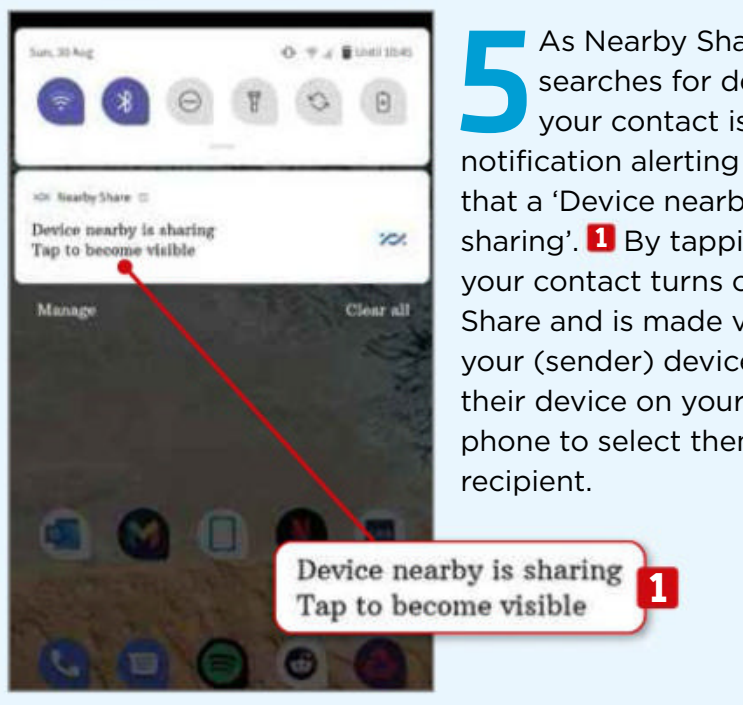


2 Once Nearby Share is running, you can toggle it on and off. 1 The other main options are number verification, 2 which helps contacts find you via your phone number; 'Device name', 3 so your contacts know who to look for; and 'Device visibility', 4 for determining which contacts can 'see and share' with you.

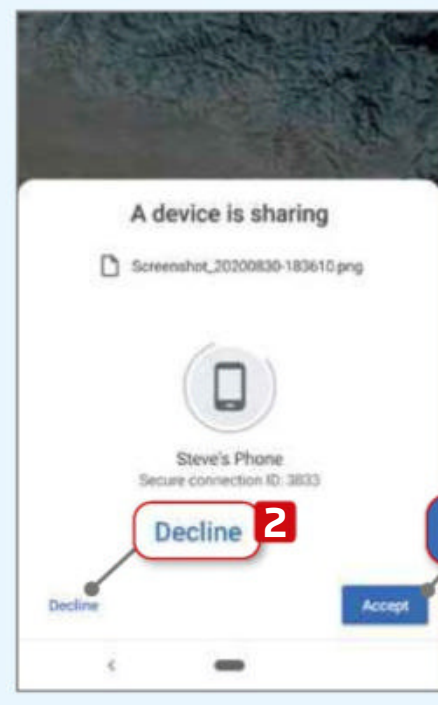
3 Of these, 'Device visibility' is arguably the most important – you don't want random passers-by sharing files with you. By default, it's set to 'All contacts'. 1 Selecting 'Some contacts' 2 lets you toggle on (or off) 3 contacts on an individual basis. Hidden 4 means your device isn't visible to anyone.



4 When you're ready to share, open a file and tap the Share button. Select Nearby Share from the sharing options to begin searching for devices. 1 Make sure both sender and receiver phones are unlocked, with Bluetooth and location on. Tapping your profile picture 2 opens Nearby Share's settings, which is helpful for quickly changing 'Device visibility'.



5 As Nearby Share searches for devices, your contact is sent a notification alerting them that a 'Device nearby is sharing'. 1 By tapping this, your contact turns on Nearby Share and is made visible on your (sender) device. Tap their device on your (sender) phone to select them as the recipient.



6 The two devices now connect to each other. Before any files are copied, your contact must tap Accept 1 or Decline. 2 Sharing is near-instant and the files are sent to your Downloads library. You can stop share requests by pressing Cancel or leaving the request to time out.

Weekend Project

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

How to...

Move Windows 10 to an SSD

Wayne Williams shows you how to boost the performance of your Windows PC by upgrading to an SSD

One of the best ways to give your PC a performance boost is to swap the mechanical hard-disk drive (HDD) for a solid-state drive (SSD). Because SSDs use flash memory, your PC will start much quicker and everything will load faster. The lack of moving parts makes them significantly quieter, too, with none of the clunking and whirring you typically get from hard drives.

Compared to HDDs, SSDs are still quite pricey – especially for larger capacities – but they're a lot more affordable now than they were a few years ago. If you're upgrading a desktop PC, the ideal solution would be to buy an SSD for your operating system and keep the old hard drive for storage. You could even buy a new, larger hard drive while you're at it. If you're upgrading a laptop, you'll just want to get an SSD that's large enough to suit your personal storage needs.

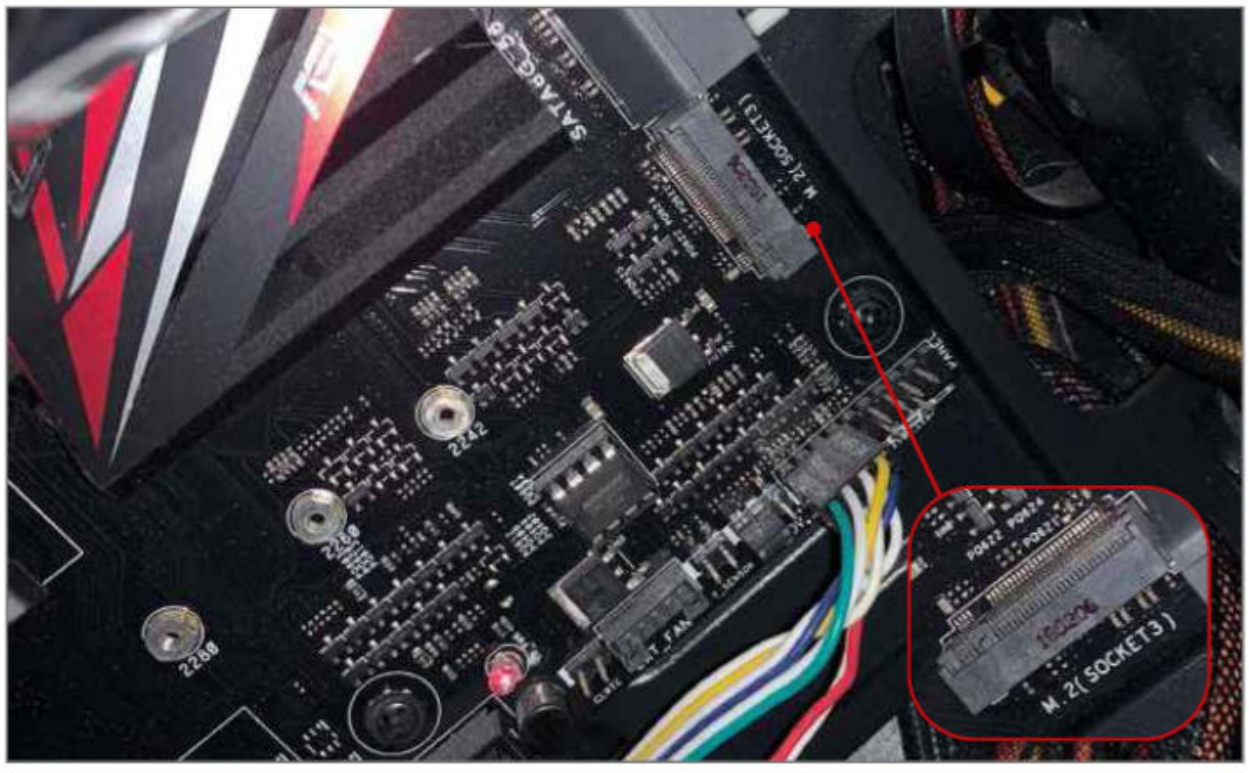
What you need

Buying an SSD isn't simply a case of going online, finding one you like and purchasing it. There are two very different types to choose from. 2.5in SATA solid-state drives are the most common, and can be used in any PC. If you're installing the SSD in a desktop PC, you also need to buy a mounting bracket so you can fit it into a spare 3.5in bay (although some SSDs include a mounting bracket in the package).

The other type of SSD is an M.2 PCIe NVMe drive. These offer significantly faster speeds than SATA drives but require your PC to have an NVMe M.2 slot on the motherboard, which older or cheaper systems may not have. If your computer does have one of these, we'd definitely recommend going down this route. Most of the NVMe solid-state drives you can buy now are based on PCIe (PCI Express) 3.0, but drives for the new PCIe 4.0 standard are becoming more popular, though only the newest PCs support it.

To check whether your motherboard has an M.2 socket, open the case and look around inside for an inch-long port with some screw holes spaced a short distance apart. See the photo on the opposite page. The socket will be labelled M.2.

M.2 PCIe NVMe drives are more



If your motherboard has an M.2 slot, we recommend you choose an M.2 PCIe NVMe SSD, which is faster than a SATA SSD

expensive than SATA drives, but not by much. To give you an idea, the ADATA XPG SX8200 Pro 1TB M.2 Gaming Solid State Drive (SSD) will set you back £125 on Amazon, while the SATA-based ADATA Ultimate SU800 1TB Solid State Drive (SSD) costs £110.

So, what size SSD should you get? Well, that depends what you use your PC for, and whether you'll also be using a mechanical hard drive for storage. We would recommend a minimum of 500GB, but 1TB or more would be preferable. To get as much life as possible from the drive, you should aim to use no more than 50% of its capacity at any one time. Only use it for storing your operating system and important programs.

As with buying other solid-state memory products – such as standard memory and SD cards – it's definitely worth buying your SSD from a well-known brand, such as SanDisk, Kingston, Corsair or Crucial. The memory chips that make up an SSD can only be written to a set number of times and a cheaper drive might develop faults or fail sooner. That said, SSDs can last a very long time, even if you use them a lot.

We show you how to fit an SSD drive in our Mini Workshop, below.

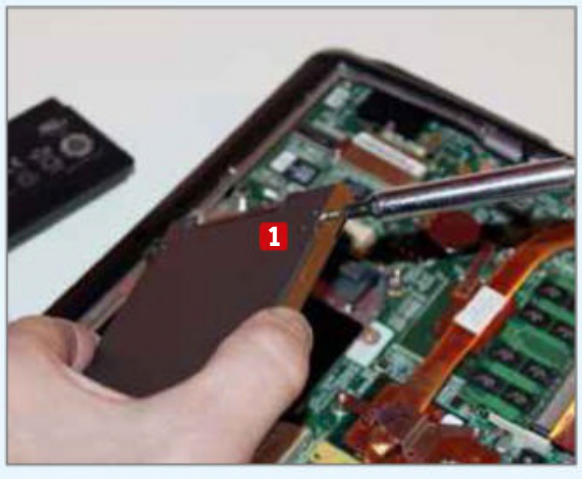
Preparing to move Windows 10

Once you've installed your new SSD, you have a couple of options. If possible, we recommend you start with a clean install. Download the Windows 10 Media Creation Tool from bit.ly/mct510 and save the installer in an ISO file. Burn it to DVD or write it to a USB flash using Rufus (rufus.ie). Use this to boot your computer, then install the OS on your new drive.

Once that's complete, you need to reinstall all your old software, configure it all and copy over all your files. The process takes a while but it's worth the effort because Windows will run much better for it. That said, most people favour cloning the existing drive to the

SSDs come in two forms – the larger SATA models and the smaller, faster M.2 drives

MINI WORKSHOP | Install a SATA SSD



1 2.5in SATA SSDs are the perfect size for installing in laptops. To replace your drive, earth yourself, shut down the laptop, remove the battery, unscrew the back of the case and remove the existing hard drive. Insert the SSD, attach the power and SATA connectors, then reassemble everything. 1

2 Desktop PCs have 3.5in drive bays, so installing a 2.5in SSD requires a 2.5-3.5in internal mounting kit. Your SSD may come with one but, if not, you can pick one up for around £6 from Amazon. Earth yourself, insert the SSD into the adapter and screw it in place. 1

3 Turn off your PC at the wall, then open the case. Find a spare bay and insert the drive. The process varies depending on the chassis design, but usually you slide the drive in and secure it with screws. 1 Once that's done, attach the power and SATA cables and you're all set.

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4	Virgin media	Virgin Media: Big Bundle + Fibre Broadband + Weekend Calls	£29.99 (£59 after 12 months)	12 months	108Mbps avg. speed	∞ unlimited	£359.88

Terms & Conditions apply - see ISP sites for details
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Data supplied by www.broadbandgenie.co.uk. Correct as of 1st September 2020.

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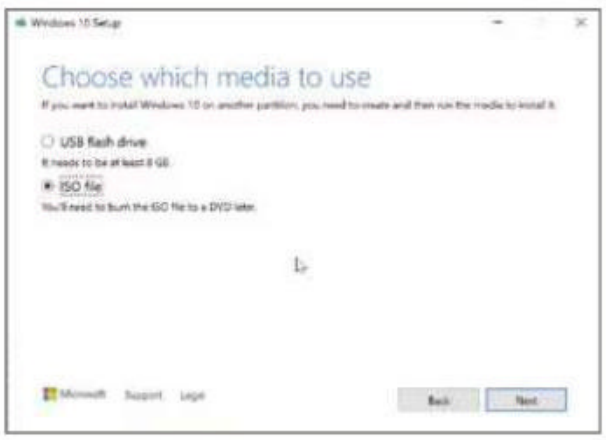
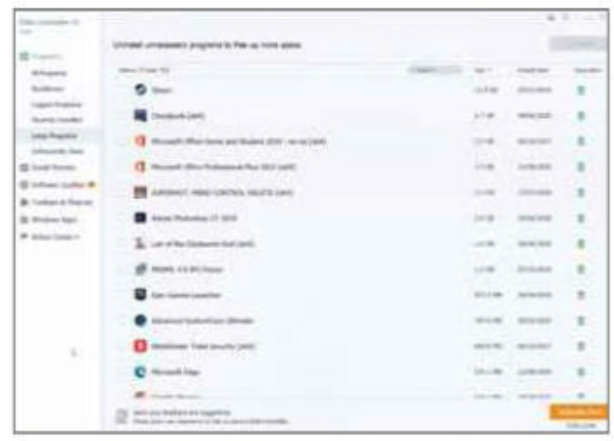
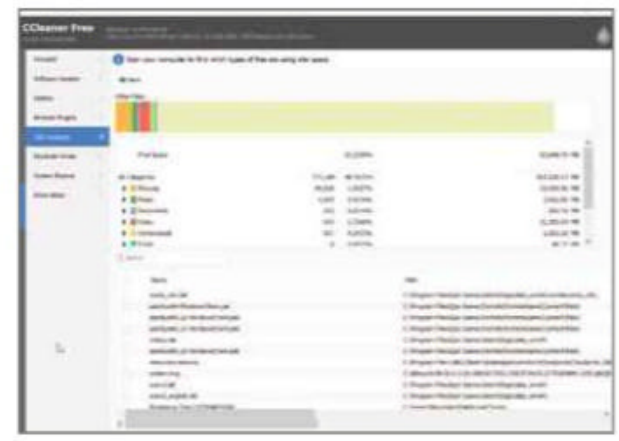


Use the Windows 10 Media Creation Tool for a clean install



IObit Uninstaller 10 removes unwanted programs and cleans up after them

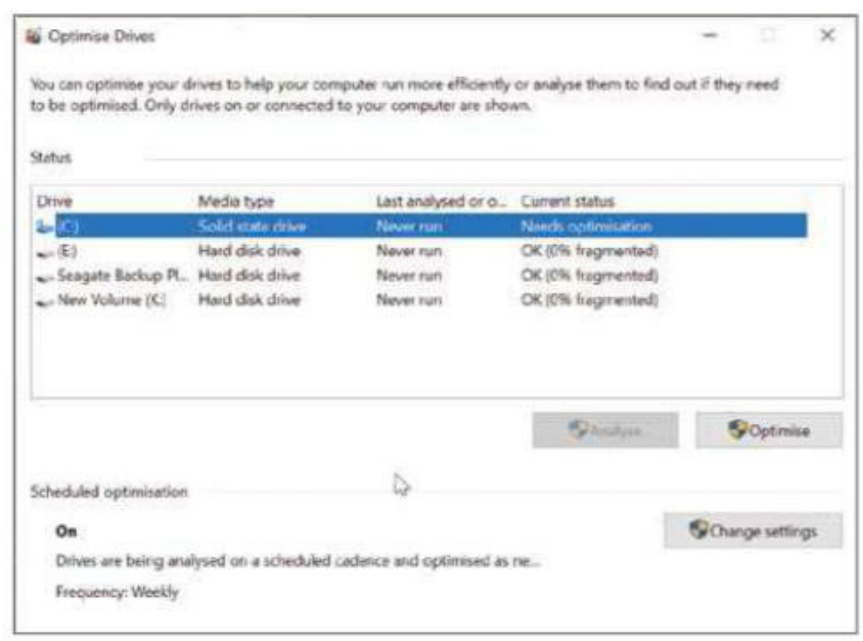


CCleaner's Disk Analyser can help you find the largest files on your computer

SSD because you can get on with using the drive immediately afterwards.

If you decide on the latter option, please take the time to indulge in a spot of housekeeping first, to make your cloned OS as small as possible. The recently updated IObit Uninstaller 10 (iobit.com) is a useful tool for this tidying-up process, because it can batch-remove unwanted programs and clean up after them, removing junk files and Registry entries that would normally be left behind. The tool can also uninstall Windows Store apps, including those bundled with Windows 10. To find and remove even more unwanted junk on your system, use CCleaner (ccleaner.com).

Once you've done that, move your personal files (such as photos, videos and documents) to another drive and delete anything you don't want. CCleaner has a useful Disk Analyser – found under Tools – which can show you the biggest space hogs on your PC. This can help when trying to free up space. Once you've reduced the size of your Windows installation as much as possible, you'll be ready to clone it.



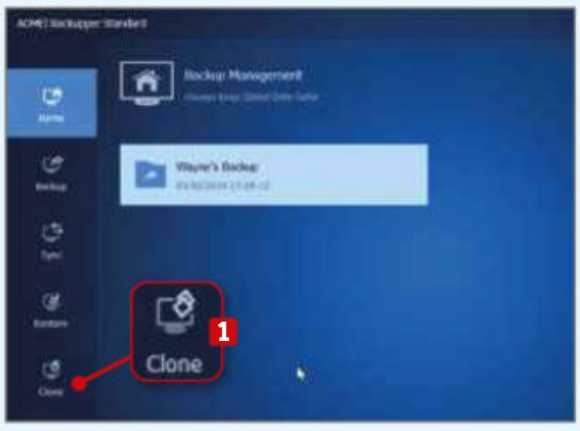
You can optimise your SSD after you've used it for a while, but it's not essential

Follow the steps in our Mini Workshop, below.

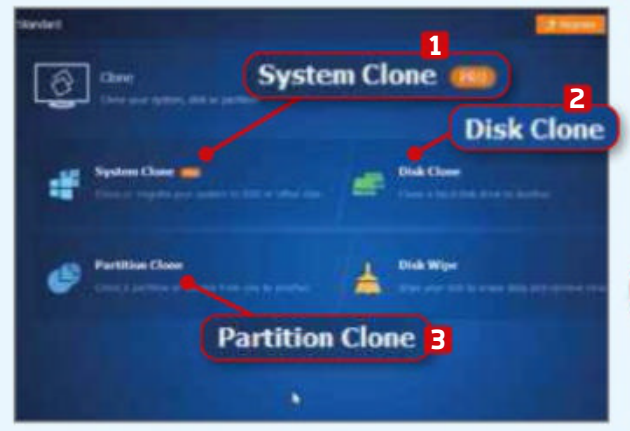
Optimise your SSD

Defragging your hard drive reorders its contents so that the data is arranged into neat contiguous sections, but this isn't something you need to do with an SSD. There's no speed benefit to be had and moving data around the drive in this way can shorten the SSD's lifespan. Thankfully, disk-defragmenting tools – including Windows 10's own 'Defragment and Optimise Drives' – can identify an SSD and won't let you defrag it. These tools typically offer an optimisation mode you can use instead, but it isn't necessary and it's unlikely that you'll notice any speed improvements, anyway.

MINI WORKSHOP | Transfer Windows 10 to your new SSD



1 Some SSDs come with cloning software you can use to transfer Windows 10 (and any installed software) from your old drive to the new one. If software wasn't supplied, you can use a third-party program, such as the excellent AOMEI Backupper Standard (bit.ly/backupper510). Select Clone. 1



2 System Clone 1 is a Pro-only feature (upgrading costs £43) and, while this makes it easier to migrate your operating system from the old drive to the new one, it's not essential. Choose Disk Clone 2 or Partition Clone 3 depending on whether your OS is stored in a separate system partition. We'll choose Disk Clone.

3 Next, select the source drive (where the OS currently resides), click Next and select the destination drive (your new SSD). Click Next again and check the details are correct. 1 Tick the SSD Alignment option 2 and Sector By Sector Clone (if the source drive is healthy). 3 Click the Start Clone 4 button to begin cloning.

NEXT ISSUE **How To...** Add more ports to your PC and other devices

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Web User Masterclass

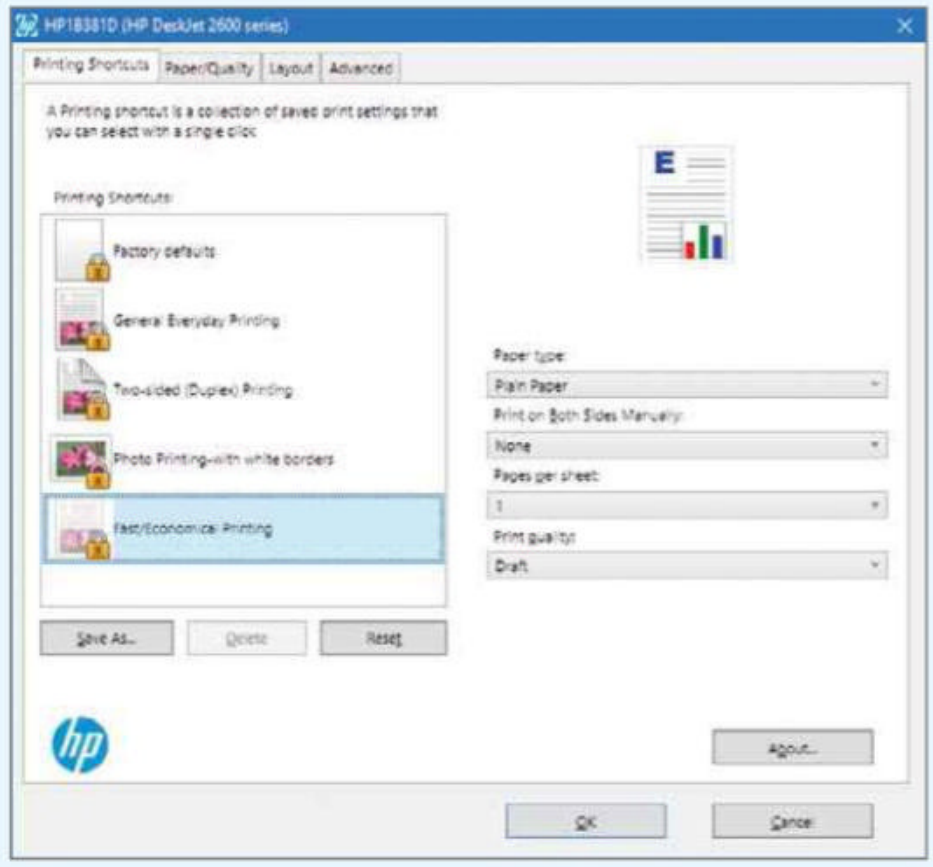
Fix common printer problems and save money on running costs

Stop wasting printer ink

Printer cartridges contain one of the most costly liquids you will ever buy – more expensive per millilitre than Chanel No 5 perfume or vintage Dom Perignon champagne. To save money, it's worth considering whether the document you're about to print really needs to be output at the highest possible quality.

Go to print your document in the usual way, then click Preferences in the print window. Many printers provide a quality setting with options for Draft, Normal and Best. Select Draft to use the least ink.

It depends on the printer software, but there may be other options for customising the quality, such as General Everyday Printing, Photo Printing and Fast/Economical Printing. Choose the latter option and avoid the others to save money. If you can, set it as the default.

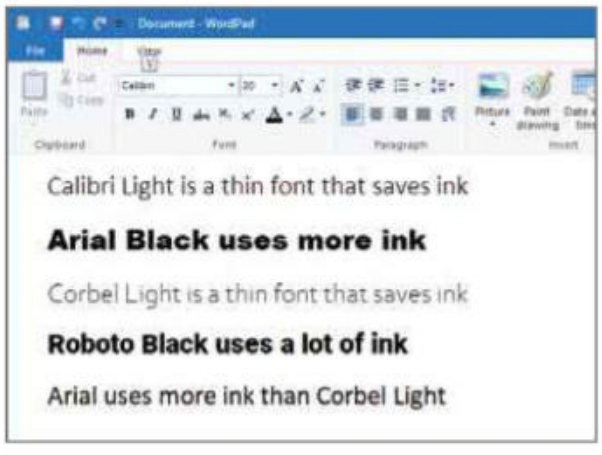


Check the printer settings before printing and choose Draft or Economical printing

Use economic fonts

Ecofont (www.ecofont.com) is a tool that replaces common computer fonts – such as Arial, Times New Roman, Calibri, Tahoma and Verdana – with lookalikes that use an average of 46% less ink. They do this by inserting 'micro holes' in the fonts – spots where no ink is used that are invisible to the human eye. Ecofont's subscription service costs £6.25 a year and is worth signing up to if you print a lot of text.

Simply selecting a thin font instead of a thick one can save money on ink, too. Next time you write a letter or document, choose Calibri Light, Corbel Light or whatever thin fonts you have on your computer. Avoid thick ones such as Arial Black, Roboto Black and others.



Want to save ink costs? Use a thin font instead of a thick one

Stop wasting paper

Using less paper reduces running costs, so print on both sides of a sheet if you can by selecting two-sided printing in the Print window. Some printers provide the option to 'Print on both sides manually' – once the odd pages are printed, you flip them over and insert them in the paper tray upside down to print the even pages on the other side.

Try setting narrow margins in the Print window or in your word processor to fit more text on a single page and, if possible, use recycled paper. When you select Print in a program, click Preferences in the Print window and, in the next window, look for paper options, such as plain paper, photo paper and recycled paper. Less ink is used with plain and recycled paper settings because the sheets are more absorbent.

Cancel from the print queue

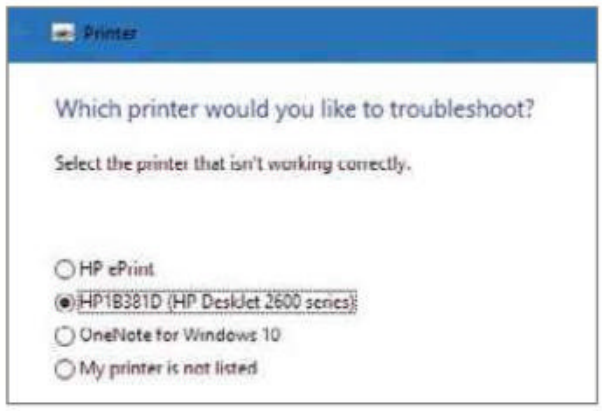
Printing multiple items puts them in a queue that sends them to the printer one at a time. If you suddenly realise you need to cancel one – perhaps because you've clicked the wrong document – simply open the Settings app in Windows 10 and click Devices. Select 'Printers & Scanners', click the printer name on the right and click the 'Open queue' button. Select an item in the queue, go to the Document menu and select Cancel or Pause.

This is especially useful for photos because they can take several minutes to print, so you have plenty of time to cancel your selection.

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.

Solve printing problems

If you run into a problem with printing, it can be difficult to discover whether the fault lies with your printer, with Windows or with the software you're printing from. Use the printer

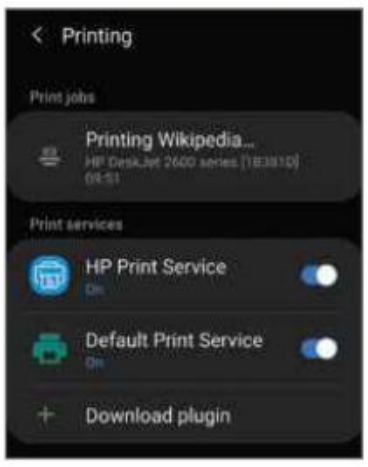


Some printing problems can be fixed via the troubleshooter

troubleshooter to detect and fix any problems. Open the Settings app and click Devices, then click 'Printers & scanners' and 'Run the troubleshooter'. Follow the instructions to check Windows printing services.

Install printer apps

Open the Microsoft Store app in Windows 10 and search for a printer manufacturer, such as HP, Canon, Epson and so on, or just search for 'printer'. Dedicated printer apps help manage various processes, such as configuring print options, printing photos and scanning with all-in-one printers.



Search your phone's settings for 'printing' and add a print service plugin

Phones and tablets often have manufacturer-specific printer apps. Search for 'print service plugin' in the Google Play Store, then select a manufacturer, such as HP Print Service Plugin, Canon Print Service and so on. On the iPhone or iPad, search the App Store for 'printer' to see apps from Canon, HP, Epson, Brother and more. These tools simplify wireless printing over the network.

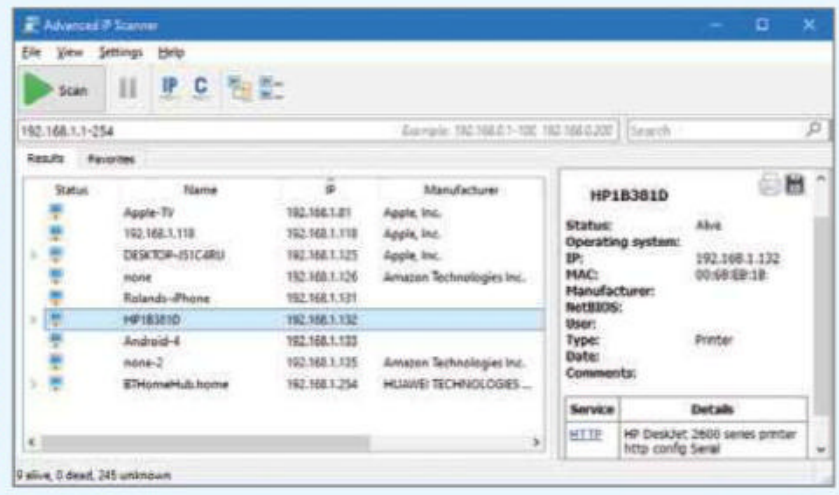
Clean the print heads

Ink nozzles in inkjet printers can get clogged, but you can prevent this by printing something every week or two. It can be small, but it must be colourful.

If the print quality is poor, try cleaning the print heads. The process for this depends on the printer's make and model. If the printer has an app, as many do, run it and look for maintenance options. Some printers provide access to these options via the print window. Select Print in any application, click Preferences and a new window appears with printer settings and, possibly, print-head cleaning. Be aware, though, that this process uses a lot of ink, so only use it if it becomes necessary.

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

More advanced tips for when you're feeling brave



Use Advanced IP Scanner to identify devices on the Wi-Fi network

Find a Wi-Fi printer's IP address

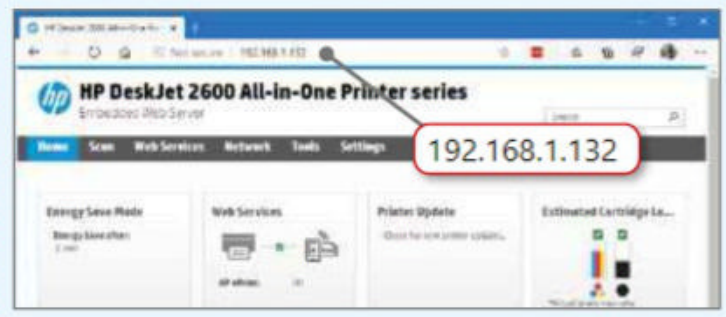
The advanced tips in this section require your printer's IP address. To find it, open Windows 10 Settings and click Devices, then 'Printers & Scanners'. Select the printer and click the Manage button, then 'Printer properties'. A window opens showing the IP address, for example http://192.168.1.132:3911. The first four sets of numbers are its IP address.

Advanced IP Scanner (www.advanced-ip-scanner.com) shows IP addresses of devices on a network. You can run it without installing it, but give it a minute to scan your network.

Alternatively, if you know your router's IP address, enter it in your browser's address bar. Most routers have a status page or similar in the settings, where you can see a list of the IP addresses of connected devices, such as your printer.

Browse your printer

Type your printer's IP address in a web browser and you may be surprised to see a web page appear. The availability, features and functions of a printer's built-in website vary with the make and model. HP inkjet printers, for example, provide an excellent browser interface where you can view the ink levels of cartridges, access tools and settings, check for printer firmware updates and more. When printing from a mobile phone or tablet, the browser interface is useful for customising settings that aren't available on mobile devices, and for accessing cleaning tools.



Access a wireless printer's web page by entering its IP address in your browser

Check the printer response

If you're having problems printing, and you're not sure whether your printer is functioning normally or may have crashed, 'ping' the printer and check the response. Press Windows+R and enter `cmd` to open a command prompt window, then type `ping` followed by your printer's IP address. For example:

```
ping 192.168.1.132
```

This sends four packets of data to the printer, which should respond by returning them. Check that the response is "Packets: sent = 4, Received = 4, Lost = 0". If any are lost, it indicates a printer or network problem. Try switching everything off, including the PC, printer and router, then switch everything back on again.

Update printer firmware

Your printer's built-in software enables it to print but, like all software, it may contain bugs or compatibility problems that need an update to fix. On rare occasions, these updates may even unlock new features.

A wireless printer on your home network may update itself automatically. For a USB printer or a wireless model that doesn't automatically update, go to the manufacturer's website and search for the model, then download and run the update on your computer.

If your wireless printer offers a built-in web page (see 'Browse your printer' tip, left), check this for update options. The websites for some HP printers, for example, have a Printer Update section with a button to manually check for updates, and a tick box to enable automatic updates.

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

Fix Windows update errors

If your PC won't update, check Windows Update history in Settings and click the links for info and help

Q My aged Sony laptop, now upgraded from Windows 7 to Windows 10 Home 2004, is displaying error code 0x80070013. I researched the problem on the internet but don't feel confident solving the problem without some help. For your info, my latest successful updates were KB84565627 and KB84565503. I also have three failed updates: 0x8024001E (twice) and 0x80070013.

I read your Ask the Expert articles in issues 483 and 486, but I don't know whether these fixes would solve my current problem.

Eric Worley, via email

A Error code 0x80070013 means that your PC is trying to install a driver that's already working or is less compatible than the one it's trying to replace. Future updates may fail if this error is not fixed.

Type `disk cleanup` in the search box and select the option to run the tool as an administrator. Select your hard drive, click OK and tick every box, then click OK again to clean up Windows Update and more.

Open Settings, choose 'Update & Security' and click Troubleshoot. Find 'Additional troubleshooters', then run Windows Update. Afterwards, type `command` in the Windows search box and run Command Prompt as an administrator. In the window that opens, type the following text, pressing Enter after each line, then restart Windows:

```
sfc /scannow
DISM.exe /Online /Cleanup-image /Restorehealth
net stop wuauserv
net stop bits
rename c:\windows\SoftwareDistribution SoftwareDistribution.bak
net start wuauserv
net start bits
```

Another fix that worked for some people is to type the following at the admin command prompt (again, pressing Enter after each line):

```
net stop wuauserv
net stop cryptSvc
network stop bits
net stop msiserver
ren C:\Windows\System32\catroot2 Catroot2.old
ren C:\Windows\SoftwareDistribution SoftwareDistribution.old
```

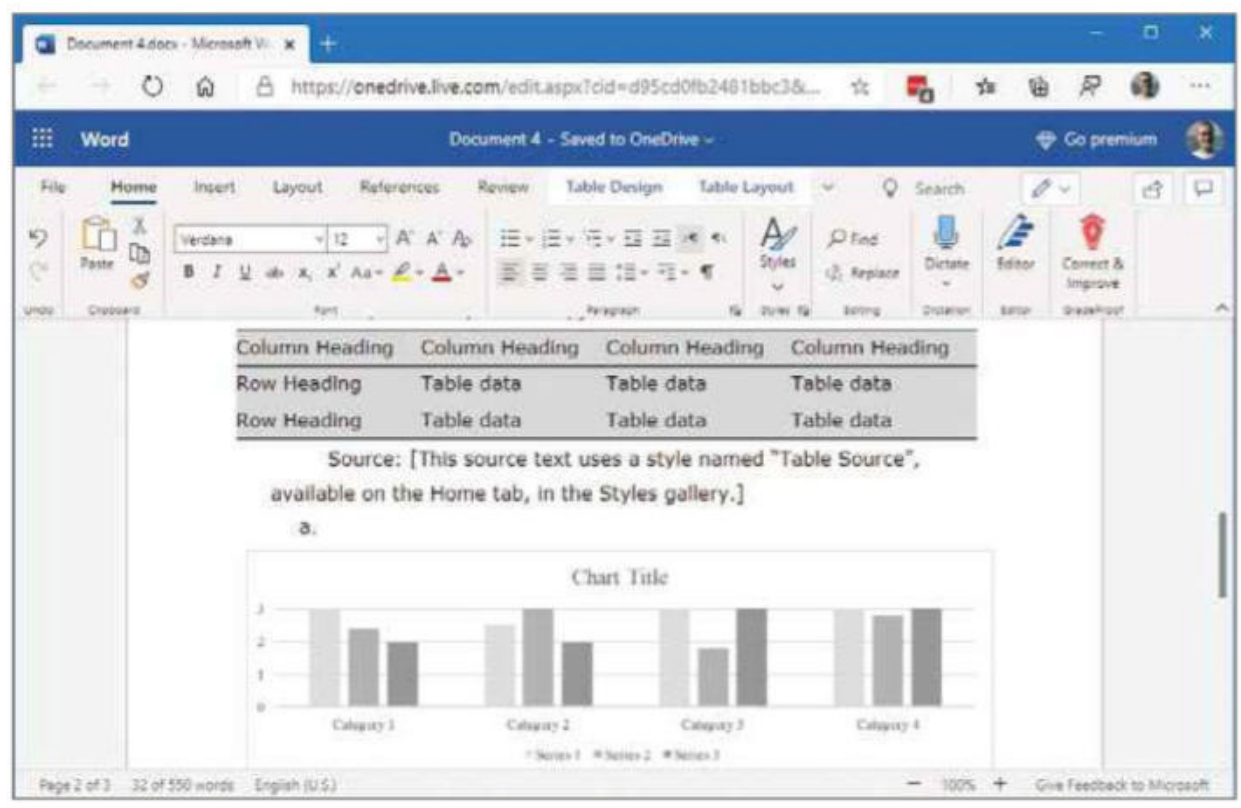
Restart Windows afterwards and the services restart. Windows Update should now work.

OFFICE

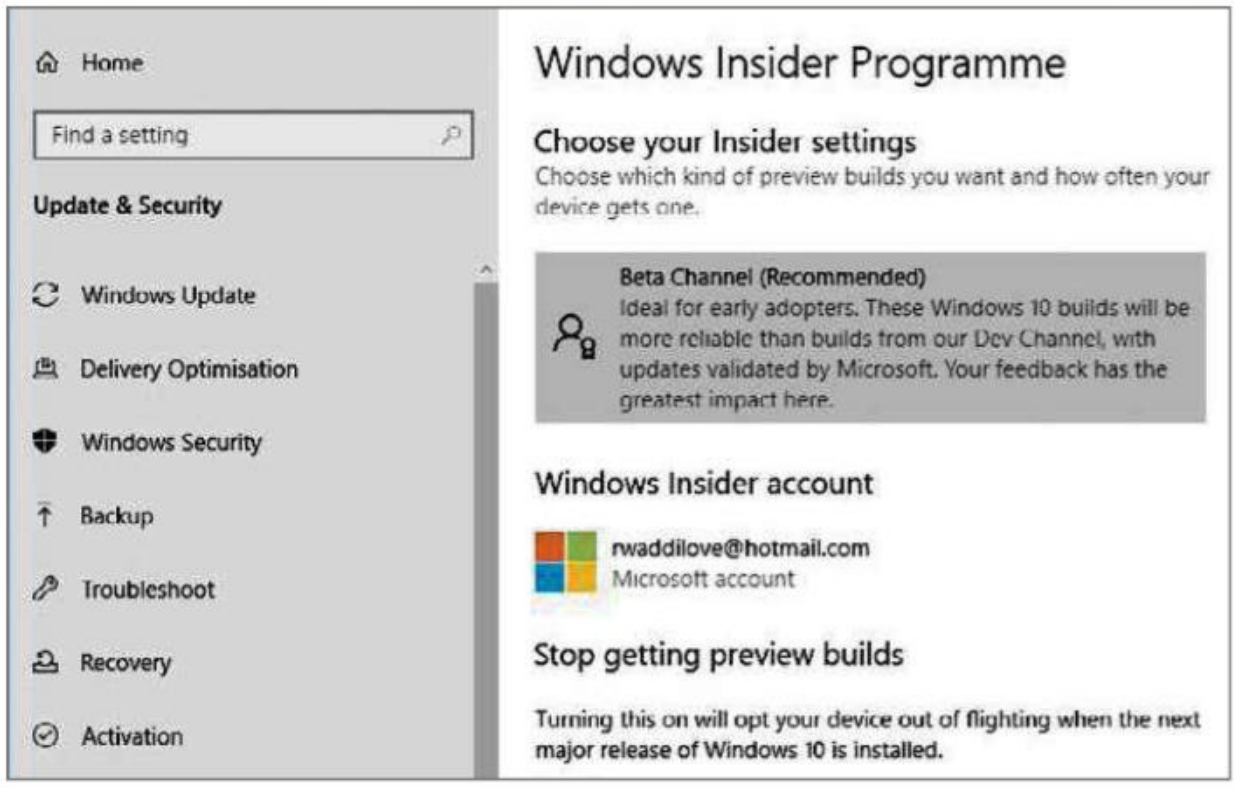
Recover corrupted Word documents

Q I created some research documents a few years ago using Word on an old Windows 7 PC. I use LibreOffice (www.libreoffice.org) instead of Word on my new PC, but the documents worked fine in the ODT (Open Document Text) format. However, I recently agreed to a prompt "Would you like to save in Word 97 format?", thinking it would be easier for sharing the documents with family members. Some of the files were corrupted leaving paragraphs of gobbledegook and some empty pages. I tried using Recuva (www.ccleaner.com/recuva) to retrieve the original files, but the outcome was the same garbage. Any suggestions would be gratefully received.

Geoge Dalton, via email



Put old Word documents on OneDrive and open them in Word online to update them



Running the beta version of Windows is a risk, but updates come sooner and with fewer compatibility checks

A The Word 97 file format is 23 years old and has been superseded by newer formats, so you should avoid using it. It doesn't support all the features of today's Word and LibreOffice software and, when you save documents, any content that isn't supported is removed or appears wrong. That might explain some of the problems you are seeing.

The file format is not supported by some applications. DOCX is the current Word format that most software will recognise. If you have the original ODT documents, load them and save them in DOCX format, if you want other people to be able to access them.

If you don't have the original files and only have the Word 97 files, go to onedrive.com and upload the files or put them in the OneDrive folder on your PC to sync them. Now open your OneDrive in a browser, click the files and the Word web app will try to load them.

Microsoft can open and convert Word 97 files and this may be your best bet to recover the corrupted files. However, it may be worth trying some online file converters, such as Online-convert.com (www.online-convert.com), ConvertFiles (www.convertfiles.com) and Convertio (convertio.co).

WINDOWS

Bypass version 2004 problems

Q The following notice has appeared in the Update section of my Settings app, and has been sitting there since the end of May: "The Windows 10 May 2020 Update is on its way. Once it's ready for your device, you'll see the update available on this page version 2004".

I ran various tests on my computer, but no errors were detected. When I tried to download the update manually from the Microsoft's 'Learn more' site, it appeared to install normally, but stopped at 55% after about three hours of waiting. I have repeated this process four times.

My PC works normally, with Update KB4569751 downloaded successfully on 12 August. If version 2004 is not suitable for this PC, does that mean that any future updates will also be blocked?

Eugene Coyle, via email

A The problem is not caused by errors on your computer, which can be running perfectly. It just isn't compatible with the current version of Windows. New versions of Windows are pushed out first to computers that are known to work with it, and delayed for PCs that are known to have problems. Although it's frustrating not to have the latest version, it's generally less annoying than having a broken PC.

As update problems surface, Microsoft fixes them, improving the compatibility of the current version of Windows so more computers can download the update. It can take a couple of months for Microsoft to produce a version that is compatible with some computers, so be patient. However, if you never receive the 2004 update, it's unlikely that you'll get any big updates in the future.

We had a computer that always seemed to be the last to update to new versions. The solution that worked for us was to open Settings, choose

GAMES

Install Flight Simulator on a second hard drive

If you don't have enough space to install the latest games, try using a second hard drive

Q I'm not a gamer but I was a fan of Microsoft Flight Simulator years ago and would like to try the latest version. My problem is that I only have 90GB of free space on my C: drive and the Microsoft Store says that simulator requires 127GB to install. I have a secondary hard drive (D:) that has more than enough space. How do I save and install Flight Simulator on the D: drive?

D. Baker, via email

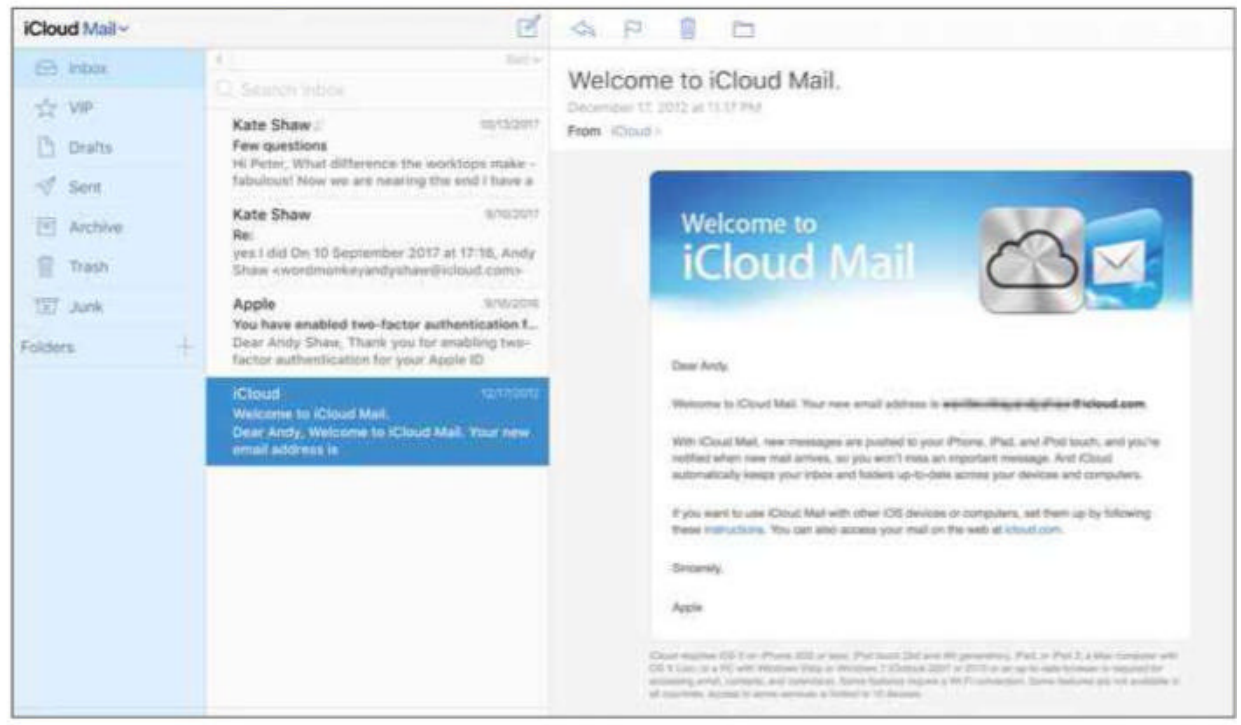
A There are a couple of options, one of which is to create more space on the C: drive. The folders for Music, Pictures and Videos are often many gigabytes each, so moving them to another drive may create sufficient space for Flight Simulator. Right-click each folder in the Explorer sidebar and select Properties, then select the Location tab and click Move.

Another way to increase space is to select This PC in the Explorer sidebar, right-click the C: drive and select Properties. Tick the box, 'Compress this drive to save disk space'. The results vary, but you may be able to reclaim a few gigabytes.

Another option is to change the drive used by Microsoft Store apps. Open the Settings app and click System, followed by Storage. Scroll down and click 'Change where new content is saved'. Under 'New apps will save to', select the drive you want to use – in your case, the D: drive. New apps will now download and install to this drive instead, while existing apps will remain where they are.

'Update & security', then select Windows Insider Programme and sign up for the beta channel.

Updates are installed from here before they are released to the public, and there are fewer compatibility checks. This means there is a chance the beta could cause problems, but we have found it to be stable. That said, there is a risk, so make sure you have backups if you choose this route.



If emails aren't getting through, try using a different address by signing up with iCloud

EMAIL

Unable to receive energy emails

Q Earlier this year, I decided to switch to a different energy supplier. I rang M&S Energy by Octopus Energy and gave my details to the agent, who said I had a 14-day cooling off period and the terms and conditions would be emailed.

Three days later I had not received the email, so I contacted M&S Energy again. The agent I spoke to informed me that the email had bounced back from Virgin Media. After a few trials, it appears that the company's automatic system emails bounce back, but emails from agents come through. Their suggestion was to contact Virgin Media and ask why the automated emails bounced back.

After carrying out a few checks, Virgin Media said there doesn't appear to be any problem and that emails from M&S Energy and Octopus would, at worst, be sent to my Junk mailbox. I rang M&S Energy and, because their system relies on auto emails, I cancelled the order.

Annoyed that I couldn't take advantage of the M&S offer, I went direct to Octopus Energy and asked for a quote to be sent to my email. Two days later, there's still no email.

I am using the Mail app on an Apple MacBook. Is there something I can do to sort out this problem?

David Milledge, via email

A You could try turning off spam filtering but it sounds like a problem with Virgin Media. Sign in at mail.virginmedia.com and click Settings. Expand Mail, click Spam and select the option to turn off spam filtering. The changes are saved when you leave the Settings page.

You could also try using another email account. Since you have a MacBook, you must have an Apple ID and an iCloud email account, such as someone@icloud.com. Use that instead. Alternatively, you could get a free Gmail or Outlook account if you prefer.

PHOTOS

No thumbnails on OneDrive photos

Q I have a problem with some thumbnails of photos not showing in Explorer. All the photos in my PC's Pictures folder display thumbnails but, in the other Pictures folder in OneDrive, some have thumbnail images, while others don't.

If I copy a photo that's missing a thumbnail from OneDrive's Pictures folder to the PC's Pictures folder, the thumbnail appears. I can then move it back to the OneDrive Pictures folder and the thumbnail is still there. Also, if I open a photo in any program to view it, the thumbnail appears. Is this a bug?

Mark Walters, via email

OneDrive's Files On-Demand feature saves hard drive space

A It's not a bug, just a side effect of a OneDrive feature. OneDrive is an online storage service that provides space for your files in the cloud. The OneDrive folder on your computer mirrors your online files and shows everything stored in it.

A file in the OneDrive folder might look like it's on your PC's hard drive, but it may just be a link to the online file. When you click to view the file or open it in a program, OneDrive downloads it to your hard drive, at which point Windows can 'see' the contents of the file and create a thumbnail for it.

When you then move this file back to your PC's OneDrive folder (or you move any image file from your PC's hard drive to your OneDrive folder), the file remains on your hard drive along with its thumbnail, because Windows already knows its contents. This is why some files have thumbnails and some don't.

Click the OneDrive icon in the notification area of the taskbar, choose 'Help & Settings', then Settings. Select the Settings tab and, in the Files On-Demand section, 'Save space and download files as you use them' will be ticked. This saves hard-drive space by keeping files you haven't viewed online, rather than on your PC's hard drive. This means that thumbnails of photos may not always appear.

Clear the tick next to 'Save space and download files as you use them' to download all online files to your PC. This lets Windows generate thumbnails, but uses extra hard-drive space. An alternative is to only select the files that don't have thumbnails in Explorer, right-click them and choose 'Always keep on this device'.

This fortnight Roland has been working on his website, updating his plugins and the new version of WordPress

Readers' Helpdesk

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

READERS RESPOND

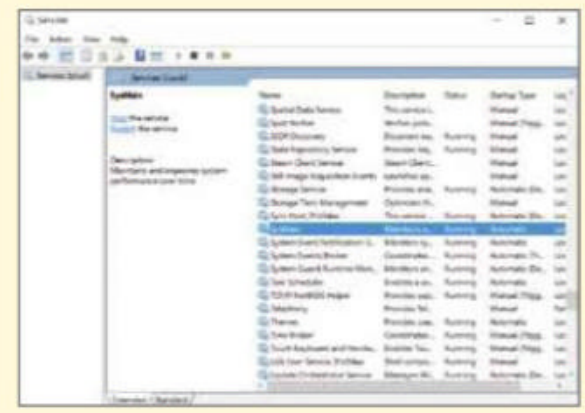
Back Issues disc winner

WINDOWS

Why you should use 'Superfetch'

A In reponse to Mik's problem in Issue 507 (bit.ly/webuser507), I'd like to pass on a very informative article from the Help Desk Geek website (bit.ly/prefetch510). In a nutshell, Superfetch pre-loads frequently used apps into the PC's memory to boost performance. It used to be known as Prefetch back in the Windows XP days, became Superfetch after Windows Vista and is now known as SysMain. In Mik's case, it's not vital to run, but it can be useful, especially during demanding computer sessions.

Philip, via email



Superfetch has been renamed SysMain in the latest version of Windows

BROWSERS

Keep bookmarks on your homepage

Q I've used the bookmark depository at only2clicks.com for over a decade but the website was recently disabled and I've lost a lifetime of bookmarks. I've been on the lookout for an alternative for some time, but apps such as OneNote and Google Keep don't seem to be the best solution for me.

Frank, via email

A It's always a shame to see long-standing websites disappear but it's particularly galling when they vanish without warning, taking your information with them. Finding an alternative is a tad tricky, though, because many such websites have gone the same way as only2clicks.com or else no longer work exactly as required (start.io, for instance).

Modern browsers are partly to blame. Opera (www.opera.com) and Vivaldi (vivaldi.com) have long offered a speed-dial start page for a limited number of bookmarks – the latter offers a service closest to what you require. Chrome, Edge and Firefox also let you add your own bookmark shortcuts to the New Tab page.

If you're not looking to switch browsers, though, try the Utab browser tool (utab.io) for Chrome, Firefox and Edge. This lets you create and manage an unlimited number of bookmarks on your New Tab page.

Steve Clark, Features Writer

Utab can make a Start page containing plenty of your bookmarks

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.

SOFTWARE

Q In Issue 500 (bit.ly/webuser500), I requested suggestions for suitable software for collectors to inventory their treasures, but I did not receive a single reply. Can anyone help?

George Dalton, via email

GOOGLE

Q Although I don't have a commute set, my Google Home Hub insists on showing me my 'commute' with times and traffic details. How do I stop this?

Stephen Rice, via email

WINDOWS

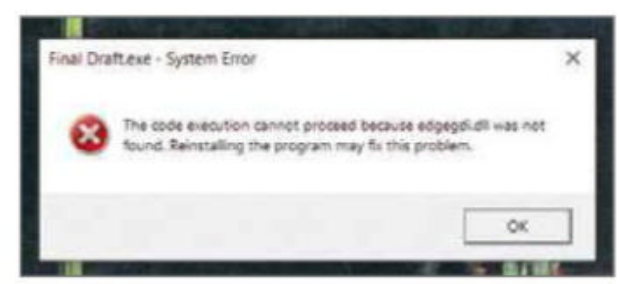
Remove an annoying error message

Q Ever since the latest Windows update, opening certain programs brings up an error message saying 'edgedi.dll was not found'. I've searched all the usual repositories but I can't find this file. The error message tells me to redownload the program, but this isn't an option for some of my programs.

Dan Hall, via email

A Like you, we couldn't find any way to redownload the individual DLL file, so you have four options. Some DLL files can be fixed by restarting your computer. Others can be restored by opening Windows' Update & Security, Recovery, 'Advanced start-up', Restart Now and booting up in Safe Mode. More likely, you need to roll-back the system to a point prior to the update that caused the issue. Finally, try a full reinstallation of the problem programs. It's worth noting that while the error message is annoying, it usually doesn't affect the actual running of your programs.

Steve Clark, Features Writer



This error message is annoying but there are ways to get rid of it

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

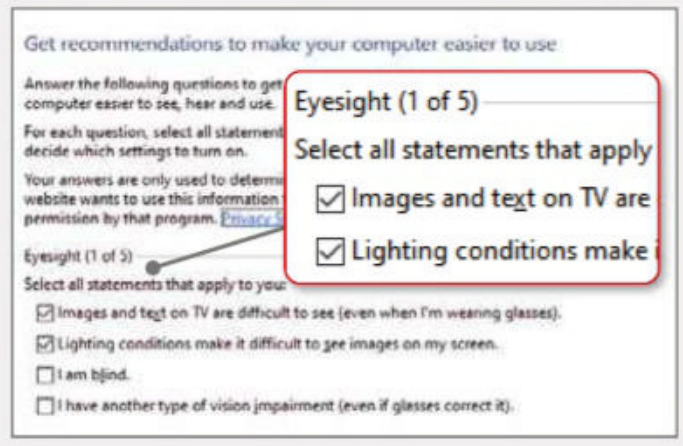
WINDOWS

Make your PC easier to use

As I get older, my hearing is getting worse and my glasses are getting stronger. I can still use my computer without problems, but I discovered some settings in Windows that might help as things get worse.

Open the old Control Panel (instead of the new Windows 10 Settings app) and set the view to Category. Under 'Ease of Access', click 'Let Windows suggest settings'. You can also set the view to small icons and click 'Ease of Access Centre', then 'Get recommendations to make your computer easier to use'.

There are multiple boxes you can tick to describe the problems you have using a computer. Some are about sight and hearing, others cover things that can distract you. At the end, all the settings that may help are listed – there are quite a lot of them. Some of the settings are pre-selected but you can go through them to change whatever you want.



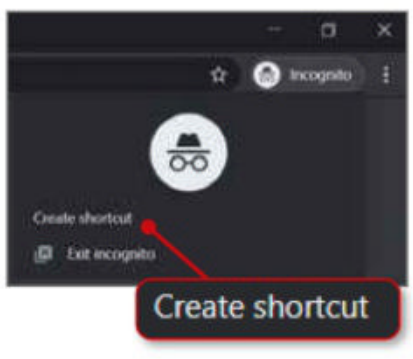
Windows can suggest optimum settings to make your computer easier to use

Ian Rorke, via email

BROWSERS

Go incognito in one click

If you regularly use Chrome in Incognito mode, there's a new option, currently only available in the experimental Chrome Canary, that lets you create an Incognito mode shortcut for your desktop. It's hidden behind a Flag, so visit `chrome://flags/#enable-incognito-shortcut-on-desktop` and change this option to Enabled. Restart the Canary browser, then open Incognito in the usual manner and click the Incognito button in the top-right corner to see two options: Exit Incognito and the new 'Create shortcut'. Choose the latter and, from now on, you won't need to open a browser window to select Incognito mode because it's right there on the desktop already.



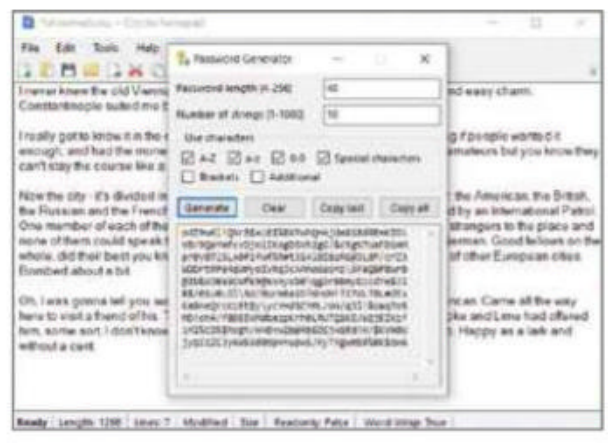
Create a desktop shortcut for a faster path to incognito

Kyle Riley, via email

SOFTWARE

Encrypt your Notepad

I often use Notepad but I sometimes want to create text documents that are harder for other people to access. I recently found Crypto (bit.ly/crypto510), which for all intents and purposes is Windows Notepad with added encryption. Whenever you save your document (which allows both TXT and the proprietary CNP formats), you're automatically prompted to set a password to encrypt it. It also provides a few other useful options, such as the read-only document viewer and, more pertinently, a password generator for keeping files secure. It's also portable, if that swings it for those on the fence.



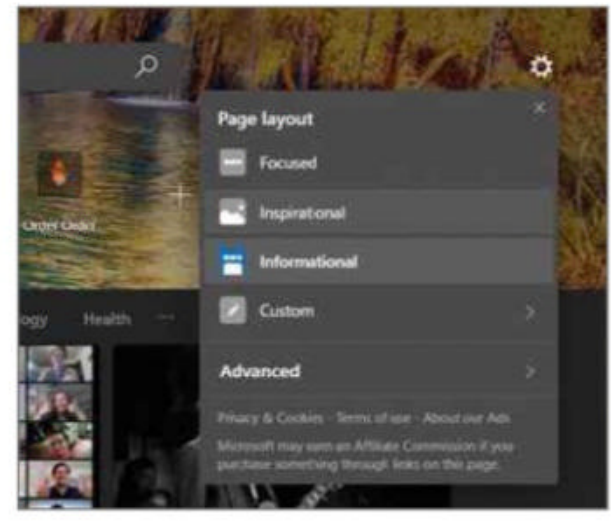
Keep your text files secure with Crypto

B Brown, via email

BROWSERS

Hide Edge's articles

Anyone else absolutely hate the way Microsoft Edge pushes all manner of terrible articles, clickbait and so-called news unworthy of the name? You can turn this off by opening the browser and clicking the Settings cog. If you find the browser too busy with articles, you may have the page layout set to Informational. For a less cluttered view, try Inspirational. If you want to strip out almost everything entirely, Focused may be the best option.



If you don't like Edge's default new tab screen, change it to something less busy

Joshua Chung, via email

iOS

Create custom Share Sheets

Whenever you go to share something on your iPhone or iPad, such as a photo or a file, you're shown a ton of different apps you can use for the purpose. Many of these options aren't useful to me, because I mostly share via WhatsApp

and email, rather than Twitter or Facebook. To personalise the selection of apps, tap the More option at the bottom of the Share Sheet. Click Edit to view two categories: Favourites and Suggestions, both of which are based on your usage.

Apps in Favourites can be dragged into a different order. You can also replace these apps with ones from the Suggestions section. When you're sorted, tap Done. Your new-look Share Sheet is immediately updated.

Jim, via email

SOFTWARE

View WebP images

For those looking for a reliable WebP image viewer, I'd like to recommend Light Gallery (bit.ly/light510). It's open-source (always a bonus), very easy to navigate due to its streamlined design and has functions such as slideshow and autoplay with custom speeds. It opens all the image formats I need – I just drag and drop them into the gallery or open via the File option. If you've not come across WebP images before, it's a format for high-quality small images, developed by everyone's favourite internet giant, Google. Light Gallery isn't the only tool available – Paint.net and FastStone also support the WebP format. I'd love to hear other readers' recommendations, too.

Peter Feore, via email

LightGallery is a simple WebP image viewer - which one do you use?

SOFTWARE

Add a dictionary

I don't use a word processor very often and my needs are quite simple, so I just use WordPad. The one feature it doesn't have is a spellchecker, but I've found one that can be added. WordWeb (wordweb.info/free) is a free program that claims to add a dictionary and thesaurus to almost any Windows program. I can't vouch for that, but it works in WordPad and Notepad, which are my main writing tools.

After installing it, Ctrl+right-click any word in WordPad or Notepad to check the spelling. It suggests the correct word if it's wrong and can replace it. If the word is correct, it shows the dictionary definition, and can also show synonyms and antonyms. It's not perfect but it's certainly a help. The biggest problem is that it doesn't highlight misspelt words, so you have to look out for any you suspect might be wrong. It's great for looking up definitions, though.

James Harris, via email

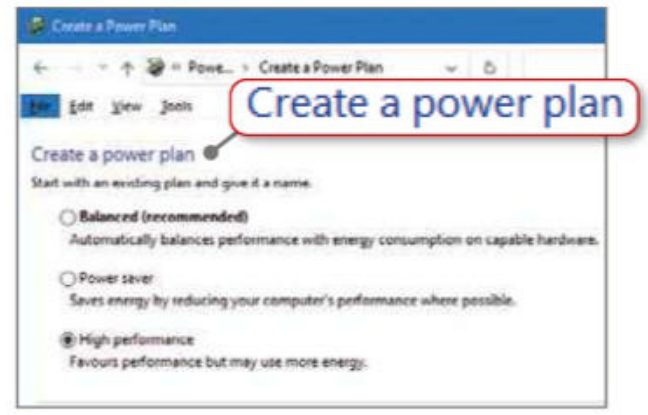
Add the WordWeb spelling checker and dictionary to Windows

WINDOWS

Turbo-charge your PC

Before you start a game, video-editing session or anything else that puts demand on your PC's hardware, turn up your computer's power to the max so that it runs faster. Click the power button in the taskbar and drag the slider to the Best Performance end of the scale. Open Power Options in the Control Panel and select the High Performance plan. If there isn't one, click 'Create a power plan' and create it.

Back at the Power Options main screen, click 'Change plan settings' next to the High Performance plan. Click 'Change advanced power settings' on the next screen, then go through each of the



Play games and other demanding applications at maximum power

sections and choose the maximum performance (or the least power-saving) in each case. Just as you wouldn't drive your car all the time at maximum revs, don't use this all the time – just select it when you need extra power.

P Johnson, via email

HARDWARE

Clone HDDs to SDDs easily

I recently updated my laptop's hard drive to an SSD. It is usually said that the new SSD needs to be the same size or greater than the donor drive. I used the Samsung Data Migration tool (available at bit.ly/samsung510) to clone my 750GB hard drive to a 250GB SSD (the old disc had only 70GB of data on it). The program even works out the partitioning for you.

Roger Keene, via email

Web User **says:** For more help moving to an SSD, check out our Weekend Project on page 58.

BLUNDER OF THE FORTNIGHT

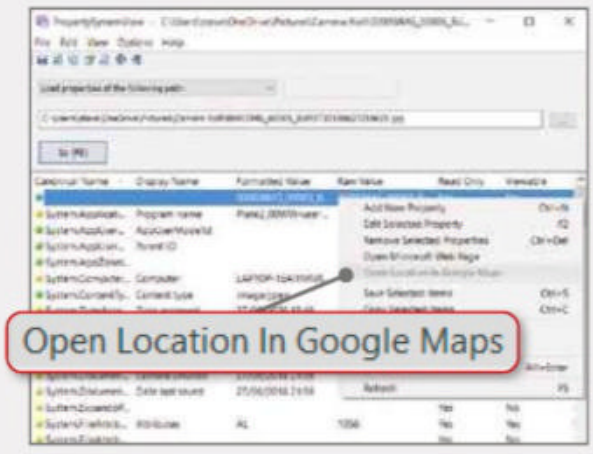
PHOTOS

See where you took your photos

I often scroll through the many photos on my computer and can't for the life of me place where they were taken. I'll remember that it was, say, George's 50th birthday party, but it's like a Countdown conundrum trying to remember which pub we were in.

As it happens, all I needed to do was download NirSoft's Property System View tool (search for it at nirsoft.net), whose latest update includes the option to 'Open Location in Google Maps'. You could also try Exif Data View from NirSoft, which only works with photos, not all documents.

Load a photo into either tool by pressing the three-dot button, selecting a file and clicking Go. Now right-click the file to open Google



NirSoft can help you remember where photos were taken

Maps, which shows you exactly where the photo was taken. Just be aware that it only works with JPEG images that include geolocation data.

Steve Hall, via email

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

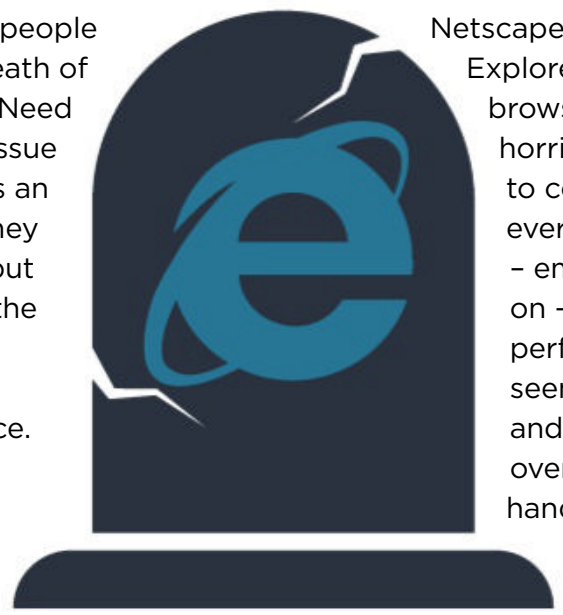
Inbox

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

Star Email

Don't dismiss Internet Explorer's legacy

It's all very well for people to celebrate the death of Internet Explorer (Need to Know and Inbox, Issue 509) by saying it was an awful browser that they never used anyway, but they seem to forget the importance it had in getting millions of us online in the first place.



Back in the early 2000s (I refuse to use the word Noughties!), before Chrome and Firefox came along, the options available for browsing the web were limited to Netscape Navigator, Internet Explorer and AOL's own browser. The latter was horribly bloated and tried to coerce you into doing everything through AOL – email, news, chat and so on – while Netscape was perfectly adequate, but seemed to become slower and more prone to crashes over time. IE, on the other hand, was built into Windows 98, so you didn't need to download it, and it was easy to use, so anyone going online for the first time could get the hang of navigating web pages, clicking links, adding sites to Favorites [sic], sending emails and other tasks we take for granted these days.

Of course, better browsers eventually came along and Internet Explorer fell by the wayside, but it's worth remembering how widely used it once was and its role in popularising the web. Most sites were once specifically designed with IE in mind, and most businesses relied heavily on the browser to perform their online operations – in fact, some still do.

I haven't used IE for seven years, but I'm still thankful for its legacy and won't be gleefully cheering its demise.

Paul Giddings, via email

Invest money in broadband not HS2

I couldn't agree more with Barry Collins' column in Issue 509 about the government's folly in pursuing the HS2 rail project ('Give full-fibre broadband the green light'). This ridiculously expensive and pointless endeavour has already resulted in the destruction of hundreds of homes and businesses, untold damage to wildlife sites and great inconvenience to the people with the misfortune to live in its sprawling path.

And for what purpose? To cut the journey time from Birmingham to London by half an hour, from 2029. By which point, most businesspeople who would have benefited from the shortened commute time will probably be working from home anyway. Even claims that HS2 will be good for the environment fall flat, because of the increased carbon emissions and disruption to woodland already caused by this poorly planned project.

Credit: Alex Daniels / Shutterstock.com

As Barry rightly says, the £100bn wasted on HS2 would be far better invested in high-speed broadband infrastructure as a means of connecting the country through technology, rather than in overpriced and underused transport.

Graham Caldwell, via email

Let's hear more about Chromebooks

I believe that *Web User*'s primary objective is to help users get the best out of using the internet. So why is there almost no information about Chromebooks? These devices have been around for almost 10 years and are almost exclusively used to access the web.

Please can we have some articles focusing on the range of Chromebooks available, how to select the right model, their basic usage and how they can be used to load native Android apps and Linux distributions.

Trevor Watkin, via email

Quiz Answers: Issue 509

1 *Radio Times*
2 *TV & Satellite Week*
3 *Private Eye*
4 *Woman & Home*
5 *Computer Shopper*
6 *BBC Good Food*

WINNER!
Well done to **Paul Preston** who wins a Web User Back Issues Disc

WAYBACK MACHINE
2009

***Web User* says:** We hear you, Trevor. In fact, we've got a feature about why Chromebooks are better than Windows PCs in this very issue – turn to page 50.

Iron is the best Chrome alternative

I refer to Barry Collins' column in Issue 507 titled "Let's Stick to the Software Diet". Barry rightfully refers to Google Chrome as a bloated program and mentions Edge as an alternative. Assuming you guys don't already know this, let me give you a tip: go with the Iron Browser (www.srware.net/iron).

I have tried quite a few Chromium-based browsers, including Vivaldi, Brave and Edge, but they are all different in their own ways, which means there is a learning curve when switching from Chrome. Iron is a carbon copy of Chrome, but there is no bloat, no tracking and no learning curve. It's lean, mean and runs like a bullet. And I have yet to find an extension from the Chrome Web Store that doesn't work in Iron.

Test it on a virtual machine (or spare computer) and, if you agree, please recommend Iron to your readers.

Humbert, San Antonio

How I save money on phone costs

I enjoyed Barry Collins' column in Issue 508 about mobile phone options ('High end handsets can take a hike'). However, I go the extra mile in reducing my cost of phone ownership.

I always buy a used phone from a reputable company, many of which have excellent TrustPilot reviews. My Huawei P30 Pro was bought from 4Gadgets (www.4gadgets.co.uk) in a described "good" condition. It was pristine and arrived in an attractively packaged case.

I then ordered a SIM from ID Mobile (www.idmobile.co.uk) for their basic monthly package and transferred my phone number. I also set up Wi-Fi calling as I live in a very poor reception area. This service works brilliantly and I now get crystal clear calls.

This all costs me just £3.99 per month. Can any other reader beat this?

Joe Rice, via email

What you say...

DO YOU THINK YOU CAN BUY A DECENT PHONE WITHOUT SPENDING A FORTUNE?

I don't see the point of having the latest phone, because you're paying over the odds just to show off. I bought myself a 'new' second-hand phone and it does everything I want and more, so why pay over £700 for the latest model?

Gerrit Max

I fell out with my Sony Xperia to the extent that I bought an LG for £150. Did me just fine for the balance of my contract. My only issues with it were that it had limited memory (though this could be supplemented with a memory card) and the camera wasn't as good as more expensive models.

Nat Grove

In recent years, the latest handsets aren't really offering anything that is life-changing or new – foldable phones are actually very old, for example, and 5G is far from full coverage. Paying for a new handset that is barely discernible from previous models seems a waste.

Rich Grove

My Moto G7 Power has an absolutely incredible battery life and was very cheap. However, the Wi-Fi is awful when the Bluetooth is on, it weighs too much and the phone is slow to do a lot of things. That said, it will do them slowly for days and days on a full charge and, when you commute, that's a godsend.

Caroline Chapman

I bought a new iPhone 7 Plus on its release and it's still going strong. I will keep the phone until it is too slow to use or can't update apps. When I do eventually upgrade, I will take advantage of Apple's interest-free payments and not take out a new contract.

Pamela J Anderson

I use a £150 Android phone for work (a Huawei P Smart). It's actually a great phone but I prefer Apple iOS over Android and will no doubt buy the new iPhone 12 on release. It's just personal preference, though!

Mark Chatham

I never use my mobile phone for phone calls, but it's essential for everything else, so I tend to go for something high quality.

Jan Swanton

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF FACEBOOK'S NEW WEBSITE DESIGN?

It's hideous and not PC-friendly – too image intensive, for a start.

Ann McClean

I don't like it. Poor notifications, and shortcuts to groups disappear when you click one, so you either have to go back a screen or click the Facebook logo. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," is my motto.

Geoffrey Boow

The new layout is awful. It looks like Stevie Wonder designed it.

Carl Briggs

The original design looked like it was thought up by a teenager (probably because it was). The new design looks like it is aimed at under-10s.

Caroline Monroe

I don't mind the new design. I love the new Dark Mode.

Mike Martin

Like all "upgrades", there are good things and bad things. The main problem I find these days is the testing. There are so many devices in use, but Facebook doesn't seem to test the new version on them all. What might work on one device might not work on another.

Anthony Higham

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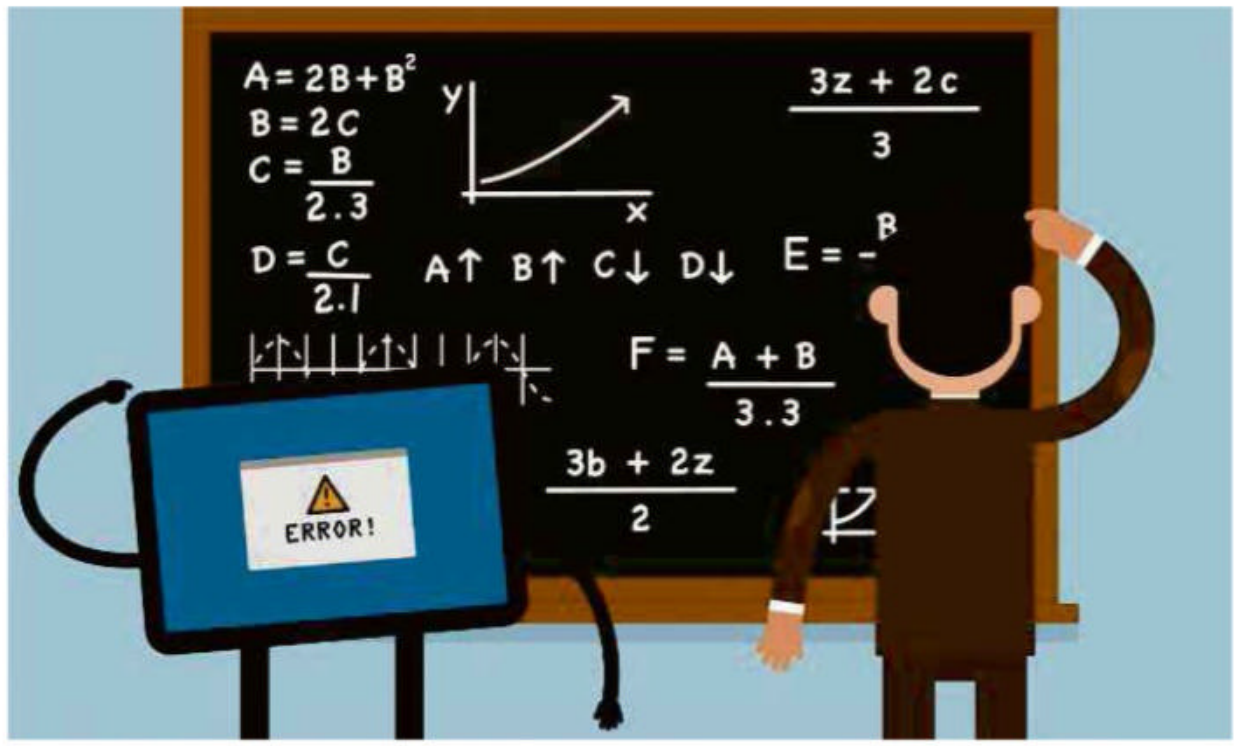
It wasn't algorithms that flunked this year's A-level results, says **Barry Collins**

Don't blame algorithms for human error



Spare a thought for the poor algorithms. There they were, going about their business, carrying out the orders of their human paymasters in the precise manner they always do, when suddenly they're being blamed for robbing millions of teenagers of their bright futures. "An algorithm decided my future," read one student protester's placard. "I'm ****** off."

Now, with an exam-sitting teenager under my roof, I can well understand the protester's frustration. I can imagine how upsetting it must be to see your grades slashed by a piece of software. But the many, rightfully angry students and parents are picking on the wrong target: algorithms aren't to blame, humans are.

Firstly, algorithms are wonderful things. They look after us in ways that we're simply incapable of doing ourselves. It's highly trained algorithms that warn us when a life-endangering storm is brewing; it's an algorithm that stops your car smashing into the vehicle in front when it detects you're driving too close; it's an algorithm that decides that you might be at a greater risk of catching prostate cancer and prompts you to visit the doctor for a check-up. We could live without them, but not as safely.

> "Algorithms are wonderful things – they look after us in ways that we're simply incapable of doing ourselves"

However, an algorithm is only as good as its programmers and the data it's working with. Yes, the more advanced forms of AI are now capable of working things out for themselves – such as the Libratus computer in the USA, which was taught the rules of Texas Hold 'em poker, then left to work out how to actually win the game by playing trillions of hands against itself until it worked out the best strategies. It wasn't influenced by how we humans normally play the game – it developed its own style and then beat several of the world's top players.

Normally, however, algorithms are guided by humans, bringing to bear our biases or desired outcomes. The A-level results of many promising state-school students weren't downgraded because an algorithm took a dislike to the kids from the local comprehensive. It was programmed to do so to prevent overall grade inflation. That was a human decision, not a computer one.

Even when left to simply chew over the data and reach their own conclusions, algorithms can pick up inherent biases that we've created. There was the infamous case of Amazon using algorithms to pre-select candidates for interview, which was trained to vet applicants by analysing patterns in the company's recruitment over the past 10 years. The algorithm penalised candidates who had items such as "women's chess club captain" on their CV because it decided – looking at past successful candidates – that the company was primarily looking for men. It was rightly binned.

Yet, we shouldn't lob the baby out with the bathwater. A mad scramble is going on in the press now, looking for other cases of public-sector algorithms penalising minorities or reinforcing the status quo. That's not a bad thing, and there should definitely be more transparency about how algorithms are implemented and the resulting outcomes.

But we shouldn't demonise algorithms, either. Algorithms are like dogs: train them properly and they'll reward you. Train them badly, however, and they'll come back to bite you.

Illustration: Andrew Torrens

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