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Master Your Home Wi-Fi

Amazing things you never knew you could
do with your wireless network **p40**

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Encrypt files you store in the cloud

p54

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**CONNECT YOUR PHONE
& TABLET TO YOUR TV**

Use apps on your biggest screen

p58



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Where there's Wi-Fi, there's a way

One of the biggest downsides to being stuck at home for seven months while the pandemic rages outside is what “experts” (that is, people who like being quoted in press releases) have dubbed “lockdown lethargy”. Simple domestic chores become Herculean tasks, distances seem to double and time moves simultaneously too slowly and too fast.

For example, right now I'd like a cup of tea, but my kettle is in my kitchen and I'm sitting at my computer. Why can't I just boil it from here? If only I'd invested in a Wi-Fi kettle, which is just one of the wireless

wonders in this issue's cover feature.

Our home Wi-Fi networks are typically something we set up and ignore, letting the router do its job while we enjoy cable-free browsing and streaming in any room. But, as we explain on page 40, there's lots more you can do with your wireless network to make it speedier, safer and smarter, from adding a second router to blocking annoying ads and – yes – making the tea!

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



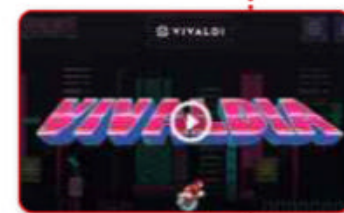
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How to use Bitly links

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.



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



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28 OCT - 10 NOV 2020

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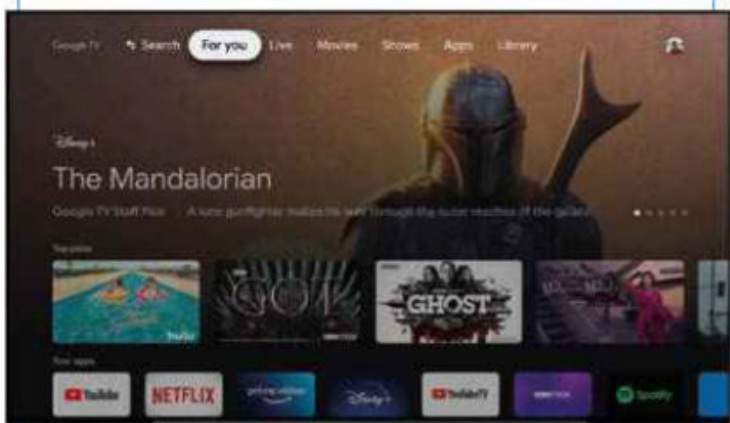
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enhance your wireless network

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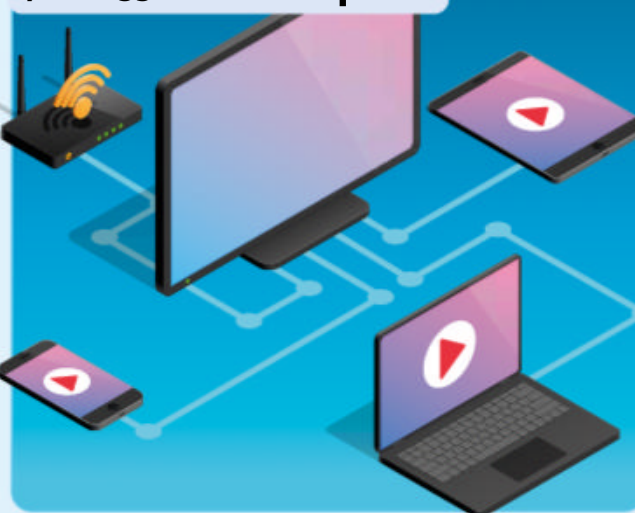
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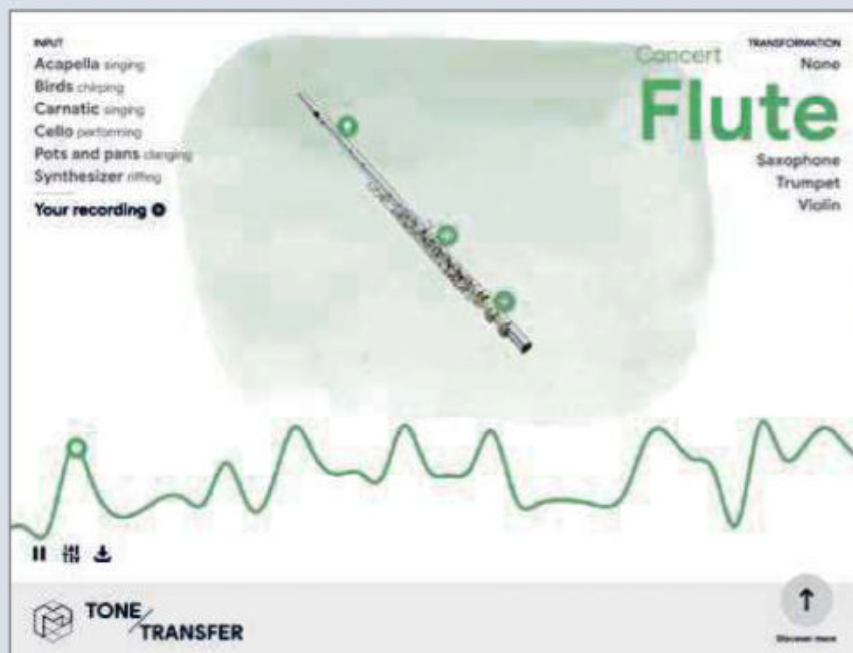
What's New Online

Turn everyday sounds into music

If you can't play an instrument, you may find yourself composing your own tunes by whistling, humming or even turning your table into an impromptu drum kit. Launch Tone Transfer, however, and you can do all those things while creating something that sounds a little more professional.

The idea is that you take an audio input (be it birds chirping or pots and pans clanging) and run it through Google's machine-learning algorithm to hear how it would sound played on a flute, saxophone, trumpet or violin. By selecting Add Your Own, you can be as creative as you like, selecting Record to produce a 15-second audio clip (or uploading some pre-recorded sounds) before hitting Transform.

You have to grant the tool access to your microphone, but the

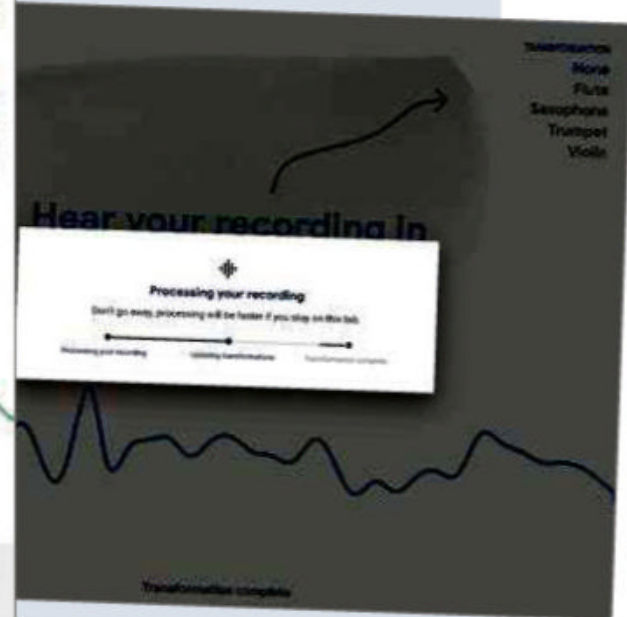


recording is transformed in your browser and no identifiable information is collected. It's also possible to make adjustments, by mixing the output sound with your original recording or adjusting the octave and loudness.

The results are frequently impressive, but it doesn't stop there. You can

discover more about the instruments and training data, and download your efforts – either as the original recording or any of the four transformations. Recordings can only be made via the desktop or Android (alas, not on iOS).

sites.research.google/tonetransfer



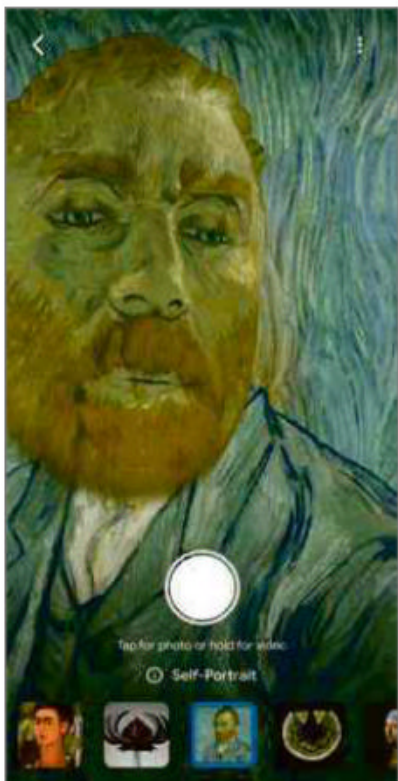
Apply Google Arts & Culture's new filter

artsandculture.google.com

Anyone who fancies immersing themselves in a work of art should immediately launch the Google Arts & Culture app where you'll find a set of 3D-modelled augmented-reality filters that use some of the world's most famous self-portraits, paintings and artefacts.

Try flashing a smile as Vincent van Gogh, get pictured with a monkey in Frida Kahlo's self-portrait from 1938 or adorn yourself with a 19th-century Samurai helmet, a Faience collar necklace from Ancient Egypt or the pearl earring from Johannes Vermeer's masterpiece.

Just tap the rainbow camera icon, choose Art Filters and make your choice, then get yourself in focus and take a snap to share with others. The tool lets you learn more about the history and context of the art and, since it's all run on your device, you don't need to worry about making yourself look silly.



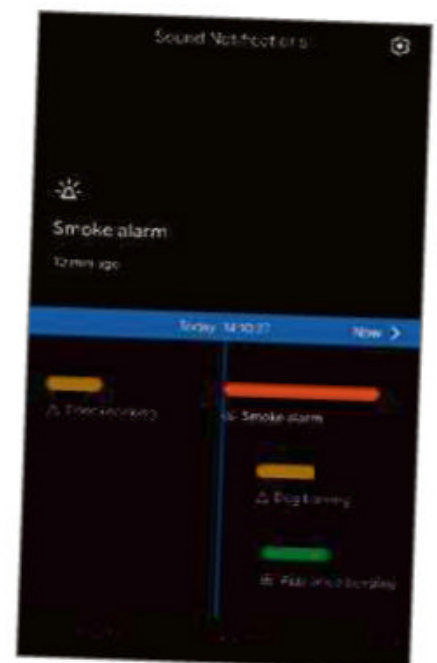
Listen for important sounds with your phone

bit.ly/transcribe513

Ever heard a bump in the night and wondered if you were dreaming? Or been blissfully unaware of the noises around you because you were wearing headphones? Maybe you simply have hearing difficulties. In all cases, Android is riding to the rescue.

A new feature called Sound Notifications can be found within the Accessibility menu of Android's Settings app (if not, go to Google Play and download the Live Transcribe app from the link above). Enable the function and choose the sounds you'd like to detect, from smoke and fire alarms, sirens, shouting and the ring of a doorbell to a dog barking, water running and an appliance beeping.

You can also set your notification preferences to choose how you want to be alerted, whether with a vibration, flashing light or an alert to a wearable device running Wear OS. Machine learning processes the sounds and a Timeline displays anything it picks up.



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

See who's waking and sleeping

wakingandsleeping.glitch.me

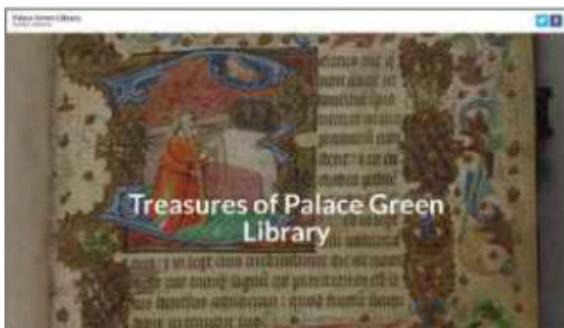
Sometimes we have to pinch ourselves to tell if we're awake – has someone really mapped when and where people are tweeting “good morning” or “good night”? The answer is, of course, yes, with the data compiled from recent Twitter activity to show who's just got up and who's headed to bed, provided that users have allowed location sharing.



Explore historical treasures

bit.ly/durham513

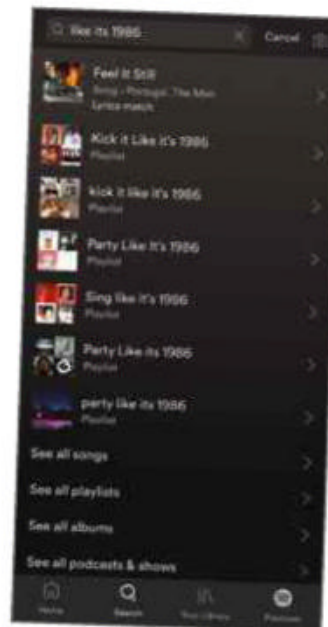
In 1998, Shakespeare's First Folio – a rare 17th-century collection of work by the Bard – was stolen from a Durham University library. It was returned 12 years later and is now one of 11 historic items put on display as part of a new online exhibition called ‘Treasures of Palace Green’, along with a 2,000-year-old letter excavated in Egypt, ancient manuscripts, hand-coloured engravings and the second book to be printed in three colours. You can also search the catalogue and get a sneak peek of forthcoming online exhibitions.



Search songs by lyrics in Spotify

www.spotify.com/uk

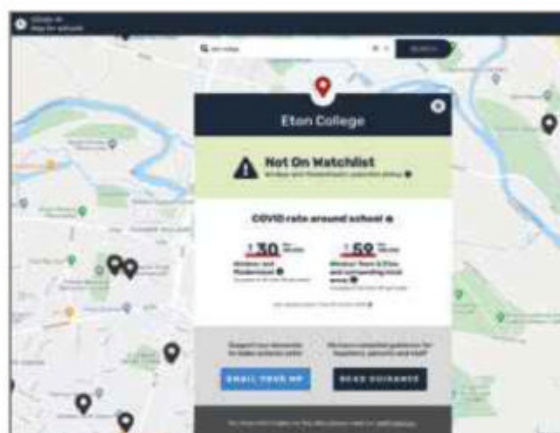
Got a song swirling around your head but haven't got a clue what it's called? With Spotify on iOS and Android, you can now relieve your frustration by tapping in a few words from the lyrics and have the app quickly look for matches. It works automatically in any version of Spotify (but we'd still advise updating to the latest). Simply look down the list of results and you'll see any tunes including those words marked with “lyrics match”. You'll also be shown any song titles containing those words – simply tap the title to start playing.



Check the Covid-19 rate around schools

schoolcovidmap.org.uk

Anyone worried about the prevalence of COVID-19 in the areas around schools and colleges can enter a name or postcode into this online tool to see its watchlist status, the current infection rate and whether it's rising or falling. There's also guidance for teachers, parents and staff, and a facility to email your MP with any concerns.



NEW VOICE COMMANDS



Search within apps

Google Assistant now lets you issue commands involving more than 30 top Android apps. Just say “find [song] on Spotify”, “check news on Twitter”, “search [item] on Etsy” and so on.



Get cycling directions

Bike routes aren't available for every UK city yet but saying: “Hey Siri, get me cycling directions from [location] to [location]” could freewheel you to your destination.



Book a location-accurate Uber

Enable the “3 Word Go” skill to get a precise pickup spot for your Uber. Find a location at what3words.com and say: “Alexa, ask 3 Word Go to order me an Uber from [3words]”.



Assess your job skills

beta.nationalcareers.service.gov.uk

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has advised anyone facing unemployment to seek new opportunities. This skills assessment website asks you to agree or disagree with a series of statements to find a new career.

Use Lennon songs in TikTok

www.tiktok.com

TikTok creators can now access several songs written by John Lennon, including *Imagine*, *Woman*, *Instant Karma!* and *Give Peace a Chance*. They follow the addition of songs by Prince in June.

View COVID-related skin conditions

covidskinsigns.com

Skin rashes have been linked to COVID-19 and there are calls to add them to the UK's official list of symptoms. This site from the British Association of Dermatologists lets you view typical coronavirus rashes to help you identify tell-tale signs.

Apple unveils smaller iPhone and its first 5G handsets

What happened?

Not even a pandemic could stop a new iPhone from arriving this autumn, but Apple had a genuine surprise in store for this year's annual smartphone refresh: the iPhone 12 Mini, a smaller handset that bucks the trend for ever-bigger smartphones.

Smartphones, including the iPhone, have regularly increased in size: the first iPhones featured 3.5in screens, while the iPhone 6 leapt to 5.5in before Apple pushed beyond 6in displays on its flagship models over the last two years. The iPhone 12 Mini has a 5.4in display but, unlike its tiny stablemate, the 4.7in budget iPhone SE, it has specs on a par with larger models, which means that people with smaller hands need not sacrifice performance for usability.

Beyond the Mini model, the new iPhone 12 handsets also feature a new "ceramic shield", which Apple says offers "four times better drop performance" – in other words, your phone is less likely to smash if it slips from your hands. There's also a faster new processor that supports better photography, including a 'Night mode' that lets you take selfies in low-light conditions without a flash.

Of course, Apple still offers a large model for those who want a big-screen handset. The iPhone 12 Pro and iPhone 12 Pro Max were also unveiled with 6.1in and 6.7in displays respectively. These top-end smartphones offer augmented reality through a LiDAR laser scanner, a feature more often



found in driverless car prototypes.

The other big new feature in this updated range of iPhones is 5G. However, it's worth noting that the UK network currently doesn't offer full 5G coverage, so don't assume you'll be able to get those faster speeds everywhere you go. The iPhone 12 versions for the US have support for a local variant of 5G called mmWave, but that's not available in the UK so phones sold locally won't include an antenna for that system.

Another new feature on all the 12-range phones is an array of magnets embedded into the rear of the handset, which makes it less fiddly to fit chargers, and has prompted Apple to develop a new range of accessories, including magnetic wallets that stick to the phone.

How will it affect you?

The iPhone 12 was available to buy in the UK from 23 October, but you'll have to wait until 6 November to pre-order the iPhone 12 Mini, with delivery from 13 November. The iPhone 12 costs £799 for the 64GB model, £849 for 128GB and £949 for 256GB, while the iPhone 12 Mini is priced at £699 for the 64GB model, £749 for 128GB and £849 for the 256GB version. Be aware that these phones don't come with a power adapter, which you'll have to buy separately or use one you already have.

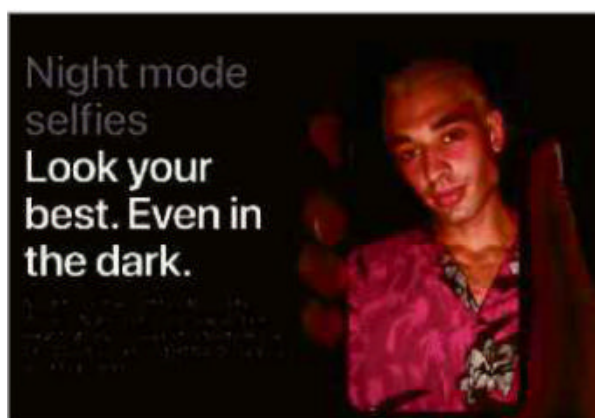
The iPhone 12 Pro was also available from 23 October, but pre-orders for the iPhone 12 Pro Max begin on 6 November, with delivery a week later. The price of the Pro models begins at £999.

If you're looking for a lower-cost option, Apple is keeping the iPhone 11 in its lineup, starting from £599 for last year's model, and continues to offer the iPhone SE at £399.

What do we think?

It's great to see Apple widening its range to appeal to more people. The top-end iPhone 12 Pro Max has some great features, including that LiDAR sensor, but a 6.7in device is difficult to operate with small hands. If you don't want a nearly tablet-sized phone, you now have two new options for smaller handsets: the lower-end iPhone SE and the higher-end iPhone 12 Mini, which features the same specs as the larger iPhone 12 at a more manageable size (though not a huge reduction in price).

It's true that smartphones increasingly look the same – subtle variations on a black, glass rectangle – but Apple's new lineup shows there's still room for differentiation. We don't all want the same thing from a handset, and if we're going to shell out hundreds of pounds, we should all be able to get one we can hold with one hand.



The iPhone 12's new 'Night mode' lets you take photos in low light without a flash

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

Microsoft forces Office apps on Windows users

What happened?

Windows 10 users have complained that Microsoft installed new apps on their computers during the last monthly update. After the reboot, some users spotted progressive web apps (PWAs) for the online versions of Office tools, including Word and Excel.

To access these tools, you'd normally visit their websites in your browser, but PWAs act more like standard software, with features such as quick-launch icons, offline support and the ability to send push notifications. They're powered by Microsoft Edge, but you don't need to open them in the browser first.



These PWAs mainly seem to have been installed on the PCs of users in the Windows Insider Program, which suggests that Microsoft is testing the idea of automatically installing the web-app shortcuts.

How will it affect you?

If you suddenly see Office apps show up in your Start

menu, then you're part of the PWA trial. Clicking their icons will open the online versions

of the Office software, without the need to open your browser first. The apps are free to use, though you'll have to log in first.

If you don't want those icons cluttering up your computer, you can uninstall them as you would any other software, through the 'Apps & features' screen in Windows 10's Settings. If, on

the other hand, you'd like to use these PWAs but haven't been offered them, some users suggest you can install them yourself by heading to [Office.com](https://www.office.com) and looking for an Install button in the address bar.

What do we think?

These PWAs are handy if you want to use Word and Excel for free but don't have the full version of Office installed. However, installing them without asking isn't a smart move and seems to have understandably riled some test subjects. It could draw the ire of regulators who are never keen on any software being installed by default.

Streaming-service payments scrutinised

What happened?

MPs are set to investigate how music-streaming services pay the artists on their platforms, to see if musicians are earning enough via Spotify, Apple Music, Deezer and more. MPs will study the "economics of streaming" to see if it negatively impacts new musicians, and prevents artists from achieving success.

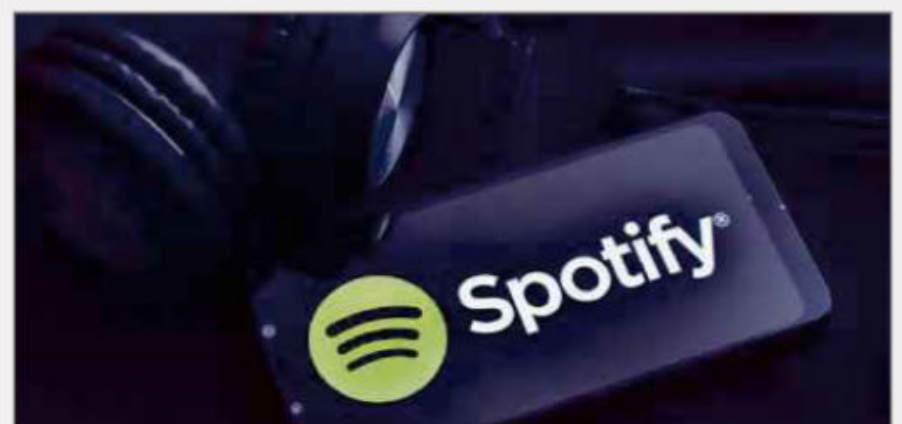
Currently, musicians are paid as little as 13% of the revenue generated by streaming subscriptions, according to a statement from the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport select committee that's running the inquiry. Each stream of a song pays rights holders as little as £0.002. If an

artist is signed to a record label, they'll get a small slice of those fractions of a penny. The inquiry will begin next month and take evidence from across the industry.

How will it affect you?

We'll have to wait and see what changes the inquiry recommends, but any demand by the government that streaming services pay artists more money is likely to be met with higher prices. Right now, most services, including Spotify, charge £9.99 a month.

A survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of the #BrokenRecord campaign showed significant support for artists, with 77% of respondents saying they felt musicians and songwriters



weren't being paid enough by streaming services. And while two-thirds said they didn't want to pay more for their subscription, half said they would if the money went directly to artists.

What do we think?

It's good to see this issue finally being examined, especially as musicians have been unable to earn money from live shows during

lockdown. If there's a way to divide subscription fees to better support artists, it's clear most of us would back such a change.

We're also pleased to see that the government isn't just looking at the revenue divide, but also examining how the streaming algorithm promotes mainstream acts at the detriment of new and emerging musicians.

Credit: Funstock / Shutterstock.com

Drivers banned from holding mobile phones

What happened?

From next year, it will be illegal to hold or use your phone while driving. You may have assumed it was already against the law to operate a phone while behind the wheel, but that's not entirely accurate. As the law currently stands, drivers aren't allowed to make calls or send text messages. This update means it will also become illegal to play games or take photos and videos. So, no more amusing Instagram snaps of your motorway traffic jam, then.

Calling the act of using a phone while on the road "distracting and dangerous", Roads Minister Baroness Vere claimed that "for too long, risky drivers have been able to escape punishment". On this issue, the police are in agreement with the government. Chief Constable Anthony Bangham, the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for Roads Policing, said: "Using a mobile phone while driving is incredibly dangerous and being distracted at the wheel can change lives forever. Police will take robust action against those using a hand-held mobile phone illegally and proposals to make the law clearer are welcome".

Breaking the current law already costs you six points on your licence and a £200 fine. The new law, which aims to close the existing loopholes, is expected to be introduced early next year.



How will it affect you?

As wise and law-abiding citizens, we're sure that *Web User* readers won't be affected by this change in the law – you probably weren't using your phone on the road in the first place. But it's a timely reminder of the dangers of using a phone behind the wheel.

For those who do insist on handling their phones while driving, there are a couple of notable exceptions to the rules. You'll still be able to use the device as a contactless payment method, and ministers have also allowed the use of hands-free functions, rejecting calls from some parties to ban the use of phones altogether.

What do we think?

We're with the RAC on this one. Nicholas Lyes, Head of Roads Policy at the group, said: "The closing of this loophole is very welcome and reflects the multitude of ways drivers can use hand-held phones when behind the wheel in 2020. We know that the use of hand-held mobile phones at the wheel continues to represent a very real road safety risk, so it's clear more needs to be done to make this as socially unacceptable as drink-driving".

We think the law has got the balance right here – protecting other road users, while not blanket-banning necessary and largely risk-free use.



FIRST LOOK

OnePlus 8T

bit.ly/oneplus513

OnePlus is back with a new flagship phone, and it's arguably the company's best yet. It's been a while since we've seen a top-of-the-line device from the Chinese manufacturer. For several years, it proudly punched well above its weight, taking on the likes of Samsung, Apple and Google. Then we saw the release of the less innovative OnePlus 8 and the similarly low-priced, high-spec OnePlus Nord, and wondered if OnePlus' flagship-challenging days were over.

The OnePlus 8T is a marked improvement. The latest model expertly integrates top-level features into a smart design. As you'd expect from a phone with an asking price of

£549, the 8T packs in a high-res 6.55in 120Hz AMOLED screen, 65W ultra-fast charging, a quad-camera array to the rear and 5G connectivity.

Inside, the phone runs on the excellent Qualcomm Snapdragon 865 processor, so you shouldn't experience any lag. At the low-end, the Lunar Silver 8T comes equipped with 8GB of RAM and 128GB of storage. Pay another £100, though, and the Aquamarine Green edition offers 12GB of RAM and 256GB of storage.

But paying extra gets you more than just more memory. OnePlus states that the Aquamarine Green model has a glossy finish that won't get muddled by fingerprints (although you could



just buy a case, which does the same job for a lot less money).

There's not much new here for shutterbugs, though. While the camera quality is fantastic, the main 48-megapixels,

f/1.7 camera is identical to that found in older OnePlus models. At least you get an ultra-wide camera, a 5-megapixels macro camera and a 2-megapixels monochrome camera, as well as some interesting video modes that shoot in up to 4K quality and 60fps (frames per second).

Overall, the 8T is a welcome return to form for OnePlus.



WHAT'S THE RUMOUR

Will Google be forced to sell Chrome?

Google could be forced to sell its popular Chrome browser, if the US Department of Justice (DOJ) gets its way.

The Justice Department, alongside state prosecutors, is currently investigating the search giant over alleged antitrust violations. Google's parent company, Alphabet, is accused of abusing its dominance in the online search market, by accessing users' browsing history to 'improve' its digital advertising business.

In January, Google promised to stop using third-party cookies within two years, as Mozilla and Apple have already done. That move is likely to have a major impact on the company's ad revenues – but it's unlikely to be enough to placate the DOJ.

The accusations have culminated in the federal government looking at ways to break up the company's market



share. It's believed that forcing the sale of Chrome is one solution currently being discussed.

The DOJ is expected to bring these allegations to court in the next few weeks. If the department is successful, it would mark the first time a court has ordered a US company to be broken up since Microsoft was ordered to split into two separate businesses back in 2000.

LIKELIHOOD RATING



We doubt that Google will take this threat lying down. It's already making moves to curb any attempt to break up the company. Alongside the blocking of third-party cookie use, Google is also working on an alternative to cookies, nicknamed Turtledove, which it claims is better for user privacy, since data is

retained on devices without uploading it to external servers.

Even if the DOJ is successful in its bid to reduce Google's market share, there's no guarantee we'll see a sell-off of Chrome. When the court demanded that Microsoft be split up, the ruling was later overturned – and Google is unlikely to accept any similar order without launching an appeal.



What's new on Kickstarter

Our favourite new project on the crowdfunding site

CryoShower

bit.ly/cryo513 | From £645

The CryoShower may sound like a form of punishment, but it's actually designed to introduce cold therapy into your home. It promises "data-led and technology-driven" results to aid with muscle recovery, improve cardiovascular circulation and bring a host of other health benefits. Essentially, it chills the naturally cold water of your bath or shower. Both the Standard and Plus models feature three settings controlled via an app that also tracks your recovery, but the upgraded edition also uses technology to simulate an ice bath. Pledges start at £645 for the base model.



WEBOMETER



WE LIKE...



Zoom adds end-to-end encryption

Video-chat service Zoom has finally started rolling out end-to-end encryption to its free users, following pressure from privacy groups. The feature will need to be enabled by hosts or admins and turned on manually by all chat participants.



YouTube bans anti-vaccine videos

YouTube has banned misleading claims about coronavirus vaccines, including allegations that a vaccine will kill people, cause infertility or implant microchips. The site has already removed 200,000 videos containing COVID-19 misinformation.



WE DON'T LIKE...



Amazon dodges digital sales tax

HMRC has admitted that Amazon will not be affected by the new Digital Services Tax, but smaller traders who use its online marketplace will pay 2% more in charges. Last year, Amazon reportedly paid only £14.4m in tax on £13.7bn of UK revenue.



Google ditches Trusted Contacts app

Google is shutting down its Trusted Contacts app, which let friends and family locate each other in an emergency. Google said the app's features have been rolled into Google Maps, but this requires location-sharing to be enabled at all times.



Stay Safe Online

News about the latest threats and advice from security experts

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

Android ransomware gets more sophisticated

Microsoft has warned Android users about a new form of ransomware that has so far managed to evade most security tools.



Like most Android ransomware, this particular threat, called AndroidOS/MalLocker.B, doesn't encrypt your files. Instead, it blocks access to your device by displaying a full-screen notification that demands payment in exchange for its removal.

Microsoft researchers are especially alarmed by the sophisticated techniques used by the malware. "This mobile ransomware is the latest variant of a ransomware family that's been in the wild for a while but has been evolving non-stop," said the Microsoft Defender Research Team.

"The new variant caught our attention because it's an advanced malware with unmistakable malicious characteristic and behaviour, and yet manages to evade many available protections."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Microsoft recommended its own 'Defender for Endpoint' app as the best way to protect Android devices against AndroidOS/MalLocker.B.

bit.ly/ransom513

Barnes & Noble customers hit by cyberattack

The US bookstore giant Barnes & Noble has disclosed that it was the victim of a serious cyber-attack earlier this month, which breached the company's network and potentially exposed customers' data, including email addresses and other personal information.

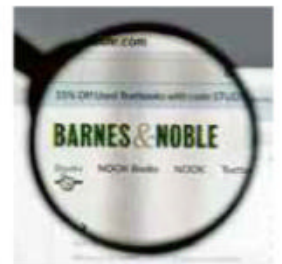
The hack affected Barnes & Noble store systems, reportedly rendering cash registers unusable for a time, as well as its Nook ebook service, including apps

and e-readers.

In an email to customers, Barnes & Noble said: "It is with the greatest regret we inform you that we were made aware on October 10, 2020 that Barnes & Noble had been the victim of a cybersecurity attack, which resulted in unauthorised and unlawful access to certain Barnes & Noble corporate systems."

The company warned that the exposure of email addresses could mean customers "may receive unsolicited emails", but stressed that no payment details were accessed because "Barnes & Noble uses technology that encrypts all credit cards". It is believed that hackers exploited an unpatched vulnerability in Barnes & Noble's VPN servers to gain access to its internal network.

bit.ly/barnes513



Credit: Casimiro PT / Shutterstock.com

Security Helpdesk | Your questions answered by security specialists

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT:
Louis-James Davis,
CEO of
VST Enterprises
(vstenterprises.com)



Q Does scanning QR codes to check into places carry any security risks?

Trevor Wallace, Twitter

A The launch of the government's NHS contact-tracing app raised many concerns about privacy, protection

of data, tracking of users' locations and the security of Bluetooth. The use of QR code technology in the app, which asks you to scan a QR code before entering certain venues, potentially puts your personal data at risk.

QR codes can be cloned and redirected to other information points and websites. Criminals exploit this by putting a fake QR code over a genuine one, redirecting to rogue websites where you're tricked into entering personal and financial information. The rogue site looks and acts like the genuine one, and mirrors



“ QR codes can be cloned and used to redirect people to rogue websites ”

it precisely.

Because QR code readers and encoders are open-source technology – free to use and manipulate – there are thousands of them in the app stores. They don't work on a closed-loop security system, which means the QR code design might not be unique and scanning and decoding can be exploited or manipulated.

QR codes often have to be scanned close up, which

means that scanning a QR code for contact tracing can breach the two-metre social-distancing protocol.

VCode, which is the digital barcode used by our contact-tracing app and V-Health Passport, cannot be cloned because it works on a call and response system of information between the code and web platform. This is used to verify the location of the code, user ID, time and date, and much more.



G-MASTER™
#MONITORS **4** GAMERS
by **iiyama**

RED EAGLE™

**QHD or Full HD?
Go CURVED!**



G-Master GB3266QSU
Red Eagle

G-Master G2466HSU
Red Eagle

Immerse yourself in the game with the new **Red Eagle** #monitors4gamers.
Choose the height adjustable **GB3266QSU** with a 2560x1440 resolution or the **G2466HSU** with 165Hz refresh rate and enjoy stutter-free gameplay on these 1500R curved VA panels.



Find your match at gmaster.iiyama.com

iiyama

★ Best New Websites

Site of the Fortnight

ROYALTY

RELAUNCH

Royal Foundation royalfoundation.com

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge have given their website a stylish makeover that gets our seal of approval. By incorporating larger images, the site has a greater visual impact and better showcases the work carried out by and on behalf of Prince William and Kate Middleton, exploring subjects such as conservation and mental health that are close to the royal couple's hearts. As such, the redesign brings a modern sensibility while the spontaneous intimacy of many of the photos ensures the content isn't too formal and PR-led. Its crowning glory is a news timeline that lets you quickly pick up on the highlights.

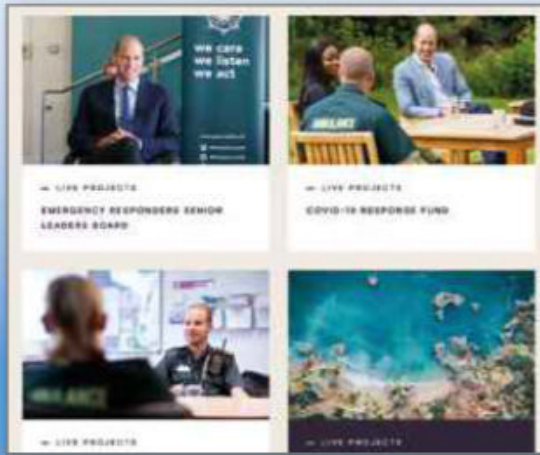
Our rating



£17BN 90% 40%

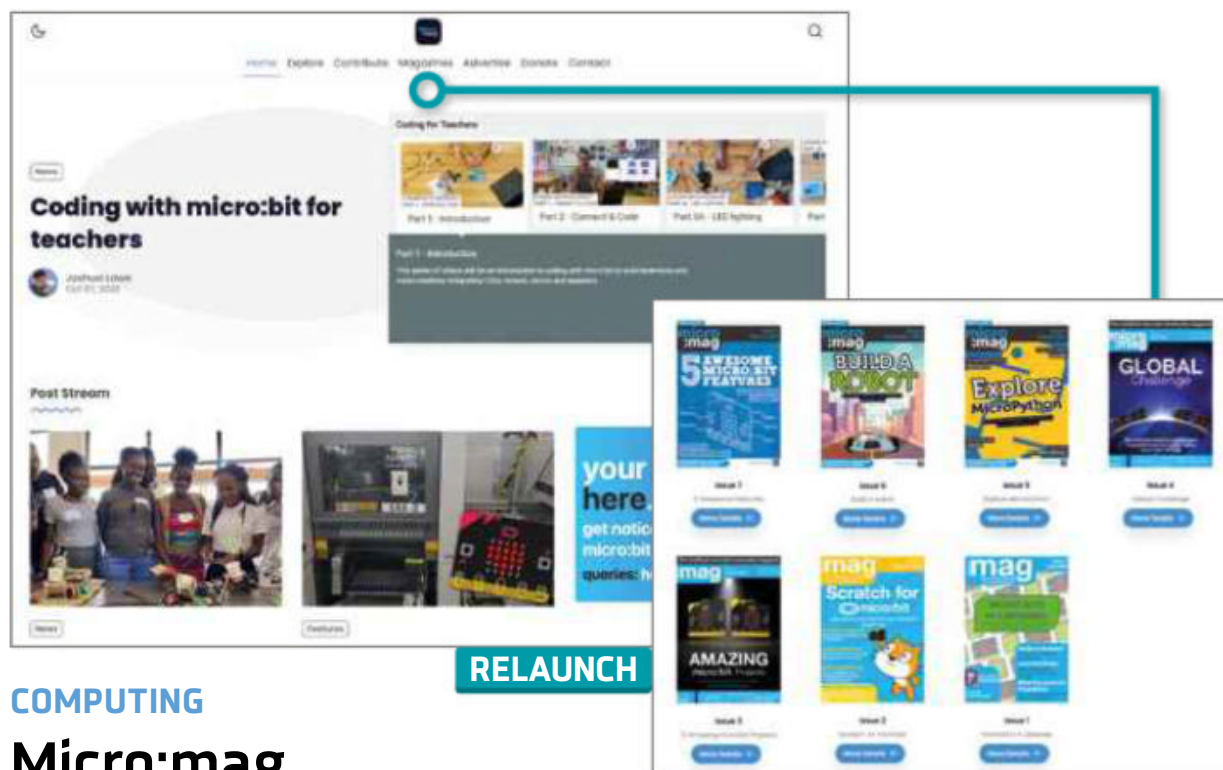
MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Learn how the Royal Foundation is helping tackle COVID-19, conservation and mental health



LIVE PROJECTS

Discover more about the Earthshot Prize and other current Royal Foundation initiatives

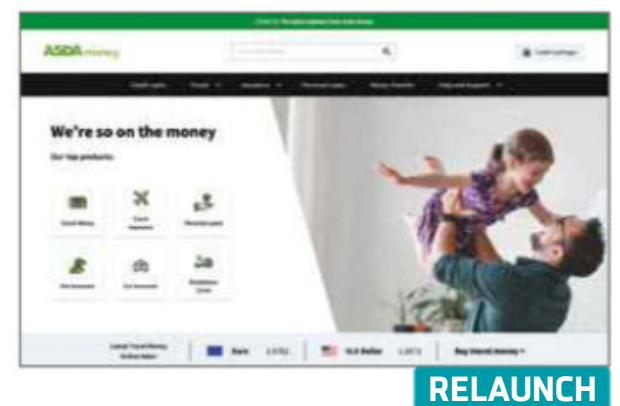


COMPUTING

Micro:mag micromag.cc

Dedicated to the micro:bit ARM-based microcontroller, announced five years ago as part of the BBC's Make It Digital campaign, Micro:mag is now fully online having begun life as a magazine. Its regular stream of news, reviews and features emphasise creativity – so you can discover people's imaginative builds or check out the growing number of accessible tutorials. Whether you fancy trying your hand at fun coding projects or cheap makes, you'll find instructions clearly broken down into easy steps. You can also get involved and submit your own articles, creating a friendly community feel, while past issues of the magazines can be downloaded for free.

Our rating



RELAUNCH

FINANCE

Asda Money money.asda.com

Asda Money's site, which offers a range of financial services from car insurance to personal loans, has dispensed with the clutter and added a search engine. The streamlined design highlights Asda's top products and cleans up the categories, ensuring most of what you're after is a simple click away. We like how the site continues to flag its current Euro and dollar rates, and the blog covering money, family, travel and pets. Help and Support also includes some decent financial how-tos but quite why you have to click Read More rather than just the headline or image is baffling.

Our rating



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



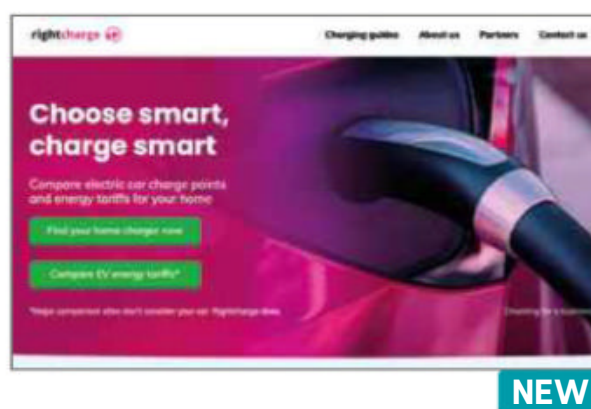
FOOD

Quality Street

www.qualitystreet.co.uk

It's not long until Christmas and now there's this magic moment: the ability to create a personalised tin filled with Quality Street sweets. You can either pack a tin with the standard dozen treats or choose between one and six of your favourites by simply clicking the sweets you want. You then get to add a name for the lid and create a message for the gift card, with the whole process completed in just three easy steps. By clicking the info next to a sweet, you can see its nutritional value or look elsewhere for other Quality Street products. Payment is card-only with no option for PayPal.

Our rating



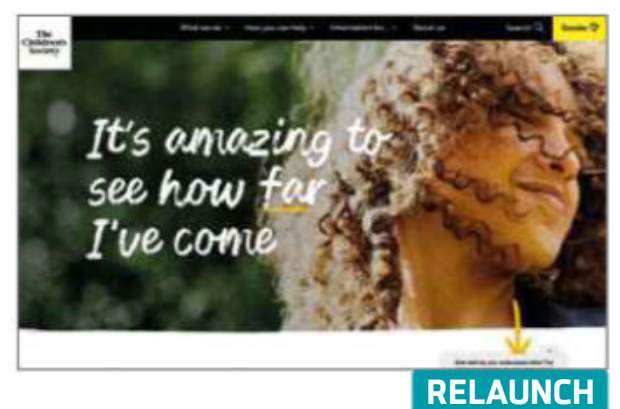
MOTORING

Rightcharge

rightcharge.co.uk

Electric cars may not run on petrol or diesel, but they still need fuelling and this comes at a cost. Rightcharge lets you compare the price of electric charge points and energy tariffs by entering the name of your vehicle and filling in extra details such as the estimated mileage. In both cases, you're offered a report via email, which you can ignore if you want to go straight to the comparisons. For the energy tariffs, these are clearly displayed in a table, starting with the smallest estimated cost. However, for the charge points, you'll need to fill in your details to obtain a quote.

Our rating



CHARITY

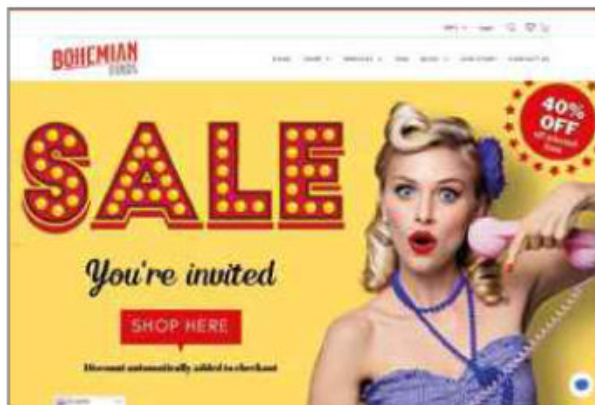
The Children's Society

www.childrenssociety.org.uk

The stories of young people form the heart of this relaunched site and, while they make for difficult reading, they're instrumental in garnering support for this charity that's fighting for the future of children with troubled pasts. Read about the impact of the campaign and discover how to get involved. Each section is clearly laid out, making it easy to find relevant information. There's also an unobtrusive pop-up in the bottom corner of the screen asking how well you understand what the charity does, based on the details on the page – helping to ensure that the message gets through.

Our rating





RELAUNCH

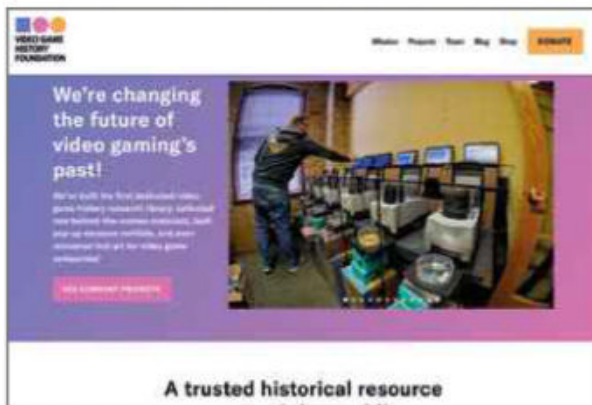
FASHION

Bohemian Finds

bohemianfinds.co.uk

Bohemian Finds proves that every cloud has a silver lining. When the shop was forced to move premises due to COVID-19, the owners decided to rethink their online presence and it's now emerged as a colourful and quirkily styled site showcasing the alternative vintage store. It's easy to find all manner of 1940s and 50s-inspired clothing and accessories, thanks to a clear selection of categories and a delightful set of photos. You can also delve into the store's history, book a wardrobe makeover or get set up with a personal shopper. The only letdown is the blog, which currently needs more content.

Our rating



RELAUNCH

VIDEO GAMES

Video Game History Foundation

gamehistory.org

Based in California, the Video Game History Foundation has spent three years preserving gaming's past by cataloging, digitising and preserving old titles. It's also built a collection of design documents, press kits, posters, media and source code, and has set up a growing physical research library. You need to visit in person to see most of this but the blog gives a decent (if irregular) insight into the work being carried out and the Foundation's ongoing projects. Even so, it can feel like you're standing at the window of a sweet shop that's closed. More pictures and collection highlights would be welcome.

Our rating



NEW

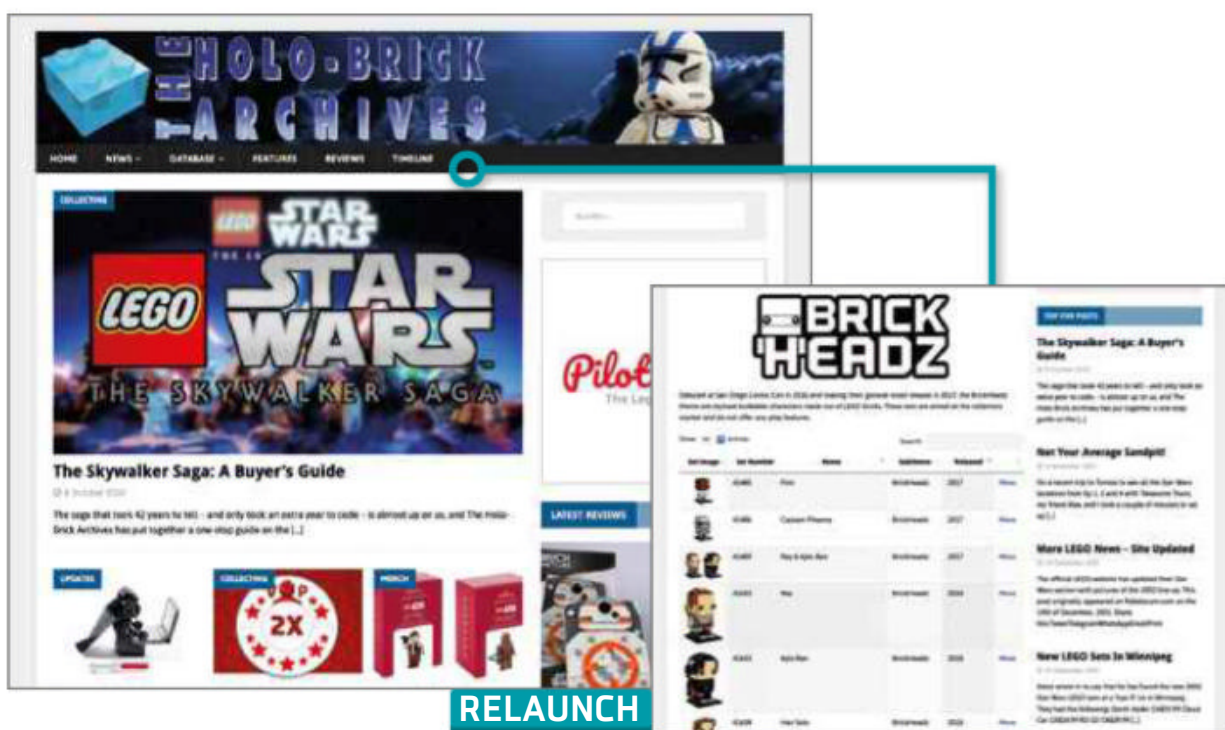
HISTORY

Far East Prisoners of War

fepow75.org.uk

Be patient – it takes a short while for this website to load, but it's a fascinating tribute to the thousands of captives released from South-East Asia at the end of World War Two. Click Histories or continue scrolling down the screen, and you'll find a gallery of artwork, details of prisoner life under the Imperial Japanese and stories of key moments. You can also watch videos of veterans paying tribute to the fallen and hear a memoir from a former captive. The site is packed with information but, if you want more, there's a list of resources pointing to research websites, along with information for teachers, and books and exhibitions.

Our rating



RELAUNCH

TOYS

The Holo-Brick Archives

www.holobrickarchive.com

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away – or, more accurately, in 2009 on planet Earth – Lego created a website called The Holo-Brick Archives as a database of its Star Wars sets. It lasted for a year but, over the past four months, two fans have worked to create this amazing resource which, so far, includes almost every set's instructions and more than 1,000 entries in its product database. You can search by keyword or browse by theme, year or timeline, and keep up to speed with almost-daily news accompanied by less frequent features and reviews. There's even a history of the Lego Star Wars franchise. You can really feel the force in this one!

Our rating



NEW

TRAVEL

Forest of Bowland

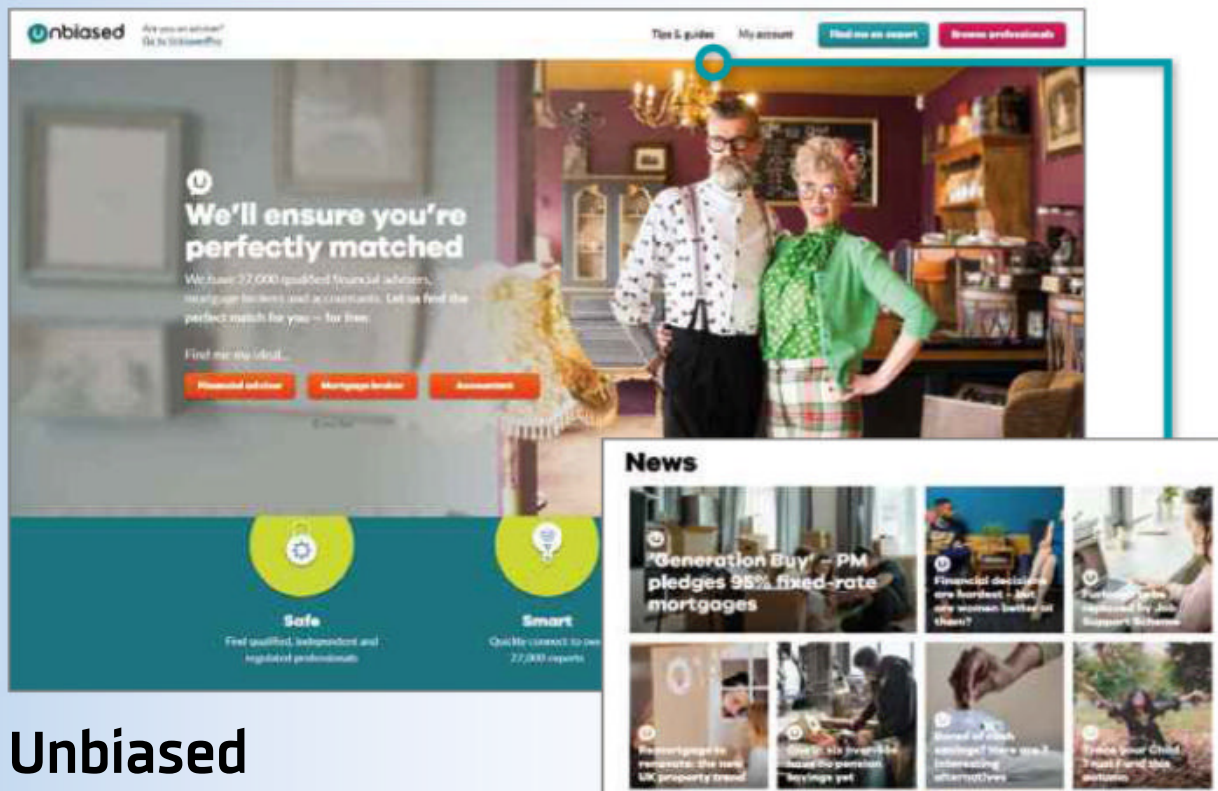
www.discoverbowland.uk

With one eye on bookings for 2021, businesses in the Forest of Bowland – which straddles Lancashire and North Yorkshire – have joined forces to help boost the local economy. The site's focus is on outdoor activities, along with places to stay, see, eat and drink, but it could do with a some refinement. While it does a fine job of showcasing businesses, it's crying out for a menu or an expandable list – anything to make it easier to navigate and avoid all the scrolling. Using an embedded Google Calendar for the events didn't quite work for us, either.

Our rating



ESSENTIAL BOOKMARKS THIS ISSUE: Handy personal-finance sites



Unbiased

www.unbiased.co.uk

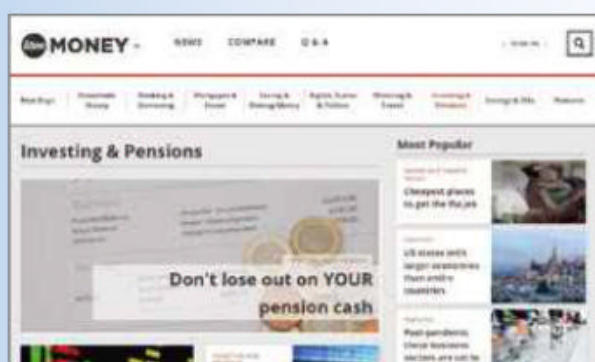
Not sure what to do with your pension pot? Don't know which adviser, solicitor or accountant to trust? Unbiased aims to matchmake you with the right expert for your situation and location – just enter your queries and your postcode. It also offers free advice – hover over 'Tips & guides' and click Tools or choose a topic to find interactive wizards to, say, help you plan a big spend, boost your retirement income or work out whether you need an accountant for your situation. The 'Life's biggest decisions' section has authoritative, up-to-date articles on handling family inheritance, equity release and more; News reveals how the economy's latest ups and downs affect you; and UnbiasedPro has fascinating business and investment articles to read for free.



Money Dashboard

www.moneydashboard.com

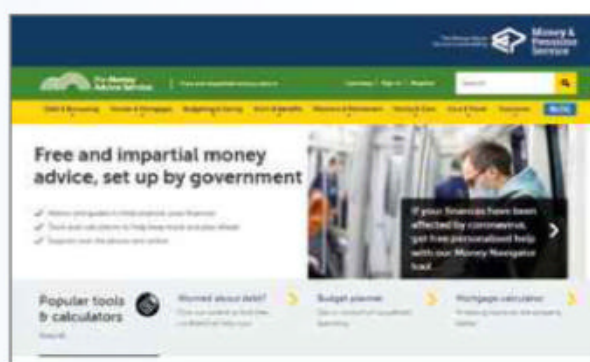
The web has made it much easier to manage your bank accounts without having to queue or remember opening times, but juggling several accounts – current, savings, joint and so on – is still a hassle. The free UK service Money Dashboard lets you manage the lot in one place, then offers advice to help you balance the books. All your data is encrypted using 256-bit technology and two-factor authentication, and the site's secure algorithms automatically detect patterns in your spending to help you plan and budget. It's quick and easy to sign up, but you need to use the tool for a while so it can learn your money patterns and offer accurate advice.



Lovemoney

www.lovemoney.com

Lovemoney doesn't quite live up to its claim to be a financial-product comparison tool (the comparison engine is currently a work in progress), but its free online magazine articles are excellent. Browse topics such as Household Money, 'Motoring & Travel' and 'Investing & Pensions' for hundreds of well-researched and up-to-date articles. Topical subjects such as the cheapest places to get a flu jab, the post-pandemic high street and how to work around the madness of panic buying are covered in depth, along with more general investment tips and scam warnings. It's also worth signing up for the email newsletter and following Lovemoney on Facebook, though the links to its Twitter and Instagram feeds don't work.



The Money Advice Service

www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

Get a free wealth check using this info-packed site run by the government-funded Money and Pensions Service (moneyandpensionsservice.org.uk). The site looks a bit basic and staid, but hovering over the section tabs ('Family & Care', 'Cars & Travel' and so on) reveals useful interactive tools such as the Money Health Check, an annuities-comparison tool and a car-costs calculator. There are also 'Free printed guides' you can print at home or order through the post, and a selection of letter templates for cancelling and complaining. All the information is impartial and friendly, and you're invited to ring the team for financial advice or chat to a money expert via WhatsApp.



Microsoft Office Templates

bit.ly/templates513

When the government lost thousands of COVID cases in Excel, a nation of spreadsheet users rolled their eyes – then wondered if it could happen to them. The free templates in Microsoft's 'Financial management' category can help you keep track of your income, expenses and goals. There are dozens to download, including 'Vehicle service record' and 'Home contents inventory list,' as well as the more money-specific 'Retirement financial planner' and 'Charitable donations tracker'. If you use Google Sheets, check out the free templates at template.net/editable/google-sheets.

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Build a Better Site

Specialist tips, top tools and practical help

Top Tips of the Fortnight

Learn CSS animation and transitions

CSS is the code that affects how web pages look, and it's the most efficient way to add animation and fancy graphics to your site. Sophisticated graphics can be broken down into simple text commands that make your site look great without it slowing to a crawl as graphics are loaded. The excellent site freeCodeCamp (www.freecodecamp.org) has a great tutorial on transitions (bit.ly/2FCmhCY) that shows you how to add dynamic, interactive movement to your site.



Send WordPress.com posts to Twitter

If you promote your WordPress.com site on Twitter, you can now send whole posts to the social media network. The post is automatically split into paragraphs and images to best fit Twitter's character limit. Find the option by clicking the Jetpack icon and linking your Twitter account.



Deal of the Fortnight

GoDaddy (uk.godaddy.com) is offering 'co.uk' domains for 1p for the first year, if you sign up for a second year at the full price of £11.99.

Web-building Helpdesk

Q I've heard that Google prioritises sites that use 'AMP' on its mobile search results. What is AMP and can I get it on my WordPress website?

Karen Fletcher, via email

A AMP is short for Accelerated Mobile Pages and it's a way of presenting information in a visual, easily digestible style, which Google thinks is more appealing to mobile users. If you search for something from your mobile phone, you'll often see AMP tiles sitting above your standard search results. You can find out more about it at amp.dev.



The easiest way to create AMP-compatible pages in WordPress is to use the AMP plugin, available from bit.ly/1pczDI8.

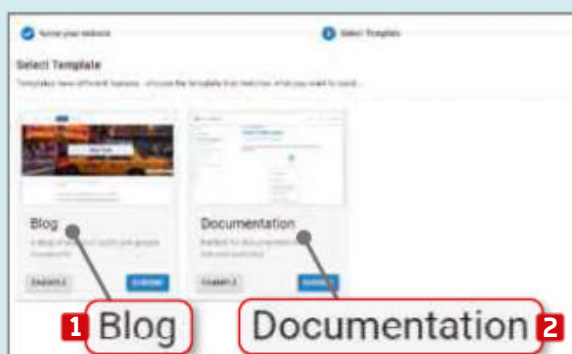
Andy Shaw, Technical & Reviews Editor



MINI WORKSHOP | Build a website hosted on your Google Drive

nocode: www.nocode.works | 10 mins | Google Drive

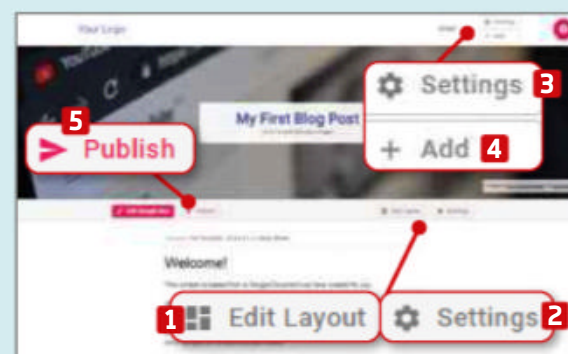
Nocode is a free online site-building tool that lets you build a simple website and host it on Google Drive. You have to sign in with your Google account but it can only access the files you've created through Nocode.



1 Go to www.nocode.works and click Get Started. Sign in using your Google account and allow the requested permissions. Give your website a name, then click Next. Choose a template from Blog **1** or Documentation. **2** Next, choose a layout (don't worry too much about this because you can change it later).



2 To edit the Google document containing the page's content, click Edit Google Doc. **1** This takes you to a standard document containing the text for the site. Any changes you make will update the preview site automatically. You can click the title to change it, and you don't have to stick to text – you can insert images and other elements, too.



3 To change the site's template, click Edit Layout. **1** You can add tags and main images to a post from the Settings button. **2** The other Settings button **3** lets you change elements such as the order in which posts appear on the site. Click the Add button **4** to add new pages to the site. When you've finished, click Publish. **5**



What To Watch Online

Pick of the fortnight

prime video



Hunt spooks with Frost and Pegg in *Truth Seekers*

From 30 October

Shaun of the Dead duo Nick Frost and Simon Pegg reunite for more spooky suburban capers. Frost is Gus Roberts, broadband installer by day and paranormal investigator by night, who teams up with the coincidentally monikered Elton John (Samson Kayo) to stake out haunted churches and abandoned hospitals with their homemade ghost-detecting gadgets – and things soon take an apocalyptic turn. Malcolm McDowell co-stars, along with Julian Barratt, Kevin Eldon and Kate Nash.

All eight episodes of *Truth Seekers* arrive on Prime Video on 30 October. Meanwhile, watch a teaser at bit.ly/truth513, the latest trailer at bit.ly/seekers513, and more clips on Twitter at [@primevideouk](https://twitter.com/primevideouk).

Frost and Pegg's 'Cornetto trilogy' of films (*Shaun of the Dead*, *Hot Fuzz* and *The World's End*) are available via Prime Video and Now TV; *Hot Fuzz* is also on Netflix. Channel 4 sitcom *Spaced*, which first brought the pair together on screen, is on Netflix, Prime, All 4 and BritBox.



Save Baby Yoda in Season 2 of *The Mandalorian*

From 30 October

Following the controversy over Disney's whopping extra charge for *Mulan* comes some good news: Baby Yoda is back.

In the second season of *The Mandalorian*, the titular bounty hunter (Pedro Pascal) encounters a new foe in Moff Gideon (Giancarlo Esposito), an ex-Imperial officer out to capture Baby Yoda. Rosario Dawson (Marvel's Claire Temple) joins the cast as Jedi Ahsoka Tano, a character from *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* (also available to watch on on Disney+). You can catch *The Mandalorian's* official trailer at bit.ly/mandalorian513 and follow [@themandalorian](https://twitter.com/themandalorian) on Twitter for updates.



Watch gritty crime drama *Godfather of Harlem*

From 1 November

Emmy award-winning gangster tale *Godfather of Harlem* is now on Season 2 in the US, but Season 1 has taken a year to reach the UK, where it's being shown on StarzPlay. Oscar-winner Forest Whitaker plays the eponymous 1960s crime boss, and Giancarlo Esposito co-stars. Stream 10 episodes weekly via StarzPlay, which costs £4.99 per month after a 7-day trial (www.starz.com/gb/en, or via

Prime Video bit.ly/amstarz513). Meanwhile, catch the official trailer at bit.ly/3IKLGcO.

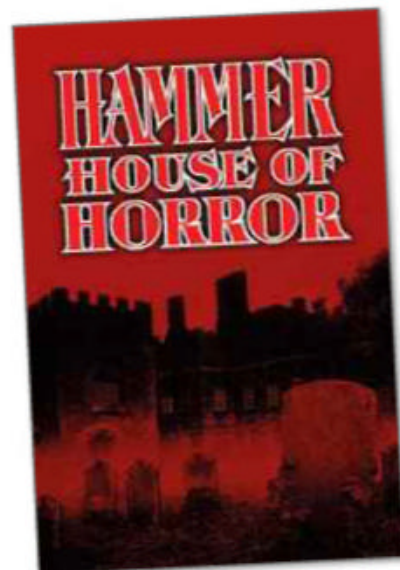


Hide behind the sofa for *Hammer House of Horror*

From 29 October

Your Halloween shut-in is sorted: the Hammer Horror collection is coming to BritBox. You can watch Christopher Lee films including 1966's *Dracula*; 1968's *The Devil Rides Out*, and the full 1980 *Hammer House of Horror* anthology TV series featuring Peter Cushing, Brian Cox, Pierce Brosnan and Diana Dors.

Other box sets arriving on the same day include 20 years' worth of *Grand Designs* – a different kind of horror show, you might say – plus all episodes of Keeley Hawes in *Honour* and Alan Davies in *Bob & Rose*.



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



See The Who, Paul McCartney and The Cure live (ish)

Teenage Cancer Trust's YouTube channel 'Unseen' (bit.ly/3jVOr17) is the place to be if you're missing live music. Throughout October, the UK charity has added archive concerts from its 20-year partnership with the Royal Albert Hall, and they're still available to stream on-demand. None of the half-hour sets had aired before, and they're all free to watch (although donations are encouraged). 30-minute sets from superstars including Paul McCartney, Paul Weller, Ed Sheeran, Muse and The Who are available already, and on 31 October you can watch a full live stream of The Cure.

Watch Season 5 of family drama *This Is Us*

From 28 October

NBC's *This is Us* has gained plaudits for its witty take on soapy family drama. An ensemble cast including Milo Ventimiglia (*Heroes*) and Sterling K Brown (*The People Vs OJ Simpson*) play members of the same family across different generations and at different times. The first two episodes of Season 5 come to Prime Video on 28 October,

BT hands out free BritBox

BT is treating its customers – new and existing, broadband or TV – to a free six-month subscription to British streaming service BritBox.

The offer, which BT customers can find at bit.ly/3IL49Gu, marks the arrival of a BritBox app on BT set-top boxes. But you don't have to watch via the app because the six-month freebie also lets you access BritBox across other devices, including iPhone, Android, smart TVs and in your browser.

At the time of writing, BritBox is offering standard customers a retention deal of three months for £10, when trying to cancel a subscription. The service normally costs £5.99 per month after a 7-day trial (www.britbox.co.uk).



Watch Season 18 of *Family Guy*

From 10 November

Seth MacFarlane's *Family Guy* is back on Now TV (with an Entertainment Pass) for Season 18 at bit.ly/2SSEX4j. At the time of writing, Now TV won't confirm which (if any) previous seasons will return at the same time, but you can watch several episodes from Season 17 for free via ITV Hub at bit.ly/2IUUily. Season 18's trailer is on YouTube at it.ly/3jZtIs6.

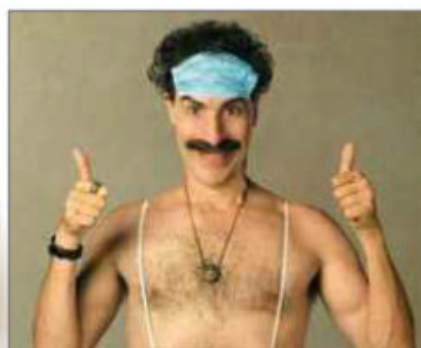


followed each Wednesday by new episodes at amzn.to/3IlqBjo. Watch the latest trailer at bit.ly/33Wt9V2, and get a taste for the show from Amazon's Season 4 clip at bit.ly/370LP89.

New shows debuting on Now TV this fortnight are FX's Australian crime comedy-drama *Mr Inbetween*, which arrives on 29 October (watch the trailer at bit.ly/2lv2aaX), followed on 1 November by NBC's church choir sitcom *Perfect Harmony* (bit.ly/373FVD7).

In case you missed it...

Borat: Subsequent Moviefilm has landed with cheeky aplomb on Prime Video, joining



the 2006 original (amzn.to/3nMydTP). Recent cinema releases *Parasite*, *1917*, *David Copperfield* and

Eddie the Eagle are also now on Prime.

Borat's Sacha Baron Cohen takes a more serious role in Netflix's *The Trial of the Chicago 7*, a new film from *The West Wing* creator Aaron Sorkin. Watch the trailer at bit.ly/3dnOp9o. Netflix has also added Season 2 of 19th-century crime drama *The Alienist*

(bit.ly/3nRyyEX) and sports documentary *Guillermo Vilas: Settling the Score* (bit.ly/3nQOY04).

New to Now TV are Season 3 of *Riviera* (bit.ly/2V3Kqsp); the whole fifth season of *Billions* (bit.ly/2VF6Ys); and the short-lived TV version of *Minority Report* – you can watch the trailer at bit.ly/2lxzOWR.

Product Test

We test and compare the latest products

Apple iPad 10.2in (8th generation, 2020)

This year's update to Apple's most affordable iPad offers a significant boost in performance

Apple's basic iPad is such a successful product, the company would be mad to change it. If you want the most innovative features, at a price, feel free to check out the iPad Pro. However, here at the bottom of the iPad price spectrum, the latest iteration of the 10.2in iPad is reassuringly familiar in almost every respect, and there's nothing disappointing in that – it's still the best tablet you can buy for the price.

Outwardly, there's little change. As with the previous model, this iPad has a 10.2in IPS touchscreen with a resolution of 2,160 x 1,620 pixels. Its dimensions are exactly the same (251 x 174 x 7.5mm, weighing 490g) and none of the buttons have been moved. It has the same old Lightning connector (no move to USB-C here) and even the cameras are identical – an 8-megapixels snapper on the back and a rather disappointing 1.2-megapixels FaceTime HD camera on the front.

The only significant change is the processor, which has been upgraded from the quad-core A10 Fusion chip of the previous two generations, to a six-core A12 Bionic chip.

Even the pricing has stayed



the same. The basic 32GB model is £329, rising to £429 for 128GB. If you need mobile internet, you can add 4G for an extra £130. Adding a Smart Keyboard Folio case costs a further £159, which effectively turns the tablet into a very capable laptop for a total outlay of £500.

Apple Pencil and Scribble software

The new iPad is compatible with the Apple Pencil (£89 or £119, depending on the model), which has seen a major usability update in iPadOS 14. Called Scribble, this is Apple's stab at integrating handwriting

recognition. The idea is that you can simply scribble down some words and iPadOS will attempt to recognise them and turn them into text. This works about as well as most handwriting recognition, and includes some delightfully intuitive features: you can scribble over words to delete them and select text by circling it or dragging the corners of a selection box.

Scribble works best in the Notes app, where it leaves your handwriting in place and lets you copy and paste it, just as you would real text.

“ Adding a Smart Keyboard case for £159 effectively turns the tablet into a very capable laptop for a total outlay of £500 ”

“ The big news – especially as the price has remained the same – is that the basic iPad is now much more powerful ”

However, you can also write in most text fields across the iPad’s apps, from web forms to reminder lists. It’s even possible to write text into the iPad’s word processor, Pages, and enter data directly into cells in the spreadsheet Numbers, which is converted into standard text on the fly.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this level of compatibility doesn’t extend to Google Docs just yet, although you can enter handwritten data into Google Sheets cells.

Scribble will even recognise hand-drawn shapes – from circles and ellipses to stars and squares – and convert them into geometrically accurate renditions. Simply draw the shape you want (and you can be as loose as you like), then pause at the end and wait for the iPad to do its thing.

Screen, performance and battery

The new iPad’s screen is no different to its predecessor – a 10.2in IPS panel with a pixel density of 264ppi, sRGB coverage of 90.6% and a maximum brightness of 509cd/m² (in our test) with an acceptable contrast ratio of 1,086:1. It’s sharp, bright and vibrant.

However, Apple’s pricier tablets in the Pro and Air ranges have a laminated display, where the touchscreen glass is physically attached to the LCD below it. This reduces glare and increases the sense of immediacy when touching the screen, and it’s a shame this isn’t a feature in the basic model.

The standard iPad also lacks the variable refresh rate of the Pro tablets, which can go all the way up to 120Hz,

and the extremely broad colour coverage, which makes the iPad Pro even more vibrant to look at.

The big news, however – especially given that the price has remained the same – is that the iPad 10.2in is now much more powerful than last year’s model, with the six-core A12 Bionic replacing the A10 Fusion. This is a welcome development, particularly as the 2019 model had the same processor as the 2018 iPad.

There isn’t a hugely noticeable uplift in responsiveness, though. The iPad feels as speedy and slick as always, with apps launching quickly and most games playing at a smooth frame rate. However, if you want to tax the tablet with something a little more

demanding – a spot of video editing and rendering via iMovie, for instance – you’ll find the six-core A12 Bionic is more than capable. It’s also a more efficient chip than the previous iPad’s A10 Fusion. As a result, 2020’s iPad lasted an extra 16 minutes longer than the 2019 model in our video rundown battery test, at 12 hours and 45 minutes.

OUR VERDICT



This year’s Apple iPad 10.2in is the best tablet in its class in almost every area, and more powerful than anything else at the price.

Adding a keyboard – either the official one or a cheaper alternative – transforms the tablet into an exceptionally good-value

laptop replacement, while the Apple Pencil and accompanying Scribble software bring some handy and intuitive features.

While not much else has changed, neither has our overall verdict. If you’re after any kind of computer – tablet, laptop or otherwise

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

– and can’t spend more than £500, the iPad 10.2in eighth-generation (2020) should be top of your list.



PRODUCT INFO

Apple iPad 10.2 (8th generation, 2020)

Price: £329

Buy from Apple: apple.co/2OulcO9

SPECIFICATIONS

- 10.2in IPS multi-touch display
- 2,160 x 1,620 pixels resolution
- 64-bit A12 Bionic processor
- 802.11a/b/g/n/ac dual-band Wi-Fi
- iPadOS 14
- 251 x 174 x 7.5mm
- 490g

FOR

- ✓ Fast and responsive
- ✓ Slim and lightweight
- ✓ Reasonable price

AGAINST

- ✗ Webcam is mediocre
- ✗ Non-laminated display
- ✗ No USB-C

ANDROID ALTERNATIVE

Samsung Galaxy Tab S6 Lite, £339

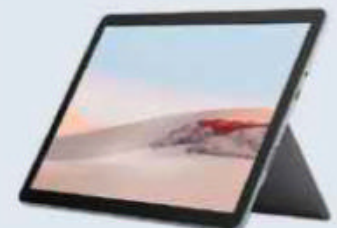
amzn.to/30E9Fm4



WINDOWS INSTEAD

Microsoft Surface Go 2, £399

amzn.to/30BJ2xW



Google Nest Audio

Google's latest smart speaker focuses on audio quality

It's been more than three years since Google launched its Google Home speaker, which we reviewed in Issue 422 ([bit.ly/webuser422](https://www.bit.ly/webuser422)). Since then, Google has not only changed the name of the device, but it's also revamped the design, both inside and out, lowered the price and renewed its focus on audio quality. In short, Google has pulled out the stops and created an absolute cracker of a smart speaker.

The device is covered in a sturdy recycled fabric. Like the Nest Mini, it has four LEDs across the front and a physical mute switch on the rear to stop it listening to you. Its Wi-Fi connectivity is now complemented by Bluetooth.

The internal changes are more dramatic, with new sound technology that

Google says delivers 75% more volume and 50% more bass than the original Google Home.

Other than that, the premise remains the same: it's a smart speaker you can control with your voice. Get the speaker's attention by saying "Okay Google" or "Hey Google", then ask it to play music, listen to radio, control smart home devices, set timers and alarms, and answer general questions.

Sound

The Nest Audio is all about sound quality. It delivers more volume and a fuller sound, with rich vocal performances and clearly defined instrumentation. Buy two Nest Audio units and you can set them to play in stereo from the Google Home app.

The only time the Nest Audio begins to struggle is when you crank the volume up to maximum and cue up something raucous. It simply doesn't have the power to cope with higher volume levels and, in these circumstances, you can hear the strain as it runs out of puff.

The Nest Audio doesn't just excel at music reproduction, though. Thanks to what Google is calling "Media EQ", it's also able to automatically adapt its settings to the content being played, whether that's podcasts, audiobooks or talk radio. We couldn't hear any obvious evidence of this, but we did notice that, on a football podcast, the Nest Audio was able to mitigate the deep tones of one of the presenters, making him easier to understand.



“ The Nest Audio automatically adapts its settings to the content being played ”

The weakest part of the package is the Nest Audio's touch-sensitive control. This is split into three zones, arrayed across the top of the speaker, just in front of the fabric seam that runs around the circumference. Tap the speaker's right shoulder to turn up the volume, the left to turn down the volume and the centre to pause or play.

Unfortunately, there are no markings to indicate where the zones start and finish, which meant we often adjusted the volume when we wanted to pause. However, you're more likely to use voice commands, which sidesteps this problem, and we found the device invariably picked out our voice and interpreted requests correctly.

PRODUCT INFO

Google Nest Audio

Price: £89.99

Buy from Google:
[bit.ly/3iECzsj](https://www.bit.ly/3iECzsj)

SPECIFICATIONS

- 75mm woofer and 19mm tweeter
- 3 far-field microphones
- 802.11b/g/n/ac dual-band Wi-Fi
- Bluetooth 5.0
- 175 x 124 x 78mm
- 1.2kg

FOR

- ✓ Sounds great
- ✓ Reasonable price
- ✓ Effective voice recognition

AGAINST

- ✗ Slightly fiddly touch controls
- ✗ No 3.5mm audio output/input

OUR VERDICT



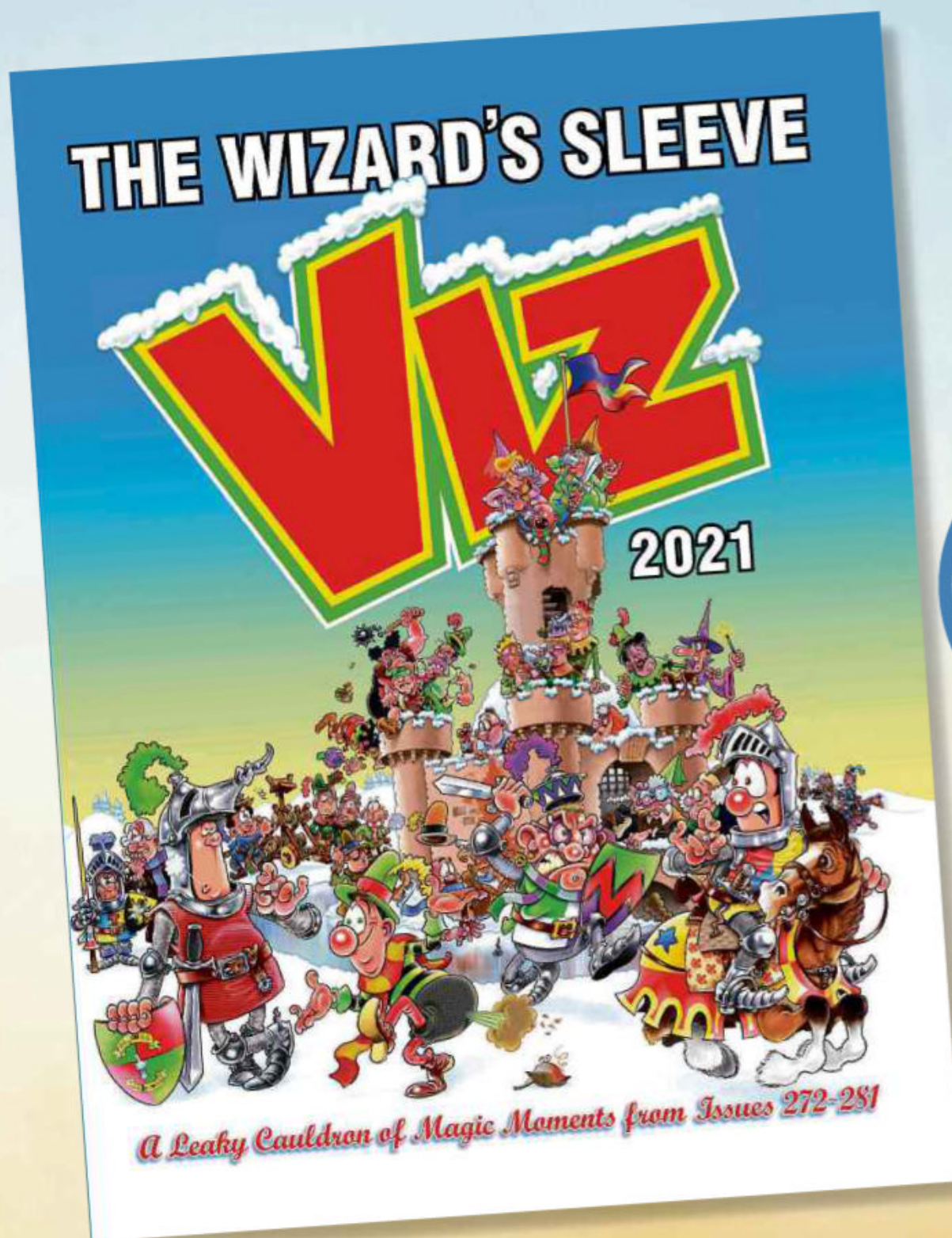
Google's latest smart speaker looks great, sounds amazing and works beautifully. If you've been waiting for the ideal speaker to add to your Google-powered smart home - one that's affordable but doesn't

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

compromise on sound quality - the Nest Audio is excellent value for £90.



2021 ANNUAL OUT NOW



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Enjoy all the best bits from issues 272-281 of Viz Comic, Britain's funniest* and best-selling** magazine.

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*Winner, Britain's Funniest Magazine, Viz Comic Magazine Awards, 1979-2020

**Source: ABC figure experienced during a dream after eating a large amount of cheese



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HARDWARE, SOFTWARE & SERVICES

TABLET

Apple iPad 10.2in

£329 from bit.ly/ipad513

Tested: Issue 513



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

Hexa-core 2.49GHz Apple A12 Bionic processor ■ 10.2in Retina screen, 2,160 x 1,620-pixels resolution ■ 1.2-megapixels front camera, 8-megapixels rear camera ■ 32GB storage ■ 3GB RAM ■ 802.11ac Wi-Fi ■ 251 x 174 x 7.5mm ■ 490g

SMARTPHONE

Google Pixel 4a

£349 from store.google.com

Tested: Issue 511



This mid-priced compact phone is a great all-rounder. It offers plenty of storage, has a high quality screen, takes excellent photos and provides impressive battery life.

KEY SPECS

Octa-core 1.8GHz Qualcomm Snapdragon 730G processor ■ 6GB RAM ■ 128GB storage ■ 5.8in, 2,240 x 1,080 pixels resolution screen ■ 12.2-megapixel rear camera, 8-MP front ■ Android 10 ■ 144 x 68 x 8.2mm ■ 143g ■ 1-year return to base

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

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, 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

Gold Award winners

The best from our software tests

PHOTO-EDITING APP

Snapseed

Free from bit.ly/snapseed510

Tested: Issue 512

Whatever your experience level with image editing, Snapseed helps you turn any photo into a work of art. It offers an array of useful options, from editing tools to preset filters.

NEW!



BLOATWARE REMOVER

Bloatbox

Free from bit.ly/2ZEAXs0

Tested: Issue 511

This tiny portable tool has one mission: to remove unwanted software and apps that Microsoft installs with Windows. It helped us reclaim nearly half a gigabyte of hard-drive space.



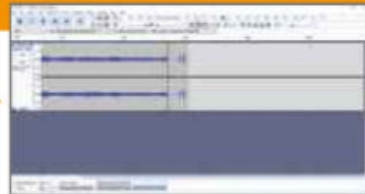
AUDIO EDITOR

Audacity

Free from www.audacityteam.org

Tested: Issue 510

Audacity is still the best free audio-editing software around. It has all the features of professional, paid-for alternatives, with no annoying limitations or paywalled extras.



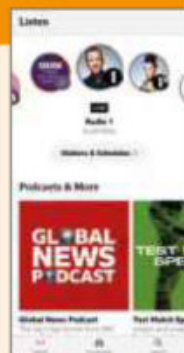
RADIO-STREAMING APP

BBC Sounds

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.



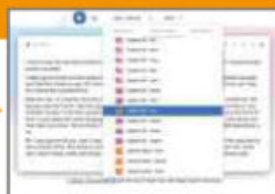
TEXT-TO-SPEECH TOOL

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.



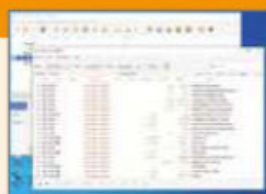
BANKING SOFTWARE

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.



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

IMAGE EDITOR

ImBatch 7

www.highmotionsoftware.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10

File size: 30.3MB

There's no shortage of free software that you can use to fix problems with and make improvements to your photos, but applying the same tweaks to a large number of images – such as resizing them or converting them to a different file format – can quickly become monotonous.

ImBatch, which is free for non-commercial use, solves the problem by letting you make multiple changes to whole batches of photos in one go by queuing up tasks. It comes with a huge selection of different options to apply, including AutoCrop, AutoEnhance, Brightness/Contrast, Colour Balance, Resize Canvas, Curves, Fish Eye, Frame,

Mosaic, Photo Collage, Publish on Facebook, Resize and Rotate. You can apply these to individual images or whole folders of them.

The two biggest changes in ImBatch 7

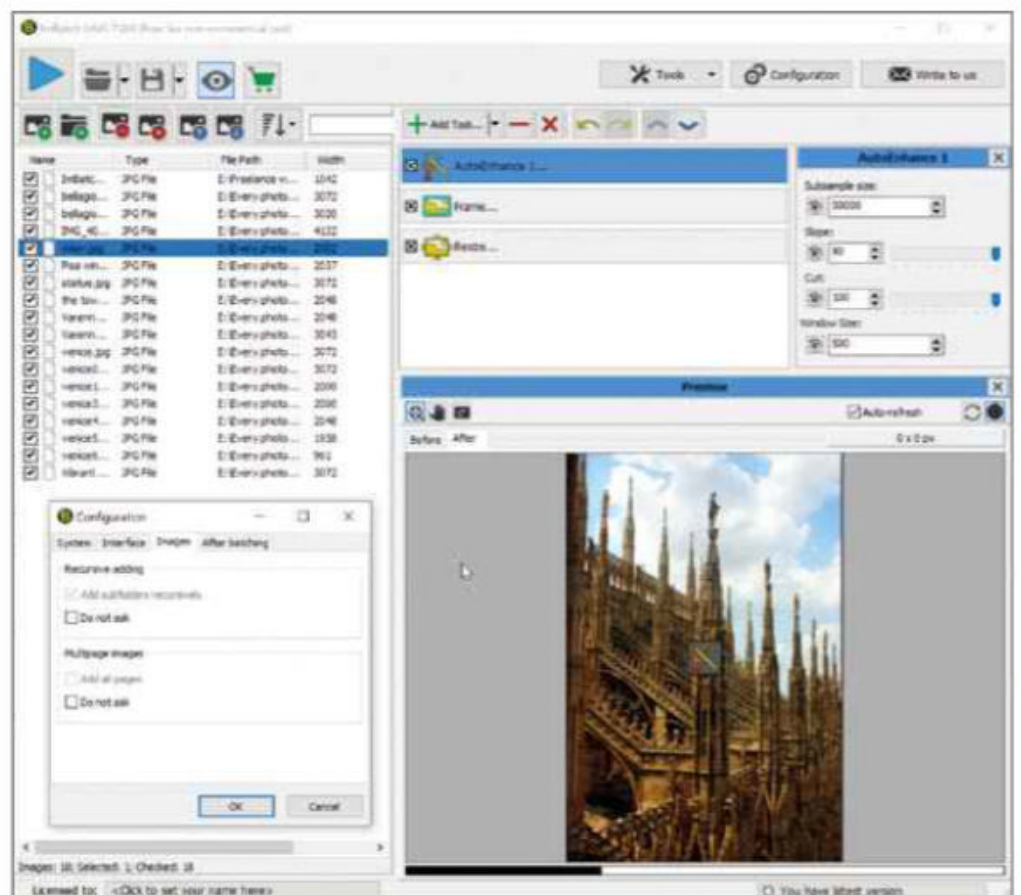
are the introduction of a dedicated

64-bit version (the new default) and a clever new Separate Objects task that scans each photo for elements, such as people, buildings and trees, cuts them out and saves them as individual images.

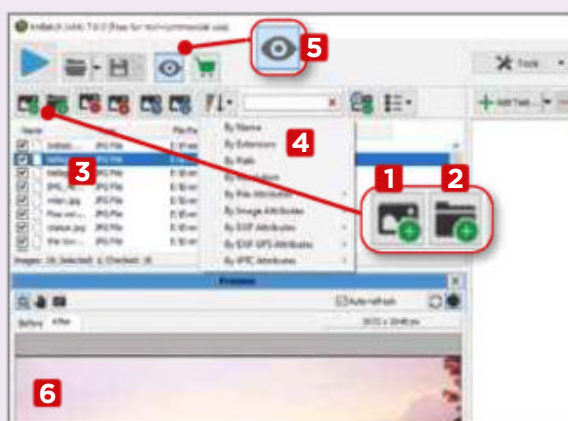
There have been improvements made to other tasks, too, such as the ability

to customise a shadow's radius and offset in the Soft Shadow task, and a choice of image-resizing methods in the Create Contact Sheet task. Adding images to ImBatch is now significantly faster, and lots of other minor problems have been fixed in this release.

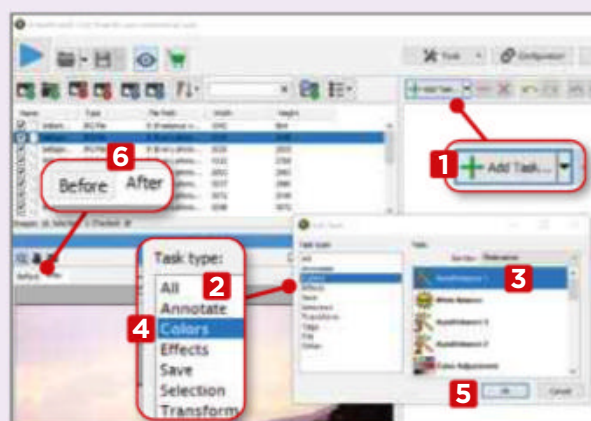
When installing the software, you have the choice of standard (recommended) or portable modes. The latter is useful if you want to carry ImBatch around on a USB stick.



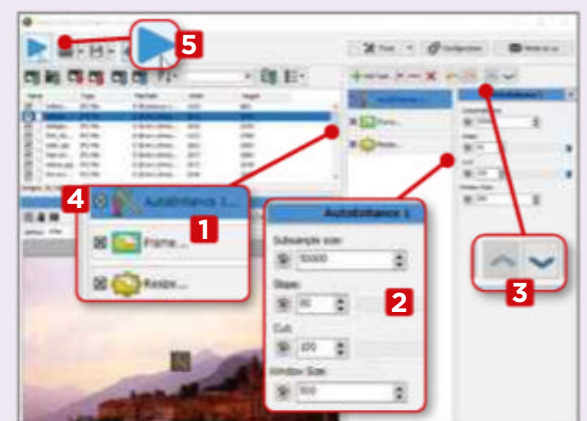
MINI WORKSHOP | Improve your photos with ImBatch 7



1 Drag and drop the images you want to process to the ImBatch interface. Alternatively, click the buttons at the top to add individual files **1** or a whole folder of images. **2** The list of pictures to edit appears below. **3** You can sort the list by various criteria. **4** Click the Eye button **5** to show the preview pane. **6**

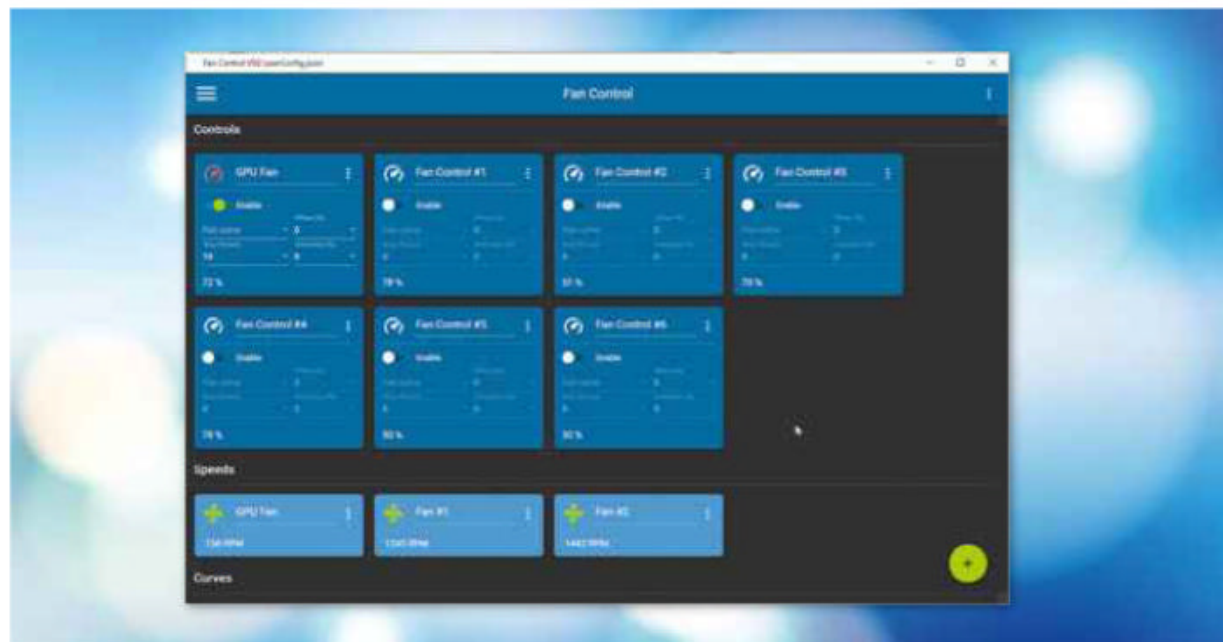


2 Click the Add Task button **1** and browse the selection of task types **2** you can apply to your images. AutoEnhance, **3** under Colours, **4** is a good place to start. Select some tasks and click OK. **5** The changes are reflected in the preview window. You can switch between Before and After views. **6**



3 ImBatch's standout feature is its ability to queue up multiple tasks. **1** Left-click any task and the options for it appear on the right. **2** Tasks can be reordered using the arrows above. **3** Click the X on the left **4** to deselect a task. Click the Run button at the top **5** to apply the tasks.

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



SYSTEM TOOL

Fan Control 50

bit.ly/3df5X7q

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10 **File size:** 3.5MB

The fans inside your PC perform the vital task of keeping the internal components cool and preventing overheating, which can lead to crashes and other problems. Your system should ensure that the fans run at the optimal speed (reducing heat without draining too much power), but Fan Control lets you take over manually. The interface displays each fan's activity, letting you apply custom fan curves, and save, edit and load different profiles.

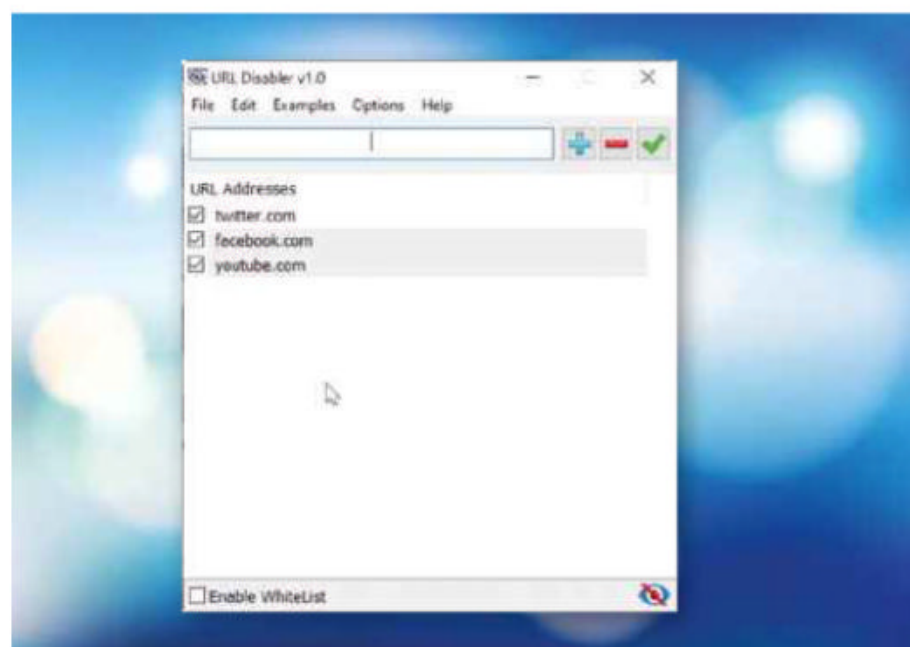
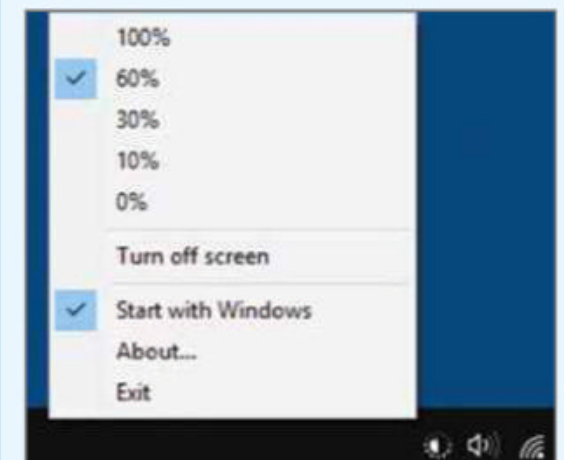
New Windows 10 App

BrightnessControl

bit.ly/2SNf4CN

File size: 780KB

This tiny Windows app adds an icon to the system tray that gives you greater control over your monitor's brightness. Just right-click the taskbar icon and you can choose one of the preset percentages, or turn off the screen entirely. BrightnessControl can be set to start automatically with Windows if you want it to.



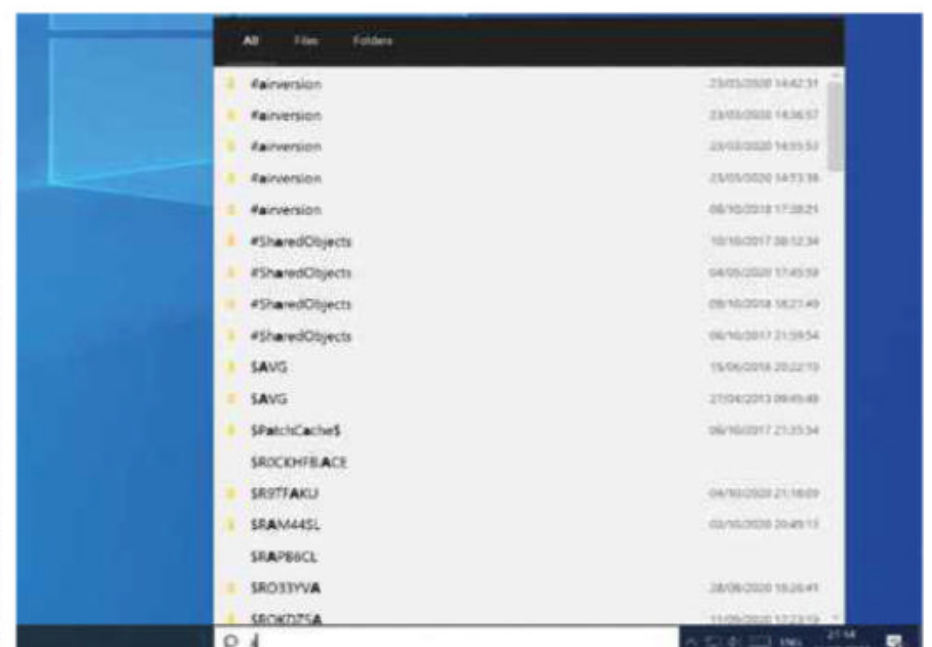
SYSTEM TOOL

URL Disabler

bit.ly/2GGOpW2

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10 **File size:** 886KB

URL Disabler stops specific websites loading in Chrome, Firefox and Microsoft Edge – handy for preventing kids from accessing sites they shouldn't. Just enter the site address to block, then click the blue Add button. The Examples menu lets you quickly add Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Once you've selected websites to disable, click the green tick icon. You can choose which browsers to block sites in, and remove previously blocked locations from the list.



SEARCH TOOL

EverythingToolbar

bit.ly/3jMByjs

Min requirements: Win 10, Everything Search **File size:** 408KB

Everything (www.voidtools.com) is a speedy search tool for Windows, and EverythingToolbar adds its search functionality to the Windows taskbar. Download, install and run Everything from Voidtools (there are 32- and 64-bit versions), then download and unzip EverythingToolbar. Right-click the install.cmd file and select 'Run as administrator'. Once installed, right-click the taskbar, go to Toolbars and select Everything Toolbar. Type text into the new toolbar to start a search.

NOTE-TAKING TOOL

Evernote 10

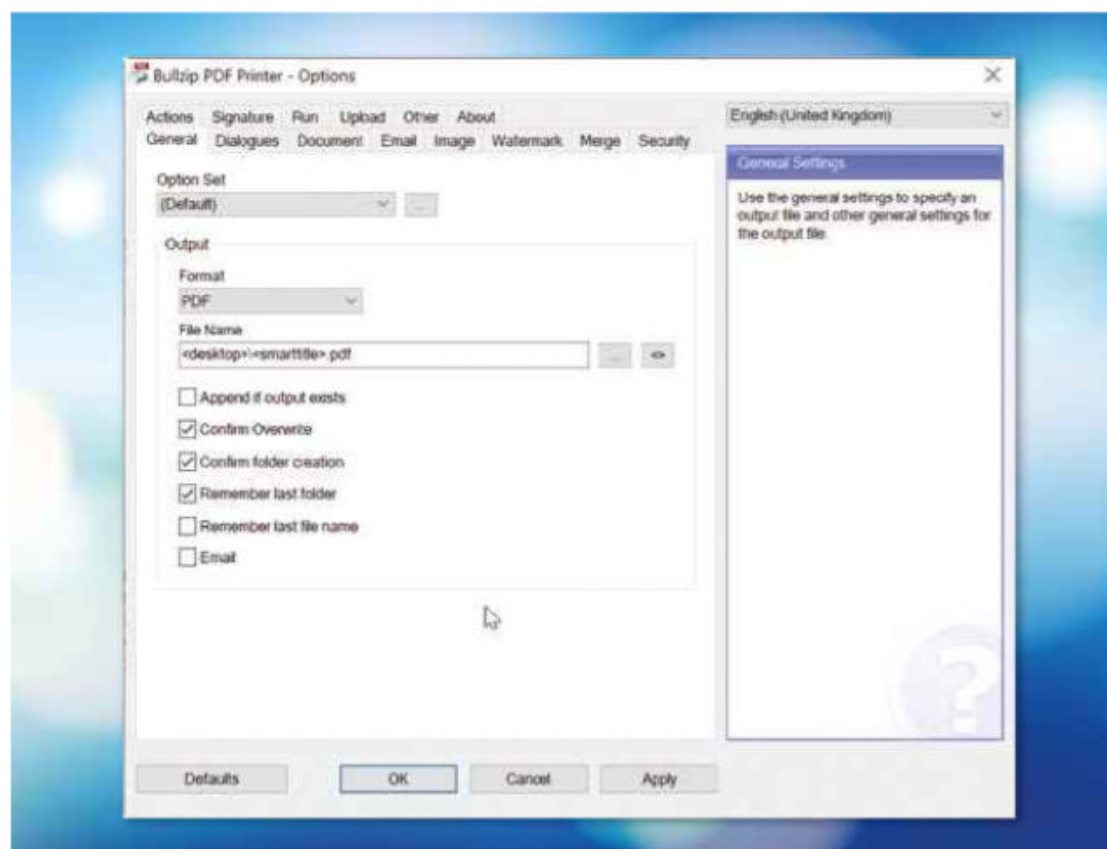
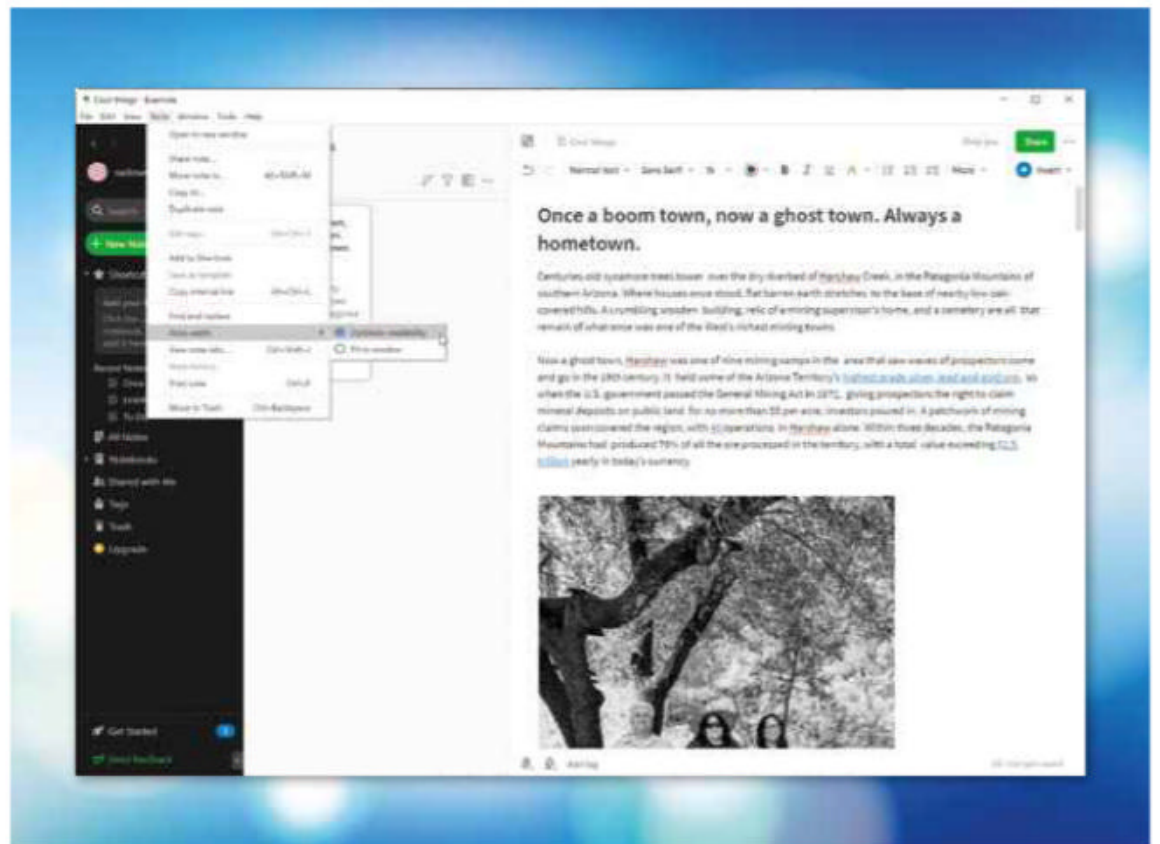
evernote.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10, macOS

File size: 285MB

Evernote is a popular note-taking tool that lets you clip and store content from emails and web pages, attach photos, write down ideas and more. Content you add is automatically processed, indexed and made fully searchable. Version 10 has been rebuilt from scratch, with a new, cleaner interface, additional formatting tools and faster search. You can set your preferred default width for notes, the sketch tool has been overhauled and the app now offers support for dark mode.

Because Evernote has been totally rewritten, some features (such as the option to edit note-creation dates) are currently absent, but will return in a future update.



PDF MAKER

Bullzip PDF Printer 12

www.bullzip.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10

File size: 40.7MB

You can save documents as PDFs in Windows, but Bullzip PDF Printer provides a much more advanced solution, with useful extras such as password protection and watermarks. The software is free for personal use - and for businesses with 10 or fewer staff members - and can be used in most Windows apps. Just select Bullzip as the printer, set any required options and it will save your file as a PDF - or an image if you prefer.

This version of the software adds support for multiple printer ports, so you can batch save several PDFs concurrently. It also fixes various bugs in the program, including one that caused problems with Corel Essentials 2020.

SECURITY TOOL

ShadowGuard

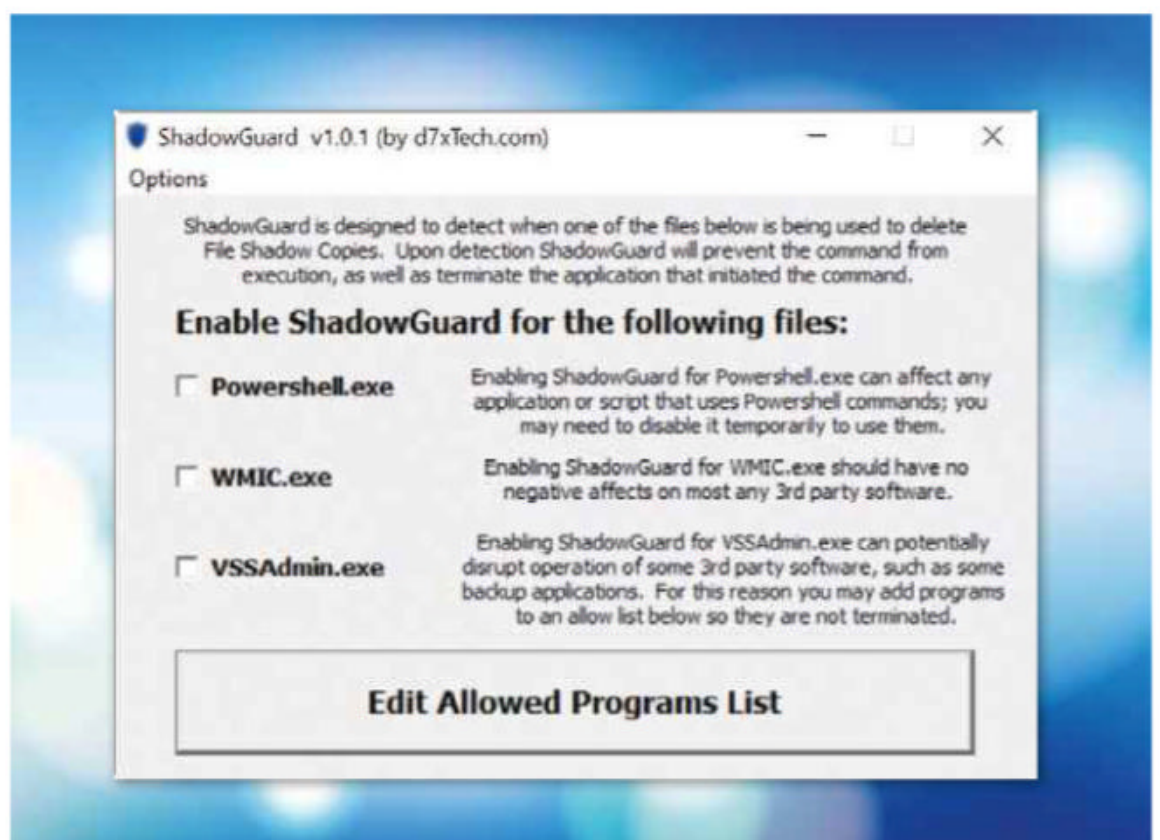
bit.ly/3ilaL6p

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10

File size: 794KB

Windows creates regular backup copies of files on your PC. If ransomware infects your system, it often tries to delete these 'shadow copies' before it encrypts the contents of your hard drive, to stop you being able to restore your files without paying a ransom. ShadowGuard detects when malware tries to delete shadow copies, stops the command running and kills whatever application issued it. An allowed-programs list lets safe apps - such as backup tools - access the shadow copies without being terminated.

Although ShadowGuard is designed for Windows 10, it works with older versions, going all the way back to Windows XP.





GAME

Die with the Spikes

bit.ly/36QzYcO

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10

File size: 34.4MB

This cheerfully titled 3D game was created in just 48 hours for a competition. It sets you the challenge of crossing a temple to recover some treasure. The bad news is that most of the tiles you have to walk on are boobytrapped and will kill you immediately; the good news is that you have infinite lives, so you just have to remember which tiles are safe.

✓ Install this program...

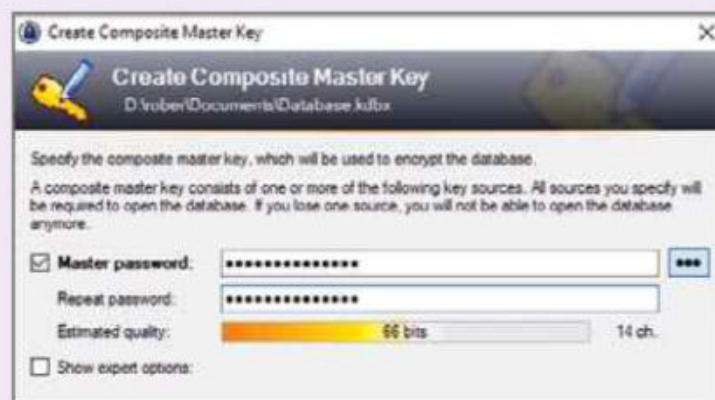
KeePass

keepass.info

Min requirements: Windows Vista/7/8/10

File size: 3.1MB

With its high-level encryption, two-factor authentication and powerful set of tools, KeePass ensures all your passwords are kept safe and makes it easy to manage them. You can install it on your PC or download the portable version to run from a USB stick. Start by creating and saving a database to store your logins and passwords, then secure this with a master password (don't forget it or you'll lock yourself out of your other accounts). Unlike similar programs that store your credentials in the cloud, KeePass saves its databases on your computer, for greater control and security.



...Not this one ✗

Odin Password Secure Manager

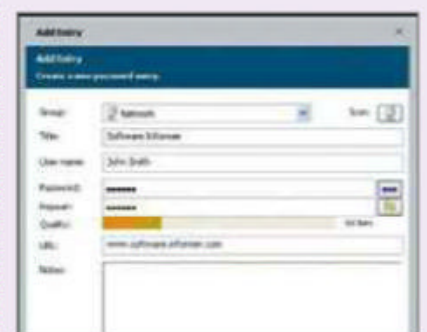
odinshare.com

Min requirements:

Windows XP/Vista/7/8

File size: 1.5MB

Can you really put a price on the security of your files? Probably not, but that doesn't mean you won't baulk at paying £23. That's what Odin Password Secure Manager used to charge, but the program is no longer being developed and its website is now defunct. If you encounter it online, don't download.



OTHER OPERATING SYSTEMS What's new for Linux and macOS



LINUX DISTRO

Ubuntu Linux 20.10 'Groovy Gorilla' Beta

ubuntu.com

Min requirements: 1GB RAM, 64-bit processor

File size: 2.8GB

It's always big news when Canonical releases a new version of Ubuntu, one of the world's most popular Linux distros. Ubuntu Linux 20.10 'Groovy Gorilla' is still in beta, but it's stable and available with the GNOME desktop environment, and in other variants such as Kubuntu and Xubuntu. It comes with updated packages and applications (Firefox, LibreOffice and Thunderbird). You may find the odd problem, but any significant bugs should have been fixed.

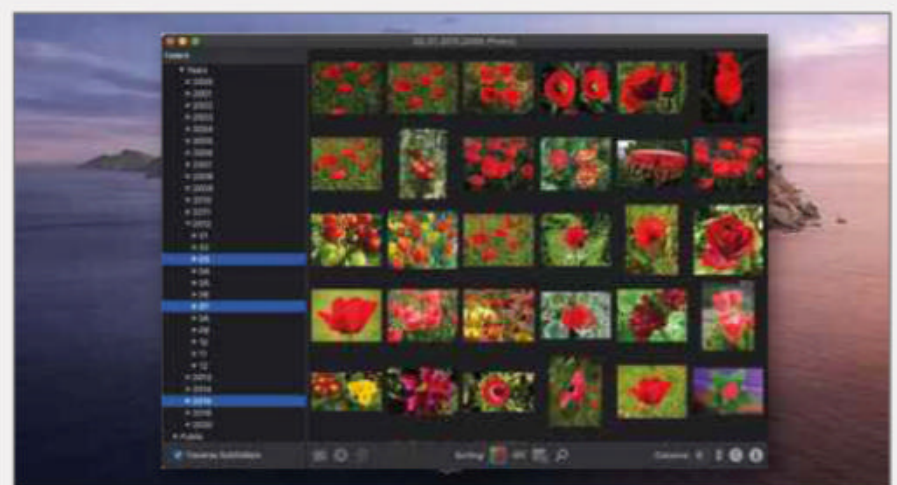


IMAGE SORTER

PicArrange

apple.co/2GFDJH2

Min requirements: macOS 10.15 or later, 64-bit processor

File size: 9.7MB

PicArrange is an alternative tool for finding images on your computer. Its options are more sophisticated than the macOS Finder app, which lets you search your Mac for pictures by name and date, allowing you to fine-tune your search to include content and colour. You can even view sorted images from different folders, which makes it handy for finding and deleting duplicate (or similar) images. Photos can be opened with Preview or located in Finder.

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

Best New Browser Tools



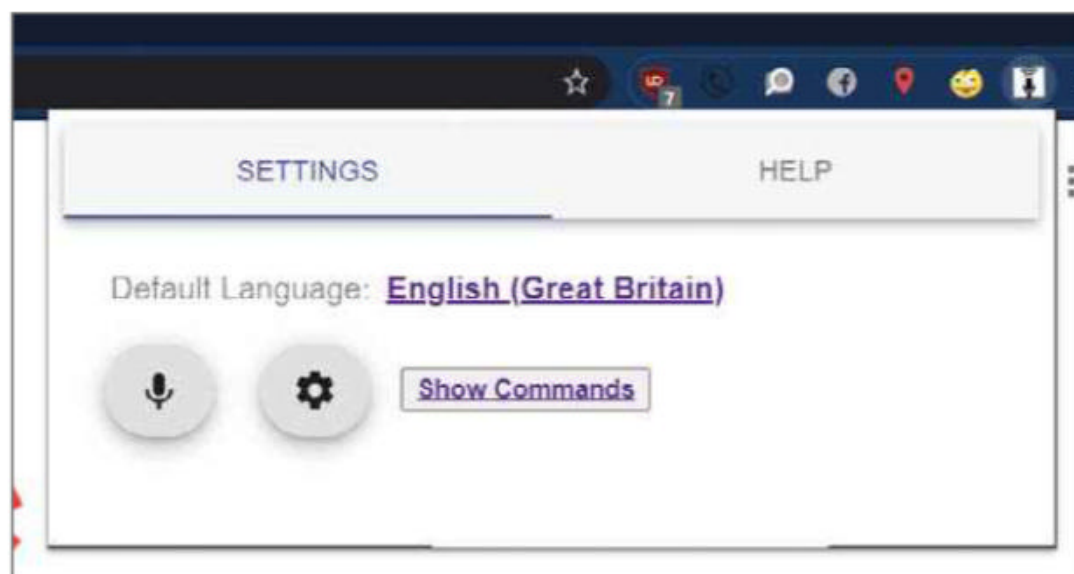
CHROME

Fill in online text boxes using your voice

Speech Recognition Toolkit (bit.ly/speech513) is a handy new extension that transcribes spoken words and enters them in a text field. Sites such as Google and Bing let you do this already, but this add-on extends the feature to the rest of the web.

The first time you use Speech Recognition Toolkit, you have to allow microphone permissions. You'll then see the Toolkit's dashboard, which is where you access its settings and commands that let you speak actions such as "undo", "press Enter" and "emoji". Don't forget to click Default Language on the dashboard, which opens a drop-down menu of languages, including English (Great Britain), for better results.

With the Toolkit set up, head to any website with a text box – YouTube is a good place to try this out. Open the extension,

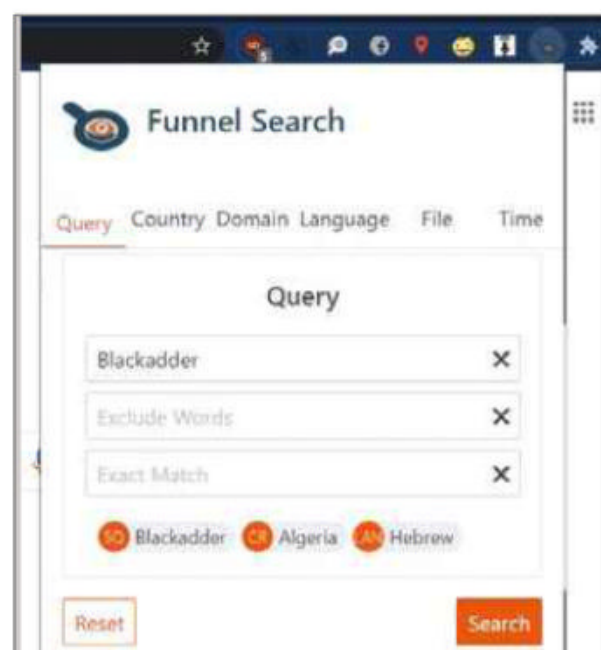


click the Microphone button (it'll now say Listening), then click a text field and speak. After a second, your words will appear without you needing to type.

Unlock better Google searches

Google search operators help you refine search results, such as only displaying content from a specific year or website, but they can be tricky to remember. Funnel Search (bit.ly/funnel513) makes using operators easier. It's organised into six tabs – Query, Country, Domain, Language, File and Time – each of which contains additional search parameters, such as excluding certain words or filtering by file type. Fill in the Query box, then add any extra filters you like. Each additional parameter adds a tag at the bottom of the screen.

When you're ready, click Search



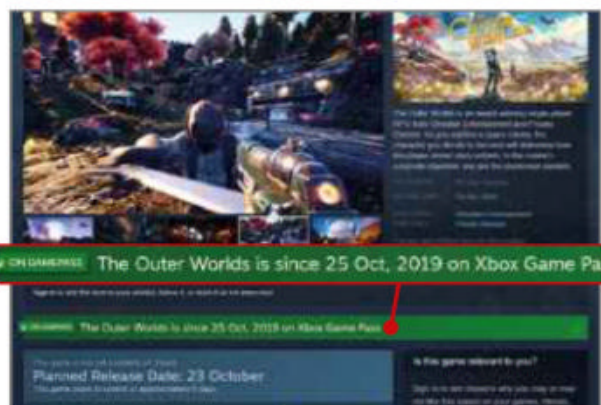
and Google will return results tailored to your specifications.

Check if Steam games are on Xbox Games Pass

If you're a gamer on both PC and Xbox, then Xbox Game Pass Info on Steam (bit.ly/xbox513) is a must-have browser tool. It's made for anyone who's ever bought a game on Steam, only to find that they could've played it free with their Xbox Game Pass subscription.

Search for a game on the Steam Store (store.steampowered.com) and, if it's in the Game Pass library, you'll see a helpful green banner on the page giving you the details.

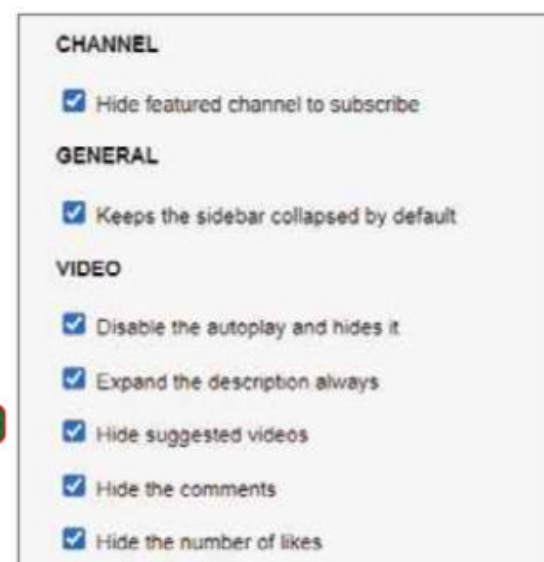
Just remember that the Xbox Game Pass is constantly updating. Like Netflix, titles come and go, so you may want to add the game to a wishlist and pick it up from Steam if it ever leaves Microsoft's subscription service.



Waste less time watching YouTube

Watching YouTube is the online equivalent of slumping in front of the TV with the remote control out of reach. YourTube (bit.ly/your513) aims to solve this problem.

Unlike many tools that aim to drown out the noise of the internet, YourTube doesn't just block everything and hector you into getting on with work. Instead, you customise your setup to suit your viewing needs. For example, you may want to disable and hide the autoplay option but keep recommended videos on display. Just tick the relevant box to instantly apply the change.



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



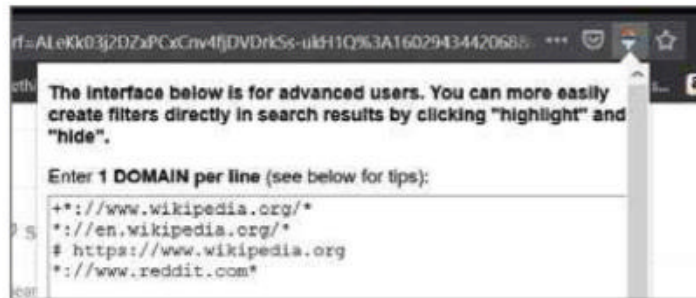
FIREFOX

Show or hide websites in Google

Google Search Filter (bit.ly/search513) helps you hide or highlight specific websites in search results. Despite the name, it doesn't only work with Google, but also Bing, DuckDuckGo and StartPage.

You'll see the extension's icon in the address bar after you've searched any supported search engine. The first time you click this, you're asked to set up or randomly generate a 'sync name', after which you can begin to create your filters.

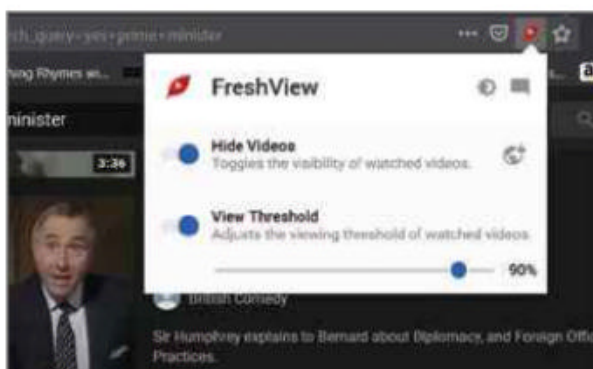
You need to type or copy and paste a list of URLs into the extension's domain box in the following format: `*://www.[domain].com*`. Doing so will hide any result from that website. To force a site to stand out in results instead, just add a plus sign before the first asterisk. Alternatively, just search for a domain that you want to highlight or block from search results, then select either 'highlight' or 'hide'. Your filter list is automatically updated.



Remove watched videos from YouTube results

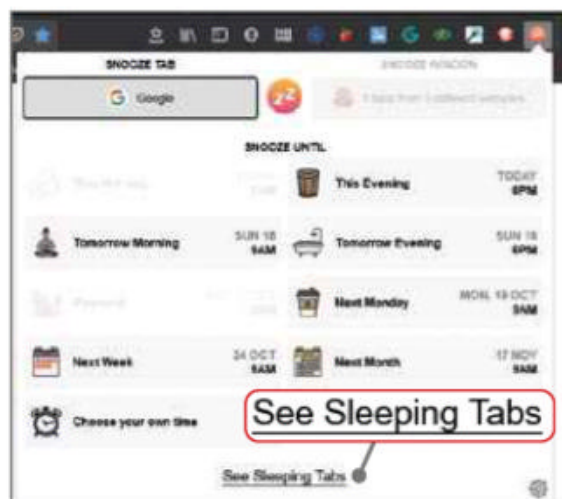
If you like to browse YouTube for new content and don't want to see videos you've already watched, FreshView (bit.ly/fresh513) can declutter your viewing experience.

When you run a search on YouTube, suggested videos you've already watched usually have a red line at the bottom of the thumbnail. FreshView goes further by letting you remove any previously seen videos from search results – just switch the toggle to On (or turn it off to immediately see them again in the results). Use the View Threshold slider to determine how much of a video you need to have seen before the extension conceals it.



Snooze Firefox tabs and windows

If you're prone to opening a multitude of tabs during a browsing session, there



are all sorts of tools that help you declutter. However, Snoozz (bit.ly/snooz513) does this in a particularly user-friendly way. Where most such browser tools rely on fiddly drop-down menus, Snoozz provides large, clearly labelled buttons that wouldn't look out of place on a tablet or phone.

When your browser becomes overcrowded, click the extension's toolbar button to get two options at the top: either snooze the tab you're on or snooze every tab in the window. Choose from different times and dates, or set your own, and the tab will stay snoozed until Snoozz rings the alarm clock.

You can view any tabs you've set aside by clicking See Sleeping Tabs, and even snooze a tab before you open it, to save it for later.

OTHER BROWSERS



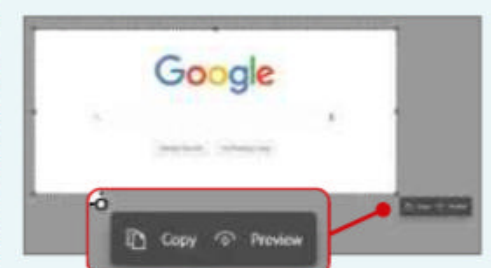
Customise Vivaldi menus and play a game

The latest update to Vivaldi brings a host of new features, including the ability to edit the browser's right-click menu and an Eighties-style arcade game called Vivaldia (go to vivaldi://game to play this). To get started, go to Settings, Appearance, Menu, 'Menu customisation'. The browser also introduces Periodic Reload – right-click any tab and select the option, then choose how often that tab should refresh itself, to make sure it's up to date. To get this update, if you haven't already, click the Vivaldi icon, then Help, 'Check for Updates'.



Try Edge's new web-capture tool

Microsoft has introduced a new Web Capture tool for its experimental Edge Canary browser (bit.ly/canary513). Right-click any page and choose 'Web capture' – or press Ctrl+Shift+S – to begin. It works in a similar way to Snipping Tool, fading the screen and replacing your cursor with a cross hair. Use this to select an area of the screen and either click Copy to add the image to your clipboard or Preview to open it in a new window. It's not as feature-rich as other screen-capture tools, but the bonus is that it's built right into the browser.



Best Free Apps



App of the Fortnight

PHOTOS

Google Photos

photos.google.com/apps

(varies) 11

UPDATED

Earlier this summer, Google released a big update for its Photos app, with a refreshed, three-tab interface, a map view and a redesigned app icon. Rather than taking a well-earned break from developing new features, the Photos team is back, just a matter of weeks later, with yet another major update – this time it's an overhaul of the app's editing tools.

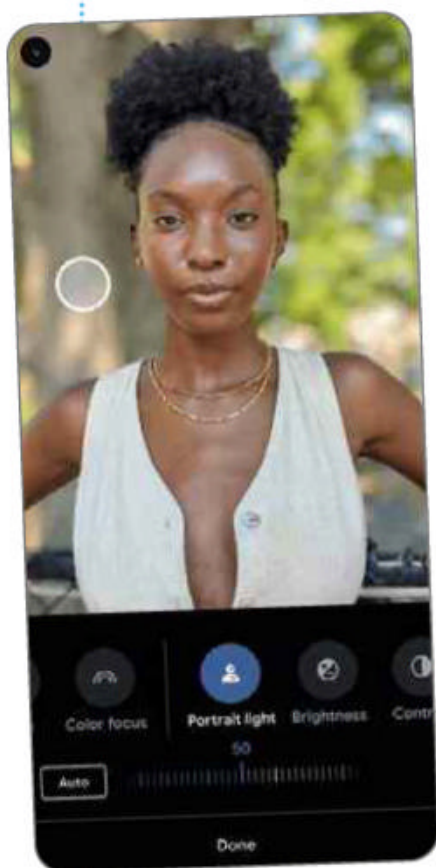
Google Photos already helps you get the most from your photos by suggesting tweaks such as brightening and rotating, and offering to archive a picture while you're viewing it. This latest update builds on this by providing three suggested ways to give a quick boost to any photo you view. The options shown depend on the content of the

image – the app can intelligently identify what's in your photos and offer the most appropriate tools. So, if the image contains people, for example, you'll see Enhance, B&W Portrait and Colour Pop buttons.

In addition to these quick fixes, the main editing tools in Google Photos have been revamped. It's now much more intuitive to apply granular edits to your shots and get them just right.

Sadly, these new abilities are currently restricted to users of the Android version of the Photos app – time will tell whether Google deems iOS users worthy enough to receive similar options. The company has, however, promised that users of its own Pixel-brand handsets will soon benefit from further new Google Photos features, including Portrait

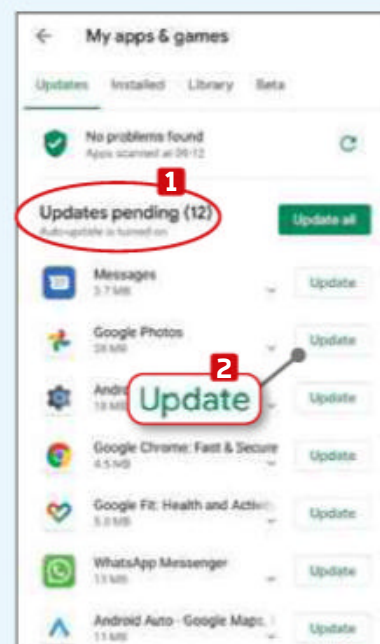
Light, a tool that provides more control over the look of portrait shots.



MINI WORKSHOP

How to use Google Photos' new editing tools

1 Make sure that Google Photos is up to date before you start. Open the Google Play app, tap the three-line menu button and select 'My apps & games', then scroll through the 'Updates pending' **1** to see if Google Photos is listed. If it is, tap the Update button **2** to download and install the latest version. Once the update is complete, launch the app and navigate to a photo you want to improve.



2 Open the photo and tap the three-slider Edit button below it. A tab appears below your photo with three suggested improvements: Enhance **1** balances the exposure and optimises brightness, contrast and colour; 'B&W portrait' **2** converts a portrait photo to black and white; and Colour Pop **3** enhances your subject's colour, while desaturating the background. Swipe left next to Suggestions. **4**



3 Keep scrolling left to see the full range of improved editing tools – Crop, Adjust, Filters and More. Tapping Adjust, for example, brings up a further selection of tools – swipe left to see more. To apply one of these tools – Contrast, **1** for example – tap it and swipe left or right on the slide rule below **2** to change the setting. Tap Done **3** when you're happy with the results.



Our rating



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

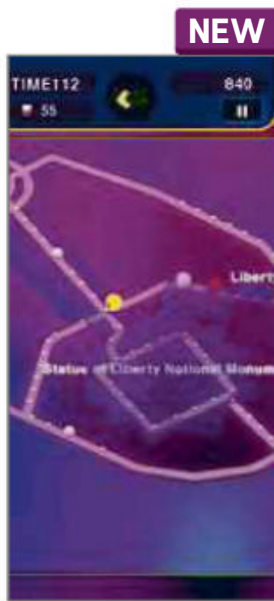
GAME

Pac-Man Geo

bit.ly/2SWEApx
apple.co/31eXFYB

 6  11

The latest retro gaming legend to get the real-world treatment is everyone's favourite pill-popping yellow ball, Pac-Man. In Bandai Namco's latest mobile spin on the franchise, our spherical hero is seen munching his way through mazes based on the streets of real cities – including New York, Paris and Tokyo. There are two gameplay modes: Map Mode lets you create, play and share mazes; while Tour Mode lets you compete against other players around the world in famous locations. There are currently a few bugs, but they should be fixed by the time you read this.



Our rating



TOOLS

InstaMocks

bit.ly/3k3A4RP
 4.4

Admittedly, this app is a bit niche, but it's nicely designed and works well. Basically, InstaMocks' chief purpose is to help you create authentic-looking screenshots by framing your grabs with mockups of real-world mobile devices (See? Told you it was niche). There are more than 40 device mockups to choose from, including both Android and iOS phones and tablets, as well as custom options. You can align, move, rotate and scale your mockups as needed, and add effects, backgrounds, customisable text and more. It's certainly worth a look.



Our rating

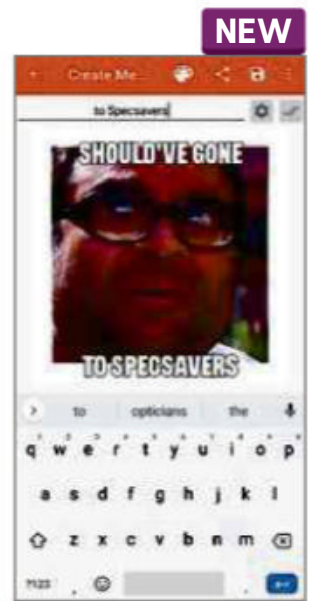


SOCIAL MEDIA

Meme Maker

bit.ly/376H7Wq
 5

Memes are everywhere on social media and the internet at large. If you've ever wondered how to make your own, to share with your friends, family and followers, then this app provides an easy method. You can generate memes either from the selection of images provided – cats, celebrities, cartoon characters and so on – or you can import your own photos from your device's gallery. You can then edit your meme in a few taps, entering your own text, selecting meme-friendly fonts and more before sending it out into the wild and potentially "going viral".



Our rating



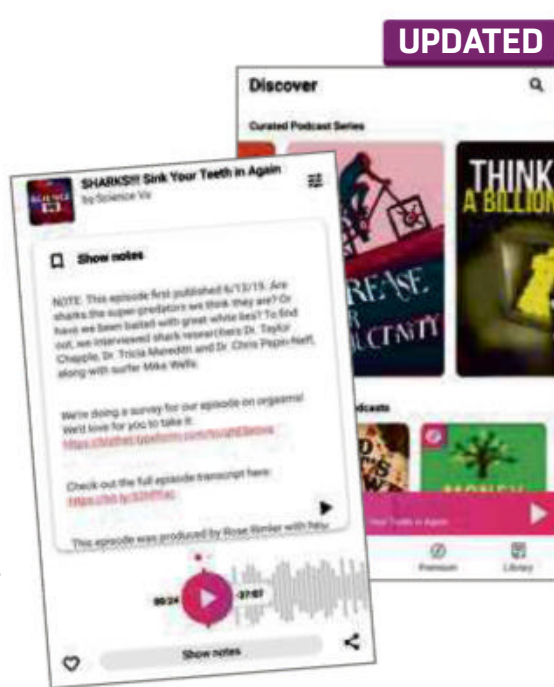
PODCASTS

Elision

bit.ly/2T1kHu
apple.co/2FyQAuh

 6  13

Elision has some admirably lofty ambitions – it aims to educate its users with a selection of podcasts, largely centred around science, business, health and productivity. The app's unique RichAudio feature enhances the audio content with on-screen text, photos and links – though this is fairly useless if your device is in your pocket. The latest update adds Podcast Series, a curated selection of episodes from some of the podcast industry's most valuable voices. Unfortunately, access to much of this content requires a pricey subscription of £4.99 per week. With so many great free podcasts around, it's hard to gauge what makes Elision's premium content worth paying for.



Our rating



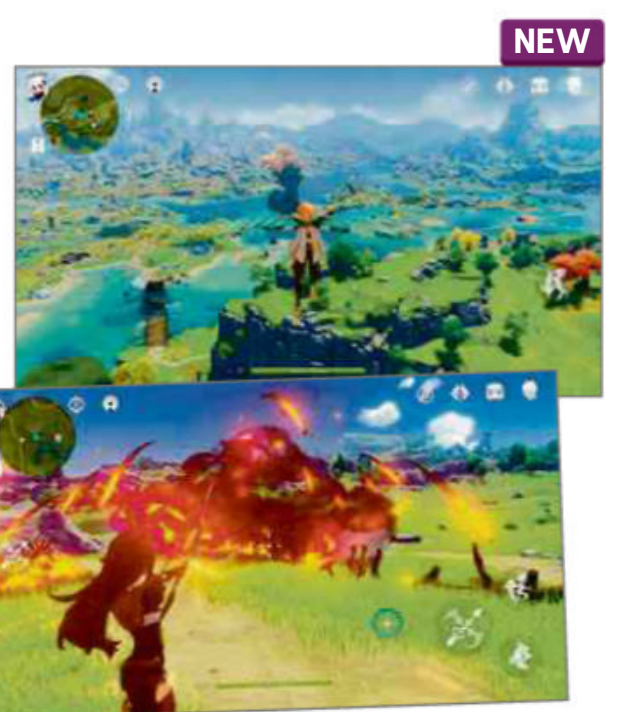
GAME

Genshin Impact

bit.ly/3j47w9N
apple.co/2Hb18T6

 5  9

Released last month, this free-to-play action role-playing game has quickly become a breakout hit. Bearing more than a passing resemblance to Nintendo's *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, both in its overall look and open-world gameplay, Genshin Impact lets you explore either alone or in parties of up to four players as you battle baddies, complete quests, upgrade skills, unlock characters and other tasks. The in-game monetisation (in the shape of randomised loot boxes that offer easy ways to gain upgrades) can be entirely avoided if you prefer to play for free.



Our rating



5 NEW APPS WORTH PAYING FOR

SOCIAL MEDIA

Aviary

apple.co/3dxjJT3

Price: £3.99

 14

This attractive-looking Twitter client is specifically designed to take advantage of iOS's built-in features, such as long-press context menus. Aviary was recently updated for iOS 14 with tons of new options.



GAMING

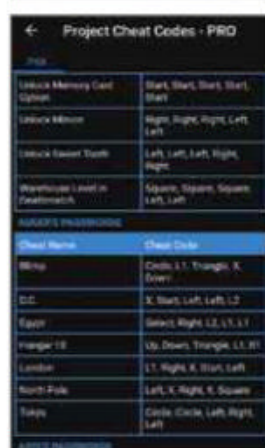
Project Cheat Codes

bit.ly/319ZeHi

Price: £1.49

 5.1

Remember trying to work out how to enable hacks and hidden modes in old games? Well, this app provides you with a portable database of cheat codes for games old and new.



GAME

1-800 SUPER

apple.co/31tLbwr

Price: £2.99

 10

This narrative game is a novel twist on the comic



book genre, in which you play an operator working at a crisis hotline for superheroes and villains. The advice you dish out for their everyday problems and life-or-death situations shapes the unfolding story.

PRODUCTIVITY

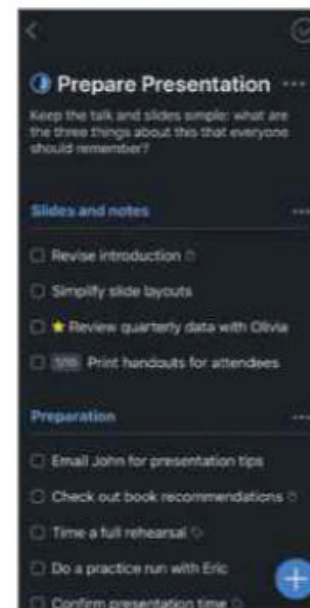
Things 3

apple.co/3j53pu3

Price: £9.99

 12.1

One of the best iOS organisers just got even better, thanks to a recent update that takes advantage of iOS 14. The new version adds handy home-screen widgets, support for Scribble in iPadOS and more.



VIDEO

VX Video Editor Pro

bit.ly/31bm4yf

Price: 59p

 7

Video-editing apps are often either too complicated or too basic. This app strikes a happy medium, with a simple, focused set of tools aimed at quickly trimming, tweaking and converting clips.



Aviary



Project Cheat Codes



1-800 SUPER



Things 3



VX Video Editor Pro




✓ Install this app...

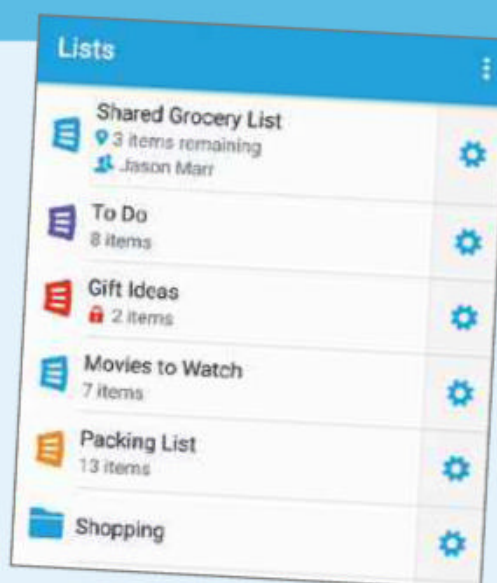
AnyList

bit.ly/31aHbAy

apple.co/2IELFcX

 4.4  12

Whether you're making a shopping list of items to stock up on in the event of another lockdown, collating recipes or just making a list of films you want to see, AnyList has you covered. As its name suggests, the app can be used to make virtually any kind of list, and it's bursting with features. You can choose from one of the predesigned categories or create your own custom list, and add, cross off items as needed, share lists with other household members, sync your lists across mobile devices and more. A recent update adds widgets for iOS 14.



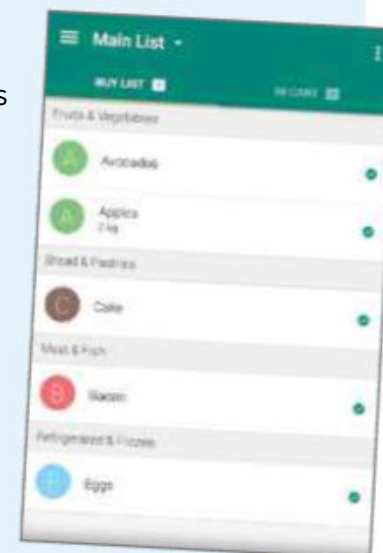
...Not this one



Cinnamon Grocery List

bit.ly/2FCwm2O

This shopping list app looks fine at first, but there's a hidden catch. Despite still offering an in-app purchase (£2.34) to unlock Cinnamon's cloud sync feature, users are reporting that the function doesn't work any more, and that it's no longer even possible to create an account. Last updated in 2017, it's very cheeky of the developers to continue taking people's money for what is, effectively, abandonware.





Take a Screen Break

Take a rest from your browser with our fiendish fortnightly challenges. Can you guess our famous horror-story emoji and 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 HORROR STORIES FROM THE EMOJI?

1		2	
3		4	
5		6	

GUESS THE WAYBACK MACHINE YEAR

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

WayBackMachine

Harry honours Diana on 18th birthday



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City



COMPETITIONS

WIN 1 OF 3 Corel Painter 2021

Painter 2021 is the latest version of this powerful and creative professional digital-painting software. For the first time, you can access an AI-based style transfer workflow that offers the customisation, control and Natural-Media realism professionals demand. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'Painter' in the subject line. For more information, visit www.painterartist.com and follow [@corelpainter](https://twitter.com/corelpainter) on Twitter.



**WORTH
£359.99
EACH**

WIN 1 OF 10 TP-Link Tapo P100 smart plugs

Using TP-Link's Tapo P100 smart plugs, you can turn connected devices on and off wherever you are through the Tapo app. Set up the 'Away Mode' so your devices automatically turn on when you're not at home, deterring burglars. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk. For more information, visit www.tp-link.com/uk and follow [@TPLINKUK](https://twitter.com/TPLINKUK) on Twitter.



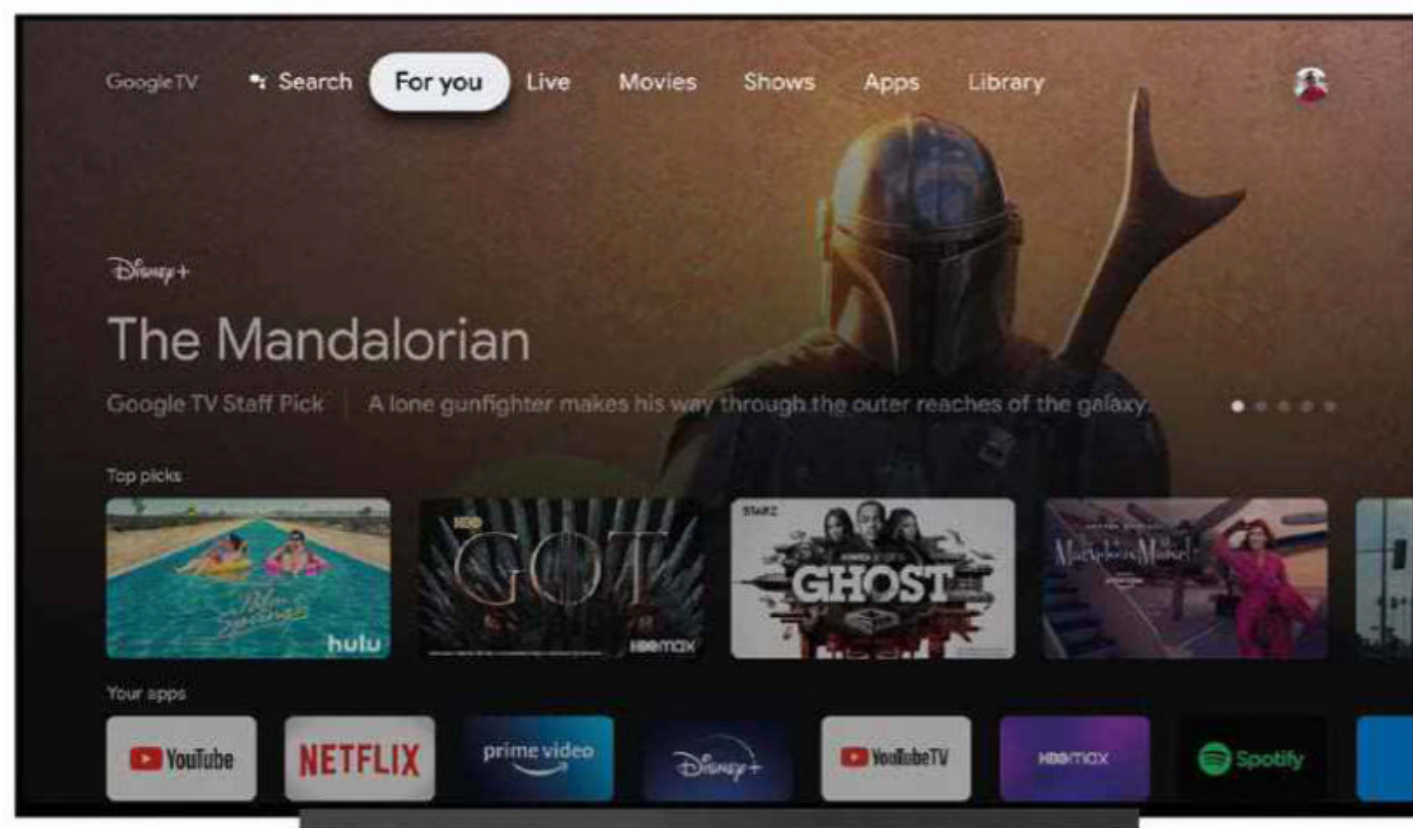
**WORTH
£12.99
EACH**



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

Our guide to Google TV

Save money on a new smart TV by using Google TV to access content on all your favourite streaming services. **David Crookes** takes a look at the new platform



What is it?

Google TV (tv.google) is a skin designed to sit on top of Android TV – Google’s smart television platform, which is based on its mobile operating system. It provides an interface that makes it easier for viewers to browse and watch content delivered by a wide range of streaming services, bringing them together on a single screen and placing a greater emphasis on search and discovery.

Is it a replacement for Android TV?

Yes and no. Android TV shows you a host of apps, such as Netflix, Disney+, Prime Video, YouTube and more, and lets you launch them separately to find the shows and films you want to watch. Google TV puts the content, rather than the

streaming services, at the forefront, which allows for cross-platform recommendations and searches that cut across your subscriptions. However, Google TV needs Android TV because the former is built on the latter’s operating system. To that end, Android TV is here to stay.

But Google TV’s one to watch?

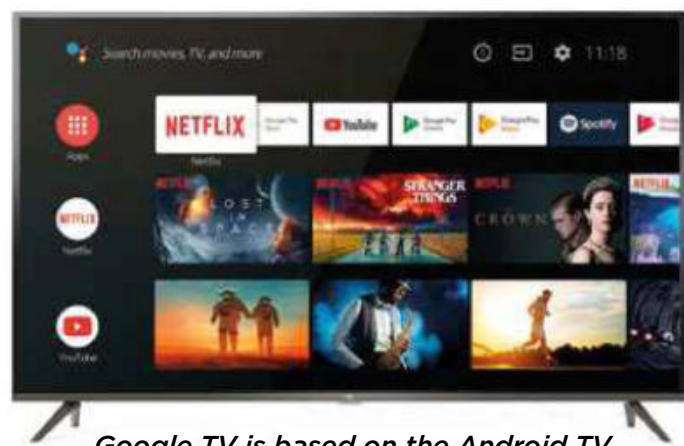
Apparently so. Google claims to have studied how viewers discover media by looking at the ways we search for specific titles and at how we tend to browse content by genre. It has designed Google TV’s interface with these things in mind, while also making improvements to Google’s Knowledge Graph – a technology that’s used to enhance search results based on information gathered from various sources. This means Google TV can draw on machine learning to make informed decisions about the content it organises into genres and topics, so what you see on screen should, in theory, always feel relevant, with recommendations helpfully presented on a For You tab.

Naturally, you can also search

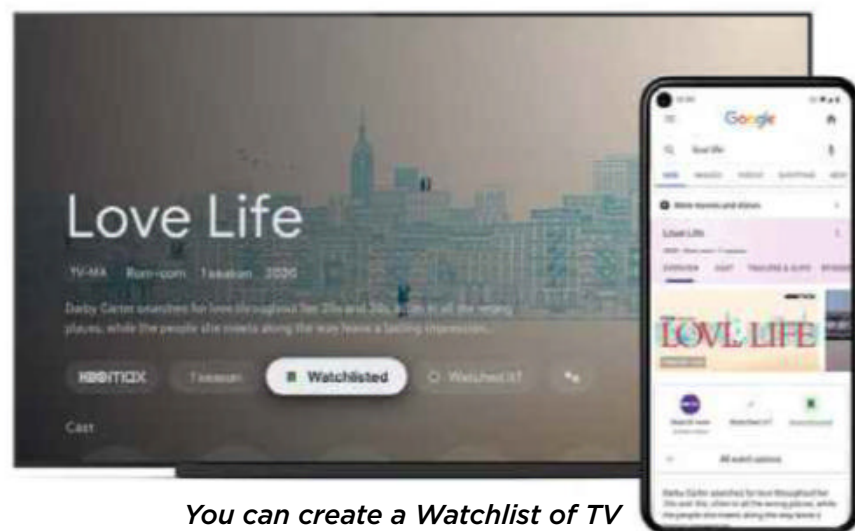
for shows and films to watch, and help Google TV work out what you like by adding titles to a Watchlist.

What if I’m not near my TV?

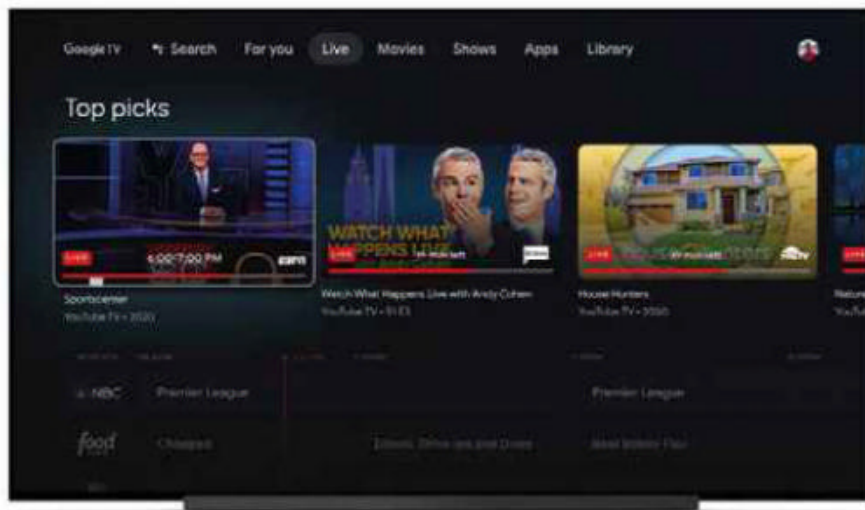
Since April, searching Google for a TV programme or film brings up a card highlighting the streaming services on which the show is available. There’s a button that lets you indicate whether you’ve watched it already, and another you can press to add it to your Watchlist, which now also adds the show to your Watchlist on Google TV, assuming you’re using the same login details. It’s a convenient way to manage your entertainment when you’re on the go.



Google TV is based on the Android TV platform used by many smart TVs



You can create a Watchlist of TV shows and films directly from Google search results



Live TV channels are currently only available to YouTube TV subscribers in the US



You can cast video, audio and photos from your phone or tablet to Google TV

Will I be able to watch live TV?

Google TV has a live television section, but it's currently only available if you subscribe to YouTube TV (tv.youtube.com) for \$64.99 per month and live in the US. YouTube TV gives viewers access to more than 85 live television channels without locking them into lengthy contracts, and allows for unlimited recordings. But there's no word on when the service is likely to come to the UK.

What about content I've bought?

As well as For You, Google TV has tabs for Movies, Shows, Apps and Library. The latter will include content that you've bought from the Google Play Movies and TV app which, rather confusingly, is also being renamed Google TV.

So how can I get the Google TV interface?

The service is debuting on the new Chromecast with Google TV dongle, which plugs into an HDMI socket on your television. It differs from previous Chromecasts because you're not restricted to using a

Google TV makes its debut on the new Chromecast device, which comes with its own remote control



smartphone or tablet to cast content from mobile apps. Instead, you'll be able to enjoy all Google TV's features via a bundled remote control.

The new Chromecast is a small, pebble-like device, much like its predecessors. There's a protruding HDMI connecting lead and a socket for the power supply, just in case – as is likely – the 5V of electricity from your TV isn't sufficient. Although the dongle is likely to be hidden from view when used with most televisions, you can choose from three colours: snow, sunrise and sky, with the remote coloured to match.

Will it give me a good picture?

That depends on your television. Chromecast with Google TV can show content in full HD (1080p resolution), but it will also provide 4K HDR10+ streaming at up to 60fps (frames per second) with Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos.

So, if you have a TV and sound system capable of such high quality, you'll be able to enjoy ultra-sharp images and listen to blisteringly crisp sound.

That said, you may find yourself let down by your broadband internet connection. The new Chromecast doesn't have an Ethernet jack, so

you'll have to use Wi-Fi until Google comes good on its promised USB-C to Ethernet adapter, which it's likely to roll out soon.

Is the remote easy to use?

The Bluetooth/infrared remote has a directional navigation pad at the top and buttons running down two columns. You can press these to visit Google TV's homescreen, go back a step, power on and off, and switch inputs. You can also mute the sound and use the side buttons to increase or decrease the volume, and use the shortcuts dedicated to YouTube, Netflix and Google Assistant.

Speaking into the remote by holding down the relevant button will allow you to use Google assistant to search for TV content. You can voice your request for specific titles or find shows by genre, mood, actor and other categories, and ask general questions – such as information about the weather. You're still able to cast media from an Android or iOS device, too.

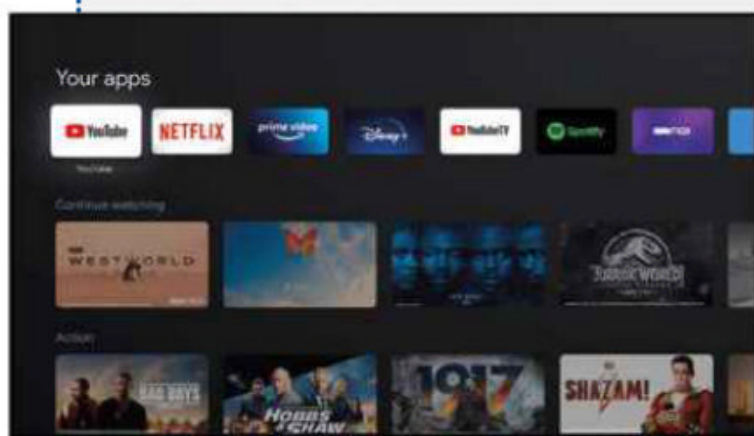
Can I play games on it?

You certainly can. Since Google TV is built on top of the Android TV operating system, you can choose from more than 6,500 apps, including games. What you can't do – at least, not at the moment – is play games using Google Stadia (stadia.google.com), which lets you choose from dozens of games and stream them via Wi-Fi or wired connections. That feature, however, is expected to come on board next year.

How much does the Chromecast cost?

Chromecast with Google TV will set you back £59.99, though you can stump up an extra £30 for a six-month Netflix subscription (saving you £23.94) if you buy it direct from the Google Store (bit.ly/chromecast513). High-street shops including Tesco, John Lewis, Argos and Currys PC World are also selling the device.

CAN I UPGRADE MY ANDROID TV?



You can't upgrade a television or streaming device running Android TV to Google TV just yet – but upgrades have been promised in 2021. Unfortunately, we don't know which televisions or devices will be brought up to date, although Google has confirmed that some Sony Android TV sets will be among those that benefit.

Master Your Home Wi-Fi

**COVER
FEATURE**

Your home Wi-Fi has many more uses than just browsing the web and streaming TV. **Wayne Williams** reveals amazing things you never knew you could do with your network

In a year when most of us have been forced to stay indoors, our domestic Wi-Fi networks have become more important than ever. Forget hopping on public hotspots or browsing the web at work – 2020 has made us dependent on fast, reliable internet in and around our homes.

This makes it all the more baffling that many of us fail to make the most of our wireless networks – other than connecting our phones, tablets and TVs, and letting our routers carry out their work in the background – because there are all manner of clever things you can do with your Wi-Fi to make your life easier, your files safer and your network all-encompassing.

Back in Issue 480's cover feature (bit.ly/webuser480), we explained how to boost your Wi-Fi from the inside out by tweaking your router's settings. In this feature, we reveal how to expand and enhance your network from the outside in, by sharing more content, adding new devices, improving security and more.



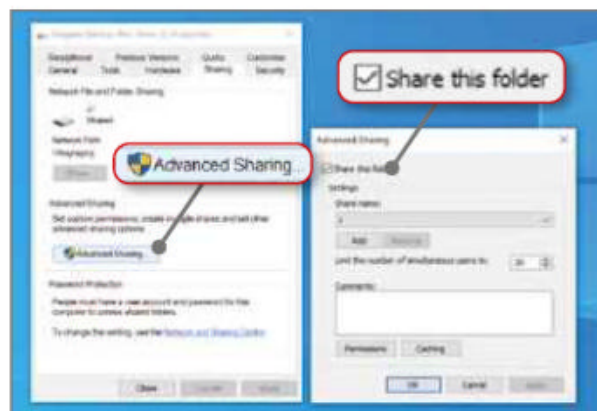
))) SHARE MORE CONTENT OVER WI-FI

Share the contents of your hard drive

It can be useful to assign a hard drive (internal or external) that all computers on your Wi-Fi network can access. You can then use this as a central repository for all your photos, videos and important documents.

Sharing a drive over a network via Windows is very straightforward. Launch File Explorer, right-click the drive you want to share and select 'Give access to', then 'Advanced sharing'. This opens the Properties window with the Sharing tab selected. Click 'Advanced sharing' and tick the box for 'Share this folder'. Give the drive a descriptive name, then apply and OK the setting.

Anyone on your network should be able to access this drive by opening the Network setting in File Explorer.

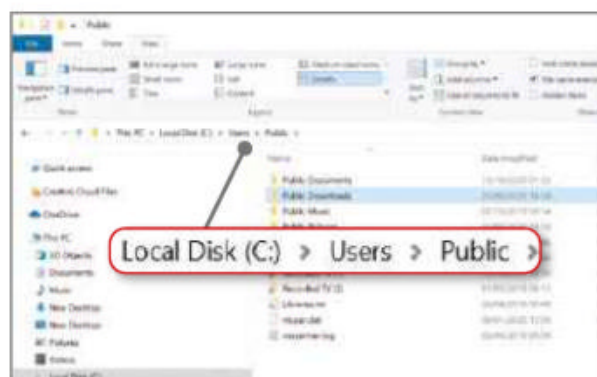


Share important files across your network through a dedicated central drive

Share files using Public folders

You can share Public folders with anyone who has an account on your PC, as well as over your wireless network. To view Public folders that have already been set up, open File Explorer and go to C:\Users\Public. These are likely to include Public Documents, Public Downloads, Public Music, Public Pictures and Public Videos. You can create new locations by right-clicking and selecting New, Folder.

To access content that's been shared in a Public folder on your network, open File Explorer, go to Network, select the computer, click Users and choose Public.



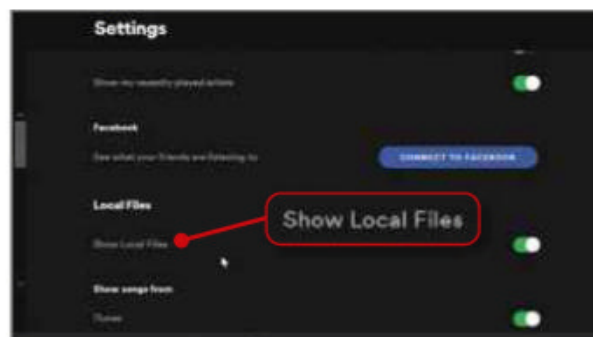
Public folders offer an easy way for members of your household to share files

Play locally stored music on your phone

Spotify ([spotify.com](https://www.spotify.com)) provides access to millions of songs, but you can also use it to listen to tracks stored on your computer that aren't available on the streaming service. You will need the Spotify app on your desktop, and the app on your iPhone or Android device.

In the desktop app, go to Menu, Edit, Preferences. Scroll down, enable Show Local Files and click 'Add a Source', then browse to the folder where you save your songs. You'll be able to play this content in Your Library through Local Files. Next, launch Spotify on your phone, making sure you're signed into the same account and are on the same wireless network, and go to Your Library, Playlists. Enable the Downloads option to be able to access your songs on your phone when you're offline.

To find out how to stream music and video over your network using VLC, see our Mini Workshop on page 42.



Spotify lets you stream files stored on your PC to your phone over Wi-Fi

Add a NAS or external hard drive

NAS (Network Attached Storage) is a system made up of one or more hard drives that acts as a central repository for all your files, such as photos, videos, music and backups. You can buy ready-made NAS devices that attach to your Wi-Fi network, or create your own using a free program such as FreeNAS ([web.freenas.org](https://www.freenas.org)). A ready-made cloud-storage solution, such as Western Digital My Cloud (bit.ly/3nLG6sJ), is a convenient option, and costs from

£123.99 for a 2TB drive.

Alternatively, if your router has a USB port (cheaper and ISP-supplied routers usually don't, unfortunately), you can connect a USB drive to it and access your files over your home network.

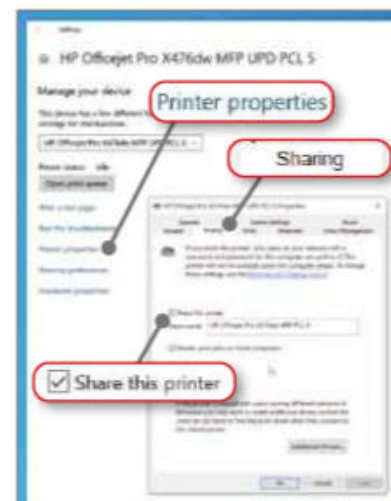


Attach a NAS to your Wi-Fi network to store and access terabytes of files

Share your printer across devices

If you have one printer, but more than one PC – a desktop and a laptop, for example – it's worth setting things up so they can both print to the same device. If you have a wireless printer, you can just connect to it over Wi-Fi, but otherwise you can share it over your network using Windows 10.

To share the printer, go to Settings, Devices, 'Printers & scanners'. Choose the printer to share, then select Manage, 'Printer properties' and click the Sharing tab. Tick 'Share this printer' and change the device name, if required. Once shared, you can connect to it from another computer through Settings, Devices, 'Printers & scanners'. Under 'Add printers & scanners', click 'Add a printer or scanner'. Select your printer and click Add Device.

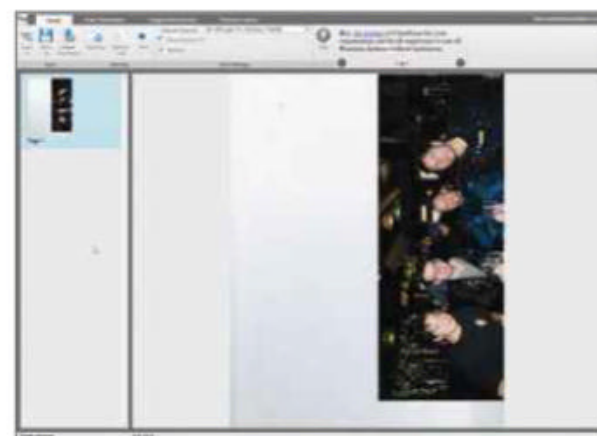


Share your printer over your Wi-Fi network to print from any PC

Share your scanner using CloudScan

To share your scanner with other computers on your network, download and install the SharedScanner app from www.scanworkssoftware.com on the PC that your scanner is connected to. Launch the program and the WebScan client will open and should detect and show your scanner. You can test it's working by clicking the Scan button.

To share the scanner, click the Settings button on your main PC and make a note of the IP address. Open your browser on another computer, go to bit.ly/orVviF and enter the IP address of your main computer. The web app should connect to it and allow you to perform a scan from there.



CloudScan lets you share your scanner between computers over your network

EXPAND YOUR NETWORK

Switch to a mesh router

A mesh router system is the best solution for weak Wi-Fi and dead spots around your home. It's a modular Wi-Fi system that uses a number of access points working together to deliver reliable overall coverage. You only have a single network name and password to worry about and, once all the units are set up and connected, the system will seamlessly switch you to the nearest node as you move around the house.

Mesh networks are more expensive than traditional range extenders, but they work exceptionally well and you can add as many nodes as required. Google recently upgraded its mesh solution, turning the Nest Wifi access points into Google Assistant smart speakers. The router will set you back £119 from bit.ly/3JTF5MY, with each additional Wi-Fi point costing £129. You can pick up a set containing a router and one access point for £199.



Boost the speed and reach of your Wi-Fi by upgrading to a mesh system

Turn your PC into a Wi-Fi hotspot

Connectify Hotspot (connectify.me) is a virtual software router that lets you wirelessly share your internet connection with friends, co-workers and mobile devices. Setting it up is very straightforward – just give the new network a name, enter a password and choose the connection you want to share. You can turn a wired connection into Wi-Fi or share an existing wireless network, and the software also comes with a universal ad blocker.

If you need additional features, there are Pro and Max versions of Connectify Hotspot available, for £25.98 and £39.98 respectively.



Connectify Hotspot lets you set up a virtual network to share with other people

Add a second router to your network

One way to improve your home's wireless signal is to add a second router to your setup. If you have an old router

that you no longer use, you can give it a new role on your network. There are two options available to you: either connect two routers together using Ethernet and access either one (we have Google Wifi attached to a Virgin Media Super Hub and can connect to either); or use the older device as a range extender for the main router.

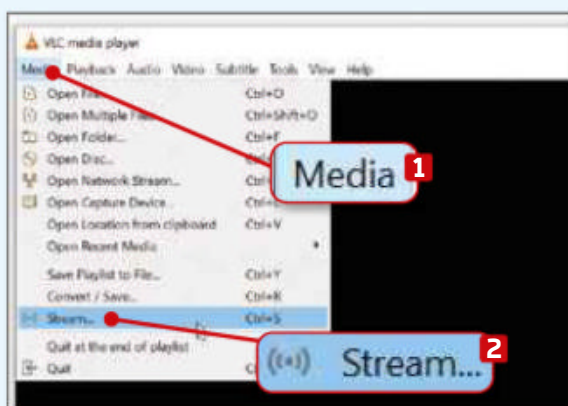
To check whether your router offers this as an option, log into its settings page and see if you can find a reference to it. If it's not there, you might want to consider replacing the router's firmware (the software written to the ROM – where it stays “firmly” in place) with DD-WRT (dd-wrt.com) to add the required functionality. To replace the firmware, you need to ‘flash’ the ROM – so-called because the ROM is usually flash memory. You should be able to find a guide for doing this with your router at bit.ly/2Sauraw.

Replace your router's antennas

Many modern routers have adjustable external antennas and directing them into the centre of the room, away from external walls, can improve your wireless signal. But did you know that these antennas can be unscrewed and replaced with better ones? Check that the “gain” of any replacement antenna is higher than the original – ideally, at least 9 dBi (decibel isotropic).

If your router has an internal antenna, you may be able to boost it with an external “high-gain” one to improve the

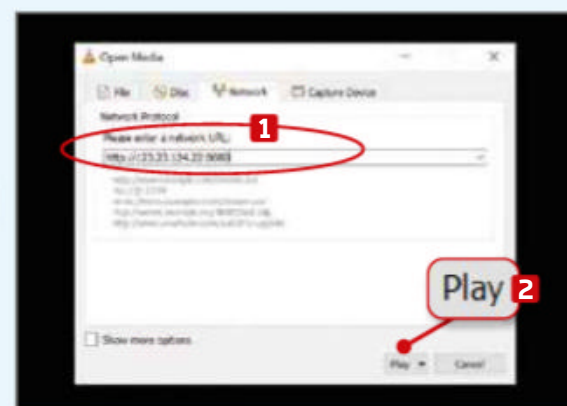
MINI WORKSHOP | Stream media over a network using VLC



1 VLC Media Player (www.videolan.org) is packed with features, and can even stream your music and videos over a local network (or the internet, using the web interface). To start broadcasting your content, click Media **1** in the menu bar and select Stream... **2** The Open Media window will launch.



2 To stream a video from the desktop, select the File tab, click Add and navigate to the video you want to share. Click Stream to open the wizard. Click Next and choose HTTP in the drop-down box, **1** then click Add. **2** You can customise the port and path, but the defaults should be fine. Click Next twice, then click Stream.



3 On the other PC, launch VLC and go to Media, Open Network Stream. Enter `http://ipaddress:8080` (substituting 'ipaddress' for the other computer's actual IP address) **1** and click Play **2** to start the stream. You'll need to make sure the Windows firewall on either computer doesn't block the broadcast.



Upgrade the antennas on your router to expand the range of your network

range. Check the router's manual or the manufacturer's website.

Add a Powerline adapter or HomePlug

Powerline or HomePlug networks use your property's electrical wiring to transmit data. You plug the adapters into your home's power supply, then connect your devices to the adapters. This is possible because the wiring is capable of supporting a variety of frequencies. The speeds achieved aren't far off those you get from an Ethernet connection, and there are no trailing wires to worry about. Thick walls, floors or heavy furniture won't degrade your signal, either, which is a problem you often encounter with Wi-Fi.

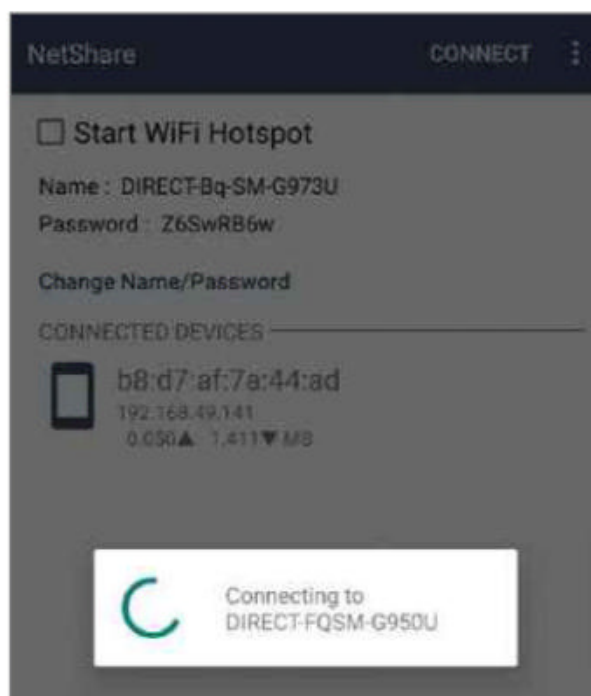
These adapters aren't especially cheap, but you get what you pay for, and these days they support Wi-Fi, too. The Devolo Magic 2 WiFi Next (www.devolo.co.uk) starter kit gives you two adapters for £169.99 and promises speeds of up to 2Gbps. The units come with two Gigabit LAN ports and deliver mesh Wi-Fi as well, so you're guaranteed a solid connection wherever you are in the house.



Powerline adapters such as the Devolo Magic 2 offer superior internet speeds

Use a smartphone as a Wi-Fi extender

If you have an old smartphone going spare, you can use it to boost your home's wireless signal. Download



Boost your Wi-Fi network using an old smartphone and the NetShare app

'NetShare - no-root-tethering' for Android (bit.ly/2GS30hi) and follow the setup instructions. The free version of the app has some time restrictions, but you can remove these for £7.49 or switch to the Pro version for £8.49, which also unlocks additional features, such as the ability to filter device traffic.

Add a kettle to your Wi-Fi

There are all kinds of different internet-enabled devices you can connect to your network, including smart thermostats, lightbulbs, fridges and more. The AppKettle, as you can guess from its name, is a kettle that you control with an app. If you're looking for ways to modernise and

automate the tea-making process, this kettle lets you use your phone or an Alexa-enabled device such as the Amazon Echo to turn it on and have water boil at any temperature between 60-100°C.

The app can tell you how much water is in the kettle and the number of drinks you can make, as well as how long it will take to boil and the amount of energy it will consume doing so. It can keep the water warm for up to 30 minutes, too. The one thing it can't do is fill itself up. You can buy the AppKettle from www.myappkettle.com for £99.99.



With an AppKettle, you can boil the water for your tea via an app on your phone

WIRED VS WIRELESS

Before the advent of home Wi-Fi, accessing the internet required a wired connection, which meant running an Ethernet cable from your modem to your computer. Wi-Fi is a much tidier solution that lets you connect all manner of 'smart' devices to the internet, including mobile phones and digital assistants, without trailing cables all over your home. However, it's worth noting that Ethernet delivers significantly faster speeds, so it's worth using it for devices that need the best possible connection, such as streaming boxes, games consoles and gaming PCs. Ethernet can also transfer files between devices on your network much faster than Wi-Fi.

That said, you'll only notice a significant difference if you have a strong internet connection. 802.11ac routers deliver real-world speeds of around 100Mbps, so if your internet is slower than that, you probably won't get much benefit from a wired connection (though it will be more stable).

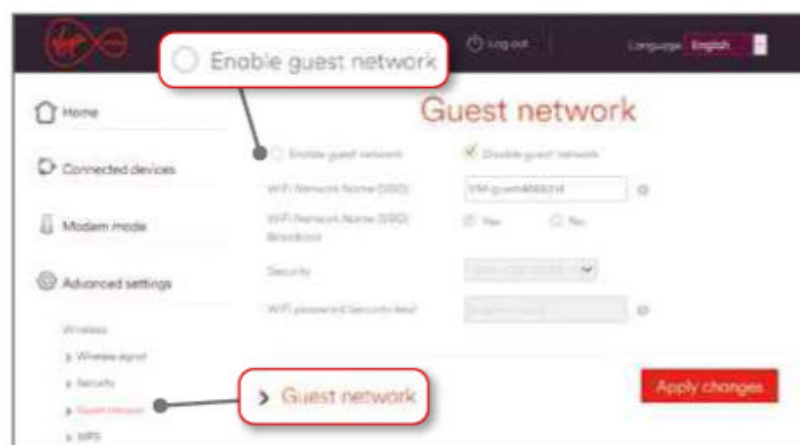


PROTECT YOUR NETWORK

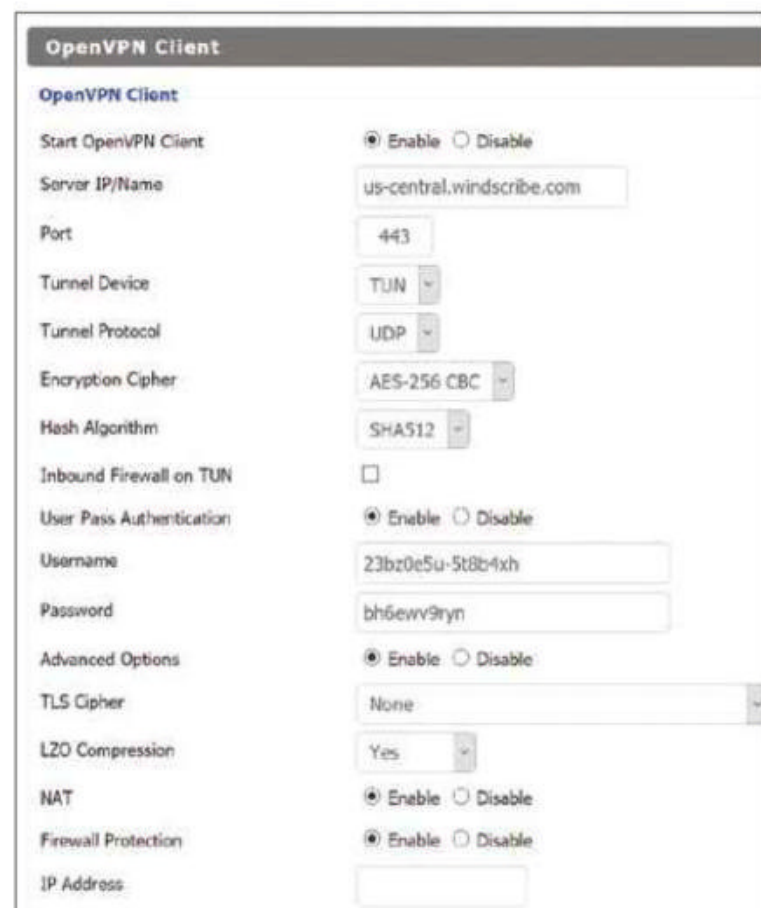
Install a VPN on your router

A VPN (virtual private network) disguises the location you're browsing from, so it's a great way to protect your privacy on the web. However, you need to install it on every device you use – unless, that is, you install it on your router. To do this, you either need a router with a built-in VPN client mode, or you'll need to replace your router's firmware with DD-WRT (as we discussed on page 42, 'Add a second router to your network') to get VPN support.

Most good paid-for VPNs, such as NordVPN (nordvpn.com), can be installed on a router. The process is a little complicated, but you should find instructions for how to do this on your VPN's support pages. We also covered this topic in our Weekend Project back in issue 498 (bit.ly/webuser498).



Set up a guest network on your router to grant visitors access to your Wi-Fi



Installing a VPN on your router lets you browse anonymously from any device

Update your router's firmware

Router developers roll out new firmware updates from time to time, introducing new features and fixing security problems. Unlike replacing your firmware with DD-WRT, which isn't entirely without risk, updating the firmware is pretty straightforward, and some routers even update themselves automatically in the background. You can check to see if an update is available through your router's settings page. Log in as usual, then check for an upgrade option.

Set up a guest network

Sharing your Wi-Fi password with a visitor to your home – whether a friend, neighbour

or tradesperson – could put your network at risk. Unless you change your password regularly, anyone who knows it can access your internet when in range. Most routers give you the option to create 'guest networks' on either the 2.4GHz or 5GHz bands. This means you can share your internet without giving full access to your network.

Look for the option to create a guest network in your router settings. When setting it up, you may have the option to allow or deny specific devices access to the network and also specify a security type.

Monitor who's using your Wi-Fi

Provided your wireless connection is protected with high-grade encryption and a strong password, no one should be able to connect to your network without permission. However, there's still a risk that someone you've given the login to in the past – such as a friend or neighbour – could be leeching off your signal. There are a number of ways you can check who is connected, including through your router's settings page. If you spot a device you don't recognise, you can remove it from your network.

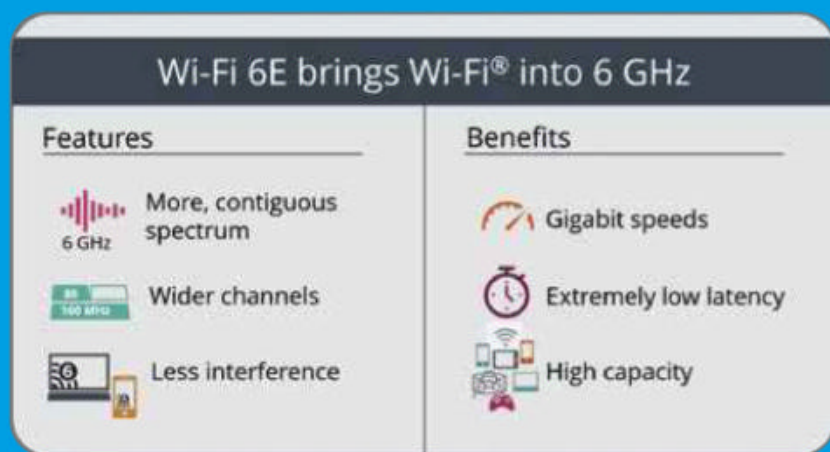
Wi-Fi Network Monitor 6 (bit.ly/33RU7wU) can remotely scan a wireless



Use Network Monitor to ensure unauthorised people aren't on your Wi-Fi

HOW MANY WI-FI DEVICES?

According to a recent study from Aviva (bit.ly/3jUwzxf), the average UK household now has 10.3 internet-enabled devices, which is a 26% increase since 2017 (homes with three or more children have 15.4 internet-enabled items). The more devices you have on a Wi-Fi network, the greater the impact on performance, although you won't need to fight for a connection because routers can support up to 250 connected devices (theoretically, at least). Your router's settings may allow you to prioritise important devices to ensure quality doesn't suffer where it's most needed.



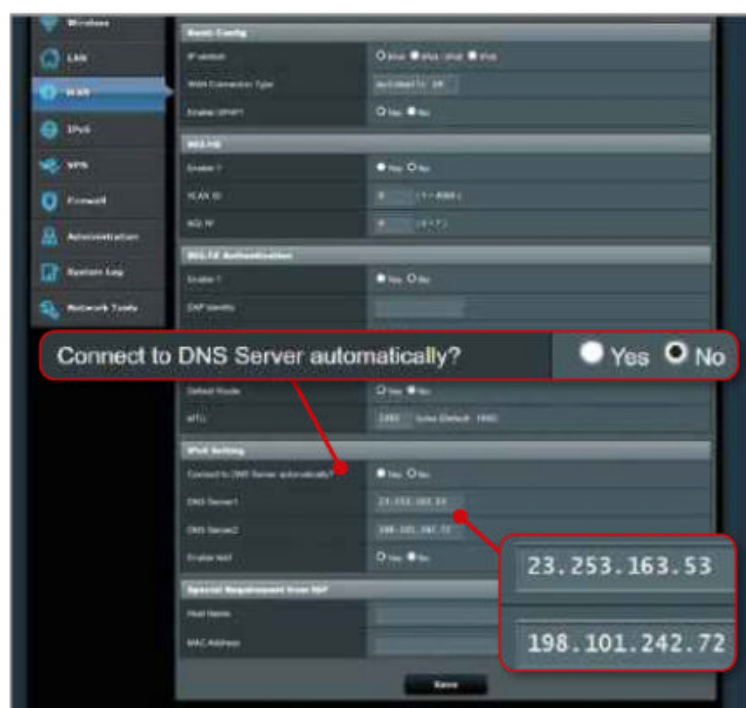
Wi-Fi 6 (802.11ax) routers offer the next generation of Wi-Fi and deliver higher data rates and increased capacity, which solves the potential problem of having too many devices connected simultaneously.

network and discover all the devices connected to it. It automatically scans your system, though there's an optional manual mode, too.

Block ads via your router

You can easily block adverts on your PC, smartphone and tablet by installing an ad blocker, such as Adblock Plus (adblockplus.org). However, as with a VPN, you need to install the blocker on each of your devices. A better solution is to block ads at the router level because this will stop them even reaching your device.

To do this, simply switch from your current DNS (Domain Name System) to Alternate DNS (alternate-dns.com), which blocks ads by using an updated database of known ad-serving domain names. To make the switch, log into your router settings, find the DNS and untick 'Connect to DNS Server automatically' (or similar). Change the DNS to the following server addresses:



Switch to Alternate DNS to block ads on all devices connected to your network



Protect all devices on your Wi-Fi network by investing in a Bitdefender Box

Primary: 23.253.163.53
Secondary: 198.101.242.72

Secure your devices with a Bitdefender Box

Bitdefender has some of the best antivirus solutions around, including products such as Bitdefender Total Security, which can protect either five or 10 devices on your network. The company also sells Bitdefender Box (www.bitdefender.co.uk/box), which connects to your router via an Ethernet cable.

The device is controlled via a smartphone app and protects all connected devices. It costs £129.99 and comes with a year's subscription to Bitdefender Total Security.

Protect your network with Firewalla

If we told you of a device that connects to your router and monitors all network traffic, blocks anything dangerous and reports back via an app, you'd probably imagine something the size of the Bitdefender Box (see previous tip). Firewalla (firewalla.com), however, is tiny, measuring just 4cm square and 3cm deep – enough space to include a micro-USB socket and microSD card on the front, along with a USB-A and Ethernet port on the rear.

There are two versions of Firewalla available: Red device costs \$109 (about £83) and is for home users with internet speeds up to 100Mbps; while Blue costs \$179 (about £136) and is for heavier users with speeds up to 500Mbps (it also includes country-level blocking and a VPN). ■



Firewalla is a tiny device that offers powerful protection for your home network

NEXT ISSUE

on sale Wednesday 11 November 2020

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Best free docks for Windows



Add-on docks for Windows provide a handy toolbar of icons and shortcuts to group and launch your favourite programs. **Andy Shaw** picks the best of the bunch

Winstep Nexus | bit.ly/nexus513 | ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★ PERFORMANCE ★★★★★ EASE OF USE ★★★★★

**WebUser
GOLD
AWARD**

What we liked:

You'd be forgiven for dismissing Winstep Nexus as an outdated remnant of Windows 7 when you first launch it. But don't be put off by the widgets and the transparent Aero theme, because you can easily change almost everything about Nexus's appearance to give it a flatter look that's better suited to Windows 10.

The software places a toolbar, aligned centrally, across the top of the screen. This houses a handful of icons offering shortcuts to the Start menu and Recycle Bin, along with various widgets such as a clock, a weather forecast, and CPU and RAM meters.

The dock can be placed anywhere on the screen, either hugging one of the edges or, if you prefer, floating and available for dragging around with your mouse, so you can position it wherever you like.

Click the Nexus button and you can configure the dock to suit your preferences. As well as changing its appearance, Nexus can be set to replace the taskbar, automatically displaying icons for the programs you're currently running and even adding the icons from the system tray.



We were impressed with the level of customisation available, from the size of the icons to the way the dock is displayed. Nexus also offers a wealth of predesigned themes, which you can further tweak to suit your preferences, and the option to cluster several widgets together to save space.

There's little that the software can't do, or be configured to do from its settings, and it's this powerful versatility that wins Nexus our Gold Award.

How it can be improved:

There are a few free widgets included but most of them are already installed. You can click a button to get more in the settings but this takes you to the

paid-for Pro version, which costs £15. This also buys you more themes, though there are plenty in the free version.

OUR VERDICT

A good dock should be easy to control and configure – you want just the right collection of shortcuts to your most used items, neatly arranged and ready to launch. Winstep Nexus provides this with flair and flexibility. Programs can be dragged into place from desktop shortcuts and you can configure it to look and work in exactly the way you want it to.

RocketDock | punklabs.com | ★★★★★☆
 FEATURES ★★★★★☆ PERFORMANCE ★★★★★☆ EASE OF USE ★★★★★☆

WebUser
SILVER
AWARD

What we liked:

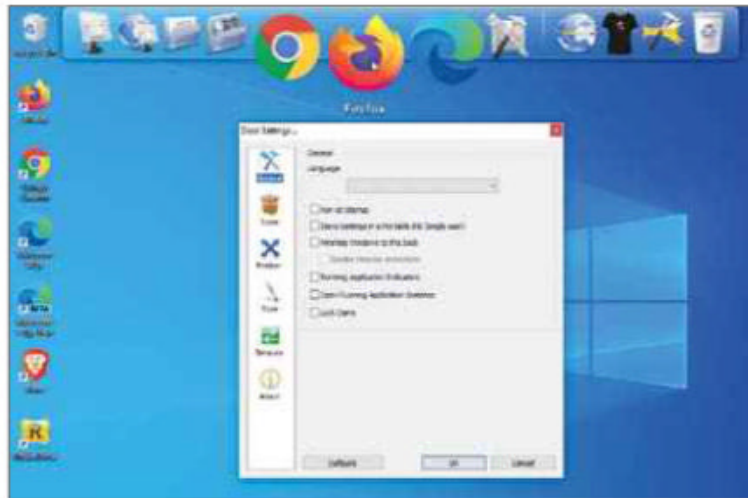
RocketDock installs at the top of your screen, where hovering over an icon enlarges it,

so it looks like it's leaping out of the dock, ready for action. You can change its appearance by applying different themes, but it's not as flexible as Winstep Nexus.

Drag a shortcut to the dock to add its icon, or remove it by dragging it off the dock again (it vanishes in a little puff of smoke). This works well with program icons, such as desktop shortcuts you've already made, but isn't as intuitive with built-in Windows apps, such as the Settings app. To get around this, you can add Settings to the dock in the same way as you'd create a desktop shortcut. However, this replaces the flat Windows 10 icon with a less attractive alternative that can't be customised as easily as with Winstep Nexus.

How it can be improved:

Even RocketDock's developer seems



surprised that it's still popular, stating on its website that it's "a bit outdated, but people still love it". We take this as a sign that the program is unlikely to be updated any time soon.

OUR VERDICT

RocketDock is a useful way to gather program icons into a handy toolbar, and it does the job well. However, its own icons are horribly old-fashioned, and it doesn't offer the level of customisation and control you get from Winstep Nexus.

TaskbarX | chrisandriessen.nl/taskbarx | ★★★★★☆
 FEATURES ★★★★★☆ PERFORMANCE ★★★★★☆ EASE OF USE ★★★★★☆

WebUser
BRONZE
AWARD

What we liked:

TaskbarX isn't really a dock – it's a taskbar tweaker with some tools to make your existing Windows 10 taskbar

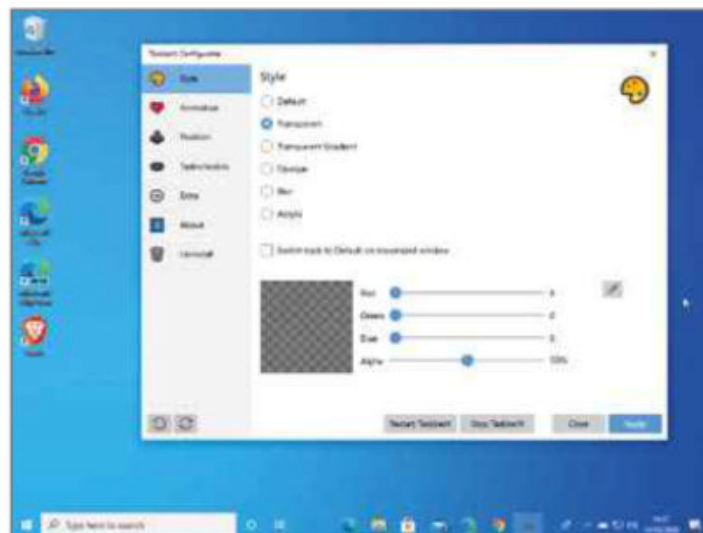
look more like a dock. It's ideal if you just want to make a few subtle, minimalist changes.

We tested the free portable version of TaskbarX, but you can also download and install it from the Windows Store for 89p, which then updates automatically.

The simple interface lets you perform some clever tweaks, such as making the taskbar transparent to give your icons the appearance of a floating dock and moving elements of the taskbar around multiple screens, if you use more than one monitor.

How it can be improved:

TaskbarX is all about appearances. It's simple and effective, but doesn't do much more than change where



the elements are positioned.

OUR VERDICT

If you're not bothered about the widgets and other elements of a proper dock, TaskbarX may be all you need. It lets you perform various tweaks to the existing Windows taskbar, such as centering icons and making the background transparent, to give it a dock-like look.

BEST OF THE REST

Appetizer

appetizer.cozic.net

Running Appetizer provides you with a small box containing shortcuts to launch programs, files and anything else you can create an icon for. It looks a bit dated, with tiny control buttons and curved corners, and the few skins available only change the colour of the interface. We also found the portable version of the software slow, with a significant lag between clicking an icon and seeing the results.



ObjectDock

bit.ly/objdoc513

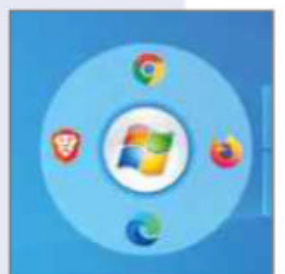
Given the £5 charge, we were expecting ObjectDock to stand head and shoulders above its free cousins. It has similar looks and configuration options to our Gold Award winner but, sadly, none of the standout features. There's a free 30-day trial but, even so, we think you'll be more content with Winstep Nexus. What's more, its weather app failed to provide us with a local weather forecast, which Nexus manages without even asking where you are.



Circle Dock

circledock.wikidot.com

Judging by its website, Circle Dock was last updated in 2011, so we weren't particularly shocked that it didn't work very well with our Windows 10 PC and kept disappearing. The concept is nice enough, defaulting to a circular dock that you drag your icons to, but we couldn't keep it running for long enough to be of use.



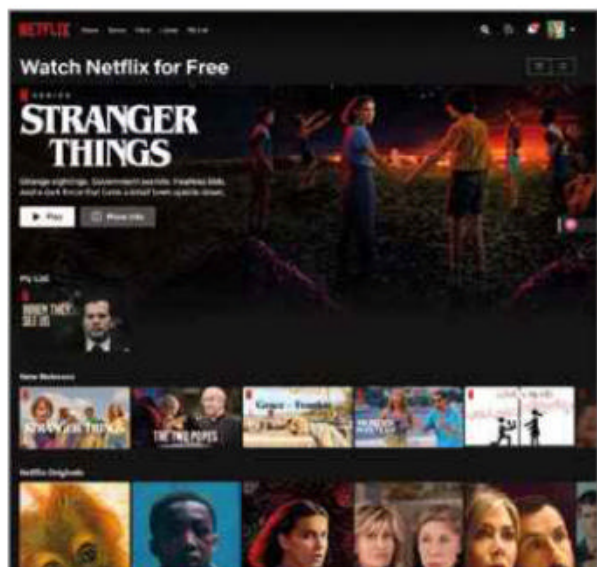
Get free content from STREAMING SERVICES

Netflix is the latest subscription service to offer free content to non-subscribers. **Jane Hoskyn** reveals what else you can stream for free

N Watch Netflix Originals for free

Netflix has launched the streaming equivalent of a free test drive, with the first episodes of popular TV series *Stranger Things*, *Our Planet* and *When They See Us* among the shows you can now watch on-demand for free at www.netflix.com/watch-free. The gratis collection also includes Netflix Original films *Bird Box* and *The Two Popes*.

It doesn't matter where in the world you are, or whether you've ever signed up for a Netflix subscription. The one proviso is that the freebies are only available to watch in your browser, and not via the Netflix app for mobile or TV.



Netflix now lets you watch some of its greatest hits for free



Bookmark BT Sport's 'free to air' player

Sky, BT and Amazon all streamed



Watch women's international football for free via BT's site, app and YouTube channel

Premier League and international football for free over the summer, but they've since blown the whistle on the freebies. In October, Sky and BT even slapped an extra charge of £14.95 per game to stream Premier League footy (bit.ly/2GNmxiP).

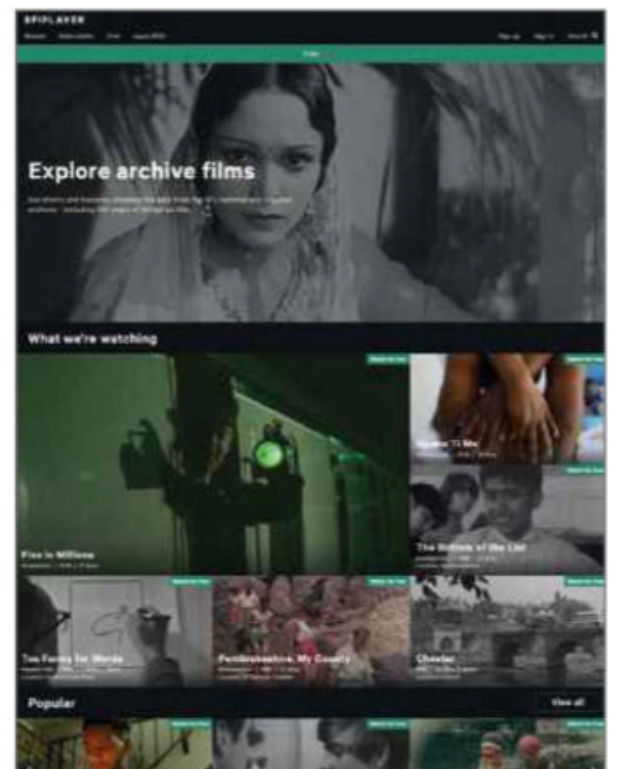
There are still free streams to be found, though. BT Sport's website has a video player that shows certain live games with no charge or login, at bit.ly/2SGAW2U, as well as at youtube.com/btsport and in the BT Sport app (bit.ly/3deU1Tq). BT doesn't give much notice of what it's showing for free, but it will include certain games in the 2020/21 women's international football season, and the Champions League and Europa League finals.

BT subscribers should also check the BT Player (www.player.bt.com) for free on-demand episodes from channels such as AMC, which recently offered the first half of *The Walking Dead* Season 10 for free.

BFI Stream Britain's history for free via BFI Player

The British Film Institute's BFI Player costs £4.99 per month for access to hundreds of films, and also offers Amazon Prime-style rentals. However, it's keen to woo potential customers with a selection of freebies.

At player.bfi.org.uk/free, you'll find archive documentaries about British life (from the birth of the NHS to the jazz musicians of Harlow); training films and ads starring the likes of Hugh Laurie and Peter Cook; and oodles of intriguing short films, all free and on-demand (but currently for UK viewers only).



Stream new films, old movies and British documentaries for free via the BFI Player

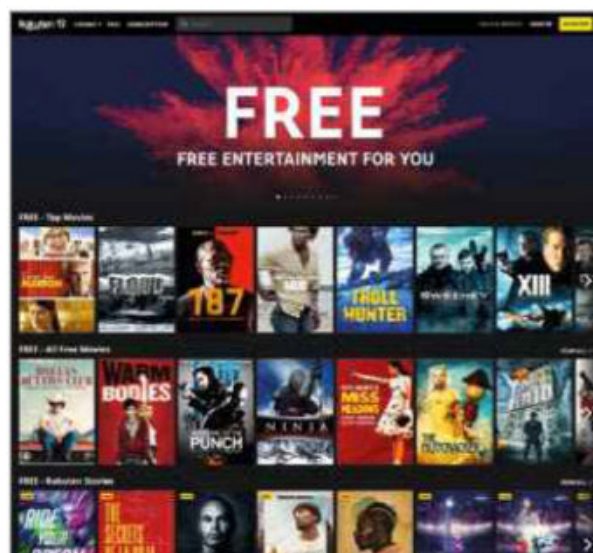
Get free content from streaming services

20 games are only “free” if you pay for Amazon Prime.

Watch free films and shows on Rakuten TV

Rakuten TV (rakuten.tv/uk), like Prime Video, provides films, TV shows and add-on channels (including StarzPlay) for a basic monthly subscription of £4.99. But unlike Amazon, it has a generous free selection. Click Free to watch films including *Muriel's Wedding* and *Dallas Buyers' Club*, plus original sport documentaries about FC Barcelona, Lionel Messi and more.

You need to register and put up with ads in return for your freebies, but you don't have to submit payment details. Rakuten is now also trialling a 'Rakuten TV Free' app for smart TVs, including newer Samsung and LG models.

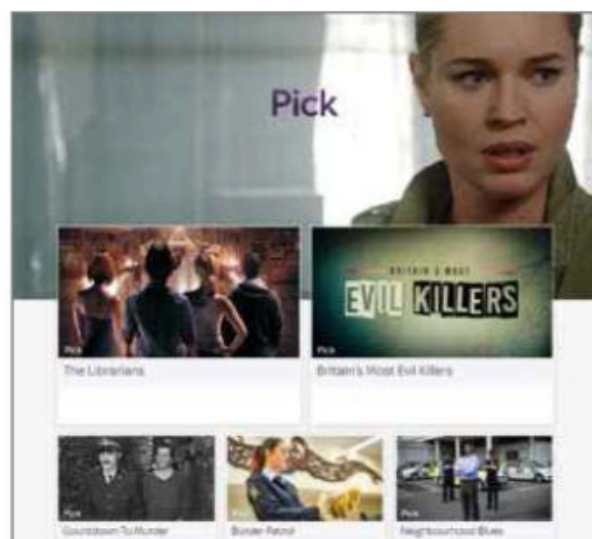


Stream oodles of Hollywood films for free via Rakuten, without subscribing

Discover Sky's hidden free channel

Sky's free channel Pick TV (sky.com/watch/channel/pick) became a lockdown hero in the summer, when it hosted 25 free Premier League games. And there's more than footy: *Merlin*, *Border Patrol* and *Britain's Most Evil Killers* are among its current shows.

Pick TV doesn't have its own website or app – officially, you need to watch it via Freesat (where it's channel 147) or Freeview (11), or via the subscription



Pick TV – formerly Sky 3 – is completely free to watch

services Now TV and Sky Go.

Sky Arts (sky.com/watch/channel/sky-arts) is also now free to watch, but only via Freesat, Freeview or Sky Go.

Live-stream Freeview channels with TVPlayer

TVPlayer lets you stream dozens of TV channels live and on-demand via its app and website (tvplayer.com/uk). A monthly £6.99 subscription unlocks all channels, but there are numerous free-to-air channels available, including Film4, Food Network and Paramount Network. Sky's free channels Pick and Arts aren't included, and for BBC content you're now redirected to the iPlayer. Browse the full list of TVPlayer's free channels at bit.ly/2GHHZFT.

You have to create an account to watch the free streams, but don't click Sign Up Now or you'll be sucked into a paid subscription. Instead, click a free channel's thumbnail, its player and then Sign Up For TVPlayer. Enter your email address and a password, then ignore the Pick Your Plan page and click Watch Live. Hovering over the player brings up controls, including full-screen view.



Get Freeview channels in your browser with TVPlayer

Watch live channels for free with Plex

Paying users of Plex (£3.99 per month, plex.tv/plex-pass) can juggle multiple streaming services and their own video files in one library (app.plex.tv/desktop). But Plex has now decided to welcome free users, too. It recently made more than 80 live TV channels free to stream, along with an on-demand library of free shows, films and podcasts.



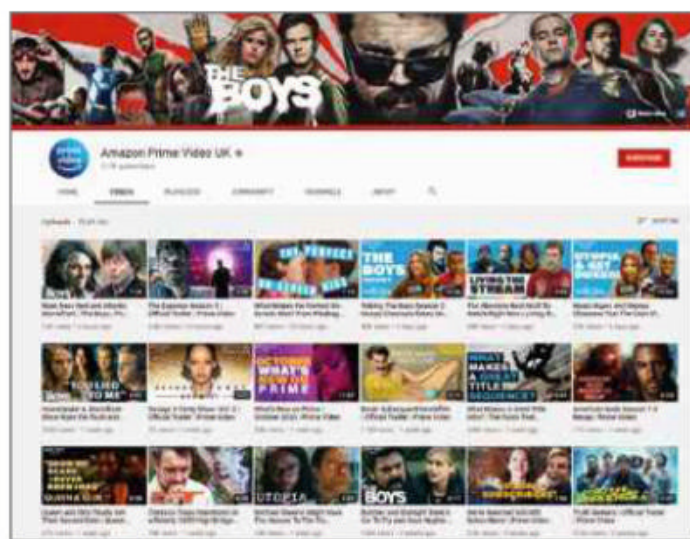
Media streaming tool Plex offers free live channels and a few on-demand classics

Watch free highlights of Prime Video shows

Amazon Prime Video's website isn't the best place to find free content – it won't even let you watch trailers unless you log into Amazon and put up with messages urging you to upgrade to Prime. But its YouTube channel is another matter.

At youtube.com/PrimeVideoUK, you'll find a fabulous collection of clips from hit shows such as *The Boys*, *Good Omens*, *The Grand Tour* and *Hanna*, completely free to watch, with no login required. The collection also includes exclusive mini-documentaries ('What Makes the Perfect On-Screen Kiss?'), round-ups ('What's New on Prime' each month), behind-the-scenes films and a feast of trailers.

Amazon won't say whether it plans to show any of its 2020/21 Premier League games for free. At present, it seems its



Prime Video's YouTube channel hosts a collection of clips, round-ups and extras

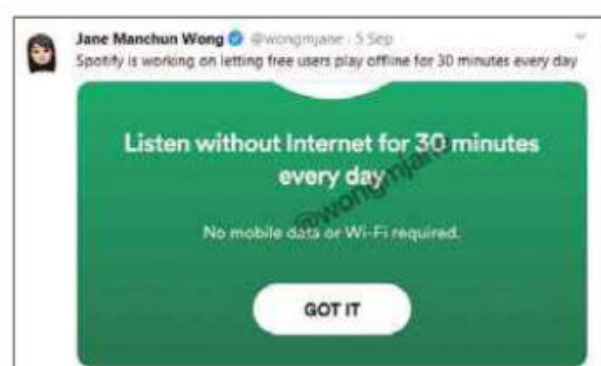
Get free content from streaming services

The channels included in its new Free section (plex.tv/watch-free) are quite niche – from Game Show Central to the combatively named Channel Fight – while on-demand freebies are mostly archive titles such as *Zulu*, *Hamish Macbeth* and *The Red Balloon*. Although you have to create an account to watch, there's no longer a requirement to submit payment details.

Download music with Spotify Free

One of the main attraction of Spotify Premium (£9.99 per month, spotify.com) is that it lets you download music for playing offline. The good news is that downloads may not be a Premium-only provision for much longer. According to an engineer who's correctly predicted Spotify updates before, Spotify Free users may soon get 30 minutes of offline listening per day (bit.ly/2GIH7RC).

Meanwhile there's still plenty you can do without upgrading. Spotify Free users can download podcasts via the app (spoti.fi/34IFXNR) and the service has also launched a free keep-fit website with streamed music – you don't even need a Spotify Free account to use it. Go to pumped.byspotify.com, choose your options, then click 'Continue without logging in' under 'Have an account?'.

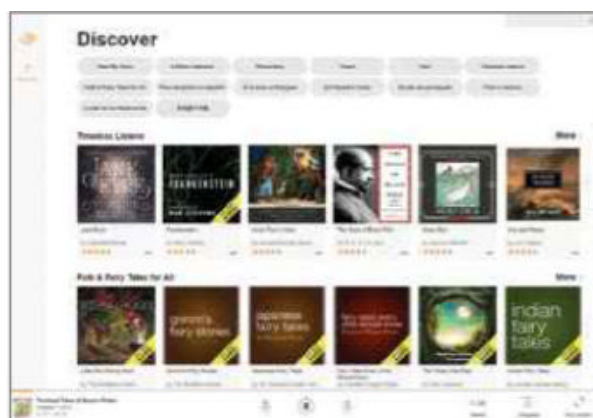


Engineer Jane Wong spotted a Spotify test that could bring free downloads for all

Stream Audible audiobooks for free

Six months after Amazon's audiobooks app Audible launched its selection of free books for lockdown, the collection is still going strong at stories.audible.com/discovery. The titles consists mostly of children's books, but there are some wonderful classics, story collections and foreign-language books, too. They're free to stream in your browser (mobile browsers included), so you don't need the Audible app.

The app offers podcasts for free, but only to members paying £7.99 per monthly audiobook (or members still in the 30-day free trial period, www.audible.co.uk). Unlike Spotify, Audible doesn't have a free membership plan.



Listen to Audible's top-notch classic audiobooks for free in your browser

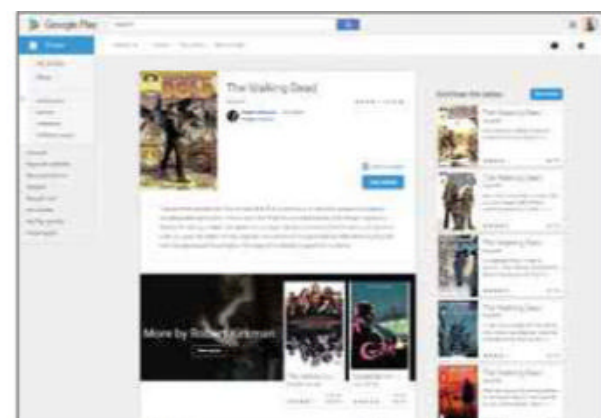
Read Kindle, Apple and Google ebooks for free



Amazon's Kindle Unlimited costs £7.99 per month for access to more than 1 million ebooks to read on your Kindle or via the Kindle app (www.amazon.co.uk/ku). However, it also has a collection of 300 free public-domain books that you can download without having to subscribe. You will still need an Amazon account, though. Browse the freebies at amzn.to/3fus9uT.



The Google Play Store's Books section also has several gratis goodies and, among the bodice-rippers and erotica, you'll find gems such as the



Google's free ebooks can be hard to find, but some are well worth tracking down

first issue of Robert Kirkman's original *The Walking Dead* comic (bit.ly/3lwK0np). Google makes you scroll through rows of paid-for ebook categories before revealing this free content, so here are a few shortcuts: 'Top free ebooks' (bit.ly/3nmWTIF), 'Start a new ebook series for free' (bit.ly/30Gs2Xo) and 'Free ebooks for kids' (bit.ly/36F1g5M), plus 'Free audiobooks' (bit.ly/2SyV4UG).

You can effectively turn any ebook into an audiobook by telling Google Assistant: "OK Google, read my book".

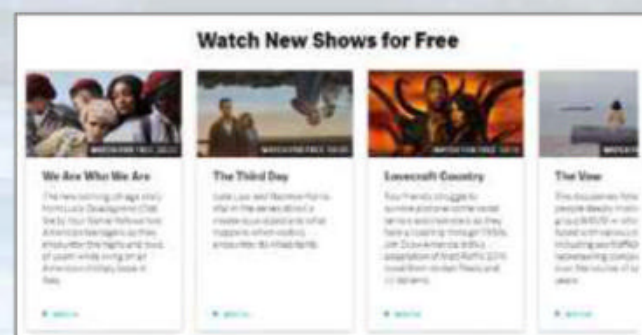


Apple's Books app (iOS, apple.com/uk/apple-books) has a Free Books section in its Book Store, offering ebooks and audiobooks. ■

STREAM FREE US CONTENT WITH A VPN

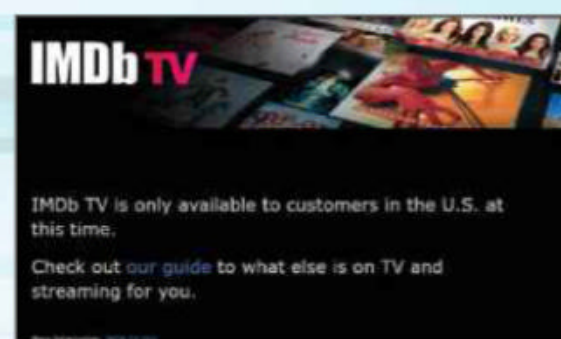
US viewers get all the best freebies. You could, in theory, access US-only streams by using a VPN to spoof your location, such as Web User favourite Windscribe (windscribe.com). The free version gives you 10GB of data per month and includes servers based in America. Here are some of the treats you can enjoy:

- **YOUTUBE ORIGINALS:** YouTube has refused to make its Originals – which include *Cobra Kai*, now a hit on Netflix – free outside the US. In the UK, you can only watch them with YouTube Premium (£11.99 per month, youtube.com/premium).
- **EPIX:** Streaming service EPIX (epix.com) costs \$5.99 (£5) per month to watch films, shows and originals via its own app, but it's currently free via the Apple TV app (iOS, Roku, smart TVs) – that is, if you're in the US.
- **HBO WATCH FREE:** An episode of HBO's *Watchmen* episode was available free in the UK in June, but it was the exception that proves HBO's US-only rule. Current freebies at hbo.com/watch-free-episodes include



Lovecraft Country, *His Dark Materials* and the first episode of *Succession* – but they won't play outside the US.

• **IMDB TV:** The Internet Movie Database's free streaming TV service (imdb.com/tv) comprises several channels, including one devoted to *The Walking Dead*, but it's only available in the US. You could try breaking the geoblock with a VPN, or wait (possibly in vain) for its UK arrival.



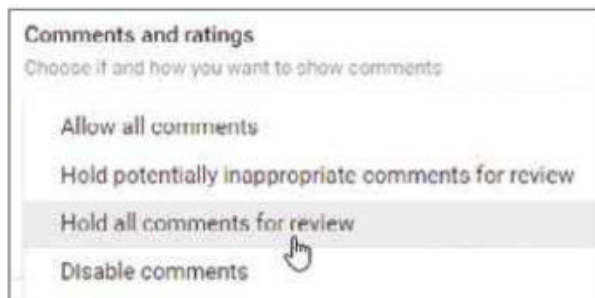
Block comments on websites

Tired of unwanted feedback on your online posts? **Robert Irvine** explains how to curb the right to reply



YOUTUBE

Publicly sharing a video on YouTube can be asking for trouble from the site's commenting community, but fortunately it's easy to stem the flow of idiocy. When you upload a video, select More Options at the bottom of the window and scroll down to 'Comments and ratings'. Here, you can choose to hold all comments for review to stop them appearing automatically, hold only those that YouTube's algorithm deems inappropriate or disable them altogether. You can also hide likes and dislikes on the video.



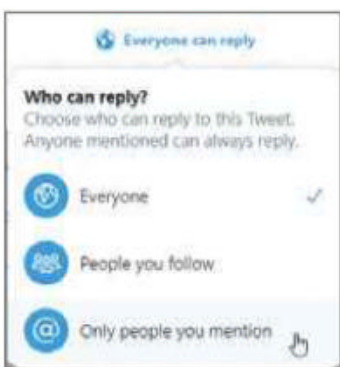
To remove comments from a video you've already uploaded, choose 'Edit video,' then 'More options'. To set your comments preference as the default, open YouTube Studio (studio.youtube.com) and select Settings, 'Upload defaults', 'Advanced settings'.

TWITTER

To stop trolls and time wasters invading your Twitter conversations, you can either make your profile private – go to 'Settings & privacy', 'Privacy and safety' and select 'Protect your Tweets' – or use Twitter's new feature for controlling who can reply.

When you compose a tweet, click or tap the 'Everyone can reply' option at the bottom of the message box and choose either 'People

you follow' or 'Only people you mention' to stop interlopers chipping in. Selecting the second option means that, unless you mention someone in the tweet, all comments are effectively disabled.



These settings work on top of Twitter's blocking and muting options for silencing annoying users.

INSTAGRAM

You can't completely disable replies to your Instagram photos and videos, but you can at least limit who can respond. Open your Instagram profile, tap the menu button in the top-right corner and select Settings, Privacy, then Comments. Tap 'Everyone' next to 'Allow Comments from' to restrict comments on your posts to people you follow, those who follow you or both.

Back on the Comments screen, you can also block comments from specific Instagram users and apply filters to automatically hide offensive comments and those that contain specific words and phrases. To block comments on your Instagram Stories, tap Story on the Privacy screen and select Off under 'Allow message replies'.



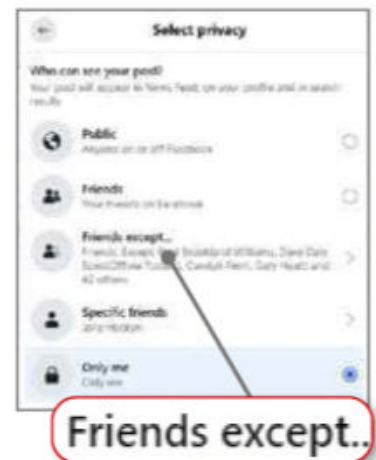
FACEBOOK

Facebook's whole ethos is based on interaction, so unsurprisingly it doesn't let you disable comments. You can, however, limit who sees the content you share, to stop strangers and distant acquaintances chiming in with their

tuppence-worth.

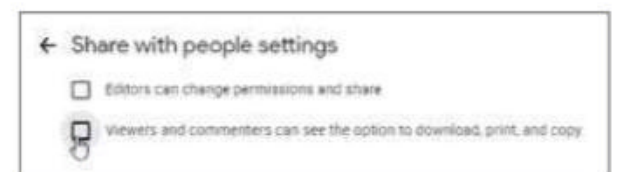
When you create a new post, click or tap the drop-down menu below your name to open the 'Select privacy' box. Here, you can restrict the post's audience to your Facebook friends, specific people or just yourself, or choose 'Friends except' or Custom to stop specific friends viewing your content.

More drastically, you can 'unfriend' or block a person to stop them seeing and commenting on your posts.



GOOGLE DOCS

Commenting on other people's documents is one of Google Docs' key collaboration tools, but you might not always want friends or co-workers jotting their 'thoughts' all over your hard work. To disable comments on a document, click the Share button in the top-right corner, then click the cog icon and untick the options 'Editors can change permissions and share' and 'Viewers and commenters can see the option to download, print, and copy'. Now, when you share the file, no-one will bother you with their 'suggestions'! ■



MAKE THE WEB SHUT UP!

If you often bristle at the inflammatory, offensive and inane comments below online articles, blog posts or videos, you need Shut Up: Comment Blocker (bit.ly/shutup513). This add-on automatically hides comments on sites including YouTube, Mail Online, The Guardian, Facebook and many more, so you'll never even know they're there. If the temptation grows too much, simply click the speech-bubble toolbar button to reveal what the developer calls the "vitriolic, idiotic wasteland" of the comments section. Shut Up is available for Chrome, Firefox, Edge, Opera and Safari, and as an iOS app (bit.ly/shutupapp513).





Practical WebUser

16 pages of workshops, tips, projects and problem solving

Record and share your screen using the new OBS Studio

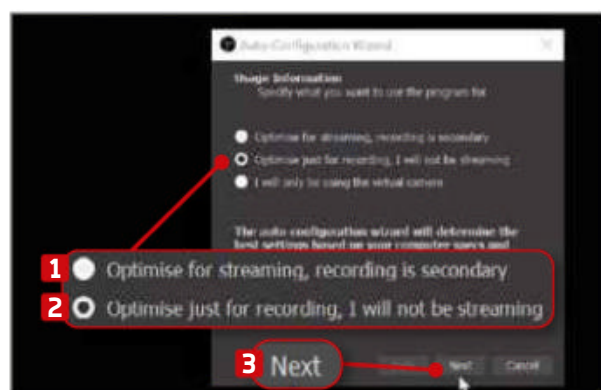
The updated software gains some useful new features and improvements. Here's how to use it

OBS Studio: obsproject.com | 🕒 20 mins | 🖥️ 8, 10 🍏 10.13+ 🐧

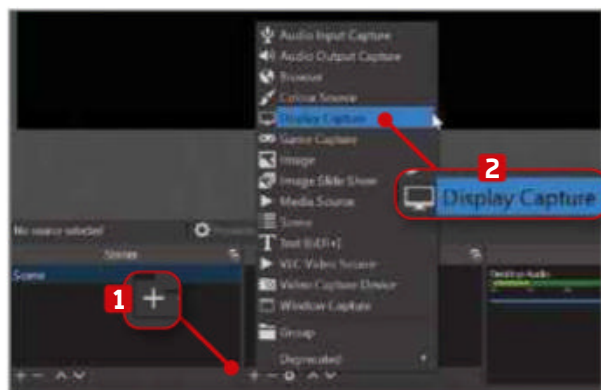
OBS Studio is a free, open-source tool for Windows, macOS and Linux that lets you record on-screen activity, then edit and share the results or stream it live (OBS stands for Open Broadcaster Software). It's primarily designed for capturing and broadcasting game play – Amazon's Twitch ([twitch.tv](https://www.twitch.tv)) is one of the main

sponsors – but you can use it for other tasks, such as recording desktop activity or capturing video you're playing. You can also mix together various video sources, with fades and transitions.

The latest update includes controls for media/VLC playback, a virtual camera for using the OBS Studio output in other apps, such as Zoom, and a new toolbar.



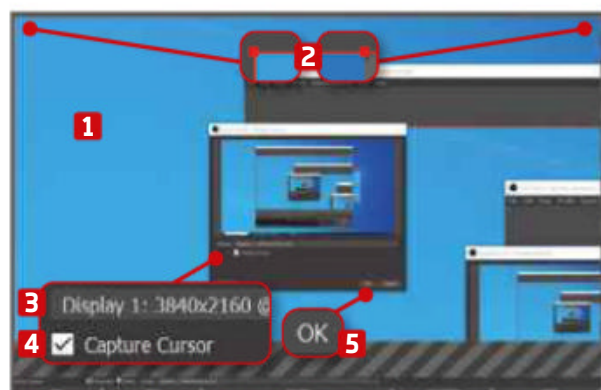
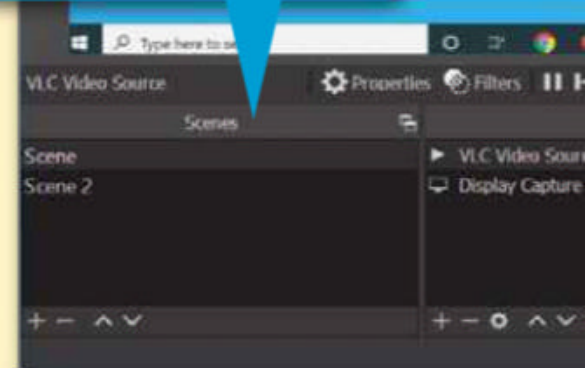
1 Launch the software and you're given the option to run the Auto-Configuration Wizard. This can also be launched from the Tools menu. You can 'Optimise for streaming' **1** or 'Optimise just for recording'. **2** In most cases, you'll want the second option, so select that and click Next. **3**



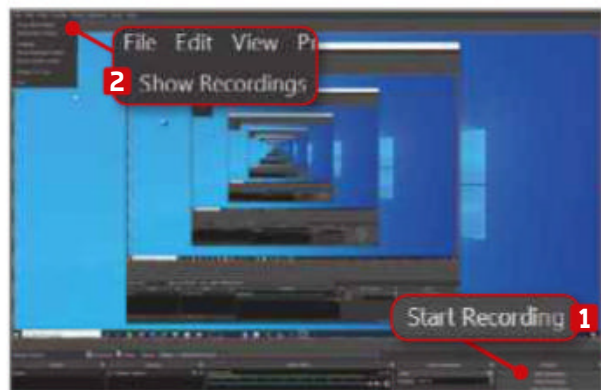
2 Select a Base Resolution and frames per second (FPS) for recording (the defaults should be fine). Click Next, review the estimated settings, which include the recording encoder and recording quality, and click Apply Settings. Click the plus sign under Sources **1** and select Display Capture. **2** Name it and click OK.

SCENE

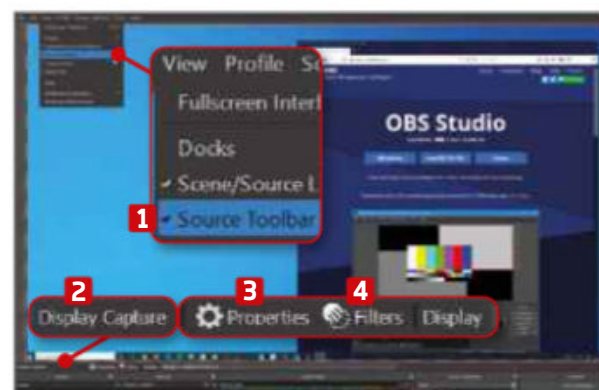
You can create multiple scenes with different sources, and switch between them here



3 A preview of your screen appears. **1** Resize this if needed, using the red handles. **2** The Properties box lets you select a screen to record (if you have more than one) **3** and toggle the cursor capture on or off. **4** Click OK **5** to close the box, then configure any other settings.



4 Click Start Recording. **1** Minimise OBS and perform the action you want to record on your screen. You can pause and resume this at any time by clicking the Pause button that appears. When you've finished, stop the recording and go to File, Show Recordings **2** to view your screen capture.



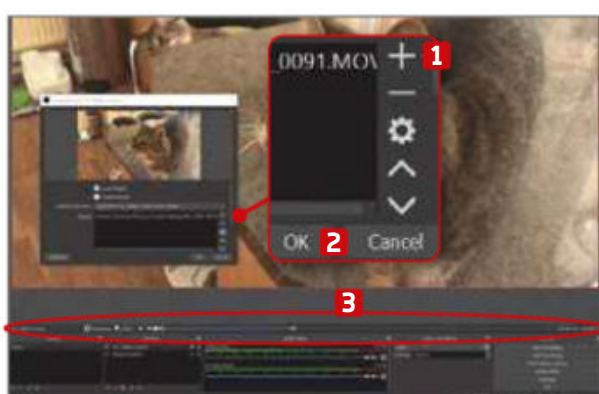
5 The Source Toolbar is a new feature, which can be toggled on or off via the View menu. **1** This adds a small toolbar under the preview window showing the current source, **2** and gives you access to Properties, **3** Filters **4** and any other relevant options.



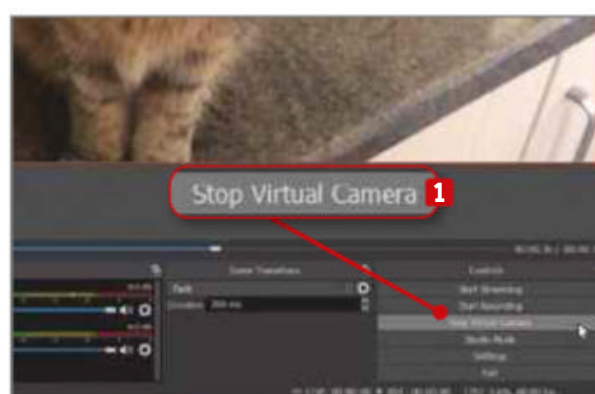
AUDIO MIXER
Balance the sound between the desktop and media sources. Click the cog button next to an audio source to access more tools

START STREAMING
To stream something, you need to enter the site's URL and Stream Key into the Stream tab under Settings

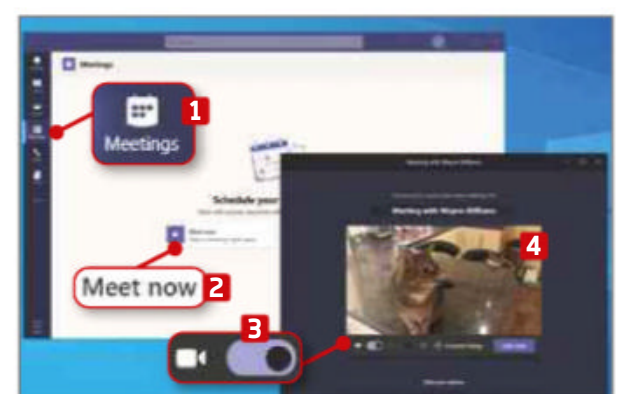
STUDIO MODE
Studio Mode lets you mix sources together and add transitions, cuts and fades



6 To record playing video, click the plus sign under Sources and select VLC Video Source (or Media Source). Name it, click OK and, in the Properties box, click the plus sign. **1** Browse for a file to play and click OK. **2** Adjust the window with the red handles, then record (or stream) it. The controls are displayed below. **3**



7 Another new feature is the ability to set whatever's on screen as a virtual camera for chats, using programs such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Prepare the setup for your view and click Start Virtual Camera (this changes it to Stop Virtual Camera). **1** Clicking it again closes the virtual camera.



8 We'll use this camera in Microsoft Teams but the process is similar in other chat tools. In Teams, click the Meetings button **1** and select 'Meet now'. **2** When you toggle on the video, **3** the view from OBS Studio appears. **4** This is what people will see when they join a meeting you've started.



Workshop 2

Encrypt sensitive files you upload to the cloud

Cryptomator: cryptomator.org | ⌚ 20 mins | 🖥️ Windows 🍏 macOS 🐧 Linux 🤖 Android 🍏 iOS

Online storage is convenient, because you can access your files from any device and have a backup in case your computer is damaged or stolen. But storing your files in the cloud means trusting a third party with their contents.

If you're worried about prying eyes accessing your confidential data, Cryptomator is an excellent tool that lets you "put a lock on your cloud". Not only does it encrypt files saved to your computer, you can also upload your encrypted files to online storage, so snoops can't steal your data and read your files.

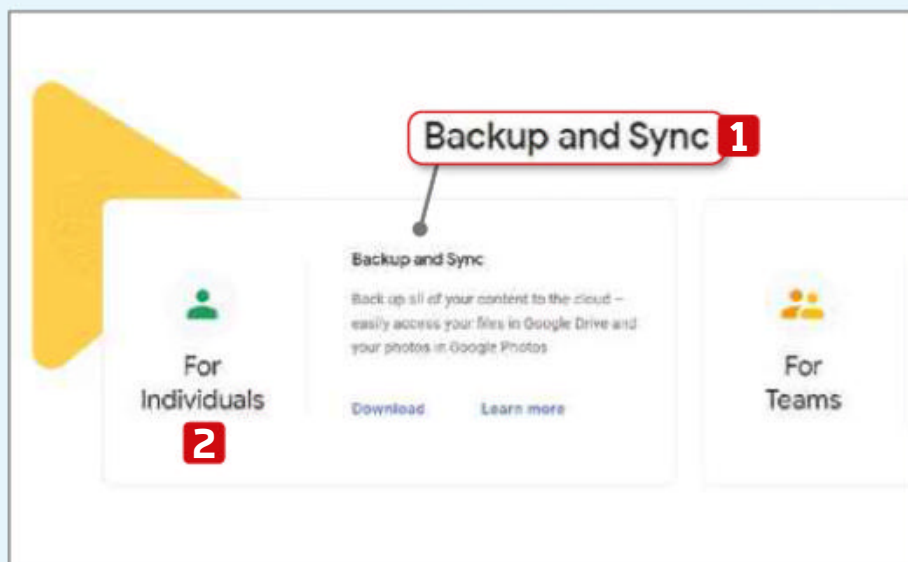
Cryptomator is available on all platforms, and as a portable app (bit.ly/cryptoport513). It works with Dropbox, OneDrive, Google Drive and iCloud.



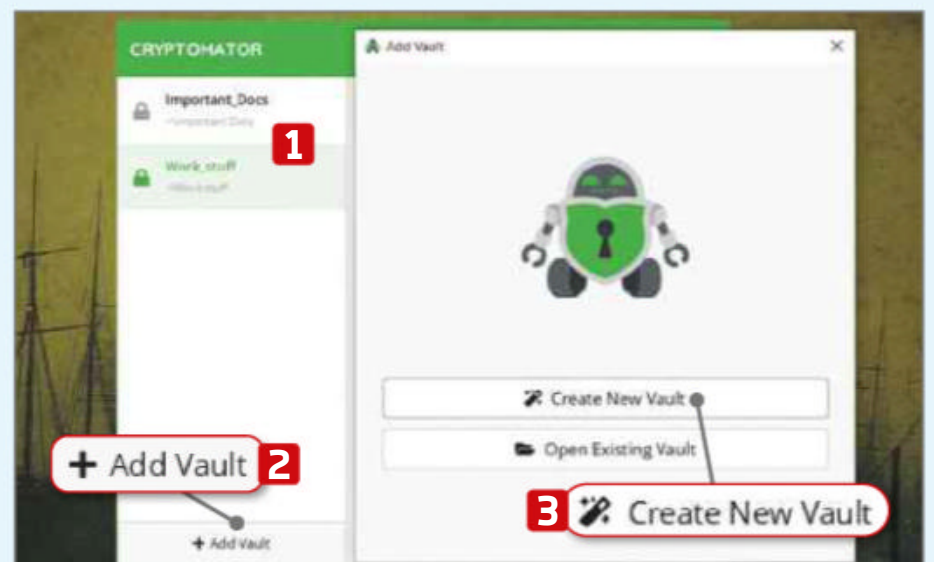
EXPERT TIP

Steve Clark says

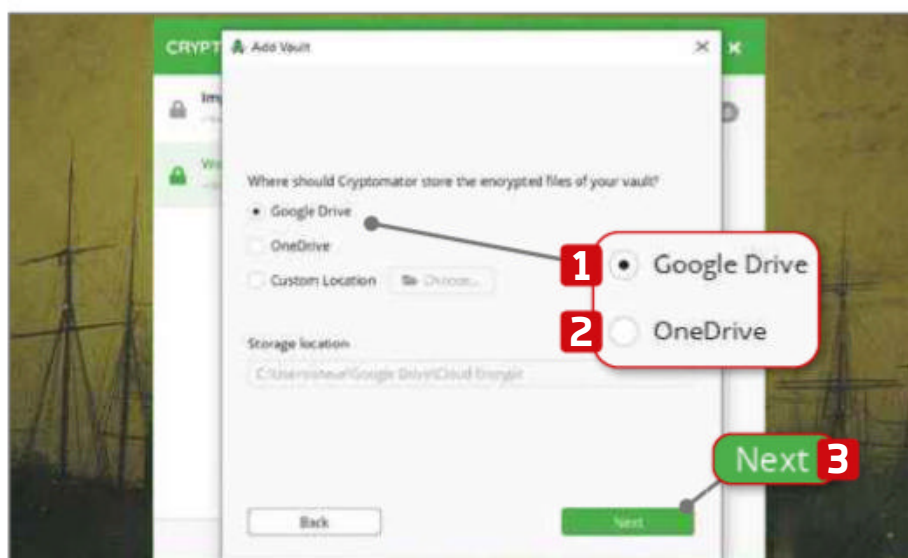
Cryptomator only displays available cloud-storage drives if they're part of your computer's user directory. It can't automatically access a cloud-storage app downloaded to your desktop because this is stored in Program Files, and navigating to it results in an error message. When setting up your cloud app, you need to make sure you're syncing at least one folder between the cloud and your computer.



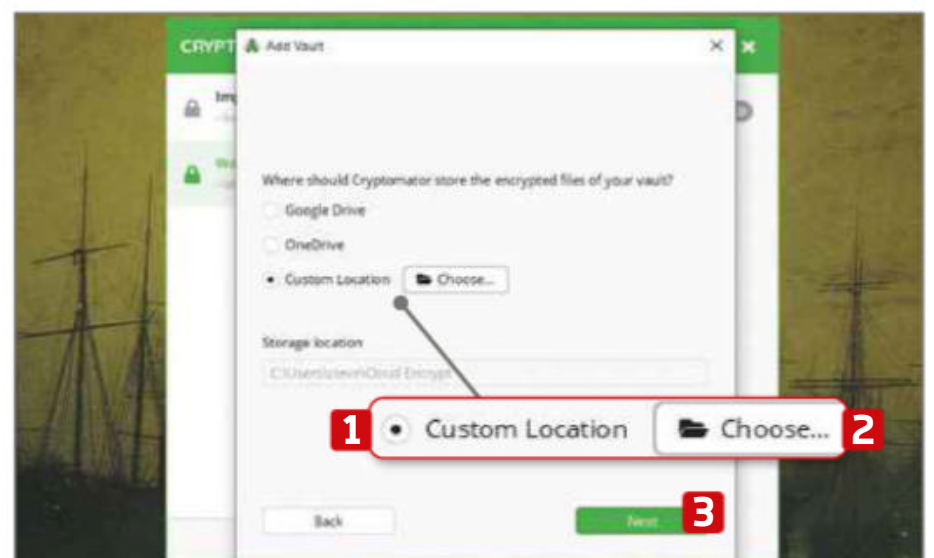
1 Start by downloading a desktop version of your preferred cloud storage. If you're using Windows 10, you already have OneDrive, but Cryptomator also works with Dropbox, iCloud and Google Drive. In this workshop, we're downloading Google Drive and choosing 'Backup and Sync' **1** 'For individuals'. **2** The steps are very similar for all services.



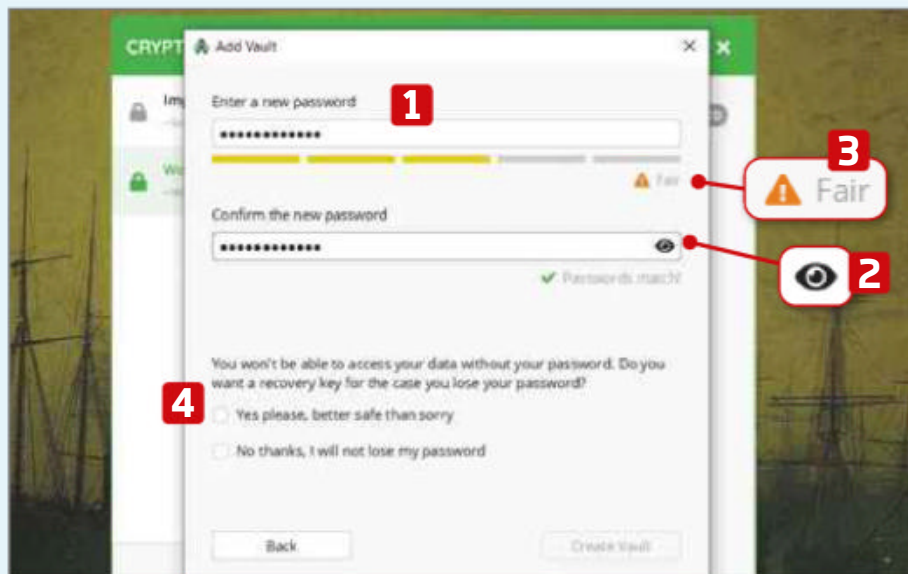
2 Open Cryptomator. If you've used it before, you'll see a list of existing 'vaults' where files reside, **1** with the option to Add Vault **2** at the bottom. Click this, then select Create New Vault. **3** You need to choose a name for it – we're going for 'Cloud Encrypt' – then choose Next.



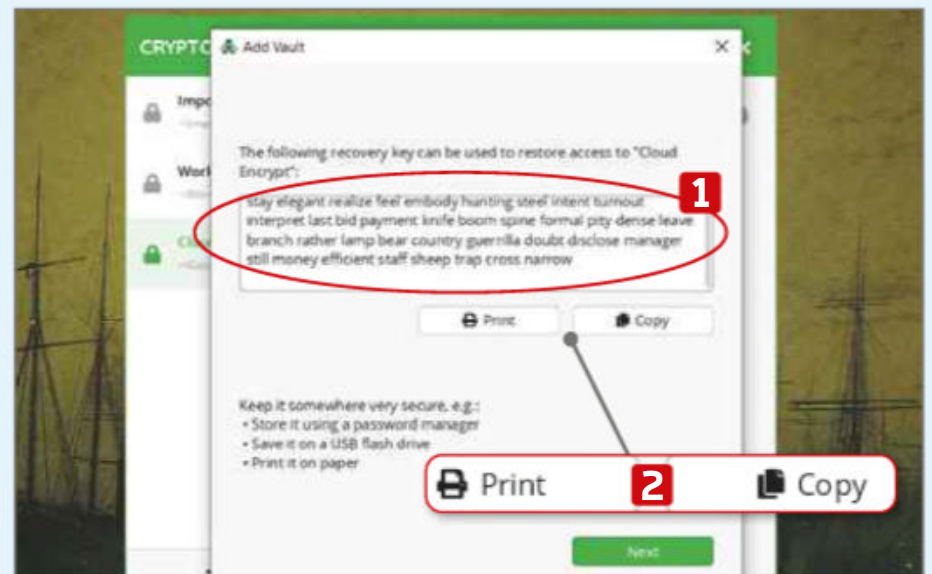
3 Next, you're asked where your encrypted files will be saved. Depending on the number of cloud services accessible on your PC, you'll see a list of various cloud services, including Google Drive **1** and OneDrive. **2** Select one, then click Next. **3** If you use multiple cloud-storage services, repeat this step, selecting a different one each time.



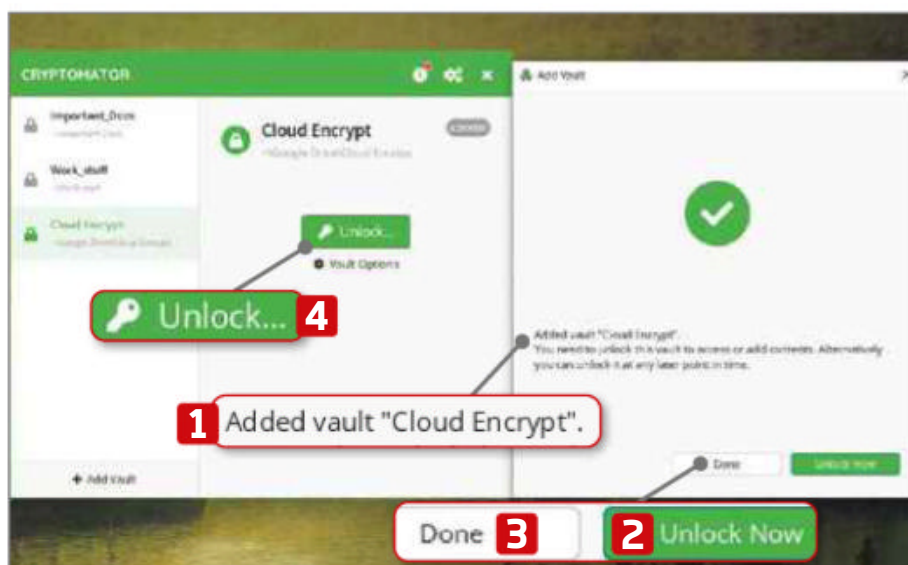
4 If, for some reason, Cryptomator doesn't show your preferred platform, pick Custom Location. **1** This unlocks the Choose box, **2** which opens File Explorer. Navigate to the cloud-storage folder in the user directory (such as C:\Users\[your name]\Google Drive) – not Program Files, where the app data is saved. Choose Select Folder, then click Next. **3**



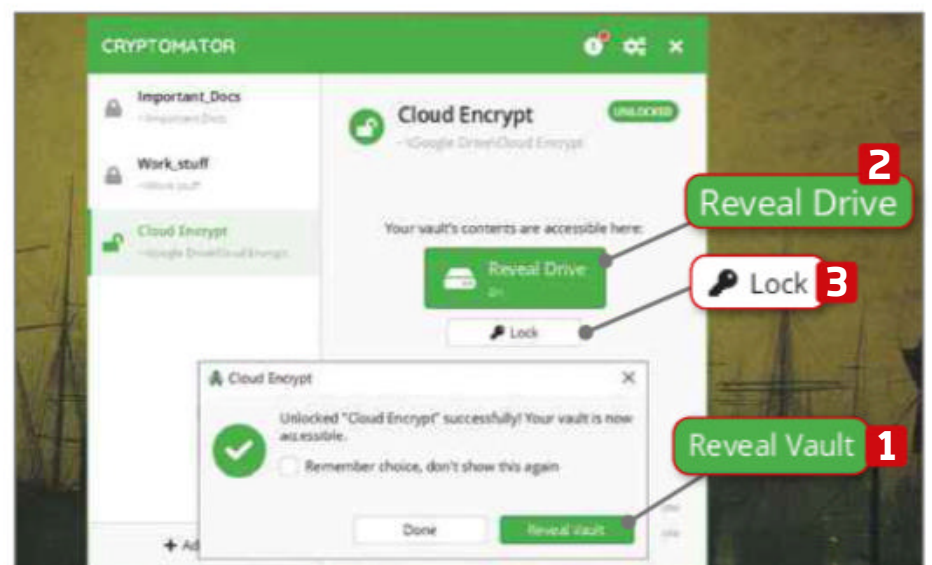
5 You're now prompted to create **1** and confirm a password (with the option to 'reveal' it, **2** to check it's correct). The password strength is displayed beneath, **3** ranging from Very Weak to Very Strong. You're then given the option to create a recovery key, **4** which is used to unlock your vault, should you forget your password.



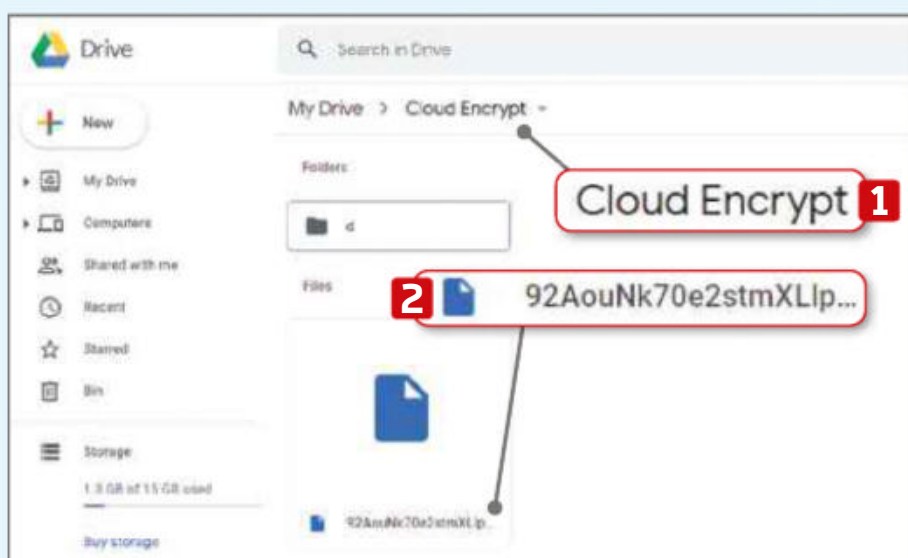
6 The choice is yours, but to be on the safe side, select 'Yes please, better safe than sorry'. Now click Create Vault. Doing so generates a random string of words. **1** This is in plain text format, with options to Print and Copy; **2** or you can manually select and copy them. Remember to keep this 'key' safe. Click Next.



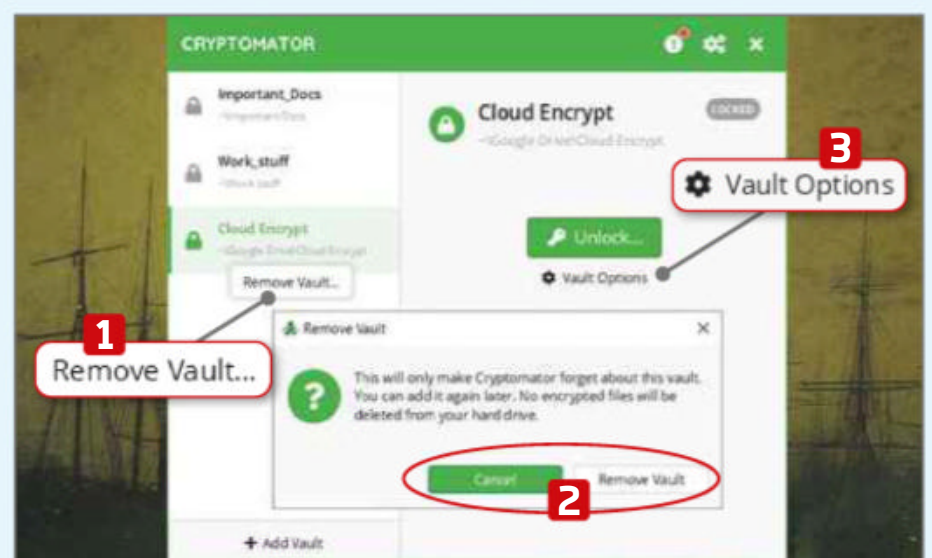
7 You're notified that Cryptomator has added your vault to the list, **1** so you can Unlock Now **2** and start saving encrypted files. Alternatively, click Done **3** to return to the dashboard, though you must unlock the vault when you want to add files by selecting it from the list and pressing Unlock. **4** Either way, you're prompted to type your password.



8 After giving your password, choose Unlock, then Reveal Vault. **1** While the vault is unlocked, you can click Reveal Drive **2** at any time via the dashboard or lock it again. **3** By revealing it, Cryptomator opens the drive's location in File Explorer. Drag and drop files to this window; or, when saving a file, navigate to this drive via This PC, then 'Devices and drives'.



9 Once your cloud storage has updated, head to the service in your browser. In Google Drive, for example, you should see your newly created vault under Folders. Click this to view the vault folder, **1** named for the virtual drive it was assigned. Clicking through the multiple folders it contains will reveal your files – encrypted and completely unreadable. **2**



10 If you no longer want to upload encrypted files to the cloud, right-click the vault in the sidebar and select Remove Vault. **1** Once confirmed, **2** this removes the vault from Cryptomator. You still need to delete the folders and files in your cloud drive. To make further changes to the vault on the dashboard, highlight it and select Vault Options. **3**

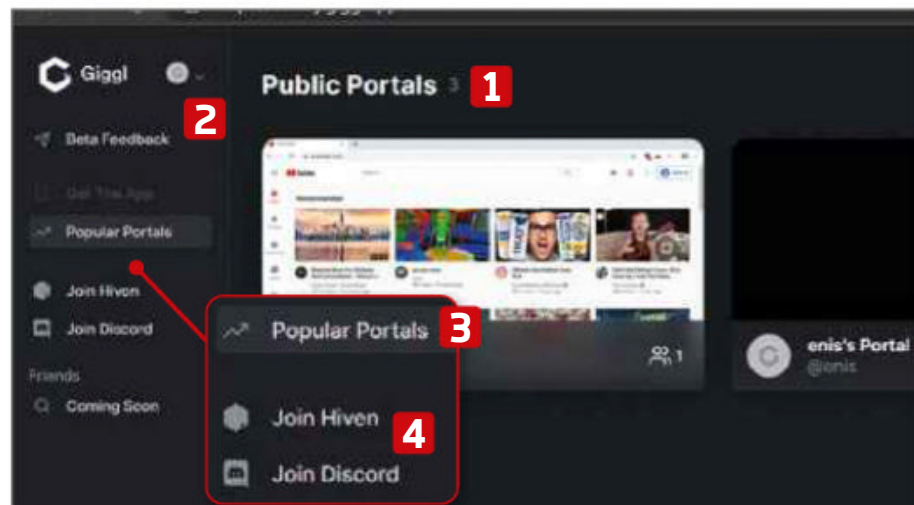


Watch videos with friends you can't meet

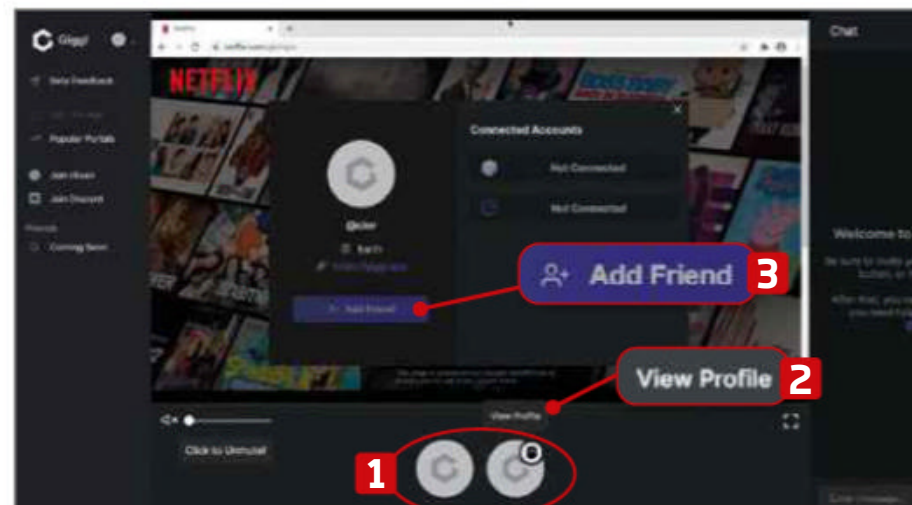
So, you can't go to the theatre, your local cinema is shut and you haven't felt safe letting anyone into your house for the last seven months. While the situation is far from ideal, it doesn't mean you and your family and friends can't sit

Giggl: giggl.app |  10 mins | [Any browser](#)

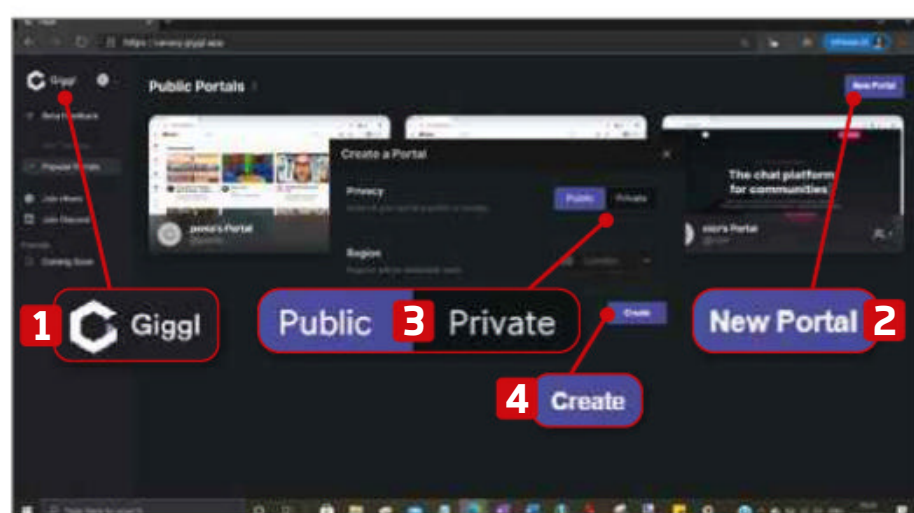
down together and watch a movie. Giggl offers an easy way to share your screen. It's free, fully-featured and a mobile app is also in the works.



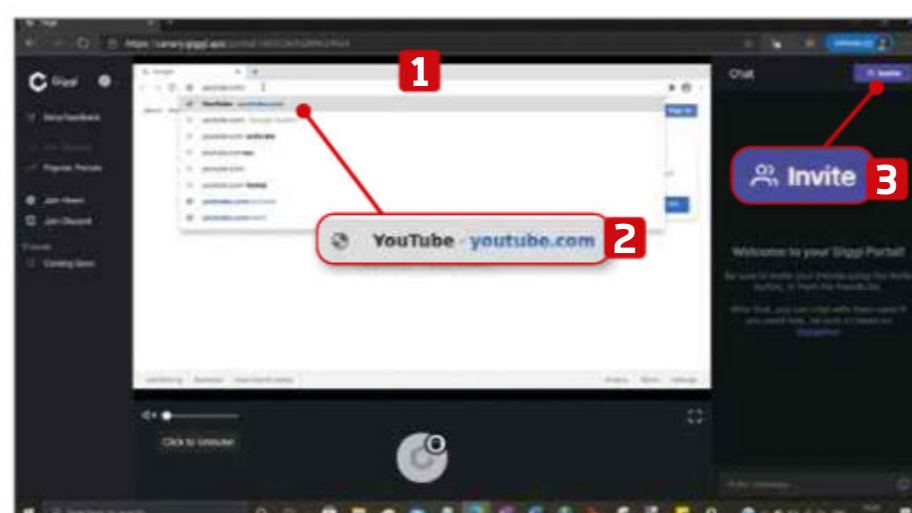
1 Sign up for a free account and head to the Giggl dashboard. The main pane displays a list of public portals **1** that you can join. Since it's in beta, the sidebar **2** is sparse, but this is where you can view other portals, **3** and connect to the chat platforms **4** Hivon and Discord.



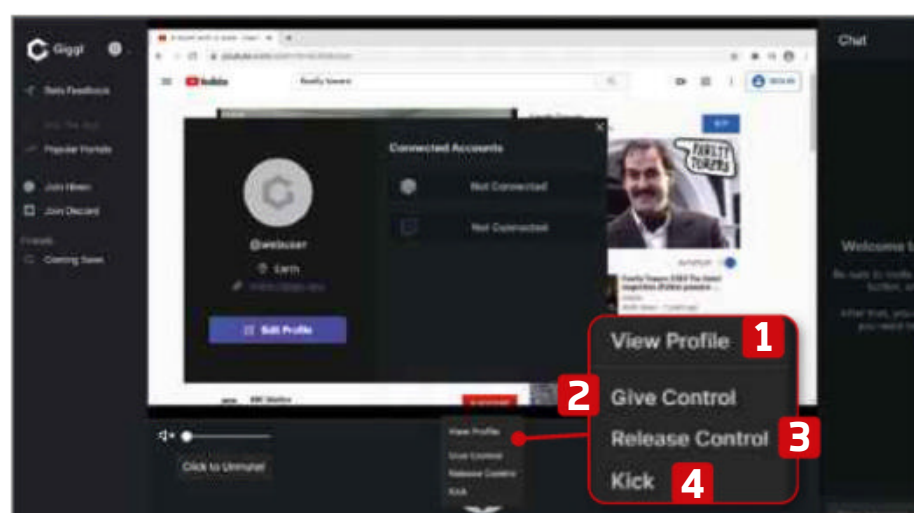
2 If you want to watch with strangers, select a public portal. Only the host has control over what's on-screen, but you can see how many others are watching along with you. Click the profile picture **1** and select View Profile **2** to see their info, including the option to add them as a friend. **3**



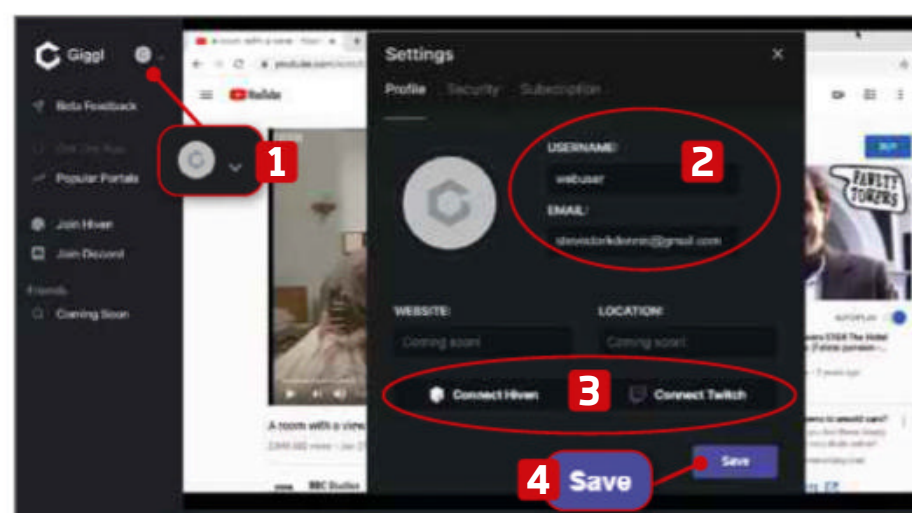
3 If you'd prefer to choose what to watch, click the Giggl logo **1** to return to the dashboard and select New Portal. **2** Switch to the Private portal **3** and click Create. **4** As with the public portal, you'll see a media pane, volume and full-screen options, and a chat box where you can invite friends.



4 The media pane opens with a virtual version of Chrome. **1** Use it as you would a normal browser, visiting a website, **2** signing in and selecting a video to watch. To share, click Invite. **3** This copies the Giggl URL for emailing or messaging to family and friends.



5 As host, clicking your profile picture lets you view your own profile (now with the option to edit it). **1** There are three other options: Give Control **2** lets someone else use the virtual browser (though you remain host), Release Control **3** lets you take it back and Kick **4** boots users from the room.



6 Click the G-shaped cog wheel **1** at the top of the sidebar and choose User Settings. Here, you can tweak your username and email, **2** and connect the chat app Hivon and the games-streaming service Twitch. **3** When you've finished, select Save. **4**



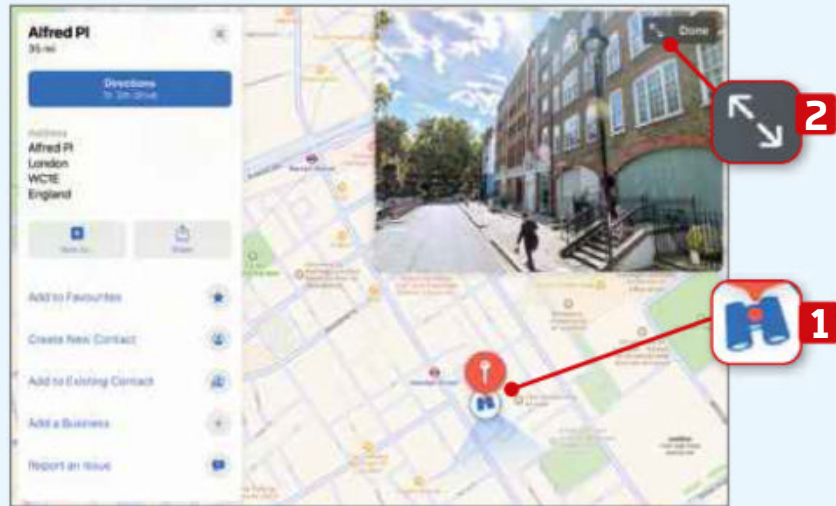
Find your way around Apple's new Maps

If you have a device running Apple's new iOS or iPadOS 14, it's worth exploring the new Maps app because the latest update brings some great new tools and enhancements. These let you explore cities in 3D, read location guides

written by local experts and take advantage of its improved directions.

We'll walk you through the best of the most recent additions to Apple Maps.

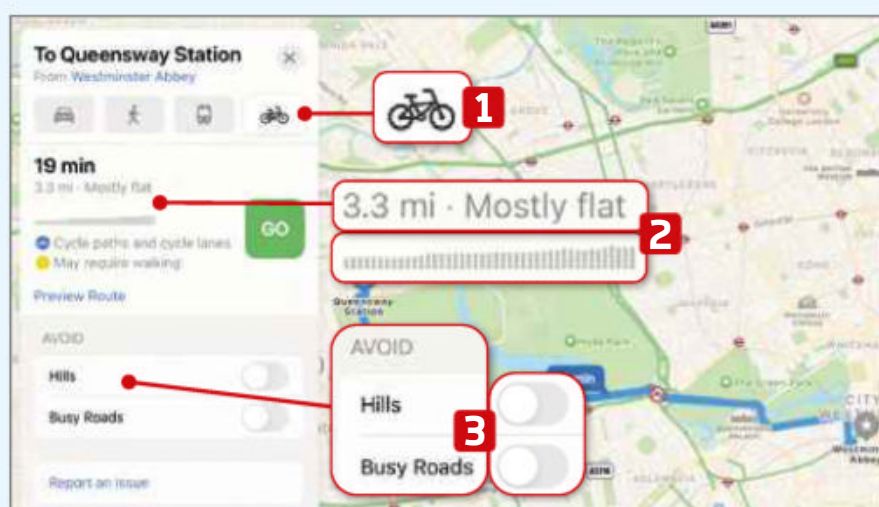
Apple Maps: www.apple.com/uk/maps | 10 mins | **iOS/iPadOS 14**



1 The new Look Around tool is similar to Google Street View, if not as comprehensive. You'll find its icon **1** in maps for London, Edinburgh, Dublin and a few other cities. You can open Look Around in a window or full screen, **2** and scroll the map to change the area viewed.



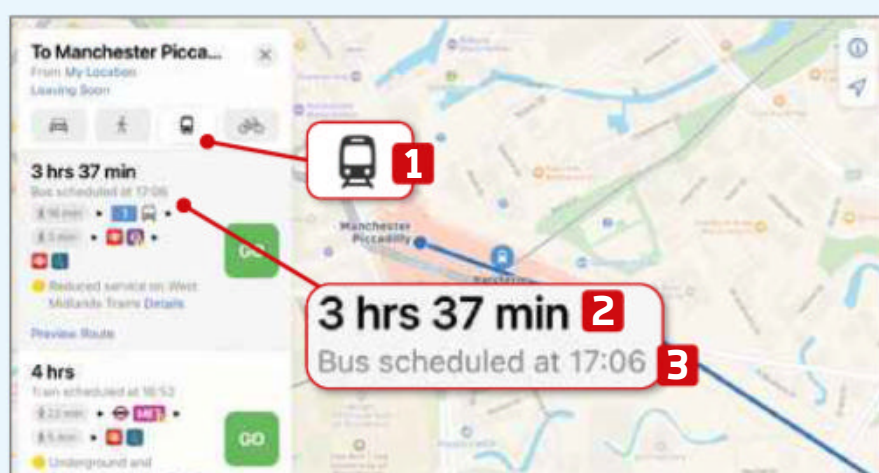
2 London has a collection of professionally curated guides for exploring the city, which automatically appear when you look at items that feature in them. Select it to see the guide's recommendations marked on the map. **1** Scroll to the bottom for more guides in the series. **2**



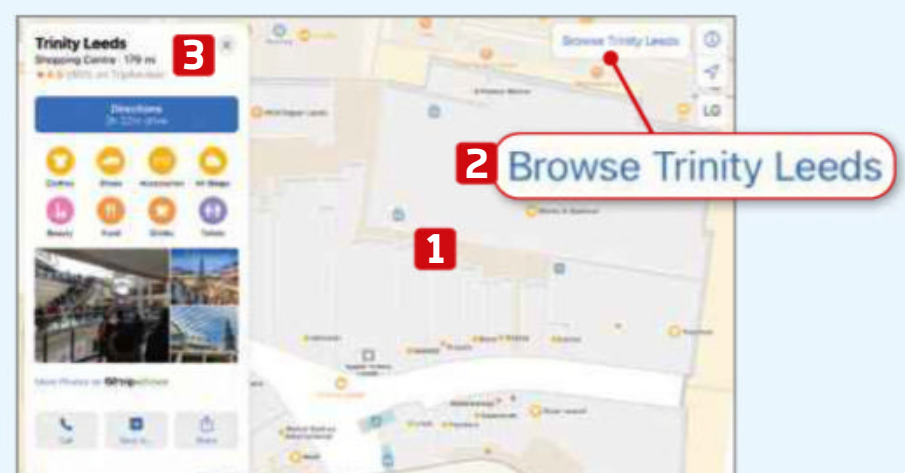
3 New cycling directions have been added to the London map. Tap the bike icon **1** to convert a route to one that's suitable for cycling. Apple Maps estimates how hilly the route is **2** and lets you toggle switches to circumnavigate hills and busy roads. **3**



4 For drivers, there's new congestion-charge warning information – a small £ icon is displayed **1** if you're going to get charged for entering an area. If you'd prefer to avoid tolls, you can choose this option by toggling the switch. **2**



5 Public transport options are packed with real-time information. Enter your destination and choose the public transport route from the icons. **1** The route tells you how long the journey is expected to take **2** and what time the train or bus is scheduled to leave. **3**



6 Some interior locations have been mapped, including airports and shopping centres in London, Leeds and Hatfield. As you zoom into a location, you may notice the interior layout appearing. **1** Tap the Browse button **2** to open that venue's information panel. **3**

Weekend Project

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



How to...

Connect small-screen devices to your TV

Wayne Williams shows you how to enjoy your movies, games and everything else from your smaller devices on your biggest screen

Phones, tablets and laptops can store thousands of photos, videos, songs, apps and games, but those amazing photos and videos from your holiday of a lifetime are never going to wow friends and family on a 6in handset. Likewise, that new state-of-the-art of 3D shooter can't compete with a PS4 game when the action is crammed onto a tiny screen.

The best way to get around the problems of a small display is to connect your phone or tablet to your television, so you can enjoy all the benefits of a big screen. There are several ways to do this and, in this issue's Weekend Project, we guide you through them.



Cast your phone's screen

One of the easiest ways to view the contents of your phone on your TV is to use Google Chromecast. This comes built into modern Android TVs and certain set-top boxes, but if you don't have the required hardware, you can buy a Chromecast dongle. Even if you do have a compatible TV set or box, it may be worth buying the dongle anyway

because Google recently updated it (see our FAQ on page 38), adding loads more features, including 4K support and a remote control with Google Assistant built in. Just plug it into a spare HDMI port on your TV, add power, connect it to your home's Wi-Fi (the same network as your phone or tablet) and start streaming.

You can cast from hundreds of compatible Android and iOS apps,

including VLC Media Player, and also mirror Chrome tabs on your TV. This means that anything you can

Look for this icon to beam content from your phone to Google Chromecast





The new Chromecast with Google TV comes in a choice of colours - this is "Sky"

view in your browser can be displayed on the big screen. Because Chromecast is a Google product, all the search giant's services are fully supported, so it's easy to enjoy whatever content you've got installed, such as a slideshow of images from Google Photos, on your TV. The trick is to look for the Cast icon when viewing something, then tap it and choose the device to connect to.

The new Chromecast comes with Google TV for £59.99, or Google TV and six months' worth of Netflix for £89.99. You can buy it from bit.ly/2GZo3OO.

If you don't need all the bells and whistles of the new device, such as Google TV or Google Assistant, you can still buy the older model Chromecast from Google. This can stream content from an Android device or iPhone and costs around £30. It's available in Charcoal (dark grey) and Chalk (white) from bit.ly/2ZDOfoq.

You can also mirror your screen with an Amazon Fire TV Stick - we show you how in our Mini Workshop on page 61.

Apple TV 4K is one way to beam content from your iPhone to the big screen

Stream content with AirPlay

If you have an iPhone or iPad, you can use Apple AirPlay to stream audio and video to your TV. However, the catch is that you need either a TV with AirPlay built in, such as the latest OLED TVs from LG (which also support Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa) or a set-top box such as the Apple TV HD (£149 from apple.co/33XmaLK) or the Apple TV 4K, which costs from £179 (bit.ly/2hKGSZo). Both come with a year's subscription to Apple TV+, Apple's video streaming service.

To stream content from your iPhone or iPad to your TV, make sure you're on the same wireless network, then tap the AirPlay icon in an app you want to stream from, such as Apple Photos.

Stream from a laptop

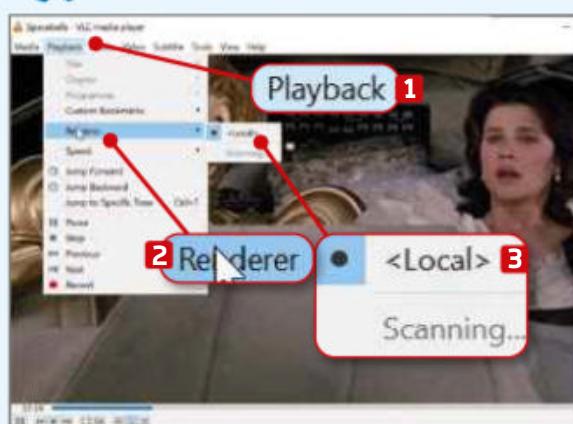
Laptops and PCs have larger screens than phones and tablets, but nothing beats watching content on your living room TV, from the comfort of your sofa - especially as a group.

Most modern PCs and laptops have HDMI ports for connecting to monitors, so setting up a wired connection to a TV shouldn't be a problem. You can then effectively use your TV as a second monitor or to mirror what's happening on your laptop's screen.

If you want to play video that's saved to your laptop, you can use VLC to stream the content to a Chromecast. We show you how to do this in our Mini Workshop, below.



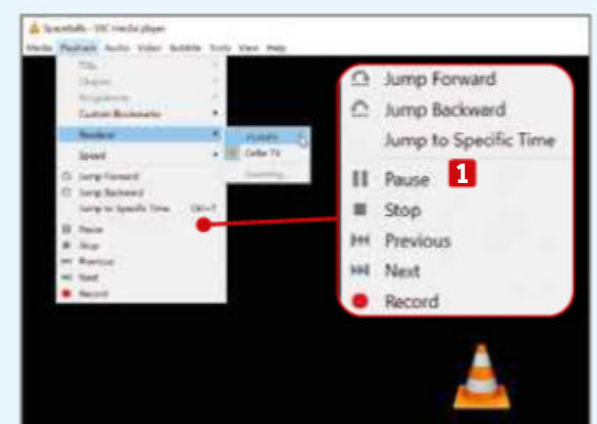
MINI WORKSHOP | Stream video from your laptop to a Chromecast using VLC



1 Plug the Chromecast into an HDMI port on your TV and make sure it's connected to your wireless network. Start a video playing on VLC on your PC (on the same network) and click Playback, **1** then Render. **2** Make sure <Local> is selected. **3** This means the video plays inside VLC. The media player will now scan your network.







2 Wait a minute or so, then go to Playback, Renderer again. This time you should see an entry for your Chromecast (Cellar TV, in this example). **1** If you don't, and it's still just showing 'Scanning', make sure the Chromecast is connected to the correct network and repeat the process. Select your Chromecast in the menu.



3 VLC's screen will turn black and the video should begin streaming on your TV via the Chromecast. You can control playback in VLC as if it was playing in the video window. **1** When you want to stop streaming on your TV, open the Renderer menu again and select <Local> once more.

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1	 Shell ENERGY	Shell Energy: Fast Broadband	£19.99	18 months	11Mbps avg. speed	∞ unlimited	CHEAPEST £239.88
2	 sse	SSE: Unlimited Fibre + Line Rental Only	£23.00	18 months	35Mbps avg. speed	∞ unlimited	£276.00
3	 sky	Sky: Superfast Talk and Line Rental	£27.00	18 months	59Mbps avg. speed	∞ unlimited*	£324.00
4	 Virgin media	Virgin Media: Big Bundle + Fibre Broadband + Weekend Calls	£29.99 (£62 after 12 months)	18 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 12th October 2020.

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Amazon's Fire TV Stick is an affordable way to mirror your phone's screen on your TV

Connect using a cable

If you're not prepared to faff around with wireless networks, you can simply plug your phone directly into the back of your TV. The results are much less impressive than the wireless solutions we've explored in our previous tips, but it's cheap and quick.

The cable required to set this up will



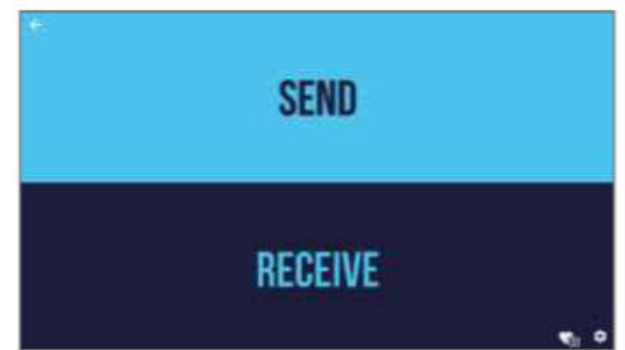
A Lightning to HDMI cable lets you connect an iPhone or iPad to your TV's HDMI port

depend on the type of phone you have. Modern Android phones mostly use USB-C, in which case you can buy a USB-C to HDMI cable from Amazon for around £14, which can output up to 4K resolution.

For an iPhone, you'll need the equivalent Lightning to HDMI cable, which costs around £16, or an adapter that you connect to your phone's Lightning port and then plug in a regular HDMI cable.

Transfer data from your phone

Transferring content from your phone or tablet to your TV – as opposed to just beaming the device's screen – requires a



'Send files to TV' sends files from your Android phone to a connected television

USB cable. If your TV has a USB 3 port, you should use this because the data transfer is faster.

Make sure you use a data cable to transfer content. Most compatible cables you own – including the one you use to charge your phone – should be fine, but if it doesn't work, try a different one. When you've connected the phone to your TV, pull down the menu from the top of the screen in Android and make sure the connection is set to 'Data Transfer' or MTP (Media Transfer Protocol). It should appear as a source on your TV and you can begin to explore your phone's contents.

There are apps available that let you perform a similar task wirelessly. For an iPhone, you can use the File Transfer App (apple.co/3ILVRhr), while Android users should install the 'Send files to TV' app (bit.ly/2H8nHoX). Both are free, but offer in-app purchases to remove ads. They don't work with every combination of TV and phone, but we had no problems with our own setup, and there's nothing to lose by trying them out. ■



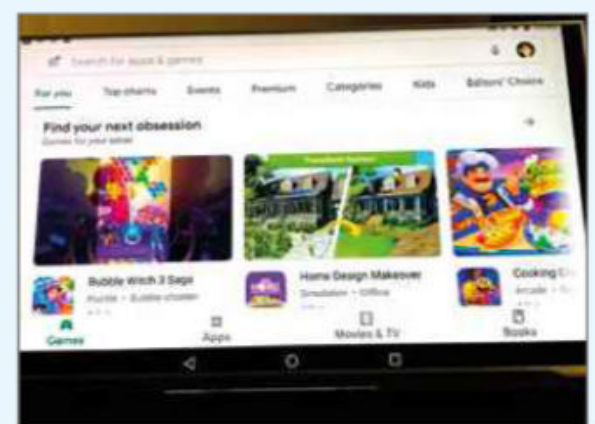
MINI WORKSHOP | Screen mirroring with a Fire TV Stick



1 Amazon's Fire TV Stick is a great little device. You can use it to watch Amazon Prime TV, run Kodi and – the thing we're most interested in here – mirror the screen of your smartphone. Connect the Fire TV Stick to a spare HDMI port on your TV, then connect it to your network and open the Settings menu. **1**



2 Select Display & Sound, **1** then Enable Display Mirroring. **2** This makes your Fire Stick temporarily visible to other devices. The next screen shows the name of your stick, and lets you connect your phone to it. Clicking a button on your remote exits display monitoring.



3 On your Android phone, look for a screen-mirroring option (possibly called Cast or Miracast) in the quick-access menu. Select the Fire TV device you want to connect to. Wait a few seconds for the connection to be made. The screen of your phone will appear on the TV, and you can now interact with it.

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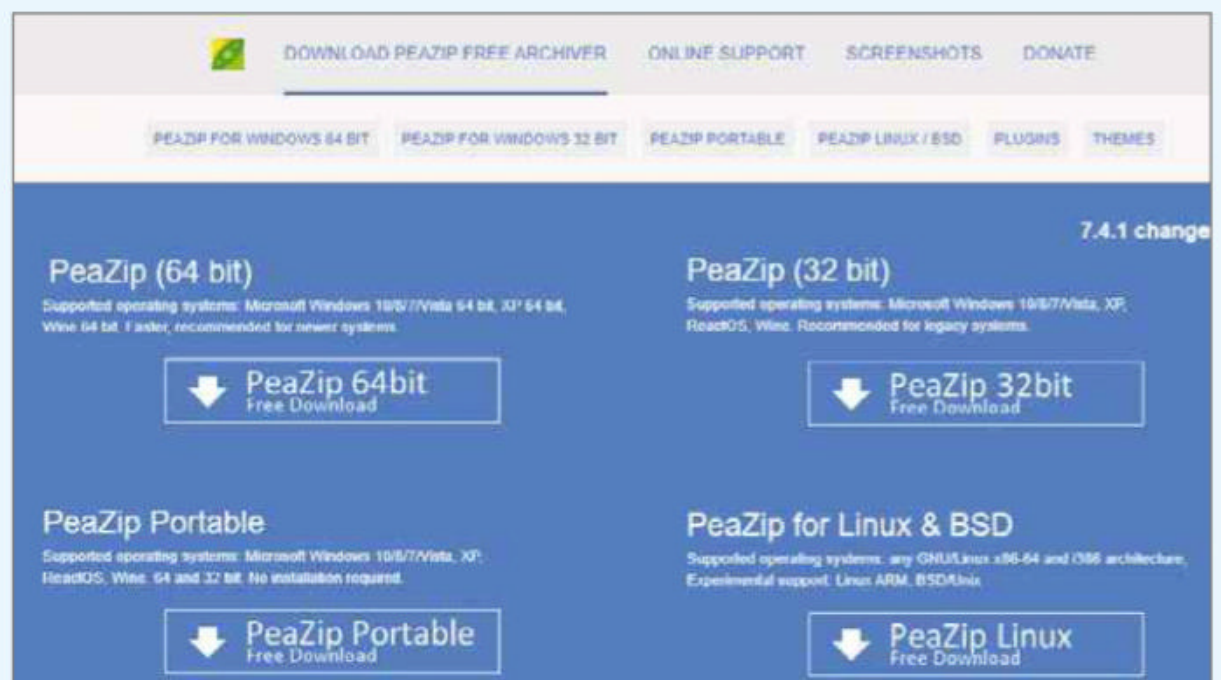
Save disk space, protect files and shrink images with our compression tips

Increase Zip file size by upgrading from 32- to 64-bit

The maximum size of a Zip archive (a compressed folder) or the files it contains is limited to 4GB when using 32-bit software. This is a physical limitation of 32-bit code and means you can zip a 640MB CD image but not an 8GB DVD image, for example.

64-bit Windows and 64-bit compression software are faster at archiving files and impose a size limit of 8,446,744,073,709,551,615 bytes (about 8.5 million TB), which is to say that there is essentially no limit. This is one of the reasons why Windows and many programs are now 64-bit.

If you have an old PC running 32-bit Windows, you can only run the 32-bit versions of compression tools such as PeaZip (peazip.github.io) and 7-Zip (www.7-zip.org). If you have 64-bit Windows, the 64-bit versions of these tools offer faster compression and no size limit.



Avoid 32-bit zip tools and use 64-bit for speed and size, if your PC can handle it

Increase compression to save more space

The ZIP file format, originally PKZIP (PK stands for Phil Katz, the format's co-creator), has become a widely accepted standard, so popular that Microsoft built it into Windows. Right-click any file or folder and select 'Send to', then 'Compressed (zipped) folder'.

It's quick and easy, partly because Windows doesn't put much effort into compressing the files. There are, in fact, several degrees of compression ranging from none (often called Store) to Ultra, which is the maximum.

Ultra Zip compression takes longer, sometimes double the time it takes to compress a standard Zip archive, but it

results in smaller files. The size savings vary, depending on the number and type of files being compressed.

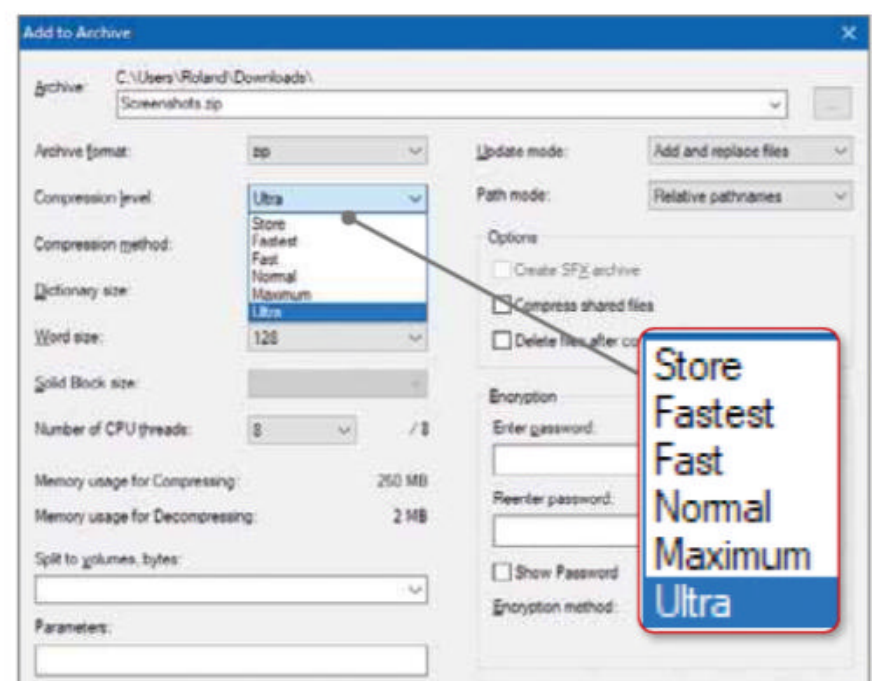
Windows doesn't let you choose the compression method for Zip archives, but tools such as PeaZip and 7-Zip do: select a folder or files to compress and click the Add button in the toolbar to create a new archive, then select 'zip' as the archive format and Ultra for the compression level.

Here are our results after compressing a large folder of images:

Windows compression = 487MB

Ultra compressed Zip = 465MB

These results show a saving of 22MB, which isn't huge but it makes a difference when there are a lot of files. It saves disk space and speeds up emailing and sharing files online.



Tools such as 7-Zip offer a range of compression methods

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.

Password-protect Zip files

If you share files over the internet, email them or carry them on a USB stick, you may worry that other people could access them. One way to protect your files is to store them in a Zip file and lock it with a password. Windows can't password protect a Zip, but 7-Zip and PeaZip can. Select



PeaZip lets you password-protect Zip files and can encrypt the filenames within

a file or folder in PeaZip and click Add. Click 'Enter password' to the right of the filename in the next window.

When you open the zipped file in Windows, it looks normal and displays a list of its contents. However, any attempt to open, copy or move these contents results in an error. To extract the files, you have to select the zipped file in PeaZip and click Extract, then click 'Enter password' to the right of the filename and fill in the required info.

Save more space with 7z

Other file-compression formats, such as 7z, have taken ZIP technology to new levels to create even smaller archives. 7z isn't available in Windows, but it's offered as an option in compression software such as PeaZip and 7-Zip.

In either tool, click a file or folder and click the Add button. In the options window, set the compression type to 7z and Ultra for the level. Here are typical results:

Windows compression = 487 MB

Ultra compress Zip = 465 MB

Ultra compress 7z = 400 MB

Our results show a saving of 87MB in the archive size, though as ever it depends on the number and type of files. 7z files are great for sharing online, emailing and storing on USB sticks, where size is a priority.

Encrypt zip archives

Password protecting Zip archives is useful but, for maximum security, the contents of Zip files should be encrypted using tools such as PeaZip and 7-Zip. For example, select a file or folder in 7-Zip and click Add in the toolbar. Select 'zip' for the archive format and enter a password in the Encryption section on the right. There are two encryption methods available – we recommend AES-256, which is very secure and popular. Continue and create the Zip file.

You can open the Zip file in Windows, but you have to use PeaZip or 7-Zip to decrypt it and access the files it contains. This is a very secure method for transferring files over the internet or for preventing anyone from accessing the files on a disk.

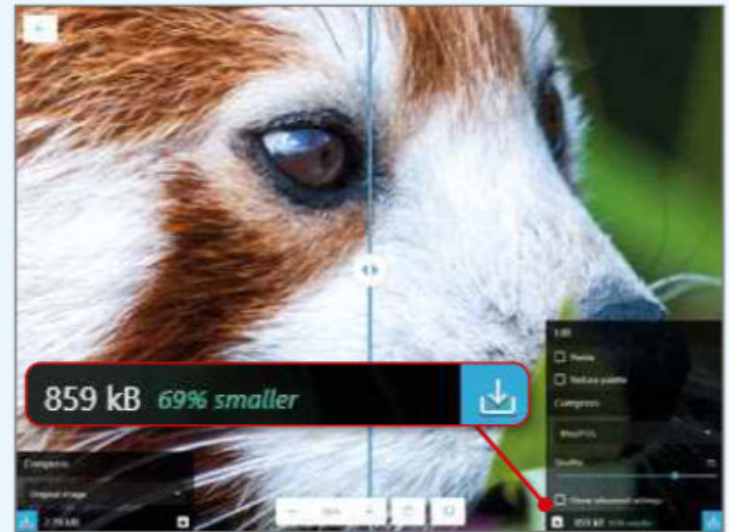
TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

More advanced tips for when you're feeling brave

Compress images

Large images look great on websites, but the downside is that they are slow to download and pages can take a long time to appear in the browser, especially on phones. In an effort to speed up the web, Google produced Squoosh, a tool for compressing images. Though it's intended for use by websites, you can use it to compress your own digital photos.

Go to squoosh.app and drag a photo from your hard drive to the browser window. Squoosh compresses it. The default quality setting is 75 and, by dragging the double headed arrow in the centre of the image, you can compare the original and compressed images before applying it. It's hard to spot a visual difference, but the download button in the bottom-right corner shows the size reduction.



Squoosh shrinks your photo file sizes but only one file at a time – there is no bulk processing

Click Advanced, then tick 'Compress contents to save disk space' in the next window. Click OK, then OK again.

The file looks no different and works the same as before. Right-click it and select Properties, then compare the Size with the 'Size on disk' to see the difference. Compression varies with the file type but, in our tests, a 5.93MB TIF image took up just 2.63MB of space. That's more than 50% compression without zipping the file and making it hard to access. Imagine the space savings you could make if the whole disk were compressed.

Click This PC in Explorer, right-click the C: drive and select Properties. Tick the box 'Compress this drive to save disk space'. This saves many gigabytes of hard-drive space without affecting access to the contents.

If your PC's hard drive is small or running short of space, it's worth enabling compression. It takes time to compress a whole hard drive, so do it when you have the time to leave your PC chugging away for an hour or two.

Files are only compressed while they remain on the hard drive. If you email or share a file online, or copy it to another drive, an uncompressed version is used.

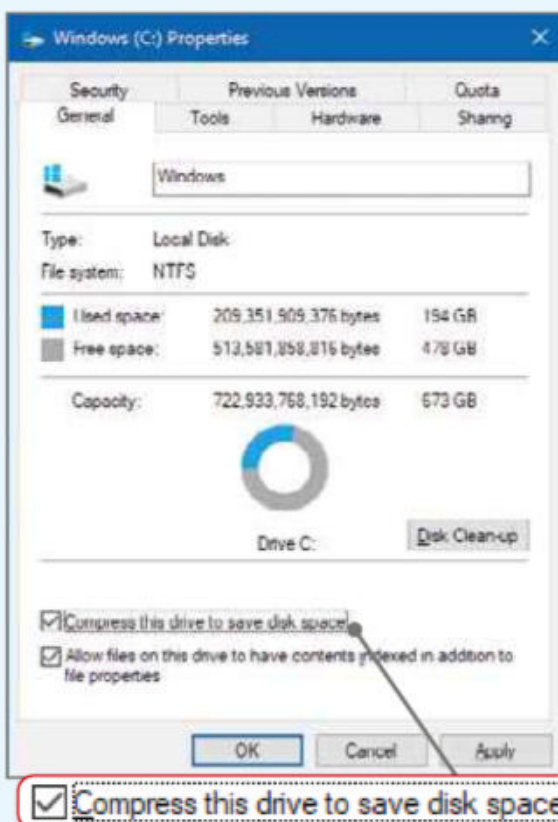
Use portable tools

There are portable versions of PeaZip and 7-Zip available at PortableApps.com (portableapps.com), which can be carried on a thumb drive and used on any computer. If you don't have one, and are using a computer with only basic Windows file-compression tools, over 60 compressed file formats can be extracted using 123apps' Archive Extractor (extract.me).

Get more disk space with NTFS compression

The NTFS disk file system used by Windows has some useful features, including on-the-fly compression. Use it to free up space and store more files on your hard drive or other connected storage.

In Explorer, right-click any file on the C: drive and select Properties.



Compress all the files on your hard drive to save gigabytes of space

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



INTERNET

Get Wi-Fi working on mobile

Q I recently changed broadband provider from TalkTalk (www.talktalk.co.uk) to Plusnet (www.plus.net). I set up my router and my computer works fine. My smartphone, which is on the Vodafone network, initially connected to my new broadband. However, after an hour, it disconnected.

The Wi-Fi on my phone shows it is connected to Plusnet, but it says “No internet”. However, I know the internet connection is functioning because my computer can access the web.

I had no problems connecting this phone to my previous provider’s broadband, and it connects to a BT router in a friend’s house, but it won’t connect to Plusnet, which means

I have to buy data from Vodafone.

I’ve tried phoning Plusnet but have been kept waiting for over an hour, by which time I lose patience and hang up.

David Austin, via email

A This is likely to be a problem with either the phone or the router’s settings, and “forgetting” them often helps. On an Android phone, open Settings, Connections and tap Wi-Fi. Tap the cog icon next to your home network, then press Forget at the bottom (though menus vary in different versions of Android).

On an iPhone, open Settings, Wi-Fi, tap the ‘i’ to the right of your home network and press Forget This Network.

If mobile devices aren’t connecting to the internet, try rebooting your router

Now, connect to your home Wi-Fi again and enter the password. If this doesn’t help, power off the router and forget the network on the phone, then restart both the phone and the router.



SOFTWARE

Uninstall CloudReady

Q I was inspired by your article about Android for laptops (Weekend Project in Issue 507, bit.ly/webuser507) but I’m stuck. I have a cute little Acer V5-122P netbook that came with Windows 8. Updating to 8.1 and then 10 left the poor thing suffering, and using it was like wading through treacle.

CloudReady (www.neverware.com) sounded fun but I didn’t like it, so I tried to install PrimeOS (primeos.in) and am now going round in circles as CloudReady steadfastly clings on. I can run PrimeOS but, when I try to install it, CloudReady takes over and repairs itself. I have tried various options.

Alice Morland, via email

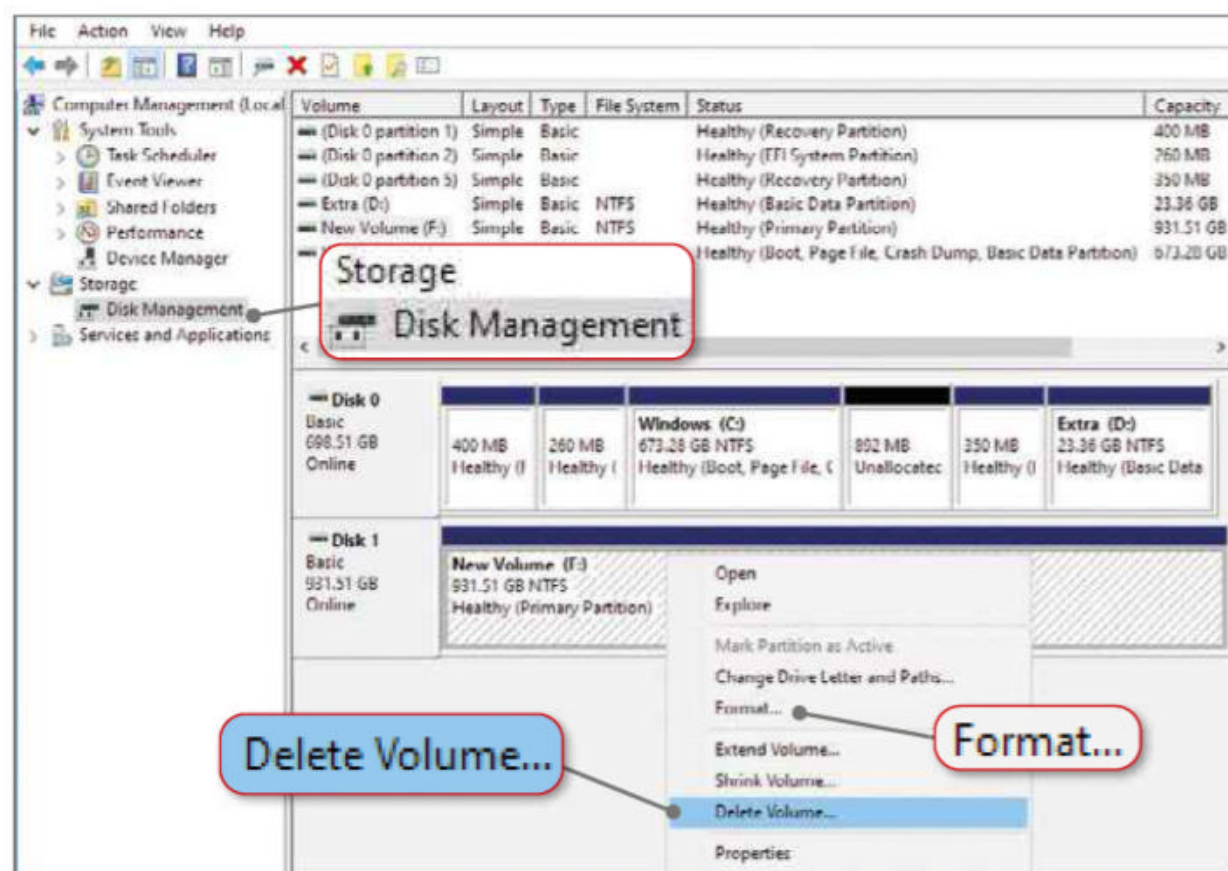
A CloudReady is an operating system, so it doesn’t come with an uninstall button. The only way to remove it is to find the disk partitions it uses, then delete and format them.

Can you still get into Windows using the boot menu? If so, open Explorer, right-click This PC on the left and select Manage. Expand Storage in the

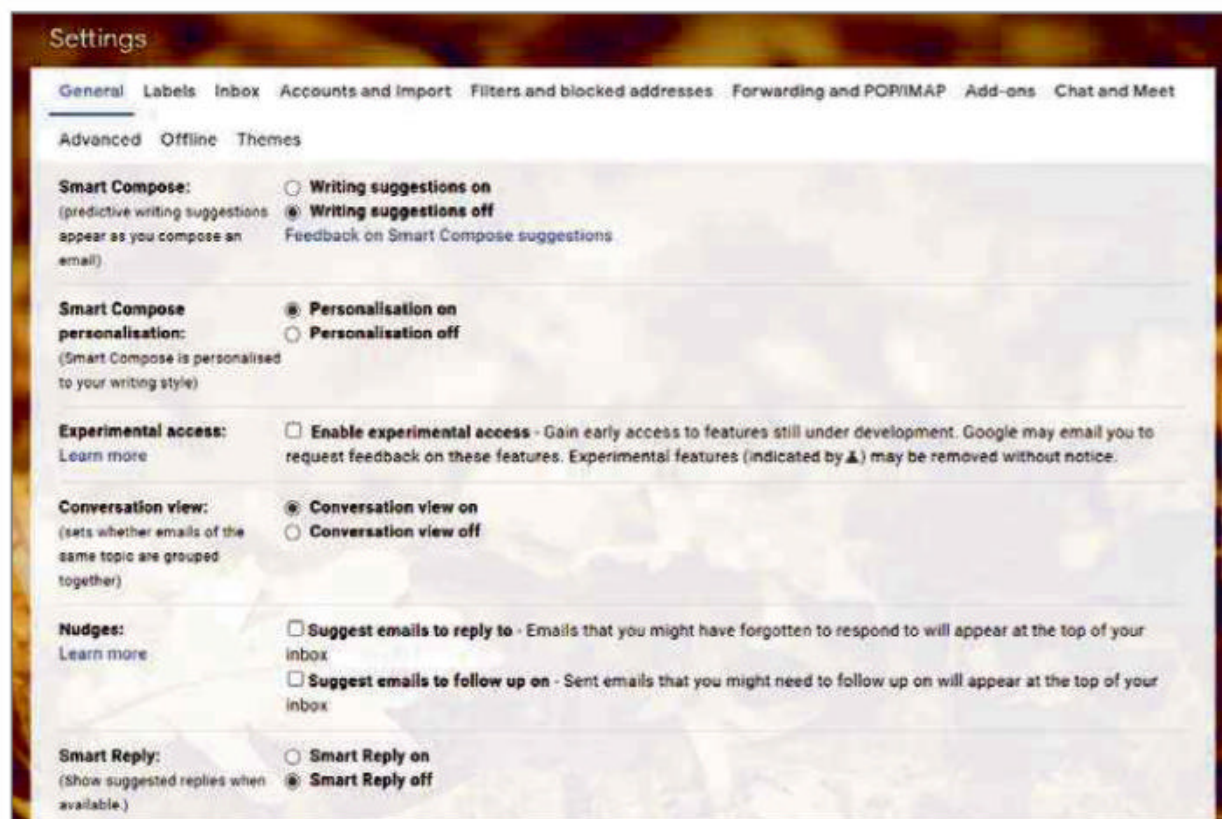
Computer Management window and select Disk Management.

All the partitions on the disk are displayed in the lower part of the window and, when another operating

system is added, partitions are created to the right of Windows (C:). Right-click a partition and select Format, then enter a short name for the partition, accept the default settings and click OK. After



Delete or format partitions in Disk Management to remove a stubborn operating system



Turn these Gmail settings off if they get in your way when reading or writing emails

formatting, the partition appears in Explorer as a new empty drive.

Select Delete Volume and that partition is then labelled as unallocated space. Right-click it and select New Simple Volume. Click Next in the following window, select an unused drive letter for the partition, accept the default settings and format it. The partition then appears in Explorer as a new hard drive.

After deleting a partition, you can expand the partition that appears immediately to the left of it into the space. Right-click it and select Extend Volume. Add all the space and click Next, then Finish. The two partitions become one.

The computer boots from whichever partition is marked as active. Right-click the Windows (C:) partition and select 'Mark Partition as Active'. Now that the computer is back to normal, with CloudReady gone and booting into Windows, you can try setting up PrimeOS again.

None of this should be attempted without a backup. A tool such as EaseUS Todo Backup Free (www.easeus.com) or AOMEI Backupper Standard (bit.ly/34rIWtX) can save a snapshot of a hard drive and all its partitions, and put them all back again if a problem arises.

EMAIL

Recover disappearing emails

Usually, after reading a new message in Gmail, if I don't delete it or take any other action, the original message is still there when I next visit my Inbox. Occasionally, however, the original message has vanished, leaving only a Quick Reply panel. This can be

very inconvenient if the original message included a link or delivery-tracking information that I hadn't made a note of.

HARDWARE

Stop wrongly orientated printing

I have two printers attached to my network via Wi-Fi: an Epson WF-7515 and an Epson XP-605. Also on the network are two laptops running Windows 10 and a PC running Windows 7.

All documents I send to my Epson WF-7515, whether a spreadsheet or document, are printed orientated in the opposite way to whatever I set. My Epson XP-605, on the other hand, works perfectly. The problem persists on all my computers, whether I am using one of the laptops or the PC.

Regards Trevor, via email

This isn't a common problem but you're not alone in experiencing it. However, there is no clear solution and it seems like a configuration and setup issue. Somewhere, something has been set to do this and the only solution is to go through all the settings on the printer and printer driver to check them.

A good place to start is by making sure that the latest software is installed. It can be downloaded from bit.ly/3kYvm8d.

Open an application such as Notepad and select File, then Page Setup. Set the paper size to A4, the

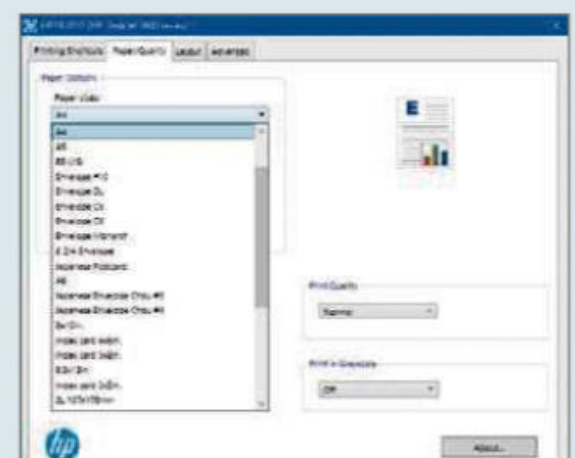
Can you explain why this happens and how it can be prevented?

Alan Beasley, via email

Is this happening in the first emails you receive or in conversations? Conversations can hide content. For example, previous emails in a conversation can be hidden so you only see the last one. Look in the top-right corner of the email conversation for an up/down 'V' arrow. When the mouse hovers over it, it says 'Expand all'. Click it and the hidden emails are displayed.

Replies to emails can also hide content. Look in the email body for a three-dot icon and click it to show hidden content.

Click the cog icon in Gmail, click 'See all settings' and select the General tab. There are a number of settings that affect what you see when viewing an email, such as Smart Reply, which provides suggestions for email replies. Turn this off, along with Smart Compose, 'Smart Compose personalisation' and Snippets.



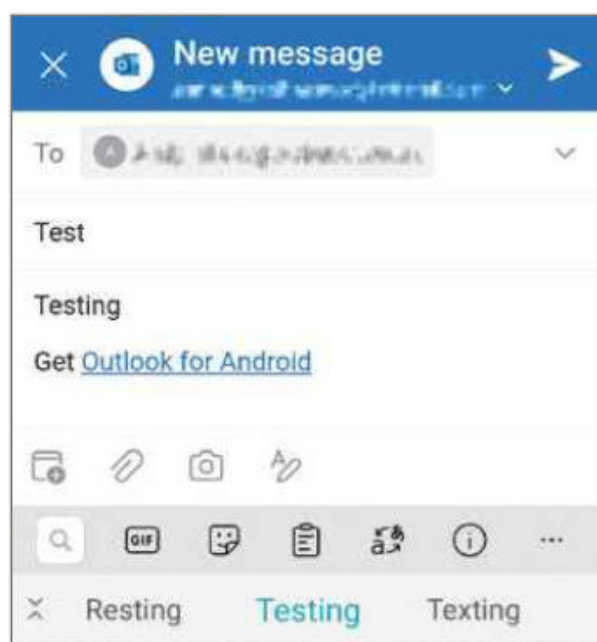
Click Preferences in the Print window to set the paper size and orientation

orientation to Portrait and the margins to around 20mm. Click OK, then select File, then Print. Select the printer and click Preferences. Select each tab and set the paper size and orientation to A4 and portrait, and the document size A4. Make sure two-sided or multi-page print options aren't selected.

Check the settings in the software you're printing from. Make sure it's set to print in portrait to A4 paper and not, for example, to rotate it 90 degrees, which is a trick some programs can perform. The option might be labelled something like 'Auto-rotate and centre'. Clear it.

The printer has a small screen and menus. Go through each of the printer functions and make sure that A4 portrait printing is selected. Make sure the paper is in the printer the correct way round.





Outlook for Android appears to have a bug that can grey-out the Send buttons

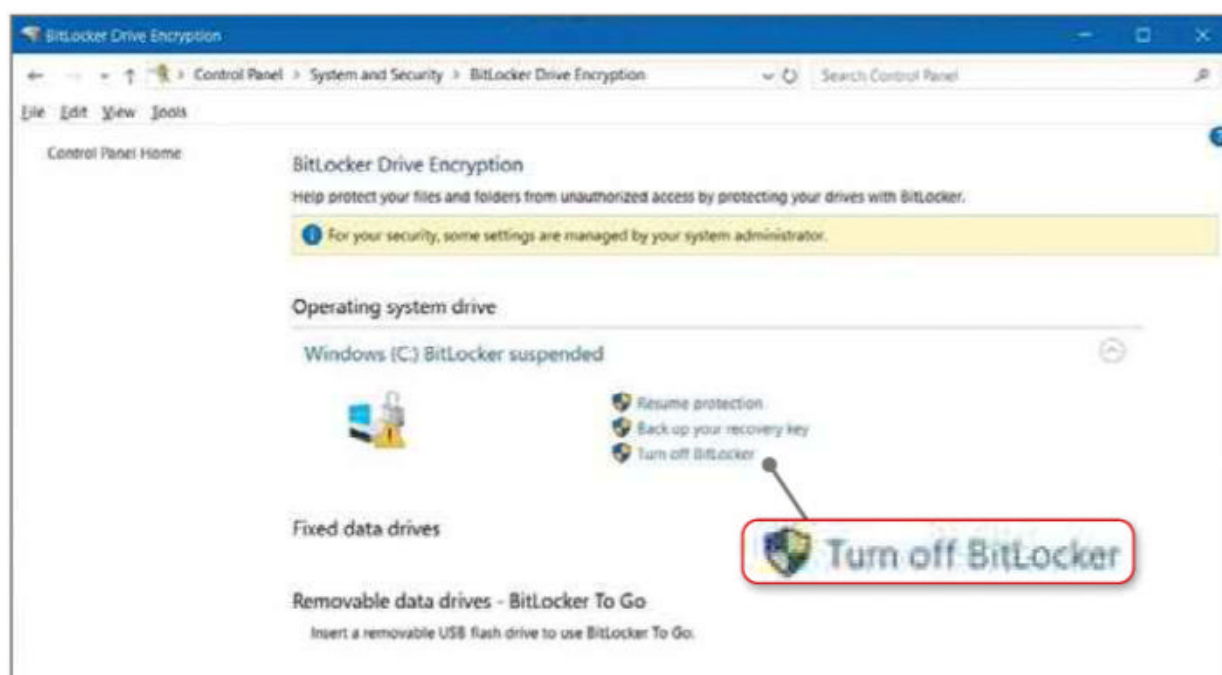
EMAIL

Can't send from Android Outlook app

Q The Outlook app on my Android phone has worked fine until now. For some reason, I can no longer send emails because the Send button is greyed out. I tried deleting the Outlook app and installing it again, but it hasn't solved the problem. I can reply to emails, I just can't create new ones. Why has this happened?

R Andrews, via email

A This problem seems to be a bug in a recent update to the Outlook app that affects a small number of users. The Outlook app is updated every week or two, and the next version should fix it.



Switch off BitLocker encryption from the BitLocker Drive Encryption window

Don't forget that you can go to outlook.com using a browser on your phone. The site works almost as well as the app, and there shouldn't be any problems sending email this way. You can go back to using the app when it's been updated.

WINDOWS

Turn off BitLocker

Q I have Windows 10 Pro installed on my laptop computer. When I first got the laptop, I switched on BitLocker encryption. I suspect that this might now be causing problems with a program I am using, so I want to disable BitLocker and see if it makes a difference. How do I do this?

F Minter, via email

A BitLocker can be found in the Windows 10 Settings app and in the old Control Panel, but only in those versions of Windows that support it. Windows 10 Home doesn't, but Windows 10 Pro does. The easiest way to find it is to click the Start button and type "Manage BitLocker", then click it in the search results.

You can also open the Settings app, click Update & Security and then select Device Encryption. Both of these methods can be used to enable or disable BitLocker. Make sure it's off in both places. It shouldn't make any difference to installed software but, if you've tried everything else to solve the problem, it's worth seeing what happens with it switched off.

WINDOWS

Stop pop-up help notices

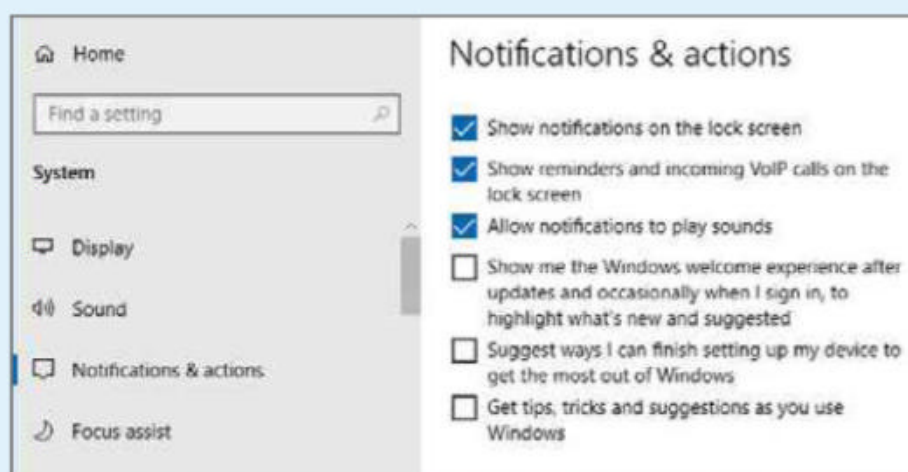
Q It seems that everything I use displays pop-up notices. They often state the obvious and it's tiresome closing them or having to sit through several in a row. It happens on my computer and my phone.

Paul Connor, via email

A Software on PCs and mobile devices is updated frequently. At one time, update notes used to be provided, but people either didn't read them or didn't see them, so they weren't aware of new features that had been added.

The solution, which has become common now, is to show in-app tips explaining any new things that have been added, changed or moved. They are usually helpful, but can be

If you're seeing too many notifications in Windows, turn off the bottom three of these options



irritating if you use a lot of apps and web services that display them.

There's no global setting that turns them off or on, but Windows, programs and mobile apps may have individual settings to control them. For example, open the Settings app in Windows and click System, then 'Notifications & actions'. Clear the ticks in these three boxes: "Show me the Windows welcome

experience..."; "Suggest ways I can finish setting up my device..."; and "Get tips, tricks and suggestions..."

Some programs provide their own options. In Microsoft Word, for example, click File, Options, General to see an option for 'ScreenTip style'. Set it to 'Don't show ScreenTips.' Try looking for similar options in other programs and mobile apps.



This fortnight, Roland has barely noticed local lockdown restrictions, spending most of his time hunched over his PC



Readers' Helpdesk

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

WINDOWS

Change your computer mode

Q I'm not sure if I've received the Windows 10 October update or if I've just pressed the wrong button, but the last time I switched on my computer, I found a number of changes to the operating system. Most immediately, I can't return to the desktop. Instead, all I can do is open the Start Menu, which is now so big it covers the entire screen. Windows can only be opened in full-screen or split-screen, and all the icons have disappeared from the Taskbar. Also, I can no longer access the System Tray.

What on earth is going on? If this is a new look for Windows, I can't say I'm impressed.

Arnold, via email

A It's possible that your computer has updated, but the changes you're describing suggest that your system has switched itself to Tablet Mode. This is why programs are only opening in full-screen and split-screen, since anything else isn't practical on most touchscreen devices.



Turn off Windows' tablet mode

To revert back to the regular interface, open Settings, choose System, then select Tablet from the list. You don't say whether you're using a laptop with a touchscreen but, if you are, make sure to set the two drop-down options to 'Never use tablet mode' and 'Ask me before switching modes'. Next, click 'Change additional tablet settings' and toggle Tablet Mode to Off.

Steve Clark, Features Writer

IMAGES

Add numbers to photos

Q I'd like to put 12 photos on an A4 page and number them underneath, from 1 to 12. I've managed to position the

READERS RESPOND

SOFTWARE

Catalogue your collections

A In issue 510, George Dalton asked for help with software to catalogue collections. May I suggest Evernote (evernote.com)? There are free and paid-for versions, and I use it for equipment and household inventories, recording collections and purchases, project plans, a daily journal and much more. It is cross platform and syncs automatically with all my devices.

You can add images, PDFs and other files to your notes, and use the editor to format text, and create lists and tables. Notes can be organised into notebooks and tagged for quicker



Manage your inventories with Evernote

recall using the search function (you can save searches, too).

I've been using Evernote for several years and have a database of over 2,500 notes that can be exported, backed up and shared with others. I hope that helps.

Mike Jones, via email

CAN YOU HELP?

webuser@webuser.co.uk

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

ANDROID

Q Is there any way to force the latest Android version to install on my phone? I'm stuck on Android 10.

Oliver Marchant, via email

MESSAGING

Q How do I gather all my messenger apps – Facebook, Slack, Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp – in one place?

Derrick Irving, via email

12 photos but adding the numbers is beyond me. Is there a program I can use to do this?

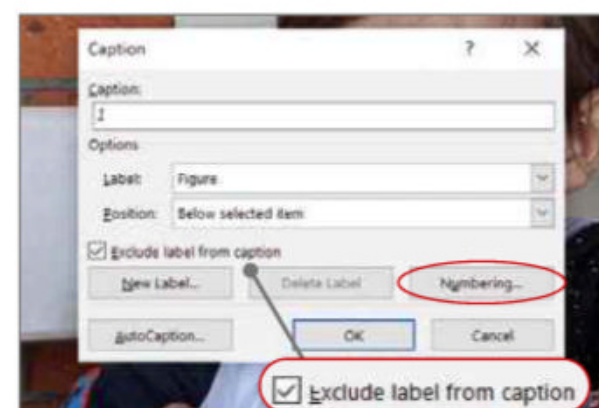
Reg Potter, via email

A If you're using Microsoft Word, the easiest way to pop a number beneath your images is to place the picture on the page, then right-click it. Choose Insert Caption from the menu and, in the dialogue box (pictured, right), untick 'Exclude label from caption'. In the Caption field, enter a number and click OK. You can change the format of your numbers by clicking Numbering.

Alternatively, you could position a text box beneath the picture and type in the number. This takes slightly longer, but

you'll have more control over the appearance of your numbers, from font type to size. This option is found under Insert on the toolbar.

Steve Clark, Features Writer



Using Word's caption option is the fastest way to assign numbers to images

Your Top Tips

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



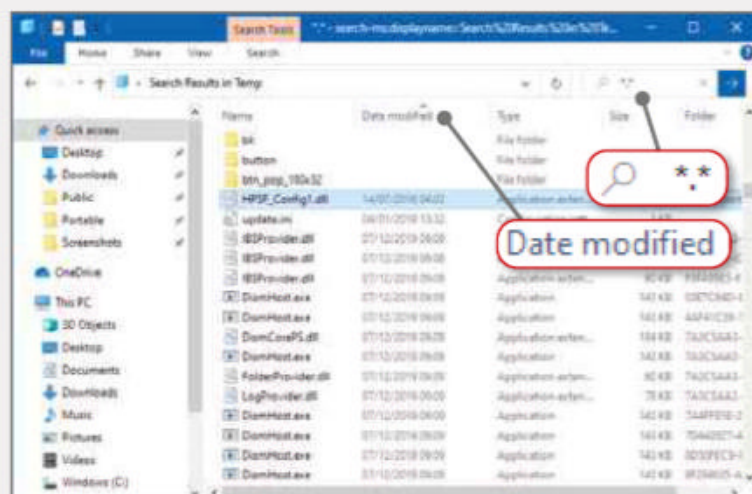
TOP TIP

WINDOWS

Delete old temporary files

Windows and the programs that run on it create temporary files on the hard drive that should be deleted automatically when they're finished with, but this doesn't always happen. Over time, the number of temporary files can build up and become a problem as you run out of space on your hard drive. There are ways to clear out temporary files, including Disk Clean-up, but they don't always work properly. I have a better method.

Press Windows+R and enter %temp% to open an Explorer window showing the temporary files folder. Enter *.* into the search box to find all files. Wait till this has completed, then click the View menu and select Details. Click the 'Date modified' column header twice to sort the list with the oldest item first. If you can't see a 'Date modified' column, right-click any column header and enable it.



Delete old temporary files if you're running short on hard drive space

Ignoring any folders at the top, you'll now see a list of temporary files with the oldest first. I found files going back as far as 2016, despite running Disk Clean-up probably a hundred times over the last four years. If you switch off your PC at night, no files over a week old should ever be needed again – after all, they are only temporary. Go ahead and delete them.

Tom Richardson, via email

Back Issues disc winner



button on the right-hand side of the menu bar at the top of the page.

Will Davidson, via email

WINDOWS

Customise Start menu items

Click the Start button and you'll see a column of icons on the left. When the mouse hovers over them, the Start menu changes to show Power, Settings, your account and possibly other items.

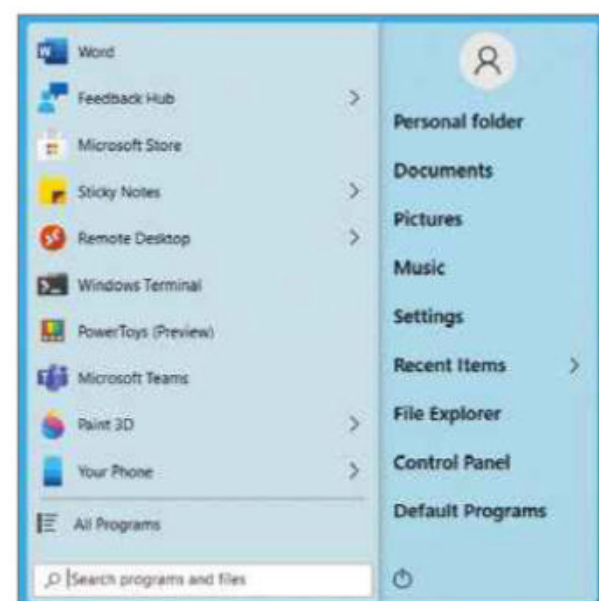
There are a number of other items you can add to this list. Open the Settings app, then the Personalisation section and click Start. Click the link 'Choose which folders appear on Start'. There are nine items, each with on/off switches: Explorer, Settings, Documents, Downloads, Music, Pictures, Videos, Network and Personal Folder. Choose the ones you want to add. This makes getting to these folders easier than going through Explorer.

A Philips, via email

WINDOWS

Bring back the Windows 7 Start Menu

Remember the good old days of Windows 7, when the Start menu made sense and Microsoft wasn't constantly

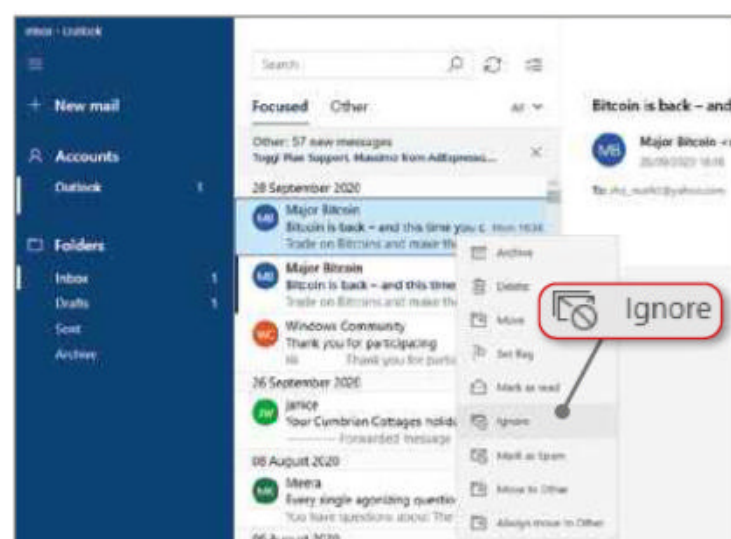


If you still miss Windows 7's Start menu, try this downloadable skin

EMAIL

Ignore annoying emails

In the Windows 10 Mail app, right-click an email in the inbox and you'll find an



Delete old and future conversations using the Ignore option in Windows Mail and Outlook

Ignore option that lets you end conversations that have become annoying. I must admit, I had to search Google to find out what it's for because it's not obvious.

The scenario is that you email someone, they reply, you reply and so on, making a conversation. If you become frustrated with it and want to stop, right-click it and select Ignore. All previous emails in the conversation and, more importantly, all future emails, are moved to Deleted Items. You will never see the conversation again.

I discovered that you can perform the same action in Outlook webmail. Select an email and click the three-dot menu



toying with it? Well, I recently discovered a downloadable skin on GitHub (bit.ly/start513) that brings it back. You need to also download Open Shell (bit.ly/shell513) for it to work. The developer says it works with Windows 8, too, though it's recommended for Windows 10. It's also packed with other enhancements for personalising colours, fonts and buttons. Now, if only Microsoft would just give us the option to change the interface!

Ahmed, via email

SOFTWARE

Create and edit your own PDFs

I would like to recommend an excellent free PDF creator and editor called PDF24 (en.pdf24.org) that I've been using for several years. It lets you convert, split and merge PDF files, and includes many other useful tools.

Basil, via email

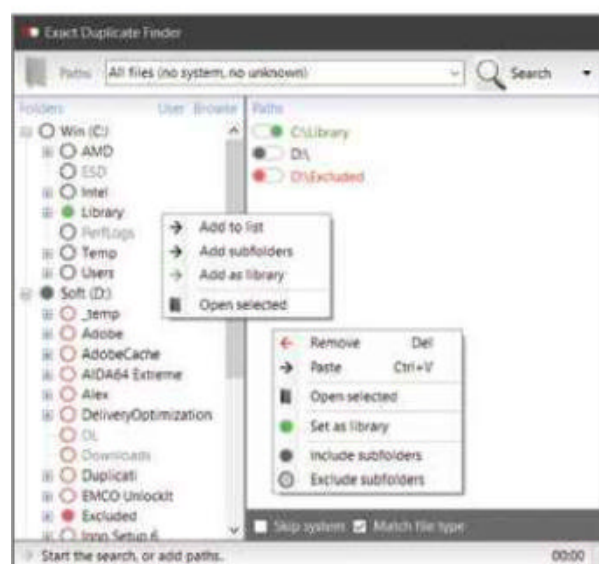
SOFTWARE

Find and remove duplicate files

I know *Web User* has covered duplicate file finders in the past, but I'd like to suggest my current favourite. Exact Duplicate Finder (bit.ly/finder513) is a portable tool that I find very easy to use, in part because it's very basic in design (though not in performance).

The software has plenty of rules to set, letting you find all sorts of duplicate files on your computer. You can also choose to search for specific file formats. The tool makes it very easy to locate and remove these unwanted files.

Joe Braben, via email

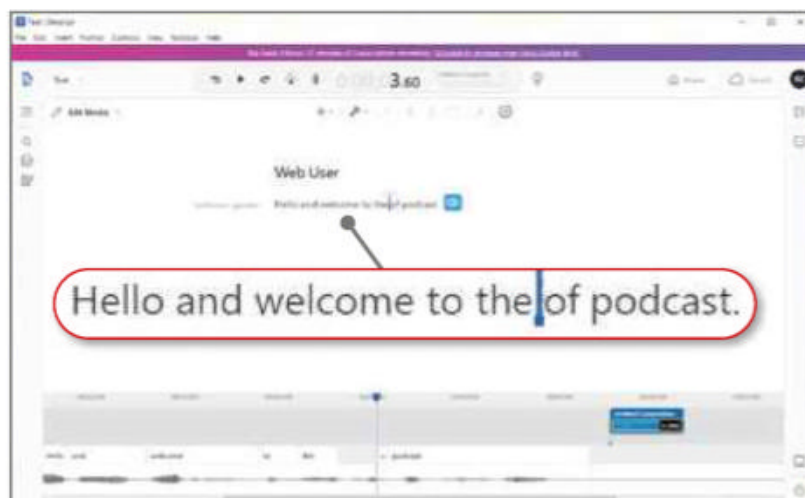


Don't let duplicate files clog up your computer

SOFTWARE

Edit audio with words

I've wanted to get into podcasting for a while now and, judging by Spotify and the like, I'm not alone. One tool I've found helpful for speeding up post-production is Descript (www.descript.com).



Descript can take a lot of the pain out of creating podcasts

It transcribes your words as it records your audio. You can then use this as a guide for editing your recordings, dragging and dropping the text into position, which then alters the track.

There's also an option to create text-to-speech that sounds like your voice, but this is only available in the paid-for subscription.

John Beemish, via email

ANDROID

Share your screen in Duo

Google's voice- and video-calling app Duo (duo.google.com) was pretty terrible for a very long time, but I must say it's come on in leaps and bounds since I last used it (many moons ago, when 'lockdown' was a word in a dictionary, not a way of life). Not only does it work on multiple devices, but Google has also

added a lot of new, modern features.

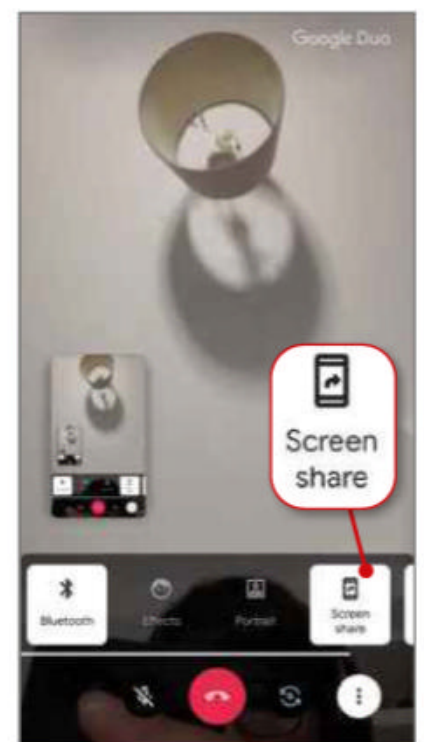
Notably, and most recently, it's added the ability to share your screen. I find this useful for showing photos without having to send or share them, and remotely helping friends with their phone. The way to do this is to start a video call, then press the three-dot button.

This brings up a ribbon of options, including 'Screen share'. Tap this and the other person immediately sees what you're seeing. You terminate screen-sharing by pulling down the notification area and selecting to end it. This won't stop the call.

The option is still rolling out, so don't fret if you don't have it yet – it's on its way.

Joshua Chung, via email

Google Duo now lets you share your screen during calls



BLUNDER OF THE FORTNIGHT

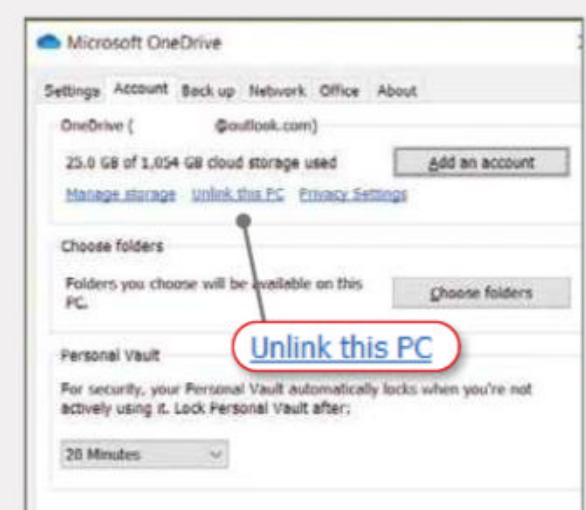
ONLINE STORAGE

Remove OneDrive from your computer

I've always hated OneDrive – it's unreliable and you'll never convince me otherwise. I much prefer using Google Drive for my cloud-storage needs.

I had enough of OneDrive taking up space on my computer, so I decided to completely get rid of it. However, for some reason, the app refused to uninstall itself, even when going through Control Panel. That's when I had a thought – I clicked the OneDrive icon in the notification area, went to 'Help & Settings' and chose Settings. Because I'd set it up when I first got the computer, OneDrive was linked to my Outlook account, even though it wasn't syncing anything.

In the Settings window, move to the Account tab and click 'Unlink this PC'. Confirm your choice by clicking 'Unlink



Unlink your account if you're having trouble uninstalling OneDrive

account'. Don't worry, this won't delete any files you have. After this, I found OneDrive uninstalled without any fuss.

Wes Saint, via email

Have you managed to fix a PC-related disaster?

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



Star Email

Ads are the biggest obstacle to accessibility

I was interested to read Jane Hoskyn's 'Make the Web Accessible' feature in Issue 512, which contained some useful advice about making web pages easier to read. However, my biggest problem with accessing websites is less to do with their design than with the distracting adverts that often dominate the page and prevent you from focusing on their content.

Take a site such as Mail Online, for example, which has a big ad slapped across the top of the homepage, two other large ads down either side and many more within the articles themselves. The worst of these are the videos that start playing automatically. Scroll down the page to get away from them and the video player moves to a

pop-out box that follows you, so there's no escape!

This surfeit of ads is extremely annoying and often headache-inducing. It certainly doesn't encourage me to click any of them, which is surely the point. Friends tell me that I should use an ad blocker, but I don't feel this is fair on the smaller websites who rely on advertising revenue to survive, and use ads sparingly and unobtrusively. It's a shame that the bigger sites have to ruin things for everyone.

I also agree with Jane Hoskyn that the



standard of automatically generated subtitles on YouTube videos is often very poor, and not helped by a low maximum sound level. I'm glad that there are options available for adding subtitles yourself, but YouTube should be paying more attention to this problem.

Of course, YouTube is also swamped with annoying ads, which brings me back to my first point!

Derek Sherwood, via email

We need HS2 more than high-speed broadband

The recent column by Barry Collins and letter from Graham Caldwell about why the government should prioritise high-speed broadband over HS2 left me gobsmacked – it's like comparing apples to goldfish! Not only will HS2 provide rapid personal transport between major centres of population in the UK, it will also help the West Coast Main Line in the movement of manufactured goods. Can broadband do this?

Let's get this straight: the number of people who can work from home in the UK is probably less than 20%. There are huge numbers of doctors, nurses, construction workers, shop assistants and many more who could not possibly do their jobs from home! I know people who are home workers due to COVID-19 who are desperate to get back to work, and being stuck inside four walls is doing them no good whatsoever – "stir crazy" was one comment I heard.

Mr Caldwell should count himself lucky that it's not a double four-lane motorway between London and Birmingham, as was suggested by some MPs in preference to HS2. Then you really would have something to moan about.

Alan Heasman, via email

Don't conflate transport with communication

Your columnist Barry Collins and the ensuing correspondents would appear to be suffering from bouts of myopia if they

think we should scrap HS2 in favour of high-speed broadband! Did I miss the news that scientists have perfected a 'Star Trek'-style matter transmitter that would enable goods to be reduced to their constituent atoms and transmitted all over the UK?

The systems should be taken separately for what they are – transport and communication. HS2 will help the movement of people and goods, and being all-electric should take a considerable number of heavy-goods

Quiz Answers: Issue 512

1 **American Beauty**



2 **Toy Story**



3 **The Silence of the Lambs**



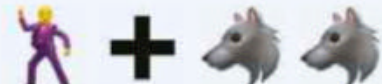
4 **Edward Scissorhands**



5 **Starship Troopers**



6 **Dances With Wolves**



WINNER!

Well done to **Terry Franklin** who wins a Web User Back Issues Disc



WAYBACK MACHINE

2003





vehicles off our roads – another benefit to the environment.

Fortunately, not everyone wants to work from home. We are not, and hopefully never will be, in the sci-fi situation where the whole population is enclosed in little boxes and only allowed out for a week or so a year.

Jeff Jefferson, via email

Apple quality is worth the extra money

Your review of the Apple iMac 2020 in Issue 510 caught my eye, particularly your final comment about the quality of the product coming at a price.



The way I see it, I can get a Windows machine with better specs than Apple's startup model for about £1,300, but a good monitor for my editing needs could easily cost an extra £500. The cost is therefore comparable. The problem is that I'd be lumbered with Windows 10, and its frequent, irritating updates (my PC had many problems during lockdown).

I own both a Mac and PC and, in the last five years, the Mac has always been my preferred option. Apple has a nerve to charge a premium for many items, such as RAM, but by rejecting Apple outright, I'd be throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Rik Ward, Facebook

The trouble with spare parts and batteries

With regard to Mike Gosling and his Canon printer (Star Email, Issue 511, 'Lack of spare parts spoiled my repairs'), while

I sympathise with him, there has to be a cut-off time when spares are no longer cost-effective to manufacture or even stock. The same goes for TVs, washing machines, fridges and so on. Can you still get spare parts for a 10-year-old TV? I doubt it.

On another point raised in recent issues – how many mobiles, tablets and laptops end up in landfill and bins, simply because the batteries cannot be replaced by the owner? On modern devices, there is almost no chance of doing this yourself.

John C Kent, via email

What you say...

WILL YOU BUY THE NEW CHROMECAST WITH GOOGLE TV (see FAQ, page 38)?

Absolutely not. I had a Chromecast that I never used, and now Virgin Media and our TV have apps for YouTube and Prime Video. Google TV is too late to the party.

Nat Grove

Nope! Smart TVs and smart speakers (I have Google Nest Hubs) now come with Chromecast built in, which you can use stream content from your smartphone, tablet, laptop or even your PC directly to your TV.

Kevin Gadget Man Benton

I'm not happy buying anything from Google after what it's done to Google Play Music and my Chromecast Audio setup. Not happy at all.

Barry Griggs

No, it's just another gimmick with no real change.

Ady Colclough

No. We pay Virgin Media enough already and, as this won't have anything I want without more subscriptions on top of the initial cost, any "saving" will be misleading at best. If the service does have any useful aspects, Google will no doubt remove them eventually (as it did with Google Play Music).

Rich Grove

I have two original Chromecasts sitting collecting dust somewhere. I haven't used them in ages as there are plenty of other ways to stream to my TV. My 4K Fire TV Stick is faster and has far more options, and you can install apps. My choice is the Emby app (emby.media) to stream from my computer. It's brilliant.

Gary Olsen

No, I'm happy with Freeview. That's enough entertainment for me, with no contracts and no subscriptions.

Brian Brown

No, there are better ways of achieving the same thing. I have two Chromecasts that have not been used in over a year, whereas my Nest Hubs are used daily and are very useful. Chromecast isn't that good and it can be very slow. I replaced mine with Fire TV Sticks, which run far faster in conjunction with my NAS system.

Shaun Thomas

No. Every TV or set-top box has all the apps built in these days. Chromecast has had its day.

Stan Elliott

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE COLOURFUL NEW GMAIL LOGO?



It's similar to the multicoloured Maps and Play Store logos. I prefer the old one because of the shadow effect on the envelope, but I can see that Google is trying to streamline its logos in the same style.

Chris Armstrong

I prefer the old one. Why this constant urge to change things? It's just a logo, but if it ain't broke don't fix it.

Iain Kenworthy-Neale

It must have taken Google's graphic design specialists all of two seconds to come up with that.

Martin Kyle

It's certainly more prominent and brighter, but I use Aqua Mail Pro on my Android phone.

Brian Brown

It isn't the Gmail logo that I'm worried about. It's the fact that I keep having problems logging into my account to access my messages. Google should focus on fixing that.

Andrew Guest

It's crap.

Geoffrey Boow



Barry Collins' patience has finally snapped with his so-called 'smart' doorbell

My Ring doorbell doesn't chime with me

For roughly 200 years, electric doorbells just worked. Someone pressed a button on the outside of the house, another person heard a chime on the inside and doors were opened. It was a near-flawless system, bar the doorbell's disappointing inability to discriminate between Pat from number 42 and Scientologists.

Then Ring came along. You need a doorbell that does more than just ring, they said, somewhat oblivious to the company name. You need one that allows you to tell double-glazing salesmen to naff off while you're on a beach in Lanzarote, one that triggers motion alerts when a cat passes by at 3am, one that costs £250 and a £25-a-year subscription, just so you can tell who called. And we lapped it up in our millions, because we're idiots.

I was lulled into this racket a few years back. I'd converted my garage into a home office, but that meant I couldn't hear the doorbell, giving the Amazon

couriers (I'll come back to them later) a convenient excuse to lob laptops and wine glasses over the wall when I supposedly "wasn't in".

For the first year or so, everything worked pretty smoothly. There was a slight delay between someone pressing the doorbell and it pinging my phone to alert me to the visitor, but nothing serious. And there was a delightful incident when a local lad playing knock-down-ginger was informed it was a video doorbell and we could tell it was him. You've never seen a 12-year-old look so humbled.

However, for the past year or so, the Ring has become so terrible that it's mainly referred to by another four-letter word in our household. Every new version of the software seems to make

the damned thing slower. Now, when someone presses the doorbell, the chimes/smartphones/Alexa devices in our house will alert us shortly after the visitor has left the county. I saw a report recently that said some Ring users were getting 'phantom callers' in the middle of the night, some six hours after the

doorbell was pressed. The report said it was a glitch on Ring's servers – it sounded like a faster new model to me.

Delayed alerts aren't the only problem with the Ring. Video so

choppy that you can't make sense of what the person at the door's saying, batteries running dry without warning and random disconnections are just some of the many issues that I – and many others – have experienced. Better still, those aforementioned Amazon couriers just don't bother with it, either because it's so slow to respond it breaks their six-second delivery window or because they don't want to be caught on camera disappearing before you've had a chance to answer the door. Irony fans will be delighted to hear that Amazon bought Ring for \$1bn a couple of years ago.

I'm currently exploring options to rid myself of Ring and its unreliable doorbell. There are several alternatives out there, including Nest, Netamo and Eufy. And to be fair, there are more modern Ring models that people tell me perform much better. But I think I've had enough of this 'smart' technology that's dumber than its predecessors. I'm hiring a butler. I'm just worried I won't hear them when they turn up for the interview.

“When someone presses the doorbell, the chimes in our house alert us shortly after the visitor has left the county”



Illustration: Andrew Torrens

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