DON'T FALL FOR FAKE BROADBAND DEALS

WebUser

Issue 515

25 Nov - 8 Dec 2020 / Best software / New apps / All you need is Lobe

What comparison sites don't tell you about:

- ☒ Hidden fees & charges
- ☒ Biased search results
- ☒ False speed claims

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WHO TARGETS YOU ONLINE?

Expose the snoopers who track and sell your data – and block them p40

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PLUS

RUN WINDOWS IN A VIRTUAL MACHINE

Without sacrificing speed

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STREAM ALL TV AND FILMS IN ONE PLACE

Say goodbye to app-hopping

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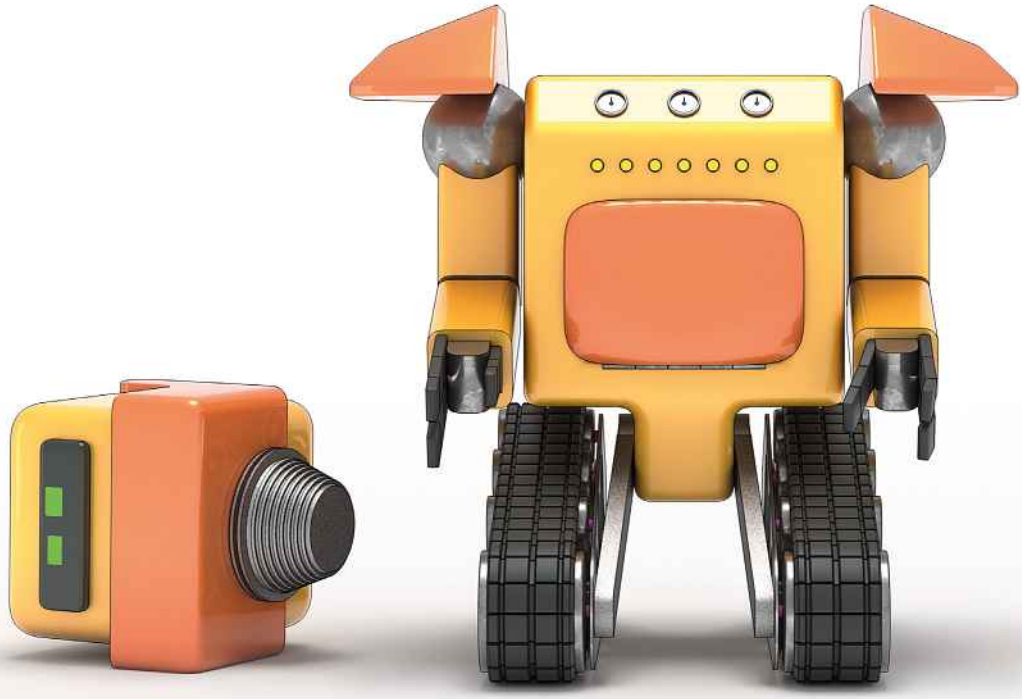
HACK YOUR MOUSE AND KEYBOARD

Unleash the hidden power of your peripherals p58

DON'T LOSE YOUR HEAD OVER BLACK FRIDAY DEALS



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Don't be in the target market

A turf war has recently broken out in my neighbourhood between Morrisons and a new branch of Lidl. This may not sound as glamorous as Macy's versus Bloomingdales, but with few other shops open at the moment, it's a matter of life and cheap groceries for the local community. It also means that every time I open Google or Facebook, I see adverts and sponsored posts for both stores, battling for my custom.

As we explain in this issue's cover feature, this type of behaviour is now par for the course online, with companies tracking and targeting you every time you open your browser. But aside from the obvious offenders, such as supermarkets, there are more devious and even dangerous snoopers to worry about if you value your privacy.

We lift the lid on the secret spies who lurk in every web page, and reveal what they want with your data. We also explain how to block these nosy parkers and avoid becoming a target in future.

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

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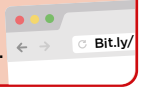
How to use Bitly links

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.



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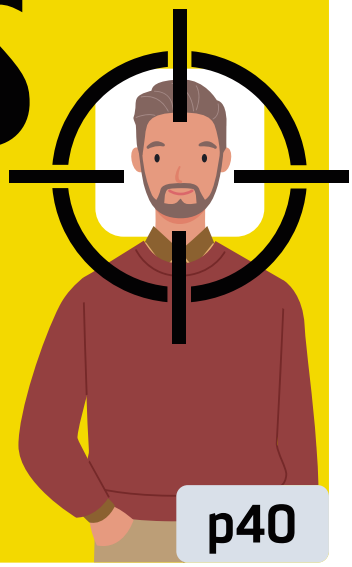

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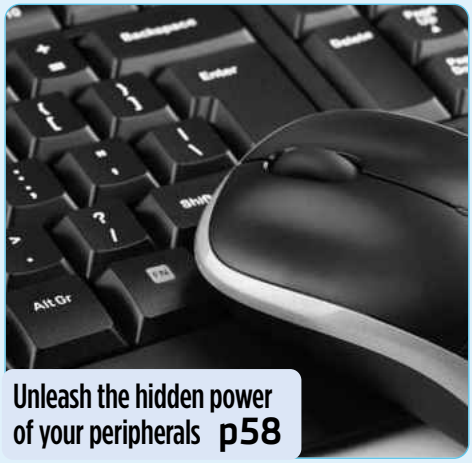

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What's New Online

Send vanishing WhatsApp messages

One problem with sending standard text messages is that they can come back to bite you. This is why self-destructing messages, which are automatically deleted after a set period of time, are becoming more popular – and now WhatsApp is getting in on the vanishing act.

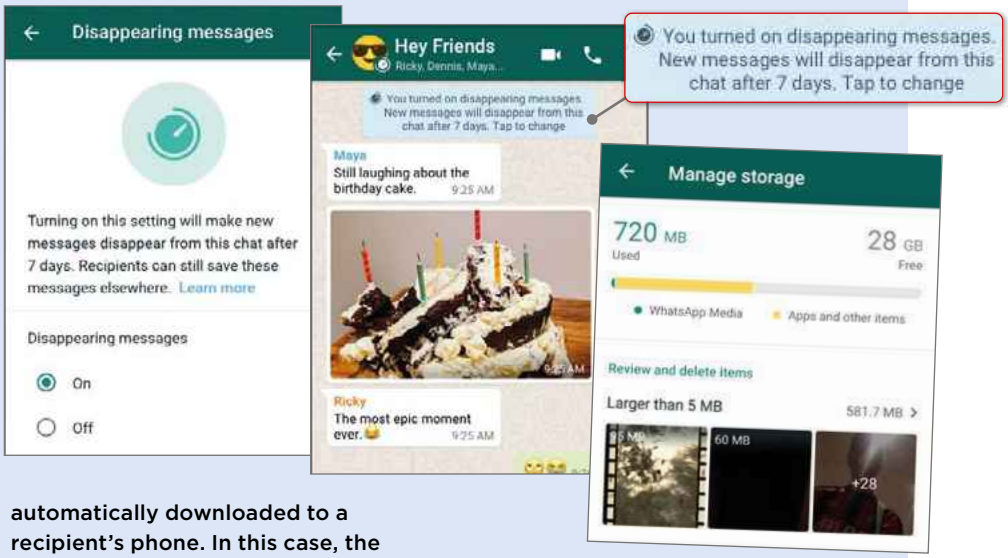
Tap a contact's name and activate Disappearing Messages, and anything you send within the chat from that point on will vanish after seven days. It works for individual conversations and, if you're a group admin, you can do the same in group conversations.

When making the switch to disappearing messages, however, there are limitations. For starters, any messages that were previously sent and received will remain. Likewise, if a message is quoted in a reply or forwarded, then it, too, can remain in a chat for longer than a week.

Another thing to bear in mind is that any images you send can be automatically downloaded to a recipient's phone. In this case, the images will disappear from WhatsApp after seven days, but they'll remain on that person's device.

That said, WhatsApp is at least making it easier for users to delete items. By going to Settings, 'Storage and data', 'Manage storage', you'll see files organised by size. You can preview images and videos, then select multiple items to delete them in one go.

www.whatsapp.com



Enjoy free online talks

mirthy.co.uk

Loneliness is a major problem, particularly for older people who are more likely to self-isolate during the ongoing pandemic. To help combat this, a new platform called Mirthy has emerged offering live online talks on a wide variety of subjects, from history and hobbies to music and travel.

Registering for individuals is free and lets you attend a pre-selected weekly online event. This has so far included talks entitled 'Curiosities from London's Streets', 'William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement' and 'The Grace Kelly Story'. Simply log in on the required date and time to join in. Costs are introduced if you register as a club, but you can pick from a long list of specific talks for club members and read about the content and the person speaking before making a commitment. It costs £50 for each club talk or £150 to include a live chat and Q&A with the speaker.

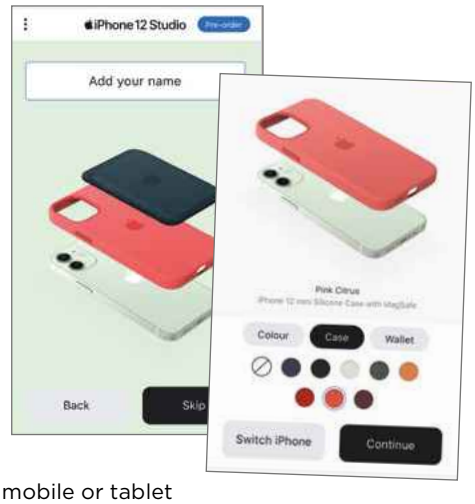
Design a personalised iPhone 12

bit.ly/apple515

It used to be the case that you could have any colour iPhone as long as it was black. Today, you can also buy the latest iPhone 12 in white, blue, green and red, and choose nine different coloured cases. But how can you ensure the end result won't look garish?

Step forward Apple's iPhone 12 Studio. Designed to be used on a mobile or tablet (you'll be asked to scan a QR code if you're viewing on a desktop), it lets you select an iPhone 12 model and determine how you want the device, MagSafe case and wallet to appear.

Simply experiment by tapping the colour icons, name the design and download the resulting image. Alternatively, try accessory maker MagSafe's desktop-compatible tool, which works in much the same way but is a little more fiddly (bit.ly/magsafe515).



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

View Russian Cold War spy maps

bit.ly/coldwar515

The Soviet Union created comprehensive military maps of the world during the Cold War to aid them in possible future invasions. Here, you can see just how detailed they were by zooming in on this interactive collage of maps, noting the Russian spellings of locations and checking out the infrastructure and buildings. Different layers allow you to view maps at numerous scales.

Listen to tailored YouTube Music playlists

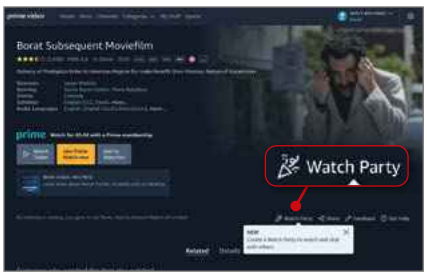
music.youtube.com

YouTube Music is offering up to seven personalised mixes to match your mood. These consist of different selections of tunes, each one containing up to 50 songs – you can play them in order or shuffle the mixes and add them to your library. As a bonus, a constantly updating Supermix selection of songs spans all your tastes. You can also select Explore to browse moods and genres, each of which includes various playlists.

Watch Amazon Prime Video with friends

www.primevideo.com

Even if you're apart, Amazon Prime Video now lets you watch your films and shows with friends and family. The streaming service's Watch Party lets you bring together up to 100 friends and chat using text and emoji, while viewing content included with a Prime membership. Eligible shows include a Watch Party option – simply enter a username, click Create Watch Party and share the generated link. It works on all browsers except Safari and IE.



Bring an Australian animal into your home

www.google.co.uk

Search Google for a koala, quokka, wombat, emu, platypus, echidna, kookaburra, emu or kangaroo in your mobile browser on iOS or Android and you can now see these Australian animals interact with your immediate surroundings, thanks to the magic of augmented reality. Just tap View in 3D and watch the animal move. Android users also get to enjoy the animals' sounds.

NEW VOICE COMMANDS

Listen to Scooby

Two Scooby-Doo Mysteries – 'Fright at Zombie Farm' and 'Secret of the Flying Saucer' – can be heard by adding the skill to your device (bit.ly/scooby515) and saying: "Hey Google, talk to You Choose Scooby-Doo Stories".

Get a personal update

As of iOS 14.2, Siri's Personal Update feature delivers a daily briefing including news, weather reminders and more when you ask: "What's my update?".

Bring Lego to life

Say: "Alexa, open Lego Moments" to hear structure-based soundscapes including construction of the Empire State Building in 1930 and Taj Mahal being built in 1632.

Improve Google Photo's AI

photos.google.com

Android users can help improve Google Photos's object-recognition algorithms by labelling the content of images. Tap Search, scroll down and select Help Improve Google Photos. Describe items in the image, name events they're associated with and choose preferred collages.

See pre- and post-Wall Berlin

bit.ly/berlin515

Use a slider to see what Berlin looked like during and after the time of the Wall, with its location and course plotted on a map. This aerial perspective also has a slider showing Berlin in 1989 and 2019.

Stream songs from Apple Watch

www.spotify.com/uk

Spotify subscribers can now stream songs directly from an Apple Watch when connected to Wi-Fi or a cellular network, so you can ditch your phone when going for a run.

Need to Know

Apple's Big Sur macOS update suffers bugs and privacy issues

What happened?

Apple rolled out its latest operating system, but the arrival of macOS 11 Big Sur introduced the type of bugs and privacy concerns more commonly associated with Windows updates.

At first, the problems appeared to be centred on the download system. The rush to get the new OS meant its digital certificate checker crashed, so downloads were slow and appeared to affect unrelated apps, including Apple Pay, iMessage and FaceTime. Users reported that apps were slow to open, even if they weren't made by Apple, but said that turning off their internet connection meant the apps opened normally. Those problems were solved within several hours by Apple.

The outage raised concerns about the privacy implications of macOS telling an Apple server every time a user opens an app. Privacy activists noted that Apple logs every application opened, along with the date and time, IP address and location, all sent in a series of letters and numbers called a hash.

Apple does this for security purposes: when an app is opened, Apple checks its security certificate against its own database – a system called Gatekeeper – to ensure the app isn't malicious and hasn't been meddled with by hackers. If everything checks out, the app continues to load. This system has been in use for several years, and Microsoft has its own version, but the process normally happens so quickly you don't notice. After the Big Sur rollout, the process stalled and some Mac users became suspicious.

Little Snitch stops macOS apps sharing your personal data without your consent

Privacy advocates and security researchers have raised concerns about the system, in part because the hash of information about a user isn't sent encrypted. It would take some effort to unpick that information, but it is theoretically possible, and the data could, for example, be accessed by the government to see if someone was using a specific computer at a certain time.

Apple has acknowledged the concerns, saying the app-checking hash has no information linking it to specific Apple users, such as through an iCloud account. However, the company did admit that it was logging IP addresses, which could be used to identify a user's location or device. Apple said it would stop collecting this information and purge any IP addresses it had already gathered. Additionally, it said it would begin encrypting the hashes and allow users to opt out of Gatekeeper security checks.

How will it affect you?

Apple's proposed changes to Gatekeeper are expected to arrive next year, though IP addresses are being removed immediately. You can block the checks by using your Mac offline or installing a tool called Little Snitch (obdev.at), which stops such data being shared. But it's worth noting that security certificates are designed to keep you safe, so if you do disable them, you need to be extra careful with the apps you install.

Support for Big Sur covers any Mac Pro, MacBook Pro and MacBook Air from 2013 onwards, and Mac Mini and iMac from 2014, as well as the 2015 MacBook and 2017 iMac Pro. To check if your model is supported, visit Apple's Big Sur website: www.apple.com/uk/macos/big-sur.

What do we think?

Security certificate systems need to be designed with privacy in mind. It's good practice to check that applications aren't malicious, because an app that's been created by hackers could wreak havoc on your computer and leak your data. But the criticism of Apple is fair, which is why it's stopped collecting IP addresses, and will now encrypt hashes and offer an opt-out.

All this should have been done back when Big Sur was introduced, and not noticed only because of a server outage. Apple should also do better at communicating exactly what data it is collecting.

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

Facebook introduces vanishing messages

What happened?

Facebook is to follow the addition of vanishing messages to WhatsApp (see page 6) by introducing a similar feature called Vanish Mode in its apps for Messenger and Instagram.

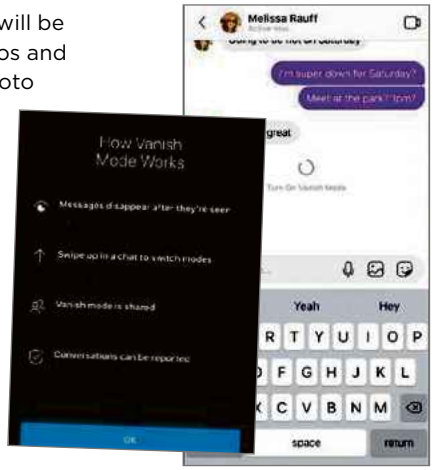
Once enabled, the mode ensures that messages and photos can only be viewed once before they disappear, a feature that's popular among young users of rival apps such as Snapchat.

Facebook's version was announced earlier this year, but is only being rolled out in the US now as part of wider plans for the company to invest more effort in direct messaging.

How will it affect me?

If you're an Instagram fan, the vanishing feature will be familiar because photos and videos sent via the photo app's direct-messaging system already disappear after they've been viewed.

Once it's been fully rolled out, Vanish Mode will be available in Facebook Messenger and Instagram, but that doesn't mean all messages or pictures sent will automatically disappear. Instead, users will have to enable it in the settings for each chat, with the other participant shown a message asking them to agree to disappearing messages as well. Initially, Vanish Mode will only be available in one-to-one messaging and not in group chats.



Vanish Mode is already showing up in Messenger for some users in the US and will arrive on Instagram imminently. Facebook hasn't said when the feature will arrive in other countries, including the UK, but it's expected to roll out soon.

What do we think?

This is a handy way to send messages that you don't want to stick around for too long, such as a goofy photo or a bit of gossip. Don't forget, though, that the recipient can take a screenshot or otherwise capture anything you send, even if the content is set to automatically delete.

Facebook may be making it easier for messages to disappear, but you should make sure you trust the person you're sending them to, and don't share anything embarrassing or incriminating.

Windows update causes password problems

What happened?

Microsoft issued a support notification after an update to Windows 10 caused a glitch that meant passwords weren't being remembered for some users.

The problem was first noticed in April by beta testers of the update, but it's only now been addressed by Microsoft. Users report being repeatedly asked to log into various Microsoft accounts, including OneDrive and Outlook, as well as other non-Microsoft software.

It's hardly the worst bug to hit Microsoft of late, but it's clearly frustrating to some users.

How will it affect you?

This particular bug showed up after Windows 10 Version 2004 Build 19041.173, but it doesn't necessarily affect all users. Microsoft said it appears to be caused by an HP Customer participation tool conflicting with the Task Scheduler.

Microsoft doesn't yet have a solution to this problem. In the interim, anyone impacted can simply type in their passwords manually.

If that becomes too frustrating, Microsoft has detailed a workaround that involves copying and pasting a command into Windows PowerShell. If you feel confident with such tweaks, you can follow the instructions at bit.ly/36JkCoN.

What do we think?

These bugs seem to plague every Windows update, but that's no surprise given that Microsoft pushes out frequent updates to hundreds of millions of computers, all of which have different specifications and settings. That makes it difficult to avoid bugs, even if they only affect a small percentage of users.

Still, Microsoft needs to do better. This bug has been around since April, and the fact that it's only being addressed now is frustrating. That may be because it's more an irritation than a security threat, but when every update has a bug, it's hard to convince people to install them automatically – even though this is wise because most updates specifically fix known security flaws.

See page 48 to discover what's new in the latest Windows 10 Update.

Google drops free unlimited photo storage

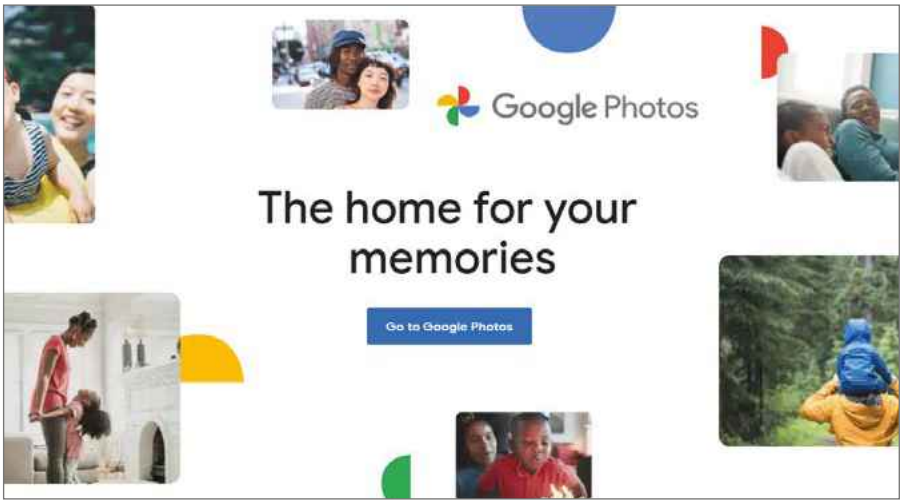
What happened?

In a shock announcement, Google confirmed plans to stop offering free, unlimited storage for Google Photos (bit.ly/2IMWvgh). The service currently lets users store as many high-quality photos as they like in the Photos app, with an option to pay for full-resolution storage.

Now, according to Google, "starting June 1, 2021, all new photos and videos backed up in High quality will count toward the free 15GB of storage that comes with your Google Account or any additional storage you may have purchased, the same way other Google services like Google Drive and Gmail already do".

Luckily, there's a fix for this: money. And Google is offering a generous deal with the option to buy additional storage space through its Google One subscription service. Prices begin at £1.59 for 100GB.

The move places Google in line with Apple, which currently offers iCloud subscription plans starting at 79p for 50GB, and OneDrive, which provides 100GB for £1.99. Both iCloud and OneDrive give users just 5GB for free.



How will it affect you?

When the new terms kick in, there's no need to panic. All high-quality photos uploaded to Google Photos prior to 1 June won't count against your storage limits, and Google plans to launch a new storage-management tool that analyses photos and recommends deleting those that are "too dark, blurry, or otherwise unwanted".

You can check Google Photos' personalised estimate tool, which details how much space you're using, and roughly how long that should last you based on your average use (in our case, over four years). Check back again in June 2021, though, and expect to see a very different estimate.

When you use up too much storage or go "over quota" – where you use more storage than allocated – you'll no longer be able to back up photos. Stay over quota for over two years, and Google says "your content may be impacted".

What do we think?

Free high-quality photo storage (with the option to pay for more) has long been one of the main attractions of using an Android phone – take as many photos as you like, without worrying about limited cloud space. But it couldn't last forever.

Google Photos has over a billion users, which makes it a costly endeavour. Having locked so many people into the service, Google was bound to look for new ways to monetise its base. After all, everyone else is doing it.

FIRST LOOK

iPhone 12 Mini

www.apple.com/uk/iphone-12

The iPhone 12 Mini bundles most of the premium tech-wizardry found in the iPhone 12 into a super-compact package. Even smaller than the latest iPhone SE – in fact, the Apple line-up hasn't seen a phone this tiny since the dinky 5S – the iPhone 12 Mini remains the top choice if you're after a pocketable handset that doesn't compromise on quality.

That's not to say it's identical to the impressive (and impressively large) iPhone 12. The Mini's 5.4in screen may have the same Super Retina XDR OLED display as the iPhone 12, but it also comes in a slightly lower resolution. Truth be told, you'd be hard pushed to spot the difference.

Elsewhere, the phones are evenly matched, with the Mini running iOS 14 on the powerful A14 processor. Within the pleasingly familiar Ceramic Shield front, glass back and aluminium design, you'll find the front- and rear-camera setup packs wide and ultra-wide 12-megapixel lenses and 4K video recording.

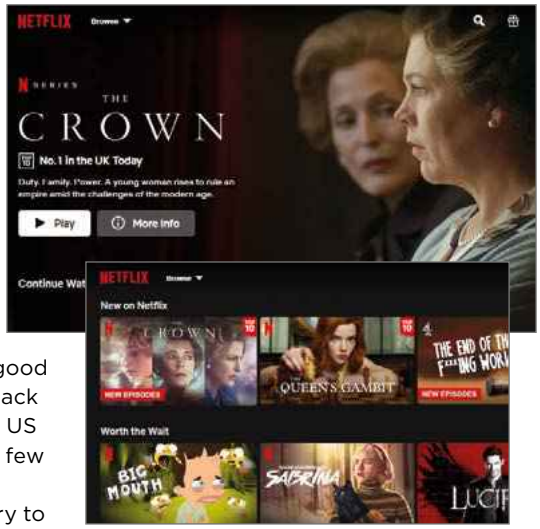
All your favourite iPhone features make an appearance, including FaceID, ApplePay and the ultra-new MagSafe – Apple's latest magnetic-docking innovation, which lets you attach accessories like a wallet to the rear of the phone – alongside wireless charging.

On the downside, the base model's 64GB of storage just isn't enough for a modern-day phone (still no sign of that missing microSD slot), which will inevitably push people toward the more expensive – and expansive – models. The battery life is also underwhelming, struggling to last a full day on a single charge. But this is a fair trade-off for a phone that almost perfectly mimics the top-of-the-range iPhone 12 but packs everything into a palm-sized shell.

The iPhone 12 Mini is available in three versions – 64GB, 128GB and 256GB – and five colours, including blue and red, priced from £699.

WHAT'S THE RUMOUR

Is Netflix upping its UK prices?



Rumours abound that Netflix is planning to increase its subscription prices in the UK. The fears stem from the company's recent decision to raise subscription costs in the US, which saw its premium plan jump to $18 a month, with a dollar added to the standard plan price for good measure. You may recall that back in 2019, when Netflix upped its US fees, a UK price rise followed a few months later.

America isn't the only country to see Netflix price increases – Canada has also experienced a similar rise in its subscription fees. However, despite previous trends, a Netflix representative claimed there were "no plans" to up the rise for UK subscribers, having previously said any change "in the US does not influence or indicate a global price change".

Increased competition among streaming platforms and a desire to improve the Netflix catalogue are cited as reasons behind the possible price rise. According to the streaming service, "people have more entertainment choices than ever" in the form of YouTube, HBO Max and Hulu (in the US); any increase in price means Netflix is able to produce or buy "more variety of TV shows and films".

Just don't mention the company's $14bn debt.

LIKELIHOOD RATING

✓✓✓✓✓

If past behaviour is anything to go by, a UK price increase is inevitable. Expect it in the New Year, once we've all finished bingeing on *The Crown* and Kurt Russell's Santa movies. It's no secret that Netflix is playing the long game here – spending billions on content creation, and customer acquisition and retention. The only surprise to the rumoured price hike is that it took so long. If the US price increase is anything to go by, look out for the all-new £9.99 and £13.99 plans coming to a screen near you.

What's new on Kickstarter

Our favourite new project on the crowdfunding site

Sentai

bit.ly/3pBZLwc | **From £299**

Sentai is yet another smart speaker, akin to Google Nest Mini and Amazon's Echo Dot, but with nobler aspirations. The device "uses artificial intelligence to help older people live independently in their own homes, for longer". It provides daily reminders and tasks to guide you through your day, and an AI that starts conversations to combat loneliness. For peace of mind, Sentai can monitor your routines and contact carers about changes. You can support the project from as little as £5, but only a £299-plus donation gets you a device.

WEBOMETER

WE LIKE...

Apple introduces privacy nutrition labels

Apple will now require developers to provide privacy information about their apps in its App Store. These "privacy nutrition labels" will better inform users about what data apps collect without them having to read lengthy, confusing privacy policies.

What3words makes satnavs more accurate

Geo-location tool What3words will soon be available in the sat-nav systems of 150 million cars around the world. The precise, word-based navigation feature will be integrated with Here maps in vehicles from Ford, Volkswagen, BMW and more.

WE DON'T LIKE...

eBay blocked by parental controls

Virgin Media and TalkTalk customers were unable to use eBay for three days, after overzealous parental-control filters blocked scripts from running on the site. Both ISPs have since apologised to users and fixed the "technical difficulties".

Amazon's Ring doorbells catch fire

Dozens of Amazon's Ring smart doorbells are reported to have caught fire or burned their owners' fingers. The overheating problem is said to be caused by the fitting of the wrong screw. Amazon has now issued a revised instruction manual.

Stay Safe Online

News about the latest threats and advice from security experts

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

National Insurance numbers leaked online

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has removed the personal details of thousands of people after they were exposed online for over two years.

The files, published in March and June 2018, included the National Insurance (NI) numbers of more than 6,000 people who had applied for the disability benefit, PIP. No other personal data was exposed in the incident.

Privacy rights group Big Brother Watch discovered the data breach earlier this month and alerted the DWP, which removed the files from the web. "The DWP's reckless publication of data that could identify people receiving disability welfare is a gross violation of privacy," said Big Brother Watch's head of research and investigations.

Analysis suggests that the NI numbers of 6,441 individuals were viewable online for the two-and-half year period. "While no one can be identified from the information published, we apologise for the mistake," said a DWP spokesperson. "We take our responsibility to protect data very seriously".

bit.ly/dwp515

Ransomware hackers target victims twice

Ransomware gangs are reportedly sending victims fake evidence that their stolen data has been deleted, only to use that data again in a second extortion attempt.

Notorious hacking groups including Sodinokibi, Maze and Netwalker have been tricking victims into a false sense of security, according to a report from cybersecurity firm Coveware.

The report found that it has now become the default position for criminal groups to hold on to data they have acquired, regardless of whether a ransomware payment has been paid by the victim. In fact, Coveware found evidence that many groups are providing faked files that claim the data has been deleted.

Although some victims may decide there are valid reasons to pay, cybersecurity experts invariably advise against it. This is largely because there is no credible way to prove the data has been deleted, or any way to ensure that it's returned. There's also the potential that stolen data has already been traded, sold or passed to other hackers for reuse.

bit.ly/ransom515

Credit: chrisdorney / Shutterstock.com

Security Helpdesk | Your questions answered by security specialists

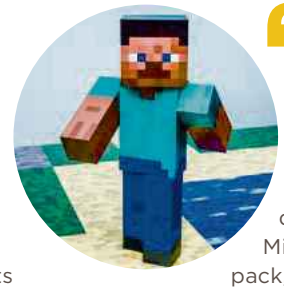
THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT: Ondrej David, Malware Analysis Team Leader at Avast (www.avast.com)

Q What is fleeceware and how do I avoid installing it?
Peter Stanford, Facebook

A Fleeceware is a relatively new category of cybercrime. It offers users an attractive service, most commonly an Android app, for a short free trial period. After that, the app automatically and sneakily begins charging excessive costs of up to $30 (£22.43) a week.

Fraudsters expect the user to forget about the installed app and its short trial, or fail to notice the real subscription cost. Reviews of these apps in the Google Play Store usually have lots of 1- and 5-star retings, but nothing in between.

This type of scam takes advantage of people who don't read the details of apps they download. Children are particularly at risk because they may think they are innocently downloading a Minecraft add-on pack, for example, and fail to check the details of the service to which they are subscribing.



> "It's essential to remain vigilant when downloading apps from unknown developers"

It's essential to remain vigilant when downloading any app from unknown developers and to always carefully research user reviews and billing agreements before subscribing.

If you have installed an app that you suspect may be fleeceware, it is not enough to uninstall the app – you must also cancel the subscription directly in the Play Store. To do this, open the menu in the top-left corner of the Play Store app and choose Subscriptions.

Avast has reported several fleeceware apps to Google Play, including Skins, Mods, Maps for Minecraft PE; Skins for Roblox; and Live Wallpapers HD & 3D Background.

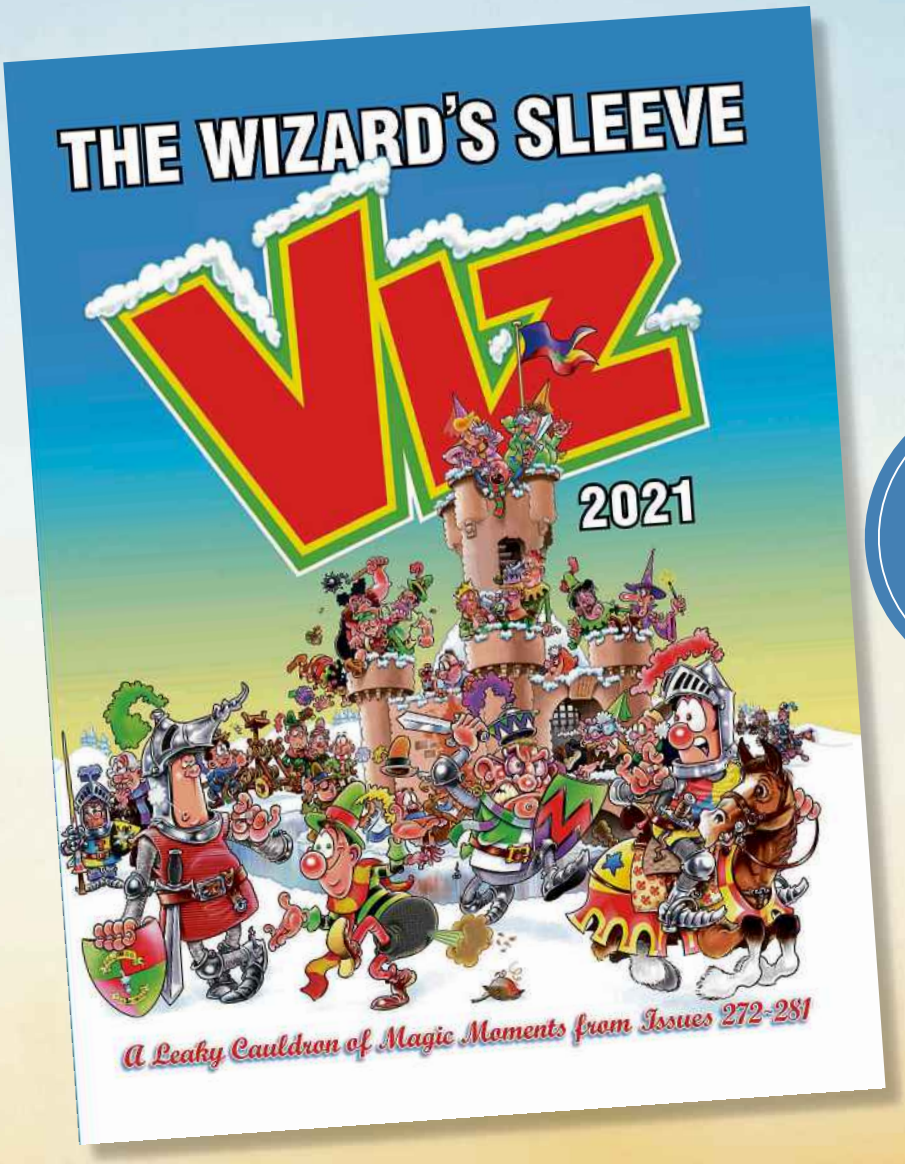
Credit: Pabkov / Shutterstock.com

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

Viz

2021 ANNUAL

OUT NOW



RRP £12.99

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

Available from Amazon, WHSmith, Waterstones and other good bookshops.

*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

Best New Websites

Site of the Fortnight

BOOKS

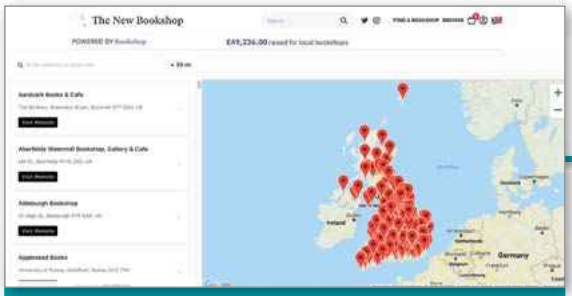
NEW

Bookshop

uk.bookshop.org

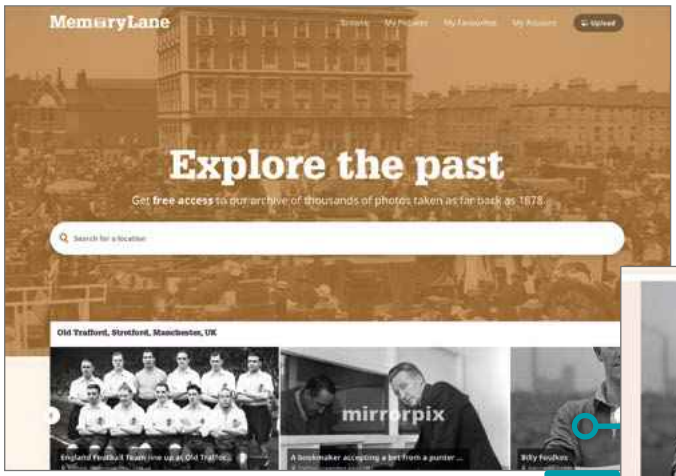
Created as a socially conscious rival to Amazon, Bookshop has partnered with more than 130 local independent booksellers, providing a channel for customers to support the underdog. The site's design makes it simple to use – just enter the title of a book or an author, read the description and add it to your basket or wishlist. Each purchase raises money for local bookshops and a running total is displayed at the top of the screen. You can customise this to select a specific bookseller, if you have one you'd like to directly support. The site offers and applies discounts, and all books are shipped by Bookshop itself.

Our rating ★★★★★



FIND A BOOKSHOP
Zoom into the map or enter an address or postcode to find a specific bookseller's storefront

PRODUCT DETAILS
Discounts are clearly displayed and product pages also include recommendations



NEW

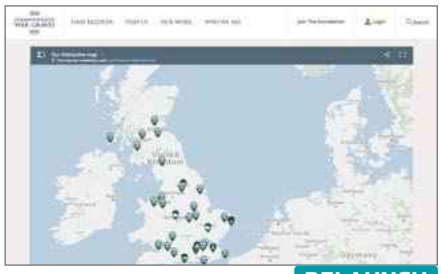
HISTORY

Memory Lane

www.memorylane.co.uk

You have to register for an account to browse Memory Lane, but once you're signed up, you're granted free access to an archive that spans over 140 years. Enter a location and you'll likely to find a host of images that you can share, save or even buy. You can also widen the scope by up to 100 miles, filter the results by time period and add any images you particularly like to your favourites. To help build the archive further, visitors are encouraged to upload their own images, but arguably the best feature is a colourisation option – add a black and white image and it'll be processed for you. You can then see the difference between the two versions using a slider.

Our rating ★★★★★



RELAUNCH

HISTORY

CWGC

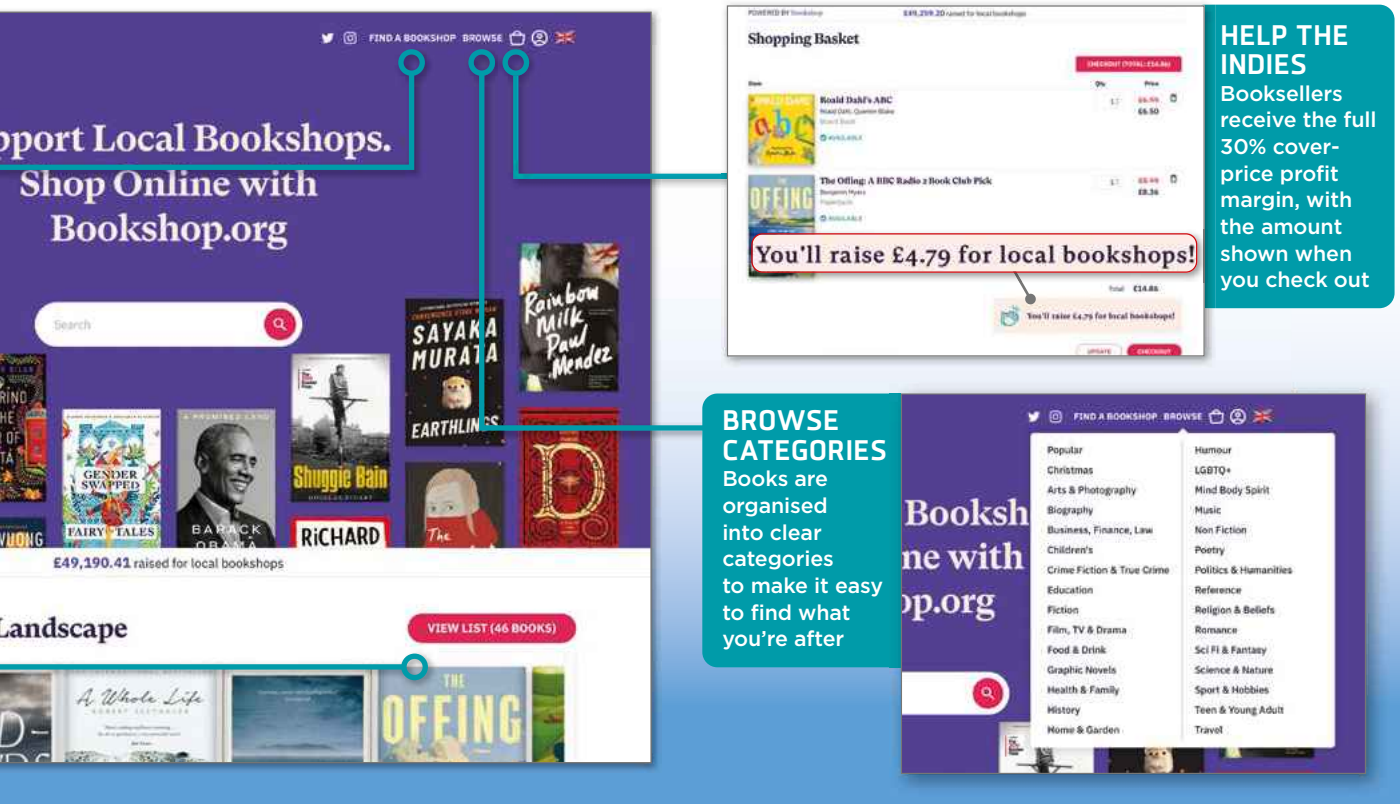
www.cwgc.org

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission looks after more than 12,500 war graves sites in the UK, and this website helps you find them. You can search by country, locality, name, number of casualties and a specific war, and the site's interactive map lets you locate cemeteries and memorials, showing pages for each region. Also included are historical details about the cemeteries and a downloadable list of casualties. While discovering all this information entails a fair bit of clicking around, the amount of detail at your fingertips is very impressive.

Our rating ★★★★☆

Reviews by David Crookes

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



RELAUNCH

TRAVEL

Visit Outer Hebrides

www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk

With the world in a state of flux, it's tempting to get as far away as possible and – in the UK, at least – the Outer Hebrides feels about as remote as it gets. This tourism site explores the island chain off the west coast of mainland Scotland, showcasing stunning landscapes and wildlife, and delving into Hebridean history, Gaelic culture and local activities. All you need to know about the islands is covered, including the adventurous cycle route, the Hebridean Way. You can also discover how to become an islander, although this part of the site is in its infancy.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RELAUNCH

SHOPPING

Bennetts

www.bennettsofderby.co.uk

The world's oldest department store, Bennetts, can trace its roots in Derby to 1734, but it fell into administration early last year. Having been rescued (and while work continues on reopening the physical store), you can buy its goods via this website. The simple design's slick drop-down menus and clearly presented images make shopping a pleasure. Simply fill your basket with gifts, toys, home and leisure items, and food and drink, and head for the checkout. The entire process is smooth and straightforward, and puts this historical name in a good position for the future.

Our rating ★★★★★

NEW

HEALTH

The Athlete Place

www.theathleteplace.com

Athletics can take a mental and physical toll on competitors, and The Athlete Place has been created to help with burnout and other issues, allowing people to seek and offer support. As well as letting you discuss problems anonymously, the site offers blogs and stories covering issues such as body confidence and experiences of living with athletes, and although the site's forum is in its infancy, it's easy to sign up and get involved. There's an email newsletter to keep you updated, and content creators are encouraged to get in touch to have their work featured.

Our rating ★★★★☆

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

NEW

FOOTBALL

Hatters' Heritage

hattersheritage.co.uk

Luton Town Football Club was established in 1885 and, although its major honour was a League Cup victory 32 years ago, it scores well at celebrating its history. Hatter's Heritage aims to make every match programme in its collection available to visitors, along with every match report, complete with photos and images of historical memorabilia. The site admits that the project is likely to take years and is kicking off with the 1970-71 and 1981-82 seasons. It scores an early goal with its search options, which let you look for people, matches and items in its collection, while showcasing a selection of engaging features.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RELAUNCH

CREATIVE

Arts Emergency

www.arts-emergency.org

The mentoring charity Arts Emergency aims to help young people break into the creative sectors by making it easier to forge connections, show off their work and benefit from careers advice. The much-improved website lets you read stories of those who have made their way in the industry and get tips on how to present a portfolio, breeze through an interview, make an impression at auditions and more. There's also advice on becoming a mentor or volunteer. Sign up for the newsletter to stay updated and, if you fancy making a donation or becoming a bursar, the benefits of both are comprehensively explained.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

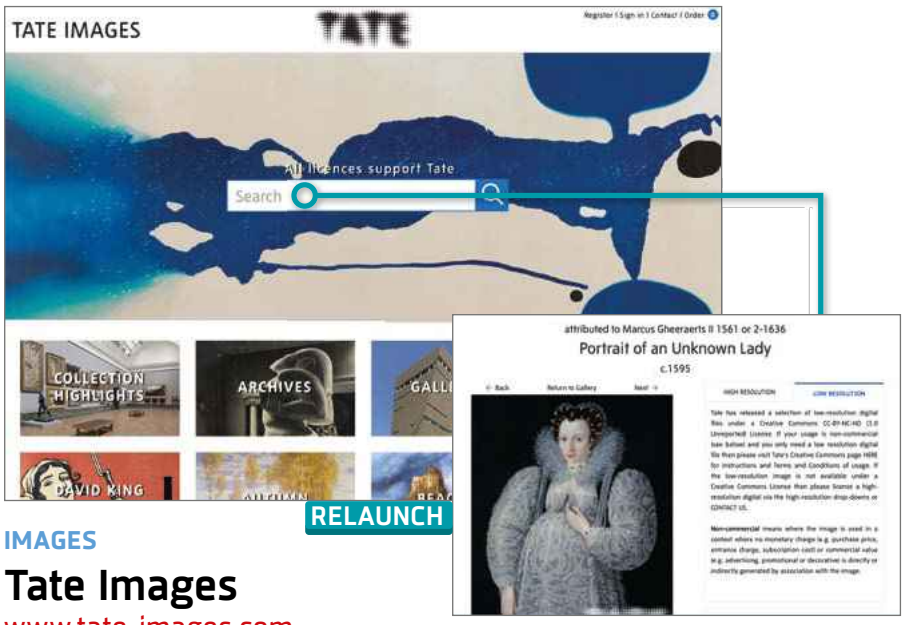
HEALTH

Dementia Change Action Network

dcan.org.uk

This open collaborative network organised by NHS England, the Alzheimer's Society and Coalition for Personalised Care seeks a personalised approach to looking after people with dementia. As well as explaining its key aims, the site keeps you informed of the latest news with regular articles and a blog tackling issues such as COVID's impact on dementia, the NHS's long-term health plan and the components of Universal Personalised Care. The tone is largely approachable, if a little dry in places, but for anyone affected by dementia, it's certainly worth a visit.

Our rating ★★★★☆



RELAUNCH

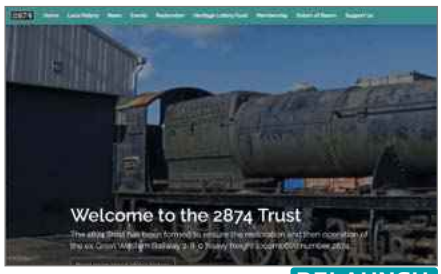
IMAGES

Tate Images

www.tate-images.com

Tate has a collection of over 70,000 images and it partly supports its work by selling access to and licences for many of its digital photos. The high-res images can be browsed and bought online via this website, which is now accessible on tablets and mobile phones as well as desktop computers. The overhauled design focuses attention on the search results and preview pages, which are now easier to browse, while Collection highlights, spotlighted categories and keywords help you find what you're after. High-res images attract a fee depending on how you intend to use them, while lower-res ones can be used non-commercially under a Creative Commons Licence.

Our rating ★★★★★



RELAUNCH

TRANSPORT

The 2874 Trust

www.2874trust.org

The 2874 Trust exists to restore and operate the 2874 ex-Great Western Railway steam locomotive which was in service between 1918 and 1963. This revamped site provides an in-depth history of the train, with striking images and a close look at the restoration works. There's plenty of news to keep you on track with the latest progress and, while the events section is rather spartan for obvious reasons, there are absorbing flourishes including a video and a focus on the women involved in restoration works. Navigation could be improved but the site is mobile-friendly and a vast improvement on the previous effort.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

ESSENTIAL BOOKMARKS THIS ISSUE: Fantastic free games sites

Miniclip
www.miniclip.com

Games are more fun if you compete against others, and Miniclip lets you get stuck into loads of multiplayer titles. These include Forge of Empires, Roblox, Tanki Online, Minecraft's creative mode and 8 Ball Pool, which bills itself as the world's biggest and best online pool game. There are also hundreds of single-player games and a decent selection of two-player games that let you go head-to-head with a friend. What makes MiniClip stand out is the impressive number of Android and iOS games that you can enjoy in your browser. If you run your own website, you can embed Miniclip games for free, and there are a number of games available to download. You only need to register if you want to save your progress, challenge others and level up.

Kongregate
www.kongregate.com

Kongregate has been the king of Flash-based games for 14 years. It lets you play more than 128,000 independently developed titles across a host of genres, from adventures and puzzles to action and strategy. Despite Adobe dropping Flash support, these games will remain, but the site is moving towards HTML5 – indeed, many creators are converting their games to better preserve them. Clear categories, highlighted games and a rating system make finding titles easy, and you can collect badges and level up by earning achievements and high scores. You need an account to play, and the ads are a pain, but the forums offer friendly discussions and recommendations.

Armor Games
armorgames.com

Armor Games has its own development studio, which produces games for Steam (store.steampowered.com). These free titles are available to play within an installed client, as well as on consoles and mobile devices. Its online game portal, however, also includes third-party titles and is a great destination for well-produced Flash and HTML5 offerings. You can see how many players have enjoyed each game, read their comments and leave your own. Discussions can also be conducted in the forums, which provide a great way to discover what's exciting other people and get help with tricky parts of a game. If you've developed a game of your own, you can submit it in the hope it will join the new additions to the site each week.

Pogo
www.pogo.com

Owned by EA – one of gaming's biggest names – Pogo has a small but quality selection of casual games, some of which you'll find instantly recognisable, such as Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit, Risk and various versions of Mahjong. Since EA owns PopCap Games, there are also colourful classics such as Bejeweled and Peggle, with all titles browsable from a drop-down menu and augmented by descriptions and screenshots that help you decide whether you'll enjoy playing. While the site encourages you to stump up $6.99 (£5.19) a month to join Club Pogo to access exclusive member games and take part in time-limited challenges, there are more than enough free games to keep you coming back. Pogo's blog will keep you up-to-date as well.

The Oliver Twins
www.olivertwins.com

Retro game enthusiasts will love this developer-focused website, which delves into the careers of Philip and Andrew Oliver (The Oliver Twins) and lets you play most of their games for free via online emulation. In many cases, you can choose from Spectrum, Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC and NES. Each page includes videos and screenshots, along with magazine reviews, design notes, concept maps and pack shots. The twins are best known for their series of "eggs-cellent" Dizzy adventure games, all of which are featured on the site – including recently discovered entries that were never commercially released.

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

Computer Active

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Windows 10 Home NOW ONLY £29.99*

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

Build a Better Site

Specialist tips, top tools and practical help

Top Tips of the Fortnight

Discover Google's new Search Central hub

Google's brilliant Webmaster Central resource is being updated, expanded and renamed. The term "webmaster" is seen as a bit archaic nowadays, so the blog and resource center is being rebranded as Google Search Central. You can find the new site at developers.google.com/search and read about the decision behind the change at bit.ly/2UomDRn.

CSS background patterns

We've come across a great tool for creating attractive, complex

graphical backgrounds that can add texture to your website, but only require a few lines of CSS code. Even better, you don't need to know the code yourself, but can choose from a handful of shape templates, then tweak the colours, opacity and spacing using colour pickers and sliders. CSS Background Patterns is available for free at bit.ly/3pr4yjX.

Deal of the Fortnight

Guru (www.guru.co.uk) is offering all its hosting packages for £1 per month until January 2021.

Web-building Helpdesk

Q **I've spent quite a bit of time learning how to build a website from scratch using HTML because I like the idea of having full control over its content. What's the best way to get it online?**

Matthew Webber, via email

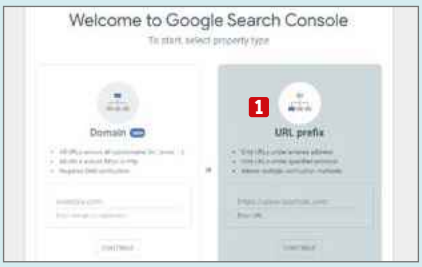
A On a basic level, you just need to sign up with a web host. It will provide you with some storage space on one of its servers, which you can access using FTP software (try FileZilla at filezilla-project.org). Use this to transfer your site from your PC. You'll also need to register a domain name but it may come as part of the package. If you want to get deeper into the nuts and bolts, there's a useful introduction at FreeCodeCamp (bit.ly/38JLYNZ).

Andy Shaw, Technical & Reviews Editor

MINI WORKSHOP | See how your site performs in Google searches

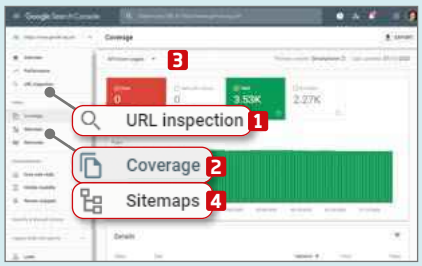
Google Search Console: search.google.com/search-console | 10 mins | Any browser

Google drives a lot of the web's traffic, so it pays to keep an eye on your standing with the search engine by exploring the Google Search Console.



1 Sign up for the service at search.google.com/search-console. You need a Google account and a way to verify you're responsible for the site you want to view. The simplest ways are to upload an HTML file to your site or drop a piece of code into your existing HTML. Choose the URL prefix option 1 and follow the instructions.

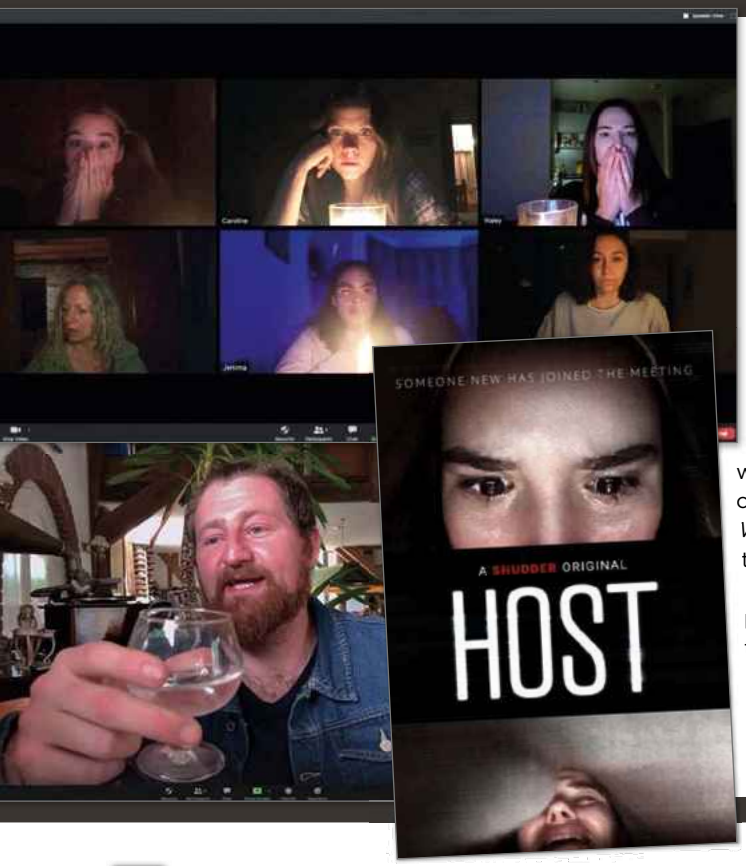
2 The Overview page shows a basic graph of your site's performance in Google searches. Clicking Performance 1 displays the last three months of clicks and impressions (when your site shows up in search results but isn't necessarily clicked). Below this, you can see what people have searched for. 2 Explore the different tabs 3 for more information.



3 Check whether a page is included in Google's index by clicking 'URL inspection' 1 and entering the address into the search box. Coverage 2 shows how many pages are being indexed 3 or not. If you're struggling to get listed, use Sitemaps 4 to show Google what's on your site.

What To Watch Online

Pick of the fortnight



Watch British video-chat horror film *Host*

From 4 December

Just when you thought it was safe to go back onto Zoom, out comes new Shudder Original film *Host* to remind us all that evil spirits don't obey lockdown.

The hour-long film, by British filmmaker Rob Savage – who cut his teeth writing about spooky Druids in *Britannia*, currently on Now TV at bit.ly/3km5ZMA – follows six friends who gather for a virtual seance to puncture the boredom of quarantine. As the trailer suggests, things don't go to plan: bit.ly/2IoDmBr.

The film was shot and directed remotely during lockdown, with the cast of relative newcomers each setting up their own cameras, lighting and stunts. The result is a little like *The Blair Witch Project*, right down to actors using their own names, but the characters are far more relatable for UK audiences of 2020.

Host was well-received at cinema previews in October, but plans for a wider theatrical release have been scuppered by the second lockdown. You can watch it on-demand on horror channel Shudder (www.shudder.com) and via platforms including Roku, Fire TV, Chromecast and Amazon Prime Video Channels (amzn.to/3nhxtou). Shudder costs £4.99 per month (less if you subscribe for a year) after seven days free.

Watch *Rising Damp* and Shakespeare on BritBox

From 26 November

Leonard Rossiter, Frances de la Tour, Don Warrington and Richard Beckinsale are the eclectic lodgers in classic 1970s sitcom *Rising Damp*, whose four series come to BritBox on 26 November. The 1980 spin-off film is already available at bit.ly/3klTMYu.

Arriving on the same day are several Channel 5 documentaries including *Charles and Camilla: King and Queen in Waiting* and *The Clues That Caught The Killer: Fred & Rose West*. To even up the tone, there's also an influx of stage classics including ITV's 1970 adaptation of *Twelfth Night* starring Alec Guiness and Ralph Richardson, and Laurence Olivier in the National Theatre's acclaimed 1974 staging of *The Merchant of Venice*.

A BritBox subscription costs £5.99 per month after a 7-day trial (www.britbox.co.uk).

Swindle the Mafia in anime *Great Pretender*

From 25 November

Netflix's Japanese comedy-crime animation is back for a second season,

with returning heroes pro swindler Edamura Masato and his partner in crime Kudo. Season 1 saw them attempt to con French visitor Laurent Thierry, then get swindled in return when Thierry turned out to be a Mafia boss. Find out what happens next when Season 2 arrives on Netflix at bit.ly/2GONP8C. Discover more about the show via Anime News Network at bit.ly/2Ip1QKT, and watch a trailer (with English dubbing) at bit.ly/38DVOBb.

Watch Sundance Film Festival favourite *Uncle Frank*

From 25 November

Six Feet Under and *American Beauty* writer Alan Ball wowed critics at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival with this semi-autobiographical film, loosely based on his experience growing up in the American South. *Uncle Frank* streams exclusively in the UK via Prime Video, and stars Paul Bettany as a closeted gay man who comes out to his

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

conservative family in 1973. Watch the official trailer at bit.ly/3lnVf1B.

Bettany next stars in Disney+'s upcoming Marvel show *WandaVision*, due in January (bit.ly/3knph4u).

Netflix launches live TV channel

Netflix is testing a new feature that could hardly be further from the service's core remit: live TV.

The new Netflix Direct feature has just launched a public test in France, chosen because live TV continues to be popular in that country, whereas the UK and US have switched more enthusiastically to on-demand. However Netflix will extend the feature to the UK and other countries if the French trial is a success.

Netflix chooses content for Direct five days in advance, targeting shows that are currently popular locally and globally. After viewers start watching live, they can pause the channel as though it were a catch-up stream. It's an interesting idea, but seems a bit of a backwards step to us.

Explore the life and death of a comedy legend in *Belushi*

From 27 November

The Blues Brothers star John Belushi, who struggled with drug and alcohol abuse before succumbing to an overdose in 1982, receives a respectful testimonial in this new documentary from Showtime. Family and friends including Carrie Fisher, Dan Aykroyd and Jim Belushi take part in the film, which includes previously unseen footage and audio recordings. *Belushi* airs exclusively in the UK on Sky Documentaries, so you can stream it on-demand via Now TV with an Entertainment Pass. Watch Showtime's official trailer at bit.ly/2limigh.

Belushi director RJ Cutler is also behind the upcoming Billie Eilish documentary, *The World's A Little Blurry*, which comes to Apple TV+ in February 2021 (bit.ly/3lhgnGS).

Watch Emmy-winning teen drama *Euphoria*

From 7 December

Zendaya, the young Emmy award-winning star of this gritty HBO teen drama plays 17-year-old drug addict Rue in a dark tale that you might not expect to be the stuff of 'season specials', but the show has been such a hit that it's spawned two spin-off films. The first arrives on Now TV on 7 December, the day after it airs in the US (as tweeted by Zendaya at bit.ly/3eN4Cpc). The second will follow in a couple of months.

Euphoria's first two seasons are not currently available via Now TV, but you can buy them via Prime Video (amzn.to/3eT0Dr9) or the Sky Store (bit.ly/3eOlsEc).

In case you missed it...

Hulu's stop-motion comedy *Crossing Swords*, a new show from the makers of *Robot Chicken*, has just begun streaming via ITV Hub (www.itv.com/hub). The show didn't impress critics but audiences loved it, judging by YouTube comments on the trailer (bit.ly/38wTrzZ). New episodes arrive each Monday at 10pm, courtesy of ITV2.

It wouldn't be November on Netflix without a Christmas special from Dolly Parton. This year's treat, *Dolly Parton's Christmas on the Square*, casts Dolly as a rhinestone-bedecked angel guiding Scrooge (Christine Baranski) to redemption through the power of song. Check out the trailer at bit.ly/2JYwD1P.

Amazon Prime Video has more uplifting escapism, this time a reality show featuring 12 dogs and their humans making an epic journey around the world. Watch *The Pack*'s wonderful trailer at bit.ly/3khX4vX.

Product Test

We test and compare the latest products

Roku Streambar

Improve the quality of your TV's sound and get all Roku's streaming benefits in one affordable little unit

The built-in speakers of most TVs often sound lacklustre, so a good-quality soundbar will take your home entertainment experience to the next level. Roku's Streambar doesn't just enhance sound but, as the name suggests, it also includes a built-in Roku streaming device, so you can use it to access Roku's fabulous smorgasbord of on-demand TV streaming services, in 4K HDR resolution and at 60 frames per second (fps).

The soundbar's streaming function is essentially the same one you'll find in a £50 Roku Streaming Stick+, so the Streambar's price of £129.99 values the soundbar element at £80. This is excellent value for money if you're looking for an opportunity to upgrade both your streaming hardware and your TV's audio equipment.

Setup and build

Plug the Streambar into a mains socket and connect it to your TV through an HDMI input that supports ARC (Audio Return Channel) audio. If you have an older TV that doesn't support this, you can use the optical cable instead. From this point, all your TV's audio passes through the Streambar instead of the TV's built-in speakers.

You also need to connect the Streambar to your Wi-Fi, though you can use Ethernet if you buy an optional USB adapter. Wait for the software updates to complete and create a Roku account if you don't already have one. This entire process took us less than 10 minutes to complete.

The Streambar is one of the most compact soundbars you can buy, measuring just 356 x 107 x 70mm – low enough to fit neatly in front of most TVs without obscuring the picture.

> "The Streambar offers excellent value for money if you're looking to upgrade both your streaming hardware and your TV's audio"

The main body is made of sturdy plastic finished in matte black, with a rubberised base to stop it sliding around. The speaker grilles are wrapped in a grey mesh fabric, with a Roku logo positioned under an LED status light in the centre.

All the ports are located at the rear. There's a power port, an optical input, an HDMI 2.0a ARC input and a USB Type-A slot. Every cable you need to get started is included in the box.

Sound quality

Roku boasts that the Streambar can produce powerful cinematic sound with Dolby Audio, but this is limited to Dolby Digital. You don't get object-based Dolby Atmos support and there's no

> "The unit's four 1.9in drivers deliver on Roku's promise of room-filling sound: it gets really loud, even at 50% volume"

coverage for DTS formats, either.

Inside the unit, there are four 1.9in drivers, two of them front-facing and two side-facing. These deliver on Roku's promise of room-filling sound: it gets really loud, even at 50% volume.

Watching movies and TV shows with the Streambar instead of listening through our TV's tinny speakers made a world of difference. The full-bodied wall of sound has a lot of power behind it, so car chases and shoot-outs are immersively lively. The bass lacks the kick of rival soundbars with dedicated subwoofers, but you still get a satisfyingly deep, impactful rumble from explosions and sound effects.

Dialogue separation is good, with speech coming through loud and clear, even in films notorious for mumbling actors and TV series that layer speech over noisy action sequences. If the default sound profile isn't to your liking, Roku offers a number of alternative presets you can try, such as "Dialogue Enhancement" and "Bass Boosted".

Streaming service and interface

Roku's operating system looks the same on the Streambar as it does on other Roku devices, albeit with a couple of audio-centric additions, and it's as intuitive as ever. Installed applications appear as square tiles arranged into columns. It's quick and easy to add or remove channels, and you can swap around the order based on which ones you use the most.

There are thousands of apps and streaming services in Roku's store, with 929 listed in Film & TV alone. More important than the sheer volume, however, is the fact that every mainstream platform is accounted for, from Netflix and Disney+ to Prime Video and Now TV. All the free UK catch-up services (BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, All 4, Demand 5 and so on) are present. In fact, Roku is the only platform that doesn't miss out on any of the key streaming services – even Google's new Chromecast fails to include Now TV and Apple TV+.

As well as offering TV and movies on streaming apps, the Roku Streambar also provides access to games, educational apps, photo viewers, news feeds and media players such as Plex.

Voice control and video formats

Finding content couldn't be easier, thanks to the Roku remote's voice search. State the name of the show or movie you're after and it produces a list of relevant results. Once you select a title, you'll see a menu of streaming options. Roku shows you all the services you can watch it on and how much each one charges. If it's already on a service you're subscribed to, you can launch right into it. Voice search can also be used to launch apps, bring up subtitles and find videos within the YouTube app.

Support for video formats is solid, if not cutting-edge. The Streambar plays content up to 4K at 60fps and HDR (High Dynamic Range) playback up to the HDR10 standard, but it misses out on newer video-enhancing formats including HDR10+, Dolby Vision and Hybrid-Log Gamma (HLG). HLG isn't that big of a deal but HDR10+ and Dolby Vision are, as they're well supported by the likes of Amazon Prime Video and Google Play Movies and TV.

Native 4K and upscaled 4K content both look great, however, and we didn't notice any major playback issues.

PRODUCT INFO

Roku Streambar

Price: £129.99
Buy from Argos:
bit.ly/roku515

SPECIFICATIONS

- ARC and Dolby Audio sound enhancement
- 4K (3,840 x 2,160 resolution) at 60fps
- HDR10
- HDMI 2.0a port
- Bluetooth 5.0
- Wi-Fi 802.11ac
- 356 x 107 x 70mm
- 1.1kg

FOR

- ✓ 4K HDR streaming
- ✓ Great, room-filling sound
- ✓ Roku remains the best streaming platform

AGAINST

- ✗ Lacks some of the latest audio and video enhancements

AMAZON FIRE TV ALTERNATIVE

Anker Nebula Fire TV, £159.99
bit.ly/anker515

SOUNDBAR-ONLY ALTERNATIVE

Creative Stage 2.1, £79.99
bit.ly/creative515

OUR VERDICT

★★★★★

If you're looking to improve your TV's streaming experience and home-entertainment audio without breaking the bank, the Roku Streambar is an excellent solution. It's an all-in-one solution that adds full-bodied sound and a practically unlimited library of apps for only £129.99 – and it's extremely easy to set up, too.

While you won't get the all-encompassing surround-sound experience that more expensive soundbars deliver, the power and quality of its audio is much better than we expected from such a compact unit.

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

Amazon Echo and Echo Dot (4th Generation)

The latest Alexa-powered smart speakers look better, sound better and provide a warm glow

New Amazon Echos have become an annual tradition and to mark this year's update, there's been a significant change to the product design. Gone are the cylinder and pill shape of the previous Echo and Echo Dot, replaced by spacey fabric-clad globes. If you already have an Echo or two, you'll be wondering whether the new models are worth the upgrade.

Internally, the new Echo (£89.99) adds an additional speaker, giving the unit better directional sound. It also has a new automatic sound sensor that adapts the audio output to its surroundings, such as whether you have it positioned on a solid or hollow surface. The smaller Echo Dot (£49.99) has no internal upgrades, though you can get it with a clock display for an extra £10, which is a worthy addition, particularly if you plan to keep your Dot by your bed and bin your old-fashioned alarm clock.

The Echo is about the size of a cantaloupe melon, while the Dot is akin to a cricket ball. Both have a bank of plastic buttons on the top, that let you adjust the volume and pause playback. The ring of light that activates when you say the "Alexa" wake word has relocated to the bottom, which we're big fans of, purely for the warm glow it casts onto the surface it's sitting on.

Sound and intelligence

As you'd expect, the sound quality of the larger unit is the better of the two. The distance between its built-in speakers doesn't allow for proper stereo separation, but a side-by-side comparison with the previous model shows the sound is much improved. The same applies to the new Dot, which is also crisper, clearer and louder than its predecessor.

Both units keep their 3.5mm input/output jack, so you can plug in external speakers or play directly from a phone without having to fiddle with Bluetooth settings.

Where both speakers disappoint is in their smart capabilities. While Alexa is still streets ahead of Apple's Siri digital assistant, Google Assistant makes it look like a dunce, both in understanding the questions you ask and the quality of answers it delivers. The Echo is fine for playing music and getting a weather forecast, but it's no voice-activated encyclopedia. Google's jokes are better, too.

To our ears, Google's £89.99 Nest device also outstrips Echo's audio, so it's well worth considering as an identically priced alternative. That said, we prefer the sound quality of the Echo Dot to Google's latest Nest Mini speakers.

If you've already bought into Amazon's Alexa ecosystem, then these new models provide an excellent extension to its services. However, if you're looking to start from scratch or make a change, we'd opt for Google's identically priced models instead.

PRODUCT INFO

Amazon Echo and Echo Dot

Price: £89.99 (Echo); £49.99 (Echo Dot)
Buy from Amazon: bit.ly/echo515

SPECIFICATIONS

- 3in woofer and dual 0.8in tweeters (Echo); 1.6in front-firing speaker (Echo Dot)
- Dolby Audio (Echo only)
- Built-in Zigby smart home hub (Echo only)
- 144 x 144 x 133mm (Echo); 100 x 100 x 89mm (Echo Dot)

FOR

✓ Great new design
✓ Improved clearer sound
✓ Flexible line in/out jack

AGAINST

✗ Alexa isn't as clever as Google Assistant

OUR VERDICT

★★★★★

If you're thinking of treating your voice-activated Amazon network to an upgrade, both the Echo and Echo Dot look and sound better than their predecessors. However, if you're starting from scratch, we think Google's Nest system offers a more sophisticated level of artificial intelligence.

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

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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

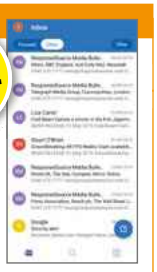
All prices correct at time of review

Gold Award winners

The best from our software tests

EMAIL APP

Outlook



Free from bit.ly/2G04HsG
Tested: Issue 514
Outlook supports multiple accounts, syncs with your calendar and lets you connect your online storage. We much prefer it to Gmail.

WINDOWS DOCK

Winstep Nexus

Free from bit.ly/nexus513
Tested: Issue 513
Winstep Nexus is easy to control, and provides shortcuts to all your most used items in one place. It can be customised with themes to look and work exactly the way you want.

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.

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.

WebUser

BACK ISSUES DISC 2019

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

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or search for 'webuser disc'

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

Best Free Software

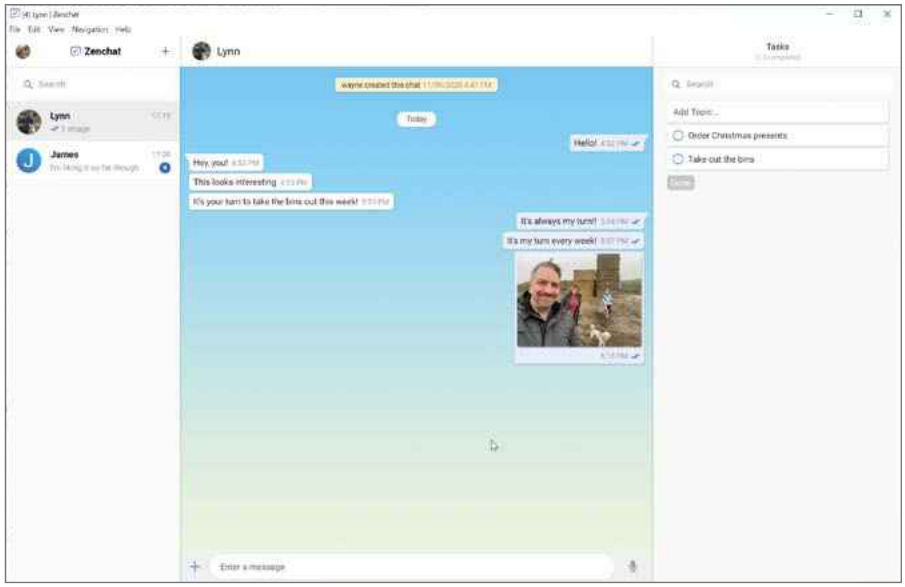
CHAT TOOL

Zenchat

bit.ly/zenchat515

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

File size: 101MB



We first became aware of Zenkit when the company released Zenkit To Do, a fantastic to-do list and time-management app that was designed to be a replacement for the much beloved but discontinued Wunderlist. Now, the company has released a new combined chat and task-management tool aimed at people working from home – though anyone can use it.

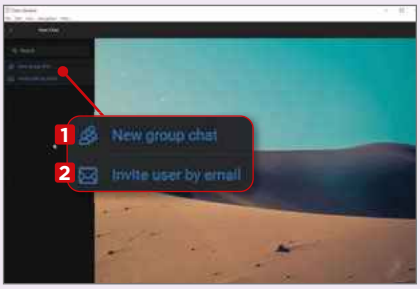
Zenchat is available for all the major platforms. As well as Windows, macOS and Linux, you can download it on iOS and Android devices, and run it on the web.

The app lets you engage in group or one-to-one text chats, and record and send audio messages. You can also attach other types of file, such as photos. The handy built-in to-do feature lets you create and manage tasks within chats.

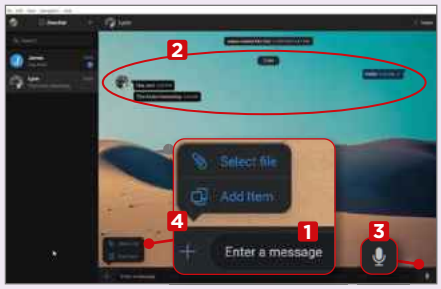
This is a very early release of Zenchat, and more features will be added in the future, including the ability to record and send video clips, place voice and video calls, and broadcast to a group of friends and get individual replies.

The free Personal version of Zenchat does have a few limitations. You can conduct up to five chats with a maximum of five people at a time. Chat history is stored for just four weeks, and you only get 600MB of space for files and attachments. If you need extra storage and want to increase the number of people in a chat to up to 50, you can upgrade to the paid-for Plus version for €5 (£4.50) a month.

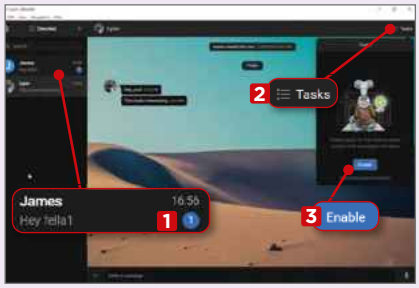
MINI WORKSHOP | Chat with friends and assign tasks using Zenchat



1 Launch Zenchat and you'll be greeted with an uncluttered interface featuring a picture of a sand dune. Click the plus sign at the top of the page to start a new group chat 1 or invite users by email. 2 If you choose the latter, you can enter the participant's email address and name, then click Send Invitation.



2 Once you've added someone, you can start chatting with them by typing in the bar at the bottom of the screen. 1 Messages between participants appear just as they do in other messaging tools. 2 Click the microphone 3 to record audio to send. Clicking the plus sign 4 lets you attach other content.



3 If you receive messages from someone in a different chat, you'll see a notification. 1 You can add to-dos to a chat window by clicking the Tasks button in the top-right corner, 2 then clicking Enable. 3 A new window appears in the corner where you can begin adding tasks.

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

ANTI-MALWARE UPDATER

Beytas Offline Update 1.5

beytasofup.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10 **File size:** 2.2MB

Antivirus software must be up to date at all times to be effective. Most anti-malware programs automatically update themselves when online, but Beytas Offline Update is a free, portable app that downloads offline updates for all the major anti-malware tools. Just tick the boxes of the programs you want updates for and click Download.

This updated version improves the user interface and adds offline updates for additional anti-malware programs, including McAfee, Vipre and Ikarus.

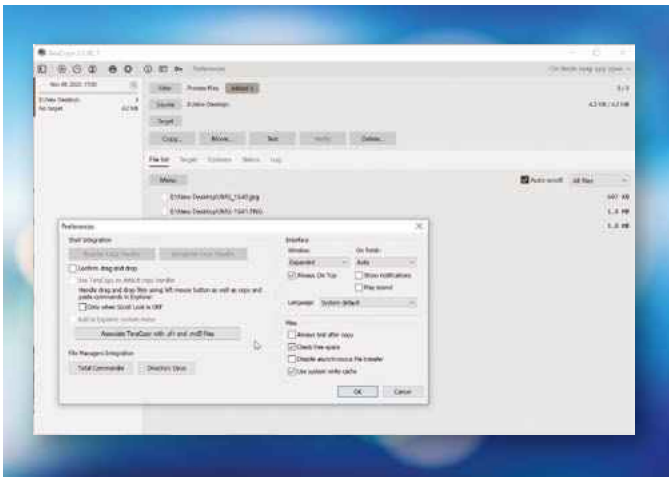
New Windows 10 App

Alexa

bit.ly/3ld9hD8

File size: 160MB

Amazon's hugely popular digital assistant Alexa has its own Windows 10 app, which lets you ask questions, set reminders, play music and control your smart home. The app has just been updated and gains a new look and some useful new features, including video calling and Drop-In support. You can also ask Alexa to play your favourite tracks on Spotify.



COPY TOOL

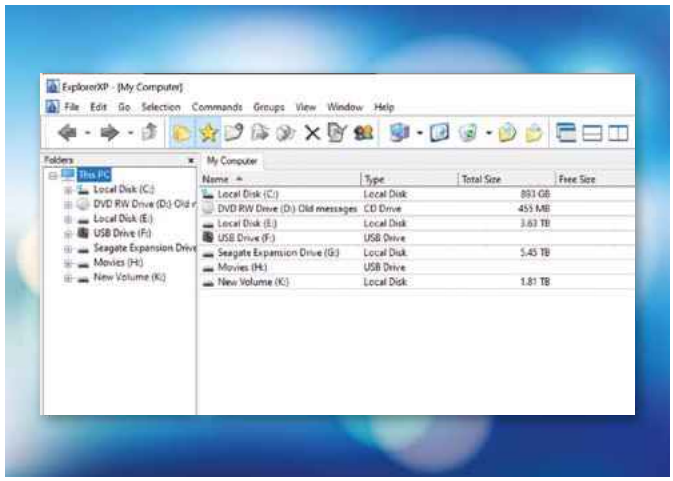
TeraCopy 3.5

hblog.codesector.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10

File size: 8MB

Copying lots of files from one location to another in Windows can be slow – especially over a network. TeraCopy has been designed to speed up the process and introduces several handy additional features. You can pause and restart file copying, for example, and attempt to resume broken file transfers. This new release offers a 64-bit version of TeraCopy and the program now always shows the source folder path.



FILE MANAGER

ExplorerXP

explorerxp.com

Min requirements: Windows 10

File size: 2MB

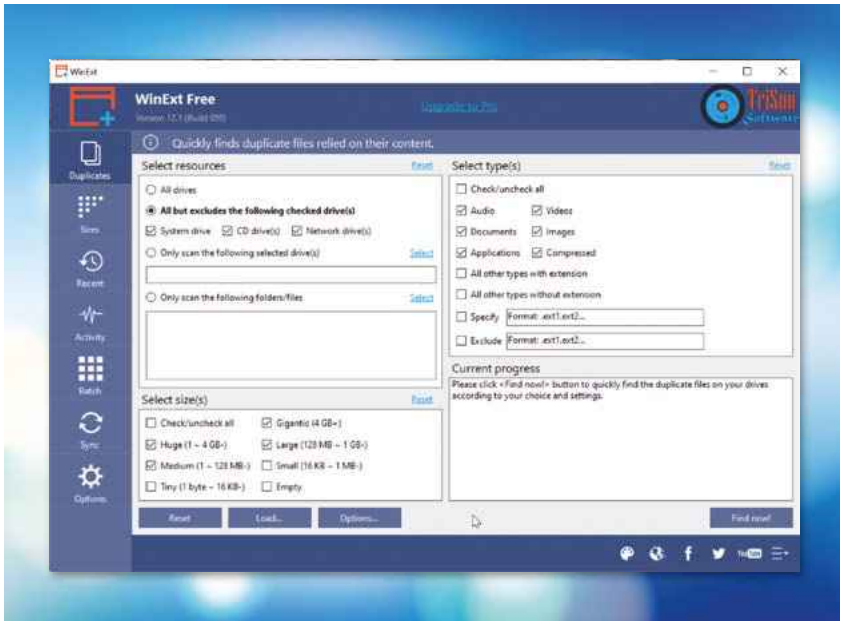
Despite having a name synonymous with an old version of Microsoft's operating system (and it did work on XP in the past), ExplorerXP is in fact a tiny, fast file manager for Windows 10. It shows you at a glance the total size of your folders and lets you explore them via a tabbed interface. You can rename multiple files in one go, split and merge files, remove junk and customise the toolbar to suit your needs.

FILE MANAGER

WinExt Free 12

www.trisunsoft.com/we/

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10
File size: 1.5MB



WinExt is a powerful file finder that can track down duplicates, show you which files and folders are using the most space, monitor Windows activity and perform batch operations, such as deleting or renaming a group of files. Its interface has clearly been 'inspired' by CCleaner, with all the available features in a strip down the left-hand side, though it's no longer the direct copy it once was. The latest version offers a choice of themes, can display common Windows locations and optimises the appearance of the folder-tree view. The reloading speed has been improved, too, and WinExt can now recognise more file types.

SYSTEM TOOL

ExperienceIndexOK 3

bit.ly/2U3u1l7

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10
File size: 74KB

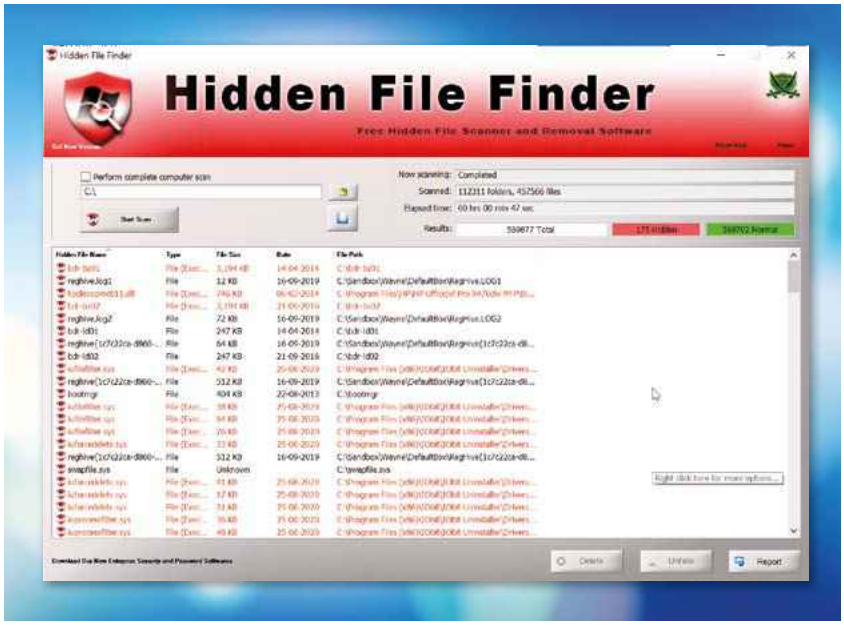
Windows Experience Index, or WEI for short, is a basic benchmarking tool found in Windows 7 (and Vista) that rates the various components in your PC and presents you with an overall score out of 10, as well as sub-scores for the various components, such as your computer's processor, memory, graphics, gaming graphics and primary hard disk. Microsoft dropped WEI from Windows 8 onwards, but you can get it back by running ExperienceIndexOK. Just launch the software and it will check your system and report back. You can rerun the assessment at any time. This new version introduces some improvements for Windows 10 and updates the software's language files.

SYSTEM TOOL

Hidden File Finder 8

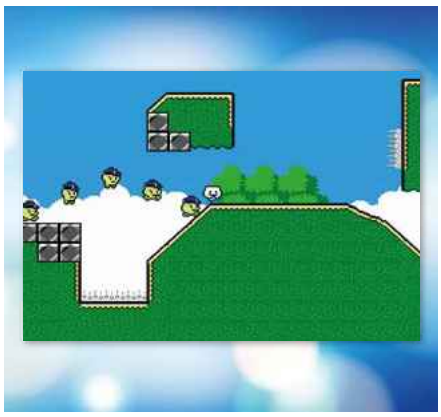
bit.ly/35alZND

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10
File size: 3.4MB



The aim of this program is to reveal all the files hidden on your system. It can detect executable files (EXE, DLL and COM), and normal files and folders that have been concealed for one reason or another (often just to stop you deleting something you shouldn't). Anything that Hidden File Finder finds can be unhidden with a single click and you can view a detailed report on the software's discoveries. It's very easy to use: simply select the hard drive to focus on (if you have more than one) and click Start Scan.

This new version of Hidden File Finder improves the speed of its scans for hidden files.



GAME

Hamachi – The Psychotic Killer

bit.ly/2UkaTQ1

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10
File size: 208MB

In this fun platform game, you play Hamachi, a cute cartoon character with a dark side. You can choose to spare the other characters you meet along the way, or opt to bludgeon them to a bloody mess instead. Going on a murderous rampage will attract the attention of the police who try to chase you down and arrest you. Don't worry, it's not as gruesome as it sounds!

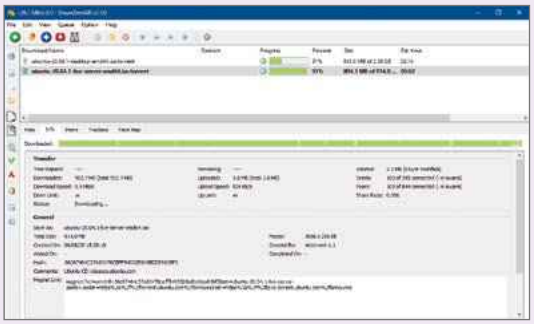
✓ Install this program...

DownZemAll

bit.ly/downzem515

Min requirements: Windows 7/8.1/10, macOS or Linux **File size:** 18.6MB

DownZemAll is a rewrite of the old DownThemAll download manager for Firefox. Unlike its predecessor, which was killed off in 2016, this is a standalone tool that works with all major browsers including Firefox, Chrome and Edge. You can use it to select, organise and run multiple downloads in parallel, whether they're photos, videos, documents or torrents. Just paste in the web address of a site that contains download links and select a save location. It's particularly useful if there are a lot of items on a web page that you want to download at once.



...Not this one ✗

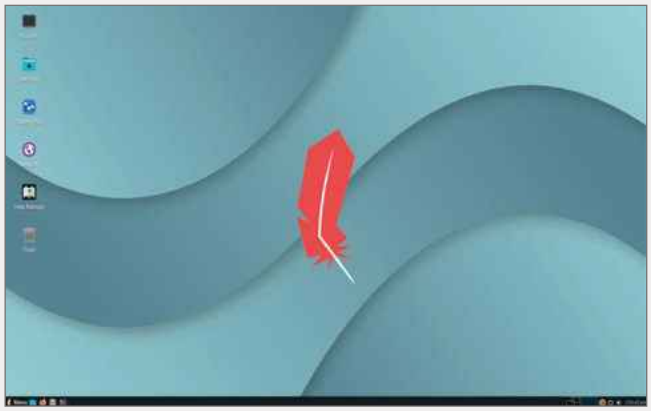
FlashGet

www.flashget.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8
File size: 7.7MB

FlashGet used to be a very popular download manager, which was packed with useful features and boasted of having the "highest number of users on the internet". Then, like many similar tools, it started bundling junk with its installer and was ultimately discontinued eight years ago. Don't be tempted to download it now.

OTHER OPERATING SYSTEMS What's new for Linux and macOS



LINUX DISTRO

Linux Lite 5.2

www.linuxliteos.com

Min requirements: 8GB hard drive space, 64-bit processor
File size: 1.3GB

The Ubuntu-based Linux Lite is a simple, fast and free alternative to Windows. It has a familiar looking desktop, taskbar and system tray, and comes with popular programs including LibreOffice, VLC, GIMP and Firefox. This version is based on Ubuntu 20.04.1 and uses Linux kernel 5.4.0-52. There are nine new wallpapers to choose from, Adobe Flash has been removed, and you can now download Zoom and Microsoft Teams through the software library.

DESKTOP TOOL

Fireplace 3D Lite 2

apple.co/36hCyX9

Min requirements: macOS X 10.8 or later, 64-bit processor
File size: 28.2MB

Winter is here, and what better way to keep warm than with a roaring open fire? Fireplace 3D Lite doesn't actually generate any heat, of course, but it does turn your Mac display into a realistic looking fireplace. It is Retina 5K-display ready, supports multi-monitor setups and can be used in screensaver mode. The latest version adds support for dark mode and automatically optimises processor usage. You can also now set a password for the screensaver.

Best New Browser Tools

CHROME

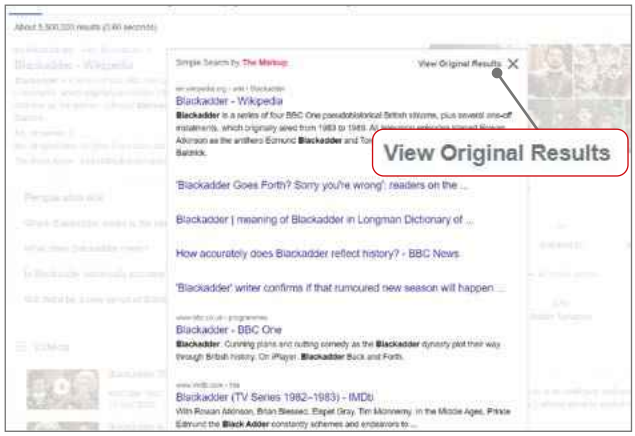
Simplify Google's search results

The developer behind Simple Search (bit.ly/3pB476u) wants to bring back the good old days "when search results provided '10 blue links' that sent you to the right place".

But how can you do that without creating your own basic search engine? After all, today's Google is a very different beast to the one that first appeared in 1996. These days you have to cut through a swathe of sponsored ads and information boxes before getting to the results you need.

For Simple Search the answer is, well, simple. The extension adds an overlay to your search results – it works with both Google and Bing – that serves up just 10 useful links. No ads, no extras, just the links you went looking for. You can view the full list by clicking View Original Results.

It makes you realise the extent to which modern search engines are geared toward diverting our attention.



Bring back old Google icons

You're bound to have noticed Google's latest icon redesign, but you may have failed to discern which icon is which, since Google has decided to prioritise uniformity of colour over user needs – and everything from Gmail to Google now looks the same.

These unintuitive overhauls can make finding the right tab a nuisance when opening multiple Google services, which is where Restore Old Google Icons (bit.ly/3pw87Fz) proves its usefulness.

With the extension running, head to a Google site such as Drive, Calendar or Gmail and the tab will display the distinct, classic icon design, such as the white envelope with the red M to denote your inbox.

Navigate Netflix with your keyboard

If you watch Netflix on your computer, you'll realise its interface is better suited to smart TVs and games consoles. Using a mouse on the streaming site is much more fiddly than navigating with a remote control.

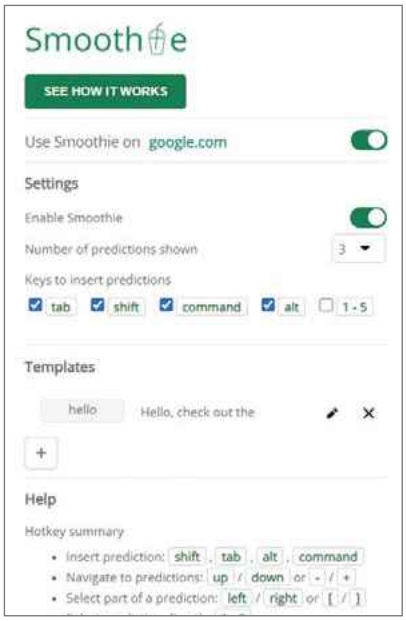
Netflix Navigator (www.netflixnavigator.com) lets you use your keyboard for more precise control. From the moment you land on netflix.com, you can use the arrow keys to navigate through the platform's well-stocked catalogue. Press the Enter key on a title to display the option to play, read additional information and view related shows and movies. You can also jump straight to the search box by pressing the 'S' key.

Use predictive text across the web

One of the most frequent requests we get from *Web User* readers is for a reliable and efficient predictive-text tool. There's a lot of you out there who have been scarred by years of tapping the number 7 key four times just to get the letter 'S' on an analogue mobile phone.

The answer – for web-based writing tasks, at least – is Smoothie (smoothie-io.launchaco.com). This browser tool uses AI to help you type faster by serving up suggestions as you write. It works on "all major websites", including Facebook, WhatsApp, Outlook, Gmail and Slack.

More than just a predictive-text tool, Smoothie lets you set templates, access keyboard shortcuts and use the Smoothie Editor for websites that aren't currently supported. As a bonus for the security-conscious, the extension doesn't store what you type, either.



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

FIREFOX

Watch multiple picture-in-picture screens

There's a scene in *Back to the Future Part II* where Marty McFly watches six different TV channels at once. Firefox's new multiple picture-in-picture (PiP) mode is our modern-day equivalent.

The feature hasn't seen a full, stable release yet – it's only available via the highly experimental Firefox Nightly browser, which you can download from mzl.la/2H3Zsst. Once you have Nightly, go to about.config (and accept the risks), then search for media.videocontrols.picture-in-picture.allow-multiple. Toggle the value from False to True and restart Firefox.

Now, hover over a video and for the option to pop it out into its own always-on-top, floating window. As with the single video PiP mode, you can't navigate away from this page. To open multiple videos at once, use multiple tabs.

Set up a talking alarm clock

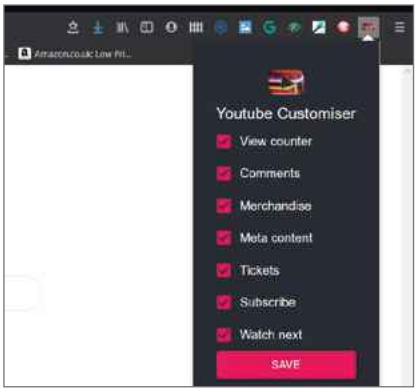
Sales of alarm clocks have no doubt plummeted since the advent of the smartphone, but setting an alarm is still a useful reminder. After all, you won't always have your phone with you when you're working at a computer.

Talking Alarm Clock (mzl.la/3npBAz5) is a lightweight browser add-on with a friendly cartoon clock mascot that displays the current time in analogue and digital, and lets you set two alarms for different times. Setup is simple and intuitive, using drop-down menus, text boxes and sliders.

You can accompany your alarms with a range of tones, such as a digital alarm or a cuckoo clock, as well as speaking your own phrase and tweaking the clock's voice.

Remove clutter and distractions from YouTube

YouTube is the ultimate time-waster – a website seemingly designed to keep you watching videos for as long as possible and distract you from the world beyond.



When willpower alone won't cut it, there's always YouTube Customiser (mzl.la/3kueF3D). This is no nannying browser tool – instead, it simply lets you add or remove core elements from the site so it's more to your liking. That it can help block out distractions is a bonus.

Open the add-on to see a list of YouTube elements ranging from view counters and merchandise banners to subscribe buttons and 'watch next' suggestions. Untick the pink box and the extension strips these out, leaving you free to see only what you want to see on the site.

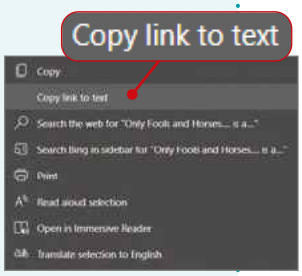
OTHER BROWSERS

Translate videos in real time

Ultimate Video Translator (bit.ly/32OYWpX) lets you translate anything on any page – including YouTube's video captions – with the click of a button. Open the extension, set your translation language and click Start. When you click any text on the page, the English transforms into Dutch, Afrikaans, or any of the 72 included languages. Subtitle translation works in the same way. Just open the tool and click Translate YouTube Caption. When you use the CC option in any YouTube video, your English text is instantly translated.

Copy links to text

If you ever wanted to highlight a specific sentence or word on a web page, then save or share it along with the URL, Edge's new 'Copy Link to Text' feature is for you. However it's currently only available in the experimental Edge Canary, and is hidden behind a flag. Open Canary, go to edge://flags/#copy-link-to-text, then enable the setting and restart Edge. Now, when you highlight text on a website and right-click, you'll see the option 'Copy link to text'. Click this, then paste it into a document or email and you'll see both the words and the URL for the page.



Best Free Apps

App of the Fortnight

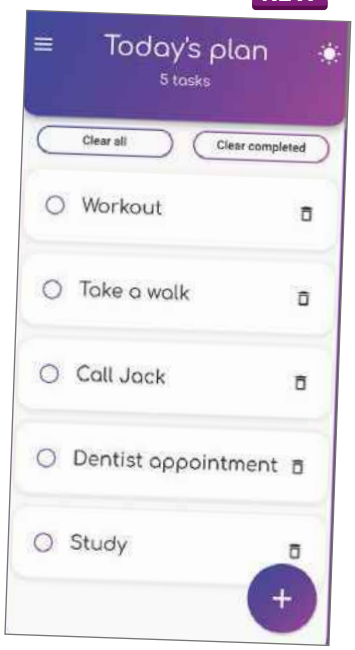
PRODUCTIVITY

Task Air

bit.ly/taskair515

4.1

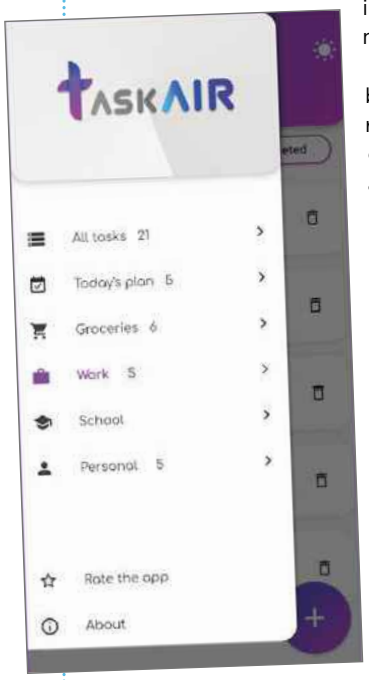
NEW



Keeping yourself organised is vital these days, but it's a shame that so many of the apps designed to help you stay on top of your daily tasks are either badly laid out or bloated with unnecessary features that just get in the way.

Enter Task Air – a free, clean, easy-to-use to-do list app that aims to help you maximise your productivity with the minimum of fuss.

The first thing to note is that you don't need an account to use the app. It's refreshing to be able to install an app like this and start using it without having to sign up and log in first. Secondly, Task Air works offline – you don't need to be connected to anyone's servers to retrieve or upload your own data, and you won't ever need to depend on an active internet connection to see what's next on your to-do list.



The app's interface is beautifully simple, with your most recent upcoming tasks given centre stage on the main screen and a big button to add new items – see our Mini Workshop, right, to find out more about how to get started. Tasks can be categorised and you can get straight to specific types – shopping lists and school or work appointments, for example – direct from the menu screen.

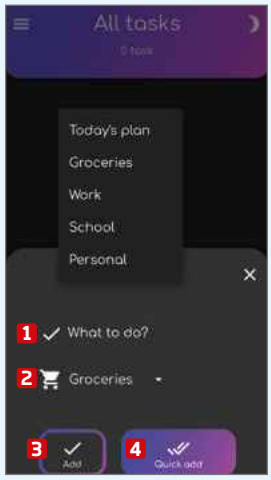
Task Air is completely free, assuming you're happy to put up with occasional adverts. If not, you can banish them for the princely sum of 99p. It's the first in a planned series of minimalist productivity apps from Canadian developer Julien Lefebvre. We look forward to trying out Series Air's upcoming password manager, budget tool and a workout-log app soon.

Our rating ★★★★★

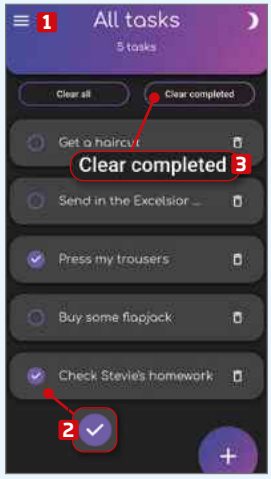
MINI WORKSHOP
Organise your life with Task Air

1 Launch Task Air for the first time and you'll see a very simple screen, with a menu button 1 in the top-left corner and a button to switch between light and dark modes 2 top-right. You don't need to sign in with an account, so you can start building your to-do list straight away. Tap the plus-sign button 3 at the bottom to add your first task.

2 In the 'New task' screen, type a name for your task where it says 'What to do', 1 then tap where it says Groceries 2 to select a category for your task – you can choose Work, School Personal, Groceries or 'Today's plan'. Press the Add button 3 to add your task and return to your list. If you have more tasks to add, tap 'Quick add' 4 instead and repeat the process.



3 When you return to the main screen, you'll see all the tasks you've added in a long list. You can view tasks of a specific category by pressing the menu button 1 and selecting the category you want. To mark a task as completed, tap the circle icon next to its title 2 to enter a tick. To remove tasks you've ticked off your list, tap the 'Clear completed' button. 3



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

MESSAGING

NEW

Zenchat

bit.ly/zendroid515
bit.ly/zenios515

5.1 11

Zenchat is what you get if you cross a messaging app with a to-do list app. This combo lets you transition seamlessly between chats, reminders, notes and more without having to switch apps. You can create tasks directly from within chats or bring someone into a chat group by mentioning them in a task. Zenchat (known as Zenkit Chat on iOS) is currently positioning itself as a business tool, but it could potentially prove useful for large, busy households, too.

See page 28 for details of the desktop version.

Our rating ★★★★☆

SPORT

UPDATED

Sporting Life

bit.ly/sportingdroid515
bit.ly/sportingios515

6 11

If you like to keep up with all the latest racing results, football news and live sports data, then it's likely you've already tapped into the resources available at www.sportinglife.com. Now, you can easily access all that sporting info wherever you go, thanks to Sporting Life's new mobile app. The redesigned app lets you view all the latest headlines and stories, check live racing results via its Fast Results section and more. Promised future updates will let you track specific horses, watch replays and get live football scores.

Our rating ★★★★☆

COMMUNICATION

UPDATED

Zoom

bit.ly/zoomdroid515
bit.ly/zoomios515

5 8

Positive news on the COVID vaccine front means that a return to some kind of normality could be on the horizon. Still, the chances are that video-calling apps and Zoom meetings will be around for a while longer, so it's good to see that Zoom is continuing to adapt and improve its mobile app. This latest update includes a number of new features, including the ability to live stream to YouTube directly from your mobile device, as well as finally offering end-to-end encryption for video meetings.

Our rating ★★★★☆

GAMING

UPDATED

PlayStation App

bit.ly/psdroid515
bit.ly/psios515

6 12.2

With a dearth of stock online and a lack of big launch events, the debut of Sony's PlayStation 5 has felt a little muted, compared to the bombastic launches of past game consoles. That's 2020 for you. Still, Sony has taken the opportunity to rebuild its PlayStation companion app from the ground up. The new app is faster and now combines the functions of the PlayStation Chat messaging tool, PlayStation Store and remote control of your console in a single app. You'll still need the separate PlayStation Remote Play app to stream games from your console to your device, though.

Our rating ★★★★☆

PODCASTS

NEW

Bitcast

bit.ly/bitcast515

13

Does the world really need another podcast app? The team behind Bitcast certainly think so. The app was developed in partnership with publisher Podcast Notes, which provides the backbone of its content. But the real 'twist' is that the app has its own social-networking element built in. Users can 'clip' sections of podcasts to share with others, either by tagging fellow Bitcast users or by posting them on social media. Bitcast is currently iOS-only, though an Android version is in the works – in fact, you can sign up to the Android waiting list at bitcast.fm/waiting-list, should you feel so inclined.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

5 NEW APPS WORTH PAYING FOR

GAME

The Pathless

apple.co/32Huoq7

Price: £4.99 per month

13

This console-quality action-adventure game, which is available on Apple Arcade, sees you and your faithful eagle surfing, soaring and shooting arrows as you explore a mysterious island.

GAME

MO: Astray

bit.ly/3luDNsy

apple.co/2K5q5OZ

Price: £4.49 (Android) £4.99 (iOS)

6 9

This old-school side scroller boasts great-looking pixel art, clever environmental puzzles and a neat twist on traditional platforming that lets you stick to surfaces, avoid traps and battle enemies.

GAME

Under: Depths of Fear

bit.ly/32DhWrd

Price: £5.99

6

In this haunting first-person survival game, you take the role of a traumatised WWI veteran trapped on board a sinking ocean liner. An immersive story and atmospheric visuals make for an unsettling experience.

CLOCK

Fliqlo Flip Clock Pro

bit.ly/3eXsgzm

Price: 59p

4.4

This simple but stylish app turns your phone into a vintage flip clock. It's not the first time we've seen this, but Fliqlo's minimalist design and customisable themes make it stand out from the crowd.

CAMERA

DSLR Camera

apple.co/3eUFdKc

Price: 79p

13

Take your photography to the next level with this app, which offers a DSLR-style manual control. It's just been updated with new features that take advantage of iOS 14 and the iPhone 12 Pro's LiDAR sensor.

The Pathless | MO: Astray | Under: Depths of Fear | Fliqlo Flip Clock Pro | DSLR Camera

✓ Install this app...

ISS Live Now

bit.ly/issdroid515

bit.ly/issios515

4.1 9.3

Whether you're celebrating 20 years of scientific breakthroughs aboard the International Space Station (go.nasa.gov/38FxA9q) or you're just a straight-up space buff, ISS Live Now is the app you need. Like other ISS apps, it lets you track the station's progress as it orbits the planet 250 miles above our heads. But it also provides access to a number of incredible live camera feeds and other video content, including a live stream of Earth from the station's point of view, HD recordings of astronauts' space walks, access to NASA TV documentaries and more. The Android app supports Google Cast so you can watch on the big screen.

...Not this one ✗

ISS Tracker

bit.ly/38G3FxO

This app has none of the features that make ISS Live Now so great. In fact, it only really does one thing – display the current position of the space station on a map of the world. And it doesn't even do that properly. Many users have pointed out that the location recorded by this app is wildly different from the station's true position, as reported by more reliable trackers.

Take a Screen Break

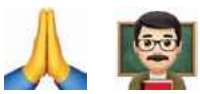
Take a rest from your browser with our fiendish fortnightly challenges. Can you guess our British TV show emoji and our Wayback Machine?

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 OLD BRITISH TV SHOWS FROM THE EMOJI?

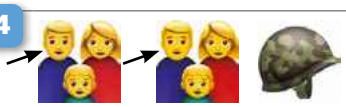
1

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?

Brown takes over

Say hello to iPhone.

The Simpsons Movie

COMPETITIONS

WIN 1 OF 2

XPG Summoner RGB Keyboard

WORTH £129.99 EACH

With CHERRY MX switches and RGB backlighting, this keyboard is just what every gamer needs to win every battle and race. It also has multimedia keys for adjusting volume, and macro keys to perform complex sequences. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'XPG' in the subject line. For more information, visit www.xpg.com and follow @adatatechnology on Twitter.

WIN 1 OF 5

Balance Folio for iPad Air

WORTH £34.95 EACH

Ideal for the home office or kicking back on the sofa with a Christmas movie, this slim and stylish case from Speck offers multiple viewing and typing angles. It also boasts 1.2m drop-protection, with rear magnets to shield your camera when it's not in use. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'Balance Folio' in the subject line. For more information, visit www.speckproducts.co.uk and follow @speckproducts on Twitter.

FAQ

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

Microsoft Lobe

Machine learning just became much easier, thanks to a new Microsoft project. **David Crookes** discovers what Lobe's got to do with it

What is Lobe? (Baby don't hurt me)

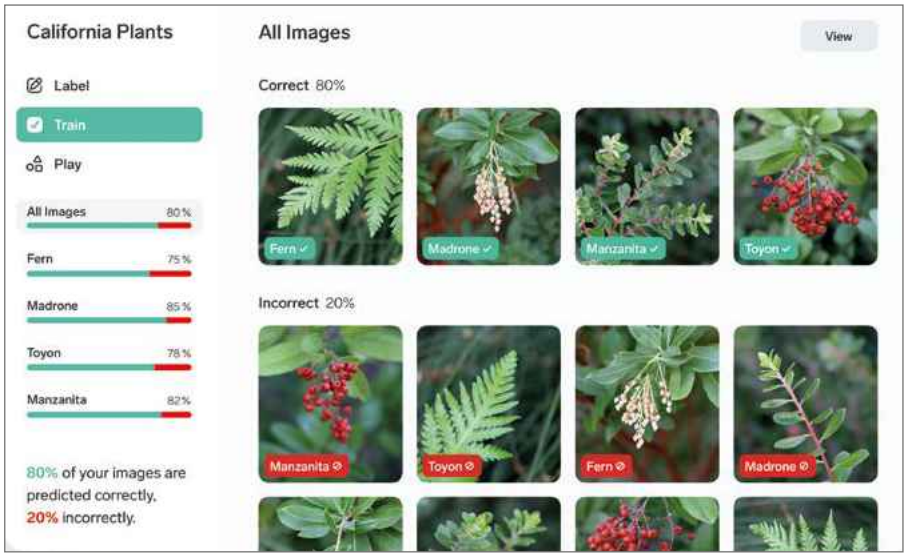
Microsoft Lobe (lobe.ai) is a new program that lets you create machine-learning models without having to write any code. It's been designed to be as easy to use as possible, allowing people with no programming experience to conduct experiments in artificial intelligence, and enabling developers to integrate machine-learning capabilities into their apps.

How does it work?

After downloading the Lobe desktop app for Windows or macOS, you can import or capture images and quickly classify them according to what they are showing. These pictures are used to train the app to recognise certain elements, so Lobe can identify what is happening in any subsequent image. Since it works out which open-source machine-learning model should be used for the dataset, you don't have to fiddle around with any settings to get started. And it's completely free.

So how can it be used?

Well, let's say you want to teach the system to identify when a bird flies over to eat some food. To do this, you compile a series of images: one set may show an empty bird table, while another set shows the table with a bird. By labelling the first set as "no bird" and the other set as "bird eating", you'll teach Lobe to recognise when a feathered friend is in the frame. If you then show the app two further images – one with a bird and the other without – it should be able to tell the difference between the two and automatically show you the relevant label.

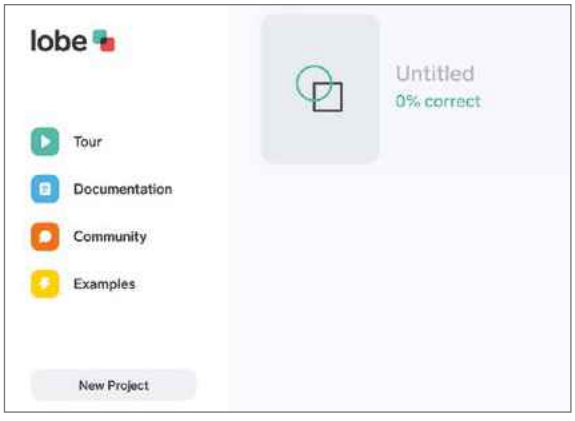


What if it gets mixed up?

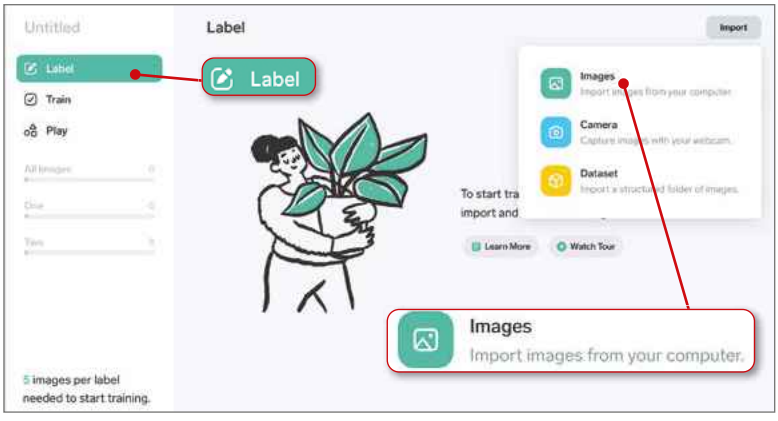
There is every chance that your machine-learning model will not work perfectly straight away. In our example, we want to know when the bird is actually eating the food rather than just appearing in shot so, ideally, we'd want to make some refinements. Lobe allows this by letting you experiment with the model. It can classify anything it examines in real time, including shots from a camera. This means you can simply click a red or green button to indicate each occasion Lobe makes a mistake, ensuring the model continues to learn.

But why is this such a big deal?

Up until now, the process for machine learning has tended to be out of reach



Lobe is very easy to use and it's available to download for free for Windows and macOS



Import some images into Lobe or capture them from your camera, and label them to train your own machine-learning model

for most people. Although many efforts have been made to open artificial intelligence to developers, with Google being among the companies involved (ai.google/education), it has still generally required users to understand data science and deep-learning models. Lobe strips away such needs and makes machine learning accessible to all. You can come to it with little or no experience and quickly understand what's going on.

Does it only work with images?

Yes. Lobe, which was acquired by Microsoft in September 2018, is still in beta and it currently only supports image classification. But Microsoft hopes to expand the app's capabilities to other types of models and data in the future.

Lobe says it will offer object detection, which will locate specific items within an image, as well as data classification, so that information in a table will be labelled based on its content. For now, though, users can become familiar with the simple interface by importing images from a computer or webcam. If you're a little more confident, you can also import a structured folder of images.

Will Microsoft be harvesting my data?

Not at all. Rather than upload data to the cloud, your images will remain on your computer and they'll be processed locally – there's no login and you don't need an internet connection. Best of all, Lobe works its magic under the bonnet, which means you're sure to get a lot of pleasure out of it once you begin to play around – and all without worrying that your privacy is being compromised.

What can I do with the dataset, though?

Ultimately, Lobe is designed to make it easier for developers to use the datasets in their own apps. As such, the program has an export tool which allows any created machine-learning model to be used on industry-standard platforms.

The Lobe program includes examples of machine-learning models you can create

Lobe was used by a Microsoft beekeeper to protect his hive from dangerous invaders

These include TensorFlow 1.15 SavedModel, which developers use within local applications coded in the Python language, and those hosted on Azure, Google Cloud or AWS. It is also possible to export Lobe datasets as Core ML for the development of iOS, iPadOS and macOS apps, and as TensorFlow Lite to create apps for Android, web browsers and Raspberry Pi computers, too.

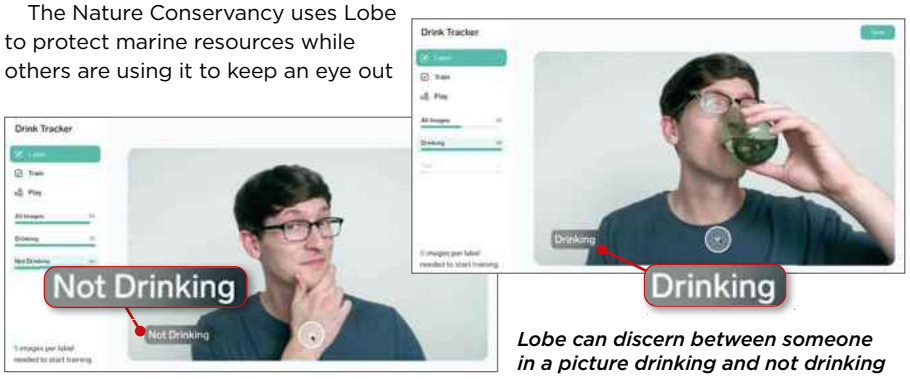
Is Lobe already being used by developers?

It certainly is. Microsoft has drawn attention to a project created by one of its software engineers who keeps bees in his garden. He has fitted a motion-sensor-activated camera at the entrance to a beehive and, by training a machine-learning model to recognise different types of invader such as mites, wasps and Asian giant hornets, he is now alerted to any incoming problems, which allows him to act fast in rescuing colonies of bees from threats.

The Nature Conservancy uses Lobe to protect marine resources while others are using it to keep an eye out for parking spaces outside their homes. Microsoft suggests it could be used to identify plant species, create a baby monitor, recognise facial expressions to create emoji and more.

How much support is there for Lobe?

Lobe is beginning to attract a strong following and a community has built up on Reddit (www.reddit.com/r/Lobe) where people are sharing tips, asking questions and helping each other solve problems. Newcomers can also get a very clear explanation of the tool by visiting lobe.ai/tour. This takes you through the process of training Lobe to detect if you are drinking water, then showing how that could be used in an application. It shows a tutor taking images of himself drinking, then not drinking, while eliminating mistakes – such as Lobe thinking that his hand being in shot means that he is taking a sip. It's a great introduction to the power of this tool.



Lobe can discern between someone in a picture drinking and not drinking

HOW DOES LOBE COMPARE WITH ITS RIVALS?

Lobe's main rival is Google's Teachable Machine (teachablemachine.withgoogle.com), which was recently revamped to make it even easier to use. Like Lobe, it allows machine-learning models to be created without any prior expertise or coding skills – it's just a matter of gathering a set of samples, categorising them and training the model so that it can figure the status of any new examples it sees.

However, Teachable Machine goes beyond image classification. Its machine-learning models can be taught to classify audio through the recording of sound samples, and it will also classify different poses made in a webcam. The website has three tutorials that allow you to get to grips with the three different types of machine learning, and you can also discover some of the models that have been made using the tool.

WHO TARGETS YOU ONLINE?

COVER FEATURE

Your every online move is being watched – but who's watching, and what are they doing with the data they gather about you? **Jane Hoskyn** reveals how to expose the spies and snoopers, and block them

When you stop to ponder who's tracking your web activity and harvesting the data for purposes they'd rather you didn't know about, you might automatically think of hackers and advertisers. Those big bad guys are certainly out there, but most of the people targeting you are both more mundane and surprising. And because you don't give them much thought, they're able to snoop by stealth and get away with devious invasions of your privacy.

Right now, your clicks, taps and location are being tracked not only by companies you trust and people you know (or thought you knew), but also politicians and passing acquaintances.

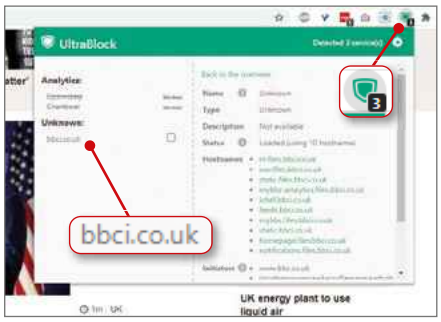
In this feature, we reveal the latest tools for unmasking everyone who's invading your privacy and using their discoveries to target you – not just with ads, but also with creepy "personalised" features, subtle political tricks and scams designed to take advantage of your biggest worries, including the coronavirus pandemic. Over the following six pages, we explain how to unmask these snoopers, prevent them from using the information they harvest, and block them for good.

FIND OUT WHO'S TARGETING YOU

Expose the BBC and British government's secret tracking

After you run a search on Amazon, you'll often see targeted adverts for related products on websites and apps for the rest of the day, if not week. You've come to expect it. But what about non-commercial sites such as BBC News and Gov.uk? They, too, follow you around with trackers, then analyse the data and use it to target you with intrusive bespoke content.

To expose the snooping behind the scenes of these venerable websites, install the browser extension UltraBlock for Chrome and Edge (ultrablock.org), then click its toolbar button above a web page (for example, bbc.co.uk/news in our screenshot, below). In the window that appears, UltraBlock names and shames the trackers watching you on that page, then lets you click any of them to see the 'hosts' currently benefiting from the data being gathered.



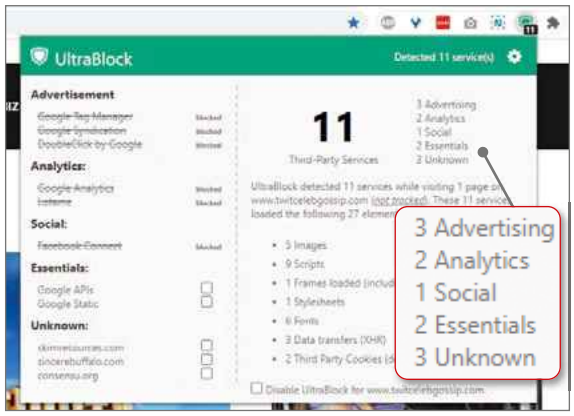
Ultrablock shows you who's tracking you and what they do with data they collect

On the Beeb's site, we logged in, paused our ad blocker and allowed location access, so UltraBlock found quite a few trackers. It automatically blocked at least two 'unnecessary services', leaving just an internal BBC analytics tracker, bbci.co.uk. Clicking its name revealed a list of BBC website features such as feeds, notifications and 'My BBC', all of which were using information about our clicks, searches and scrolls to tailor our content.

On Gov.uk, the extension blocked one third-party analytics service – in other words, a tracker that wasn't even put there by the site itself.

Unmask your advertising stalkers

We then ran UltraBlock on a couple of commercial websites – US broadcaster CNN (edition.cnn.com) and a British celebrity gossip site – again, after pausing our ad blocker. As you'd expect, the results were more colourful. UltraBlock automatically blocked several 'unnecessary' trackers, including Amazon Ad System, Google Publisher Tag, Facebook Connect, Outbrain (a web ads platform) and Scorecard Research (marketing), all of which share data about your activity with commercial partners who then target you with ads and posts.



Prepare for a shock when you run a tracker blocker on a commercial website

Uncover hidden Facebook and Twitter buttons

Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram and other social networks litter the web with Like buttons and Share icons designed to boost their business. These buttons are often well hidden and may be tracking you by stealth. To root them out, install the free version of Ghostery (Chrome, Firefox, Edge, Safari – ghostery.com). It works much like UltraBlock and reveals similar findings (albeit with a few annoying upgrade ads), but its plain-English categories make its discoveries easier to interpret at a glance. Click its toolbar button on any page, then hover over an item in the Social Media category and click a pop-up icon to block it on that site or all over the web.

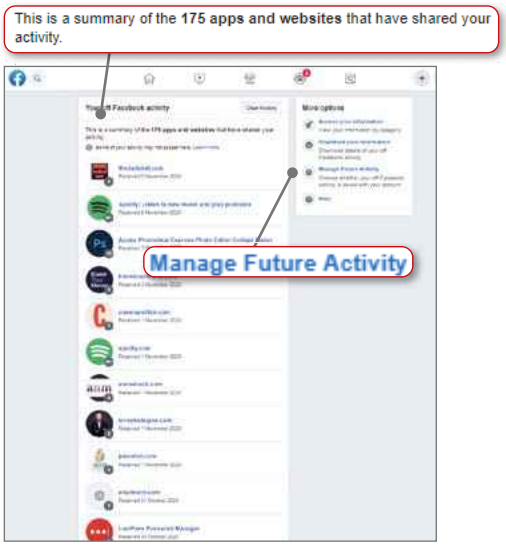
Ghostery lets you see and block social sites that track you with hidden buttons

Discover who Facebook shares your web activity with

Facebook is the king of online targeting. Earlier in 2020, it even launched a tracker that monitors your activity when the Facebook app or site is closed on your device. The 'Off-Facebook Activity' tracker lets Facebook (and Messenger and Instagram) target you with ads and posts based on, say, the driving route you saved to your GPS app, the shopping you logged with your virtual store card, and the songs you played on Spotify. It knows your sleep timer and alarm routines. It probably knows where you live.

Facebook does at least let you see the third-party sites and apps it gleans this data from – but only because the 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal forced it to. Go to facebook.com/off_facebook_activity, then click 'Manage your off-Facebook activity' to see the last six months' worth of data collected about you by the many companies in cahoots with Facebook.

Shockingly, many of the companies in the list will have tracked you via adverts and buttons that you didn't even click. Click 'Clear history' to get rid of them, then use Manage Future Activity to limit the snooping in future.



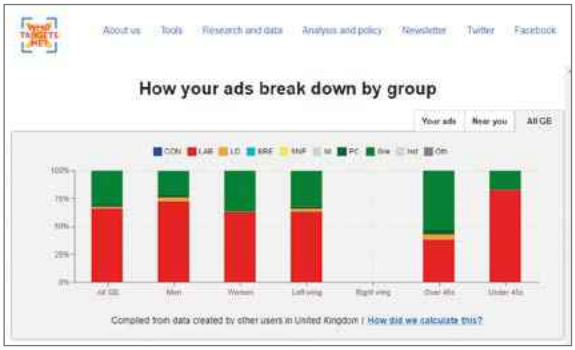
Facebook lists sites who share your data with it, including ones you've never visited

Expose the politicians who target you on Facebook

British web tool Who Targets Me (Chrome, Firefox whotargets.me) monitors the politically targeted posts in your social-media feeds, then reveals who paid to put them there in a bid to influence your vote.

To do this, Who Targets Me needs to scan your Facebook and other social profiles deeper than UltraBlock and Ghostery, and over a longer time. Its creators aim to build a crowdsourced global database of political ads and the kind of users they're forced upon, so they request a few details upfront, including your age and postcode. No personally identifiable information is stored, and no web activity is scanned, other than targeted ads on social sites.

To use it, install the extension, then click its toolbar button to get set up. You'll be taken to results.whotargets.me, your personal page of graphs that reveal what types of organisation are targeting you. Leave the extension running for a few days while you use Facebook, Twitter and so on, then check the 'Your ads' tab to see exactly who is trying to buy your vote.



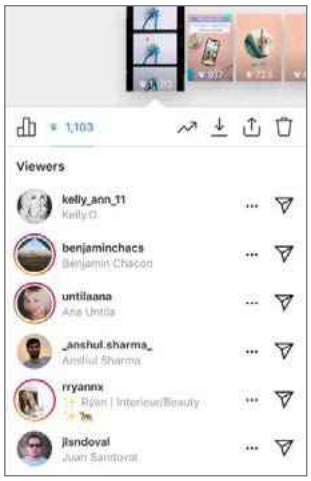
Who Targets Me reveals why the posts you see on Facebook match your political persuasion

Tracking Exposed (tracking.exposed) is a similar tool that unmasks targeted content on YouTube, Amazon and – for those who dabble – Pornhub, as well as Facebook.

Catch old friends (and dodgy exes) who stalk you

Facebook and Twitter deliberately make it difficult to see who's spying on you.

To unmask a Facebook stalker, lay a trap: post a Facebook Story, then check its viewers



Facebook's code powerfully blocks apps and extensions that claim to reveal who's been checking out your profile (bit.ly/3p5xj5o), so don't risk using them. The best workaround for catching Facebook snoopers is to post Facebook Stories, which disappear after 24 hours. You can then go to Your Story, Story Details to see a private list of viewers (find out more at bit.ly/2U3dpdf).

Twitter has just removed the Audiences tab from Twitter Analytics (analytics.twitter.com), which used to reveal the gender, location, age and 'interests' of people interacting with your specific tweets. All you get now is an overall impressions count.

Perhaps the answer is to join professional network LinkedIn (linkedin.com), whether you're still in the job market or not. It's brilliant for finding old colleagues (including those who may hold a candle for you), and LinkedIn profiles appear high in Google search results, making you easy to find. You can then discover snoopers via the site's Who's Viewed Your Profile tool, which you can even set to notify you with a link to every person who peeks.

See if your phone's new owner is viewing your contacts

Before you sell, ditch or donate an old phone, tablet or computer, you should wipe all its data so no one can plunder your info or pretend to be you. But what if you forgot, or it was stolen, or someone nicked your passcode? Then you can at least check which devices are currently being used to target your info.

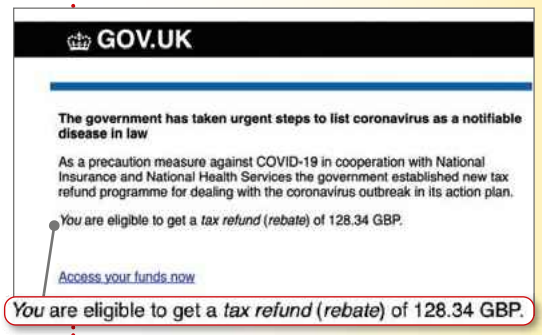
To see who's using your Google account, go to google.com/devices. Click 'More details' to see when (and where) each device last had access. Click 'Don't recognise this device?', then answer some security questions to permanently cut a gadget's connection to your account. Once you've done this, change your password. You can also

WHY COVID MADE YOU AN EVEN EASIER TARGET

Scammers love a big news story, and news stories don't come much bigger than a global pandemic. Indeed, criminals have piggybacked the crisis to fleece tens of millions of pounds from the British public.

Back in July, Action Fraud revealed that more than £11m had already been lost to criminals exploiting people's concerns (actionfraud.police.uk/covid19). In October, the Charity Commission revealed that 645 UK charities had reported being victims of fraud or cybercrime since lockdown began in March. Reported losses amounted to £3.6m (bit.ly/2UbBo9Y); the Charity Commission said the true scale is likely to be much higher.

Why do these national (and global) crises make us such easy targets? Because we're primed for unusual messages – HMRC offering us grants; Ipsos Mori inviting us to take part in research; exposure alerts from NHS apps – and we want to do our bit to help and be helped. So we respond. And we fall into traps such as phishing emails laced with malicious attachments; online ads for protective products that we pay for and never receive; and scam texts and emails claiming to offer financial help (see screenshot). There's a long list of COVID scams at bit.ly/3khYTc6.

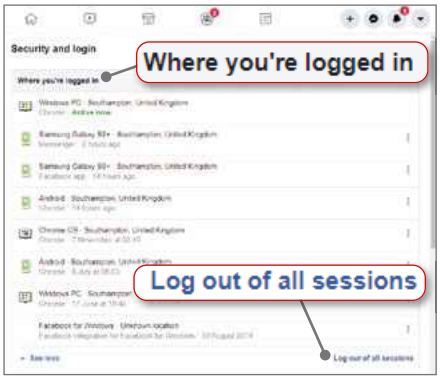


If a COVID-related message appears threatening or seems too good to be true, report it via the Suspicious Email Reporting Service by going to bit.ly/2IjxV6C or forwarding the message to report@phishing.gov.uk. Since its launch in April, the service has received 1.7 million reports and identified more than 6,500 scams.

lock your device remotely using the Find My Device app (Android, bit.ly/find515).

To see which devices are currently accessing your Apple ID, go to Settings on another iPhone or iPad linked to the same account, then tap your name and scroll down. You can get the same device list via your Apple ID account page on the web (appleid.apple.com), or on your PC via iCloud, Account Details, Manage Apple ID.

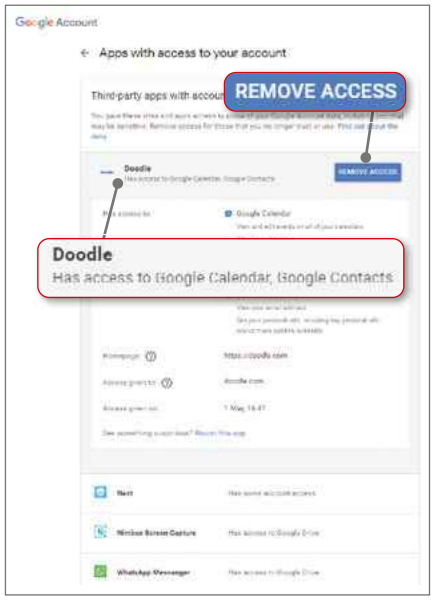
To check which devices have accessed your Facebook account, go to www.facebook.com/settings, 'Security and login', then click 'See more' under 'Where you're logged in'.



Are you really logged into Facebook from all these devices? If not, sign out

Protect your Google and Facebook accounts

Dozens of companies can access your Google account and Facebook profile without having to use special trackers, because you clicked Allow when they asked. To see who has access to your Google account, go to myaccount.google.com/permissions and click an app for details. To block them, click Remove Access. Find out more at bit.ly/gaccess515.



See who has access to your Google contacts, calendar and personal info

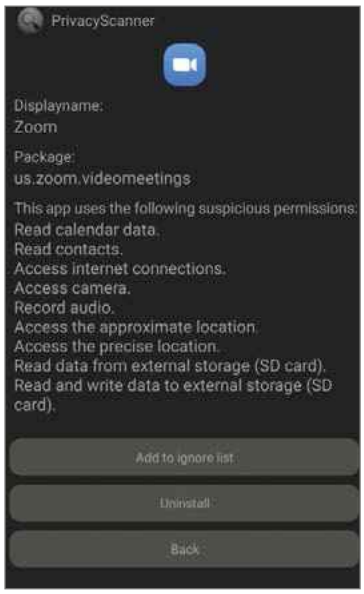
To see which apps you've allowed to spy on your Facebook profile and friends list – along with the third-party commercial partners using Facebook's trackers – go to facebook.com/settings and click 'Apps and websites'. Click 'See more' under the Active tab, then 'View and edit' to revoke access.

Stop people targeting your phone's mic and camera

Many apps need access to your camera and microphone to work properly, but if one of those apps is dodgy, the hacker or scammer behind it can target your camera and mic, too – and potentially your photos, contacts and private messages.

To help combat this, iOS 14 now displays indicators on your iPhone or iPad every time an app begins using your mic or camera. Android no longer lets apps secretly use your microphone or camera in the background, but for extra peace of mind, you can install the free app Access Dots (Android bit.ly/2BpKgTF) to add iOS-style indicators that show when they're being used.

The free Android app Privacy Scanner (bit.ly/privacy515) quickly scans your installed apps to reveal which permissions you've granted them. These permissions include SD card access, location tracking and access to calendar, contacts and photos, as well as mic and camera access.



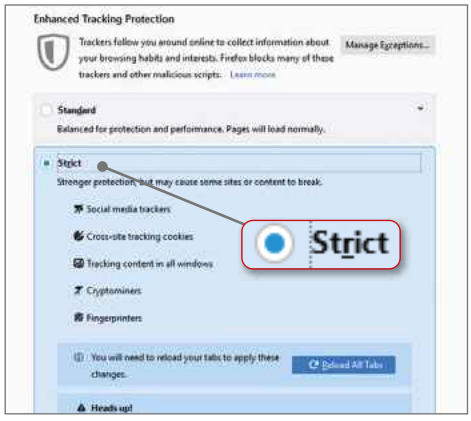
PrivacyScanner reveals the many permissions demanded by Zoom

LOCK DOWN AGAINST TARGETING

Boost your browser's built-in defences

The Do Not Track request in your browser settings may look like your first line of defence against companies who harvest your data, then target you with creepy personalised ads. Unfortunately, it's useless (find out why on page 44). So browsers are learning from extensions such as UltraBlock and Ghostery to create built-in tools that actively halt the tracking.

Safari now includes Intelligent Tracking Protection, which automatically blocks third-party trackers; Opera blocks all trackers by default unless you allow an exception; and Edge automatically blocks "a majority of trackers" if you opt for the Strict setting at edge://settings/privacy.



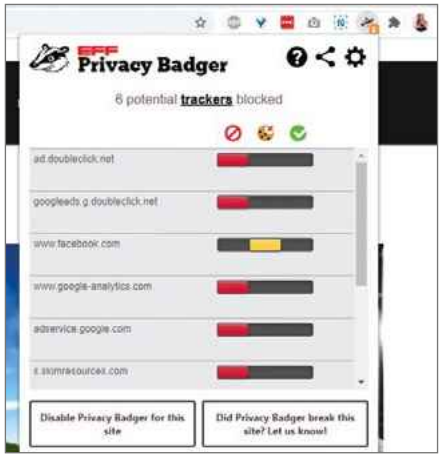
Firefox now lets you lock out all trackers without having to install an add-on

Firefox also now blocks all trackers in Private mode or normal mode, depending on your preferences. Go to about:preferences, click Privacy & Security and choose Strict. If a page fails to load properly as a result, click the Shield icon on the address bar, then click the Enhanced Tracking Protection toggle. You can find out more about Firefox's new blocking tools from the Mozilla blog at mzl.la/3n75Cr9.

Automatically block trackers in Chrome

Chrome's built-in tracker protection is weak but you can shore up its defences with free extensions. The Electronic Frontier Foundation's brilliant Privacy Badger (Chrome, Firefox, Opera, Edge privacybadger.org) automatically blocks the most persistent and troublesome trackers. It's a clever tool, able to recognise whether a third-party script – such as an embedded map on a news story – is useful to you, rather than to the company that put it there. You can set it to block all trackers if you prefer.

DuckDuckGo's private search engine (duckduckgo.com) has always been one of our favourite privacy tools, with top-notch tracker-blocking built in. You can now extend its power to Chrome and other browsers, and to your phone and tablet, by installing its extension and mobile app. Click 'Add DuckDuckGo to Chrome' to install it, and click 'iOS & Android' to get the app.



Set Privacy Badger to block all trackers or let it intelligently decide what to block

Banish Facebook and Google's creepy targeted ads

"Better recommendations and more personalised experiences" promises Google, in return for tracking you 24/7. Head to google.com/myactivity and click Web & App Activity to see, limit and delete the data it's harvesting, or to switch off web tracking altogether. On Android, go to Settings, Google, Ads and switch off 'Opt out of Ads Personalisation'.

Facebook makes you jump through even more hoops. Go to facebook.com/settings and click Ads to see which companies' paid-for posts have appeared in your feed and click Hide Ads on each one. Then click 'Ad settings', 'Data about your activity from partners' and switch the toggle to 'Not allowed'. Back on 'Ad settings', click 'Audience-based advertising', then See All Businesses to scroll through the companies who've shared tracked info about you with Facebook. Click each one in turn, then click the arrow under 'Why are you included...?', and then Don't Allow. Finally, click 'Ads shown off Facebook' and switch the toggle to 'Not allowed,' to ban targeting across the web.

Switch on 'Not allowed' to throw Facebook's ad partners off your tail

Delete old accounts that make you a target

Old, forgotten web accounts and forum posts are easy prey for ID thieves and anyone wishing to exploit your personal info. GDPR regulations enshrine your 'right to be forgotten', but this is easier on some sites than others. Google's Personal Information Removal Request Form (bit.ly/2P17rIH) and 'Removing Content from Google' wizard (bit.ly/2ym0top) let you erase your data from Google Search and Google products such as YouTube. Click 'See more products' to reveal the full list, which includes Google Assistant, Gmail and Google Groups.

To batch-delete Facebook posts without deleting your account, use the free Chrome extension Social Book Post Manager (bit.ly/36ojJBE). To delete old tweets in bulk, use the free web tool TweetDelete (tweetdelete.net).

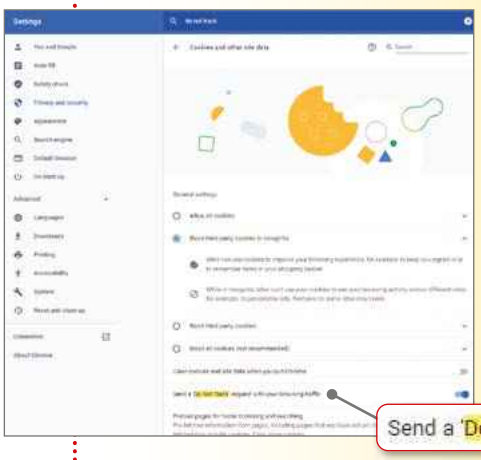
Click a Google product on the Removing Content page to strip your data from it

WHY 'DO NOT TRACK' IS WORSE THAN USELESS

The Do Not Track setting in your browser is a request, not an order. Companies aren't legally obliged to comply, even under GDPR (bit.ly/gdpr515), so hardly any of them do. According to the Who's Watching study by VPNMentor (bit.ly/watching515), "almost no major sites" obey the request.

Microsoft is among the companies who've always ignored Do Not Track (DNT). "There is not yet a common understanding of how to interpret the DNT signal [so] Microsoft services do not currently obey them," the company said, which is ironic given that the company enabled the setting by default in Internet Explorer 10.

Do Not Track is just another job for your browser to do, potentially slowing it down. Worse, its uselessness creates a false sense of security among web users who assume it protects them. Apple says this is so dangerous that it's now removed the option from Safari (apple.co/3eoEd0E). Do Not Track is still part of other major browsers (search for it in Settings or Options) but its days are numbered.



Go to Deseat.me (www.deseat.me) and click 'Get started' to find and delete old accounts you've forgotten about. Your Social Media Fingerprint (bit.ly/2luGm1A) is also useful for revealing all the places signed into, including forums you've posted on.

In some cases, you'll have to contact a site's administrator to have old posts and data removed. Search its WHOIS entry (www.whois.net) for contact details. To wipe your details from marketing databases, use the form at UK Datahouse (ukdatahouse.com).

Get a burner email address and phone number

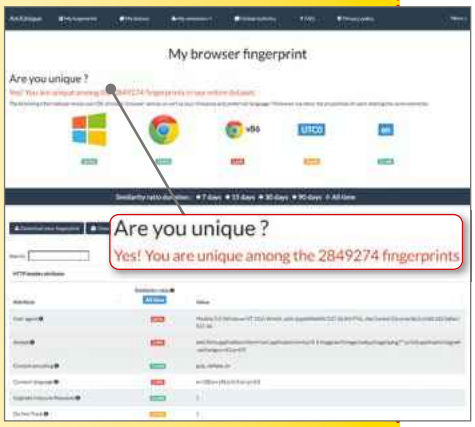
If a company demands your phone number for no good reason, hand over a dummy number from fakenumber.org/united-kingdom. Then, when the company targets you with spam calls and texts, they won't reach you.

You can also get 'burner' email addresses. Go to open-source site Guerrilla Mail (www.guerrillamail.com) and copy the anonymous address it currently displays (it'll switch to a new one in a few seconds). You can use the temporary inbox to confirm you're a real person if the registration demands this, and then ditch the fake address.

Protect yourself from spam by using a temporary address from Guerilla Mail

BLUR YOUR BROWSER FINGERPRINT

Browser fingerprinting is an easy and increasingly popular type of tracking. Using simple tracking scripts, companies and criminals can access data such as your operating system, time zone and language. It might seem like generic stuff, but your exact browser fingerprint is unique in around three million, which makes it a pretty clear target. No surprise that a new study reveals a quarter of the world's top 10,000 websites use fingerprinting scripts (bit.ly/2JLwMW6).



To see what fingerprint data you're broadcasting, click 'View my browser fingerprint' at Am I Unique (amiunique.org). For even more info, go to mybrowserinfo.com and click 'See Detailed Location and Browser Information'.

It's hard to stop sharing this data, though some tools try – UltraBlock, for example, has a 'prevent fingerprinting' option, which you can switch on by ticking 'Protect your privacy' in the overview window. Free Chrome extension Browser Fingerprint Protector (bit.ly/3k8IF60) spoofs your plugins, languages and user agent to make you more difficult to categorise by marketing types. Ultimately, though, the best way to blur your fingerprint is to use a VPN or Tor.

Make yourself untargetable with Tor

A VPN or proxy tool can help to spoof your location and hide your activity. Our top VPN recommendation is Windscribe, which gives you 10 server locations and 10GB of data for free each month. If you need more, you can add extra locations for $1 (77p) each or subscribe to a paid-for plan, for £7 per month.

For top-level privacy, use Tor (torproject.org). This open-source software is not just a whole new browser but a network – effectively, an entire new OS – which bounces your activity around the world, making it impossible for anyone to track you ('Use a mask... Resist the surveillance pandemic' it says, cheekily). Tor is free and legal, and available for Windows, macOS, Linux and Android. ■

Resist the 'surveillance pandemic' with Tor, the ultimate privacy protective gear

FINAL ISSUE on sale Wednesday 9 December 2020

Get ready for THE FUTURE OF THE WEB

We predict the technology that will revolutionise our lives over the next 20 years

PLUS...

HACK YOUR BROWSER
Secret tweaks that make Chrome and Edge even better

SPEED UP YOUR STARTUP
Stop unwanted programs running alongside Windows

BEST DOWNLOADS EVER!
Our favourite free software since *Web User* began

VISIT OUR FACEBOOK PAGE AT FACEBOOK.COM/WEBUSERMAGAZINE

Make notes on all your devices

Want to take your lists and ideas wherever you go? **Andy Shaw** tests six of the best free tools that let you make notes on one device and read them on another

Notion | www.notion.so | ★★★★★

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

WebUser GOLD AWARD

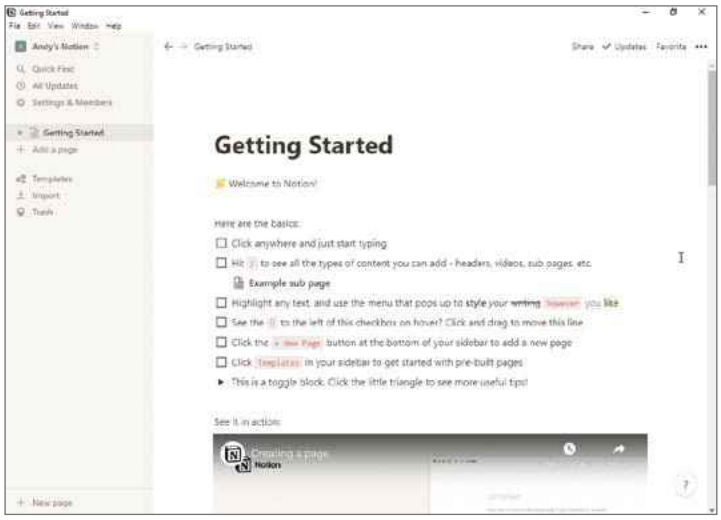
What we liked:

Notion starts with the concept of an online notebook you can access from any device and uses it to create an extraordinarily powerful tool. It lets you write or paste anything, from a basic list to the opening pages of your next novel, by offering a simple blank canvas and supplementing it with a suite of templates and tools that can supercharge standard notebook features, such as to-do lists and tables.

The software is designed to help teams share notes but, as an individual, you can get its amazing features for free and still share notes with up to five people, which should be plenty for most non-professional purposes.

The interface, which you can access through downloadable software (for Windows and macOS), mobile apps (iOS and iPadOS, and Android) or just by logging into the web page, is clean and relatively easy to use. Your notes are organised as if they were individual sections and pages in a single physical notebook. You can navigate through these using the tree structure on the left or through menus that are created automatically on the pages that host any subpages. All changes are saved on the fly and synced across all your devices.

As well as simple notes, Notion lets you insert files, images, videos and links, and uses its own systems for adding simple tables, Kanban-style task-management cards and lists with clickable tick boxes.



How it can be improved:

The power of Notion is also its Achilles' heel because, for a tool that many people will only want to use for simple tasks such as shopping lists and note-taking, you can end up spending a disproportionate amount of time choosing options and fiddling with templates.

We love Notion's flexibility but there's a significant learning curve if you want to get the most out of it.

OUR VERDICT

Notion lets you carry out all the basic note-taking tasks such as jotting down your thoughts or keeping an updated wish list, but you could probably run an empire from its vast array of flexible, powerful options. The only downside is that this huge power adds extra complexity, so if your requirements are modest, you may end up wishing for less.

Simplenote | simplenote.com | ★★★★☆

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

What we liked:

If Gold Award-winner Notion sounds too complicated, Simplenote is the ideal antidote.

As its name suggests, it's a straightforward document-creating tool that's a lot like the notepad apps you'll be familiar with from your mobile device.

On your computer or on the web, this takes the form of a two-panel interface, with a list of pages on the left and a space to type on the right. On your phone, you'll see a list of notes – just tap one to read or edit it.

One huge benefit Simplenote has over a regular notebook app is that it's available across every platform you can think of: Windows, macOS, Linux, iOS and iPad OS, and Android. Set up a Simplenote account and it syncs your notes across any or all of them.

Simplenote has a few other handy tricks up its sleeve, including tags, search and the ability to create checklists, but while its features are scant in comparison to Notion, it's also much easier to use.

How it can be improved:

You can use sorting and filtering to rearrange your notes in the left-hand panel of Simplenote's interface, but you can't build a bespoke tree-like structure like Notion's. Also, Simplenote is text only, so there's no option to add extra elements such as images.

OUR VERDICT

Simplenote is a brilliant text-only tool that works across all your devices and manages syncing for you. While it doesn't have the vast range of additional options that Notion offers, it's not saddled with its complexity either.

Standard Notes | standardnotes.org | ★★★★☆

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

What we liked:

One thing missing from both Notion and Simplenote is the promise of privacy. By requiring you to sign up to an account and syncing your unencrypted files to their own servers, your notes may not be as secure as you'd like them to be.

Standard Notes offers a similar service to Simplenote, but your notes are encrypted with the AES 256 standard on the device you create them on. You can still sync notes for viewing on other devices, but they're stored encrypted and are only unlocked when you open them on another device.

Aside from the increased privacy, Standard Note's tools are kept simple. You can't organise notes in sections, as you can in Notion, but you can use tags to filter your list when searching.

How it can be improved:

Standard Note offers a number of extensions to provide more features but they're only available if you upgrade to the paid-for version. This costs $9.99 (around £7.50) per month, which is rather expensive, though you can reduce this to $2.48 (£1.86) per month if you commit to a five-year plan.

OUR VERDICT

It's not the best note-taking tool of the group, but Standard Notes deserves an award of its own for being the notepad that's most aware of the importance of privacy, using AES 256 encryption to keep the snoops from your files. If that's your priority, it's a great option.

BEST OF THE REST

Joplin

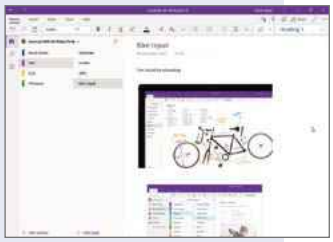
joplinapp.org

There's a lot to like about Joplin – a portable program you can use on a PC or a handy mobile app for when you're on the move. Unfortunately there's no web version, though you can sync your notes with a free Dropbox account. We liked the interface, which has a Markdown split-screen mode that can help you learn how to format documents from the keyboard.

OneNote

onenote.com

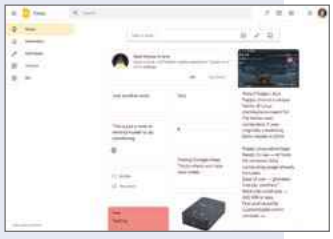
Microsoft's OneNote has the benefit of coming preinstalled with Windows, syncing with OneDrive and generally tying in with all aspects of your Microsoft account. If you've also signed up to other Microsoft services such as Office and Teams, this integration will be a bonus. It's a shame, then, that OneNote is so average and uninspiring in its design and features.



Google Keep or Turtl

keep.google.com or turtlapp.com

For those who prefer sticky notes to notebooks, Google Keep is an appropriate place to jot down your thoughts. The downside is that it's not great for storing and managing a great number of notes. On the plus side, because Keep links to your Google account, it integrates seamlessly with Gmail and Drive. If you prefer not to share your notes with Google, Turtl offers a similarly simple and intuitive service.



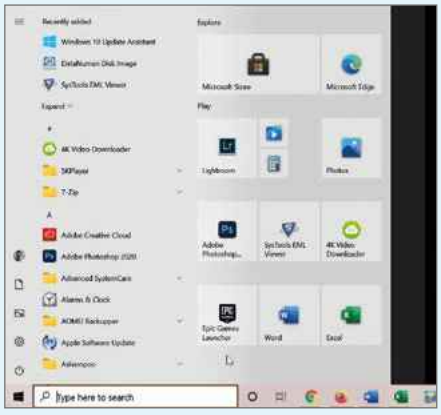
What's new in WINDOWS 10

It may be a month late, but the Windows 10 October 2020 Update (20H2) has finally arrived. **Wayne Williams** reveals everything that's been added, improved and removed

Use theme-aware Start tiles

One of the most obvious changes in the October 2020 update is the addition of "theme aware" tiles in the Windows Start menu. Instead of each of the app tiles having a solid colour backplate behind it (blue by default), the partially transparent background will be light or dark, depending on which Windows theme you're running.

We think it's a big improvement, but if you miss the previous splash of colour, you can get it back. Go to Settings, Personalisation, Colours, then switch to Dark mode and, under 'Show the accent colour on the following surfaces', tick 'Start, taskbar and action centre'.



The Start menu tiles in Windows 10 now adjust to suit the overall theme

New Microsoft Edge

There's a good chance that Microsoft has already installed the new Chromium-based version of its Edge browser on your system, but if not, you'll get it as part of the October 2020 Update. Unlike the old Edge, which never quite seemed finished, this new incarnation is fast, secure, open-source and packed with useful features. And because it's based on Chromium, the open-source engine that powers Google Chrome (and various other browsers), it supports all the current web standards and can run loads more add-ons. Although Microsoft is pushing its new browser heavily in Windows 10, you're under no obligation to use it, but it is worth giving it a try because Chromium Edge is genuinely good.

You now get Edge whether you like it or not, but it's definitely worth trying

View open Edge tabs using Alt+Tab

Alt+Tab has long been one of the most useful keyboard shortcuts in Windows and now it's even better – if you use the new Microsoft Edge, that is. When you press Alt+Tab, it not only lets you switch to the programs and folders you have open, but also allows you to jump to your open browser tabs. By default, it only shows the five most recently viewed open tabs, but you can change this to show every one.

To make this change, open Settings, go to System and select 'Multi-tasking' on the left. Click the drop-down menu under Alt+Tab and select 'Open windows and all tabs in Edge'. This menu also lets you show only three recent tabs or none at all, if you want to disable the new addition.

Alt+Tab now lets you switch between browser tabs as well as open windows

View open site tabs

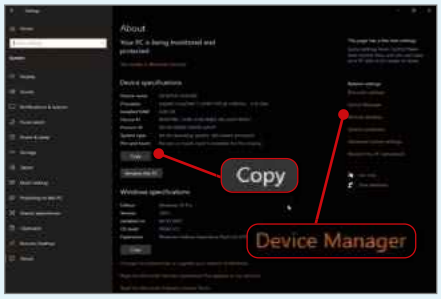
Edge lets you pin your favourite sites to the taskbar, so you can access them instantly. To do this, open a site and click the three-dot menu in the top-right corner of the browser, then go down to 'More tools' and select 'Pin to taskbar'. This isn't a new feature, but the October 2020 Update improves on it. Now, when you hover your mouse over the site's

The October 2020 Update improves the option to pin sites to your taskbar

taskbar icon, you'll be shown all the open tabs for that website.

System Control Panel has been removed

Microsoft has long planned to replace the old Control Panel with the new Settings app, but it doesn't seem in a huge rush to complete the process. In the October 2020 Update, it has taken another step towards the end goal by removing the classic System page from the Control Panel. If you try to open it now, you'll be redirected to the About page in the Settings app. You can copy device information from this page and there are buttons for opening features such as Device Manager.



Microsoft has removed the System page from the Windows Control Panel

If you're not happy with the change, there's a simple workaround that will restore the traditional System Control Panel. Simply right-click the desktop and select New, Shortcut. In the location field, type:

```
explorer shell:::{BB06C0E4-
D293-4f75-8A90-CB05B6477EEE}
```

Click Next, then give your shortcut a suitable name and press Enter

Change your screen's refresh rate

Increasing the refresh rate of your monitor can result in much smoother visuals, and the October 2020 Update lets you do this. Open Settings, go to System, Display and click the 'Advanced display settings' link. Use the drop-down menu at the bottom to select the refresh rate you want. The options available will depend on the make and model of your screen (it's possible you won't be able to change it beyond the default).

You can now adjust your monitor's refresh rate from within Windows 10

In addition to improving the motion of visuals, increasing the refresh rate can also use more power, so be warned.

Personalise your taskbar

If you're just updating your PC to the new Windows version, you won't actually see this change because it only appears when you perform a clean install of the OS, create a new account or log into a different account for the first time. As part of the out-of-box experience (OOBE) you encounter during any of those above scenarios, Windows will now offer you the chance to personalise the taskbar based on your preferences, only showing the icons you're actually interested in. For example, if you have a linked Android phone or an Xbox Live account, you'll see buttons for those on the taskbar – but if you don't, then you won't.

Smoother 2-in-1 switching

If you have a tablet with a detachable keyboard – a 2-in-1 device – Microsoft has made a small tweak in the October 2020 Update that changes Windows 10's behaviour. When you remove the keyboard, the operating system will automatically switch to the tablet experience without asking you to do this yourself via a desktop notification.

Windows 10 will detect when you remove the keyboard from a 2-in-1 device

Better notifications

When notifications pop up on your PC, it isn't always obvious where they've come from. Microsoft has changed this by adding new app logos to the top of notifications so you can see at a glance where they originated. There's also a new "X marks the spot" addition that lets you quickly close the notification and get back to whatever it was you were doing. ■

WHAT'S COMING IN THE SPRING 2021 UPDATE

Microsoft works on two Windows 10 updates at a time – one debuts in the spring while the other arrives in the autumn (like the October 2020 Update). If you're a Windows Insider, then you'll already be testing builds and features from the 21H1 update, which is scheduled to arrive in the first half of 2021.

As is always the case, there's no guarantee that the features being tested will be included in the finished update, but highlights to look forward to so far include the addition of system-wide DNS over HTTPS (DoH), which will boost online security and privacy; automatic Linux distro installation in Windows Subsystem for Linux; theme-aware splash screens for Universal Windows Platform (UWP) apps (building on the theme-aware tiles now found in Start); and improvements to the Optimise Drives page (Settings, System, Storage, Optimise Drives).

There's also a new page in the Windows out-of-box experience that asks users what they will be using Windows 10 for (Gaming, Schoolwork, Family, Entertainment, Creativity or Business) to help ensure that the operating system gets set up correctly.

Switch your internet provider online

Comparison sites make it easy to find a cheaper broadband deal, but the results they present don't give you the full picture. **Robert Irvine** reveals how to spot the tricks to save yourself money and disappointment

Beat biased search results

Broadband comparison services such as Broadband Choices (www.broadbandchoices.co.uk), uSwitch.com (www.uswitch.com/broadband) and MoneySuperMarket (www.moneysupermarket.com/broadband) are very easy to use: you just enter your postcode to view deals currently available in your area. However, their results are rarely ordered in a way that places the best plans first because priority is given to 'featured' and 'sponsored' deals, which earn the comparison site extra money.

Below these, the site's 'recommended' results are typically listed by popularity, which is determined by how many other users have clicked them. Other deals are labelled as ending soon, to persuade you to switch now or miss a great saving.

For this reason, it's always worth reordering results using the drop-down 'Sort by' menu, which is usually in the top-right corner. This lets you list deals by cheapest first (if price is the most important factor), whether that's the average monthly cost, the first-year cost or the total-contract cost.

You can use the site's filters to narrow your search results by minimum speed, contract length, and TV and phone options. This may significantly reduce your choice, but it helps find the best deal for you, rather than the one the comparison site wants you to choose.

Reorder your search results on broadband comparison sites to uncover better deals

Look beyond the big providers

With so many packages listed, you may assume that comparison services perform a thorough scan of the broadband market, but look closer and you'll notice their results tend to come from the same dozen providers. This is because these sites make money from affiliate revenue when you click through to sign up with certain companies. Smaller ISPs can't compete with the commission doled out by the big providers, so they don't pay to be included in comparisons. Also, household names such as BT, Sky and Virgin Media offer broadband, phone and TV combos, which reap greater rewards for comparison sites.

Even sites that claim to cover the majority of the market still base their results on the ISPs with the largest customer bases. According to the independent site ISPreview, there are currently 83 super-fast broadband providers in the UK (bit.ly/ispreview515), which means most comparison sites feature less than 15% of all the available options.

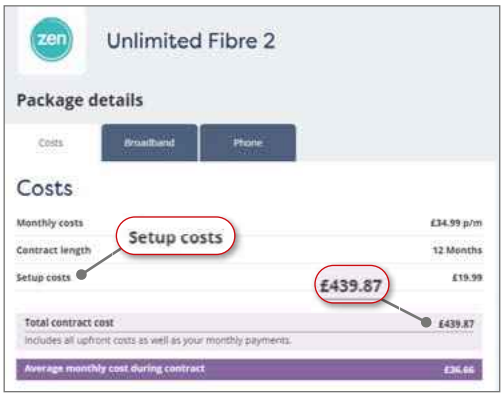
Most broadband comparison services focus on the same dozen well-known ISPs

ISPreview lists all super-fast broadband providers in the UK, not just the big ones

You may also notice a similarity in the presentation and content of results offered by many comparison sites including MoneySuperMarket, Broadband Choices, Comparethemarket (broadband.comparethemarket.com) and MoneySavingExpert (broadband.moneysavingexpert.com). This is because they're powered by a company called Decision Technologies Limited, which is now owned by MoneySuperMarket. So much for freedom of choice!

Although it will take more time, it's worth visiting ISP sites individually to see what deals they're currently offering – use ISPreview's list as a guide.

Interestingly, Sky broadband plans don't currently appear in direct comparisons on Decision Tech-partnered sites, despite Sky being mentioned as a provider. However, rival services such as uSwitch and Broadband Genie (www.broadbandgenie.co.uk) do cover Sky's deals.



Always check the setup fee and total contract cost before switching

CANCEL YOUR BROADBAND WITHOUT CHARGE

You can cancel a new broadband contract within 14 days without being charged, but if you're well into your current contract, there are a couple of loopholes that can get you out for free. These rules apply to BT, EE, Plusnet, Sky, TalkTalk and Virgin Media.

First, if your internet speed drops below the figure advertised when you signed up, complain to your ISP. If it fails to resolve the problem within 30 days, you can leave immediately without paying an early termination fee. Test your speed at speedtest.net to see if you have a case.

Second, if your broadband provider increases the price of your package to an unreasonable amount, you have 30 days from being notified to cancel your contract without charge.

Watch out for hidden costs

High-speed broadband for less than £20 per month sounds like a fantastic bargain, but additional costs that aren't included in the headline price on comparison sites can significantly bump up your bill.

For example, there may be a setup or activation fee of up to £35, or even more if an engineer needs to come to your home to install a phone line. You may also need to pay for equipment such as a router, broadband 'hub' or set-top box. If possible, sort your search results by 'Setup cost' and click 'More details' next to a plan to uncover the true price.

Since 2016, ISPs have been legally obliged to include line-rental costs in their prices, but the default option for phone calls may not suit your needs or budget. You may be charged for "unlimited" calls you're unlikely to make because you mostly use your mobile; or only be offered free calls at off-peak times and weekends, when you prefer to make them during the working day. You can usually filter search results by phone plan to focus on the most suitable options.

Also, look out for price hikes after the first six, 12 or 18 months. Most ISPs lure customers in with attractive discounts, then inflate the cost once you're settled. Virgin Media's Big Bundle package, for example, is priced at £33 a month for the first year-and-a-half, after which it costs £56. Sorting results by 'Total contract cost' tells you how much you'll really be paying, but doesn't cover post-contract hikes. Under new Ofcom rules, your provider must inform you of any planned price increase and cheaper deals before your contract ends.

Finally, you should check how much cancelling the package will cost you, especially before signing up to a long contract. This figure is rarely mentioned by comparison services, so you'll need to look at the terms and conditions on the ISP's own site. BT, for example, charges an early termination fee for each month remaining on your contract at the time of cancellation, minus VAT.

Be sceptical about speeds

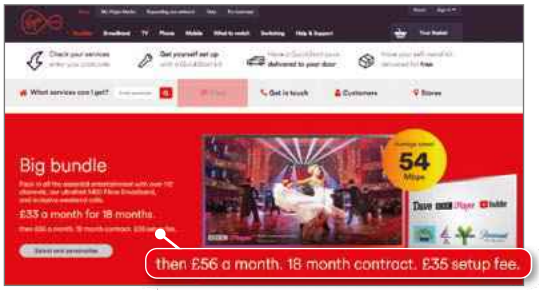
Last year, Ofcom introduced a new code of practice for broadband providers to prevent them from advertising unrealistic "up to" speeds (bit.ly/ofcom515). ISPs must now quote "average" speeds upfront for their packages, which are based on download speeds experienced by at least 50% of customers at peak times (8pm to 10pm). That's reassuring, but it still doesn't guarantee you'll get the speed promised.

When you enter your postcode on a broadband comparison site, you may be quoted some very impressive speeds – for example, MoneySupermarket told us we could enjoy 300Mbps with both BT Fibre 2 and EE Unlimited Fibre Max Broadband. However, when we checked the providers' own websites, those plans weren't available to us, and the maximum speeds available to us were 74Mbps and 73Mbps respectively – that's still very fast, but it's less than 25% of the touted figure.

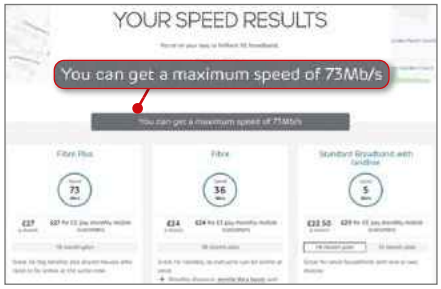
This discrepancy is caused by comparison services sourcing the data for your postcode from your nearest broadband exchange, not for your precise address, which could be several miles away. Some sites, such as uSwitch, ask for your house or flat number to deliver more accurate results, as do broadband providers' sites (which ask for your phone number, too).

Last year, Ofcom admitted to our sister title *PC Pro* that "we're aware some people have experienced issues with the accuracy of information about the broadband available at their address. This relates to the level of detail telecoms providers share with comparison sites about broadband availability".

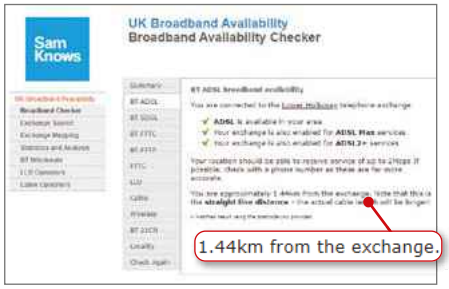
You can find out how far your home is from your local exchange, and the broadband services available to you (ADSL, cable, FTTC and so on), by entering your postcode (and optionally phone number) in the Sam Knows Broadband Availability Checker (bit.ly/samknows515). ■



Virgin Media charges a £35 setup fee and increases its price by £23 after 18 months



EE quoted us a top speed of 73Mbps, but MoneySuperMarket promised 300Mbps



Sam Knows says we're 1.44km from our local exchange and can get ADSL

Master the new home screen widgets in iOS and iPadOS 14

The latest update to Apple's mobile OS adds support for widgets. Here's how to use them

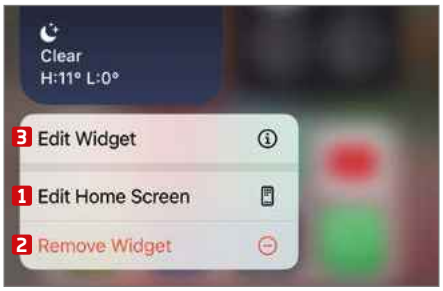
Apple iOS/iPadOS 14: bit.ly/ios515 | **20 mins** | **iOS/iPadOS 14**

The upgrade to iOS 14 and iPadOS 14 introduced a number of new features, including an App Library, improved search, smarter Siri, more Memoji options, better window management and improved privacy controls. But perhaps the biggest change is that the mobile OS now supports widgets on the Today View and home screens, and these can be resized and customised in various ways. Tapping a widget opens the app it relates to.

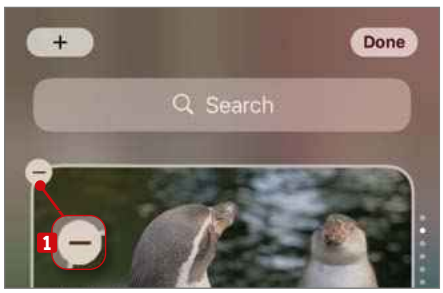
You can download widgets from Apple and other developers, and more are being added all the time. There's also a new Smart Stack option that shows the widgets you're most likely to want to see based on time, location and activity.

ADD WIDGETS
When you tap the plus button, the widgets you can add appear on the right-hand side, making them easier to drag into place

1 In iOS 14, the main place to view widgets is on the Today View screen, which appears on the far left if you keep swiping. Its contents depend on the apps you have installed, with a search bar at the top 1 and the widgets below. 2 Scroll to the bottom and tap the Edit button 3 to make changes.



2 You can also edit the screen by long-pressing a widget and selecting Edit Home Screen. 1 This menu also lets you delete a widget 2 and, in some cases, edit it. 3 For example, you can change your location in the weather widget. Unfortunately, non-Apple widgets don't respond to long-presses.



3 The Edit screen is very simple to use. The widgets wobble and you can reorder them by dragging them into position. You can also drag any Apple widget to any other home screen on your iPhone. Tapping the minus symbol in the corner of a widget 1 removes it.

4 To add new widgets, tap the plus sign in the top-left corner of the Edit screen. This button also appears if you long-press on any home screen. Available widgets are shown 1 and you can also search for a widget by name. 2 Tap any item you'd like to add.

5 You're shown a description of the widget. 1 Scrolling left and right lets you choose a size – small, medium or large. Select the one you want, then tap Add Widget 2 to add it to the current page. Tap Done in the top-right corner to exit the editing screen.

6 In Edit mode, a Customise button appears at the bottom of the Today View screen. Tap this and you can manage widgets created from apps you have installed. Tap a red minus symbol 1 next to a widget to remove it, or a green plus sign 2 to add it. Drag the three-line icon 3 to reorder your list.

7 You can make your own Smart Stack-style widgets, where up to ten items appear in the same box. In the Edit screen, tap and drag widgets of the same size on top of each other. This works with both Apple and third-party widgets. Long-press to edit the stack's contents. 1

8 In iPadOS, widgets are fixed to the Today View screen. In portrait mode, they appear on a screen of their own; in landscape, they are to the left of the app icons. 1 Pressing an app lets you remove a widget, edit the Home Screen and, in some cases, edit the widget. 2 You can't drag widgets to other screens, though.

Store passwords in the cloud to use on any device

AuthPass: authpass.app | 20 mins | Windows macOS/iOS Linux Android

AuthPass takes password management to the next level. It's free, compatible with KeePass (keepass.info) and works on all your devices. The software's modern, Google-style design, fast and accurate search function, and wealth of keyboard shortcuts make navigation simple.

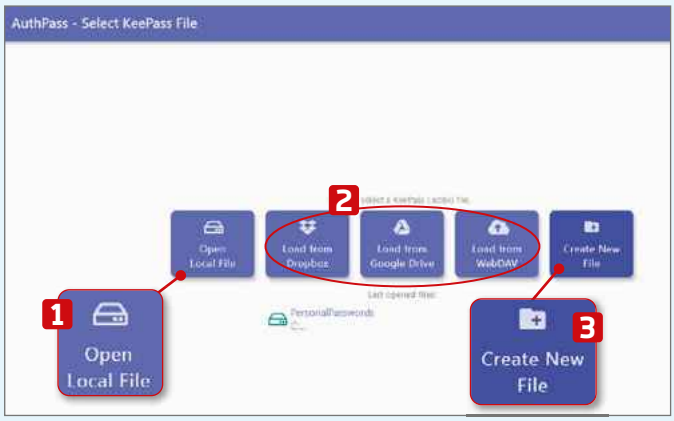
However, multi-device support and a clean interface are no substitute for secure, encrypted password storage. AuthPass ably delivers on that score, and you even have the option of saving your encrypted passwords to Dropbox and Google Drive, so you can retrieve and manage your passwords anywhere.

The PC version is relatively new to Windows and Linux, but we'd urge you to also try the Android app. This integrates with your mobile device's password auto-fill function and biometric data.

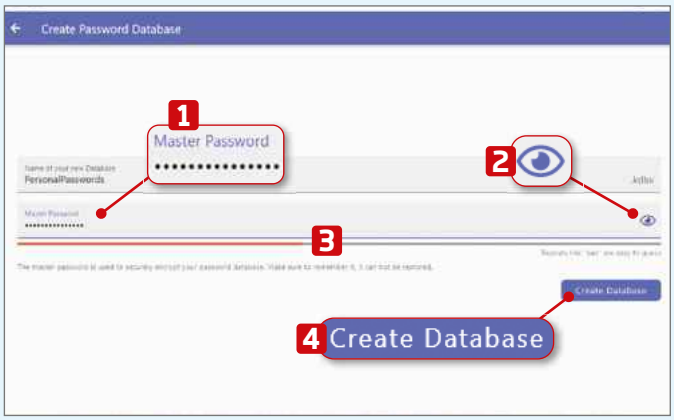
EXPERT TIP

Steve Clark says

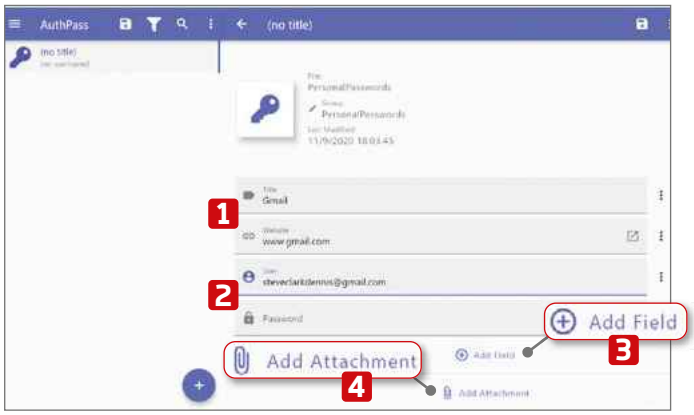
It may still be in beta, but check out AuthPass Cloud. Select it by clicking the three-dot button in the AuthPass sidebar. After confirming your email, you can auto-generate anonymous email addresses that forward to your real one. Use it to create different addresses for each service you sign into, to add an extra layer of security in case a company inadvertently leaks your data to hackers.



1 When you install the AuthPass software on your PC, you're given two choices: 'Yes, open my passwords' and 'I'm all new! Get me started'. If you already use a password manager, select the first option. This lets you open any KeePass file stored on your computer 1 or online. 2 You're also able to create a new, password-protected KDBX file. 3

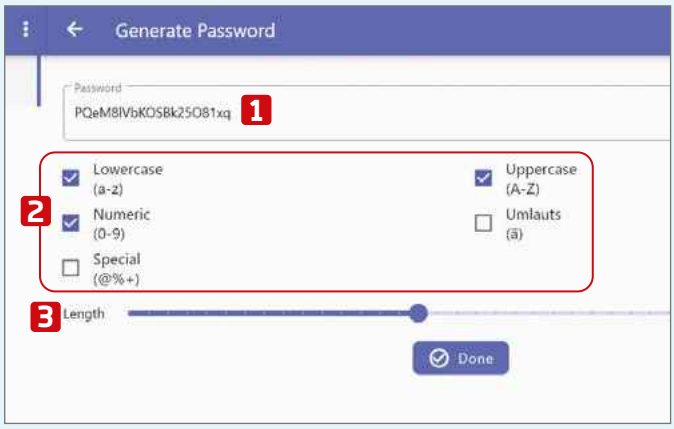


2 If you're new to password management, select 'I'm all new!' and create a Master Password 1 to secure and encrypt your password database. Click the eye icon 2 to view the password and check the coloured bar 3 to see how secure it is. Click Create Database 4 when you're set.

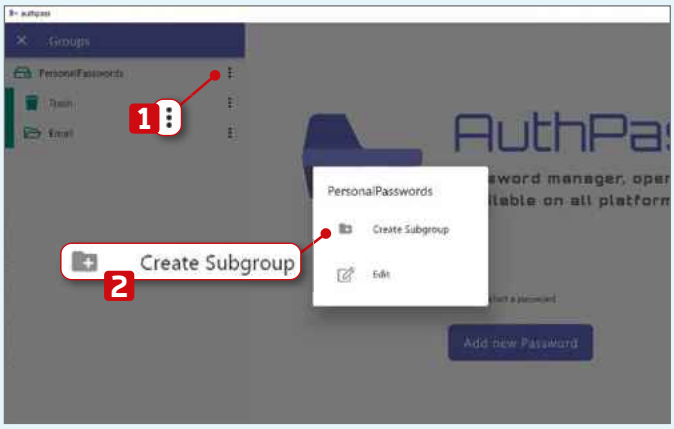


3 You can now start building a password database. Select 'Create your first password'. The process is very straightforward – simply enter a title, website, 1 username and the password. 2 By clicking Add Field, 3 you can create extra text boxes, including One Time Password and custom fields. Attachments 4 can also be added.

4 Before you Save, click the three-dot button beside a text field to open a menu that lets you manage entries, such as by copying 1 and renaming 2 the selected field. Protect Value 3 disguises a field's entry using asterisks, to deter over-the-shoulder snoopers. 'Click to reveal' makes the text visible again. 4

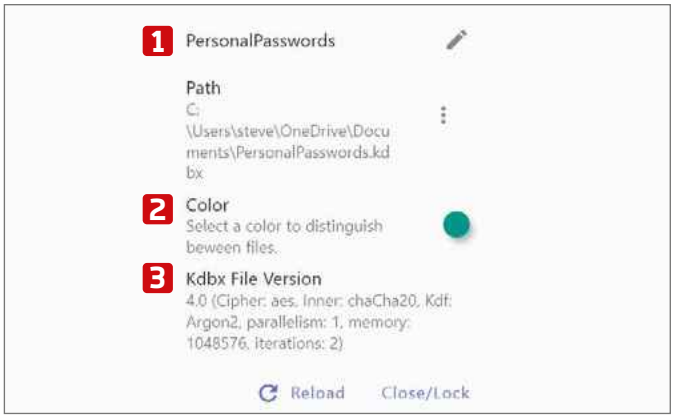


5 Generate Password helps you create unguessable passwords. Select this option from the three-dot menu. At the top is a random password 1 that copies when clicked. Below, you can set specific parameters for a generated password, such as including specific cases and characters, 2 and password length. 3

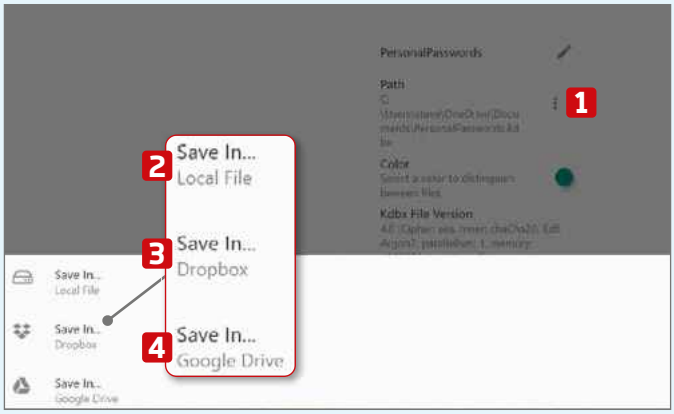


6 The AuthPass sidebar fills up as you add more passwords. To keep them in order, sort them into subgroups. In the sidebar, click the three-dot button and select Manage Groups. You can now rename any existing group by clicking its name. To create a subgroup, click the three-dot icon next to the parent group 1 and choose Create Subgroup. 2

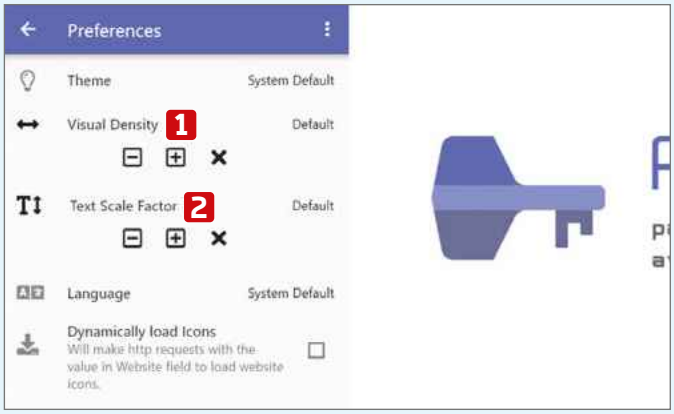
7 Give your new subgroup a name and click the default folder icon to pick from a list of symbols. Click the back arrow to save the group. You can get rid of any subgroup by clicking its three-dot button and choosing Delete. To add an existing or new entry to a subgroup, open it and click Group, 1 then select the group you want. 2



8 Once you've added your passwords, you can save your database to the cloud and secure it on your computer. Click the three-dot button at the top of the sidebar, then click the open database – by default, it's called PersonalPasswords. On the next screen, you can edit its name 1 and colour, 2 and see more details about the file. 3



9 Click the three-dot button next to Path 1 to select a save location, and choose from your computer, 2 Dropbox 3 or Google Drive. 4 The first time you do this, you must log in and authenticate AuthPass. Click Close/Lock to secure and close your database; to open it again, click Open File, select the file and enter your Master Password.

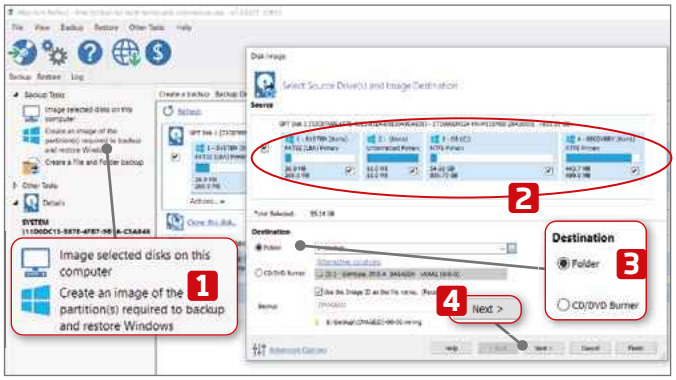


10 The software has a few customisation options – click the sidebar's three-dot icon and choose Preferences to access them. Visual Density 1 and Text Scale Factor 2 make the interface more accessible. AuthPass also lets you highlight any entry and swipe right with your mouse to copy the stored password or left to copy the username.

Automate backups with Macrium Reflect

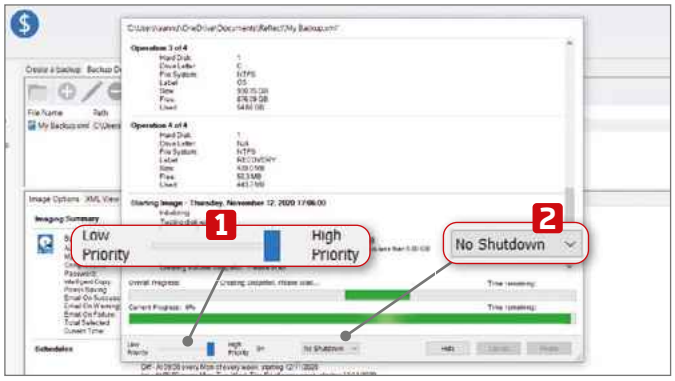
Macrium Reflect Free is a handy hard-drive backup tool that can save regular copies of your PC's contents to an external drive for safe-keeping. If disaster strikes, you can use this backup to restore your PC and get it working again. Previously, it used Windows' own scheduling tools to run automated backups, but it's just introduced built-in tools to improve its reliability.

Macrium Reflect Free: macrium.com/reflectfree | 20 mins | Windows 7, 8, 10

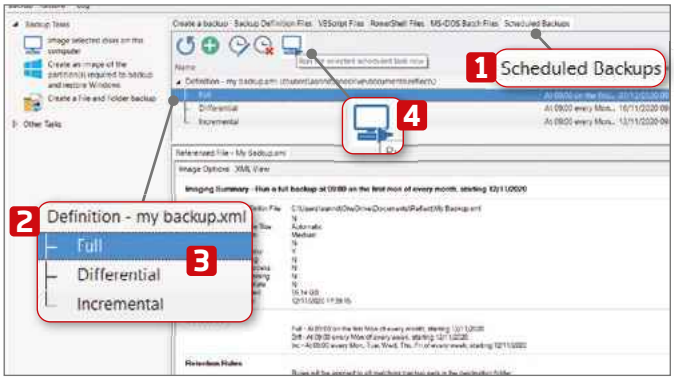


1 If you don't already have a backup plan created, you need to make one. Click one of the image options in Macrium Reflect Free 1 and choose which partitions you want to include. 2 Select a destination 3 and click Next. 4

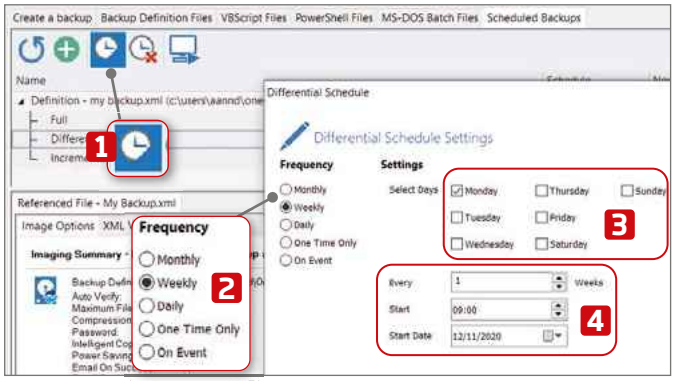
2 Select a template for the backup plan – the options are explained in the drop-down menu. 1 This adds some scheduling information automatically. You can add another scheduled backup, edit the existing schedule or delete it. 2 Below, choose how long you want to store your backups. 3



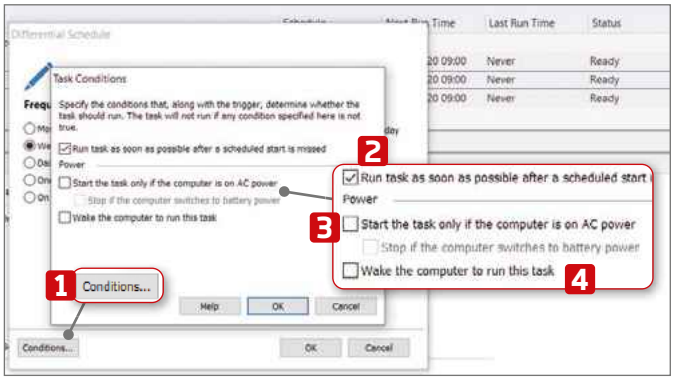
3 Click Next, check everything looks in order, then click Finish to run the backup. While the backup is doing its first run, you can prioritise 1 it to run it as fast as possible or limit its resource usage; and set your PC to shut down when it's finished. 2



4 To edit an existing backup's schedule, select the Scheduled Backups tab 1 and highlight the backup 'definition' you want to edit. 2 The various schedules associated with it are listed. 3 You can also run a backup from here using the 'Run the selected scheduled task now' button. 4

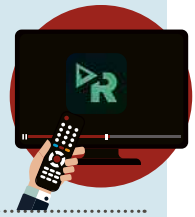


5 You can edit the schedules of Full and Differential backups in the free version of Macrium Reflect. Select a backup, then click the Edit button. 1 Here, you can choose the frequency of the backup, 2 choose which days you want it to occur on 3 and confirm any extra timing details. 4



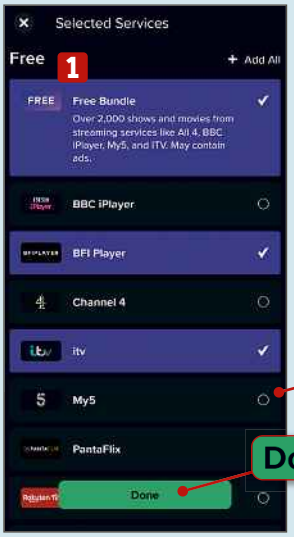
6 Click Conditions 1 to set how the schedule operates if the PC isn't on. The default is to run it as soon as possible after the scheduled moment has passed, 2 but you can also choose caveats based on whether your laptop is connected to power 3 and if you want to wake a sleeping machine. 4

Stream your favourite shows from one app

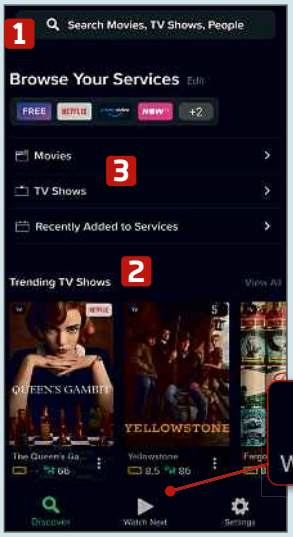


Readers often ask us how to combine and manage all their apps in one space, whether it's messaging or social media. Reelgood provides an all-in-one solution for video streaming, and recently added UK streaming services to provide instant access to Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, BBC iPlayer, All 4 and more – all available to search and browse without having to open separate apps.

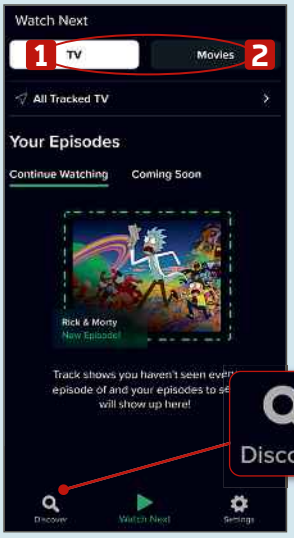
Reelgood: reelgood.com | 10 mins | Android iOS/iPadOS, any browser



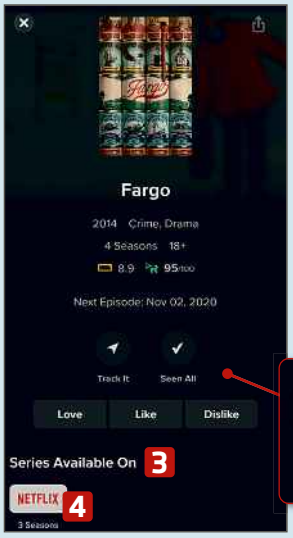
1 When you first load the app, you can either log in or choose Let's Go. The latter leads you to the Selected Services page. There are two sections: Free Bundle **1** and Subscription. You can add all or just select individual services by tapping the dot beside the name. **2** Tap Done. **3**



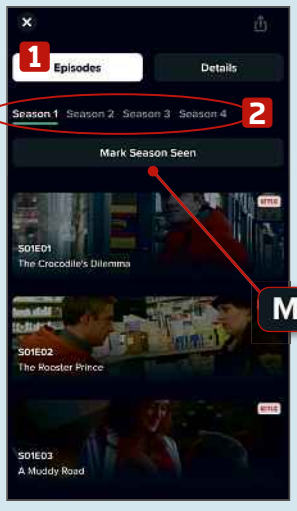
2 Reelgood's Discover screen is similar to its supported streaming services: search at the top, **1** browser at the bottom **2** and video filters in between. **3** At the foot of the screen is the Watch Next button **4** to continue where you left off. To use this, you have to sign up for a free account.



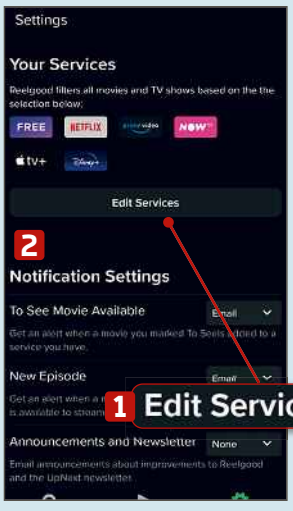
3 Watch Next doesn't just let you pick up where you left off. By switching between the TV **1** and Movies buttons, **2** you can keep track of all the shows and films you're watching, want to see or have seen. But first, we need to visit some videos, so head back to Discover. **3**



4 Tap any video that takes your fancy. To add it to your Watch Next tracker, select See/Track It **1** or Seen It/Seen All. **2** In the playback section, **3** press the streaming service **4** to start watching – if you have the corresponding app installed, it now opens; if not, you're directed to the relevant website.



5 A little further down the screen, you'll find some more video options. This is where individual TV episodes **1** and seasons **2** are listed, along with an option to select Mark Season Seen. **3** Scroll down further for reviews, cast lists and suggested videos.



6 Settings is where you can Edit Services, **1** adding and removing platforms. Scrolling down the list, you'll find options to take control over notifications, **2** use the app as a Roku remote control and include listings from streaming sites you haven't connected. Enabling Make Watch Next Home means any shows you're watching or tracking will be made available on the app's home screen.

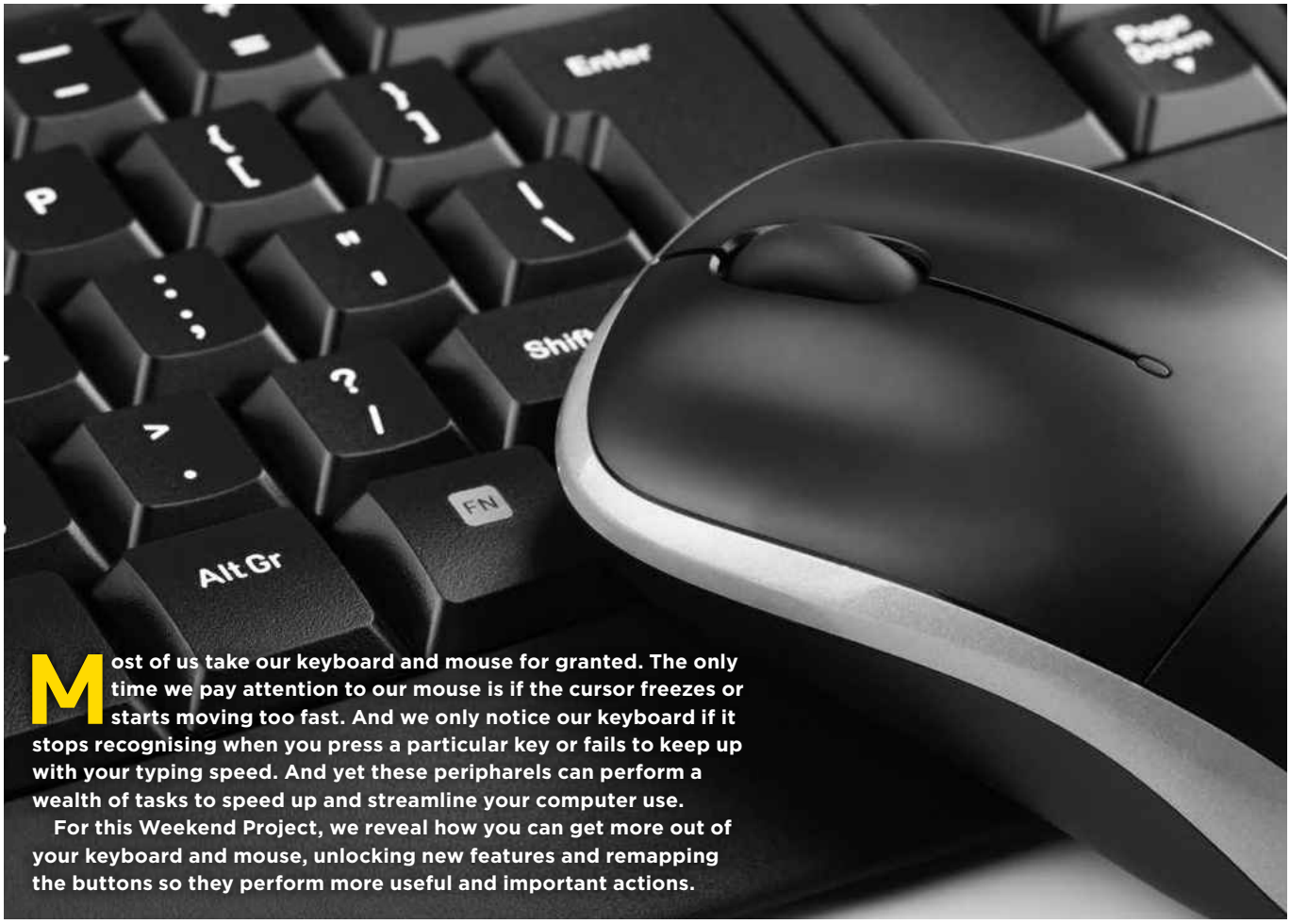
Weekend Project

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

How to...

Hack your keyboard and mouse

Get more from your peripherals as **Wayne Williams** explains how to unleash hidden power in your keyboard and mouse



Most of us take our keyboard and mouse for granted. The only time we pay attention to our mouse is if the cursor freezes or starts moving too fast. And we only notice our keyboard if it stops recognising when you press a particular key or fails to keep up with your typing speed. And yet these peripharels can perform a wealth of tasks to speed up and streamline your computer use.

For this Weekend Project, we reveal how you can get more out of your keyboard and mouse, unlocking new features and remapping the buttons so they perform more useful and important actions.

The Menu Key

Most keyboards come with a Menu key but very few people actually use it. This is not to be confused with the Windows key, which is found in the bottom-left corner and can be used to open the Start menu (among other things).

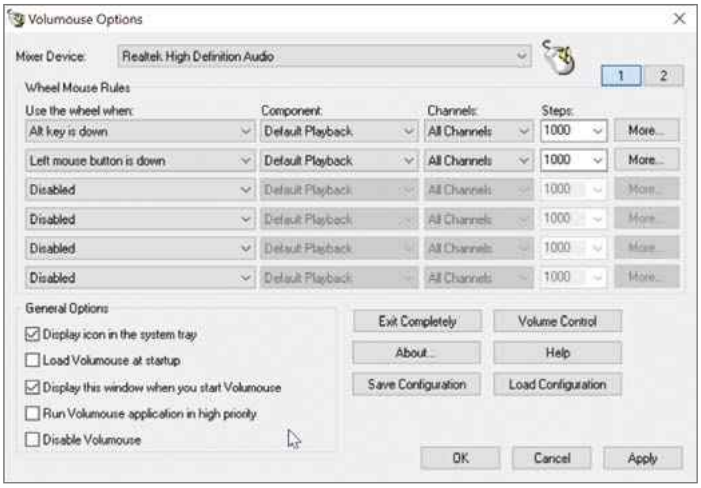
On full-size keyboards, the Menu key is bottom right, next to Ctrl, and is usually labelled with a square containing three lines. Pressing it displays the context menu that you'd normally summon by right-clicking your mouse. If you don't have a Menu key, you can enjoy the same functionality by pressing Shift+F10.

This feature is particularly useful if you use a trackpad (or if the right-click button on your mouse is broken), but essentially it's simply duplicating functionality that your mouse arguably does better.

To make the Menu key more useful, consider remapping it, so it performs a different function when pressed. Some keyboards come with their own customisation software that you can use for this task, but SharpKeys (bit.ly/sharp515) is a more powerful solution. It lets you map one button's functions to another, and works by making a small tweak to the Windows Registry.

We show you how to use SharpKeys in our Mini Workshop, opposite.

It's worth remapping the Menu Key on your keyboard to give it a more useful purpose



Volumouse lets you control playback volume on your PC with your mouse

Remap other keys

It's not just the Menu key that's worth changing – there are plenty of others on your keyboard that you might rarely use, including Scroll Lock, Pause, some of the lesser used Function keys and even Caps Lock (you can just hold down Shift if you want to type a lot of text in upper case).

Some keyboards come with additional keys that are designed to launch specific Windows programs or perform set actions. You may find buttons for launching the calculator, web browser, email software, webcam, search and zoom tools. They might also be used for controlling media playback or for controlling the volume. If you're not using these keys for their intended purposes, it's worth remapping them.

SharpKeys may recognise these keys when pressed or you may be able to select them from the list. Your keyboard manufacturer may also offer its own customisation software that lets you change which actions the keys perform.

If you have a Microsoft keyboard, for example, you can download and use the Mouse and Keyboard Centre (bit.ly/mkbc515) to customise these bonus keys. Simply click any of the keys under 'basic settings' or open the 'app-specific settings' screen and assign actions to keys. The software shows a picture of the keyboard at the top and you can also click the keys to choose what you want to change.

Customise your mouse buttons

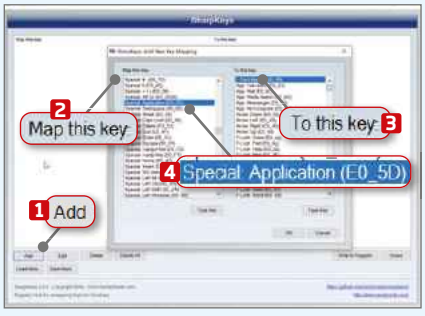
Most mice offer two or three main buttons. If your mouse has three buttons, the third usually doubles-up as the scroll wheel – spin it to move through pages or click it to perform whatever action is assigned to it. Other mice – most notably gaming models – include several other buttons that perform a range of actions.

You can make basic tweaks to your mouse's behaviour in Windows Settings, with options including switching your primary mouse button (useful for left handers) and adjusting the cursor speed. The recently released Mouse Settings Changer from Sordum (bit.ly/sordum515) is a command-line tool that lets you make a string of changes by typing various instructions. For example, to set the pointer speed, enter:

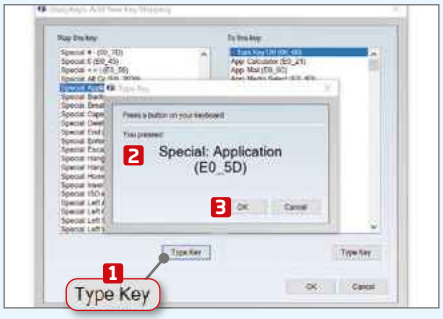
```
MouseSC_x64.exe /Speed:10
```

For more advanced options, such as changing what the buttons do, your best bet is to see if the manufacturer offers its own software. For a Microsoft mouse, you can use the Mouse and Keyboard Centre to assign commands to the buttons, including modifying them with keyboard button presses. If you want to delve

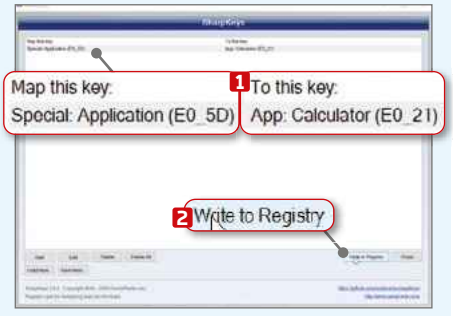
MINI WORKSHOP | Remap the Menu key (and others) with SharpKeys



1 When you install and run SharpKeys, you're presented with a blank box. To remap the Menu Key, click the Add button. 1 SharpKeys displays a long list of buttons you can map from 2 and to. 3 The Menu Key is listed in the left-hand pane as 'Special: Application (E0_5D)'. 4



2 If it's not clear what the name of the key you want to map is, click the Type Key button 1 in the From window and, when prompted, press the key on your keyboard. A new window opens, showing the name of the key you pressed. 2 Click OK 3 to select it.



3 Next, click the Type Key button in the To window and press the replacement button on your keyboard. For example, you could make the Menu Key open your web browser when pressed. Click OK. Your planned changes are shown at the top. 1 Click the 'Write to Registry' button 2 and restart Windows.

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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	£28.99 (£62 after 12 months)	18 months	108Mbps avg. speed	∞ unlimited	£347.88

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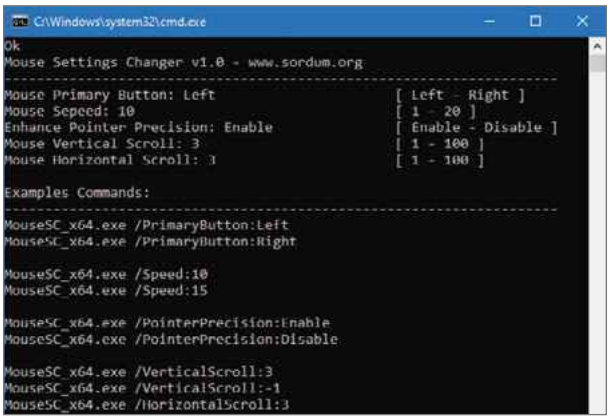


Mouse Settings Changer can customise your mouse setup using text commands

If you have a Microsoft Mouse, visit the Mouse and Keyboard Centre to set up app-specific commands

deeper, the 'app-specific settings' section lets you set things up so the mouse buttons action different commands, depending on which program you're currently using. For example, Microsoft says you could have the same button activate Digital Ink when in PowerPoint, run a macro when in a game and open the Magnifier in any other application.

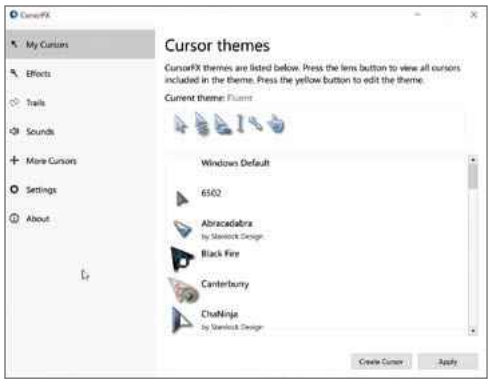
There are other useful programs available, the best-known of which is X-Mouse Button Control (bit.ly/xmouse515), which lets you reconfigure your mouse behaviour for Windows or individual applications. It's been around for years but is still being developed, and there are installer and portable versions available. We show you how to use it in our Mini Workshop, below.

Another useful option is Volumouse, from prolific software developer NirSoft (www.nirsoft.net), which transforms your mouse wheel into a handy volume control, allowing you to turn your PC sound up or down with a flick. Usefully, it doesn't remove the wheel's other functions – you can set it so you need to hold down a key or a mouse button to activate the feature.

Make it easier to find your cursor

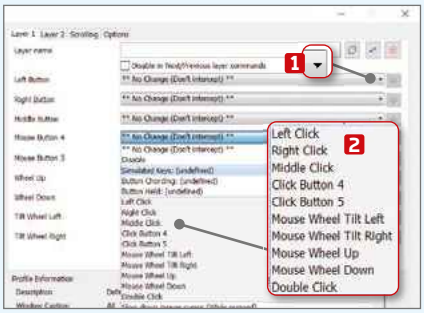
If you occasionally struggle to locate your mouse cursor, there are a couple of ways to make it easier to spot. In Windows 10, open Settings, and click Ease of Access, then 'Mouse pointer' on the left. Here, you can change the pointer size and colour, and enable visual feedback.

If you want something more advanced, CursorFX (www.cursorfx.com) can change the pointer to make it easier to find. It offers a choice of cursor themes, effects, trails and sounds, as well as support for high DPI screens, multiple monitors and high refresh rates. It costs £4.99.

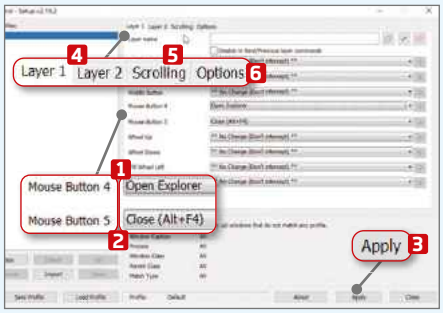


Use CursorFX to make your mouse pointer more interesting and easier to see

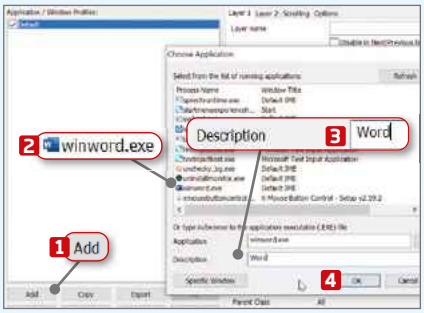
MINI WORKSHOP | Customise your pointing device with X-Mouse Button Control



1 X-Mouse Button Control lets you customise the actions of the left, right and middle buttons, along with the scroll wheel and up to two other buttons. At its most basic, all you have to do is use the drop-down menu next to a button to change what it does. 1 Scroll down to see the full list of available actions. 2



2 We've set Mouse Button 4 to open File Explorer 1 and Mouse Button 5 to close the currently selected window. 2 Clicking Apply 3 activates the change. The program lets you create different 'layers', which are sub-profiles for different purposes. The tabs let you switch layers, 4 customise scrolling 5 and set other options. 6



3 X-Mouse's most useful feature is its ability to assign different actions to buttons based on the application you're currently using. Click the Add button, 1 then find and select the app you want to create a profile for. 2 Give it a description 3 and click OK, 4 then make your required button changes as before.

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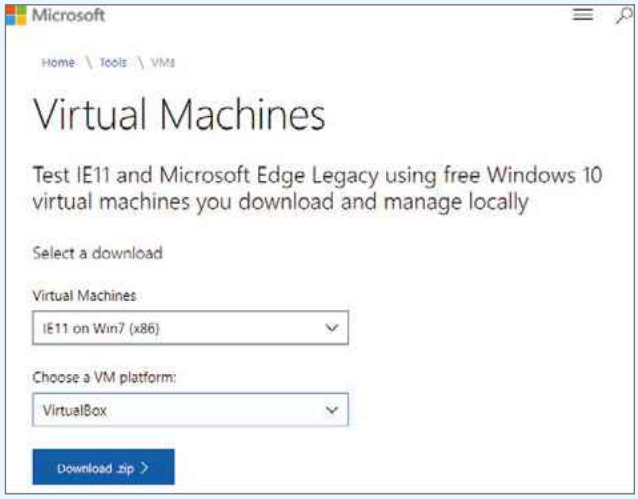
Web User Masterclass

Master multiple operating systems with VirtualBox virtual machines

Run Windows software securely using VirtualBox

Downloading software from the internet and installing it in Windows is risky. Will it work? Is it buggy? Does it contain malware? Will it crash your PC? VirtualBox (www.virtualbox.org) lets you run another copy of Windows within a window on the desktop. It is kept completely separate from the host PC and is the safest way to test software. Malware can't get out, crashes are avoided, bugs aren't a problem and there are no uninstaller issues.

Install VirtualBox, then go to bit.ly/2bqxcvF and select a Windows 7, 8.1 or 10 virtual machine. Select the VirtualBox format, download the file and unzip it. Go to VirtualBox and choose File, then Import Appliance. Now click the folder icon and select the virtual machine you downloaded. This version of Windows runs for 90 days. When it expires, you can delete it and import it again.

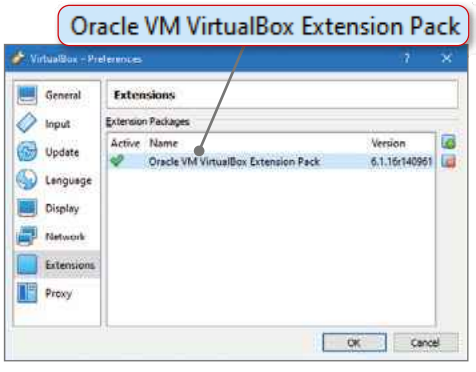


Download free and legal versions of Windows to run in VirtualBox

Add features and boost speed

VirtualBox runs immediately after installation, but it can be slow and may lack important features. Check that the Extension Pack, which contains drivers for video, audio, USB devices and more, has installed automatically with VirtualBox.

Select File and go to Preferences, Extensions. If none are listed, grab the VirtualBox Extension Pack from the Downloads section at www.virtualbox.org. Return to VirtualBox extensions, click the plus button and select the extension pack. Start the virtual machine and, in the virtual PC's window (not VirtualBox), select 'Insert Guest Additions CD image' from the Devices menu. Open the CD from File Explorer and run VBoxWindowsAdditions.exe or VBoxLinuxAdditions.run.



Make sure the VirtualBox Extensions Pack is installed

Use the Host key

By default, the Host key is the Ctrl key on the right of your keyboard. It's used for various functions: Host+E saves a screenshot to disk; Host+F toggles between full screen and a window on the desktop; Host+T takes a snapshot; Host+Q quits, and so on.

Some compact keyboards don't have a right-hand Ctrl key. To assign a different key as Host, go to File, Preferences, Input and select the Virtual Machine tab. Click the Host Key Combination Shortcut, delete Right Ctrl and enter Right Alt – or whatever other key you want Host to be.

Turbo-charge virtual machines

Virtual machines are slowed down by battery-saving options in the Windows power settings. Click the power icon on the right-hand side of the taskbar and drag the slider to the right for best performance.

Open Power Options in the Control Panel and select the High Performance plan. If there isn't one, click 'Create a power plan' and make one.

Run Linux live CDs

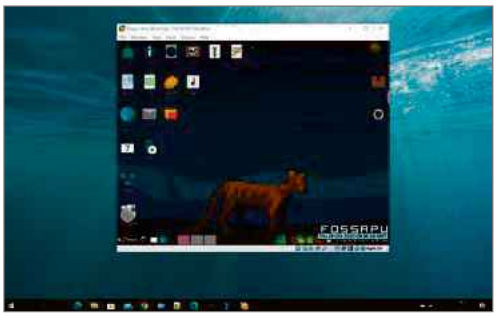
A Linux live CD lets you boot a Linux-based operating system alongside Windows, without installing it on your PC's hard drive. This is great for testing them out.

Right-click the virtual machine and go to Settings, Storage. Select Empty under Controller IDE, click the disc icon on the right and select 'Choose a disc file'. Select a Linux ISO file (if you haven't got one, try downloading one from distrowatch.com). Now start the virtual machine. The Linux Live CD runs in a window on the desktop and doesn't install anything or use any further hard drive space.

Clone vs snapshot

A virtual machine with a guest OS can be cloned. A clone is a full copy of all the virtual-machine files, which could be 20GB or more, depending on the

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.



Running a Linux live CD in a window on the desktop is the easiest way to try it

OS and software installed. Snapshots, on the other hand, take up little hard drive space as they only contain the changes since the previous snapshot. Select the OS in VirtualBox, open the Machine menu and choose Tools, Snapshots. Select a snapshot and clone it.

Move to another PC

Virtual machines can be moved from one computer to another, if you want to upgrade or share with someone else. Select the virtual machine, open the File menu and choose Export Appliance.

Bear in mind that virtual machines can be 30GB or more, so they are slow to export and import. A USB flash drive of 32GB or more is required to transfer one.

Free up space

Virtual machines are not deleted when VirtualBox is uninstalled. Delete them to free up disk space before uninstalling VirtualBox, or whenever you need more room on your hard drive. Right-click the virtual machine in the left-hand list and select Remove. Click 'Delete all files'.

Remove virtual machines before removing VirtualBox to free up hard-drive space

Create shared folders

Virtual machines are isolated from Windows, so getting files in and out of them can be tricky. Open a web browser and use OneDrive, Dropbox or Google Drive to transfer files between the PC's hard drive and the virtual machine.

Better still, create a shared folder. Right-click a Windows virtual machine and select Settings, then Shared Folders, and click the plus symbol on the right. Select the C:\Users\Public folder. It appears like a drive in the virtual machine and files can be read and written to it.

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

More advanced tips for when you're feeling brave

Keep Windows 7 running

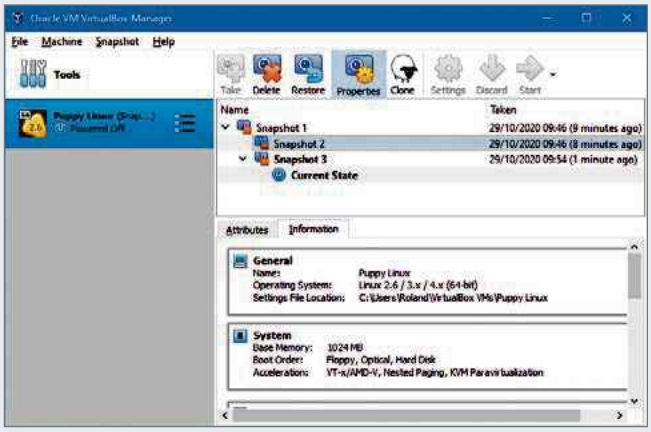
When you install Windows 7 in a virtual machine, the step that asks for a licence code can be skipped. The machine works for 30 days. After that, open a command prompt in administrator mode and enter `slmgr -rearm` to get another 30 days. You can get up to 90 days this way. After that, you can just restore a snapshot that was created immediately after installation to start again.

Undo disasters with snapshots

Snapshots are backups that save the exact state of a virtual machine. If you get into trouble or make a mess of the guest OS, restore a snapshot to put everything back as it was. This removes all changes, software and malware, and sometimes undoes expired trials of the OS or software.

Click the three bars next to a virtual machine and select Snapshots. Click Take in the toolbar to take a snapshot, or press Host+T when running a virtual machine.

The item labelled Current State is the latest version. Select any snapshot and click Restore to make that snapshot the current version, undoing all changes made since it was taken. Select any snapshot and click Start to boot the virtual machine with that snapshot.



Snapshots are like backups because restoring them undoes any changes you've made

Solve network problems

If you have problems connecting to the internet or networking within the virtual machine, go to the Settings, select Network and, in the 'Attached to' list, select Bridged or NAT.

Bridged is best because it makes the virtual machine appear on the network like a real computer. Other computers and devices can then connect to it. NAT often solves internet connectivity, but it makes connecting other network devices more difficult.

Use USB devices

You need the VirtualBox Extension Pack to use USB devices in a virtual machine. Assuming you have it, select the virtual machine and click Settings, USB. Select USB 2.0, then click the first icon on the right to add support for any USB device.

If the Windows desktop or any program is selected when you plug in a USB device, Windows will grab it. To use a USB device in a guest OS, click the virtual machine window to make it active, then plug in the USB device. This ensures that the guest OS recognises it for use.

Virtual machines in 4GB of memory

Running a second OS in VirtualBox is difficult if your PC only has 4GB of memory – it's recommended that you have at least 8GB. However, Windows XP and 98 are exceptions because, by modern standards, they're relatively lightweight.

Some versions of Linux are designed to be light on resources. Puppy Linux (puppylinux.com), for example, is small, but still has enough features and software to be useful. It boots even when the virtual machine is set to just 256MB of memory. Right-click the virtual machine, select Settings, System, then Motherboard to set the memory.

AntiX Linux (antixlinux.com) is suitable for old PCs with limited memory and it needs just 256MB. The 32-bit version of Bodhi Linux (www.bodhilinux.com) also runs in 256MB of memory.

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

WEBSITE BUILDING

Fix missing website images

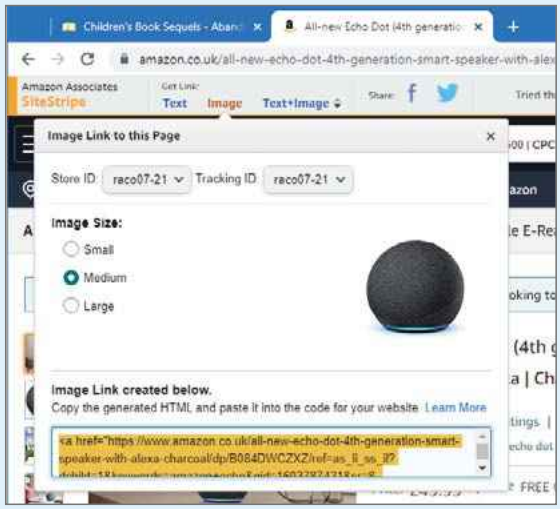
Q I am having a lot of problems with Google Chrome. I run a website called called Children's Book Sequels (www.childrensbooksequels.co.uk), but when I look at the site on my HP Pavilion G series laptop, Samsung A7 or Samsung Galaxy Tab A tablet, the images don't load. It doesn't seem to matter whther I'm signed into Chrome or not.

If I go into Edge or Firefox, the images load. Weirdest of all, if I switch to Google Chrome from Edge, signed into my Chrome account, the images load. I have cleared caches, cookies and so on, and I have the latest version of Chrome.

Sarah Corcoran, via email

A The HTML of one of your pages shows that you are linking directly to images on Amazon. Most sites don't like people using their images because they're paying to host them, but you'd think Amazon would welcome other sites promoting its products. In fact, Amazon has a special tool for this to stop you grabbing its images. It's possible that Google knows this rule and disables Amazon images displaying in Chrome, or Amazon itself blocks off-site use in Chrome. There's definitely something going on between them.

Whatever the reason for the problem, you should in future source images through SiteStripe (bit.ly/stripe515), which is an Amazon toolbar you can use through your affiliate settings. When an Amazon affiliate visits the Amazon website, a SiteStripe toolbar appears across the top of each page.



Amazon affiliates should get authorised image links from SiteStripe

Find the product you are interested in and, on the product page, click Image under Get Link in the SiteStripe toolbar. Select the size of the image you need and check that the Store ID and Tracking ID are set to your Amazon affiliate ID.

Copy the HTML that's automatically generated and paste it into your website at the place you want the image to appear. If you are using WordPress, insert an HTML block in the editor and paste it into that. This should solve your problem.

This isn't simply a case of Amazon being awkward. Products, images and prices change daily on the site, and the official SiteStripe method takes this into account, so that the correct information, prices and images and always displayed.

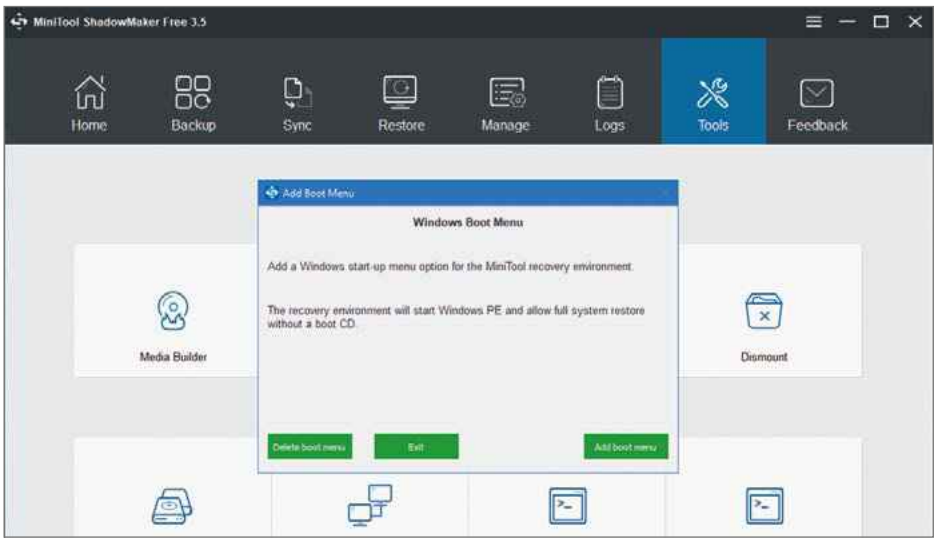
SOFTWARE

Restore a backup

Q Windows is failing to load on my computer. I have backups saved on an external USB drive, so my files should all be there, but how do I restore them if my computer won't start?

Gareth Holmes, via email

A You have to use 'rescue media', which is a CD or USB flash drive that contains a minimal operating system with just enough power to start the computer and run a restore utility. This is then used to copy everything back to the PC's internal drive. You'll need a full disk or partition backup for this, not a file backup of the type Windows File



Use MiniTool ShadowMaker's Media Builder to create boot media to help recover from a failing hard drive

You can run Windows on an Apple MacBook with Parallels software

History creates.

Many backup programs, such as MiniTool ShadowMaker Free (bit.ly/mtsm515), have a built-in tool to create rescue media, but this has to be used while your computer is working. It can't be created after the PC has failed. If you don't have rescue media, use another computer or ask a friend to install the backup software and create the rescue media for you.

Now place the rescue media in the CD/DVD drive or USB socket of your failed computer and turn it on. From the menu that appears, select the option to boot from the rescue-media device (not the C: drive). If the menu doesn't appear, repeatedly tap a function key several times just after powering on the PC. The key required varies from one computer to the next, but it's usually at the start (F1 to F3) or end (F9 to F12) of the row. Try them all.

WINDOWS

Is there a Windows 11?

Q I have seen several articles about Windows 11 – one even listed the versions, such as Windows 11 Home, Windows 11 Pro and so on. Is Windows 11 real or are all these rumours wrong?

Paul Green, via email

A Microsoft releases a new version of Windows twice a year and the current version is 20H2, which means the second half of 2020. However, the Windows 10 name remains the same. If you look at old screenshots of Windows 10, it's clear how much the operating system has changed, and it's very different to the original Windows 10 released five years ago.

There is no Windows 11, just updates to Windows 10, but that doesn't mean we'll never have an 11. As we reported last issue, Microsoft is rumoured to be working on a revamp of Windows 10, codenamed 'Sun Valley'.

SOFTWARE

Get the Print Screen key on a MacBook

Q I have an Apple Mac computer but there are some Windows apps I like, so I use Parallels Desktop (www.parallels.com) to run Windows on my Mac. It works very well, but there are some keyboard anomalies I find irritating.

I figured out that the Mac's Cmd key is the same as the Windows key, and that fn+Backspace is the same as Delete (there is no Delete key on my MacBook). However, I have never found an equivalent of the Print Screen or Prnt Scn key that PC keyboards have, for taking a screenshot of the Windows desktop. Is there an alternative?

Harry Peters, via email

A Mac keyboards don't have as many keys as a Windows PC, and there's no physical Print Screen key. However, Parallels desktop has a virtual Print Screen key. Go to the Parallels icon in the menu bar at the top of the screen and select Devices, Keyboard, then PrintScreen. There is also a Take Screenshot menu under the View menu.

There are several Windows tools that provide the same screenshot capability as the Windows+Print Screen key combo on a PC. In fact, they go much

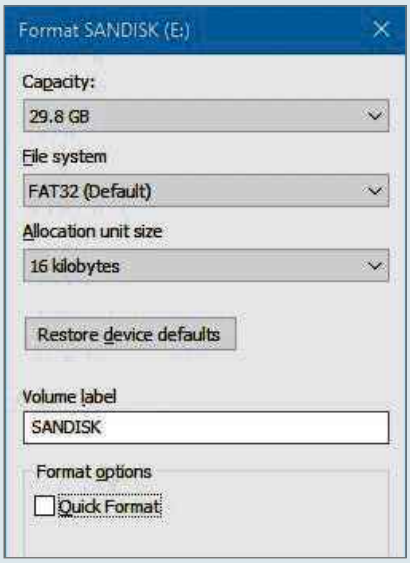
PHOTOS

Picture problems on memory stick

Q My wife makes and decorates cakes, and I take a photo of the finished cakes to keep on a USB memory stick for future reference. I use my phone to take the images, then transfer the photos to the memory stick.

The problem is, when I open the picture on the memory stick, some of them have a coloured band half way across the picture making it impossible to see the cake. This only happens once the photographs are stored on the memory stick. If I leave them on the phone, they're fine.

Robert Phillips, via email



Clear the Quick Format tickbox to test a drive during formatting

A It sounds like the memory stick has problems remembering things. You could try and fix it, but we wouldn't advise using it to store your one and only copy of photographs. It looks like it's corrupting them.

Plug the memory stick into the computer, right-click it and select Format. Select the FAT32 file format, which is the most compatible with other devices. Clear the Quick Format option to ensure that each part of the storage is thoroughly tested, then format it. It's a slow process.

This may fix the problem, but we still don't think it's worth taking the risk. USB memory sticks are very cheap, so we'd advise simply buying a new one.

Better still, install Google Photos on your phone and your photos will automatically be backed up online. They can be accessed at photos.google.com and downloaded to your computer if needed. Storage is free and unlimited.

OneDrive and Dropbox are also good for backing up photos, storing them online and syncing them with your computer. This takes place wirelessly in the background, so you won't even notice it's happening.

further and offer many more features, which makes them useful on PCs, not just Macs running Windows.

Greenshot (bit.ly/green515) is a favourite of ours. It's free, loaded with features and, although it hasn't been updated for three years, it works with the latest version of Windows 10. Right-click the Greenshot icon at the right of the taskbar for a menu. You can define your own screenshot hot keys and choose where they're saved.

WINDOWS

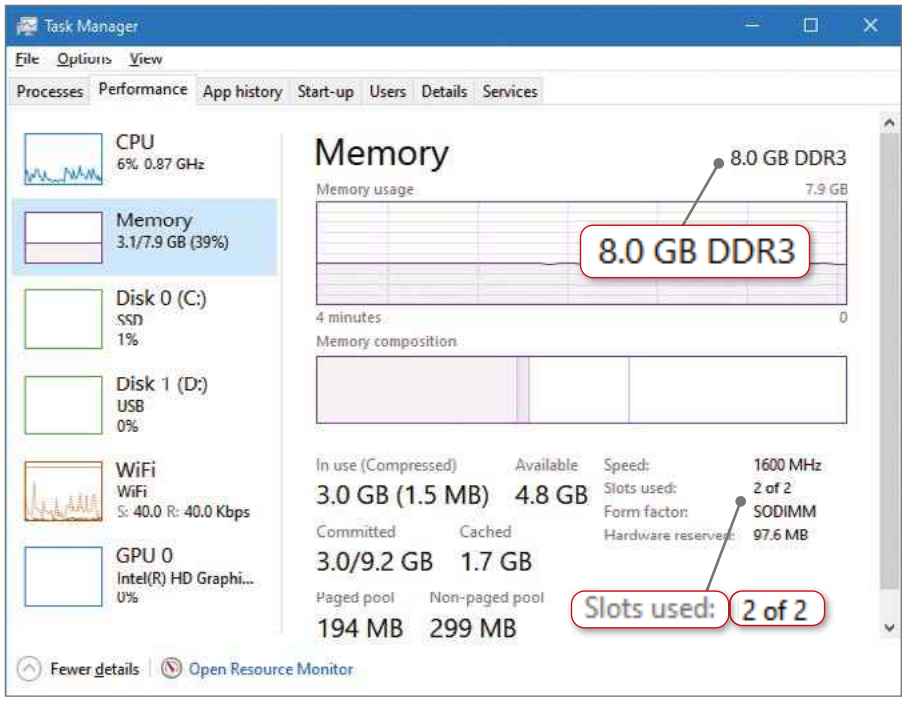
Revitalise a tired mouse

Q For the last two days, my wireless mouse sticks for a second or two when I try to move it, then starts moving again. Is it a driver problem?

Pete Graham, via email

A By the time you read this, you will probably have discovered the cause and fixed it, but we'll print it here for other readers who might suffer a similar problem. Basically, it's due to flat mouse batteries. A wireless mouse becomes erratic, hard to use and 'sticky' for several days before the battery finally dies. We have had mouse batteries last over six months, so it is easy to forget that they don't last forever.

If your wireless mouse starts misbehaving, try changing the batteries



Task Manager shows the amount of memory and number of slots used

HARDWARE

Count your memory slots

Q If I open the Windows Task Manager and select the Performance tab, then Memory, it says that there are four memory slots but that only two are in use. That means there should be two free slots into which I could add more memory. I searched online for my computer model and found that it only has two memory slots. Who is right?

Eric Mathews, via email

A Windows is querying the system, such as the BIOS, and showing what it reports. It can't physically detect memory slots – you'd have to open the computer and look at the motherboard to see how many there are.

One reason why Windows could be wrong is that some slots contain memory soldered in. This is used in some compact laptops and, while they may have memory slots, they can't be used for upgrades. Maybe the motherboard can have four slots in some configurations, but only two are used in your PC. There could be other reasons.

Open it and look for the memory slots or find a YouTube video of someone else opening an identical model.

SOFTWARE

Photoshop not updated

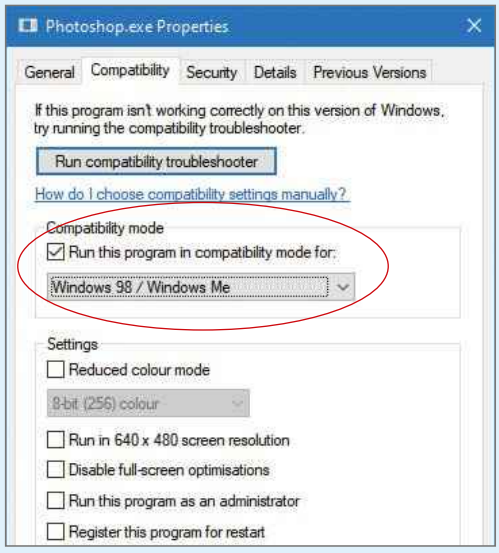
Select a previous version of Windows to solve software compatibility problems

Q I have been using Adobe Photoshop 6 for longer than I can remember and it's always done everything I wanted, but problems have arisen with the latest Windows Update and now it won't work. I tried right-clicking the photoshop.exe file and selecting 'Troubleshoot compatibility', but this didn't help.

I know Photoshop 6 is old, but is there any way to keep the software running? I don't want the cost of upgrading to the latest subscription version.

H Walters, via email

A Photoshop 6 was released somewhere around 2001, which makes it very old in software terms, so it's not surprising to see compatibility issues. However, there may be a solution. Right-click the program file, then instead of using the troubleshooter, select Properties. Select the Compatibility tab, tick 'Run this program in compatibility mode for' and select Windows 98 from the drop-down list. This has worked for some Photoshop 6 users.



This fortnight, Roland has been chatting to people on Zoom after recommending the service to his family and friends

Readers' Helpdesk

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

GOOGLE

Stop Google Hangouts slowing down Gmail

Q Page 40 of *Web User* Issue 511 (bit.ly/webuser511) mentions that Google is killing off its Hangouts tool. On my Windows 7 computer, whenever I open my Gmail account, I have to wait while it loads Hangouts, which slows the process down. I've never understood Hangouts and never tried it. How do I delete it?

Derek Wellings, via email

A We suspect you're not the only one infuriated with Gmail's lag while Hangouts loads. The bad news is that you can't delete it completely – you'll just have to wait until Google removes it.

On the plus side, you can prevent it from loading whenever you open Gmail. To do this, head to your inbox and click the cog icon, then select 'See all settings'. Click the 'Chat and Meet' tab, where you can turn Hangouts on or off (and show or hide Google Meet, too). Once you've saved these changes, your inbox should take less time to load.

Steve Clark, Web User

If you don't use Hangouts you can remove it from Gmail

EMAIL

Create a Gmail desktop app

Q I don't want to keep opening my browser and logging into Gmail to check my emails. I've had a hunt around the Windows Store but, unless I'm missing something major, I can't find any Google apps there, much less a Gmail one. I can't believe this is right – how does one of the most popular email providers not have a desktop app?

Liam, via email

A Your eyes aren't deceiving you – the Gmail app is only available on mobile devices. But you do have two alternative options. The first is to link your Google account to the Windows Mail app. This is straightforward enough. Go into Settings, 'Manage accounts', 'Add account' and, after choosing your provider and signing in, you can access all your Google emails from the desktop.

The second option is to create your own Gmail app of sorts using the Chrome browser. In Gmail's settings, under Offline, tick the box 'Enable offline mail'. Make sure you're happy with the other syncing and saving options, then save the changes. Head back to the inbox, then click the three-dot button in the top-right corner of Chrome. Select 'More tools', 'Create shortcut', call your shortcut Gmail and save it. Now, visit `chrome://apps` and right-click the Gmail shortcut you just created – it should be last in your list – and choose the option 'Open as window'. Your newly created 'app' will now open in its own window, rather than in the Chrome browser.

Steve Clark, Web User

Windows 10 doesn't have Google apps but you can create your own shortcuts

READERS RESPOND

SOFTWARE

Collate your collection

A Regarding George Dalton's request for collector software in Issue 510 of *Web User* (bit.ly/webuser510), may I suggest a visit to www.collectorz.com, which has a few paid-for programs specifically designed for cataloguing music, books, films and the like. Also, it's web, mobile and desktop-based.

I use the music-collector tool on my computer to catalogue my CD collection. Once you've paid, it can be used indefinitely and I've found the software continues to work fine, even without paying for further updates, except backups to the cloud-storage facility.

The paid-for tools at Collectorz help you catalogue all sorts of collections

Brian, 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.

APPLE

Q How do I record streaming audio from my Mac to a recording tool such as Audacity?

Ron Benjamin, via email

APPS

Q Is there a way to sideload the Amazon app store on an Android tablet and download Kindle Fire apps?

'Curious', via email

Your Top Tips

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

TOP TIP

Back Issues disc winner

WINDOWS

Monitor your PC's performance

Task Manager lets you check your processor and other system resources, but I prefer using Game Bar widgets. Open the Settings app and enable the Xbox Game Bar in the Gaming section, then press Windows+G to open Xbox Game Bar and click Widgets Menu in the toolbar. Open Performance and Resources, then move these widgets to where you want them on the screen and click the pin button in the top-right corner of the widget windows. Click anywhere on the desktop to close Xbox Game Bar and the pinned windows remain, staying on top of every other window, so you can see your system resources at a glance.

Raymond Lightfoot, via email

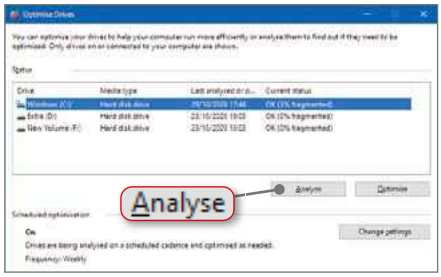
Xbox Game Bar displays system-resource widgets on your desktop

WINDOWS

Defrag disks for speed

I'm not sure when this happened but you can now access the disk defragmenter from the Settings app. Choose System, then Storage. Look below the usage report in the 'More storage settings' section and click Optimise Drives to open the Optimise Drives utility (it used to be called Disk Defragmenter). Select the C: drive and click Analyse to see how fragmented it is. It runs automatically once a week, but you can force it to run immediately by selecting a drive and clicking Optimise. Remember that you shouldn't defrag SSD drives.

Neil Cooper, via email



Old-style mechanical hard drives need defragmenting to maintain their speed

ANDROID

Check your phone's battery health

I've been keen to keep tabs on my phone's battery health for a while, but other than the standard usage data, I couldn't find much info about it on the phone itself. I was recommended AccuBattery (bit.ly/382IYMw) by a friend and I've found it really useful. It's a very simple app that provides data about how your phone's battery degrades over time, along with suggestions on how to use the battery more effectively. There's a Pro version available but I find the free version does everything I need.

Mike Gruntham, via email

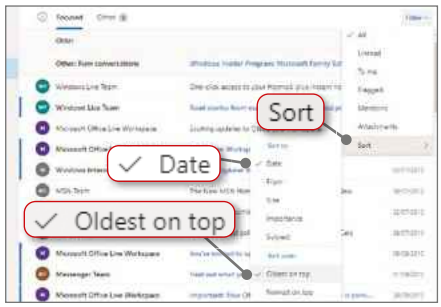
See how long your phone will last before the battery dies

EMAIL

Delete old emails in Outlook

I have been using Outlook webmail since it was called Hotmail, and I suddenly realised that I might have emails going back 15 years. They can't possibly contain anything useful, so why not clear them out? Open outlook.com in your browser and click Filter to the right of the inbox column. Hover your mouse over Sort to get a sub-menu and select Date. Return and select 'Oldest on top' for the sort order. You can now click and delete old emails to tidy up and reduce wasted storage.

T Johnson, via email

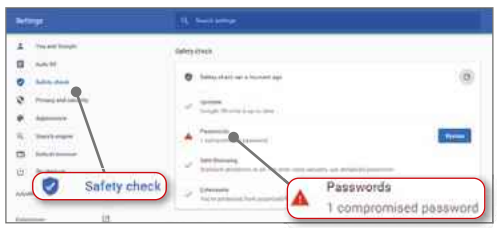


Sort your email to display the oldest ones on the top

BROWSERS

Monitor your password security

Here's a quick reminder that Google Chrome has a great new safety feature. Open the browser's settings to see the 'Safety check' section, which offers several options for ensuring that you're browsing securely. Most impressive is the



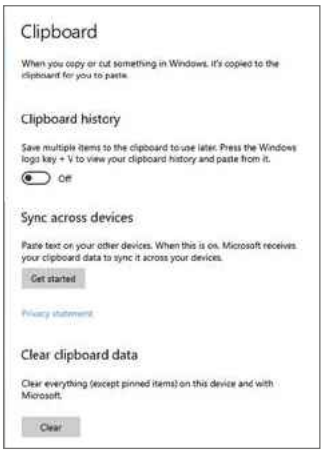
Don't forget to check your online security with Google's Safety Check

leaked password section, which lists any passwords that have been compromised and gives you the option to go directly through to the leaked account to update your settings. The safety check also lets you know if you're using any potentially harmful extensions and reminds you to install the latest updates.

Barbara Cross, via email

WINDOWS

Clear your cloud clipboard



Switch off clipboard sharing from the Settings app

Windows can make the contents of the clipboard on one PC available on all the PCs you use by syncing data through your Microsoft account. This works by 'sending' your clipboard to Microsoft, which happens even if you only have one PC.

I haven't heard about any security problems, but if it worries you that everything you copy is being stored in your Microsoft account, clear the data and turn off the feature by opening the Windows 10 Settings app, going to System, Clipboard and turning off all the switches. Click the Clear button at the bottom to clear anything that has previously been stored online.

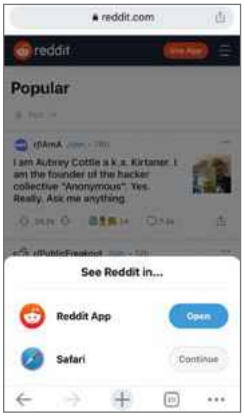
Simon Philips, via email

SECURITY

Use your phone's browser for better security

Rather than download apps, it's often better for your privacy to use your phone's browser to perform tasks such as checking social media or watching videos. A browser can't access as much of your personal data as an app can, so for maximum privacy, try uninstalling the apps that you don't need. I recommend going through your apps once every few weeks to see if there's anything you can get rid of.

Frankie Wicks, via email



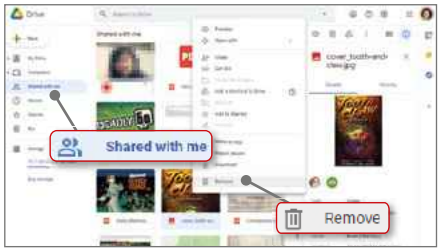
You don't have to download apps to get services on your phone

SECURITY

Check shared file activity

Beware of malware that spreads through shared Google Drive docs. Go to Drive in a browser and select 'Shared with me' to see your shared files. Select one and click the 'i' in the toolbar to open an information panel. The Details tab shows who created and modified it, and the Activity tab shows who did what and when. Be suspicious of unexpected shared files with lots of activity. Right-click them and select Remove.

Rob Thompson, via email



Check your 'Shared with me' folder on Google Drive for unwanted files

STREAMING

Use gestures to control your videos

YouTube's recent update has finally brought gesture controls to the Android app. I like to keep my phone's screen locked in portrait mode, but I still want to view videos full screen. Now, I just swipe up on the video to automatically change to full screen in landscape mode. Swiping down switches back to standard view.

The time counter lets you toggle between viewing how much time has elapsed and how much of the video is left. Simply tap the timer to switch between the two options.

Mo White, via email

iOS

Speed up your iPhone

I've been looking at ways to improve the running speed of my iPhone, to avoid lags, and I found a couple of easy tweaks in the phone's settings that make a notable difference. First, disable Background App Refresh, which is listed as its own item in the General section of Settings. You can also enable Reduce Motion, under Accessibility, Motion.

Switch off background apps to make your iPhone run faster

Daniel Johnson, via email

STREAMING

Zoom YouTube videos

I've just noticed that the YouTube app on your phone lets you pinch and zoom a video, as you would any image online. If you switch the video to full screen, you can zoom out to get a wider view, or pinch and pull outwards for 'zoomed to fill', which fills the screen.

Pete Helson, via email

BLUNDER OF THE FORTNIGHT

GENERAL PC

Switch your keyboard's input language

For as long as I can remember, what ought to be the '£' on my computer has always been rendered '#'. I assumed this was because my keyboard was American, as it also changed quotation marks to the '@' symbol when pressing Shift+2. I've often had to search the web for the pound sterling symbol, then copy and paste it into my documents.

It's easy to change a US keyboard to a UK layout

Then, quite suddenly, my '#' became a '£'. "What magic is this?," I wondered. Then it switched back again, so I went on the hunt for an answer. Turns out the fix was very simple – and I must've pressed it quite by mistake during typing. If you hold Shift+Alt, you can change your keyboard's input language – in this case, changing a US keyboard to a UK one.

Ray G, via email

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

Inbox

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

Star Email

Back Issues disc winner

Alexa favours singing cats over recycling

I have two Amazon Echos and use Alexa on three PCs and my phone. Each week, I get notifications of the new things that Alexa can do; this week, it was cats singing "Happy Birthday".

However, Alexa doesn't know the addresses (and hence the opening times) of local authority refuse and recycling sites in England. These are the non-commercial services used by people to get rid of waste or to recycle items.

If I ask Alexa: "When is Stevenage Refuse and Recycling Centre open?", she tells me about the "Stevenage Furniture Recycling Scheme" instead. Similarly, if I ask for Berkhamsted Refuse and Recycling Centre, Alexa provides details of Berkhamsted Sports Centre. She doesn't know the location (let alone the opening times) of the other 15 refuse and recycling centres in my county, Hertfordshire. I've tried other counties, with a similar response.

I originally raised this query in July and Amazon's Alexa support team said: "It is an important subject and someone will email you for further input". This didn't happen. On Monday, I spent another two hours "chatting" with Alexa support. They again said they would email for further information, but didn't.

How is it that a company that is supposed to be climate friendly, and ends its emails "Earth's most customer-centric company", prioritises singing cats over recycling?

Google Assistant, however, does appear to know where Hertfordshire recycling centres are and when they are open. Perhaps you should publish an article comparing the usefulness and climate-friendliness of smart assistants?

Dave Bartlett, Hertfordshire

We need to standardise cables and plugs

Someone wrote into *Web User* recently about making USB-C the standard connection for devices. I couldn't agree more, as one ends up with all manner of different cables, none of which are interchangeable.

Not only do the cables for various devices pose problems, but so do the different electrical plugs worldwide. I am one of those people who tends to buy devices in different countries. This powerboard (see image below) is a type that I have only ever seen in Thailand – what a wonderful idea it is for people like myself.

I would like to see powerpoints in residences take on this design. While they're at it, they could standardise the volts/amps for chargers, too!

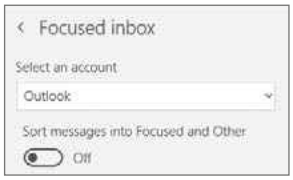
Lynnette Hammet, Melbourne

"Helpful" email feature was more of a hindrance

I recently set up a laptop and Outlook email account for a small club that I help administer. I was contacted by the treasurer (and custodian of the laptop) to say she could not "see" some of the emails I was referring to.

I talked her through how to open a web browser and access the account from there, where all the emails were present. On my home machine, I could also use my browser or Thunderbird to access all the messages, but when using Windows Mail the elusive emails were missing there, too.

This caused much head scratching, as I wondered what was causing Windows Mail to censor our emails. I was even 90% of the way through writing an email asking for your help, when my eye was caught by the option at the top of the Windows Mail screen that sorts emails into 'Focused' or 'Other'. Turning off this dastardly Focused Inbox function presented all the emails in their full glory.



Quiz Answers: Issue 514

1 Waterloo
2 Dancing Queen
3 Fernando
4 Angel Eyes
5 Chiquitita
6 Super Trouper

WINNER!
Well done to **Ellen Gardner** who wins a Web User Back Issues Disc

WAYBACK MACHINE
2015

It's bizarre how some of these "helpful features" cause so much grief.

Paul Moles, via email

Plagued by the Plusnet hub problem

In Issue 513's Ask the Expert, David Austin raised the issue of his smartphone disconnecting from his Plusnet hub, with the Wi-Fi showing as connected but with no internet access. This is a known problem that has affected Plusnet routers since a firmware update over 18 months ago (bit.ly/plusnet515).

The problem affects the 5GHz spectrum and causes all Wi-Fi devices to disconnect. This results in the 'incorrect password' error with no internet access. Rebooting the hub solves the problem but only for a short period. It always recurs within a couple of days.

After months of suffering, I (and many others) solved the problem by swapping the Plusnet Hub1 for a BT HH6, which works perfectly. BT owns Plusnet, so the swap was straightforward, but Plusnet only offers support if you're using the Hub1.

Despite 18 months of effort, Plusnet seems nowhere near a full solution.

Ian Fisher, via email

Grow up, soft tech lads!

In Issue 513 of *Web User*, we not only have Barry Collins moaning about his hi-tech doorbell, but also the Editor, Robert Irvine, griping that he can't boil his kettle by Wi-Fi.

Grow up, lads! If you were born, as I was, in the 1930s, you would appreciate what you have a lot more. Now it's just "technology for the sake of it".

I suggest that Barry buys himself a door knocker, though he might have a job fitting it as this involves a screwdriver and a drill (he can look it up on YouTube). Meanwhile, our Editor should get off his idle backside and make his own tea.

The more I see of this generation, the more I wonder how they would have coped back in the 1940s and 50s. You may have COVID to deal with, but we had Adolf Hitler, air raids and food shortages!

Alan Heasman, via email

What you say...

DO YOU ALWAYS READ THE TERMS & CONDITIONS BEFORE INSTALLING AN APP?

No, because if it's an app I want to use, such as WhatsApp or LinkedIn, there's really no choice but to accept. It's a sad state of affairs when the terms aren't clear and to the point.

Caroline Chapman

I scroll to the end of the terms and conditions if I can't install the app until I have 'read' them. I rely on the outrage of the internet to let me know if there is anything too onerous.

Nat Grove

With apps from the official app stores, I rely on Google and Apple to ensure I'm not installing anything dodgy. If it was an app downloaded from an independent site, I might check the privacy policy first.

Tim Beam

Let's be honest: who has the time to read the terms and conditions?

Brian Brown

Companies deliberately make their terms and conditions long and boring to discourage you from reading them. That way, they can sneak in dodgy clauses and data-sharing stuff, without you realising.

Paul Giddings

WILL YOU STOP USING GOOGLE PHOTOS WHEN IT ENDS UNLIMITED FREE STORAGE (see page 10)?

You can still upload photos at their original quality, it just comes out of your 15GB of allocated free storage. Just means you need to be fussier about the photos you keep.

Michael Renshaw

I'll keep using it. I have a Pixel phone and a Chromebook, and I'll buy more storage if I need to. I only wish you could sync Google Photos to your PC and organise pictures in meaningful folders, rather than just by date.

Russell Cox *@RussWWFC*

I've never used it as I don't trust online services for photo sharing or storage. I will stick with Unraid (unraid.net) and Nextcloud (nextcloud.com), which have been working fine for my 11,000 photos going back to 2005.

Goldmaster *@Goldmaster*

I don't use Google Photos, because I don't want Google looking at pictures I've taken and then using them to target me with ads.

Craig Wells

I suppose it couldn't last forever.

John Young

WHEN DID YOU LAST SWITCH YOUR BROADBAND PROVIDER (see page 50)?

I've been with BT for 16 years and I don't see any reason to change. Perfectly happy with the service.

Ian Graham

I switched from Virgin Media earlier this year, because it went offline for several hours twice in one month. Am now with Sky, and no problems so far.

Alan Bradley

I last switched about four years ago, from TalkTalk to Plusnet. Best decision I ever made!

Keith Faraday

I've been thinking of changing providers since Sky increased my subscription at the start of the year, but I was worried about being without broadband during the changeover. If we hadn't been in lockdown, it wouldn't have mattered so much.

Sarah Beasley

None of your beeswax!

Trevor Whitehead

Page 404

Tech companies need to help us delete data from our drives, says **Barry Collins**

Wiping devices shouldn't be so hard

Bank statements, health records, tax returns, a file marked "passwords": just some of the data discovered by researchers from Dundee's Abertay University, who bought 100 USB drives from eBay to see what they would find. Two thirds had partially or fully recoverable data, despite all but two being 'wiped' before they were sold. Clean, but not clean enough.

Deleting files from a device doesn't delete them for good. Even formatting a drive doesn't necessarily make the data unrecoverable. Unless you've overwritten the contents several times with dummy data, there's still a chance for someone to recover the files from an unencrypted disk. And it doesn't take a team of academics to do it, either – freely downloadable software can rescue 'deleted' files. We've covered several such tools in this magazine over the years.

Why is it so hard to delete stuff properly? That's what the student who wrote the Abertay paper wants to know, arguing that Microsoft and Apple don't make it simple enough to securely delete data. "Why do operating systems still persist in only wiping file indexes in this day and age?" asked James Conacher. "Could the operating systems not detect that all files on a drive had been dragged to the Recycle Bin, and then ask the person if they want the drive wiped securely?". It sounds like a great idea to me.

> "If you're getting rid of old USB drives or hard disks, a few whacks with a hammer should put the data beyond reach"

To be fair to Apple, the macOS Disk Utility does provide the option to securely erase the data to US military standards, while Windows 10's full disk format will also overwrite data to the point where it's all but gone. But it's not the default on either system, and the Abertay research shows that people aren't finding these options.

It's not only USB drives that people have problems shifting sensitive data from. Old laptops, smartphones and tablets are often sold or discarded without any reassurance that a reset has fully wiped the data stored on them. Mobile devices normally have a 'factory reset' that claims to put the phone back into the exact state that it left the store in, but several studies show that the data remains recoverable with specialist tools.

How do you ensure data is securely wiped from devices? If you're simply getting rid of old USB thumb drives or hard disks, a few judicious whacks with a hammer should put the data beyond reach. I also rather like the suggestion of *PC Pro* columnist Paul Ockenden, who disposes of his old memory sticks in dog-litter bins. If anyone's willing to fish for disks there, good luck to them.

On laptops, smartphones and other devices, you can either deploy specialist software that ensures disks are properly wiped clean – MiniTool Partition Wizard (www.partitionwizard.com) is one such tool for Windows; or you can take a more manual approach. Resetting the device, then filling its storage with dummy data, such as copies of a movie, ensures everything is overwritten. It's not military-grade protection, but it's enough to defeat all but the KGB's finest.

You shouldn't have to do any of this. Format should mean format, factory reset should wipe a device thoroughly. But until the tech firms take your data security seriously, you're going to have to deal with it yourself.

Illustration: Andrew Torrens

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

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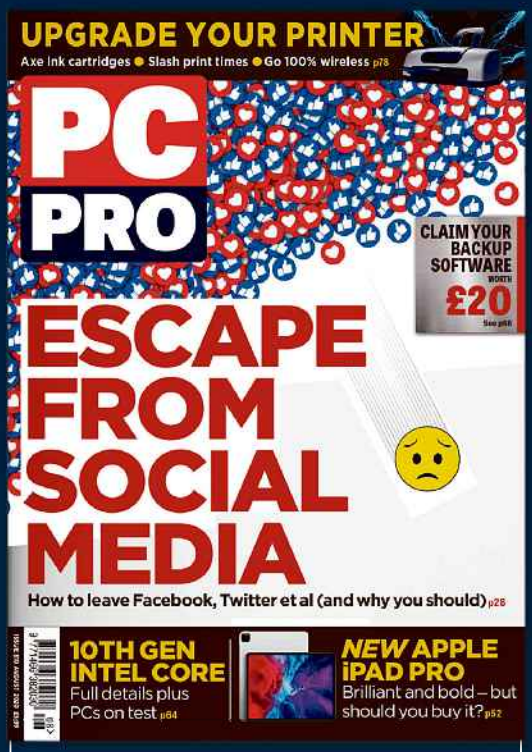

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